CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Fiction is the most popular form of literature in the twentieth century. It fascinates people by covering the entire gamut of human emotions, aspirations, and activities. The subject matter of most fiction is the variety of human relationships. People write fiction and read fiction because of the innate human desire to tell a tale and hear a tale. Fiction does not make very heavy demands upon the reader. Unlike other forms of literature, its broad canvas virtually leaves nothing out. It comprehends everything relating to the lived experience of the contemporary society. It is a subtle medium for analysing the emotions, thoughts, values of life, and ideologies of people.

Novels serve as a vicarious experience for most of the modern readers. People derive some sort of fulfilment for their unfulfilled desires and aspirations by reading fiction. The characters in a novel are usually ordinary people and we are able to identify ourselves with them and also find emotional, ideological and even personal solidarity with them. There are at least four levels of relationships with the characters that one comes across in fiction — rapport, solidarity, identity and antipathy. Some people read fiction in order to satisfy their curiosity to know how people live in other parts of the world. Yet another reason for the wide popularity of fiction is that it is easily available in convenient paperback editions at affordable prices.

1. Fiction as Social Document

Fiction is a social document depicting the contemporary life of society. Yet, different novelists focus on different aspects of the contemporary social,
political, psychological, religious, cultural milieu. Hence, the kaleidoscopic human situation and the mindscape of multitudes of individuals. For instance, in almost all his novels, whether sad or humorous, Dickens sets out to expose the evil in the Victorian society. He is at heart a moralist, and he portrays scenes of crime, filth and degradation only to denounce them.

All the major writers of fiction at least inadvertently make use of their experiences and environment for social documentation. Jane Austen is an artist whose reaction to life is singularly fresh and interesting. She has refined and simplified the novel making it a true reflection of English life. Her stories are all from the life she knew best. She gives a vivid picture of the social manners and customs of the eighteenth century. She is a moralist and a sympathetic satirist. She hates folly, irresponsibility and lack of self-restraint. Folly is the chief source of laughter in her fiction. Thomas Hardy notices plenty of tragic situations and experiences in the life of the Wessex people, who are poor, dependent and ignorant. He finds them exposed to the oppression of the social system and merciless fate undoing their lives every now and then.

Joseph Conrad uses the novel to illustrate the fundamental social facts of life, fidelity and preservation of human trust. His characters prove rather feeble in their struggle against the forces of nature. The tragedies of his characters are brought about by their own shortcomings and defects.

Aldous Huxley is the social historian of England between the two World Wars. He is a friend of D.H. Lawrence and like him, he is seriously concerned about the perils the modern world faces. His novels are satiric and caustic in tone.
E.M. Forster raises his voice against contemporary civilization and man's craze for material advancement. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, he laughs at the commercial morality and snobbery of the upper middle class society. In *A Passage to India*, he deals with the problems of human relationships and with the problems of the British rule in India, the clash between good and evil, reason and emotion, intellect and sentiment.

