



The Institute Newsletter

Spring 2022

Notes from the Executive Director

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Hello!

It's March in Milledgeville, which means the sun is warming and flowers are starting to bloom. It also means it's Flannery O'Connor's 97th birthday this month.

I recently had the honor of interviewing a woman who had been a classmate of O'Connor's at Georgia State College for Women (now Georgia College). She was enthusiastic, thoughtful, and engaging, providing wonderful details about what life was like in Milledgeville during the war years. Aside from the sheer pleasure of talking with her, it made me reflect on the grit and resilience it took to be a young woman in college during that period. What was the future going to bring? What kind of world would they be adults in? These unknowns shaped their understanding and the way they saw their lives.

It certainly seems to have shaped O'Connor's view of the world. I shouldn't be surprised, but I am always intrigued by the variety of ways O'Connor wrote about and reflected this turning point of the 20th century US experience. Whether it's the influence of the war as reflected in "The Displaced Person" or her influence on late 20th century music, her experience has become our experience.

There's a great many new things to celebrate with this issue. Be sure to stay in touch with Andalusia Institute now that spring has come.

Best wishes for productive year---

Irene Burgess

(Thank you to Nissa and Heidi Johnson for the picture of Petey the Peacock)



Keep in Touch!

Your feedback and input are important to what we can accomplish. I invite you to contact me at irene.burgess@gcsu.edu for your ideas of useful programming, projects, and partners. I also invite you to consider donating to the Institute if you have found value in what we do. For information on how to donate, visit our website at www.gcsu.edu/supportandalusiainstitute

Interview with Sarah Gordon

Dr. Sarah Gordon, professor emerita of English at Georgia College and State University, has been an influential voice in O'Connor studies for many years. Her books include *Flannery O'Connor: The Obedient Imagination* and *Flannery O'Connor: In Celebration of Genius*. She was the editor of the *Flannery O'Connor Bulletin* and founding editor of the *Flannery O'Connor Review*. Never fully retired, Dr. Gordon has just released her newest book of poetry, *The Lost Thing: Poems*.



When did you first discover Flannery O'Connor?

When I was an undergraduate, I wrote a collection of short stories for Honors in English. My mentor urged me to read a number of contemporary short story writers for inspiration, including Updike, Cheever, and O'Connor. I tried my best to read them before I graduated, alas, but senior year was too busy. I ended up reading O'Connor the next year, in 1965, while I was working on my master's at the University of Missouri and at the same time becoming much interested in Catholicism. However, my initial response to the stories was laughter, much laughter. O'Connor captured so well the South that I knew; her ear for banalities and the sheer absurdity of life really hooked me. At the time I didn't know much about O'Connor's life, but I had a suspicion that spiritual matters underlay the fiction. I actually made a bet with a friend that if O'Connor was Catholic, I'd take instructions. Of course, she was, I did, and I became a Catholic in 1968. For several years I taught a course at the Newman Center (for the U. of MO) called Religious Themes in Contemporary Literature and Flannery was one of the authors I chose to use. My intense interest in O'Connor has always been linked to my own spiritual seeking. It still is, though I have long since fallen away from the Roman Catholic Church.

What do you think you learned about O'Connor by living in Milledgeville and working at Georgia College?

I was so taken with O'Connor's fiction and her faith that I applied for and got a one-year job as an instructor at Georgia College in 1968. I wanted to absorb her world, I think. That year was eye-opening; I met and got to know Regina O'Connor and learn my way around Milledgeville and the college. When I was finishing my doctorate in Texas in 1973, I was asked if I'd be interested in a full-time position at the college, which had, by that time, obtained the O'Connor papers and library and begun *The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin*, edited by Rosa Lee Walston and Mary Barbara Tate. I was really excited at the prospect of returning to Georgia College. This is a long-winded way of saying how I came to know Flannery's world, some of her friends and family, and how I soon became involved in Milledgeville life. We held our very first O'Connor conference in 1974, with Caroline Gordon, Robert Drake,

Interview with Sarah Gordon (Continued)

and others on the program. I must say that talking with scholars who visited the collection in Russell Library, working with them on articles and books, and planning other O'Connor symposia (five during my tenure) led me to appreciate different points of view, including some I'd have labelled the lunatic fringe, and to understand in a profound way the attraction of O'Connor's work to all kinds of folks in all kinds of ways. I was fortunate, I must say, to have been in on the ground floor, so to speak, of Georgia College's immersion in O'Connor studies. The familiar Shaker hymn has always resonated with me; I have always felt, however strangely, that I "came down where I ought to be." My time in Milledgeville, over thirty years, seems, still, inevitable and right, though it was not always easy. In fact, we were often challenged, early on, to persuade the college's administration of the incredible importance of O'Connor's alma mater to her life and increasingly popular work

If you were to meet O'Connor, what would you like to ask her?

