CHAPTER III

RELATIONSHIPS — THE SOCIETAL ANGLES

Man is the only animal styling himself as a social being, all the time highlighting the virtue of sociability with a premium placed on the value of relationships beyond instincts and physical compulsions. It is living in the company of fellow beings and their influences that make him a social animal. He is dependent on other members of his species more than perhaps he would like to admit. “Man is dependent on society for protection, comfort, nurture, education, equipment, opportunity and the multitude of definite services which society provides. He is dependent on society for the content of his thoughts, his dreams, his aspirations, even many of his maladies of mind and body.”¹ From the moment of his birth, till he reaches his grave, man is in absolute need of society, and is open to influences from others, offering his share of influences to those with whom he interacts all the time.

Since man lives in society and depends on it in numerous ways, much of his behaviour grows out of his conscious or unconscious effort to establish meaningful and fulfilling relationships with others. There are no hard and fast regulations and models governing interpersonal relationships. But there are certain socially accredited ways of behaving in society which vary from society to society and from time to time. They include social customs, traditions and conventions, forms of etiquette, taboos etc. Centuries of practice have established such modes of behaviour and they govern human relationships. They

are necessary for peaceful co-existence, to attain common goals, to meet mutual needs and also to build up fulfilling and satisfying relationships.

All human relationships are dynamic and subject to change all the time. Social relationships are never stagnant or stationary. When old conflicts are resolved, new ones crop up. They sometimes better the relationships between the individuals or they estrange them.

Many people conform themselves to the established patterns of the behaviour of a particular society for approval or due to social pressure. "Every social relationship involves in fact an adjustment of attitudes on the part of those who enter the relationship." Modern society throws people together for work, recreation, education etc. Because of man's inevitable need for society and on account of the fear of rejection and humiliation, a great number of people do conform.

When people with myriads of differences live together in a community, social conflicts are inevitable. In fact, social conflicts represent an important problem in modern life. Though conflicts are often unavoidable, they can be reduced in their destructive nature. But it is very unfortunate that most human beings lack the ability to dissent creatively. It is to be noted that creative dissent, difference and distinction indicate the normalcy and health of a community. Very often the human tendency is to be aggressive and destructive in social interactions, especially, when there is dissent. These types of interactions are often immature and regressive.

\[\text{Ibid., p. 25.}\]
1. O’Connor’s Social Sensibility

The geographical, socio-cultural background of much of O’Connor’s fiction is the rural Georgia of the 1950s and early 60s. She writes with a strong sense of place. “You can’t cut characters off from their society and say much about them as individuals. You cannot say anything meaningful about the mystery of a personality unless you put that personality in a believable and significant social context.” One of the most striking aspects of her fine art of fiction is her close-up, comprehensive observation of Georgia’s plain folk with all their manners and mannerisms in their day to day social interactions. O’Connor lived with her mother on the Andalusia farm, which she operated with hired labour. The region that comes alive in her fiction is her mother’s farm and what she observed their daily. Josephine Hendin points out how important the region is for O’Connor: “She would use the trappings of Southern life, but make them explode in new and unexpected directions.” Some of her mother’s tenants and Negro farm hands serve as patterns for characters in her fiction. Some of her local acquaintances chose to avoid her for fear of being made a character in her stories. It is her unique ability to make familiar people and situations part of her fiction. This technique of characterization has brought her many artistic advantages. For one thing, it adds to the authenticity of her characters. Secondly, she can avoid straining her imagination at the expense of lived experience. More advantageously, it makes her task of characterization much easier. In short, it is a kind of lineal transfer from one plane of experience to another.

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Most critics over-estimate O'Connor's religious concerns, to such an extent that her great social sensitivity is not recognized adequately. Her social sensibility manifests itself in immediate, intense, and spontaneous responses to the reality around her. She writes about real men and women and children whose joys, sorrows, aspirations, hopes and disappointments she understands, without being sentimental about them. Our inability or failure to recognize and appreciate her social sensibility is to do a disservice to her and also to her fiction.

O'Connor's is a cartoonist par excellence. Her cartoons drawn at a very young age reveal her rare artistry in depicting the oddities of people. This is evidenced in the cartoons published in her school and college magazines. Painting was one of her pastimes. Her self-portrait is quite famous. Her room was furnished with her own paintings. This capacity for caricature and portrait painting has stood her in good stead in the delineation of characters in her fiction. This cartoon effect and her skill in her conjuring up characters are very much evident everywhere in her fiction, highlighting her capacity to portray the minutest details of human interactions and endeavours with minimal words in a very effective and humorous way.

A close look at O'Connor's fiction makes one notice that she is fully alive and sensitive to the social realities of her times. In story after story, she highlights some social conflicts or other of her day. Though she is proud of her region and cherishes it, she does not fail to condemn the unpleasant aspects of the Southern social life, its poverty, squalor, filth, racism etc. She is unsparing in her criticism of what appears to be socially unacceptable and perverse. In fact, the seething social problems of her day are vividly portrayed in the pages of her fiction with focus on the intriguing social interactions. It is this social sensibility which qualifies her to speak competently on different types of social regressions.
2. *Racial Conflicts — An Overview*

In O'Connor we get a clear view of the tensions in race relations and also the Southerners’ attempts at adjustments to be made in view of the rapidly changing modern times.

Conflicts arising from group prejudice and discrimination are very much a part of most societies. Very often such conflicts are deeply ingrained in the cultural differences of people:

Prejudicial attitudes are acquired largely from parents, relatives and neighbours during early childhood, and are confirmed by habitual emotional reactions and are so strong and so deeply imbedded in the personality structure that they yield only to prolonged critical examination in a social situation that puts a premium on their opposite.\(^5\)

One can offer no rational justification for the prejudice against racial groups. There is discrimination against Jews, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Negroes and so on. However, it is the Negroes who have suffered the most from racial discrimination throughout American history. In this study the term Negro is used, instead of Afro-American for reasons of convenience and personal choice.

The social and economic subjugation of the Negroes can be traced back to the beginning of slavery in America as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century. The economic conditions of those days necessitated, encouraged and silently approved of slavery. There was the need for cheap labour in the vast Southern plantations and the slave trade brought huge profits to the slave owners.

