CHAPTER II
ERODED FAMILIAL TIES

The family is the oldest human institution, as old as the first human pair attempting to share their life together. It is the most basic unit of anthropological, socio-cultural and religious economic set-up. It is usually accepted as the most long-standing, stable, well-knit unit with well-assigned roles, with moral and spiritual concerns built into it. The family is an institution of paramount importance from the religious and moral points of view.

*Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines family as “any group of persons closely related by blood, as parents, children, uncles, aunts and cousins.” Here is a more comprehensive definition. Sister Frances Jerome Woods defines family as “a group of persons related by ties of marriage, blood, or adoption, residing in the same household, interacting and communicating with each other in their respective familial roles, and creating and maintaining a common culture.”

The family interactions are the most basic type of human relationship. “The family always mediates between the individual and society, transmitting the traditional ways of the culture to each new generation, fulfilling human needs that cannot be satisfied elsewhere, and sometimes defining man’s entire position in the world.” These definitions and opinions turn a Nelson’s eye to a significant dimension of familial interactions. They seem to ignore the possibility of negative interactions, and cross communications which are very likely to result in

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regressive patterns of behaviour which may negate the family's excellence and in very rare cases its very existence.

Unlike other social institutions and organisations, the family as an institution has got a number of functions integrated with one another, taking on a cumulative significance. The family as an institution is expected to fulfil emotional, psychological, sexual, reproductive, economic, religious and educational functions. These functions have accumulated a host of strengths and benefits over the centuries. Of these strengths and benefits two are conspicuous. First, the need to love and be loved is fulfilled best in the family. Second, the need to belong, which is a primary human need, gets its fulfilment through the security that a family offers. The result of these two needs being fulfilled is happiness which is the sine qua non for an integrated personality.

1. The Changing American Family

The American family system is based on the European model mostly guided by Christian mores and values. The American hearth and home used to be a place where the father or the patriarchal figure exercised unquestioned authority over the family and where everyone conceded to his supremacy, as a matter of course. But the sweeping changes after the two World Wars, what with women and youth asserting their individuality and freedom, almost metamorphosed the nature of the American family. In fact, the whirlwind of social changes has been battering the very foundations of the family set up.

The mid-twentieth century America believed in the omnipotence of its technology, leisure and money-power. This, in general, produced a sort of smugness, self-complacency, optimism and self righteousness. If the youth had the drive and the initiative they could find jobs and live independently of their
parents and most of them did exactly that. Consequently, with this new found economic independence, they very often ignored family values and customs, generating a conflict of generations. It became quite fashionable to rebel against their "less enlightened" parents and parental authority. Most of them lost all respect and regard for earlier generations. Thus, interaction of members within the family became more and more difficult and unpleasant.

2. Treatment of Family Relationships

Home and familial bonds have always been a pertinent, significant concern in O'Connor's fiction. Using the ironic point of view, she presents the erosion of these entities and the crucial need for them in salvaging man's post-lapsarian state. In a good number of her stories in both her collections and in her two novels, she treats the theme of familial ties. "... the relationship most frequently examined in Miss O'Connor's work is the conflict between two generations of the same family. Indeed it appears that no child of any age can get along with his guardian or parent."3 Existence within domestic confines in O'Connor's stories is marked by constant bickerings and antagonism. As Jon Lance Bacon points out, "... the typical relation between parent and child, or among siblings, is one of spite and resentment."4 As a result, very often the family conflicts culminate in suicide or even murder of a child or parent.

When personalities of individuals are fragmented, tension and violence precipitate. Tension and violence in the family are often the result of rage. This rage, in its turn is often the result of frustration emanating from losing emotional


battles between children and parents, from non-fulfilment of the four psychological needs, viz., the need to love and be loved, the need to belong, the need for self-worth and the need for autonomy, and from expectations they are not capable of fulfilling.

Single parent families are not unique to O’Connor’s fiction. In Evelyn Waugh, another writer with a Christian perspective, almost all his principal characters have one parent living. Both in the cases of Waugh and O’Connor none of their characters who are parents can be held up as an example of domesticity. In these writers the repetition of character and situations is clearly no accident. The family is the essential unit of society. Individuals who belong to broken families come into life as incomplete men and women. As both these writers visualize modern society, it is essentially a society of incomplete men and women.

3. Mother-son Conflicts

Many of O’Connor’s stories are peopled with angry sons and daughters who experience conflicts within themselves, which are manifested as visible and palpable regressive behaviour.

Conflicts hurt people emotionally. These hurts, unless healed, result in negative feelings like frustration, self-pity, revenge, and withdrawal symptoms. These in their turn, have a cumulative impact on the person’s behaviour. What manifests itself then is regression. Conflicts arise because of the belief systems lurking or working in the minds of the persons concerned — hedonism versus the element of self-sacrifice, illusion versus reality, power versus helplessness, and all the concomitant presentations of attitudes.
Children in O’Connor’s stories are by and large ungrateful, rebellious and nonconforming. They take delight in hurting the feelings of their service-minded, serviceable, well meaning, hardworking, widowed mothers. For example, in “The Enduring Chill” when Asbury’s mother suggests that he remove his coat, he shouts, “You don’t have to tell me what the temperature is. . . . I’m old enough to know when I want to take my coat off.” O’Connor’s fictional youth appear to be independent in their speech and behaviour, but on analysis we understand that they are far from being so in their experience and repression of emotions and in their exercise of conscience.

Regressive patterns of behaviour are noticed as elsewhere, in mother-son relationships too. Episodes involving conflicts between mothers and sons seem to be patterning themselves into a type. The mothers generally are efficient, pragmatic and run their farms with the help of tenants, whereas the sons are lazy, inefficient, emasculated, inhibited, impotent pseudo-intellectuals giving themselves airs, enjoying the fruit of their mothers’ hard labour. They are jealous, suspicious, lacking in will-power, resentful, hostile, depressed and dejected, and they find themselves incapable of moving out of their regressive positions. As a result they find themselves unable to fend for themselves, and to cope with life in successful ways.

In the title story of the second collection, “Everything that Rises Must Converge,” the son’s arrogance, rage and perverse intellectualism cause his mother’s death. Julian has to accompany his mother every Wednesday night to the weight-reducing class at the Y. She has to lose twenty pounds on account of her blood pressure. She does not like to travel alone at night after the buses

have been integrated. She lives in the memories of an elegant past and is ridiculously proud of her ancestry. Her grandfather was a governor, a ‘Godhigh’. In her regressed mental make up she is still her grandfather’s ten-year-old little granddaughter. But she now lives “in reduced circumstances.”

Julian considers himself enlightened on the race question. He sits down near a Negro just to shock his mother. He has a mischievous and evil urge to break her spirit. When the Negro does not take any interest in him, Julian withdraws into the inner compartment of his mind where he spends most of the time, and where he also feels quite secure:

This was a kind of mental bubble in which he established himself when he could not bear to be part of what was going on around him. From it he could see out and judge but in it he was safe from any kind of penetration from without. It was the only place where he felt free of the general idiocy of his fellows. His mother had never entered it but from it he could see her with absolute clarity. In spite of going to only a third-rate college, he had, on his own initiative, come out with a first-rate education. Most miraculous of all, instead of being blinded by love for her as she was for him, he had got out himself emotionally free of her and could see her with complete objectivity. He was not dominated by his mother.\(^6\)

Julian is not able to find the freedom he pursues by cutting himself free of his bonds with the mother. The freedom he thinks he has is just an illusion leading only to alienation and isolation. Julian is not able to cope with his present

\(^6\) Ibid., pp. 491-92.
frustrations and he is incapable of living up to his aspirations. By regressing into “the inner compartment of his mind” he tries to escape from his problems which he is incapable of solving.

