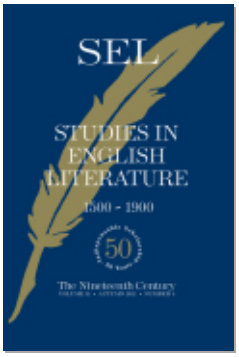
Morality's Ugly Implications in Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales

Justin T. Jones



SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, Volume 51, Number 4, Autumn 2011, pp. 883-903 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2011.0039*

SEL 51, 4 (Autumn 2011): 883–903
ISSN 0039-3657

Morality's Ugly Implications in Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales

JUSTIN T. JONES

Beauty has always been an important topic in fairy tale literature. Cinderella's magnificent beauty makes her stepsisters appear odious by comparison—though none of the variations of the tale refers to them as ugly—and Snow White's beauty is the envy of the kingdom and the primary cause of all her troubles. Beauty is personified in Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" (1757), and her lovely appearance outwardly reflects the compassion she has for her beastly suitor.[1] Moral rectitude almost always goes hand-in-hand with physical beauty in these tales, but few characters lose their beauty as they face their moral tests. Indeed, the authors of more conventional tales usually ascribe ugliness to those characters portrayed as morally confused or completely immoral: witches, giants, ogres, trolls, goblins, and sometimes animals such as wolves or serpents. Thus Snow White's evil stepmother "stain[s] her face" to enact her heinous plot to kill the young girl, effacing her terrible beauty to become the ugly old woman.[2] These characters' outer ugliness often reflects their inner deformities of vice and corruption.[3] Such are some of the typical conventions that govern the genre, but Oscar Wilde's fairy tales are, quite literally, another story.

In Wilde's unorthodox tales, ugliness frequently accompanies the often brutal moral instruction of his most beautiful characters. This ugliness is not always manifested physically, but whenever it occurs, it disrupts the fairy-tale-world aesthetic completely, causing either the death of a main character or a shift in the tale's fundamental concept of beauty. Incredibly, many of Wilde's critics

Justin T. Jones recently completed his Ph.D. in Victorian Literature at the University of North Texas in Denton where he teaches World and British Literature and Composition as lecturer in the Department of English.

read his tales as traditional homilies because of their inclusion of such apparently blatant moral lessons. John Allen Quintus suggests that Wilde was simply a product of his age and could not resist the Victorian "predilection to preach,"[4] and Robert K. Martin claims that Wilde's most popular tale, "The Happy Prince," is a semi-autobiographical account of the author's "change of heart," resulting in his sudden contempt for "hedonism and aestheticism."[5] Other commentators on the tales have been less willing to believe in Wilde's "moral prerogative," but these readers generally go to the opposite extreme and focus exclusively on the tales' alleged homosexual or pederastic undertones. For example, Naomi Wood writes that Wilde's tales are textual opportunities for "soliciting" his younger audience members "with more than words"; Wood asserts that Wilde's stories "encode the vision of an idealistic pederast."[6]

In contrast to the tales of the classical tradition, however, Wilde's fairy tales challenge the superficial moral tenets of the British bourgeoisie. In his essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism" (1891), Wilde affirms that many of his contemporaries exacerbate the plight of the poor and ruin their own chances for a fulfilling life through misguided humanitarian endeavors: "The majority of people spoil their lives by an unhealthy and exaggerated altruism—are forced, indeed, so to spoil them."[7] The source of this compulsion, Wilde explains, is the rigid set of "altruistic virtues" promulgated by those on the upper rungs of the social ladder (p. 1079). Since Wilde's program for significant social change requires freedom for every individual—especially the artist—from all such compulsions, his tales indict the burden such systematic moralism places on the individual.[8] The tales employ ironic moments of moral instruction—accompanied by the ugliness of the characters and/or the surroundings—to mark the boundary between artistic beauty and coarse reality and to highlight the moral hypocrisy of those in his audience who would extol the virtues of charity and compassion for the less fortunate while supporting the class system responsible for their condition.

Unlike the stories of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, Wilde's tales do not uphold the hypocritical social mores of the middle and upper classes. Instead, Wilde includes elements of those lessons to make a point about the relationship between morality and art. In keeping with his desire to subvert the moral claims the ill-informed Victorian upper classes placed on works of art, Wilde includes real-world moral issues in his tales to illustrate how "Life … is the solvent that breaks up Art, the

enemy that lays waste her house."[9] He uses the typically didactic but artistically rich genre of the fairy tale to demonstrate how morality functions as a ponderous anchor in reality, preventing the more elevated artistic elements of his stories from achieving true beauty, which is accomplished through the uninhibited expression of the artist's personality. In other words, the artist's aesthetic prerogative takes precedence over ugly reality and its moral authority. Once Wilde subjects one of his fairy tale characters to moral correction, that character is in danger of losing his otherworldly beauty or his love of beauty for its own sake—both gifts of the supermoral realm of art. Wilde's creations must either reject the moral outright (the Infanta, the Water-rat), succumb to a revised aesthetic where Christ's image is the source of beauty (the Young King, the Happy Prince), or die as a result of their moral knowledge (the Star-Child, the Selfish Giant). I shall argue that Wilde's tales resist the authority of shallow, bourgeois morality by flouting the conventions of the classical fairy tale tradition, and I shall suggest that Wilde uses the concept of ugliness in his tales to illustrate the corrosive influence of such superficial morality on artistic beauty. I shall then demonstrate morality's adverse effects on the fantastic world of pure art in three of Wilde's stories: "The Birthday of the Infanta" (1889), "The Young King" (1888), and "The Star-Child" (1891).

