

# Literary analysis and interpretation of the nightingale by hans christian anderse...



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The Nightingale is a story about an emperor who hears of a nightingale bird in his empire that he has never seen or heard and everyone is talking about how beautiful this bird is. He is intrigued to find this bird and so he sends his chamberlain out to search the corridors and find the famous nightingale. The chamberlain approached the kitchen maid who has heard of the nightingale before. She leads him into the forest to find the bird and request that it sing for the emperor. Once the emperor hears the nightingale, he orders a cage and keeps him in his empire but the bird is unhappy to be stuck inside so waits for the perfect moment to escape the empire leaving the mechanical bird in the cage. The emperor is angry that the bird escaped and banished the bird from his empire. The emperor falls ill; enough to soon die, and has death sitting on his chest. The nightingale flies back to the empire and sings for the emperor who soon finds himself healed and healthy. The emperor and the nightingale set a plan for the bird to remain free to come and go as it pleases and sing whenever it wants to - or not. The nightingale promises to sing about good and bad, sad and happy, all of which is hidden from the emperor as long as he promises not to tell people a little bird tells him everything. And they lived happily ever after.

Although this story does not start off with "once upon a time," or anything similar like a typical folktale does, the author alternatively creates a distant setting that happened long ago and makes it known that its an old story. As folktales are known to be old stories that are told from teller to teller, this story reminded me of such. Like a folktale, the story has a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning of the story focuses on creating an imaginary landscape, one that is a world of magic and beauty. I noticed that this story

creates an obstacle right from the starts where the chamberlain is in search of the nightingale at the emperor's request. He searches high and low, so to speak, for this nightingale bird and with the help of the kitchen maid; they find the bird to bring back to the empire. In this part of the story, I noticed the conflict fell into the repetition of three. The chamberlain heard the cow mooing and thought it was the bird, he heard the frogs croaking and also thought it was the bird, finally, he heard the real nightingale bird.

Another similarity between the traditional folktale and this story is that the story includes helper figures. The Nightingale has three—the chamberlain who helped find the nightingale bird for the emperor, the kitchen helper who took the chamberlain to the forest to find the bird, and the nightingale itself, as it sang for the emperor no matter what happened, which brought him back to good health. In the middle of the story, I didn't quite notice the action coming quickly or main conflict like the traditional folktale would have. Instead, and this is another example of how they differ, the nightingale brought much happiness to the emperor and those in the empire until a mechanical bird showed up one day sang with the nightingale. The nightingale slipped out the window without anyone noticing and this became another conflict within the story. The emperor was upset, as were the courtiers who berated the nightingale and said it was the most ungrateful bird. It was banished from the empire and everyone was quite happy with the singing of the mechanical bird because they always knew what it would sing and came to know all of the words to the song.

Quickly, the plot changes and the emperor became ill. He couldn't breath and felt something sitting on his chest. The emperor saw death sitting on his

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chest with his crown on its head, sword in one hand, and magnificent banner in the other. Again, I notice the conflict came in three like a traditional folktale—the search for the bird, the bird that escaped, and now the sick emperor. The emperor heard people talking about things he never knew about, he demanded music to drown out the voices of those who were talking around him so he didn't have to listen to what they had to say. Suddenly, after the climax, we hit the end of the story. The hero, also known as the nightingale, came to the emperor's rescue and started singing in the window, asking Death for the crown, sword, and banner to keep singing until Death was filled with longing for his garden and drifted like a cold, white mist out the window. A known characteristic of a folktale is that they have heroes who usually resolve the conflict/obstacle near the end of the story. In *The Nightingale*, I would recognize the nightingale bird as the hero since he saved the emperor's life, resolved the conflict in the empire entirely (by informing the emperor in the future about all of that, that he didn't know), and also dedicated himself to the emperor to keep him happy and healthy.

In the end of *The Nightingale* the emperor apologizes for driving the bird out of his land and empire. The conflict is now over as the nightingale has sung the bad visions away from the emperor's bed and removed Death from his heart. The bird remained faithful and reliable as the emperor awoke refreshed and healthy with the nightingale still sitting there signing, even though his servants hadn't returned as they thought he was dead. The emperor tried to fulfill the bird's wishes by offering to have him sing when only he wants to and to destroy the mechanical bird. However, the nightingale makes a final deal, committing himself to the emperor, stating he

will sit in the window and sing to the emperor about those who are happy, those who suffer, the good and the evil, which is kept hidden from him, if only he can be free to come and go as he pleases and that the emperor will not tell anyone that a little bird is telling him everything. The villain (Death) was also defeated and the hero was rewarded. The ending was happy, everyone was pleased and got what they wanted and/or needed, much like the traditional folktale.

It is evident that *The Nightingale* has many similarities with the traditional folktale. I believe there was more similarities than differences and that *The Nightingale* could easily be mistaken for a folktale. It had many of the characteristics identified in a folktale such as a villain, a hero, the sequence of three's, a beginning that created an imaginary landscape, a middle that had three different conflicts, and an end where it ended happily with a resolution in place.