Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow, said the Prince, will you not stay with me one night longer? It is winter, answered the swallow, and the chill snow will soon be here. In Egypt the sun is warm. From his high vantage point, the glittering statue of the Happy Prince is the pride of city officials. But the Prince’s sapphire eyes are filled with tears because of the suffering he sees below. Stuck fast on his pedestal, there is nothing the gem-encrusted statue can do to help relieve the poor, until a little swallow stops to rest at his feet. The Prince persuades the bird to be his messenger, and to pluck out and carry one precious jewel after another to those in need. In order to survive the winter, the swallow must fly to a warmer place, but his love for the now-shabby Prince compels him to stay despite the consequences. Time after time, the brave little bird does all that is asked, until both he and the Happy Prince have nothing left to give. Oscar Wilde’s classic fairy tale of compassion and selflessness is given new life by Robin Muller’s exquisite illustrations in this special edition.

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In these tales, most of them being sad and even very sad, Oscar Wilde looks for a way to save one’s soul in front of the misery of the world. Anyone in society who lives in the upper classes does not necessarily see the ugliness and suffering of the world when one looks at the lower classes. But in these tales the Happy Prince, or the Selfish Giant, or any other character will manage to get salvation out of their upper class blindness, by opening their eyes to misery and suffering and by doing what they can to repair these pains and evils because they will realise they have to feel responsible for the world, because they are more powerful and could easily impose their selfish rule. But the giant will discover nature, if not God, punishes him for his selfishness. The nightingale will try to redeem a young student by giving him a red rose in a season when red roses do not bloom. And yet the student will not get the love he wants
because he is nothing but a non-entity for the girl he would like to be loved by. There is also a very sad note in A Devoted Friend and how friendship can become a mask for selfishness, a nice appearance for an ugly and egoistic attitude. Those tales are sad and at the same time they convey a moral full of hope. All is not lost if the Happy Prince can give away his happiness for those who suffer, even if later the powerful of his society will reject him when he does not look happy and beautiful any more.

Dr Jacques COULARDEAU, University of Perpignan

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