THE CRITICAL RESPONSE TO FLANNERY O'CONNOR

Douglas Robillard, Jr.

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Review

"Douglas Robillard has judiciously selected reviews and scholarly articles to present, in chronological order, the spectrum of critical opinion on Flannery O'Connor's works, from the earliest reviews (some of which Robillard presents because they are so entertainingly wrong-headed) to several of the best recent innovations in O'Connor scholarship. Beginning students of O'Connor as well as professional scholars will benefit from this rich gathering."-Marshall Bruce Gentry, Professor of English Georgia College & State University, Editor, Flannery O'Connor Review

"Douglas Robillard, Jr. has pulled together an excellent collection of criticism on Flannery O'Connor's fiction. For the O'Connor scholar it provides a convenient collection of many of the significant reviews of O'Connor's books and even introduces some of us to a few essays that slipped under the MLA bibliography radar. For the O'Connor novice, in addition to making easily accessible a large chunk of O'Connor criticism, this book's very readable introductory essay critiques the growth of a literary reputation from the initial bafflement of much of the literary world in 1952 when Wise Blood was published to O'Connor's entry into American canon celebrated with the 1998 American Library edition of her collected works to contemporary new directions in O'Connor studies."-Virginia Wray, Professor of English Lyon College, President, the Flannery O'Connor Society

About the Author

DOUGLAS ROBILLARD JR. is Professor of English at the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff. He specializes in modern literature but as a generalist he has diverse teaching and research interests.

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As the author of such classic American short stories as A Good Man Is Hard to Find, Everything That Rises Must Converge, and Revelation, Flannery O'Connor has always been recognized as a distinctive voice in American literature. A devoutly Catholic, Southern author with serious literary ambitions, she dealt with topics such as the operation of grace in ordinary life, and the nature of evil, sin, and redemption. Fifty years after the publication of her first novel, Wise Blood, her fiction is acclaimed for its high literary value and with the publication of her Collected Works, her work has become part of the canon of American literature. This volume includes articles on the racial, critical, and theological controversies surrounding O'Connor's work. And, rather than presenting a consensus of literary opinion, it shows how different critics arrive at radically different interpretations of a given O'Connor story or novel.

An introductory essay examines the growth of O'Connor's literary reputation and outlines the major approaches taken by literary scholars to interpreting and elucidating her work. The 47 pieces collected in this volume represent the diverse reactions her work has created. The items are grouped into three sections, each representing a chronological period: the first section compiles the reactions of critics during her lifetime, the second section compiles criticism from the 25 years that elapsed between her death in 1964 until the 1989 publication of her Collected Works, and the third section brings together new critical approaches that foreshadow future trends in O'Connor criticism.

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Good starting point for advanced undergraduates, grad students and faculty interested in the growth of O'Connor's reputation...

By RNS

Douglas Robillard, Jr., a Professor of English the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff, is commended for attempting a project that has been needed for some time -- identifying, selecting and reprinting the best criticism from the more than 2,000 books, articles and essays published on Flannery O'Connor for the general and scholarly reader.

Unfortunately, from the hundreds of truly excellent, well-written and insightful articles on O'Connor -- due to space limitations -- Robillard could only include reprints of forty-seven.

Presented chronologically, the authors included do appear as a modest who's who of the O'Connor world. Among those included are: Caroline Gordon; Louis D. Rubin, Jr.; Sister M. Bernetta Quinn; Sumner J. Ferris; John Hawkes; Ted R. Spivey; Thomas Merton; Louise Y. Gossett; Guy Davenport; Stanley Edgar Hyman; Robert Drake; Miles D. Orvell; Josephine Hendin; David Eggenschwiler; Preston M. Browning, Jr.; John R. May, Sally Fitzgerald; Robert Coles; Frederick Asals; Paul W. Nisly; Diane Tolomeo; marshall Bruce Gentry; Louise Westling; Frederick C. Crews: Mary Neff Shaw; Sue Walker; and, Sarah Gordon. While there are a lot of worthy names that I do not see, those selected are a good subset.

The selection is useful as a general introduction for advanced undergraduate, graduate and faculty interested in the response by readers and scholars to O'Connor's works and the growth of her critical reputation.

It's no small task these days to identify the copyright holder of criticism, acquire permission and have funds available to pay for the permission to reprint the item, and then find time to type, edit and proofread the more than 300 pages of published content. As such, the scholarly community is in indebted to Robillard for his persistence to see this book through to publication.

There is a need for additional volumes of this nature. THE FLANNERY O'CONNOR BULLETIN, for example, holds an enormous amount of content that -- because so few libraries subscribed to it -- could be pulled into an edited multivolume set. Also, it would be useful for scholars to have a multi-volume set of this nature with articles focused on specific works by Flannery O'Connor and arranged in that same order.

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