



Psychoanalytic Redemption of The Misfit in O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"

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Putra, E.S and Sriastuti, A. (2026). Psychoanalytic Redemption of The Misfit in O'Connor's
"A Good Man Is Hard to Find". *Journal of English Language and literature*, 11(2), 227-236,
doi: 10.37110/jell.v11i2.347

Received: 20-06-2026

Accepted: 02-07-2026

Published: 02-09-2026

Abstract: Violence in literature often appears as an outward act of brutality; however, it frequently reflects a deep convergence of psychological conflict and spiritual anxiety. In Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," The Misfit presents a jarring paradox: his calm rationality contrasts sharply with his extreme violence, raising vital questions about the psychological roots of his criminality and his capacity for redemption. This study investigates how The Misfit's violence functions not as senseless cruelty, but as a complex manifestation of inner anxiety, unconscious conflict, and profound existential struggle. Utilizing Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework, specifically the tripartite psyche (id, ego, and superego), defense mechanisms, and moral anxiety, the research demonstrates how his obsession with legalistic punishment and Christ's resurrection stems from a harsh superego coping with absolute theological doubt. The analysis reveals that his ultimate redemption is uniquely twisted and paradoxical. Rather than unfolding as a conventional transformation toward goodness, his redemption occurs through the violent climax of murdering the grandmother, an act that backfires by shattering his rigid intellectual armor. This confrontation leaves his ego entirely exposed, stripping away his defenses and forcing a tragic self-awareness characterized by the renunciation of worldly pleasure and an inescapable confrontation with divine grace.

Keywords: Anxiety, redemption, repression, superego, violence

INTRODUCTION

Society has long been both fascinated and unsettled by the anatomy of violence. Far from being spontaneous, acts of brutality are often the culmination of hidden psychological tensions, social pressures, and moral conflicts. In the tapestry of everyday life, violence manifests not only in physical crime but also in the subtle "micro-aggressions" of emotional repression and inner turmoil. The human mind remains mysterious because it is a master of camouflage; a smile may mask profound

despair, and silence rarely equates to peace. Beneath the surface of a composed individual, unresolved trauma and destructive impulses often churn, held in check only by the fragile structures of social functioning. From this perspective, violence is less an act of "evil" and more an outward eruption of an internal psychological rupture.

This duality is masterfully explored in Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1980). The encounter between a traveling family and the escaped convict known as "The

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Misfit" strips away the veneer of Southern decorum to expose the thin line between morality and brutality. Unlike the stereotypical "mindless villain," The Misfit is calm, articulate, and deeply reflective. His violence is not impulsive; it is philosophical. Through his dialogue, O'Connor reveals an obsessive preoccupation with justice, the weight of punishment, and the theological implications of Christ's resurrection. This complexity demands an analysis that goes beyond moral judgment, inviting a classical Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation to explore the unconscious motivations and defense mechanisms driving his behavior, while simultaneously expanding into modern psychological perspectives that treat the unconscious as an active, adaptive system rather than a passive depository for hidden pathologies.

The application of Freudian theory to violence is well-established in contemporary scholarship, particularly within film studies where the "unstable protagonist" serves as a primary subject. Abdulloh (2023) provides a foundational example in his study of David Fincher's *Fight Club*. By analyzing the narrator through the lens of the tripartite psyche, Abdulloh demonstrates how an imbalance between the id, ego, and superego leads to identity fragmentation. In this case, the id dominates, manifesting as aggressive rebellion against a sterile society (Abdulloh, 2023). Building upon this Freudian framework, Fari (2025) extends the analysis of violent catharsis to the film *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019). While Abdulloh focuses on the rebellion against consumerism, Fari (2025) highlights how historical anxieties and the psychological desire for reality correction act as catalysts for alternative history fantasies. In *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019), the gratification of the audience's emotional needs through an altered timeline results in a therapeutic release of aggressive impulses against historical perpetrators, framing the film's graphic violence as a restorative act of emotional catharsis rather than senseless brutality (Fari, 2025). While the aforementioned studies focus on the internal mechanics of the character, Alifiadita

Nindyarini Wirawan (2021) shifts the focus toward the external, the audience's perception. Using a Lacanian perspective (the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic), Wirawan examines Todd Phillips's *Joker*. This research suggests that the "violence" of the character is often misinterpreted by society; viewers frequently conflate Arthur Fleck's psychological suffering with inherent danger, thereby reinforcing social stigmas (Wirawan, 2021).

