

SOCIETAL ISSUES AND CONDITIONS IN THE STORIES “THE HAPPY PRINCE” AND “THE GIVING TREE”: A SOCIOCULTURAL CRITICISM

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Abstract

Like blood flowing through our veins providing the human body with nutrients and oxygen to breathe and live, literature flows across time and space offering humanity universal knowledge and the beauty of entertainment. With its aesthetic form and didactic points, literature continues to perform its social functions of unraveling obscure truths of social life and the complexities of human rights and conditions. It is through these variables that deeply untackled perspectives in literature, purportedly for sparking inspirational positive values in young minds, is unearthed in the children's stories: The Happy Prince and The Giving Tree. On a superficial level, these two stories appear to fulfill their duties of infusing values and fostering positive traits of generosity, humility, and affection. However, in a critical review, the presence of extreme altruism which balances itself between a positive and negative value, is unearthed. Looking through a Sociocultural lens, examining and appreciating these stories bear unparalleled results thereby surfacing societal issues and conditions in both stories.

Keywords: altruism, Sociocultural, social conditions, social functions, social injustice

INTRODUCTION

Literature, history, and culture are all interconnected to society in many ways. History and Literature existed like twins born out of time; one with a straightforward tongue, the other a weaver of tales and stories. Both detail events, people, and even the culture during a certain period of time which eventually shaped the society. However, among the two, Literature has the ability to sleep whenever and wherever in society. It can give insight into the human experience and reflect and shape the history and culture of a civilization. For instance, literary works can offer a window into the ideas, values, and social conventions of culture as well as a view into the historical occurrences and changes that have influenced it. Literature can also be used to transmit historical events and cultural customs. In general, literature, society, history, and culture are interwoven and mutually scintillating.

Literature is the art of telling something exceptional from the mundane lives of ordinary people or translating into common language the extraordinary occurrences that took place. It undeniably has a strong link to history being a mirror of the past. There is a close and important link between literature and life. In the words of Ghosh (2018), a literary work is to be viewed in its totality and for the quality of experience it evokes. Literature borrows elements from life, but it creates an autonomous domain that is invested with an uncommon import. Literature uses language to convey ideas and aspects of society and personal life. The subject and treatment must be something that appeals to the general human interest- emotive in expression, aesthetic, and satisfactory in form.

The pursuit of pure beauty through art, art for the sake of art, and the construction of a literary or artistic masterpiece as an aim in itself are all currently out of style- it has always been an art of expressing and sharing one's insight for the better. In his book "Henry VI", William Shakespeare (as cited by Lombardi, 2023), wrote, "I'll call for pen and ink and write my mind." This implies that literature is the writers' point of view and perspectives. Similarly, Rexroth (2023) claimed in Britannica that, Literature is a form of human expression. Indeed, literature is a form of art that



can be summed up as the pleasing arrangement of words. However, literature elevates and modifies experience through words beyond "mere" pleasure through what Rexroth (2023) phrased as "functioning more broadly in society as a means of both criticizing and affirming cultural values."

Given the notion that literature represents social reality, this comparative analysis seeks to provide a thorough analysis to reveal the societal issues and conditions present in the two stories, *The Happy Prince* and *The Giving Tree*. The study's central claim is examining the numerous underlying themes that the two literary compositions present.

THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF LITERATURE

Literature reflects life, frequently painting a picture of what people believe, say, and do in society as a reflection. It is because of this that literature similarly impacts society to how that literature influences the society in which it is set. It captures everyday social occurrences in real time, transforms them into fiction, and then shows them to the public as a mirror in which individuals can examine their behavior and make corrections as needed. The ability of literature to mirror society in a specific degree of verisimilitude and render awareness about the things that necessitate change and redressing is all part of literature's social functions.

The needs of the public must always be served by great writing. Their highest objectives and deepest passions must be expressed. Literature has its social functions- to mirror life and educate the world about things that occur and exist in our midst. The literature presents tales of triumph and glory, resilience and patience, and affection and humanity. Albrecht (1954) points out that the idea of literature reflecting society is as old as Plato's concept of imitation. The best literary works serve as a type of template for human society. Literature spans all eras and cultures, from the writings of prehistoric societies like Egypt and China to Greek philosophy and poetry, from Homer's epics to William Shakespeare's plays, from Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte to Maya Angelou. The ability to open up a new realm of experience makes literature more than just a historical or cultural artifact. However, aside from the positive aspects, literature is also unafraid to unravel the truths lurking in the world's shadow. It reveals the unspoken social realities, indirectly critiques the negatives, and enlightens people to see beyond the lines so that they may realize these issues.

