

The implementation of allegory by oscar wilde

Literature



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Oscar Wilde was an Irish dramatist and short story writer who became famous for his fairy tales for children, or short stories. His short stories were mainly decorated with an extensive implementation of allegory. His short stories are artistically created because he was an aesthetic: he used symbols, symbolic characters, symbolic settings, situations, incidents, and events. He was able to convey multiple meanings through his writings. Oscar Wilde belonged to the Victorian age. Unlike the other Victorians, he was a dandy. In the Victorian age, the word 'dandy' was used for a cultured gentleman who took pride in himself on his charm, natural elegance, wit, and extravagant manners. The same wit, charm, elegance and noticeable manners can be easily seen both in Wilde's own personality and in his works. Wilde is best known for his light and comic stories, as he once said "Life is far too important to be taken seriously". So, these lines show his philosophy of life. He did not want to remain serious, similarly, he did not want to teach anything explicitly, Wilde was a social critic, who has criticized society in an indirect way through the use of allegorical elements. He was able to do so in a mild and artistic way. He did all this moral teaching without being cynical or harsh. According to him when the writer tries to convey something merely for the purpose of moral teaching it does not attract anyone so he never criticized the human beings and their follies in a harsh or cynical manner e. g. through the swallow in "The Happy Prince" and nightingale in "The Nightingale and the Rose" he presented the whole situation in front of the people without being cynical and harsh. He always preferred to do so in a milder way. With the help of allegory, he was able to point out the follies and weaknesses of human beings without being cynical. In his short story "The

Selfish Giant” he highlighted the feeling of selfishness through the character of a giant.

The giant in this story represents a materialistic person who is self-centered and mean. He is not ready to share his property with other people around, as he says, “ My own garden is my own garden”. In this story, Oscar Wilde has presented the human follies through the character of the giant. The Giant is the symbol of selfishness to selflessness. This the transformation of giant shows that Wilde has shown the positive characteristics as well as negative characteristics of a human being by using symbolic characters and situations. Which are in fact important aspects of the device of allegory.

Oscar Wilde was born in an age when the industrial revolution was in progress in the English society. People were using machines in different fields of life so their behavior also became machinery. They were devoid of feelings and emotions, they became selfish. In his short story “ The Happy Prince”, he has exposed the miseries of poor people in a very artistic manner. For example, a beautiful rich girl was worried about her dress which she wanted to wear to a party. She is totally indifferent towards the miseries of poor people.

The story is mainly about the callous and heartless behavior of upper class towards the miseries and suffering of the lower class. Everybody is interested in his life: the people have no concern with others’ miseries. A statue is placed in the center of the city which is made up of stone, but ironically he is the only one in the city who can feel the miseries of the poor. Then he is assisted by migrating swallow to help the poor people of the city. The swallow contains a sympathetic feeling for the wretched people of the

city. So he helps the happy prince and even sacrifices his own life when he decides to stay back to the prince when he becomes blind. Oscar Wilde has presented animal characters better than human beings which is an important aspect of allegory. These animal characters are offering help to others; the swallow takes a flight to do charity work for the happy prince. On his way, the swallow finds that rich people are busy in money making on the other hand poor people are suffering from hunger like the son of seamstresses. With the help of these allegorical characters and situations, Oscar Wilde has criticized his contemporary society in an artistic and subtle way without being rude. Oscar Wilde's short stories have mainly dealt with the theme of love and sacrifice. So, with the technique of allegory, he has presented his themes artistically. As stated before, allegory makes readers think and get multiple underlying meanings of the author in an amusing way. So it provides a writer a chance to convey his message implicitly which is usually more effective than the explicitly conveyed message. In the story of "The Nightingale and the rose" Wilde has presented the positive feelings of love along with a negative feeling of selfishness and materialism which are found among human beings. The student and the girl whom he is in love with are shown as an embodiment of selfishness and materialism.