While these studies effectively utilize psychoanalysis to decode the "violent" subject, a distinct gap remains in analyzing the unique contribution of both psychological defense mechanisms and spiritual anxiety in a literary character, specifically in relation to violence. Previous research primarily focuses on the id-ego conflict in modern cinematic settings, and Wirawan focuses on audience reception. However, none of these studies address how a literary character utilizes physical violence as a structured defense mechanism to cope with profound metaphysical and religious doubt. Unlike the characters in *Fight Club* or *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, The Misfit's violence is inextricably linked to his "faith confusion". This research departs from previous scholarship by focusing on a literary, rather than cinematic, subject whose primary conflict is not just social or parental, but existential.

Due to the intersection of psychological trauma and spiritual crisis inherent in the text, this study is aimed at providing a comprehensive psychoanalytic evaluation of the antagonist. Primarily, the research identifies the roots of The Misfit's anxiety as they stem from his pervasive faith confusions. Furthermore, it seeks to map the landscape of his unconscious mind to reveal the specific origins of his destructive impulses. In addition, the study explains the specific defense mechanisms he employs to justify his brutality. Ultimately, this psychoanalytic interpretation illustrates how the character's internal conflicts and defensive maneuvers culminate in a total collapse of ego defenses during confrontation. This collapse reveals that his actions represent a Paradoxical or "Twisted Redemption"—a

state where his violence functions not as complete moral emptiness, but as the painful catalyst that strips away his psychological armor and forces an agonizing, authentic spiritual awareness.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design, which is characterized by an inductive approach to understanding human experience and the construction of meaning. According to John W. Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions that explore a social or human problem. In this context, the "problem" is the psychological complexity of violence and the internal struggle for redemption within a literary subject. The qualitative framework is particularly suited for this study because it allows for a holistic, detailed examination of a character's psyche that a purely quantitative approach would overlook. To properly align this qualitative design with a text-based, literary analysis, the traditional components of empirical inquiry, specifically participants, instruments, and procedures, are precisely tailored to textual data.

In this text-based design, the "participants" are defined as the short story text itself and the fictional characters residing within the narrative, focusing primarily on the antagonist known as The Misfit. Correspondingly, the research "instruments" are explicitly established as the primary source text, Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1980), and the structural psychoanalytic theoretical framework used to decode the narrative.

2.1 Integration of Qualitative Research and Psychoanalysis

The synergy between qualitative research and psychoanalysis lies in their shared focus on interpretation and depth. While Creswell (2014) emphasizes the researcher's role as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, psychoanalysis provides the specific "lens" through which that data is interpreted. By treating Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is

Hard to Find" as a narrative case study, this research moves beyond surface-level plot summary to uncover the latent meanings behind The Misfit's dialogue and actions.

2.2 Research Procedures

The research is executed through a systematic, step-by-step analytical process divided into three distinct phases:

Phase 1: Data Collection through Close Reading The initial stage involves a rigorous "close reading" of the primary text. This procedure requires multiple immersions in the story to systematically identify how recurring themes, metaphors, and behavioral cues operate within the narrative. These extracted textual patterns are systematically recorded and evaluated to uncover their underlying psychoanalytic significance. Special attention is paid to The Misfit's philosophical ruminations and his interactions with the grandmother, which serve as the primary data points for analysis.

