

sources from newspaper articles, high school yearbooks, interviews, and participant observations to scholarly literature without subjecting these sources to too much critical analysis. Illustrations work very well to enhance the text and are used both as illustration and comment.

Sometimes the stories are too myopic for my taste, they resemble a private journal, and I cannot get excited by all these Hovell relatives. I lose the thread and wonder where I am in these meanderings and memories. But mostly I am intrigued by how McMillin weaves together the many threads or layers – a truly archaeological venture – not to arrive at one truth, but at many. How complicated are the webs of relations in American soil, and how simplistically it is rendered when the bleached prairie grass layer of settlers is grafted onto its many other, and deeper, deposits! The stories are not new to students of Native American history. Others have documented and discussed how white America has appropriated Indian land, cultures, and identities, while removing actual Indian peoples. But McMillin refreshingly tells the story of her discovery of this past, and by uncovering, bit by bit, the many strata and diverging storylines she forces the reader to think differently about the landscape and the human impact upon it. It made me wonder what controversies, power struggles, and exclusions the rocky soil of Småland – where I live – hides. Yet, what also becomes apparent in McMillin's story is that Indians, Ho-Chunks mostly, are still there, not only buried in the soil but also invisible to the villagers in Trempealeau. The inability of the town's inhabitants to see their presence McMillin likens to a "benign face of violence." White settlers had been part of removing Indians, and refusing Ho-Chunks to return in the past, but it was "well-meaning people doing their jobs [who] had destroyed mound after mound in the area as they farmed, constructed the park, built roads, made homes, remaking the place in their own image." Friends and neighbors came together to fight the archaeological dig that they viewed "as intrusions of outsiders ... who had no history in the place, no connection at all to the story the residents had weaved together about the town, about family, about the way things are done" (223). However, McMillin's own account that gives such life to her family's past and sense of belonging fails to do the same for the Ho-Chunks, Dakotas, and Ioways, who also call this land home. Perhaps this is an inadvertent consequence of the difficulties of reconciling the contesting claims, the very real history of loss and anguish that enabled the success of settler communities such as Trempealeau. McMillin astutely acknowledges that "the memory of that violence, the sadness and meanness and regret that accompanies it, is something that shapes who we think we are, where we think we live" (205).

The benign face of violence, combined with a penchant for seeing oneself as "simple folk just trying to make a living" ensured that in Trempealeau, as in so many other towns all over America, the Indian past and present remains buried and hidden.

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Jan Nordby and Karl-Heinz Westarp, eds. *Flannery O'Connor's Radical Reality*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. 196 pages. ISBN 1-57003-

601-2. \$39.95 hardcover.

"The more you look at an object, the more of the world you see in it."⁴ Flannery O'Connor's words in this passage provide an appropriate guide to reading this anthology of thought-provoking essays edited by Jan Gretlund and Karl-Heinz Westarp. O'Connor's radicalism was about this ability to see through details, including the depraved, deformed, and grotesque elements in human experience in order to "[show] us how mystery and grace intrude upon us when we least expect it" (ix). Although her two collections of short stories, two novels, collections of lectures and articles, letters, and interviews comprise a relatively small body of work,⁵ and though she died at the age of only thirty nine, O'Connor's writing continues to resonate in the imagination of readers who have been studying her work for the past forty years.

As specialists in literature of the American South, the editors of *Flannery O'Connor's Radical Reality* are in a good position to point to new directions for international O'Connor scholarship as its fifth decade begins. Westarp and Gretlund have previously done much to introduce Scandinavian audiences to O'Connor's fiction. In this book, contributors from Norway, Denmark, and Sweden as well as the United States are represented. Westarp's essay, "Metaphoric Processes in Flannery O'Connor's Short Fiction," reinforces the theme of his previous book, *Realist of Distances: Flannery O'Connor Revisited* (2002)⁶ in which he demonstrates that O'Connor uses metaphor as intimately connected to the revelation of the spiritual in the material world. Other topics addressed in *Flannery O'Connor's Radical Reality* include a discussion of the ways in which theological discourse is relevant for short story theory; a consideration of the relationship between biographical context and form; and connections between race relations in the American South and European intellectual politics in the first part of the twentieth century. As a whole, the essays provide deeply sympathetic readings of O'Connor's work.

One element of the book I found striking was the way in which the thematic organization of its chapters seems designed to stimulate debate. For example, the first two chapters are respectively the most critical and the most laudatory of O'Connor's relationship to social criticism. The essays in the middle most explicitly focus on previously neglected areas of scholarship. These are followed by pieces that open up larger discussions of genre in relation to the practice of reading, and to ontology. When the reader reaches the last few chapters, we are brought back to the living, breathing person of O'Connor herself at her mother's farm in Georgia, writing, reading, wel-

4. Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, eds. Robert and Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969) 77.

