

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses topics related to the background of the study, research questions, research objectives, significance of the research, scope and limitation, and definition of the key terms.

A. Background of the Study

Literature has always been an essential medium through which human beings express their thoughts, emotions, values, and worldviews. As a cultural artifact, literature reflects the society in which it was produced and serves as a window into the moral, ethical, and philosophical ideas of its time. Through literature, readers are not only entertained but also invited to reflect upon complex human experiences, societal norms, and the moral dilemmas that define everyday life. It acts as a mirror of society, providing insights into how people navigate justice, love, sacrifice, and other abstract values.

In the academic context, literature plays a significant role in fostering critical thinking and moral reflection. One of the key reasons literature remains vital in educational settings is because of its ability to present multifaceted human experiences through narrative structures. These narratives often involve ethical conflicts and situations that challenge both characters and readers to evaluate right and wrong, good and evil, selfishness and sacrifice. By engaging with these texts, readers are encouraged to examine their own values and question the moral structures of the societies in which they live.

The study of literature and moral values is deeply interconnected. Moral values, such as honesty, compassion, responsibility, and empathy, are among the central themes that many literary works seek to explore. These values are often embedded in the characters' actions, the outcomes of their decisions, and the overall message of the story. Literary texts can challenge the reader's assumptions and present diverse moral perspectives, thereby functioning as a form of ethical education. As such, analyzing how moral values are portrayed

in literature can lead to a richer understanding of human behavior, social justice, and the complexity of ethical decision-making.

Among the various literary forms, short stories hold a unique place. Their brevity does not limit their capacity to convey deep moral lessons or explore complex issues. On the contrary, their concise nature often forces authors to focus intensively on character development and thematic depth. Short stories can be powerful tools for conveying moral messages because they quickly immerse the reader in ethically charged situations and highlight the consequences of moral or immoral behavior.

One of the most notable authors whose short stories convey strong moral messages is Oscar Wilde. Although Wilde is primarily known for his plays and his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, his collection of fairy tales titled *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* holds profound moral significance. These stories, while written in the style of children's literature, present rich moral content that resonates with adult readers as well. Wilde uses these tales to critique social inequality, emphasize the value of compassion and sacrifice, and challenge the superficial morality of Victorian society.

Previous researchers have explored various aspects of Wilde's stories. For instance, Kirvalidze (2018) analyzed the aesthetic morality and intertextuality in Wilde's fairy tales, highlighting his critique of societal vices and promotion of Christian morality. Lestari (2017) investigated altruism in *The Happy Prince* using empathy theory and found that the character's selfless actions were driven by emotional awareness and moral duty. Tufescu (2007) delved into the hidden meanings of Wilde's fairy tales and concluded that these stories offer significant moral lessons suitable for both children and adults. Similarly, Ševců (2019) analyzed Wilde's tales as a social critique, revealing the author's disapproval of materialism and social apathy. Cristian (2018) focused on the themes of compassion and inequality, demonstrating how the moral values in Wilde's characters serve as reflections of broader societal issues.

Although these studies provide important insights, most of them focus on individual stories or specific themes. There remains a gap in the literature regarding a comprehensive moral values analysis across all stories in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* collection. Few have examined how moral values are consistently portrayed across the stories, nor how characters apply these values in particular situations. This gap presents an opportunity to conduct an in-depth study that explores not only what moral values are present but also how these values are contextualized within the narrative and what message Wilde ultimately seeks to convey.

This study, therefore, aims to analyze the moral values found in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* by Oscar Wilde, focusing on how these values are represented through the characters' actions and decisions, and in what narrative contexts they are applied. The stories in this collection provide timeless lessons on kindness, generosity, humility, and the cost of selflessness. In a contemporary world where individualism and materialism often overshadow moral concern, revisiting Wilde's tales offers a meaningful opportunity to reflect on the enduring importance of compassion, empathy, and ethical responsibility.

Based on the above considerations, the researcher is motivated to carry out a study entitled *Moral Values Analysis in Oscar Wilde's The Happy Prince and Other Tales Short Stories*, which seeks to explore, identify, and interpret the moral values embedded within Wilde's narratives.

B. Research Questions

Based on the background of the study above, the research questions can be formulated as follows:

1. What moral values are depicted in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*?
2. How are the identified moral values reflected through the actions and decisions of the main characters in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*?

C. Objective of the Study

Based on the research questions above, the objective of this research can be formulated as follows:

1. To identify the moral values depicted in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*.
2. To analyze how the identified moral values are reflected through the actions and decisions of the main characters in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*.

D. Scope and Limitation

This research focuses on analyzing the moral values found in Oscar Wilde's short story collection *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. The analysis covers seven selected stories: *The Happy Prince*, *The Nightingale and the Rose*, *The Selfish Giant*, *The Devoted Friend*, *The Remarkable Rocket*, *The Sphinx Without a Secret*, and *The Birthday of the Infanta*. This study aims to identify the moral values presented in these stories and to analyze how those values are reflected through the actions and decisions of the main characters. The analysis will be framed using Lickona's (2013) theory of moral development, particularly focusing on the aspects of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

This study is limited to the moral values presented in the seven aforementioned stories and does not include other works by Oscar Wilde. The analysis concentrates on key moral values such as empathy, sacrifice, honesty, responsibility, and compassion as represented by the main characters. The study does not explore the reception of these stories by readers or the influence of the stories on contemporary moral discourse. Furthermore, historical and cultural background will only be considered insofar as it supports the understanding of moral values within the context of the Victorian era in which the stories were written.

E. Significance of the Study

Based on the objective above, the significances of this study are formulated as follows:

1. For Students:

This study is expected to help students understand moral values depicted in the *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* Short Stories. Additionally, students can improve their English skills through the analysis of this literary work and deepen their understanding of classic literature, particularly in identifying and interpreting moral values and their implementation in various situations.

2. For English Teachers:

This research can be a guide for English teacher in understanding the moral values in the *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* Short Stories. Teachers can use these short stories as a teaching medium to improve students' English language skills while fostering an appreciation for moral values through discussions on the short stories' themes and characters.

3. For the Researcher:

The findings of this study are expected to provide a reference for other researchers interested in studying moral values in literature, particularly in exploring how these values are depicted and implemented in Oscar Wilde's works.

4. For the Field of Education:

This study can be a reference for educational institutions in selecting literary works that combine language learning with moral education. The analysis of moral values and their implementation in specific situations can serve as an educational tool to promote character development among students.

F. Definition of Key term

To avoid misunderstandings about the terms used in this study, the following definitions will be provided:

1. Moral Value

Moral values refer to principles or ethical guidelines that distinguish right from wrong and shape human behavior. These values often manifest in qualities such as kindness, empathy, sacrifice, and compassion. In this study, moral values specifically refer to the ethical lessons conveyed through the actions and experiences of the characters in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*.

2. Short Story Collection

In literary studies, a *short story collection* refers to a compilation of fictional narratives that are relatively brief in length, yet complete in terms of plot and character development. Each story typically conveys a distinct theme or message. In this research, the term refers to *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* by Oscar Wilde, a collection of five short stories. Although each story stands alone, they are analyzed collectively as a cohesive body of work that reflects Wilde's moral vision and literary style.

3. *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*

The Happy Prince and Other Tales is a collection of short stories written by Oscar Wilde, first published in 1888. This study examines the moral values embedded within the narratives, focusing on how Wilde employs allegory and symbolism to convey messages of kindness, sacrifice, and social criticism within the Victorian context.