The habit of being

Printed in the United States of America

Published simultaneously in Canada

by McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., Toronto

Designed by Cynthia Krupat

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

O'Connor, Flannery / The habit of being

Includes index

1. O'Connor, Flannery—Correspondence

2. Novelists, American—20th century—Correspondence

I. Fitzgerald, Sally / II. Title

PS3565.C57Z48 1978 / 813'.5'4 [B] / 78-11559

To Regina Cline O'Connor

in gratitude for letting readers

come to know her daughter better

Contents

Introduction

Among the papers in the Flannery O'Connor Memorial Room of the library of her college, Georgia College, in Milledgeville, I came across a tiny, scrappy notebook, about three inches by four, kept by Flannery when she was twelve. It was scrappy in both senses of the word. On the first page a warning to snoopers—"I know some folks that don't mind thier own bisnis"—called me to order and reminded me that it would be well to walk gingerly through her correspondence, bearing in mind what she herself would have objected to as a breach of privacy, particularly the privacy of her friends. No great loss, for there was something here of much greater interest. Reading through her letters, I felt her living presence in them. Their tone, their content, and even the number and range of those she corresponded with, revealed the vivid life in her, and much of the quality of a personality often badly guessed at.

Katherine Anne Porter wrote to Flannery's friends, the Gossetts, after they had taken her to lunch with Flannery and her mother at the farm, "I am always astonished at Flannery's pictures which show nothing of her grace. She was very slender with beautiful, smooth feet and ankles; she had a fine, clear, rosy skin and beautiful eyes. I could wish I had some record of her as she appeared to me . . ."

Most of her friends wish the same thing, both literally and figuratively. But she was not photogenic in maturity, or at least the camera was often as unjust as what was written about her. I have come to think that the true likeness of Flannery O'Connor will be painted by herself, a self-portrait in words, to be found in her letters. Read in sequence—from the beginning in 1948, when she wrote asking Elizabeth McKee to become her literary agent,

through to the last note of 1964 on her bedside table, waiting to be posted—her letters sketch the lineaments, add the chiaroscuro of depth and space and the color of life itself. There she stands, to me, a phoenix risen from her own words: calm, slow, funny, courteous, both modest and very sure of herself, intense, sharply penetrating, devout but never pietistic, downright, occasionally fierce, and honest in a way that restores honor to the word. Perhaps because I remember her as smiling and laughing often when she was a part of our family in the Connecticut woods, her self-portrait wears, for me at least, a smile I recall very clearly. The mindless camera records on Flannery's face the ravages of ill health; her letters wipe them all away, not in a cosmetic sense, but by means of something that lay within and imparted the fine clarity and youthfulness Katherine Anne Porter perceived. And her offhand way of speaking of her physical ordeal, when she did, tells more about her gallantry than any encomium could make real.

Letters were always important to her. When she lived with us, she took a daily walk to the mailbox, half a mile away at the bottom of our ridge. One thing it always contained was a letter from Regina O'Connor, who wrote to her, and to whom she wrote, every single day. This daily exchange of news and talk between them ought to be mentioned, just to keep the record straight, since none of those letters will appear in the collection. Flannery shared news items from Milledgeville with us, and we came to feel that we knew all her kin well, long before we met them. Her strong family feeling was manifest even then.

On the subject of Mrs. O'Connor herself, I can report a remark that Flannery made to me the last time I talked to her. She told me that she had fully come to terms with her confinement, and with the physical danger in which she lived; that she had, in fact, only one great fear—that her mother would die before she did. "I don't know," she said, "what I would do without her." The letters themselves are full of Mrs. O'Connor: she is quoted, referred to, relished and admired, joked with and about, altogether clearly loved.

What else, though, do the letters tell us of the storyteller herself? The overriding impression is of a *joie de vivre*, rooted in her talent and the possibilities of her work, which she correctly saw as compensating her fully for any deprivations she had to accept, and as offering her a scope for living that most of us never dream of encompassing. From this sensibility grew a wonderful appreciation of the world's details: the vagaries of human personality; the rich flow of the language she heard around her; the

beauty of Andalusia, the family farm outside Milledgeville where the O'Connors went to live after Flannery fell ill, and of the birds, homely or regal, with which she peopled it; the hospitality she and her mother offered to friends and strangers alike; good food, always a pleasure to her; talk, books, and letters. These letters reveal her to have been anything but reclusive by inclination: to have been, on the contrary, notably gregarious. She enjoyed company and sought it, sending warm invitations to her old and new friends to come to Andalusia. Once her inviolable three-hour morning stint of writing was done, she looked for, and throve on, companionship. When people couldn't come, she wrote to them, and looked forward to hearing from them in return. She participated in the lives of her friends, interested herself in their work, their children, their health, and their adventures. Anything but dour, she never ceased to be amused, even in extremis. In a letter after her return from the hospital and surgery, in 1964, she wrote: "One of my nurses was a dead ringer for Mrs. Turpin. Her Claud was named Otis. She told all the time about what a good nurse she was. Her favorite grammatical construction was 'it were.' She said she treated everybody alike whether it were a person with money or a black nigger. She told me all about the low life in Wilkinson County. I seldom know in any given circumstances whether the Lord is giving me a reward or a punishment. She didn't know she was funny and it was agony to laugh and I reckon she increased my pain about 100%."

