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Bc. Andrea Řehounková

Shakespearean Themes in the Works of Oscar Wilde

Diplomová práce

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Michal Charypar, Ph.D.

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Prohlášení

1. Prohlašuji, že jsem předkládanou práci zpracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedené prameny a literaturu.

2. Prohlašuji, že práce nebyla využita k získání jiného titulu.

3. Souhlasím s tím, aby práce byla zpřístupněna pro studijní a výzkumné účely.

Anotace

Ve své diplomové práci se budu věnovat využití Shakespearovy tvorby Oscarem Wildem a vlivu, který měla na jeho vybrané texty. Zvláštní pozornost bude věnována *Obrazu Doriana Graye*, *Portrétu Pana W. H.* a eseji *Pravda masek*, která patří mezi Wildovu nejranější dochovanou tvorbu. Pokud jde o metodologii, práce bude pojata intertextuálně, a to zejména na základě koncepce uměleckého vlivu zpracované Haroldem Bloomem v jeho *Kánonu západní literatury*, popř. v dalších publikacích. William Shakespeare je Bloomem popsán jako střed západního kánonu, k němuž se souhlasně či polemicky vztahují mladší autoři včetně Wilda a jeho současníků – viktoriánů, ale též Joyce apod. Práce též podle potřeby může využívat komparatistických postupů. Oscar Wilde ve svém psaní bohatě intertextuálně odkazuje ke hrám a poezii Williama Shakespeara. Zároveň Shakespeare ovlivnil Wilda i v jeho osobním životě, mj. v soudních projevech při svém procesu na něj Wilde činil reminiscence, ale také když se angažoval při otevření Shakespearova památníku. Cílem mé práce je zmapovat vnímání postavy Williama Shakespeara Oscarem Wildem a odlišnost jeho přístupu k Shakespearovi ve srovnání s tradiční viktoriánskou perspektivou. Rozborem jeho textů a veřejných projevů chci sledovat, v čem se Oscar Wilde shoduje a rozchází s tradiční viktoriánskou představou a zda se nepokoušel skrze svoji tvorbu podat nekonvenční obraz shakespearovských témat, ale i osoby Shakespeara.

Klíčová slova

Wilde Oscar, Shakespeare William, viktoriánská éra, anglická literatura, 19. století, intertextualita, komparatistika

Abstract

In my master thesis, I will concentrate on Oscar Wilde's usage of William Shakespeare's work and its influence on some of his chosen texts. Special attention will be paid to *The Picture of Dorian Gray, The Portrait of Mr. W. H.,* and the essay *The Truth of Masks, one* of Wilde's earliest known works. My thesis will methodologically make use of intertextuality, especially based on the concept of artistic influence written by Harold Bloom in The Western Canon and possibly other publications, too. Bloom describes William Shakespeare as the core of the Western canon to whom younger authors, including Wilde other Victorians, and also Joyce, refer to either polemically or in agreement. If needed, comparations might be used in my thesis as well. Oscar Wilde vastly references the plays and poetry of William Shakespeare in his work. Simultaneously, Shakespeare influenced Wilde in his personal life – for example in his defence during his trails or when he partook in the opening of Shakespeare's memorial. The goal of my thesis is to map Oscar Wilde's understanding of the character of William Shakespeare and the difference in his approach to Shakespeare in the comparation of the traditional Victorian perspective. I wish to examine how did Oscar Wilde agree and disagree with the traditional Victorian idea through analysing his works, and to see whether he did or did not attempt to create unusual picture of Shakespearean themes and the character of Shakespeare.

Keywords

Wilde Oscar, Shakespeare William, Victorian Era, English literature, 19th century, intertextuality, comparations

Počet znaků 147 156

Poděkování

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Za podporu bych také ráda poděkovala své rodině a přátelům.

Special thanks go to my friend Lexi for revising this text and for her kind support.

Obsah

Introduction

Ever since the publication of the First Folio in 1623, the author of the texts as well as the texts themselves have received considerable attention of literary and theatre historians. The afterlife of William Shakespeare's work – its literary influence and overall cultural significance – has also been excessively studied. A similar statement can be made about Oscar Wilde, while; hundred and fifty years after Shakespeare's death, he became the centre of many studies.

The initial reason for my research was the fascinatingly imaginative way in which Oscar Wilde used Shakespearean characters to build his own characters in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde created a palpable echo of the famous Shakespearean heroines in the character of Sibyl Vane, stripping her of her individuality. To correspond with this decision, the main character of Dorian Gray also carried many Shakespearean characters.

After realizing the inclination Wilde might have had for using Shakespearean themes in his works, the rest of his work was carefully analysed, revealing an abundance of Shakespearean themes, characters, and other references. Wilde used Shakespeare's plays intertextually, but he also used Shakespeare as inspiration in a truly unique way. An example of this is his less often staged play *The Duchess, of Padua*. The play carried a strong reminiscence of *Romeo and Juliet*. It was written in blank verse, traditionally associated with Shakespeare even though it was a staple of the era rather than the man.

Wilde´s *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* once again provides a different approach, and this time uses the themes of Shakespeare's writings and Shakespeare himself as a person/character. Wilde made William Shakespeare into a character of his story in quite a daring way, considering the social standards of the era. Another interesting stratum of this short story is its storytelling techniques. Wilde used quotes from Shakespeare's sonnets to build an entire story, proving his vast knowledge of Shakespeare's work and the literary theories surrounding them.

Lastly, the only discussed non-fiction work of Oscar Wilde – *The Truth of Masks*. The essay *The Truth of Masks* is one of the earliest works by Oscar Wilde, its first version being written during his studies at Oxford. The essay provided us with a much-needed

window into Wilde's thinking. Here Wilde wrote about the staging of Shakespeare's plays in his time, considering known sources of how they were staged in Shakespeare's times.

When doing research into the nineteenth century theatre for this chapter, with the emphasis on Shakespearean production, *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage* edited by Richard Foulkes, David Francis Taylor's *Shakespeare and Drama* chapter in *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century, as well as Sillars' Shakespeare and the Victorians,* proved abundantly useful.

Marion Jones' study of stage costumes in *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage* corresponds well with Oscar Wilde's *The Truth of Masks* which, among other topics, concerns itself with costumes. Jones pays a lot of attention to the costumes worn by the famous Victorian actress Ellen Terry, especially her green dress worn in the role of Lady Macbeth. By studying Oscar Wilde's texts, it was possible to find that he was a fan of Ellen Terry and that he got to see her portrayal of Shakespearean heroines on stage, including Lady Macbeth, which he directly commented on.

This thesis aims to build up on the previous research done about the two writers and on the influence of William Shakespeare's work on nineteenth century culture. The main concern of the thesis is the difference in Oscar Wilde's understanding of the themes and his usage of them in his own work as opposed to other authors of the nineteenth century, primarily the Victorians.

To reach the set goal of the thesis, I adopted the qualitative approach to data collection. First, I thoroughly studied the complete known works of Oscar Wilde, including the essays and personal letters. Through content analysis, I selected those works which use Shakespearean themes and motifs in a way that either develops the story or its characters or is a crucial part of the story itself. The works were further studied in the context of the connection found with Shakespeare's works.

Here, two main aspects were considered. The intertextuality of the works, as well as Oscar Wilde's approach to using these themes as opposed to the traditional Victorian

views and the Shakespearean influence. For this, I used Harold Bloom's theory of influence which he wrote about in *The Anxiety of Influence.*

To better understand William Shakespeare's position in the nineteenth century British culture, I consulted several studies on this problem. I collected this information in the chapter *Shakespeare in the 19th century.* The purpose of this chapter was to give a short, clear, but comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The research done for the chapter was mainly conducted from secondary data collected about the issue as well as my personal knowledge of the topic. The primary sources for this chapter were: Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages,* different studies in Gail Marshall's *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century,* and Stuart Sillars' *Shakespeare and the Victorians*.

The Western Canon by Harold Bloom, especially his chapter dedicated to William Shakespeare, became a key point for the understanding of the position Shakespeare's literature had not only in the nineteenth century British cultural world. Harold Bloom's placement of Shakespeare into the centre of literary canon corresponds with the Victorians' opinion frequently advocated.

The collection of essays *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century* edited by Gail Marshall became an especially valuable source. The chapter *The Shakespeare in the Periodicals* written by Kathryn Prince, shaped the idea of how different social-economic groups perceived William Shakespeare. By understanding how Shakespeare was presented to the broad public, it was possible to better distinguish the complexity of Oscar Wilde's usage of Shakespearean themes as well as his idea of the character of Shakespeare. The study maps the differences in how Shakespeare was presented to young girls and boys as well as the way he was used in many political movements of the era. Combined with Stuart Sillars' description of how the Victorians celebrated Shakespeare's work in his *Shakespeare and the Victorians*, it was possible to create a fuller image of the nineteenth century reflection of Shakespeare.

The chapter serves as a stepping point onto the following chapters, which concerned themselves with the selected works of Oscar Wilde. It considers several aspects of the issue. How was William Shakespeare celebrated as a person and the position he was put

into, and how he and his work were presented to the people in education and through periodicals.

This was later put in the context of Oscar Wilde's essay *The Truth of Masks* (chapter 2) where he discusses the contemporary styles of staging Shakespeare's plays with a heavy emphasis on the costumes and overall aesthetic of the productions.

This then played a crucial role in the in-depth analysis of the selected works of Oscar Wilde – *The Truth of Masks, The Picture of Dorian Gray, The Portrait of Mr. W. H.,* and *The Duchess of Padua.*

The Shakespearean themes in the selected works that I carefully distinguished and analysed made up the central part of the thesis. I concentrated on intertextuality and overall themes that manifested themselves in the plot of Wilde's stories and his characters. This analysis aimed to show how exactly Oscar Wilde worked with these themes and how different it was in the context of other British nineteenth century literature.

How did Oscar Wilde view Shakespeare's work? Was there a sense of irony in his usage of Shakespearean themes? How did he view Shakespeare as a character when writing about him as opposed to the traditional views of nineteenth century society?

Harold Bloom: Intertextuality and Literary Influence

Harold Bloom's View on Shakespeare and His Influence

In his book *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, Harold Bloom places William Shakespeare in the centre of the canon. He claims that Shakespeare is the greatest writer in the history of Western literature and his influence is so large that the majority of literature written after Shakespeare is in one way or another affected by him.[1]

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[1]BLOOM, Harold. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages.* Florida, USA: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1993. p.23-25.

and BLOOM, *Harold. The Anxiety of Influence.* Oxford: Oxford Univesity Press, 1997. 2. vydání. p.XVIII.

Since Shakespeare impacted the English language the way he did – adding many new words to the vocabulary, creating new phrases and idioms that became a part of everyday speech – more contemporary writers could not escape the influence since these changes had already been embedded in the English language. This statement cannot be argued with.

Anyone who uses "break the ice" quotes *The Taming of a Shrew* or *Henry V*. with "the heart of gold". Taking this into consideration, we can see how these pieces of Shakespeare became almost inseparable from everyday English. Bloom's statement about it being impossible to escape Shakespeare is then a logical outcome. Many people do not even realize they are quoting Shakespeare when using these phrases and idioms, and this can be true for writers, too. Even if a writer sets a goal to avoid any Shakespearean influence, they would find it hard if not impossible to do, especially if writing in English. But even if their language of choice was a different European language, the influence is there, even though it is on a smaller scale.

Harold Bloom is right in his statement that we would hardly find a writer who had the same impact on the English language and literature as much as Shakespeare did, and it is not only literature. Many characters and stories received an almost universal understanding in popular culture. We can name films like *The Lion King* (inspired by *Hamlet*) or 10 Things I Hate About You (inspired by *The Taming of Shew)*. Characters like Hamlet or Romeo and Juliet or abundantly referenced even outside of Anglophone and Eurocentric cultural circles. For example, *Romeo and Juliet* was referenced in South Korean dramas[2] 힘쎈여자 도봉순 (*Strong Woman Do Bong Soon)* and 푸른 바다의 전설 (*The Legend of the Blue Sea). 커피 프린스 (Coffee Prince)* is partially created with *The Twelfth Night* in mind.

In the preface of *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom states that: "Shakespeare, as I have argued at length elsewhere, quite simply not only is the Western canon; he is also the

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[2] The term drama does not mean a play or has any connection to theatre in Korean culture. It means a type of program which lies between a film and a tv show and which is a unique type of modern South Korean storytelling.

world canon."[3] This statement is more challenging for me to agree with. Even after stating the South Korean examples above, I would argue that what is Western canon does not necessarily have to be the world canon. We cannot forget smaller cultures that live in isolation from Western influence, like certain tribes, but even larger cultures started opening to the West only in the 19th century and sometimes even the 20th century. Can we, for example say that Shakespeare is a canonical author in North Korea? Or that even in South Korea or Japan - is his influence larger than those of Korean and Japanese classical authors? While we find allusions in modern Korean culture, their culture nor their canon is centred around Shakespeare or Western literature in general. We would find far more Korean cultural intertextuality in Kim Nam Joon's lyrics or Lee Min Jin's *Pachinko*.

While we can find well-received adaptations of Western works in these cultures (for example, Akiro Kurosawa's adaptations of Shakespeare's plays), our idea of seeing the worldwide importance of Western culture (in this case, Shakespeare) shows the presence of white supremacy and therefore must be approached carefully and with objective reflection.

If we stick to the Western canon, even there, the idea that Shakespeare is the centre of it, and everything resolves from this set point can create some issues. First, we need to identify which countries belong to the West, Bloom does not further specify this, but his statement is undoubtedly more accurate to the English-speaking countries than non-English speaking countries.

