

Morality in Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales¹

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the moral issues presented in seven of Oscar Wilde's fairy tales from two collections: *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888) and *A House of Pomegranates* (1891). This research framework employs literary criticism with a focus on moral critique. The results showed that Wilde explores the concepts of both morality and immorality in his fairy tales, such that moral people either gain rewards or do not gain them. Likewise, immoral people are either punished or not punished. There are five main moralities in the fairy tales; namely, self-sacrifice, repentance, generosity, compassion, and empathy. Regarding poetic justice, self-sacrifice, and generosity, they can either be rewarded or not, while repentance, compassion, and empathy are consistently recompensed. In terms of immorality, Wilde

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argues that selfishness and cruelty can either be punished or not. Moreover, immoral people tend to take advantage of naively moral ones.

Keywords: Morality, Oscar Wilde, Fairy Tales

Introduction

Recent studies investigating Oscar Wilde's fairy tales are fewer than those examining his plays and novel (Promsuttirak, 2014). These studies can be categorized into those about the characteristics of his writing (Ekmekçioğlu, 2016), those about patriotism and religion in the fairy tales (Killeen, 2007), and those about the morality in the five stories of *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (Kirvalidze & Samnidze, 2018). The results of Kirvalidze and Samnidze (2018) studies indicate that Wilde portrays the desire to teach morality by promoting compassion, love, self-sacrifice, and generosity to the poor, rather than selfishness, ambition, and self-conceit. The author also believes in the eternity of nature, an artistic morality reflected in the self-sacrifice of the characters of the Happy Prince and the little Swallow, which come to symbolize art for the people. However, there are no studies about the issue of morality in Wilde's other fairy tale collection, *A House of Pomegranates* (1891). Therefore, the present researcher wanted to analyze the significance of moral issues, which is the ideal in the Victorian era, in this particular book in order to suggest that Wilde wants not only to promote different moral issues but also to explore the disadvantages of being naively moral when encountering those who are completely immoral.

The objective of this study is to analyze morality in seven of Oscar Wilde's fairy tales from two collections: "The Happy Prince," "The Nightingale and the Rose," "The Selfish Giant," and "The Devoted Friend," from *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (Wilde, 1888); and "The Young King," "The Birthday of the Infanta," and "The Star-Child," from *A House of Pomegranates* (Wilde, 1891).

Literature Review

Morality is defined according to The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy (2015) as "an informal public system applying to all rational persons, governing behavior that affects others, having the lessening of evil or harm as its main goal, and including what are commonly known as the moral rules, moral ideals, and moral virtues. To say that it is a public system means that all those to whom it applies must understand it and that it must not be irrational for them to use it in deciding what to do and in judging others to whom the system applies" (Audi, 2015, p. 686). Thiroux (2001) also defined morality as "it deals with how humans *treat* other beings so as to promote mutual welfare, growth, creativity, and meaning and to strive for what is good over what is bad and what is right over what is wrong" (p.27)

Another concept of morality is moral virtues. According to Becker & Becker (2001), moral virtues are certain qualities of character virtues and some acts morally required which are necessary for the thriving or flourishing of human communities. While a quality of character or a kind of act or omission

which destroy this thriving or flourishing is vicious and is morally wrong (p.1749).

So morality is the system of rules that people use to govern their behavior that affects other people and judging others and human beings who treat others with some qualities of character virtues with the aim to promote the prosperity of society possess moral virtues while people who have some traits that lead to the destruction of the flourishing of society are morally wrong.

Research Methodology

The author used moral criticism as a framework. Moral criticism is “a tendency—rather than a recognized school—within literary criticism to judge literary works according to moral rather than formal principles” (Buchanan, 2010). Therefore, it is to examine literature from the moral perspective to determine the moral or ethical dimensions. The author also used morality concept of Thiroux (2001) and moral virtues concept of Becker & Becker (2001) as a framework to analyze morality and immorality of the characters by their character traits. The author selected seven of Oscar Wilde’s fairy tales that portray morality themes according to morality concept of Thiroux (2001) and moral virtues concept of Becker & Becker (2001) from two collections : “The Happy Prince,” “The Nightingale and the Rose,” “The Selfish Giant,” and “The Devoted Friend,” from *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (Wilde, 1888); and “The Young King,” “The Birthday of the Infanta,” and “The Star-Child,” from *A House of Pomegranates* (Wilde, 1891). *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* is a

collection of stories for children first published in May 1888 and *A House of Pomegranates* is a collection of fairy tales published in 1891 as a second collection for *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888).