Phase 2: Data Identification and Categorization Following the close reading, the researcher systematically extracts specific segments of the text that correlate with Freud's structural model of the psyche and psychological defense mechanisms. To ensure a transparent and structured selection process, textual segments are analyzed and categorized according to the following explicit criteria and Freudian concepts:

Moral Anxiety and Faith-Based Tension: Textual passages or dialogue showing the ego's failure to mediate between primitive instinctual drives and the rigid moral rules of the superego, manifesting as deep existential doubt, spiritual instability, or faith confusion.

Narrative Hints of Repressed Material: Textual cues or behavioral anomalies that indicate actively repressed unconscious energy, specifically focusing on the character's paternal history, underlying trauma, and his psychic rejection of institutional authority or the "head doctor's" claims.

Psychological Defense Mechanisms: Textual segments where the character utilizes structured mental armor, such as rigid intellectualization, a detached clinical persona, or reaction

formation, to preserve his ego and artificially shield himself from emotional vulnerability or divine confrontation.

Phase 3: Psychoanalytic Interpretation and Synthesis The final stage involves analyzing the identified and categorized data through the Freudian concepts of the id, ego, and superego (Freud, 1920), as well as defense mechanisms such as intellectualization and reaction formation. This interpretive phase culminates in the explanation of the "Twisted Redemption," where the qualitative textual evidence is synthesized to demonstrate how the gradual internal psychic friction and the final, total collapse of ego defenses under immediate situational shock lead to an agonizing moment of tragic self-awareness and spiritual clarity.

2.3 Anxiety in Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

Anxiety plays a central role in Freud's structural model of the psyche. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud argues that anxiety arises when the ego fails to mediate the conflict between the id and the superego. As noted in the journal article, "Freud contended that anxiety and its feelings are an outcome of the ego's failure to intercede the id-superego conflicts" (Ally and Aloka, 2024). In such moments, anxiety acts as a warning signal, alerting the psyche to internal tension. In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, Freud further defines anxiety as "the feeling of forthcoming danger based on a moral, neurotic, or objective threat". Moral anxiety stems from the superego's threat of guilt, neurotic anxiety from fear of instinctual impulses, and objective anxiety from real external dangers. Importantly, Freud later maintained that anxiety precedes repression and even gives rise to it, emphasizing its central role in psychic life. Thus, from a Freudian perspective, anxiety is not simply emotional distress but a structural signal of unresolved internal conflict, often leading to defensive or destructive behavior.

2.4 Freud's Psychoanalytic View of Human Behavior

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory challenges the assumption that human behavior

is governed primarily by rational choice. Instead, Freud proposes that the unconscious mind plays a decisive role in shaping actions, desires, and moral conflict. He famously asserts that the ego attempts to control and regulate unconscious impulses, yet repressed desires continue to influence behavior in indirect ways. Repressed desires, particularly those associated with aggression, guilt, and forbidden wishes, do not disappear but resurface in disguised or destructive forms. Freud's structural model of the psyche, id, ego, and superego, further explains how internal conflict produces psychological tension. According to Daniel K. Lapsley and Paul C. Stey (2012), the id represents instinctual drives rooted in biological impulses, the ego functions as a mediator with reality, and the superego internalizes moral standards and parental authority. The ego must negotiate between the primitive demands of the id and the moral restrictions imposed by the superego. When this balance fails, anxiety and destructive behavior may emerge. This framework is particularly useful in the study of violence. From a Freudian perspective, violent behavior may occur when the ego is overwhelmed by instinctual drives or when the Superego produces excessive guilt and inner tension. Rather than labeling violence as senseless cruelty, psychoanalysis encourages readers to observe how destructive acts may function as symptoms of unresolved inner conflict and repression.

2.5 The Unconscious Mind, Repression, and Hidden Desire

Central to Freud's theory is the concept of the unconscious mind, which contains desires and impulses that are actively repressed because they threaten social order or personal identity. Freud explains that repressed material continues to seek expression through slips of the tongue, compulsive behavior, or aggression (Lapsley and Stey, 2012). These unconscious forces operate beyond awareness but significantly shape human conduct. Lapsley and Stey further clarify that repression does not eliminate instinctual energy; instead, it redirects it into substitute behaviors, often producing psychological tension or neurotic symptoms.]

