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Patrick Samway, S.J.

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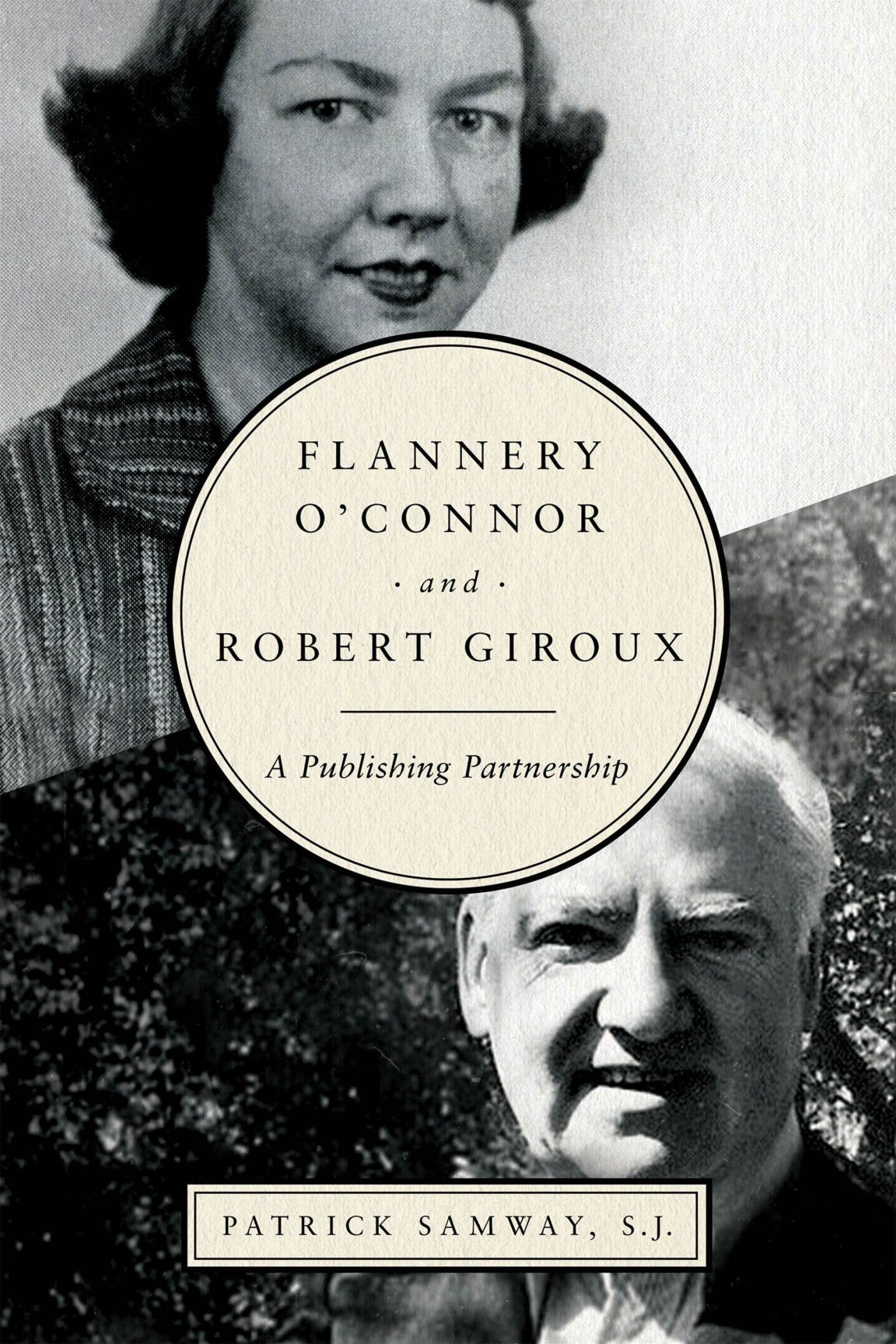

FLANNERY O'CONNOR · *and* · ROBERT GIROUX

A Publishing Partnership

PATRICK SAMWAY, S.J.

FLANNERY O'CONNOR AND ROBERT GIROUX

Flannery O'Connor
and
Robert Giroux

A Publishing Partnership

PATRICK SAMWAY, S.J.

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In memory of a wonderful friend,

ROBERT GIROUX

(1914–2008)

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NOTES ON THE TEXT

During the twenty-plus years that I knew Robert Giroux, he sometimes repeated informally the same anecdotes about his authors, and thus I did not provide a specific date for each of the hundreds of times we met. I taped an interview with him in 1997 on a two-hour plane ride from New York to New Orleans, during which he related much of his personal life. In addition, Jonathan Montaldo videotaped Giroux for sixteen hours over a period of several months a few years before Giroux's death. Both of our interviews are housed in the Robert Giroux Collection in the Special Collections Room, Monroe Library, Loyola University, New Orleans.

I acknowledge that some of the observations and quotes by Giroux concerning T. S. Eliot, J. D. Salinger, and Robert Lowell's mother, to cite but three examples, can be found in George Plimpton's interview with Giroux ("Robert Giroux: The Art of Publishing III"). I also acknowledge using material from the biographies of Flannery O'Connor written by Jean Cash and Brad Gooch, as well as Sally Fitzgerald's chronology in Flannery O'Connor's *Collected Works*. Some of my comments about O'Connor's *A Prayer Journal* were previously published in my review of that journal in the *Flannery O'Connor Review*. Some of the material in this book concerning O'Connor and theology appeared in a talk I delivered, "Jesuit Influence in the Life and Works of Flannery O'Connor," and also in my essay "Toward Discerning How Flannery O'Connor's Fiction Can Be Considered 'Roman Catholic.'" In addition, some information about Giroux's final months at Harcourt, Brace can be found in my essay "Tracing a Literary & Epistolary Relationship: Eudora Welty and Her Editor, Robert Giroux" and in my introduction to *The Letters of Robert Giroux and Thomas Merton*.

I am most grateful to the following people for their gracious encouragement in writing this book: In the United States, Louise Florencourt; Robert Giroux; Charles Reilly; Mr. and Mrs. Hugh James McKenna; the Jesuit communities at Saint Joseph's University and Saint Peter's University; JoAlyson Parker, Peter Norberg, and my colleagues in the English Department at Saint Joseph's University; my most capable and steadfast agent Albert LaFarge; Mark Bosco, S.J.; Ben Camardi; Art Carpenter; Gary Ciuba; John Desmond; Joseph Feeney, S.J.; Victoria Fox; Marshall Bruce Gentry; Roberta Rodriquez Gilmor; Cynthia T. Harris; Harriet and Michael Leahy; Helen Menendez; Judith Millman and Robert Miss; Susan and Rex Mixon, William Monroe; Kathleen Healey Mulvehill; Eanan Nagle; Trish Nugent; and Dominic Roberti. In France, la famille Michel Gresset, la Communauté des Sœurs de Jésus au Temple à Vernon, and Ben et Nadine Forkner.

I am likewise grateful for permission from Maria Fitzgerald to publish from the letters of Robert and Sally Fitzgerald; Charles R. Lindley, M.D., to publish from the letters of Denver Lindley; Alison McCallum to publish from the letters of John McCallum; Sheila B. Riordan to publish from the letters of Mavis McIntosh; and Percy "Pete" Wood to publish from the letters of Caroline Gordon. The Estate of Robert Giroux has given permission to publish Robert Giroux's letters to Flannery O'Connor as found in his personal files, in the files of Farrar, Straus & Giroux in the New York Public Library, and in the Harcourt, Brace archives. The Mary Flannery O'Connor Charitable Trust (© Flannery O'Connor, renewed by Regina Cline O'Connor) has given permission to publish an excerpt from Flannery O'Connor's essay "The Writer and the Graduate School" and her letters to Robert Giroux as found in his personal files, in the files of Farrar, Straus & Giroux in the New York Public Library, and in the Harcourt, Brace archives, as well as from Flannery O'Connor's letters to Elizabeth Bishop, William Jovanovich, Maryat Lee, Elizabeth McKee, John McCallum, and George White, as found in various repositories and indicated as such in the endnotes. The repositories for the unpublished letters are cited in the endnotes. In some cases, copies of letters can be found in two or more repositories; in all such cases, I have cited only one repository.

For citations and material taken from O'Connor's published letters not found in the endnotes, I have relied on letters in two books: *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor* and O'Connor's *Collected Works*. It

should be noted that some of the letters in the latter volume did not appear in *The Habit of Being*. For those who wish to consult the larger context of these published letters, I indicate the recipient and the date or time period of each letter, since I did not want to burden the reader with an enormous amount of bibliographical citations. In a very few cases, I have made silent corrections to O'Connor's use of punctuation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AT	Allen Tate
BU	W. L. Lyons Brown Library, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY
CC	Catharine Carver
CG	Caroline Gordon
CW	Flannery O'Connor. *Collected Works.* Edited by Sally Fitzgerald.
DL	Denver Lindley
DU	David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC
EB	Elizabeth Bishop
EL	Erik Langkjaer
EM	Elizabeth McKee
EU	Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA
FOC	Flannery O'Connor
FS&C	Farrar, Straus & Cudahy
FS&G	Farrar, Straus & Giroux
GC	Library and Instructional Technology Center, Georgia College, Milledgeville, GA
HB	*The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*. Edited by Sally Fitzgerald.
HBA	Harcourt, Brace's Archives
HU	Modern Books and Manuscripts Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
JB	John Berryman
JM	Jacques Maritain

JMC	John McCallum
MEC	Maurice-Edgar Coindreau
MM	Mavis McIntosh
MandM	*Mystery and Manners*
NYPL	FS&G Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library
PH	Paul Horgan
PS	Patrick Samway, S.J.
PU	Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ
RF	Robert Fitzgerald
RG	Robert Giroux
RGF	Robert Giroux's Files
RL	Robert Lowell
SF	Sally Fitzgerald
TM	Thomas Merton, O.C.S.O.
TSE	T. S. Eliot
UL	unpublished letter
UNC	Walker Percy Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC
VC	Catherine Pelton Durrell '25 Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY
WP	Walker Percy

Introduction

She could put everything about a character into a single look, everything she had and knew into a single story. . . . For her, people were complete in their radical weakness, their necessarily human incompleteness. Each story was complete, sentence by sentence. And each sentence was a hard, straight, altogether complete version of her subject.

—Alfred Kazin about Flannery O'Connor,
New York Times Book Review, November 28, 1971

Giroux is a great man of letters, a great editor, and a great publisher.

—Charles Scribner Jr.,
in his 1990 memoir *In the Company of Writers*

Robert Giroux, former editor in chief of Harcourt, Brace & Company and former editor in chief and chairman of the editorial board of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, was Flannery O'Connor's devoted friend and admirer. Though not her sole editor, he edited her three books published during her lifetime, as well as the collection she completed just before she died. While O'Connor had a fine rapport with her two other editors at Harcourt, Brace, Catharine DeFrance Carver and Denver Lindley, who successively replaced Giroux after he resigned from the firm in the spring of 1955, they never took credit for editing any of her published books. This does not mean, however, that she did not enjoy their friendship or respectfully consider the critical comments they made about her work—

just the contrary, especially in the case of Carver, whose literary judgments never failed to impress O'Connor.

O'Connor reserved her greatest accolade for Robert Giroux—sometimes referring to him casually as "Old Giroux" and an "old friend"—whom she considered not only a "very nice person" but "the best" of her three editors.[1] It was on the basis of this judgment that she wrote to Giroux on April 17, 1958, immediately after Lindley resigned from Harcourt, Brace, to inform him that she felt comfortable returning to him, this time as her editor at Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. She was "properly back where she started from," and Giroux remained her editor until her death on August 3, 1964, and even, it should be emphasized, after her death. In retrospect, this series of editors had a dramatic impact not only on the manner in which O'Connor approached her fiction, but also perhaps on the actual number of her stories—and novels—simply because Carver and Lindley did not orchestrate and move forward the publication of her fiction in book form. Most likely they felt pressure, as Giroux certainly did, from several Harcourt, Brace senior officials to focus more on compiling academic textbooks and less on promoting and publishing imaginative literature. Carver, unfortunately, did not write about her appreciation of O'Connor's fiction, but Lindley did in his letter of reference as part of O'Connor's application in 1955 for a Guggenheim Fellowship:

> From her first published story, Flannery O'Connor has shown remarkable technical skill in writing and a strong individual point of view. Her recognition by the critics was a little slow in coming, perhaps because of her bizarre and sometimes gruesome themes. With her last volume of short stories, however—*A Good Man Is Hard to Find*—the experts tried to outbid one another in praising her. Her first novel *Wise Blood*, which we published in 1952, though not a popular success, aroused interest out of proportion to its actual sales. . . . Miss O'Connor is a very serious and determined writer. She does not produce rapidly, but the result is always both technically excellent and emotionally affective. A Fellowship would enable her to devote all her time to creative work and would, I believe, thus make a real contribution to American writing.[2]

Though his comments about O'Connor's technical skills and gruesome themes have merit, if explained in more detail and with contextual ex-

amples from her fiction, Lindley omitted mentioning O'Connor's religious sensibilities and her focus on the relationship between human and divine mystery. Due to his Roman Catholic background and close editorial work with a variety of religious writers, Giroux perceived instinctively what O'Connor was doing. In addition, he believed that a crucial part of the success of any talented fiction writer was to publish regularly at strategic intervals. In early March 1949, O'Connor, just about to turn twenty-four, looked forward to meeting Giroux as her prospective editor because he might open wider the door to her future as a creative writer. Pleasant, affable, totally professional, and always searching for new authors, Giroux, approximately eleven years older than O'Connor, had clearly established himself as a rising star in the publishing world and had an uncanny ability to recognize talented individuals. When the noted poet Robert Lowell, who wanted to advance O'Connor's career as a published author, brought her to see his editor at Harcourt, Brace, O'Connor could not have been more pleased. Giroux considered Lowell to be not only a dear friend and someone whose literary judgment he valued, but among the best poets of his generation.

