

University of Pardubice

Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

The Depiction of the Grotesque in “He” by Katherine Anne Porter and
“The Life You Save May Be Your Own” by Flannery O’Connor

Bachelor Thesis

2024

Jana Kopová

Univerzita Pardubice
Fakulta filozofická
Akademický rok: 2022/2023

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení: **Jana Kopová**
Osobní číslo: **H21202**
Studijní program: **B0231A090018 Anglický jazyk**
Specializace: **Anglický jazyk pro vzdělávání**
Téma práce: **Vyobrazení groteskna v dílech He od Katherine Anne Porter a The Life You Save May Be Your Own od Flannery O'Connor**
Téma práce anglicky: **The Depiction of the Grotesque in He by Katherine Anne Porter and The Life You Save May Be Your Own by Flannery O'Connor**
Zadávající katedra: **Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná bakalářská práce se zaměří na povídky *He* (1927) od Katherine Anne Porter a *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* (1955) od Flannery O'Connor, tedy na dílo autorek, které spadají do období éry "jižanské renesance". V teoretické části studentka zasadí výše zmíněné povídky do literárně-kulturního kontextu dané oblasti a pokusí se charakterizovat jižanskou prózu. Zvláštní důraz bude kladen na groteskní prvky. Autorka rovněž pojedná o vnímání hendikepovaných jedinců a důležitosti rodiny v jižanské kultuře. Analytický celek se bude soustředit na groteskní elementy a vyobrazení hendikepovaných postav ve výše zmíněné tvorbě. Srovnávací analýza bude založena na primární literatuře, kvalitních sekundárních zdrojích a na autorčině vlastním rozboru. Práci zakončí přehledné shrnutí daných zjištění.

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:
Rozsah grafických prací:
Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

Primární zdroje:

O'Connor, Flannery. *A Good Man Is Hard to Find: The Life You Save May Be Your Own*. London: Faber & Faber, 2019.

Porter, Katherine Anne. *Flowering Judas and Other Stories*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958.

Sekundární zdroje:

Arant, A. "A Moral Intelligence": Mental Disability and Eugenic Resistance in Welty's "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies" and O'Connor's "The Life You Save May Be Your Own". *The Southern Literary Journal* 44, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 69-87.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24389010?searchText=flannery+O'Connor+life+you+save+may+be+your+own&search-default%3A6c63dae154b2330ae811dcd94f5319c2>

Crow, Charles L. *A Companion to American Gothic*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2014.

Davis, Lennard J. *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Flora, Joseph M., Lucinda H. Mackethan. *The Companion to Southern Literature*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002.

Gray, Richard. *A History of American Literature*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012.

Jorgensen, Bruce W. "The Other Side of Silence": Katherine Anne Porter's "He" as Tragedy. *Modern Fiction Studies* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 394-404.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26281227?searchText=katherine+anne+porter+disability+he&searchUri=%2Faction%2Fdefault%3A183b41e5d33055c11b0d18b12198b00d>

Moddelmog, Debra A. "Narrative Irony and Hidden Motivations in Katherine Anne Porter's "He". *Modern Fiction Studies* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 405-413.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26281228?searchText=katherine+anne+porter+He&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasic%2Fdefault%3A9cfa1358d776ffe1d13d05a3e8e1194f8&seq=2>

Procházka, Martin, Justin Quinn, Hana Ulmanová, Erik S. Roraback. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2002.

Spiegel, Alan. "A Theory of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction." *The Georgia Review* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1972): 426-437.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41396901?searchText=theory+of+the+grotesque&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasic%2Fdefault%3Adb8f5f397131bed41ce8e00f2bac4cdc>

Westling, L. "Flannery O'Connor's Mothers and Daughters." *Twentieth Century Literature* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 510-522.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/441199?searchText=flannery+o+connor&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3Fdefault%3Aa8872759ae32c900f3b546ab80ef69c0>

Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Mgr. Petra Kalavská, Ph.D.**
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **2. dubna 2023**
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **30. března 2024**

doc. Mgr. Jiří Kubeš, Ph.D. v.r.
děkan

Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D. v.r.
vedoucí katedry

V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2023

Prohlášení autora

Prohlašuji:

Práci s názvem The Depiction of the Grotesque in “He” by Katherine Anne Porter and “The Life You Save May Be Your Own” by Flannery O’Connor jsem vypracovala samostatně. Veškeré literární prameny a informace, které jsem v práci využila, jsou uvedeny v seznamu použité literatury.

Byla jsem seznámena s tím, že se na moji práci vztahují práva a povinnosti vyplývající ze zákona č. 121/2000 Sb., o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon), ve znění pozdějších předpisů, zejména se skutečností, že Univerzita Pardubice má právo na uzavření licenční smlouvy o užití této práce jako školního díla podle § 60 odst. 1 autorského zákona, a s tím, že pokud dojde k užití této práce mnou nebo bude poskytnuta licence o užití jinému subjektu, je Univerzita Pardubice oprávněna ode mne požadovat přiměřený příspěvek na úhradu nákladů, které na vytvoření díla vynaložila, a to podle okolností až do jejich skutečné výše.

Beru na vědomí, že v souladu s § 47b zákona č. 111/1998 Sb., o vysokých školách a o změně a doplnění dalších zákonů (zákon o vysokých školách), ve znění pozdějších předpisů, a směrnicí Univerzity Pardubice č. 7/2019 Pravidla pro odevzdávání, zveřejňování a formální úpravu závěrečných prací, ve znění pozdějších dodatků, bude práce zveřejněna prostřednictvím Digitální knihovny Univerzity Pardubice.

V Pardubicích dne 25.03.2024

Jana Kopová v. r.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express a sincere gratitude to my supervisor Mgr. Petra Kalavská, Ph.D. who guided me and helped me throughout the whole process of writing this thesis.

I would also like to thank my wonderful parents, the rest of my family and my boyfriend who were always patient and supportive, and who motivated me not to give up.

ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis investigates the depiction of the grotesque and its relation to handicap in two short stories “The Life You Save May Be Your Own” written by Mary Flannery O'Connor and “He” by Katherine Anne Porter. The paper attempts to identify the influence the child’s handicap has on its mother and how she takes care of the child. The paper also attempts to characterize the literary phenomenon American Southern Renaissance in literary and cultural context.

KEYWORDS

literature, family, handicap, American Southern Renaissance, grotesque, protagonist, Mary Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” “He”

NÁZEV

Vyobrazení groteskna v dílech „He“ od Katherine Anne Porter a „The Life You Save May Be Your Own“ od Flannery O'Connor

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá vyobrazení groteskna a jeho provázanost s handicapem v dílech “The Life You Save May Be Your Own” od Mary Flannery O'Connor a “He” od Katherine Anne Porter. V rozboru těchto dvou povídek je analyzován způsob, jakým handicap dítěte ovlivňuje jeho matku a jak se také daná matka o toto dítě stará. Práce se také pokouší charakterizovat americkou jižanskou renesanci v literárním a kulturním kontextu.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

literatura, rodina, handicap, americká jižanská renesance, groteskno, hlavní postava, Mary Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, “The Life You Save May Be Your Own”, “He”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	8
1. AMERICAN SOUTHERN LITERATURE IN CULTURAL CONTEXT	10
2. AMERICAN SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE	14
3. GROTESQUENESS AND HANDICAP IN RELATION TO SOUTHERN MOTHERHOOD.....	19
4. GROTESQUENESS AND HANDICAP IN RELATION TO MOTHERHOOD IN “THE LIFE YOU SAVE MAY BE YOUR OWN”	23
5. GROTESQUENESS AND HANDICAP IN RELATION TO MOTHERHOOD IN “HE”	30
CONCLUSION.....	39
RESUMÉ	41
BIBLIOGRAPHY	44

INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner, Truman Capote, Harper Lee, Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers. These, apart from many other names which could be listed, are all well-known writers that one may come across while reading various books, articles or essays concerning the American Southern literature. That the region of the American South is reflected in its literature is not surprising, as the main function of regional literature is precisely this – to reflect the region. However, what differs the American Southern literature from other literatures is the fact that it had started rather late. This idea is further supported by several authors who date the American Southern literature in the first half of the twentieth century. This period of American Southern literature is generally referred to as the American Southern Renaissance. This literary phenomenon played a huge part in the reinvigoration of the American Southern literature. During this period, many names of authors, even some mentioned above, started to occur. The two names which are at the centre of this paper are Mary Flannery O'Connor and Katherine Anne Porter.

The two female writers, Mary Flannery O'Connor, an essayist, novelist and short-story writer, and Katherine Anne Porter, similarly to O'Connor, an essayist, novelist and short-story writer, but also a poet, political activist and journalist, are not chosen for this thesis aimlessly. Not only did these two writers know each other or share a similar career or religious faith, but most importantly, are two of the most known writers of the already mentioned literary phenomenon, who in great quality mirror the main features of the American Southern Renaissance. Mary Flannery O'Connor and Katherine Anne Porter are most known for their productive careers, mainly for their short stories. What they shared the most was their writing style, which can best be understood from O'Connor's quote: "I am not afraid that the book will be controversial, I'm afraid it will not be controversial." Both O'Connor and Porter chose topics which are uneasy to read, yet tremendously interesting and significant for the development of the American Southern Renaissance. The great contribution of the two writers to this literary phenomenon is in great quality mirrored in their two short stories: "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" written by Mary Flannery O'Connor and "He" by Katherine Anne Porter. The aim is to analyse the depiction of handicap and grotesqueness in the two short stories mentioned, especially their influence on the

relationship between a mother and a disabled child. The attention is also being paid to the impact the handicap of children can have on the mothers, and to how it influences their decisions and manners in which they take care of their children. The reason why these two short stories are chosen for the analysis is mainly based on the similarities between them, either considering the parallels between the main characters, or the choices of topics.

Firstly, the research focuses on the cultural background shaping the American Southern literature in general. Secondly, the research provides information about when, why or how the American Southern Renaissance started, with the attention being paid to its most prominent features, which are for example the already mentioned grotesqueness and handicap. These features are what makes the American Southern Renaissance the most extraordinary. The following analysis examines the grotesqueness and handicap as mentioned above, based on the contexts provided in “He” and “The Life You Save May Be Your Own.” The analysis does not examine the two short stories chronologically. Firstly, it examines the short story “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” as the manner in which the mother behaves and takes action is less extreme than in the short story “He,” which should enable the reader to understand the behaviour of the two mothers gradually. Furthermore, the analysis is divided into several sections. Each analysis firstly introduces the author. Secondly, an overview of the short story in general is included, and lastly, an analysis of each of the protagonists who indicate grotesque features follows. To make the arguments more objective, opinions and claims of authors examining either the same topic, or the same two short stories, are provided in both the research part and the analytical part.