After the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation granted freedom to the slaves. But it did not put an end to social discrimination. In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation was permissible under law and offered “separate but equal” facilities for the Negroes. They were segregated in housing, education, transport and recreational facilities. To sum up, segregation replaced slavery as an institution, especially in the South.

Sincere attempts were made since World War II to eliminate discrimination and accord equal status to the blacks. In 1954, the Supreme Court decreed that segregation was unconstitutional. Schools, colleges, the army, public transport, hotels and restaurants were all ordered to be desegregated. Public forms of segregation have completely been ended, but private forms of prejudice still persist. Though racism is illegal, and penalty for discrimination severe, there is a glass-ceiling which prevents the Negro from rising to the highest social position in various areas.

3. Racial Conflicts in O’Connor

The South, where slavery had been the strongest, could not take in much of the reforms imposed on society, and very often, the whites continued to be as prejudiced towards the blacks as before. O’Connor’s stories figuring black characters show the reaction of the whites towards desegregation, and their general prejudice towards the Negro race. Julian’s mother in “Everything That Rises Must Converge” thinks that the Negroes were better off when they were slaves on the plantations. Many Southern ladies of O’Connor’s days shared the opinion of Julian’s mother about the equality of the races: “It’s simply not
realistic. They should rise, yes, but on their side of the fence." In some stories, she shows that both the races are also capable of living in harmony, loving each other, and at the same time "knowing their place" in society.

Though the Negroes figure in several O’Connor stories, she does not make them the central characters. The only story in which the main character is a Negro is "Wildcat," one of her early stories which was neither published nor rewritten. This is the reason she gives for not making the Negroes figure more prominently in her fiction: "I don’t understand them the way I do white people. I don’t feel capable of entering the mind of a Negro. In my stories they're seen from the outside." Perhaps O’Connor seems to think she lacks the confidence to write convincingly about the Negroes. Hence her preference to write about her own race. But whenever she has written about the Negroes, she displays rare psychological insight in portraying the working of their minds. This proves that her apparent lack of confidence lacks a basis. There is some consolation in Alice Walker’s statement. According to Walker, one of O’Connor’s Southern contemporaries, “The essential O’Connor is not about race at all, which is why it is so refreshing, coming as it does, out of such a racial culture.”

O’Connor makes no mention in her stories about the atrocities committed by racists. Her reticence on the issue is quite surprising. Though she deals with racial relationships in several stories, the only story she wrote about the changing race relations is “Everything That Rises Must Converge.” In one of her letters to Father J.H. McCown, she tries to explain why she did not write more stories of

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this type: "I’d like to write a whole bunch of stories like that, but once you’ve said it, you’ve said it, and that about expresses what I have to say on That Issue."\textsuperscript{9} She speaks out more frankly in a letter to her friend "A", "The topical is poison. I got away with it in ‘Everything that Rises’ but only because I say a plague on everybody’s house as far as the race business goes."\textsuperscript{10} The comment shows her lack of sensitivity to one of the burning problems of the day. She dismisses the whole issue as topical and, therefore, ephemeral. This point of view is patently erroneous because O’Connor forgets the fact that it is from the topical that the writer rises to the universal.

O’Connor detests what she considers the moral pretensions of the reformists, liberals and integrationists, and their over-enthusiasm. She doubts the sincerity and the integrity of these people and wonders if the strict steps taken by the government will have the desired effect. She denounces the zeal shown by Howard Griffin who darkened his skin and lived with the Negroes to show them his solidarity. In a letter to her friend Maryat Lee, who herself was an integrationist and also a playwright, O’Connor comments that she prefers a “genuine Negro” to Griffin. Lee wanted O’Connor to meet James Baldwin in Georgia. But O’Connor quips, “I observe the traditions of the society I feed on – it’s only fair. Might as well expect a mule to fly as me to see James Baldwin in Georgia.”\textsuperscript{11} On a later occasion O’Connor tells Lee, “About Negroes, the kind I don’t like is the philosphising prophesying pontificating kind, the James Baldwin kind. Very ignorant but never silent. Baldwin can tell us what it feels like to be

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p. 537.
Negro in Harlem but he tries to tell us everything else too.”¹² O’Connor’s perception of the racial issue here appears to be unfortunately inadequate. When the whole of America is troubled about the complex race problem, she says, some how she does not like “to romanticize the race business to a ridiculous degree.”¹³ Her distrust of the liberals and integrationists, her ambivalence on the issue along with her wilful silence and the occasional unpleasant remarks she has made in her correspondence show a streak of racist conservatism. In this regard, we may say safely that she shares the racial prejudice of some of the Southern ladies she has portrayed in her stories. O’Connor being a product of the racist South, it is quite natural that she shares an antipathy towards the Negroes like the other members of her community at least at the subliminal level. She tries to sublimate such an irrational attitude at the conscious level of the mind. But the dichotomy is discernible to the observant readers because it reveals itself in the form of inner conflicts in the personalities of some of her characters.

It is true that she makes fun of the clownishness, slowness and the cunningness of her mother’s Negro farm hands Shot and Jack, in her letters to her friends and their counterparts in her fiction. On the evidence of her letters alone we may not label her a racist to the core. She also shows understanding and great respect for the Negroes: “The uneducated Southern Negro is not the clown he’s made out to be. He’s a man of very elaborate manners and great formality which he uses superbly for his own protection and to insure his own privacy.”¹⁴ O’Connor genuinely believed that any number of legislations could not make the two races to live in peace and harmony, at least in the South:

¹² Ibid., p. 1208.
For the rest of the country, the race problem is settled when the Negro has rights, but for the Southerner, whether he's white or colored, that's only the beginning. The South has to evolve a way of life in which the two races can live together with mutual forbearance. You don't form a committee to do this or pass a resolution; both races have to work it out the hard way.¹⁵

These words do not really show her resistance to integration. According to her what is essential to live in peace is mutual acceptance and charity, which is the foundation of her Christian belief. The racial problem has to be solved on the basis of true Christian charity.

