

'A Good Man Is Hard To Find' :
A Perspective on the Grotesque in Modern
Society in Selected Works by O'Connor and Mahfouz
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(Abstract)

This paper attempts to analyze O'Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* and Naguib Mahfouz's *The Thief and The Dogs* (Al Liss Wal Kilab) to point out that grotesque characters are the outcome of grotesque societies. When the horrifying and the farcical reign and when inequality and injustice prevail, societies can be described as grotesque societies.

The definition of the grotesque which is used in this study is that of fragmentation and alienation of the self. Also it stresses the apparent absurdity of reality that participate in destroying people instead of embracing them with love and protection.

"الرجل الطيب صعب المنال": منظور في غرابة الأطوار في المجتمع الحديث من خلال أعمال مختارة لمحفوظ وأوكنر

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ملخص

يحاول هذا البحث من خلال دراسة مقارنة للقصة القصيرة "الرجل الطيب صعب المنال" للكاتبة فلانري أوكنر وقصة اللص والكلاب لنجيب محفوظ أن يوضح الطبيعة الغريبة للمجتمعات. فعندما يتحكم كل ما هو هزلي ومخيف وعندما يسود الظلم في المجتمعات ويغيب العدل بين الأفراد فإن هذه المجتمعات قد توصف بأنها غريبة الأطوار. وإذا كانت كلمة "grotesque" لها كثير من التعريفات التي تركز على كل ما هو سخيف ومثير للاشمئزاز فإن المعنى المستخدم في هذا البحث يركز على معنى العزلة والتشتت وعلى معنى غرابة وعبث الواقع الذي لا يؤمن بأى شيء مطلق مثل الدين. والشئ المهم أن هذه الأشخاص غريبة الأطوار هي انعكاس لنا جميعاً.

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The Swedish Academy of letters in awarding Naguib Mahfouz the 1988 Noble Prize for literature noted that "Mahfouz through works rich in nuance - now clear-sightedly realistic, now evocatively ambiguous, has formed an Arabic narrative art that applies to all mankind" (Gassick 7). This assumption is the main premise upon which this paper attempts to reinterpret both Mahfouz's *Al-Liss Wal Kilab*, and O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. Regardless of the great bulk of material in hand on the two works of art, this paper attempts to point out, through the allusive nature of both of them, the unspoken message which is similar in the two stories namely: why it is hard to find a good man. Both O'Connor and Mahfouz ascertain that the grotesque is not only an individual phenomenon but rather a societal one. Interpretation and comparison will be preceded by definitions of the word grotesque.

The grotesque is not a phenomenon of modern civilization. It goes back to Roman culture but its manifestations vary from culture to culture and from age to age. With the grotesque – as with any complex concept, "be it philosophical, aesthetic, or psychological ... (and grotesque is all three) ... there is a sediment of connotation layered upon the bedrock of denotation" (Ellery 3). This maintains the different implications of the same word and work.

The extension of the word grotesque to literature and to non-artistic things took place in France as early as the sixteenth century, but in England and Germany only in the eighteenth century. In his book *The Grotesque in English Literature* Clayborough says:

The word grotesque thus comes to be applied in a more general fashion during the age of Reason and of Neo-Classicism when the characteristics of the grotesque style of art-extravagance, fantasy, individual taste and the rejection of the natural conditions of organization are the object of ridicule and disapproval.(6)

Grotesque stands for what is ridiculous, distorted and unnatural. Kayser rejects the previous definition and stresses the presence of "the

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Ludicrous with the monstrous, the disgusting or the horrifying” (qtd. in Clayborough 14). Similarly, Ruskin insists on the combination of "the ludicrous and the terrible in the grotesque, and he associates the latter element with horror, anger or awe at the human condition" (qtd. in Thomson 15). Accordingly, it may be used as a means of presenting the world in a new light without falsifying it. Thomson sees that the most distinguished characteristic of the grotesque is the element of disharmony that might be figured as "conflict, clash, mixture of heterogeneous or conflation of the disparate"⁽²⁰⁾. Grotesque art, then, is an expression of all that a culture denies. Sometimes, it is destructive and blasphemous, as it plays havoc with our most cherished ideals (Pence 116). Nevertheless, James Hillman sees these grotesque figures as " a sign of vitality as they emerge from our complexes" (qtd. in Pence 114). Herein lies the appeal of the grotesque; "aggressive and obnoxious, saturated with human sweat but possessing a riotous imagination; it is a vulgar defender of being against the pure concept of category" (Pence 116). It does not romanticize or beautify the image of our life, but it is rather ugly, degrading and shocking. Accordingly, the grotesque is "an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world" (Kayser 188).

