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4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are to:

- Critically examine the short story ‘*The Happy Prince*’ by Oscar Wilde, the famous literary figure of Victorian era.
- Study the biographical sketch of the author and his significant literary works that have marked the literary scene.
- Critically evaluate the characters in the story, the underlying themes and the narrative techniques.
- Understand Oscar Wilde as an author who was critical of the age in which he lived.

4.1 INTRODUCTION: ‘THE HAPPY PRINCE’ BY OSCAR WILDE

‘*The Happy Prince*’ by Oscar Wilde tells the story of a Happy Prince who always remained happy as was he was kept away and ignorant from the suffering of the poor people in his town. After his death, his statue is placed on a raised platform in the centre of city by the local authorities. The statue is studded with gold, eyes are made of sapphires and rubies are attached to his sword. Those who passed by the statue appreciated the smile on the face of Happy Prince and the beauty of the statue as it is studded with gems and gold. But being on a raised platform at the centre of the city, the prince is no longer happy as he witnesses the suffering and agony of the poor people of the town.

Due to approaching winter, a Swallow that is flying over to Egypt comes and takes shelter near the statue of the Happy Prince. The Swallow is surprised and sorry to see tears filled in the eyes of statue of the Happy Prince. The Happy Prince talks to the Swallow about the pain he feels seeing the misery of the poor people and requests the Swallow to stay back for one night and help him. The Swallow decides to help the Happy Prince and stay back for several nights. As commanded by the Happy Prince, the swallow removes the sapphires, rubies and gold and drops it near the poor people who are in need. Both the Happy Prince and the Swallow feel happy serving the less privileged in the city.

As winter approaches, the Swallow is not able to bear the cold of the chilly winter and dies at the feet of Happy Prince’s statue. Just at the moment, the Swallow dies and falls, the statue cracks down, especially the heart that made up of lead gets snapped into two parts. This shows that the Happy Prince is not able to bear the loss of his dear friend. The statue is taken down by town counsellors, as it is no longer attractive and is sent to the foundry to melt. The entire statue melts down but the heart does not. The workmen throw away the heart of the statue where the Swallow is lying dead. God’s angels take the heart of the Happy Prince and the Swallow to the heaven, as they are the most precious things on the Earth. God is also happy seeing the heart of the Happy Prince and the Swallow and therefore gives them a place in his garden of paradise.

4.2 OSCAR WILDE: LIFE AND WORKS

Oscar Wilde was born on October 16, 1854 in Dublin. Oscar was the second child of the three born to Jane Francesca Wilde and William Wilde. Sir William Wilde (1815-1876) was a famous eye and ear surgeon. Oscar’s mother Lady Jane Francesca Wilde (1820-1896) was a renowned poetess of her time writing patriotic Irish verse. She was famously known as “Sperenza”. Oscar had an elder brother named William and younger sister named Isola who died at the age of 10. Oscar Wilde received his primary education at Portora Royal School. In 1871, he went to Trinity College, Dublin and then to Magdalen College in Oxford, England (1874-1878) to study classics. At Oxford, he got involved with the Aesthetic Movement that advocated “Art for Art’s Sake”. He was highly influenced by the critic Walter Pater’s aesthetic philosophy. At Magdalen College, he not only excelled in his studies but also started establishing his literary career and won Oxford’s Newdigate Prize for his poem “Ravenna” in the year 1878. After graduating from Oxford University, he decided to move to London and there he continued to focus on writing poetry. In 1881, he got his first collection of poems published titled *Poems*. In 1882, Wilde travelled to New York City on a tour where he delivered several lectures. There he got an opportunity to meet the leading literary figures like Walt Whitman, Oliver Holmes and Henry Longfellow. After his return from America, he lectured in England and Ireland (1883-1884). In the year 1884, Wilde married Constance Lloyd, daughter of Anglo Irish Barrister named Horace Lloyd. The couple was blessed with two sons named Cyril (1885) and Vyvyan (1886).

In 1887, Wilde started working with Woman’s World Magazine. And in 1888, he got *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* published. In 1891, two collections of

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short story titled *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and other Stories* and *A House of Pomegranates* were published. Along with the short stories, he published his first novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. However, this novel did not receive a positive response from the literary critics as it had element of homoerotic in it and lacked the element of ethics. In 1892 he wrote a play titled *Lady Windermere's Fan* which was a great success. He even wrote *Salome* in the same year. With the success of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Wilde decided that he would move ahead with writing plays. His other famous plays include *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).

