



RESEARCH PAPER

Marxist Study of Wilde's The Birthday of the Infanta

¹Dr. Sadia Waheed, ²Amani Sharif and ³Ramsha Saif

1. Assistant Professor, Department of English, GCWUF, Punjab, Pakistan

2. Lecturer, Department of English, GCWUF, Punjab, Pakistan

3. M.A English, Department of English, GCWUF, Punjab, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author

mfarhankhanabbasi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present study probes class disparity in Oscar Wilde's short story The Birthday of the Infanta from the perspective of Marxism. Oscar Wilde is a prolific writer who also penned fairytales for children. Outwardly, these fairytales are bed time stories for children. In reality, they are multilayered like an iceberg providing various interpretations and meanings. They meticulously address the class discrepancy and other socio-economic predicaments of the era. One of his short stories is analyzed with the theoretical lens of Karl Marx. This study is accomplished employing Marx's viewpoint of the Bourgeois and the Proletariat to analyze the class bigotry prevailing in the short story, The Birthday of the Infanta. Researchers in the past have conducted their research on different short stories of Oscar Wilde from Marxist perspective but this particular work has not been analyzed earlier. This study will add to the contributions made by previous researchers and it will help the future researchers to conduct research from the Marxist standpoint. This study also accentuates the class distinction existing in the era of Oscar Wilde.

KEYWORDS Charter of Economy, Non-Partisan Economist, Political Consensus, Political Uncertainty, Political Vendetta

Introduction

Oscar Wilde is a talented and prolific writer who has portrayed issues prevalent in the society of his time. He employs his writings to depict contemporary issues and bring them to the fore. He wrote during the Victorian era when the novel was the most popular genre of literature. However, his fairytales gained much recognition because of his magnificent style. Apparently, his stories are bed time stories but the prevailing feature of his sublime stories is satire and sarcasm. This unparalleled amalgamation is extolled as: "Children do not care for satire, and the dominant spirit of these stories is satire." (Wood, 2002, p. 156)

Oscar Wilde has discreetly presented his era in his short stories. The Victorian era is famous for class bigotry when the elite class was crumbling and the middle class was rising. The exploitation of the working class had not been eliminated but the working class was striving to improve its situation. These different classes have been depicted masterfully in his works. For this reason, Marxist study has been conducted on various works of Oscar Wilde. Socio-economic themes are the important part and parcel of Wilde's masterpieces. Wilde's masterpieces are celebrated in the memorable words: "An exotic product of a commercial age ... a protest against current ugliness and smugness, a fine - frenzy set against average ideals and commonplace platitudes." (Ellis, 1918, p. 191)

The prevailing class discrepancy is depicted in this famous story, *The Birthday of the Infanta*. It was first published in 1891 in his famous collection of short stories; "*A House of Pomegranates*". Later, this story was published in the book with the title *The Birthday of the Infanta* along with other fairytales. In this story, Oscar Wilde has presented the class disparity in a unique way. Apparently, he is describing the birthday party of Infanta, the Princess of Spain, but deep down he is presenting the miseries of the amusers. He has compared the life style in the imagination of the Dwarf but that comparison clearly hints at the class discrimination. He has presented the melancholic miseries of the common people. He himself said: "*More marvelous than anything is the suffering of men and of women. There is no mastery so great as misery.*" (Wilde, 1909, p. 14)

Wilde's work depicts the misery of the dwarf who has imagined the Infanta to be in love with him only to realize later that she found his appearance amusing. The Dwarf is so heartbroken that he dies but the Infanta does not care for it and heartlessly issues orders of not bringing people with heart to her court again to play with her. This attitude reflects that the poor are nothing more than toys in the eyes of the elite class. This harsh yet crystal clear reality of the Victorian era is meticulously depicted in this short story.

Literature Review

Class discrepancy and disparity has always been a pre-eminent issue in human society since the commencement of life on Earth. The rights and privileges relished by the rich and elite class are beyond the thought of the poor. Even today, with a lot of advancement the world is incapable of getting rid of this class distinction. The resources are unequally distributed among different countries and then unevenly among different classes of the society.

