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Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales and Their Interpretation in English Classes

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Klíčová slova

Oscar Wilde, pohádky, anglická literatura, náboženský motiv, morální motiv, motiv smrti, Sobecký obr, Šťastný princ, Wildovi synové

Abstract

The aim of this thesis was to find out whether the fairy tales still, although they were written hundred years ago, have a meaning for contemporary secondary school students. The Bachelor Thesis includes basic biographical information about the author and about his work. Then the thesis deals with the reasons that led the author to write the tales and how the tales are related to his personality and his life. The theoretical part also concentrates on the most often discussed aspects in these tales. The practical part of the thesis is devoted to the analysis of students' reactions to two chosen tales. Special consideration was put on the understanding of key motives in the fairy tales.

Keywords

Oscar Wilde, fairy tale, English literature, religious motif, moral motif, motif of death, Selfish Giant, Happy Prince, Wilde's sons

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to present Oscar Wilde as an author of fairy tales, and to show how these short tales can be used in English lessons. In order to fulfil this aim, we also need to become acquainted with the outstanding personality of the author, as his literary work is remarkably influenced by his background. Many people remember Oscar Wilde as a person who struggled with society because of his sexual orientation. I would like to show the other aspects of his personality, as he was also the loving father of his two sons for whom he invented these precious jewels of literature.

In this paper I am going to focus on the main topics and messages in Oscar Wilde's fairy tales. Most people know only the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), some even are acquainted with his drama, as *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), or *The Ideal Husband* (1899). It may seem that the fairy tales are of less importance. Even critics prefer to analyse the novel, implying there were no deep thoughts in the fairy tales. However, the motives and the messages in Wilde's fairy tales are surprisingly thought-provoking.

One aspect I want to deal with, is that Wilde's fairy tales may give the reader the impression that they are not fairy tales at all. Usually they end with the death of the main character. In reality though, they are artfully naive fairy-tales inspired by Hans Christian Andersen, they are decorative and they have the prerequisite of clear moral stance that fairy-tales require.

The reason I chose this topic is simple. Wilde's fairy tales impressed me mainly with the religious motives, which are straightforward but also hidden at the same time. Religion in our country was suppressed for over forty years due to Communism. The generations born after the Second World War were not taught about Christ, and they were not allowed to go to church. This led to the situation, which currently prevails, where only a small percentage of the population is religious.

As the main core of the thesis concerns the usage of the tales in classes of a secondary school, I decided to present two of the tales using a combination of two skills, reading while listening, followed up by a questionnaire and by a discussion in the class. Thus students will have the opportunity to think over what the

messages in the texts are, prepare them in writing and then present their opinions. The questionnaires are supposed to supply the basis of the analysis.

In the first place, I am interested whether the students are able to see the main motives in the tales, namely the religious and moral themes. At the same time I also feel the urge to share such beautiful stories with my students. Last but not least I also want to try to enhance the students' vocabulary in a more natural way and present a more entertaining lesson, or at least make the lessons a little different.

1 Biography of Oscar Wilde

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin, on 16 October 1854. His father, William Ralph Wills Wilde, was a successful eye and ear surgeon in Dublin, where he also founded a hospital, and later was knighted for his medical achievements. Oscar Wilde's mother Jane Francesca Agnes Lady Wilde was known as Speranza, and she became famous as a writer and nationalist. Oscar was their second son.

Oscar Wilde started writing poems while he was studying at Oxford. After finishing university, he moved to London. He earned his living as a writer, though not always successfully. Over time he got a reputation, and became widely known among other artists, writers, literary critics, actors, and actresses. In 1880 he published his first play. Soon after he became a regular contributor to *The World*, a weekly society magazine and he wrote regularly for the monthly *Time*.

In 1884 Oscar Wilde got married with Constance Lloyd. At that time he had already travelled the world, namely around America, where he lectured on aestheticism, and was also very famous. Harford Montgomery Hyde commented on their marriage in his extensive biography:

"That Oscar and Constance Wilde were deeply in love with each other at the time of their marriage and some years afterwards, certainly until after the birth of their second child in November 1886, is beyond dispute." However it did not last for ever... "as time went on she failed to keep pace with her husband's changing personality and was unable, in the popular word, to "cope". She had little if any sense of humour, and she neither appreciated nor in some instances understood her husband's brilliant and amusing talk." (Hyde 1990, 127)

Their first son Cyril Wilde was born on 5 June 1885. Their second child, Vyvyan, was born in November 1886. Their surnames were later changed to Holland.

"Although Cyril and Vyvyan were never to see their father after 1895, their childhood memories of him were very happy." (Hyde 1990,134)

Vyvyan Holland talks about his father in his book *Son of Oscar Wilde*.

"He was a real companion to us, and we always looked forward eagerly to his frequent visits to our nursery. Most parents in those days were far too solemn and pompous with their children, insisting on a vast amount of usually undeserved respect. My own father was quite different; he had so

much of the child in his own nature that he delighted in playing our games. He would go down on all fours on the nursery floor, being in turn a lion, a wolf, a horse, caring nothing for his usually immaculate appearance. And there was nothing half-hearted in his methods of play." (Holland and Holland 1999, 52)

He also talks about the times when their father told them his stories:

"When he grew tired of playing he would keep us quiet by telling us fairy stories, or tales of adventure, of which he had a never-ending supply. ... He told all his own written fairy stories suitably adapted for our minds, and a great many others as well." (Holland and Holland 1999, 53)

The first collection of Wilde's fairy tales was published in 1888, but they were apparently first told for an adult audience:

"Oscar Wilde appears to have come up with the story of *The Happy Prince* when, on a visit to Cambridge in 1885 he was asked to entertain some student friends." (Killeen 2007, 21)

In 1891 the second part of the collection of stories *A House of Pomegranates* was published. He dedicated the book to his wife and each of the stories contained a special dedication to one of Wilde's women acquaintances.

As usual, Wilde sent a copy of the book to his mother, who was deeply affected by the stories:

"Your book is beautiful, most beautiful! Jewels of thought set in the fine gold of the most exquisite words..." (Hyde 1990, 161)

The same year also *Lady Windmere's Fan* entered to the theatres with success.

"Certainly Wilde could look back upon the year 1891 with a sense of satisfaction with what he had achieved. Nevertheless, if it marked the height of his literary output and established his position as a successful writer on both sides of the English Channel, it also contained the seeds of misfortune. For it was in that year that he first met Lord Alfred Douglas, the handsome Oxford undergraduate who was to ruin his career and to have such a baneful influence on his life." (Hyde 1990, 169)

Though Wilde had numerous male lovers, it was solely his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, nicknamed Bosie, which led him into prison. After three trials he was finally sentenced for "committing indecent acts" and had to spend two years in prison.

"The punishment which Wilde faced, although by reason of his age and physical condition he was to escape some of its worst features, was still one of terrible severity... two years' imprisonment with hard labour, involving solitary cell confinement with its attendant laborious and largely useless work in the shape of the tread-wheel, the crank, and oakum picking, which had to be performed on a poor and inadequate diet, were calculated to break a man in body and spirit.... The cells in which hard labour prisoners were confined for twenty-three out of the twenty-four hours in the day were badly ventilated, and the sanitary conditions were primitive. The plank bed on which the prisoner was condemned to lie at night was an instrument of torture, which inevitably produced insomnia." (Hyde 1990, 376)

If the torture of imprisonment were not enough, Wilde had to suffer more personal sorrows. Not only did his mother die while he was in prison,

"... he had another most painful experience. This was the handing over of his children by an order of the High Court to the joint guardianship of his wife and her cousin Adrian Hope, while he was to be restrained from attempting to remove them from their mother's custody or otherwise "interfering" with them. For their father this was an appalling blow. (Hyde 1990, 396)

but also his family changed their surname into Holland, meaning Constance and her sons had no connection with Oscar.

Wilde was released from prison early on the morning of 19 May 1897, but he failed to find happiness after his time in captivity. Wilde's relationship with Alfred Douglas soon failed when Alfred found out Oscar had no money. Constance Wilde died after an operation on her spine in April 1898. His brother Willie Wilde died on 13 March 1899, largely as a result of excessive drinking.

Wilde spent the last years mainly in France, Switzerland or in Italy. He never came back to Britain. He also suffered a lot from depression and was seriously ill. What struck him even more was that many of his former friends now avoided him. He had nearly no money, so he had to write begging letters to friends he trusted.

He died in a hotel in Paris after a painful illness. Only Robert Ross and Reggie Turner witnessed the last days and hours of Wilde's life as they both stayed in the hotel. Wilde passed on 30 November 1900. The press did not comment on it at all. It took several years till Wilde's debts were paid thanks to the fact that his plays were put on the stage again.

Oscar Wilde's work undoubtedly proved its value by surviving over a century. It is still honoured, his plays are still some of the most appreciated by the audience, and his fairy tales still bring a sense of morality to their readers. His grandson Merlin Holland in his preface to the compilation of Wilde's fairy tales writes:

"He was a brilliantly witty writer, an amusing and clever talker and his plays, for which he is best known, still make people laugh now as much as they did 100 years ago when he first wrote them." (Wilde, Holland, and Brierley c2005, 4)

2 The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde

The collection of Wilde's fairy tales was first published in May 1888, and was called *The Happy Prince and Other Stories*. The fairy tales were some of the first Wilde's works. The book consists of five stories. *The Happy Prince*, *The Nightingale and the Rose*, *The Selfish Giant*, *The Devoted Friend*, and *The Remarkable Rocket*. Later, in 1891, another four stories were added under the title *The House of Pomegranates*. They were *The Young King*, *The Birthday of the Infanta*, *The Fisherman and His Soul*, and *The Star-Child*.

2.1 The features of fairy tales

Since the first publishing, the main question arose - are they really fairy tales? If we want to answer this question, we have to consider another issue. What are the main features of fairy tales? First of all we expect them to have a happy ending. Here it may seem that the Wilde's stories differ. However, there are other features that contribute to making of a fairy tale. These features include supernatural beings, talking animals or plants, living inanimate objects and often a moral message. With regards to the latter features Wilde's fairy tales meet all of these requirements. There is a giant as a supernatural being, a talking swallow or a nightingale, as well as a statue of the happy prince, or the remarkable rocket. There are lots of personifications in every story such as a group of animals (*The Devoted Friend*) or a group of flowers (*The Birthday of the Infanta*) that comment on the story.

