

O’Gorman, Farrell. *Peculiar Crossroads: Flannery O’Connor, Walker Percy, and Catholic Vision in Postwar Southern Fiction*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2004. 259 pages. \$22.95 paper. ISBN 978-0-8071-3355-4.

Farrell O’Gorman’s biographical, philosophical, aesthetic study links Flannery O’Connor and Walker Percy, who (with Eudora Welty) constitute the foremost Southern writers of the second half of the twentieth century. The only other book-length study to date devoted to the Catholic writers of the South has been Robert Brinkmeyer’s *Three Catholic Writers of the Modern South*, which deals with Tate, Gordon, and Percy, but not O’Connor.

Throughout the study O’Gorman relates the two writers because of their Catholicism, but he also details similarities in their life stories, especially their illnesses and the loss of their fathers. He discusses the guidance and encouragement they received from Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon and their mutual grounding in the classic Catholic writers such as St. Thomas Aquinas, adding that they were even more influenced by twentieth-century Catholic philosophers Jacques Maritain and Romano Guardini. O’Gorman finds commonalities that shape the fiction of both, a concern for the here and now, not the glory of the past, and an insistence on the concrete rather than the abstract. He sees the two writers as focusing on revelation rather than memory as they “balanced a committed and sincere religious faith with authentic and powerful writing about their native region,” noting that “the radical religiosity of O’Connor and Percy’s vision is precisely what has made them so valuable to the South as original fiction writers and social critics” (p. 5). He finds in both existentialism, realism, satire, and post-modernism as they reject narcissistic individual sensibility and intellectual self-sufficiency while confronting alienation in the consumer-oriented, crumbling modern world and looking forward with hope for renewal to come out of the ruins.

The scholarship is thorough, the breadth of the last chapter in its survey of contemporary novelists—among them Cormac McCarthy, James Lee Burke, Lee Smith, Annie Dillard, Doris Betts, Alice Walker, Mary Lee Settle, Randall Kenan, Josephine Humphreys, Padgett Powell, and Bobbie Ann Mason—influenced by O’Connor and Percy impressive, and the prose lucid and precise. This excellent study should be read by anyone serious about O’Connor and Percy.

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