“The Stories of Flannery and Faulkner”:
Upcoming Conference in Milledgeville April 2-5

In just a few weeks, Milledgeville and GCSU will host its 7th conference devoted to celebrating and studying the work of Flannery O’Connor, this time in conjunction with the work of another Southern genius of the American literary scene, William Faulkner. Titled “The Stories of Flannery and Faulkner” and slated for April 2-5, it will welcome over two hundred scholars and devotees to Georgia’s antebellum capital and to O’Connor’s own alma mater. Participants, eager to exchange ideas and deepen their understanding, will enjoy a wealth of delightful events. Two keynote addresses are slated. Jay Watson of University of Mississippi will speak on “Faulkner and Flannery: Two Case Histories in the Aesthetics, Psychology, and Economics of the Twentieth Century American Short Story.” Anne Goodwyn Jones of East Carolina University will deliver an address titled “The Burden of Southern History: Flannery, Faulkner, and the Civil War.”

Gordon, Amason, Martin Publish
New Pictorial Guide to O’Connor’s Georgia — Avis Hewitt

With the appearance of this nifty volume on the American literary scene, Gordon, Amason, and Martin have rendered O’Connor studies an invaluable and most engaging service. Featuring more than sixty full-color contemporary photographs, supplemented with numerous black-and-white images from Georgia archives and family holdings, the book enables readers—both visually and with Gordon’s elegant explanatory prose—to experience not only O’Connor’s life history, beginning in Savannah and ending at the Milledgeville dairy farm Andalusia, but also the contemporary status of O’Connor’s legacy. Its features make it a must-have from every O’Connor enthusiast. Providing an overview and chronology of O’Connor’s life, as well as maps to her home sites in Savannah and Milledgeville and the house and grounds of Andalusia, the evocative power of Martin’s gorgeous color photos combined with Sarah Gordon’s ability to bring in exactly the right passages from O’Connor’s fiction, essays, and letters to unlock for readers the imag...
Excitement is brewing on lots of fronts in O'Connor Studies these days. Last May the Betty Hester letters were opened at Emory University, attracting much attention, as well as scholarly presentations by Bill Sessions (Professor Emeritus, Georgia SU) and Ralph Wood (Baylor U). Then in July the NEH sponsored a We the People Summer Institute at Milledgeville, “Reconsidering Flannery O’Connor,” where twenty-four O’Connor scholars participated in a month-long festival of O’Connor-related events and learning activities. Bruce Gentry and John Cox (both of Georgia College & SU) have earned the directing and hosting credit for both that event and the upcoming April 2-5 conference, “The Stories of Flannery and Faulkner” at Milledgeville and on the campus of Georgia College and State University. (See article front-page and below.)

The following month offers two O’Connor sessions—one Friday and one Saturday—at San Francisco’s American Literature Association gathering on Memorial Day Weekend. Remember as well the Sunday paper in a panel on “Sexuality and Southern Women Writers.” and the annual business meeting of the FO’C Society.

We can also look forward to the 2009 conference in Rome, “FO’C: Literature, Letters, and Faith,” sponsored by the Poetics and Christianity Project of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. The dates are April 23-25, and inquiries should be directed to Fr. John Paul Wauck (PUHC) or Hank Edmondson (GCSU). Surely readers continue to be both startled and gratified by the intense interest in and the sheer volume of work on O’Connor. In part, this grand expansion comes from her increasing global appeal and the excitement about her work in non-print media. A search of the MLA database reveals that of the eight articles published on O’Connor in 2007 (excluding, of course, all of those in Volume 5 of the FO’C Review), two of them are in French, one in Japanese, one published in Scandinavia, and one from Senses of Cinema, an on-line film journal. All these fine articles testify to the unplumbed elements of O’Connor’s genius and to the ongoing task of illuminating her relevance to a dramatically changing global scene.

