

# Flannery o'connor: everything that rises must converge essay



**ASSIGN  
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In *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Flannery O'Connor places the broad societal conflict of race relations and racial tensions within the context of the volatile relationship between Julian and his mother, comparing and contrasting generational and societal conflicts. While Julian sees his mother and himself as nothing alike, on opposite ends of the spectrum concerning racial issues such as integration and acceptance, it's quite clear to the reader that Julian and his mother are far more similar than it would appear at first, or even second glance.

Their similarities range from arrogance, small-mindedness and ignorance to shallow whole hearted belief in the significance of their unenlightened mindsets. Both Julian and his mother rely heavily on appearances to separate and elevate themselves from the rest of society. Julian's mother hopes that her public demeanor, attitude and clothing will hide the fact that she no longer possesses her family's former wealth. She in turn judges others by their appearances, automatically considering blacks inferior.

She looks down upon the negro man on the bus who wears a suit, even though he is better dressed than her own son. She also looks down on the black woman on the bus although they wear the same ostentatious hat, symbolizing somewhat the transforming cultural landscape and presenting the idea that the two women could be thought of as on equal social footing. Ironically, Julian also relies heavily on appearances to judge those around him, even whilst criticizing his mother for the same shortcoming.

He despises and resents the neighborhood and evident poverty he must live with every day, and uses his university education to distinguish himself from

others around him, repeatedly claiming that true culture comes from the mind, in a feeble attempt to justify his apparent failure as a writer. Flannery O'Connor skillfully uses Julian and his mother's societal delusions to illustrate the unreliability of appearances. They differ most apparently in their societal views.

Julian's mother holds to the belief that social conduct reflects a person's true nature, where Julian believes that social conduct shows an unwillingness to adapt to social change. Julian's mother pays most attention to manners and behavior, emphasizing this by dressing well and behaving graciously, especially so when in public. Although her family is no longer of wealth, she still tries to conduct herself as and uphold the image of, a woman of importance.

Julian has an entirely different view of social conduct, as he believes that the content of a person's mind determines their true nature and who they really are. He strongly upholds the belief that his intellect, and not his clothes or manners, dictate the person that he is. Julian's mother's strict adherence to social conduct and etiquette constantly infuriates Julian, who believes that her actions demonstrate her ignorance and unwillingness to accept her lower social standing in a swiftly evolving society.

Although he claims to have liberal, intellectual views on race, Julian is in many ways just as petty and small-minded as he believes his mother to be. During college, it's implied that he acquired enlightened perspectives in regards to racial and social equality. He attempts to distance himself from his mother's dated belief system by publicly demonstrating his "broad-

mindful" views on integration, mostly to spite his mother. Throughout the story he makes failed attempts to connect to blacks while repeatedly discovering that they often do not live up to his idealized expectations.

He desperately wants to demonstrate his ability of communication with blacks (again, mainly out of contempt for his mother), but he finds himself unable to connect with anyone, particularly across racial lines. Julian seems to have no more understanding of African Americans than his bigoted mother, despite all the liberal views he spouts. It becomes increasingly clear as the story progresses that he speaks of racial equality only to irritate his mother, not out of any actual compassion for African Americans.

For him, African Americans are a class of people he cannot understand, foreign enough that he even fantasizes over bringing one of them home to meet his mother, not as an individual, but as a trophy of his education and liberalism. Julian's perception of blacks and racial equality indubitably isolates him from reality, though he's far from seeing it. While he undoubtedly has deficient connection skills, particularly with his mother, it's not unlikely to believe that he will someday be able to "converge" into a relationship with others, though they will probably possess the same falsely broad-minded ideals and concealed arrogant beliefs as he does. According to Julian, "true culture is in the mind", not in the heart. He wishes to emphasize the importance of knowledge and education, his personal privileges. Through the story, Julian is considered to be an educated man who is unabashedly proud of his intellect and mind, which he uses as a tool to justify his behavior. Julian's mother, on the contrary, holds to the belief that "true

culture is in the heart and in how you do things, and how you do things is because of who you are”.

The heart represents her will and strength in the past and present. She believes that how she does things represents her class and family's glorious past. Though living in a new world and in reduced circumstances, she expresses her steady point of view that you know who you are and you remain who you are. The irony lies in that their superiority and arrogance both seem to be wrapped up in where they each respectively believe true culture originates from.