

A judicious analysis of The Nightingale and the Rose for people of fifteen

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Abstract: *Wilde's parodic fairy tale The Nightingale and the Rose is often considered a critical enigma due to its artistic ambiguity. The teller himself has restricted his tale to 'childlike people between eighteen and eighty'. The target population of this study consists of fifteen year old students who are embarking on the path of appreciating literature in Sri Lanka and the tale is contained in their anthology. It is a rich artifact due to its dexterity of plot, multiple themes, dramatics and the powerful poetics in discourse. Analyzing the short story with intricate motifs woven into its fabric this study depicts it as an aesthetic experiment with an inherent transformative power. Yet pedagogic caution is a requisite as Wilde himself has stated that the tale has 'many secrets, many meanings and many answers' embedded in it. Judicious analysis of Wilde's tale will make the young adults explore some age relevant secrets, meanings and answers while discovering the beauty of his art.*

Keywords: *Appreciating literature, fifteen year old students, pedagogic caution, The Nightingale and the Rose.*

I. Introduction

1.1 OSCAR WILDE (1854 –1900)

Oscar Wilde was a famous Irish writer and poet. He was born to an upper-middle-class family and graduated from the Trinity College in Dublin where he studied Classics¹. In 1879 Wilde moved to London. Not only were his short stories popular he was also one of the most creative playwrights. The Nightingale and the Rose was originally published among the narratives in Wilde's first volume of fairy tales, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* in 1888.

Wilde wrote during the Victorian age (1837 – 1901) when Queen Victoria reigned England. The story is set in London where the remnants of the prior Romantic era were still evidenced. Romanticism idealized both love and passion. Though true love and passion have a thematic value in the short story skepticism makes Wilde address the negative effects of industrialization on the Victorian society: individualism, materialism and utilitarianism using prose as his medium. In his letter to G. H. Kersley in June 1888 Wilde claims that his first fairy tales were 'meant to mirror modern life in a form remote from reality- to deal with modern problems in a mode that is ideal and not imitative' (cited in Tattersall, 1991: 135)^[1]. Thus Wilde worked within the genre of fairy tales but rather than imitating it he subverted it innovatively to produce an ideal mode for exploring and exposing the weaknesses of the society he lived in.

Furthermore during this period the Aesthetic Movement in Europe theorized that aesthetic values should be prioritized over moral themes in literature. The aim of art, according to this movement, was simply to create beauty. The influence of Aestheticism too can be found in the writings of Wilde.

His writings fall into the class of social satire where he skillfully comments on life in London during the 1890's which he considered to be decadent. Social class was used by Wilde to portray value systems. Thus rather than been depicted as individual most of characters are stereotype representatives of class, race and gender values of the society. The upper class as described by Wilde reflected superficial values and used snobbery to look down upon the people of lower stratifications.

Wilde's work very often has an open ending. Human weaknesses are exposed but no solutions are provided. Thus the reader is left to grapple with the unresolved conflicts. Though based on a specific era his work transcends time and the themes have universality.

According to Willoughby (1993)^[2] Wilde's *The Nightingale and the Rose* had a number of analogous predecessors. Of them, one is a medieval myth which states that the blood of Christ turned all white roses red at the time of his crucifixion. Many overt and subterranean associations with this medieval legend: the pale white rose turning a delicate pink and finally crimson; blood and the ultimate sacrifice suggest that it might have had an influence on Wilde when crafting the short story.

¹ This is the study of the languages, literature, laws, philosophy, history, art, archaeology and belonging to the culture of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classics>

1.2 The Fifteen Year Old Readers

The fifteen year old Sri Lankan students, the target population in this study, are novices to the art of Appreciation of English Literary Texts which is the title of their anthology. Wilde himself classifies *The Nightingale and the Rose* as a fairy tale but states that it is not for children, but for 'childlike people from eighteen to eighty' (cited in Neikirk, 2009: 41)^[3]. Thus this population is still short of three years to be eligible. But they are young adults and will abhor the stratification: children. They are 'childlike people' who are at the threshold of the transient period of adolescence when a child develops into an adult. Should *The Nightingale and the Rose* gain entry to their anthology?

Answering in the affirmative this study argues that the short story has a multitude of merits which makes it excellent raw material for embarking on the process of appreciation of the short story. The aptness for the age group lies in the tightness of the plot, the powerful symbolism, vivid imagery, the economy and the beauty of language, the thematic value and the entailed social criticism. It is a perfect specimen for detecting the qualities of a good short story.

1.3 Age and Social Aptness

The target population belongs to a generation which question and doubt the 'they lived happily ever after' finale within the realm of a fairy tale. In the current social context in Sri Lanka 'good is rewarded and evil is punished' too is convoluted and beyond reality. Thus as Neikirk (2009: 41)^[4] suggests the canon of fairytales and their 'concepts morph into their perspective of reality'. The reality is that the modern teenage girl would hate to sit 'winding blue silk on a reel'. There is no need as they buy their clothes off the rack. Such leisurely activity adds a 'once upon a time' touch to *The Nightingale and the Rose* to the modern reader, 127 years after its publication. But the symbolism transcends time. Girls still engage in, at this age of equal gender rights, trivial feminine activities which boys would not dream of doing. The majority are feminine feminists.

This generation has read and recited Roald Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes* and enjoyed the broad farce. Red Riding Hood 'whips a pistol from her knickers', kills the wolf and when seen again is wearing a 'lovely furry wolf skin coat.' Cinderella declares 'No more Princes, no more money', wishes for a 'decent man' and marries a 'lovely feller, a simple jam maker by trade', and 'they were happy ever after'. But that was before they became teenagers. At fifteen there is dire requirement to be weaned of broad farce and explore the subtler flavours of humour: Wit, Satire and Irony. Wilde's fairy tale has the power to metamorphose them and turn them into connoisseurs of these higher forms of humour.