In 1895, Wilde developed an affair with Lord Alfred Douglas. When Douglas's father, Marquis of Queensbury came to know about this, he accused Wilde of sodomy. Wilde was found guilty for the crime and was sentenced to two years of prison. In prison, he wrote a dramatic monologue and an autobiography *De Profundis*. Later when he was released in the 1897, he penned *The Ballad of Reading Goal*. After his release from the prison, he found himself physically weak and emotionally broken. He started wandering in France living in low-cost hotels. On November 30, 1900, he died of cerebral meningitis in a hotel in Paris.

4.3 TEXT OF THE STORY '*THE HAPPY PRINCE*'

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

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

'Why can't you be like the Happy Prince?' asked a sensible mother of her little boy who was crying for the moon. 'The Happy Prince never dreams of crying for anything.'

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

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

'How do you know?' said the Mathematical Master, 'you have never seen one.'

'Ah! but we have, in our dreams,' answered the children; and the Mathematical Master frowned and looked very severe, for he did not approve of children dreaming.

One night there flew over the city a little Swallow. His friends had gone away to Egypt six weeks before, but he had stayed behind, for he was in love with the most beautiful Reed. He had met her early in the spring as he was flying down the river after a big yellow moth, and had been so attracted by her slender waist that he had stopped to talk to her.

'Shall I love you said the Swallow', who liked to come to the point at once, and

the Reed made him a low bow. So he flew round and round her, touching the water with his wings, and making silver ripples. This was his courtship, and it lasted all through the summer.

‘It is a ridiculous attachment,’ twittered the other Swallows, ‘she has no money, and far too many relations;’ and indeed the river was quite full of Reeds. Then, when the autumn came, they all flew away.

After they had gone he felt lonely, and began to tire of his lady-love. ‘She has no conversation,’ he said, ‘and I am afraid that she is a coquette, for she is always flirting with the wind.’ And certainly, whenever the wind blew, the Reed made the most graceful curtsies. I admit that she is domestic,’ he continued, ‘but I love travelling, and my wife, consequently, should love travelling also.’

‘Will you come away with me?’ he said finally to her; but the Reed shook her head, she was so attached to her home.

‘You have been trifling with me,’ he cried, ‘I am off to the Pyramids. Good-bye!’ and he flew away.

All day long he flew, and at night-time he arrived at the city. ‘Where shall I put up?’ he said ‘I hope the town has made preparations.’

Then he saw the statue on the tall column. ‘I will put up there,’ he cried; ‘it is a fine position with plenty of fresh air.’ So he alighted just between the feet of the Happy Prince.

‘I have a golden bedroom,’ he said softly to himself as he looked round, and he prepared to go to sleep; but just as he was putting his head under his wing, a large drop of water fell on him. ‘What a curious thing!’ he cried, ‘there is not a single cloud in the sky, the stars are quite clear and bright, and yet it is raining. The climate in the north of Europe is really dreadful. The Reed used to like the rain, but that was merely her selfishness.’

Then another drop fell.

‘What is the use of a statue if it cannot keep the rain off?’ he said; ‘I must look for a good chimney-pot,’ and he determined to fly away.

But before he had opened his wings, a third drop fell, and he looked up, and saw - Ah! What did he see?

The eyes of the Happy Prince were filled with tears, and tears were running down his golden cheeks. His face was so beautiful in the moonlight that the little Swallow was filled with pity.

‘Who are you?’ he said.

‘I am the Happy Prince.’

‘Why are you weeping then?’ asked the Swallow; ‘you have quite drenched me.’

‘When I was alive and had a human heart,’ answered the statue, ‘I did not know what tears were, for I lived in the Palace of Sans-Souci where sorrow is not allowed to enter. In the daytime I played with my companions in the garden, and in the evening I led the dance in the Great Hall. Round the garden ran a very lofty wall, but I never cared to ask what lay beyond it, everything about me was so

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beautiful. My courtiers called me the Happy Prince, and happy indeed I was, if pleasure be happiness. So I lived, and so I died. And now that I am dead they have set me up here so high that I can see all the ugliness and all the misery of my city, and though my heart is made of lead yet I cannot choose but weep.'

