



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S WOMEN AS VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF A  
PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY***

**ELIZABETH ANNE PEREIRA**

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PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY**

By

**ELIZABETH ANNE PEREIRA**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in  
fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts**

**June 2015**

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**DEDICATED**

To my beloved parents,  
Rene and Shirley Pereira



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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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**June 2015**

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This in-depth study of the selected works by Flannery O'Connor aims to address the scarcity of feminist research on her literary works. This research incorporates textual analysis and close reading of eight selected short stories. This study is based on the feminist concept of patriarchy and women's empowerment, thus striving to magnify the positive traits of female characters while contrasting common negative perceptions of O'Connor's women characters. Besides that, this study attempts to illustrate the struggles of the women characters due to their gender as females in 1940's and 1950's southern patriarchal American society. Since O'Connor's female characters have been always viewed through prejudicial lens by past scholars, this study focuses on rebranding these female characters by giving them a more positive appeal. This study acknowledges the barrage of negative perceptions by past scholars who label O'Connor's female characters as naïve, physically unattractive, handicapped, unintelligent, self-righteous, pessimistic, superficial and not strong willed. Conversely this study was able to rebrand the tarnished image of the female characters by highlighting their positive traits such as optimism, independence, motherly love, steely resilience, strong faith in God, saintly patience and bold streaks of womanly courage. Besides that, this study was able to illustrate the struggles these women face such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, misogyny, sexism and verbal abuse. Furthermore, a future study through the lens of psychoanalysis is recommended that would delve into the psyche of O'Connor's female characters and unearth the effects of male oppression on them.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

**WANITA FLANNERY O'CONNOR SEBAGAI MANGSA AND PEJUANG  
DALAM MASYARAKAT PATRIAKI**

Oleh

**ELIZABETH ANNE PEREIRA**

**Jun 2015**

**Pengerusi : Shivani Shivagurunathan, PhD**  
**Fakulti : Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi**

Penilaian mendalam kajian karya terpilih Flannery O'Connor ini bertujuan mengatasi kekurangan penyelidikan bertema feminisme terhadap sastera tulisan beliau. Kajian in menggunakan analisa teks dan penilaian rapi lapan cerita pendek terpilih. Penyelidikan ini berasaskan konsep patriarki dalam fahaman feminism dan pemerksaan wanita. Ciri-ciri positif watak wanita diagungkan dan dibandingkan dengan tanggapan negatif yang biasa dikaitkan dengan watak wanita O'Connor. Di samping itu, kajian ini cuba menggambarkan kesusahan watak wanita kerana jantina mereka semasa dekad 1940-an dan 1950-an dalam masyarakat patriarki Amerika selatan. Memandangkan watak wanita O'Connor telah selalu dinilai secara serong oleh para sarjana yang lepas, kajian ini mempunyai fokus untuk menukar imej watak wanita ini dengan memberi mereka daya tarikan yang lebih positif. Kajian ini mengakui terdapat banyak tafsiran negatif oleh sarjana lepas yang melabel watak wanita O'Connor sebagai naif, kurang menarik secara fizikal, cacat, tidak pintar, keterlaluan dalam tanggapan kebaikan sendiri, pesimistik, cetek pemikiran dan tidak mempunyai semangat yang tinggi. Sebaliknya, kajian ini dapat menukar jenama imej terjejas watak wanita dengan menonjolkan ciri-ciri positif mereka seperti sikap optimistik, berdikari, kasih keibuan, ketabahan yang kuat, kepercayaan kepada Tuhan, kesabaran keramat dan keberanian wanita yang teguh. Selain itu, kajian ini menggambarkan kesusahan yang dihadapi oleh wanita-wanita ini seperti gangguan seksual, keganasan rumah tangga, kebencian pada perempuan, seksisme dan penceraan. Tambahan pula, penyelidikan lanjut berfokuskan psikoanalisa dicadangkan untuk mendalami jiwa watak wanita O'Connor dan mendedahkan kesan penindasan lelaki terhadap mereka.

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May God bless you all abundantly with His choicest blessings and graces.