Analyzing other characteristics of the daughter of the Professor sharpen their world view. They would agree that guys, or even girls, if you are not interested in them should be told off, not encouraged. But the callousness of the way the girl did it and the reasons spelt out and rubbed in would not receive approval of the majority. True appreciation of the short story will create awareness of the materialism, class consciousness and false values based on appearances in the daughter of the Professor. Evidence for all these human weaknesses exists around them but such awareness creation would lead to self-questioning: am I going to be tainted by such negative values? They learn to not only identify but also critically evaluate prevailing attitudes and values in the contemporary Sri Lankan society.

Furthermore this age group has to struggle with a formerly little known emotion: Love. On Valentine's Day a red rose is sold at exorbitant prices in Sri Lanka. You will find many a young boy proudly carrying one for his love. These youthful readers, whether male or female, are taught the consequences of unrequited love: disillusionment and frustration. The Student mishandling rejection will make them probe alternate ways where they need not turn into a recluse. They will also be taught that discarding Love as a silly thing after rejection is, in their own terminology, 'sour grapes'. Most importantly they will learn to discern between true love and infatuation.

The manner in which the Student resolves to shut himself up with dusty tomes of knowledge might give rise to many a parallel. It reflects a very modern affliction the young generation suffers from: reclusiveness. In search of emotional and physical isolation it might not be dusty books they seek. Instead alienating yourself from the problems of the world outside can occur in the form of addiction to and seeking refuge in various forms of electronic media. Is resorting to reclusiveness on the rebound a solution? Let them find answers. Furthermore the most enthralling aspect of the short story is it's the open ended finale. This age group will grapple with the above and a multitude of other questions. Did the Nightingale sacrifice its life in vain? Should she have let her heart rule over her head? Is love better than life, as the Nightingale believed? Thus as evidenced above for the student who is taking the first steps towards the appreciation of the genre of short story Wilde's *The Nightingale and the Rose* is a unique experience.

1.4 Genre: Parodic Fairy Tale

de Medeiros and Gomes (2015)^[5] state that until 1860, the fairy tales published in Britain (for example collections by Hans Andersen, and brothers Grimm) had a clear didactic function to preach the values and ideals

of Victorian society, which included earnestness, virtue, hard work, propriety, and restraint. Many scholars (Hutcheon, 2000^[6]; Tolkien, 1983^[7]; Zipes, 2006^[8]) consider that *The Nightingale and the Rose* has a dissident function and agree that it falls within the genre of parodic fairy tales.

Zipes (2007)^[9] identifies one distinctive quality which makes a literary work acquire the nuances of a fairy tale. In a fairy tale, The characters, settings, and motifs are combined and varied according to specific functions to induce wonder. (p. 5)

Moreover Tolkien (1983, p. 113)^[10] states that the characters in a fairy tale need not be restricted to 'fairies or elves'. The fairy tale quality is often generated with talking animals and plants, and even 'ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted' (ibid). In sum the sense of wonder and enchantment woven into a short story and the inclusion of magical talking plants and animals add a fairy tale quality to it distinguishing it from other modern short literary genres.

The Nightingale and the Rose may not have 'fairies or elves' but within the setting of the garden talking animals and plants bewitch, especially, the young reader. Equally enthralling is the creation of the rose which is sheer magic. Thus Wilde's craft adds a fascination which is generally created within the genre of fairy tales. But the magic has a short life within the story. The semantics in the verbal exchanges of the animals and plants and their character traits lift them above mundane personifications. They have many human weaknesses. This turns the garden to a thing unrelated to the canon of fairy tales.

The Lizard is a cynic, the Daisy has cultivated mannerisms, and the Oak-tree has feelings as it 'was very fond of the little Nightingale' but though it understood the gravity of the Nightingale's decision it passively accepts it and hastily bids a farewell: 'I shall feel very lonely when you are gone.' Wilde himself has declared that there is the 'other half of the garden' where rather than enchantment the reader will find 'suffering and sorrow' (Wilde 2005: 349)^[11]. Thus *The Nightingale and the Rose* is not the archetypal fairy tale. It is raised to a higher form of art through the use of parody.

Parody can be defined as deliberately copying a style of something to create amusement through ridicule. Parody need not be limited to ridicule. According to Hutcheon (2000: 54)^[12] 'parody can use irony easily and naturally as a preferred, even privileged, rhetorical mechanism'. Wilde uses the genre of fairy tale but he converts his storyline into a parody by not only by the removal of enchantment from the garden but also subverting the happy ending habitually associated with fairy tales.

Agreement comes from de Medeiros and Gomes (2015: 30)^[13] who state that,

The lack of a happy ending in the short story both work to promote Wilde's parodic intent towards the fairy-tale tradition and to strengthen the social criticism towards a materialistic and utilitarian society.

Thus discarding ridicule Wilde's narrative style prefers the rhetorical mechanism of irony and flavours it with wit. He imitates the fairy-tale tradition but uses ironic inversion flouting its norms. Irony is generated through the description of youthful life in Victorian England. It is denoted as based on false values. Even the pursuit of higher knowledge is parodied by Wilde. Utilitarian values win over genuine emotions. Using ironic inversion Wilde makes the Nightingale possess the higher human qualities: compassion, true love and sacrifice making the author claim that she is the only one worthy of Romance.

