



# Unearthing Women's Charisms and Patriarchal Prejudices in Flannery O'Connor's 'The Comforts of Home'

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## Abstract

This paper examines a charismatic nameless female protagonist (known as Thomas's mother) in a patriarchal domestic setting. In Flannery O'Connor's 'The Comforts of Home', O'Connor seeks to expose the trail of patriarchal prejudices sparked off by Thomas towards Sarah Ham, the fallen feminine figure who took refuge under the caring motherly wings of his mother. Thomas's mother was able to accentuate her caring motherly nature which complemented her noble virtues of generosity, Christ like compassion and courageous streak of independence where she found immense meaning and profound sense of happiness as a woman. In breaking away from the suffocating structures of patriarchy, Thomas's mother was not strictly tied or conformed to patriarchal stereotypical traits bestowed on women as it was crucial for her to discover her own identity while exercising and utilizing their skills, talents and potential to the fullest. Besides that, this paper also dwells on the heart wrenching struggles faced by Sarah Ham who was drown in an oppressive patriarchal world dictated by Thomas, a highly inflamed misogynist male.

**Keywords:** patriarchy, charismas, misogyny, patriarchal prejudices

## 1. Introduction

Flannery O'Connor has carved her niche as an established author for the many decades and has emerged victoriously as one of America's finest and greatest Southern writers. However, the missing element in the vast research that has been previously done on her work is the lack of feminist studies and scholarship. On the bountiful and vast research on her work, most of the early O'Connor criticism and much of the later work focuses on the Christian elements of her writing such as original sin, the mystery of grace and redemption and the fear of God. Analysis done by such scholars such as Orvell (1991), Martin (1968), Feeley (1982), Asals (1982), May (1976), and Baungaertner (1988) differ slightly in approach but the focal point is theological in nature. It is the main purpose of this paper to fill in the gap of the existing studies on O'Connor's stories by examining the charismas of O'Connor's short story's nameless female protagonist (only known as Thomas's mother) in a patriarchal domestic setting.

## 2. Patriarchy and Patriarchal Society

Critics and scholars often define patriarchy in a monocular way which highlight and emphasize male dominance, superiority and privileges in various social structures of a society. According to Charles Bressler, patriarchy is a term used by feminist critics and others to describe a society or culture dominated by males which reflects a compact and precise definition. Patriarchy literally means 'father rule'. In practice, it is the legitimization of sexism (quoted in Hooks, 2000). Besides that, McHugh (2007:93) defines patriarchy as a "systemization of the oppression of women by social structures such as marriage, heterosexuality, laws, policies and even language". She adds that feminists have written about, analysis and fought against patriarchy on numerous levels. For example, feminist political theorist Pateman (1988:1) argues in *The Sexual Contract* that the social contract, which is the foundation for western democracy, is really a sexual contract, in other words 'political right as patriarchal right or sex right, the power that men exercise over women'. This bias statement reflects imbalances in society which gives men a strong edge or the upper hand in exalting their superiority and masculinity over women in a patriarchal society through various spectrums of life. Furthermore, masculinity is prized and valued as men take centre stage to exercise their will, power and potential in a world that give them vast opportunities to dominate and rule social structures which marginalized and sidelines women. In relation to this fact, Kate Millet observes and believes that "our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance-in short, every avenue of power within society within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands. As the essence of politics is power, such realization cannot fail to carry impact. What lingers of supernatural authority, the Deity, "His" ministry, together with the ethics and values, the philosophy and art of our culture-its very civilization-as T.S Eliot once observed, is of male manufacture (Pateman, 1988:25). Therefore, Humm (1995:172) believed that Millet made a devastating and very influential analysis of the modes in which patriarchy operates-biology, sexual violence, class and education, and transformed contemporary thinking about women's roles.

