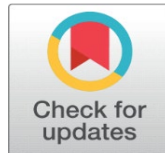
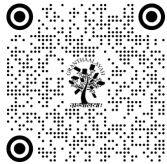


ANTHROPOMORPHISM: A CURE FOR LONELINESS - RE-READING THE STORY THE HAPPY PRINCE

Fancy D. R. ¹ , Solomon Asha Joseph ², Leena Liz Mathew ³, Dr. Saran S. ⁴  

^{1,2,3} Assistant Professor, Department of English, Christian College, Chengannur, Kerala, India

⁴ Assistant Professor & Head, Department of English, University Institute of Technology, University Regional Centre - Pathiyoor, University of Kerala, Tiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India



Corresponding Author

Dr. Saran S., srn.s@rediffmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Anthropomorphism involves attributing human traits or behaviors to God, animals, or objects. This tendency is deeply rooted in human psychology and can be beneficial in various ways. For instance, many people keep pets to combat loneliness. Psychologists agree that pets provide companionship and unconditional love, which can help alleviate depression, improve mood, enhance resilience, and support emotional healing. In Oscar Wilde's story *The Happy Prince* (1888), the concept of anthropomorphism is illustrated through the actions of a swallow, symbolizing virtues that humans should embody. During his life, the Happy Prince, surrounded by wealth and comfort, never experienced loneliness. However, after his death, as a statue, he is plagued by loneliness until he forms a bond with the swallow. This friendship reveals that improving the quality of relationships, particularly by fostering intimacy, can be a powerful remedy for loneliness. Positive psychology suggests that focusing on enhancing positive emotions within relationships or increasing social interactions can lead to deeper and more meaningful connections with others. While many research papers analyze *The Happy Prince* through an anthropomorphic lens, this analysis seeks to explore the story as an example of how anthropomorphism can offer a solution to loneliness.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, Emotions, Friendship, Loneliness and Rereading

1. INTRODUCTION

Humans have long sought to connect the natural reflexes and behaviors of animals with human emotions. This innate urge drives us to domesticate birds and animals as companions, despite the potential costs and risks involved. Anthropomorphism, the practice of attributing human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities, is often employed by writers to bring their characters to life. By giving human-like qualities to animals or objects, writers create vivid, relatable characters that resonate with readers. This technique allows for the exploration of different narratives that might not be possible with human characters

alone. Additionally, it can add symbolic depth to a character, making the story more allegorical.

Anthropomorphism is prevalent in folktales, mythology, and religious stories, with animals often serving as stand-ins for humans. In such narratives, the audience is meant to perceive these animals as people, engaging in human-like activities such as talking, falling in love, and behaving as humans would.

Oscar Wilde, an Irish poet and playwright, was a prominent advocate of the aesthetic movement, which championed the idea that art should be appreciated for its beauty alone. Wilde gained recognition at Oxford in the 1870s for his scholarship, wit, and devotion to this movement. His literary legacy is largely built on his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), and his brilliant comedies of manners, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1893) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1899). Wilde became a notable figure in London's social and artistic circles, known for his wit and flamboyant personality. First published in May 1888, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* by Oscar Wilde is a collection of stories aimed at children. In many of these tales, Wilde employs anthropomorphism to appeal to young readers, making the stories more engaging and relatable through the humanization of non-human characters.

2. "THE HAPPY PRINCE"- STORY

The story centers around a grand statue of a prince that overlooks a city. This prince, during his lifetime, lived a life of luxury and ease, completely oblivious to the struggles and hardships beyond the walls of his castle. Now, as an ornate statue adorned with gold and precious stones, he finds no joy. From his elevated position, he witnesses the widespread misery among the city's inhabitants, a reality he was once ignorant of. The poverty and suffering he now sees cause him immense sorrow, and each night, he weeps out of the helplessness of not being able to aid those in need. One day, a swallow, on its journey to Africa, stops to rest at the feet of the statue. Moved by the statue's sorrow, the swallow decides to assist him, despite the fact that winter is approaching and she needs to migrate to warmer lands where her fellow swallows await her.

At the Prince's request, the swallow begins to strip away the statue's precious materials to distribute them to the needy. She takes the red ruby from the hilt of the Prince's sword to a poor seamstress who cannot afford to buy oranges for her sick son. Next, she plucks an expensive sapphire from one of the Prince's eyes and delivers it to a struggling playwright in need of financial support. The second sapphire is taken from the other eye and given to a match girl, to help her earn some money. Finally, the swallow removes the gold leaf that covers the statue, piece by piece, and distributes it among the poor and needy throughout the city.