I'd likely ask her about matters of faith. I frequently, even now, "converse" with her about Catholicism, which, of course, I know to be an extremely patriarchal institution, and I admit that I'm often so upset with the church that I can imagine her disgruntlement with me! Someone who is brought up in that traditional faith might find the questions and concerns that I have ludicrous or beside the point; however, I have realized in recent years that I am truly protestant (lower-case) at heart. My Scots Presbyterian family background has risen to the forefront, I confess.

How did you discover your desire to write poetry?

When I was working, years ago, on my senior honors thesis, I began writing poetry (much of it rhymed then!) "on the side." I had taken a wonderful class in modern British and American poetry the year before, and I was, as we like to say, blown away! One of the professors who read my thesis asked me when I was going to turn to poetry, saying that he found my fiction quite lyrical and poetic. That question really gave me license to take myself seriously as a poet. Of course, in my academic career and because of my long and intense involvement with O'Connor studies, I had little time for my own writing. I used to rise very early in the morning to write before I headed out to work. Actually, as I look back, I treasure those pre-dawn hours, the silence and the freedom of time to myself.

As a postscript, I'd like to say that the handsome cover of my new book, *The Lost Thing*, is a painting by the wonderful and immensely talented GCSU alumna Nancy Jay. In reality, the painting is much larger than it appears on the book. In fact, Nancy created a series of peacock paintings for the *O'Connor Review* in the early years of its transition from *The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin* to the *Flannery O'Connor Review*; they are marvelous.

What's something about you that people might not know?

I'm a big fan of what some call Outsider Art, that is to say, folk art, creations by artists untutored but somehow moved to paint or draw or otherwise claim their own visions. I have a small collection in our home. Though it is unpolished and often extravagant in color and form, folk art is essentially cheerful and clever; it makes me happy.



Sarah Gordon

Andalusia Institute Virtual Schedule for Spring 2022

Thursday, March 3: 7:00 (Virtual)-“Popular Music and Flannery O’Connor,” Dr. Irwin Streight, Royal Military College of Canada, author of the forthcoming *Flannery at the Grammys*, discusses the impact that O’Connor’s work has had on contemporary music from Springsteen and REM to heavy metal and Lucinda Williams.

Register at: <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/da3a02f9ce1c41389d21e47d01a9a14a>

Thursday, March 24: 4:30 and 7:00 (Virtual)-Dr. Bruce Gentry leads discussion on Flannery O’Connor’s short story "The Enduring Chill."

Register at: <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/6195578cef2d4e7b985b3ddf9895f458>

Thursday, April 7: 7:00 (Virtual and Live)- “A Lifetime with Flannery O’Connor,” celebrate the release of Dr. Bruce Gentry’s book of his own essays about Flannery O’Connor, *Better to See You With: Perspectives on Flannery O’Connor, Selected and New*, forthcoming from the Mercer University Press.

Register at: <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/8315bb62633249f3be25bd86f7e737df>

Thursday, April 21: 4:30 and 7:00 (Virtual)-Dr. Bruce Gentry leads discussion on Flannery O’Connor’s short story "Revelation." Register at: <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/c72d112e873543218981073db792d53b>

Thursday, May 5: 7:00 (Virtual)-“Flannery O’Connor and Simone Weil,” Ruthann Johansen and E. Jane Doering, authors of *When Fiction and Philosophy Meet: A Conversation with Flannery O’Connor and Simone Weil*.

Register at: <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/49bf87ada1204d558c94d9e584f1c495>

Thursday, May 19: 4:30 and 7:00 (Virtual)- Dr. Bruce Gentry leads discussion on two Flannery O’Connor essays, "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction" and "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South."