Additionally ironic inversion of the fairy-tale tradition of a handsome prince and beautiful princess enhance the parodic excellence in Wilde. The character of the daughter of the Professor is devoid of physical description as is the Student. Unlike the sweet, docile princesses in fairy-tales she is sharp tongued, cold and calculating. The macho prince is reduced to a weeping imbecile.

Wilde also seems to explore the stereotypical gender roles through the Student and the girl. Her father is a learned professor and the only other male in the narrative, his student is a recluse amongst great dusty books of Philosophy and Metaphysics. She is given the conventional tasks of winding thread, dancing 'so lightly that her feet will not touch the floor', and thriving among admiring courtiers. Thus unlike in fairy-tales Education is brought in as a theme by Wilde but it is parodied as it brings out the gender bias and the final outcome of knowledge.

Furthermore a clear subversion of the fairy tale genre is evidenced in the radical outcome of the short story. According to Pihlström (2014: 43)^[14],

When children are gradually initiated into moral thinking- for example- through traditional fairy tales- they usually learn that the good will eventually be rewarded and the bad 'will get what they deserve'. The protagonist in a fairy tale typically gets a reward for a morally heroic action, while the villains are punished or destroyed. However according to Bushakevitz (2009: 103)^[15] Wilde's tale does not subscribe to the above traditional moral thinking introduced by fairy tales.

In *The Nightingale and the Rose*, good is not rewarded nor is evil punished. The fact that the professor's daughter does not accept the student's offer of the rose cannot be viewed as a punishment for the

student, since his reaction to the rejection demonstrates that his ‘love’ of the girl was insignificant even to him. It would have been a reward for the nightingale had the girl accepted the rose, but this does not happen.

In sum through these subversions Wilde not only parodies the genre of classical fairy tale but uses it as a vehicle for ‘his elegant style and keen wit to give full expression both to his philosophy of art and his critique of English high society’ (Zipes, 2007, p. 167)^[16]. Additionally, through the deft use of art Wilde has been able to lift the prose away from the boundaries of English society in the Victorian era as the social satire can be extended to many a society in the contemporary world including the Sri Lankan.

The short story has other valuable assets. The artistic dexterity in the crafting of the main components of a short story: plot, theme, and characterization, makes *The Nightingale and the Rose* a technically perfect artifact for young learners of literature who are commencing prose analysis.

II. The Nightingale And The Rose: An Analysis

2.1 The Model Plot Development

The fine art of plot development in a short story where language should be economical yet retain its beauty reaches its perfection in *The Nightingale and the Rose*. The technical excellence of the plot can be clearly seen through Figure 1 below.

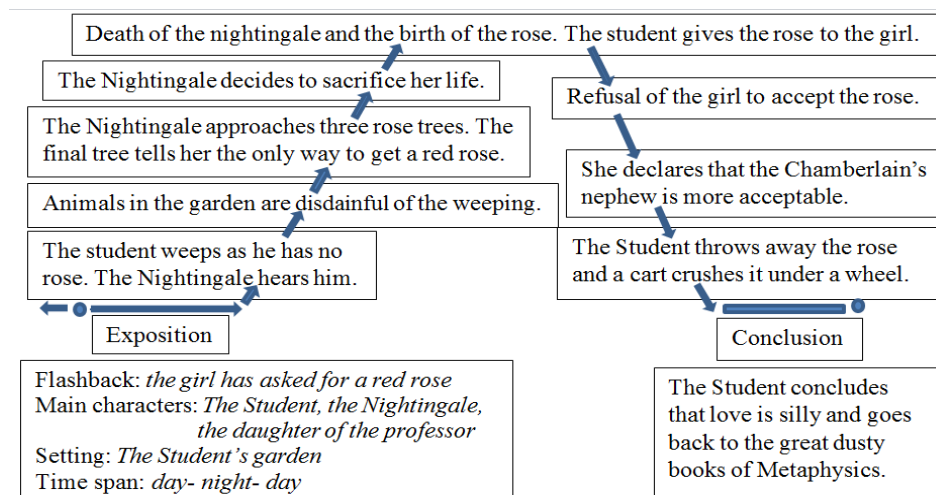


Figure 1: The plot diagram: *The Nightingale and the Rose*

Expanding each component of the plot the young learners experience the artistic genius of a master craftsman.

2.2 Exposition

At the beginning of the exposition using a flashback the author introduces the main conflict. The Student is attracted to his professor’s daughter and she has asked for a red rose to dance with him. It is not a demand which can be fulfilled as the Student says ‘in my entire garden there is no red rose’. The inability to find a rose makes ‘his beautiful eyes’ fill with tears and decide that his life is ‘wretched’.

2.3 Rising Action

Across each stage of the Rising Action the story moves swiftly while attaining a magical quality.

2.3.1 Entry of the Nightingale and his empathy with the Student

The Nightingale hears the Student weeping and judges him to be genuinely in love and states ‘Here at last is a true lover’. He listens to the lamentation of the Student. A flash forward is used in this instance to create a powerful imagery of the ballroom scene through the eyes of the Student summarized in Table 1 below.

TABLE I: the Student’s predicament in a flash forward

If I have a red rose	If I do not have a red rose
‘I shall hold her in my arms, and she will lean her head upon my shoulder, and her hand will be clasped in mine.’	‘I shall sit lonely, and she will pass me by. She will have no heed of me, and my heart will break’.

Based on the outward demonstration of grief the Nightingale concludes, ‘Here indeed is the true lover’.

Another flash forward where the Student’s words vividly describe the girl and visualize his plight at the ball is summarized in Table II below.

