



PROJECT MUSE®

*Flannery O'Connor: The Cartoons* ed. by Kelly Gerald  
(review)

Joseph M. Flora

Mississippi Quarterly, Volume 65, Number 2, Spring 2012, pp. 330-333 (Review)

Mississippi  
Quarterly

The Journal  
Of Southern Culture

Edited by  
O'Connor, Styron,  
Williams, Faulkner, Cheever,  
and Faulkner

Vol. 65, No. 2 Spring 2012

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mss.2012.0019>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/740955/summary>

*Flannery O'Connor: The Cartoons*, edited by Kelly Gerald. Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2012. ix, 141 pp. \$22.95.

PUBLICATION OF THIS GATHERING OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S CARTOONS from her high school and college years is cause for celebration. O'Connor's readers are wont to chuckle over descriptions of her characters, and teachers frequently mention her habit of seeing them as cartoons. From childhood onward, she drew images to accent what might also be said through words. Thanks to Kelly Gerald, readers can now realize in depth the connection between O'Connor's cartoon habit and her vision of the world and more fully understand her genius.

The cartoons date from O'Connor's years at Peabody High School and at Georgia State College for Women. They appeared regularly in *The Peabody Palladium* (the student newspaper) and, more extensively, in *The Colonnade* (the student newspaper at Georgia State College for Women); she became art editor of both. At the college she had multiple opportunities to display her skills. *The Alumnae Journal* reprinted cartoons from *The Colonnade* and added two others drawn just for the journal. It dubbed O'Connor "The Cartoon Girl." O'Connor's cartoons also enhanced the pages of *The Corinthian*, the college's journal for creative writing and the arts. Her work for *The Spectrum*, the annual yearbook, culminated in 1945, her senior year, when she served as feature editor. Alumnae looking back at their years at GSCW can do so by revisiting O'Connor's depiction in picture and word of life in "Jessieville." ("Jessies" was the affectionate name for women at the college; "Jimmies" populated Milledgeville's Georgia Military College.) The rich totality depicts the aspirations and talents of their creator.

Barry Moser's introduction explains the process of linoleum prints, the medium O'Connor used to create the cartoons, and judges the work with the eyes of the professional artist and printmaker. Though the prints are "unpolished," Moser appreciates a sustained style and the skill at creating gesture. Skillfully, he makes the process of lithograph art (cut backward to move forward) metaphoric for the fiction O'Connor would write.

Kelly Gerald, whose Ph.D. dissertation examined O'Connor's cartoons, follows the cartoon gallery with a splendid survey of O'Connor's aspirations during the formative years when the satirical cartoonist envisioned a career in journalism. Gerald identifies the

influences that helped shape O'Connor's practices in the cartoon medium, being careful to ground the reader in the circumstances of O'Connor's life, the community, and the institutions she attended. Always, Gerald is aware that the marvel lies in the fiction the prints anticipate.

But the pleasure in these prints just for themselves cannot be denied. They reward many visits and invite many perspectives. We do not view them in the same way that their first viewers, O'Connor's classmates, did. Those viewers did not see them as a collection, but they soon recognized a familiar perspective that critiqued their lives and their times. They looked forward to the arrival of the bi-weekly paper carrying the distinctive cuts with inscription by "MFOC," just as elsewhere readers anticipated the signature cartoons of James Thurber or Bill Mauldin. Viewing them together now, we realize how the young Mary Flannery O'Connor, an only child who grew up in highly protective circumstances, living at home through her college graduation, distinguished herself on campus. When she graduated, she had an entry in *Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities*.

After their first tour through the gallery, readers will want to revisit, now keeping a finger on the "Art Credit" section at the end of the book. It notes the outlet where the cartoon first appeared and provides information about its circumstances or setting. Looking more closely, we appreciate not only the fun of the images, but young Mary Flannery's questioning mind. Several cartoons anticipate later concern about American education, a theme she would confront in her fiction and lectures. The women attending GSCW were preparing to be teachers. Like Sally Poker of "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," O'Connor took courses in Education, presumably to teach Social Science, her major. The cartoon on page forty-nine shows a student (carrying two books) telling another (carrying no books) that "Kilpatrick was fair." The credit note tells us that William Heard Kilpatrick visited GSCW to promote the educational philosophy of John Dewey, one that accented student interests and promoted experience learning. O'Connor would not be of the Dewey persuasion and in her adult life lamented that the classics had not been part of the curriculum. Another cartoon shows a student at the circulation desk asking, "Do you have any books the faculty doesn't particularly recommend?" (A library survey at the college to determine how the library might improve its services triggered this cartoon.)