Thus, violence can be interpreted not simply as criminal intention but as displaced psychic conflict. In Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, the contrast between The Misfit's calm demeanor and his extreme violence invites psychoanalytic inquiry. His rational speech and philosophical reflections obscure deeper tensions related to guilt, punishment, and moral accountability. Rather than interpreting his actions solely as criminality, a Freudian reading allows readers to consider how repression and unconscious conflict shape his behavior.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Anxiety lead to the Misfit's faith confusions within the story

In the study of psychoanalysis, anxiety is more than just a feeling of being nervous. It is a signal from the ego that something is wrong deep inside the mind. For the Misfit, this takes the form of moral anxiety. This type of anxiety happens when the ego is caught between the raw desires of the id and the very strict rules of the superego. The Misfit is clearly a man whose mind is in a state of constant tension because he cannot find a way to make his life make sense. This tension shows up as a deep confusion about faith and religion. He is not just a simple criminal who does not believe in God. He is someone who is obsessed with the idea of Jesus because he feels that Jesus changed the rules of the world in a way he cannot handle. The Misfit's anxiety is rooted in the idea that the world is no longer balanced. He articulates the source of his neurosis, as appeared in page 45 : *"Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead and He shouldn't have done it. He thrown everything off balance."* (O'Connor 1980, p. 45) . From a psychological view, the Misfit needs balance because the ego wants a world that is predictable and logical. If Jesus can raise the dead, then the laws of life and death are broken. This creates a huge amount of anxiety for the Misfit because he cannot verify the truth of this miracle with his own eyes. He is stuck in a state of doubt that he cannot escape. This doubt leads to a psychological problem where he feels he must choose between total faith or total violence. From page 45, we can see that he

tells the grandmother: *"If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him."* (O'Connor, 1980, p. 45). This quote shows that his faith confusion is actually a defense mechanism. Because he cannot be sure about Jesus, he chooses meanness as a way to feel in control. He uses violence to ground himself in a reality that he can touch and see. The Misfit also feels a lot of anxiety because he was not there to see the miracles himself. This is a sign of an ego that demands empirical proof to quiet the superego. Notice on page 45, he says with a cracked voice: *"I wasn't there so I can't say He didn't... if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now."* (O'Connor, 1980, p. 45). This is a very sad admission. He recognizes that his whole life as a killer is a result of this missing piece of information. His anxiety has shaped his entire personality. He is a misfit because he cannot find a place in a world that requires faith without proof. His confusion about God is really just a reflection of his own internal psychic imbalance. Furthermore, the Misfit's anxiety is made worse by the grandmother's constant talking about prayer. Every time she tells him to pray, she is poking at his moral anxiety. He does not want to pray because prayer requires a surrender that his ego is too scared to make. He tells her: *"I don't want no hep. I'm doing all right by myself."* (O'Connor, 1980, p. 43) As we can see on page 43. This is a classic ego defense. He is trying to convince himself and the grandmother that he is in control, even though he is a fugitive in the woods. His faith confusion is the external mask of a very deep internal struggle to find peace in a world that feels rigged against him.

3.2 Modern Perspectives on the Misfit's Unconscious

To complement the classical Freudian analysis established thus far, this section introduces a distinct, secondary analytical layer that reframes the character's internal mechanics