The question remains about the happy ending. The happy ending usually means: "and they lived happily ever after." Wilde's stories usually end with death. The swallow in *The Happy Prince* freezes to death, the nightingale in *The Nightingale and the Rose* sacrifices itself by pressing its heart against the thorn, Little Hans was drowned on the moor while trying to fulfil what his friend asked him for. Even *The Star-Child* dies in the end. The story leads towards a perfectly happy ending, after the Star-Child learns how to behave to the animals and other human beings, finds his mother who forgives him, and becomes a new king. The story could have finished there. However, there is another short paragraph:

"Yet ruled he not long, so great had been his suffering, and so bitter the fire of his testing, for after the space of three years he died. And he who came after him ruled evilly." (Wilde 1994, 204)

If it were not for Wilde's narrative skill, we would definitely feel sorry for the main characters and the stories would be rejected and forgotten. Merlin Holland explains the meaning of death in these stories this way:

"The stories have often been described as modern parables, but a parable is quite clear in its meaning. *The Happy Prince* and *The Selfish Giant* come closest to it, because their reward is to be taken to Paradise for giving to others. But what of the nightingale and little Hans? Their only reward seems to be in death. This is clever story-telling, because after it is finished we are left to reflect on the apparent triumph of selfishness over self-sacrifice and to see that there may be, after all, a greater value in death with honour than life without it." (Wilde, Holland, and Brierley c2005, 7)

2.2 Wilde's motivation in writing fairy tales

At the time of publishing the fairy tales, Wilde had already been ranked among famous and popular dramatists, journalists and poets. Why would an author with such a reputation write fairy tales then? This is a question Wilde answered himself, and is quoted in many publications. Dr Jarlath Killeen in his book *The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde* quotes:

"Wilde remarked to one friend that: "It is the duty of every father, to write fairy tales for his children. But the mind of a child is a great mystery. It is incalculable, and who shall divine it, or bring to it his own peculiar delights? You humbly spread before it the treasures of your imagination, and they are as dross." (Killeen 2007, 10)

Jerusha McCormack, in his essay *Wilde's fiction(s)*, published in Peter Raby's collection *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde* also uses Wilde's quote about paternal duty, but he also mentions:

"What one fails to take into account is that the stories were not so much composed for children - as for Wilde himself. No one (to my knowledge) has considered what it meant for Wilde to become a father. I believe what it meant for Wilde is inscribed in *The Selfish Giant*. A kind of giant himself, Wilde might be taken as recording his initial response to the arrival of his first son, Cyril, as one of rejection: "My own garden is my own garden"." (McCormack 1997, 105)

This kind of behaviour is quite natural for many people, men especially. A place that previously used to be their territory, is abruptly disturbed by an invader. It takes some time to adapt to the new situation, but then the reward comes.

"Closing off his own space to the child, the Giant doomed the garden to winter; relenting, he brought spring. For Wilde, fatherhood was also to bring emotional rebirth and a flowering of his genius; in the following years, he was to produce his best work." (McCormack 1997, 106)

2.3 Wilde's self-reflection in the tales

It is natural, that writers include something of their personal life experience in their work. In Wilde's case there is no exception. All of Wilde's work was inspired by his life, his love affairs and his own feelings. This is the truth for his only novel and more deeply for his short stories. Some of the fairy tales only reflect Wilde's social comment, but those that were chosen for this thesis bear much more than this. *The Selfish Giant* as well as *The Happy Prince* are regarded as Wilde's self-portraits. Dr. Jarlath Killeen says:

"*The Selfish Giant* is, perhaps, Wilde's best-known, and most loved, fairy tale and was also his own personal favourite." (Killeen 2007, 61)

This story was frequently narrated by Wilde to his sons and it was this story, that made Wilde cry. His sons used to ask him why he had tears in his eyes and he answered that such beautiful things always make him cry. Nevertheless, we can also guess there was something more in Wilde's attitude towards the Giant. Wilde is described as an exceptionally tall man of 6 feet 3 inches (=1.90 m), so he also considered himself as such a kind of giant. The connection between Wilde and the Giant then seems clear. Killeen sees Wilde's own reflection this way:

"Wilde's height, and the sexual unease which surrounded it, have led to readings of *The Selfish Giant* as an obvious self-portrait, an attempt by Wilde to redeem himself from the charge of having neglected his own children in favour of selfish bodily desires. The link between Wilde and the Giant has allowed the story to be seen as a good example of Wilde's capacity for doublespeak." (Killeen 2007, 61)

The story of *The Happy Prince* bears even more features from Wilde's life. Killeen mentions that critics believed the story was inspired by Wilde's relationship with young Canadian Robert Ross, when the Reed in the story represents Wilde's wife Constance. Then the relationship between the Swallow

and the Reed mirrors Oscar and Constance. Wilde's admiration towards Ross is described in the Swallows love towards the statue.

Killeen also points out, that some other critics see the figure of the Prince as a representation of Christ who expresses with dismay the problem of poverty:

"Society continues on in exactly the same way after the Prince's sacrifice as before. These critics are disturbed by the fact that self-immolation of the Prince ultimately appears to change nothing in the political or economic establishment. His gifts of gold and jewels have merely provided a local and temporary respite for some from the full rigours of the capitalist system which inevitably marginalises so many. Either Wilde's tale exposes private charity as a misguided, though understandable, activity or it has no answers to the problems of economic exploitation it poses." (Killeen 2007, 22)

For the readers it may appear that the jewels and gold Prince gave away made the poor people in the town happy. However, a deed like this could never help people in the long run.

2.4 The audience

The fairy tales have an omnipresent death theme and questionable happy endings. The language is conspicuously sophisticated, often needing paraphrase and simplification for a young audience. So who did Oscar imagine his audience and readership might be?

Sarah Marsh deals with Wilde's fairy tales in her article *Twice upon a Time: The Importance of Rereading "The Devoted Friend"*, where she contemplates the question that arose among readers soon after the first publishing of Wilde's fairy tales in 1888: "... readers frequently have wondered if these "nasty little stories" were intended for children." Marsh also emphasizes that the main intention of a story for children "is to teach manners and morals to children." (Marsh 2008, 72)

With respect to other features that appear in the stories, Marsh admits:

"Because these Andersen and Grimm stories were written to instruct children in the home, Wilde's subversion of them bears a plurality of meanings to child and adult readers alike." (Marsh 2008, 77)

Talairach-Vielmas sees another aspect that is typical for the child audience, as she exposes Wilde's own possible intentions:

Inevitably, the idea that Wilde's fairy tales may have been written with a child audience in mind conjures up the question of form. If Wilde's narratives frequently point out the significance of orality and betray the

writer's links with Irish culture, the fairy tale, as several critics argue, may have enabled Wilde to bridge the gap between oral and textual/literary culture. (Talairach-Vielmas 2011, 393)

Then Merlin Holland's interpretation appears to be the most consistent, as it incorporates all the previous surmises accompanied with Wilde's own words, while he also disproves the intention of a moral aspect:

"Although we may think of Oscar's stories as tales for children, and of course they are, they have that greatest of qualities in a children's story - they appeal to grown-ups as well, especially when they are read aloud. Oscar himself realized this. "They are meant partly for children," he said, "and partly for those who have kept the childlike faculties of wonder and joy." He always hated the idea that his stories had morals to them, for that would have put him in the position of telling people what was absolutely right or wrong; at the end of *The Devoted Friend* we cannot be sure whether he is on the side of the water rat or the duck or the linnet." (Wilde, Holland, and Brierley c2005, 6 - 7)

2.5 Comparing Wilde's tales to other authors

The 19th century appears to be an era that inspired the authors to collect and write fairy tales. The world's most famous authors lived and created their literary treasures just in this century. To name the most well-known Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875), Jacob Grimm (1785-1863), Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859), Lewis Carroll (1832-1898), they were Wilde's contemporaries, or at least they lived in the same century. Among the critics who analyse Wilde's fairy tales, we can mention Sarah Marsh or Elizabeth Goodenough. Both Marsh and Goodenough compare Wilde with the Grimms. They comment on the use of violence in fairy tales, which outraged readers at that time.

"Though Wilde consistently maintained in his stories the motifs and character types of Grimm and Andersen fairy tales, he was not interested in the surrender of material possessions and capitulation to duty these tales often promoted." (Marsh 2008, 73)

The motives in Wilde's stories are similar. Marsh analyses *The Devoted Friend* and compares the story to Andersen's *Little Claus and Big Claus*. She also points out the different ending of the stories.

"The relationship between Hugh the Miller and little Hans in *The Devoted Friend* comprises Hugh's exploitation and Hans's sacrifice of his material possessions, two tropes which recall happier Andersen and Grimm stories in which such sacrifice ultimately is rewarded with good fortune and exploitation is punished, often by death." (Marsh 2008, 74)

Other stories that deserve comparing are for example Wilde's *The Star-Child* and Andersen's *The Girl who Trod on a Loaf*, where the main character is a child who learns a lesson. Also the motif of three dreams, after which the main character realizes his own bad behaviour could be seen not only in Wilde's *Young King*, but also in Dickens' *Christmas Carol*. Although, Ebenezer Scrooge's correction is well accepted by all the people in the story, this is not the case of the young King, who is rejected by nobles and called a beggar.

It is almost inevitable to see similarities between Oscar Wilde and Charles Dickens (1812-1870), as they both wrote satirically about the society of that time. Although Wilde is famous for saying of Charles Dickens "The Old Curiosity Shop", which obviously was not a form of compliment, he never fully succeeded in escaping his shadow.

2.6 Motives

2.6.1 Motif of death

As mentioned above, the motive of death is omnipresent. The story of *The Selfish Giant* ends when the Giant meets the Christ child, and leaves with him to Paradise. This seems to be a nice depiction of death, just leaving to another "garden". It shows that this is not the definitive ending of the rectified giant's life, and in fact it refers to the eternal life. The story ends with these lines:

"And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms." (Wilde 1994, 39)

The Christ child took only the soul of the Giant, his body was left on the Earth, as it belonged to the Earth. The dead body, covered with white blossoms resembles innocence, as the Giant turned from selfishness to generosity and compassion.

The Happy Prince, although he is not a living creature, but just a statue, very beautiful, but still only a piece of metal, also dies in the end. Throughout the story the Prince appears as a being that has more empathy than any other living person in that town. In the end, when he gives away all the precious things he had, the prince's "leaden heart had snapped right in two" (Wilde 1994, 21) just after the

Swallow, who helped him and fell in love with him, dies. This, however, is not the actual end. Wilde again tries to show there is something more after death:

"Bring me the two most precious things in the city," said God to one of His Angels; and the Angel brought Him the leaden heart and the dead bird.
"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. (Wilde 1994, 22)

Little Hans in the story of *The Devoted Friend* sacrifices himself in the name of friendship, and he dies as well, while his selfish friend, the Miller, speaks at his funeral as the chief mourner. In this story no Paradise, no Angels, no Christ appears. The life of little Hans ends just with him drowning in the moor.

"At last he lost his way, and wandered off on the moor, which was a very dangerous place, as it was full of deep holes, and there poor little Hans was drowned. His body was found the next day by some goatherds, floating in a great pool of water, and was brought back by them to the cottage." (Wilde 1994, 54)

No afterlife motif, no thorough description, just a short mention about how poor Hans died.

