For Immediate Release

EMORY TO CELEBRATE THE HABIT OF BEING
Anniversary of O’Connor’s Letters to Include Theatrical Reading

To recognize the 30th anniversary of the publication of Flannery O’Connor’s letters in Sally Fitzgerald’s book *The Habit of Being*, Emory Libraries is hosting “Habits of Being: Flannery O’Connor and Sally Fitzgerald,” a program of special events scheduled for Nov. 5, 2009.

The celebration will include a panel discussion, a lecture by *Washington Post* book critic Jonathan Yardley and a dramatic reading from O’Connor’s letters by Atlanta actress Brenda Bynum.

*The Habit of Being*, published in 1979, is a collection of O’Connor’s correspondence with a wide range of thinkers, poets, writers and theologians during her life. O’Connor, a Southern writer and native Georgian, lived with Sally and Robert Fitzgerald and their children on a farm in rural Connecticut in 1949 and 1950. The three had many discussions about their shared Catholic faith, and O’Connor remained close friends with the couple until her death in 1964.

“It was a groundbreaking book in terms of understanding the nature of Flannery O’Connor’s work and the insights into her life that the letters provided – her personality, humor, relationships and beliefs,” says author and O’Connor scholar Rosemary Magee, vice president and secretary of Emory University.

The plural “Habits” title of the celebration is a twist on the singular title of the book “in that Sally Fitzgerald and Flannery O’Connor inspired habits of thinking and writing – and therefore of being – in all of us,” says Magee.

Fitzgerald, who compiled and edited *The Habit of Being*, was a visiting research scholar at Emory in the 1980s and 1990s. She played an instrumental part in the Emory Libraries’ acquisition in 1987 of O’Connor’s letters to Atlanta friend Betty Hester, which were kept closed according to Hester’s instructions until 2007 (Hester was the anonymous *A* in some of the letters in *The Habit of Being*). The Emory Libraries acquired Fitzgerald’s papers in the winter of 2008; both collections are at the Libraries’ Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL).
“As Emory holds both O’Connor’s letters to Betty Hester and the Sally Fitzgerald papers, it’s very appropriate that Emory host a celebration of the 30th anniversary of this seminal work,” says Naomi Nelson, interim director of MARBL.

The upcoming celebration involves interconnected events, says Magee – the 30th anniversary of The Habit of Being, Fitzgerald’s longtime relationship with Emory University, her role in its acquisition of the Hester letters, and Emory’s recent acquisition of Fitzgerald’s papers.

Washington Post book critic and author Yardley, who reviewed The Habit of Being when it was first released in 1979 and again in 2005, will give a lecture entitled “Flannery O’Connor’s Last Masterpiece” in the Jones Room at the Woodruff Library.

The day will conclude with a theatrical reading of O’Connor’s letters to the Fitzgeralards, performed by Atlanta actress and Emory professor emeritus of theater studies Brenda Bynum. Bynum is well known for capturing O’Connor’s humor, perceptions, and accent in previous readings of the author’s letters.

The schedule of events on Nov. 5 is as follows:

4 – 5 p.m.: Panel: “30th Anniversary of The Habit of Being: The Legacy of Sally Fitzgerald,” Jones Room, Level 3 of the Woodruff Library, 540 Asbury Circle on the Emory campus, Atlanta 30322. Rosemary Magee, O’Connor scholar and vice president and secretary of Emory University, will serve as moderator; panelists will include William Sessions, a retired Georgia State professor and a personal friend of O’Connor’s; Bruce Gentry, a faculty member at Georgia College & State University and editor of the Flannery O’Connor Review, a quarterly literary journal; and Elizabeth Chase, Woodruff Library Fellow.

5 – 6 p.m.: Lecture by Jonathan Yardley: “Flannery O’Connor’s Last Masterpiece,” also in the Jones Room in Woodruff Library.

7:30 – 9:30 p.m.: Reading by Brenda Bynum: “‘Cheers and regards to children . . .’ The Letters of Flannery O’Connor to Robert and Sally Fitzgerald,” Cannon Chapel, 515 Kilgo Circle on the Emory campus, Atlanta 30322.

Additional sponsors of the celebration include Creativity: Art and Innovation (a component of the university’s strategic plan); Hightower Fund of Emory College; and the Provost’s Luminaries Series.

These events are open to the public at no charge. For more information, call 404.727.6887 or visit http://marbl.library.emory.edu/current-exhibitions.html.

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The Emory University Libraries (http://web.library.emory.edu/) in Atlanta and Oxford, Ga., are an intellectual commons for Emory University, Atlanta and the world. The nine libraries’ holdings include more than 3.1 million print and electronic volumes, 40,000-plus electronic journals, and internationally renowned special collections.

Emory University (http://www.emory.edu) is known for its demanding academics, outstanding undergraduate experience, highly ranked professional schools and state-of-the-art research facilities. Perennially ranked as one of the country’s top 20 national universities by U.S. News & World Report, Emory encompasses nine academic divisions as well as the Carlos Museum, The Carter Center, the
Yerkes National Primate Research Center and Emory Healthcare, Georgia’s largest and most comprehensive health care system.