Based on the critic's insights and observations which reflect the harsh realities of a male dominated world, "patriarchy values the masculine, which identifies with the language of reason, government and administration-the language of reason, government and administration – the language of realism" (Allen,1998:119). Thus in a society that favours men to rule and reign as leaders, administrators and dominators, Kaufman and Kimmel (2011:23) pinpoints that "in a world dominated by men, the world of men is, by definition, a world of power. That power is a structured part of the economics and systems of political and social organization; it forms part of the core of religion, family, forms of play, and intellectual life. He adds that "men enjoy social power and many forms of privileges by virtue of being male. But the way we have set up that world of power causes immense pain, isolation, and alienation not only for women but also for men (Kaufman & Kimmel, 2011:23). In parallel to this statement which highlight the disadvantages encountered by females in a patriarchal world, we believe that their marginalization and isolation in a male dominated setting speaks volumes of their social deprivation, lack of opportunity of utilizing and self-actualizing their potential, talents and skills due to the fullest due to the constant oppression by the brutish, cruel and aggressive male counterparts.

On a narrow point of view, patriarchy tends to bestow stereotypical labels on women which further amplify the injustices, discrimination and prejudices towards women in a patriarchal world. For instance, Robbins (2000:169) believes that patriarchy shores up its own position of power by developing a whole series of characteristics which it labels 'feminine'- characteristics such as sweetness, subservience, irrationality – and it then elides any distinction between these culturally derived characteristics and the female body. Patriarchy argues that if you are born a woman, if you have a female body, you will necessarily and naturally exhibit these characteristics. Not to exhibit them (in case anyone would dare), is to risk being labeled monstrous, unnatural, antisocial, deviant, mad. Her (Helene Cixous) attack on patriarchy, then is that it is patriarchy itself that is essentialist and biologist; it bestows feminine virtues on all the female bodies that it is prepared to tolerate.

This bitter truth imposed by patriarchy will further restrict women to conform to stereotypical roles which will hinder their growth and development to reach their fullest potential and ability. On a similar vein, Tyson (1999:87) has recognized the patriarchal concept of femininity- which is linked to frailty, modesty, and timidity. She also strongly believes that this feminine features "disempowers women in the real world; it is not feminine to succeed in business, to be extremely intelligent, to earn big bucks, to have strong opinions, to have a healthy appetite (for anything), or to assert one's rights". Furthermore, Moi (1998) also agrees and supports the notions of various scholars on their take on patriarchy which has developed a whole series of 'feminine' characteristics (sweetness, modesty, subservience, humility, etc). According to Moi, patriarchy, not feminism, has always believed in a true female/feminine nature. Patriarchy desires to bestow feminine virtues on all female bodies. However, she gives a darken and shallow view under patriarchy that "femininity is equated with passivity and death." and "either woman is passive or she does not exist" (1998:125) which highlights women's invisibility, silence and marginality in a male dominated world.

Thus, patriarchy views women in a rather myopic, condescending and negative point of view which magnifies the imbalances and double standards of a patriarchal society which weakens and paralyses the true potential, strength and charisms of a woman. Steven Lynn (2001) strengthens this view by stating that patriarch "assumes that women are the weaker sex (emotional, unstable, passive, irrational), needing protection, unable to compete with men." However, he is able to refute this gender bias statement and breathe a sense of rationality by stating that "all women are not weaker than all men in any way. Many women are taller, stronger, smarter, and more aggressive than many men." He further states that "these qualities are in fact the yardsticks of a man-oriented, or patriarchal culture but even by those values, which may be questioned, generalizations about "men" and "women" are troublesome" (194). Moreover, De Beauvoir admits that it may be easier to comply with such patriarchal definitions of woman, which may even make us happy, but she stresses that our liberty is more important than our happiness (p.29) (qtd. in Watkins, 2001:15). Hence women should not be strictly tied or conformed to these stereotypical traits imposed by patriarchy as it is important for women to discover their own identity while exercising and utilizing their talents and potential to the fullest.

