

READING FLANNERY O'CONNOR IN SPAIN:
FROM *ANDALUSIA* TO *ANDALUCÍA*

Mark Bosco, S. J. & Beatriz Valverde (Eds.)



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FLANNERY O'CONNOR: CATHOLIC AND QUIXOTIC

MARK BOSCO, S.J.
BEATRIZ VALVERDE

“Flannery O’Connor is unique. There is no one like her. You can’t lump her with Faulkner, you can’t lump her Walker Percy, you can’t lump her with anyone.” So proclaims the American novelist Alice McDermott regarding the place of Flannery O’Connor in the American canon of literature. When engaging O’Connor and her work today, one’s approach ought to be framed by four distinctive features of her life and work: faith, race, gender, and disability. O’Connor was a devout and intellectually formed Roman Catholic who claimed that her religious beliefs grounded her literary vision. She was a person of white privilege during the dismantling of the Jim Crow South trying to reckon with the culture of racism embedded in the class structure of her community. She was a serious fiction writer in a predominantly male world of writers and publishers. And she was a person challenged by the autoimmune disease lupus erythematosus, struggling to focus her energy on her art in the midst of great debilitation. O’Connor lived amidst the social changes that happened during and following World War II, especially as women entered the workforce and the civil rights movement came to dominate the conscience of the United States. Her work vividly portrays narratives of cultural conflict in a nation “haunted” by religious belief.

Critics and fans alike know that O'Connor's religious faith is central to her literary vision. Throughout her life, she immersed herself in the currents of the twentieth century Catholic revival—a hermeneutic that touched upon not only Catholic philosophy and theology, but literary aesthetics, as well. O'Connor maintained: "I write the way I do because (not though) I am a Catholic... However, I am a Catholic peculiarly possessed of the modern consciousness, that thing [Carl] Jung describes as unhistorical, solitary, and guilty" (1988: 90). A writer who came of age during the rise of totalitarian regimes, world wars, and the terror of the Jewish and atomic holocausts, her works question the purpose of humanity, suggesting a higher order account of human commitment. O'Connor's religious imagination, "peculiarly possessed of the modern consciousness," blends the truths of a Catholic medieval metaphysics with modern, existential categories. She believed her faith was her greatest asset in assessing the profound crises of modernity, and found a way to rearticulate the transcendental call to human flourishing in her works. As O'Connor notes in a letter to her friend, Betty Hester, "To possess this [sense of crisis] within the Church is to bear a burden, the necessary burden of the conscious Catholic. It's to feel the contemporary situation at the ultimate level." (1988: 90)

O'Connor's intellectual journey—one which encompassed her entire adult life—began with her graduate degree work at the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop and continued throughout her life. She was well read in the transnational Catholic discourses of 20th century European thought—especially the revival of St. Thomas Aquinas and the many contemporary interpreters of Aquinas, embodied in thinkers like Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson. She was taken by the Spanish mystics St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila. She was drawn to the theologians whose insights echo throughout the Church's Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), such as the Italian-German theologian Romano Guardini and the French Jesuit paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. She read, in translation, the works of the French Catholic literary revival—León Bloy, Georges Bernanos, and Francois Mauriac.

She read John Henry Newman and Baron von Hugel, but also Freud, Jung, and Buber, as well as the 20th century “Crisis Theologians” of the Protestant tradition, Karl Barth and Paul Tillich. As the critic Ted Spivey notes: “what is deepest in [O’Connor’s] writing is a tension that exists between her medieval self and her modernist self” (1995: 10). Though not a theologian, O’Connor sought in her art to embody the crisis of meaning in the twentieth century while simultaneously confronting, and perhaps embracing, the contours of her Catholic vision of life. The dramatic settings of her short stories are riveting precisely because they extend outward and upward toward transcendent mystery. Her success in capturing this mystery depended on her ability to shock her readers into acknowledging that the human and the divine literally, and sometimes violently, collide.

