

## RELIGIOUS MOTIFS IN THE FAIRY TALES OF OSCAR WILDE

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### Abstract

Wilde's fairy tales are the subject of much research, not only from the standpoint of religious and other motifs, but the present article needed to focus on the religious elements in fairy tales. Motifs, motif fragments and blind motifs from world religions, e.g. Apollo, Armenian, copper ring (Giges), bazaar, bengal fire, whipping with thorns, dervish, divan, priest with slanted eyes, Egypt, eunuchs, gong, India, Isis and Osiris, Orient, kaftan, Koran, leopard (leopard paws), lion skins, Idol, Mecca, Nile, Nubians, opium, pavilion, pyramids, pagan creatures, Roman candle, Samarkand, Syrians, elephant, silver crescent, slave, temple, tiger (tiger paws), turban, cave, Jews, etc.

**Keywords:** Oscar Wilde, fairy tales, motifs, fairy, Virgil's Wheel.

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### Wilde's Life

Oscar Wilde, full name Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, was born on 16 October 1854 in Dublin, Ireland and died on 20 November 1900 in Paris, France. He is widely known in literary history as a witty playwright, essayist, poet and novelist. His works were translated into Slovene relatively early, e.g. the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891, in Slovene 1924), *Lady Windermere's Fan: A Play in Four Acts* (1892, in Slovene 1921), *The importance of Being Ernest* (1895, in Slovene 1967), etc. Wilde was born into an aristocratic family, his father Sir William Wilde was a doctor and his mother Jane Frances Elgee, with the stage name Speranza, was a poet or "poetess" who ran a literary salon. Wilde studied classical philology at Trinity College, Dublin, and Magdalen College, Oxford, and showed great talent as a student.

That is why in his fairy tales there are frequent mentions of Greek statues, Adonis, Narcissus, etc. Wilde traveled extensively to America, London, Paris, was an invited lecturer, a witty speaker with an aphoristic style. He was influenced by various literary genres in the Victorian period, e.g. decadence, aestheticism and symbolism. Undoubtedly, Wilde was a charismatic person, as he traveled and lectured extensively in his short life. Based on M. Juvan's article *Karizma teorije (Charisma of Theory, 2014)*, it is evident that Wilde had all the characteristics of a "cosmopolitan celebrity system" (2014, 206).

Wilde married Constance Lloyd (1858–1898) in Dublin in 1855. He read and/or told fairy tales to his sons Cyril (1885–1915, full name Cyril Holland Wilde) and Vyvyan Holand (1886–1967, full name Vyvyan Oscar Beresford Wilde). His fairy tales are crossover, which means that they can be read by both young people and adults. Due to Wilde's relationship with Lord Douglas, Oscar and Constance later separated. The wife went with her sons to Switzerland and changed their surname to Holland. Wilde had three high-profile lawsuits due to his public same-sex union for which he was also sentenced to prison (1895–1897). Transcripts from the court are publicly available on the website. In prison, he wrote *De Profundis* in 1897, which was published posthumously in 1905. In this work, Wilde's essay *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1891, in Slovene 1993) is well known which also relates to the context of fairy tales.

In 1891, Wilde fell in love with Lord Alfred Douglas, with whom he had an affair for several years, but Douglas' father accused him of sodomy, triggering lawsuits<sup>140,141</sup> and imprisonment at Pentonville Prison and his early death in Paris, where he took refuge. In prison, he came closer to faith. During his academic years, he leaned towards paganism, during his prison years he converted to Christianity (conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism on his deathbed), because almost everyone left him due to the criminalization of homosexuality and trials and imprisonment. The three lawsuits against Wilde (1895) are taught as study subjects at some law schools<sup>142</sup> and are the subject of numerous interdisciplinary scholarly articles on literature and law.<sup>143</sup>

### **Wilde and Faith**

Wilde was religious in his own way, he was a Christian of the Anglican faith, but on his deathbed, he was supposed to be baptized into the Catholic faith. He is considered an atheist Christian, but he also used motifs from world religions in fairy tales, e.g., ancient motifs (polytheism) and motifs from Islam or Orient. Wilde's father was a Protestant and Wilde came to faith in prison. During his student years, he leaned toward paganism, approaching Christianity at Pentonville Prison, as he also visited Pope Pius IX and even dedicated a poem to him that was published in the religious magazine *The Month*, as almost everyone left him in prison. There are monographs on this topic, e.g. *The Faiths of Oscar Wilde: Catholicism, Folklore and Ireland*.<sup>144</sup>

### **Wilde's fairy tales, 1888 and 1891**

Oscar Wilde has written two collections of fairy tales, with a total of nine. The first collection of fairy tales is entitled *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (published in 1888, in Slovene 1919, under the title *Srečni kraljevič in druge pravljice*; translated by Alojz Gradnik and illustrated by Avgust Bucik): *The Young King, Infanta's Birthday, The Fisherman and His Soul, The Star-Child*. The next translation of Wilde's fairy tales, entitled *Pravljice (Fairy Tales)*, was translated in 1921 by Milan Jaklič.