When O'Connor and Lowell entered Giroux's office at 381 Madison Avenue, near Forty-Sixth Street in midtown Manhattan, Giroux was immediately taken by this young woman, as he mentioned in his introduction to O'Connor's *Complete Stories*: "Behind her soft-spoken speech, clear-eyed gaze and shy manner, I sensed a tremendous strength. This was the rarest kind of young writer, one who was prepared to work her utmost and knew exactly what she must do with her talent."[3] O'Connor had already signed an option with another publisher for her novel in progress, part of her award for taking first prize in the Rinehart-Iowa Fiction Contest while at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. In talking with the young O'Connor, Giroux grew in his appreciation of this talented, original author, who was carving out new terrain in her fiction. One could all too easily cite some possible distant precedents, such as the Georgia humorist Joel Chandler Harris, notable in his depiction of poor, white Reconstruction farmers in *Free Joe, and Other Georgian Sketches*, or Grace King, whose *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard* portrays life in post–Civil War New Orleans on both sides of the color line, but these comparisons simply miss the target. If anything, O'Connor's writing reflected the imaginatively restrained quality of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, as well as the serious intensity of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*

(though clearly her stories and novels are shorter, more fluid and direct, without Melville's lengthy detours and side maneuvers). But most of all, Diane Arbus's photographs, which invite considerations about the seemingly eccentric, marginalized, decentered, grotesquely ordinary, and bizarrely conventional among us, capture a palpable feeling that one can find in O'Connor's fiction.[4] "There's a quality of legend about freaks," Arbus wrote, "like a person in a fairy tale who stops you and demands that you answer a riddle. Most people go through life dreading they'll have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born with their trauma. They've already passed their test in life."[5] Whether photographing *Hermaphrodite and a dog in a carnival trailer, Md.* or *Tattooed man at a carnival, Md.*, Arbus, as Susan Sontag (another of Giroux's authors) notes with great perspicacity in her book *On Photography*, gives a privileged glimpse into the lives of her characters, constantly revealing their unusual form of interconnectedness.[6] Arbus's photographs re-present the mystery that is here now and will remain in the future. In a similar manner, O'Connor, distrustful of artificial posing, sentimentality, and hypocrisy, is not a voyeur, but allows us to witness characters during select moments in their lives that may be decisive ones. O'Connor hoped that her matter-of-fact depiction of sometimes shocking, painful, and embarrassing situations could change the perceptions of her readers. Her interest in Protestant preachers of any ilk, whom she does not patronize or mock, reinforces her acute desire to probe the fullness of God's mysteriously inexhaustible word / Word for each human being.

Right from the beginning, the literary relationship and personal friendship of O'Connor and Giroux took on a character of its own and thereafter never remained static. It changed in subtle and unpredictable ways as their lives intersected at various times in configurations that could never have been predicted, particularly due to Giroux's decision to leave Harcourt, Brace and to O'Connor's debilitating illness, caused by disseminated lupus erythematosus, a chronic inflammatory disease, as well as the exhaustion resulting from typing and retyping her fiction and essays. In late June 1960, when O'Connor felt great stress on a number of fronts, she wanted to make sure that none of this affected in the least her relationship with Giroux: "I don't know how the rumor could have originated that I am dissatisfied with my publisher," she wrote to Elizabeth McKee, "because it certainly isn't true. . . . If Giroux has got the notion I am dissatisfied, please tell him there is nothing to it."

Toward the end of her life, as O'Connor became more and more incapacitated, Giroux's 1961 laconic and positive reply to her request to have a book published by Farrar, Straus & Cudahy about the short life of Mary Ann Long, who suffered from a large cancerous tumor on her face in addition to having had one eye removed, showed the tremendous confidence he had in O'Connor's judgment: "I read the story, with a few misgivings which somehow are not important."[7] Neither Carver nor Lindley, I believe, would have risked accepting this book about a girl who died so tragically, but Giroux, calling on years of experience with a vast array of authors, a good number of whom were Catholic and had written books not unlike what O'Connor was proposing, appreciated and valued the literary and theological significance of each work she submitted to him for publication. O'Connor, who wrote the introduction to the book, was overjoyed by Giroux's response, and in February 1961 she considered getting this book published a "genuine miracle"—not a phrase she would use offhandedly. In a more unguarded moment, O'Connor wrote of the book, "It's very badly written but should be published and Giroux had the good sense to see it."[8] Only years of respect and trust could have brought such an author and such an editor together in mutual accord. It should be mentioned, too, that after O'Connor's death, her mother served as the executrix of the Estate of Mary Flannery O'Connor and Robert Fitzgerald as O'Connor's literary executor, and after Fitzgerald's death in January 1985, Giroux served for a while in this capacity.[9]

The lives of O'Connor and Giroux cannot be set out synoptically in clear, parallel fashion because their age differences, family backgrounds, educations, personal and professional interests, travels, friendships, obligations, and differing longevity do not allow facile coordination. Yet the gaps in time and place—those generational spaces that separated these two individuals—become highly relevant and add a specific tone and texture to their particular relationship, opening up connections that might not always have verifiable certitude, but go from the sense of the possible, to that of the probable, to that which approximates the real. While facts can ground biographical perspectives, they sometimes fail to capture the imagination that demands interpretive interspaces. It is possible in hindsight to make certain connections that most likely were intuited but rarely articulated by either O'Connor or Giroux, but which nevertheless permitted these two individuals to form a bond that withstood unforeseen setbacks and changes. Giroux, for example, did not know the complete

story behind the Rinehart-Iowa Fiction Contest until after O'Connor's death; only then could he fill in the pieces and reconfigure in his mind what O'Connor was going through when they first met.[10]

When friends of Gertrude Stein first saw the portrait of her done in 1906 by Picasso, for which Stein had at least eighty sittings, they turned to the famous artist and, not liking Stein's heavy-lidded, masklike face, said, "Gertrude doesn't look anything like that." To this Picasso coyly replied, "Oh, but she will."[11] In like manner, when O'Connor preferred that her 1953 self-portrait be used for the cover of her first collection of stories, she wrote to Giroux in January 1955 that it would "do justice to the subject for some time to come."[12] Curiously, when she painted it, after suffering from a particularly acute siege of lupus, she did not look at herself in the mirror or at the pheasant cock, for she knew what both looked like. Such is the power of portrait artists (and writers of critical books and essays that contain biographical information, as well as writers of biographies) to create enduring personal images that are distinctive and, if successful, compelling.

This book intends to bring into focus two quite disparate lives, those of a Southern female fiction writer and her Northern male editor, and the impact they had on each other. O'Connor's relationships with her two interim editors, as well as her two literary agents and a host of writers and intellectuals mainly connected with Princeton University, among other institutions of higher learning, need to be added to this equation, so that the emerging sequential patterns have an acceptable degree of coherency. To a great extent, the tone and texture of the letters of these six individuals, but principally between O'Connor and Giroux, allow us to get a close-up glimpse of the way they communicated with one another and especially the way in which O'Connor wrote and revised her fiction. One of Giroux's greatest gifts to O'Connor was to allow her complete freedom to make changes in galleys and page proofs right up to the moment of publication. Their correspondence, the nature of which could not be predicted in advance, came in time and over time. Many of the letters included here have never been published before; citing them, at times in their entirety, gives readers an added sense not only of how these individuals related to one another, but also of the letters' contextual importance.

Since no critical book to date has focused in depth on the history of O'Connor's writing career, with particular attention to the interrelated

development of her stories and novels as detailed in her extensive correspondence, it has not been possible to appreciate what she did and how she did it from this perspective. The letters that O'Connor and Giroux exchanged provide the greatest insight into their relationship, first when Giroux was at Harcourt, Brace and then at Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, which became Farrar, Straus & Giroux soon after O'Connor's death.[13] In light of this, I have relied heavily on these letters, not omitting the correspondence with her two other editors and two agents, as a way of giving a faithful framework to what transpired on an ongoing basis. I believe this primary biographical data contributes significantly to the presentation and evaluation of their relationship. Furthermore, I have been fortunate to know personally some of the people who knew O'Connor and the value of her published works, particularly Robert Giroux, Maurice-Edgar Coindreau, Paul Horgan, Walker Percy, and Eudora Welty, as well as Giroux's close friend Eileen Simpson, who introduced me to the importance of O'Connor's Princeton-based friends and admirers, all of whom Simpson knew, especially Robert Lowell.[14] Moreover, William Lynch, S.J., who knew Giroux, had an extensive correspondence with Allen Tate, and influenced O'Connor more than anyone else concerning the relationship of theology and literature, was one of my theology professors.[15]

When O'Connor and Giroux first met, each could deal only with unstructured impressions and try to withhold superficial judgments about the other, since they were strangers with quite different backgrounds. O'Connor was born in Savannah, Georgia, on March 25, 1925, but her move as a young adolescent to Milledgeville, a small city southeast of Atlanta, shaped her personality in essential ways and stayed with her until the end of her days. Giroux's happiest memories, the ones to which he often returned, were rooted not so much in early life in his native Jersey City, New Jersey, but rather during his college days and, after his time in the navy, his early work experience.

In spite of the effects of the Great Depression on her modest Southern family, O'Connor coped fairly well as an only child, no doubt because she had an extended family network. (Her mother had a total of fifteen sisters, brothers, half-sisters, and half-brothers.) Born a Catholic, she attended Catholic grade schools, developed a deep personal spirituality, and continued to grow in her faith, mainly through personal prayer, sacramental life, and reading books and articles on medieval Scholasticism. She lived most of her life in central Georgia, which remained

racially divided and had relatively few Catholics, though both sides of her family prided themselves on their long-standing Irish Catholic roots. After her father's death in 1941 from lupus, O'Connor experienced a dispiriting, unarticulated void in her life. When she was diagnosed with the same disease in early 1951, her mother, Regina, out of extreme maternal concern, no doubt revealing deep-seated trepidation, kept the diagnosis of this disease from her until she learned about it in June 1952. Neither Regina, with whom she lived almost her entire life, nor any male companion ever helped O'Connor to develop her potential for intimacy. "He died when I was fifteen," she wrote about her father in mid-July 1956 to her close friend Betty Hester (designated as "A" in the posthumous letter collection *The Habit of Being*), "and I really only knew him by a kind of instinct."

O'Connor's nurturing instincts became most apparent in the chickens, ducks, and geese—and eventually peafowl—that she raised. She made clothes for her pet duck in Margaret Abercrombie's high school home economics class and later designed for herself a signature emblem shaped like a bird.[16] Her childhood friend Nell Ann Summers distinctly recalls being invited to see young O'Connor's backyard menagerie: "bantam hens dressed in striped trousers and white piqué jackets; chickens with sunflower bonnets and starched aprons; peacocks in their natural glory fanned out forming a backdrop; little houses for her barnyard birds; street signs for the fowl that walked the formal paths of the garden."[17] As a teenager, O'Connor also owned one hundred and fifty miniature glass and china fowl. Thus her creative imagination, rooted in her native surroundings, manifested itself at an early age. Her delightfully informative essay "The King of the Birds" shows her adult attachment to peafowl, while her 1953 poem "The Peacock Roosts" reveals a more controlled, Romantic appreciation for this bird:

The clown-faced peacock
Dragging sixty suns
Barely looks west where
The single one
Goes down in fire.

Bluer than moon-side sky
The trigger head

Circles and backs.
The folded forest squats and flies.
The ancient design is raised.

Gripped oak cannot be moved.
This bird looks down
And settles, ready.
Now the leaves can start the wind
That combs these suns

Hung all night in the gold-green silk wood
Or blown straight back until
The single one
Mounting the grey light
Will see the flying forest
Leave the tree and run.[18]

Furthermore, in her story "The Displaced Person" a peacock is magnificently transformed into a symbol of Christ's Transfiguration just as an elderly woman is given the opportunity to reflect on the deeper significance of her Christian faith. But most of all, O'Connor's sustained effort to write three novels, two collections of short stories, essays, book reviews, and talks—as well as a prizewinning posthumous volume of letters and a spiritual journal—reveals extraordinary talent and dedication, which continue to be appreciated in the United States and throughout the world.

