

**Behind the surprised endings of O Henry's short fiction: Fantasy  
(Psychology) and O Henry's material reality**

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**Abstract**

O Henry lights us to imagine the unimaginable. O' Henry earned his popularity not only through his lucid, humorous and ironical narrative style or sentimental themes but the understanding of the reader's psychological yearning to be surprised or shocked by sensing the reality they did/could not think of. This paper will discuss how with his rare but precious insights into human destiny and human nature, he creates the 'imaginal' deconstruction of reality which is just as important as the construction of it. The material reality he sketches through his short stories continuously moves towards the state of equilibrium with imperfections and conflicts. To reveal the real which is no longer real, Henry fantasizes his characters to unmask the unimaginable reality by interpreting and experiencing the meaning of those fantasies. Freud, Lacan and Jung have their own interpretations regarding fantasy (psychology) which is the primary concern of this article to conceptualize the narrative structures of O Henry's stories. And with this privilege of psychoanalysis, this essay will unfold the literary universe Henry creates with surprising ends and connect the deeper relation among the themes of his work.

**Key Words: fantasy (psychology), Phantasy, imagination, materialism**

O Henry recreates the reality differently and organically by employing different frequencies and suspense. He exposes, sympathizes and criticizes different characters and status of the American people in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when romanticism and realism coexist in local colour of literature. Interest grew in creating new and more urbane works. Henry through his short stories captures the social change in the United States. The unrest left in the wake of the American Civil War especially within the country's urban centres, promoted diverse changes in lifestyle. Class distinction, racial conflicts, intra racial conflict, capitalism grasp the total society and required reformation. O Henry dismantles this harsh social reality with the use of humour and irony in his twisty short stories. Instead of attempting to synthesize O Henry's literature and life, this article will focus preponderantly upon psychoanalytic reading of his writing—incorporating the detail analysis on fantasy (psychology) and seek to reveal the deeper relation among the themes of his work. By exploring Henry's distinctive themes primarily as they appear in “Cop and the Anthem”, “Last leaf” and “Hearts and Hands”, this essay will correlate the fantasy (psychology) to mirror the material harsh capitalist social reality that binds, infects and deters from seeing the distorted reality. But Henry always makes us surprised at the end and the end is now the beginning to excavate behind the surprising endings of his stories.

O Henry's one of most touchy stories, “Last Leaf” is an emotive story of amity, love and self-sacrifice. The theme that Henry portrays here can be well explained through fantasy (psychology). Fantasy starts with the imagination of an individual that expresses certain desires or aims which is not ‘real’ but exists as an imagined state of object to subject. “In everyday life, individuals often find their thoughts pursue a series of fantasies concerning things they wish they could do or wish they had done...fantasies of control or of sovereign choice...daydreams”.(Erikson 183) All the characters in this story fantasize their own world. Living in early 20th century Greenwich Village two young women artists, Sue and Johnsy have a promising future as an artist. Their dreams bring them to share an apartment and artist's studio. Johnsy is a painter and her new roommate Sue is a promising sculptor. Their passion for art, the youthful hopes and dream they shared form a strong friendship between them. Beside the dream worlds of these two youngsters there was another dream world of an old artist who lived on the ground floor beneath them. This Mr. Behrman for forty years wielded the brush without any victory to speak of. He had been always about to paint a masterpiece, but had never yet begun it. His creative faculty also for several years, under the pressure of this capitalist society had created nothing except now and then a smear in the line of commerce or advertising.

He earned a petite by serving as a model to those juvenile artists who could not manage to pay for a professional.

As fantasy has beneficial elements — providing 'small regressions and compensatory wish fulfillments which are recuperative in effect' is very prominent in this story. (Fenichel 554) Research by Deirdre Barrett reports that people differ radically in the vividness, as well as frequency of fantasy, and that those who have the most elaborately developed fantasy life are often the people who make productive use of their imaginations in art, literature, or by being especially creative and innovative in more traditional professions. As Mr. Behrman developed fantasy life and dreams to paint his masterpiece gets it ultimate success with the productive use of his imagination which costs his life.

