

## The Literary Fairy-Tale: A Study of Oscar Wilde's 'The Happy Prince' and 'The Star-Child'

The Happy Prince collection of literary fairy-tales constitutes an attempt, as Wilde put it himself, to 'treat a tragic modern problem in a form that aims at delicacy and imaginative treatment: it is a reaction against the purely imitative character of modern art.'<sup>1</sup> In stories like 'The Nightingale and the Rose,' 'The Devoted Friend,' and 'The Remarkable Rocket,' Wilde achieves his goal by exploiting the gap between the rather remote and happy kind of tales that the reader might expect to emerge from worlds populated by kings' sons, Russian princesses, roses, balls, and talking fireworks, and the very cynical and bitter accounts of man's depravity that he actually encounters. In such cases the fairy-tale provides only the extremely ironic trappings of what amount to wry pieces of social and moral commentary. 'The Happy Prince' and 'The Star-Child,' however, make much more subtle and creative use of the fairy-tale and only those readers who are acquainted with the style, form, and implications of the genre can appreciate their full significance.

It will be my aim in this paper to prove initially, by examining his stories in relation to the typical stylistic and structural elements established by Axel Olric<sup>2</sup> and Vladimir Propp<sup>3</sup> respectively, that in 'The Happy Prince' and 'The Star-Child' Wilde was following the fairy-tale form extremely closely. I will then attempt to demonstrate that his occasional deviations from the norms provide the reader with the key to the meaning of these stories.<sup>4</sup> In order to carry out this latter task it is necessary to complement Propp's formalist study of the fairy-tale with Joseph Campbell's<sup>5</sup> structuralist study of myth.

1 *Letters*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London 1962) 221

2 'The Epic Laws of Folk Narrative,' *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood-Cliffs, NJ 1965) 129-41.

3 *The Morphology of the Folktale*, translated by Laurence Scott, 2nd ed. (Austin 1968).

4 It is, of course, impossible to establish with any certainty whether Oscar Wilde was engaged in a fully conscious manipulation of the basic fairy-tale form, thus pre-empting in his artistic creation the later scientific studies of scholars such as Propp, Olric, and Campbell, or whether his perception of the form and significance of the folk-tale form emerged from that area of the unconscious which Jung would claim is the source of all such literature. In this study I am only claiming that at some level of consciousness Oscar Wilde understood the essential nature of the folk-tale well enough to rework it towards his own ends.

5 *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton 1949).

This is a valid procedure because the 'monomyth' upon which Campbell bases his conclusions is morphologically identical to Propp's single definitive fairy-tale. As Campbell<sup>6</sup> himself asserts, it seems likely that the fairy-tale is simply a domestic form of myth, and as such is to be granted the same significance.

Before proceeding to an examination of Wilde's tales, it is necessary to establish a theoretical framework by providing a brief summary of the pertinent aspects of Olric and Propp's studies of the fairy-tale, by demonstrating the common morphological basis of Propp and Campbell's analyses of the fairy-tale and the myth, and by outlining Campbell's interpretation of the significance of the myth, and hence of the fairy-tale.

In 'The Epic Laws of Folk Narrative,' Axel Olric establishes that there are thirteen main recurring compositional elements in the fairy-tale: 1/ The tale does not open or close abruptly. 2/ Repetition, usually three-fold, is used extensively. 3/ The number three appears frequently. 4/ No scene includes more than two characters. 5/ Frequent use is made of contrast between the hero and the characters around him. 6/ Two characters can be used to fulfill the same role. 7/ Whenever a series of persons, or things, occurs, then the principal one will come first. However, the character who comes last will always be the one for whom the reader feels most sympathy. 8/ The tale is always single-stranded. 9/ Different episodes tend to be patterned in very similar ways. 10/ The story reaches its climax in the form of one or more tableau scenes. 11/ The plot is internally plausible but need make no reference to external reality. 12/ The tale possesses epic unity, with the result that its conclusion is forecast from the very beginning. 13/ The tale concentrates on a leading character. This is the most important single element in the folk-tale.