O'Connor presents two Southern liberals in Julian of "Everything That Rises Must Converge" and Asbury of "The Enduring Chill". Both are victims of filial ingratitude and use spurious zeal for the equality of the Negroes as the weapon against their mothers, who practise racial discrimination. Their moral pretension and liberal self-satisfaction appear to be more serious offences than rank racial injustice. "Her chief concern is not with bigots who demean and degrade Negroes. She is exercised, instead, about the naive righteousness which besets enlightened people like herself and her readers. It was a more courageous act, in O'Connor's opinion, to write about liberal self-satisfaction than about racial injustice."¹⁶

When Julian accompanies his mother in the integrated bus to her weight-reducing class, he sits next to a Negro and borrows a box of matches. But he

¹⁵ Ibid.
realises he has no cigarettes and returns the matches. This annoys the Negro, but he resumes reading the paper. Julian muses that all his efforts to establish friendship with Negroes have been failures. He recalls that he once sat next a distinguished looking dark brown man, who had answered his question with a sonorous solemnity, but who turned out to be an undertaker. On another occasion, he sat down next to a Negro with a diamond ring on his finger and they exchanged some pleasantries. But before the Negro got down, he slipped a couple of lottery tickets into Julian’s hands. Julian next imagines his mother very ill and securing a Negro doctor for her. He has also a desire to participate in a sit-in-demonstration to show his solidarity towards the Negroes. He imagines bringing home a Negro woman as his fiancée, though with some horror. Like a child, Julian has an aversion and loathing for all dark forms. Inspite of all his moral pretensions and liberalism, he is not capable of accepting the Negro on equal footing. O’Connor seems to suggest the old graciousness of the antebellum South with its racial prejudice, which Julian’s mother represents is less dangerous than the self-congratulatory attitude of Julian who poses as an integrationist.

Like Julian’s mother, Asbury’s mother, Mrs. Fox in “the Enduring Chill,” is also a practitioner of racial prejudice. She is amazed and also amused at her son’s silly wish to write a play about Negroes. Asbury wants to find out what their interests are. According to Mrs. Fox, their interests are in doing as little as they could get by with. Asbury’s efforts to establish friendship with his mother’s black labourers, Randal and Morgan end in failure. He makes them smoke in his mother’s dairy and drink fresh warm milk. But they are smart enough to let Asbury drink and they themselves do not drink, because they know it would be injurious to health. Asbury later thinks that he is dying and wants to bid goodbye
to Randall and Morgan. He forces his mother to bring them to his bed-side. They pocket the two packs of cigarettes he offers them to smoke and they flatter him. The following dialogic exchange indicates their flattery: "I ain't ever seen you looking so well before", Randall said. . . .'Yessuh . . . I speak you ain't even sick.' . . .' You be up and around in a few days,' Morgan predicted." Then they begin to bicker among themselves and Mrs. Fox has to intervene to put an end to their quarrel.

Asbury's mother's Negro farm hands are thoroughly dishonest in their conversation with him. Asbury himself is dishonest in his dealings with them. He has no genuine interest in them. He pretends to be interested in them to hurt his mother's feelings, who does not like to mix freely with the Negroes.

Yet another aspect that we notice in Asbury's dealings with Randall and Morgan is that the illiterate black workers have better practical sense than the educated Asbury who poses to be a champion and advocate of the blacks against the tyranny of his racist mother. He wants to put an end to her sway over them. Here also he meets with failure. There is no evidence in the story to show that they have any complaint as such against Mrs. Fox. Like a regressive child, Asbury is capable of thinking only of himself and his comforts and wants everyone, including the black labourers of his mother, at his service.

In this story also, O'Connor seems to scorn the moral congratulatory attitude of the hero. It is a kind of false intimacy that Asbury tries to establish with the Negroes. He regresses and behaves like a curious child who likes to make new experiments and discoveries, how the Negroes "really felt about their

condition." But the real motive behind all this pretension of friendliness to the Negroes is to shock and annoy his mother who is incapable of thinking them innocent, and who shares the racial prejudice of her generation. No amount of legislation will free her kind of such attitude. Asbury's "... humanist substitute for a meaningful relationship, his phony liberalism, proves a miserable failure."¹⁸ Asbury's resentment and regressive behaviour find their expression in his instigating the black farm hands to demand their freedom. The Negroes are sensible enough to see through the insincere, immature strategies of the patronizing Asbury.

The conventions of society have given ordered places to different groups. "American norm-role definitions specify ... that mates should be selected from within the same social class, the same religious group, and the same racial group."¹⁹ The rural South is especially noted for its strict observance of such conventions.

In "The Displaced Person," Mrs. McIntyre is extremely happy and satisfied with the European refugee, Mr. Guizac, who is the very epitome of efficiency and hardwork. She has had a rough time with her farm hands and considers Mr. Guizac her "salvation." She thinks of dismissing the other workers, so she could pay him better. But when she comes to know of his plan to rescue his sixteen-year-old cousin from the concentration camp back in Poland by arranging to marry her to Sulk, one of Mrs. McIntyre's Negro farm hands, she sees the balance of life on her farm threatened. She decides to dismiss Mr. Guizac. She observes the conventions of the community in which she lives, where whites do not marry

blacks. "Mr. Guizac! you would bring this poor innocent child over here and try to marry her to a half-witted thieving black stinking nigger! What kind of a monster are you!" But Mr. Guizac insists that the girl does not really mind that her husband is black. She has been in the camp now for three years. But Mrs. McIntyre refuses to understand the miserable plight of the girl in the camp or Mr. Guizac’s enthusiasm to save her: "... that nigger cannot have a white wife from Europe. You can’t talk to a nigger that way. You’ll excite him and besides it can’t be done. May be it can be done in Poland but it can’t be done here and you’ll have to stop. It’s all foolishness." Traditional values and taboos are more sacred to people like Mrs. McIntyre than essential humanity:

Interracial relations between a white man and a black woman may have been tolerated by (white) men, but those between a black man and a white woman, though not unknown, represented the violation of a virtually unassailable taboo in Southern culture, the violation of idealized white womanhood—indeed, of the region’s most sacred value. This type of attitude towards inter-racial marital relationship is the remnant of the antebellum South, where the blacks were considered as subhuman or as property.