In 1911, Jung published the first part of *Wandlungen and Symbole der Libido* (Transformations and Symbols of the libido). He entitled the first chapter "Concerning Two Kinds of Thinking" where he vocalizes William James' two kinds of thinking, Jung says, "quickly leads us away from reality into phantasies", and "image crowds upon image" directed thinking is reality thinking, while non directed thinking is fantasy thinking. (qtd. in Adams 1) Later that same year, Freud published an article entitled "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning". The two principles were the "pleasure principle" and "the reality principle". In contrast to the reality principle, Freud defined the pleasure principle as fantasy thinking: "With the introduction of the reality principle one species of thought activity was split off; it was kept free from reality-testing and remained subordinated to the pleasure principle alone. This activity is phantasing". (*ibid*)

To Sigmund Freud fantasy is a part of 'defence mechanism'. The "last leaf" for Johnsy was fantasy. As Freud explains 'fantasy' as an auxiliary construction of wish fulfillment which they cannot subsist from the reality but dwelling on imaginary wish fulfillments. He compared such phantasing to the way a nature reserve preserves its original state where everything including what is useless can grow and proliferate there as it pleases. There were so many images that constructed the idea of death in front of Johnsy. She becomes ill with pneumonia, and the prognosis wasn't good. The doctor said that she had a one in ten chances of surviving and that chance was for her to want to live. She loses her strength and her body becomes weaker. She was so touched with the idea of death. She believes that she will not live very long "I've known that for three days. Didn't the doctor tell you?" These thoughts create a bleak surrounding of Johnsy

though she was getting good care of her roommate she was declining. This unhappy and disappointed soul of Johnsy replaces the fantasy of living with the Ivy vine beside her window. She keeps watching the bare vine has only a few leaves on it which can be explained as auxiliary construction of her mind. This affects Johnsy psychologically as Frued says when drives cannot be satisfied in reality they are repressed into the unconscious. Johnsy stimulates with the certain "class of human beings" who find it necessary to recount their fantasies. "I'm tired of thinking," says Johnsy. "I want to turn loose my hold on everything, and go sailing down, down, just like one of those poor, tired leaves". However, an unexpected hero arrives to save Johnsy. It's not the brusque doctor who gives her only one in ten chances to survive, raising them to one in five if Sue can get her to hope for something important like a man, not her true desire to "paint the Bay of Naples someday".

To Frued, they are the victims of nervous illness who are obliged to tell their phantasies among other things. By staring at the bare ivy vine all the time, she starts to feel that she will also die when the vine dies. Frued declares in no uncertain terms that "a happy person never phantasies, only unsatisfied one." (qtd. in Adams, 4) He equates fantasy with daydreams and contends that they, like dreams, are without exception wish-fulfillments. "The motive forces of phantasies," he says, "are unsatisfied wishes, and every single phantasy is the fulfillment of a wish" (*ibid*) And to him, the purpose of analysis is to cure patients of their fantasies. When she wakes up after a rainy night and finds that the last leaf is still there, Johnsy begins to think wisely. She tells Sue how bad she is because of her silly ideas. Finding that the last leaf is still there is a turning point in Johnsy's case. She begins to recover and think optimistically. She says, "Sudie, someday I hope to paint the Bay of Naples." So the phantasy proves that it includes a great deal of the true constitutional essence of the subject's personality and energetic man who succeeds by his efforts in turning his wishfull phantasies into reality whereas the artist "can transform his phantasies into artistic creations instead of into symptoms..." (Frued 81) For Johnsy, fantasy transforms into symptoms but for another unsatisfied soul was able to transform his phantasies into artistic creation that is Mr. Behrman. To Mr. Behrman's death is his dream in order to achieve another dream. Mr. Behrman has a great challenge with himself, so he does not care about the bad weather. All what he wants is to paint his masterpiece and its time arrives. He paints the last leaf, which gives a new life to Johnsy and gives him a feeling of triumph.