Wilde's tales often contain references to popular tales in the classical tradition, but these are rarely typical allusions; they subvert or contradict the central themes of the stories they evoke. One such reference occurs in "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888), which is arguably Wilde's critical response to "The Nightingale" (1843) by Andersen. In Andersen's story, the Imperial Court of China admires the altruistic nightingale for his beautiful music. Unlike the unfortunate bird of Wilde's tale, whose sacrificial gift is rejected out of hand, Andersen's nightingale eventually saves the Chinese Emperor's life and becomes his closest advisor, "sing[ing] not only of those who are happy but also of those who suffer" and bringing the kindhearted ruler news "of the good and of the evil that happen around [him]."[10] Because of his willingness to help someone in need (and submit to governmental authority), Andersen's bird gains the most influential position in the Chinese Empire. But Wilde's selfless singer of love gives his life for nothing and influences no one. Jack Zipes highlights the subverting effect of Wilde's ironic retelling of Andersen's tale: "Whereas Andersen in his fairy tale portrays the nightingale as an artist and has him heal a king's sickness through his singing, Wilde is intent on re-

vealing the shallow values of the student and his sweetheart and the vain efforts of the nightingale as artist to change them."[11] A reader familiar with Wildean aesthetics might expect an echo of Andersen's exaltation of the artist, but instead Wilde's tale focuses on the student's shallow (but more realistic) concept of love and on how that superficiality destroys the beauty of the bird's musical martyrdom. As Clifton Snider notes, "Wilde as a writer of fairy tales … wrote to undermine stereotypical Victorian values," and certainly "The Nightingale and the Rose" undermines the established social values expressed in Andersen's "The Nightingale."[12]

In addition to dialogic and ironic responses like the one in "The Nightingale and the Rose," Wilde frequently inverts generic fairy tale structures to denote his break with convention and to complicate the relationship between beauty and morality in his stories. For example, many of Wilde's tales contain talking flora and fauna—a longstanding tradition in fairy tale literature—but Wilde's blooms, birds, and beasts typically display an unnatural preoccupation with pragmatism, social status, and other distinctly human concerns. The various animals and flowers of the Nightingale's garden think the lovelorn student's act of "weeping for a red rose" is "ridiculous," and the Lizard "laugh[s] outright" at such a romantic notion.[13] The garden flowers in "The Birthday of the Infanta" mock the lower-class birds for their "vulgarising" incessant movement and distinguish themselves as "well-bred" members of high society because of their stationary nature.[14] In contrast, classical fairy tales tend to use animals as morally pure metamorphosed humans or as one-dimensional expressions of carnal primitivism (e.g., the Frog Prince and Red Riding Hood's lupine adversary, respectively), but rarely do these creatures ever voice the banal concerns of the bourgeoisie. Wilde's sardonic flowers and cynical critters also highlight the paradoxical dynamic between physical beauty and moral repugnance that runs through all his tales. These bizarrely urbane animals and plants express unattractive sentiments, and the result is a series of ugly ideas spoken from the mouths of nature's most beautiful creations.

Wilde's fairy tales further defy generic convention in their repeated rejection of the happily-ever-after trope of the classical tradition. The story of Cinderella would hardly instill the middle-class values of hard work and humility if she had a heart attack or developed breast cancer shortly after marrying the prince. Nevertheless, Wilde chooses to end seven of his nine fairy tales with the death of one of the main characters—often as a direct result of his moral reformation.[15] The Star-Child's "suffering" during

his trials with the wicked magician is "so great" that "after the space of three years he died," and he is replaced as king by an evil despot.[16] The Selfish Giant recognizes the value of sharing beauty with others only to die at the command of the Christlike "boy he had loved."[17] Though the Happy Prince is already technically dead when his story begins, the virtuous heart that lives on inside his bejeweled statue ends up on the "dust-heap," along with the stiff carcass of his partner in philanthropy, the Swallow.[18] In each of these cases, though there are occasional promises of honors to come in the hereafter, Wilde rewards his characters' good deeds and burgeoning moral sensibilities with peremptory death.

With very few exceptions, moral education brings a destructive sense of reality to Wilde's fairy tales, and that reality slowly dissolves the colorful and tactile luxury of those tales from the inside and ruins any hope of a happy ending. Ironically, the only story in Wilde's canon of short fiction that ends with a variation on the happily-ever-after trope is "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" (1887)—a tale in which the main character has committed an act of murder (and several attempted murders) out of an acquiescence to the supposed intractability of fate and a bizarre sense of duty. Lord Arthur's act of cold-blooded homicide—a decidedly immoral act—earns him marital bliss with Sybil and a vague sense of perpetual youth: "For them romance was not killed by reality. They always felt young."[19] In this story at least, the "romance" of Wilde's aesthetic realm remains undisturbed by the ugly "reality" that eats its way into virtually all of his fairy tales via intense moral pedagogy. Philip K. Cohen lauds Wilde's tales' ability to confront real problems—rather than resorting to simple escapism—but he also notes the tales' tendency to allow their "reality" to overwhelm and defeat their elements of fantastic beauty, their "romance": "Rather than the humanized, unified world common to fairy tales, Wilde almost always presents a setting marked by division, fragmentation, and irreconcilable strife. In the most important manifestation of struggle, reality and romance, together with Christian and anti-Christian values that, respectively, adhere to them, are the antagonists. Reality usually wins."[20] Reality frequently "wins" by killing off the very characters that succumb to moral enlightenment: the compassionate Happy Prince, the reformed and philanthropic Star-Child, the selfless Nightingale, and the generous Selfish Giant. In Wilde's fairy tale universe, few live happily ever after because few are allowed to live at all. Instead, Wilde uses death as an ironic reward for the moral characters in his tales; rather than frightening young readers into morality with the grisly

deaths of the immoral characters—as the Brothers Grimm do in "Hansel and Gretel" (1812) and "Little Red Riding Hood" (1812), for example—Wilde reserves death and physical deterioration for his most morally scrupulous creations.[21] The beauty of Wilde's characters begins to fade the moment the threat of moral conformity touches their lives, and the predominant options they have in the face of such moral exposure are denial, aesthetic revision, or death. And of all of Wilde's fairy-tale characters, the Spanish Infanta best represents the first of these choices.

The landscape of the opulent Spanish Court in "The Birthday of the Infanta" is peopled with creatures from the world of art.[22] Wilde paints the blinding beauty of the Infanta's special day in exquisite detail in the story's opening lines: "purple butterflies" with "gold dust on their wings" dart among the "straight" and "splendid" flowers, and the lemons display "a richer colour from the wonderful sunlight" as the magnolia blossoms "[fill] the air with a sweet heavy perfume" (p. 234). The children on the palace terrace move with "stately grace" and wear fancy, ceremonial garments of state: "the boys with their large-plumed hats and short fluttering cloaks, the girls holding up the trains of their long brocade gowns" (p. 234). Only the melancholy King, brooding over the death of the Queen inside the palace, casts a shadow over these elegant proceedings. The exaggerated pain of his grief removes him from the innocent beauty promenading on the terrace. In response to those foreign dignitaries who urge the mournful monarch to remarry, he instructs his ambassadors to report that "the King of Spain was already wedded to Sorrow, and that though she was but a barren bride he loved her better than Beauty" (p. 236). The King's exaggerated grief has overwhelmed his aesthetic sense and disrupted the beautiful majesty of the Court; but, the Infanta suffers no such pains of conscience. She thinks her father "silly" for shirking the bright sunlight in favor of his "gloomy chapel," and with a toss of her "pretty head," she denies the claims of filial obligation and remains firmly within the realm of art (p. 236).