2. The American Scene

American fiction forms a major segment of the world fiction of our times. It is a unique entity. It has imbibed the European fictional heritage as well as made unique contributions to the growth and development of world fiction by introducing different modern techniques. The American fiction writers also show the influences of the philosophers and writers of other countries. For example, Sherwood Anderson has been influenced by Freudian ideas. Henry James has been influenced by Turgenev and has therefore developed character novels which give more importance to characters than to plot in his fiction. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novels are highly complex, original, uniquely allegorical and symbolic. His fiction is the exploration of the psyche and the repercussions of sins of various kinds. He calls his stories "psychological romances". Henry James uses fiction to depict the complexities and ambiguities of the human mind. He chooses for his treatment man not in relation with God, but man living in the midst of the so called sophisticated intellectual society. He lays more stress on human relationships than human actions. Despite having European models, the American fiction is not a blind imitation of its Continental counterpart. While maintaining its regional nature, it is universal in form and content.
The early American fiction shows the influence of Puritanism, Transcendentalism and man's search for identity. The twentieth century American scenario provides vast and interesting materials to the fiction writers. The American novelists have shown a keen interest in studying the different phases in the growth of society. In the case of some others, the past of America has fascinated them. The result of all this is a rich harvest of sociological and historical fiction. Some of the writers show man as best in relation to the soil. They have tried to attack the prevailing capitalism and industrialism. They have also discussed the results of scientific inventions and the change in the American society from agricultural to industrial. Sherwood Anderson describes a small Georgia Mill town in *Beyond Desire* (1932). He portrays unrest in the mind of the hero which is caused by the industrial change in society. Ellen Glasgow revolts against the hypocrisies of the world in her work. She gives a picture of the life-styles of the people of Virginia and the emphasis is on men who were to build the Virginia of the future. She, in fact, does not regret the losses of the past. Her fiction is a social history of Virginia, with a good picture of the defeat of the South. Yet, the universal impulses are stronger than the local ones in her work. Thus, the American fiction writers have always endeavoured to reveal the capacity of literature to reflect the consciousness of widely different groups which could be represented as a fascinating mosaic of varied cultures, religions and backgrounds.

3. *The “South” of Fiction*

In the American literary mosaic, Southern fiction commands great heights. It has produced a number of very prolific and imaginative writers. The Southern fiction has a unique literary tradition of its own. The region has its own unique historical experiences and characteristics which mark it off from the rest of the
country, viz., its fundamentalist religion, defeat in the Civil War, troubled economy, heritage of slavery, racism etc.

In the Southern fiction, man as individual does not exist apart from the framework of community. He defines himself in terms of the community in which he lives and to which he belongs. Every Southern writer is strongly embedded in the physical and cultural soil of his region which comes alive in his work, identifies himself with the region and believes himself to be the conscience and the spokesman of the place.

The prominent fiction writers of the twentieth century South include William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Caroline Gordon, Walker Percy, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Shirley Ann Grau, Robert Penn Warren, Katherine Anne Porter. All these writers have invariably been deeply involved in the theme of the individual's separation from the established community life. In their own unique ways, they have been concerned with the basic facts of human relationships which alone can provide the foundation of social organisation.

4. The O'Connor Story

Flannery O'Connor, on whom this project is focussed, like the other Southerners, is deeply rooted in the Southern soil. But her region is different from Margaret Mitchell’s Magnolia South or William Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County. Hers is the red clay mid-rural Georgia, inhabited by Protestant fundamentalists, seen through the eye of a Catholic. She is an upper class Southerner, but she chooses to write about the poor whites, the freaks, the maimed — people who are not whole, blacks and whites. Her fiction is a socio-psychological and spiritual commentary on the tumultuous South of the 1950s and the early 60s. Her “sublicomic” (with a sublime purpose and comic method) eye
catches every minute detail of the social scene and she has a sharp ear for Southern folks's dialectal nuances. But it may also be noted that her fiction is Southern only in texture, but is universal in application. Her stories insistently dwell on the horrors that make the human condition, without grace, intolerable in the spiritual wasteland of the times.

Since the writer with whom this study is concerned excels more in the short story form than novels, it may not be inappropriate to make a few passing comments about this genre and O'Connor's adept mastery of it.

O'Connor was trained formally at Iowa Writers' Workshop in creative writing by great tutors like Paul Engle and Andrew Lytle who discovered her rare capabilities as an artist. The training she received there brought her innate artistry to fruition and it also provided her with controlled mastery over the form. The influence of New Critics is seen in her writings. She has taken pains to perfect her art because she has always been aware that fiction writing is her vocation and she attaches certain sanctity to the practice of her art. Before submitting her stories for publication she would give them to some of her friends who have shared her interests, like Caroline Gordon, her mentor, for advice and suggestion.

