

# About The Story Of Henry's The Skylight Room

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**Submitted:** 15-Dec, 2024

**Accepted:** 26-Dec, 2024

**Published:** 29-Dec, 2024

**Vol. 1, No. 1, 2024.** Sociometrics.us

International Journal of Diversity and  
Multiculturalism

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## Abstract

This article explores O. Henry's *The Skylight Room*, analyzing its themes, narrative techniques, and portrayal of urban poverty. Through a detailed examination of the story's characters and setting, the paper highlights O. Henry's critique of societal indifference and his use of irony. The article also delves into the symbolic significance of the skylight room and its broader implications for human resilience and despair.

**Key words:** O. Henry, *The Skylight Room*, irony, urban poverty, symbolism, short story, American literature, New York City, realism, narrative techniques

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## Introduction

O. Henry (William Sydney Porter) is widely celebrated for his short stories that explore everyday life with wit, irony, and compassion. His works often depict the lives of ordinary people in urban settings, particularly in New York City at the turn of the 20th century. Among his many short stories, *The Skylight Room* stands out as a poignant narrative illustrating themes of hope, poverty, and societal indifference. First published in 1906 as part of *The Four Million* collection, the story continues to resonate with readers due to its universal themes and emotionally charged ending.

This study examines the central themes, symbolism, and narrative techniques employed by O. Henry in *The Skylight Room*. By doing so, it aims to shed light on the story's enduring relevance and its commentary on human resilience and social inequalities.

## Materials and Methods

The analysis employs a qualitative approach, focusing on literary analysis techniques to

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dissect the elements of theme, symbolism, and narrative style. Key sources include primary and secondary literature on O. Henry's works, alongside critical interpretations from modern scholars. The study interprets textual evidence to unravel the layers of meaning in *The Skylight Room* and contextualizes it within the socio-economic conditions of early 20th-century New York.

**Setting and Symbolism:** The story's setting plays a crucial role in conveying its themes. The boarding house where Miss Leeson resides represents a microcosm of society, inhabited by various tenants who embody different social classes and attitudes. The "skylight room" itself symbolizes isolation and desperation.

**Physical Confinement:** Its small size, lack of ventilation, and absence of a proper window make it an almost prison-like space, reflecting Miss Leeson's physical and emotional struggles.

**Symbol of Hope:** The skylight represents hope and the dream of escape. Miss Leeson's fascination with the stars, especially the star she names "Billy Jackson," underscores her yearning for beauty and connection.

**Juxtaposition of Themes:** The contrast between the unattainable vastness of the sky and the confined room highlights the gap between human dreams and harsh realities.

**Economic Hardship:** Miss Leeson's struggles reflect the challenges faced by many women in her era, such as securing employment and affordable housing.

**Critique of Apathy:** The landlady and other tenants, despite observing Miss Leeson's plight, remain passive and indifferent. This indifference underscores a societal failure to care for vulnerable individuals.

**Narrative Techniques and Irony:** Irony: The story's conclusion reveals that Miss Leeson's condition is due to "starvation," a tragic irony given her solace in the stars.

**Narrative Voice:** O. Henry's blend of humor and pathos brings Miss Leeson's world to life, while subtly critiquing societal norms and values.

**Character Analysis:** Miss Leeson: Embodies resilience and optimism despite dire circumstances.

**Supporting Characters:** The landlady and tenants act as foils, showcasing societal attitudes ranging from indifference to superficial concern. The doctor symbolizes a belated recognition of Miss Leeson's suffering.

## Results and Discussion

O. Henry's *The Skylight Room* serves as a timeless commentary on poverty, societal

indifference, and human resilience. The symbolic skylight room encapsulates the struggles of individuals marginalized by society, while the story's irony underscores the harsh realities of life.

The enduring relevance of this story lies in its universal themes. It challenges readers to reflect on the importance of empathy and to question societal norms that perpetuate inequality. Through Miss Leeson's character, O. Henry inspires hope while exposing the fragility of human existence.

O. Henry wrote during a period of rapid urbanization and industrialization in the United States. Cities like New York were hubs of opportunity but also rife with inequality. The influx of immigrants and rural migrants into urban centers led to overcrowding, poor living conditions, and social stratification. The Skylight Room captures these realities, shedding light on the lives of individuals relegated to society's periphery.

Through the lens of Miss Leeson's struggles, O. Henry critiques the economic systems that perpetuate poverty and the societal attitudes that normalize indifference. The boarding house serves as a microcosm of these dynamics, with its residents embodying various facets of human behavior—from compassion to callousness.

Miss Leeson's experiences are emblematic of the challenges faced by women in the early 20th century. Limited employment opportunities and societal expectations often forced women into precarious situations. As a typist, Miss Leeson represents the emerging class of working women who sought independence but faced systemic barriers.

O. Henry's portrayal of Miss Leeson's resilience highlights the strength of women in the face of adversity. However, her ultimate fate underscores the fragility of this independence in a society that fails to provide adequate support.

**Irony and Social Critique:** The irony in *The Skylight Room* is not merely a literary device but a tool for social critique. Miss Leeson's naming of the star "Billy Jackson" reflects her yearning for connection, yet the celestial object is as distant and indifferent as the society around her. The doctor's diagnosis of "starvation" is both a literal and metaphorical commentary on Miss Leeson's plight—she is starved not only of sustenance but also of empathy and support.

The skylight itself is a multifaceted symbol. Its placement at the top of the room suggests both aspiration and unattainability. While it offers a glimpse of the sky, it also serves as a reminder of Miss Leeson's confinement. This duality mirrors the broader human condition—the tension between hope and despair, freedom and limitation.

O. Henry's *The Skylight Room* remains a profound exploration of human resilience and societal failure. Its themes of poverty, loneliness, and hope continue to resonate, reminding

readers of the enduring relevance of empathy and compassion. By examining the story's historical context, gender dynamics, and use of irony, this article has sought to illuminate the layers of meaning within this timeless work.

The skylight room, with its confined space and distant view of the stars, serves as a poignant metaphor for the human condition. It challenges readers to reflect on their own roles in perpetuating or alleviating societal indifference. Through its rich symbolism and emotional depth, *The Skylight Room* invites us to look beyond the surface and engage with the struggles and aspirations of those around us.

## Conclusion

The analysis of O. Henry's *The Skylight Room* underscores the profound critique of societal indifference and the struggles of marginalized individuals, as symbolized by the titular room. The study highlights how the narrative juxtaposes hope and despair through the confined, prison-like space of the room, which symbolizes both physical hardship and emotional yearning, further emphasized by Miss Leeson's attachment to the distant star "Billy Jackson." The narrative's irony—where Miss Leeson, starved of sustenance and empathy, finds solace in unattainable celestial beauty—serves as a poignant commentary on social apathy during a period of rapid urbanization and economic disparity. These findings stress the enduring relevance of themes such as poverty, societal neglect, and resilience, encouraging readers to reflect on their responsibilities in addressing inequality. Future research could explore comparative analyses of O. Henry's treatment of gender and economic struggles across his works or examine the reception of his social critiques in different cultural and historical contexts..

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