Mr. Guizac’s lack of knowledge, and the consequent failure to observe the customs of the society in which he lives, paves the way for his tragic end. Unlike the other whites, he shakes hands with the blacks and takes them on equal terms. "The foreigner poses the threat of an altogether different set of values to a

21 Ibid., pp. 313-14.
society that has managed to deal in its own way with issues of race, class and sex." Mr. Guizac is also imprudent in reporting the theft of a young turkey by Sulk. Mrs. McIntyre makes the Pole understand that all Negroes steal. The honest, hardworking refugee is the odd man in a place where all the rest are corrupt and dishonest, regardless of race. Mr. Shortley, Mrs. McIntyre’s white farm hand has a still (distillery) on her land. He smokes in the dairy, which is against the rule. And, Mrs. McIntyre is herself greedy, dishonest, and an opportunist for she at thirty married a seventy five year old man thinking him to be rich. He lived in splendour, and when he died, he was bankrupt and left her nothing but the farm. The Pole, with his foreign ways, efficiency, honesty, hardwork, uniqueness and goodness, proves to be “...as disruptive as any civil rights activist ever could be — more so, in fact.” He causes conflict without knowing it, through his not observing the age old customs and manners of society, particularly its rigid racism.

Mrs. McIntyre does not want the Displaced Person to continue working for her because she finds him totally strange, threatening to upset the normal life of her little kingdom — her farm. But she fails to fire him. Usually her workers left on their own. She tells the Catholic priest, Father Flynn, who brought him there, that the Pole is extra and that he has upset the balance around there. He does not fit in.

Everyone on the farm is either uneasy or repulsed by the Displaced Person’s presence on the farm. Mrs. McIntyre is afraid that the control of her farm might altogether slip out of her hand because Mr. Guizac has an independent

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24 Ibid.
way of doing things and she resents this and his outlandish mode of behaviour contrary to the mores of the society. At any rate, she wants to keep her authority intact, so she is willing to dismiss such an exemplary worker, though it means financial loss to her. Mr. Shortley and the Negroes are jealous and uneasy about the Pole's efficiency and knowledge of the machinery.

Though the population on the farm has differences of opinion in other matters, they are all united in their dislike and hatred of Mr. Guizac. He lies half-hidden under a small tractor making repairs. Mr. Shortley gets the larger tractor out and when he tries to park it on the slight incline, it rolls down towards the place where Mr. Guizac lies. No one shouts a word of warning to him. Just before the tractor reaches him, Mrs. McIntyre's, Mr. Shortley's and the Negro's eyes "come together in one look that froze them in collusion for ever..."25

The death of the Displaced Person does not make life secure for those who colluded for his death. The black and white workers depart and Mrs. McIntyre sells her livestock to butchers at a loss. She is completely disintegrated by her heavy burden of sin and is confined to her bed, waited upon by a Negro woman. She is very lonely and the only visitor she has is Father Flynn, who comes occasionally to instruct her in the doctrines of the Catholic Church, and to feed bread crumbs to the peafowls. Mrs. McIntyre had only contempt for religion, and God in any discussion embarrassed her as sex did her mother. It is ironic that inspite of her lack of respect for religion and contempt for the priest, he is the only visitor she has now.

In the story there is evidence to show that O'Connor intended the Polish refugee as a Christ figure. Mrs. McIntyre avers, "Christ was just another D.P." The Pole suffers for no offence of his own. Christ suffered to save mankind from sin and Mr. Guizac to save his cousin from the gas ovens in Germany. The religious tone of the story also lends a cosmic significance to the sacrificial death of the Pole. Those who colluded for his death charge him with miscegenation, a taboo in the South. Those who silently colluded for his death are themselves displaced. Their displacement is an ironic act of faith which they express quite unconsciously.

When we tend to take others for granted and relate to them as far as they meet our own needs, such relationships are bound to be fickle and selfish. Such allegiances have no lasting human or religious basis and purely conditioned relationships, which are regressive in nature. They often lead to unpleasantness, and disruption of communities.

When people plunge into relationship without understanding the situation and their own self-worth, and the attitudes of others, they tend to commit serious mistakes, and create unpleasantness. In their over-enthusiasm to be helpful and friendly in an alien place with alienated individuals, quite unconsciously, they call for trouble. At times, it is wiser to leave people with explosive nature to themselves so that there will be no hassles.

Negroes who have enough drive and initiative can get ahead of the whites, what with the Government protecting their rights, providing the... equal opportunities for education, job etc. Dr. Foley of "Judgement Day" is such a Negro. He wants Tanner the white squatter on his land to operate his still for

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26 Ibid., p. 320.
him if the latter wants to continue to live on the land he has bought. Dr. Foley remarks, "The day is coming . . . when the white folks IS going to be working for the colored and you might's well to get ahead of the crowd."\(^{27}\) Tanner's response to this remark is typical of his generation: "The governmint ain't got around yet to forcing the white folks to work for the colored."\(^{28}\) It is shocking and humiliating for to him to work for a Negro:

The sudden discovery that Negroes could buy land out from under whites was a shocking blow to Tanner's sense of racial superiority. The insolent black dentist represents for Tanner, the ultimate reversal of values, the intrusion of Northern principles into Southern society; the placing of the bottom rail on the top.\(^{29}\)

He would rather go and live with his daughter in New York than submit himself to such social degradation.

Tanner finds it exceedingly difficult to adjust himself to the new social situation in the city. Being terribly lonely, he longs for the company of his Negro friend back in Corinth, even though it meant becoming "a nigger's white nigger" instead of "sitting here looking out of this window all day in this no-place."\(^{30}\)

Tanner is the author of his own misery for he assumes the New York Negro to be like the ones he knew in Corinth. He had handled Thomson


\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 684.


Negroes at work in the sawmill at the point of his knife. He watches the Negro actor wearing horn-rimmed glasses, who has come to live next door to his daughter, and the Negro woman with bronze hair who accompanies him, with immense curiosity, and is anxious to establish rapport with them, in spite of his daughter's warning not to go over there trying to get friendly with them. "They ain't the same around here and I don't want any trouble with the niggers. . . . If you have to live next door to them, just you mind your business and they'll mind theirs. That's the way people were meant to get along in this world." But Tanner thinks that the Negro would like to talk to someone who understands him. When Tanner addresses him "preacher," the actor takes it for a racist slur and points out that he is not a preacher and not even a Christian, and abuses him, "I don't take no crap . . . off no wool-hat red-neck son-of-a-bitch peckerwood old bastard like you." He then slams him against the wall. It brings on a stroke and Tanner becomes very weak. Now dead or alive he wants to go back to Corinth. He does not want to be buried in New York.