The book includes fairy tales from the first collection: *The Happy Prince, The Nightingale and the Flower, The Selfish Ober* (translated by Ciril Kosmač as *The Selfish Giant*), *The Loyal Friend and The Famous Rocket*, and other texts (poems in prose). Wilde's second collection of fairy tales, *A House of Pomegranates* from 1891, was translated into Slovene in 1959 and contains nine fairy tales.

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<sup>140</sup> Cf. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-trial-of-oscar-wilde-printed-in-1906> (Accessed: 25. 03. 2021).

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid* 1

<sup>142</sup> Cf. <https://famous-trials.com/wilde> (Accessed: 30. 03. 2021).

<sup>143</sup> Wan, Marco (2011). A Matter of Style: On Reading the Oscar Wilde Trials as Literature. *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 709–726.

<sup>144</sup> Killeen, J. (2005). Realism and Romance: Between Protestantism and Catholicism in Wilde's Final Writings. In: *The Faiths of Oscar Wilde*. Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth Century Writing and Culture. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Both collections of fairy tales, *The Happy Prince and Other Fairy Tales* (1888) and *A House of Pomegranates* (1891), were published in 1959 in the Kondor Library in full and translated by Ciril Kosmač, with illustrations by Vladimir Lakovič and an accompanying text by Josip Vidmar. In Vidmar's accompanying words, children or young addressees are not mentioned, as the collection, despite the fact that it is explicitly intended for children, is actually intended for adults or is a crossover.

Wilde's fairy tales are distinctly authorial, unlike J. and W. Grimm's model of folk tales. H. C. Andersen established the model of the classical fairy tale, but Wilde added distinct literary elements to the fairy tales. Intertextually, he related to the model of folk tales, including the collection of Arabic tales *One Thousand and One Nights*, e.g., the fairy tale *The Fisherman and the Ghost*, which appears in the Brothers Grimm fairy tales under the title *The Fisherman and His Wife* (1812), in Andersen as *The Little Mermaid* (1837) and in Wilde as *The Fisherman and His Soul* (1891).

### **Fairy tales or/and-fairy tales**

O. Wilde's tales are distinctly literary, but if we take into account Max Luthi's theory developed in his work *The European Folktale: Form and Nature* (2011), Wilde's fairy tales are also related to the model of folk (European) tales and have their essential features, but at the same time, as distinctly authorial or literary tales, move away from this model. One-dimensionality – Wilde's fairy tales are one-dimensional, they take place on a miracle level, the real and fairy-tale worlds are not separate (Luthi 2011, 1), literary characters and fairy-tale creatures are physically close to man (2011, 4). Literary characters speak, e.g., statues, birds, fairy tale characters appear, e.g., witch, little mermaid, giant, etc.

Flatness – Wilde's tales are not linear, they are complex, although they take place at the level of a new one-dimensionality, where it is quite selfevident that humans and animals, e.g., birds (*The Nightingale and the Rose*) talk, as well as that the fisherman talks to his soul, that the latter lives an independent life in a new dimension. Abstract style – Wilde's fairy tales are not characterized by an abstract style and the use of hypernyms (e.g., forest, castle; once upon a time, somewhere ...), as in the model of folk tales, but there is a pronounced use of hyponyms (hawthorn, god Adonis, Egypt, India, etc.).

Literary characters include a beggar, a god, a priest, a soul, a king, a prince, a mermaid, a giant, a bird (swallow, nightingale), a shepherd, and there are many twists and turns, that rich people are selfish, that poor people are selfless (*The Star-Child*), thus expressing the social theme and embodying the article *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*. Typical proverbial provisions for time and place, which are characteristic of fairy tales, but more for the model of folk tales (Grimm's tales) and less for the authorial or literary tales such as Wilde's appear in the text, but the time and place are definable, from concretization (e.g. Egypt) to indirect determinacy (e.g. ebony – the black tree in India).

Wilde's space is also sacred (altar, temple), but the heart has a more sacred meaning than the church (*The Happy Prince*), as love is the space of eternity and is literally above the church (*The Fisherman and His Soul*). Wilde's fairy tales contain a lot of elements of metallization (copper, silver, lead, gold, iron), and elements of mineralization are also common, i.e., stones and precious stones or gems (beryl, amber, crystal, chrysolite, jade, onyx, selenite, emerald, turquoise, including ivory, etc.). Isolation and Universal Connectivity – Wilde's fairytale characters are both isolated and universally connected to the action. In his fairy tales, fairy tale types ATU<sup>145</sup> 1620 also appear, e.g. *The Emperor's New Clothes*, which in Wilde's tale *The Young Prince* have a different emphasis, a social sense of rich and poor.

