



Pedagogická
fakulta
Faculty
of Education

Jihočeská univerzita
v Českých Budějovicích
University of South Bohemia
in České Budějovice

Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích
Pedagogická fakulta
Katedra

Diplomová práce

Gothic and Realistic Features in the Works of Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers

Spojení gotických a realistických prvků
v prózách Flannery O'Connorové
a Carson McCullersové

Vypracovala: Bc. Zuzana Záhorová
Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Kamila Vránková, Ph.D.

České Budějovice 2021

Prohlašuji, že svoji diplomovou práci jsem vypracovala samostatně pouze s použitím pramenů a literatury uvedených v seznamu citované literatury.

Prohlašuji, že v souladu s § 47b zákona č. 111/1998 Sb. v platném znění souhlasím se zveřejněním své diplomové práce, a to v nezkrácené podobě archivovaných pedagogickou fakultou elektronickou cestou ve veřejně přístupné části databáze STAG provozované Jihočeskou univerzitou v Českých Budějovicích na jejích internetových stránkách, a to se zachováním mého autorského práva k odevzdanému textu této kvalifikační práce. Souhlasím dále s tím, aby toutéž elektronickou cestou byly v souladu s uvedeným ustanovením zákona č. 111/1998 Sb. zveřejněny posudky školitele a oponentů práce i záznam o průběhu a výsledku obhajoby kvalifikační práce. Rovněž souhlasím s porovnáním textu mé kvalifikační práce s databází kvalifikačních prací Theses.cz provozovanou Národním registrem vysokoškolských kvalifikačních prací a systémem na odhalování plagiátů.

V Českých Budějovicích dne

.....
Zuzana Záhorová

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank PhDr. Kamila Vránková, Ph.D. for her valuable advice, comments and support.

Poděkování

Na tomto místě bych ráda poděkovala vedoucí práce PhDr. Kamile Vránkové, Ph.D. za její cenné rady, připomínky a podporu.

Anotace:

Diplomová práce se zaměřuje na komparativní analýzu děl dvou autorek americké jižanské literatury – Flannery O'Connor a Carson McCullers. Zvláštní důraz je kladen na posouzení vztahu gotických a realistických prvků v jejich dílech. Východiskem analýzy je charakteristika jižanské gotické literatury (hlavně místa a prostředí), na jejímž základě jsou stanoveny hlavní znaky tohoto žánru.

Samostatné kapitoly jsou věnovány životní zkušenosti obou autorek. Vlastní komparativní analýza je zaměřena na charakteristiku postav a jejich vztahů, funkci prostředí, význam groteskních prvků, spojení tragična a komična, vliv minulosti, úlohu náboženství a otázku dobra a zla.

Klíčová slova: Jih, gotika, groteskno, osamělost, postižení, šílenec, vykoupení, bizarnost, zděšení, černoš, dospívání

Abstract:

The diploma thesis focuses on a comparative analysis of Flannery O'Connor's and Carson McCullers' Southern Gothic literary works. Special emphasis is put on the relationship between the gothic and realistic features. The comparative analysis is based on the characterisation of Southern Gothic literature (the landscape and environment as the main focus), which leads to the specification of its main features. Individual chapters contain O'Connor's and McCullers' biographies. The comparative analysis itself concentrates on the description of the heroes and their relationships, the function of landscape, the meaning of grotesque motifs, the connection of traditional and comical features, the influence of past, the role of religion and the issue of good and evil.

Keywords: South, gothic, grotesque, loneliness, disability, freak, redemption, bizarre, terror, black man, adolescence

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
1. TERMINOLOGY	3
1.1. THE GOTHIC	3
1.2. THE FEELING OF TERROR	4
1.3. THE GROTESQUE	4
1.3.1. <i>Flora's Approach</i>	4
1.3.2. <i>Spiegel's Approach</i>	5
1.3.3. <i>O'Connor's Approach</i>	6
1.4. CORELATION BETWEEN THE GROTESQUE AND TERROR	7
2. GOTHIC STORY FEATURES	8
2.1.1. <i>Punter's Themes</i>	8
2.1.2. <i>Bridget M. Marshall's Approach</i>	8
3. GROTESQUE CHARACTER	11
3.1. SPIEGEL'S <i>THE GROTESQUE</i>	11
3.2. HAAR'S REPULSION, FEAR AND OTHER FEELINGS	12
4. HISTORY OF GOTHIC LITERATURE	13
4.1. EUROPEAN CLASSIC GOTHIC FICTION	13
4.1.1. <i>Horace Walpole</i>	14
4.1.2. <i>The Gothic Revival</i>	14
4.1.3. <i>The Gothic During the Industrialization</i>	15
4.1.4. <i>Decadence and Gothic</i>	15
4.2. AMERICAN GOTHIC ARISES	16
4.2.1. <i>Charles Brockden Brown</i>	16
4.2.2. <i>Southern Myth and Edgar Allan Poe</i>	17
4.2.3. <i>Antebellum Gothic</i>	17
4.2.4. <i>Post Bellum Gothic</i>	18
4.2.5. <i>Modern and Postmodern Southern Gothic</i>	18
4.2.6. <i>Gothic and Southern Renaissance</i>	19
5. REALISM	21
5.1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT	21
5.2. REALISM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE	22
5.3. REALISM AND SOUTHERN WRITERS	22

6. FLANNERY O'CONNOR	24
6.1. BIOGRAPHY	24
7. CARSON MCCULLERS	45
7.1. BIOGRAPHY	45
8. THE RELATION OF O'CONNOR AND MCCULLERS	79
8.1. O'CONNOR ON MCCULLERS	79
8.2. MCCULLERS ON O'CONNOR	79
8.3. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES	80
9. DEFINING CHARACTERS IN THE WORKS OF O'CONNOR AND MCCULLERS	82
9.1. THE LONELY AND UNWANTED	82
9.1.1. <i>McCullers' Wedding Members and Lonely Hunters</i>	82
9.1.2. <i>O'Connor's Bizarre and Ambivalent</i>	88
9.2. THE MAIMED	92
9.2.1. <i>McCullers' Lonely and Hunched</i>	92
9.2.2. <i>O'Connor's Ambiguous Characters</i>	93
10. REALISTIC AND GOTHIC FEATURES IN THE WORKS OF O'CONNOR AND MCCULLERS	97
10.1. NARRATOR	97
10.2. MIDDLE CLASS, LOWER CLASS IN THE SOUTH	98
10.3. THE RACIAL ISSUE	99
10.3.1. <i>McCullers' Approach</i>	100
10.3.2. <i>O'Connor's Approach</i>	101
10.3.3. <i>McCullers and O'Connor Combined</i>	102
10.4. THE GOTHIC AND THE GROTESQUE	103
10.4.1. <i>McCullers' The Gothic and The Grotesque</i>	103
10.4.2. <i>O'Connor's Gothic and Grotesque</i>	105
11. FAITH	107
11.1. CATHOLIC FLANNERY O'CONNOR	107
11.2. LONELY CARSON MCCULLERS	108
12. ANALYSIS' CONCLUSION	110
CONCLUSION	112
RESUMÉ	115
BIBLIOGRAPHY	118

Introduction

The Southern Gothic genre is not a literary category that is easily specified. When focusing on the Gothic genre overall, the Southern Gothic has a specific position. It drew heavily on the traditional Gothic genre, nevertheless, it dropped many of the typical themes and motifs. Some of the books focusing on the Gothic overall do not recognize it as a Gothic genre subpart, focusing only on the traditional Gothic with horror and mystic traits. Therefore, the first chapters of this thesis focus on defining the key words for the Southern Gothic genre and tracking its development.

Certain confusion is in the terminology concerning the Southern Gothic genre. Therefore, the first chapter of this thesis focuses on defining the gothic and the grotesque, adding the third important term – terror. These three terms are immensely important for the whole thesis as well as for the whole Southern Gothic genre, for they define it.

The chapters that follow focus on the different approaches towards the main Southern Gothic themes and features, providing two different points of view, that however compliment each other. The chapter dealing with the typical gothic character closes the first part of the thesis focusing on the terminology and the most important traits of the Southern Gothic genre.

The next chapter concentrates on the historical development of first the traditional Gothic genre in Europe. For it served the Southern Gothic as a lead, the most important source of inspiration. Then we move to the origins of the Gothic literature in American context, starting in the beginning of the 19th century and ending with the Southern Renaissance period. One chapter deals with the characterization of Realism, focusing on the use of realistic techniques in connection with the Southern literature.

The next two chapters deal separately with the life experience of Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers. The biographies connect their personal life with their work, providing detailed insight on events that heavily influenced their life journey, their opinions and most importantly, their works. The chapter that follows provides insight into the feelings of both authors, looking for the most important similarities and differences in their lives that influenced their work.

The most important part of this thesis comes next. It is the analysis of selected stories of both authors. The main goal of this thesis is to analyse the work of O'Connor and McCullers with special attention paid to the gothic (grotesque) traits in relation

to the realistic method. The analysis focuses mainly on the characters, for they bear the most distinct features of the Southern Gothic genre. The subchapters analyse the most important personality traits as well as the appearance of the characters focusing on the signs that are most typical for O'Connor and McCullers (loneliness, bizarreness, deformity). Apart from the characters, the realistic features and methods in their works are also analysed, thereafter connected with the gothic and grotesque features, analysed too. Last but not least, different approaches towards the faith the authors had in their lives as well as in their fiction is also included in the analysis.

The last chapter of the thesis deals with the analysis, highlighting the most important findings, comparing both authors with focus on similarities as well as differences, and characterizing the essence of their work.

1. Terminology

The term *gothic* is used in the title of this thesis; however, it is important not to neglect other terms connected to it. Especially *the grotesque*, to which *the gothic* is tied rather closely. It is not rare that these two terms substitute for one another. In that case they mean the same thing. As is stated in an article written by Lucinda MacKethan, the terms *Southern Gothic* or *Southern Grotesque* both refer to “literature that mixes terror and horror in order to shock or disturb.”¹ If, however, one would look past the substitution of these two terms, differences in their meaning and in their manifestation in literature can be found.

The term that is closely connected to *the gothic* and *the grotesque* is *terror*. It is not less important than the two above mentioned ones. As a matter of fact, it can be perceived as a result of properly used gothic and grotesque techniques in the narrative. After reading the text below, the relationship between these three separate, yet tightly bonded terms, should be clearer.

1.1. The Gothic

The word *gothic* has a variety of different meanings, covering literature, art, history, or architecture. In literature the term is “usually applied to a group of novels written between the 1760s and the 1820s.”² Among the members of this group the authors such as Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley or Horace Walpole can be counted (see chapter 4.1).

The Gothic, or as Joseph M. Flora states, *Gothicism*, is a “mode of fiction utilized by critically acclaimed modernist writers [...], characterized by **grotesque** characters and scenes, explorations of abnormal psychological states, dark humour, violence, and a sense of alienation or futility.”³ Flora then proceeds to list several traits of Southern society of that time which are often used in Southern Gothic stories. The most prominent is a contrast between a representative of the patriarchal plantation aristocracy, who is trying to appear ethical towards all races, and a representative of a lower class, who is not well educated but fanatically religious, racist, on the verge of poverty, pervert, violent and often suffers from physical deformities as well. The fact that these characters

¹ MacKETHAN, Lucinda. *Genres of Southern Literature*. [online]

² PUNTER, David. *The Literature of Terror*, p.1

³ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 311

are usually not ashamed of their shortcomings, moreover, they put them on display, often causes a sense of **terror** in the reader's mind.

It should be noted that some of these traits could be perceived as stereotypical, even O'Connor in her essay expresses a certain resentment about the critic's and the reader's expectations of what the 'typical southern writer' should write about and what a 'typical southern story' looks like.

1.2. The Feeling of Terror

Oxford Learners Dictionary defines *terror* as "a feeling of extreme fear."⁴ What causes this feeling is undeniably unique for any person. There are, of course, some things that trigger fear, or shall we say terror, more often than others. The feeling of distress that in some cases may even lead to anxiety while seeing, for example, a spider is quite common. However, the gothic literature, especially the Southern Gothic, often diverges from these common triggers of terror on behalf of other sources, more subtle ones. As is stated in *American Gothic*, the authors often use specific language means or literary topics to evoke the feeling of, if not terror, then at least uneasiness in the readers of their stories. The word subtle was used to describe the triggers of terror the authors of the American gothic use, and subtle they are. Sometimes, the whole mood of the story can change with one skilfully chosen word. It is not as rare as one would expect that the reader can follow the changes from a pleasant family tale to a disturbing, macabre, and sometimes even incomprehensible narrative.

On the other hand, the feeling of terror is, often at least partially, replaced by a sense of **grotesqueness**. These two things are not incompatible, however, to differentiate them would be appropriate.

1.3. The Grotesque

1.3.1. Flora's Approach

Flora defines *grotesque* as a "term applied to a decorative style in sculpture, painting, and architecture characterized by fantastic representations of intricately woven human, animal, and vegetable forms creating distortions of the natural to the point of comic

⁴ Oxford Learner's Dictionaries: *Terror*. [online]

absurdity, ridiculous ugliness, or ludicrous caricature. [...] In literature, the term is applied to anything deviating from an explicit or implicit norm: bizarre, incongruous, ugly, unnatural, fantastic, abnormal.”⁵

Flora also states that the literary grotesque can appear in any form. It can be manifested in a dehumanized character (either because of physical or psychological deformation) or in a behaviour that is perceived as illogical, or in animal figures. Another type of manifestation can be represented by an inanimate object which, for the lack of better words, can be marked as possessed. This object then manifests traits similar to human will or great energy the non-living thing should not ever possess. Apart from other things the focus on literalization, ideas and situations full of paradoxes, as well as the usage of stereotypes are also, according to Flora, common means to create a grotesque sense.

As the most important component that defines the grotesque in literature, Flora marks the “juxtaposition or fusion of contrasting, paradoxical, and incompatible elements, such as an impossible or horrific event provoking a humorous response.”⁶ Humour or even laughter used in a serious situation, where it is totally out of place and can be perceived as inappropriate, forces the reader to suffer through an internal fight between two approaches – to laugh or to feel disgusted and shocked? This inner conflict forces the reader to find another solution. Exit to rationality often looks like the right thing to do, nevertheless, the memory of the inappropriate reaction (laughter, amusement) is still present in the reader’s mind. The writer does not help the situation at all, the illogical, irrational situation is not further explained and rationalised, creating additional tension and increasing the reader’s distress.

1.3.2. Spiegel’s Approach

In his essay Spiegel states his disillusionment about the usage of the term *grotesque*. Literary critics of his time (the essay was published in 1972) were, according to him, using this term too recklessly, which led to the loss of its clarity. Many of them used it to describe any literary work from America as well as Europe that averted from the traditional (poetic approach replaced by antipoetic hence grotesque, heroism turned

⁵ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 321

⁶ Ibid., p. 321

into cowardness etc.). This means anything that was unique in modern fiction was grotesque. The second approach (Spiegel mentions Leslie Fiedler as its representative) restricts the usage of *grotesque* to specific parts of only Southern fiction. In this case the term represents something extravagant or exotic (often represented by the forms Flora lists as grotesque – see 1.3.1).

Spiegel is not able to agree fully with either of these approaches. He is incapable to find an answer for whether a gothic story is also grotesque and vice versa. The lack of strictly defined terminology leads him to his own approach to what is *grotesque*.

According to him *grotesque* “refers to a type of character that occurs so repeatedly in [...] Southern novels that readers have come to accept – indeed, expect his appearance as a kind of convention of the form. [...] The grotesque character has his distinguishing set of character traits. [...] The grotesque as I view him, always appears in Southern fiction as either a physically or mentally deformed figure.”⁷ This excerpt from Spiegel’s essay suggests more concrete approach to what *grotesque* is. Rather than looking for something bizarre throughout the whole story, he focuses mainly on the characters. However, the main traits that define what grotesque is remain: strangeness and deformity. More about Spiegel’s view on grotesque characters can be found in chapter 3.1.

1.3.3. O’Connor’s Approach

In her essay *Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction* Flannery O’Connor herself delves into what Southern literature in connection with the grotesque portrays:

“In these grotesque works, we find that the writer has made alive some experience which we are not accustomed to observe every day, or which the ordinary man may never experience in his ordinary life. We find that connections which we would expect in the customary kind of realism have been ignored, that there are strange skips and gaps which anyone trying to describe manners and customs would certainly not have left [...]. The fictional qualities of the characters lean away from typical social patterns, toward mystery and the unexpected.”⁸

⁷ SPIEGEL, Alan. *A Theory of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction*, p.428

⁸ O’CONNOR, Flannery. *Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction*. [online]

What others said explicitly O'Connor only suggests, nevertheless the conclusion is the same as with previous approaches. She sees *the grotesque* as something unexpected, abnormal, for some even shocking both in the character's personality traits and in particular situations that are presented in the stories. Thus, the strangeness and deformity of characters that Spiegel describes, as well as the reader's bilateral approach towards disturbing events of Flora's point of view go hand in hand in O'Connor's approach.

1.4. Corelation Between the Grotesque and Terror

In Oxford Learners Dictionary, the term *grotesque* is defined as a "strange in a way that is unpleasant or offensive" and also as an "extremely ugly in a strange way that is often frightening or funny."⁹ None of these two definitions mention the word *terror*. Nevertheless, this should not lead us to a wrong conclusion. The word *frightening* is used in the second definition, and this word is what ties the terms *terror* and *grotesque* together. What is unpleasant or offensive to us can, given the right circumstances, causes the feeling of terror. The usage of grotesque situations or characters causes exactly the above mentioned feelings to the reader. For the situations possible to describe as *strange*, *unpleasant*, or *extremely ugly* are what often stands out the most from the Southern Gothic stories. Although a contradiction often occurs – what is perceived as unpleasant and grotesque by the reader is not often perceived as such by the characters themselves.

⁹ *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries: Grotesque*. [online]

2. Gothic Story Features

2.1.1. Punter's Themes

Punter introduces three most important gothic themes. The first being the *taboo*. Meaning that the gothic fiction often wanders into areas usually not sought out by readers or generally people in their everyday lives. The reason might differ, these areas might be offending or difficult to speak about.

The second theme is *paranoia*. It creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and doubt. The feeling of something almost visible to the human sight, something in the shadow, something that constantly haunts the character or even the reader.

The last theme is *barbaric*, a fiction that “brings us up against the boundaries of the civilized, demonstrates the relative nature of ethical and behavioural codes, and contrasts the conventional world with a different sphere in which these codes do not operate, or operate only in distorted forms.”¹⁰

2.1.2. Bridget M. Marshall's Approach

Bridget M. Marshall in her essay published in Jay Ellis' publication *Critical Insights: Southern Gothic Literature* provides, with a bit of irony several different American gothic themes. They are introduced through a comparison with a 'recipe' for traditional European gothic novels from 1797:

- “An old castle, half of it ruinous.
- A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.
- Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.
- As many skeletons, in chests and presses.
- An old woman hanging by the neck; with her throat cut.
- Assassins and desperadoes ,*quant stuff*. ‘
- Noise, whispers, and groans, threescore at least.”¹¹

This list serves her to create a similar one for American gothic and to compare and contrast them. For the sake of the accuracy, the titles of the features were left as Marshall named them.

¹⁰ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 312

¹¹ ELLIS, Jay. *Critical Insights: Southern Gothic Literature*, p. 5

2.1.2.1. The Gothic Setting: From Castle to Plantation

The traditional British gothic story (but the American will not be an exception) is dependent on its setting, which helps to establish the right atmosphere. Commonly, it is an old ancestral house, a monastery, or even a castle. The description of the place itself often plays an important role in establishing the right mood (e.g. Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* with its 'rusty hinges').

To place the characters of the American Gothic tale into a castle would be almost impracticable, provided the characters are not travelling around the world. The American soil is rather short on the castles. Therefore, the castle is replaced by a plantation. As is usually the case with the gothic stories, the plantation's history is often full of disconcerting events (often related to slaves – rape, violence). The British castle and the American plantation both represent high society long gone; posh history forgotten.

2.1.2.2. The Gothic Villain: From Aristocrat to Master

The British gothic villain is usually a person from a higher social circle, a person of noble lineage (or at least they want the others to think so). Their evil actions are often pride motivated. These villains often commit not only the 'common' crimes, but also more horrific ones, like incest. As their behaviour is awful, their looks and presence are not, that is why these villains are often taken by the other characters and the readers as well.

Incestuous behaviour is a common motif in Southern gothic as well, in this case frequently connected with the issue of slavery. The heroes here put on a mask of innocence behind which they hide their true nature. Especially in the American Gothic, but gradually in the gothic overall, the character's psychology is emphasized. Starting with Poe, who provided an insight into madman's psyche via using the first-person narrator and continuing to Faulkner and his mentally ill characters.

2.1.2.3. The Gothic Victim: From Maiden in Peril to ... Maiden in Peril

Not only in Gothic literature, the villain typically endangers the fair sex rather than the muscular one. Poe is, as in many other cases, a case study. His stories often feature women who are described without a flaw, sometimes idealised, yet they meet no happy ending (*The Raven*, *Annabel Lee*).

In the Southern Gothic stories the line between the victim and the villain is thin. In many stories, both of them are mentally ill, often causing their violent behaviour, sometimes also their death. The villain becoming the victim of his own actions is also not rare in the Southern Gothic.

2.1.2.4. Slavery and the Southern Gothic

There is no point in denying the British Gothic was not influenced by slavery. However, for the Southern Gothic literature, it is one of the most prominent themes. “[...] America’s history of slavery, racial violence, and racial inequality lie at the heart of Southern Gothic. [...] American Gothic more generally is haunted by frequent references to the historical crimes of slavery, the institution that physically built the nation.”¹²

2.1.2.5. The Grotesque

The term grotesque was explained in chapter 1.3. Especially the character’s physical deformity was a common theme in the gothic fiction for a long time (*Frankenstein*, *Dracula*). Physical deformity occasionally went hand in hand with moral deformity. The grotesqueness of deformed characters might be the most typical theme of the Southern Gothic literature.

2.1.2.6. Realism versus Supernaturalism and the Gothic

The Gothic, containing the Southern Gothic as well, is not necessarily only supernatural. The supernatural is sometimes only induced by drugs, unstable mental health or overactive imagination. More often than it might seem, the authors of the Southern Gothic also wrote realistic works or combined methods from both. Real historical events, especially American Civil War, were frequently featured.

“[...] the line between the horrors of the fantastic and the realism of the mundane are deeply intertwined in this genre.”¹³

¹² ELLIS, Jay. *Critical Insights: Southern Gothic Literature*, p. 11

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 15

3. Grotesque Character

The characters in the Southern Gothic fiction are often the foundation stone of the whole story. Especially the grotesque characters, who do not need to be necessarily the main ones, however they influence the whole mood of the story the most. Through them the reader experiences the feelings of terror and the grotesque so typical of the Southern Gothic literature (see chapter 1). This chapter provides two approaches towards the grotesque characters. These approaches are not essentially contrasting, they rather complement each other, since both see the character's deformation as the key element.

3.1. Spiegel's *The Grotesque*

As was already mentioned, Alan Spiegel places the grotesque element of Southern Gothic into the character's hands. He even 'names' this type of a character as *The Grotesque*. In this sense we can perceive *The Grotesque* the same way as we would perceive, for example, the character of the Great Detective with all his or her typical personality (and other) traits. It is then on the authors' ability to create their own version of *The Grotesque*.

Description and characterization of *The Grotesque* correspond with the overall approach towards the grotesque elements in Southern Gothic literature. Deformation is the key element and it does not matter if it is physical or psychological. Crippled people, mutes or dwarves are the most common in the physical deformation traits *The Grotesque* can bear. In case of psychological (mental) deformation the character is either a mad-man, half-wit or an idiot.

According to Spiegel, *The Grotesque* can evolve in two different ways. It can either become a truly grotesque character or it can become an archetype. To be truly grotesque is surprisingly not an advantage for the characters, for it is only a repellent, or self-pitting or picturesque creation, only drawing attention to their grotesqueness. The archetype is described as „the scapegoat, the outcast, the *pharmakos*; that figure whose alienation from society never seems quite justified because his punishments always exceed his crimes.”¹⁴

¹⁴ SPIEGEL, Alan. *A Theory of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction*, p. 426-37

3.2. Haar's Repulsion, Fear and Other Feelings

Maria Haar treats the Southern Gothic characters in their relation to repulsion and/or fear they induce in the reader, but also in the other characters in the stories. The first category she focuses on is the fear or repulsion caused by physical deformity. To this category she also adds feeling of amusement, which the reader experiences simultaneously with the other feelings when confronted with a physically deformed person. The character's deformity does not differ from what Spiegel stated as the most common types of deformation.

The second category is represented by the repulsion or fear caused by mental disorder. The amusement is present here as well. However, it is not as strong, it is suppressed by the feeling of fear, since the mentally deranged characters can constitute a threat to others.

Repulsion or fear caused by both, physical and mental deformity, belong to another type Haar suggests. This is a case in many Southern Gothic stories, one example for all might be Mr. Shiftlet from O'Connor's story *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*, who is handless and, if not downright mad-mad, surely shows the aspects of a poor moral compass as well as the lack of conscience.

Deviating sexual behaviour is the penultimate cause of fear and repulsion, often combined with the other causes as well. Especially physical deformations (or at least the features differentiating them from others such as an unbecoming obesity, feminine features in a man) combined with their sexual behaviour is what creates the grotesque feeling.

Apart from the feeling of repulsion and fear, the comic is also present. It is, as well as fear and repulsion, caused by the characters' behaviour, appearance, or their wits (or therefore the lack of). Haar confirms Flora's claims from chapter 1.3.1 (definition of the term *Grotesque*). The presence of comic elements creates tension caused by otherwise disturbing events and bizarre characters. It forces the reader to feel at least uncomfortable. The "so called defensive laughter"¹⁵ is often the only reaction the reader has for these situations.

¹⁵ HAAR, Maria. *The Phenomenon of Grotesque in Modern Southern Fiction*, p.135

4. History of Gothic Literature

The Gothic literature has undergone a long development, throughout which it evolved, changed, was inspired, and influenced by historical and cultural transformation. The roots of traditional Gothic fiction can be tracked to Great Britain, from there it spread to numerous places, including the American South. The mutual influence is indisputable. Therefore, it is important to follow not only the development of the Southern Gothic, but also the development of its British predecessor, focusing on the most important milestones.