**Elizabeth Anne Pereira**  
**30<sup>th</sup>. July 2015**



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the study

Mary Flannery O'Connor, born in 1925 in Savannah, Georgia, is known as one of America's most acclaimed Southern writers. Flannery O'Connor, who was stricken with lupus at the age of 26, wrote in the middle of the twentieth century, in the American South, during a strongly patriarchal period. The settings of her story and novels are in her native land, either Georgia or Tennessee, often centring on rural areas. Ted Spivey, a correspondent of O'Connor, pinpointed that she set her work in the forties and early fifties of that century, a time when the South experienced an upswing in confidence due to the prosperity that accompanied the Second World War. In addition, the writer, whose works after the Second World War explicitly reveal the effect of Southern religion, wrote two novels and an assortment of short stories in which she used the spectacular intensity of Southern religious fundamentalism to satirize the emptiness of modern rationalism (Roland 14).

On a similar vein, she showed the same devotion to her birthplace as so many other Southern writers. Flannery O'Connor's significant voice in Southern American literature made waves among other established writers during her glorious and triumphant heyday as she stood tall on the same platform with such literary greats as William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Mitchell, Robert Penn Warren and Eudora Welty. Michael Friedman states that O'Connor credits a good deal of her success as a novelist to the region she comes from. It is generally suggested that the Southern writer has some advantages here (235). In relation to this, Charles P. Roland believes that the South has flourished with creative literary works by great writers due to its positioning as "The Sahara of the Bozart" – a literary and artistic desert (11). This prestigious acknowledgement reflects the literary fruitfulness of many great Southern writers who produced literary masterpieces that showcase the horrific grotesque nature of its people's lives and the mounting religious fervour of Christianity whilst encapsulating the bizarre racist and violent attitudes of Southern people. On the other hand, the South has been labelled the "The Bible Belt", with Protestantism as the dominant religion, which brought a spiritual revival among Southerners and served as a major element in O'Connor's work. O'Connor, together with Faulkner and McCullers, strongly applied grotesque characteristics in her writing. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the grotesque treatment of controversial historical themes, such as slavery, segregation, resistance to change, loneliness and violence, became a prominent feature of Southern literature. In these works of literature, this grotesque element is a defining feature and is synonymous with the terrorizing ugliness of human existence. From another angle, her position as a practising Catholic magnifies the novelist's motives in writing literary works for spiritual and moral purposes. Through a close examination of her works, O'Connor highlights the stark reality of being a true follower of Christ, which is often strewn with obstacles, trials and temptations that challenge the faith, endurance and patience of her characters in male-dominated populated settings.

However, Preston M. Browning, Jr discovers that O'Connor was no parochial writer dedicated to eccentric or narrowly "religious" concerns. Rather, she also touched on fundamental human issues, such as guilt, anxiety, spiritual restlessness and immersion in the quotidian, and the discontent it is likely to hide, along with infinite longing and rebellion against the infinite – which have been major themes of the great writers of the Western tradition and have perhaps become major themes of modern fiction since Melville and Dostoevsky (265). In her writings, I find that there is also a great dose of realism and ironical situations, where characters go against the grain of embracing an ideal Utopian way of life. Although rooted in Christianity, righteousness does not necessarily spell a happy life, yet it does reflect the symbolism of the cross. As followers of Christ, O'Connor's characters have to carry their crosses, which are synonymous with excruciating pain, inner turmoil and endless suffering on earth. Concurrently, their lives represent the biblical story of the passion and death of Christ, who endured torturous persecution, bloody crucifixion and sorrowful death on the cross.

