

CALL FOR PAPERS
Flannery O'Connor Society
American Literature Association
2025 Annual Conference
May 21-24, 2025
Westin Copley Place | Boston, MA

The Flannery O'Connor Society seeks proposals for three planned sessions at ALA 2025 in Boston. See panel descriptions and submission details below under the appropriate headings.

1. “Flannery O'Connor and American Literature: A Celebrated and Embattled 100-Year-Old's Place in the Canon(s) of US Literature”

March 25th, 2025, will mark Flannery O'Connor's 100th birthday. Given that her mother Regina Cline O'Connor lived until the age of 99, Flannery's readers may be forgiven for speculating about what could have been. Even if O'Connor had lived to 70 (the average US life expectancy when she died in 1964), we would have called the run from *Wise Blood* (1952) to *Everything that Rises Must Converge* (1965) her “early period.”

Instead, O'Connor died of lupus in 1964. She became among the most celebrated American writers of the 20th Century, winning the only posthumous National Book Award for Fiction ever granted (*The Complete Stories* in 1972) and attracting scholarly attention from seemingly every corner of the “big tent” of literary studies, not just the Southern specialists and Christian scholars.

And still, recent years have brought important questions about O'Connor's status as a widely anthologized, taught, and studied author. Her fiction remains unchanged, but we just keep learning more about the Georgia writer—bowdlerized letters unearthed, excerpts of a previously unpublished novel released, an Antebellum mansion full of previously unseen O'Connor belongings, and so on. But why, exactly, *should* we read Flannery O'Connor? Writing on her appears to be continuing unabated, but what does the future hold for Flannery O'Connor scholarship? To the extent that canons—American, Southern, Christian, Religious, Regionalist, Comic, Gothic, Short Story, Grotesque, Great Books—still have salience, where does O'Connor “live” *now* in American Literature? Why?

Proposals or 250-400 words (and a brief bio) should be sent to Matt Bryant Cheney (mbryantc@utk.edu) by January 20th, 2025. Earlier statements of interest are strongly encouraged.

2. A Roundtable Discussion of Ethan Hawke's *Wildcat*

In 2023, famed American actor Ethan Hawke released *Wildcat*, a biographical film about Flannery O'Connor directed and co-written by Hawke (with Shelby Gaines) and starring Maya Hawke and Laura Linney. The film follows O'Connor as she struggles to publish her first novel, *Wise Blood*, during the painful and disabling onset of the Georgia author's lupus. *Wildcat* opens with O'Connor imagining a movie trailer based on “The Comforts of Home” and nymphomaniac

boarder Star Drake whose exploits lead to a violent ending. The film then follows other imaginary and biographical episodes interspersed with dramatic vignettes of O'Connor's fiction and dialogue lifted from her other writings.

The Flannery O'Connor Society seeks proposals for scholars interested in participating in a roundtable discussion of Hawke's film. We plan to show the movie one evening during ALA and then have a roundtable discussion the next day of four to five panelists each reading a 12-15-minute paper. Topics may include (but are certainly not limited to) the following:

- Scholarly assessment of the film's strengths and weaknesses
- Evaluation of critics' reaction to the movie
- Analysis of the film's aesthetics
- Hawke's depiction of O'Connor's lupus
- The film's treatment of racism
- Explorations of the creative process and the relation between the art and the artist
- Comparison between Hawke's vision of the art/artist dynamic and O'Connor's
- Hawke's portrayal of the role faith plays in O'Connor's work

Proposals or 250-400 words (and a brief bio) should be sent to David Z. Wehner (wehner@msmary.edu) by January 15, 2025. Earlier statements of interest are strongly encouraged.

3. Open Topics Panel

The Flannery O'Connor Society invites abstracts (of no more than 250 words) for open topic presentations at the annual conference of the American Literature Association. We will accept proposals for a wide variety of topics about and/or related to Flannery O'Connor's oeuvre.

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