We can anticipate in the next while several new books adding to this effort as well: William Sessions (Georgia SU) and Brad Gooch (William Patterson U) are both preparing biographies of O’Connor. Susan Srigley (Nipissing U) has edited a collection of O’Connor essays titled Violence and Grace: New Essays On The Violent Bear It Away while Bob Donahoo (Sam Houston SU) and I have edited a group called Flannery O’Connor in the Age of Terrorism. Both collections are under review as this issue of the newsletter goes to press. Keep in touch as you create or discover new O’Connor efforts. I hope to see many of you at Milledgeville in April, at San Francisco in May, or in Rome in ’09!

Milledgeville Conference, cont. from pg. 1

by trolley car, take a tour of Central State Hospital with Josephine Keese King, take a walking tour of Milledgeville with Professor Bob Wilson of GCSU’s History Department, attend a reception at Andalusia hosted by Executive Director Craig Amason, participate in the screening of six O’Connor and Faulkner film adaptations (The River, A Circle in the Fire, Good Country People, The Life You Save, The Displaced Person, Barn Burning, The Comforts of Home), hear leading American artist Barry Moser speak on his O’Connor woodcuts and oils, and attend a book signing with Sarah Gordon and Craig Amason to purchase copies of their new book, A Literary Guide to Flannery O’Connor’s Georgia—just published! These spring days in the sunny

Have you purchased your copy of the 2007 Flannery O’Connor Review?

This exciting issue features art by Betty Bivins Edwards, twelve color photographs of the Savannah childhood home by Jane Thimme, four cartoons by Josephine Keese King, six book reviews, and articles by Rebecca Lemov, Charles Clay Doyle, Sarah Gordon, Brad Gooch, Virginia Wray, Mark Bosco, S.J., Carole Harris, John D. Sykes, Jr., Cynthia Barounis, Denise Fidia, Jason Ambrosiano, Donald Hardy, and a translated article by Guadalupe Arbona and Jose Jimenez Lozano.

$15.00 to Bruce Gentry, Editor, FO’C Review, Box 44, Georgia College & State University, Milledgeville, GA 31061
the book. However, much of the success Professor Hardy achieves lies in the fact that, despite the skepticism of people like me, his book amply illustrates the benefits of attempting “to bridge the divide between the sciences and the humanities” (26) by using computer technology to amass statistical data concerning O’Connor’s style—which he elects to see as word choice and grammatical constructions—and offer some sense of its uniqueness and implications.

Hardy begins with a justification for focusing on the body by drawing heavily on recent works by Susan Srigley and Christina St. Geme in opening up troves of evidence from which arguments about meaning can be built—a technique that some readers may wish to skip his third chapter due to its focus on statistical theory, and probably his fourth due to the amount of data concerning O’Connor’s grammar which he elects to see as word choice and grammatical constructions. In his introduction, Hardy warns the reader he claims as his audience that some findings for years. I found his insights range from the fact that The Violent Bear It Away uses more reflexives than O’Connor’s other works to noting that “the ‘found X-self’ construction is used to encode shock and disorientation on the part of the focalized character” (128). Undoubtedly, some future scholar will be able to link such findings to the familiar phrase from the King James Bible that the prodigal son “came to himself” (Luke 15:17) to offer insight into O’Connor’s thought.

The only real drawback to Hardy’s work—other than the dense statistical passages and linguistic terminology—is that he so seldom elects to pursue interpretative possibilities very far, leaving it to his reader to make use of his findings. Still, in opening up troves of evidence from which arguments about meaning can be built and in demonstrating how literature and technology can fruitfully interact, Donald Hardy has provided an important service. This work is likely to prove groundbreaking in more than one field.”

Bieber Lake that use theological and literary arguments to explain the importance of sacramentalism and incarnation in O’Connor’s fiction. Because O’Connor’s thought is grounded in the belief that the divine is manifest in matter, her work puts great emphasis on bodies and body parts that often seem to act apart from the conscious minds of her characters. In O’Connor’s fiction, Hardy writes, ”[t]he body (including individual body parts) celebrates its own agenticity and thus demonstrates the spirit in the flesh, or the flesh as spirit” (8).