In a nutshell, Melvin J. Friedman believes that her place (the South), her religion (Catholicism) and her hobby (raising peacocks) reinforces her stories and novels at every turn. One can even attach the three words most appropriate to her fiction to three traits: "grotesque" to the South; "redemption" to Catholicism; and "violence" to raising peacocks. All of these qualities, however, spring from the humility which she asks for as a creative writer. This virtue is everywhere in evidence in her frequent interviews and appearances as part of a discussion panel (235). As a matter of fact, O'Connor made the best of her simple life as a Southerner, where her solid faith in Christianity complemented her observant and sensitive nature towards the daily scenarios in the rigorous farm life of her mother, Regina O'Connor, from which she often drew inspiration, steely courage and poignant themes that are close to Southerners' minds, hearts and souls. Nevertheless, her works are generously peppered with sparks of racism, patriarchal prejudices, grotesque notoriety, religious contradictions and dysfunctional family relationships which are encapsulated in her own unique Southern Gothic style of writing. Through the passage of time, Flannery O'Connor's golden legacy lives on and will always have a special place in the hearts of many literary enthusiasts across the globe. Many literary critics highly regard her literary works as the masterpieces of a remarkable female Southern writer who defied the odds as a disabled artist and emerged with a highly creative and intellectual streak by shining brightly and triumphing victoriously with her craft of Gothic writing while patiently enduring the debilitating disease of lupus until her last breath.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Over many decades, Flannery O'Connor has carved a niche and become an established author, she has emerged victoriously as one of America's greatest Southern writers. However, a missing element in the vast research that has previously been done on her work is the lack of feminist studies and scholarship. Of the bountiful and vast research on her work, most of the early O'Connor criticism and much of the later work focuses on the Christian elements of her writing, such as original sin, the mystery of grace and redemption, and the fear of God. The analysis done by such scholars such as Miles Orvell (*Flannery O'Connor: An Introduction*), Carter Martin (*The TrueCounty*), Kathleen Feeley (*Flannery O'Connor: Voice of the Peacock*), Frederick Asals

(*Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity*), John R. May (*The Pruning Word*) and Jill Baungaertner (*Flannery O'Connor: A Proper Scaring*) varies slightly in the approach used but the focal point is always theological in nature (Caruso 2).

The female characters in Flannery O'Connor's short stories are victims and survivors who are subject to the patriarchal norms of the 1940s and 1950s setting of the American South. Most of the women are often portrayed as weak, powerless and silenced by male subjugation, which often leads to their mental, emotional and physical oppression. These stories are often laced with a touch of irony while interweaving theological elements from Christian perspectives against the backdrop of the American South. Elizabeth Toohey supports this claim when he asserts that "O'Connor's texts have rarely been viewed through a feminist lens. O'Connor makes male characters the focus of her novels, often representing women as foolish, condescending and blind" (70). On the other hand, Sue Brantley Whatley believes that O'Connor fails to satisfy feminist aims because "she seemingly punishes her female characters" (6) and never attempts to infuse her works with feminist themes. Furthermore, J. June Schade concurs that "the analysis of Flannery O'Connor's fiction from a feminist standpoint has been limited due, in part, to the restricted scope within which most of her work was critiqued, but also because of scholarly research done from an undeniably masculine, more specifically, Catholic viewpoint" (156), which fuels the need for an in-depth analysis of the author's works from a feminist perspective.

Most feminists believe that our culture is a patriarchal one, i.e. one organized in favour of the interests of men. Feminist literary critics try to explain how power imbalances due to gender in a given culture are reflected in or challenged by literary texts (Guerin et al. 196). In "*The Feminist Spectator as Critic*", Jill Dolan states that "we need to promote feminist criticism as a strategy widely available for calling out sexism and other exclusions" (xxvi). Hence by examining the struggles of women due to their female gender and highlighting the issues of feminism interwoven with patriarchal prejudices, I hope to address the scarcity of feminist studies on the literary works of Flannery O'Connor. Besides that, by analysing these selected texts, I also hope to portray women in a positive light while showing the common perceptions of O'Connor's women as negative characters, as depicted by past scholars.

### 1.3 Scope of the study

The scope of study of this research is limited to the analysis of selected short stories by a prominent American author, Flannery O'Connor. The eight short stories selected for review are found in Flannery O'Connor's *The Complete Stories* (1971), which consists of thirty-one short stories penned by the author. The study attempts to highlight and shed light on feminist issues and examine the struggles of the female characters and the patriarchal prejudices in the plot of each story. The eight stories are "A Circle in the Fire", "Good Country People", "The Comforts of Home", "The Displaced Person", "Parkers Back", "The Life You Save May Be Your Own", "The View of The Woods" and "Greenleaf".

"Good Country People" portrays a disabled women, Hulga, who is entangled in a love tryst with a Bible salesman, called Manley Pointer, whose sweet talk and charming nature plunge her into an ecstasy of romantic and sexual bliss. However, she feels



manipulated and sexually oppressed when he entices her with pornographic visuals and, worse still, steals her artificial limb, hence unmasking his true self of deceit and hypocrisy.