Tanner's regressive tendency is seen in his fantasies. In them, he wistfully dreams of Coleman, and has reunions with him. He misses his friend very badly. He imagines that his Negro friend would come to the railroad station to receive his body bound homeward for burial. He even imagines himself playing a practical joke on his friends by sitting up in his coffin and shouting "Judgement Day" to them.

The secret of the success of the friendship between Tanner and Coleman is not exactly that the former knew how to "handle a nigger," but because the latter knew how to handle a white man. Tanner's maxim in his relationship with the

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31 Ibid., p. 688
32 Ibid., p. 690.
blacks is governed by a belligerent attitude: "The secret of handling a nigger was to show him his brains didn't have a chance against yours..."\textsuperscript{33} Both are equally aggressive, but soon they come to understand their need for each other. Tanner recognizes his double in Coleman: "...he had an instant's sensation of seeing before him a negative image of himself, as if clownishness and captivity had been their common lot."\textsuperscript{34} But Tanner is not prepared to think of Coleman as his equal. "For the sake of his own threatened pride, Tanner still maintains that Coleman was a lackey who could not resist the white man's domination."\textsuperscript{35} Though Tanner is dependent on Coleman for love, understanding and support, his racial pride will not let him recognize the Negro as his equal, which shows his regressiveness in terms of societal values.

When his daughter is away, Tanner makes one last attempt to reach Corinth and asks the black actor for help on the stairs. "Hep, me up Preacher. I'm on my way home."\textsuperscript{36} The infuriated Negro, who thinks he is insulted, thrusts Tanner against the spokes of the banister which results in his death. The Negro's anger knows no bounds. It is in fact not the misplaced anger of just one stray Negro, but the anger of a whole race against slavery, abuse and discrimination. Unfortunately, the object of this anger happens to be Tanner, who has unknowingly provoked the Negro actor. "Tanner's bumptious stupidity and the black actor's swollen rage are the sparks of everyday tragedy: they are problems

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 681.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 683

so recognizably American and unmistakably human that to deny them is in a sense to deny ourselves."\(^37\)

The Tanner-black actor relationship is marked by a complete ironic reversal of Tanner’s philosophy of “handling a nigger”. It is the Negro who dominates Tanner and reacts violently to what he considers to be the white man’s condescending attitude. Tanner is completely dependent on and is fully under the control of the black man, who mercilessly kills him. The violent death of Tanner and the inimical attitude of the black actor towards the old man, all speak of the social changes after the Civil Rights Movement:

Tanner’s downfall, his exile in New York, and death in the stocks are part of the terrible Saturnalia that is sweeping the South. An old order has been suspended, an old hierarchy inverted, and those who were once looked down upon rise against their betters in a festival of violence and abuse.\(^38\)

“Judgement Day” is a fine conclusion to a bunch of stories titled *Everything that Rises Must Converge*, which are remarkable for O’Connor’s portrayal of human relationship, with a compelling vision of reality.

The conflicts that are there within the individual and their destructive relations with the others are consequences of their inability to find their place in society, where man regardless of his race is displaced and rootless. Any attempt by people to establish rapport with alienated individuals will result either in total indifference or violence itself, when such an effort is not appreciated.


Patronising attitudes and inability to leave unfriendly people alone are often the result of ignorance and role confusion.

Racial prejudice is not something inborn, but acquired through contacts with people who have it. It is a kind of contagion. This point is illustrated by Nelson’s inability to recognise a Negro when he sees one on the train on his journey to Atlanta with his grandfather, Mr. Head in “The Artificial Nigger”. They both have been staying in an area where the last nigger was driven away twenty years before. A huge, rich, dignified, coffee-coloured man wearing expensive clothes passes before them. Mr. Head asks the boy:

‘What was that?’

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

‘What kind of man?’ Mr. Head persisted.

‘A fat man,’ Nelson said. He was beginning to feel that he had better be cautious.

‘You don’t know what kind?’ Mr. Head said in a final tone.

‘An old man,’ the boy said.

‘That was a nigger,’ Mr. Head said and sat back.

‘You said they were black,’ he said in an angry voice. ‘You never said they were tan. How do you expect me to know anything when you don’t tell me right?’

He felt that the Negro had deliberately walked down the aisle in order to make a fool of him and he hated him with a fierce
raw fresh hate; and also, he understood now why his
grandfather disliked them.\textsuperscript{39}

The Negro that walked down the aisle does not correspond to the stereotype picture that the grandfather has given the boy. However, Mr. Head has succeeded in making the boy prejudiced towards the blacks that they are an inferior race and there "... is a mysterious element to be reconciled with by excluding it from the rest of the community."\textsuperscript{40} This incident incurs certain guilt feelings in him and also serves to make him prejudiced towards coloured people.

We also note that inspite of the hate and dislike that Mr. Head tries to instil in the boy, he feels a strong attraction towards a huge Negro woman:

He stood drinking in every detail of her. His eyes travelled up from her great knees to her forehead and then made a triangular path from the glistening sweat on her neck down and across her tremendous bosom and over her bare arm back to where her fingers lay hidden in her hair. He suddenly wanted her to reach down and pick him up and draw him against her and then wanted to feel her breath on his face. He wanted to look down and down into her eyes while she held him tighter and tighter. He had never had such a feeling before.\textsuperscript{41}

Nelson will not openly admit this feeling to himself and surely never to his grandfather for fear of ridicule. Nelson’s secret fascination for the Negro


mother-figure, "a mountain of maternity," reminds us of the poignant truth that the boy had lost his mother when a small baby and has missed the warmth of maternal touch. He regresses to his lost infancy and wants to be hugged by his mother. The boy's latent sexuality is also aroused by the tremendous bosom and bare arms. This type of erotic description is rare in O'Connor. But one cannot fail to notice her great ability to fathom the feelings of the young boy who has missed a great deal in his life. The ten-year-old boy's response is perhaps more to a mother-figure than to a dark sexual figure. Racial conflicts manifest themselves at the rational level and not at the emotional level. When we begin to rationalise, we lose our filiations and affiliations.