4.1. European Classic Gothic Fiction

“The classic Gothic novel is characterised by elements of magic, mystery, and chivalry and by supernatural occurrences and horrific settings that impart an uncanny atmosphere of terror.”¹⁶

Even though the Southern Gothic genre abolished many of the traditional features of the original gothic fiction, it developed from it and was influenced by it, especially in the early stages. Therefore, it is important to mention it.

Allan Lloyd-Smith sees the Gothic fiction as a “representation of extreme circumstances of terror, oppression and persecution, darkness, and obscurity of setting [...],”¹⁷ and places its beginning (Flora agrees with that) into hands of **Horace Walpole** and his *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), followed by **Ann Radcliffe**’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and **Matthew G. ‘Monk’ Lewis**’s *The Monk* (1796).

The term *gothic* in these times was mainly used in a pejorative way, describing something offending, diverging from classical literature or the classical art. “Gothic stood for the old-fashioned as opposed to the modern; the barbaric as opposed to the civilized [...]. The gothic was the archaic, the pagan, that which was prior to, or was opposed to, or resisted the establishment of civilized values and a well-regulated society.”¹⁸ It is important to note that many of the gothic authors saw Gothic literature as a gateway to hidden, ignored parts of history, to which they could bring attention.

¹⁶ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 312

¹⁷ SMITH, Allan Lloyd. *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*, p. 4

¹⁸ BOTTING, Fred. *Gothic*, p. 8

Lloyd-Smith also explores the influence of British and American stories containing gothic elements (the term gothic literature is not used deliberately), since British and American culture were not two separate entities as it was later. The influence worth mentioning the most would be **Brown**'s (for further information see chapter 3.2) influence on British authors, especially **Mary Shelley** (*Frankenstein*, 1818).

4.1.1. Horace Walpole

His novel's theme set a pattern followed by many other authors of the classic Gothic novels. "A delicate female sensibility is subjected to the onslaught of elemental forces of good and evil within a plot designed for suspense in which sanity and chastity are constantly threatened and over which looms the suggestion that evil and irrationality will destroy civilization."¹⁹ He creates a Gothic which arouses the feeling of horror. This world refuses to reward the heroine for her virtues and shows her no respect, even though in a 'normal' world she would be granted both.

With his work he went against the Age of Reason and its focus on what is real and present, and turned back to "the old 'dark' days of superstition and corruption, [...] to the romance of the past."²⁰ The past, however, was moulded to his needs, it was not an accurate representation of historical events.

4.1.2. The Gothic Revival

Throughout times the approach towards the gothic world had somehow changed, and when the second wave of authors (including **Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, H. G. Wells, Bran Stoker and Charlotte Brontë**) arose, it focused more on the "mysterious inhuman forces that cannot be adequately explained by the metaphors of psychology, sociology, or well-meaning humanism."²¹ This new era of the Gothic literature is shaped by three most significant elements. The intensified focus on consciousness being the first, confrontation with evil the second, and expanded reality the third. These three elements are not important only for this era, but for the twentieth century American Southern Gothic as well.

¹⁹ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 312

²⁰ BOMARITO, Jessica. HOGLE E., Jerrold. *Gothic Literature: A Gale Critical Companion*, p. 57

²¹ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 312

4.1.3. The Gothic During the Industrialization

The structures of society were transformed by the industrialization – the agricultural Great Britain changed into industrial. This process, of course, had its effect on the whole society. The population moved into cities, new social norms as well as new professions were created. People in cities lived much closer than they were used to from the countryside, yet many of them felt alienated and isolated.

Above mentioned *Frankenstein* (1818) by **Mary Shelley** was written during this time. Portraying a character that is artificial, non-human, created by science hits nail on the head. The increasing notion of dehumanization and regimentation was prominent in the society.

Later, the industrialization affected the change of setting in gothic fiction, it moved from abbeys and castles to the city and its narrow (and often filthy) streets, opium dens and slums. **Charles Dickens** can be chosen as an author who usually gravitated towards such settings even though his work was in some aspects too ‘naïve,’ using the *deus ex machina* method which does not correspond with the gothic elements well.

4.1.4. Decadence and Gothic

The Decadence movement arose during the late nineteenth century, which was also a time of cultural crisis. In times like this the Gothic motifs and literature overall reemerges. Some of the most significant Gothic genre works were created in this time, e.g., *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Oscar Wilde, and *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker. All these books are “concerned in one way or another with the problem of degeneration, and thus of the essence of the human. They each pose, from very different angles, the same question [...]: how much, can one lose—individually, socially, nationally—and still remain a ‘man’?”²²

The city is still a primary setting, being full of danger and cultural decay. Unexpectedly, the lower class is not the cause of this corruption. It is the middle class which should be, on the first glance, representative of respectable society.

²² BOMARITO, Jessica. HOGLE E., Jerrold. *Gothic Literature: A Gale Critical Companion*, p. 158

4.2. American Gothic Arises

Jay Ellis states that “Southern Gothic, in many ways, originated on its own, but always as extension of other Gothic pathways, and not always ‘down’.”²³ Down is meant to represent the American South. According to her, the Southern Gothic is connected not only to European literature (especially Great Britain), but also to immigrants, slave owners and slaves themselves, through who the influence came to America. The Gothic in America, more than the British Gothic, concentrated on psychological site, its extremes, and the effect extreme, supernatural or pseudo-supernatural might have on individual’s mind.

4.2.1. Charles Brockden Brown

Flora names **Charles Brockden Brown**’s (1798-1801) novels as the starting point of the American Gothic. However, the American Gothic differed from the British one, especially in the approach towards setting and time. American authors did not set their stories in the past, and they usually stayed within their own country. Unlike the British authors, who, as mentioned previously, paid attention mostly to history and were not tied to one place. The almost only option of ‘historical’ setting for the American authors was the period of colonialism and revolutions. Brown himself was passionate about using American motifs, setting etc. He wanted to “reject ‘superstitious and exploded manners, Gothic castles and chimeras’ in favour of ,incidents of Indian hostility and perils of the Western Wilderness’.”²⁴

Even though Brown was never able to achieve as much popularity during his life as he desired, his work and methods foreshadowed many important authors who came after him. Most importantly **Edgar Allan Poe** (see chapter 3.2.2.) who used similarly untrustworthy narrators for his stories, and was also similarly fascinated with human psychology and its deviations. Apart from Poe, Brown also paved the way for **Herman Melville**’s and **Nathaniel Hawthorne**’s fiction by transforming the Gothic into “a strange, surreal mix of the extraordinary and the everyday [...]”²⁵

²³ ELLIS, Jay. *Critical Insights: Southern Gothic Literature*, p. XVI

²⁴ GRAY, Richard. *A History of American Literature Second Edition*, p. 85

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87

4.2.2. Southern Myth and Edgar Allan Poe

The American South was a complete opposite to the West. It was confined, focused on guilt and the past, it was doubtful and full of people either limited in their lives or evil and grotesque. Although Poe (1809–1849) was not a Southern writer by origin (comes from Boston) and almost never set his works into Southern landscape, he is by many considered a founder of the Southern Myth.

Poe's short story *The Fall of the House of the Usher* (1839), set in a unknown setting, more likely a dreamscape, has "all the elements that were later to characterize Southern Gothic: a great house and family falling into decay and ruin, a feverish, introspective hero half in love with death people, a pale, ethereal heroine who seems and then is more dead than alive, rumours of incest and guilt – and above all, the sense that the past haunts the present and that there is evil in the world and it is strong."²⁶ He himself was aware that he did not invented the Gothic genre itself (as well as he was aware that he did not invented the detective story), his significance lies in his new approach towards literary genres. As was already mentioned he took inspiration from Brown and utilized a narrator whom the reader could not trust (could be a liar or a madman). Into the character's 'soul,' their inner self he places the terror.

4.2.3. Antebellum Gothic

Antebellum is "connected with the years before a war, especially the American Civil War (1861-1865)."²⁷ Comes from Latin words *ante* (before) and *bellum* (war).

The Gothic literature of this time mirrors the political approach towards society – larger public concerns overrule individual's needs. **Robert Montgomery Bird**, **William Caruthers**, or **Joseph Holt Ingraham** can be counted among the antebellum southern writers. Work of these authors carries a paradox, a contradiction between supernatural, and between the rational towards which they situate the main events of their stories. Supernatural elements are usually "all revealed as merely delusive appearances."²⁸ Antebellum authors often, even though sometimes it was unconscious, offered an ironical and critical insight into the American society. As an example of such criticism, Flora provides the "grotesque characterization of the stereotypical deformed

²⁶ GRAY, Richard. *A History of American Literature Second Edition*, p. 105

²⁷ *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries: Antebellum* [online]

²⁸ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 313

dwarf Negro slave, which if read as symbolic, raises the interesting possibility of antebellum southern writer's unstated acknowledgment of the stultifying effects of slavery and its potential threat to whites."²⁹ The character of Negro slave was utilized in **Joseph Holt Ingraham**'s novel *Lafitte* (1836), or in a **Henry Clay Lewis**' short story *A Struggle for Life* (1843).

4.2.4. Post Bellum Gothic

The years after the Civil War were heavily influenced by its course and outcome, not excluding the literature, especially the Southern one. "In this postbellum era of reconstructing and reviewing their world, a few southern writers chose gothic forms to reveal a different view of both contemporary and past southern societies."³⁰ Among the authors who focused on the Southern society can be counted **Mark Twain, George Washington Harris, Charles W. Chesnutt, or Thomas Nelson Page.**

Literary works of these authors heavily influenced the Southern Renaissance Gothic stories. They took over the gothic feel and utilised it to bring focus to current problems in southern society. The Gothic fiction was a mix between the grotesque and Realism. This blend of two seemingly contrasting approaches is not only "typical, but it is also distinctive to the South."³¹

4.2.5. Modern and Postmodern Southern Gothic

The Southern Gothic literature of this time connects and mixes not only the gothic and realism, but also grotesque approaches. Flannery O'Connor in her essay *Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction* (1960) describes them all. The first is the traditional gothic, which is divisive and dark, with special attention on the antebellum gothic focusing on broken family relationships and community pressures. The second is the comic-grotesque tradition, the clash between humour and violence. The third and the last are "the lessons all writers have learned

²⁹ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 314

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 314

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 315

from the naturalist.”³² The unadorned display of violence, primitive behaviour, lack of control are the most prominent traits of the lastly mentioned approach.

The Southern plantations change into small rural towns, the exact description of world is disrupted by mysterious elements forcing characters to suspect their perception. The sometimes-shocking Southwestern humour morphs into grotesque.

There are many significant authors representing modern and postmodern Southern gothic, e.g. **William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote** and of course **Carson McCullers** and **Flannery O’Connor** (see chapters 6 and 7).

4.2.6. Gothic and Southern Renaissance

The above listed authors created their works during Southern Renaissance period. After the war, American South, and the culture there, was ‘frozen’ by its outcome. The most prominent theme was the Lost Cause (they believed the Confederate States’ cause was just) and nostalgia for antebellum South. The Southern Renaissance changed this approach, and with that drew the eyes of many to the new generation of Southern writers. These authors wanted to “discover the meaning of the South as integral with modern history.”³³ Southern gothic authors “tended to render the image of the South as a symbol of the modern age at its worst [...]”³⁴ This led to stories full of appalling and bizarre motifs and themes. Violence of any nature (lynching, murder, rape or even castration), insanity, suicide and rape were all commonly used. This might be partly the reason why many critics or publishers and even the readers reacted to these works quite intensely and the term Southern Gothic (or Southern Gothic author) was by some understood almost as an attack (O’Connor can be counted among them).

The authors that followed the main period of Southern Renaissance were able to utilize the southern gothic ‘genre’ to establish a new myth of the South. Many of these authors (including e.g. **Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy** or **William Styron**) reacted to the Civil Rights Movement and its impact on the society.

³² O’CONNOR, Flannery. *Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction*. [online]

³³ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 315

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 316

4.2.6.1. Southern Renaissance

The term *Southern Renaissance* was used and since it is a period crucial for the development of Southern culture (literature especially), it is only fitting to explore it more. *Southern Renaissance* is considered to be a reawakening of the literature in the American South (which we can say was in somewhat a state of a deep sleep after the Civil War). It brought a new, critical, point of view on the Southern history, focused on gender and race issues (bringing awareness to the traditional restrictions). The authors were not afraid to experiment and to describe the Southern society as realistically as possible. “By examining their region with a more trenchant gaze, the writers [...] produced works that revealed the region’s social conflicts and cultural weakness even as their efforts advanced the South’s literary reputation.”³⁵

³⁵ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 835

5. Realism

Realistic approach and techniques are prominent in the works of many Southern Gothic authors. These two literary styles did not exist separately, they drew inspiration from one another, therefore it would be advisable to briefly delineate the meaning of Realism in literary theory.

Oxford Learner's Dictionary describes realism as “a style in art or literature that shows things and people as they are in real life.”³⁶ In Flora's *The Companion to Southern Literature*, Realism is described as “writer's attitude toward the raw materials of art, including such features as style, voice, and intent. [...] Realism aims for method so transparent that technique does not eclipse its constant aim – ‘verisimilitude,’ or a direct representation of the actual. Thus, it avoids the subjective nature of romanticism, impressionism, expressionism, or surrealism. [...] Above all, Realism attempts to persuade readers that the created world mirrors the objective, inhabited world.”³⁷ It originated in Europe in the nineteenth century, counting Daniel Defoe, Honoré de Balzac or Alexander Pushkin as its representatives.

5.1. Historical Context

The begging of literary Realism in the United States can be traced to the nineteenth century, after the end of the Civil War. It was a time full of changes – industrialization connected with urbanization were the most prominent ones. The middle class was on the rise for the first time in American history. Equality was a big theme in politics as well as in everyday life. African-Americans demanded social equality and their right to vote, a request they shared with American women. Working conditions, free public schools and many more were also the subject of discussions. Immigrants from Asia and Europe represented the cheap work force. The influx of new inhabitants was not only positive. It led to various social conflicts – xenophobia, confusion about what the true American identity is.

³⁶ *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries: Realism* [online]

³⁷ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 723

5.2. Realism in American Literature

All the changes the American society was going through influenced the writers and forced them to focus on the social issues, to turn away from the past, and to portray the swiftly changing world. “Realist writers sought to understand and explain their changing society, as well as to resist it, celebrate it, influence it, and profit from it – but above all to depict it with [...] the air of reality.”³⁸

In literature, the focus was on the ordinary people who the characters resembled. Inspired by the rise of the middle class, the authors often placed their stories to this part of American society, focusing on real-life problems. The authors did not always try to find the solutions for these problems, for in real life, there is not an opportunity to find it every time as well. However, the middle class was not the only focal point. As mentioned above, the authors attempted to describe their current American society, part of which were also the immigrants, poor or people of colour.

Connected with the endeavour to portray the American society as realistically as possible is also the usage of ordinary speech, the realistic setting, or the effort to strip the narration of any sentimentality or authors intrusion is what defines Realism. The free indirect discourse, “a style that allows a text’s narrative voice to maintain third-person objectivity while also, often in the same paragraph, speaking from the point of view and in the tone of a specific character.”³⁹ This type of narrator allows the readers to see how the character feels or thinks while simultaneously letting them to keep their distance and analyse the character’s thoughts and emotions.

5.3. Realism and Southern Writers

In the introduction to this chapter, the distancing of Realism and several different isms, more focused on the subjective side, not necessarily providing the ultimately real experience, was stated. However, nothing is only black and white, and the literary movements are not strictly bounded. Many authors tend to combine different methods, approaches towards the narrative, or different motifs. It is also the case of Realism. As one, who is influenced by Romanticism in some aspects of his work, while in others remaining strictly realistic, Flora provides Faulkner. His focus on and description

³⁸ BARRISH, Phillip J. *The Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism*, p. 3

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3

of human nature with all its conflicts is indisputably realistic, while his method of narration tends to be 'unrealistically' lyrical.

Other authors mould realism into a slightly amended form. O'Connor calls them the 'realists of distance.' These authors (including O'Connor herself) are in many aspects realists but are also "willing to subvert or distort the probability in order to achieve a vivid and sometimes humorous new consciousness in their readers."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 725

6. Flannery O'Connor

“There won't be any biographies of me, for only one reason, lives spent between the house and the chicken farm do not make for exciting copy.”⁴¹

Flannery O'Connor (1925 – 1964) is by many considered to be a crucial figure for the development of the Southern literature and for its spread throughout not only the American South but the whole United States. This claim can be supported by many different statements. According to J.A. Bryant Jr. she was the dominating literary figure in the sixties and seventies for the whole nation. Mary Ellen Snodgrass characterizes her as a “brilliant ironist and major contributor to Southern Gothic [...]”⁴² And lastly, Thomas Frazier in Flora's *Companion* introduces Flannery with admiring declarations. “Mention modern southern fiction and the name of Flannery O'Connor soon surfaces. Just as definite, begin a discussion of the art of fiction, and there is her name. [...] She has secured a seat in the pantheon of not only southern but also American arts and letters.”⁴³

6.1. Biography

6.1.1. Early Life

On March 25th, 1925 Mary Flannery O'Connor was born in Savannah, Georgia. Savannah at that time was a typical Southern city. Here she spent the first fifteen years of her life, living on the Lafayette Square, which was a part of Irish neighbourhood and also a Savannah's important centre of the Roman Catholic life.

Her parents, Regina and Edward, were Irish Catholics so it was no wonder they chose the St. Joseph's Hospital (founded by Irish Sisters of Mercy) as the place where they would bring their first and only child to this world. The early years of Flannery's life were happy, her family had enough money to take good care of her and to provide her with everything a small child needs to be happy and thriving. Both her parents loved her and had her best interest in minds, although in slightly different ways. Her mother's objective was to raise her daughter as a proper Southern girl, her father

⁴¹ FITZGERALD, Sally. *The letters of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, p. 310

⁴² SNODGRASS, Mary Ellen. *Encyclopaedia of Gothic Literature*, p. 260

⁴³ FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 600

was more benevolent in his approach towards his daughter upbringing. Nevertheless, their balanced and loving relationship and mutual respect is mirrored in the fact that her parents did not mind O'Connor calling them by their first names (Ed and Regina) even when she was quite young.

6.1.2. St. Vincent's Grammar School for Girls

In the year 1931, Flannery became a student at the St. Vincent's Grammar School for Girls. It should be noted that the year she started her schooling was also a year heavily influenced by the stock market crash in 1929. The whole society had to cut down their expenses, including the O'Connor family. More seriously, Flannery's father worked for a company operating in the real estate field, which was suppressed by the depression as well. It, however, did not affect Flannery's schooling.

The school had strict rules, hierarchy, and a run-in routine, young Flannery could not fully identify with. According to her own letters and sketches, she felt a bit out of place. Perhaps this might be the reason her classmates perceived her as a quiet and timid girl, who was usually a bit secluded from the others. Only six years old she enjoyed the solitude, drawing quietly in her room.

Throughout the next six years she visited the school, she had experienced small quarrels and misunderstandings with the nuns teaching there, she sometimes could not recognize their authority. They could also see her being different from other girls, on the other hand, they could not find anything special about her apart from her obsession with writing about birds. Her school results were acceptable, she was not excellent but managed to score points within the acceptable limits. It might be surprising for some that her biggest obstacle was spelling.

During her elementary school years, she started to present her first literary works (about birds) decorated with her sketches to her peers. Thanks to her mother many children from the neighbourhood would arrive every Saturday to listen to a fairy tale on the radio, eat snacks and play. Some of those kids became Flannery's first audience forming the Merriweather Club presided by none other than O'Connor herself. The bird stories were followed by satires about the members of her family (typed and bound with her father's help) so accurately captured, forcing some to pretend it is not about them at all.

6.1.3. Big Changes

Starting her sixth grade, Flannery had been pulled out of the St. Vincent's Grammar school by her mother and was transferred to the Sacred Heart School. A change perceived by many as unexpected and unconventional. The reason for this shift is not known, so we can only guess seeing her daughter constantly misunderstood and unhappy might have made Mrs. O'Connor rethink Flannery's education. Here she was also perceived as an introverted girl and her school results remained the same.

At the end of 1930s' Flannery's father took bigger interest in the American Legion, since the real estate field was not enough for him anymore. He travelled through several smaller posts and ended as a state commander for Georgia. At the peak of his political career, he started to feel the effects of a mysterious illness. We now know it was lupus – an autoimmune disease that “causes the body to produce antibodies that attack its own healthy tissues.”⁴⁴ This fact was kept away from Flannery (as was customary, she was only twelve). Due to this illness (causing him to feel more and more tired), he was forced to resign from his position. He, however, did not remain dormant. Looking for new opportunities he ended up having to “move to Atlanta to take a position as senior zone real estate appraiser for the Federal Housing Administration.”⁴⁵ Her father's new job forced Flannery to pull out of the Sacred Heart School (year 1938). For two months (last months of the seventh grade) she attended the Peabody Elementary Scholl in Milledgeville. The time following these changes was not easy as both, Flannery and her mother, had to travel back and forth from Atlanta to Milledgeville. The hopes of coming back to Savannah were never fulfilled.

6.1.4. The Bird Sanctuary

A Bird Sanctuary was a nickname Milledgeville earned thanks to several rare species of birds nesting in various parts of the town, an occasion many residents were proud of. Sounds like an ideal place to live for someone who was fascinated with birds from an early childhood and nowadays was keeping several different bird species herself. It was not O'Connor's first time being in Milledgeville, her parents frequented it throughout her whole childhood. After their move from Savannah, O'Connor

⁴⁴ GOOCH, Brad: Flannery. *A Life of Flannery O'Connor*, p. 41

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44

and her mother were staying with their relatives, her father visiting from Atlanta on the weekends. He was not the only 'visitor.' O'Connor's cousins often stayed in Milledgeville during the summer months, these were no exception, and O'Connor enjoyed their company at least a little. Nevertheless, she still remained the shy introverted girl most of the time.

The Peabody Elementary was a school completely different from those O'Connor attended beforehand. The nuns were replaced by practice teachers and their supervisors, the 'basic' subjects (such as Reading, Social Studies or Arithmetic) were extended with Arts, Health Activities, Social Habits and Attitudes. Going to this school for only two months, O'Connor's results remained the same – satisfactory but not phenomenal.

6.1.5. Atlanta

The commuting between Milledgeville and Atlanta could not last forever, so Mr. O'Connor had eventually found a house for his family near Atlanta, in Peachtree Heights (Buckhead neighbourhood). This move had other advantages as well since several O'Connor family relatives lived nearby.

While living in Buckhead, O'Connor started to attend the North Fulton High School (1939). The progressive approach towards the education in North Fulton was similar to the one Peabody Elementary had. As good as it might have been for the development of the school system in the United States, for O'Connor, a girl who was used to the strict doctrine established by the nuns, it was all slightly baffling.

The United States had still not fully recovered from the Stock Market crisis. In the year she started her high school education, the situation was slowly getting better, nevertheless the streets of Atlanta were still half filled with closed shops and breadlines (formed by hungry and poor people who queued for free food). Sights like these had taken a root in O'Connor and she often came back to them in her works, where originally vibrant cities turned into an image of depression full of deserted lots.

6.1.6. Return to Milledgeville and Literary First-Fruits

Only a year after O'Connor had started her schooling at the North Fulton High School, she was back at the Peabody school in Milledgeville (this was her tenth grade), because she was unhappy at the big modern school in Atlanta. Thanks to her mother's

help, O'Connor became an art editor of the high school newspaper *Peabody Palladium*. Her mother spoke about O'Connor's writing and drawing with the newspaper advisor, and although too shy at the time to present her writing, O'Connor loved her new role. The fear to post her works was however only temporary. In November 1940 her first poem was published in the newspaper.

The school shift was not the only change that occurred during the year of 1940. Her father's health worsened, he had to give up his job and moved to the house of their relatives in Milledgeville. The whole family, O'Connor included, had to watch how a man they all loved, and who would otherwise have years of life before him, perished. He died at the age of forty-five, on the 1st of February 1941.

Despite the tragical event, she did not ease up on her writing and wrote (also illustrated) three books during the spring of 1941. All three books (*Elmo*, *Gertrude*, *Mistaken Identity*) were about geese. Do not be mistaken by the theme, these stories were not simple fables or fairy tales. Especially *Mistaken Identity*, a poem focusing on geese suffering with gender confusion, is quite progressive and can be considered up to date even now.

6.1.7. Georgia State College

O'Connor graduated from the Peabody High school in 1942 with sufficient results and a number of credits from various subjects. Georgia State College for Women was the school she had chosen to continue her education (she was now seventeen years old). Here she met a lifelong friend Betty Boyd Love, who shared interest in literature (especially poetry) with her.

In college, O'Connor remained the slightly isolated woman she had always been, especially because she was not living in the campus as majority of the fellow students, but home in Milledgeville. One exception was the Newman Club she had joined her first year, formed by approximately ten girls. They were the only Roman Catholics in the Georgia State College. Apart from the Newman, she was not interested in any other student club or group. She was repeatedly invited to the gatherings of YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association), yet she never came.

She continued to publish her works (although with low frequency); she just changed the high school newspaper to the college literary magazine *Corinthian*. The first satire

she published here was called *Going to the Dogs*. She also continued with her drawing, not only as a hobby, but she was also creating cartoons for a college paper – *Colonnade*. She became its art director, producing a new cartoon for every week. Eventually these cartoons earned her enough popularity the *Macon Telegraph and News* published a photo of O'Connor together with her profile titled *Mary O'Connor Shows Talent as Cartoonist*.

In her English classes, the teachers were not particularly blown away by O'Connor's writing style or her themes. They usually expected her to write like a young lady, which was not the case. This might be the reason for her choosing a Social Science major instead of Literature. Apart from that, she also chose education as her minor. The first academic person who saw a true talent in O'Connor was Miss Smith, her teacher for a special elective course (it included only twelve young women) called English 324, Advanced Composition. Miss Smith saw a real potential in O'Connor and encouraged her many times to submit her work to the *Corinthian*. After several of these recommendations, O'Connor finally submitted some of her works, first being the *Elegance Is Its Own Reward*, followed by *Home of the Brave*.

Preparing for her graduation in 1945, being now twenty years old, O'Connor had undergone a long way. From a quirky shy girl known by her colleagues on campus as the different one, she transformed into a woman many knew about and respected. She became the editor in chief of the *Corinthian*, art editor of the *Colonnade* newspaper, and feature editor of the *Spectrum* yearbook. She was also elected to the honor societies (Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities; the Phoenix; the International Relations Club).