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<sup>145</sup> ATU is an international label or an acronym based on the surnames of three folklorists (Antti Aarne, Stith Thompson, Hans-Jörg Uther), who published an internationally classified index of fairytale types (Uther 2011)

His tales can be said to contain motifs, motif fragments and blind motifs (Adonis, ebony, Egypt, Endymion statue, India, Memnon, Narcissus, etc.). Since he lived at the end of the 19th century, in the period of fin de siècle and decadence, the characteristics of his style, which he also transferred to fairy tales, include scents (cinnamon, hawthorn, myrrh, etc.), birds (swallow, ostrich, peacock, finch, nightingale, etc.), fruits (cherries, plums, etc.), flowers/plants (flowers), which he expresses with sub-meanings and species, e.g. dahlias, chrysanthemums, lilies, water lilies, stepmothers, daisies, carnations, daffodils, eagles, peonies, sandalwood flowers, forget-me-nots, lilies of the valley, primroses, reeds, violets, roses (they have a special place), bunnies, etc.

## Sublimation and all-inclusiveness

### Virgil's Wheel

Literary science knows of the so-called "Rota Virgilio" (Latin for Virgil's Wheel) or a medieval illustration of literary genres that hierarchically lists in three categories three literary styles for three stylistic types (low, medium and high style) associated with the three works of Virgil, i.e., pastoral poems (Bucolic), didactics (Georgica) and epics (Aeneid), which also illustrate the three stages of Virgil's development. Based on a medieval style analysis on the basis of ancient literature, the style of Wilde's fairy tales can be illustrated by keywords in context: trees, places, tools, animals, names (own) and social estates (classes).

Table 1. Comparative analysis of Grimm's, Andersen's and Wilde's fairy tales

Categories of analysis	Low style (rural denominations)	Medium style (urban denominations)	High style (biblical denominations)
	<b>J. and W. Grimm</b>	<b>H. C. Andersen</b>	<b>Oscar Wilde</b>
<b>Trees</b>	tree (beech / beautiful / precious / gnarled / gorgeous / small / young / mighty / biggest / beautiful / fertile / silver / century old / dry / tall / hollow / tree of life)	"They're from your very garden!" Said the fruit seller and showed him apples and pears (Andersen 2005, 41) The Elder-Tree Mother The Last Dream of the Old Oak Tree (elm / flowering / mighty / right): – elm (74); – oak (44); – pears (17) – apples (66)	"The pillars, which were made of cedar, were wrapped with necklaces of yellow leaves." (Wilde 2000, 139) "There I sat with sailors drinking wine of two colors and eating barley bread and tiny, pickled fish on bay leaves." (Wilde 2000, 141).
<b>Names</b>	"On the edge of a large forest lived a poor woodcutter and his wife with their children, the boy's name was Hansel and the girl's name was Gretel." (Grimm 1993, 88). People's names: Hans, John, James, Lenny, Gretel ... Occupation: Bremen town musicians, armless	Jorindel, Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood  "Two men lived in a village and both had the same name. Both had the name Nicholas, but one had four horses and the other just one. In	Horses was called Nicholas, and the one who had only one horse was called Little Nicholas." (Andersen 2005, 11). Adolf, Gerda, Herman, Hlaimar, Jonas, Kay, Maya, Ole Lukøje, etc. Adonis God whose name is love Emperor and Nubian The Soul The name of the guilty

	girl, servant, farmer, tailor, shepherd, shepherdess, traveler... Functional names: King Thrushbeard, Jorinda and	orderto separate them, the one who had four	prophet Name, of God A name that should not be pronounced Name, mermaid
<b>Infanta</b>		Narcissus	
<b>Cain</b>	Hood, Snow White Rumpels 5ltskin, Sleeping Beauty, Know-it-all ...	Star-Child	
	J. and W. Grimm	H. C. Andersen	Oscar Wilde
<b>Places</b>	church (38) forest (446) city (327) city (74) pasture (15) village (145) garden (38)	church (21) mansion (15) forest (261) castle (238) city (78) village (56) garden (90)	church (15) mansion (65) forest (52) city (9) south (2) city (25) garden (117) east (5) west (9) deliciousness (2)
<b>Tools</b>	field (22) to remove snow (2) plow (8) stick (22) knife (39)	sword (6) stick (6) plow (2) lighter (28) knife (17)	sword (8) goblet (3) thought (7)
<b>Class (social)</b>	"When the cows were being driven to pasture the next morning, the little peasant called the shepherds and told him." (Grimm 1993, 335). fool (5) witch (62) wizard (18) priest (9) servant (48) peasant (256) shepherd/-ess (59) seller (5) executioner (2) soldier (154) gardener (15)	"Your name? Your position?" the guard asked the one who got out of the carriage first." witch (60) wizard (15) priest (15) peasant (80) master (35) shepherd (60) seller (26) executioner (6) serviceman (78) soldier (137) gardener (49)	witch (9) wizard (2) leper (8) king (228) prince (32) soldier (10)
<b>Animals</b>	The Bittern and the Hoopoe The Goose Shepherdess The Fox and the Cat The Cat and the Mouse The Guinea Pig The Donkey The Dog and the Sparrow The Singing Lark The Owl The Sparrow and His Four Children The Frog King The Rabbit and the Hedgehog	The Ugly Duckling: "I'll fly to them, to the royal birds!"* <sup>146</sup> [...] It is be]er for them to kill me than for me to be pinched by ducks, bitten by chickens, than to be kicked by a girl who takes care of a chicken coop, and to suffer a lot in winter!" (Andersen 1999, 161)	The Fisherman and His Soul: "And in that garden walk white peacocks and peacocks with blue breasts." (146) The Nightingale and the Rose (nigh5ngale) The Happy Prince (swallow