On the way, a big “fierce looking” Negro woman and her four-year-old son, Carver, board the bus. She sits near Julian and the son, next to Julian’s mother. It is as though the sons have exchanged their mothers. The Negro woman wears an identical hat as Julian’s mother. She feels “sickened at some awful confrontation.” Julian gloats over his mother’s discomfiture. But the mother soon assumes a comic attitude, and thinks “as if a monkey had stolen her hat.” Incidentally they all get off at the same stop. Julian’s mother offers Carver a penny though Julian had earlier warned her against it. The black woman is infuriated by her condescension and hits her with her red pocket book and stuns her. Julian tries to bring home the lesson to her by explaining that the old ways to which she so fastidiously clings are gone. The shock is too much for her and she suffers a heart attack. His inner urge to break her spirit becomes a reality.

As a result of the violent attack on the mother both she and Julian regress into their childhood and she calls for her Negro maid, “Tell Caroline to come get me.” Once again, she becomes her illustrious grandfather’s little granddaughter, “Tell Grandpa to come get me.” She lacks the needed competencies to face the unexpected, violent confrontation; hence the fatal shock and death.

His mother’s sudden death consequent on violence against her reveals, quite ironically, Julian’s shallowness and helplessness. He too regresses to his

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7 Ibid., p. 495.
8 Ibid., p. 500
9 Ibid.
infantile world and becomes his mother's helpless little child. "A tide of
darkness seem to be sweeping her from him. 'Mother,' he cried. 'Darling, sweet
heart, wait!' Crumpling, she fell to the pavement. He dashed forward and fell at
her side, crying 'Mamma, Mamma.'"\textsuperscript{10} But the mother does not recognize her
son. In her moment of suffering, she does not call for him but her childhood
Negro maid. "Her face was fiercely distorted. One eye, large and staring, moved
slightly to the left as if it had become unmoored. The other remained fixed on
him, raked his face again, found nothing and closed."\textsuperscript{11} It is quite evident that
Julian's mother is not able to place her son, and at the moment of her death has
almost forgotten him.

For Julian, his mother represented "the past," and it is quite ironic:

He has created his own reproachless false progressivism, and
the false identity thus provided him is suddenly destroyed by
her death. He must face the 'void alone'. His perversion of
her real values and his own prideful (sic) isolation have
fostered a moral adolescence in which he has had no mature
identity, and now alone, 'the tide of darkness seemed to
sweep him back to her, postponing from moment to moment
his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow.'\textsuperscript{12}

The mother-son relationship has borne the bitter fruit of frustration resulting from
the son's ungrateful behaviour and the mother's inability to convince him of her
love. Moreover, the son's strongly felt need for autonomy gets mostly nullified

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} John F. Desmond, "The Lessons of History: Flannery O'Connor's 'Everything
by his degrading dependence on his mother for sustenance. This prompts him to have his inner battles which at a later stage are taken out and manifest themselves as mother-son conflicts.

He “isolates himself from the most dominating reality of this world, his mother. In consequence of this self-imposed isolation, he knows neither himself, nor her.”¹³ When an individual isolates himself and seeks immunity he is cut off from “convergence”.

Let this important concept of “convergence” be taken up for a detailed discussion, since it has a bearing upon the entire study. O’Connor borrowed the idea of convergence from Teilhard de Chardin, a French palaeontologist philosopher. Chardin hypothesized it as a universal drive toward higher levels of consciousness to spiritual union and love. It is an evolutionary process to reach the Omega point. As visualized by Chardin and O’Connor, convergence implies “inter-communion and inter-dependence” of men. In almost all O’Connor stories the characters resist this kind of rising towards the Omega and inter communication among men. They seek isolation and immunity. As regards the progress of the Negroes, Julian’s mother says, “They should rise, yes, but on their own side of the fence.”¹⁴ Julian does not feel the need for convergence with any one, not even his mother. Whenever he could not bear to be a part of what was going on around him, he retreats into his “inner compartment,” where even his mother had no entry. His idea of an ideal home is one that is three miles away


from his neighbours on either side. In “Everything That Rises Must Converge,” the focus is on mother-son relationship and also on racial convergence. In the story “the fierce looking Negro woman,” Julian and his mother avoid convergence.

To sum up, convergence manifests itself at two levels: human individual and his Creator, and also between individuals. When relationship between human beings is intact and in fine fettle, the relation between the concerned individuals and their sustaining and redeeming God is in good health. When a person fails in convergence, God intervenes in the individual’s affair through retribution and he is grimly reminded of his failure in responsible relationships. For instance, the concept gets exemplified in the case of Julian in the story, “Everything That Rises Must Converge,” which was briefly narrated at the beginning of this discussion.

In “The Comforts of Home,” one of the stories in the same collection Everything That Rises Must Converge, the mother-son conflict is due to the emergence of an “intruder” whom Thomas’s mother brings home to rehabilitate. Thomas, the thirty-five-year-old historian lives with his widowed mother and is dependent on her for material and mental comfort. Sarah Ham, “the intruder,” who calls herself Star Drake is a nymphomaniac arrested for passing a bad cheque. Thomas could not tolerate the idea of the slut sharing his mother’s love, and their home. He feels that his mother with her daredevil charity is about to wreck the peace of the house. He gives his mother an ultimatum, “You can choose — her or me.” Thomas’s regression here is identical with the regression shown by a child upon the arrival of a young sibling. The negative feeling of jealousy grips his mind and consequently his behaviour gets altered. He wants

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15 Ibid., p. 588.
all his mother’s love for himself and is pathologically jealous of the new person having a claim upon his mother’s affection and care. He never likes to leave his mother even for a day because he cannot do without her and the comforts she provides. Obviously, this is a case of mother fixation of the Oedipal type, which manifests itself in acute possessiveness. Thomas is unhappy that his mother has a weakness for helping the “unfortunate.” This is obviously borne out by his jealousy of pathological proportions.

Thomas’s hatred of his father when he was alive and his exclusive love for his mother are Oedipal in origin. When “the intruder” arrives to share their home and his mother’s love, his deep-laid fixation surfaces itself. To make things worse, his mother calls Sarah Ham her self-given name, Star Drake. The sexual implications of Star’s behaviour, her empty laughter and her appearing nude in his room, all upset him. He hates the slut with his whole heart and soul. But in his unconscious mind he has an urge to resolve the complex and grow into really mature selfhood. In order to achieve this, it is essential that he remove the source of this Oedipal attachment, his mother. Though the killing of his mother is purely an accident, psychologically it provides him with a normal sexual outlet for his unconscious desires.

The deliberate listing of the order of events leads the reader to the fact that on some level the son wants to, acts to get rid himself of the mother, to destroy finally and irrevocably all that she represents; his dependency on her, his endless childhood, his impotence. Only through her death can he free himself.16

The accidental killing of his mother, resolves Thomas’s Oedipal fixation and also his regressive dependence on her.

From the angle of the concept of collective unconscious, the matter can be perceived and analyzed in some detail. Instead of falling in line with the social structures and processes, he gets himself cut off from society at large, its interest and obligations. Except for his professional associations with the local historical society, he is a loner with nothing much to give to the people he lives with. This anti-people posture, this withdrawal from relationships, this regressive pattern of behaviour is a natural result of his mother fixation of the Oedipal type.