Another issue of the grotesque which is emphasized in theatre is that of fragmentation and alienation of the self which is best reflected in Pirandello's plays. Kayser "stresses the division of the self which has become the guiding principle of the characterization" (135). The theatre of grotesque that appeared between the two world wars holds that man is only a puppet in the hand of fate. The unity of the personality is no longer felt. Attached to this, the grotesque is sometimes defined as "the play with the absurd" (Kayser 30), as it exposes "the absurdity of apparent reality and of the absolute by means of a great and universal reduction and absurdum "(Kayser 38). Because of the absurdity of the world and absence of any absolute, the grotesque is more prevalent, and at the same time, more cruel stressing man's sense of estrangement and alienation. The world is incomprehensible by the alien forces that threaten the accepted norm of society. It is an observable deviation from the norm either on the part of the individual or the society.

It is important to note that the grotesque confronts new sources of menace and estrangement in the form of social and political tensions, international conflicts and crises and technological developments. These forces stem from the family and the society destroying the individual's moral beliefs and his sense of security.

If the grotesque is the outcome of an inconsistent society in which the horrifying absurd and the farcical reign, it is logical to label this society as being grotesque. To ascertain the social and religious background that is responsible for the prevalence of these grotesque images, both O'Connor and Mahfouz refer to other texts with referential significance that illuminate the meaning.

Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find* has been a subject of countless readings. O'Connor's use of the grotesque has been recognized easily because of her use of shocking, violent and despairing themes. Within the context of the previous definitions of the grotesque, this paper stresses the definition of the grotesque as "the alienated world" and "the alienated character" and how the world is made menacing by the incomprehensible forces that attack the familiar and comforting pattern of the world.

Speaking of the grotesque, O'Connor wrote:

He is looking for one image that can connect or combine or embody two points; one is a point in the concrete, and the other is a point not visible to the naked eye, but believed in him firmly just as real to him, really, as the one that everybody sees.
(*O'Connor, Mystery 170*)

O'Connor's concrete point "may refer to the prevalence of violence and violent characters in society. It is important to note that violence is not an end in itself, as O'Connor says. "It is the extreme situation that best reveals what we are essentially andthose are times when writers are more interested in what we are essentially than in the tenor of our daily life" (*O'Connor, Mystery 111*). O'Connor goes further and says "I found out that violence is strangely capable of retuning my characters and preparing them to accept the moment of grace" (*O'Connor, Mystery 112*). Contrary to O'Connor's words, violent

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actions signify the presence of something wrong in both individuals and societies. To start with, O'Connor's story is based on a real incident. Tate, in an article entitled "A Good Source Is not Hard to Find", stresses the source of the word "Misfit" and says:

The text of an Atlanta Constitution article of November 6, 1952, p. 29, identifies for us the source of a celebrated sobriquet ... the head line says enough: "The Misfit" robs office, Escapes with \$ 150". Flannery O'Connor took a forgotten criminal's alias and used it for a larger purpose: her Misfit was out of place in a grander way than the original..⁽⁶⁷⁾

The original Misfit was an unambitious thief. O'Connor took only from him his name "the Misfit". Tate ascertains that there was another "well – publicized criminal a loose in Tennessee and Georgia". This criminal had four important qualities in common with O'Connor's Misfit. "First, he inspired a certain amount of terror through several states. Second, he had, or claimed to have, a certain *politesse*. Third, he wore spectacles. Fourth, he had two accomplices, in more than one account" (Tate 68).

Another reference to a similar episode entitled "Maniac's Gang Terrorizes Hills" published in "*Constitution, October, 24, p. 2, from Sparta, tenn.*"). The article states that:

A fantastic band of highwaymen, led by a self-styled "maniac" who laughed weirdly while he looted his victims, spread terror through the Cumberland hills today... [the leader] boasted that he had escaped from the Utah State prison and killed two people. (Tate 69)

Mamac Hill was "Adjudged Incompetent" and was sent to a mental institution; this may have suggested O'Connor's Misfit's experiences with the "head, doctor". Stressing the real sources of O'Connor is an important issue that articulates the prevalence of violence in society and, at the same time, has indirect implication as it is going to be clarified through the analysis of the story.

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Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find* is about a family trip to Florida. In her description of the trip, of the family and the surrounding environment, O'Connor defines the Southern culture as being hypocritical and evil. As an embodiment of Southern culture, O'Connor describes the family as:

A misnomer, for there is no uniting bond. It is each for himself without respect, without manners. The children, uncorrected crudely insult their grandmother, and the grandmother for her selfish ends uses the children against her surly son. The practice of deceit and the mouthing of pieties are constant in her life and the praise of the past when good men were easy to find degrades that past by the banality of her memories. (Jones 120)

The grandmother states that children in her time "*were more respectful of their native states and their parents and every thing else*" (O'Connor, *A Good Man* 35). The description of the family suggests the world at large. In their conversation when they take rest at Red Sammy's barbecue they talk about the "awfulness of the time" and how it is hard to find a good man these days.

