

## SYNTHESIS OF PHILOSOPHY AND ART IN O. WILDE'S GOTHIC STORY *THE CANTERVILLE GHOST*

**Abstract.** The article analyzes O. Wilde's story *The Canterville Ghost* in the context of using the genre of the "Gothic" story to embody the writer's philosophical views. The article studies the causes of Wilde's appeal to the "Gothic" story, its interpretation by foreign and Russian researchers. The purpose of the article is to prove the synthesis of art and philosophy in the story. The multi-layers of the writer's works reflect his understanding of the multi-layered nature of the world, and Wilde's text combines reflections on topical social, moral and philosophical problems with an individual author's vision of reality. In *The Canterville Ghost* Wilde begins to comprehend the „American theme“, which highlights the problems of interaction between civilizations, the victory of rationality over spirituality and the tragedy behind it. Wilde's negative attitude towards materialism, practicality of modern times is also manifested in depicting false messages based on logic.

**Key words:**  
Gothic novels; mutual influence of cultures; philosophy of the unreal; English literature; English writers; literary activity; literary characters; literary plots.

In the image of the Canterville Ghost, there are features that are evident in dandy heroes of Wilde's dramatic texts and the novel: the ghost is shown as a philosopher, an artist in his soul; Sir Simon's ghost has a fascinating voice, he is an individualist, not subject to female charms, he is wealthy and independent. Accidents, that are connected with the power of the irrational in Wilde's works, help the action come to a happy ending. Wilde believed that sin contributes to progress, he was interested in characters with a difficult fate, who redeemed their sins. Sir Simon's image is one of the first in a series of Wilde heroes who have received forgiveness and found peace. All the situations in the story, including the renewal of the stain, illustrate the thought of the pointlessness of the human struggle against the unreal. Mystical moonlight also reminds of the power of the irrational over human decisions and destinies, the mystery of Wilde sees the creative, spiritual bond in love, the idea of completing the story with the marriage of an American woman and an Englishman is that the union of such different civilizations is possible only on the basis of love.

The article shows the relationship of *The Canterville Ghost* with the previous and subsequent works of Wilde.

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## СИНТЕЗ ФИЛОСОФИИ И ИСКУССТВА В «ГОТИЧЕСКОМ» РАССКАЗЕ О. УАЙЛЬДА «КЕНТЕРВИЛЬСКОЕ ПРИВИДЕНИЕ»

**Аннотация.** В статье проанализирован рассказ О. Уайльда «Кентервильское привидение» с точки зрения использования жанра «готического» рассказа для воплощения философских взглядов писателя. Работа изучает причины обращения Уайльда к «готическому» рассказу, его трактовки зарубежными и отечественными исследователями. Целью статьи является доказательство синтеза искусства и философии в произведении. Многослойность произведений писателя отражает его представление о многослойности мира, и в уайльдовском тексте соединяются размышления об актуальной социальной, нравственно-философской проблематике с индивидуально-авторским видением действительности. В «Кентервильском привидении» Уайльд начинает осмысление «американской темы», в которой выделяются проблемы взаимодействия цивилизаций, победы рассудочности над духовностью и трагедии, кроющейся за этим. Уайльдовское негативное отношение к материалистичности, практицизму современников проявляется также в изображении ложности посылов, основанных на логике.

**Ключевые слова:**  
готические рассказы; взаимовлияние культур; философия нереального; английская литература; английские писатели; литературное творчество; литературные герои; литературные сюжеты.