Research Findings

1. “The Happy Prince”: Self-sacrifice leads one to become precious in the eyes of God and rewarded with admission to Paradise.

In this tale, Wilde explores the theme that the most precious things in life are the sacrifices one makes for those who suffer, not the expensive jewels and money that many obsess over, thinking they will bring them happiness. This is demonstrated by the Happy Prince who, while alive, refuses to see the misery of his people, but later as a statue, becomes devoted to self-sacrifice and helping his impoverished subjects. He inspires a similar change in the character of the Swallow, as well.

When the Happy Prince is alive and possesses a human heart, ironically, he seems to be heartless because he does not want to see or care about the suffering of his subjects. In this way, he thinks himself happy since his life is full of pleasure and without sorrow. However, following his death, when his people craft a gilded statue of him with a leaden heart that sits high above his city, he is sorrowful because he can see all the misery of his subjects through his bright sapphire eyes. As a result, he becomes determined to help his people by sacrificing the beautiful jewels that decorate his body. These include the red ruby on his sword hilt, which he offers to a poor seamstress; one bright sapphire eye, given to a miserable young playwright; another

sapphire eye, given to a poor match-girl; and the thin leaves of fine gold gilding, which he distributes to poor children.

Furthermore, when the Swallow tells the Happy Prince that he will stay with him because the prince is now blind, the Happy Prince refuses the offer, insisting that the bird go away to Egypt since it is winter and the Swallow will die soon. Thus, the Happy Prince exhibits selflessness because he considers the life of the Swallow more precious than his own. In addition, although the Swallow tells the Prince of all the mysterious things he has seen in strange lands and informs him of the marvels of the world, the Happy Prince comments that the suffering of humans is more marvelous than anything, stating “there is no Mystery so great as Misery,” (Wilde, 1888, p.19) and urging him to open his eyes to the people of the city. Later, the statue of the Happy Prince is dismantled by humans who no longer find him beautiful nor useful; though, in the eyes of God, the Happy Prince’s leaden heart is the most precious thing in the world. Thus, the prince’s self-sacrifice is rewarded by God with an ascent to Paradise, as the superficial beauty of jewels and gold are left behind.

Moreover, the Happy Prince’s selflessness stimulates the same quality in the little Swallow, the messenger who delivers his love to the people. Before the Swallow meets the Happy Prince, he is selfish and egotistical. He first shows this in his attraction to beauty of the Reed’s slender waist, although other swallows do not approve of the courtship and think it ridiculous since the Reed has no money and many relations. The Swallow is so fascinated with the Reed’s body that he chooses to stay behind while the other swallows fly

away to Egypt in autumn. We again see the Swallow's self-centric nature when he insists that his wife should love traveling because he does himself, and condemns her as insincere since she does not want to go away with him. In addition, on his first night in the city, the Swallow expects the town to have made preparations for him, again demonstrating that he demands everything and everyone to serve his needs and his self. It is ironic that he clearly sees the faults of others, but not his own, such as when he criticizes the Reed for being selfish since she used to like the rain whereas he thinks it is dreadful, however, he leaves her only because she will not travel with him and blames her that she has been trifling with him. It is only after witnessing the sorrow and tears of the Happy Prince that the Swallow starts to pity other people and begins to turn away from his life of pleasure, embodied by the warmth of Egypt, toward a life of sacrifice, working as the Happy Prince's messenger. In this way, he begins to overlook his previous unpleasant experiences with rude children and to endure the coldness of winter while ferrying jewels from the Happy Prince to the poor.

The Swallow also demonstrates compassion when he uses his own body — his wings — to fan the forehead of a feverish boy. This act makes him feel warm, even though the weather is cold, which the Happy Prince says is because he has done a good action. It is implied that this act of empathy helps to reduce the Swallow's ego. Later, when he decides to stay with the prince another night to take his sapphire eye to the miserable playwright, the narrator writes that the Swallow "really had a good heart," (Wilde, 1888, p. 14) since he empathizes with the prince who sacrifices his eyes for the miserable

people, not caring about his own self. The Swallow also learns to use his eyes to see the suffering of people, rather than the marvelous and strange things that he used to see exclusively and describe to the prince. With this new power of sight, the Swallow sees the inequality between the rich and poor: the wealthy happy in their beautiful houses, while beggars and starving children sit at their gates, on the streets, and under the bridge. Ultimately, the Swallow decides to neglect his own life, no longer migrating to the warmth of Egypt, but rather sacrificing himself to a wintry death so he may stay with the blind prince. Thus, the Swallow moves beyond sexual love to sacrificial love and becomes one of the most precious things in the city, along with the leaden heart of the Happy Prince, and is rewarded with a place in Paradise.

In contrast to the Happy Prince statue and the Swallow, Wilde shows that humans prefer to ignore the suffering of others because they are selfish and care only for their own interests. Humans cannot see the prince's true beauty, which lies in his leaden heart, because they are superficial. Though, of course, when the prince was decorated with jewels, he was very much admired by the people. Wilde also satirizes humanity's self-absorption through one of the town councilors, who remarks that the prince is as beautiful as a weathercock because he wants to maintain a reputation for "having artistic tastes" (Wilde, 1888, p. 3). However, since his image is very important to him and he fears people will think him "unpractical," he additionally comments that the Happy Prince is not quite so useful. This carries the implication that the politicians are not useful because they care only for their fame and do not see the problems of the poor, whom it is their duty to care for. On the

contrary, it can be clearly seen that the Happy Prince is the most useful person in the city, since he sacrifices his jewels to save many lives, unlike the politicians who neglect their society's problems and instead quarrel over making their own statue for people to admire. At the end of the story, however, God does not punish the humans for this behavior.

2. “The Nightingale and the Rose”: Naïve self-sacrifice for the sake of shallow people is useless and will go unrewarded.

In this story, the Nightingale is naïve because she cannot truly see the conditional nature of human love and relationships, which demands something in return. She has dedicated her life to singing about idealistic love and promoting the idea that love is a wonderful thing. For her, love “is more precious than emeralds and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the marketplace. It may not be purchased of the merchants, nor can it be weighed out in the balance of gold” (Wilde, 1888, p. 29) and “love is better than life” (Wilde, 1888, p. 33). She also believes that “what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man” (Wilde, 1888, p. 33), “love is wiser than philosophy” (Wilde, 1888, p. 34) and “sang of love that is perfected by Death” (Wilde, 1888, p. 38). She praises the Young Student as a true lover only because she sees his sorrow, pain, and desire for a red rose to win the Professor's daughter's heart. However, it is the Nightingale who is, in fact, the true lover since she never asks anything in return when she sacrifices herself for the red rose. For humans, though, her life is of little worth, her sacrifice goes unnoticed, and her rose is discarded in the gutter.

In contrast, shallow humans believe that wealth, represented here as jewels or roses, can buy love. This concept is shown by the Professor's daughter, who prefers the Chamberlain's nephew as her lover rather than the poor Young Student because the former gives her real jewels, which are more precious than a rose. Furthermore, she tells the Young Student that his rose does not go with her dress and that everybody knows jewels cost far more than flowers. This suggests that humans value material wealth more than love, so of course, they do not appreciate the Nightingale's self-sacrifice. In fact, the Young Student's response to the Nightingale's song can be ironically applied to the Professor's daughter that she has no feeling, without sincerity, she would not sacrifice herself and she is selfish.

Regarding the Young Student, his self-absorption is evident in his preoccupation with his own situation. He is shallow because he is incapable of understanding the Nightingale's song and quickly assumes it is meaningless and can do no practical good, even though the song portrays the Nightingale's willingness to sacrifice her life for his happiness. Additionally, the Young Student takes for granted that the girl is seriously in love with him.

Moreover, Wilde suggests that humans become foolish and unable to see the true nature of selfishness when they learn only from books, much like how the Young Student studies philosophy, which is of limited use when it comes to the matter of feelings. The Young Student ultimately condemns the Professor's daughter as ungrateful because she does not keep her promise to dance with him if he gave her a red rose. In fact, it is he who is ungrateful to the Nightingale since he never appreciates her sacrifice. Instead, the Young

Student convinces himself that love is but a silly thing that makes one believe things that are not true, despite the fact that right before his eyes is the sacrificial love of the Nightingale, which he does not see.

3. “The Selfish Giant”: Repentance and generosity lead to the reward of Paradise, while wicked selfishness is punished with cold winter.

This story explores the idea that if one is remorseful for his or her wickedness, one will be forgiven by God and rewarded with admission to Paradise. At first, the Giant is selfish because he will not share his garden with the children who are very happy to be there and who have no other place to play. Determined to end every trespass, he puts up a notice: “TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED” (Wilde, 1888, p.46). As a result, he is punished with a perpetual winter with Snow, Frost, Hail, and North Wind, because the trees and flowers feel sorry for the children and forget to blossom while other places turn to spring, summer and autumn. This suggests that, as the Giant is cold-hearted, he will receive coldness from nature in return.

One day, the children crawl back inside his garden and spring returns. The Giant realizes how selfish he has been and feels sorry for his actions, thus, he is rewarded with beautiful flowers and leafy trees yet again. Now looking upon the children with kindness, he proclaims, “It is your garden now, little children” (Wilde, 1888, p.52). The Giant plays with them and learns to share himself and his possessions in order to benefit the happiness of others. Among the children is a little boy who the Giant helps to climb the branches of the tree. This boy is later revealed as Christ in the form of a child, and God rewards

the Giant's selflessness by allowing him into the Garden of Paradise when he dies in old age.

4. "The Devoted Friend": The selfish take advantage of the kind through beautifully crafted praise and ignore morality, while claiming that they themselves are generous. Believing in the morality of a selfish person's beautiful words can result in self-destruction.

In this story, the old Water Rat exhibits selfishness, since he thinks his dear friend should be devoted to him, though he should not have to do anything in return. He also disregards the moralistic tale told by the Linnet, stating that he would not have wanted to hear it if he had known that the story had a moral lesson.

The selfish are represented by both the old Water Rat and his counterpart in the Linnet's story: Hugh the Miller. The Water Rat cannot stand disobedient people, which he makes clear upon seeing the little ducks paying no mind to their mother's teaching them how to stand on heads (through which Wilde satirizes the ridiculousness of proper society). The Water Rat also claims that he worships friendship more than love because he knows nothing in the world that is nobler or rarer than a devoted friend. However, his definition of a devoted friend is one who serves him. He expects his friend to dote upon him, and he sees no point in doing something in return.

The Water Rat's self-centered nature is also exhibited when he asks the Linnet if the story about a devoted friend is about him or not. Though the Linnet tells him that the story is applicable to him, the Water Rat does not see the connection between himself and the selfish Hugh, who always takes

advantage of his poor and kind friend, little Hans. Furthermore, the Water Rat likes and sympathizes with Hugh and thinks him a good person, which is evident when he says, “I have all kinds of beautiful sentiments myself, so there is a great sympathy between us” (Wilde, 1888, p. 67).

Like the Water Rat, Hugh takes advantage of his generous and devoted friend, Hans, requesting that he perform difficult errands for him. Hugh convinces Hans through his moralizing speeches about true friendship, which are ironically very pleasurable for Hans to hear. For example, when Hugh wants beautiful products from Hans, he says that real friends should have everything in common; and Hans feels proud to embody such noble ideals. Even though the neighbors think it is strange that the rich Hugh never gives anything in return, Hans does not find it a problem because Hugh tells him of “the unselfishness of true friendship” (Wilde, 1888, p. 65).

During the winter when Hans’ business is quiet and his life becomes hard, Hugh never goes to visit his best friend, because he believes that when people are in trouble they should be left alone and not bothered by visitors. Instead, he waits to visit Hans in the spring, when he comes seeking Hans’ primrose, which he thinks will make Hans happy. Later, when Hugh finds himself in hard times after his son falls down a ladder, he asks Hans to travel three hours to fetch him the doctor. All of this suggests that selfish people will find excuses to make themselves look generous, though in fact, they want others to serve them in order to maintain their wealth.

At another point in the story, Hugh will not let Hans buy his flour on credit, stating that “Flour is one thing, and friendship is another, and they

should not be confused” (Wilde, 1888, p. 66). This demonstrates his lack of generosity and shows that he considers his wealth more important than helping his best friend. He is also displeased when his youngest son comes up with an idea to show kindness to Hans: “if poor Hans is in trouble I will give him half my porridge, and show him my white rabbits” (Wilde, 1888, p. 66). He thinks this is a silly idea that would only make Hans jealous; and he, as his best friend, cannot allow that to happen to Hans. Ultimately, Hugh’s every selfish action is carried out for the sake of “real” friendship.

Hugh also controls Hans by always mentioning his generosity of the promise to give his broken wheelbarrow to him in exchange with his difficult tasks such as giving him a plank of wood to repair his barn, giving him some flowers in return as he convinces little Hans that true friendship was quite free from selfishness of any kind, carrying heavy sack of flour to sell in the market, and mending his barn roof. However, he never gives Hans the broken wheelbarrow. Though he is lazy, Hugh accuses Hans of laziness and teaches him that idleness is a great sin; he justifies these criticisms by saying that he is a true friend, thus he doesn’t shy from speaking unpleasant things and giving pain to Hans because he’s doing it for his own good. Finally, Hugh believes it is only fair that Hans should go to fetch the doctor for his son as a kind of payment for borrowing the wheelbarrow. When Hans loses his way and drowns, miserable and alone, Hugh mourns very publicly and praises himself for his goodness and his generosity in lending his wheelbarrow, though he will certainly not to give away anything again because “one always suffers for being generous” (Wilde, 1888, p.83).

Ultimately, Wilde argues that generous people can fall victim to selfish ones if they become obsessed with the theory of morality, especially that espoused by stories. The selfish will never perceive themselves as sinful, but will rather convince themselves that they do bad things for the benefit of those they are taking advantage of. As Hans is preoccupied with Hugh's beautiful speech about true friendship, he never pays attention to the behavior of his purportedly devoted friend, who is actually a selfish person. In fact, Hans is the one who suffers for his generosity and the selfish Hugh is not punished. Instead, he lives happily.

5. "The Young King": An empathic ruler is rewarded by God and deemed righteous and worthy to rule his people.

The Young King is the only one who recognizes that his wealth derives from the lives and suffering of poor laborers, thus he empathizes with and refuses to wear his luxurious coronation costume: a robe made by impoverished weavers, a scepter laid with pearls collected by a slave, and a crown encrusted with rubies that caused the deaths of many miners. He rejects these fineries, despite living in a cruel society that insists it is useless to care for the suffering. The kingdom had previously been ruled with cruelty, under the Young-King's grandfather, who had his lower-class son-in-law brutally stabbed.

Since the Young King grew up in the freedom of the forest without strict etiquette or tedious court ceremonies, he is fascinated by the beauty of the luxurious jewels of the Joyeuse Palace. When he learns that his status has been upgraded, he is thrilled to live in the world of pleasure and beauty.

Upon seeing a Venetian painting, he kneels down before it as though worshipping a god; and he kisses an ancient statue that was made by a slave of King Hadrian. To feed his admiration of beauty, he orders people to fetch luxurious products from around the world, such as amber from fishermen in the North Sea and turquoise from pharaohs' tombs — though he is unaware of how difficult it is to procure these items.

The night before his coronation, the Young King has three dreams about the hardships of the people who produced his coronation robe, scepter, and crown. These visions make him terribly sad because it was he who had ordered them to work night and day for his designs and to find the most beautiful and worthy jewels. He comes to see that he had caused their deaths, and also learns that the rich get richer by abusing poor laborers, including children. Despite their culpability, the rich do not care because they are selfish. One such example is the master of the ship, who shows little care for the death of the young slave who dives into the sea to find pearls for the Young King's scepter. Moreover, Avarice is personified in one dream and causes the death of the abused workmen who seek rubies for the Young King's crown in the terrible jungle; because of her stubbornness, they all die of sickness caused by a personified Death.

As a result, on the coronation day, the Young King determines to don the clothes he wore in poverty: a leather tunic and a coarse sheepskin cloak, with a shepherd's staff and a crown of wild briar. Seeing this attire, the nobles think he is like a beggar, is not worth to rule them, and should be killed for shaming the state. This suggests that rich people only consider the value of a

leader by the value of his materials, not for possessing the true quality of empathy toward his subjects. Even one of the poor wants the Young King to wear his finely crafted robe, since the laborers lives depend on the rich and it is more bitter to have no master, even if they are nothing to the rich. Moreover, the old Bishop tells the Young King that he alone cannot solve society's social problems and tries to convince him to put on the proper robe so he can crown him with the golden crown.

In contrast, God sees clearly that the Young King is righteous, because he has empathy for his miserable subjects and cannot stand to cause them pain in order to maintain his high status. When God makes the Young King's robe golden with sunlight, decorates the dead staff with lilies whiter than any pearl, and adorns the thorny crown with roses redder than rubies, this suggests that the glory of God has crowned him and rewarded this king with a face like an angel.

6. "The Birthday of the Infanta": The beautiful can be cruel and can destroy the lives of the kind and innocent.

This story portrays the Infanta as heartless. Although she is beautiful and dresses gracefully, she treats the little Dwarf as her slave for amusement at her birthday party, not caring that her laughing at his abnormal shape constitutes mockery. She further shows this by referring to him as "my funny little dwarf" (Wilde, 1891, p. 60). During the Dwarf's performance, the Infanta laughs delightedly and throws a beautiful white rose from her hair at him, thus reinforcing the fact that she only wishes to mock him and to tease the Camerara. She does not, in fact, admire the Dwarf, but he does not understand

this. Moreover, she orders him to dance for her again after the siesta. Later, the Dwarf comes to realize that he is an ugly monster and that the Infanta's friends and courtiers have been mocking him, delighted by his fantastic and exaggerated mannerisms. Upon this realization, the Dwarf exhibits his true pain and desperation, though the Infanta finds this even funnier than his dance, stating that he is almost as good as the puppets but not quite natural. The Infanta treats him only as an object for serving her happiness and is unable to distinguish between reality and his performance.

She also wishes him to dance for her a second time, although at that point, he merely lies still because he has died. Childish and self-centered, the Infanta stamps her foot when he does not do what she orders. Finally, when the Chamberlain tells her that the little Dwarf will never dance again, she asks the reason, while laughing. When he tells her that it is because the Dwarf's heart is broken, she frowns and says "For the future let those who come to play with me have no hearts" (Wilde, 1891, p. 61). This suggests that those who have hearts to feel cannot satisfy her amusement, and the Infanta goes on ignoring her own cruelty that has caused the Dwarf's broken heart.

In addition, her aristocratic society shows that cruelty is instilled from childhood. Unlike in the forest, kindness such as that possessed by the Dwarf is not desired in the heartless palace, where everyone must hide their feelings and follow court etiquette. The world of children in the palace mimics the cruel nature of the adult world. This is seen in the children's shows that promote violence, such as the sham bullfight in which the 14-year-old Count of Tierra-Nueva kills the fake bull and the boy inside the bull costume laughs

happily. The children love this show, and no one finds the performance violent.

Moreover, almost every adult is violent in the “sombre palace.” Prince Don Pedro has two members of a Gypsy tribe hanged for sorcery in the marketplace at Seville, and he is also suspected of murdering the Queen. Of course, he also forces the little Dwarf to dance for the Infanta and threatens to whip him when he dies and lies still.

Everyone in the palace looks down on the Dwarf; even the proud flowers in the garden are disgusted with him, thinking him an ugly monster who should not be in the beautiful and graceful palace, running freely and happily. This indicates that all the beauty and luxury of the people in the palace does not imbue them with kindness. Rather, their minds possess cruelty and violence, which can destroy a generous and innocent heart like that of the Dwarf.

Wilde also chooses a setting that reflects the cruelty of cultivated society, placing the characters in an intense heat and under a bright sun that suggests the pleasure and delight the aristocracy derive from the pitiless and cruel performances. Wilde tells us that the sun was shining brightly in the gardens of the palace and the “pitiless sunlight” mocked the king’s sorrow. As well, the little Lizards “lay basking in the white glare; and the pomegranates split and cracked with the heat and show their bleeding red hearts. (Wilde, 1891, p. 28). The sun also symbolizes the royal power, as at the end of the hall hung a “curtain of black velvet, powered with suns and stars, the King’s favourite devices.” Also, the mirrored room in which the little Dwarf dies is the

brightest and most beautiful room, thus showing that a cruel heart with a beautiful surface is dangerous and can destroy innocent life. In the end, these cruel people are not punished. Instead, they continue their pleasurable and luxurious lives.

7. “The Star-Child”: Repentance and compassion are rewarded, while cruelty is punished; though, it is possible to redeem oneself by passing challenging tests.

The story is set in the bitter cold of winter, where Wilde tells us that two Woodcutters “knew that the Snow is cruel to those who sleep in her arms” (Wilde, 1891, p.131). This foreshadows the capacity for cruelty of the Star-Child who is found in the snow. This later cruelty is contrasted with the poor Woodcutter’s compassion, shown in his determination to take the Star-Child home, since he believes “it were an evil thing to leave the child to perish here in the snow” (Wilde, 1891, p.133). He also demonstrates a lack of greed when he refuses to give his friend the child’s golden cloak because it belongs to the child, not to them. He also persuades his angry wife to take care of the child, saying, “Into a house where a heart is hard cometh there not always a bitter wind?” (Wilde, 1891, p.135). Thus, they are a merciful couple, even though they are poor and do not have enough food to feed their own children.

Unlike the kind couple, though, the Star-Child’s beauty causes him to become narcissistic and cruel: “Yet did his beauty work him evil. For he grew proud, and cruel, and selfish” (Wilde, 1891, p.136). He believes he has a higher status than the other children in the village and that he is a noble sprung from

a Star, thus he appoints himself as their master. He also has no pity for the poor beggars and the handicapped, and he throws stones at them, driving them away and mocking the weak. He also leads other children to do cruel things, such as poke a sharp reed into the eyes of a mole and cast stones at a leper. As their cruel leader “they became hard of heart, even as he was” (Wilde, 1891, p.138).

Later, the cruelty that he shows his beggar mother leads him to receive the same punishment. He throws stones, mocks, and rejects her as his real mother because she is a beggar and is ugly, and he does not care that she had wandered the world in search of him and only needs his love. He tells her she should not come to see him again because she brings him shame. Besides, he says he does not want to kiss her since she is too foul and he would prefer to kiss the adder and the toad. As a result of these words and actions, he is punished by being transformed into an ugly person. “His face was as the face of a toad, and his body was scaled like an adder” (Wilde, 1891, p.142). Repenting his pride and cruelty toward his mother, the Star-Child decides to cleanse these sins by seeking her forgiveness.

Facing the same cruelty as he used to inflict, the Star-Child undergoes a three-year test. He tells the kind daughter of the Woodcutter, “I have been cruel to my mother, and as a punishment has this evil been sent to me” (Wilde, 1891, p.143). While seeking her, the animals will not help, for they remember his previous cruelty: poking the eyes of the Mole, clipping the wings of the Linnet, and killing the mother of the Squirrel. The Star-Child begs their forgiveness, and thus learns to repent his sins. Meanwhile, the village children

mock and cast stones at him, and no one pities him nor allows him to sleep in the byres because he is very foul and they fear he may cause mildew in their store rooms.

The Star-Child is later sold as a slave to an evil magician who demands that he bring him white gold, yellow gold, and red gold from the forest. The magician tells him that if he cannot find them, he will be beaten. These difficult tasks become an opportunity for him to learn compassion and self-sacrifice: Along the way, he saves a little Hare caught in a trap who helps him to find the gold and he also sacrifices the gold to a hungry leper, since the leper's needs are more important than his own and he is willing to receive punishment from the sacrifice. These actions show that he has become more modest and merciful toward others.

Accordingly, the Star-Child's pity for the underprivileged is rewarded with the return of his beauty. He then meets his parents and realizes that his mother is the queen and his father, who had been posing as the leper, is the king. He learns that he is the prophesized ruler that the people have been waiting for. As he weeps over his mother's feet, begging for her forgiveness, he shows he is worthy to be the merciful and righteous king. However, Wilde suggests that the world tends to have evil rulers, as after the Star-Child becomes a kind king for three years, the next ruler "ruled evilly" (Wilde, 1891, p.158).

