

“Civility and Cruelty: The Dual Faces of Society in Jackson’s *The Lottery* and O’Connor’s *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*”

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Abstract

This paper examines how Shirley Jackson’s *The Lottery* and Flannery O’Connor’s *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* show the hidden cruelty in normal-looking societies. Both stories occur in everyday places, a quiet village and a family road trip, but they end with surprising violence. The writers show that people can accept cruel actions when they are part of tradition, religion, or social rules.

In *The Lottery*, Jackson describes a small village that holds a deadly ritual annually. The people in the town seem nice and friendly, but they take part in a public stone-throwing without asking why. This story shows how following tradition without thinking can lead to violence and loss of kindness. People do this not because they are bad, but because they think it is normal.

In *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, O’Connor shows a Southern family and a grandmother who thinks she is moral and religious. Later, however, her ideas of being good are shown to be weak and selfish. The story ends in sudden violence when the family meets a criminal named The Misfit. O’Connor uses this moment to ask what it means to be “good” and whether people are moral because they genuinely believe it or just out of habit or fear. Both stories make the reader think about how cruelty can hide behind nice behaviour, religion, or tradition. This paper compares how Jackson and O’Connor use symbols, characters, and irony to show the dark side of human nature. It also talks about how their stories still matter today, showing how people can ignore unfairness when it is part of a system or accepted by most people.

The Lottery and *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* show that evil does not always come from clearly bad people. Sometimes, it hides behind smiling faces, old customs, and the comfort of routine. With simple but strong writing, both authors ask us to question what we think is “normal” and to see the danger of not thinking about our beliefs.

Introduction

In our daily lives, we usually think that cruelty comes from bad people or violent events. But sometimes, cruelty hides behind a smile, a nice talk, or an old habit. This kind of hidden cruelty is hard to notice because it happens in places that feel safe and normal. That's why it's essential to look at how this works in stories, especially those that show how normal people can do or allow bad things, just because it's always done that way or because they think they are doing the right thing.

This paper discusses two short stories: "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson and "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" by Flannery O'Connor. Both stories take place in usual places, a small town and a family trip, but both end with shocking and sudden violence. These stories don't have scary monsters or bad guys. Instead, the people who commit violence seem like regular people. They could be our neighbours, our friends, or even us.

Looking closely at these two stories, we can understand how society sometimes hides cruelty behind traditions, religion, or ideas about what is "normal." Both Jackson and O'Connor show how dangerous it can be when people stop thinking for themselves and do what everyone else does. These stories make us look at our world and ask hard questions about what we accept without thinking.

Many hurtful things still happen today because "it's always been that way." That's why this topic is still significant. Through their stories, Jackson and O'Connor help us see the hidden side of cruelty and warn us about what can happen when people follow rules or beliefs without asking if they are reasonable or fair.

Context: Shirley Jackson's story "*The Lottery*" was published in 1948. It surprised and shocked people who read it. The story begins in a quiet village on a sunny day. The people are calm, friendly, and seem happy. But as the story continues, we find out something scary. The people are getting ready for a violent event. One person is picked by lottery to be stoned to death. The whole village, even family and friends, take part in killing that person. This is a tradition they do every year. No one knows precisely why they do it. But they still do it, just because it has always been done. The story shows how people can stop feeling bad about something cruel if it is part of a tradition.

Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" was written in 1953. It is about a family going on a car trip in the southern part of the United States. The grandmother thinks she is a good person who follows religious rules. But her actions show that she can be selfish and proud. Later, the family had a car accident. Then they meet a dangerous man called The Misfit, who has escaped prison. The story becomes dark and scary. The grandmother tries to stay alive by talking about God and being good. But it doesn't work. In the end, the whole family is killed. This story shows how people often do not understand what being "good" means. It also shows how people can forget their values when they are scared.

Both stories show regular people in usual places, but the endings are shocking and sad. These stories make us think about how people can accept cruel things. Sometimes, they do it because it is a tradition. Sometimes, they do it because they believe they are doing the right thing. These stories are not only about the past. They still matter today. That's because we still see the same problems in people following traditions without thinking, pretending to be moral, and doing things just to fit in with others.

Article Statement: In "*The Lottery*" and "*A Good Man Is Hard to Find*," the writers show that cruelty is not always loud or easy to see. Sometimes, cruelty is quiet and hidden in everyday life. People may participate because they think they are doing something regular or proper. This paper says that Jackson and O'Connor use simple places, regular people, and potent symbols to show how dangerous it is when people stop asking if tradition or morality is right.