Class bigotry is also seen in Oscar Wilde's fairytale, "*Happy Prince*" (Wilde, 1888). In this story, there is an aristocratic ruling class and the prince belongs to it. He is carefree around the clock and has every amenity of life. The other class is that of ministers and advisors who tell the prince that all is well. Due to which the ruling class thinks that everyone is doing well. Then there is a working labor class which includes the tailor woman who has no money to buy oranges for her ailing son. The starving playwright and the poor matchstick seller girl also belong to that class. The blithe reigning class pays no heed to them and they are living from hand to mouth. They hardly make both ends meet. This class distinction leads to torment in the society.

Oscar Wilde displays class discrimination and undue pride of the aristocrats in his play, "*The Importance of Being Earnest*" (Wilde, 1895). It was written in the Victorian era when the proud aristocrats were facing economic pressure and the middle class was trying to marry the aristocrats for the titles. Same is the case here where Jack, a middle class boy, proposes Gwendolen, an aristocrat. Her mother refuses the proposal because of her pride and vanity. Later, she agrees to marry her nephew, Algernon to a girl named Cecily who was the responsibility of Jack just because she was the heiress of a lot of wealth. This demonstrates the lust and pride of aristocrats who could traverse any boundary for their pride and accumulation of wealth. Later, she agrees to marry her daughter to Jack only after coming to know of his blue blood and the truth that he is the son of her own sister. In this way, Jack also lives an elated and euphoric life later on with aristocrats.

"*North and South*" (Gaskell, 1854) shows the class discrepancy where the South represents the pastoral area and the aristocratic class away from all strikes and strife. They prefer education to business. The North represents the working class in the urban area where the industrialists are enjoying and booming while the working class has to face a lot

of issues and there are a lot of strikes there. They prefer money to education. A girl from the South is married to a man from the North. They both keep on arguing about the merits and demerits of both the classes and eventually they come to the conclusion at the end of the novel that both classes have to strive to make their lives better and they will have to accept the flaws and endeavour to rectify them in order to spend a beatific life.

Throughout the novel "Great Expectations" (Dickens, 1861), Dickens probes the class system of Victorian England at that time England was going through colossal fiscal torment and cultural differences, when due to the Industrial Revolution, poverty, and child labor were rampant. Dickens depicts behaviour of upper class society with the lower class society. In 19th century upper class used to abase lower class because of their status and background. In this novel, a boy of lower class in society is held in contempt because of his dressing, family background and social status by the girl of high class society whom he adores and loves. The boy shifted to England and expected to become gentleman who has all the values appreciated by society in order to have that girl and upper class life style. In addition to this, the poor cannot reach and afford good education. It relays the distinctions between rural and urban life, and the deceitfulness of upper class society that was immoral, depraved and nefarious. A number of characters in this novel are dominated by avarice for money and fame.

"Jude the Obscure" (Hardy, 1895) also throws light on the class distinction prevailing in the society particularly in the Victorian era. The high class did not let Jude, the protagonist, become the schoolmaster. He applied for a scholarship to get admission in a well reputed college but he received the letter from the college which said that anyone of Jude's class was better without a degree. He ended up taking odd jobs to look after his mistress and three children. The social pressure even forced his eldest son to kill his two younger siblings and then he himself committed suicide. The reason was that they could not make both ends meet. The upper class compelled the working class Jude to live a grim life and die scuffling. He would have led a better life if the upper class had let him study and pursue his goals.

Sue Townsend presents the picture when the royal family is forced to live the normal life of the working class in his novel, "The Queen and I" (Townsend, 1992). The royal family is compelled to live in a distant area as subjects due to the political condition of the country. Only then the monarchs realize the difficulties of the working class and they develop a soft corner for them. They discover the plummeting political situation on the television and feel what the working class feels about the prevailing political situation and want to surrogate the situation. Only then the queen wakes up from her sleep in her royal bedroom and is grateful that it was just a nightmare. After that nightmare, she has an altered perspective towards the working class and is resolute to change their prevalent situation.

Lilinia Heker manifests the issues of social ranking in society in her short story, "The Stolen Party" (Heker, 1994). She conveyed this theme through Rosaura's misapprehension of her place at the party. Her mother, a maid, reluctantly takes her daughter to the birthday party of her employer's daughter. She is not treated as other guests but as an impoverished class of the society. Even the magician juxtaposes her to the monkey for both of them, Rosaura and monkey, are servants. She realizes at the end that she cannot be friend of the upper class girl. This incarnates how people treat others differently based on their rank in the society.

