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Happiness, Love, and Friendship as Grotesque Imagery in Oscar Wilde's Fairy-Tales: Bakhtinian Perspective

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Abstract

Grotesque is an image or aesthetic form that presents a nuance of bizarre and peculiar. Commonly understood, that grotesque may posits negative connotation and horrible forms of symbol lies in works of arts, architecture, and even in literary works. Within literary works grotesque imagery may posit certain interpretation and value, depends on the lied perspective to see. Here in this research, researchers put a lens through children's literatures or fairy-tales to investigate the images of grotesque which may indicating certain value. Three selected Oscar Wilde fairy tales were chosen as material objects in this research. Investigation of grotesque imagery is conducted by comprehensive reading and content analysis to elaborate the findings. Bakhtin theory of grotesque is applied as theoretical framework of analysis. Then, hermeneutical analysis is applied to interpret the image and elaboration of the meaning with the Bakhtinian notion of grotesque imagery and body. Result of the research indicated that there are some grotesque images represented in Wilde's fairy tales with distinctive depictions: a) materialist construction of body and willingness to sacrifice for others happiness; b) degrading value of love as materialist and void sacrificial act; c) grotesque subject for friendly relationship and death for blossoms rebirth. This provides some evidence how grotesque aesthetics became Wilde's ways to depict how easily human's grandiose conception substituted or represented by shallow and trivial objects. Furthermore, as demonstrated by this research findings, Wilde use grotesque imagery to evoke more radical issue like "materialism", "self-sacrifice", "death", and "unusual love or relationship".

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Introduction

Fairy-tales commonly written by attributing images of colorful worlds, happy characters, magic and bright atmospheres which makes children feel comfort and easy catch on the value. Instead, how about fairy-tales that are written with a certain style of

aesthetics that make peculiar images, bizarre events, and provoke weird conceptions toward the story. Standing in the position of an adult or grown individual, first, people tend to make a distance and question whether this kind of "odd" fairy tale is suitable for children's reading material. General understanding about what kind of works, especially literary works which are fit for children consumption, leads to the problem of standards where related to the content and purpose, conventions related to genre and public demands, and market in other dimensions related to the popularity and needs (Epstein, 1986 & Short, 2018). These notions bring us to the basic understanding in conducting a view on children's literature, those encompass every aspect in children's literature exclusively and literary works for inclusively.

Encountering children's literature with the images that is considered out of convention, certainly it evokes problematization on the issue of appropriateness. That is discussed by O'Malley (2012, pp. 23-25), about the claim of appropriateness is based on the view of adults that the works for children because of its noble story, children's favourite taste, and pedagogical use; besides, some scholars of education and pedagogy also support this claim by asserting proposition on philosophical perspective. Nevertheless, it is noticeably only one side of coin, since children's literature itself not limited only matter of appropriateness, but before it, matter of artistic discourse is also important. Citing scholar Kimberly Reynolds (2007, p. 4), as she proposed the importance of the way aesthetics of a literary works that needs to be considered profoundly to make it suit with the discussion of children literature since it is linked with the content itself, language, characterization, and any formal structures.

Drawing the previous elaboration, researchers concern on the problem of style or aesthetics of a children's literature. Commonly understood, children's literature has its own style in writing because it is aimed for children with stage of ages. To fit with children's reading material, the literary works have its adjustment; author needs to compose the language and its variation align with the material, adjusting the level based on subject matter on the works and children's age, also formulating the narrative and formal structures since it could provoke children's reception or imagination (Lerer, 2008, p. 288). As stated above, certain author has style and aesthetic choice in writing, it is linked with how the formal structure is formed and builds a mode of interpretation as the reader dives in.

Continuing previous statement, there is an author that has a distinctive style and aesthetic formulation in his works by which in this research become the research object, he is Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). Born in the late-Victorian era, he was a prominent figure of art and literature with his own endeavour and research on how art and literature existed within materialistic and capitalist regimes. Working Aestheticism, Wilde has his concern of diminishing value of art, because of community's discourse which dragging the problem of arts and literature into their sphere; this issue aggravates the nature of art and literature as a manifestation of individualism, purity form that live as individual expression (Wilde, 2020, p. 43). Here, Wilde criticized the Victorian community that tended to commercialize the work of art and literature as a popular. Furthermore, he asserted that art and literature lose its essence and become stereotyped when its creation is under a regime control or demand, because art and literature should have not become popular (Wilde, 2020, pp. 44-45).