In contrast to Freud, Jung says that “fantasy is a natural expression of life which we can at most seek to understand but cannot correct”(qtd. in Adams, 5) Not all fantasies are wish fulfillments, some are pleasurable and some are unpleasurable. Johnsy’s fantasy regarding the last leaf with no doubt is life saving pleasure (wish fulfillment). But Mr. Behrman had to go through the unpleasant phase of fantasy to achieve his dream. It is, Jung contends, “not a sickness but a natural and vital activity”(ibid) The psychological impact of the bare ivy vine tree made Johnsy more sick than she was but at the same time as it is natural and vital activity as Jung says, helps to recover her with the same fantasy she believes in. And Mr. Behrman fits to prove to accept a natural death and regenerate his potentiality to a life saving masterpiece. Mr. Behrman, an old man who lives in the apartment below Sue and Johnsy, who enjoys drinking, works sometimes as an artist’s model, and as yet has made no progress over the past 40 years on painting his own masterpiece, becomes in typical O. Henry fashion the hero. The evidence of his heroics are found the day before he dies from pneumonia: outside Johnsy’s window are a ladder, a lantern still lighted "some scattered brushes, and a palette with green and yellow colors mixed on it . . . it’s Behrman’s masterpiece--he painted it [a leaf] there the night that the last leaf fell", Sue informs Johnsy. Jung has no small opinion of fantasy. He says “we can never rise above fantasy”. He concludes “All the works of man have their origin in creative imagination. What right, then, have we to disparage fantasy?” (qtd. in Adams, 1)

In another gripping short story, “Hearts and Hands”, O Henry blends reality and fantasy in such a way that both Jung and later Lacan’s theory of fantasy melt appropriately. To Jung “Psyche is composed of images and the reality is constructed in and through those images” (quoted in Adams 6) The images O Henry creates in this short story with the utmost dramatic irony and personality traits of Miss Fairchild, Mr. Easton, and the Marshall all contribute to the surprise ending. But behind the surprised end, the harsh reality is made known by catching the images that reveals the way east sees west. The story took place somewhere in the eastern part of America and it happened in the 19th century. As a whole, it pictures what happened there at that time, especially to the people. This story also reveals the style of language and manner of a certain social class where the lady belonged at that time. It also shows how the people of the east felt about the west, which at that time was still untamed exploratory country. Henry uses dramatic irony to craft a surprising but acceptable ending. Mr. Easton is handsome with a bold, frank countenance, which mislead readers into thinking that he is the marshal. The description of the glum-faced and roughly dressed man let readers imagine that he is the prisoner. While the

seemingly unintended dialogue between the two passengers reveals, reader's fantasy gauges the reality.

Miss Fairchild is an interesting character with many diverse personality traits. She seems to be smart, stylish and rich. Her name 'Miss Fairchild' suggests the fantasy she may carry within herself. She is totally abstracted by the social images that blind her from seeing the reality. Her changing facial expressions when she saw the handcuff bound at the wrist of Mr. Easton reveals that she is a conceited, arrogant and inflated person. It becomes more overt when the real Marshall said to Miss Fairchild "Don't you worry about them miss, all Marshalls handcuff themselves to their prisoners to keep them from getting away. Mr. Easton know his business", she should have gotten suspicious. And when she asked whether she will see Mr. Easton in Washington soon and got this answer: "Not soon I think, my carefree days are over, I fear...", she just said: "I love the West." with her eyes shining softly. She was not paying any attention to know the real but fantasizing her own fantasies. While the young man's hand was handcuffed, the young lady's heart was locked with the images of her happy past. And most of all, it was the heart of the real Marshall that really showed kindness as he tried his best not to embarrass his prisoner. Miss Fairchild did not have any doubt when the roughly dressed man told her that Mr. Easton was taking him to the Leavenworth prison. It reveals that Miss Fairchild tended to judge people by their appearance and outfits. When Mr. Easton said, "My butterfly days are over", he hinted that he is put in prison later and not being free while Miss Fairchild thought that he's talking about social days. When Mr. Easton answered, "Yes, I must go on to Leavenworth." he did mean he must go to the Leavenworth Prison and stay there while Miss Fairchild thought that he just take prisoner to Leavenworth, as a marshal. She has a fair name and face, but her heart is not that fair. When her father was ill, she did not go home to take care of her father instead of continuing her journey. And fantasy that pushed to the extreme may lead to the narcissistic personality disorder.

