

O'CONNOR, FLANNERY.

Letters to Betty Hester,1955-1964

Emory University
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Descriptive Summary

Creator: O'Connor, Flannery.
Title: Letters to Betty Hester,1955-1964
Call Number: Manuscript Collection No.1064
Extent: 1.25 linear ft. (3 boxes)
Abstract: Letters from Georgia-born author Flannery O'Connor to Betty Hester.
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Restrictions on Access

Special restrictions apply: The use of personal cameras is prohibited.

Collection stored off-site. Researchers must contact the Rose Library in advance to access this collection.

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Source

Gift, 1987.

Citation

[after identification of item(s)], Flannery O'Connor, Letters to Betty Hester, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Processing

Processed by Kathy Shoemaker, December 2006.

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Collection Description

Biographical Note

American novelist and short story writer, Mary Flannery O'Connor was born to Edward Francis and Regina Cline O'Connor in Savannah, Georgia, on March 25, 1925. She attended parochial schools in Savannah before moving to Milledgeville after the death of her father in 1941. After finishing high school in Milledgeville, she attended the Georgia State College for Women (now Georgia College & State University) where she received a B.A. in social science in 1945. After graduating from college she earned a scholarship to the Iowa Writers Workshop. She graduated from Iowa in 1947, then spent parts of 1948 and 1949 at Yaddo, an artists' colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. After becoming ill with lupus in December 1950, she moved in with her mother at Andalusia, a farm near Milledgeville, where she lived until her death on August 3, 1964.

Shortly after the publication of *A Good Man is Hard to Find* in 1955, O'Connor began a correspondence with Hazel Elizabeth "Betty" Hester. Hester was born in Rome, Georgia in 1923 and attended Young Harris College. After serving in the U.S. Air Force in Germany shortly after World War II, she then moved to Atlanta. Under O'Connor's mentoring, Hester became a Roman Catholic in 1956, choosing O'Connor as her godmother. She remained a convert until 1961, reverting to her original atheism. She was occasionally invited to visit O'Connor at Andalusia, the family farm where O'Connor lived with her mother outside of Milledgeville. Betty Hester committed suicide in Atlanta on December 27, 1998.

Publication Note

A selection of O'Connor's letters to Betty Hester were originally published in 1979 in *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor* edited by Sally Fitzgerald. Hester made the letters available to Sally Fitzgerald for publication with the stipulation that she was to remain anonymous. She is identified as "A" in Fitzgerald's work. Other letters edited by Sally Fitzgerald appear in *Collected Works* by Flannery O'Connor, which was published in 1988.

Scope and Content Note

The collection includes a significant cache of letters from Flannery O'Connor to Betty Hester which spans nine years, from 1955 to 1964, and offers insight into O'Connor's approach to her faith and to her writing. There are approximately 250 letters and the majority of them are written from Milledgeville at a rate of 2-3 times a month. Reflecting the intellectual nature of their exchanges, the letters contain references to writers, philosophers, and psychologists, including Thomas Aquinas, Sigmund Freud, Caroline Gordon, Graham Greene, Baron Friedrich von Hugel, Henry James, Robert Lowell, Francois Mauriac, Katherine Anne Porter, Bryon Reece, and Simone Weil.

In addition to the dominant themes of theology, writing and literature, O'Connor addresses a spectrum of topics, including various friendships, familial relationships, speaking engagements, exchanges of books and clippings, feminism, and life on a rural farm. She also comments on the televised adaptation of "The Life You Save" by the Schlitz Playhouse of Stars, which aired March 1, 1957, and starred Gene Kelly (in his television debut) and Agnes Moorhead. There is also mention of a proposed film adaptation by Robert Jiras of O'Connor's short story

"The River." Throughout the letters, O'Connor's acute powers of observation and her wry and irreverent sense of humor are strongly evident.

The manuscripts include one short story by Betty Hester titled "The Joys of the Fittest," and two short stories by O'Connor titled "Greenleaf" and "A View of the Woods". "Greenleaf," which was originally published in *The Kenyon Review*, was awarded first prize in the O. Henry Award competition in 1957 and "A View of the Woods" published in *Partisan Review* took third prize in 1959. Also present is a separate folder of clippings O'Connor mailed to Hester as individual items of interest.

Arrangement Note

Arranged by record type.

Container List

Correspondence

Box	Folder	Content
1	1	July-December 1955
1	2	1956
1	3	January-June 1957
1	4	July-December 1957
1	5	January-June 1958
1	6	July-December 1958
1	7	January-June 1959
2	1	July-December 1959
2	2	January-June 1960
2	3	July-December 1960
2	4	January-June 1961
2	5	July-December 1961
2	6	January-June 1962
2	7	July-December 1962
2	8	January-June 1963
3	1	July-December 1963
3	2	January-July 1964

Manuscripts

3	3	"Greenleaf," March 12, 1956, 31 pp., and "A View of the Woods," December 21, 1956, 29 pp., two short stories by O'Connor together in one binder sent to Betty Hester
3	4	Four sheets of handwritten notes of criticism by O'Connor of an unidentified piece of fiction by Betty Hester, [1959]; see letter dated March 27, 1959
3	5	"The Joys of the Fittest," short story by Betty Hester with suggestions for revisions in O'Connor's hand, 9 pp., returned to Hester in envelope postmarked June 7, 1960

Clippings

3	6	Clippings mailed to Betty Hester from O'Connor, 1956-1961
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Photographs

3	7	Sally Fitzgerald, Bill Sessions and wife, and Betty Hester, circa 1980s
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