Wilde's aesthetic in writing is considered to be idealistic and materialistic in one creation, since he is Hegelian that put the principles of dialectics from the ontological assumption (Pease, 2004, p. 96). Further analysis on Wilde's aesthetic, he put emphasis that his style is prompting self-expression for self-consciousness, so it is tendencies like irrational, personal, relative and non-universal. This kind of aesthetics tries to break the rules of Kantian aesthetic essentialism, by exposing self-realization, mood, rejecting universalism, accepting personal truth, and ego manifestation (Pease, 2004, p. 107). From Wilde's aesthetic, we can infer that his works are trying to render the strict and stiff form of art and literature that emerged as a Kantian aesthetic movement in the 18th century. Besides, living in the late-Victorian era, the time when industrialism and

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capitalism gained its power, prompts consumerist and materialistic life-style. Wilde put his political-stance against it by positing works of satirical and breaking the norm of bourgeois.

From Wilde's aesthetics and satirical voice as his political-stance against capitalism, researchers view three fairy-tales entitled *The Happy Prince*, *The Nightingale & the Rose*, and *The Selfish Giant* have distinctive traits on their intrinsic elements. We find something strange that we borrow the term "grotesque" in the way Wilde invokes love relationships, chemistry of the characters, and life-death dichotomy that have its own symbolism. Because of those overviews, researchers have the intention to analyse these fairy-tales' aesthetic form in its story to reveal the symbolization and meaning. Besides, researchers see that these fairy-tales are famous for children's reading but then with such style and hidden images, researchers try to comprehend and propose questions: 1) What grotesque images lie in Wilde's tales? 2) What is Wilde's intention on this kind of images in his fairy-tales? 3) How are the meaning construction of the images have?

Further analysis on this recent study that about the imagery and aesthetics of fairy-tale of Oscar Wilde, researchers have intention to make the problem of grotesque imagery within Bakhtinian notion, and fit it with the deep analysis regarding radical children literature. For what it makes understandable, that grotesque imagery is not merely a picture of odd or peculiarity that may in common assumption break the rule of children's understanding as it is not properly suited. The problem is a tendency to ignore the way criticism works. Tendency to make it into a singular voice, without making the dialogue with other constituents. Therefore, to make it obvious that in depth analysis constitutes the problem of grotesque and the text's aesthetics within the space of children's literature discussion, the work is done by noticing integral parts. As stated by Brett & Huck (1982) that in search for proper understanding and value in children literature criticism or analysis, avoids a narrow point of view in order to step away from essentialist or stagnant judgment, instead by knowing that developments of forms, art, society, and children itself, are continuous.

Researchers intend to view the uniqueness and extraordinary images or aesthetics and narratives in Oscar Wilde's three fairy-tales by using Mikhail Bakhtin theory of grotesque, since this framework provides a distinctive lens to view aesthetic form. Conducting analysis using Bakhtinian notion on grotesque, it opens distinctive interpretation and way of viewing problem of aesthetics and literary text formulation. Bakhtin proposed this theory as his analysis on classic literature of Francois Rabelais and criticism toward scholars who also analysed Rabelais works. From its historical definition, the image of grotesque is often used to describe paintings and architecture which have extraordinary images. While people tend to describe grotesque as peculiar, horrible and sort of negative connotation, but Bakhtin and scholars viewed grotesque as a new form of aesthetics, in which its conception become significant for cultural and art movements also brought an ideological discourse that for the next year after the concept has been accepted and became a publication (Leite, 2023).

Bakhtin theory on grotesque is mainly discussed in his book *Rabelais and His World* (1984). Tracing the medieval literature and renaissance literature, Bakhtin asserts that those variables provide carnivalesque space for the emergence of grotesque. The carnival or carnivalization according to Bakhtin (1984, pp. 10-11), provides a state where the unified or the fixed is no longer fit, carnival is a banquet of time, becoming, transformation, and renewal along with the logic of gay uniquity of prevailing truth and dominance; carnivalization has logic of peculiarity there is an incessant everchanging from the top to bottom, from front to rear of a satire, humiliation, unorthodoxy and uncrowning. The carnival serves as a space in which every constituent is met and interacts with no hierarchy, a body, whether it is damaged or beautiful. This conception of carnival is linked with grotesque realism. First the linkage is explained on the understanding of grotesque realism or grotesque body. Grotesque refers to the way objects are described as being incomplete, on-going, on-process, distorted, or

something that is "bizarre" in certain understanding. Bakhtin posits several fundamental principles on grotesque image: 1) exaggeration, 2) hyperbole and 3) degradation (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 303). Those fundamental principles have their own traits and are inherently overlapping. Though Bakhtin emphasized that degradation is the important one. Degradation means to lower what is high, divine, ideal and abstract; it is a transmission to material sphere, to the earth and body in a unity (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 19-20). Further explanation, Bakhtin made a topographical analogy about degradation, he made an analogy of earth and heaven. Degradation means to come down to the earth, fall to the earth as element which symbolize a bury, gulps, and birth at the same time; to degrade is to bury to the ground and killing at the same time for a regeneration or rebirth for better transformation (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 21). While the concept of exaggeration refers to the way inappropriate things and bizarre or monstrous things are viewed, grotesque nature is exaggerating the inappropriate, the negative (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 306). Hyperbolism may have a similar conception with exaggeration. The point made by Bakhtin is that exaggeration and hyperbole are created in order to justify the essence of satire; as one of the attributes of grotesque.