To me, this theory induces many limiting ideas. I believe that stating that Shakespeare is the greatest writer ever alive is subjective.[4] While his influence on culture and language is evident and unarguable, can we truly compare writers? Even if we stay within the drama, is it possible to compare every playwright to Shakespeare, and is it necessary? While Shakespeare managed to create many stories that remain relatable, the world has changed, and we can find other stories that are in many ways more relatable, because they

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[3] BLOOM, Harold. *Anxiety of Influence.* p.XV.
[4] BLOOM, Harold. *Western Canon*. p. 53.

speak of the contemporary world. Is Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* a lesser work than *Hamlet*? The comparation of the two might be interesting but does not necessarily has to tell us much about the two playwrights and does not prove their literary qualities. The subjectivity of such comparation brings different ideas and opinions, but not a finite solution.

Bloom compares the writer's struggles to Freud's concept of the Oedipal complex. In this context, the writer feels indebted to the precursor who they read and who probably inspired them to start writing in the first place. This metaphorical debt creates a sense of anxiety for the later writer since, in order to create a new original piece, they would have to decline the precursor's work and, in a way, devalue it. Alternatively, the precursor's influence on their work will lead to the creation of a lesser work that cannot compare well to the precursor's work.[5]

In Bloom's theory, the later writer is not able to write a revolutionary, innovative work without distorting the precursor's work, creating a sense of "creative misprision."

In my own opinion, Bloom is right in the pressure the "new" writer can feel when creating, aware of the great writers that came before them. Even today, nearly fifty years after Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* was first published, I am often faced with the idea that all the best books were already written, and modern literature is slowly deteriorating. I do not share this pessimistic outtake on current literature. I believe that each era brings new talented writers and ideas, and every time we feel like nothing more can be said, a unique voice challenges this idea. The globalization that happened in the last few years (and which Bloom could not predict at the time of writing his theory) proves it.

The merging of cultures which evolved separately for centuries brought a new shift in all elements of art (and outside of the creative industry). To use my previously stated example of South Korea, its *Hallyu*[6] caused a strong creative shift both in Western and Korean culture, creating a sense of novelty for both cultures. For instance the film 설국열차 (Snowpiercer) by Oscar-winning director Bong Joon Ho, the announced US

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[5] BLOOM, Harold. *Anxiety of Influence.* p. 8-11.

[6] A recently accepted term for „the Korean wave" by the Oxford Dictionary. The word comes from the Korean word for „wave" – 한류.

attempts of recreating several Korean dramas or the trend of half English and half Korean songs best seen in bands like 방탄 소년단 (BTS). A similar trend can be seen in contemporary Japanese literature, for example, Haruki Murakami, whose writing style is considered westernized by the Japanese but still appears strongly Japanese to Westerners and unlike the western types of storytelling we are used to. His novels (for example, 海辺のカフカ - Kafka on the Shore) show an abundant presence of both Japanese and Western intertextuality.

The children of immigrants also pose an exciting take on globalization in literature since their upbringing combines two cultures. As examples, we can mention the Vietnamese-American poet and novelist Ocean Vuong or Chinese-American author Chloe Gong whose *These Violent Delights* and *Our Violent Ends* are a retelling of *Romeo and Juliet* set in 1920s Shanghai, exploring the Chinese-Russian relations in the Shanghai underground world.

Nor do I agree entirely that writers are destined to feel this sense of "anxiety of influence" and that they have no choice but to battle with it. While I think that the sense of it is real for many writers and can often be limiting or even downright impossible to overcome, causing them to stop creating, I do not think that every writer feels this way.

Some writers, in my opinion, deliberately choose to stop fighting and accept the reality of the existence of the great works. They don't view their existence as something which must be fought with, instead, they accept them. A great example of this is M. L. Rio, who, in her debut novel *If We Were Villains*, managed to use "the great" Shakespearean works to her advantage and created a story which not only was original (even with its heavy intertextual elements), it became revolutionary in the way it shaped the still forming aesthetical movement of Dark Academia. Similarly, Donna Tart's Secret History – also heavily relying on intertextuality and the influence of great works – is even considered one of the foundations of the movement.

Writers can also inspire themselves in their precursors' works and use them in their writing out of respect or in an attempt to discuss the topics or ideas which they might agree or disagree with. This can be, for example seen in the trend of retellings which

include more diverse characters and in that might challenge particular views present in the older works. In this case, the later writer might argue with the society's norms which transferred themselves into the precursor's work rather than the precursor themselves. To name some examples: *As I Descent* by Robin Talley (a retelling of *Macbeth*) or *The Last True Poets of the Sea* by Julia Drake (a retelling of *Twelfth Night.*)

While *Twelfth Night* is often interpreted to have LGBTQ elements, using crossdressing as a queercoding for either homosexuality/bisexuality of the characters or possible transsexuality. Because of this, the play became an important work for the LGBTQ community. Bound by the time he lived i,; Shakespeare could not write an openly queer play. So, in this case, Julia Drake not only pays homage to Shakespeare by retelling his story, her sapphic version of the play is an antithesis to the homophobic standards of (not only) Elizabethan England.

However, even though I wouldn't be as bold as Bloom as to make such strong statements, I do agree that Shakespeare profoundly influenced Western, especially anglophone literature. This level of influence is the main point of interest in my thesis. Especially how it is transferred through intertextuality, particularly in the works of Oscar Wilde.

Intertextuality

The term intertextuality was first introduced by French literary critic of Bulgarian descent and novelist Julia Kristeva (*1941), and according to the Oxford Dictionary it is "the relationship between texts, especially literary texts." This can include allusion, quotation, translation, parody, and pastiche. As we can see, this definition opens the door for many connections between texts. For the purpose of this thesis, let's use two sets of terms that will be used to define the relationship between William Shakespeare's and Oscar Wilde's texts.

First, the six revisionary ratios defined by Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* which concentrate on the writer's approach to his precursor's work – in this case, Wilde's to

Shakespeare's. Bloom uses these terms in connection to poetry, but they prove to be a practical guide in other genres, too.[7]

1. **Clinamen** – Bloom defines this term as a moment where the writer accurately follows the source text to a certain point but then chooses a different route.

2. **Tessera –** This term is to signify a type of work in which the writer continues another writer's work, using the existing terms but changing the sense, in Bloom's words – "as if the precursor had failed to go far enough."[8]

3. **Kenosis –** Bloom defines this as a movement towards discontinuity with the precursor. In this process, the writer humbles himself.

4. **Daemonization –** A moment in which the writer generalizes the uniqueness of his precursor's work.

5. **Askesis –** A phase of solitude where the writer strives to separate himself from other influences and create a unique sense of self. During this process, the writer does so in a way in which they do the same to the precursor, completely separating the two.

6. **Apophrades** – The last term describes a moment in writer's life where he opens his work to the precursor again. This can create the idea that the later writer's work influenced the precursor.

Second, Gérard Genette created a helpful concept of five types of intertextualities (which he collectively called transtextuality) in his *Palimpsestes* which he divides as[9]:

1. **Intertextuality** – Here, Genette includes quotes, allusions, or plagiarism.

2. **Paratextuality** – Relation between one text and its paratext – for example, titles, prefaces, or headings.

3. **Metatextuality** – Explicit or implicit commentary of a text.

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[7] BLOOM, Harold. *Anxiety of Influence.* p.14-15
[8] BLOOM, Harold. *Anxiety of Influence.* p.14.
[9] CHARYPAR, Michal. „Umělecký vliv, jeho průkaznost a relevance. K typologii odkazů v beletrii 19. století". *Česká literatura* 64, 2016, vol. 5. p.670-71.

4. **Hypertextuality** – Text which directly links to another text. For example, a parody, sequel, or even a translation.

5. **Architextuality** – The place which the text holds in a genre.

In my study of Wilde's texts, I attempt to implement these two theories in search of Wilde's take on Shakespeare. While Shakespeare plays an essential role in my research, it is Wilde who is at its centre. I try to concentrate on his approaches and intertextual techniques used in his work. At the same time, I want to document how Wilde used these themes. Was he being provocative, innovative, or was he simply following the trends of this era?

For context, the first chapter was included in this thesis, mapping the traditional approaches to show the contrast in Wilde's work. Wilde presented several takes on Shakespeare in his work, using different intertextual techniques in *The Duchess of Padua* than in *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* In chapters 2-5, I discuss these works in more detail, using the mentioned theories above and inspiration.

1. Shakespeare in the 19th Century

The popularity of William Shakespeare is not something that would be particularly new or specific for 19th century Britain as opposed to the previous two centuries. However, we can see a significant increase in the presence of William Shakespeare and his work in the contemporary culture of the era to the point where he becomes an undividable part of it.

While there were four complete editions of his work in the seventeenth century, 80 in the eighteenth century, nineteenth century produced over 800 editions with the addition of approximately 2 700 editions of single plays.[10]

This means that the name, as well as his stories, settled in contemporary literature and art and are often mentioned and are used intertextually. William Shakespeare's work is studied and abundantly referenced with the expectation of the modern reader to understand the meaning of these references.

Not only do his characters become a part of new stories, Shakespeare himself becomes a character which is written about in fiction – an idea which was, among others, also entertained by Oscar Wilde (*The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*).

In this chapter of my thesis, I will talk about the approach to the person and work of William Shakespeare to create a sense of the traditional portrayal of his character, which will later be put in context with Oscar Wilde's own approach.

1.1. The Persona of William Shakespeare

1.1.1. Celebrating William Shakespeare

When Phillip Stanhope took his seat in the House of Lord on March the 4^{th,} 1856, he made a speech, hoping to get support for the opening of the National Portrait Gallery, which, in his words, would hold portraits "of those persons who are most honourably

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[10] DECKER, Christopher. Shakespeare editions. In MARSHALL, Gail (ed.). *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.16.

commemorated in British history as warriors or as statemen or in arts, literature or science."[11]

The gallery was established later in the year, the newly forming collection of portraits starting with a portrait of no other than William Shakespeare.[12] The Chandos portrait–called after the Duke of Chandos, who formerly owned the portrait – which is believed to depict William Shakespeare, was created between 1600-1610, possibly by John Taylor, and is the most well-known portrait of the playwright.[13]

It is quite interesting that after the gallery finally began its collection, the first portrait it acquired was that of William Shakespeare. At the same time, we could easily expect it to be a portrait of the Queen or an important monarch of the past. This single occurrence shows just how present Shakespeare was in the mind of nineteenth century Brits. His portrait in the National Portrait Gallery was, after all, just one of the reminders of his person. We could name many memorials built in Shakespeare's honour.

One of such was erected in Leicester Square, north of the National Portrait Gallery, in 1874.[14] Another memorial that can be mentioned is a memorial in Stratford-upon-Avon unveiled in 1888, welcoming Oscar Wilde, who gave a speech at the event.[15]

Shakespeare's presumed birthday (23. 4.) was also an excuse for lavish celebrations. Those were, of course, held in Stratford-upon-Avon. However, there were more events happening in London, too, intended for those who could not attend the celebrations held at the playwright's birthplace.

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[11] National Portrait Gallery. *Gallery History.* [2022-01-17]. https://www.npg.org.uk/about/organisation/history

[12] National Portrait Gallery. *Gallery History.* [2022-01-17]. https://www.npg.org.uk/about/organisation/history

[13] National Portrait Gallery. *Chandos Portrait* [2022-01-17]. https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait.php?search=ss&sText=shakespeare&LinkID=mp04051&rNo=0&role=sit

[14] MARSHALL, Gail. *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. p.1.

[15] BRISTOW, Joseph. Oscar Wilde, Ronald Gower, and the Shakespeare Monument. *Études anglaises* 2016, vol. 69, n°1, p. 7 -22.

This would consist of productions of certain plays, speeches, concerts, etc. On this day, Stratford-upon-Avon turned into a modern tourist attraction. Visitors found their way to Anne Hathaway's cottage, and exhibitions were opened for those who wished to view them.

In 1864, three hundred years after the bard was born, an exceedingly great celebration was held for his birthday. Preparations for his event began even months before the day was due and happened simultaneously in Stratford-upon-Avon and London. The procession, speeches, formal banquet, and fireworks, as well as religious services, were held in the playwright's honour.[16]

Queen Victoria herself lent the portrait of Kemble as Hamlet to the exhibition which was happening in Stratford. Among the guests of the event was even Mrs. Mary Baker, who was considered to be the last surviving member of the Hathaway family. The celebration lasted for two days, and several plays were performed during.[17]

Several plays were performed in a meadow by the River Avon in a special pavilion constructed in a meadow. *Twelfth Night, As You Like It, Romeo and Juliet*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Othello, Much Ado About Nothing,* and *Merchant of Venice* along with them, the more contemporary piece *My Aunt's Advice* was performed[18] – a fact which might be slightly confusing, considering it was the celebration of William Shakespeare's birthday anniversary.

The day after the celebrations began (on Sunday the 24th), two services were held in the Holy Trinity Church, where William Shakespeare's text, as well as his person, were presented as a gift from God and a guide for the perfect morals.[19] This only cemented the idea of Shakespeare as not only the picture of everything English and aspirational morals but something and someone who was sent to the nation by God and thus placing him in a superior position among other writers – both past and present.

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[16] SILLARS, Stuart. *Shakespeare and the Victorians.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. p.7.
[17] SILLARS, Stuart. *Shakespeare and the Victorians.* p.8.
[18] SILLARS, Stuart. *Shakespeare and the Victorians.* p. 2-4.
[19] SILLARS, Stuart. *Shakespeare and the Victorians.* p. 7.

This spiritual approach to Shakespeare wasn't unusual in the Victorian Era. Charles LaPorte points out that Shakespeare's texts were considered almost sacred. To the Victorians, there was the Bible, and there was Shakespeare.[20]

This short recollection of the 1864 celebration is only proof of the standard Victorian perception of his character and his plays, adding moral value to William Shakespeare without knowing much about the playwright's life, to begin with. All his character traits which were meant to be taught as guidelines to the people – especially young people – were constructed from his plays, often from their extensively edited and censored versions.

It might be strange for the modern consumer of Shakespeare's work to see why Shakespeare's works presented moral guidelines for society as conservative as the Victorian one. However, we must consider that the Victorians (as well as their predecessors) were not always faced with the original texts. The reader would have the chance to read many commentaries that were accompanying the plays themselves. These commentaries were meant to stir their way of understanding the text in the desired direction. It is also important to mention that not all of Shakespeare's surviving plays were available for their "doubtful morals".

