

Critical Evaluation-Assisi

A poem that I have been studying recently is Assisi by Norman McCaig, which I found very interesting to read because it made a statement which relates to our world today even though the poem was wrote about thirty or forty years ago. The poem has lots of ideas including effective figures of speech, good choice of words, important images and irony. The statement that McCaig makes is, where ever there is great wealth it always exists along side great poverty.

The poem is set in Assisi in Italy around the 1970's were all the rich tourists are coming in hundreds from all different countries far and wide to see the frescoes painted by Giotto in Assisi's huge cathedral. McCaig mainly focuses on the dwarf outside of the three-tier cathedral built in honour of St. Francis. McCaig then proceeds to the priest guiding the tourists around the cathedral telling them the history of Giotto's frescoes and how they individually teach people the goodness of God and the suffering of his son. McCaig uses effective littery techniques to describe the tourists and to describe the dwarf. He then goes on to explain that the tourists are not studying the frescoes and are just there to boast about being there. Then he goes on to tell of the dwarfs voice when he says "Grazie" for the money one of the tourists have given to him outside the cathedral.

McCaig uses juxtaposition by situating the dwarf outside of the huge three tier cathedral. McCaig also refers to the dwarf as a "ruined temple". By saying this he creates a huge contrast between the dwarf and the cathedral, he also uses irony to compare the dwarf to St. Francis were he says:

"Outside the three tiers of churches built in
honour of St. Francis, brother of poor, talker with birds, over whom
he had the advantage of not being dead yet."

This is saying that the dwarf had an advantage over one group of people, the dead. I think that it was a good idea to situate the dwarf outside the huge cathedral and create the image of a great, strong, beautifully designed building standing over a small, weak, deformed person. [wwad adw esadads ayad adba nad kcad aduk:](#)

McCaig gives the reader a graphic description of the dwarf in both stanzas 1 and 3 where he uses many littery techniques to describe the dwarf. In stanza 1 he uses alliteration, simile and metaphor to give the reader a graphic view of the dwarfs deformed body:

"The dwarf with his hands on backwards 7
sat, slumped like a half-filled sack
on tiny twisted legs from which
sawdust might run."

He uses alliteration to say things like, "sat slumped" and "tiny twisted", these two pieces of text give a good view of the dwarfs way of sitting and his little weak legs. The simile used is, "Slumped like a half-filled sack." This tells me that the dwarf had no strength to keep himself up straight and every time he sat down his back got closer to the ground. McCaig also uses a metaphor to tell you of the dwarfs legs, "Tiny twisted legs from which sawdust might run." Here he is speaking about the dwarf as if he was an old teddy bear, he is saying that his legs are so worn out that sawdust might run from them, this is what happened to the teddy bears in the late 19th century, they were filled with sawdust and if they wore away the sawdust would run out.

In stanza 3 McCaig called the dwarf "a ruined temple.", this gives the image of the dwarf who is battered and bruised and over the years he has begun to rot since no one has been looking after him. McCaig says this because the dwarf has been living around the huge cathedral for many years and is now wearing away. McCaig goes on to give more details of the dwarfs appearance:

"whose eyes,

wept pus, whose back was higher than his head, whose lopsided mouth"

All of these properties of the dwarf are very brutal, McCaig says this to make the reader feel pity for the dwarf but surprisingly McCaig goes on to tell how the dwarf had a voice as sweet as a child's:

"Said Grazie in a voice as sweet

as a child's when she speaks to her mother."

I think McCaig does this to give the reader an element of surprise by giving the dwarf such a sweet voice when the reader would expect a rough, deep voice, McCaig uses very good figures of speech in these both stanzas describing the dwarf

In stanza 3 there is an extended metaphor comparing the tourists to hens:

"A rush of tourists, clucking contentedly,

fluttered after him as he scattered

the grain of the word."

McCaig uses this metaphor to show that the tourists are rushing after the priest because he is spreading the word of God, he compares the tourists to hens who are following the farmer as if he is scattering grain. This also shows that the tourists did not pay much attention to Giotto's frescoes which told stories of God. This leads to the tourists devaluing the life and work of Christ. I think that McCaig has made a very clear image of the tourists and that he makes very good use of the metaphor by extending it. [from www.essaybank.co.uk](http://www.essaybank.co.uk)

Throughout the poem there is the use of irony and sarcasm, the first piece of irony used is in stanza 1 where he compared the three tier cathedral built in honour of

St. Francis to the little deformed dwarf. The next piece of irony is in stanza 2 where McCaig tells us that the priest is spending his time guiding rich tourists round the cathedral showing of Giotto's frescoes instead of spending time with the people who need it most. The next and last piece of irony I will highlight is in stanza 3 where the dwarf is sitting outside the cathedral which was built to feed the poor begging. This is a good literary technique used by McCaig where he compares the cathedral which was supposedly built for the poor to the poor dwarf who is begging to the rich tourists. McCaig then goes on to use sarcasm when he compares the dwarf to St. Francis and says:

"He had the advantage
of not being dead yet."

This is true but the dwarf has nothing to live for and would most probably want to be dead. I think that these two techniques which were used by McCaig were really useful in describing the scenes he is trying to show the reader of the poem.

In stanza 3 McCaig gives the reader the one and only experience of the dwarf's voice, from the way McCaig has vividly described the dwarf you would expect him to have a rough, deep voice but it is not:

"Whose lopsided mouth
said Grazie in a voice as sweet
as a child's when she speaks to her mother
or a bird's when it spoke
to St. Francis."

Once again McCaig brings St. Francis into the poem by comparing one of the bird's voice when it spoke to St. Francis to the dwarf's voice as he says "Grazie". This shows that McCaig is a good writer because he can use so many literary techniques to create a poem of this class. [wwgc](#) [gcw](#) [esgcgcs](#) [aygc](#) [gcba](#) [ngc](#) [kcgk](#) [gcuk](#).

I have chosen a poem and studied it carefully, identified the literary techniques used. I looked at such ideas as effective figures of speech, choice of words, important images, irony..... I have also showed how the poet has made the social comment:

"Where ever there is great wealth it always exists along side great poverty."