When O'Connor started writing short stories the form had already become highly stylized and mature on both sides of the Atlantic. In the hands of the great masters of the art form such as Flaubert, Chekov, Anderson, Faulkner, Hemingway, this form is able to express the inner struggle of man and his predicament and at the same time be a lucid commentary on the social conditions prevailing in their time and in their countries. Like these great artists O'Connor also knows the potentials of the form and the formal discipline that is essential
for it. It is of paramount importance that every detail of the story must add to its wholeness. Generally, a storyteller selects a point at which to approach life, giving just enough information to the reader and withholding information which is invested with a high degree of suggestion. The storyteller should only “show” and not “tell”. Usually, in short fiction universal issues are discussed presenting a single situation.

As a great practitioner of the genre, O'Connor knows that it makes continuous demands upon the artist’s ability to use economy of expression and on his ability to make use of innovative methods and new techniques with an unerring sense of the aesthetic. Being an intellectually oriented writer with an active interest in the theory and practice of fiction, she uses it to portray the existential anguish of modern man who has lost sight of God’s presence in this world, all his sense of powerlessness, spiritual and psychic aberrations in a dehumanising world. She portrays all these aspects of modern man’s predicament by writing perfectly chiselled stories which have deeper symbolic, allegorical and mythic dimensions.

5. Title

The title of this study is “Regressive Patterns of Human Relationships in the Fiction of Flannery O’Connor: A Socio-Psychological Analysis.” There are strongly discernible recurrent patterns in human interactions in the fiction of Flannery O’Connor. These recurrent patterns are regressive in nature. Regressive means, receding, tending towards degeneration, disintegration, etc. As psychoanalytic jargon, regression is one of ego’s defence mechanisms. It may be noted that in this study the word regressive is not always used in the usual sense. The word has a multiplicity of extended usage, applications and impact.
apart from strictly scientific, psychological definition. "The concept of regression suggests that when faced with conflict, stress and particularly frustration, a person may return to an earlier stage of life when he was secure, and in so doing avoid the present conflict of stress."¹ When a person feels frustrated, inadequate and lacking the needed competencies and hence unable to cope up with the present problems, he tends to rely on modes of adjustments and patterns of response that had previously brought satisfaction. Regression may be permanent or temporary. There is a tendency in every human being to "make use of temporary, partial or limited regression . . . and almost anyone in extreme provocation may indulge in a childlike display of anger, tears or other feelings."² Regression gives psychological security to the individual but, when carried to an extreme, it can be self-defeating and incapacitating.

Regression is perhaps a more comprehensive reaction than just trying out outmoded responses in the event of the failure of new ones. The process of growth from dependence to independence is by no means an easy one. To avoid the pain of frustration and desperation, a person may resort to emotional insulation. In certain circumstances, he may as well place the blame for his failures on others, which helps him acquire a certain feeling of adequacy. By indulging in wish-fulfilling fantasies and the nostalgically pleasant memories of the good old days, a frustrated individual may counteract the feelings of inferiority and inadequacy.


Sigmund Freud considers regression to primitive behaviour as a pathological escape from reality. But later psychologists like E. Erickson, Abraham Maslow, E. Kris and Kevin Fauteux, who have expanded Freud's ideas, consider regression not as pathological always but as something indispensable to psychological growth. Their finding is that partial, temporal, or adaptive regression helps people to recover creatively. It is essential for gaining religious experience.

On the basis of the study of O'Connor's fiction we perceive a regressive pattern of human relationships. These interactions are due to lack of values, or conflicting values, or unhealthy and even dangerous belief systems, customs and traditions, irresponsible behaviour patterns and unmanageable temper tantrums, and immature and emotional outbursts. The unpleasant types of ties that O'Connor's characters establish are also due to intermingling and confusing of their spiritual and mundane concerns. The resultant destructive sort of relationships they establish lead to tension and anxiety to the point of madness. There is a conspicuous lack of emotional and spiritual support in the family, society and religion. The resultant withdrawal makes the characters alienated, isolated, individualistic, frustrated and powerless. This withdrawal from the problems and frustrations of the times is indicative of the human mind to escape from the unpleasant realities of life. This sort of regression as a defence mechanism is visible in modern societies, as reflected in the fictional works of O'Connor.