It is hard indeed – as Madison Jones believes – to find a good man "in a world unleavened by any presence of the spiritual, a world portrayed, incidentally in scores of contemporary TV. Sit. Coms."⁽¹²²⁾. Within this cultural context the Misfit appears both as a victim of this society and as a scourge of society. He has been alluded at implicitly and now he appears in an explicit way:

I call myself the Misfit because I cannot make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment (O'Connor, *A Good Man* 64)

'Misfit' is a word that denotes incongruity, abnormality, or inability to cope with the surrounding environment. Nevertheless, "abnormality alone cannot constitute the grotesque, for an exotic flower can be out of the ordinary without being grotesque. So, to the principle of abnormality must be added something else, debasement" (Ellery 53).

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Something wrong prevails between grotesque figures and the universe. This results in alienating both, characters and societies. The Misfit is alienated from his world because of a crime he does not remember. He says in an answer to the grandmother's question about the reason of going to the penitentiary:

It was a head doctor at the penitentiary said what I had done was kill my daddy but I known that for a lie. My daddy died in a nineteen ought nineteen of the epidemic flu and I never had a thing to do with it. (O'Connor, A Good Man 48)

In his confinement, he experiences pain and suffering. The big world turns to be a prison in which he does not know what to do, everywhere the way is blocked:

Turn to the right, it was a wall, looking up again at the cloudless sky, turn to the left it was a wall. Look up it was a ceiling, look down it was a floor. I forgot what I done, lady And I aint recalled it this day. (O'Connor, A Good Man 49)

To be unjustly blocked maddens him and creates of him a demon of destruction that finds enjoyment in his life "by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness" (O'Conner, A Good Man 50). "According to the ethics of this teacher, goodness is a matter of sadistic gratification. No pleasure but meanness" (Bryant 78). The only path he finds after his release is to take revenge on the society that made of him a criminal. The fact that the Misfit is "isolated and outlawed makes him direct the violent longings of his soul inwardor against the other" (Marks 91). This is natural with the prevalent secular tendency that attempts to "rationalize man's inherent spiritual drives out of existence, rather than acknowledging and providing for them" (Marks 91). This secular tendency makes the individual not only violent but at war with the other and the society. Mostly, he becomes a nihilist who does not believe in the existence of moral values rejecting the existent religion and the existent social institutions. This nihilistic attitude results as –Nietzsche says- in an "apathy toward life and poisoning of

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the human soul" (qtd. in Martin 208). O'Connor stresses the Misfit's response to "both also internal and external pressures which upset long-held notions of a stable cosmos and reveal the world to be, instead, absurd and on the verge of collapse" (Ellery 76). Accordingly, and in an answer to the grandmother's question "Why don't you pray?", he makes it clear that he has no faith simply because "everything of balance" in this world:

It was the same case with Him as with me except he hadn't committed any crime and they could prove I had committed one because they had the papers on me. (O'Connor, A Good Man 94)

This indicates how his "conscience has been seared and his vision warped by his hedonistic atheism" (Bryant 78). This atheistic attitude stems from his sense of 'loss of balance', and injustice for being "*punished a heap and another ain't punished at all*"(50). He lacks faith in Christ, "Had he been there when Jesus raised the dead, he would have immediately and radically changed his life,"(Bellamy 106). This makes him feel that, it is his duty to make life "nastier, shorter and more brutish" (Bellamy 106). As a result, his image is that of a beast that attempts to ascertain the law of retribution making of himself judge and executioner at the same time.

The Misfit, the condemned man, turned executioner of the grandmother and her family seeing no "difference between the dignified judge who condemns a criminal to die, and the industrious mechanic who carries out the sentences" (Dyson 143). As the Misfit is judged wrongly by the others, including his father who considers him of "*a different breed of dog*", from his brothers and sisters and by the community that sent him to penitentiary, he expresses his inability to understand the reason of what is happening to him and says to the grandmother:

"You know, It's some that can live their whole life out without asking about it and it's others has to know why it is, and this boy is one of the latters... he is going to be into everything. (O'Connor, A Good Man 52)

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The Inability to comprehend, makes the Misfit terrorize the other, and form an image of the world which rather is unfair. His father had a darker side and some problems with the authorities and he never got in trouble with them. This moved him – as Dyson says – " to pass sentence on individual cases by his impulse to philosophize on the nature of the circumstances which produce the individual cases"⁽¹⁴³⁾. Since everything is off balance, the result of his judgment is to kill the family. The Misfit considers the family a symbol of the society that lacks compassions and feelings, and is willing to "smash his face" if they recognize him.