Besides that, imposing and generating stereotypical feminine traits on women is a form of violation, subjugation and oppression to women. This ugly truth of the patriarchal world is supported by Moi(1998) who believes that "patriarchy oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women in order to precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are natural. This woman who refuses to conform can be labeled both unfeminine and unnatural. It is in the patriarchal interest that these two terms (femininity and femaleness) stay thoroughly confused. However, Moi points out that the breakthrough or ray of hope lies when "feminists, on the contrary have to disentangle this confusion, and must therefore always insist that through women undoubtedly are female, this in no way guarantees that they will be feminine" (1998:65). On a same wavelength, Michael Kaufman elucidates that a "women's rebellion against patriarchy holds the promise of bringing patriarchy to an end. Although patriarchy in its many different social and economic forms still has considerable staying power, an increasing number of its social, political, economic, and emotional structures are proving unworkable."

On a wide worldview, most feminists believe that our culture is a patriarchal culture: that is, one organized in favor of the interests of men. Feminist literary critics try to explain how power imbalances due to gender in a given culture are reflected in or challenged by literary texts. Despite their diversity, feminist critics generally agree that their goals are to expose patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices, to promote discovery and reevaluation of literature by women, and to examine social, cultural, and psychosexual contexts of literature and literary criticism. Feminist critics therefore study sexual, social, and political issues once thought to be a non-literary. Hence, in a nutshell, feminists are on a noble mission to uphold and fight for the rights of women who have long been deemed invisible, subjugated, oppressed and

violated under the rule of patriarchy. If patriarchy continues to reign and dominate the various spheres of society, it would be a tremendous waste of talent, potential and skills which will further hamper and stunt the healthy growth and development of the female species. Women should come out from the dark shadows of patriarchy and begin to shine when they are able to accentuate their true essence of femininity according to their own natural talents, potential and capabilities in a world of vast opportunities.

### 3. Thomas's mother, a Christ like feminine figure

In 'The Comforts of Home', O'Connor depicts Thomas's mother as a Christ like figure who is an epitome of genuine love and compassion in regards to her relationship with Sarah Ham, the bewildered feminine figure who had a murky past. Despite receiving a barrage of criticism from her defiant infuriated son Thomas, she went against the patriarchal tide of submissiveness and obedience to pursue her noble acts of charity and generosity towards Sarah Ham, a wayward unstable feminine figure. By magnifying her glowing maternal attributes, Thomas's mother positions herself as an empathetic listener who would listen attentively to Sarah Ham's speech without any trace of prejudice, discrimination and intolerance. This is because "every remark of the girl's his mother met as if it deserved serious attention." (O'Connor, 1971:390). She was the total opposite of her son, Thomas who always had "a continuous gaze of disapproval and disgust" (O'Connor, 1971:390) towards Sarah Ham. As an attentive listener, Thomas's mother would give undivided attention, digest and comprehend Sarah's speech (O'Connor, 1971:390) which describes her as a good listener who had genuine care, concern and love for Sarah Ham. These good traits in her were evident when she prompted Thomas to give a lift and take Sarah home at night. She was deeply concerned and worried for the girl's safety and did not want her to travel alone "in taxis by herself at night" (O'Connor, 1971:390). Besides that, Thomas's mother also showed her motherly concern over the choice of movies Sarah was watching. She cautioned and reminded Sarah "to be careful about the kind of movies" (O'Connor, 1971:389) she watches. Moreover, she believed that "crime stories" (O'Connor, 1971:389) were not a good watch for Sarah Ham since it was imbued with a large dose of violence, aggression and bloodshed. On the other hand, these movies could cast a negative influence when it further poisons and pollutes her disorientated unstable mind.

### 4. Patriarchal prejudices sparked off by Thomas

In displaying her motherly love for a fallen feminine figure, Thomas's mother received heavy scrutiny and strong opposition from her rebellious and defiant son, Thomas. With a thick air of patriarchal arrogance and intense feeling of animosity, he constantly wanted to get rid of her and strongly voiced his grievances and disgust to his mother. According to Charles and Leslie Rubin (2002) in *Flannery O'Connor's Religious Vision of Regime Change*, Thomas loves his mother, though she scares him, and he explicitly cares for virtue, defined not by a political movement but rather, in an apparently old-fashioned way, by self-control, moderation, and rationality. Yet his rationality allows him to speak of devils only metaphorically, whereas O'Connor portrays very real devils confronting him and entering his soul, causing his downfall. Most of the educated people we meet in these stories would never use the word "devil," even with metaphorical seriousness.

