

## The Smiling Soul of Love in the World of Innocence and Simplicity in O. Henry's *The Gift of the Magi*

Noorbakhsh Hooti

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran

### ABSTRACT

This study tries to give an innocently appealing picture of the nature of heart-woven sense of belonging, which surpasses all the calculations of the overgrown industrialized world of highly calculative expectations. It tries to show the potent and invincible power of love, which is free from the viral infections of greed, emulation, jealousy and devastating competitions, which are the products of the highly competitive world of consumerism. Indeed, the study gives a vivid vista of virginity and purity of love dissolved within the existential structure of simplicity and honesty. Ultimately, the paper comes to its closing mode by maneuvering over the didactic facets of the highly appreciated but the least practiced term, namely Love, which is succeeded by infatuation and hot passions.

**Key Words:** Love, Simplicity, Soul, Consumerism, Virginity.

### 1. Introduction

Love is the integral flavor of man's existence. It is the most powerful and decisive impetus, which stirs up different senses within one's complicated and mysterious world of existence. It may give birth to very gentle and altruistic emotions and dependence; it may also leave behind irretrievable satanic and brutal traces of inhumanity. Indeed, the love, which touches humanity and keeps distance from atrocity, is the genuine and uncontaminated emotion of belonging. The one, which resorts to any possible acts to reach its goal, is called infatuation. Actually, it is the fake but challenging successor of Love itself. Oedipus complex can be an apt example of the kind of love, which is drowned in conflicts and contradictions. As Ellmann (1994) states:

Perhaps the most disturbing implication of the Oedipus complex is that love is never merely a relationship between two people, but always a contest between three, even if the third is present only as a psychic obstacle. Because of this triangular enmeshment, sexual identity is torn between the impulses to identify, desire, or compete with both maternal and paternal prototypes [13].

### 2. The concealed Nature of Love in the industrial world of civilization

The growth of Industrialism and Consumerism has imposed different weird complexities upon the relationships. People have become paranoiac and calculative in their relationships. This sense of calculation has made the relationships short-lived and selfish. Love presents itself in different shapes. Hill (2003) comments:

One is chained by the Socratic love of knowledge and the delusion of being able thereby to heal the eternal wound of existence; another is ensnared by art's seductive veil of beauty fluttering before his eyes; still another by the metaphysical comfort that beneath the whirl of phenomena eternal life flows on indestructibly. (102)

Love as one of the ingrained ingredients of man's existential values has got its own complexities. The most common love is between a male and a female. We hear every day various love stories and break ups. Indeed, the hot and passionate love stories change into dejecting and tearful splits. What happens that beautiful sentences like 'I love you' changes into 'I hate you'? Or 'I cannot live without you' changes into 'I cannot imagine living with you' and so on? Is it not that indeed, love hardly exists the way it is believed to be? Most of the axioms on love have lost their strength of meanings by the passage of time. Is it not true that we just love ourselves? Actually, we try to seek pleasure and enjoyment in others. It means others are simply used as the source of enjoyment. Indeed, we keep on strengthening the growth of this relationship until and unless we reach somehow a dead-end, where we feel saturated or our opposite sex feels so. Ackerly (2000) gives the following comments on such kinds of love and attachments

Being able to have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence, in general, to love, to grieve, to feel longing and gratitude. Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development. (99)

\*Corresponding author: Noorbakhsh Hooti, Assistant professor, Razi University, Faculty of Arts, English Department, Post code: 6714967346 Kermanshah, Iran. E-mail: nhooti@yahoo.com Phone No: +989125935460

We consider others our loved ones as long as they give us the enjoyment that we expect. The moment, we feel that they cannot satisfy our needs, or cannot be the source of our enjoyment any longer, so we stop loving them, since we do not see any reasons to have any attachments. We cannot love somebody without getting any attention from her or him. So, love is a give and take business. It is mostly a strong passion of the war of the exchange of challenging rhetoric of intuitive dictions. As Hill (2003) avers, "Pity and love have their centre of gravity in the representation of the other being; revenge and envy seek the preservation of one's own self. (28)

