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**The Portrait of Women Characters in the Major Short Stories of Kate Chopin  
and Flannery O'Connor**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this humble work to my parents' who sculptured me for who I am now. I dedicate it too to my young brother Mohamed Abd el Ilah and my young sisters Asmaa Hayat and Nourhane who have been my crutches and were at my service in a way making me feel a queen by my own.

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## Table of Contents

### Summary

### Introduction

#### **Chapter One:** Kate Chopin's portrait of women characters in "The Story Of an Hour"

and "Athénaïse"

I.1. The New Perception of Louise/Mrs.Mallard's Life Bestowed by Death	9
I.2.The Two Versions of Mrs.Mallard	10
I.3.The Dichotomy of Death in Mrs.Mallard's Life	19
I.4.Athénaïse' Strife in Search for the Female "Self"	23
I.5. Athénaïse' Plight in Search for the "Self"	28

#### **Chapter Two:** Flannery O'Connor's representation of women characters in "Good Country People" and "A Stroke Of Good Fortune"

II.1.Hulga/Joy Enjoying Her Entity and Her Intellectuality	35
II.2. The change of Hulga/Joy's Name as a No Mean Feat	38
II.3. Hulga/Joy's Artificial Leg as a Source of Empowerment	40

II.4.The Shattered Facets of Hulga/Joy	42
II.5.The Erect Ruby	47
II.6.The Serious Denial of Ruby’s Pregnancy	51
II.7.Ruby’s Pregnancy as a Hazard to her “Self”	52
II.8.The Broken Ruby with a Broken Self-Conception	56

**Chapter Three:** A comparative study of Kate Chopin and Flannery O’Connor’s portrayal of the women characters

III.1An analogy between Mrs. Mallard /Louise in “The Story Of an Hour” and Joy/Hulga in “Good Country People”	64
III.1.1.The Influence of Male’s Presence in Mrs.Mallard/Louise and Hulga/Joy’s Lives	64
III.1.2.Mrs.Mallard/Louise and Hulga/Joy versus the Other Women in Their Lives	71
III.1.3.The Name as a Device of Characterization	75
III.1.4.The Ambivalence Aspect in Portraying Mrs.Mallards /Louise and Joy/Hulga	77
III.2.An analogy between Ruby Hill in“A Stroke Of Good Fortune” and Athénaïse in “Athénaïse”	80
III.2.1. Ruby Hill and Athénaïse Enjoying their Womanhood before the Realization of pregnancy	80

<b>III.2.2. Ruby Hill and Athénaïse being Affected by People around them</b>	82
<b>III.2.3. Ruby Hill and Athénaïse' Reaction Towards Their Pregnancy</b>	83
<b>III.2.4. Their Mothers' Reflection in Their Lives</b>	87

## **Conclusion**

## **Work cited**

## **Annexes**

## **Abstract**

This dissertation carries out three purposes. First, how does Kate Chopin portray Mrs. Mallard/Louise in “The Story Of an Hour” and Athénaïse in “Athénaïse”? Second, how does Flannery O’Connor represent Joy/Hulga in “Good Country People” and Ruby Hill in “A Stroke Of Good Fortune”? Third, how do Kate Chopin and Flannery O’Connor depict their women protagonists’ womanhood, and their maternity when searching “the self”? .The First chapter tackles Mrs. Mallard/Louise and Athénaïse’ womanhood in “The Story of An Hour” and “Athénaïse” and how they make a valiant attempt in maintaining their self-conception and individuality in a social environment that does not allow them to do so. The second one scans how Hulga/Joy and Ruby Hill in “Good Country People” and “A Stroke of Good Fortune” live up to the dream of enjoying their lives and be the decision makers of what concerns them. Yet, they appear unfortunate for not realizing that dream for it is not acknowledged for them inasmuch as being women to live up to such a dream in their social milieu. The Third one represents the core of this dissertation, it scrutinizes comparatively from distinct dimensions how both writers Kate Chopin and Flannery O’Connor in their aforementioned short stories take of their literary creatures, women protagonists, to mirror the women’s experience in their society. It tackles the conditions of of women in a way taking their women protagonists’ social and cultural state as an exhibition of how the American women were influenced by their social environment when seeking the female “Self”.

**Key Words:** Women, Womanhood, Male, Mother, Social Milieu.

## Résumé

Ce mémoire a pour objectif de répondre à trois questions. La première concerne la manière dont Kate Chopin présente Mme. Mallard / Louise dans “The Story Of an Hour ” et Athénaïse dans “Athénaïse”.La deuxième porte sur la représentation de Joy / Hulga par Flannery O'Connor dans “Good Country People” et Ruby Hill dans “A Stroke of Good Fortune”.Enfin, comment Kate Chopin et Flannery O'Connor conçoivent la féminité de leurs femmes protagonistes ainsi que leur maternité lors de la recherche de “soi” .Le Premier chapitre aborde aussi bien la féminité de Mme Mallard / Louise et Athénaïse dans “The Story of an Hour” et “Athénaïse” que leur courage à essayer de maintenir la conception que chacune a d'elle-même ainsi que leur individualité dans un environnement social qui n'est pas favorable. Dans le deuxième chapitre il s'agit d'une étude dans laquelle nous avons essayé de montrer à quel point Hulga / Joy et Ruby Hill dans “Good Country People” et “A Stroke of Good Fortune” ont tentés de réaliser leur rêve à aimer leur vie et d'être en mesure de prendre des décisions concernant leur vie personnelle. Finalement, cette tentative à été échouée car elles n'ont pas pu faire face à la société .Elles n'ont donc pas pu accéder au bonheur. Le troisième chapitre qui est une étude comparative faite à partir d'aspects distincts insiste sur la manière dont les deux écrivaines Kate Chopin et Flannery O'Connor ont créé leurs personnages féminins dans leurs nouvelles. Leur but étant de mettre en évidence la réalité de leur condition sociale et culturelle dans la société pour mieux cerner la part de l'influence de l'environnement de la femme américaine dans la quête de “Soi”.



# **INTRODUCTION**

Literature is the art in which life is presented, it tends to reflect the life of human world dwelled by human beings. American literature is the gate that is opened to many writers to utter and choose the appropriate material to reflect the American individual. Some take Realism as their package integrated in their imagination to render reality. Kate Chopin and Flannery O'Connor take this realistic frame to portray the American women's experience to the readers in their society via their literary productions.

In "The Story Of an Hour", "Athénaïse", and "Good Country People", "A Stroke Of Good Fortune" Kate Chopin and Flannery O'Connor make readers live in a fictional world that is not much distinct from the real one during the twentieth century. They are the short stories which are the matrix that show us the position of women in their social environment as entities rather than literary creations; regarding their own life, characters, and their own dreams.

Observing the situation of women in the Algerian society and as being a woman part of that society, I was motivated to make of my dissertation a pulpit to cross the Algerian cultural boundaries in an attempt to reach the American ones to survey and picture the experience of the American women in their social milieu. Ruth Sherry mentions in her book "Studying women's writing: An Introduction" that "we look to the wiring of women in cultures other than our own to help us to an imaginative understanding of their situation – an understanding which is a necessary prerequisite to the ideal of an international 'sisterhood'" (Ruth 17). Ruth reveals how women's writing is a window to other cultures and a binoculars to see and apprehend women's situation in their societies.

Since women are deemed to represent a vital slice of society not only for the reason that they play a fundamental role in their society but indeed they are the producers of their society; not only in terms of biological productivity but rather in terms of cultural and

social one. Women are responsible of taking care for their children and rearing them on certain manners, their children are later other fathers, brothers and sons to these women. Hence, from this view point I was motivated to devote this dissertation to render the experience of women in their environment ruled by men, who bring them up to be as such.

In this dissertation I work on displaying the experience of women by women writers. It centers on how women writers represent women's experience via literary production. Chopin's "The Story Of an Hour" and "Athénaïse" as well as O'Connor's "Good Country People" and "A Stroke of Good Fortune" are a study case of portraying the women experience by women writers. In general, the portrayal in this dissertation is conducted from a feminist perspective; it integrates the tenets of French Feminism "écriture Feminine" and Anglo-American Feminism "Gynocriticism". Precisely, it focuses on rendering the images of the women protagonists in the major short stories of Chopin and O'Connor .In particular, it works on the images of women in women's writing. Women's writing is considered as branch of Feminism that "provide (es) insights into women's lives and experiences which may be relevant for a feminist analysis."(Ruth Sherry 17). Sherry claims that the aim of women's writing is not that different from feminist analyses'. Therefore, the focus in this work is not only on the tenets of Feminism but rather the experience of women protagonists.

Each chapter carries a query that convenes an attempt to answer. First, how does Kate Chopin portray Mrs. Mallard/Louise,in "The Story Of an Hour", and Athénaïse' ,in "Athénaïse" ,individualism vis- à-vis their surrounding ? Second, how does Flannery O'Connor represent Joy/Hulga ,in "Good Country People" ,and Ruby Hill's, in "A Stroke Of Good Fortune", identity in their social milieu? Third, how do Kate Chopin and Flannery

O'Connor depict their women protagonists' womanhood, and their maternity when searching for their "female self"?

These queries brought a drive to each chapter. The First one exposes the way Chopin sculpts her women protagonists Mrs. Mallard/ Louise and Athénaïse to render the image of the women in the American society in the beginning of the twentieth century. The second one presents O'Connor's portrait of her women characters Joy/Hulga and Ruby Hill who appear to urge to assert their "selves".

Chopin and O'Connor's women characters Mrs. Mallard/ Louise, Athénaïse, Joy/Hulga and Ruby Hill are considered as the sample by means of which the writers mirror the experience of women inspired from reality. They reveal how tough is women's journey to themselves vis-à-vis people in their environment. They characterize these characters from distinct angles to render faithfully the shared experience of women in the American social environment.

The first chapter is entitled "Kate Chopin's portrait of women characters in "The Story Of an Hour" and "Athénaïse"". It is divided into two parts in which each part is devoted to analyze the characters Mrs. Mallard /Louise and Athénaïse in the aforementioned short stories. Within these two parts there are two sub-parts, "The New Perception of Louise/Mrs. Mallard's Life Bestowed by Death", "The two versions of Mrs. Mallard" "The Dichotomy of Death in Mrs. Mallard's life", "Athénaïse' Strife in Search for the Female "Self", and "Athénaïse' Plight in Search for the "self"". The whole chapter is concerned with Mrs. Mallard /Louise and Athénaïse' individualism and womanhood. It exposes how they are influenced by their social environment when seeking their "selves" as women. On one hand; It exposes how Mrs. Mallard /Louise develops another understanding of her life due to the fact that her husband is dead. Her husband's death

makes her buried identity reappear again and her happiness is so great when meeting her “Self” again. But , her happiness does not last as death represents a source of life in the beginning of the story, it sets her free by the end of the story. On the other, it depicts how the other protagonist Athénaïse enjoys her freedom when running away from her husband refusing to play the role of the obedient wife and later how her pregnancy is the forceful factor that obliges Athénaïse not only go back to her husband to play her role as Mrs.Cazeau but also to be the mother of his child.

The second chapter is entitled “Flannery O’Connor’s Representation of Women Characters in “Good Country People” and “A Stroke Of Good Fortune” and it includes two parts to analyze the characters Joy/Hulga and Ruby Hill. It has eight subparts entitled as it follows: “Hulga/Joy enjoying her Entity and her Intellectuality”, “Hulga/Joy’s Artificial Leg as a Source of Empowerment”, “The change of Hulga/Joy’s Name as a No Mean Feat”, “The Shattered Facets of Hulga/Joy”, “The Erect Ruby”, “The Serious Denial of Ruby’s Pregnancy” , “Ruby’s Pregnancy as a Hazard to her “Self””,and “The Broken Ruby with A Broken Self-Conception”. In this chapter Joy/Hulga’s self-confidence and conception and independence are explored by means of her intellectuality , her artificial leg and her name. It pictures how later Joy/Hulga’s self-confidence ,conception and independence are splintered by Manley Pointer. It exhibits in parallel how Ruby Hill enjoys her womanhood and how she desires ardently to stick to her womanhood; as it delves into Ruby’s smashed womanhood by her motherhood after going through a serious denial of her pregnancy.

The third chapter is a comparative study of Chopin and O’Connor’s portrayal of the female characters. It consists of two major parts .The first one is an analogy between the

two women characters Mrs. Mallard /Louise and Joy/Hulga, the protagonists of the short stories “The Story Of An Hour” and “Good Country People”. This part casts light on how both protagonists’ lives and womanhood are influenced by men .It also exposes how they are represented compared to the other women in their environment. It reveals how Chopin and O’Connor make of Mrs. Mallard /Louise and Joy/Hulga’s names as a decoder of their characterization. The second one is an analogy between Ruby Hill in “A Stroke Of Good Fortune” and Athénaïse in “Athénaïse”. It tackles the way both Ruby Hill and Athénaïse enjoy their womanhood before the realization of their pregnancy and how they are affected by people around them while being in the course of pregnancy. As it tackles, in terms of comparison, with the manner they react towards their pregnancy and how they reach new understanding of their female and feminine“selves” and lives comparing their situation to that one of their mothers’.

# **Chapter One:**

**Kate Chopin's portrait of women  
characters in "The Story Of An Hour"  
and "Athénaïse"**

“...when man began to feed and defend woman, she ceased proportionally to feed and defend herself when he stood between her and her physical environment and respond to it.” (Gilman 370)

Kate Chopin is one of the American writers who focus on the human experience in general and the experience of women in particular by highlighting their cultural and sociological environment. Many scholars and critics deem that she devotes her fiction to portray the female experience, particularly the American woman in the turn of the century. She is considered as a pioneer who speaks about the experience of the American woman with a very striking style. Teresa Gilbert puts it:

Kate Chopin's contemporary audience was attracted to her Louisiana stories because it was felt that they accurately depicted the everyday of life of ordinary people in an area that seemed particularly exotic to the rest of America (02).

Though Kate Chopin is known as a southern writer who renders the reality in that region for the American South was and still an interesting area in United States. She depicts what represents an American woman in every part of America not typically southern. She aims at exposing the life in America as a whole not in one region. She does not like to be considered or called a regional writer as she deems herself as an American writer primarily. She mirrors vividly the south particularly the Creole life in Louisiana .Her focus is on the influence of the traditions and the mores of that region of the American women's lives . Marie Fletcher writes that: “Certainly she was the first to weave the customs and traditions of the people of the Cane River country into fiction.”(122). She renders the south with all its strict values and morals. Barbara C.Ewell in her Presented Kate Chopin: A



critical Biography (1969) considers that Chopin represents unusual images of women in her fiction during the nineteenth century unlike many other women writers of her time. She writes: “Her apparent deprecation of her art is [... ] partly a response to the contradictory role assigned to women writers of the nineteenth century, especially those of Southern traditions” (140).

She regales her readers with the way she approaches her fiction to be as real as possible for them. Actually her artistic way of shedding light on the situation of the women with a stunning literary boldness made of her a woman writer with an unusual vision. She is abhorred for her fiction for all what she does is just presenting the reality that was never faced to her people.

The way reality is exposed in her fiction makes her a different writer with a different eye for she approaches reality from an atypical angle, McMahan writes that Chopin is “ a woman much ahead of her time”(35).And Stanley Kauffmann states : “ Kate Chopin was at least a generation ahead of her time “(vii) and Kaye Gibbons writes “She was writing American realism before most Americans could bear to hear that they were living it”(Ivii);She is appealed to this way of treating the relationship between the reality and fiction. Once she falls under the spell of Maupassant’s fiction in which she feels so attracted to the life in his works rather than the literary production itself.

Chopin is appealed to the way he represents life in his fiction and to his distinctive perspective about that life, not taking the social tradition into account. She notes “Here was life, not fiction [...] .here was a man who had escaped from tradition and authority, who had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own being and with his own eyes ; and who , in a direct way and simple way, told us what he saw.”(1430).

## **I.1.The New Perception of Louise/Mrs.Mallard's Life Bestowed by Death**

Kate Chopin devoted more than a novel and a couple of collections of short stories to exhibit the experience of women in the American society. The short story "The Story of an Hour" is one of them; it is a story that in one hour draws an experience of the protagonist's, Mrs. Mallard, entire life. The story takes place in one hour but it is much longer for the readers to live Mrs. Mallard's past, present, even her future. Mrs. Mallard is a heart troubled woman whose her household made strenuous efforts to break to her the new of Mr. Mallard's sudden death. When she knew that her husband died in a train accident, something shook her soul. The omniscient narrator mentions:

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her. (276)

What shook her soul made her distinct from any woman that would be in her shoes. Indeed, receiving such news is an induced reaction that may concern many women, but not her in particular. The narrator refers to that reaction describing that Mrs. Mallard is supposed to "hear the story as many women have heard the same" (276). She appears to be shocked and speechless but the wonder grows in the readers' mind to know what makes her as such especially when it is mentioned that "When the storm of grief had spent itself" (276) because this makes the readers wonder if she was really sad for that news and why that grief passed that quick.

Later the readers learn more about Mrs. Mallard's cold reaction to this news. The narrator states: "There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul"(276). In this passage Chopin displays how Mrs. Mallard is exposed to her sadness as if she is sitting with death to receive the liveliness and liberty brought to her life and soul. Compared to the previous passage the grief is replaced by comfort that makes both her body and soul light.

In such situation it is outlandish to have such feelings instead of mourning and being alone in one's room instead of having people around. But for Mrs. Mallard it is not the case as for her there is no need for these people around her; Chopin hints that she does need some space which can be found, at least at this moment, in her "room".

## **I.2.The Two Versions of Mrs.Mallard**

The readers notice two Mrs. Mallards; the first one is the poignant woman who was informed that she lost her spouse and she is the one who is not occupying the whole story.The readers know this woman for a while just in the beginning of the story. She appears to be the ideal woman for being the lovely and loving young faithful wife and she is ideal in the eyes of her society. She is the one who lives only for the others (mainly her husband) and she barely thinks of herself.

The other one is ideal and distinct image of Mrs. Mallard , she is the woman who the readers discover once she is alone with her thoughts, desire, and dream in her room. She is the one who seems striking upon something in her life via her husband's demise. Something she overlooked for a long time for she deems it to be part of the world of fantasy or would never even dare to think of. In her book, *verging on the Abyss: The Social Fiction of Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton*, Mary E.Papke reckons that Chopin represents two versions of a woman. One is the ideal woman who is dependent on man and submissive to him. The other one is the version of woman who holds a new sense to her life with determination. Mary E.Papke says that Chopin:

makes up her own continuum of females : woman as 'true woman' , a seemingly helpless being who is defined only through relationships to and with men ; women as outsider , an artist of a new world view ; woman as dual self , a female precariously balanced between submission and self-will (34).

Papke considers that Chopin in her fiction provides two images of the same woman in each literary piece. It is either the true woman or the outsider; true from the point view of the society and the cultural standards for the woman is considered true just if the social conventions draws her as such.

Unlike in the parlor, "her room" has a great significance in the story alongside her husband's death. Mrs. Mallard in the room is the one who is facing a big openness to her life and she is the woman who is not sorrowful for the lost of her husband. The room is the bank to her spiritual world. Death, unusually, does not bring any sadness or negativeness to her .On the contrary; it seems to bring gaiety and positiveness instead. Chopin writes:

She could see in the **open** square before her house the **tops of trees** that were all aquiver with the **new spring life**. The delicious breath of **rain** was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of the distant **song** which comes was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves (276)

Here Chopin displays Mrs. Mallard's state after "the storm of grief" has gone and she is in her room facing the "open" window. Actually it contains lots of positive symbols that refer to her 'After State'. The word open is used repeatedly used to suggest the new start of her life and new reality that she is going to be part of without her husband. The open window (or the square in this quote) is in no longer the same because now it is a metaphor to her soul that suggests her open go to new "her" and it is the gate to her "self".