Last but not least, the fact that should be mentioned about O'Connor's college endeavours would be her ongoing interest in philosophy. She was well acquainted with many old philosophical works as well as the newer ones, and throughout her schooling attended many philosophical courses. The last one was the most important one – a survey of modern philosophers tutored by Dr. Beiswanger. With him she led sometimes heated debates about various topics from the Medieval Church to Modernism. It was Dr. Beiswanger who suggested her to apply to the University of Iowa. Having contacts there, he had managed to secure her a generous journalism scholarship. It was an offer she could not refuse, so after her graduation from Georgia State College for Women on June 11, 1945, she was ready to continue her education there.

6.1.8. Iowa and The Workshop

O'Connor had moved to Iowa alone, her mother only helping her settle down the first time she travelled there. The change of surroundings was not the only one O'Connor had undergone. It was in Iowa where she decided to introduce herself not as Mary Flannery O'Connor, but simply as Flannery O'Connor (firstly asking her mother's permission to do so). Initially focusing on magazine work, she took courses focusing on magazine writing and such. She was also still interested in pursuing career as a cartoonist, submitting her cartoons to the Art Department and taking courses on drawing. She had also sent her drawings to several journals, but with no success.

Drawn by her failure on the artistic field, she decided to try her luck in writing. In the fall of 1945, she visited the director of the Iowa Writer's Workshop (creative writing programme at the University of Iowa), Paul Engle. After reading some of her stories, he accepted her to the Workshop immediately. As already established, the Workshop focused on creative writing, the students would usually meet in a circle and one or two of them would read their stories, the rest would comment on them. In Atlanta, she was encouraged to submit her works for publishing, and in Iowa the case was the same. After a rejection from *Sewanee River*, she did not give up and sent her stories *The Geranium* and *The Crop* to the *Accent* magazine. This magazine, however, not particularly large one, was accepted by the Workshop members as a good one. Therefore, it was considered as an accomplishment when they decided to publish *The Geranium*. Focusing more than ever on her writing, she developed a habit of writing every day at the same time of the day, which lasted O'Connor her whole life. She had not stopped submitting her stories even on her summer break, she, however, was not lucky this time. The *Southwest Review* refused her twice.

Starting her second year, she became more confident around the fellow students and some of the students started to seek her out, either to ask for help with writing or to just spent some time with her. Especially those who were able to see her potential and understood her personality.

The stories she wrote during her second year in the Georgia State College differ from each other a lot. This inconsistency shows O'Connor's exploration of her own writing abilities, themes she can work with, her writing style. *The Barber* is inspired by a true story concerning the member of the Workshop who because of his skin-color had to travel long distances to get a haircut (barbers in Iowa would

not allow him into their parlours). The first hints using her faith as a literary inspiration can be found in her other story, *The Turkey*. The character of Hazel Wickers, who will later reappear with changed name Haze Motes, was introduced in *The Train*, finding inspiration for the story literally during a train ride. These three above mentioned stories (together with other three) are comprised in O'Connor's master thesis collection.

While finishing her master thesis collection, she met Andrew Lytle (visiting instructor and lecturer), who became her mentor. Being a fellow Southerner, Lytle understood O'Connor and her work, more so was mesmerised by it. With his help, she was able to complete the missing pieces of *The Train* and present her master thesis collection *The Geranium: A Collection of Short Stories* (1947). However, it was more than just her master thesis, it also won her \$750 in a competition announced by Rinehart Publishers.

6.1.9. The Finale

Thanks to Engle's help, O'Connor secured a position as a teacher's assistant for her final year of study. Thanks to this position she was given her own office. She had also rented her own room in a big house similar to the one later described in *Wise Blood* as Haze Mote's abode.

Much has changed since her first public reading of her stories in Iowa. In the beginning, students and even the tutors had problems understanding her thick southern accent, now her readings were sought after. She particularly liked to read her stories to a small circle gathered at Austin Warren's house (he was a literary critic she had met thanks to his seminar she attended) every Sunday.

People who managed to get closer to her understood she needed guidance concerning her future. "Engle arranger a teaching fellowship for the following year,"⁴⁶ another friend (Paul Griffith, Workshop instructor) suggested her to apply for "a summer residency at the Yaddo artists' colony in Saratoga Springs."⁴⁷ He also helped her to get long list of recommendations from several members of the Worksop. O'Connor had been accepted and spent there the summer months of 1948.

⁴⁶ GOOCH, Brad: Flannery. *A Life of Flannery O'Connor*, p. 123

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123

6.1.10. The Place for Creators

The Yaddo artists' colony is located in the state of New York. Built in 1893 and consisting of several buildings, this vast estate has served as a "centre for creating"⁴⁸ since 1926. It is rumoured to be a place where Edgar Allan Poe (her big inspiration) have written *The Raven* in the 1940s.

In the summer of 1948, total of twenty-four guests (including O'Connor) were staying there. They were not only writers (even though the majority was), but also painters or composers, the majority residing in the mansion. There they would also meet for breakfasts and dinners. However, do not be mistaken, it was no vacation. A strict regime has been established for every guest. After breakfast, they were given a box with refreshments and were meant to go to their individual studios and create. To prevent any disturbance there must have been silence starting at nine in the morning and ending at four in the afternoon. During this time, no visitors were allowed as well. O'Connor had no problem with these rules since she had already found out the importance and positive influence the regular regime had on her work.

With a group of people from all over the States, it should be expected some will and some will not get along. She did not favour those who liked to party and act sometimes a bit posh. Nevertheless, there were also people she enjoyed, particularly strong male figures. A romantic interest might come to mind as the most probable reason, it was, however, not the case. As with Engle or Lytle, she found protection and support in those men, they, on the other hand, admired her as a writer but also as a person. One was Paul Moor, who recommended O'Connor to his literary agent, Elizabeth McKee. Interested in her work, she began correspondence with O'Connor concerning a contract for her novel in progress. The second male figure was Edward Meisel, who advocated for O'Connor's return to Yaddo after a short holiday spent in Milledgeville.

O'Connor continued to work on a draft of her novel, which she and Elizabeth McKee wanted to submit to John Selby at Rinehart (a short reminder – O'Connor had won \$750 with *The Geranium* in the Rinehart Publishers competition). This draft contained several chapters, some not entirely completed yet, of a story that would be later known as *The Wise Blood*.

⁴⁸ GOOCH, Brad: Flannery. *A Life of Flannery O'Connor*, p. 126

Spending the Christmas of 1948 at Yaddo, she perfected the first nine chapters of her novel, sending them to her agent to show to Selby (from Rinehart). He returned them with a note about required revision. O'Connor ended up sending the chapters as well as Selby's note to Engle, who partly shared Selby's confusion about where the novel was heading. Frustrated, she wrote back to Selby expressing her need for artistic freedom, claiming her novel will not be conventional and emphasizing the importance of peculiarity. These proclamations resulted in O'Connor being invited to a meeting with Selby to discuss the matters personally.

The ever-present peaceful atmosphere at Yaddo was disturbed in January 1949. One of the Yaddo former residents, Agnes Smedley, had been accused of helping Soviet spies out of Shanghai. Shortly after this report, two FBI agents questioned some of the Yaddo residents about their knowledge on Communist sympathies at Yaddo. The investigation had resulted in the ousting of Elizabeth Ames, the Yaddo's director. She later came back, without any charges and was the head of Yaddo until her retirement. However, directly after all the questioning, the guest at Yaddo left one by one, O'Connor included.

6.1.11. The Rain on Her Parade

The abrupt departure from Yaddo left Flannery confused and unhappy, her regular working schedule disrupted. She had travelled to Manhattan, staying briefly with a fellow Yaddo resident, then moving to a single room apartment. She found help in New York as well. Robert Lowell, whom she had also met at Yaddo and became close friend with (he was also a Catholic, admired her work), introduced her around. It was him who brought her to Sally and Robert Fitzgerald's house. Especially Sally was instantly interested in O'Connor's writing, finding *The Train* intense and unexpected.

Changing the apartment, she dived back to her routine, consisting of a morning prayer, and then mostly spending time in her room, writing. She, however, did not enjoy New York very much, therefore the invitation from the Fitzgeralds to move with them (as a paying guest) into a nice country house in Connecticut, was much appreciated. After some time spent with their family (they had several children) she started to consider them her 'adopted kin,' later becoming a godparent to their third child.

A routine visit to Milledgeville in December 1949 turned out to be much more serious. O'Connor was hospitalized for an operation for a floating kidney. Eventually, she had spent a whole month in hospital, after which she spent another month with her family in Milledgeville, gaining back her strength.

She arrived back to Connecticut in March. Working tirelessly on her novel, eventually retyping the whole piece, different health issues started to manifest. She complained about a stiffness in her hands, attributing it to her writing schedule. When the stiffness had changed into the inability to raise her hands to the typewriter, she visited a doctor. He deemed a rheumatoid arthritis (“a chronic disease marked by symptoms of inflammation and pain in the joints⁴⁹) to be the most probable diagnosis, however the symptoms did not check out completely. Therefore “he recommended a complete physical examination at her local hospital.”⁵⁰ During her journey back South, her condition worsened noticeably and upon her arrival, she was admitted to Baldwin Memorial Hospital.

6.1.12. Lupus Erythematosus

At first, she had been treated for the rheumatoid arthritis, being given cortisone (it had powerful anti-inflammatory properties). Her improvement was expected, however, it turned out to be just that – an expectation. It had helped her to an extent but did not relieve her of high fever. Her condition was discussed with Dr. Merrill (Georgia's first kidney specialist) over the telephone. It was him who had suggested disseminated lupus erythematosus as the most probable diagnosis. As mentioned previously, lupus is an autoimmune disease and causes “widespread inflammation and tissue damage in the affected organs. It can affect the joints, skin, brain, lungs, kidneys, and blood vessels.”⁵¹ The disease is also highly unpredictable, it manifests itself in flares, sometimes it is almost dormant, other times the affected person suffers through different symptoms.

On Dr. Merrill's recommendation, O'Connor was transferred to a hospital in Atlanta (the Emory University Hospital) in February 1950. There he would personally manage her tests. One of them confirmed Dr. Merrill's suspicion, however, her mother's decision

⁴⁹ *Rheumatoid arthritis symptoms* [online]

⁵⁰ GOOCH, Brad: Flannery. *A Life of Flannery O'Connor*, p. 155

⁵¹ *Systemic Lupus Erythematosus* [online]

was not to tell her, since it would weaken her even more. After all, the same disease had killed O'Connor's beloved father. It was not only the bad memories attached to lupus that caused distress in her family members, it was also the fact that science did not progress in finding a cure for it. O'Connor was prescribed with high dosages of ACTH ("adrenocorticotrophic hormone, derived from the pituitary glands of pigs"⁵²). It helped her tremendously; however, the side effects could not be overlooked. If we put it plainly, her mind was overstimulated, according to her own words, the cortisone made her think night and day.

6.1.13. Wise Blood

After O'Connor's discharge from hospital, her mother decided to move from Milledgeville, since the house there was not opt for her daughter's physical condition. She chose a former plantation in Andalusia, where they would live together.

One good thing came from her month-long stay at the Emory – her novel was finished. Rinehart, however, refused to publish it, therefore she sought out Robert Giroux (Harcourt, Brace publishing house) and sent him the manuscript, bearing the title *Wise Blood*. She met Giroux when Lowell was introducing her around New York and he was instantly charmed by her, he could feel she is special, an unusual talent. After initial hesitancy from the editorial board, *Wise Blood* was accepted in June 1951. The letter of acceptance was accompanied with suggested additions and corrections. The manuscript had also been sent to the Fitzgeralds, who (with O'Connor's permission) sent it to Caroline Gordon (novelist, literary critic). Caroline was "in search of a Catholic literary 'renaissance.' In *Wise Blood* [...] she saw some of her wish realized."⁵³

Gordon did not hesitate to express her enthusiasm, but also to send a few suggestions that would improve the novel. Being respected among young writers, these suggestions were appreciated, starting a back-and-forth correspondence between them.

May 15 of 1952 was the day *Wise Blood* was finally published (in three thousand copies), accompanied with a few words from Caroline Gordon, comparing O'Connor's work to Franz Kafka. The unconventional novel earned contrasting

⁵² GOOCH, Brad: Flannery. *A Life of Flannery O'Connor*, p. 160

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 165

reactions from readers and mixed reactions from critics. Many of them were occupied with different, in post-war world 'more interesting' literature (Steinbeck's *East of Eden*; Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, or National Book Award-winning *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison). Others were not able to see the real point behind the obvious, or even called the story a work of insanity and the writer insane. However, after the first negative wave, the second, more thoughtful one came. They saw big potential in Flannery O'Connor, appreciated her courage to take on a nontypical subject.

6.1.14. Back Home

Year and a half later than O'Connor anticipated; she decided it was the right time for her to return to Connecticut to her adopted kin – the Fitzgeralds. It was from Sally Fitzgerald's mouth O'Connor finally learned the true nature of her illness, since she had been still convinced she had arthritis. Although being shaken by this revelation, she was infinitely grateful for Sally's honesty. Shortly afterwards, half of the household came down with different health issues, including O'Connor (she contracted a virus), who decided it was her time to leave Connecticut.

From there she travelled to Atlanta to see Dr. Merrill. There she heard disturbing news – the lupus was reactivated by the virus. She had to undergo two transfusions and her dosage of ACTH was raised. Deciding not to come back to Connecticut, she moved back with her mother. After the lupus flare, she needed some distraction, so she ordered peafowls that became a lifelong pleasure of hers.

The small-town life was her inspiration for other writing. The first attempt to portray the society she was surrounded with was a satire *A Late Encounter with the Enemy*, published in Harper's Bazaar September issue in 1953. The subtle changes in her style continued in another Flannery O'Connor's work, a short story *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*. The change, highly appreciated and admired by many earned her a \$2000 *Kenyon Review* fiction fellowship, followed by publication of the above-mentioned short story in the spring 1953 issue.

6.1.15. A Good Man Is Hard to Find

Always being keen on keeping up with a regular schedule, in Andalusia O'Connor established a rhythm she stuck with for the rest of her life. As was already mentioned, she was a Catholic, always dutifully attending the masses wherever she was. Andalusia was no exception. "Immediately on waking, she read the prayers for Prime [...]. Following coffee, she and her mother then drove into town to attend mass at Sacred Heart, celebrated most weekday mornings at seven [...]."⁵⁴ The period from nine to twelve was reserved for writing. The years of 1952 and 1953 were especially fruitful. She started to work on her second novel as well as on several short stories (all contained death as one of the prominent themes). Stories like *The River* or *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* belong to this period. After reading the stories both her agent and her publisher were thrilled.

Being inspired by a family of Polish refugees who started to work for O'Connors at the farm, she started working on another short story – *The Displaced Person*, dealing with a theme of manners and race. She later revisited it and turned it into a novella. Another story inspired by her surroundings was *A Circle in the Fire*, published in *Kenyon Review* in 1954. Almost at the same time she wrote another story, *A Temple of the Holy Ghost* introduced in *Harper's Bazaar* in May 1954. She had earned a bit of a discordant reaction from a publisher for naming her next story the *Artificial Nigger*, notwithstanding the story was published in the *Kenyon Review* in 1955.

Even though she did her best in taking care of herself, following her body's needs and resting, whenever she felt like it, she was in pain and it was starting to show. Her friends noticed she was being more careful, while walking down the steps, a slight limp from a hip pain caused by rheumatism. By the spring of 1954, she had started to use a cane.

Throughout her stay in Andalusia, she had been much more productive (compared to her writing *Wise Blood* for seven years). Heeding Robert Giroux's advice, she put the short stories together and created a collection published under the title *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, published in spring 1955. It contained one new short story, *Good Country People*, praised by her publisher as well as Caroline Gordon, to whom she turned for review every time. To promote the collection, O'Connor

⁵⁴ GOOCH, Brad: Flannery. *A Life of Flannery O'Connor*, p. 184

had attended a talk show Galley Proof hosted by Harvey Breit, an assistant editor of the New York Times Sunday Book Review.

The reception of her newest book was positive, many critics had changed their opinion on her fiction. Reviews in Herald Tribune Book Review or in the New York Times praised her as ‘the new shining talent’ or ‘one of their (means American) most talented writers. The book itself was selling successfully, through the summer of 1955, around 4,000 copies were sold, leading to the collection being named a finalist of a 1956 National Book Award.

6.1.16. Novelist, Presenter, Reviewer

Despite not feeling particularly keen on writing another novel, she had signed a contract for a story with a working title *You Can't Be Any Poorer than Dead*. Similarly to *Wise Blood*, it would take years to finish it. For O'Connor, writing a novel sometimes felt as a duty, homework. She often ‘escaped’ to writing short stories, often perceived as her most successful work. These escapes resulted for example into a short story *Green Leaf*, but also in writing her talk on literary freaks to be presented for the American Association of University Women on Lansing. This was one of many speeches she delivered all across the country, many of them focusing on explaining her work. While giving her speech at the Emory in 1957, she protested against being labelled the ‘stereotypical Southern gothic writer.’ She “insisted that her own use of the grotesque was meant to convey a shocking Christian vision of the original sin.”⁵⁵

Flannery O'Connor also formed a professional relationship with Bishop Francis E. Hyland, specifically the *Bulletin* – a paper published under the Diocese of Atlanta every second week. She wrote one-page reviews that appeared in *Bulletin* for the next eight years. The Bishop was not the only person she had established some kind of a relationship with. Thanks to her popularity growth, she met many new people and made many new friends (especially through correspondence).

⁵⁵ GOOCH, Brad: Flannery. *A Life of Flannery O'Connor*, p. 238

6.1.17. Lourdes Pilgrimage

The Lourdes Centennial Pilgrimage was a package tour organised by the Diocese of Savannah to the “site of Bernadette Soubirous’s vision of the Virgin Mary in the south of France.”⁵⁶ Despite her worsening health condition, O’Connor had been planning to undergo the trip in 1958, mostly because her cousin generously offered to pay for both O’Connor and her mother (it was \$1,050.40 per-person), hoping the Bernadette’s spring would improve O’Connor’s health. She would not go only to Lourdes, but also to Paris, Dublin, London, Barcelona, Rome, and Lisbon, all this she had planned to do in seventeen days.

The plans were almost lost when Dr. Merrill advised against the trip after an X ray had revealed hip deterioration. O’Connor was not too unhappy, not entirely excited to go in the first place. However, her cousin could not accept this outcome, designing a less taxing schedule than the previous one. Being as pragmatic as she could be, three days before the departure, she had filed her will, feeling that a trip as demanding as this one could have fatal consequences.

They left for the trip on 21st April 1958, travelling through Dublin, London, and Milan to stay at the Fitzgeralds’ estate near Genoa. O’Connor unfortunately caught a cold, which stick to her even after they had left to continue their journey to Paris. Therefore, she had to stay in her hotel room most of the time. From Paris, they travelled to Lourdes, where, although being sceptical, she endured a bath in the healing water, to fulfil the wish her cousin had. Their journey back home took them (among other places) to Rome, where the pope (Pius XII) himself gave her a special blessing. After their return home, O’Connor had received a word from Dr. Merrill, claiming that her hip had begun to calcify. Thanks to that she was able to walk at least around her room freely, without crutches. One can only debate if this unexpected improvement was a result of her pilgrimage, therefore a work of God.

6.1.18. The Violent and the Sexual

The rest she took from writing her second novel did wonders for her. After she was rested from her journey, she went straight back to it with a new fervour, also settling definitely on a title for it – *The Violent Bear It Away*. Finishing the story

⁵⁶ GOOCH, Brad: Flannery. *A Life of Flannery O’Connor*, p. 245

at the beginning of 1959, she sent the manuscript to Caroline Gordon as her first reader, and also to the Fitzgeralds and some other friends. Their reactions forced her to rewrite some parts of the story to finally finish it in the fall of the same year.

While waiting for the novel to be published, she returned back to story writing with a short story *The Comforts of Home*. She was angered by some readers, and especially the editor of *Kenyon Review*, who published the story with an illustration of a naked person. She defeated the story (and some others) since her intention was not to write anything highly sexual. “When anyone detected a sexual undercurrent in her own stories, she could be very outsized in her response.”⁵⁷ It is important to understand that O’Connor had never been with a man more intimately than to share a kiss (as far as is known, a big collection of her correspondence is available). This might be a reason for her anger towards those who saw a sexual motif in her stories, nevertheless it is only a hypothesis.

The Violent Bear It Away was finally published on February 8, 1960. The critics’ reactions were mixed, they again admired her as a writer, yet perceived the story as a bit too ‘harsh.’ Kinder words came from the *Catholic World* and, perhaps surprisingly, from *Vogue*. Her friends’ reactions to her newest novel were equally mixed.

As was previously mentioned, O’Connor had given a number of speeches about literature, her work, especially focusing on Southern literature, Catholic authors, Grotesque themes etc. She was also often invited to give public readings of her stories (especially *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* was favoured). The year of 1960 was no exception, she had even attended a three-day long workshop dedicated to her work.

6.1.19. Southerner. Racists?

By the beginning of 1961, she was back at her typewriter, working on another story, with Teilhard’s (Jesuit priest, theologian, philosopher whom she had found while searching for new catholic thinkers) popular phrase as the title – *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. The title sums up “the priest’s notion of all life, from the geological to the human, converging toward an integration of the material

⁵⁷ GOOCH, Brad: *Flannery. A Life of Flannery O’Connor*, p. 263

and the spiritual [...]. In O'Connor's case, she had applied Teilhard's opinions on a "certain situation in the Southern States & indeed in all the world."⁵⁸ The 'situation' meant the civil rights movement sparked by a famous bus incident concerning Rosa Lee Parks (December 1955).

Being from the South, she was raised in racially not always tolerant environment, especially her mother was not too keen on a subject of racial equality. She escaped this while being at college, but now was back home. Her feelings were mixed, she felt sorry for the victims of segregation, yet the cultural influence was still in the back of her mind. One of her monk friends addressed O'Connor's stance towards black people: "I would call Flannery a cultural racist. It wasn't that she didn't know they were children of God redeemed by the blood of Christ. Of course, she knew that. Nevertheless, the vocabulary she used was typical Southern white. [...] She did not hate black people. But she did resent the whiteys from the North coming down and telling us how to handle our problems with the black."⁵⁹

Whatever her opinion on the whole civil rights movement matter was, she used it to her advantage as a source of inspiration. *Everything That Rises Must Converge* was published in October 1961 (in *New World Writing*) and won her the O. Henry Award a year later.

6.1.20. The Lame and the Rage

Summer of 1961 came, and O'Connor was working on a new story yet again. Taken from scraps of *The Violent Bear It Away*, the first draft of the new story *The Lame Shall Enter First* she presented to Caroline Gordon, who was on a visit in Andalusia, as per usual. However, she was not enthusiastic about it, claiming O'Connor's style was starting to be influenced by her essay writing. Therefore, after Caroline had left, she set to rewrite the story, finishing it by the end of 1961. She was still angry with Robie Macauley (editor of *Kenyon Review* who published her story with the naked man photography), therefore she contacted Andrew Lytle, now editor of *Sewanee River*, asking him to publish the story. He was pleasantly surprised with the development of her writing style since she was his student, he even dedicated a special summer issue

⁵⁸ GOOCH, Brad: Flannery. *A Life of Flannery O'Connor*, p. 272

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 275

to O'Connor and her fiction. Lytle's praise was probably not enough since she tried (unsuccessfully) to stop the publishing process of *The Lame Shall Enter First*, because 'she did not like it.'

The following year brought no new stories. She instead focused on her public readings and talks. For the literary festival in Converse College in Spartanburg, she shared an invitation with other important authors, among them Eudora Welty. O'Connor's opinion of other Southern writers was usually not amiable, she especially disliked Carson McCullers, yet she respected Welty. Being repeatedly asked when her third novel would see the light of the day, she started to work on it (the title was *Why Do the Heathen Rage?*) after her return from Rosary College. However, as with her two previous novels, she struggled with this one too, especially with the main character (Walter, a bookish novelist, who bears characteristics similar to O'Connor herself).

6.1.21. Health Issues

In the fall 1963, O'Connor's health had begun to worsen again. "She had been suffering from increased fatigue, diagnosed as severe anaemia, for which she was treated with an iron preparation."⁶⁰ Her sitting in a waiting room of her doctor's office had one advantage, she could observe people and gather impressions of country types and what they talk about. These observations resulted in another short story – *The Revelation*. Gaining enthusiastic reactions from Caroline Gordon, as well as her other friends, she allowed the story to be published in *Sewanee River*.

This brief writing interlude ended when one morning in December 1963 O'Connor fainted. She spent ten days on a bed rest, the test results showing a problem with her blood (lower blood pressure). Astonishingly, she found strength to start working on her second collection of short stories.

In February, she received another message from her doctors – she has an enlarged fibroid tumour that needs to be surgically removed (this was the cause of her anaemia). Fearing another lupus flare, Dr. Merrill had suggested she should undergo the procedure in Atlanta. O'Connor refused his recommendations, not wanting to strain her mother (recovering from flu) and herself as well. She was admitted to Baldwin County Hospital

⁶⁰ GOOCH, Brad: *Flannery O'Connor*, p. 290

on February 24, 1964. She was sent home ten days after her admission, convinced (as the others) her operation had positive outcome. However, she was back in bed within two weeks, due to postoperative cystitis and infections. Her condition was not getting better, by the time her thirty-ninth birthday came, she knew her situation was not good. One morning in April she had woken up with a lupus rash, this was a sign for her to seek medical help in hospital.

When she came back to the Andalusian farm, she immediately continued her work on the second short story collection. She had originally planned to redo parts of the original stories; however, she was not able to do so. Her doctor prohibited her typing more than short business letters. The solution to her ‘problem’ was simple, she asked her agent to collect the stories (eight in total) how they were published in magazines. Eventually deciding to omit *The Partridge Festival* and substitute it with *Judgment Day*, which was “a retelling of her first published story from Iowa, *The Geranium*,” she intended to redo to show how much she improved over the years. Signing the contract for this collection, its definite name was revealed – *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. After that she was admitted to hospital once more, having to undergo several tests and receiving four blood transfusions. She lost about twenty pounds, for her doctors prescribed her a low-protein diet.

She was not idle even in a hospital bed. She managed to rewrite the *Judgement Day*, and start her work on yet another story, *Parker’s Back* (idea for this story had been in her mind for many years).

