

PSYCHIC FEMINISM AND REALISM IN O'HENRY'S, *THE GIFT OF THE MAGI*

G. Sivasamy

ABSTRACT

The aspect of love in one's life was handled as a key factor by many writers. The social and gender factors also influence the writers to a greater level thereby affecting or effecting life and sacrifice. It does not mean that all people who show their love to their beloved will be reasonable in all ways and means it may be wise to certain people and foolish to some others. Love is not valued on the cost of the present but it is valued on the sacrifice. I like to present '*The Gift of the Magi*' by O' Henry with the predominance of Super ego and self-actualization as proposed by the psychologists that led a couple sacrifice for true love. The characters Jim and Della were influenced by it than on Id or Ego.

Keywords: Love, Present, Sacrifice, Super Ego, Self – Actualization.

The feeling of love can really effect or affect the life of one in a great extent. We know that the feeling is same for the people who love each other for altruistic reasons. We look forward the ultimate end of true love is sharing the life towards achieving the purpose of life Which again is nothing but giving and getting the true love from the beloved. There is a great joy in seeing the beloved getting the feeling of happiness when one gives a gift to express love. Loved is not viewed much greater if it is ordinary but it is really valued higher if it is selfless which doesn't care for the forces of Id or Ego. It is considered to be the supreme love when it is driven by Super Ego. The parameters of the female's development are not the same as the male's and that the same terms do not apply (Gilligan 1982:48). We can see this in the sacrifice done by Della by selling her hair to buy a Christmas present for Jim.

It is the not an unusual thing to see people giving and accepting gifts on the time of occasion to share love by spending something that can be possible for them to spend but it is really atypical to see someone who can be ready to sell something that they own as treasure for the sake of giving gift. Della is very much aware that the gold watch of Jim even though presented by his traditional fathers lacks the elegant look and he worried a lot to see it before others because of the need of proper chain that can hold his watch. The absence of proper fob chain worried Jim a lot and he was disturbed by it. Knowing one's self is preliminary to knowing the mental processes that govern human conduct in general and in

particular to knowing the psychic nature of neurotic disturbances. (Stern1922: 52).

Freud categorized mind into three parts: Id centered on primal impulses, pleasures, desires, unchecked urges and wish fulfillment. Ego concerned with the conscious, the rational, the moral and the self-aware aspect of the mind and Superego the censor for the id, which is also responsible for enforcing the moral codes of the ego. Freud acknowledged that the super-ego is the moral component of the psyche, which takes into account no special circumstances in which the morally right thing may not be right for a given situation. The rational ego attempts to exact a balance between the impractical id and the equally impractical moralism of the super-ego; it is the part of the psyche that is usually reflected most directly in a person's actions. Della was presented as the character who was ready to sacrifice her beauty by selling her hair in order to show her love to her husband without worrying for the external beauty of her. She was fully filled with the thought that a true lover should give a suitable present to her beloved and she worried a lot to get that by her efforts without the help of Jim even though she was her husband.

Maslow used the terms Physiological, Safety, Belongingness and Love, Esteem, Self-Actualization. The most fundamental and basic four layers of the pyramid contain what Maslow called "deficiency needs": esteem, friendship and love, security, and physical needs. If these "deficiency needs" are not met there may not be a physical indication, but the individual will feel anxious and tense. We can see at the beginning of the story that Della was anxiously counting the money not once. Della doesn't have money to buy a proper gift to Jim but she thinks otherwise and it resulted in selling her hair which was considered to be the treasure of Jims. She was very much aware that the beauty of her will go in vain if she is without her hair even then she decides to sell her hair to buy Jim a useful present and she took the liberty of her decision with a will that she can pacify Jim by revealing her real love. Freedom of Science means that anyone who so desires may arrive at his own opinion on every question imaginable without being restricted in his choice of sources of information or forms of research; it also means that anyone may formulate and publish his opinion and try to convince others who are willing to listen to him, by communicating to them his data and his arguments. (Freud1945: 205 - 206).