The world's greatest literary works have affected people's ideas, sparked uprisings, and contributed to altering the course of history. By drawing people's attention to the emerging truths of life, literature should lead people forward to a higher plane of life and thought. This is what Walt Whitman meant when he said that the object of literature is "to free, arouse and dilate the human mind". Literature, in this sense, must emancipate the mind from its limitations; arouse it to a consciousness of the dynamic urge of life. Even though it would be challenging to cover all of its contributions and diversity in just several pages of paper, one can synthesize the functions literature bears in society through what it can provide to the readers:

Literary Competence. Building vocabulary, improving writing skills, and harnessing critical thinking. A wide-ranging vocabulary is essential for several reasons, including both writing and reading abilities. For a variety of reasons, including both writing and reading ability, a broad vocabulary is necessary. Reading frequently is the best approach to impart writing abilities. You are engrossed in words when you read. Students learning to use written language to communicate with the outside world for the first time can learn a lot from literature and use it as an example. It also improves one's cognitive abilities. According to Davis (2006), "Even the best phonics-based skills program will not transform a child into a strong reader if the child has limited knowledge of the language, impoverished vocabulary, and little knowledge of key subjects."

Cultural Relevance. Since the dawn of humanity, stories have played a crucial role in society. Histories, myths and legends, fables, religions, and other narratives form the foundation of cultures. According to Ishii and Eisen (2016), cultural values are ingrained into the unwitting and habitual behaviors that people engage in daily, including daily rituals, practices, communication styles, interpersonal discourses, and public representations.



Expanding Horizons. Everyone inclines to become so engrossed in their own life that they lose sight of what is happening in the world around them. This is especially likely to happen to kids and teenagers. Education aims to teach students about the cultures of other eras and places as well as their history. Reading a novel set in a different era or location is more interesting than attending a lecture or studying a textbook to learn about it. varied cultures have varied preponderances of scenarios and interpretations of those events, and the emotional reactions that each scenario generates are impacted by its cultural relevance. (Ishii & Eisen, 2016).

Adding Values. Literary works are portraits of the thinking patterns and social norms prevalent in society. They are a depiction of the different facets of the common man's life. Classical literary works serve as food for thought and encourage imagination and creativity. Exposing yourself to good literary works is equivalent to providing one with the finest educational opportunities. On the other hand, the lack of exposure to good literature is equal to depriving yourself of the opportunity to grow. To be able to measure the multiple and subtle ways in which literary texts can indirectly disseminate values, Baumbach, Grabes, & Nünning (2009) point out that a critic and cultural historian needs equally subtle theoretical and methodological tools.

Impacting Living. Some of the great literary works such as the Bible and Mahabharata provide society with the guiding principles of life. Works by poets such as Homer, Plato, Horace, and Virgil, Shakespeare's sonnets, timelessly amuse their readers. While some literary and poetry works carry life's lessons, many others make us think. Some works are known for the pure entertainment they provide, while others intrigue. Readers tend to associate themselves with the emotions portrayed in these works and become emotionally involved in them. This is affirmed by Law (2012), claiming that understanding a story through the experiences of a character enables us to feel what it could have been like and helps us consider the impact of events, significant or otherwise, on ordinary people. Gaining a broad view of society, through the eyes of another, fosters understanding, tolerance, and empathy and the value of these capacities cannot be underestimated in today's world.

Thus, literature has a profound influence on readers' minds, abilities, values, and cultural awareness, which in turn affects their life. And if you believe that reading is exclusively beneficial for adults, consider all the children's books you were exposed to as a child. Those were not meant to put children to sleep alone, those are used to teach values and traits that parents and the whole society wish children would possess

THE PURPOSE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The science behind how literature enhances our lives is the development of stories into human-helping tools. Literature not only aids in the development of good readers, but also fosters empathy, creativity, and imagination in even the most hesitant readers. Additionally, literature has been utilized to mold children's minds and instill good ideals in them.

Some of the best children's books include *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Matilda*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and others. These novels appeal to kids because they introduce them to a brand-new world through words or because the readers can identify with the characters. Kids identify with and idealize the characters in the stories they tell because they find them amusing. Moral tales can help parents and teachers teach their students valuable life lessons. Among the best-known children's writers are Aesop, Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, and Mark Twain, enriching the childhood of countless children. Their works greatly impressed millions of kids and many of their writings paved the way to the acquisition of positive values and attributes. wo of these literary piece for children are *The Happy Prince* and *The Giving Tree*, analyzed to reveal the significant details and points.



THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

The two literary works are scrutinized through Socio-culturalism merging both sociological and cultural literary criticisms to explore the intertextual links and at the same time take into account multiple views. Employing sociological criticism to examine the stories allows one to examine how the social functions in literature operate in real life. Likewise, cultural criticism emphasizes the value of beliefs and cultures. In addition, Javed (2023) asserts that literature is a social phenomenon that is created in society, a component of society, and that is destined for society. Thus, *The Happy Prince* and *The Giving Tree* are two literary works inspired by social events. As a result, they are considered to be indicative of the period they were penned and disclose values that ought to be attained as well as conducts that need to be mended.

RESEARCH METHODS

In a qualitative-descriptive analysis, numerical data are replaced by themes to uncover the most reflective meanings that can be revealed in a text or set of facts. A qualitative study gathers and analyzes data. Large, complicated data sets can be systematically organized and analyzed using the qualitative research method known as thematic analysis. Finding themes that can include the narratives present in the account of data sets is the goal. Through attentive reading and rereading of the recorded material, themes must be identified (King, 2004; Rice & Ezzy, 1999 as cited by Dawadi, 2020). In accordance with Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017, as cited by Dawadi, 2020), a careful thematic analysis technique can result in reliable and meaningful findings.

The two literary works *The Happy Prince* and *The Giving Tree* are contrasted and compared in terms of their most important themes, which were thoroughly examined, discussed, and arguably strengthened by the assertions made by pertinent study researchers. To create the framework for understanding the various thematic elements included in the literary works being studied, applying the socio-cultural lens. Dawadi (2020) laid out a systematic arrangement of the analysis. From the familiarization of data, and generation of initial code, to the search for themes, reviewing of themes, and defining themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Literature provides a vast knowledge base. Even a lifetime may not be sufficient to truly 'study' literature because of its extensive and varied reach, especially when themes, and intended and interpreted meanings from symbols are analyzed. From the familiarization of the data through several readings and re-readings, the following themes from the two stories are compared and contrasted below:

1. Manifestations of Materialism. Marsha Richins and Scott Dawson, two pioneering researchers in the field and the inventors of the first scale to assess materialism, are quoted by Salzgeber (2019) as pointing out that "*People are materialistic to the extent that they place acquiring possessions at the center of their lives, judge success by the number and quality of one's possessions, and see these possessions as vital to happiness.*" The need for material possessions has historically been linked to a poorer level of well-being (Nickerson et al., 2003, as referenced by Bellovary, Virzi, and Quinn, 2021).

Nevertheless, how researchers define materialism may affect the connection between it and well-being. Three types of materialism—status signaling, happiness, and identity centrality—are evaluated by the popular Materialism Values Scale (Richins & Dawson, 1992), but it's conceivable that there are additional types of materialism that have varied links to happiness. Daykin et al. (2008), Todd et al. (2017), Thomson et al. (2018), as cited by Bellovary, A., Virzi, and Quinn (2021), suggest that aesthetic experiences, particularly viewing art, are beneficial to well-being. This is the reason why aestheticism was used to supplement materialism in some cases and this is manifested in the following lines:



“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.”

The Happy Prince is described as bejeweled and gold-coated- in short, he looked majestic and beautiful like a piece of art as the supported by these following lines:

*“He is as beautiful as a weathercock,” remarked one of the Town Councilors.
“He looks just like an angel,” said the Charity Children.*

However, this sense of aestheticism is clearly a manifestation of the town councilors’ or the ruling class’ materialism, because the people in the town, specifically the common folks are living a very cruel and poor lives. Putting a bejeweled statue in the middle of a not well-off society is definitely an implication of materialism of the authority. Instead of building or spending money to aid the common people, the ruling class erects a statue dressed in gold and jewels.

It’s nearly impossible to avoid developing materialistic impulses in today’s world. Consider how frequently the rich and famous are glorified and celebrated in media, including movies, commercials, billboards, and other forms of entertainment. However, Salzgeber (2019) clarifies that the degree of materialism determines whether it’s good or bad. Materialistic possessions are acceptable. The underlying motivation is what truly makes a difference. In the story The Happy Prince and The Giving Tree, many of these materialistic manifestations are visible.

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.”

From the Happy Prince, this part where a lady from the palace, enjoying her time mutters about her dissatisfaction about the seamstresses working on her dress. Unaware of the tough situation of the seamstress, she talks carelessly just because of her dress, clearly manifesting materialism. The same is true in the story of The Giving Tree which is full of lines where the boy asks something from the tree.

*‘I want to buy things and have fun. I want some money?’
‘I want a house to keep me warm,’ he said. ‘I want a wife and I want children,
and so, I need a house. Can you give me a house?’
‘I want a boat that will take me far away from here. Can you give me a boat?’*

Everything the boy asked was given by the tree, and though the tree gave those willingly, the fact that the boy took it all without batting an eye even if it meant cutting the tree down and taking off its branches is clearly materialism. This is supported by Lyubomirsky (2013) in her lines, *“At the individual level, materialistic individuals are less satisfied and grateful for their lives, have less purpose, feel less competent in general, are more antisocial, and have weaker connections with others...”* In general, materialism makes you less content, thankful, sociable, likeable, empathic, and purposeful.