The Misfit's cruelty and ferocity may look shocking, but it is a natural result of suppressed feelings of anger and hatred, and at the same time "powerful and frustrated instinct for meaning and justice " (Jones 123). O'Connor's words "*There was a pistol shot from the woods followed closely by another-then silence*"^(50) are very significant. The pistol shot is a protest cry against the world in which violation is a prevalent form of human behavior and its subsequent reaction. There should be positive actions to correct what is wrong, but the phrase "then silence" increases the individual's suffering and by necessity the willingness to torture the other since some are punished and others are not .As Dyston says "the absurd law begets a correlative absurd response, reductive in nature from the affected town people"⁽¹⁴¹⁾. If others are affected, it is the Misfit who suffers most, and if others die physically, he dies spiritually and this is the severest punishment. The grotesque image here is applicable more to the society, as the Misfit was reacting not acting. What else do we expect from a person whose character is the result of the " breakdown in humanity, family values and all the values that have been lost in today's culture" (Galloway 7). Do we expect him to live a moment of grace as a received truth lived by the grandmother? The negative answer makes the Misfit ask " where is the justice in a world in which grace is a gift, a gift he feels temperamentally incapable of receiving " (Bellamy 106). Josephine Hendin considers the gun used by the Misfit to be the natural expression of a "Misfit"

what frees the Misfit from total emptiness is his

gun. Solid and enduring in his otherwise blank universe, the gun expresses the Misfit's unfathomable rage. Its voice is far more authentic than the polite phrases he uses to address the family before he has them exterminated. The gun is his most "animal" part, a potent extension of himself..... (Hendin 150)

This "animal" part is consistent with the reaction of the world in which he lives.

Many critical writings emphasized the moral significance of the final scene in which the grandmother-another grotesque character in the story – lives a moment of grace that redeems her. Here, it is essential to ask about the significance of this moment of grace to a selfish and hypocritical old woman. Because of her, the family had strayed from the main path "onto an unimportant side road where they are killed"(Galloway 3). Galloway sees that "the wrong way" symbolizes "how people often stray from Jesus and follow the wrong path spiritually"⁽³⁾. The clouds to Galloway represent 'the grandmother's superficial faith'⁽³⁾. Facing the Misfit alone, the grandmother attempts to save herself by praising him and describing him as a good man; the thing he denies and reflects her hypocrisy. Earlier in the story she ascertains that she "*could not go any direction with a criminal like that a loose in it*"⁽³³⁾. This criminal becomes good to her only, when she faces death. Her failure makes her turn to Jesus to help and protect her. But the grandmother's hope in Christ seems to crumble when he does not save her. Accordingly, the grandmother's moment of grace is obviously superficial. She is "a hollow recipients of divine impulse" (Marks 84). Like puppets in some cosmic marionette show, the grandmother "twitches" on her wires as the indifferent spirit moves her "either to bizarre acts of criminal insanity or to equally incredible decisions for Christ"(Marks 85). Resorting to Christ in this violent moment reflects the good nature of man that is hidden in this secular world. Such a character deserves to be pitied only because at the moment of death "she is confronted with the unbearable truth of [her] own folly, [her] own pathetic wasted life" (Marks 85). She is stripped bare and faced by the truth of superficial

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human life that lacks substance and real religious sense that is capable, if real, to surround the other with love and human consideration. In an attempt to save herself and in a gesture of tenderness, the grandmother claims that " he is one of -the criminal- her babies" and that is ambiguous enough as Hendin says, " for her babies are killed". Nevertheless, "the grandmother's tenderness implies that she can cure his misery" (Hendin 157) ,and this is the crucial point of the story. Lack of tenderness, human consideration and justice is a very strong incentive to push the Misfit to kill and , at the same time, to point out the responsibility of the grandmother and the society for this tragic end. O'Connor stresses this sense of responsibility on the part of the grandmother and says:

She realizes, even in her limited way, that she is responsible for the man before her and joined to him by ties of kinship which have their roots deep in the mystery she has been merely prattling about so far. At this point, she does the right thing, she makes the right gesture. (*O'Connor, Mystery 114*)

If the Misfit is considered a "grotesque figure" being "ridiculous" and "horrifying" living in utter isolation with his fragmented soul, he can be taken as an expression of " powerful (and) frustrated instinct for meaning and justice" (Jones 123) in a world that lacks any hope of redress for the human condition. In this case, it is the society that should be labeled as being "grotesque" not individuals. "It may be inferred that this same instinct is what has produced his tormenting thoughts about Christ" (Jones 123). What is shocking is that religion which is fundamental and true becomes skeptic because of the absurdity of this world.