In contrast to *The Devoted Friend*, the tale of *The Nightingale and the Rose* shows an even more tragic ending, when the nightingale kills itself to aid the student's love, which in the end appears to be unrequited. The Nightingale's death was in vain. What is more, the death in this story is described a lot more thoroughly and in more detail.

"And 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 cold crystal Moon leaned down and listened. All night long she sang, and the thorn went deeper and deeper into her breast, and her life-blood ebbed away from her." (Wilde 1994, 28)

The death in this story is depicted as something beautiful and pure, as the highest form of Love. There is nothing dark and gloomy about the death in this tale either.

In the second book of Wilde's fairy tales *The House of Pomegranates*, the death follows after some suffering. In *The Birthday of the Infanta*, the little

Dwarf's heart breaks, when he realizes that it was his ugliness that made Infanta laugh. McCormack sees the reason for the suffering in the love of women:

"The love of women, as the fairy tales explicitly show, is shallow and cruel. The Infanta only tolerates the Dwarf because he amuses her; when the Dwarf, seeing himself for the first time in a mirror, sees how ugly he is and, with that revelation, the impossibility of the Infanta's love, he kills himself." (McCormack 1997, 107)

The Fisherman (*The Fisherman and His Soul*) grieved for his love to the Mermaid, and the Star-Child (*The Star-Child*) suffered while he was searching for his mother. The only story where the main character does not die is *The Young King*.

2.6.2. Religious motif

The most straightforward religious motives can be found in the tales *The Selfish Giant*, and *The Happy Prince*. In the first one it is the Christ child who comes for the Giant to take him to the Paradise. In the second one God himself sends an Angel to bring some precious things to decorate his garden, the Paradise.

In *The Selfish Giant* the Jesus appears as a little boy who comes to save the Giant. The Giant, who used to be selfish, changes after suffering recurring winters in his garden and is allowed a second chance. The Giant shows that he has changed into a loving person just by putting the little Jesus up in the tree. At this time the Jesus is just a little boy with no special signs. The suspicion that he is someone special comes to the reader's mind gradually when the boy disappears and the Giant asks for him day by day, but nobody knows of him. When the boy finally appears at the end of the story, the bloody marks on his hands and feet reveal his real identity. The prints of nails should remind the reader Jesus who was put on the cross. When the boy says "These are marks of love", he tells of his sacrifice for the human race in the name of love.

Goodenough in her essay *Oscar Wilde, Victorian Fairy Tales, and the Meanings of Atonement* mentions the revelation of Christ after the Giant's conversion:

"After he has kissed the boy, opened his garden to all the children, and grown old, his special little friend reappears with wounds on his hands and feet. His longing for the Christ child prefigures the salvation that awaits the Giant in death, as he leaves his body to join the boy in Paradise. That we do

not see this child receive stigmata after the conversion of the Giant is characteristic of the way Wilde represents suffering as unseen theatrical." (Goodenough 1999, 350)

With respect to this, *The Selfish Giant* is definitely the most symbolic story in the collection. In the story of *The Selfish Giant* there is no direct mention of God or Angels or Heaven. The only word connected to religion is the word "Paradise". One comes to realize that the Giant does not really die, but he lives forever. The Giant dies only in this world, because he is old and ill. This is why in a certain way we can say that the Giant "lived happily ever after".

Killeen also mentions the religious motif:

"It is not clear whether Wilde is referring here to the beauty of the idea of Christian sacrifice at the centre of the tale, a sacrifice which picks up on the Nightingale's death in the previous story, or simply to the beauty of his reworking of the Christ myth, but there is clearly something personal involved for him here." (Killeen 2007, 61)

And he adds the reason for using the motif based on Wilde's life experience:

"Wilde seeks both forgiveness and justification through his moral tale in which Jesus leads him to a version of Greek same-sex passion that is magically legitimated by Christianity." (Killeen 2007, 61 - 62)

The story of *The Happy Prince* shows the religious motif more directly when in the end God appears himself to ask his Angel to bring him the most precious things. The Prince's body was melted in a furnace, but the most important part, his heart, resisted the heat and so it was thrown on a dust-heap together with the dead Swallow. The motif of eternal life is expressed literally in the last paragraph when God praises the Angel.

Elizabeth Goodenough sees another religious motif at the beginning of the story:

"Only the Charity School children recognize the Prince as an Angel like the one they have seen in their dreams. To the Mayor and the Town Councillors - the philistine, utilitarian, and worldly the statue divested of gold looks shabby, "little better than a beggar" (Goodenough 1999, 350)

However this motif is questionable and could be considered only as a simile.

The story says:

"He looks just like an angel," said the Charity Children as they came out of the cathedral in their bright scarlet cloaks and their clean white pinafores.

"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 looked severe, for he did not approve of children dreaming." (Wilde 1994, 10)

The story of *The Young King* also carries a religious motif, though it is not exactly that of an afterlife as described in previous stories. As mentioned above, the King does not die in the story. Instead of this, the King goes through a complete transformation. At the beginning of the story, he enjoys all the luxuries that a life of a king can offer. However after one night when he had three dreams about the suffering of the people who worked hard so that the King could appreciate the best food, clothes or art works, the King rejects all the precious materialism and starts to live modestly. His humility is so deep and real that in the end of the story he is rewarded by Christ.

2.6.3 Moral message

Fairy tales are generally supposed to teach children how to behave and how to become good human beings who do not hurt other people or other living creatures. In this aspect Wilde's stories satisfy all the expectations.

"Wilde's remarkable accomplishment in retelling these Grimm and Andersen tales is to break apart each tale's deep structures and, with the remaining fragments, fashion a new fairy tale intended to alert readers to the problems of moral codes promoted by the didactic tradition of Andersen and the Grimms." (Marsh 2008, 77)

The stories that were chosen to be presented in the classes both have a strong moral message and in both stories the message is straightforward. The story of *The Selfish Giant* shows one particular feature of character and that the transformation from a selfish being into a loving one is rewarded.

The story of *The Happy Prince* on the other hand, describes that sharing ones wealth with those less fortunate is a good deed and that even though it is not appreciated by people, deserves to be rewarded by God. Although some of the

people in the city were happy because of the Prince's gift and the fact that they had food thanks to him, the Town Councillors judged him only by his appearance, they did not consider the deeds of the Prince and the Swallow. Fortunately, there comes God in the end, who appreciates their deeds and rewards them. It reminds us that the human justice may not be fair, but in the wider context the good deed is rewarded.

The other stories from Wilde's collection also have a strong moral message. In this respect, we could mention *The Star-Child*, a story of a proud and nasty child who had to go through a lot of suffering for rejecting his mother. As mentioned above, the story is very similar in the moral message to the fairy tale *The Girl who Trod on a Loaf* by Hans Christian Andersen. In both stories the children are proud and arrogant and they do not respect any authority. They both have to suffer to realize the wrong things they did and to mend their ways.

3 The difference between the full and the simplified version

The classes of pre-intermediate students would find the full version of the fairy tales very demanding to deal with. This is why I had to choose some easier versions which would be less difficult for the students to understand. Luckily there are several versions of both of the stories. There are also some cartoons on the internet which could entertain the students more. However, for my purpose I decided to look for stories that are both in written and spoken form. The written version was chosen so that the students could follow the story in the text and then, when answering the questions they could look for the information in the same text. The spoken version enabled the students to listen to the correct pronunciation and fluent language and it also saved a lot of time during the lesson. It would take most of the lesson time if they were asked to read the story by themselves.

3.1 Simplified versions

The simplified version of *The Selfish Giant* (appendix 1) was found on the internet site helpforenglish.cz in three levels. I chose the simplest one, designed for elementary students so that everybody could understand. As most of the stories on this website, this one includes a recording of the story as well as the written form. The story was retold by Marek Vít, who is the author of the website.

The other tale, *The Happy Prince*, (appendix 2) was printed four years ago in the *Gate* magazine, which we use at school as a complementation source for students. The magazine usually comes accompanied by a CD. The stories are partly introduced in comic form which is also recorded on the CD and another part which is designed for listening only. Students were therefore given the first part of the text in comic form and the second part in transcription. The script of the story was written by Jo Molloy, one of the magazine's editors.

3.2 Vocabulary

Vocabulary is definitely the most distinctive feature of Wilde's writing style. At the same time this is also the most difficult and demanding thing for understanding. Moreover, the stories were written more than one hundred years ago, so some of the vocabulary is already antiquated. Just to mention, Wilde still

uses the archaic forms of "thee", "thou" or "hath" which were considered obsolete even in his times.

For this thesis it was necessary that students should understand the story and they should not be distracted or even discouraged by numerous unknown words. For this reason, the shortened version of *The Selfish Giant* eliminated the elaborate descriptions, which are certainly marvellous, but not necessary for comprehension of the storyline. To give an example we can compare some of the excerpts. The first one is the part when the Giant expelled the children from his garden:

When he arrived he saw the children playing in the garden.
"What are you doing here?" he cried in a very gruff voice, and the children ran away.
"My own garden is my own garden," said the Giant; "any one can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself." So he built a high wall all round it, and put up a notice-board. "TRESSPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED" (Wilde 1994, 34)

The shortened version is simplified:

When he saw the children in his garden, he was very angry. "Go away and never come back!" he shouted. "This is my garden and nobody can play here!" He built a high wall all around the garden and wrote a sign in big letters: "DO NOT ENTER!" ("Oscar Wilde: The Selfish Giant (Elementary)" 2006)

Another example of Wilde's poetic writing is for instance the Giant's last meeting with the little boy:

Downstairs ran the Giant in great joy, and out into the garden. He hastened across the grass, and came near to the child. And when he came quite close his face grew red with anger, and he said, "Who hath dared to wound thee?" For on the palms of the child's hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet.
"Who hath dared to wound thee?" cried the Giant; "tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him."
"Nay!" answered the child; "but these are the wounds of Love."
"Who art thou?" said the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child. (Wilde 1994, 38-39)

The same situation is very simply retold in the shortened version:

One day, he saw the small boy in the garden. The giant was very happy and ran to him. But the boy was hurt, there were bloody marks on his hands and

feet. "Who did this to you?" asked the giant angrily. "These are marks of love," the boy said sweetly.
"Who are you?" the giant asked in wonder. ("Oscar Wilde: The Selfish Giant (Elementary)" 2006)

Here we encounter one problem in the shortened version. The full version reads: "prints of nails" while the shortened version uses only: "bloody marks". This was not found sufficient for complete understanding. For somebody who knows the story this is not a problem however, the expression "bloody marks" is unspecific and vague and for the first-time reader the marks have almost no significance and are not connected with the Christ's crucifixion.