A second feature of O’Connor’s life and work that shapes our response to her is the ways in which she addressed—or failed to address—race. O’Connor was a Southern white woman of some privilege, living through the last years of the Jim Crow south and the rigid class system of constitutive thereof. She was slow to grasp the magnitude of the developing civil rights movement and its effect on the southern United States. Critics acknowledge that O’Connor was shaped by the racist and segregated world in which she lived, but note the complexity of how race operates in her life and work. Her stories often explore how racism is a learned trait, and suggest that anyone who unconsciously lives with the categories of white privilege is, in fact, always recovering from the latent effects of racism. Recovering from white racism takes a long time, and O’Connor would have included herself as one who journeyed on this path of recovery. Indeed, her stories are shocking and revolutionary in the way they bring home to her readers the assumptions of whiteness. Whether it is Mrs. McIntyre in “The Displaced Person” or Ruby Turpin in “Revelation,” her characters are always caught up short by their deformed understanding of status and race.

The intersection, in O’Connor’s work, of the religious imagination with the racialized social milieu of the Jim Crow South is what inspires

this collection of essays on her work. O'Connor suffered from lupus the last 16 years of her life, and lived with her mother on the family farm in Milledgeville, Georgia: Andalusia. It is said that the name of the farm was chosen because its location was the farthest the Spanish explorers of the sixteenth century traveled before returning to Florida to establish settlements. While, perhaps, colloquial in its origins, this is, nevertheless, a fitting way to connect the American south with the South of Spain. As part of the 2017 *Andalusia in Andalucía*, literary critics from around the world gathered to focus on O'Connor's literary vision in light of three areas of reflection —areas that connect both the Southern Gothic and Southern Spain: first, the relationship of the literary grotesque (a genre that often defines her work, with Spanish baroque aesthetics that have come to define Spain's artistic heritage; second, the relationship between O'Connor's South and the literatures of the broader global South; and, third, the similarities and differences with other writers whose Catholic imagination made their work “counter, original, spare, strange,” to borrow a phrase from the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem, “Pied Beauty.”

Certainly, there is something “counter” about O'Connor's art —something akin to the Catholic Baroque aesthetics of the seventeenth century Counter Reformation. As an artistic and a religious response to a culture reeling from the effects of the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Baroque offered a theological vision that was as accessible as it was excessive in its sensory overload. It emphasized dramatic, often strained effects typified by bold, complex forms and elaborate ornamentation. Painters as diverse as Caravaggio, Rubens, Velazquez, and Zurbaran —as well as writers of the Spanish baroque age, such as Miguel de Cervantes and Francisco de Quevedo— communicated religious insights in strange, expressive ways, rendered in theatrical or revelatory moments, responding to the spiritual-cultural exigencies of their time. O'Connor is heir to the same strategies of Baroque aesthetics. Her Catholic literary vision fashioned an accessible mode of literary realism that reflected her modernist, formalist credentials, while placing them

at the service of an orthodox Christian faith — a faith that often found itself at odds with a complacent and compromising American culture distorted by complacency and privilege. Her parabolic stories deconstruct preconceived notions of righteousness and social order, drawing her characters into the real struggles and costs that constitute attempts to live a coherent and authentic life.

The logic of what might be called O'Connor's baroque aesthetic is asserted in her essay, "The Fiction Writer and His Country":

The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make them appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience. When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal ways of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock — to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the blind you draw large and startling figures (1969: 30).

In order to shake the reader out of such false conceptions, O'Connor affects a realistic narrative style that routinely ends in horrendous, freak fatalities, or, at the very least, a character's emotional instability. These grotesque distortions shine a light, in a manner much like a painter's use of chiaroscuro, on a moment that penetrates the self-delusions of her characters.

O'Connor also lived through an extended revival of Southern fiction in the United States. Though never organized as a coherent group, twentieth century American fiction turned out many prize-winning intellectuals, poets, and writers. Beginning with William Faulkner and extending through writers like Eudora Welty, Robert Penn Warren, Caroline Gordon, and Walker Percy, the world O'Connor inhabited was one in which the south was constantly being theorized and discussed. This was, in no small part, because of the growing civil rights movement

throughout the United States. O'Connor's sense of place affected how she understood herself. In her essay, "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction," she notes the irony that "anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic." She goes on to suggest that "whenever I'm asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognize one," claiming that "you have to have some conception of the whole man, and in the South the general conception of man is still, in the main, theological." From the standpoint of the southern writer, O'Connor notes "it is safe to say that while the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted." The freak, then, can be ascertained as a "figure for our essential displacement that [...] attains some depth in literature" (1969: 44).