The world of the absurd delighted her. She regaled us with Hadacol advertisements; birth announcements of infants with names that had to be read to be believed; such news items as the attendance of Roy Rogers' horse at a church service in California, or the award of first prize in an amateur contest to a crimped and beribboned seven-year-old singing "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"; and the wonderful mugs of a gospel quartet promised as a Coming Attraction somewhere. All these things filled her with glee, and gleefully she passed them on. She could write fine country talk, of course, and often did, to amuse her friends and herself. The next letter, however, might set forth in strong clear style a literary or theological insight that shed light in every direction. She was capable, at twenty-three, of flooring a patronizing publisher with one courteous but steely letter when he proposed to "work with her" to "change the direction" of her first book. He later complained in a note to her former teacher, Paul Engle, that she suffered from "hardening of the arteries of cooperative sense," adding, "It seems most unbecoming in one so young." But she escaped and went on to a publisher and to editors who were better

able to recognize the originality of her gift and who encouraged her to develop in her own way.

However inordinate her self-confidence seemed, she never failed to send her manuscript drafts to those of her friends who she felt understood what she was trying to do, and whose literary judgment she respected. There is continual discussion of work-in-progress throughout the letters over the years, and she was always open to suggestion or instruction, and almost always acted upon any advice that helped her to improve a particular piece of writing. She had the true humility that is based on a just assessment of one's own worth. She certainly knew hers, and at the same time knew that it could always be increased by a willingness to learn. One thing she had little interest in learning, however, was how to spell. In the ragged little journal mentioned above, she complained, "Teacher said I dident know how to spell what of it?" Well, what of it? Possibly because her ear was so fine, it was enough for her to get things down more or less as they sounded. In any event, she was what she described as "a very innocent speller." Except for obvious misslicks on the typewriter, I have retained her own versions of what words ought to look like; to have corrected them would have destroyed some of the savor of her letters.

One commentator has remarked unkindly that "any crank could write to her and get an answer." I expect it is true that she answered any letter someone had taken the trouble to write to her. She mentions several cranky, furious, funny, or simply foolish letters that found their way to her. But on the whole, her correspondence was an enrichment of her life, to say nothing of the lives of her correspondents, and was by no means conducted with fools or cranks. One of her most valued friendships began with an exchange of letters with a reader whose comments interested her and whom she encouraged to continue to write to her. They met only later, became close friends, and their correspondence flourished for nine years. Another equally cherished comradeship began in the same way and endured until her death seven years later. Almost all her close friendships were sustained through the post. I have tried, with each of Flannery's correspondents, to use enough of the letters to give a sense of the continuity, or lack of it, in their correspondence, and so to give a sense of continuity to her life. Isolated "statements" to be found in her letters are too much just that. No sense of her existence, and of some aspects of her personality, can be gained from these alone; nor can any sense be gained from them of the various people who were most important to her, or of the kind of importance they had

in her life. One needs to follow her in a correspondence for these things to emerge.

There is much discussion of books in Flannery's letters, not just her own but all kinds of books. Understandably, reading was one of the great pleasures and interests in her life. She exchanged books with friends, and commentaries in turn. She liked to discuss ideas, and she liked to discuss theology, and she made a striking apologist for Catholicism, which was, to say the least, an arguable system of belief and thought to many, even most, of the people she wrote to. This faith was her intellectual and spiritual taproot, and it deepened and spread outward in her with the years. Her real love for Christianity and for the Church as its guardian is inescapable in her letters, and so is her impatience with fatuity and obtuseness among Catholics. On the latter subject she is not so much astringent as withering. In her letters to an intelligent Jesuit friend, she would demolish the Catholic press and some Catholic education with a blast and, at the same time, ask a dispensation to read two authors listed on the late, unlamented Index of proscribed works. She maintained throughout her life that the Church in no way impaired her true freedom, either in the practice of her art or in her personal life. She gladly honored the prerogatives claimed by the Church, holding that what the Church gave her far outweighed any demands it made in return. To the novelist John Hawkes, Flannery wrote, "There are some of us who have to pay for our faith every step of the way and who have to work out dramatically what it would be like without it and if being without it would ultimately be possible or not." There is in her letters not a hint of deviation from her orthodox position, even in her mind. She says in so many words to one correspondent that she has simply never doubted, or for a moment wanted to leave the fold.

She did, however, at one point want to leave the South. Like so many gifted young people, she was sure, at twenty-one, that she could never properly "work" in her own native region. As it turned out, after two years of study in Iowa and less than a year as guest of one of the foundation estates offering hospitality to promising artists, she fetched up in our country house in Connecticut where, if she wasn't in the South, she was living with another emigré Southerner, and there was plenty of spoonbread and mutual understanding to feed on. She wasn't far from home, after all, least of all in her thoughts, in the ensuing two years.

