



# **Peculiar Crossroads: Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and Catholic Vision in Postwar Southern Fiction (Southern Literary Studies)**

*Farrell O'Gorman*

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The two southern fiction writers most informed by orthodox religion, Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy were also among the most influential southern writers of their generation. In *Peculiar Crossroads*, Farrell O'Gorman explains that the radical religiosity of O'Connor and Percy's vision is precisely what made them so valuable as both southern fiction writers and social critics. Via their spiritual and philosophical concerns, O'Gorman asserts, these two unabashedly Catholic authors bequeathed to even their most unorthodox successors a postmodern South of shopping malls and interstates imbued with as much meaning as Appomattox or Yoknapatawpha.

O'Gorman builds his argument with biographical, historical, literary, and theological evidence, examining the two writers' work through intriguing pairings—such as O'Connor's *Wise Blood* with Percy's *The Moviegoer*, and O'Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* with Percy's *Lancelot*. He traces the influence exerted on their thought by the mid-century transatlantic Catholic Revival and by their relationships with southern modernists Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate. Ultimately, Percy and O'Connor embraced a Christian existentialist view that led them to dissent from both the historical, tragic mode of the Southern Renaissance and the absurdist apocalypticism of much postwar American fiction. They were, O'Gorman concludes, transitional figures, more optimistic about their culture's future than the modernists and more optimistic about the truth-telling capacities of language and literature than the postmodernists.

Despite their devastating satire of collapsing southern traditions and complacent American consumerism, Percy and O'Connor found hope and significance in a "Christian realism" of the "here and now"—focusing on the peculiar crossroads "where time and place and eternity somehow meet," as O'Connor described the writer's world. Such, O'Gorman neatly reveals, is the two's distinct legacy to a later generation of writers—including Randall Kenan, Josephine Humphreys, and Padgett Powell—who search for meaning in a postmodern South where historical themes seem increasingly problematic.

An impeccable exercise in literary history and criticism, *Peculiar Crossroads* renders a genuine understanding of the Catholic sensibility of both O'Connor and Percy and their influence among contemporary southern writers.

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