The following short story, “A Circle In The Fire”, speaks of women’s experiences on a farm, coping with a group of mischievous male youths. A gem of a character who extols strong feminist qualities is Mrs. Pritchard. Her tolerance, with the patience of a saint and her steadfast faith in God, knows no bounds, despite the crude and rude mannerisms of the youths who, in the end, deal her an ultimate unforgiving blow.

“The Comforts of Home” is a story that deals with Thomas, a history buff who experiences intense feelings of irritation and angst over a prostitute, Sarah Ham, who lives under one roof with him and his mother. Sarah Ham faces verbal and emotional oppression due to his chilly reception and the outbursts of rage from Thomas and his late father, a supernatural character who displays sky-rocketing levels of discrimination, hate and intolerance against their female guest.

The short story “Greenleaf” revolves around the life of Mrs. May, a farm head who faces a series of patriarchal prejudices from her farmhands as well as from her educated chauvinistic sons, Wesley and Scofield. On the other hand, she faces the daunting task of getting rid of a bull off her farm. Sadly, she lacks support from her male counterparts to help her in this ordeal.

As for the short story “Parker’s Back”, it centres on the life of Parker, a hedonist who gets married to Sarah Ruth, a stern fundamentalist Christian. His unhappy marital union with her makes him an introspective person, which eventually prompts him to get a tattoo of the Byzantine Christ to melt her heart of stone. Ironically, Sarah’s volcanic rage at the sight of his new tattoo sparks a deep conversion in her heart.

In the short story “A View of the Woods”, the plot presents the close bond between Mary Fortune and her grandfather, Mr. Fortune, who share similarities in their business acumen and personality traits. However, their close relationship becomes sour and is rocked by grave incidents of violence after Mr. Fortune brings to light his plan to sell his property to make a huge monetary profit and build a gas station on it.

“The Displaced Person” hinges on the life of Mrs. McIntyre, who goes through a series of mishaps, betrayals and rough patches with her white male farm hands and a Polish refugee. The painful circumstances drive her to the brink of insanity, destroying her self-esteem and blighting her with deteriorating health.

Lastly, I researched on “The Life You Save May Be Your Own”, which portrays the life of a nurturant mother, Mrs. Lucynell, who showers an immense sea of love and affection on her deaf and mute angelic daughter, Lucynell Crater. As she craves a son-in-law, she offers Tom T. Shiftlet, an unattached bachelor, an automobile and a sum of money in exchange for her daughter. Sadly, Shiftlet, a manipulative sociopath, cheats Mrs. Lucynell by marrying her innocent daughter with the purpose of getting possession of her prized automobile.

I have chosen to do research on these eight selected short stories as they offer substantial proof of the ruthless victimization of and brutal patriarchal prejudices

against women which destabilized and ferociously shook the patriarchal hierarchy of 1940s and '50s American society. Besides that, these stories have great potential to be analysed in a qualitative way incorporating close reading and textual analysis through the microscopic lens of patriarchy and women's empowerment, which will further enrich the feminist studies of O'Connor's literary works. Furthermore, O'Connor's short stories depict various experiences of women being oppressed by men in an American patriarchal world. Thus these stories, which depict triumphant and victimized female characters who courageously battle patriarchal oppression are simultaneously hailed as empowered women, will be analysed in an in-depth manner, with a focus on unearthing their inner strengths and positive traits, as well as their struggles which have been overlooked by previous scholars and critics. Besides that, there is a wide gap in previous research incorporating a feminist perspective. Therefore, this in-depth analysis of these selected short stories is a timely quest to rejuvenate Flannery O'Connor's work and prompt an awakening to her female character's characterizations in a positive light.

#### **1.4 Limitations of the study**

The feminist issues discussed in this research are mainly confined to and based on twentieth-century Southern American culture and traditions as embedded in the works of Flannery O'Connor. In addition, the discussion of the issues raised in this study is limited to the eight short stories of Flannery O'Connor and does not encompass other genres, such as the novels by the same author. The criticism of these selected works will be based on a feministic perspective, they will be analysed and examined and the focus will be on the feminist concept of patriarchy and women's empowerment.

#### **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

1. To illustrate the struggles that women face due to their gender as female in 1940s and 50s' in Southern patriarchal American society.
2. To show the common perceptions of O'Connor women characters as negative characters.
3. To challenge how the female characters in O'Connor's stories can be viewed in a positive way.