When she came home to Georgia for good, it was of course under the hard constraint of disseminated lupus erythematosus, a

dangerous disease of metabolical origin—incurable but controllable by steroid drugs—which exhausts the energies of its victims and necessitates an extremely careful and restricted life. But her return was for good, in more ways than one. She herself acknowledged this, describing it in one of her letters as not the end of all work she had thought it would be but only the beginning. Once she had accepted her destiny, she began to embrace it, and it is clear from her correspondence that she cherished her life there and knew that she had been brought back exactly where she belonged and where her best work would be done.

Here her mature growth began. When she learned how matters really stood, and when her health had been more or less stabilized and meticulous treatment worked out to control her illness, she set about building a life with her mother, under Regina O'Connor's care, at Andalusia. Her living and working habits were established so as to ensure that her diminished strength could go almost entirely into her writing. She wrote us that she was able to work at her fiction no more than two or three hours a day. If she had a long struggle accepting loneliness, and the reality of a permanently curtailed life, or if she felt resentment or self-pity (and how could she have failed to suffer these, and much more, to some degree?), she gave no sign of such feeling to any of us. There is no whining. A characteristic description of how she stood is contained in a 1953 letter to Robert Lowell and his wife: "I am making out fine in spite of any conflicting stories . . . I have enough energy to write with and as that is all I have any business doing anyhow, I can with one eye squinted take it all as a blessing. What you have to measure out, you come to observe more closely, or so I tell myself."

But her life was becoming pleasurable, too. She had doted on chickens from early childhood, and now the long love affair with her flock of peafowl, and attendant Muscovy ducks, Chinese geese, and one-eyed swans began, and she wrote constantly of these; of the reading she was doing; of Mrs. O'Connor's farming adventures; of her numerous visitors and friends; of the progress of her novel, and the relief she felt when she occasionally put it aside for the comparative ease of writing a story. She began to travel on occasion, as well, to give readings or talks, and she enjoyed these trips until they became too difficult and costly to her strength; and she learned to love getting home to Andalusia. She went to Europe, though not very willingly, and was even gladder to get home.

With time, her correspondence enlarged greatly, widening her contact with the world beyond Milledgeville. She was as generous

with her correspondents as she and her mother were in their hospitality. She received many manuscripts and, though spared the wear and tear of classrooms, counseled and taught these "students" with gentleness and patience, offering them any kind of help and encouragement she was able to give. As the years passed, we cannot fail to see in her letters the increase in her own being, commensurate with and integrally related to her growth in stature as a writer.

When Flannery went home, expecting to return to us, she left behind a book, *Art and Scholasticism,* by Jacques Maritain. I had mislaid it, and bought another copy to send her when I forwarded her things. She told me to keep her copy when I found it, and I have it still, underlined here and there by her. It was from this book that she first learned the conception of the "habit of art," habit in this instance being defined in the Scholastic mode, not as mere mechanical routine, but as an attitude or quality of mind, as essential to the real artist as talent. Maritain writes:

> Operative habit resides chiefly in the mind or the will . . . Habits are interior growths of spontaneous life . . . and only the living (that is to say, minds which alone are perfectly alive) can acquire them, because they alone are capable of raising the level of their being by their own activity: they possess, in such an enrichment of their faculties, secondary motives to action, which they bring into play when they want . . . The object [the good of the work] in relation to which (the habit) perfects the subject is itself unchangeable—and it is upon this object that the quality developed in the subject *catches.* Such a habit is a virtue, that is to say a quality which, triumphing over the original indetermination of the intellective faculty, at once sharpening and hardening the point of its activity, raises it in respect of a definite object to a maximum of perfection, and so of operative efficiency. Art is a virtue of the practical intellect.

Flannery consciously sought to attain to the habit of art, and did, by customary exercise and use, acquire it in the making of her novels and stories. Less deliberately perhaps, and only in the course of living in accordance with her formative beliefs, as she consciously and profoundly wished to do, she acquired as well, I think, a second distinguished habit, which I have called "the habit of being": an excellence not only of action but of interior disposition and activity that increasingly reflected the object, the being, which specified it, and was itself reflected in what she did and said.