The cartoon that Gerald chose for the dust jacket is among the most memorable. Drawn for the 1944 yearbook, it portrays seven students, seated, waiting for something to happen. One reads a book (we can't help thinking of Mary Grace in O'Connor's late story "Revelation"); another reads a newspaper. The other women appear bored, isolated. Each student wears a baggy sweater. (Dress here as in other cartoons mirrors the conformity of the time.) The Art Credit note informs us that the picture represents GSCW clubs. The reality of club life, the satire declares, does not match its press.

The students O'Connor depicts are not always so dour. Her cartoons catch them in numerous stances. Even though she never lived in a GSCW dormitory, O'Connor participated in student life, never standing too far from the foibles she portrays. She understands frustration with professors and administrators, understands the importance of dances and the social preoccupation of the majority of her classmates. One image (35) portrays a campus dance. At the fore is a seated student wearing the prescribed formal but also glasses. While three couples dance, two of them joyously, the student looks at us and smiles, "Oh, well, I can always get a Ph.D."

The southern women's college of O'Connor's era would not, of course, remain cloistered for long. One cartoon shows two young Milledgeville lads walking by the college. One says to the other, "I hope the rules of that place slacken before we start going out with girls" (51). Indeed, the college would partner in profound change. O'Connor's college years, 1942-45, parallel America's participation in World War II. Milledgeville and the campus were altered, each designated a training center for US Navy WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service). In 1943 the WAVES arrived. The women of GSCW making their way to classes grew accustomed to seeing regiments of WAVES marching down campus paths. Numerous cartoons show the students being crowded from their space, making way for another (perhaps more adventurous?) kind of woman. O'Connor was already becoming another kind of woman, certainly one attentive to vast changes in the nation and the world.

We know her better because of *Flannery O'Connor: The Cartoons*. Let us rejoice! The book brings much pleasure. Each section is handled with care, and the parts work together splendidly. The price should keep

no admirer from owning it, and it would make a lovely gift. Cheers to Kelly Gerald and to all who aided her.

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

*Joseph M. Flora*

*A Mess of Greens: Southern Gender and Southern Food*, by Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011. 248 pp. \$69.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper, \$24.95 ebook.

*Stirring the Pot: The Kitchen and Domesticity in the Fiction of Southern Women*, by Laura Sloan Patterson. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2008. 240 pp. \$39.95 paper.

FOOD AND THE KITCHEN ARE NOT QUITE NEW TOPICS IN SOUTHERN LITERARY criticism. A special issue of the *Southern Quarterly* edited by Peggy Prenshaw in 1992 contained important essays by Patricia Yaeger, Minrose Gwin, Mary Ann Wimsatt, and other critics that set the terms for recent discussions of food and literature. Foodways studies have developed over the past few decades as an area of inquiry within both the social sciences and the humanities with a distinct interdisciplinary methodology that uses food to examine social organization and cultural values. More recently, Southern food has taken on scholarly significance as the focus of the Southern Foodways Alliance based at the University of Mississippi and as the subject of several cultural studies. Critical works have emerged in the past few years that incorporate the methods of foodways study into the analysis of Southern texts, such as Psyche Williams-Forsen's *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs* and Andrew Warnes's *Savage Barbecue*. *A Mess of Greens: Southern Gender and Southern Food*, by Elizabeth Engelhardt, and *Stirring the Pot: The Kitchen and Domesticity in the Fiction of Southern Women*, by Laura Sloan Patterson, combine foodways analysis with feminist theory to develop nuanced and revealing interpretations of twentieth-century women's novels and, perhaps more importantly, Southern women's lives.

Elizabeth Engelhardt begins *A Mess of Greens* with an extended meditation on an idealized Southern meal from her childhood, a memory based on summers spent with her family in the North Carolina mountains, where fresh tomatoes, fried chicken, potato salad, and homemade peach ice cream covered picnic tables. Her nostalgia gives