

QUICK CARD: “THE LAME SHALL ENTER FIRST”



<i>Reference</i>	“The Lame Shall Enter First.” Flannery O’Connor. (1965) ISBN: 978-0374504649
<i>Plot</i>	Since his wife’s death Sheppard has worked selflessly to better his community. In particular, he volunteers at a boy’s reformatory where he first met Rufus Johnson, a young charge with high IQ scores and a violent criminal record. Determined to save this young crippled boy’s life, he gives him keys to his house and devotes his days to improving his condition. In the meantime, he grows increasingly irritated by his son Norton’s selfishness. Instead of sharing his belongings, Norton hoards his savings and grieves loudly over his mother’s death. When Sheppard allows Rufus to stay in his home, the boy manipulates the father into being kind to him while performing wicked deeds behind his back. He claims he is in the power of Satan and despises Sheppard’s good works, saying only Jesus can save him. Rufus teaches Norton that his mother is in heaven, and that Norton can see her if he doesn’t live long enough to send himself to hell. In a final act of defiance, Rufus is caught by the police, and his final words sink into Sheppard’s heart. Realizing that he has neglected his son in preference for a stranger, Sheppard runs to repent to the boy. Instead he finds that Norton has hanged himself and left for space to see his mother.
<i>Setting</i>	A Southern suburb in the mid-19 th century. It is an area permeated with superstition and religion in a time of scientific rationalism.
<i>Characters</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheppard: A young father whose hair has already turned white. After losing his wife he has dedicated himself to helping others at the expense of his neglected son. He believes in the rational and has no patience for supernatural ideas. • Norton: Sheppard’s ten-year-old son who still grieves his mother’s death and longs for a way to be with her. • Rufus Johnson: A delinquent fourteen-year-old who claims he is in the power of Satan. Although he is the most wicked character in the story, he may be the closest to the truth.
<i>Conflict</i>	Man vs. Man Man vs. Himself Man vs. God

<i>Theme</i>	Man's inability to justify himself by his own works. Original sin. Severe mercy – the need to see oneself clearly in order to find redemption.
<i>Literary Devices</i>	Southern Gothic genre The grotesque: a warping or exaggerating of things with the goal of grabbing a reader's attention. Imagery / Symbolism