It is to this second habit that her letters attest, even as they

shed a great deal of new light on the novels and stories she gave us in the practice of the first. This is not to say that the selection of letters is an exercise in hagiography. Although she was far from being as self-centered as either her genius or her invalidism might have made her, she was not without vanity, and her tongue could take on a quite unsaintly edge. And there was an area of sensibility in her that seems to have remained imperfectly developed, as her letters suggest, although I believe that she touched it in what she often described as probably the best thing she would ever write, "The Artificial Nigger"—a story that she said contains more than she herself understood. That she *did* understand somewhat, however, is plainly suggested in a letter she wrote to Ben Griffith: "What I had in mind to suggest with the artificial nigger was the redemptive quality of the Negro's suffering for us all." I had understood this to be her intention when I first read it, and to my mind this story contains the germ of a final enlargement of understanding for Flannery O'Connor. There is important evidence of a developing sense of this mystery in *The Violent Bear It Away.* Buford Munson, the old country black, monumental astride his mule, looks down at the renegade Tarwater, moments before—almost as though in conjunction with—the boy's compelling epiphany, and reproves him in these significant words: "It's owing to me he's resting there. I buried him while you were laid out drunk. It's owing to me his corn has been plowed. It's owing to me the sign of his Saviour is over his head." And there are other flashes, integral to the particular story she is telling, winks of light in her own prophetic vision, which, if she had lived long enough to see it whole and to give it concrete form, might have perfected that vision and completed the extraordinary work in which she was to embody it.

Moreover, I have found myself thinking that her own being would have been likewise raised and perfected, completed, by a greater personal empathy with the blacks who were so important a part of the tissue of the South, and of the humanity with whose redemption she was so truly and deeply concerned. Her will was never in danger on the score of racism; she describes herself as bridling at a contemptuous jape from a bus driver addressed to a group of blacks waiting to board, and says that from that moment on she was an integrationist. But large social issues as such were not the subject of her writing, and she never thought in those terms. She wrote: "The uneducated Southern Negro is not the clown he is made out to be. He's a man of very elaborate manners and great formality which he uses superbly for his own protection and to insure his own privacy." There is a great deal of respect in this characterization but, sentimental about no one else, she was equally unsentimental about blacks as individuals. Frequently she was impatient with them, and said so. She disliked the stridency of the militant movement and some of its spokesmen, although she recognized the need for, and approved of, Martin Luther King's crusade. The blacks on the O'Connor farm were as primitive as some of the whites she wrote about, and they perhaps served as trees obscuring her view of the social forest. Certainly they sometimes vexed her sorely. In any case, she evidently felt unable to "get inside their heads," in her own phrase. This may have been humility. In her letters, she uses the prevailing locution of the South as easily, and as unmaliciously, as it often occurs there, among blacks and whites alike. It was simply natural to her in her time and place. And if she did not live to envision fully and dramatize their role in the divine comedy, it was perhaps because it was her well-met responsibility to her gift to give dignity and meaning to the lives of individuals who have far fewer champions, and enjoy considerably less sympathy, and are far lonelier than they. In the last year of her life, Flannery wrote to Sr. Mariella Gable, "I've been writing eighteen years and I've reached the point where I can't do again what I know I can do well, and the larger things I need to do now, I doubt my capacity for doing." You write, she repeatedly said, what you can. And you become, we can further infer, what you can. Her accomplishments in both making and being are too impressive to support cant from any side.

This is enough, or more than enough, to hear about her letters before proceeding to read them. The sharp little journal calls me again to order: "I've got a lot of *faults* but *I hope* I won't ever hang on the line like Mrs. S."

Sally Fitzgerald

Cambridge, Massachusetts
March 1978

Editor's Note

I should like to express my gratitude to all those who so generously made their letters from Flannery O'Connor available to me for this selection. I am indebted to Gerald Becham, curator of the O'Connor papers in the Georgia College Library in Milledgeville, for his unfailing courtesy and helpfulness. I am indebted, as well, to Professor Mary Barbara Tate and Dr. Sarah Gordon, also of Georgia College, and to Mary Ann Tate, who all three braved some steamy August days to scan the galley proofs with me. I am grateful to Marian Schlesinger, Betsy Walsh, Frances McFadden, and Eileen Simpson, who read the introduction in draft and offered useful comments. Robert Giroux was invariably patient and supportive in the face of all the difficulties and delays that ensued in the course of preparing this book. Professor Charles Haar, showing remarkable tolerance of the absent mind at the secretarial desk, gave me every encouragement. Robert Fitzgerald, Flannery's literary executor, read the entire manuscript and made some needed corrections. Thanks are owing to Fr. John Boles, of St. Paul's Church in Cambridge, for the indispensable cell he so kindly lent in the last year of my labors. And, finally, I want to thank my children for all they did to keep me afloat on my sea of papers.

Except for the first and last letters, no salutations or closing words are reproduced, in order to avoid pointless repetition and save space. The name of a correspondent is given only with the first of a series of letters; the absence of a name indicates another exchange with the same person. Similarly, Flannery's address is given only with the first of a series or when her location changes, which (except for the first few years) is rare. After July 1952, almost

every letter Flannery wrote came from Milledgeville. Even accounts of her trip abroad in April 1958 were mostly written after she reached home.

Brackets indicate editorial interpolations, usually factual, to clarify obscurities. Dots indicate editor's deletions. Footnotes have been kept to a minimum. Flannery's sometimes bizarre spelling and punctuation have in general been respected. In the few instances of alteration, her meaning would not have been (as she always wished it to be) perfectly clear.

S.F.