В образе кентервильского привидения просматриваются черты, которые очевидны в героях-денди уайльдовских драматических текстов и романа: призрак показан как философ, художник по духу; призрак сэра Саймона обладает завораживающим голосом, он индивидуалист, не подвержен женским чарам, он состоятелен и независим. Случайности, которые в художественном творчестве Уайльда связаны с идеей власти иррационального, помогают действию рассказа прийти к счастливому финалу. Уайльд полагал, что грех способствует прогрессу, его интересовали персонажи со сложной судьбой, искупившие свой грех. Образ сэра Саймона стоит одним из первых в ряду уайльдовских героев, получивших прощение и обретших покой. Все ситуации, приведённые в рассказе, включая возобновление пятна, иллюстрируют мысль о бессмысленности борьбы человека с ирреальным. О власти иррационального над человеческими решениями и судьбами, тайне жизни также напоминает очарование мистического лунного света. Созидательное, объединяющее начало Уайльд видит в любви, идея завершения рассказа браком американки и англичанина в том, что союз столь разных цивилизаций возможен только на основе любви.

В статье показана связь «Кентервильского привидения» с предшествующими и последующими произведениями Уайльда.

**Для цитирования:** Валова, О. М. Синтез философии и искусства в «готическом» рассказе О. Уайльда «Кентервильское привидение» / О. М. Валова, Т. В. Щербакова // Филологический класс. – 2019. – № 2 (56). – С. 186–192. DOI 10.26170/ФК19-02-25.

**For citation:** Valova, O. M. Synthesis of Philosophy and Art in O. Wilde's Gothic Story *The Canterville Ghost* / O. M. Valova, T. V. Shcherbakova // Philological Class. – 2019. – № 2 (56). – P. 186–192. DOI 10.26170/ФК19-02-25.

Throughout his career, Oscar Wilde experimented with genres that were popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote sonnets, short stories, fairy tales, a novel, tragedies, comedies. The writer filled the forms familiar to the reader and the spectator with texts of multilayered meaning, interesting to both fans of the genre, and novelty seekers.

*The Canterville Ghost*, subtitled "A Hylo-Idealistic Romance" was first published in 1887. Modern foreign and Russian literary critics state that this work is close to a Gothic story, being its caricature [Ericksen 1977: 58; Wilburn 1987; Dryden 2003; Guy 1998: 225; O'Connor 2004: 330; Подкопаева 2009: 115; Хабибуллина 2011: 250; Тетельман 2009: 155; Глушкова 2012: 152; Анцыферова, Листопадова 2014: 204; Посудиевская 2015: 33]. At the same time A. Astvatsurov rightly notes, *The Canterville Ghost* is a "model of metaliterature" where "the plot schemes, action mechanisms are analyzed and decomposed, which discusses the purpose of art, how to become an artist, obstacles and incentives of art" [Аствацатуров 2017: 92].

The reasons for Wilde's turning to the Gothic "ghost story" seem obvious. L. Wilburn writes in the article "Oscar Wilde's *The Canterville Ghost*: The Power of an Audience" about the relevance of ghost stories throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the influence of the gothic tale and the renewed interest to paranormal phenomena. So, in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, for example, where Wilde was to publish "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.", ghost stories were part of the monthly fare, whether written as real attempts at horror, investigations into the supernatural, or comedies about ghosts [Wilburn 1987: 45]. The theme of the supernatural was covered in the works of such popular authors as J. Austin ("Northanger Abbey"), E. Bronte ("Wuthering Heights"), H. James ("The Turn of the Screw"). Creating *The Canterville Ghost* Wilde could count on seasoned audiences

Popular genre forms were attractive to a young writer who sought recognition. Back in September 1880, Wilde corresponded with the theater censor E. F. S. Pigott about the motives for creating his play *Vera, or the Nihilists* (1880) and noted that he turned to playwriting because it is a democratic art, and he was seeking fame [Уайльд 1997: 42]. As we understand, the writer was aware of the genre significance from the earliest experiences, it is not by chance that in the lyrics he turns to the sonnet – one of the most complicated poetic forms. Later, in 1888, in a letter to the poet Thomas Hutchinson, Wilde wrote explaining the idea of his collection of fairy tales that he began with the form and tried to give it beauty, concealing many riddles and many clues [Уайльд 1997: 81]. In the essay "The Critic as Artist", first published in 1890, the form was defined as "the beginning of things". It contains "the secret of life", "creates not merely the critical temperament, but also the aesthetic instinct" [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 1009].