The entertainments presented at the Infanta's birthday celebration are only diluted representations of reality—highly stylized and exaggerated to avoid verisimilitude—and they allow the children to retain their innocent beauty and keep their aesthetic world intact. Several of the children perform a mock bullfight in ludicrous costumes, yet the Infanta thinks the "sham" fight is "much nicer … than the real bull-fight that she had been brought to see at Seville" (pp. 236–7). The fake bull, a playful child in

"wickerwork and stretched hide" who occasionally weakens the illusion by standing up and "running round the arena on his hind legs," is described as "just like a live bull." No bloody wounds or inhumane taunts of a frightened animal enter into the world of make believe; the artifice preserves the uninhibited enjoyment of a symbolically violent performance. When the bull is decapitated at the fight's end, the description is quite graphic in its violence, but instead of bloody gore and death, the fatal blow of the young toreador's "wooden sword" reveals only "the laughing face of little Monsieur de Lorraine" (p. 237).

Similarly, the Italian puppet show performance of *Sophonisba* allows the children and courtiers to witness the tragic tale of enforced suicide without moral investment. Not only is the subject matter of the play far removed from anything that might disturb the Spanish nobles, but also the tragic story is enacted by wooden marionettes, which cannot express realistic emotion or elicit genuine sympathy from their audience. Nevertheless, the puppets bring the children to tears and profoundly affect the impassive Grand Inquisitor: "[The puppets] acted so well, and their gestures were so extremely natural, that at the close of the play the eyes of the Infanta were quite dim with tears. Indeed some of the children really cried, and had to be comforted with sweetmeats, and the Grand Inquisitor himself was so affected that he could not help saying to Don Pedro that it seemed to him intolerable that things made simply out of wood and coloured wax, and worked mechanically by wires, should be so unhappy and meet with such terrible misfortunes" (p. 237). The children's transient grief is easily assuaged by treats, and the Grand Inquisitor responds to the sorrow of the performers only because they are not flesh and blood. Just as the mock bull is "like a live bull," the wooden actors are "extremely natural." Here, Wilde presents art undisturbed and uncorrupted by real life; as he wrote in "The Decay of Lying" (1889), "The world has become sad because a puppet was once melancholy."[23] As long as the spectacles contain no vestiges of reality, they hold no ugly appeals to conscience and do not threaten the pure beauty of the Infanta's fairy tale world.

Ugliness enters that fairy tale world in the figure of the Dwarf, however, and his presence ultimately provides the greatest danger to the aesthetic stability of the Infanta's palace of art. The nameless Dwarf dies with infinite pathos, but the Infanta's seemingly cruel response in the face of that death marks the tale's rejection of bourgeois morality's preoccupation with pain in favor of the joyous world of beauty.[24] Nevertheless, some critics have pointed

to this tale's ending as an indication of an implicit moralism in Wilde's work.[25] For example, Christopher S. Nassaar correctly asserts that the Infanta retains her "innocence" throughout the story, but his suggestion that "the tale is a clear appeal to the reader to recognize human suffering, develop a heart, and attain a state of higher innocence" seems less plausible in light of Wilde's insistence on the failure of compulsive morality.[26] Though some readers and critics consider his aesthetic tenets to be ironic—a hasty conclusion, I would argue—one of Wilde's maxims from the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) explains the Dwarf's tragic mistake: "Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming."[27] After looking in the mirror, the Dwarf finds an "ugly meanin[g]" in his own appearance and in his dance for the Infanta, which was by all accounts an artistically "beautiful thin[g]." Significantly, the Dwarf initially thinks his reflection is the Infanta, who is standing across the room awaiting his gift—a fanciful idea to be sure, but one uncorrupted by self-loathing and despair. Nevertheless, the Dwarf's death occurs because he conceptualizes his ugliness in the Infanta's mirror, which ruins the beautiful picture of his courtly dance.[28] After all, his innocent oblivion of that ugliness makes him "irresistible" to the Infanta and her guests and provides the greatest source of his happiness: "Perhaps the most amusing thing about him was his complete unconsciousness of his own grotesque appearance. Indeed he seemed quite happy and full of the highest spirits" (p. 239). The Dwarf's awakening to his "grotesque" and "misshapen" form also destroys the ideal romance he had created during his romp in the garden, resulting in his symbolic, violent destruction of the white rose he brought for the Infanta (p. 239). The Dwarf's awareness of his "loathsome[ness]" and the moral implications that accompany that awareness have sealed his doom (p. 246). His preoccupation with the pain of cruelty and humiliation corrupts the beauty of his dance for the Infanta and the splendor of his time in the palace garden, and his presence in the story mars the Infanta's aesthetic Court. He has looked through the mirrored window into the real world and introduced cruel reality into the palace of art.[29]

Whereas the Dwarf dies as the result of his moral epiphany, the Infanta—as princess of the realm of art—remains separate from the ugly reality of his death, lest she learn a platitudinous moral lesson and cease to be beautiful. During the Dwarf's poignant last moments, as he pounds his fists on the floor and enacts his melodramatic death, the Infanta and her friends ar-

rive in time to view the spectacle. Indeed, the Infanta thinks the Dwarf's real suffering is "acting" and declares it to be "funnier still" than his dancing. His actual death is "capital" and elicits an encore from the children (p. 246). The Infanta does not recognize the ugly reality of the situation; she chooses to treat it like an artistic performance. And her curt response to the Chamberlain's diagnosis of a broken heart as the most likely cause of the Dwarf's death highlights her refusal to acknowledge the ugly claims of unhappiness and mortality: "For the future let those who come to play with me have no hearts" (p. 247). In other words, the hollow moral constraints that would demand sympathy for the Dwarf while simultaneously branding him a monster have no authority in the playhouse of art, so those who wish to enter that world must leave behind their "hearts"—those specious moral notions that comprise what Wilde in "The Soul of Man under Socialism" calls the spectator's "silly views, his own foolish prejudices, his own absurd ideas of what Art should be, or should not be" (p. 1096). Because the Infanta denies the ugly reality—and implied morality—of the Dwarf's pathetic death, she retains the beauty of her "dainty rose-leaf lips" and expresses her final sentiment with "pretty disdain" before running back to the perennial beauty of "the garden" (p. 247). But not all of Wilde's fairy tale characters fare so well as the Infanta, who is allowed to maintain her aesthetic purity in the opulent Spanish Court in spite of the invasion of ugly morality. At least one of Wilde's creations must opt for a revised aesthetic in order to maintain his beauty and avoid death in the face of hideous moral knowledge, and such is the case with "The Young King."

