

The Christ-Abandoned Landscape of

Nothing Gold Can Stay

Martha Greene Eads

Eastern Mennonite University

Flannery O'Connor is perhaps best remembered for her frequent use of violence to awaken her characters to their spiritual desolation. As a devout Roman Catholic struggling to communicate with an audience she perceived to be increasingly secular, O'Connor hoped the bizarre elements in her fiction would awaken readers to the need they share with her characters for spiritual deliverance. She discusses this intention in "The Fiction Writer and His Country": "When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures" (*Mystery and Manners* 33-4). The "beliefs" to which O'Connor refers include both the recognition of sin and the possibility of deliverance from that sin through Christ. Ron Rash, also writing in the South O'Connor famously described as "Christ-haunted," employs violence similarly to stun his characters into awareness of sin. Payment for sin is still necessary, Rash suggests in *Nothing Gold Can Stay*, but it comes only in the substitutionary atonement other mortals provide, either willingly (as in "Those Who Are Dead Are Only Now Forgiven" and "The Dowry") or unwillingly (as in "Where the Map Ends"). In either kind of atonement, Christ is conspicuously absent.