1.1.2.   William Shakespeare as the Moral Icon

The heightened accessibility of Shakespeare's work in the nineteenth century led to a growing number of articles produced as a reaction to this phenomenon. A significant number of reviews of new editions, as well as productions of the plays, were populating contemporary periodicals along with articles about the man himself.

These articles were often intended for different groups, sometimes with the expectation of being the introduction of the work to a new reader, therefore making its appearance in periodicals published for adolescents. We can find strong moral undertones in these

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[20] YEATS, George. Shakespeare's Victorian Legacy: Text as monument and emendation as desecration in the mid-nineteenth century. *Victorian Literature and Culture* 2012, Vol. 40, No. 2, p.471.

particular texts, which can occasionally seem to the modern reader as constructed from a certain idea of a play rather than the play itself.

After all, it is essential to mention that while Victorian society lifted William Shakespeare on a pedestal as a moral icon, his work was often criticised in the past for his crudeness and suggestive undertones. This created issues when producing certain plays, which had to undergo edits, bearing contemporary social norms in mind, and even translating the plays to other languages.

The Victorian periodicals presented William Shakespeare not only as an inspiration for morals but also as the working-class hero, the picture of English masculinity.[21] Placing the playwright in this light (without considering the accuracy of these statements) creates an image which must have been favourable for the average reader of these periodicals, creating the idea that the writer was one of them and, therefore, could be used as a guide in many matters of life.

There was an undeniable trend in using Shakespeare in connection to current trends and issues which were happening in society. Because of that, we may find traces of Shakespeare in discussions concerning feminism, imperialism, or Chartism, among other topics.[22]

Chartist periodicals like the *Black Dwarf*, *Political Register,* and *Northern Star* attempted to draw Shakespeare as a working-class hero. This idea was explored through biographies which were published through them. Between April and June 1840, the Northern Star even published a series called the "Chartism from Shakespeare". Here, Shakespeare's work (mainly the Roman and historical plays) was abundantly cited to use his popularity to their own cause. While the more conservative periodicals leaned more heavily towards the idea that the views presented in Shakespeare's work are his character's and not his own, the radical periodicals placed these views in Shakespeare's mouth. [23]

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[21] PRINCE, Kathryn. Shakespeare in the periodicals. In MARSHALL, Gail (ed.). *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.60.
[22] PRINCE, Kathryn. *Shakespeare in the periodicals*. p.63.
[23] PRINCE, Kathryn. *Shakespeare in the periodicals*. p.63-64.

In magazines intended for women and girls, Shakespeare's heroines were often used as role models, drawing characteristics which would play into the idea of the perfect modest young Victorian girl who would grow up into a respectable and obedient woman.

Whether Shakespeare's work was the best source for this kind of moral propaganda is questionable, of course, considering the large number of characters appearing in his plays, some of which surely did not fall into the category of perfect moral examples. However, it was possible to twist characters into the desired image, providing explanations rather than discussions and telling their readers what to think, what to accept and what to omit.

This idea was further strengthened with publications like *Shakespeare's Heroines* by Anna Jameson (1832) and *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* by Mary Cowden Clark (1850-52), which most likely inspired a series in the *Ladies' Treasury* called *Shakespeare's Maidens*. [24]

That is not to say that the Victorian Women and 19th century women, in general, were not encouraged to think about Shakespeare's work, even though we can see attempts to navigate their thoughts in the preferred direction of contemporary society.

Magazines like the *Girl's Own Paper* and *Atlanta* invited their readers to write their own essays about Shakespeare's heroines, selected pieces published in later issues. There is also a distinction between the approach of periodicals like the *Atlanta*, the *Girl's Own Paper,* and the *Ladies' Treasury*. The *Ladies' Treasury* used Shakespeare's heroines to create moral examples, while the Girl's Own Paper chose emotionalism, promoting the dominant view of Shakespeare for girls. On the other hand, *Atlanta* magazine called for a more conservative and intellectual approach. For example, their prize-winning essay by Susan H. Cunliffe was called: *"Was Shakespeare a Moralist?"[25]*

Another example of a women's magazine which concerned itself with Shakespeare's work is *Victoria*. In contrast to the previously mentioned periodicals, *Victoria* had a more radical and feministic tone in its publication.[26]

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[24] PRINCE, Kathryn. *Shakespeare in the periodicals*. p.64-65.
[25] PRINCE, Kathryn. *Shakespeare in the periodicals*. p.65.
[26] PRINCE, Kathryn. *Shakespeare in the periodicals*. p.65.

Magazines for women and girls often ignored William Shakespeare's biography, concentrating on emotional connections and quotes – often without provided context, which could result in comical usage to those familiar with the plays. This was not favoured by *Victoria,* which isn't concentrated so much on the moralising tendency but instead uses Shakespeare's life for its feminist message.[27]

Just like in magazines intended for girls, boys' magazines often pressured the moral lessons in their engagement with both Shakespeare's person and plays. Shakespeare is introduced with attention to adventure and achievement rather than domesticity as it is in the girls' magazines.

In Shakespeare's biography in the *Boy's Own Paper,* H. P. Burke Downing writes that boys interact with Shakespeare with patriotism and great respect. Disrespecting Shakespeare, as he says, was equal to disrespecting the Queen. [28]

The Little Folks magazine, when publishing the playwright's biography, listed what they thought to be his three greatest strengths: great noble heart, a single mind, and indomitable perseverance. [29]

Another approach can be seen in the *Boys of England,* which targeted lower-class readers than the two previously mentioned magazines. With the different target audience, the editors of the magazine felt the need to create a different image of William Shakespeare. Their concentration was on the transition from poorness to richness. The *Boys of England* also published stories of crimes and violence which were popular at the time.[30] This interest manifested itself even in their engagement with Shakespeare's work – for example, publishing the plot of Othello in several instalments with special attention paid to the murder of Desdemona. [31]

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[27] PRINCE, Kathryn. *Shakespeare in the periodicals*. p.66.
[28] PRINCE, Kathryn. *Shakespeare in the periodicals*. p.68.
[29] PRINCE, Kathryn. *Shakespeare in the periodicals*. p.68.
[30] Victorian England had strong interest in the cult of death and found fascination in morbidity such as the famous Madame Tussauds Museum which originally exhibited wax figurines reminiscing murders which happened at the time, often using real props from the crime scenes like furniture or clothes of the victims.
[31] PRINCE, Kathryn. *Shakespeare in the periodicals*. p.69.

Is it safe to state that the entirety of the 19th century British population was admiring Shakespeare and had a deep respect for him? The answer is, of course, no. While we can make the statement that the majority of the press showed respect for both Shakespeare and his work, it is whole another question whether the people had the same opinions, especially those of the lower class and marginalized groups which weren't given the same platform to express themselves as someone of a higher class.

There is, however, one famous case of a writer who was not conveying the same excitement for Shakespeare as some of his colleagues. That writer was George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950).

G. B. Shaw made a point of sharing his opinion on Shakespeare's writing on multiple well-documented occasions. He disagreed with the overall idea of Shakespeare having been given any divine talent which would place him above other playwrights. At the same time, he shared his doubts about the idea of William Shakespeare's plays being a reasonable moral guide.

At the same time, Shaw denied this sentiment to any other author, with the exception of Homer. Shaw went even as far as to say that he "despised Shakespeare when measuring his own mind with his".[32]

Much could be said about Shaw's long fight against Shakespeare's unbalanced popularity, which genuinely was sometimes taken far as in the example of special masses and proclaiming of his divine connection, and after all, Shaw was not the only writer who stood up against this. Another name to mention in this sense could be Thomas Hardy (1840-1928).

To the Victorians, Shakespeare was a hero and a tool to share English cultural heritage with the rest of the world, especially in Europe. When Thomas Carlyle gave his lecture on "Hero as a Poet" in 1840, he shared this view of Shakespeare as a way of expressing all that is English with the world. Shakespeare's work, as George Yeats states in his article

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[32] RUSSELL, Jackson. Shakespeare their contemporary. In MARSHALL, Gail (ed.). *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century*. p.79.

Shakespeare's Victorian Legacy, was almost a monument for the British nation, one that survived for centuries, never failing to be the pride of the nation. [33]

1.2. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can trace the different ways the 19th century British society perceived William Shakespeare. On one side of the scale, we had the God-sent poet whose rise to fame was not caused by luck or talent but rather divine intervention, placing him nearly in the same position as the nation's saints. On the other side, we have the working-class hero. Somewhere between the two, there is Shakespeare, the moral icon.

The majority of the 19th century society, especially the Victorian one, barely perceived Shakespeare as a human being but rather as an idea which could be moulded in whatever way is needed for their cause. To them, Shakespeare was a celebrity even decades after his death and was treated similarly to how our modern society often treats celebrities, forgetting the human nature of his existence.

In this chapter, I have attempted to summarize the nineteenth century approach to William Shakespeare in different media. We can see the immense importance the playwright and his work played both in the culture of this century as well as the education and overall lives of its people. The way Shakespeare was viewed in this century was often with extreme idolization, which created an idea of almost an unhuman writer. When referencing Shakespeare in their works, most authors did so with respect and the idea of Shakespeare being a set part of a culture that can be borrowed from.

The following chapters will concern themselves with Oscar Wilde's approach in the context of his contemporaries and predecessors with the intention of discovering whether he shared their sentiments about the playwright.

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[33] YEATS, George. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, p.471.

2. The Truth of Masks

During his life, Oscar Wilde wrote several essays on various topics, including art, theatre, and fashion. These essays were published in collections like *The Intentions* (1891), which among others, included *The Truth of Masks: A Note on Illusions.* The essay carries a different tone than other included texts (*The Decay of Lying* or *The Critic as Artist*), which Wilde explicitly stated. In a letter to his publisher William Heinemann, he suggested not including the essay, but in the end, it did make the final cut.

Although *The Truth of Masks* is non-fiction, we can find elements of intertextuality in it. This is mainly in quotes. Unlike the texts discussed in the following chapters, where we can find more cases of intertextuality, I have decided to include this essay mostly because it tells us about Wilde's relationship with Shakespeare without it being told through a character or narrator.

2.1.   Comparing the Two Versions

The original version of this essay was published in 1885 in volume XVII of *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review* under the title *Shakespeare and Stage Costume.* Although the two versions are mostly the same, there are slight differences.

In the opening of the 1885 text, Wilde mentions Henry Irving's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* and Wilson Barrett's of *Hamlet* (1884)*,* criticizing the staging. In the 1891 version, Wilde uses the exact words "He [Shakespeare] would probably say that the play, and the play only, is the thing and that everything is leather and prunella." to criticize Lily Langtry's production of *Antony and Cleopatra* (1890).

Using different examples for the newer version of the essay is a logical change. However, the phrasing of the first paragraph speaks of Wilde's ironic nature and sets a tone for the remaining twenty pages of the text. Wilde does not bother changing the wording even when talking about a different production.

Other than that, we can only find small changes in the phrasing of some sentences without changing their meaning or extending some quotes by a few more lines.

Overall, we are faced with two nearly identical texts, and so, in this chapter, I will be referring to the later version of the essay.

2.2.   Staging Shakespeare in the 19th century

To understand Wilde's need to write the essay, we must first understand how Shakespeare's plays were staged in the nineteenth century, mainly the latter half.

As discussed in the first chapter, Shakespeare was regarded with high honour and respect; this might provoke the idea that the Victorians would approach his plays carefully and that they would try to be as true to the original as possible. However, this was not always the case.

The increase in publishing of new editions of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century went hand in hand with the increase in the staging of his plays. As stated in the previous part of the thesis, Shakespeare was not secluded to the highest classes of British society but was embedded in the consciousness of the ordinary citizen, thus creating a great demand for Shakespeare's plays.

This presented itself in the capacity of the theatres and many different sections within them, which separated the classes of its visitors further. For example, the Covent Garden Theatre and the Drury Lane Theatre could hold up to three thousand visitors each[34]. For comparison, the replica of the famous Globe Theatre in London can hold half as many people.

A theatre with this capacity, without the luxury of modern technology like microphones, had to adjust the production, so it was well visible and easily understandable for all the visitors. Gestures, speech, make-up, costume, and even the props had to be altered to satisfy the need of a theatre this large. It is to no great surprise that with the overall interest in Shakespeare, there was also interest in the different ways Shakespeare was staged, including the costumes.

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[34] SILLARS, Stuart. *Shakespeare and the Victorians.* p. 51-52.

Around the middle of the century, there were attempts to create a more realistic stage, aiming for authenticity. Bridges, houses, even the channels of Venice. This aim for authenticity also reflected itself in costumes.

Costumes are undeniably one of the most important visual aspects of staging a play. The right costume can draw the viewer deeper into the story and even transmit silent messages. Shakespeare's plays are certainly no exceptions, and the nineteenth century society understood the importance of costume. After all, costumes often play an important role in Shakespeare's plays. *Twelfth Night* wouldn't be complete without the famous yellow stockings and the right costume to show Violet's attempt to mask herself as a man is a key part of the story. In the same measure, we cannot imagine *Romeo and Juliet* without masks, and *Coriolanus* must wear the right wolvish gown.

Generally, there are two main approaches to creating a period costume, whether it is for a film or a play. The first is sticking to the available fact as close as possible and creating almost a replica of the original gown, sometimes using modern sewing methods and pattern drafting, sometimes attempting to mimic the historical methods.

The second approach would be implementing more artistic ideas in the design. This can mean combining the historical elements with modern and fantastic elements or even setting the play in a completely different era. [35]

As mentioned above, Victorian society strived to reach higher authenticity in their productions which also mirrored itself in the costumes. This means that Victorians leaned more heavily to the first out of the two mentioned approaches to creating costumes for a period piece. Some designers and directors strived for extreme authenticity, going as far as buying historical fabrics from the needed period, often spending large sums of money on the materials alone.

