



## The Analysis on the Color Intention of Oscar Wilde’s “Nightingale and the Rose”

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Received 3 December 2016; accepted 11 March 2017  
 Published online 26 April 2017

### Abstract

Literature works often try to create the beauty of arts by way of portraying color which stands for a peculiar artistic language. Wilde regarded his fairy tales as “studies in prose”, and in his works, Wilde adopt quite a lot color words to create sophisticated intention to convey his aestheticism and unique death consciousness. It is of great significance to analyze the color intention in his fairy tales. This paper adopt his popular fairy tale “Nightingale and the Rose” as an example to give a detailed analysis on the color intention from three aspects: the constitution and variation of color, the functions of color words and the intention of color words.

**Key words:** Color words; Intention; Nightingale and the Rose

Hou, Y. F. (2017). The Analysis on the Color Intention of Oscar Wilde’s “Nightingale and the Rose”. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 14(4), 57-59. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/9593> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/9593>

### INTRODUCTION

Color is the characteristic of human visual perception described through color categories, with names such as red, yellow, purple, or blue. The exist of color is a complicated physical phenomenon and a special aesthetic perception. Literature works often try to create the beauty of arts by way of portraying color which stands for a peculiar artistic language. As a representative figure of the esthete, Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde (1854—1900), was well-known

as an Irish-born playwright, novelist, essayist and poet. As the representative writer of Aestheticism in the end of the nineteenth century, Oscar Wilde had prominent literary talents that admired by people. His achievements consisted of almost all literary forms: prose, poems, fairy tales, novels, dramas and critic essays. His works are suffused with his aestheticism, brilliant craftsmanship, legendary wit and ultimately, his tragic muse Wilde, who was known as the notorious figurehead of aestheticism, really surprised the readers with such an ideal work of charity, beauty and love.

Wilde regarded his fairy tales as “studies in prose”(Belford, 2001). And in his works, Wilde adopt quite a lot color words to create sophisticated intention to convey his aestheticism and unique death consciousness ,which is considered as the typical features of his fairy tales and could account for their great popularity among both children and adults. It is of great significance to analyze the color intention in his fairy tales. This paper adopt his popular fairy tale “Nightingale and the Rose” as an example to give a detailed analysis on the color intention from three aspects: the constitution and variation of color, the functions of color words and the intention of color words.

### 1. THE CONSTITUTION AND VARIATION OF COLOR WORDS

According to the definition from Wikipedia and some linguistics dictionary, the color words can be categorized as basic color words and objective color words. The basic color words refer to those color words keeps solid and unique meaning of a certain color which will not change with the context, such as red, yellow and green.(Xu Yuan,2009) The objective color words refer to the words in nature which could be used to stand for a typical kind of color, such as jade, gold and pearl.

In Wilde's fairy tale "Nightingale and the Rose", both the basic color words and objective color words were used. Some basic color words, like "red", "yellow", "pink" appear frequently to convey a strong and hearty feeling towards the truth and beauty. Compared to the directness and simplicity of basic color words, Wilde preferred to adopt some objective color words like "emerald", "opal", "coral" and "ruby" to present the readers a romantic and magnificent pictures to realize his artistic conception.

The variation and contrast can bring about artistic association and sharp aesthetic effect. Wilde craftily adopt various color words which set off each other in a fascinating way. "red" was the most frequently used color in "Nightingale and the Rose". Red, symbolizing the true love and sacrifice, was repeated again and again in a climax way. "Surely love is a wonderful thing. It is more precious than emeralds and dearer than fine opals" said the Nightingale. The author use emerald and opal to set off the red rose so as to highlight the precious true love. When the young student cried for the wanting of red rose, a green Lizard passed by and teased him. The Lizard was something of a cynic who cannot understand the secret of the student's sorrow and the mystery of love, so he laughed outright at the love and arts. In this context, "Green Lizard" forms a sharp contrast to "red rose", reveling the ironical attitude of Wilde to those who could not understand his pursue to "arts for art's sake".