Vladimir Propp, who approaches the fairy-tale structurally rather than stylistically, has perceived a similar consistency from tale to tale. In all, he traces thirty-one elements, each represented by a letter or symbol, which comprise the full morphology of the fairy-tale. However, not all of these elements are of equal importance, as Propp himself points out,<sup>7</sup> and for our purposes we need take into account only the most crucial ones. Very briefly, the single story which Propp finds at the basis of all folk-tales involves the hero's progression from a condition of lack to one of fulfillment. Initially, the villain either causes harm to a member of the family (A) or the hero suffers from a lack (a). After being made aware of this misfortune or of his own lack (B) the hero either agrees to or decides upon counteraction (c), and leaves

6 Campbell 37-8

7 Propp 34, 58

home (↑). He then successfully fulfills a number of tests (D), meets his future donor and, by responding correctly (E), wins magical aid or a helper (F). In the next stage of the story, the hero is transferred to the whereabouts of the object of his search (G) and, after joining in combat with (H), suffering a scar from (J) and killing the villain (I), is able to eliminate the initial misfortune or lack (K). Finally, the hero returns to his kingdom (↓) after escaping (Rs) from pursuit (Pr), is married, and ascends the throne (W).

If we compare Propp's basic fairy-tale with Joseph Campbell's monomyth it becomes clear that structurally the fairy-tale and the myth are the same since almost all of the elements described above are to be found in the outline of the hero's journey that Campbell gives in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure [aBC↑. In this summary Campbell does not state explicitly that the hero is either in a condition of lack (a) or that he is made aware of this lack (B). However, in the specific examples that he cites elsewhere the hero is usually motivated by the desire to possess something that is beyond himself – King Arthur rides off in search of a hart and the Arapaho girl chases a porcupine.<sup>8</sup> There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark ... or be slain by the opponent and descend in death. ... [The crossing of the threshold is generally not a part of the folk-tale, which usually includes only the lesser tests that follow.] Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests) [D], some of which give him magical aid (helpers) [EF]. When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round [G], he undergoes a supreme ordeal [equivalent to (HI)] – the fight with the villain] and gains his reward (K). ... The final work is that of the return [↓]. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection [Propp does not include the possibility of divine help during the return journey] ... if not, he flees and is pursued [Pr]. ... At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind [Rs]; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread. ... The boon that he brings restores the world [W].<sup>9</sup>

Thus the fairy-tale and the myth both follow the pattern A or a BC↑DE FGHIK↓PrRsW.

Because they share a common morphological basis it is reasonable to conclude, as Campbell does himself, that the fairy-tale has the same function as the myth, which is to 'supply the symbols that carry the human spirit

8 Campbell 53–5

9 Ibid. 245–6

forward.<sup>10</sup> Implicit in the story of the way in which the hero is able to eliminate his personal lack and to establish sovereignty over his people is a statement of faith in the ability of the individual to find personal salvation and, consequently, to introduce new spiritual energy into the world.<sup>11</sup> However, Campbell points out that while the myth is still relevant to the individual who experiences its basic pattern in dreams, it is only in simpler societies than ours, where the social unit is a carrier of religious content and not an economic-political organisation and where every important transitional period in the life of the individual is marked by dramatisations of the basic myth story in the form of rites of passage, that the extremely close equation established here between individual and social salvation is a completely accurate one.<sup>12</sup>

Having established our frame of reference, it is now possible to return to Oscar Wilde's tales. An examination of 'The Star-Child' reveals that it is consistent with Olric's laws with two vital exceptions. The tale fulfills the most important of the epic laws by focusing its attention on a single character, the Star-Child (law 13); it establishes contrasts between the initially arrogant hero and the humble figures of his foster parents, his mother, the beggar and the hare, and between the finally noble and altruistic hero and the selfish and grasping magician (law 5); it utilises the foster parents, the soldiers, the beggar and the mother to perform single functions (law 6); it is single-stranded in that it follows the Star-Child's adventures from the moment of his discovery in the woods, through the account of his selfishness and mistreatment of his mother, to his purgatorial trials and eventual reunion with his parents (law 8); it possesses epic unity since we know that his adventures will be terminated with the discovery of the whereabouts of his mother (law 12); and it ends with a truly dramatic tableau scene in which the hero recovers his beauty and learns of his regal lineage (law 10).

