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AESTHETIC MORALITY AND INTERTEXTUALITY OF OSCAR WILDE'S *THE HAPPY PRINCE AND OTHER TALES*

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The paper is devoted to the linguocultural study of Oscar Wilde's literary tales which are genre-stylistically associated with both − fairy tales and short stories. We consider *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* as a cycle of thematically interconnected texts, where imagination/fantasy merges into reality thus aesthetically depicting the bipolar morality of the late 19-th century English society with its virtues and vices. Linguocultural analysis of these tales has enabled us to present Oscar Wilde in a new light − as a moralist who, underneath the masks and poses of amoral hedonism and other latent evil impulses hidden in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, aspires to preach kindness, love, self-sacrifice and compassion for the poor rather than to promote selfishness, ambition, self-admiration, self-conceit and practicism. Moreover, in *The Happy Prince* Oscar Wilde, who is generally known as the father of the English decadence literature and an aesthete guided by the doctrine Art for Art's Sake, appears to believe in the eternity of the inherently moral nature of art. In fact, the self-sacrifice of the protagonist duet of the statue of the Happy Prince and the swallow symbolises the motto Art for People's Sake. Wilde's consistent indictment of vices, his celebration of love as well as his compassion and self-sacrifice for the sake of others are evident in the rest of the fairy tales that he himself integrated in one book together with *The Happy Prince*.

Keywords: Intertextuality, Fairy tales, Short stories, Bipolar morality, Vices and virtues, Transformation of the thematic line.

Introduction: Theoretical Prerequisites

Oscar Wilde's works and personality have been a longstanding interest for a lot of people since his lifetime. His plays and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* have been thoroughly studied from different angles both by literary critics and text linguists. Scholars have emphasized aestheticism, satanism, decadence, homosexuality and other latent impulses hidden in his works. Wilde is often remembered for the scandal of his homosexuality for which he was imprisoned and which precipitated his downfall. His biographers and critics write that he was torn between two choices – John Ruskin and the moral and didactic nature of art, on the one hand, and Walter Pater's purely aesthetic and hedonistic influence under his manifesto Art for Art's Sake, on the other (Goldfarb 1962, pp. 369-370; Ellmann 1988, p. 78; Dirksmeier 2006). Pater believed that the shortness of life encourages an indulgence in pleasure to maximize the ecstasy: "We

have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among 'the children of this world,' in art and song (Pater, 1986, p. 52)."

However, critics have almost overlooked his wonderful fairy tales (Wilde 1994) that seem somewhat paradoxical in relation to his dramatic works and the novel due to their aesthetic moral essence. As John Allen Quintus claims, "The avoidance of his tales and articles suggests an unwillingness to treat material which is *prima facie* more serious and more moral than the amoral hedonism, the 'studied triviality' so long associated with both Wilde's life and his art (Quintus, 1977, p. 78)."

Wilde published *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* in 1888. The book did not create the sensation that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or his plays did, although the tales were reviewed favourably by *The Saturday Review* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* (Small 1994, p. X). Wilde himself made a passing remark about *The Happy Prince* that might be applied to the rest of his tales as well. He wrote to a friend that the story is "an attempt to mirror modern life in a form remote from reality to deal with modern problems in a mode that is ideal and not imitative (Wood 1962, p. 78)." He also said that his tales were not intended for children.

Wilde chose to preach morality in the form of literary tales that are genre-stylistically associated both with fairy tales and short stories (Wijngaart 2012; Lam 2007; Lambourne and Sato 2000; Monagham 2001). We consider *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* as a cycle of thematically interconnected literary texts in which imagination/fantasy merges into reality thus enabling the author to review different manifestations of morality of his contemporary society exposing its vices and virtues in an allegorical-metaphorical form. *Dictionary of Active Terms and Concepts of Poetics* defines the notion of cycle as an interdisciplinary phenomenon which is connected with literary criticism as well as with modern theories of text interpretation and text linguistics dealing with intertextuality (Poetics 2008, pp. 292-293). Linguocultural research of a cycle of literary texts implies two moments of intertextuality:

a) first, the existence of the dominant text which serves as a basis for creating the metacohesion of the cycle, that is, thematical wholeness of a set of texts;
b) second, analysing what transformations thematic line undergoes in each text within the cycle thus revealing its intertextual essence.

Though Wilde did not mention the term cycle in connection with his tales, he himself defined *The Happy Prince* as the central text and subordinated the rest four tales in the book to it, masterfully exposing and discussing different vices and virtues of English society in the socio-cultural context of the end of the 19-th century.

Thus, we consider Oscar Wilde's literary tales as a hybrid of two different genres – fairy tales and short stories. The above-mentioned dictionary of poetic terms defines a short story as a subgenre of prose writing, which is conspicuous for the dynamic development of its plot, strictly determined compositional structure, short dialogues incorporated in the narration and an accurately formulated finale (Ibid. 2008: 146).

