

A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF O. HENRY'S "THE GIFT OF THE MAGI" (WILLIAM SYDNEY PORTER)

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Abstract:

This article aimed to bring more possibilities into existence for one of the O. Henry's texts, "The Gift of the Magi", in terms of the application of metacognition concept. The idea of level was rooted in metacognition concept and was used to examine the text. The study found that there were two levels for a same thing in O. Henry's text.

Keywords: Magi, meretricious, truant, instigate, prosperity, parsimony, depreciate, envy.

Introduction

The short story The Gift of the Magi is written by William Sydney Porter better known by his pen name O. Henry. The story rotates to Mr. and Mrs. Young dealing their problem giving each other gifts despite them not having enough money and penniless at that moment. The author delivers a truly-heart warming moral lesson about love in gift giving. The short story teaches us that if you sacrificing is part of true love someone, you will sacrifice anything, even things you treasure the most "The Gift of the Magi" is one of O. Henry's most famous short stories. In this paper I will have a closer look at the short story "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry. I will start by analyzing the major themes love, sacrifice and wisdom. Furthermore, I will also have a look at the ending of the story, which is an example of the so-called 'O. Henry twist'. By analyzing these different aspects of the short story I will conclude with the meaning for the reader today and the question whether this short story is worth reading.

Literature review

The Gift of the Magi

By William Sydney Porter "O. Henry"

Introduction

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his pen name O. Henry. The story rotates to Mr. and Mrs. Young dealing their problem giving each other gifts despite them not having enough money and penniless at that moment. The author delivers a truly-heart warming moral lesson about love in gift giving. The short story teaches us that if you sacrificing is part of true love someone, you will sacrifice anything, even things you treasure the most.

"**The Gift of the Magi**" is a short story by O. Henry first published in 1905. The story tells of a young husband and wife and how they deal with the challenge of buying secret Christmas gifts for each other with very little money. As a sentimental story with a moral lesson about gift-giving, it has been popular for adaptation, especially for presentation at Christmas time. The plot and its twist ending are well known; the ending is generally considered an example of cosmic irony. The story was allegedly written at Pete's Tavern on Irving Place in New York City. The story was initially published in The New York Sunday World under the title "Gifts of the Magi" on December 10, 1905.[1] It was first published in book form in the O. Henry anthology The Four Million in April 1906. "The Gift of the Magi" is a short story by O. Henry about a young couple, Jim and Della, who are deeply in love but struggling financially. They each want to buy the other a special gift for Christmas, but they have very little money. Despite this, they are determined to find a way to make their loved one's holiday special. Della sells her long, beautiful hair to buy Jim a chain for his watch, while Jim sells his watch to buy Della combs for her hair. However, the twist at the end is that the gifts they bought for each other are not what the other wanted. Jim's watch chain is useless without his watch, and Della's combs are useless without her long hair. Despite this, they are still happy with the gifts because they know that the other person sacrificed something special for them in order to buy the gift. It is a heartwarming tale about a young couple, Jim and Della, who are deeply in love but struggling financially. They each want to buy the other a special gift for Christmas, but they have very little money. Despite this, they are determined to find a way to make their loved one's holiday special. The story is beautifully written and the characters are incredibly relatable and endearing. The twist at the end, where it is revealed that the gifts that Jim and Della bought for each other are not what the other wanted, is touching and really drives home the message of



love and sacrifice. Overall, I highly recommend “The Gift of the Magi” to anyone looking for a heartwarming and poignant short story. It is a true classic that will leave you feeling uplifted and inspired.

ANALYSIS

The Gift of the Magi’ penned by American short story writer O. Henry is one of the most beautifully written short stories in the world. It has been adapted into several films and has become a part of many short story anthologies. “The Gift of the Magi” is a very unusual and surprising story central to a Christmas theme. O. Henry, also known as William Sydney Porter, published this short story in 1905. Therefore, the short story is considered part of the Realism and Naturalism literary period of American History. Like almost all of O. Henry’s short stories, the story has a beautiful and clever twist in the end, which brings out O. Henry’s genius and narrative skills. He compares the gifts that the Magi or the three wise men of the East brought to the Baby Jesus in the manger to the gifts Della and Jim give each other on a rather dismal winter Christmas Eve.[2] Although the Magi chose their gifts wisely, they gave their gifts out of their plenty without sacrificing much. In comparison, there was a deep sense of sacrifice and most important love in the gifts bought on Christmas Eve by Della and Jim. The sixth of January is celebrated in most Christian countries as the Epiphany of the Lord Jesus, the day when the three Magi or Wise men from the East traveled a great distance to ratify Lord Jesus’ love for humankind by offering their symbolic spiritual gifts. However, if we have people like Della and Jim in our midst, they are better Magi than the three wise men because of the love they share in their gifts. Because of selfless loves like Della and Jim’s, the Lord Jesus is manifested every day in our midst. We no longer have to wait for the Magi to come and declare the divinity of love to the people of Earth. Also, note that Della and Jim bought gifts for each other by sacrificing articles that were very much dear to them. Della sacrificed her long brown hair to buy a platinum fob chain for Jim’s watch, while Jim sacrificed his watch to buy a set of tortoise-shell jewel-rimmed combs for Della’s hair. The Magi did give gifts, but they did not have to sacrifice much for it. They came to manifest the Lord Jesus, the very Son of God on Earth, as per the Christian theologians. If the Magi did sacrifice anything, it would have been the time taken to reach Judea to seek out the child Jesus. Looking at Biblical texts, one notes that the Magi would have taken two years to travel from Persia to Judea. The Star of Bethlehem could have appeared two years before the wise