Arundhati Roy displays class disparity and caste system in her novel "The God of Small Things" (Roy, 1997). The novel is set in postcolonial Indian society where caste

system still prevails. Social class is depicted through several points such as wealth, occupation, and education. This novel puts to light the hurdles, inequality and difficulties which a woman faces from paradoxical opinions stemming from caste built system. Social obligations depict how woman and lower class citizens are treated. Class discrimination is seen in terms of education, wealth and occupation. Social discrimination is set in caste system of India which separates untouchable lower class from the upper class. The members of the untouchable class were not permitted to touch members of higher class or enter their houses. They were considered polluted beings and were deprived of their basic human rights. Even women from upper class were also treated abysmally. Women and lower class citizens were completely isolated and secluded. This class distinction is displayed to have a great negative impact on mental and physical health, family life, religion, social justice and even on education.

The Marxist study has been conducted on almost all these works and on other stories of Oscar Wilde. Oscar Wilde's fairytale, "The Birthday of the Infanta" has not been critiqued with Marxist point of view yet.

Material and Methods

This research substantiates Marxist theory based on his social, economic and political perspectives. It was put forward by a German Jew, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who was a German philosopher, political theorist, socialist, historian, political activist and journalist. Both of them co-authored the book, "The Communist Manifesto".

In his theory, he presented the two classes, the bourgeois (the capitalist class) and the proletariat (the working class). According to him, the proletariat produce all the things and is the soul of the economy but despite all the hard work, they live from hand to mouth. They are not allowed to utilize the resources they are producing. The bourgeois seize all the resources and the surplus value only benefits them. This undue exploitation of one class by another class leads to class struggle and the unrest in the society. This class struggle leads to social and economic reformation. According to Marx, this class struggle will eventually lead to socialism. Marxism "*talks about conflicts between social classes, and clashes of large historical forces.*"(Barry, 2009, p. 152)

Karl Marx further says that in the industrial era, this class struggle was between the capitalists and the workers. The workers work in factories and other places to earn capital or money. Capital is the means of production or money. Capitalists are those who own money, lands, factories and who are possessors of all resources. Karl Marx calls the capitalists as the ruling class. He says that the capitalists take over the government, courts and army. He calls the small business owners as the "Petit-bourgeois". They exploit the working class to the lees to pile up wealth. Karl Marx calls this class clash as "Dialectical Materialism". According to Karl Marx, the history of humans is the history of clashes between classes. Different classes are at the war for their basic rights. According to Karl Marx, this capitalism and class struggle will pave the way to communism which will be a classless society. In that classless society, everyone will have equal rights and every class will enjoy equal resources.

Marxism spurs the readers "*to see the unhappy truths about material/historical reality, for whether or not authors intend it they are bound to represent socioeconomic inequalities and ideological contradictions*" (Tyson, 2006, p. 66). Marxism is quite palpable in this short story, "The Birthday of the Infanta". The lifestyle of the Infanta, her manners, her eating habits and taking others as no more than puppets epitomizes her blue blood. The dance of dwarf and others is actually the manifestation of poverty dancing in the court of the young

Infanta to amuse her for earning livelihood. Class bigotry and unequal distribution of resources are delineated in this fairytale.

Results and Discussion

Oscar Wilde's fairytale, *The Birthday of the Infanta* underscores the class bigotry and distinction prevailing in the society. Three classes are presented in the story; one is the royal class, second class includes the masses and the third consists of the poor working class who amuses the royalty to earn bread. There is a lot of disparity among these classes. Oscar Wilde presents this difference in a number of diversified ways. The Infanta belongs to the aristocratic class. Infanta is usually the title of the daughter of the emperors of Spain or Portugal. However, Infanta usually is not the heiress to the throne. There is not a single point of similarity among these classes and it is quite evident throughout the story, except for the one point; the birthday. Despite being the only daughter of the king and the apple of the eyes of the whole state, the Infanta has only one birthday a year. Oscar Wilde says: "*Although she was a real Princess and Infanta of Spain, she had only one birthday every year, just like the children of quite poor people*" (Wilde, 1891, p. 31)