However, it would be wrong to claim all the costumes perfect or historically accurate. There were cases when the creators reached for random historical pieces, mixing them in

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[35] This practice gained popularity in the 20th century and continued to the 21st century, often using the combination of modern setting and Shakespeare to comment on current issues. For example, the many productions of *Measure for Measure* happening in 2018-9 as reaction to the *Me-Too* movement or *Richard III.* in reaction to different elections in the recent years.

vague references or even missing the era completely, without making it clear that this was the intention.

One of the cases would be Henry Irving's 1882 production of *Romeo and Juliet* with him and Ellen Terry as leads which was staged in the Royal Lyceum Theatre in London. Henry Herman critiqued the costumes for using clothes in the style which would be worn roughly a hundred years earlier.[36][37] This style of clothes would be vastly different from the style worn in the 14th or 15th century (the time in which the play is usually set) as well as the style worn in the 1880s. [38]

The opposite of this would be the case of the now-famous costume worn again by Ellen Terry in a production of *Macbeth* in 1888-89, which inspired John Singer Sargent to paint her as Lady Macbeth after attending the opening night in December 1888. The dress itself required Alice Comyns Carr to crotchet the fabric using green silk thread twisted with blue tinsel and sewing on the beetle wings as decoration (bright beetle wings were not unheard of in Victorian fashion). Oscar Wilde commented on this costume, saying that lady Macbeth took care of all of her shopping in Byzantium. [39] While there was extensive and admirable work put into the costume, even this famous dress reflects one of the traditions of Victorian costumery, which survived to this day.

If we look closer at the surviving photographs of Ellen Terry in the dress as well as the dress itself, it seems that they were fitted to be worn over the 1880s style of corset, which of course, disrupted the 11th-century silhouette. This could have been done both for the

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[36] JONES, Marion. Stage Costume: Historical Versimilitude and Stage Convention. In FOULKES, Richard (ed.). *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 57.

[37] Ellen Terry Archive. *Romeo and Juliet.* [2022-01-24] < https://ellenterryarchive.essex.ac.uk/shakespeare/event/166/romeo-and-juliet>

[38] While it is true that the 1780s fashion slowly headed to the styles of empire lines which gained popularity roughly decade later and which sometimes took inspiration not just from ancient fashion but also the renaissance, it is still incomparable. Especially so, if some of the clothes were taken from earlier decades like the 1760s and 1770s with their wide paniers and heavily boned stays, creating the idea of prolonged and flattened chest with overexaggerated hips instead of the more relaxed fashion with high waist and less voluminous skirt worn in the 14th and 15th century.

[39] JONES, Marion. S*tage Costume: Historical Versimilitude and Stage Convention.* p. 63-65.

modesty of the actress dictated by the late 19th century standards as well as the desire to create an image which is attractive for the audience of the time.

This meant that hairstyles and underpinnings were often those of the 19th century and not of the era in which the costumes were meant to be set. The effect of this could result in comical outcomes. For example, Isabella Glyn as Cleopatra with the hairstyle of the late 1840s and crinoline and corset of the era under her clothes. [40]

In conclusion, while Victorians claimed to strive for high authenticity, vanity often got in a way, just like it does today in many period pieces.

2.3. Wilde's Opinions on Shakespearean Staging

One of the most repeated words of the essay is "archaeology," and indeed, Wilde seems to place strong importance on it. He frequently stresses the importance of research when staging a historical play while admitting that sometimes productions are limited by time or finance. Simultaneously, he praises Shakespeare for his own approach to the issue. He quotes several of Shakespeare's plays where the text explicitly states how the character's dress or accessories should look.

After recounting many of these textual occurrences on several pages, he goes on to discuss the notes that Shakespeare left as staging guides. Sadly, as Wilde states too, many of these burnt together with the Globe theatre. He then continues to give tips on where to read the surviving notes so that the people preparing new productions can do their research.

The archaeological approach to costume, as Wilde talks about, should have been - from what we know about Victorian staging – a common one. However, as his essay reveals, there was much improvement to be done, at least in the eyes of Wilde, who was not content with the way Shakespeare was presented on stage.

The reason why he places such importance on historical accuracy might be partially a result of respect for Shakespeare but probably stems from his overall philosophy about staging a historical play. Because of his personal experiences, he understands the

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[40] JONES, Marion. *Stage Costume: Historical Versimilitude and Stage Convention.* p. 68-69.

importance of the aesthetical aspect of the production, and he knows that certain changes or ignorance of the original text (regarding the costumes) can interfere with the story. This belief is something I share with Wilde; Shakespeare also knew that the visual part of his plays was perhaps not as important as the text itself but carried a large portion of their success. After all, it is no secret that humans are visual beings.

Shakespeare's characters often mask themselves for some part of the play, for example, Viola in *Twelfth Night.* Here, her mask is a crucial part of the story and was it is done wrong; the entire production might suffer from it.

But what does it tell us about Wilde's viewing of Shakespeare? How is it relevant to his own take on Shakespeare that is discussed in the following chapters?

Among the critique of specific productions and general theatre staging management, Wilde's feelings about Shakespeare come to the surface. Wilde is not only unsatisfied with the productions because of his love for fashion and costume design; it is because he feels they don't do Shakespeare justice. Theatre and fashion might be his passion, but so is Shakespeare, and possibly in an equal measure.

Wilde praises Shakespeare's approach to costume, and in a way, he uses him as an example of what he thinks to be the right way of staging a play. To him, Shakespeare is inspirational not only in his writing but also in his overall connection to theatre.

"And the interest was not confined merely to classical dress or the dress of foreign nations; there was also a good deal of research, among theatrical people especially, into the ancient costume of England itself: and when Shakespeare, in the prologue to one of his plays, expresses his regret at being unable to produce helmets of the period, he is speaking as an Elizabethan manager and not merely as an Elizabethan poet."[41]

In the essay, we can see the fondness Wilde had for Shakespeare as a writer, theatre producer, and, dare I say, a person. This is mirrored in his writing. When quoting Shakespeare in his stories, the characters usually make sure to point out their respect. This

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[41] WILDE, Oscar. *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde.* Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997. p. 883.

is well seen in the discussion between the main characters in *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* He does so even when, in the very same story, he addresses Shakespeare's possible queerness – a fact which in Wilde's time would be considered the exact opposite of respect. Most likely, it would be considered an insult. However, as we know from Wilde's personal life, that was probably not his intention.

And, if I were to judge Wilde's respect for Shakespearean theatre (meaning all aspects of it, not just the plays' plots) based on this essay, I would say it transcends the traditional piety Victorians had for Shakespeare. Wilde does not worship him blindly; he respects him for what he finds necessary. Shakespeare seems to be an idol for Wilde, were it Wilde at thirty when the first version was published or at forty when he decided not to tone any of his praises down and not change his opinions. This means that Wilde, who wrote *The Duchess of Padua* (1883), had the same affection for Shakespeare as Wilde, who wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890/91).

2.4. Conclusion

The Truth of Masks tells us a lot about Wilde's careful approach to Shakespeare, which is also mirrored in his texts like *The Duchess of Padua* (Discussed in Chapter 5). His vast knowledge of staging Shakespeare's plays in the Elizabethan Era proved in this essay, combined with his experience in playwriting, gave him an excellent foundation for writing *The Duchess*.

His interest in the overall topic of costume and fashion is also a result of his dandyism, and we can see it in other essays like *The Philosophy of Dress* (first published in 1885 in The New York Tribune). His letters also reveal that he sketched costumes and stage designs for his own plays. But, as we can tell from reading the text, the interest isn't just costume; it is Shakespeare.

As stated above, this text is not as rich in intertextuality as the texts in the following chapters, however, it is still present in quotes and lengthy references to costume notes in Shakespeare's plays.

I think that even though this is a piece of non-fiction writing, we can put it in the context of Bloom's theory of influence. His idea of the Oedipal complex does not seem

to be effective in the case of Wilde. Wilde welcomed the influence that Shakespeare had on him, and this essay is only the beginning of it, as we will be able to see in the following chapters. I cannot find any hints of inner turmoil which would suggest that Wilde fought this influence. Shakespeare is not the key element of his writing, he is not writing to continue Shakespeare's work, not in the majority of his texts at least and I do not claim it to be the case. However, the occurring intertextuality in Wilde's texts speaks of his connection to Shakespeare. It is intentional and - as this essay proves - coming from life-long love for Shakespeare. He does not strive to compete with Shakespeare, and his texts show that he was not bound by his influence, but instead, he welcomed it in small increments, which added another layer to his texts.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the exact extent of this influence, cases of intertextuality, and the contrast of Wilde's description of Shakespeare as opposed to the traditional Victorian idea.

3. The Picture of Dorian Gray

In this chapter, I shall discuss the only novel by Oscar Wilde and, arguably, his most famous work. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published in 1890 in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine as a thirteen-chapter novella. A year later, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* got published again, this time extended by seven chapters. The second version was mostly extended for practical publishing reasons; therefore, the description of characters nor the course of the story changes. It is also the version of the story nowadays used to publish new editions. For this reason, the version I worked with in this chapter is the second one.

When we first think about *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in connection to Shakespeare, we may not see any apparent components which would link the two. In some way, the novel reads like a Shakespearean tragedy with its plot and complex characters, but at the same time, it would be wrong to limit dramatic plot and well-written characters only to Shakespeare and should be therefore perceived as Wilde's qualities as a writer.

After a closer inspection, we can, however, find several Shakespearean themes in the story, one of which ends up being a significant influence on the course of the story, especially the development of the main character – Dorian Gray. Apart from this influence, we would find several references, some of which can provide a wider context to the story and its characters, although subtle at first glance.

3.1. Synopsis

The story begins with young Dorian Gray coming to London; he meets a painter Basil Halward with whom he immediately bonds and agrees to have his portrait painted. During this time, he meets Basil's friend Lord Henry Wotton who slowly begins changing Dorian with his philosophy. The outcome of this is Dorian's infamous wish for his portrait to age instead of him.

Shortly after this, Dorian meets an actress, Sibyl, with whom he has a short-lived affair that ends in her death – presumably a suicide. After this, Dorian starts slipping into madness and completely changes his way of living. Soon he realizes that his portrait is taking on all of his sins, wounds, and age.

He becomes obsessed with the painting and is completely transformed. Basil, who was once his greatest friend and possibly even a lover, becomes a victim of this change when Dorian murders him. After covering up the murder, he leaves England for years.

When he arrives, he is looked upon strangely. All his old acquaintances now aged while he visually remained the same. He wishes to get rid of the painting and start a new life; however, in his attempt to destroy it, he kills himself. The painting returns to its original state while Dorian's body becomes the ugly man from the painting.

3.2.   Intertextuality in Characterization

There are several cases of intertextuality in the characters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In this sense, the most complex character is Sibyl Vane, who is described as bland, and her only personality is the characters she plays. This culminates in her death scene, where Lord Henry refers to her by different names of the Shakespearean heroines she played instead of her name. This could, in a way, be viewed as a type of hypertextuality where to understand Sibyl fully, the reader must know the original characters and thus is taken to the original texts.

He also paraphrases some lines from Shakespeare's plays which is another case of intertextuality.

3.2.1. Dorian Gray

The very first Shakespearean reference we find is in the first chapter of the book when Basil Halward talks to Lord Henry about Dorian. He says: "He is all my art to me now."[42] This is a reference to the last two lines of William Shakespeare's Sonnet 78. In their original form, these lines sound like this:

"But thou art all my art, and dost advance

As high as learning my rude ignorance."[43]

Even without the context of the Sonnet, it would be clear from Basil's words how important Dorian is to him. The stakes are unarguable high. Dorian is his muse; he consumed his artistic life and, to some extent, his personal life, too, because we are often reminded throughout the story how intertwined these two aspects of life are for Basil.

If we go further and assume that Wilde wrote the reference with the intention to prompt the reader to connect this with the Sonnet and perhaps even turn to the Sonnet to reread the whole poem to gain more context. The perception of Dorian as Basil's muse would

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[42] WILDE, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2001. p. 11.
[43] SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Works*. London: Spring Books, 1968. p. 1052.

be even strengthened. In the Sonnet, he invites his muse to be proud of his best poems, for they are born of its influence. This can also be a foreshadowing of Basil's and Dorian's relationship.

Basil does not paint Dorian's picture to gain fame through it (though it is later said that it is his best work and he wished to exhibit it); he is more interested in creating a lasting likeness of the young man because he is charmed by his beauty.

As Martin Hilský writes in his study of the Sonnets, Sonnet n°78 is the first from a series of Sonnets referring to unspecified rival poets - possibly George Chapman.[44] In this series of Sonnets, the subject is seen as a rival for fame and patronage – hence the title of a rival poet (or poets, depending on whether we assume it to be one person or more people).

Interestingly, Basil uses this quote when talking to Lord Henry since Henry becomes somewhat of a rival for Dorian's attention early on in the story. We can even say that Henry wins this "battle" as Dorian ends up leaning more towards his character than Basil. So, this one single reference gives the reader a hint of what both Dorian and Henry mean to Basil. Muse and a rival.

Another character that we may consider to be the most Shakespearean in this novel is Sibyl Vane, the love interest of Dorian and, at the same time, one of the main causes of his moral decline. When we are first introduced to the character of Sibyl – a poor actress performing in one of the less glamorous parts of London – it is during a performance of Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet,* to be precise.

The first time Dorian sees Sibyl is as Juliet; her performance immediately entrances him. In later parts of the story, where he talks about Sibyl or thinks about her, he can barely separate the real Sibyl – an actress who merely portrays the character – from the characters of Shakespeare's plays.