1. AMERICAN SOUTHERN LITERATURE IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

The American South has been a topic of many studies concerning history, literature and culture. Considering the Southern cultural background, it is very often reflected in the American Southern literature. There are certain features which make it specific and unique. These features are for example strong family ties, strong link with the past, sense of place or storytelling tradition. For example, the importance of family is pervasive in most southern writings for many various reasons. Firstly, it is important to define what most Southern writers mean when they refer to a family. According to Robert O. Stephens, the Southern people mostly consider family to be all blood relations, not only their closest relatives.¹ This means that when a family of a Southern person is described, it usually refers to many generations and therefore, many people. Stephens explains that family was tremendously important to the Southern people because the family members were very often the only people one would interact with – there were not many people to talk to during the day, as the American South was mostly agricultural, and therefore, many people spent most of their time working on their fields, spending the whole day with their family members.² Not only was family a source of social interactions and social patterns, but also one of the reasons for the strong historical consciousness. Stephens suggests that given the storytelling tradition, most family members knew a large amount of information about their ancestors. The past of their family was a very sensitive topic, yet tremendously important to know in order to, for example, learn from the mistakes of their ancestors.³ However, it might come as a surprise that although the importance of family is, as already mentioned, pervasive in most southern writings, Hana Ulmanová and Erik S. Roraback claim that “[r]esponsibility to family in the traditional sense of the word is rather rare [...]”⁴ This might be surprising because as it was previously mentioned, on the one hand, family is a very important and an essential part of a life of a Southerner. On the other hand, it

¹ Robert O. Stephens, “Family,” in *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, ed. Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, and Todd W. Taylor (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 248.

² Stephens, “Family,” 247.

³ Stephens, “Family,” 248.

⁴ Hana Ulmanová, and Erik S. Roraback, “American Southern Literature,” in *Lectures on American Literature*, ed. Martin Procházka, Justin Quinn, Hana Ulmanová and Erik S. Roraback (Praha: Karolinum, 2002), 376.

seems that when it comes to a commitment to the family, or to a decision as to whether to save oneself over the family, the responsibility to oneself is more important. This idea is further supported by Stephens who further suggests that in literature, southern families are depicted as “anything but happy,”⁵ which might come as a surprise too, considering the depiction of southern family previously mentioned. Conclusively, the family is one of the most important factors shaping a Southern character and literature, where family tends to be in the centre of the story. Not only because of its ever-presence, but also because of it being a source of knowledge and social patterns, no matter the result as to whether the person stays committed to his/her family or not.

Another feature shaping the American Southern literature is the strong connection to the land to which the family of a Southerner was bound the most. A term used by many theoreticians is a term sense or awareness of place which occurs in writings on the topic of the connection of Southerners to the American Southern land. For Example, Robert O. Stephens claims that a sense of place is a connection of all members of a family to not only the geographical region, but also, for example, to the house or the whole farm at which the family had been living for generations.⁶ This means that he considers the reason for the strong awareness of place to be closely connected to family. As it was previously mentioned, families usually spent most of the time working on their fields together, probably for generations. Therefore, it is not surprising that their ties to the land were so strong considering the fact that even their ancestors worked on the same fields as themselves. This also connects Stephen’s perception of the awareness of place with the perception of the term suggested by Hana Ulmanová and Erik S. Roraback – the connecting factor is the past. Ulmanová and Roraback see the Southern awareness of place as a feature of Southern literature which is closely connected to the strong historical consciousness.⁷ The authors expand on this idea by naming a number of authors belonging to the American South who in most cases used to write stories which took place in the town or region in which they were born. Therefore, the authors connected both past and sense of place when writing their pieces, which means that Ulmanová and Roraback consider the sense of place to go

⁵ Stephens, “Family,” 215.

⁶ Stephens, “Family,” 249.

⁷ Hana Ulmanová, and Erik S. Roraback, “American Southern Literature,” in *Lectures on American Literature*, ed. Martin Procházka, Justin Quinn, Hana Ulmanová and Erik S. Roraback (Praha: Karolinum, 2002), 227.

hand in hand with the strong relationship with the past. Conclusively, the ties of people living in the American South to the land were based not only on the physical land on which they might have been living for generations, but also on the historical conception of the land.

Strong historical consciousness was mentioned several times before, either in relation to family, which is a source of knowledge about the past, or in connection to the relationship to the Southern land, which was seen as a connecting element with one's ancestors. Nevertheless, there are other reasons for the past being a sensitive, yet an important topic to Southern people, too. The above-mentioned reasons for the strong historical consciousness seemed to be rather positive, however, the historical consciousness was, in relation to certain topics, seen as rather opposite of positive. There are authors who claim that what keeps being a sensitive topic in the American South considering history, apart from the above-mentioned family and land, is the Civil War, which the South had lost. The Civil War is mentioned by several authors as a reason for the Southern historical consciousness and perception of the nation's identity. It is also present in many Southern writings, although it might not be the main focus of the story. For example, Hana Ulmanová and Erik S. Roraback mention that the South was "crushingly defeated,"⁸ and so the Southerners suddenly woke up from the American dream where failure does not happen very often.⁹ It is not surprising that not only did this conflict influence the American Southern literature, but the Southern identity, too. Bradford A. Wineman suggests that the Civil War changed the perception of Southerners, not only the perception of oneself but also how they are perceived by outsiders.¹⁰ The American South was certainly not proud of the fact that they had lost the war, and therefore, it seems to be a very traumatic experience. Not only because the South had lost, but also because many families were destroyed by the conflict, too, and taking into consideration how important the family was to Southern people, it is not surprising that the Civil War was not what the Southerners would like to be reminded of. Richard D. Rust mentions this depressive experience as a "burden of the

⁸ Ulmanová et al., "American Southern Literature," 227.

⁹ Ulmanová et al., "American Southern Literature," 227.

¹⁰ Bradford A. Wineman, "Review: Southern Identity and Memory: A Review Essay," *American Studies International* 42, no. 2/3 (June-October 2004): 249.

past in the present,”¹¹ described by William Faulkner, which is evident in many Southern writings. It might come as a surprise then, that according to Rust, the writers of the American South producing writings on this topic were rather sentimental and used romance in combination with the horrible events of the Civil War.¹² It is possible that this might have been one of the strategies to cope with the lost the South had suffered. To conclude, history was seen as a sensitive topic to Southern writers, no matter whether in a positive or in a negative way.

¹¹ Richard D. Rust, “Civil War,” in *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, ed. Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, and Todd W. Taylor (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 155.

¹² Rust, “Civil War,” 155.

2. AMERICAN SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE

The author of the novel *The Confederate Spy*, a Confederate chaplain from Mississippi, starts the preface of his novel with these words: “The South must have a literature of her own. If we could not gain our political, let us establish at least our mental independence.”¹³ Although the viewpoint on Southern independence changed rapidly throughout the future, the idea to create a unified picture of American Southern literature seemed to be up-to-date for many following years. Not only did the author of the quote, but so did other authors seek for literary independence, as there were literary critics who believed that American literature is only a branch of European literature. This need to be original and independent prevailed up to the 2nd half of the 20th century, when the American Southern literature started to flourish.

Considering the writing style of American Southern writers, Richard Gray suggests that the viewpoint of Southern writers on certain topics differed from other authors significantly. For example, the writers of the American West had a tendency to support the American dream and depict America in a positive way – they depicted it as a “land of possibility.”¹⁴ He calls this depiction a “Western myth.”¹⁵ On the contrary, he further claims that the depiction of America by Southern writers differed – both the literature and the writers, sometimes even the main characters, were:

preoccupied with place and confinement rather than space and movement, obsessed with the guilt and burden of the past, riddled with doubt, unease, and the sense that, at their best, human beings are radically limited and, at their worst, tortured, grotesque, or evil.¹⁶

Gray puts this depiction in contrast with the previous one and calls it a “Southern myth.”¹⁷ Although grotesqueness is mostly evident after the 1910s when the Southern Renaissance started, the term occurs even when defining the American Southern literature in general. By the word “burden,”¹⁸ Gray might refer to the already

¹³ Jay B. Hubbell, “On Southern Literature,” *Texas Review* 7, no. 1 (October, 1921): 9.

¹⁴ Richard Gray, *A History of American Literature* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 105.

¹⁵ Gray, *History*, 105.

¹⁶ Gray, *History*, 105.

¹⁷ Gray, *History*, 105.

¹⁸ Gray, *History*, 105.

mentioned Civil War or for example to slavery. Together with the strong awareness of place, they are what defines Southern culture. Therefore, it is not surprising that these features were reflected in many Southern writings. Susan H. Irons supports this idea by claiming that it was during the 1830s already when the question of what exactly the American Southern literature is like entered discussions of many critics. Irons supports the idea that it was shaped by the need to establish a unified picture of the American Southern literature, but she also suggests that the main aim of the early Southern writers was to “reflect the South.”¹⁹ This might come as a surprise as during the 1st half of the 20th century, it seemed that the authors departed from this aim, as the depiction of the American South was rather unflattering when it comes to the depiction of the nature of Southerners.

It was during the 1910s when, according to Hana Ulmanová and Erik S. Roraback, a literary critic H.L. Mencken described the American South as “a cultural desert.”²⁰ There were not many people producing literature as, as it was previously mentioned, agriculture and work on people’s fields was very demanding and people simply had no time to think of writing any pieces of literature, and therefore rather focused on storytelling traditions. However, the authors further suggest that in the 1940s and the 1950s, “one could not fire a pistol in the air without hitting a writer.”²¹ The authors further name a number of writers by which they support their claim that during this time period, many people started to produce literature of various kinds. This time period is very often referred to as an American Southern Renaissance. Comer Vann Woodward supports this idea by adding another, very similar description of the American Southern Renaissance, also by H.L. Mecken, who describes this period as a time when “poets [...] had become as common as evangelists or snake-oil salesmen.”²² Of course, not only were the writers of this time period poets, but also writers of prose. Woodward also pays attention to the difficulty of the term, as he belongs to a group of authors who claim that there was nothing like literature in the American South before the already mentioned 1940s and the 1950s. Therefore, he refers to it as to a birth, not

¹⁹ Susan H. Irons, “Southern Literature, Idea of,” in *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, ed. Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, and Todd W. Taylor (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 828.

²⁰ Ulmanová et al., “American Southern Literature,” 225.

²¹ Ulmanová et al., “American Southern Literature,” 225.

²² Comer Vann Woodward, “Why the Southern Renaissance?,” *The virginia Quaterly Review* 51, no. 2 (Spring, 1975): 2.

a rebirth.²³ There is a number of authors who seem to agree with Woodward, as for example Michael Kreyling, who describes the American Southern Renaissance as a “phoenix-like resurrection.”²⁴ Considering the fact that phoenix is believed to rise from ashes, the metaphor Kreyling used might resemble the literary situation in the American South as described in previous lines. This means that there are authors who consider the writers of the American Southern Renaissance to be the first generation of Southern writers.

Not only is the American Southern Renaissance hard to define as there are many interpretations, but the usage of the term may differ, too. Although most authors use the term Renaissance, for example Jeffrey J. Folks uses a term “Renascence.”²⁵ Yet, he describes the same literary phenomenon. Folks further suggests that the Renascence was so influential that the authors of this period “created a major movement in the twentieth-century American literature”²⁶ and that they “brought a new critical temper and self-consciousness to the representation of the region.”²⁷ Although he does not provide any further details as to whether he considers the writers of the Southern Renaissance to be the first generation or not, it seems that he believes that the authors made a significant contribution to the literary development of the Southern region, no matter whether they are considered the first generation of the American Southern writers or not. This is what authors writing various essays and further pieces of literature on the topic of American Southern Renaissance agree on – the contribution of the Renaissance to the development of the American Southern literature is significant.

