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**DEVOTION AND EXPLOITATION: A PSYCHOANALYTIC
STUDY OF OSCAR WILDE'S *THE DEVOTED FRIEND* AND *THE
NIGHTINGALE AND THE ROSE***



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Abstract

*This paper explores devotion and exploitation in Oscar Wilde's *The Devoted Friend* and *The Nightingale and the Rose* using a psychoanalytic approach that goes beyond Freud's ideas. The main research question asks how deep emotional needs and ideal ideas about love and goodness lead characters to sacrifice themselves or take advantage of others. The study uses a qualitative method, based on close reading of the texts. Characters, symbols, and events are examined to understand the emotional and psychological reasons behind their actions. This approach helps reveal the deeper human emotions and struggles behind the stories, rather than seeing them as simple moral lesson.*

*The findings show that devotion in both stories is often unhealthy and one-sided. In *The Devoted Friend*, Hugh the Miller hides his selfishness behind words of friendship, while Little Hans's kindness comes from a strong need to be accepted, making him vulnerable to exploitation. In *The Nightingale and the Rose*, the Nightingale's deep belief in love drives her to sacrifice herself, but her love is not appreciated. Overall, Wilde shows devotion as something beautiful yet risky, revealing how love and goodness can lead to pain when they are not met with understanding, balancing and caring..*

Keywords: Devotion, Exploitation, Psychoanalysis, Wilde, Freud

Introduction

Oscar Wilde was an Anglo-Irish poet, playwright, and novelist who became a well-known literary figure in the late nineteenth century. (Sloan, 2003) He was born on 16 October 1854 in Dublin, and his full name was Oscar Fingal O' Flaherty Wills Wilde. Wilde's writing as influenced by many Victorian writers, and he developed a style that made him stand out in English Literature (Raby, 1988). His works continue to be read and studied for their insight and originality. Although, he died on 30 October 1900, his writing keeps his legacy alive. (Haslam, R. 2014). As a leading figure in the Aesthetic Movement, Wilde strongly supported the idea of "Art for Art's Sake". He believed that beauty if more important than moral messages. Wilde also championed artistic freedom, emphasizing that "art never expresses anything but itself" (Ruby, 1997, p. 87). Over time, he became famous worldwide for his advocacy of aesthetic principles.

According to Zhang (2004), more than 1,500 works about Wilde were published during the first half of 20th century, and the number of publications increased even further in the second half of the century. In *The Devoted Friend* (1888), Wilde portrays society through the contrast between two characters, Hans and Miller. Hans is an innocent, poor, and genuinely selfless, and he hopes to be a loyal friend to Miller. Although he lives near a beautiful garden, winter brings hardship, leaving him with nothing to eat. During his difficult season, Miller shows no concern for Hans and refuse even to visit him. Once winter arrives and his needs are no longer met, Miller loses all interest in Hans. For him, wealth and personal gain matter more than compassion or loyalty. (Ali, 2025).

The Nightingale and the Rose, also published in 1888, is another masterpiece work by Wilde in which he explores the themes of devotion and exploitation. In this story, Wilde shows how even nature becomes a victim of devotion when that devotion is directed toward someone unworthy. This idea is expressed through the contrast between the Student and the Nightingale. The student is heartbroken because a girl has agreed to dance with him only if he brings her a red rose. Although he searches everywhere, he finds only white and yellow roses. Believing that his chance at love is gone, he cries in despair. Several creatures observe him, but it is the Nightingale who becomes deeply moved by what she believes is "true love." Eventually, she discovers that the only way to create one is through a painful sacrifice, she must press her heart against a thorn and sing throughout the night until her lifeblood forms the red rose.

Both stories present the same message through the character of Hans and The Nightingale. Each of them wishes to be a loyal and devoted friend, and they believe their devotion will help the people they care about. Their intentions are honest and kind, but instead of being valued, they are taken advantage of.

