ABSTRACT

The study interprets the short fiction of two contemporary Roman Catholic writers, the basis of whose art are the fundamental tenets of Christian orthodoxy.

Chapter One introduces Flannery O'Connor and J.F. Powers and fixes their literary positions in the age in which they write. It regards the faith they profess as a common meeting ground and considers the relation between their religious commitment and their fictional aims.

Chapter Two takes up a specific discussion of selected stories of O'Connor and Powers which are secular in setting. A common narrative pattern, which employs violence and the shock of an intruding evil into a quiet, familiar world to create a new dimension of awareness of grace in their protagonists, forms the basis for the considerations of this chapter.

Chapter Three takes up stories based on racial conflict. While the context is social, the basic problem, as identified by each writer, is spiritual. The need for grace irrespective of race and colour is the prime concern. The spiritual maladies which affect mankind gain importance over immediate problems of racial violence in O'Connor and Powers.
Violent confrontations are resolved through spiritual transcendence and Christian charity. Chapter Four considers stories that are openly religious in theme and setting. O'Connor uses native religious elements to express a doctrinal position of orthodox Catholic belief. Grace operates through the most violent and bizarre practice of evangelical Protestantism in the American South. Powers deals with institutional problems of the Roman Catholic Church in detailed comic descriptions of inner rectory life. In the Church and its ministers, Powers finds the redeeming source of grace for a lost, secular world.

Chapter Five draws conclusions to the consideration of O'Connor and Powers as literary artists who express, in fiction, convictions of faith and spirituality in an age that has carelessly discarded these values. Perfectionists in their craft, they produce art of the highest order which rarely descends to propaganda. Their fiction illustrates the working of grace in every context of life through techniques of violence which dispense, in spirit, with the demarcations between secular and religious, sacred and profane.