The "tree" is a plant in nature that offers oxygen that signifies "life", in the story embodies this life offered to her by death. Moreover, "spring" is another strong symbol that refers the blossoming time, thus here is her time of her soul and life to blossom. In addition, "rain" in this passage alongside spring stands for the rebirth of Louise. This use of symbols reveals how the stylistic use of the writer contributes to the understanding of her literary production. Victoria Hicks says that Chopin: "[.....]Chooses to use symbolism to most accurately portray the oppression of women, predominantly in the form of the southern plantation home. The oppressive image is easily recognizable in the area that she is writing about [.....]". (07)

So the reason behind this use of the symbols is targeting the reality that was experienced by real women. Since reality is the source and the fiction is a reflection of it. All together they submit the newness of the fictional Mrs. Mallard who is not being any more Mrs. Mallard but rather just her. It makes her think of her life with dissimilar binoculars. The narrator puts it:"

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window(276) [.....] But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. (277)

This clear good weather of the day when Mrs. Mallard is informed of her husband's death is a metaphor of her clear and good vision of her life ahead of her. She thinks of a future long life which she has always waited for. Her husband's death opens a path to her selfhood and freedom. Throughout the course of the story she utters the word free five times. "she said it over and over under her breath:"free, free, free!" and "Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering" (277).At this time she is devoted totally to herself and to move on with her life ; for her there is no time to waste just focusing on the future and it is enough thinking of the past .

Chopin makes the readers enter her room by following the omniscient narrator to take her eyes and see what is out the window to see the motion and the energy for the first time. They are the same eyes but with different lenses which permit her to see the world with its true colorations. Those symbols from nature hold Mrs. Mallard's sensations and the harmony that her soul longed to dance on but never got the guts to make any move to break that suppression that she was under.

They point out to the burst of her emotions for now she feels no need to keep them locked anymore. They point to the transformation of a woman with passive voice and soul to a woman with an active spirit. Her heart now is occupied with emotions; it is pumping with life to the whole body and moving the soul. John Deigh defines emotion as: "a state through which the world engages our thinking and elicits our pleasure or displeasure [.....] it is the turbulence of the mind that captures our attention, orients our thoughts, and touches our sensibilities" (829-830).

The emotions in her 'heart' make that connection between her body and soul for the first time. The way the body functions in respond to the soul is by means of the emotion for it is the power to it .Williams James, a psychologist who was contemporary of Chopin's, argues that "the immediate cause of emotion is a physical effect on the nerves" (1073) is true to Mrs. Mallard's case for her emotions are engaged with her thinking about her new state, that is having her life and individuality, and elicit her bliss with this new situation.

Chopin underlines Mrs. Mallard's physical reaction that reflects the impact of emotions not only the body but the soul also: "Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously" [.....] "Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body."(277) .Her body's reactions are louder enough to make the readers feel the wave of the bottomless elation in her soul and see her new perception of her beautiful life that is waiting for her and the bright future she draws for herself in her room and for sure that her husband is not part of it at all.

Mrs.Mallard's chamber is a place where the reader witnesses the preparation of her birth. Accordingly, she is described as a new born child wrapped in her innocence and purity. She is described also sitting in her chair putting her head on its cushion this description contains two symbols that add much to the meaning of Mrs. Mallard's new situation. The first one is the head and the second is the chair.

The head is, according to the Cambridge dictionary, "the part of the body above the neck that contains the eyes, nose, mouth and ears and "**the brain**" (my emphasis)(577) so the head here connotes leadership, and the chair is not anymore the furniture, to be précised: "the seat for one person, which has a back, usually four legs, and sometimes two arms" (Cambridge dictionary 191).

It is the official ironical title given to Mrs. Mallard to be in charge of running her life for the chair is the symbol of might thus it attributes her mighty status. Chopin writes: "She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dream" (276). A contradiction is marked between what Mrs. Mallard's urged for so long, her free life, and never daring to declare her desire that is freedom and what Chopin refers to in describing her as being motionless. Had the readers read this passage again; they will grasp that idea that Mrs. Mallard is motionless because simply this is a new thing to her. She is about to live a life that seemed before to be impossible to have especially when living in a strict society which is based on Victorian values seemed totally impossible to live up to one's choice as a woman.

Alongside being, Mrs. Mallard, the new born child with her innocence and purity, Chopin refers to her sobbing as an annoying aspect in this pure and innocent new born child. The sobbing sound here displays how she suffered deeply from mistreatment before and how forlorn she was; when she had her life married to Mr. Mallard. It actually refers to suppression and oppression that she underwent in her life which annoyed her all that time and never dared to face it or declare it.

Mrs. Mallard finally finds herself and feels what she is feeling because she was a canned-soul woman. She becomes the widow who is living her life for herself nobody else, free from any oppression or pressure. Chopin exhibits how vital is this new life to Mrs. Mallard, nothing will prevent her to enjoy it even her love to him. The writer states: "And yet she had loved –sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self-assertion" (277). Chopin tackles a very prominent element in couple's life and how it plays a role in their



relationship, mainly in a woman's life. In Mrs. Mallard's case it is deemed as a "mystery", it is strange and unknown to her. It is as such simply because she did not experience it.

Though Chopin mentions that Mrs. Mallard loved him "sometimes" but makes of it as a duty to show some love to him because it is part of her role as a good wife. Mrs. Mallard does not make that love come at the expense of her selfhood, womanhood, and freedom especially when the opportunity she is offered by destiny.

After living a dead life, Mrs. Mallard is enjoying herself and her new life that she waited for all the time all the household think the opposite, they think that she is locking herself and dying out of melancholy. Chopin draws a situational irony that adds to the understanding of the situation of women in the American society at that time. Women are considered as those submissive and the ones who stick to their gender social roles as wives and mothers. Mrs. Mallard is considered to be the ideal woman and wife who continues to be as such, and the one who is submissive to her husband though he is gone for she is locking herself with her sorrow of losing him. This is the way her stand is misinterpreted because it is observed from viewpoint of the social conventions of her society.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door – you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door. She replies: "Go away. I am not making ill" the narrator mentions: "No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window. (277)

What they do not know is that she is healthier than anytime, they cannot see this otherwise it would be strange and unacceptable.

When Mrs. Mallard gets out of her room, she is a total different woman. Actually, she is for the first time a woman with a new sensation of her life. The door of the room is

the metaphor of the door opened to her new life .The omniscient narrator describes her once she is out of her room: “Her fancy wad running riot along those days ahead of her.Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long”. (277-278). She is now wearing a new social role, the widowhood. She gets out the door for the first time as Louise rather than Mrs. Mallards as she is called as such since the very first of sentence of the story .It is just when she is in her room she is set to get out of it as Louise for she is prepared to gain her identity.

In this new role she is a woman who finally gained her self-identity; this role is the one that enables her to be in a position of being accountable of any one in her life especially Mr. Mallard, her husband, and she consequently has more rights. She will not live as subordinate any more. In this way she is removed from her husband’s influence for her marriage to Mr. Mallard is like a trap from which she suffered from suppression. Chopin writes: “She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength” (277) .This description makes the readers hear it out loud that Mrs. Mallard suffered of being Mrs. Mallard; she is described as a beautiful young woman but the lines in her face are what explains her suffering. This kind of contradiction is presented by Chopin intelligently to make those “lines” speak out loud just to refer the pressure and stress that they cause young people like Mrs. Mallard to have wrinkles before their time and the reason is her marriage.

The word ‘repression’ is juxtaposed with ‘a certain strength’ to refer to the way Mrs. Mallard gathers her power to resist this oppression and never dared to complain about it and it is palpable that it takes not only of her energy but of her time too; the time of her life. For no woman in the begging of the twentieth century American society is allowed to

declare that she vents her feelings out; Angelyn Mitchell puts it plainly: “Patriarchy’s social conditioning creates codes of social behavior to ensure the suppression of feminine desires’ (60). Louise’s power frails and fades for the immense strength of the social codes imposed on Mrs. Mallard’s soul and body (heart). It is those social codes that will stand any female’s way to reach her individuality and self-assertion and her womanhood.

The door of Mrs. Mallard’s room marks her as Louise the new woman with a new spirit, new desires and new options. In fact she is not only a woman with a dream but a woman who is urging to work on realizing her dream. She works to live the dream up to her commands. The omniscient narrator describes her as it follows:

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister’s importunities. There was feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory; she clasped her sister’s waist, and together they descended the stairs. (278)

In this passage Chopin’s camera renders to the readers so vividly this new woman descending the stairs with certain élan, she is the woman with not only opportunities but with victory. Here Chopin emphasizes this victory with the capitalization of the word ‘Victory’. She is for the first time pacing her steps in her Space where there is no room for her husband just because she reached an enormous self-assertion, self-identity and self-worth. Now she is a victorious woman for death made of her as such.

This victory that allows her to take care of herself is pictured when ‘*clasping her sister’s waist*’(278); the sister who did not undergo what she underwent and she did not reach the other side of the world she is still in the world where the man is the decision maker of her own life. It is the image that delineates her with an absolute oomph.

When Louise is on her way to the parlor again after locking herself in her room with a great felicity; her oomph is tested for she encounters her “husband” in flesh, the

man who is supposed to be a corpse, she perishes. Mrs. Mallard's gaiety does not last when her husband shows up. Her household get her doctors to help her but that is in vain. The doctors declare that she died out of joy for joy kills. Chopin makes the readers so surprised since they lived a sweet hour with Louise in her heaven. Her death is never expected just like her husband's return to the house. Actually, Kate Chopin makes this unexpected ending so ironical.

It is true that the ending is surprising but Chopin foreshadowed Mrs. Mallard's death since the first line. She mentions that she 'was afflicted with a heart trouble'. Berkove writes: "Louise was indeed doubly afflicted with heart trouble. Physically, her heart was weak, and emotionally, it had no room for anyone else." (157). Chopin points to her physical condition, her heart, indeed she does refer to the emotional one. Physically, because she is weak; emotionally, because she has been suffering from her marriage and worse she is never able to show such feelings. She is well if she has no room for anyone else for she urges to be handcuffed and her husband seems to be the handcuffs that she is afraid of and makes her heart ill.

### **I.3. The Dichotomy of Death in Mrs. Mallard's Life**

Kate Chopin makes of the death as a double edged element in the story. She personified Death as the one who bestows her freedom on one hand in her husband's soul; on the other it is hers for her heart condition could not handle the stand in which she saw her dream fading away feeling soul emptied with his presence. Hicks states: "Her death at the end of the story was her last chance for liberation and it is only in death that she is truly free from her husband." (10) And goes further writing "Her body chose death over being oppressed because her heart condition is ultimately her escape from her

husband.”(10). Louise dies out of sorrow of losing her life again .She was not ready to let it go after she thought finally she is going to live her life that she dreamt of. She is not ready to live again for anyone else except Louise thus death is the call to prevent her from doing so.

Louise does not want anything to spoil her joy anymore .Chopin makes it as if she opts out to die and keeping the taste of freedom and selfhood in her soul. She appears not to be that brittle lady that the readers meet at the very beginning of the story but rather a brave woman to whom death is her ultimate chance since death is the most thing that any human being fears especially “man”. She does not want to spend the rest of her life like her sister Josephine.

Josephine is the contradictory image of a woman to Mrs. Mallard, she is the type of a woman who is not aware of her being as a woman possessing a life. She is the obedient in that patriarchal society. Chopin draws her as the typical ideal woman according to society who is idolized in society like the version of Mrs. Mallard before her husband’s death news. This image is emphasized when Chopin informs the reader of her stand on her sister’s death that is just like other male doctors who interpret her death out of joy instead of the real reason.

Therefore, Louise feels that life loses its savor since her husband is still part of it accordingly and his presence makes her flesh creep; she reckons that it is better and enough for her to live one hour as “Louise” rather than 100 years as Mrs. Mallard. Madonne M. Miner points out: “She is referred to once as “Mrs. Mallard,” twice as Louise (within three sentences), thirty –three times as she, and forty times (including objectival and genitive forms) as her”. (31)

She is referred as his wife at the very beginning of the story and the very end of the story. She is Louise when she enjoys her identity, freedom, and self-assertion “which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse to her being!”(277); the readers are informed of her name just when her sister Josephine was so concerned about her for locking herself. Again after her husband’s reappearance she returns to be the shadow to her husband and anonymous and inert and this is the thing she does not abide by.

This shows how Chopin uses these references of cataphora and anaphora just to refer to the vitality of Louise’ identity and individuality and how women like her are unable to obtain; none of them while living in a severe environment which is ruled by strict social institutions. Ralph Waldo Emerson considers selfhood, independence, and individualism as the holy things of a being that is man. In His essay Self reliance he writes:

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string” (121). “Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind” ( 122 ) “What I must do, is all that concerns me, not what the people think” (123) “ I must be myself, I cannot break myself any longer for you ,or you.”(131) “Nothing can bring you peace but yourself (137).

This is exactly what Chopin is getting Louise to do but not able to reach her selfhood and individualism since she is a woman, simply she is suppressed. For this reason, Chopin makes this story ends with an unrealized dream and the complicated situation of Louise just to reflect the complexion of her society that she is living in. Barbara C.Ewell points out:

In the united states as in most nations and cultures, patriarchal custom explicitly defined women as self-less. They were named and described only in terms of their relationship to men – daughter, wife, mother, sister, widow-or more specifically , in terms of their sexual relationships to men: virgin, whore, mistress, spinster. Women were as Simon de Beauvoir so eloquently explained, simply men’s “other”, defined as whatever men were not: not

rational, not strong, not self .Women were not subjects but objects, of sexuality, of discourse, of art – of men.( 158)

Louise lives in a stern world where everything is considered through the male's eyes when it concerns her life. When she died it is male doctors who declared that she died out joy because joy of her husband's back that kills. Also Richard agrees and considers this to be the logical reason for her death. Emily Toth deems the doctors' claim as "an occasion for deep irony directed at patriarchal blindness about women's thoughts" (24). This irony enables the readers to observe how inattentive they are to her desires and longings as a woman simply because as a woman she is considered to have none.

With striking literary tone and style, Chopin makes this protagonist undergoes an awakening hour with that bulk of emotions that are too bold to be expressed or shared by American women during the turn of the century. The ironical ending reveals the strict social environment that women lived during her time and Mrs. Mallard is a specimen by presenting an ironical meaning to "death".

This is unusual because she gives a different meaning to death to mean life and a release and a beginning to Louise rather Mrs. Mallard. Death means in Louise' situation the Depart to a new life which is full of ecstasy and in which she has the ability to reign it the way she wishes and enjoys the taste of that life without sharing it with anyone else; simply she is the heroine of her afterlife story because it is just there she can be as such. There is no chance for her to be as such in the actual world where she is obliged to devote her life to everyone but herself. She is hemmed in by the social conventions of her environment where their individuality is deactivated; here Chopin activates this protagonist from Mrs. Mallard to Louise.

#### **I.4.Athénaïse' Strife in Search for the Female“Self”**

Athénaïse is another appealing story for it is an eponymous story which draws an experience of a woman protagonist of the same name as the title of the story. Athénaïse is a very young woman who has been married to Cazeau for couple months and left him to go back to her parents' house .At the beginning of the story, the readers learn that Athénaïse left her husband because she feels unhappy but never meets her. Chopin makes the readers first meet her husband Cazeau. He is presented to us as a bad man, we fear him and his voice ; the way he walks and especially when he worries about the pony, that his wife takes as a means of transportation, rather his wife. The narrator mentions that “He was tall, sinewy, swarthy, and altogether severe looking” (39) he mentions further :

Cazeau's eyes were dark blue, narrow and overshadowed. His hands were coarse and stiff from close acquaintance with farming tools and implements and [.....] But he was distinguished looking, and succeeded in commanding a good deal of respect, and even fear sometimes. (40)

Chopin gets the readers in an uncomfortable and fearful atmosphere in which the protagonist is part of before meeting her just to make us understand her disliking of her life in her husband's house and her reason of leaving the house to her parents'. The writer emphasizes this atmosphere when making the husband focusing on his job and not thinking a bit about his wife.

The only time he remembers that he has got a wife is just when it was time for bed. After three days of Athénaïse' absence and no response from her to her husband's letters he thinks it is time to snatch her. The omniscient narrator states: “Cazeau had always so much to do; but among the many urgent calls upon him, the task of bringing his wife back to a sense of her duty seemed to him for the moment paramount.”(44).



Chopin presents another motive for Athénaïse' leaving her husband's house which is that life in his house is as bleak as his soul. When she describes the pleasure, the joy and the dance that Athénaïse enjoys in her parents' house and when Cazeau is described as a dull man. Thus this explains that Athénaïse is striving for life that is patent lacking in his house. The narrator cites:

Upstairs , the rooms were so large, so bare , **that they offered a constant temptation to lovers of the dance**, whose importunities Madame Miché was accustomed to meet with amiable indulgence. A dance at Miché's and a plate of Madame Miché's gumbo file at midnight were **pleasures not to be neglected or despised , unless by such serious souls as Cazeau.** (My emphasis)(44-45)

Cazeau asks her to get prepared to leave with him but she refuses .He does not force her to go back home with him he tells her that he wants her to go back alone out of her will. She is asked by her household why she does not want to and if ever he is bad to her she answers that he is not mistreating her but the fact that of being Mrs.Cazeau that what she hates and despises and she wishes to be Athénaïse Miché again.

She hates the social role attributed to her that is being "Mr. Cazeau's wife". She says " I can't stan' to live with man; to have him always there; his coats an' pantaloons hanging in my room; his bare feet –washing them in my tub, befo' my very eyes,ugh!"(1897:50). She cannot stand living her life totally for someone else; she is not even prepared nor convinced to do so. Accordingly, she is so dauntless not to go back to his house and be again his property. The omniscient narrator make the readers sense this determination by getting them into her thoughts "Wen 'Thénaïse said she wasn' goin' to set her foot back in Cazeau's house, she meant it" (1897:48).

Kate Chopin makes Athénaïse explain it explicitly to the readers why she decides to leave Mr.Cazeau's house after scattering hints to the readers to encode like the scary image attributed to Mr.Cazeau and lifeless life she had in his house. Kate Chopin uses more than one time the rhetorical question "why she married Mr.Cazeau?" to put it plain by making Athénaïse utter the crucial trigger of being away from Mr.Cazeau. Athénaïse declares that she married him because it is a custom for a girl like her to marry. She married him because she has to marry not because she wants so.

From a social point of view she is obliged to marry because as a girl she has a role to play and that role is not her option. Though Mr.Cazeau told her that he married her because he loved her and she is the only one that he wanted. Though the narrator states Athénaïse' response to make the readers learn that she "was not the woman to be loved against her will" (57).But he married her because he wanted so; he chose her ; she was not involved in taking decision about this union as if she is not part of it.

She repudiates to return back with him because she does not want it so badly, her repudiation is well stressed by the writer "she would not, and would not, and she would not continue to enact the role of wife to Cazeau."(57).Athénaïse' household find her attitude unacceptable for her parents always think:

[...] that marriage would bring the poise, the desirable pose, so glaring lacking in Athénaïse's character. Marriage they knew to be a wonderful agent in the development and formation of a woman's character, they had seen its effect too often to doubt it. (56)

Unlike them she reckons that marriage traps her and her attitude makes her mother fill with "treachery and deceit"(57).Chopin presents two oppositional view points about marriage the former made by the social institution of her time and Athénaïse' environment and the latter by Athénaïse and women like her who are not allowed to express their viewpoint

towards a reality lived and experienced by them. And among the two the former is reckoned as the correct and ideal thing that marriage. She presents what means good for a woman from a woman's point view versus other's viewpoint. This refers to passivity of a woman in what concerns her life, she does not take part of it all it is decided for her instead of herself.

Athénaïse' stand towards her husband and her marriage is abhorred as nobody understands her except of her brother Montécline. She is deemed as an immature woman for urging life and striving for her selfhood and purchasing her true sense of womanhood. Chopin writes referring to that: "people often said that Athénaïse would know her own mind some day."(56)

Athénaïse' father Miché was so angry with what she did and blamed his wife for not having the "firmness to manage her" and claims that Athénaïse needs a firm hand to control and manage her like Cazeau's hand. "It takes just such a steady hand to guide a disposition like Athénaïse', a master hand, strong will that compels obedience" (57).Chopin here draws the difficult situation that this woman is in. She is not welcomed by her parents nor understood for she is a woman and she is considered to obey her husband and not allowed to express her mind nor feelings.