It is with his elevated style that Wilde gives his fairy tales a biblical, uplifting and solemn style. In doing so, he goes beyond the Christianized conception of God, as he often says, "God whose Name is love."

<sup>146</sup> Note. \* I.e., swans

## **Seer / Prophet**

Wilde's fairy tales are also characterized by the aesthetics of opposites, in contrast to the model of a folk tale, e.g. by J. and W. Grimm, characterized by an aesthetic of identity when fairy tales meet the traditional expectations of readers. Wilde's tales are based on the model of folk tales and the aesthetics of identity (e.g. J. and W. Grimm, *The Fisherman and His Wife* – O. Wilde, *The Fisherman and His Soul*), but they also deviate from it (e.g. H. C. Andersen, *Small and Great Klaus* – O. Wilde, *A Devoted Friend* [*Little Hans and the Miller Hugo*] etc.). Among other things, Wild is described by literary science as a 'dandy', which represents a social type in the second half of the 19th century in England, characterized by extravagance, conversation, dress, and celebrity status (Juvan 2014, 237–238).

In the article entitled *Model kanonizacije evropskih kulturnih svetnikov* (*The Model of the Canonization of European Cultural Saints*), Marijan Dović<sup>147</sup> reflects on the status of the "chosen one" in literature, which O. Wilde certainly is. Almost more literature has been written about his life than about his work. Dović sets the following criteria: *vitae* (potentials of the individual), *inventio* (justification of status), *cultus* (reproduction) and *virtutes* (social implications). Possible applications of Dović's theory would go beyond the purpose of the present article, so they will be analyzed in one of the following articles. Nevertheless, in Wild it makes sense to mention the subcategories of *vitae* (potentials of the individual). These are *opera* (works), *persona* (personality and appearance), *aenigma* ('transgressions') and *acta* (cultural achievements).

All of these characteristics were typical of Wilde and are reflected in his nine fairy tales. Dović also mentions the position of the seer-prophet (Dović 2017, 74). In Wild, the motives of the artist or the seer-prophet are anticipated in his fairy tales, most explicitly in *The Happy Prince* (1888), in which he foresaw the course of his life. As long as he enjoyed celebrity status (work, personality, transgression [homosexuality] and cultural achievements) he was like a statue of a happy prince (wealthy, handsome, young, high [social status]), but when convicted and imprisoned, the majority forgot about him and denied him support. Wild was most affected by the abandonment of his partner, Lord Douglas, named Bossie, who was with him as long as he was rich and famous. When Wild fell ill, he left him. Wilde's fairy tales, e.g. *The Selfish Giant*, in which Wilde thematizes selfishness and selflessness, could be said to be a kind of self-prophecy, as he himself traveled from egocentrism to sociocentrism.

In the fairy tale *Infantina's Birthday*, inspired by the masterpiece *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego Velazquez, in addition to the implicit celebration of great artistic predecessors, he revived and invented a new tradition (aesthetics of innovation) and thematized the status of the chosen artist, lover through the midget in Velazquez's painting). In the extensive fairy tale *The Fisherman and His Soul*, Wild thematizes the love between two creatures of different origins (marine – terrestrial) and sex (male – female), but the upper part of the mermaid's body is female, and the lower part "fish" or non-existent.

Due to falling in love with a mermaid, who is the alter ego of Lord Alfred Douglas (Bossie), the fairytale character changes from good to bad, so he cuts off his shadow and thus renounces his soul, which is the motif of Mephistopheles, by saying: "The shadow is the body of the soul." At the end of the fairy tale or anti-fairytale fisherman without a soul walks the world and commits crimes (as well as Wilde, which is written in the transcripts of lawsuits against him), but in the end both literary characters die or they commit suicide, which is taboo. Therefore, the priest buries them outside the church walls, but when the priest is surprised the next day by two flowers that are intoxicating and intertwined and grown over the church arch, he suggests that both unfortunate lovers (suicides) be buried inside the church cemetery.