Wilde's success in satisfying the condition that the tale possess an internal validity which is not necessarily consistent with external reality (law 11) is illustrated very clearly by this final tableau scene. Although the hero is surrounded by a large crowd of admirers and city officials, Wilde at no time conveys any sense of numbers or confusion. Indeed, the slight spatial context within which the action is initially set is removed entirely during the climactic encounter between the child and his parents. However, the reader feels no sense of dissatisfaction, because Wilde has focussed his attention so completely on the protagonists. This lack of concern with the spatial context

10 Ibid. 11

11 Ibid. 19-20

12 Ibid. 387-8

can also be observed throughout the rest of the action since the hero's adventures are played out against a very generalised and stylised background of woods and cities. Similarly, Wilde conveys only the most minimal sense of the passing of time during the boy's growth from infant to child before he leaves home, and from child to adult in the course of his adventures.

The crucial number three recurs frequently throughout 'The Star-Child' (law 3). The Star-Child is rebuked by three of the animals that he has mistreated when he begs for help in his misfortune. He walks through the forest for three days, wanders in the world for three years, encounters three soldiers, and rules for three years.

Three-fold repetition (law 2) is to be found during Wilde's account of the Star-Child's tasks. The Star-Child is sent out three times to find a piece of gold in the woods, is helped three times by a hare, and three times gives the coin to a leper despite the magician's warning that failure to carry out his errand will result in punishment.

The overall patterning of the three incidents during which the Star-Child is tested is similar (law 9), not only in that he is sent out each time in search of gold, or in that he always meets the leper and the hare, but also in that the magician's commands are phrased in very similar terms. On the first day the magician says, 'Today thou shalt bring me the piece of white gold, and if thou bringst it not back, I will beat thee with a hundred stripes' ('s-c,' 157),<sup>13</sup> on the second, 'If to-day thou bringst me not the piece of yellow gold, I will surely keep thee as my slave, and give thee three hundred stripes' ('s-c,' 160), and on the third, 'If to-day thou bringst me the piece of red gold I will set thee free, but if thou bringst it not I will surely slay thee' ('s-c,' 162).

Although there are a large number of characters in 'The Star-Child' no more than two appear within a single scene (law 4). The opening scenes are essentially restricted to two characters because the two Woodcutters who discover the Star-Child and the kind Woodcutter and his wife who give him a home play single roles. The episode during which the Star-Child discovers the identity of his mother also involves the Woodcutter and his wife, again acting as one character. However, the three characters are grouped into combinations of two and thus do not all appear at the same time. After the Star-Child has stoned the beggar-woman he runs off while the Woodcutter takes her into his house, where he discovers that she is the Star-Child's mother. He and his wife then leave the house, give this information to the child, and remain outside while he goes into the house to meet his mother. In the next fully-realised scene the Star-Child encounters three soldiers. However, like the Woodcutter and his wife, they serve a single function and can

13 All references to Wilde's works are included in the text and are cited from *The Works of Oscar Wilde* III (New York 1909).

be regarded as one person. By contrast, the three characters involved in the testing of the Star-Child have distinct roles and are kept strictly apart. The magician, who sets the tasks, remains in his house, the hare, who helps the child, stays in the woods, and the leper, who begs for alms, never moves from the city gate. Although the child is surrounded by a large crowd of admirers and city officials during the story's climactic reunion scene, Wilde again breaks down the action into units of individual intercourse. After encountering the priests and the high officials, who speak with one voice, the Star-Child isolates the leper and his mother out of the faceless crowd. Since it was by learning to pity the leper that the child truly redeemed himself for his treatment of his mother, the significance of the two characters becomes inseparable. It is thus fitting that each should tell him to rise in exactly the same manner: 'And the beggar-woman put her hand on his head, and said to him "Rise," and the leper put his hand on his head, and said to him, "rise," also' ('s-c,' 166).

However, Wilde is not finally trying to write a fairy-tale but is using the form as a medium through which to express his personal vision. Therefore, we can assume that his occasional deviations from the norm will provide us with significant indications of his purpose. For this reason, Wilde's failure to close his story gradually (law 1) is of more importance than his adherence to any of the other laws. Like the opening, which takes the reader gently into the story by way of a general account of the Woodcutters and their environment before focussing on the discovery of the Star-Child, the ending seems to be seeking a gradual relaxation of tension after the crucial discovery of the boy's paternity, until Wilde suddenly introduces a surprising and ironic conclusion:<sup>14</sup>

Much justice and mercy did he show to all, and the evil Magician he banished, and to the Woodcutter and his wife he sent many rich gifts, and to their children he gave high honour. Nor would he suffer any to be cruel to bird or beast, but taught love and loving-kindness and charity, and to the poor he gave bread, and to the naked he gave raiment, and there was peace and plenty in the land.