She does not have the right to run her life, it is deemed as a dangerous thing in such social institution if a woman thinks in this way. If she does then there must be there a hand of "her master" (husband), to handle things for her instead of herself. Mr.Miché's stand shows the man's statute in a woman's life, even if that woman is his daughter. He is the guider, the controller, and even the discipliner. Her father blames her mother for not managing her girl as she is responsible for raising a girl ironically like her submissive and obedient and justifies himself by saying that he did not have time for her, like Cazeau did

not have time for his family, and that he was busy with raising his son Montécline who he reckons as a “good accomplishment”.

At this state Athénaïse feels alone for no one understands her even her parents; there is no place for her to be welcomed except of her brother Montécline. She left her parents’ house and moved to the city of New Orleans. Due to the fact that she feels that no place is fitted to live in enjoying her selfhood and womanhood neither in Cazeau’s house nor in her parents’.

It seemed now to Athénaïse that Montécline was the only friend left to her in the world .her father and mother had turned from her in what appeared to be her hour of need. Her friends laughed at her, and refused to take her seriously the hints which she threw out, - feeling her way to discover if marriage were as distasteful to other women as to herself. Montécline alone understood her. (62)

Chopin makes Athénaïse sails against the wind to refer to the idea that nothing comes above a woman’s individuality, selfhood, and womanhood that she has in the city. Athénaïse is so happy of having her life in this city; she feels that a new Athénaïse is born. Athénaïse sees everything beautiful and distinct.

Chopin uses the symbol of the rain in the city to refer to Athénaïse’ washed soul. She uses rain which, Carl Jung associates with rebirth in order to reflect Athénaïse’ new born entity , will to survive and the promising life that she has now and of which she is the solo master .

## **I.5. Athénaïse' Plight in Search for the "Self"**

Chopin breaks Athénaïse' joy with her beautiful life by learning that she is pregnant by a land lady Sylvie who is described as a wise lady compared to Athénaïse the "ignorant". Her pregnancy changes her perception of her life. It makes her aware of being placed to another social category as a mother of the descendent of Mr.Cazeau rather being Mrs.Cazeau. It is the category from which she cannot run away. Hence she is doomed to go back to her husband's house live again as Mrs.Cazeau. Victoria Hicks writes about her saying that: "she has simply placed herself in another category based around her relationship with her husband."(17). Athénaïse scarifies her selfhood and womanhood just for her baby. She is condemned to live as a selfless mother.

Athénaïse' pregnancy makes of her another woman, a total diverse woman who the readers do not meet since beginning of the story .It makes her determination disappear. She appears to be passive and submissive unlike before she was a woman of will and decision making when it comes about handling things about her life .Here she hands everything to her husband .In this way Chopin demonstrates a strong literary wit of presenting Athénaïse in two opposed images.

The readers meet one before pregnancy and the other one after. The former is the woman with a rebellious spirit and who does not care about anyone accept her individuality and dealing with her life and putting everything behind. She is the one who looks for happiness away from her husband and does not accept to wear her role as Mrs.Cazeau. She is the one who is full of life for it is all what she strives for. She is an independent woman who has a life in the city of New Orealans and has a job though it is

low waged but that has never been a huge deal because what matters is not the wage of the job but rather the job per se.

She is deemed as an immature woman. However, the other image is so dissimilar. She is a flaccid woman and submissive to her husband and so convinced that her place is just with Mr. Cazeau. Her submission to her husband's power is ironically referred when the writer refers to Cazeau's control over his slaves just like his father. Thus, she wears her domestic roles, the wife and the mother, without any resistance or abhorrence to be marked. She is reckoned as a mature woman since she found happiness next to her husband owing Per Seyersted considers that Chopin presents this happiness as the traditional happiness.

It is clear that Athénaïse's Pregnancy puts her in a new statue which is motherhood. This motherhood draws a new path. Peggy Skaggs points out, Athénaïse finds that "perspective motherhood not only refers a role in which she feels comfortable, but also releases-up love for Cazeau".(38). Also, Alfred Bendixen and James Nagel argues that Athénaïse, "after a brief attempt at "freedom", finds profound satisfaction in motherhood, a conventional nineteenth-century ideal female fulfillment".(162).

Chopin indirectly does not refer to Athénaïse's comfort or satisfaction with this new statue nor her love to Mr. Cazeau. But she refers to the deactivation of her being due to pregnancy and motherhood. This refers to the forceful obedience and bending to what she is born for in such environment in such time. Chopin illustrates how things get out of a woman's control and how futile her rebellion is and to get her back to normal social column that she belongs to.

These two images represent the ideal image of a woman considered by her and the ideal woman by the social environment of that same woman. Actually, this is what Kate Chopin aims at representing the image of the true woman from the perspective of the woman character Athénaïse versus the traditional image of the true woman from the social perspective of her environment.

The two images in the story refer to Chopin's ambivalent stand in considering the audience and the reality from which she was inspired. She tries to present the image of the woman who is accepted to be a good woman from the social perspective of that time and makes Athénaïse', and many other women's, purchase of her selfhood, womanhood and freedom just a dream that might be realized in a different time not in Athénaïse's time nor society because she "fit(s)" in, (for) one more typical Louisiana wife of her era."(26) as Allen F. Stein regards it.

The ambivalence is marked when Chopin makes Athénaïse never develop to reach her goal which is living her life the way she wishes enjoying her individuality and womanhood. She does so just to refer to the idea that it is impossible for her as she is a woman and it is arduous to enjoy her selfhood in a very strict social environment.

Another ambivalent stand is observed when Chopin starts the story with a sharp and creepy description of Cazeau and then we encounter another Cazeau in third part of the story to learn that he is not that lousy like Chopin made us think of him. But later we are reminded of his power and strength when he is described as the slave owner who does not force his wife to return back with him home when he asked her to.

Chopin's literary wit works to make Athénaïse return, seemingly, out of her will via pregnancy. Allen F. Stein regards that: " Cazeau tells himself that he wants his wife to

return of her own free will, and, unfortunately, it does not really seem that he gets what he wishes here(24). Athénaïse returns not out of her will but because that spins out of her control. Cazeau does not notice this because Chopin makes him understand so the editors of her work can be published because she suffered from the rejection of her works for some of them were “constituted a manifest challenge to her society”(Daniel Candel Borman 82)and Athénaïse is just one of them.

Chopin uses the keys ambivalently to display two things. The first is when Athénaïse hands over her house keys to her servant and tells her that she does not need them anymore and it is not her responsibility to take care of Mr.Cazeau’s house. In the second is when Athénaïse is handed over the same keys by her husband Cazeau as if she lost them and he got them for her.

Chopin reveals here by the keys of the house as the responsibility of taking care of Mr.Cazeau and his house. In the first situation where Athénaïse refuses to be handled this thing and in the second Chopin smoothes things and gets Athénaïse in charge of this responsibility and makes her play this role again and forever as if nothing happened just to hint to how a woman in such social environment is placed.

Another sign of ambivalence is the sound of the cry of a Negro baby at the beginning and at the end of the story. At the very beginning of the story Chopin represents Athénaïse as a voiced being who wants to be a free woman enjoying her individuality.

At the end, this sad sound refers to two things concerning Athénaïse .One is that she is mature but it is nothing but a woman who tries to play the new role attributed to her. On another, it exhibits the doomed destiny that this Athénaïse shares with this Negro baby, it is slavery but hers seems worse for it is an eternal slavery. Linda .J.Byrd and Anne Good



Jones suggest that “the anticipated baby is a “dues ex machine” and that final note of the story is a somber, possible ironic evocation of the parallel to slavery” (150).For there will be never time nor a chance for Athénaïse to meet “Athénaïse” again since she will live the rest of her life as Mrs.Cazeau and die as Mrs.Cazeau.

# **Chapter Two:**

**Flannery O'Connor's representation of  
women characters in "Good Country  
People" and "A Stroke Of Good  
Fortune"**

“...women like to live on their imagination.//It’s all they can afford, most of them.”

( Fitzgerald 113)

Flannery O’Connor is another woman writer who portrays the experience of women in her fiction in a special way. Her portrayals are drawn from the real world that the fictional women characters are inspired from, for the environment of the writer influences the writer’s writing. Generally, Barbara McKenzie considers that it is “the writer’s country” that contributes in producing a literary production. And particularly on Flannery O’Connor, Ted R.Spivey writes that her vision is “based as much on a woman’s institution and observation as it was on a dedicated writer’s practice of observing all aspects of that life which would provide the raw material of her work.”(43) and Teresa Caruso states : “The women she writes about are real women immersed in the strong patriarchal society of the South, women who form an integral part of the culture that produces and defines that society”(4) .

Thus, Flannery O’Connor represents the situation not only that of the southern woman but rather the American woman. She pictures ‘women’s’ way of life not only in the south but that of America for “the south was getting more like the rest of the country” (Barbara McKenzie 331) she works on reflecting what represents not only her region but her country.

Though the south is a vital area, in her essay *The Fiction Writer And His Country* she writes: “Don’t be a Southern writer; be American writer.”(803). For Flannery O’Connor, it is vital to present one’s country not only region. Flannery O’Connor makes the readers enter that real world by making them feel that world seems as real as possible

and feel that the characters are “alive on the page” (Grec: 173). She reckons that “[f]iction writing is very seldom a matter of saying things, it is a matter of showing things” ((Mystery and Manners: 93) Melvin J. Friedman: 290). She makes the fictional world and its dwellers appear as real as possible to the readers, she makes them part of it instead of telling them about it ; she projects it.

## **II.1.Hulga/Joy Enjoying Her Entity and Her Intellectuality**

In “Good Country People”, Flannery O’Connor draws a special portray of an American woman with certain criteria. The protagonist Joy is a confident and intellectual woman in her thirties. She is a woman with a vision and philosophy for she holds a PhD in philosophy. Her mother Mrs. Hopewell is never satisfied with her nor with her PhD. She considers her education as an awkward thing for it makes of her an awkward woman with an awkward status unlike “a nurse” or “a schoolteacher” or “a chemical engineer”. Mrs. Hopewell sees people as types and it is hard and confusing for her to apprehend which type her daughter’s PhD makes of her.

Mrs. Hopewell considers Mrs. Freeman’s daughters Glynese and Caramae, who joy calls “Glycerin” and “Caramel” as the ideal women that a mother can have. Flannery O’Connor makes of these girls as the model of a good woman; the woman whose femininity serves to be in favor of men. She is not the sort of woman who uses her femininity to be attractive to man and produces children.

The way that joy calls them connotes their roles in the society ruled by men. They do their best to be good enough for “men” not for themselves. Caramel takes care of her

look to be attractive for her man and Glycerine appears to be a secondary choice in her man's life. The way she does not say their names correctly reveals how these kind of women do not get her interest as they do not depict what it means to be a woman in her eyes.

Their mother is so proud of bringing up her girls as such and Mrs. Hopewell praises her for them and feels so upset with her daughter for it seems for her that her daughter "grew less like other people and more like herself"(276). It has been annoying for her that her daughter is not like those of Mrs. Freeman she is not the woman that she is suppose to be like them.

Joy's PhD stands for the newness and differentiation of Joy as a woman among all the women in the story. Flannery O'Connor puts these women in one category and Joy in another one alone to the extent she appears strange and different compared to the others. When her mother could not accept her difference is an irony to how society does not accept her for what she is.

Joy is the intellectual woman whose diploma connotes her own philosophy that is different from that one of her mother's and Mrs. Freeman's and her girls. Flannery O'Connor makes of her as another type of woman whose mind rules her way of life and whose philosophical vision of life is influenced by her PhD. She does not strive to purchase men nor urges to care about them. She hates men and deems them as stupid creatures.

She does not appear as feminine as any woman, as the readers learn she does not like "dogs or cats or birds or flowers" (276).She does not wear like other women; she does not care about her feminine to appear like Mrs. Freeman's daughters. All what she does is reading, getting her mind stuffed with philosophy. John F. McCarthy mentions that "[h]er

only devotion is to the reading of philosophy and her reading has convinced her that life is meaningless and that what appears to exist is really nothingness.”(1144). She does not follow what others tell her to believe. This strikes Mrs. Hopewell when she learns that her daughter’s approach, of life, of nothingness. Joy’s approach is nothing but her way of considering things in her life is according to her. She thinks what fills her mother’s and Mrs. Freeman’s mind and life is “nothing”, nothing at least to her.

Ironically the narrator mentions that Mrs. Hopewell is a woman with great patience but she is not with her daughter for she is not what she wished her to be, to be like other women; at least like Mrs. Freeman’s daughters. The irony is marked too when she says that “ everybody is different”(273) but Flannery O’Connor makes it patent to the readers how Mrs. Hopewell is not able of accepting her daughter’s difference. Joy says to her: “If you want me, here I am LIKE I AM” (274) and she goes further saying “Woman! Do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are not? ... “Malebranche was right: we are not our light. We are not our light!”(276). Joy faces her mother , who bitterly reacts to this, with her difference and with the reality that women are reckoned, from male view point, as subordinate and obedient to them; they are not themselves as they believe.

She claims that other people have their own opinions but she does not accept her daughter with different opinions. Flannery O’Connor uses Hulga/Joy’s name as another element in her characterization to highlight her difference when she makes Hulga changes her name to Joy , Stanley writes in his pamphlet of Flannery O’Connor: “Joy chooses a way of life by becoming Hulga” (33); she chooses to face reality and face her mother to this reality.

## II.2. The Change of Hulga/Joy's Name as A No Mean Feat

Joy's name is so crucial in her portrayal in the story; the name is the window to this protagonist. Batts deems that O'Connor uses names, "to foreshadow and define character" (v) Flannery O'Connor makes of her name the clue to her personality. Joy is presented as the woman who does not know what joy is and who manifests her displeasure since the beginning of the story. Dorothy Tuck McFarland writes that: "[h]er face is characteristically expressionless" (37). The readers cannot trace her joy. Whenever she is called by her mother as Joy she responds to her in a very mechanical way and her mother insists in doing so. She finds the name Hulga as the ugliest name ever.

That is exactly what Joy/Hulga sees; ugly life; as Dorothy Tuck McFarland considers that: "[h]er rejection of .....[her]world stems from her awareness of its liability to imperfection." (36); She rejects the world she lives in because of its ugliness. She lived an ugly childhood as she had grown up with an artificial leg never got the chance to dance, so there was no room for Joy in her life. Mrs. Hopewell insists on calling her Joy to make her believe that her reality and life are joyful for she feels pity for her; while all what Hulga sees is ugliness instead.

Joy finds the name is the thing that she gets the chance to handle by her own self; it is her highest accomplishment alongside her PhD. The narrator mentions: "She considered the name her personal affair .....She saw it as the name of her highest creative act." (p275) .It is personal; it is about her so she is the solo decision maker of what concerns her life. Flannery O'Connor writes that the name is "[o]ne of her major triumphs that her mother had not been able to turn her dust into Joy, but the greater one was that she had been able

to turn it herself into Hulga.”(275).Joy reckons this change of name as a big deal ; it makes of her a victorious woman for she is activating her life the way she wishes.

She feels that she is for the first time the controller of her life not her mother. Suzane Morrow Paulson puts it clearly deeming that “in choosing her name, she asserts her freedom in re-creating the self.”(51). Flannery O’Connor goes further in considering the effect of this change of name on Joy, it is not only no mean feat of re- creating herself but it makes her feel as a goddess.

The narrator mentions: “She had a vision of the name working like the ugly sweating Vulcan who stayed in the furnace and to whom, presumably, the goddess had come to come when called.”(275). whenever she is called by the name she chose for herself she is reminded not only of her achievement but of her status. The effect of the name on her is suggested by the imagery of the function of the Vulcan “the Roman god of fire, change, and creativity” (Suzane Morrow Paulson: 51).The function of the roman god connotes what this name has brought to Joy’s life; the warmth, change and sense of creating one’s life.

The name she picks for herself reflects the effect of her philosophy of life. She sees the reality differently from a different angle which she does not share with her mother. She feels she does not belong to this world which she considers too ugly, so changing her name to Hulga is not just a way of perceiving for real this world but to rebel against it and to announce her self- independence. She does not follow what others tell her to believe. Suzane Morrow Paulson writes:



“Hulga feels that being “Joy” amounts to being classified as “Good Country People” and accepting a deadly “sameness”, an eclipsed identity .By changing her name from Joy to Hulga, she denies her mother’s wish that she conform and she asserts her independence.” (51).

She regards that the name “Joy” puts her in the zone of the conformity and according to her mother ,since it is her who gave her such name, is the one that makes of her the good woman who follows the herd “to be like the other women in the story” .So by changing her name she declares her difference and the will to leave the herd and avows her sovereignty. “She therefore chose to emphasize her deformity and ugliness by assuming an ugly name.”(Dorothy Tuck McFarland 37).

### **II.3.Hulga/Joy’s Artificial Leg as a Source of Empowerment**

Alongside Joy’s name O’Connor makes of her artificial leg as another clue to Joy’s Portrayal.Though Joy/Hulga as a one-legged woman since she was ten, she appears to be a tough woman not affected by the loss of her limb. O’Connor makes her wooden leg as the promoter of confidence and strength in her personality instead of her weakness .She feels that her artificial leg makes her unique just like her PhD.

O’Connor represents Joy as “invulnerable”, as McFarland deems it, by means of this artificial leg. It does not signify any obstacle towards her self–knowledge, self–appreciation and self –worth. John F. McCarthy mentions that “the wooden leg reflects the fact that as a human being she is incomplete.”(1144). But the readers find that Joy never feels incomplete physically; she feels that it adds to her special being as a woman who relies on her mind. The wooden leg works as the sustainer of her philosophy. Thanks to

that wooden leg she can stand up without anybody else's help .She makes her move and overcome her incompleteness and never reveal it to any one ; and able to express her mind freely .

On one hand, Flannery O'Connor, with literary wit, uses the artificial leg as a device to refer to the abhorred reality that Joy can see thus to be rendered to the readers. Indeed, it does refer to her announcement of refusing to be copy of neither her mother nor the one made by that culture; she does not accept to be a replica of her.

On the other, the leg refers to how she is affected by a male controlled society by means of the hunting accident. She lost her leg when she was ten and it was her father was the cause behind the loss of her limb. The father here works as the male representative who shaked her life as a female. In this way the leg is another element in the characterization of Joy that adds to the significance of the abhorrent reality exposed by her other name Hulga. Clara Claiborne Park points out that “the wooden leg of poor Hulga who has rejected Joy and embraced ugliness of body and spirit symbolizes “a wooden part of her soul”” (251). The wood connotes stillness and passiveness; thus, this refers to the way Joy reacts towards the environment that she finds so ugly.

That ugliness is underlined when Mrs. Hopewell narrates repeatedly to Mrs. Freeman, implicitly to Joy too for she hears her all the time when doing so ,the accident that occurred to her leg with the same details and with the same pity ; that functions as an evoker to Joy's pain and a reminder to the ugliness that she is aware of .The ugliness is underscored when Joy purposefully makes an “ugly sound” with her leg to make her mother hear it, though she can control her way of walking while the artificial leg is on, just like a normal person. “[S]he could walk without making the awful noise but she made it — Mrs. Hopewell was certain— because it was ugly-sounding”(275). Ironically, she

endeavors to deliver that ugliness that reaches her soul and cannot be patent to her mother. Yet, the way Flannery O'Connor makes of her woman character as an able lady instead of disable in such scene makes the readers spot the tough aspect about her woman character. It is spotted when the character Joy lost her leg and she did not lose her consciousness; this is a mark of toughness, regardless her age. The image of toughness here reveals how she is prepared later as an adult woman with a mature toughness.

#### **II.4.The Shattered Facets of Hulga/Joy**

Flannery O'Connor makes her woman character Joy goes through a test of this toughness and confidence when the Bible salesman Manly Pointer appears in her life. Once she sees him, she gives him a look a bite to make him interested in her; she succeeds in capturing his attention, and then neglects him. She makes him fathom that he lost her attention during his stay in her house, and then gets his attention again when talking with him before leaving her house and arranges a meeting, as picnic, for the coming day.

