

LOVE AND SACRIFICE IN O. HENRY'S SHORT STORY

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“The Gift of the Magi”

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ABSTRACT

O. Henry's timeless masterpiece, “The Gift of the Magi” continues to captivate readers with its poignant exploration of love and sacrifice. This article delves into the intricate tapestry of emotions woven by the protagonists, Jim and Della, as they navigate the challenges of expressing love through selfless acts of sacrifice. Through a careful examination of the narrative's nuances, the article seeks to unravel the symbolic significance of the gifts exchanged, the profound irony embedded in their actions, and the enduring lessons on the true essence of love. By scrutinizing O. Henry's craft and the cultural context of the story, this analysis aims to illuminate the enduring relevance of “The Gift of the Magi” in reminding us of the transformative power inherent in acts of genuine love and sacrifice.

Keywords: love, sacrifice, genuine, selfless, love, affectionate, happiness, irony, Christmas.

Nowadays, the world is full of various people that can vary absolutely. Some people are affectionate and love each other or vice versa. In American literature, an author whose pen name is O. Henry (William Sydney Porter), is greatly well-known for his short story dubbed “The Gift of the Magi” which attracts thousands of readers in terms of its moral lessons. The work was originally published in a collection titled “The Four Million.” This collection, published in 1906, includes a variety of short stories showcasing O. Henry's keen observations of New York City life and his skillful use of irony. “The Gift of the Magi” stands out as one of the most beloved stories from this collection and has continued to be widely read and appreciated over the years. As it could be a good example of a literary work in which love, kindness, care, that's to say, all the blessings of humankind are skillfully depicted. It encourages us to be kind, not to favour money rather than happiness, and most importantly, to have the ability of value others' efforts.

This short story is bursting with ethical lessons that one can learn exhaustively, for instance:

“She started to try to cover the sad marks of what she had done. Love and large-hearted giving, when added together, can leave deep marks. It is never easy to cover these marks” [1. 15]

The extract which is given above conveys that one of the main characters Della sacrificed her precious thing in order to make her husband happy at Christmas. It means people can do everything either, despite the challenges they face or whatever their condition is. Because, at that time Della and, her husband, Jim had only small amount of money, that's one dollar and eighty seven cents for their living, Although, Della wasn't discouraged and tried to find a solution. Then she decided to sell her wealth, her hair in order to get a gift, a platinum pocket watch chain, for her partner. And Della sells her hair to the shopkeeper who is cold and detached in her business dealings named Madame Sofronie. Also, O. Henry masterfully highlighted the scene when Jim saw his wife without her hair in the lines below:

“Jim stopped inside the door. He was as quiet as a hunting dog when it is near a bird. His eyes looked strangely at Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not understand. It filled her with fear.” [1. 25]

With these lines, we can understand that, O. Henry wants to keep the situation a secret in order to intrigue the readers.

“It was not anger, nor surprise nor anything she had been ready for” [1. 14]

After reading this sentence, our interest increases highly. Although the story does not reveal much about Jim, it is easy to see that he is wise, intelligent and very loving towards his wife from his reaction when he hears that Della's hair has been sold. In fact, Della is a hero for a great number of women who are afraid of being brave enough to make their loved ones happy. Because, she could do many women cannot. Her bravery and devotion are clear here:

“Maybe the hairs of my head could be counted...but no one could ever count my love for you”. [1. 12]

We must also recognize Jim's dedication. Because he also purchases Della a comb as a Christmas gift by selling his only possession, his watch, to please his wife. It is impossible not to moisten the eyes of the readers who read the situation when Della opens her present:

“White fingers pulled off the paper. And then a cry of joy; and then a change to tears”. [1.14]

We can visualize their condition of happiness. After opening their presents, Jim and Della are aware of their everlasting love while the sacrificial gifts of love cannot be used. And we, the readers, understood that, love is such a feeling that it is like a

force that makes all people give up their most valuable things and try to make each other happy. A person values and protects his family so much that he is ready to sacrifice everything on this path. The presence of loved ones, their support and affection, caring, kindness are enough for him to live happily for a lifetime.

Finally, the moral of the story is that giving presents to loved ones, or the price of gifts, is not the most important thing. The main thing is to show people's attention to each other, love, what they are ready for and bravery. As Ellen G. White said:

“True love is not a strong, fiery, impetuous passion. It is, on the contrary, an element calm and deep. It looks beyond more externals, and is attracted by qualities alone. It is wise and discriminating, and its devotion is real and abiding”

The story concludes with a touching realization. Despite the sacrifices made by Jim and Della, their love remains intact and even stronger. The narrator suggests that their gifts, though seemingly rendered useless, become symbols of the enduring and selfless nature of their love. The story encourages readers to reflect on the true meaning of gift-giving and the essence of love, transcending material possessions.

In essence, “The Gift of the Magi” teaches that love, sacrifice, and the thought behind a gift hold greater value than the monetary worth of the gift itself. It encourages readers to appreciate the intangible aspects of relationships and challenges societal notions of wealth and happiness.

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