In the story of *The Happy Prince* some necessary changes were also made, the less common phrase "pluck out" is replaced by a familiar "take" or the wording "would be blind" by "will not see". Here is the original sentence where the Swallow refuses to remove the Prince's last eye:

"I will stay with you one night longer," said the Swallow, "but I cannot pluck out your eye. You would be quite blind then." (Wilde 1994, 18)

compared to simplified version:

"Alright, I'll stay with you. But I can't take your last eye, you will not see." (Gate 2014)

Or to give one more example, the most moving moment in the story when the Swallow is saying goodbye to the Prince and dies, Wilde described this way:

But at last he knew that he was going to die. He had just strength to fly up to the Prince's shoulder once more. "Good-bye, dear Prince!" he murmured, "will you let me kiss your hand?"
"I am glad that you are going to Egypt at last, little Swallow," said the Prince, "you have stayed too long here; but you must kiss me on the lips, for I love you."
"It is not to Egypt that I am going," said the Swallow. "I am going to the House of Death. Death is the brother of Sleep, is he not?"
And he kissed the Happy Prince on the lips, and fell down dead at his feet. (Wilde 1994, 20)

The shortened version does not lack any of the moving atmosphere:

At last the Swallow knew she was going to die.
"Goodbye, dear Prince! May I kiss you on your head?"
"I am happy you are going to Egypt, little Swallow. You have stayed here too long. You must kiss me on the lips because I love you."

"I am not going to Egypt, it is too late now. I am going to die."
The Swallow kissed the Prince and fell down. She was dead. (Gate 2014)

3.3 Content

Some changes were also made in the content. As for *The Selfish Giant*, the main changes in the content were the omission of the descriptions of the garden and narration about the long and tough winter. The changes in *The Happy Prince* story were a bit larger, as the story itself is longer. Some parts, such as admiration of the statue by the town citizens or the narration about Egypt, where the Swallow was heading to, were just mentioned in one sentence. Other parts, such as the Swallow's love with the Reed or the Prince's narration when he was alive, are not mentioned in the short version at all. These parts may give the impression that they are only supportive in the story and have no big influence on the main storyline and thus they are not necessary. In the context of Wilde's own intentions they play an important role, but for the short presentation in the class these could be neglected.

Another difference between the versions of *The Happy Prince* is very common. Wilde originally wrote the story about a male swallow. Many translations and also some shortened versions prefer to talk about a female swallow. There are two reasons for it. The first one is that there are still many people who detest the idea of love between two males. It does not matter that the love between a swallow and a statue cannot be a physical one. However, this is not the case of love between the Giant and the boy, as the boy is Jesus. This kind of love is usually approved and well accepted. The other reason why the swallow in many versions is referred to as "she" is that it is more natural and moreover the swallow translated into Czech bears the female gender.

4 The interpretation in English classes

As mentioned above, for the interpretation part I decided to choose two of Wilde's stories, *The Selfish Giant*, and *The Happy Prince*. These two stories are not so well known among Czech students, but both of them contain enough symbols to be understood, and they both make the reader think. This was how I felt about them and I wanted to evaluate the reactions of my students.

4.1 Lesson plan

I designed two lessons of 45 minutes, each for one of the stories. Both lessons have a similar plan. At the beginning of the first lesson, students were given a questionnaire (appendix 3 and 4), and were asked to fill only the first part. The aim was to find out whether they knew anything about the writer or about the tales. Then I asked them if anyone knew. If they did not know, I gave them some basic information, so they knew what the lesson was going to be about, and what to expect before reading. This was not necessary in the second lesson, so the students were given only two questions to introduce the new story.

The core of the lessons was to get a sufficient response from the students. That is why I decided the fastest way to present the story, so the students would have enough time to think about it. Each student was given one copy of the shortened version of the tale. To save the time I played the recording of the story while students were following the text. This part of the lesson did not take longer than six minutes in the case of *The Selfish Giant*. In the case of *The Happy Prince* it took about twelve minutes, as the first part of the story was presented as comics, and the second part as listening while reading.

After the listening / reading part, students were encouraged to ask about any vocabulary they did not understand. I also asked them if they felt they understood the story. Then students were given enough time to complete the rest of the questionnaire, which took about 15 to 20 minutes. They were asked to work individually at first. While answering the questions, they could ask about the meaning of the questions if they were unsure. The weaker students could also write their answers in Czech if they were not confident in English.

I particularly encouraged them to answer the questions about the message which was a part of both questionnaires. This part was supposed to show how the students feel about the stories and if they see the religious and moral motives.

Ten minutes before the end of the lesson I asked them, to put down their pens. We went through some of the questions they were most curious about, and talked about them together. I also assured them that there were no correct responses, that each response was valuable as it showed their own opinion, and their own way of understanding.

At the end of the second lesson I also asked them to make any comments to the stories and to think about the age of the reader for such stories. There was also a space to connect the stories with similar ones by other authors.

4.2 Prerequisites

I chose students from the first, second and third grade of the secondary school I teach at. This means that mostly they had not heard about the writer before they listened to the story. Those students who knew Oscar Wilde could name only one of his works, which was *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

The other prerequisite was knowledge of Andersen's tales, or those of Grimms. This way students could compare, and evoke some of the similarities between the styles.

As the Wilde's fairy tales contain the religious motives, I wondered whether any of the students are acquainted with religion. In this respect I expected that the students' knowledge in this area would be poor.

5 Analysis

For my thesis I decided to experiment with two of Oscar Wilde's fairy tales in an English class. I first encountered these fairy tales when I was a student at a secondary school myself in the late 1980s. The first was *The Nightingale and the Rose* and it was abridged for secondary school students of that time as English was not a favoured language. I still remember the disappointment with the ending of the story, with the girl who rejects her admirer and breaks her promise and with the pointless death of the nightingale. Despite this I liked the story because it was something completely different from any other stories. There was something really deep in the story which I did not understand at that time. It was the sacrifice of the nightingale, absolutely selfless, and the narration of the story with all its rich description that make one feel the story deep in one's heart.

It took a few years until I got the complete collection of the fairy tales in English. I read *The Selfish Giant* first, as it was the shortest one and I was amazed. The story took my breath away and I had tears in my eyes, as it was so wonderful for me. I especially appreciated the way the story was told, the narration, the descriptions of the garden, the symbols. This was the main reason why I wanted to show the story to my students. For the second story to present to the students I decided to choose *The Happy Prince* as this is the most well-known story from the book.

5.1 Chosen responses

The stories were planned to be presented in two classes of an ordinary secondary school. Currently I am teaching five groups, each of them consisting of about twelve to sixteen students. I did the research in four of the groups, this means I received over fifty responses to both stories, which is twice as many as I needed. However, I expected some of the responses to be quite useless, as the students did not write many or sometimes even any reactions. When they were asked for explanation, they said they did not understand or that they did not know what to think about the story. On the other hand the same students also responded

that they liked the fairy tales. At least they had a different lesson than that which they are used to.

The school I teach at is a business academy and technical school. Among the classes two of them are exclusively boys classes. These are the third graders specializing in sports management (OS 3) and the second grade's specializing in fire fighting (PO 2). The two other groups are of mixed students, boys and girls, specializing in business and economics (OA 1 and OA 2). It should be mentioned that students at these types of schools do not specialize in literature as students at grammar schools do and that they are not expected to continue their studies at university. These students are qualified for the job they study for after passing the maturita exam. This means that the level of their literature knowledge as well as their language knowledge is simply average. The same applies to their interests and hobbies, which are usually internet, sports, and music. It could be said that this is a sample of an average Czech group of teenagers.

Each of the stories was presented in one lesson of forty-five minutes on different days. It means that there were a few students missing in one of the lessons. I decided not to give the analysis to certain people. Some of the students also had great responses in one of the questionnaires while during the other lesson they did not work as well.

I got 51 responses for *The Selfish Giant* story and 54 responses for *The Happy Prince* story. After excluding the questionnaires with no or only a few responses, I had 30 samples of nearly complete questionnaires for each story. I followed the same lesson plan in each of the classes, so all the students had the same conditions. The tables below show the number and percentage of the students who were present and how many of the questionnaires were chosen from each class.

Table1- The Selfish Giant

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
present students	22	9	11	9	51
chosen students	13	6	8	3	30
girls / boys	5 / 8	6 / 0	0 / 8	0 / 3	11 / 19
percentage of chosen students from a class	59%	67%	72%	33%	-
percentage of a class in the sample	43%	20%	27%	10%	100%

Table 2 - The Happy Prince

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
present students	20	11	10	13	54
chosen students	12	8	7	3	30
girls / boys	4 / 8	6 / 2	0 / 7	0 / 3	10 / 20
percentage of chosen students from a class	60%	73%	70%	23%	-
percentage of a class in the sample	40%	27%	23%	10%	100%

The first presented story was *The Selfish Giant*. In the OA1 class there were 22 students present, out of them I chose 13 responses, five girls and eight boys, which is 59%. This class consists of the most advanced students, even though they are the youngest. The OA 2 class had only 9 students and 6 of them were chosen, this means 67%. They were all girls, as the boys were either missing, or their responses were not complete enough. The PO 2 class had 11 students, from which 8 completed the questionnaire, 72%. In the OS 3 class there were 9 students present, but only 3 of them understood the story and the assignment, which is 33%. Out of the total 30 students the OA 1 class formed 43%, OA 2 20%, PO 2 27% and OS 3 10%.

The second story, *The Happy Prince*, was presented with some time interval. In the OA 1 class it was after a week. There were 20 students present and I chose 12 of them, four girls and eight boys, which represents 60%. The time interval in OA 2 was the longest, it was three months, as they did the first story in the summer before the holidays, but it did not have any effect on what they remembered, compared to other classes. In this class there were 11 students present and 8 of them were chosen, six girls and two boys, which is 73%. The PO 2 class got the second story after two weeks. There were 10 students present, 7 of them were chosen, that is 70%. The OS 3 class heard the story after three weeks. 13 students were present, but again only 3 of them completed the questionnaire, only 23%. Out of the total 30 students OA 1 class formed 40%, OA 2 27%, PO 2 23% and OS 3 10%.

The time interval was not chosen intentionally and it also did not influence the responses. The reason for the interval was simply the schedule. There were Summer holidays, Autumn holidays and some sports events, when the students were not present at school at all.

To evaluate these four groups of students according to their English level, I use my own experience with the groups, as I work with them on a regular basis in our English lessons. The students have also undergone different ways of testing during the English classes which gives me the authority to say that the OA 1 class is the most advanced of these four classes. From this class there is the highest number of students reaching B1 level. The next is the PO 2 class and the least advanced group is OS 3, the oldest group. That the oldest group is the least able proving progress is related to effort and motivation rather than length of study. There is also no sign of difference between the boys and mixed groups. In all the research it was only one third of the girls who demonstrated the same talent for comprehension and for languages as their male counterparts.

