

REVIEW OF *Flannery O'Connor's Manhattan*, Katheryn Krotzer Laborde, Fordham University Press, New York, 2024 (208 pp. Also available as an eBook.)

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Flannery O'Connor's Manhattan, by Katheryn Krotzer Laborde, seems to be a book like no other. In part a memoir, in part a biography, and in part a reference work, it is at the core a minutely annotated and contextualized scholarly account of Flannery O'Connor's five address books, focusing on those contacts that had their addresses located in New York City, or – more precisely – in Manhattan. When approached with attention to detail, and put in larger contexts, the address books become a valuable resource able “to toss light on previously unexplored avenues of [Flannery O'Connor's] life, such as the Southern midcentury writer's time in, and connections to, New York City” (p. xiv): the place important for the experiences it provided, but also, for a writer, for being “the heart of the publishing world” (p. 4).

O'Connor lived in New York for several months in 1949. The stay followed her departure from the Yaddo Artist Colony in Saratoga Springs in March 1949, and ended in August of that year, when she moved in as a boarder with her friends, Sally and Robert Fitzgerald – whom she met in New York – to their house in Connecticut. Broadening the view a little, this was part of the writer's precious period of independence, after she graduated from the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1948 and was awarded a place at Yaddo to continue work on her first book, *Wise Blood*, and before the time when her deteriorating health forced her to return to Georgia from the Fitzgeralds, to live with her mother, the finality of the move confirmed when she asked the Fitzgeralds to send her the belongings that she kept at their home, in 1952. While accounted for in her biographies, O'Connor's 1949 stay in New York has not been given much scholarly attention. Katheryn Krotzer Laborde's book fills in this gap, firmly anchoring her work in O'Connor's published and unpublished correspondence, biographies and other secondary sources. Thanks to the structure of the book, which will be discussed below, and Laborde's engaging writing style, the work never becomes a dry listing of people and places and remains throughout a rich and highly readable account of interwoven locations – and lives.

The five address books are part of the holdings of the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia; they were acquired, together with letters, from the Mary Flannery O'Connor's Charitable Trust in 2014. In the Preface, subtitled "In search of Flannery's Manhattan", Laborde writes how in 2016 she visited the Library aiming to study O'Connor's newly acquired letters from Iowa, and how instead, in a life-changing moment, she shifted her attention to the address books. What followed was her search for "Flannery's Manhattan": studying the entries from the address books, as well as visiting New York in 2016, 2017 and 2019 and walking in Flannery's footsteps there.

The Introduction, subtitled "The Tour Begins", features first an imaginary tour around the most significant places of Flannery O'Connor's Manhattan. It carries more or less overt references to O'Connor's life and works. The presence of an imagined guide who leads the tour allows for the inclusion of further details from O'Connor's life, as does the brief section "Flannery O'Connor 101", which places her stay in New York in the general context of her biography – should there be a reader not acquainted with it before reaching for the book. The Introduction, next, in addition to explaining the structure of the book, also describes the address books themselves as artefacts and, collating and juxtaposing information of various kinds – the work of a scholar-detective, many examples of which can be found also elsewhere in the book – it attempts to date and correlate them.

Part I of the book, entitled simply "New York City", offers a narrative account of O'Connor's visits and stays there. Of course the most significant was her stay in Manhattan which she began in March 1949 and which came to a close with the end of August of that year. Yet, as it appears, she first visited the city, including Manhattan, on two brief summer occasions in 1943, before starting the junior year at Georgia State College for Women in her hometown of Milledgeville. This is described in Chapter 1 of the book, "The Education of Mary Flannery O'Connor". Chapter 2, "City Life", offers an account of the time when she either lived in Manhattan before moving to the Fitzgeralds in Connecticut, or when stayed close to New York City, which made it possible for her to pay short visits there. These close-by stays included O'Connor's time at the Yaddo Artists and Writers Colony in Saratoga Springs (from June to July 1948, and from September 1948 to February 1949), and then, after living in Manhattan in 1949, the time that she spent as a boarder at the Fitzgeralds in Connecticut (begun in autumn 1949; involving travel – notably short trips to New York, and long stays in Georgia; and coming to a definitive end in 1952). Chapter 3 describes O'Connor's visit to Manhattan in May 1955, which she undertook in connection with the publication of her