Shirley Jackson writes about a village where everyone participates in a violent event. They do not do it because they are evil. They do it because it is a tradition. The story shows how people can do horrible things if told it is normal. No one in the village asks if the lottery is fair or needed. They do what they are told. This shows how bad tradition can be when people do not ask questions.

Flannery O'Connor writes about a grandmother who thinks she is a good person. She wears nice clothes and talks about religion. But when she faces death, her idea of goodness falls apart. The criminal in the story, The Misfit, makes her see that her beliefs are weak. The story shows that people can think they are good but still act selfishly or meanly.

Both stories show two sides of people: the nice side they show, and the cruel side they hide. They warn us about following the rules without thinking.

Literature Review

This literature review combines different research papers and critical writings focusing on cruelty, tradition, and morality themes in Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery* and Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*. This writing looks at different studies and essential writings about the ideas of cruelty, tradition, and right and wrong in Shirley Jackson's story *The Lottery* and Flannery O'Connor's story *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*. These studies help us understand how both authors use standard settings and everyday characters to reveal society's hidden violence and moral confusion. These studies help us see how both writers use ordinary places and normal people to show the secret violence and ethical problems in the world around us.

Cruelty and Sanctioned Violence in Jackson's "The Lottery": In his paper "Controversial Conflicts in Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery'," **Dr. V. Sudhakar Naidu** discusses how Jackson uses the story to show the dark side of human nature. In his writing called "Controversial Conflicts in Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery'," Dr. V. Sudhakar Naidu talks about how Jackson shows the bad side of people in the story. He explains that the

villagers are not evil people, but they still take part in a violent ritual simply because it is a tradition. He says that the people in the village are not evil, but they still do violent things just because it is a tradition. This paper supports the idea in the abstract that people often accept cruel actions when they are part of a social or cultural rule. This writing agrees that people usually allow cruel things when those things are part of society or culture. Naidu points out that the characters don't question the lottery, even though it ends in death. Naidu shows that the people in the story do not ask questions about the lottery, even though it kills someone. This lack of questioning shows how dangerous blind traditions can be. This indicates that following tradition without thinking can be very dangerous. It fits well with your argument that cruelty can hide behind friendly faces and routine behaviour. This matches your idea that cruelty can hide behind kind-looking people and everyday actions.

Social and Political Protest in “The Lottery”: The paper “Human Rights at Stake: Shirley Jackson’s Social and Political Protest in ‘The Lottery’” by **Zaid Ibrahim Ismael and Sabah Atallah Khalifa Ali** looks more deeply at the social meaning of the story. The writers say that Jackson is making a political message about how people sometimes forget about human rights to keep old traditions. They also explain that people with power use these traditions to control others. This connects to the main idea mentioned in the article because it shows how violence can seem “normal” when people stop asking questions about what they believe. The paper helps readers understand that Jackson’s story is not only about one small village, but also a warning that society can become cruel if people follow bad traditions without thinking.

Hidden Power Structures and Marginalisation: In “Social Domination and Marginalisation in Shirley Jackson’s The Lottery” by **Novalita Pradnya Paramitha**, the writer examines how the story shows unfair societal power. She says that the lottery controls people and makes them feel scared. The village uses tradition to make sure everyone follows the rules. This paper shows how normal people can become part of a cruel system because they are afraid to be different or break the rules. The idea in the article is that evil can be inside systems that look normal on the outside. It also helps show how society uses daily habits and fear to hide cruelty.

The Evil Within Ordinary People: In the article “The Evil of Humanity in Shirley Jackson’s ‘The Lottery’ and ‘The Summer People’” by **Chumin Hu and Jingdong Zhong**, the writers discuss the idea that evil does not always look scary. They say that Jackson writes about normal people who do bad things, not because they are monsters, but because they follow what others do. This point in the article is that cruelty often comes from people who seem nice and normal. The article also says that people stop listening to their conscience when they think their actions are okay in the eyes of society. This follows the article’s idea that evil can hide in daily habits and traditions.

Dual Personality and the Nature of Evil: The paper “The Existence of Evil through Dual Personality” from TopEssayWriting.org talks about how people can have two sides, one that looks good and another that can be cruel. The paper looks at both stories to show how characters can hide their dark side behind being polite or following tradition. It explains that the grandmother in O’Connor’s story and the villagers in Jackson’s story do things that go against the morals they say they believe in. The idea in the article is that people may not be moral but are just doing what is typical of others. It also helps show how cruelty can be hidden under polite and expected behaviour.