Thomas ranges not only against his mother’s “hazy charity” but also against his own inability to put his foot down to pack the girl off from the house. To get the girl out, he has to be masculine enough like his father. His ruthless father whom he hated when alive, has taken “a squatting position” in his mind and urges him to assert himself, to show himself to be a man. The Sheriff whose help he seeks also reminds him of his father’s masculinity. He would “... never let anything grow under his feet. Particularly nothing a woman planted.”\(^\text{17}\) When his mother “fails” him, he follows the “voice” of his father, which leads to the ultimate disaster. “The influence of the regressive father intensifies as the story progresses. . . . Thomas confronts his mother because his masculinity is threatened. . . . He surely becomes like his father when he goes to the Sheriff to arrange for the girl’s arrest for stealing his gun. . . .”\(^\text{18}\) His gun is an inheritance from his father. Several of O’Connor’s fictional children appear to be afraid of


becoming like their parents. His father had been dishonest and Thomas had only hatred and contempt for the old man. When he obeys the promptings of his father’s “voice” he becomes more ruthless than the old man himself. The unconscious fear of becoming like his father is actualized when he goes to the Sheriff and later, when he shoots his mother.

It is Thomas’s intellectual pride and self righteousness that prevent any type of convergence with Star Drake. Convergence could take place at three levels — it could be “... of ordinary politeness, or the sexual encounter that she openly invites, or the spiritual convergence implied in his mother’s repeated ‘it might be you’.” Thomas has avoided convergence with the girl. But an ironic convergence takes place when he falls into the hands of the slut after shooting his mother. The worst sin of modern intellectuals is the total refusal of recognizing evil in oneself. This O’Connor “... saw to be a major obstacle to rising in consciousness... to true convergence. True rising, she implies, begins with the recognition of oneself as a non-privileged member of sinful and suffering humanity, and true convergence involves union with what is most despised.”

The inability of individuals to accept their own failures and limitations is a sign of infantile behaviour. Such people find it difficult to accept others and are often intolerant of their weakness. This behaviour pattern leads to regressive relationship among the people concerned.

We have another mother-son pair in “The Enduring Chill” in Mrs. Fox and Asbury Porter Fox. The son alienates himself from his home and the Southern “collapsing country junction of Timberboro” and travels to New York, where he

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20 Ibid., p. 56.
thinks his literary imagination will have infinite freedom. He wants to liberate his literary imagination from the stifling atmosphere of home. But now he finds that he is not able to write anything and has exhausted all his physical energy and has frequent fever and chills. The self-deceiving Asbury thinks that art is bringing him death because he has been its faithful servant. He thinks he is in love with art, but in fact, he is in love with his own image as an artist. He lacks both the gift and the call to be an artist.

Though he does not want to have anything to do with his mother and his sister, and detests even his resemblance to them, he is ultimately forced to return because he has nowhere else to go. After his failure to live independent of his family influences, his return home is for a regressive dependence on his mother whom he despises. Before returning home, he writes a letter to his mother which fills two note books and which should be opened only after his death. It is in the fashion of the letter which Kafka wrote to his father. He thinks that if the letter did not kill her, it would at least make her sense his tragedy and her part in it. He blames his mother for all his failures. "Woman, why did you pinion me?" He is sure that the letter will leave her with an "enduring chill." The angry, passive Asbury fails to build up enduring ties with his mother and sister. He is down right antagonistic to his sister and the treatment of his mother is one of hostile toleration. He needs his mother's services, but takes her for granted. He can neither love nor leave her. Though rebellious, he avoids a direct confrontation with her. But there is no end to his torturing her in smaller ways. He forces his Protestant mother to get him a Jesuit priest to talk to. Mrs. Fox, though she operates her farm with the help of Negro workers, like most Southern

ladies, she too keeps herself insulated from them. But, Asbury forces her to get the Negro workers to his bedside to bid them farewell.

There is a lot of disparity between what Asbury is and what he thinks he is. He poses as an intellectual surrounded by fools. Though he is an adult chronologically, he lives in his infantile fantasies. He is incapable of facing the realities of life and when they confront him, he is frustrated and cannot but express the emotions of a rebellious child, thus regressing to the childish reaction of disobedience. It is this rebellion against his mother and his need to defy her that make him drink unpasteurized milk in his mother's dairy and encourage the Negroes, Randall and Morgan to do the same. But they refuse to do so, perhaps, they know the danger of drinking unpasteurized milk. He wants to weaken her power over them. He succeeds in making them break her smoking ban in the dairy. "...Asbury struggles to combat the domineering mother set upon insuring that her child remain an appendage of herself."22 This is yet another way in which he regresses to free himself of his mother's power over him.

Asbury has only contempt for Dr. Block, the family doctor and boasts that his problem is "way beyond block". But it is Dr. Block himself who diagnoses his ailment to be undulant fever (brucellosis) from a "blood culture". It is shocking to know that his malady though serious is not fatal. And, when the story ends, it is the son, not the mother who has an "enduring chill." It is a chilling realization for him to know that he is not going to die soon and he has to be dependent on his mother for the rest of his life.

Asbury places the blame for all his failures on his mother. The psychological phenomena of Projection helps him maintain feelings of adequacy and worth by placing the blame for all his failures on his mother. In his regressed state, in the case of Asbury's, projection has some defensive value. The result of projection in Asbury's case is such that the negative aspects of regression are either diluted or marginally reduced. It is a kind of mask which he wears comfortably. The comfort is adequate enough to keep him going.

The conflicts in the data analysed above arise from the crucial question, whether these mothers are willing to accept their grown up sons as autonomous entities entitled to personal dignity, respect and freedom of choice. The obvious answer is that they are not, because these loving mothers, protective and possessive, like to see their sons as their own extension and not as individual human persons to be treated on with par with themselves. This unconscious behaviour pattern of the mothers is marked by anxiety about the future of their sons, and by feelings of misplaced insecurity that their sons might be lost. On the other hand, the sons need, want and even demand autonomy which is progressively denied to them. As a result, the conflicts arise and lead to unpleasant situations. The consequence, very naturally, is regression.

4. Mother-Daughter Conflicts

In a patriarchal society, where economic power and authority are vested in father, and they are passed on to the sons, mothers and daughters are driven to domestic slavery and forced submission. In order to survive in a male-dominated society, women often become cunning, and assume extraordinary politeness, which they unknowingly hand over to their daughters. By adopting such self-protective measures and putting on facades they lose their self-identity.
The mother-daughter bonding is a primal connection even when the
daughter grows up. When the connection between the mother and the daughter is
on a mature level, the relationship is constructive. But often the mother expects
unquestioned obedience and conformity on the part of the daughter. In such
cases, the daughter finds the connection with the mother a stifling one. The
daughter of such an overpowering mother resents. This resentment is often
externalized through disobedience, and through being disagreeable, aloof,
frustrated, dissipated and angry. The mother may interpret the daughter's
behaviour as rebellious. Or, the mother may even attribute the nonconformity of
the daughter to her own failure at mothering, and consequently, the mother also
becomes frustrated. These frustrations of mother and daughter obviously lead to
regression.

The daughter feels the need to cut herself off from this second umbilical-
cord, which the mother uses to control and subjugate the daughter to obedience.
It may often be difficult for the daughter to liberate herself, especially if the
daughter is emotionally and economically dependent on her mother. However,
the inner struggle that goes on within the daughter makes her treat her mother
with hatred, contempt or indifference, which ultimately leads to alienation
between mother and daughter.

When the daughter loathes the power and the authority of the mother, she
will naturally be afraid of becoming a woman like her own mother. The daughter
wants to be a separate entity, not the shadow of her mother. The daughter has to
struggle hard to cut herself free off the second umbilical cord. But, in this power
game, it is difficult to speak of victory or defeat. It often ends in tragedy, a "no-
win" situation. In other words, both lose the fight. Owing to factors of heredity,
environmental and cultural sameness, and owing to the psychological phenomena
called “replay,” the daughter becomes, unwittingly, unknowingly, the mirror image of the mother.