Physiological needs are the physical requirements for human survival. If these requirements are not met, the human body cannot function properly, and will ultimately fail. Physiological needs are thought to be the most important; they should be met first. Della considered that she was attended by Jim to get all the physical needs of her met by the love of him. We find Della as the wife of Jim being owned nothing of some great luxuries but she was really happy with her husband and the love of her doesn't go any less which she welcomes Jim on every evening. She was happy with the things that were provided by

Jim in that small apartment. We can't find it in the thoughts of other woman since woman are always aiming for luxuries to lead their life more sophisticatedly at the young age instead Della seems to be self-sufficient with the things that she can find in her home. She was not sure whether Jim will earn much in his later life or not because his salary became less while comparing it with the previous one. She made up her thoughts to adjust with the things that she had in her home with the satisfaction that they were all provided to her by her beloved husband. Life seems to me filled with questions for which I shall probably never feel I have found certain answers. I do not suffer too much about this. It is, I believe, the human condition to long for certainty without finding it, to desire permanence and live in a world of flux. (Fadiman 1990: 153).

It is not a conception that we should be proud when we do something good to others instead it is otherwise in the case of Della. We generally know that the person who receive a gift from other will always say a word of thanks but here it is not so. Instead of being elated after buying a gift to Jim she fears the consequences of selling her hair since it is not just selling it but it is something to do with her beauty and no husband will like the wife saying that she had lost her beauty for the sake of buying something as a present. The persona appears as a consciously created personality or identity fashioned out of part of the collective psyche through socialization and experience. Jung applied the term persona, meant the mask which the actor bears, expressing the role he plays. Persona, he argues, is a mask for the collective psyche. Jung regarded the persona-mask as a complicated system which mediates between individual consciousness and the social community. Della was so conscious of giving Jim a present even though she does not have the money to buy him a present. However she performed her role as the true and affectionate wife of Jim by arranging a valuable and suitable gift to him. Here we can see the psyche of Della worries her a lot when she loses her beauty after selling her hair and the womanly look of her got changed into boyish look. She fears that Jim must accept her as she is even though she is without her hair and her usual welcoming of Jim by hugging him was not done on the day of her present. The most prominent feature of a true phobia is its function of inhibiting some activity. (Ruitenbeak 1973:281).

With their physical needs relatively satisfied, the individual's safety needs take precedence and dominate behavior. In the absence of considerable income of Jim let Della lived the life of ordinary woman but she felt safe with Jim in his apartment. The three most important things in my life have been, in this order, family, friends and work. (Fadiman 1990:9). Here we can see that Della concentrated first on her family and it seem that she haven't cared for either of her friends or her work on that day and for that she counted the money that she had saved, her thoughts were fully filled with buying a suitable present to Jim. Surely that act will give her a lot of joy and she wanted to prove her husband that the love of her to

him is really true.

After physiological and safety needs are fulfilled, the third level of human needs is interpersonal and involves feelings of belongingness can impact the individual's ability to form and maintain emotionally significant relationships with family. According to Maslow, humans need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. The behavior of one will tell us the way in which one is influenced. We may think in many aspects but the act of us will be surely governed by only one style or else we may not behave in a decent manner and we get confused with our own work. The thought of Della was on giving present to Jim but she was least cared of her beauty and takes her decision by which she can buy her beloved a suitable gift. This clearly portrays her as the woman who cares much for her lover than the one who care for her beauty. There is a difference between the way psychology individuates behaviors and mental states and the way common sense does. (Fodor 1987: 44).

All humans have a need to feel respected. Esteem presents the typical human desire to be accepted and valued by others. People often engage in a profession or hobby to gain recognition. These activities give the person a sense of contribution or value. Jim tried a lot to keep Della happy with his meager income. Della had no profession of her own but she had a lot of love to make Jim happy by giving him a present. Women “empower” themselves primarily by realizing that all their troubles result from patriarchy, and that they key to greater self – esteem is held by feminist political analysis. (Patai and Koertge 2003: 105). We can see Della as a woman who cared the need for her husband and as the one who concentrates on keeping her home with love and warmth by attending her husband. She considered it as the duties of a woman under patriarchal family. She considered it as the disturbance to her husband if she asks anything that would worry him financially and for that she decided to manage the situation of raising the funds with her own effort.