O'Connor's friends and close acquaintances, beginning for the most part during her graduate school days, never doubted her writing talent, and yet her illness caused her to adjust constantly to realities beyond her control. Most notably, she was confined for all practical purposes to "Andalusia," a two-story house and farmlands set amid 544 acres of rolling red-clay hills and stands of pine trees four miles outside Milledgeville, from shortly after her twenty-sixth birthday to her death at age thirty-nine. O'Connor's particular medical situation charged her creative energies; her limited environment at Andalusia—restrictive but supportive—allowed her imaginatively to touch the bass strings of her existence on this earth. Surprisingly, in June 1957 she gave an unabashedly honest and upbeat perspective about returning as an adult to Milledgeville to her friend Maryat Lee, who had indicated that she, too,

would like to move to the South: "You get no condolences from me. This is a Return I have faced and when I faced it I was roped and tied and resigned the way it is necessary to be resigned to death, and largely because I thought it would be the end of my creation, any writing, and any WORK from me. And as I told you by the fence, it was only the *beginning*" (emphasis mine). Lee, who harbored negative feelings about the pretentious attitudes of many Southerners, first met O'Connor at Christmastime 1956, and according to Lee they corresponded thereafter at least twice monthly on average. During their first encounter, O'Connor told her new friend in a flat, honest tone that she had lupus. So upsetting was this news that Lee leaned against a nearby fence for balance. As they looked at each other, these two women realized that they had not so much a kinship as a type of undefinable knowledge that had special significance for each.[19] O'Connor knew the value of direct personal communication that opened up moments of authentic human revelation.

O'Connor is forever identified with Milledgeville, which had by 1957 approximately 1,200 inhabitants and was noted then mainly for four institutions: Georgia State College for Women, Georgia State Training School for Boys (a reformatory), Georgia Military College, and Central State Hospital for the mentally ill, the latter a source of considerable speculation about the origin of some of her characters. Like Henry David Thoreau accurately surveying the width and depth of Walden Pond or William Faulkner mentally delineating and populating Yoknapatawpha County, O'Connor had to discover the breadth and scope of what would always be dearest to her. Once, as a participant in the literary festival at South Carolina's Converse College in April 1962 with Eudora Welty, Cleanth Brooks, and Andrew Lytle, she heard Welty read her famous essay "Place in Fiction," which she found "very beautifully written," reinforcing her own feeling that, in addition to having a good ear, a writer of Southern fiction needs to look at life locally for a check on reality:

> I think the sense of place is as essential to good and honest writing as a logical mind; surely they are somewhere related. It is by knowing where you stand that you grow able to judge where you are. Place absorbs our earliest notice and attention, it bestows on us our original awareness; and our critical powers spring up from the study of it and the growth of experience inside it. It perseveres in bringing us back to earth when we fly too high. It never really stops informing us, for

> it is forever astir, alive, changing, reflecting, like the mind of man itself. One place comprehended can make us understand other places better. Sense of place gives equilibrium; extended, it is sense of direction too. Carried off we might be in spirit, and should be, when we are reading or writing something good; but it is the sense of place going with us still that is the ball of golden thread to carry us there and back and in every sense of the word to bring us home.[20]

In her fiction, O'Connor depicted both the local and the universal—or, more precisely, the transcendental—before returning home imaginatively to begin again. Her "improbable combination of religious faith and eccentricity," as novelist John Hawkes put it, "accounts in large part for the way in which 'unknown territory' and 'actuality' are held in severe balance of her work."[21] Not a reclusive Southern version of the Belle of Amherst, she knew the value of reaching out to others not only through the written word but also by giving more than sixty readings and talks at various colleges and universities while living at Andalusia.[22] Over the years, but especially after editing *Everything That Rises Must Converge* and reading her marvelous letters in *The Habit of Being,* Giroux came to realize O'Connor's overwhelming dedication to her craft and how tenacious and indefatigable she actually was.

If O'Connor's locale had a distinctive down-home character to it, Robert Giroux's was much more diverse and cosmopolitan. Descended from relatively obscure French Canadian immigrant stock, he was born in working-class Jersey City on April 8, 1914, the youngest after four siblings: Arnold, Lester, Estelle, and Josephine. His Canadian-born father, Arthur Joseph, worked for a while in the silk industry, while his mother, Katherine Regina Lyons Giroux, a grade-school teacher of Irish descent, took care of the household. Friends and relatives seem to agree that the Giroux family never rose above the ordinary, a key factor that impelled Robert to excel in whatever he did, first at Saint Aloysius School in Jersey City, then as a scholarship student at the Jesuit-run Regis High School in New York, and finally at Columbia College. In late June 1932, he received the first Nicholas Murray Butler Scholarship sponsored by the Columbia University Alumni Club of Hudson County, New Jersey, after achieving the best grades in a triple test in which fifty graduates of county high schools competed. During the second part of the test, an interview, Giroux and two others proved equal. A subsequent four-hour intelligence

test proved decisive for Giroux. With this partial scholarship in hand (a typical semester cost him less than $200), he anticipated entering Columbia's Pulitzer School of Journalism but then abandoned it to take the regular courses in Columbia College.

Much to his dismay, his father had stopped working by that time and withdrew more and more from involvement with his family.[23] As a result, family activities were kept to a minimum and Giroux grew progressively ill at ease inviting classmates to his house. Like O'Connor, he dealt with the problem of a missing father at a critical age in his life. While at Columbia, however, he became more expansive and developed a deep and lasting friendship with Mark Van Doren, one of his professors, and with two classmates, John Berryman and Thomas Merton, whose books he went on to edit.

As an editor who worked his entire life in New York—rising to become an editor in chief at Harcourt, Brace and eventually taking the same position at a firm that bore his name, Farrar, Straus & Giroux—he achieved a great awareness of the complexity and plurality of an overwhelmingly large metropolitan city—something he thoroughly relished. Giroux possessed an invaluable knowledge of the works of his authors, as well as sensitivity to the problems that both he and they faced in seeing their books through the press. While O'Connor considered New York "totally unsuitable to grow up in," she entertained the idea of moving there in April 1949, at least until her money ran out.[24] Giroux treated each of his authors as individuals and worked with them on a one-to-one basis, aware of each writer's literary genotype and, at the same time, of the larger, interconnected human patterns that inevitably develop within the publishing world. When he started as an editor in the early forties, book publishing in America enjoyed a different character from today's global industry, with its foreign and domestic mega-mergers, acquisitions editors who never edit, and inflated literary super-agents. He thought in terms of the *formation*, rather than the formal education, of an editor, as exemplified in the editorial careers of Edward Garnett, who launched Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, and John Galsworthy in England, or Maxwell Perkins, who published F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Thomas Wolfe at Scribner's. Giroux commented archly on the great difference between an acquiring editor, a line editor, and what he considered the work of a genuine editor:

> The truth is that editing lines is not necessarily the same as editing a book. A book is a much more complicated entity, the relation and portions of its parts, and its total impact could escape even a conscientious editor exclusively intent on vetting the book line by line. Perhaps that is why so many books today seem not to have been edited at all. The traditional function of the editor as the author's close collaborator from manuscript to printed book, and through all the aftermath, has too often been neglected, with deplorable consequences, in the current atmosphere of heightened commercial pressures and a largely acquisitive publishing posture. Editors used to be known by their authors; now some of them are known by their restaurants.[25]

A good editor, for Giroux, has judgment, taste, and most of all empathy and the capacity "not only to perceive what the author's aims are, but to help in achieving their realization to the fullest extent." This later point, absolutely central to Giroux's philosophy as an editor, served as the basis of many discussions we had together over the years.

By looking at the way Giroux dealt with his fellow editors and authors, one can get a better sense of the way he gradually developed his editorial philosophy, particularly when the publishing winds shifted and he had to adjust his tack, moving forward with each project, seeing it to completion, knowing that he was an important part of the process. Editors were and are under a lot of pressure; there is always a contest to receive famous awards. Giroux knew that his authors' books had to make money, and he gradually learned, once he could sign book contracts himself, that he needed at times to take risks. He likewise knew the direction he wanted to take, but how to get there, given the numerous manuscripts on his desk at any one time, was not always apparent. He often said that editorial and sales meetings gave him a definite awareness of the practical side of publishing. Above all, he had to make sure that he retained his humanity and did not let his growing success and visibility govern his behavior. He had to be grounded in all sorts of ways, so that when he spoke—especially to his authors—he said good, true, and efficacious words.

While some biographical sketches of Giroux exist, no formal, in-depth biography of him has been attempted. I first made his acquaintance in the mid-1980s, during a weekend in Charlottesville, Virginia, where we both were houseguests of one of his authors, Mary Lee Settle. I grew to know and admire him over the years, not as a father figure, but simply as

my editor, mentor, and friend. Conversation always flowed naturally between us. From 1999 to 2001, while I held a visiting professorship at Saint Peter's College in Jersey City, we had dinner together a couple of times a month. I regularly visited him during his final years, when he resided in Seabrook Village, a few miles inland from Asbury Park on the Jersey shore. With enthusiasm and tact, he was never hesitant about discussing the authors he knew and the works he edited. His deep chuckle still resonates in my ears as I recall him recounting some wonderfully humorous incidents in his life.

Since Giroux edited a collection I assembled of Walker Percy's essays and talks, entitled *Signposts in a Strange Land*, as well as my biography *Walker Percy: A Life*, I have a firsthand appreciation for the ways in which he integrated his professional and personal life. As he mentioned to me, his role in editing O'Connor's works was fairly simple and straightforward. In the case of *Wise Blood*, he knew that criticism from O'Connor's faculty and mentors at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, in addition to the critical advice of Caroline Gordon and Robert Fitzgerald, had given the novel the structure it needed to allow the fullness and depth of the story to reveal itself. Most of O'Connor's stories had been published before they were collected into book form, so he felt no particular need to make suggestions on how to recast them. From personal experience, I know that he read every word of a text, used a red pencil to suggest corrections, and then attentively reread subsequent versions. He was most concerned about the overall content and structure of a work. After one of Giroux's authors, who had received some adverse criticism from him about novel in progress, called me to share some built-up anxiety and frustration, I mentioned this to Giroux. He said to me honestly and without equivocation, "I read the novel and felt that certain sections needed to be altered. My ultimate role as an editor is to help all my authors write their very best." I considered this last sentence his personal, sustaining mantra. Though he might question his own judgment from time to time, he knew that his overall experience served him in good stead.

When O'Connor first met Giroux, she could not have imagined the impact that meeting would have on her life, nor of some of the incalculably fluid dynamics already at play. At that moment, the lives of these individuals, as well as certain of their friends and acquaintances, flowed into one another, creating an unanticipated multilevel *confluence* whose

swirling vortices move forward, creating receding eddies or new currents of one sort or another—a powerful image used by Welty in *The Optimist's Daughter*. In this novel, as Laurel McKelva dreams about traveling with her fiancé, Phil Hand, from Chicago to Mount Salus, Mississippi, to be married in a Presbyterian church, she senses the interconnectedness of all that surrounds her: "All they could see was sky, water, birds, light, and confluence. It was the whole morning world. And they themselves were a part of the confluence."[26]

Critical essays and books about O'Connor that contain biographical information and the two biographies about her written by Jean Cash and Brad Gooch, as well as the letters in *The Habit of Being*, can serve as the basis for explaining the specific elements or facets of her life. If the resulting biographical creation authentically unites these elements, the result is recognized as the subject re-presented not as a living clone, a creature revivified through genetic manipulation, but as a three-dimensional, intelligent and intelligible individual who has depth and coherence. In short, this verbal re-presentation is analogous to giving birth to someone who then grows and develops before the reader's eyes. Yet it is often assumed—naïvely, in my opinion—that the reader, having finished a biography, sees the subject exactly as the biographer does; rather, the reader must analyze and decode the sign systems, re-inscribing mentally what he or she has read. Critical essays and books containing biographical information about O'Connor constantly force us to consider the basic intersecting dimensions of her life. Yet a problem remains throughout this process: to what extent can O'Connor critics and biographers raise hypotheses and suggest possibilities without distorting their viable ongoing model? Still and all, a biographer or critic can discover an amalgam of elements that reveals the multifaceted nature of the person under consideration.

One crucial factor in evaluating and interpreting biographical information about both O'Connor and Giroux is to consider whether a particular biographer had personal knowledge of the subject and the subject's family, friends, and acquaintances, as did Sally Fitzgerald, whose biography of O'Connor, most likely partially written before her death, has not been published. Giroux, who would have edited the book, told me in the spring of 1997 that he never read a page of it, though he had hoped to see it published in 1986.[27] In much the same way, an authorized O'Connor biography, tentatively entitled *"Stalking Joy": The Life*

and Times of Flannery O'Connor, which William Sessions was writing before his death in August 2016, will, if and when published, undoubtedly change our views of O'Connor. As a former Regents Professor of English at Georgia State University and a friend of both O'Connor and Betty Hester, Sessions had access to material not previously available to other O'Connor scholars. Fitzgerald and Sessions had a distinct advantage in that they could test the accuracy of their views against the mimetic pull of O'Connor's mannerisms and voice, and of those times when they enjoyed her company. While such knowledge does not guarantee a successful biography, it does add authenticity of a degree very close to that known by members of the family, at least at the level of reportage.

Biographers are not hesitant about discussing this crucial issue. Joseph Blotner, author of two biographies of William Faulkner and my mentor in graduate school, has written specifically about his recollections of Faulkner dating from 1953, though he readily admitted in three essays, "Did You See Him Plain?," "The Sources of William Faulkner's Genius," and "William Faulkner: Life and Art," that Faulkner was too varied for a single image and, at the same time, too strong to fail to leave behind a powerful image. "To be with him alone," Blotner writes, "to talk with him alone, was to learn a new mode of communication. He felt no need whatever to engage in talk just for the sake of talk. He was a master of avoidance. Even the most gregarious of us experience moments when he simply does not want to talk with the friendly stranger in the elevator who though wordless is pregnant with some well-meant and trivial conversational gambit. It was as though Faulkner by a subtle act of will or legerdemain compressed his ectoplasm and retreated within himself." While writing his biographies, Blotner retained a powerful image of his subject: "Many times, nearby or at a distance, most of us see in one figure almost a double of another that we know. This has never happened to me in all the years since I first saw William Faulkner."[28] Perhaps the same could be said by those who knew O'Connor, and in doing so they would underscore that which made her inimitable, though she would be among the first not to invite any type of comparison between herself and Faulkner.[29] In the final analysis, literary critics know that biographical portraits of noted writers and their editors and friends will never be finished. These portraits change as more dimensions of the subjects' lives are brought forward and put into appropriate literary and human perspectives, as a way of paying more apt, discerning, and fitting homage.