through contemporary psychological paradigms. Delineating these two approaches reveals how modern cognitive models expand upon classical drive theory, particularly in explaining how the Misfit's behavioral control operates when his conscious ego defenses are paralyzed. While a classic Freudian lens views the Misfit's mind as a turbulent battleground of repressed trauma, active resistance, and unresolved Oedipal guilt, contemporary scholarship offers an expanded, parallel framework that treats the unconscious as a foundational, active dimension of human existence rather than a passive depository for hidden pathologies. Modern psychological and philosophical inquiries demonstrate that the unconscious functions as a decentralized locus of psychic activity, running advanced behavioral guidance systems entirely independent of conscious awareness or Cartesian intentionality. From this perspective, the Misfit's calm, deliberate, and highly organized control over his criminal operations is a clear demonstration of a corporeal interface where biological effect actively manages environmental adjustment. While his conscious awareness is completely paralyzed and alienated by systemic contradictions, moral calculations, and historical doubts regarding the divinity of Jesus, his sophisticated, automated unconscious mechanisms seamlessly step in to navigate his immediate physical survival and lethal interactions.

This contemporary framework provides a compelling alternative explanation and parallel interpretation for the Misfit's extensive list of past occupations and transient identities, which he explicitly enumerates on page 44. Rather than viewing his shifting history as a soldier, gospel singer, and farmer as a purely psychoanalytic expression of Freudian repetition compulsion, his background can be understood as the adaptive byproduct of an evolved, open-ended system designed for survival. Because environmental demands are fundamentally unpredictable over evolutionary timescales, human biology relies on phenotypic plasticity, which enables individuals to automatically and unconsciously "download" external cultural habits, local norms, and

situational values to reduce uncertainty and stabilize baseline behavior in their immediate environment. Because the Misfit's foundational childhood alignment with his father and primal authorities failed to provide a reliable structural anchor, his open-ended cognitive architecture continuously and automatically attempts to recalibrate itself across local environmental variations. Each successive occupational identity represents a non-conscious effort to adopt a functional set of social habits to reduce the sheer unpredictability of his world, though each baseline calibration is ultimately destabilized by the severe psychological friction occurring deeper within his mind.

The Misfit's persistent psychological torment is perfectly captured in his central existential lament on page 44: "I can't make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment" (O'Connor, 1980, p. 44). Where classical theory attributes this distress to the severe inner tension generated by a harsh superego, modern cognitive psychology expands upon these Freudian ideas by clarifying this structural imbalance through the precise cognitive and neural mechanics of internal conflict resolution. While the unconscious mind is fully capable of processing a multitude of contradictory motivational impulses and evaluation tracks in parallel, physical behavior must ultimately execute within a serial world where an organism can only perform one action at any given moment. When these parallel unconscious impulses inevitably clash, they generate conflicting internal intentions that carry an inescapable, severe aversive subjective cost that cannot be turned off voluntarily. Crucially, while problematic behavioral inclinations can be successfully suppressed on an external level, they cannot be mentally suppressed; instead, these unexpressed unconscious agents continue to heavily influence and flood the nature of conscious awareness. The Misfit's constant sensation of paying an inexplicable cosmic price for an unremembered or mismatched crime is the literal manifestation of this structural psychic friction, the continuous, painful feedback of unexpressed parallel impulses that continue to be experienced

consciously even when they are behaviorally inhibited.

This intense internal friction reaches a violent, definitive flashpoint during the story's climax on page 46 when the grandmother reaches out to touch his shoulder. Delineating the two frameworks at this critical juncture demonstrates how modern psychology explicitly builds upon the Freudian breakthrough of repressed trauma. While a classical reading interprets this touch as a direct strike to his repressed core, modern psychological terms explain that her physical proximity and sudden maternal intimacy function as an extreme instance of contextual priming. This priming automatically activates his internal representations of family, vulnerability, and primal trauma, alongside the goals, knowledge, and affect stored within those networks. Because there is an evolutionary, automatic connection between immediate perception and behavioral output, this sudden contextual priming completely bypasses his rational, scholarly defense mechanisms. His immediate physical response, springing back violently and shooting her three times, perfectly substantiates the empirical reality that action precedes reflection. The behavioral impulse to eliminate the sudden threat of profound emotional vulnerability is generated unconsciously within the brain before conscious mediation has the opportunity to intervene or regulate the act. His subsequent cool, detached evaluation of her character, "She would of been a good woman... if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life" (O'Connor, 1980, p. 46), illustrates the conscious mind acting precisely as a gatekeeper and sense maker after the fact, operating retroactively to rationalize, interpret, and claim individual ownership over a raw, automated behavioral output.

