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**Self-censored Wilde**

**Social pressure on Wilde's revisions of  
his society plays**

Master's Diploma Thesis

Supervisor: Mgr. Tomáš Kačer, PhD

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*I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,  
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.*

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## **Introduction**

Literature, theatre and film are media that immensely influence our society. They reflect our attitude to life, expectations, values, preferences, tastes, lifestyle etc. Those who have the power to influence media, have also power to influence society. The aim of my thesis is to analyse a selection of Oscar Wilde's plays and study the impact of various social and political influences on these plays. On the examples of Wilde's life and work, especially his social comedies, I want to show how censorship, politics, and conventions influence the author, production of theatres and consequently shape our perception of reality.

The thesis will focus on the analysis of Oscar Wilde's plays in connection to their censorship, self-censorship and various influences. I want to show connections that lead to banning or censoring the plays and consequently influenced the notion or perception of the play by their audiences. The thesis disproves fallacious opinions about the Victorian society and its conventions and morality, deals explicitly with the topic of censorship and searches for possible reasons behind the censorship of Oscar Wilde's plays. The thesis introduces the theatre of Oscar Wilde in the wider context of the Victorian society.

I was well aware, before I started to write my thesis that there was a quantum of literature written about Oscar Wilde and the Victorian society. Wilde and his works have been analysed from all possible angles and perspectives. There are a few approaches to Wilde: his contribution to aesthetic and

decadent movements, his sexuality and trials and analysis of his works on the basis of the criticism of the Victorian society. I do not want to concentrate on any of these well-worn topics, although it is impossible to completely avoid them in my thesis. Yet another approach to analysis of Wilde's works appeared with the new evidence and materials about his plays, trials and the Victorian society itself. Although the problem of censorship figures through the whole Wilde's life, the majority of non-fictional literature that deals with the censorship of Wilde's works focuses on either his *Picture of Dorian Gray* or on his play *Salomé*. Taken into consideration, that Wilde reached the peak of his career as a playwright, there was very little written about the censorship of his society plays. With the discovery of relatively new transcripts of Wilde's trial and with regard to the Victorian code of silence we can approach to the analysis of Wilde's work a little bit differently. Crucial for my analysis were earlier versions and manuscripts of Wilde's plays, which were shared and contributed by Wilde's grandson, Merlin Holland, and gathered up by Kerry Powell. In fact, it was from the large part Kerry Powell's unique approach to Wilde that inspired me to carry out the analyses of his plays on the grounds of censorship and performativity.

In the first part of the thesis, I introduce the Victorian era, its society, conventions and real practices. My focus is on the feminist and social-purity movements which were closely related to Wilde's life and most importantly to his works. Second part is dedicated to the Victorian theatre, as this period marked the expansion of the theatre and introduced the term 'theatre-goer' in the right sense. In this part I also deal with aestheticism and Wilde's lecturing

trip to America in connection with the notion of stardom and marketing practices of theatre managers. The Aesthetic movement and the introduction of marketing practices were important parts of creating the popularity of Wilde and his actual pose of an aesthete which was a launching point in his career.

Third part discusses Wilde's life and work and deals explicitly with Wilde's dispute with Marquess of Queensberry which lead to the trial and consequently to banning of Wilde's plays. With the discovery of the first trial transcription of Wilde's famous trial I could have a close insight into the inner, uncensored cross-examinations and testimonies. As the trial dealt explicitly with Wilde's literary works and letters, it serves me as an invaluable source of information.

In the fourth part I focus on the topic of censorship and explain more or less trivial reasons for censoring or banning plays in general. Subsequently it examines Wilde's trial with Queensberry and deals with the censorship of Wilde's plays. In Wilde's case the problem of the censorship was not primarily the problem of an inadequate content of the plays but much more it was the matter of the political atmosphere, and later on with the trial, of his notoriety. Although I mention various reasons for censorship of Wilde's works, I focus mainly on his self-censorship due to political reasons. In this part I analyse the earlier manuscripts of the plays, and compare them to the final versions, explaining the changes and revisions made by the author. This part also gives me an insight into censorship of Wilde's other works, and discusses drama as the powerful means of transmitting ideas.

The last and most extensive part of the thesis is aimed at the analysis of the selected society plays written by Oscar Wilde: *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Ernest*. I do not want to analyse the plays on the grounds of the criticism of the Victorian society, although these themes are an inherent part of Wilde's works. My aim is to scrutinize the influence and real intentions of the playwright on the basis of the comparison of the earlier manuscripts of the plays with their final versions. I am tracing Wilde's connections with actor-managers and their marketing policy, feminist and social-purity movement, and legal authorities, on the background of the criminal underground of the Victorian society.

In the conclusion I would like to point out the power of the performative art, and the extent to which it have been shaped and influenced by authorities, politics, and conventions. I want to disrupt general views on the Victorian society, but mainly I want to penetrate deeper to the area of theatre, practices of stage managers, marketing practices, politics, and censorship. I want to find out who and what exactly was behind the censorship of Wilde's plays (among many others) and what impact did it have on the final versions of the plays, and consequently on their perception by the Victorian as well as our present-day society.

## 1. The Victorian Era

The Victorian era is a fascinating period of the British history. It was very complex and paradoxical as it conveyed a wide and varied epoch. It is usually described as a period of Queen Victoria's reign, but the dates 1837-1901 are just orientational.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I would like to disrupt false pretences connected to Victorianism and the Victorian society, as well as to point out the crucial influences of social, political, and literary movements on Oscar Wilde's works. The division of the social classes, The Feminist and social-purity movements, Victorian code of silence, and the criminal underground of Victorian cities, were all factors that shaped and transformed Wilde's society plays.

The period that marks the passage from the Victorian world to that of today is called '*the turn of the century*'. It can be characterized by the triumph of evolutionism in science, the rapid growth of industrialization, economic and political rivalry among countries, the emancipation of women, and the rise of urbanization. Though progress caused optimism, as many people more and more believed in the strength of the British Empire, there was also a negative side. Pessimism, melancholy, and doubt marked the last phase of the era. The

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<sup>1</sup> See also Victorianweb, *Victorians and Victorianism*

rapid industrialization also showed its less wishful sides: poverty, injustice, and alienation<sup>2</sup>.

Victorian England is generally considered as very prudish and repressed but in fact it was an era of peace, prosperity and great expansion of sciences and culture. Literature and theatre were blooming, and especially drama attracted the masses. It gave rise to new theatres, stage managers, and furthermore to new kind of profitable business. On the other hand, literature and drama served as an outlet to influence a changing society (as it still serves today).

Oscar Wilde, as one of the most prominent playwrights, with his extravagant lifestyle and attitude to life and art, represented a very controversial figure of the time. After his trial and mainly due to his notoriety, his writings were considered improper and immoral, as they were connected to homosexuality, corruption, and obscenity. In his society comedies he masterly reflects the state of society, problems of classes, family life, gender relations, corruption and hypocrisy of the era.

What affected the life of the Victorians most, was probably the great expansion of the British imperial power and industrial expansion. Growing middle-class and increase in international trade caused great demand for

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<sup>2</sup> See also Victorianweb, *Victorians and Victorianism*

consumer goods. Britain became the world leader in trading, which resulted mainly from the development of rail networks and steamships.

There were plenty of important inventions created in this era, from communication links, through sanitation reforms, to the gas lighting. The Victorians loved progress and sciences, this period gave rise to natural sciences, they developed many sports, and introduced the notion of relaxation and recreation.<sup>3</sup>

The important thing behind industrialization and technological development in this period, was the modern idea of invention – “the notion that one can create solutions to problems, that man can create new means of bettering himself and his environment” (victorianweb). The Industrial Revolution did not mean just rapid development of industry and economics of the country, but it also influenced social transformation. “Although the first decades of the nineteenth century were marked by wars, financial crises, and social unrest, by the time Queen Victoria came to the throne, Britain's status as an industrial power was unchallenged” (vam).

As to the politics and social matters, it is important to mention a few great movements and changes. The Victorians invented the notion of Democracy, Socialism, Marxism and Feminism. It was an era of Darwin and

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<sup>3</sup> See also Victorianweb

Freud, in which people searched for modern solutions to their everyday problems and for new innovations.

Feminist political action of the time depended from the large part on journalism and Wilde as an editor of *The Women's World*, actively took part in this movement. The magazine focused mainly on the women's suffrage, education and employment, and other issues concerning the position of women in the society. Wilde was in close contact with the prominent figures of the women's movement and with his wife Constance they were involved in Dress Reform Movement. Constance later joined Women's Liberal Association, and belonged to the more moderate side of the feminist movement. Nevertheless, the more aggressive feminist agenda of morality was later parodied and criticized in Wilde's society comedies. In *Acting Wilde* Kerry Powell explains Wilde's change of the tone towards feminists in his plays: "Instead of advocating a feminist agenda, as he had done as a journalist, Wilde began producing texts in which women, especially feminist women, were a disruptive presence..." (Powell 53). In fact, the earliest versions of his society plays are marked by exaggerated attacks on the feministic movement of the time, but the laborious revisions of the plays reduced their melodramatic hostility.

## **1.2. The Victorian Society, Conventions, and Morality**

*"An Englishman will do whatever in the name of principle."* (G.B.Shaw)

The word 'Victorian' was first used during The Great Exhibition in 1851 (vam). Considering the complexity of the era, and classes in Victorian England, we can't generalize about its society or morality. Because of the complexity of the period and various classes, Victorian lifestyle, values and attitudes greatly varied. As we have mentioned earlier, it was a period full of paradoxes and contradictions. J. Merriman in his *A History of Modern Europe* points out a few interesting examples of these contradictions: On the one hand "Victorians tended to cultivate their appearance of dignity and restraint" (Merriman 5), but still there was a widespread prostitution and child labour. "They considered improper to say 'leg' or 'sea' – instead they used 'limb' and 'bathing machine' in formal company" (5), but nudity wasn't nothing unusual for them. In spite of the puritan views of the Victorians, "Queen Victoria alone collected male nude drawings and she even gave one as a present to her husband" (5).

Nevertheless, what is true about Victorian conventions is that they had rules of etiquette for almost everything. There were rules about who to talk to, how to talk, what to wear, how to bow, who to dance with and so on. Also it was almost impossible to run a household without any servants. Actually, in great houses the amount of servants could equal to a small army. For sexual feelings and emotions in written communication the 'language of flowers' was often used, however, there are recordings of explicit erotica or writings about women's orgasms. Typically, brides did not have any information about sex,

and suffered a real shock on their wedding nights, but on the other hand it is proved that both Victorian men and women enjoyed making love.

When it comes to sexuality, the common misinterpretation is that the Victorians were very sexually repressed. It may roots from the known ethical and moral codex of the time, and from many articles dealing with the status of women in the Victorian era. In fact, women's rights were extremely limited as with marriage they automatically lost their ownership of their wages, all property and money and all these were legally given to their husbands. Victorian wives were literary a property to their husbands. Their task was to give birth to children, and take care of the household. John Michael Geer puts it very interestingly in his *Victorian Sex Magic*:

The Victorian era wasn't particularly oversexed, as eras go. But it certainly wasn't particularly undersexed, either. What it was, possibly more than any other culture in recorded history, was caught in a bind between public ideology and private reality. It's popular to dismiss this as a matter of simple hypocrisy, but it was much more complex than that. The Victorians believed intensely in word magic. When Victorians wanted something to be true, they said that it was true, and they expected reality to play along. If it didn't, they got uncomfortable, and said it again, twice as loud. Reality being what it is, they ended up shouting some things at the top of their lungs. (Geer)

The Victorian code of silence caused great misinterpretations of the Victorians social life, literature, and also the criminal law. In the time of the trial of Oscar Wilde, any homosexual case was heavily censored; such cases were usually not recorded at all, not to mention journalistic accounts. That is why the newly discovered uncensored transcription of the first trial of Oscar Wilde, sheds more light on the real practices of silencing the facts and evidence. Nevertheless, the etiquette was very important in Victorian England. Actually, there was a rule of etiquette for almost everything from what to wear, through who to speak to, how to talk, to set of rules that shown how to bow or tip your hat. The proper behaviour and stereotypical conduct were highly important in the middle and upper classes society, and they served Wilde as subject of satire in his works.

