

Romance Formula Potrayed in The Gift of The Magi Short Story by O. Henry

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| Received: 31/12/2024 | Revised: 29/01/2025 | Accepted: 30/01/2025 |

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Abstract

This research aims to find out how romance formulation is applied in shaping the storyline of "The Gift of the Magi". Because in previous studies, no one has studied this short story in terms of its plot. Then the researcher analyzes the elements of the plot in the short story The Gift of the Magi based on Cawelti's romance formula. This research uses qualitative research methods. This is the qualitative methodology part of the research design. The researchers use theory by Cawelti "Romance formula" to find the data from O. Henry's short story entitled The Gift of the Magi published in 1905. The storyline of "The Gift of The Magi" can categorized into four stages : (1) the first is about their love story as marriage couple (2) thinking about christmas gift for each other while they don't have money (3) the obstacle tells that Della excitedly presents Jim with a platinum chain for his pocket watch, hoping to please him, but learns that Jim has sold his watch to buy her the dream comb she adores, revealing their selfless sacrifice for each other (4) In the end, Jim and Della, despite sacrificing their prized possessions, find joy in the tradition of gift-giving, embodying the true spirit of Christmas as modern-day Magi. The researcher hopes this study will offer extensive exploration and new insights into literature.

Keywords: plot, romance formula, The Gift of The Magi, theory of Cawelti

1. Introduction

The evolution of literature in contemporary times has shown a remarkable increase, reflecting a thriving literary era (Zamzami et al., 2023). While literature primarily entertains, it also holds significant educational value by offering insights into life experiences and embodying crucial life values (Roslina et al., 2020). Incorporating literature into the learning environment enhances students' skills and knowledge. One genre that effectively imparts these values and has gained prominence over time is romance literature. Through romantic stories, readers can experience emotions and situations that enrich their understanding of human relationships, love, and sacrifice. Renowned romance novels like Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" and Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre" not only entertain but also provide critical perspectives on social norms and gender roles. In schools, literature captivates students' interest, fostering critical thinking, creativity, and a deeper understanding of diverse human experiences and cultural contexts. This genre continues to evolve, conveying important messages about life and human connections.

The romance genre is a fairly popular genre of literature today whether in terms of novels, novellas, short stories, or other types of literature. Romance literature before it became as popular as it is today was considered an inferior genre. The romance genre became known during the modern romance era beginning with Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice* (1812) and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847). These novels provided optimism and motivation to women who felt humiliated by the norms and traditions of a patriarchal society, as well as the antiquated conventions that still influence modern love stories (Kirtley, 2021). Since then, the romance genre has been recognized among the public.

This research focuses on analyzing the plot of a short story from a famous writer who has the pen name O. Henry. The famous American writer of his era, O. Henry, was originally known by the name William Sydney Porter. The majority of his literary creations are situated in the 20th century, reflecting the time of his own existence. Several of his works enjoy widespread popularity among Americans, and some have gained international recognition, including titles such as "The Gift of The Magi," "The Cop," and "The Anthem." Consequently, his short stories consistently attract attention from critics (Zhang & Wang, 2015). In their study, researchers focused on one of O. Henry's short stories titled "The Gift of The Magi," initially published in 1905, which has since evolved into one of the most renowned short stories in American literature.

"The Gift of The Magi" is a short story that explores the themes of love, sacrifice, and the authentic essence of life. It recounts the tale of a young couple deeply in love, Jim and Della Young, who find themselves in challenging financial circumstances during the Christmas season. Both of them want to give a special gift to their partner as a token of love. This is the reason why the author chose this story, which is related to the plot throughout the story which is a touching and sacrificial romance genre. This story tells of the couple's struggle and sacrifice in buying Christmas gifts amidst the economic difficulties that hit their family. And their story ends with them realizing that their gifts are no longer useful because of each other's sacrifices, they remain together in love and happiness. Although the material gifts have lost their value, the essence of this story is the sacrifice and sincere love between the couple. Therefore, this story is suitable when associated with romance formulas.