3.3 The Misfit's twisted Redemption

The concept of redemption typically implies a positive transformation, a moral realignment, or a restorative return to a state of grace. In classical Christian theology, redemption operates along two primary axes: objective redemption, which represents the

universal salvific work accomplished by Christ through suffering, and subjective redemption, which involves an individual's experiential realization and free acceptance of this grace through faith. In the case of Flannery O'Connor's character, The Misfit, this process is profoundly distorted. His redemption is uniquely "twisted" because it does not unfold through a conventional religious epiphany or pious surrender; instead, it occurs through an act of extreme violence that paradoxically forces the total collapse of his psychological and spiritual defenses.

This climactic convergence happens when the interaction between the grandmother and The Misfit reaches its ultimate crisis. Throughout the narrative, The Misfit relies on rigid intellectualization and a detached, clinical persona to insulate himself from genuine human or spiritual contact. He discusses his criminal past as if he were an objective social historian, utilizing his glasses as both a literal and symbolic barrier to keep the world at bay. This psychological armor shields him from confronting what can be understood as the true mystery of redemption, a mystery that requires confronting existential suffering and divine authority rather than intellectualizing them.

The grandmother serves as the unexpected catalyst for this twisted subjective redemption when her own superficial ego defenses fail. Throughout most of the story, she is preoccupied with social status, propriety, and a legalistic moral superiority. However, facing imminent death, she experiences a sudden, transcendent moment of clarity. She ceases to view The Misfit as an abstract monster, instead recognizing a shared, broken humanity. She articulates this profound connection, declaring, "*Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!*" (O'Connor, 1980, p. 45). In reaching out to touch his shoulder, she extends an instinctive gesture of unconditional love. In theological frameworks, unconditional love is a primary modality through which the divine reveals itself to mortal humanity.

This sudden manifestation of grace delivers a severe psychological and spiritual shock to The Misfit. It is an intrusion of unconditional recognition that threatens the

very foundation of his nihilistic autonomy. In psychoanalytic terms, this touch bypasses his carefully constructed ego defenses and strikes directly at his repressed core. His immediate reaction is an expression of absolute terror; the text notes that "*The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest*" (O'Connor, 1980, p. 45). For The Misfit, the offer of divine communion and adoption is as threatening as a venomous bite. He murders her to preserve his identity as an isolated outcast, rejecting a spirit of reconciliation in favor of a self-imposed "spirit of slavery to fall back into fear". He cannot tolerate being categorized as anyone's child, because entering the human family would mean subjecting himself to the moral and divine order he has spent his life resisting. By shooting her, he attempts to violently eliminate the possibility of his own redemption.

The central irony of the narrative, however, is that this act of violence accomplishes the exact spiritual awakening he sought to avoid. Following the murder, a distinct shift occurs in his physical and emotional posture, signaling an agonizing paradigm shift. He removes his glasses and begins cleaning them, discarding his protective armor for the first time. O'Connor (1980) observes that, "*Without his glasses, The Misfit's eyes were red-rimmed and pale and defenseless-looking*" (p. 46). This explicit defenselessness marks the onset of his twisted redemption. Stripped of his intellectual shielding, his ego is left bare. He is no longer the omnipotent arbiter of life and death, nor is he the detached philosopher; he is exposed, vulnerable, and plunged into a profound crisis of faith and identity. This raw vulnerability forces an unprecedented level of self-awareness, as his exposed eyes reflect the deep-seated spiritual torment previously concealed behind his criminal rationale.