'What, is he not solid gold?' said the Swallow to himself. He was too polite to make any personal remarks out loud.

'Far away,' continued the statue in a low musical voice, 'far away in a little street there is a poor house. One of the windows is open, and through it I can see a woman seated at a table. Her face is thin and worn, and she has coarse, red hands, all pricked by the needle, for she is a seamstress. She is embroidering passion-flowers on a satin gown for the loveliest of the Queen's maids-of-honour to wear at the next Court-ball. In a bed in the corner of the room her little boy is lying ill. He has a fever, and is asking for oranges. His mother has nothing to give him but river water, so he is crying. Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow, will you not bring her the ruby out of my sword-hilt? My feet are fastened to this pedestal and I cannot move.'

'I am waited for in Egypt,' said the Swallow. 'My friends are flying up and down the Nile, and talking to the large lotus flowers. Soon they will go to sleep in the tomb of the great King. The King is there himself in his painted coffin. He is wrapped in yellow linen, and embalmed with spices. Round his neck is a chain of pale green jade, and his hands are like withered leaves.'

'Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,' said the Prince, 'will you not stay with me for one night, and be my messenger? The boy is so thirsty, and the mother so sad.'

'I don't think I like boys,' answered the Swallow. 'Last summer, when I was staying on the river, there were two rude boys, the miller's sons, who were always throwing stones at me. They never hit me, of course; we swallows fly far too well for that, and besides, I come of a family famous for its agility; but still, it was a mark of disrespect.'

But the Happy Prince looked so sad that the little Swallow was sorry. 'It is very cold here,' he said 'but I will stay with you for one night, and be your messenger.'

'Thank you, little Swallow,' said the Prince.

So the Swallow picked out the great ruby from the Prince's sword, and flew away with it in his beak over the roofs of the town.

He passed by the cathedral tower, where the white marble angels were sculptured. He passed by the palace and heard the sound of dancing. A beautiful girl came out on the balcony with her lover. 'How wonderful the stars are,' he said to her, 'and how wonderful is the power of love!' 'I hope my dress will be ready in time for the State-ball,' she answered; 'I have ordered passion-flowers to be embroidered on it; but the seamstresses are so lazy.'

He passed over the river, and saw the lanterns hanging to the masts of the ships. He passed over the Ghetto, and saw the old Jews bargaining with each other, and weighing out money in copper scales. At last he came to the poor house and looked in. The boy was tossing feverishly on his bed, and the mother had fallen

asleep, she was so tired. In he hopped, and laid the great ruby on the table beside the woman’s thimble. Then he flew gently round the bed, fanning the boy’s forehead with his wings. ‘How cool I feel,’ said the boy, ‘I must be getting better;’ and he sank into a delicious slumber.

Then the Swallow flew back to the Happy Prince, and told him what he had done. ‘It is curious,’ he remarked, ‘but I feel quite warm now, although it is so cold.’

‘That is because you have done a good action,’ said the Prince. And the little Swallow began to think, and then he fell asleep. Thinking always made him sleepy. When day broke he flew down to the river and had a bath.

‘What a remarkable phenomenon,’ said the Professor of Ornithology as he was passing over the bridge. ‘A swallow in winter!’ And he wrote a long letter about it to the local newspaper. Every one quoted it, it was full of so many words that they could not understand.

‘To-night I go to Egypt,’ said the Swallow, and he was in high spirits at the prospect. He visited all the public monuments, and sat a long time on top of the church steeple. Wherever he went the Sparrows chirruped, and said to each other, ‘What a distinguished stranger!’ so he enjoyed himself very much.

When the moon rose he flew back to the Happy Prince. ‘Have you any commissions for Egypt?’ he cried; ‘I am just starting.’

‘Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,’ said the Prince, ‘will you not stay with me one night longer?’

‘I am waited for in Egypt,’ answered the Swallow. To-morrow my friends will fly up to the Second Cataract. The river-horse couches there among the bulrushes, and on a great granite throne sits the God Memnon. All night long he watches the stars, and when the morning star shines he utters one cry of joy, and then he is silent. At noon the yellow lions come down to the water’s edge to drink. They have eyes like green beryls, and their roar is louder than the roar of the cataract.’