Maslow describes this level as the desire to accomplish everything that one can, to become the most that one can be. Individuals may perceive or focus on this need very specifically. Jim and Della became the two to achieve this stage by selling their valuables to show their love. From the beginning of the story we are introduced to the anxieties of Della and her love to her husband. She was presented as the one who had no care on her beauty which had attracted others since her hair was considered not just as a hair but the one which was so worthy than the other woman of her place. Even though her reason was superior to show her love, she was presented as a character who fears her act by performing it without the concern of her husband. She is highly influenced by the thought that the wife should take the concern of her husband before doing anything. As a symbol system, gender difference is the most ancient,

most universal and most powerful origin of many morally valued conceptualizations of everything else in the world around us. (Harding 1986:17).

Miller calls for “a new Psychology of women” that point for women’s development the fact that “women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with others,” that “women’s sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make, and then to maintain, affiliations and relationships,” and that “eventually, for many women, the threat of disruption of an affiliation is perceived not just as a loss of relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self”. (Gilligan 1982:169). Della develops an unconditional love with Jim since she cared a lot for him and his financial position that portrays Jim as the one who needs a new overcoat but he was not able to buy them because of the lack of money. She tried to show that she is really happy in that apartment which was reduced in size because of the meager income of Jim and she never showed any anger against Jim for living with her in that condition.

The issue of women’s self – development continues to raise the specter of selfishness, the fear that freedom for women will lead to an abandonment of responsibility in relationships. (Gilligan 1982:130). Della on the other hand takes her freedom with selfless love to her husband she knows that her husband will never accept her idea of selling her hair to buy him a present for that she decided not to take any steps to inform him instead she sells it and buys Jim a present and she was sure that Jim was her only relative with whom she can show and shower her love and affection.

Certain emotions and feelings are good reasons for beliefs and actions. “Maternal thinking” draws on different evidence than does paternal thinking. (Harding 1986:184). Della took her decision not as the one who had a control over her husband but as the one who had her true love on her husband. The feminine thought of her made her sacrifice her hair and got it sold to buy Jim a beautiful and suitable present.

Patriarchy’s foundation has rested for millennia on the unwritten but rigorously enforced rule that women and children keep the secrets of men, and suffer abuse in silent shame. (Wolf 1993:18). We can see that Della feared to be present in front of Jim after selling her hair and she was described as the one to have a boyish look than a womanish look. This might have surely worried her a lot but she cared little for that and she took her decision to gift Jim a valuable present. She was ready to face the comments that may result by her boyish look.

Women lack a positive emotional vocabulary about money. While many of the great stories about men are stories about the romance between men and riches, women have very little narrative

relationship to the idea of wealth, or the drama of seeking, building, or losing a fortune. (Wolf 1993:40). To prove this statement Della led her life with Jim even after the salary of him became meager she became the one to adopt the earning of Jim and found a way to live peacefully with him. This really shows her the woman who cares little for money or wealth but as the one who care more for the love and affection of her beloved.

“Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government.” (Wolbrecht 2000:231). Della is proved to be a successful business woman by selling her hair for a fair price and she also earned money by bargaining in the shops. Wherever she went for shopping she had got a discount even for a meager purchase. Perhaps the amount that she counted at the beginning may be meager for the readers but it was the result of the bargain of Della which was really a earning that can be made possible only by her.

Being “feminine” has everything to do with one’s appearance – both how you see yourself and how others see you – but surprisingly little to do with sex or being attached to a man. (Henry (1994):43). Just not by the words of being called as a woman in nature Della surely had the feminine qualities when she longed to buy a comb and when she expressed the cry of joy on getting a pair of combs as a present from Jim and at the time when she shed the tears fell on the mat when the thought of selling the hair came to her. Surely she thought of making sacrifice for her loved one who cared a lot for her to make her happy even in his meager income.

Many women feel freer about their bodies today, are less slavish about the latest fashions, and are concerned about fitness. But they still care desperately how they look. (Henry (1994):55). As Della sold her hair for the sake of money to buy Jim a gift she became the one to worry for her beauty and she really cared a lot since she feared that Jim will not like her without her hair and she wished that Jim could love her even though she is without her hair.

Control of one’s physical life is the key to successful relationships and not trial marriages. Della and Jim were presented as the characters who loved each other than anyone else. We can see both the characters bought their presents to show their love that they had on each other without worrying for the loss of their valuable possessions. It doesn’t mean that they don’t know the value of their possessions but it really meant that they know the value of true love.

