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## САМОПОЖЕРТВОВАНИЕ КАК ГЛАВНАЯ ТЕМА В РАССКАЗАХ О. ГЕНРИ

**Кенджаева Гулрух Фаттиллоевна,**  
Бухарский государственный университет  
доктор философии по филологическим наукам  
g.f.kendjaeva@buxdu.uz

**Убайдуллаева Феруза Елёржон кизи,**  
Бухарский государственный университет Магистрант 1-го курса  
feruzaubaydullayeva320@gmail.com

**Аннотация.** О. Генри, известный своими неожиданными концовками и глубоким пониманием человеческой природы, часто исследует тему жертвы в своих рассказах. В Последнем листе пожилой художник жертвует своей жизнью, чтобы вдохновить надеждой молодую, больную девушку. В Двух джентльменах на День благодарения раскрывается ирония жертвы: пожилой человек, следуя своей традиции кормить бедного мальчика, в конечном итоге сам оказывается в тяжёлом положении. Дары волхвов представляют трогательный обмен жертвами между молодой супружеской парой, где каждый отказывается от своего самого ценного имущества ради другого. Через эти истории О. Генри раскрывает глубокий и часто ироничный характер самоотверженности, когда личные потери становятся символами любви и преданности.

**Ключевые слова:** жертва, самоотверженность, ирония, надежда, преданность, неожиданный финал, человеческая природа, символизм.

## O.HENRY HIKOYALARIDA FIDOIYLIK ASOSIY MAVZU SIFATIDA

**Annotatsiya.** O'Henry, o'zining kutilmagan yakunlari va inson tabiatini chuqur tushunishi bilan mashhur bo'lib, o'z hikoyalarida qurbonlik, o'zini fido qilish mavzusini yoritadi. "So'nggi yaproq" hikoyasida keksa rassom yosh va kasal qizga umid bag'ishlash uchun o'z hayotini qurbon qiladi. Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen asarida qurbonlikning kinoyali tomoni yoritiladi: kambag'al insonni ovqatlantirish an'anasi keksa odamning o'ziga azob-uqubat olib keladi. The Gift of the Magi hikoyasida esa yosh er-xotin bir-birlariga bo'lgan muhabbatlari yo'lida o'zlarining eng qadrlı narsalaridan voz kechishadi. Ushbu hikoyalar orqali O'Henry inson fidoyiligining chuqur va ko'pincha istehzoli tabiati, shaxsiy yo'qotishlarning chuqur sevgi va sadoqat ramziga aylanishini ochib beradi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** qurbonlik, fidoyilik, kinoya, umid, sadoqat, kutilmagan yakun, inson tabiati, ramziylik.

## SACRIFICE AS A MAIN THEME IN O'HENRY'S SHORT STORIES

**Abstract.** O. Henry, known for his twist endings and deep human insight, frequently explores the theme of sacrifice in his short stories. In *The Last Leaf*, an aging artist sacrifices his own life to inspire hope in a young, sick girl. *Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen* highlights the irony of sacrifice, as an elderly man's tradition of feeding a poor boy ultimately leads to his own suffering. *The Gift of the Magi* presents a poignant exchange of sacrifices between a young couple, each giving up their most prized possession for the other. Through these stories, O. Henry reveals the profound and often ironic nature of selflessness, where personal losses become symbols of deep love and devotion.

**Keywords:** sacrifice, selflessness, irony, hope, devotion, twist ending, human nature, symbolism.

**Introduction.** Sacrifice is one of the most profound expressions of human love and devotion, often revealing the true depth of one's character. It is in these moments of selflessness—when one gives up something of great value for the sake of another—that the true measure of the human spirit is revealed. While grand heroic acts often dominate stories of sacrifice, it is the quiet, unnoticed gestures—the ones born of love, compassion, and deep emotional connection—that truly resonate with us. Few authors have captured this complexity as effectively as O. Henry. A master of the short story form, O. Henry possessed an uncanny ability to depict ordinary people caught in extraordinary emotional circumstances. His stories, often marked by surprise endings and rich irony, explore universal human experiences with warmth and poignancy. Among the most recurring and deeply moving themes in his work is that of sacrifice—a theme he presents not as mere loss, but as an act that often brings about a deeper, more meaningful gain. In this article, we delve into how O. Henry explores the theme of sacrifice in four of his most poignant short stories: *The Last Leaf*, *Two*

Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen, A Retrieved Reformation, and The Gift of the Magi. Each story shines a light on a different aspect of selflessness—whether it is the ultimate artistic offering of an old painter, the quiet persistence of a man who upholds tradition in the face of personal struggle, the redemptive choices of a reformed criminal, or the heartfelt mutual giving of a young couple bound by love. Through these narratives, O. Henry does more than tell stories—he invites readers to question the value society places on material wealth, and to reflect on the emotional and spiritual wealth that can come from giving. In doing so, he leaves us with a timeless and compelling question: is sacrifice truly a loss—or is it, perhaps, the purest form of love?

**Main body.** O. Henry's short stories are celebrated for their wit, irony, and unexpected twists, but beneath their entertaining surface lies a rich exploration of human nature and social realities. His works often center around ordinary people—shopgirls, clerks, outcasts—capturing the struggles and hopes of life in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century America. Common themes in his stories include sacrifice, love, poverty, deception, justice, and irony of fate. With compassionate humor, O. Henry reveals how individuals navigate moral choices, often finding dignity and meaning in small acts of kindness or courage. His storytelling reflects both the harshness of life and the enduring warmth of the human spirit. O. Henry's exploration of sacrifice in *The Last Leaf*, *Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen*, and *The Gift of the Magi* extends beyond simple acts of giving; it delves into the irony, emotional depth, and symbolic meaning of selflessness. His masterful use of literary techniques such as irony, symbolism, and characterization elevates the theme, making each sacrifice both deeply human and profoundly impactful.

*Irony and the Unexpected Twist.* One of O. Henry's signature literary devices is irony, which plays a crucial role in highlighting the complexity of sacrifice. In *The Last Leaf*, Behrman, an aging and unfulfilled artist, scoffs at the idea of heroism yet ends up making the ultimate sacrifice—painting a leaf in the cold to give hope to a dying girl, only to succumb to pneumonia himself. The irony lies in the fact that his greatest masterpiece is not in a gallery but on a wall, unseen as art yet immeasurable in its impact. Similarly, in *The Gift of the Magi*, Jim and Della's selfless acts of love are rendered practically useless—Jim sells his watch to buy combs for Della's hair, while Della cuts her hair to buy a chain for Jim's watch. However, O. Henry transforms this ironic twist into a powerful commentary on love's true value, showing that their willingness to sacrifice makes them richer than before.

In *Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen*, irony takes a more satirical form. The old gentleman believes he is preserving a noble tradition of generosity by feeding a poor boy every Thanksgiving. However, the boy, having already eaten a large meal, forces himself to endure another feast just to maintain the old man's joy. The ultimate irony is that the boy's sacrifice, intended to protect the gentleman's generosity, leads to both of them suffering—the boy from overindulgence and the old man from financial strain. This story challenges the reader to question whether acts of sacrifice are always as noble as they seem or if they sometimes stem from obligation rather than true selflessness.

*Symbolism and the Value of Sacrifice.* Symbolism is another key element in O. Henry's depiction of sacrifice. The painted leaf in *The Last Leaf* serves as a metaphor for hope and survival. Behrman's creation is not merely an imitation of nature but an embodiment of faith, a last act of artistry that saves a life at the cost of his own. The irony deepens the symbolic weight—he had never painted a true masterpiece until this final moment, proving that real artistry lies in the impact it has on others.

In *The Gift of the Magi*, the watch and the hair symbolize personal identity and pride, but their true worth is revealed only when they are sacrificed. O. Henry directly compares Della and Jim's actions to the biblical Magi, suggesting that wisdom is not in material wealth but in selfless love. The gifts, though materially useless, gain infinite value as expressions of devotion.