Yet ruled he not long, so great had been his suffering, and so bitter the fire of his testing, for after the space of three years he died. And he who came after him ruled evilly. ('s-c,' 166-7)

It will not be possible to account fully for the introduction of this sudden and extremely unexpected note of pessimism into a story which had hitherto been so confidently proclaiming the Star-Child's achievement in developing

14 This kind of reversal is, of course, a common feature of the myth (*Beowulf*, for example). However, it is not usually to be found in the fairy-tale, and thus it seems legitimate to regard Wilde's introduction of this element as a deviation from the norm.

from a spoilt and selfish child into a kind and benevolent adult, until we have examined 'The Star-Child' in relation to Propp and Campbell's studies. However, a second deviation from Olric's epic laws does serve to point us toward the source of Wilde's sense of disillusionment. As we saw earlier in examining his approach to space and time, Wilde generally avoids relating the action of his story to the demands of external reality (law 11). Yet he ignores this principle, and hence breaks with the norm of folk-tale narrative, on two occasions. During the story's opening conversation the animals introduce an element of explicit social commentary by blaming the misery of their existence on the government:

'Ugh!' snarled the Wolf, as he limped through the brushwood with his tail between his legs, 'this is perfectly monstrous weather. Why doesn't the Government look to it?' ('S-C,' 137)

Later, in the course of demonstrating the nature of the Star-Child's selfishness, Wilde once again strays beyond the immediate world of his story and makes it perfectly clear that his hero's faults, and hence, by implication, the oppressions suffered by the animals, can be related specifically to the conditions operating in his own society. By justifying his cruelty towards the beggar-woman on the grounds that her ugliness is spoiling the beauty of the tree beneath which she is sitting the boy reveals himself to be an adherent to the narrowly aesthetic creed that was so popular during the last years of the nineteenth century. Although the Star-Child learns to adjust his own perspective on experience, there is no indication that he is able to obliterate Governmental corruption or pernicious creeds in general. The dichotomy thus established between the salvation of the individual and that of the group accounts in part for the ambiguous attitude that Wilde reveals at the end of 'The Star-Child.' However, for an explanation of the broader implications of his attitude toward man and his society, we must now turn to our second area of comparison.

An examination of 'The Star-Child' in relation to Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* reveals that, just as, with a few vital exceptions, Wilde's story is consistent with the style of the oral fairy-tale so, with equally vital exceptions, it is faithful to the structure. The Star-Child's lack is defined in the opening pages of the story when, instead of bringing relief from cold, hunger, and despair, as the Woodman anticipates, he increases suffering (a). The boy is made aware of this deficiency when he becomes ugly as a result of mistreating his mother (B), and is thus inspired to leave home in search of forgiveness [↑]. After wandering in the world for three years, he falls into the hands of the magician, who sets him three tasks and is consequently, but unintentionally, the donor (D). The obviously spiritual nature of the boy's search is emphasised by the three-fold basis of each task. Not only must he

find the coins but, more important, must show pity towards the hare and the leper. By successfully fulfilling these tests (ε), the Star-Child acquires the magic agent (ϕ), which is, of course, pity. Instead of a sequential process from task to reward, Wilde presents a horizontal one whereby the reward emerges in the course of fulfilling the tests. The Star-Child now recovers his beauty and discovers that the city contains the object of this search (γ). His lack is fully eliminated by his mother's forgiveness for the suffering that he caused her (κ), and he is able to take on his royal inheritance (ω).

Although Propp admits that no single tale need reproduce all of the functions, the nature of the omissions in this story is extremely significant. When the two schemes are juxtaposed,

(Propp)	A or abc↑defghjik↓PrRs w
(Wilde)	abc↑defg κ w

it can be seen that the Star-Child neither destroys the villain (ηη), nor returns to teach his lesson to the world (↓PrRs). If we now apply Campbell's interpretation of fairy-tale/myth to 'The Star-Child' it becomes obvious, as our stylistic analysis indicated, that, for Wilde, although salvation is possible at an individual level, society cannot be freed of its basic villainy because the hero cannot communicate his lesson to others.