The Infanta's birthday is quite significant for the whole state. The day is really special and it is made further memorable with a number of events to regale Infanta. The whole royalty and the state seem to have made it a cause of great jubilation for Infanta. It is her twelfth birthday. Even the flowers of her majestic palace bloom exquisitely as if they are adorned for her birthday. The butterflies and the lizards are out to see the birthday celebrations and to congratulate her on the auspicious occasion. The little princess is very jubilant and her joy knows no bounds. She is playing exultantly with her companions. Usually she is not allowed to play with the children of the masses but on her birthday she has the freedom to invite whoever she wants. The class disparity is depicted here when Oscar Wilde says that she is not allowed to play with the children who are not of her rank in the usual days. The King is class conscious and he does not want his daughter to adopt the habits of the subjects. She ought to maintain her eminence and noble habits. This restriction is the cause of her isolation in usual days but that does not matter much. Her rank is far more important. Wilde presents this rank consciousness as:

"On ordinary days she was only allowed to play with children of her own rank, so she had always to play alone, but her birthday was an exception, and the King had given orders that she was to invite any of her young friends whom she liked to come and amuse themselves with her." (Wilde, 1891, p. 32)

Then, the class discrepancy is manifested by representing the obvious dress difference of different classes. The dresses of the children who came to play with her are mostly made of brocaded gowns. These dresses are not so pricey. They were according to their own class. Their crappy dresses are making the Infanta appear even more elegant and exquisite. Her dress is glamorized with the pearls and silver. All these embellishments and the extravagance have exalted the elegance of her personality. She is looking the most beautiful of all. The pink color and pearls have increased the beauty of her dress to many folds. The extravagant dress of the Infanta is described as:

"But Infanta was the most graceful of all, and the most tastefully attired, after the somewhat cumbrous fashion of the day. Her robe was of grey satin, the skirt and the wide puffed sleeves heavily embroidered with silver, and the stiff corset studded with rows of fine pearls." (Wilde, 1891, p. 33)

Social differences are reflected through the fans of the children belonging to middle class and that of the Infanta. The fans of the children of the masses are simple, black and silver colored, while the fan of the Infanta consists of pearls. The pink color of the fan hints at the matching and the beautiful taste of the royalty. Perhaps she has other matching fans as well. The bounties and treasuries of the state are profusely used to make the little Infanta gorgeous. The gorgeous looking Infanta is not, however, welcomed by her father who is melancholic due to the death of his lovely wife twelve years ago. The class bigotry is seen in the treatment of his ailing beloved queen. He leaves no stone unturned to recover the health of his queen. On the other hand, the father of the dwarf does not try to get him treated and finds salvation in selling him. The dwarf is physically deformed which was not his fault but he dies of humiliation which his physical malformation caused him in the royal court. His physical impairment is presented as: *"Not properly shaped, as all other people were, but hunchbacked, and crooked-limbed, with huge lolling head and mane of black hair."* (Wilde, 1891, pp. 63, 64)

The class discrimination is seen when the dead of the poor and the middle class are buried while the dead queen of the king is preserved even after twelve years of her death. The king cannot afford to lose the glimpse of her dear face and so instead of burial or cremation, she is preserved in a small chapel of the palace where no one is allowed to enter, not even the Infanta. Oscar Wilde describes it as: *"Her body was still lying on its tapestried bier in the black marble chapel of the Palace, just as the monks had borne her in on that windy March day nearly twelve years before."* (Wilde, 1891, p. 34)

The extravagant use of resources is seen when the Infanta reflects that her father has gone to the chapel where the candles keep on burning twenty-four hours. The poor do not have ample oil for their stoves but the candles are burning round the clock for a dead queen who should have been buried or burnt according to the religious rites and rituals but the royalty has so much power that it can change the norms of the society as well as of the religion. There is no might besides the wealth. The aristocrats can do whatever they want without caring for anyone by dint of wealth and power.