The theory of grotesque body, Bakhtin explains the important conception that in a grotesque body there is no finished or complete body, or under the concept of "unfinalizable-self". According to Bakhtin (1984, pp. 317-318), grotesque body is body of becoming, body that transforms, never completed; body that is built recurrently and create another body; grotesque body is cosmic and universal, emphasizing the elements in entire cosmos and this body can merge with numerous natural phenomena. Besides, in drawing to the concept of grotesque imagery, Bakhtin (1984, pp. 317-318) also explains the logic of grotesque image that tend to neglect the closed, smooth and impenetrable-body conception; grotesque image maintains the images that openings and convexness that present another newly perceived body and grotesque image constructs of what so called double body, body that meet with other body or part of body (particularly lower) and become interlinked from the one body that born from previous death.

By the grotesque theory proposed by Bakhtin it reveals another variation of aesthetics and new form of imagery along with its symbolization and interpretation. Perhaps, returning to the object material of this research that is three fairy-tales by Oscar Wilde, certainly researchers have conducted an aesthetic analysis on Wilde himself. He has certain form, style, mood, and principle, nevertheless it is possible to drive more far to draw the line from the point where Wilde's style has not been touched before. Grotesque image presumably one of Wilde's traits that he himself was not realizing in his own style and aesthetics movement that time. This is in line with the conception of grotesque that emerged after the end of the Victorian era, more precisely in Bakhtin time.

Many research on Wilde's fairy-tales proposed issues such as ideological perspectives, stylistics, sociological analysis, and applying Marxist literary criticism approach; those topics are abundant in the study of Oscar Wilde. While recent research is intended to analyze Wilde's grotesque aesthetics formulation as a children's literature, therefore selected previous studies that will be reviewed are related with such issue.

There are several past studies on Oscar Wilde's fairy tales, *The Nightingale & the Rose* and *The Happy Prince* with different perspectives and topics. Mostly chosen within this research that provides a supporting element, mainly within the notion of sacrificial, death, and meaning interpretation. Issues of sacrificial depicted in story narratives was studied by Omar (2018), Fonseka (2020), and Nha & Hoa (2020). Their focus on sacrificial inquiries based on the problematization of contextual background as they have analyzed the tales. They put the emphasize toward sacrificial act along with its symbolism. Drawing the contextual discourses, they highlighted the value degradation of sacrificial act. Since Oscar Wilde lived in Victorian era when the society's life was furnished by consumerism and materialistic orientation as the aftermath of industrialism and capitalism,

it shaped Wilde's view toward reality. Every aspect of morality is degrading, besides they asserted that Oscar Wilde was trying to give a mockery—a satirical nuance which is implicitly drawn within children's reading materials. When sacrificial act tends to lead to the heroic action for the sake of goodness, love, and virtue, the case they found apparently showing a contrast, that sacrificial act is done for the sake of material satisfaction, hypocrisy, and social validity. These findings indicated the way the tales are written for the sake of humanity which undergoing a social and moral problems. Correlation with recent study, researchers drawing the notion of sacrificial symbolism which in recent research shapes different conception. Researchers try to elaborate further the notion of their findings by drawing it to the matter of narrative or aesthetics aspects along with distinctive interpretation that will be explained in the discussion section.

Another study on Wilde's fairy tale *Selfish Giant* was about the meaning of death by Dobrodum (2023). This research has a correlation with recent research especially lies on the mode of interpretation of *Selfish Giant* tale. Dobrodum (2023) put the analysis based on the meta-anthropological point of view. Quite complex perspective in analyzing literary works, nevertheless philosophical output appeared by the analysis toward narratives and formal aspect of the tale. Every formal aspect in the tale, for instance characters that have different appearances, demeanor, and series of events became variables for the research to run. Dobrodum (2023) viewed that the giant character symbolizes the evolution or transformation of human personality as the tale put the giant in developmental stage from harsh to generous. While the children in the tale symbolizes youth and purity. Explanation on events within the tale, Dobrodum (2023) highlighted the death of the giant and the child. This image of death was interpreted based on the shifting boundaries lies on meta-anthropological perspective. The shifting demeanor from the giant character and children lied a point for death analysis as the aftermath of the shifting boundaries between characters, death was interpreted as mystical immortality. This immortality refers to the tale when the giant gets sick and dead. The giant's death is not interpreted as the end, but a new way to heaven.

