

While condensing his literary examples, Darby might have somewhat expanded his account of contextual realities. Regrettably, he set aside two interesting arguments that are potential in his subject—whether bestsellers “reflect, follow or create popular taste” and whether they reveal cultural values in ways high art cannot. Nonetheless, he has brought to our attention the kinds of affirmations and sanctifications that we desire from popular books in order to help us know our times, past and present.

MARTIN LIGHT



Loren Logsdon and Charles W. Mayer, eds. *Since Flannery O'Connor: Essays on the Contemporary American Short Story*. Macomb: Western Illinois UP, 1987. 152 pp. No price given.

John F. Desmond. *Risen Sons: Flannery O'Connor's Vision of History*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1987. 135 pp. \$18.00.

*Since Flannery O'Connor* could surprise readers who expect a focus on the work and influence of Flannery O'Connor. That subject is literally at the edges of its concerns. This collection of fourteen essays contains four essays on O'Connor, two each bookending the volume. The first two treat O'Connor's "Geranium" and its reworking into "Judgement Day"; the last two discuss O'Connor's influence on the work of Bobbie Ann Mason and Raymond Carver, respectively. In between are essays on the work of a variety of contemporary writers, from Welty and Cheever to Doctorow and Ozick (twice), but nothing on, say, Phillips or Wolff. Presumably some principle guides the selection of writers included, but the only clear foundation is that of all of the writers spotlighted, O'Connor died first. Maybe that is enough.

More surprising is the uneven quality of the essays. Several in this potluck offering are informative, fresh, and engagingly written—let me recommend the pieces on Donald Barthelme by Clarke Owens or the one on postmodern fiction by Lance Olsen—but several others seem to have escaped editorial review. The essay showing the development of the grotesque from O'Connor to Mason is at least one revision from publishable quality. The author does not define "grotesque" and applies the term uncritically to situations in Mason's fiction that are more easily read as conventional realism. Additionally, she attributes a "vigorous espousal of Christianity" to the grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," an astonishing judgment. The author even claims that a critic who has predicted the survival of the grotesque "as long as the South continues to evolve" now "proves his assertion with the publication" of a "collection of essays." Such lapses of judgment and logic should have been remedied, or what is an editor for? Barbara

Lonnquist, on the other hand, writes a compelling essay on the "powerful presence" of O'Connor in the fiction of Raymond Carver. In Carver's as in O'Connor's fiction, Lonnquist argues, meaning is disclosed in moments of epiphany, the dramatization of the "smallest gesture" that produces a "sense of simultaneous recognition and discovery." Here is not the anxiety but the efficacy of influence, Carver's secular accomplishment deepening in the light of his religious precursor even as his work adjusts our understanding of O'Connor. T. S. Eliot would approve. The two essays treating the maturing of "Geranium" into "Judgement Day" are professional and competent pieces.

In a less obvious way, John Desmond's *Risen Sons* relegates O'Connor to the edges of its interest. The stated purpose of the study is to show that "O'Connor's historical sense and her artistic sense [are] inseparable within the creative act." For Desmond, her historical sense derives from "the Incarnation of Christ . . . the event in history which her fiction attempts to imitate." Her artistic technique is to effect this imitation through analogy: "an analogical view of reality is at the core of [her] vision and practice." After a labored chapter building the conceptual framework for his study, Desmond discusses the relation of framework to fiction. He writes an effective chapter on her early neglected work (those stories not included in her two collections), discusses the shortcomings of *Wise Blood*, and gives several of O'Connor's classic pieces a slightly different look. Mrs. Turpin's vision at the end of "Revelation," for example, displaces her from a private and privileged history to one within a "mystical community." Desmond argues further that O'Connor's career discloses a development of her historical vision through her mastery of analogy as a technique. "Geranium," for example, is inferior to "Judgement Day" because the former fails where the latter succeeds in dramatizing "a unification of historical vision and analogical technique."

O'Connor's fiction, however, is only illustrative of Desmond's covert purpose—to elaborate a Christian metaphysics of history. He patches together a metaphysical cart ostensibly designed to pull O'Connor's work into clearer sunlight, but his study is more concerned with the cart than the living fiction. The metaphysics might be justified if the authorities Desmond calls on to construct it were central to O'Connor's own theological formation. He utilizes William Lynch and Eric Voegelin, for example, where O'Connor's library and letters suggest a much richer indebtedness to Jacques Maritain and Teilhard de Chardin. Desmond's olympians reveal, it seems, his spiritual ancestry rather than hers.

In the final three chapters Desmond nearly abandons O'Connor altogether as he presents "theories of the development of consciousness in history." His model of humankind's evolution is neither fresh nor freshly presented, and listing the names of O'Connor characters who illustrate stages of consciousness enlightens us about neither her fiction nor intellectual history.

If the best of this study were distilled, there could be an exciting article showing that in several of her stories O'Connor dramatizes the incarnation of the divine in natural history. As it stands, however, readers must work too hard to unearth what nuggets there are. In addition, Desmond's style is ponderous—"This regression is appropriate in the sense of being retribution for her presumptuous dissociation from the reality of history"—and his diction is curiously unemancipated:

he prefers "Negro" to "black," and men and women alike are always the generic "man." Overall, the book adds disappointingly little to our understanding of O'Connor's accomplishment.

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Richard F. Patteson. *A World Outside: The Fiction of Paul Bowles*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1987. 164 pp. \$18.95 cloth; pb. \$7.95.

Robin Lydenberg. *Word Cultures: Radical Theory and Practice in William S. Burroughs' Fiction*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1987. 222 pp. \$24.95.

Although Paul Bowles continues to be a writer of demonstrable quality, attention from literary critics has been notably sparse. Richard Patteson's *A World Outside* is, therefore, particularly welcome. It is a refreshing study that focuses on Bowles's themes and motifs and makes a persuasive application of structural analysis. Seeing architectural images as fundamental ("Bowles' work is delicately poised between the unacceptable chaos of experience and the unbelievable order of artifice"), Patteson examines the extensive range of Bowles's productions and discovers special merit in *The Spider's House*, that unjustifiably neglected novel.

Patteson traces a basic image—that of a window—to Bowles's earliest recollection of his father, a man with such antipathy toward his son that he tried to kill the six-week old baby by placing him, naked, in an open window during a blizzard. Bowles's difficulties with his father are, of course, part of the novelist's legend. Patteson observes that *Without Stopping*, Bowles's autobiography, may be most profitably regarded as "a book that purports to be a factual account of his life." ("Total recall, with subtle variations," Bowles's old friend Bruce Morrisette has labeled the process.) Patteson's controlled skepticism helps his literary argument, for even autobiography is the product of a shaping imagination. "Bowles' sense of exile and his conviction that 'security is a false concept' have a much deeper explanatory source than the mere fact of living abroad."

Because Bowles's work has so often been thought of in terms of its locale (North Africa and Latin America), the few stories set in North America have received little attention. Consider "How Many Midnights," for instance, which Patteson does consider—and profitably. Bowles thinks this story a failure because "I never think of it." But Patteson believes that those interested in Bowles's predominant themes *should* think of it. Written "in a little cottage up on the mountain in Tangier in the autumn of '47" while the author was at work on *The Sheltering Sky*, that story may have been, as Bowles once said to me, "sort of a vacation