

## *The Love of the Nightingale: Fitzgerald and Wilde's Views on Love*

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### Abstract

Wilde's love was like the nightingale in his work *The Nightingale and the Rose*, who was desperate for the love and beauty in his heart. While Fitzgerald loved the night, his personality is as gentle as it, and his love is also as loyal as the nightingale in Wilde's writing. Loving only one person in his whole life, he attained fame and fortune for her, and lost himself because of his love. Fitzgerald and Wilde, separated by the Atlantic Ocean and lived in two periods of 40 years apart, but their love that did not end well, resounds like the poignant song of a nightingale.

**Key words:** Fitzgerald; Wilde; Devotion; Love of the Nightingale

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In 1888, the fairy tale *The Nightingale and the Rose* was published in England and included in Oscar Wilde's collection of fairy tales *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, which tells the story about a nightingale who is touched by the affection of her beloved young man and sacrifices her life to cultivate a red rose for him, and the nightingale's willingness to devote herself for love can be described as "The Love of the Nightingale". Struggled to gain wealth and fame for Zelda and spent his life in toil, Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, the representative writer of the Jazz Age (1919-1928), has numerous characters which

accord with the spirit of "The Love of the Nightingale", a dedication to love.

Numerous Chinese scholars have analyzed and studied *The Nightingale and the Rose* from a variety of perspectives. For example, Cheng Yuyu (2010) analyzed the beauty of life and love in terms of artistic conception and rhetoric (Cheng, 2010, pp.104-106), while Ning Yizhong and Liu Beibei (2015) combined it with Julia Kristeva's semiotic theory to analyze the design of the storyline (Ning and Liu, 2015). Numerous foreign scholars also tried to interpret *The Nightingale and the Rose*, such as Mehmood et al (2014) combined this tale with Halliday's Transitivity Analysis to analyze the interpersonal function of language reflected from it (Mehmood, Amber, Ameer, & Faiz, 2014), Mugair and Abbas (2016) combined the theory Stylistics to analyze Wilde's writing style (Mugair & Abbas, 2016). However, there is no separate analysis on the view of love behind "The Love of the Nightingale" in the previous studies, and the analysis of Wilde's concept of love has rarely been combined with other writers. Therefore, this paper will take "The Love of the Nightingale" as the point of penetration to analyze the manifestation of this kind of love, the influence caused by social background and the psychological characteristics of this kind of love with a series of works by Fitzgerald and Wilde.

### MANIFESTATION OF THE NIGHTINGALE'S LOVE: SELF-DESTRUCTION AND DEVOTION

According to Nietzsche's theory (1872), love and death are always the same, and that the will to love is also the willingness to die (Nietzsche, 1872). In both ancient and modern times, "love and death" is always a common theme in literary creation, countless characters are willing to destroy their prospects and beliefs because of love,

some of them even die for it. Looking at "The Love of the Nightingale" of Fitzgerald and Wilde's characters in their writings, we can divide it into two categories: self-destruction and devotion.

The term "self-destruction" can be understood as the loss of self-consciousness and awareness due to love, which will lead to the destruction of one's own future. According to Sartre (1976), "hell is other people", the love between people is essentially an attempt to deprive freedom from each other (Sartre, 1955), when this attempt fails, it will bring a devastating end to people. In *Babylon Revisited*, Charlie cannot forgive his wife who is unfaithful to their marriage and bolts her out on a snowy night after a quarrel, which causes his wife to fall ill and die, and his life goes into turmoil from then on. In *Salome*, Salome asks for Iokanaan's head against the king's will just to get his kiss, and she is also killed by the king after kissing Iokanaan's head. Sartre (1943) claimed in *Being and Nothingness* that all love is doomed to failure because love is a bad faith attempt to capture the Other's freedom in order to secure for oneself a fixed nature (Sartre, 1943). However, one cannot completely deprive another person's will and freedom, Just as Charles cannot prevent the feeling of love between he and his wife from fading away, Salome cannot change Iokanaan's hatred of her, Fitzgerald and Wilde's characters try to possess each other with love, but this love only ends up bringing them into conflict with the person they love, and the pain caused by this conflict continues to torment their hearts, distort their emotions gradually, and finally end in failure and self-destruction.

