



Meet **Annie Spence**, keynote author for the *Second Annual Lowcountry Book Club Convention*

“Perfect for any bibliophile and terrifically funny.” That’s how the esteemed *Library Journal*, in a starred review, praised *Dear Fahrenheit 451*, the debut book from librarian Annie Spence. It’s an apt description of the author as well. Spence will keynote the Pat Conroy Literary Center’s second annual Lowcountry Book Club Convention, a free day of learning and fellowship to be held at the Technical College of the Lowcountry’s MacLean Hall on Saturday, October 6.

A stand-out volume for anyone who loves books about books, *Dear Fahrenheit 451* is a collection of Spence’s love letters and break-up notes to books (many well-known, others less so), with some wonderful variations and recommended reading lists added for good measure. In advance of her October 6 keynote appearance, Annie Spence spoke with **Conroy Center executive director Jonathan Haupt** about her writing and reading life.

Written by Jonathan Haupt
Tuesday, 02 October 2018 12:30

Jonathan Haupt: Annie, let's talk about the origin story for your book, *Dear Fahrenheit 451*. What first prompted you to write a break-up note to books being weeded out of library circulation?

Annie Spence: At my first job as a public librarian, about ten years ago, there was a little table of free books that we had discarded from the library. They looked so pathetic—a table of misfits. I wrote a few “Dear John” letters to the books on that table to amuse myself. I remember one was *Pictorial Anatomy of the Cat*, another was maybe called *High Impact Hair* or *High Voltage Hair* and was basically pictures of female bodybuilders with fabulous 1980's blowouts. The idea of breaking up with a library book as if it were a person tickled me. And years later, when my agent was asking me for book ideas, I attached a few of those letters to an email and my own book was born.

JH: How did you get from that experience of having a few sample letters to share with your agent to having a book-length collection of break-up notes and literary love letters?

AS: I began with a small list of break-up letters to weird books discarded from the libraries I had worked at (or, in some cases, still on the shelves). Once we decided that the collection could become a book, we also decided to add love letters, which was fun for me because I love to gush about my favorite books. I also wanted to try to include a book from most every genre, so I really had to dig back into books I had read to get that variety. And I wanted to hit all of the emotional notes we feel when we're reading. It's not just love or hate—it's everything in between. Feelings of nostalgia, disappointment, invigoration, I wanted to travel along all of those paths. So after thinking about that, it was just a matter of fitting the pieces together and finding out which books made me feel a certain way.

JH: What other guides or rules for yourself when you first started working on the book-length collection? Did you seek recommendations? Or did the letters flow organically toward the genres and emotions you wanted to include?

AS: I at first began working on it organically. I wrote about whatever books came to mind that I had really strong emotions about (for better or worse). I made sure to include my favorite writers. And, for some reason, I was really attached to including *Cornzapoppin'*. After I had

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written about the books I felt strongest about, I wrote toward the inclusiveness I mentioned of a variety of genres and emotional responses. I never asked for suggestions because it was such a personal collection of letters to me. Although I did post a Facebook poll for friends about who was literature's biggest [colorful term for sexual obstructionist]. (Ahem, Mr. Darcy.)

JH: Here's a good point to ask, do all librarians swear this much?

AS: Well, never at the Reference Desk.

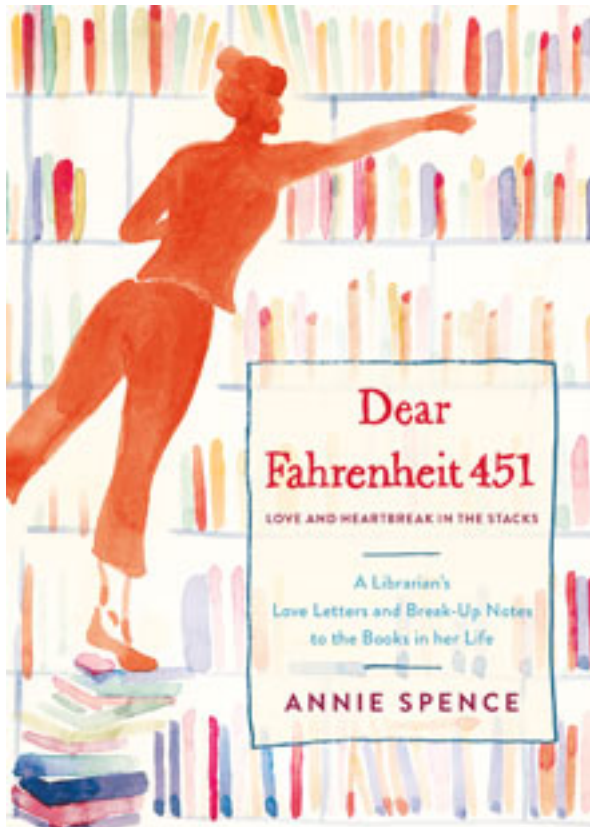
JH: Your variations on the epistolary model are particularly striking—from letters to book series to your one act drama written in response to *Scenes for Student Actors* to your letter to “The Books I Imagine My Upstairs Neighbor Reads,” to (my favorite) your letter to “The Fancy Bookshelf at a Party I Wasn't Technically Invited To.” What led you to expand your format to include all of the variants?

AS: I didn't want to get boring! The book is a slam-dunk for booklovers, but I wanted people who had maybe gotten out of the habit of reading to have some fun with it as well. If the collection was all “I love you” or “I hate you,” it would have gotten old, but having a few unconventional letters helps break things up—and also helps reveal just how often I think about books. (Spoiler alert: A lot.)

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