



The Furnished Room

©2010 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

This is perhaps the bleakest of O. Henry's best-known stories. Although the basic ironic plot can be summarized in a sentence—a young man commits suicide in the same room where a young woman for whom he has vainly searched killed herself—it is the musty atmosphere of the room and the suggestion that every place bears the traces of the lives that have inhabited it that makes the story so compelling. It is a story of transience, of lives that move through a bleak, indifferent world, leaving only bits of themselves, which the young man uncovers as he searches through drawers and pokes into every corner and crevice of the room looking for something that remains of the woman he seeks. However, all that is left is an illusory sweet familiar smell, which melodramatically becomes the sweet smell of the gas he turns on in despair, as she did only one week previously. Although the fact that the young man ends up in the very same room in which his lost sweetheart took her life is one of the most extreme coincidences in all of O. Henry's fiction, the power of the atmosphere of the story is so strong that readers are willing to accept it.

The story ends with two old Dickensian landladies prattling over their beer about the death of a young woman in the room the previous week, which the landlady has kept secret because she did not want to lose the young man's rent. As the young man lies dead upstairs, the ending of the story, with its focus on the mendacity of the old women, reinforces the squalor of the room, further suggesting the unfeeling city that has no room for the romanticism of the two lovers.

Bibliography

Current-Garcia, Eugene. *O. Henry*. New York: Twayne, 1965.

Èjxenbaum, B. M. *O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story*. Translated by I. R. Titunik. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1968.

Langford, Gerald. *Alias, O. Henry: A Biography of William Sidney Porter*. New York: Macmillan, 1957.

O'Connor, Richard. *O. Henry: The Legendary Life of William S. Porter*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970.

Pattee, Fred Lewis. *The Development of the American Short Story: An Historical Survey*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923.

Voss, Arthur. *The American Short Story: A Critical Survey*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973.

Copyright Notice

©2010 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

The Furnished Room: The Furnished Room

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/furnished-room-salem>