Theocratical Framework

The present research is conducted with the help of a marvelous mind, and philosopher, Sigmund Freud's sublime idea which revolves around the understanding of minds. The idea is developed in the late 19th and early 20th century after conducting deeply study in human minds actually the theory starts with the confusion though all human beings are created equally, why people think, feel and act in different ways. Their preferences, thinking angle, acting point and feeling-power all are the different from one another. Based on his study, he has divided human mind into three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego. The id belongs to human desire, elevates the human wishes and pumps the human soul to fulfill his desires. The ego belongs to the reality and informs human body about what the actual incident is. The superego belongs to moral values and provokes to do the ethical and moral deeds.

The theory is more important for everyone just for understanding the human character and preferences. On the base of mind division, people are treated different from one another. The study also helps to understand the preferences of human bodies and even help to judge the humanity in the base of analyzing his deeds. Freud has also explained how people show devotion for others on the base of superego. On the contrary, how people exploit the others on the base of id. Apparently, those who follow back to id and think negatively for others, they themselves fall in the dig. According to Freud, having knowledge about id and superego is a crucial part for understanding the character. Those who show their id are selfless, desire worshiper and deceiver. At every moment, they think negatively about others. On the contrary, those who come forward their superego, they are selfless and kind hearted. Their lives are always for others. Their wishes are denounced. Their aims are bridged with others preference. Even they do not think upon and never take care their own preferences. Ultimately, society exploits them with brutal way.

On the base of Freud's concept which revolves around the psychoanalytic study, there are two types of people: selfish and selfless. Selfish always represents the sharp minded class in society while selfless is considered kind-hearted and innocent minds. Pure-hearted minds always take care others and are nominated genuinely devoted people as Hans and The Nightingale. While sharp minded people always exploit the innocent people by getting benefits from their devotion as Miller and the students. The theory is more closely to the present study because the idea revolves around the human minds which is discussed in Wilde's both short stories.

Literature Review

There are different forms of devotion that may lead to slavery. It is important to note that there are different words that convey the same connotation as devotion. Hence, the present literature review aims at discovering different concepts about these terms such as love, devotion, fanaticism, intolerance, dogmatism and exploitation in the name of devotion in different fields of human activity and belief. A fanatical man is described as "a person with an extreme and uncritical enthusiasm or zeal, as in religion or politics." (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary, 1996). These kinds of strong feelings can sometimes make a person lose their ability to think clearly. It is important to understand these ideas so we can see how devotion can become unhealthy or controlling.

The word *devote* is linked to the word's *fanatic* & *fanaticism*. These words come from the Latin *fanatice*. Which means acting in a wild or excited way, and *fanaticus* which means being very enthusiastic or extreme. The verb *fano* means "to devote". When *fanum* and *fanaticus* are put together, the word fanatic can be understood as "a temple worshipper who acts in an excited, wild, or frenzied way". (Kleis et al., 2002). Pekinson (2002) believes that people who are fanatically devoted become so focused on their own ideas that they ignore any facts or arguments that disagree with them. Their attachment to these ideas is so strong that they cannot see other point of view, and they reject new information just it does not match what they already believe. This kind of thinking make it hard for them to learn or grow. It can also create conflict with others who have different opinions.

Passmore (2003) says that the excitement of fanatically devoted people is so strong that it cannot be called reasonable. Their enthusiasm says that the excitement of fanatically devoted people is so strong that it cannot be called reasonable. Their enthusiasm often too much and sometimes goes over the top. This extreme

devotion can make it hard for them to think clearly or see things from a normal perspective. Harmon (2005) thinks that devotion can sometimes turn into extremism, which can cause war, violence, and bloodshed. A fanatically devoted person might do terrible things without thinking about others. They often do not care about other people's feelings.