Researchers see different meanings in Wilde's addressing to the genre of the Gothic story. So, Linda Dryden's article is primarily about Wilde's altering traditional "Gothic" story. In *The Canterville Ghost*, the hero, in fact, becomes a victim contrary to the idea of the ghost as an aggressor, and the American Otis family rationalizes the perception of the supernatural; here Wilde demystifies the *gothic* clash [Dryden 2003: 111–112]. By the way, Dryden also looks at *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime*, published the same year as *The Canterville Ghost* (1887), as "a modern Gothic tale with a

comic twist" [Dryden 2003: 112]. In both texts, Dryden observes the "gothic" horror of modern age, which is the dismantlement of moral, aesthetic, sexual codes. Decay is the result of unnatural vicious decadent relaxation and narcissism. The beauty of decadence, according to Dryden, is also a source of horror [Dryden 2003: 114].

In the monograph "Phenomenology of the text: game and repression" A. Astvatsurov writes that Wilde "prepares" the schemes of the popular at the turn of the century genres of the detective, gothic novel, feuilleton, anecdote, "revealing their internal mechanisms and completely discovering their conventionality, inability to grasp unpredictable reality" [Аствацатуров 2007: 21]. O. Antsyferova and O. Listopadova adhere to a similar position: they see the reason for turning to the genre of the Gothic story not only in the readers' interest, but also in the possibility for Wilde as an aesthete to "protest against the generally accepted customs and traditions both in literary and social spheres" [Анцыферова, Листопадова 2014: 204].

A. Tetelman notes that the basis for the external conflict is a paradoxical collision of the supernatural with the material, with the pragmatism of the Otis family. The solution of this conflict is not in favor of the parties mentioned, but in favor of love, which is discussed in the second part of the text [Тетельман 2009: 155]. O. Posudiyevskaya sees the conflict in the clash of "friend" and "foe", embodied in the image of the former castle owner's ghost, on the one hand, and the Americans, on the other [Посудиевская 2015: 33]. The resolution of the conflict, according to Posudiyevskaya, is in returning "to the historical and cultural traditions of the Old World and to the beautiful artistic world created by European literature" [Посудиевская 2015: 35]. At the same time, the researcher notes the illusiveness of this compromise, since (as the finale is interpreted) "together with Sir Simon, the world of poetry and imagination, which stimulated people's belief in the supernatural, strengthened their ability to poeticize reality, becomes history" [Посудиевская 2015: 35].

In the essay "The Critic as Artist" (1890), the writer expresses his view on the evaluation of works of art and declares that only an artist can be a true critic. "The critic is he – he writes – who exhibits to us a work of art in a form different from that of the work itself, and the employment of a new material is a critical as well as a creative element" [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 990]. Wilde considers the critic's own individuality a vital part of the interpretation [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 991]. In his own literary work Wilde acted as a creator, giving by his own art a sample of combining a popular scheme of the Gothic story with philosophical understanding of the reality, representing possible depth of the genre form. The purpose of this article is to present the synthesis of art and philosophy in the writer's early story *The Canterville Ghost*.

The idea of the synthesis of arts is one of the most popular at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Pre-Raphaelites, who believed that the arts did not complement each other, but, when combined, gave rise to a new artistic whole, drew Wilde's attention to this topic. Wilde talks about the unity of the art of different kinds, the art of the past and present. In the article "At Mr. Whistler's lecture at ten o'clock" (1885), the writer states that there are no many

different arts, that the poem, the painting and the Parthenon, the sonnet and the statue are all essentially the same [Уайльд 1993: 92].