second book, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (such is also the title of this chapter). Chapter 4, “*Lourdes Bound*”, contains an account of her stay in Manhattan in 1958 as part of the pilgrimage that Flannery, a devout Catholic, made with her mother to Lourdes, on the occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to St. Bernadette Soubirous. As her health deteriorated, this turned out to be the last time that Flannery visited Manhattan – although she continued to travel, mostly in connection with the public talks and readings that she gave at many locations. Chapter 5, “*New York, O’Connor, and Lee*”, is devoted to the correspondence between her and Maryat Lee, a New-York based playwright whom she met in 1956, who on numerous occasions invited Flannery to visit New York, but each time Flannery declined or evaded her invitation. In 1963 she also declined the invitation by *Esquire* to a party held to honour the authors published in the magazine’s July issue. As Laborde poignantly writes at this point, to close this chapter and Part I of the book, “(...) the glitz and the glamour of such an event did not appeal to O’Connor. It never did, just as the fast pace of the New York lifestyle never appealed to her. She had been to Manhattan, had lived in Manhattan and, in the end, couldn’t be bothered. Her sights were set on bigger things. Bigger, even, than New York City” (p. 50). In 1964, after long struggle with lupus, Flannery O’Connor died.

Part II, “*The Listings*”, contains richly annotated and cross-referenced entries for all O’Connor’s Manhattan-based contacts that can be found in the five address books. Laborde’s writing is never tedious, but as if further to avoid any danger of tediousness, the three chapters with alphabetically organized general listings (6, “*A through G*”; 8, “*H through N*”, and 10, “*O through Z*”) are separated with two themed chapters: 7, “*Writers and Other Artists*”, and 9, “*Three Correspondents*”. Among the writers and artists listed and annotated in Chapter 7 there are the playwright Maryat Lee, and the painters Margaret Sutton and Clifford Wright. Chapter 9 discusses three Manhattan-based fans of O’Connor’s prose, and writers themselves, who reached out to her and with whom she decided to correspond afterwards: Crandell Price, Beverly Brunson, and Fred Darsey. The persons listed and annotated in the themed chapters are also included in the chapters with general listings.

After Acknowledgements, the book has an Appendix in which the names of persons and businesses listed and annotated in the preceding sections of the book are organized geographically, according to the parts of Manhattan in which they resided. Finally, the scholarly apparatus of Abbreviations, Notes, Bibliography and a general Index follows. The book includes several illustrations: it opens with an outline map of Manhattan with some of

the most significant locations marked, and then, in the chapters, there are a number of reproductions of pages from the address books, as well as a reproduction of a cartoon drawn by Flannery.

Flannery O'Connor's Manhattan has been published by Fordham University Press, New York, as part of the Studies in the Catholic Imagination: The Flannery O'Connor Trust Series, with four books included in the series to date.

Katheryn Krotzer Laborde is writer of creative non-fiction and a scholar, and her both fields of activity show – to her contribution's advantage – in the reviewed study. To date, she has authored three non-fiction books, including *Flannery O'Connor's Manhattan*. She is a professor of English at Xavier University in Louisiana. Because of the mixture of genres that she employs in *Flannery O'Connor's Manhattan*, her writing style, as well as the comprehensiveness of the scholarly apparatus used, the book is an accessible and informative gateway to Flannery O'Connor's network of Manhattan-based contacts and, through this, to her life, especially as many of the contacts discussed in the book remained important to O'Connor long after she visited New York for the last time. One can only hope that also the other, non-Manhattan-based contacts from the address books will be examined in the future in an equally engaging and informative publication.