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<sup>147</sup> Dović, Marijan (2012). Model kanonizacije evropskih kulturnih svetnikov. Primerjalna književnost, year 35, no. 3, pp. 71–85.

In this tale, which already in 1891 prophetically foretold Wilde's fatal love for beings of another context/gender, his selfreferential engagement with good and evil within himself and society, the author wrote, by emphasizing his own position sublimated into a fairy tale supposedly intended for children, a prophecy and a vision of one's future or the category of genius of the "sinner" (bohemianism, eroticism, intoxicants).

### Crossover aspect of Wilde's fairy tales

All nine of Wilde's fairy tales are crossover, despite the fact that the author allegedly intended them for children and told them to his sons, as they meet the criteria of a classic or crossover literature based on the theory of Bettina Kummerling Meibauer. Wilde's fairy tales are innovative, representative, aesthetic, but at the same time simple and complex, they represent the children's world (to a lesser extent), they are imaginative, crossover and have multiple meaning.

### Comparative analysis of the most common religious motives<sup>148</sup>

#### The Happy Prince and Other Tales, 1888

It is common knowledge that the fairy tale of The Happy Prince could in a sense be understood as Wilde's autobiography, similar to that of Andersen and his fairy tale The Ugly Duckling.

Table 2. Comparison of Wilde's fairy tales and the Bible I<sup>149</sup>

<p>“And David examined the people who were with him, and appointed captains who commanded over a thousand people, and those who commanded over a hundred people. The boy knew nothing, but Jonathan and David knew about it. Jonathan gave his weapon to the boy who was with him and said to him, “Go, take it to the city!” When the boy ler, David rose from behind the stone of Ezel, fell face down on the ground, and bowed three 5mes. Then they kissed each other and cried over each other, David especially loudly.</p> <p>How the heroes fell in the middle of the balle! Jonathan is pierced on your heights! I feel sorry for you, my brother, Jonathan! You were very nice to me. Your love was wonderful to me, more than a woman's love.” 26</p>	<p>“High above the city center stood a statue of the happy prince on a high pillar.” (Wilde 2000, 7). “‘You are warm because you have done a good deed,’ said the prince.” (2000, 15) “And so the li]le swallow chose a large ruby from the prince's sword and flew with it in its beak over the city roofs.” (2000, 12). “He kissed the happy prince on the lips and then fell dead at his feet.” (2000, 20). “‘Bring me two of the most precious things from the city,’ God said to one of his angels. And the angel brought him a leaden heart and a dead bird.</p> <p>‘You have chosen right,’ said God, ‘why in my heavenly garden this little bird will sing forever, and in my golden city the happy prince will glorify me!’” (2000, 21).</p>
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<sup>148</sup> All highlights are made by the authors of this article. All quotes from the Bible are from Biblija.net: The Bible on the Internet. s. d. Slovenian standard translation 3. Ljubljana: Svetopisemska družba Slovenije. <https://www.biblija.net/biblija.cgi?Bible=Bible&l=sl> (Accessed: 23. 08. 2021)

<sup>149</sup> Explicit biblical allusion to homosexuality and implicit recognition of the equivalence of same-sex love by reference to the Bible

### The Nightingale and the Rose

Wilde's anti-fairy tale or a fairy tale with a tragic ending is related to Andersen's ironic fairy tale *The Princess and the Pea* and *The Swineherd*. In the fairy tale *The Nightingale and the Rose*, Wilde intertextually relates to the ancient motif of Philomena – the swallow or the nightingale. The symbol of the nightingale is characteristic of poets and is the so-called "literary bird" (Ferber 2012, 138). The theme has been known at least since Aristophanes' *The Birds*, and medieval minnesängers and troubadours have also written about the poet nightingale. Among others, Keats also wrote *Ode to a Nightingale*, Andersen the fairy tale *The Nightingale*, C. Baudelaire *The Albatross*.

Nightingales or birds are usually masculine nouns. Wilde's tale *The Nightingale and the Rose*, with a thorn motif, is probably of medieval origin. When a nightingale sings to roses until spring, it sometimes presses its chest against the rose thorn to increase the pain (in the song). In *A Dictionary of Literary Motifs*, Ferber connects this motif with Omar Khayyam and the Persian bird: "Bulbul, when the bird bulbul/nightingale sings a mourning song to a rose."

