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The Mystery of Knowledge

It has been human nature, for as long as we can record, to seek, out of curiosity, knowledge of what is unknown. Through exploring the mysterious of the universe, mankind has discovered many wonders of the natural world such as fire, space and minerals and have learned how to build magnificent creation like machines, building, cities, bridges and tunnels. For centuries mankind has found means of teaching and expressing its known and unknown knowledge through writings of literature. Our need to know has fueled physical creations as well as psychological works of art. The relationship between the known and the unknown, the need to know, is clearly present in today’s literature as found in works such as Caryl Churchill’s *A Number* and O’Connor’s *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. The relationship between Knowledge and the unknown are crucial components to human development as it propels us to discover and wonder despite the dangers that knowledge brings.

In human nature, those who know are always trying to discover the unknown while those who do not know are always trying to discover the known. This paradoxical relationship creates a circle of knowledge where one being knows something that the other wants to know and vice versa. We can see this relationship in the exchanges between B1 and Salter and B2 and Salter in Churchill’s *A Number*. B2 is seen to wonder why there are so many clones of him and explains to Salter, “I got the impression there was this batch and we were all in it. I was in it” (Churchill 1612). B1 is doubtful of the information that Salter has previously given him and questions all of it. Churchill’s literature portrays B1 as another lost being trying to replace his learn his unknown facts. B1 wants to know why there are so many clones of him. He wants to know why Salter felt the need to abandon him at the age of four. B1 demands “I want to know if you could hear me or not because I never knew were you hearing me and not coming or could you not hear me and if I shouted loud enough you’d come” (Churchill 1618) when trying to figure out why Salter would ignore the screams of B1 as a child. This is part of B1 trying to find out why Salter has abandoned him.

In the play, it is made very clear that B1 and B2, although are genetic clones, are complete different people with completely different ideas and personalities. However, while both seek to learn more, they share the same ultimate goal to learn their self-worth. He asks Salter, “you couldn’t mistake” (Churchill 1619) because he wants to know if he really has any value to him. B1 wants to know the same thing as B2, although for the reason of abandonment, B1 wants to know as well if he has any value to him. B1 and B2 begin to question their lives and worth because Salter is a consistent liar when it comes to explaining facts. This piece of literature also represents the one of the dangers of knowledge, which is source. Salter has made up a story and for B2 so that he has grown up thinking he was a normal birthed boy who had a normal mother and father. This was B2’s knowledge up until this point. B2 thought he knew this life. This known life to B2 begins to grow mysterious as he begins to pick up on inconsistencies and questions Salter on the truth. This causes B2 to hate Salter and causes uncertainty, fear and unhappiness in B2’s life and once his mysterious life is truthfully revealed. Salter’s lies also affect B1 in the same way. Once shipped off at four years old, B1’s reality is he was sent off to child care and that was where he grew up. B1 went through the same rollercoaster that B2 did when his day care life unfolded to reveal the mysterious reality of Salter and his lies and the existence of B2. B1 goes mad with anger and sadness as his known place grows mysterious as the mysterious place is revealed.

We see trust and knowledge go hand in hand elsewhere as well both in real life and in works of literature. The news, for example is a source of knowledge that we must decide to trust and accept or distrust and reject. Teachers and parents are also sources of knowledge we must make the same decision on. In fact, almost every source of knowledge requires a decision to trust it or not to accept it as factual knowledge or to reject it. O’Connor mentions the act of trust many times through his *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. The grandmother repeated talks of times where people where nicer and simpler. Which is simply put that they could be trusted easier. During the road trip that the family takes to Florida, while stopped at the barbeque restaurant the owner Red Sam tells the grandmother “I remember the day you could go off and leave your screen door unlatched. Not so more” (O’Connor 122). The story emphasized on a modern distrust of the everyday folk as it appears more criminal activity must be occurring.

To trust someone is to put faith into someone that they will not wrong you and you can believe that you will be safe with their knowledge. The criminal introduced as the Misfit actually put his trust into the family when the family got into a car accident and the Misfit and his gang found them stranded on the side of the dirt road. This man intended to help fix the family’s car however the story takes a rather dark turn as it results in the deaths of the family at the hand of the Misfit. When found by the Misfit, the grandmother claims to know who he is and then tells the man that she knows he is the Misfit. Now for the Misfit, his known place in this situation is that he was safe with these people, he would not be sent to prison. Once the grandmother says that he looks familiar, his known place becomes mysterious and once she says that he is the Misfit, his mysterious place is reveled and he knows he has been compromised and can no longer trust these random people when he says, “But it would have been better for all of you, lady, if you hadn’t reckernized me” (O’Connor 127). The Misfit kills the family to avoid being revealed to the public and sent to prison.

O’Connor’s work also represents the dangers of knowledge. The grandmother repeatedly attempts to assert her intellectual dominance over the rest of the family. For example, in the beginning of the work, the grandmother attempts to sway the family into traveling to Tennessee over Florida. She also steps up to the plate to direct Bailey and the family on how to get to the house with the secret panel. During the interaction with the Misfit, she must announce his name because she knows who he is and she does not stop talking to the Misfit, claiming that she knows is a “good man” (O’Connor 127). The grandmother assuming that she has knowledge above the rest of the family ends up dooming the family in this story. Her superior knowledge backfires at first when she directed the family down the wrong road because “the house she had remembered so vividly was not in Georgia but in Tennessee” (O’Connor 125). Having so much, or at least believing so, more knowledge than others led to grandmother to lead the family into danger and ultimately their demise as she also revealed to the misfit that she knew who he was and his crimes.

The relationship between the known and the unknown is that there cannot be a known without an unknown. People will always seek to know what they do not know as seen in \ and people who know will always seek to spread their knowledge to others, whether it be true or it be false as discovered in Churchill’s *A Number.* The desire to know is the very driver for human ingenuity and advancement however knowledge itself can bring on dangers to those who claim to possess it as in O’Connor’s *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. Learning and knowing can change the way one perceives things, it can change things that one once believed to be mysterious and unknown to something extremely understood and concrete. At the same time, it can destroy any firm grasp on something that one may believe they know and shred it to pieces leaving nothing but a mystery left. Knowledge is the fire that fuels humanity but one should watch for too much of its power or you might find yourself getting left burned.