As a child of the South, O'Connor witnessed the destruction of rural life during the Great Depression, as both white and black populations moved to the urban north to find work throughout the 1930s and 1940s. She was keenly aware of her region, and the ways in which it struggled with loss and tragedy. This was, for O'Connor, something unique about the American south. She comments on fellow Southern writer, Walker Percy, whose response to an interviewer who asked why there are so many good southern writers—"Because we lost the War," captivated her. His answer, she explains, had less to do with America's Civil War providing good source material than it did with the war's effect on the southern psyche: "What he was saying was that we have had our Fall," O'Connor writes. "We have gone into the modern world with an inburnt knowledge of human limitations and with a sense of mystery which could not have developed in our first state of innocence—as it has not sufficiently developed in the rest of the country" (1969: 59). This sense of human limitation was profoundly religious for O'Connor, for it discouraged presumptuous attempts to elevate the individual as perfectible by his or her own efforts.

The essays in this collection position Flannery O'Connor on a global stage, particularly in light of her Southern Catholic Baroque aesthetics. Her aesthetics are southern because they dramatize a region that is still haunted by religious faith; they are Catholic because her parable-like stories deconstruct the rationalized and distorted preconceptions of faith in order to reevaluate modern religious experience; they are baroque in the excessive yet accessible ways her work moves the reader to mystery and insight. The grotesque — a signature of O'Connor's literary style — that creates a gap between a surface-level realism and the mystery within the complex motivations of her characters. The advent of this “mystery” as a latent force breaking into the the realism and manners of her culture that interrupt the observable social and cultural reality. Each of the following essays locate O'Connor's transnational and global reach in light of these aesthetics, most especially in how her religious faith and the literary strategies she uses draw out the revelatory flashes of insight that become the interpretive center of her stories. This collection offers helpful comparisons of O'Connor with other European writers, especially from Spain and the British Isles, that broaden the intellectual conversation about her work.

In the chapter that opens this volume, “Reaching the World from the South: The Territory of Flannery O'Connor,” Guadalupe Arbona examines the broad scope of influence that Flannery O'Connor's narratives have inspired in the works of others. In this essay, she focuses on the case of Spain, a country in which many authors have declared their admiration for O'Connor: José Jiménez Lozano, Esther Tusquets, Antonio Muñoz Molina and Juan Manuel de Prada, among others. Arbona argues that the reason for the appeal of O'Connor's literary production is her textual dynamics, which goes from the particular to the universal, from specific situations to wider visions of human existence. Readers, as Arbona puts it, first feel first attracted to the Southerner's extravagant situations in her stories only to be awakened to universal concerns of human experience by the story's end — experiences like transcendence, migration, social intolerance or different forms of racism. To demons-

trate this point, Arbona analyzes three of her outstanding stories, “The Displaced Person” (1955), “The Artificial Nigger” (1955), and “Parker’s Back” (1965). In “The Displace Person,” two female characters, Mrs. Shortley and Mrs. McIntyre, reject Mr Guizac and his family —Polish immigrants running away from the refugee camps in Europe— on the basis of religious and national difference. Playing with the concept of seeing, both women become blind, but at the same time both find a new vision, identifying themselves with Guizac’s suffering. In “The Artificial Nigger,” O’Connor deals with racial segregation in the South. Her aim was to dramatize racist white perceptions and feelings towards the African-American community. In this story, the odious racists are depicted in a grotesque way, and it is not until they experience humiliation that they understand the constructed illusions of their imagined superiority. Finally, in “Parker’s Back,” a story with a strong Biblical background, O’Connor exposes through concrete spaces (geographical and physical) the universal question of whether it is possible to perceive God in the flesh. In these stories, Arbona argues, readers are presented with one reality, but then, in classic O’Connor fashion, are confronted with a different horizon —one which may not have been previously possible.