6. Significance

O'Connor is regarded as one of the finest short story writers of all time. Her particular circumstances in life, her region and religion have their
significance in her fiction. O'Connor was born in Savannah, Georgia on March 25, 1925 of Catholic parents whose ancestors were Irish. Her family moved to Milledgeville, Georgia, when her father became ill with disseminated lupus, the rare generalised form of lupus erythmatosus which affects the heart, spleen and kidneys, which she was to inherit from her father, and which made her an invalid for fourteen years and finally killed her on August 3, 1964. O'Connor spent her entire life in the rural Georgia, except for a short spell at the Graduate School at Iowa and the Universities of New York and Connecticut. Her illness confined her to Milledgeville. The disease which wasted her body acted as a source of strength spurring her on to write a few good stories before death finally overtook her. There is not an element of self-pity or weakness in her fiction or letters. Her fiction is so manly and powerful that Evelyn Waugh wondered if it could really be “the unaided work of a young lady”. The disease which ravaged her body for quite a long time has significantly influenced her life and work.

A devout Catholic, O'Connor grew up in what H. L. Mencken contemptuously refers to as “the Bible Belt”. The term refers to the region covering areas of the South and dominated by conservative Baptists and Methodists. This region roughly covers the physical, geographical area of O'Connor’s fiction. There is a close relationship between the region’s religious culture and her work. The Southern culture and traditions inform her consciousness and art. All her characters are from the “Christ haunted” Bible Belt. They are grotesque, deformed and freakish. The freakishness of her characters is expressed through her mordant humour and ironic detachment. For her, in this wasteland of modern communities, the grotesque, the deformed and the freakish are quite normal and what we call real is abnormal. According to her, Southerners like her have a
penchant for the freakish, because in the South they still have an idea of the whole man.

What strikes us as very emphatic throughout O'Connor's work is the absence of a community of loving, supporting, enduring persons with commitment to others. The void is seen in familial bonds, in the case of divorced and widowed mothers who struggle to manage their homes with emasculated sons and ugly, ungrateful daughters, Negroes who make a marginal living, playing second fiddle to their white masters, and preachers perverting religion to eke out a living. When such cohesive bonds do not work out, the hope for a community of healthy relationship becomes very remote and obscure. The person looking for self-identity seeks the community and not finding it, he is thrown into a deeper vacuum. Hence, the regressive patterns of human relationships in the fiction of Flannery O'Connor.

O'Connor's artistic vision has a Christian perspective. Her vision is a sacramental one, for she believes that the grace of God interpenetrates this world and transforms it. This is what she calls "mystery" and it is this mystery which she tries to demonstrate in her fiction through "manners". Her Christian mythic vision transforms her Southern material into the universal. Though she depicts the moral depravity of modern man in a secular society, she still instills hope in her readers about redemption. Her fiction often unsettles the reader and makes him do a little bit of soul-searching.

posthumously. Even though her output is meagre, as compared with that of many other writers, its impact has been phenomenal, and the consequent critical response has been tremendous, which indexes the power of O'Connor as a writer of lasting value. Her stories have found their due place in many anthologies, clearly indicating the fact that O'Connor is considered significant and even valuable.

O'Connor's fiction has a rich multiplicity of meanings, and lends itself to several different levels of interpretation. Her distinctive literary excellence may be attributed to her employment of apt and telling imagery, economy and clarity of expression, subtle wit, irony and under-statement. The sights and sounds she notices around her come alive in her fiction.

O'Connor's ironic juxtaposition of the holy and the sinister, the grotesque and the beautiful makes her theme very suggestive. She stresses the co-existence of good and evil and the necessity of mutual dependence in a community of loving and caring people in order to make the powers of redemption effective.