The Happy Prince as the Dominant Text of the Cycle and Its Aesthetic Morality

We begin linguocultural discussion of *The Happy Prince* with the analysis of its exposition in which the author introduces the main protagonist of the text − the statue of the Happy Prince that stands on a tall pedestal overlooking the city:

> High above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince. He was gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold, for eyes he had two bright sapphires, and a large red ruby glowed on his sword-hilt.
>
> (Oscar Wild, "The Happy Prince", p. 3)

Wilde does not start his story with a conventional story telling like any other fairy tale with phrases like *Once upon a time* … or *Once there lived* … . He instantly directs the reader's attention to the statue of the Happy Prince by the inverted word-order placing an adverbial phrase and a verbal predicate before the subject which is represented by a noun-phrase preceded by the definite article (*the statue of the Happy Prince*). It is important to note that Wilde chooses a statue to be the major character of the story as it is easy to recognize that the statue symbolises art since artistic works, memorials and monuments are set up to immortalise a person or an event. Besides, the statue implies that the story told in the tale concerns the present and not an indefinite period of the past.

The statue of the Prince was beautiful and covered with expensive jewels, sapphires, gold and ruby as Wilde meant it to represent art in all its grandeur. There is no wonder why he decorated the statue with the most precious stones. He often associated beauty with precious stones as he strongly believed that they were symbols of permanence and beauty.

So, the statue of the Happy Prince stood high above the city as a symbol of artistic perfection covered with expensive jewels, sapphires, gold and ruby. It was admired by everyone in the city, including the town officials:

> 'He is as beautiful as a weathercock,' remarked one of the Town Councillors who wished to gain a reputation for having artistic taste; 'only not quite so useful,' he added, fearing lest people should think him unpractical, which he really was not (p. 3).

The town councillor's remark comparing the statue to a weathercock was meant to show his interest in art, but it only diminished the latter's real value. The official's words indicate that he is far from appreciating the true value of art as he finds a weathercock more useful than the statue claiming indirectly that art should be useful, otherwise it is useless. However, the statue was much admired despite the fact that the townspeople do not seem happy enough to express their admiration in any form:

> 'I am glad there is someone in the world who is quite happy', muttered a disappointed man as he gazed at the wonderful statue (p. 3).

The luxurious statue of the Happy Prince contrasts with a misery reigning in the town ruled by the town councillors and the Mayor who turn later to be mere hypocrites guided solely by their utilitarian pragmatism. Therefore, we may think that the misery of the town was obviously caused by the authorities themselves, by their selfishness and greed.

Utilitarian pragmatism is the basic principle of the town management in every sphere of life, including art. Art belongs to imagination which is forbidden under the authoritarian regime. The town does not approve of dreaming. For instance, the mathematical master, who is an incarnation of the utilitarian pragmatism, frowned when he heard the Charity School children exclaim that the Happy Prince looked like an angel they saw in their dreams:

> 'How do you know?' said the Mathematical Master, 'You have never seen one.'
> 'Ah! but we have, in our dreams,' answered the children; And the Mathematical Master frowned and looks very severe, for he did not approve of children dreaming (p. 3).

Dreaming is not allowed in the selfish town and children are not allowed to dream for this may threaten the very existence of the governing elite and as there is no art without imagination and dreaming, art is doomed not to exist in the impoverished town.

However, the statue of the Prince cannot be regarded as the only protagonist of the story. Soon Wilde introduces into the text another main character – a little swallow, who finds shelter between the feet of the statue of the Prince, and who is later sent on different errands by the latter to help the poor in the city. Like the Happy Prince, the importance of the Swallow is brought into focus by the author in a peculiar way − it is introduced in a new paragraph by a noun phrase, preceded this time by an indefinite article (*a little Swallow*), which linguistically marks a new subject matter. Moreover, this character is again intro-

duced to the reader by the inverted word-order placing the most important component of the information at the end of the sentence:

> One night there flew over the city a little Swallow. His friends had gone away to Egypt six weeks before, but he had stayed behind, for he was in love with the most beautiful Reed...
>
> Then he saw the statue on the tall column. 'I will put up there,' he cried; 'it is a fine position with plenty of fresh air.' So he alighted just between the feet of the Happy Prince (p. 3).

Wilde depicts the meeting of the protagonists in three stages that is symbolically marked by three drops of tears:

> 'I have a golden bedroom,' he said softly to himself, and prepared to go to sleep; but just as he was putting his head under his wing, a large drop of water fell on him.
>
> Then another drop fell....
>
> But before he had opened his wings, a third drop fell, and he looked up, and saw – Ah! What did he see?
>
> The eyes of the Happy Prince were filled with tears, and tears were running down his golden cheeks. His face was so beautiful in the moonlight that the little Swallow was filled with pity (p. 4).