#### **1.6 Significance of the study**

One of the main factors, and significance for this study, centres on addressing the scarcity of feminist research on O'Connor's literary works. In accordance with the goals of feminism, this study is based on the feminist concept of patriarchy which strikes a chord with the male-dominated settings of the American patriarchal world in O'Connor's short stories. On the other hand, the novelty of this study lies in magnifying the virtues of the female characters in the selected short stories by incorporating the concept of women's empowerment, which has long been overshadowed by the negative and sceptical views of previous scholars. Besides that, Steven Lynn states that "feminist criticism grows out of an effort to identify and oppose the various ways women are excluded, suppressed, and exploited" (194). Thus

this study also aims to bring to light the struggles faced by women, due to the harsh circumstances of oppression, abuse and discrimination by their male counterparts, in the 1940s and '50s American patriarchal era. Since O'Connor's female characters have always come under heavy scrutiny and been viewed through a prejudicial lens by previous scholars and readers, this research aims to rebrand these female characters by giving them a more positive appeal.

In analysing the selected short stories of Flannery O'Connor, I am offering crisp pristine insights into gender conflicts between men and women as well as raising a new awareness of the feminist issues revolving around the lives of the characters in the plots of these stories. Relating to this, there is substantial proof that there is lack of feminist studies on this author's work. In other words, feminist criticism has not viewed Flannery O'Connor from a more wholesome perspective. In these selected short stories, Flannery O'Connor presents female characters who are sometimes capable of making and voicing decisions; it is hoped that through their stories, that project authentic and extraordinary women's experiences, the women's own personal responses to these events will be illuminated. In refuting the negativity heaped on O'Connor's women over past decades by misogynist sceptical critics, Judith Fetterley points out that "the first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcising the male mind that has been implanted in us" (xxii). Hence this in-depth study of the selected short stories will challenge the sceptical male viewpoint and raise awareness of the hidden gems in O'Connor's women by raising their self-worth as empowered women and subsequently change the misconceptions of readers and pessimistic critics who have associated them with negative traits of smugness, grotesqueness and weakness over the past decades. The goals and significance of this study will be achieved when critics/readers are able to witness the female characters from a new perspective, as strong women who courageously took up the challenge of weathering the storms of trials, tribulations and sufferings on their rough life journey and emerged as survivors in a harsh Southern American patriarchal society.

### **1.7 Methodology**

In this study, the feminist concepts of patriarchy and women's empowerment will be applied when critically analysing the selected eight stories of Flannery O'Connor. According to Kolmar and Bartkowski, patriarchy is defined as "a set of social relationships between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. Though patriarchy is hierarchal and men of different classes, races, or ethnic groups have different places in the patriarchy, they also are united in their shared relationship of dominance over their women; they are dependent on each other to maintain that domination" (358). In rationalizing the application of the concept of patriarchy, its distinct advantage lies in its striking features of universalism and totality which condense and summarize a myriad of patriarchal prejudices and the women's oppression which is evident in incidents of sexual abuse, rape, sexual harassment, sexism, domestic violence and men's misogynist treatment towards women in O'Connor's work.

Most feminists believe that our culture is a patriarchal one, i.e. it is organized in favour

of the interests of men. Feminist literary critics try to explain how power imbalances due to gender in a given culture are reflected in or challenged by literary texts. Despite their diversity, feminist critics generally agree that their goals are to expose patriarchal premises and the resulting prejudices, to promote the discovery and re-evaluation of literature by women, and to examine the social, cultural and psychosexual contexts of literature and literary criticism. Feminist critics therefore study sexual, social and political issues once thought to be “outside” the study of literature (Guerin et al. 196–7). Hence the selected eight short stories of Flannery O’Connor will be critically analyzed in a random order through a close reading to subdue and contradict the splurge of negative reviews of O’Connor’s female characters by past critics. Furthermore, this method will be utilized with a view to achieving the main objectives of this study, which are to magnify the positive qualities of O’Connor’s women and challenge the common misconception of O’Connor’s women as negative characters by incorporating the concept of women’s empowerment. According to Cecelia M.B. Sardenberg, the major objective of women’s empowerment is to question, destabilise and, eventually, transform the gender order of patriarchal domination. Such an approach is consistent with a focus on women organising and on collective action, though not disregarding the importance of the empowerment of women at a personal level (19). Hence the incorporation of this positive concept will seek to capture the women’s achievement and milestones in a male-dominated world and highlight their laudable leadership qualities, mothering skills, resourceful nature, virtuous traits of generosity and ardent spirituality.