Conflict between mother and daughter is inevitable. In fact, conflict is a sign of growth. A mature mother will let the daughter be herself and let her experience and face life by herself. Every daughter, while growing up to the mature adulthood, needs certain amount of autonomy. It is difficult for some mothers to recognize the uniqueness and individuality of their daughters. The insensitivity of the mothers makes the daughter feel frustrated. Its manifestation is in the form of secondary feelings of anger, hatred and self pity. The childish display of these negative feelings is regression.

Yet another cause for the conflict between the mother and the daughter is the mother’s own feelings of insecurity. When the mother feels morbidly insecure about herself, and her children, she has a tendency to keep them tied to her apron strings. Such a mother consciously or unconsciously becomes overprotective and blocks the children’s growth. With the passage of time the child’s dependency naturally decreases. When the mother interferes in her growth and freedom, the child retaliates. If the child is unable to assert herself and act independently, she will turn out to be either of the two types: one, the “adapted child,” and two, the “rebellious child,” two concepts in Transactional Analysis, a branch of Psychology. The adapted child is agreeable, pleasing, conforming and consequently, non-assertive, lazy, inefficient, lacking in initiative and drive. The “rebellious child” is angry, disagreeable, provocative, disobedient and quarrelsome, dissipating her energies and reaching nowhere.

When a mother assumes the role of both provider and nurturer, it is difficult for her to manage well. She will turn out to be either a poor provider or a
poor nurturer. When a mother concentrates all her attention in making money, which is traditionally a male role, she will naturally have less time and energy for her children. In many homes when there is a conflict between the mother and the daughter, it is the father who acts as the moderator and offers emotional support to the daughter. Lack of a father may create a void in the daughter’s life especially when the relationship between the mother and the daughter is strained, and she may not necessarily succeed in her male-associations in later life.

Flannery O’Connor’s fictional daughters are by and large, ugly, fat, unpleasant, rude, rebellious and forced to live with their widowed or divorced mothers. The mothers on the other hand, are well meaning and hard working, but often assertive, complacent and pharisaical. In the Southern society, which is patriarchal in nature, when widows assume economic authority and control, they have an obsessive desire, often quite unconscious, to wield authority over their children, possessions and workers. The children resent this authoritarian way, but they are forced to submission, for lack of alternatives.

The mothers, though well-meaning and concerned about their daughters, are often over protective and nagging. Their cliché-ridden conversations and their insistence that their daughters, conform to the genteel Southern manners, annoy the younger generation. They subject their daughters to the rigours of social decorum, which amounts to a kind of mental subjugation and emotional slavery. As a result, the daughters often react through an outburst of rage, which is a form of partial regression.

In “A Circle in the Fire”, Mrs. Cope tries to instil in her daughter, Sally Virginia, “a pale, fat girl of twelve with a frowning squint and a large mouth full of silver bands,” feminine and lady-like qualities when she dresses herself in a
pair of overalls pulled over her dress, a man's old hat pulled over her head and a
gun and a hostler set around her waist. "... the spunkiness and comically violent
imagination of the young daughter ... suggest the inadequacy of Mrs. Cope's
attempt to keep every thing genteel and bland."23 The mother is thoroughly
disappointed and laments why her daughter has to look like an idiot, and wonders
what is going to become of her. The child is irritated. She says, "Just leave me
be. I aint you."24 The mother and daughter fail to understand their mutual needs
for love, respect, self-worth and autonomy. The mother is disappointed not
because she is very much concerned about the daughter's predicament, but
because the child fails to live up to the mother's expectations and those of the
society.

Sally Virginia lives in her fantasy world all day, and she is often let to
herself. It is a kind of insulated regressed state where she finds happiness and
freedom from her nagging mother. She barricades herself behind her books all
day. She does not help her mother with the running of the farm. As for Mrs.
Cope, she is bothered only about the safety of her woods and about the running of
her farm profitably. The mother has an obsessive fear that her woods might catch
fire. The daughter neither shares the mother's anxiety nor her enthusiasm about
the beauty of nature. When Mrs. Cope asks the child to get up and look at the
gorgeous sunset, she dampens her mother's spirit by retorting that she had better
smell around and see if the wood is not on fire.

23 David Eggenschwiler, The Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor (Detroit:
24 Flannery O'Connor, Collected Works, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Library of America,
Sally Virginia is just a passive onlooker of all that goes on around. When a group of delinquent orphan boys—Powell and his friends—force their way into her mother’s farm, she watches them with great curiosity from a distance, hiding herself, by kneeling down at the window. When the boys prove themselves to be destructive, and when they refuse to leave the farm, Sally Virginia tells her mother that she is going to give them a piece of her mind and “beat the daylight out” of their eyes. Then the mother admonishes her and warns her to keep out of their way, and says that they will be gone the next morning. Secretly the girl goes out to confront the boys with a pistol and hides behind a pine. There she watches the naked boys washing themselves in the cow trough and then racing across the field. Quite helplessly she watches the boys setting ablaze her mother’s woods. Inspite of all her antagonism towards her mother she feels “weighed down by some new unplaced misery she had never felt before.”

The child runs towards her mother and “... stared up at her face as if she had never seen it before. It was the face of new misery she felt, but on her mother it looked old and looked as if it might have belonged to anybody, a Negro or a European or to Powell himself.”

It is their humiliation and misery that bring the mother and daughter together for a while. This unity of experience and mutual commiseration are exceptional, a respite from the running battle of nerves brought on by the mother’s possessiveness, which can cut at the roots of familial bonding and result in rupture.

When a mother insists that her daughter be “nice” and conformed to the established values and modes of the behaviour of the society they live in, sometimes, such insistence can generate the opposite result. The daughters may

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25 Ibid., p. 250.
26 Ibid., pp. 250-51.
become violent, aggressive, cynical and non-conforming. In “Revelation,” while at the waiting room of doctor’s office, Ruby Turpin engages herself in conversation with a respectable looking lady who is there with her fat, ugly Wellesley College girl, whose face is filled with pimples, ironically named, Mary Grace. All through the conversation, the ugly girl stares at Mrs. Turpin as if she had some special reasons for disliking her. Mrs. Turpin expresses her general satisfaction with herself, and the way she is running the farm, managing the Negro workers and loving them too, and with the order of things in the world in general. Like the Pharisee of Jesus’s parable, she thanks God for what she is, a fine white woman, and for giving her a significant place in this world. The boastful, cliché-ridden, stereo-typed, platitudinous conversation of the older woman gets on Mary Grace’s nerves. “. . . the raw-complexioned girl snapped her teeth together. It was the ugliest face Mrs. Turpin had seen any one make. . . . She was looking at her as if she had known and disliked her all her life — all of Mrs. Turpin’s life, it seemed too, not just all the girl’s life. Why, girl, I don’t even know you, Mrs. Turpin said silently.”

The conversation continues on the same line, almost uninterrupted, except for an occasional remark by one or two of the listeners. It is quite evident that Mary Grace is the target of the remarks made by her mother, like, “people with a bad disposition are more to be pitied than anyone on earth. And again, “I think the worst thing in the world. . . is an ungrateful person.” She sees her mother’s double in Mrs. Turpin. These uncalled for indictments make the girl exasperated, and snarling, she throws, a thick book *Human Development*, that she has been reading, at Mrs. Turpin. The girl tries to strangle her and calls her “a wart hog” out of hell. She vents the

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27 Ibid., p. 640.
28 Ibid., p. 644.
venom of her anger and resentment on her mother’s double, instead of the direct object her mother, though it might justly have been aimed at her. This transfer of hostility is called “displaced aggression.” Mary Grace may be afraid to express her hostility directly toward her mother the person responsible for her frustration, because she is dependent on her for sustenance. So she takes it out on her mother’s double. Mary Grace then collapses into her mother’s lap like a little child. “The girl’s fingers were gripped like a baby’s around her thumb.”