‘Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,’ said the Prince, ‘far away across the city I see a young man in a garret. He is leaning over a desk covered with papers, and in a tumbler by his side there is a bunch of withered violets. His hair is brown and crisp, and his lips are red as a pomegranate, and he has large and dreamy eyes. He is trying to finish a play for the Director of the Theatre, but he is too cold to write any more. There is no fire in the grate, and hunger has made him faint.’

‘I will wait with you one night longer,’ said the Swallow, who really had a good heart. ‘Shall I take him another ruby?’

‘Alas! I have no ruby now,’ said the Prince; ‘my eyes are all that I have left. They are made of rare sapphires, which were brought out of India a thousand years ago. Pluck out one of them and take it to him. He will sell it to the jeweller, and buy food and firewood, and finish his play.’

‘Dear Prince,’ said the Swallow, ‘I cannot do that;’ and he began to weep.

‘Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,’ said the Prince, ‘do as I command you.’

So the Swallow plucked out the Prince’s eye, and flew away to the student’s garret. It was easy enough to get in, as there was a hole in the roof. Through this he

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darted, and came into the room. The young man had his head buried in his hands, so he did not hear the flutter of the bird's wings, and when he looked up he found the beautiful sapphire lying on the withered violets.

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

The next day the Swallow flew down to the harbour. He sat on the mast of a large vessel and watched the sailors hauling big chests out of the hold with ropes. 'Heave a-hoy!' they shouted as each chest came up. 'I am going to Egypt!' cried the Swallow, but nobody minded, and when the moon rose he flew back to the Happy Prince.

'I am come to bid you good-bye,' he cried.

'Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,' said the Prince, 'will you not stay with me one night longer?'

'It is winter,' answered the Swallow, and the chill snow will soon be here. In Egypt the sun is warm on the green palm-trees, and the crocodiles lie in the mud and look lazily about them. My companions are building a nest in the Temple of Baalbec, and the pink and white doves are watching them, and cooing to each other. Dear Prince, I must leave you, but I will never forget you, and next spring I will bring you back two beautiful jewels in place of those you have given away. The ruby shall be redder than a red rose, and the sapphire shall be as blue as the great sea.

'In the square below,' said the Happy Prince, 'there stands a little match-girl. She has let her matches fall in the gutter, and they are all spoiled. Her father will beat her if she does not bring home some money, and she is crying. She has no shoes or stockings, and her little head is bare. Pluck out my other eye, and give it to her, and her father will not beat her.

'I will stay with you one night longer,' said the Swallow, 'but I cannot pluck out your eye. You would be quite blind then.'

'Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,' said the Prince, 'do as I command you.'

So he plucked out the Prince's other eye, and darted down with it. He swooped past the match-girl, and slipped the jewel into the palm of her hand. 'What a lovely bit of glass,' cried the little girl; and she ran home, laughing.

Then the Swallow came back to the Prince. 'You are blind now,' he said, 'so I will stay with you always.'

'No, little Swallow,' said the poor Prince, 'you must go away to Egypt.'

'I will stay with you always,' said the Swallow, and he slept at the Prince's feet.

All the next day he sat on the Prince's shoulder, and told him stories of what he had seen in strange lands. He told him of the red ibises, who stand in long rows on the banks of the Nile, and catch gold fish in their beaks; of the Sphinx, who is as old as the world itself, and lives in the desert, and knows everything; of the merchants, who walk slowly by the side of their camels, and carry amber beads in their hands; of the King of the Mountains of the Moon, who is as black as ebony, and worships a large crystal; of the great green snake that sleeps in a palm-tree, and has twenty priests to feed it with honey-cakes; and of the pygmies who sail

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over a big lake on large flat leaves, and are always at war with the butterflies.

‘Dear little Swallow,’ said the Prince, ‘you tell me of marvellous things, but more marvellous than anything is the suffering of men and of women. There is no Mystery so great as Misery. Fly over my city, little Swallow, and tell me what you see there.’

So the Swallow flew over the great city, and saw the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates. He flew into dark lanes, and saw the white faces of starving children looking out listlessly at the black streets. Under the archway of a bridge two little boys were lying in one another’s arms to try and keep themselves warm. ‘How hungry we are’ they said. ‘You must not lie here,’ shouted the Watchman, and they wandered out into the rain.

Then he flew back and told the Prince what he had seen.

‘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.’