She thinks that she succeeded in seducing him, thus controlling him. She thinks that this man is inferior to her for she is a woman with a good vision; and she has to seize the go to manipulate him to make him see things from her perspective. The narrator mentions: “[t]rue genius can get an idea across even to an inferior mind. She imagined that she took his remorse in hand and changed it into a deeper understanding of life. She took all his shame away and turned it into something useful.”(284). She kept , the night before, thinking and imagining their meeting not as any girl thinking how romantically that could be but thinking of how she could get control over him. Besides, the way she is prepared to

this meeting gives the readers the impression that Joy does not deem this meeting as a romantic one ; She does not dress up neatly for this meeting like any girl would do.

The narrator describes her look: “She wore a pair of slacks and dirty white shirt, and as an afterthought, she had put some Vapex on the collar of it since she did not own any perfume.” (284).She does not take care of her physical look for she urges to influence him by means of her mind not charm. Moreover, the narrator states: “she did not take anything to eat, forgetting that food is usually taken on a picnic.” (284).This hints to the way she reckons this meeting and at this moment the readers spot for the first time Joy’s real “JOY” throughout the course of the story, it is the joy of another accomplishment. It is the accomplishment that turns around switching the spots between Hulga and Pointer. Flannery O’Connor makes the unusual appears usual or possible in Hulga’s mind that is to have the man the victim and Hulga as the controller.

Unfortunately, the meeting goes against Joy’s plan and wish and the readers’ expectation too .It is in their meeting that Flannery O’Connor represents another image of Joy. She is Joy the seduced and Pointer as the seducer. Manley Pointer also appears as a different man not the one that Joy thought that she seduced the day before. O’Connor writes: “[h] e had not worn it yesterday and she wondered if he had bought it for the occasion.” (285)the hat connotes the mind , the place where one holds his thoughts and his way of thinking .Thus, pointer is not anymore the same man with the stupidity that Joy thinks he holds.

Flannery O’Connor makes Manly pointer crushes on Joy /Hulga on his way not Joy’s; he kissed her so strongly but Joy does not respond emotionally to that kiss. Though the readers are informed that she did not experience this before, yet it is “common enough”

(286) for her. Flannery O'Connor makes her sensible rather than sensitive towards this kiss as the woman whose mind rules her emotions.

O'Connor refers to the effect of this kiss as "the power [that] went at once to the brain." (285) In such moment this power transmitted to her virgin lips should go to the heart instead, but O'Connor does not make it the case for her Woman character "Joy". This attitude makes of her an unusual woman with an unusual reaction. It also pushes Joy to dare to make a move of taking control of Pointer. She tries to give him a villainous kiss as the narrator describes this image, mentioning:

"the girl at first did not return of the kisses but presently she began to and after she had put several on his cheek, she reached his lips and reminded there, kissing him again and again as if she were trying to draw all the breath out of him." (287).

While kissing, O'Connor once again draws her as a woman with deactivated emotions for she writes: "[H]er mind, throughout this, never stopped or lost herself for a second to her feelings." (287). This emphasizes the stillness of Joy's heart and her collected soul.

O'Connor makes of this stunning reaction as a motive of getting Pointer out of his disguise and revealing the tricky side of his personality. He takes off her artificial leg, to prove to him that she loves him, alongside her glasses without making her feeling that they are taken from her. Metaphorically, both the glasses and the artificial leg stand for the foremost parts of Joy's identity. By taking her glasses off, it is meant to have her insight taken away from her and represents how a woman's vision falls down front of the Male's one.

This shows how woman's vision does not count compared to man's in such social environment. While for her leg, it hints to her loss of her self-reliance and independence and makes of Pointer as the one who she should rely on. Flannery O'Connor depicts how

Hulga loses her confidence and how her life takes another way that is planned by this man Pointer instead of herself. The loss of the leg connotes how a woman is doomed to live and run her life by no other means except of relying on man in doing so.

O'Connor makes this Male character appear in Joy's life as the male representative in a woman's life whose role is to crush and punish her. O'Connor uses him as the device of conning Hulga to make the readers notice the other version of Joy when the leg and the glasses are off thus making her look as the disabled woman with absent confidence, self-reliance, nor self-independence and whose soul is shaken by fear and diffidence.

Flannery O'Connor leads the readers ambivalently by means of more than one hint implicitly to Joy's shaken soul; she referred to the barn where Joy loses her leg, thus; her independence and her personality. The barn is described as cool and dark inside; the way it is cool connotes the way Joy considers the place where her next accomplishment is marked and dark inside connotes the darkness waiting for her to be exposed by Pointer. Also, it is the dark side that O'Connor implicitly refers to the male ruled society. The dark barn refers to the doomed destiny waiting for joy and women like her in the social environment during Flannery O'Connor's time.

Another ambivalent hint of the doomed destiny of joy and the real position of woman in society opposed to the image drawn to her since the beginning of the story. It has been mentioned twice that joy is deemed by pointer as the fantastic animal in the zoo. This explains clearly how woman is positioned by man in society, she is considered as the creature who is inferior to man. She is jailed in the zoo and pointer is the keeper of that prison. This draws the real bitter status of woman in US in general and in the south.

The status of woman in such environment is drawn by the writer when depicting the opposition between Hulga and her mother. Hulga is the opposed version of the social

archetype of woman to the “traditional woman” who is embodied by her mother. She is considered as an immature woman, as she always called her girl instead of her name. She is deemed as such for she is not the type of woman who takes man as the centre of her life nor she is the one who works to attract him and produce children nor to take care of him and his babies and take care of the kitchen nor gets help to run the farm.

Women are made to follow what they are asked to do so as to play their social roles that they are socially accepted by their social environment. The development of their lives and their own selves are never taken into an account as they are limited by the roles that are made to play. That is what Hulga was expected to be the kind of woman belonging to this category of women like her mother, but she did not accept.

O'Connor makes Pointer the male who appears in Hulga's life to refer to her failure as a woman in the patriarchal world and in such world especially in the south. In such environment, as a woman, she is not allowed to win nor to get things under control nor running things up to her wishes which seem hard to obtain. Flannery O'Connor makes things turn against Hulga to picture Hulga as the specimen of many women so as to reveal the dark side of the social environment in which those women lived silently and not enjoying their self-independence, self-confidence, nor self-knowledge.

Paulson writes on O'Connor's women mentioning that they: “are expected to conform to that which is believed to be an acceptable female role, severely limiting their contribution to their community, as well limiting their own self.”(29) He refers to the fact that O'Connor's women are supposed to be obedient and act according to their social environment.

Hulga is the case of woman who does not accept to conform to her community for it limits her identity. O'Connor makes Pointer the male coming from nowhere to force her to do conform and humiliate her by making him injure her. Ironically, to exhibit how her education and sense of self-worth and confidence fades front of "Male Pointer" and to leave her as the submissive rigid woman.

Fisher deems that O'Connor uses Pointer as a technique "to illustrate the system of patriarchal authority in order to expose its "contradictions"" (32). This refers to the way she uses him to demonstrate how women are depraved to live a life decide by the system of their community instead of being the decision makers of their lives. As Shade writes : "her negative portrayal of women and the feminine in her work are convincing proof of the unsympathetic and patriarchal viewpoint of O'Connor held concerning women."(155). The negative way that O'Connor portrays women is just a reflection of the negative situation and environment they live in.

## **II.5.The Erect Ruby**

In "A Stroke of Good Fortune" Flannery O'Connor depicts an experience of a female protagonist in which a slice of her life is reported to the readers in a way that represents her entire life. Flannery O'Connor paints the protagonist Ruby whose life appears at the beginning to go well to her will and her plan before her realization of her pregnancy.

Ruby is depicted as a woman who enjoys a certain self-esteem and self-confidence; Flannery O'Connor makes the readers see clearly this character's traits since the beginning of the story. Ruby's traits are perceived when she is described looking at herself



admiringly at the mirror at the entry of the building of her apartment where the readers meet her for the first time in the story.

Ruth Reiniche comments on the reflection of the mirror of Ruby's trait stating: "as the story begins, the first object confronting the reader is a mirror that provides a moment of self-contemplation for Ruby as she pauses before ascending the stairs." (90) Ruth considers that Ruby's moment front of the mirror is a moment of appreciating the self "the female self". Also, when she is described that "she was extremely young looking for her age" (98) this reflects the way she esteems her entity, she thinks of herself so young, though she is a lady with a body aged thirty-four years old but deems herself with a soul aged fourteen years old.

Another patent marker of her traits is when she was climbing the stairs, Flannery O'Connor writes: "she felt the wholeness of herself, a whole thing climbing the stairs." (99) Here the omniscient narrator refers to Ruby as a woman with an entity and the way she deems herself that is a complete woman for the word "whole" refers to something complete, she feels and enjoys that completeness.

The readers get the impression that a victorious and an ambitious woman is climbing the stairs for Ruby is the woman who married a good businessman and urges to move to an urban area and most prominently she is the woman who takes care of her life in a way that succeeds on not having any baby after five years of marriage.

Ruby considers the way she controls her life and her marriage by not having baby as a great achievement which distinguishes her from the other women in her family especially her mother. On the stairs on her way to apartment Flannery O'Connor gets the readers in Ruby's mind and her interior monologue. Actually, the stairs are the way by means of which the readers get to know Ruby deeply and they are the means by which

Flannery O'Connor leads Ruby to confront her bitter reality that Ruby longs not to face ; it is an episode in her life that she does not wish to be part of her life ; it is "her pregnancy".

Flannery O'Connor adopts at the beginning of the story the method of Ruby's characterization as an "expository presentation". She makes the readers meet Ruby before any other character in the story .On one hand ,to give a straightforward description of Ruby's corpulence, way of acting ,moving, reacting and thinking .On the other one to make a clear description of Ruby's womanhood vis-à-vis the other women in her life mainly her mother .It is at this crucial presentation of the other female characters that O'Connor draws the two archetypes of women , the one that the society molds and the other one that the woman herself decides upon her life.

Ruby sees herself as a special woman compared to her sisters and mother simply because she is not the type of woman whose life is devoted to produce children , the narrator comments on Ruby's attitude towards her sisters: "She had to smile , thinking about that , because she had done so much better than her sisters — they had married from around."(98).Her sisters are married for five years just like her but unlike her they have children and considers that she cannot stand their situation, the omniscient narrator mentions again: "She didn't see how they stood it always going to the doctor to be jabbed with instruments." (97).She cannot stand the pain that brings motherhood to the female body but rather to her soul. She deems that they are the type of women who follow the same steps as their mother who had a great impact on Ruby's stand against motherhood and pregnancy.

On the stairs before reaching the first storey Ruby's attitude towards pregnancy is exposed through a flashback, she recalls the memories of how her mother's life was devoted to produce children and chiefly the scene of giving birth to her little brother,

Rufus, the narrator reports: “her mother had got deader with one of them”, for she reckons that “by escaping pregnancy she can escape the risks of aging and death” (Charels W.Mayer 72).For W.Mayer pregnancy equals death and getting older in Ruby’s eyes as she mentions the whole experience of giving birth to Rufus as the “all the misery for Rufus!”(97).

Teresa Carsuo reckons that “Ruby’s memories, that keep this reader at least from condemning her “(45); there is a pathos in her memories that elucidates her attitude towards motherhood and having babies to the readers. Ruby deems that each of her mother’s experience of pregnancy and giving birth gets her a step closer to death but Rufus made of her mother an absolute dead woman with a dead soul.

Ruby makes an analogical comparison between herself at the age of thirty four years old and her mother at the same age. The first thing is considered in that analogy is between her corpulence and her mother’s; she thinks that she is younger than her mother at the age of thirty four years old. She remembers how at this age her mother looked so old as if she was sixty four years old; she had a gray hair and she was so pale like “ a puckered – up yellow apple”(97) while she is vivacious and looks younger being at the same age .

Ruby deems that her mother is “ignorant” and “stupid” due to the fact that she lived her life randomly aimlessly devoting it to pregnancy and producing children at the expense of her womanhood,self-esteem and self -realization .While she is an aware lady unlike her sisters who followed their mother’s footsteps. She urges to have another scenario of her life knowing what makes her life worth to be lived for and knowing what completes her womanhood and seeing clearly how to run her life .She is a woman with an aspiration of making her life moving to the next pitch, she deems not having any baby during her

marriage of five years is no mean achievement that makes her a dissimilar woman from all the women in her family.

Ruby's recall of her mother's giving birth to her brother is graved in her memory and left a mark in her soul and formed her stand not only towards her brother in general but pregnancy in particular. The recalled scene explains later Ruby's bitter stand and disfavor with him. She deems "Children are death-dealing monsters to avoid" (56) as the critic Joy A. Farmer puts it. She considers him as the crucial motif behind getting their mother the last step to death and turned her to a dead corpse with a dead soul, she gave up her womanhood for motherhood to have him and grow up as a useless man.

## **II.6. The Serious Denial of Ruby's Pregnancy**

Flannery O'Connor metaphorically makes the stairs and each floor as a reference to Ruby's way to her apartment her actual way to her realization of her pregnancy since the beginning of the story Flannery O'Connor uses patent symbols and clear hints to Ruby's pregnancy. At each storey Ruby meets people explicitly refer to her pregnancy and the more she meets other persons the more hints to her pregnancy are so lucid.

Throughout the course of the narrative we get the impression that Flannery O'Connor emphasizes Ruby's pregnancy to the readers but in fact it is Flannery O'Connor's way of divulging how that the emphasis is on how Ruby herself strives vainly to convince herself that pregnancy is a physiological state that she could never go through, she tries to look for anything but her pregnancy.

Flannery O'Connor hilariously represents how Ruby goes through a serious state of denial of her pregnancy when moving from one storey to another and how each person she

meets in each floor on her way to her apartment gets her a step closer to her realization of her pregnancy and her distinct considerations and justifications of her symptoms of her pregnancy.

In the first floor, she meets a boy whose mother calls a good fortune instead of his name, Hartley Gilfeet, and who plays with a gun toy and leaves it so Ruby sits on when taking her breath on the stairs. The boy ironically refers to Ruby's coming boy and the gun toy represents Ruby's moment which triggers Ruby's later confrontation to her pregnancy that Flannery O'Connor puts her in a denial state. The boy depicts a good fortune to his mother opposed to Ruby's signification of these two words for she deems the good fortune as Madame Zoleeda informed her that she is expecting a good fortune sooner in her life.

## **II.7. Ruby's Pregnancy as a Hazard to Her "Self"**

The title of the story is an oxymoron that Flannery O'Connor uses to express Meiosis or litotes for the readers are led to apprehend that the words "stroke" and "fortune" are juxtaposed in a way that sums up Ruby's situation. The word stroke refers to the sudden "quick forceful action" or event and "an act of hitting someone with a weapon" (Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary 1268), in the same source, the word 'fortune' refers to the wealth and the chance or the way it effects someone's life" (490).

In the story Pregnancy is neither the wealth, the chance nor the fortune that Ruby urges but it is that weapon that slays her as she considers that nothing is considered as a fortune when having a child as this mother. Since Madame Zoleeda told her to wait for the coming fortune to her life, Ruby started to see her real fortune compared to the boy's

mother; Ruby's fortune is represented in moving to the sub division and living comfortably and enjoying her life in which there is no place for a baby and considers that is under her control and even her husband could never betray her by ruining her life by having a baby.

Flannery O'Connor makes it so plain to the readers that Ruby is pregnant but Ruby endeavors to ignore this fact. The way she is on the stairs, she feels so tired and unable to continue moving forward on the stairs and the symptoms of her pregnancy are so plain but she justifies those symptoms as having a heart trouble.

Ruby considers pregnancy as the factor that mortifies her life and she accepts to have cancer rather than being pregnant, this demonstrates how Ruby accepts to have an ill ruined body rather an ill and dead soul by means of pregnancy, actually pregnancy in her mind's eyes is worse than cancer. Flannery O'Connor represents Ruby as woman who urges life and youth just like Dr. Jerger the resident of the second floor, she depicts how a woman can have desires as a man who is typified by Dr. Jerger who spent all his life urging youth and enjoying his life in which pregnancy is not part of.

The readers notice in the third floor how seriously Ruby physically is exhausted and frail and how she struggles to pace some steps. "The walls turned black and she felt herself reeling, without breath, in the middle of the air, terrified at the drop that was coming." (102) It is in this floor that Ruby is confronted to her pregnancy with her friend Laverne watts as she told her that she is absolutely pregnant especially when telling her that she: "bets it's not one (baby), "she" bets it's two" (104) and she refers that Ruby has swollen ankles and big feet and got some weight and asks her with mockery: ""How long you think you can hold off?!""(103).

This is a Rhetorical question that Flannery O'Connor uses implicitly to refer how long Ruby is going to deny what is patent and giving up is her ultimate choice, but Ruby deems that her stomach aches as just gas. She reacted brutally and expresses a serious denial of her pregnancy when her friend acted like a pregnant woman and repeated the word mother over and over; the word "MOTHER" does not only get on her nerves up but made her feel insulted.

Flannery O'Connor makes Ruby confronts her phobia "pregnancy" after leaving her friend's apartment Laverne Watts. Ruby experiences a serious physical tiredness and disability of moving a step on the stairs. Flannery O'Connor writes: "It was just a little feeling like a piece of her inside rolling over but it made her breath tighten in her throat. Nothing in her was supposed to roll over." (106). Here Flannery O'Connor draws the scene of Ruby's surrender and realization of her doomed destiny that she tried to deny since the beginning of the narrative and which was so plain to the readers too. Flannery O'Connor puts it as such: "she felt herself getting calmer. She got upset too easy ..... On the sixth one (step), she sat down suddenly, her hand slipping weakly down the banister spoke onto the floor." (106).

The stairs in the story are a clue in Ruby's way to her realization of her pregnancy, before the publication of the story with its current title Flannery O'Connor published the same story entitled as "woman in stairs" in "the August 1949 issue of Tomorrow (vol. 8). It was republished with the current title in Shenandoah, Spring 1953 issue (vol. 4) before appearing in the Good Man collection in 1955." (115). The following excerpts describe the use and the significance of the stairs in the story:

The steps were thin black rent in the middle of the house covered with a mole-colored carpet that looked as if it grew from the floor. They stuck straight up like steeple steps, it seemed to her. They reared up. The minute she stood at the bottom of them, they reared up and got steeper for her benefit. As she gazed up them, her mouth widened and turned down in a look of complete disgust. (96)

The stair cavern was dark green and mole-colored and the wail sounded at the very bottom like a voice answering her (106)

She sat on the step, clutching the banister spoke while the breath came back into her a thimbleful at a time and the stairs stopped seesawing. She opened her eyes and gazed down into the dark hold, down to the very bottom where she had started up so long ago. "Good Fortune," she said in a hollow voice that echoed a long all the levels of the cavern, "Baby."(107)

Flannery O'Connor since the beginning of the narrative lays emphasis on the description of the stairs for they hold a connotative meaning of Ruby's situation and omens her dark and murky life that is waiting for her after the realization of her pregnancy. The aforementioned quotes refer to the way Flannery O'Connor referred repeatedly to the darkness and sharpness of stairs throughout the course of the narrative to point out Ruby's coming darkness and sharp curve into her life.

Ruby says when being up on the stairs with swollen feet :” They feel tight sort of .I had the awfulest feeling when I got up those steps, like sort of out of breath all over , sort of tight all over, sort of of—awful.”” (104), Ruby appears to complain from the stairs but she actually expresses her awful feeling about being pregnant.



## **II.8. The Broken Ruby with a Broken Self-Conception**

Flannery O'Connor uses the stairs as the device to lead not only the readers but Ruby herself to realize and confront her pregnancy; they describe the two versions of Ruby. At the foot stairs she is the young woman full of life, she is the victorious Ruby who holds a vision of spending her life. While after about seventy four stairs, Ruby is marked to be crushed down like an avalanche; she is old, insecure and a dead woman. The critic Katherine Hemple Prown mentions that Ruby appears to "relinquish ownership of her body and submit to the forces of male authority"(48) ; Hemple Prown describes how Ruby is a defeated woman with a destroyed soul by means of the "stroke" of her pregnancy.

It is the pregnancy that marks another and different Ruby with no confidence and low self- esteem with evaporated desires and frail will to live her life .She feels that she became a strange Ruby that she does know and never urged to know. She holds an obscure vision of her life.

