



Flannery O'Connor, Hermit Novelist

Richard Giannone

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'Lord, I'm glad I'm a hermit novelist', Flannery O'Connor wrote to a friend in 1957. Sequestered by ill health, O'Connor spent the last thirteen years of her life on the family farm in rural Georgia, which she claimed was accessible 'only by bus or buzzard'. During this productive, solitary time she became increasingly fascinated by fourth-century Christians who retreated to the desert for spiritual replenishment. In "Flannery O'Connor, Hermit Novelist", Richard Giannone explores O'Connor's identification with these early Christian monastics, a bond that stemmed from her faith as well as her own isolation and physical suffering from lupus, and the ways in which their strange, still voices illuminate her fiction. Distinguishing among various desert calls summoning O'Connor's protagonists to solitude and renunciation, Giannone shows how these characters live out a radical simplicity of ascetic discipline as a means of grappling with their demons and drawing closer to God. Combining discussion of her fiction with biographical detail and excerpts from the writings of the early Christians, Giannone reveals how O'Connor's treatment of the desert brings self-denial and self-scrutiny to bear on the urgencies of modern American life. Through the insights of the ancient monastics, "Flannery O'Connor, Hermit Novelist" not only clarifies the bizarre demonology that has long perplexed O'Connor's readers but also reveals in her fiction an attention to the qualities of inner life and a prescient concern for the rampant evil and dissensions of the outside world.

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