Universität Kassel

Proseminararbeit

Alfred Douglas

Bucolic Motifs in Oscar Wilde's Art Fairy Tales

Provide course instructor's name, title and semester of the relevant course.

Prof. Dr. Alfred Wills
Proseminar "Oscar Wilde: A Literature of Decadence?"
Wintersemester 1897/98
Table of Contents

1. Introduction ............................................................................................... 1
2. Bucolic and Pastoral Literary Tradition ....................................................... 2
3. Bucolic Motifs in Oscar Wilde’s Art Fairy Tales............................................ 5
   3.1. Nature/Culture Dichotomy ........................................................................ 5
   3.2. Bipartite Nature ...................................................................................... 9
   3.3. Christian Motifs ...................................................................................... 2
4. Narrative Sympathy .................................................................................... 14
5. Conclusion .................................................................................................. 15
6. Works Cited ............................................................................................... 16

The table of contents should contain all chapter's and sub-chapter's titles and the correct page numbers.
1. Introduction

From a critical perspective, Oscar Wilde's art fairy tales have received a comparatively small amount of professional attention. In the light of the wide distribution of the art fairy tales, this is more than mildly surprising: In 1980, Norbert Kohl estimates the number of sold copies in German translation alone at several hundred thousand (87). The apparent lack of interest in a critical examination may be, on the one hand, connected to the genre of the fairy tale itself; the fact that the addressee of the art fairy tale in particular does not necessarily have to be a child or child-like is often neglected.

On the other hand, the often moralising content and the clear separation of good and evil marks a distinct difference to Wilde's other works. An approach attempting a consistent interpretation might therefore tend to ignore The Happy Prince and Other Tales and A House of Pomegranates due to this apparent inconsistency. Seemingly, they do not really fit the part ironic and cheerful, part sarcastic and gloomy play with literary conventions and traditions that frequently defines Wilde's other works. This, however, seems inadequate, since Wilde assigned a special place in the canon of his work to The Happy Prince and Other Tales and A House of Pomegranates. ... Wilde's reactions and letters do indicate the importance of these two short volumes to Wilde himself, and to the study of the artist and his work (Tattersall 131).

In the course of this paper I will attempt to show that the genre of the fairy tale, with its conventions regarding morals, values, poetic justice and stereotypical characters, lends itself particularly well as a sort of 'testing ground' for the inversion and subversion of conventions and traditions that defines Wilde's works as a whole. Examining "The Nightingale and the Rose", "The Young King" and "The Birthday of the Infanta", the use of established and
3.1. Christian Motifs

The growing impression of a clear distinction between good and evil in the fairy tales is confirmed and reinforced when examining the correlation of bucolic and Christian motifs. Since pastoral poetry is firmly established within the Christian tradition due to the rendition of Jesus' birth in the Gospel of Luke (Curtius 195), bucolic motifs are significant as both Christian and pastoral metaphors.3

The positive image of the young king who, after his catharsis, appears dressed in a shepherd's dress, therefore results not only from its pastoral associations, but from his association with Christian imagery as well. Just like Christ is portrayed as the Good Shepherd, the young king becomes the shepherd of his people: "he opened a great painted chest, and from it took the [...] rough sheepskin coat that he had worn when he had watched [...] the shaggy goats" (220). The *imitatio Christi* is rendered almost glaringly obvious when he shapes "a wild spray of briar" (220) into a crown. Any remaining doubts about the spiritual cleansing of the young king are now destroyed.

In contrast to this the nightingale in "The Nightingale and the Rose" is denied such an explicit elevation. Her self-sacrifice in the name of love is not efforts are not even rewarded with success. be measured according to her intention, and not effects of her actions, as Guy Willoughby points out:

... the Nightingale realized herself in an awe-inspiring act of self-denial. If the beautiful creation which embodies that perfection has been obliterated at the hands of an insensitive and materialistic audience, her achievement remains undiminished (115).

Paradoxically, it is the depravity of civilization that enables the nightingale's sacrifice and her subsequent "genuine self completion" (Willoughby 109). Had

---

3 For a detailed analysis of the relationship between bucolic motifs and Christian metaphors refer to...
6. Works Cited

Literature


Criticism


Kassel, den [Abgabedatum]

[eigenhändige Unterschrift des Verfassers]

Do not forget the "Ehrenwörtliche Erklärung". Your paper will not be graded without it.