Wilde had chosen several plays which Dorian has the chance to watch in the story – *Romeo and Juliet, As You Like It*, *Hamlet, Othello,* and *Cymbeline.*

As stated in the first chapter, Shakespeare's plays were more than common on the Victorian stage and were intended for the lower classes as well, so there is nothing strange about Dorian finding a theatre that would hold these performances even in the poor parts

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[44] HILSKÝ, Martin. In. SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Sonnets*. Brno: Atlantis, 2012. p. 239.

of London. However, Wilde did not use these plays only as a passive background for the plot but rather as foreshadowing.

3.2.2. Lord Henry Wotton

One of the story's main characters and a character that is introduced before the reader first encounters Dorian is Lord Henry Wotton. Oscar Wilde managed to create a well flashed-out and morally grey character. Wilde later said that that character is written the way people perceive Wilde, though he feels more like Basil.[45]

We must, of course, take into consideration this inspiration for the character since the information comes from the author, but there seems to be another layer to the character of Henry which fits well into the characterization Wilde gave to Sibyl Vane. The character which comes to mind in this connection is Iago.

Iago is one of the most complex of Shakespeare's characters, and we may even argue that there are more layers to him than the main character – Othello. In the play, Iago is the mastermind behind the impending doom at the end. He twists words and situations and weaves a new reality for his own gain (even though it eventually turns against him, too).

Lord Henry often seems to take the position of the wicked whisperer who leads the other characters in the direction he wishes, even when he knows it will hurt them. The major difference is that Iago's motive is jealousy and revenge, while in Lord Henry's case, his primary motivation seems to be boredom.

However, there is also a possible aspect of jealousy, too – towards Dorian, who has what Lord Henry desires - youth and beauty. Though this doesn't seem to be the main motive for Henry's action, it may be one of them.

The main connection between Henry and Iago seems to be in the scene where he announces Sibyl's death to Dorian. Here Henry directly compares Sibyl to Desdemona and quotes *Othello*. I explain this further in the following part.

Since Henry is involved in this part of the story, Dorian's approach changes. The first shock and guilt which overpower him are quickly exchanged for something crueller—Henry advices Dorian to take the girl's death as an experience and see it as something

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[45] Course Hero, *The Picture of Dorian Gray: Character Analysis,* [2022-03-30]. https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Picture-of-Dorian-Gray/character-analysis/

romantic. The more Dorian listens to him, the more he changes. This is important because it proves that Dorian was not changed because of the painting but because of what Henry taught him and the painting only mirrors the deterioration of his psyche.

Another difference between the characters is the ending. While Iago is punished for his deeds, Lord Henry gets to live even after Dorian's death, unaffected by everything that happened.

Lord Henry, apart from his resemblance to Iago, seems to show elements of Don John from *Much Ado About Nothing*. Mainly in what drives him to interfere with the lives of others. Unlike Iago's motivation, Don John is driven by boredom and mischief. This seems to be the case for Lord Henry, too.

However, there are not any strong references to the play, which would prove that Wilde intentionally combined the characters of Don John and Iago to create Lord Henry Wotton. It is important to state that while there are many probably intentional connections between Wilde's and Shakespeare's characters, I do not wish to reduce them to copies of previously written characters. They are still Wilde's inventions and prove his creative qualities, and the Shakespearean resemblances are only parts of them. They might also spur from general character archetypes we find in fiction.

3.3. Sibyl's Death

One of the culminating scenes of the novel is the death of Sibyl Vane. After a fight with Dorian, which spurs from his anger about her bad theatre performance and the shame he felt in front of Henry, she is found dead. It is unclear whether it was by accident or purpose, but the story hints that she committed suicide.

Wilde uses several Shakespearean elements in her death. The character of Sibyl combines the tragedies of three famous characters, Ophelia, Juliet, and Desdemona – two of which commit suicide.

3.3.1. Sibyl as Juliet

When we are introduced to the character of Sibyl, it is in her role of Juliet. In one of her last scenes, when Dorian visits the theatre with Henry, she is also playing this role. This seems to create a complete circle for the character. Apart from the fact that having her play the same role shows the difference in her performance, there is another reason for her portraying Juliet.

If we think of *Romeo and Juliet*, two prominent features come to mind: the seemingly impossible relationship between the two characters due to the hatred between their families and their tragic ending.

Dorian's and Sibyl's families don't have a long-lasting feud, but their relationship is not viewed favourably by those among them. This is because of their social differences. While Dorian is a young bachelor with great inheritance who fits well into high London society, Sibyl is merely a poor actress, a job which was often frowned upon since actresses were by many considered the equivalent of prostitutes.

Since there is a difference between the issue keeping Romeo and Juliet apart and that which Dorian and Sibyl have to face, it creates an obstacle of similar greatness. However, Dorian decides not to listen to his friends, blinded by his fascination with Sibyl.

The key difference here is that while the element of love forms the central part of *Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* it is only a catalyser for the character's infamous development and therefore isn't explored as in-depth as in *Romeo and Juliet.*

The second anticipation that Wilde might have intended by relating Sibyl to Juliet is her suicide. Although it is not clearly stated in the story whether Sibyl committed suicide, it is hinted that that was the case. In the novel, Sibyl poisons herself with either prussic acid or white lead.

Poison is also a key element in *Romeo and Juliet*. The first type of poison is given to Juliet to fake her death. The second poison, this time deadly, is purchased by Romeo after hearing of Juliet's fake death. There, Juliet has the intention of poisoning herself as well when finding Romeo is dead, but eventually has to result to stabbing herself with his dagger.

Wilde could not have used this particular method because it would break the element of doubt, and it also doesn't give Sibyl the chance to die in a way that might seem accidental. If she wanted to be properly buried, her death would have to look like an accident.

3.3.2. Sibyl as Ophelia
There also seems to be an attempt to draw Sibyl in the likeness of Ophelia.

This turning point in the story is also a closure of the Ophelia metaphor. Like with Hamlet, it is unclear whether the female lead's death was a suicide or not.[46]

It is also her death that causes an essential shift in Dorian's psyche. While Dorian allegedly sold his soul to stop aging, the reader cannot see any significant or unnatural fall in his morals just yet. There is no proof that Dorian loses his soul the moment he expresses his wish.

It is only possible to notice a change after the fight with Sibyl – this is also the first moment where Dorian feels like something about his portrait has changed. Within the context of the story, Sibyl is his first sin. He is aware of this and, at first, is decided to go to Sibyl and fix his mistake – that is until he learns that it is too late.

After the announcement of Sibyl's death, Dorian is convinced that it will "make his soul ugly" his narcissism turns the young woman's tragedy into his own. Henry's intervention quickly shifts any left signs of guilt to a moral story from which Dorian can learn. It is here that Dorian truly begins changing and starts succumbing to madness.

In Hamlet, the main character pretends to be mad, but the audience knows it is only a pretence, a part of his plan. After Ophelia kills herself – if we assume that she did commit suicide as the play hints – his madness becomes real. It is like his ordeal becomes sealed at this moment. This was the event that tipped him over the edge of sanity – possibly, just like Dorian.

The difference apart from the method is that Sibyl's suicide is the outcome of Dorian's treatment of her, while Ophelia's suicide is caused by a series of tragedies in her life, Hamlet's actions toward her being only one reason. Another difference – and this is true for Desdemona and Juliet, too – is Sibyl's upbringing. All of the three women are from higher social ranks, while Sibyl is of lower class which is also the reason why she becomes an actress.

The intention of creating a parallel between Sibyl and Ophelia is made clear after her death when Henry comes over to Dorian's in chapter eight. After seeing how distressed Dorian is, Henry tries to convince him that he never loved Sibyl, but instead, he only loved the characters she played. Among these characters, he mentions Cordelia, Desdemona, and Ophelia. A few lines later, Lord Henry says: "The moment she touched

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[46] The popular 2008 film adaptation *Dorian Gray* directed by Oliver Parker presses on this by changing Sibyl's death to drowning. The scene even resembles the 1851-2 painting of Ophelia by Sir John Everett Millias.

actual life, she marred it, and it marred her, and so she passed away. Mourn your Ophelia, if you like."[47]

Henry tries to, in a way to, dehumanize Sibyl, turn her into an object or, rather in this context, a character. This way, he assumes Dorian will move over her death faster.

If we view this scene as a goodbye to the character, it seems important that we are reminded of these women, all of which suffered a tragic fate. By telling Dorian to mourn Ophelia but not Sibyl, it appears that Henry pushes the young man further towards Hamlet's fate, in this case, madness and untimely death.

3.3.3. Sibyl as Desdemona

Out of the three mentioned characters, Desdemona is the strongest referenced one. If we put this in context with other *Othello* references in the text, we get a picture of Dorian's development and the deterioration of his mind.

The first of this series of references connected to Sibyl's death takes place before the reader finds out about her fate. After the fight in the theatre, Dorian returns home, angry but not regretting his action nor feeling guilty. The scene changes slightly when he sees his portrait and notices its first change.

"No; it was merely an illusion wrought on the troubled senses. The horrible night that he had passed had left phantoms behind it. Suddenly there had fallen upon his brain that tiny scarlet speck that makes men mad."[48]

This is an intentional reference to "It is the very error of the moon; she comes nearer Earth, and she was wont and make men mad."[49] Othello speaks these words in his conversation with Emilia after he murders Desdemona.

It seems that Wilde used this reference to further foreshadow Sibyl's upcoming death to the reader, but also Dorian's now inevitable slip into the darkness and madness which is to happen in the following chapter.

When Dorian notices the change in his portrait, he is startled by it and understands it for what it is. His guilt finally catches up with him, and he wants to make amends. Realizing the pain, he must have caused Sibyl; he promises himself to fix their relationship the following morning and to never see Henry again, recognizing the negative influence he has on Dorian.

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[47]WILDE, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. p. 84.
[48] WILDE, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. p. 74.
[49] SHAKESPEARE, William. *Othello.* Ware: Wordsworth Limited Editions, 2000. p. 124.

This is a crucial point for the character as it is his last chance for redemption – one he was more than willing to take. But, just like Othello, he realized his wrong too late as, at this point of the story, it is impossible to save Sibyl from her death.

His realization – especially his understanding of Henry's influence is also strengthening Henry's position in the story as Iago. Dorian understands that Henry might not have his best interests at heart and that his intentions might not be as pure as he presumed until then. His doubts about Henry are, however, pushed back in the following chapter when Henry uses Dorian's vulnerable state to not only get back into his graces but to twist the situation to his own liking.

In his eyes, Sibyl's death is not more than a casualty, similar to how to Iago Desdemona's death is just a means to execute his plan.

Dorian shows guilt at finding out about Sibyl and says: "I was terribly cruel to her. You forget that."[50] Henry proceeds to tell him about how women enjoy being treated cruelly and how he should not forget that he loved her for the characters she played, not for herself. "You said to me that Sibyl Vane represented to you all the heroines of romance – that she was Desdemona one night, and Ophelia the other; that if she died as Juliet, she came to life as Imogen."[51]

Only a few lines further on in the dialogue, Henry says: "Cry out against Heaven because the daughter of Brabantio died."[52] The daughter of Brabantio is meant to be Desdemona.

While Henry is trying to strengthen the idea of Sibyl being a mere character rather than a real person and with it bash any sense of guilt (and natural human reaction) out of Dorian. It is not the painting which doomed Dorian but rather this conversation with Henry. The moment where Dorian stops experiencing emotions in a healthy human way, he slowly becomes the villain of his own story.

The last reference to *Othello* to discuss is written in the text after Henry leaves and Dorian returns to watching his painting. As he wonders about the changing of the picture and the seeming connection it has to his actions and his emotions, he feels saddened by the idea of the picture losing its beauty and he says: "The pity of it! The pity of it!"[53]

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[50] WILDE, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 83.
[51] WILDE, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 83.
[52] WILDE, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 84.
[53] WILDE, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 85.

This is a reference to: "But yet the pity of it, Iago – O the pity of it, Iago."[54] (Act 4, Scene 1). Othello speaks this line after Iago convinces him that Desdemona gave the gifted handkerchief from Othello to Cassio. It is this action that makes Othello believe that Desdemona is cheating on him and thus (in his eyes) that she must die. At the same time, Othello talks about how sweet and beautiful Desdemona is and that it is a shame that he must kill her.

Iago steps in again to convince Othello that he must not think of Desdemona in this way, for his idea of her was false. It is similar to what Lord Henry did to Dorian when he felt guilt for breaking off his engagement with Sibyl and her presumed suicide.

In that sense, the line has two meanings in the novel. One might still be connected to the conversation Dorian has with Henry, and it works as a closure of the Desdemona metaphor.

The second is connected to the scene itself. Because at this point, Dorian is alone, only with his portrait. He speaks these words not towards Henry but himself. It is a testament to the shift in his thinking which happens during his conversation with Lord Henry. The regret Dorian feels now is not about the loss of Sibyl but the changing of his portrait.

This metaphor is mostly presented to the reader through chapter eight, with a short setting up at the end of chapter seven. It is quite fascinating how Wilde used the characters of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona to add depth to the tragedy of his story. The references are not subtle enough to be unclear, but at the same time, they are not direct quotes which might be easier to spot for the reader. Wilde wrote a second layer into the scene for the readers who were well educated in Shakespeare's plays.

We can also find several cases of intertextuality in this passage of the text, mainly through Lord Henry's abundant references to Shakespeare's characters. However, it is also in the way some of the characters are introduced to us. The most visible and intentionally seeming case to me is Sibyl, whose individuality is constantly taken away until right after her death; Henry attempts to make her nothing more than a character to help Dorian deal with her passing away.

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[54] SHAKESPEARE, William. *Othello.* p.103.

3.4.   The Painting of a Sorrow

The last example of Shakespearean reference in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* I wish to discuss is from chapter nineteen – the second to last chapter of the entire novel. The quote said by Dorian is also another type of intertextuality used in the novel.

In the exchange between Lord Henry and Dorian, they talk about the portrait made by Basil. At this point in the story, Basil has been dead for years, and Dorian has returned from his travels; he is also slowly realizing that he wants to begin a new life without the painting, and therefore he is preparing to destroy it.

