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**The St. George Tucker Society**

**“Reading Flannery O’Connor in the 21st Century”**

**Milledgeville, GA, July 25-27, 2019**

Flannery O’Connor’s ‘Innerlekshul’ Women:

The Mind and the Matter

“That’s the trouble with you innerlekshuls, you don’t never have nothing to show for what you’re saying.”

----*Wise Blood*

Readers of Flannery O’Connor’s works will recall her misfit intellectuals, often come home from the North, to recover from an illness, take care of an ailing relative, or look for a job. Characters like Asbury in “The Enduring Chill,” Rayber in “The Lame Shall Enter First,” or Julian in “Everything That Rises Must Converge” invite our laughter, sympathy, and sometimes disgust as they wield their abstractions like weapons in a world they see as radically unfit for their unappreciated talents. But I would argue that O’Connor reserves her sharpest satire for female characters like Hulga with the wooden leg in “Good Country People,” or Mary Grace reading *Human Development* in that powerful late story “Revelation.” O’Connor is not kind to intellectuals. But she seems especially disdainful of her unsexed women intellectuals who often suffer physical afflictions and disabilities. Think of Mary Grace’s “fit” in the doctor’s waiting room in “Revelation.” Like those nineteenth-century writers like Hawthorne who used physical disability or deformity to reveal individual or cultural moral failings, O’Connor used her over-educated women intellectuals not only to dramatize what one critic has called “the uneasy life of the mind in rural Georgia,” but especially to depict the fate of the woman intellectual who was distinctly antithetical to the southern ethos of womanhood. In the largely ungendered world of O’Connor’s fiction, the Hulgas and Mary Graces ironically emerge as grotesque bodies—and minds—that reveal O’Connor’s own discomfort as a woman intellectual [though she would argue with this characterization] in a conservative rural South.

**Mary Ann Wilson** is Professor Emerita of English and a Fellow of the Center for Louisiana Studies at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette where she held the James D. Wilson Endowed Professorship in Southern Studies. She has recently retired from UL and relocated to LaGrange, Georgia.

She has published widely on American women writers, Louisiana writers Grace King and Rebecca Wells being the most recent. Her current book project is *Every Good Impulse: New Orleans Women’s Book and Culture Clubs 1880-1925.*

. In the last few years of her university career, Louisiana life and culture were her topics of research. Mary Ann’s essay “Redneck Feng-shui: *Duck Dynasty* and the Other Louisiana” appeared in fall 2017 from LSU Press in a collection called *Small Screen Souths*:  *Region, Identity, and the Cultural Politics of Television.* She is at work on a personal essay titled “A Tale of Two Lafayettes,” chronicling the French revolutionary hero’s role in American and southern history.