2. Struggles in Society. As literature is indeed a reflection of society, the conflicts found in the stories are inevitably existing in the society as well. Thus, from the two stories, some of the dominant struggles in the society are drawn out and exposed.

a) Beauty vs. Morality. The theme of “Art for Art’s sake” is a recurring one throughout all of Oscar Wilde’s literary works, indicating his notable commitment to aestheticism. The title character



of "The Happy Prince" is a statue created for city decoration, and through him, the narrative examines the connection between art and use. The movie "The Happy Prince" also shows the darker aspects of society's fixation with beauty, such as the great destitution and social injustice needed to fund the luxurious lifestyles of the upper class.

The first description of the Happy Prince concentrates on his aesthetic beauty: he is "gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold," his eyes are "two bright sapphires," and on his sword-hilt "a large red ruby glowed." However, the word "gilded" indicates that such beauty is fleeting. Similar to how the prince's name, "happy," conceals reality, the prince weeps upon his towering column when the Swallow first encounters him. The prince tells the Swallow about his upbringing in a palace "where sorrow is not allowed to enter," where he was free from worry since everything was "so beautiful." They called him the Happy Prince, "if pleasure be happiness." True happiness, this quote hints, differs from pleasure, while beauty frequently depends on hiding suffering.

Another one is the scenario of the seamstress. While her own young son is contagious with a fever, a poorhouse seamstress embroiders "passion-flowers on a satin gown for the loveliest of the Queen's maids-of-honor." The tragedy of their situation is heightened by the opulent goods she is laboriously producing; –besides the fact that she won't be going to any balls, the money she makes from adding flowers to this satin gown isn't even enough to purchase her any oranges or medicine for her ailing son. Even the town's arts and culture are influenced by severe social inequities; a young playwright "is trying to finish a play for the Director of the Theatre" but is unable to do so due to cold—"there is no fire in the grate, and hunger has made him faint." Similar to the Prince's childhood palace, the splendor created here ultimately hides the misery of the underprivileged citizens whose efforts craft aesthetics in the society.

It's important to note that Wilde's fiction does not completely reject beauty. Instead, it rejects and criticizes the concentration on outward beauty at the expense of compassion. The prince relieves himself of that which had previously given him such pleasure by willingly giving up his beauty in the form of his diamonds to aid the underprivileged, redistributing part of its power in the process.

b) Poverty, Inequality, and Greed. According to Haynes, Campbell & Hitt (2016), "greed is one of the oldest social constructs." In an era when millions of London's poor people faced starvation, Oscar Wilde, a self-described socialist, lived in the city. The mass of humanity, according to "The Happy Prince," lives in extreme agony and suffering in order to save a handful of people's power and money cravings. This novel takes a harsh stance against inequality, which drives so many people into lives of squalor and hardship due to the greed of the wealthy and the great suffering it creates. Because problems of corruption extend so widely throughout the empowered classes in society, remedies to this inequality require acknowledging the flaws in their values. The politicians and individuals responsible for the town's welfare use their power for selfish and corrupt reasons, instead of fulfilling their duties to serve the wider community.

A child plays with a tree that offers shelter and comfort as he grows up in Shel Silverstein's story, *The Giving Tree*. When the boy grows to want what the tree has to offer, he starts to associate happiness with materialism which manifests his greed. Even though the tree gives up everything it is made of to the boy, it continues to be giving until it turns into a stump. The boy continues to live in the comfort of the tree (even if it is a stump) after he becomes too old for any other pursuits or aspirations. This makes him understand that all he really needed was a peaceful spot to sit and relax. The inequality is also evident as the tree seems to be the only one giving without asking anything in return while the boy continues to desire things, unrecognizing the tree's sacrifice.

From reading the two tales, greed- both direct and indirect, are apparent. The Happy Prince indicates a large-scale greed operating behind the idea of aesthetics, while the Giving Tree highlights greed that is difficult to point out because the giver willingly hands over all that can be given. However, Seltzer (2012), speaks about how nothing surpasses the greed-driven pursuit of gain in its audacity, deceitfulness, and egregious insensitivity to the needs and feelings of others when it comes to addictions. Not to mention its severe, negligent, and impulsive greed.



3. Allegories of Altruism. Merriam- Webster’s Dictionary defines allegory as the “*the expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths or generalizations about human existence.*” Many literary pieces have explicit allegories. In the same stance, Mahler (2017) in Litcharts describes an allegory is a piece of art that uses symbolic characters and circumstances to communicate a hidden message, typically one that is moral, spiritual, or political. The well-known parable “*The Tortoise and the Hare*” offers as its lesson that it is better to proceed slowly and steadily (represented by the tortoise) than hastily and overconfidently (represented by the hare).

