



Impossible to Say: Representing Religious Mystery in Fiction by Malamud, Percy, Ozick, and O'Connor (Contributions to the Study of World Literature)

L. Lamar Nisly

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Although Judaism and Catholicism have important differences, both religions contain elements of religious mystery, aspects of belief that transcend the rational. Each religion additionally provides believers a concrete method for encountering the numinous: following the commandments in Judaism or partaking of the sacraments in Catholicism. This book studies how Jewish and Catholic practices of giving structure to religious mystery are embodied in the works of Bernard Malamud, Walker Percy, Cynthia Ozick, and Flannery O'Connor.

The volume links Malamud with Percy and Ozick with O'Connor because these Jewish and Catholic authors depict religious mystery in similar ways. Percy and Malamud use the quest form to give shape to mystery. In doing so, they show their characters moving toward a religious commitment. In contrast, O'Connor and Ozick use the grotesque and fantastic to evoke the numinous. Thus they embody the religious mystery that Malamud's and Percy's characters seek to encounter. Whether presenting a movement toward mystery or serving to evoke it, these four authors explore an ineffable dimension that readers need to sense in order to gain a better understanding of their works.

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