Though a devout Catholic, she has no sectarian axe to grind, for her best characters are Protestant fundamentalists. Though she has a Christian theological perspective, in her fiction she goes beyond theology, and offers social and psychological reasons for the failures of society as a diligent observer of life alone can do.

O'Connor's religious, intellectual and artistic commitments are evident in her Catholic faith, her desire to write in the modernist tradition and her critical vision of contemporary American society. All these make her fiction distinct and
thus offers a unique moral perspective on life unlike many contemporary American writers.

7. Objectives

i. This study attempts to broaden critical perspectives that allow a fuller understanding of O’Connor’s fiction.

ii. The second objective is to show how people with personality problems isolate themselves from the community and regress to the haven of their fantasies instead of facing their problems in a mature manner.

iii. The next aim of this project is to show the effect of conflicts on individuals with regressive tendencies as seen in O’Connor’s fiction.

iv. This study endeavours to expose the painfulness of human isolation and alienation by studying them at the familial, social and religious levels and go deep into the reasons for alienation from one’s own self, home community and God.

v. This project also analyses man-woman relationships, inter-relation between blacks and whites, the Southerners and refugees from Europe, farm owners and labourers in the context of Southern societies and Southern tradition as depicted in O’Connor’s fiction.

vi. Yet another objective is to show the saving grace of God at work in sinners and how some of the characters move from the basic denial of their sinfulness and inhumanity, to the recognition of sin, repentance, acceptance of society, and from isolation to integration in community life.
vii. Finally, this study attempts to show the contribution of the author as a moralist of our times as reflected through her fiction in shaping the course of our life.

8. State of-the-art Review

Flannery O'Connor stands alone among the distinguished American writers of the present time on account of reputation disproportionate to the small but intense oeuvre of her creative writing. The emergence of new schools of criticisms since her death, like the structuralist, metafictionist and postmodernist has literally revolutionized the poetics of fiction. The ever-growing interest of critics in her work and the abundant number of articles, reviews and book-length studies show the significance of her work. Her works have been examined from a wide range of critical perspectives — theological, psychoanalytical, hermeneutical, feminist, narratological etc. Apart from the articles and reviews that have appeared in the literary journals, there are several books devoted exclusively to the study of the author. She also figures in many books concentrating on particular themes and trends in fiction, especially in the short story form.

Kathleen Feeley’s Flannery O’Connor: Voice of the Peacock analyses the works of the author providing useful information about the various influences on her art, her intellectual life etc. The study also deals with the interpretation of imagery in her work.

Herbert J. Muller in Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O’Connor and the Catholic Grotesque, attempts to show how her stories are based on her belief in original sin, God’s mercy and revelation. Besides acknowledging the spiritual essence of her fiction, he recognizes O’Connor’s literary craftsmanship. But he appears to be over-enthusiastic in his appreciation of O’Connor’s work.
The World of Flannery O'Connor by Josephine Hendin is a reaction against the efforts of O'Connor's critics to subordinate her art to her faith. But Hendin carries things too far by disregarding religion altogether in O'Connor's fiction and interprets her work on the basis of the particular circumstances of her life. Her misreading of O'Connor's fiction results in subordinating literature to psychology.

In Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens Louise Westling makes a sustained effort to analyse O'Connor's fiction from a feminist perspective. But Westling's analysis is limited, for she deals only with the mother daughter relationships, ignoring all the other varieties of interactions in O'Connor's fiction.

Since the first publication of O'Connor's Wise Blood (1952), she has been recognised as a very powerful writer. Some of the significant contributions to O'Connor's criticism that have appeared are articles in various journals. Many writers have attempted the study of O'Connor's imagery. One such study is Stuart L.Burn's "Torn by the Lord's Eye: Flannery O'Connor's Use of the Sun Imagery" in Twentieth Century Literature. According to him, in O'Connor's fiction, the sun is the constant symbol, functioning as a visible manifestation of the divine agency. This symbol enables her to define man's attitude towards God and God's relationship with man. Such a symbol, according to him, is appropriate psychologically and theologically.

