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Analysis of one of Oscar Wilde's Poems: Amor Intellectualis

Título: Analysis of one of Oscar Wilde's Poems: Amor Intellectualis. **Target:** ESO y Bachillerato. **Asignatura/s:** Lengua Inglesa. **Autor/a/es:** Beatriz March Moya, Licenciada en Filología Inglesa.

Amor Intellectualis

*OFT have we trod the vales of Castaly
 And heard sweet notes of sylvan music blown
 From antique reeds to common folk unknown:
 And often launched our bark upon that sea
 Which the nine Muses hold in empery,
 And ploughed free furrows through the wave and foam,
 Nor spread reluctant sail for more safe home
 Till we had freighted well our argosy.
 Of which despoilèd treasures these remain,
 Sordello's passion, and the honied line
 Of young Endymion, lordly Tamburlaine
 Driving his pampered jades, and more than these,
 The seven-fold vision of the Florentine,
 And grave-browed Milton's solemn harmonies.*

Although Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) is famous for his theatre plays and prose narratives, he also wrote very good poetry capturing his feelings and thoughts about his vision of life. He is most famous for his sophisticated, brilliantly witty plays and also for his eccentricity in dress, tastes and manners. His first published work, *Poems* (1881), was well received and served as a springboard for his 1882 United States lecture tour. The poem which is going to be analysed is included in this collection.

The first thing to do when we want to analyse a poem is remember the moment in which it was written. In this case, we should set the context of the Victorian Age in which the ideas of conventionalism and totalitarianism were the bases of the society. People could not express their own ideas; they could only follow the instructions that reigned in the monarchic system. In this concern, Wilde had his own socialis, anti-burgeoise, revolutionist and thinking ideas which were opposite to the valid ones. He criticizes and parodies these aspects in most of his theatre plays and in his poems too. In addition, his homosexuality was another problem he had to face to, in a society where there was no place for people who were "different".

As regards to the art, his point of view was aesthetic. He defended the art for art's sake, and belonged to the aesthetic movement in literature. We have to point out his dandysm and his mytic vision of life.

In his poetry, he uses specific stylistic devices in a way and with a purpose that makes his style unforgettable and recognizable as unique and original one.

It should be clear that at first he had some problems at the publishing of his *Poems*, although later there would be three editions more of them.

Talking about the poem called *Amor Intellectualis*, it was published in *Rosa Mystica*, Poem in 1881. We can begin talking about the title, which refers to Baruch Spinoza's, a 17th century religious philosopher and his doctrine of *Amor Dei intellectualis*. His belief is that the ultimate aim for humankind is the intellectual love of God or the *Amor Dei intellectualis*, which is equivalent to knowledge of God, that this knowledge of the natural causal order is the only true 'religion' and a route to freedom. It is through this untiring bond of devotion that enables man to attain his greatest achievements by creating an intellectual bond of affection.

In the discussion and comparison between the many myths and religions of the world, Wilde interprets and likens these ideas of myth and theological faith among the poets and their work as an *Amor Intellectualis*.

'Eternity is now' and 'Art for arts sake' are the two ideas Wilde juggles well in this poem. It can be broken into two stanzas. The first, an octet concerns eternity and mythos in a joyful presencing. *Castaly* was the spring sacred to the muses on Mount Parnassus; *sylvan* is a mythological woods. Euphony begins now in a magical forest and sets sail upon a large merchant ship ,argosy guided by the nine sister goddesses in Greek mythology who presided, empery, over their song and poetry.

The second stanza, a sestet in which Wilde calls forth the names of *Sordello*, an early thirteenth-century troubadour and the subject of Robert Browning's famous study of a poetic soul in his 1840 poem, *young Endymion* about the perpetual youth of Greek myth and the subject *John Keats* poem by the same. There is the lordly *Tamburlaine* from *Tamburlaine the Great* (1590)," by Christopher

Marlowe and the seven-fold vision of the Florentine are Dante Alighieri's picture of the seven levels of The Inferno. Wilde finishes his poem with the soft echoes of John Milton's ageless losing first and then regaining of Paradise.