5.2 Questionnaires

Both questionnaires consist of two main parts, before reading and after reading questions. The before reading part was oriented to find out how much the students know about the writer or at least if they know anything. Considering the age of the students I did not expect much knowledge about the author nor did I expect they knew the fairy tales. In the first questionnaire I questioned their general knowledge of Oscar Wilde. During the lesson I told the students some basic information about the writer, such as when he lived, what he wrote, and something about his life. In the second questionnaire the before reading questions focused on how much they remember and as *The Happy Prince* story is more famous, I expected some of the students could have read it.

The second part, after reading, was divided into a larger part of understanding the story, consisting of nine questions, and a shorter part of understanding the message, containing four questions, and some follow up questions.

The questions of general understanding were assigned so that the students could use the facts from the story and show they are versed in the story and that they understand the main storyline. The four questions dealing with the message aimed to find out whether there is something more the students see in the story and how they feel about the story.

All classes were instructed clearly concerning how to answer the questions and what the questions mean. The main objective of the questionnaires was to find out how much the students saw in the stories, so I tried to facilitate the task. The students were allowed to use dictionaries when needed and some of the questions were translated into Czech in the class upon students' request. This helped students feel secure about the understanding of their task.

Some students also felt unsure as to how to form the answers in English, so they were allowed to write the responses in Czech or they could even write some part in English and some part in Czech. This enabled them to form the sentences in English as far as they were able. Some students found it as an advantage, because their English vocabulary is limited. They also do not have much experience with writing in English and expressing their own thoughts and opinions. Exercises in school books are mostly restricted to translating or completing given sentences or finding the right answers in texts. This is great while training how to form the sentences and learning how language patterns work. When the students are asked to say or write something on their own it is like making their first steps on their own. The problem is they are not children anymore, so they feel ashamed when they make a mistake.

The students also do not have enough experience with forming the sentence structure, so their own sentences not only miss the grammatical features, articles and tenses, but they mostly form sentences with Czech word order and often omit subjects. This is why Czech language made them more secure when expressing themselves.

When answering the first questionnaire four students chose to write only in Czech, nine of them wrote partly in Czech and partly in English and seventeen of them wrote in English. In the second questionnaire there was only one student who wrote clearly in Czech, four of them wrote in both languages and twenty-five students found enough courage to write in English. In both of the questionnaires ten students who chose to write in English were from the OA 1 class. This proves my assertion that students in this class are smarter than those from the other classes.

In the following chapters I tried to analyse all the questions from both of the questionnaires. The responses of the students are tabulated when necessary and accompanied by some of the best responses. When required their responses were corrected grammatically.

5.3 Analysis - The Selfish Giant

As I stated above, in the first part of the questionnaire, students were asked about their general knowledge of Oscar Wilde.

Table3 - answered questions A

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
no answer	4	0	0	0	4
IDK answer	4	5	3	0	12
correct answer	4	1	5	3	13
wrong answer	1	0	0	0	1

Out of the thirty chosen responses four students gave no answer, twelve of them admitted they knew nothing and fourteen of them made a guess. Out of those fourteen students one wrote that Oscar Wilde was an artist, a painter. The others answered correctly that Oscar Wilde was a writer, and three of them wrote he was a dramatist. Only four students knew Wilde's famous work *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as they had already talked about it in their Czech lessons.

In the second part there were nine questions.

Table4 - answered questions B

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
9	6	4	7	2	19
8	3	0	0	0	3
7	1	1	1	1	4
6	2	1	0	0	3
5	1	0	0	0	1

Six of them were for general understanding, which students answered directly according to the text. The three other questions supposed some more thinking about the meaning of the motives. Out of those nine questions, nineteen students answered all of them. All of the remaining eleven students answered at least five questions. The questions that caused them most difficulties and so sometimes they stayed unanswered were the three ones asking about the motives.

The first question "What selfish thing did the Giant do?" was meant to find examples of selfish behaviour in the text. There were a few of them. The other

reason for this question was to check whether the students really understood the meaning of the word which was pre-taught at the beginning of the lesson together with the word "Giant".

Table 5 - What selfish thing did the Giant do?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
he only liked himself	2	0	0	0	2
he didn't allow children	5	2	5	1	13
he built a wall	4	3	3	1	11
he didn't want to share	1	0	0	1	2
he left for seven years	1	1	0	0	2

The most frequent questions were that the Giant did not want the children to come to his garden. There were thirteen answers. Eleven other students stated that the Giant built a wall around his garden. Two students wrote that he liked only himself, two students said he did not want to share the garden and two students wrote that the selfish thing was, that the Giant left for seven years and that he went to visit his friend. All of the students answered this question.

"He didn't like when children played in his garden, so he built a high wall around his garden."

"He said that it is his garden and built a wall around it."

"He didn't want the children to play in his garden and he drove them out, because it was his garden."

"He thought the garden is only for him."

Even the second question was answered by all of the students. I asked "Why didn't the Spring come to the giant's garden?" This question was mainly for understanding the story.

Table 6 - Why didn't the spring come to the giant's garden?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
the Spring saw the sign	8	0	6	2	16
there were no children	3	4	1	0	8
there was the wall	1	1	0	1	3
he was selfish	1	1	1	0	3

In this question sixteen students indicated the big sign as the reason, eight wrote that there were no children. Three students wrote that the Spring did not come because of the wall and three students reacted that it was because the Giant was selfish. Again all of the students replied to this question and all of the questions were correct.

"Because in front of the garden there was a sign "Do not enter"."

"Because the children couldn't go inside."
 "Because the children didn't sing in his garden and it was still cold there."
 "Because it saw the sign and flowers didn't grow there, because there were no children."

The third question "What happened in the garden when the children appeared there again?" seemed a narrow question, unfortunately it was not answered by any of the students.

Table7 - What happened in the garden when children appeared there again?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
the Spring came	9	6	7	2	24
the giant played with the children	2	0	0	0	2
no answer	2	0	1	1	4

Twenty-four students answered correctly that the Spring came to the garden, two other students skipped this fact and wrote that the giant went to play with the children. This is also true, as there were no limitations in the question about what happened exactly at the time. Anyway there were four students who left the space blank.

"Spring came when children were there."
 "The Giant played with the children all day."
 "The trees were green and there were white flowers."
 "The spring came back and the garden was beautiful again."

The fourth question "What did the Giant do with the crying little boy?" also required the students to find the answer according to the text.

Table8 - What did the Giant do with the crying little boy?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
he put him in the tree	10	6	5	2	23
he helped him	2	0	2	0	4
he asked him who hurt him	1	0	1	1	3

All of the students answered this question. Twenty-three of them answered that the Giant put the boy in the tree, four wrote only that he helped him. However three of the students got lost in the story and reacted in accordance with the second meeting of the Giant and the boy.

"He helped him to climb to the tree."
 "The Giant took him in his hand and put him in the tree."
 "He put him in the tree, because he couldn't reach the branches himself."
 "He asked him: "Who did this to you?""

The fifth question appeared confusing for the students who had already got lost in the previous part. Some of them therefore made irrelevant responses. I asked "What happened then?" At this stage I expected responses that the Giant destroyed the wall and that the children went to the garden to play with him every day, that he was not selfish anymore.

Table 9 - What happened then?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
correct answer	4	3	6	1	14
similar answer	3	3	0	0	6
"lost"	2	0	2	1	5
no answer	4	0	0	1	5

Fourteen students answered correctly in accordance with the text. The most appropriate answers were:

"He played with children all the day and then he destroyed the wall."

"Children saw that the Giant isn't angry and they came back and started to play in his garden."

"The Giant loved the boy, but he didn't appear for a long time and the Giant became ill because of it."

"The other children came back and sang. The spring came into the garden. Everybody was happy and they played together."

"The other children came, climbed the trees and started to sing and the spring was everywhere in the garden."

On the other hand there were also responses that showed the students were looking for answers in a different part of the text or that they misunderstood what was happening in the story:

"Little boy killed the Giant."

"The boy and the Giant died."

"Giant came and put him in the tree."

"He was hurt."

"The boy said he had to leave and winter came."

The sixth question "Who was the giant waiting for the next days? Why?" was again easier to understand.

Table 10 - Who was the giant waiting for the next days? Why?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
he was waiting for the little boy	10	5	7	1	23
no answer	3	1	1	2	7
because he loved him	8	4	3	1	16
no answer	5	2	5	2	14

Twenty-three students answered the first part of the question correctly. Out of them sixteen students added the reason why the Giant was waiting for the boy. Surprisingly the higher percentage of non-answered questions appeared with older students.

"He was waiting for the boy because he loved him."
 "He was waiting for the small boy, because the boy didn't come back."
 "For the little boy to come to play. The boy wasn't from the town."

The next three questions asked about the main motives. The first motif was "the little boy". I picked this question intentionally, as I see it as the most important message of the story. When I was reading the story for the first time, meeting with the little boy at the end of the story was the most beautiful and the most moving moment for me. I was sure it is clear to everybody who the boy was, but then I found out on the helpforenglish.cz site that I was wrong. In the commentaries people asked about who the boy was, so I decided to ask my students as well.

Table11 - Who do you think was the little boy?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
angel	6	1	2	1	10
death	2	1	0	1	4
god	0	0	3	0	3
no answer	1	1	1	0	3
IDK answer	2	0	1	0	3
other answers	2	3	1	1	7

The most frequent answer was that the boy was an angel, the other answers used more than once were the death or God. Some students said that he was a good boy, a small magical boy, love, conscience or Spring. Only one student answered that the boy was Jesus.

The second motif I asked about were the bloody marks on the boy's hands and feet. This question I asked because I thought it could help students find out who the boy was. Again my assumption was wrong.

Table12 - How would you explain the bloody marks on his hands and feet?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
no answer	4	1	2	0	7
IDK answer	5	1	4	1	11
other answers	4	4	2	2	12

Eleven students wrote just "I don't know" and seven of them left the question unanswered. Out of the twelve answers, four students wrote exactly according to the text that they are "marks of love", but when I asked them why the marks appeared, they had no notion. Other students wrote that the boy "cut himself", and one answer was that it was because "the boy built a new garden". Only one student wrote that it was because the boy was Jesus. Interestingly, the answer was from a different student of a different class.

However, the third motif appeared to be much narrower and student's answers were mostly right.

Table13 - Where did the boy take the giant? What does it mean?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
heaven / paradise	8	5	8	3	24
no answer	2	1	0	0	3
other answer	3	0	0	0	3

Twenty-four students answered "paradise" or "heaven" or both. Only three students did not answer. Two students wrote just "garden", and one student wrote about redemption. Surprisingly, even in this case it was a different student than in the previous two cases.

Part C of the questionnaire had only one task. I wanted to know whether the text was understandable for the students and if there was any new vocabulary for the students. Twenty-one students left the space empty. The others mentioned the following words: branches, corner, tears, selfish and giant. This could show that the students had no problems with understanding.