"What does fantasy do? The most important function of fantasy is to keep desire going" (Hill 75) as we see in Johnsy in "Last Leaf" the image of bare ivy trees last leaf keep her desire going. Mr. Behrman's desire also gets its room with the cost of his life and his masterpiece. Miss Fairchild's desire to be a proud woman of vanity abstracted her from reality. Mr. Soapy in "The Cop and the Anthem" reveals the harsh reality of the society's relationship with man. According to Lacan,

“Desire is the stuff of life, the most important fact of human existence” and “Usually a subject’s fantasies are close variations on a single theme.” In “Cop and the Anthem”, the character of Soapy is developed through his thoughts, actions, and speech and the reactions of others with no great "ambitions," but he does hope to go jail "on the Island" for the winter months and remain warm. He has confidence in himself and also courage to woo the police to capture him as they did before for him. The way Soapy is leading his life creates another reality behind the reality we all know. The idea of prison is an imaginal deconstruction of reality here. Society which should be the shelter for ours and prevents man from doing wrongs is presented oppositely in this story. Soapy before each winter takes prison as shelter. It echoes that he is deprived of shelter in the real world he is living. For that reason, he fantasies about prison as shelter where he gets the warm.

To continue this fantasy, he clockwise in winter chooses the same strategy to get warm in winter. Because, as Lacan said, “Fantasy operates to keep desire roughly constant, to protect it from too much variation.”(Hill 76) And possibly for this reason, Soapy sticks into the point of prison as his shelter. His life is compared with the leaf that is blown by cold wind. But as Jung says that all fantasies are not pleasurable, some are unpleasant also and it is needed to increase consciousness by interpreting or experiencing the meaning of those fantasies. Ironically, in the city where he can lead his life freely is not free for him at all. But the prison would bring him the feeling of being “free” to enjoy life without fear. . Soapy is a proud man; he does not desire something for nothing and is willing to “pay” for his room and board by going to some effort to commit an act that will get him in jail. He rejects charity, for he knows that he will have to pay for charity by being preached at and lectured to.

We reach in the peak of the moment of the story when Soapy came to an old church and began to mirror himself. His ideas and opinion alter considerably, as he realizes the possibilities of changes. Soapy stands on the street and considers this plan for his future; however, a policeman taps him on the shoulder and asks him what he is doing. When Soapy answers “Nothing,” his fate is sealed: he has been arrested for loitering. In the magistrate’s court on the following day, he is convicted of a misdemeanor (in the courtroom, he is pronounced guilty of "vagrancy, no visible means of support"), and is sentenced to three months to the island. And it clarifies that reality is not only constructed but also deconstructed by the imagination. The changed future

Soapy desires by growing out of his fantasy deters him from growing and imprisons him in his own made fantasy world.

O Henry's short fiction mirrors the society of that time. He unites the physical time with the psychological time by exploring at the bottom of society to the upper one. Freud delineates fantasy as wishfulfillment for an unhappy person. Jung places it with vitality for both pleasant and unpleasant imagination. Lacan leads this imagination towards desire. All the three different justifications regarding fantasy get bloomed with the psychoanalytic reading of O Henry's short fiction. He has more than 300 hundred stories. Among them three are chosen for this article to explain the relation of fantasy (psychology) with the characters of his short stories which always give surprise at the end. The surprises create special criteria of his stories and make it popular in his time and beyond. But behind these surprises, the psychoanalytic reading reveals a new truth about the characters of his stories who are the representative of his century or society. Society always creates an ideology and makes its man fantasizing and exercising of that created reality which is surprisingly revealed in O Henry's stories. All three stories, "Last Leaf", "Hearts and Hands", "Cop and the Anthem" analyzed in this article well expose the theory of fantasy (psychology) which is for sure a new surprise to the readers of O Henry who love surprises.

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