After her attack on her mother’s double, Mary grace regresses to her infancy, as evidenced by her gesture. Her dependency syndrome cannot be resolved owing to the underlying, conflicting feelings of antipathy. The story indexes O’Connor’s rare insight into the negatives that are at work in human interactions.

O’Connor’s “Good Country People” presents a domineering mother and rebellious, ungrateful and uncompromising daughter. It is a typical O’Connor story with a cliché-mongering, stereotyped mother and scowling, angry, antagonistic, yet dependent daughter. Hulga, a Ph.D. in philosophy, with a weak heart and wooden leg, is forced to live with her mother. She lost her leg in a shotgun accident when she was twelve years old. Her mother cannot admit the fact that her daughter has lived for twenty years with only one leg and has not had any “normal good times” like other girls. “Mrs. Hopewell treats her as if she were a child. And while the daughter resents the mother’s over protection, she continues to play the role of the child.”

Like the rebellious child, Hulga is moody, sullen and cranky. Though she is thirty two, she dresses like a teenager. “Her regressive tendencies are suggested by her mode of dress — she wears ‘a

29 Ibid., p. 646.
six-year-old skirt and a yellow sweatshirt with a faded cowboy on it' — but more important, her rebellion against her mother." Hulga has not come to terms with her ailment and physical disability and her consequent dependence on her mother. "Hulga resents the fact that she relies on her mother for comfort and sustenance, and expresses that resentment through annoying physical habits. She will 'lumber into the bathroom and slam the door. She will deliberately 'stump' into the kitchen though she can walk without making such 'awful noise'." It looks as though the daughter wants to remind her mother of her disability.

Hulga's antipathy and her hatred for her mother are so strong that she has "... defined a self that is the antithesis of her mother's." This is evidenced by her changing the name that her mother gave her at birth. She changed her name Joy into Hulga, when she was legally of the age to do so, without her mother's knowledge. She is pleased with the ugliness of her name — Hulga. "She saw it as the name of her highest creative act. One of her major triumphs was that her mother had not been able to turn her dust into joy, but the greater triumph was that she had been able to turn it herself into Hulga." But the mother has no use of her new name. "When Mrs. Hopewell thought the name, Hulga, she thought of the broad blank hull of a battleship. She would not use it. She continued to call her Joy to which the girl responded in a purely mechanical way." Mrs.

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35 Ibid., p. 266.
Hopewells’s refusal to call her daughter by her personally chosen name shows her lack of respect for her daughter’s freedom and individuality. "Unable to accept what Hulga has grown up to be (a hulking, awkward unpleasant Ph.D. in Philosophy), Mrs. Hopewell further denies her individuality by refusing to call her by her legal name ‘Hulga’..."  

Mrs. Hopewell is not at all satisfied with her daughter’s choice of becoming a Ph.D. in Philosophy. In fact she is ashamed of it. “You could say, ‘My daughter is a nurse,’ or ‘My daughter is a school teacher’ or even ‘My daughter is a chemical engineer.’ You could not say, ‘My daughter is a philosopher.’ That was something that had ended with the Greeks and Romans.” Mrs. Hopewell thinks that it is nice for girls to go to school to have a lot of fun, but her daughter has “gone through,” getting highly educated and acquiring a number of degrees is beyond her ken. She admits that her daughter is “brilliant” but does not forget to add that she does not have “a grain of sense” in her.

Hulga is a nihilist who believes in “nothing” and is able “to see through to nothing.” She has only contempt for the world in which she lives. She tries to insulate herself hiding behind her books to escape from the realities of the world outside, and that is a form of regression. She spends most of her time reading. Sometimes, she goes for walks, but does not like dogs or cats or birds or nature or young men. “She looked at nice young men as if she could smell their

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One day during dinner, without any provocation, she shouts at her mother, “Woman! Do you ever look inside and see what you are not? God... Malebranche was right: we are not our own light. We are not our own light!”

Both the mother and the daughter regress by trying to wish away the realities of life: the daughter through her nihilistic faith shuns society and remains withdrawn; the mother escapes the realities of life through her shallow optimism and cliché-ridden expressions. She has a stock of such clichés which she gives out in and out of context. Clichés are expressions which have been effective in the past. Her penchant for cliché-ridden speech shows her regressive tendencies which pull her back temporally.

One day, a Bible salesman Manley Pointer comes to sell Mrs. Hopewell a Bible. He notices that there is no Bible in the parlour. But the truth is that it is somewhere in the attic. But she cannot tell him that her daughter is an atheist and she will not have her keep one in the parlour. She feels an instant sympathy for him when she comes to know of his “heart condition” and in that way he is very much like her daughter. She invites him to dinner, but immediately regrets having invited him. She is very much impressed by the lad’s simplicity and throws out one of her favourite clichés, “Good country people are the salt of the earth.” But the daughter asks the mother to “get rid of the salt of the earth” so that they can eat their dinner. But the mother says that she cannot be rude to anybody. All through the meal Hulga is rude towards Manley. “Mr Mrs. Hopewell could not understand deliberate rudeness, although she lived with it,

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38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., p. 271
41 Ibid.
and she felt she had always to overflow with hospitality to make up for Joy’s lack of courtesy.\textsuperscript{42}

Like the credulous mother Hulga is also deceived by Manley Pointer’s apparent simplicity. “If Hulga’s mother tries to control her by imprisoning her in childhood, Hulga attempts to do the same to Manley. In her thoughts and words she labels him a child.”\textsuperscript{43} Hulga and Manley meet the next day and they go to a hay-loft, and there Manley makes her say that she loves him. He wants to see where her artificial leg joined her limb. She is at first shocked by the suggestion because she is “as sensitive about her wooden leg as a peacock is about his tail.”\textsuperscript{44} But a change comes over her. “Passion makes her supple and yielding, she smiles at Manley, something that she has never done at her mother.”\textsuperscript{45} She trusts him unconditionally as a child would. It was like losing her own life and finding it again, in his. From his briefcase, he produces a hollow Bible containing a flask of whiskey, a pack of condoms and a pack of pornographic cards. She is shocked and in a pleading voice asks him “Aren’t you . . . just country people?”\textsuperscript{46} In her bewilderment she repeats one of her mother’s platitudes. He puts the wooden leg and eye glasses into his briefcase to add to the bizarre trophies he has collected from other girls. Hulga has been planning to seduce him, but ironically

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 272.
she is seduced by him by the theft of her wooden leg and glasses. He violates her emotional integrity and walks away saying, "... you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing since I was born!" Here Manley proves himself to be more nihilistic and worldly wise than Hulga. Like a lost child Hulga is completely bewildered.

Deprived of her wooden leg and glasses, Hulga becomes helpless and dependent on her mother. Though she longs for independence and autonomy, she is made to relapse into a state of infantilism and helplessness leading to regression. The violent shocking experience makes her realise very painfully, her dependence on others, more particularly on her mother, whose joy she has to be.