Table 3. Comparison of Wilde's fairy tales and the Bible II

<p>"And he grabbed the elders of the city, and took the thorns and the thistles of the desert, and brought them to the men of Succoth." (Ecc 8:16). "And all the trees said to the thorn bush, 'Come, reign over us'" (Ecc 9:14). "But in order not to be overwhelmed by the sublimity of revelations, I was given a thorn in the flesh, Satan's messenger that was supposed to beat me so that I would not become proud." (2 Cor 12: 7).</p>	<p>"Your lips are like a purple ribbon, your mouth is lovely. His mouth is sweetness itself, he is all charming. Let your breasts be like grapes of vines and the scent of your breath like apples, your mouth like the best wine that flows to my beloved in sweetness, glide over the lips of the sleeping." "As the moon shone in the sky, the nightingale flew</p>
<p>It sang all night with its chest impaled on a thorn, and the cold crystal moon leaned down from the sky and listened." (Wilde 2000, 26). "It sang all night and the thorn penetrated deeper and deeper into its chest and the blood of its life flowed from it." (2000, 26). "The Lord God planted a garden to the east of Eden and placed there the man He had formed." (1 Ms 2: 8).</p>	<p>"All I ask in return is that you love faithfully because love is wiser than wisdom, even though wisdom is wise, and mightier than power, even though power is mighty. Its wings are of fiery colour and its body is of fiery colour. Its lips are as sweet as honey and its breath is as incense." (2000, 25). "Then they were joined by a group of Hasidim, virtuous men in Israel, who were all devoted to the law."</p>

### The Selfish Giant

The fairy tale *The Selfish Giant* is Wilde's shortest tale and thematizes the literary character of the selfish giant, who initially sees children playing in his garden. He forbids them to do so, so winter sets in in his garden. In the end, he allows the children to enter his garden, especially one boy, who represents the Christianized character of the chosen one, to play and even kiss him (on the mouth). There are explicit religious motifs in this tale, especially the motif of Christ.

Table 4. Comparison of Wilde's fairy tales and the Bible III

<p>“The Lord God has brought forth from the earth all kinds of trees, pleasing to the eye and good to eat, including the tree of life in the midst of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (1 Ms 2: 9). “If I don't see the nail wounds on his hands and s5ck my finger in the nail wounds and put my hand on his side, I won't believe it.”</p>	<p>“The human heart gives an image to the face, either for good or for bad.” (Sir 13.25). “Be generousto the poor, do not leave him to wait for pi]ance.” (Sir 29.8). “The selfish eye is not sa5sfied with its share, evil wickedness dries up its soul.” (Sir 14.9). “The character of a lying man leads to dishonor and</p>
<p>“The years went by and the giant got very old and very weak. He couldn't play anymore, so he sat in a giant armchair, watching the kids play, and admired his garden.” (Wilde 2000, 34). “In the farthest corner of the garden stood a tree covered with beau5ful white flowers.” (2000, 37). “Who was so presumptuous as to hurt you?’ he asked, as there were two nail wounds on the li]le boy's palms and two nail wounds were on his 5ny legs.” (2000).</p>	<p>hisshame is constantly with him.” (Sir 20.26). “The human heart gives an image to the face, either for good or for bad. Laziness is a great sin and I don't really like any of my friends being lazy and careless.” (Wilde 2000, 47). “Therefore, it is quite clear that there is no compassion in your character,” said the muskrat.” (2000, 51). “What, in your opinion, are the du5es of a devoted friend?” (2000, 38).</p>

### The Remarkable Rocket

This whole fairy tale is actually an anti-fairy tale, as the main literary character the Great Rocket ends tragically in the end. Wilde thematizes the ‘seven sins’, especially pride. He also implicitly thematizes celebrity status, not only his own but that of other people as well. The basic complication in addition to the frame story (the wedding of the king's son) is a conversation between pyrotechnic literary characters, the central one – a rocket, a Bengal fire and a Roman candle.

Table 5. Comparison of Wilde's fairy tales and the Bible V

<p>“Pride leads to destruc5on and decay, and recklessness leads you to humilia5on and great depriva5on, because recklessnessisthe mother of hunger</p>	<p>“The only thing that keeps a person afloat all their lives is the awareness that everyone else is infinitely inferior, and that's a feeling I've always nurtured.” (Wilde 2000, 57)</p>
<p>Before disarray walks pride, before fall the arrogance of the spirit.” (Prg 16, 18). “Adorn yourself with exalta5on and majesty, put on dignity and splendor!” (Job 40.10).</p>	<p>“A bad rocket? A bad rocket?’ she said as she spun in the air. ‘Impossible! A famous rocket, so said the man. Bad and famous sounds almost the same, and in fact it is the same many 5mes.’ And she fell into the mud.” (2000, 61). “It's going to be a mission,’ Rocket said, trying to look as dignified as possible.” (2000, 65)</p>

Wilde also introduces elements of modern fairy tales, e.g., narcissism, which goes beyond the purpose of the present article.