The king is head over heels in love with his beautiful French queen. He cannot bear her separation even for a single jiffy and for this reason, he neglects all of his royal responsibilities after marrying her. Even after neglecting all the duties, he is living his life lavishly. As Karl Marx already says that the bourgeois always enjoy the benefit of the surplus value and get whatever they want even with little or no effort which is made by the proletariat to improve their life. He uses the treasures of his state munificently to make her perpetually happy. All his extravagance and exultations for her could not save her from death, the leveling point of the bourgeois and the proletariat. His love and lavishness is portrayed as:

"Certainly he had loved her madly, and to the ruin, many thought, of his country, then at war with England for the possession of the empire of the New World. He had hardly ever permitted her to be out of his sight: for her, he had forgotten, or seemed to have forgotten, all grave affairs of State; and, with that terrible blindness that passion brings upon its servants, he had failed to notice that the elaborate ceremonies by which he sought to please her did but aggravate the strange malady from which she suffered." (Wilde, 1891, pp. 35, 36)

Class disparity is conspicuously presented in the processions of the birthday of the Infanta. Even the arena is made up of purple silk which is more expensive than the clothes of the amusers who are going to amuse the little Infanta on her twelfth birthday. The embellished young lad of fourteen years leads Infanta to her expensively decorated chair which is decorated with gilt and ivory. She sits on a raised place in the arena while the

children group themselves all round. The two classes cannot sit on an equal level because of the class discrepancy. Then, there is a bull fight to regale the little Infanta. Even the horses are richly decorated because the eyes of royalty are not used to looking at the simplicity and harshness of life. During the clearance of the remnants of the bull-fight, a French posture-master performs the feat of walking on the tight rope. The impoverished is dancing on the rope in the court of the royalty. That is just an amusing trick for the Infanta, but for the posture-master all that is done for winning the bread.

The Infanta is introduced to the tragedy of *Sophonisba* by the Italian puppets. Her heart is deeply touched by her tragedy and then she is amused by the performance of the African juggler. There are different people from the poor working class who are amusing the Infanta on her birthday while forgetting their own problems. Oscar Wilde presents another instance where royalty makes the innocent church boys dance. The religious people are not supposed to dance for the amusement of Infanta but to perform religious rituals and to live a life of simplicity, piety and modesty. The royal wealth makes them dance too. The Infanta even sends a gift to the church because of the mirth rendered to her on her special day by the church boys. In this way, it is evident that the aristocrats control not only the resources and society but religion as well. Oscar Wilde describes the gift as:

"She acknowledged their reverence with much courtesy, and made a vow that she would send a large wax candle to the shrine of Our Lady of Pilar in return for the pleasure that she had given her." (Wilde, 1891, p. 44)

A troop of Egyptians who are called *gipsies* come in the arena and present a beautiful performance on zithers. They have a strange expression on their face when they catch sight of the uncle of Infanta. He has had two of their tribe members killed with the allegations of sorcery a few weeks ago. The class discrepancy is depicted here too that they cannot say no to the killer of their fellows and have to dance to amuse the niece of their fellows' killer. Had the gipsies been guilty of killing anyone of the royal family, their tribe would have been hanged or exiled (if powerful politically or monetarily). Despite suffering from the pain of the separation of their beloveds, they are dancing because they are not allowed to say no to the ruling class. Then the troop brings bear in chain and apes that are their subservient. In the later part of the story, the companions of the Infanta compare the dwarf, another performer, with the apes for they do not consider him a human being. Although he is malformed, the heartlessness of the elite refuses to consider a malformed dwarf a human. Their comparison is drawn as follow: *"'Yes,' cried all the children, 'you must get up and dance, for you are as clever as the Barbary apes, and much more ridiculous.'"* (Wilde, 1891, p. 67)

The dwarf comes to perform. His head is unusually large and he is malformed. He performs all his feats to make them happy but later he comes to know that their laughter and smiles are not due to amusement but they are merely mocking his deformity, even the Infanta does the same. Her flower which he is considering a token of love is actually nothing. His malformation is portrayed in his own words in the later part of the story as:

"So it was he who was misshapen and hunchbacked, foul to look at and grotesque. He himself was the monster, and it was at him that all the children had been laughing, and the little Princess who he had thought loved him - she too had been merely mocking at his ugliness, and making merry over his twisted limbs." (Wilde, 1891, pp. 65, 66)

