

July 2009

## REVIEW: Flannery: A Life of Flannery O'Connor

William A. Richards

*Georgia College & State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq>



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Richards, William A. (2009) "REVIEW: Flannery: A Life of Flannery O'Connor," *Georgia Library Quarterly*: Vol. 46 : Iss. 3 , Article 23.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol46/iss3/23>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Georgia Library Quarterly by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

## Off the SHELF

The Georgia Library Quarterly reviews books on aspects of life in Georgia and the South, including history, literature, politics, education and genealogy. Materials written by Southern authors or published by regional publishers may also be considered, as well as those on libraries and librarianship.

**Brijin Boddy**, Off the Shelf Co-editor, Chattahoochee Valley Regional Library System, bboddy@cvrlls.net

**Karen Odom**, Off the Shelf Co-editor, Houston County Public Libraries, kodom@houpl.org

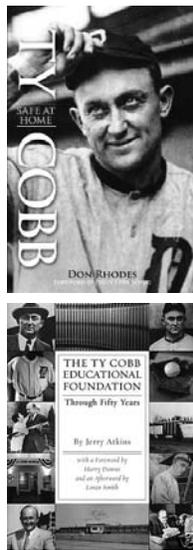
See more Off the Shelf reviews at [http://gla.georgialibraries.org/glq\\_bookreviews.htm](http://gla.georgialibraries.org/glq_bookreviews.htm)

### NONFICTION

**Ty Cobb Safe at Home** by Don Rhodes (The Lyons Press, 2008; ISBN 978-08203-3017-4, \$15.95, pbk.)

**The Ty Cobb Educational Foundation Through Fifty Years** by Jerry Atkins (Five Points Press, 2007; ISBN 978-09789539-0-4, \$21.99, hbk.)

In the preface to his work *Ty Cobb Safe at Home*, Don Rhodes states that one of his goals is to focus on Ty Cobb's "rich life in Augusta." While Cobb's place in baseball drives other accountings of his life, including his own autobiography, *Ty Cobb: My Life in Baseball*, this account looks at Cobb through the words of Augusta, Ga.'s newspapers and the eyes of Augusta's people. We see Cobb leaving home and coming back, participating in civic and social life and being part of the fabric of the town. By emphasizing Augusta's position as the home base of Cobb's life, Rhodes has succeeded in making Cobb the man the focus of the story rather than the teams, scores and plays. Rhodes says nothing which would revise opinion that this legendary ballplayer was in private: quick-tempered, impatient, sometimes violent and less than kind to his family. Rather, he shines more light on a Cobb who was motivated by high standards and, in spite of serious faults, still made the world a



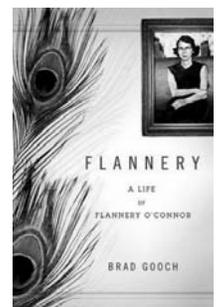
better place when he left, as is illustrated in Cobb's legacy of the Ty Cobb Healthcare System and the Cobb Educational Foundation. It's a swift and absorbing read, of interest more to the local history enthusiast than the baseball fan, but satisfying to both. If your interest is piqued by the insight into the man, a further look at his legacy might be in order. *The Ty Cobb Educational Foundation Through Fifty Years* has capsule biographies of important people in Cobb's life and reproductions of Cobb's correspondence. The reliance on primary sources adds weight to the narrative of the founding of the fund and the awarding of subsequent scholarships. While an informative and interesting book on its own, this would be an excellent addition to the reading resource list of Georgia academic counselors and scholarship reference collections. ►►

— Reviewed by **Carol Waggoner-Angleton**

Reese Library  
Augusta State University

**Flannery: A Life of Flannery O'Connor** by Brad Gooch (Little, Brown and Co., 2009; ISBN 978-0-316-00066-6, \$30, hbk.)

O'Connor once speculated that "there won't be any biographies of me because, for only one reason, lives spent between the house and the chicken yard do not make



exciting copy." Those readers familiar with O'Connor's work will appreciate the self-effacing humor and irony in her comment. Yet, in fact, it took 38 years for the first book-length biography of O'Connor to appear (*Flannery O'Connor: A Life*, by Jean Cash, University of Tennessee Press, 2002). And now we have Brad Gooch's very good biography of her as well. Why did it take so long for a biography to appear? Certainly not because she was an unworthy subject. As Gooch points out, O'Connor has become a one-woman academic industry. To date, more than 195 doctoral dissertations, more than 70 book-length studies and well over 1,000 articles have been written about her relatively small body of work.