In the culture of the turn of the century, there is a desire not only for the synthesis in the field of artistic pursuit, but also for the synthesis of philosophical ideas, science and art. Researchers note that elements of mythological structures penetrate philosophy, psychology, and art criticism *fin de siècle*, and myth-oriented art “is subject to philosophical and scientific generalizations” [Лотман, Минц, Мелетинский 1992: 62]. The problem of synthesis in literature is presented in detail in the monograph by N. S. Bochkareva and I. A. Tabunkina “Artistic Synthesis in Aubrey Beardsley’s Literary Heritage” [Бочкарева, Табункина 2010]. It deals with the synthesis of generic forms (epic, lyric, drama), the typology of the synthesis of arts, the multilevel nature of the synthesis in literature, etc. Referring to the study of T. A. Akindinova and L. A. Berdyugina, the authors of the monograph also speak of the existence of a general cultural synthesis connecting the principles of artistic and philosophical thinking – the synthesis of philosophy and literature [Бочкарева, Табункина 2010: 13].

Already in the early texts, Wilde embodied the unity of the beauty of artistic design with his vision of the laws of being, the most vivid example of such a synthesis, in our opinion, is the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). The writer’s comment on the idea of synthesis is evident in the treatise *De Profundis* (1897). Wilde recalls how once at the meeting with A. Gide, while sitting in some Parisian cafe, he said that although metaphysics was of little interest to him, morality did not interest him in at all, “there was nothing that either Plato or Christ had said that could not be transferred immediately into the sphere of Art and there find its complete fulfillment” [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 1081]. Wilde emphasized that this generalization was both deep and new. Russian literary criticism practically do not reflected the problem of fusion of art and philosophy in the writer’s texts, although it is quite clearly not only in the novel, small prose, but also in the drama.

Wilde was a supporter of idealistic philosophy, in many respects his position correlated with the views of the nineteenth-century irrationalists. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, philosophical views dominated by the idea of alogicality and irrationality of the structure of human society and the world as a whole gained popularity. The concept of regularity, rationality of life foundations fades into the background or is completely denied by European and Russian thinkers, often in a rather sharp form. Lev Shestov, for example, stated that “he order, which philosophers dream of, exists only in the classrooms, the solid ground sooner or later crumbles under the human feet, and after the person continues to live without the ground or with the ground constantly fluctuating underfoot, even then he ceases to consider the axioms of scientific knowledge to be truth that do not require proof, he ceases to consider them truth and calls them false” (“Apotheosis of Groundlessness”, 1905) [Шестов 1991: 45].

Multilayers of the writer’s works reflect his idea of the multilayered nature of the world, where, as M. Maeterlinck wrote, “the inner life seems to be something unimportant next to these constant depths” [Метерлинк 2000: 33]. The unknown, irrational, depths of being, secrets that

could be revealed through art, were of particular interest to Wilde.

Like in other works, Wilde shows urgent problems of contemporary reality in *The Canterville Ghost*. Here he begins extensive comprehension of the “American theme”, which appears in his letters and works of art after the 1882 lecture tour. Wilde raises the issue of the ever-increasing influence of the American culture on the European one, of the urge (with all the differences and antagonism) to find points of contact.

The writer didn’t doubt the value of art, he did not accept excessive rationality, lack of imagination, stereotyped thinking, everything that, in his opinion, prevented to perceive the beautiful or could destroy it. After visiting the United States, this country, to a certain extent, becomes a symbol of practicality for Wilde. In his works, the author regrets the prevalence of the utilitarian view on things in the modern world. In fiction and non-fiction prose, the theme of America allows us to discuss issues of the writer’s concern. Many researchers note [Gupta 2018: 77; Mendelssohn, Manning, 2007: 43; Pochmara 2015: 64–66; Хабибуллина 2011: 250; Аствацатуров 2017: 91], Wilde practically always writes about Americans with irony, pointing to their rigidity, rationality, ordinariness, lack of fantasy and sense of humor, predictability, simplicity, and ingeniousness.

In *The Canterville Ghost* Wilde makes fun of Hiram Otis’s practicality, he buys Sir Simon’s ghost together with furniture, not believing in his existence for a minute. The message of “the ability to assess a symbolic meaning of supersensible phenomena” is significant for the writer [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 200]. Materialists are not able to see the signs of fate, to feel the essence of the phenomenon.

Wilde writes that the final blow the spirit of Canterville received occurred on the 19th of September. This is the day of the beheading of St. Januarius. The comic association is traced in the fact that, “being hemmed in by his enemies” (the Otises boys), “he vanished into the great iron stove”. According to the legend, St. Januarius was also sent to fire, but Januarius did not burn. A few paragraphs above, there appears “the character of Reckless Rupert, or the Headless Earl” [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 200], which, at one time, frightened Barbara Modish and could not produce the proper impression on the twins. If the beasts did not touch Januarius, the spirit of Canterville was torn to pieces by the Otises. One way or another, but the image of the Canterville ghost is associated with martyrdom. The scenes with bullying the ghost provides the idea of the victory of rationality over spirituality and the tragedy behind it.

Wilde’s negative attitude towards materialism, rationality is also manifested in logical conclusions that are often wrong. The author emphasizes false reliance only on facts. So, when Virginia disappeared, Otis asks “to find the little girl who had been kidnapped by tramps or gypsies” [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 206]. Logic suggests that gypsies kidnapped Virginia because they left suddenly, but the truth is that they just mixed up the day of the fair. Actions are not always thought out and it is unreasonable to rely on logic, it is not present everywhere.

From the very beginning of the story Wilde focuses on the differences in the worldviews of representatives of

two cultures. There is obviously a contradiction between the Otises and the ghost, the symbol of which is the stain of blood on the floor. Each of the parties stubbornly stands its own way: Sir Simon draws a spot, the Americans remove it. The ghost and the new owners of the castle are in conflict with each other when meeting, no one wants to give in, and the situation begins to resemble a battle ground. In the confrontation of the Otises and the Canterville Ghost there is a broader problem of interaction of civilizations.

Wilde shows that only representatives of a different civilization, people brought up on the principles of "republican simplicity" can freely meet and talk with a spirit who have run wild without human intercourse. A. Astvatsaturov believes that Virginia became the savior of Sir Simon, since Americans' naturality determines the innocence of her soul [Астватсатуров 2017: 91]. In our opinion, natural kindness and the absence of prejudice are also significant in this situation. Wilde says here that it is the soul that is important in the personality, not nationality or religion.

The American theme in *The Canterville Ghost* is connected with the problem of a person outside his history, which excited the writer in his later works. In *The Canterville Ghost* the author makes fun of Americans who are anxious to find ancestors: "I know lots of people there who would give a hundred thousand dollars to have a grandfather", says Virginia, "and much more than that to have a family ghost" [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 205]. In the comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) it is shown that a person who does not know his ancestors, his history, cannot find true happiness. John Worthing is in constant agony about his birth, this is a sore point for him. In the scene of Worthing's "interrogation", Lady Bracknell can put up with all the shortcomings of the future son-in-law except for the lack of pedigree: "To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution" [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 679]. In *The Canterville Ghost*, America is shown as a country that needs connections to European history and culture.

The marriage of a young Virginia with a representative of an old English family, the Duke of Cheshire, is symbolic. In April 1887, in his article *American Man*, published in the magazine "Court and Society Review" Wilde notes that the secret of the well-being of American marriages lies in the fact that, firstly, the controversial issues are stipulated in the marriage contract and, secondly, the simplicity of divorce, the very fragility of the bond [Уайльд 1993: 143] makes the union stronger. Of course, marriage is presented in the article in an ironic way, but the writer says, for example, that Americans marry several times, their rights are spelled out in the marriage contract, the influence of women is so great that a man is usually considered to be guilty of family quarrels, Wilde calls America "a Paradise for Women" [Уайльд 1993: 145]. There is another side of the marriage matter at the end of the nineteenth century. It was clear to Wilde's audience that the Otis family came to England in search of a titled bridegroom for their daughter. According to M. O'Connor, *The Canterville Ghost* contains the idea of triumph of commerce over romance [O'Connor 2004: 335]. At the same time, in our opinion, completing the work with a picture of a happy family conversation,

O. Wilde again emphasizes the idea that only Love can reconcile and unite people of different nationalities and different cultures.