Conclusion and Discussion

Wilde explores both the concept of morality and immorality in his fairy tales, revealing that moral people can either be rewarded or go unrewarded and that immoral people either be punished or go unpunished. In terms of morality, there are five main actions depicted in the fairy tales: namely, self-sacrifice, repentance, generosity, compassion, and empathy. At times, self-sacrifice and generosity are rewarded, and at other times they are not.

Regarding self-sacrifice, there are both benefits and limitations to its rewards. The Happy Prince statue sacrifices his finery, his gold leaf, his sapphire eyes, and his red ruby, to help save an exploited seamstress, a struggling playwright, and a little match girl, thus he is rewarded with admission to Paradise, even as the people find him useless and ugly. The Swallow, who helps in distributing the jewels to the poor, also ascends to heaven. In this way, Wilde suggests that the value of self-sacrifice is that it places the giver in a special relationship with God. However, individual sacrifice is limited in that it may not solve the root causes of poverty and the misery of the poor.

Furthermore, self-sacrifice can go entirely unappreciated if one gives away his life to someone unworthy or shallow. In the “Nightingale and the Rose,” the Nightingale’s selfless devotion to find a rose for the sake of the unworthy Student leads her to a useless and unnoticed death. This is due to her belief in an idealized form of love that is in contrast to that of the shallower human relationship, which sees the value of materials as greater than that of self-sacrifice. Wilde argues that self-sacrifice has no direct ethical

influence on human behavior. Like the tale of the Nightingale, Hans' experience in "The Devoted Friend" also suggests that selfless devotion has no value in the face of selfishness. Little Hans is innocent and foolish enough to be duped by selfish Hugh, thus he dies due to being exploited. The story reflects that the mere ideal of devoted friendship, though not the actual practice, serves the interests of the rich who praise the virtues of charity while enjoying ample material comfort. Self-sacrifice can also lead one to become righteous in the eyes of God and be rewarded with a place in Paradise or a position on the throne as a worthy leader, such as is seen in "The Happy Prince" or in "The Star-Child." These examples contrast the Nightingale, whose naïve self-sacrifice is useless and goes unrewarded.

Additionally, generosity can be rewarded with access to Paradise, as is seen in "The Selfish Giant." However, Wilde warns that naïve and generous people can fall victim to those who selfishly desire to take advantage of them. This can, ultimately, lead to self-destruction, particularly if they fall victim to the cruelty of people such as those in "The Birthday of the Infanta."

The moral actions that are rewarded include repentance, compassion, and empathy. Those who are repentant will be rewarded with an ascent to Paradise, like that of the Giant, or deemed a righteous ruler, like the Star-Child. And an empathic ruler will be rewarded by God as being worthy to rule the kingdom, as with the case of the Young King. When the Young King comes to understand the misery of his poor subjects, he realizes that the luxuries of the rich derive from the lives of the poor, thus he decides to reject the luxurious robe and crown. For this, he is blessed and crowned by God, rather than the

priest who disapproves of him, and stands before his people as a righteous king. Similarly, the Star-Child's empathy for the sick and the poor eventually lead to the return of his former beauty and to his righteous rule as king.

With regard to immoral actions, Wilde suggests that selfishness and cruelty will either be punished or go unpunished. In the case of the Giant, his selfish actions are punished with a cold winter in his house and garden; though, when it comes to Hugh the Miller, he remains unpunished when he takes advantage of little Hans, and, in fact, is all the richer for it. Moreover, in terms of cruelty, those who exhibit such actions are punished with the same act of violence, but their plight can be improved if they pass certain bitter tests, like those of the Star-Child. However, some cruelties will go unpunished, such as when the Infanta destroys the life of the kind and innocent Dwarf, thus punishing him for his moral attributes.

In sum, the findings correspond with Kirvalidze and Samnidze (2018) studies in terms of Wilde desires to promote compassion, love, self-sacrifice, and generosity to the poor. This research also found out that Wilde attempts to promote readers to pursue moral actions such as self-sacrifice, repentance, generosity, compassion and empathy. However, Wilde warns that being moral does not necessarily lead to recognition from other people as can be seen in terms of being too naïve to sacrifice yourself to unworthy people or too naïve to be generous to the selfish which can eventually lead to self-destruction. Besides, Wilde satirizes society that allow immoral people such as the selfish and cruel who will never perceive themselves as sinful and tend to take advantage of naively moral ones to exist and go unpunished.

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