Solitary as an Oyster: Understanding Ephemeral Values on their Contemporary Society through the Curmudgeon Characters of Fedrick Backman’s Ove and Charles Dickens’ Scrooge

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Abstract
This study is about analysing the curmudgeon personality of Ove and Scrooge and the reflection of their ephemeral values on their contemporary society, thereby highlighting the emotion of fatherhood as depicted by their characters. The study also focuses on the reasons that make these characters experience their self-inflicted loneliness. The two greying protagonists are featured in a humorous and heartwarming way. An emerging genre within this literature is the “geezer and grump lit”, as discussed by Swinnen (2019), a genre where older people are active protagonists, and while often portrayed as grumpy usually turn out to have a golden heart.

“Solitary as an Oyster”. This simile suggests the nature of a person who is tightly closed and will not open except by force. Like an oyster they don’t group. Charles Dickens uses this simile in his novel, A Christmas Carol in Stave-1. The author compares Ebenezer Scrooge to an oyster, saying that Scrooge was “Solitary as an oyster”. This comparison does not imply anything negative. Dickens uses this simile to highlight how Scrooge lived his life. On a similar platform, is the 59 year old widower and protagonist of Fredrick Backman’s A Man called Ove who bears so much resemblance. Ove is also grumpy, unfeeling and stoic is not necessarily a negative character in the story. Both Scrooge and Ove are curmudgeons in the society, the kind of people who point at people they dislike as if they were burglars caught outside their bedroom window. Both have staunch principles, strict routines, and a short fuse.

Key words: Past and Present, Curmudgeon, Ageing Botched Suicide, Neighbour-Neighbour Relationship, Scrooge, Bah Humbug, Christmas Ghost

Introduction
A Christmas Carol depicts the life of a spirited and selfish old man, Ebenezer Scrooge, who hates Christmas. Scrooge is unkind to the people who work for him, then refuses to give charity, and then is rude to his nephew when he invites him to spend christmas with him, when Scrooge gets home, he is visited by the ghost of his business partner Jacob Marley - and then by three ghosts. They are
the ghosts of Christmas past, Christmas present and Christmas yet to come. The ghost’s journey through time teaches Scrooge the errors of his ways. When he wakes up on Christmas day he is full of excitement, and buys the biggest turkey in the shop for family before spending the day with his nephew full of the joys of Christmas.

A Man called Ove tells the life of a cankerous 59 year old man, a grumpy curmudgeon according to the society. Thinks he is a strict disciplinarian by following the rules he set for himself. All poor Ove wants to do is to end his life in an honourable way. The Solitary world turned on its head when a boisterous young Indian couple moved in next door. Curmudgeon Ove points out people he dislikes. A proud man of his staunch principles is addressed as a bitter neighbour from hell. Behind the cranky exterior there is a story of sadness. The narrative technique alternates into Ove’s past and present events.

**Similarities between the Characters**

The protagonists taken up for consideration are both old men. Both create systems for themselves and feel safe and secure. Their attitude towards their contemporary society with regard to neighbour- neighbour relationships is disdainful. These disgruntled old men crave for love and warmth and have lived despite their hardships. The unexpected turn of events changes these curmudgeon characters into lovable and respectable persons in the society.

**Objective of Study**

In the current paper I wish to extend my examination in two ways- the curmudgeon personality by applying psychologicall predictions of one’s attitude towards a specific object of interest or people. Understanding the relationship of curmudgeon personality with the society will demonstrate the meaningful effect of the disposition onto the person themselves. Second- more importantly they become a predator of their self-inflicted values. „A society is a group of individuals involved in persistent social interaction, or a large social group sharing the same spatial or social territory. Although the characters Ove and Scrooge are initially portrayed as perpetual loner, it soon becomes apparent that they are mean to the core. “Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. (Dickens, 34) The reader gets the idea that Scrooge is not just a grumpy, jaded old man- he is mean to the core, and makes sure no one mistakes him otherwise. He is ,, hard and sharp as flint suggests that he is caustic and mean to anyone who comes close enough to be pricked by his words.

Ove is obviously out of elementinan Applestore. He mistake sanipadforan" O-pad, when the sales clerk tries to explain that it’s an ipad, Ove tries to ascertain that an ipad is a computer. When the sales clerk refutes it, Ove glares at him and yells, “I want a computer, a normal bloody computer!” Ove creates a sense of order for himself. He seems to believe that salespeople are out to upsell things to him. This opening passage introduces several of the primary questions of the novel: how Ove come to behave this way, and what happened to him and what prompted him to come to this Apple store. He expresses obvious disdain for young people. This nature exhibits the introvert nature of the protagonists. Introvert personality is due to lack of acceptance and adaptability. This can be analysed using psychological theory as well as the approach proposed by Carl Gustav Jung (1921). Introversion is normally characterised by a hesitant, reflective, retiring nature that keeps itself to itself, shrinks from objects and is always slightly on the defensive. Sharp (1973:13)

Taking into study the curmudgeon’s acceptance and adaptability, acceptance is the hardest part. They find it difficult to accept that the times have changed and they are no longer in their youthful
years. They feel as if there is no space for their old ways in this modern world and this bitter truth makes them angry. Older adults are just resistant to change. They express their resistance by anger.