The young student desired for a red rose, as red as the feet of the doves, and redder than the great fans of coral. The Nightingale determined to build it out of music by moonlight and stain it with her own heart's blood. When the Nightingale sing to the rose with her breast against the thorn all night, the cold crystal Moon leaned down and listened. Here, the cold crystal moon makes a sharp contrast to the warm and hearty singing bird, creating a tragedy atmosphere. Such intensified contrast and conflict of color and light brings about extreme tension and reveal Wilde's resistance to the contradiction of reality and his aesthetic pursue.

Apart from the contrast to the color words, gradient ramp or the gradual change of color was also explored in this work. For example, when the Nightingale began to sing first of the birth of love in the heart of a boy and the girl, the rose tree there blossomed a marvelous rose, but as the thorn had not yet reached her heart so the rose's heart remained white. So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn and the thorn piece in her heart, and then the marvelous rose became crimson, like the rose of the eastern sky. Crimson was the girdle of petals, and crimson as ruby was the heart. When she gave one last burst of music, the red rose trembled all over with ecstasy and opened its red petals in the cold morning air. But the Nightingale was lying dead in the grass with the thorn in her heart. Such gradual change of the color of the rose leads readers to approaching the climax unconsciously

and finally reach the magnificent epic but full of pathos.

What more, Wilde elaborately use some words to balance the light and shade in this tale., such as "bright", "dazzling", "pale", "cold", "dim" and "soft", etc. readers seem to be put in a beautiful world decorated by various shade of lights together with amazing colors. But different from common paintings which present us visualized and synchronic aesthetic feelings, Wilde's words present readers marvelous dynamic and diachronic pictures intensifying by the power of language, creating unique aesthetic effect by different readers of different association.

## 2. THE FUNCTIONS OF COLOR WORDS

### 2.1 Set the Tone of the Story

The great literature works always adopt color words to set the tone of the text, to render the atmosphere, to shape the characters and to reveal or to sublimate the theme. In "Nightingale and the Rose", red is the dominant tone al through the story. The young students cried for not getting a red rose to prove his love to the girl, so the Nightingale sang for death for the reddest rose but was finally discarded by ignorant young students and the girl. The story was told in such red melody, romantic but ironical.

### 2.2 Develop the Plot and Reveal the Fate of Protagonist

Various and gradual change of colors help Wilds create an attractive tale world, beautiful but not real. Like many fairy tales, the plot is very simple, but the repetitive pattern of color change was used as a ladder to make readers reach the climax. For example, three episode was told to reveal the difficulties to find a red rose. When the Nightingale spread her brown wings for the first flight to search for a red rose, the rose tree shook its head and answered, "My roses are white, as white as the foam of the sea, and whiter than the snow upon the mountain." When she approached to the second rose tree, she was refused and was told "my roses are yellow, as yellow as the hair of the mermaid, and yellower than the daffodil that blooms in the meadow." So she had to made the third try and finally got the answer: "my roses are red, as red as the feet of the doves, and redder than the great fans of coral. But the winter has chilled my veins, and frost has nipped my buds, and the storm has broken my branches, and I shall have no reses at all this year." From white to yellow, from yellow to red, the story developed by the climax of color, which brings the tragedy a special beauty.

### 2.3 Construct the Intension Through Metaphor

In literature works, color words are the carrier of different emotions and intention. Psychologically speaking, the choice of color is determined by the author's inner intention rather than the objective characteristics. Colors always have a symbolic or metaphoric function, aiming to lead readers to imagine and explore the deeper meaning

under the colorful words so as to reach an implicit but meaningful artistic expression.

Words would always be Wilde's most powerful defense, and no other writer in the English language has used them with the same elegance. He made an art form of the single sentence and the perfectly poised, contradictory color words. True love is red, cynical lizard is green, the beautiful song was like water bubbling from a silver jar....Some of these seeming contradictions are the natural reversals of opinion brought about by dramatically eventful life. But such sharp contrast of color and sound indicates the rebel of Wilde to the cruel and hypocritical Victoria society.

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## CONCLUSION

Color, as an artistic language, is of great significance in Wilde's fairy tales with great aesthetic value. In

"Nightingale and the Rose", the basic red tone and other various colors make a sharp contrast and create pictures full of tension in which love and hatred, beauty and ugliness, true lovers and hypocrites were presented to readers. The analysis of the color intention is of great value to explore the aestheticism and the eternal artistic charming of Oscar Wilde.

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