The repression of our true feelings is often the result of our upbringing. It requires courage, integrity and honesty to admit to ourselves and others our true feelings. The young ones in any society often imbibe the prejudicial attitudes of their elders and readily conform to their ways. People who are prejudiced on account of caste, colour or creed, often unconsciously shift their frustration on to the object of their prejudice. This is a recurrent pattern of regressive behaviour in any society where individuals are prejudiced in their attitude towards other members of the society.

4. Landowner versus Tenants

O'Connor's stories dealing with landowners and tenants show a loose but clear tenancy system at work. The landowners often have hundreds of acres of land to cultivate and a dairy to run. The landholders are not very rich, but they cannot manage their farm by themselves. As a result, they depend upon white tenants and Negro labourers. Often the white hired hands are accommodated in a cottage on the farm near the landowner's house. Besides the regular pay they
receive, some of them have secret stills on the land where they serve. They are not very enthusiastic about carrying out the orders given them. With the growth of cities and the progress of industries, people prefer to work in cities where they are paid better. As a consequence, it is very difficult for the landowners to get dependable workers. Often they don’t have much choice. They have to run the farm with the kind of workers they get. Some of the landowners have a new tenant family every year. Sometimes, the tenants leave on their own, at other times they are packed off. The Negro labourers are often depicted as dishonest and lazy. They are also tolerated with a certain level of understanding because it is very difficult to get even such workers. Thus the tenancy system, as depicted in O’Connor’s stories, is getting weakened.

O’Connor’s stories give us a clear picture of the socio-economic class structure of her time and place. All the farmowners in O’Connor’s fiction, except Mrs. Ruby Turpin, are elderly widows or divorced women with a child or two, who run their farms with white hired hands and Negro labourers. Thus, we notice, that the stories with landowners and tenants form a pattern with a lot of stereotyping.

In stories dealing with landowners and tenants, we notice a three-tier class-structure at work:

i. The hard working landholders form “the good country people” who consider themselves decent and respectable.

ii. The hired hands who are lazy, irresponsible and shiftless belonging to the lower middle class forming the poor “white trash.”

iii. Finally, there is the Negro labourers who are often described as insincere, cunning, undependable and lazy.
The landowners are at the apex of this class-structure and very conscious of their social and economic superiority. They feel aggrieved at the shiftlessness and lack of compliance of their workers. The problem of getting dependable workers from among the lower class is reflected in several stories. In "Revelation" Mrs. Ruby Turpin laments, "... niggers don't want to pick cotton any more. You can't get the white folks to pick it and now you can't get the niggers — because they got to be right up there with the white folks." With the people's unwillingness to work on the farm, the system is getting debilitated. What is inferred here is that the regressive patterns affect the system too.

Mrs. May in "Greenleaf" becomes a farm owner after her husband's death. She is more than satisfied with her own hard work and looks around and appreciates her well-run farm. At the same time she indulges in self-pity: "Every thing is against you ... the weather is against you and the dirt is against you. They're all in league against you. There's nothing for it but an iron hand!" She has to manage her farm with unreliable farm hands. Her grown-up sons who live with her are indifferent to her plight. They will not milk a cow even for the purpose of saving her soul from hell. Mr. Greenleaf, her tenant has to be told three or four times to do a thing. He would never tell her about a sick cow until it was too late to call the veterinarian, and if her farm were on fire, he would call his wife to see the flames before he began to put them out. She looks down upon the trashy Greenleafs, especially Mrs. Greenleaf who is a spiritual healer with a "trashy" religion. She is jealous of the prosperity of the Greenleaf boys, thanks to the Government support to former soldiers. She admits that the Greenleafs have come along way—the Second World War was responsible for it. The

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42 Ibid., p. 638.
43 Ibid., p. 511.
smartest thing that they did was to get sent overseas and there to marry French women. According to Mrs. May they were both cunning enough to get wounded and they both now have pensions. Later, when they were relieved from the army, they took advantage of all the benefit provided by the Government. They went to the School of Agriculture, at the University — the tax-payers meanwhile supporting their French wives. They now live in a bungalow the Government has helped them to build. Mrs. May says, “If the war had made anyone . . . it had made the Greenleaf boys.” In twenty years, they will be “society.” She is so shocked and surprised to find the Greenleaf twins living so well:

Mrs. May snoops around their farm to find fault and discover instead a showplace of efficiency. The advanced technology and spotless milking room distress her anew. Evidence that the Greenleaf boys, sons of her hired hand and that prayer healer, are rising above her lays bare the fear and envy behind her tenacity. More for others means less for her.

She is not willing to give the credit of their success to their industry. She considers their success thrust upon them by the Government. She calls the Greenleafs the lilies of the field. For her, their success any way is undeserved. When Mr. Greenleaf asks Mrs. May if she is not buying a milking machine she replies that she is not assisted hand and foot by the Government. Her jealousy towards the Greenleafs knows no bounds, especially when she compares the Greenleaf twins to her lazy and quarrelsome boys.

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44 Ibid., p. 508.
A scrub bull belonging to the Greenleaf twins has strayed into Mrs. May's herd. Mr. Greenleaf's indolence allows the bull to escape when he accompanies her to shoot it. Now that the boys have become prosperous and have independent income they can afford to ignore her demand for the removal of the bull from among her herd.

As in the case with many of O'Connor's empowered women, Mrs. May's relationship with her workers consists of little more than constant demands and complaints of non-compliance. Having been raised on a steady diet of Mrs. May's whining and now being free from their economic dependence on her, the Greenleaf twins are glad to be able to turn even a more deaf ear to her than their father does.46

The power struggle between Mrs. May and Mr. Greenleaf ends up in Mrs. May being gored by the bull to death. "The Greenleaf bull is the symbol of the lower class destroying the obstacle to their advancement; he is the bullet of divine wrath and Greenleaf vengeance."47 However, their struggle for power and competition shows them to be regressive on account of their ambitions and jealousies. Mrs. May's effort to isolate herself from the Greenleafs whose cooperation she requires has far reaching consequence.