Society's ideals, expectations and demands from individuals often had impact on unrealistic expectations which consequently lead to deceit and engaging in a double life in order to satisfy conventions. This is exactly the idea behind Wilde's most famous play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Other subjects of satire in Wilde's society comedies are marriage, class, gender roles and family life. Gender roles are frequently changed and all Victorian values are ironically disrupted.

### **1.3. Real Practice**

*"Work is the curse of the drinking classes"* (Oscar Wilde)

In contrast to the middle and upper classes, there was about quarter of population living in poverty. Along with industrialization and urbanization, the population of England also increased. There was lack of housing, and it was expensive, which resulted in overcrowding of the cities. The water supply system was not a public service, and the unsanitary conditions that prevailed in the era caused the majority of diseases and epidemics. This era is ingloriously known for child labour – children worked in mines, factories or as chimney sweeps, as rat catchers, messengers or mudlarks - these were children who tended to wade into the Thames in search of any stuff that could be sold for a few pences. The lower class population consisted mainly of prostitutes, thieves, beggars, pickpockets and opium addicts. They were living in slums, sometimes as many as thirty people squeezed into one room. Because they were so densely packed with bodies, slums were profitable for landlords and so rarely cleared by the authorities. The only alternative to the poverty on the streets was the workhouse. But workhouses weren't any better than living in the slums. Parents were separated from children, husbands and wives were forbidden to talk to each other, healthy people were lodged alongside with diseased. Conditions in prison were sometimes far better and more sanitary than in 'honest' work. Workers usually worked as much as 16 hours, and the

owners of the factories threatened them as slaves, as they charged them more for lodging than the workers could earn. It was an era of modern slavery.<sup>4</sup> That was the reason, why lots of girls flew to the streets to make their living. Prostitution began to be seen as a great social problem, especially with the spread of syphilis epidemic and other sexually transmitted diseases in the British armed forces. The legislation of The Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860's allowed police to arrest prostitutes, and they were subjected to compulsory checks for venereal diseases. Josephine Butler, the most influential woman activist of her time relentlessly fought against the CD Acts, altogether with the Ladies' National Association, Social Purity Alliance and National Vigilance Association, stating that the problem was men themselves. Butler and other feminists advocated a new masculinity based on the domestic ideology.<sup>5</sup> This idea is ridiculed, parodied, and criticized throughout all Wilde's society plays, most importantly in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, as will be shown later in chapter 5.

Another very important consequence of these feminist campaigns was the passage and alteration of the Criminal Law Amendment in 1885. This "Act to make further provision for the Protection of Women and Girls, the suppression of brothels, and other purposes" (banap), strengthened existing legislation and finally recriminalized male homosexuality. This brought about a

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<sup>4</sup> See also Jen Newby. *Writing Women's History*

<sup>5</sup> See also Powell, *Acting Wilde*, pp. 43-52

new profitable kind of business – a sexual blackmailing especially of male prostitutes and homosexuals, of which Wilde was also a victim. The topic of male prostitution and blackmailing is another vital part of Wilde's plays, especially in *An Ideal Husband*.

#### **1.4. Victorians and Culture**

Along with technological, social, and political changes of the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution brought about also the notion of leisure time. It can be said that leisure time activities were invented to compensate for the strict rules and morality of everyday life. Working-class free activities mainly included going to pubs, which served as an opportunity for socialization. But it also included bowling, quoiting, flower shows and amateur dramatics. As the new bourgeoisie class became powerful, their attitudes and values shaped the role and form of leisure activities. For the middle-class majority of the time, leisure had to be not only respectable, but also productive. Among the widespread and most favourite activities, belonged going for walks in establishing town parks and seaside recreation. There were founded facilities for mental improvement, working men's clubs, and variety of so called 'friendly societies' and various clubs including golf, cricket, rugby, and tennis. New technology introduced new forms of leisure – excursions, tourism and travelling

to seaside resorts. Increasingly influential became the commercialization of leisure. Music halls and theatres bloomed and by the time a concept of the star was born.<sup>6</sup>

The 19th century was an era of star actors and performers idolized by masses. The rise of the star caused many changes in art business. The two most famous actresses of the time were Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse. Some actors such as Charles Macready or the Bancrofts prepared the way for a style of performing which later became a norm in modern theatre. The 19<sup>th</sup> century actor-managers were responsible for all kinds of duties from choosing scripts and costumes to dealing with finances. It was also common practice that an actor-manager was the theatre's star performer.

Kerry Powell, in his *Acting Wilde* deals with the performative aspect of Wilde's life and work, in connection to his tour in America, advertising and marketing practices. Powell sees Wilde's activity in America, as well as his further life, work and trial, as a mode of performance managed by talent agents, theatre managers, economists and various authorities. Powell tries to answer the question of the 'creation' of Wilde, in the era of the mass production and invention of the stardom, asking whether "(Wilde) was the autonomous, revolutionary advocate of beauty over commerce...." or rather "...was he performing...with a managerial collar around his neck, not the enemy of

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<sup>6</sup> See also: Victorianweb

commercialism but its agent - 'the acme of advertising' and a walking, talking 'side-show' to Patience?" (Powell 23). In the following chapters I will deal more explicitly with this topic, trying to explain the links between Wilde's commercial success and marketing tools, and his performativity.

## 2. Victorian Literature and Aestheticism

*"Life imitates art far more than Art imitates Life."* (Oscar Wilde)

To better comprehend Wilde's works and intentions, it is inevitable to introduce some general information about Aesthetic movement and Wilde's lecturing on Aestheticism. Wilde is considered to be a leading figure in promoting the movement and it is sometimes stated that his death marked the end of the Aestheticism. Peter Ackroyd in his *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* claims that "After the Wilde's trial and condemnation the whole Aesthetic and Decadent movement went down as nobody wanted to be connected with it" (Ackroyd 35). Yet, more interesting for the purposes of my thesis, is the by-end of Wilde's American lecture tour in connection to the marketing and promotion of Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera *Patience*. In the following lines I would like to introduce the cultural context of the Victorian era, and focus on the Aesthetic movement.

The predominant genre in Victorian period was the novel. The first part of this era belonged mainly to Charles Dickens, the Brontë sisters and William Thackeray while later writings were produced by George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. Later Victorian writings tended to rebel against the prudish morality and stereotypical codes of behaviour. Actually, this strict Victorian etiquette often served as a subject for satire and parody for many authors. Wilde's plays serve as a perfect example. From the appraisal against the Victorian early mode of behaviour arosed lots of movements that contradicted political or social aims of the time. One of them, which certainly worth mentioning is the Aesthetic

movement or 'Art for art's sake', on the basis of which later developed the modernist period which followed after. Creative writing is deeply affected by the general spirit of the age. If the traditional literature of Victorian time is meant to set clear positions for right and wrong and to give the moral messages, the writers of the turn of the century are searching for new perspectives. The pluralism of styles and eclecticism are typical of that time. Some of the writers of the turn of the century are influenced by all kinds of philosophical ideas; others put forward their own theories. The spirit of decadence is a characteristic feature of many literary works of the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The term Fin de Siècle or the End of the Century is not strictly chronological, it was cultural and social as well.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to conventional ideas, "vulgar materialism and utilitarian spirit" (victorianweb) which dominated the Victorian society, Aestheticism rebelled against all of these values and views. Aesthetes estimated beauty over commonly received standards and ideas, and lived according to John Keats 'Beauty is truth, truth is beauty.' Actually, they glorified beauty as their new deity, elevating it above the truth. They tended to seek for beauty everywhere - in art, literature, drama, and life in general, in order to satisfy their need for personal fulfilment and find meaning to their life.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See also: Unlv.edu, *The Victorian Period*

<sup>8</sup> See also: Vam, *Aestheticism -The Cult of Beauty*

Wilde's extravagant appearance and outrageous posing attracted attention even before he had written anything. At the time of his visit of America, he was not yet established as a writer. According to Walter W. Walker „He was a fledgling artist trying to promote himself and his early plays“ (Walker, *Interview*). Wilde soon became a target of satire for his Aestheticism. He was caricatured in drawings by George du Maurier, and later in Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *Patience*, whose main character Bunthorne strikingly reminds Wilde (or was it Wilde who imitated Bunthorne?). “Ostensibly he (Wilde) was promoting the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta that ironically was lampooning his school of thought. But he also had something to say, a talent for saying it, and someone prepared to pay him for saying it” (Walker). In 1882, Oscar Wilde was sent to give a series of lectures on Aestheticism. In fact, as Powell explains, Wilde was sent there by an English talent agent, Richard D'Oyly Carte, to promote the *Patience*, which was already closely identified with Wilde. Kerry Powell is tracing contrivances and commercial intentions of Carte, in connection to Wilde's action in America: “Carte's well-oiled publicity campaign for Wilde began with advance stories in the newspapers of his imminent arrival in America, followed by interviews, high-society receptions covered by the press, and a cleverly conceived visit by Wilde to the theatre where *Patience* had been playing as a smash hit since September 22 of the previous year. This marketing of a comic opera Oscar Wilde produced the desired results” (Powell 25). In this sense, what some authors considered a sovereign an exceptional lecturing on Aestheticism was a well-prepared marketing campaign in the hands of a talent agent.

From this point on, Wilde's career, life, work, and trial seems to be a kind of performance manipulated by all other persons and institutions, except of himself. Yet another example of handling with Wilde as with a piece of advertisement can be seen in Wilde's posing for photography to Napoleon Sarony - a preeminent celebrity photographer, whose photo of 'Oscar Wilde No.18' became an issue of intellectual property. Soon after the photo was offered for sale, 85000 of unauthorized copies were printed for a hat advertisement. Sarony's photographs of Wilde were appropriated by commercial firms to advertise their products. *The New York Times* published an article entitled "Did Sarony invent Oscar Wilde" (qtd. in Powell 25). The Supreme Court upheld the lower court ruling that Sarony was indeed the 'author' of Oscar Wilde as he appeared in the photograph. So the 'Oscar Wilde No 18' photograph was declared as a piece of Sarony's property. This case was just one of the many examples, in which Wilde was either limited or governed by external forces. As Powell concludes: "Wilde's posing for Sarony, and what came of it later...was a subtle yet powerful demonstration that one's self-enactment, no matter how audacious, would always be conducted within the oversight of social regimes of regulation and power...Wilde's American experience was significantly authored by others - by Richard D'Oyly Carte in setting-up this side-show in the first place, by Napoleon Sarony in his photographic studio, and by Gilbert and Sullivan in a Savoy opera called *Patience*" (Powell 26).

In this regard, we can conclude that Wilde and his contribution to literature or theatre was from the beginning immensely influenced, and manipulated by external forces with the aim to achieve a commercial success. In my analysis I want to show how these practices are reflected in Wilde's writing and rewriting of his society comedies. But first, I will deal with the impact of these influences in connection to the theatre, and the choice of the society plays as a suitable genre for Wilde in the following chapter.

## **2.1. Victorian Theatre**

*"I love acting – it is so much more real than life." (Oscar Wilde)*

As I want to analyse Wilde's society comedies, it is important for me to study first the background of the Victorian theatre, to comprehend the conditions in which his plays were produced and performed. I also try to explain the term society play, and demonstrate the significance of the choice of this genre for Wilde.

