

DUAL NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS IN THE SHORT STORY
“THE DEVOTED FRIEND” BY OSCAR WILDE

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Abstract: This article is dedicated to study Oskar Wilde’s “The Devoted Friend”. It mainly focuses on the aspect of human relationships, characterized by mutual affections, loyalty, and support between individuals. The story serves as cautionary tale the danger of selfishness and exploitation, emphasizing how a true friend should be loyal, honest, selfless in their action. It also highlights the analyses of positive and negative features of the ideal friendship and impact of it in someone else’s life. These concepts are fully explained with the help of extracts from the literary work.

Key words: Oscar Wilde, human relationships, loyalty, friendship, concept, dual nature of human beings.

“The Devoted Friend” is a short story written by Oscar Wilde. It is a captivating literary piece that explores the themes of friendship, loyalty, and manipulation. Through the clear description and intricate symbolism Wilde presents touching portrayal of the sincerity and genuine in our friendships and remind us that true friendship is based on mutual respect and kindness rather than selfishness and manipulation. We think that just finding that right person will make us happy and fulfilled. But research shows that friends are actually even more important psychological welfare. When people are asked what gives meaning to your life? Friendship figures at the top of the list. Friends bring more happiness into our lives, but some friends can lead to a fatal destination for the course of their selfishness. They accustomed to thinking only inside of the frame, completely does not know what was happening outside of it. We must get rid of egoistic habits by showing them harmful effects of self-centeredness. From this point of view, Oscar Wilde’s short story “The Devoted Friend” doubtfully is a good example for revealing positive and negative points of friendship along with encouraging the audience to read bestsellers.

Oscar Wilde, an Irish writer, poet, and playwright, gained popularity in London in the early 1890s as one of the most influential playwrights of the Victorian era. He was born on October 16th, in Dublin, Ireland. A poet and translator. He quickly gained fame through his plays, essays, and public speak engagements. His works often satires the social conventions and hypocrisies of Victorian society. He experimented with different literary styles in the 1880s before gaining recognition as a prominent figure in the literary community. Wilde’s wit, humor, and social commentary continue to captivate audiences, making him a timeless and enduring literary figure. Wilde was a versatile writer, trying his hand at plays, poetry, lectures, and reviews. He was known for his sharp wit, stylish dress, and captivating conversations, becoming a well-known figure in society. In the 1890s, he focused on the importance of art and explored themes of decadence and beauty in his novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. Despite setbacks, such as the refusal of his play Salome in England, Wilde went on to write successful comedies and establish himself as a prominent playwright in Late-Victorian London. Also, Oscar Wilde wrote many short stories throughout his career. Such as “The Happy Prince”, “The Canterville Ghost”, “The Devoted Friend”, “The Selfish Giant”. These short stories showcase Wilde’s wit, humor, and ability to convey complex themes in a simple and engaging way. They are beloved for their moral lessons, fantastical elements, and timeless appeal.

“The Devoted Friend” first published in 1888 as part of his collection of fairy tales titled “The Happy Prince and Other Tales.” The story is a social commentary on the nature of friendship, loyalty, and the true intentions of people. In the plot two characters named Hans and Miller play crucial role. Oscar Wilde explained the dual nature of human beings in this story. The story starts with discussion of the Duck and water rat. They all were discussing about real friendship and its motives. The bird started the story of two friends, one was a poor farmer named Hans, while the other was a humble and simple man, who always preferred friendship. Miller was a rich man who always felt good and impressed Hans. He always took advantage of Hans’s garden:

“Real friends should have everything in common,” the Miller used to say, and little Hans nodded and smiled, and felt very proud of having a friend with such noble ideas.” [8]

He collected fruits from the garden. Poor Hans never Mind at all, when Hans went through bad events in life, Miller never visited him. He said people should know how to deal with bad events”

“There is no good in my going to see little Hans as long as the snow lasts,” the Miller used to say to his wife, “for when people are in trouble they should be left alone, and not be bothered by visitors. That at least is my idea about friendship, and I am sure I am right.” [8]

