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No mystery is so great as misery; A hallmark of Oscar Wilde's Socialism

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Abstract

Apparently, the short story the happy prince has been adjudged as a fairy tale. But this article argues that profound study of this short story tells us that it is not merely a fairy tale adorn with literary techniques like of allegory, irony and satire but beneath the surface we find that Oscar Wilde has written it under the influence of philosophy of socialism. The emerging threats of emerging industrialization in his contemporary Victorian society resulting economic turmoil and increasing discrimination between haves and have-not urged him to propound his social realism in his work. Side by side his philanthropy and love for suffering humanity were motivating factor behind this exemplary short story. Because of him to alleviate the misery of suffering humanity must be foremost moral responsibility.

Keywords: socialism, industrialization, san-souci, capitalism, philanthropy, class discrimination, utopia, pederasty.

Introduction

Oscar Wilde the renowned Victorian author and socialist has always discussed society stratification and class discrimination in his renowned work like socialism under soul of man happy prince and the nightingale and the rose etc. The Victorian contemporary commercial society was dominated by the supremacy of laissez faire and unrestricted competition of getting wealth completely deviating from his contemporary trends. Oscar Wilde has promoted entirely an ethical and aesthetic socialism while emphasizing on self-realization. His philosophy of socialism reflects the posed by private property and vigilant denial of the forging and flourishing a distinctive personality.

Socialism is a political and economic theory based on the belief that everyone has an equal right to share of country's wealth and that government should own control the main industry. The happy prince is a renowned social allegory through which Oscar Wilde favour of socialism and his spirit of philanthropy is quite evident. Its story is a political and social criticism that unveils the social injustices and discrimination between poor's and aristocratic class of London society. Every character in this short story has certain attributes to represent the existing scenario of society. Oscar Wilde with the device of moral allegory revealed the shallowness and moral degeneracy of Victorian age, where suffering humanity was exploited. He negated the idea of private ownership of property and emphasized the spirit of charity and generosity, first he depicts the general predicament of down trodden community in utter desperation but despite the severe indifference and callous attitudes there are still philanthropic elements hidden somewhere on the gods earth to solace the haves not. He handles the miseries of lower strata of the society as a great mystery. As the real remedy of human agony is his world is sympathize with other and help them out of their troubles.

Although Oscar Wilde has earned a reputation of renowned aesthetic yet he was a supporter of aesthetic and descendant movement. He has refined his idea of supremacy of art in his literary work and was strong believer of art for art sake manifesto in Victorian age. But if we deeply examine his work especially his short story we will find that he is a great inspirer of socialism. As a socialist he has glorified the role of down trodden and working class and struggled for its emancipation. He was dreaming of a society in which all men shall be equally treated and in which wealth and power should be equal distributed.

In Victorian age after the reform Bill in 1852 in industrialization became on exploiting giant for the week and lower strata of the society. The social exploitation was so swift and brutal

that under Godwinian Utopianism that intellectuals and writers of that time had to play their role to combat with the economic upheaval in society. Oscar Wilde also reacted against the harsh realities of industrialization and capitalization in his short stories.

As T.S Eliot describes Wilde as

“An exotic product of a commercial agea protest against current ugliness and smugness, a fine frenzy set against average and common place platitudes”

The protagonist of the story is a prince who led a life of luxury and comfort when he was alive. He lived in the palace of Sans Souci in carefree manners. He remained indulge in merry making, singing, and dance throughout his life, he played with his companions in the great hall. Everything gave him pleasure. He was totally indifferent from the agonies of common people. At that time his spiritual insight has not awakened yet and he did not know that true happiness emerges from the service of mankind. After his death he was transformed in to a statue made of metal, with a heart made of lead. He was glided with the layers of fine gold. He was emphasized with sapphires, ruby and emeralds. Now after his death happy prince is no longer happy prince. Because his inner eye has opened and spiritual insight has fully awakened. His vision has changed now. He became humanitarian his heart was replete with grief for people. He says that “I can see all the ugliness and all the misery of my city, and through my heart is made of lead yet I cannot choose but weep”

Oscar Wilde’s social consciousness is fully revealed here. The above depiction bear witness to his moral insight (pederastic bond between prince and swallow). According to some critics the pederastic bond between swallow and prince implies towards the homosexual affair between Oscar Wilde and Alfred Douglas on account of few sexual suggestive moments in the story. As in this exchange of conversation between them it is quite evident, when swallow says good bye dear prince will you let me kiss my hand? Prince answers

“You must kiss me on the lips, for I love you”.

