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Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

The Image of Oscar Wilde in Film  
Bachelor Thesis

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## **ANNOTATION**

This thesis focuses on the portrayal of Oscar Wilde and related concepts of Conformity, Sexuality, and Family in biographical films about his person. The films were chosen to represent different time periods in contemporary history. Background on Conformity, Sexuality, and Family in the context of the Victorian era is given in the theoretical chapters of the thesis. Following, the films are analysed with emphasis on changes in the described themes and the focus on them in the chosen films. The progress in portraying the themes is tracked, and the thesis is closed with a final chapter which recapitulates, compares, and derives general conclusions from the analysis.

## **KEYWORDS**

conformity, scandal, sexuality, homosexuality, family, nuclear family, biography, Oscar Wilde, Victorian era

## **NÁZEV**

Obraz Oscara Wildea ve filmovém zpracování

## **ANOTACE**

Tato práce je zaměřena na vyobrazování Oscara Wildea a s ním souvisejících témat konformity, sexuality, a rodiny v biografických filmech o jeho osobě. Filmy byly vybrány tak aby reprezentovaly různá časová období současných dějin. Teoretické kapitoly pojednávají o zvolených tématech, konformitě, sexualitě, a rodině, v kontextu viktoriánské doby. Filmy jsou následně analyzovány s důrazem na změny ve vyobrazení daných témat a jejich použití. Současně je pozorován jejich vývoj v čase. Práce je zakončena kapitolou, která zjištění z analýzy shrnuje, porovnává, a na konci odvádí obecnější závěry.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

konformita, skandál, sexualita, homosexualita, rodina, nukleární rodina, biografie, Oscar Wilde, viktoriánská doba

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## Zásady pro vypracování

Pavla Stěhulová se ve své práci zaměří na filmová zpracování života Oscara Wildea, jednoho z nejvýznamnějších, ale i nejkontroverznějších ikon viktoriánské literatury. V první části využije sekundární zdroje a s jejich pomocí pojedná o vybraných tématech, která jsou s tímto obdobím spjata, zejména pak otázka rodiny, sexuality a konformity. Na tomto základě a s využitím životopisné prózy (např. R. Ellman) provede detailní analýzu třech filmových zpracování Wildeova životního příběhu – *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1960), *Wilde* (1997) a *The Happy Prince* (2018). Korpus je vybrán tak, aby jednotlivá díla zastupovala různá časová období, což autorce umožní vystopovat povahu tematických i formálních změn. Soustředit se bude primárně na zobrazování výše zmíněných společenských otázek a na důraz, který je na ně kladen. Práci uzavře kapitola, která z předchozích zjištění vyvodí obecnější závěry.

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Sekundární zdroje:

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## Introduction

Oscar Wilde is one of the most beloved yet controversial figures of literary history. He certainly agitated people in his era, but times change, and so do concepts of morality and socially acceptable behaviours. Perception of Wilde and his legacy changes with them.

This thesis examines the changes in the image of Wilde and topics related to him and his era, as portrayed in biographical films about the artist. Since the genre of film has become perhaps the most popular and widely used media in contemporary history, it has been found in various genres, including biography. For the purpose of this thesis, three films have been chosen: *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* from 1960, *Wilde* from 1997, and *The Happy Prince* from 2018. They have been chosen to represent different, distinct times in history to allow for a better contrast. They are analysed and compared in three major categories. The aim of this thesis is to track changes in portrayal and focus put on these categories and the themes they carry to identify the progress in their perception and portrayal through time.

The categories for analysis reflect the fundamental concepts of Victorian era life. Conformity is the strongest of the three and was ever-present in people's lives, especially in connection with the middle classes, who often acted as trendsetters and upholders of it. The next concept, Family, was crucial as the central unit of society. Lastly, Sexuality might not have been observed much at the time, but in hindsight, it is a fascinating concept, and it is integral to Wilde's story. These three concepts are analysed in the films as to their presentation and focus on them. They form the basis for tracking changes in the portrayal.

The theoretical chapters of the thesis consist of background for the three concepts in the context of the Victorian era. Following that, introductions to the issue of subjectivity in biography and biographical films are given. The chosen films are introduced, including brief descriptions of their plot and, if relevant, circumstances around their production, in a separate chapter between theory and analysis. The analysis consists of nine short analyses, which are grouped together by concept, through which the progress is tracked. The last chapter recapitulates the findings of the individual analyses and compares them to derive conclusions. It ends with a final conclusion that presents the general trends.

# 1. Conformity

The separation of society into social classes is a theme present throughout most of human history. Victorian society was not an exception. Although almost caste-like, classes were seen as nearly natural to a Victorian person. Each came with its distinct ideologies, which were upheld and enforced by the members. Never before were the upper and middle classes so numerous. By the time of Queen Victoria's death, their numbers had risen to four million;<sup>1</sup> largely thanks to industrialisation and the slight increase in social mobility it brought with it.<sup>2</sup> The most influential in the context of conformity would be the middle class, particularly its peak, the Bourgeoisie. Their notion of propriety came from their belief in naturally good and bad characters, the so-called "morally sane" and "morally insane" characters.<sup>3</sup> Moral sanity was but a vague concept. It was believed to be largely genetic, with one's upbringing playing a role also, for a family was regarded as the principal institution of socialising people;<sup>4</sup> though the blame was put solely on the mother, as the primary child carer responsible for the child's development.<sup>5</sup> The phenomenon of moral insanity was first described by James Cowles Pritchard, a physician, in 1835, in his study *A Treatise on Insanity*.<sup>6</sup> In it, he describes it as a strange perversion and depravity of one's moral principles, which is characterised by a loss of power to self-govern and an incapability to conduct oneself properly in life.<sup>7</sup> One is not born with it, for it is generally acquired through a traumatic experience to one's body, like attacks of epilepsy or inflammatory diseases, which contribute to the confusion of moral faculties.<sup>8</sup> The affected person, however, is without changes to their intellect and sense of reality.<sup>9</sup> Due to that, a morally insane character is not immediately recognisable, but they can be singled out of a group by the remarkable qualities in their manners or habits.<sup>10</sup> To be regarded as a morally sane character, one had to have a plan in life and blend in with the mainstream above all else. Any small disturbance to the expected way of life or personal quirk could lend one the insanity label.

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<sup>1</sup> James Walvin, *Victorian Values* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 17.

<sup>2</sup> James E. Adams, "Introduction," in *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era I*, ed. James E. Adams, Tom Pendergast, and Sara Pendergast (Danbury: Grolier Academic Reference, 2003), xi–xii.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Fee, "Psychology, Sexuality, and Social Control in Victorian England," *Social Science Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (March 1978): 633.

<sup>4</sup> Walvin, *Victorian Values*, 124.

<sup>5</sup> Rosemary R. Ruether, "Church and Family III: Religion and the Making of the Victorian Family," *New Blackfriars* 65, no. 765 (March 1984): 112.

<sup>6</sup> John Macpherson, *Mental Affections: An Introduction to the Study of Insanity* (London: Macmillan, 1899), 300.

<sup>7</sup> James C. Pritchard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1835), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Pritchard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Pritchard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Pritchard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, 12.

Prichard himself believed that there were many insane characters wandering the streets;<sup>11</sup> they were simply better at hiding their disparities. This explanation aligned nicely with the middle-class affinity for hard work and self-control;<sup>12</sup> and “moral insanity” became a label for people whose behaviour was deviant and therefore necessary to scrutinise, to discourage it in others. Since the Victorian times were before the dawn of modern psychology, whose theories and research into the human psyche have made remarkable progress in understanding deviations, this understanding was backed by an already established theory.

The leading principle of 19th-century psychology was the aptly called Theory of Regression. Derived from the word “regress”, meaning “go back”, it perceived morality as the last stage of a person’s development. Not appearing moral meant being undeveloped, ill.<sup>13</sup> Generally, illnesses are meant to be cured. In the Victorian context, that meant coercing the ill person into complying with the norm. This therapy was meant to replace the will and judgment that the person clearly lacked. The most used method for this was work, which, if applied in excessive amounts, was believed to cure every ailment stemming from regression.<sup>14</sup> The keyword here is “appearing”, for the Victorians did not care about transgressions as long as they were practised within the confines of one’s home. It was publicity that was truly damning.

Quite like any other social group, Victorians loved scandal. The policing of social behaviour was not only the responsibility of the government, which would often fail to do so, but also mostly of popular justice.<sup>15</sup> One’s morals would be studied and judged at their place of work, worship, or schooling, and, of course, by family and community members. Such surveillance would be hard on anyone, but if one does not show, others will not know. It was the public showing, offending the purity and respectability of the wider audience, which led to scandals. According to Adut and his developed theory, “scandal is the disruptive publicity of transgression.”<sup>16</sup> It serves as a way for society to control the trends emerging in it and purify itself of the ones deemed obscene. It is an inevitable reaction of the audience to witnessing a transgression, for not condemning it would be seen as complying by the rest, which would bring judgment and possible repercussions to the passive observer, such as contaminating them and deeming them involved or sympathising with the transgression.<sup>17</sup> A thorough negative reaction

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<sup>11</sup> Pritchard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Fee, “Psychology, Sexuality, and Social Control,” 633.

<sup>13</sup> Fee, “Psychology, Sexuality, and Social Control,” 634.

<sup>14</sup> Fee, “Psychology, Sexuality, and Social Control,” 635.

<sup>15</sup> Walvin, *Victorian Values*, 79.

<sup>16</sup> Adut, “A Theory of Scandal,” 219.

<sup>17</sup> Adut, “A Theory of Scandal,” 219-222.

and participation in whatever condemnation was necessary to protect oneself and their good reputation, which was the most observed part of one's person.

To summarise, the most influential class of Victorian England was the middle class. Their mentality and views on morality formed the basis of right and wrong behaviour, which members of society were expected to adhere to. If not, and a transgression was discovered publicly, one was running a risk of being labelled a morally insane character and condemned, because scandals spread fast and could easily contaminate a seemingly sympathising individual.

## 2. Sexuality

Contrary to popular belief, Victorians were quite open to matters of sexuality as long as they were kept private. It was during the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the professional debate over the topic started. The terms “homosexuality” and “lesbianism” were invented then, though they would not be used much, and the public was becoming aware of the issues of consent and prostitution, which was running rampant.<sup>18</sup> One scientist who drew attention was Ellis Havelock. As an English contemporary of Sigmund Freud, he devoted his life to studying the psychology of sex. In his view, inversion was a harmless feature present in people from birth, effectively making it natural.<sup>19</sup> Homosexuality was not yet a defined concept. Instead, Victorians used the terms “inversion” and “inverts” for what would later be coined “homosexuality” and “homosexual”. The underlying theory was also different. Although Havelock had a permissive attitude towards it, even he characterised it through the Darwinian view that people are ruled by feminine and masculine energies. An invert, therefore, was tragically born with an excess of the opposite energy than what their anatomy suggested.<sup>20</sup> While for women it was not much of an issue, a man with feminine energy was a social pariah since femininity was under a man’s station.<sup>21</sup> In the court of law, much to the displeasure of contemporary psychologists, sexual and other offences relating to a person’s psyche fell into the category of criminology, which mainly only considered the physical characteristics of a crime and not the personal circumstances of the offender.<sup>22</sup> After 1861, sodomy went from a capital offence to a crime punishable by life imprisonment. Another change came in 1885 with the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which included the infamous Labouchere Amendment.<sup>23</sup> Although predominantly concerned with the protection of young women and girls, it also included a small section which criminalised all sexual activity between two men under the banner of “gross indecency”.<sup>24</sup> It was under this amendment that Oscar Wilde was brought back to court after his dropped libel trial against Lord Queensberry.<sup>25</sup> What followed was the most well-known homosexual case of the Victorian era, which brought Wilde the highest penalty that a gross indecency trial could, that being two years

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<sup>18</sup> Walvin, *Victorian Values*, 121.

<sup>19</sup> David Reide, “Ellis, Havelock,” in *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era II*, ed. James E. Adams, Tom Pendergast, and Sara Pendergast (Danbury: Grolier Academic Reference, 2004), 49.