In the course of the novel Scrooge and Ove reject companionship. Jacob Marleyis Scrooge’s business partner and sole friend in the world Old Marley was as dead as a doornail. Marley’s definitive dead-ness also shows that ever since Marley died seven years ago, Scrooge has been totally isolated from other human beings, besides the one he is required to interact with (like his clerk Bob Cratchit.”). He is a man of black and white. And she was colour. All the colour he had. (Backman37) Ovel oves rules, structure and concrete things, while Sonja loves beauty, spontaneity and art. Sonja encourages Ove to think outside his rigid ideas of how the world should be and embrace nuance and difference. After Sonja’s death, Ove’s poor state of mind refuses to observe “colours” necessarily to live happily As a boy Ove lost his mother then as a teenager his father died. Ove quit school and began working in the railways. His co-worker Tom accuses Ove of stealing money, and because Ove refuses to disclose the name of the thief (though he knows that the actual thief is Tom) he loses his job. This incident further alienates Ove from society.

“The school is not quite deserted”, said the ghost. “Solitary child neglected by his friends, is left there still”. (Dickens 57) The Ghost of Christmas Past first brings Scrooge to his old boarding school, which he attended as a child. It is mostly deserted because the students went home for the holidays, young Scrooge remains behind for unclear reasons. In this quote Scrooge weeps at the lonely memory. For in the story, Scrooge has been a mean and unfeeling character, immune to the woes of others. This sudden onset of tears reveals Scrooge’s hidden softer side and shows his capacity for empathy, inspired by his younger self.

Ove and Scrooge grew up as solitary children, neglected by relatives and teased by friends. They experience childhood traumas as a result they grow up to be cold-hearted. Their past is full of struggles that have served to shape them into what they are today. Their meaness is not spontaneous or voluntary.

Growing with this feeling of dejection, Scrooge loses the love of his beloved, Belle. She breaks off their engagement because of his altered values. Ove experiences solitary with his neighbourhood, even though his wife Sonja at tempts to bring back “colours” into his life. The ghost of Marley and the subsequent spirits awaken Scrooge and Ove’s hard and brittle hell is opened by the arrival of the Iranian neighbour, Parvenah. Jacob Marley, despite not being Particularly missed by Scrooge, was never the less the miser’s only friend, and is the figure that haunts and protects him by introducing the three Christmas Ghosts. He manifests the horror of regret with the burdensome chain and describes how he is doomed to wander the earth for eternity, a fate that Scrooge too will face unless he changes his ways. “I will live in the Past, the Present and the Future! Scrooge repeated as he scrambled out of bed. The spirits of all the three shall strive within me. Oh. Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say on my knees, old Jacob , on my knees!” (Dickens 111).

Parvenah’s role in enhancing the rectitude of Ove is similar to the role played by Marley. Ignoring his eccentricity she is constantly behind him-picking up conversations in spite of his stringent tongue. In due course Ove feels that Parvenah shares similarities with Sonja which provides him with are alperson to begin, taking the place of Sonja’s memory.

Their settlement engages with the community which allows them to transpose for the better and also follows his “principles” of doing rather than just speaking. Ove’s strictictide as a bout gender have been challenged since meeting Mırsad. His welcoming neighbourhood allows him to change for the better and also follows his opening. The drawings of Nasanin on the walls of her room suggest that the two have more in common. This encourages Ove to think more critically about how he judges people.
Ove understands that not everyone sees him as a mean curmudgeon. You are the funniest thing she knows. That’s why she always draws you in colour, says Parvaneh. Nasanin thinks he’s hilarious and sees through his gruff exterior to the kind heart inside. Ove convinces Amel to accept his son Mirsad who is a gay. Finding Ove at the Apple store is indicative of his complete transformation over the course of this novel. Ove gets Nasanin an Ipad. She hugs him, thanks him and calls him “Grandad”.

A wakening dawns on the protagonists. Marley’s ghost described his awful fate to walk on the earth, enchained, for eternity, and Scrooge’s fate loomed a head of him. Now Scrooge has the chance to make amends for all his bad deeds—one by one he apologises to the virtuous characters he has met and scorned. This structure allows Dickens to show Scrooge’s complete transformation from evil to good.

Conclusion
The true lesson of the story lies here. Not only did the two characters use their new transformation to amend their ways, they are also forgiven by those characters who have been most personally affected by his cruelty. The metamorphosis of these close-fisted curmudgeons hinges on forgiveness. The sea-change in Ove’s character gives him a gateway to his neighbourhood and he becomes “granddad”. Scrooge becomes a father to Tiny Tim and accepts to take care of his medical treatment. The novels end on a positive note highlighting the benevolence and social conscience of the two ageing heroes.

References
Primary Source

Secondary Source