5. O'Connor's short story collections include *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (1955), and *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965); her novels include *Wise Blood* (1955) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960). Her talks and interviews were published in *Mystery and Manners* (1969), her letters collected in *The Habit of Being* (1979), her reviews in *The Presence of Grace* (1983), and a collection of interviews in *Conversations with Flannery O'Connor* (1987). See Westarp 26.

6. Karl-Heinz Westarp, *Precision and Depth in Flannery O'Connor's Short Stories* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2002).

coming visitors, and raising waterfowl. At this point in the text, two biographical essays examine O'Connor's brand of Catholicism, the centrality of place in her own experience as related to her fiction, and the fourteen-year struggle with disseminated lupus that set physical limitations but also influenced the development of her art.

The first chapter, Michael Kreyling's "A Good Monk is Hard to Find: Thomas Merton, Flannery O'Connor, and the American Catholic Writer," criticizes O'Connor's (lack of) social engagement in the context of the political climate in the Fifties and impact of McCarthyism. Kreyling argues that "O'Connor's vision was tethered to her historical circumstances. [...] Flannery O'Connor, writer and believer, lived in an America shaped by the pressures of conformity in thought and behavior and by the upheavals of race" (2). For example, he notes that her story "'Everything That Rises Must Converge' is anything but sentimental, but neither is it comedic or progressive. By the end of the story, the writing is on the wall: Do not rock the boat; neither progress nor improvement is attainable in the human sphere, only the deluded try" (14).

In the second chapter, Lila N. Meeks, "Flannery O'Connor's Art: A Gesture of Grace," responds to Kreyling when she writes, "If her fiction does not investigate the social concerns some critics believe it should, it is because she was attempting to dig beneath the manners to the mysteries" (20). Meeks defends O'Connor's spiritual orientation to life and her work as being most important: "[O'Connor] knew that the serious writer must gnaw on universal bones, even when everyone else has gone out for fast food" (19). As indicated in this passage, Meeks' metaphors in her article are at times poetic to the point where they may interfere with her being even mildly critical of O'Connor.

Of the essays that deal with previously neglected areas of research, Kelly Gerald explores the ways in which the images in O'Connor's stories are inspired by her work in the visual arts (40). In "The World of Cartoons and Their Importance to O'Connor's Fiction" she integrates a tremendous range of examples in a carefully documented, astute analysis to show how O'Connor's sense of humor was expressed in the character types she repeated both in cartoons and in fiction.

Whereas Gerald addresses a wide range of sources, Marshall Bruce Gentry focuses more narrowly on a comparison between "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. "He Would Have Been a Good Man: Compassion and Meanness in Truman Capote and Flannery O'Connor" provides sensitive insights into the ways in which the different attitudes on the question of human evil held by Capote and O'Connor were expressed respectively in their attitudes toward their characters. One striking question Gentry poses is, "[What do] Capote's uses of and opinions of O'Connor teach us about her?" He suggests,

I believe that O'Connor, fascinated as she had to be in order to create them, rarely went all the way in endorsing the voices of her misfit characters and misfit narrators. [...] O'Connor was finally able to endorse meanness, not as a place to stop, but as a stage in a process, a stage one might revisit repeatedly. (49)

Two of the articles deal with O'Connor's European influences. W.A. Sessions's

“Then I discovered the Germans’: O’Connor’s Encounter with Guardini and German Thinkers of the Interwar Period,” can be read, along with Meeks’s essay, as a response to Michael Kreyling’s view that O’Connor did not carry her political criticism far enough. His essay speaks both to O’Connor’s acute awareness of racial injustice as well as to her intellectual breadth. Referring to Toni Morrison, he notes that she “has called ‘brilliant’ O’Connor’s story ‘The Artificial Nigger’” (67). O’Connor’s sensitivity to the ways in which racism can be resisted at the level of the imagination was made possible in part by her discovery of the interwar writing of the German Catholic theologian, Romano Guardini, who she said gave her hope as well as strength to create her art.

Just as Guardini in his position as a Catholic German in the 1920s was a minority within a minority, so too was O’Connor as a Catholic Southerner in the U.S. For O’Connor, the sense of being an outsider was magnified further through her struggle with lupus. Perhaps most important for Sessions is the notion that these sorts of connections “moved [O’Connor’s texts] from their quite local worlds in Georgia into a universal discourse” (67). This claim to the universal relevance of O’Connor’s work is one of the points of *Flannery O’Connor’s Radical Reality* as a whole.

