

Old mrs chundle – thomas hardy and a visit of charity



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The two titles, despite being relevant to their respective stories, are misleading, in the way that after reading the heading one would think that in “ A Visit Of Charity” the characters and the actual plot is more charitable than “ Old Mrs Chundle”, in fact this is not the case. After reading both short stories one will conclude that in “ Old Mrs Chundle” true and honest charity is performed as opposed to the “ charity” performed in the second story which in all truth and honesty is only performed to enhance the characters’ own ranking with the Campfire Girls.

The way “ society”, in our story represented by the curate and Marian, treated the respective old ladies is very indicative of the time in which both stories were written. Thomas Hardy lived in England; he was born in 1840 and died at the age of 88 years old in 1928. He lived in Victorian England, when there was contrast between the upper and the lower classes, namely between the wealthy and the poor. Despite this people were more courteous to one another than in modern day era.

Eudora Welty, on the other hand was born in 1909 some sixty years after Hardy was born. Welty was born in Jacksonville, Mississippi in the USA and is still alive now, she therefore lived in a totally different era and therefore approached the context of her story in a totally different way to that of someone like Thomas Hardy who died only a few years earlier.

Another factor about the different contexts of the stories is where both stories are taking place. “ Old Mrs Chundle” occurs in the countryside where there are far fewer houses and therefore most people know each other especially those who live within close proximity of each other. “ A Visit of

Charity" takes place in the heart of a metropolitan city and therefore we find that the characters have different approaches to one another. I think it essential to analyse the characters in both stories. In "Old Mrs Chundle" the two main characters are Mrs Chundle and the curate.

The curate seems to be kind, innocent, zealous, and perhaps slightly naive as will be shortly explained. Mrs Chundle on the other hand is quite interesting to describe. She comes over quite independent. Typically a woman of the land, happy with her lot as she has never felt the need to go to Enckworth even if the highway starts right by her door. She is shrewd but fiercely honest. Even though she doesn't want to take money for the curate's lunch, she quite happily lies to the curate about coming to church as she thought, she wouldn't be found out.

Hardy portrays kindness in two ways, the first being the helpfulness of Mrs Chundle for giving the curate some of her food which she herself had grown in the back garden 'been just brought in from the garden' as is common with most households of the same area "'Tis all my own growing, that's true." The curate feels that he has to repay the debt, but upon learning how she had lied to him by saying that she attended church every Sunday, when in truth the rector hadn't seen her in all of his thirteen years as head of the parish he was unhappy and called her "A wicked old woman.

This is the first sign of the curate's "bad" side. Further on in the story the curate seems to portray a certain naivety, when he says he will "obtain the tube," "at the curate's own expense," just so that Mrs Chundle could hear the sermon, it doesn't seem to enter his mind that she will not come after

the first few times. Mrs Chundle has been a difficult person to deal with.

Despite this, she is still very grateful for all the effort the curate had made in order to make her feel more at ease.

She knows that she cannot discriminate between age, race and social class and therefore appreciates that the curate did also not, " He's a man in a thousand. He's not ashamed of an old woman, and he holds, that her soul is worth saving as well as a richer people's. " In Hardy's work the characters and the way they interact is typically of his time and the setting in which the story is written, namely in the English countryside, where the elderly, who aged gracefully, independent and proud were cared for by neighbours and the parish's priests who cared more for their spiritual welfare than their physical well being.

It is apparent that the common theme running through Welty's story is charity as well as she even titles it totally inappropriately: " A visit of charity", although in truth the only true kindness was performed in the Hardy story, because in the story written by Eudora Welty the only supposed philanthropy is when Marian went to visit the old age home, but her intentions were not true for really she was going for the sole purpose of gaining some ' brownie' points which would enhance her status within the Campfire Girls, "' If we bring flowers"- Marian began and then fell silent'.

In truth what Marian really meant to say was that this would just gain her a mere few points on her score chart, though it seems as though she is hit by a sudden attack of conscience for she fails to complete the sentence. Unlike Mrs Chundle who lived in a substantially built and " respectable" cottage

surrounded by her modest belongings but having her most important possession of all: respectability. The two old ladies in Welty's text have no dignity at all.

In those days the Americans were obviously too busy with the modern era and acquiring wealth to care about their elders. The two old ladies seem to be abandoned in a Home which borders on a sanatorium without any personal belongings at all " A penny to spare for a poor old woman that's not got anything of her own. " No one ever comes to visit them. Where are their relatives or the rest of the community? They are rude and dirty and spend their days fighting. Screaming and insulting each other.

Welty constantly compares them to animals " Like a pet. There is quite a fundamental difference between the two stories. Welty seems to have written her story in order for people to take pleasure in the story not for any other purpose, Hardy's, on the other hand seems to be written more as a moral message than as anything else, and this is further certified by the fact that this was Hardy's only story which he failed to publish in his life time, for the story was only recognised the year after he died in 1929 when it was published in a journal.