The famous romance formula theory proposed by Cawelti is widely used as a reference material in analyzing famous literary works of this century. In his book titled "Adventure, Mystery, and Romance," he argues that the concept of formula in popular literature has a similar meaning to the term genre in the context of high literature or classical literature. According to this theory, formula can be defined as the combination or synthesis of various culture-specific conventions with more universal or archetypal story forms.

In the context of romantic literature, the plot of a romance story generally takes the theme of love and develops it through a series of events of sadness, joy, and obstacles and hurdles in the development of the main character's love relationship. According to Cawelti (2014), romance can be defined as a fantasy of the sufficiency of love, with most romantic formulas focusing on overcoming various social or psychological obstacles. Overall, this concept concludes that a work is considered very romantic when the main character manages to achieve the happiness of love through the struggle to overcome various difficulties, including social and psychological challenges, which form a dramatic and profound background for the love story (Widyawati, 2020).

There are several previous studies related to the study of the short story *The Gift of The Magi*. Purnami et al., (2016) explain the psychological condition of the main character and to find out

the psychological condition of the main character that affects the way he resolves conflict in the process of *The Gift of The Magi*. The data of this study was obtained by using literature method and analyzed by qualitative method. The theory used is the theory issued by Kenney and Benhardt. The results of the analysis of this study show that Della is the main character in this story. She has a warm nature and gives up everything for someone she loves. In addition, she has to face internal conflicts that make her have to give up something valuable in herself.

Meanwhile, Wandansari & Yulistiyaniti, (2020) concentrated on identifying character archetypes in O. Henry's 1905 short story "The Gift of Magi". Henry's 1905 short story "The Gift of the Magi". This research is qualitative and descriptive. The love story of a couple struggling financially is depicted in this short novel. _ plays the role of husband, and Della plays the role of wife. The personas they have. The conclusion of this research is that everyone has archetypes. and researchers can benefit from this research by learning more about different types of art.

The following research stems from (Wardana, 2019) who focused on identifying the romance formula created in Nicholas Sparks' book "The Notebook". The way the romance formula is written in this book is the issue discussed in our research. This research analyzes human experience, researchers use qualitative design. Verbal data such as discourse, words, and sentences become the data source of this investigation. The researcher used structuralism as a method, specifically formalism. The researcher knows how to read, identify, ascertain the purpose, and record data when collecting it. The following methods of data analysis were used: identification, classification, interpretation, and conclusion. Following investigation, the researcher discovered that the novel "The Notebook" contains six different types of romances: (1) love at first sight; (2) impressed love; (3) empty love; (4) unblessed love; (5) self-love; and (6) true love.

There are some parallels and some differences based on the studies mentioned above. The research object utilized in the first and second experiments is similar. The literary work "The Gift of the Magi (1905)" by O. Henry was the identical object utilized in both investigations. Even though the two publications use the same item, their analyses are distinct. The primary characters of the short story "The Gift of the Magi (1905)" are examined in the first study by Ida Ayu Sri Purnami, etc.

In the second study by Mawar Dewanti Wandansari, and Yulistiyaniti, researchers examined the psychological condition of the main character as the main factor in dealing with conflict in "The Gift of Magi (1905)". However, in the third study, there are differences. The researcher uses the same formula/theory as the first and second studies, although different objects, namely using Cawelti's Theory, namely Romance Formula Theory. Mawar Dewanti Wandansari and Yulistiyaniti's second study focused on the main character's psychological state as the primary means of resolving conflict in "The Gift of Magi (1905)". There are variations in the third study, though. Using Cawelti's Theory—that is, the Romance Formula Theory—the researcher applies the same formula/theory as the first and second experiments, albeit with different items.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to ascertain how the plot of "The Gift of the Magi" is shaped by the application of romance formulation. because the plot of this short story has not been examined in any prior research. Next, using Cawelti's romance formula as a basis, the researcher examines the plot points of the short novel *The Gift of the Magi*. The findings of this research should help to clarify how the romance formula is used to shape the storyline of "The Gift of the Magi." The findings of dissecting the narrative of this tale and the plot development in "The Gift of the Magi" can close the information gap and offer fresh perspectives on the romance formula in the work.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This research uses qualitative research methods. This is the qualitative methodology part of the research design, which allows the author to describe a phenomenon by presenting complex details without attempting interpretation. In analyzing data, researchers need to gather, record, interpret, and report the information obtained. Data analysis should be conducted promptly to determine the next steps in data collection. The data analysis process involves three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Fadli, 2021). This method is applied to test the condition of a natural object (as opposed to an experiment), where the researcher acts as a research instrument. The researchers use theory by Cawelti "Romance formula" to finding the data from O. Henry's short story entitled *The Gift of the Magi* published in 1905.

