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What does "Everything That Rises Must Converge" suggest about the nature of convergence in human relationships?

In a world divided by conflicting differences, the notion of peaceful convergence seems like a distant ideal. Flannery O'Connor's short story "Everything That Rises Must Converge" vividly illustrates this struggle, presenting a narrative where the clash of old and new values plays out in poignant and often painful ways. While the text may have discussed convergence in the extremes, implying that some characters are completely incompatible or entirely attached, such a binary perspective oversimplifies the complex dynamics at play. So, how does the relationship between the characters reveal both chaos and peace, instead of simply one? The text portrays human relationships as nuanced through the bonds of characters, exploring both the chaos and order that arises from attempting to reconcile differences.

The story's symbolic elements reveal the possibility of convergence and the similarities between different groups. The identical hats worn by Julian's mother and the black woman on the bus serve as a symbol of their shared traits and potential for convergence. This similarity suggests that, on the surface, they could find common ground. Despite their differences, the hats symbolise a potential connection between them. When Julian's mother sees the other woman wearing the same hat, she is "pleased" at first, indicating an initial recognition of this similarity. The integrated bus itself acts as a microcosm of societal convergence, where different racial groups are brought together in close proximity. This forced integration mirrors the broader

societal attempts to bridge racial divides. The bus becomes a symbol of the potential for different groups to coexist peacefully. Julian notes that his mother had never been on a bus before, highlighting her unfamiliarity with this new reality and the potential for new experiences. The presence of both characters on the bus underscores the potential for convergence, suggesting that despite their differences, they share a common space and experience. Clearly, this shared space represents the broader societal potential for reconciliation. This idea sets the stage for examining the deeper complexities of human relationships, as the characters' initial similarities are contrasted with their underlying incompatibilities.

While there is certainly hope for the possibility of convergence between characters, incompatibility is evident despite the superficial similarities that have appeared. While the identical hats worn by Julian's mother and the Black woman on the bus initially suggest a possibility for convergence, their actual interaction highlights their conflicting differences. Despite the hat symbolising superficial equality, the tension between them emphasises that true convergence requires more than just surface-level similarities. When Julian's mother sees the other woman wearing the same hat, she is "pleased" at first but then "her face froze," indicating her immediate rejection of this potential connection. The incompatibility between Julian and his mother is also illustrated through their ideological divide. Julian's sardonic reactions to his mother's pride in their ancestral heritage amplify this divide, as he sees her values as outdated and racist. This ideological conflict is exacerbated by Julian's passive aggressive attempts to provoke his mother, such as when his mother reminisces about the past, saying, "It's been such a long time since I've been downtown," Julian scornfully thinks about "bringing someone home...to teach her a lesson.." This moment encapsulates the broader generational tensions between them, with Julian's disdain for his mother's views fueling his desire to confront and

disrupt her complacency. These scenes collectively portray the profound incompatibility between the characters, emphasising the challenges of achieving convergence amidst prejudices.

The bus in the story exemplifies forced convergence and the inherent challenges it presents.

O'Connor employs the integrated bus as a kind of experimental setting, blending together people of different races, socioeconomic statuses, and educational backgrounds, and closely examining their interactions. This transforms the bus into a representation of the 1960s South, offering a glimpse into society. One compelling instance occurs when Julian and his mother board the bus, symbolising their forced proximity to African Americans, whom they view with condescension. This tension is palpable as Julian observes, "The bus was ten minutes late and the Negroes sat down in the first vacant seats, ahead of him." Here, discomfort and racial hierarchy are established on the bus, highlighting the societal imposition of proximity without genuine understanding or acceptance. The narrative tension is intensified during the climactic scene where Julian's mother offers a coin to a young African American boy, asserting, "You take this nickel and go buy yourself an ice-cream cone." This gesture reveals the power dynamics at play, showcasing how forced convergence under societal pressures exacerbates rather than resolves underlying tensions. The act of offering the nickel serves not only as a display of economic disparity but also highlights the racial prejudices that dictate social interactions on the bus. Julian's mother's paternalistic tone and presumptuous gesture expose the beliefs of superiority that pervade her worldview, contrasting sharply with the actual complexities of race relations and dignity. The novel challenges the audience to reconsider the true implications of societal integration, suggesting that forced proximity alone cannot dismantle prejudice.

As suggested in the title, all aspects of life will eventually intersect. The ending leaves it for the reader to decide whether such convergence results in a disastrous collision, or a peaceful merging

of equals. In the final scene of the novel where Julian's Mother suffers a stroke, Julian's desperate actions are juxtaposed with the ineffectiveness of those actions. While he cried "Wait here, wait here!", the story quickly evolved to him moving his feet 'numbly as if they carried him nowhere'. The passage moves from immediate actions of Julian becoming concerned and wanting to help his Mother, to a more surreal and helpless scenario. His subsequent numbness and inability to act effectively convey the reality of their relationship and the broader societal divide. This scene parallels earlier instances, such as Julian's discomfort when his mother interacts with an African-American child on the bus, highlighting the underlying tensions rooted in societal changes. Furthermore, Julian's attempt to connect with his mother in her moment of need exposes not only his own helplessness but also the futility of attempting reconciliation under the weight of societal prejudices. These moments throughout the story show how convergence, though inevitable, often leads to disastrous collisions rather than peaceful resolutions, as individuals struggle against ingrained societal pressures. The tension builds further as Julian is literally and metaphorically swept back into the darkness of familial and societal guilt, depicting the inevitable collision between his aspirations for change and the unyielding reality of his circumstances. This sequence of events underscores O'Connor's thematic exploration of societal forces compelling disparate groups to converge, often with devastating consequences when genuine acceptance fails to materialise.

Yet it seems that some relationships, whether maternal or otherwise, lead to a somewhat peaceful merging. Throughout the story, Julian constantly antagonises his mother, demonstrating resentment towards her traditional views. However, as she suffers a stroke on the bus, Julian's callous demeanour is changed by a moment of genuine concern and tenderness, revealing affection that transcends their ideological clashes. This transformation highlights O'Connor's

exploration of how familial bonds, despite their tumultuous nature, can converge in moments of vulnerability, suggesting the potential for reconciliation even amidst conflict. In a moment where he "let her go," both physically and emotionally, Julian transcends their differences, acknowledging the immutable bond between mother and child. His tearful transition from "Mother" to "Mamma" signifies an acknowledgment of their shared familial ties. This transformation not only highlights the potential for pacification amidst conflict but also underscores the universal truths that bind us, despite our differences - family. Through Julian's journey, the audience considers the complexities of human relationships and societal intersections, challenging us to reflect on whether these convergences ultimately lead to unity, or in this case, at least acceptance.

Human relationships are nothing but complex. While at first glance, a relationship may seem straightforwardly simple, more or less love or hatred. Recognising that once delved deeper, humanity is able to uncover layers of nuance. The novel reveals the power to bridge seemingly insurmountable gaps. A familial bond in this case, can create connections that span across cultures, generations, and ideologies.. Yet, with equal potency, relationships can also burn bridges, leaving scars that may never fully heal. A careless action, or a fundamental disagreement can ignite fires that consume the very foundations of our connections. It can be said that human bonds are seemingly heartbreakingly fragile yet unbreakable strong all at once.

Work Cited

O'Connor, Flannery. *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. Southern Classics Library, Birmingham, 1984. Print