Flannery O'Connor describes this obscurity by putting it clearly: "Then she recognized the feeling again, a little roll. It was as if it were not in her stomach. It was as if it were out nowhere in nothing, out nowhere, resting and waiting, with plenty of time."(107) Ruby sees a foggy future waiting for her; she sees the coming life is not devoted to Ruby and it is life that is going to be spent at the expense of Ruby's womanhood. She sees the nothingness that is growing in her womb the same as the nothingness that her brother brought to her mother's life.

Flannery O'Connor represents Ruby's experience as a specimen in Gothic humorous mold. Since the beginning the readers know about Ruby's pregnancy while

Ruby kept denying that process of denial is reflected in a humorous way . W.mayer puts it clearly by writing that “ Ruby’s blindness (she didn’t need to be told”)becomes more clearly comic”(71).

It is the Gallows Humor or the grotesque by which that Flannery O’Connor uses to reveal how a female character’s happiness and womanhood and self realization is smashed down when they are not apt to decide what suits their lives and when it does or not .Claire kahane refers to pregnancy as “the Gothic horror stalking its unwilling victim” ( 345) and deems that “ the Gothic fear” represented in the story “ is revealed as the fear of femaleness itself , perceived as threatening to one’s wholeness, obliterating the very boundaries of self.”(347).

As a writer O’Connor attempts to get women’s voice heard enough that is not even known to the society that there are many “Rubys” going through the akin upheaval and having that fear residing their souls but not allowed nor able to declare it and how it feels to be a woman and in Ruby’s shoes and how thirsty a woman is to enjoy her life that she lacks and to decide by her own how to run her life and consider what befits her life and her gaiety.

Stephen Sparrow thinks that Flannery O’Connor “told her stories from the other side, the dark side where people who shun the light try to work out their lives on their own.” (02) As a woman she is doomed to miss the fortune that she considers as such but the fortune that serves all people in her life except herself.

Ruthann Kechel Johansson says that “The good fortune that Ruby denies is motherhood, a state she associates with death”(44) Pregnancy represents to her mortality though having a baby is considered as symbol of life ; but in Ruby’s case is distinct as “she fails to love and fears not only death , but life itself” (Suzanne Morrow Paulson,15) By means of pregnancy Ruby appears to reject life for the type of life waiting for her is a dead one , there is no life for her since having a bay already makes her a dead woman.

# **Chapter Three:**

**A comparative study of Kate**

**Chopin and Flannery**

**O'Connor's portrayal of the**

**women characters**

“Literature is where I go to explore the highest and the lowest places in human society and in the human spirit, where I hope to find not absolute truth but the truth of the tale, of the imagination of the heart.” (Salman Rushdie 18)

Literature is the imaginative world where the imagination soothes the readers' soul. It is the medium that enables the readers to go to another world. It is the place where one urges to be escorted and pleased by the artistic sculpture of the human imagination. As literature is a means of entertainment; it is also a means of didacticism.

It tends to convey a message to the reader. It reflects facts. The readers are enabled to do so if the writer's message is echoed clearly enough in the text. Toril Moi cites “The great author is great because he (occasionally even she) has managed to convey an authentic vision of life; and the role of the reader or critic is to listen respectfully to the voice of the author as it is expressed in the text.”(78). It is true that literature is considered to be the gate that offers the readers some sunshine to enjoy their fictional trip by means of the writer's imagination. Literature permits the readers to see the real world via the real one.

The writer tends to reflect the real world thus literature reflects society; it provides an understanding of the way a society functions. Pam Morris considers that literature represents the reality in the literary world which reflects the real one, he writes: “Literature constructs a representation of that already existing reality” (7). It is considered to be the reference that reveals the operating system of a given society. The writer as an artist plays the role of a painter to render faithfully the reality of a given society.

Literature does not take care of society merely but rather of those who make that society. It takes care of their experience in that society. It tackles the human experience in a creative way. Kelly Griffith says: “Still another kind of “truth” conveyed by literature is the experience of reality” (26). The writer presents the human experience by focusing on portraying it rather than speaking about it. He tends to paint that experience with its true colors by means of a special artistic touch. Accordingly, the writer takes the fictional character as a device to make the readers witness the reality and re-experiences it.

Thanks to literature the human could know things about each other. Their voices could be heard through time for literature was and still to be the horn to do so. That horn is the same means that enables the women writers to make women’s voices to be heard. Ruth Sherry considers that “Women’s writings .....provide insights into women’s lives and experiences”(17). They take fiction to represent the situation of women in their society. Literature is the medium that is adopted by feminists to represent images of women in their society.

“The Images of Women Approach” is a branch of feminism that deals with the embodiment of the female experience considering their social environment. It is a link between the author’s life and the readers’ one. The critic’s task is to make the readers consider the writer’s experience from his viewpoint. Toril Moi mentions:

“In ‘Images of Women ‘criticism the act of reading is seen as a communication between life (‘experience) of the author and the life of the readers. When the readers become a critic, her duty is to present an account of her life that will enable her readers to become aware of the position from which she speaks”. (43)

Toril Moi here deems the writer works on rendering the life experienced during her time to the readers. Since the writer is the son/daughter of his environment; ergo, her women

writer's duty towards the readers and the text per se is to represent that real world in a non real one. The writer who is behind the work gives it more sense.

The text is explained if the author's print sustains it for he/she writes a text which holds his/her certain cultural and sociological background. Consequently, the critic has to see this background that serves in the understanding of the work. Stephen Heath states: "when the Author is found, the text is 'explained' – victory to the critic. ....Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile" (147). This has nothing to do with the biographical references about the writer; the focus is on the way the writer's artistic print is patent to the readers.

The direct link between literature and life comes at the core of this approach for it is concerned with the presentation of images of women taking realism as the literary form of the literary work. The woman writer creates an unreal female character as a device to embody the female experience taking into account her social and the cultural environment. The reflection of the female experience is the absolute task of the woman writer; thus she goes back to reality for it is the solo-reference of the literary creation.

This process represents the focus of the Anglo-American feminism; this process is called "Gynocriticism", which was coined by Elaine Showalter. Mary Eagleton puts it clear on this term and the function of the woman writer using this process is called the gynocritic:

The gynocritic dedicates herself to the female author and character and develops theories and methodologies based on female experience, the touchstone of authenticity. The gynocritic discovers in her authors and characters an understanding of female identity-not that she expects her authors and heroines to be superwomen, the essential struggle will be towards a coherent identity, a realization of selfhood and autonomy. The most popular sequence in a gynocritical reading is from reality, to author, to reader to reality: there is an objective reality which the author apprehends and describes truthfully in her text; the

reader appreciates the validity of the text and relates it to her understanding of her own life. In this paradigm author, character and reader can unite in an exploration of what it means to be a female (9)

Mary Eagleton cites in this passage the tenets of the gynocriticism. She evinces the way the woman writer works on the female character to render her experience. The gynocritic attempts to make of the text and the female character and her experience a confluence between the reader, the author, and the reality reflected in that work and “through” the female experience.

Though the readers get the feeling of having the literary production as a “visa” to get away from their world, but it is never forgotten that the readers are part and parcel of their real world. By means of the literary work the exposition of that experience clarifies the triangle relationship between the author, reader, and reality.

When the efforts of both the author and the critic are gathered, the readers are able to see that world and re-experience that experience “molded” in words and lines of the author’s work. The presentation of the women characters is done according to the normal standards in a way that it can be apprehended and pictured in the readers’ mind; and why not shared or experienced and simply found in their real world.

Both Kate Chopin and Flannery O’Connor’s short stories: “The Story Of An Hour”, “Athénaïse” and “Good Country People”, “A Stroke Of A Good Fortune” are an allegory of the representation of women’s experience in literary production. They portray the female experience via their women protagonists; Mrs. Mallard/Louise, Athénaïse, Joy/Hulga, and Ruby Hill. They do not depict the experience of woman in the American south but rather the experience of the American woman at any part of Unites States so as



“to provide a more powerful understanding of the ways in which society works to the advantages of women.” (Pam Morris 7)

### **III.1.An analogy between Mrs.Mallard /Louise in “The Story Of An Hour” and Joy/Hulga in “Good Country People”**

Both Kate Chopin and Flannery O’Connor sculpture their women fictional characters to reflect the experience of women who inhabit the real world .Mrs. Mallard, the protagonist of “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin, and Hulga /Joy , the protagonist of “Good country People” by Flannery O’Connor ,as women character seem to share sundry dimensions of their experience .Kate Chopin is considered as a writer that belongs to the late nineteenth century and beginning of the turn century and Flannery O’Connor to the period of the fifties. They portray distinct stereotypes of women, in a way to define who a woman is , which appear to be odd to the standards of the social environment .

#### **III.1.1.The Influence of Male’s Presence in Mrs.Mallard/Louise and Hulga/Joy’s Lives**

Kate Chopin and Flannery O’Connor expose how the male presence influences their protagonists’ lives and womanhood, self – assertion, self reliance and self– independence. Cheri Register in her essay “American Literary Criticism: A bibliographical introduction” writes that “A literary work should provide “*role models*”, instill a positive sense of feminine identity by portraying women who are “self-actualizing, whose identities are not dependent on men”” (20). That is on what Kate Chopin and Flannery O’Connor worked in their literary works via women characters, they represent them as role models of independent women.

Kate Chopin's protagonist Mrs. Mallard is a flat static character who displays throughout the course of the narrative one attitude towards her womanhood and her perception of her life which she savors it when realizing that her husband is not part of it. Louise for the first time locks herself in her room having time to arrange and plan for life by her own and looking from the window to appreciate the liquor of the moment and to read a new chapter of her life, seeing things that she never thought she might ever think of .

She sees nature with its trees, its birds and its sky for the first time, "[...] she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air"(Chopin 277).Ironically, Chopin represents how Louise is aware of what surrounds her perceiving the new congenial things that are taking place in her life. Kate Chopin depicts how Louise perceives life when she starts savoring this new life which she "open(s) and spreads her arms out [it] in welcome" (277) .It is in this new life her soul "blossoms" with will ,self-assertion and self- knowledge. The door metaphorically refers to new brand start to Louise's life and her victory gate; after leaving her room, she is a very confident and sturdy woman .

Kate Chopin exposes how Mr. Mallard affects Mrs. Mallard's life before being informed of the false news of his death, her husband is present in her life .She is the woman whose eyes hold a "dull stare", she is the "powerless" woman, she is the woman who suffers from "heart trouble" and she is the one who due to the repression has a wrinkled face though being young, she is the woman who gives up being Louise. The narrator points to the psychological transformation upon Louise' soul mentioning:

[...] she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her "*absolutely*"(my emphasis).And she opened and spread her arms out of them in welcome. There would be no one to live for her during those coming years: "*she would*

*live for herself*"(my emphasis).There would be no powerful bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and "*women*"( my emphasis) believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow creature(277).

Contentedly realizing Mr. Mallard's absolute eternal absence, Louise' heart is healed and pumps of life again, and her eyes see admiringly everything except him. She sees those coming years that will compensate and heal her enough to forget those which she spent with Mr. Mallard. Allen F.Stein speaks of Louise' enjoyment and appreciation of her new life mentioning that: "Chopin is pointing up just how much is necessary in terms of personal resources to win autonomy for oneself" (59) and notes that when "receiving word of her husband's death, comes to the realization that she has never been a free woman since her marriage and looks forward now to a life forever unconstrained by matrimony."(57).Stein reveals how it is vital to Mrs. Mallard to live again as Louise and how death affords her this chance to rearrange a better life to live freely .

Kate Chopin does not make Louise' happiness and enjoyment of the coming back of "Louise" last longer .Once Louise is on her way on stairs down seeing the door of the house being opened by her husband, Louise falls dead. Mary Papke considers Louise as a woman "whose powers of reflection have been repressed, suddenly shocked into being, and then brutally cut off" and the "woman who changes in unchanging world"(64). She refers to the fact how Louise' dream of freedom is amputated and how there would be no place for her since she realized the taste of freedom. As it marks how she could not give up her lust for freedom and herself as Louise , she is apt to die rather to live as a dead soul .

Her husband appears again bringing her back the garment of Mrs. Mallard that makes " Louise " vanish by his presence. The door again metaphorically refers to the fact that everything is smashed down again in Louise' life and points to her defeat since there is no other way to save nor to have that freedom except death.

The omniscient narrator spots the scene in which Louise appears at her best moment in her life ever achieving her apotheosis. It mentions:

“She rose at length and opened the door to her sister’s “importunities”.( my emphasis)There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like “a goddess of victory .She clasped her sister’s waist” (my emphasis), and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom” (278)

In this passage, the act of holding her sister’s hand (in particular her waist) connotes how Louise for the first time is making the move of getting her life under her control and how she is able to help another woman to guide her to the way to her being since she is now a decision maker instead of a follower as she used to be.

Hulga shares the same doomed destiny as that of Louise. Hulga appears as a self-confident and self-assertive woman at the beginning of the story .Flannery O’Connor represents her as an intellectual woman lead by her perspective of considering things; she does not like being told what to do .Her self –assertion is marked when she changed her name legally from Hulga to Joy, she deems this change made her feel a victorious woman. She is a sort of woman who reckons men inferior to her .When she meets Manley Pointer she works on making him get of her knowledge, she attempts to manipulate his vision towards life.

Flannery O’Connor depicts not only how a woman can get control over man’s ideas and vision not the opposite in such a social environment where women’s lives are under control of men but also “to demonstrate how “it is natural that bright, ambitious girls would find more interest in fantasies of male adventure in male world than in imagining themselves as traditional women like their mothers”( Wrestling 514).

Though Hulga has an artificial leg, she is a woman who has a control over her life. Flannery O'Connor portrays her as an ambitious woman and man is not part of that ambition, living her life for herself with "joy" comes at the top of her ambition. The narrator points to her ambition: "Joy might see forty –five. She had a weak heart. Joy had made it plain that if it had not been for this condition, she would be far from these red hills and good country people. She would be at university lecturing people who knew what she was talking about."(276). O'Connor ironically refers to Joy's ambition when she climbs the ladder to the second storey of the large barn without any difficulty for a person with a joined artificial leg.

The feature of controlling is represented when Joy kisses Manley Pointer; O'Connor portrays the scene as if Joy is in a war rather than acting romantically and she reveals how Joy /Hulga urges to control Manley Pointer by means of her charm via kisses. The narrator puts it clearly: "The girl at first did not return any of the kisses but presently she began to and after she had put several on his cheek, she reached his lips and remained there, kissing him again and again as if she were trying to draw all the breath out of him" (O'Connor 287).It adds describing her stout: "She had never been kissed before and she was pleased to discover that was an unexceptional experience and all matter of the mind's under control."(286), and "Her mind, throughout this, never stopped or lost itself for a second to her feelings."(287).

In another passage the readers are exposed to Hulga's true confidence and tenacity of her superiority over man by means of knowledge and philosophy:

During the night she had imagined that she seduced him. "She imagined" (my emphasis) that the two of them walked on the place until they came to the storage barn beyond the two back fields and there, "she imagined" ( my emphasis), that things came to such a pass that she very easily seduced him and that then, of course, she had to reckon with his remorse.

True genius can get an idea across even to “an inferior mind” (my emphasis). “She imagined” (my emphasis) that she took his remorse in hand and changed it into a deeper understanding of life. She took all his shame away and turned it into something useful.(284).

Unusually to a woman, O'Connor exposes how Hulga is a very practical woman led and controlled by her mind and reason rather her emotions especially when kissing Manley Pointer. As she depicts how easy was for her to get control over Manely Pointer whose mind is inferior than hers , she also reveals paradoxically that man is exposed to have a broken heart and be a victim as a woman can be a victim of the male fist .When Manley Pointer asks her if she loves him she replies that the word “love” represents nothing but illusions, that reply is an omen for Joy/Hulga's real illusions about her self- confidence, self-reliance, self-knowledge and self- assertion.

Unfortunately, as Mrs. Mallard, Joy's happiness did not last neither her enjoyment of her self- confidence, self-reliance, self-knowledge and self- assertion. Manley Pointer shatters Joy's joy and reconstructs the ugliness in her life as he called her as Hulga when abandoning her with her artificial leg off. Christine Atkins marks “ In stealing Hulga's leg , Pointer emasculates her and reestablished the “natural” order of the things – a paradigm of male dominance and female submission”(127).Pointer takes Hulga's leg to make it clear to her that in the social scale , a male comes at the top of that scale of be dominant while the female comes at a lower position to be submissive.

Joy's philosophy is demolished under the control of Manley Pointer for that control is something that “she only imagined to achieve”. When he takes off her glasses that stand for Joy's vision of life and vis -à -vis herself. Also; when he takes her the artificial leg that, that is so vital in her eyes and not willing to show it to any one, stands for her self-independence, reliance and “her rationality and her godlessness”(Christine Atkins

121)because Pointer asks her to prove her love to him by exposing her joined leg; implicitly to push her to waive her self-independence and reliance.

The narrator points to Pointer's bestial reaction towards Hulga rather Joy and hers too when her leg has been taken off, he told her: "Leave it off for a while you got me instead. .... She gave a little cry of alarm but he pushed her down and began to kiss her again. Without the leg she felt entirely dependent on him. Her brain seemed to have stopped thinking altogether and to be about some other function that it was not very good" (289). O'Connor exposes how man plays a role in a woman's life and how her power frails vis -a-vis his presence in her life and that she cannot be independent, her independence is only confined by him. In Joy's case Pointer is meant to be the replacement of her artificial leg by means of which she never needed someone to rely on and only on him; she is doomed to do so for her artificial leg is in his fist and she is unable without it and not apt to do anything.

O'Connor portrays how the male's presence influences Joy/Hulga's life, first when she lost her leg because of her father but later worked on to overcome it. Though Hulga's "wooden leg corresponds to to her wooden part of soul"(99) as Flannery O'Connor deems it in "Mystery and Manners", Hulga takes her Ph.D as a refuge so as to "negate her maimed body by living in her mind, where she can prove herself a full person"(63).She considers her mind as a source of life and never let that physical injury reach her soul. O'Connor reveals how firmly Hulga/Joy takes an advantage of this incompleteness so as to avail herself of it to heel her personality and make her as an unusual girl. O'Connor also, depicts how Hulga/Joy is harmed by the presence of male in her life, the first male is represented by her father who affects her body at the beginning of the narrative, by means of accident which coasted her leg, while the other is represented by Manley Pointer who appears to affect her soul by the end, taking her artificial leg.

Both of women protagonists, Mrs.Mallard and Joy-Hulga are portrayed to be different from the other female characters in both stories. Mrs.Mallard appears to be dissimilar from sister and Joy-Hulga is unlike her mother Mrs.Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman's two girls Glynese and Carramae who "are caricature of normal girls who court young men, marry, and produce children."(Westling 518) Both Chopin and O'Connor put their female protagonists in a special category different from the one that the other women of the narratives belong to .They characterize them in such a way to portray the new stereotype of a woman in their social environment, those standards appear to be not only new but rather outlandish and unacceptable to a certain extent.

### **III.1.2.Mrs.Mallard/Louise and Hulga/Joy versus the Other Women in Their Lives**

Both of writers represent their female protagonists in a new social mold to stand as a sample of the "new woman" versus the other women characters representing the traditional type of women. Mrs. Mallard locks herself for a while in her room after being informed of her husband's death, unexpectedly from any other women in her environment, to bath her soul from the sorrow and refresh it and get ready to live her life happily without her husband.

Kate Chopin makes of Louise' attitude a situational irony to refer to Louise' state of flavoring her freedom endowed by destiny and that she is not ready to yield it up again. Riziki Theodorus Johan speaks of her reaction stating that: "Chopin represents a different image of a wife. She deconstructs her readers' notion of a perfect and loving wife. The way Mrs. Mallard reacted seems not a common reaction of a wife who had just lost her beloved husband; on the contrary, she seemed relieved."(43).Theodorus considers that



Chopin represents Mrs. Mallard, unusually at least from the social view point, as a non-typical woman for not reacting as she is supposed to do.