She was sent back home on June 12, 1964, where her mother had set an electric typewriter by her bedside so she could write. She mainly focused on finishing the short story collection, debating what stories she should rewrite or what other stories to include. However, she was not getting any better, her symptoms of kidney infection returned, she had another transfusion and was prescribed double dose of antibiotics. On July 29, she felt extremely ill, an ambulance was called and she was rushed into hospital, yet there was not much that could be done at this point. She received the Eucharist and was administered last rites. In the night, O’Connor had “slipped into a coma, and was pronounced dead, at the age of thirty-nine, on August 3, 1964 at 12:40 a.m.”⁶¹

⁶¹ GOOCH, Brad: Flannery. *A Life of Flannery O’Connor*, p. 302

6.1.22. The Aftermath

Funeral mass for Flannery O'Connor was held the next day (August 4, 1964) at 11:00 a.m. at Sacred Heart Church. Therefore, her friends from the North were not able to attend it. Many of them learned about their beloved passing from the *New York Times*.

Her death did not stop the publishing process of her last short story collection *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (published in April 1965). Whether moved by her tragical fate and recent death or not, the reactions were highly positive. Her popularity did not evaporate with her last publication. Robert Giroux collected all her short stories, arranged them in chronological order and published this collection under the title *The Complete Stories*. It was definitely a success, winning O'Connor the 1972 National Book Award in Fiction posthumously.

7. Carson McCullers

“I live with the people I create, and it has always made my essential loneliness less keen.”

Carson McCullers (1917-1967) is often connected with the term grotesque, one of the main features of her work. The opening sentence of a section devoted to her in *Encyclopaedia of Gothic Literature* can be a proof for all: “McCullers produced a remarkable canon of Gothic stories about grotesque, alienated, and freakish characters who botch repeated attempts at intimacy.”⁶² In majority of publications, although celebrated as a great author, she often stands in a shadow of other authors, or is compared to them. Flannery O’Connor was no exception. Richard Gray in *A History of American Literature* introduces McCullers as “a writer whose fictional world was as strange yet instantly recognizable as O’Connor’s.”⁶³

7.1. Biography

7.1.1. Lula

Carson McCullers was born as Lula Carson Smith on February 19, 1917 to Marguerite Waters Smith and Lamar Smith in Columbus, Georgia. She was named after her grandmother from her mother’s side (an Irish emigrant), nevertheless at the age of seventeen she abandoned her first name Lula and became just Carson Smith.

Both of her parents were invested in their jewellery business, recently buying a new shop in the lobby of the Grand Theatre on Broad Street (Marguerite’s idea how to attract the window-shoppers). Their business was good, the family was provided for. Therefore, twenty-seven month after their little Carson had been born, her mother delivered a second child, brother named after his father Lamar, Jr.

Her mother was always ambitious, convinced her firstborn child would be ‘someone big, important, or famous.’ Therefore, she had signed her to a kindergarten at the age of four and a half (September 1921) to be “exposed to a teacher who might encourage her talents to flower more readily.”⁶⁴ Even before, she was fascinated with

⁶² SNODGRASS, Mary Ellen. *Encyclopaedia of Gothic Literature*, p. 225

⁶³ GRAY, Richard. *A History of American Literature Second Edition*, p. 592

⁶⁴ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 13

words, having been able to recognize many of them in a text at such a young age. She also liked to invent her own stories while flipping through a book.

Even during her early childhood, she preferred solitude to being with many people. She had made an exception for her closest family and a friend or two, otherwise she enjoyed the time spent in her room alone the most. This could be caused by her nature, but also by her mother's conviction that her beloved Carson is special, different. Hence to be 'marked' as different could cause her self-isolation.

When she was five years old, her last sibling was born: a sister called Margarita Gachet Smith. McCullers did not appreciate the new addition to the household much, she was jealous she was not her mother's only princess. Also, the noise and peace disturbance a new-born can cause was not welcomed.

7.1.2. Changes

The whole family had lived at Marguerite's mother house, with her mother Lula Waters being the true leader of the household, the matriarch. When she died on November 21, 1923 (McCullers was almost seven years old), things have changed. The family had lost their interest in the First Baptist Church, the children still attending the Sunday school, but the parents not caring much about any form of organized religion. McCullers, however, went through a religious phase, when she joined the First Baptist Church in November 1925, presenting herself for baptism the following spring. This religious phase has lasted for another seven years and stopped after she had decided she would no longer attend the Sunday school or go to church again.

Another big change connected with the days after her grandmother had died occurred when the family decided to move away from their old house. The downtown area was not as attractive as it used to be, so they decided to move to suburbs. For McCullers, it was not a pleasant experience, since she had to change schools (Sixteenth Street School to Wynton Elementary). She was afraid that she would be singled out, would not find any new friends. Eventually she found some friends to play after school, also her best friend Helen Jackson moved to the same neighbourhood a year later.

7.1.3. Becoming Carson – the Pianist, the Writer

Carson McCullers' great talent, apart from writing, was playing the piano. Her mother introduced her to music and the instrument itself at a young age, sitting on a piano stool with her daughter on her lap. She knew her daughter had an ear for music. After their move, she arranged piano lessons for her. Music became her passion, often practicing several hours a day. At the age of thirteen she set a goal for herself – to become a famous concert pianist. Her first teacher was Mrs. Kendrick Kierce, who taught her everything she could, after that she recommended her to find someone more experienced than herself. McCullers then applied to Mary Tucker, a concert pianist. She recommended McCullers to study piano at universities in New York or Philadelphia. In the summer of 1930, she also decided she would no longer use both her names (Lula Carson) and abandoned Lula in favour of Carson.

As stated, music was her interest from a very young age, writing was not. The first thought about writing came to her mind when, at the age of fifteen, she was put to bed rest for several weeks due to a serious illness. The diagnose was pneumonia with complications, years later changed to rheumatic fever. Whatever the case, she was sure, it was tuberculosis, identifying with Eugene O'Neil, who really suffered from it. During her convalescence she started to consider writing, nonetheless, gave it up and studied composition instead. This, however, led her to ponder upon her future as a concert pianist. She was not sure if she really was this wunderkind, this genius her mother wanted her to be, or if she was 'just' a talented musician.

She had spent weeks contemplating what her future should be. Finally, in December 1932, still fifteen years old, she announced her friend Helen she would not be a famous pianist but a famous writer. She, however, did not stop attending Mrs. Tucker's lesson for quite a long time.

7.1.4. High Scholl Endeavours

After she had finished the elementary school, she started to attend the Columbus High School. She did not break her social bubble even there, many of her classmates considered her to be a bit of a freak, especially for her fashion style and overall appearance (old-fashioned clothing, loose fitting sweaters etc.). She definitely was not popular, she did not date, her first kiss came years later. McCullers herself

was not happy with her appearance, especially her height. Being 5 feet and 8_{1/2} tall, she would always be the one to stick out from the rest in school photos. To stop her growth, she started smoking at the age of fourteen, her mother never raising any objections, on the contrary offering her daughter a cigarette herself.

Her high school teachers shared similar attitude about her as her classmates. They found her irritating sometimes, they were unhappy about her obvious lack of interest for school. Some blamed her demanding piano training (three hours before school and three to five after) for her average results. Nevertheless, she successfully graduated in June 1933 with five credits above the required limit.

7.1.5. Under the Influence

McCullers expressed no desire to go to college after her graduation, her mother, however, was convinced she would study at Juilliard School of Music in New York. The problem was a lack of financial resources. She would need to apply for a scholarship, which she declined. She continued to study under Mrs. Tucker.

Her interest in literature also emerged. She instructed her cousin working in library to provide her with a list of all the books marked as the ‘greatest literature in the word.’ She would then proceed to read them all, interested in everything from the translations of German and French literature; nineteenth century Russian realists, Greek philosophy and drama, to British and American literature. Especially interesting for her were the writings of James Joyce, Gustave Flaubert, Brontë sisters, Nathaniel Hawthorne, or William Faulkner.

Influenced by Eugene O’Neil (and being in platonic love with him), she wrote her first play *The Faucet*, which she sent him. No response ever came and there is no copy of this play preserved as far as is known. Her second play *The Fire of Life* was influenced by Nietzsche’s text.

McCullers also wrote her first novel – *A Reed of Pan*, set in New York. She even managed to find an agent who promised to try and market it for her. However, he pointed out several factual errors she made, since she had never been to New York. Realising she needed to work on her writing more before submitting it anywhere, she promised herself to spend next few years ‘working like a fiend.’ The first short story she presented

to her parents was *Sucker*, with a plea to have it typed. Lamar (her father) solved the issue brilliantly; he bought his daughter her own typewriter so she could do it herself.

7.1.6. Peacock Alternates Tucker

Spring of 1934 was not a happy time for her, her piano teacher Mrs. Tucker had announced her she would be moving away because of her husband's transfer (he was in military). For McCullers, Mrs. Tucker and her family was like a second family to her, therefore this information caused emotional turmoil in her. Yet, what she felt inside, she never showed on the outside. She continued to take lessons and play the piano. Her emotions overflowed when visiting her teacher who was still recuperating from serious illness, McCullers announced to her she would never be a concert pianist, giving up her dream and setting out a new one – to become a writer. For Mrs. Tucker this statement was as shocking as was for McCullers the announcement of their departure.

Apart from all the musical knowledge she received from Mrs. Tucker, she can also be grateful for the opportunity to meet a lifelong friend through the Tucker family. Edwin Peacock and Carson McCullers met in a car ride to Rachmaninoff's concert in Atlanta, a journey the Tuckers helped to arrange. Shortly afterwards he was a regular at the Smiths household, listening to gramophone or eating dinner with the family. For him McCullers even started to play the piano again. She also showed him her stories, for she considered him to be well-read. Her impression was right, he soon introduced her to authors she did not discover for herself (John Steinbeck, John Dos Passos), but also put her in touch with Karl Marx.

7.1.7. New York Is Calling

The more she was invested in literature, the more she wanted to be in New York among other writers, pleading her other to allow her to move there (she was only seventeen). Although others tried to discourage Marguerite from this idea, she wanted the best for her daughter, and New York was the best for her future career she thought. The financial side of the matter was an issue. Her father had to sell a valuable family heirloom so they could afford both, their daughter studying at Juilliard, and also creative writing courses at Columbia University. She was sent on her way with around five hundred dollars.

Upon her arriving Claire Sasser was waiting for her. McCullers was to live with her until she would find something else. Their meeting had been arranged by their parents; they were complete strangers. Claire was instructed to keep an eye on her, to be her mentor. She took this task seriously, the first advice she gave her was about her finances. It was dangerous for her to carry all her money on her always. Therefore, they combined their money together to store it, yet it had never come to that, all the money was gone, stolen, or left behind on the subway. Feeling responsible, Claire phoned home to ask for money for both of them. McCullers was not brave enough to announce to her parents what had happened, so she accepted enough money from Claire to survive.

She found herself in a situation that prevented her from studying at Juilliard, since she needed to find a job to take care of herself and to attend the writing classes. Fortunately, she managed to pay her tuition to Columbia University before she lost all her money, therefore she could attend the classes there (philosophy, psychology, the art of short story). She could not stand the small apartment with one bed she shared with Claire, therefore she left. When someone would ask her years later where she had gone, she would give a shocking answer – a brothel. A tale about her naivete and ignorance would then develop, how she only realised where she wanted to live after a man was presented to her to take care of (she did not). Whether the story is true or false, she was lost in an unknown big city.

She had found shelter in the Parnassus Club, a West Side girls' residence, nevertheless, it did not make her happy. Moreover, she was sick with cold for most of the time. To find a job in a big city during the Great Depression was not easy, especially for an unskilled worker as herself. On the other side, it provided her a good material to write about, like in a short story *Court in the West Eighties*. She tried many job positions in a short amount of time. Truth be told, she was not an employer of the year, in an office job she was reading a book instead of answering a phone, when applying for a position in a restaurant, she refused to serve as a short-order cook, because she would not learn how to cook for someone else. Even the jobs she had in magazines as editor were short-lived, for these magazines were always at the brink of bankruptcy. The dog walker position had turned out to be the best for her, she loved dogs, she could observe the people and the city, and it provided her enough time to go to classes and write.

McCullers did not spend a long time living in the Parnassus Club, at the beginning of the semester, she moved to the Three Arts Club, a housing for girls who made their living by practicing art (be it dancing, painting, acting, or writing). Here she found some friends and her life finally settled down a bit.

7.1.8. Fruitful Summer

She maintained correspondence both with her mother and Edwin Peacock, who wrote her everything about his new friend – a corporal from Fort Benning called James Reeves McCullers Jr., who Edwin sometimes brought along to visit the Smith household. That is how Carson Smith and Reeves McCullers met, when she came home in June 1935 after her term at Columbia university had ended. The three of them shared the same interests – music and literature, but they also hiked together, drove around the country, and drank beer. It did not take long for them to fall in love.

In the summer of 1935, she was not only having fun, but she was also writing and collecting inspiration for her future stories by walking through the town. Especially interesting for her were the not so attractive parts of her hometown. She would spend hours walking around the riverbank where she could meet and talk to all sorts of people, not hesitant to wander through the black parts of the town.

It might have been during those walks when a new idea about how to fulfil her writing ambitions came over her mind. She contacted Nelson Shipp, the Columbus Ledger editor, to ask him for an unpaid position as a volunteer reporter. He was a former journalism instructor and the prospect of training a new reporter had lured him, therefore he accepted. She lasted a month in the Ledger. The “practicality of writing factual prose, the regimentation required by the rigid structure of journalese, the impossibility of embellishment-all intimidated her.”⁶⁵

7.1.9. Mrs. Bates

In September, it was time for Carson McCullers to go back to New York. Although she wanted to live there for the rest of her life, it was not easy to leave Edwin

⁶⁵ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 58

and especially Reeves, with whom she was engaged at the time (even though there was no engagement ring).

This time she chose to attend the Washington Square College of New York University, applying to Sylvia Chatfield Bates's evening fiction workshop that had been recommended to her. She did not have to regret this decision. Mrs. Bates encouraged her, gave her critical response, and forced her to be more disciplined. It was under her leadership, McCullers wrote some of her first superior works (*Poldi*; *Instant of the Hour*), however, they remained in her table drawer for her whole life, being published four years after her death (collection called *The Mortgaged Heart*, edited by her sister). Sadly, she destroyed many of her early stories she was not satisfied with.

She came home that summer (June 1936), tired and ill, for a shorter time period than the previous summer. Mrs. Bates encouraged her to attend Whitt Burnett's short story writing course in July. Reeves had managed to purchase his discharge from the U. S. Army and moved to New York in September, to study journalism and anthropology. By this time, she was not interested in listening to others critiquing her writing, it was time for her to do it on her own.

7.1.10. Too Focused

Encouraged by acceptance of her two pieces (*Wunderkind* and *Like That*) by the *Story* magazine, McCullers adopted an unhealthy lifestyle of waking up early to write for several hours, surviving mainly on coffee and cigarettes (three packs a day). Her body, always quite fragile and prone to illness could not endure this 'torture' forever. Hence on November 12, 1936 she was taken back to Columbus by Reeves, because she became seriously ill (deep respiratory infection, chronic low-grade fever).

Upon her arrival, she was put to bedrest for the whole winter (1936-1937) in order to fully recover. She was misdiagnosed with tuberculosis, while in reality it had been a rheumatic fever. This mistake caused her serious health issues later in her life that could have been avoided if she would change her lifestyle (for that however she would need the right diagnose).

The reason she had spent so many hours writing was her objective to write a novel. Yet it was not until she was back home when she had the breakthrough idea to make the main character a deaf mute. With this idea, the fundamental base of *The Heart*

Is a Lonely Hunter was created. When it had seemed all right to leave for New York again, she moved in with Reeves and his friend Vincent Adams, the three of them shared an apartment in Sunnyside. Her stay there however, was not long, only three weeks after she had arrived, she was back home in Columbus, for she was ill again.

7.1.11. Mrs. McCullers

This time her convalescence was much quicker, by June 1937 she felt well enough to open her own course, lecturing Columbus ladies in music appreciation. She had hoped to earn enough money to buy her trousseau. Reeves too was trying desperately to earn money for their life together, however in the time of Great Depression it was not easy. He moved to his aunt and uncle in Charlotte, North Carolina, and was looking for a job, yet bad luck was sticking to his feet. Eventually he had found a job, the salary however was not fixed, he was dependant on a commission. Almost everything he earned he spent on food and other necessities, with the rest he bought a car to be able to see more people, therefore earn more money. Unfortunately, the car had been damaged in a car accident. After this incident, he decided there was no point in waiting, he would go back to Columbus and marry Carson.

Reeves arrived at Columbus on September 20, 1937 and they arranged the wedding the same day. Everything was rushed, Carson McCullers was washing her hair at their neighbour's house (the water at theirs was off), her mother was sewing her daughter nightgowns, the refreshment for the guest was prepared by their neighbour. The ceremony took place at noon, then they had lunch after which they left for train station to travel for Charlotte, where Reeves rented them an apartment.

The first eight months of their marriage spent in Charlotte had been on a cloud nine, as is the usual case with newlywed couples. However, by no means was it smooth. The money was an issue, but they managed to survive, health was another problem. The winter was the worst, McCullers suffering with chest ailment, Reeves came down with pleurisy. They took care of each other and even managed to do some writing in the process, especially McCullers, since Reeves spent a lot of time in his job (he acquired a position as an investigator). In March 1938, Reeves was promoted, meaning higher salary but also necessity to move away from Charlotte to Fayetteville. Neither of them had ever been there, nevertheless she did not hesitate for a moment and supported her husband.

Right before their intended move, McCullers had been contacted by Sylvia Chatfield Bates (her teacher from New York writing courses), who recommended her to apply her novel in progress for the Houghton Mifflin Fiction Fellowship Award. Before that she should also send it to William March, an acquaintance of both of them, whom she should ask for criticism and opinion. His more than positive reaction convinced her to send the novel to Houghton Mifflin.

7.1.12. The Reality Check

Fayetteville was polar opposite of Charlotte in more than one sense. The apartment they stayed in was in a dirty noisy neighbourhood, they did not like the hot weather and the flat landscape. This disillusionment influenced their relationship as well, the cloud nine was gone, replaced with frustration and arguments.

For the townspeople Carson McCullers was hard to understand, they perceived her as a peculiar young woman to say the least. She would not hesitate to tell others she did not like the city, which nobody who lives in said city wants to hear. She would also engage in conversation with random people she had stopped on the streets and ask them about their families, their political views, or their way of life. She would also often talk with black people, something others frowned upon. After several people had seen a black man entering McCullers' flat, they tried to ignore her as much as possible.

McCullers' frustration was increased more every day when there was no answer from the Houghton Mifflin contest, in total she had to wait two months for a response. Even though Mrs. Bates and William March were both certain she would win, she did not. However, she did not come out empty-handed, the publishers "had decided to grant her a second award contingent upon her finishing the novel to their satisfaction."⁶⁶ The financial side of her prize was not negligible either, she would get "a five-hundred-dollar advance against royalties."⁶⁷

Aiming for the summer of 1939 to have the novel finished and in publisher's hands, McCullers focused solely on writing. She had never been much of a housewife, but now everything was in Reeves' hands. Her husband showed great patience,

⁶⁶ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 82

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83

he understood how important the novel and the money it could bring to the household was. On the other hand, he slowly realised his wife would be the writer, not him, even though in their dreams before marriage they would both be writing.

7.1.13. Waiting for Money

Carson and Reeves McCullers were both looking forward the day her novel would be finished to lift the financial burden off them a bit. The manuscript was ready by the end of April 1939. She had sent it to her New York editor and was waiting for a response as well as for her second half of her royalty advance, that would come any day, or at least that is what she had thought. In reality she misunderstood her contract, for she would not receive the money until the novel was published, not simply finished.

The whole situation around her novel frustrated her, therefore she had found an outlet for her emotions. She started writing another story – *Army Post*, finishing it after only two months of writing. Seeing it as unpublishable, she stored it away in her dresser. Instead, she revisited her older pieces written under Mrs. Bates and Mr. Burnett's tutorage. She submitted *Sucker* and *Court in the West Eighties* for publication to New York literary agent Maxim Lieber. He had accepted them and sent to many magazines, but with no success, none accepted the stories.

This emotionally drenching situation again needed an outlet. She already had a new idea in her mind for another story, temporarily named *The Bride and Her Brother* (published five years later as *The Member of the Wedding*).

When finally, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* was published on June 4, 1940 and she received her money, she and Reeves decided they had enough of Fayetteville. They sold their car, Reeves quit his job and they moved back to New York.

7.1.14. A Star Is Born

On a train ride to New York, McCullers was dreaming about how her life would be different now, since she is a published author. She always wanted to be recognized, to be famous and admired. This time her wishes were not far from the truth. She could see her book displayed on a prominent spot at the bookshop windows with her photo

above them. People loved both, her book, and her boyish fresh look as well. The critics' response was similarly positive.

She was also already "being acclaimed for a second major manuscript that had been accepted by Houghton Mifflin."⁶⁸ The manuscript was none other than *Army Post* (now *Reflections in a Golden Eye*), the story she put away into her drawer. It was discovered by editor of Harper's Bazaar, when he came to interview her and pushed for other manuscripts and urged her to let him publish it in his magazine.

Her editor from Houghton Mifflin offered her a fellowship to Bread Loaf Writer's Conference (it was a summer program for young authors, where they could work on their own or under a tutor). He thought it would be beneficial for her to work in a place like this, where she could really focus. She was excited about the offer.

7.1.15. Annemarie

McCullers was enjoying her popularity immensely, meeting many new people all over the city. Through her acquaintance with Klaus and Erika Mann (children of Thomas Mann) she met Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach, a Swiss travel writer, novelist, and journalist. Wherever she went, Annemarie was always a centre of attention, with her androgynous look both men and women could not resist her, McCullers was no exception. Apart from her looks, she was also drawn to her personality. They shared similar interests in literature, music, and piano. She immediately fell in love with her, the feelings however were not reciprocated. Annemarie knew there was no future in their relationship, and she did not want to hurt McCullers.

Reeves was noticing something has been different concerning his wife's behaviour. She would spend less and less time home with him, she was also not writing as much as before. Being the calm and patient man he had always been, he thought the best thing to do would be to leave his wife to sort it all out on her own.

For McCullers, this period was extremely difficult. She had always been mentally unstable, sensitive to tense situations. Her marriage was almost at a breaking point, her anxiety and uncertainty provoked to life by involvement with Annemarie. She was anticipating the Bread Loaf conference to be a gateway from her problems. At the same time, she dreaded her departure, fearing she would not find Annemarie

⁶⁸ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 98

in New York after her return. She would present her (and Reeves who was acquainted with Annemarie as well) crazy plans about how she would leave the Bread Loaf early to go to Boston with Annemarie; how Annemarie would come to the Bread Loaf to be with her. None of these suggestions were accepted and McCullers felt extremely betrayed by the woman she fell for as well as by her husband.

7.1.16. Separation

Because McCullers already was at a place meant for creating, the means how to escape her feelings, was clear. She plunged herself into writing once more. Meeting Louis Untermeyer, a poet, who passionately defeated her manuscript of *Reflections in a Golden Eye* in front of the staff of the Bread Loaf (they were disturbed by some macabre grotesque scenes) also helped her to calm down and they quickly became friends.

After the conference had ended, she was invited by her editor Robert Linscott to meet him in Boston. It was actually Annemarie who had suggested this trip to Linscott, pleading him to look after her health. Her fear was justified, for when she had arrived at Boston, Linscott immediately noticed her deep cough and wan look. McCullers herself usually tried to ignore her health issues, thinking they would disappear. After a brief stay at Boston, where she visited the Houghton Mifflin office, Linscott took her to Cape Cod to spend some time in the salt air and sun.

When her holiday had ended, she came back to New York and her husband. However, it was not a happy reunion. Reeves “did everything he could to make life easy and uncomplicated for her, to divert her mind with pleasantries, little gifts, informal entertaining and dinner parties [...]”⁶⁹ Nonetheless, she was not happy, she missed the freedom she had at Bread Loaf and Cape Cod.

Her negative feelings were too strong, and she was not able to resist them. She cared deeply for Reeves, she loved him, and she would always love him, however more like a brother than a husband. Sadly, she could not stay with him any longer, she wanted her own space. The opportunity presented itself after she reunited with George Davis, the editor of Harper’s *Bazaar*, who interviewed her after *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* had been published. He wanted to help her and eventually found a house in Brooklyn

⁶⁹ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 114

Heights and offered McCullers and his old friend Wystan Auden to move in with him (in October 1940).

7.1.17. In Sickness and in Health

The house they had moved in quickly became a meeting point for many of their friends and acquaintances, some just simply stopped by, and some stayed even for several months. The word had quickly got around that “George Davis had a three-story house in Brooklyn Heights, in which Wystan Auden presided as poet laureate and housefather [...]. Other artists quickly petitioned for membership.”⁷⁰ Musicians, poets, writers, painters, all were interested to attend at least a small gathering there, if not to stay longer, for all that came for example Salvador Dali can be mentioned. The tenants were changing almost constantly.

Even McCullers was not always present in Brooklyn, in the winter of 1940-1941 she had to return to Columbus, for she was seriously ill again (fierce cough, aching chest, chronic fever). Despite being weak both physically and mentally, she continued to write. In December 1940, *Vogue* published her article *Look Homeward, Americans*, in January 1941 the *Night Watch Over Freedom* and in March 1941 *Brooklyn Is My Neighbourhood*, all nonfiction. On February 14, 1941 her second book *Reflections in a Golden Eye* was published (previously serialized in Harper’s *Bazaar*). The reviews were in general positive, some were expecting a bit more when compared with her first novel, however they still admired her talent.

McCullers abruptly returned back to New York when she received a letter from her friends informing her that Annemarie had escaped from psychiatric hospital and was now hiding with them in New York city. Despite still being ill, she immediately left Columbus to be with her friend and to help her. Few days later however, Annemarie was discovered and forced to leave and was placed to a hospital in White Plains. From there she could not write letters or call to anyone, she was probably not getting McCullers’ letters either. McCullers was devastated by the whole situation and returned back to Columbus. In February 1941, she suddenly became ill again, struggling with her vision, experiencing stabbing pain in her temples, and suffering with severe headaches. The doctors were unable to explain to her what was happening to her. Only

⁷⁰ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 120

years later it was established she had suffered through her first cerebral stroke (at the age of twenty-four). Her convalescence was long, she was feeling weak and was unable to write for a long time.

Although the situation was serious, it brought with it something positive. Reeves had been afraid for her the whole time of her convalesce, being regularly informed from her mother. He still loved her and she realized she needed him, she needed someone affectionate close to her. They were both willing to attempt to live together again and came back to New York in April 1941. For some time, their life together had been fine, Reeves was selling insurance, Carson McCullers was writing. However, she could not be tamed, eventually she was again spending more time away from home, not telling her husband where or with who. They both handled this tension with the help of alcohol.