As a staunch Catholic, O'Connor stresses "the homogenizing of all racial, regional and religious culture into one uniform and godless civilization" (Marks 84). To be saved from this hellish, godless and violent world, man has to repent and to be a true adherent and follower of religion. Violence is not what is needed to awaken man's religious sense, but rather a chance to live in a humane,

tolerant and just world. If the Misfit had been treated compassionately, he would not have killed the family. As a result, he could not be compassionate for this would mean his death as a Misfit. Accordingly, grotesque characters can be taken as an example of the folly of denying true religions. It is when "the freak can be sensed as figure for our essential displacement that he attains depth in literature and life" (Pence 21). The concept of displacement is used by O'Connor as "a displacement from the world of the one true God" (21), a theological displacement. It is also a social displacement based on the nature of the Misfit's position in his family and society. Estrangement is the natural result because of the society's reaction that denies him repentance. As a result he seeks pleasure in torturing the other. So, the Misfit exists "not by coincidence but by the logic implicit in lives made grotesque when vision has departed. He, O'Connor tells us, is the fierce avenger our souls beget upon our innocent nihilism". (Jones 126). The Misfit, in this way, reveals surprising truth about the apparent norm in the society that hides what is horrifying and ludicrous.

The negative end of the story signifies the necessity of giving every individual a chance to live as a human being, even if he has committed a crime. We have to think of them differently if we have to make them live a moment of grace. These grotesque figures "are us" and they point out that there is something rotten in our life as individuals and as a society.

Naguib Mahfouz's "*The Thief and the Dogs*" Al-Liss wal Kilab – is another example in which the character of Said Mahran is the 'Misfit'. He can be considered a grotesque image. Like the Misfit, he is victimized by his grotesque society, and is driven to live in isolation. Said Mahran is concerned about his inner feeling of revenge on those who rejected him. The novel revolves around the character of Said Mahran and his anguished pain for deception and betrayal. Naguib Mahfouz emphasizes the idea of betrayal in the story of Said Mahran which is equivalent to the Misfit's feeling of injustice. His wife asked for divorce while he was in prison to marry his friend and follower, Ilish. Everything is lost; wife, daughter and money, and what is left is a distorted image of a man, broken but like a hurricane is boiling inside.

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Central to the making of Said Mahran is Rauf Ilwan, "his one time criminal mentor, who used the same revolutionist rhetoric, but now, being a respected journalist and businessman, is in seeming opposition to Said, whose outlook has not changed" (Gordon 72). These perceived betrayals throw the protagonist into the utmost confusion and his initial calculation in revenge becomes even more "a wild failing against the whole world" (Gordon 72) that is described as being corrupt in different aspects.

The story of a man who is consumed with anger and desire of revenge is not exaggerated. Anger makes any person blind to see truth and by necessity leads to his destruction. Like the story of the Misfit, the story of *the Thief and the Dogs* is based on a real story. Fatma Moussa says:

Mahfouz's novel was inspired by the story of the Alexandria Killer, Mahmoud Amin Soliman, who aroused public interest at one point in time and raised a hue and cry in Egypt. Thanks to the exaggeration of the press, he was turned into a hero, a superman, capable of every thing. Then came his end. He was hounded by police dogs till he was cornered in a cave in the mountains-where he sought shelter – very much like a beast, running away from hunting dogs.(194)

Like Said Mahran, the real thief is obsessed with the idea that his wife betrayed him, and as a result he has to take revenge. The similarity is insignificant, but it stresses the typicality of Said Mahran's story and the surrounding environment that forces people to be criminals.

Said Mahran was a harmless young intellectual who "was unfairly denied a place in the self-same university to which the rich were easily admitted" (Mooti 10). More importantly, he was forced to steal the belonging of a village student to buy medicine for his dying mother and it was Ra'uf Ilwan his law-student friend, that calmly told him "fear nothing. Fact is I regard this theft as a perfectly lawful action" (Mahfouz 71). Moreover, he encourages him saying:

Have you really stolen something? Bravo, it is high time that exploiters got divested of some of their sins... It is a lawful action, Said, never doubt that" (Mahfouz 64)

Henceforward, Said Mahran never stopped either reading or robbing, and "it was Rauf Ilwan who gave (him) the names of people who deserve to be robbed" and it was in theft I found my glory, my honor. I was generous to many people Ilish Sidra amongst them"(78). But Rauf Ilwan changes after he occupies his position as a famous editor. He forgets class strife and asks his friend to forget about their friendship:

Said- today is not like yesterday. You were a thief and at the same time my friend for reasons that you know. But today is not like yesterday. If you go back to burglary, you will be just a thief and nothing more. (Mahfouz 30)

Like the Misfit who found himself a criminal because of a crime he does not remember, Said Mahran addresses his faithless friend in his thoughts and says:

You create me and then you reject me. You change, in all simplicity, your thoughts after you have suffused my whole being that I may find myself quite lost with no origin, value or hope to speak of. (Mahfouz 49)

Said loses balance and faith. He feels that everything turned upside down. As Adrian Mckinty says, "Said Mahran considered himself a Markist Robin Hood" ("Less Park More Bite" 3) simply because he steals only from the rich and the corrupt, and in this way he is fighting for a better society as Rauf Ilwan used to say to him. Now, he is regarded only as a thief. What is painful is that, it is his teacher; Rauf Ilwan, who hurts him badly. Consequently, the thief, like the Misfit

has appointed himself both judge and executioner. He takes it upon himself to punish the dogs. The dogs are those who have betrayed his trust and love. He rushes on like a hurricane to

hound those dogs. However, his bullets miss the mark: they do not kill the dogs but innocent people. (Moousa 94)

Like the Misfit, he kills innocent people, which is attributed by critics – like Fatma Moousa – to the fact that "Said Mahran is not a hero as he believes himself to be but a thief, a clown"(94). It is unfair to consider Mahran as a clown. Both, the Misfit and the thief-may not be tragic characters, but definitely they are tragic figures dominated by one passion; anger regardless of the driving reason of this anger. Said Mahran is angry because of betrayal and injustice. His master in evil has become a resident of villa number 18 in the same wealthy neighborhood that Said used to rob. "It is not surprising to be a thief in a society which is rotten from the top down but it is shocking to be labled a thief, whereas the generals, the colonels, the politicians are stealing in much more subtle and elegant ways" (*Mckinty, The Thief 12*). Astonishment and madness are quite obvious in Said's words:

I was one of your listeners at the foot of the same tree where the history of my love began – and the times themselves were listening to you too..." the people! theft! the holy fire! The Rich! Hunger! Justice! (Mahfouz 78)

This feeling of "injustice" pushes Mahran to swear to kill Rauf Ilwan in order to put an end to what is ludicrous in society. It is not fair to be punished while others, like Rauf Ilwan, are not. They could even prove that Mahran is guilty, and Ilwan is not:

What nonsense life would turn to be if I were myself killed tomorrow – in retribution for murdering a man I didn't even know ! If there's going to be any meaning to life – and to death, too – I simply have to kill you. My last outburst of rage at the evil of the world – And all these things lying out there in the graveyard below the window will help me. (Mahfouz 78-79)

The evils of the world are personified in the person of Rauf Ilwan.

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Had Said Mahran managed to kill Rauf Ilwan, he would have succeeded to give meaning to his lost life and would have destroyed his sense of loss and waste as he says: "*A world without moral, is like a universe without gravity*"⁽⁷⁷⁾. Killing Ilwan will help restore balance and morality to the world. It is ridiculous that a thief is trying to restore balance to the world exactly as does the Misfit when he talks about Christ, and that is ridiculous and funny about societies.

Both, the Misfit and the thief, feel and recognize the surrounding evil, but they feel they are the only victims. "*The whole world is cruel enough and unjust enough*"⁽⁸⁷⁾, as Said Mahran says, because of inequality. In his anger, Said Mahran dresses as an officer and goes to kill Rauf Ilwan.

Rauf Ilwan after all personified the highest standard of treachery from which people like Ilish and Nabowiyya and all their traitors on earth sought inspiration. (Mahfouz 84)

In killing Rauf Ilwan, Said Mahran believes that he kills evil incarnation. Instead he kills another innocent person and this increases Said's anger and madness.

In this state of alienation, despair, anger and hatred man is blind to see any path of redemption. In *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, the grandmother asks the Misfit to pray. Similarly Sheikh Ali asks Said to raise his face to God, "*Remember Him and definitely He will help you*"⁽⁹⁸⁾. This is useless since the two believe that "*it is the guilty who succeed while the innocent fail*"⁽⁹⁹⁾. The Misfit and the thief miss this moment of grace which might lead to redemption because "*beauty in creation stems from you*"⁽⁹⁹⁾, as Sheikh Ali says. Anger and hatred inside and ugliness outside overwhelm and destroy them. In a second, Said remembered the endless mercy of the compassionate Allah and "*memories of hope shook off the dust of oblivion and flashed with life again*"⁽¹⁰¹⁾. This flash of hope will not last as he hears a voice asking him to "*give up...make your choice between death and coming to justice...justice indeed! Said Yelled scornfully*".⁽¹⁰⁷⁾, and found himself surrounded by a different group of dogs – real dogs, police dogs who succeeded to shot him down. This end of the thief is

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the same implied end of the Misfit. It ascertains that if God can forgive, society cannot forgive any crime inspite of the fact that the society is responsible-to some extent-for these crimes.

