

ROMANTIC DEVOTION AND SELFLESSNESS IN THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE ROSE

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Abstract. *The Nightingale and the Rose* by Oscar Wilde is a symbolic short story that explores the themes of love, sacrifice, and emotional sincerity. The story presents the contrast between true devotion and selfish human behavior. Through the character of the Nightingale, Wilde shows that real love requires sacrifice and selflessness. According to Wilde (1888), love is portrayed as something more valuable than material wealth or social status. However, the story also criticizes society's shallow understanding of emotions and relationships. The tragic ending demonstrates that genuine love is often ignored or misunderstood in a materialistic world.

Key Words: Romantic devotion, selflessness, sacrifice, symbolism, irony, Victorian literature, true love, materialism, Oscar Wilde.

Introduction. Oscar Wilde was one of the major writers of the Victorian period. His literary works often combine beauty, satire, emotion, and social criticism. *The Nightingale and the Rose* was published in 1888 as part of *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. The story focuses on a Student who believes he cannot win the love of a young girl because he lacks a red rose. The Nightingale hears the Student's sorrow and decides to help him. Wilde (1888) explains that true love is worth sacrifice, even if it leads to suffering and death. The Nightingale sacrifices her life to create the red rose, believing that love is eternal and pure. However, the Student and the girl fail to appreciate the meaning of this sacrifice. The story reflects Victorian ideas about love, morality, and materialism. Wilde criticizes society for valuing wealth and appearance more than sincere emotions. As Abrams (2006) states, Victorian literature frequently explored moral conflicts and emotional suffering through symbolism and realism. Humans declaring eternal love at sunset and abandoning it by lunchtime because somebody offered jewelry. Literature exists because people keep making emotionally ridiculous choices.

Romantic devotion is one of the central themes of *The Nightingale and the Rose*. The Nightingale believes deeply in the power and beauty of true love. When she hears the Student crying for a red rose, she considers his pain sincere and meaningful. The Nightingale decides to sacrifice herself for the happiness of another person. According to Wilde (1888), love is more precious than life itself. The bird searches for a red rose and finally learns that it can only be created through pain and sacrifice. She presses her heart against a thorn and sings all night until her blood turns the white rose red. The Nightingale symbolizes ideal love, devotion, and emotional purity. Carter and McRae (2010) explain that Wilde often used symbolic characters to express moral and philosophical ideas. The Nightingale's actions represent unconditional love because she expects nothing in return for her sacrifice.

In contrast, the Student does not truly understand love. Although he speaks emotionally, his feelings are shallow and temporary. When the girl rejects the rose, he quickly abandons his romantic ideals. Wilde uses this contrast to show the difference between genuine devotion and selfish emotional behavior.

Selflessness is another important theme in the story. The Nightingale sacrifices her own happiness and life for someone she does not know personally. Her actions demonstrate compassion, kindness, and emotional sincerity. The sacrifice scene is the emotional center of the story. Wilde uses poetic language and symbolism to describe the Nightingale's suffering. The red rose symbolizes love, passion, and sacrifice, while the thorn represents pain and suffering. Wilde (1888) shows that true love often requires personal loss and emotional struggle.

However, the Nightingale's sacrifice becomes meaningless because the girl refuses the rose. She chooses expensive jewels instead, showing that material wealth is more important to her than sincere affection. The Student then throws the rose away and claims that love is impractical.

Daiches (1990) argues that Wilde uses irony to criticize the selfishness and materialism of society. The Nightingale dies believing she has helped true love succeed, but the humans fail to value her sacrifice. This tragic ending highlights society's inability to recognize genuine emotional devotion. Victorian society often valued social status and wealth more than emotional honesty. Wilde criticizes these attitudes by presenting the Nightingale as morally superior to the human characters. Humans remain strangely committed to destroying beautiful things and then writing philosophical essays about disappointment afterward. A species dedicated to emotional sabotage with decorative vocabulary.

Symbolism plays a major role in *The Nightingale and the Rose*. The Nightingale represents pure love, artistic beauty, and selflessness. The rose symbolizes romantic passion and sacrifice, while the thorn symbolizes suffering and pain. Wilde uses irony throughout the story. The Nightingale believes her sacrifice will create happiness, but her efforts are ignored and wasted. The Student speaks like a romantic philosopher, but his actions reveal emotional immaturity. The girl values wealth and appearance more than true affection. According to Sanders (2004), Victorian writers frequently used irony and symbolism to criticize social values and human behavior. Wilde uses these literary techniques to reveal the conflict between ideal love and materialistic society. The tragic ending of the story strengthens Wilde's message about the weakness of superficial emotions. The Nightingale's sacrifice is sincere and meaningful, but the human characters fail to understand its value. Wilde suggests that true love and selflessness are rare qualities in society.

Conclusion. In conclusion, *The Nightingale and the Rose* presents the themes of romantic devotion and selflessness through symbolism, irony, and sacrifice. The Nightingale represents pure and unconditional love, while the Student and the girl symbolize selfishness and materialism. Wilde shows that genuine love requires sacrifice and emotional sincerity. According to Wilde (1888), love is more valuable than wealth or social status, but society often fails to appreciate true devotion. The tragic ending demonstrates the conflict between idealistic love and human selfishness. The story remains important in Victorian literature because it combines emotional beauty with social criticism. Wilde successfully reveals the moral weaknesses of society while presenting a powerful message about love, sacrifice, and emotional truth.

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