The term "devotion" can be interpreted as the willingness to cost their life in order to overcome the suffering caused by the lack of love. According to Freud (1922)'s psychoanalysis, human instincts are divided into the life instinct and the death instinct, of which the life instinct is also called the love instinct. These two instincts hold each other in check, when a person does not receive enough love in life, or the mental stress makes him or her feel that life is painful, the person's desire to live will weaken, and the death instinct prevails in the subconscious at the same time. When this motivation to die is strong enough in the sub consciousness, the suicide is more likely to occur (Freud, 1922). In Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Wilson kills Gatsby successfully, but becomes more aware of the fact that the person his wife loved is never him, so he chooses to commit suicide after avenging his wife. Similarly, in Wilde's *The Portrait of Dowling Gray*, Sybil dies in despair after losing the love of Dowling Gray. According to Plato, love is a desire to possess something good for an enduring or even eternal period of time, which stimulates the effort of human beings to strive for immortality as far as possible (Gu and Mo, 2004). When a man cannot have the love he desired, he will lose the drive and the quest to live. In *The Rich Boy*, Sloane commits suicide by jumping off a bridge

after the fact that his girlfriend, who has been married with another man, is having an affair with him is revealed; and Lady Alroy in *The Sphinx Without a Secret* dies of lovesickness after being abandoned.

Foucault claimed that a man who is a writer is never just doing his work in the books he writes and his main job ultimately is writing himself in the process of writing books (Gao, 2011). In fact, when Fitzgerald and Wilde were caught in a predicament of love, they also demonstrated a spirit of devotion. In order to obtain Zelda, the goddess of his heart, Fitzgerald worked in an advertising agency by day and wrote novels by night in order to fulfill Zelda's quest for wealth and vanity, After his marriage, he became more obsessed with money in order to satisfy his wife's extravagant lifestyle, he was even willing to "sell his talent" and "strived to make his short stories marketable and popular". He even abandoned his "decent work" (Hemingway, 1964), which truly embodied his artistic and literary aspiration (Hemingway, 1964). Fitzgerald was dominated by money due to Zelda until his life collapsed (Kong, 1995). Similarly, Wilde also made compromises and concessions after he fell in love with Bosie. Though Bosie was not good at French, Wilde accepted his youthful beauty to assisted him in translating his plays, paid for all Bosie's bills even though he went from being financially well-off to not being able to make ends meet. He even fell into disrepute, was imprisoned and lost his wife and children because of his beloved. Shortly after his release from prison, he passed away in poverty and illness.

Judging from this, "The Love of the Nightingale" is derived from Fitzgerald's and Wilde's own love experiences: Zelda and Bosie use the lure of love to plunge them into the quagmire of love, causing them destroy their talents and stable lives until devote their lives to love. Despite the difficulty of wining their beloved person's heart, and the awareness of love's constraint, they kept compromising and unwilling to wake up from the dream of love.

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## **HIDE FROM THE NIGHTINGALE'S LOVE: CONSUMERISM**

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In *The Nightingale and the Rose*, many animals and plants such as lizards, butterflies and daisies are curious about the student's sadness, but when they learn the reason is that he is unable to obtain a red rose, except the nightingale believes that the student's love is precious and priceless, these animals and plants laugh unmercifully since they believe the love symbolised by a rose cannot be compared to the variety of precious stones. Throughout the actual experiences and works of Fitzgerald and Wilde, both of them put love in front of wealth as the nightingale, but the fact that their love is influenced by consumerism can be seen behind the nightingale's love.