To explain exactly how this occurs, Hardy spends much of his second chapter on O’Connor’s grammar—particularly her use of middle voice. Though at times his prose becomes laden with technical linguistic terms that seem far beyond the average reader he claims as his audience, as well as charts of sentences that grow confusing and disconnected, he manages to bring readers back to the central issue: O’Connor’s grammar underscores the importance of agency in her writing, to deciding just who is responsible for what. For Hardy, much of O’Connor’s grotesque lies in her tendency to allow body parts to “act with agency . . . independently of the human agency that is understood to normally control them” (50).

Here as elsewhere, Hardy draws back from offering far-reaching conclusions. However, as the long-continuing debate about the role of the devil in O’Connor’s fiction suggests, the point is an important one. And if this book doesn’t offer a final answer, it certainly makes clear why the debate is possible: by frequently placing agency in body parts—be they Enoch Emory blood or General Sash’s hand clenching his sword “until the blade touched bone,” O’Connor is able to suggest and to deny at the same time the unconscious or instinctual aspect of animal existence and the spiritual war between flesh and spirit.

In his introduction, Hardy warns that some readers may wish to skip his third chapter due to its focus on statistical theory, and indeed running across formulas such as $G^2 = 2 \sum [(\text{Freq}_1 \times \ln(\text{Freq}_1/\text{E}_1)) + (\text{Freq}_2 \times \ln(\text{Freq}_2/\text{E}_2)) + (\text{Freq}_3 \times \ln(\text{Freq}_3/\text{E}_3)) + (\text{Freq}_4 \times \ln(\text{Freq}_4/\text{E}_4))]$ is enough to thwart many a humanities student. Yet even here Hardy offers invaluable proof of assertions many of us have taken on faith. For instance, he shows that O’Connor’s use of “as if” and phrases involving eyes far exceeds that in general writing.
Academically, I have both an undergraduate and a graduate background (either academically or personally) uniquely prepared you to study her work.

DH: I remember very clearly standing in the front yard of a friend whose taste and intelligence I admired. He held up a worn copy of The Complete Stories and said, “Don, this is it. You have to read this.” That was enough recommendation for me. It took several years of reading and rereading for me to appreciate her as much as I do now, but I suppose that’s a common experience with attempting to understand great writers.

I’m a south westerner (from Texas) and was raised a Baptist. I was a child when O’Connor was writing her mature work, but I recognize aspects of her characters both in myself and in others that I grew up with or around. I started reading O’Connor when I was an undergraduate. Academically, I have both English literature degrees and linguistic degrees. I had originally planned to specialize in stylistics in my Ph.D. program, but there were no faculty specialists where I went. I did something equally fascinating to me at the time, studying native American languages, and that interest oddly shows up in this book because one of the languages that I studied, Creek, has a robust middle voice system.

Cheers! In your mind, what are the dangers of “excessive symbol-hunting,” or, as O’Connor said, “strain[ing] the soup too thin,” in analyzing literature? Why did O’Connor have disdain for the “hyperactive literary-critical mind” when she wrote literature that is so ripe for analysis?

DH: I don’t know where to draw the line. When does a soup become unpalatable? I think that depends on the individual. There are some great analyses of O’Connor that rely on symbol-hunting. There are also some that cross the invisible aesthetic line for me. I’m sure I’ve crossed a line for many people in my quantitative sections of this new book. I also don’t know why O’Connor had an aversion to the “hyperactive literary-critical mind.” I’d guess that she wanted to be understood for what she was consciously attempting to communicate in her art and found that a great deal of what was being written and said about her was not consonant with those intentions.

Cheers! How did you first become interested in O’Connor studies? What draws you to her writing? How has your own background (either academically or personally) uniquely prepared you to study her work?

