

Not my best side



How does the language used create effects? The following paragraphs explore how language is used to create effects in the poem Not my Best Side by U. A. Fanthorpe, an ekphrastic poem that uses the free verse form arranged in three stanzas of nineteen lines each. Its purpose is to entertain, which it does through the use of humour, using Standard English in an informal, conversational manner. Dramatic monologues from the characters re-tell from their own perspective, the historical myth of a brave knight that slays a fearsome dragon and rescues a damsel in distress.

There are some differences however, and playing with the readers expectations and using modern stereotypes in place of the historically accepted character roles is where much of the humour is derived. The dragon, unlike its mythological counterpart has quite a sophisticated vocabulary, use of adjectives like 'ostentatiously beardless' and the idiom 'old chap' suggests an intelligent, well spoken, stereotypical British, Upper Class gentleman, the antithesis of a ferocious monster. The line 'Not my best side, I'm afraid. , reveals the dragon's self consciousness and obsession with appearance, a recurring theme. The nouns 'artist' and 'pose' indicate the poem is about a character in a painting and the dragon is highly critical of both the painter, 'Poor chap, he had this obsession with Triangles, so he left off two of my Feet. ' and the other characters, 'Why should my victim be so Unattractive as to be inedible, '. It is the comical and conversational tone that makes the dragon so likeable and lots of rhetorical questions draw the reader in, particularly '(What, after all, are two feet To a monster? ' which, enclosed in brackets gives the impression the dragon is addressing the reader directly. Continuing the pattern of reversing the stereotypes, the girl

is presented as a slightly feminist, with a mind of her own, 'It's hard for a girl to be sure if She wants to be rescued. ', not the typical damsel in distress and likewise, not the naive maiden expected in this kind of myth, euphemisms such as, 'He made me feel he was all ready to Eat me. And any girl enjoys that. ' and 'the dragon-- Well, you could see all his equipment At a glance. are quite crude sexual innuendo of a sexually aware individual. She is a modern, young woman indicated by the nouns she uses, 'hardware, acne, blackheads', and is just as obsessed by appearance as the dragon, 'He was So nicely physical, with his claws And lovely green skin, and that sexy tail,' it is interesting that her opinion of the dragon is much more flattering than his opinion of himself. It is also ironic in view of the dragons opinion of her, she thinks the dragon fancies her 'And the way he looked at me,'.

Perhaps she is still a little naive, and the final lines of the second stanza, 'Still, what could I do? The dragon got himself beaten by the boy, And a girl's got to think of her future. ' suggests a certain helplessness, as though there really is no escape from the role assigned to her by society, despite her own desires. The final stanza opens with a very funny line, 'I have diplomas in Dragon Management and Virgin Reclamation. ', especially if one takes a moment to consider the training involved in 'virgin reclamation'.

It suggests the knight has recently completed his training and is quite young, perhaps his first day on the job. Despite the humour, he is nothing like the chivalrous knights of legend. He is arrogant, 'You can't Do better than me at the moment. ' Clearly a 'product' of the modern age, and obsessed with gadgets, 'My horse is the latest model ', Much of his language is from a modern lexicon, 'management, reclamation, prototype' etc and from the

semantic field of modernity, 'contemporary, latest, and at the moment' all of which place him in the present rather than the era in which this myth has its roots.

He seems a little confused when confronted by the girl's modern, feminist attitude, 'Don't You want to carry out the roles That sociology and myth have designed for you? '. He repeats the words 'Don't you...? ' three times, deciding chauvinistically, what the girl wants is irrelevant, 'What, in any case, does it matter what You want? You're in my way. '.