Next study on Oscar Wilde's fairy tales was focusing on the matter of happiness and its meaning. Study from Poorghorban (2022) focused on two tales, *The Happy Prince* and *The Nightingale & the Rose*. Drawing the notion from post-modernity and contextual background of the tales, Poorghorban (2022) question the meaning of happiness represented within the tales. This research has a supportive element in discussing matter of happiness as it is existing within the tales. Focusing the analysis based on theoretical framework, Poorghorban (2022) asserted that Wilde's aesthetics is quite contradictory as found on the tales and Wilde's ideology. The absence of morality as in the interpretation of the tales along with dominant discourse of Victorian era as contextual background, Poorghorban (2022) put the conclusion of Wilde's ambivalence, between presenting morality's criticism or Wilde's own aesthetical discourse. Therefore, happiness in the research can be interpreted as commodified on one side, and irony on the other side.

Based on previous studies, researchers see that majority research on Wilde's fairy-tale put the contextual background as support for their analysis and majority propose issues of morality mainly on the investigation of death and sacrificial act interpretation. There is no concern on the imagery of grotesque and its relevance toward children's literature. They only viewed the problem of ideological and sociological framework of study in the analysis. Based on that review, our recent study is novel and proposes a different topic and theoretical framework with profound analysis to draw the relation with children's literature. However, those reviewed studies can also be implemented as secondary sources to support or give a reference to our research in order to gain rich elaboration.

Methodology

As researchers have stated in the last introduction section, we focus our analysis on the imagery of grotesque in Wilde's fairy tales from its story, characterization, relationship and the way characters experiencing series of

events. We proposed the topic by theoretical consideration of Bakhtinian reading. Bakhtin uses the term grotesque to describe an artistic or form of aesthetic that reflects a strange image that might look futile and low, but this kind of image has its own interpretation and symbols. In Bakhtinian reading, the text will be read by determination of Bakhtin principles of grotesque images such as degradation forms of body, living-death event, and exaggeration or hyperbole discourses. Those principles are lied as a bridge in identifying certain cases within the texts and then researchers establish an interpretation that is suited with empirical case while analyze the text. With the focus, researchers pick three fairy-tales entitled *The Happy Prince*, *The Nightingale & the Rose,* and *The Selfish Giant* of Wilde's as object material. The data in this research will be collected by content-analysis with comprehensive reading of the tales. Image of grotesque is reflected in Wilde's narrative. Therefore, the data will be in a form of verbal sign taken from the texts as it taken in note-taking method. Analysis of the data by applying grotesque theory of Bakhtin with hermeneutical interpretation, since the text itself is a form of literary discourse as Wilde put myriad sentences and symbols as his style formulation—as his modality (Ricoeur, 2021, pp. 260-261) in order to draw the meaning of the images and its representation along with the interrelation of children's literature.

Results and Discussion

Viewing fairy-tales as it is assumed to be written for children may in certain occasions undergo changes, and gradually leaving the trace back to the historical background with traditional convention and formulation such as cute animals, fantasy-shaped world, magic, being good characters, and so on. Then we face the matter of aesthetics dynamics that could possibly alter the conventions. We are facing the matter of style and variations in literary works. Children also develop through the environment and have to adjust with something that is out of conventions; out of the box; or out of the standard norms. Here the conception of out of standard norms means that everything that is not always meant to be negative. Children need to know that the world or environment surrounds them with diversity from colours, shapes, volumes and so on. One of the mediums to depict such images is through literary works with distinctive features and aesthetics, which could evoke a certain impression and meaning.

1. Materialistic Happiness and the Degradation of Body

This discussion refers to the explanation that happiness in general refers to the feeling of joy because of certain causes. Within this research, researchers view happiness as represented in tales leads to the conception of happiness based on worldly-oriented. While body that undergoing degradation in this notion relates with Bakhtinian principle about body that in the state of becoming, lowering, mixing with other bodies or objects forming peculiar nuance for better resurrection. On materialistic happiness and the degradation of body within three material objects, Wilde's aesthetics can be found in the fictional characteristics of his stories. In this writing, the aesthetic dimension is approached by the grotesque perspective of Mikhail Bakhtin. As for this section, the story to be analysed is the story of *The Happy Prince*, a story about the Statue of the Prince and his friend the Swallow. Although the centre of the event is not about human-like subjects, the sides of the portrayal of existing figures, especially the Prince's Statue, depict grotesque characteristics.