Leaf after leaf of the fine gold the Swallow picked off, till the Happy Prince looked quite dull and grey. Leaf after leaf of the fine gold he brought to the poor, and the children’s faces grew rosier, and they laughed and played games in the street. ‘We have bread now’ they cried.

Then the snow came, and after the snow came the frost. The streets looked as if they were made of silver, they were so bright and glistening; long icicles like crystal daggers hung down from the eaves of the houses, everybody went about in furs, and the little boys wore scarlet caps and skated on the ice.

The poor little Swallow grew colder and colder, but he would not leave the Prince, he loved him too well. He picked up crumbs outside the baker’s door when the baker was not looking, and tried to keep himself warm by flapping his wings.

But at last he knew that he was going to die. He had just strength to fly up to the Prince’s shoulder once more. ‘Good-bye, dear Prince!’ he murmured, ‘will you let me kiss your hand?’

‘I am glad that you are going to Egypt at last, little Swallow,’ said the Prince, ‘you have stayed too long here; but you must kiss me on the lips, for I love you.’

‘It is not to Egypt that I am going,’ said the Swallow. I am going to the House of Death. Death is the brother of Sleep, is he not?’

And he kissed the Happy Prince on the lips, and fell down dead at his feet.

At that moment a curious crack sounded inside the statue, as if something had broken. The fact is that the leaden heart had snapped right in two. It certainly was a dreadfully hard frost.

Early the next morning the Mayor was walking in the square below in company with the Town Councillors. As they passed the column he looked up at the statue: ‘Dear me! how shabby the Happy Prince looks!’ he said.

‘How shabby indeed!’ cried the Town Councillors, who always agreed with the Mayor, and they went up to look at it.

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'The ruby has fallen out of his sword, his eyes are gone, and he is golden no longer,' said the Mayor; 'in fact, he is little better than a beggar!'

'Little better than a beggar,' said the Town Councillors.

'And there is actually a dead bird at his feet,' continued the Mayor. 'We must really issue a proclamation that birds are not to be allowed to die here.' And the Town Clerk made a note of the suggestion.

So they pulled down the statue of the Happy Prince. 'As he is no longer beautiful he is no longer useful,' said the Art Professor at the University.

Then they melted the statue in a furnace, and the Mayor held a meeting of the Corporation to decide what was to be done with the metal. 'We must have another statue, of course,' he said, 'and it shall be a statue of myself.'

'Of myself,' said each of the Town Councillors, and they quarrelled. When I last heard of them they were quarrelling still.

'What a strange thing!' said the overseer of the workmen at the foundry. 'This broken lead heart will not melt in the furnace. We must throw it away.' So they threw it on a dust-heap where the dead Swallow was also lying.

'Bring me the two most precious things in the city,' said God to one of His Angels; and the Angel brought Him the leaden heart and the dead bird.

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

4.4 CRITICALASSESSMENT

4.4.1 Themes

The Victorian age witnessed a transition from nature to rapid industrialization, development of advanced technology and rapid colonization. It was the age where aristocrats ruled and the proletariat class suffered out of poverty and exploitation. Class division became more apparent and the lower class people became the sufferers of this class divide. Wilde belonged to this Victorian era and became critical of the age in which he lived. He could witness corruption, suffering, treachery etc. in the society. Therefore through '*The Happy Prince*' he aimed to bring to the surface the theme of nobility, charity and compassion in a world that was being corrupted and was becoming insensitive towards the suffering of the underprivileged and the needy.

Wilde's choice of characters, their actions and intentions impinges the moral and poignant side of the readers. Through the story of the selflessness and sacrifice of the Happy Prince and the Swallow, Wilde evokes emotion of compassion, pain and mercy in the readers.

Appearance versus reality is the predominant theme in Wilde's '*The Happy Prince*'. The statue of Happy Prince that was studded with rubies, sapphires and gold brought smiles on the faces of the people when they looked at his jovial face. But no one could see the agony in the heart of the Happy Prince as he witnessed suffering and anguish of poor in the town. Thus, though the Happy Prince had a smile on his face, the irony was that he was extremely unhappy with what was happening in the city. And therefore, the Happy Prince, rather than looking the way people ex-

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pected him to look, ends up in tousel state as a result of his care and concern for the needy and the poor. Once the Happy Prince has sacrificed his rubies, sapphires and gold, he no longer appears to be attractive and happy to town people, the councilors and especially the Mayor who order to bring down the statue of the Happy Prince and replace it with his own. The Mayor and the town councilors pretend to be dedicated towards their work and the people of the town whereas the Happy Prince and the Swallow actually work for the town people and ultimately sacrifice themselves for the sake of the poor people. The responsibilities of the town councilors are carried out the Happy Prince and the Swallow.