Over the centuries, portrait artists have used profile views, full-face views, three-quarter views, and other techniques to depict their subjects in various poses in order to help us comprehend what they see. John Keats takes a different, more ekphrastic approach in his "Ode on a Grecian Urn," a poem favored by Faulkner, in rendering two phases of ancient Greek life that have perennial significance: an amorous young couple on one side of the urn and some type of solemn procession on the other. Since it is impossible to see both sides of the urn at the same time, we are invited by Keats to ask questions about the two scenes as we rotate the urn slowly, gaining a sense of the relationships between infatuated youth and rituals of sacrifice and death. Both highlight enigmatic notions of beauty and truth. In similar fashion, we are invited to study O'Connor's intense passion for writing fiction while living with a deadly disease in order to appreciate the fullness of who she was and what she so ably accomplished during her lifetime.

CHAPTER ONE

The March 2, 1949, Visit

When Robert Lowell brought Flannery O'Connor into Robert Giroux's office on March 2, 1949, he carried with him years of experiences and situations that had certain unarticulated resonances or reverberations but were nevertheless quite real, if not always evident. As Giroux told me, he first met Lowell and his wife, Jean Stafford, in October 1941, when both were working at the publishing firm of Sheed & Ward in New York. He was interested to learn that Stafford had worked at the *Southern Review* and was now writing *Boston Adventure*, which she submitted in early 1942 to Harcourt, Brace. When Giroux, manuscript in hand, later boarded a train on his way to see some friends in Connecticut, he was so absorbed in reading the novel that he missed his stop. "It is surely one of the greatest experiences than an editor or indeed any reader can have," he told me, "to lose oneself in a book so completely that the world and time itself momentarily disappear."

O'Connor met the dashingly handsome, chain-smoking, thirty-year-old "Cal" Lowell in October 1947 at a dinner party in Iowa City, where she was pursuing graduate studies. They met again in early November 1948, after Lowell had divorced Stafford, when he arrived to take up residence in the West House at Yaddo, the bucolic writers' colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. Just north of Albany, Saratoga tended to attract wealthy summer visitors, many of whom stayed at the Grand Union Hotel or the Gideon Putnam during August to attend the horse races.

Drinking the terrible-tasting, sulfuric mineral water and indulging themselves by taking the town's famous mud baths, they could renew themselves physically and mentally before returning to the humdrum of their daily lives. O'Connor had arrived in June 1948 for an initial stay of two months and was subsequently invited to return in mid-September and remain through the end of the year; in fact, her invitation was again extended through March and possibly beyond. Lowell had held a previous summer residency at Yaddo in 1947, spending a good deal of his time translating Jean Racine's *Phèdre*.

The relationships of O'Connor, Giroux, Lowell, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound serve as but one example of the unexpected—albeit peripheral—Weltyesque confluences in the lives of these five individuals. From October 1947 to October 1948 Lowell served as the sixth Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress, a post he held not without some heated controversy, revealing the depths of his passion for poetry as well as his assertive and sometimes belligerent nature. (In 1943 Lowell spent five months in a federal prison in Danbury, Connecticut, because of his stance as a conscientious objector during World War II.) In February 1947, he had run into considerable opposition when promoting Ezra Pound for the 1948 Bollingen Prize, awarded by the Fellows of the Library of Congress in American Letters, for the publication of the *Pisan Cantos*, especially from poet and former Harvard professor Robert Hillyer. Yet his efforts proved successful, particularly his support of three noted poets: W. H. Auden, Allen Tate (another Fellow in American Letters), and Eliot. John Berryman, prompted by Tate, wrote a letter of protest in support of Pound, signed by eighty-four interested parties, which appeared in the *Nation*. It should be noted that in November 1948, not long before bringing O'Connor to Giroux's office, Lowell attended a soirée in Princeton during which he caught up with Tate (the subject of four of his poems) and Eliot.[1] Perhaps taken with his own renown as a poet, Lowell soon began to address his letters to Eliot a bit maladroitly as "Uncle Tom."

Also in November 1948, Giroux visited Eliot, then sixty years old, at Princeton, where he was a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study working on his play *The Cocktail Party*. It was also a chance for Eliot to meet some old friends, such as Jacques Maritain, and to make the acquaintance of Eileen Simpson, Berryman's wife, who wrote *Poets in Their Youth: A Memoir*, a detailed account of her life among some of America's

most important literary figures.[2] Eliot's workroom at the Institute was one of the classrooms, where Giroux once found him diagramming the frequency of the appearances of the characters in his play in each of its three acts, using letters from each character's names. His writing resembled a mathematical equation, as Giroux told me. "Have you noticed the sign, *DO NOT ERASE*?," Eliot asked Giroux.[3] "That's because Albert Einstein occasionally uses this blackboard for excursions into the fourth dimension. I wonder what he'll think of my equations." (By naming one of his characters Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, Eliot tipped his hat to Giroux [Harcourt] and Charles Reilly, Giroux's close friend and companion.) After Eliot had been informed that he had won the Nobel Prize and Giroux accompanied him to Idlewild Airport for his flight to Europe, a reporter asked him if the prize was given for a specific work. Eliot replied, "I believe it's given for the entire corpus." The reporter then asked, "When did you write that?" Eliot always thought *The Entire Corpus* might make a good title for a murder mystery.

In an emblematic and rather bizarre way, Pound had an impact on those in Giroux's office that March morning. After moving to Italy in 1924, he embraced Benito Mussolini's fascism and made, to the chagrin of some of his friends and followers, hundreds of radio broadcasts against the U.S. government and particularly Jews. He was arrested for treason by the American forces in 1945, transported to the United States, and eventually incarcerated for twelve years in Saint Elizabeths Hospital, a psychiatric institution in Washington, DC. Considered mentally unstable with a condition that warranted long-term, psychiatric treatment, he nevertheless continued writing, focusing especially on his translation of Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* and *Elektra*.

Lowell had been attracted to Pound's poetry ever since he first wrote to him in May 1936 as a nineteen-year-old freshman at Harvard.[4] O'Connor met Pound's son Omar, a sophomore at Hamilton College (his father's alma mater), when he visited Lowell at Yaddo in 1948. Later she inquired about Omar in a letter to Lowell, since she had met a physician who knew Mr. and Mrs. Pound and liked them both.[5] Giroux had first encountered Eliot in the spring of 1946 and was impressed by the dedication of his poem "The Waste Land" "To Ezra Pound, *il miglior fabbro*." He was most anxious to meet the controversial poet, which he and Lowell did in September 1948.[6] Pound had been influential in the publication in *Poetry* magazine of Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," so

Eliot on occasion visited his old friend in Washington. (Berryman, who visited Pound with Lowell, would publish an in-depth introduction to Pound's poetry in the April 1949 issue of the *Partisan Review*. Robert Fitzgerald, an important person in O'Connor's life, had visited Pound in Italy in 1932 and later sent him a draft of his translation of Homer's *The Odyssey*.)[7]

In talking to Giroux at Saint Elizabeths, Pound mocked Giroux's colleagues Frank Morley and Eugene Reynal, for he had little tolerance for such established editors. After Pound made reference to "Weinstein Kircheberg" (in German *church* and *hill*), it took Giroux a minute or so to figure out that Pound was referring to Winston Churchill.[8] Given that Giroux, then a former naval officer, had personally witnessed the devastating aftermath at Pearl Harbor and had spent stressful months of his life at sea, participating in six major engagements against the Japanese military, he left the short visit vehemently opposed to those who sentimentalized Pound or made excuses for his pro-Axis broadcasts and anti-Semitic tirades. Giroux last saw Pound at a memorial ceremony for Eliot: he wrote to Berryman, "I've just got back from London. The services for the Old Possum [Eliot] at Westminster Abbey were marvelous, and everyone turned out. The most impressive presence was that of Ezra Pound, white-bearded and shrunken, and looking like the ghost of Lear. He arrived from Venice and presumably he had not been in London since 1922! He refused to meet the press or indeed anyone, and did not once open his mouth. When I greeted him, he bowed very formally."[9] Giroux noted that Pound's silence, after all the years of over-talk, was "crushing." Though O'Connor never mentions in her essays or letters Pound's poetry and the influence it had on American poetry, she was aware of these visits, as she mentioned in a letter to Sally and Robert Fitzgerald in January 1956: "All my erstwhile *boy friends* visit Pound at St. Elizabeths and think he is mad and finished—he calls them all funny names and they think it's wonderful, touched by the holy hand, etc." (emphasis mine).

In fall 1948, before traveling with Lowell to New York to meet Giroux, O'Connor enjoyed the quasi-monastic privacy afforded by Yaddo, where she met, among other residents, Patricia Highsmith, then writing her first novel, *Strangers on a Train*; James Ross, the author of *They Don't Dance Much* (O'Connor called it a "very fine book"); and two African Americans, Chester Himes, then known primarily for his novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, and Arna Bontemps, a dominant figure in the Harlem

Renaissance.[10] Lowell described Yaddo to Elizabeth Bishop with an indirect reference to O'Connor: "Now there are an introverted and an extroverted colored man; a boy of 23 who experiments with dope; a student [O'Connor] of a former Kenyon class-mate of mine, who at age of six was in the Pathé News Reel for having a chicken that walked backwards; and Malcolm Cowley, nice but a little slow."[11] Lowell and Bishop, who suffered from various forms of alienation, whether mental or geographical, had an astonishingly private thirty-year friendship. Bishop, later a Pulitzer Prize recipient, struck up an extraordinary epistolary friendship with O'Connor, although they never met because Bishop relocated to Brazil.[12]

At Yaddo, O'Connor projected herself as being perceptive and rather reticent, as Lowell mentioned in a letter to Robie Macauley.[13] O'Connor survived her residency by keeping busy as much as she could and by not being apologetic about her Southern roots. In November, Lowell wrote to Caroline Gordon, then teaching a creative writing course at Columbia University, that she had an admirer then at Yaddo, a fellow Catholic by the name of Flannery O'Connor, who was looking for a teaching post. Would Columbia have a teaching position available?[14] This passing reference to O'Connor as someone familiar with Gordon's fiction provided enough assurance for Gordon eventually to take O'Connor under her pedagogical wing.

Giroux, too, had known and admired Gordon, particularly during the years she lived in Princeton, due partly to his sustained personal and professional friendship with Berryman, who taught at Princeton almost continuously for ten years beginning in the fall of 1943. Princeton had become, as it still is, an epicenter for internationally acclaimed creative writers, philosophers, scientists, and academicians of all sorts because of its intellectual history and preeminent academic resources, as well as its proximity to New York. Others identified with Princeton who would have a definite influence on O'Connor include Jacques Maritain (a professor from 1948 to 1952 who continued to live there until 1960); Maurice-Edgar Coindreau (professor from 1923 to 1961); Robert Fitzgerald (fellow, 1949 to 1951), Eliot (1948, fellow at the Institute for Advance Study), Tate (1939 to 1942, fellow in creative writing), and by extension Lowell and Stafford. Though never central to O'Connor's career, Berryman, a Pulitzer Prize–winning poet and one of Giroux's authors, sat in on Tate's lectures on poetry during his senior year at Columbia.

Giroux's caring nature in dealing with both Berryman's and Lowell's recurring physical and psychological problems reveals an incredible capacity for understanding authors whose talents needed to be fostered and advanced as far as humanly possible.[15] By midsummer of 1952, most likely through Giroux, O'Connor already knew Eileen Simpson, who earned a reputation as an NYU-trained psychotherapist. Simpson lamented that the strain caused by infidelity in the marriages of Lowell and Stafford, Tate and Gordon, and herself and Berryman eventually took its toll.[16] After fourteen years of marriage, dramatized in her 1975 novel *The Maze*, Simpson divorced Berryman in 1956, though she remained, as did her former husband, a lifelong friend of Giroux. When Giroux and I visited with her in her New York apartment, she often reminisced about her days in Princeton and the importance of those years to her.

It did not take long for O'Connor to find her place among the other writers and artists at Yaddo, though some had trouble understanding her heavy Southern accent. O'Connor, like everyone at Yaddo, knew who Robert Traill Spence Lowell IV was, for he had already achieved tremendous acclaim for his Pulitzer Prize–winning volume of poetry *Lord Weary's Castle*, judiciously critiqued in advance by his friend Randall Jarrell, edited by Giroux, and proofread by Berryman.[17] After Giroux had signed a contract for this book, Mrs. Lowell phoned from somewhere in the empyrean, as Giroux was wont to say.

> "Is Bobby [she never called him Cal] any good?" When Giroux said her son was first-rate, she further asked, "Will his books make money?"
>
> "It takes years to get established," he replied, "and ordinarily poems make little money at the start."
>
> Her retort: "I thought so."