The Young King—the son of either a wandering lute player or "an artist from Rimini"—comes by his aesthetic sensibility naturally.[30] Though his father's identity may only be speculation, the story makes it clear that, whoever he was, he possessed some extraordinary artistic skill that seduced the young Princess into marrying "much beneath her in station" (p. 224). And the Young King instinctively admires the aesthetic splendor of his newfound royal surroundings: "from the very first moment of his recognition he had shown signs of that strange passion for beauty that was destined to have so great an influence over his life" (p. 225). Like the woodland Dwarf from "The Birthday of the Infanta," the Young King grew up in the forest, where he lived among goatherds as a Pan-like child of nature, before the dying King's men plucked him from nature's bosom and placed him in the royal palace *Joyeuse*, surrounding him with fantastic ornament and luxury. Unlike the

Dwarf, whose monstrous reflection ruins his appreciation of all beautiful things, the Young King gluts his senses with every splendid detail of his lush environment, adorning his chambers with "rich tapestries representing the Triumph of Beauty" (p. 226). He moves around the palace in a virtual trance, like beauty's devoted acolyte, absorbing all the sensual stimuli it has to offer, "feeling through a certain quick instinct, which was almost a divination, that the secrets of art are best learned in secret, and that Beauty, like Wisdom, loves the lonely worshipper" (p. 225). The presence of Paterian aesthetics is palpable in this description, as are the echoes of Wilde's characterization of Dorian Gray's "yellow book" period.[31] Like Dorian, the Young King is ostensibly a natural aesthete, made to spend his life in the worship of art, but the moral claims of his dreams disrupt his palatial lifestyle and force him to adopt an alternative, pseudoreligious aesthetic.

The Young King's three dreams—each one a minisermon on the horrendous sufferings of his ugly subjects—are replete with grotesque images and other sensory details that offend all five senses with equal ferocity. The opening description of the first dream is startling in its repugnancy, particularly when juxtaposed with the preceding passages of rich, artistic luxuriance: "The meagre daylight peered in through the grated windows, and showed him the gaunt figures of the weavers bending over their cases. Pale, sickly-looking children were crouched on the huge crossbeams … Their faces were pinched with famine, and their thin hands shook and trembled. Some haggard women were seated at a table sewing. A horrible odour filled the place. The air was foul and heavy, and the walls dripped and streamed with damp" (pp. 226–7). These poor weavers, with their "pinched" and "haggard" faces, are certainly different from the exuberant Young King, whose boyish face is "too happy" to be counted among the miserable inhabitants of the weaving room (p. 227). They are well aware of the social injustice of their plight, as the one weaver who speaks makes plain, and the King's presence only makes their lives seem worse by comparison. Beauty has no place in such a setting, since its denizens are preoccupied with the typical moral concerns of "Poverty," "Sin," "Misery," and "Shame." The weaver also mentions that he and his co-sufferers have watched "the faces of those [they] love become hard and evil" (p. 227). Brooding on the moral wrongs of their social betters has literally turned these people into monsters.

Whereas the first dream focuses more on physical ugliness and its corresponding moral implications, the second dream

dwells on the ugliness of death. Unlike the pallid weavers of the first dream, the characters of the second dream are adorned with some rudimentary objects of beauty, such as the galley master's "crimson silk" turban, silver earrings, and "ivory scales" (p. 228). But the focus of the dream shifts when the galley master shoots the Arab horseman "in the throat" with his arrow: the body "[falls] heavily into the surf," and a woman, presumably the Arab's wife, looks mournfully back at his corpse as she flees with the others (p. 228). Similarly, when the pearl diver brings his last—and most beautiful—discovery back to the surface, he falls to the deck with "blood gush[ing] from his ears and nostrils" and dies, only to have his body unceremoniously tossed overboard. In both cases, beauty is trumped by ugly death: the exotically attired galley master's "painted bow" becomes an agent of grisly murder, and the slave diver's hideous death overshadows the discovery of the fairest of all pearls (p. 228). These scenes of gruesome death soil the beauty of the pearl and its exotic locale for the Young King, and the third dream will only further undermine his already waning aesthetic sensibility.

Though it begins with a nod to natural beauty, the third and final dream ends by indicting the Young King's allegedly immoral indulgence at the expense of others by forcing him to look into an austere pilgrim's mirror. The third dream opens with a lovely description of an exotic jungle, an almost magical place full of "beautiful poisonous flowers" and "bright parrots," where "[t]he trees were full of apes and peacocks" (p. 229). But after Avarice and Death have performed their parts in Wilde's brief version of a medieval morality play, nothing beautiful remains. There are only hideous landscapes, monstrous beasts, and the cold, sobering lesson of the pilgrim with the mirror: "And out of the slime at the bottom of the valley crept dragons and horrible things with scales, and the jackals came trotting along the sand, sniffing up the air with their nostrils" (p. 230). When the pilgrim forces the Young King to look upon his reflection, the sermon culminates in the accusation of beauty itself: though the beautiful Young King has personally done nothing wrong to any of those he has witnessed, and though the golden raiment, pearls, and rubies are not in and of themselves immoral, they are condemned as the cause of pain and suffering and therefore lose their aesthetic value.[32] If the Young King wishes to avoid the Dwarf's fate and remain alive, he must abjure the opulence of art and embrace the Christian alternative—or at least the "raiment" of that alternative (p. 233).

Zealous with newfound altruism, the Young King's rejection of beautiful things begins immediately upon his awakening from the dreams, but he must ultimately assume the role of Christ to overcome his moral knowledge and retain his beauty. In an act that mirrors the superficial gestures of compassion Wilde criticizes in the middle and upper classes, the King rejects his beautiful coronation regalia—now stained with the blood of the less fortunate in his mind because "he remembered his dreams" (p. 230)—and chooses to dress in weeds and rags for his procession to the cathedral. He abandons the cries of joy that artistic beauty used to evoke from his lips and assumes a silent, sad countenance. His courtiers attempt to remind him that a "dream [is] but a dream, and a vision but a vision" (p. 231), in which sentiment one can hear echoes of Wilde's related tenet from the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "Those who read the symbol do so at their peril."[33] But the Young King sticks to his humble goatherd's attire, and the people mock him as he rides past, maintaining their contempt even after he relates the message of his three dreams. Finally, after the Bishop makes one final plea for the Young King to "ride back to the Palace and make [his] face glad, and put on the raiment that beseemeth a king," and forget his troublesome dreams, the Young King "[stands] before the image of Christ" and undergoes his miraculous transformation. Vestments "fairer than the robe that had been fashioned for his pleasure" replace his ugly clothes, and a new fierce, heavenly beauty outshines the jewels that represent his old aesthetic (pp. 232–3).