However, Campbell's further comparison of the function of myth in the small and harmonious communities from which it originally derived with its role in the complex world of today enables the reader to understand that Wilde is not merely using the fairy-tale form to present a critique of his own age. Rather, he succeeds in placing the problem of alienation in the nineteenth century in its proper perspective and thus demonstrates that the total sense of despair which has tended to be modern man's reaction to his situation is unnecessary. Myth can no longer provide the very direct sense of security that it once did in societies in which all of the members were united in their sharing of a small number of relevance structures and thus felt an intimate link between the fate of the individual and that of the group. However, the despair generated in such writers as Joyce and Eliot by their realisation of this breakdown of communal ideals is perhaps exaggerated since, as both Campbell and Wilde perceive, the hero-deed is still relevant to the inner experience of the individual:

Isolated societies, dream-bounded within a mythologically charged horizon, no longer exist except as areas to be exploited. And within the progressive societies themselves, every last vestige of the ancient human heritage of ritual, morality, and art is in full decay.

The problem of mankind today, therefore, is precisely the opposite to that of men in the comparatively stable periods of those great co-ordinating mythologies which



now are known as lies. Then all meaning was in the group, in the great anonymous forms, none in the self-expressive individual; today no meaning is in the group – none in the world: all is in the individual. But there the meaning is absolutely unconscious. One does not know toward what one moves. One does not know by what one is propelled. The lines of communication between the conscious and the unconscious zones of the human psyche have all been cut, and we have been split in two.

The hero-deed to be wrought is not today what it was in the century of Galileo. Where then there was darkness, now there is light; but also, where light was, there now is darkness. The modern hero-deed must be that of questing to bring to light again the lost Atlantis of the co-ordinated soul.<sup>15</sup>

It is precisely because Wilde retains his faith in the individual's ability to perform the 'hero-deed' and to quest successfully for 'the lost Atlantis of the co-ordinated soul' that he is able to introduce Christian symbolism into 'The Star-Child' without any of the irony which usually characterises its use in modern literature. Thus, in contrast to such stunted Christ figures as Joe Christmas, the Star-Child is affirmatively and unambiguously related to Christ. 'And the priests and the high officers knelt down and said to him, "It was prophesied of old that on this day should come he who was to rule over us"' ('S-C,' 164).

The thematic pattern established by our analysis of 'The Star-Child' is somewhat more obvious in 'The Happy Prince,' since the hero of this story is engaged in an extremely direct conflict with his society. As before, Wilde is generally consistent with the stylistic laws established by Olric, with a few significant exceptions. The Swallow is the story's single hero (law 13), the Prince playing the role of tester. However, a certain amount of twinning is also to be found (law 6). While the Swallow is shown going through the whole process from lack to fulfillment, the Prince, who admits that he too once lived entirely for pleasure, is in the final stages of a similar journey. Thus, at the end of the story, the Angel takes both the Prince's heart and the bird up to heaven. The story is single-stranded (law 8) in that it proceeds in a direct line from the beginning of the Swallow's journey, through his meeting with the Prince and the performance of the tasks, to his death and ascent into heaven; it reaches its climax in the tableau scene (law 10) in which the Swallow and the Prince die; and it opens gradually with an account of the citizens' reaction to the statue, before turning to the Swallow, and closes in a similar manner after the climactic moment of death with an ironic contrasting of the respective attitudes of the citizens and God towards the Swallow and the Prince (law 1). Contrasts are established (law 5) between the initially selfish Swallow and the altruistic Prince, then between the Prince and the

Swallow – after it has learnt to pity others – and the egocentric and self-seeking citizens and town councillors. No scene includes more than two characters (law 4), since the main action is restricted to the Swallow and the Prince. The citizens and town councillors who serve to open and close the story act as a single character. The number three plays an important part in the story (law 3), since the Prince sheds three tears, and the Swallow performs three tasks (law 2) before committing himself to staying with the Prince instead of going to Egypt. The incidents involving these tasks are patterned in similar ways (law 9). Each includes a plea from the Prince that the Swallow stay one more night in order to perform a good deed, an attempt by the Swallow to argue that he must go to Egypt, a final capitulation on the part of the Swallow, and the transference of a precious jewel, taken from the Prince's body, to a suffering inhabitant of the city. The sense of repetition and patterning thus conveyed is heightened by the very similar terms in which the Prince's three requests are phrased. On the first occasion he says, 'Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow ... will you not stay with me for one night, and be my messenger?' ('H.P.', 176) and on the second and third, 'Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow ... will you not stay with me one night longer?' ('H.P.', 179, 181).

