

Spassky At A Safe Distance, Issue 3

1: Introduction

2: Spassky's Senior Speculation

3: Story + Bonus



1.

[Note: This Was Written In February]

At first I intended this to be a Valentine's-themed issue, but things went like romances usually do: I was infatuated with the idea; I thought our relationship would last forever, so I came to marry it, and even had some offspring with it – none of which were particularly readable. Then, like how romances go, the infatuation grew old, and the products of our union became increasingly tedious to deal with; then I realised I didn't like the idea anymore, nor the things I made with it, so I went out to buy some milk, to try to find someone more interesting at the dairy-aisle...This is what I found.

You'll discover what's written under 2 in just under sixty, but 3, I feel, deserves some introduction. "The Gift of the Magi" is one of the greatest short stories in the English language, or in any language it has ever been translated into; it's by O. Henry – more mustn't really be said – and it felt like a prosecutable offence to not introduce you to it in this month of giving, love, and mistakes – and believe me, this week's story has a lot of all three!

2.

“It was a dark and stormy night;” may be the worst victim of the sentence-sentencing of well-worn sentences of all prints, writings and scribbles ever. It is also the greatest exhibit of why this sentence-sentencing, and the literary judges imposing these, should cease their judicial career forever!

Just yesterday it was a dark and stormy night, and I lay thinking of how many writers would instead describe the scene as a “Howling night”, or a “a night as black as pitch”, or a “Howling night as black as pitch”, and would thereby sound incredibly contrived, and even lose some the point of the nature of the night: for it was a dark and stormy night! Ever since that correct and sensible description of a dark and stormy night has become – if I may put on a basker and stuff a baguette in my mouth – a *cliché*, dark and stormy nights have seemingly disappeared from fiction – especially serious horror. There have been some inky and turbulent nights, some ill-lit and squally nights have surely been documented, and there is no doubt that you’ve read of a few gloomy and blustery nights yourself. But dark and stormy nights have disappeared!

There is a sort of allergy, in literature, against these *clichés*. But isn’t that a bad thing? A saying becomes popular because it’s true: something can definitely be red as blood, white as snow, or pitch-black! If we instead try to dance about a just, and maybe even the best description of a scene, aren’t we just hurting the scene? A writer might be obliged to switch a scene that is dark and stormy for a scene that is just dark, so that they won’t sound *chichéed*, and then where did the stormy-ness go?!

I feel bad for good descriptions: In the current state of *clichés*, they’re like hipsters: they try to do their thing – be a bit unique – but if they do their thing too well other people will do their thing too, until it’s regarded as just a thing – and certainly an exhausted thing.

How many good descriptions does it take until we realise the damage of this persecution? How many things must cease to be red like roses, or cold like ice, or be sweet like honey? Will the judges of *chichés* not put down their gavels before every justly popular description is dead? Until everything is just red, or cold, or sweet?

I think it’s time to bring back dark and stormy nights that are ice-cold and howl like wolves, perhaps not exclusively, but to break free from “rules” that exist only to starve the English language of perfectly reasonable descriptions.

So the next time you write some horror story, don’t be afraid of the invisible *chiché*-judges and their tyranny over English, and if you find yourself in the defendant’s chair, don’t hesitate to bring these scribbles to your case, to defend the writer’s right to write as they perceive right!

3.

This week’s story: [O.Henry's most celebrated story: The Gift of the Magi \(1905\)](#)

Bonus: [A Filmatization of O.Henry's Best Known Short Stories. The Gift of the Magi Included!](#)