DH: I think that close grammatical analysis of O’Connor’s work is yielding work that is worth the effort.

I think that some of the most interesting stylistic literary readings can be performed on writers one wouldn’t expect to be stylistically interesting. O’Connor is almost too easy because she has such a distinctive style. However, if grammatical analysis can yield interesting results with writers that are not quite so famous for their style, we will know that the method is worth pursuing more widely, both in research and in pedagogy. This kind of work is being done right now all over the world. (84)

Cheers! Do you think O’Connor and other authors are consciously Intentional of their grammatical patterns or are they a natural, unconscious function of the way that author thinks and speaks? In your focus on the author’s grammar, do you also make use of biographical study of the author?

DH: I’m not sure how much writers are consciously aware of their style, or grammatical patterns. Even when they talk about it, I’m not sure we can trust them. If I were a creative writer, I don’t think that I would want to give away every secret of my style.

However, biographical detail is important because what O’Connor, for example, did say about what she was trying to do, how she lived her life, how she coped with her illness—all of those details show up in her writing. Those details give us real signposts for understanding. An oral story told by a friend is almost always more revealing and interesting to me than one told by a stranger.

Cheers! How is grammar “incarnational”?

DH: Language is incarnational of our spirits and thoughts and God, as many others have pointed out is made clear in Biblical texts. One of the most enigmatic of mysteries besides just the questions of the why and the where of the ontological reality of the world is the perfect marriage of spirit and material in language. Language would be impossible if we were disembodied voices. As many scholars have pointed out, language depends in its form, structure, intent, and meaning on the fact that we are walking around in bodies. (90)

Cheers! Is O’Connor unique in giving subjectivity to body parts, implying that they have minds of their own? How does this practice relate to her Catholic and sacramental worldview and how does it go against the grain of modern thought?

DH: She isn’t unique. I talk about several studies in my book that have pointed out this pattern in
other writers like Sherwood Anderson, for example. I think that this practice goes against the grain of modern thought only in the sense that the grotesque is in many modern writers is just simply that—grotesque. It has no spirituality—no purpose—driving the grotesque. It’s there like a carnival sideshow, but there’s no one talking about or implying how God intended us to be this way.

Cheers!: How does O’Connor’s fiction and language illustrate the limitations—and the possibilities—of human knowledge?

DH: That is the topic of my first book on O’Connor: Narrating Knowledge in Flannery O’Connor’s Fiction. It’s a huge topic, and it is manifested grammatically in hundreds of ways, only a few of which was I able to talk about in that book. O’Connor’s use of false presupposition is wonderfully comic. Her characters almost always know wrongly or incompletely, and the stylistics of false knowledge concentrates in verbs of cognition (e.g., know, realize, remember). Readers can be fairly certain that whatever O’Connor’s characters think they know, realize, remember is wrong. This false knowledge is, of course, a source of great humor in O’Connor, but it is also a source of great illumination of our place in the world, stuck between knowing and not-knowing.

Cheers!: What specific computer software do you utilize in “computational stylistics” and how is it invaluable to your studies?

DH: I wrote the software that I use in my own work, all in the language PERL, which is a great language for text analysis. The software is valuable in my own literary and more purely linguistic studies because I can see and alter the interior structure of the program. I can modify the program to handle specific texts and datasets. For example, I am now radically altering the interior of my program for use on large syntactically-parsed data sets, that is, data that have been parsed for sentence structure to the degree that is possible for example, to go in and pull every single relative clause out of millions of words of data and automatically classify those relative clauses by interesting structural patterns.

Cheers!: Is literary study scientific, and should it be?

DH: Literary study does not have to be scientific, and I don’t think that scientific study is inherently more valuable than non-scientific study. What I think is frequently missed is that a good bit of literary study is already scientific in the sense of formulating falsifiable hypotheses and reformulation and development of ever more robust hypotheses. Those hypotheses could frequently benefit from including linguistic formulations as well.