Novallis said, "Poetry dissolves the being of others in its own," and it's Oscar Wilde's own heroic allegiance which drives him to look to his fellow poets and sees that comprehension starts in the presence of eternity and is visible, not from the poets themselves, but from their manifestations.

The poem introduces us to the 'intellectual love of God,' in which wisdom consists. The intellectual love of God is a union of thought and emotion: it consists, one may say, in true thought combined with joy in the apprehension of truth. All joy in true thought is part of the intellectual love of God, for it contains nothing negative, and is therefore truly part of the whole, not only apparently, as are fragmentary things so separated in thought as to appear bad.

In the octet, Wilde seems to be describing that joy; and in the sestet anchoring it to understanding. It is significant that in the sestet he refers not directly to the poets, but to their works: Sardello (Robert Browning); young Endymion (Keats) -- and perhaps also Longfellow, who wrote a poem of that title about Keats; Tamburlaine (Christopher Marlowe); the seven-fold vision of the Florentine (Dante's picture of the seven levels of the Inferno). The idea seems to be that understanding comes from the manifestations of these poets, not from themselves.

Criticism

Oscar Wilde has been very much with us both as a personality and a creator and critic of artistic work over the course of the past century. Whether they have approved or disapproved of him, it has proven difficult for artists and intellectuals of the most diverse persuasions to ignore him. There is something in his life and work that continues to compel not merely interest, but partisanship. He is, so to speak, an unresolved issue.

Wilde is one of the foremost figures of late nineteenth-century literary Decadence, a movement whose members espoused the doctrine of "art for art's sake" by seeking to subordinate moral, political, and social concerns in art to matters of aesthetic value. This credo of aestheticism, however, indicates only one facet of a man notorious for resisting any public institution—artistic, social, political, or moral—that attempted to subjugate individual will and imagination. In contrast to the cult of nature purported by the Romantic poets, Wilde posed a cult of art in his critical essays and reviews; to socialism's cult of the masses, he proposed a cult of the individual; and in opposition to what he saw as the middle-class façade of false respectability, he encouraged a struggle to realize one's true nature. Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), is typically considered one of the defining literary works of the Decadent movement. Exhibiting the author's fascination with human perversity, the novel also features numerous Gothic themes and techniques as it details in elaborate, ornamental prose the moral degeneration of its morbidly.

Many critics said that Wilde was perhaps less than a mature poet, but a good critic, and a splendid playwright. Oscar Wilde held particularly to his reputation as a dramatist, and this with some reasons. At the time successes, William Archer, the influential and enlightened critic, had placed him apart and above other contemporary authors; and Wilde believed himself to be unquestionably the equal of

Ibsen, the famous Norwegian dramatist. When Wilde turned to the theatre, he concerned himself with a social class, which had not yet been presented on stage. Arthur Pinero, the glittering English dramatist, had achieved notoriety with place drawn from middle-class life and a large number of others were producing popular dramas.

Wilde's plays have been popular with both audiences and critics, who praise his humorous and biting satire of English manners at the turn of the twentieth century. Analysis of sexuality in his work has been a rich area for critical discussion, as commentators investigate the role of androgyny and homosexuality in his comedies. Possible influences on and sources for his work has been another subject for critical study. Commentators on Wilde have also come to stress the intellectual and humanist basis of his plays. Traditionally, critical evaluation of Wilde's work has been complicated, primarily because his works have to compete for attention with his sensational life. Wilde himself regarded this complication as unnecessary, advising that "a critic should be taught to criticise a work of art without making reference to the personality of the author. This, in fact, is the beginning of criticism."

He was even the object of criticism in one of the lyrics of Ambrose Bierce in *The Wasp*:

There was a sweet infant named Wilde

A precious and crystalline child;

While sucking his playthings,

However he'd say things,

That proved that his mind was defiled.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that Wilde was an author whose talent wasn't recognized at his time as it did deserve. But this, instead of harming his potential, has led him to a state of glory which will preserve forever and ever. He will always be remembered as one of the genius in writing in the XIX th century. ●

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