From the President’s Desk

Happy new year! This newsletter finds me trying to find my way back to the rhythm of a new semester, after what always seems like a much-too-short winter break and a quick trip to Seattle for the Modern Language Association’s annual conference. Despite the passage of time, though, interest in Flannery O’Connor in both academia as well as popular culture continues to be strong.

Perhaps one of the most exciting examples of this is the forthcoming documentary *Flannery*, directed by Elizabeth Coffman and Mark Bosco. I know some of you have seen early cuts of this documentary; there was a screening at Andalusia a little over a year ago, and the filmmakers are continuing to screen the film at various film festivals. In October, it was the first recipient of the prestigious Library of Congress Lavine/Ken Burns Prize for Film, which includes an award of $200,000 to finish the film. The film includes interviews with a wide variety of people, from Alice Walker to Conan O’Brien, who have been influenced by O’Connor’s work. It’s wonderful to see this film getting so much attention, as it does a great job of presenting O’Connor’s words not only in her own voice, but also using striking visuals and narration. The trailer (available for viewing here) provides a good sense of the larger documentary, which incorporates interviews, archival footage of both historical events and of O’Connor herself, along with engaging animation of her stories. I am hopeful that the Library of Congress award bodes well for the film’s completion as well as a wide distribution of the film.

I myself have been struck by the continued wide-ranging appeal of O’Connor’s work as I have been working on a new edited collection about southern literature more
more broadly. As I have been working through the proposals for the new Routledge Companion to Literature of the American South with my co-editors, it’s been surprising to see how many proposals for topics include references to O’Connor. Certainly, we expected to receive proposals including her for topics such as “religion” or “southern gothic,” but her work has been referenced in so many more, including immigration, humor, displacement, southern cityscapes, the “lost cause” mythology, science and technology, and even Ireland. While it has added to the challenge of editing this collection, it has been heartening to see that scholars continue to recognize the continued relevance of her work, especially in the midst of current debates about immigration and the role of Confederate monuments.

While I personally wish that stories such as “The Displaced Person” would stop having such relevance to current events, I have been especially drawn to the ways in which this story has been used in the classroom and the contemporary authors with whom this story has been paired. Most notably, I have been thinking about Carole K. Harris’s essay in Approaches to Teaching the Works of Flannery O’Connor (the wonderful new book edited by Robert Donahoo and Marshall Bruce Gentry, featured on page 5 of this issue of Cheers), in which she discusses teaching the story along with work by the Dominican American author Junot Diaz in an Introduction to Fiction course. I was especially struck by the ways in which Harris’s students, many of whom were immigrants or children of immigrants, identified with the O’Connor’s depiction of the immigrant experience in this story. By putting O’Connor’s work in conversation with Diaz’s, Harris provides her students with a rich constellation of readings from which to draw a complicated picture of American immigration.

I’m always looking for new approaches to teaching O’Connor, and this entire collection is spurring a lot of new thoughts. What would happen if I put “The Displaced Person” in a unit along with Diaz and poet Warsan Shire? Or with an excerpt from Louisa May Alcott’s Work? What other contemporary voices might O’Connor work well in discussion with?
UPCOMING CONFERENCES

AND FLANNERY THIS AND THAT

AMERICAN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION, May 21-24, 2020 in San Diego, CA
Flannery O'Connor Society Session
Topic: The Laughter of Flannery O'Connor. Too late for submissions, but if you want more information about the panel, contact Robert Donahoo at eng_rxd@shsu.edu

INTERNATIONAL FLANNERY O'CONNOR CONFERENCE, June 18-21 at St. Michael’s College, University of Toronto, Canada.
“No Kind of Place: Location, Migration, and Imagination”
For more information, contact Susan Srigley at susans@nipissingu.ca.

AND STILL LOOKING AHEAD...
Bruce Gentry is planning an O’Connor conference for March 2021 in Savannah. This will be in conjunction with the American Literature Association. Anyone who wants to be kept informed about that conference may email Bruce at bruce.gentry@gcsu.edu.

FLANNERY O’CONNOR SCULPTURES
Mud House Art and Literature <mudhouseart@gmail.com> has produced busts, half busts, Christmas ornaments and wall reliefs that feature Flannery O’Connor. If you are interested in purchasing a product, you can see their site at our site.

FLANNERY O’CONNOR SOCIETY PUBLIC FACEBOOK PAGE!
Thanks to the skills of Matt Bryant Cheney, the Society’s underpaid techie, we now have a public Facebook page. Many have joined the group already—let’s get more members of the Society to lend their voices to the discussion!

CONTACTS
For society membership questions or suggestions for inclusions in Cheers!, contact Colleen Warren at clwarren@taylor.edu

For suggested updates to the Flannery O’Connor Society website, contact Matt Bryant Cheney at mbryantcheney@cn.edu

For questions about or submissions to The Flannery O’Connor Review, contact Bruce Gentry at bruce.gentry@gcsu.edu
O’Connor Publications

Articles and Books: 2018-2019


FEATURED SCHOLARSHIP: Approaches to Teaching the Works of Flannery O’Connor
Robert Donahoo and Bruce Marshall Gentry, eds.

Introduction: Teaching on the Borders (1)
Robert Donahoo

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