The choice of material in the body construction of the Prince's statue can be traced from the imagination of the city's inhabitants of the Happy Prince. "*'He is as beautiful as a weathercock', remarked one of the Town Councillors who wished to gain a reputation for having artistic tastes; (..).*" (Wilde, 2008, p. 4). The dialogue indicates the role of the Prince's statue as an object that represents the official's artistic taste. Second, it became a symbol of happiness. It appears in the dialogue of a mother to her crying child. "*'Why can't you be like the Happy Prince?' asked a sensible mother of her little boy who was crying for the moon.*" (Wilde, 2008, p. 4)

In these statements, the body of the Prince's statue is constructed on the basis of a highly materialistic consciousness: how a concept of "artistic taste" and "happiness" is

symbolized by the use of the "gold" material that forms the body. Through the Bakhtinian perspective in grotesque questions, these are the forms of aesthetics in which the metaphysical, the heavenly, are lowered into trivial things. This finding indicates the theme of materialism that was Wilde's aesthetic reflection point in this story. Furthermore, the question of the relationship between materialism, happiness, and the body came to light as the conflict in the story grew.

With the development of the story, in short, the character of the Swallow standing at the feet of the Prince's statue finds the Princess's statue crying. Through his life, the prince was always happy, never thought a minute to be sad and cry. However, now (in the form of a statue), he is forced to see the reality of life, where many people are suffering and living in misery in the city. Seeing the people of such a city, the Prince's statue became sad and then decided to help the people around him. Then the bird was asked to remove the ornaments on his body to be distributed to the needy.

> *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*. (Wilde, 2008, p. 13)

This is the moment when the body of the Prince's statue is degraded. With the release of his golden eye, the Prince's statue is getting further and further from perfection. However, his body still performs functions to fulfil the imagination of the "happiness" of society. By dividing parts of his body, the Prince's Statue hopes to alleviate the suffering of those he sees. The idealistic nature of the golden material in the body of the Prince's Statue is becoming increasingly apparent in the following dialogue.

> *"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.* (Wilde, 2008, p. 17)

The Prince's statue statement confirms the imaginary values of happiness. Furthermore, his statement that "*the living always think that gold can make them happy*", indicates a materialistic ideology: that gold—which to a certain extent can be called "wealth"—is an object that can create happiness for the masses. This ideological view underpins the Prince's determination to deform his body as a means of achieving happiness for others. The story of *The Happy Prince* is a story of self-sacrifice, with the symbolization of the body that must submit to the materialist values of the discourse of happiness. The body of the Prince's Statue is a form of degradation, where "desire" becomes a symbolic object of happiness. And ironically, performing those functions until his own body can no longer carry those symbolic-idealistic values. Because at the end of the story, the Prince's statue was broken down by the officials for being deemed "too damaged" and "too ugly". These values can be traced into Wilde's aesthetic context, where, as many experts have shown (Fonseka, 2020 & Poorghorban, 2022), an attempt to criticize the social realities of the Victorian era during the industrial uprising and as the aftermath, moral value were degrading along with its sacrificial acts represented in the tale. From the explanation researchers see Wilde's aesthetics shaped the artistic choices that appeared in his fantasy story, *The Happy Prince*.

2. The Grotesque Imagery of "Love"

The traces of self-sacrifice and the value of the body, which were Wilde's aesthetic focus, can also be explored in the story *The Nightingale & the Rose*. Unlike *The Happy Prince*, grotesque is portrayed in hyperbolic ways, by hiding it into artistic symbolism. This section tries to dig this issue further by looking at the verbal features and grotesque depictions in the storyline, especially those related to the character Nightingale.

The story of *The Nightingale & the Rose* tells the story of a Nightingale bird who loves a boy. One day he found the boy crying. The woman she likes wants a red rose for anyone who wants to dance with her at the palace dinner. The boy cannot find a red rose anywhere. The Nightingale bird, then, went looking for the flower from tree to tree. He found a tree that promised red roses, on the condition that the flowers should be dyed with

his own blood. Like *The Happy Prince*, *The Nightingale & the Rose* also raised a big theme with self-sacrifice. By sacrificing the body to be an ideal symbol. Nightingale is willing to meet the qualifications given by the tree. By turning his life and body into a tree, he hoped to be a red rose flower that the boy could use to fulfil his desire to dance with the woman he liked.