Register at: <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/6a0ba83fdf70463aab9e360b292d9b8a>

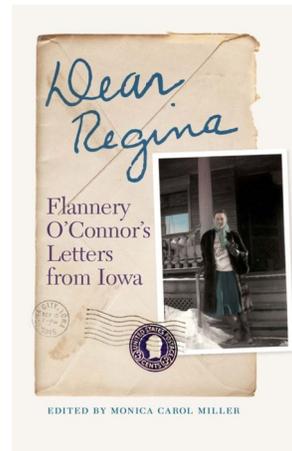
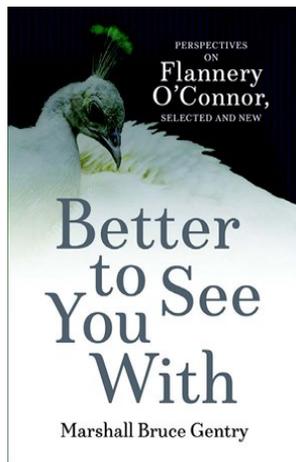
Thursday, June 16: 7:00 (Virtual and Live)-Dr. Monica Miller, release of *Dear Regina: Flannery O’Connor’s Letters from Iowa*, a new book of Flannery O’Connor’s letters to her mother, Regina Cline O’Connor, during the years she was at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop.

Register at: <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/64b85e84dca04f9fbf31649d96a02e80>

New Book Releases

Dr. Bruce Gentry, Professor of English at Georgia College and renowned Flannery O'Connor scholar, has released his book, *Better to See You With: Perspectives on Flannery O'Connor*, Selected and New, through Mercer University Press. Covering a lifetime of writing and thinking about O'Connor, this collection of essays will add immeasurably to the O'Connor critical canon.

Dr. Monica Miller, Associate Professor of English at Middle Georgia and head of the Flannery O'Connor Society, will be releasing her book, *Dear Regina: Flannery O'Connor's Letters from Iowa*, through University of Georgia Press in June. These letters from O'Connor to her mother, Regina Cline O'Connor, during her time at the Iowa Writers' Workshop will provide fascinating and necessary insight to O'Connor's everyday concerns during this period.



Laidlaw Fellowship

The Andalusia Institute of Georgia College offers the Jean M. and William C. Laidlaw Junior Scholar Fellowship to Flannery O'Connor scholars whose work would benefit from access to materials in Ina Dillard Russell Library's Special Collections and the Collection at Andalusia: The Home of Flannery O'Connor. See <https://www.gcsu.edu/andalusiainstitute> under Awards and Opportunities in the Learn More section of the website to learn more about this unique opportunity.

Andalusia Institute

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Committed to the rich, complex literary legacy of Flannery O'Connor, Andalusia Institute provides a venue where scholarship flourishes, the creative process deepens, and knowledge grows through the inspiration of O'Connor's work. As part of the desire to support O'Connor's legacy, the Institute exists to nurture fresh approaches to the arts and humanities through the innovative collaboration of all types of students and learners—artists, community members, and scholars. Situated in Milledgeville, Georgia, Andalusia Institute is at once regional, national, and international in focus, offerings, and educational outreach. Doing our work at the heart of the liberal arts mission of Georgia College, the Andalusia Institute is devoted to the arts and humanities in its many expressions, while contributing to the cultural vibrancy and economic well-being of the community.

Updates from Andalusia: the Home of Flannery O'Connor

It has been an exciting year here at Andalusia. To begin with the biggest change...Me! My name is Cassie Munnell and I am the new curator here at Andalusia, starting in November 2021. A little bit about myself: I received my Bachelor's degree in History with a Minor in English Literature from Agnes Scott College and my Master's degree in Museum Science and Heritage Management with a focus in Museum Science from Texas Tech University. As a Georgia native, I'm very excited to be back in the state after being away in Texas. Getting to join the staff of Andalusia has been a wonderful and exciting experience for me, and I cannot wait to continue working and learning here.

To start the new year, we have just opened a new exhibit called "Drop Me a Card." This exhibit is about the cards and letters that Flannery and Regina received and sent. This exhibit is an exciting start to this year and is on display in the foyer until June 19th and can be viewed at any point during touring hours, Tuesday-Saturday from 10-4 and Sundays from 2-4.

I'm excited about the things to come in 2022. And one thing to come is the return of in-person events. Our first in-person event of the year is on March 9th. This event, which starts at 6 pm, is a performance of "Peacock Feathers", the concept album by Colin Cutler, based on the short stories of Flannery O'Connor. Later in March, there will be the annual celebration of Flannery's Birthday on March 25th. Join us for a celebration with virtual tours of the new exhibition and building, a lecture, and a book signing by Amy Alznauer for her new book "The Strange Birds of Flannery O'Connor – a life," a cake cutting, and free tours of Andalusia. Keep an eye on our website and social media, where we put information about goings-on, and upcoming events.

Hope to see you here at the Museum,

Cassie Munnell, Curator Andalusia, the home of Flannery O'Connor



