

Understanding of literary terms

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Understanding of Literary Terms The Gift of the Magi The short story “ The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry revolves around the main theme of unselfish love. The first sentence of the story, “ One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all.”, gives one an overview of the dilemma that confronts the main character of the story (Shmoop University, Inc., n. d.). The personalities of the characters Jim and Delia contribute to the presentation of the theme of the story.

The third person point of view was used by O. Henry to objectively describe to the readers the setting and the characters so that the readers may ultimately be surprised at the ending of the story.

The setting of the story contributed to the theme the author wished to convey. It illustrated the poor living conditions of the couple to emphasize that they do not really have any precious possessions except Delia’s lovely hair and Jim’s heirloom watch. The way O. Henry describes the apartment where the couple lives and the clothes that they wear are all depictions of poverty. The setting allows the readers to commune with the character’s problem of finding a way to finance the gift for their partner. The setting was relevant in building up the theme of the story because it underscored the fact that even though Jim and Delia were poor, they both have that ardent desire to give the best gift to each other. The setting makes the readers further realize the extent of the sacrifice that both Jim and Delia had to go through just to be able to give the gift that each one yearned so much. Giving up one’s most cherished possession is not easy but if it is done to bring joy to a loved one, the pain of separation from the possession becomes irrelevant. This situation was clearly shown in the story. The generosity of

both characters is further magnified as the readers go through the plot of the story. The time frame used by O. Henry is Christmas Eve, another contributing factor to the theme of the narrative. The author could not have chosen a better time for the setting. Unselfish love is the very essence of Christmas which was shown by God in giving His Only Son as the Savior of the world. Gift-giving is also a Christmas tradition which was first demonstrated by the Three Kings on Christmas Eve (Smith, 2009). The Christmas setting indeed highlighted the couple's role as "magi" to each other, each one giving the best gift that both could offer.

The author uses irony in this classic Christmas story (Play: The Gift of the Magi, 2002). O. Henry describes Jim and Delia in the last paragraph as "two foolish children" but later on ironically calls them the "wisest" and the "magi". The author presents the main theme of the story in the last paragraph, that of selfless love. Although the gifts no longer have any use for both Jim and Delia, what O. Henry wants to communicate to his readers is that those gifts symbolize something more precious. It symbolizes the gift of love.

Aside from the main theme of unselfish love, other themes presented in the short story are the theme of marriage, sacrifice, wealth and women and femininity (De, 2011).

References

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