2.2 Data Sources

The data for this study were categorized into two types: primary and secondary data. Primary data, as defined by Sugiyono (2019), are directly obtained from the source and are essential for addressing the research problem. In this study, the primary data consisted of the text of *The Gift of the Magi*. This text served as the core material for the analysis of narrative elements and the application of the romance formula.

Secondary data refer to datasets collected by other individuals or entities. These data were gathered from online sources, including articles, journals, books, and other references related to *The Gift of the Magi*, its main character, and aspects supporting the subject matter. The secondary data enriched the analysis by providing broader context and insights into fiction analysis.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process followed a systematic sequence. The first step involved close reading of the primary source, *The Gift of the Magi*. This meticulous and repeated examination allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the text's narrative elements and thematic content (Santoso et al., 2019). Next, relevant data were selected and categorized. This phase included identifying specific elements from the primary text and supplementing them with secondary sources, such as articles, journals, and books related to the romance formula. These additional materials supported and contextualized the primary dataset.

Collected information was then systematically organized and classified to ensure a structured foundation for subsequent analysis, particularly focusing on the narrative's formalist elements, such as plot structure. The analysis concentrated on the formalist elements of the narrative, specifically the plot. The researcher utilized Cawelti's "Romance Formula" to dissect and interpret the story's structure and thematic content. The findings were categorized to provide a coherent framework for discussion.

In the final step, the researcher synthesized the findings, drawing insights and interpretations from the analyzed data. This step brought the research process to a comprehensive conclusion, offering a detailed understanding of the romance formula as applied in *The Gift of the Magi*. By adhering to these procedures, the study ensured a thorough and systematic analysis, aligning with the principles of qualitative research methodology.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Romance Plot Formula

A plot is often defined as the complete sequence of events within a story. It represents the progression of events as planned by the author. The plot plays a crucial role in a story, as it determines how engaging the narrative will be. Additionally, the plot can be viewed as the story's structure, which must follow a specific order comprising three main parts: the beginning, the middle, and the end (Jusriati et al., 2024). As is the case in the short story *The Gift of The Magi*, which is a romance genre. According to Cawelti, a work can be considered very romantic if the fulfillment of love needs for the main character is achieved through various difficulties in overcoming social and psychological problems. This theory also applies to the story "*The Gift of The Magi*," where the plot of the short story depicts several difficulties and problems, both social and psychological.

This is a classic love story that revolves around the theme of selfless love and sacrifice. The story takes place on Christmas Eve, where a couple, Jim and Della Young, are facing financial difficulties. At that time, they both wanted to give each other Christmas gifts, but on the other hand, they were also struggling with economic difficulties. They ended up selling their valuables to be able to buy Christmas gifts for each other. They were both struggling to give Christmas gifts to each other.

3.2 Plot Analysis of the story "*The Gift of The Magi*,"

Cawelti outlines four primary romantic plot structures: 1) Their first meeting: this story typically begins by presenting the hero and heroine, offering insights into their backgrounds, personalities, and dreams. This initial stage aims to set the groundwork for their characters and create the basis for the upcoming romantic adventure.; 2) Boy wins the girl: Romantic stories evolve further through an increasing series of events that bring the main male and female characters into closer proximity. This development is characterized by a sequence of meetings and exchanges that contribute to the strengthening of their emotional bond; 3) Obstacle: the turmoil in their love, inadvertently steering them towards upholding their dedication; 4) Ending: the romantic tale invariably concludes with a joyful resolution (Prasetyo, 2023).