Despite the Young King's humble attire, Wilde still relates the coronation in highly aesthetic terms that indicate the pervading power of art. In fact, the whole scene at the altar is an enactment of the Young King's fanciful, artistic vision of the event from earlier in the story: "He saw himself in fancy standing at the high altar of the cathedral in the fair raiment of a King" (p. 226). The sunlight streaming through the "painted windows" of the church affects his dazzling appearance, and the monstrance crystal in its "jewelled shrine" emphasizes his majestic silhouette (p. 233). "Marvellous vessels of gold" and a "chalice with the yellow wine" decorate the altar itself. The subtle motion of the "saints in their carven niches" and the music of the organ and trumpeters reveal the "Glory of God" that appears to fill the cathedral (p. 233). The Young King may have chosen to renounce his luxuriously beautiful regalia on supposed moral grounds, but he still worships in the palace of art. The revised Christian aesthetic is a viable means to reclaiming artistic beauty for the Young King because it is to "the

image of Christ" that he turns for transformation—the "image," but not the *real* Christ.[34]

The Young King's revised aesthetic allows him to retain both his own beauty and his worship of art by eschewing real suffering and authentic moral transformation. After their ruler rejects beauty and art in favor of an aesthetic Christianity based on "the image of Christ," the Young King's subjects genuflect and avert their gazes from his angelic countenance. But as Rodney Shewan points out, the newly crowned monarch's revised aesthetic changes very little about the social structure of his monarchy: "The mistress—or minion—art, has been rejected. And yet, in terms of the narrative framework, this rejection achieves little. The king's subjects are not merely unappreciative, like the poor in 'The Happy Prince,' but hostile: unjust employers, they feel, are preferable to unemployment. The King ignores their objections, his face saddened and his eyes on higher values, but Wilde gives no indication of future benefits in this for the state."[35] After his unpopular procession in rags to the cathedral, the Young King will presumably return to his opulent chambers in *Joyeuse* and continue to enjoy their majestic splendor. His poor subjects will continue to toil for the wealthy of his kingdom—even if he swears off the commissioning of any more ostentatious regalia. His rejection of art has been a ceremonial event at most. He has still effectively avoided the ugly morality of real suffering—just as he avoided the ugly suffering of the real Christ by using "the image of Christ" as his aesthetic model. Therefore, the tale's most vocal peasant does well to question "What hast thou to do with us, and what we suffer?" (p. 232); the King's superficial altruism has done nothing to significantly change the social hierarchy of his kingdom.

Nevertheless, the monarch does remain true to his personality by renouncing the private property that came with ugly moral obligations. He manages to avoid the more lasting ugliness of an internalized moral transformation by donning the ugly rags of a beggar before reclaiming beauty by donning the "fair raiment" of Christ. However, not all of Wilde's characters are lucky enough to avoid real suffering and its accompanying physical ugliness altogether. In "The Star-Child," the main character's moral education robs him of his beauty and, ultimately, his life.

The Star-Child's early life among the Woodcutter's family is an allegorical representation of the unsteady relationship between art and real-world morality. Unlike the Infanta and the Young King, the Star-Child is not raised in the palace of art: he

is found in the woods by woodcutters and brought up in poverty. The Star-Child is naturally "enamoured of beauty," but because ugliness surrounds him from birth, his love of beauty can find no inspiration beyond the reflection of his own face (p. 276). He becomes a living Narcissus and shuns the ugliness of those poor peasants around him on the basis of his aesthetic superiority.[36] The Star-Child, wrapped in a "cloak of golden tissue," seems to have literally fallen out of the world of beauty into a biblical parable, complete with "thee's," "thou's," and the casting of stones (p. 274). The people of the Star-Child's adopted village accost his vicious behavior with trite moral aphorisms delivered in the judgmental language of the King James Old Testament. When the Star-Child attacks a "foul beggar-woman" on the basis that "she is ugly and ill-favoured," his adopted father admonishes him with the most formal of moral speeches: "Surely thou art hard of heart and knowest not mercy, for what evil has this poor woman done to thee that thou shouldst treat her in this wise?" (p. 277). The Star-Child's response asserts the autonomy of art in the face of moral rebuke: "Who art thou to question me what I do? I am no son of thine to do thy bidding" (p. 277).[37] A child of art need not submit to moral authority in Wilde's tale because art need not conform to conventional moral constraints. In "The Decay of Lying," Wilde points to art's superiority over any standard external to itself, moral or otherwise: "Art finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself. She is not to be judged by any external standard of resemblance."[38] Thus the Star-Child finds artistic perfection in his reflection in the priest's well, and he refuses to cower before the frequent indictments of his supposed immorality. However, when the Star-Child discovers that the hideous beggar woman is actually his mother, his ideal of otherworldly parentage is destroyed, and he embraces the authoritative moral code of his community, moving out of the realm of art forever.

The Star-Child's moral testing begins the instant he willingly recognizes his "sin" in the same well where he had previously admired his radiant beauty (p. 278). Upon learning that the squalid beggar woman is indeed his mother, the Star-Child laments the horrible knowledge she imparts and states that "it had been better hadst thou stayed away, and not come here to bring me to shame, seeing that I thought I was the child of some Star, and not a beggar's child, as thou tellest me that I am" (p. 278). The woman's ugliness and implicit moral censure of the Star-Child's cruelty literally "bring him to shame," forcing him to declare himself immoral and lose his beauty. After initially refusing to kiss

the woman because of her "foul" appearance, the Star-Child runs off to play with the companions who love him for his beauty and artistic abilities.[39] However, the discovery that he is apparently not the "child of some Star" has already severed his connection to the world of art, and his companions reject him for his fall from beauty: "But when they beheld him coming, they mocked him and said, 'Why, thou art as foul as the toad, and as loathsome as the adder. Get thee hence, for we will not suffer thee to play with us,' and they drave him out of the garden" (p. 278). The dethroned Star-Child no longer has a place in the realm of beauty, and he is banished from its "garden." Nassaar marks the importance of the Star-Child's transformation by describing it in terms of a paradigm shift between universes: "When the star-child's [*sic*] world of beauty is shattered, he finds himself a hideous part of the universe of pain and ugliness."[40] The Star-Child cannot see beauty in the well's reflection because morality has subsumed his aesthetic sensibility, and thus he must procure his mother's forgiveness—moral absolution—to regain his former beauty after three years' wandering.