Thomas, however, has some instinctual insight that shows him the world in such old fashioned terms, which he then tries to justify with contemporary arguments. He is repulsed by Star, she is a "slut" but he accepts the psychological analysis that because she cannot help it, neither can his mother help her (1971:215). Furthermore, Thomas believed that his mother ought to serve him alone for his own comfort and pleasure which highlights his male egocentric nature and black streak of self-centeredness. This is due to the fact that "his own life was made bearable by the fruits of his mother's saner virtues-by the well-regulated house she kept and the excellent meals she served." Thus the existence and presence of Sarah Ham in his life fuels his pangs of anger and provokes a sense of disgust as his mother has shifted her attention and love on the "unwelcomed guest" in his house. As a form of escapism and perpetual estrangement from Sarah Ham, he believed that the "the place to take her is the jail" (O'Connor, 1971:394). However, Thomas's mother who was filled with genuine compassion and sympathy for Sarah Ham declined this obnoxious and crude suggestion. With her strong cords of motherly love and instincts, she believed that what Sarah needed most was a loving, conducive and comfortable environment of a home.

Therefore, it was indeed a difficult and uphill battle between mother and son in terms of deciding Sarah's mode of accommodation. Thomas openly and was never hesitant to display and showcase his reluctance and disapproval of Sarah living under one roof with him when he proclaimed she does need his home as a place of shelter and rehabilitation. However, Thomas's mother who had a deep sense of compassion for Sarah could not agree with Thomas. Hence she pleaded with him that Sarah just will stay "Only for tonight, Thomas," (O'Connor, 1971:395). Caruso (2011) states that Thomas's attempts to control his mother are driven by the patriarchal belief that she could conform to the image of the angel in the house. Women who violate these conventional, male-imposed identifier are considered as non-female, at best a witch or a bitch, at worst insane and dangerous (Caruso, 2011:138-139). She adds that "the ultimate violation of the female is rape, violation for the male takes a different form. Here, Thomas has suffered no bodily harm; his "self" is intact. He has suffered only the loss of his mother's attention and servitude, yet he is outraged" (O'Connor, 1971:138).

### 5. Going against the patriarchal conventions

Although Thomas's mother goes against the patriarchal conventions which is a contradiction to the will of her son's, she does not fit into any of these negative terms or connotations associated with women who go against the patriarchal conventions. This is due to the fact that Thomas's mother acts of charity are based on the foundations of goodwill

enhancing the virtues of nobility and kindness which will serve as a mode of redemption and rehabilitation when Sarah Ham gets a comfortable and loving home to live in. On a positive note, De Beauvoir admits that it may be easier to comply with such patriarchal definitions of woman, which may even make us happy, but she stresses that our liberty is more important than our happiness (qtd. in Watkins, 2001:15). In parallel to this statement, Thomas's mother found immense happiness and great satisfaction in her liberty and independence in reaching out to Sarah Ham. On another angle, Thomas's mother is fondly portrayed as a woman with a heart of gold who took pride in reaching out to others by her sacrificing her time, money and effort. For instance, small yet kind deeds such as "taking a box of candy was her favourite nice thing to do" (O'Connor, 1971:386).

She exhibited a great dose of thoughtfulness in terms of gifting her acquaintances by showing her appreciation, gratitude and sympathy. Otherwise, the candy served as symbol of victory and triumph to the recipients "when any of her friend's children had babies or won a scholarship" (O'Connor, 1971:386) she would give them candy as a gift. As a thoughtful person, she brought candy to an "old person" (O'Connor, 1971:386) who broke his hip and stood by his bedside. Her small yet thoughtful kind gestures would have brought him immense comfort and consolation. As for Sarah Ham, her charitable deeds towards this girl knew no boundaries. Not only did she provide shelter, care and love for Sarah Ham but she also reached out to her during her most darkest and bleak period of life. For instance, when she brought candy for Sarah Ham, it amused Thomas, who did not have an inkling of charity or generosity like his mother. In fact, "he was less sorry for the girl's being in jail than for his mother having to see her there" (O'Connor, 1971:387) which reflects his male egocentric nature in contrast to his mother's spirit generosity.