Non-conformity for its own sake, and exaggerated individualism prevent one from living happily with the members of one's family and community. The so called non-conformist may find the conventional society ridiculous, irrational and at times stupid. But to break away from the established norms and values of the family and the community, for the sake of exaggerated individualism does not do any good to the individual or the community. O'Connor's belief system is such that an individual who is a member of a family is duty-bound to honour its values and live in mutual charity without which convergence is impossible. Lack of understanding and lack of love among members of the family, it may be inferred, lead to regressive sorts of relationships.

5. Of Grandparents and Grandchildren

In families where there are grandparents, children are usually attached to them and when parents are absent, or dead, they do care for the young ones. This

bonding is popularly considered one of the intimate relationships when the grandparents are willing to share their love and warmth with the younger generation. The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is almost unique for the simple reason that children receive a truly life-giving sort of love from grandparents. The bonding is made easy and smooth because of the great patience and understanding that grandparents generally display, unlike the children's own parents. The riches of the experience of the grandparents are channelized appropriately and effectively, securing a highly relatable kind of affection.

Modern American families are small in size and are isolated from their extended kin. They prefer nuclear families. "Grandparents and other distant relatives are not expected to live with the couple and their children; when they do, they are usually relegated to second-class citizenship in the family that has no place or use for them!"48 We come across such a grandparent in O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard To Find." In this story she presents an ordinary middle class modern Georgia family noted for its banality. The family consists of Bailey, his mother, who is called "the grandmother" throughout the story, Bailey's wife and three children, John Wesley, June Star and the little baby. Bailey plans to take the family on a holiday trip to Florida. But Florida does not interest the grandmother and she likes to go to Tennessee. The children's mother remains indifferent, but the eight year old boy, John Wesley says, "If you don't want to go to Florida, why don'tcha stay at home?"49 and June Star responds, She


wouldn't stay at home to be queen for a day. . . . She wouldn't stay at a home for a million bucks. . . . Afraid she'd miss something. She has to go everywhere we go."\(^{50}\) The position of the imposing self-important grandmother in the family is quite interesting. The two bratty children quarrel with her. Her son Bailey scarcely tolerates her and his wife conveniently ignores her altogether. With the unerring deft stroke of the artist, O'Connor reveals the items the family is interested in through their reading of the newspaper. The grandmother is interested in the sensational tabloids; Bailey is interested in the sports section; and the children in "the funny papers".

In 'A Good Man Is Hard to Find,' Flannery O'Connor presents a devastating critique of 1950s American society that incorporates parodistic structures and elements of black humour in an overall satire of such 50s icons as the American nuclear family, tv shows, child actors, and notions of middle class respectability.\(^{51}\)

The next morning the grandmother is the first one in the car. She has hidden the family cat Pitty Sing in the basket because her son wouldn't like to arrive at a motel with a cat. The grand mother is too vain for her age. She puts on a navy blue dress printed with small dots and wears a blue sailor hat to match her dress. In keeping with the fashion of the time, she wears white gloves and carries a purse. "Her collars and cuff were white organdy trimmed with lace and at the neckline she had pinned the spray of cloth violets containing a sachet. In case of an accident, any one seeing her dead on the highway would know at once she was

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

a lady."52 The grandmother "has unthinkingly acquired materialistic values of the American commercialized culture."53 She shares the materialism and worldliness of most of O'Connor's ladies and gives excessive importance to outward appearance. Having reached the fag-end of life, one would expect the grandmother to be reflective and other-worldly. But she does not appear to have a thought of eternity or the state of her spiritual life.

The grandmother has a way of domineering and manipulating the family to suit her own whims and fancies. In order to have her way and go to Tennessee, she frightens the family by saying that the convict who calls himself the Misfit has escaped from the Federal Pen and he is also heading towards Florida. But everyone in the family is indifferent to her. Though she fails in her attempts to divert the trip to Tennessee, she succeeds in the attempt to take a side trip to an old plantation mansion near Toombsboro which, she thinks, she has visited as a child. She arouses the greed of the children by making them believe that the ancient mansion has secret panels hiding the family silver. The children pester their father into taking them there.

The grandmother likes to be in control of everything. She cautions her son about the speed limit and about the patrolmen hiding behind billboards and clumps of trees. She also writes down the mileage on the speedometer of the car because it would be interesting to know the distance they covered when they get back.


We appreciate the grandmother because she is kind and considerate and caring inspite of all her banalities, platitudes and false gentility. One of the reasons for her smuggling the cat in her basket is that she is “afraid he might brush against one of the gas burners and accidentally asphyxiate himself.” She offers to hold the baby in the car. When the children have finished reading their comic books and start bickering she offers to tell them a story if they stop fighting.

The grandmother recalls that in her time “children were more respectful of their native states and their parents and everything else.” She also remembers that people in those days did right. She does not live in the present, but is alienated from reality. The tombstones in the cotton fields are remnants of the grand antebellum South for her. A naked little Negro child they see on the roadside shack, is “a cute little pickaninny” that she would like to paint. “A self-centered romantic, the grandmother arranges reality to suit herself when she can, and indulges in fantasies when she cannot. Her false gentility precludes any honest reaction to life....” She delights in talking about her good old childhood days and about one of her suitors, Edgar Atkins Teangarden who used to bring her watermelons with his initials E.A.T cut on it. She regrets not having married him, because in her own words, “he was a gentleman and brought Coca-Cola stock when it first came out and that he had died only a few years ago, a

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55 Ibid., p. 139.

very wealthy man."\(^{57}\) The grandmothers flight from the present and living in her world of fantasy show her regressive tendencies. The fragments of the past, especially the happier events and situations remain actual and active in the grandmother’s present, compelling and constraining her to take on regressive patterns of thought process having a jarring effect on the present.

When the grandmother suddenly realises that the mansion they are seeking is not in Georgia, but in Tennessee, she is startled and upsets her valise and the cat hurls itself into Bailey’s shoulder, which causes the car to turn over once. She wishes that she were hurt so that Bailey’s wrath would not come down on her at once. The children’s attitude to the accident is amusing. “We’ve had an ACCIDENT.... But nobody is killed.”\(^{58}\) When the rest of the family is trying to recover from the shock of the accident, the grandmother pressing her side says, that she has injured an organ. But nobody answers and she decides that she would not mention that the house is in Tennessee.

The Misfit, the escaped convict, and his two companions who have been watching the accident take place, appear on the scene. The grandmother recognizes the Misfit and blurs it out. This recognition precipitates death and destruction to the entire family. The Misfit observes that it would have been better for all of them, if she had not recognized him. At this Bailey turns and says something sharply to her “that shocked even the children,” and the grandmother begins to cry. When the members of the family are being shot one by one in the woods, she pleads with the Misfit to spare her because she is a lady. When that is of no avail she advises him to pray. But he does not want to do it because he is


\(^{58}\) Ibid., p. 145.
doing all right by himself. He refuses to believe in Jesus because he was not there when he raised the dead. The grandmother then offers to give all the money she has got and the Misfit's macabre but humorous reply is, "... there never was the body that give the undertaker a tip." 59 When she notices the Misfit wearing her deceased son's shirt she recognises the relationship with the man before him. She reaches out to touch him saying, "Why you're one of my own babies, you're one of my own children!" 60 This gesture of love and concern has just the opposite effect on the Misfit. It makes him spring back as though a snake had bitten him and shoots her three times through her chest. He shoots the grandmother because he cannot bear the touch of love that appears to be painfully lacking in his life. The plight of the misfit as a human being deserves our pity. He is neither capable of accepting his guilt (patricide) nor is he able to believe in religious mysteries. His nihilism offers him little solace and his mind continues to be tortured, and his murderous impulses seek release through his mean crimes. "The emptiness in the soul of the misfit is not an absence of religious faith (as the Grandmother naively sees it), but his lack of any kind of faith at all. ... The misfit's inability to believe has destroyed his humanity. His nihilism is complete. ..." 61

This story which is discussed in some detail shows how domination and manipulation, by which the grandmother tries to control the entire family leads to self-destruction and the death of everyone. It is not only the grandmother who tries to dominate and manipulate. In fact it is a chain-reactive type of

59 Ibid., p. 152.
60 Ibid.
manipulation and domination that we notice in the story. Bailey is dominated by his mother. Bailey dominates his wife and children. The children manipulate and dominate everyone in the family to get done what they want. The dominance of the Misfit is ultimate because he exterminates the entire family in a matter of a few minutes. With carefully selected details, the story suggests that the attempt to live in an idealized past, at the expense of the present which is a form of regression, can lead to death and destruction.

