

Good country people by flannery o'conner



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'Good' Country People Most commonplace truisms regarding 'good country people' are overturned in Flannery O'Connor's short story, when 'Manley Pointer,' the country lad, points out in a very ungentlemanly manner to Hulga Hopewell (a city-bred Doctor of Philosophy) that " I'm as good as you any day in the week." And when he says " good," he leaves her in no doubt that he means 'clever,' 'cunning,' or 'crooked'-anything but good. The short story reveals how clever townspeople (among others) can be blinded by book-knowledge and their own feelings of intellectual superiority to the winding ways of the world.

The 'city' attitude to 'good country people' is revealed at the very beginning. The story begins with Mrs Hopewell's analysis of Mrs Freeman's limited facial expressions, but therein she reveals also the limits of her own thinking. Her thoughts of the Freemans are laced with some scorn, but she humors them because they are " good country people" and of use to her. Mrs Hopewell's daughter Hulga, who had lost her leg in a shooting accident, is openly rude to Mrs Freeman, but the good countrywoman was never troubled even by " a direct attack, a positive leer, blatant ugliness to her face." The author, however, does not attempt to present any rosy picture of country people. Mrs Freeman is shown to poke her very sharp nose into everything, with " a special fondness for the details of secret infections, hidden deformities, assaults upon children." Her children, Glynese and Carramae, whom Hulga secretly refers to as Glycerin and Caramel, have all the worst qualities of the girls of their age in the town, but the story is not primarily about the Freemans.

The story line follows the thread of one particular 'good' country man's attitude to these city folk. The irony of his point of view is revealed in full

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only at the very end of the story. The 'good' country man of the story is a young man who claims he is just nineteen, calls himself 'Manley Pointer,' and bursts in on the Hopewell household one day with a suitcase full of Bibles to sell. When his first sales ploys fail, he depicts himself as a country bumpkin, a boy who cannot sell anything to city folk, a young man whose heart condition may strike him down any day. This is enough to wring Mrs Hopewell's feelings, because her daughter too has a similar heart condition. She invites him to lunch, but Hulga is deliberately rude to the young man, thinking him stupid. He talks a lot about how he " wanted to become a missionary because he thought that was the way you could do most for people." And, " he was so sincere, so genuine and earnest that Mrs. Hopewell would not for the world have smiled." And even Hulga does not snort. The country bumpkin has the last laugh. He privately arranges to take a 'picnic' walk with Hulga the next day. Hulga's virgin romantic spirit is aroused, and she practically invites him into a lonely barn. Playing the admiring innocent, he gets her to take off her wooden leg, leaving her at his mercy. Swiftly revealing himself a conman rather than a good country man, he makes off with the wooden leg as a trophy of the adventure, one of many such in his life. As Mrs Hopewell sees him leave, she suspects nothing, and tells Mrs Freeman, " He was so simple."

O'Connor's story, with disarming and deceptive simplicity, reveals that nothing is as simple as it looks. In the modern world, even a simple, homely term like 'good' can embrace suggestions and connotations of evil. A 'good' country bumpkin may outwit the city blue-stocking with a PhD, " any day of the week" if he sets his 'simple' mind to it. There is simply no place for stereotypes any more.

References

O'Connor, Flannery. " Good Country People."

26 Feb. 2004. Retrieved 1 May 2006.