<sup>20</sup> Paul A. Robinson, “Havelock Ellis and Modern Sexual Theory,” *Salmagundi*, no. 21 (winter 1973): 33.

<sup>21</sup> John Gardiner, “Homosexuality,” in *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era II*, ed. James E. Adams, Tom Pendergast, and Sara Pendergast (Danbury: Grolier Academic Reference, 2004), 207.

<sup>22</sup> Fee, “Psychology, Sexuality, and Social Control,” 637.

<sup>23</sup> Gardiner, “Homosexuality,” 207.

<sup>24</sup> “1885 Labouchere Amendment,” Sexual Offences Act 1967, UK Parliament, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/collections/1/sexual-offences-act-1967/1885-labouchere-amendment/>.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 456.

of imprisonment with hard labour.<sup>26</sup> Attempts were made to define and understand sexuality in people, but with little success, especially when it came to public opinion on it.

History teaches that sex is a sensitive topic for most. Respectable young people from higher classes, especially daughters, received virtually no sex education. On the contrary, they were sheltered and kept away from any and all mentions of impropriety until marriage was discussed.<sup>27</sup> While upper-class parents went to lengths to ensure their daughters' purity, lower-class women did not have that luxury. Their moral low ground was prescribed by their poor living conditions and lack of money. Many young women, including children, were forced to prostitute themselves to make money for their family's survival.<sup>28</sup> Even though the upper classes were prolific, their numbers paled in comparison to the lower working classes;<sup>29</sup> so this was sadly the reality for most. Marriage was a breaking point in an upper-class person's life, for with it came responsibility. Sex within marriage was seen as the highest impulse of being – a purpose given by God to produce children and keep humankind alive.<sup>30</sup> For women, this role of sex as a means of securing a lineage was largely the only right they had to it. This standpoint was justified by society's regard that women's libido stemmed from the inborn instinct to be a mother.<sup>31</sup> Men had other options, often soliciting prostitutes, largely the young, unprivileged women from lower classes, or having mistresses outside of marriage;<sup>32</sup> even though outside of it, sex was an instinct of the lowly who could not control themselves.<sup>33</sup> Nonproductive sexual behaviour, like homosexuality or masturbation, was seen as "frivolous" and as a testament to insanity.<sup>34</sup> Although the world of science was becoming increasingly more interested in homosexuality and its definitions, in mainstream society, it was an "unmentionable" and "nameless" crime. Lesbianism was never even criminalised, for the Victorians thought the fragile minds of young ladies would become tempted if its existence became public knowledge.<sup>35</sup> Homosexuality could not provide offspring, therefore could not be viable in a society that centred around the God-given mission to reproduce. Although Victorians are known for their insistence on virtue and purity, in the everyday lives of the people, it was a slippery

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<sup>26</sup> Gardiner, "Homosexuality," 207.

<sup>27</sup> Walvin, *Victorian Values*, 125.

<sup>28</sup> William Whitla, "Prostitution," in *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era III*, ed. James E. Adams, Tom Pendergast, and Sara Pendergast (Danbury: Grolier Academic Reference, 2004), 262-263.

<sup>29</sup> Walvin, *Victorian Values*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Fee, "Psychology, Sexuality, and Social Control," 636.

<sup>31</sup> Claudia Nelson, "Gender," in *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era II*, ed. James E. Adams, Tom Pendergast, and Sara Pendergast (Danbury: Grolier Academic Reference, 2004), 143.

<sup>32</sup> Walvin, *Victorian Values*, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Fee, "Psychology, Sexuality, and Social Control," 636.

<sup>34</sup> Fee, "Psychology, Sexuality, and Social Control," 637.

<sup>35</sup> Adut, "A Theory of Scandal," 223.

concept, which was fiercely defended by one and yet perfectly unattainable by the other, larger side of society.

Overall, the 19<sup>th</sup> century made efforts to define and understand sexuality, including the non-heterosexual form of it. The attitude towards it was permissive as long as it was kept publicly unnoticed. The upper-class mentality would not allow acknowledgement of it for fear of demoralising the young, impressionable minds, especially young women. Whilst upper-class daughters were being safeguarded from sex, young lower-class women might not have had that luxury, for prostitution was one of the possible means of securing money. For the upper classes, sex was a means of purposeful reproduction, a divine plan to which couples were expected to adhere, and since homosexuality cannot produce offspring, it was not seen as an option for people in their right mind.

### 3. Family

Victorian society was obsessed with family. So much so, that the word itself became something of a catchphrase. It was during this era that the structure of many people's lives and property changed, and with it did their familial relations. The Victorian era is known as the dawn of the nuclear family trope. Due to Industrialisation, which swept England in the latter half of the previous century, production and, therefore, work opportunities started moving to factories.<sup>36</sup> Until then, it was customary to produce goods based on a need for survival.<sup>37</sup> For such, manufacturing at one's place of residence was sufficient. However, with the booming economy and new machinery to speed production, large, designated buildings were found more useful, and so the production moved from the household to the factory.<sup>38</sup> Without the work, the once-busy households became a place of rest and solace from the loud, machinery-driven world of business. This haven was run by the wives who no longer needed to work, in the business sense, since more production at the factory meant more money entering the household. Hence, domestic labour, previously seen as a hindrance to their productivity, became their vocation.<sup>39</sup> This feeling of safety and belonging contributed to the household's shift from a house to a home. Although homes are mostly found in houses, a house does not automatically become a home. It is the feeling, and the people found there, that make it. It is the routine of repeated activities and the familiarity of the layout, along with the privacy it provides to each member, which makes one feel at home.<sup>40</sup> It was industrialisation and the separation of living and working spaces that allowed for these conditions to bloom within middle-class Victorian homes and hearts and for the term "nuclear family" to assert itself almost synonymous with the era.

Famously, the Victorian Age is closely connected with morality and sobriety within the family. Magazines and manuals advising on domesticity and how it should look were popularised and sold in massive numbers.<sup>41</sup> Wilde himself had edited one of them, *The Woman's World*, for multiple years.<sup>42</sup> Many of the now-middle-class persons hired to work in factories came from rural areas outside of the city.<sup>43</sup> This urban domestic territory was new and

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<sup>36</sup> Ruether, "Church and Family," 111.

<sup>37</sup> Adams, "Introduction," xi.

<sup>38</sup> Tamara L. Hunt, "Women's Work," in *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era* IV, ed. James E. Adams, Tom Pendergast, and Sara Pendergast (Danbury: Grolier Academic Reference, 2004), 195–197.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth F. Gray, "Angel of the House," in *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era* I, ed. James E. Adams, Tom Pendergast, and Sara Pendergast (Danbury: Grolier Academic Reference, 2003), 40.

<sup>40</sup> David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000), 20–21.

<sup>41</sup> Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 4.

<sup>42</sup> Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 291–292.

<sup>43</sup> Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women* (London: John Murray, 1993), 87.

untried, therefore, any advice was welcome to help it achieve its idealised potential. The ideal of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century family was the so-called “nuclear family”. Stemming from the Latin “nucleus”, meaning core, the concept is characterised in large by shrinking the number of beings living in direct contact and separating the ones who do not need to be there. Only the mother, father and children, the core of the family, stayed close together. Unlike in the times before, animals, servants, and distant relatives, including children from outside the current marriage, were no longer welcome to stay in the home for long.<sup>44</sup> The nuclear home was truly a separate microcosm away from the harsh realities of the industrialised world. This concept of home as a safe haven was also derived from religious doctrine.<sup>45</sup> The church taught of two distinct spheres, the public and the private sphere. The public sphere was for men. It was where the business happened and where the power and authority lay. The father of a family had the right and responsibility to rule and discipline the other members. It was a role appointed by God, which shall not be stripped. A wife belonged to the private, domestic sphere. She belonged to the home and, by extension, to the family. She was stationed under her husband and always expected to obey his judgment.<sup>46</sup> She was “The Angel in the House” just as.<sup>47</sup> This assortment of gender roles, although beneficial for men, seriously undermined the position of women in society and trapped them in gilded cages.

In the Victorians’ eyes, women and children were remarkably similar. With the production moving out of the household, women lost the jobs they did to help run the business.<sup>48</sup> Hence, the woman of the household was left behind at home, and her only occupation there was taking care of the house and the children. Women became viewed as the primary child carers and educators, and a mother was the person who spent the most time with the child.<sup>49</sup> Victorians had a specific way of perceiving children, and due to the closeness between child and mother, women would often get judged by the same measure. Being a woman meant playing a double role, keeping one’s personal beliefs and identity and fitting into the male audience’s expected standard of “the perfect wife”.<sup>50</sup> The “perfect wife” phenomenon is often called “the angel in the house”, a real term used in Victorian society, first introduced by Coventry Patmore in his poem of the same name, which he wrote about his own wife, whom he deemed the perfect,

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<sup>44</sup> Ruether, “Church and Family,” 111.

<sup>45</sup> Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Ruether, “Church and Family,” 112–13.

<sup>47</sup> Gray, “Angel of the House,” 40.

<sup>48</sup> Hunt, “Women’s Work,” 195–157.

<sup>49</sup> Perkin, *Victorian Women*, 88.

<sup>50</sup> Perkin, *Victorian Women*, 86.

ideal, angelic woman.<sup>51</sup> It describes women as the selfless, devoted mothers and wives they were expected to be. An angelic woman was an idle, self-sacrificing figure who dwelt in the home. She was pure of heart and body and followed the religious advice of the time, and most of all, she was completely dependent on and devoted to her husband.<sup>52</sup> This view of women as helpless and subordinate is remarkably similar to the notion that children are incapable little criminals, and it surely contributed to the romanticisation and infantilisation of women and their children.

During this era, the idea of a country being judged by its way of treating the youth emerged and inspired a shift in law and people's views of children and childhood as a stage in life. The sentiment was generally that a happy, carefree child would grow into a fulfilled, secure adult.<sup>53</sup> Initially, the society did not share it, and attitudes of the general public were mixed between the Christian theory of original sin and the romantic sentiments popular in culture and literature.<sup>54</sup> Regardless, legislation was passed and implemented to protect the young and vulnerable. Some of it concerned issues like registering births, raising the age of consent, and the possibility of removing a child from an abusive home.<sup>55</sup> With this new circumstance, the lives of children became more tolerable. Childhood stretched far beyond the imagination of people in times past. Especially upper-class children, whose parents could afford it, were given the opportunity to indulge in leisure and play, with all their needs met by nannies working around the clock;<sup>56</sup> quite like the heroine of a beloved Victorian children's story, Alice, at the beginning of her tale, when she "begin[s] to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do."<sup>57</sup> Middle-class occupations required high levels of education and training, which took many years to complete, therefore, even middle-class children were allowed the luxury of parental dependency until their late twenties, for the sake of their future careers.<sup>58</sup> Not all was perfect, however. The redefining of childhood and legislation passed around it left the public under the impression that children were somewhat of a different species. The newly passed legislation heavily suggested that children are primitive creatures incapable

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<sup>51</sup> John Coutts, "Patmore, Coventry Kersey Dighton," in *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era* III, ed. James E. Adams, Tom Pendergast, and Sara Pendergast (Danbury: Grolier Academic Reference, 2004), 180–181.

<sup>52</sup> Perkin, *Victorian Women*, 86.

<sup>53</sup> Mahar Gubar, "Childhood," in *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era* I, ed. James E. Adams, Tom Pendergast, and Sara Pendergast (Danbury: Grolier Academic Reference, 2003), 243.

<sup>54</sup> Gubar, "Childhood," 244.

<sup>55</sup> Gubar, "Childhood," 246.

<sup>56</sup> "Victorian Children in Victorian Times," Victorian Children, published December 11, 2012, <https://victorian-children-in-victorian-times/>.

<sup>57</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1993), 37.