In terms of social standards she is supposed to mourn and to be filled with sorrow and melancholy instead of gaiety and hope, yet she does not do so for now she is a lady who knows what misses her life simply because she is not the type of woman who is submissive and lives as a man's shadow, she urges so badly to have a shadow instead of playing its role.

Louise's sister Josephine is represented as the type of woman who lives under the control the social standards which do not take her selfhood and womanhood into account. When Louise locked herself in her room she interpreted Louise's attitude according to the social standards that rule her life too.

Kate Chopin writes: "Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door." "Go away. I am not making myself ill." No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window."(277). Louise is expected to play her role properly as being the devoted wife to her husband when he was alive and dead too. Josephine asks her sister Louise to open the door thinking that she is harming herself, she takes Louise's reaction as normal for she would react the same way, but Chopin creates of Louise the atypical woman with an aberrant reaction and attitude towards the news of her husband's death and her social environment.

Like Louise, Joy-Hulga is portrayed as an intellectual woman with a vision and a way of perceiving things differently, her difference makes her seem unusual to people in her environment especially in her mother's eyes. She appears to be different

from the pregnant Glynese and the Carmen ,who is so happy getting married .She “does not like things other women like such as”( Atkins 120) “dogs or cats or birds or flowers or nice young men”(276). She is not the kind of woman with a restricted typical thinking of having man to be her ambition, as she deems men as inferior by means of their “stupidity”. Neither does she urge to look ideal in his eyes nor be submissive to him and spend her life on producing children woman with no common sense as the other girls. Her mother Mrs.Hopewell is so angry with her attitude for not being another copy as the rest of typical ideal traditional women.

Mrs. Hopewell considers the degree of philosophy makes of her daughter as a strange girl, and that this kind of degree is weird that a woman can have and wonder to which social column that her daughter belongs to. She wonders what can that degree make of her as a woman in society compared to other occupations as a nurse, an engineer, or a schoolteacher.

Mrs. Hopewell has always been not fulfilled with her daughter’s difference and at the same time Joy-Hulga defends her difference and tells her mother to accept her for what she is saying: “If you want me, here I am –LIKE I AM.””(274). The Algerian writer Lounes mentions in his book “ Ras El Mahna” : “I say that the fact to look abnormal to people who do not think like me ,it is that I am as normal in comparison to abnormal who do not think like me”<sup>1</sup>, this citation sounds philosophical, he deems that when he does not think like the others ; whether he is abnormal and the others are normal or vice versa , it asserts his difference .This refers to Hulga/Joy’s case , in both cases she seems abnormal to the others compared to her mother and other women in the story because she thinks differently from them.

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<sup>1</sup>« je dirai que le fait de paraître anormal à des gens qui ne pensent pas comme moi, c'est que je suis normal par rapport à tant d'anormaux qui ne pensent pas comme moi. »(68)

Joy-Hulga expresses her difference and points to it as being “her own light” and asks her mother to make a stab at looking inside herself to see that light, in other words she tries to provoke in herself the sense of self-knowledge. She tells her mother “Woman! do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are not? God!” she had cried sinking down and staring at her place, “Male-branché was right: we are not our own light. We are not our own light!”(276). This ironically points at the way women who live their lives without being aware of the nature of their lives and not having reasons of living it and spending them according to social codes put by men not themselves that control their lives instead of themselves.

Both Kate Chopin and Flannery O’Connor portray their women protagonists as victorious women compared to the other women in their environment. Both writers depict how their protagonists’ enjoyment of self-independence and knowledge, reliance and assertion make of them as such. Louise goes out from her room as a victorious Louise enjoying her self-knowledge and reliance for the first time, as a woman who can get things under her control. She appears as a woman who hands her sister’s hand, she can provide help to another woman to her self-knowledge, her self – independence and reliance.

Joy feels as a victorious woman when she changes her name legally from Hulga to Joy, she takes changing her name as a personal thing that concerns only her and it is her great accomplishment so far. O’Connor portrays how a woman refuses what society imposes on her and the confident move she makes to do so; in Mrs. Hopewell’s daughter case, Joy-Hulga refuses her name Hulga that was imposed on her, as it was given by her mother who objected severely the new name Joy. The name is deemed to reflect and be part of one’s identity. Hulga is the name which made of Joy’s life an imposed identity for she does not feel herself with such name. Whereas with the new name Joy she urges to

look for the missing component of her life which is feeling the self and deciding things for herself by her own and most importantly being joyful with that .

### **III.1.3.The Name as a Device of Characterization**

The name of the character is reckoned as the first and foremost element in the process of characterization, it is “never neutral” (Lodge 37) as it contributes to the understanding of the literary work. The name of both of female protagonists mirrors part of their experience and their way to their womanhood and self knowledge, independence, and assertion. In “The Story of An Hour”, Mrs. Mallard’s name is an imagery of her life and her experience as being a married woman whose husband impedes her way towards her womanhood , her self-independence, and knowledge.

Chopin refers to her as Mrs. Mallard at the beginning of the story and throughout the course of the narrative as “she” except “Louise” for twice and then as “his wife” to be Mr. Mallard’s woman. Ironically, Chopin refers to the short while that her female character lived as herself as Louise relishing the “elixir of [her new free] life” (277) when the news of her husband’s death in the railroad disaster. While being Mrs. Mallard, she does not enjoy her life due to her husband’s presence; she is not anymore Louise as the story opens presenting her as Mrs. Mallard, an oppressed woman, and ends as Louise, a free woman; death sets her free as Louise.

Mallard is the male bird who prefers calm and shallow sanctuaries, Jay Sharp & Lynn Bremner point to the life style of the mallard by writing “male –dominance [referring to the mallard’s] relationships among rivals reflect aggressiveness, persistence, and fighting abilities of individuals”. Louise lived her life under the control of Mr.

Mallard, a calm life nothing special about it, her house represents the shallow sanctuary where Louise cannot live in for it does not give her free rein to herself, her womanhood, self-knowledge and independence. It is also the place where her soul is oppressed. Mallards are deemed as flying birds, yet Louise lived there as Mrs. Mallard; not being able to be a flying free mallard, nor to be simply herself.

As Kate Chopin, O'Connor makes of the protagonist's name of her short story "Good Country People" as the crucial element not only to the understanding of the story per se but also to the protagonist's perception of her life and identity vis-à-vis her social milieu. O'Connor is reckoned to use names "to foreshadow and define character" and by Hulga/Joy's she "leaves [her] name [as] con man up to the reader" (Archer 23) name When Joy decides to change her name legally to Hulga, she wants to give up the Ugliness which she encountered in her life. "At majority she also Changes her name to hulga to make permanent the incoherence she felt in childhood about her name, her mother and the world" (Giannone 63). "The change of the philosopher's name from Joy to Hulga issues a new warning about the perils of dejection. *Hulga* worships the sadness that *Joy* could overcome. *Hulga's* ideal is not to belong to or enjoy the world but to discredit it." (Giannone 66). Giannone refers to the fact that Hulga changed her name to Joy due to fact of she lived in gloomy environment that was reflected by the name Hulga. Thus, her decision of changing her name to joy is a move that reflects her move to look for Joy that lacks her life.

The joy that she longs for so badly is represented in deciding things for her not others. When her mother named her Hulga and kept doing so and asks Mrs. Freeman to call her daughter with Hulga instead of Joy is an "organic metaphor"<sup>2</sup> of forcing Joy to see

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<sup>2</sup> Organic metaphor: "also known as a functional or structural metaphor; in this figure of speech the vehicle is symbolic and carries an implicit tenor." ( Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory 618 )

reality with her mother's binoculars which depicts reality as a beautiful reality as she keeps saying that how she could change a beautiful name as Hulga which she gave her by Joy. Joy as a name reflects how O'Connor's protagonist sees her life in another mold that fulfills her nonetheless not being deemed as such by the others in her environment. As it is enough for a woman to decide and see what really befits her needs and desires to savor her life and relish its flavor.

### **III.1.4. The Ambivalence Aspect in Portraying Mrs. Mallards /Louise and Joy/Hulga**

Both of Chopin and O'Connor portray the afflicting experience of their female protagonists ambivalently to render the gothic atmosphere and the darkness that surrounds them. Their ambivalent attitude is patent when representing the situation of the protagonists enjoying given self-knowledge, independence and reliance for a short while. At the end of both stories, both of protagonists end up with evaporated desires and broken soul smashed, knocked down and obedient to the patriarchal code that rules their social environment.

Chopin renders how Louise suffered being Mrs. Mallard and how she appeared to be so happy and planning for her coming years without her husband and how she became so healthy not suffering from heart trouble as before due to the fact that being a way from her husband and enjoying the rest of her life out of the rods of marriage. However, by the end of the story the readers come across a situational irony in which it is never expected that Louise could die. As the readers are informed that the motif behind her death is her immense joy of her husband's return to home and the false news that she was broken about his death.

Allen Stein comments on Louise' sudden death writing that "Mrs. Mallard's shock and despair when her husband turns up alive prove too much for her weak heart, and she drops dead, her sense of exaltation and autonomy pathetically brief." (58). Stein refers not only to the reason behind her sudden unexpected death that is totally contradictory to her real Joy when she starts deciding things for her life when seeing her life differently just for getting it back under her husband's fist but mainly to the very short period that she lived and enjoyed her epheremal freedom endowed by her death.

Chopin exposes how Doctors and people in her environment interpreted her reason of death considering that Louise' heart could not support the happiness of her husband's return after being in a deep sorrow for thinking that she lost him forever. "When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease-of joy that kills" (278). Kate Chopin's ambivalent attitude is palpably marked when referring to Louise' "Joy" by the end of the narrative compared to that one referred to throughout the course of the narrative so as to portray how things in a woman's life are deemed, urged and decided from her own eyes and those from her social environment's.

The Joy that is interpreted to kill Louise by the end of the story, ironically, is the fright and anguish that killed her. It is the one that makes of her the ideal woman who is devoted to her man though being dead out of her life physically but keeps residing her soul. With literary wit Kate Chopin does not make the narrative end with Louise' Joy without her man for that would be considered as a taboo and odd to the code that their society is based on so. Implicitly, she pictured the difficult situation of women experienced during the nineteenth century and beginning of the turn century.

It applies to Joy, she is a confident ambitious intellectual woman who considers males as stupid creatures of whom Manley Pointer is one of them and tries to influence his reasoning as she is a woman who is ruled by her brain instead her emotions. O'Connor makes her round-developing protagonist Joy-Hulga goes through a "moral deliberation"<sup>3</sup> in a way, equivocally, to develop another attitude that goes with the social code and appears as the "good woman". By the end of the story Joy is deemed again as Hulga by her mother and Manley Pointer, the all-knowing narrator marks: "..., it was like surrendering to him completely. It was like losing her own life and finding it, miraculously, in his." (289) She is Hulga who loses in front of the patriarchal power; she is the frail Hulga instead of the robust Joy; the one who is totally dependent on Pointer instead of on her leg and her brain which depicts her source of reasoning.

O'Connor ends up the story in a way getting things to their normal track for it is surmised to be natural and socially accepted that a woman should be dependent on man instead of herself; for he knows what is really suitable for her instead of herself, simply because he is the one who is supposed to rule her life. O'Connor demonstrates "how women are expected to conform to that which is believed to be an acceptable female role, severely as well as limiting their own "self"" (Paulson 29). She is doomed to her destiny as the other women in her environment after being dispossessed from her glasses and leg ironically her reasoning, vision and self-knowledge, independence, and reliance to be classed with the category of the good woman alongside the other women who are devoted to be submissive to man and domestic activities.

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<sup>3</sup> Moral deliberation: is "when a character reaches this level which involves all of the character's being: its existence, background, religion, past; present and future, we say it has reached the highest level of characterization. For only at this point, when a character is faced with a serious decision to make, are all of its attributes summoned up and brought to bear on the character's choice of alternatives or courses of action. Moral deliberation, an examination of the pros cons of a certain important situation and the decision taken, throws light on the whole being of the character, and this, surely, is the highest point of character portraiture a writer can achieve."(Y.Daghistani 36)



At the very end of the story O'Connor moves the camera from the scene where Pointer leaving the poignant, lost, injured and defeated and "a normal" (David Havird 24) and "receptive"(Christine Atkins 121) Hulga to spot how save the other women playing their domestic roles in their social environment, during the mid of the twentieth century, and who should be as expected by their social standards and refers ironically how the world is a better place especially if men as Manley Pointer dwell such world .

### **III.2.An analogy between Ruby Hill in“A Stroke Of Good Fortune” and Athénaïse in “Athénaïse”**

#### **III.2.1.Ruby Hill and Athénaïse Enjoying their Womanhood before the Realization of pregnancy**

In “Athénaïse” and “A Stroke Of Good Fortune” Kate Chopin and Flannery O'Connor tackle another vital element in the experience of the women protagonists and portray how that would impact their womanhood vested in their pregnancy. Both of Athénaïse and Ruby wear ephermally their womanhood robe to wear later eternally the one of their motherhood, they are awarded a while to enjoy certain self-knowledge before their realization of their pregnancy.

Athénaïse moves to the city New Orleans to start a new life, she runs away from her husband Mr. Cazeau relying on her own self in deciding what befits her life. She finds a place to stay in and a work, though it is low- waged but she feels so happy as she sees life differently. Chopin writes “Athénaïse at once fell into the rocking –chair, with the air of

exhaustion and intense relief of one who had come to the end of her troubles” (71). It is in this city where for the first time she lives her life the way she wants and enjoys it so much; the omniscient narrator cites:

She spent much of her time weeding and pottering among the flowers down in the courtyard. She tried to take an interest in the black cat, and a mockingbird that hung in a cage outside the kitchen door, and a disreputable parrot that belonged to the cook next door, and swore hoarsely all day long in bad French.(95)

Chopin describes how Athénaïse is relieved and comfortable and marks the end of her worries; she spends her time by taking care of the other creatures in nature as she is ‘now the creature who takes care of herself by her own. Athénaïse’ joyful time was even better when she met a man , Gouvernail, with whom she felt that she would spend the rest of her life, a man of her own choice. Kate Chopin speaks of her sense of decision making: “She had to love somebody in her own way!”(94) for “Athénaïse was not the woman to be loved against her will” (57) .

New Orleans is Athénaïse’ destination to her new journey towards a “New Athénaïse” and the place where she moved to running away from the rods of her marriage which she deems as “a trap”.When she expressed her discontentment over her married life by leaving Cazaue’s house , she is asked by her father why she married him , she answered “because (she) supposed it was customary for girls to marry when the right opportunity came.”(49). Like the other girls in her society , she is obliged to get married because she is not the one who makes the decision about how and with whom she will spend the rest of her life.

Ruby Hill appears to enjoy her life too before her realization of her pregnancy, for she is the sort of woman who knows what befits her life as she is an ambitious woman unlike her brother Rufus .The critic Cynthia L.Seel speaks on Ruby’s ambition and

readiness for embracing her being : “ Ruby will [...] come to realize the greater necessity of her essential nature: she is a vigorous ,lively woman[...]She has the capacity to create , to succor, and to give of herself”(228).She urges to have a better life and married Mr. Bill Hill just to have an access to that life .In the narrative ,Flannery O’Connor never gets it patent to readers if she has feelings for him , her marriage is a means to her longings and her self- assertion since her marriage made her leave Pitman and move to Florida . Yet, her ambition does not stop here, since the city is a place where her desire and wishes can be realized she wishes to move to a housing estate.

Having this longing to live her life in the lap of luxury and not having babies so far for five years makes Ruby feel as though she was a victorious woman and different from her mother and her two married sisters for “four years with four children apiece” as it makes her feel so younger than her dead mother when being at her thirty four years old. Not having a baby makes her feel as a woman with a safe and vivacious soul. Ruby enjoys her life and it is marked when she goes back from her grocery shopping looking at herself at the mirror at the entrance of the apartment building. When she starts paving her first steps at the bottom of the stairs her self-knowledge is discernible, for the readers sense Ruby’s self-esteem, steadiness and complete entity while getting up on the stairs.

### **III.2.2.Ruby Hill and Athénaïse being Affected by People around them**

The protagonists Athénaïse and Ruby appear to be affected by those around them. Athénaïse’ brother is represented as the ideal man in an environment in which women voices are not heard .He is the man who seems to be very understanding while all condemned her when expressing her discontent about her marriage. The all knowing narrator describes him: “Montéclin alone understood here alone had always been ready to

act for her and with her, to comfort and solace her with his sympathy and his support Her only hope for rescue from her hateful surroundings lay in Montéclin.”(62). She relies on him in many things for he used to be on her side, standing by her side pushed Athénaïse to be dependent on herself the narrator speaks of her decision of being self ‘independent: “To live at the expense of Montéclin’s generosity was wholly out of the question, and Athénaïse meant to look about for some suitable and agreeable employment.”(76). He functions as the character promoter of Athénaïse self-independence and assertion, and reliance for she finds “solace” in him.

Unlike Athénaïse, Ruby expressed her strong disliking for her brother Rufus since the beginning of the narrative, though the readers never meet Rufus in the story , they learn that he went back from the European Theater and not that ambitious man and he prefers to stay in Pitman rather Florida ,if he gets the chance ;even though he is twenty years old, she deems him as an infant as she repeats many times throughout the story saying that he is “a baby” or “an infant” because he is a reminder of the threat that doomed her mother as she died when she gave birth to him. Whenever she sees her brother she remembers the scene in which her mother was giving birth to him , her fear is provoked and increased towards pregnancy which she deems it as a peril to her self-knowledge, assertion .

### **III.2.3.Ruby Hill and Athénaïse’ Reaction Towards Their Pregnancy**

The protagonists Athénaïse and Ruby enjoy their womanhood , self-independence and assertion and do not like anything to spoil that womanhood self-independence and assertion. When their pregnancy’s symptoms are clearly hinting to their absolute pregnancy, they interpret it into anything but pregnancy simply because they surmise it as

a menace to their womanhood and their self-assertion and knowledge. Athénaïse interprets her pregnancy symptoms as heart trouble , body sickness , and later as homesickness .She does not have any idea about what pregnancy is regarding her young age and the fact of not being that mature to know things concern the married woman and nobody did to let her know.

Unlike Athénaïse, Ruby Hill reveals a strong and negative attitude towards pregnancy. When the pregnancy's symptoms are so apparent to the readers that she is pregnant; she interprets her pregnancy as heart trouble, pain in stomach, gas , and even as a cancer. Her emphasis of denying her pregnancy pushes her prefer to have a cancer rather than being pregnant. Ruth Rienche states: "O'Connor's sardonic version of this female character type was just not sellable in the popular culture of the early 1950s when the bona fide pattern of this woman was widely being marked."(88) and Margaret D.Beauer argues that "" the irony mocks( the irony of Ruby's preganancy)-not Ruby- but the public scorn of the woman who asserts her right not to have children if she does not want them- that is ,her right not to fulfill the socially designated role of mother if it does not correspond to her own goals"(45).

Both critics consider that O'Connor sculptures Ruby in a humorous mold by which her pregnancy is mocked explicitly but mocks indeed ,implicitly, the situation of women in such environment as Ruby's case is akin to many other whose pregnancy stands their way to their womanhood. Ruby's state of denial also reveals her tenacity for her womanhood which can be threatened by her motherhood as it was the case of other women in her environment such as her mother and her two married sisters.

Generally speaking, the fact of being pregnant is deemed to be an instinct and a lovely feeling and the most beautiful thing that can happen in a woman's life as it is so

special having a unique feeling growing inside woman's body, for she is holding a life of another creature in her womb. It is never the case for Athénaïse and Ruby. When Athénaïse realizes that she is pregnant she is incarnated as a deactivated soul. The narrator describes her state : "She kept looking from the carriage window, silent, and embarrassed as "Eve" (my emphasis) after losing her ignorance."(101).The narrator delineates how a woman as Athénaïse , by means of her pregnancy, loses the power that is awarded to her soul by her feeling of her womanhood and self-independence and assertion.

Athénaïse' name is so connotative for it is originated by the name of the Greek goddess Athéna ,who according to the Greek mythology, is the goddess of wisdom and military victory, and the patron of the democratic city of Athènes. Athenians' concern was realizing the equilibrium of the body and soul in their city. Implicitly, when Athénaïse realizes that she is pregnant she loses her battle of getting back herself in a non- democratic milieu; she loses equilibrium between her soul which urges for independence and body which holds a baby.