1) Tells about their love story as marriage couple

The romance story begins with the introduction of a young married couple, Mr. James Dillingham Young and Mrs. Della Dillingham Young. James Dillingham Young and Mrs. Della Dillingham Young, who are deeply in love with each other, but are experiencing financial difficulties. They live in a modestly furnished apartment for \$8 per week. Her living conditions do not reflect the life of a beggar, but the appearance of the apartment she lives in is not much different from that of a shabby residence. It is also explained that there is a lobby of the apartment, where in the lobby, there is a small box that holds a mailbox as well, although there is rarely any incoming mail.

Here it is explained that they love each other, even though they live in a place that is not much different from the rundown residence. Household harmony is often associated with the strength of the love that underlies the relationship, as love is the basis of marriage (Baharuddin & Nurainiah, 2024). This is evidenced by the quote in the story:

"While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar

description, but it certainly had that word on the look-out for the mendicancy squad.” (p. 1)

“...But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.” (p. 2)

2) Thinking About Giving Her Husband's Christmas Gifts, but She Doesn't Have Some money.

Della realized that tomorrow was Christmas, and she only had \$1.87 to buy a Christmas present for her husband. Della looked around and found an ornamental mirror and looked at her own reflection. Her eyes shone brightly, but within twenty seconds her face paled. In a hurry, she shook her long hair and looked at her beautiful figure. She hurried to a shop with a sign that read "Mme Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds". Without thinking, Della sold her hair and got 20 dollars.

It is important to remember that the most important and meaningful thing to Mr. James was his gold pocket watch, which was passed down through Jim's family tree. James is a gold pocket watch that has been passed down through Jim's family tree. Mrs. James' most important possession is her long hair. They both gave up their valuables in order to give Christmas gifts as a form of love. This is evidenced by the quote in the story:

“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...” (p. 2)

3) The Obstacle (Conflict)

The obstacle or conflict serves as an essential element within the storyline, enhancing its excitement and development. The introduction of conflict generates a heightened sense of intrigue among readers, prompting them to eagerly anticipate the unfolding events. Similarly, in the journey of life, encountering conflicts is inevitable; it is implausible for an individual to navigate their entire existence without facing challenges (Nurratnasari, 2016). As per Michael et al., (1990), "The Bedford Introduction to Literature," conflict can be categorized into two distinct types: internal conflict and external conflict.

3.3 Internal Conflict

Internal conflict refers to a struggle occurring within an individual, commonly described as an inner conflict or a conflict between a person and themselves. Setianingsih & Nafisah (2023) defines internal conflict as a dilemma individuals experience when confronted with challenging decisions that are hard to resolve. This conflict takes different forms, such as inner confusion in moments of mental distress, complex moral dilemmas in distinguishing between right and wrong, and lasting trauma from disappointment and fear. Additionally, internal conflict may arise from psychological issues, causing a disruption in one's confidence when making decisions. In essence, it occurs when individuals face multiple choices and must navigate among various alternatives.

The intention behind introducing conflicts for the hero and heroine is to delay the anticipation of a joyful resolution in the story. The following is the internal conflict that occurs in this story, two hours after Della sold her hair, Della was enthusiastically looking for a special gift for Jim, until she came across a series of platinum pocket watch chains. Despite spending almost all of

her money, Della is confident that she has made the right decision on the gift to give her husband. However, when she got home and waited for Jim's arrival, Della was worried about Jim's reaction to her new hair. This is evidenced by the quote in the story:

"If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do--oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?" (p. 4)

At seven in the evening, Della waits for Jim to come home by preparing coffee and starting to cook dinner. As she sits at the corner of the table, she watches the chain of the pocket watch she has just bought, while her anxiety builds because Jim doesn't usually like to be late. When Jim arrived, Della's face was pale, and she whispered a plea to Jim to keep her beautiful. Jim looked thinner and more serious than usual, showing the weight of family responsibility he carried at such a young age. This is evidenced by the quote in the story:

"Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please, God, make him think I am still pretty." (p. 4)

3.4 External Conflict

Characters experience different types of external forces, which may involve conflicts with other characters, interactions with nature or natural forces, and relationships with their community. External conflict is essentially a struggle that occurs between a character and elements outside of their own being. This can encompass conflicts with the environment or nature, and typically arises when characters find themselves entangled in broader worldly issues (Pambudi, 2019).