These three drops of tears of the Happy Prince who is crying with sympathy for his townspeople build a bond between the main characters. The statue begins to tell his story to the Swallow, that when he lived in a palace of luxury he did not feel the suffering of his townspeople. He was too engaged with carnal and sensual desires enjoying all types of pleasures and was so happy that he was called the Happy Prince. But now, having assumed an artistic shape of the statue that was set up on a tall column overlooking the town, he could see the misery of its people. Art has transformative powers capable of changing the soul of the Happy Prince to such degree that he comes to life and begins crying with tears. He attains some kind of self-denial and decides to give away all the precious stones and gold he is made of to help the poor in the town, sacrificing thus his own life to them. He befriends the swallow and solicits his help in implementing his decision.

Wilde, who belonged to the decadence movement in literature, in his tales did not follow the doctrine Art for Art's Sake which almost entirely separates morality from art. Russel M. Goldfarb, one of Wilde's critics, points out some of the major characteristics of this movement. He claims that this literature does not emphasize philosophical, historical, or intellectual concerns, but it does emphasize the values to be gained from experiences and sensations of all sorts. Because of this emphasis, decadent literature is inspired by the exploration of immoral and evil experiences; it never preaches morality, or insists upon ethical responsibilities. Therefore, decadent literature is characterized by artistic concern for the morbid, the perverse, the sordid; it is characterized by a self-conscious and weary contempt for social conventions such as truth and marriage (Goldfarb 1962, p. 369).

Wilde proves just the opposite in *The Happy Prince* preaching his theory that art and free imagination are integral parts of the moral code of any society. The transformative power of art changes not only the Happy Prince but the Swallow as well. The Swallow is idealistic by nature and realistic at the same time. Though he is in love with the Reed and admires her slender waist, he still decides to leave her because he thinks she will not be a good match for him, both of them having different interests in life. Besides, he claims that, "She has no conversation and I am afraid that she is a coquette, for she is always flirting with the wind (p. 4)."

We get to see more character traits of the Swallow as the text unfolds. Flying to the city, he wonders if they have made any preparations for him. He is proud, vainglorious and snobbish, expecting the town to celebrate his coming. These are the features that are symbolic of any average Englishman with typical pride, realism and idealism with a peculiar Victorian lack of appreciation for aesthetic objects.

Like the town officials, the Swallow finds the golden statue of the Happy Prince useless in the rain. He remarks: "What is the use of a statue if it cannot keep the rain off? I must look for a good chimney-pot (p. 4)". These words indicate that a dirty chimney-pot is for him more protective and useful than a statue covered with precious stones.

The knowledge to appreciate art gradually transforms the Swallow turning him into a more sensible and more caring character. But at the beginning he is unwilling to let art enter his heart so that he could feel the sufferings of the town people. When the statue of the Happy Prince asks him to take the ruby out of his sword-hilt and give it to the poor hard-working seamstress whose hands are red and all pricked as "she is embroidering passion-flowers on a satin gown for the loveliest of the Queen's maids-of-honour to wear it at the next Court-ball", the Swallow refuses to fulfil his request and tries to justify himself saying that he is being waited for in Egypt where the weather is warm, his friends are flying up and down the Nile talking to the lotus-flowers. And he begins enumerating all types of pleasure he is likely to miss in case he accepted the Happy Prince's request. The statue continues to awake the Swallow's pity and compassion for the poor woman depicting her miserable condition:

> "In a bed in the corner of the room her little boy is lying ill. He has a fever, and is asking for oranges. His mother has nothing to give him but river water, so he is crying (p. 5)."

Seeing the tears and sadness of the Happy Prince, the Swallow, however, reluctantly agrees to fulfil his request. He picks up the ruby and flies over the city to give it to the poor seamstress in appreciation of her hard work. The Swallow places the ruby beside the thimble and hovers around the feverish boy fanning him with his wings.

Wilde concentrates on the indifference of the rich to the poor. While flying over the city, the Swallow passes by a balcony of that beautiful maid-of-honour of the Queen speaking to her lover about the Court-ball, and complaining that the seamstress was too lazy to embroider passion flowers on her dress. Wilds displays the selfish nature of the rich. Ironically, the lovers speak about the power of love though it is obvious that they are not aware of its true essence which is not merely love of pleasures but sacrifice and self-denial for the sake of spiritual perfection that leads to true happiness. Wilde does his best to make this concept clear in *The Happy Prince*. His use of irony to reveal hypocrisy is poignant.

The first transformation that the Swallow underwent was his feeling warm in the cold weather. "That is because you have done a good action," was the answer of the Happy Prince. Art has changed the vainglorious Swallow. He is no longer a conformist who blindly complies with the norms of the society. He is now more sensible, more willing to accept the errands of the Happy Prince. A conflict between sensual pleasures and spiritual ones is resolved by the Swallow in favour of the latter. The statue or, in other words, art has not only made an atmosphere conducive to change but served as a moralizing agent preaching morality and spirituality.