*The Canterville Ghost* also deduces Wilde's aesthetic and philosophical views, when he writes about the power of the irrational, the paramount importance of art and love, capable of solving questions that are beyond the control of reason.

Wilde's aestheticism has been studied fairly well both in Russia and in the West, but the problem of Wilde's philosophy has hardly been investigated, primarily because the author himself underspoke about it. However, the writer's texts reflect his philosophical views. Wilde's edifice is based on various idealistic teachings – from antiquity to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The central idea of Wilde's philosophy is the power of the irrational. The image of the ghost in the *The Canterville Ghost* helps to reveal the essence of the irrational for Wilde.

V. Mahaffey's study [Mahaffey 1999: 58] presents the meaning of art as a kind of supernatural power in *The Canterville Ghost* both most clearly and playfully. The ghost in this work is presented as an actor and an artist. Wilde's conflation of art with religion is apparent when the sinful old actor is saved by young Virginia's love. The author "justifies" the supernatural producing a rejuvenation (we remember: the almond tree suddenly bloomed).

The image of the Canterville Ghost has features that are evident in the dandy heroes in Wilde's dramatic texts and the novel: the ghost is shown as a philosopher, an artist inside who possesses a magic of influence. Sir Simon's ghost has a special voice, we learn that only closer to the story final, when he tells Virginia about a small garden where a nightingale sings "the cold crystal moon looks down, and the yew tree spreads out its giant arms over the sleepers" [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 205]. Wilde characterizes his voice twice, at first case it's a "a low dreamy voice", in the second case it is compared with wind sighs ("his voice sounded like the sighing of the wind" [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 205]). L. Wilburn notes that Virginia Otis was initially tempted by a "dreamy voice" and the poetically convincing rhetoric of the ghost, but this technique is used by a bunch of men to tempt a bunch of girls [Wilburn 1987: 51]. Let us disagree with the opinion of the researcher, because in Wilde's artistic world, the voice has a categorical meaning and is associated with the magic of the unreal.

The beauty of the voice has a truly magical power, and together with the attractive night landscape, the nightingale singing, the magic of the moon or the richness and charm of decoration, it affects the characters' way of thinking and actions [Валова 2013: 88–97]. Like singing of sirens, an extraordinary voice makes you forget about the previous life forever, like singing of sirens, it can be deadly dangerous if a person forgets Circe's command to do everything not to hear it, and to sail the intended course without departing from the goal.

The ghost is associated with dandy heroes by dressing elegantly in his own way („He was simply but neatly clad in a long shroud, spotted with churchyard mould, had tied up his jaw with a strip of yellow linen, and carried a small lantern and a sexton's spade. In fact, he was dressed for the character of "Jonas the Graveless, or the Corpse-Snatcher of Chertsey Barn", one of his most remarkable imperson-

ations, and one which the Cantervilles had every reason to remember, as it was the real origin of their quarrel with their neighbour, Lord Rufford”) [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 202]), Sir Simon is an individualist, not enchanted by women. Wilde’s literary texts present women’s influence as negative. Women’s beauty and charm will practically deprive men of their will, only dandy heroes, who express the author’s position in his works, are able to preserve their personality. As a rule, dandy heroes have no women companions (Prince Moralovsky (*Vera, or the Nihilists*, 1880), Lord Darlington (*Lady Windermere’s Fan*, 1892), Algernon Moncrieff (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, 1895), at the time of the play Lord Goring is not married (*An Ideal Husband*, 1895)). The reader knows a little about Lord Henry’s wife (*The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, 1891), she appears in the fourth chapter of the novel, she has a “high, shrill voice”, she laughs “unexpectedly and inappropriately”, and “whose dresses always looked as if they had been designed in a rage and put on in a tempest” [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 34–35]. This characteristic shows that Lady Henry is completely devoid of charm and cannot influence her husband. In addition, for a number of signs, we can guess that there is no love between spouses. In a conversation with Dorian, Lord Henry reveals that a woman appears in too violent and tasteless clothes, very elegant hats bought by someone else’s husband, when she begins to feel indifference from her own husband [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 71]. Sir Simon’s wife also couldn’t influence him, because “My wife was very plain, never had my ruffs properly starched, and knew nothing about cookery” [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 204]. The spirit of Centerville is close to dandy heroes in his wealth and independence.

The image of Sir Simon as an artist is also connected with the magic of a chance. Even Aristotle, in the “Nicomachean Ethics” made the following remark: “A chance and art <...> are in some sense dealing with one and the same thing; according to Agathon: ‘A chance is dear to art, art is dear to a chance’” [Аристотель 1984: 176]. In the story *Lord Arthur Sevil’s Crime*, the hero’s order for a watch with explosives is performed by the anarchist Herr Winckelkopf, for whom his work is not a means of earning, but art. That is why the device did not kill anyone, but only amused the family of the dean.

In *The Canterville Ghost*, images chosen by Sir Simon appear intuitively, they are never explained logically. The spirit of Canterville determined the fate of many households (changed, broke) with his unexpected appearances. But he could not do anything to people with a pure soul, with those who did not commit a sin. This is Virginia, whose name already means “virgin” (“She had never insulted him in any way, and was pretty and gentle” [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 198]) and her “little duke”. Wilde preferred to depict the child as an innocent. The order can be restored to a haunted house if “a golden girl can win prayer from the lips of sin” [Mendelssohn, Manning 2007: 256]. The heroine’s portrait is enlarged by a detail significant in Wilde’s artistic world: the girl “was in the habit of going out to the garden every evening to get flowers for the dinner-table” [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 207]. Flowers in the works of Wilde are a symbol of the amazing transience of beauty, art.

Virginia’s image is built into the series of heroines of Wilde’s comedies, who at a certain point of their lives stood at death’s door. Thus, Lady Windermere (*Lady Windermere’s Fan*) was miraculously saved from public shame, and Lady Chiltern (*An Ideal Husband*) accidentally avoided serious trouble because of a note to Lord Goring: “I trust you. I want you. I am coming to you. Gertrude” [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 634]. Both women have revised their initial views on human relations, gained ideas about the true value of love. It is indicative that the comedy ends with the words of Lady Chiltern: “Love, and only love. For both of us a new life is beginning” [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 662]. Virginia does not want to tell her young husband about what happened to her on the day of her disappearance, but she expresses sincere thanks to Sir Simon: “He made me see what Life is, and what Death signifies, and why Love is stronger than both” [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 212].

In Wilde’s artistic world heroes who have been affected by an enchanting voice often face death. This is the Swallow from the fairy tale *The Happy Prince*, and Dorian Gray (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*), and Salome from Wilde’s play of the same name. Sir Simon’s voice also called Virginia to the other world, she remained alive, but the former American woman died in her, having learned the secrets of life and death.

For Wilde heroes, the concept of “pure soul” is important, but most heroes cannot survive without desecrating the soul with sin, they are tempted by physical (in a wider sense – material) benefits. In earthly life, a return to the original purity is impossible, that is why, in a number of texts, Wilde shows that the attainment of purity is possible through a break with the material taking place in the heart of a hero.

The writer considered sin a means of establishing both an individual and a society, calling it “an essential element of progress” in the essay “The Critic as Artist” (1890) [Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 979]. Passing through sin gives personal growth for heroes who have a soul<sup>1</sup>, enriches them with previously unknown experience, deepens the personality, gives a wider world outlook. In June 1890, Wilde wrote to the editor of *St. James Gazette* about the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that good people, as they belong to the ordinary and, therefore, commonplace, are not interesting to art. Bad people, from the point of view of art, are a fascinating subject for study. They are colorful, varied and amazing. Good people call for reason; bad ones awake the imagination [Уайльд 1994: 112]. The image of Sir Simon is one of the first in a series of Wilde’s heroes-sinners, who have received forgiveness and found peace.