Anne-Marie Pouchet draws connections between O’Connor and Spanish writer Juan Manuel de Prada (1970-) in her essay, “Another of Her Disciples: The Literary Grotesque and its Catholic Manifestations in *Wise Blood* by Flannery O’Connor and *La vida invisible* by Juan Manuel de Prada.” Similar to O’Connor, Prada considers himself a ‘Catholic writer.’ Rather than thinking about themes related to the Catholic faith, Prada defines the Catholic writer as one whose religious sensibility pervades his/her literary production. In her study, Pouchet argues that the theological virtues of faith, charity and, most significantly, hope, are interwoven in O’Connor and Prada’s work to bring a Catholic ethos to the fore. What is more, Prada’s Catholic vision is often achieved through the use of the literary grotesque, much like O’Connor. In this sense, Pouchet analyzes the aesthetics of the grotesque as expounded by the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and applies this analysis to O’Connor’s *Wise Blood*, as

is it an important influence in Prada's novel *La vida invisible* (2003). As Pouchet notes, the use of the literary grotesque in both authors is seen in the use of the most abject characters, the outcasts of society, to demonstrate the reality of sin in all its ugliness. These same characters are, however, the ones who mediate the Catholic significance of hope and redemption through expiation and suffering.

O'Connor's scope of influence reached other contemporary authors in Europe as well. In his essay "Andalusia on the Liffey': Sacred Monstrosity in O'Connor and Joyce," Michael Kirwan reads O'Connor alongside James Joyce and evokes a kind of negative theology operative in their work. Negative, or apophatic, theology is shaped by an approach to the divine through negation — that is to say, what God is not. Both authors manifest a negative theology via their characters, who often assume they are acting faithfully to the norms and manners of religious culture, yet find themselves surprisingly at a loss as to their plight. Both were excellent short-story writers but divergent in both their religious experience and in their feelings towards their respective geographical and cultural contexts. While O'Connor embraced the South and her Catholic faith as essential to her fiction, Joyce's life and work are presented as a Luciferian gesture of refusal of, and exile from, "home, fatherland and church." In their work, however, we find similarities in their sacramental imagination, which produces, in Kirwan's words, "epiphanies' of grace and revelation." In his comparative analysis, Kirwan focuses mainly on stories from *A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories* (1955) and *Dubliners* (1914), but expands his analysis to their novels as well. In order to carry out this comparative reading and illuminate both contrasts and convergence between O'Connor and Joyce, Kirwan draws from the insights of René Girard's mimetic theory and the link Girard establishes between violence and the sacred. According to Kirwan, reading Joyce alongside O'Connor makes possible an understanding of Joyce's rebellion towards Catholicism not as a denial, but a form of negative theology. To put it in O'Connor terms, it makes possible the demonic groundwork that is needed for grace to be effective.

Continuing along this line of thought, Anabel Altemir-Giral and Ismael Ibáñez-Rosales draw a comparison between O'Connor and another contemporary: Muriel Spark. In "Death's Personal Call: The Aesthetics of Catholic Eschatology in Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori*," they note the affinities between Spark and O'Connor in terms of the religious dimensions of their work. Though the two never met, both authors admired each other's literary production. We see this admiration that is expressed in O'Connor's letters and also in interviews with Spark. Both writers share a penchant for violence and shocking moments in their stories in creating an aesthetics of Gothic realism. However, the references to Catholicism in Spark's work are more obscure; the divine doesn't intrude so overtly into everyday life as in O'Connor's stories. Altemir-Giral and Ibáñez-Rosales focus their comparative analysis on different approaches to the experience of death in Spark's novel *Memento Mori* (1959) and O'Connor's story "A Good Man is Hard to Find." In these narratives, the authors argue, each writer conveys a different Catholic eschatological vision connected with death. Born into a Catholic world O'Connor's imagination is permeated with notions of death and salvation, which, in turn, appear as themes underlying most of her fiction. Death also pervades Spark's novel, as we see in the very title of the work — *Memento Mori*, Latin for "remember that you must die." In the novel, characters are reminded about their death through a series of mysterious phone calls, forcing them to face their own mortality. Each reacts differently to this inevitable fact. Spark, a convert to Catholicism, invites her readership to consider that the way we deal with our impending death may be the door through which we transcend our earthly limitations. In a similar vein, O'Connor uses violent death to highlight this eschatological theme in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," a satire about the brutal murder of an ordinary family committed by the Misfit, a character defined aesthetically as the personification of death. Both, Spark's novel and O'Connor's short story, serve to remind readers of death as an inevitable ingredient of life that can lead one to transcend human selfishness and egotism.