TABLE II: At the ball

The girl at the ball	The Student's plight
'My love will dance to the sound of the harp and the violin. She will dance so lightly that her feet will not touch the floor, and the courtiers in their gay dresses will throng round her.'	'But with me she will not dance, for I have no red rose to give her'.

The dramatic quality of the narrative intensifies as the Nightingale watches as the Student flings 'himself down on the grass', buries 'his face in his hands' and weeps.

2.3.2 Other animals in the garden

During the next stage of rising action the story takes a fairy tale quality. Each animal is personified and given specific human qualities. The Daisy is demure, ladylike and 'whispers' in a 'soft, low voice'.

The opposite is found in the inquisitive Butterfly who is engaged in the useless activity of 'fluttering about after a sunbeam'. Here Wilde seems to be creating associations with a hyperactive social butterfly who is flitting around. They are scornful about the reason for the Student's weeping and together they express their disdain by stating: 'how very ridiculous!' The Lizard who runs 'with his tail in the air' is 'a cynic' and he 'laughed outright' demonstrating no qualms about flouting social etiquette. Though the talking animals add to the fairy tale quality of the short story the technique used by Wilde makes it a social gathering of personifications, each decked with a stereotypical human characteristic.

2.3.3 The Nightingale and the red rose tree

Not discouraged by her encounter with the animals in the garden the Nightingale decides to help the Student and approaches the rose trees in the garden. Finally she finds a red rose tree. But it says that the harsh winter 'has chilled my veins, and the frost has nipped my buds, and the storm has broken my branches'.

When asked for a method of getting a red rose the tree states 'but it is so terrible that I dare not tell it to you.' Here a very human trait is hinted at by the author. It is human nature to pretentiously prewarn a destructive action especially if you are going to benefit out of it. It clears one's conscience. The rose tree knows that she 'shall have no roses at all this year' thus this is a good opportunity to fulfil its desire to bloom. The moment the Nightingale says 'Tell it to me' the veneer of concern is shed making it a false social requirement. The tree does not need much persuasion and unemotionally gives step by step details of the dreadful way a red rose could be created. The change of tone in diction of the rose tree moves from dissuasion to authoritative.

- 'You **must** build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart's-blood.
- You **must** sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you **must** sing to me by moonlight.
- All night long you **must** sing to me, and the thorn **must** pierce your heart, and your life-blood **must** flow into my veins, and become mine.'

The diction of the rose tree is full of imperatives; a cold blooded description of a process. Here too the personification is not restricted to the ability to talk. The insistent must repeated at each step in the lines above shows an eagerness for very detail in the process to be perfected. No camouflaging of the suffering involved is indicated throughout and at the climax of the pain 'your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine' is clearly stated by the rose tree.

Thus the Nightingale is made fully aware of the severity of pain and the length of suffering. But she decides to sacrifice her life. Then the increasing eagerness and the selfishness of the rose tree are strongly conveyed by the repetition of the line below.

'Press closer, little Nightingale,' cried the Tree, 'or the Day will come before the rose is finished.'

Under the façade of helping the Nightingale the rose tree keeps spurring her on to fulfil the deed and the finale is reached when the rose tree exclaims joyously,

'Look, look!' 'the rose is finished now'

Devoid of any regret on the destruction of the life of the Nightingale the rose tree victoriously announces to the world the attainment of her goal. This is a very human weakness: triumphant self-declarations which reek of personal glorification with no recognition given to the weighty contribution made by others. Thus the personified rose tree is yet again a vehicle to make the reader become conscious of human weaknesses.

2.3.4 The soliloquy of the Student

In between the decision of the Nightingale to sacrifice herself and the creation of the rose the author dramatically makes the Student talk to himself using a soliloquy form. A soliloquy is a literary technique normally associated with the genre of drama. Through a soliloquy a character reveals his or her inner thoughts to an audience. In this instance it is the reader who hears the inner thoughts of the Student. It seems that this soliloquy of the Student has multi purposes. When the Student says 'She has form,' and asks himself 'has she got feeling?' and goes on to say 'she is all style, without any sincerity' he might be thinking of the girl. Then this foreshadowing hints at the future as he is having doubts. The reader is pre warned that the girl, though fashionable and in demand, might not have been sincere when she says that she will dance with the Student if he brings a red rose.

On the other hand the Student was thinking about the Nightingale during the above observations it connotes that he lacks the aesthetic sensibility to appreciate and understand the beauty of the song. Ambiguity is also connoted by the following line.

She would not sacrifice herself for others.

If it is about the Nightingale the Student's lack of appreciation and incomprehension of the emotional depth of others is conveyed. This is heightened as the Nightingale does indeed sacrifice herself for his happiness later in the story. If it is about the girl it foreshadows the futility of the attraction in the Student towards a girl who would not sacrifice her material comforts and social status for the love of a Student.

The rest of the soliloquy too serves different aims of the author. It critiques the attitude of bookish scholars who thrive on theory towards artists.

'Arts are selfish..... they do not mean anything, or do any practical good'.

Thus the economy and the power of language make the fifteen year old readers not only grapple with the multi meanings but also the enigma unfolded leave them in awe of the flawless craftsmanship.

2.4 CLIMAX

The climax of the story is reached when the Nightingale sacrifices herself. The gradual death and the birth of the red rose are vividly described. The increasing pain of the Nightingale keeps time with the increased tempo of her song which ironically is a celebration of eternal love as depicted in the lines below.

'Bitter, bitter was the pain, and wilder and wilder grew her song, for she sang of the Love that is perfected by Death, of the Love that dies not in the tomb'.