The statue again asks the Swallow to help him. Repeating his delicate and poetic phrase "Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow", he implores the swallow to take his help to a young dramatist living in misery in a garret:

> '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 (p. 7).'

This time the statue of the Prince has no ruby to give away but he does have rare sapphires as his eyes. He is willing to sacrifice one of them to creative people like the dramatist to stimulate his imagination, probably, hoping that it would help the town children start dreaming again. So the swallow plucks out one of the Prince's eyes and brings it to the young man who accepts this present as an appreciation of his creative work:

> 'I am beginning to be appreciated,' he cried; 'this is from some great admirer. Now I can finish my play,' and he looked quite happy (p. 7).

Wilde believed that caring for children and cultivating their imagination was very important for any society as imagination might help children dream of building a better future. For him, only creative people like dramatists and novelists, writers and authors, were able to reform society. Therefore, the statue of the Prince sends his eye to the dramatist so that he could finish writing his play thus helping promote children's imagination.

The Swallow still continues planning to fly to Egypt. So, he keeps telling the Prince marvellous things about this country:

> "He told him of the red ibises, who stand in long rows on the banks of the Nile, and catch gold fish in their beaks; of the Sphinx, who is as old as the world itself and knows everything; of the merchants, who walk slowly by the side of their camels, and carry amber beads in their hands; of the King of the Mountains of the Moon, who is as black as ebony, and worships a large crystal; of the great green snake that sleeps in a palm-tree, and has twenty priests to feed it with honey-cakes; and of the pygmies who sail over a big lake on large flat leaves and are always at war with the butterflies (p. 9)."

He promises the statue that he will bring him back more beautiful and more shinning jewels than the ones he has given to the townspeople. As mentioned before, Wilde often associated art with precious stones as he strongly believed that they were symbols of permanence and beauty.

But all these beautiful stories do not really impress the Happy Prince as he is no longer interested in any sensual pleasures. This time he implores the Swallow to pluck out his other eye and take it to a little girl selling matches in the square. Her father will beat her if she comes back home without money because she has dropped her matches in the gutter and they are all spoiled. Wilde regarded children the backbone of healthy society. So the Prince sends his other sapphire eye to the poor girl and she goes home happy.

The Swallow is now capable of resisting sensual desires for a higher and more sublime objective. The statue of the Happy Prince explains to him that more marvellous than anything is the suffering of men and of women: "There is no Mystery so great as Misery (p. 10)." Wilde considered the suffering of people as a mystery since it was quite ambiguous for him why human beings wronged each other in such a way that the majority lived in poverty and misery while only few people accumulated wealth and fortune in their hands.

The statue asks the Swallow to fly over the city to observe the situation there. Returning back, the Swallow tells him of the poor people and the beggars starving in the streets. This prompts the Happy Prince to ask him for the last errand which is to give the gold that covered his body to the poor to soften the suffering of the poverty-stricken town.

The Swallow, having undergone a true transformation in favour of spiritual happiness, began to pick off "Leaf after leaf of the fine gold" until the Happy Prince looked quite dull and grey. He brought the gold to the poor, and the children's faces grew rosier, and they laughed and played games in the street. "We have bread now!" – they cried. Wilde believed that social assistance to support the needy was a corner stone for making people live happily. So the town looked different now:

> "The streets looked as if they were made of silver, they were so bright and glistening; long icicles like crystal daggers hung down from the eaves of the houses, everybody went about in furs, and the little boys wore scarlet caps and skated on the ice (p. 10)."

The relationship with the statue of the Happy Prince has entirely changed the arrogant and proud Swallow. His concerns are no longer love, warmth, Egypt, rest and other pleasures that he used to describe. He feels that instead of going to Egypt he would go to the House of Death. Spiritually the Swallow finds his rest in death which he calls "the brother of sleep".

It is interesting to note how the town officials reacted to the transformation of the Happy Prince. All the precious stones and gold having been removed from the statue, the Mayor of the city finds it shabby and ugly – therefore, useless. "In fact, he is little better than a beggar", is the Mayor's evaluation. So he

decides to have it pulled down and melted in a furnace. As Wilde's critic, Raby observes, "The town councillors and the public in general utterly failed to perceive the significance of the Happy Prince's transformation. The brisk insensitivity of human characters − at least of the powerful and the learned among them − gives 'The Happy Prince' a tone of scepticism (Raby 1988, p. 24)." The disregard of what the Happy Prince and Swallow have done is a clear indication of the Victorian misunderstanding of aestheticism and their inability to realize that art and beauty do have a higher mission than simply standing there as an exhibition object.