“Civility and Cruelty: The Dual Faces of Society in Jackson’s The Lottery and O’Connor’s A Good Man Is Hard to Find”

Shirley Jackson’s *The Lottery* and Flannery O’Connor’s *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* show how people can be cruel daily. These stories show that normal people can do bad things. They show that evil can hide behind good manners, old traditions, religion, and rules. Even though both stories are short and take place in simple places, they still make the reader feel a lot. The writers use symbols, characters, and irony to show how people can do bad things without knowing it is wrong. This article will examine four main things: symbols, characters, irony, and how both stories are alike. It will show how people sometimes think that cruelty is routine in society.

1. Symbols: The Hidden Messages Behind Objects and Appearances

Both Jackson and O’Connor use symbols to give deeper meaning to their stories. These symbols help show how cruelty hides behind everyday things.

The Lottery – The Black Box

One of the most essential symbols in *The Lottery* is the **black box**. It is **old, worn-out, and falling apart**, but the villagers still use it yearly for the lottery. The **black box** stands for **tradition**. Even though the box is in bad shape, and nobody remembers the exact reason for the lottery, the villagers never think about questioning or changing it. This shows people can follow **cruel traditions** because “it’s always been done that way.” The **black box** also stands for **death** and **fear**. It holds the slips of paper, one of which will lead someone to be **stoned to death**. But the villagers treat it with **respect**, even though it leads to **murder**. This shows how symbols of **tradition** can make people accept **terrible actions**.

A Good Man is Hard to Find – The Grandmother’s Hat

In O’Connor’s story, the grandmother’s **hat** is also an important symbol. She wears it so that if she dies in an accident, people will see she was “a lady.” The **hat** stands for her **pride** and her **false idea of being good**. She wants to look **proper** and **respectable**, but cares more about her **appearance than** being a good person. Later, when the family crashes into the car, her **hat is ruined**. This shows the fall of her **false self-image**. It shows that her idea of being a “good person” is not strong enough to protect her or her family. The **broken hat** shows that what she looked like on the **outside** did not match with who she was on the **inside**.

2. Characters: Everyday People with Hidden Darkness

The characters in both stories seem normal, but their actions show that cruelty can live in ordinary people.

The Lottery–The Villagers

The people in *The Lottery* act like any group of friendly neighbours. They say hello, talk about their farms, and act like it is just a typical day. But they are getting ready to throw stones at someone until they die. Even kids help by picking up rocks and watching. What is surprising is that no one asks if it is wrong. This shows how people can do cruel things when it is part of their way of life. Tessie Hutchinson, the woman who is picked to die, is happy and smiling at first. But when she is chosen, she yells that it is not fair. Still, she does not say the lottery is wrong; instead, she only says it is unfair because she lost. This shows that even people hurt by a bad system may not speak against it if they are always safe.

A Good Man is Hard to Find – The Grandmother and the Misfit
In O'Connor's story, the grandmother is the main person in the story. She thinks she is good because she is polite, wears nice clothes, and talks about God. However, the things she does show that she is selfish and not honest. She lies to her family about an old house, hides a cat in the car without telling anyone, and tries to trick people to get what she wants. The Misfit is a man who got out of jail. He is the one who kills the family. He is mean and hurts people, but he also thinks deeply. He talks about God and right and wrong. He says, "Jesus threw everything off balance." He knows that people who say they are good are not always truly good, like his grandmother. At the end, the grandmother tries to talk to the Misfit and calls him "one of my children." Some people think this is her one good moment, but it is too late. Her story shows that people can feel good, even if they do not live in a good way.

3. Irony: Saying One Thing but Showing Another

Irony plays a significant role in both stories. It helps the authors show the difference between appearance and reality and strengthens the endings.

The Lottery–Normal Life Leading to Death

The biggest surprise in *The Lottery* is how normal everything looks at the start. The village is quiet, the sun shines, and kids play. It feels like a nice summer day. But soon, the reader finds out that the people are meeting to pick someone to kill. It is also surprising that this scary event is treated like a town party, like a fair or picnic. People smile, talk, and act like it is not a big deal. This difference between calm actions and a cruel killing is what makes the story so shocking.

