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CORE ISSUE PORTRAIT IN O' HENRY'S THE GIFT OF MAGI: PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUE OF DELLA DILLINGHAM

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Abstract	Article information
<p>This study aims to analyze the core issues of the main female character, Della Dillingham. This study uses an approach from Lois Tyson about core issues. The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative. The results of this study found that Della had four kinds of core issues out of the five core issues proposed by Tyson. Those are low self-esteem, Insecure or unstable sense of self, Fear of intimacy, and Fear of abandonment. Low self-esteem is about Della's perspective on her value and beauty. Insecure or unstable sense of self refers to Della's decision to sell her beautiful long hair and her husband's response to her decision. Then, fear of intimacy refers to emotions that she gives to her husband through her gift will not be conveyed. And lastly is fear of abandonment, refers to Della's fear of being abandoned both physically and emotionally by her husband.</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Corre Issue, Della Dellingham, Psychoanalysis, the Gift of Magi</i></p>	<p><i>Received:</i> 22 August 2023</p> <p><i>Revised:</i> 1 November 2023</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> 30 December 2023</p>

Introduction

1.1. Background

A short story is a literary work of fiction or nonfiction created by the author. In making a story, the author creates a character who will play a role in the story. According to Fitriani, Y. (2019), characters have an important role and give the most effect to what happens in the story (3). This means that characters are needed in a story to make that story happen. It shows that in creating a story, the author must pay close attention to the characters that will be created in order to make the story good and make sense. In

a story, the character itself has a relationship with the psychological aspect. Zhang, S. (2020), defines psychology as the study of mind and behavior (8).

Afifulloh, M. (2019), identifies Studying psychology as trying to understand humans as personal and social creatures (1). It means that to analyze the psychology of the character in the short story, the writer must try to understand the personality of the character described by the author. Purnami et al. (2016) state that Psychological conditions are considered to be an important influence on every character, and these

conditions are different from one character to another and also able to influence the way in which the characters deal with the conflict that they face (5). So, that means psychology determines the characteristics of each character in a story.

From the explanation above, the writer is interested in analyzing the psychological aspects of the main character in the short story "The Gift of Magi" by O. Henry. This study wants to find the psychological aspects possessed by the main character. Tyson, L. (2011) states that there are five basic concepts of psychological problems: Repression and the unconscious, defenses, core issues, and dream symbolism. Even so, this study will not analyze all the basic concepts proposed by Tyson but will only analyze one part of the basic concepts of psychological problems, namely core issues. The writer limits the characters to be analyzed. In this study, the writer focuses on analyzing the psychological aspects of Della Dillingham, the main female character (6).

This study uses an approach by Lois Tyson (2011). He states that the core issue is a psychological problem that is the underlying cause of some sort of recurring self-destructive behavior, whether that behavior is something as seemingly mild as being habitually late for important appointments (for example, job interviews!) or something as serious as being habitually involved with abusive romantic partners. There are five kinds of core issues that Tyson proposes in his approach. They are Low self-esteem, an insecure or unstable sense of self, Fear of abandonment, Fear of intimacy, and Oedipal fixation (6).

Low self-esteem is the unwarranted belief that we are less worthy than other human beings and don't deserve any other form of life's rewards. Insecure or unstable senses of self are unable to sustain a feeling of personal identity or a sense of knowing themselves. Fear of abandonment is the unwarranted nagging belief that our friends and loved ones are going to desert us (physical abandonment) or don't really care about us (emotional abandonment). Fear of intimacy is the unwarranted but unshakeable and overpowering feeling that emotional closeness will seriously damage or destroy us and that we must, therefore, protect ourselves by remaining at an emotional distance from others. An oedipal fixation (or complex) is a dysfunctional bond with a parent of

the opposite sex that we don't outgrow and that doesn't permit us to mature into adult relationships with others (6).

The previous study that relates to this study is from Purnami et al. (2016) in their article "*Psychological Condition Of The Main Character As The Main Factor In Dealing With Conflict In Henry's The Gift Of The Magi*". Their study aims to provide an explanation of the psychological state of the main character and how it influences how she resolves the conflict in The Gift of the Magi's prose. Their study uses the theories of Kenney and Benhardt. The results of this study show that Della has a warm nature and quits any pretense of everything for somebody she cherishes. Moreover, she needs to confront struggles under the surface that cause her to need to relinquish something significant inside her (5).

Another previous study that relates to this study is from Wandasari et al. (2020) in their article "*Archetype Analysis Of The Main Characters In O. Henry's Short Story The Gift Of The Magi (1905)*". This study focuses on the archetypes of the characters in the short story "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry, 1905, using psychological studies by Carl Jung (1953). The results of this study found that the most common archetype is the Lover. It might happen because they are a couple, and the story tells about their struggle to live together after marriage (7).