Just like Athénaïse, when Ruby Hill realizes that she is pregnant, she is completely demolished and appears not to reach the top of the hill, not being pregnant and to pay the Bill of her motherhood at the expense of her womanhood. She considers that could not happen to her particularly as she doctored herself for five years, also her husband Bill Hill would not slip up and kill her.

After the realization of their pregnancy both Athénaïse and Ruby undergo a physical and moral transformation in a way of being aware of the new life waiting for them carrying out a creature in their wombs. Chopin writes on Athénaïse saying that "she was not well; she was not herself" and adds "when she finally arose from the chair in which she had been seated, and looked at herself in the mirror, a face met hers which she seemed to

see for the first time, so “transfigured” was it with wonder and rapture”(96). Flannery O’Connor describes Ruby when being devastated by her pregnancy : “

She sat on the step, clutching the banister spoke while the breath came back into her a thimbleful at a time and the stairs stopped seesawing .She opened her eyes and gazed down into the dark hold, down to the very bottom where she had started up so long ago.”Good Fortune”, she said in a hollow voice that echoed along all the levels of the cavern, “Baby.”(107)

Both writers limn how the protagonists are strongly shattered by the realization of their pregnancy, especially Ruby who appears to be venerable after a long denial. Elizabeth B. Holmberg maintains that Athénaïse’ identity is senuous being has been awakened by her pregnancy, and her erotic feelings are channeled towards her husband as she returns a more mature woman in all respectability.”(8). Holmberg. B points out how pregnancy made Athénaïse see herself and her world from another morose perspective. Athénaïse and Ruby’s reaction to their pregnancy look like a sad candle which is doomed to enlighten others’ lives while nobody is paying attention to neither its flow of sizzling tears nor how it is burning from the inside to be at service of the others.

Both of protagonists’ resolution is frail by the end of the narratives. Athénaïse shows a great resolution of not coming back to her husband but later her pregnancy forced her not only to go back to their home instead Cazeau’s home, as she always consider it as Cazeau’s ‘Roof’, but also to play her role as his wife and get prepared to be a mother of his baby. That preparation of playing the new role attributed to her is marked when she gets closer to a baby trying to be nice to him and when she awoke suddenly, by the end of the story, hearing a baby’s crying wondering what is wrong with him. As Athénaïse, Ruby reveals a greater resolution too of denying her pregnancy especially when her friend

Laverne mocks her pregnancy she felt insulted for the reason Laverne does not see the threat as Ruby does. Yet by the end she surrenders the bitter reality of her pregnancy.

Both of Athénaïse and Ruby end up as lost dead deceptive souls, surrendering to their unknown and obscure coming days. That obscurity is molded by the gothic aspect used by both writers. Both narratives end up with a wail which is the sad sound that echoes the horror and dysphoria dwelling Athénaïse' and Ruby's souls like their mothers'. Kate Chopin ends up the story by Juliette 's negro baby's sharp crying that "arrested her"(104) while Flannery O'Connor ends it up with Ruby's "hollow voice" uttering the word the word "baby", while holding Gilfeet's pistol ,that was echoed to the bottom of the "steeper" and "dark" stairs as she sees them.

#### **III.2.4.Their Mothers' Reflection in Their Lives**

Kate Chopin and Flannery O'Connor make their protagonists' doomed destiny reflect their mothers' , "Athénaïse and Ruby are Chopin's and O'Connor's sample by which the writers depict how women's scope to their womanhood is not limited only to the social roles they have to play as wives or mothers and having no room for the appreciation of their being. They are likely, according the social code, to follow their mothers' steps to be a replica of them. Rosaldo and Lamphere state :

[ ...]women have been seen as wives, and more particularly as mothers; that their personalities have been limited by the responsibilities of child care; that their lives have been defined in terms of productive functions, and that their personalities have been shaped by ties with "mothers" ,who in turn are women-all of these are human products that we feel account for women's secondary status; [ ...](14)



According to Rosaldo and Lamphere, in terms of relationship of mother and daughters, women are considered to inherit their mothers' limited social roles: to give birth and rear children nothing else, simply because they are accounted to be created to do so. Chopin and O'Connor make their protagonist deviate from their mothers' track and choose another one by means of which their womanhood and self-conception are above anything in their lives. Regrettably, they end up not succeeding to do so for they are doomed to have a life with ruined womanhood and self-conception just for being women with restricted functions.

Both protagonists urge to avoid their mothers' destiny and both writers make them express their resentment that their mothers did not dare to do so. When Athénaïse expressed her dismay with her marriage her mother's sadness is marked, Athénaïse's attitude hints to how her mother spent her life not bearding to express her feelings for it is a taboo for a woman to have an opinion especially about her life. The same thing goes for Ruby, Ruby's mother has not been at all for her a role model to follow as her sisters did. She wanted to live her life up to her desires and wishes and to live as a young woman with a young soul and making pregnancy out of her plans. Hitherto, she does not succeed to live up her desires and wishes. Margaret D. Beauer speaks of Ruby's letdown to differentiate herself from her mother:

Ruby's failure to distinguish herself from her mother, however, should not be surprising. She responds from the experience of having, as an impressionable child\_ indeed, a daughter who might therefore easily follow in her mother's footsteps watched her mother suffer the agonies of childbirth and witnessed her mother's sorrow when some pregnancies ended in stillbirth [...]. Ruby is unable to consider pregnancy without such images of her mother's suffering overcoming her (42)

Margaret D.Beauer explains how it is obviously that Ruby as a daughter is expected to pace her mother's way , and how she insists on her denial not to be a mother like her mother for what she witnessed is just the pain of pregnancy that brings to a woman's life.

# Conclusion

Working on “The Story Of an Hour”, “Athénaïse”, “Good Country People”, and “A stroke of Good Fortune” by Kate Chopin and Flannery O’Connor was a great opportunity to learn about the American culture in general and to learn about the situation of women in their milieu in particular. As it was an opportunity to get a chance to plunge into the women’s psych and more interestingly captivating how that is depicted from women writers’ view point as Chopin and O’Connor.

The aforementioned short stories depict how women are part and parcel of their society for they are ‘entities’ enjoying their lighthearted independent existence. The female characters’ thirst to find their ‘self’ is patently painted by Chopin and O’Connor. They seek their self-knowledge and conception, as they urge to be independent and assert themselves by deciding things for themselves nobody else.

Both Chopin and O’Connor give a chance to Mrs. Mallard, Athénaïse , Hulga /Joy, Ruby Hill to enjoy temporally their womanhood and self-independence .They are doomed to spend their lives with the evaporated dream of self-reliance and independence. Mrs. Mallard enjoyed it only when she was falsely informed of her husband’s death. Athénaïse enjoyed it in New Orleans before learning that she is pregnant and being forced later under this circumstance to go back to her husband against her will. Hulga/Joy did by means of her Ph. D though she lost her leg at a very young age and moved on with her life with an artificial leg. Ruby Hill did too when she succeeded in taking care of her life in a way to make it move to the next pitch and duck out of having babies while being married for five years.

It is true that both Chopin and O’Connor conceive these female characters in these short stories (the selected ones in this dissertation) as literary creatures, but they are considered as samples of experience that many women may undergo not only in USA nor

in the South, nor during the turn of the century. They are archetypes of women that can exist in any society and any time and reflect what resides in any woman's soul. The writers represent lucidly to the readers woman's experience in her social milieu by embodying woman's thoughts and conception towards her "self" and her entourage, sensations, and desires.

As men have the right to live enjoying their rights and spend their life the way they want, Chopin and O'Connor delineate how their women protagonists' hanker for the akin rights. Unfortunately, they are hapless of their society's standards for they defile their sense of autonomy and self-assertion as being women, they are obliged to play the roles designed by their society. Via situational irony Chopin and O'Connor depict how their female protagonists end up with flimsy confidence and how they are condemned to conform and live as deactivated souls.

Tackling the way American women writers as Chopin and O'Connor portray the experience of American women during the twentieth century in America in general and in the American South in particular provoked our curiosity, in another opportunity for another research, to undertake the contemporary situation of the experience of Afro-American women in USA in general and in the US South in particular. To go in a bit in depth in Feminism that is the Afro-American feminism, also known as Black feminism. It is a branch of feminism that mirrors the situation of black American women in USA and particularly in the American south. But what are the tenets of this branch of feminism? What is particular about representing the situation of this category of women in USA? How is the experience of Afro-American women mirrored via literary production?

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# Annexes

## **Kate Chopin 's Works (1851-1904) :**

### **Novels :**

- At Fault (1890)
- [Awakening, The](#) (1899)

### **Short fiction :**

- The collection of short stories entitled as : Bayou Folk (1894)
  - [A No Account Creole](#)
  - [In and Out of Old Natchitoches](#)
  - [In Sabine](#)
  - [A Very Fine Fiddle](#)
  - [Beyond the Bayou](#)
  - [Old Aunt Peggy](#)
  - [The Return of Alcibiade](#)
  - [A Rude Awakening](#)
  - [The Bênitous' Slave](#)
  - [Desirée's Baby](#)
  - [A Turkey Hunt](#)
  - [Madame Célestin's Divorce](#)
  - [Love on the Bon-Dieu](#)
  - [Loka](#)
  - [Boulôt and Boulotte](#)
  - [For Marse Chouchoute](#)
  - [A Visit to Avoyelles](#)
  - [A Wizard from Gettysburg](#)
  - [Ma'ame Pélagie](#)
  - [At the 'Cadian Ball](#)
  - [La Belle Zoraïde](#)
  - [A Gentleman of Bayou Têche](#)
  - [A Lady of Bayou St. John](#)

The collection of short stories entitled : A Night in Arcadia (1897)

- [A Night in Acadie](#)
- [Athénaïse](#)
- [After the Winter](#)
- [Polydore](#)
- [Regret](#)
- [A Matter of Prejudice](#)
- [Caline](#)
- [A Dresden Lady in Dixie](#)
- [Nég Créol](#)



- [The Lilies](#)
- [Azélie](#)
- [Mamouche](#)
- [A Sentimental Soul](#)
- [Dead Man's Shoes](#)
- [At Chênière Caminada](#)
- [Odalie Misses Mass](#)
- [Cavanelle](#)
- [Tante Cat'rinette](#)
- [A Respectable Woman](#)
- [Ripe Figs](#)
- [Ozème's Holiday](#)

### **Uncollected Stories**

- Emancipation: A Life Fable
- Wiser Than God
- A Point at Issue!
- Miss Witherwell's Mistake
- With the Violin
- Mrs. Mobry's Reason
- The Going Away of Liza
- The Maid of Saint Phillippe
- A Shameful Affair
- A Harbinger
- [Doctor Chevalier's Lie](#)
- An Embarrassing Position: Comedy in One Act
- Croque-Mitaine
- A Little Free-Mulatto
- Miss McEnders
- An Idle Fellow
- [The Story of an Hour](#)
- [Lilacs](#)
- The Night Came Slowly
- Juanita
- [The Kiss](#)
- [Her Letters](#)
- Two Summers and Two Souls
- [The Unexpected](#)
- Two Portraits
- Fedora
- Vagabonds
- Madame Martel's Christmas Eve
- [The Recovery](#)
- [A Pair of Silk Stockings](#)
- Aunt Lympy's Interference
- The Blind Man
- Ti Frère
- A Vocation and a Voice

- A Mental Suggestion
- Suzette
- [The Locket](#)
- A Morning Walk
- [An Egyptian Cigarette](#)
- A Family Affair
- Elizabeth Stock's One Story
- A Horse Story
- [The Storm](#)
- The Godmother
- A Little Country Girl
- [A Reflection](#)
- Ti Démon
- A December Day in Dixie
- Alexandre's Wonderful Experience
- The Gentleman from New Orleans

## **Flannery O'Connor Works :**

### **Novels :**

- *Wise Blood*, 1952
- [The Violent Bear It Away](#), 1960

### **Short story collections :**

*A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, 1955:

It contains the following stories:

- "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"
- "The River"
- "The Life You Save May Be Your Own"
- "A Stroke of Good Fortune"
- "A Temple of the Holy Ghost"
- "The Artificial Nigger"
- "A Circle in the Fire"
- ["A Late Encounter with the Enemy"](#)
- "Good Country People"
- "The Displaced Person"

*Everything That Rises Must Converge*, 1965

It contains the following stories:

- "Greenleaf"
- "A View of the Woods"

- "The Enduring Chill"
- "The Comforts of Home"
- "The Lame Shall Enter First"
- "Revelation"
- "Parker's Back"
- "[Judgment Day](#)"

*The Complete Stories*, 1971—[National Book Award](#)

This collection contains the short stories of the collections “A Good Man is Hard to find” and “Every Thing Rises Must Converge” in addition to:

- "The Geranium"
- "The Barber"
- "Wildcat"
- "The Crop"
- "The Turkey"
- "The Train"
- "The Peeler"
- "The Heart of the Park"
- "Enoch and the Gorilla"
- "[You Can't Be Any Poorer Than Dead](#)"
- "[The Partridge Festival](#)"
- "Why Do the Heathen Rage?"

**Non Fiction:**

- *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, 1969
- *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, 1979
- *The Presence of Grace: and Other Book Reviews*, 1983
- *Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works*, 1988
- *A Prayer Journal*, edited by [W. A. Sessions](#), [Farrar, Straus and Giroux](#), 2013

## Synopsis

### “A Story Of An Hour” by Kate Chopin

The beginning of “Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin launches directly into the plot and the first sentence, which is a paragraph unto itself, reveals not only that Mrs. Mallard has a heart condition but also that this should be a consideration when telling her that her husband died. In short, this first short paragraph not only introduces vital information but also acts as foreshadowing, an important element in “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin.

Her sister Josephine is the one who must tell her the bad news in the company of her husband’s friend Richards who was the one who heard the news first and then double-checked to make sure it was not a mistake. It is at this point in the second paragraph when the narrator of “Story of an Hour” narrows the focus on Mrs. Mallard and her reaction which is not taken with a “paralyzed inability to accept its significance” but rather with an instant bout of tears as she steals away to her room, wanting to be alone and sinking into an armchair by the window with a “physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.”

Despite the sad news she has been given, she notices the world outside of her window; a world that is coming alive with the freshness and new life of spring. She notices the blue sky and twittering birds as she sobs every so often “as a child who has cried itself to sleep [and] continues to sob in its dreams.” The narrator goes on to describe the physical

appearance of Mrs. Mallard, noting that she looks like an intelligent woman, despite the glassy look in her eyes which indicates a “suspension of intelligent thought.”

Suddenly, Mrs. Mallard begins to feel something coming over her, a feeling or sensation that came to her “creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air” and it almost seems that the springtime itself becomes completely apparent to her. She takes a deep breath and before she realizes it, she begins repeating to herself the words, “free, free, free!” as the glassy and vacant look disappears from her eyes. Although for a moment she knows she will be sad when she sees her husband’s corpse during the funeral with the face that had “never looked save with love upon her” actually dead, she still sees that her coming years would belong to her completely and she “opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.”

She reflects on this for a few moments and admits that she did love her husband sometimes, but with the powerful understanding that she is finally free to live her own life, this means little. Just as she is thinking about her newfound freedom her sister begins begging her to open the door, telling her she will make herself ill. Mrs. Mallard responds that she is fine and the narrator states that at that moment she “was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.”

Eventually she gives in and allows Josephine, who looks triumphant, to open the door and lead her downstairs where Richards is waiting by the door, which is being opened with a

latchkey. The person entering the house is none other than Brently Mallard, her husband whom she thought was deceased and who seems confused by the piercing cry of Josephine and Richard's quick attempt to conceal his entrance from Mrs. Mallard, supposedly to avoid giving her heart a kick. It turns out he had been far from the accident and did not even know about it.

Without offering narration about the events of what happened, the story ends, just as it begins, with one important sentence that relates that Mrs. Mallard "died of heart disease" and of "a joy that kills." The reader is left to assume that this is how everyone thought of her—that she was simply overjoyed and it gave her heart a lethal boost, but it is clear that there is an alternate explanation—that it was shock and sadness, just as she had glimpsed her freedom.

<http://www.supersummary.com/short-stories/12-plot-summary-of-story-of-an-hour-by-kate-chopin> retrieved on 04/6/2015

## **“ Athénaïse” by Kate Chopin**

Athénaïse went away one morning to visit her parents, ten miles back on the Bon Dieu River in Louisiana. She did not return in the evening, and Cazeau, her husband, was worried. Cazeau expressed his worries to his servant, Felicite, who served him dinner. He ate alone by the light of a coal-oil lamp. Felicite stood nearby like a restless shadow. "Only married two months and she has her head turned already to leave! It is not right!" she said.

Cazeau shrugged his shoulders. Felicite's opinion of his wife's behavior after two months of marriage did not matter to him. He was used to being alone and did not mind a night or two of it. Cazeau stood up and walked outside. The night was beginning to deepen and gather black around the groups of trees in the yard. Far away, he could hear the sound of someone playing an accordion. Nearby, a baby was crying. Cazeau's horse was waiting, saddled. He still had much farm work to do before bed time. He did not have time to think about Athénaïse. But he felt her absence like a deep pain.

Before he slept that night Cazeau was visited by an image of Athénaïse's pale, young face with its soft lips and sensual eyes. The marriage had been a mistake. He had only to look into her eyes to feel that, to sense her growing dislike of him. But, the marriage could not be undone. And he was ready to make the best of it and expected the same effort from her.

These sad thoughts kept Cazeau awake far into the night. The moon was shining and its pale light reached into the room. It was still outside, with no sound except the distant notes of the accordion.

Athénaïse did not return the next day, although her husband sent a message to do so through her brother, Monteclin. On the third day, Cazeau prepared his horse and went himself in search of her.

Athénaïse's parents, the Miches, lived in a large home owned by a trader who lived in town. The house was far too big for their use. Upstairs, the rooms were so large and empty that they were used for parties. A dance at the Miche home and a plate of Madame Miche's gumbo were pleasures not to be missed. Madame Miche was sitting on the porch outside the house. She stood up to greet Cazeau. She was short and fat with a cheery face. But she was clearly tense as Cazeau arrived.

Monteclin was there too. But he was not uneasy. He made no effort to hide his dislike of Cazeau. "Dirty pig!" He said under his breath as Cazeau climbed the stairs to the porch. Monteclin disliked Cazeau for refusing to lend him money long ago. Now that this man was his sister's husband, he disliked him even more.

Miche and his oldest son were away. They both respected Cazeau and talked highly of him. Cazeau shook hands with Madame Miche who offered him a chair. Athénaïse had shut herself in her room. "You know, nothing would do last night," Madame Miche said. "Athénaïse just had to stay for a little dance. The boys would not let their sister leave!"



Cazeau shrugged his shoulders to show he knew nothing about last night. "Didn't Monteclin tell you we were going to keep Athénaïse?" she asked. But Monteclin had told him nothing. "And how about the night before?" asked Cazeau. "And last night? Do you have dances every night?" Madame Miche laughed and told her son to go tell Athénaïse her husband had arrived. Monteclin did not move.

"You know as well as I do that it is no use to tell Athénaïse anything," said Monteclin. "You and pa have been talking to her since Monday. When Athénaïse said she was not returning to Cazeau she meant it." Two fiery red spots rose to Cazeau's cheeks. What Monteclin said was true.

Upon arriving home, Athénaïse had announced she was there to stay. It was difficult for her to understand why she had married. Girls were just expected to get married. And she did like Cazeau. Monteclin had asked Athénaïse to explain herself. He had asked her if Cazeau abused her, or if he drank too much.

"No!" Athénaïse had said. "It is just being married that I hate. I do not like being Missus Cazeau. I want to be Athénaïse Miche again. I do not like living with a man, all his clothing everywhere and his ugly bare feet." At the time, Monteclin had been sorry his sister had no serious evidence to use against Cazeau.

And now, there was Cazeau himself looking like he wanted to hit Monteclin. Cazeau stood up and went inside the house to his wife's room. "Athénaïse, get ready," he said quietly. "It is late and we do not have time to lose."