Compassion and sacrifice for the less privileged forms another predominant theme of the story. The Happy Prince feels miserable when he witnesses the poor people’s suffering and therefore sacrifices the gold, rubies and the sapphires that embellish him for the sake of the poor people. He even does not mind giving away the sapphires from his eyes that would result in his blindness. He realizes that more than him, it is the town’s citizens that need the rubies and gold with which he is adorned and therefore becomes ready to be stripped of everything he has. Thus, the Happy Prince through his altruism becomes a source of happiness for the poor in the society. The Swallow too sacrifices his life while helping the Happy Prince. He sacrifices his life by deciding not to fly to Egypt and dies in the freezing winter.

Wilde was a devoted Christian all through his life and therefore he gives a biblical touch to the story towards the end where the sacrifice of the Happy Prince and the Swallow are rewarded by God. The angels present the hearts of the Happy Prince and the Swallow to the Lord calling them “the two most precious things in the city”. And the Lord keeps them in his garden of paradise. The Happy Prince and the Swallow have lived their life the way god wanted and therefore are blessed by God by finding a place in heaven.

The bond between human and non-human is vividly explored by Wilde in the story the Happy Prince. Wilde gives life to the statue and lets the Swallow and the Happy Prince develop a bond of trust and love with one another and this bond removes misery from the society. Swallow feels sorry for sad Prince and becomes ready to be his messenger and help him in eradicating misery from the society. The Swallow develops such an intense bond with the Happy Prince that it stays back in the chilly winter to help the Happy Prince knowing that it would die out of cold. Unable to bear the cold, the Swallow kisses the Happy Prince, falls down at the feet of the Happy Prince, and dies. The heart of the Happy Prince also breaks into two parts seeing the dead Swallow. The intensity of love and trust between the Happy Prince and the Swallow, and the way Swallow tries its best to help the needy shows that even the birds possess the feeling of compassion, love and trust for the other beings.

Wilde in his story has also explored the theme of greed, self-indulgence, inequality and poverty in the society. Wilde makes a scathing attack on self-indulgence and corruption of the town authorities and the representatives of the town who are appointed for the well-being of the society. Through the two town councilors and the Mayor who are selfish and corrupt, Wilde shows how these authorities use their power for their own welfare. They are shown in negative light when the

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Mayor announces that the statue of the Happy Prince should be replaced by his own statue. Secondly, the watchman, who is entrusted with the role of safeguarding the society, shouts at the two hungry children who are lying under the archway of a bridge in one another's arm to keep themselves warm. He asks them to go away and the children left wandering in the rain. The inequality in society is seen when the rich are happy and making merry in their big and beautiful mansions while the beggars are sitting outside their gates and the children are dying out of starvation. Thus, through the story 'The Happy Prince', Wilde has critically presented the society of his time that was insensitive and unconcerned towards the suffering of the weaker section of society. Yet through the character of the Happy Prince and the Swallow, Wilde has shown that though there exists exploitation and suffering in the society, there are few who devote their lives for the noble cause.

4.4.2 Characterization

4.4.2.3 The Swallow

The Swallow is one of the important characters in the story '*The Happy Prince*'. Through the character of the Swallow, Oscar Wilde has presented how a selfish being can change into a selfless being through the bond of love, compassion and trust. In the beginning of the story, Wilde presents the Swallow to be selfish and self-obsessed and this becomes evident when he leaves the Reed he loves and decides to migrate to Egypt where his companions were flying off to in hope of finding a better and warm place during winter. Just like the rich Victorians, the Swallow is shown to be egotistic who thinks only of his own-self. But the Swallow undergoes metamorphosis when he comes in contact with the Happy Prince and realizes the need of compassion and mercy for the poor. He feels sad for the Happy Prince who has tears his eyes on seeing suffering of the underprivileged in the town. When the Swallow witnesses the suffering and agony of the poor and needy in the town, he too along with the Happy Prince feels pity for them and decides to stay back to help the Prince in gifting his jewels and gold to the needy. There develops a bond of trust and love between the Happy Prince and the Swallow. Towards the end of the story, the Swallow dies out of fatigue and cold and falls at the feet of the Happy Prince and makes his ultimate sacrifice. A Swallow who is selfish in the beginning of the story undergoes transformation, sacrifices his life out of love for the Prince and his concern for the poor, and as a result finds himself in paradise. Thus, the Swallow plays a vital role in the story by becoming a messenger for the Happy Prince and a source of happiness for the poor.