A Good Man is Hard to Find – Being "Good" Doesn't Mean Being Kind

In O'Connor's story, the name of the story is also a surprise. The grandmother keeps saying it is hard to find a good man. She says people are "good" if they act nice in public or believe in the same old ways she does. But she is not a good person. She lies and only cares about herself. The Misfit, the man who escaped jail, is the opposite. He does bad things, but he is honest about who he is. He says he doesn't believe in God or punishment and lives that way. This is surprising because the "bad man" is more honest than the "good" grandmother.

4. Comparison: How Both Stories Show Society's Role in Cruelty

Jackson and O'Connor use their stories to ask the same question: **How can normal people do cruel things?** The answer lies in how society teaches them to act.

Tradition in The Lottery

In *The Lottery*, people are cruel because of tradition. The villagers kill someone every year because they have always done it. They do not ask why, and they do not try to stop it. Even though tradition is mean and unfair, people still do it because it is part of their way of life. This shows that people can forget what is right or wrong when they follow old ways without thinking. The story tells us that not all traditions are good, and we should ask questions about things that hurt others.

Religion and Morality in A Good Man Is Hard to Find

In O'Connor's story, the main idea is about religion and being a good person. The grandmother says she believes in God and acts like she is good. But the things she does show that she is not. Her idea of being "good" is about how things look, not being kind or honest. Even though he is a criminal, the Misfit thinks a lot about God and what it means to be good or bad. This shows that religion, if not truly understood, can be something people follow without a fundamental belief. People may do it because they are scared or because it is a habit, not because they believe.

Social Rules and Appearance

Both stories also discuss what society expects and how people look to others. In *The Lottery*, the villagers keep playing the lottery because everyone else does. They are scared to be different. In *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, the grandmother wants people to think she is a lady and to respect her, but she does not act like one. In both stories, people care more about fitting in than doing what is right.

Questioning What We Think is Normal

The Lottery and *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* are strong stories because they show that cruelty does not always look like cruelty. Sometimes, it hides in old traditions, polite words, or talk about religion. Jackson and O'Connor ask us to look closely at what we think is "normal." Are we doing things just because others do them? Are we being kind, or just trying to look good? By using symbols like the black box and the grandmother's hat, the writers show how big the problem is. Their characters are not monsters. Instead, they are normal people who follow rules without thinking. Using irony (when something is the opposite of what you expect) clarifies the truth. And when we look at both stories, we see that tradition, religion, and social rules can be used to hurt others if we stop asking questions. Both stories still matter today. They remind us to look deeper and to ask questions about the systems we live in. Absolute goodness does not come from old habits or fear. It comes from thinking, caring, and choosing to do what is right, even when it is hard.

Conclusion

Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery* and Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* are intense and upsetting stories. They show that normal people can do very cruel things. These stories tell us that violence is not always easy to see. It is not only done by people who look or seem bad. Sometimes, people are cruel because they follow old rules or act politely. They may do bad things because it is normal in their town or group. The writers use easy words, simple people, and places we know to show that bad things can hide in

everyday life. Both stories ask us to look closely at what we consider customary and reasonable. They ask us how easy it is to be part of something cruel when no one stops to ask why.

In both stories, the idea is that evil can be quiet and done by many people together. In *The Lottery*, the people in the village do not seem mean. But they all help kill someone once a year, just because it is tradition. No one says it is wrong, not even the woman who is picked to die, until it happens to her. Even the children help, which shows how this cruelty is taught to them. The black box in the story stands for the old tradition. People treat the box respectfully, even though it is old and broken. This shows people can follow old ways without asking if they are still good or right.

In *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, the grandmother thinks she is a good person. She wears nice clothes and talks about God. But she lies and tricks her family. She makes selfish choices. She only cares about how she looks. Misfit, a criminal, thinks more deeply about what is good and evil. He does bad things, but he is not fake. He knows who he is. This shows that being polite or looking nice does not always mean someone is good inside.

Symbols in both stories help show hidden cruelty. In *The Lottery*, the black box shows how people hold on to old ways even when they are bad. In O'Connor's story, the grandmother's hat shows she cares more about how she looks than who she is. When the hat is ruined, it shows that her fake image is also broken.

Both stories use irony, where things turn out the opposite of what we expect. In *The Lottery*, the happy start turns into something scary. In *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, the grandma talks about "good men," but she is wrong. The killer is not good, but he is honest. These stories warn us about following rules without thinking. They show how regular people can help keep bad systems going. The writers want us to ask questions about what we do and why. Even today, many people follow unfair rules because they seem normal. These stories remind us that being polite or doing what others do is not always right. Ultimately, both stories show that cruelty can hide in everyday life. They ask us to think: are we doing what is right, or just what we are used to?

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