Even a university art professor who is supposed to represent educated people remarks that as the statue is no longer beautiful, it is no longer useful. The educated classes conform to the norms, habits and ways of thinking of the authorities to please them. Wilde reflects on the Victorian utilitarian view of art that judges beauty by usefulness. The Victorians believed that people only enjoy beauty as a utilitarian means and nothing beyond that. In *The Happy Prince* Wilde, however, confirms that art and beauty help create a mood and a sensation that transforms man's vision and helps him look at the world from a different perspective.

Wilde's critical and cynical attitude to the authorities of the town reaches its climax in the episode when, after melting down the statue of the Happy Prince, the Mayor holds a meeting during which he suggests that the city should have another statue and that it should be a statue of him. Wilde condemns the boundless ambition and self-conceit of the Mayor and the town councilors who instantly seize his proposal and start quarrelling with each-other as to whose statue it should be. "When I last heard of them they were quarrelling still (p.11)", comments the narrator.

Thus, the superficial appearance of the statue at the end of the story is ugly and shabby, though his soul has attained the perfection of beauty that the utilitarian materialistic town councillors are not able to appreciate. Therefore, they are likely to continue to see him useless as long as they do not fully understand the real value of art. Their utilitarian pragmatism makes them even worse than they really are in the eyes of Oscar Wilde who proved in this story that he is not amoral in his aesthetic theory and that his philosophy of art is a supreme religious realm that involves beauty and morality at the same time.

Wilde neither identifies himself with the town councillors nor with the educated university professor. He indeed identifies himself with the Swallow who stands as a symbol of the transformation that art can exercise on people.

The finale of the story is controversial. On the one hand, it is obvious that the self-sacrifice of the protagonists guided by morality and sympathy for the townspeople had no result in a pragmatic society as the statue of the Prince was melted down and his lead heart was thrown "on a dust-heap where the dead Swallow was also lying (p. 11)." On the other hand, this demonstration of self-denial and kindness to help the poor is not left unnoticed by God. Both protagonists are rewarded by the Supreme Creator. When God asked his angels to bring him the most precious things, they brought him the lead heart of the Happy Prince and the dead Swallow. God said:

> 'You have rightly chosen,' said God, 'for in my garden of Paradise this little bird shall sing for evermore, and in my city of gold the Happy Prince shall praise me.' (p. 11)

God's reward of the protagonists implies that religion does not disapprove or contradict art. The perfection attained through art is similar to that of religion. Being perfectly unselfish, the Happy Prince has sacrificed everything and his life to others' wellbeing. Like Christ, he did not expect any reward in return and remained anonymous to the very end of the story. Guy Willoughby comments on the similarity between the figure of Christ and the Happy Prince in sacrifice. As he observes: "In wider social terms, such charitable gestures may be useless, but in individual terms, the terms in which Christ realized himself fully, such sacrifices are vital. When he divests himself of his wealth, the Happy Prince, and not his community, becomes the recipient of grace – or 'perfection', to use the Wildean term. He is akin to a Gospel character whom Wilde would introduce into both of his later theoretical discussions of Christ (Willoughby 1987)."

Transformation of the Thematic Line of Morality within the Other Tales of the Cycle

Wilde's consistent indictment of selfishness, boundless ambition, self-conceit and pragmatism, his celebration of love as well as his compassion and self-sacrifice for the poor are evident in the rest of the fairy tales that he himself integrated in one book together with *The Happy Prince*. Thematic line of bipolar morality undergoes several transformations within the cycle thus creating its metacohesion.

The theme of sacrifice and love continues in *The Nightingale and the Rose* in which Wilde depicts how the main character gives her life for love. This story also stars a bird as a protagonist. The initial situation in it is that of a young student crying over the fact that his love, a professor's daughter, announced that she would dance with him at the Prince's ball the following day only if he brought her a red rose. This serves as a starting point for the drama developed in the story. The student has no red roses in his garden. He talks aloud to himself, thus proclaiming his despair. Hearing his words, the Nightingale regards him as a true lover, the one she has sung of in her songs all her life, and decides to help him find a red rose he needs to come closer to the realization of his love. The nightingale leaves the oak tree in which she has her nest, and flies around in the student's garden talking to three different rose-trees, the figure "three" again symbolically indicating the stages of her actions in her attempt to help the student. The same exchange is repeated each time:

> "'Give me a red rose,' she cried, 'and I will sing you my sweetest song.' But the Tree shook its head" (*The Nightingale and the Rose*, p. 13).

The first tree had white flowers and the second one only yellow. The third did normally bear red roses, but the wind and the frost had prevented it from having any flowers at all that year. Though, one red rose could be produced if the nightingale pierced her heart on a thorn and sang all night as her blood flowed into the tree. The Nightingale decides that "Love is better than Life" and sacrifices herself to it. She kills herself by crushing her breast against a thorn so that the rose, nourished by her blood, will grow, and the student will have a flower to give to the girl he loves. It is not coincidental that the rose-tree's thorn must pierce the Nightingale's heart and her life-blood be transfused into the veins of the tree before the flower can fully come into existence. The protagonist's soul can be said to flow with the blood from her heart into the tree and become a part of the red rose. It might be stretching the interpretation too far to claim that the rose becomes a symbol of the hero of the tale, but it is nonetheless a symbol of the protagonist's highest ideal, true love, and her unbending faith that this ideal might become reality through her own sacrifice.