## **1. 8 Definition of terms**

### **Sexism**

Sexism is the institutional and individual patriarchal oppression of women that results from their sex as women and the tandem privileges given to men because they are men. In one of her earliest essays, Marilyn Frye seeks to understand and define sexism. She says ‘the term “sexist” in its core and perhaps most fundamental meaning is a term which characterizes anything that creates, constitutes, promotes or exploits any irrelevant or impertinent marking of the distinction between the sexes’ (McHugh 126).

### **Objectification**

Sexual objection is the primary form of the subjection of women, Catherine MacKinnon argues. It is the male epistemological stance. There is no distinction, for women, between objectification and alienation [...] The objectification of women in art and literature goes along without objectification in pornography, claim feminist critics, since pornography is merely a simplified version of general objectification. Within culture, women are a generic object whose subject is the male gender. Culture is itself predicated upon the aesthetification and objectification of women (Humm 191).

### **Sexual harassment**

Sexual harassment is defined as a deliberate or repeated pattern of sexual advances that are unwelcomed and/or other sexually related behaviours that are hostile, offensive or degrading (McAnulty & Burnette 513). Uninvited letters, emails, telephone calls or

material of a sexual nature; uninvited and deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering or pinching; uninvited pressure for dates; and uninvited sexual teasing, jokes, remarks or questions all constitute sexual harassment (U.S Merit Systems Protection Board, 1995).

## **Violence**

Feminist writing about violence towards women dispels several popular myths, namely that victims of violence 'ask for' or provoke violence or that battered women seek out a battering partner. Whether violence takes the form of rape, battering, incest, sexual harassment or pornography, feminist theory proves that violence against women is pervasive and is the product of a patriarchal culture in which men control both social institutions and women's bodies [...]

Feminist sociologists argue that violence is a form of power differential in marriage. They show that the existence and scale of male domestic violence makes the issue of domestic violence a major example of the contradictory forces (the state, money, law and the sexual division of labour) that shape women's lives (Humm 293).

## **Oppression**

Oppression is a multi-faceted experience that consists of having an outside force limit that arranges or constrains (sometimes physically and violently) an individual or collective's life or aspects of their life. People are oppressed based on their race, gender, class, sexuality and ability. Oppression entered feminist theory as a conceptual theory through Marxist feminism (Jaggar 1988) and has been used to think about many aspects of women's experience and feminism, including how to define feminism. For example, bell hooks defines feminism through the work to end oppression. She states that 'feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression' (2000: viii). In her essay, 'Oppression' *The Politics of Reality* (1983), Marilyn Frye starts off by describing oppression as 'Mold. Immobility. Reduce' (2). Frye uses her now well-known analogy of the birdcage to further describe the experience of oppression. Frye argues that if you look at each individual wire of a birdcage, you cannot see why the bird does not just fly around it, but if you look at the whole cage it is 'perfectly obvious that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relationships to each other, are as confirming as the solid walls of a dungeon' (5) (qtd. in McHugh 89).

## **Misogyny**

Misogyny literally means the hatred of women. Feminists have shown that misogyny exists at numerous social as well as individual levels. Individually, we can point to men or women, though obviously we are more likely to point to men, as misogynists [...] Social institutions can be misogynist through the laws, policies and practices they put forth (McHugh 81).

## **Resisting reader**

The resisting reader sees these women in a new light, empathizing with those who have

not previously gained the reader's compassion and hearing those who may be silent – or silenced – for “silence is nothing more or less than what lies outside the radius of interest and comprehension at any given time. We hear ... with culturally attuned ears” (qtd. in Caruso 3).

### **1.9 Summary**

Flannery O'Connor, one of America's finest author vividly depicted the lives of 1940's and 50's female characters on patriarchal farm and home American settings. Many of her stories are inspired by her growing up years and surroundings in Savannah, Georgia and are often infused with themes of Christianity, racism, violence, dysfunctional family relationships, patriarchal prejudices and grotesque nature of her characters. By incorporating textual analysis and close reading in analyzing the selected eight texts, the novelty of this study lies in unearthing the hidden gems of the women characters which were overlooked by past scholars and filling in the scarcity of feminist studies of the author's work.

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