> *Surely Love is a wonderful thing. It is more precious than emeralds, and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the marketplace*. (Wilde, 2008, p. 22)

The quotation marks the motives of love that underlie the behaviour of the characters in the story, including the character, Nightingale. Nightingale loves boys, and he translates that "like" into action: his willingness to sacrifice himself to make the boy happy. "*If you want a red rose*," said the Tree, "y*ou must build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart's-blood. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine.*" (Wilde, 2008, p. 26)

To get a red rose, the rose flower has to be dyed with its own blood by striking a tree dart to the chest at Nightingale. The condition given to the tree to Nightingale indicates a very sublime description of sexual intercourse. Wilde's artistic selection in this presentation describes how the body is sacrificed by sensual acts; presented with "singing" and "blood". Furthermore, the sensual image of the body becomes increasingly visible in the description in the following quotation.

> "*Be happy," cried the Nightingale, "be happy; you shall have your red rose. I will build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with my own heart's-blood. All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true lover, for Love is wiser than Philosophy, though she is wise, and mightier than Power, though he is mighty. Flame coloured are his wings, and coloured like flame is his body. His lips are sweet as honey, and his breath is like frankincense.*" (Wilde, 2008, p. 26)

In this quote, Nightingale alleged love as something embodied. By describing the body as something related to food and smells, a metaphorical attempt to describe the characteristics of the body—and its desires—from the concept of love. Based on that quote, Wilde approaches the concept of "love" to "body", turning from something abstract to something close, something much profane. But, despite the Nightingale's sacrifice, the boy still failed to dance with the woman of his heart, because the woman was given the diamond pieces that made him decide to dance with the prince. The end of this story is an ironic depiction of grotesque. On the other hand, the conception of love reduced to the form of "red roses" remains inferior to the material value of "diamonds". At the end, the rose was thrown away by the boy and destroyed by the passing horse chariot, which symbolizing all the sacrifices that Nightingale had made are all in vain.

The story of *The Nightingale & the Rose* continues patterns in Wilde's aesthetics, as revealed in the analysis of *The Happy Prince*. In addition to love being reduced to symbolic matter (red roses), love is also reduced into the body and all the desires that accompany the sanctity of the body. The portrayal of Nightingale's body sacrifice is a portrait of the sexual relationship artistically packaged by Wilde while creating a grotesque picture of love itself. Furthermore, the depiction of grotesque elements on both tales as a representation of sexual discourse, become Wilde's own traits in presenting such themes and evoking either constructionist and essentialist reading—as the way homosexuality and *paiderastia* (loving younger and smaller man) in *Happy Prince* tale, and non-productive heterosexuality in *The Nightingale & the Rose* arise counter or reverse discourse on Wilde's time convention (Duffy, 2001).

3. Friendly Grotesque "Subject"

Previous findings on two of Oscar Wilde's fairy tales indicate several important discussions that lead to the matter of children's reading and writer aesthetic. Moreover, the grotesque image has its own traits and interpretation among scholars of

aesthetics and literary studies themselves. In this section, another analysis is conducted to view the case of grotesque images in the third selected fairy-tale entitled *The Selfish Giant*. The tale is telling about the giant that has a beautiful garden and children who like to play in there.

The story dominantly highlights the development of the giant character for once he was selfish and then fell in love with a boy then became friendly with other children. Wilde's uniqueness can be found on the problem of queer or sensual relationship between the giant and the little boy in the story along with magical events per se. The story of this fairy-tale has several resemblances with previous tales, in the matter of aesthetics that was dominantly put by Wilde in the aspects of self-expression and non-universal or relative. We tend to see the characters in Wilde's tales that have unique and even grotesque images and bodies. Based on the previous data, the shape or the image of the Happy Prince statue as grotesque since it maintained exaggerated and excessive style of the way Wilde put the physical traits, has its own interpretation and reading experience. Another Wilde's uniqueness in this data is about the way Wilde designates the image of a selfish giant. Here the text form the tale that explain the image:

> *Every afternoon, as they were coming from school, the children used to go and play in the Giant's garden.*
> *It was a large lovely garden, with soft green grass. Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach-trees that in the springtime broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit.* (Wilde, 2008, p. 33).