The two stories- The Happy Prince and The Giving tree, both have a variety of interpreted representations. The Happy Prince is often attributed by children as an allegory of kindness, friendship, and even a clear Christian ethos which is derived from the similar concept of compassion and sacrifice of Christ. In the Bible, Jesus’ crucifixion- his self-sacrifice, motivated by his love for humanity, is praised as the pinnacle of virtue. In the same manner, the story of the Giving Tree is often linked by readers to kindness, selflessness and sacrifice just like the Christian ethos, too.

In one complete concept, compassion and kindness, sacrifice and selflessness, and the Christian ethos can be synthesized in one word- Altruism. Altruism is doing something to benefit someone else at the expense of oneself. It can cover a wide range of actions, such as offering one’s life to save others, donating money to a good cause or working for a certain event, or even just holding the door open briefly for a stranger. When people observe others in difficult situations, they frequently act altruistically out of compassion and a desire to lend a hand. This is manifested by the Happy Prince when he laid eyes on the truth of the town, and when the Giving Tree felt like she needed to provide what the boy wanted.

Altruism is the selfless concern for others—as expounded by Cherry (2023), it is characterized by acting out of a genuine desire to assist others rather than out of a sense of duty, loyalty, or religious obligation. It entails taking action out of concern for the welfare of others. It is something we’re all familiar with, but social psychologists want to know why it happens. *What motivates these good deeds? What drives people to put their own lives in danger in order to save a total stranger?*

In her writing, Cherry (2023), pens that altruism is one facet of what is referred to as prosocial conduct- an activity that helps others, regardless of the motivation or the way the provider gains from the behavior. There are several reasons we might assist others, including guilt, duty, obligation, or even incentives. In the story of The Happy prince, the following reasons for the prosocial conduct of altruism are extracted and interpreted. Altruism is driven by:

a) Guilt, Pity & Empathy

Guilt. Why do we offer others the things we have when we are unlikely to gain anything in return? This is one seemingly easy question with a very complex variety of answers. Researches on altruistic conduct has mostly focused on the positive emotions we experience when we donate generously like kindness, initiative, charity and generosity. Reluctantly, new research findings presented suggests that some people’s altruism may be driven by a completely different somewhat negative emotion: guilt.

Marczyk (2015), explains in the most straightforward definition, guilt is an emotion sparked by the impression of wrongdoing on their behalf that has affected someone else. Due to the unpleasant feelings of guilt, the guilty individual frequently wishes to make apologies to the damaged party in order to repair the harm done. Hence, although the Happy Prince did not hurt anyone directly, he was fully aware that his ignorance and uncaring behavior in the past made him a guilty individual.

My courtiers called me the Happy Prince, and happy indeed I was, if pleasure be happiness...

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.”

The Happy Prince felt remorse since, while he was still alive, he was only aware of happiness and joy and had no interest in what was beyond the wall dividing the upper from the lower class. It’s true that the prince’s boyhood bliss was full of ignorance but he became aware when he had passed



away and was turned into a statue. The prince, then, could only see the misery that existed alongside his own joy when it was hidden by high walls. Thus, the beauty he knew is associated with deceit and even cruel indifference, at least in a superficial, physical sense. It was from this that his guilt rose and fueled his altruism.

Pity. Feeling sorry for someone else because they are unfortunate or at least in a worse circumstance than you are known as having pity. Burton (2014) adds that the emotion of pity, which frequently has paternalistic or condescending connotations, is one of discomfort at the suffering of one or more sentient individuals. The idea of pity implies that the subject of it does not deserve their situation and that they are helpless to stop it. This can be observed when the Happy Prince suddenly talks about the seamstress, playwright, and match girl and the situations they are in. The fact that he detailed their problems and knew exactly how to help them implied that he was continuously observing them and their pitiful states. This also motivated his altruism.

“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.”

“Far away across the city I see a young man in a garret...His hair is brown and crisp, and his lips are red as a pomegranate, and he has large and dreamy eyes. ...but he is too cold to write anymore.”

“In the square below stands a little match-girl. Her matches fell in the gutter, 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.”

He was forced to see the harsh and cruel life of those residing outside of high society after witnessing the realities of life (since he was unable to move from his position or cover his eyes because he was already a statue). His compassion for the people's plight increased daily. He also realizes that each one of those suffering people who are struggling, their misery can be traced back to the effort they're exerting, to their work of art.