To point out the difficulty of finding a good man, both O'Connor and Mahfouz resort to similar techniques. Titles are symbolic. *A Good Man is Hard to Find* is natural with the prevalence of dogs in societies that are violent, hypocritic, deceptive and unjust. In *The Thief and the Dogs*, dogs may stand for Nabawiyya, Illish and Rauf Ilwan. "The dogs are seen in the negative way as representing betrayal and treachery"(Rozovsky,n.p.). Illish is again likened to a dog when Said asks "Have you forgotten, Illish, how you used to rub against my legs like a dog" (Mahfouz 24). Apart from the imagery of dogs, there are references to other animals such as "snakes", "black beetle" and mice that indicate degradation in man's nature. According to Dr. Maher Shafeik these dogs symbolize the criminal society that victimizes people through betrayal, deception and exploitation:

وهكذا نرى أن في هذه القصة لصاً يلعب دور البطولة وكلاباً
يوجدون عنصر الصراع معه . فإذا كان اللص ضحية
للقسوة والخيانة والغدر فإن الكلاب يمثلون في هذه القصة
خيانة المجتمع وبشاعة الخيانة . (شفيق 740)

" In this story, there is a thief and dogs who are in conflict with him. If the thief is the victim of cruelty and betrayal, dogs symbolize in this *story* the horrible image of the conspiracy and treachery of the society (Shafik 740, my translation).

If Dr. Maher stresses the destructive impact of society and the surrounding environment, he implicitly rejects the issue of fatalism in Mahran's life; the issue which is advocated by Dr. Rashad Rushdy (p.518-519). In both "*A good Man is Hard to Find*" and "*The Thief and The Dogs*", the two major characters feel that they are victimized and isolated by the surrounding environment and society. This makes us label these societies as grotesque. Instead of embracing all members of society

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with love and protection, societies make of them Misfits. "Sympathy of the millions is voiceless, and impotent like the longings of the dead" (Mahfouz 90). This negative reaction makes Said Mahran see himself as a hero who is going to save people. He says:

Whoever kills me will be killing the millions. I am the hope and the dream, the redemption of cowards; I am good principles, consolation, the tears that recall the weeper to humility. And the declaration that I am mad must encompass all who are loving. Examine the causes of this insane occasion, then reach your judgment however you wish. (Mahfouz 191)

His final verdict is that "Said Mahran is great", but his greatness is shrouded in black. This black colour reflects the gloomy atmosphere of the surrounding graves and the cruelty of the outer world.

Imagery of animals is related to those of imprisonment which create a sense of alienation. Said Mahran has never been released from his prison. The cruelty of the world outside intensifies his loneliness. The psychological feeling of imprisonment increases Said's anger and hatred of the society that should be just in dealing with him and other dogs. Dr. Mahmoud ElRubai presents this issue of injustice and its destructive impact. He believes that justice is the greatest issue in this story and should be written in bold. Taking Said Mahran's life into consideration forces us to raise an important question " can we consider Said Mahran a dangerous insect whom the whole society with its different institutions should face and destroy? ". In an answer to this question Dr Al Rabi'i says:

بالتأكيد .. لا يستطيع الإنسان أن يدافع عن لص ... لكن
مثل هذه الإجابة العادية تتجاهل بعيدين هامين من أبعاد
الموقف العام المعروض في اللص والكلاب . أولى هذين
البعدين أن هذا اللص المجرم ضحية لظروف خاصة
أبسرها الفقر والحاجة المادية وأعقدها أنه أعد إعداداً
فكرياً معنيا جعله يحس أحساساً حاداً. على طريقته بمعنى
تكافؤ الفرص والوفاء والعدل . ولقد رأى هذه المعانى

تنهار . وأهم من هذا أنه رأها تنهار تحت سمع المجتمع
وبصره فلا يحس بها أحد ولا يدافع عنها أحد . ولقد
تشبث بمثالة وحاول تحقيقه عنوه بأخذ القانون في يديه ،
بعد أن استحال تحقيقه عن طريق القانون . وثانيهما أن
عليش سدره ونبوية لصان بالمعنى المعقد ، لقد سرقا
شيئاً لا يرى بالعين ولا يلمس باليد ولكنه حاضر في كل
ضمير حي حضوراً بديهيًا... (25) .