Freedom is a basic right for every human being. The Human Rights Committee says that no one should be treated as a slave, tortured, or treated in a cruel or unfair way. These rules protect people from any kind of slavery, whether mental or physical. Everyone owns their own rights, and no one can take away a person's freedom. By defining slavery, the UN has rejected this practice. Slavery is seen as the exploitation of people in weaker positions. Based on the principle that "all human beings are born free," international rules have been passed to abolish slavery. Articles 6, 7, and 8 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ensure that everyone has the chance to live a free life (UN Doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.6, 1994). In addition, all people are entitled to basic rights such as fair working conditions, equal pay for equal work, the right to vote, the right to education, and the right to be treated with dignity and respect (UN Doc E/CN.4 Sub.2/1982/20, 1982).

Jane Wilde expresses her ideas in her powerful poem *The Famine Year* (Wilde, 1871). She shows that some people act cruelly toward others to protect the happiness of those in power. In the poem, she describes how the poor are punished or controlled to serve the interests of their masters. Over time, these people lose even their basic rights. Ruth Robbins (2011) provides a detailed study of Wilde's literary career in her book *Oscar Wilde* covering his plays, novels, poetry, critical essays, short stories and letters written from prison. She explores how Wilde blends wit and emotion in his shorter works, using the fairy tale form to highlight and critique social injustices.

Content Analysis

This chapter explores the idea of exploitation in the name of devotion in *The Devoted Friend* and *The Nightingale and the Rose*. In both short stories, Wilde has presented the idea vividly by prescribing the different characters like Hans, Miller, The Nightingale, and the student. It is clearly understood that devotion is considered a psychological bondage. Even for the sake of devotion, selfless people sacrifice everything, their lives, wishes, needs and preferences. They retain their friendship and make strong relationship without taking care of own wishes, needs and preferences. In *The Devoted Friend*, the story teller Wilde presents two different characters, Hans & Miller who have contrast preferences. Apparently, they feel as bosom friends but when the reader reads the story, he realizes that in the name of devotion, one exploits the others.

In *The Devoted Friend*, the relationship between Hans and Miller demonstrates an unequal emotional dynamic: Hans is a selfless and innocent, while Miller apparently proclaims the devotion but in actual, he manipulates the devotion for his own purpose. In the beginning, reader understands that when a selfish character, Miller repeatedly claims, "*Real friends should have everything in common*," (Wilde, *The Devoted Friend*). Though he claims and utters such kind of exploited words for exploiting his friend, yet he never shares anything with him. From a Freudian perspective, Miller's tone, words and behavior demonstrate selfishness. He plays with Hans's innocent mind and exploits him in the name of devotion. Even innocent soul Hans accepts Miller's authority in lieu of devotion. In this way, Wilde exposes how devotion can turn into a form of mental enslavement driven by hidden motives.

It is naked truth that man's life is tied up with ups and downs. Circumstances encompass the intensity of friendship. Fair feather friends always leave alone in rainy days. The same situation is prescribed in the story when Hans suffers from hard days and Wilde captures the picture with these words: "For when people are in trouble they should be left alone, and not be bothered by visitors" (Wilde, *The Devoted Friend*). Hans does not have any splendid earning source except a small garden. When the winter comes, he deprives of any profit from garden. Now, the selfish friend, Miller, refuses him even to visit his home. According to Freud's theory, Hans's mind reflects a conflict between the id and superego, where his superego compels him to present a self-sacrificing role, while Miller's id persuades him to come forward personal gain (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 1923).

Wilde's story highlights how genuinely devoted people like Hans can be trapped for personal advantages. "If Hans came here, he might ask me to let him have some flour on credit, and that I could not do" demonstrates Miller's cunning and selfish behavior. (Wilde, *The Devoted Friend*). From a Freudian perspective, Miller belongs to such community that acts according to his id, getting only personal gain, on the

other hand, innocent type of people like Hans always follows their superego and take care the string of friendship. The selfish minds always get benefit from innocent minds in the name of devotion and use them with the name of fabricated love. Their selfish desires always bring devastation in innocent people lives. (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 1923).