The grandparents and grandchildren in O'Connor’s fiction form a strange brood. They are isolated because of their narcissism and inflated ego. Where self-love reigns supreme, it is difficult to establish any lasting relationship. They manipulate one another to realise their own selfish ends. The grandparents in O'Connor, instead of boosting up the morale of the children, fail to be proper guides to them on account of their pride and selfishness, and sometimes cause the death of the young ones, as in “A View of the Woods.” In this story, although Mark Fortune’s daughter “... feels bound to duty to tolerate her father, O’Connor shifts the emphasis of the conflict between generations from the parent and child to grandparent and child.”62 Through grotesquerie and violence, O’Connor shows the consequences of the old man’s stubborn will and his refusal to take into account the feeling of an entire family, leading to his death and that of his granddaughter as well as to the destruction and annihilation of all his progressive views.

Mark Fortune, aged seventy nine years, lets his son in law Pitts farm his land. Though he has been slogging on his farm for the past ten years, the old man will not have Pitts make any capital investment on the land, nor will he sell him

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any of his land. He has been repleting his acreage of the farm by selling it to rich businessmen for a fishing pond, gas station, etc. He thinks a small town called "Fortune Georgia" will come up there, bringing him fame and money. He does not remember whether the daughter with whom he is staying is his third or fourth child. She had married Pitts against her father's wish. He thinks, she is tolerating him for the property she hopes to inherit after his death. "He knew they were waiting impatiently for the day when they could put him in a hole eight feet deep and cover him with dirt."63 He will leave everything in trust his favourite grandchild, Mary Fortune, naming his lawyer and not Pitts as the executor. She is his pet because she is the exact replica of the old man. She has the same type of hair, glasses, same gait, and shares his enthusiasm for progress. He is very much concerned about her safety and "will not allow her to sit in snakey places or put her hands on bushes that might hide hornets."64 He conveniently ignores the fact that Mary Fortune is a Pitts too, "as if it were an affliction the child was not responsible for."65 She is his hope for the future in carrying out his plans for progress and also for persecuting the Pitts. "In spite of the seventy year gap in their age, Fortune and Mary are spiritually close in their strength of will."66

Pitts resents the old man's control over his daughter. He takes his revenge on Fortune by whacking Mary Fortune, who is the double of the old man. For no apparent reason at all, he leads his daughter from the dinner table to a clearing in

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64 Ibid., p. 529.
65 Ibid., p. 528.
the woods to be whipped. It is inexplicable both to Fortune and to the readers why she submits herself so meekly to her father. It is not that the child is incapable of reacting or counter-attacking. When asked by Fortune, she denies her father beating her. "Nobody's ever beat me in my life . . . and if anybody did, I'd kill him."67 Perhaps, being an intelligent child, she thinks that it is the image of the grandfather in her that her father is attacking. Fortune exercises his authority over Mary Fortune, who is the extension of the old man. Pitts claims that Mary Fortune is his to whip and he would whip her every day of the year if it suited him. The helpless little girl "is the victim of both men. She is used by her grandfather . . . as a means of extending his will into the future. She is used by her father as an instrument of his own revenge. She is both a projection of Pitts' rage and Fortune's hopes."68

Though Mary Fortune shares her grandfather fascination for progress, she tenaciously rebels against the sale of the lot in front of the house for a filling station and a parking lot because it will block the view of the woods; it is there that her father grazes his calves, and it is a lawn for the children. No amount of protest from Mary Fortune will deter him from his plan. He is, in fact, shocked that a cow pasture should stand in the way of progress. He cannot understand why she should care about her father's interests since he beats her. The old man tries to lure her with the promise of a boat and when it fails, with an ice-cream. But none of these appeals to her:


For Mary Fortune, the lot in front of the house possesses practical, aesthetic and mystical meaning, and even its practical aspects for her are infinitely superior to Mr. Fortune's crass materialism. It is pasture for her father's calves as well as playground for the children, more significantly, it functions aesthetically as 'lawn' and mystically as a view of the woods.  

Finally, quite exasperated by her attitude, Fortune makes her choose her loyalties: 'Are you a Fortune... or are you a Pitts? Make up your mind.' Her voice was loud and positive and belligerent. 'I'm Mary — Fortune — Pitts'... 'Well I,' he shouted, 'am PURE Fortune!' Both the grandfather and granddaughter have adamant wills and they are not prepared for any kind of compromise.

When the deed is concluded for the sale of the land, Mary Fortune is so angry that she begins to hurl bottles at Tilman who has just bought the land. Appalled at her behaviour, Fortune thinks he has been too lenient with her and decides to whip her. He leads her to the exact place where she has been beaten up by her father. She refuses to submit herself but begins to kick and bite him and completely overwhelms him and shouts triumphantly: "You been whipped... by me... and I'm PURE Pitts." When Fortune notices "his own image," "hostile and triumphant," calling itself "PURE Pitts," she ceases to exit as his property. He strikes her head against a rock asserting that there is not an ounce

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71 Ibid.
of Pitts in him. The grandfather’s and child’s mutual attack on each other shows their regressive beastly tendencies. Having killed the child, he suffers a heart attack. “His heart attack is an attack of consciousness as well as an attack on conscience. But knowledge, like introspection in O’Connor’s world, always kills.” Fortune thinks of Mary Fortune as an extension of himself, his double. But the reality is that she is Pitts, and her bold declaration of her allegiance to Pitts destroys that fantasy. His image calling itself “Pitts” frustrates him. In his frustration he regresses to his bestial animalistic nature; and his frustration is expressed with fury against the source of his disappointment. He has to kill his own double in order to conquer it. In the process he has to lose his own life and that of his granddaughter.

The conflict between Mark Fortune and Mary Fortune is a conflict between head and heart:

In killing Mary Fortune Pitts, the grandfather has in effect killed the feeling part of himself, and in doing so, destroyed any possibility of the integration of the fragmented elements of his personality. In fact, he destroys himself, for he dies of a heart attack — of a heart literally ‘expanded’ by an unaccustomed rush of feeling — as he tries to find his way out of those dark and bloody woods.

When a person prefers a relative above others, he may demand undivided loyalty from his favourite. If the latter prizes his individuality and freedom above the

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favours he receives, there is bound to be conflict between the two. If the persons concerned are not in control of their primitive aggressive drives, then there is a tendency to regress and fight in the most bestial manner until there is total destruction, as exemplified in the story just discussed.

"The Artificial Nigger" is a story in which a grandfather tries to initiate his grandson into the realities of life. He wants the young boy to be aware of the evils of the world, but ironically, for the first time in his life, he becomes conscious of the evils in his own heart and the need for God's healing and forgiving mercy.