PART I

UP NORTH AND GETTING HOME

1948–1952

Most of the readers of these letters are probably familiar with the simpler facts of Flannery O'Connor's life: that she was born in Savannah, Georgia, on March 25, 1925, the only child of Edward Francis O'Connor and Regina Cline O'Connor; that she moved to Milledgeville, Georgia, her mother's birthplace, when she was twelve years old, after her father had fallen gravely ill. He died when Flannery was fifteen. Thereafter she lived in Milledgeville with her mother, in the fine old home of the Cline family, and attended Peabody High School and Georgia State College for Women (now Georgia College) in the same town. By the time she received her A.B. degree in 1945, she knew very well what she could and wanted to do.

When Flannery left Milledgeville to "go north," it was to the School for Writers, conducted by Paul Engle at the State University of Iowa. Her promise had been recognized in college, and she received a scholarship for her Master's studies. This seems to have been an interesting and fruitful time for her: she read a great deal and she learned a lot about writing. Her first publication, in Accent *magazine, of her story "The Geranium," occurred in 1946 while she was still a student. In 1947 she won the Rinehart-Iowa Fiction Award for a first novel, with part of* Wise Blood.

On the strength of this, she was recommended for a place at Yaddo, in Saratoga Springs, New York, a philanthropic foundation offering artists periods of hospitality and freedom, enabling them to concentrate on their work. For a few months she enjoyed working there, but in the spring of 1949, together with all the other guests, she left Yaddo, which was undergoing a turmoil described on page 11. After a few disagreeable weeks in New York City, she went back to Milledgeville, returned to New York for the summer, then came with her half-finished novel

in September of the same year to join the Robert Fitzgerald family in a hidden house on a wooded hilltop in Ridgefield, Connecticut. There she lived and wrote until, in 1951, illness redirected her life.

None of the letters she wrote while she was in Iowa has been made available for this selection. Most of them were probably to her mother, who feels that they are purely personal and contain nothing of literary interest. Her close college friend, the late Betty Boyd Love, wrote us, soon after Flannery's death, that they had corresponded monthly in the first few years after they graduated, when Flannery went her way and Betty Boyd set off for the University of North Carolina to take her own master's degree in mathematics. Inevitably, some of these letters were lost, and unfortunately none at all from Iowa turned up in the search.

So it must be that Flannery's correspondence during her years in the North begins with the letter she wrote, in 1948, at the outset of her professional life, on a professional matter of great importance. As it turned out, it was a lucky letter, for it marked the beginning of an association and a friendship that continued throughout her life and, on the part of her correspondent, until the present day.

To Elizabeth McKee

Yaddo
Saratoga Springs, New York
June 19, 1948

Dear Miss McKee,

I am looking for an agent. Paul Moor [another writer at Yaddo] suggested I write to you. I am at present working on a novel [*Wise Blood*] for which I received the Rinehart-Iowa Fiction Award ($750) last year. This award gives Rinehart an option but nothing else. I have been on the novel a year and a half and will probably be two more years finishing it. The first chapter appeared as a short story, "The Train," in the Spring 1948 issue of the *Sewanee Review*. The fourth chapter ["The Peeler"] will be printed in a new quarterly to appear in the fall, *American Letters*. I have another chapter ["The Heart of the Park"] which I have sent to *Partisan Review* and which I expect to be returned. A short story of mine ["The Turkey"] will be in *Mademoiselle* sometime in the fall.

The novel, except for isolated chapters, is in no condition to be sent to you at this point. My main concern right now is to get the first draft of it done; however as soon as *Partisan Review* returns the chapter I sent them, I would like to send it to you, and probably also a short story ["The Crop"] which I expect to get back from a quarterly in a few days.

I am writing you in my vague and slack season and mainly because I am being impressed just now with the money I am not making by having stories in such places as *American Letters*. I am a very slow worker and it is possible that I won't write another story until I finish this novel and that no other chapters of the novel will prove salable. I have never had an agent so I have no idea what your disposition might be toward my type of writer. Please consider this letter an introduction to me and let me know if you would like to look at what I can get together when I get it together. I expect to be in New York a day or two in early August, and if you are interested, I would like to talk to you then.

Yours sincerely,
(Miss) Flannery O'Connor

July 4, 1948

It was good to get your letter and I am glad you look kindly on handling my work.

My chapter has been a month at the *Partisan Review*. I understand things are regularly lost around there but I will hope to get it back before the novel is finished. The story I had out at a quarterly came back and I find it much too bad to send to you.

I want you to put through the details of my contract with Rinehart if they take up their option. John Selby [editor-in-chief of Rinehart] has written me that they want to see the first draft before considering a contract. I am a slow six months before the end of a first draft, and after that, I will be at least a year cleaning up. I think I will need an advance for that year.

Paul tells me that you will be in Europe when I go through New York. I am very sorry that I won't have the chance to talk to you.

July 21, 1948

I enclose a few things you might like to see.