Women’s lives were always ancillary to those of men, and that women should always be dependent on men. (Matthews 2003:5). This had made Della worry a lot on selling her hair even though her reason was noble. She was under the thought that the activities of woman should always be directed under the

guidance of man and for that she feared that Jim will not like her without her hair since she considered that she was dependent on Jim as his wife even though she had a lot of love on him.

A general pattern is for ownership of family asserts to be vested in the 'head of the household', who is almost invariably classified as a man, even in cases where he is not physically present in the household. We know that the hair of woman belong to her and man whoever be the relation to her may not have his control on that and a woman has the will to do anything on that but since the hair is not just mentioned as the hair Della considered the decision of selling of her hair should need the permission from Jim before she got it sold. In order to get the money she sells it without the concern of Jim. (Rogers 1980:43).

The idea that women have the capacity to offer a more thoroughly human, rational and ethical vision than men is not new. (Green 1995:10). Della searches for the best suited present for Jim and for that she went to many stores and finally found a beautiful platinum fob chain as a suitable present to her Jim. She compares the simplicity and precious quality similar to that of Jim. She was really the match to Jim to find him a valuable present.

A woman is better than a man when she is more virtuous and the man of greater value when he is the more virtuous. (Green 1995:33). We can find this statement best suited for this couple Della and Jim who gave their valuables to gift each other with the suitable gift. A woman of noble degree had to know how to fulfill her duty as subject to her husband, but she also needed to be able to fill his place as ruler of their estate in his absence. (Green 1995:37). Della being efficient in her efforts manages her home and house by giving her service as a good lover of Jim and as a good administrator of her house by attending the needs of Jim by her work thereby sharing his love as equally with Jim.

REFERENCES

1. Carol, G. (1982) *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard university press.
2. Darlington, P. S.E. and Mulvaney, B. M. (2003) *Women, Power, and Ethnicity: Working Toward Reciprocal Empowerment*. New York: The Haworth Press.
3. Ed. by Fadiman, C. (1990) *Living Philosophies: The Reflections of Some Eminent Men and Women of Our Time*. New York: Doubleday.
4. Ed and Introduced by Ruitenbeak, H. M. (1973) *Freud As We Know Him*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
5. Foder J.A. (1987) *Psychosemantics: The Problem of Meaning in the Philosophy of Mind*. Massachusetts: The MIT press Cambridge.
6. Green, K. (1995) *The Woman Of Reason: Feminism, Humanism and Political thought*. Continuum: New

- York.
7. Harding, S. (1986) *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
 8. Henry, S. (1994) *The Deep Divide: Why American Women Resist Equality*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
 9. Karen, G. (1995) *The Woman of Reason: Feminism, Humanism and Political Thought*. New York: Continuum.
 10. Kessler- Harris, A.(2001) *In Pursuit Of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th - Century America*. Oxford University press.
 11. Matthews, J.V (2003) *The Rise Of The New Woman: The Women's Movement in America 1875 - 1930*. The American way series: Chicago.
 12. Patai, D. and Koertge, N. (2003) *Professing Feminism*. Lexington Books.
 13. Rogers, B. (1980) *The Domestification Of Women: Discrimination in developing societies*: New York: St. Martin's Press.
 14. Ronald, I. and Norris, P. (2003) *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World*. Cambridge University Press.
 15. Wolbrecht, C. (2000) *The Politics of Women's Rights: Parties, Positions, and Change*. New Jersey: Princeton University press Princeton.
 16. Wolf, N. (1993) *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century*. New York: Random House.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



G. Sivasamy during his ten years of career in education department, worked as a Block Resource Teacher Educator for 4 years covering various aspects on teaching and learning methodology. His work mainly focused on adopting innovative methods in teaching and also in giving training to the teachers who are working in government and in aided schools up to elementary level. This has in turn helped him greatly and brought a wide exposure to improve his knowledge by undergoing in-service trainings at RIE Bangalore, at Rishi Valley and many other places. Now, Sivasamy is working as a Post Graduate English Teacher in a Government School at the Higher Secondary Level and teaches for the higher secondary students.