men arrived in Jerusalem. It is believed that the Christmas star could have appeared anywhere from 8 to 4 B.C. However, since they find what they searched for, their sacrifice does not go without its evident reward. Coming to the gifts; they were symbolic gifts given to represent the three different aspects of Lord Jesus' as an entity here on Earth: gold as a symbol of kingship on Earth, frankincense an incense as a symbol of deity, and myrrh an embalming oil as a symbol of death. Other than the gold, the other two gifts were of no use to Lord Jesus or his little family. The Magi gifted them to the Lord Jesus out of respect and honor. However, Della and Jim's gifts were given out of love for one another, which is the love manifest in the basic teachings of Lord Jesus Christ. There is a lot of hidden sublime Christian theology in the story, unlike most short stories penned about and on the Christmas Season.[3] You can decipher more about it by reading the Holy Bible. If you want to learn how to read the entire Holy Bible in two months, you can check out my blog post titled 'Tips on How to Read the Bible from Start to Finish' [here](#). Della's and Jim's gifts were gifts of sacrifice and true love for each other. The Magi may have revered the Baby Jesus but may not have loved him so much. Though I would think that if a person had taken two years to follow a star to worship the person to whom the star belonged, I suppose there should be a great deal of love connected to that. But that is what O. Henry is drawing to our minds, for it is not wisdom that prompted Della to cut off her hair and Jim to sell his watch. It was innocent love that made them do this. Wisdom is good to a certain extent, but love is even greater. And most of the time, love knows no wisdom. The wise men from the East invented the art of gifting presents on Christmas. I suppose the Baby Jesus or the parents of Lord Jesus accepted the gifts since I presume, he was too young to understand their significance. I am sure if there was a problem with the gifts, then as O. Henry says, the wise men could exchange these gifts, for they gave them to the Lord Jesus from their plenty. Della and Jim gave not what they could spare, but they gave their best possessions to the one they loved most. Therefore, O. Henry, the master writer, claims that Della and Jim were wiser than even the Magi because of this element. The good news is that there are many Della's and Jim's in this world who, through their love for each other, keep reminding us of what the Magi did a long time ago in Judea. Coming to the text, Della seems to be a very naïve and innocent woman. She is married to Jim, who is only twenty-two, implying that she was probably even younger than he was. Della has only one dollar and eighty-seven cents with her, which she has scraped to save for Jim's



Christmas present. She is madly in love with Jim and is ready in the end to sacrifice her one greatest possession for him: her hair. It did not occur to her that Jim would buy a present for her, which would have required her hair to be in place. She did not ‘think’ or muse over the idea of cutting her hair before she acted. She was more than happy to do it because she was doing it for her Jim. There is a hint of suspense, and we wonder if after Della has cut her hair, Jim would still love her. But we underestimate Jim, for he loved the soul, not the body. However, when we are told the short story from his point of view, we realize that he was only taken aback by the idea that his wife could have done a deed so great as to sacrifice her hair from him. His act is nothing less, for he sold his precious watch for her combs. There are references that the couple were poor, sought out a living on twenty dollars a week, and were given to fancying that the janitor was in love with Jim’s watch and the woman living opposite the airshaft was jealous of Della’s hair. The janitor was compared to the Biblical character King Solomon and the woman opposite the airshaft was compared to the Queen of Sheba. Note that both Biblical names are synonymous with wisdom in the Bible – the Queen of Sheba used to come to Israel to hear the wisdom of King Solomon. There is a hint given by the author O. Henry that love would triumph over wisdom in this short story titled ‘The Gift of the Magi’.[4] When Jim comes home, he sees Della’s curly cut locks and cannot digest the fact that the hair for which he bought the tortoise-shell combs was cut. In a trance, he asks Della twice about the hair, to which, like a cheerful schoolgirl, she wishes him a Merry Christmas and asks him to be joyful. There is no reaction mentioned on how Della reacted because her gift of the platinum fob chain was of no use as Jim pawned the watch to procure the money to buy the combs. Instead of showing Della’s reaction, O. Henry gives us a Catechism on the relevance of the Magi’s gifts, which is indeed an apt ending to this very charming and heartfelt short story. ‘The Gift of the Magi’ is deemed the greatest short story that O. Henry has ever written. I read it for the first time in 2001 when I was in school; it was a part of my literature syllabus. I then went on to read more of O. Henry’s short stories.

Conclusion

In conclusion, The Gift of the Magi is a kind and inspiring story about two young people truly loving each other. Their love is revealed by their willingness to sacrifice the most valuable things they own to bring joy to each other. Apart from the theme of affection, the story is concerned with the concepts of poverty and



wealth. It asserts that rich people are not those with much money but those who love and are loved in return.

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