The class bigotry is manifested when Infanta wishes to see the funny gestures of the Dwarf again, his uncle and the Duchess say that it is too hot for her to stay out and that she should go inside to enjoy her feast and siesta. The Infanta orders that she wants to take

a gander of Dwarf's dance later after feast and siesta. The class discrepancy is evident that the performers are not invited to have lunch and they all go back except the Dwarf. The Dwarf is left alone in the garden and is not given anything to eat. He waits outside to perform again in the scorching heat. The royalty does not bother about the hunger of the poor and not even of the blazing heat. Ironically, the Dwarf is extremely happy for having a second chance to perform before his beloved Infanta. His happiness is sketched as:

"Now when the little Dwarf heard that he was to dance a second time before Infanta, and by her own express command, he was so proud that he ran out into the garden, kissing the white rose in an absurd ecstasy of pleasure, and making the most uncouth and clumsy gestures of delight." (Wilde, 1891, pp. 48, 49)

Even the flowers in the garden of the palace depict aristocratic traits and they portray disliking for the Dwarf. They want to kick him out. One of the flowers wants to pierce his thorns into the body of the Dwarf because they think that he is too ugly and poor to be in the palace. The white rose plant is particularly irked because the Dwarf has one of its best bloomed flowers which it gifted to Infanta as a birthday present. The flowers think that the Dwarf is forgetting his class. They are annoyed by his intrusion into their elegant home, the garden. However, the birds like him very much because instead of focusing on his ugly appearance, they have seen the amiable and congenial side of him. The Dwarf used to sing with them. He even shares his meager amount of food with the birds and sometimes with the wolves whenever they were hungry. Even the lizards used to play with him and he never hurt them just like other humans. His gentle behaviour is told to flowers by the birds and lizards but instead of admitting it, they dislike their compliments for the Dwarf. The royal water has perhaps made them curt and disdainful. The flowers then look down on the birds and lizards. This is presented in the story as:

"The Flowers, however, were excessively annoyed at their behaviour, and at the behaviour of the birds. 'It only shows, they said... 'Birds and lizards have no sense of repose, and indeed birds have not even a permanent address. They are mere vagrants like the gipsies, and should be treated in exactly the same manner.' (Wilde, 1891, pp. 53, 54)

The flowers want to confine the Dwarf within the four walls for the rest of his life merely because of his malformation. The Dwarf, who is unaware of the demeaning comments of the flowers, constantly thinks about the Infanta and is intoxicated by the white rose given to him by the Infanta. He kisses it fervidly. He is die hard lover of the natural biodiversity, and even cares about the lizards. He likes the flowers ardently. He considers them the most beautiful thing of the world. His love and humane nature is depicted as: *"He liked the birds and the lizards immensely, and thought that the flowers were the most marvellous things in the whole world, except of course Infanta."* (Wilde, 1891, p. 54)

The Dwarf starts daydreaming. He thinks that Infanta loves him because she wants to see his dance for the second time and she has given him a white rose. He considers it a token of love. He completely forgets that he has been sold by his father and he is no more than a slave. How can the royal blood fall in love with a slave! He thinks that he would take her to forest and then she would live with him all her life. He thinks of the small delights which he would offer her. There is a sharp difference between the amenities of the palace and the simplicity of the life of the Dwarf in the forest but he forgets the disparity between them. The stark difference is seen in the later part of the story when he gets inside the palace to look for the Infanta. He himself says in the later part of the story:

"Here, in the Palace, the air was close and heavy, but in the forest the wind blew free, and the sunlight with wandering hands of gold moved the tremulous leaves aside. There were

flowers, too, in the forest, not so splendid, perhaps, as the flowers in the garden, but more sweetly scented for all that.” (Wilde, 1891, p. 62)