4.4.2.2 '*The Happy Prince*'

'*The Happy Prince*' is the protagonist in Wilde's story '*The Happy Prince*'. He becomes a representative of nobility, compassion and goodness. Towards the beginning of the story Wilde describes the Happy Prince to be very happy and jovial in his palace as he is kept away from the problems faced by people outside the palace walls. After his death, his statue is encrusted with gems and gold and is placed on the high pillar in the centre of town. Everyone appreciates the beauty of the statue and the smile on the face of the Happy Prince. But the irony is that being on a raised platform he witnesses the agony and misery in life of poor people and feels sad and helpless as he cannot do anything for the poor. The Happy Prince

takes help of the Swallow that finds shelter near his statue and with the help of the Swallow gives away all his sapphires, rubies and gold to poor people in the town to make their life better. The realization that rather than him, it is the poor who are in need of the gems and the gold changes the lives of many in town. Thus, the Happy Prince becomes the epitome of generosity, righteousness and morality. There develops a bond of love between the Happy Prince and the Swallow and on the death of the Swallow, the heart of Happy Prince also breaks into two parts. Seeing the statue of the Happy Prince in tattered state, the mayor orders it to be taken down and is sent to the foundry. But surprisingly the heart of the Happy Prince does not melt and is therefore thrown away where the Swallow is lying dead. But both the hearts of the Happy Prince and the Swallow are taken to God by the angels and God feels extremely happy with the deeds of the duo and therefore gives them a place in his paradise. Thus, the Happy Prince becomes a symbol of goodness and nobility in the world.

4.4.3 Narrative Technique

Wilde wrote this story for children and through this story he wanted to teach them the lesson of compassion and mercy for the poor. Therefore he adopted a very simple and lucid style of writing the story. The author has avoided long description in story so that the readers do not find it difficult to interpret the message behind the story.

The story is told from third person point of view where the author stays outside the story and narrates the story using pronouns like “he”, “she”, “it” and “they” to tell the story. Wilde uses the technique of presenting a story within a story also called frame narrative where he begins with the story of the Happy Prince and the Swallow and gradually inside the story tells another story of a seamstress whose son is ill, a young man who is unable to write a play for the Director of the theatre because he is hungry and suffering from cold and a match-girl whose matchsticks have fallen into the gutter and are wet and therefore her father would beat her if she returns home without taking money.

Wilde deploys the literary device of satire in the story. The story satirizes the people especially the aristocrats and the town authorities during the Victorian era. The society in spite of progressing was shallow from inside and was filled with the vices, corruption, and inequality. Irony is yet another device used by Wilde to show contrasting situation in the society. People looked at the statue of the Happy Prince and thought he was very happy but the irony was that as he was placed high pillar he could see the agony and suffering of the poor and was extremely unhappy and distressed about it. Second instance of the use of irony is when the Swallow flies over to the city, sees the rich people making merry and the poor starving outside their gates. The rich people are happy and enjoying in their big mansions but the irony is that these people are ignorant or chose to be unaware about the poor people that are dying out of hunger outside their gates.

Through the story of the compassion, charity and sacrifice of the Happy Prince and the Swallow and how they are taken to the heaven by the angles, Wilde gives an allegorical meaning to the story. Wilde brings in biblical allusions in the story towards the end when the angles bring the bird and the heart of the Happy Prince

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to the God and how the God gives them a place in the heaven. This makes the story and its moral etched in the mind of the readers. 'The Happy Prince' is not just a story of a Happy Prince and the Swallow but it is a story of compassion and sacrifice for the well-being of the society.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

'The Happy Prince' is a gripping and heartrending tale with several themes carefully crafted through different literary devices and narrative techniques. The story through its characters and situations conveys an important lesson of nobility and compassion needed in the society. The story becomes a testimony to Wilde's concern for the society that was grappling with the issues of poverty and inequality in his time.