The American Southern Renaissance is a literary phenomenon which is rather specific, for example for the choice of topics or the choice of the main characters. Considering the main characters, what distinguishes them from the characters of any other literary genre or period, they are usually described as grotesque and are very often handicapped. Several authors claim that this was one of the reasons why the main

²³ Woodward, “Southern Renaissance,” 222.

²⁴ Michael Kreyling, “The Renaissance of the Southern Renaissance,” *The Mississippi Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (Winter, 1980-81): 60.

²⁵ Jeffrey J. Folks, “Southern Renascence,” in *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, ed. Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, and Todd W. Taylor (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 835.

²⁶ Folks, “Southern Renascence,” 840.

²⁷ Folks, “Southern Renascence,” 840.

characters suffering from physical or psychical deformities were very often excluded from the society. However, the grotesqueness and its relation to handicap will be discussed later, as the definition of the term grotesqueness is rather complex and needs deeper examination.

Taking the topics of American Southern Renaissance writers into consideration, Jeffrey J. Folks claims that what the writers of the American Southern Renaissance period focused on the most was a “realistic presentation of social conditions in the South.”²⁸ This is not a new approach as for example the writers of social realism wanted to project the same, however, not in the American Southern region, but anywhere else in the world, which Max Rieser calls a “reflection of reality.”²⁹ Considering Folks, he dates the Renaissance mainly in the already mentioned 1940s and 1950s. The social conditions in the South were not very good, taking into consideration that this was a (post)-World War II period. Therefore, Folks suggests that it is not surprising that the “writers of the Renaissance displayed an interest in realism and naturalism as narrative forms.”³⁰ Although Folks did not provide any further explanation as to why the authors used the naturalistic narrative form, it might stem from the general pessimism after the World War II. This idea is further supported by Richard H. King, who uses a term “sense of the tragic,”³¹ which he uses to describe the overall style in which writers of the Southern Renaissance used to write.

The somewhat pessimistic mood is also evident in the topic of loneliness, which is very frequently present in Southern Renaissance stories. This idea is supported by Joseph Allen Bryant who names a number of writings of the American Southern Renaissance period where the main characters were rather lonely.³² Bryant further explains that one of the reasons why certain characters might have felt lonely was either that they were excluded from the society, sometimes even from their own families, because they were grotesque – therefore, different – or that the stories usually

²⁸ Folks, “Southern Renaissance,” 835.

²⁹ Max Rieser, “The Aesthetic Theory of Social Realism,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 16, no. 2 (December 1957): 237.

³⁰ Folks, “Southern Renaissance,” 840.

³¹ Richard H. King, *A Southern Renaissance, The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 5.

³² Joseph A. Bryant, *Twentieth-Century Southern Literature* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 138.

took place in the “Deep South”,³³ where one would not interact with many people during a day. However, the fact that the characters might have felt lonely does not mean that they had to be physically alone only. Louise Blackwell claims that the main characters of Southern Renaissance stories usually lived in a large family. She explains that family was “a strong social institution in the South”³⁴ and that it “had and still has a healthy influence.”³⁵ Contrastingly, it was already mentioned that Stephens suggests that in literature, southern families are depicted as “anything but happy.”³⁶ This means that although the characters were usually part of a family, they might not feel like belonging to it. The families in the story might seem strong and well-functioning. However, the reader slowly finds out that the opposite is the truth – usually, the families were rather dysfunctional. Furthermore, it is one of the reasons why the main characters of the American Southern Renaissance writings were usually described as “misfits,”³⁷ not only did they not belong to for example a community, but to their family, too. Therefore, it is not surprising that family was usually in the centre of the story. Conclusively, although it seems that the writers of the American Southern literature in the 1940s and 1950s wanted to focus on a realistic depiction of how people lived in the American South, the main aim might have been to criticize the nature of Southerners. The main characters were probably not accepted because they were somehow different – usually handicapped and grotesque. This might have drawn attention to a general hypocrisy, distrust and a sense of detachment of the nation from anything that was out of normal, no matter whether the grotesque figure was a member of one’s family or a complete stranger.

³³ Bryant, *Twentieth-Century*, 148.

³⁴ Lousie Blackwell, “Flannery O’Connor and the Southern Renaissance,” *Revista de Letras* 17 (1975): 102.

³⁵ Blackwell, “Flannery,” 102.

³⁶ Stephens, “Family,” 215.

³⁷ Martin Procházka, Justin Quinn, Clare Wallace, Hana Ulmanová, Erik S. Roraback, Pavla Veselá, David Robbins, *Lectures on American Literature*, 2nd ed., (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2007), 375.

3. GROTESQUENESS AND HANDICAP IN RELATION TO SOUTHERN MOTHERHOOD

It was already mentioned that family usually stands in the centre of the American Southern Renaissance stories. Therefore, it is not surprising that the main characters were usually members of a large family, and therefore, the whole story usually took place in a southern family environment. It might come as a surprise then, that the main characters of Southern Renaissance stories were very often not accepted by their family members. The reason for this are their grotesque qualities and their handicap.

Firstly, it is important to define what grotesqueness means. Molly Boyd explains the term grotesqueness as “anything deviating from an explicit or implicit norm: bizarre, incongruous, ugly, unnatural, fantastic, abnormal,”³⁸ which she uses to describe the overall appearance of the main characters. She also claims that grotesqueness stems from the overall impression a reader can get based on the plot events, which usually depict an “impossible or horrific event narrated matter-of-factly and with great detail.”³⁹ Most authors examining the term grotesqueness use almost the exact same explanation – grotesqueness stems from the main protagonist’s appearance or from the overall character of such story. Taking the appearance into consideration, grotesqueness is very often connected with various sorts of both physical handicap and mental deformities, which can even overlap – Alan Spiegel claims that a grotesque character “always appears in Southern fiction as either a physically or mentally deformed figure.”⁴⁰ Physical and mental deformities are also mentioned by Boyd again, who further explains that the “[l]iterary grotesques appear in many recognizable forms: as figures, or human beings who appear dehumanized because of physical deformity, the discordance of body and soul (or mind), [...]”⁴¹ There are authors who even consider the grotesqueness and handicap to somehow go “hand in hand together,”⁴² as it co-occurs so often that it is almost inseparable. Therefore, it is not

³⁸ Molly Boyd, “The Grotesque,” in *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, ed. Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, and Todd W. Taylor (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 321.

³⁹ Boyd, “Grotesque,” 321.

⁴⁰ Alan Spiegel, “A Theory of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction,” *The Georgia Review* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1972): 2.

⁴¹ Boyd, “Grotesque,” 321.

⁴² Martin Procházka, Justin Quinn, Clare Wallace, Hana Ulmanová, Erik S. Roraback, Pavla Veselá, David Robbins, *Lectures on American Literature*, 2nd ed., (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2007), 408.

surprising that “[d]isability, particularly physical disability, has long been used as a narrative tool in the tradition of the Southern grotesque, [...]”⁴³ Conclusively, the term grotesqueness is usually used to characterize anything that would not please one’s eyes, for example if an appearance of a person is taken into consideration, or a situation which is absolutely out of normal. Moreover, it seems that handicap and grotesqueness simply co-exist and co-occur in most writings of the American Southern Renaissance, as to be handicapped simply means to be grotesque, therefore, different and not accepted.

Taking the reasons into consideration as to why the writers of the American Southern Renaissance used grotesqueness in their stories, many writers on this topic mention a general artists’ need to criticize the nature of Southerners. Boyd suggests that grotesqueness in general is supposed to provoke “a humorous response.”⁴⁴ This means that the story describes a person or an event which is so horrible that it should simply make the reader laugh. Spiegel adds that grotesqueness should also “bring him [the grotesque character] closer to us [the readers].”⁴⁵ It seems that the purpose was to create a connection between readers and the main characters through amusement which was, however, used in situations that were not amusing at all. Boyd further adds that “[t]he use of the grotesque may either be the expression of the artist’s profound sense of dislocation or alienation.”⁴⁶ To expand on this idea, she mentions Flannery O’Connor who used “grotesque images of deformity to indicate the moral and spiritual incompleteness of characters and the essentially fallen or corrupt nature of all men.”⁴⁷ O’Connor is mentioned several times as she is known for her witty narrations which, however, describe utterly controversial family issues. Conclusively, the authors probably used grotesque figures and plot twists to aim at readers’ emotions in order to emphasize intra-family problems they considered alarming. Their main goal was to criticize the overall hypocritical society and the fact that because an individual is different, he/she is simply not accepted, therefore, abandoned and lonely.

Considering the fact that family is an important feature of American Southern

⁴³ Donnalee Frega and Brigette Craft, “Disabling History: Contemporary Southern Literature’s Solution,” *The Southern Literary Journal* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 104.

⁴⁴ Boyd, “Grotesque,” 321.

⁴⁵ Spiegel, “Grotesque,” 2.

⁴⁶ Boyd, “Grotesque,” 321.

⁴⁷ Boyd, “Grotesque,” 321.

Renaissance, it is not surprising that parenting, especially from a perspective of a mother, plays an important role in this literary phenomenon. However, why fathers and fatherhood in general were not as influential as motherhood in Southern Renaissance stories is explained by Louise Blackwell – she claims that fathers were simply either not active much in the story, or they were not mentioned at all, therefore, the family consisted of children and mothers only.⁴⁸ It seems that mothers and maternity simply played much more important role in a child’s overall development.

Taking motherhood in general into consideration, Katy Simpson Smith explains that “[m]otherhood shapes a woman’s identity”⁴⁹ and that it is such a unique experience that “[n]o two mothers experience parenthood in the same way.”⁵⁰ Simpson’s perception of motherhood seems to be rather optimistic – she considers it to be a unique experience shaping the mother’s identity, therefore, self-image and self-perception. Simpson further mentions that to Southern women, motherhood was “a source of personal worth and communal consequence,”⁵¹ therefore, an essential and very important part of their lives. However, considering women in Southern Renaissance stories, they used motherhood for intentions which were not as clear as they should be. Simpson further explains that Southern mothers used “their own maternal power”⁵² in order to “shape the lives of their children and families.”⁵³ This idea is further supported by Louise Blackwell who claims that for example Flannery O’Connor was “interested in intra-family relationships and concerned about the bitter struggles she saw there.”⁵⁴ She further explains that in O’Connor’s stories, “mothers frequently dominate their sons and daughters.”⁵⁵ The reason for this might have been to make the whole family life seem happier than it was in reality, so that the mother could keep the image of a good parent. Therefore, it is not surprising that when one is a mother to a disabled child, the disability becomes a threat to the mother’s public image because the child requires an extra special care and attention, which is demanding. Heidi P. Perryman

⁴⁸ Lousie Blackwell, “Flannery O’Connor and the Southern Renaissance,” *Revista de Letras* 17 (1975): 102.