The Star-Child remains wholly within the "universe of pain and ugliness" for the rest of the story—though he is given a few opportunities to reenter the aesthetic realm—and he dies as a result. The "evil-visaged" Magician who buys the Star-Child into slavery lives in decadent opulence, but because the Star-Child has abandoned art's house of pomegranates in favor of moral redemption, he is not allowed to view that dark beauty (p. 280). Upon entering the Magician's house, where the "old man touched the door with a ring of graved jasper," the two descend "steps of brass into a garden filled with black poppies and green jars of burnt clay," but the Magician obscures the Star-Child's vision with "a scarf of figured silk" until he arrives in a dank and barren dungeon (p. 280). The old man then thrusts the Star-Child into the dungeon, where he administers the ugly reminders of Christ's suffering in the form of a lackluster Lord's Supper. And when the Star-Child's new master orders him to fetch the three colored pieces of gold, the beautiful wood in which the unfortunate boy searches rejects and wounds him because of his ugliness and moral agenda. The wood's "beauty profit[ed] him little, for wherever he went harsh briars and thorns shot up from the ground and encompassed him … so that he was in sore distress" (p. 281); he cannot roam freely through the realm of beauty any longer without being distracted by pain and suffering. Instead of returning the gold pieces he finds to the old man—for which he

might conceivably be rewarded—he succumbs to philanthropic pity for the leper outside the city gates and receives harsh punishment as a result. His destructive moral growth is such that he only recovers his beauty for three short years before he dies, and even during that time, his rigid conscience—"that in his eyes which he had not seen there before"—constrains him to continue his moral reformation of the entire kingdom (p. 283). Wilde attributes the Star-Child's death directly to his moral trials: "Yet he ruled not long, so great had been his suffering, and so bitter the fire of his testing" (p. 284). In contrast to the Infanta and the Young King, the Star-Child's moral transformation is internalized, and his fairy tale world resonates with a startling cynicism at the end. The Star-Child's misguided lessons in loving kindness and charity do nothing to permanently improve his kingdom: the king who succeeds him "ruled evilly" (p. 284). Once compulsive morality has entered the story, there can be no happily ever after.

Wilde's fairy tales use their subversive components and the motif of ugliness to denote the damaging effects of compulsory, imitative, spurious morality on the ideal realm of aesthetic beauty. Although I make no claims about Wilde's personal morals with this statement—according to Wilde, after all, the artist "stands outside his subject" and should not be conflated with his medium ("The Soul of Man under Socialism," p. 1093)—I do maintain that his fairy tales consistently resist the intrusion of systems of moral conformity into the autonomous world of art, and I affirm that he uses the theme of ugliness to demonstrate the inevitable results of such an intrusion.[41] Much of Wilde's criticism, poetry, prose, and drama contains both serious and witty comments on the potentially causal relationship between morality and ugliness, but in the fairy tales, Wilde depicts that relationship in a very literal sense.[42] The struggle between artistic liberty and moral edification occurs in each story, but to try to align one side or the other with Wilde's intent is, I think, to miss the point. Rather, it seems Wilde was using his ostensibly moral or Christian tales to demonstrate how the spectator always sees what she wants to see in any artistic creation. Indeed, Wilde inveighs against the spectator's critical authority in an 1891 letter to the editor of *The Speaker*, where he addresses an unfavorable response to the cover design of *A House of Pomegranates*, which apparently reminded the reviewer of "a chimney-pot hat with a sponge in it." Wilde writes,

> Now, I do not for a moment dispute that these are the real impressions your critic received. It is the spectator, and

> the mind of the spectator, as I pointed out in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, that art really mirrors … The primary aesthetic impression of a work of art borrows nothing from recognition or resemblance … Properly speaking, they are not part of a real aesthetic impression at all, and the constant preoccupation with subject-matter that characterises nearly all our English art-criticism is what makes our art-criticism, especially as regards literature, so sterile, so profitless, so much beside the mark, and of such curiously little account.[43]

Time seems to have proven Wilde's point, given the large number of modern critics who see his fairy tales as either late Victorian, pseudo-Christian moralism or as seditious, pederastic hedonism. However, if art is neither moral nor immoral and seeks to express only itself, as Wilde repeatedly asserts, then we should not read Wilde's fairy tales as a "hideous cant about self-sacrifice" or as a lascivious indulgence of fetishism for the innocent child ("The Soul of Man under Socialism," p. 1100).[44] Such projective readings—such manifestations of our authority—only reflect our social prejudices or biographically influenced biases and become the "solvent that breaks up" the "Art" of these tales. Ultimately, the greatest value of these tales of "subtle strangeness" lies in their ability to tell us something further about Wilde's complex aesthetic philosophy and about what role morality ought to play in the house, garden, or palace of art.[45]

NOTES

[1] Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, "Beauty and the Beast," in *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, ed. and trans. Maria Tatar (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2002), pp. 58–78.

[2] Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Snow White," in *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, pp. 79–94, 88.

[3] One notable exception to this generic tendency is Hans Christian Andersen's tale "The Ugly Duckling" (1844), but the self-conscious duckling's ugliness is, of course, only temporary; he ultimately grows into the most beautiful of all waterfowl—the swan (in *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, pp. 288–301).

[4] John Allen Quintus, "The Moral Prerogative in Oscar Wilde: A Look at the Fairy Tales," *VQR* 53, 4 (Autumn 1977): 708–17, 708.

[5] Robert K. Martin, "Oscar Wilde and the Fairy Tale: 'The Happy Prince' as Self-Dramatization," *SSF* 16, 1 (Winter 1979): 74–7, 74.

[6] Naomi Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child: Paterian Aesthetics, Pederasty, and Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales," *M&T* 16, 2 (October 2002): 156–70, 156.

[7] Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism," in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, rev. edn. (1966; rprt. New York, London, and Tokyo: Harper and Row, 1989), pp. 1079–104, 1079. All subsequent references refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text and notes by page number.

[8] According to Wilde's plan for social reform in "The Soul of Man under Socialism," each individual must be wholly free from the controlling authority of the rest of society. Conformity and compulsion have no place in Wilde's socialism, and the artist should be the least restricted individual of all: "If a man approaches a work of art with any desire to exercise authority over it and the artist, he approaches it in such a spirit that he cannot receive any artistic impression from it at all. The work of art is to dominate the spectator: the spectator is not to dominate the work of art. The spectator is to be receptive" (p. 1096).