Definitely, any reasonable person cannot defend a thief. Such an answer ignores two important factors. First: this thief is a victim of specific circumstances; the simplest is poverty and financial needs, while the most difficult one is that he is prepared intellectually in a specific way that makes him have his specific meaning of equality, loyalty and justice. What is painful is that, he has seen these meanings collapse in front of the whole society and no one feels or cares to defend them. As a result, he tries to fulfill what he believes in and makes of himself a judge and an executioner. Secondly, Ellish and Nabawiyya are two thieves, they stole something that cannot be seen or touched but existed in every alive conscience. (25, my translation)

Dr. El-Rubai goes further and sees that the most dangerous thief is Rauf Ilwan who destroyed the society as a whole by saying what he does not do. What is dangerous about Rauf Ilwan is that he is secure in his position, as he is considered one of those who protect law. Hence, it seems meaningless to punish some thieves and leave the others. If premeditated murder is the greatest sin in any society, to be an accomplice in any murder is also a sin. Unjust societies can be considered an accomplice in the crimes committed by Said Mahran and the Misfit.

Like O'Connor, Mahfouz resorts to religion; to the spiritual path to help Said Maharn to find way out. Mckinty sees Sheikh Ali as

"the classic Sufi-saint who can project love for his fellow man"(8). Sheikh Ali does his best to help Said Mahran and direct him to the way of redemption. Like the Misfit, Said's heart is hardened, and anger blinds him. In addition, "Said is engrossed in self", as Gassick says, and is unable to communicate with Sheikh Ali and " the devotes who are engrossed in attempting to come close to God and to deny themselves in this process" (6). The inability of both, Said and the Misfit, to feel the merciful power of God is an indication of their loss of faith. Absence of faith is responsible for the prevalence of violence, murder and betrayal. Going to Sheikh Ali, Said Mahran is seeking " the walls not the heart", a place to hide in not thinking of God's help. Religion is depicted as something irrelevant to the predicament of modern man. As El-Enany says "there is a complete divorce between the harsh reality in which Said Mahran lives and the imperturbable peace of the mystic Shaykh Ali which is achieved by complete withdrawal from the world"(26). Said's "burning heart yearns for shade, yet continues forward under the fire of the sun"(Mahfouz 105), or rather the fire of his desire of revenge that blinds and destroys him and emphasizes the wide gap between God and man. This stresses the superficial faith of people and the indirect message of the novel about the importance of having strong faith in order to direct man to the right path. It is important to believe that we have a "chance at redemption" either in this world or the hereafter. Such a belief might be an incentive to change and start a new life.

If O'Connor resorts to confrontation between the grandmother and the Misfit to point out reasons of his anger, Nagib Mahfouz uses the technique of the stream of consciousness to illuminate the dark and vengeful nature of Mahran that can be considered a projection of external reality. In a marvelous inner monologue, Said Mahran imagines a trial in which he tries to defend himself. He says:

You must assert that the treachery has become a silent conspiracy: I did not kill the servant of Rauf Ilwan. How could I kill a man I did not know and who didn't know me? Rauf Ilwan's servant was killed because, quite simply, he was the servant of Rauf Ilawn.(Mahfouz 90)

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Said Mahran attributes his tragedy to the treacherous corrupt and unjust society that forced him to kill innocent people. He goes further and wishes to communicate with all people and tell them reasons of his loneliness.

To conclude, Mahfouz and O'Connor are similar in stressing the dangerous impact of grotesque societies on human life. Grotesque societies are distorted and unnatural since they propagate isolation and fragmentation with the prevalence of injustice and inequality. When societies are grotesque, corruption and evil prevail, and overwhelm the whole community. Any society, whether it is Mahfouz's or O'Connor's society, should extend every possible means to absorb the deviated persons and help them to be fully integrated in their societies. Instead of alienating both, love can change the Misfit and the thief.

Reference to religion is similar in the two stories. The two protagonists are offered a way out through spiritual surrender, but anger and hatred make them unable to reciprocate. Nevertheless, both stories stress the importance of religion in solving man's problems; both make wrong decisions, but revenge, and murder do not get them anywhere. On the contrary, revenge is destructive of individuals and societies. The prevalence of true religion in just societies is sufficient to make any individual feel secure and satisfied and, as a result, be able to face the other – whether it is the individual or the society – peacefully; not using a gun as it is the case with the Misfit and the thief. If O'Connor is considered a rebellious writer screaming in protest against the apparent secularism of the world, Mahfouz is, similarly, satirizing the dark aspect of the society that lurks behind the unjust dealings of the grotesque societies.

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