What you say about the novel, Rinehart, advances, etc. sounds very good to me, but I must tell you how I work. I don't have my novel outlined and I have to write to discover what I am doing. Like the old lady, I don't know so well what I think until I see what I say; then I have to say it over again. I am working on the twelfth chapter now. I long ago quit numbering the pages but I suppose I am past the 50,000 word mark. Of the twelve chapters only a few won't have to be re-written; and I can't exhibit such formless stuff. It would discourage me to look at it right now and

anyway I yearn to go about my business to the end. At this point I think the novel will run about 100,000 words. The chapters I enclose should give you some idea. They are the best chapters in it.

If I find I am able to come to New York before the 31st I will write you. If I don't come before then, I will probably skip New York this time altogether, although I would like to meet John Selby and George Davis [fiction editor of *Mademoiselle*]. There is a possibility that I may come back to Yaddo in the fall and/or winter.

The enclosed story "The Crop" is for sale to the unparticular.

July 21,1948

Thank you for returning the chapter. I agree that compression at both ends would help "The Crop" but unless you think there is a possibility of its being taken anywhere, I don't care to fool with it now.

I'll be interested to hear if the *Partisan* has lost the "Heart of the Park" and of the outcome of the lunch with Selby. I don't want an advance from Rinehart until I finish the first draft and they see what they are getting—six or eight months hence. I cannot really believe they will want the finished thing.

[P.S.] My address after August 1 will be, Box 246, Milledgeville, Georgia.

Milledgeville
September 3, 1948

I plan to stop in New York September 14th and 15th on my way back to Yaddo, and I shall hope to see you. You suggested once that you make appointments with John Selby and George Davis for me. I would like to have you do this if you would. I get in the afternoon of the 13th and will be free anytime the next two days.

I sent John Selby a copy of Chapter Nine which the *Partisan Review* decided to take.

[P.S.] In case you should want to call me, you would find me at the Woodstock Hotel.

Yaddo
September 18, 1948

Dear Elizabeth [first use]:

I was glad to get your letter and am anxious to hear if Mr. [Philip] Rahv or Mr. [Robert Penn] Warren or Mrs. Porter [Arabel Porter, editor of *New World Writing*] will recommend me [for a Guggenheim Fellowship]. I haven't been able to face the blanks yet but I suppose there is no need to until I know by whom I am going to be recommended.

You will probably hear from me asking you to make hotel reservations for me in November sometime. There will be only three of us here this winter (Clifford Wright, Robert Lowell, and myself) so I shall probably be more than ready to take off for a few days by that time.

I'll send you a copy of "The Crop" as soon as I can type one up.

I am altogether pleased that you are my agent.

September 30, 1948

I am sending you two copies of "The Geranium" and one of "The Train" which if you think advisable you can show to Mr. Rahv or anybody. I don't know that this is enough or good enough to influence him one way or the other, but it is all I have . . .

The novel is coming very well, which is why you haven't got the copy of "The Crop." *American Letters* may be out. The editor doesn't know my address now so I won't get a copy. It would be a good thing for Mr. Rahv to see, if it is out. Thank you for your trouble.

November 14, 1948

Robert Lowell has said he will recommend me for the Guggenheim, so if it is not too late to add a name, I would appreciate your calling Mr. Moe's secretary [Henry Allen Moe, president of the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation] and having it put on. Lowell's address is Yaddo.

December 15, 1948

Enclosed is the letter from George Davis. After re-reading as much of the story ["The Crop"] as I could stand, I am more than ready to agree with his criticism. Please send the manuscript back to me. I should not write stories in the middle of a novel.

I appreciate his reading it and writing the Guggenheim letter.

Paul Engle sent me a copy of his report and I have seen Robert Lowell's, so there should be three anyway with Mr. Moe.

Perhaps I shall get down in January and perhaps before that send you the chapters I am working on of the novel. I have decided, however, that no good comes of sending anything (that story) off in a hurry so you may expect it when you see it.

Alfred Kazin, who was at Yaddo with Flannery, was at that time a consultant to Harcourt, Brace and Company; he recommended her work to Robert Giroux, editor-in-chief of the publishing house, as did Robert Lowell. In February 1949, when Flannery accompanied Lowell on a visit to Giroux at the publishing offices, then located at 383 Madison Avenue, she met her future editor and publisher for the first time.

January 20, 1949

Here are the first nine chapters of novel, which please show John Selby and let us be on with financial thoughts. They are, of course, not finished but they are finished enough for the present. If Rinehart doesn't want the book, what about Harcourt, Brace? Alfred Kazin, who is up here now and works for them, said they were interested.

I am going to send the sixth chapter to the *Kenyon Review* and if they don't want it to the *Sewanee*.

January 28, 1949

My visit here [Yaddo] is sure only through April. I have asked to stay through July and to come back again next October but I have my doubts about either of these requests being granted. I won't know until the end of March whether I can stay longer than April, but considering the improbability of it and the improbability of my getting a Guggenheim this year, an advance on the book is more than necessary.

I would like to come down to New York but not until I have to. How long is it supposed to take the Brothers Rinehart to decide if they want to risk their money on me? . . .