This, however, does not happen. Like the sacrifice of the Happy Prince and the Swallow, the self-sacrifice of the Nightingale also appeared useless in the pragmatic era of the late 19-th century as neither the daughter of the professor, nor the student were able to appreciate the red rose as a symbol of love − the girl rejects the rose giving preference to the jewels sent to her by the Chamberlain's nephew while the student, disappointed by the girl's behaviour, throws the rose into the street, "where it fell into the gutter, and a cart-wheel went over it (p. 17)." The young man, now spurned by the girl who was once the object of his romantic ardour, begins to doubt the value of love. He considers it as a silly and quite unpractical thing, and exclaiming that "In this age to be practical is everything (p.17)," he returns back to his dusty studies.

The Nightingale, who sings magnificently as she dies, may be interpreted as a symbol of the artist Wild would like to aspire to. Regrettably, unlike the Happy Prince and the Swallow, the Nightingale is not taken up to heaven or canonized in any way. So the conclusion of the tale leaves one with the feeling that it was all for nothing. Undoubtedly, Wilde also experienced that fear. Perhaps, the true artist suffers more than the false one, though both are vulnerable. The Nightingale's vulnerability renders her situation tragic, as her ultimate sacrifice has led to nothing. The core message in *The Nightingale and the Rose* is the idea that love is worth fighting for and making sacrifices for, even though the outcome is not always as successful as anticipated. Maria Husum Øygarden, Oscar Wilde's critic, observes: "As the tale ends, one might feel that the nightingale is a sort of Don Quixote character, a somewhat naïve idealist with an

image of the world as something different and more fantastic – in all senses of the word – than it in fact is (Øygarden 2004, p. 24)."

Wilde ascribes specific importance to the moon which is present as a symbol and creator of mood in this tale. The melancholy of the scene where the nightingale sets her breast against the thorn and begins to sing is emphasised by the fact that "the cold crystal Moon leaned down and listened." Towards the end of the Nightingale's song, just before the sun was about to rise, the thorn touched her heart and her song escalated parallel with her pain:

> "Then she gave one last burst of music. The white Moon heard it, and she forgot the dawn, and lingered on in the sky. The red rose heard it, and it trembled all over with ecstasy, and opened its petals to the cold morning air. Echo bore it to her purple cavern in the hills, and woke the sleeping shepherds from their dreams. It floated through the reeds of the river, and they carried its message to the sea (p. 16)."

The cool, ominous white of the moon in this passage is contrasted with the red of the rose, red being the colour of love and passion, as well as of blood and pain. The red rose connects all four – the blood and pain of the Nightingale opens the possibility for love and passion in the student's life.

Another effect of the presence of the moon is that the reader's attention is drawn towards the heavens and the unearthly. The fact that the protagonist is a bird contributes to the idea that she stands somewhere between heaven and earth, she can move in both spheres. As Jack Zipes assumes, "Birds have always been messengers of the gods since they symbolize flight, ascent to the heavens and the transcendence of higher states of consciousness (Zipes 2015, p. 123)." In *The Nightingale and the Rose* the bird can be seen not only as a messenger of God but as a part of Christ sacrificing his own life for the sake of love, the thorn having connotations with both – Christ's crown of thorns and the cross on which he was crucified.

The idea of a Christ-like figure conveying the importance of love and generosity of heart is present in several of Wilde's other tales. In *The Selfish Giant* this figure appears in the shape of a little boy who makes the main character, the giant, realise and repent the selfish way of his own behaviour. The tale begins with the description of the setting. The giant is away visiting a Cornish ogre, and every afternoon while he is gone, children gather to play in his beautiful garden with flowers, peach-trees and songbirds. Then, as the giant returns home, he forbids the children to play in his garden. "My own garden is my own garden", the giant says and puts up a notice-board proclaiming: "Trespassers will be prosecuted" (*The Selfish Giant*, p. 19). The giant lacks the knowledge of the value of a person's generosity and kindness, and this does not go without consequences: when the children were forced to leave the garden, spring and summer disappeared too and the garden fell victim to snow, frost, and harsh winds. After an ever-lasting winter, one morning the Giant hears some lovely music. He looks out and sees that children have crept back in through the hole in the wall. As they climb the trees, life returns to the garden:

> "The birds were flying about and twittering with delight, and the flowers were looking up through the green grass and laughing" (p. 21).

