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THE FICTION OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR AND BUBER'S *I AND THOU*

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2000

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Abstract

There are detailed parallels between the fiction of Flannery O'Connor and the thought of Martin Buber. Martin Buber, the Jewish religious existentialist philosopher and social anthropologist, and Flannery O'Connor, the Southern Catholic writer, share a strong aversion for idealism and endorse realism, which, paradoxical thought it may sound, is the gateway to the divine mystery. They both celebrate the 'here and now', rejecting any metaphysical ideas that may obscure or mar the grandeur of the universe and the miracle of human existence. Moreover, they support that this 'here and now' should lead to the ultimate Thou, both stressing that the pilgrimage to divinity is an arduous course and consists of various stages.

According to Buber, the first stage is a strenuous effort leading to self-consummation, to integration of both parts of the basic pair of one's self—I and Thou—which should develop at the expense of the other pair, I and It. The second stage is the establishment of a community whose pivotal point should be a dialogical communication relied on, and enhanced by, sincere, mutual interaction.

As we delve into the works of Buber and Flannery O'Connor, we encounter striking similarities which lead us to the deduction that the gamut of human feelings and existential anxiety are universal. The writer depicts her characters within the contours of a family or a community whose foundations are constantly undermined by arrogance, a shaky sense of well-being, guilt, intrusions of progress, inroads of sophistication, encroachments upon the pastoral landscape, shallow knowledge and sterile rationalism.

Although, O'Connor's characters are overwhelmed by the emergence and dominance of the It-world, they experience momentary glimpses of revelatory grace. Revelation is either caused by or precipitated after an encounter with an agent of evil, disaster or even death, presented in a grotesque way which alleviates the impact of doom on both the characters and the readers and stirs latent feelings of a mild catharsis.