James Ross, a writer who is here, is looking for an agent. He wrote a very fine book called, *They Don't Dance Much*. It didn't sell much. If you are interested in him, I daresay he would be glad to hear from you. Right now he wants to sell some stories he is reworking.

February 3, 1949

I am very much pleased about what you have done with the manuscript. Until I hear from Selby, there is not much I can say, but $1,500 for an advance from Harcourt sounds altogether good to me, and I don't see Rinehart giving me that much. I want mainly to be where they will take the book as I write it. I gather it is also well to be where they will try to sell some copies of it, but if Harcourt would give me $1,500 I presume they would try to get that much out of it anyway.

When I hear from Selby I will write you again and probably ask you to make a hotel reservation for me so I can come down and talk to you and to Amussen [Theodore Amussen, an editor at Harcourt who had previously worked at Rinehart] before I make up my mind.

The long-awaited letter from Mr. Selby to Flannery opened with the remark that she seemed a "straight shooter," an approach that did not go down very well with her, as she wrote Elizabeth McKee.

February 17, 1949

I received Selby's letter today. Please tell me what is under this Sears Roebuck Straight Shooter approach. I presume Selby says either that Rinehart will not take the novel as it will be if left to my fiendish care (it will be essentially as it is), or that Rinehart would like to rescue it at this point and train it into a conventional novel.

The criticism is vague and really tells me nothing except that they don't like it. I feel the objections they raise are connected with its virtues, and the thought of working with them specifically to correct these lacks they mention is repulsive to me. The letter is addressed to a slightly dim-witted Camp Fire Girl, and I cannot look with composure on getting a lifetime of others like them. I have not yet answered it and won't until I hear further from you, but if I were certain that Harcourt would take the novel, I would write Selby immediately that I prefer to be elsewhere.

Would it be possible for you to get the manuscript back now and show it to Harcourt, or does Rinehart hang onto it until we break relations? Please advise me what the next step is to be, or take it yourself. I'll probably come down week after next if you think it advisable. I am anxious to have this settled and off my mind so that I can get to work . . .

February 18, 1949

I received your letter of the 17th today and I have decided to come down next Wednesday since you say that will be quicker. I have my doubts about the efficacy of personal conversation with Selby as my experience with him is that he says as little as possible as vaguely as possible. With this in mind, I am writing him a letter, stating what my position about the book is, so that he can collect himself and have something specific to say. I enclose a copy of same.

Would you make an appointment with him or Raney [William Raney, an editor at Rinehart] or whomever for Thursday the 24th? I would also like to see Amussen on this visit, if that would not be rushing things. I will be down the 24th, 25th, and part of the 26th. I am going to stay in Elizabeth Hardwick's apartment so it won't be necessary to make a hotel reservation for me . . . I'll be there probably around five Wednesday afternoon.

To John Selby

February 18, 1949

Thank you for your letter of the 16th. I plan to come down [from Yaddo] next week and I have asked Elizabeth McKee to make an appointment with you for me on Thursday. I think, however, that before I talk to you my position on the novel and on your criticism in the letter should be made plain.

I can only hope that in the finished novel the direction will be clearer, but I can tell you that I would not like at all to work with you as do other writers on your list. I feel that whatever virtues the novel may have are very much connected with the limitations you mention. I am not writing a conventional novel, and I think that the quality of the novel I write will derive precisely from the peculiarity or aloneness, if you will, of the experience I write from. I do not think there is any lack of objectivity in the writing, however, if this is what your criticism implies; and also I do not feel that rewriting has obscured the direction. I feel it has given whatever direction is now present.

In short, I am amenable to criticism but only within the sphere of what I am trying to do; I will not be persuaded to do otherwise. The finished book, though I hope less angular, will be just as odd if not odder than the nine chapters you have now. The question is: is Rinehart interested in publishing this kind of novel?

I'll hope to see you Thursday and hear further what you think.

To Elizabeth McKee

February 24, 1949

I am sorry you will have to break the Tuesday appointment with Selby. I get in Tuesday night and will call you Wednesday morning. Anytime after that will do for the appointment.

We have been very upset at Yaddo lately and all the guests are leaving in a group Tuesday—the revolution. I'll probably have to be in New York a month or so and I'll be looking for a place to stay. Do you know of anything? Temporarily I'll be staying at something called Tatum House but I want to get out of there as soon as possible. All this is very disrupting to the book and has changed my plans entirely as I definitely won't be coming back to Yaddo unless certain measures go into effect here.

I hope you are finished with the grip and feel well again.