As the bird grows weaker everything around her responds to her last burst of music. The effect it had on the listeners is powerfully depicted as follows.

- The white Moon heard it, and she forgot the dawn, and lingered on in the sky.
- Echo bore it to her purple cavern in the hills and woke the sleeping shepherds from their dreams.

At the moment of its birth the red rose hears the final cadences of the song and 'it trembled all over with ecstasy' while the Nightingale lay dead 'in the long grass, with the thorn in her heart'. The student sees the rose and says that it is a 'wonderful piece of luck' to discover what he was craved for, plucks it and takes it to the daughter of the Professor. Then the story moves through the stages of Falling Action.

2.5 Falling Action

The twist in the plot is expected after the climax. The young readers witness the death of the hero and await the rose to serve its purpose. They are cruelly brought back to reality during the Falling Action. In crafting the Falling Action Wilde seems to leave behind the beautiful poetry of his language thus shedding the prior magical quality created in the story. Reality is harsh and is handled with great economy.

2.5.1 The rejection

The girl refuses to accept the rose. First she frowns and protests stating,

'I am afraid it will not go with my dress'

This highlights her superficial values. Then she discloses that the Chamberlain's nephew is more acceptable as he had sent 'real jewels' and he is rich enough to have 'silver buckles' in his shoes. Her final words 'who are you? Only a Student' cruelly point out that his inferior social position makes him an undesirable suitor. Thus her reasons for rejecting the Student clearly convey her class consciousness and materialistic values.

2.5.2 The plight of the rose

The Student angrily throws away the rose and 'a cart wheel went over it'. The rose which was created through the supreme sacrifice of life is thus discarded symbolizing the death of true romantic love.

2.5.3 Resolution

Though this stage is titled the resolution the conflicts in the story are not resolved. The Student concludes ‘What a silly thing love is’ and goes back to the great dusty books of Metaphysics. By the word silly love is considered to be a trivial emotion which could be easily cast-off. The sacrifice of the Nightingale is wasted on shallow youth such as the Student and daughter of the Professor. The open ended finale leaves the reader contemplating on multiple human weaknesses depicted within the story.

2.6 THEMES

The short story *The Nightingale and the Rose* is rich in its thematic value. The allegorical prose weaves themes into the narration with dexterity and questions many values embedded in our social order. Most themes carry an ironical piquancy and many myths about human emotions such as Love is ‘wonderful’, ‘precious’ and it brings joy to the hearts of mankind are shattered. Other themes such as unbalanced education too are depicted as negative forces.

2.6.1 Love

Multi forms Love are examined in short story: True love, infatuation and conditional love.

TABLE 3: A contrastive analysis of three aspects of love

True Love	Infatuation	Conditional Love
Represented by the <i>Nightingale</i>	Represented by the Student	Represented by the professor’s daughter
True Love involves sacrifice, selflessness and suffering. It is one of the strongest human emotions.	This form of love is impulsive and superficial as it is based on mere physical attraction. Outward demonstration of its strength (such as offer of gifts, weeping) is usually associated with infatuation.	Conditional Love is not genuine. As its name suggests it sets down conditions which need to be satisfied. Even when one condition is satisfied moves to other conditions in order to avoid commitment.
True Love is wiser than Philosophy and mightier than Power.	Brands True Love as a silly thing. ‘it is always telling one of things that are not going to happen, and making one believe things that are not true’. It is ‘quite unpractical’.	Is often based on social conditions as materialism and status. The mind is calculating and crafty and works towards obtaining the maximum in these two spheres.
True ‘Love is better than Life’.	A false passion which does not think of sacrifice.	This form of love does not associate itself with emotions.
True Love is a ‘Love that dies not in the tomb’. It stands the test of time.	It is an intense feeling but without the quality of being believable. Short term and easily forgotten.	Alters and seeks of wealth and a higher social class in the partner. It is transferred easily to a better contender.
True Love is the rarest among mankind. It is often discarded as the red rose for a lesser emotion which might not demand sacrifice.	Infatuation is a common form of love. It is full of doubts and is fickle.	Though projected as a female affliction could be equally applicable to males. This too is a common form of love.
All three forms of love are universal and applicable to all times.		

2.6.2 Education

Education is given a fairly negative value in the short story. It is represented through the self-consuming study of Philosophy² and Metaphysics³. Though the Student peruses the nature of existence, truth, life and the universe it has not taught him of human emotions. He is unable to discern between true love and infatuation.

The education received by the Student is symbolized by ‘great dusty books’. Theoretically it is great as it contains knowledge which comes down from renowned philosophers in the world. But he term dusty denotes that it is ancient knowledge which theoretically searches for meaning, in addition to other things, of human life. Such education has left the Student’s defining his short experience in love as a ‘quite unpractical’, shallow emotion. Furthermore as far as human behavior is concerned, he states that ‘in this age to be practical is everything’. This is lop sided philosophy.

Wilde’s technique carefully keeps the Student away from responding or feeling the stronger emotions of mankind. His reaction to the beauty of the rose is ‘I am sure it has a long Latin name’. He has no qualms about plucking it. Wilde makes him see the rose but not the Nightingale ‘dead in the long grass, with the thorn in her heart’. Symbolically he may be suggesting that the form of education the Student is engaged in has left him blind to sacrifice and selflessness. Additionally he lacks an aesthetic sense which is concerned with beauty and art. This is heightened by his cynicism towards artists

Thus the system of education undergone by the Student has left him an unbalanced individual. Devoid of the fine-tuning of his aesthetic sense, education has created a human being who is ‘practical in everything’.

