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American Studies

The Ugliness of Humanity: Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find*

*A Good Man is Hard to Find* by Flannery O'Connor is a collection of 10 short stories. The stories are set in the first half of the twentieth century, in the south. They are in the southern gothic style, and are about the gruesomeness and ugliness of humanity. The stories are interesting, and easily grab the readers' attention.

The characters are well developed within the stories; however, although the stories are written in third person, some of the characters are developed from the perspective of one of the other characters. For example a one-armed tramp in *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* is not portrayed as he is, but rather from the perspective of the two women with whom he moves in. This allows for interesting surprises about the nature of some characters. All the main characters are portrayed as having some major flaw, and most are common people who are woefully ignorant.

The theme throughout the novels is the gruesomeness of man. O'Connor shows people doing evil acts, from murder, to stealing, to drowning themselves. In a number of the stories, one of the characters will act as a warning to the others of the evil to come, or the character will have some form of foreboding, but still the characters walk into the evil acts. At the end of some of the stories, the character(s) responsible for the evil doing will repent, by accepting who they now are, or the truth that they had previously refused to accept.

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The plots within the stories are twisted, and this twist is what O'Connor's writing is based upon, and it is what makes the stories so interesting. Some have subtle twists and some have large twists where the story completely flips over on itself.

The collection is worth reading; it portrays man in an interesting light and is enjoyable. It also has important literary and to some extent historical value due to O'Connor's style which has a very distinctive mid 20<sup>th</sup> century southern accent, and carries aspects of that setting such as extreme racism and widespread ignorance. These factors combined with the fact that O'Connor is considered a master of the short story make the collection important, and worthy of the reader's time.