The "upset" at Yaddo centered on a well-known journalist, Agnes Smedley, who by all accounts made no attempt to disguise the fact that she was a Communist Party member in good standing. She had lived at Yaddo for five years, while most guests were invited for a few precious months. She left Yaddo in 1948. Miss Smedley had not only lived there for years but had published almost nothing during her stay, although the function of Yaddo was to free guests to do their work. Partly because of her long sojourn, the F.B.I. had for some time had Yaddo under surveillance. When a newspaper stated (inaccurately, as it turned out) that Agnes Smedley's name had appeared in an army report, the investigation became an open one. There were four writers-in-residence that winter: Robert Lowell, Edward Maisel, Elizabeth Hardwick, and Flannery O'Connor. When Maisel and Elizabeth Hardwick were questioned, they of course told the other two. Hindsight now seemed to clarify much that had bothered them only as a vaguely unpleasant atmosphere of hostility and evasiveness. Concerned about the possible misuse of a benevolent institution, meant to be devoted to the arts, the four decided to inform the board of directors of the Yaddo Corporation privately of the presumed misconduct of the directress in the form of collusion with Agnes Smedley. The directors they reached did not disregard their charges as incredible, and a formal meeting of the entire board was quietly convened.

The four plaintiffs chose Robert Lowell—a powerful personality at any time—as their spokesman at the hearing. Possibly they needed good legal counsel, or at least clearer knowledge of the rules of evidence. The evidence they had was largely circumstantial, and some of it was sub-

jective. What they had to say was neither conclusive nor implausible enough to permit an immediate decision, and it was agreed that another meeting would be held three weeks later and a final decision made.

It was further agreed that nothing would be said publicly, and the four writers honored this agreement. But in the interim one of the board members leaked the stenographic transcript to some of his literary friends in New York, who at once circulated to eighty or ninety others a hasty and inaccurate letter describing the events at Yaddo as a public inquisition carried out in an atmosphere of hatred, panic, and fanaticism. They enclosed a petition, in the nature of a shriek, describing the charges as "preposterous . . . a cynical assault . . . smear technique," to be signed and returned to the Yaddo board. This was hardly fair. The four had made their charges in good faith, in private, and in open confrontation with their adversary, who was unlikely to be hurt if those charges could not be thoroughly substantiated. The kind of injurious attack launched, chiefly against Lowell, by people he had thought were his friends, was a profound shock to him, and to the others. The board, buffeted by forty-odd signed petitions, and threatened by wide publicity, abandoned its inquest, appointed a new admissions committee, and retired. The directress retained her place. This was all very instructive to Flannery. Nothing in it reflects discredit on her motives or her intelligence. Someone less young than she, less naïve, might have been wary of the jungle of political and literary infighting, but she behaved honestly throughout and in accord with her convictions.

The episode left a deep impression on her, especially the unexpected and violent attack from the organized left, which I think did more to convince her of the possible justice of their charges than anything that had happened until then. In any case, she quite detachedly judged that concerted assault to be an evil, and this surprised her possibly less than it did her friends. She lost no respect from anyone at Yaddo as a result of the episode. On the contrary, she was later cordially invited to return. The idea amused her.

It was when she came down to New York from Saratoga Springs in the company of Elizabeth Hardwick and Lowell, in the time between the two hearings, that my husband and I first met her, alert and coolly sensible as always. As events developed, she silently watched and listened, seeing and understanding clearly what was occurring at every stage. Toward the end of March she returned to Milledgeville for a few weeks, and then came back to New York for the summer, before moving to Connecticut.

To Paul Engle

Milledgeville
April 7, 1949

I am in the process of moving. I left Yaddo March 1 and have since been in transit and am now getting ready to go back to New York City where I have a room and where I hope to keep on working on the novel as long as my money holds out, which is not due to be long. Therefore, being in a swivit, I am writing you in brief what I take the situation with Rinehart to be but when I get to New York in ten days I will write you further and send back the letter Rinehart sent you. Thank you for sending it to me.

When I was in New York in September, my agent and I asked Selby how much of the novel they wanted to see before we asked for a contract and an advance. The answer was—about six chapters. So in February I sent them nine chapters (108 pages and all I've done) and my agent asked for an advance and for their editorial opinion.

Their editorial opinion was a long time in coming because obviously they didn't think much of the 108 pages and didn't know what to say. When it did come, it was *very* vague and I thought totally missed the point of what kind of a novel I am writing. My impression was that they want a conventional novel. However, rather than trust my own judgment entirely I showed the letter to Lowell who had already read the 108 pages. He too thought that the faults Rinehart had mentioned were not the faults of the novel (some of which he had previously pointed out to me). I tell you this to let you know I am not, as Selby implied to me, working in a vacuum.

In answer to the editorial opinion, I wrote Selby that I would have to work on the novel without direction from Rinehart, that I was amenable to criticism but only within the sphere of what I was trying to do.

In New York a few weeks later, I learned indirectly that nobody at Rinehart liked the 108 pages but Raney (and whether he likes it or not I couldn't really say), that the ladies there particularly had thought it unpleasant (which pleased me). I told Selby that I was willing enough to listen to Rinehart criticism but that if it didn't suit me, I would disregard it. That is the impasse.

Any summary I might try to write for the rest of the novel would be worthless and I don't choose to waste my time at it. I don't write that way. I can't write much more without money and they won't give me any money because they can't see what the finished book will be. That is Part Two of the impasse.