⁴⁹ Katy Simpson Smith, *We Have Raised All Of You: Motherhood in the South 1750-1835* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 1.

⁵⁰ Simpson, *Motherhood*, 1.

⁵¹ Simpson, *Motherhood*, 2.

⁵² Simpson, *Motherhood*, 3.

⁵³ Simpson, *Motherhood*, 3.

⁵⁴ Lousie Blackwell, “Flannery O’Connor and the Southern Renaissance,” *Revista de Letras* 17 (1975): 102.

⁵⁵ Blackwell, “Flannery,” 102.

explains that coping with one's child being disabled might result in denial, which is described as a situation when parents "refuse to believe the diagnosis. They deny that there is any problem [...]"⁵⁶ This might be reflected in mothers' attitude towards the disabled child, which is to present their children as completely healthy people. Perryman further claims that they also become "overly protective, believing the child requires extra-special care."⁵⁷ However, it was already mentioned that Southern mothers focused on keeping their public image. Therefore, the overprotectiveness might stem from the need to protect the mother from being called a bad mother, not the child. Furthermore, Bruce W. Jorgensen mentions that the mothers even wanted to be "sentimentally pitied"⁵⁸ by for example neighbours. These two authors again support the idea that a public image was very important to Southern mothers. By creating a superior relationship towards their children, mothers in American Southern Renaissance stories could influence their children easily in order to make them look more vulnerable and in need of a high quality care, which might support the positive public image of the mother who protected the child and took care of it. Conclusively, mothers in Southern Renaissance stories were depicted as caring, loving and protective. However, instead of taking care of their disabled child, they seemed to care about what other people thought of them, or they even used the handicap of their children for their own benefit.

⁵⁶ Heidi P. Perryman, "Parental Reaction to the Disabled Child," *Family Court Review* 43, no. 4 (October 2005): 599.

⁵⁷ Perryman, "Reaction," 601.

⁵⁸ Bruce W. Jorgensen, "The Other Side of Silence: Katherine Anne Porter's *He as Tragedy*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 396.

4. GROTESQUENESS AND HANDICAP IN RELATION TO MOTHERHOOD IN “THE LIFE YOU SAVE MAY BE YOUR OWN”

Flannery O’Connor was already mentioned as a writer who focused on intra-family and mother-child relationships in order to criticize the corrupted nature of southern society. However, she is also known for her interest in the grotesque, which usually stands in the centre of her stories. Donald T. Hollenbeck and Julie West Johnson describe how O’Connor’s childhood influenced her future writing:

As a child, Mary Flannery O’Connor had a pet chicken that could walk either backward or forward, and some newspaper reporters came to photograph the animal. This experience, she later said, marked her for life, for it began her preoccupation with the deformed and the grotesque.⁵⁹

This experience probably laid the basis for her future writing style which is one of the reasons why she is one of the most known Southern Renaissance writers. However, not only was she interested in grotesqueness, but in handicap and disabilities too, which unfortunately stems from her youth as well. Hollenbeck and Johnson further explain her personal experience with Lupus – firstly, it took a life of her father and when she reached the age of approximately twenty-five years old, she found out that she suffers from the same disease as her father. Despite her illness, she moved into a farm where she lived for next thirteen years and produced her most-known writings.⁶⁰ The authors also describe her writing style: “[h]er characters are a series of misfits, psychic cripples, religious fanatics, and assorted con men obsessed with questions of salvation and damnation.”⁶¹

Considering Flannery O’Connor’s short story “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” the overall way in which the main characters live partially reflects her life – the short story takes place on a farm somewhere in the countryside where, however, no neighbours can be seen, yet it is possible to get to a non-specified city. The reader

⁵⁹ Donald T. Hollenbeck, and Julie West Johnson, *McDougal, Littell literature: Yellow Level* (Evanston: McDougal, Littell & Company, 1984), 482.

⁶⁰ Hollenbeck et al., *literature*, 482.

⁶¹ Hollenbeck et al., *literature*, 482.

follows a story of two women, Mrs. Lucynell Crater and her mentally disabled daughter, also named Lucynell. These two women live on their own – no father is present in the story, as Mrs. Crater mentions that he had passed away a long time ago. This could reflect O’Connor’s experience, as her father passed away when she was rather young, too. Considering the social conditions, Mrs. Crater mentions that the women are rather poor – when one of the protagonists, Mr. Shiftlet, appears and is willing to work for Mrs. Crater, she mentions that she cannot pay him, but she can provide him with food and a place to sleep.⁶² It seems that Mrs. Crater and Lucynell are the only people living on the farm, the absence of a male character is evident in several scenes – the roof is damaged and there is a broken car in the garden. Although it is not specified what the two women do throughout the day, or what they do to make money, it is probable that as they live on a farm, most of their work consists of farm chores. Considering the fact that the two women live rather far from the civilization and spend most of their time together, it is not surprising that their relationship is rather strong and that they are very close to each other. However, as the story unfolds, the reader can slowly find out that the affection might be only one-sided, or not as strong as it seems.

It was already mentioned that in Southern Renaissance stories, the main characters are depicted as grotesque and are very often handicapped. However, in the short story “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” there are several protagonists which could be identified as grotesque, either for their appearance, qualities, or for their actions. Firstly, for example Mr. Shiftlet. He is a war veteran who travels on his own, and seems not to belong anywhere, which means that he could be considered a misfit. He is handicapped – he had lost a part of his left arm, which is one of the reasons for his grotesqueness. Although he might not seem like it, Mr. Shiftlet is a very complex character. His handicap seems to be a great concern for him – he argues that the fact that he is disabled does not mean that he is not capable of performing the same physical activities as a completely healthy person: “There ain’t a broken thing on this plantation that I couldn’t fix for you, one-arm jackleg or not. I’m a man, [...]”⁶³ This idea is further supported by Alison Arant, who claims that Mr. Shiftlet presents himself to be

⁶² Flannery O’Connor, “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” in *McDougal, Littell literature: Yellow Level*, ed. Donald T. Hollenbeck, and Julie West Johnson (Evanston: McDougal, Littell & Company, 1984), 484.

⁶³ O’Connor, “The Life,” 485.

“useful despite his handicap.”⁶⁴ He wants to be acknowledged as a healthy person and denies his handicap, however, only up to some extent and only in certain situations. He is capable of corrupting Mrs. Crater by using his handicap to get what he desires – he considers his handicap to make him more trustworthy, as he looks rather vulnerable and therefore, not dangerous. This is one of the reasons why Mrs. Crater thought that it would be easy to trick Mr. Shiftlet, without thinking that he might trick her instead. Therefore, Mr. Shiftlet seems to have learned how to turn his handicap into his biggest strength and use it for his own benefit. Furthermore, he is a typical representation of the main characters described by Hollenbeck and Johnson as “assorted con men.”⁶⁵ This means that one should not trust such person as he/she is likely to be tricked, even Mr. Shiftlet’s name suggests that he is shifty.

Considering Mr. Shiftlet’s credibility, he himself questions it and warns Mrs. Crater from trusting him: “how you know I ain’t lying?”⁶⁶ This approach towards his credibility is rather strange, considering the fact that for several times, he mentions a “moral intelligence.”⁶⁷ According to Arant, he “argues against the existence of a link between physical ability and a moral character.”⁶⁸ To him, physical handicap is not a reason for other people to consider him mentally weaker or less moral, which seems to be a great concern to him, similarly to his handicap. He keeps mentioning it several times in order to emphasize that only because he is handicapped, it does not make him less credible than any other person. During several scenes, he even seems to be moral enough to feel bad about his actions, for example when he is obviously concerned about how he treated Lucynell at the end of the story. According to Arant, he “at least partially recognizes his sin, but he fails to return and recover Lucynell.”⁶⁹ This proves that he is well aware of the fate which awaits Lucynell, but is not moral enough to go back and save her. Conclusively, as Carla L. Verderame suggests, Mr. Shiftlet is trying to fight his “false assumption of his own innocence”⁷⁰ throughout the whole story. He

⁶⁴ Alison Arant, “A Moral Intelligence”: Mental Disability and Eugenic Resistance in Welty’s “Lily Daw and the Three Ladies” and O’Connor’s “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” *University of North Carolina Press* 44, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 69.

⁶⁵ Hollenbeck and Johnson, *literature*, 482.

⁶⁶ O’Connor, “The Life,” 484.

⁶⁷ O’Connor, “The Life,” 485.

⁶⁸ Arant, “Intelligence,” 69.

⁶⁹ Arant, “Intelligence,” 85.

⁷⁰ John F. Desmond, “The Shifting of Mr. Shiftlet: Flannery O’Connor’s “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” *The Johns Hopkins University Press* 28, no.1 (Winter 1974-75): 55.

is convinced that he is a moral and capable person and wants every other person to see him the same way. However, his “villainy is merely revealed at the climax,”⁷¹ where his actions prove his corrupted nature. Therefore, not only is he grotesque because of his handicap, but because of his inner fight, too – he is well aware of his immoral nature and yet does not even try to behave in any other way, which is absurd and ridiculous. Therefore, instead of receiving a potential empathy from readers, which is what most grotesque characters usually receive for their inconvenient situation, his actions evoke disgust.

Secondly, there is another protagonist who is handicapped and therefore, grotesque, yet her deformity has both mental and physical character. Her name is Lucynell Crater, a daughter of Mrs. Crater. Although her mental disability is not specified, it is probable that she is mentally retarded. Lucynell is mute, deaf, has trouble seeing and although she is an adult person, her behaviour resembles that of a child. It is probable that Lucynell does not know any other person than her mother, which makes her rather lonely. This is evident in the scene when Lucynell meets Mr. Shiftlet for the first time: she “saw him all at once and jumped up and began to stamp and point and make excited speechless sounds.”⁷² Her behaviour proves that she was willing to meet new people despite her inability to communicate. Furthermore, one could think that she would be scared of a stranger coming to her house, considering the fact that she is not used to many social interactions. It is also evident that Lucynell was willing to learn new things, especially speaking: throughout Mr. Shiftlet’s stay at the Crater’s farm, he taught Lucynell to say a word “bird.”⁷³ This means that if Lucynell was given enough care and attention, maybe she would eventually be able to produce at least a limited number of words and be able to communicate. Alison Arant comments on this fact by stating that Lucynell is an object that requires most fixing on the farm,⁷⁴ which although sounds rather extreme, seems to be true, as Mr. Shiftlet’s actions prove that it is possible to fix her, at least up to some extent. The reason why Mrs. Crater might not have paid enough attention to helping her daughter with her disability as much as she could, is either the fact that she is simply selfish, or, more probably, that she pretends that nothing is wrong with Lucynell. Mrs. Crater even calls her daughter

⁷¹ Desmond, “Shifting,” 55.

⁷² O’Connor, “The Life,” 483.

⁷³ O’Connor, “The Life,” 485.

⁷⁴ Arant, “Intelligence,” 82.