She was the first “nice” girl he had ever known. In various unrevealed capacities he had come in contact with such people but always with indiscernible barbed wire between.....he had never been in such a beautiful house before. But what gave it an air of breathless intensity was that Daisy lived there—it was as casual a thing to her as his tent out at camp was to him. There was a ripe mystery about it, a hint of bedrooms upstairs more beautiful and cool than other bedrooms, of gay and radiant activities taking place through its corridors and of romances that were not musty and laid away already in lavender but fresh and breathing and redolent of this year’s shining motor cars and of dances whose flowers were scarcely withered. It excited him too that many men had already loved Daisy—it increased her value in his eyes (Fitzgerald, 1925).

This is Gatsby’s recollection of his first time when he met Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*, and it is clear from this description that it was not Daisy made her house more beautiful but Daisy’s luxurious home gave Daisy the glamorous glow (Liu and An, 2006). Gatsby was a penniless young man at the time, and he came to Daisy’s house “by a colossal accident”, a place is not originally available to the social background he was born of. Daisy captivated Gatsby with the beauty given by her wealthy family and her habituation to the luxury mansion, causing him to fall in love with this “nice girl” and igniting Gatsby’s “American dream” of “climbing to the top of society”, “being a ‘big shot’ “, and marrying the “prettiest girl” (Fitzgerald, 1920).

For fledgling and innocent Gatsby, Daisy, a rich and beautiful young woman, undoubtedly becomes the embodiment of his career and his dream. However, while *The Great Gatsby* devotes a great deal of words to express Gatsby’s fascination and determination for Daisy, there is little explanation of why he falls in love with Daisy, and the merely two words “beautiful” and “rich” are sufficient to sum up the reason. Therefore, Gatsby is seems fall in love with Daisy, the thing he actually loves is the wealth and status that Daisy represents. He is obsessed with everything that has to do with wealth and vanity, and Daisy happens to bring him all the vanity he pursues: beauty, wealth, and lots of suitors (Liu and An, 2006). However, love and this level of wealth are both things he had never experienced before for Gatsby at that time, so he inevitably confused the two things and became a prisoner of money during the process of chasing love, and it is the misconception that money can achieve anything that led to Gatsby’s tragedy.

As a matter of fact, it would be hard to find a writer in America more stuck with the issue of money than Fitzgerald, and many of his short stories are the products of economic need. According to Fitzgerald’s daughter, Fitzgerald had conflicting feelings about money, he was at a loss when he faced the money so he was enslaved by it for the rest of his life ( Key, 2014). On the one hand,

money was the most direct manifestation of his ‘American Dream’, through which he got the fame and love he desired, but on the other hand, money controlled him was so firmly that he was forced to waste his talents for writing short stories that would have been disdained by writers such as Hemingway at the time in order to satisfy Zelda’s extravagant expenses. By analyzing his novels with Zelda as a prototype, such as *The Great Gatsby*, it is easy to deduce that Fitzgerald’s pursuit of love intertwined with his ambition and desire for glory and wealth .In fact, he strove to pursue love through money and fame, unaware that his choice of love is also unwittingly controlled by money.

Unlike Fitzgerald who had a mixture of love and hate towards money, Wilde implicitly mocked the professor’s daughter since she favors the chamberlain’s nephew who gives her jewellery. In *The Fisherman and His Soul*, the fisherman also rejects the temptation of soul and insists that ‘love is better than wealth’. As for real life, he opposed Bosie’s extravagant lifestyle and tried to persuade him through conversations and letters. Although he loved and condoned Bosie’s materialistic obsession, he was disgusted this reality in his heart: believing that individuals are hopelessly corrupted by money, he strove to rescue them from commercialized environment and preserve an unsullied place for his aesthetic dream.