When Henry asks Dorian what happened to the portrait, claiming it was Basil's best work that he wished to buy, Dorian replies that he does not remember what happened to it and that he never liked it, to begin with. "But I never really liked it. I am sorry I sat for it. The memory is hateful to me. Why do you talk of it? It used to remind me of those curious lines in some play – *Hamlet,* I think – how do they run?

> *Like a painting of a sorrow,*
>
> *A face without a heart.*[55]

Yes: that is what it was like."[56]

The line which Dorian quotes is from Act 4 Scene 7 of *Hamlet*. It is spoken by Claudius when he asks Laertes whether his father was dear to him or whether he is like a painting of a sorrow, a face without a heart. What is meant by that is that the character only pretends to feel emotions, in this case, grief, when he is numb.

When Dorian speaks about the painting in this way, he is talking about himself because he believes he is no longer able to feel emotions and that all that remains is a beautiful face without a heart. The negative transition of the character, which begins with meeting Henry and seeing Basil's love for the beauty of the painting, culminates with Sibyl's death, is now complete.

Dorian resembles nothing of the man he once was, and he is now more resembling a painting than a real human being.

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[55] SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Works*. p.973.
[56] WILDE, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. p.169-170.

3.5. Conclusion

To conclude my take on Shakespearean references in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, it is fair to say, Wilde did not shy away from combining different plays to create a complex layer of his novel. The strongest influence seems to be *Othello* and *Hamlet*. Wilde uses the story as well as the two characters to create a complicated character in the form of Dorian.

He also used it in the relationships between the characters. Henry/Dorian as Iago/Othello or Sibyl/Dorian as Desdemona/Othello and Ophelia/Hamlet. The dynamics seemed to be strongly inspired by the dynamics penned by Shakespeare.

These cases of intertextuality are combined with quotes and paraphrases like those discussed above. Wilde referenced well-known plays which were considered the peak of Shakespeare's talent in the 19th century just as much as they are in the 21st century. The choice of these plays hints that he hoped the references would be discovered even outside of the highly educated circles.

Unlike *The Duchess of Padua* and *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.,* where removing all Shakespearean elements would completely distort the story, that is not the case with *Dorian Gray*. Apart from Sibyl, who is intentionally built from Shakespeare's characters, the other characters are well fleshed out even without the discussed allusions.

So, what does it tell us about the influence Shakespeare had on this text? Wilde managed to write an original piece of fiction without binding himself to the precursor's work. The intertextuality can be viewed as a form of intentional enrichment of the text. Although the story would still be an excellent prosaic piece thanks to Wilde's talent for storytelling as well as the complex plot and important and often heavy issues it deals with (societal pressures on beauty, negative views on aging, the idea of sin, etc.), Wilde's incorporation of Shakespearean themes elevates both the aesthetical and intellectual aspects of the novel.

4. The Portrait of Mr. W. H.

The Portrait of Mr. W. H. arguably does not belong among the most famous works of Oscar Wilde, but it is an interesting piece, nevertheless. The short story was first published in the Blackwood's Magazine in 1889 and later it was added to the collection of short stories *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*. At first, the collection was published without the story, but it has been included in editions published after 1900.

From his personal letters, we know that one of the inspirations for the story was a conversation he had with Robert Ross about Thomas Tyrwhitt's theory about the dedicatee of the Sonnets. It would seem Wilde had some fascination for the theory and that he commissioned a portrait of Mr. W. H. to be made – a scene which became a part of his short story.[57]

The story is also referenced in James Joyce's Ulysses, where Mr. Best uses the story as proof of Tyrwhitt's theory and calls it Wilde's best work.[58]

We can also find several cases of intertextuality in the text, beginning with the title itself. It is taken from the dedication of the first edition of the Sonnets, which, using Genette's theory, could be considered paratextuality. We can also find many quotes and an interesting case of paraphrasing where Wilde combined several lines of the Sonnet to write several sentences of the story.

There is intertextuality with the Sonnets, but there is also intertextuality with Tyrwhitt's theory which Wilde explicitly critiqued, and thus he created metatextuality – both to the theory and to the Sonnets. How exactly this manifested itself in the text is discussed in this chapter.

4.1. Synopsis

The story is composed with snippets of William Shakespeare's Sonnets, exploring the different theories about the addressee of the Sonnets. It primarily concentrates on a theory by an eighteenth-century scholar Thomas Tyrwhitt (1730-86).

The story is partially told in conversations between two men—the unnamed main character, who also serves as the narrator, and Mr. Erskine. Erskine is telling an account

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[57] Shakespeare Institute Library. *Wilde about Mr. W. H. and the Sonnets.* (15. 3. 2018) [2022-04-29] https://silibrary1.wordpress.com/2018/03/15/wilde-about-mr-w-h-oscar-and-the-Sonnets/

[58] The Rosenbach. *Thomas Tyrwhitt, Oscar Wilde, Mr. W. H. and James Joyce.* (27. 3. 2015) [2022-04-29] https://rosenbach.org/blog/thomas-tyrwhitt-oscar-wilde-mr-wh-and/

of his friend Cyril Graham who was fascinated with the Sonnets, specifically with the mystery behind the dedication of its first edition.

Erskine explains that one day, Graham became convinced he had solved the long-asked question of the identity of Mr. W. H. to whom the Sonnets were dedicated to. Using parts of the Sonnets, he explains his theory about William Shakespeare being in an intimate relationship with one of the young actors – Willie Hughes.

After this, Erskine and Graham spend weeks trying to find any mention of Willie Hughes, but with no luck. Erskine refuses to publish the theory without any proof, while Graham is convinced that his reading of the Sonnets is enough. Giving up on the theory, Erskine is ready to move on when Graham one day shows him a chest with the initials W. H. carved in its front panel. Along with it, he presents Erskine with a portrait of Master Will Hews. Later on, by accident, Erskine finds out the portrait to be a forgery, commissioned by Graham to bring the proof Erskine wanted.

Soon after, Cyril Graham commits suicide, leaving Erskine with the portrait and a letter asking him to continue the search for Willie Hughes.

Fascinated by the story and Graham's theory, the main character dives into his own research, dissecting the Sonnets and, along with it, creating a love story between William Shakespeare and Willie Hughes, including a tragic ending to their relationship.

After he convinces himself that the theory must be true, he tells the whole story of their love to Erskine, who eventually believes him. Although soon, the main character realizes the theory is not as strong as he first thought. Two years later, the main character rushes to meet Erskine after receiving what seems to be a suicide letter in which Erskine proclaims his belief in the theory. By the time the main character reaches his house, Erskine is dead – the cause of his death being tuberculosis, not suicide. The main character is then given the portrait of Mr. W. H. hoping that it will now be he who continues the theory.

4.2. The Sonnets as a Guide to Shakespeare's Life

Before Wilde wrote *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*, many scholars tried to use the Sonnets to solve the mystery of William Shakespeare's life. We can see a clear shift in how the Sonnets were seen in the 19th century as opposed to the previous two centuries. While Shakespeare's plays were played and printed, it was the Romantics who brought attention back to the Sonnets.

If we take into consideration the Victorians were obsessed with William Shakespeare; it is no surprise there were many attempts to use the Sonnets to decode Shakespeare's personal life, including friendships and possible love affairs.

To name a few, in 1838, Charles Armitage Brown published the *Autobiographical poems. Being his Sonnets clearly developed; with his character drawn chiefly from his works.* In 1865, Gerald Massey published the *Sonnets never before interpreted; his private friends identified; together with the recovered likeness of himself.* In 1870, J. R. Smith published the *Shakespeare's Sonnets solved, and the mystery of his friendship, love and rivalry revealed*[59]

Wilde's story carries an unmissable tone of irony when talking about Shakespearean theories. Throughout the story, all three main characters (the narrator, Erskine, and Graham) become excited about dubious theory with different outcomes. Graham drives himself to madness, believing the cause was worth dying for. Although logical at first, Erskine seems to follow the same route but dies of an illness instead. Lastly, the narrator becomes momentarily obsessed, creating a fantasy love affair between William Shakespeare and Willie Hughes, who - as the story suggests - never existed, just to abandon the theory the next day completely.

Rather than a story of Shakespearean theorists, Wilde wrote a story of unhealthy obsessions, succumbing to madness, and doubt of literary theories. Wilde doesn't show a glorified academic space or discussions; rather he concentrates on the dark aspects of such fixation without showing any signs of taking the issue seriously considering the personal inspiration for the story might be a self-critique.

The story's pacing may appear messy at first reading but seems to be a conscious choice of the author. By paying extreme attention to details of the theory, and nit-picking in each quote, he makes it seem bigger than it is. He gives the reader the same illusion the characters had, that there indeed might be something hidden in the lines. After creating this elaborate fantasy, he immediately shuts it down, the story ending altogether a few pages later. What appears so significant at one point becomes forgotten a moment later, stealing its artificial importance.

Wilde spends paragraphs on the possible spellings of the young actor's name while altogether omitting the main character's name. It raises the question of whether the

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[59] SILLARS, Stuart. *Shakespeare and the Victorians.* p.134.

narrator even is the main character of the story. Was it he and Erskine, or was it, Shakespeare and Willie Hughes?

By taking away the name of the amateur literary theorist and instead of giving it to someone who possibly never existed, Wilde mocks the importance that can be given to literary theories.

4.3. The Real Mr. W. H.

Considering Wilde's essay *The Truth of Masks* and *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.,* it would seem he was well educated when it came to Shakespeare and the possible theories surrounding his work. While the full extent cannot be measured, Wilde proved his knowledge of details such as the contents of various original notes to Shakespeare's plays and his wishes regarding the staging and costumes. It is then safe to presume Wilde knew the real theories of Mr. W. H.'s identity.

As he mentions in the story, the dedicatee of the Sonnets has been a troublesome topic for decades. The first issue is the uncertain origin of the dedication – it is unclear whether the dedication was written by Shakespeare or the publisher Thomas Thorpe. This creates a possibility of Mr. W. H. not only not having any deep relationship with William Shakespeare but never meeting the playwright.

> *"To the onlie begetter of*
>
> *These insuing Sonnets*
>
> *Mr. W.H. all happinesse*
>
> *And that eternitie*
>
> *Promised*
>
> *by*
>
> *Our ever-living poet*
>
> *Wisheth*
>
> *The well-wishing*
>
> *Adventurer in*
>
> *Setting*
>
> *Forth"*

The wording of the dedication is not, as we can see, showing clear signs of being written by Shakespeare. It might have also been a dedication to a patron by both him and Thorpe.

Some scholars consider the possibility of the dedication being made to William Herbert, the 3rd Earl of Pembroke (this is also mentioned in the opening part of the short story). Another possible theory points towards Henry Wriothesley, the 3rd Earl of Southampton, a patron of many writers. However, a clear proof for any of these theories is yet to be found.[60]

Judging by Wilde's inclusion of Pembroke's name in the text, he knew the theory which is built in the story is not backed up by many proofs, and he probably didn't mean it seriously. The story of Shakespeare's love for a young actor was meant as a fictional one.

4.3.1. Tyrwhitt's Theory

Eighteenth-century scholar Thomas Tyrwhitt (1730-86) presented a theory in which he suggests that the capitalised word Hews was Shakespeare's secret way of including the name of his lover in his poetry. "A man in *hew*, all *Hews* in his controlling." In other Sonnets, the word Will was capitalised.

From this, Tyrwhitt draws the name, Will Hughes. Since Elizabethan English didn't have the same standardized spelling as modern English, Tyrwhitt's assumption that Hews could mean a Hughes might be problematic and farfetched due to the lack of other evidence, but not entirely impossible.

4.4. LGBTQ+ Implications

However, Wilde nor Tyrwhitt are not the first to suggest a queer context in William Shakespeare's Sonnets; Wilde's approach to the matter is pushing the matter further. This did not go unnoticed and was used as evidence against Wilde during his trials.

 In the story, Wilde does not shy away from portraying William Shakespeare as queer,[61] and all characters of the story brush his attraction to another man without any worry or even disgust which might be expected for a text of this era. It can be expected

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[60] Britannica. *Mr. W. H.* [2022-04-24] https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mr-W-H
[61] Shakespeare's sexuality is not specified as homosexual, bisexual or pansexual (or other), because of that the word *queer* is used.

that Wilde's reasons for capturing Shakespeare in this light were personal, and they mirrored his own preferences.

The characters regard the matter in a nearly idealistic way. Shakespeare was attracted to men (or at least one man), and this is stated as an unquestionable fact. The interest there is in finding the identity of Mr. W. H., not because of the possible sensationalizing of the matter, but because they are simply interested in the Sonnets and Shakespeare's life. The story is written in a way that makes us believe they would be as excited to explore the mysterious muse if it were a woman – or there is never a reason to believe otherwise.

Even if we consider modern LGBTQ+ literature, it is rare a story would be promoted simply as a love story and not as queer/LGBT/gay/lesbian love story. Of course, Wilde could never promote his story as gay fiction, nor could he promote it as a love story. There weren't many options for Wilde (or anyone else) to publish a love story between same-sex characters, so the only way of doing so was either queer-coding the characters[62] or by wrapping the story inside another story.

I have already stated that Wilde wrote the story as a parody of literature theories, but this is also an unquestionably important layer. With so little queer representation in the pre-20th century literature, the existence of such a plotline in a story by a writer like Wilde poses as a valuable source.

4.5.   Why Shakespeare?

Apart from the apparent bravery of writing and even just attempting to publish a story with LGBTQ+ elements, it is even more interesting that Wilde had chosen Shakespeare to be a protagonist of such a story (even when hidden inside of another story).

If we consider the way Shakespeare was regarded in the nineteenth century – especially the Victorian Era – it is an entirely different picture than what the regular reader was used to. Shakespeare was written about and celebrated with high respect and honour. In a way, the picture that was created of him was untouchable. There was no greater writer in the history of British literature, and not only that, but he was also the representation of the perfect Englishman.