² The study of nature and the meaning of the universe and human life. It involves a particular set or system of beliefs resulting from the search for knowledge about life and the universe. These beliefs can guide a person to think deeply about things.

³ The branch of Philosophy which deals with the nature of existence, truth and knowledge.

Wilde is critical of an education system which is unbalanced. As symbolized through the Student it spews out insensitive human beings lacking the higher forms of human emotion.

Thus Wilde suggests that intellectual development devoid of aesthetic development results in an individual with a shallow viewpoint towards life. Agreement comes from an educationist of modern times, Denac (2014: 1714)^[17], who suggests that 'aesthetic education influences the experiencing, feeling and enjoying of beautiful things as a counterbalance to our currently rationalized world'. Analyzing the beauty of literary art will provide such a counterbalance at a young age to the target population of this study.

2.6.3 Reason vs. passion

The theme reason vs. passion is addressed through the Nightingale. Passion is a very strong human emotion which can erupt in many forms: love, hatred or as sympathy. The personified Nightingale is passionately in love with true love. She sings about true love. She rejoices when she discovers, according her blind estimation, 'the true lover'. But this is ironically based on the strength of the Student's weeping. Furthermore, based on outwardly appearance she assumes that his suffering is due to the true love he feels towards the daughter of the Professor as it has 'made his face like pale ivory'. Thus the Nightingale feels a strong empathy with 'the true lover'.

Reason comes in the form of her fellow mates in the garden. Together they state that crying for a red rose is 'very ridiculous'. The red rose-tree warns that the process of creating a red rose in winter is 'so terrible that I dare not tell it to you'. Thus reason where judgment is passed through logical thinking was available for the Nightingale. The fact that her own rational powers too advised her on not sacrificing her life is evidenced in the following line.

'Death is a great price to pay for a red rose,'

But in the final outcome passion wins over reason. Her passionate desire to make the true lover happy makes her decide to sacrifice her life. She considers her self-sacrifice to be insignificant in comparison to preserving the continuity of true love. Thus she contemplates,

'Yet Love is better than Life, and what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?'

Finally disregarding reason she decides to sacrifice her life for her passionate love for true love. She asks but one favour in return.

'All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true lover'.

But both her request and deed are of no avail. The outcome of her sacrifice, the red rose, is brutally crushed under the wheels of a cart. Instead of being a true lover the Student returns to his dispassionate perusal of knowledge. Thus finally passion's reign over reason makes the Nightingale's sacrifice seem outwardly futile. The examining of the theme self-sacrifice is a dire requirement at this juncture.

2.6.4 Self-sacrifice

The Nightingale is used by Wilde to encode the theme of self-sacrifice into the short story. Killen (2007: 42)^[18] states that Wilde in the form of the Nightingale has produced 'a beautiful creation that embodies the perfection of artistic self-sacrifice'. But Shewan(1977)^[18] is critical about the outcome and the intention of such self-sacrifice. Identifying two forms of self-sacrifice he states that the first is for altruistic motives and considers it as futile and wasteful. Secondly the other form of self-sacrifice, according to Shewan, is in pursuit of a personal vision and he considers it to be as egotistical as any other form of self-realization.

2.6.4.1 Altruistic and futile

If self-sacrifice of the Nightingale falls under the first form identified by Shewan(1977)^[19] it is based on altruistic motives. Altruism is selflessness and, in principle, is the practice of concern for the welfare of others. Shewan's (ibid) altruistic sacrificial love ends in futility. This raises the question whether the Nightingale's self-sacrifice was futile and wasteful.

According to de Medeiros and Gomes (2015: 30)^[20] the Nightingale 'values immensely the matter that serves as her inspiration'. The source of her inspiration is an amalgamation of imagination, sensibility and art. In the short story the outcome is a celebration of transcendental true love which seems to be beyond the limits of human experience or knowledge. This celebration of true love is a strong stimulus which possesses the power to create a mental response in the reader.

Agreement comes from Culler (2011) ^[21] who states that the diction of the Nightingale generates mental reactions such as perception, thoughts and feelings in the reader. He (ibid) further states that these 'mental processes give an insight into people's consciousness and how they sense the experience of the reality at metalanguage level' (p. 34).

Thus to judge whether the self-sacrifice of the Nightingale was futile and wasteful we have to examine the power of the linguistic strategies used by Wilde. Wilde's narrative at metalanguage level is a blend of music and poetry. The poetic devices such as repetition and the incremental comparatives in the first half of the line below powerfully depict the increasing pain and the mounting passion in the Nightingale's song. The musicality adds to the sensations thus generated heightening the suffering.

Bitter, bitter was the pain, and wilder and wilder grew her song, for she sang of the Love that is perfected by Death, of the Love that dies not in the tomb.

The second half of the line conveys the joy derived by the Nightingale as she sings to immortalize true Love. Here the tone of the line mellows down. As the theme of her song is directly conveyed to the reader Wilde strategically points out that self-sacrifice in the name of what one truly believes is not futile. The value of such a sacrifice is that in the mind of the reader it creates the consciousness that true Love and sacrifice are kindred entities. Thus what Wilde demands from the reader is to transcend beyond the linguistic level and enter the world outside through meta-analysis of the text. Agreement come from Waugh (1984: 3) ^[22] who states that meta-analysis is required 'in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers. In fiction they are required in order to explore the relationship between the world of the fiction and the world outside the fiction'.

Thus the thematic value of the Nightingale symbolizing true love based on sacrifice enlightens the young reader to the conflicting norms and values associated with love in the human world. The human norms and values are depicted vividly through the representative characters of the young Student and the daughter of the Professor. They create the foil for true love: infatuation which is transient and conditional love based on status and materialism. The impact of the negativity awakens the young reader not only to the rarity but also the necessity for true love amongst mankind. This awakening itself makes the Nightingale's sacrifice devoid of futility.