Wilde begins to demonstrate the differences between his fictional world and that of the fairytale on this occasion by breaking the law of epic unity (law 12). Instead of going to Egypt, the land of pleasure, as he originally intended, the Swallow finds himself compelled to stay with the Prince and, consequently, wins a place in Heaven. Wilde thus establishes a contrast between two very different life styles, the first of which demands of the individual only that he pay heed to his own selfish desires, and the second that he dedicate his life to the service of others. In order to show that the Swallow's initial attitude, which is shared by the citizens of the town, is the dominant one not only in the world of 'The Happy Prince,' but also in his own society, Wilde breaks with a second fairy-tale convention and introduces references to the world beyond that of his story (law 11). By presenting the Town Councillors, who say that the Prince is 'as beautiful as a weathercock ... only not quite so useful' ('H.P.', 171) as Utilitarians, and the Art Professor, who says of the Prince, after he has sacrificed all his jewels and gold, 'As he is no longer beautiful he is no longer useful' ('H.P.', 187) as a follower of the art for art's sake creed, Wilde locates his story's selfish characters specifically within the nineteenth century.

In order to understand fully Wilde's attitude to the Swallow's gradual acceptance of the Christian ethic and consequent alienation from a world dominated by the selfish creeds of the nineteenth century, it is now necessary to analyse 'The Happy Prince' in relation to the studies of Propp and Campbell. Although the Swallow does not realise that its vanity and trivial-

ity constitute a lack (a), it nevertheless sets out on a journey (↑), and proceeds through the usual sequence of events. It is tested by the Prince (D) who asks it to perform three good deeds (E), and acquires the magic object, which is again the spiritual quality of pity (F). It then realizes that, by staying with the Prince, it has all the time been in the presence of the object of its quest (G) and that, almost unintentionally, its lack has been eliminated (K). The Swallow is now ready for the apotheosis that follows its death (W). As in 'The Star-Child,' so the functions of the battle with the villain (HJI) and the return to society (↓PrRs) are omitted from 'The Happy Prince.' Wilde is thus once again stating that, while the modern individual can achieve transcendence, he is incapable of completing the heroic cycle possible in simpler, more harmonious communities, by communicating this lesson to his society. While the Swallow and the Prince are transported up into heaven, the world as a whole goes on much as before. The Town councillors are last seen arguing about which of them will be immortalised by the new statue replacing that of the Prince. The Prince gives poignant expression to the gap existing between himself and his society when, rather than offering the poor people the spiritual help they need so desperately, but which he knows they would reject, he gives them the material relief for which they yearn: "'I am covered with fine gold,'" said the Prince, "you must take it off, leaf by leaf, and give it to my poor; the living always think that gold can make them happy"' ('H.P.', 290).

The Christian symbolism which underlines Wilde's continuing faith in the individual in 'The Star-Child' is much more pervasive in this story. Apart from the explicit equation that is established between good deeds and heavenly rewards, the Prince, as Gertrude Jobes' *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols* reveals, is a traditional symbol for Christ, the Swallow for the incarnation of Christ, the ruby for divine love, the sapphire for the Virgin Mary, and gold for the divine spirit.

In these stories, Wilde's usually satiric impulse is subordinated to a profound sense of the gap that exists between the communal optimism expressed by the myth and the fairy-tale, and the desperate and lonely struggle that faces the individual in the modern world. In many ways, Wilde's fairy-tales prefigure the methods adopted by Joyce (in *Ulysses*) and Eliot (in *The Waste Land*), who utilised *The Odyssey* and the Grail myth in order to make precisely these distinctions between the past and the present. However, by asserting his faith in the individual's ability to transcend the limitations of his world, Wilde manages to introduce an optimistic note that is missing from the work of Joyce and Eliot.

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