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Edwin O'Connor's novel *The Last Hurrah* presents an effective view of the difficult and complex life of the Irish-American community in Boston of the 1950's. The author uses a number of characterizations to produce themes that relate to the political and social considerations of this era. He also provides most of the accounts in his novel from a single perspective, that of Frank Skeffington.

He is the main character. This character in particular enables O'Connor to present the topic with some accuracy while continuing to create a fictional account of the time frame. This was his goal, to provide truth inside a fictional story.

O'Connor talks directly about and gives great consideration in the system of criminal activity. He feels it directly corresponds with the political structure in the community. The author develops his novel around Skeffington, but also around the characterization of James Michael Curley, the forceful and corrupt political force in the community in Boston. These two characters seem to be greatly different, but they also have some likeness to each other. This novel portrays the complexity of the corruption within this community and the political structure. He also demonstrates the support for this type of institution and its importance within the community itself. There is particular consideration given to the political climate in this story. It is incorporated with social and ethnic concerns that are prevalent.

The story also addresses prejudice and the theme of ethnic stereotyping through his character development. O'Connor does not present a work that is riddled with Irish slurs or ethnic approximations. Instead, he attempts to

provide an account that is both informative and accurate. One important theme that is developed through the characterization of Skeffington is the great importance he has of the historical perspective on the current life of the Irish immigrant community. While O'Connor uses this character to present a dignified representation of Irish immigrant politics, it is also clear that Skeffington serves as a contrast to Curley. Curley demonstrates a clearly determined form of corruption without concern for the ethnic or political history of the Irish immigrant community.

Skeffington cannot ignore the past and the impact history has on his community. Skeffington is a product of the Irish community, and reflects on his origin in many instances through out this story. There are a number of important elements that are unique to the Irish community in Boston and also significant to the life of Skeffington.

Some of these elements include historical perspective, the work ethic, and religion. The major conflicts developed are not just products of the perceived political situation or the corruption defined by the individual characters, but also are related to common social and religious perspectives indicative of the community. O'Connor also creates characters that both represent these perspectives and also contrast both Skeffington and Curley.

The development of the quiet, somber and almost delicate persona of John Gorman is one contrasting character to the complex Skeffington and the boastful, almost ridiculous Curley. Gorman's dedication to social structures and concern for religion and the family contrast the ideals represented by the candidate and the corrupt political leader. When talking with Gorman at

a party, Molly Riordan presents her perspective of Frank Skeffington, and is met with Gorman's skeptical response. Molly says, " He's the best of them all, John, God love him. There's not a night goes by I don't say a little prayer for him.

.." (85). Gorman's response is a simple non-committal comment about the party and skeptically attempts to avoid demonstrating any commitment to Molly's remarks.

Although Gorman and Skeffington have a close association, there is no determination of any loyalty that exists from Gorman's perspective. He is not dedicated to the cause of Skeffington's election, although that is a primary aspect of many of his interactions. Gorman's odd sense of humor also adds to his presentation of skepticism in regards to Skeffington. When discussing the topic of campaign issues that came up between Skeffington and his nephew, the nephew acknowledges that the topic did come up whenever they were together. Gorham's response, intended to invoke religious symbolism as well as humor, was: " Ah well, that's natural enough...If you met the Pope, you'd talk about religion.

" (192). Moments like these present O'Connor's design towards skepticism and irony, while also putting things in a religious and cultural context. The connection between Skeffington and his nephew Adam is also a area that allows the author to produce comparison as well as produce irony. Their relationship represents a commonalty in the Irish community, as well as the interconnectedness within many ethnic families. Adam not only becomes and essential part of Skeffington's political process, but also often appears to

represent his kinder side. Perhaps the comparison shows Skeffington's persona as a young man, before so many outside and corrupt influences became associated to his self-identity.

It shows how much politics have changed him over the years. Skeffington looks to Adam as a means to keep hold of family connections while also reminding himself of who he was and who he is. Skeffington's election night is a much-anticipated action in the story. The impact of his political defeat redefines him. It is no longer his primary role in life to be a defined part of the political structure, and he faces a new reality of goals and perceptions.

At the same time, his defeat could be viewed as his greatest success. It gives him the opportunity to step back from all the influences he has on him being a politician. Skeffington, in the midst of undeniable defeat, must also display his important self-image within his strengths as a "good loser." Rather than accepting defeat, Skeffington embraces it as a means to rededicate his life. O'Connor's book is powerful because of its complexity of levels. There is a defined consideration for the plot and characterizations, but O'Connor does not stop at this. He also creates complex characters that promote an understanding of the political and social structures of the day, while also addressing corruption in the Irish-American community in Boston in the 1950s. It is also important to note that O'Connor develops his characters within a historical perspective, because it is necessary for his characters to understand the significance of the past in order to avoid the same mistakes in the future.

Characters like Frank Skeffington, who originated out of the Irish ghettos, could comprehend their past and make determined efforts to avoid the same issues and behaviors of their childhood in order to become powerful adults. Although Skeffington can remember his meager past, he cannot think of a way to change his future without having to be involved in the corruption presented by people like Curley. The similarities and contrast between these two men, as well as the contrast with John Gorman, successful demonstrate the complexity of social and political order in the community of this time.

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