When the story reaches the climax, the story teller, Wilde, presents the Miller's better half selfish behavior. Instead of correcting her partner, she appraises and pamper him with these words: "Why, what a good heart you have! ... you are always thinking of others" (Wilde, *The Devoted Friend*). According to Freud, she elevates the Miller's id, and persuades him to continue the same cunning behavior with people. (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 1923). Despite of cunning attitude towards Miller's family, Hans stays obedient and devoted with Miller's family. Even he is ready to sacrifice everything for his friendship.

Another twist comes in the story when Miller knows that the cloud of hard times is going to be disappeared in Hans's life and charismatic days will shadow in his life. Miller starts appreciation and shares everything to Hans for showing the connectivity. When Miller says, "We often talked of you during the winter, Hans," (Wilde, *The Devoted Friend*) It demonstrates the loyalty of true friendship. It is truly stated that devoted friends always stay connected in every time and never think to leave the friends in any moment. According to Freudian perspective, Miller's Id shows the authority while the superego of Hans allows to maintain the friendship in every moment of life. Psychologically, Hans becomes slave and adopts the enslavement for the sake of devotion. When a man psychologically becomes slave, he is ready to sacrifice everything and even does not care anything.

Genuine devoted friends often feel disturbed when they realize a little bit diversion from friends. Story teller Wilde shows the anxiety of Hans in these words when he feels that his friend, Miller, does not pay attention to his matters. "I was half afraid you had forgotten me" (Wilde, *The Devoted Friend*). When the story reaches the falling point, a statement uttered by Hans finds in which the loyalty and sincerity has been mentioned. It is naked truth that Devoted friends always take care the liking and disliking of their friends. In this story, Hans fears Miller's anger, but Miller does not take care rather than enjoys the authority and sneers at Hans innocent behavior.

Miller often mocks upon Hans's words, attitudes, behavior, and personality instead of encouraging him. For instance, Miller says, "You are very lazy." (Wilde, *The Devoted Friend*). Even Miller utilizes his energy for domestic work and orders him to do his domestic work. Instead of refusing, Hans accepts his order with zeal and zest. It is psychological effect prevailing in society that owners always underestimate their subordinates. Whenever they want, they criticize their subordinates. It is naked truth that all human beings are equally created and no one has any right to degrade or taunt to another person. From a Freudian perspective, Hans's acceptance gives a chance for Miller to exploit him and snatch even the fundamental rights.

In the end of story, we find a brutal behavior when Miller's son becomes ill. Instead of caring himself, he orders his bosom friend, Hans, for treatment. Despite the stormy weather and severe darkness, Hans does not take care and considers as a blessing. As he returns to the hospital, Miller demonstrates the behavior as the owner behaves to his subordinates. At that time, Miller said, "You must lend me your lantern." (Wilde, *The Devoted Friend*). These words show how fair feather friends use their friends and cast them after specific time when they fulfil their all needs. Freud would explain Hans's compliance as an inner conflict between his desire to serve and his fear of disapproval.

In the second story "*The Nightingale and the Rose*," the idea exploitation in the name of devotion has been presented very thoroughly. Innocent character *The Nightingale* is ready to sacrifice even her tiny soul for relationship. The reader finds that even nightingale forgets about her own safety. When she says, "*Give me a red rose and I will sing you my sweetest song*" (Wilde, *The Nightingale and the Rose*), it demonstrates that she is ready to attain the pleasure of others. From Freud's viewpoint, her action represents those people who are genuinely devoted. Their purpose is to attain the pleasures of others. Her superego pushes her to do what is right for others. Because of this, her devotion becomes a kind of self-sacrifice that leads to her suffering.

The Nightingale's actions highlight those people who dedicate their lives, services, and preferences to others. Actually, *The Nightingale* goes to every tree for attaining red rose which is the dire need of student. She sacrifices her soul for seeking the pleasure of student. By prescribing the character of *The Nightingale* actually the story teller wants to elevate the idea that countless persons are in our society who dedicate their lives to others. Their superegos compel them to show moral and ethical deeds for others without any reason. They

demonstrate the devotion and present an extraordinary behavior just for seeking devotion. Mostly sharp minds get benefits and ultimately exploit the innocent minds. Consequently, Innocent minds lose their lives as they trap into sharp minds net.