Claire Katz's "Flannery O'Connor's Rage of Vision" in American Literature is a psychoanalytical reading of O'Connor's stories. Like Hendin, Katz also makes the mistake of linking her stories with the biographical circumstances of the author. Yet, this study stands as a powerful challenge to the usual
theological interpretations of O’Connor’s fiction. According to this critic, as narrator, O’Connor functions as the avenging Christ. She derives a kind of sadistic pleasure from humiliating her characters through aggressive caricature. Though she punishes them, she lets them also express their rage.

Judith F. Wynne in “The Sacramental Irony of Flannery O’Connor” in *Southern Literary Journal* points out that too much stress on her theology makes the critics bypass her literary aesthetics and the critics go to the extent of reducing the irony in her work to allegory. According to Wynne, the irony in O’Connor’s work is sacramental and apocalyptic. In other words, irony in her work leads to revelation and epiphany.

Besides the long list of articles and reviews published in a number of literary journals, *The Flannery O’Connor Bulletin* published annually by Georgia College, Milledgeville, Georgia since 1972, deals exclusively with O’Connor, her work, art, life etc. It contains formal, textual analysis of her work in relation to the Southern literary tradition.

Inspite of the staggering number of critical studies on O’Connor, it needs to be pointed out that O’Connor critics seem to repeat one another despite many untreated areas of her work. This is probably because many critics take her own comments on her work as the touchstone of the criticism of her work, and also because of the critics’ tendency to interpret the fiction from a theological perspective because of her preoccupation with the various religious issues in her work. Critical interpretations of her work have varied from being lop-sided to extremist. These biased critical evaluations ignore her real role and function as a Catholic novelist writing for a non-religious audience. It needs, therefore to be
pointed out that the last word on her work is not yet said but her work lends itself to varieties of new critical interpretations.

9. Justification

Though O'Connor's work has attracted serious critical attention, no single critical approach can really be adequate in analysing the multifaceted talent of a rare genius. Critics, scholars and reviewers have discussed her fiction on the basis of evidence provided by her work, letters, interviews etc. in order to approach her work from different angles, according to their varying persuasions. Though attempts have been made to place her work on the Existentialist, Realist, Grotesque, Modernist, Religious traditions etc., and though different kinds of theories have been applied to the study of her fiction, no specific attempt has been made to study human relationships in her fiction, more particularly their negative aspects. There has hardly been any attempt to study her fiction on the basis of the human relationships of her characters in her fiction from a socio-psychological perspective. Though the attempt is a modest one, the issue is a crucial one, because O'Connor has lavished such art on the matrix of the human relatedness in her fiction and this study serves to focus our attention on this vital aspect of the creative genius of one of the most important artists of our time. In her stories she probes the depths of human experience to portray the repercussions of human conflicts of various kinds on the inner lives of her protagonists on the one hand and their psychological, social and religious effect on the other, in a very subtle manner. Whenever critics have touched upon the issue of O'Connor's concern with relationships, they have dealt with it very vaguely or left the discussion incomplete. This general avoidance of a notable issue in her fiction causes a lack of our understanding of her work. The need to
discuss the regressive types of relationships in all areas of life in O'Connor's fiction and take them to their natural conclusion, prompts the present study.

10. Methodology

A thorough analytical study of primary sources will be undertaken. The primary sources are Flannery O'Connor's two novels, *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, the two collection of the of short stories, *A Good Man Is Hard To Find* and *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, her lectures, essays, interviews and letters. Her work will be scrutinized and evaluated in the light of different socio-psychological, theological and literary theories. The secondary sources are different book-length studies and shorter studies on her work and achievements. They will be made use of appropriately.