The Dwarf mentions the pleasures of the forests. He mentions different animals and birds. He thinks how he would feed the animals with her. There are no animals to play with in the palace. The birds and animals are the adornments of the forests. On the other hand, the pricey pearls and jewels adorn the palace and add elegance to it. Different tapestries and embellishments are evident of the rich taste and affluent adornments the royalty possess. The throne room and other rooms are richly adorned with pricey pictures, portraits and other valuable things. He thinks that he would give his small bed to her and watch her all night and offer her the small food he would have. On the other hand, the Infanta has splendid food in the palace daily. The class discrepancy is also shown through the furniture. All the Dwarf's belonging is a small bed while the room of Infanta has a lot of pricey furniture. This hints at the class bigotry that the poor hardly have a bed to lie upon while the elite class has profusely embellished life style. The room of Infanta is portrayed as:

“Of all the rooms this was the brightest and the most beautiful. The walls were covered with a pink-flowered Lucca damask, patterned with birds and dotted with dainty blossoms of silver; the furniture was of massive silver, festooned with florid wreaths, and swinging Cupids.” (Wilde, 1891, p. 63)

The class discrepancy is objectified in the description of the Dwarf about the company in the forest. The passers-by are the source of amusement in the forest. A lot of amusers are present in the royal court to entertain the blue blood. The Dwarf has no jewels, pearls or ornaments to present to the Infanta. He plans of giving her a necklace of berries while the Infanta has dresses adorned with pricey pearls. The pure soul, the Dwarf, is under the delusion that she would love that necklace which is rather free of cost. His daydreaming of making her neck exquisite with necklace is depicted as:

“He would make her a necklace of red bryony berries, that would be quite as pretty as the white berries that she wore on her dress, and when she was tired of them, she could throw them away, and he would find her others.” (Wilde, 1891, p. 57)

The purity of emotions is presented which also hints at the class distinction and portrays how different classes have different emotions. How wealth makes the elite class heartless! It is depicted by the suspicion of the king that her beloved queen is killed by his own brother by gifting her poisoned gloves and the king holds grudges against his brother just because of these baseless suspicions. However, if it is true then how heartless and cruel is the brother-in-law who killed the love of his brother, the queen of the state. The bourgeois give no importance to anyone or any feeling except wealth. The purity of the soul of the poor is depicted when the Dwarf remains untouched by the elegance and embellishments of the palace. He does not even think of the luxuries of the palace. He considers the white rose of the Infanta dearer than any wealth of the world. He refuses to give the flower even for throne. It is beautifully portrayed by Oscar Wilde as:

“But the little Dwarf cared nothing for all this magnificence. He would not have given his rose for all the pearls on the canopy, nor one white petal of his rose for the throne itself What he wanted was to see Infanta before she went down to the pavilion.” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 61, 62)

The royalty is enjoying a lot of amenities that the amusers or the working class has never seen. The rich decorations and pricey portraits are quite unknown to the Dwarf. The mirror is an innovation for the Dwarf. He has never seen mirror and himself in the mirror before. He thinks that there is a monster in the room and wants to inform the Infanta about

that. *"Infanta! It was a monster, the most grotesque monster he had ever beheld. Not properly shaped, as all other people were, but hunchbacked, and crooked-limbed, with huge lolling head and mane of black hair."* (Wilde, 1891, pp. 63, 64)

He later finds out that it is mirror and is doubling everything of the room. Then he realizes that his dance is not affection for the Infanta but a mere amusement and that the rose is not a token of love but a mere symbol of mockery. He then realizes that his poor father has sold him just to get rid of his deformity and uselessness. He has just earned some money by selling him. He has actually saved his future bread. On the other hand, the Infanta's father has bought him as an amuser for his daughter. He is no more than a toy and only poverty should be blamed for this mockery. His helplessness and his mockery make him cry and he realizes that he is merely an item of amusement. The children and the Infanta herself want to mock him again. After realizing the truth, he tears the rose into pieces which he would have never given to anyone, even for the throne. His sadness is depicted as:

"When the truth dawned upon him, he gave a wild cry of despair, and fell sobbing to the ground. So it was he who was misshapen and hunchbacked, foul to look at and grotesque. He himself was the monster, and it was at him that all the children had been laughing, and the little Princess who he had thought loved him - she too had been merely mocking at his ugliness, and making merry over his twisted limbs. 'Why had they not left him in the forest, where there was no mirror to tell him how loathsome he was? 'Why had his father not killed him, rather than sell him to his shame? The hot tears poured down his cheeks, and he tore the white rose to pieces." (Wilde, 1891, pp. 65, 66)