There are two aspects that distinguish this study from previous studies. The first is the psychology section that is being analyzed. In the previous study, the focus of analysis is on the psychological state of human motivation in Della Dillingham and archetypes in the main characters, while in this study, the focus is on the analysis of core issues in Della Dillingham, the main female character. The second is the theory used; this study uses core issues from Louis Tyson.

Meanwhile, the first previous study uses theory by Kenney and Benhardt, while the second previous study uses theory by Carl Jung (1953). Based on the background, the research question of this study is: What are the psychological problems experienced by Della Dillingham in The Gift Of Magi?.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this study is descriptive-qualitative. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is the process of constructing a complex, holistic picture through the utilization of words, the reporting of in-depth perspectives from informants, and the utilization of natural settings in order to gain an understanding of a social or human issue (2). The data is collected from reading the short story *The Gift of Magi* by O' Henry in the form of phrases, sentences, dialogues, conversations, and explanations related to the topic. The technique used in this method has several steps. First, look for journals that are relevant to this study. Second, read the short story many times. The third is looking for data in short stories and taking notes. Fourth, analyze the data and classify it, and finally make supporting statements and conclusions.

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FINDING AND DISCUSSION

By using the approach of core issues from Louis Tyson the writer found several core issues in Della Dillingham in the short story *the gift of Magi*. The results of the analysis are as follows.

1. Low self-esteem

These scenes show Della Dillingham's Low self-esteem, which shows her assessment of herself.

“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.” (The gift of Magi: 3)

Based on Tyson's approach, the unfounded belief that we are less worthy than other people and, as a result, do not deserve attention, love, or any other form of life's rewards is known as low self-esteem. Della's character shows signs of low self-esteem, which is evident from her perception of her self-worth and beauty. Her perspective, which judges that she does not have the charm or beauty of other girls, says that the only thing of which

Della can be proud is her beautiful long hair. However, this cannot change Della's view of herself. She instead compares herself to the legendary Queen of Sheba. She believes that even a queen's possessions will not be more valuable than her hair.

“One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas. There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it.” (The gift of Magi: 2)

One day before Christmas, Della only have one dollar and eighty-seven cents to buy a present for her husband, Jim. Della does not know what else to do to get money for Christmas tomorrow because there is nothing she can do to make her money grow. This makes Della question her worth and feel inadequate compared to what she feels Jim deserves. She feels that what she has worked for is not enough. In addition, her perspective on the beauty that she has makes her think that material possessions are one thing she can give to her husband.

“She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn’t go far.” (The gift of Magi: 2)

Even though Della collects the money from several months ago, all she has is one dollar and eighty-seven cents. Della is increasingly questioning her ability to raise money for tomorrow's Christmas gifts. After several months, she still does not have enough money to buy Christmas gifts for her husband. Della's action further shows Della's perception of her ability and beauty. This makes Della believe even more that her value and ability to contribute to her relationship relate to material possessions.

1. Insecure or unstable sense of self

These are some scenes that indicate Della's insecurity and instability in the story.

“When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task.” (The gift of Magi: 4)

According to Tyson, we are insecure or unstable if we are unable to maintain a sense of self-knowledge or a sense of personal identity. Della's insecurity refers to her willingness to sacrifice her long, beautiful hair to get gifts for her husband, Jim. How she cuts and sells her hair at the salon. From this scene, it can be seen how the happiness that Della initially felt turned into worry after she arrived home. In addition, her action to immediately fix her hair, which is not the same as before.

“Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.” (The gift of Magi: 4)

However, her efforts to make her hairdo better did not help much. She tries carefully and critically to keep her hair looking good. This can be seen from this scene, where Della spent forty minutes styling her hair in front of the mirror. It shows Della's insecurity about her hair, which is not the same as usual. She tries to make it look good and convince herself that her decisions and actions are the right ones because her hair is a symbol of her identity.

“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?” (The gift of Magi: 4)

Then, Della's instability refers to her thoughts on her husband's response, where Della thinks that her husband will like her new hair. But on the other hand, Della thinks, What if, in reality, Jim does not like her new hair because her husband really likes her beautiful long hair? Then, what can she do with the money she gets? These things make Della's mind unstable. This relates to Tyson's approach that Della cannot maintain her sense of self-knowledge or sense of personal identity because of her actions of cutting and selling her beautiful long hair, which is a symbol of Della's identity.

1. Fear of intimacy

“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.”

Della's fear of intimacy refers to the way Della expresses her love and affection for her husband. Della's desperate state while contemplating Christmas emphasizes her concern about her inability to offer gifts that adequately reflect how she feels. Her inability to give meaningful gifts contributes to her fear of not being able to express her love effectively. This shows that Della wants to express her love and affection for her husband through Christmas gifts. On the other hand, she does not have enough money to buy gifts that can express her love for Jim.