[9] Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," in *The Complete Works*, pp. 970–92, 977.

[10] Andersen, "The Nightingale," in *Hans Christian Andersen: The Complete Fairy Tales and Stories*, trans. Erik Christian Haugaard (New York: Anchor Books, 1983), pp. 203–12, 211.

[11] Jack Zipes, afterword to *Complete Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde*, by Wilde (New York: Signet Classic, 1990), pp. 205–13, 210.

[12] Clifton Snider, "Eros and Logos in Some Fairy Tales by Oscar Wilde: A Jungian Interpretation," *VN* 84 (Autumn 1993): 1–8, 2.

[13] Wilde, "The Nightingale and the Rose," in *The Complete Works*, pp. 292–6, 292–3. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically by page number.

[14] Wilde, "The Birthday of the Infanta," in *The Complete Works*, pp. 234–47, 241. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically by page number.

[15] Those seven tales include "The Star-Child," "The Selfish Giant," "The Birthday of the Infanta," "The Nightingale and the Rose," "The Happy Prince," "The Remarkable Rocket," and "The Fisherman and His Soul." Admittedly, the eponymous rocket of "The Remarkable Rocket" actually "went out" rather than dying in the traditional sense, but that extinguishment amounts to death for an inanimate character like him (Wilde, "The Remarkable Rocket," in *The Complete Works*, pp. 310–8, 318).

[16] Wilde, "The Star-Child," in *The Complete Works*, pp. 273–84, 284. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically by page number.

[17] Wilde, "The Selfish Giant," in *The Complete Works*, pp. 297–300, 299.

[18] Wilde, "The Happy Prince," in *The Complete Works*, pp. 285–91, 291.

[19] Wilde, "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime," in *The Complete Works*, pp. 168–92, 191.

[20] Philip K. Cohen, "Dynamics of Faith and Genre: The Fairy Tales," in *The Moral Vision of Oscar Wilde* (Rutherford, Madison, and Teaneck NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press; London: Associated Univ. Presses, 1978), pp. 73–104, 80.

[21] Grimm and Grimm, "Hansel and Gretel," in *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, pp. 44–57; "Little Red Riding Hood," in *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, pp. 17–27.

[22] According to his letter to Mrs. W. H. Grenfell, Wilde's inspiration for the story (the Infanta's dress, the courtiers, the Dwarf) was Diego Velázquez's

famous painting of the Spanish royal family, *Las Meninas* (1656): "One of the stories, which is about the little pale Infanta whom Velasquez painted, I have dedicated to you, as a slight return for that entrancing day at Taplow" (Paris, 12 November 1891, in *More Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis [New York: Vanguard, 1985], p. 100).

[23] Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," p. 983.

[24] As Wilde explains in "The Soul of Man under Socialism," "Up to the present man has hardly cultivated sympathy at all. He has merely sympathy with pain, and sympathy with pain is not the highest form of sympathy. All sympathy is fine, but sympathy with suffering is the least fine mode. It is tainted with egotism. It is apt to become morbid. There is in it a certain element of terror for our own safety" (p. 1101).

[25] Unlike many other critics of Wilde's fairy tales, Zipes has rightly argued against their being read as Sunday school lessons for young, uninitiated Christians: "The fact that [Wilde] portrayed so many Christlike protagonists in his fairy tales did not mean that he wanted to propagate the Christian way as the path toward salvation. Nor did he feel obliged to indulge himself in Christian moralizing for the sake of children as some critics have mistakenly argued" ("Inverting and Subverting the World with Hope: The Fairy Tales of George MacDonald, Oscar Wilde, and L. Frank Baum," in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* [New York: Wildman, 1983], pp. 97–133, 116).

[26] Christopher S. Nassaar, "The Fairy Tales," in *Into the Demon Universe: A Literary Exploration of Oscar Wilde* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 1–36, 28. In "The Soul of Man under Socialism," Wilde defines his concept of "Individualism" with an emphasis on its complete lack of enforced morality: "And so Individualism exercises no compulsion over man. On the contrary, it says to man that he should suffer no compulsion to be exercised over him. It does not try to force people to be good. It knows that people are good when they are let alone" (p. 1100).

[27] Wilde, preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in *The Complete Works*, p. 17. Interestingly, Richard Ellmann suggests that the function of Wilde's preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was to check what he considered to be a too blatant moral message in the novel: "And Wilde, feeling that the book had too much moral, subverts it with a preface which expounds sympathetically some of that aesthetic creed by which the book shows Dorian to be corrupted" (*Oscar Wilde* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988], p. 99). Wilde did not wish to see his only novel reduced to mere didactic moralism by its readers, so he subverted its perceived moral message with lines such as "[t]here is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all" (preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 17).

[28] By wallowing in self-pity over his wretched condition and appearance—an awareness brought about by the comparison between his shape and origins and the beauty and opulence of the Infanta's world—the Dwarf becomes a living poster child for the moral "authority" of the "People"—the authority that Wilde censures for its hypocrisy and its destructive influence on art. In the following passage from "The Soul of Man under Socialism," Wilde could be describing the Dwarf himself as he discusses the destructive results of the People's authority: "And as for the People, what of them and

their authority? Perhaps of them and their authority one has spoken enough. Their authority is a thing blind, deaf, hideous, grotesque, tragic, amusing, serious and obscene. It is impossible for the artist to live with the People … Who told them to exercise authority? They were made to live, to listen, and to love. Some one has done them a great wrong. They have marred themselves by imitation of their superiors … They are as a clown whose heart is broken" (p. 1099).

[29] See Wilde's comments on mirrors as gateways between life and art in "The Decay of Lying": "Life holds the mirror up to Art, and either reproduces some strange type imagined by painter or sculptor, or realises in fact what has been dreamed in fiction" (p. 985). The Dwarf does the latter by recognizing the "fact" of his ugliness, and so he is made unfit for the fairy tale world of "Art."

[30] Wilde, "The Young King," in *The Complete Works*, pp. 224–33, 224. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically by page number.

[31] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in *The Complete Works*, pp. 18–167, 101. The "music" of the book enchants Gray: "The mere cadences of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music … produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming" (p. 101). Similarly, the Young King "wander[s] from room to room, and from corridor to corridor" of the palace (p. 225).