2.6.4.2 Egotistic

If the Nightingale's self-sacrifice falls under the second form identified by Shewan(1977) ^[23] it is an ego ride in pursuit of a personal vision. The personal vision of the Nightingale is encompassed in her statement that 'Love is a wonderful thing'. Then she states 'what I sing of he suffers: what is joy to me, to him is pain. The 'Nightingale understood the secret of the Student's sorrow' and this insight makes her decide that it is her mission to convince the Student that Love is joyous.

'Be happy,' cried the Nightingale, 'be happy; you shall have your red rose. I will build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with my own heart's-blood'. All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true lover.'

Egoistic people are associated with extraordinary levels of pride and are self-centered and self-loving. Egoists are self-publicists, are self-protective and often shun pain and suffering. What Wilde is able to do through the diction of the bird in the above lines is to show the reader the simple joy the Nightingale will derive as she creates the red rose. The beauty of the deed is heightened as the red rose is created out of music by moonlight. The willingness to undergo suffering is brought forth as she bravely states that she will 'stain it with my own heart's-blood'. The humble invitation to the Student to 'be a true lover' contradicts an egoistic demand for public acknowledgement.

Furthermore many analysts of the short story (Killeen, 2007^[24]; Waugh, 1984^[25]; Willoughby, 1993^[26]) draw a parallel between the self-sacrifice through crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the self-sacrifice of the Nightingale. The main association of the word crucifixion is a slow painful death. Further in ancient Greek it translates as impalement. Both associations are present in the self-sacrifice of the bird. She is impaled on a thorn and dies a slow painful death.

According to Jones (2004) ^[27] Christ's death carries our sins away from us by teaching us love, self-denial and goodness. Thus Christ's self-sacrifice cannot be linked to egotism. It served a purpose. Jones (ibid) further states that the New Testament supports the idea that Christ died chiefly to make mankind achieve a state of goodness that is transcendent. Thus the self-sacrifice of the Nightingale too serves an artistic purpose. It awakens the reader to the values which are depicted as lacking in mankind: true love, self-denial and goodness.

Willoughby (1993: 26) ^[28] claims that Wilde through the dexterity in his craft has achieved the following.

In *The Nightingale and the Rose* the 'perfection' attained by the songbird through sacrifice is realized, not in heaven, but in a work of art.

Thus the self-sacrifice of the Nightingale is a noble, self-effacing deed devoid of egoistic intentions and carries a strong message to the youthful reader.

2.7 Characterization

Shewan(1977) ^[29] posits that through *The Nightingale and the Rose* Wilde has created his most succinct piece of social criticism. The most powerful mode of generating social criticism in the short story is the vibrancy of characterization.

2.7.1 The Student

The Student epitomizes a scholar who has gained a high level of intellectual knowledge as seen in his statement given below. I have read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy are mine. But he is insensitive to the beauty of art. His analytical mind founded on logic cannot decipher the meaning and emotions conveyed through the song of the Nightingale. His argument goes as follows. 'She has some beautiful notes'. But 'they do not mean anything'. Then he arrives at the hasty conclusion. Therefore the song serves no 'practical good'.

Additionally the final outcome of his education makes him assume that every action within the world outside should have a utilitarian value. Not only art but a primary emotion such as love too is condemned. Based on the outcome of his infatuation he decides that Love is silly and is quite unpractical and theorizes 'in this age to be practical is everything'. Wilde through the character of the Student brings out a human weakness which is prevalent in current societies throughout the world: education should be expertise in one field. Wilde himself was not hesitant to clear misconceptions about the Student. In 1888 Thomas Hutchinson (Letters P 218) wrote to Wilde stating that 'the Student in *The Nightingale and the Rose* was a worthy representative of great love'. Extracts from Wilde's reply (Letter 354, cited in Willoughby, 1993: 43^[30]), given below, conveyed his view point on the subject.

I am afraid that I don't think as much of the young student as you do. He seems to me rather a shallow young man, and almost as bad as the girl he thinks he loves.

Thus as Willoughby (ibid) states, 'it is after all the Student and the daughter of the Professor who are the villains' of the story.

2.7.2 The daughter of the Professor

Adhering to the requisite of economy of language in a short story the character of the girl is allotted only two utterances. The longer discourse is as follows.

'Ungrateful!' said the girl. 'I tell you what, you are very rude; and, after all, who are you? Only a Student. Why, I don't believe you have even got silver buckles to your shoes as the Chamberlain's nephew has;' and she got up from her chair and went into the house.

In a very economical manner through the tone and the diction of the girl the author powerfully conveys not only her materialism but also that she lacks finesse. The arrogant and rude tone of the speech clashes with the imagery created of her refined social behavior at the ball. The imagery created when 'the courtiers in their gay dresses will throng round her' is of a girl who is in demand not only for her sense of dress and deportment but also for her social graces. Ironically the tone in the above extract also shatters the imagery of the docile ideal female in fairy tales and the girl in the Student's dream world, she will lean her head upon my shoulder, and her hand will be clasped in mine. Her thin veneer of refinement cracks as she harshly rejects the Student and cruelly spells out the reasons for doing so. Through this short speech Wilde conveys that appearances and social mannerisms can be deceptive. Wilde's portrayal of the daughter of the Professor to exposes universal human weaknesses: materialism, importance placed on status and the duality of personality. Additionally a significant omission in the depiction of the character of the daughter of the Professor is her outer beauty. Through this deliberate exclusion Wilde seems to suggest that outer beauty is of no importance in the absence of inner beauty.