The young boy, Nelson takes pride in the fact that he was born in the city, Atlanta. His grandfather is his sole relative and lives with him in the backwoods where there are no blacks. Mr. Head wants to show him all the corruption of the city and what his place of origin means and contains. Mr. Head considers himself to be experienced and incorruptible and hence "a suitable guide to the young." But Nelson does not trust his grandfather unquestioningly. He has his own doubts about his grandfather's ability as a reliable guide, when he hasn't been to the city for more than fifteen years.

Mr. Head tries to instil in Nelson hatred of the black race and wants to show him that city is the synonym of hell, and blacks live in it. He makes Nelson have a close look at the city's sewerage system and frightens him of engulfment in the sewer. According to Mr. Head the sewer system is one of the most frightening aspects of the city, and he makes Nelson sticks his head into the tunnel. "Head is especially regressive when he instinctively threatens his grandson with those experiences infants fear most (engulfment in the sewer, hunger, and abandonment) — stimulating Nelson's insecurities but acting himself
like an insecure child." Mr. Head, on whom the spiritual and the material guardianship of Nelson is vested, acts very cruelly when he frightens the child. In doing so he exploits his authority, experience and the trust the boy places in him. Here he behaves more like a rivalrous sibling than a wise old man, who is expected to guide the child.

In the train when Nelson does not recognise "his first Negro," his grandfather makes fun of him. He does not know Negroes could also be coffee brown instead of black. In the black neighbourhood of the city, where they lose their way, Nelson asks for the guidance to a motherly-looking black woman. Mr. Head makes fun of the boy for this. Later, when Nelson falls asleep on the sidewalk, he hides himself behind a garbage can and makes an awful noise to frighten him. Not finding his grandfather, the boy is panicky and knocks down an elderly woman carrying grocery. She begins to yell for the police and a group of women join her and demand compensation. Mr. Head is afraid, and like Peter denying Jesus, he denies his kinship to Nelson. "This is not my boy . . . I never seen him before." Like a child, who is afraid to face the consequences of the action, Mr. Head tells a lie and denies the truth of his relationship to Nelson. This treachery is too much for Nelson to endure and he entirely cuts off his ties with his grandfather. In his shame, disgrace and loneliness, the street appears to Mr. Head as a "hollow tunnel" and the drives wind around like "endless ridiculous circles." Finally he asks a stranger the way to get to the railroad station. On the way they come across an old dilapidated plaster statue of a nigger

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eating watermelon. The sight of the battered statue has a mysterious effect on the
two and they forget their differences and get reconciled to each other. They
return to their back-woods home humble and contrite with self-knowledge of
their sinfulness.

O'Connor presents the relationship between Mr. Head and Nelson as rivalrous. They argue without end on various issues. Both try to outsmart the
other. O'Connor describes the grandfather and grandson thus: “... they looked
even enough alike to be brothers and brothers not too apart in age, for Mr. Head had a
youthful expression by daylight, while the boy’s look was ancient...” The
grandfather as experiences and knowledge has weapons to boss over and
manipulate his grandson. “The regressiveness of sibling rivalry ironically defines
grandfather/grandson relationship...” Though there is parallelism to sibling
relationship, there are certain differences too. The predominant element in
sibling relationship is the attempt at outsmarting the other. But in grandfather-
grandson relationship there is a systematic attempt at bossing over and
smothering the individuality of the boy.

Though Mr. Head hates the city with all its filth and niggers, it is the city
that reveals his true self to himself. It is there that he is made aware of his
sinfulness and the mercy of God. God may have intervened in his life, and made
him ready to receive His pardon and mercy. But it is very doubtful if his attitude
to the blacks has undergone any change. In fact, he has succeeded in convincing
his grandson that the blacks are evil, the city is evil as well, so that at the end of
the journey, Nelson comments, “I’m glad, I’ve went once, but I’ll never go back

76 Ibid., p. 212.

77 Suzanne Morrow Paulson, Flannery O’Connor: A Study of the Short Fiction
again!" At the beginning of the story, Nelson insists that this is his second visit because he was born there. But when he admits at the end that he is glad he has gone “once” and does not want to go back again, he shows his perfect conformity to his grandfather’s will. This shows the regressiveness of the boy in order to avoid further trouble in future. Mr. Head’s indoctrination does have the desired effect. By frightening and manipulation, Mr. Head has succeeded in bringing his grandson round to his line of thinking. It is very likely that with this type of conformity, the child will also become narcissistic like his surrogate parent and develop a racist mind.

A change from conformity takes place when the imposed mentor proves himself to be a power to be reckoned with. When a person realises that his opponent is too strong and powerful to resist, he accepts defeat, and conforms himself to his rival’s ways and attitudes. Consequently, the conformist’s individuality is sacrificed and smothered.

This pattern of human relationship is frequently seen in the world. The power and authority exercised by one’s rival is often irksome and hateful. At the same time, his power and authority are secretly admired, and the natural outcome is that the imposed mentor, becomes the mentor. In the long run, the person who has been at the receiving end of this sort of relationship turns out to be the replica of the imposed mentor.

In portraying the intricacies of relationship marked by contradictions, love-hate relationships, the candour and honesty of the author is palpable. She does not gloss over things but takes an anti-romantic or non-idealistic stand. For these

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reasons, this story is a masterpiece on human relationship, belonging to the realm of realism which is O'Connor's forte.

For O'Connor, the spiritual guardianship of grandparents is of vital importance. In fact, she would like to present grandparent-grandchild relationship as something that is spiritually oriented with a value system being passed on to next but one generation. But O'Connor's data, based on her empirical observation on social reality, happen to be of negative implications, and this seems to disturb the author much. Hence, the inevitable highlighting of conflicts. O'Connor's stories with grandparents in them serve to show the loss of spiritual kinship in families with extended kin.

In the stories analysed in this chapter, it is seen that the families on the whole are degenerate. This degeneration is due to a variety of reasons like personal egoism, lack of love and generosity, and indifference of the members of the family. The principal cause of degenerate family is the lack of authentic love of the parents, especially of the mother for their offspring. Authentic love is unconditional, with no strings attached, tangible, visible and easily understood with no motive of return. Conflicts in the family may be due to lack of awareness, on the part of the parents of their own style of functioning as parents. But this kind of parents tends to be over-protective, blocks and retards the mental, social and spiritual growth of their children, and destroy their happiness.

Man is happy in the degree to which he is related to others, especially to the members of his own family. But if there is a tendency for any member of the family to dominate, it deprives the family of happiness and peace. If there is delegation of power or empowerment on the part of the parents in favour of their
children, there would be less friction. An alternative to the use of dominance may be made available at this juncture.

Inter-personal conflicts and the resultant friction and frustration can be minimised by the means of the process of empowerment. As per the norms of this process, power or authority is not considered something good in itself. Unless used very carefully it can pave the way for domestic tragedies. To avoid them, what is required is delegating power to children. The baton of authority should change hands with every new generation coming up. This is certainly painful and can create a feeling of insecurity on the part of power-wielders. But when power is not used for its own sake, or when it is dispensed with as unnecessary, or when it is given over to younger ones de facto, empowerment takes place. Consequently, conflicts and friction disappear, giving way to mutual respect, acceptance, understanding and all round sense of well-being in mental and physical terms.

In any human relationship the basic factor is love. When this basic instinctive need is unfulfilled, especially in familial relationship, it may cause deep-seated mental stress and restlessness. This unrequited longing for love and the resultant disappointment in a person's life can cause much unhappiness to himself and to the members of his family. When people expect from one another the love and care they are incapable of giving, the interaction of the members is bound to be regressive. In a smothering atmosphere of rejection anger and violence, regressive patterns of relationship between members of the family are the net result, as evidenced in the stories analysed above.