



THE USAGE OF IRONY IN O. HENRY'S STORY "THE GIFT OF THE MAGI"

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ABSTRACT

American author of short stories O. Henry was outstanding writer in the history of the world literature. His writing is full of various stylistic devices as irony, paronomasia, metaphor, metonymy and exaggeration which make the story full of fun. He is a master of surprising endings, and his story plots are usually designed dramatically, and some unexpected changes at the end make people read and enjoy them. Tearful smile is another feature in his writing style, and it is the combination of comedy and tragedy. O. Henry's typical writing styles can be presented as follows: humorous language, surprising endings and tearful smile. The article deals with the problem of revealing the stylistic features of irony in the works of a well-known American writer. It describes the language features of realism in American literature.

KEYWORDS: *O. Henry, writing styles, humorous Language, surprising Endings, Tearful Smile, rhetorical devices, unexpected ending, local colour, verbal irony, parallelism*

1. INTRODUCTION

O. Henry's unusual background influenced the plots for his tales and the characters of his stories depict the life of commoners of New York City. O. Henry's personages are only examples of his proficiency in creating a bright texture of language by generating native dialect. This linguistic sensitivity contributes to O. Henry's inconstancy as a local colorist. O. Henry was always well-known for his humorous narration ability to add some shade of light into tragedy and some sadness into comedy. Presenting such kind of effects in the stories was made with the help of stylistic devices and irony was one of essential among them. Extraordinary endings is another phenomenon of O. Henry's writing style. They were used to encourage low-class people to find a better life notwithstanding uncomfortable conditions.

2. O. HENRY'S WRITING STYLE

2.1 The role of stylistic devices in analyzing literary work

Linguistics as the science of studying languages gives information about what language stands out among other phenomena, what are its elements and units, how and what changes occur in the language. The research is devoted to the stylistic analysis, so before analyzing the works let's look through with stylistics, its origin, aim and meaning.

The stylistics is a branch of linguistics that investigates the principles and the usage of various resources for the transmission of thoughts and emotions in different conditions of communication. There are different types of stylistics like, for instance, the stylistics of language and the stylistics of speech or linguistic stylistics and literary stylistics. Stylistics belongs to the western traditional rhetoric and poetics of Europe. Style was a notion in the field of rhetoric in ancient Greece. It is considered as a method and art for producing texts. Ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle played essential role in writing about rhetoric. The notion of style comes from the use of rhetorical devices to catch certain effects in conversation. O. Henry uses many techniques and different styles in his writing like local colour, for example. As he was born in North Carolina, the cultural tradition had a great influence in his literary career as a result of his southern background. He is one of the most outstanding writers of the earlier twentieth century. The most famous technique in his short stories is using unexpected ending; for example in "The Gift of the Magi", the reader never expects the husband to sell his watch when the wife brings him a chain for it and the wife to cut her hair when her husband is buying her combs.

There are various stylistic devices the writer uses to enrich the aesthetic value of his text. Without the metaphorical language, writing would be ordinary



and flat. The more stylistic devices used, the more incomparable writing can be.

2.2 The function of irony in stylistic analysis of the text

Stylistic analysis of the text gives opportunity to understand more clearly the meaning of the words and expressions used by the author. The major objective of the first stage of the analysis is to define the structure of the text material and its semantic meaning and the most thorough study of all the details will be followed. But stylistic analysis is done with the help of diverse stylistic devices. In this article such a stylistic device as irony will be regarded.

Irony is such a stylistic device the meaning of which is the opposite of the literal meaning. Irony is very effective literary device and it influences on the reader's understanding of the situation. This device is grounded on the interaction of dictionary and contextual logical meanings. There are three types of irony in modern theories of rhetoric: verbal, dramatic and situational.

Verbal irony is an inequality of expression and intent: when a speaker says one thing but means another, or when a literal meaning is contrary to its intended effect. Dramatic irony is an inequality of expression and awareness: when words and actions have expressiveness understandable for the listener or when public understands, but the speaker or character has difficulty in understanding. In the situational irony intention and result can be different: when the result of an action is opposite to the desired or expected effect.