Empathy. Burton (2014) explains that the foundation of empathy is "theory of mind," or the capacity to see that because we are all unique, each of us has a unique set of beliefs, wants, proclivities, sensitivities, and other characteristics. Empathy is advantageous from an evolutionary perspective because it encourages parental care, social bonding, and prosocial behavior, which ultimately prompts people to act. Now that he is a statue, bejeweled but helpless as he can't move on his own and do what he desires to do, he could empathize with them to a certain extent.

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.”

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.

Pluck out my other eye, and give it to her, and her father will not beat her.”

Though, the Happy Prince can't move, he sacrificed to give all that he had even if it meant being admired less, bare, and lose his sight. The same is true to the Swallow who never intended to help and was hesitant at first.

“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.

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.

“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.”



The Swallow was initially requested and commanded by the Happy Prince to remain and help, eventually he felt warm after doing a deed and even accepted his fate of dying after his last act of goodness.

“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.

These three made the Happy Prince yearn and long to help the people each passing day. Along with him was the helpful Swallow who was moved by his actions, and was also influenced after feeling the warmth of doing a good deed. Cherry (2023) elucidate that this is due to the brain's reward regions being triggered by altruism. According to neurobiologists, those who behave altruistically exhibit increased activity in their brain's pleasure centers. The reward system in the brain is activated when we behave compassionately wherein good feelings produced by acting compassionately then promote altruistic behaviors.

b) Affection and Love. While the Happy Prince's altruistic behavior was driven by guilt, pity and empathy, the Giving Tree was different. It was out of pure affection and love. The lines from the story supports this:

Once there was a tree and she loved a little boy.

*And every day the boy would come and he would gather her leaves
and make them into crowns and play king of the forest.*

He would climb up her trunk and swing from her branches and eat apples.

*And they would play hide-and-go-seek and when he was tired,
he would sleep in her shade.*

And the boy loved the tree very much.

The primary driving force in this story is the tree's love for the boy. That love encompasses not only romantic love and love for family, but also all other individuals one comes into contact with, and to the fullest extent, all living things. Words like friendship, affection, kindness, and goodwill. This broader definition of love that goes beyond the boundaries of romantic love or family love has been further confirmed by academicians. (Sorokin, 1954, as cited by Post, 2003). The actions of the Giving Tree surely reflect this:

I'm sorry,' said the tree, 'but I have no money. I have only left and apples.

Take my apples, boy, and sell them in the city. Then you will have money and you will be happy.'

*'The forest is my house, but you may cut off my branches and build a
house. Then you will be happy.'*

Cut down my trunk and make a boat,' said the tree.

The strongest emotion in the universe is love, which is even more potent than its polar opposites, hate or indifference. Dr. Stephen Post of Stony Brook University, as quoted by Akdemirci (2010) said, *"When the happiness and security of another person means as much to me, or more than my own happiness and security, I love that person."* Love is the foundation of altruism, which Gulen (2004), as cited in Akdemirci (2010) described as an elevated human emotion.

4. Hypocrisy of the Higher Class. The town of the Happy Prince, specifically those in power and in higher standing display hypocrisy- the pretense of having good character often due to an inflated ego and self-righteousness, lacking the trait of being humble. Here are the hypocritical characters in the story:

"The Mathematical Master frowned and looked very severe, for he did not approve of children dreaming."



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.

"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."

The Mathematical master who is educated- achieved his dream career, did not wish the children to dream. Ironically, even the Professor who wrote about the Swallow's existence amid the approaching winter, publicized his work on a newspaper for the common folks using words only he could understand. The lady in the palace enjoying her leisure time claims that the seamstresses are lazy, not knowing of their situations. Indeed, hypocrites who are self-centered are characterized by them. Yet, if there is a greater hypocrite, it is those in power.

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.

"Dear me! how shabby the Happy Prince looks!" he said. "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!"

The Swallow observed "*the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates*" as it flew overhead during the winter. Even while the wealthy could glance outside and witness the misery, they choose to remain unaware of it—which seems virtually impossible given the Swallow's description of the situation's close proximity. This emphasis on his reputation betrays both a narcissism and a shallowness underpinning his desires—not only does the Councilor disregard his political obligations, but his relationship to art is also borne only of appearances. At the beginning of the story, the councilors are presented as people with selfish motivations, like the Councilor "*who wished to gain a reputation for having artistic tastes.*"

Even the teachers and police officers in charge of the kids ignore their pain. The Charity Children are reprimanded by a Mathematical Master because "he did not approve of children dreaming," and later, in the winter, "*two little boys were lying in one another's arms to try and keep themselves warm,*" to which a passing Watchman merely shouts in response to their complaints of hunger, "You must not lie here." In both of these cases, the very people entrusted with social welfare choose to ignore the unjust suffering of children out of their own spite. Politicians are portrayed as ruthless, greedy hypocrites who only usurped power for their own gain while the struggling towns people suffer.

