

Reading Flannery O'Connor in Spain: 'Sacred Monstrosities'

In the summer of 2017 an unusual conference took place in Seville, at which Con Casey and Michael Kirwan, of the Loyola Institute, were present. The conference brought scholars and enthusiasts together to discuss the work of the American Catholic writer Flannery O'Connor. The theme was 'from Andalusia to Andalucía', a reference to Andalusia, the name of her family farm in Georgia, and Andalucía, where this conference took place. The event was a fascinating conversation between American and European (mainly Spanish) readers of O'Connor, as we looked for connections between her brand of Southern Gothic and styles such as southern baroque and magic realism. The conference also gave us the first glimpse of a new documentary film, *Flannery*, about the writer and her context in the 'Christ-haunted' South:

<https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2019/oct/18/film-probes-o-connor-her-place-in-chris/>

The essays from this event are now being published as *Reading Flannery O'Connor in Spain: from Andalusia to Andalucía*, eds. Mark Bosco SJ and Beatriz Valverde (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, with University of Jaén Press, Andalucía). As the publishers state:

This collection of essays places Flannery O'Connor's work in constructive and collaborative dialogue with Spanish literature and literary aesthetics. ... They explore O'Connor's literary vision through three interpretive lenses: first, through the relationship of the literary grotesque (a genre that often defines her work) with the Spanish baroque aesthetics that have come to define Spain's artistic heritage; second, through the relationship between O'Connor's literary imagination and the literature of other European writers that broaden the intellectual conversation about her work; and, third, through comparisons with other writers whose Catholic imaginations made their work—as the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins puts it—"counter, original, spare, strange."

Michael Kirwan's essay is entitled "'Andalusia on the Liffey': Sacred Monstrosity in O'Connor and Joyce"; which utilises the 'mimetic theory' of René Girard to look at two Catholic writers (Joyce rejecting his faith, O'Connor's embracing it). Both were masterful short story writers, and a comparison of O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find* with Joyce's *Dubliners* shows up interesting similarities and contrasts in their vision of the capacity for and possibility of human regeneration; in another word, 'grace'. A shorter version of Michael's essay can be found on the online journal of the British Jesuits, *Thinking Faith*:

<https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/flannery-o%20%99connor%20%99s-%20%98sacred-monstrosity%20%99>

In the words of the publishers once again, 'the work of Flannery O'Connor continues to bear rich intellectual and spiritual fruit when engaging with enculturated literary and aesthetic traditions'.

Michael Kirwan