The connection of Flannery O'Connor with Spanish Literature that Arbona draws in the first chapter and Pouchet exemplifies with the case of Juan Manuel de Prada in the second, is also reinforced in Brent Little's "Quixotism and Modernism: The Conversion of Hazel Motes," which relates O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood*, to what is considered one of the masterpieces of Spanish literature, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Specifically, Little reads O'Connor's work in connection with the notion of quixotism, understood as an impractical idealism sometimes rooted in a rigid certainty. Drawing upon Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, Little distinguishes between the categories of the "porous" self and the "buffered" self. He argues that Hazel Motes suffers from his own form of quixotism, an idealism marked with an intense certainty that leads him to attempt to preach a "Church without Christ." Little examines the nature of Motes' peculiar quixotism, which he argues is "a distinctly modern variety, for it exalts autonomy and insists that the self should construct its own meaning and morality apart from the influence of a religious past." Such modern idealism —consistent but rigid, sincere but uncharitable— marks Motes' insistence that he is free from any obligation towards others, maintaining his independence from communal responsibilities. His stance manifests, therefore, an extreme dimension of secular modernism. Motes goes through a process of disillusion, in which he realizes that the material world is no longer the sole reality he must grasp. But does such disillusion lead him to reject his modern vision of existence? In this sense, Little's analysis of this quixotism sheds light on a long-running debate amongst O'Connor readers: whether, at the end of *Wise Blood*, Hazel's self-imposed blindness is a manifestation of a legitimate Christianity. Little casts doubt on this possibility, seeing the overall pattern of Motes' behavior as a problematic form of Christian faith, for his conversion aggravates his disregard for community and his rejection of active discipleship in the world.

Xiamara Hohman also explores the connection between Cervantes and O'Connor. In "A Christian *Malgré Lui*: Crisis, Transition, and the Quixotic Pursuit of the Ideal in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction," Hohman

claims that even though scholarship has focused on examining the religious aspects of O'Connor's fiction, little research has been conducted on the ways in which her characters attempt to deal with periods of transition and crisis. Hohman explains why it might be useful to do so, drawing upon Mark Greif's *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America* and providing parallels with her reading of the Spanish philosopher, Miguel de Unamuno. Using Unamuno's understanding of Spanish Catholicism and his love for the literary figure Don Quixote de la Mancha, Hohman draws analogies to O'Connor's characters. Don Quixote, in Hohman's words, "is the character that best exemplifies a man who, unable to deal with the rapid changes of his time, abstracts himself from reality and enters into an enduring but ultimately misguided quest for the ideal." Reading O'Connor alongside Cervantes's masterpiece, Hohman sheds light on the historical discourses of social and political change, on the one hand, and the ways in which O'Connor calls her readership to transcend the moments of crisis and transition, on the other. After the trauma of the second world war, O'Connor's contemporaries offered an existential despair as the only possible response, whereas O'Connor proposed a sober hope that resonates with the character of Don Quixote at the moment he is dying. Hohman discusses the implications of O'Connor's vision of hope for readers at the beginning of the twenty-first century, undergoing its own a socio-political crises.

Michael Bruner's "The Other as Angels: O'Connor's Case for Radical Hospitality," delves deeper into our current crises, reading O'Connor's work in relation to "the inhospitable tenor of our historical moment." In a world with ever-increasing migratory and refugee crises affecting political, cultural, and religious communities, Bruner claims that defining the nature and limits of hospitality has become an urgent task. In this sense, O'Connor's artistic portrayals of hospitality prove to be significant. Bruner also focuses on the role of the Christian churches in our current situation, a role that—in his view—is crucial if people of faith are to heed Christ's call to welcome and embrace the other. In this line of thought, Bruner examines O'Connor's use of the home motif as

an instrument to show how Christian hospitality works and to contrast it with what he calls the alleged “Southern hospitality” of O'Connor's era. In her fiction, Christian hospitality, which involves caring for the Other, paying attention to their material needs but also to their moral and spiritual aspirations, serves as an indictment of “Southern hospitality,” in which what matters the most is showing good manners. One is hospitable only to the degree that those manners dictates. The Southern tradition of manners, however, when separated from mystery — which serves as a conduit for God's mercy— falls far short of Christ's commandment of establishing an eschatological community of justice and service. Bruner analyzes O'Connor's sense of hospitality in the stories “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” “The Turkey,” “The Artificial Nigger,” “The Comforts of Home,” and “Revelation.” With the depiction of her sense of Christian hospitality, O'Connor intends to awaken her readers to a different conception of home. As such, Bruner argues, the role of Christian witness in O'Connor's fiction becomes the antithesis of southern hospitality.