Patrick Samway and Sarah Gordon, together with Westarp in his essay on O’Connor’s use of metaphor, reflect on O’Connor’s art as “Catholic” in a radical non-sectarian sense. Gordon, in “Seeking Beauty in Darkness: Flannery O’Connor and the French Catholic Renaissance,” explores some of the ways in which French Catholic intellectuals “set a precedent of spiritual creativity and thought that was, at the least, bound to have been reassuring to O’Connor” (84). Gordon has little patience for Catholics who want to flatten O’Connor’s narratives as spiritual allegories (69). Her discussion is extended by Patrick Samway, S.J., in “Toward Discerning How Flannery O’Connor’s Fiction Can Be Considered ‘Roman Catholic.’” For Samway, as for Gordon, the particular power of O’Connor’s writing as a Catholic would only have been possible in literature, not in a theological treatise (172).

Another chapter that deepens the reader’s understanding of the relationship between O’Connor’s art and her Christian faith is Jack Dillard Ashley’s “‘The very heart of mystery’: Theophany in O’Connor’s Stories.” Whereas Westarp in his essay argues that O’Connor’s art was at its core a practice of the Christian Incarnation, Ashley adds to the reader’s understanding of how. His discussion of “theophany” illuminates the question why she delves so deeply into the darker sides of human nature.

Ashley also examines the concept of theophany in comparison with epiphany, a term more familiar to most readers. Whereas epiphany is based in the Christian New Testament idea of light and sudden recognition at a personal level, theophany comes out of the Hebrew Old Testament, and evokes “emotions of terror, awe, reverence, and sorrow” (103). Whereas epiphany occurs in the human mind at a microcosmic level, theophany takes place in the macrocosm. Ashley’s discussion is particularly pertinent to short fiction theory where “epiphany” has been considered as a central structuring element of the form.

Also concerned with short fiction theory is Hans H. Skei’s “O’Connor’s *Everything That Rises Must Converge* and Theories of the Short Story Sequence.” Skei urges the reader to maintain a healthy skepticism of the tendency to see too much

unity in the stories in O'Connor's last collection, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. Skei also makes a provocative connection between the biographical context for O'Connor's writing and her aesthetic choices in suggesting that "O'Connor had every reason to stick closely and almost exclusively to what we may call an aesthetics of brevity. The most obvious reason, seldom acknowledged, was the threat of sudden death" (143).

Finally, the two biographical pieces at the end of the anthology deserve more attention than the limits of this review allow: Ashley Brown's "Life at Andalusia" and Jean W. Cash's "Flannery O'Connor as Communicant: A Constant Devotion." In an essay that is arguably the most personal one in the anthology, Brown narrates some of the ways in which O'Connor's personal life was intellectually and socially rich in spite of her physical limitations. Jean W. Cash's "Flannery O'Connor as Communicant: A Constant Devotion" is also a sympathetic portrayal of O'Connor as friend and mentor to the author. Cash gives a perceptive analysis of the ways in which the spiritual convictions at the center of O'Connor's life influenced her writing.

At the end of *Flannery O'Connor's Radical Reality*, the biographies of the contributors attest to the international, interdisciplinary scope of the book. Gretlund and Westarp's index, too, is valuable in light of intention of the editors to signal new directions for research. However, it would have been helpful if the individual story and book titles had appeared in separate entries rather than being put under the subcategories of O'Connor "as short story writer" or "as novelist." I found it cumbersome to have to search the subcategories, and then to have to look for the collection where a story appeared, before I located a specific title.

If R. Neil Scott's *Flannery O'Connor: An Annotated Reference Guide to Criticism* (2002)⁷ demonstrates the sheer quantity of O'Connor studies in the past half a century, this volume illuminates particular examples of the depth and breadth possible, and it suggests the humanity of both the author and her readers. I left my reading of *Flannery O'Connor's Radical Reality* with a sense that I could almost hear O'Connor's voice, both speaking through the articles themselves, and responding to them.

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Charles H. Russell. *Undaunted: A Norwegian Woman in Frontier Texas*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006. ISBN 1 58544 453 7. \$29.95.

Charles H. Russell's *Undaunted: A Norwegian Woman in Frontier Texas* is a biography of Elise Wærenskjold (1815–1895). It is the first book length study of the life and writings of a lady who belongs in the canon of Norwegian-American Studies, along with younger female voices such as Elisabeth Koren (1832–1918), Gro

7. R. Neil Scott, *Flannery O'Connor: An Annotated Reference Guide to Criticism* (Millidgeville, Georgia: Timberlane Books, 2002).