On the other hand, the boy from the story of the Giving Tree, is a hypocritic individual who showed a short-lived love for the tree and then took advantage of the unconditional love the tree bears for him. Each time he came, he asked the tree for something, took the tree's fruits, its branches, its trunk and eventually its hope of seeing him again. Amid all that, the boy never thanked the tree, nor expressed gratitude for always thinking of his sake. The boy's first engagement with the tree involves his gathering the falling leaves and making a crown for himself out of them. He starts a game in which he pretends to be the king of the jungle while wearing this crown on his head. The youngster's self-situation as king serves as a symbolic premonition of a succession of occasions that will cause many readers to criticize the boy for being wholly selfish in his connection with the tree. Unquestionably, the boy loves the tree in return, but the point of this discussion is to argue that the tree is loving the kid in the other way. His is very conditional and driven by egotistical needs, but hers is unconditional.



5. Excessive Altruism. Some people are motivated by these acts of kindness to put their own lives at danger in order to help others. Such actions are frequently taken selflessly and without any thought of gain. Other situations, referred to as reciprocal altruism, entail helping others with the hope that they will return the favor. In the first themes, altruism is described as a good value, but an excessive type of altruism is a different angle of a story.

Cherry (2023), lists different forms: Genetic altruism is doing good deeds for members of one's immediate family; Reciprocal altruism is based on an exchange of gifts and favors; Group-selected entails doing good deeds for people depending on their membership in a particular group; and Pure altruism, means doing good deeds without expecting anything in return. Internalized morals and ideals serve as its driving forces. Nonetheless, everything that is excessive is not right. Hence, try to look deeper and unearth the excessive altruism in the events of the two stories.

Altruism may have various potential downsides and challenges. It occasionally poses a risk. Altruistic actions people take sometimes put them in danger. On occasion, it could cause people to put their own needs for money, social support, or health on hold in order to take care of others. The Happy Prince and the Giving Tree, including the Swallow who eventually sacrificed his life as well, are undeniably representations of excessive altruism.

"It is very cold here," he said; "but I will stay with you for one night, and be your messenger." 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.

"Alas! I have no ruby now," said the prince; "my eyes are all that I have left. Pluck out one of them and take it to him. "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."

Pluck out my other eye, and give it to her, and her father will not beat her."

"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 he brought to the poor.

Even the Giving Tree mistook love and generosity to extreme altruism, one that had branded it an excessively self-sacrificing character.

'I'm sorry,' said the tree, 'but I have no money. I have only left and apples.

Take my apples, boy, and sell them in the city. Then you will have money and you will be happy.'

'The forest is my house, but you may cut off my branches and build a house. Then you will be happy.'

Cut down my trunk and make a boat,' said the tree.

Despite the best of intentions, charitable deeds don't always have a happy ending. Just when his finery disappears and he no longer looks as attractive as he had previously been the town people judged him. The mayor and the town councilors were shocked to see the dull-looking statue of the Happy Prince bereft of his sapphire eyes, ruby-studded sword hilt and gold leaves. They decided to pull it down because it looked much too shabby and beggarly, and was no longer beautiful or useful. They did not only judge the happy prince but they also destroyed him just because it had lost its beauty. His acts were unrecognized, indeed, but that is altruism. Though the tree on the other story also reunited with the boy (now an old man), she no longer has fruits and branches or trunk to carve on because everything's been given. The lack of gratitude and sensitivity towards the tree is also on another level. What makes it excessive and dangerous is the path and ways taken to help.



There is such a thing as being too charitable. Pathological altruism is when someone goes beyond the bounds of altruism and reaches a point where their deeds result in more harm than benefit. As it happens, there are a lot of circumstances where acting with unrestrained kindness could be detrimental. Pathological altruism, as described broadly as "good intentions gone awry" by pathological altruism pioneer Barbara Oakley, as cited by Schreiber (2012), refers to any act of assistance that has the unintended consequence of harming either the giver or the recipient.

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? 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.

A life can be sacrificed but still not receive even the slightest bit of gratitude. In the story *The Happy Prince*, the theme that focuses on the ending extracted that a good act is a reward in itself is truly amazing and dynamic; the *Giving Tree*, finding solace and reuniting became the concluding part. However, this discovery of the excessive altruism is the main focus of the study. While altruism is a prosocial behavior that benefits people, the problem lies on the people or the society receiving it which never seeks change. Considering the social function of literature, especially children's literature of instilling values and teaching children the proper values and the need to correct unnecessary actions, the story of *The Happy Prince* and the *Giving Tree* should be carefully introduced. Despite a good and virtuous intention or motive, the truth that this becomes a vicious cycle of give and take without appreciation and gratitude is extremely disheartening. Hence, literature and its social function of instilling proper values will be all for naught. This is also why readers should be critics who view literature to learn and evaluate the content.