Athénaïse was not prepared for his calm request. She felt a sense of hopelessness about continuing to rebel against the idea of marriage. She gathered her hat and gloves. Then, she walked downstairs past her brother and mother, got on her horse and rode away. Cazeau followed behind her.

It was late when they reached home. Cazeau once more ate dinner alone. Athénaïse sat in her room crying. Athénaïse's parents had hoped that marriage would bring a sense of responsibility so deeply lacking in her character. No one could understand why she so hated her role as wife. Cazeau had never spoken angrily to her or called her names or failed to give her everything she wanted. His main offense seemed to be that he loved her.

Athénaïse was not a woman to be loved against her will. At breakfast, Athénaïse complained to her husband. "Why did you have to marry me when there were so many other girls to choose from?" she asked. "And, it is strange that if you hate my brother so much, why would you marry his sister!"

"I do not know what any of them have to do with it," Cazeau said. "I married you because I loved you. I guess I was a fool to think I could make you happy. I do not know what else to do but make the best of a bad deal and shake hands over it."

It now seemed to Athénaïse that her brother was the only friend left to her in the world. Her parents had turned from her and her friends laughed at her. But Monteclin had an idea for securing his sister's freedom. After some thought, Athénaïse agreed to his plan.

The next morning, Cazeau woke up to find his wife was gone. She had packed her belongings and left in the night. Cazeau felt a terrible sense of loss. It was not new; he had felt it for weeks.

He realized he had missed his chance for happiness. He could not think of loving any other woman, and could not imagine Athénaïse ever caring for him. He wrote her a letter stating that he did not want her back unless she returned of her own free will.

Athénaïse had escaped to the big city of New Orleans. She was staying at a private hotel that Monteclin had chosen and paid to rent for a month. A woman named Sylvie owned the hotel and took good care of Athénaïse.

Athénaïse soon became friends with Mister Gouvernail who was also staying at the hotel. This friendship helped her feel less lonely about missing her family. But Mister Gouvernail soon started to fall in love with Athénaïse. He knew she was uninformed, unsatisfied and strong-willed. But he also suspected that she loved her husband, although she did not know it. Bitter as this belief was, he accepted it.

Athénaïse 's last week in the city was coming to an end. She had not found a job and was too homesick to stay any longer. Also, she had not been feeling well. She complained in detail about her sickness to Sylvie. Sylvie was very wise, and Athénaïse was very stupid. Sylvie very calmly explained to Athénaïse that she was feeling sick because she was pregnant.

Athénaïse sat very still for a long time thinking about this new information. Her whole being was overcome with a wave of happiness. Then, she stood up, ready to take action. She had to tell her mother! And Cazeau! As she thought of him, a whole new sense of life swept over her. She could not wait to return to him.

The next day Athénaïse spent travelling home. When she arrived at Cazeau's, he lifted her out of the horse carriage and they held each other tight. The country night was warm and still except for a baby crying in the distance."Listen, Cazeau!" said Athénaïse. "How Juliette's baby is crying! Poor darling, I wonder what is the matter with it?"

<http://learningenglish.voanews.com/content/a-23-2009-06-26-voa1-83140882/117078.html>  
[retrieved 04/06/2015](#)

## **“Good Country People” by Flannery O’Connor**

The story begins with Mrs. Freeman, who has three facial expressions: "neutral," "forward," and "reverse" (1), like a machine on a road. Neutral is the facial expression she uses when she's by herself, forward works for most human interactions, and reverse is what she uses on the rare occasion she has to take something back. When this happens, she basically disappears from whatever situation she's involved in. Mrs. Hopewell knows that no amount of talking will get Mrs. Freeman to actually admit she's wrong—instead she'll make small talk.

Mornings in the kitchen, during breakfast: that's where and when Mrs. Freeman and Mrs. Hopewell conduct their "most important business." At 7:00 AM Mrs. Hopewell rises, lights her heater, and then lights Joy's. Joy is Mrs. Hopewell's daughter. She is thirty-two years old and has an artificial leg, as well as a big education. From the bathroom, Joy can hear Mrs. Freeman coming into the kitchen and talking to her mother.

When Joy gets to the kitchen, the two women are usually talking about Mrs. Freeman's two daughters, Glynese and Carramae, who are eighteen and fifteen years old; Carramae, the fifteen year old, is "married and pregnant" (2). Mrs. Hopewell says really nice things to people about Glynese, Carramae, and their mother.

They have been wonderful employees for the past four years and are definitely not "trash" (3)—rather, they are "good country people" (3). Ahem: Title alert, Shmoopers. Mrs. Hopewell almost hadn't hired the Freemans. According to the last farmer they worked for, Mr. Freeman was "a good farmer," and Mrs. Freeman is "the nosiest woman on earth" (4). Since no other families had applied, though, Mrs. Hopewell decided to "put [Mrs. Freeman] in charge" and

therefore use her nosiness for "constructive" (3) purposes. Mrs. Hopewell is big on sayings like "Nothing is perfect" (5), and "well, other people have their opinions too" (5).

Joy listens to the two women talk at breakfast and is always irritated. Mrs. Freeman is also fond of such sayings, but hers all make the point that she knows everything, and knows it first. A favorite of hers? "I always said so myself" (6). Joy has these kinds of sayings, also known as platitudes, all three meals of the day.

Mrs. Freeman shows up at every single meal, which is very hard on Mrs. Hopewell, even though she is "a woman of great patience" (11). But, she consoles herself with the knowledge "that nothing is perfect" and that at least the Freemans are "good country people" (there's that title again...) and not "trash" (11). Until the Freemans, the tenant families Mrs. Hopewell hired usually only lasted about a year. (Tenant farmers raise crops on another person's land for a—usually quite small—share of the profit.)

Anyhow, Mrs. Hopewell is divorced and she needs a non-trash woman to walk around with her while she supervises the fields and such. She used to get Joy to walk with her, but Joy had such a bad attitude about it that Mrs. Hopewell stopped asking. Mrs. Hopewell lets her get away with this because of the fact that, since she was ten, Joy has been missing a leg. Her leg, it seems, was "shot off in a hunting accident" (13).

Mrs. Hopewell has trouble thinking of her daughter as a grown woman who has "never [...] had any normal good times" (13). Seems understandable. When Joy was twenty-one she changed her name to Hulga. Her mother thinks she found the ugliest name possible. She legally changed it without even telling Mrs. Hopewell first, and now Mrs. Hopewell still calls

Hulga *Joy* anyway. When Mrs. Hopewell isn't paying attention, Mrs. Freeman calls Hulga *Hulga*.

For a time, Hulga noticed that Mrs. Freeman seemed intrigued by her, though she couldn't figure out why. Finally, she understood that Mrs. Freeman was interested in her false leg. She can tell that Mrs. Freeman loves hearing the story of how Hulga lost the leg.

In the mornings, Joy, making noise with her false leg, grumps into the kitchen and boils her eggs without speaking to the other two women. Mrs. Hopewell looks at her daughter and thinks that her face would be fine, if only it had a happy look on it. She also thinks that if only Joy *didn't* have a Ph.D (in philosophy, no less), she could go back to school and have something to do. But then again, Mrs. Hopewell doesn't think Joy could go back right now anyway: According to the doctors, Joy has heart problems and probably won't live past forty-five.

Joy has let her mother know that if she didn't have a heart problem, she wouldn't be here at home; instead she'd be teaching at some college. Mrs. Hopewell can picture her daughter doing just that, wearing her childlike clothing.

As the years go by, Joy gets more and more different than other people—specifically, she gets meaner and ruder. She also says weird stuff for no reason, like "Malebranche was right: we are not our own light. We are not our own light!" Mrs. Hopewell can't tell people, "My daughter is a philosopher" (19).

Once, Mrs. Hopewell peeks into a book of Hulga's. She reads an underlined passage that talks about "science" being the study of "nothing" (20). In any case, the passage seems like some kind of bad spell written in "gibberish" and it creeps Mrs. Hopewell out.

Today, when Hulga enters the kitchen at breakfast time, Mrs. Freeman is talking about (as usual) Carramae's morning sickness. While Joy cooks her eggs, Mrs. Hopewell watches her back and wonders about her daughter's conversation with the Bible salesman yesterday—she can't figure out what they could have had to talk about.

Yesterday, "a tall, gaunt [thin faced], hatless" (22) young man came by selling Bibles. He was kind of good-looking, and he wore a blue suit with yellow socks. Mrs. Hopewell was hungry and about to eat her midday meal (dinner), so she invited him in reluctantly. He told her he was selling Bibles and that he noticed that she didn't seem to have one. She explained that her daughter is "an atheist" (31) and doesn't allow bibles on display; Mrs. Hopewell said she keeps her Bible next to her bed. She was fibbing. Her Bible is actually in storage somewhere.

The salesman said he thought that "for a Christian, the word of God ought to be in every room of the house" (34). Mrs. Hopewell tried to get rid of him at that point, but he got a little offended and said he knew that "People like you don't fool with good country people like me!". Now *this* got to her, and Mrs. Hopewell told the salesman that the world is in a bad state because of its shortage of good country people. This made him happy, and he introduced himself as Manley Pointer. She told him to wait a minute, then went into the kitchen to make sure the food wasn't burning.

Joy was in there waiting and listening; she told her mother to ask Pointer to leave so they could eat. While trying to get rid of him, she learns that he—like Joy—has a heart



condition. So she asked him to dinner, even though she didn't really want to. His heart condition, he explained, is what prompted him to devote his life to spreading the word of God. Joy, of course, was rude to him all through the meal.

To make up for her daughter's rudeness, Mrs. Hopewell was super-nice to Manley, and pried his life story out of him. He has eleven siblings, and his father died when he was eight; he is currently nineteen, and his Bible salesman career has gone on about four months. Manley also told them that he has sold seventy-seven bibles so far.

All through dinner he kept looking at Joy, and after, he stayed for two more hours, talking to Mrs. Hopewell. Joy was in the road when he left. He stopped and they had some kind of conversation. Mrs. Hopewell couldn't believe it when she saw Joy walking with him to the gate. Of course, she can't ask Joy what they talked about, though.

This morning, Hulga is glad Mrs. Freeman is here talking about her daughters—she hopes this will keep the conversation off Manley, which is where she knows her mother wants it to go. Sure enough, she raises the topic with Mrs. Freeman. Apparently Mrs. Freeman saw him, but she reveals the information slyly, as if she and Hulga have a secret.

The platitudes fly at this point, and Hulga abruptly leaves the table, making lots of noise. She is actually supposed to meet Manley today at 10:00 AM. Hulga remembers the conversation she had with him the day before: When Manley stopped near her on the road, he looked at her like she was "a new fantastic animal at the zoo" (73)—there was something "familiar" (73) about it, but she didn't know who had looked at her like that before.

He didn't talk to her at first. And when he did he asked, "'You ever ate a chicken that was two days old?'" (73) Which, you know, is one way to start a conversation. She'd told him that she had, in fact, eaten a chicken of that age, at which point Manley turned red and giggled. When he asked her age, she said seventeen.

He started talking about her leg and told her she was "'real brave'" and "'real sweet'" (78); then he asked her name, and she told him it was Hulga. After repeating her name a few times he asked if she was shy. She said she was. He told her he was a serious person because he knew he might die soon.

Hulga said she might die soon, too. Manley said he thought they might have been meant to meet because they had so much in common. Then he invited her to go on a picnic with him, and she agreed, which is why she's meeting him today.

Last night she fantasized about seducing him, and then helping him transform the "shame" he would feel into "something useful" (90). Without her mother noticing, Hulga goes to meet Manley—she doesn't bring any food and wears pants and "a dirty white shirt" (91). Manley, however, isn't waiting at the gate like he's supposed to be. First she feels like he's standing her up, but then she sees him rise from his hiding place behind a bush, looking tall. He's wearing the same suit, but a new hat.

She asks why he's got his Bibles with him, and he says, "'You can never tell when you'll need the word of God, Hulga'" (94). They walk down toward the pasture. Manley swings his Bible case; it doesn't look as heavy as it did yesterday. Suddenly, he asks Hulga where her fake leg meets her real leg. She turns red, and he apologizes and says God takes care of her. She tells him she doesn't believe in God. He seems amazed at this bit of news, and as they walk, he says it's unusual for "a girl" (98) not to believe in God. Then he kisses her.

This is her first kiss, and she isn't that impressed. They keep walking. Manley asks Hulga if she's "saved" (102). She says that, in her way of looking at things, she is the one who's "saved" and he is the one who's "damned"—then she reminds him she doesn't "believe in God" (102). He looks at her admiringly, again, as if she's an animal on display. And then he asks if she knows of a place they can go to sit.

Hulga suggests the nearby barn. When they get in the barn, he says it's sad they can't go up in the loft. Hulga climbs up, much to his amazement. She beckons him to follow and, lugging his case, he does. She tells him he won't be needing any Bibles up there, but he says—again—that one never knows when one might need one's Bible.

Hulga lies back and looks at the blue sky through the opening in the barn. Manley starts kissing her. He takes off her glasses and puts them in his pocket. She eventually begins kissing him back. Even when Manley says he loves her, her mind stays totally clear. When she doesn't return his declaration of love, though, he tells her she should.

She just looks out the window; the hills look like lakes. She isn't aware that he took her glasses—she doesn't usually notice the scenery. Manley demands Hulga tell him she loves him, but Hulga says she doesn't use that word. She says: "I don't have illusions. I'm one of those people who see *through* to nothing" (115).

Anyhow, Manley isn't convinced and *still* demands that Hulga say she loves him. (Hey Manley—simmer down already.) She speaks condescendingly to him, saying that it's probably best that he doesn't understand what she does, which is that everything is nothing. He asks again if she loves him.

She agrees that she does, and tells him they should be honest with each other. Toward this end, she tells him she's "thirty years old" (119) and that she has "a number of degrees" (119).

Um... Hulga? You're thirty-two. Getting closer, yes, but still *not* telling the truth. He says he doesn't care about her age, that he just wants to know if she loves him. Then he kisses her until she says yes.

While she's wondering how she "seduced him" (122) without really trying to, he asks to see where her false leg attaches to her real one. She freaks out. Not because she's ashamed—she isn't ashamed of anything, thanks to her education—but rather, she is just really sensitive about the leg, and considers it a very private and special matter. She tells him she won't do it. He suggests this means she doesn't really love him.

She gives in and shows him that it attaches at the knee, and asks why he's so interested. Manley says he's interested because "it's what makes [her] different" (126). She thinks he's the first truly innocent person she's ever met, and so she decides to show him her false leg. After she shows him, he wants to see how it's taken off and put back on.

She shows him, and then he takes it off for her, and seems very pleased with himself. Hulga tells him to put it back on, all the while imagining running off with him, and enjoying it when he takes her leg off at night and puts it back on in the morning. He says no, that she has him "instead" (132)—when she expresses alarm, he just responds with more kisses.

Now Hulga's brain *isn't* working in the way she's used to at all. Again, she asks for her leg back, but Manley tells her to wait, and he opens the bible case. He takes out one of the two Bibles inside it, and opens it. It's been hollowed out, and inside is "a pocket flask of whiskey, a pack of cards" (134) and a box of condoms. Man oh man. The cards have "obscene" (134) pictures on them, and he offers her a drink from the old flask. She says she thought he was "good country people" (135). (You see that title shout-out right there? Of course you do,

smarty-pants.) Manley says he *is*, but that he hasn't let this stand in his way—he says he's "as good" (135) as she is.

She asks for the leg again, and he continues encouraging her to party with him. Manley wants to know what the big deal is if she really does believe in "nothing" (139). Hulga says he's just a hypocrite like all the other Christians she's met. Slightly offended, he says, "I hope you don't think [...] I believe in that crap!" (140) And then he implies he's going to hell. (Like Hulga, Manley seems to believe in the ideas of heaven and hell... and *not* believe in them at the same time.)

Now—urgently—Hulga screams for her leg. Manley takes his Bible, the stuff that was in it, Hulga's leg, and puts it all in the bible case. Then he exits the loft. From below he tells her he makes a habit of stealing things in this way, including a woman's glass eye. He also tells her that Manley Pointer isn't his real name. Then he tells her: "Hulga [...], you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing since the day I was born" (142).

In a little while, Mrs. Freeman and Mrs. Hopewell are digging up onions in a pasture. They see Manley heading toward the highway, and Mrs. Hopewell says he was selling Bibles to "the Negroes" (143) who apparently live in the woods. Mrs. Hopewell comments on his simplicity, and says it would be better if more people were as "simple" (143) as he is. Mrs. Freeman says that many people, herself included, could never be as simple as Manley.

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## **“A Stroke of Good Fortune” by Flannery O’Connor**

Ruby comes in her apartment building with her groceries, leans them on the hall table and looks at herself in a mirror without even recognizing herself, she is so tired and sick. She is short and round, and the curls in her hair are a mess from the heat and her walk.

She'd bought collard greens to cook for her little brother--Rufus, just home from the war in Europe--and she was disgusted by this request of his. He was unchanged, had no "get" in him. He had come to stay with her and her husband--Bill Hill, who sold Miracle Products--because there was no one left in the country where they grew up. Rufus was good for nothing, like most of her kin. Even Bill Hill had seen this immediately.

She left the sack for Bill to bring up, and tries to mount the stairs. Even Madame Zoleeda, the palmist, agreed she was sick. But Madame Zoleeda had told her that her long illness would result in a stroke of good fortune. Ruby knew this already: she and Bill were going to move, hopefully to a subdivision. Bill had to agree one of these days. These steps were killing her, though thirty-four years old is not that old. Her mother looked terrible at thirty-four. It was all those children that did her in. Several had died. What terrible ignorance.

Ruby's sisters had kids and she couldn't tell how they stood it. Rufus was so hard for her mother to birth--Ruby walked ten miles and watched three picture shows just to get away from the screaming. And now Rufus was worthless and looked old. Ruby looked young for her age. She sat down on the stairs, exhausted, and sat on a neighbor boys toy pistol. The

boy's mother acted like the little brat was her greatest fortune. Ruby would smack the little brat, if she could.

She felt nauseous, but she would not go to a doctor. They would have to knock her out, first. Could she have heart trouble? She looked good, and Bill seemed happy that she had put on weight lately. Her neighbor Mr. Jerger, seventy-eight years old, came out on the landed and shouted to her--he was part deaf. He always wanted to ask her silly questions, and then tell the answer when she didn't know. Like, Whose birthday is it today? Florida's!! And then other questions, about explorers and the like, the fountain of youth--he says it is in his heart, actually. He also says people just don't like to think anymore, and that Ruby should ask her husband these questions when he got home. She escapes back to the terrible stairwell.

She felt a pain in her stomach, things pushing around--could it be cancer? She gasps up a few more steps to her friend Laverne's door, and knocks with the toy pistol. Laverne thinks this is very funny. She asks Ruby why she doesn't go to the doctor, and marches around the apartment with her stomach stuck out. Ruby sits, exhausted, staring at her ankles, while Laverne asks if Ruby likes her new shoes and if Rufus is home so she can show him? Rufus! Ruby scowls--he's just an infant, and only made her mother deader.

They talk, and Laverne staggers around and sings MOTHER MOTHER and Ruby gets very upset--it's not that, and she won't go to a doctor. Laverne wants to know how long she is going to hold out? Ruby says Bill takes care of making sure there are no babies. Laverne points out that he slipped up, didn't he? Ruby is furious, and stomps out, saying Bill better

move her before her heart gives out. Laverne tells her to give up the gun before she shoots somebody.

Ruby slams the door and then looks at her stomach, though she doesn't want to. Bill wouldn't. . . Her skirt is tight. And it is not a skirt that is usually tight.

She tries going upstairs again, but thinks No, no. Madame Zoleeda said good fortune. It can't be cancer. No, it can't be a baby. Not like her mother. Bill said it always worked, what he did. No, no.

There is a bang at the bottom of the stairs and a little neighbor boy rushes up the stairs in a racket. Mr. Jerger tries to hush him and grab him but the little boy cusses him and runs up with his two pistols and crashes right into Ruby. She reels, and thinks Good Fortune. Baby. All is hollow and dark. She recognizes a little roll, as if it were not in her stomach, but resting somewhere outside, waiting, "with plenty of time."

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