Whereas the Nightingale is an outstanding embodiment of selfless devotion. After his first collection of fairy tales came out, he emerged as an influential author. The British magazine *Elegance* praised his fairy tale 'The Selfish Giant' and regarded it as perfect work. His complete collection of fairy tales are said to be the quaintness of the pure English language. In his short stories he showed a picture of Victorian English society but his short stories,

they portray human society in general and also contain the elements of universality. His short stories were and enjoyed by the people of all ages in the 19th century. Raby Petter has praised Oscar Wilde short stories by saying; “ It is not only the collection of short stories meant only for children; they are studied in prose put for those who kept childlike faculties of wonder and joy” The criticism of Victorian society in Wilde’s fairy tales is quite apparent. As stated above that in his short stories he blended the real-life situations with the imaginary situation. His tales show the injustices committed by the powerful ruling class against the working class e. g. in his story ‘The Devoted Friend’, the characters of Miller and Hans are symbolic.

The character of Miller is representing the ruthless and powerful ruling class, who remain oblivious to the problems of others. His short stories seem to reflect the indifferent attitude of the ruling class which was prevalent in his contemporary English society. On one level his fairy tales are very much interesting and amusing for young children because they have a lot of fantastical elements including symbolic setting, characters, and events. As Oscar Wilde himself once commented about his; “ It is the duty of every father to write fairy tales for his children” In fact, he himself wrote fairy tales for his own children. And on the deeper level, his short stories contain deep criticism on his contemporary society, and he did all this in an indirect way by using the technique of allegory in his fairy tales. His characters and settings are allegorical. Encyclopedia Encarta has defined allegory as a “ symbolic work”, a work in which characters are representing other things and symbolically expressing a deeper level often with spiritual, moral or political meanings. An allegory is a device used in literature, rhetoric, and art

to signify a meaning that is not literal. When allegory is used in any piece, a device and a character are symbolic of a concept like reason and fortune symbolizes the character of everymen in the universe. In literature allegory has been frequently used sometimes are especially allegorical. Plato in Allegory of Cave and Boethius in Consolation of philosophy also used allegory in extended form.

In fact, Boethius's Consolation becomes the inspiration for Dante who used the allegory in his main work "the divine comedy" He used extended allegory to symbolize the sins in particular. Dante is considered the master of allegory, "the divine comedy" was written in 1321. It was an imaginative and allegorical version of Christian afterlife and worldwide view. There are three parts of the divine comedy, namely; Inferno, Purgatorio, and paradise. Allegorical aspects in Inferno represents the Christian soul in seeing the sins, and the three beasts represent three types of sins first is self-indulgent, the violent and the malicious. "Morality plays" were the main features of medieval times. In the most famous medieval play "Everyman" the main character everyman is the allegory of the plight of all men in the face of temptation. Allegory has been used in classic children literature by different writers. A moral is often placed in the action and decisions of the characters, often the main characters in allegory are either animals or creatures of fantasy, Writers in different ages have been using allegorical elements in their writings. Oscar Wilde was an awesome reader and took inspiration from these allegorical aspects in these fairy tales. These short stories have two levels of meaning. The apparent amusing tale is understandable for the reader. Oscar Wilde short story 'The Nightingale and the Rose', on one level

it is a very interesting and amusing fairy tale but on the deeper level, it contains serious criticism and the selfish and money minded people of the 19th century of his contemporary society. Conclusion In this chapter we explored the historical background of allegory, starting from the origin of the word 'allegoria' meaning veiled language, and ending with the actual literature review. Thus characters and settings of his fairy tales are symbolic.

On one level they are very amusing but on a deeper level, they portray the situations of the 19th century and the behaviors of human beings. The titles of these fairy tales are also symbolic and ironical for example the happy prince who is made up of stone and is basically an individual who can feel the miseries of others in contrast to real flesh made people who cannot feel that. Wilde criticized English society in particular by using the technique of allegory to present these issues to his readers. From this chapter, we may conclude that allegory from the time of its creation has been and is an absolutely thoughtful literary device as it is up to the reader to think over it and understand the real meaning of the story which the writer intended to impart. In this graduation paper, we intend to explore the historical background of allegory, its definitions and to do a textual analysis of several short stories written by Oscar Wilde and to explore the allegorical aspects of his stories.