No, the reason there was no biography of O'Connor until recently is that her friend Sally Fitzgerald was generally understood by fans and scholars of O'Connor to be working on the definitive O'Connor biography, a project that had been under way for more than 20 years. Fitzgerald was still working on the O'Connor biography when she died in 2000. This provided Cash and Gooch an opportunity to fill the biographical void.

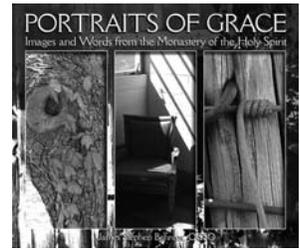
Gooch's carefully researched and documented biography relies heavily on the recollections of people who actually knew O'Connor. That is both a strength and something of a weakness, since some of those recollections are well over 50 years old. He also largely refrains from literary explication in favor of giving biographical details that help provide context for the stories.

So now we have two biographies, and one would think that would be more than enough to cover a life "spent between the house and the chicken yard." As Gooch commented in a recent interview, "Unless someone comes walking out of the woods with a startling revelation, the plot points of O'Connor's life have been set, and the connections with her work are now open and available for interpretation and reinterpretation."

All Georgia libraries should have both the Cash and the Gooch biographies in their permanent collections. Yet what is lacking in both books is a better understanding of O'Connor's essential spiritual life and its relationship to her art. Perhaps the biography currently being written by professor emeritus William Sessions (who knew O'Connor well) will address this aspect of her life more fully. In the meantime, the best sources for understanding that fundamental aspect of her life and art remain her own letters and essays published posthumously as *The Habit of Being* and *Mystery and Manners*. ►►

— Reviewed by **William A. Richards**  
Professor of Library Science  
Georgia College & State University

**Portraits of Grace: Images and Words from the Monastery of the Holy Spirit** by James Stephen Behrens, OCSO (Acta Publications, 2007; ISBN 978-0-87946-334-2, \$19.95).



This collection of observations and meditations pair a photographic image from the monastery with corresponding text. Both the size of the photos and the amount of related text vary from page to page. Some observations cover three paragraphs, others two or less. Each photo has a caption, or title, such as "Friends," "Colored Brick Wall," "Stress," "The Brighter the Light." The book is coffee-table sized, at 9-by-10 inches. All photos are color.

Although the book follows no obvious pattern (there is no table of contents), it does offer a focus of morning observations in the first pages. Each photo captures a scene, an object or a mood from the monastery. Besides the photo of the author on the back cover overleaf, no human is fully pictured. Among the 200 or so photographs, only three contain images of the human form: an artist painter's torso, Jesus Christ on the Cross and the Buddha. Still, the book is titled *Portraits of Grace*.

The objects of the photographer's eye range from clay pots to airplanes to flowers to aged tools to scenes of rooms set with their items of function such as a dining room, a scriptorium or a wall of shelved books. Many photos capture a sense of timeless function: a brick pathway, an old step stool, a bicycle, a pair of worn boots. Other scenes capture the columns of the monastery church in various shades of contrast from vivid dark to bright light, or subdued infusions of light. An ever-present theme of the book is light: the light of the Divine, which illuminates the human to better grasp as well as the variety of light needed to capture the photo in its intended sense.

Is it a photography book or one of meditations? It is both a visual delight and a collection of concise wise observations about our lives within the context of a larger continuum. The Monastery of the Holy Spirit, a Trappist community, is located in Conyers. Visitors are welcome to walk the grounds, shop at the bookstore/gift shop and bonsai nursery, to worship at regularly scheduled services, as well as attend retreats. This book is the third by the author. All three volumes explore the dimension of grace found in the everyday, the ordinary and in the monastic way of life. ►►

— Reviewed by **Tim Wojcik**  
Librarian & Media Specialist  
Our Lady of Mercy Catholic High School