Even though she was more unconventional when it came to love, Reeves too was not entirely traditional. When Carson McCullers met David Diamond (a composer and violinist) at a party, she fell for him rather quickly, and he fell for her. After a brief scuffle at a different party, from which Reeves took a bite, David took care of him and they mutually realized, the delicate feelings were not reserved only for her. “Both Carson and Reeves urged Diamond to spend as much time with them both in their apartment as possible, and Diamond, loving them both, readily acquiesced.”⁷¹

7.1.18. Yaddo

The thought of enduring the summer heat in New York was something she could not imagine. She was looking for a way out and the opportunity had presented itself – Yaddo (the explanation of Yaddo and its philosophy can be found in Flannery O’Connor’s biography). McCullers went through an interview with Mrs. Ames, the colony director, who assured her, she would certainly be able to come and spend the whole summer there. She was hoping the strict regimen Yaddo relied on would help her to finish her two works in progress - *The Ballad of the Sad Café* and *The Bride of My Brother*.

She had arrived at Yaddo on June 14, 1941. She knew only few people there, one of them was Katherine Anne Porter, a writer she briefly met at Bread Loaf. Upon

⁷¹ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 149

seeing her again at Yaddo, she fell in love. Katherine Anne however did not appreciate McCullers' affection and she was not afraid to show it, their relationship turning into antagonism almost. Another person McCullers knew from Bread Loaf was Eudora Welty a newcomer to Yaddo as well, but they were not able to get closer over the summer.

The Yaddo atmosphere was truly stimulating for the artists' creativity. The short story *The Jockey* she had written there was published in *The New Yorker* on August 23, 1941. She was also making a good progress on *The Ballad*. She had no problem with the rules at Yaddo, in fact, Mrs. Ames considered her to be one of the most hard-working artists that had ever resided at Yaddo. While working, she was focused, her emotions went downhill when she was not working. She was often feeling lonely. Reeves was not writing her, a situation she could not comprehend. Being quite self-centred, the things she had done to him, he could not do to her. Also, the friends she had made at Yaddo left sooner than her, adding to her feeling of loneliness.

Little did she know her husband was not responding to her letters because he left New York soon after she had left for Yaddo. He had finally admitted to himself he was a bisexual and his love for David Diamond was not only platonic. He wanted to start a new life with Diamond and moved with him to Rochester. Diamond however was torn between loving both Carson and Reeves McCullers simultaneously, yet he felt that Reeves was somehow blocking his creativity the same way McCullers sometimes felt. He was not the only one who had been emotionally torn. Reeves was feeling guilty, he also missed her but was unable to write to her, for he knew he had betrayed her.

7.1.19. Divorce

This was not the only betrayal Reeves committed. At Yaddo she also discovered he had been forging her signature and had been cashing her checks (payment for *The Jockey*, royalty payment for her first two books). She could not forgive something like this; therefore, she saw divorce as the only option.

The nerve-wracking situation took its toll on her, she was experiencing symptoms of her illness that at this point was considered to be chronic (heart pain, heart skipping). Her doctor at Yaddo recommended her a complete change of scenery to relieve the distress. She had been asked by some friends to accompany them to Canada a few days prior to her examination, she could therefore heed the recommendation. When

the trip ended, she had returned to Yaddo for a few days, then went to New York to proceed with the divorce as soon as possible.

7.1.20. Back Home

After the papers for divorce were sorted (the final decree would not be granted for several months), she came back home to Columbus (October 1941). To splurge herself and to forget all that had happened in the recent days, she bought herself a new piano. Otherwise, not much had changed in her daily life. She kept her routine as it always was – morning walk and then writing in her room for several hours. She, however, was struggling with almost every word.

She realized that her troubles were partly caused by her inability to pray. “She admitted that she had always felt a need to be close to God, yet for too many months-years, in fact-she had ignored Him.”⁷² We already know she had left church at the age of fourteen, for her God was omniscient, a creator, who however sometimes left His creations unfinished (that is the reason why there are freaks). McCullers felt like “she could no longer ask anything of people. [...] She could call now to no one except God [...].”⁷³

Somehow finding herself and God as well, she had lived quite happily in her hometown for some time. She had finally written to David Diamond, to whom she was not able to write for some time, fearing he was still with Reeves. He had however left him, for he was blocking his creativity. Through their correspondence, she and David became close again. She also wrote other friends, including Annemarie who had managed to get mentally well again and was now travelling. If not ideal, all seemed at least well.

The string broke during Christmas 1942, when she became ill again, more seriously than ever (considering she had a cerebral stroke). The sickness had crept in slowly, manifesting firstly as tiredness, nervousness, and indifference towards work. Then high fever, ear and streptococcal infections were added. She had little time to get better, when she was sick again with double pneumonia, pleurisy and terrible chest pains. She had to be hospitalized. When she came back home, she had the best caretaker she could wish for, her mother.

⁷² CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 194

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 186

By mid-February 1942, she was able to write again and keep up with her schedule. To take a rest from *The Bride* on which she was working for a long time with difficulties, she wrote a short story *A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud*.

A big boost for her was a notification about her winning the Guggenheim Fellowship on March 24, 1942. These fellowships are “intended for individuals who have already demonstrated exceptional capacity for productive scholarship or exceptional creative ability in the arts.”⁷⁴ It solved her financial worries with added bonus, which she wanted to spend on travelling (to Mexico) when the situation would be calmer (the World War II was raging).

7.1.21. Yaddo no.2

Since travelling was not an option at the moment, she accepted Elizabeth Ames’ invitation to spend another summer at Yaddo. McCullers promised herself she would stay there not only for the summer, but until she would finish her *Bride*. Many of her acquaintances and friends were invited as well, including David Diamond. Seeing him again made her happy. She, however, was not as happy to see Katherine Anne Porter there, for their animosity did not cease. To make things worse, Diamond was friend with them both, causing such a friction that eventually he was asked to leave Yaddo by Mrs. Ames to lift some of the tension between the two ladies.

During her stay at Yaddo, the short story *A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud* she had written back home in Columbus was published in Harper’s Bazaar. It was well received and received an invitation for the O’Henry Prize Stories. As many times before, she could not celebrate for long, for an awful news was coming. On December 1, 1944 she received a letter informing her about Annemarie’s death. She fell into a state of disbelief and numbness, she could not sleep at all for several days, she was not seeing the world around her. She had been torn out from this state by Newton Arvin, her friend from Yaddo.

She could not stay at Yaddo after this, despite her promise to finish her novel there, she needed a change of scenery. She was urged by George Davis to come back to 7 Middagh Street in Brooklyn, where they would take care of her. She had accepted his offer and left Yaddo on January 17, 1943.

⁷⁴ John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation [online]

7.1.22. Love's Not Time's Fool

Being back at Brooklyn felt like being back home. She enjoyed taking long walks with George, however it was not without a cause. The winter had been cold and the snow high, causing McCullers' recurring illnesses. She also went through terrible ordeal when during a routine extraction of a molar, her dentist accidentally broke her jawbone. To look at it from a brighter side, thanks to her daily visits at her dentist in order to heal the infection that had set in, she met Cheryl Crawford. She introduced her to theatre and what was happening behind the scenes.

During the winter of 1943 she also re-established contact with Reeves, who had sent her a conciliatory letter. He informed her about healing from mental illness, as well as his enlisting back into the army. Probably calmed and inspired by his letter she fulfilled a request from *Mademoiselle* magazine to write an article representing a universal message to a soldier from his wife. Her *Love's Not Time's Fool* was published in April 1943. It was followed by *War Wife*, focusing on women during the time of war, who often had to sit and wait for the outcome without being able to do anything helpful.

On April 9, 1943 she received a letter "from the president of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters informing her that she was to be awarded a one-thousand-dollar 'Arts and Letters' Grant to further her creative work in literature."⁷⁵ This money together with the money she would receive for her manuscript of *The Ballad of the Sad Café* which she had sold to Harper's Bazaar would make her financially supported.

On April, McCullers had decided she would go back to Columbus. The two main reasons were her father's worsening health and to meet with Reeves who secured a pass. He had stayed with her and her family, speaking about his experience from the war. She was proud of him, her feelings towards him still strong (same for him). They, however, were also able to see that all they had done to each other would always be there.

7.1.23. Back and Forth

After their meeting, McCullers went back to Yaddo (June 1943), where she made a steady progress on *The Bride*. Nevertheless, she could not stay long, only two months after her arrival she needed to come back home, since her father's health worsened.

⁷⁵ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 229

The biggest issue was that he had repeatedly refused to see a doctor, and in addition had serious problem with alcohol drinking.

The situation escalated in September 1943, when her father collapsed and finally allowed to be seen by a doctor. The doctor banned the alcohol, ruled out cancer which haunted Lamar the most, but was concerned about his heart. She took it upon herself to take the best care of her father.

On October 21, she left Columbus to travel to Fort Dix to spend some time with Reeves before he would go overseas. In one of her letters to him she had proposed a remarriage. However, when they met, they “knew that they loved each other as much as they ever had loved; but as they talked, they realized that a remarriage then would have its roots in desperation and an attempt to prove their love.”⁷⁶ To come home to Columbus, knowing that Reeves would soon leave for war (he was supposed to head for Europe and be a part of either Anzio landing or the D-Day operation) was extremely hard for her. To listen to the news about fallen and captured soldiers was even worse.

While Reeves had been gone and the war was raging, she travelled back and forth from Columbus to New York and to Yaddo. At each place she felt good for a while, but then she felt the need to be somewhere else. It was in the summer of 1944, she was staying at Yaddo, when she had learned that her father had died of an acute coronary attack in his jewellery shop. After the funeral, Carson McCullers, her mother and sister (who was working in New York) had decided to move away from Columbus. They found an apartment at Nyack-New City area near Rockland County, New York.

Reeves fought valiantly during the Omaha beach landing and during several other objectives, being wounded in the process several times. His last injury had sent him home, he was wounded with shrapnel and had fractured hand. He returned home as a decorated war hero (received the coveted Silver Star and three Bronze stars, Presidential Unit Citation, Purple Heart) on February 24, 1945. Three weeks from his return to USA, she and Reeves remarried.

⁷⁶ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 240

7.1.24. The Member of the Wedding

Reeves, however, was not ready to leave the army completely. If he could no longer be a part of combat, he would seek a position in the American Military Government and ask to be sent to Europe. It was easier said than done, instead he was sent to Camp Wheeler in Georgia. While he would be there, McCullers had decided to return to Yaddo to hopefully finish her *Bride*, which has finally acquired its final title *The Member of the Wedding*.

Throughout the years, there had been several versions of the story, yet something was always missing. For her, the story was almost cursed, she felt like she would never finish it. Every version she had presented to Elizabeth Ames at Yaddo and sought her advice and criticism. In August 1945, she presented Elizabeth with the final version, her reaction without exception positive. Now, with her work finished, she felt, like she could leave Yaddo and spent some time with Reeves and her family.

The Member of the Wedding was published on March 19, 1946 receiving positive reactions from the critics. Feeling the need to hide before the negative reviews that she had been sure would come, she left for Yaddo. Here she received a letter informing her about her being awarded with her second Guggenheim fellowship. Not being able to be at one place for too long, she left Yaddo in favour to Nantucket Island, to where she had been invited by Tennessee Williams, her admirer (and fellow writer). She ended up staying a whole month, she and Tennessee becoming friends almost immediately. They spent evenings talking about many things, one of them being drama. McCullers, encouraged by Williams, decided to turn her latest novel into a drama. She managed to finish it by the end of the summer of 1946.

7.1.25. Vive la France

She and Reeves were both restless to fulfil their dream of living in Europe. Receiving her second Guggenheim and the early royalties from *The Member*, they decided to leave America in favour of France. They had left on November 22, 1946 and arrived in Paris. Having two of her works translated into French (*The Heart* and *Reflections*), the literary world was excited to meet her. Life in Paris however was not suited for neither of them. "There was too much exuberance in Paris to be taken in, to be lived, they felt."⁷⁷

⁷⁷ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 284

She could not write there, and Reeves did not want to find a job there either. On the other hand, they were both charmed by the city's beauty, all the streets, cafés, and culture.

The downside was that she and her husband started to drink more heavily than ever before. They switched from bourbon to brandy and separately were able to finish a bottle of the spirit daily. The alcohol brought the worst out of them, they argued over trivialities, the argument ending in Reeves leaving and she crying. They were also difficult to be around other people, who eventually stopped to invite them for their gatherings.

It was during her stay in France that she had suffered her second stroke, in August 1947. It had happened in the middle of the night when she was home alone. She did not lose consciousness, however she laid on the floor paralyzed for eight hours. The aftermath was even worse. "She lost the lateral vision of her right eye, the whole right side of her face was numb, and the left side of her body was partially paralyzed."⁷⁸ She was released from hospital with clear instructions – to stop her drinking. A task, she could not fulfil.

Her health issues were not the only problem, she was concerned about her play, for she received no response from her publisher. When the Theatre Guild had finally agreed to produce it, there was a condition. She would agree to work with another playwright and revise it. She agreed; however, she was not happy about the decision, more so when she received the revised script which she did not like at all. This happened in the fall of 1947. All the drama around her play was overshadowed by a kidney infection followed with a third stroke. The doctors concluded that the main contributor to her strokes was "a damaged rheumatic heart that had not been diagnosed during Carson's early years in Columbus."⁷⁹ She stayed in hospital for three weeks, the doctors doing everything they could to reduce the paralysis. When she was able to travel, she was transferred to Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, New York.

7.1.26. Downhill

With his wife in hospital, Reeves spent his days in their Nyack home with her mother. She helped Reeves to get his drinking under control. McCullers herself came back home just before Christmas. However, she definitely was not back to her normal self, still

⁷⁸ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 291

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 292

bedridden and emotionally wrecked. When the news about McCullers being announced one of the six best post-war writers in America by *Quick* magazine, she almost did not react.

To add salt to a tumour, her relationship with Reeves was again turning sour. He was once more unable to withstand being just the husband of Carson McCullers, he wanted to be someone who people knew for himself not for his wife. His ongoing sexual crisis did not help, he was not able to find his sexual identity and envied his wife the fact she could (she just simply liked anyone, she needed tenderness, to be loved, and it did not matter if it was by a man or by a woman). All these negative feelings led to their separation.

Another source for her unhappiness was her play, specifically the author that was supposed help her with the script. “He was threatening to sue her since she had refused to allow the Theatre Guild to go ahead with the production of their joint script.”⁸⁰ This issue fortunately got solved when the Theatre Guild itself stood up for her.

All the recent events were too much for her already disturbed psyche. In March 1948 she had slashed her left wrist and had to be hospitalized at the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic in Manhattan. Her mother gave consent, because she did not think, she could handle the situation. She blamed her for it because she felt abandoned and helpless at the Payne Clinic. Her mother realized that and took her back home, yet McCullers could not forget it so easily.

7.1.27. A Burnt Child Dreads the Fire

She needed a distraction, a new objective, to be herself again. Distraction was provided by a new friendship established through correspondence with, paradoxically, a young psychiatrist. He provided her an outlet for her emotions, but also admired her and her work, which she always appreciated. This helped her to find a new hope. She started to take care of her body and health again, eating a lot, exercising, playing piano, and also writing.

She revised her play completely, using a secretary to write what she was saying. She had sent it to Tennessee Williams, whose reaction was somehow positive, yet she knew he was not entirely convinced the play was perfect. She was open

⁸⁰ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 298

to his criticism. She was also seeking someone who would produce the play and introduce it at Broadway.

The change in her attitude allowed her to be more independent again. She used this opportunity to travel to Washington to meet her psychiatric friend, who had invited her to a psychiatric convention.

Her attitude was not the only thing that had changed. She and Reeves renewed their contact few days before McCullers left for Washington. He had arrived at Nyack to see her and tell her he had a job now (in a radio station); he had stopped drinking and was again the man she met all those years ago. By the summer, he was again part of the family. All should have been well, but it was not – her health got worse in August (leg pain, problems with her arm).

7.1.28. Showtime

Carson McCullers had been worried about her name disappearing from magazines, for she did not submit a new story for several years. When her husband brought her an electric typewriter, she was able to write again, because it did not require near as much pressure as the mechanical one. She started to write again, choosing *Mademoiselle* to publish her stories (her sister was the fiction editor there). Her story *How I Began to Write* was published in September 1948. Apart from the story in *Mademoiselle*, she also had two of her poems published in *New Directions* (*When We Are Lost* and *The Mortgaged Heart*).

When ideas for a new novel had begun circling in her head, she knew it was time for her to return back South for some time, to redraw the atmosphere. Her mother would accompany her on this trip, of course. They left Nyack in March 1949 and headed to their hometown, Columbus, where they would spend four days. Then they stayed in Macon with Masse and Paul Bigelow. During their trip, she received the news about the Yaddo communist scandal (more about it in chapter 7.1.10), since the accused, Elizabeth Ames was her dear friend, she immediately left for New York to support her.

In the second half of 1949 her play finally entered the production phase. It, however, was not without bumps. Several actors and other people concerned with theatre refused to be a part of a story that actually “is not a play, [...] it has no regards to theatrical conventions, [...] it has little plot and no big climaxes or sweeping

movement.”⁸¹ The other proof that suggests the play was initially thought to be a failure, was the extremely tight budget it got. Despite the difficulties, the show opened at the Walnut Theatre in Philadelphia on December 22, 1949. Everything went fine, the actors gave thrilling performance, the only problem was the length – four hours was too long of a show for Broadway. Cuts would have to be made, a notion displeasing for her, yet necessary for the play.

7.1.29. Showtime

After the ‘trial’ show in Philadelphia, the play would head to Broadway. All could relax for a while, except of Carson McCullers. Upon her return home, she had to be hospitalized. She had felt something was wrong in Philadelphia, she however contributed it to her nervousness connected with the play. When the problems did not cease after the premiere, she was not so sure anymore. The doctors confirmed her suspicion. She was not sick, she was pregnant. Unfortunately, with the health problems she had, it might as well had been considered as sickness. “To go through a full-term pregnancy and delivery, was an unwise and dangerous risk, a threat to her life. [...] It was not a matter of whether Carson wanted an abortion; the medical advice was that she must have one.”⁸²

The Broadway premiere was scheduled for the 5th of January 1950, she, however, was recommended to not attend the premiere, for she was still in convalescence after her abortion. The premiere went outstandingly well, the audience gave standing ovations to the actors. The following days line were forming at the box office and soon the show was sold out for weeks, then months. She could not attend the premiere; she however could attend the producer’s party after the play had ended. There they have all been waiting for the early morning papers with reviews. The Herald Tribune one was negative, complaining about the lack of structure. This did not please her. The other reviews fortunately fixed her mood, bringing positive feedback, admiring the artistic side of the play.

To confirm the superiority of positive approach towards the play, it received several honours and awards. The first one was the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award,

⁸¹ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 332

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 342

McCullers' drama "received seventeen of a possible twenty-five votes, making it the best American play of the year for period April 1, 1949, through March 31, 1950."⁸³ She also received the golden medal from the Theatre Club, Inc. for "the best play by an American author produced during the year."⁸⁴ The 'best play of last season' and the 'best first play by an author to be produced on Broadway' titles from the annual Donaldson awards followed. The icing on the cake was the play's inclusion in John Chapman's (drama critic) *The Burns Mantle Best Plays of 1949-1950*.

Overall, the play had been a tremendous success and before it closed "on March 17, 1951, after 501 performances, it had grossed over \$1,112,000 for its Broadway run alone."⁸⁵ After the closing on Broadway, the whole ensemble went on a tour of major American and Canadian cities.

7.1.30. Travel Time

Despite her not so good health, she was planning to travel to Europe again. She needed another change of scenery to be able to write something new. On May 20, 1950 she sailed for Dublin, Ireland where she would stay with her friend and fellow writer Elizabeth Bowen. She owned a beautiful mansion there, which McCullers loved. She felt inspired there to write poetry, but nothing more, she was more interested in the gardens than in writing. Nevertheless, after few weeks she became bored of it and wanted to go somewhere else. Therefore, she had called Reeves and told him to meet her in London from where they would continue to Paris. There they had stayed in a hotel for several nights, then lived with their friends for a while. Then she took him back to Ireland to introduce him to Elizabeth Bowen.

They returned to America in August, she immediately leaving to stay with her friends Marty Mann and Priscilla Peck. In their home she started her work on a cycle of poems, later named *The Dual Angel: A Meditation on Origin and Choice*.

Everything went fine for some time, only before Christmas 1950, McCullers had learned more about her health issues. She had met a new doctor who she hoped would cure her, even though deep in her heart she realised the improbability of her wish. The latter was true. "He told her that there was absolutely no hope that she would regain

⁸³ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 345

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 345

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 347

free movement of her arm, hand, and left leg, and that her illness suffered three years ago in Paris stemmed from a haemorrhage that had destroyed certain motor nerves that could never be restored.”⁸⁶

Fortunately, in McCullers’ life something negative is often balanced with something positive. In the April 1951 issue of *Vogue*, she was “being heralded for her past literary successes and phenomenal Broadway success, as well as for the forthcoming omnibus publication of her collected works. Entitled *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*.”⁸⁷ It included all her major works plus one new story *A Domestic Dilemma* and was published on May 24, 1951, receiving excellent reviews. The tale bore autobiographic features, one of the themes was a problem with alcohol.

In real life she and Reeves were both struggling with excessive drinking. Reeves at least tried to get better (he was a member of anonymous alcoholics for some time), she however did not. Instead, while Reeves was on his drying-out period in hospital (although he eventually started drinking again), she planned her trip to England. She stayed there for almost three months, meeting a number of writers, editors, and other important people from the culture sphere. She also took time to work on a long poem *The Dual Angel: A Meditation on Origin and Choice*, a piece she had been at work occasionally for the past year since she came back from Ireland.

On January 15, 1952 (back home at Nyack) she received a letter informing her she had been elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters eminent Department of Literature. She was pleased, however her mind was partially set on something else. She and Reeves had been preparing to move to Europe for a longer period of time. They sailed for Italy, where they would spend the winter months, on January 30, 1952. In Italy she met Princess Marguerite Caetani, an editor of *Botteghe Oscure*. In her magazine, McCullers had her poem *The Dual Angel* published.

The change of scenery may have been good for her desire to socialize; however, it had done no good for her marriage. Reeves was once again feeling as useless as the fifth wheel. His wife was the centre of the attention, he was sometimes not even invited to the parties and gatherings. Their drinking did not improve the situation either.

⁸⁶ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 368

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 369

There were countless of incidents and arguments between them during their stay in Italy. Although Reeves had never hit her, there were threats of violence.

By the end of April, desperately needing to move on, they decided to leave Italy and go to France. They were staying with friends for over a month while Reeves was looking for a house. Meanwhile, she was trying to work on *The Clock Without Hands*. They had found their new home in a town of Bachvillers, where they would be the only Americans for miles away. She focused on writing and Reeves on making the old house cosier. For some time, they were happy like this.

7.1.31. Until Death Do Us Part

“Several weeks after their move into the country, Carson receives word that her mother had suffered a severe heart attack and fall and had fractured six ribs.”⁸⁸ They flew back to America immediately and stayed until she was better. The situation repeated itself just few months later, this time her mother suffered through pulmonary embolism. She did not fare well when she was home alone without her children. Therefore her brother Lamar Jr. took her to live with him and his family.

When she and Reeves came back to Bachvillers, she could not feel happy there. “She suffered not only from a sense of physical isolation living in the remote village [...] but from spiritual isolation as well. [...] People rarely visited them at Bachvillers. She felt set apart from both Paris and her American friends nearby [...]”⁸⁹ Despite this, they stayed, sometimes visited by their friends. There were arguments as well as times of peace and quiet, full of writing.

Nothing however lasts forever; in the summer of 1953, another relapse came. Reeves was leaving her alone in Bachvillers, staying in Paris over the weekends, supposedly looking for job, but also drinking and spending time with other women. The worst, however, were his suicidal tendencies. He tried to hang himself on a tree, but the limb broke. More than once he also tried to persuade her to commit suicide together. The last straw had snapped when on a way to check-up to a hospital, Reeves instead intended to drive them into a forest to hang themselves. When they stopped to buy brandy, she escaped from the car and hailed a ride with a passing car. She sought refuge with

⁸⁸ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 391

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 394

her friends, trying to get back to America immediately. She would never see Reeves again.

Reeves was found by their mutual friend in their home in Bachvillers, depressed, malnourished, without money. He was taken to a hotel in Paris to get better. On November 18, he called several people, using an old wartime saying used when “a man felt his death is imminent.”⁹⁰ He also sent telegram with the same message to his wife. Day later, November 19, 1953, his body was found in a hotel room.

7.1.32. Motherless

The reactions to Reeves’ death varied. Some blamed her, some felt sorry for her and some were asking a pragmatic question – who is going to take care of her now? The issue had been sorted rather quickly, her sister Margarita (called Rita by all) would do the duty together with their mother, who would provide the emotional support and much needed love and closeness.

In December 1953, she took another trip to breathe in the Southern atmosphere. She had met Ralph McGill, a friend but also the editor of *Constitution*, to whom she flaunted about her recent literary creations. She was working on a Georgia article for the *Holiday* magazine, in December issue of *Mademoiselle* her story *The Discovery of Christmas* was published. She had also created an adaptation of her short story *The Sojourner* into a television play called *The Invisible Wall*. Unfortunately, the Georgia article was never published, not meeting the magazine’s expectations. Fortunately, the television drama was a hit.

Spring of 1954 was marked by a new opportunity for her. She was to attend an event in Goucher College in Towson, Maryland. She gave a lecture on Isabelle Kellogg Thomas and also attended two informal conferences for all the College community members. The lecture and the conferences were such a success, encouraging her to accept request to give a talk from other institutions. During her lecture tour, she had travelled all across the South, then she stopped by Edwin Peacock’s house in Charleston to spend some time and write. She was still working on *The Clock Without Hands* but also on a new play *The Square Root of Wonderful*.