“smart,”⁷⁵ she also names all the farm and household chores Lucynell can handle, yet there are scenes during which Mrs. Crater has to pick Lucynell up from the ground when she falls, as she is not able to do it herself. Therefore, it is not likely that she would be able to “cook, wash, feed the chickens and hoe.”⁷⁶ Considering Lucynell’s appearance, it is a matter of discussion both between Mrs. Crater and Mr. Shiftlet, and Mr. Shiftlet and the waiter in *The Hot Spot* – Lucynell is described as “a baby doll”⁷⁷ or “an angel of Gawd.”⁷⁸ She has “long pink-gold hair and eyes as blue as a peacock’s neck.”⁷⁹ Conclusively, similarly to Mr. Shiftlet, her grotesqueness stems from her handicap. However, in this case it stems from her childish behaviour and appearance too, which to some readers might even appear amusing. Her angel-like appearance supports a positive relationship towards the character of Lucynell which is not hard to develop, as she is depicted as innocent, vulnerable and some might even say beautiful, which supports the idea of Alan Spiegel, that grotesqueness is supposed to create a connection between a reader and the grotesque character.⁸⁰

Lastly, Mrs. Crater is a grotesque character, too, although she is neither physically, nor mentally disabled. However, she has no teeth and is rather small: “[s]he was about the size of a cedar fence post,”⁸¹ which might appear amusing. Her grotesque qualities stem from her actions mainly. Mrs. Crater is a typical representation of the bad, corrupted Southern mother who pretends to love her disabled child more than she does in reality, in order to keep the image of a caring and a loving mother. Although this sounds rather extreme and is not entirely evident in the beginning of the story, where it seems that the two women are very close to each other, it is revealed as the story unfolds. Mrs. Crater describes Lucynell as “the sweetest girl in the world”⁸² and that she “would give her up for nothing on earth.”⁸³ However, Mrs. Crater is described as being “ravenous for a son-in-law.”⁸⁴ It seems that she is willing to do anything that would provide her daughter with a husband. This stems from the fact that marriage is

⁷⁵ O’Connor, “The Life,” 485.

⁷⁶ O’Connor, “The Life,” 485.

⁷⁷ O’Connor, “The Life,” 488.

⁷⁸ O’Connor, “The Life,” 488.

⁷⁹ O’Connor, “The Life,” 483.

⁸⁰ Alan Spiegel, “A Theory of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction,” *The Georgia Review* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1972): 2.

⁸¹ O’Connor, “The Life,” 483.

⁸² O’Connor, “The Life,” 485.

⁸³ O’Connor, “The Life,” 485.

⁸⁴ O’Connor, “The Life,” 485.

highly improbable for Lucynell, considering the fact that she is disabled. This idea is further supported by Alison Arant, who in general describes the topic of the short story as generating “anxiety,”⁸⁵ that is “the marriage of a woman with mental disabilities.”⁸⁶ Carla L. Verderame further claims that “disability dictates lifestyle not only by its visibility, but also by its acceptance or rejection by the social world that it inhabits.”⁸⁷ This means that Lucynell is in fact predestined not to get married because of her disability. Therefore, it is not surprising that Mrs. Crater was willing to act immoral in order to provide her daughter with a husband. She even lies about Lucynell’s age to make her more attractive for Mr. Shiftlet – although Lucynell is around thirty years old, Mrs. Crater says that she is around fifteen or sixteen. The reason for this is that Mr. Shiftlet mentioned that if he were to get married, his wife would have to be an innocent woman only, by which he probably means a virgin, which a fifteen or sixteen-year-old girl certainly was supposed to be. Mrs. Crater also tries to manipulate Mr. Shiftlet by aiming at his disabilities – she wants to make him believe that there is nobody who would love a handicapped man with no money or friends, which shows how cruel and determined to get her daughter married Mrs. Crater actually is. Therefore, Mrs. Crater’s grotesqueness does not stem from disability (because she does not have any), it stems from her amusing appearance and her absurd behaviour – she lies in situations in which one would not dare to believe a person is brave enough to lie, she is selfish, determined to achieve her goals and tremendously reckless.

Although it might seem that Mrs. Crater acts for the good of her daughter only, her intentions are, as previously mentioned, selfish. It was already mentioned that Mrs. Crater pretends that there is nothing wrong with Lucynell. Arant claims that the reason for this might be that Lucynell “constituted a threat to communal morality,”⁸⁸ and therefore a threat to Mrs. Crater’s public image. Therefore, it was easier for her to ignore her daughter’s illness, rather than actually helping her, which again supports the idea that she is a bad mother – rather than helping her daughter develop as much as she can, she was worried about her social status. However, she is not the only one who is willing to ignore Lucynell’s illness, as described by Arant again, who claims

⁸⁵ Arant, “Intelligence,” 80.

⁸⁶ Arant, “Intelligence,” 80.

⁸⁷ Carla L. Verderame, “A Retreat Home: Flannery O’Connor’s Disempowered Daughters,” *Board of Regents of the University System by and on behalf of Georgia College and State University* 26/27, (1998-2000): 142.

⁸⁸ Arant, “Intelligence,” 70.

that Mr. Shiftlet was willing to ignore it too in order to get a car which he desired, by which he became a solution to Mrs Crater's problem – to get her daughter married. Therefore, Mrs. Crater's intentions were not to provide her daughter with a husband in order to make her happy, but to forward "the daughter as a liability"⁸⁹ to Mr. Shiftlet, as a liability Lucynell certainly is. Arant even claims that "[t]he mother further suggests that Lucynell's disabilities make her particularly suited to be a good wife"⁹⁰ – not only does she overlook her daughter's disabilities, but similarly to Mr. Shiftlet, she turns them into an advantage, she claims that Lucynell will not annoy Mr. Shiftlet as she is not able to speak. This need to get Lucynell married becomes a subject of a deal with Mr. Shiftlet, where Lucynell is described as "an object of bargaining"⁹¹ and the deal as a "negotiation,"⁹² which means that both Mr. Shiftlet and Mrs. Crater treat Lucynell as an object to be sold. In her innocence, Lucynell does not, unfortunately, understand how little does she mean to the two people, one of them being her mother who should care about her the most. Conclusively, Mrs. Crater seems to be very similar to Mr. Shiftlet, taking their actions into consideration. They are both dishonest, shady and willing to ignore handicaps in order to get what they want, they both treat Lucynell as an object and they both act for their own good only. However, Mrs. Crater is Lucynell's mother, which is why she is blamed for her behaviour much more than Mr. Shiftlet. He is undoubtedly reckless, but Lucynell is a stranger to him, which is why it would make sense that it is easier for him to for example leave Lucynell on a place from where Lucynell is not likely to get back home and make her face a great danger. It is Mrs. Crater who should be moral enough not to let her daughter leave with a stranger. It seems that her desire to forward her biggest responsibility, her daughter, to someone else is much stronger than her maternal instincts – which usually are to protect the child.

⁸⁹ Arant, "Intelligence," 81.

⁹⁰ Arant, "Intelligence," 83.

⁹¹ Desmond, "Shifting," 57.

⁹² Arant, "Intelligence," 83.

5. GROTESQUENESS AND HANDICAP IN RELATION TO MOTHERHOOD IN “HE”

As long as one reads about the most influential American Southern Renaissance writers, Katherine Anne Porter is mentioned in almost every writing on such topic. Similarly to Flannery O'Connor, she started writing literature when she was very young, probably even younger than O'Connor – Donald T. Hollenbeck and Julie West Johnson describe Katherine Anne Porter as a child who was “[p]recocious and sensitive,”⁹³ who “read widely and began writing stories when she was still a young girl.”⁹⁴ The words which are very often used considering her writing style are “precision and discipline,”⁹⁵ which explains why although she was writing her stories since a very young age, she “did not try to publish any of them until she was past thirty.”⁹⁶ Her high standards are reflected in the quality of her writing, for which she is called “one of the America’s finest prose stylists.”⁹⁷

Katherine Anne Porter and Flannery O'Connor are very often mentioned together. The reason for this are not only the similar choices of topics which they made, but more importantly, the fact that these two writers became friends. This friendship is described by Jan Nordby Gretlund, who explains that it had started in 1958 when Porter visited O'Connor on her farm and admired O'Connor’s chickens, by which Porter won O'Connor’s heart.⁹⁸ However, the friendship between Porter and O'Connor was not based on their interests in farm animals, but on what Gretlund describes as a “mutual admiration.”⁹⁹ They were “interested in each other’s work and treated the other’s work with great respect on a professional level.”¹⁰⁰ The author also explains why their relationship was as strong as it was – it “rests in the criticism they offered of each other’s work”¹⁰¹ – the two writers very often shared their stories and provided feedback and inspiration to one another. This also explains why their choices of topics may

⁹³ Donald T. Hollenbeck, and Julie West Johnson, *McDougal, Littell literature: Yellow Level* (Evanston: McDougal, Littell & Company, 1984), 492.

⁹⁴ Hollenbeck and Johnson, *literature*, 492.

⁹⁵ Hollenbeck and Johnson, *literature*, 492.

⁹⁶ Hollenbeck and Johnson, *literature*, 492.

⁹⁷ Hollenbeck and Johnson, *literature*, 492.

⁹⁸ Jan Nordby Gretlund, “Flannery O'Connor and Katherine Anne Porter,” *Board of Regents of the University System by and on behalf of Georgia College and State University* 8, (Autumn 1979):79.

⁹⁹ Gretlund, “Flannery,” 84.

¹⁰⁰ Gretlund, “Flannery,” 84.

¹⁰¹ Gretlund, “Flannery,” 84.

appear so alike: mothers in the centre of their stories together with their disabled children and the impact the handicap has on their parents. It is not surprising then, that if one of the two writers is mentioned, the name of the other one follows. Hollenbeck and Johnson further describe the complexity and quality of Porter's stories stemming from the fact that "Porter was able to say little and suggest much."¹⁰² This is evident in many of her stories, especially in the short story "He," which is a part of her first volume "Flowering Judas," published in 1930. Here, the main subject of the story is a relationship between a mentally retarded son and his mother. Firstly, it seems that the mother cares about her son a lot, takes care of him as much as she can and provides him with love and affection. However, Porter drops several hints to the reader that the opposite is the truth, very similarly to "The Life You Save May Be Your Own."

Porter depicts the Whipple family – Mr. Whipple and Mrs. Whipple, a husband and a wife, who take care of their three children, two daughters Adna and Emly, and their middle son whose name is He. Although it is not specified where the family lives, it can be said with confidence that as Mr. Whipple is a butcher, and as they own pigs, cows and horses, the family is a family of farmers, similarly to "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." However, the difference is that in this story, there are several male characters, or male family members – not only the mentally handicapped son, but also the father of the children – Mr. Whipple. Although Mr. Whipple is rather passive, he is able to admit that his son is not mentally healthy, without pretending any affection that is either not there, or at least not as strong as Mrs. Whipple presents it to be. Debra A. Modellmog claims that "Porter develops in detail only the relationship between Mrs. Whipple and her retarded son."¹⁰³ Although the author does not explain why Porter chose to do so, it is probably related to the fact that as it was previously mentioned, in Southern Renaissance stories fathers were either not paid much attention to or not present at all.¹⁰⁴ Considering the overall social and financial conditions, in "He," they seem to be slightly better than in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." However, the narrator of the story claims that it was still "hard to feed all the hungry

¹⁰² Hollenbeck and Johnson, *literature*, 492.