Cheers!: How does The Body in Flannery O’Connor’s Fiction build on what has been written before?

DH: Two of the most recent influential books for me are Susan Srigley’s Flannery O’Connor’s Sacramental Art and Christina Bieber Lake’s The Incarnational Art of Flannery O’Connor. Some of the more linguistically oriented O’Connor work that I’ve built on in both of my books is that by Joanne Halieran McMullen and David R. Mayer.

Other influential works are far too numerous to mention. I’ve tried very hard to make explicit my use of insights from others in my book and credit those many scholars whose work mine builds upon.

I think that the main thing that I’ve done in this most recent book that is valuable is a very close and detailed attention to the lexicon and grammar surrounding the use of the body and body parts in O’Connor. Secondly, I’ve tried to explain the methodology as thoroughly and as clearly as I possibly could.

Cheers!: Explain the focus of your next book, The Modern Grotesque Gap: The Hideous and the Humorous, and how it relates to O’Connor.

DH: The narrative gap is generally understood to be an absence in the string of narrative events. The narrative gap depends on the reader’s complicity in filling the gap for gestalt narrative closure. Thus, it is a further development of the intersection of the grotesque and the limitations of human knowledge. Some theorists of the gap include Millicent Bell, Wolfgang Iser, Michael Toolan, Gerald Prince, and Peter Wilson. Narrative complicity is marked by other linguistic and stylistic features that co-occur with the gap, such as presupposition, supposition, implicature, and entailment. Among the authors that I discuss are Flannery O’Connor, Cormac McCarthy, William Faulkner, Edgar Allan Poe, Sherwood Anderson, Truman Capote, Edward Lewis Wallant, Nathanael West, and David Sedaris. The book will be a contribution in the development of a general stylistics of narrative gaps, a development of Hardy (2005, “Towards a Stylistic Typology of Narrative Gaps: Knowledge Gapping in Flannery O’Connor’s Fiction” Language and Literature 14.4: 363-75), in which the beginnings of this specific typology are delineated. What is new about this book is the application of the typology not only to the grotesque and to general epistemological patterns of pragmatics and syntax, but also to the wider range of authors named.
The Sarah Gordon Award

$500 Prize for the best article written by a graduate student on Flannery O’Connor and/or Southern Studies. Entrant must be a graduate student as of August 1, 2008. Articles must be submitted between April 1, 2008, and August 1, 2008, to be considered for the 2008 award. The 2008 award will go to an article using any approach.

Please note: All entries will be considered for publication in the Flannery O’Connor Review. Articles must conform to the usual submission guidelines outlined in the Review.

Mail submissions to:
Flannery O’Connor Review
Sarah Gordon Award
Department of English, Speech, and Journalism
Campus Box 44
Georgia College and State University
Milledgeville, GA 31061

With energetic balance A Literary Guide introduces O’Connor as having used her “here-and-now” to provide “an avenue to asking the most compelling questions of our existence, those involving the meaning and purpose of life as viewed under the aspect of eternity” and as repeatedly having “attack[ed] smugness, superiority, and, most importantly, unbelief” in a world where original sin makes all of us “displaced persons, imbued with the capacity for willfulness and arrogance,” and affords us a “foolish trust in progress and technology,” which finally “leads us to a false sense of autonomy, to selfishness, and to manipulation of others” (xi). As the University of Georgia Press notes, this book is “a visually stunning guide to the physical world of a profoundly spiritual, wildly imaginative writer.” Its pages are a place where souls and spaces meet. Note: All author royalties from sales of the guide will be donated to the Flannery O’Connor-Andalusia Foundation.