⁹⁰ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 402

In 1954 McCullers wrote another short story, *The Haunted Boy*, portraying a child who is strongly dependant on its mother, which is something she surely was as well. Many who knew Carson McCullers and her mother realised “she was reacting to a severe love-hatred-and-guilt relationship which she tried, unsuccessfully, to suppress, while at the same time, to hide from her mother.”⁹¹

Her mother endured another fall followed by a stay in a nursing home to recuperate. Then she had been brought back home, where she spent most of her days alone. Rita had her job in *Mademoiselle* in New York and though she did visit her mother often, it had been difficult for her to commute to Nyack every day. She was more away than she was home, spending time with Tennessee Williams at Key West or staying in New York with her friends. Her mother had a help, Ida Reeder, who took care of her and the household. It was Ida, who witnessed Marguerite’s last breath on June 10, 1955.

She was entirely devastated. She was the only one of the three Smith children who would be able to arrive shortly after their mother’s death (Rita was at hospital after appendectomy and Lamar Jr. would take longer to arrive), yet she could not enter the house where her mother died.

7.1.33. The Square Root of...Terrible?

The reception of her play *The Square Root of Wonderful* can be perceived as McCullers’ only larger professional failure. “Many persons close to the play’s source thought it should never have opened. Most of the critics concurred.”⁹² The play went through several rewrites of the script and through several directors, settling finally on José Quintero. After a devastating opening in Princeton, Anne Baxter spoke about his approach towards the debacle: “Quintero knew that the play was sliding down the drain, but he was powerless to save it. He could not rewrite, and he knew that Carson couldn’t either. He couldn’t cope with what was wrong.”⁹³

The Broadway premiere on October 30, 1957 received bad reviews (only one of seven New York dailies published a semipositive review). The play was last performed on December 7, 1957, after only forty-five performances. The whole period

⁹¹ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 417

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 449

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 455

of preparing the show, the rehearsals, the fact that some rewrites were done without her supervision, and obviously the play's failure, left her drained physically and mentally.

7.1.34. The Clock Is Ticking

Being depressed, McCullers started going to a therapy with a new doctor, Mary Mercer. These sessions helped her tremendously. However, Carson McCullers being Carson McCullers instantly fell in love with her doctor. When Mary dismissed her, proclaiming she does not need therapy anymore, she was broken. On her way home, she suffered from a severe cardiac failure. She was “rushed to the hospital, [...] placed in an oxygen tent for several days, her condition termed seriously ill.”⁹⁴ It was during her hospitalization the doctors found out the cause of her health issues. According to them, she “had suffered since childhood from chronic rheumatic heart disease [...] and her strokes were the result of emboli from her damaged heart rather than a congenital anomaly of the cerebral blood vessels.”⁹⁵ Her stay in hospital had, however, positive outcome, for the doctors suggested an operation would help with her damaged leg and arm.

She had undergone two of the four operations within the same year. She had her elbow operated so she could lower her arm down, then her left wrist was fixed so she could have at least partial mobility in it. The operations did not relieve her of her pain, she still had to use cane and sometimes felt weak, yet the fact there was a chance for her to get at least a bit better was uplifting.

She was interested in writing again. The manuscripts of *The Flowering Dream* were written after she met Dr. Mercer. There were several of them, many ended up destroyed, for she used the process of writing as a sort of therapy and was not comfortable with others reading it. Eventually one version ended up published in *Esquire* in its December 1959 issue.

There was pressure on her regarding her publishing schedule. Some believed she would not live long enough to finish her novel *The Clock Without Hands*, seeing her frail figure and knowing about her poor health. “Carson had published no major

⁹⁴ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 466

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 466

works since 1946, except her theatrical adaptation of *The Ballad of the Sad Café* in hardback [...], and the play that failed *The Square Root of Wonderful*. There had been little new in print for over ten years except a few short stories, [...] all in periodicals.”⁹⁶

Finally, in December 1960 she managed to finish her novel (after fourteen years). Setting the month of publishing to September 1960, however it did not come out till a whole year later. By the time the novel “was officially released September 18, 1961, it had already been on the best-seller list for a month and was ranked sixth in the nation.”⁹⁷ This was possible because of the copies sold in advance. The book remained on the list for five months, however, the “reviews were mixed, far more divided than those of any of her previous books.”⁹⁸

The start of the holiday season of 1961, she ‘celebrated’ with another Christmas piece. The previous ones she had published in *Mademoiselle*, this one – *A Child’s View of Christmas* she published in *Redbook* (her sister moved there to be the fiction director instead of *Mademoiselle*).

7.1.35. Ache

“Carson’s last years were marked by a lack of the finite. There were unfinished stories, an unfinished musical version of *The Member of the Wedding* [...] and an unfinished journal about her life, her works, and why she wrote them - a book she reportedly entitled *Illuminations and Night Glare*.”⁹⁹ The 1960s for Carson McCullers was marked by even more health issues than ever before. In June 1962 she undergone an eight-hour operation, having her cancerous left breast removed. After that while she was still under, they also performed the planned surgery on her left hand. Another surgery followed in September 1963, this time on her swollen and aching left leg.

Her issues did not stop her from trying to live as normally as possible. She was not afraid to travel, spending a few days on Fire Island with Mary Mercer (she spent McCullers’ last years with her). She also took a trip to England in 1962, being invited to the Cheltenham Festival to give a talk on love and to present the literary prizes.

⁹⁶ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 482

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 493

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 494

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 507

She also managed to make one last trip to the South, to see Edwin Peacock on April 12, 1963.

Despite being tired and unable to type for long (and using only one hand), she was still writing. For her, writing was always more than just profession, it was therapy, a way of living. After her surgeries, she created “children’s verses inspired mainly by incidents from her childhood.”¹⁰⁰ She wrote them for the children of her lawyer. However, when a Houghton Mifflin editor read one or two of them, he wanted to read the rest. It resulted into a small collection *Sweet as a Pickle and Clean as a Pig*, published on May 10, 1964. Also *Sucker*, the short story she wrote when she was seventeen, the story all the editors refused as unpublishable, appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* (1963).

Year 1964 was hard for her. She broke her hip and shattered an elbow when she fell in the bathroom. She needed another surgery; however, it was risky to even put her through anaesthesia. She had been in a lot of pain for almost a year, because of an excruciating ache in her hip, the doctors not knowing the cause. Only during another operation on her hand, they “discovered a real cause of Carson’s pain. A pin had slipped from her hip after the earlier operation and was wandering around pinching her.”¹⁰¹ After having to go through this ordeal, she had to spend three months in a hospital bed.

The last short story that was published before she died was *The March*, published in *Redbook* in the March 1967 issue. It was the first part of short stories trilogy. The other two stories (*The Man Upstairs* and *Hush Little Baby*) were, however, published later.

During the last months of her life, she was thinking about having her left leg amputated, in so much pain she had been. She was not comfortable neither sitting or lying, needing to have the leg outstretched or elevated, fearing constantly someone would hit it by mistake. This, however, did not stop her to take her last trip overseas to Ireland. The whole logistics of the trip was extremely difficult. Nevertheless, everything worked out and she enjoyed her trip very much.

After her last stroke, her agent expressed his concerns about her fate. “If she should survive, she would probably be unable to talk, [...] her vision had apparently been

¹⁰⁰ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 521

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 508

seriously impaired, [...] she would be unable to use either arm, and [...] the necessity for amputation would doubtless be even more pressing.”¹⁰²

Carson McCullers’ heart stopped on September 9, 1967 after she had been in coma for forty-seven days. She was buried on October 3, 1967 in Oak Hill Cemetery in Nyack.

¹⁰² CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 524

8. The Relation of O'Connor and McCullers

Although contemporaries, there is not a single mention that these female writers met. Sometimes it almost looks like they missed each other almost by a second, especially during their stays at Yaddo. They were both big names in the literary field during their lives. From letters preserved on both parts as well as from the memories of their friends we can establish their opinion on one another. Despite (or perhaps because) them belonging to the same genre and coming from the same region, they did not think highly of themselves.

8.1. O'Connor on McCullers

O'Connor was definitely not a fan of McCullers' works, especially her newer stories. The following statement she wrote to Janet McKane on November 28, 1963:

*"I was interested in the reviews of the Carson McCullers adaptation. I dislike intensely the work of Carson McCullers but it is interesting to see what is made of it in the theatre, and by Edward Albee at that."*¹⁰³

The following excerpt from a letter addressed to A. (written on July 22, 1961) confirms the previous statements:

*"Last week Houghton Mifflin sent me a book called Clock Without Hands by Carson McCullers. This long-awaited-by-the-faithful book will come out in September. I believe it is the worst book I have ever read. [...] It must signal the complete disintegration of this woman's talent."*¹⁰⁴

8.2. McCullers on O'Connor

McCullers' opinion on O'Connor comes from a memory on a certain conversation McCullers had with her cousin. He noticed she had a copy of O'Connor's short story collection. Her reaction on his inquiry about her opinion on it was:

*"I started it, but I didn't finish it. I did read enough, though, to know what 'school' she attended, and I believe she learned her lesson well."*¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ FITZGERALD, Sally. *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, p. 550

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 550

¹⁰⁵ CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*, p. 433

To explain, what 'school' is McCullers talking about, is important to remember she often thought highly of herself. She saw herself as THE writer, the one who many other writers only imitated. According to McCullers, O'Connor was one of her imitators.

8.3. Similarities and Differences

The similarities or differences in their work will be discussed later. However, after reading their biographies, it is difficult to overlook the similarities (and on the other hand polar opposition) in their life stories.

The fact they both come from the South, even the same state (Georgia), is obvious. They were both tied strongly to their homeland, even though they both were not present there all the time, they would always come back. The South was their inspiration. Especially the people, for they were both involved in the racial issue (each of them in their own way). However, it was not only black people they were interested in. The whole Southern society was their target.

Another big thing tying them together are health issues. As was already established, both of them suffered from quite a young age from pain and illness, limiting them in their daily lives and eventually taking their lives too soon. Closely connected to their health is the mother-daughter relationship. In both cases, their mothers were an important part of their lives, took care of them, supported them. In either case, however, the relationship was not ideal. O'Connor's mother was sometimes overprotective or strict and did not share her daughter's more liberal approach toward the race issue. In McCullers' case, her mother was sometimes too focused on her, doing things because she thought it was in her daughter's best interest. Unfortunately, sometimes it was not the case.

Probably the biggest difference between them was their approach towards relationships, which also influenced their work, and also their approach to love and sex scenes in their stories. McCullers needed love, she needed affection and it was not important whether she would receive it from a man or from a woman. She was not strictly speaking promiscuous, for there was hardly ever intercourse involved. This does not mean O'Connor did not need to be loved. On the other hand, she never expressed a direct wish to be involved with someone intimately. There were men that she liked, and they would visit her and spent long hours together, talking.

From her correspondence it is clear she was mildly in love with some of them, nevertheless nothing ever escalated further. Once or twice, she was also approached by a woman and although she was always supportive and flattered, she was not interested either.

9. Defining Characters in the Works of O'Connor and McCullers

There is not a simple way how to describe the characters in the works of both of the authors. Often, in the true spirit of the Southern Gothic, there is a truly grotesque character (physically or mentally afflicted). This character does not necessarily need to be the main hero, sometimes they appear only for a short period (as in McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding*). However, often the characters are not strictly speaking grotesque, they can sometimes, for the first glance, seem totally normal. It is only later through the story we learn their true nature. Other times, the main character can be the one who suffers the grotesqueness of the world around.

The selection is vast, and there are many options for how to perceive the characters. Since this thesis focuses on comparison of the two authors and their works, apart from characterization of some of the characters, their more prominent personality traits or their stories will be explored. It should be noted that this is one's person perspective that can differ from how the readers of this thesis understand the characters themselves.

9.1. The Lonely and Unwanted

Loneliness is somehow tied to the big American South where there were big distances between cities and even between households. The loneliness, however, is not caused only by the space. More often, actually, the characters feel lonely in a world full of people, in their own home and in their own family.

9.1.1. McCullers' Wedding Members and Lonely Hunters

9.1.1.1. Frankie

Carson McCullers was especially keen on using the motif of loneliness, possibly influenced by her own life, since she often felt lonely and wanting and searching for more love, more attention. Therefore, it was not hard for her to portray how her characters could feel.

Frankie in the novel *The Member of the Wedding* searches for something as well. It could be love, it could be a person who would understand her. She wants to belong somewhere, to be a **member**. She desperately wants to find a place, to find herself, because she does not know where she should belong. The second sentence

from the whole novel says: “*This was the summer when for a long time she had not been a member.*”¹⁰⁶ Her conversation with Berenice, however unrealistic Frankie’s wish might be, shows her desire clearly:

“I am talking about this town,” F. Jasmine said in a higher voice. “There are all these people here I don’t even know by sight or name. And we pass alongside each other and don’t have any connection. And they don’t know me and I don’t know them. And now I’m leaving town and there are all these people I will never know.”

“But who do you want to know?” asked Berenice.

*F. Jasmine answered: “Everybody. In the world. Everybody in the world.”*¹⁰⁷

The fact she desperately wants to belong somewhere is manifested also through her wish to donate blood so it would go to the soldiers fighting in the World War II. Her wish is however not to help, as much as to be a part of the fighting, to be with the soldiers at least through her blood when she cannot join the fighting personally. Her efforts are often in vain, as is the case with her blood donation. She suffers through refusal, which for her means not only her blood is refused, but she as well.

*She decided to donate blood to the Red Cross; she wanted to donate a quart a week and her blood would be in the veins of Australians and Fighting French and Chinese, all over the whole world, and it would be as though she were close kin to all of these people.*¹⁰⁸

It would almost seem as if Frankie should be an orphan or live in neglect, since she feels so lonely and unwanted. That is not the case. She lives with her father, a jeweller (another biographical influence) who loves her, nonetheless spends a lot of time at work. He also, not intentionally, puts Frankie through another refusal. As a small child she was always used to climb up in bed with her father so she would not sleep alone. It has never been a problem, until recently. Her father started to see Frankie, being almost thirteen, as a young woman more than a child. By calling her a “*great big long-legged twelve-year-old blunderbuss who still wants to sleep with her old Papa*”¹⁰⁹ he, in her eyes, thrown her out of his bed and refused her.

The Wedding of her brother Jarvis is an opportunity for her, she claims she had been thinking about leaving the town she lives in. The wedding is the perfect time

¹⁰⁶ McCULLERS, Carson. *The Member of the Wedding*, p. 1

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 110

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22

to put her plan into action. She wants to travel, to see the world, but most importantly, she wants to belong. Therefore, by leaving with the newlyweds, both of her dreams would come true. She sees them as her 'we of me' (all the other people are part of **we**, for the soldiers the army is their 'we', for her father 'we' is his shop). She does not care whether they would want her with them or not, she does not listen to people telling her it is not right to steal someone's honeymoon. Frankie has a plan how to stop being lonely, she had found her 'we of me'. She even abandons herself, changes her name to F. Jasmine (since both her brother and his bride's names begin with J) and refers to her past self as the 'old Frankie.' With the name change also comes Frankie's changed perception of herself, she feels as a woman more than a child, she dresses and acts the part.

She however is misunderstood and refused once more at the wedding, nobody actually seeing how significant the wedding could be for a twelve-year-old girl. They all see her only as a child, who had to throw a tantrum after she was pulled out of the wedding car. Their behaviour offends her, for she did all she could to be perceived as an adult, she had tried to convince herself she is not a child anymore, to fit in, to belong into their 'adult club.' However, she still very much is naïve and lost child. On the way home she sees that being the member of the wedding, something she longed for, did not do anything for her. The end of the story suggests she firstly needed to find herself, to truly mature, not just pretend, to be a part of 'we.'

9.1.1.2. Berenice

Berenice (also from *The Member of the Wedding*) acts as a motherly figure to Frankie, she is her counsellor, her guide. She helps Frankie understand the 'adult world.' She is not afraid to talk about mistakes she had made so Frankie might avoid making them as well. Her biggest mistake (or mistakes) and also the source of her loneliness were her marriages. She had been married four times.

The first marriage with Ludie Freeman was a happy one. They lived together for nine years. He even took her North to see snow, an experience of great value for people from the South (at least in McCullers' world). With him, she did not feel lonely, after he had died, she did.

“I think about the years when me and Ludie was together, and about all the bad times I seen since. Ludie would never have let me be lonesome [...]. Me and Ludie,” she said. “Ludie and me.”¹¹⁰ [...]

“Sometimes I almost wish I had never knew Ludie at all,” said Berenice. “It spoils you too much. It leaves you too lonesome afterward. When you walk home in the evening on the way from work, it makes a little lonesome quinch come in you. And you take up with too many sorry men to try to get over the feeling.”

Bernice’s last sentence from the excerpt suggests her solution for her loneliness – men. There is nothing peculiar about that whatsoever, if only she would not end up with men, who reminded her of her first husband in the most unexpected ways. She missed her first husband, missed their shared happiness, she was lonely. She knew there would hardly be man as perfect for her as he was, yet she tried to find someone to fill the empty hole in her heart.

“I loved Ludie and he was the first man I loved. Therefore, I had to go and copy myself forever afterward. What I did was to marry off little pieces of Ludie whenever I come across them. [...] My intention was to repeat me and Ludie.”¹¹¹

Berenice found her other three husbands almost by accident, some might argue it was a fate, some might say she was seeing only what she wanted to see because of her broken heart. Whatever the case, neither of the ‘substitute’ husbands did not make her happy and not lonely. Her second husband had the same maimed thumb as Ludie, and he was a *“sorry old liquor-drinker.”¹¹²* Her third husband had the same figure as Ludie, more importantly, he wore the same coat (it really was Ludie’s coat, since it had been sold into a second-hand shop where he bought it) and eventually, he had gone crazy on her after three weeks of marriage. Berenice never truly explained what had happened with her fourth husband, suggesting it is not a story Frankie or her little cousin John Henry should listen to.

When we encounter Berenice in the story, she is seeing T. T. Williams, a man, who owns a coloured restaurant. He is always polite and nice to everyone and seems like an ideal man, in comparison with who preceded him. He could be the one who ends Berenice’s loneliness. Berenice enjoys all the perks the relationship provides; however, she does not want to marry T. T. because *“he don’t make [her] shiver none.”¹¹³* Here

¹¹⁰ McCOLLERS, Carson. *The Member of the Wedding*, p. 87

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 101

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 25

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 89

the roles of Frankie and Berenice shift and Frankie becomes the advisor, for Frankie cannot understand, why is Berenice refusing her second chance for a happy relationship. She changes her mind only when other changes occur:

[Frankie] was in the kitchen with Berenice on the day before they moved; the last afternoon that Berenice would be with them; for when it had been decided that she and her father would share with Aunt Pet and Uncle Ustace a house out in the new suburb of town, Berenice had given quit notice and said that she might as well marry T. T. ¹¹⁴

9.1.1.3. Hunting Alone

McCullers' novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* has loneliness even in its title. The main characters honour it, each of them is somehow lonely. More about the character of Doctor Copeland can be found in chapter 10.3.1. and more about Mick in the chapter 10.4.1, as well as an additional comment on Mr. John Singer, who will be the focus of this chapter. He is the one who connects all the other characters. To say he is the main character would be presumptuous, for the narrator's focus shifts between all the characters. However, Singer has a significant impact on the lives of all of them.

He is a deaf-mute, this characterization by itself sounds lonely. However, he is not, or at least was not at the beginning of the story. He has a friend Antonopoulos (see 10.4.1.). He becomes lonely after his friend is taken away to an asylum. That is paradoxically also the time when all other characters start to engage in a conversation with him, which results in their making Singer almost their confessor. They idealize Singer, see in him what they want to see, what they need most. They have one thing in common. They all feel Singer exudes calmness, which draws them to him, makes them feel secure and welcomed to share whatever they feel they need to share. Each of them in a sense creates their own Singer, for each of them needs something else from him. For example, for Blount, he is the one who 'knows,' who understands the struggle of the American society and the need to change.

With losing Antonopoulos, Singer also lost his only outlet. He is unable to communicate (or he does not want to) with people now, he only writes the most important things he wants to say, otherwise just nods, or shakes head. The 'talkative' one is now silent. "*For something had happened in this year. He had been left in an alien*

¹¹⁴ McCULLERS, Carson. *The Member of the Wedding.*, p. 149

land. Alone.”¹¹⁵ The excerpt below from a letter Singer wrote to Antonopoulos shows Singer’s despair springing from his inability to communicate how he was used to:

*His hands were a torment for him. They would not rest. They twitched in his sleep, and sometimes he awoke to find them shaping the words in his dream before his face. He did not like to look at his hands or to think about them. [...] The years before he had always tended them with care. [...] He had loved to wash and tend his hands. But now he only scrubbed them roughly with a brush two times a day and stuffed them back into his pockets.*¹¹⁶

The letters to Antonopoulos provide almost the only insight into Singer’s thoughts and feelings. They are also his only outlet; however, he never sends them. The letters show the reader the sight of Singer nobody, except Antonopoulos, was able to see. He would never let them.

Exactly how lonely Singer was is obvious from another part of his letter:

*It has been five months and twenty-one days now. All of that time I have been alone without you. The only thing I can imagine is when I will be with you again. If I cannot come to you soon I do not know what. [...] The way I need you is a loneliness I cannot bear. Soon I will come again. My vacation is not due for six months more but I think I can arrange it before then. I think I will have to. I am not meant to be alone and without you who understand.*¹¹⁷

For Singer, the visits to Antonopoulos are the same as the visits the other four characters pay him - essential. It is only during his visits he is finally able to let out everything he had stored in him and talk again, actually for hours, without minding Antonopoulos is more interested in what Singer brought him. It is during his last visit Singer learns Antonopoulos is dead. We will never learn the cause; Singer did not ask and the narrator did not provide the answer either. It is actually not important. Singer lost his hope to be sometime in the future reunited with his friend, a notion that had helped him to manage through his loneliness. With the hope gone, there is nothing left, even the reason to live is gone, so he kills himself.

The other four characters experience similar feelings as Singer – loss. They cannot understand Singer’s reasons, as they do not know any. He had never told them about his friend. Eventually they all move on, yet it is not a happy ending. They all gave

¹¹⁵ McCULLERS, Carson. *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, p. 204

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 216-217

up something they held dear, for example Blount who had hoped to change people's opinion in the city left to find happiness or at least content somewhere else.

9.1.2. O'Connor's Bizarre and Ambivalent

9.1.2.1. (Un)wise Enoch

Enoch Emery is one of the main characters from O'Connor's first novel *Wise Blood*. He is an eighteen years old man, who recently moved to an unknown town and feels lonely, since he was not able to find friends or at least someone to talk to.

*"I been here two months," he said, "and I don't know nobody. People ain't friendly here. I got me a room and there ain't never nobody in it but me."*¹¹⁸ [...]

*"My daddy made me come," he said in a cracked voice. Haze looked at him and saw he was crying, his face seamed and wet and a purple-pink color. "I ain't but eighteen year old," he cried, "an he made me come and I don't know nobody, nobody here'll have nothing to do with nobody else. They ain't friendly."*¹¹⁹

However, his loneliness is not a recent state of affairs, it accompanies him his whole life. He feels unnoticed, like nobody cares for him, he always felt like that. When he speaks about his father, about how he had made him come to the town, he mentions it was because of a woman. His father chose a woman over his son and sent him away. Still, however, he calls him papa.

When he meets Haze Motes, the main character of the novel, he feels as he had found a soulmate, someone who is in a similar situation (also came to the town recently, knows no one). Enoch thinks Haze feels the same was as he does.

*"You don't know nobody neither," Enoch said. "You ain't got no woman nor nothing to do. I knew when I first seen you you didn't have nobody nor nothing but Jesus. I seen you and I knew it."*¹²⁰

Even though Haze does not give Enoch a single reason to like him, on the contrary, he ignores him or is even slightly rude to him, Enoch does not seem to care enough. He realises it, points it out when he announces Haze is not goo either, even though he is not from the town. However, the happiness he feels when there is finally someone he can talk to, overshadows everything. The following excerpt shows Enoch's reaction

¹¹⁸ O'CONNOR, Flannery. *Three*, p. 35

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98

when he finds out Haze was looking for him, his intentions are not important at all, the fact someone wanted to find him outweighs it all:

“That blind man,” Haze said, “that blind man named Hawks-did his child tell you where they lived?”

Enoch didn’t seem to hear. “You came out here special to see me?” he said.¹²¹

How we have described Enoch so far could lead us to pity him, and pity him we could, but not only for his loneliness. Enoch is not just lonely; he is also unpredictable and often rude to people, thinking at least this would get their attention. Most of the just find him annoying and are irritated by him (as with the waitress in restaurant he visits regularly). His need for acceptance and connection forces him to do bizarre things. When meeting the gorilla, he sees it as an easy target for his insults, the ‘animal’ is something that would have to listen to him, it would have to shake his hand, it would have to notice him. However, he would face the rejection once more.

Enoch had gone over his fear and was trying frantically to think of an obscene remark that would be suitable to insult him with. [...]

The child in front of him finished and stepped aside and left him facing the ape, who took his hand with an automatic motion.

It was the first hand that had been extended to Enoch since he had come to the city.

It was warm and soft.

For a second he only stood there, clasping it. The he began to stammer. “My name is Enoch Emery,” he stumbled. “I attended the Rodemill Boys’ Bible Academy. I work at the city zoo. I seen two of your pictures. I’m only eighteen year old but I already work for the city. My daddy made me come...” and his voice cracked.

The star leaned slightly forward and a change came in his eyes: an ugly pair of human ones moved closer and squinted at Enoch from behind the celluloid pair. “You go to hell,” a surly voice inside the ape-suit said, low but distinctly, and the hand was jerked away.¹²²

9.1.2.2. A Good Grandmother Is Hard to Find

The grandmother is a character from O’Connor’s short story *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*. The way of the story narration leads the reader to assume that the grandmother is the main character of the story. The first words of the short story actually

¹²¹ O’CONNOR, Flannery. *Three*, p. 50

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 99

are *the grandmother*. In many ways she is. Even though she is just a travelling companion for her son's family, it is her who is in fact responsible for the course their journey eventually takes. Thanks to that she is also responsible for their destiny. To classify her is rather complicated, she could also represent one of the ambiguous characters, this category, however, is intended for the physically disabled characters (see 10.2). Apart from her ambiguity, she definitely is lonely. She represents those, whose lives are full of people, however, they still miss something (Mr. Singer feels similar).

From the begging of the story, it is clear that she is a caring person. This shows in her interaction with her son, when she tries to convince him to change his mind about a trip to Florida but also when she takes her cat with them because she cannot leave it home alone. On the other hand, her son and his whole family does not appreciate her concern and probably even her company. Many times, throughout the whole story the members of her family ignore her. *"Bailey didn't look up from his reading so she wheeled around then and faced the children's mother [...]. The children's mother didn't seem to hear her [...]."*¹²³ The behaviour of her grandchildren is worse, they openly show their absence of respect towards her on many occasions. They often do not listen to her, ignore her or are even rude.