Besides O'Connor's two novels and two collections of short stories, her own writings on art and religion collected posthumously under the title, *Mystery and Manners* and her published letters, *The Habit of Being* which are useful and reliable guides to assess the art of her fiction, will be brought under the purview of this study as an aid to a better understanding of her fiction. The writings of the literary artists like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Joseph Conrad, Nathanael West etc. whose influences are easily recognizable in her writings will be examined.

11. Theoretical Foundations

This study uses various disciplines like Theology, Sociology, Psychology and Literary Theory in a flexible manner and in different combinations. Influences of Catholicism, Christian Existentialism and echoes of Nihilism mark O'Connor's work. She has been very familiar with the works of Existential philosophers like Martin Buber, Gabriel M. Marcel, Jean Paul Sartre and Martin
Heidegger. She has imbibed the idea of "the habit of art" or art as vocation from the French Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain.

The bulk of O'Connor's writings show the influence of Christian theologians ranging from St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Thomas Aquinas, Blaise Pascal, Baron Friederich von Hugel, Teilhard de Chardin to Thomas Merton. She has been well read in psychological theories and appears to be well acquainted with the writings of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung.

O'Connor claims literary kinship with Nathaniel Hawthorne. She is greatly influenced by François Mauriac, Georges Bernanos, Leon Bloy, Nathanael West and Joseph Conrad. Her reading has been intensive so far as concepts were concerned and extensive as far as general reading was concerned. O'Connor seems to have enjoyed reading Faulkner, Flaubert, Balzac, Dostoevsky, Turgenev and her Southern contemporaries like, Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, Eudora Welty and Katherine Anne Porter. Some of these writers have remarkably influenced her social consciousness and literary aesthetics.

Since this study focusses on uncomplimentary or crossed transactions in O'Connor's fiction, the various theories of Sigmund Freud, C.G. Jung, Abraham Maslow and such others will be made use of to interpret the interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships in her fiction.

Religious and social ideas relating to man-woman relationships and other levels of social relationship will be made use of to interpret her fiction. The various theories of sociologists and social psychologists like Erich Fromm, Karen Horney and such others will be made use of to analyse and interpret social relationship and alienation in the fiction of O'Connor. An attempt will be made to evaluate her as a Modernist writer with Christian concerns.
12. Scope

This study will concentrate on O’Connor’s two novels, *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, and her two collections of short stories, *A Good Man Is Hard It Away To Find*, and *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. Her own observation and comments on art, religion, literary aesthetics, her lectures delivered at different colleges, interviews, and letters serve as useful materials in assessing her talent and also for a better perception and appreciation of her repertioire. The writings of the novelist-contemporaries, especially Southerners like William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Walker Percy will come under the scope of this study for the sake of comparison and contrast.

14. Hypothesis

Regressive patterns of relationship are inevitable in a society like that of the American South and elsewhere owing to the multiplicity of reasons pertaining to the non-fulfilment of the fundamental psychological needs.

This study aims at working on the hypothesis that there is a recurrent regressive pattern of relationships in Flannery O’Connor’s fiction. Conversely, given the same situation and the accompanying factors, the same regressive pattern might recur in any human community at any point of time.

Man possesses free will and that will, as O’Connor says, is “many wills at war within oneself.” The result is that there is a wide gap between what man ought to be and what he really is. Man aspires for idealized experiences, situations and achievements. But his attempts fall short of the ideal state. This disparity surfaces itself when he has to interact with others, and often he fails to
interact successfully. This failure results in strained and straining relationships which ultimately promote alienation between persons.

In the course of this study, the focus will be on the impact of such crossed relationships between persons appearing in O’Connor’s fiction, especially people with personality disorders, forming strange and destructive sorts of encounters.

The ensuing chapters attempt to show how the complex sets of interactions between members of families who lack the strong basis of love and understanding, between people in society who suffer from psychological aberrations, and between members of religious communities who are spiritually depraved, create familial, social and religious conflicts. The following chapters try to establish the fact that O’Connor’s flawed characters create emotional, physical and spiritual upheavals in all areas of life due to regressive type of relationships.