Theatre of the UK has had a long and vibrant tradition since Renaissance with its roots far deeper. Theatrical Licensing Act of 1737 put an end to authors with strong political and philosophical attitudes, replacing provocative Restoration comedy by sentimental comedy, domestic tragedy and opera. Due to this act, only two theatres in London were allowed to perform plays – The Drury Lane and The Covent Garden. The period from 1830 to 1890 was primarily focused on prose and poetry. In fact, until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,

there were not many significant works of drama produced.<sup>9</sup> But closer to the end of the century, especially with the growth of leisure and entertainment, the theatre in Britain flourished. New theatres had to be opened to satisfy the demand of theatregoers. While in the 18<sup>th</sup> century theatre served as an exclusive meeting place for aristocracy, by the beginning of the 19th century there was a demand for more theatres and widening capacity for the mass attendance. In 1880s, there was an increasing criticism of the English stage. Henry James commented in *The London Theatres* in 1877 that “the English stage has probably never been so bad as it is at present and at the same time there probably has never been so much care about it” (qtd. in Rowell 16). Foreign influences also contributed to a discussion of English drama during the 1880s. The popular cultural critic - Mathew Arnold, was pivotal in popularizing these discussions in the press, with the aim to grow interest in the theatre among the middle class. By 1860s, working-class people could afford cheaper seats, and the middle class attended theatre frequently. The Drury Lane and The Covent Garden as the only two patent theatres were the only one to be allowed to stage legitimate dramatic performances.<sup>10</sup> The Lord Chamberlain had an ultimate power of censorship over these theatres. Other theatres “could produce drama that included some text plus a number of songs” (De Jongh, *Politics, Prudery and Perversion* 24). Melodrama became a very popular genre

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<sup>9</sup> See also Victoria and Albert Museum, *19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian Theatre*

<sup>10</sup> See also Victorianweb

in this period. Melodrama has a “universal appeal because of its simplified, surreal world and predictable plot, but it often lacks psychological depth” (Esdail 19). As the matter of fact, melodrama explores a notion of democratic morality as it emphasizes the importance of individual choices and moral responsibility for the choice. As Esdaile writes in her *Acclaim*: “because of the great demand for new plays, melodramatic playwrights were initially little more than hack writers. The wages of resident dramatist were abysmally low” (Esdail, 19). Playwrights were usually paid for a play, and so they were forced to write in very quick pace in order to make a living. As gothic melodrama lost its audience, it was replaced by domestic melodrama that depicted everyday life in the city or country. These plays were written especially for the working-class audience with the aim to “reflect a high degree of class-consciousness” (Esdail 20). Greater demand for the theatre contributed to legislating of a new Theatre Regulation Act of 1843. The Act restricted the power of Lord Chamberlain, so that he could only forbid the performance when he considered it not fitting “for the preservation of good manners, decorum or of the public peace” (Rowell 5). It also gave power to local authorities to licence theatres, and so broke the monopoly of the patent theatres.

In the early 19th century, theatres suffered from the bad reputation being considered immoral and not respectable places. Theatre auditoriums were typically dark, dimly lit, and chaotic, and so the theatres were attended mostly by the working class. However, with the introduction of gaslight, theatres gained respectability. It also helped to bring more realism in acting

and scenic sets. Melodramas at The Drury Lane were truly spectacular productions, designed to show off the new technology of the theatre. It became synonymous with spectacle, and it remained popular until 20<sup>th</sup> century. The new technology gave rise to sensation dramas, and the principal attraction was the special effects. The plays put great attention to historical accuracy, costumes and other details. Particularly pictorial drama emphasized the use of properties, and was very meticulous in archaeology and history. One of the main proponents of pictorial drama was Charles Kean. He was absolutely punctual in historical details, and he was admired even by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert who "were attending his plays frequently" (vam).

However, with the changing face of the theatre there was a need for new drama. Pantomime and opera were legacies from the Georgian theatre and to them was added melodrama. As the matter of fact, comedies were not very favourable among the Victorians, as George Rowell points out in his *The Victorian Theatre 1792-1914*: "the theatres were too big, the audience's understanding too small" (Rowell 25). And so it was usually limited to two or three acts and did not give sufficient space for the development of the characters or plot. In this regards they reminded farces. The only truly spontaneous form of comedy, Victorian spectators accepted was a burlesque. With the 1737 Licensing Act, burlesques were severely limited because of the exclusion of political matters from the plays. However, when Planche turned his attention to burlesque and joined with Madame Vestris, a manager of The

Olympic Theatre, they succeeded in refining the style and staging of classical burlesque.<sup>11</sup>

According to Rowell, "we can treat the period 1893-1914 as the last chapter in the history of the Victorian theatre" (104). With the leisured classes, theatres introduced matinee performances, unreserved accommodation expended, and so it encouraged the growth of the long run. The prestige of the theatre of the time depended on its general appeal (104).

## **2.2. The Actor Managers**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, managers of the theatres were usually the main characters in the plays and they were often famous stars who attracted theatre-goers. Henry Irving ran The Lyceum Theatre and occupied London stage for 25 years. He was actually the first actor to be awarded a knighthood. He helped to increase the status of theatre, and under his influence acting became for the first time a respectable profession. Herbert Beerbohm Tree managed The Haymarket Theatre, and in 1904 he founded The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He produced plays not only by Oscar Wilde but also by Ibsen at a time when Ibsen's work was very unfashionable, and considered morally deranged. In 1891 George Alexander took over The St James's Theatre, and offered

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<sup>11</sup> See also Rowell 67

engagement also to Oscar Wilde.<sup>12</sup> With George Alexander and Tree emerged a native drama largely independent of foreign sources. According to Rowell "The English playwright's rising status found legal recognition in the International Copyright Act of 1887 and the American Copyright Act of 1890, which put an end to the shameless theatrical piracy from which Gilbert and Sullivan in particular had suffered severely. It was on this statutory protection that the prosperity of playwrights famous and less famous was now established" (Rowell pp.107-108).

Neither woman actor managers were unusual- Marie Bancroft as one of the most successful woman actor-manager, introduced a new kind of drama – a drawing room drama, to London stage. She managed The Haymarket Theatre and her plays attracted a very middle class audience. Other woman actor-managers included Eliza Vestris – a manager of The Olympic Theatre, or Emma Cons who ran The Victoria Coffee Music Hall, and her niece Lilian Baylis took over The Old Vic. Turning it into a quasi-national theatre, she became the most influential woman manager in 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The most popular performances among these actor managers were Shakespeare's plays. As the stage performance and effects were more important than the texts, they were often cut short to make place for massive sets. Later on, the spectacular drama was replaced by so called 'cup and saucer

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<sup>12</sup> See also Victorian and Alber museum

drama' and drawing drama, which dealt with everyday problems.<sup>13</sup> These 'problem plays' developed into social dramas which is the main area of Oscar Wilde's work, and focus of our thesis. Among the favourite topics of society plays belonged 'woman with past' - a fallen women whose past improper behaviour disqualified her from any respectable position. A compromising document, usually a love letter or stolen secret, were common traces of such plays. The plays often draw from French drama especially by playwrights like Scribe or Sardou.

Wilde combined the 'strong' drama taken by Grundy from the French with High society setting and with his polished dialogues. In fact, Wilde needed a medium for his epigrams, and it is mainly for the witty dialogues that his plays are still popular.<sup>14</sup> George Alexander at The St James's Theatre specialized in society drama. By 1891, Wilde has already written two unsuccessful plays - *Vera* and *The Duchess of Padua*, and *Salome*, which was banned and censored. After this, Wilde decided to turn to comedy, and offered his first society play to Alexander. As Alexander was an experienced manager, he suggested exhausted revisions and rehearsals of the play. In this regard he had a great impact upon the final form of the play. After the success of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, the two began meticulous preparations and revisions of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Alexander asked Wilde to shorten the play and to remove some parts,

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<sup>13</sup> See also Victoria and Albert Museum, *19<sup>th</sup> century Theatre*

<sup>14</sup> See also Rowell pp.

and even one of the characters. The two other plays - *A Woman of No Importance* and *An Ideal Husband* were premiered at The Haymarket Theatre.

Melodramas traditionally focused around the themes of sexuality and morality. According to Markwart "censorship played a large role in defining morality itself, and which topics were responsible to discuss on stage" (Esdail 38). What is more, censorship itself in great part influenced the way playwrights wrote, which I will demonstrate later in my analysis on the example of Wilde's writing of society plays. The censorship either encouraged the playwrights to deal with taboo themes conventionally, or avoid them altogether. Wilde's plays were written in the time of the transition of censorship, and the struggle of popular melodrama to renew itself. Wilde heavily borrows from melodramatic tradition as to the form, general plot, and characters. Although the plays closely remind domestic drama or problem plays, they are unusual in the way they subvert the conventional morality. In spite of the fact that Wilde's society comedies had no official problems with the censorship, I want to penetrate deeper into the problem of self-censorship of his plays. The self-censorship greatly depends on the social and political conditions the author lives in, as well as on his own life experiences. Therefore, it is crucial to provide the reader with the more or less general biographical information.

### **3. Life and Work of Oscar Wilde**

*"Cherchez la femme!" (Alexander Dumas fils)*

In the previous chapters I dealt with the social, political, and cultural background which undoubtedly, shaped the personality of Oscar Wilde and had a great impact on his work. This chapter provides the reader with Wilde's personal experiences and influences from his early childhood, through his studies, beginnings of his career, to his trial and condemnation. These are all vital information for the context of his plays.

Oscar Wilde was born and lived in the second half of the Victorian era, which brought about contradictory and constantly changing social conditions. He was formed by the Victorian moralism, hypocrisy, by the industrial surrounding and materialistic views and greatly influenced by its cultural and aesthetic values. Since 1854, his character was shaped mainly by his mother – prominent writer and nationalist - Jane Francesca Agnes née Elgee (or Speranza), after whom Oscar inherited his eccentricity, Irishness and more effeminate attitude to life. In *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*, Peter Ackroyd draws a vivid picture of Wilde's childhood and the enormous influence of his mother, as she was treating him as a girl during his early childhood, and dressing him in girls' clothes. That is why lots of authors accuse her of causing Wilde's 'homosexuality'. However, she also stirred up a real passion for beauty and philosophical thinking in him, which is reflected everywhere in his later life and work. Her devotion for literature, art, and culture altogether with the appreciation of wit, left deep imprint on Oscar Wilde's life. What is more, her

influential friends from the intelligence and literary circles were very helpful connections for Wilde in his later life. She established a literary salon devoted to intellectual and artistic conversations, and often invited intellectuals, artists, and respected doctors to their house.<sup>15</sup> So from the early childhood, Wilde was exposed to witty conversations and intellectual debates. Wilde's father - Sir William Robert Wills - was a prominent ear and eye surgeon. Wilde highly respected his father, however it seems that the relationship with his father wasn't too close.

Wilde was given advantage of superior education. After his initial years of schooling at home, he entered exclusive Portora Royal School, where his long-lasting interest for ancient Greece and Aestheticism began. After that, he attended The Trinity College in Dublin, where he continued with his study of classic Greek literature. Then he went on to study the classics at The Magdalen College. It was here that he came under the influence of writer and critic Walter Pater and helped to found the Aesthetic Movement. Wilde excelled in his studies, winning many prizes and awards including Oxford's Newdigate Prize for his poem *Ravenna*.

While at The Magdalen College, Wilde became particularly well known for his role in the Aesthetic and Decadent movements. Wilde was deeply impressed by the English writers John Ruskin and Walter Pater, who argued for the central

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<sup>15</sup> See also Peter Acroyd, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*

importance of art in life. He began wearing his hair long, began decorating his rooms with peacock feathers, lilies, sunflowers, blue china and other objects of art. Wilde's mode of dress also came under attack by critics such as Higginson, who wrote in his paper *Unmanly Manhood*, of his general concern that Wilde's effeminacy would influence the behaviour of men and women, arguing that his poetry "eclipses masculine ideals [..that..] under such influence men would become effeminate dandies" (Esdail, 20). He also scrutinised the links between Oscar Wilde's writing, personal image and homosexuality, calling his work and lifestyle 'Immoral'.

In 1879, Wilde started to teach Aesthetic values in London. The Aesthetic movement, represented by the school of William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, had a permanent influence on English decorative art. As the leading aesthete in Britain, Wilde became one of the most prominent personalities of his day. Though he was sometimes ridiculed for them, his paradoxes and witty sayings were quoted on all sides. During his tour of the United States and Canada he visited New York, Chicago, Boston, Fort Wayne (Indiana), Omaha (Nebraska), Philadelphia, and Washington, and he had the opportunity to meet some famous personalities from artistic and intellectual circles e.g. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes or Walt Whitman. Americans

seemed to be attracted by Wilde's unconventional personality and lifestyle. He also had audiences with Lincoln's son, Robert, and Jefferson Davis.<sup>16</sup>

After the tour, Wilde spent three months in Paris where he met other important celebrities, this time from the European intelligence - Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, André Gide, Edgar Degas, Pissarro and others. During his stay in New York, Wilde wrote his play – *Vera*, however, it was not very successful and he set up for another tour of Britain and Ireland. In 1884, he married Constance Lloyd, a wealthy daughter of an English barrister, and they settled and had two children - Cyril and Vyvyan. During this time Wilde lived a respected domestic life, wrote book reviews for newspapers and magazines, and in 1887 he became an editor of *The Woman's World*. However, he left this position two years later to set a career as a playwright. From 1888 on, Wilde proved as a prolific author, during this seven-year period he created nearly all of his most greatest literary works. He wrote *Poems* and published *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, a collection of children's stories. Preceding his successful series of society plays, Wilde wrote his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and stories: *Intentions, Lord Arthur Savil's Crime and Other stories, A House of Pomegranates*. Between 1891 and 1892, he produced his

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<sup>16</sup> See also Victoria and Albert Museum, *Style Guide: Aestheticism*, and *Aestheticism -The Cult of Beauty*

well-known plays - *Salome*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, and an essay *The Soul of Man under Socialism*. During this period, Wilde enjoyed commercial success and acceptance from the British aristocracy and launched his career as a playwright.