*[...] John Wesley, a stocky child with glasses, said 'If you don't want to go to Florida, why dontcha stay at home? [...] She wouldn't stay at home to be a queen for a day,' June Star said [...]."*¹²⁴

The attitude of her relatives towards her could represent the clash of old traditional world with the world new, modern. The grandmother cannot leave the past, she often thinks about it and also talks about it. Her family does not care about it, they do not listen to her. For them, the past is not important. With the rejection of the past, they also reject experience and knowledge passed from generation to generation. Apart from their rejection of her opinions and believes, they also reject her. She lives with them yet without the real them.

Twice before their accident a notion of fate is brought up. Firstly, when the grandmother talks about her youth and how she could have married another man. After reading the whole story, the reader can realise that if she would have done it, she might have never met the killer. Secondly when she talks with owner of The Tower

¹²³ O'CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*, p. 117

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 117

establishment. *“These days you don’t know who to trust.”*¹²⁵ This sentence might be a foreshadowing. Looking back after reading the whole story, she never should have trusted a group of strangers.

The events directly preceding the accident are what makes a binary character of the grandmother. On one hand, she is a tragic character because she loses her whole family and eventually her own life. On the other hand, she is the one who caused it and therefore she is the hidden villain of the story. She might even be the ultimate villain. She had several opportunities to prevent their deaths. But her bad decisions sealed their fate. The first bad decision was connected with the moment when she lied about hidden silver. Later, when she realised that she confused the location of the house, she did not say anything and with her reaction to this realisation she caused the accident. And the final bad decision was her foolishness: when she recognised The Misfit, she was not able to keep quiet.

*The grandmother shrieked. She scrambled to her feet and stood staring. “You’re The Misfit!” she said. “I recognized you at once!” “Yes’m,” the man said, smiling as if he were pleased in spite of himself to be known, “but it would have been better for all of you if you hadn’t reckernized me.”*¹²⁶

When comparing her to The Misfit, who is the obvious villain of the story, an interesting parallel arises. They both seem to be very polite, even kind, yet they both have done something terrible. The grandmother unintentionally condemns her whole family to death, The Misfit is the one who does the act. Nonetheless the development of the grandmother’s character is much more tragic. She is perceived as a good, kind woman who cares about her family but after reading the whole story she is the one who could be blamed for everything. The Misfit is perceived as a bad character from the start, not even his polite demeanour would mislead the reader about his intentions. Moreover, his behaviour is what makes him more horrifying because it gives the characters (especially the grandmother) and also the reader hope that he might be merciful.

In reality, probably nothing could have saved the family. With the grandmother’s actions which can be easily interpreted as a series of unfortunate events or even a destiny, she leads her family to other world, the world of evil. They are powerless there because they have no experience with it. In spite of that,

¹²⁵ O’CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*, p. 122

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127

the grandmother does not give up, she attempts to change this world, tries to influence it with her own ordinary world (especially through God). “*Do you ever pray? she asked. [...] ¹²⁷‘If you would pray,’ the old lady said, ‘Jesus would help you.’ ¹²⁸* She also tries to show The Misfit her warmth, tries to show him he could have a better life if he would be like other people from the ordinary world. She tries to convince him to leave the world of evil. “*You shouldn’t call yourself The Misfit because I know you’re a good man at heart. I can just look at you and tell.*” ¹²⁹ However, all her efforts are in vain. Her world can never influence his world, not a single thing from it can survive in the world of evil and so she and her family cannot survive in it either.

9.2. The Maimed

As mentioned previously, deformation physical or mental is one of the constituting parts of the Southern Gothic genre. Both of the authors created such a character who often could provoke feelings of sympathy in the reader. Other times the description of their deformities leads the readers to the feeling of bizarre amusement, that is inappropriate and leaves the readers confused and partially disgusted with themselves (see chapter 1 for more about the grotesque). There are, however, also cases, when a character who we should feel pity for, is an actual villain of the whole story.

9.2.1. McCullers’ Lonely and Hunched

For Carson McCullers, the deformity of the body is often connected with the deformity of the heart. Her ‘freaks’ and disabled characters stand out in one way or another and that often causes their loneliness. Whether it is the deaf-mute who is the centre of attention for many people yet thinks about his friend (chapters 9.1.1.3. and 10.4.1) or a manly looking woman suffering from unrequited love (10.4.1).

McCullers gets the closest to the moral decay represented through a body disproportion with the hunchback Lymon in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. He shamelessly exploits her hospitality only to then fall in love with her husband (who she does not love,

¹²⁷ O’CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*, p. 129

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128

however, she loves Lymon). With said husband he eventually robs her and disappears. Similarly to O'Connor's Shiftlet, the uneven spine mirrors the ugly soul.

9.2.2. O'Connor's Ambiguous Characters

9.2.2.1. Rufus The Lame

Rufus Johnson from O'Connor's short story *The Lame Shall Enter First* is an ambiguous character through and through. He represents the story's catalyst, it is thanks to him and his actions Sheppard (the main character) realises his own mistakes, he finally knows he was not acting selflessly, but to satisfy his need to create another version of himself for he perceived himself as spotted. However, we should not think that his 'help' makes Rufus good, he can be perceived as the villain of the story (although Sheppard is not without guilt too). His negative actions lead to a positive change in Sheppard's mindset, but the overall consequences are tragic, the change came too late. Rufus is the type of villain the reader occasionally roots for, sympathises with him. That is because he is not afraid to be vulnerable, more than once he had said or done something that made Sheppard and the reader believe he truly is a good boy with unfortunate childhood. This leads us to believe he can be saved.

Rufus is smart fourteen-year-old boy, lives with his grandfather, although he could as well be an orphan, religious (especially interested in the notion of hell, but at least has a faith, something Sheppard does not). Rufus' disability is his clubfoot. It plays an important part of the story; the perception of the foot is as ambiguous as the perception and actions of Rufus himself. Sheppard sees this brilliant child in Rufus, who only waits for someone to help him, to raise him from the ashes, then he will thrive and do something good with his life. Rufus' clubfoot shod in ragged old shoe represents all the bad in Rufus for Sheppard, his soul is as deformed as his foot. "*The case was clear to Sheppard instantly. His mischief was compensation for the foot.*"¹³⁰ By buying him a new shoe, his transformation would be completed, he would cover the foot as well as Rufus' bad behaviour with something new and better.

Sheppard could not get to the brace shop quickly enough. He left Norton at home because he did not want his attention divided. He wanted to be free to observe Johnson's reaction minutely. The boy did not seem pleased or even interested in the prospect of the shoe,

¹³⁰ O'CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*, p. 450

but when it became an actuality, certainly then he would be moved.¹³¹ The shoe was going to make the greatest difference in the boy's attitude.¹³²

For Rufus, however, his clubfoot is in a sense the most valuable thing he has. He is not ashamed of it, he puts it on display. „*Johnson was as touchy about the foot as if it were a sacred object.*“¹³³ He does not see the new shoe as his redemption, on the contrary he despises it, the new shoe would take him his old life away, which is something he does not want. He repeatedly says he is in Satan's power, he will go to hell, therefore there is no point in changing his way of life.

“You want to take it home and see if it suits you first?” the clerk murmured.

“No,” Johnsons said. “I ain't going to wear it at all.”

“What's wrong with it?” Sheppard said, his voice rising.

“I don't need a new shoe,” Johnson said. “And when I do, I got my ways of getting my own.”¹³⁴

The confrontation of their contradictory beliefs happens at the end of the story, when Rufus does not hesitate to accuse Sheppard of things he did not commit (although his accusation about Sheppard being atheist is true). Even though at this point Sheppard knew Rufus was beyond saving, he had tried to inculcate his theory on Rufus, he tried to show him he knows the reasons for his actions, that he understands him, in a hope of saving himself.

“Wait,” Sheppard said. He came down one step and fixed his eyes on Johnson's eyes in a last desperate effort to save himself. “Tell the truth, Rufus,” he said. “You don't want to perpetrate this lie. You're not evil, you're mortally confused. You don't have to make up for that foot, you don't have to ...”

Johnson hurled himself forward. “Listen at him!” he screamed. “I lie and steal because I'm good at it! My foot don't have a thing to do with it! The lame shall enter first! The halt'll be gathered together. When I get ready to be saved, Jesus'll save me, not that lying stinking atheist, not that ...”¹³⁵

¹³¹ O'CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories.*, p. 469

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 459

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 459

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 470-471

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 480

9.2.2.2. Shifty Shiftlet

Mr. Tom T. Shiftlet is a character from another of O'Connor's short stories, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*. He misses half of his left arm and is unable to stand completely straight (this could be a suggestion he has no spine in real life when dealing with people). He is another ambiguous character. From the beginning the author gives subtle hints about his true nature, be it his name or his rude ignorance of Mrs. Lucynell questions. He, however, gives false trust with his speech about all he had seen and done, it seems like he has nothing to hide. Also, his proclamation about people wanting only money but him seeking for the purpose of men can lead us to believe his intentions are good. On the other hand, this lengthy monologue also serves Shiftlet to divert Mrs. Lucynell attention.

The true nature of his actions becomes much clearer in retrospect, only after the whole story is known, his ulterior motives are uncovered. It is most probable that even while he was having his initial conversation with Mrs. Lucynell, he had his plan all laid out in his head. Picking only the right words and acting as if he had not seen young Lucynell's mental disability, he wanted to secure their trust. Shiftlet truly was a master manipulator.

"Lady," he asked finally, "where would you find you an innocent woman today? I wouldn't have any of this trash I could just pick up."

The daughter was leaning very far down [...] and she suddenly fell in a heap on the floor and began to whimper. Mr Shiftlet straightened her out and helped her get back in the chair.

"Is she your baby girl?" he asked.

"My only," the old woman said "and she's the sweetest girl in the world. I would give her up for nothing on earth." [...]

"No," he said kindly, "don't ever let any man take her away from you."¹³⁶

He is extremely good at hiding his true intentions behind nice words. He knows he cannot ask Mrs. Lucynell for money and the car (his heart's desire) directly so he creates a story about his mother raising him to treat a woman always like a lady and therefore he would have to take his wife, his lady on a honeymoon trip, for which he would need money. Poor Lucynell is just an object for Shiftlet and her mother too.

¹³⁶ O'CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*, p. 149

The ambiguity in his behaviour almost gone now, he had shoved his true colours (an example can be his reaction to being allowed to paint the car: whatever colour he wants with paint Mrs. Lucynell would buy: “*Mr. Shiftlet smile stretched out like a weary snake waking up by a fire.*”)¹³⁷ The reader however could still feel sympathy for Shiftlet, could hope for his change. From the beginning he had several opportunities to see through his actions and take on a different course. The biggest opportunity is his wedding with Lucynell, if he would have stayed with her, he could have the car he so desired and also a place to live and a good wife. He, however, does not seize the opportunity and by his actions makes lives of all the people involved much worse. Whether he is happy or not is debatable, although it is safe to say he skips any soul-searching. The excerpt below shows the very end of the short story, where he abandons the hitchhiker as well as young Lucynell without a second thought.

After a few minutes there was a guffawing peal of thunder from behind and fantastic raindrops, like tin-can tops, crashed over the rear of Mr. Shiftlet's car. Very quickly he stepped on the gas and with his thump sticking out the window he raced the galloping shower into Mobile.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 152

10. Realistic and Gothic Features in the Works of O'Connor and McCullers

As nothing is only black or white, neither can the stories of O'Connor and McCullers be described only as Gothic. With the development of culture and many different literary styles and movements merging together and influencing one another, it is only natural there will be aspects of other movements, especially realism. As was already established (chapter 1), the Gothic (to be precise the Southern Gothic) often focuses on the description of violence, abnormal psychological states, or character's deformation (inner or outer). These descriptions are usually using the realistic approach, trying to be as accurate as possible.

10.1. Narrator

For realism, the omniscient narrator is typical, and it is also the type of narration both O'Connor and McCullers tend to use. In theory this should help the reader to understand the character's motives, however, it is necessarily not the case. The reasons may differ. In McCullers *Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* the orientation in the story and characters' mindset is compiled by changing the character the story follows (it shifts between five different characters). A question of who the main character actually is arises. Since all the characters are acquainted, they are sometimes all (or at least some) present in the same situation, the narrator however provides us only with one point of view. Therefore, the narrator might be omniscient, but the reader is not.

The case is similar in *The Member of the Wedding*, where we observe three characters (the others who appear in the novel are described only vaguely, the focus is on the three). These characters and especially Frankie are under the watchful eye of the omniscient narrator as well. Although the most focus is on Frankie, we are invited to get to also know Berenice's thoughts, especially when race is questioned. On the other hand, certain things are obscured again so the reader can grow together with Frankie and to feel as trapped and lonely in a world as she does.

O'Connor uses omniscient narrator too, regularly. The reader, however, is none the wiser. With O'Connor it is mainly caused by her character's abnormalities. In *Wise Blood* the narrator provides us with enough detail about Haze's and Enoch's thinking, we usually know their motives for acting the way they act; however, their behaviour

is often so out of the box, even the omniscient narrator cannot make the reader understand fully. The case is similar in the short story *Revelation*, where the narrator provides us with thorough insight into Mrs. Turpin's thoughts. The reader, however, will never know the real reason Mary Grace had for acting so out of the ordinary when she threw her book on Mrs. Turpin's head.

There is a certain similarity between both authors and their usage of omniscient narrator. They use it in majority of the story yet retreat from it when they want the readers to look for the hidden meanings, the symbolism, therefore they force the reader to contemplate on the character's behaviour or his or her feelings.

10.2. Middle Class, Lower Class in the South

O'Connor and McCullers both describe the whole society, however, they especially focus on the middle and lower classes of the rural American South. From their biographies, it is obvious neither of them was poor, yet neither of them was wealthy. O'Connor was probably a little bit more well off than McCullers. Nevertheless, none of them experienced the difficult life the lower class had. They, however, witnessed it, both being especially skilled at observing their surroundings. The South was still influenced by the results of Civil War, but also the Great Depression and World War II took its toll and many people had to scrape along. The authors are not afraid to describe their ways of living, which are often verging on the borderline of survival. Especially accurate is the description of the surroundings, as the excerpt from McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* illustrates:

Soon he entered one of the mill districts bordering the river. The streets became narrow and unpaved and they were not empty any longer. Groups of dingy, hungry-looking children called to each other and played games. The two-room shacks, each one like the other, were rotten and unpainted. The stink of food and sewage mingled with the dust in the air.¹³⁸

The focus on the lower classes is one of the most prominent features of realism, together with the language typical for said class. A trait their stories bare as well. Even without reading the novels and short stories aloud, the southern accent is springing

¹³⁸ McCULLERS, Carson. *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, p. 61

out of their books (“*You heah me? Come heah!*”¹³⁹ *Quit yo’ foolishness [...] before I knock the living Jesus out of you!*)¹⁴⁰

Simply told, their books are descriptions of the Southern everyday life with a gothic twist. For example, O’Connor’s short story *Everything That Rises Must Converge* could be described as a story about a son who escorts her mother to a gathering because she is afraid to travel alone in the evening, however, that is not the whole point of the story. This story in particular is full of grotesque and bizarre situations, with a surprising climax quite similar to another story of the same author, *The Revelation*.

This usage of realistic methods helps the gothic and grotesque motifs to be even more shocking or absurd. To read about a world that is completely normal, getting to know the character’s troubles and opinions, only to be thrust into a madhouse of unexpected behaviour gives much more impact to the story.

10.3. The Racial Issue

The racial issue was a big part of the Southern literature overall, not excluding the Southern Gothic genre. As was already established in their biographies, both authors were born in the South and set their stories there. The South had a rich history concerning the racial issue. Both authors were influenced by the changes the society undergone throughout their lives. If we would take a look on their attitude towards the black people integration, there were minor differences. O’Connor, influenced by her mother, was a bit more hesitant, she however was not in any case a racist (as is also established in her biography - chapter 7.1.19). McCullers was much more invested; she overall was against oppression and persecution of all the people.

Whatever their opinion might be, they were both not afraid to portray the reality. The negative attitude towards black people that many Southern inhabitants shared is captured accurately. Despite the negative connotation the word had even back then, they do not stifle from using the word ‘*nigger or negro*’ to capture the mood as truthfully as possible.

¹³⁹ O’CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*, p. 416

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 417

10.3.1. McCullers' Approach

Carson McCullers continues with her focus on the motif of loneliness even when black people are concerned. Their loneliness is connected (or should we say caused) with oppression, this theme in variants repeats itself in the majority of her work. The black characters are often one of the main ones in the story (Dr. Copleand, Berenice, Portia). Doctor Benedict Mady Copeland from the novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* is one of these characters. In his community, he is loved and admired. He helped numerous patients who would not receive help elsewhere (he is a doctor for black people), he organises an annual Christmas party for the community. He is an important man, yet he feels lonely. His loneliness springs up from his complicated relationship with his children. It (indirectly) is because of one of his sons, when he suffers through the oppressive behaviour aimed towards black people in general. Paradoxically, he is attacked by a policeman in a court hallway while acting as politely as always, not giving him a single pretext to do such a violent thing.

“What you say you wanted to see the judge about?”

“I did not say,” said Doctor Copeland. “I merely said that my business with him was urgent.”

“You can’t stand up straight. You have been drinking liquor, haven’t you? I can smell on your breath.”

“That is a lie,” said Doctor Copeland slowly. “I have not-“

The sheriff struck him on the face. He fell against the wall. Two white men grasped him by the arm and dragged him down the steps to the main floor.¹⁴¹

Doctor Copeland is also taking on a role of an advocate for the black people. He is a very calm and composed man, yet when he starts speaking about their oppression, he becomes passionate, representing the feeling of black people in that time:

“And the Negro. Do not forget the Negro. So far as I and my people are concerned the South is Fascist now and always has been. [...] The Nazis rob Jews of their legal, economic, and cultural life. Here the Negro has always been deprived of these. And if wholesale and dramatic robbery of money and goods has not taken place here as in Germany, it is simply because the Negro has never been allowed to accrue wealth in the first place.”¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ McCULLERS, Carson. *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, p. 261

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 299

*"We have no representatives in government. We have no vote. In all of this great country we are the most oppressed of all people. We cannot lift up our voices. Our tongues rot in our mouths from lack of use."*¹⁴³

10.3.2. O'Connor's Approach

O'Connor chooses a slightly different approach than McCullers. O'Connor often gives them an episodic role, they often would not even be named, their impact on the story, however, is usually important. Their appearance sets the mood, helps to illustrate the reality of the Southern society, shows us how other characters feel about the black issue etc. Furthermore, as with McCullers, these characters show us, how the society perceived black people.

One example of an episodic appearance with a high impact can be found in a short story *The Artificial Nigger*. Here the grandfather (Nelson Head) takes his grandson to the big city to see his first 'nigger.' Although the outline might be a bit unrealistic, the people's opinions are not, they mirror the reality. The grandson's reaction, however, is not as he would expect. The grandson is not rotten with prejudice, yet.

"What was that?" [the grandfather] asked.

"A man," the boy said and gave him an indignant look as if he were tired of having his intelligence insulted.

"What kind of a man? Mr. Head persisted, his voice expressionless.

"A fat man," Nelson said. [...]

"You don't know what kind?" Mr. Head said in a final tone.

"An old man," the boy said [...].

"That was a nigger," Mr. Head said and sat back. [...] "That's his first nigger," he said to the man across the aisle.

*"You said they were black," he said in an angry voice. "You never said they were tan."*¹⁴⁴

This exchange is also another great example of a situation that is both tragical and comical. To think about people who treat another person almost as a spectacle is truly appalling. On the other hand, the boy's initial ignorance and his replies add a comedic element. In combination causing the reader to be once more in a state of dismay about how to feel.

¹⁴³ McCULLERS, Carson. *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, p. 193

¹⁴⁴ O'CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*, p. 255

10.3.3. McCullers and O'Connor Combined

Interesting parallel might be drawn between McCullers' novel *A Clock Without Hands* and O'Connor's short story *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. These works both deal with the racial segregation. McCullers' novel focuses on the days before the US Supreme Court official decision to end segregation in public schools. McCullers presents a society full of hate and prejudice, culminating with an assassination of a black boy called Sherman Pew.

"Are we going to let the zoning of our town be decided by niggers? I am asking you, are we or are we not?" Balancing himself carefully, the Judge pounded his fist on the counter. *"This is the hour of decision. Who is running this town, us or the niggers?"* [...]

"Who's going to bomb the bastard?" a hoarse voice called.¹⁴⁵

O'Connor's short story then presents the attitude of society after the strict rules for segregation began to loosen. Whether the law had changed or not, the people were still the same. Who was against black people before the change would not stop being against black people after it. In *Everything That Rises Must Converge* the anti-black part of society's opinion is represented by Julian's mother, Mrs. Chestny. She is influenced by her traditional upbringing, desperately clinging to the old division of society by strict rules. Her attitude towards black people is patronizing and hypocritical. She speaks ill of black people, however, perceives a little black kid as cute. The way she acts when encountered with a black woman is in a direct contradiction with the way she wants to be perceived – a lady.

"I see we have the bus for ourselves," [Julian's mother] said.

"For a change," said the woman across the aisle, the owner of the red and white canvas sandals. *"I come on one the other day and they were thick as fleas-up front and all through."*

"The world is in mess everywhere," his mother said. *"I don't know how we've let it get in this fix."*¹⁴⁶

Her reaction on a black man who disturbed her 'white' bus is fully descriptive:

*"Now you see why I won't ride on these buses by myself."*¹⁴⁷ She proceeds

¹⁴⁵ McCULLERS, Carson. *The Clock Without Hands*, p. 223

¹⁴⁶ O'CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*, p. 410

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 412

to express her opinion when the woman who sat next to the black man changed her seat. Julian's mother "*leaned forward and cast her an approving look.*"¹⁴⁸

10.4. The Gothic and The Grotesque

As was already established (chapter 1), these terms often substitute for each other. In the gothic literature, grotesque characters are almost fundamental. This applies to O'Connor as well as McCullers. The previous chapter suggests a vast use of realistic features in works of both authors. Gothicism and realism however do not exclude, they complement each other. The characters are the prime example of such relationship. As we have mentioned previously, the characters and their way of life are subjected to realistic description. The description however does not focus only on the inner life, but also on the character's exterior.

That is when the most prominent gothic feature comes in – the characters are often somehow disabled (missing limb, dwarves, exceptionally tall women, deaf-mutes, hunchback), suffer from various diseases (tuberculosis), are mentally unstable, or they bare distinct physical characteristics (different coloured eye, obesity). Their untypical features are thoroughly described. There is, however, a second layer behind the general description. The layer that focuses on the symbolic meaning of their disability, on the paradoxes, bringing with itself the sense of grotesque. The symbolism is not the only thing connected with the gothic and the grotesque. The tragical and comical elements are closely connected with one another and with the gothic overall (it is the several times mentioned internal fight – see 1.3).

10.4.1. McCullers' The Gothic and The Grotesque

A great example provides McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, where every character is somehow out of the ordinary. There is the sexually perverted Biff, Marxian fanatic Blount, black doctor Copeland, a young girl struggling through adolescence Mick and the incapacitated Mr. Singer. The most obvious one is Mr. Singer (see 9.1.1.3.), who is a deaf mute. That is the basic description, yet something more is hidden behind

¹⁴⁸ O'CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*, p. 412

it. The fact a deaf mute could miss talking to a friend is grotesque enough as well as the need of the four other characters to conduct lengthy conversations with him.

[The four people] come up to my room and talk to me until I do not understand how a person can open and shut his or her mouth so much without being weary.¹⁴⁹

Grotesqueness and a hint of comedy can also be found in his relationship with a Greek Antonapoulos, his deaf-mute friend. One would look hard for two people more different than they are. Singer loves Antonapoulos dearly, almost obsessively (the same way the four other characters were obsessed with Singer). Singer loves to talk to him with his hands, he tells him everything, however, the communication is almost one sided. Antonapoulos' tends to talk mainly about food. When he is sent away, Singer tries to have a moment with him, to tell him everything he was not able to, Antonapoulos is interested only in his lunch box. It is almost as if he would not care whether a lamp stood on a pavement instead of his friend Singer.

[...] Antonapoulos was so busy checking over the various items in his lunchbox that for a while he paid no attention. Just before the bus pulled away from the curb he turned to Singer and his smile was very bland and remote – as though already they were many miles apart.¹⁵⁰

More subtle disproportion is manifested in the character of Mick who goes through a significant change throughout the course of the novel. From a tomboy she becomes a young woman. It is however not without an obstacle, the change is accompanied with confusion and loneliness (Frankie from *Wedding* is another great example), inducing the feeling of grotesque. Especially in liminal phase where the young tomboy girl both wants and does not want to grow up (the fear of menstruation, her supposed lack of femininity), resulting in her putting on a 'charade' in attempt to be feminine even though she does not feel that way yet. Her actual growing-up is not connected with her sexual experience but with her decision to quit school in order to earn some money. With this she is also knowingly giving up her dreams of becoming a famous pianist she had as teenager.

Strong autobiographical references bears the grotesque character of Amelia Evans from the novel *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, who is a 'giant' (McCullers herself struggled with her height, especially as a child – see her biography) and has a complicated

¹⁴⁹ McCULLERS, Carson. *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, p. 214-215

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10

relationship with two men (stormy relationships were McCullers' forte). She too, as the majority of her characters, is lonely. Amelia has a distinct look, typical for Southern Gothic fiction. "She was a dark, tall woman with bones and muscles like man. [...] She might have been a handsome woman if, even then, she was not slightly cross-eyed."¹⁵¹ More grotesque than her looks is however the difference between the two men she was involved in, her husband Marvin (coming home from penitentiary) is handsome tall man, her second interest is her hunchback cousin Lymon. The return of her husband ends in a bizarre and unexpected love triangle, when Lymon falls in love with Marvin. Again, biographical elements are utilized to create a gothic grotesque situation. The situation then culminates in a bizarre fight between the spouses, leaving Amelia physically changed, from the strong manly female, she became just a woman. She became a casualty of her passion.

Overall, McCullers utilizes the grotesqueness to add on another reason for her characters loneliness and alienation, a trait so typical for her work.