In a general sense, imagine that the *Happy Prince* and the *Swallow*, and the *Giving Tree* are representations of Mother Nature- The tree is a symbolic of different things, depending upon the overall allegorical interpretation one takes and so is the *Happy Prince*, but for once, use one example. For many—perhaps most—the tree is really a symbol for the boy's mother; her willingness to give and give despite getting so little in return is symbolic of the unconditional love of a mother for a child, but then the *Happy Prince* would not match the symbol. Another popular allegorical interpretation of the story is one focusing on environmentalism in which the tree is symbolic of all the planet's natural resources which are exploited by selfish human beings for short-term goals and needs. If the two are treated like Mother Nature, then a message will become clear. Both the *Happy Prince* and the *Giving Tree* were symbolically like nature, leave out other variables and past interpretation. Trees are part of nature, the material and jewels of the *Happy Prince* all belong to nature in their rawness. And, if there was one idea that would seem like an all-giving, self-sacrificing entity, it would be nature. Worn out from the long years of providing for us without receiving gratitude, instead is asked for more, nature is truly well-characterized by the two. Now that this idea is established, we should look at how we treat it- we are taking it for granted.

CONCLUSION

Given the idea that literature represents social reality, this comparative analysis seeks to provide a thorough analysis to reveal the societal issues and conditions present in the two stories, *The Happy Prince* and *The Giving Tree*. All these were drawn out from the two stories through the Socio-cultural lens. The unchanging struggles in society and manifestations of materialism disguised in the aestheticism concept are discussed, realizing that materialism is intertwined with the struggles in society like greed, inequality, and so on. From there, the kind of society is found to be one that is self-centered and confined to traditional culture like in the *Happy Prince's* Victorian era. The complexities of society just like the factions are not a new thing.



However, as illustrated in the stories, the main issue is not the concept of poverty and inequality, but the greed that resides in those who have power. These two are merely results of that greedy nature. Exploitation also haunts society even now. It seizes the hopeless individuals and works them until their bones and flesh snap out of their bodies. The working common folks continue to exert their efforts while the rich lavishly spend their finances, insensitive to the working-class situations. These two themes also revealed the hypocrisy of the higher class as they act mighty and noble when in fact the common folks are the backbone of their society; but even then, those who survived thirst and hunger while tirelessly working are not spared from the wealthy's mockery and cruelty. It revealed that even people from the higher class, nobles and educated when raised in an environment that is materialistic and long been blind towards other sufferings, will develop ill behaviors like the people in the stories.

Lastly, the dominant theme of altruism is emphasized. From its nature, it triggers, impacts, and influences. A supplementary theme focuses now on the unearthing of excessive altruism.

As mentioned in this analysis, literature elevates and modifies experience through words beyond "mere" pleasure through society as a means of both criticizing and affirming cultural values.


Hence, after discerning the themes, it is necessary to elaborate on how these are relevant at present and what actions must be taken if the findings necessitate. The stories tackle many aspects of society. The political facet of society is likened to the mayor and councilors who desire to show off their power and authority but fail to do their part of upholding and serving the people for whom they are elected to serve. In the cultural aspect, horrendous culture is observed such as exploiting children to work as characterized by the match girl. The educator or mathematician dismissed the idea of children dreaming in life to be unlikeable as well. The social order is one most concerning as workers are treated less even with their countless efforts, and worse blamed and put to shame once they're unable to provide their service. Our society is exactly the same and it is quite amusing because not only are these stories written in a different period of time but also originating from a different place.


While usual studies investigated the good values drawn out from children's literature, this group is accomplished to share the interpretations and analysis that are identified, compiled, treated, named, and interpreted, all of which direct to the idea that Altruism is the most common factor within the two tales. It also, once pointed out a potential risk and issue when reading children's books without proper guidance and explanation. This potential risk pertains to the unexplained value of altruism like in the two stories. Hence, suggestions and recommendations are also provided. Altruism may have various potential downsides and challenges and occasionally can lead to risk. The discovery of emotional rewards for altruism in various cultural situations lends credence to the idea that this may be a general explanation for altruistic behavior.

Indeed, the value of literature lies in its ability to influence society. In other words, society is the subject, the object, and ultimately the recipient of literary works, thereby boosting the idea that individuals may use literature as a way to gain perspective on the challenges that people are now facing. In relation to one another, the two literary works encourage everyone to read and learn values or teach values to children while reconsidering the appropriateness of the content, reassessing matters at hand, and deciding how it will influence the law of the living.

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