¹⁰³ Debra A. Modellmog, "Narrative Irony and Hidden Motivations in Katherine Anne Porter's "He"," *Modern Fiction Studies* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 405.

¹⁰⁴ Lousie Blackwell, "Flannery O'Connor and the Southern Renaissance," *Revista de Letras* 17 (1975): 102.

mouths”¹⁰⁵ and that “keeping them [the children] decently clean was hard,”¹⁰⁶ or that “[f]rom year to year the Whipples were growing poorer and poorer.”¹⁰⁷ Apart from the Crater family, the Whipple family is also surrounded by neighbours who, as it is slowly revealed throughout the story, to one of the members of the Whipple family, are much more important than they probably should be.

That there are protagonists whose names are the same as the name of the story they occur in is rather frequent. However, it might come as a surprise that the main protagonist in the short story “He,” written by Katherine Anne Porter, is actually named simply He. He is a ten-year-old boy who suffers from a mental illness, which is, again, a reason for his grotesqueness. Although his mental illness is not specified, it is highly probable that He is mentally retarded, similarly to Lucynell Crater. However, one would recognize Lucynell being mentally ill at first glance, which does not apply to He. For example, He is able to produce a limited number of words. However, because nobody paid a necessary attention to him, he “learned a few words, and after this He forgot them,”¹⁰⁸ and so the only sounds he is able to produce are only “squatting”¹⁰⁹ or “mumbling.”¹¹⁰ It seems that the Whipples at least tried to teach their son a few words, contrastingly to Mrs. Crater in “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” however – unsuccessfully, and so they probably gave up on teaching Him any further. Another, yet important difference between Him and Lucynell Crater is that He is very strong and physically developed – the narrator mentions that “He was ten years young now and a third again as large as Adna, who was going on fourteen”¹¹¹ and that he “went skittering along the branches like a monkey.”¹¹² This means that although He was probably mentally retarded, he was able to perform the same physical activities as completely healthy children, even without getting hurt. This is further explained to Mrs. Whipple by a preacher who once claimed that “[t]he innocent walk with God – that’s why He don’t get hurt.”¹¹³ This is also what connects Him with Lucynell – the

¹⁰⁵ Katherine Anne Porter, “He,” in *McDougal, Littell literature: Yellow Level*, ed. Donald T. Hollenbeck, and Julie West Johnson (Evanston: McDougal, Littell & Company, 1984), 493.

¹⁰⁶ Porter, “He,” 493.

¹⁰⁷ Porter, “He,” 497.

¹⁰⁸ Porter, “He,” 493.

¹⁰⁹ Porter, “He,” 493.

¹¹⁰ Porter, “He,” 493.

¹¹¹ Porter, “He,” 495.

¹¹² Porter, “He,” 494.

¹¹³ Porter, “He,” 493.

innocence of a disabled child. His mental retardation is a subject of Bruce W. Jorgensen's article on this matter, where he explicitly calls Him "retarded."¹¹⁴ However, his mental retardation is probably not as strong as that of Lucynell's. On the one hand, he seems not to be able to express his feelings, as for example during the scene when Mrs. Whipple boxes his ears for getting his fresh and clean clothes dirty: "she boxed Him on the ears, hard,"¹¹⁵ but instead of crying, He "blinked and blinked and rubbed His head."¹¹⁶ On the other hand, he was probably trying not to cry because he knew that his mother would be concerned about it. Therefore, He understands to what feelings and emotions mean and what they might cause to other people, which is what most mentally retarded people are not able to understand. However, He was not able to tell his mother not to do it because she is hurting him, as he lacks speaking skills. The fact that his mental retardation is not as strong as it seems is also evident at the end when He is taken sick and Mrs. and Mr. Whipple talk about what they shall do next: "[t]hey didn't talk before Him much, but they never knew just how much He understood."¹¹⁷ The narrator further claims that "maybe He knew they were sending Him away for good and all because they were too poor to keep Him."¹¹⁸ This proves that He is even able to understand problems and ideas which were not directly uttered before him. Conclusively, He seems to understand his position, he never complains nor expresses disobedience, and yet, he is not even given a proper name – contrastingly to Lucynell who is at least given her name after her mother. He is simply named He, probably because he is not even worth giving a name, which proves that not only was He not loved as much as he should be by neither of his parents, but that he was not considered a human being, simply a "burden,"¹¹⁹ which is how Bruce W. Jorgensen described his unfortunate position in the family. This is also one of the features which connect Him with Lucynell Crater – they both are a burden to their parents, they both are grotesque for their disabilities, and both are so unfortunate and innocent that readers may tend to have a certain empathy with them, which is, once again, what grotesqueness is supposed to make the readers feel.

¹¹⁴ Bruce W. Jorgensen, "The Other Side of Silence: Katherine Anne Porter's He as Tragedy," *Modern Fiction Studies* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 395.

¹¹⁵ Porter, "He," 495.

¹¹⁶ Porter, "He," 495.

¹¹⁷ Porter, "He," 498.

¹¹⁸ Porter, "He," 498.

¹¹⁹ Jorgensen, "Silence," 395.

As long as one shall consider Mrs. Crater a bad, corrupted and selfish mother, Mrs. Whipple seems to be very likely to be perceived in the same way. Considering her overall qualities, Mrs. Whipple is described as a person who “must always worry and never know a moment’s peace about anything,”¹²⁰ she “couldn’t stand to be pitied”¹²¹ and according to Bruce W. Jorgensen, she possesses the “natural motherly feelings,”¹²² similarly to any other mother. In a different context, this might make Mrs. Whipple look as a very strong woman. However, the opposite is the truth. For example, how big of a role did the neighbours already mentioned before play in Mrs. Whipple’s life could even be considered disturbing. This stems from the fact that as many other mothers in American Southern Renaissance literature, the social status and public image of hers are crucial for Mrs. Whipple’s well-being. Instead of focusing on the well-being of her children, she constantly thinks about what the Whipple family’s neighbours might think of them. She is obsessed with the idea that her family is in the centre of attention of all their neighbours. To her, they are constantly “nosing around,”¹²³ which is the reason why she is constantly nervous and worried. She even worries about what her own brother might think of her and her family. This is one of the reasons why Mrs. Whipple is a bad mother and a grotesque character – she is selfish in the sense that the feelings and needs of people who are not members of her closest family are more important to her than the ones of her own children.

Considering her relationship with He, at first glance one would say that she “loved her second son, the simple-minded one, better than she loved the other two children put together.”¹²⁴ She was even “forever saying so.”¹²⁵ When the time of a meal came, she for example “loaded up a big plate for Him first, before everybody,”¹²⁶ and although she pretended that she did not enjoy talking about her son, “every time anybody set foot in the house, the subject always came up, and she had to talk about Him first.”¹²⁷ Had this stemmed from her need to talk about his progresses or successes, it would be completely understandable. However, instead of this, she would very often complain about how hard it is to take care of Him and raise him. This behaviour of hers, which

¹²⁰ Porter, “He,” 496.

¹²¹ Porter, “He,” 493.

¹²² Jorgensen, “Silence,” 401.

¹²³ Porter, “He,” 494.

¹²⁴ Porter, “He,” 493.

¹²⁵ Porter, “He,” 493.

¹²⁶ Porter, “He,” 495.

¹²⁷ Porter, “He,” 493.

although at the beginning sounds rather natural for a protective and loving mother who has to take care of her handicapped child, soon reveals her as a selfish, hypocritical person, as only such person would be able to repeatedly claim that she prefers one of her children more than the other ones. Throughout the story, it also becomes clear that her affections for her son are a strange mixture of feelings which could actually be described as the exact opposite of affection. Firstly, similarly to Mrs. Crater, she refuses to admit that there is something rather odd about her son and she, for example, very often says that “He’s as able as any other child,”¹²⁸ contrastingly to His father, who admits that He “ain’t got sense enough.”¹²⁹ Here, one could argue that this is what Heidi P. Perryman describes as a denial, where the parents of a disabled child are so concerned about the health of it that they simply do not accept that their child is not healthy.¹³⁰ In this case, Mrs. Whipple refuses to believe this because she, again, only worries about what the neighbours might think of them. His father, on the contrary, accepts the fact that He is not mentally healthy and does not pretend any feelings for his son which are simply not there. Mrs. Whipple’s answer to her husband is: “Don’t never let anybody hear you say such things. They’d think you favored the other children over Him.”¹³¹ Here, she even admits that the fact that she claims to love her handicapped son more than her two daughters stems from the fear that she would be considered a bad parent, had she felt any other way. That Mrs. Whipple only pretends to love Him is further supported by Debra A. Modellmog, who explains Mrs. Whipple’s actions: she “makes them only when the neighbors are (or might be) listening”¹³² or that they are simply “exaggerated contradictions of her actual feelings.”¹³³ This absurdity of her behaviour is another reason for her grotesqueness, similarly to Mrs. Crater.

Not only is Mrs. Whipple a bad mother and a grotesque character for the way in which she is concerned about her social status, or that she pretends to love her child more than she does in reality, but mainly for the reckless way in which she treats her mentally disabled son. Debra A. Modellmog even calls it a “neglect and

¹²⁸ Porter, “He,” 494.

¹²⁹ Porter, “He,” 494.

¹³⁰ Heidi P. Perryman, “Parental Reaction to the Disabled Child,” *Family Court Review* 43, no. 4 (October 2005): 599.

¹³¹ Porter, “He,” 494.

¹³² Debra A. Modellmog, “Narrative Irony and Hidden Motivations in Katherine Anne Porter’s “He,”” *Modern Fiction Studies* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 406.

¹³³ Modellmog, “Irony,” 406.

exploitation,”¹³⁴ which although sounds rather extreme, is not far from the truth. Apart from Mrs. Crater who actually seemed to take care about her daughter Lucynell (at least in the sense that Lucynell was properly dressed, for example), Mrs. Whipple did not even provide her disabled son with proper clothes when the winter came, she explains the fact that she did provide her daughters with clothes and not her son with these words: “He sets around the fire a lot. He won’t need so much.”¹³⁵ When one of the Whipple’s daughters falls ill, Mrs. Whipple even takes Him blanketed from his bed and gives it to the ill daughter, instead of for example giving up her own or thinking of any other solution which would not endanger the health of her handicapped son. Not only does she endanger her son by not providing him with sufficient clothes, she even makes him face dangerous animals, for example when one of her daughters is supposed to take one of the piglets so that Mrs. Whipple can kill it and cook it. The daughter is too scared to do so, and so Mrs. Whipple suggests that He should do it, although she knows that the pig was “a great fighter, worse than a Jersey cow.”¹³⁶ Therefore, the chance that it could kill Him with no difficulties is rather high. She even jokes about it which again, proves how bad of a mother she is – she consciously makes her child face a direct danger. A similar situation repeats when the Whipples need to lead their bull to a different place. Mrs. Whipple is very scared of the animal as she “had heard awful stories about how they followed on quietly enough, and then suddenly pitched on with a bellow and pawed and gored a body to pieces.”¹³⁷ Although she is well-aware of the fact that the animal could kill her son, she immediately thinks of Him and eventually makes him lead the bull. Conclusively, Mrs. Whipple is willing to sacrifice the life of her own mentally disabled son in order to do necessary farm chores which should be performed by an adult person. This is yet another reason why Mrs. Whipple is a bad mother, and maybe even worse than Mrs. Crater, as Crater seemed not to wish her disabled child’s death. Crater only craved forwarding her daughter as a responsibility to somebody else and get her married, which of course, is certainly not moral, but definitely not as immoral as what Mrs. Whipple wants to achieve – the death of her handicapped son. This fact is further supported by Jorgensen who suggests that Mrs. Whipple intentionally “exposes Him to danger and harm,”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Moddelmog, “Irony,” 407.

