

Muddled memory: values and virtues in the loved one



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Today, the good is often overshadowed by the evil. The media is flooded with more crime and negativity than it is the positives and stories of charities and selfless deeds. Similarly, in Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One*, the bad, those obsessed with money, self-preservation and appearances, and insincerity in general, cloud the few characters that oppose them. Though Sir Francis has a brief appearance in the novel, he is an admirable character because he is the only character that is self-aware, ethical, sincere, and persistent, despite a problematic society.

In the novel, Waugh satirizes the American and British ways of life, criticizing distorted priorities and exposing falseness and inhumanity in behavior, action, and the environment, due to a lack of emotion and general regard for things meant to involve more than the materialistic, such as death. Though part of one of the main symbols that illustrate the infatuation people have with superficial, the movie industry, Sir Francis recognizes the flaw of insincerity, realizing how few genuine emotions, care, and effort go into his industry and society as a whole, stating, ' The studios keep us going with a pump. We are still just capable of a few crude reactions—nothing more'" (14). There is nothing real in the movies, as it is all props and acting rather than genuine action and reaction, nor are the people that work on them, as they are performing at mere minimums by force. The fact that he is aware of this and acknowledges it makes him an valuable character because he is the only character to do so outwardly. Sir Francis attempts to make others aware or avoid getting involved as well, reminding Dennis Barlow, "' And my advice, I think, was to return to Europe'" (15), implying his knowledge of the horrors of the industry and the society and advising a friend to escape it

while he has the chance. His cognizance is also evident when he comforts Barlow about his deviation from what occupation and reputation society expects of him by becoming an employee at a pet cemetery, remarking the fakeness in that society's emotion as well, stating, "' We cannot expect sympathy from them'" (15), as if they are entirely incapable of such a human emotion. He is praiseworthy character because Sir Francis not only observes these issues within society and its people, but also does not withhold the truth, rather, attempting to bestow such knowledge on others.

With his knowledge, unlike some others, Sir Francis' ego remains stable, rather, he is the opposite of someone intelligent but conceited: sincere and moral. Despite his failure in America with poetry in comparison to his home in Britain, Sir Francis encourages Dennis Barlow, complimenting him when he says, "' You are a young man of genius, the hope of English poetry. I have heard it said and I devoutly believe it'" (13). He is the only character to ever give a genuine compliment to another character without some ulterior motive, such as attempting to win the affections of a woman through false pretensions or plagiarized poetry. Sir Francis is also the only character to demonstrate morals in terms of the atrocities that occur in such a distorted society. He expresses concerns when the movie industry takes an actress and transforms her into new people by going as far as ripping out her teeth, asking, " Could you legally bind her to annihilate herself?" (25), acknowledging her as a human, unlike the industry. He the one character to question anything in a novel that consists of unnecessarily elaborate funeral homes and " painted and smirking obscene [travesties]" (75) upon the faces of the deceased, a gruesome image that is just accepted. Because of this, Sir

Francis becomes a more noteworthy character because he, therefore, is the only character to reveal genuine human emotion and concern in the things he does and says.

Not only is Sir Francis more appealing humanistically, but he is also admirable because he invokes sympathy by performing at his best, despite the distorted societal expectations, such as being rich with a profitable reputation, though he eventually falls victim to pressure. As his career declines and his age increases, Sir Francis is set on an assignment to reinvent an actress into a fresh, new character, yet, according to the movie company he works for, he is ““ Just another has-been”” (26), which they call him behind his back rather than confronting their issues with him. His bosses do not treat him with any amount of respect, even more evident when, after he presents his ideas for his assignment, they ask sarcastic questions such as, ““ Or maybe you feel kind of allergic to the assignment?”” yet he takes it, saying only, ““ No,’ said Sir Francis feebly. ‘ No, not at all. ... I’m sure I’ll have no further difficulty”” (26). Not only does his situation warrant a sympathetic response, Sir Francis’s persistence to overcome the human urge to defend himself is also commendable. Rather than getting angry, even when he discovers “...in the slot which had borne his name for twelve years—ever since he came to this department from the script-writers’—there was now a card typewritten with the name ‘ Lorenzo Medici’” (28) revealing that he has been replaced without being notified, Sir Francis does the best that he can and handles the situation as calmly as possible by talking with his boss.

Having the patience and tolerance to respond to such mistreatment is inspiring, though he suffers silently, resulting later in his suicide. However,

even with his gruesome death, Sir Francis is a exemplary character still, as he is more tolerant and dedicated to his job and to himself and his abilities than any other character in the novel.

Though clouded by the bad influences around him, Sir Francis is one of, if not the only, admirable character within the novel as a result of his acknowledgement and further teaching of what is wrong with certain things in society, his honesty and morality, and his resiliency. Because he appears briefly and is not mentioned much after his death, unfortunately, Sir Francis becomes a muddled memory, overshadowed by the evil and distortion of society, just like in the media, despite his sole sincerity.