The last part of the questionnaire dealt mainly with understanding the message. Students were asked six questions. The first one was: "Do you think this is a fairy tale?" This was the question that first appeared just after Wilde published his short stories, so the choice of this question seemed natural.

Table14 - Do you think this is a fairy tale?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
yes	10	2	6	2	20
no	0	3	2	1	6
no answer	2	0	0	0	2
IDK answer	1	1	0	0	2

Out of the thirty chosen students, twenty of them had no doubts and answered: "Yes, it is." Six other students answered "No", and their reason was

that it does not have the happy ending. Two students wrote that it could be, but they were not sure. Only two students did not give any answer.

The second question "Do you think the ending was happy or sad?" is linked with the previous one in a sense that a happy ending is the first thing we expect from a fairy tale. People generally believe the life is difficult and sad. Fairy tales with a happy ending give them hope for the future. As the story of *The Selfish Giant* ends with death, the happy ending is doubtful. Common belief is that the happy ending must sound like "and they lived happily ever after", so death is considered as a sad ending of a life. On the other hand, we all have to leave this world and die one day. From this perspective, the Giant's death was harmonious and what is more, we can see the motif of the after-life when the Giant is taken to Paradise.

Table15 - Do you think the ending was happy or sad?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
happy	3	0	3	1	7
sad	7	6	3	2	18
both	3	0	2	0	5

Students answered eighteen times that the ending was sad, as the Giant died, but seven students wrote it was happy, that the Giant was redeemed, and the remaining five students answered that the story was both happy and sad, or something in between.

In the third question I asked students about a religious message. In the class, the meaning of the word "religious" had to be explained or translated as students mostly did not know the word.

Table16 - Is there a religious message?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
yes	5	1	7	0	13
no	6	3	1	1	11
no answer	2	0	0	0	2
IDK answer	0	2	0	2	4

However, thirteen students, which is nearly half of them, connected the notion of Paradise and the Angel and answered positively. The other eleven students did not see the link and answered negatively. Two students did not answer and four others wrote they did not know.

The fourth question was about a moral message. The moral message is also considered to be one of the essential features of a fairy tale. In the story of *The Selfish Giant* this message is quite straight. The Giant used to be selfish and he changed during the story.

Table17 - Is there a moral message?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
yes	9	6	7	3	25
no	0	0	1	0	1
no answer	2	0	0	0	2
IDK answer	2	0	0	0	2

This question was answered positively by twenty-five students. One student wrote "No", two students did not answer and two students wrote they did not know.

The fifth question was not connected to the story itself. As there was the religious motif and the students were asked about it, the background of the students' religion seemed important. The answers for the question "Does religion mean anything to you?" did not bring any surprising information.

Table18 - Does religion mean anything to you?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
yes	1	0	0	0	1
no	6	3	6	1	16
no answer	4	3	1	1	9
IDK answer	2	0	1	1	4

Only one student answered "Yes", sixteen answered "No", nine did not give any answer and four of them answered that they were not sure.

The sixth and last question asked the students about what they think Oscar Wilde wanted to teach his children.

Table19 - What do you think Oscar Wilde wanted to teach his children?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
not to be selfish	5	3	4	1	13
be nice	4	1	2	1	8
no answer	0	0	2	1	3
IDK answer	4	2	0	0	6

Thirteen students answered: "Not to be selfish" and eight of them answered: "Be nice to other people". Three students did not answer and six students wrote they did not know.

The students also had the opportunity to comment upon any question in the questionnaire. They were encouraged to explain their opinion or attitude as often as possible. Not many of them used this opportunity. They preferred to answer the simplest way with one word only. However there were some comments which I would like to mention.

One of the interesting findings was that the students answered negatively to the question of the religious motif, but at the same time they wrote the little boy was an angel and that the Giant went to heaven. This shows the students did not see the connection and they were not aware that these were religious motives. One other explanation is that the story was presented and afterwards questioned in just one lesson and they had little time to think about it and to comprehend what the story was exactly about and what was questioned. Another explanation I can offer is that the students are also used to being told everything. They are often told what they should see in the story and what the story is about. Letting students find the answers themselves is very time consuming and of course, even for the needs of this thesis we did not have time enough. On the other hand, the students also lose their concentration and if the work they are supposed to do is not fast enough, they give up and prefer to hand in an empty questionnaire.

The next interesting finding was that some students also take everything literally. They do not have the capacity for abstract thinking, so a garden is just a garden for some of them, and bloody marks are just cuts or scrapes. These answers were found in the questionnaires of the first grade students.

Out of the interesting answers from the second grade students, I would mention an explanation why a student decided it was a fairy tale. He gave two reasons: "It's about a giant. Weather can't read signs." These are definitely signs that the story is not real, and good arguments to say it is a fairy tale.

One student saw the religious message in a more complex way than the others, and wrote: "When we do something good we'll be redeemed and will get to heaven." On the other hand, not all the students from the second grade answered the questions that smartly. To give an example, there was an answer to the question what were the marks: "The boy fell from the tree and die." There was no

evidence for this answer in the text, so it seems it was just the student's imagination.

5.4 Analysis - The Happy Prince

In the second lesson, students were given a similar questionnaire. This also had four parts, and the same kind of organizing questions. The aim of the questions in part A was to find out how much students knew and what they remembered from the previous lesson. Not all the students were present in both lessons which might be the reason the answers were comparable to those in the first lesson.

Table20- Answered questions A

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
yes - writer	6	2	5	1	14
yes - more information	1	0	2	1	4
no	3	6	0	1	10
no answer	2	0	0	0	2

Fourteen students answered that Oscar Wilde was a writer, but they gave no more information. Only four students added at least one more piece of information. Usually they wrote when he lived or what he wrote. Anyway, ten students wrote they remembered nothing and two students did not answer. The story of *The Happy Prince* was new for all of the students.

In part B, there were nine questions again. This time the questions were focused more directly on understanding the story. I tried to ask more Wh-questions, in order to avoid yes/no answers. Most of the questions in this part could be answered on the basis of the text and only the last question demanded some explanation.

Table21- Answered questions B

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
9	5	5	6	2	18
8	7	2	0	0	9
7	0	0	0	0	0
6	0	1	1	1	3

Out of the nine questions in this part, eighteen students answered all of the questions, nine students omitted only one question and the remaining three students answered six out of the nine questions.

The first question "Who are the main characters?" caused no problems everybody answered the same and no student omitted this question.

In the second question I asked: "What time of the year (season) does the story begin?" Students usually answered Autumn or Winter, only two students did not understand the question and wrote a century. Supposedly they misread the question and did not mention the word "season".

The third question was: "What do swallows usually do at this time?" I wanted the students to realize what sacrifice the Swallow made when she stayed with the Prince.

Table22 - What do swallows usually do at this time?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
fly to warm/southern lands	4	4	4	1	13
fly to Egypt	6	4	3	1	14
no answer	2	0	0	1	3

Students usually answered correctly. Thirteen of them wrote that swallows fly to warm countries and fourteen answered according to the text that they fly to Egypt. Two students did not answer and one student wrote a strange answer: "Make a question."

The fourth asked question was: "Why did the Swallow stay with the Happy Prince?" In this question I expected students to find some positive qualities, which they did.

Table23 - Why did the Swallow stay with the Happy Prince?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
she loved him	9	5	3	1	18
she wanted to help him	2	2	3	1	7
he couldn't see	1	0	0	1	2
no answer	0	1	1	0	2

Most students, eighteen of them, saw the reason that the Swallow did not leave was because she loved him. Seven students stated that the Swallow wanted to help the Prince and two directly indicated that the Prince could not see and therefore he needed her to tell him what was happening in the city. Only two students gave no answer.

Here are some replies:

"Because the Prince needed help for this city and the Swallow loved him."

"She didn't want him to be alone after he sacrificed to the unfortunate."

"Why did the Prince give away his precious jewels?" was another question which was expected to be answered without problems.

Table24 - Why did the Prince give away his precious jewels?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
to help the poor people	10	6	5	1	22
other answer	0	1	1	2	4
no answer	2	1	1	0	4

The students' answers were generally based on the text. Twenty-two students wrote that he wanted to help poor people, two students wrote he wanted to make people happy, one student wrote the reason that he was good and one student stated that it was because the people were poor. Only four students did not answer this question.

"Because he was good and he loved the people in his town."

The sixth question "Did it help? Has anything changed in the town?" was meant to follow up the previous one. I wondered whether the students saw only what was in the story or if they had thought what could be between the lines.

Table25 - Did it help? Has anything changed in the town?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
yes	12	4	4	2	22
no	0	1	2	0	3
maybe	0	2	1	0	3
no answer	0	1	0	1	2

Twenty-two students answered that giving away the jewels helped the people in the town. Most of them added that the people had food, some said the people were happier. This is what was written in the story. However three students wrote it did not help and three answered maybe. They also gave the reason for their answers that there were too many poor people that this action could not help. Only two students did not answer this question.

"Yes, the Swallow cooled the fever down, children had food."

"It did help a little, but in the long run the town probably remained unchanged."

"Why did the Swallow die in the end? Was the Swallow happy or sad?" These questions are closely connected, so I put them together. As some students

answered only one of these questions, there are two tables. Each of them shows the answers for one of the questions.

Table26 - Why did the Swallow die in the end?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
because it was cold	6	6	5	0	17
because it did not leave	3	1	1	3	8
no answer	3	1	1	0	5

The first question, why did the Swallow die, was answered by twenty-five students. Seventeen students stated the cold weather as the reason and eight gave the reason that the Swallow did not leave. Five students did not answer the question.

Table27 - Was the Swallow happy or sad?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
happy	9	6	5	2	22
sad	0	0	0	1	1
no answer	3	2	2	0	7

The second part of the question was answered by twenty-three students. Only one student answered the Swallow died sad. All of the other twenty-two students answered that the Swallow was happy, some even added the reason that the Swallow and the Prince were together forever.

"Because she didn't travel south. She was probably happy since she died loved."

Another narrow question was: "Why did the Prince's heart break?" The answer was obvious, so it was good for checking the understanding. In addition I also expected some broader answers.

Table28 - Why did the Prince's heart break?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
because the Swallow died	11	7	5	2	25
other answer	1	1	2	0	4
no answer	0	0	0	1	1

This question was one of the easiest questions in this questionnaire. There was only one student who did not answer. Twenty-five students stated that it was because the Swallow died and four students added some more ideas.

"He felt wretched, the Swallow didn't go to Egypt because of him."

"Because the Swallow was dead and the Mayor wanted to change it for another statue, because the Prince looked poor."

"Because the bird died to spend time with him."

The last question "What did the angel bring to God at the end of the story? Why?" had two parts again. The first table shows the answers for exactly what the angel brought.