Meanwhile, in *Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen*, the meal represents tradition and social expectation. The old man's insistence on feeding the boy symbolizes a rigid adherence to the past, even when it causes personal suffering. The boy's reluctant sacrifice of his comfort for the sake of maintaining this ritual highlights how societal expectations can sometimes overshadow genuine altruism.

*Characterization and Psychological Depth.* O. Henry's characterization adds depth to the theme of sacrifice, portraying individuals whose choices define their moral essence. Behrman, initially presented as a gruff, failed artist, reveals himself as the true hero of *The Last Leaf*. His transformation from cynicism to selfless action illustrates the redemptive power of sacrifice.

In *The Gift of the Magi*, Della and Jim are depicted as young and financially struggling, yet their emotional richness surpasses their material poverty. Their willingness to part with their most treasured possessions demonstrates the idea that love is measured not by what one has, but by what one is willing to give.

The old gentleman in *Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen* is a poignant character study in social obligation and personal hardship. Despite his deteriorating financial situation, he clings to his annual act of



generosity, revealing a deep-seated belief that kindness should persist even in adversity. The boy, in contrast, is caught between gratitude and discomfort, illustrating the complexity of sacrificial giving—does true kindness require suffering, or should it be an act of joy?

Through irony, symbolism, and deep characterization, O. Henry crafts a powerful literary exploration of sacrifice. In each story, acts of selflessness challenge conventional ideas about material wealth, love, and tradition. Whether through the quiet endurance of an old gentleman, the tragic yet hopeful brushstroke of an artist, or the heartfelt yet ironic exchange of gifts between lovers, O. Henry reminds us that true sacrifice transcends the physical—it is an act of love, a testament to the enduring human spirit.

In “A Retrieved Reformation,” O. Henry presents sacrifice as a powerful symbol of personal transformation and moral courage. Jimmy Valentine, a former safecracker who has built a new life under the name Ralph D. Spencer, gives up his hard-won identity, peaceful life, and chance at love to save a child trapped inside a bank vault. In doing so, he risks being arrested and losing everything he has rebuilt. However, his selfless act becomes the ultimate proof of his genuine reformation. Through Jimmy’s choice, O. Henry emphasizes that true redemption often requires personal loss—that sacrifice is the final step toward moral rebirth. The twist ending, in which the detective lets Jimmy go, further reinforces the idea that sacrifice, when born from sincerity, can inspire forgiveness and change.

**Conclusion.** O. Henry’s short stories masterfully depict sacrifice as a central theme, revealing not only its emotional depth and symbolic resonance but also its complex moral dimensions. His narratives take ordinary characters—artists, lovers, strangers—and place them in situations where their choices carry weight far beyond the material. In *The Last Leaf*, the quiet heroism of an aging artist becomes a lifeline for a young girl clinging to hope, showing that the most powerful gestures often go unnoticed by the world but mean everything to those they touch. *The Gift of the Magi* redefines the idea of wealth, illustrating how love, expressed through mutual sacrifice, holds greater value than any possession money can buy. *Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen* subtly critiques societal expectations and traditions, urging us to consider whether true generosity comes from habit or heartfelt compassion.

In each story, O. Henry does more than simply present a tale—he offers a lens through which to examine the nature of giving. His characters are not saints or heroes in the traditional sense; they are flawed, human, and deeply relatable. Yet it is through their imperfections that their sacrifices become all the more touching and real. The irony he so deftly employs adds a layer of unpredictability, reminding us that life rarely unfolds according to plan, and that the outcomes of our choices may surprise us. But beneath every twist of fate lies a deeper truth: the value of a gift is not determined by its price, but by the love, intent, and humanity behind it. Ultimately, O. Henry’s stories challenge readers to reconsider what it truly means to give. They remind us that sacrifice is not merely about loss—it is about the transformative power of love, empathy, and selflessness. In a world that often measures worth in material terms, O. Henry invites us to look inward and recognize that the most enduring legacies are built not from what we keep, but from what we give away.

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