Seven in ‘06 and ‘07: Recent Dissertations on O’Connor


Anthology of O’Connor Tribute Stories Planned

Doug Davis of Gordon College reports that “small press Payseur & Schmidt is planning to do a lavishly illustrated/packaged chapbook anthology of four recent O’Connor tribute stories, including Duncan’s ‘Unique Chicken Walks in Reverse,’ plus stories by Michael Bishop, F. Brett Cox and John Kessel. (In 2004, Duncan and Cox edited a volume called Crossroads: Tales of the Southern Literary Fantastico, which includes Kessel’s O’Connor-inspired sequel to ‘Good Man,’ ‘Every Angel is Terrifying.’) I remain intrigued by how much O’Connor continues to inspire contemporary fantasy and sf authors; I speculate that it has to do with her ability to realize the supernatural in contemporary settings.”

Cheers!
Due March 14:
Flannery O’Connor: Critical Intersections

November 6-8, 2008
San Antonio, Texas
Flannery O’Connor’s stories, novels, essays, letters, and interviews reveal a writer concerned with her relationship to the South, to regional identity, and to racial politics.

In light of the theme of “Borders” for the 2008 conference of the South Central Modern Language Association, the Flannery O’Connor Society seeks proposals for papers that consider O’Connor’s work as intersecting with a variety of critical disciplines, including (but not limited to) new southern studies, cultural studies, hemispheric American studies, and studies of critical race theory.

Please send 250-500 word abstracts to Noah Mass at the University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station, Stop B5000, Austin, TX 78712, or via e-mail to: noahmass@mail.utexas.edu.

Due March 20:
Women Writers Representing Masculinities

Papers that address ways in which contemporary American women writers are constructing and/or critiquing masculinities in their work. Such analyses may examine popular women’s literature, such as Chick Lit or its derivatives, or more ‘literary’ work. Papers should look at how women writers are representing masculinities and how this may be influencing contemporary American women’s writing, new visions of femininity, understandings of nationalism, etc. Subtopics may include: masculinity and nation, distinct American masculinities, white masculinity, ethnic masculinities, feminist theory/ masculinity studies, postfeminist theories, consumerism and fashioning femininity, men as consumable objects.

Send 250-word abstracts of presentation paper ideas to karosteguy@wsu.edu along with a brief bio and contact information.

Also Due March 20:
Conference on Southern Writers, Southern Writing

In conjunction with the Annual Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference: the graduate students in the Departments of English and Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi invite you to submit abstracts exploring Southern culture. Accepted submissions will be presented in Oxford, Mississippi, July 17th-19th, 2008. Topics for papers or panels are not restricted to literature. They may include: ecocriticism, travel narratives, nature writing and the Southern landscape, religion, gothic and the grotesque, folklore, material culture and community, letters, diaries, and cookbooks, oral culture, music, and food representation in Southern culture and literature, the South in global contexts, race, gender, class, and identity.

Please send 200–300 word abstracts of critical work or entire creative works to: swswgradconference@gmail.com.

LitertaryTraveler.com Offers O’Connor Tour

Flannery O’Connor Tour: Mystery and Manners in Savannah, April 6-10, 2008

Literarytraveler.com is offering a Flannery O’Connor-themed tour of Savannah and Milledgeville, Georgia with accommodations at the Marshall House in Savannah’s historical district, discussions led by Nancy Carr and Mary Barbara Tate and tours of her childhood home in Savannah and family farm in Milledgeville.

For more information: www.literarytraveler.com/tours/flannery_oconnor_georgia_tour.aspx

$1,920 plus $320 single supplement include all readings, accommodation, discussion, guided walks, two meals per day, informal talks, admission fees, and private coach excursion to Milledgeville and Andalusia.

Like what you’re reading? Join The Flannery O’Connor Society. Send $10 annual dues (or $100 lifetime dues) to Robert Donahoo, English and Foreign Languages Department, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX 77341.

Please send O’Connor news items to Avis Hewitt at hewitta@gvsu.edu.
Recent Publications


LHH 127
Department of English—110000-40225-123
Grand Valley State University
1 Campus Drive
Allendale, MI 49401
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED