

Irony in Oscar Wilde's "Fairy Tales"

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In the realm of literature, beauty has always been a significant theme that has captivated the minds of poets, writers, and readers alike. The world of literature has extensively debated beauty's mysterious nature and its subjective perception across cultures and generations. In fairy-tale literature, beauty is explored while characters bestow it as a reflection of their grace and inner goodness, where Cinderella's beauty makes her stepsisters jealous of her and Snow White's beauty is the primary cause of all her troubles. However, in Oscar Wilde's "Fairytales", ugliness is the most prominent topic that accompanies the "brutal moral instruction" of Wilde's most beautiful characters, reflecting their inner deformities, unlike other fairy tales where "beauty" governs the genre (Jones). The ugliness in Wilde's characters is not manifested physically but in typical moral conventions that shift the fairytales' fundamental concept of beauty. Drawing on completely different tales of Oscar Wilde, "Fairytales" present a tragedian view imbued with misery and infinite suffering that shows shallow and contradictory values of the society but are full of rhythms and tones in an ironic manner.

Oscar Wilde, renowned for his famous satire and wit, employs irony in many of his works, including "The Selfish Giant", "The Happy Prince", "The Devoted Friend", and his other works in the collection of "Fairytales", adding depth and complexity to the narratives. The irony present in Wilde's "Fairytales" adds complexity and depth to the narratives offering a satirical commentary on the societal norms, hypocrisy, and double standards of Victorian society. Wilde's inclusion of irony in his tales reflects his own skepticism towards the relation of things and the fixed meanings in the world that allows for a suspension and acceptance of judgement and ambiguity that is inherent in life (Killeen). Furthermore, Wilde's use of irony creates a sense of uncertainty that challenges conventional beliefs, which encourages readers to embrace an open-minded and more tolerant attitude towards the complexities of human experience.

The way Wilde employs irony in his "Fairytales" invites readers to contemplate alternative perspectives that challenge and expose the absurdities and contradictions of societal norms (Reshytko). Irony in Wilde's "Selfish Giant" serves as a vehicle to convey the ultimate message of selfishness and compassion through the ironically selfish actions of the giant at the beginning of the story, which transforms into a compassionate and selfless being at the end of the story. Elena critiques in "Oscar Wilde's Fairy-tale the Selfish Giant in Elli's Works: from Dramaturgy to Poetry" that the irony lies in the transformation that highlights the theme of redemption while the giant transforms into a compassionate being. Giant's act of tearing down the wall to allow all the children back in the garden highlights the capacity for individuals to change their actions and perspectives (Elena A. Glukhovskaya). Despite his previous disdain for children, the giant's redemption emphasizes the significance of connection and compassion in a seemingly indifferent and cold world. This irony serves as a critique of the expectations of the societal norms for exclusivity and self-interest, suggesting that fulfilment, contentment, and true happiness can be found in acts of compassion and generosity

towards others.

Moreover, the irony in Wilde's "The Happy Prince" is apparent through the contrast between the impoverished condition of the city where people are living under the line of poverty and the beautifully adorned statue. Wilde uses this irony to critique superficial appearances and material wealth that lead to the Prince's realization of the poverty and suffering in the city that exists beyond his gilded exterior. Moreover, the irony in "The Happy Prince" critiques the shallow expectations and values of the society that initially adorns and benefits from the generosity of the gilded statue but ultimately rejects the statue once its gold, ruby, wealth, and beauty are no longer intact. Through the technique of "Metatheatricality" in "The Happy Prince", Wilde showcases self-reflexive awareness to convey deeper meanings in order to highlight the artificiality of the theatrical performance and draws attention to the medium itself. The ironical transformation serves as a criticism of society's inability and superficiality to value genuine acts of selflessness as well as kindness and the superficiality of human nature and relationships, exposing the ingratitude that can be found within society (Liang).

Furthermore, another ingenious and thought-provoking work of Wilde, "The Devoted Friend", from his collection of "Fairytale" explores identity, friendship, transformation, and the consequences of dark reality behind human relationships as the tale follows the interaction between Hans and Miller, a poor gardener and his wealthy friend. Eduardo Valls Oyarzun offers criticism in "Theory and Practice of Friendship: Avantla - Lettre Populist Resemantization in The Devoted Friend" that throughout the tale, Oscar Wilde employs irony when he highlights the relationship between the poor but kind-hearted gardener Hans and his wealthy but manipulative friend Miller to emphasize the contradictory nature of human behaviour. The title "The Devoted Friend" depicts the irony in itself, which shows that the story should be centered around sincerity and loyalty in friendship, but as the story unfolds, the readers get to know that the tale is ironically about the deceptive facade of friendship (Eduardo Valls Oyarzun). Thus, the story ultimately reveals that the friendship is anything but devoted and heartfelt between the two individuals critiquing the ironical nature of the societal norms and expectations surrounding the pure and loyal relationship of friendship.

In conclusion, Oscar Wilde has ingeniously shifted the narrative of fairytales from beauty to ugliness as his "Fairytale" serve as a powerful tool to expose the underlying manipulation and exploitation that often exist within so-called human relationships and behaviours. Poets in the world of literature have often explored the complexities and nuance of beauty, using it as a lens to examine personal relationships, societal norms, and individual identity from ancient times to the present day. From classical to modern poetry, beauty has always been an important topic that authors and poets have explored various facets of it and its impacts on individuals and society as a whole. However, critics have often noted that Wilde's theme of ugliness in "Fairytale" showcases not only his wit as a writer but also serves as a powerful commentary on the expectations and norms of the society of his time in the Victorian era. Throughout his narrative in "Fairytale", with his ironic tone and subversive storytelling, Wilde challenges the conventional notions of wealth, love, and beauty as he extends his tales to expose the shallowness, exploitation, and hypocrisy that often exist beneath the surface of Victorian society.

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