Irony can be comprehended in two senses: broad and narrow. In a narrow sense irony is presented with the word having positive connotative meaning in order to express a negative assessment of something. In a broad sense irony is thought ironical if asserting to a positive or neutral attitude of the speaker towards some fact it implies his negative evaluation of it. Some words and phrases have a definite ironical connotative meaning, which they preserve in all contexts. O. Henry used irony in his works to make his writing extraordinary and distinctive. Let's analyze irony in the short story «The Gift of the Magi».

2.3 The unusual ending in O. Henry's story «The Gift of the Magi»

The unusual ending distinguishes O. Henry's writing from many other outstanding short story writers. The plots of his stories attract readers' attention because at the end the stories normally change their direction unexpectedly and when the readers try to predict the ending it turns to something different. These surprising endings make the story reasonable, even if they are sad.

At first in «The Gift of the Magi» the author tells us how valuable was the watch for Jim and how precious was the hair for Della. In order to buy Christmas gifts, the poor young couple is sacrificing their best possessions. As a consequence, however, their two precious presents they bought all became unnecessary at the end of the story. However, they proved to each other how strong their love is. It makes readers smile and feel sad at the same time, but the most important thing is that we can feel the pure real love between the couple. This typical unusual ending is something specific in O. Henry's writing.

2.4 Parallel construction and irony used in the story «The Gift of the Magi»

Parallelism can be very effective means to underline the irony of definite descriptions or situations in literary works. Parallel construction is a device, which may be encountered not so much in the sentence. Identical syntactical structure in two or more sentences or parts of a sentence is important feature of parallel construction. Repetition of the words (lexical repetition), conjunctions and prepositions is used in parallel construction. Pure parallel construction, however, does not depend on any other kind of repetition but the repetition of the syntactical design of the sentence. It is widely shown in the story "The Gift of the Magi". "Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied." Using parallel constructions the author sneer at Della who put aside the money for her husband's gift. "In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring."

Parallelism successfully shows the author's irony in describing the main characters' place of living. "Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day 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."

The author shows the irony when Della cuts her hair which is the most precious thing in order to buy a platinum chain for her husband's watch. At the same time Jim sells his watch to buy a comb made of the shell of a tortoise for Della's hair. They were taken aback when they met and decided that the gifts should be put aside for a while. When Henry described Della's appearance he used the word "wonderfully" to indicate a verbal irony in a comic exterior of his heroine. "Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that



made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. The irony aimed at the way how rapidly Della went out to sell her hair. "It was not anger, not surprise, not disapproval, not horror, not any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for." The writer skillfully managed to express situational irony using parallel constructions with the particle "not" while pointing out Jim's stressful condition after his revealing Della's Christmas present as a result of which his gift became useless. "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."

The author uses irony in this story to oblige the reader to stop and think about love, sacrifice and what is really valuable. Ordinary human love, which O. Henry shows in the actions of his main heroes, elevates to a height of wisdom of the Magi. It is a wonderful gift to buy for any money. O. Henry approves the actions of the heroes by using humour. In this example, the author used irony to create a delicate expression of emotional tension.

3. CONCLUSION

O. Henry's style of writing can be distinguished by its brightness. First and foremost, it is humour used in his language in the form of paronomasia, metaphor, irony, parallelism and so on to capture readers' attention and make the story more interesting. Secondly, O. Henry's surprising endings are known as the most famous feature of his writing. Thirdly, despite funny situations shown in his stories we can feel a great sadness. The combination of tragedy and comedy creates the style of "tearful smile".

In conclusion, this article does not only indicate drawbacks, but also unmask unfair claims giving them ironic sense. Irony as a stylistic device has aesthetic function, increasing emotional tension and comic effect, and the author uses irony to deride some actions that you don't have to do, or the cases that can occur in the life of any person.

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