Table29 - What did the angel bring to God at the end of the story?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
broken heart and dead swallow	7	5	4	1	17
no answer	3	3	3	2	11
IDK answer	2	0	0	0	2

Even though this question seemed quite easy, it was answered by seventeen students only. I suppose the remaining thirteen students were either tired of the questions or that they did not know where to find the answer.

The second part was also answered by seventeen students. However, not all the students who answered the first part of the question, answered the second part as well. There were also some students who answered only the second part and omitted to write what the precious things were.

Table30 - Why did the angel bring to God the broken heart and the dead Swallow?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
no answer	7	4	1	1	13
because they did good thing	3	3	4	0	10
the most precious thing	2	1	2	2	7

Ten of them wrote the answer: "Because they did a good thing." or some variations of this answer and seven students mentioned: "the most precious thing" as it was in the text.

In part C, twenty two students did not write any vocabulary that could be new for them. The remaining eight students put down these words: sword, melt, swallow and statue. This shows, that vocabulary was not a problem in this story either.

In part D students were asked some of the same questions as in the first questionnaire. The first one I asked again was whether this is a fairy tale.

Table 31 - Is this a fairy tale?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
yes	7	4	4	3	18
no	2	4	3	0	9
no answer	2	0	0	0	2
IDK answer	1	0	0	0	1

While *The Selfish Giant* was recognized as a fairy tale by twenty students, there were just eighteen of them who saw *The Happy Prince* as a fairy tale. Six students said the first one was not a fairy tale and the negative answer was written by nine students for the second story. Two students did not answer and one student wrote "I don't know" for *The Happy Prince* story. There was also a comment by a student:

"I wouldn't read it to my children when I have some."

The question whether the story was sad or happy was answered by all of the students in both cases.

Table32 - Was the ending happy or sad?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
happy	7	2	2	0	11
sad	5	3	4	3	15
happy and sad	0	3	1	0	4

While the ending of the story of *The Selfish Giant* was happy for seven students only, the ending of *The Happy Prince* was happy for eleven of them. Eighteen students marked the ending of the first story as sad and only fifteen students marked sad for the other story. This time there were four students who said the story was both sad and happy, which is comparable to the five same responses in the first questionnaire.

"Sad, but also happy, because they stay together."

"Sad, because the Swallow dies at the end."

"The ending was good, because they will be together forever."

Also in this questionnaire students were asked whether there were some religious motives.

Table33 - Is there a religious message?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
yes	4	6	5	2	17
no	3	0	1	1	5
no answer	3	1	1	0	5
IDK answer	2	1	0	0	3

Seventeen students answered positively to the second story, while only thirteen students saw the religious motif in the first story. Five students answered

negatively, five other students gave no answer and only three students wrote that they did not know if *The Happy Prince* story has any religious motif.

- "Be generous and you're going to heaven."
- "You should be nice to others and you get it back."
- "Yes, they both were redeemed by God."
- "That God exists and there is some after-life."
- "There is presence of God, who rewards main characters for selflessness."

The last identical question that appeared in both questionnaires was the one that tried to ascertain whether the students saw the moral motif in the story.

Table34 - Is there a moral message?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
yes	5	6	7	3	21
no	0	0	0	0	0
no answer	3	2	0	0	5
IDK answer	4	0	0	0	4

This time there were only twenty-one positive responses, but in the first questionnaire there were twenty-five of them. Out of the remaining nine students, five of them did not answer and four of them wrote they did not know. There were no negative answers.

- "The happiness of other people is sometimes more important than our own."
- "Yes, we should help people, but without longing for reward."
- "The story could help encourage children to help others."
- "Yes, be good, because than you will go to God."
- "Yes, help people who are unhappy."
- "There are a few moral values in the story, like putting down your own good for others. The other one I can think of is the loyalty of the Swallow, still loving the Prince even though he became ugly and "poor"."

In the second questionnaire I also added three more general questions. The first of them was: "Are the stories for children, for teenagers or for adults? Why?" This was also one of the questions that arose soon after the publishing of the stories.

Table35 - Who is the story for?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
children	2	1	3	0	6
teenagers	2	0	3	0	5
adults	4	0	0	0	4
all	3	2	0	2	7
teenagers and adults	1	5	1	1	8

Students' answers varied and the number of those who would give the story to children and teenagers was nearly the same as the number who disagreed. Six students wrote the stories are for children, five students wrote they are for teenagers and four students would give the stories to adults only. Seven students did not see any problems to readers of all generations, while eight students thought that children would not understand and that the story is for teenagers and adults.

"Adults and teenagers, because the story is sad and it has a religious message."

"The story is for teenagers, it's too sad for children."

"It is for teenagers, because they often don't appreciate what they have and they are inconsiderate to others."

"The story is for teenagers or adults, because this story was cruel for the Swallow and a bit sad."

"I think it's for adults, it's very hard to understand."

"It is for children because it has a simple plot and straight point."

As mentioned in the previous chapter, some critics compare Wilde's stories to those of the Grimms, or to Andersen's stories. Compared to Wilde, Andersen is much better known as a fairy tale writer, and nearly all of his stories were also made into films. I was sure that the students would mention at least *The Snow Queen* or *The Little Match Seller*. My anticipation was absolutely wrong.

Table36 - Do you know any similar stories?

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
yes	0	1	0	0	1
no	10	4	5	3	22
no answer	2	3	2	0	7

Seven students did not answer and twenty-two students wrote: "No" for the answer. Only one student reacted positively and she mentioned *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. When we talked about the stories afterwards, I directly asked them if they saw any similarities between Wilde's and Andersen's stories. Then the students admitted that there was some resemblance.

At the end of the questionnaire I asked students to make any comment on the lessons.

Table37 - Make any comment on the lesson.

class	OA1	OA2	PO2	OS3	total
interesting	2	0	3	0	5
like it	3	0	2	2	7
sad but beautiful	2	1	0	0	3
not like	0	0	2	1	3
no comment	5	7	0	0	12

Even though twelve of the students did not make any comments, there were also five answers that the lessons and stories were interesting, seven students wrote that they liked them and three students wrote the stories were sad but beautiful. On the other hand, there were also three students who wrote they did not like it and that they would prefer normal lessons. If we count those positive responses together, we get the result that just fifteen students enjoyed the lessons, which is exactly half of the chosen responses.

As well as in the first questionnaire, there were some other interesting comments I would like to quote.

"It was better than typical lesson."

"This story makes no sense for me. It is so weird. I don't like it. Just regular lesson but it was cool."

"The lesson was fantastic. It was more enjoyable than normal lessons and for me it is better to learn English this way when I can hear English from native speakers."

"I liked this story but it's not my main genre of a book."

"It's not very nice. It's too sad and it doesn't give me anything."

"I prefer normal English lessons."

"I think the story is educative, for thinking about how people behave to each other and that there are also good-hearted people."

"I like it. I think it's better than normal lesson. I also think it's more useful."

"I like it, it was very interesting and unusual."

"It was very sad when the Swallow died and the Prince's heart was broken, but it was also very beautiful."

Conclusion

In this thesis we wanted to present Oscar Wilde as an author of fairy tales and to show how interesting the tales are for contemporary readers.

Firstly, we focused on aspects of Wilde's life that motivated him to write these stories, such as his relationship with his sons and the influences of other writers of the 19th century. To find out about Wilde's life we used Hyde's biography, as it is one of the extended ones, and also the book written by Wilde's younger son Vyvyan Holland.

Secondly, the attention was driven towards the motives and messages Wilde used in the stories, namely the religious and moral ones. To support interpretation of the messages and motives, Killeen's and McCormack's books appeared as those most thorough ones. Another helpful book that extensively analysed Wilde's motives was the collection of stories compiled by his own grandson Merlin Holland.

The main part of the thesis consists of the interpretation of two of the Wilde's tales in class. At first I chose them just because I loved them most. Later, while searching the reviews and other sources I discovered that these two stories were also Wilde's favourites and that they are most internally connected to his own life. The story of *The Selfish Giant* shows how Oscar Wilde saw himself, and *The Happy Prince* showed his relationship with his wife and with his male lover.

The stories were presented in five different classes of the secondary school. Students were asked many questions, so that we could find out how much they understood and what motives they saw in the stories. In both cases there were some similar questions. We found out that it is difficult for one third of the students to see the stories as fairy tales, because they do not think they have a happy ending. On the other hand there were also students, who saw the assumption of the main characters as a happy ending.

As we expected, religion is not important for the students. However, half of them were able to find the religious motif in the stories and some of them even wrote about the redemption of the Giant and the Prince. The moral message, which Wilde himself did not like to present, was quite clear for eight out of ten students.

Wilde also expressed his opinion that the stories are for all generations, children, as well as adults. Even critics wrote about this aspect of the tales repeatedly, as many of them considered the tales not suitable for children. The same opinion appeared in the students answers. In the same way this question divided the readers at the end of the 19th century, it divided the students of today.

Finally, we wanted to show whether Wilde's fairy tales are interesting for secondary school students. It is very difficult to find something attractive for teenagers, namely those who study ordinary secondary school. In this respect, we can say, that the aim was fulfilled. Half of the students stated that they enjoyed the lessons and considering their effort during the classes, there must have been more of them who liked the tales.

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Appendix:

1. Shortened version "The Selfish Giant"
2. Shortened version "The Happy Prince"
3. Questionnaire "The Selfish Giant"
4. Questionnaire "The Happy Prince"

Oscar Wilde: The Selfish Giant (elementary)

Vydáno dne 26.07.2006

Pohádka Oscara Wilda ‚Sobecký obr‘ psaná zjednodušenou angličtinou pro úroveň elementary (pokročilejší začátečníky). Nyní obsahuje i zvukovou nahrávku!

The Selfish Giant

Oscar Wilde

Retold by Marek Vít

Nahrávku můžete spustit zde:

[Stáhnout mp3](#)

Once, there was a giant. The giant had a garden, and the garden was full of beautiful flowers, green grass and peach trees. Every summer, the trees had sweet fruit.

One day, the giant decided to visit his friend far away in the mountains. He left his castle and nobody saw him for seven years!

When the giant was gone, little children found his garden and went there every day after school. They played in the grass, climbed the trees and sang in the branches. Every summer they ate the sweet peaches from the trees. They were very happy.

Seven years passed and the giant came back. When he saw the children in his garden, he was very angry. "Go away and never come back!" he shouted. "This is my garden and nobody can play here!" He built a high wall all around the garden and wrote a sign in big letters: "DO NOT ENTER!" He was a very selfish giant, he only liked himself.

The children were very sad. Every day they walked past the wall and remembered the beautiful garden.

Then winter came and after winter it was spring again. The grass was green and there were beautiful flowers everywhere. But the giant's garden was still covered with snow and ice. Spring did not enter the garden, because it saw the big sign. And flowers did not grow there, because there were no children.



Ilustrace: [Markéta Vydrová](#)

The giant was very unhappy. He looked out of the window of his castle. "Where is the spring? I hope the weather will change soon." But the weather did not change. There was always snow, and cold wind was running around the garden.