“Della doubled the job 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 a little silent prayer about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: “Please God, make him think I am still pretty.”” (The gift of Magi: 4)

Della concerns that the gift she gets at the expense of her beautiful hair cannot fully convey the emotion that is poured into the gift, and she wants to give Jim a meaningful gift as a way to express her deepest love and affection. This fear makes Della worry that emotions such as love and affection she gives through her gifts will damage her relationship with her husband, Jim. Her anxiety is shown by her reaction, which pales for a moment when she hears footsteps from the stairs, plus how Della prays silently to ask God for help so that her husband will think the same as what she is thinking.

“Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.” (The gift of Magi: 4)

This is further strengthened by Jim's reaction when he sees Della at home; as he enters the house, he immediately stops by looking at Della with an expression that Della cannot understand. Jim's reaction makes Della feel more afraid of

intimacy, so that she cannot enjoy the results of the emotional closeness that she pours into the gift at the expense of her hair. This actually makes Della's worries even greater about her relationship with Jim, her husband. This relates to Tyson's approach to fear of intimacy, which he defines as the unjustified, unshakeable, and overwhelming belief that emotional closeness will seriously harm or destroy us and that we must, as a result, maintain an emotional distance from others in order to protect ourselves.

1. Fear of abandonment

“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.” (The gift of Magi: 4)

Della's fear of abandonment here refers to two things: the first is the fear of being ignored because of her actions, where she cuts her beautiful hair in order to get money to buy Christmas gifts for her husband. It can be seen from Della's anxiety waiting at the door for Jim's arrival. This shows her fear that Jim will be disappointed by her actions. Her focus on men's punctuality reflects her concern about the impact her choices will have on their relationship.

“Jim, darling,” she cried, “don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again—you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say ‘Merry Christmas!’ Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice—what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you.” (The gift of Magi: 4)

The second is her inability to buy gifts for her husband. Della is afraid that her husband will be dissatisfied with her and ignore her for not giving him a memorable Christmas present. This makes Della cut and sell her beautiful hair. Although this action creates a sense of anxiety and fear in her, Della's plea for Jim not to judge her and her use of the term "love" underscored her desire to maintain their bond. It is showing how frightened she is of her ability to give Jim a meaningful gift. However, on the other hand, her fear of potential disappointment or rejection is evident in her fear of how he will view her after her sacrifice.

“You needn't look for it,” said Della. “It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered,” she went on with sudden serious sweetness, “but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?” (The gift of Magi: 5)

Della's fear of being abandoned is not only about her husband's physical abandonment but also emotional abandonment, where Della is afraid that her husband will ignore her emotions (deep thoughts and affection) that she pours into her gifts and sacrifices. This relates to the approach used about fear of abandonment that is stated by Tyson. He states that the unfounded and persistent belief that our friends and loved ones will abandon us (physical abandonment) or that they will not really care about us (emotional abandonment) is known as fear of abandonment.

This study shows the psychological problems experienced by Della Dillingham, especially the core issues that exist in Della herself. The writer found that Della had four kinds of core issues based on Tyson's approach used in this study. among them: low self-esteem, an insecure or unstable sense of self, fear of intimacy, and fear of abandonment. These four kinds of core issues affect Della's perspective, actions, and assessment. The results of this study is an addition to previous studies that also analyzed Della's psychology. According to Purnami et al. (2016), their analysis illustrates that Della has a warm nature and gives up everything for someone she loves. In addition, she has to face internal conflicts that force her to release something precious within her.

Another previous study analyzed the archetype with three kinds: Ego, Soul, and self, by Della and Jim. Wandasari et al. (2020) found in their study that Della has two ego archetypes: hero and Caregiver. Della's soul had the explorer and Lover archetypes. Meanwhile, the writer did not find any quotation that supports Della's character in Self. This shows that this study is different from previous studies, which also analyzed the psychology of the main female character, Della Dillingham. The difference lay in the part of psychology being analyzed and the theory used. However, the results of this study are not a form of rebuttal to the previous study but are an addition to the results of the previous studies, which focuses on the core issues.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it is found that Della is identified as having several core issues. By using the approach of core issues from Louis Tyson, it is found that Della had four of the five kinds of core issues that existed. The first is low self-esteem, which led to Della's perspective on her value and beauty. The second is an insecure or unstable sense of self, which led to changes in her hair after her decision to sell it and her thoughts on her husband's response to her decision. The third is the fear of intimacy; in this part, Della has a fear that the emotions that she gives to her husband through her gift will not be conveyed. And lastly, there was the fear of abandonment, which refers to Della's fear of being abandoned both physically and emotionally by her husband. All of these are various core issues that exist in Della, while one type of core issue in Tyson's approach that is not found was the oedipal fixation.

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