



Altruistic Birds of Oscar Wilde in “The Happy Prince” and “The Nightingale and the Rose”

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies about the selfless attitudes of the birds in Oscar Wilde’s *The Nightingale and the Rose* and *The Happy Prince*. In these two short stories birds are the selfless and sacrificial heroes. Some writers present their heroes as Gods or humans in their fables, but Oscar Wilde eccentrically used birds as his sacrificial heroes. The nightingale in *The Nightingale and the Rose* and the swallow in *The Happy Prince* are functions as selfless heroes for the sake of others. They tolerate horrible conditions of death just to please people.

KEY WORDS: Selfless love, Altruism, Sacrifice, swallow, Nightingale, life blood, thorns.

INTRODUCTION

Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde was born on 16 October 1854 and died on 30 November 1900. He was an Irish poet and playwright. No name is more inextricably bound to the aesthetic movement of the 1880s and 1890s in England than that of Oscar Wilde. He became one of the most popular playwrights in London in the early 1890s. He published *The Happy Prince and other tales* in 1888, which reveals his gift for romantic allegory in the form of the fairy tale. *The Happy Prince* is probably the most famous fairy tale for children. Wilde told these short stories at dinner parties before they were published illustrates an unusual fact about their intended audience: they were not composed for children.

In these two short stories Oscar Wilde explores the theme of love, sacrifice, altruism through the use of human and animal characters. Wilde compares the altruistic behavior of these nonhuman characters with human characters. *The Happy Prince* stresses the importance of giving of oneself, even of making the ultimate sacrifice, in order to ameliorate the conditions of the poor. *The Nightingale and the Rose* deals in a similar way with giving, but here emphasis is on the need to sacrifice for love. The love of beauty and his conception of its fleeting quality find expression in this story of a nightingale who sacrifices its life to produce the perfect rose.

ALTRUISM

According to the Cambridge dictionary ‘willingness to do things that bring advantages to others, even if it results in disadvantage for yourself’. As the altruist and receiver are the two main components of the altruism, the whole set of action depends upon them. Here the terms interspecies and interspecies are for understanding the role of the altruist i.e. both are of the same species or from two different species. Altruism is acting to help someone else at some cost to oneself. It can include a vast range of behaviors, from sacrificing one’s life to save others.

THE HAPPY PRINCE – THE SELFLESS SWALLOW

The Happy Prince is the story of a majestic statue that looks down over a city. The statue is of a Prince who had had an easy, luxurious life, completely unconcerned by what was happening beyond the walls of his castle. When a bird swallow comes and stays under the feet of Prince, he begs for his help to the match girl, poor writer and the seamstress. The Prince is apparently happy but is weeping bitterly after seeing all the down trodden people. The swallow stayed with the Happy Prince. Rest of his block migrated to Egypt. The swallow had already fallen in love with the plant, but the plant refused swallow’s love proposal. So, the swallow is infuriated and he decides to migrate to Egypt by himself. When the swallow saw the prince’s sadness he felt sorry for him and agreed to help him despite the fact that she did not have lone time, because winter was on its way and he had to emigrate to the warmer lands.

The Swallow guided by the prince, took out the precious materials that covered him to give them to the people who needed them. The prince’s statue looks ugly without the precious stones and gold. The sculpture was no more beautiful and valuable like before. It stood abandoned. Finally the snow came and the swallow died of the snowy season. The leaden heart of the prince had snapped directly in two pieces at the sudden demise of the sweet,

selfless and kind swallow. When the mayor and town councilors saw the dull statue of the prince, they pulled it down soon after. They melted the sculpture in a furnace, yet the broken heart did not melt. Thus it was rendered useless for them so, they discarded it where the dead swallow was lying. Soon, God requested one of His angels to bring the two most valuable things in the city. The angel brought the leaden heart of the prince and the dead swallow. God welcomed the two beings in His garden of paradise and regarded them as His charming creations.

THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE ROSE - PRICE OF LOVE IS THE LIFE BLOOD OF HEART

The story starts when a young student cries near a holm-oak tree because his love demands a red rose from him in case he wants to dance with her. The student fears that there is no red rose in the garden in this autumn season, hence, he may lose his chance of dancing with his lady love. On the holm-oak tree, a nightingale listens to the hue and cry of the young boy. After hearing the Student's sighs, the Nightingale calls him a "true lover" and determines to find him a red rose. She flies around the garden, asking rosebushes if they might grant her a red rose in exchange for a song. Unfortunately, the rosebushes she speaks to only produce white or yellow roses. The nightingale cries and asks for the red rose but she could not find it anywhere in the garden. That's when she finds the rosebush under the window which can offer a red rose in exchange for her heart's-blood. The rose plant gives her the most terrible way of getting it. He says that the only way is if she sings a song for a whole night and ultimately sacrifices her life while giving her heart's pure blood to the plant. Nightingale thinks for a while about the life that she has spent in seeing the beauty of the sun, the green gardens and the moon as well as the fragrances that she smelled. No one wants to give up their life for others love, but she agreed to die for the young student.

The Nightingale goes to the boy and promises him to bring a red rose that will grow from her blood. She also addresses the boy and says that the boy should remember that love is wealthier than philosophy though she feels that philosophy has importance of its own. Nonetheless, the boy does not understand what the nightingale says to him. He does not even know that the price of a red rose is the life of the nightingale. The nearby Oak tree understands what she says; he knows that she is going to die for a red rose, hence, for one last time he wants to hear her song, which she sings for him.

The student meanwhile thinks about his love. He is of the view that she is as selfish as the art of an artist. The nightingale completes her song and goes to the rose plant again. She pushes her breast against the thorn and starts singing a song that she continues to sing for the whole night. She pushes more and more her breast to the thorn and finally she dies and the plant quenches its thirst with the blood of the nightingale. In return, the rose-plant grows a beautiful red rose. The boy looks out of the window and is shocked to see such a beautiful red rose. He plucks the flower and goes to the professor's house to see his love. He wants to tell her the good news that he has found a red rose for her. He is happy that he is able to get her company in the ball party; however, in summary words Oscar Wilde shows that the boy does not perceive the sacrifices of the nightingale to get a rose for him.

At the end of the tale, there is a surprise for the boy. He hands over the girl the red rose but he is astonished that "the girl frowned". She answers: "I am afraid it will not go with my dress and, besides, the Chamberlain's nephew has sent me some real jewels, and everybody knows that jewels cost far more than flowers." The boy realizes that the red rose that is full of love and sacrifices has no value in the eyes of people who prefer material things. He throws the flower in the street while declaring the girl an ungrateful lady. The girl however defends herself while portraying that jewels have more value as compared to the red rose and also she praises the bounties that Chamberlain's nephew has. The nightingale gave its life for his love but finally it was wasted. It felt the pain when the thorn touched the heart but the selfless nightingale ready to tolerate the pain for the love.

THE ALTRUISTIC BIRDS OF OSCAR WILD

In *The Happy Prince* the swallow takes the role of the hero, which is selfless, sacrificial, altruistic and responsible. The swallow decided to stay and act selflessly towards his best friend, The Prince, and rescue the poor. The weather is against the bird, but it did not affect the swallow's great mission. On the opposite, the bird becomes more resolute than before to help the afflicted. It decides to stay in spite of all the hardships around it, and determines to take the responsibility unlike other birds that fly away searching for a warm place, a mission that no bird can accept for the sake of humans. This shows the swallow's sacrifice. At the end of the mission the swallow begins to feel sick and tired, but that weakness does not stop him from helping others. It sacrifices its journey and health for the sake of the Prince and the poor people. Similarly in *The Nightingale and the Rose*, nightingale sacrifices its life to destroy the sorrows of the young lover. Already the bird knows the horrible mission even though it accepts for the boy's love. It doesn't care about its pain and sufferings. It sacrifices itself for the welfare of that boy.

CONCLUSION

These stories accomplish Wilde's aim through using the birds to communicate a serious concept, which is altruism, showing the world that a tiny creature may hold a great purpose inside, one which is greater than anything in this world which is selfless love. All in all the birds of these two short stories offer themselves to reduce human misery and suffering as well as make their wishes come true. The two birds already know that they will die, even though they sacrificed themselves for the welfare of their beloved persons. This denotes the altruism of the birds. Altruism is the unselfish concern for other people, doing things simply out of a desire to help, not because you feel obligated to out of duty, loyalty or religious reasons. It involves acting out of concern for the well-being of other people. Here these two birds also performed unselfishly and without any expectations of reward.

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