## A House of Pomegranates, 1891

The fairy tales in the A House of Pomegranates collection thematize an artist who believes in his talents and the importance of art and exceptional people. Already in the title there is a religious motif – a pomegranate. As a classical philologist, Wilde added intertextuality with Persephone (Isis), also symbolized by the pomegranate.

Table 6. Comparison of Wilde’s fairy tales and the Bible VI

<p>“On the edge of the garment, place pomegranates of cherry and red scarlet and crimson, round and round along its edge, and between them around and around the golden bells: the golden bell and the pomegranate, the golden bell and the pomegranate around and around the edge of the outer garment!”</p>	<p>“His hair is dark and curly, his lips are red as a pomegranate and his big eyes are dreamy.” (Wilde 2000, 16). “Neither pearls nor garnets can pay for it nor it is not even for sale in the market.” (2000, 23) “Dark red butterflies with gold dust on their wings flew here and there and visited flower after flower, tiny sand lizard crawled out of the cracks in the wall and sunbathed in the white sun, pomegranates split and cracked from the heat and showed their bleeding red hearts.” (2000, 88). “We plucked pomegranates from the trees, broke them and sipped the sweet juice.” (2000, 128). “As I was lying in the teahouse in Pomegranate Street that night, the Emperor’s guards came in and took me to the court.” (2000, 135).</p>
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## The Young King

Wilde’s tale of the young king who refuses to be crowned solely because of external attributes (dress, crown...) is the antithesis of Andersen’s ironic tale The Emperor’s New Clothes.

Table 7. Comparison of Wilde’s fairy tales and the Bible VII

<p>He walked over to him and kissed him. (1 Ms 27,27)</p>	<p>“They also saw him, as they recounted, how he pressed his hot lips to the marble forehead of the ancient statue that was discovered in the riverbed while digging the foundations for a new stone bridge; the name of Hadrian’s Bithynian slave was engraved on the statue. And once he spent the whole night watching the moonlight envelop the silver statue of Endymion.” (Wilde 2000, 71). “He stood before the image of Christ, and to his right and to his left were beautiful golden vessels, a chalice of yellow wine, and a bottle of consecrated oil. He knelt before the image of Christ and large candles lit brightly at the tabernacle sprinkled with jewels, and the smoke of incense swirled in thin blue circles around the church. He bowed his head in prayer and the priests in their ceremonial</p>
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	robes crawled away from the altar.” (2000, 84).
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### The Birthday of the Infanta

Wilde’s fairy tale with a tragic ending is related to Diego Velazquez’s painting *Las Meninas* (1656),<sup>150</sup> which depicts nine creatures, eight people and a dog. Two of the characters are midgets on the right, and Wilde wrote a two-part tale in which he devoted the first part to the mourning of the infantine’s father, the Spanish king, over his poisoned wife, whom he had embalmed. In the second part, the midget walks around the rooms with mirrors and confronts his own identity or appearance.<sup>151</sup>

Table 8. Comparison of Wilde’s fairy tales and the Bible VIII

“He then ordered his servants physicians to embalm his father. And the physicians embalmed Israel.” (1 Ms 50.2). “He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. And he took him down from the cross, and wrapped him in a piece of linen, and laid him in a sepulcher, hewn out of the rock, where no man had laid before him. It was preparasyon day and Saturday was approaching.”	“He loved her so immensely that even the grave was not allowed to cover her. She was embalmed by an Arab doctor [...]” (Wilde 2000, 91). “The Queen’s corpse s5ll lay on her death bed, covered with carpets, in a black marble courtyard chapel, as brought there by the monks on that windy March day nearly twelve years ago.” (2000, 91).
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### The Fisherman and His Soul

Table 9. Comparison of Wilde’s fairy tales and the Bible IX

“His soul became a]ached to Dina, Jacob’s daughter; he fell in love with the girl and spoke kindly to her.” (1 Ms 34, 3).	“Li]le mermaid, li]le mermaid, I love you! Marry me, I love you!” (Wilde 2000, 114).
“Then Heber’s wife Jaéla grabbed the tent peg, took the hammer in her hand, quietly approached him, and drove the peg into his temple so that it sank into the ground. In a sound sleep, he shuddered and died.” (Ecc 4:21).	“What people call the shadow of the body is not the shadow of the body, but the body of the soul. Go to the shore, turn your back towards the moon, and cut off your shadow, which is the body of your soul, from your feet, and command your soul to leave you, and it will leave you.” (2000, 124).
“And God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruixul and mul5ply, fill all the waters of the sea!	“And when [the priest] came ashore, he blessed the sea and all the wild creatures that live in it. He also blessed the fauns and the

<sup>150</sup> Cf. <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/las-meninas/9fdc7800-9ade48b0-ab8b-edee94ea877f> (Accessed: 26. 05. 2023).