Alfred Kazin, a well-known literary critic, literary scout for Harcourt, Brace, and author of *On Native Grounds*, was one of a number of visitors at Yaddo while O'Connor was there. He described Lowell with great exuberance: "He was not just damned good, suddenly famous and deserving his fame; he was in a state of grandeur not negotiable with lesser beings. He was Lowell; he was handsome, magnetic, rich, wild with excitement about his powers, wild over the many tributes to him from Pound, [George] Santayana, his old friends, Tate, Jarrell and [Robert Penn]

Warren."[18] After O'Connor shared some manuscript pages of her novel, Kazin could barely retain his enthusiasm for her as well. "No fiction writer after the war seemed to be so *deep*, so severely perfect as Flannery," he wrote, though curiously he later voted against the novel's acceptance by Harcourt, Brace.[19] Ironically, Kazin went so far as to predict that out of the emerging crop of talented writers, O'Connor would become "our classic." He was quick to add that she "seemed to be attending Lowell with rapture."

Although O'Connor felt strongly attracted to certain men during her lifetime—John Sullivan in college, Robie Macauley in graduate school, and particularly Erik Langkjaer in the early 1950s—Lowell, whose pedigree was beyond impeccable, then and there captivated her, especially as he was both a brilliant poet and (at that moment) unmarried. Lowell was then writing his masterful *The Mills of the Kavanaughs*, which would be followed by *Life Studies*, *Phaedra* and *Figaro* (translation), *Imitations*, and *For the Union Dead*, all edited by Giroux. Lowell's father and grandfather had been navy commanders, and two distant cousins—Abbott Lawrence Lowell, who served as twenty-fourth president of Harvard University, and his sister Amy, a poet—likewise achieved national prominence. His mother, Charlotte Winslow Lowell, could trace her family back to Pilgrims on the *Mayflower*. O'Connor recognized in her new friend both a proven literary genius and someone seeking religious values in his life, a pursuit that grew in seriousness after his marriage in April 1940 to Stafford (Tate gave away the bride). Though Giroux edited the works of both Lowell and Stafford, he maintained a deeper and more abiding personal friendship with Stafford, particularly through some of the darker moments of her life.[20]

While a college student, Lowell had read such Catholic theologians and writers as Maritain, Étienne Gilson, Cardinal John Henry Newman, Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., and Blaise Pascal, some of whose works in various degrees exerted a great influence on his decision to convert to Catholicism in 1941. O'Connor—as did Gordon—refers to most of these same authors as significant figures who helped her better understand various facets and dimensions of Roman Catholicism. O'Connor would later think of Gilson as a more vigorous writer than Maritain.[21] As someone who rarely left the debates of the thirteenth century, Gilson maintained that Christian philosophy had important roots in a basic concept: Invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur (The

mind perceives God's supernatural entities by means of created things).[22] As O'Connor developed as a writer, she placed a number of her protagonists in concrete situations that at first appear small, perhaps insignificant, until these characters experience their expansive nature and theological fullness. In this way, some of her protagonists gradually move closer and closer to an unspecified, but nevertheless mystical, beatific vision, though no one route is preferable to another in finding either one's heart or God—if that can, in the final analysis, be achieved. Still, Maritain and O'Connor both believed strongly in the spiritual unconscious that is part and parcel of the mysterious nature of the literary enterprise. By the time O'Connor arrived at Yaddo, she had read prolifically not only religious writers such as Georges Bernanos, Léon Bloy (Maritain's godfather), Graham Greene, François Mauriac (her personal library would eventually contain fifteen of Mauriac's books), and Evelyn Waugh, but also those who had made their mark on the world of literature from widely differing perspectives: William Faulkner, Katherine Ann Porter, Eudora Welty, Peter Taylor, Djuna Barnes, Dorothy Richardson, and Virginia Woolf ("Va. Woolfe," as she called her). Her interest in Russian and Polish fiction writers, including Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, Gogol, and Joseph Conrad (she read almost all his literary works), provides clear proof that her taste in fiction had a definite Catholic / catholic bias.[23] In much the same way, Lowell's interest in the works of explicitly Christian writers, in addition to more contemporary secular authors who had captivated him since his days as an undergraduate, could find striking echoes in O'Connor's own reading background. Each of them, in varying ways, could look through both ends of the telescope and thus make personal judgments about faith based in part—but only in part—on an awareness of important works of their Western literary heritage.

A faith commitment, no matter how often it is renewed, will bear fruit only if it emerges from the insights and experiences of the entire person, including the works of literature and the theology they internalize. Almost never in my experience as a Catholic priest are the works of one specific author the reason for someone's conversion to the faith. In the long run, personal prayer trumps intellectual acumen. I once asked Walker Percy why he had converted, and he replied that he had been led to the Catholic Church by reading Søren Kierkegaard. When I spontaneously remarked, "No one ever converted to Catholicism because of Kierkegaard," his face lit up and he thought for a minute before saying that he had actually been impressed by one of his North Carolina frater-

nity brothers who had the habit of rising early and going to daily Mass. During the twenty-three three-day retreats that Percy made during the course of his life at the Jesuit retreat house in Convent, Louisiana, he had many occasions to evaluate the various authors he had read and was reading. Conversion for him demanded ongoing acts of re-commitment.

O'Connor, a lifelong Catholic, stated explicitly in a letter to Helen Greene in May 1952 that her "philosophical notions don't derive from Kierkegard (I can't even spell it) but from St. Thomas Aquinas"—something that Percy would have appreciated, especially through his prolonged studies of the medievally savvy semiotic philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. It is worth noting that O'Connor explicitly states that her philosophical notions, *not* her theological ones—a crucial distinction—derive from Saint Thomas, though this distinction might not be all that clear-cut. Both Percy and O'Connor knew that religious commitment—and its transformation into works of literature—were a matter not just of accepting and repeating dogmas and decrees, but of interiorizing one's faith, sometimes in its ritualistic form, and allowing others to see that such faith not only can exist but also determine one's being, especially as a writer.

Lowell never forgot his first impression of O'Connor: "It seems such a short time ago that I met her at Yaddo, 23 or 24, always in a blue jean suit, working on the last chapters of *Wise Blood*, suffering from undiagnosed pains, a face formless at times, then, very strong and young and right. She had already really mastered and found her themes and finely calibrated style, knew she wouldn't marry, would be Southern, shocking and disciplined. In a blunt, disdainful yet somehow very unpretentious and modest way, I think she knew how good she was."[24] Lowell undoubtedly was taken by both O'Connor's disarming wit (deliciously sardonic at times) and determined commitment to her craft, even though later in her career she might work for months and throw everything away, not thinking that she had wasted her time at all.[25] While O'Connor might have been smitten by Lowell, no doubt prompted by his temporary re-commitment to Catholicism, their relationship, unlike the not-so-subtle amorous activities of some of the other Yaddo guests, never went beyond the bounds of propriety. It would have been clear to O'Connor that Lowell was reserving his expressions of affection for thirty-two-year-old Elizabeth Hardwick, also a Yaddo guest. Bishop had warned Lowell about not getting involved with Hardwick, someone he had known for a couple of years.[26] The marriage of Lowell and Hardwick on July 28, 1949,

at his parents' house in Beverly Farms, Massachusetts, took place just after Lowell had been released from Baldpate, a small hospital in Georgetown, Massachusetts (where Giroux visited him), and before his stay at Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic on East Sixty-Eighth Street in New York, where Stafford had previously been hospitalized.

O'Connor and Hardwick seemingly had little in common and, in fact, never became close friends, though O'Connor considered her an excellent writer. Hardwick's background and lifestyle, had O'Connor even an inkling, would have astonished her. A native Kentuckian, the eighth of eleven children, Hardwick received a master's degree in English from the University of Kentucky in 1939 before heading off to Columbia to pursue graduate work for two more years. While living in New York in the early 1940s, she took up with Greer Johnson, a gay man she had known in Lexington. Her first novel, *The Ghostly Lover*, written while a student at Columbia, had been edited by John Woodburn, Giroux's good friend and colleague at Harcourt, Brace. In *Sleepless Nights*, published when she was sixty-two years old, the licentious protagonist, a Columbia student named Elizabeth, relates a decadent world that O'Connor could only have imagined in her wildest dreams:

> New York: there I lived at the Hotel Schuyler on West 45th Street, lived with a red-cheeked, homosexual man from Kentucky. We had known each other all our lives. Our friendship was a violent one and we were as obsessive, critical, jealous and cruel as any ordinary couple. The rages, the slamming doors, the silences, the dissembling. Each was for the other a treasured object of gossip and complaint. In spite of his inclinations, the drama was of man and woman, a genetic dissonance so like the marital howlings one could hear floating up from the courtyard or creeping up and down the rusty fire escapes.[27]

Lowell's famous poem "Man and Wife" recounts a moment, aided by a drug called Miltown, that reveals that his own out-of-control marriage with Hardwick had little chance of survival:

Man and Wife

> Tamed by *Miltown*, we lie on Mother's bed;
> the rising sun in war paint dyes us red;
> in broad daylight her gilded bed-posts shine,

abandoned, almost Dionysian.
At last the trees are green on Marlborough Street,
blossoms on our magnolia ignite
the morning with their murderous five days' white.
All night I've held your hand,
as if you had
a fourth time faced the kingdom of the mad—
its hackneyed speech, its homicidal eye—
and dragged me home alive. . . . Oh my *Petite*,
clearest of all God's creatures, still all air and nerve:
you were in your twenties, and I,
once hand on glass
and heart in mouth,
outdrank the Rahvs in the heat
of Greenwich Village, fainting at your feet—
too boiled and shy
and poker-faced to make a pass,
while the shrill verve
of your invective scorched the traditional South.

Now twelve years later, you turn your back.
Sleepless, you hold
your pillow to your hollows like a child;
your old-fashioned tirade—
loving, rapid, merciless—
breaks like the Atlantic Ocean on my head.[28]

During their twenty-three years of marriage, Hardwick, always astonished at the depth of her husband's character, nursed him through his recurring manic-depressive episodes and hospitalizations. In many ways, she became an articulate spokeswoman for those female writers who had been seduced and then betrayed by the men they loved. One of her greatest personal achievements was assisting Jason and Barbara Epstein in founding the *New York Review of Books* in 1963, though most likely O'Connor never knew about this publication.

As Lowell went through a process of metanoia, trying to retrieve a faith that always seemed to escape his grasp, his behavior attracted attention. O'Connor's personal devotion to her faith undoubtedly awakened something within Lowell. There was a bond between them that neither

defined with precision, preferring just to signal its presence. After he had separated from Hardwick in 1954, Lowell wrote to O'Connor, "Flannery, I love you very much," though he was quick to add that this was not a proposal.[29] Lowell repeated this word *love* in his tribute in *Flannery O'Connor: A Memorial*.[30] In a letter written in late 1957, he informs her that he considers her, Elizabeth Bishop, Peter Taylor, and Allen Tate as his "old friends."[31] Reciprocally, O'Connor continued in her own fashion to love Lowell, as she mentioned to Hester in a letter written in April 1956:

> I watched him that winter come back into the Church. I had nothing to do with it but of course it was a great joy to me. I was only 23 and didn't have much sense. He was terribly excited about it and got more and more excited and in about two weeks had a complete mental breakdown. That second conversion went with it, of course. He had shock treatments and all that, and when he came out, he was well for a time, married again a very nice girl named Elizabeth Hardwick, and since then has been off and on, in and out of institutions. . . . What I pray is that one day it will be easy for him to come back into the Church. He is one of the people *I love* and there is a part of me that won't be at peace until he is at peace in the Church [emphasis mine].

O'Connor's use of the word *love*, so honest and unnuanced, reveals a dimension of her life otherwise rarely seen, certainly not in her fiction, where she avoids depicting couples, young or otherwise, in love with each other, though she sometimes ended her letters to Maryat Lee with this word. What impressed Lowell was how O'Connor fused her habit of doing with her habit of being—particularly when focused on the process of conversion, as she wrote to Hester in April 1958: "It seems to me that all good stories are about conversion, about a character's changing. If it is the Church he's converted to, the Church remains stable and he has to change as you say—so why do you also say the character has to remain stable? The action of grace changes a character. Grace can't be experienced in itself."

Given her externally reserved personality, O'Connor had no intention of preaching to Lowell or serving as a catechetical mentor; she preferred just being present to him as a committed Catholic, continuing to express her faith as she had always done—in simple, unobtrusive ways

that, of course, did not go unnoticed. In addition to going to Mass, as she had done almost every day at Saint Mary's Church during her three-year stay in Iowa City, she would soon start reading the breviary, a book used especially by priests and monks as they recited prescribed prayers and reflected on spiritual exhortations throughout the day. Since participation at religious services did not seem to be a priority for Yaddo guests, O'Connor accompanied Jim and Nellie Shannon, a caretaker and head cook at Yaddo, when they drove to Sunday Mass at Saint Clement's Church on Lake Avenue in Saratoga. O'Connor's devotion to the sacred liturgy was solidly based on its dogmatic, sacrificial dimensions. "Dogma," she informed Cecil Dawkins in December 1959, "is the guardian of mystery."

O'Connor had come to Yaddo not to find a husband, but to write and get published. Her first step in establishing herself as a professional writer was to write to Elizabeth McKee on June 19, 1948, indicating that she had been working on a novel "a year and a half and will probably be two more years finishing it"; at the suggestion of one of McKee's clients, Paul Moor, she asked McKee to become her agent. Though her relationship with McKee, a former editor at the *Atlantic Monthly*, provided her with a sustained conduit to the professional world of publishing, it did more than that: it helped to lessen her tendency to assume the responsibilities of a literary agent, mainly to guarantee control of the placement of certain stories.[32] McKee was a partner in McKee & Batchelder at 624 Madison Avenue in New York, as indicated on the inside address of O'Connor's first letters to her. She then joined Mavis McIntosh Riordan and Elizabeth Otis, a good friend of Giroux, at their firm of McIntosh & Otis at 30 East Sixtieth Street, which eventually became McIntosh, McKee & Dodds. When Giroux first met O'Connor, he had not yet met McKee; his contact had always been and would be for at least the next six years with McIntosh.[33] "Miss McIntosh," O'Connor wrote to Maryat Lee in early 1957, "is an old lady who sits at her desk with her hat on and Miss McKee is a youngish lady who speaks out of the side of her mouth like a refined dead-end kid"—perhaps, as Sally Fitzgerald once speculated, the result of facial paralysis.[34] Together, these two capable women would successfully represent such writers as William Styron, John Irving, Edna O'Brien, John Gardner, and Robert Coover.

O'Connor felt that the first chapters of her first novel were in no condition to be sent to anyone, certainly not a literary agent. She informed

McKee that the first chapter, "The Train," had been published (*Sewanee Review*, April–June 1948); the fourth chapter would appear in the new quarterly *American Letters* in the fall; another chapter had been sent to the *Partisan Review*, but she expected them to return it; and that a short story had been accepted by *Mademoiselle* for their fall issue. Wanting to become independent as soon as possible, O'Connor did not hide from McKee her concern about her personal finances: "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*." McKee replied on June 23 that she would be glad to look at whatever O'Connor sent to her, indicating, too, that she was a good friend of John Selby at Rinehart & Company and could easily handle any contractual arrangements.

O'Connor probably knew little about Selby's background, especially his fiction, which most likely would not have appealed to her. By the time he came to know O'Connor, he had published four novels; the last, *Elegant Journey* (1944), concerned the Trace family history in his native Missouri from 1840 to 1880. After graduating from the University of Missouri in 1918, Selby worked as a journalist and music critic for the *Kansas City Star* until 1929. While living in France from 1929 to 1932, he furthered his interest in art and music, eventually working for the Associated Press. In 1944, he left the Associated Press to become associate editor and publicity director for Rinehart, assuming the role of editor in chief the following year.

McKee also contacted George Davis at *Mademoiselle* and asked him to send her the galleys of O'Connor's story. "Please don't let it worry you," McKee wrote to O'Connor, "that you are not a prolific writer, as that doesn't bother me at all. I know that you are sincerely interested and serious toward writing, and that is the determining factor in my attitude toward a writer."[35] In her letter dated July 4, 1948, O'Connor informed McKee that *Partisan Review* still had her story and that an unspecified story had been returned to her, but she thought it best not to send it to McKee. She mentioned to her agent that Selby had written her that he wanted to see the first draft of her novel before considering a contract, though she felt at that point that it would take six months to finish a first draft and then another year to finish the final version. She carefully kept McKee up to date about her progress. By mid-July, she noted she was working on the twelfth chapter of her novel and estimated that she would

be kept busy with revisions for a while; in its final form, this chapter would run to 100,000 words. She enclosed a number of what she considered the best chapters, including "The Crop," which she asked McKee to try to place with a literary journal.[36] On July 21, before heading off to Milledgeville for six weeks, O'Connor thanked McKee for closely reading this story and returning it to her, but added that she did not want to fuss with it unless some publication expressed sincere interest. "I don't want an advance from Rinehart," she concluded, "until I finish the first draft and they see what they are getting—six or eight months hence."[37] Selby and McKee had lunch, as she mentioned in this letter, on Friday, July 30, just before McKee took off for a vacation in France. By early September, Selby had read O'Connor's story "The Turkey," which he returned to McKee, as well as some of the novel in progress, including chapter nine, "The Heart of the Park," which had been finally accepted by the *Partisan Review* (and was published in the issue of February 1949).[38] In her letter from Milledgeville, O'Connor informed McKee that she intended to be in New York later that month, staying at the Woodstock Hotel in Midtown Manhattan on her way back to Yaddo, and hoped for a meeting with Selby and Davis (about to resign as the fiction editor of *Mademoiselle*), who took her story "The Capture" for their November issue.[39]

Certainly Selby's hesitation about accepting the novel without reading it in its entirety had professional merit, but not the tone of the letter he sent to O'Connor. "What mystified John Selby," according to Virginia Wray,

> is what was to become the essential nature of all of O'Connor's fiction beginning with *Wise Blood* and continuing up through her final and deathbed story, "Judgement Day." Invariably O'Connor uses her native deep-south Protestant homeland as setting for the development of religious themes. Every piece, no matter the cast of characters or the plot, explores the working of grace in a distinctly Southern territory occupied by the devil. Yet, ironically, both the Southern milieu and the religious themes are absent from the fiction prior to *Wise Blood*. A close reading of her early surviving works prior to *Wise Blood* suggests that only after O'Connor had left her native South was she fully imaginatively drawn to it—and embracing her southern home—to discover what she called her "true country."[40]

O'Connor's *Wise Blood* begins with the observation by Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock to Hazel Motes, "I guess you're going home," and ends with his landlady, Mrs. Flood, saying, after he had blinded himself like an American Tiresias, "I see you've come home!" Motes's final home is not, however, the house he returned to after the war; it would be an undefined spiritual place he had to discover. In effect, O'Connor's first novel, when completed, would explore her native literary and theological landscape. Her own personal, unexpected, definitive journey southward toward home lurked in the not-so-distant future. But now she was only beginning to locate her idiosyncratic dramatic voice and the locale in which this voice could best find expression. Since Selby had not seen the end of the novel, he could not have understood the importance of homeland in this text.

O'Connor commented more about *Wise Blood* in her letters than about any of her other fiction. In a March 1954 letter, for example, she wrote,

> Let me assure you that no one but a Catholic could have written *Wise Blood* even though it is a book about a kind of Protestant saint. It reduces Protestantism to the twin ultimate absurdities of The Church Without Christ or The Holy Church of Christ Without Christ, which no pious Protestant would do. And of course no unbeliever or agnostic could have written it because it is entirely Redemption-centered in thought. Not too many people are willing to see this, and perhaps it is hard to see because H. Motes is such an admirable nihilist. His nihilism leads him back to the fact of his Redemption, however, which is what he would have liked so much to get away from.

Though often solitary and reflectively intuitive like Hazel Motes, O'Connor had, it seems to me, more of the instincts of young Tarwater in *The Violent Bear It Away* as she moved steadily through her stories, her face set toward the dark city where the children of God lay sleeping. Her identification with Tarwater is clear from the way she signed some of her letters with variants of Tarwater's name—Tarblender, Tarsot, Tarbutter, Tarpot, Tarbug, Tarroot, Tarfunk, and, toward the end, Tarweary.

As O'Connor wrote day by day, following the lead of her characters and preferring not to outline this novel in advance, she continued to be

upset by Selby's decision. The lack of funds continued to worry her, and she tried to do something about it. Davis agreed to write a letter of reference on her behalf for a Guggenheim application in 1948. She also asked for letters from Paul Engle, her mentor at the Writers' Workshop in Iowa; Robert Penn Warren, whom she had met briefly in April 1946 while at Iowa and who had publicly praised one of her stories; Theodore Amussen, who had been at Rinehart & Company before moving recently to Harcourt, Brace; and Philip Rahv, coeditor of the *Partisan Review*.[41] Of this group, Rahv is clearly the most atypical, mainly because of his family background and political convictions; he would publish two of O'Connor's stories, both chapters of *Wise Blood*, "The Heart of the Park" and "The Peeler" (December 1949).[42] The application was unsuccessful.

Feeling more relaxed and confident now that she had an agent, O'Connor wrote to McKee on September 18, 1948 "I am altogether pleased that you are my agent." With her newfound freedom, she started to rely on McKee's background and expertise. Not having time to retype "The Crop" as requested, she thought she could send McKee the first five chapters in about a month's time. Her progress to date pleased her. That September she met with Selby, who said that he needed to see six chapters before Rinehart would give her an advance.[43] On September 30 she sent McKee two copies of "The Geranium," the first story in her master's thesis, and one copy of "The Train," which she suggested be shown to Rahv—or anyone else. By early November, she changed her mind and said she intended to send McKee the first seven chapters, which comprised the first part of the novel. She finally sent "The Crop," reworked as "A Summer Story," to McKee.[44] On December 15 she wrote again to McKee: "Perhaps I shall get down [to New York] in January and perhaps before that send you the chapters I am working on. . . . I have decided, however, that no good comes of sending anything off in a hurry." McKee returned "A Summer Story" to the author with a polite note.[45] O'Connor sent McKee the first nine chapters of the novel, which she wanted her to pass on to Selby, on January 20, 1949. In the accompanying letter she raised a distinct possibility: if Rinehart rejected her novel, would Harcourt, Brace be interested in it, a suggestion made to her by Kazin. Little remained in her literary cupboard, but what she did have she wanted to have published; she herself would send chapter six to the *Kenyon Review*, and should they turn it down, then to the *Sewanee Review*. She informed McKee in a letter mailed eight days later that she could only stay at

Yaddo until April, but hoped to extend her stay through July and possibly return in the fall. As she worked away on her manuscript, her anxiety about the possible contract and advance from Rinehart did not diminish. Behind the scenes, McKee had apparently contacted Amussen at Harcourt, Brace and discussed an advance of $1,500. Understandably, O'Connor was anxious to discuss her tenuous situation with both her agent and Amussen. When she learned that McKee had talked to Selby, she was most concerned to learn about the outcome of their conversation.[46] Prompted by McKee, Selby wrote a letter to O'Connor in mid-February 1949:

> I think you are a pretty straight shooter, and I hope you won't mind if I work along the same line.
>
> You want to know about us, and we very much want to know what you need from us. I could assemble a large number of memos and give you almost paragraph by paragraph our own doubtless valuable ideas about the chapters we now have. I think this would be foolish, since what we need to tell you is basically simple.
>
> It is that you have an astonishing gift, that the chapters we have now don't seem to have the directness and direction that you probably feel yourself, and that here are probably some aspects of the book that have been obscured by your habit of rewriting over and over again.
>
> Do you want us to be specific and work with you the way we do with most of the writers on our list, or do you prefer to go it alone? To be honest, most of us have sensed a kind of aloneness in the book, as if you were writing out of the small world of your own experience, and as if you were consciously limiting this experience.
>
> I wish you would sit down and tell me what is what, so that you and ourselves will know on what basis to proceed.
>
> I also hope you won't mind this forthright letter.[47]

Incensed by Selby's critique of her writing habits and his overall evaluation of her work, O'Connor immediately wrote to McKee:

> 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.

Thank you for sending the copies of my stories. They and the carbon of the novel have been sent to Mr. Moe [of the Guggenheim Foundation].[48]

Although O'Connor wanted the novel to be sent to Harcourt, Brace, she wondered if this could be done without a formal rejection from Rinehart. Clearly she was upset and wanted to settle the matter as quickly as possible and get back to writing, a normal procedure for her. She received McKee's reply on February 17, and promptly said that she would travel to New York soon. She wrote to Selby, stating her position about the novel, and made plans to be in New York City from February 24 to 26, staying at Hardwick's apartment, and hoping, if it could be arranged, to meet with Amussen or William Raney. "I have my doubt about the efficacy of a personal conversation with Selby," she mentioned to McKee, "as my experience with him is that he says as little as possible as vaguely as possible."[49] She believed that Selby's reply totally missed the point of the kind of novel she was writing. Lowell, too, had reacted negatively to Selby's letter, especially after he had read the first nine chapters and commented on them, but not without some reservations of his own.[50]

Resentful at being treated like a dimwitted child by Selby, O'Connor unconsciously—or perhaps consciously—was positioning herself, most

likely with Kazin's and Lowell's concurrence, to approach Giroux at Harcourt, Brace. Her mid-February letter to Selby might have been meant to prompt him to abandon his interest in publishing her novel:

> 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.

While she might be amenable to criticism, it would have to deal with what she was actually trying to do. She concluded, "The finished book, though I hope less angular, will be just as odd if not odder than the nine chapters you now have." Willing nevertheless to keep the momentum going, O'Connor informed Selby that she would continue writing her novel, but only by following the interior pattern that the novel was in the process of establishing.

Clearly supportive of her new author, McKee set up an appointment for O'Connor with Selby on Tuesday, March 1, though O'Connor quickly replied that she would prefer a meeting on either Wednesday or Thursday.[51] "I am sorry you will have to break the Tuesday appointment with Selby," she wrote McKee. "I get in Tuesday night and will call you Wednesday morning. Any time after that will do for the appointment."[52] Once she arrived in New York, she learned that only Raney—who, along with Amussen when he was at Rinehart & Company, had assisted Norman Mailer with the publication of *The Naked and the Dead*—had apparently liked her novel (though even there, she mentioned, she only had secondhand evidence). She told Selby, as she mentions in a letter of April 1949 to Engle, that she would listen to criticism from Rinehart, but if it was not to her liking, she would disregard it. "That is the impasse." In the years to follow, O'Connor mellowed her tone, became more pliant, and even looked forward to receiving advice and comments about her work from those she trusted. But for now, she let her ego come forward and set the conditions for what she would or would not allow.[53]

The factor that precipitated the rather abrupt departure of Lowell, O'Connor, Hardwick, and Edward Maisel (a musicologist who took a fancy to O'Connor, though Lowell did not like him) from Yaddo that Tuesday morning had to do with Yaddo's creator and longtime director, Elizabeth Ames. The four had accused her of fostering an unfortunate friendship with Agnes Smedley, author of *China's Red Army Marches* and *Battle Hymn of China*. The events surrounding this situation become known nationally when Smedley was named as a Soviet spy by General Douglas MacArthur in the February 11, 1949, issue of the *New York Times*. (A few days later, the army admitted that it had no evidence for this accusation and the paper retracted its statement, though Smedley was later known to have spied on the Japanese for the Russians while in China.)[54] FBI agents visited Yaddo in mid-February, and when life there reached an intolerable point, the board convened a formal enquiry on Saturday, February 26, with Lowell assuming a leading role. During the session, O'Connor stated that she was leaving Yaddo the following Tuesday.[55] Robert Fitzgerald noted in his journal that the "day after the abortive meeting he [Lowell] went with Miss O'Connor, who is a Catholic, to [Sunday] Mass for the first time in over a year."[56]

After leaving Yaddo, O'Connor stayed with Hardwick at her apartment in the Devonshire House on East Tenth Street before moving to the Tatum House, an inexpensive YWCA residence on East Thirty-Eighth Street near Lexington Avenue. Lowell went to the Hotel Earle on Waverly Place, where, immediately upon his arrival on March 1, he sent an urgent evening telegram to Tate, then teaching at the University of Chicago, to come to his aid—no doubt signaling that he was in some type of acute emotional distress just as he was about to take O'Connor to see Giroux the next day.[57] When Lowell and O'Connor visited the Fitzgeralds in their apartment at 29 West 104th Street in New York on Ash Wednesday, Lowell announced that he had returned to the Church "after receiving an incredible outpouring of grace."[58] At this time, Lowell called Berryman in Princeton and asked him to join in some sort of "holy crusade," which Berryman summarily dismissed as a plea from someone who had drunk too much.[59] One can only imagine how Lowell had to control himself as he escorted O'Connor on Wednesday for their all-important meeting, during which he simply sat there, occasionally commenting on a number of people, but for the most part remaining silent.[60]

Thursday, March 3, as Ian Hamilton notes, was an incredibly disturbing day for Lowell; that morning he filled his bathtub and went into

ecstatic convulsions praying to Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, whom Fitzgerald noted was O'Connor's patron. He then went to the Jesuit Church of Saint Francis Xavier on West Sixteenth Street and next to the Franciscan Church on West Thirty-First Street, still caught up in his excited state. He subsequently took a train to visit a Trappist monastery, Our Lady of the Valley Monastery, in Lonsdale, Rhode Island, in an attempt to achieve some spiritual equilibrium.[61] Fitzgerald immediately wrote a long letter to Tate and Gordon, giving his interpretation of Lowell's actions, fully aware of his friend's paranoiac tendencies.[62] Tate, who refused to travel east because Lowell had discussed publicly Tate's infidelities, subsequently saw Lowell in Chicago and wrote to Cleanth Brooks about Lowell's "delusional paranoia, far advanced religious mania (Christ, etc.) mixed up with sexual delusions."[63] In early April, Lowell, dirty and disheveled, took a train to stay with his old Kenyon College roommate and good friend Peter Taylor in Bloomington, Indiana; the two of them had dinner at a club. Afterward Lowell struck a policeman and spent time in jail. Eventually Lowell's mother, Lowell's friend John Thompson, and psychiatrist-poet Merrill Moore arrived and took him to Boston and subsequently to Baldpate.[64]

Lowell's odd behavior did not always remain secret. O'Connor later explained her thoughts about what had happened, considering it "revolting" that anyone would have shamelessly repeated the story, especially as Lowell was then close to a mental breakdown. She wrote to Hester in May 1960,

> He had the delusion that he had been called on some kind of mission of purification and he was canonizing everybody that had anything to do with his situation then. I was very close to him and so was Robert [Fitzgerald]. I was too inexperienced to know he was mad, I just thought that was the way poets acted. Even Robert didn't know it, or at least didn't know how near collapse he was. In a couple of weeks he was safely locked up. . . . Things went faster and faster and faster for him until I guess the shock table took care of it. It was a grief for me as if he had died. When he came out of it, he was no longer a Catholic."

In the spring of 1954, O'Connor informed the Fitzgeralds that she had previously written to Lowell, saying that his "not being in the Church

was a grief to me and I knew no more to say about it. . . . I said the Sacraments gave grace—and let it go at that." Her subsequent sporadic letters to Lowell and his wife were fairly generic, and when she tried to be personal, she could be unexpectedly shocking, as when she revealed to them in March 1953 that she had lupus: "My father had it some twelve or fifteen years ago but at that time there was nothing for it but the undertaker." Though there existed a relationship in her mind between Lowell and death, as O'Connor mentioned in a June 1960 letter to John Hawkes, Lowell saw their relationship from a different angle, one that had its roots in a common bond that had to do with maddening, creative control: "I have been thinking that we perhaps have something of the same problem—how to hold one's true, though extreme vein without repetition; how to master conventional controls and content normal expectations without washing out all one has to say. This hurried way of saying it sounds cynical, but I think something like this happened to Shakespeare in moving from his clotted, odd, inspired *Troilus and Cressida* to the madder but more conventional *Lear*."[65] Because O'Connor did not want to become involved with Lowell's vacillating and irresolute personality—though she sometimes inquired of others about him—their friendship, which began so intensely and greatly impacted her future career, receded asymptotically, like one of Welty's undercurrents that over time seemed to disappear completely. Giroux continued seeing Lowell and communicating with him as he went through the process of editing his books.

The Lowell–Gordon–Tate relationship reveals a deep, swirling turbulence that existed before O'Connor went to Yaddo.[66] After two years at Harvard (1935–1937), and at the urging of Merrill Moore, Lowell went south to meet Ford Madox Ford, whom he had previously encountered in Boston.[67] Lowell felt that Harvard was not particularly interested in exposing its students to contemporary poetry. Thus he bivouacked for three months in a tent on Tate and Gordon's front lawn, a time described in his poem "An Afternoon in an Umbrella Tent at Benfolly." When he first arrived at Benfolly, a rather dilapidated Greek Revival mansion overlooking the Cumberland River near Clarksville, Tennessee, he realized that his world was about to change. He put aside thoughts of his native New England: "My head was full of Miltonic, vaguely piratical ambitions. My only anchor was a suitcase, heavy with bad poetry. I was brought to earth by my bumper mashing the Tates' frail agrarian mail box post.

Getting out to disguise the damage, I turned my back on their peeling, pillared house. I had crashed the civilization of the South."[68] Not totally pleased about his uninvited visitor, Tate wrote to Andrew Lytle that "the Lowell boy" turned up twice and seemed to be a potential nuisance.[69]

When Ford Madox Ford arrived to visit the Tates in May 1937, he again met Lowell, and not long afterward Tate, Gordon, and Lowell drove Ford cross-country for a literary conference in Michigan, as captured in Lowell's poem "A Month of Meals With Ford Madox Ford." Ford and Lowell then moved on to another writers' conference at the University of Denver, where Lowell first met his future wife Jean Stafford.[70] Feeling Tate's influence more and more, Lowell entered Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, to study with John Crowe Ransom, who had previously been Tate's mentor. This is the point about which Welty's image of the confluence unpredictably spirals. While at his new college, Lowell met Robie Macauley, later a close friend of O'Connor, and also began lifelong friendships with Randall Jarrell and Peter Taylor, both of whom would also have Giroux as an editor. (Taylor's short story "1939" concerns, in part, a Thanksgiving trip that he and Lowell took together in 1938. Lowell and Jarrell became roommates, a perfect match for two young men seriously aspiring to enter the world of poetry. It should be noted, too, that Ransom, who also taught Warren, Taylor, and Macauley, would later have an important role in the publication of O'Connor's short stories. While editing the *Kenyon Review* from 1939 to 1959, Ransom published four of O'Connor's stories: "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" [Spring 1953], "A Circle in the Fire" [Spring 1954], "The Artificial Nigger" [Spring 1955], and "Greenleaf" [Summer 1956]).[71] When Lowell undertook further studies at Louisiana State University in 1941, he came to know both Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren; the latter he considered the best teacher he ever had. Two important Brooks and Warren texts, *Understanding Poetry* and *Understanding Fiction*, shaped the methodological thinking of professional writers and students of literature, including O'Connor, for decades afterward.

Given this highly intricate social and literary network, which O'Connor might have discerned in her own way over the years, she would never have suspected how important Gordon—and, to a lesser degree, Tate—would be in evaluating the novel she was working on at Yaddo. More than any of Lowell's friends, except for Giroux, Gordon would have the most significant impact upon O'Connor's initial career as a writer, though a

good part of their literary communication has been lost.[72] Above all, Gordon encouraged O'Connor to approach her fiction in a way that always seemed somewhat strange to the younger writer but, at the same time, not disassociated from what she had seen during her graduate school years. Gordon focused on what she considered the nature of literature, which integrated her Southern background with her religious convictions. Born in 1895 in southern Kentucky, near the Tennessee border, she brought to her reading of O'Connor's fiction strongly weighted values and experiences rooted in the postbellum South and the Western Frontier, later transformed by her knowledge of the philosophy and literary perspectives of the Southern Agrarians. She graduated from Bethany College in West Virginia in 1916 and then moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee, to work on a local newspaper. After moving home again, at age twenty-nine she met Tate, introduced to her by his former college roommate Robert Penn Warren. She and Tate married in a civil ceremony in 1925 in New York.

Though Gordon developed as an independent fiction writer, she is often discussed in terms of her collaborations with her husband, who in many ways overshadowed her. The youngest of three boys, Tate was born in 1899 in Winchester, Kentucky, and since his family moved frequently, he was forced to study a good deal on his own. With a quick mind and a discerning intellect he entered Vanderbilt in 1918; during his senior year he began attending gatherings led by Ransom and Donald Davidson, a member of the English faculty. Their journal, *The Fugitive*, for which Tate served as assistant editor in 1923, helped to introduce new and more critical approaches in post–World War I American literature. As these postwar writers became more numerous and vocal, their message served as a clarion call to Southerners (*and* Northerners) to reject industrialism in the South, arguing instead for agrarianism and the preservation and development of Southern literature, which reflected in its own way the wit and intelligence of the ancient classical age. In his well-known work "Ode to the Confederate Dead" (a "masterly poem," according to O'Connor, and subsequently translated into French by Maritain), Tate exhibits an inquiring intellectual posture steeped in Southern history, no doubt the result of research for his biographies of Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis. In this poem, he depicts a former Confederate soldier ruminating on issues of honor, heroism, and mortality—in short, his place in the world—as he looks over a Confederate graveyard.[73] This

powerful image implicitly embodies many of the questions Southerners were asking as they transformed their past, becoming less and less recognizable after the Civil War, into viable life structures that incorporated both old and new forms of identity.

With two such powerful minds not always working in synchronism with one another, it was inevitable—no doubt due, in part, to their wanderlust—that Gordon and Tate had significant marital troubles. Their two marriages had an imploding-exploding synergism that would have flattened lesser souls. In October 1928 they sailed to Europe on the SS *America*, and Tate visited Warren, then a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, and Eliot, a poet he had long admired, in London. When the couple arrived in Paris, they socialized with the transplanted American writers who often gathered in Gertrude Stein's famous salon on the Rue de Fleurus. They even rented a two-room apartment a few doors away from Stein's before moving into one owned by Ford. Urging Gordon to complete her first novel *Penhally*, Ford typed parts of her manuscript, requiring that she dictate five thousand words per day to him. In short, Tate and Gordon witnessed firsthand the avant-garde literary currents then in vogue in France. Gordon profited immensely from the advice and criticism of her literary mentor and was more than willing to assume the same role for Flannery O'Connor.

Tate gained considerable recognition at this point in his life with his important essay "Remarks on the Southern Religion," which appeared in *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, a collection of significant essays by twelve Southern Agrarians.[74] This volume embodied their thinking about Southern culture, society, religion, industry, and the arts, not unlike what Matthew Arnold and Thomas Carlyle had done in a more sustained way about British culture for Victorian England. Most likely these essays did not influence O'Connor since she read them late in her life, but her acquaintance with a number of the principal actors in the Fugitive / Agrarian movement and their methodological concepts gave her the opportunity to view and evaluate her own fiction through this particular literary lens. The influence of the Agrarians on O'Connor, Katherine Hemple Prown notes, "stemmed from the central role they played in the dissemination and, eventually, in the institutionalization of the foundational theories and discourses underpinning the modern emergence of a self-conscious body of Southern writing and literary criticism and in the formulation of broader theories regarding the

interpretation of literature generally."[75] It could be argued that the conversions of both Gordon and Tate to Catholicism reflected their disaffection with the Agrarian philosophy, especially after World War II and the burgeoning acceptance of industrial capitalism in the United States.[76] O'Connor never became an acolyte for the Agrarians, for she sought to give an explicitly transcendent foundation to her fiction. After the onset of lupus, she felt more attracted to some of the concepts of Saint Thomas Aquinas, which metaphysically grounded her in a way few of her literary contemporaries—Tate and Gordon perhaps being the exceptions in this case—felt they needed.