Hans sold his only wheelbarrow in winter, when Hans become stable after a months of the hard work. Miller again visited him, he promised that he would give his wheelbarrow to Hans. He presented three condition. One of them was that Hans would repair his house items. Hans was a simple man, he repaired in love for friendship. One-day Miller rushed to Hans and told him about his son who needed a doctor. Hans called the doctor for Miller’s son. Hans tried to lend lantern, because it was dark and there was not any lighting, but Miller refused. Anyway brave Hans could manage calling for a doctor immediately did not paying attention to long distance. In the morning people found Hans in a pit, they concluded he fell during the night. The story ends when Miller realizes his mistakes at the end, he felt bad for his deed. However, Hans is no longer alive to hear his apology. This tragic ending shows how some people only recognize the value of true friendship when it is too late. Oscar Wilde’s message remains relevant even today, as many people still mistake kindness for weakness and fail to treat their friends with genuine care and respect. In today’s world, similar problems in friendship still exist. Like Miller, some individuals take advantage of those who are loyal, helpful, and honest. For example, in many workplaces, there are people who form so-called “friendships” only to benefit from others’ efforts. They ask for help, expect emotional support, or borrow things, but when their friend is in trouble, they disappear or give excuses—just like Miller did when Hans was suffering during the winter.

Social media has also changed the meaning of friendship. In the past, friends would visit each other, talk for hours, and share both happy and difficult moments. Friendship meant standing by someone through thick and thin. Today, many friendships are only digital. People may have hundreds or even thousands of “friends” on Facebook or Instagram, but in reality, they often feel lonely. A person may post a sad message or ask for help online, but instead of real support, they receive only a few “likes” or short comments. This is similar to Miller’s behavior—he praised Hans in words but never supported him in actions:

“Lots of people act well,” answered the Miller; “but very few people talk well, which shows that talking is much the more difficult thing of the two, and much the finer thing also...” [8]

In real life, stories like Hans’s still happen. For instance, there are students who help their classmates with homework or lend money without expecting anything in return. But when they are sick or struggling, those same classmates often forget about them. In some cases, young

people become friends with someone only because that person has a car, expensive phone, or popularity—not because of shared values or emotional connection. Another example can be seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people were isolated and going through mental stress. True friends were the ones who stayed in touch, checked in regularly, and offered help without expecting anything in return. But others stayed silent or avoided their friends during hard times, showing that their connection was only based on convenience. Compared to the past, today's friendships often lack depth. In earlier generations, people valued long-term loyalty and spent time together without distractions. Friendships were formed slowly, built on trust and shared experiences. Now, because of technology and busy lifestyles, many people focus more on temporary, fast connections rather than meaningful bonds. Yet, there is still hope. Some people today still value true friendship. They show up when it matters, listen without judgment, and care deeply—just like Hans, but with more awareness of setting boundaries so they are not exploited. Modern education and awareness have helped people recognize toxic relationships and choose healthier friendships.

In conclusion, Oscar Wilde's "The Devoted Friend" serves as a timeless allegory that exposes the dangers of unequal and self-serving relationships. Through the tragic character of Hans, Wilde illustrates how blind loyalty, when exploited, can lead to suffering and even death. His story is a clear warning: not all those who claim to be friends truly are. Miller's behavior mirrors that of many individuals today—those who speak kindly but act selfishly, who take without giving, and who disappear when others are in need. In the modern age, the essence of friendship has undergone both positive and negative changes. On one hand, technology allows us to stay connected across distances; on the other hand, it sometimes weakens the emotional depth and sincerity of our relationships. Superficial connections can give the illusion of friendship, but they often lack the empathy, sacrifice, and mutual care that define true companionship. Wilde's tale encourages us to look inward and ask difficult questions: Are we being true friends, or are we benefiting from others without giving back? Are we surrounding ourselves with people who support us in hard times, or with those who vanish when we are no longer useful to them? Moreover, the story invites us to reflect on the value of setting boundaries. While Hans was noble and kind-hearted, his failure to recognize Miller's manipulation cost him his life. True friendship should not come at the cost of one's dignity or well-being. Real friends do not demand sacrifice—they give support freely, out of mutual respect and love. Today, more than ever, we need to teach and practice the principles of honest, supportive, and balanced relationships. **While the world has changed in many ways, the values of honesty, loyalty, and mutual care in friendship remain timeless.** Friendship is one of life's most meaningful bonds, and when built on trust, empathy, and equality, it becomes a powerful force for emotional strength and personal growth.

"The Devoted Friend" remains a powerful reminder that friendship is not measured by words or appearances, but by consistent actions, shared responsibilities, and the willingness to walk together in both joy and hardship. As we navigate our own relationships, Wilde's story challenges us to become better friends—and to choose wisely those we call our own.

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