Wilde reflected in his works Bible views on the relationship between the soul and the blood of animals and man: as the Old Testament states “for the soul of every body is its blood” [Leviticus 17:14].

In Wilde’s artistic world, heroes (most often heroines) who have lost their lives “bloodlessly” are murderers themselves. “Bloodless” death is a kind of punishment, since the soul, aggravated by sin, does not acquire original purity,

<sup>1</sup> The *soul* means the most common personality traits associated with the inner life, ethical attitudes, determined by the process of spiritual ascent of the heroes of Wilde’s works through sin, suffering.

does not appeal to God. It is known that the spirit of Canterville is also a murderer, and his death is bloodless (In Sir Simon's conversation with Virginia, we hear: "However, it is no matter now, for it is all over, and I don't think it was very nice of her brothers to starve me to death, though I had killed her" [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 204]).

Wilde, no doubt, knew the lines from the book of the Prophet Joel: "Rend your heart and not your garments, return to the Lord your God" [Joel 2:13]. Soul and blood are connected in the playwright's view, and bloody blows are considered as a sign of fellowship with the world of the divine. For example, in Wilde's fairy tales, heroes' hearts may break, and in works of other genres (the novel, plays), as if "close" to reality, the characters "let" the soul into the heart on last breath and die. Let us remind that Sir Simon's death is bloodless, i.e. the soul and the body have not reunited, the Canterville ghost wanders through the castle.

All the situations described in the story, including the renewal of the stain, illustrate the thought of the pointlessness of the human struggle against the unreal. Barbara Modish (the name of a Greek origin, meaning 'a foreigner, wanderer') did not accept the ghost, she declared that "nothing in the world would induce her to marry into a family that allowed such a horrible phantom to walk up and down the terrace at twilight" [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 201], soon died; Francis Stilton argued that he would play dice with the spirit of Canterville, and he was

found paralyzed; at the same time, the Cantervilles who accept the ghost remain alive.

Perhaps the most beautiful and mysterious part of the unreal in Wilde's artistic world is love, it changes fate, it keeps, protects, helps. In love, Wilde sees a constructive, spiritual bond, the idea of completing the story with the marriage of an American woman and an Englishman is that the union of such different civilizations is possible only on the basis of love.

The author's attitude toward ghosts and his quirks is manifested in the lines that this is "one of the greatest mysteries of the supernatural, or, to employ a more scientific term, the higher-natural world" [The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde 1997: 201]. The mystery is also emphasized by the "moon" imagery: the ghost can lean on the moonbeam, the heroes noticed that the almond tree blossomed in the moonlight, the moon came up when Virginia laid a cross of flowers on Sir Simon's grave. The fantastic lunar world present in the story gives it depth, emphasizing the presence of a different reality, the inner connection of the man with the elements, the mystical component of the world. In such a context, the image of the moon will also appear in Wilde's later works, particularly vividly in *Salomé*.

Thus, in *The Canterville Ghost*, using the features of the Gothic story, Wilde presents topical problems of modern life rationalization, the problems of the mutual influence of American and English cultures, and his idea of the power of the irrational. The irrational is suprapersonal forces, which influence the person. They are love, art, soul, accidents, they are fears, doubts, emotional experiences, which, often not submitting to reason, change life. *The Canterville Ghost* is one of Wilde's first works where the usual genre form seems to fill with the writer's thoughts about the laws of reality, about the power of the world beyond logic, about the mysteries of life.

<sup>1</sup> For example, Wilde's tragedies depict bloody murders or suicides (Vera (*Vera, or the Nihilists*, 1880), Duke of Padua, Guido (*The Duchess of Padua*, 1883), Young Syrian, Prophet Iokanan (*Salomé*, 1892) and bloodless: Beatrice drinks poison (*The Duchess of Padua*), Salome is crushed by shields (*Salomé*). All the heroes who died of a knife or dagger are victims.

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