

Free lovely irony in o. henrys the gift of the magi book review example

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The dialectical relationship between love and material objects is complex. In the United States of America different elements in culture often take opposing sides: some, like most spiritual organizations, favoring the former, and others, like the capitalistic worldview, favoring the latter. O. Henry was one of this country's most famous turn-of-the-nineteenth-century writers, who constantly incorporated its culture into his texts; "The Gift of the Magi", one of his most famous and important short stories, deals with this dichotomy. Using many of O. Henry's staples, it rests on irony to construct a bittersweet tale where love ends up prevailing. In this sense, the author wisely uses his power as an artist to divulge teachings that go against what capital culture teaches. Overall, "The Gift of the Magi" is one of O. Henry's most significant short stories, where he uses many techniques, including irony, to parlay the countercultural message that love is more important than money.

O. Henry was born William Sidney Porter in North Carolina and lived from 1862 to 1910. He was indicted for embezzlement and fired from his job in 1895-1896; however, he fled the country to Latin America so as to not stand trial, an event he kept secret all his life. Even though this scandal was discovered posthumously, his legacy has been largely positive, including having his pseudonym as the name of one of the most prestigious literary prizes in America, which is handed out for short stories. He also has many educational institutions to his name and many American presidents, including Barack Obama, have used quotes from his stories in important speeches. Through the use of wit, where common people serve as the characters, O. Henry explores the culture and psychology of America a

couple of decades after the Industrial revolution and before World War I. In "The Gift of the Magi", the members of a young married couple each sacrifice their most valued possession to buy a gift for their partner. The reader follows the anguish that the wife, Della, goes through as she realizes that she does not have enough money to give her husband a good present and decides impulsively to sell her hair on the day before Christmas. "There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it" (Henry). O. Henry constantly makes us dive into the character's fretting mind, be it through direct expressions like these, short sentences, colorful little details, etc. Finally, she buys her husband a platinum chain for his most prized possession: his watch. Nevertheless, these ardent displays of love are foiled by the ironic conclusion that, in typical O. Henry fashion, twists the plot unexpectedly. Its characters are well-developed and relatable, with themes that are common to almost every person. Being in a loving relationship and having to sacrifice material objects for it is a commonplace idea. Furthermore, its use of interesting and colorful adjectives allows viewers to more vividly experience the story; one of the most important aspects of this is the masterful building up of tension that climaxes when the couple finally gets the opportunity to exchange gifts. In an ironic turn of events, the husband of the couple has sold his watch to buy combs that the wife had coveted, effectively rendering both presents useless. Irony is a literary technique wherein the manipulation of truth reveals an incongruity between what is expected and what is obtained. Therefore, the situation that is achieved at the end of the story is ironic because, while both parties expected to give their partner an important and

useful present for Christmas, they made it impossible to enjoy the object that they were going to receive, sacrificing it in the name of love. The picturesque characters respond to this differently: while Della emits “ an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails” (Henry), her husband, Jim, becomes almost paralyzed with astonishment. However, they are awakened by love. After Della declares her unalterable love for Jim, the latter rapidly reacts. A bittersweet sentiment reigns over the story, as the reader realizes at the same time as the characters that all they have gone through and sacrificed will not be used for now; however, one also sees that they did this out of love, and that their feelings for one another prevail and are more important. The fact that both parties agree to “ put the chops on” (Henry) shows that they have understood the sacrifice that each other has made and that they value it over the material utility of the objects that they have swapped, which has unexpectedly been rendered null.

This message counters the popular current of capitalism, one of America’s fundamental tenants. O. Henry, ever in his culture, realized that there was something more important than material objects: love. Even though the capitalist worldview believes that time is money, this latter being the ultimate end of culture, O. Henry popularized a short story that states the opposite. In the sort of epilogue that is the last paragraph of the story, the narrator says that “ in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest” (Henry). The fact that the love they had for each other was such that they were willing to sacrifice what was most important for them is what the wisest gift was. Furthermore, he

manifests that this is a counterculture teaching, addressing this lesson to the people that purport to be the contemporary magi, but who do not recognize that love is more important than money.

This is also evidenced by the commercialization of Christmas, the temporal setting for the story. Even though this holiday is supposed to commemorate the birth of God's one and only son because of His love for man, presents are almost a requisite in its celebration. One can see that material objects have become more important than family and love in culture as a whole because of this day's modification. Another aspect of this masterful setting is that the objective of Jesus Christ was to be a supreme sacrifice, which has its parallels in the material objects that are surrendered in the story. Christian beliefs state that God's gift to man was His son, his most beloved possession, who he sent to the Earth to serve as a sacrifice for Man's sins. Likewise, the gifts that the Dillingham couple gives to one another are their most prized belongings, a sacrifice made out of love.

As one can see, the popular O. Henry short story "The Gift of the Magi" shows that love is what really matters, though a dramatic and ironic twist ending. After a married couple, realizing that they do not count with sufficient money to buy each other proper presents for Christmas, they sacrifice their most valued possessions in a display of love. However, in an ironic twist ending, these objects are rendered useless because they had been bought thinking of the partner's most important belonging, which each had surrendered. Thus, the author teaches that love is the wisest gift that may be given, going against a current of cultural teachings. This is one of the

most important aspects of art: that it allows the mass divulgation of a countercultural teaching.