One morning the giant was lying in his bed. Suddenly he heard some beautiful music. "What is it?" he thought.

He looked out of the window of his room and saw the children. They were sitting in the trees and they were singing. The trees were green and there were white flowers in the grass below. Only in one corner of the garden it was still winter. A small boy was standing there and he was so small that he couldn't climb the tree. He was crying.

The giant said to himself: "I was very selfish!" and he went out of his castle. When the children saw him, they ran away and winter returned. Only the little boy did not run, because his eyes were full of tears. The giant took him in his hand and put him in the tree. The boy was very happy and he loved the giant. When the other children saw that the giant is not angry, they came back. They climbed up the trees and started singing. Now it was spring everywhere in the garden. There were beautiful pink flowers in the trees.

The giant played with the children all day. When they went home, he destroyed the wall and the sign. He was not selfish any more.

The next day the children came back and they played in the garden again. But the small boy did not come. The giant was very sad and asked the children: "Where is the small boy?" The children answered: "We don't know, we don't know him, he doesn't live here." And the giant was very unhappy because he loved the boy. He waited for him every day, but the boy did not come again. The giant became very ill.

One day, he saw the small boy in the garden. The giant was very happy and ran to him. But the boy was hurt, there were bloody marks on his hands and feet. "Who did this to you?" asked the giant angrily. "These are marks of love," the boy said sweetly.

"Who are you?" the giant asked in wonder.

"You let me play in your garden," the boy said. "Today, you will come with me to my garden, to Paradise."

When the children came to play in the garden later that day, they found the giant dead. He was covered with beautiful white flowers.



Slovíčka z této povídky si můžete procvičit a naučit zde:
[Okruhy slovíček: The Selfish Giant](#)

Informace o autorovi a další povídky a pohádky od něho naleznete zde:
[Author page: Oscar Wilde](#)

Autorka ilustrací:

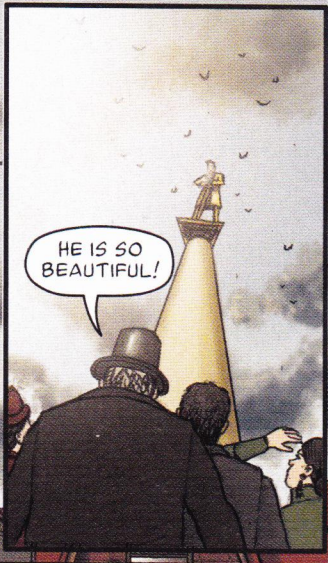
Markéta Vydrová, výtvarnice. Zabývá se různými odvětvími výtvarné činnosti. Ilustruje knihy, především ty pro děti

THE HAPPY PRINCE

A1

STORY: OSCAR WILDE • SCRIPT: JO MOLLOY (UK)
ART: MICHAEL PETRUS (CZ) • LETTERING: MANKIN (SK)

A LONG TIME AGO, THERE WAS A CITY WITH A GOLDEN STATUE OF A HAPPY PRINCE.



HE IS SO BEAUTIFUL!



ARE YOU COMING? WE ARE LEAVING FOR EGYPT.



I AM GOING TO STAY FOR A BIT.

HURRY UP! THE WINTER IS COMING!



WHAT IS THIS? IS IT RAINING?



OH, IT'S YOU! WHY ARE YOU CRYING?

I AM SAD WHEN I SEE ALL THE UNHAPPINESS IN THE CITY.

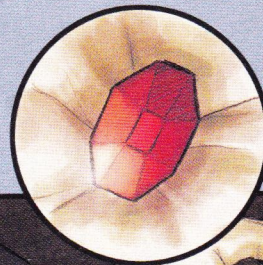


THERE IS A POOR WOMAN AND HER SON IS ILL. SHE HAS NO MONEY TO BUY ANYTHING.

PLEASE, TAKE THE RUBY OUT OF MY SWORD AND GIVE IT TO HER.



I WILL HELP YOU. BUT THEN I MUST FLY TO EGYPT BEFORE THE WINTER COMES.



POOR BOY. THIS WILL COOL THE FEVER DOWN.



IT IS COLD BUT I FEEL WARM.

THAT IS BECAUSE YOU DID SOMETHING GOOD.

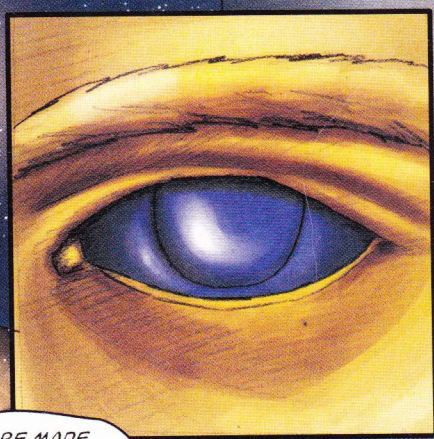
I MUST FLY NOW.



CAN YOU STAY WITH ME ONE MORE NIGHT, PLEASE?



THERE'S A YOUNG MAN. HE IS WRITING A PLAY FOR THE THEATRE. BUT HE IS COLD AND HUNGRY.



MY EYES ARE MADE OF SAPPHIRES, CAN YOU TAKE HIM ONE?



WHAT WILL THE SWALLOW DO? WILL SHE TAKE ONE OF THE HAPPY PRINCE'S EYES? OR WILL SHE LEAVE FOR EGYPT? SCAN THE CODE AND FIND OUT ON OUR WEBSITE WWW.BRIDGE-ONLINE.CZ, OR LISTEN TO THE REST OF THE STORY ON THE CD.



VOCABULARY

- statue ['stætʃu:] – socha
- for a bit – chvílku
- Hurry up! ['hʌri] – Pospěš si!
- unhappiness [ʌn'hæpɪnɪs] – neštěstí, smutek
- ruby ['ru:bi] – rubín
- sword [sɔ:d] – meč
- cool the fever down ['fi:və] – zchladit horečku
- sapphire [sæ'fʌɪə] – safír

Oscar Wilde The Happy Prince

Narrator: *The end of the story about the Happy Prince.*

Swallow: I will wait with you one night longer.

Narrator: *Said the Swallow, and took one of the Happy Prince's sapphire eyes. She flew above the city to the poor young man. The young man was happy to see the Swallow.*

Young man: Now I can finish my play!

Narrator: *The next day the happy Swallow flew down to the sea and shouted:*

Swallow: I am going to Egypt!

Narrator: *She was very excited. She flew back to the Happy Prince to say goodbye.*

Happy Prince: Swallow, little Swallow, will you stay with me one more night?

Swallow: The winter and snow are coming. In Egypt the sun is warm. I must go, dear Prince. I will not forget you. I will come back! And I will bring you a ruby redder than a rose and a sapphire as blue as the sea.

Happy Prince: Please, stay. There is a poor girl in the square. She is crying because she bought matches and they are wet. Her father will beat her if she doesn't bring back any money. Take my other sapphire eye and give it to her.

Swallow: Alright, I'll stay with you. But I can't take your last eye, you will not see.

Happy Prince: Swallow, little Swallow, do as I say.

Narrator: So the little Swallow took the Happy Prince's last eye and flew to the girl. She put the sapphire into the girl's hand. The girl was happy and ran back home with it. The Swallow flew back to the prince.

Swallow: You can't see now, so I will stay with you always.

Narrator: *And the Swallow slept. The next day she sat on the Prince's shoulder and told him stories about Egypt.*

Happy Prince: My dear Swallow, you tell me so many nice things. But please fly over the city and tell me how the people are doing.

Narrator: *The Swallow flew over the great city. She saw the rich people in their beautiful homes, and then the poor people on the streets. There were two poor hungry little boys who were trying to keep warm. She flew back to the Prince and told him everything.*

Happy Prince: My clothes are made of gold. Take the gold and give it to my poor people in the city.

Narrator: *Swallow took the pieces of gold and gave them to the poor. Soon she saw the children playing in the streets because they had bread to eat. Then the snow came and the Swallow felt colder and colder. But she never left the Prince because she loved him. At last the Swallow knew she was going to die.*

Swallow: Goodbye, dear Prince! May I kiss you on your head?

Happy Prince: I am happy you are going to Egypt, little Swallow. You have stayed here too long. You must kiss me on the lips because I love you.

Swallow: I am not going to Egypt, it is too late now. I am going to die.

Narrator: *The Swallow kissed the Prince and fell down. She was dead. At that moment there was a sound inside the statue. The Happy Prince's heart broke in two pieces. The next morning the mayor walked by.*

Mayor: Dear me, look how old and dirty the Happy Prince looks. His ruby is gone, he has no eyes, he is grey and not gold and he looks poor. There is even a dead bird! Take him away. Melt him and we can make another statue from him.

Narrator: *The workman tried to melt the statue but could not melt the two pieces of the Happy Prince's heart.*

Workman: This broken heart will not melt in the fire. We must throw it away.

Narrator: *And they threw the heart away on an old dump where the Swallow was. God asked one of his angels to bring him the two most precious things in the city, and so the angel came back with the Prince's heart and the dead Swallow.*

God: You have chosen well! This little bird will sing and the Happy Prince will love me forever in my house.

The Selfish Giant - Oscar Wilde

A) before reading:

Who is Oscar Wilde? When did he live? What did he do?

What is his most famous work?

Have you ever read anything from him?

B) after reading - understanding:

What selfish thing did the giant do?

Why didn't the spring come to the giant's garden?

What happened in the garden when children appeared there again?

What did the giant do with the crying little boy?

What happened then?

Who was the giant waiting for the next days? Why?

Who do you think was the little boy?

How would you explain the bloody marks on his hands and feet?

Where did the boy take the giant? What does it mean?

C) vocabulary:

Write down any word that was new for you:

D) understanding - the message:

Do you think this is a fairy tale?

Do you think the ending was happy or sad?

Is there a religious message?

Is there a moral message?

Does religion mean anything to you?

What do you think Oscar Wilde wanted to teach his children?

The Happy Prince - Oscar Wilde

A) before reading:

What do you remember about Oscar Wilde?

Have you read The Happy Prince story?

B) after reading - understanding:

Who are the main characters?

What time of the year (season) does the story begin?

What do swallows usually do at this time?

Why did the Swallow stay with the Happy Prince?

Why did the Prince give away his precious jewels?

Did it help? Has anything changed in the town?

Why did the Swallow die in the end? Was the Swallow happy or sad?

Why did the Prince's heart break?

What did the angel bring to God at the end of the story? Why?

C) vocabulary:

Write down any word that was new for you:

D) understanding - the message:

Is this a fairy tale?

Was the ending happy or sad?

Is there a religious message? What?

Is there a moral message? What?

Are the stories for children, for teenagers or for adults? Why?

Do you know any similar stories? Which?

Make any comment on the lessons: