

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter lays the foundation for the research by outlining its key elements. It presents the study background, research questions, objectives, significance, and the scope and limitations.

1.1. Background of the Study

A short story is a fictional literary work written in prose and often presented in a concise narrative style (Ummah *et al.*, 2020). Short stories rely on their elements to create a unified and meaningful narrative. These elements form the foundation for building a plot, presenting characters, and conveying a message to the reader. Saragih (2022) states that short stories consist of two types of elements: intrinsic and extrinsic elements. The intrinsic elements include character, characterization, theme, plot, point of view, setting, and message (Nuraini *et al.*, 2022). Intrinsic elements are those that form the internal structure of fictional prose, such as theme, plot, and characterization. Meanwhile, extrinsic elements are those that influence literary works from the outside, such as aspects of education, religion, economics, psychology, and so on.

This research analyzes the intrinsic elements, especially the themes, in short stories by O. Henry. The theme is the foundation of a story and is closely related to various life experiences and similar aspects. To identify themes in works of fiction, it is necessary to draw conclusions from the entire story, not just from parts of it (Muhandra, 2023). By analyzing themes, this research aims to understand the central ideas or concepts that are the focus of the literary work. The theme not only encompasses the issues or topics raised but also reflects the author's values, worldview, and perspective on social or cultural reality.

This research will focus on the short stories by O. Henry. William Sydney Porter, better known by his pen name O. Henry, was born in Greensboro, Guilford County, North Carolina, on September 11, 1802. He passed away in New York City on June 5, 1910 (Henry, 2015). O. Henry was a Renowned writer in America during

the twentieth century. He was known for his ability to craft stories that were both engaging and thought-provoking. O. Henry's writing style is characterized by unexpected twists, making his stories captivating to read. Through his works, he consistently elevated everyday life with high moral standards, establishing himself as one of the most significant figures in the field of fiction.

This research will analyze three short stories by O. Henry; *The Gift of the Magi*, *The Last Leaf*, and *The Cop and the Anthem*. The first short story, *The Gift of the Magi*, tells the tale of a young husband and wife, Della and Jim, who live in poverty. Despite their limited possessions, they love each other deeply and wish to give one another special gifts to celebrate Christmas. Della, having nothing of value except her long, beautiful hair, decides to cut and sell it to buy a watch chain as a Christmas present for Jim. Meanwhile, Jim sells his family's inherited pocket watch to purchase a beautiful hair comb for Della. When they exchange gifts, they realize that each has sacrificed something precious to buy the other's gift. Jim no longer has a pocket watch to pair with the chain Della bought, and Della can no longer use the comb because she has sold her hair.

The second short story, *The Last Leaf* is a short story that depicts hope and sacrifice to survive through the power of art in a painting. It tells the story of the friendship between Johnsy and Sue. Johnsy falls ill with pneumonia and believes that her life depends on the ivy leaves outside her window. She is convinced that when the last leaf falls, she will die. Hearing Sue's concerns about Johnsy, an old painter named Behrman decides to paint a leaf on the wall during a stormy night to give Johnsy hope. His sacrifice rekindles Johnsy's will to live, although Behrman eventually succumbs to pneumonia himself.

The final short story, *The Cop and the Anthem*, tells the tale of a tramp named Soapy. The harsh winter drives him to seek a warm place, and the only solution he can think of is to get himself sent to prison. Soapy knows that in prison, he can find the food and warmth he desperately needs. He tries various ways to get arrested by the police. However, despite his suspicious actions, he always manages to avoid capture. After a series of failed attempts, Soapy sits on a park bench, reflecting on his life, and comes to the realization that he truly wants to change his ways. Ironically, just as he decides to turn his life around, the police arrest him for

sitting in the park in a suspicious manner.

The three short stories by O. Henry will be analyzed using the semiotic theory developed by Charles Sanders Peirce, specifically Peirce's triadic semiotic approach, which includes signs, objects, and interpretants. Through this semiotic analysis, the study will focus on the symbolic elements used by O. Henry in his short stories. The aim of this research is to identify the main symbols found in O. Henry's short stories and explore the symbolic elements used in each story to convey deeper themes. Furthermore, this research aims to analyze how these symbols represent universal themes present in O. Henry's stories, as well as to understand how these symbols not only function within the context of the stories but also reflect values or messages that are relevant to human life in general.

Many researchers have conducted studies on O. Henry's short stories with various research focuses. For example, Heni, (2022), in his research entitled "*Cultural Phenomena and Moral Values in the Short Story The Gift of the Magi*" discusses the cultural phenomena and moral values contained in the story. Similar research was conducted by Luo (2016) with the title "*Analysis of Social Criticism in O. Henry's Short Stories*" which examines social criticism in O. Henry's works. Furthermore, Hanifa (2022), in her research entitled "*Transitivity Analysis in the Short Story The Last Leaf by O. Henry*" analyzed the transitivity aspect in the story The Last Leaf. In addition, Wandasari (2020), in her research entitled "*Archetype Analysis of the Main Characters in O. Henry's Short Story The Gift of the Magi (1905)*" explored the archetypes of the main characters in the story. However, there are still research gaps that have not been extensively explored, particularly in theme analysis using a semiotic approach. Specifically, the application of Peirce's semiotic theory, especially in the analysis of symbols, has not been widely utilized in the study of O. Henry's short stories. This gap presents an opportunity for more in-depth research focusing on symbol analysis to uncover the central themes in these short stories.

This study offers a new perspective by integrating Peirce's semiotics in analyzing themes in three of O. Henry's short stories: *The Gift of the Magi*, *The Last Leaf*, and *The Cop and the Anthem*. This approach not only explores the theme directly but also examines the symbolism used by O. Henry in each short story to

convey deeper messages and values. While these stories are often considered to have simple moral lessons, this symbolic analysis reveals more complex and multidimensional meanings that connect universal values with the social and cultural context of their time. Through Peirce's triadic semiotic theory, which involves sign, object, and interpretant, this research aims to explore how the symbols in these three short stories reflect universal themes.

This study fills the gap in the existing literature and offers a fresh perspective on O. Henry's works. The symbolic analysis conducted not only enriches our understanding of the themes in O. Henry's short stories but also shows how these symbols communicate deeper meanings about life, social values, and the human condition in a more universal context.

1.2. Research Questions

As outlined in the research background provided above, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What do the symbols in O. Henry's short stories reveal?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

Based on the research questions outlined above, this study has two primary objectives, which are as follows:

1. To discover what symbols reveal in O. Henry's short stories

1.4. Significance of the Study

There are several significant contributions of this research, including the following:

1. Theoretical Significance

This research contributes to literary studies by offering a semiotic analysis of symbols in O. Henry's short stories, providing a deeper understanding of their role in conveying universal themes. By applying Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach, this study enhances theoretical discussions on how symbols function as signifiers of deeper meanings in literature. It also broadens the scope of literary

analysis by demonstrating how semiotics can be used as a critical tool for interpreting complex symbolic representations in narratives.

2. Practical Significance

Practically, this research is expected to provide valuable insights for readers, particularly students, educators, and literary enthusiasts, by enhancing their understanding of how symbols in O. Henry's short stories reflect universal themes. By offering a semiotic perspective, this study can help readers explore the deeper meanings of these symbols, enriching their literary interpretation skills. Additionally, it may serve as a reference for educators in teaching literature, particularly in analyzing symbolic representations in literary works.

1.5. Scope and Limitation of the Study

1. Scope

This research focuses on the application of semiotic theory developed by Charles Sanders Peirce theory (1931-1958) as the primary conceptual framework for analyzing symbols in three short stories by O. Henry: *"The Gift of the Magi"*, *"The Last Leaf"*, and *"The Cop and the Anthem"*. Peirce's theory was selected because it provides a systematic approach to understanding the relationships among signs, objects, and interpretations within cultural and literary contexts. The analysis emphasizes exploring the depth of meaning behind the symbols in the texts to uncover the universal themes they convey.

2. Limitation

This research is limited to the analysis of utterances, and narrative text in three short stories by O. Henry: *"The Gift of the Magi"*, *"The Last Leaf"*, and *"The Cop and the Anthem"*. The main focus of this research is to explore and reveal the semiotic symbols present in these stories, which function as the primary means of conveying the meaning and themes. This research aims to identify and analyze the signs found in the characters' utterances, interactions in dialogue, and narrative, all of which contribute to the development of universal themes in depth.