In “A Purifying Terror”: Apocalypse, Apostasy and Alterity in Flannery O'Connor's “The Enduring Chill,” José Liste Noya reads Flannery O'Connor's work in the shadow of the global order in the post-World War II era: the use of the most destructive weapon ever built, the nuclear bomb and the subsequent Cold War period. The terrible effects of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki influenced the realpolitik doctrines of the Cold War. The deep, unstable tensions and violent rhetorical bombast pervaded public life as a whole, and the literary domain was not exempted. In O'Connor's work, the reader finds traces of the cultural imaginary of the period. One also finds traces of a psychological and sociological discourse in which the image of apocalypse —both in the sense of destruction of the corrupt old and revelation of the transcendent new— played an important role. “The Enduring Chill” (drafted in late 1957 but not published until 1958) is not a story about the bomb, but its presence is detected in it in its apocalyptic scenarios. The protagonist, Asbury Fox —an example of O'Connor's stock parody of the existentialist, is denied the death he desires, replacing it with a self-humiliating,

coercive experience of enforced redemption. In this sense, Liste argues that the devastating nature of an apocalyptic redemption that would follow an atomic cataclysm was refused by O'Connor in "The Enduring Chill." Instead, she offers a sort of religious retreat from annihilation through a transcendent evasion.

The themes of chaos, destruction, and re-creation —along with the role that violence plays in relation to them— are also significant in the final chapter of this volume: Thomas Wetzel's "An Unpleasant Little Jolt: Flannery O'Connor's *Creation ex Chaos*." Here, Wetzel focuses on the Divine Warrior imagery and its presence in O'Connor's fictional world, especially in his analysis of "Why Do the Heathen Rage?," one of the last stories published by O'Connor in her lifetime (and conceived as the opening section of a new novel she was planning to write). Wetzel argues that the vision of Jesus as the Divine Warrior in this story "reflects O'Connor's more mature thinking on the relationship between divine grace and violence," thus opening therefore a new way of examining the presence of violence in her later work. As Wetzel explains, the source for the image of the Bible's Divine Warrior imagery is to be found in the cultural context of the Ancient Near East —specifically in the Divine Warrior Myth or the Divine Combat myth, that echoes throughout religious discourse even today. This myth proposes that creation does not occur peacefully through divine speech; rather, it is the result of a battle between the ancient chaos deity and a young storm god. Upon his victory, the storm deity creates the ordered universe from the remnant elements of the chaotic material, *creation ex chaos*. Humanity thus shares in preserving creation against the forces of chaos as a real battle, both physical and spiritual. Drawing on the biblical sources upon which O'Connor's narratives frequently depend, Wetzel analyzes the presence of chaos in O'Connor's fictional world, and its connections with the Divine Warrior myth and the use of violence to mark divine presence.

Taken together, these essays offer productive ways to think about O'Connor's work in both interdisciplinary terms and global terms. They offer new readings of O'Connor's thematic preoccupations and strategies

in connection with the aforementioned distinctive features of her life and work: faith, race, gender, and disability. They examine O'Connor's response in her work to the political tensions of her time —the World Wars, the atomic bombs, the Jewish holocaust, and the Cold War— as well as the social changes that derived from them. They also analyze her response to the crisis of meaning of modernity, rejecting the dominating secular ethics and offering through her Catholic vision a way of rearticulating in her work the importance of human values. In global terms, these essays also analyze comparatively the response that other contemporary and subsequent authors have given to similar socio-political and spiritual preoccupations. In O'Connor's textual dynamics, her concerns are dramatized in a concrete time and place; yet, they can be read beyond Southern boundaries and become universal concerns of human experience with which any reader feels identified. Finally, the essays included in this volume shed light on O'Connor's aesthetics of the grotesque, a vision that accentuates the distortions of modern life for her characters in such a way that they are brought back to themselves in some new insight. All of them challenge readers to think about O'Connor's work in broader frames of reference, opening before us an interdisciplinary reflection that follows in the wake of reading her fiction all around the world.

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