

A Literary Analysis Of The Gift Of The Magi

Posted on July 31, 2022

Introduction

The Gift of the Magi is a short story written by William Sydney Porter. Although the story was written over a century ago, it is still relevant to modern times. The descriptive language that the author has used almost plunges us into the story, making us view the story unfold before our eyes in such a way that we feel part of it (History.Com, 2009). The core idea behind this novella is about love and sacrifice. It teaches us that the cost of a gift is not as important as the love behind it. The thought behind the present, making it personal and for a particular individual, is far more important than the gift itself. This paper goes through the literary analysis of the short story The Gift of the Magi and discusses the fact that love and sacrifice go hand in hand, with an example of a couple deeply in love with each other.

Literature Analysis

O. Henry wrote this story in an interesting, third-person narrative. The story is a bit folksy since the author is casual in his descriptive phrases as if he were an invisible and impartial observer. The novel directs our attention to look at the home the young couple resides in (p. 1). The author describes the house and gives the reader a view into Della's and her husband, Jim's life. They live in a rented room that is furnished adequately for someone who earns eight dollars a week. The house has an electric bell, or what is now called a doorbell, which does not work. Many other things in the house are either broken or badly need repairs. Mr. James Dillingham Young, as he is more formally known, makes only twenty dollars a week, which is a reduction from his previous thirty dollars a week (pp. 1-2). The combined salary is enough for the two to live reasonably but not enough for a comfortable life.

The theme of the story revolves around love and sacrifice. The story is set the day before Christmas. Della and Jim plan on giving gifts to each other, even though they have very little money. Both of them have managed to save some money from their respective salaries. However, their savings are not enough, and they are both forced to come up with an idea to earn some extra cash. Della has what is described by O. Henry as a "shining stream of brown water, reaching below her knees." (1910, p.3) Her hair is her most valued possession, while Jim's would be the watch that he inherited from his father and grandfather before that.

They are proud of these items and hold them as precious commodities in their meagre possessions. Della comes to the difficult decision of selling her beautiful hair. She can get twenty dollars for her hair, which will be enough to buy a present for Jim. Della finds a gold watch chain for his pocket watch that he treasured from his father and grandfather. She compares the chain to her husband, saying

they both have quietness and value (p. 3). She pays twenty-one dollars and leaves with eighty-seven cents.

When Jim returns home, he is surprised to see Della's haircut. She explains how she sold her hair to purchase a Christmas gift for Jim. Overcome with emotions, the two embrace each other. Jim then withdraws from his pocket the present he has for Della. She joyfully opens the present but feels sad when she realizes that Jim has purchased a beautiful, jewelled comb that she wanted to buy. Now that Della has cut her hair, it would be difficult for her to use the comb. She consoles her husband, saying her hair will grow fast and she may be able to use the bejewelled comb soon (p.5). When Della gives Jim his gift, he, too, is overwhelmed with sorrow. Jim tells her that he has sold his watch and bought her the hair comb instead. Both of them sacrificed and sold their most treasured possession to get something they knew that the other person cared for and would value as a symbol of love from the other.

Love and sacrifice are the themes of this story, though irony plays an integral part as well. The irony is that both give the other a precious gift that would have made the other happy, only to find out that their partner had sacrificed as well (p.2). The young couple sold their prized possessions, sacrificing something they treasured so that the other could have something.

Conclusion

True love always has elements of sacrifice. God showed us that when he sent Jesus to earth to save us. He loved us just the way he loved his son, and he knew that the only way for us to get to him would be through his son's sacrifice. Those amongst us who have realized the meaning of love understand the value of small things. They have little to no desire to crave the bigger things, especially if the bigger things drain the romance and emotions from the relationship ("John 3:16," 2011). The relationship of a husband and wife is a fragile one. The more a person cares about the other, the more he or she is able to sustain it.

References

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