

The life and works of o. henry

Literature



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The Life and Works of O. Henry

One of the most celebrated writers in American literature, William Sydney Porter (1862 -1910), better known in his pen name O. Henry, was born on September 11, 1862 in Greensboro, North Carolina as the son of Algernon Sidney Porter, a physician, and Mrs. Mary Virginia Swaim. He is celebrated as one of the most important writer of short stories in American literature and his works are renowned for their wit, wordplay, great characterization and intelligent twist endings. Significantly, this prolific American short-story writer is known as “ a master of surprise endings, who wrote about the life of ordinary people in New York City. Typical for O. Henry’s stories is a twist of plot which turns on an ironic or coincidental circumstance. Although some critics were not so enthusiastic about his work, the public loved it.”

(Liukkonen) Therefore, O. Henry is an important writer of short stories who was more recognized by ordinary people who loved the magic charm of his writing, rather than by the eminent critics of literature.

A reflective exploration of the life and works of O. Henry confirms that he received education only until the age of fifteen, and he was an avid reader of books. The death of his mother at the age of three left William Sydney Porter at the caretaking of his paternal grandmother and aunt, and he worked in a drug store after he left his school at the age of fifteen. He also engaged himself with a number of jobs when he moved to Houston and got married in 1882. “ In 1894 Porter started a humorous weekly The Rolling Stone... When the weekly failed, he joined the Houston Post as a reporter and columnist... In 1897 he was convicted of embezzling money, although there has been much debate over his actual guilt. Porter entered in 1898 a penitentiary at Columbus, Ohio.” (Liukkonen) It was during his prison days that he started to <https://assignbuster.com/the-life-and-works-of-o-henry/>

write short stories to earn money to support his daughter and “ Whistling Dick’s Christmas Stocking” (1899), was his first short story, which appeared in McClure’s Magazine.

It is fundamental to realize that William Sydney Porter is one of the most read authors in the world of short stories across the globe, next only to Mark Twain and Edgar Allen Poe. A profound understanding of the various works he created and the quality of his short stories confirms that he is best suited for the title “ master of the short story”. William Sydney Porter’s stories are most known for two basic characteristics: his reversal of the narrative and his reversal of a character’s nature. “ In simple terms, Porter begins a story in one direction and just when the reader thinks they can predict the ending, he sends it in a totally different direction. In his stories, people who are characterized as one thing often are the complete opposite... One technique that is typical of Porter is his surprise endings. These themes and techniques are typical of most of all Porter’s short stories.” (Winborne) Some of the most celebrated works by O. Henry includes the collection Cabbages and Kings, The Four Million, the stories “ A Municipal Report”, “ The Gift of the Magi”, “ The Ransom of Red Chief”, “ The Cop and the Anthem”, “ A Retrieved Reformation”, “ After Twenty Years”, “ Compliments of the Season”, and “ Friends in San Rosario”. In conclusion, O. Henry (William Sydney Porter) has been one of the most celebrated writers of short stories in American literature whose works are highly appreciated even in the contemporary times.

Works Cited

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