Due to this point the essences of both stories seem to differ for they were written with different intentions. Hardy continues to show kindness when Mrs Chundle reciprocates the kindness bestowed upon her by the curate, even when the curate was least expecting it, namely when she failed to return to listen to the sermons. Whereas in the other story Welty could have also

enhanced the feeling of kindness if she would have improved the reasons for Marian's visit but this was not the case.

Marian does not enjoy her visit of charity; furthermore she is selfish for she is relying on a good deed only to enhance her social status. This is the absolute opposite to the curate's intentions that initially will even run expenses in order to accommodate the old lady. The story ends with, "went out like Peter at the cock-crow." This reference of betrayal is what the curate felt, as he thinks to himself that it was his consistent urging caused Mrs.

Chundle to pass away so tragically, he kneels in the sand and is broken with remorse. In total contrast to the curate Marian in the Welty story has no initial intentions of trying to help the old ladies "As she walked vaguely up the steps she shifted the pot from hand to hand; then she had to set it down and remove her mittens before she could open the heavy door."

The absence of certainty shows that this is the first time Marian has ever performed such a deed. It was like caught in a robber's cave, just before one was murdered." Again this continues to show her reluctance in going, and the reference to a "robber's cave" which in itself is quite a daunting place if you are not supposed to be there shows Marian to be ill at ease and wishing to be somewhere else. At the end Marian runs out desperately trying to return to her old selfish and carefree life without a second thought or compassion for the two old abandoned women.

This is in total contrast to the curate who is in constant control over his feelings, perhaps this is because the curate has experience as an assistant priest or vicar of a parish, or perhaps this is because the curate never had a '
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defragmented claw' try and grab him or maybe it is because the curate is more able to hide his anxiety and irritation than the young Marian. At this point I would like to point out that both authors used humour in their stories.

Humour runs through most of the Hardy story and it slowly builds up until the day Mrs. Chundle breathes up the bell mouth smelling of onion stew causing a premature end to the sermon as it became a ' hazard' as so to speak for the curate to continue. The only humour in the Welty story can be described as black humour, its visions of defragmented claws and the whole story is one big anti-climax. Initially the situation and dialogue between the women seem comical but truthfully it is very sad.

Another point deserving mention, are the different techniques which the two authors adopt. Welty focuses solely on the perspective of Marian, she never tells the story from the point of the old women, ' " If we bring flowers -," Marian began, and then fell silent. She had almost said that if Campfire Girls brought flowers to the Old Ladies' Home, the visit would count one extra point, and if they took a Bible with them on the bus and read it to the old ladies, it counted double.

This is solely what Marian thought never what the old lady wanted. Hardy's story is in contrast to this for he not only looks at this from the curates point of view, but also from the view of Mrs Chundle and a " narrator", ' The kind-hearted curate, at the great trouble to himself, obtained the tube and had it fitted vertically as described, the upper mouth being immediately under the face of whoever should preach, and on the following' fateful ' Sunday morning it was to be tried'.

What is also good about Hardy's method of writing is how he uses the "narrator" to portray the feelings and thoughts of the characters, this is why the above is an ideal example and extract of Hardy's style of writing. Welty uses language in a very effective way, she uses specific words individually meaning something, for example towards the end of the story Marian scared runs out and in the hall notices the nurse reading "Field & Stream" which symbolises freedom which Marian is about to encounter.

She also uses objectives to explain features and to enhance what Marian sees, like the old woman's hand which Marian sees as a 'claw', a term of surrealness this effect is reinforced by most of the story being told to us in the third person like, 'Marian felt as if she was walking on the waves.' This puts us at a distance and helps to analyse Marian from further off. Another descriptive word the Welty story uses is a constant mention of comparing the old women to animals most commonly sheep.

I think this is to show you old women are compared to a herd of sheep like one old woman starts they all continue. Unlike Welty, Hardy uses the characters speech as if they come to life and not through description, i. e. in the third person. Speech can also describe a person, which is what Hardy uses for Mrs Chundle, in order to understand what social class she belongs in and what sort of education she has, "Twasn't a mossel o' good, and so I could have told 'ee before." Presentative of her education and social background.

Both stories have unexpected endings, Marian runs out of the old age home, upset, disturbed and frightened and in the other story Mrs Chundle dies from

which the curate is deeply grieved, despite this apparent difference in endings they do have one thing in common, they both end with the key characters distressed. I particularly have to stress my liking to the word “apple” towards the end of the Welty story. This symbolises life, it goes round and although at the moment Marian feels distressed some day she will come to the same stage of life as those old women.

As proven and analysed above, both stories deal with the same theme, how a younger member of society cares and perceives old people, but as I see it, Welty’s story is just a dramatically written interesting analysis realistically set in “modern” America, and not much else. Despite it having been a thriller story. Hardy’s story on the other hand has more depth to it, the relationship between the two main characters changes and there is a thoughtful and considerate ending. People did care and respected the elderly more in rural England in Victorian times.