Here we can see the giant character in the tale does not have described physical characteristic, Wilde only write that the character is a giant. General assumption on giant as a character commonly described with vigorous narrative such as image of cruelty, evil, man-killer, man-enemy and other negative-connotation descriptions. Giant in aesthetics of fictions also commonly described as such way with the emphasis on body description along with inhuman behaviour; narrated as monstrous and linked with cultural aspects (Rae, 1998). Mythology-based and legend-based often used giant as a subject that could lead to the destruction and imbalance nature because of its greed. The case is different in Wilde's tale, where giant here is written with no ugly or bad conventions like in other form of art or aesthetics. Wilde describes the giant with only negative connotation of "selfish" because in the story the giant does not want to share the garden with the children. Another uniqueness here is the giant which commonly associated with gloomy and violence nature, Wilde put it live altogether with human and live in a castle with beautiful garden. Children in the tale also unique, that they don't afraid of playing in giant's garden. Here we see another aesthetics form of Wilde by put his mood and non-universal conventions of images. Giant itself, according to Bakhtin (1984, p. 328) belongs to the image or legend of grotesque body and image. Wilde's choice to give giant as the character in his fairy-tale indicating his own style and provoking grotesque imagery and body representation. Even though, giant in Wilde's tale does not have bizarre-looking face or body, instead the strange images out of conventions. This uniqueness of writing and images provokes various interpretation depending on what kind of view and framework that fit or suitable with the problematization.

Other variables linked with this research problematization on grotesque imagery we find in this tale that Wilde put the aspect of exaggeration on certain events in the tale. Bakhtin (1984, p. 303), asserted that exaggeration is one of fundamental notions in grotesque imagery. This kind of notion leads to the matter of satirical interpretation and aesthetic inquiries. In Wilde's *Selfish Giant* we can see the principle of exaggeration in following monologue

> *So, it was always Winter there, and the North Wind, and the Hail, and the Frost, and the Snow danced about through the trees.* (Wilde, 2008, p. 35)

Wilde wrote that by putting an excessive amount of "cold" nuance within the scene in the tale. It tells of the garden of the selfish giant

after he blocked the garden with a huge wall in order to make the children move away from his garden. Apparently, his demeanour toward children put his own self to a karma of being selfish. The winter and other cold nuances are staying in his garden, while outside of his home the seasons are changing. This kind of exaggeration indicates an emphasis toward a discourse. If we take a look at the moral of the story as children's reading material, we found that this is a kind of mannerism teaching. But when we draw the contextual background of this tale back in the Victorian era, the giant home indicates a place where a strict social construction is established, this style of exaggeration by Wilde is a kind of satirical discourse toward selfish capitalistic society which overestimate private property. Another view of exaggeration in Wilde's tale is presented in following monologue:

> *It certainly was a marvellous sight. In the farthest corner of the garden was a tree quite covered with lovely white blossoms. Its branches were all golden, and silver fruit hung down from them, and underneath it stood the little boy he had loved*. (Wilde, 2008, p. 39)

Above monologue presents Wilde's imagination on trees that has white blossoms, and all the tree morphology is made of gold and silver fruit, this kind of image may an aesthetic form by Wilde, besides, excessive or exaggeration of substance or materials that belong to the earth (gold and silver) become grow along with a tree, this kind of picture is a grotesque body that put an emphasis on the meeting of different substance or nature. This kind of body, according to Bakhtin, became a manifestation of a doubled-body or grotesque; body that merged with other cosmic elements (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 318). This kind of imagery provides a new form of aesthetics and fantasy-like conception as free-will to write or put a picture of various natural elements that become a phenomenon. We tend to see this kind of style of Wilde's writing as Wilde's own aesthetic principle. Another common picture is found on following monologue:

> *In every tree that he could see there was a little child. And the trees were so glad to have the children back again that they had covered themselves with blossoms, and were waving their arms gently above the children's heads*. (Wilde, 2008, p. 36)

The monologue presents an image of trees with arms that could be waving and covering children in the story. This kind of image fits with the grotesque principle of doubled-body. Besides, Wilde used the word "arms" instead of "branches" to present such a unique image, arms identical with living creatures and fixed to the non-living thing like trees. Slightly viewed, this is a normal thing in fiction, but in an aesthetic dimension this is a kind of distinctive image which provokes certain understanding. In this tale there is also a picture of ambivalence in Wilde's writing about love and wound. This kind of ambivalence is one of the principles in grotesque imagery proposed by Bakhtin, the case of ambivalence is presented below:

> "*Who hath dared to wound thee?" For on the palms of the child's hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet.*
> *" Who hath dared to wound thee?" cried the Giant; "tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him." "Nay!" answered the child; "but these are the wounds of Love."*
> (Wilde, 2008, pp. 39-40)

The dialogue between the changed giant with the boy that is loved by the giant, the giant shocked about the wound on the boy's palm and feet, but the boy said that they are wounds of love. This kind of ambivalence becomes the way a grotesque image is presented. Distinctive features like this bring a certain touch on Wilde's aesthetic. Love and wounds may be ambivalent, but the meaning behind the dichotomy brings a value to be learned as reading material for children, that some occasions love can be hurtful and can leave a wound; other meaning love and wound as a part of life's journey that will be undergone by everyone. The last data in this tale analysis is one image of death that was presented by Wilde in this monologue:

> *And the child smiled on the Giant, and said to him, "You let me play once in your garden, to-day you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise.'"*

> *And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms.* (Wilde, 2008, p. 40)

This death in fairy-tale is a unique scene that might not be found on other children's reading text, except the death of the evil or wicked character. Death is one of the distinctive styles by Wilde in his writings, especially death in sacrificial acts and death as a goal for virtue. The giant in the tale is described by Wilde as growing feeble and old, even though he cannot stand to accompany the children to play in his garden. But one day when he saw the boy that he loved, he became aware and made sure of the condition. The story ends with the giant's death as he talked with the boy that asked him to play in the garden of paradise, so the giant met his death with blossoms covering his body. This death image is grotesque. Bakhtin (1984, p. 21) asserted that death is one of the manifestations of the degradation principle, in which it delivers another new form; transformation into another life, the dead body will prompt rebirth for a better version. Key principle of grotesque image in Bakhtinian theory is degradation. By discussion in this data, the giant meets death, death here means not only total stop but it delivers better transformation, the boy apparently brings the giant to paradise after undergoing death, so the giant has a new form of life in paradise. Another discussion, the death of the giant apparently became a sign of new birth. After the giant is dead, blossoms are covering his body, this means that the death brings earth fertility (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 327). The giant is degraded, but evokes a new form. Image of death in fairy-tale may indicate different perception for children.

Death is fairly complex discussion for content of children's literature since, mostly understood death is the frightening stage of life. But by putting the conception of death by image of grotesque, Wilde understanding of life shows as the symbol within his own creative style. Death might be frightening, but the thing is the only certain in life, as explained and discussed in Dobrodum (2023) that death passes shifting meta-anthropological dimension. Apart from that, bringing the good aftermath of death, researcher argue that, death as grotesque imagery within such a fairy-tale trying to coax children for viewing death as a certain thing that will happen and death is not only the final destination of human life with horrible nuance, but by putting goodness and virtue in life—just as like the giant in the story—death arrives with "blossom" instead.

Those findings of the analysis of grotesque imagery and body, put an influence toward viewing the story and meaning-making process. What so-called grotesque that might be odd or peculiar, become viewed as a certain form of aesthetics, especially Wilde himself that certainly has his own aesthetics. The point in this elaboration is that, grotesque image in this finding has certain interpretations. This fairy-tale presents a giant as a grotesque image who becomes familiar and friendly with children, the giant becomes a grotesque subject that develops through the story. Another grotesque image such as trees, ambivalence of love and wound, exaggerated narrative on certain events, can be acknowledged as aesthetic variation by Wilde, from the grotesque, reader may find a kind relationship, unique description, and distinctive interpretation that avoid dispositive judgment on aesthetic form. Children's reading material with such images, presumably become another version of reading material that has distinctive style and reading response. Grotesque subjects in the tale become "friendly" and meaningful for the reader.

Conclusion

The grotesque portrayal in the children's stories of Oscar Wilde is presented in various forms. First, he presents the symbolization and materialistic association of abstract concepts such as "happiness" (*The Happy Prince*) and "love" (*Nightingale & the Rose*) and substitutes them into shallow and trivial, such as "gold" (for happiness) and "rose" (for love). Second, Wilde also presents grotesque in the various depictions of the characters of his tale which rendered as "friend" (*The Selfish Giant*). This provide some evidence how grotesque aesthetics became Wilde's way to depict of how easily human grandiose conceptions are substituted or represented by shallow and trivial objects. This makes Wilde's stories have

layered meanings. On the surface, grotesque aesthetics helps Wilde in constructing a fantastical world in children's tales. Additionally, the Wilde's aesthetics has succeeded in hiding the complexity of ideas and meaning behind the surface layer. These findings make Wilde's works more leaned towards the opposite spectrum of "traditional children's literature", a conception based on conservatism perspectives which point out pedagogical value of certain literary text for certain category of children (usually based on their age). Furthermore, as demonstrated by this research findings, Wilde uses grotesque imagery to evoke more radical issue like "materialism", "self-sacrifice", "death", and "unusual love or relationship". But as far as this research go, these findings also underlined the limitations of this research, as it is uncapable to explore how children perceives the grotesque imagery of literature they read. However, it also opens research possibilities of these topics for more practical use, like "how to use this kind of Wilde's works for pedagogical practice?" or "where to put or categorize this kind of works in children's literature?"

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