

Enda Kickham's review of 'The Happy Prince' by Oscar Wilde

'The Happy Prince' provides us with an exceptional glimpse into the social class system of Victorian England. It is a wonderful, creative masterpiece, typical of 19th Century English Fiction. Social injustice, the redemptive power of love and indeed the loss of innocence are the universal themes explored by Wilde. I think that in many ways this story is timeless and has never been more relevant due to the moral of the story. We learn that the worst aspects of modern society can be overcome by charity, love and friendship, which has the unique ability to unite men and make them whole.

The story opens with a statue who, at one time, was a real prince. The prince was happy when he was alive due to his ignorance of any sadness or suffering outside his palace walls. Upon his death, an opulent statue, (covered in gold with eyes of beautiful sapphires and a ruby attached to his sword-hilt), was erected. As a result of the materialistic society he was part of he was thought to be quite beautiful; "useless" but "beautiful." Due to the location of the statue, the prince was allowed to witness, for the first time, the pain, poverty and misery of the city's poor. A loving swallow becomes the statue's messenger. A wonderful friendship follows as the bird redistributes the statue's gold and jewels among the poor.

Eventually, with the swallow's death, the sculpture cracks with sadness at the loss of his friend and the statue is replaced because of its lack of beauty. In my opinion, a modern audience would find it very easy to draw comparisons between the prince's fate and the treatment of people in society today. We largely live in a materialistic world, where the outside of a person is valued in public, as opposed to the most beautiful part of a person, which in the case of the statue is the kind and giving heart.

I would highly recommend 'The Happy Prince' to a readership of my age and indeed there is a lesson in there for anyone whose worldly ambition in life is to accumulate material goods. This is a wonderful story of friendship, love and a willingness to part with one's own riches which may very well indeed be more important today than ever before.