In the end, both the swallow and the Happy Prince sacrifice themselves in their efforts to bring happiness to the impoverished citizens. The story concludes with God sending his angels to bring the dead swallow and the broken heart of the Happy Prince to heaven.

3. ANTHROPOMORPHISM- THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT

Anthropomorphism is a prevalent way in which humans interpret and engage with the world. Over time, the ways in which we attribute human-like traits to non-human entities have evolved, yet the underlying concept remains unchanged. Children, driven by their curiosity, often anthropomorphize as it helps them understand their surroundings. They may notice human-like characteristics in non-

human objects that adults might overlook. For some, the tendency to anthropomorphize extends into adulthood, as it helps people make sense of events and behaviors they encounter. By assigning emotions, attitudes, mental states, faces, and values to non-human entities, individuals can feel a sense of connection to something beyond themselves.

Given that the human brain processes social information rapidly, it's natural to assess non-human entities with the same cognitive framework. We are so accustomed to perceiving faces around us that we might start to see them in non-human objects, even if the resemblance is slight. People who tend to anthropomorphize may also exhibit stronger moral considerations and experiences. Additionally, anthropomorphism can foster a sense of connectedness and empathy. Research even suggests that pet owners, who often attribute human qualities to their pets, tend to laugh more frequently than those without pets.

In Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince*, the world is one where it is assumed that animals and inanimate objects can speak and feel. The use of anthropomorphism is central to the story's fairy tale setting. The narrative highlights the joy the Happy Prince experiences as he donates the precious materials that adorn his statue to those in need. A key element of this tale is that the agent of this generosity is a bird, a swallow. The Prince, through his relationship with the swallow, seeks to make his 'afterlife' meaningful by doing the good he failed to achieve in his privileged life. The bird becomes the means of enacting this sharing, which the author portrays as an essential human quality.

4. ANTHROPOMORPHISM- A CURE FOR LONELINESS

“A single tear unseen, unheard, a testament to a lonely heart.”

Loneliness is often described as a distressing emotional state that arises when there is a disparity between the relationships one desires and those one perceives they have. It is a mindset that can lead individuals to feel empty, isolated, and unloved. The unpleasant feelings associated with loneliness are subjective; studies have shown that loneliness is not necessarily about the amount of time spent with others or in solitude. Rather, it is more closely tied to the quality of one's relationships than the quantity. A person experiencing loneliness may feel misunderstood and believe that their relationships lack depth and meaning. For some, loneliness may be temporary and easily alleviated, such as when a close friend moves away or a spouse returns home after a trip. For others, however, loneliness can be more persistent and difficult to overcome, such as in the case of losing a loved one or the end of a marriage, where there may be fewer opportunities to connect with others.

The loneliness felt by the Happy Prince can be seen as falling into this latter category. Initially, it may seem that his solitude is bound to last forever. People who are lonely often yearn for human contact, but their state of mind can make it challenging to form connections. However, through the companionship of the swallow, the Happy Prince comes to realize that his endless loneliness can indeed be overcome.

5. “THE HAPPY PRINCE”- A REREADING

The story opens with the captivating line, "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" (Wilde 279). The irony in this sentence becomes apparent as the narrative unfolds, revealing that the Prince was not truly happy, nor did his elevated position bring him joy. When the Prince was transformed into a statue, it marked the pinnacle of his luxurious existence. His physical description highlights the distinctive nature of the Happy Prince, a grand and ornate statue admired by every resident of the city for different reasons. Mothers, for instance, would tell their children, "Why can't you be happy? The Happy Prince never cries about anything." A disillusioned man, gazing at the magnificent statue, murmurs, "I am glad there is someone in the world who is quite happy" (279). Schoolchildren, emerging from church, observe, "The Happy Prince looks just like an angel." When their teacher questions this, asking, "How can you tell when you have never seen an angel?", the children respond that they have seen angels in their dreams. Everyone collectively assumes the Prince's happiness, yet none of these observations or remarks alleviate his loneliness.

In death, the Prince is granted a chance to perform the good deeds he neglected during his lifetime. He eagerly seizes this opportunity, emptying himself of his wealth to assist others. He enlists the swallow's help to fulfill his wishes, gradually freeing himself from the solitude that has plagued him. Anthropomorphism plays a significant role in allowing the Prince to escape his loneliness.

The swallow, seeking to avoid the harsh winter, finds refuge at the golden feet of the Happy Prince's statue. Rather than basking in the luxury of this golden sanctuary, the swallow begins to aid those who are suffering. It realizes that true happiness is not found in luxury, but in caring for others, even at the cost of diminishing the statue's beauty.

Despite being a prominent figure in the city, the Happy Prince is unable to directly impact the lives of the people below, which deepens his sense of isolation. He comes to understand that his high position and separation from the people only increase his distance from true happiness. The companionship of the swallow brings immense relief to the Prince.

The swallow feels the water droplets soaking through its feathers and realizes they are the tears of the Prince, who is filled with remorse. The anthropomorphic element of the story emerges when the bird recognizes the Prince's sorrowful tears. During their initial encounter, we read the following exchange:

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am the Happy Prince."

"Then why are you weeping?" inquired the swallow (280).

The assumption that the Prince was truly happy is ultimately proven wrong. However, we also see that the arrival of conversations marks the beginning of relief from loneliness. The Prince, now a statue, becomes a helpless observer of human suffering, his feet anchored to a pedestal, rendering him powerless against forces beyond his control. From the moment the statue was erected until the swallow's arrival, the Prince endures the deep sadness of solitude. The swallow's presence not only alleviates the Prince's loneliness but also empowers him to address the isolation of others.

The Prince finds a way to help the sick child of the needlewoman. The boy's constant cries for oranges cause the Prince great sorrow, and his inability to move to assist compels him to entrust the task to the swallow. The swallow's act of bringing warmth to the neglected boy is a powerful example of imbuing human

emotions into a creature. The gentle fluttering of the swallow's wings soothes the ill and lonely boy, lulling him into a peaceful sleep.

Though eager to join its friends playing along the Nile in Egypt, the swallow decides to stay for one more night in London at the Prince's request. The narrator attributes human emotions to the bird, emphasizing its longing to join its friends and escape its own loneliness, now that it is far from their company. The swallow also shares its dislike for boys, recalling how they threw stones at it while it flew over the river the previous summer.

The young poet in the story is another lonely figure, sitting with his head in his hands, his despair mirrored in the wilted flowers nearby. The swallow's entry through a hole in the poet's hut, and its placement of a sapphire among the dead flowers, inspires the poet to complete his play and restores his hope for future success. The loneliness experienced by the match girl is of a different nature. Although her father is mentioned, his cruelty and abuse make her feel utterly isolated and exploited. The swallow's gift of the sapphire brings a glimmer of hope into the girl's life.

After donating both of its eyes, the Happy Prince becomes blind. The swallow returns to him, saying, "You are blind now, so I will stay with you always" (283). Remarkably, the swallow understands that loneliness intensifies with physical limitations, and it offers companionship to the statue. Despite the harsh cold, the swallow longs to assist the Happy Prince, saying, "It is very cold here, but I will stay with you for one night and be your messenger" (283). The nights spent with the Happy Prince draw the swallow closer to the chilling winter, making it struggle to survive the freezing temperatures.

In helping the needlewoman's son, the swallow alleviates the loneliness caused by poverty and illness. When aiding the playwright, the swallow provides motivation, removing obstacles like hunger and lack of inspiration that hinder creativity. The match girl's loneliness, exacerbated by her father's exploitation and the absence of a mother figure, is poignantly addressed by the swallow's compassionate gift.

The swallow's own loneliness is another key element of the story. Initially, it lives happily with its friends, but it becomes isolated when it delays its migration. "His friends had gone away to Egypt six weeks before, but he had stayed behind, for he was in love with the most beautiful Reed" (279). Although the swallow loves the Reed, she is a flirt, constantly playing with the wind. When the time comes for the swallow to leave, the Reed refuses to follow, being too attached to her home. The swallow, in tune with nature, soon overcomes its loneliness by embracing altruism and helping others.

There are many ways to combat loneliness, and forming friendships with animals is just one of them. However, the story of the Happy Prince demonstrates that such relationships can be profoundly meaningful. Though the swallow succeeds in alleviating the loneliness of others, it ultimately falls dead at the Prince's feet. This act shatters the Prince's heart in two, leaving behind one of the city's most precious treasures. The swallow, having ended the solitude of so many, will forever remain a symbol that resonates deeply within lonely human hearts.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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