### 3. Love in the World of Simplicity

Love in a less challenging world of simplicity is much closer to its virginity and originality of meaning as the leading pure art of mutual attachment. It does more justice to its birth of originality. It is not contaminated with the complexities of dreamy desires and expectations and is quite bucolic and rustic in its charm, simplicity and honesty. Of course, it is not excluded from the give and take deal, but in this case, this deal is with mutual dependence and sacrifice, free from all the modern calculative and shrewd terms and conditions that practically believe that the old love rusts.

A heart of purity and unabridged love does not tend to commit offences, just simply acts with simplicity, but unfortunately, nowadays simplicity seems to be the highest offence. Sadly, it seems to be the emblem of stupidity and backwardness. Unfortunately, the modern business-minded characters of the brutal civilization regard the world of innocence and vividness as vapid and immature.

The complex-free love may burgeon if the hidden self-determination and independence of the individuals are not encroached. If the individuals do not try to intrude and annex each other's private territory, which needs its own privacy, then their love life may run hurdle-less and slickly. Osho (2004) very aptly opines:

You come alone, you go alone; you are alone between birth and death. And I am not saying that you cannot love a man or a woman. In fact, when two independent, free people, who take people, who take responsibility on their own shoulders, meet, there is immense beauty in it. Nobody is a burden to the other. Nobody is dumping anything onto the other. You have dropped the very idea of dumping anything. You can be together but your aloneness remains untouched, pure, crystal-clear, virgin. You never trespass on each other's territories. You can enjoy each other just because you are separate. (25)

### 4. The voice of Uncontaminated Love in The Gift of the Magi

O. Henry, in his *The Gift of the Magi* shows his concerns about the under-privileged strata of a society, who are consigned to oblivion. According to Hart "O. Henry had a genuine sympathy for the downtrodden and oppressed which was unusual in writers of his era." (qtd. in Tai-An Lin, 2010: 51)

*The Gift of the Magi* is about a husband and wife, namely Della and Jim, who do their best to provide a smooth and amicable atmosphere of simplicity and love, which is free from any cliché type of intrinsically imposed and pretentious display of love and worship. It puts on show a brilliant picture of appreciation and approbation of genuine enthusiasm and attachment in a world of unadulterated love and affection with the least worldly privileges. It shows the feasibility of creating a heaven-like haven even in a financially unprivileged life. The following extract shows the worries of Della to buy a Christmas gift for her husband:

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling--something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim. (Hansen, 1953: 7)

Indeed, this sense of responsibility, which is seen in Della's helpless tears, does not arise from simply a habitual trend of filling in the given blank of a repetitive annual occasion, but it is an indicative of the very heart-felt attachment between a husband and wife. It shows that how caring and affectionately concerned Della is toward her life partner. Actually, the study tries to put on view the simple world of this loving couple, who take pride in very ordinary possessions, as the following text shows:

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window someday to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy. (8)

Finally, the study makes an attempt to give a vivid picture of a poor couple with rich souls of sacrifice. They sacrifice their most loved possessions to bring a smile to each other's faces, though it turns out to be an unexpected surprise to both of them:

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table. "Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first." White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat. For their lay The Combs--the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jewelled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone. But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!" And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh!" Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit. "Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it." Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled. "Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on. (10-11)

## 5. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to show that the whole source of an undemanding and non-commercial life is leaning on non-luxurious bedrock of desires and expectations. It displayed a family context, where simplicity rules. It tried to divulge the depth of love and belonging, which is free from the shackles of the daily nags of the commercially dominated world of dreamy desires and expectations.

In a world, where simplicity and honesty are the dictum of life, aspirations and expectations inevitably wear the attire of simplicity, which ultimately lead to a life engulfed with genuine love and affection. It is through the principles of non-commercial based life system that one feels safe and secure, as Della and Jim are.

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