[32] The episode in "The Young King" with the pilgrim and his "mirror of silver" is an almost perfect inversion of the "laughing Narcissus" with its "polished mirror" that stands in the Young King's bedroom in the palace (pp. 230, 226). In contrast to the mirror held by one of Wilde's favorite symbols for youthful beauty untainted by moral concern—Narcissus—the mirror of his moral awakening is held by a pilgrim, with all of that character's connotations of piety and self-abnegation. See also Wilde's comments on the "endless claims" of private property in "The Soul of Man under Socialism": "Property not merely has duties, but has so many duties that its possession to any large extent is a bore. It involves endless claims upon one, endless attention to business, endless bother. If property had simply pleasures, we could stand it; but its duties make it unbearable" (p. 1081).

[33] Wilde, preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 17.

[34] Wilde repeats the phrase "the image of Christ" three times during the coronation scene in "The Young King" (p. 233). He never refers to Christ in any other way or calls attention to Christ's body or blood—doing so would violate the boundary between art and reality, making Christ's suffering real and incompatible with the Young King's "image"-based aesthetic.

[35] Rodney Shewan, "Art and Pastoral," in *Oscar Wilde: Art and Egotism* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1977), pp. 7–69, 54.

[36] The Star-Child represents a perfect example of the laudable rebellious poor—those who refuse to accept their place complacently in an unjust system. In "The Soul of Man under Socialism," Wilde writes, "As for being discontented, a man who would not be discontented with such surroundings and such a low mode of life would be a perfect brute. Disobedience, in the eyes of any one who has read history, is man's original virtue" (p. 1081).

[37] The idea of an art liberated from the claims of external authority, moral or otherwise, seems to be one of Wilde's most consistent and treasured sentiments, as it appears repeatedly in both his fiction and critical essays.

For example, in "The Soul of Man under Socialism," Wilde writes, "Upon the other hand, whenever a community or a powerful section of a community, or a government of any kind, attempts to dictate to the artist what he is to do, Art either entirely vanishes, or becomes stereotyped, or degenerates into a low and ignoble form of craft" (p. 1090).

[38] Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," p. 982.

[39] Earlier in the tale, the Star-Child's companions admire him for his physical beauty and his artistic talents: "And his companions followed him, for he was fair, and fleet of foot, and could dance, and pipe, and make music" (p. 276).

[40] Nassaar, p. 27.

[41] Wilde's emphatic treatment of this point cannot be overstated. Again and again in "The Soul of Man under Socialism," he argues that the spectator who wishes to control the work of art through any means external to the art itself "becomes the avowed enemy of Art": "[The spectator] is not the arbiter of the work of art. He is one who is admitted to contemplate the work of art, and, if the work be fine, to forget in its contemplation all the egotism that mars him—the egotism of his ignorance, or the egotism of his information … The moment he seeks to exercise authority he becomes the avowed enemy of Art, and of himself" (p. 1097).

[42] To name but a few examples, see Dorian's response to the inquest over Sibyl Vane's death in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "How ugly it all was! And how horribly real ugliness made things!" (p. 100). Also see Mrs. Erlynne's comments in *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892): "I thought I had no heart. I find I have, and a heart doesn't suit me, Windermere. Somehow it doesn't go with modern dress. It makes one look old" (in *The Complete Works*, pp. 385–430, IV.i, p. 425). Also relevant is the Duke's curt remark about his wife in *The Duchess of Padua* (1891): "Why, she is worse than ugly, she is good" (in *The Complete Works*, pp. 576–646, II.i, p. 588).

[43] Wilde to Editor of the *Speaker*, Paris, December 1891, in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Hart-Davis (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), pp. 299–301, 301.

[44] In yet another comment on the individual artist's need for freedom from external authority in creating his art, Wilde responds to a negative review of *A House of Pomegranates* in the *Pall Mall Gazette* with an equivocal statement suggesting his indifference to the public's opinion about his work, and he once again affirms the artist's freedom from any "standard of beauty" other than his own: "Now in building this *House of Pomegranates* I had about as much intention of pleasing the British child as I had of pleasing the British public … No artist recognises any standard of beauty but that which is suggested by his own temperament. The artist seeks to realise in a certain material his immaterial idea of beauty, and thus to transform an idea into an ideal. That is the way an artist makes things. The artist has no other object in making things" (Paris, December 1891, in *The Letters*, pp. 301–2, 302).

[45] Wilde to G. H. Kersley, 16 Tite Street, 15 June 1888, in *The Letters*, p. 219. In his letter to Kersley, Wilde defines the fairy tales in *"The Happy Prince" and Other Tales* (1888) as "studies in prose, put for Romance's sake into a fanciful form: meant partly for children, and partly for those who have kept the childlike faculties of wonder and joy, and who find in simplicity a subtle strangeness."

The MLA Supports Your Teaching and Scholarship

IN 2012, the MLA Annual Convention will be held in Seattle from 5–8 January. We hope you will join us to attend sessions, browse in the exhibit hall, meet and dine with friends and colleagues, and explore Seattle.

Visit www.mla.org and you can

- research career and job market information
- scan reports and surveys issued by the MLA on job market issues, enrollments, evaluating scholarship, and the state of scholarly publishing
- learn about the MLA's public outreach activities, including the popular MLA Language Map
- download the Academic Workforce Advocacy Kit, a tool for helping improve conditions for students and teachers
- read FAQs about MLA style

These are some of the activities you support when you become an MLA member. Graduate students may join for $20 per year for a maximum of seven years.

MLA Member Benefits

The MLA offers members a wide array of benefits, including

- subscriptions to *PMLA*, the *MLA Newsletter*, and *Profession*
- online access to the *Job Information List* for ADE and ADFL member departments
- priority convention registration
- access to searchable lists of members and departmental administrators

Visit www.mla.org/membership for a full list of MLA member benefits.

Three easy ways to join

- Visit www.mla.org.
- E-mail membership@mla.org to request a membership packet.
- Call 646 576-5151.

Modern Language Association MLA

646 576-5161 ■ Fax 646 576-5160 ■ www.mla.org

The MLA Annual Convention 5–8 January 2012 in Seattle

featuring a special focus on Language, Literature, and Learning

The largest gathering of teachers and scholars in the humanities now meets in January. Other changes include

- new features, including more roundtables and workshops
- more collaboration and discussion
- more free time in the evenings
- special presentations featuring renowned thinkers, artists, and critics in conversation
- local excursions for registrants
- regular Twitter updates during the convention

2012 members receive reduced rates and special discounts for the 2012 convention in Seattle. Visit www.mla.org/convention for more information.

Follow the MLA Annual Convention on Twitter www.twitter.com/mlaconvention