

Lord Arthur Savile's Crime

and other stories

O.Wilde

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Four short stories, two of some substance, the other two trifles. Or so one would be tempted to conclude. 'The Canterville Ghost' I read in Swedish in an adaptation as a play when I was a child. I found it very funny. In particular I recall, the American expatriate remarking, that we have everything in common with the English, except the language. I also was amused by the contrast of the old world and the common-sense approach of the Americans. It was written in late 80's and I must have read it some seventy odd years later, still I did not get the idea that it was old-fashioned, It could have taken place today I thought. The first story is also very amusing in a sunny, childish way. Who can make more light of a murder than Wilde? At one point one draws ones breath. Will that lovely girl Sybil eat that fateful bonbon? That poison that the old aunt had failed to swallow? If so, farce would have been tragedy. But there is no tragedy in Wilde, except when he later on tries to make his own life into one. The result is more pathetic than tragic.

The two trifles remind one of French symbolism, and no doubt Wilde was influenced by such writers. It is all very mysterious but ultimately, I would say uninteresting. Wilde was a late contemporary with the pre-Raphaelists. The tenor of his work, very much agrees with them. It is all romantic longing and fin-du-siecle symbolism and pessimism. But it is just an attitude it is not for real, just as the aristocratic world of great births and titles to match is a kind of fairy-tale. Wilde was as much mesmerized by the smart world of titled personages, as they were of him. But his fascination ran deeper, theirs were only fluttering, as the wings of a buttered fly. What would have happened if Wilde had had more distance to his fascination with the aristocracy? He would have been a different writer, a more sarcastic one, and the easy delight with which his stories are infused, would not be present. After all his touch is light, as that of a fairy. And I am not writing that because he was one, although that does not make it worse.

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