That being said, Wilde's story is truly unique and daring. Not only is he writing a same sex love story, but he is also using arguably the most famous British writer ever alive. The same person, who is used as an example of what the ideal Englishman should be like,

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[62] As he did in *The Picture of Dorian Gray.*

the person who, during some occasions was treated as a saint, was now queer and in love with a young actor. There might have been several possible reasons for Wilde to choose Shakespeare.

First – he simply wanted to write a queer story about Shakespeare, who he admired, and at the same time, explore a topic that was close to his personal life.

Second - he chose Shakespeare because he assumed this was a way of getting away with writing a queer story since the idea that at least some of the Sonnets were written for a man was already existing, and thus he would not rouse too much backlash.

Third – he chose Shakespeare because of the way he was regarded in society and poking the idea of the perfect Englishman in an unthinkable way. Less than thirty years before the short story was published, men could still be executed for same sex relations[63]. Just six years later, Wilde was to be sentenced to two years of hard labour in prison, with *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* being used against him as evidence.

When asked about his fiction and the nature of the texts, Wilde was asked whether he ever admired a man the same way he describes in his stories (mainly *The Picture of Dorian Gray*):

"Oscar Wilde: I have never given adoration to anybody except myself.

Edward Carson: I suppose you think that is a very smart thing?

O. W.: Not at all.

E. C.: Then you have never had that feeling?

O. W.: No. The whole idea was borrowed from Shakespeare, I regret to say – yes, from Shakespeare's Sonnets.

E. C.: I believe you have written an article to show that Shakespeare's Sonnets were suggestive of unnatural vice?

O. W.: On the contrary, I have written an article to show that they are not. I object to such a perversion being put upon Shakespeare."[64]

The article mentioned during the trial is *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* and Wilde's answer is truly interesting. Of course, he couldn't admit what Carson was saying was true, so he used the satiric tone of the text to his advantage. However, the only part of the story

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[63] The death penalty for homosexuality (between men) was abolished in 1861, but the last executed couple was killed in 1835. Homosexuality remained illegal till 1967 in England and Wales and 1980 in Scotland.

[64] Famous Trials. *Testimony of Oscar Wilde on Cross Examination (April, 3, 1895) (Literary Part). .* [2022-04-24]. https://www.famous-trials.com/wilde/346-literarypart

backing his statement is how quickly the narrator leaves his theory behind after being so obsessed with it for days. We can assume that what Wilde said about the story was in defence and not the real intention behind the text.

Considering the norms of Victorian society and the reason for Wilde's trial, Wilde had no other choice but to decline any possible traces of queer themes in his writing, just like he had to lie about his true sexuality. I believe that this part of the examination was not sincere for the simple reason of Wilde not being able to be sincere. However, the fact that it was used as proof against him in the case shows how unusual it was to portray Shakespeare in this way.

While we cannot say for sure what the reason for the story was, it is possible to consider there was more than one, and perhaps it was the combination of all the above.

The story is likely a parody on literary theorists, but it might also be a satire of English pride.

4.6.   The Usage of Sonnets

How did Wilde use the Sonnets to build the story?

The first mentioned Sonnet in the text is Sonnet 25. Here Graham draws the first characteristic of Willie Hughes – that being that he does not come from a rich background. This is meant to eliminate the possibility of the addressee of the Sonnets being Lord Pembroke or Lord Southampton.

Wilde quotes the opening four verses of the Sonnet:

> Let those who are in favour with their stars
>
> Of public honour and proud titles boast
>
> Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumph bars,
>
> Unlook'd for joy in that I honour most. [65]

Along with the closing two verses:

> Then happy I, that love and am beloved
>
> Where I may not remove nor be removed.[66]

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[65] SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Works*. p. 1046.
[66] SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Works*. p. 1046.

It is this Sonnet that first shows Shakespeare as of lower class; the closing of the Sonnet, however, shows he prefers being loved where it matters to him the most, which might be the theatre rather than the court. Martin Hilský points out that Wilde uses a popular Elizabethan symbol of marigolds and the sun (Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread, /But as marigold, at the sun's eye, /And in themselves, their pride lies buried, /For a frown, they in their glory die.) to show how the rich are bound to the monarch. They don't have freedom because they are dependent on the monarch's grace (the sun). [67]

Since Shakespeare seems to distance himself from these circles, Wilde used the Sonnet to convey that his heart is with the theatre and the lower class (hence someone of a lower class like an actor) and simultaneously denies the established theories of Lord Pembroke or Southampton being the central figures of the Sonnets.

The name – and here Wilde uses Tyrwhitt's theory the most – is meant to be drawn from Sonnets 135, 143, and the seventh line of Sonnet 20.

"A man in hew, all Hews in his controwling."[68]

Sonnet 135 uses the word "will" repeatedly throughout the Sonnet with several meanings. Sometimes the word is capitalised; in other cases not. Martin Hilský explains the abundant usage of the word as erotic. The meanings in Elizabethan slang included: vagina, penis, and lust. One of the reasons for the repetition was, of course also Shakespeare's name. [69]

Sonnet 143 only mentions the name Will in line 13:

"So will I pray that thou mayst have thy Will."[70]

This Sonnet also carries a suggestive tone and describes a person (Will) running to his lover.

As Erskine explains shortly after this scene, Graham was convinced that Willie Hughes abandoned Shakespeare's company in favour of playing in a rival theatre. To prove his point, he uses the last two lines of Sonnet 86 as well as Sonnet 78 and 79.

"But when your countenance filled up his line,

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[67] HILSKÝ, Martin. *The Sonnets.* p. 133.
[68] SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Works.* p. 1045.
[69] HILSKÝ, Martin. *The Sonnets.* p. 352.
[70] SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Works.* p. 1060.

> *Then lacked I matter; that enfeebled mine."*

Wilde uses these verses from Sonnet 86 to show a change in the relationship between Hughes and Shakespeare. It is interpreted as a loss of his Muse – in this case, his lover. The Sonnet does seem to discuss some issues in Shakespeare's creativity and writing, but whether the muse is a metaphor for his writing, or an actual person is not clear. Even less when it comes to Willie Hughes.

Here, Wilde indeed stretches the meaning of the Sonnets to press on the satiric aspect of his story. It shows how literary theorists sometimes grasp certain parts of a text, torn out of context, and use them as proof of their theory.

> *"Every alien pen has got my use*
>
> *And under thee their poesy disperse,"[71] [72]*

Lines 3 and 4 from Sonnet 78 are, in Graham's words, a play on the name *Hughes* and the word "*Use*" is here in place of the actor's real name.

Lines 1-4 in Sonnet 79 are used to press further on the matter of the lost Muse who visited another poet. These Sonnets are traditionally interpreted as referring to unspecified rival poets. Within this interpretation, we could see the Muse as a show of Shakespeare's rivals having better luck with their writing at that time.

Wilde omits this interpretation and instead uses the Sonnets to prove Graham's point about the breakup of Willie Hughes and Shakespeare, the Muse being taken more literally and so describing how Willie Hughes left.

> *"Whilst I alone did call upon thy ais,*
>
> *My verse alone had all thy gentle grace;*
>
> *But now my gracious numbers are decay'd,*
>
> *And my sick Muse doth give another place;"[73]*

While we may assume that Wilde knew about the traditional interpretation of these Sonnets and we cannot tell with certainty whether he believed the theory he penned in his text, his piecing of the verses together to create a story is quite imaginative.

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[71] SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Works*. p.1052.

[72] Sonnet 78 is also referenced in the opening chapter of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where Basil explains how important Dorian is to him. He uses line 13 to do so: „*But thou art all my art…*"

[73] SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Works*. p.1052

Once the narrator takes over the theory in chapter 2, the short story begins, including a large number of quoted Sonnets. Sonnets: 1, 2, 8, 18, 20, 22, 26, 53, 55, 67, 81, 82, 87, 93, 94, 95, 109, 110, 111, 126 and a passage from *A Lover's Complaint* (lines 302-315) – poem originally published alongside *The Sonnets* in 1609.

The main themes studied by the narrator are Shakespeare's adoration of Willie and the parting of the two lovers, accompanied by Shakespeare's bitterness.

Sonnets 53 and 67 show the praise of his talent, which transitions to his attempt to make the man immortal by writing him in his Sonnets and writing roles for him in his plays. The narrator backs this idea with Sonnet 55, claiming that "it was extremely likely, from the general character of the Sonnet, that a particular play was meant, and that the play was none other but Romeo and Juliet." [74]

He does not explain what parts of the Sonnet refer to *Romeo and Juliet*, nor is this any of the traditional interpretations. It is possible that Wilde got the idea from discussions with Robert Ross, but we do not get more explanation about it in the actual text.

Many plays could be connected to the Sonnet, and it is likely Shakespeare meant his work in general.

> *Not marble nor the gilded monuments*
>
> *Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme,*[75]

What does make it an excellent Sonnet for his story are the last verses.

> *So, till the judgment that yourself arise,*
>
> *You live in this, and dwell in lover's eyes.*[76]

Here we can see the clear intention of the writer to use his words to immortalise his lover and the feelings he has for them. This idea is even stronger in Sonnet 18. While it is usually interpreted as a gift of immortality to Shakespeare's lover, the narrator uses it to also prove that Willie Hughes was indeed an actor in his company.

> *Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,*
>
> *When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:* [77]

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[74]WILDE, Oscar. *Collected Works*. p.236.
[75] SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Works*. p. 1049.
[76] SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Works*. p. 1051.
[77] SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Works*. p. 1045.

The narrator claims that "eternal lines" is a nod towards a play he was sending to Willie Hughes at the time, along with the Sonnet where he was to play a part.

The idea of these Sonnets being written as a proof of deep love where Shakespeare wanted to immortalize his lover was already existing before Wilde wrote the story, so rather than creating a new theory about the Sonnets, he uses existing interpretations and fits them within the narrative.

However, what is not a traditional interpretation of Sonnet 18 is the fact that in the narrator's words, it proves that it was dedicated to an actor. While we still have no proof of Mr. W. H.'s existence, we can see how the shine described in the Sonnet could point towards talent and gained fame by an actor.

A different way of working with the Sonnets is shown in the middle of Chapter 2, where the narrator is in the midst of deciphering the feelings William Shakespeare might have had for Willie Hughes, instead of directly quoting a passage or an entire Sonnet and continuing with an explanation of how exactly it fits within the theory.

In this passage, however, he uses single verses from 9 different Sonnets and builds them into his prose.

"Yes; who else but he could have been the master-mistress of Shakespeare's passion, the lord of his love to whom he was bound in vassalage, the delicate minion of pleasure, the rose of the whole world, the herald of the spring decked in the proud livery of youth, the lovely boy whom it was sweet music to hear, and whose beauty was the very raiment of Shakespeare's heart, as it was the keystone of his dramatic power? How bitter now seemed the whole tragedy of his desertion and his shame! – shame that he made sweet and lovely."[78]

The quoted lines of Sonnets in this part are Sonnet 20, 2. Sonnet 26,1. Sonnet 126, 9. Sonnet 109, 14. Sonnet 1, 10. Sonnet 2, 3. Sonnet 8, 1. Sonnet 22, 6. Sonnet 95. 1.

The interesting part of this is that Wilde is intentionally referencing Sonnets which often describe same sex love – like Sonnet 95, where the line "sweet and lovely" refers to a homosexual man as the word sweet was used to describe them in the Elizabethan slang, combines with the word shame, Sonnet 95 became one of the staples of queer poetry. We can also find queer concepts of gender - like Sonnet 20, where the words

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[78] WILDE, Oscar. *Collected Works.* p. 236.

"mister-mistress" describe someone who within our modern vocabulary does not fit the binary.

4.7. Conclusion

Despite the short length of the text, it covers many topics and has many layers. First and most apparent is the critique of literary theories and theorists. When Graham commits suicide to prove his belief, he is not painted as a hero or a revolutionary believing in his cause; the story does not show the emotions we would expect from a man who lost his friend. The information is shared pragmatically, which makes the scene almost comical. His death is a result of an obsession gone too far; it is not a great story of a scholar.

The narrator's short-lived obsessive dissecting of the Sonnets concludes on an equally sad and comical end. He is convinced to discover one of the greatest secrets of the literary world, abandoning it with no interest whatsoever right after he is done, hence making it sound as if Wilde despises people who dedicate their lives to such interests.

At the same time, the narrator seems to be caught in a loop of the theory when he is given the portrait as an inheritance after Erskine. While it appears that the portrait only brings doom to those who own it, the narrator accepts it, and we never find out what happened to him, the theory, or the portrait. It almost appears as if the narrator's faith was never important, to begin with. This also leads to believe that Shakespeare (the character) and his possible lover play a bigger role in the story than the man characters.

Another important theme is the queer love between Willie Hughes and Shakespeare. The inclusion of such a topic in the Victorian Era – a time which oppressed queer people and sexuality in general – is of great significance. It was highly provocative of Oscar Wilde to use the beloved writer for his story and to build a theory about his sexuality and involvement with another man. The severity of such a decision was then felt during his trials.

While Wilde claimed to prove that Shakespeare was never involved in such a relationship in his story (due to its sarcastic nature), we may assume this was only said to appease the jury. From what we know of Wilde's personal life, the topic was probably much more important to him than he could have admitted.

The transtextual elements of the story are an undeniably large part of it. The critical elements both to the theory and the Sonnets (because, in a way, Wilde writes his own theory on it in the story) are a case of metatextuality combined with intertextuality in quotes and paraphrases. As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, the usage of Mr. W.

H. in the title of the story (taking it from the dedication of the Sonnets) could be a case of hypertextuality.

So, as we can see, *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* is built with references. Its intertextual elements are a key part of it, and were they taken away, the whole structure of the story would fall apart. The story depends on the Sonnets and the theory; they are its main topics.