At this point, Welty's confluence continues to swirl and twist about. After a stint at the Women's College of the University of North Carolina from early 1938 to the summer of 1939, Gordon and Tate moved from Greensboro to Princeton and remained there until the summer of 1942. When Tate's contract as the first fellow in creative writing was not renewed, they moved to Monteagle, Tennessee, five miles north of the University of the South at Sewanee. One has only to read Tate's essay "Miss Emily and the Bibliographer," based on Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily" and delivered as a lecture in the spring of 1940 at Princeton, to sense the resentment Tate bore against certain Princeton faculty. Faulkner's Miss Emily refused to accept the death of her former lover and grotesquely kept his body in her bedroom. Tate writes, "It is better to pretend with Miss Emily that something dead [past works of literature taught at Princeton] is living than to pretend with the bibliographer [some colleagues at Princeton] that something living is dead."[77] The move south would prove fortuitous for O'Connor because Tate and Gordon reestablished ties with Lowell, who was beginning to come into his own as a writer.

Once in more congenial surroundings, the couple invited Lowell and also Stafford, then writing *The Outskirts*, later to become *Boston Adventure*, to live with them, and by March 1943 Lowell had written a good number of the poems that appeared in his first book, *Land of Unlikeness*, a collection of twenty-one intensely religious poems most likely influenced by the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets. Gordon worked indefatigably, publishing five novels and working on another, *The Women on the Porch*. This was not a pleasant time for Tate and Gordon, especially due to Tate's infidelities, and their marriage gradually fell apart. In August 1943 they moved to Washington, DC, where they invited Brainard

("Lon") and Frances ("Fannie") Neel Cheney, fellow Tennesseans they had known for a long time, to live in the downstairs section of their house. Lon had taken a position as advisor and executive secretary to U.S. Senator Tom Stewart of Tennessee, while Tate employed Fannie, a former student of Ransom at Vanderbilt University, as his assistant. She would later become president of the National Library Association. Tate enjoyed his role as poetry consultant at the Library of Congress (1943–1944) and was succeeded in this post by Warren, who later became the Library of Congress's first poet laureate. The Cheneys and O'Connor would become good friends, visiting one another's homes beginning in the summer of 1953 and subsequently entering into a warm and protracted correspondence. (Vanderbilt University's Heard Library contains 188 surviving letters and carbons, of which 117 are from O'Connor.)

When Tate took over the editorship of the *Sewanee Review* for two years beginning in October 1944, just as the war in the Pacific was building to a crisis, one of the first things he did was solicit and article from Maritain.[78] Though neither Tate nor Gordon was Catholic at this point, they were gradually heading in that direction, and while Maritain, who would greatly influence O'Connor's religious sensibilities, was an unusual choice as a possible author for this journal, Tate's initiative shows that he was willing to take risks just as he was beginning his new job.[79] When the Cheneys entered the Catholic Church in 1953, Tate and Gordon served as their godparents. In a minimal way, it might be said that Tate was searching for some moral and religious stability in his life—and reaching out to Maritain for an essay on Catholicism was simply a sign of this. After Tate and Gordon had another terrible fight in New York in 1945, Gordon rented a room in Princeton. Lowell and Stafford then offered her refuge in their home in Damariscotta Mills, Maine (a residence paid for by the financial success of *Boston Adventure*, edited by Giroux), and she accepted. Unfortunately, the three could not tolerate one another, so much so that Stafford once called the sheriff to intervene. These sometimes explosive conversations, about which we can only speculate, were part of the fabric of the lives of Gordon, Tate, Maritain, Lowell, Stafford, Giroux, and others who entered and exited this turbulence at various times.[80] Giroux often visited Gordon and Tate in Princeton, and they visited his home in Pittstown, New Jersey.[81] Thus he was fully aware of their marital difficulties. Little would O'Connor, as an up-and-coming writer, ever have imagined that a small core of people associated at various

times with Princeton would have such a remarkable impact on her life and career. In effect, these writers and scholars were establishing a critical hegemony by mentoring, directly and indirectly, not only O'Connor but also other future literary stars. In retrospect, Lowell brought to Giroux's office not only O'Connor, but also Davidson, Maritain, Ransom, Stafford, Warren, and Berryman, as well as Tate and Gordon and, through them, their friends the Cheneys.

If Lowell gradually became a more and more distant part of O'Connor's life, the same was not true for Sally and Robert Fitzgerald, whom O'Connor first met when a mentally unstable Lowell brought her to their apartment on York Avenue in early March 1949. At this point, the confluence loops back and circles around. Robert had met Lowell in 1946 through Randall Jarrell during the first year that Robert taught at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York.[82] "Fitzgerald is good on classics and good (very strident Catholic, though) on religion," Lowell wrote to Berryman in late August 1948. "Terribly patient and earnest and somehow surprisingly subtle at times—completely unselfish."[83] As with Jarrell, Giroux had a fine professional and personal relationship with the Fitzgeralds, both before and after their divorce. When he first started at Harcourt, Brace, Giroux came to know Robert Fitzgerald through Dudley Fitts. After finishing high school in 1928, Fitzgerald had spent a year at the Choate School in Wallingford, Connecticut, where Fitts was one of the masters. Fitzgerald went on to Trinity College, Cambridge University, from 1931 to 1932 and had a chance to meet T. S. Eliot, who encouraged him to write poetry. After graduating from Harvard in 1933, he worked at the New York *Herald Tribune* and *Time* magazine. Fitts tapped Fitzgerald as his cotranslator for a series of works of Greek drama, ending with Fitzgerald's fantastic solo rendering of *Oedipus at Colonus*.[84] Between translations, Fitzgerald served in World War II, assigned in late 1944 to the commander in chief of the Pacific fleet, first at Pearl Harbor and then in Guam. In fact, his naval career had certain similarities to Giroux's.

In late August 1949, at her own suggestion, O'Connor began living with the Fitzgeralds, then on Acre Road in Redding Ridge (adjacent to Ridgefield), Connecticut. There she would care for their two children and work on her novel.[85] Her room for approximately the next sixteen months, over an attached garage, had windows on three sides and looked out at the forest of oak, pine, and maple, so at odds with the locale of Taulkinham that she described in *Wise Blood*. The following May, O'Connor

and Giroux acted as godparents for Maria Juliana Fitzgerald, becoming, in effect, a part of the larger Fitzgerald family. The O'Connor–Fitzgerald–Giroux relationship continued when the Fitzgeralds selected and edited *Mystery and Manners*. Robert wrote the introduction to *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, and Sally introduced *Three by Flannery O'Connor* and selected and edited O'Connor's posthumous collection of letters, *The Habit of Being*. In addition, son Michael Fitzgerald produced John Huston's 1979 film *Wise Blood*, with a script written by his brother, Benedict Fitzgerald. The 1988 Library of America edition of O'Connor's collected works was edited by Sally Fitzgerald.

As Robert Fitzgerald mentions in his introduction to *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, "Flannery was out to be a writer on her own and had no plans to go back to live in Georgia. Her reminiscences, however, were almost all about her home town and countryside, and they were told with gusto."[86] O'Connor rarely spoke about her three years in Iowa City while staying with the Fitzgeralds, but both husband and wife were aware of the work of Robie Macauley. In Redding, they all read and admired Andrew Lytle's classic essay on Gordon, whom the Fitzgeralds likewise knew. In addition, they read some of the works of Cardinal John Henry Newman and Lord Acton, as well as the Reverend Philip Hughes's *History of the Church*. After the children had been put to bed, O'Connor found time to read other important works, including the *Divine Comedy*, Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism*, *The Family Reunion* by T. S. Eliot (which had a successful Broadway run a few years before), and books by the French literary critic and traditionalist Émile Faguet. She eventually learned that Robert had been raised as a Catholic, but left the Church in his late teens. After his subsequent marriage outside the Church was annulled, he gradually reunited with Roman Catholicism. When O'Connor came to know Sally better, she also learned that she had been a convert. Like Lowell, Robert Fitzgerald had distinct memories of his first visit with O'Connor, "frowning and struggling softly in her drawl" as she chose her words with great care. "We saw a shy Georgia girl, her face heart-shaped and pale and glum, with fine eyes that could not stop frowning and open brilliantly upon everything. We had not then read her first stories, but we knew that Mr. Ransom [then editor of the *Kenyon Review*] had said of them that they were *written*."[87]

Based on the Fitzgeralds' and Lowell's support for O'Connor, Giroux intuited over the ensuing months that he could take a lot for granted, es-

pecially O'Connor's years of study and writing both in college and as a recipient of a graduate school scholarship in journalism at the State University of Iowa. Details about her educational and literary background would come later, once this initial encounter in his office was finished. O'Connor's great challenge now consisted in learning what type of professional posture she wanted to project, while remaining true to the not-as-yet-completely-articulated, deep-set values she had developed over the years. While in Iowa, she published an essay in the 1948 *Alumnae Journal* of the Georgia State College for Women concerning her experiences there, which contains a straightforward assessment: "No one can be taught to write, but a writing ability can be more quickly developed when it is concentrated up and encouraged by competent literary people than when it is left to wander. A graduate program for writers should give the writer time and credit for writing and for wide reading, and if his writing and reading are of high enough quality, it should offer him a degree."[88] O'Connor set out the basics but did not feel she had to be a publicity agent for the Iowa Writers' Workshop, considered by some to be the most successful of its type. Old-fashioned Southern charm worked well at white-gloved tea parties and polite gatherings in Milledgeville, where O'Connor had lived from age thirteen until the time she headed off to Iowa, but she was experienced enough to know that it would not sell on Madison Avenue in New York City. Since she had never had a *real* job up to this point, she had to learn how accommodating she should be before those, such as Selby or Giroux, who had the power to see that her works would or would not be published. Maps existed—one had only to read the biographical sketches of established writers—but she was not sure which road to take to get her where she wanted to go. "What first stuns the young writer emerging from college," she noted in the alumnae journal, "is that there is no clear-cut road for him to travel on. He must chop a path in the wilderness of his own soul; a disheartening process, lifelong and lonesome." Put succinctly, O'Connor felt the options were limited for someone with literary ambitions: either take writing courses or consider "the poor house" and "the mad house."

While not earthshaking, the initial meeting between O'Connor and Giroux proved to be a *callida iunctura*, although neither party was at all sure where it would lead. It would not take Giroux long to realize how focused O'Connor was on becoming a serious writer even at such an early stage in her literary development; she was absolutely convinced that she

needed not only to work at her own speed but also publish as soon as reasonably possible—attributes that Giroux could only admire. During their meeting in his office, Giroux noted that though O'Connor was "very parsimonious with words," he "decided at that very moment that [he] was sorry [he] didn't have her under contract." He added, "You look at her when you're talking to her and she tells the truth, but she does it in her own way, which is very peculiar, of course. That was her gift."[89] Giroux found O'Connor direct, honest, and open, with wonderful, clear eyes that revealed much to him. Later he came to realize, as he mentioned in the O'Hare interview, that O'Connor's "intellect was superior to all the people she was dealing with and she knew it and it didn't bother her, that's rare, almost a unique thing in my experience."

At that point O'Connor had published more than Giroux suspected, though he had already been aware of her writing. After rejoining Harcourt, Brace in early 1946 subsequent to the completion of his tour of duty in the navy, he had traveled in March 1947 to the Women's College of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where he joined Warren, Taylor, Macauley, Ransom, Lowell, and Jarrell to select the winning story in a college fiction contest; it turned out to be one of O'Connor's stories.[90] Because of his involvement with the university and the Arts Forum, Taylor secured Warren as the main speaker. At the last minute, Giroux, who worked with Lambert Davis, Warren's editor at Harcourt, Brace, expressed interest in attending and was invited to join the select group. According to Giroux, the forum was a "rousing success," something like a family reunion for this particular group. Tate, to cite but one connection, had previously had the honor of giving away the bride, Eleanor Ross, when she married Taylor at Monteagle, Tennessee, in June 1943, with Lowell serving as best man.[91] Never one to miss a good business opportunity, Giroux talked with Taylor, whose books *The Long Fourth and Other Stories* and *A Woman of Means* he would later edit.

Though Giroux might have recalled O'Connor's winning story when they first met, neither was aware of the countless factors already at work on both sides, some quite subtle and never to be brought to the surface or made explicit, even if one or the other wanted to make it so. Over the years, they would come to know each other better, not just through personal conversations and visits and the comments made by mutual friends, but especially through Giroux's expert advice about O'Connor's fiction. By the time he retired, Giroux could easily be counted as among the very

best editors produced in the United States, if one could make a judgment based solely on the number of his authors who received either the Nobel Prize or the Pulitzer Prize in literature.[92] Before leaving Giroux's office, O'Connor asked about Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, and Giroux was most pleased to give her a copy of Merton's recently published *The Seven Storey Mountain*, which was enjoying tremendous success and which would become Giroux's best-selling book.[93] Later, Giroux linked Merton and O'Connor together, as did Sally Fitzgerald in her essay "Rooms With a View," since both monk and fiction writer had much in common, particularly, according to Giroux, a highly developed sense of wit, deep faith, and great intelligence: "The aura of aloneness surrounding each of them was not an accident. It was their métier, in which they refined and deepened their very different talents in a short span of time. They both died at the height of their powers."[94] Merton flourished in the seclusion of the monastery, due in large part to his searching imagination and his desire to communicate through the printed word. His vocation had many similarities with that of O'Connor. To those who believed that a Trappist monk should keep silent, both in and out of the cloister, Giroux would send a succinct six-word card he had printed: "Writing is a form of contemplation." O'Connor would have instinctively understood this observation.