External conflict occurs when Della immediately approached Jim who was still frozen staring at Della, she cried while explaining what happened to her hair. Jim, as if waking up from a dream, hugged his wife. Jim took out a gift for his wife which turned out to contain a set of very beautiful combs, made of turtle shells with jeweled edges. The combs were often complimented by Della as they strolled around the Broadway shops. Della realized the beauty and high cost of the combs had been a dream, and now, she was happy that they were hers, even though her long hair had been cut.

"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." (p. 5)

"For there lay The Combs--the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshiped for long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise-shell, with jeweled 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 with the coveted adornments were gone." (p. 5)

Now it's time for Della to give her husband a gift. Della excitedly hands Jim his gift, a platinum chain for his pocket watch. She hopes that Jim will be pleased and invites him to see the

pocket watch that has been fitted with the chain. Jim explains that he has sold his watch to buy Della a set of combs that she has been dreaming of.

"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. (p. 6)

"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. (p. 6)

4) Ending

In the end, Jim chose to put all of his Christmas gifts in storage and maybe use them at a later time. They continued Christmas Eve with a feeling of emotion while enjoying dinner. Although they were both surprised at first, they were very grateful and happy to receive the gifts, even though Della's hair had been cut, Jim's precious watch had been sold. Both of them had to sacrifice their valuables, but their happiness lies in the loyalty and sacrifices they made for each other.

"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." (p. 6)

The end of the story explains that the Magi, being wise men, were the pioneers of the tradition of gift-giving on Christmas Day. Their gifts have great significance, and in this story, the Christmas mood is illustrated through a young couple who, although careless, are willing to sacrifice for each other. These young people are considered the wisest in their giving, given the saying that those who give often receive much. These generous people who often give are known as the Magi. Romantic love involves being intimate with one's partner, sharing affection, and a passion that arises from affection, and desire arising from physical attraction (Sternberg, 2016).

4. Conclusion

Therefore, the romance formula in O. Henry's "The Gift of The Magi," this analytical study suggests a conclusion that the narrative features a romanticized plot, unfolding a love story between the main characters—a hero and heroine. The storyline of "The Gift of The Magi" can be categorized into four distinct stages : (1) the first is about their love story as marriage couple; (2) thinking about christmas gift for each other while they don't have money; (3) the obstacle tells that Della excitedly presents Jim with a platinum chain for his pocket watch, hoping to please him, but learns that Jim has sold his watch to buy her the dream comb she adores, revealing their selfless sacrifice for each other; (4) In the end, Jim and Della, despite sacrificing their prized possessions, find joy in the tradition of gift-giving, embodying the true spirit of Christmas as modern-day Magi.

While this study provides insights into the romance formula as applied in "The Gift of The Magi," it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The analysis primarily focuses on the plot structure and does not delve deeply into character development or the broader social context of the time in which O. Henry wrote. Future research could explore these aspects further, examining how the characters' backgrounds and societal influences shape their actions and decisions. Additionally,

comparative studies with other romance literature from different cultures or time periods could yield valuable insights into the evolution of the romance genre and its thematic concerns.

Acknowledgment

The researcher would like to express her deepest gratitude to all those who have supported this research. Special thanks to the supervisors for their invaluable guidance and encouragement, as well as the co-researchers for their constructive feedback. The researcher also appreciates the contributions of the authors and researchers whose work formed the basis of this study. The last, the researcher is grateful to the family and friends for their unwavering support and understanding throughout this research journey.

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