The Infanta demands a second performance from the Dwarf but he does not move. She calls her uncle and her uncle orders him to dance or he will have to face the whipping. It shows that the poor have no choice. They have to dance whenever the royalty demands. The subjugation of the poor class at the hands of the bourgeois is evident. The Infanta and her uncle do not request him to dance, they issue orders. The Infanta says: *"Now you must dance for me."* (Wilde, 1891, p. 67)

Chamberlain, a servant, feels for the Dwarf and checks him and finds that he is dead. He declares that the Dwarf would not dance again but that infuriates the blue blood. The Infanta, unaware about his death, wants him to dance. Chamberlain then announces his death and says that his heart is broken. The Infanta, whose tears come out after seeing the performance about the tragedy of *Sophonisba* is not moved by the death of the poor Dwarf. Only the tragedy of the rich is tragedy for the blue blood and they do not consider the poor even humans. Instead of being somber, she is irked and leaves, ordering not to bring heartless people for future. *"And Infanta frowned, and her dainty rose-leaf lips curled in pretty disdain. 'For the future let those who come to play with me have no hearts,' she cried, and she ran out into the garden."* (Wilde, 1891, p. 69)

Conclusion

Oscar Wilde clearly depicts the class discrepancy in his fairy tale, "The Birthday of the Infanta". Oscar Wilde presents class bigotry in his other stories like "The Happy Prince", "The Child Star" etc. In this story, he hints at the power of affluence. The Bourgeois can do whatever they want with the dint of wealth. They can even make the church boys dance. They can change the religious rituals just like the king of the state changes regarding the funeral/cremation of his beloved Queen. They can alter the social norms and laws according to their wishes and desires. They yearn only for wealth. They give no importance to anyone's feelings and emotions. They are fond of showing off their wealth. They are

relishing such luxuries and amenities that the Proletariat cannot even imagine. The mirror, which is usually not very expensive, is not available to the poor Dwarf living in the forest. They are unable to have even the basic needs of life. As the Dwarf mentions that he has only a small bed and nothing else to comfort him in his house. He even has small amount of food. Still he cares for the feelings of animals, birds, lizards and other human beings. On the other hand, the class of Bourgeois is too greedy to share even the surplus food and resources with the Proletariat. They just want to seize even the smallest thing possible to fill up their treasure. Oscar Wilde has shown how the class bigotry sometimes hurts the poor so much that their broken hearts can lead to their deaths. The elite class does not care even if they die or live. They are so stone hearted that even the death of a poor man has no effect on them. They do not consider them humans. They treat the poor as if only the elite class has emotions. Oscar Wilde is a prolific writer and has meticulously portrayed the class disparity prevailing in the society and wants to highlight the issues of the poor and the heartlessness of the Bourgeois. Apparently Wilde's fairytales are just bedtime stories for the children but deep down they present the universal themes of the miseries of the poor and the agonizing class distinction of the society which ought to end in order to make the society a heaven and a place worth living. The class discrepancy and disparity is a great obstacle in the prosperity of a state. Only the equality, equal rights, and equal opportunities can end social bigotry and injustice. This will spur the society to flourish.

References

- Barry, Peter. (2009). *Beginning theory : an introduction to literary and cultural theory* (3rd Ed.). (2009). Manchester University Press.
- Ellis, Havelock. (1918). "A Note on Oscar Wilde", *The Lotus Magazine*, Vol. 9, No. 4, Jan.
- Marxism Facts for Kids. (n.d).
<https://kids.kiddle.co/Marxism#:~:text=Marxists%20believe%20that%20if%20the,there%20is%20no%20government%20anymore.>
- Tyson, Lois. (2006). *Critical Theory Today* (2nd Ed.). (2006). New York: Routledge
- Wilde, Oscar. (1891). *A House of Pomegranates* (7th Ed.). (1891). London: Methuen & Co. LTD.
- Wilde, Oscar. (1909). "The Young King", *The Happy Prince and Other Fairy Tales*. (1909). New York: Brentano's
- Wood, Naomi. (2002). "Creating the Sensual Child: Paterian Aesthetics, Pederasty, and Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales", *Marvel and Tales*