¹³⁵ Porter, “He,” 496.

¹³⁶ Porter, “He,” 494.

¹³⁷ Porter, “He,” 497.

¹³⁸ Jorgensen, “Silence,” 399.

and by Modellmog who claims that Mrs. Whipple even “desires His death.”¹³⁹ However, it is important to explain why Mrs. Whipple wants such a horrible thing to happen.

The reason for Mrs. Whipple’s wishes is revealed by the end of the story, when He is taken fatally ill and is supposed to be carried to the Country Home where he would be provided with painkillers only, as the doctor is no longer able to help him and the family does not have enough money to pay for any further medication. This means that it is certain that He is going to die. Debra A. Modellmog explains that “Mrs. Whipple’s life will improve now that He has been placed in the country home.”¹⁴⁰ She will no longer have to think of the way in which she is taking care of her handicapped son, as he will be simply gone. The author further explains that “His going to the county home is a solution to Mrs. Whipple’s pressing problem,”¹⁴¹ that is, to get rid of Him, which is exactly what Mrs. Whipple seems to have wanted to achieve since the beginning. At first, Mrs. Whipple refuses to give her son up, but as soon as she realizes that this means the end of her misery, she happily imagines “full summer again, with the garden going fine, and new white roller shades up all over the house, and Adna and Emly [the two daughters] home,”¹⁴² as if she immediately forgot that she ever had a son. She obviously “does not desire his return”¹⁴³ and is even able to admit that she thinks that it is “a mortal pity He was ever born.”¹⁴⁴ She, however, at the same time started to cry as she realised that He started crying too. Suddenly, He is able to express his feelings, as he understands very well that he is not coming back home because he is going to die in the Country Home. According to Jorgensen, Mrs. Whipple finally understands that “He is far more a human being, a person, than she has allowed herself to think”¹⁴⁵ during this scene. She finally sees him as a human being and maybe, as her own son. She then “wrapped her arms tight around Him,”¹⁴⁶ which Jorgensen describes as a “Pietà,”¹⁴⁷ as this closing scene reminds the author of the moment when Mary the Saint

¹³⁹ Modellmog, “Irony,” 407.

¹⁴⁰ Modellmog, “Irony,” 406.

¹⁴¹ Modellmog, “Irony,” 410.

¹⁴² Porter, “He,” 498.

¹⁴³ Modellmog, “Irony,” 411.

¹⁴⁴ Porter, “He,” 498.

¹⁴⁵ Jorgensen, “Silence,” 395.

¹⁴⁶ Porter, “He,” 498.

¹⁴⁷ Jorgensen, “Silence,” 403.

held Jesus in her arms, crying over his dead body.

The biased approach of Mrs. Whipple towards Him seems to be the main reason why Mrs. Whipple is grotesque – she does not entirely know what she wants and her decisions are very disturbing, hard to read, or to even understand. This is further explained by Moddelmog. She claims that the subject of the story reflects the difficulties that a parent must face while “coping with the psychological and physical demands of raising a retarded child.”¹⁴⁸ Although Jorgensen and Moddelmog agree that Mrs. Whipple is immoral, selfish and self-pitied mother, they agree that the stress caused by the difficulties which she must face mentioned above has fatal consequences, too. In her own way, she becomes mentally unstable and performs actions which she might have never performed provided all her children were healthy. On the one hand, she tries to love Him as much as she can, at least that is what she is thinking about during the final moments of her time spent with her handicapped son: “she had loved Him as much as she possibly could.”¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, she does not take care of him as much as she should and she makes him face a great danger. Therefore, that she wants to be seen as a good mother and that she cares about her status of a good mother might stem from the fact that she is actually trying to convince herself, too – not only her neighbours, which creates a connection between her and Mr. Shiftlet, as they both are trying to convince themselves that they are better people than they are in reality. Additionally, Mrs. Whipple might be blaming herself for her son’s handicap, and so she chooses to take care of her two healthy daughters as it is much easier. Conclusively, Mrs. Whipple and Mrs. Crater are both strong characters who must face difficult decisions. One might even say that they should be pitied for the already mentioned difficulties they must face while taking care of a disabled child and that their behaviour is simply an inevitable result of the unfortunate situation. Nevertheless, they are the typical representation of the corrupted mothers depicted in the American Southern Renaissance stories – their behaviour is grotesque, they consciously choose to act immoral, for their own benefit and for their own well-being.

¹⁴⁸ Moddelmog, “Irony,” 406.

¹⁴⁹ Porter, “He,” 498.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to analyse the depiction of handicap and grotesqueness in the two short stories “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” written by Mary Flannery O'Connor, and in “He,” written by Katherine Anne Porter. The attention was being paid to the influence of handicap and grotesqueness on the relationship between a mother and a disabled child. Furthermore, the research analysed how the handicap of the children, as depicted in the two short stories, can influence the mothers, and how it influences their decisions and manners in which they take care of their children.

The first chapter of the theoretical part indicated how American Southern culture is reflected in its literature. The most prominent features mentioned are strong historical consciousness, awareness of place and connection to the Southern land, and mainly, the importance of family. Family was found to be in the centre of not only the overall life of American Southern people, but also in the centre of their literature, as American Southern literature stories were proven to take place in southern-family environment mainly. The American Southern Renaissance is no exception, as described in the second chapter. Here, the research indicated that the Renaissance had started around the 1940s or the 1950s in order to differentiate the American Southern literature and criticize the Southern society. This part of the research also revealed reasons why the American Southern Renaissance has a dark tone – it is pessimistic, the main characters are lonely, grotesque and handicapped, yet their hopeless situation can evoke humour or amusement. This ambivalence is further described in the next chapter, where the term grotesque and its connection to handicap are focused on. The chapter explained the term grotesque as the overall protagonist’s appearance or a plot character, which are usually bizarre, out of normal or strange and very often closely connected to handicap, with which grotesqueness goes hand in hand. However, that the protagonists can be grotesque with no mental or physical deformities is proven in the analytical part.

Based on an analysis of the two short stories “The Life You Save May Be Your Own” and “He,” it can be concluded that the short story “He” is more uneasy to read, as it is proven that not only does the mother neglect her child, but also desires its death. Contrastingly, “The Life You Save May Be Your Own” is less radical, as the mother

only wants to forward her biggest responsibility – her disabled daughter – to somebody else. Yet, several similarities between the two short stories were identified in the analytical part. The two short stories are similar in their topic, which is an impact a child's handicap can have on its parents. Furthermore, there were discovered parallels between the protagonists. Not only were they identified between the two mothers, but between the disabled children, too. Considering the children, they are both depicted as suffering lack of a proper care, they are handicapped, yet innocent and, of course, grotesque, however mainly for their handicap. The handicap of the children in the two short stories is also the reason for the neglect both the children suffer from. Considering the parallels between the mothers, they are influenced by the handicap of their children in such a way that it makes them want to get rid of their children. In their own way, the mothers have proven to become grotesque, especially for their immoral behaviour. This leads to a conclusion that a character does not have to be mentally or physically deformed in order to be considered grotesque. Considering the mothers, the grotesqueness was proven to be a choice, as the mothers always had an option to take care of their children as they should, but chose not to do so, contrastingly to their children who are grotesque because of their handicap, which certainly is not an option. Therefore, it can be concluded that the term grotesque covers not only the appearance of the protagonist or the overall character of a story, but one's behaviour, too, therefore a choice, as it can be bizarre and out of normal as well.

RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se věnuje problematice americké jižanské literatury, a to konkrétně v období nazývaném jako „jižanská renesance“. V této práci je zvláštní důraz kladen na groteskní prvky a na vyobrazení handicapovaných postav, a to v povídkách „The Life You Save May Be Your Own“ od Mary Flannery O'Connor a „He“ od Katherine Anne Porter. Práce dále zkoumá způsob, jakým je ovlivněn vztah matky a jejího handicapovaného dítěte či vliv dětského handicapu na matku samotnou, a na její rozhodování a přístup k výchově jejího handicapovaného dítěte. První polovina práce definuje americkou jižanskou literaturu v kulturním kontextu společně s termínem „jižanská renesance“ a s termínem groteskno, čímž vytváří podklad pro druhou polovinu této práce. Tato druhá polovina se dále věnuje analýze dvou výše zmíněných povídek a jejich porovnání.

V první části této práce je popsána americká jižanská literatura v kulturním kontextu. Zde je popsáno, jaké faktory ovlivňovaly tvorbu amerických jižanských autorů. Mezi tyto faktory se řadí například silný vztah k americké jižanské půdě a obecně k pozemním, se kterými jsou její obyvatelé úzce spjatí; dále například vztah k historii amerického jihu, která je pro obyvatele tohoto regionu citlivým tématem; a v první řadě důležitost rodiny a rodinných vztahů obecně. Tyto faktory ve značné míře prostupují téměř všechna díla řadící se do americké jižanské literatury. Důležitost rodiny je zmíněna i v části, která se věnuje pojmu jižanská renesance. Zde jsou uvedeny její hlavní znaky, a též je zde zmíněna komplexnost pojmu jako takového, neboť anglický ekvivalent tohoto literárního úkazu je možný užit dvěma způsoby, nýbrž se stejným významem. Rozdíl je nejen ve výslovnosti, ale i v hláskování tohoto termínu. Jak již bylo řečeno, význam se však nemění. Tento literární úkaz je charakterizován jako dá se říci literární novinka, nýbrž se objevil kolem poloviny dvacátého století. Někteří autoři toto období nazývají znovuzrozením či dokonce přímo zrozením americké jižanské literatury, jelikož do té doby nebylo mnoho literárních děl z amerického jihu k přečtení. Důvodem byla silná a dlouho přetrvávající zemědělská tradice, která začala ustupovat až v již zmíněném období, kdy několik autorů našlo společný cíl – odlišit americkou jižanskou literaturu od literatur ostatních a zároveň jí vdechnout nový život. Co se týče hlavních postav v americké jižanské renesanci, jsou velice často fyzicky či psychicky handicapované,

deformované, a na okraji společnosti. Jejich politováníhodná situace, jejich osamělost a do jisté míry nevinnost zároveň vzbuzují jistou míru empatie a shovívavosti, která může zapříčinit vznik kladného vztahu, který si čtenář může s postavou vytvořit. Tato zvláštní směsice pocitů vede k dalšímu termínu, který je v této části charakterizován, a není jím žádný jiný než termín groteskno. V této části je popsáno několik možných definic shodujících se však na tom, že groteskno v mnoha případech a většinou pramení z celkového charakteru příběhu, který má, ač morbidní, tak do jisté míry úsměvný tón; dále z již zmiňovaného handicapu hlavních postav, tudíž z jejich vzhladu. Groteskno je většinou spojováno s celkovým vzezřením postav, s jejich chováním, a hlavně s jejich deformacemi, ať už fyzickými či psychickými. Tyto deformace jdou v mnoha případech ruku v ruce právě s grotesknem, které z jejich deformací většinou pramení. Jak je však ukázáno v druhé části této práce, ne vždy musí groteskno postav pramenit pouze z jejich handicapu.

