

The Impact of the Inclusion of the Ballad “Der König von Thule” in the German Drama “Faust” by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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INTRODUCTION

“Faust” is one of the well-known artistic works produced by the renowned German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The drama bases itself on the major theme of the contest between Heaven and Hell over a human soul, while it simultaneously develops on implying several other sub themes including love and sexuality, moral ambivalence, good and the evil. In the first part of “*Faust*”, the scene titled “Abend” includes the song “Der König von Thule” which is sung in the middle of a soliloquy by Gretchen, the main female character of the drama. The song which can be considered as a ballad or a “Volksballad”, relates a tragic story of a king who lived in a city called “Thule” in a simple but effective manner.

PURPOSE

Every writer considers his work as a complete project which progresses into its artistic and thematic accomplishments. Thus, a playwright will not include a single word into his text, unless the word is supports the development of the plot of the drama. Hence, the inclusion of the ballad “Der König von Thule” appears to have several root causes and dramatic expectations. Therefore, this paper explores the impact of the inclusion of the ballad “Der König von Thule” in the drama “Faust”. This specifically investigates how the ballad “Der König von Thule” enhances the strong characterization of Gretchen, the main female character of the drama and how it supports the development of the theme and the plot. Moreover, the musical impact of the song is also taken in to consideration.

METHODOLOGY

In investigating the above three aspects, namely characterization, plot development and musical effect, a textual analysis was employed as the research methodology. The original version of the ballad “Der König von Thule” was considered for this study. When analyzing the text of this ballad, its narrative plot, language and the literary structure were particularly given attention. Hence, the original German ballad written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe becomes the primary resource for the textual analysis. Moreover, the secondary sources including the English and Sinhala translations of the drama, literary analyses as well as scholarly articles written on the ballad “Der König von Thule” in relation to the drama “Faust” were also taken into analytical studies.

FINDINGS

The textual analysis revealed that the ballad as a whole has a metaphorical implication to the character of Gretchen, where it sets up an allegory to the spiritual and sexual awakening, love, passion and desire, self-surrender and the tragic downfall of the main female character of the drama. This also builds up in to the implications of the theme of womanhood. Moreover, it can be concluded that the ballad which revolves around a romantic theme also takes a form of a parable; a story within a story, as it relates a story of a king and his love, while the main plot develops into relating the story of Faust and the related minor characters. The concept of the inclusion of parables in dramas can be also seen in the German drama "Nathan der Weise" written by the German writer Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, where it also includes a story within a story which connects with the main plot in reaching the thematic and dramatic expectations.

Furthermore, the ballad creates a dramatic irony in relation to the tragic fate of Gretchen. Throughout the ballad, each and every detail reveals the faithfulness and true fidelity of the king to his deceased love, while in the life story of Gretchen, although she falls for Faust both spiritually as well as

physically, neither fidelity nor truthfulness was received by her in return from Faust. This, in fact, shows that it creates a dramatic irony along with the allegorical connection that the ballad implies. Hence, the inclusion of the ballad supports the development of the dramatic plot through characterization and the metaphorical symbolization. Moreover, the hymn like musical environment created by the singing of this ballad by Gretchen also enhances the implications of Gretchen's urge to surrender her spiritual love and the physical body to her lover Faust. At this point, the different compositions of music produced for the ballad "Der König von Thule" was also examined, in highlighting the musical impact of the ballad on the thematic and dramatic implications.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research mainly highlighted that the inclusion of the ballad "Der König von Thule" is highly symbolic. The outcomes of this study would possibly support the academics who are interested in studying Goethe and his literary works, particularly the drama "Faust". Moreover, this research opens up to discuss about the inclusion of parables and songs as sub plots and symbols within the main plot of the dramas.

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KEYWORDS

Der König von Thule, characterization, textual analysis, ballad, allegorical connections

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