Thomas's mother charitable deeds compliment her non-prejudice and discriminative treatment of Sarah Ham which speaks volumes of her genuine and sincere care. For instance, after relating the sad and turbulent plight of Sarah Ham to Thomas, "she returned to the jail with Kleenex and cold-cream and a few days later, she announced that she had consulted a lawyer" (O'Connor, 1971:387). In relation to her undying spirit of charity and generosity, Sue Brantley Whatley (2010:130) believes that Thomas's mother's behavior and most specially her evolution towards an empathetic, collective, and unprejudiced compassion lead her away from humanistic and judicial principles. She compares this virtuous lady "to the dying Christ figure who refuses special recognition of his own mother, who stands her over to another willing adopted son, and who offers perhaps his greatest act of compassion to the thief hanging on the cross beside him". Thus, Thomas's mother ought to be hailed as a Christ-like figure who sacrificed her life for the redemption and rehabilitation of Sarah Ham, a fallen and disgraced feminine figure resembling the thief on the cross whom Jesus pardoned and saved.

## **6. Thomas's unquenchable misogynist stance against Sarah Ham**

Misogynist literature, the primary vehicle of masculine hostility, is both an hortatory and comic genre. Of all artistic forms in patriarchy it is the most frankly propagandistic (Millet, 1971: 45). Female psychoanalysts argue that misogyny, or hatred of women, is rooted in the infant's primitive rage towards the mother because society allocates childrearing to women. Only the full participation of men in infant care, they argue, can eradicate the deep roots of misogyny (Humm, 1995:173). Thus Thomas's hatred for Sarah Ham is in parallel with his misogynist nature as he claims "the girl had caused a disturbance in the depths of his being" (O'Connor, 1971:393). In relation to this fact, ever since Sarah Ham stepped into Thomas's life; he always displayed intense hatred, resentment and sexist nature towards her by his hostile and cold body gestures, mannerisms and facial expressions.

Thomas harboured intense feelings of hate which speaks volumes of his patriarchal prejudices towards her as he believed that Sarah had violated his sense of privacy and caused him much resentment, anxiousness and disturbance in his home, his anger was manifested when "his large bland face contracted in anticipated pain." (O'Connor, 1971:388). In parallel to this statement, he could not come with the terms that his home which was used by him for multi-purpose reasons was violated by the girl. Hence, "his flushed face had a constant look of stunning outrage" (O'Connor, 1971:395). On another occasion, he sprang into an aggressive and violent mode of bodily reactions when Sarah Ham tried to enter his room, he hurriedly sprang into action by blocking her with a chair. His antagonistic actions were carried out like a Herculean task "like an animal trainer driving out a dangerous cat" (O'Connor, 1971:384). Stan Gray states that "authoritarianism, intimidation, aggression-these are a basic part of sexism. You can't separate aggression from sexism. Aggressive ways of relating to people are part of sexism is" (qtd. in Minas, 2000:157). In relation to this fact, Thomas was overreacting towards Sarah's presence by his exerting authoritative stance complemented with his aggressive actions which inflicted a great dose of fear, intimidation and panic in Sarah. As a matter of fact, he "had driven her silently down the hall" (O'Connor, 1971:384) and the girl who was gasping for breath "turned and fled into the guest room" (O'Connor, 1971:384).

On other occasions, it was his cold and agonizing silence towards Sarah Ham which proved and solidified his hostile, sexist and antagonistic nature towards her. For instance, when she complemented him by repeatedly saying "Fabulous!" (O'Connor, 1971:389) on his appointment as the president of the local Historical Society, he gave a cold numbing response to her. In parallel to this, he "managed to look as if he were alone in the room." (O'Connor, 1971:389). His coldness and hostility towards Sarah Ham was a way of shunning her unwanted attention and annoying existence. In relation to this situation, he also kept a tight lip when she questioned him in his car, "where's the fire?" (O'Connor, 1971:391) when he drove fast and "shot forward as if he were being pursued" (O'Connor, 1971:391). Based on this scenario, Thomas perpetually gave the cold shoulder to Sarah Ham which exemplifies his misogynist and sexist stance towards her. By not giving voice and value to women's opinions, responses, and writings, men have suppressed the female, defined what it means to be feminine, and thereby devalued, devalued, and trivialized what it means to be a

women. In effect, men have made women the “nonsignificantOther” (Bressler, 1994:103). As a result, it heightens Sarah Ham’s feelings of self-pity and her self-esteem takes a drastic plunge. This is evident when she sorrowfully proclaims “Nobody likes me” (O’Connor, 1971:391) in a sullen tone.