V druhé části této práce se teze věnuje dvěma výše zmíněným povídkám, a to povídkám „The Life You Save May Be Your Own” od Mary Flannery O'Connor a „He” od Katherine Anne Porter. První část analýzy pojednává nejprve o povídce „The Life You Save May Be Your Own”, a až poté o povídce „He“. Důvodem je jakási posloupnost a návaznost argumentů, které svědčí proti matkám v obou povídkách. Zatímco v povídce „The Life You Save May Be Your Own” je vztah matky a dítěte ve svém způsobu kladný, v povídce „He“ je matka až zaujatá vůči jeho dítěti, a jak je později prokázáno, dokonce si přeje jeho skon. Postupná gradace argumentů by tedy měla zaručit postupné porozumění čtenáře tomu, proč se obě matky rozhodují a chovají tak, jak tomu v povídkách je. V obou částech analýzy je nejprve položen základ popisující autorku konkrétního díla, její motivace či vztah obou autorek, nýbrž výběr těchto dvou povídek není náhodný – nejen že se povídky shodují ve výběru tématu, čímž je vliv handicapu dítěte na jeho matku; zároveň se povídky částečně shodují ve způsobu, jakým matky ke svým dětem přistupují. Povídky jsou hlavně provázané z toho důvodu, že se autorky osobně znaly a podporovaly se ve svých literárních kariérách, což mohlo zapříčinit jisté shody v jejich dílech. V dalších částech analýzy je popsáno celkové pozadí příběhu – životní styl postav, jejich sociální a finanční situace a celkové složení rodiny. Dále analýza pojednává o každé z postav, která vykazuje jakékoli groteskní prvky. Analýza také podrobně zkoumá, jakým způsobem matky přistupují k výchově svých handicapovaných dětí či způsob, jakým jsou hlavní

postavy ve dvou již zmiňovaných dílech navzájem provázány, ať už z důvodu jejich podobných deformací, chování či charakteru.

Z analýzy vyplývá, že vztah matky a jejího dítěte v obou povídkách na první pohled vypadá idylicky, a že se obě matky snaží, aby se jejich handicapované dítě mělo nejlépe, jak je to jen možné. Bohužel, opak je pravdou – matky své děti naopak zanedbávají a pouze svou lásku a péči předstírají. Hlavním důvodem je samotný handicap jejich dětí, který zapříčiňuje jak jejich groteskní stránku, tak fakt, že se jich jejich matky chtějí zbavit, a to buď násilnou či nenásilnou formou. Svým vlastním způsobem se matky stávají také deformované a omezené, a to především psychicky. Nátlak způsobený obtížnostmi spojenými s péčí o handicapované dítě může zapůsobit na morální složku osobnosti matek, která se ukáže jako nemorální. Tím pádem se matky samy stávají groteskními, a to hlavně pro jejich absurdní a těžko pochopitelná rozhodnutí a obecný způsob jejich chování. Závěrem práce je tedy možné podotknout, že groteskno pramení nejen z fyzických či psychických deformací, ale také z pouhého způsobu, jakým se hlavní postavy rozhodnou chovat, čímž pádem se groteskno stává jejich vlastní volbou, na rozdíl od handicapovaných jedinců, kteří si své omezení, a tím pádem groteskno, sami vybrat nemohli.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources:

O'Connor, Flannery. "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." In *McDougal, Littell literature: Yellow Level*, edited by Donald T. Hollenbeck, and Julie West Johnson, 482–489. Evanston: McDougal, Littell & Company, 1984.

Porter, Katherine Anne. "He." In *McDougal, Littell literature: Yellow Level*, edited by Donald T. Hollenbeck, and Julie West Johnson, 492–498. Evanston: McDougal, Littell & Company, 1984.

Secondary sources:

Arant, Alison. "A Moral Intelligence: Mental Disability and Eugenic Resistance in Welty's "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies" and O'Connor's "The Life You Save May Be Your Own"." *University of North Carolina Press* 44, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 69-87. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24389010?searchText=moral%20intelligence&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dmoral%2Bintelligence&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A8f607807a3d8fe19e0cbeadb4b1aaadf.

Blackwell, Lousie. "Flannery O'Connor and the Southern Renaissance." *Revista de Letras* 17 (1975): 101-105. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27666204?searchText=southern+renaissance&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dsouthern%2Brenaissance&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A679f6fb052377595369e404adebf63bf&seq=1.

Boyd, Molly. "The Grotesque." In *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, edited by Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, and Todd W. Taylor, 321-324. Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001.

Bryant, Joseph A. *Twentieth-Century Southern Literature*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997.

Desmond, John F. "The Shifting of Mr. Shiftlet: Flannery O'Connor's "The Life You Save May Be Your Own"." *The Johns Hopkins University Press* 28, no.1 (Winter 1974-75): p. 55-59.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/26474172?searchText=shifting%20of%20mr%20shiftlet&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dshifting%2Bof%2Bmr%2Bshiftlet&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A9b8633a402d6bb15dc9f50efa7c1e5ba.

Frega, Donnalee and Brigitte Craft. "Disabling History: Contemporary Southern Literature's Solution." *The Southern Literary Journal* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 103-121.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/20078186?searchText=disabling%20history&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Ddisabling%2Bhistory&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3Ad5f820212ae936d192d9be09e589029d.

Gray, Richard. *A History of American Literature*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2012.

Gretlund, Jan Nordby. "Flannery O'Connor and Katherine Anne Porter." *Board of Regents of the University System by and on behalf of Georgia College and State University* 8, (Autumn 1979): 77-97.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/26669993?searchText=Flannery%20O%27Connor%20and%20Katherine%20Anne%20Porter&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3DFlannery%2BO%2527Connor%2Band%2BKatherine%2BAnne%2BPorter%26so%3Drel&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A62645dcf577179d3cdde1d21a85a117e.

Hollenbeck, Donald T., and Julie West Johnson. *McDougal, Littell literature: Yellow Level*. Evanston: McDougal, Littell & Company, 1984.

Hubbell, Jay B. "On Southern Literature." *Texas Review* 7, no. 1 (October, 1921): 8-16.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/43465402?searchText=on+southern+literature&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Don%2Bsouthern%2Bliterature&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3Aab9fdd69f32660db240fa62f6c1c6311d.

Irons, Susan H. "Southern Literature, Idea of." In *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, edited by Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, and Todd W. Taylor, 828-834. Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001.

Jorgensen, Brude W. "The Other Side of Silence: Katherine Anne Porter's He as Tragedy." *Modern Fiction Studies* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 394-404.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/26281227?searchText=disability+in+he+katherine+anne+porter&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Ddisability%2Bin%2Bhe%2Bkatherine%2Banne%2Bporter&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A409925d55ecaec1dd55e9c725e4d003c&seq=2.

King, Richard H. *A Southern Renaissance, The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Kreyling, Michael. "The Renaissance of the Southern Renaissance." *The Mississippi Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (Winter, 1980-81): 60-67.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26474755?seq=1>.

Moddelmog, Debra A. "Narrative Irony and Hidden Motivations in Katherine Anne Porter's 'He'." *Modern Fiction Studies* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 405-413.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/26281228?searchText=Narrative%20Irony%20and%20Hidden%20Motivations&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3DNarrative%2BIrony%2Band%2BHidden%2BMotivations%26so%3Drel&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A7067e546c2b2d244508752e23b7a5b0b.

Perryman, Heidi P. "Parental Reaction to the Disabled Child." *Family Court Review* 43, no. 4 (October 2005): 596-606.

[https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/results?vid=6&sid=41a2c324-1d0c-40db-b4ef-db659c2f603d%40redis&bquery=AR+"Perryman%2c+Heidi+P."&bdata=JmRiPWE5aCZkYj04Z2gmZGI9bHhoJmxhbmc9Y3MmdHlwZT0xJnNlYXJjaE1vZGU9U3RhbmRhcMmc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZl](https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/results?vid=6&sid=41a2c324-1d0c-40db-b4ef-db659c2f603d%40redis&bquery=AR+).

Procházka, Martin, Justin Quinn, Clare Wallace, Hanna Ulmanová, Erik S. Roraback, Pavla Veselá, David Robbins. *Lectures on American Literature*, 2nd ed. Prague: Karolinum Press, 2007.

Rieser, Max. "The Aesthetic Theory of Social Realism." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 16, no. 2 (December 1957): 237-248.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/427602?searchText=what+is+social+realism&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dwhat%2520is%2520social%2520realism&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A6eb6aad56e64b402bc5f174c430b34fa&seq=1.

Rust, Richard D. "Civil War." In *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, edited by Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, and Todd W. Taylor, 155-161. Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001.

Smith, Katy Simpson. *We Have Raised All Of You: Motherhood in the South 1750-1835*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013.

Spiegel, Alan. "A Theory of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction." *The Georgia Review* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1972): 426-437.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/41396901?searchText=theory%20of%20the%20grotesque&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dtheory%2Bof%2Bthe%2Bgrotesque&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A0ad722fcb38d01284c72811a2c7aaef5.

Stephens, Robert O. "Family." In *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, edited by Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, and Todd W. Taylor, 247-250. Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001.

Ulmanová, Hana, and Erik S. Roraback. "American Southern Literature." In *Lectures on American Literature*, edited by Martin Procházka, Justin Quinn, Hana Ulmanová and Erik S. Roraback, 225-237. Praha: Karolinum, 2002.

Verderame, Carla L. "A Retreat Home: Flannery O'Connor's Disempowered Daughters." *Board of Regents of the University System by and on behalf of Georgia College and State University* 26/27, (1998-2000): p. 139-153.

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/26674751?searchText=disempowered+daughters.](https://www.jstor.org/stable/26674751?searchText=disempowered+daughters)

Wineman, Bardford A. "Review: Southern Identity and Memory: A Review Essay." *American Studies International* 42, no. 2/3 (June-October 2004): 249-256.
[https://www.jstor.org/stable/41280084.](https://www.jstor.org/stable/41280084)

Woodward, Comer Vann. "Why the Southern Renaissance?." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 51, no. 2 (Spring, 1975): 222-239.

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/26435707?searchText=why+the+southern+renaissance &searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dwhy%2Bthe%2Bsouthern%2Brenaissance&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A212c1c38dcdd8f339b67fc0c57a4a9c8.](https://www.jstor.org/stable/26435707?searchText=why+the+southern+renaissance&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dwhy%2Bthe%2Bsouthern%2Brenaissance&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A212c1c38dcdd8f339b67fc0c57a4a9c8)