<sup>58</sup> Ruether, "Church and Family," 112.

of controlling themselves and in need of protection. Some policies went as far as to claim all children were inherently criminals.<sup>59</sup> The sentimental view of childhood also brought questionable tendencies in adults. Many started romanticising the innocent age and used it as an escape from their own real-world troubles. Childhood became a commodity for people to look at and idolise. Small children were regularly featured in magazines, art, and commercials. Their portrayals and visage were often suggestive and pointed towards sexually charged motivations in the adults perceiving them that way.<sup>60</sup> These performances would garner much attention and appreciation from adult viewers, contributing to the rise of infantilisation. Not even Alice herself was spared. Lewis Dodgson, pen name Carroll, the author of the story, was famously questioned about the nature of his relationship with Alice Liddell, his favourite “child-friend” and the inspiration behind the fictional heroine.<sup>61</sup> It should be noted, however, that according to both Alice herself and her descendants, no sexual advances took place.<sup>62</sup> It is clear that, in a way, he was obsessed with her, but not in a sexual manner. Quite like the case of Alice and Carroll, the Victorian outlook on children and childhood truly was a fascinating phenomenon, never before seen, and misunderstood in the times after. Despite their strange fondness for children, Victorians made good progress towards protecting the young, and shifted the view of childhood towards simplicity and innocence, which is a view that continues to echo.

In summary, the Victorian era could be called the dawn of the nuclear family, which was a common family structure due to the flourishing industrialisation and the rise of the middle classes who contributed to it greatly. Production moved out of the house to factories, which were run by men and left many women behind to upkeep the home and children. An ideal woman was a pure angel who devoted her life to that calling and was happy to do so. Childhoods stretched and became more tolerable than ever before with new reforms protecting the young being passed. Not all was perfect, however, the new understanding of childhood as a pure, innocent time in life became very attractive to dissatisfied adults. To cater to this sentiment, children were showcased and commercialised for the viewers’ pleasure, sometimes bordering on inappropriate. The closeness between child and mother made it so that women and womanhood became an idealised concept similarly to childhood.

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<sup>59</sup> Gubar, “Childhood,” 245.

<sup>60</sup> Gubar, “Childhood,” 246.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *The Story of Alice: Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 131.

<sup>62</sup> Derek Hudson, *Lewis Carroll: An Illustrated Biography* (New York: The Crown Publishing Group, 1977), 168.

## 4. Issues of Biography and Its Adaptation

Like many other genres of literature, biography comes with both charm and dangers. It is relatively simple to write a narrative, but writing a good biography is a complex process that pushes the writer out of their comfort zone and perspective. The most crucial standards to adhere to while crafting a life story are social atmosphere and accuracy. Social atmosphere refers to the time a subject lived in. It analyses the society and norms which they were expected to follow, and through their (non)compliance with those rules, helps the writer construct the subject's character, as well as justify their actions.<sup>63</sup> The other crucial standard, accuracy, comes mostly from evidence, its quantity, and the degree of its reliability.<sup>64</sup> As the main building block of biography, it should ideally be as truthful as it can be. However, this ideal is often not easy to meet. While letters and other written documents are concrete, their use rests on the interpretation of the researcher, putting a degree of subjectivity into them after all. The writer's view and focus are influenced by their current cultural and social context, which is a notion they should keep in mind while doing research, and which greatly emphasises the necessity of understanding and considering the atmosphere of the subject's time.<sup>65</sup> Literary biographies, a beloved subgenre of biography, which focuses on portraying stories of well-known literary figures, deal with another more or less unreliable source – the subject's work. These biographies tend to be popular because they offer a look into the subject's mind and their creative process,<sup>66</sup> yet the works created, through which the image is given, are questionable material for a biographer. Although they surely elevate the aesthetics of the text and its impression on the reader, as evidence, they are problematic. They are called "quasi-facts" for no one can either prove or disprove them. These "quasi-facts" have an enormous potential for subjectivity, yet many authors use them in their research.<sup>67</sup> Regardless of its subjectivity, even a good amount of evidence might not be enough for a full story, which is when a narrative structure comes into question. A collection of events does not make for a compelling story. A narrative serves to straighten the unruly nature of a human life into a concise tale with a beginning and an end, as well as fill in the gaps in evidence.<sup>68</sup> Biography as a genre is both like and unlike fiction, and its handling of narratives is rather similar. The nature of its purpose and content are unique to

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<sup>63</sup> Helen M. Hamilton, "Balance in Writing a Life: Some Issues in Biography," *Collegian* 27 (2020): 588.

<sup>64</sup> Hamilton, "Balance in Writing," 586.

<sup>65</sup> Hamilton, "Balance in Writing," 588.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Benton, "Literary Biography: The Cinderella of Literary Studies," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 2005): 45.

<sup>67</sup> Michael Benton, "The Aesthetics of Biography – And What It Teaches," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 7–8.

<sup>68</sup> Benton, "Cinderella," 49.

the genre, but the selection of content, its interpretation, and presentation are similar to fiction.<sup>69</sup> It is for these similarities that scholars hesitate to call biography non-fiction, yet it is not completely made up and devoid of fact, like a fictional story would be.<sup>70</sup> Another point about accuracy to consider is fairness regarding the writer's relationship with and view of their subject. Since biographies lack the presence of a narrator that would take on the role of the storyteller, it is the writer who speaks, and their stance towards the subject is reflected in the writing.<sup>71</sup> Relating to the writer's stance, the question of how to ethically handle sensitive information is also relevant. Some sources discovered might degrade, perhaps even incriminate, the subject, affecting their reputation, and so the writer, depending on their view of the subject, might opt out of using, or modify certain information to prevent such an effect.<sup>72</sup> As illustrated, with each step in the process of writing a biography, the level of possible subjectivity rises. While consuming biographical content, one wants to believe that they are receiving pure facts. However, the level of subjectivity involved in the process of making such content would suggest otherwise, and it should be kept in mind that the content one is consuming could never be the exact true story.

As a popular, beloved genre, biography is often adapted into different media. In recent years, there has been a rise in the number of biographical films made, this trend making a catchphrase for itself, "the new wave of biopics". Film is a popular medium, not just for original stories but also for adaptations warranted by its special way of viewing reality.<sup>73</sup> It bridges the gap between story and consumer and places the viewer right in front of it, as if they were in the room, observing the situation in however much detail is comfortable for them. The concise picture makes it possible to see and hear everything clearly and in a much more exact and extensive way than other media. It lets one recognise the environments and situations and relate them to their own life. Most notably, it is more accessible than other media. Thanks to the visual nature, symbolism is simple to notice and understand, and no prior education is needed to understand the form. Similarly, the absence of a narrator makes it so that the story is told from the protagonist's point of view, which also helps with understanding and builds a direct link between the viewer and the protagonist.<sup>74</sup> In general, films transform the art into life. It sounds like a desirable effect, and it certainly is in its basic principle. However, for the genre of

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<sup>69</sup> Benton, "Cinderella," 46.

<sup>70</sup> Benton, "Cinderella," 48.

<sup>71</sup> Benton, "Cinderella," 51.

<sup>72</sup> Hamilton, "Balance in Writing," 588.

<sup>73</sup> Roger Bacon, "Why Movies Move Us," *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 26, no. 2 (June 1972), 66.

<sup>74</sup> Bacon, "Why Movies Move Us," 66-68.

biography, film has a detrimental feature, that being the necessity for actors and impersonation. While the media of film is not inherently incapable of presenting fact, and often does so in documentary films;<sup>75</sup> it is the presence or absence of make-belief that decides whether it is presenting fact or fiction. Media that include make-belief, meaning their function or existence relies on passing something or someone as what they are not, cannot be classified as factual. Applied to the case of biographical films, which rely on actors to present and interpret characters in a way that looks natural on screen through their particular acting style, this notion shows that they are inherently fictional, regardless of plot and dialogue factuality.<sup>76</sup> In short, if it features actors in roles of the subjects, the film is not a believable biography, but fiction. The label of biographical film is used, but it should not be taken as a point of reference for facts, for it is fully subjective.

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<sup>75</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, "Fact, Fiction and Media," in *Narrative Faculties: A Handbook*, ed. Monika Fludrnik, and Marie-Laure Ryan (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 85.

<sup>76</sup> Ryan, "Fact, Fiction and Media," 84.

## Film Introduction and Description

*The Trials of Oscar Wilde* is a 1960, BAFTA-winning film directed by Ken Hughes. It stars the legend of his time, Peter Finch, as Oscar Wilde. The film is based on a book by Montgomery Hyde, and a play by John Funnell.<sup>77</sup> It is also connected with Vyvyan Holland, formerly Wilde, Oscar's younger son, and Lord Cecil Douglas, the then-current Marquis of Queensberry, and the nephew of Lord Alfred Douglas. They joined the production as advisors, each representing one side of the story.<sup>78</sup> The story itself is a legal drama which chronicles the three trials of Wilde, along with exploring the situations leading up to them, and the artist's subsequent quick fall to disgrace. It starts in the midst of the character drama leading to the trials. The trials themselves, which are an almost word-for-word recreation of the trials as documented in Hyde's book, make up the largest part of the film. Wilde is found guilty and sentenced to two years in prison. The story ends with his release and his leaving the country.

*Wilde* is a 1997 film directed by Brian Gilbert. It stars the remarkably similar-looking Stephen Fry as Oscar Wilde, along with the notable Michael Sheen as Robert Ross. It premiered at the renowned Venice International Film Festival on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September that year. Based on a book by Richard Ellmann, it tells a tender story of the artist's family and love life, misunderstood and ended by a tragic lawsuit. It explores the artist's family dynamics and contrasts them with his love affairs, with a focus on his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, the one that leads to the trials and the artist's imprisonment and downfall. The film is a character-driven romantic drama which introduces Wilde as both an artist and an individual.

*The Happy Prince* is a 2018 drama. It is a passion project of British actor and singer Rupert Averett, who plays the protagonist Oscar Wilde. Averett also wrote and directed the film and later wrote an autobiography about it. The film is a lively retelling of Wilde's last few years and the end of his life. It starts with his arrival in France after being released from prison and focuses on his inability to forgo his previous life and return to society without people's judgment. After giving up, he reunites with Lord Alfred Douglas, the lover who indirectly caused his downfall. However, the relationship does not last, and Wilde is back at a dingy Paris hotel, living beyond his means and waiting for the end, which inevitably comes to him soon. The story is interlaced with flashbacks to the protagonist's past, which often mirror his present. This film is certainly the most visually stunning of the three, yet the most challenging due to its non-linear structure and little explanatory value.

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<sup>77</sup> Ken Hughes, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (Eros Films, 1960), 00:01:05.

<sup>78</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:01:18.

## 5. The Image of Conformity

The presentation of conformity issues in the 1960 *Trials of Oscar Wilde* is the closest to Victorian sensibilities of the three films. This makes sense given the film dates the closest to the era and the involvement of Holland and Douglas with production as advisors. The two had been born and raised in the era, and had witnessed the situation first-hand, even though they were children at the time, so their contribution to the production surely brought in some period views. A particular emphasis is put on class and social distinctions, which seem to be the driving force behind Wilde's unfortunate fall from grace, rather than his infidelity or choice of partner.

In this version of the story, the character of Oscar Wilde stands outside of society and good company, and he does so willingly. He is a proud, stubborn man who thinks himself better than anyone else. He confidently states his disrespect for the Victorian standard in front of journalists and influential figures, completely disregarding the power of their word should it turn against him, and instead playing the situation as a witty anecdote.<sup>79</sup> In his view, the bourgeoisie equates old and dull, and the idea of himself belonging there makes him frown.<sup>80</sup> Later, during his interrogation in court, he confidently retorts to the attorney, already bored with the conversation, "I have no views of the ordinary individual," perfectly cementing his perception of himself as above others.<sup>81</sup> This Oscar is definitely regressed. Besides his pride and flaunting, he is also a pathological liar, going so far as to lie at court about things as mundane as his age.<sup>82</sup> His relationship with Alfred Douglas, or Bosie, is perceived and treated as a condition. Oscar describes it as a "strange fascination [...] that [he] can't get rid of," and his lack of will comes mainly from interactions with Bosie. His face contorts in pain when recalling it, and he hides in his wife's arms and begs for help.<sup>83</sup> Yet, when Bosie finds him in the town where he retreated to get away, he is unable to break away properly, instead breaking down to the ground and crying while Bosie, symbolising the pathology in him, circles him like prey.<sup>84</sup> He is weak and hides it behind a conceited persona, which serves him until it does not.

While Oscar is mostly oblivious to his glaring issues, the public is not. As Robert Ross, or Robbie, points out, Oscar's novelty is wearing, people are starting to notice his missteps, and rumours are spreading.<sup>85</sup> This is a world where perception matters above all else, and Oscar is not exactly being secretive with his affairs. When Lord Queensberry, Bosie's father, enters

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<sup>79</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:08:36–00:09:13.

<sup>80</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:41:19–00:41:30.

<sup>81</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 01:12:15–01:12:28.

<sup>82</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 01:07:39–01:08:00.

<sup>83</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:30:21–00:31:06.

<sup>84</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:37:00–00:39:05.

<sup>85</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:23:20–00:24:27.

uninvited into Oscar's home to confront him about the rumours and his suspicion of an inappropriate relationship between his son and the artist, his main argument is, "I do not say that you are. I say that you look it, which is just as bad."<sup>86</sup> However, the film is mostly concerned with his image rather than his infidelity, so what most are agitated about is not the nature of his relationships but the fact that he is in contact with people below his station. After Robbie informs Oscar of the rumours about him being blackmailed because of his relationship with Bosie, he adds "that you consort with stable boys," in a hushed voice. It is deemed more of a secret than the concept of the two men's relationship. Bosie, who caused the situation with the so-called stable boy in the first place, questions Oscar's sense of propriety for associating with such a person.<sup>87</sup> Even during the court proceedings, one of the biggest concerns weighing on Oscar's team was their inability to understand how he could associate with such people, and the credibility of the men's testimony given their low status.<sup>88</sup> Class plays a significant role in this film, for aside from Oscar's questionable contacts, the central relationship between Bosie and Oscar is largely centred around their class differences and their inability to fit into each other's world. Oscar might see himself as devoid of hierarchy, but the world does not. He is middle-class, supposedly above the people he blends well with, yet never good enough for Bosie. Bosie is painfully upper-class. He regards himself and his friendship as something that must be earned and maintained, demanding luxury on somebody else's account.<sup>89</sup> He despises Oscar's middle-class need to track his spending and avoid overindulging, and when confronted with his expensive tastes, he snaps back with "I'm sure you keep an account," before lecturing Oscar on the self-defined value of his friendship and storming out.<sup>90</sup> This version of the story has class and social stratification in general imprinted into almost every interaction, and one's actions simply do not go unnoticed.

This mid-century version of Oscar is going through two judgments, one in court and one at the hands of popular justice. Although the former is the one which delivers the consequence in the form of a prison sentence, the latter arguably delivers the harsher blow. The artist's impeccable image and popularity quickly turn sour, and the plethora of fans and admirers turn into a plethora of haters and self-righteous, self-appointed executors. No scenes depict this better than the two premieres of Oscar's plays compared to an auction of his belongings after his second trial. During the premiere of *Lady Windemere's Fan*, people flood him as he is trying

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<sup>86</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:28:16–00:28:27.

<sup>87</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:19:12–00:19:29.

<sup>88</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 01:34:05–01:34:49.

<sup>89</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:20:52–00:21:37.

<sup>90</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:20:32–00:20:38.

to descend the stairs, pushing past each other to congratulate him on the play. Heads are turning, faces flush in awe, hands are being shaken, and the applause is deafening.<sup>91</sup> He is their hero, and they have come to spend a moment in his limelight. Even as Queensberry comes gatecrashing after the other premier, the crowd laughs at his protests, the situation turning into a show of the artist's charm and quick wit.<sup>92</sup> Oscar could do anything in these situations, and they would allow it because he is beloved. The auction scene is a stark contrast. The chaos of a room teeming with people is overbearing now, as it is his own study they are occupying and his precious belongings being dissected and sold for lousy money. Oscar is the one hiding in the corner now, watching as the crowd that once hung on his every word now desecrates his home and legacy. His future is obvious as he is referred to as "the late Oscar Wilde."<sup>93</sup> To this crowd, he is as good as dead. As Oscar's attorney says, "The case has already been judged by the press and the public. As far as they're concerned, Wilde's guilty. It only remains for him to be sentenced."<sup>94</sup> The wave of hatred is immediate, and no one can ignore it, because nobody would like to be caught in it.

Unlike the mid-century, for 1997 *Wilde*, conformity is certainly not the main theme. This film uses the outsider stereotype as well, but this time it is not framed as the protagonist's fault. Things just somehow happen to him without his involvement or knowledge, and his agency is stripped by his lover, Bosie, who acts as the villain of the story.

This version of Oscar is framed as an outsider in a way that he does not belong. He is often put into situations where he does not understand and is not understood in return. The very first scene of the film is a confused Oscar arriving at a mine where he is supposed to lecture poor working men on Aestheticism. The workers are bored with what he is saying, more concerned with Cellini's national origin and his killing a man than Oscar's flowery speech about the nature of his art and character, and while Oscar finds their simplicity charming;<sup>95</sup> he is just an opulent clown to them.<sup>96</sup> A similar scene unfolds as he enters a brothel for the first time. Compared to Bosie, who knows immediately what he is there to do and how to go about it, Oscar stumbles in unsure, and treats the place like a social club, trying to make gentlemanly conversation with the rental boys, confused as to why everyone is observing him with hidden laughs.<sup>97</sup> This Oscar is too precious for his own good and has had the misfortune of being alive

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<sup>91</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:01:51–00:04:14.

<sup>92</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:52:52–00:53:50.

<sup>93</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 01:46:32–01:49:32.

<sup>94</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 01:34:54–01:35:02.

<sup>95</sup> Brian Gilbert, *Wilde* (PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, 1997), 00:04:48–00:05:02.

<sup>96</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:02:27–00:03:40.

<sup>97</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:36:50–00:38:40.

at the wrong time. During his court hearings, he is not showy or confrontational. His demeanour is one of quiet observation and reason, and in this light, his answers seem like explanations of his view in an attempt to be understood, rather than a defence.<sup>98</sup> Compared to the 1960s, this film uses answers that show the protagonist in a favourable light, switching the self-assured “I have no views of the ordinary individual,”<sup>99</sup> for a humble “I do not recognise social distinctions,”<sup>100</sup> to keep with the message that Oscar is the victim there. Understood he is not, however, for he, by whom he is, is a threat to this society. As Mrs Wilde’s mother reminds her daughter Constance, “It’s not whether there is, it’s whether there appears to be [something wrong],” because in their society, others’ perception matters, and when it comes to Oscar, it is not favourable.<sup>101</sup> His gentleness and charm are natural to him. They are not a mask like in the previous film, but as Queensberry puts it, “men shouldn’t be charming.”<sup>102</sup> His behaviour symbolises a pathology to the general public, and his quiet, gentle nature is labelled as weakness. The 1997 *Wilde* is a tragic story of a man who was born in the wrong generation rather than one who purposefully defies the norms.

Although class and scandal are not as intensely entwined with this film as they were with the previous, they are showcased through the central relationship between Oscar and Bosie and its consequences. Oscar is a middle-class man, and Bosie despises that side of him. Bosie seeks thrill and luxury, thinks he is entitled to it given his upper-class family name, and Oscar’s need to track his spending is a common source of frustration since in Bosie’s mind “no gentleman ever has the slightest idea what his bank balance is.”<sup>103</sup> To get his lover out of this tedious state of living, the younger man uses his contacts and introduces the artist to his idea of fun – parties, brothels, and rental boys. Due to his status, Bosie has privileges, which is something Oscar cannot afford, so when the rumours spread and the public eye shifts towards their perpetrator, it is Oscar that people blame, not Bosie, who actually caused and indulges in the transgressions that they fear. Bosie is also the one who pushes Oscar into suing Queensberry because, as he says, it is his chance to “show the world what a swine and shit he’s always been.”<sup>104</sup> Everyone around them can see that Oscar is a puppet in Bosie’s feud with his father. Even the lawyer they contact has doubts about the case and demands Oscar’s verbal confirmation as Bosie looms over them, yet Oscar cannot deny Bosie anything, so they proceed

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<sup>98</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:28:20–01:31:12.

<sup>99</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 01:12:15–01:12:28.

<sup>100</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:19:45–01:20:30.

<sup>101</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:34:36–00:34:50.

<sup>102</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:51:34–00:51:50.

<sup>103</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:41:45–00:42:38.

<sup>104</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:14:08–01:14:15.

with the lawsuit.<sup>105</sup> Oscar, being the blameless martyr he is, is in no way responsible for his downfall. Instead, it is all a game orchestrated by Bosie, the villain of the story. A game for which Oscar pays the price, as always in this relationship. After the trials and his final sentence, Oscar is a ruined man with his legacy forever tarnished. The paparazzi are relentless, swarming Oscar's place of stay, attacking anyone who comes in or out.<sup>106</sup> When Oscar is being led out of the courtroom, the crowd that formed outside the room insults him, beats him, and spits in his face.<sup>107</sup> Their disgust is evident and lasting, as after his release from prison, Oscar is afraid that no one will even read his books or watch his plays again. The film overcomes that notion, however, keeping the mood positive as Robbie ends the film and Oscar's worries with three simple words, "Yes, they will."<sup>108</sup> In this version of the story, class and popular justice serve to provide necessary conflict, but ultimately give way to the hopeful, sentimental message of Oscar's martyrdom by the end of the film.

In 2018 *The Happy Prince*, presentation of conformity is scarce. Since the film deals with a different timeline than the other two, it presents different challenges for its characters and protagonist. In the context of such events, this portrayal of Wilde tends to lean similar to the 1960s one. Gone is the lovable martyr. This version of the artist is a crafty antihero. Wilde in this film is a fugitive on a journey to escape his captors, the English, and start a new life abroad.

The film is particularly good at portraying its protagonist's struggle to adjust to his new place in the hierarchy. In the other two films, Oscar was presented as middle-class, and his attitude towards money was cautious. Here, Oscar is a man accustomed to luxury, and his middle-class status is not noticeable. He is portrayed as of undefined class, yet implied to be high up the social ladder through his spending habits. His current position would suggest he be cautious, but any money acquired through whatever means, including begging, is immediately spent while chasing a ghost of his past fame and social standing. He is ruined, and he is aware of it, even calls himself as much whenever he speaks about himself. His quiet, placid nature does not serve him here either. As old acquaintances come threatening, he hangs his head low and lets them torment him.<sup>109</sup> When he eventually loses his composure and fights his persecutors, his turn to violence is remarked on positively by his friends. That is what his new

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<sup>105</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:17:05–01:17:40.

<sup>106</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:24:59–01:25:20.

<sup>107</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:31:50–01:32:47.

<sup>108</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:44:36–01:44:52.

<sup>109</sup> Rupert Everett, *The Happy Prince* (Lions Gate United Kingdom, 2018), 00:31:09–00:31:37.

station requires, he will not survive if he does not learn to play the game.<sup>110</sup> He holds on to his nature a while longer before he strays from the presumed correct path to be with Bosie for one more time. With his return to Paris, however, with an empty heart and nothing to live for, he is a changed man. In Maples, he learned from Bosie how easy it is to entice the lower classes into anything as long as money is involved. Grown men blush like maidens, and mothers nudge their married sons towards the seemingly rich who have taken interest.<sup>111</sup> He might not accept his new station still, yet he surrenders to his surroundings and learns to play the game. He uses the lower class, so numerous in this environment, and well presented in the film, for his own benefit. The Parisian poor live in torn wooden sheds in the backstreets, where amenities are none and survival is hard.<sup>112</sup> For Oscar's two new friends, orphaned match boys who are lucky to have a broken house, unlike the many other poor children living out in the streets, work is a necessity and simple foods like eggs are a luxury they normally cannot afford.<sup>113</sup> They are in desperate need of money, and Oscar is ready to supply it in exchange for services. His gallant artist persona is nowhere to be found. He wanders the streets inebriated, begging past admirers, who recognise him and might pity him, for money;<sup>114</sup> and spending it in suspicious burlesque bars and hostels the very same day.<sup>115</sup> At that point, he is beyond help, simply waiting for death to take him home, which it soon does. In his final moments, the film shows a spark of hope. As Oscar is telling the titular story one last time, he hallucinates Queen Victoria and the gentry listening approvingly;<sup>116</sup> as if in respect to the artist, hinting at his glorious legacy, which would become synonymous with English culture. This version of Oscar starts as a man who has learned his lesson and is adamant to regain his social standing, and ends his journey as a fugitive who has fully returned to his old ways. It tells a story of a tragic, deeply flawed person, but with a glorious legacy.

Through the stages of Oscar's journey, it becomes obvious that he is a fugitive from public justice. His arrival in France marks his timely escape from the clutches of the English vice. The English had judged and imprisoned him;<sup>117</sup> and publicly shamed him for it.<sup>118</sup> His wife and children, who left the country, are kept out of his reach and advised not to communicate

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<sup>110</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:32:33–00:33:39.

<sup>111</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:52:00–00:53:32.

<sup>112</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 01:12:12–01:12:44.

<sup>113</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 01:10:03–01:12:11.

<sup>114</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:04:24–00:05:27.

<sup>115</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:07:57–00:09:24.

<sup>116</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 01:31:46–01:32:29.

<sup>117</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:17:06–00:17:50.

<sup>118</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:33:43–00:35:00.

with him.<sup>119</sup> Even in France, he is not truly free of the English nature. His encounters with Englishmen go horribly wrong. At the beginning of the film, Oscar gets recognised and approached by a lady who admired him back in London. She has sympathy for him and gives him money when he asks for it, but her companion does not share her sympathy. They both used to be fans, Oscar remembers seeing them at his premiere nights. Now, the man threatens him with violence.<sup>120</sup> Another encounter finds him chased through Dieppe streets by a group of English-speaking students while he is on a casual walk. They insult him, unprovoked, “Are you wearing your silk stockings today, Oscar?” calling him a madam and feminising him for their amusement. They are vicious and treat him as if he were beneath them, despite being half his age.<sup>121</sup> There is no one else around who would recognise them, and Oscar is behaving perfectly politely, so they are not doing it for fear of getting contaminated by his scandal, but simply because they want to. They show that wherever he is, the English will haunt him just for who he is. Thankfully, he finds his way to Maples, where the people are simpler, and his transgressions are left unnoticed or overlooked for the sake of monetary gain. When Oscar and Bosie have a party with the local man, and a mother sees them in various states of undress and comes scolding, she automatically assumes that there are women. After realising that there are men only, she panics and apologising profusely, leaves the party at once.<sup>122</sup> The idea of men being intimate with each other does not cross her mind. In this place, the couple can revel in their transgressions and the locals are none the wiser. Their retreat does not last long, however, and soon, Oscar finds himself back in the city. Only this time, he knows where to go and how to manipulate people in his favour. Oscar’s journey in this film is one of escaping his physical and mental imprisonment by the English, trying to restart his life, only to end up giving up on himself, but finding a place where his transgressions are overlooked, allowing him to live the rest of his life the way the English despised him for.

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<sup>119</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:39:11–00:40:12.

<sup>120</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:05:27–00:05:50.

<sup>121</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:30:21–00:32:33.

<sup>122</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:57:39–00:59:53.

## 6. The Image of Sexuality

In the 1960 *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, sexuality is merely presented regarding the central relationship, and it leans overwhelmingly towards the notion of it being a disease. The film's closeness to the Victorian age and involvement of contemporaries aside, this attitude can partially be explained by the industry standards at the time. The film was made and released during the time of the so-called "Hays Code". Formally called The Production Code, it was a self-inflicted set of guidelines prohibiting and regulating the use of suggestive topics and violence in American film. Although *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* is a British-made film, it was still influenced, for the code appealed not only to films made in America but to any that were to be screened there, which *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* was, distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Entertainment Company.<sup>123</sup> Famously, one of the code's most adhered to and long-lasting restrictions was on the portrayal of homosexuality on screen, hiding under the title of "sex perversions".<sup>124</sup> It is likely that the cautious approach towards the topic in this film was influenced by the desire to release it in America and, therefore, a need to adhere to said regulations. The film clearly suggests that non-heterosexual relationships are not considered to be love, but a disease that one needs to be cured from. It is harmful and incomprehensible, and professional help is needed to remedy it.

As the regulations suggest, films should not portray "sex perversions" in a positive light, and this film certainly does not. Homosexuality is referred to in dialogue, like when Queensberry confronts Oscar about the rumours surrounding his son and the artist,<sup>125</sup> but representation of tenderness between two people of the same sex is minimal and mostly up to the viewers' consideration, and never explicit. The only two queer characters in the film are the central couple, Oscar and Bosie. Even between them, the relationship is distinguished from any other by lingering looks, grazing touches, and exaggerated deep breaths. All those are cues that often symbolise chemistry between characters, but are inherently dependent on the viewers' observation and personal interpretation, therefore, they do not necessarily signal a romantic relationship. The pair call themselves friends, so they shall be perceived as such, despite the lingering eye contact.<sup>126</sup> Although the film is cautious with its portrayal of homosexuality, it is not afraid of condemning it. A large part of the film consists of the titular trials, in which the

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<sup>123</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:00:03.

<sup>124</sup> Chon Noriega, "'Something's Missing Here!': Homosexuality and Film Reviews during the Production Code Era, 1934–1962," *Cinema Journal* 30, no. 1 (Autumn 1990): 22.

<sup>125</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:27:52–00:28:38.

<sup>126</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:49:00–00:49:12.

transgression is dissected in detail. During Oscar's second trial, the judge describes his charge of gross indecency as him having "systematically endeavoured to influence these young men's minds towards vicious causes and mould them to his perverted will."<sup>127</sup> There is no sympathy for the artist in his words. It is also guilty of deleting canonically queer characters, notably the character of Robert Ross, regarded as Oscar Wilde's first male lover;<sup>128</sup> who has been relegated to a replacement father. Since Ross was involved with the Holland brothers after the deaths of their parents as the executor of Wilde's estate;<sup>129</sup> surely Vyvyan, who acted as an advisor during production, might have considered him a father figure, and in turn, influenced the portrayal of him on screen. Considering only information given in the film itself, however, it has shown that in its world, homosexuality is not considered to be a form of love, so naturally, a character who symbolises loyalty and represents the family after Oscar's disappearance should not be homosexual because that would give the wrong example. The film's Robbie is a father figure as Oscar's replacement, taking Constance and the children to the train to flee without being asked to do so;<sup>130</sup> but in a smaller capacity also to Oscar himself. He worries about his health and wellbeing, keeps track of the public's opinion of him, and wishes the rumours to be denied and explained by him.<sup>131</sup> Representation of sexuality is minimal here, perhaps under the influence of The Production Code. Homosexuality is not considered to be a form of love. In fact, it is heavily suggested to be a sickness.

It is not love, it is a sickness, which, like most sicknesses, is curable. If this story had a villain, it would be Oscar's infatuation with Bosie and his inability to remedy himself. When Bosie angrily storms out of dinner and leaves a gift that should be precious to him behind, as if it meant nothing, Oscar views it and pockets it without much consideration.<sup>132</sup> There is little emotion and care in their relationship. It is a sickness, and everyone thinks so, including Oscar. During the trial proceedings, Oscar's attorney expresses that he does not understand the nature of Oscar's conduct because "[he] is a lawyer, not a doctor."<sup>133</sup> Compared to the other films, Constance has never understood what is happening to her husband. After Queensberry threatens, she remarks to Oscar that he should cease his relationship with Bosie for his own sake, for it is not healthy for him. Oscar replies, "I know. The truth is the boy has a strange fascination for me that I can't get free of," before breaking into his wife's arms and begging for

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<sup>127</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 01:31:10–01:33:20.

<sup>128</sup> Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 277.

<sup>129</sup> Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 588.

<sup>130</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 01:25:34–01:25:50.

<sup>131</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:22:40–00:25:16.

<sup>132</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:21:34–00:22:00.

<sup>133</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 01:34:22–01:34:49.

a remedy.<sup>134</sup> They attempt to fix him, sending him away to the sea, yet as he returns home, he is not cured. He claims to be better, but deep down, he is still haunted by the man, quite like he was a few days prior, when Bosie had him on the ground, crying, while he stalked around like a wolf, symbolising the power he holds over the artist.<sup>135</sup> When the news about Bosie's brother's death comes, Oscar runs to him again, their attempt at a cure proven futile.<sup>136</sup> He is unable to free himself. Only his imprisonment, which was a common cure for regression, manages to rid him of the problem. By the end of the film, after leaving prison, Oscar is a reformed man. He runs into Bosie one last time when the man invites himself to the station as Oscar is leaving London, but barely spares him a look. Instead, he converses with his wife, who acknowledges he talks as if they were going to return to how they were before, bids goodbye to his friends, and boards the train abroad.<sup>137</sup> He is successfully cured, and that is the end of the film, with no mentions or hints of the story continuing. Oscar's journey here is from a sick man to a cured one, with his return to normalcy being the message of the film.

In the 1990s, homosexuality was no longer an offence, and the public was starting to get accustomed to engaging with the concept of it, be it from portrayal in media, or the increasing number of artists and popular persons coming out as queer. The 1997 *Wilde* reflects this change in attitude towards a more positive view, while cautiously keeping in line with the contemporary sentiment around homosexual relationships and carefully avoiding relating the concept of promiscuity, often associated with homosexual men at the time, to its protagonist.

Unlike its 1960 predecessor, *Wilde's* treatment of the topic is perfectly explicit. The film is clearly not afraid of portraying it on screen, both in dialogue and in behaviour. Here, it is not a sickness, but a feature present in people since birth. Before his first official encounter with another man, Oscar is enamoured by male beauty. He flirts with the mine workers during his lecture to them;<sup>138</sup> and stares longingly and slightly confused at a random passerby on the street.<sup>139</sup> It is a reality present on his mind as he avoids being alone with Robbie, who is trying to make him stay.<sup>140</sup> During his imprisonment, he still feels the same about Bosie and his other attractions;<sup>141</sup> his supposed cure changing nothing, as it is not a sickness, but a part of his nature. When confronted about his behaviour by Robbie, who uses Oscar's son as an example, Oscar

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<sup>134</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:30:05–00:31:07.

<sup>135</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:37:30–00:38:04.

<sup>136</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:41:30–00:42:45.

<sup>137</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 02:06:52–02:09:12.

<sup>138</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:02:27–00:03:40.

<sup>139</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:09:33–00:10:05.

<sup>140</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:10:06–00:10:49.

<sup>141</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:42:20–01:42:29.

shows as much in his response, “He must do as his nature dictates, as I only wish I had done.”<sup>142</sup> He laments to his wife after the scandal broke that had he not fulfilled his nature, his life would have been filled with dishonesty.<sup>143</sup> In this version of the story, homosexuality is a feature, not an error, and those relationships are considered to be genuine, loving, romantic attachments. After Oscar grows attached to Bosie, Robbie confirms in dialogue with another character that Oscar is, indeed, in love.<sup>144</sup> Oscar’s wife, Constance, understands his attachment but questions his love for her, saying that she does not see a way in which Oscar could have ever truly loved her.<sup>145</sup> The sentiment is that he could not have loved her since she is not the sex towards which he has shown this sort of attachment. Her mother thinks that Constance’s going through menopause is what caused Oscar to start straying from the family;<sup>146</sup> suggesting that because she cannot give him any more children, she is worthless to him and his current romantic endeavours are learned. But Constance shows that she sees it as a part of him that has been present since the beginning of their relationship and holds no resentment for it. This film makes it clear that it considers homosexuality as perfectly valid and natural to a person. It makes a connection between it and loving attachments just as much, although that is where precautions and agendas start showing.

Love is a central theme of this film, which might in part be to make Wilde’s life story more digestible for the time. By the time of its release, the British public had been subjected to countless cautionary tales and commercials about the ongoing AIDS crisis and steadily groomed to believe that promiscuity, especially in homosexual relationships, is a certain killer.<sup>147</sup> Of course, Oscar Wilde was in no danger of contracting the virus a hundred years before it first appeared, but after this borderline propaganda about homosexuality started affecting people’s opinion of it, if one wanted to make a successful film featuring it without being accused of bad representation, they had to skirt around the possible dangers in it and keep the portrayal positive. *Wilde* achieves this by using the character forgotten by its 1960s predecessor, Robbie Ross, and elevating him to one-true-love status. Bosie is a bad influence. He not only introduces Oscar to the sin of promiscuity, but also encourages and almost demands

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<sup>142</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:38:48–00:39:14.

<sup>143</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:37:10–01:37:34.

<sup>144</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:32:15–00:32:39.

<sup>145</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:37:43–01:38:00.

<sup>146</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:33:52–00:34:26.

<sup>147</sup> “AIDS: Homophobic and Moralistic Images of 1980s Still Haunt Our View of HIV – That Must Change,” *The Conversation*, published November 27, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/aids-homophobic-and-moralistic-images-of-1980s-still-haunt-our-view-of-hiv-that-must-change-106580>.

it of him.<sup>148</sup> He is not a good fit for Oscar, their relationship being terribly turbulent and discouraged by the other characters. After keeping quiet for far too long and coming to regret it,<sup>149</sup> Constance forbids Oscar from seeing Bosie again after he is released from prison.<sup>150</sup> She is not worried about the nature of the relationship, but the effect the man has on her husband and what it has cost them. Although advocating for the relationship at the beginning, Robbie comes to discourage it through its many ups and downs as well.<sup>151</sup> Each time the two separate, Oscar returns to Robbie, his first love, who takes care of him and has his best interests in mind. He is the better option for Oscar, and every other character can see it. Their friend Ada tells him that “Oscar was very lucky to meet [him],” when he blames himself for Oscar’s imprisonment since he was the one who started this chapter of Oscar’s life.<sup>152</sup> The film hints at a further story between Oscar and Bosie, and has them meet again at the end of it, but chooses to focus more on Oscar and Robbie as they dine in France after Oscar’s release from prison, and Robbie reassures the artist that he will not be forgotten.<sup>153</sup> The credits inform the viewer that Oscar and Bosie parted for good after three months, and that Oscar and Robbie are buried at the same resting place, together for eternity.<sup>154</sup> The fact adds a sense of devotion and longevity to their story, solidifying them as star-crossed lovers. The film is not afraid to show the relationships in a positive light, but chooses to shift focus from the previously central relationship between Oscar and Bosie to Robbie, whose attachment to Oscar is much more conventional and romanticised. Bosie is presented as the villain of the story, perhaps to condemn the behaviour his character encourages, not to oppose the sentiments around it and connect the wrath surrounding them to Oscar Wilde’s legacy.

In the 2018 *The Happy Prince*, sexuality is a strange mix of being central to the story and ignored at the same time. It follows the theme of Wilde leaving England to escape his persecution at the hands of the English. The protagonist travels from England, where people despise him for who he is, to France, where his transgressions are overlooked and perhaps even sought after for entertainment or monetary gain.

The film is certainly not afraid of portraying homosexuality and homosexual characters. It is talked about in dialogue as well as explicitly portrayed on screen through multiple intimate

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<sup>148</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:33:52–00:34:26.

<sup>149</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:23:00–01:32:34.

<sup>150</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:39:09–01:39:41.

<sup>151</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:00:15–01:01:05.

<sup>152</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:40:56–01:41:35.

<sup>153</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:44:29–01:45:32.

<sup>154</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:47:20.

scenes, including referenced relations with a minor.<sup>155</sup> Although socially undesirable, it is largely ignored, and through some scenes, the film seems almost like a celebration of the little queer culture there was. The neutral stance towards it does not extend to England, as Oscar's encounters with Englishmen make abundantly clear. When he comes across a group of English students in Dieppe, they ridicule him for it with graphic descriptions and feminising words.<sup>156</sup> The English have proven that they will not overlook his transgressions and will denounce him for it. His wife, Constance, is advised not to communicate with him before he proves that he will change, because he could denounce her social standing again, now that she has escaped the prosecution once already.<sup>157</sup> Thankfully, Oscar has made his way to a better, more lenient place, France, where people are happy to overlook the transgression, be it for entertainment, as they gather in burlesque bars to watch performances by underground entertainers;<sup>158</sup> or for monetary gain in the less privileged areas. For Oscar's friends, it is an inside joke. They support his determination to reunite with his wife and children, and his occasional slips, such as eyeing a waiter's backside, are treated as light-hearted moments of amusement.<sup>159</sup> Besides the English, for most in this film, homosexuality seems normalised and not of their concern, despite them being aware that it is not socially desirable. Toward the end of the film, and Oscar's life, a priest is called to hurriedly baptise him. After he learns about just whom he is meant to accept into the faith, he hesitates for a second, yet ultimately agrees to it and treats Oscar with compassion like he would any other person.<sup>160</sup> He shows that even the strictest, most traditional institutions do not see it as a disease or a reason for damnation anymore – except for the villainous English, of course. The film is not afraid of explicitly portraying homosexuality, and most characters in its universe take it at face value and are not bothered by it.

It is not a sickness or a special kind of feeling, it is the same love as between man and woman. It is natural for a person and unavoidable. Oscar recognises as much in his conversation with Robbie. They acknowledge that had they not met, Oscar might not be a fugitive now, but Oscar doubts it, saying that he would still be drawn to it even without Robbie's involvement.<sup>161</sup> His response shows that it was on his mind even before his initiation, only suppressed, and that his behaviour is not learned but natural to him. Later, when Robbie delivers the news of Oscar's dreaded return to Bosie, Constance realises the nature of Robbie's attachment to her husband

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<sup>155</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:08:47–00:09:41.

<sup>156</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:30:20–00:31:12.

<sup>157</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:39:11–00:40:13.

<sup>158</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:11:56–00:12:32.

<sup>159</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:27:17–00:27:40.

<sup>160</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 01:27:19–01:29:35.

<sup>161</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:37:16–00:38:11.

and comments, “We’re the same, you and I. He’s hurt you, too, hasn’t he?”<sup>162</sup> She is furious in the scene, but the issue is not the men’s orientation or their past relationship, but Bosie, who has cost them much already. In fact, her comment paints Robbie’s feelings and involvement with Oscar equal to her own. There is no doubt that, despite the social undesirability of them, homosexual relationships are perceived and presented as equal to heterosexual love. Bosie’s first appearance in the film is a great example. The viewer sees him from Oscar’s point of view as an angelic figure emerges into view from a cloud of smoke. The world slows down, all sounds of the platform disappear, and the person in focus on the busy train platform is the man weaving his way towards the camera.<sup>163</sup> His entrance is like something out of a romance novel, and shows just how much Oscar adores the young man. His love might be overpowering, but it is not crippling him. He explains his surrender to it as “My going back to Bosie was psychologically inevitable. I cannot live without the atmosphere of love. I must love and be loved, whatever price I pay for it.”<sup>164</sup> He entertains the feelings he has, yet takes the relationship itself as it is, and when it turns sour, his lover’s behaviour affects his view on it and his own feelings.<sup>165</sup> He is not being held there by an invisible force. He made a conscious decision to be with him, and he can exit the relationship at any moment, which he eventually does after waking up from the initial boost of happiness brought by their reunion. He leaves the union like Bosie entered it before, disappearing in a cloud of train smoke.<sup>166</sup> Later, when the two meet in Paris, Oscar seems to have little emotion to spare for the younger.<sup>167</sup> Unlike in the previous versions of his story, Oscar is not sickened or manipulated by Bosie, but makes a conscious decision to be with him, just like he later decides to pay for intimate relations with the minor, Johnny. In this universe, non-heterosexual affections and relationships are seen as no less than, and their pursuit is a decision for one to make while considering their own situation and station.

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<sup>162</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:50:33–00:51:20.

<sup>163</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:44:16–00:45:06.

<sup>164</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:49:17–00:49:30.

<sup>165</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 01:03:45–01:04:45.

<sup>166</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 01:04:47–01:05:25.

<sup>167</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 01:14:41–01:16:45.

## 7. The Image of Family

Despite not being very character-driven, the 1960 *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* has the biggest claim to the nuclear family archetype, so popular in Victorian times, out of the three films. Yet in this universe, familial relations and one's belonging to a family are conditioned by one's performance in society.

A large part of the story happens in the home here. Unlike in the other films, Oscar spends most of his time in the house. It is suggested that if people want to see him, they come to him and that his home is where he works.<sup>168</sup> He is the head of the household, and he fills his role with pride and diligence. When Wood, a past acquaintance of Bosie, comes to extort Oscar for Bosie's carelessness, without knowing what the man wants, Oscar observes his every move in the space like a hawk.<sup>169</sup> The situation is eventually resolved with words and no harm, which cannot be said about Queensberry similarly visiting the house unannounced and uninvited. After Queensberry verbally insults and threatens Oscar in his own office, the artist physically removes him from the house.<sup>170</sup> He is not afraid of using physical violence to enforce his control over the situation and protect his space and dignity. His female counterpart, his wife, Constance, rules both over the house and him. She is not overly thrilled about her station, and she might prefer to be more involved with her husband's social life;<sup>171</sup> but she accepts her fate and does not rebel against it. She plays into the stereotypes and expectations of a middle-class wife and mother. She stays at home, in her sphere, she cooks;<sup>172</sup> takes care of the house and the children, and in her free time, occupies herself with small, useful tasks like embroidery.<sup>173</sup> She wields the power of gentle persuasion and uses it to keep Oscar from straying. After the outburst with Queensberry, she urges Oscar to cease his friendship with the man's son "not for [her], but for [his] own sake." She soothes his frustration and offers her own dowry to help him leave London for a while and get a rest.<sup>174</sup> She is a good wife to Oscar, and it earns her the title of an angel in her husband's eyes.<sup>175</sup> The Wildes are an idyllic family compared to Bosie's home. When his family reunites after the death of his brother, the house they arrive at does not feel very homey. It is just a big, empty hall, and the characters do not feel much at home there either. Queensberry, the father, is in a rage, airing his grievances at the other members and trying to control everyone.

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<sup>168</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:29:42–00:29:57.

<sup>169</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:15:12–00:16:36.

<sup>170</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:28:40–00:29:22.

<sup>171</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:04:13–00:04:48.

<sup>172</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:26:04–00:26:25.

<sup>173</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:40:07–00:40:19.

<sup>174</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:30:06–00:31:50.

<sup>175</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:41:18–00:41:30.

The mother is merely sitting on the side, being completely powerless and blamed for bearing shameful sons in his view, and Bosie challenges his father to protect her, telling him that he is the one who brought shame to the family with his mistress.<sup>176</sup> This upper-class family does not care for homeliness or the sanctity of their marriage. This film's depiction of the Wilde family's structure is on par with the traditional gender expectations and stereotypes. In contrast to Bosie's dysfunctional upper-class family, they seem like a pretty picture of a nuclear family.

No good nuclear family would be complete without children. While Oscar's children are not a significant part of the story, their kind can be represented by Bosie, who acts childish in most of his encounters. He is, or was until recently, a university student after all.<sup>177</sup> Besides his age, it is his behaviour and treatment of others that make him immature. He is foolish and conceited. He gets himself dismissed from university for bad behaviour and then treats it as an anecdote, calls the issue tedious, and dismisses his father for caring about the matter.<sup>178</sup> He still thinks he is the centre of the universe. Even though this film makes Oscar's decision to sue Queensberry only his own, Robbie suggests that Bosie had influence on the decision as well;<sup>179</sup> and he surely acts the way. Oscar decides not to put him into the witness box. He means to protect him from possible repercussions of being involved, but Bosie only cares about not being able to say his part and confront his father publicly.<sup>180</sup> When his demands are not being met, he lashes out and throws "insane tantrums and extravagances," as Oscar calls them.<sup>181</sup> Whether it is by verbally confronting Robbie without being provoked;<sup>182</sup> or threatening Oscar with a knife and ridiculing him for his reaction;<sup>183</sup> Bosie shows that he has no control over himself and no remorse. His behaviour does not bring pride to anyone but himself, which is unfortunate since people's value seems to be measured by pride. Familiar relations are conditional, offspring serve to uphold the family name and reputation, and when one does not deliver, one is disgraced. Queensberry does not care much for his son's happiness, but for his own name being besmirched.<sup>184</sup> Similarly, Oscar's mother has no sympathy for him after his judgment. She cares about the family name and his origin as an Irishman rather than his safety in the face of a looming threat, and will not shelter him, for she is already wearing mourning for her son, who

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<sup>176</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:43:29–00:47:24.

<sup>177</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:09:30–00:10:35.

<sup>178</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:10:01–00:10:38.

<sup>179</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:58:06–00:58:24.

<sup>180</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:57:12–00:57:57.

<sup>181</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:37:00–00:37:16.

<sup>182</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 01:27:41–01:28:09.

<sup>183</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:37:52–00:38:37.

<sup>184</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 00:04:51–00:06:35.

is not the man cowering under her.<sup>185</sup> These family units are held together not by love but by a sense of responsibility, and the family serves to forward their social standing above all else.

In the 1997 *Wilde*, family is at the forefront of the story and characters' motivations. As the film chooses to emphasise Wilde's infidelity and division between his family and love life, his wife and children appear on screen often and struggle to emphasise the emotional weight and in-world repercussions of his decisions.

Unlike the 1960s film, in *Wilde*, the family members are an integral part of the story. Also unlike the 1960s, the home is not in focus here much at all. Oscar does not work from home, instead chooses to rent houses outside of London and hotels, sometimes at the behest of Bosie;<sup>186</sup> and later stops spending time at home almost altogether. Once, as Constance finds him at his rented residence to deliver mail that he has not collected, she bemoans that he has not visited the house for so long.<sup>187</sup> Oscar is a weak man. He yields to Bosie with everything, and his family life is not an exception. He does not guard his house or family, instead he spends time wherever the younger man wants him and leaves everything to Constance, who is tragically unequipped for it. She is the perfect angel archetype, soft, sweet, and devoted to her husband without questioning his actions. She gets introduced as "a little sunbeam,"<sup>188</sup> and lives up to that name thoroughly. She preens herself and almost purrs when around Oscar, with her eyes full of love and adoration. She is meek and easily swayed, and does not blame Oscar for anything, even defends his choice of company.<sup>189</sup> She might be the perfect companion to Oscar and his lifestyle, but as a woman, she holds little standing, and without her husband around, she is powerless, which forces Robbie to get involved with the family and mediate for her.<sup>190</sup> She later regrets keeping quiet as Bosie's thirst to sue his father gets Oscar incarcerated.<sup>191</sup> Despite it, she still visits him in prison and promises to let him see the children, without any resentment, and tries to encourage good behaviour in him.<sup>192</sup> The film kills her before Oscar leaves prison;<sup>193</sup> before his return to Bosie, which she should protest vehemently, so her gentleness and devotion are the only side the viewer gets of her. This film leans into the notion that Oscar is a weak man who is being manipulated by Bosie. The younger man keeps Oscar away from his family, forcing him to leave Constance in charge of the household. Constance is a sweet

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<sup>185</sup> Hughes, *The Trials*, 01:53:52–01:55:38.

<sup>186</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:40:57–00:41:38.

<sup>187</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:55:08–00:56:14.

<sup>188</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:06:05–00:06:35.

<sup>189</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:34:26–00:34:42.

<sup>190</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:15:49–01:17:05.

<sup>191</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:22:18–01:23:24.

<sup>192</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:38:15–01:39:05.

<sup>193</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:43:37–01:44:08.

angel, but unequipped for such a job. Her struggles serve as a reminder of the toll Oscar's infidelity took on the family.

Children are important to their parents for the sake of being their children, with no conditions put on that relationship. Oscar's children are his one big motivation, and Constance uses that fact to gently push him back towards the family and the socially acceptable path in life. She manages to make him agree to a day's outing with the family after mentioning that the children keep asking about him.<sup>194</sup> Similarly, towards the end of the story, when she visits him in prison, she gets him to condemn Bosie at the promise of allowing him contact with the children after his release.<sup>195</sup> However, Constance dies before he is released, the children fall into the care of someone who will not let him see them, and his resolve falters with that knowledge. In his conversation with Robbie, he names his inability to see his sons as one of the reasons why he would like to see Bosie again.<sup>196</sup> His good behaviour is conditioned. It is not for his sake but for the people he loves, and his children are the drivers of it. Despite them being central to Oscar's motivations, the children themselves do not get much characterisation or screentime. The main child of the film is Bosie again. His status as such is not only expressed by his actions, but through dialogue as well. When Oscar laments to Robbie about how he has dedicated his life to Bosie, yet all he gets in return is trouble, Robbie comments that the young man is still a child who has never grown up, and he never will.<sup>197</sup> Oscar himself calls him that earlier in the film while the two are momentarily apart, and he has a bit of hindsight.<sup>198</sup> Bosie uses Oscar for his amusement and gain, and is only interested in interacting with him when the artist is in his element, because as he puts it, Oscar "just about [does] it when [he's] at [his] best. [...] but when [he's] not at his best, [he's] no one."<sup>199</sup> He makes it clear that his own interests are the only ones he is willing to consider, and he manipulates the people around him to cater to them. Oscar's unfortunate lawsuit with Queensberry lies on his hands as well. He convinces the artist to sue to prove a point to his father, thinking that he will be allowed into the witness box to publicly berate him and share his thoughts on the man.<sup>200</sup> As Oscar forbids him from doing so, he resorts to screaming and temper tantrums because "everyone else has said everything, anything that came into his head. [...] It's outrageous that [he] can't have [his]

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<sup>194</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:55:08–00:55:54.

<sup>195</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:38:56–01:39:30.

<sup>196</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:44:29–01:45:02.

<sup>197</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:00:25–01:01:28.

<sup>198</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:44:32–00:45:02.

<sup>199</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:58:54–00:59:00.

<sup>200</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:13:56–01:14:40.

say.”<sup>201</sup> Thankfully, in this universe, children can be loved regardless of their behaviour or social standing, so Bosie’s father, although still harsh and controlling, actually tries to communicate with his son. He even gives Oscar a chance and later admits that the artist is charming and a good entertainer.<sup>202</sup> Similarly, Oscar’s mother shows a lot more love and care for her son as well. She still wears mourning after his judgment, but she is the one who comes to him, and her encouragements are laced with gentle words and reassurance that he will stay her son, whatever happens next, and that she will always love him.<sup>203</sup> These parents are a long way from their calculating, controlling counterparts from the 1960s, who seemed to only care about their reputation and social standing. Love has a place in people’s relations here, and one’s role as a member of a certain family is not conditioned by their behaviour.

The portrayal of family in the 2018 *The Happy Prince* is complicated, just like its sexuality. Due to the different timeline, Wilde’s family does not show in the story much, yet it haunts his every waking moment. The film emphasises the tragedy of lower-class childhood through two orphans who become the protagonist’s found family. In this world, personal motivations and survival stand before family and propriety.

The memory of his family is Oscar’s main driving force and the only motivation he has towards a new, restored life. After leaving prison and arriving in Dieppe, he is determined to change his life for the better and restore the relationship with his wife and children,<sup>204</sup> but he is impatient and thinks himself entitled to their favour. After his advances are met with reluctance, he cannot understand why he is being denied access to them and gets aggressive with Robbie for pointing out his impatience and entitlement.<sup>205</sup> Constance’s reluctance to accept him back undermines his will to change and pushes him into the arms of his lover again, since Bosie will readily receive him, unlike his wife.<sup>206</sup> He behaves only at the promise of reuniting with his family and their comfort, and when denied it, his motivation disappears, and he reverts to his flawed, unrestrained self. His wife, Constance, is only present in a few scenes, but from the few moments she is on-screen, it becomes abundantly clear that she is not a quiet little kitten like her 1997 counterpart. No angel resides in this house, for although she loves her husband and is sure she would forgive him everything, she understands well what he has cost them and will not give in to his demands or tolerate his behaviour.<sup>207</sup> When he inevitably falters and returns

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<sup>201</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:26:52–01:27:32.

<sup>202</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 00:48:29–00:51:51.

<sup>203</sup> Gilbert, *Wilde*, 01:23:46–01:24:58.

<sup>204</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:23:57–00:24:13.

<sup>205</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:40:27–00:41:02.

<sup>206</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:41:02–00:41:55.

<sup>207</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:39:10–00:40:12.

to Bosie, she all but disowns him and stops his allowance.<sup>208</sup> She sees him for who he is and tries to work with it to bring his home, but she will not entertain his senselessness for the sake of herself and the children. Familial relations are strong here, but they ultimately give way to the preservation and realisation of the self.

Due to the timeline, children and their relationships are handled differently from the other films. The film portrays the different kinds of childhood based on one's class and social standing. Bosie is a prime example of privileged upper-class childhood. He should be in his late twenties, yet he is fully dependent on his parents. He is not a student or employed, and is not used to working as he later bemoans about;<sup>209</sup> just spends his days wandering about and looking for thrills at his parents' expense. This comfortable state of being is valued by him above anything else, given that he exchanges his time with Oscar, where he had to care for himself, for money and his parents' protection again.<sup>210</sup> Besides him, however, the children in this film are not having a good time. Although Oscar's children do not play a role in his day-to-day life anymore, they are a constant on his mind and memories of them follow him in his interactions with his new companions, two orphaned match boys. The two have no privileges in life. They live in a broken-down shed in a slum area hidden from the main streets of Paris. There is no money or time for school or typical child activities, like stories. They both work in a match factory;<sup>211</sup> along with the older boy selling flowers out in the street;<sup>212</sup> and prostituting himself. Despite their morally questionable relationship laced with drugs and underage intimacy;<sup>213</sup> the boys become something like family to Oscar. He treats them well and affords them small moments of child whimsy through telling them his stories. In those small moments, they remind him of his own two boys, whom he had left behind, and the memory of whom anchors him to the reality of his current situation. Oscar used to be surrounded by the sheltered, privileged children, but currently finds himself in a world where child whimsy and innocence are unattainable if one wishes to survive.

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<sup>208</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:50:34–00:51:47.

<sup>209</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 01:16:30–01:16:45.

<sup>210</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 01:02:45–01:03:30.

<sup>211</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 01:10:00–01:12:12.

<sup>212</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 01:08:12–01:09:05.

<sup>213</sup> Everett, *The Happy Prince*, 00:08:44–00:09:23.

## Conclusion

Regarding conformity, the predominant shift is in the perception of Oscar Wilde himself. Although all three of the films use the outsider archetype, they do it in very different ways. The eldest film, from 1960, portrays it as of his own choosing, therefore, the consequences are only his own fault. Its Oscar is a conceited man who stays out of the mainstream because he wants to and actively works towards keeping himself outside, and in his mind elevated above social norms. Only, this persona is but a mask to hide his pathology, and he is, in fact, weak and sickened. His 1997 counterpart is the exact opposite. The 1997 film sees Wilde as a lovable martyr who was tragically born into the wrong era. His time and surroundings force him into places and situations where he does not belong and is not understood. Victorian people see a pathology in him, but the film makes it clear that his gentleness and charm are natural to him and cannot be hidden. The society persecutes him simply for being himself. The 2018 film presents a mix of the two. It keeps the notion that Wilde was wrongfully persecuted, yet does not shy away from his other socially destructive behaviours to avoid portraying him as a victim of his surroundings. This Oscar would be more of an antihero. The film recognises that he could change his socially destructive behaviour, but chooses not to do so, instead manipulating the less privileged around him to cater to his needs. He is not fundamentally wrong, but he does have a darker side to him that he is happy to keep. Wilde's class and social standing are also subject to change. In the 1960 film, his status as a middle-class person defines his entire life, including individuals with whom he is and is not allowed to socialise. In 1997, his class is noticeable mostly only in his relationship with Bosie, as the latter is upper-class and finds Oscar's attitude towards money and spending jarring. Finally, in 2018, his class, just like anybody else's, is not explicitly defined in the story, and his spending habits do not suggest middle-class caution. This film does a great job portraying the lower-class poor, which is not fully present in the other two, as it relates to the change in timeline. The disgrace and public judgment the artist faces are most presented in the 1960 film, where the wrath towards him is vicious and deadly. The latter two have a more gentle approach to it, with the 2018 film saving most of the hatred for Oscar's encounters with Englishmen to forward the narrative of him escaping the country and its judgment. Overall, the theme of conformity is the strongest in the earliest film, which could be influenced by the involvement of Victorian contemporaries with production. The general trajectory between the films is a loosening of expectations, with continually less emphasis on social stratification.

The theme of sexuality is uniquely different in the 1960 film, while the latter two lean in a similar direction, albeit with certain differences. In the 1960 film, everything is kept nice and hidden. The portrayal of affections other than between husband and wife is strictly kept to the central couple, and even with them, it is implicit and reliant on the viewer's understanding of the given context cues. The same cannot be said about the latter two, which have a perfectly explicit portrayal of non-heterosexual feelings and relationships, both through dialogue and on-screen performance. Both these films state that homosexuality is natural, present in people since birth, and cannot be cured. For the 1960s, it is adjacent to a curse that controls people's minds and behaviour. Everyone, including Oscar himself, knows that he is sick and needs a cure, which proves to be an issue that needs a professional remedy. By the end of the film, he is cured and back on the correct path through life, where feelings other than for his wife have no place. The message of the film in that regard is that his affection was a sickness that needed to be resolved. The 2018 film tells the exact opposite of that. There, one cannot choose their attraction or feelings for people, but they are fully in control of which relationship they choose to pursue. There is no higher power or pathology manipulating them, feelings can change, and relationships die, just like with a traditional heterosexual relationship. The 1997 film tells the same general message, but concentrates on the love and affection aspect of it. Altogether, the more common attitude toward it is positive, only the 1960 film stands out with its notion of it as a sickness. The films get progressively more explicit in their portrayal of it on screen and their normalisation of non-heterosexual relationships and queer culture in society.

Family plays a major role in all the films, one way or another. The 1960 film is the only one that emphasises the Wildes' home as their default place of being. They are a nice example of a middle-class nuclear family with their homely, eclectic living areas and firm roles. Oscar is a good father and a powerful protector of his territory. His wife, Constance, plays into the stereotypes for her gender nicely while still having some power over the household and her husband. Their home and life seem particularly calm and stable compared to the Douglasses' upper-class residence, which is not homey or stable in any way. The 1997 film has Wilde stay out of the household as much as possible, but the family he leaves behind plays a central role in the film. Constance and the children serve to provide a look at how the consequences of Oscar's actions affect not only him, but the whole family, as well as to amplify the emotional story of the film. A notable difference here would be Constance's behaviour. She is a textbook example of an angel in the house, a perfect, benevolent wife, who would have been worshipped in any other marriage. Unfortunately for her, Oscar is not the diligent, protective leader of his family here, and she suffers because of it. In the 2018 film, due to the timeline change, the

family does not appear much, but it figures in the story significantly as Oscar's only motivation to change and a memory that haunts him after he inevitably falters and returns to his questionable behaviour. His two sons, especially, are a constant reminder of better times. A common theme amongst all the films is Bosie being represented as a child, regardless of his role in the film. While in the first two, this theme serves mainly to accompany his role, in the 2018 film, it allows for an interesting contrast. As the offspring of an upper-class family, Bosie is a prime example of the long childhoods and parental reliability that these families were able to offer their children. Oscar's new child friends in Paris do not have that privilege as poor, lower-class orphans. They are both younger than Bosie, but in their world, childhood whimsy and innocence need to give way to earning money by whatever means necessary. The biggest difference between the films, however, lies in the way families are tied together and how they treat each other. In the 1960 film, one's belonging to a family is conditioned by their good behaviour and presentation of the family name. There is little room for love or protection. The members merely serve to uphold the good reputation, and if they fail to do so, they will be rejected. In the 1997 film, the sentiment is the exact opposite. Families are held together by love stronger than anything else. Parents love their children for the sake of them being their children, and that relationship is unbreakable. Finally, in 2018, family bonds are strong, but ultimately give way to personal needs and desires, because an individual and their survival are more important. The general trend in portraying family is moving away from its connections to society and instead establishing it as a private affair, which holds different weight for each person depending on their station and environment.

In general, the main trend in portraying the three themes through different decades and centuries is loosening them. Conformity is the main theme in the 1960s, yet it progressively dissipates as the years go by. Especially social distinctions like class are only implied and do not play a major role anymore. Sexuality is only seen as negative in the earliest film, but the explicitness of its portrayal on screen heightens between the latter two. Lastly, family changes from a public affair primarily existing to keep the legacy ongoing to a strictly private, intimate part of one's life that cannot be stripped, and finally, to a reality of one's existence that differs in each person depending on their situation in life and personal motivations. The attitude toward Wilde as a person changes as well. His character goes from a conceited villain to a victim of his surroundings, and finally, to an unfortunate antihero.

## RESUMÉ

Tato práce se zabývá změnami ve vyobrazování osobnosti Oscara Wildea a témat spojených s ním a jeho dobou ve filmových zpracováních napříč časem. Filmy byly vybrány tak aby reprezentovaly různá období současných dějin. Cílem práce je vystopovat změny ve vyobrazování určitých společenských témat a tím vývoj v jejich chápání. Toho bude docíleno pozorováním vyobrazení tří vybraných tematických celků.

Vybranými tématy jsou konformita, sexualita, a rodina. Témata jsou relevantní v kontextu s viktoriánskou dobou, ve které autor žil a působil. Konformita je úzce spjata se střední třídou, která díky industrializaci vzkvétala a sílila na relevanci v sociálním prostředí doby. Sexualita sice nebyla každodenním tématem lidí žijících ve viktoriánské době, ale zpětně je velice zajímavá, protože některé koncepty kolem ní, které jsou dnes vnímány jako samozřejmost, se v ní začaly rodit. Také je to hlavní zdroj konfliktu okolo Wildea. Rodina byla a je jako základní jednotka společnosti nenahraditelná. Industrializace s sebou přinesla velké změny v příležitostech pro lidi i v jejich životním uspořádání. První tři kapitoly práce se týkají teorie daných témat v kontextu viktoriánské doby. V rámci témat jsou představeny koncepte, které pod ně spadají.

První kapitola se zaměřuje na konformitu. Hlavní myšlenkou je střední třída a jimi podporované morální hodnoty. Kapitola pojednává o moralitě a tehdejší teorie regrese, která měla vysvětlit nedodržování hodnot lidmi tím, že v nich hledala patologii. Moralita byla vnímána jako poslední stádium vývoje člověka do zdravého, dospělého jedince. Ti kteří se nesečkali s morálním standardem doby byli vnímáni jako nedovyvinutí a nemocní, a potřebovali profesionální léčbu. Tento přístup byl podporován vědci, jako například doktorem Prichardem, jehož pohled na problematiku je vysvětlený v kapitole. Skandál byl důležitou částí společenského života, a proto je i důležitou částí této práce. Pro jeho vysvětlení byla použita teorie Ariho Aduta, na které se dá konceptu snadno porozumět. Skandály sloužili jako očista morální společnosti od nemocných lidí. Negativní reakce okolního publika byla nutná, protože skandály se snadno předávají a jedinec, který by přestupek nezavrhnul by se mohl stát další obětí.

Druhá kapitola, sexualita, představuje viktoriánskou dobu jako začátek profesionální debaty o homosexualitě, tenkrát zvané inverze. Viktoriánští vědci, jako například Ellis Havelock, jehož názor je součástí kapitoly, začali usilovat o porozumění tohoto tématu, i když neúspěšně s obecnou společností. Dále kapitola představuje viktoriánský pohled na funkci intimních vztahů jako bohem daný úkol pro manžele za účelem reprodukce. Jelikož

z homosexuálních vztahů potomci nevzniknou, téma bylo ve společnosti tabu. Prostituce ovšem byla všude přítomná, protože vyšší společenské třídy, které plnily úkol lidu daný vyššími silami, bylo málo v porovnání se zbytkem obyvatel. Většina obyvatel byla z nižších tříd, pro které sex figuroval jako možnost rychlého výdělku, a přežití je přednější nad smyslem života.

Třetí kapitola, rodina, klade důraz na industrializaci, která změnila koncept rodiny pro viktoriány. Tak zvaná „nukleární rodina“ byla norma střední třídy. Toto uspořádání také změnilo genderové role v rámci rodinné jednotky. Kapitola se zabývá obzvláště ideálem matek v rodinách jako andělů v domácnosti. Další součástí kapitoly je zvláštní pohled viktoriánů na děti a dětství jako komoditu, která se dá využít pro vlastní potěšení. Tento fenomén je ilustrován i na případu Lewise Carrolla, autora dětské pohádky Alenka v říši divů a reálné Alenky, Alice Liddell.

Poslední teoretickou kapitolou je problematika biografie a biografických filmů. Cílí na představení procesu přípravy biografických děl a subjektivity která do něj vstupuje s každým krokem. Zvláštním případem jsou následně rozebrané biografické filmy. Kapitola nejdříve pojednává o popularitě filmu v dnešní době, a poté kombinuje nutnosti filmu jako prostředku pro sdělování se subjektivitou v biografii. Velkým přínosem k tomuto tématu byla Marie-Laure Ryan a její výklad faktu a fikce v médiích.

Pro analýzu byly vybrány tři biografické filmy. První z nich je z roku 1960, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, a pojednává právě o jmenovaných soudních procesech s Oscarem Wildem. Film je nejen vydáním nejbližší devatenáctému století, ale také se chlubí spoluprací s Vyvyanem Hollandem, synem Oscara Wildea, a tehdejším markýzem rodu Queensberry a synovcem Alfreda Douglesse, Wildeova milence. Oba z nich vyrůstali ve viktoriánské době a kolem událostí, které filmy inspirovaly. Jejich zapojení jistě přineslo dobový nádech. Ve filmu je vidět silný důraz na konformitu a sociální stratifikaci. Druhý film je z roku 1997, *Wilde*. Jedná se o romantické drama o Wildeových vztazích a životě. Film se hodně přiklání k pohledu na daného umělce jako oběť svojí doby, která se bohužel narodila v dobu, co ho není ochotná a schopná pochopit. Jako příběh o homosexuálních vztazích má oproti prvnímu filmu mnohem sympatičtější přístup k této tématice. Poslední, nejnovější je z roku 2018, *The happy Prince*. Film je sólo projektem britského herce Ruperta Everetta, který si v něm i zahrál hlavní roli. Je vizuálně a zážitkově nejhezčí a nejvíce zapamatovatelný, ale zároveň nejtěžší na pochopení, protože má komplikovaný časový děj a nízkou vysvětlovací hodnotu pro ty, kteří Wildea neznají. Ze všech tří je nejvíce odvážný a explicitní. Všechny tři filmy jsou představeny včetně krátkého náčrtu děje v kapitole mezi teoretickou a praktickou částí práce.

Praktická část se skládá z devíti menších analýz rozřazených do třech analytických kapitol podle témat. Filmy jsou rozebrány dle koncepcí probíraných v teoretických kapitolách. Pozoruje se jejich využití, jaký je na ně kladen důraz, a jejich vývoj v čase. Dílčí zjištění jsou na konci sjednocena do poslední kapitoly práce, která je porovnává a vyvozuje z nich obecnější závěry o daných tématech.

Výsledkem práce jsou zjištění posunů ve vyobrazování daných témat. Konformita začíná jako nejsilnější téma, které prostupuje do všech sociálních interakcí, a postupně mizí, obzvlášť v případě rozdělení do společenských tříd, které by měly být od sebe oddělené. Sexualita je v nejstarším filmu vnímaná jako nemoc, ze které se musí člověk vyléčit. Oba zbývající filmy ji vnímají jako perfektně normální, přirozenou část člověka, ale je mezi nimi rozdíl v explicitnosti vyobrazování těchto vztahů, s tím, že nejnovější film je explicitnější. Téma rodiny se vyvíjí z pouhého nástroje pro vzhled rodiny a její dobrou pověst ve společnosti, do vysoce důvěrných, láskyplných vztahů, které ovšem vypadají pro každého jinak v závislosti na jeho životních okolnostech a vlastní motivaci. Celkově se dá konstatovat, že dochází k rozvolňování dříve sledovaných norem a struktur a normalizaci citlivých, potenciálně kontroverzních témat.

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