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### **The Subverted Nature of Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales**

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The fairy tale “is a dramatic projection in symbolic images of the life of the psyche” according to W.H. Auden (203). Freud and Jung have described the fairy tales as “fundamentally not different from dreams” because they speak with the same symbolic language just like dreams (qtd. in Dieckmann 2). Jeannette Winterson evaluates the fairy tales of Oscar Wilde as sources of delight and as perfect examples of how important human imagination is, though these magical stories for children have often been dismissed as lesser works of art (Winterson). Jack Zipes evaluates the fairy tales for children as “universal, ageless, therapeutic, miraculous, having a certain magical power and beautiful (*Victorian Fairy Tales* 1). Whereas Fredric Jameson in his approach to the essence of that kind of literary creation seeks to explore the political unconscious and regards it as a socially symbolic act (qtd. in *Victorian Fairy Tales* 2). Jack Zipes states that the fairy tale discourse is “a dynamic part of the historical civilising process, with each symbolic act viewed as an intervention in socialization in the public sphere” (*Victorian Fairy Tales* 11). According to Zipes, Wilde’s purpose of writing his fairy tales was “subversion”. Zipes notes that Wilde wrote subversively to

undermine stereotypical Victorian values. Carol Tattersall acknowledges that "Wilde subverts the accepted function of that genre, offering a different and paradoxically, more pragmatic approach to the use of fantasy as a didactic mode" (Tattersall 136). This Chapter will deal with the subverted nature of Wilde's *Fairy Tales* in their bizarre endings and their ironical approaches to the Victorian society.

As a devoted father Oscar Wilde started writing the fairy tales immediately after the birth of his two sons, Cyril and Vyvyan. Wilde liked to tell his sons all his written fairy tales. Once Cyril asked him why he had tears in his eyes when he told them the story of "The Selfish Giant." He replied that really beautiful things always made him cry (qtd. in Pearce 219). Oscar Wilde wrote two collections of Fairy Tales, the first being *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* in 1888 and secondly, *A House of Pomegranates* in 1891. The first collection was dedicated to Carlos Blacker and comprised five stories: "The Happy Prince", "The Nightingale and the Rose", "The Selfish Giant, The Devoted Friend" and "The Remarkable Rocket". The second collection of fairy tales was dedicated to his wife, Constance Mary Wilde and comprised four stories: "The Young King", "The Birthday of the Infanta", "The Fisherman and his Soul" and lastly "The Star-Child". Some of his tales reflect certain personal notions concerning art and morality as well as aesthetical appreciation and religious obligation which mostly reveal an instinct for social criticism that goes beyond Wilde's clever aphorisms and self-indulgent paradoxes. In his correspondence with G. H. Kersley in June 1988 Wilde said that these fairy tales were "meant partly for children, partly for those who have kept the childlike faculties of wonder and joy, who find in simplicity a subtle strangeness" (*Letters* 219, qtd. in Snider). In his private letter to Amelie Rives Chanler in 1889, Wilde admits the fact that the tales were written "not for children, but for childlike people from eighteen to eighty" (qtd. in Holland and Hart-Davis 388). These stories advocate a consistently moral point of view. Each tale is designed to reveal the ugliness of a particular vice or the beauty of a particular virtue. Certain vices like vanity in "The Remarkable Rocket" and "The Star-Child"; selfishness in "The Devoted Friend", "The Selfish Giant", "The Nightingale and the Rose"; heartlessness in "The Birthday of the Infanta" and "The Fisherman and his Soul" as well as self-indulgence in "The Young King" are all shown to be wrong and damaging for the soul. According to Wilde, there is no mystery so great and marvelous as suffering. Wilde who has discovered the truth about human suffering refers to himself as "the man of sorrows" and underlines the importance of the figure of Christ also in *De Profundis* (*Collected Works* 1085). Wilde's reference

to God whose name is Love is described as virtue and pain. In *De Profundis* Wilde remembers his Oxford years during which he could not understand Dante saying that “sorrow remarries us to God” (*Collected Works* 1076). In *De Profundis* Wilde confesses his emotions as follows:

I now see that sorrow, being the supreme emotion of which man is capable is at once the type and test of all great art. What the artist is always looking for is the mode of existence in which soul and body are one and indivisible: in which the outward is expressive of the inward [...] Pain, unlike pleasure, wears no mask [...] Truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself: the outward rendered expressive of the inward: the soul made incarnate: the body instinct with spirit [...] For the secret of life is suffering. It is what is hidden behind everything. (1078)

Within the fairy tales the themes concerning love is mostly based upon sacrifice and death. Walter Pater’s notion of pleasure and the education of the sensual child was most influential in Oscar Wilde’s *Fairy Tales*. According to Pater, the physical, material component of the Socratic eros is essential to education: education “must begin in sensuous impressions” (Dowling 98). Wood in her article entitled “Creating the Sensual Child: Paterian Aesthetics, Pederasty and Oscar Wilde’s *Fairy Tales*” states that:

The epoch was already infatuated with the idea of childhood: Inheritors of a Wordsworthian Romantic tradition that privileged childhood over adulthood and innocence over experience, fin- de- siècle authors produced a newly sensual Romantic child [...] Eschewing the didactic texts which taught children the values and ideals that would enable them to become rational, pious, and thrifty adults, these writers adjured children to be “childlike” – to repudiate adult values in favor of fantasy, play and joyous anarchy. (Wood 159)

Wilde provocatively insists upon his child readers experience Paterian “stirring of the senses with strange dyes, strange colors” (Pater 237). Wilde emphasizes the sensual pleasure rather than the moral of the tale, as the story appeals to the curious, the alien and the pagan in the mind of the child (Wood 163). In *De Profundis* Wilde

mentions the influence of Walter Pater's work *The Renaissance* in his youth at Oxford and confesses as follows:

I remember when I was at Oxford saying to one of my friends as we were strolling round Magdalen's narrow bird- haunted walks one morning in the year before I took my degree, that I wanted to eat of the fruit of all the trees in the garden of the world, and that I was going out into the world with that passion in my soul [...] My only mistake was that I confined myself exclusively to the trees of what seemed to me the sunlit side of the garden, and shunned the other side for its shadow and its gloom [...] There was no pleasure I did not experience. I threw the pearl of my soul into a cup of wine [...] The other half of the garden had its secrets for me also. Of course all this is foreshadowed and prefigured in my books. Some of it is in 'The Happy Prince', some of it in 'The Young King', notably in the passage where the bishop says to the kneeling boy, 'Is not He, who made misery wiser than thou art?'... The image of the 'pleasure that liveth for a moment' has to make the image of the 'Sorrow that abideth for ever' [...] (*De Profundis* 1080)

In his fairy tales Oscar Wilde criticizes the Victorian society and displays the unfairness of its social institutions, its inhumane practices. Oscar Wilde deliberately describes with intensified emotion the hopelessness and poverty of the lower class characters while the upper class characters remain cruelly oblivious to the problems of others. Wilde deals with such themes as aesthetic beauty of emotion versus egoistical meanness of man, cruelty versus sensitivity towards humane matters, indulgence versus poverty, selfish desires versus sacrificial love. In "The Birthday of the Infanta", the dwarf is mocked and despised by the Infanta because of his grotesque appearance. When the dwarf sees his ugly image in the mirror and dies tragically with a broken heart, the Infanta orders in disdain: "For the future let those who come to play with me have no hearts!" (*Collected Works* 272). The same kind of indifference and cruelty can be seen in "The Nightingale and the Rose". When the Nightingale gives its life's blood to create a red rose for the superficial student, while sacrificing its own blood for others' happiness like Jesus Christ, at the end of the tale the student throws away that red rose into the gutter.

In contrast with the traditional fairy- tale endings with a happy marriage, a newly gained kingdom and a brilliant future lived 'happily

ever after', Wilde's fairy tales culminate in strikingly beautiful, but often painful climaxes with ironic endings. His tales never have a truly happy ending. Most of them come to a close with a sad ending culminating in death. They reflect a pessimistic point of view concerning the society and its artificial values. Wilde's heroes in these fairy tales are usually aesthetes who love beauty and suffer from lack of humanity or human touch or tenderness. Wilde offers a vision of love and beauty that urges a different aesthetic and moral relationship to the world of experience. Wilde's tales are lyrical in tone and rich in imagery. He sometimes makes use of Biblical imagery as well as Greek myths such as those of Persephone and Narcissus are employed. He mostly relies upon the fairy-tale conventions, he personifies abstractions and objects, antropomorphizes animals and gives allegorical names to his settings. His father, Sir William was also interested in the Irish folk tales and was fond of telling tales of "charms" concerning Irish folklore during his life time. Just like Sir William, Oscar also enjoyed telling stories to his friends. "The Happy Prince" was first created orally in one of his voyages to Cambridge with some of his students and friends on the train.

Oscar Wilde's fairy tales rhetorically create a new sensual child by enacting Walter Pater's aesthetics. Walter Pater asserts that sensory experience not morality ought to be the goal of life. Wilde insists his readers experience Paterian idea of "stirring of the senses with strange dyes, strange colours" and give themselves over to a sensual pleasure by appealing to the curious, the alien and the pagan. As seen in Pater's philosophy, Wilde emphasizes physical sensation as an integral part of the spiritual and moral aspects of humankind. He sometimes creates images of the mystique Orient and the remote past. From Plato, Oscar Wilde derived his dialectic technique of the paradox, posing and counterposing utterances in order to demonstrate a new paradoxical understanding of the truth. Wilde encountered the fairy tale and folklore traditions through an Irish lense. His father, Sir William was an important folklorist who had a collection entitled *Irish Popular Superstitions* published in 1852. His book was composed of stories and traditions which he had picked up in the West of Ireland, both as a child in County Roscommon and also as a doctor of medicine in Moytura House and Illanroe Cottage where he offered medical help in exchange for stories in the cottages of peasantry. Oscar's mother, Lady Esperanza collected her husband's notes after his death and published *Ancient Legends* in 1882 and *Irish Charms* in 1890.

Towards the second part of the nineteenth century a new trend became visible in England in the discourse on socialization through fairy tales. This new approach to children's stories reflected

sharp criticism of the established traditional child-rearing and the rationalized means of discipline to make children into good and responsible future citizens. Zipes mentions that Oscar Wilde like George MacDonald and Frank Baum used the genre of fairy tales "as a radical mirror to reflect what was wrong with the general discourse on manners, mores and norms in society" (*Victorian Fairy Tales* 99). In the nineteenth century the fairy tale and the mirror cracked into sharp-edged, radical parts but they no longer reflected the cosmetic bourgeois standards of beauty and virtue. There was more social dynamite in the contents of the tales, as well as more subtlety and artistic touch. The fairy tales are mostly multi-layered and operate with a high level of both occult symbolism and allegorical inflection. In Oxford, Wilde advanced very quickly in the Freemasons, a training for occult knowledge which prepared him well for the theosophists. Masonic imagery pervades his writing and the Rose-Cross which is the symbol of female sexuality combined with the phallus in Masonic iconography, could even be seen in the explanation of the rose in "The Nightingale and the Rose". Concerning the essence of fairy tales, Michel Butor compared them to "a world inverted" which is indeed an exemplary world containing the "criticism of ossified reality" (qtd. in *Victorian Fairy Tales* 99). Pointing to the subversive capacity of fairy tales, Rosemary Jackson stated that the subversive fantasies mostly attempted to transform the relations of the imaginary and the symbolic (Jackson 91). The fairy tales, instead of transgressing the values of the "real" world, questioned them in allegorical terms. They presented the stark realities of power politics without disguising the violence and brutality of certain facts of the contemporary world such as starvation of children, ruthless exploitation and cruel punishment as well as inhuman negligence and indifference to sordid reality. The writing of the literary fairy tale as a symbolic act comprised a certain level of consciousness and understanding as well as conscience. Oscar Wilde's approach in his fairy tales was shaped by his commitment to Christian socialism based upon individualism and art, whereas his contemporary MacDonald reflected the influence of Christian mysticism. Wilde used the figure of Christ to show the need to subvert the traditional Christian message. Zipes mentions that his interpretation of Christianity demonstrated the malpractice of the Church and questioned the compromising way the church leaders used Christianity to curb the pleasure instincts and rationalize a socio-economic system of exploitation (*Victorian Fairy Tales* 114). The central idea of Wilde's essay on *The Soul of Man under Socialism* which depends upon Christ as its theoretical construct finds its voice in all his fairy tales which evince the same sentiments. According to Wilde, socialism could lead to individualism in a humanitarian sense. He states: "The

true perfection of man lies not in what he has, but in what man is” (*Collected Works* 1045).

Actually Wilde used the figure of Christ to show the need to subvert the traditional Christian message. “The Happy Prince” is a good example of how he placed the Christlike figure in a context which aimed at altering the conventional fairy tale discourse and at provoking readers to contemplate upon social change. Quite ironically the happiness of the Happy Prince was based upon ignorance, because he never realized how much his people suffered. The Happy Prince resolves to make up for his past negligence and egocentrism by bidding a devoted swallow to distribute the jewels to a poor seamstress, an artist and a match-girl. Eventually the swallow dies because of the cold winter, and the statue is melted because it is no longer beautiful and useful to the Mayor and counsellors without its precious jewels. The crucified Prince is Christlike and the swallow a kind of his apostle. The Prince overcomes an art for art sake’s position and thereby reveals the social essence of all beauty. Wilde underlines the fact that the individual actions of a Christlike person could not put an end to poverty, injustice and exploitation. Though the Prince and the swallow are blessed by God in the end, the Mayor and the counsellors remain in total control of the city. The philanthropic actions of the Prince will go for naught. Wilde suggests that the beauty of the Prince cannot be appreciated in a capitalistic society which favors greed and pomp. The discourse on manners and values in “The Happy Prince” shows how deeply disturbed Wilde was by the hypocrisy of the English upper class and bourgeoisie. All his fairy tales were artistic endeavours to expose their wanton and cruel ways by juxtaposing Christ-like figures to the norms reinforced by the civilising process. This figure was Wilde’s aesthetic artefact, employed as a device to reveal social conflicts and contradictions. Philip Cohen claims that the story of “The Happy Prince” “looks outward on human suffering and ponders the problems of economic inequality and injustice” (Cohen 81). Wilde sets up a disruption of the “real” London, revealing the Victorian facts of poverty in an imaginative form and he also unveils the utilitarianism and the gospel of success as disguises for egotism. His tale is populated with “Charity Children”, destitute seamstresses, poor artists and the huge masses who congregate in the back alleys and lanes. Historically it is known that between 1841 and 1911 over one million Irish immigrants took up residence in England. Many of these Irish immigrants arrived in London with nothing and were sent to the least attractive areas, living and working in difficult conditions. Of the female Irish immigrants seventeen percent of them became seamstresses and dominated the trade in London at very low rates.

In "The Happy Prince" Wilde singles out the seamstress as a being in particular need and describes her as follows: "Her face is thin and worn, and she has coarse, red hands all pricked with needle [...] She is embroidering passion-flowers on a satin gown for the loveliest of the queen's maids-of-honour to wear at the next court-ball" (*Collected Works* 318).

Most Irish immigrants lived in the districts of Whitechapel, St. George's and St. Giles region. In "The Happy Prince" Wilde mentions that the poor reside in "dark lanes" and "black streets". The swallow takes the rare blue sapphires of the happy prince's eyes and gives them to the poor artist and the match-girl who are in need of money. The poor artist is described as a young man living in a garret and leaning upon a desk covered with papers and a bunch of withered violets. Wilde portrays him very attractive like the figure of Jokaanaan in his play *Salome*: "His hair is brown and crisp, and his lips are red as pomegranate, and has large and dreamy eyes. He is trying to finish a play for the director of the theatre, but he is too cold to write any more. There is no fire in the grate, and hunger has made him faint" (*Collected Works* 320). The other sapphire eye of the happy prince is brought by the swallow to a match-girl who is mostly beaten by her father if she does not bring money to the house. The match-girl is described as "having no shoes or stockings" (*Collected Works* 321). Her example is also typical of child labour the Irish were forced into in order to survive in a foreign city. The swallow's persistent evocation of Egypt and its exotic and imaginative landscape reflects the desire of the imperial England for the Oriental exotic and the Oriental spirituality seen in the Victorian society.

Some critics found certain autobiographical signs behind the story of "The Happy Prince". John Charles Duffy believes that the relationship between the Prince and the swallow is best evaluated as a "patently non-sexual" but "spiritually transforming" same-sex passion mirroring the intense friendships favoured by Oxford Platonism' (qtd. in Killeen 21). Richard Ellman claimed that the story turned "on the contrast [...] of an older, taler lover with a younger, smaller beloved" (Ellmann 253) and thus mirrored Wilde's first known homoerotic relationship with the young Canadian Robert Ross, whom Wilde met in 1886. Robert Martin argued that "a good deal of Oscar's experience with Constance informs the relationship between the swallow and the Reed in the story, since Constance 'though attractive, was hardly literary and was intellectually incapable of sharing her husband's life'" (qtd. in Killeen 21). Gary Schmidgall configured the story "as a miniature" upon the moving "celebration of love that dared not speak its name", displaying "a



melancholy evocation of gay experience in a frosty, inclement, threatening society” (Schmidgall 156).

In “The Nightingale and the Rose” Wilde again starts off with Christian imagery but ends firmly in the artistic rather than the religious world. Reminding the story of Philomela and Procne in Ovidius’ *Metamorphoses*, the fairy tale again depicts a character who gives its own life for others’ happiness, just like the happy prince. The Nightingale dies in self-sacrifice, while singing continuously and crushing its breast against a thorn so that a red rose, nourished by the blood will grow and the young student will have a red rose to give to the girl he is in love with. The Nightingale promises: “I will build it out of music by moonlight and stain it with my own heart’s blood” and believes that “Love is wiser than philosophy” (*Collected Works* 329). But the story ends with the indifference of the girl who rejects the rose gained by the Nightingale’s blood because it will not suit her dress. The bitter ending of the tale points to selfishness and futility of the aesthetic sacrifice of the Nightingale. Wilde describes the death of the Nightingale as follows: “When the moon shone in the heavens the nightingale flew to the rose tree and set her breast against the thorn. All night long she sang, with her breast against the thorn... and the thorn went deeper and deeper into her breast, and her lifeblood ebbed away from her” (*Collected Works* 329). Guy Willoughby points out that the self-immolation of the Nightingale on the rose-tree’s thorn could be read as a version of the crucifixion of Christ (Willoughby 28). Whereas Philip Cohen argues that God has deserted the world of the Nightingale and believes that the story exposes love of the Nightingale “as a mere delusion” (Cohen 89-90). According to Clifton Snider, God is totally and simply absent in the interpretation of the Nightingale’s dramatic sacrifice. The beautiful death of the Nightingale appears pointless and God does not intervene at the end to justify the sacrifice.

“The Devoted Friend” also points at the selfishness, insensitivity and cruelty of human beings. The miller sends Hans to death by exploiting their friendship and remaining indifferent to the misery of his friend. “The Remarkable Rocket” can easily be read as a self-parody as the rocket bears a striking resemblance to Wilde, the aesthete, the braggadocio, the sensation of the season, the preeminent artificer, who is aware of his own posing and who is capable of making fun of himself. “The Remarkable Rocket” seems to be the most comic among his fairy tales. The rocket boasts about his parentage and superiority before a group of fireworks, he even tries to prove that he can wet his powder and still go off. But unfortunately he fails to ignite and falls into a ditch, where he

encounters a frog, a dragon fly and a duck. None of them is impressed by his claims of fiery artifice. When two boys toss him into a fire, he lights up and shrieks: "What a success I am!" (*Collected Works* 361) and finally explodes. Unfortunately no one sees his explosion. He falls upon a goose's back as a burnt shaft. In dismay the goose utters: "Good Heavens! It is going to rain sticks" (*Collected Works* 361). Quite ironically the story ends with the rocket saying: "I knew I should create a great sensation" (*Collected Works* 361).

The second collection of his fairy tales is given the title of *A House of Pomegranates*. The image of the pomegranate represents a fertile but dangerous descent into the occult knowledge required by both Theosophy and folk fairy lore. The naming of *Pomegranates* is quite significant in its context as the Greek myth tells the story of Persephone who has been kidnapped by Hades into the underworld. When her mother Demeter finds out about the kidnapping, she pleads with Zeus for help. Zeus tells that Persephone's return can be realized on one condition which is that she should not have eaten anything in the underworld. But Persephone has eaten seven seeds of the pomegranate. So she can return to the earth only for a short period of time which symbolizes the time of fertility and renewal of nature. In contrast to the Happy Prince crucified despite his philanthropic deeds, Wilde's first story in *A House of Pomegranates* entitled "The Young King" points a way to a certain utopia by setting a model of behaviour which he hopes everyone will recognize and appreciate its worth. Basically he demonstrates that the beautiful appearance of the civilized world merely serves to conceal barbaric working conditions. The young King's rejection of robe, crown and sceptre is indeed a rejection of private property, ornamentation, and unjust power. By refusing the elaborate clothes of the King and by dressing in his original and simple clothes, he becomes both an individual and equal among men. The beauty of his deed derives from a compassion for mankind and a realization that his own potential depends on whether people are truly free. Most of Wilde's stories depict how hypocritical social conventions and double standards serve to maintain unjust rule. The result comes out as pain and suffering and the plots of these tales deny a happy ending because despite the attempts of the Christ-like figures, property relations and social characters are never altered.

"The Selfish Giant" is perhaps Wilde's most consummate statement on capitalist property relations and the need to restructure society along with socialist lines. In the first part of the tale the Giant as a landowner banishes the children from his beautiful garden and in order to stop them from entering his

property builds a wall around the garden. The second part shows how his garden turns out to be an empty and desolate place like a winter garden and the stage involves the epiphany when the giant recognizes his selfishness on seeing a young boy miserable and decides to share his wealth and his garden with others. The final part of the story depicts the transformation of the garden into a paradise for children as the Giant shares his property with everyone and their joy fills the garden with voices of happy children. As the giant searches for the little boy, he could not find him until the moment before his death. He realizes that the boy was the incarnation of Christ. Wilde insisted that this love is the type of humane compassion which was necessary for the building of socialism. Wilde wanted his heroes to grasp the roots of existence based upon a moral and aesthetic sensibility for social action in order to change the society. Jarlath Killeen states that “The Selfish Giant” can be evaluated “as a compelling cultural attempt by the Victorians to seek forgiveness for their bad treatment of children” in a century known for its terrible conditions of “child labour, poverty and prostitution” (Killeen 63).

The most interesting of the fairy tales is “The Fisherman and His Soul” told in a manner reminiscent of the *Holy Bible* and the *Arabian Nights*. Wilde uses a colourfully rich language replete with maritime and sensuous imagery. The episodes possess the quality of the arcane as well as the mysterious with the symbols of magic and witchcraft. One day the young fisherman catches something extraordinary instead of fish in his fish net. The fisherman recognizes in the meshes of his net a little mermaid lying fast asleep:

Her hair was as a wet fleece of gold, and each separate hair as a thread of fine gold in a cup of glass. Her body was as white as ivory, and her tail was of silver and pearl. Silver and pearl was her tail, and the green weeds of the sea coiled round it; and like seashells were her ears and her lips were like sea-coral. The cold waves dashed over her cold breasts, and the salt glistened upon her eye lids. So beautiful was she [...] And when he touched her she gave a cry like a startled seagull and woke, and looked at him in terror with her mauve-amethyst eyes [...] (*Collected Works* 275)

The fisherman falls in love with the mermaid and does not want to separate from her. The little mermaid pleads with him to free her promising him to come each day to sing her beautiful songs to him. The fisherman cannot join her unless he becomes like the seafolk, that is, a being without a soul. So the fisherman elicits the help of

the netherworld to separate his soul from his body in order to unite with the mermaid. First, he asks the advice of the priest, he replies that the seafolk are "as beasts of the field that know not good from evil" (*Collected Works* 277). He also warns the young fisherman that "the love of the body is vile." And "the soul is the noblest part of man, and was given to us by God that we should nobly use it. There is no precious thing than a human soul" (*Collected Works* 277). Like Doctor Faustus, the young fisherman wants to sell his soul to the Merchant who gives it "a clipped piece of silver" (*Collected Works* 278). Wilde ironically remarks the bewilderment of the young fisherman: "How strange a thing this is! The priest telleth me that the soul is worth all the gold in the world, and the merchants say that it is not worth a clipped piece of silver" (*Collected Works* 278 ). The fisherman goes through a Satanic ritual in order to get rid of his soul so that he can join the mermaid. For three years the soul wanders about gaining wisdom, riches and an appreciation of sensuality in three separate and highly allegorical adventures. The witch promises to help him and invites him to a whirling dance during which owls with sulphurous eyes watch them in moonlight. "Before him lay his shadow which was the body of his soul, and behind him hung the moon in the honey-coloured air. And his soul said to him, "If indeed thou must drive me from thee, send me forth without a heart. The world is cruel, give me thy heart to take with me" (*Collected Works* 283). The young fisherman states that his heart belongs to the mermaid and tries to cut away the shadow of his soul with his knife. Wilde is keen in using the *doppelgänger* motive here. The soul wants to re-enter the heart of the fisherman, but none of his temptations proves captivating save the last which is a dazzling dancing girl. The soul entices the fisherman to steal, to strike a child and to murder a Merchant. The fisherman and his soul are bound to each other by the evil deeds. In the meantime the mermaid dies of loneliness and despair. The fisherman leaps into the sea to join her. His heart breaks and at the last moment the soul gains entry into his broken heart. The bodies of the fisherman and the mermaid wash unto the beach and much to everyone's amazement, gorgeous white flowers spring from the unmarked grave. Love triumphs albeit death despite the disapproval of the society. The white flowers seem to be symbolical of the innocence of their love and demonstrate God's sanction in a way. The tale implies that the body cannot live or exist in a blissful state without the assistance of the soul. In his attempt to separate himself from his soul, the fisherman makes life with the seafolk possible, but he becomes soulless as well as incapable of experiencing sin and repentance. Wilde usually held the idea that the body and the soul must live in harmony with one another. In his

view of life style, the Tanhauser motive and the theological concept of *a felix culpa* had a strong impact upon Wilde's imagination.

As a conclusion Oscar Wilde tried to build a moral and aesthetic sensibility for social action which created the basic root of his fairy tales. Wilde insisted upon his heroes' humane attempts to change the society, while putting the emphasis upon love and sacrifice as a form of liberation as well as the type of humane compassion necessary for the building of socialism. Wilde criticizes materialism but praises the spiritual realm of human experience and reminds his readers of the utmost importance of the soul. Some of the tales reflect significant personal tensions regarding art and morality, in other words, aesthetic appreciation and religious obligation which also appear throughout Wilde's entire work. The tensions reveal a critical instinct which goes beyond his clever aphorisms and self-indulgent paradoxes. One should not hesitate to see the real Oscar underneath the masks and poses. There exists behind all these, a Victorian gentleman with artistic, aesthetic and humanistic sensibility and a Satanic talent who even could not escape from being moralistic. Wilde's approach was based on an invitation to selfhood, an advocacy of individualism and an aesthetic sensibility. As Kingston states, the stories in the collection are "literary expressions of the tragic sense of life, probing the nature of man and illumining dark facets of experience" (Kingston 168).

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