In protecting herself against the Greenleafs, she shuts herself off from the animating, generative spirit of Jesus on whom Mrs. Greenleaf calls during her healing rituals. The narrative

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suggests that disorder reigns on the earth and in the human heart when there is no mutuality, no unifying myth, and no community.48

Economic transactions involving landowners and tenants have a subtext of implications. This could be psychological or sociological. In the wake of transition of an economic kind, these are deep-going and long-lasting psychological patterns of regressions. The unpleasant surprises thrown up by the ever so shifting scenario affect the tenants. There is role confusion owing to the upgradation of their status, thanks to economic prosperity. A new self image emerges which cannot easily cut off the earlier moorings of situational realities. On the side of the landowners, there is mental turmoil, resulting from their inability to cope with the new situations. The result is a complex of negatives marked by helplessness, inadequacy, lack of self-confidence and even self-pity. But strangely enough, in O’Connor’s fiction the frustrated land owners seem to be projecting only one negative human feeling, namely, jealousy. The objective correlative as far as this regression is concerned is unfortunately not adequate.

In most of O’Connor’s stories, widows or divorced women have the need to run the farm with the help of tenants who accept these women’s authority grudgingly. The society of the fifties and early sixties as depicted in O’Connor stories appears to be hostile to these women, who assume a traditionally male role in managing the farms. Like Mrs. May in “Greenleaf,” they feel the need to control the lazy, irresponsible hired hands with “an iron hand.” The farm owner tenant relationship is thus based not on mutual understanding, or on the need for

co-operation, but on manipulation and the absence of compliance as a sign of protest, and the consequence is regression in relationships.

Mrs. May thinks that the Greenleafs do not obey her because she is "only a woman." She feels that her demand to remove the bull from her farm is turned down because of her lacking "a man to run this place." According to Peter A. Smith, "Mrs. May is ignored simply because she tries too hard to compensate for the lack of a strong male figure by being overtly demanding and critical." It is Mrs. May's feelings of inadequacy and helplessness that make her feel very strongly the absence of a man to manage the farm. Here the tenant is more of a threat to her than a real help in managing her farm. "The competition between Mrs. May and Mr. Grenleaf results in a power struggle that reveals the violence of the male, materialistic world suggested by both characters — perhaps especially by Mrs. May as she takes over the powerful male role of her husband." In order to manage her farm effectively, Mrs. May believes that she has to assert herself and thereby exercise an aggressive male role in order to meet the exigencies of her role as a farm manageress, a role which does not appear to her tenants acceptable at all. Mrs. May fears that ultimately her tenants will triumph over her. This is evident in her dreams and infantile fantasies:

The pursuit of material territory and the ability to transcend self indicate primitive natures in O'Connor's view. Both Mr. Greenleaf's and Mrs. May's ambitions are regressive and profane. In fact, Mrs. May's fear of being eaten — which is suggested in a dream suggested by the bull's munching on the

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hedge outside her window — suggests a regression to the oral stage of the infancy, when the infant compulsively takes the world through the mouth. Mrs. May dreams that something was eating her and her boys, and . . . eating everything until nothing was left but the Greenleafs on the little island all their own in the middle of what had been her place.51

Mrs. May's actions are motivated by her unconscious fear of being completely defeated and devastated by her rivals. This fear neurosis manifests itself in the form of fantasies with apparently no sequential connection with life events, even though Freud would argue that all fantasy trips are triggered by repressions of human feelings, urges and instincts with reference points in the past. But analysing the inner life of May, it would be easily evident that her feeling of jealousy was not repressed instantly but was permitted to trigger many allied feelings. Their culmination could be found in her fantasy with an emphasis on the oral stage indicative of the regression which is built in.

Some of O'Connor's landholders are very proud of their masterful handling of troublesome tenants. But such self-confidence, with a lack of insight into the cunningness and wickedness of other people, land these women in unexpected troubles. Mrs. Hopewell in “Good Country People” and Mrs. Cope in “A Circle of Fire” are instances of it. Mrs. Hopewell has managerial problems relating to the retaining of hired hands. “She had plenty of experience with trash. Before the Freemans she had averaged one tenant family a year. The wives of these farmers were not the kind you would want to be around you for very

51 Ibid., p. 42.
long." The reason for Mrs. Hopewell’s success with the Freemans is that they are not “trash.” They are “good country people.” The report that Mrs. Hopewell has got from the man whose name they have given as reference is that “... Mr. Freeman is a good farmer but his wife was the nosiest woman ever to walk the earth. She’s got to be into everything ... if she don’t get there before the dust settles, you can bet she’s dead. ... She’ll want to know all your business.”

Since Mrs. Freeman is very noisy, Mrs. Hopewell decides to “... give her the responsibility of everything, she would put her in charge. Mrs. Hopewell had no bad qualities of her own but was able to use other people’s in such a way that she never felt the lack. She had lived with the Freemans and had kept them for four years.”

Mrs. Hopewell is absolutely mistaken in thinking the Freemans good country people. It is her inability to discern the good and evil in others that ultimately leads to her downfall and being duped by the Bible sales-man who disappears with her daughter’s wooden leg and spectacles. Though Mrs. Hopewell claims that she has the resourcefulness and the cleverness to turn other people’s bad qualities for her own good, we notice that it is Mrs. Freeman who manipulates and controls her. Mrs. Hopewell is surely an utter failure in all her relationships. She has divorced her husband and is unable to get any filial love or gratitude from her daughter. She has had a succession of hired hands. All these show that she is hardly successful in her interactions with people. She establishes only negative and regressive sorts of relationships.

There are landowners in O’Connor’s fiction who claim to love their tenants and consider them to be their equals. But in actual practice it is only a

53 Ibid., p. 264
54 Ibid.
vainglorious boast. “Mrs. Hopewell liked to tell people that Glynese and Caramae were two of the finest girls she knew and that Mrs. Freeman was a lady and that she was never ashamed to take her anywhere or introduce her to anybody they might meet.”\(^{55}\) Beneath this condescending charity, we also notice Mrs. Hopewell’s class consciousness and feelings of superiority. Though she is prepared to introduce Mrs. Freeman as a lady, she is not willing to consider her as her equal.

Another example of this type of the landowner who professes love for her workers is Mrs. Ruby Turpin in “Revelation”. She allots the Negroes the lowest place in her scale of social hierarchy. She tells the group assembled in the doctor’s waiting room that she found enough niggers to pick cotton. But her husband had to go after them and take them home again in the evening. “They can’t walk that half a mile... I sure am tired of buttering up niggers, but you got to love em if you want em to work for you.”\(^{56}\) This type of social propriety and hollow charity as evidenced in characters like Mrs. Turpin and Mrs. Hopewell are mere pretensions. Such pretensions and hypocrisy on the part of individuals do not help any one to establish mature and lasting relationships. Such immature interactions are regressive, they rather break up human ties rather than build up relationships.

