

*Flannery O'Connor: Fiction Fired by Faith.* By Angela Alaimo O'Donnell. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2015. Pp. xiii + 138. \$12.95.

Until recently, most American Catholic histories and anthologies treated the role of women as an afterthought. New narratives have recovered this role with respect to institutional and social facts. Few, however, give voice to fiction, and most overlook the literary imagination of Flannery O'Connor. O'Donnell addresses this lacuna with a succinct yet stunning account of O'Connor as both a brilliant storyteller and an incomparable intellectual. O'D.'s work nuances the biographies of Paul Elie and Brad Gooch through her own theological commentary, delving deeper into the faith behind O'Connor's fiction. The book leaves one wondering whether the self-described "hill-billy Thomist" merits the title theologian. To be sure, *Wise Blood* is no *Summa* or *Method in Theology*. Nevertheless, O'D.'s study crafts a compelling case for the theological acumen behind O'Connor's pen.

The book traces the development of O'Connor's theological worldview with a sympathetic yet critical eye. For instance, O'D. adeptly handles the ambiguities of O'Connor's relationship with Southern racism. Overall, the study charts two theological trajectories in O'Connor's development. The first focuses on her life as a quasi-monastic. After the storyteller's reluctant return to rural Georgia, O'D. highlights how O'Connor lived an informal "vow of stability," such that as she "was growing less capable of going out into the world, it seemed to be coming to her" (75–76). Her regimented observance of mass and her breviary framed her writing at the same time that her fame grew among her contemporaries. Her prayer became her means of an honest pilgrimage that wrestled with light and darkness in the church she loved. In a similar vein, O'D.'s second trajectory details how O'Connor's theology of the Mystical Body undergirds her works. The storyteller's employment of "freaks" and "folks" in her writing reflects what O'D. terms her "literary credo," a worldview embracing the flaws of humanity to unveil the invisible hand of grace and its transformation of evil into good (73). The book's brevity is appropriate for a figure whose short stories have left a lasting mark on American Catholic consciousness. A helpful index is included.

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*The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor.* Edited by Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xxviii + 611. \$150.

This volume, edited by Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, two of the foremost scholars in early Christian and patristic studies both within Australia and abroad, is divided into six parts, each of which contains several contributions that address the saint's context, life, and writings from various angles. Bringing together an array of international scholars from various disciplines, the *Handbook* begins with the "Historical Setting" (3–124), which contains a reconstruction of Maximus's