### **3.1. Oscar Wilde and Theatre**

*"One's true character is what one wishes to be, more than what one is"*  
(a line in early autograph manuscript of *An Ideal Husband*, cancelled in the process of revision).

A period preceding his success as a playwright is connected to journalism. As a journalist, Wilde wrote theatre reviews and general criticism of trends in the theatre. His *The Soul of Man under Socialism* addresses the theatre, censorship, and the public's role in censoring drama, and serves as a great contribution to discourse around censorship in the theatre.

In the beginning, Wilde's theatrical ambitions were much more about extravagant appearance, long hair, dressing in velvet and wandering down the London streets with a flower in his hand. His extravagant mode of dressing and posing in public was parodied in W.S Gilbert's play *Patience*. Kerry Powell in his *Acting Wilde* explicitly theorizes about the true relationship and connection of Wilde with Gilbert and Sullivan, suggesting that his appearance on the performance was just a well-prepared side-show. He is dealing with the idea of originality and authenticity of the persona of Oscar Wilde - who or what invented him? - and with his visitation of America, joined to giving lectures he

considers a great marketing – making Wilde only a marionette in the hands of managers.<sup>17</sup> But later on, Wilde developed in his plays a philosophy of revolutionary ideas. Wilde was definitively influenced by the Victorian melodramatic theatre. It was not so much revolutionary in its form or performance but in the fact that Wilde was living according to this philosophy and tried to apply his ideas everywhere and for every cost. As Kerry Powell aptly remarks: “What began as the high-spirited and largely unreflective ‘posing’ of a young aesthete in the early 1880s would turn deadly serious in time as Wilde grappled with the anxieties and difficulties of forming a new performative interpretation of life” (Powell, *Acting Wilde* 4). His exuberant posing in the time gradually matured and resulted in tactical reflection on social performance. In the time when feminist political action was informed by journals, books, and pamphlets, Oscar Wilde was developing the topic of genders and sexuality in his works, trying to disturb the settled meanings of concepts of femininity and masculinity. His *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, followed by his other society plays, and started off a series of radical views that “drove a militant and still widely misunderstood women’s movement” (Powell, *Acting Wilde* 4). Through his work and life he tried to establish the concept of man and woman, as well as to set up a field of tension which Wilde’s own attempts at self-fashioning took place. Wilde presented the idea that what is performed is truer than the real world. But due to the Victorian fear of this attitude to

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<sup>17</sup> See also Powell, *Acting Wilde* pp.14-21

power of the theatricality, Wilde's performative options were somehow limited by the contextual conditions. They were shaped by disputes about genders, sexual identity and simultaneously they were blurred or distorted in our retrospective view today.<sup>18</sup>

As Powell points out, in his *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s*: "Today the English theatre of the 1890s has been reduced to the plays of Wilde, Shaw, the influence of Ibsen and certain works by Pinero and Jones" (Powell, *Theatre of 1890s* 3). In the time when writing plays and acting started to become a profitable business, a long-running play could earn the author a very considerable sum of money. In fact, Wilde turned to writing drama partly due to the financial reasons. The conditions were appropriate for someone like Wilde who aspired to be the 'English Ibsen'. Wilde's theatrical ambitions began as a collaborative enterprise which he wanted to conceal because Victorian attitude towards plagiarism was very strict and unyielding. In an interview for *The St. James Gazette* in 1895, Wilde said that his works 'were dominated by himself and that no dramatist of the nineteenth century had influenced him even in the smallest degree'.<sup>19</sup> But as Powell states "...the fact is that without the spur of influence he could scarcely write a play at all" (Powell, *Theatre of 1890s* 4). Wilde proposed the idea of life as a continuum of performance, but not in the Shakespearean sense "All the world is a stage", but Wilde entirely

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<sup>18</sup> See also Powell, *The Theatre of the 1890s* pp. 1-13

<sup>19</sup> See also Powell, *The Theatre of the 1890s* 6

believed in the power of the actor and shaping the reality through the performance.

Actually, we can trace two faces of Oscar Wilde – his early plays gained popularity among social-purity feminists, who on the other hand were responsible for the enactment of a law on gross indecency, which put a great risk to his career. In the time of Wilde's greatest success as a playwright, he was arrested on charges of the gross indecency. In the following chapter I deal explicitly with his arrest, trials and the impact of his notoriety on the banning or censoring of his plays.

### **3.2. The Trial**

Wilde's personality has always been connected to his extravagant appearance and provocative behaviour. His sexual orientation became a popular topic of discussions and various analyses, considering him homosexual, bisexual or pederastic. It is said, that Wilde himself felt to belong to the Greek pederastic tradition, using the term Socratic. Pederasty has existed as a variety of customs within different cultures. Athenian pederasty dominated the 6<sup>th</sup>-century Greece. Although the marriages in ancient Greece between men and women were age structured, with men in their 30s commonly taking wives in their early teens, it was considered normal to be attracted by the beauty of a young boy. This bond between an adolescent boy and an adult man was an essential element in the Greek culture. The only question was how to express their desire, while actual copulation with young boys was considered shameful,

other aspects such as admiration of the lover's specific virtues, were considered beneficial.<sup>20</sup> Wilde was attracted to this tradition from his early studies of Greek classics and by other proponents of this philosophy he met later in his life. Mahaffy, Walter Pater, Robert Baldwin Ross and Alfred Douglas were key persons in forming Wilde's sexual identity.<sup>21</sup>

In this point I don't want to go further analysing Wilde's connection with so called Uranians as this topic is too explicit and it is not my aim to deal with Oscar Wilde's sexuality. However, Wilde's connections and sexual practices that were evident in his later life are important for the explanation and analysis of his trials, as well as his works. Wilde's frequent attendance of brothels, homosexual bars and sexual acts with youths, were proved and used against him in the trials with Queensberry. Wilde's first celebration of the romantic love between men and boys can be found in *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* (1889), in which he propounds a theory that Shakespeare's sonnets were written out of the poet's love of Elizabethan boy actor Willie Hughes.

Just a year after his wedding with Constance, Wilde met 17-year-old Robert Baldwin Ross, who had a great long-lasting influence on him. Later on Wilde started to meet Uranian poets and homosexual reformers. He was introduced to Lord Alfred Douglas in 1891, and lived with him openly which

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<sup>20</sup> See also: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *Hedonism*

<sup>21</sup> See also Victorianweb, *Oscar Wilde – Biographical Materials*

drew attention, but more importantly angered Douglas's father Marquess of Queensberry who started a trial against Wilde.

John Douglas was not a very popular person among the nobility because of his brutality, atheism, and association with boxing world. He was infamous for his divorces, despised by his children and his reputation among the Victorians was that of a 'vain and excitable thug'. Linda Stratmann in her *The Marquess of Queensberry: Wilde's Nemesis* writes that "he was abusive in every sense of the word. When he wrote publicly in his violent sprawling handwriting, of the Prime Minister as 'the Christian whoremonger and hypocrite Gladstone', or of Gladstone's successor, the Earl of Rosebery, as an 'under bred disgusting Jew pimp', he made himself repulsive to everyone except his toadies" (Stratmann). However, in 1872, Queensberry became a representative peer in House of Lords, and in 1881 he was selected president of the British Secular Union. Under his presidency he disrupted Alfred Tennyson's performance *The Promise of May* because it depicted a character of a villainous atheist. Queensberry's older son Francis is said to have homosexual relationship with Earl of Rosebery, and he committed suicide by shooting himself through the mouth. Queensberry was convinced that his sons were perverted by older homosexuals. He set out to "rescue his third son from the clutches of Oscar Wilde" (Stratmann). Queensberry wanted to end the relationship of his son with Wilde, and so he confronted Oscar Wilde several times, but Wilde successfully mollified him each time. There are rumours that once he visited Wilde at home and shouted obscenities, asking about Wilde's divorce. It is said that Wilde said calmly to his manservant that "Queensberry was the most infamous brute in

London and he was not to be shown into the house ever again" (qtd. in Stratmann). Another attempt of provocation came on the opening night of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, when Queensberry planned to throw a bouquet of turnips on Wilde and so insult and socially embarrass him. But Wilde was tipped off and Queensberry wasn't allowed to enter the theatre. Wilde took legal advice against him but, nobody wanted to give evidence against Queensberry, and hence the case was dropped.

The actual case and trials of Oscar Wilde started with the note that Queensberry left in the Wilde's club – "To Oscar Wilde, posing as a sodomite" (qtd.in Powell 130). The word 'sodomite' was deliberately misspelled as he was not spoken among Christians or be named in the press or courtrooms. It was an extreme provocation from Queensberry, and Wilde responded by suing for criminal libel. In the ensuing publicity storm, Queensberry "was combative and courageous as very nervous people sometimes are", wrote Wilde's friend Frank Harris. He was "the sort of man who, just because he was afraid of a bull and had pictured the dreadful wound it could give, would therefore seize it by the horns" (Stratmann).

Wilde's trials are not accidentally called 'the greatest drama of his life'. From the beginning of the case, the legal dispute captivated English people, not just literary world, and it was actually performed like a show. Wilde vs Queensberry case has been widely analysed since its beginning and are still curious topic for many authors of biographies, social analysts or literary critics. For many years these trials were analysed by many, and considered to be not about sex transgressions but labelled as 'Foucauldian innovations of personal

and group identity' (123). A Lot of authors assumed, that Wilde's case was instrumental to the formation of a homosexual identity, sometimes even claiming that before this trial there was no fixed notion of homosexuality. The reason for these misunderstandings was that in this period, press, police, and courts maintained a convention of silence about sexual topics, and so it was almost impossible to find any evidence. As Powell explains "Not just Wilde's, but any homosexual case at the time, would have been, and was, heavily censored in journalistic accounts" (125), and so it is highly improbable that "the lack of specific reference to sexual acts in newspaper accounts of Wilde's trials could have been responsible to any significant degree, in itself, for the formation of a new, male homosexual identity that did not depend for its existence upon particular sexual acts" (125). From the various sources dealing with Victorian sexuality we can say that knowledge of homosexuality was widespread but tacit. A long lost transcription of the first trial disproves common misunderstanding of conception and reason of Wilde's trials. On the basis of the transcription we can stand the view, that Wilde's trails were clearly sexual trails. It demonstrates that Wilde was actually accused of having engaged in specific sexual acts.

The note written by Queensberry was an extreme provocation, plotted well in advance, as now his task was to prove that his accusation was true and Wilde was indeed posing as a sodomite. Queensberry's greatest weapon to support his accusation was a list of young men who actually came to testify against Wilde, and who were alleged to commit sexual acts with him.

The first trial of Oscar Wilde began on 3rd April 1895. While Wilde was chatting with his attorney, a group of young men gathered by Queensberry, waited in another room, to substantiate his charge. Suing Queensberry in this respect proved fatal for Wilde, starting of a theatre of accusations, repudiations and testimonies against Wilde. Among the testimonies, that were omitted from the earlier accounts of the trial were ones of Alfred Wood, Edward Shelley or testimonies of the staff of Savoy Hotel. Charles Parker's testimony will serve as an example of proving Wilde's sexual behaviour:

Parker: (Wilde) committed the act of sodomy upon me... I was asked by Wilde to imagine that I was a woman and that he was my lover. I had to keep up this illusion. I used to sit on his knees and he used to play with my privates as a man might amuse himself with a girl. (qtd. in Powell 151)

Wilde and Alfred Taylor faced 25 charges of gross indecencies, or conspiracy to commit gross indecencies. Although Wilde was not prosecuted for sodomy, it was obvious that by the end of the trial he might have been. Wilde's arrogance ceased with the fourth day of the trial and he started to answer the questions quietly, however, denying all allegations of indecent behaviour. The most famous moment of his trial was his explicit answer to the question what is the meaning of the phrase from Lord Alfred Douglas's poem "the Love that dare not speak its name":

Wilde: "The love that dare not speak its name" in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis

of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo, and those two letters of mine, such as they are. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as the 'Love that dare not speak its name', and on account of it I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an elder and a younger man, when the elder man has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope and glamour of life before him. That it should be so the world does not understand. The world mocks it and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it. (qtd.in Powell 157-158)

The trial of Oscar Wilde, as seen nowadays can be perceived as a dramatic event, although not unique of that time. It turned out that the term gross indecency had everything to do with sexual behaviour. Giving his consent to a not-guilty verdict for Queensberry in the libel trial, Wilde put an end to the revealing of further prurient details about his sexual activity. But there was already too much evidence of this kind, and so he was convicted of gross indecency and sentenced to two years of hard labour on 25th May 1895. The trial stirred up nearly hysteria among the public and in the press, and caused harsh attitude towards homosexuality. However, it also caused that despite

their early success, *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* were cancelled, and Wilde was not listed as an author of his other works.

### **3.3. Texts in the Trials of Wilde**

No matter how important role sexuality played in the life and trials of Oscar Wilde, the focus of our thesis is textuality, and particularly dramatical texts written by Wilde. The truth is, that textuality played an important part of the proceedings – pointing out that through texts (novels, letters, poems etc...) Wilde represented his association with sodomy and gross indecency. Wilde's texts served as an evidence for his 'uncommon' sexual feelings and acts. Dealing meticulously with Wilde's trials, Montgomery Hyde tries to reveal the linkage of sex, texts, and performance in the actual trials that are obscured in the heavily censored accounts.

In 25 pages of uncensored transcript, defence attorney Edward Carson attempts to justify Queensberry's libel of Wilde by examining passages from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. His motive was to represent Wilde's work as having 'a sodomical tendency' and in this respect Wilde was performing sodomy. Textuality remained a vital issue from the beginning to the end. What Carson wanted to demonstrate was that while Wilde was posing as a sodomite because of his self-representation in so-called sodomitic works, such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, his posing was compounded by other sodomitic texts written by other authors (e.g. Karl Huysman's *A Rebours*). That means that his texts can

influence other people in wrong way. In fact, the trials were obsessed with texts, reinventing Wilde as a sexual actor of sodomitic novels and indecent correspondence, of criminal texts he had written. In the words of Kerry Powell: "Trapped by texts, this courtroom incarnation of Oscar Wilde 'posing as a sodomite' also became a text. He became, in his own person and against his will, the dramatic enactment of the sexually specific meaning and puritanical morality of gross indecency" (159).

After the trial, some of Wilde's plays were banned for a time or his name was removed from them. Ostensibly, Wilde's plays were relatively discreet and acceptable for a time, and it was only for his notoriety that the banning and censoring began. But according to some critics, it was Wilde's knowledge of the loopholes and limits of the censorship that enabled him to make his plays to be performed and published even if they were on the edge of being censored. The next chapter deals with the notion of censorship in generally and in connection with Wilde's plays.

#### 4. Censorship

*"Drama is a powerful means of transmitting ideas, and one that has been censored from nearly the first organized performances in the Greek Golden Age around 500 B.C.E." (Sova B Down, Banned Plays).*

Drama has always been used as a tool for propaganda in changing social, political and religious power structures. These structures have had power to either eliminate or modify plays that do not correspond with their philosophies. There are too many works that were suppressed and consequently forgotten thanks to this political power. Sova B. Down in her *Banned Plays* presents a list of 125 plays that were censored or banned in diverse time periods and she discusses various reasons for censoring the plays.

Censoring of the plays (as well as books or films) remains an actual practice even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although the office government censors do not exist in England anymore. One of the examples can be a 2002 performance of *Paradise* by Glyn O'Mally, which was cancelled in Cincinnati Playhouse. It was dealing with the impact of the war on Israeli and Palestinian youth and was cancelled because of the character that was based on the real person - an 18-year-old girl who blew herself up in Jerusalem killing 3 people. (Down 3)

Reasons for censoring or banning the plays were during the time various, from sexual activities performed on stage or portraying 'immoral conduct', usage of obscene or blasphemous language, discussion of taboo topics like homosexuality, adultery or violence to religious and political reasons. As Down points out "For centuries, plays, and the reasons that groups seek to challenge,

suppress or ban them, have served as important indicators of the concerns, desires, passions and obsessions of a society” (Down, xii). What appears on stage and what raises objections, often has less to do with merit than with present taste, as changes in political regimes, modified social values, different fashions in religious worship, and greater or lesser sexual permissiveness may condemn a play or playwright that were formerly lauded - or elevate those formerly viewed as politically, religiously, socially or morally offensive (Down, xii). *Lysistrata* written by Aristophanes in 411 BC is a perfect example of changing views and reasons for censorship during the time. First, it was banned for rising political inflammation, then because of the obscenity and sexual suggestions and finally in 1942, it was condemned by Nazist for being politically improper as it could have encouraged Greek nationalism in the time of occupation. While for Nazis and Greeks the sexual content of the play wasn't disturbing, for 1910 and 1934 English censors it was “far too gross for English stage” (xiii). In her *Banned Plays* Down gives us an account of famous banned or censored plays during the history and sometimes even more interesting reasons for their censorship. We can read that plays such as *The Venetian Night* (1912), *Maya* (1924) or *Kismet* (1910) were banned for their sexual activity which occurred only in the minds of audience. *Hamlet* (1600), *Victor, or the Children Take Over* (1964) were charged of obscene and blasphemous language. *Saved* (1963) was banned because it displayed violence and *The Merchant of Venice* (1600) was censored for violating standards of sexual and national purity. *Trip to Calais*, *The President is Dead* and *Island of Saint Marquerite* were censored for political reasons. (xii-xiii)

#### 4.1. Censorship of Wilde's Works

In this point of my thesis, I want to connect the theoretical information about Victorian background and Wilde's personal experiences with the practices of censorship and self-censorship that was applied to Wilde's society comedies. After the brief introduction to the problem of censorship, I have sketched in the previous chapter, I want to give examples of the works by Wilde that were officially censored and then I would like to move to the practical analyses of the plays and their particular censorship.

According to Sova B. Down Oscar Wilde was relatively discreet and for a time his literary flamboyance was acceptable. His *Importance of Being Earnest* was banned primarily because of the author's notoriety after the trial, although before the trial it proved to be a very successful play. However, in her list of censored plays figures also other Wilde's plays, such as *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *An Ideal Husband* and *Salome*.

Wilde's *Salome* is particularly famous case of censorship. The play was written in French in 1892, and it was banned during the rehearsals with Sarah Bernhardt. The official reason of English Theatrical censor was its "presentation of Biblical characters on stage" (Downey 12). But privately the censor Edward Pigott wrote to a friend about his real motivations:

"I must send you, for your *private* edification and amusement, this MS. of a 1 act piece ... written by Oscar Wilde! It is a miracle of

impudence ... [Salome's] love turns to fury because John will not let her kiss him *in the mouth* – and in the last scene, where she brings in his head—if you please—on a ‘charger’—*she does* kiss his mouth, in a paroxysm of sexual despair. The piece is written in French—half Biblical, half pornographic—by Oscar Wilde himself. Imagine the average British public’s reception of it.” (qtd. in Downey 13)

Actually, *Salome* was first performed in France in 1896 and premiered only privately in 1905 for the first time in England. Until 1931, *Salome* was not performed publicly in England. With the acting style of Sarah Bernhardt and the state of dramatic censorship in the 1890s *Salome* can be viewed as the product of extra literary influence. The play has been called Wilde’s second greatest achievement in drama and the one unquestionable masterpiece of English decadence. It is quite interesting that in the time when it was forbidden to perform biblical drama in English, Wilde had submitted for licencing a half biblical and half pornographic play. But Wilde knew the loophole that was a double standard for plays written in English and French (Powell 37). The other reason for writing *Salome* in French was that he wanted Sarah Bernhardt to star it, but she did not speak English. (37)

Yet another example of censoring Wilde's work is his *Picture of Dorian Gray*. British reviewers condemned the novel for its immorality, vulgarity and its unclean and poisonous content, even after the deletion of 'objectionable' texts. Deleted, censored and altered was material concerning homoerotic nature, as

for example the Hallward's explanation of his feelings in the original version goes: „ It is quite true I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man should ever give to a friend. Somehow I have never loved a woman" (Wilde, *Picture of Dorian Gray* 54). This was changed before the first appearance in *The Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in June 1890: "From the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me." (qtd. in Flood, *Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray Published*) Also the editor J. M. Stoddart removed references to Gray's female lovers and mistresses: „Is Sybil Vane your mistress?" was changed to „What are your relations with Sybil Vane?" (Flood). Stoddart also deleted passages that 'smacked of decadence'. The novel was from the beginning labelled as, "a tale spawned from the leprous literature of the French Decadents – a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction" (Flood). And so, Wilde was forced to revise the novel still further before it was first published in 1891. It was only in 2011, that the first uncensored version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published.

Censorship dominated the English Theatre to such a degree that it played a significant role in shaping the nature of the theatre itself, as well as the sensibilities of the public, and to some extent their notion of national identity. As Esdail claims "Censorship played a large role in defining morality itself, and which topics were respectable to discuss on the stage. Furthermore the existence of censorship in itself did much to influence the way playwrights wrote, by encouraging them to deal with taboo themes conventionally or avoid them altogether" (Esdail 38). The meticulous revisions of Wilde's plays are both

the proof and a great example of the fact that Wilde was well aware of the power and the limits of censorship. I want to demonstrate this idea, as well as the impact of the censorship, in the last chapter of my thesis.

## 5. Analysis of Wilde's Society Comedies

I have decided to analyse the three of Wilde's society comedies. I omitted *A Woman of No Importance*, partly because the play deals with similar themes as *Lady Windermere's Fan* and so I would have to repeat the same influences and reasons for self-censorship and partly because the lack of space in my thesis. Wilde's contribution to literature is very diverse, from essays and poems, through fairy tales and tragedies, although he gained his greatest success with his comedies. Even today, he is most famously known for his comedies (and one novel). Paradoxically, Wilde is not generally considered to be a brilliant playwright, instead, he was often accused of plagiarism and his plays of lacking depth and revolving around foolish plots. The success of the plays was thanks to their witty dialogues but mainly to Wilde's popularity. As we could see in the previous chapters, Wilde's outlandish appearance and participation in marketing campaigns were aimed at attracting the masses and gaining popularity. In this regard, I do not want to analyse the artistic value of Wilde's works, but rather to point out the external forces that made his plays popular and what Wilde had to do to make his plays popular.

As a playwright who lived and wrote in the Victorian period, Wilde was influenced by melodramatic theatre and various Victorian sources, from which he clearly draws upon in his society comedies. Melodrama was the most popular dramatic form throughout the Victorian period, but was undoubtedly a thing of past by 1980s when Wilde's society comedies were performed. Not just in his plays but throughout whole Wilde's work, the question of influence is

one that has always drawn attention. Although he has often been criticized and accused of plagiarism, his society plays are still considered to be an important precursor to modernist literature. According to Wilde's own formula 'I love acting – it is much more real than life', Wilde's own reality was a mode of performance. Wilde's focus was on whether one could become an author of his own script. This question he was struggling to answer from the beginning of his career to the end.<sup>22</sup>

After his first unsuccessful plays *Vera* and *The Duchess of Padua*, Wilde turned once again, mainly for financial reasons, to drama. In fact, *Vera* was withdrawn from the production in London in 1881 "deemed politically too sensitive in the period following the assassination of Czar Alexander II" (Powell, *The Theatre* 10). Wilde started the string of successful society comedies in 1892 with the premiere of *Lady Windermere's Fan*. As Rowell states "Wilde wanted a medium for his epigrams, and lazily chose the model most readily to hand" (Rowell 110), but the society comedies perfectly suited his witty dialogues and the plays became immediately popular with the audience.

Wilde's society comedies borrow from the melodramatic tradition, but they are simultaneously a part of theatrical experimentation in psychological realism. Alongside with Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero, Wilde and especially his plays are part of the Theatrical reform, as they challenged the Censor and society as a whole.

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<sup>22</sup> See also Powell, *Acting Wilde*, pp. 169-174

### 5.1. Lady Windermere's Fan

*"We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."*

*(Lord Darlington)*

*Lady Windermere's Fan*, subtitled *A Play about a Good Woman*, premiered in February 1892 at The St. James's Theatre, and it is Wilde's first of his society comedies. After unsuccessful tragedies, starting with *Vera* and *The Duchess of Padua* and censored *Salome*, *Lady Windermere's Fan* was an immediate success. This four-act play was made into numerous film and musical adaptations. When it was first performed in 1892 it was criticized of its reminiscence of *The Idler* by C. Haddon Chambers. However, there were many other plays or influences connected to this work – *The School for Scandal* or *Francillon* by Dumas fils. The fact is that the concealment motifs with the usage of stage properties like gloves, fans, or bouquets were commonly used by playwrights of the time. But the striking resemblance of the play was with Sydney Grundy's *The Glass of Fashion* (1883). These two plays run parallel not only in detail of the scene. Grundy actually accused Wilde of plagiarism but his charge was buried deep. The thing is, that both plays belong to a growing number of plays that were focusing on the topic of vagrant mother and abandoned daughter. But as it is vital for Wilde's work, in the last act this precedent of plays dealing with undutiful mother and abandoned child, the theme swerves. Wilde said that "The fourth act, is to me the psychological act,

the act that is newest, most true" (qtd. in Powell 55). This is what makes Wilde's style his own, although his works resembles other plays, borrow from other authors and works. His last act always upset everything by repudiating the categorical assumptions about the right and wrong, sin and punishment.

Very broadly said, *Lady Windermere's Fan* is satirizing the morals of the Victorian society especially marriage, as majority of Wilde's works do. The story centres around a fallen woman who abandoned her husband and child but came back to meet her daughter after many years. The play ironically reflects the old-fashioned domestic comedies in which a dandy or poet nearly seduces the heroine from the strong silent husband whom she must learn to appreciate and love again.

The play opens with Lady Windermere preparing for her 21st birthday ball. The first scene is in the morning room, where Lady Windermere receives a visit from her friend Lord Darlington. Their dialogue revolves around Lady's Puritan nature, and about her being upset over compliment he continues to pay to her.

LADY WINDERMERE. Well, you kept paying me elaborate compliments the whole evening.

LORD DARLINGTON. [Smiling.] Ah, nowadays we are all of us so hard up, that the only pleasant things to pay *are* compliments. They're the only things we *can* pay.

LADY WINDERMERE. [Shaking her head.] No, I am talking very seriously. You mustn't laugh, I am quite serious. I don't like

compliments, and I don't see why a man should think he is pleasing a woman enormously when he says to her a whole heap of things that he doesn't mean.

LORD DARLINGTON. Ah, but I did mean them. [Takes tea which she offers him.]

LADY WINDERMERE. [Gravely.] I hope not. I should be sorry to have to quarrel with you, Lord Darlington. I like you very much, you know that. But I shouldn't like you at all if I thought you were what most other men are. Believe me, you are better than most other men, and I sometimes think you pretend to be worse.

LORD DARLINGTON. We all have our little vanities, Lady Windermere.  
(Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*)

Lord Darlington stands here for the dandy, and also for the male intruder who serves as a critic of society. Here we have to, for the purpose of further analysis, mention Wilde's connection with women's movement. As an editor of *The Woman's World* that focused on the women's suffrage, education, employment, and range of social issues, Wilde had to deal with these topics from women's perspective. The articles revolved around the feminist agenda of the morality which later became central in Wilde's own comedies. Wilde's years as an editor were marked not only by sympathy for women's aspirations, but also for the rigidly moral framework in which they were often expressed. In a review from 1889, Wilde himself expressed the view that society "should empower women politically, because to do so would bring about the

moralization of the corrupt, male-dominated world of politics” (qtd. in Powell 52). However, his enthusiastic endorsement of women's moral influence in the public disappeared as soon as his editorship ended. In fact, his society comedies are built on reversals and modifications of the feminist politics of purity and, as I want to show further in my thesis, the plays were re-written severely times. In his society plays, the respect for women and Feminism underwent a fundamental change. Instead of advocating feminist agenda, Wilde’s texts involve women, and especially feminist women, who are a disruptive element. In fact, the first drafts of the play began as crudely exaggerated attacks on the contemporary Feminism but his laborious revisions of the plays reduced their hostility. *Lady Windermere's Fan* was also drafted and redrafted to refine its adversarial focus on feminist demands for a reconfiguration of gender. Kerry Powell in his *Acting Wilde* analyses these first drafts as he got access to a holograph manuscript, and I want to use his analysis of it to compare it with the final version of the play and the resulting changes in the tone and theme prevailing in the play. In his chapter on *Rewriting Lady Windermere's Fan*, Powell states that “in the earliest known version of the play the plot organizes itself quickly around the ideas associated with purity feminism after a wobbly opening scene in which Wilde is clearly trying to find his way” (Powell 54). This first manuscript opens with a slanging and crudely flirtatious Lord Darlington in conversation with Lady Windermere, whose outwardly rigorous virtue, Wilde implies, is only skin-deep. Using a language markedly more self-righteous than she employs in later versions of the play, Lady Windermere says to Lord Darlington on the subject of women’s

purity: „I think a woman who has done anything wrong brings a taint wherever she goes. And if she really repents she will never want to go into society again” (qtd. in Powell 55). Although the rest of the conversation continues very similarly as in the final version, there is a remarkable change in the last line.

LORD DARLINGTON. And men? Do you think that there should be the same laws for men as there are for women?

LADY WINDERMERE. Certainly!

LORD DARLINGTON. I think life too complex a thing to be settled by these hard and fast rules.

LADY WINDERMERE. If we had 'these hard and fast rules,' we should find life much more simple.

LORD DARLINGTON. You allow of no exceptions?

LADY WINDERMERE. None!

LORD DARLINGTON. Ah, what a fascinating Puritan you are, Lady Windermere!

LADY WINDERMERE. The adjective was unnecessary, Lord Darlington.  
(qtd. in Powell 54)

According to Powell, everything about this dialogue, as far as Lady's lines are concerned, matches the tone of Josephine Butler (British feminist and social reformer), except of the last line. In the first draft the last line goes: "...The adjective is *de trop*" (qtd. in Powell 54). This abrupt slip into French is suggestive in the Victorian context of a worldly and less than earnest woman. In Wilde's manuscript entitled *Play*, when Lady Windermere believes that she has discovered her husband has an affair paying a large sums of money to this woman she exclaims: "You go for your *amours* into an expensive market" (qtd.in Powell 55). While in the final draft this line is somehow omitted:

LORD WINDERMERE. Well, dear, has the fan been sent home yet?

[Going R.C. Sees book.] Margaret, you have cut open my bank book. You have no right to do such a thing!

LADY WINDERMERE. You think it wrong that you are found out, don't you?

LORD WINDERMERE. I think it wrong that a wife should spy on her husband.

LADY WINDERMERE. I did not spy on you. I never knew of this woman's existence till half an hour ago. Someone who pitied me was kind enough to tell me what everyone in London knows already - your daily visits to Curzon Street, your mad infatuation, the monstrous sums of money you squander on this infamous woman!

[Crossing L.]

LORD WINDERMERE. Margaret! Don't talk like that of Mrs. Erlynne, you don't know how unjust it is!

LADY WINDERMERE. [Turning to him.] You are very jealous of Mrs. Erlynne's honour. I wish you had been as jealous of mine. (Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays* 16)

All of the expressions that imply that under the puritan mask of Lady Windermere is a sexually knowing woman, were deleted in the final version of the play. The resulting character of Lady Windermere is softer and more sympathetic, on the contrary to the character susceptible to cynism and hypocrisy that was in Wilde's first drawing.

This softening of puritan woman through the process of rewriting the original text, would later become a paradigm in all Wilde's society plays. Further analysis of *Lady Windermere's Fan's* first version, in comparison to the final one shows, that Wilde's first conception of the character has a kind of second-thought which influenced the atmosphere and perception of the whole play. Another line that dropped from the final version was Lady Windermere's description of Mrs Erlynne as "that vile painted woman whose very sight is degradation, whose touch an infamy" (qtd. in Powell 55). All signs of the overheated language disappeared in the final version. Similarly, when Lord Darlington finally declares that he loves her and tells her to go with him, in the first draft Lady Windermere immediately agrees in anger over her supposed

betrayal of her husband exclaiming: "As there is no honour amongst men - let there be no purity among women. Evil for evil, pain for pain, sin for sin! Yes, I shall leave him-and let him know of whom" (qtd. in Powell 56). Instead, in the final draft, shaken by her husband supposed infidelity she becomes vulnerable to Lord Darlington's appeals:

LORD DARLINGTON. Yes, I love you! You are more to me than anything in the whole world. What does your husband give you? Nothing. Whatever is in him he gives to this wretched woman, whom he has thrust into your society, into your home, to shame you before every one. I offer you my life -

LADY WINDERMERE. Lord Darlington!

...

LADY WINDERMERE. [Moving slowly away from him, and looking at him with startled eyes.] I have not the courage.

...

LADY WINDERMERE. I am afraid of being myself. Let me think! Let me wait! My husband may return to me. [Sits down on sofa.]

LORD DARLINGTON. And you would take him back! You are not what I thought you were. You are just the same as every other woman. You would stand anything rather than face the censure of a world, whose praise you would despise. In a week you will be driving with

this woman in the Park. She will be your constant guest - your dearest friend. You would endure anything rather than break with one blow this monstrous tie. You are right. You have no courage; none!

LADY WINDERMERE. Ah, give me time to think. I cannot answer you now. [Passes her hand nervously over her brow.] (Wilde, *The Importance* 30)

Instead of using such an expressive and decisive phrase as in the first draft "As there is no honour amongst men - let there be no purity among women. Evil for evil, pain for pain, sin for sin!..." (qtd.in Powell 56), in the final version Lady Windermere almost without words leave the company of women she was chatting with before, and writes a letter to her husband letting him know that she is leaving him:

LADY WINDERMERE. To stay in this house any longer is impossible. To-night a man who loves me offered me his whole life. I refused it. It was foolish of me. I will offer him mine now. I will give him mine. I will go to him! [Puts on cloak and goes to the door, then turns back. Sits down at table and writes a letter, puts it into an envelope, and leaves it on table.] Arthur has never understood me. When he reads this, he will. He may do as he chooses now with his life. I have done with mine as I think best, as I think right. It is he who has broken the bond of marriage - not I. I only break its bondage. (Wilde, *The Importance* 35)

By smoothing the hard edges of the heroin's character, Wilde succeeded in converting her into a tolerant, but still highly moral woman. In the first version of the play, Lady Windermere's purity feminism is a sham that quickly collapses when tested by life, and she quickly discards her supposed ideals without reflection. While the final version revises this at first hypocritical vengeful woman into a new person who is mistaken but sincere, rattled and clueless. The result is that the heroin of the final version is definitely less cold-blooded and cynical than the original character was.

In all versions of the play, at the end Lady Windermere remains married to her husband, devoted and faithful to him. The drastic revision of the character of Lady Windermere enables Wilde to stay in contact with the feminist and social purity views of gender identity. Nevertheless, it does not change the fact that *The Lady Windermere's Fan*, as well as the other society plays, remains an assault upon the gender ideology of the social purity movement, but the revisions dilute the stridency and melodrama of Wilde's opposition to it.

## **5.2. An Ideal Husband**

Wilde began to write *An Ideal Husband* in 1893. It was first performed in The Haymarket Theatre in 1895 and it continued to be performed also during the Wilde's trials, although his name was publicly taken off the play. The play was published in 1899 without the presentation of Wilde's authorship. There

were many revisions and re-writings of the play, which are the key for my further analysis of the play.

The theme of the play revolves around blackmailing and political corruption, of which Wilde was a part and parcel in the time of writing the play. The story is set in London, and the plot goes on within 24 hours. The play is considered to be one of Wilde's masterpieces, and it is his second most popularly produced play.

The story opens with a dinner party at the Chilton house, where all the main characters are introduced. At the party Mrs Cheveley blackmails Sir Robert Chilton, as she keeps the letter which is an evidence of his corruption in the past. Sir Robert agrees to publicly support Mrs Cheveley's canal scheme to protect himself from being discredited. Sir Robert's wife, Lady Chiltern prides herself to have an 'ideal husband', but she is obviously unaware of her husband's unflattering history. She forces him to retract his promise to Mrs Cheveley. By the end of the second act, Lord Goring discovers a diamond brooch he gave someone a long time ago, and he keeps it. In the second act Lord Goring tries to convince Sir Chiltern to admit his guilt to his wife. Lord Goring tries to persuade Lady Chiltern to be understanding and forgiving, but when Mrs Cheveley informs her about her husband's indiscretions, she is disgusted and does not forgive him. She then writes a letter to Lord Goring asking him for help but the letter, written on a pink paper, could be mistaken for a love note. After receiving the letter Lord Goring meets Mrs Cheveley. As she is waiting for him in his room, Sir Robert believes the two have a love affair, after which Mrs

Cheveley propose Lord Goring to marry her in exchange for the blackmail letter against Sir Chiltern. Lord Goring refuses. Later, when he learns that Mrs Cheveley was looking for the brooch, he can blackmail her by accusing her of the stealing of the brooch. Mrs Cheveley is forced to give him the incriminating letter, but she succeeds in stealing the letter written by Lady Chiltern and wants to use it as an evidence of a love affair between Lord Goring and Lady Chiltern. At the end of the story everything is put in order. Sir Chiltern does not support the canal scheme, Mrs Cheveley's plans to destroy Chiltern's marriage fail as the two reconcile, Lord Goring gets engaged to Mabel (Chiltern's sister) and Sir Chiltern is promoted to a higher position.

The story behind *An Ideal Husband* is also a story of Wilde's life – story of a well-known man who tries to escape from the damage that can end his career. Wilde was blackmailed over his criminal behaviour like Sir Robert Chiltern, and like Lady Chiltern he wrote a compromising letters that ended up in the wrong hands. Wilde's preoccupation with male prostitutes and blackmailers put him into a risk of being charged on the grounds of the newly enacted law. *An Ideal Husband* raises potentially evolutionary questions about gendered identity and socially constructed truth, but it fails to answer these questions. One of the reasons why it fails to answer them is that this play was unusually laboriously rewrote before it was first performed, but also before the first publication which was after Wilde's return from the jail.

As he reworked the play from draft to draft, the central idea of the play took a different way from the first plan script. Lady Chiltern becomes through

the revision less flawed and more idealized Victorian woman. In generally, all characters become less Wildean and more Victorian, and the most Wildean character – Mrs Cheveley with her unconventional ideas unceremoniously disappears by the fourth act of the play. Transtextuality is also an important part of the context of the play with its preoccupation with letters and written documents. Also, this part of the play can be aligned to Wilde's experiences as his own letters were being used against him by blackmailers, in the time he was writing the play.

A series of early manuscripts of the play point out on the personal and philosophical difficulties Wilde was going through during his writing. Once again we want to deal here with the rewriting of the play, comparison of the earlier manuscripts with the final version and with the resulting effect the revision had on the play. In the first conception of the play, in the dialogue of Miss Mabel and Lord Goring, Miss Mable states that she displays little interest in the ideal man, preferring men with interesting flaws:

MABEL CHILTERN. You are always telling me of your bad qualities,  
Lord Goring.

LORD GORING. I have only told you half of them as yet.

MABEL CHILTERN. Is the other half very bad?

LORD GORING. Quite terrible!

MABEL CHILTERN. Do come and tell them to me.

LORD GORING. You will promise not to try and correct me

MABEL CHILTERN. You know perfectly well that I never correct you.  
I love your bad qualities. (qtd. in Powell 55)

This dialogue was variously revised – in the licensing manuscript there was the expression “I worship your bad qualities” (Powell 56). But in the final version the speech is shortened and toned down:

MABEL CHILTERN. You are always telling me of your bad qualities,  
Lord Goring.

LORD GORING. I have only told you half of them as yet, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN. Are the others very bad?

LORD GORING. Quite dreadful! When I think of them at night I go to  
sleep at once.

MABEL CHILTERN. Well, I delight in your bad qualities. I wouldn't  
have you part with one of them. (Wilde, *The Importance* 187)

“Well, I delight in your bad qualities” is still consistent with Wilde's approach, but nevertheless, it is far from loving or worshipping. The point Wilde further wants to develop in the play is, that although women have created the notion of ideal men, really clever women understand the absurdity of it. In the earliest draft Wilde is pointing that women are as fallible as men, and therefore when they demand purity of men they are either blind or hypocritical. In an early manuscript, Sir Robert Chiltern declares: “We all have feet of clay, women

as well as men" (qtd. in Powell 85). According to Powell, "That sentence was altered in revising *An Ideal Husband* to delete any reference at all to women and their own moral failings as being comparable to men's" (85). This is the key difference in the early manuscripts - while in the first drafts the imperfections of men can be excused because women also have their faults, in the later and final version, where this thought is omitted, the play gives rise to a more Victorian time-worn idea about genders.

Moreover, deleted in the final version, Lord Goring admonishes Lady Chiltern that "Nobody is incapable of weak actions - nobody is incapable of wrong one." This strategy to expose "the Victorian fantasy of a pure and perfect womanhood" (85) is omitted in the final draft, as it loses on the importance. Through the rewriting, Lady Chiltern becomes milder and less culpable, and so the first intention, which was to expose a good woman's moral failings in order to discredit her call for a pure and perfect masculinity, disappears. Another notable passage that was deleted in the final version, is one in which Lord Goring abruptly proposes that, under certain condition, Lady Chiltern would be able to betray her husband and make love to himself:

LORD GORING. You think you would be quite incapable of taking a sheet of that nice pink notepaper I see on your vanity (?) table and writing to me, something very romantic, "I love you - I am coming to you!" (qtd. in Powell 86)

On which Lady Chiltern rebukes: "Lord Goring...you make love to your friend's wife" (86) after which Lord Goring is turned out of the house. Later on after Lady Chiltern writes the letter to Lord Goring, she exclaims in remorse: "Each disgraced in the other's eyes - and I the more to blame" (86). Yet in another version of the script she blames herself even more dramatically: „How mad I was to write that letter! An hour afterwards I would have burned the hand that penned it, burned it for shame!" (86)

The deletion of these lines suggests, that Wilde started to doubt the gender dramatization. In the licensing typescript from January 1895, Goring's reaction to the note from Lady Chiltern is more moderate: "Upon my word, I'll give her a good lecture, make her stand by her husband, and send her home" (87). In this version there is no trace of invitation to adultery as it was in the earlier one. Wilde also revised the play before its first publication, after his release from prison. Wilde revised the play heavily in his own hand, because his own copy of the script disappeared in the court-ordered sale of his property. This typescript contains about 35 pages of revision, as well as one scene that was not included in the licensing manuscript. Until revised for the book publication, the play contained following dialogue between Lord Goring and Lady Chiltern:

LORD GORING. Be content if you can keep your husband's love. Don't sacrifice him to gratify the vanity of a high moral tone!

LADY CHILTERN. Is this the philosophy you are going to teach your wife when you marry?

LORD GORING. Certainly... I think that women are simply made to love and to be loved, and if I ever do some weak or wrong thing, I will expect from my wife pity, gentleness, kindness, forgiveness.

LADY CHILTERN. You think me hard and unwomanly, then?

LORD GORING. I think you hard but not unwomanly...

LADY CHILTERN. You think that Robert wishes to continue in public life, having done what he has done?

LORD GORING. A strong man thinks only about his future. A weak man only about his past. (qtd. in Powell 94)

The conventional understanding of gender came under a heavy attack from feminists, and that was maybe one of the reasons why Wilde deleted this conversation from the text. Here he deleted Lord Goring's line "immaculate people do very foolish things sometimes." (94)

Instead of writing an adulterous proposal to Goring, in the final version of the play *Lady Chiltern* blames Mrs Cheveley for putting romantic interpretation on the revised note. In one of the manuscripts from 1894, Lady Chiltern (when informed that Mrs Cheveley got her letter and sent it to Sir Robert shouts to Lord Goring: "What did you make me do? Why did you let her take it (the letter)? You should have killed her first. Why didn't you kill her?" (88). This homicidal rhetoric is dropped from the final version. Thanks to these heavy revisions, Lady Chiltern at the end of the final version, lives up to the ideal of perfection that she has demanded of others. As Powell concludes:

“As he reworked his play from draft to draft, Wilde gradually cancelled most of the material that emphasized the moral turpitude of self-anointed and hypocritical ‘good’ woman – material that would have taken *An Ideal Husband* in a far different direction had it remained in the script.” (100)

### **5.3. The Importance of Being Earnest**

Each of Wilde's society plays revolves around a shameful secret. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is generally a parody of trivial comedies including his own. It once again contains a shameful secret, assumed identities and sensational denouement. It also deals explicitly with dual morality, holding different attitude towards men's and women's infidelity. Despite of the great amount of influences and borrowings from other works, the play has some kind of originality of its own. The characters are generally considered to be extensions of Wilde himself. The play trivialise such important institutions of the Victorian era as marriage, gender roles, and Victorian values as a whole.<sup>23</sup>

The plot revolves around the origin and identity of Jack Worthing who wants to propose Gwendolen Fairfax, whose mother is not willing to give her daughter to a man of a 'doubtful origin'. Wilde started to write *The Importance*

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<sup>23</sup> See also Victorianweb

in 1894, while on holiday at Worthing – from which originate the surname Jack Worthing. Actually, the usage of names of people and places are tightly connected to people and places from Wilde's personal life, e.g. Lady Bracknell's surname roots from the town of Bracknell, where Lord Alfred Douglas's mother lived. The name of the play had also been different before the first premiere. Wilde called it *Lady Lacing*, to avoid "pre-emptive speculation about its content" (Esdail 35)

It is known, that Wilde was heavily revising the play during 1894 and 1895. Sos Eltis stated that "the earliest, longest handwritten drafts of the play labour over farcical incidents, broad puns, nonsense dialogue, and conventional comic turns. In revising as he did, Wilde transformed standard nonsense into the more systemic and disconcerting illogicality which characterizes Earnest's dialogue." (vam)

Wilde wrote a letter to George Alexander, the actor manager of The St. James's Theatre, that he is going to write a 'slight comedy with lots of fun and wit.' Alexander was interrogating Wilde about each line and did meticulous preparations. He also asked Wilde to shorten the play from four to three acts. Wilde agreed and had to cancel one whole character from the play - Mr. Grisby, a solicitor who comes from London to arrest the profligate Ernest from his unpaid dining bills.

The play opens with Algernon Moncrief, Jack's friend and nephew of Lady Bracknell, speaking about marriage. Jack Worthing, a main character of the story wants to marry Gwendolen Fairfax, who only loves him because she

thinks his name is Ernest. But her mother, Lady Bracknell, does not agree with their marriage because of the doubtful origin of Jack. Jack and Algernon both live double lives. Jack lives respectable life in the country with his young ward Cecily. He invented a wayward brother Ernest as a pretext for his trips to London. He is known to Algernon as Ernest. Algernon, on the other hand, lives a luxurious life in London, and he invented an imaginary invalid friend Bunbury, whom he occasionally goes to visit in the country. Because Jack was abandoned as a child in a handbag at the Victoria station, it is a hard task for him to convince Lady Bracknell of the respectability of his parents. Algernon visits Jack's house in the country under the name Ernest and becomes engaged with Cecily. Shortly after Jack comes to announce that Ernest (his invented brother) is dead. Thus begin a series of farcical events. Gwendolen and Cecily have a genteel stand-off over who is engaged to Ernest, and Jack and Algernon argue about who is going to be christened Ernest. Finally, it is revealed that Jack and Algernon are brothers and Jack's real name is Ernest. As there is now the evidence of his respectable origin, he is free to marry Gwendolen and he gives his consent to Algernon to marry Cecily. The story ends with happy ending.

Jack Worthing does not represent reality but the contingency of the self. He is a product of the ritual, textual and theatrical practices. In this way Wilde called into question the essential reality of personal and gendered identity, disrupting these well-established concepts. As the name of the play suggests, Wilde's aim was to scrutinize what does it mean to be someone particularly in connection with culturally scripted cues such as the term 'earnest'. The word

earnest had a great significance for the Victorians and its concept underwent a few radical changes during the time (Powell 111). Although it had subcultural sexual connotations, the authorized meaning associated itself with restraint, straightforwardness, undifferentiated but active virtue. It was usually applied to men but it was sometimes used also by women. *The Importance* is an innovative play in the sense that it introduces an idea that language produces reality, not just describes it, as well as it introduces the concept of social life as a performance.<sup>24</sup> Jack's dilemma "I don't know who I really am" (Wilde, *The Importance* 28), provides an opportunity for self-definition. Finally, he is defined by his social and historical context. Jack acts against at least three of the constructed performances that impose order on the social world - birth, marriage and death. Omitting or deforming these common rituals that enforce social identity, Jack is at the margins of being a real person. According to Lady Bracknell, he has no claim at bodily or social existence as he was found in a bag in the cloakroom of the Victoria station: "You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter - a girl brought up with the utmost care - to marry into a cloakroom, and form an alliance with a parcel?" (32) In the earlier versions of the play, Jack talks back to this diminishing her remark, indignantly complains of Lady Bracknell's characterization of him as a parcel:

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<sup>24</sup> See also Powell, *Acting Wilde*, 111

“I was in a carpet-bag. That is quite a different thing” (qtd. in Powell 104), and he emphatically denies the importance to have any family at all. On the contrary, in the final version Jack’s voice is reduced only to a murmur:

LADY BRACKNELL. ... You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing!

[Lady Bracknell sweeps out in majestic indignation.]

JACK. Good morning! [Algernon, from the other room, strikes up the Wedding March. Jack looks perfectly furious, and goes to the door.] For goodness’ sake don’t play that ghastly tune, Algy. How idiotic you are!

[The music stops and Algernon enters cheerily.] (Wilde, *The Importance* 32)

The effect of the final scene in the final version of the play is the emphasis of the power of social ritual exerts over the individual who tries to live independently of it, while in the earlier version it was not so. The earlier manuscripts include a dialogue, which clearly shows that the original core idea of the play revolved around the name Ernest and the social ceremony of baptism, which have a power to determine a child's future. This is shown in the

earliest version of the play, in the dialogue between Jack and Gwendolen discussing the importance of the name Ernest:

GWENDOLEN. Beautiful name, Ernest. I couldn't love anybody who was not named Ernest...

JACK. Oh, don't say that Gwendolen. Is a man's whole future to depend upon the (baptismal) font? (qtd. in Powell, *The Theatre* 45)

But in the later and final version, this idea of christening as a determining point is omitted or made much softer:

GWENDOLEN. ... The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you.

...JACK. But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

...GWENDOLEN. It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

JACK. Well, really, Gwendolen, I must say that I think there are lots of other much nicer names. I think Jack, for instance, a charming name.

GWENDOLEN. Jack? . . . No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations . . . I have known several Jacks, and they all, without exception, were more than usually plain. Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! And I pity any woman who is

married to a man called John. She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really safe name is Ernest.

JACK. Gwendolen, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once. There is no time to be lost. (qtd. in Powell, *The Theatre* 45-46)

In fact, the policy behind the term 'earnest' in the time of producing *The Importance*, was one of the feminist propaganda of Josephine Butler, to which Wilde was closely connected, especially through his wife Constance, who was affiliated to the Women's Liberal Association and social-purity movement. Their aim was, among many others, to introduce a domesticated man, which Wilde aptly illustrates on the character of Lord Bracknell. His inferior position is shown in the earlier manuscript in the four act of the play, where Lady Bracknell claims that "Lord Brancaster (his original name) is in the habit of agreeing with me in all points. It is a keynote of his character" (qtd. In Powell, *The Theatre* 51). Also, in the following passage Gwendolen describes her father:

GWENDOLEN: Outside the family circle, papa, I am glad to say, is entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be. The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive. Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-

sighted; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses? (51)

This mockery of men's domesticity resonates throughout the whole play, and the 'true man' that was a part of rhetorics of feminists whose aim was to introduce a Christ-like earnestness in men. According to Ellice Hopkins, the model of true man was Christ himself. Wilde parodizes these attempts to develop a manhood of Christ, what can be seen best on the example of Canon Chasuble, who tries to repress his own sexuality saying "I am a celibate, madam" (97). According to Powell, "Canon Chasuble is so excessively devoted to sexual purity, that he becomes a mockery of the masculine ideal that was being aggressively put forward by Josephin Butler, Ellice Hopkins and their coalition of feminists and social-purity movement" (97)

From the beginning, Wilde's intention was to counter the new manlihood with performativity – Gwendolen's ideal of man named Ernest equals an ideal upheld by women in the purity movement. In spite of the censorship and the attention of the audience and press, Wilde managed to infiltrate some hints of his own sexual practices to the play. Not mentioning *earnestness* and *bunburying*, which has a theory of its own, Wilde included in the story a cigarette case, like the one he gave to a young male prostitute, or located Algernon's rooms on Half Moon Street – the site of homosexual residents who

were known to him. Also the place where was Jack found in the bag – Victoria station, was already known to be a meeting place for homosexuals.<sup>25</sup>

In this terms, *The Importance of Being Earnest* is on the one hand about homosexuality and on the other hand about being 'earnest'. By the mid 1890s, the term 'earnestness' became increasingly complicated. By this time, there was a precedent about doubling the term 'Earnest' and 'Ernest' into a coded allusion to the same-sex passion – it was directly connected to the relationship between Wilde and Lord Douglas. The term that at first indicated a true masculine sexuality, was turned inside-out by Wilde and his play. (Powell 113)

Jack's role-playing as Ernest in a sense preceded the reality as he could not have become Ernest without first playing it. In *The Importance* Wilde started to deal with subjectivity, as it was later integrated as a part of postmodern literature, and he developed it fully in his *De Profundis*. In *De Profundis* Wilde meditates about man's subjectivity as a kind of puppet-theatre: "Puppets themselves have passions. They will bring a new plot into what they are presenting, and twist the ordered issue of vicissitude to suit some whim or appetite of their own. To be entirely free and at the same time entirely dominated by law is the eternal paradox of human life that we realize at every moment..." (Wilde, *The Complete Works Illustrated* 62)

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<sup>25</sup> See also Powell, *Acting Wilde*, 113

## Conclusion

*"Nothing is more rare in any man than an act of his own. Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation"* (De Profundis)

Oscar Wilde was a typical Victorian, his life was lived in public and all of his works were influenced by the conditions, politics, conventions, authorities and people surrounded him through his life. Wilde's theatrical attempts are tightly connected to historical circumstances. His developing ideas of genders and sexual identity arose out of a contentious dialogue with the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Feminism. It is important to state, that Wilde's best-known plays including *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* were written in a high measure in response to the radical view "that drove a militant and still widely misunderstood women's movement" (Powell 118). Under the conflict of personal and gendered identity, Wilde wrote and re-wrote his dramas, which clearly points to his self-censorship.

Through the comparison of Wilde's earliest manuscripts of the plays with the final versions, I have traced the playwright's inner fight to reveal his sometimes cruel, sometimes revolutionary, sometimes 'illegal', sometimes 'too true' ideas that could not have been performed to the audience. With the laborious revisions of the plays, disappeared a great part of the true Wildean characters of the plays, as well as it rendered the final versions to such an extent, that it sometimes turned the original meaning of the play up-side-down.

I want to demonstrate, on the examples of Wilde's personal and career life, that his life was from the beginning to the end one great spectacular theatre. 'A tragicomedy in four acts', beginning as a puppet in the hands of actor and marketing managers, then for the most part of his productive life suppressed by radical political views such as feminist or homophobic propaganda, and finally silenced by the court trials and imprisonment. With the tour of America, he became a real victim of marketing as he was sent there to propagate not only the Aesthetic movement he believed in but primarily Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera *Patience*. His pose of an effeminate dandy was constructed deliberately and aimingly by marketing managers to attract attention of press, media, and audience. The evidence of this can be seen in Sarony's won trial about copyright and intellectual property of his photograph of Wilde, as well as his propagation of *Patience*. Wilde became a living advertisement, as Sarony's portraits of him were appropriated by commercial firms to advertise their products.

Later on, the greatest influence upon his social comedies had the feminist movement and social-purity movement. Through the close analysis of the earliest drafts of the plays, we can see Wilde's strong opposition to the ideals of the feminist movement, but also the need to self-censor his aggressive attacks to make the plays appropriate to be performed in the time when the social-purity movement was highly influential.

Finally, with his growing notoriety and later publicly open trials, he had to become more careful about the content of his plays. Knowledge of the

censorship rules and traditions and self-censorship became the key tool to make his plays performable, although he managed to infiltrate some 'illegal' practices into his works.

Wilde with his notion of subjectivity and performativity opened the door to authors like Pinter, Beckett or Stoppard and to the trapped, alienated or role-playing characters of their plays that experienced the uncertainty of reality we live in. In the words of Antonin Artaud: "We are not free. And sky can still fall on our heads. And the theatre has been created to teach us that first of all." (qtd. in Powell 13)

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## Summary

The main focus of my thesis is the analysis of Oscar Wilde's society plays in connection with their censorship, self-censorship and various influences. The thesis is systematically divided into 5 chapters. The first chapter provides us with the inevitable information about the Victorian era, society, and culture. My focus here is on the feminist and social-purity movements, as they influenced Wilde's work immensely and had great impact on self-censoring of his plays especially of *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *An Ideal Husband*. The second part of the thesis provides us with the background information about the Victorian theatre. It deals with expansions of theatre, new technology and changing genres, but it also discusses the notion of stardom and marketing and advertising practices that are closely related to Wilde's career as an aesthete and playwright. The third part of the thesis provides us with the information about Wilde's life and work. I deal here explicitly with his trial and fact that lead to the banning and censoring of his plays. The fourth chapter focuses on the notion of censorship and gives us an overview of censored or banned plays and various reasons for censorship throughout the history. It also deals in detail with particular Wilde's works that were subjected to censorship. In the last chapter I analyse the selected plays: *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. I compare the earlier drafts with the final versions of the plays and analyse the resulted difference in tone, atmosphere and meaning. On the basis of these analyses, I trace the further influences that had led to Wilde's self-censorship and censorship of his plays.

## České resumé

Hlavním cílem mé práce je analýza společenských her Oscara Wildea v souvislosti s jejich cenzurou, autocenzurou a různými vlivy. Práce je systematicky rozdělena do 5 kapitol. První kapitola nám poskytuje nevyhnutelné informace o viktoriánské době, společnosti a kultuře. Mým záměrem zde je feministické hnutí a hnutí společenské čistoty, protože jejich vliv na Wildovu tvorbu a hlavně na jejich autocenzuru je obrovský, zejména na *Vějíř lady Windermerové* a *Ideálního manžela*. Druhá část diplomové práce nám poskytuje důležité informace o viktoriánském divadle. Zabývá se expanzí divadla, nových technologií a měnícími se žánry, ale také rozebírá pojem slávy, marketingu a reklamních praktik, které jsou úzce spojené s Wildeovou kariérou estéta a dramatika. Třetí část diplomové práce nám poskytuje informace o Wildově životě a díle. Zabývám se zde explicitně jeho soudem a skutečnostmi, které vedly k zákazu a cenzuře jeho her. Čtvrtá kapitola je zaměřena na pojem cenzury a nám dává přehled o cenzurovaných nebo zakázaných hrách a různých důvodech pro cenzuru v průběhu historie. Zabývá se také podrobně konkrétními Wildovými díly, které byly podrobeny cenzuře. V poslední kapitole jsem se rozhodla analyzovat vybrané hry: *Vějíř lady Windermerové*, *Ideální manžel* a *Jak je důležité mítí Filipa*. Tady porovnávám dřívější manuskripty s konečnými verzemi her a analyzuji výsledný rozdíl v tónu, atmosféře a významu. Na základě těchto analýz sleduju další vlivy, které vedly Wilda k autocenzuře a cenzuře jeho her.