When the story reaches the climax, it is evident that *The Nightingale* starts searching a red rose that is the requirement of *Student*. She goes here and there but does not find the required rose and disappoints. At last, when she finds a red rose, it demands a painful sacrifice which is a great trail for *The Nightingale*. According to Freudian concept, her moral sense, superego, polishes her mind to do for the others. Her superego removes the id which creates the concept of selfishness in human body. Like *The Nightingale*, some people face hardships, trials and tribulations for others lives. They sacrifice their wishes and mold the preferences for others. They never mind though they face countless hardships for others. Here, for the sake of *Student's* wish *The Nightingale* is ready to accept all type of miseries.

As Wilde writes, “All night long she sang, and the thorn went deeper and deeper into her breast, and her life-blood ebbed away from her” (Wilde, *The Nightingale and the Rose*). Though *The Nightingale* is not directly linked with the affection of *Student*, she is doing all these things just for the sake of unrequited love. According to the Freud’s intellectuality, when a man overloads with the affection of someone, he can sacrifice everything for the sake of devotion. His superego inspires him to act upon what his morality needs. On the other hand, many people who raise the slogan of true devotion, but they always render the responsibility by seeing their own purposes. Their aim is to only lead the life with zeal and zest.

The present research captures the words that are the hallmark of the story and the result of the idea in which the whole discussion is revolving. Resultantly, *The Nightingale* succeeds in her mission but breaths her last. She achieves the student’s smile as he receives his desire rose. By jotting down these words, “Look, look!” cried the Tree, ‘the rose is finished now;’ but the Nightingale made no answer” (Wilde, *The Nightingale and the Rose*), actually the story teller wants to provoke that devotion requires tireless sacrifices. Here, she does not take care her wishes, desires and soul rather than is ready to sacrifice the precious thing of any object. That is the true sign of pure hearted persons. Instead of having regret of losing something for others, they celebrate the moments and mostly feel pride. They consider it as a worship and part of religion.

Concluding Remarks

After analyzing both short stories with the help of a great concept of Freud, it is evident that devotion sometimes becomes a form of slavery. With the concept of devotion, usually sharp minds exploit the innocent flesh and snatch their emancipation. Wilde shows how innocent people can be exploited in the name of devotion by describing the character of Hans and The Nightingale in both short stories. Resultantly, they lose their lives. It is shown that such kind of incidents happen in religion, politics and society. Leading personalities use innocent minds for their own usages by exploiting them in the name of religion or politics. At the end, when they earn fame, they cast them without taking care their services. Without getting reward of their tireless services, innocent people lose their lives.

By conducting the research of both short stories, *The Devoted Friend & The Nightingale and the Rose* it is concluded that the person who exploits the innocent minds is very sharp, cunning and selfish without taking care others wishes, desires, needs and preferences. Apparently, he always shows the fabricated devotion, but in actual he spoils others’ lives. According to the concept of Freud, one-sided devotion is always a dangerous for both sides because unrequited devotion becomes a cause of exploitation. Through these short stories, The Miller in *The Devoted Friend* & Student in *The Nightingale and the Rose* are very clever and selfish. They use the innocent characters for achieving their own goals, hunting their own wishes, and binding their own bond. By using words, taking action, quoting religious lines, expressing moral deeds, giving fabricated consoling of brotherhood, sharp minds use the innocent persons. Innocent persons trust their religious lines, moral deeds, brotherhood laurels and exploited words. Looking at the weaknesses of those who are exploited, it is clear how devotion can turn into a kind of slavery, harming their safety and well-being. Their innocence makes them easy targets for selfish and cunning people. It is important to understand this problem and take steps to protect innocent people from being used. Society should try to prevent such exploitation so that devotion and loyalty are not taken advantage of by selfish individuals.

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