So it seems that Wilde had a firm disdain for money and consumerism, but the fact is that his aestheticism unconsciously contains characteristics of consumerism, which Baudrillard points out as an alienation of the idea of consumption. Under its influence, the value of commodities not simply lies in their utility but also in the symbolic meaning and cultural connotations (Sun, 2019). In Wilde’s novels and plays, consumption goods like interior decoration, furniture, wallpaper, fabrics, porcelain, costumes, ties, corsages, handkerchiefs, jewellery and so on have an artistic value that is worthy to be pursued and explored by the characters in his works (Gu, 2008). At the same time, Wilde also decorated his life with aestheticism artistic principles. He often wore sumptuous velvet tops, elegant bow ties and black tassels, and he liked to wear velvet lantern trousers and long stockings, with a lily or sunflower in the buttonhole, carrying his ivory cane walk through the streets as if no one was watching to present an aesthetic image to the public (Qu, 2006). Apart from this, Wilde’s choice of furniture was also identical to the prevailing views of Western society at the time, he thought using oriental objects would reflect his artistic pursuits, he had a fondness for Chinese ceramic vases and Japanese artifacts and he usually promoted them. Thus, though Wilde was opposed to love based on material rather than sincere affection, he enjoyed the benefits brought by fame and fortune which can help him in his pursuit of aestheticism. Even his love affair with Bosie, which may seem to be a result of Bosie’s admiration for his talent shown in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and his fascination

with Bosie's beauty and interest, in fact, he could not escape from the attraction of capital and vanity behind the pursuit of beauty and art.

In summary, Fitzgerald spent his life pursuing and sustaining his love, but was unwilling to acknowledge that the desire for money was hidden by love, Wilde saw love as part of his aestheticism, but he was also unable to resist that his commitment to love and beauty had long been tainted by consumerism. Same as the nightingale in *The Nightingale* and the Rose that believes the student's grief comes from the true love and that love could not be commercialized (Fonseka, 2020), even though Fitzgerald and Wilde were aware of the dissipation and vanity behind love, they were still willing to indulge in it, even if being drawn into the flood of money.

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## **ABOVE THE NIGHTINGALE'S LOVE: HOPE IN PESSIMISM**

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Fitzgerald's is addressed as "one of the most important figures with tragic color in American literature". Indeed, Fitzgerald himself was a writer with a strong sense of tragedy. He also revealed his pessimistic attitude towards love by describing a series of love stories that end in tragedy. In *This Side of Paradise*, Amory longs for status and love, but his illusions about romance and love is completely shattered after four failed romances; and so is *Tender is the Night*, in which the marriage to the rich lady Nicole wears away Dick's confidence and dreams, and Rosemary, who had once captured his heart also ends up treating him as an emotional plaything. In Fitzgerald's writings, men who fall in love are like nightingales that sing the songs for love with a passionate heart, but ultimately leave in despair, leaving the poignant songs that will be sung for generations behind.

Wilde has been called a decadent writer due to the penetration of pessimism in many of his works. In *The Nightingale and the Rose*, the nightingale sacrifices her life to create a red rose and gives it to a young man that she admired, however, after being rejected by the girl he loves, the young man promptly throws the flower on the road, leaving the nightingale's love to be crushed along with the rose by a carriage. In *The Birthday of the Infanta*, the dwarf shares everything he has with the princess out of love, but the princess responds to him with nothing more than curiosity and mockery and she even says that "For the future let those who come to play with me have no hearts" (Wilde, 1982) after his death. In Wilde's writing, those men who fall in love are like moths dart into a flame, but their pure and passionate love is only got the ending of being trampled without mercy. The tragedies of the characters he created are actually reflections of Wilde's pessimistic psychology towards love.

