

FLANNERY O'CONNOR: RECONCILIATION OF OPPOSITES

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ABSTRACT

A 20th century American southern writer, Flannery O'Connor masterfully reconciled opposites - in her work and in her life. O'Connor's creative power fused two disparate disciplines: theology and fiction. Because her spiritual life was so deep and her knowledge of theology so strong, she wrote engaging fiction which contained insights into the deepest theological truths. In an era when many artists demanded total freedom to pursue their art, O'Connor grounded herself in Christian faith and life. She found that, rather than restrict her, such grounding gave her authentic freedom to see the world truly.

A creative talent such as hers - unusual in every respect - needed powerful discipline to hone it to perfection. O'Connor's artistic discipline was legendary. She limited her scope to the parameters of her specific talent. In spite of continual illness, she wrote for three hours every morning (inspired or not) and spent the rest of the day recuperating from the effort.

The proper manners of the south, and the deepest mysteries of each person's apprehension of the holy - these disparate elements both locate her stories in place and time, and extend them infinitely. Comedy relieves and lightens grotesquerie. O'Connor's wry sense of humour lights upon disparities, impregnates clichés, deflates righteous people, and authenticates character. Her youthful talent for cartooning finds literary expression in the large and startling figures in her fiction.

O'Connor's stories use violence in the service of grace. Each violent action is demanded by the 'truth' of the story; each is inexorable; each marks the presence of grace.

In her personal life, O'Connor reconciled her own plan for her life - to leave the confines of Milledgeville for the wider literary world - and the new plan dictated by the advent of lupus, which brought her to an isolated farmhouse under her mother's care for the rest of her life.

O'Connor's fiction truly illuminates the reconciliation of opposites.