A secondary indicator of this twisted redemption is his absolute renunciation of the pleasure principle. In Freudian theory, the pleasure principle dictates that the id demands immediate gratification through impulsive self-assertion. Earlier in the encounter, The Misfit insisted that "meanness" was the only authentic

pleasure left in existence. Yet, the encounter with the grandmother shatters this delusion. When his companion treats the execution as a routine, lighthearted thrill, The Misfit sharply rebukes him, stating, "*Shut up, Bobby Lee... It's no real pleasure in life*" (O'Connor, 1980, p. 46). This realization marks a crucial turning point. He recognizes that his cycles of violence are spiritually vacant and incapable of providing the existential liberation he sought. He achieves a state of rigorous honesty, stripped of the deceptive illusions that often characterize a fractured lifestyle.

His final evaluation of the grandmother provides the most significant evidence of his internal transformation. He remarks, "*She would of been a good woman... if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life*" (O'Connor, 1980, p. 46). While overtly cynical, this statement displays a sophisticated understanding of the ongoing conflict between the ego and the superego, as well as the paradox of redemptive suffering. He recognizes that her authentic goodness was only realized when her ego was completely dismantled under the weight of mortality. By drawing this conclusion, he collapses the moral distance between them, acknowledging their shared status as deeply flawed, fallen human beings. He no longer views her from a position of detached superiority; instead, he acknowledges the agonizing, constant struggle inherent to the human condition.

Ultimately, this redemption remains twisted because it does not culminate in a conventional moral reformation or a tidy, hopeful resolution. The Misfit remains a condemned murderer who will likely persist in his transgressive lifestyle. However, he has been permanently redeemed from the delusion that his cosmic defiance makes him superior or immune to grace. He has been forced to confront his own profound emptiness. Psychoanalytically, the encounter functions as a violent catharsis, releasing the pressure of his repressed guilt and theological anxiety, leaving him in a state of stark, undefended clarity. He transitions from a state of defensive neurosis to one of tragic, authentic awareness.

This transformation is mirrored in his closing silence. He ceases his metaphysical debates regarding Jesus, his lineage, or the systemic injustices of the penitentiary. He is left simply cleaning his spectacles, gazing out with red-rimmed eyes. Having encountered the ultimate reality of sacrificial love and the absolute certainty of death, he is rendered quiet. This silence indicates a form of psychic and spiritual integration. He can no longer pretend that the universe is sufficiently off-balance to validate his monstrous persona; he is acutely aware of the spiritual cost of his choices. The Misfit's twisted redemption demonstrates that even within a highly damaged psyche, an encounter with the terrifying, unmerited reality of grace can shatter the ego, exposing the soul to the painful dawning of truth.

CONCLUSION

This analysis demonstrates that The Misfit's cruelty is the result of years of repression and unresolved guilt rather than a total lack of conscience. There is compatibility between his initial anxiety and the final collapse of his ego defenses. By the end of the story, his silence and the rejection of "pleasure" in violence suggest a form of psychic integration.

The broader implications of these findings suggest that literary violence can be analyzed not merely as arbitrary plot device or clinical delinquency, but as a highly structured defense mechanism designed to cope with deep metaphysical and faith-based confusion. By successfully bridging classical drive theory with modern cognitive models, this study illustrates that a character's destructive actions can be driven by automated unconscious survival mechanisms when the conscious ego becomes completely paralyzed by historical doubts and moral calculations.

However, certain limitations must be recognized. Because this research relies on a qualitative descriptive design focused tightly on a single short story as a narrative case study, the resulting insights remain deeply localized to the specific psychic blueprint of The Misfit. Consequently, these conclusions offer an in-depth reading of this text's unique psychological-theological intersection rather

than a universally generalizable model for all literary antagonists.

To meaningfully address these limitations, future research should directly extend this dual analytical framework to other figures within Southern Gothic literature who navigate psychological trauma and the "grotesque". Specifically, subsequent studies should investigate whether other complex O'Connor characters utilize automated cognitive adaptations or violent regression to shield their egos when faced with sudden contextual priming or the disruptive intrusion of unmerited grace. Applying this specific lens widely would determine if the structural paradigm of a "twisted redemption" operates as a definitive narrative motif across the broader genre.

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