10.4.2. O'Connor's Gothic and Grotesque

As was already established, O'Connor chooses a different path how to evoke the grotesque feel. She could be called the more 'obvious' one. Where McCullers only hints and suggests there might be something grotesque, O'Connor shouts it onto her readers. One situation or character being more shocking, bizarre, or ridiculous than the other. Where McCullers focuses on loneliness, O'Connor's interest is in the flaws of human nature, the bad character traits such as greed, arrogance or even racism. To capture these flaws, she creates characters that are rather bizarre, act unexpectedly, have crooked moral compass or indulge in violence (as is obvious from chapters about Enoch or Shiftlet). O'Connor focuses on the contrast between normal and abnormal by putting the abnormal on the pedestal for reader to ponder about. She also often uses the characters to provide the reader with a religious message of some sort, as she was a devoted Catholic (see chapter 11).

The behaviour of Enoch Emery is nothing but grotesque (his need for a friend does not excuse him). Similarly, the scene where the grandmother from *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* tries to convince the misfit who had just killed her whole family about him being

¹⁵¹ McCULLERS, Carson. *Collected Stories*, p. 198

good, brims over with grotesqueness. It is also one of those ambiguous situations that causes the reader to feel discomfort. There are certain elements in the situation that are bizarrely funny and extremely tragic at the same time.

There were two more pistol reports and the grandmother raised her head like a parched old turkey hen crying for water and called: "Bailey Boy, Bailey Boy!" [...]
She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!"
She reached out and touched him on the shoulder.¹⁵²

Her overall writing style contributes to the feeling, she usually used short sentences and unusual expressions and comparisons to make the story even more bizarre, shocking, and impactful. She also utilises humour rather well, connecting it with the grotesqueness of the whole situation. The character of Lucynell (*The Life You Save May Be Your Own*), although meeting a tragic end, provides the elements of amusement throughout the story, that however still remain tinted by the gothic feeling of uneasiness.

The chapter 9.2.1.1. focused on Rufus from the short story *The Lame Shall Enter First*, however the character of Sheppard is also important, he represents the characters who are arrogant, they think themselves good, which makes him in a sense grotesque as well, especially after knowing the story's conclusion. This good yet actually not so good grotesque character is recurring type in O'Connor's work. Apart from Sheppard, also Julian's mother (*Everything That Rises Must Converge*) is a great example.

¹⁵² O'CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*, p. 132

11. Faith

In the matter of faith, the two authors do not meet, either in their personal lives, or in their works. For Flannery O'Connor, Catholic faith was an important part of her life, as is obvious from her biography (she attended masses every morning; see chapter 6). Carson McCullers was not an atheist, she simply did not believe in organised religion, her breakthrough with the church as well as her struggle to find God is described in her biography (see chapter 7). Even if both authors were heavily influenced by their lives, the religious motif is more prominent in the works of Flannery O'Connor.

11.1. Catholic Flannery O'Connor

Her main focus was man's redemption and the ways one has to take to achieve it. Usually, her characters have to undergo certain epiphany, feel their guilt, or accept their responsibility, in order to be redeemed. Sometimes, however, it is too late (Sheppard), or the character is not interested in taking the chance (Shiftlet).

Sheppard from the short story *The Lame Shall Enter First* was already briefly mentioned in relation to Rufus (9.2.1.1.). As is often the case with O'Connor's characters, even his name provides a lead, it is a symbol. The strong resemblance with the word *shepherd* is undeniable, as well as his personality traits mirroring the biblical figure. Shepherd was someone who tended the sheep, gathered them, took care of them. The sheep metaphorically represented the people Jesus guided and saved. Sheppard, whether consciously or not, wants to be the shepherd for Rufus. He wants to guide the boy to redemption, to make a good man out of him. By doing this, Sheppard himself would achieve satisfaction.

A half an hour later Sheppard came home. He dropped his raincoat on a chair in the hall and came as far as the parlor door and stopped. His face was suddenly transformed. It shone with pleasure. [Rufus] sat, a dark figure, in a high-backed pink upholster chair. [...] He was reading [...]. It was a volume of the encyclopaedia Britannica. He was so engrossed in it that he did not look up. Sheppard held his breath. This was perfect setting for the boy. He had to keep him here. He had to manage it somehow.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ O'CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*, p. 456

Sheppard, however, is not able to guide even his own son, he overlooks his depression connected with the loss of his mother mere year ago. He also pushes him aside and favours Rufus since he thinks Rufus has more potential. Nevertheless, he thinks himself capable, he does not see his faults. Rufus' words confirm it: "*He thinks he's God.*"¹⁵⁴ Eventually Sheppard goes through an epiphany; however, it was too late, it is him who needs redemption now.

*His heart constricted with a repulsion for himself so clear and intense that he gasped for breath. He had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like glutton. He had ignored his own child to feed his of himself.*¹⁵⁵

The idea of redemption is prominent also in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* and in *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*. In both stories, the characters (the grandmother and Shiftlet) have multiple opportunities to 'save their souls,' however, they ignore them. Their ignorance forces the redemption out of their reach.

Apart from the characters' action, the idea of redemption is manifested also through biblical metaphors and symbols. One example for all might be the scene of Mr. Shiftlet's arrival, which suggests there is still hope for him.

*He turned his back and faced the sunset, he swung both his whole and his short arm up slowly so that they indicated an expanse of sky and his figure formed a crooked cross.*¹⁵⁶

11.2. Lonely Carson McCullers

As was already mentioned, Carson McCullers' faith was a little bit more complicated than O'Connor's. She often felt lonely in more than one sense. She sought love as well as God. Therefore, her books are more about the search for something unspecified, something that would make her character feel whole and not lonely.

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, a novel full of lonely people looking for a way out of their spiritual loneliness. Each of the characters finds their own target, their own Christ figure, to whom they can turn to whenever they feel the loneliest. For the four people (Biff, Mick, Blount, and Copeland) it is Singer, in whom they seek comfort and guidance from in the times of need. For Singer, it is Antonapoulos. Neither

¹⁵⁴ O'CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*, p. 480

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 481

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146

Singer nor Antonopoulos talk with their worshippers much, just as Christ would not. All the characters suffer with similar shock when their objects of worship (Antonopoulos and Singer) die.

Sometimes, her characters also express their opinion through religion and religious analogies. One representation is Blount from *The Heart*, who is very passionate during almost every conversation he has with anyone. He is angry with the government and the whole America, especially the living condition of the working-class people troubles him. During one of his outbursts, he expresses his anger using Jesus analogy:

*“The things they have done to us! The truths they have turned into lies. Take Jesus. He was one of us. He knew. [...] But look what the Church has done to Jesus during the last two thousand years. What they have made of Him. How they have turned every word He spoke for their own vile ends. Jesus would be framed and in jail if He was living today. [...]”*¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ McCULLERS, Carson. *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, p. 157-158

12. Analysis' Conclusion

There are similarities as well as differences in the work of Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers. The differences are often influenced by their life stories, their approach towards relationships and religion and their personalities. They both draw inspiration from their surroundings, the people they interact with or even people they only hear about.

As was already mentioned, McCullers' stories overall are more tamed, they do not aim to shock the reader as much as O'Connor's do. Nevertheless, both of these authors convey their intended message masterfully. Both authors have their 'typical words' that are strongly connected with them and their work, they define their work.

For Carson McCullers, the word is **loneliness**. Everything is focused around it. Majority of her characters are somehow lonely and usually search for something that would make them stop feeling this way. In the spirit of the Southern Gothic, she often utilizes characters that are in one way or another scarred, physically, or mentally. A struggle of incoming adolescence is a common theme for her, for she was inspired by her own childhood and teenage years. She also focuses on the racial issue, not being afraid to tackle the stereotypes the Southern society still drew from, despite the integration laws.

O'Connor would have two words assigned – **redemption** and **bizarreness**. Even though McCullers' characters were scarred somehow, the scarring on O'Connor's characters is much deeper. There is not a single story where there would be no freak, morally immature, or ignorant character, who causes the reader to question the possibility of such situation on one hand. On the other hand, the reader ponders upon the reasons for such behaviour. O'Connor is not afraid to make her characters as appalling as possible, whether it is because of their old-fashioned opinions towards black people or because of the total lack of conscience. However, she is also merciful. She often gives the anti-heroes a chance to redeem themselves, nonetheless the reader often suspects the true course the story and the character would take. It would not be the course towards the happy end. The use of characters that are somehow out of the ordinary is typical for the Southern Gothic genre and it is a trait these authors share.

The chapters above also illustrate the approaches towards the narration and description of the society McCullers and O'Connor took. The goal for both of them was similar. They wanted to depict the Southern society as a whole, with all the issues

it possessed. The focus on the rural and middle class connects them both, as well as their interest in black people and the race segregation issue. To provide the most accurate picture, they both utilized the realistic methods of narration.

As they are both authors of the Southern Gothic, the gothic elements are obviously present in the works of both of them. As was mentioned previously, Carson McCullers is subtler with her gothic elements (especially in her earlier creations), Flannery O'Connor, on the other hand, provides the 'typical' Southern Gothic experience. Her stories are filled with bizarre and macabre characters and events. Carson McCullers with her gothic and grotesque elements focuses more on symbolism. McCullers' grotesqueness is more about understanding, O'Connor's is more about questioning. Questioning of what is normal and what is abnormal and why is it so. Connected with the grotesque as well as with both O'Connor and McCullers, is the contrast between comical and tragical elements. The tragical, or at least gloomy and unhappy prevails. However, it is interpolated with sudden comical elements, appearing in the most unexpected and often inappropriate situations, causing a deep disbalance in the readers' perception of the novel and helplessness of how to react. This is one of the most prominent features common for both authors.

What is not so common is the utilization of religious themes and motifs dependent on their personal approach towards religion. In this field, O'Connor is definitely the more active one, connecting religious elements and symbols with one of her key words – redemption.

Conclusion

The main goal of the diploma thesis was to analyse the work of Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers, two Southern Gothic authors, with special attention paid to the gothic (grotesque) traits in relation to the realistic method. To achieve this goal, it is important to understand what the gothic and grotesque traits are. To define the basic terminology (the gothic, the grotesque, and terror) is not seamless process. There is a certain confusion in the relation between the gothic and the grotesque and deliberation upon their possible overlap. From the definitions provided in the first chapter, the term gothic takes precedence over the term grotesque. The term grotesque itself is one of the main features of the Gothic genre overall, manifesting itself especially strongly in the Southern Gothic genre. Terror is connected with both of these terms, expressing the overall feel of the stories (not necessarily meaning terror in the sense of fear, it can represent a negative feeling caused by the events the reader encounters during the reading).

With the definition established, the gothic features and motifs can be provided. No matter whether it is the approach of David Punter or Bridget M. Marshall, they both utilize the basic characterization of the gothic genre. Both authors agree on the overall negative feeling that prevails and is caused by the usage of specific means. The most highlighted one is the usage of a specific character, a trait mentioned even in the initial chapter focusing on the basic terms definition. The character is also furthermore analysed in an individual chapter, for most of the other traits of the Southern Gothic are connected with it.

The characters are usually specific in one way or another. They often bare a peculiar physical or psychological characteristic that differentiate them from the others. Two different approaches can be taken concerning this differentiation. One being the body of the character that is somehow disabled (hunchback, armless, blind, mute etc.), the second being the mind of the character that is out of the ordinary (craziness, twisted morality, anxiety). Somewhere in the middle are black people, whose dark skin makes them prone to be secluded, which also influences their mental condition. One of the most important things connected with these unusual characters is the contrast between tragedy and comedy. Both draw on the peculiarity of the characters who often inspire the feelings of pity, amusement, and terror from the reader almost simultaneously.

To map the development and changes in the Gothic genre is definitely important. Even though, on the first sight, the Southern Gothic genre has not much in common with the traditional Gothic genre, they share certain important characteristics. The first being the grotesque character, especially the villain whose rotten soul manifests itself also in their appearance. The traditional European Gothic, however, was not fit to survive on the American soil. There were no castles with ghosts or sinister events. However, there were other problems. The economic crisis and the racial issue being at the front of the pack. The authors wanted to utilize the current situation, nevertheless, to use only the realistic methods was not enough. Therefore, they took inspiration and the most prominent features from the traditional Gothic (characters and atmosphere) and used it to their best advantage. They eventually created the Southern gothic, a literary movement utilizing the realistic methods while heavily leaning on the grotesque, symbolism, but also the contradiction between comic and tragic.

Both Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers are often mentioned among the most important authors of the genre, their works being cited and presented as the canonical pieces. Their impact is undeniable. To analyse their lives was important for multiple reasons. Through their lives we get to understand the arrangement of the Southern society in the first half of the 20th century. We also get to see their working process, get acquainted with their work. Most importantly, to know their lives means to understand their work a little bit more, for they both were influenced and inspired by their own lives, no matter whether they knew about it or not, whether they wanted to admit it or not.

All the knowledge acquired through the theoretical part is essential for the literary analysis. The most important part is connected with the characters that are analysed from multiple points of view. The first one being the most prominent trait the majority of the characters bear. Both authors have this in common, they repeat themselves in a sense by using a certain trait in the majority of their works, through which it becomes significant for them.

For Carson McCullers it is the motif of loneliness, manifested in many different forms, often connected with the motif of disability (psychological or physical). For Flannery O'Connor it is the bizarreness and ambiguity. Her characters often act unexpectedly, sometimes even instinctively, shocking the reader. The shock is also caused by the characters who have two sides, suddenly showing the bad one. Another

trait is the character's disability, utilized by both O'Connor and McCullers, although more prominently in O'Connor's work.

The analysis of the realistic and gothic/grotesque features continues to focus on the characters, now from the narrator's point of view. Together with the overall description of the surroundings, the narrator is one of the most prominent realistic features. The feature that is both realistic and Southern is the focus on the black people and the racial issue, again manifested through the characters. The approach towards the realistic principles is shared by both authors. They also share the use of the typical grotesque traits. Apart from the grotesque characters, it is also the combination of comical and tragical elements, which is reflected in their work, leaving probably the biggest impact on the reader.

Since Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers were both religious, it was essential to look for the religious elements in their work. To know their approach towards religion was crucial, therefore the knowledge of their biographies paid off once more. O'Connor was more traditional in her approach toward religion, she was a Catholic, devoted to the church. Also, her works are full of religious symbols and themes, one prevailing over the others – redemption. For McCullers, religion was more about finding God in her own way than being a part of organised group. This search is mirrored in her stories as well, her characters are constant searchers for something more.

To summarize the most important findings of the analysis, we can say that Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers share the most important traits that make the Southern Gothic author. It is especially the focus on the peculiar characters (e.g. armless Mr. Shiftlet, hunchback Lymon, racist Mrs. Chestny) who usually do not find what there are looking for or meet an unfortunate end. Also, the focus on the race issue and lower class is common. On the other hand, they differ in their usage of the grotesque and religious themes.

Resumé

Hlavním cílem diplomové práce byla analýza děl Flannery O'Connor a Carson McCullers, dvou autorek jižanské gotiky. Zvláštní pozornost byla věnována gotickým (groteskním) znakům a jejich vztahu k realistickým postupům. Porozumět termínům spojeným s gotickým žánrem (groteskní/*grotesque*, gotický/*gothic* a zděšení/*terror*) bylo pro finální analýzu klíčové, stanovit základní definici těchto termínů ale nebylo jednoduché. Pojmy gotický (*gothic*) a groteskní (*grotesque*) jsou v cizojazyčné literatuře často zaměňovány, nebo se používají současně, bez odlišení jejich významu. První kapitola stanovuje nadřazenost pojmu gotický nad pojmem groteskní. Samotná grotesknost je jedním z hlavních znaků gotického žánru, pro žánry jižanské gotiky je naprosto zásadní. Termín zděšení (*terror*) je spojen jak s pojmem gotický, tak i s pojmem groteskní, a vyjadřuje celkové vyznění díla (nutně nemusí znamenat pouze pocit strachu, ale jakýkoli negativní pocit, který čtenář často po dočtení jižanského gotického příběhu pociťuje).

Na základě definice se můžeme přesunout k základním gotickým prvkům a motivům. Pro porovnání jsou uvedeny přístupy Davida Puntera a Bridget M. Marshall. Oba vycházejí ze základní charakteristiky gotického žánru. Shodu nacházejí v negativním vyznění gotických příběhů, které je způsobeno použitím konkrétních prostředků. Nejvýraznějším z nich je užití specifické postavy. Tento prostředek je zmíněn již v první kapitole, která se zaměřuje na definici základních pojmů. Této typické gotické postavě a jejímu popisu je věnována samostatná kapitola, neboť velká většina dalších prvků důležitých pro jižanskou gotiku je spojena právě s touto typickou postavou.

Gotická postava je zpravidla něčím výjimečná (ne nutně v dobrém slova smyslu), nejčastěji se od ostatních odlišuje zvláštními tělesnými nebo charakterovými rysy. Konkrétní projev odlišnosti může souviset s tělesným postižením této postavy (hrbáč, bezruký, slepec, němý apod.). Další možností odlišení je jistá psychická nevyrovnanost (šílenství, pokřivená morálka, úzkost). Mezi těmito dvěma možnostmi je odlišnost rasová: černošští obyvatelé, jejichž tmavá pleť je odlišuje na poli vzhledu, jejich segregace ale zásadně ovlivňuje i jejich psychiku. Tyto postavy na sebe váží další důležitý znak - kontrast mezi komickými a tragickými prvky. Komika, stejně jako tragika, využívají všech podivností, které postava vykazuje, k tomu, aby u čtenáře vyvolaly téměř současně pocity lítosti, pobavení i zděšení.

Postižení vývoje a změn, kterými gotický žánr prošel, je důležité. Navzdory tomu, že tradiční gotický žánr nemá na první pohled se současnou jižanskou gotikou příliš společného, oba žánry sdílejí některé důležité rysy. Prvním je groteskní postava, především záporný hrdina, jehož vnitřní zkaženost se odráží i na jeho vzhledu. Tradiční žánr evropské gotiky jako takový nemohl v americkém prostředí přežít beze změn. Staré strašidelné zámky a nevysvětlitelné děsivé události nebyly místním čtenářům dostatečně blízké. Amerika však měla jiné problémy: hlavně ekonomická krize a její následky, stejně jako rasová problematika, hýbaly společností. Pro autory byla společenská situace velkým zdrojem inspirace, nespokojili se ale pouze s užitím realistických prvků. Proto se inspirovali tradiční gotikou, převzali některé typické prvky (postavy a atmosféru) a ty využily při tvorbě svého díla. Takto postupně vznikl žánr jižanské gotiky, žánr, který v sobě kombinoval realistické postupy s groteskními, užíval symboly a opíral se rozpor komiky a tragiky.

Obě autorky, Flannery O'Connor a Carson McCullers, bývají často uváděny jako jedny z nejvýznamnějších autorů žánru jižanské gotiky. Jejich díla jsou považována za kanonická. Zaměřit se vedle jejich díla i na jejich život bylo velmi důležité z několika důvodů. Prostřednictvím jejich životních příběhů jsme schopni vypořádat uspořádání jižanské společnosti v první polovině 20. století. Životopisy taktéž poskytují vhled do jejich kreativního procesu a seznamují s jejich dílem. V neposlední řadě znalost jejich životů vede k lepší znalosti jejich děl, neboť obě byly svými životními osudy ovlivněny, ať už si to uvědomovaly a chtěly to přiznat veřejně, či nikoli.

Informace, které poskytuje teoretická část, jsou klíčové pro samotnou literární analýzu. Nejdůležitějším aspektem děl obou autorek jsou postavy, které jsou interpretovány z několika úhlů pohledu. Prvním je zaměření se na jeden či dva hlavní znaky, které jsou společné velkému množství postav. Pro Carson McCullers byla tímto znakem osamělost, která se projevovala různě a často byla spojená s postižením či omezením postavy (mentálním nebo tělesným). Bizarnost a dvojakost jsou dva hlavní znaky, typické pro postavy Flannery O'Connor. Většina těchto postav se chová velmi překvapivě, někdy až pudově, čímž šokuje čtenáře. Stejným šokem je i odhalení negativní stránky osobnosti u postav, které do té doby působily spíše kladně. Dalším důležitým rysem postav, který se objevuje u obou autorek (Flannery O'Connor jej využívá o něco častěji), je výše zmíněný fyzický nebo psychický handicap.

Analýza realistických a gotických/groteskních prvků se taktéž zaměřuje na postavy, tentokrát z pohledu vypravěče. Společně s celkovým popisem prostředí je užití vševědoucího vypravěče jedním z nejvýraznějších realistických znaků. Realistickým a zároveň typicky jižanským rysem je zájem o černé obyvatelstvo a rasovou otázku. I tato problematika je zpracována pomocí postav. Užití realistických postupů je společné oběma autorkám, stejně jako užití typických groteskních prvků. Kromě typické groteskní postavy je třeba zmínit kombinování komických a tragických prvků, které má velký vliv na čtenářovy pocity.

Obě autorky, Flannery O'Connor i Carson McCullers, byly věřící. Z tohoto důvodu bylo důležité zaměřit se i na náboženské prvky v jejich díle. Znalost jejich životopisů byla pro seznámení se s jejich přístupem k náboženství klíčová. Flannery O'Connor byla zastánkyní tradičního přístupu k víře, byla katoličkou oddanou církvi. Její dílo obsahuje množství náboženských symbolů i témat a motivů, z nichž jeden převažuje nad všemi ostatními – vykoupení (*redemption*). Pro Carson McCullers náboženství znamenalo hledání Boha svým vlastním způsobem, bez pomoci církve. Motiv hledání je přítomen i v jejích dílech, časté jsou postavy, které neustále hledají něco více.

Pokud bychom měli shrnout nejdůležitější postřehy vyplývající z analýzy děl obou autorek, můžeme se shodnout na tom, že nejtypičtější prvky jižanské gotické jsou přítomny u obou z nich. Nejvýraznější je zájem o podivné postavy (např. bezruký pan Shiftlet, hrbáč Lymon, rasistická paní Chestny), které zpravidla nenaleznou to, po čem pátrají, případně jejich cesta končí tragicky. Společným rysem je zájem o nižší společenskou třídu a rasovou otázku. Na druhé straně se autorky rozcházejí ve způsobu, jakým přistupují ke groteskní postavě a k náboženské tematice.

Bibliography

Primary Literature

McCULLERS, Carson. *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000. ISBN: 0-618-52641-2

McCULLERS, Carson. *The Clock Without Hands*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. ISBN: 0-395-92973-3

McCULLERS, Carson. *Collected Stories*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. ISBN: 978-0-395-92505-8

McCULLERS, Carson. *The Member of the Wedding*. New York: Bantam Books, 1975. ISBN: 9780553202649

O'CONNOR, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971. ISBN: 0-374-62623-5

O'CONNOR, Flannery. *Three: Wise Blood; A Good Man Is Hard to Find; The Violent Bear It Away*. New York: New American Library, 1964. ISBN:

Secondary Literature

BARRISH, Phillip J. *The Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-521-89769-3

BERKE, Amy. BLEIL, Robert R., COFER, Jordan. DAVIS, Dough. *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present*. Dahlonega: University of North Georgia Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-940771-34-2

BOMARITO, Jessica. HOGLE, Jerrold E. *Gothic Literature: A Gale Critical Companion*. Detroit: Gale, 2006. ISBN: 978-0787694708

BOTTING, Fred. *Gothic*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-415-83171-0

BRYANT, J.A. *Twentieth Century Southern Literature*. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997. ISBN: 9780813109374

BYRON, Glennis. PUNTER, David. *The Gothic*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. ISBN: 0-631-2062-3

CARR, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*. New York: Anchor Books, 1976. ISBN: 0-385-12289-6

CARR, Virginia Spencer. *Understanding Carson McCullers*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005. ISBN: 0-87249-661-9

ELLIS, Jay. *Critical Insights: Southern Gothic Literature*. Hackensack: Salem Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-1-4298-3823-8

FLORA, Joseph M. MacKETHAN H., Lucinda. *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. ISBN: 978-0807126929

FIEDLER, Leslie A. *Waiting for the End*. New York: Stein and Day, 1970. ISBN: 8128-1298-0

FITZGERALD, Sally. *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*. New York: Random House, 1979. ISBN: 0-394-74259-1

GOOCH, Brad. *Flannery: A Life of Flannery O'Connor*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009. ISBN 978-0-316-04065-5

GRAY, Richard. *A History of American Literature Second Edition*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. ISBN: 978-1405192286

HLINSKÝ, Martin. ZELENKA, Jan. *Od Poea k postmodernismu: Proměny americké prózy*. Praha: Odeon, 1993. ISBN: 80-207-0459-0

HOGLE, Jerrold E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. ISBN: 978-0-521-79124-3

MARTIN, Robert K., SAVOY, Eric. *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1998. ISBN: 978-0-87745-622-3

PUNTER, David. *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Vol. 1: The Gothic Tradition*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1996. ISBN: 978-0582237148

QUINN, John (ed.). *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2011. ISBN: 978-246-1996-5

SNODGRASS, Mary Ellen. *Encyclopaedia of Gothic Literature*. New York: Facts On File, 2005. ISBN: 0-8160-5528-9

SMITH, Andrew. *Gothic Literature*. Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-7486-2369-3

SMITH, Allan Lloyd. *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. ISBN: 0-8264-1594-6

WHITT, Margaret Earley. *Understanding Flannery O'Connor*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997. ISBN: 9781570032257

Theses

HAAR, Maria. *The Phenomenon of Grotesque in Modern Southern Fiction*. Stockholm: Universitetet i Umeå, 1983. ISBN: 91-7174-119-4

Articles

SPIEGEL, Alan. *A Theory of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction*. *The Georgia Review* 26, no. 4 (1972): 426-37

Internet Articles

MacKETHAN, Lucinda. *Genres of Southern Literature*. [online] Available from: <https://southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature/>

O'CONNOR, Flannery. *Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction*. [online] Available from: www.en.utexas.edu/Classes/Bremen/e316k/316kprivate/scans/grotesque.html

Internet Sources

John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation [online] Available from:
www.gf.org/about/fellowship/

Oxford Learner's Dictionaries: Antebellum [online] Available from:
www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/antebellum?q=antebellum

Oxford Learner's Dictionaries: Grotesque. [online] Available from:
www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/grotesque_1?q=grotesque

Oxford Learner's Dictionaries: Realism [online] Available from:
www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/realism?q=realism

Oxford Learner's Dictionaries: Terror. [online] Available from:
www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/terror?q=terror

Rheumatoid arthritis symptoms [online] Available from:
www.healthline.com/health/rheumatoid-arthritis#symptoms

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus [online] Available from:
www.cdc.gov/lupus/facts/detailed.html