

Decay of faith in the enduring chill

[Religion](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

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Heaven, earth, and beliefs of a superior being ruling the world are contradicted through Flannery O'Connor's stories. "The Enduring Chill", a short story by Flannery O'Connor, displays religious figures combined with the hypocrisy of Christian faith. "The Enduring Chill" is about Asbury, a male writer, who returns home to live with his mother due to his illness. Great conflict occurs between Asbury and his mother, so much that he would rather die and leave her in despair than to live with her, suffering life in a cage.

Flannery O'Connor applies the motif of religion to express the contradiction of a Christian believer. Flannery O'Connor portrays religion through the use of animals, symbolism to religious figures, and Christian stories throughout "The Enduring Chill". Flannery O'Connor uses religious animals to reveal the contradiction nature of humans. When Asbury sees his sister, he tells his mother to, "let sleeping dogs lie" (O'Connor 358); the dogs could be related to Cerberus, the gate keeper to the underworld. Asbury sees his sister as evil.

The quote also foreshadows Asbury's illness, because he is lying in bed waiting for the illness to take his life, like the sleeping dogs. Flannery O'Connor also uses animals from different religions to foreshadow misfortunate events, such as "the dry cows were on one side and the milk herd on the other. She slowed the car and then stopped altogether, her attention caught by a cow with a bad quarter." (O'Connor 362). The cow is a holy animal in the Hinduism religion, and the cow having a bad quarter is an omen of bad luck.

It also foreshadows to the bad milk which is tainted with the stench of smoke, and causing Asbury to fall more ill. Another use of religious animals is “to find freedom, to liberate my imagination, to take it like a hawk from its cage and set it ‘whirling off into the widening gyre’ (Yeats) and what did I find? It was incapable of flight” (O’Connor 364). The quote reveals Asbury’s sense of freedom through the use of a hawk; hawks are known to be one of the most intelligent birds, as well as having a great vision.

The hawk foreshadows Asbury’s realization, when Asbury discovers his illness wouldn’t kill him. Asbury is incapable of flying free from his caged life because he takes back the key to the drawers which held the letters, as soon as he discovers he would not die; caging himself in and stopping himself from gaining his freedom. A hawk also refers to a dove, which represents freedom and peace in the bible, and Asbury wants to live free and in peace. Animals are used to portray the progression of human life.

Flannery O’Connor uses allusion to refer to bible stories, while using the stories to display the unfaithfulness of Christians. Asbury comes off the train and waits for his mother to come pick him up, and “Asbury felt that he was about to witness a majestic transformation, that the flat of roofs might at any moment turn into...some exotic temple of a god he didn’t know” (O’Connor 357). The majestic transformation alludes to Jesus on Mt. Sinai, where Jesus becomes engulfed in light, and radiates with the power of God.

Asbury does not know the temple of God because he constantly turns away from God. The illusion he witnesses is common in the bible when God send’s a messenger and dreamsto humans to warn and help them. Another example appears during the car ride to his mother’s home, and “the he turned and

faced his mother grimly, irked that he had allowed himself, even for an instant, to see an imaginary temple in this collapsing country junction” (O’Connor 358). The temple of God is not a physical temple but the body of all the Christian believers, but Asbury does not understand God’s will.

The collapsing country junction is an allusion to the destruction of the walls of Jericho. The walls fall from the undying faith of the Israelites. Asbury does not believe he sees the event and decides to continue in life waiting for his death to come without realizing God. The wall of Jericho symbolizes Asbury’s faith which is crumbling down. While Asbury lies in the hospital “ a blinding red-gold sun moved serenely from under a purple cloud... below it the treeline was black against the crimson sky” (O’Connor 382). The red-gold sun represents the death of Christ, as he is hanging on the cross.

Jesus’s blood symbolizes the crimson sky. The black tree line forms the countless amounts of sinners which resent God and Jesus. The darkest days of the world are also on the day Christ dies; Asbury’s darkest days are also on the very same day he witnesses the scene. Each allusion displays the decaying faith of Christians and increase of human weakness. Flannery O’Connor displays the decaying faith of Christians by incorporating religious figures. Asbury describes his friend as being “ as bland as the Buddha himself” (O’Connor 359).

Buddha is usually seen as a cheerful and chubby man, who never falls into temptations, and not bland. Asbury’s knowledge of religion is very low by applying bland to Buddha. Buddha descends from a wealthy family but he decides to follow the road of hardships, but Asbury is from a well off family but he decides to live the life of a metropolitan. Asbury fails in living the life

and becomes overwhelmed with hardships; giving up the life he wished for and travels on a darker path. As Asbury wonders around his mother's home he noticed the " water stains on the gray walls.

Descending from the top molding, long icicle shapes had been etched by leaks and, directly over his bed on the ceiling, another leak had made a fierce bird with spread wings" (O'Connor 365). A fierce bird with spread wings symbolizes the Holy Spirit which appears to the disciples as they are enlightened by the Holy Spirit, with flames floating above their heads. Instead of flames there is a long icicle, the exact opposite of a flame. A fierce bird also symbolizes the anger of God because he would show no mercy to though who go against his will.

Asbury disobeys his mother's rules and falls into a deeper illness. Asbury stunned by the fact he wouldn't die, looks into the mirror and " the eyes that stared back at him were the same that had returned his gaze every day from that mirror but seemed to him that they were paler" (O'Connor 382). God is all powerful and all seeing, the eyes represent his presence in the room, but he realizes the eyes are paler. Asbury loses God and stays living in his life trapped in a cage, with is mother. Religious figures portray the weakening of Christian Faith.