<sup>151</sup> Cf. <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/las-meninas/9fdc7800-9ade48b0-ab8b-edee94ea877f> (Accessed: 23. 08. 2021).

And let the birds multiply on the earth!” (Gen 1:22).	Many creatures that dance in the woods and the bright-eyed creatures that peek from behind the leaves. He blessed all the beings of this divine world, and the people were full of joy and wonder.” (2000, 154)
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### The Star-Child

Table 10. Comparison of Wilde’s fairy tales and the Bible X

<p>“Where is the one who was born as the King of the Jews? For we saw that his star had risen, and we came to worship him.” (Ma]. 2: 2). “Do not take revenge and do not resent the sons of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.” (3 Ms 19, 15). “And, behold, there came a leper and worshiped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” (Ma]. 8: 2).</p>	<p>“He loved her so immensely that even the grave was not allowed to cover her. She was embalmed by an Arab doctor [...]” (Wilde 2000, 91). “The Queen’s corpse still lay on her death bed, covered with carpets, in a black marble courtyard chapel, as brought there by the monks on that windy March day nearly twelve years ago.” (2000, 91).</p> <p>“A very bright and beautiful star fell from the sky.” (Wilde 2000, 156). “And the old priest called him to himself several times and tried to teach him to love his neighbor. Who are you to bring pain into the creator’s world?” “There was a leper in front of the city gates.” (2000)</p>
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The table shows that Wilde knew ancient literature, the Bible and the holy books of other religions, that he was extremely educated and also extremely talented. His tales could be said to be homo narrans (J. H. J. Uther) and homo ludens (Huizinga) and represent evidence of P. Armstrong from his book *How Literature Plays with the Brain*. Wilde was educated at Oxford, as a storyteller he is both a critic and an artist. The artist as a critic, especially in fairy tales, which were considered a paraliterary type to his literary circle. Wilde’s fairy tales are a synthesis of literature and fairy tales, content and forms, and literature and philosophy.

In his fairy tales, he innovatively combined thesis (fairy tales) and antithesis (anti-fairy tales) into a new synthesis (literary fairy tales). In all fairy tales, Wilde combines binaries based on the model of a folk tale (Propp 1928, 2005), but innovatively combines them into a new synthesis. His fairy tales are an extremely innovative bridge between the model of folk and modern fairy tales, in the form of a literary fairy tale as a synthesis of contradictions of oral and written tradition, intended for children and adults and percolating between the folk and the authorial.

### Method

The descriptive method and the method of literary analysis of nine Wilde’s fairy tales in Slovene, translated by Ciril Kosmač from 1959, were used for the present article. At the end of the article, two exceptional illustrators of Wilde’s fairy tales need to be mentioned. In 1993, Wilde’s fairy tale *The Happy Prince* with illustrations by Marija Lucija Stupica (1950–2002), who graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in 1976 was published in the collection of *Velike slikanice* (Great Picture Books). In 2000, both collections were published, featuring an integral version of Wilde’s nine fairy tales with illustrations by Alenka Sottler.

## Conclusion

In all of his nine fairy tales, Wilde describes the religious motif of martyrdom, through the biblical parable of martyrdom (suffering and sacrifice), so his fairy tales are essentially anti-fairy tales because they have an unfortunate ending as the fairytale character dies and his idea survives. The titles of Wilde's fairy tales could be changed to implicit ones, for example: The Happy Prince (The Unhappy Prince), The Nightingale and the Rose (The Martyr and the Arrogant), The Selfish Giant (The Unselfish Giant), The Loyal Friend (The Unfaithful Friend), The Eminent Rocket (The Non-eminent / Assuming Rocket), The Infanta's Birthday (Death of a Dwarf), The Fisherman and His Soul (The Fisherman Without a Soul), The Star-Child (The Soullessness). In the fairy tale *The Young King*, he refuses to be crowned and wants to be crowned with a crown of thorns, to have lilies and a modest canvas around his waist.

Wilde describes that in the sunlight in the church insignia (golden crown, ermine cloak, etc.) begin to glow and they find that God himself crowned the young king: "Although today is the day of my coronation, I will not wear them because my garment was woven by pale hands of suffering on the looms of sorrow." (Wilde 2000, 81); "Should joy wear what suffering has produced?", said the young king (2000, 83). In his fairy tales, Wilde, through the main literary characters who are martyrs (suffering and victims), thematizes his life and the life of an artist/celebrity in the biblical, solemn and sublime style of the Song of Songs, gives priority to "God whose name is love" (Wilde 2000, 153) before God in the church, and then the priest begins to speak of a God whose name is love and for this reason: "He has blessed all the beings of this divine world ..." (2000, 154). By doing so, Wilde affirms faith on the one hand, and denies it on the other, and places the god of love above the God of the Church.

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