ABSTRACT

RESEARCH PAPER: Fatherhood and Sonhood in Flannery O’Connor’s The Violent Bear It Away

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DATE: May 2012

PAGES: 40

Flannery O’Connor’s second novel, The Violent Bear It Away, deals with many hallmark themes that are nearly constant throughout O’Connor’s work, such as the human need for Christian redemption and the folly of pure rationalism. However, more than many of her other writings, The Violent Bear It Away also speaks to what it means to be a father and a son in mid-twentieth century America, a time when traditional norms of patriarchal dominance of the family were being challenged throughout American society. O’Connor’s novel directs her characters to a nuanced understanding of familial responsibility between fathers and sons: a nuanced understanding where the absolute dominance of the father in the family is problematized; an understanding that emphasizes the dangers of a son’s youth rebellion; yet, more than any of these understandings, the novel emphasizes the need for fathers and sons, indeed all humanity, to submit itself to the ultimate Father, God in Jesus Christ.