The sight of the children playing in the once again blooming garden makes the giant realise how dull and useless his isolated life has been. In one corner of the garden, a single tree is left without a child in it, and beneath it a boy is crying because he is too small to reach its branches. Winter would not leave that corner, and the giant exclaims:

> 'How selfish I have been! Now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put that poor little boy on the top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground for ever and ever' (p. 21).

The Giant is really very sorry for what he has done. He goes out into the garden to help the little boy climb the tree. When the children saw him, they got frightened and ran away. However, the little boy remained as tears prevented him from seeing the Giant coming towards him. The Giant put the child gently

up into the tree. "And the tree broke at once into blossom, and the birds came and sang on it, ant the little boy stretched out his two arms and flung them round the Giant's neck and kissed him (p.21)."

As the finale of the story shows, God himself appeared in the shape of this boy to test the Giant who reacted positively, opening his heart as well as his garden to the children. As a result of this testing, the giant did not immediately receive any magical reward though he was rewarded with the feelings of satisfaction and happiness through his own generosity. And the tale continues to describe the Giant's transformed life which was much happier now than before. Years went by and the Giant grew very old and feeble. He spent his time sitting in a huge armchair watching the children play in his garden. However, he feels that he is not fully satisfied. He longs to meet again the little boy who has not been seen by anyone since the day he changed the Giant's life. The two are finally reunited at the end of the Giant's life which symbolically happens in winter. One morning the giant sees a marvellous sight through his window – the very tree that had once hesitated to bloom was now filled with blossoms in spite of the frost, and underneath it stood the little boy he had loved so much.

The giant runs out into the garden in great joy. Approaching the little boy, his face grows red with anger as he notices the prints of two nails on the boy's hands and feet, and he instantly realises that the child is really the impersonation of the resurrected Christ who was crucified for the Love of his "neighbour." A strange awe falls on him, and "he knelt before the little child" (p. 23). The striking contrast of the large giant kneeling reverentially in front of the little boy contributes to present Christ as a great spiritual power. The Giant, having recognized and repented his errors, also achieves something like a state of grace, since God rewards him for his transformation to the better saying: "You let me play once in your garden, to-day you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise" (p. 23).

Thus, the thematic line of morality in this tale develops from vice (such as selfishness) to virtue which is represented by the repentant Giant who, miraculously affected by divine compassion, is given a new form – his earthly self being a dead body covered with white blossoms, while his soul is taken to heaven, a place of everlasting happiness.

In *The Devoted Friend* the thematic line of morality again undergoes transformation focusing this time on the bipolar manifestation of friendship. On the one hand, Wilde depicts genuine friendship based on sincerity, trust, naivety and devotion. The incarnation of such friendship is little Hans, a hardworking poor but generous fellow who is ready to sacrifice everything he has, even his own life, to his seemingly "best friend". On the other hand, the author tells a story of a fake, false friendship on the part of big Hugh the Miller whose attitude towards friendship is purely utilitarian as he is always seeking to get some profit from his relationship with little Hans. Wilde describes the situation in ironic tones so vividly, that the reader may mentally picture the Miller's character – a rich greedy and stingy man, who only speaks highly about friendship without doing a single kind thing in return:

> "Indeed, so devoted was the rich Miller to little Hans, that he would never go by his garden without leaning over the wall and lucking large nosegay, or a handful of sweet herbs, or filling his pockets with plums and cherries if it was the fruit season.
>
> 'Real friends should have everything in common,' the Miler used to say, and little Hans nodded and smiled, and felt very proud of having a friend with such noble ideas (*The Devoted Friend*, p. 25)."

Little Hans is naive. He believes all the beautiful words that the Miller says to him about friendship and is ready to give him anything he wants from him. As for the Miller, at no stage does he show any generosity in actions to Hans – everything, he does, is for his own gain, though he never misses an opportunity to remind the poor fellow that generosity was the essence of real friendship.

The Miller is selfish and ambitious, praising himself for his ability to talk well on any topic. The words that he says in connection with friendship may be very fine but they are actually self-serving. Whoever matters in the Miller's life is his own self. His friendship with Hans is false. He is only there because Hans always has something that he wants. First it is some flowers, then it is a plank of wood and eventually little Hans becomes a sort of servant to the Miller. He does different kinds of hard work for the Miller in return for an old wheelbarrow promised to him which he never receives.

The Miller's utilitarian understanding of friendship reaches its climax when he sends little Hans on an errand to fetch a doctor for his own son on a stormy wild night and refuses to lend the fellow his new lantern fearing that something wrong might happen to it. Hans is honest and straightforward. He goes for the doctor without any hesitation, but on his way back home in the darkness he gets lost on the moor where he is drowned in one of the holes.

The end of the story is full of cynicism. The Miller, acting as the chief mourner at little Hans' funeral, "walked at the head of the procession in a long black cloak, and every now and then he wiped his eyes with a big pocket-handkerchief (p. 33)." Yet the truth is that the Miller has no sense of loss over Hans' death. Instead, he again focuses on himself and regrets his generosity concerning the wheelbarrow which he promised but never gave to little Hans.