In her essay *‘In and Out of Harm’s Way: Arrogance and Love’ in The Politics of Reality* (1983:67) Frye provides an account of patriarchy in which she distinguishes between the arrogant eye and the loving eye. The arrogant eye, intrinsic to patriarchy, allows men to ‘organize everything with reference to themselves and their own interests’. It also allows men to coerce women into a narrow range of options, yet satisfies patriarchy’s ideology of freedom and choice. Thus in phallographic reality men can see choice when none really exists. In contrast, the loving eye does not subsume the other under her reality. It recognizes the separateness and independence of the one loved. The loving eye is attentive, listening and questioning (Fry, 1983:75). Frye questions what it would mean not to be moulded by the arrogant eye, but to be seen through the loving eye. She argues that though the loving eye woman can begin to interpret her own experience and world outside of the vision of patriarchy (McHugh, 2007: 47).

In relation to this fact, Sarah Ham was never viewed through the loving eyes of Thomas which could have raised her self-esteem by leaps and bounds. Besides that, his loving gaze could have healed, restored and nurtured her into a wholesome being. Sadly, Thomas’s patriarchal lens which in parallel with his arrogant eyes was tainted with skepticism, prejudice and arrogance towards Sarah Ham. Described as a “parasite” (O’Connor, 1971: 401) in the text, Thomas further hurls a flurry of derogatory words at Sarah Ham which fits his prejudice and bias description of her. The negative connotative words such as “Nymphomaniac” (O’Connor, 1971:385), “little slut” (O’Connor, 1971:392), “moral moron” (O’Connor, 1971:385) “dirty criminal slut” (O’Connor, 1971:403) also reflects his intense hatred and disgust over her appearance and personality. Due to this fact, Marilyn Frye concurs that “if a woman is heterosexually active, a woman is open to censure and punishment for being loose, unprincipled, or a whore. The “punishment” comes in the form of criticism, snide and embarrassing remarks, being treated as an easy lay by men” (11) which describes Thomas’s verbal diarrhea of heartless and disparaging remarks on Sarah Ham’s past lifestyle.

Through his arrogant eyes, his choices of words are dubbed degrading and unsavoury which serves as a punishment towards Sarah Ham who is seen as a bad girl. Through his shady patriarchal lens, Sarah Ham is synonymous as a promiscuous feminine figure with an unchaste body and loose morals. Psychiatrists have explained that the key problem in promiscuity is usually “low self-esteem,” which often seems to stem from an excessive mother-child attachment; the type of sex-seeking is relatively irrelevant. (Friedan, 1997: 387). Thus Thomas’s view of Sarah as a promiscuous being could be due to her low self-esteem and attention seeking antics which further magnified her image as a “bad girl”. According to a patriarchal ideology in full force through the 1950s, versions of which are still with us today, “bad girls” violate patriarchal sexual norms in some way: they’re sexually forward in appearance or behavior, or they have multiple sexual partners. “Bad girls” are used and then discarded because they don’t deserve better, and they probably don’t even expect better (Tyson, 1998: 89).