In studying the landowner-tenant relationship, we also notice that some of O’Connor’s hired labourers’ wives are very morbid, deriving sadistic pleasure narrating gruesome details of illness, death, rape etc., with a view to making their self-satisfied, shallowly optimistic landowners frightened and discomfitted. Mrs. Freeman in “Good Country People” is fascinated by the morbid aspects of

\(^{55}\) Ibid.
\(^{56}\) Ibid., p. 639.
life. She is attracted towards Hulga because of her artificial leg. She loves to narrate the morning sickness of her fifteen year old daughter who is pregnant. The pleasure she gets by narrating and listening to gruesome details of life is immense:

Mrs. Freeman had a special fondness for the details of secret infections, hidden deformities, assaults upon children. Of diseases, she preferred the lingering or incurable. Hulga had heard Mrs. Hopewell give her the details of the hunting accident, how the leg had been literally blasted off, how she had never lost consciousness. Mrs. Freeman could listen to it any time as if it had happened an hour ago.  

Mrs. Freeman's interest in the sordid aspects of life is a direct contrast to the cheerful optimism of Mrs. Hopewell. She derives happiness at the expense of causing a lot of discomfort to the listeners.

In "A Circle of Fire," we meet Mrs. Pritchard, the counterpart of Mrs. Freeman. The landowner of this story, Mrs. Cope, has a paranoic fear of fire, of troubles, and particularly, the fear that her woods might catch fire. Mrs Pritchard constantly gives her reports about illness, death etc. She would walk miles to attend a funeral. She loves to gossip about all sorts of calamities and derives an impish satisfaction out of such recitals. She shows excessive enthusiasm about a woman who conceived a child and gave birth to it in an iron lung. She is also very cynical, for when Mrs. Cope urges her to be grateful to God, her reply is that all she has got is four abscess teeth. Mrs. Cope's retort is that she should be

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57 Ibid., p. 267.
thankful because she does not have five. Mrs. Cope claims that she has the best kept place in the country because of her hardwork:

'I've had to work to save this place and work to keep it. . . . I don't let anything go ahead of me and I'm not always looking for trouble. I take it as it comes.'

'If it all come at once sometime', Mrs. Pritchard began.

'Just doesn't all come at once.' Mrs. Cope said sharply. 58

But Mrs. Pritchard wants Mrs. Cope to be ill at ease and also wants the last word in any argument. "Well, if it ever did . . . it wouldn't be nothing you could do but fling up your hands." 59 Mrs. Cope’s fear of troubles is so great that she does not even like to think about them. She has a fear of some metaphysical evil lurking about. She sees such evil in her Negro workers, who she thinks are as impersonal as nut grass. And as for the nut grass, it is an evil sent directly by the devil to destroy the place.

In farmowner-tenant relationship, as in other interactions, the intricacies of their contacts are brought out with a deft comic touch. In "The Displaced Person," Mrs. Shortley, the wife of the tenant thinks that Mrs. McIntyre will not talk to her about trashy people if she considers her also trash. Neither of them approves of trash. Mrs. McIntyre realises that she has been fooling away with sorry people. Both the niggers and the poor white trash have been undependable and dishonest: "... not a one of them left without taking something off this place that didn't belong to them." 60 When the efficient, hardworking Polish refugee, Mr. Guizac comes to the farm, Mrs. Shortley thinks that the Negroes

58 Ibid., p. 235.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., p. 293.
would be dismissed, just as tractors replaced mules. She even expresses sorrow over their plight; "I hate to see niggers mistreated and run out. I have a heap of pity for niggers and poor folks." By an ironic twist of events, it is not the Negroes who are displaced by the arrival of Mr. Guizac, but the Shortleys. Mrs. McIntyre turns against Mr. Guizac also and finds him extra when he acts against the custom and practice of the Southern society, when he plans to get his cousin married to one of Mrs. McIntyre's niggers. His ignorance of the pattern of social relationship in rural Georgia makes him lose his life and upset the apple pie order of the farm. The entire population on Mrs. McIntyre's farm is displaced ultimately.

O'Connor's farm owners are very proud of their industry and hard work and their enviable ability to run their farms efficiently, inspite of the poor quality help they get from their tenants. In fact lazy drones have no place on their farms. But none of these women are rewarded for their virtue of hard work and the resultant material prosperity. In O'Connor's value system, hard work does not appear to be a virtue at all, especially when it is devoid of charity. All these hard working women are punished, humiliated, or meet with violent deaths. They meet with severe judgement in one form or another for their pride, self-sufficiency, inhumanity and also for forgetting their essential feminity. "O'Connor's empowered women all sincerely believe that typically masculine, aggressive behaviour is the only way to overcome the misogyny inherent in the lower middle class workers they must control in order to keep their farms operating." This sort of domineering and manipulating relationship is

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61 Ibid., p. 298.
regressive and bound to end up in failure and in some cases, in violence and death.

These women are very class conscious and contemptuous of the lower classes. Mrs. Crater refers to Tom T. Shiflet in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," as "a poor disabled drifting man." Mrs. May when visiting the Greenleaf sons' farm notices three dogs rushing at her. They are "part hound and part spitz." And therefore, "She reminded herself that you could always tell the class of the people by the class of the dog..." O'Connor satirizes these self satisfied women who consider themselves superior to others.

O'Connor's landowner women are, in general, failures in their dealings with their tenants, just as they do not succeed in their interactions with their children. These ladies, control, dominate and manipulate their workers as they do their children. They tolerate their tenants because they cannot get anyone better. The farm hands know this and they do not owe any gratitude, loyalty or respect towards their employers. The result of such interactions based on domination and control is indicative of the regressive patterns in human behaviour.

In inter-racial relationship or in landowner-tenant relationship or in any other sort of social contacts, serious or continuous dissent, disagreements, and conflicts are detrimental to the quality and stability of relationships, and also to the person involved. A common source of frustration, dissatisfaction etc., is value difference. Whatever be the cause of conflicts, seriously discordant interactions at the social level are frustrating and hurtful, and hence instrumental in formulating a matrix of regressive styles as evidenced in O'Connor's fiction.

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