In fact, The permissive view of love in their writing is not only due to their personal experiences, but also has to

do with their historical backgrounds in the time they live, at these two periods, the rapid development of capitalism led to bourgeoisie's desire for improvement of the social status, it increased so quickly that even affected literature and art, which made both Fitzgerald and Wilde, who were sensitive by nature, became sceptical about the true value of money and literature. The period when Fitzgerald had creative writing activities was the Jazz Age, when America was caught in a false economic bubble. Undoubtedly, his beloved Zelda was also seduced by fame and fortune and had an obsessive pursuit of the so-called "upper-class society", which is reflected in *Tender is the Night*, 18-year old Rosemary falls in love with Dick, beyond the empathy of their souls, her love is more about her desire for the 'upper class' which Dick is in at the time. While Wilde lived in Victorian era (1837-1901), a period when industrial civilization and overseas expansion stimulate a frenzied pursuit of money, fame and power, and he once said "What matters is possessions, what does love matter?" in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Lady Augusta Bracknell initially dislikes Jack's unknown origin and is unwilling to marry her niece to him. However, after learning the truth that Jack actually had a noble lineage, she quickly changes her attitude; there is also a reflection of this period setting in *The Happy Prince*: the good prince keeps helping others in need, but he is spurned after giving out all the gold and gems which symbolize the honor and status. By portraying characters that are consumed by wealth, Fitzgerald and Wilde asked the question "whether love is the love of the person or the love of fame" with disappointment and sorrow.

However, even though they are skeptical and pessimistic about love, they still extol its beauty in their works, believing that it can shake everything up. Fitzgerald's *The Ice Palace* tells the story of Sally, a southern girl who is brave to travel from the American South to the cold northern area to be together forever with her boyfriend and endeavor to overcome the difficulties of adapting to an extremely different environment. In *Head and Shoulders*, Horace, the representative of the 'head', takes on the responsibility of his family and puts his literary talent aside to become an acrobat, while Marcia, the representative of the "shoulder", wrote a novel with the intention of writing her husband "the world's longest love letter" (Fitzgerald, 1920) during her pregnancy and becomes a famous writer in the end. Although slightly ironic, this interchange of identities essentially demonstrates their love and responsibility, which help them, get through the family's difficulties. Wilde's works also demonstrates his affirmation of the power of love: In *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Mrs. Erlynne has the courage to liberate herself from a loveless marriage and elope with the one she truly loves because of love; In *The Fisherman and His Soul*, the fisherman is willing to send his soul away on the account of love, and the soul is able

to return to the Fisherman's body in the end also because the death of the mermaid brings overwhelming grief to the fisherman and makes his heart crushed by love. It is because of the fisherman's love for the mermaid that the soul is banished by the fisherman, but it is also his love for the mermaid that purifies the soul and brings it back into the heart of the fisherman after it underwent sublimation. Fitzgerald and Wilde believed in the power of love, even though they knew that their love has the potential to end in tragedy, they still retained their hope and seek the love diligently like the nightingale.

"All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true lover, for Love is wiser than Philosophy, though he is wise, and mightier than Power, though he is mighty. Flame-colored are his wings, and coloured like flame is his body. His lips are sweet as honey, and his breath is like frankincense." (Wilde, 1888) Even though it knows it will never receive a response from the student it loved, the nightingale in Wilde's work always believes the power of love and convinced its sacrifice can give the student the hope of love. Fitzgerald and Wilde share the same faith in their hearts as the nightingale, therefore, although they gradually became discouraged with their love, they never leave Zelda and Bosie respectively, and they still have a flame of hope in their hearts though it is faint.

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## CONCLUSION

"If you want a red rose, you must build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart's-blood. You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine." Though the nightingale knows that her love for the student is likely to have a tragic ending, it is still willing to sacrifice herself to fulfil his quest for love. Fitzgerald and Wilde are as sober as the nightingale but their infatuations are also as deep as the nightingale's. The Jazz Age and the Victorian era occurred in different nations and periods, but with the consciousness of the horrific association about love with self-destruction and death, both of them were willing to be exhausted by love until their end of life. They saw through the reality that love is firmly controlled by consumerism yet continued to find the sweetness in love. They are addicted to the dream of love, sang about hope and persistence in their desperate love as the nightingale, until they are exhausted and complete the beautiful devotion to love.

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