Such is the moral of *The Devoted Friend*, a tale which is told by a green Linnet to a Water-rat who resembles the Miller, being as selfish and inconsiderate towards others as the latter was. However, at the end of the story Wilde warns the readers against making the moral of this tale too blatant or sententious as telling a story with a moral is always a very dangerous thing to do.

In the last tale of the cycle, *The Remarkable Rocket*, the thematic line of morality focuses on such human vices as self-importance, ambition, selfishness, egocentrism and fanaticism that lead the main character, the Rocket, to self-destruction. The story deals with the events and characters of three worlds: of the Royal Castle with the King, the Prince and the Princess, and its other residents; of the Pyrotechnic object world represented by different items of fireworks, such as a Squib, a Roman Candle, a Catherine Wheel, a Bengal Light, a Fire-balloon, a Rocket, etc., and of the country-side world where the Rocket finds himself in a ditch filled with water and mud in the company of the animated creatures like a Frog, a Dragon-fly, a White Duck, and others.

The King's son and a Russian princess, who are meant to marry, meet for the first time and fall madly in love with each other. Their wedding is to be a huge celebration for the entire realm, with all sorts of entertainment, including fireworks as a grand finale. The Princess has never seen fireworks, so the King and the Prince are eager for her to see them. These fireworks, though, have the ability to speak and they talk amongst themselves before they are launched by the pyrotechnic.

Among the fireworks is a tall supercilious-looking Rocket, who is so arrogant, pompous, self-conceited, ambitious and selfish that he considers himself to be remarkable and superior to his colleagues. He is proud to announce:

> "I am a very remarkable Rocket, and I come of remarkable parents. My mother was the most celebrated Catherine Wheel of her day and was renowned for her graceful dancing. My father was a Rocket like myself, and of French extraction. The newspapers wrote about his performance in a flattering terms. Indeed, the Court Gazette called him a triumph of Pylotechnic art (p. 38)."

Thus he brags of 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 alas, he fails to ignite. So, "Every one was a great success except the Remarkable Rocket (p. 41)," who is in the end thrown over the castle wall into a ditch as a worthless stick.

The Rocket doesn't realize that he has been discarded and believes that he is being given time to recover his strength before being lit. He still believes in his superiority and speaks insultingly to the country-side inhabitants – to a frog, a dragonfly and a duck, boasting that he will be magnificent when he is finally let off. He declares proudly, that "Genius like mine is sure to be appreciated some day (p.43)." Though, the reality is quite different. Two boys who are collecting wood to make a fire mistake him for a piece of kindling. Much to his indignation, they place him on their fire. Eventually he dries off enough to ignite and explode. Unfortunately, it is the middle of the day, and no-one sees him perform except a startled goose. Even as he fizzles away, the Remarkable Rocket still believes that he has created a great sensation.

It is interesting to note that some critics think that *The Remarkable Rocket* can be read as a self-parody. Quintus, for example, assumes that "The Rocket bears a striking resemblance to Wilde, the aes-

thete, the braggadocio, the sensation of the season, the preeminent artificer, who is aware of his posing and of the unlikelihood of his affecting anyone; and who is also capable of making fun of himself (Quintus 1977, p. 87)." Besides, throughout the story there is a feeling that the rocket has no friends as he considers himself to be better than others. The rocket wanted the world to see him shine in the sky, yet at the end of the story nobody saw it fly. The two boys who had placed him on the fire were asleep. The Prince and Princess were not there, and nobody was nearby to watch him high in the sky. This may be the point that Wilde was attempting to make in this tale. He may be suggesting that should a person consider himself/herself to be better than others they will have to live a very lonely life. If we look back at the last years of Wilde's life, the comparison between him and the Rocket becomes more inviting. Like the Rocket, who ended his existence outside the Royal Castle, Wilde died far away from London, in Paris, where he lived in solitude, in self-imposed exile after his release from prison.

Conclusion

Thus, our research has revealed aesthetic morality and intertextuality of Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. The author examines bipolar manifestations of morality of his contemporary English society exposing its vices and virtues in an allegorical-metaphorical form. Like Aesop's fables, most of his tales criticize human vices while they also uphold virtuous behaviour. Wilde assumes that the fortune and wealth spoil the soul of man. He considers self-sacrifice and getting rid of material possessions for the sake of others as one of the forms of individual self-realization leading to an acquirement of spiritual beauty and perfection often rewarded by God whereas vices like selfishness, self-importance, ambition, egocentrism and fanaticism usually cause a person's self-destruction.

The paper shows that Wilde also believed in the moralist nature of art. Moreover, he believed that art that serves people is eternal and appreciated by God. Therefore, we can conclude that Wilde's philosophy of aesthetics in his fairy tales implies inseparability of art and morality.

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