4.6 KEY WORDS

- 1) Irony: A literary device where the surface meaning is different from the intended meaning. It can also mean a contrast when there is difference in what is expected to happen and what actually happens.
- 2) Satire: A literary technique used by authors to criticize someone or something. It intends to bring to surface the vices, flaws and follies of the certain character, society or the situation.
- 3) Swallow: a small bird
- 4) Seamstress: a woman who earns her living by sewing

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:1

CHOOSE APPROPRIATE OPTION FROM GIVEN BELOW.

- 1) **Which gemstone was there in the eyes of the statue of the Happy Prince?**
 - a. Sapphire
 - b. ruby
 - c. amber
 - d. emerald
- 2) **The Swallow was flying over to which country before it met the Happy Prince?**
 - a. Canada
 - b. Egypt
 - c. India
 - d. Australia
- 3) **What did the Swallow see when he passed over the ghetto?**
 - a. The Jews were bargaining with each other and weighing out money in copper scales
 - b. The old Jews were eating happily
 - c. The Jews were sleeping
 - d. The Jews were praying
- 4) **What did the Professor of Ornithology do when he saw the Swallow in winter season?**
 - a. He wrote a long letter to local newspaper
 - b. He went to capture the Swallow
 - c. He built a nest for the Swallow

- d. He asked his students to search other Swallows in the city
- 5) What was the reason behind the Swallow staying back even when his companions had migrated to other country?**
- a. He was in love with the Reed
- b. He had fear of being captured
- c. He wanted to sleep
- d. He was hurt and was unable to fly
- 6) What was the problem with the little match-girl in the story?**
- a. Her matchsticks were stolen
- b. Her matchsticks were spoiled as they had fallen into the gutter and so she could not sell it. Her father would beat her if she did not take some money home.
- c. She had lost her way to her house and did not know where to go
- d. She wanted to buy medicines for herself

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:2

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN BRIEF.

1. Where was the Swallow flying over to before it came to the statue of Happy Prince?
2. Why was the statue of the Happy Prince admired by town people?
3. What was the reason behind the tears in the eyes of the Happy Prince?
4. How did the Happy Prince and the Swallow help the seamstress?
5. What was the problem with the little match girl? How did the Happy Prince and the Swallow help her?
6. What was the reaction of the Mayor and the town councilors when they saw the statue of the Happy Prince in disheveled state?
7. What strange thing happened when the statue of the Happy Prince was taken to the foundry?
8. What does God say to his angels when they bring heart of the Happy Prince and the dead Swallow to him?
9. How did the God reward the Happy Prince and the Swallow?

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:3

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN DETAIL.

1. How did the Happy Prince and the Swallow help people of the town?
2. What all did the Swallow observe when it flew over the city?
3. Comment on the bond between the Happy Prince and the Swallow in the story ‘The Happy Prince’.
4. What happens to the Happy Prince and the Swallow at the end of the story?
5. Critically comment on the theme of compassion and sacrifice in the story ‘*The Happy Prince*’.

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6. How has Oscar Wilde presented the society of the Victorian era in the story '*The Happy Prince*'?

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:4

WRITE SHORT NOTES.

- 1) Themes in the story '*The Happy Prince*'
- 2) Character sketch of the Happy Prince
- 3) Character sketch of the Swallow
- 4) The ending of the story '*The Happy Prince*'
- 5) The conditions of the poor as observed by the Happy Prince and the Swallow
- 6) Comment on the theme of appearance v/s reality in the story '*The Happy Prince*'

4.7 BOOKS SUGGESTED

1. *Happy Prince and other stories* by Oscar Wilde
2. *The Nightingale And the Rose* by Oscar Wilde
3. *Oscar Wilde* by Richard Ellmann
4. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* by M.H Abrahams

ANSWER

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a. Sapphire
- 2) b. Egypt
- 3) a. The Jews were bargaining with each other and weighing out money in copper scales
- 4) a. He wrote a long letter to local newspaper
- 5) a. He was in love with the Reed
- 6) b. Her matchsticks were spoiled as they had fallen into the gutter and so she could not sell it. Her father would beat her if she did not take some money home.