In slipping through the history pages of Sarah Ham’s early life, she was indeed unfortunate to grow up in a turbulent household where it was reported that “an almost grown boy” had taken advantage of her in such dreadful ways” (O’Connor, 1971:387). Consequently, she could not bear the sexual harassment and abuse that she was “forced to run away” (O’Connor, 1971:387) and strived to find refuge in the embrace and home of her biological mother. Sadly, Sarah did not experience love, attention and a sense of belonging as her real mother sent her “to various boarding schools to get rid of her” (O’Connor, 1971:387). As a result, she was always open and exposed to sexual violations and harassment “at the presence of perverts and sadists so monstrous that their acts defied description” (O’Connor, 1971:387). Due to this fact, Sarah did not experience a sense of belonging and love at the homes she stayed. Moreover, she was always in danger of encountering sexual predators such as “perverts”(O’Connor, 1971:387) and “sadists” (O’Connor, 1971:387) who took advantage of her vulnerable and lowly state. Thus, this ugly, sad and despicable early childhood experience and upbringing moulded her into traits of insecurity, instability and promiscuity. In relation to this fact, the harsh and brutal patriarchal circumstances that besotted Sarah Ham’s life had a detrimental effect of poisoning her female’s own sense of physical self until it often truly becomes the burden it is said to be.

Furthermore, the harsh and turbulent life experiences she goes throughout her life moulds and shapes her psychopathic personality. According to Melvin J. Friedman in *Flannery O’Connor: Another Legend in Southern Fiction*, the “psychopathic personality” of the girl, who is the unwilling and inactive protagonist of the story, is not quite advanced enough for the asylum; her nymphomaniac tendencies, on the other hand, do not quite suit her for the ways of southern gentility (1962:239). In parallel to this statement, Sarah Ham suffered a great sense of inferiority complex, low self-esteem and plunging levels of confidence due to her complex personality traits. Besides that, she struggled to find a sense of belonging and acceptance in a society where she often experienced heart wrenching rejection and bone chilling hostility.

Due to Thomas’s flaming patriarchal prejudices reflected by his icy cold hostility, heartless persecution, stinging and painful remarks, Sarah sensed, acknowledged and knew deep down in her heart that “Tomsee doesn’t like me,” (O’Connor, 1971:396). She tried desperately to gain his approval and constantly fished for his love and affection by casting “her pouring gaze” (O’Connor, 1971:396) at him. Although Sarah’s efforts were done with much anticipation and eagerness but it was all in vain and proved a fruitless venture. Thomas did not give heed to her desperate attempts to gain his favour and attention. Instead, he gave her “the look of a Man trapped by insufferable odors” (O’Connor, 1971:396). Consequently, the prolonged sense of hostility and piercing tormenting remarks intensified a

great sense of self-pity and self-loathing within her as the coldness and hostility made her come to her senses that Thomas “doesn’t want me here. Nobody wants me anywhere” (O’Connor,1971:396).

## 7. Conclusion

Sarah Ham has lived through a rather rough, complex and heart wrenching life in a Southern patriarchal world. As a female figure struggling to find meaning and unconditional love in cold and heartless world, she goes through a rollercoaster experience under the umbrella of a caring sympathetic motherly figure and demonic chauvinist male figure. In her windy and murky path of life, she has experienced a flurry of patriarchal prejudices in the form of sexual abuses, crude derogatory remarks and chilly hostility by a string of devilish domineering male figures who took advantage of her vulnerable nature and rootlessness. To add fuel to the fire of sexism, Thomas asserts his misogynist stance on Sarah by heaping a barrage of heart piercing insults on her which magnifies his flaming arrogant nature, smug egocentric self and heightened levels of self centredness which proves detrimental to Sarah Ham’s well-being as her self-esteem and self-worth takes a drastic plunge into the abyss of patriarchal prejudices. Besides that, Thomas’s mother ought to be commended for going against the suffocating patriarchal stereotypes by exuding her true self-worth and noble virtues of generosity, compassion, Christ like motherly nature who bore no prejudices and discrimination against Sarah Ham, the fallen female figure. Hence in ‘The Comforts of Home’, patriarchy bestows both positive and negative influences on the lives of the female characters. Through the lens of patriarchy, Sarah Ham is dubbed as a distressed victim of patriarchal verbal diarrhea who faced a string of endless taunts and insults from Thomas. On the other hand, Thomas’s mother ought to be hailed as a female triumphant survivor who went against the crippling stereotypes of patriarchy and was able to shine while exuding her golden virtues in an often harsh and brutal American patriarchal society.

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