This type of sexual image in few passages cannot determine the role of swallow. In major part of the story, swallow has been used as tool to explain and veiling the economic turmoil in the society. Prince is the Wilde himself regretting over the plight of working class of London society. Swallow plays an instrument in exposure of class discrimination that was built on two extremes one hand , swallow saw the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates. He flew in to the dark lane and saw the white faces of starving children and two boys on the side of bridge where laying one another arms to keep themselves warm. How hungry we are they said. Oscar Wilde desire of social equality and equal distribution of wealth and pros parity has been aptly expressed in the words of prince when he answers to swallow

“I am covered with fine gold you must take it off, leaf by leaf, and give it to my poor, the living always think that gold can make them happy”.

Fully situated with philanthropic insight, Wilde’s grieved heart at the exploitation of wretched people could nothing

remained left to be unmarked. Whether it is play writer who is trying to finish a play for the director of theatre, but he was too old to write any more or a match girl in a great lurch. All her matches fell into gutter and were spoiled. Her father would beat her if she did not bring some money. She had no shoes or stocking and little head was bare. These plights were the aftermath consequences of capitalism, which draw a demarcatory line between exploiter and exploited ones. Wilde eagerly wanted the compensation of callous treatment with exploited ones. As prince remarks in favour of such people

“Alas I have no ruby now”

These exploited and meek class of society had very little incentive for their toiling drudgery. This exploitation is an essential element of profit making process of capitalist order. As Marx in his capital, also mentioned.

“Profit seems to be determined by direct exploitation of labour, in so far as the later permits the capitalist to realize a profit deviating from the average profit at regulating market prices which prevails in the dependence of such exploitation.”

So two strains run side by side in this Wilde’s magnificent literary work ,on one hand negation of concentration of wealth in the hands of capitalist rules and on the other hand promotion of reconstruction of society on equal basis. Wilde socialism suggest a just social order without discrimination of rich and poor.

Methodology

Literary critical analysis is the central objective of proposed research paper. The chief concern is to evaluate critically the short story happy prince by Oscar Wilde focusing on the basic concepts of socialism in Oscar Wilde’s work. The concept of philanthropy in his short story is explored and explained with different perspectives.

Findings

The happy prince published in 1888 a cursory glance at this short story gives an impression of fairy tale and imaginary story but a deep and minute study of it provide evidence that it carries Wilde’s philosophy of socialism and spirit of philanthropy. His contempt for capitalism is quite prominent in his short story, for him capitalism as a private ownership of property is nothing but just accumulation of wealth which makes rich more richer and poor more poorer .Wilde was lamenting over the miser humanity and advocated the idea of generosity and distribution of wealth. For Oscar Wilde humans suffering is most burning issue than any other. In “The soul of man “under socialism

“More marvelous than anything is the suffering of men and of women. There is no mastery so great as misery”

The Happy prince is short story which gives vivid picture of predicament of lower strata of London whose toil and drudgery have been exploited by flourishing industrialization in Victorian age. Wilde raised voice for socialism as the ideal policy in which every human being will get his share from the “general prosperity and happiness”. He totally denied the tyranny of the majority and concentration of wealth in particular hands.

Conclusion

It is pertinent to discern that beneath the glamour of fairy tale, *The Happy Prince* is an evidence of Oscar Wilde's social realism. His philosophy of socialism is a statue and swallow, which have different personal histories and origins but have conformity with each other in unconditional provisions of rights and prosperity to each and every member of society. Oscar Wilde visualized a social utopia where individuals do not sink in to material passion and prosperity and joys are in the access of every one.

The target of his satire is highly industrialized, order that is crippling down the creativity and productivity of poor people in Victorian England.

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