2.7.3 The Nightingale

Wilde in his own letter (Letters P 354) identifies the Nightingale as a worthy representative of great love and has stated the following

The nightingale is the true lover, if there is one. She, at least, is Romance, and the student and the girl are, like most of us, unworthy of Romance. (Cited in Willoughby, 1993: 43)^[31]

The irony in the statement is brought out as Wilde declares that most human beings are 'unworthy of Romance'. The diction of the Nightingale heightens the Romance associated with the bird. Not only her diction but also her flight is granted a high poetic excellence.

The bird's first flight is her leisurely. She was contemplating about the mystery of Love.

'She passed through the grove like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed across the garden'.

The long vowels and the phrase 'passed through' in the above line follows the slow thoughtful mood of the soaring bird, the metaphor sailed makes it more vivid creating an imagery of the smooth rhythm of the flight, inversion and repetition heighten the beauty of the forward-backward movement and the word shadow enhances the mystic quality of her thoughts.

Then after her decision to sacrifice herself is made these very lines are repeated. But one phrase undergoes change. The relaxed passed through is replaced by the hurried swept over reflecting her tension. Thus unlike in the characters of the girl and the Student the beauty of the language used by Wilde reflects the internal emotional state of the bird.

The song of sacrifice too is depicted through multiple poetic devices. Wilde creates a powerful imagery through the use of simile 'her voice was like water bubbling from a silver jar'. The content adds to the romance as she sang of the 'birth of love in the heart of a boy and a girl'. Even 'The cold crystal' inanimate Moon came alive and mesmerized by the musicality 'leaned down and listened'. Then her song gains an ethereal cadence: 'wilder and wilder grew her song'. The gradual buildup of passion from the mellow bubbling to the eerie wild conveys that Wilde is enamored with his own protagonist. Does he see himself in the bird?

Shelley (1903, p. 11)^[32] defining a poet states that,

A poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why.

As a writer of poetry in prose form much what Shelley has described above is true about Wilde and as is in his Nightingale: the artist who is not understood by many a human being but who are spellbound by his creation.

Yet again for all the beauty and passion in her song the nightingale is also associated with an age old negative symbolism. De Vries (1974: 341)^[33] states that 'the nightingale has been the harbinger of unrequited love and a symbol for a love-death' from Greek and Roman antiquity to more recent times. In this sense the nightingale created by Wilde is an omen that foreshadows the love of the Student as one-sided and will not be returned. The love-death symbolism of the nightingale flowing down through the ages too is reproduced by Wilde. Thus Wilde merges symbolism, legend and the personal affinity to the art of creating the nightingale to immortalize the bird in this short story.

III. Conclusion

Wilde's art in the story, devoid of the age limitations, has a powerful impact on the reader. For the target population of this study, as one student depicted it in the following illustration, the vivid imagery of the sacrifice of Nightingale is the most memorable and poignant experience which will keep them enraptured formatting many a question in their young minds.

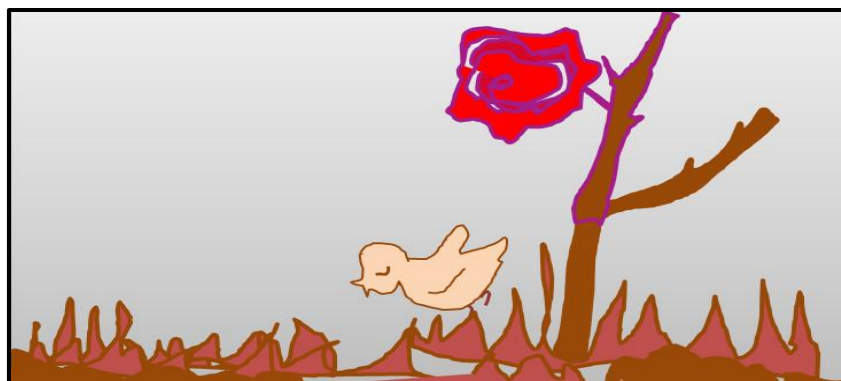


Figure 2.

The short story makes them sensitive to the reality in life, human weaknesses and it has the power to open a path to self-inquiry. Thus for the early teenager who is embarking on a journey of literary appreciation it is a cameo which is perfection within the genre of short story. It is a joy to analyze and enter hitherto unexplored areas in life, mainly, Love in its multi facets. Through proper exposure a young adult would celebrate the mystic nature of Wilde's art and with the right pedagogical handling they will be able to develop the well-honed aesthetic instinct which is demanded from them though they do not fall within the age limits specified by Wilde. His lower age limit was set down during the Victorian era but the early teenagers in the contemporary world evidence an unprecedented maturity. But it has to be remembered that it is pedagogically essential to explore literature of the caliber of *The Nightingale* and the *Rose* judiciously with the early teenager.

This caution is required as in the letter to Thomas Hutchinson in 1888 Wilde himself states that *The Nightingale* and the *Rose* contain many meanings and many secrets as quoted below.

I like to fancy that there may be many meanings in the tale, for in writing it I did not start with an idea and cloth it in form, but began with a form and strove to make it beautiful enough to have many secrets and many answers. (Letters P 354, Cited in Willoughby, 1993: 43)^[34]

The early teenagers need not be exposed to the many meanings, many secrets and many answers which according to Wilde is inherent to the text but they too possess the maturity to unravel at least some age relevant meanings, some secrets and answers to some problems they are confronted with in their young lives through analysis of *The Nightingale* and the *Rose*.

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