Wilde's relationship with Shakespeare (as a writer and his sonnets) here is also interesting since he decided to incorporate Shakespeare as a character. He did it in a way that neither critiques Shakespeare for his work or possible behaviour nor praises him. Shakespeare almost stops being Shakespeare – the poet we know – and instead, he is Shakespeare the character. These two versions of Shakespeare blend together in the story, and it becomes harder to separate them. Regarding Bloom's theory, two of his revisionary ratios come to mind. I think that Wilde's continuation of Tyrwhitt's theory as well as the Sonnets (by adding the love story to them) seem like *teserra*. As if the two didn't go far enough, Wilde takes over and continues the story.

By making Shakespeare a character rather than regarding him as the writer, it creates a sense of *apophrades* in the sense that the mentioned distortion creates the idea that the Sonnets were inspired by the theoretical love story and not that the love story was inspired by the Sonnets (which is the actual case).

However, I feel the need to add that the doubts the narrator faces right after he finishes his theory is among the ironic aspect also slightly humbling. Wilde could have chosen to end the story here; the narrator never had to doubt. He could have told his theory to the reader and never doubted it. I think this might mean that Wilde does not wish to put himself above Shakespeare; he does not wish to make conclusions. The level of respect shown in other texts discussed in this thesis is still apparent, even though it might in some parts of the story seem otherwise.

Wilde's usage of the Sonnets to tell such a story is much more complex than might be seen at first reading. Not only he considered the traditional interpretations, combining them with Tyrwhitt's theory, but he also used the quoted verses to build more depth to his story, showing how easy it can be to twist out of context quotes into desired interpretation, his deep knowledge of the Sonnets and interest in creating queer content.

5. The Duchess of Padua

The Duchess of Padua premiered the same year as the final version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published (1891) under the title *Guido Ferranti*. While *The Picture of Dorian Gray* carried many allusions to several of Shakespeare's plays, *The Duchess* takes this even further. The inspiration is not only in plot themes and characters but also in the language, which places the play into a unique position among other plays by Wilde. We can, however, find similarities in the plays Wilde used as inspiration.

The play was – as we know from Wilde's letters – finished in 1883 under the title of *The Duchess of Padua*. Even in later letters, Wilde keeps referring to the play under the original title, which is therefore going to be used in this chapter.

At the time of its finishing, Wilde calls it "the masterpiece of all my literary work". However, the play did not celebrate the success Wilde probably anticipated, and years later, in a letter to Robert Ross in 1898, he says, "*The Duchess* is unfit for publication – the only one of my works that comes under that category."[79]

Even though Wilde's feelings changed, Ross still published the play in 1908 (after Wilde's death). He dedicated it to Adela Shuster, who, in Wilde's words, "showed him much kindness,"[80] and he regretted he never dedicated anything to her. He did not see *The Duchess* as the right fit. "There is nothing but *The Duchess of Padua,* and it is unworthy of her and unworthy of me."[81] Nevertheless, Ross published the play with this dedication.

5.1.   Synopsis

The story begins in Padua, where two friends, Guido Ferranti and Ascanio Cristofano, arrive to meet with Lord Moranzone, who contacted Guido to tell him the truth about his father, who Guido had never met.

Moranzone takes Guido away from Ascanio to tell him that his father was unjustly killed because of the Duke of Padua and that he wants to help him revenge his father's death. In order to do so, Guido must abandon Ascanio and join the Duke's court.

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[79] HOLLAND, Merlin. HART-DAVIS, Rupert. *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde.* London: Fourth Estate Limited, 2000. p. 196.

[80] HOLLAND, Merlin. HART-DAVIS, Rupert. *The Complete Letters* p.1091.

[81] HOLLAND, Merlin. HART-DAVIS, Rupert. *The Complete Letters* p. 1091.

There he meets the Duchess, with whom he falls in love with at first sight, and he decides not to kill the Duke as he first planned. Instead, he wants to pretend to come to his bedroom and kill him but let him live to show his power and forgiveness. As he approaches the bedroom, the Duchess walks out with bloody hands and a dagger in her hand.

She planned to kill herself, but at the last moment, she killed the Duke instead, hoping to be with Guido. Guido is terrified by her action since, until now, he had seen her as a saint, an angel who could never commit such a crime. They begin arguing, and the dagger ends in Guido's hand. He tells her they cannot be together and decide to leave. The Duchess calls the guards and tells them Guido murdered her husband.

After a trial, Guido is sentenced to death; after revealing his true origin – a son of the Duke of Parma – he is given the option to drink poison to avoid public execution.

In the last act, the Duchess, now regretting her action, comes to the prison in a cloak, planning to help Guido escape in it while she stays inside the prison.

Guido is asleep. After seeing the poison prepared for Guido, she drinks it herself. When Guido wakes up, they discuss their feelings and the situation, and Guido forgives her and tells her he is ready to accept his fate. Soon after he finds out she drank the poison, the Duchess dies in his arms. The play ends with him using her dagger to take his own life.

5.2.   Form and Language

The play has five acts that are not further divided into scenes. Acts 4 and 5 can both be considered a single, long scene. William Shakespeare also used the five-act structure; however, it cannot be said that it would be unique for Shakespeare or that it is a clear sign of Shakespearean influence. Considering the course of *The Duchess*, we can assume that Wilde chose to write his play in five acts with Shakespeare in mind.

The difference is that Shakespeare's acts are usually separated into many scenes, often relatively short, but Wilde had made the decision not to follow Shakespeare's lead in this aspect.

Wilde used a combination of prose and blank verse (specifically iambic pentameter), which is also traditionally connected to Shakespeare, even though Shakespeare was not the inventor nor the sole user of this verse. At the end of the nineteenth century, this style of playwrighting had gone out of fashion, so Wilde's choice of it, in my opinion, is linked to Shakespeare.

Likewise, Wilde used older grammar which was no longer being used during his life. Most striking is the use of the pronoun *thou*, which stopped being a part of everyday speech in the seventeenth century. Later it was usually seen in poetry, but it was not and is not common in drama. This is combined with the verb ending -st and -t, which was used with the pronoun when it was the grammatical subject of the finite verb in the indicative mood. For example: "Hast thou so soon forgotten?" in Act 1. While *thou* symbolized familiarity between people, Wilde had already used it in the scene where Guido and Moranzone first meet.

It is unlikely that Wilde did so from not understanding the purpose of the pronoun considering his education, and so he might have used it to show us more about Moranzone – he feels like he is in the position to talk informally to Guido, or maybe he lacks respect to other people in general. We don't learn enough about the character throughout the play, so it is hard to say what leads to making Moranzone speak in this way with someone he barely knows.

While Wilde tried to mimic some aspects of Elizabethan English, the play is not written entirely in it. The spelling used in *The Duchess* is that of nineteenth century English not sixteenth or seventeenth century. It shows that Wilde used some of the elements to make the viewer feel like they are watching something that might have come from Shakespeare's time, but at the same time, they would not have an issue understanding it, especially not the more educated viewers.

Considering the heavy Shakespearean influence and intertextuality with several of his plays (mainly *Romeo and Juliet*), the play might have been intended for the more educated anyways.

I also think that the way the play was written (as if it came from the Elizabethan Era) makes it architextuality because we can consider Elizabethan theatre its own genre, and hence Wilde's attempt of writing in that way, instead of using the language and styles common in his time is architextual.

5.3.   Intertextuality

We can find several types of intertextualities in *The Duchess of Padua.* As stated above, in my opinion, intertextuality is already present in its choice of archaic language, which makes the play appear as if it belonged to a different era. Its connection to the genre of Elizabethan theatre makes it architextuality.

Paraphrases and quotes from *Romeo and Juliet* are another cases of intertextuality. The case I find the most interesting in this play is the hypertextuality present mainly in the last act of this play. As I will discuss more, Wilde retold the last act of *Romeo and Juliet* in *The Duchess* using the method of gender-bending characters. He does not quote *Romeo and Juliet* word by word, but we can find an apparent connection in the scene's setting, the method of suicide, and the fact that it could have been avoided did Guido wake up a little earlier (just like Juliet). In this case, Wilde leads the viewer/reader directly to *Romeo and Juliet.*

5.3.1. Wilde's Notes on the Shakespearean Inspiration

On March 23rd, 1883, Oscar Wilde wrote a letter to the acclaimed American actress Mary Anderson regarding *The Duchess of Padua*. In the letter, he includes notes on the play's staging and on some of his inspiration, mainly Shakespearean.

Mary Anderson played an essential part in the making of the play; Wilde wrote it with her in mind and was only promised to get paid for the manuscript if she approved of it.[82] In the letter, Wilde expresses his opinion on the importance of including comedic elements in tragedies. This opinion he must have shared with Shakespeare, whose tragedies also have comedic moments or specific characters who lighten the mood, like Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet.*

Wilde says that Act 2 has three types of comedy – bitter in the character of Duke, grotesque in the citizens, and "a comedy of Viola and Rosalind; the comedy in which joy smiles through a mask of beauty"[83]. These are the first Shakespearean characters Wilde mentions regarding the play. Viola from *Twelfth Night* and Rosalind from *As You Like It.* What the two characters have in common is they wear a disguise for a part of the story. In their case, the disguise is physical and well visible; in the case of the Duchess, the mask is metaphorical. She wears the mask of a kind woman and the Duke's wife, loved by the citizens for her generosity and by Guido for her loving nature and beauty. In the next act, her character undergoes a vast change, and she becomes a murderer, losing her mask.

Further on, Wilde writes about how he tried to redeem her character partially by using Shakespeare's *Othello* as a guide. He notes how in *Othello*, the character is written in a

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[82] Beside Every Man. *Oscar Wilde and The Duchess of Pauda.* (1.3.2016) [2022-05-10] https://eafitzsimons.wordpress.com/tag/mary-anderson/

[83] HOLLAND, Merlin. HART-DAVIS, Rupert. *The Complete Letters* p. 196.

way that makes the viewer feel sympathetic towards him.[84] He is not introduced as a villain, making his fall the more tragic. Neither is the Duchess presented as a villain, and her action comes as a surprise, unlocking a series of unfortunate decisions which lead to her and Guido's suicide.

The death of the Duchess is partially inspired by Hamlet's death and his final conversation with Horatio. Wilde says he found inspiration in the depth of their bond and tried to bring it to the relationship between the Duchess and Guido, but he also wanted to go deeper and show more emotion to intensify the tragedy.[85]

Wilde also states that Guido's hesitation in Act 3, where he ponders whether to kill the Duke or not, was inspired by several scenes from Shakespeare. "Macbeth must hesitate at the door of Duncan's room, and Hamlet behind the praying King, and Romeo before Juliet's body."[86]

Lastly, Wilde also describes Guido using the phrase "The Fortune's fool" originating from Act 3, Scene 1 in *Romeo and Juliet*.[87] Romeo and Juliet became a strong inspiration for the play and is present most vividly in the last act. More on that later.

5.3.2. Hamlet

The first Shakespearean theme that comes to mind is the death of a father in *Hamlet* and his revenge for it. Just like in *Hamlet*, the story begins with the main character – in this case, Guido – arriving at his destination because of his father's death. While Hamlet returns home to bury his father, Guido comes to Padua to learn about it. Both are coming to the place where their father was killed.

The need for revenge is also very strong in *The Duchess,* just like it is in *Hamlet,* and both lead to a tragic end and the death of nearly all main characters.

It has been said many times before that Hamlet's inability to know where to stop in his mad seeking of revenge creates the tragic end which could have been avoided were he given the space and time to mourn and were he less impulsive.

At first, Guido shows the same impulsive behaviour, but Moranzone stops him before he has the chance to kill the Duke. After that, it seems he will not follow Hamlet's tragic fate, and his decision to let the Duke of Padua live will grant him a partially happy ending

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[84] HOLLAND, Merlin. HART-DAVIS, Rupert. *The Complete Letters* p. 199-200.
[85] HOLLAND, Merlin. HART-DAVIS, Rupert. *The Complete Letters* p. 201.
[86] HOLLAND, Merlin. HART-DAVIS, Rupert. *The Complete Letters* p. 201.
[87] HOLLAND, Merlin. HART-DAVIS, Rupert. *The Complete Letters* p. 197.

where he won't be able to be with the Duchess, but his conscience will stay clear, and he won't risk execution.

Another similarity between *Hamlet* and *The Duchess* is the relationship between Ascanio and Guido. The depth of their bond reminds of Hamlet and Horatio's relationship, and just like Horatio, Ascanio, as far as we know, survives the play unharmed. However, the relationship is not the same as it is not as developed as Hamlet and Horatio's, and Ascanio never returns to the play after Act 1, while Horatio stays with Hamlet till the very end.

5.3.3. Macbeth

The allusion to Macbeth is less prominent in *The Duchess* than that in *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. We can mainly see it at the end of Act 3 when the Duchess murders the Duke. Until now, the Duchess appeared as gentle, kind, and generous, and so the murder seems completely out of her character and, for the moment, seems as if she was possessed or momentarily succumbed to madness.

During this passage of the play, the Duchess carries reminders of Lady Macbeth. Just like in Macbeth, the choice of weapon was a dagger, and the famous image of Lady Macbeth with a dagger and blood on her hands is repeated here as she meets Guido. Just like Macbeth, Guido had the intention to murder the Duke, too, at first, but changed his mind, and the female character stepped in. While the two scenes are not the same, just like the characters are not the same, we can see some of the similarities.

In *Macbeth*, Duncan is the king, while the Duke of Padua is not a king; he has a similar position and has the role of a ruler in Padua. The difference here is that Guido does not plan to kill the Duke for power, and the Duchess does not strive for it either. Her motive is love, Guido's revenge – this is more reminiscent of *Hamlet* than *Macbeth.* In *Hamlet*, Hamlet's uncle also becomes a king, so the theme of regicide is in all three mentioned plays.

5.3.4. Romeo and Juliet

The most prominent inspiration for the play comes from *Romeo and Juliet.* While the star-crossed-lovers theme does not originate from Shakespeare, personally, I think it was Wilde's primary inspiration, mainly because of the play's conclusion in Act 5.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the motivation for the couple's suicide is different than in *The Duchess.* Mainly because Juliet's intention is not to die. Due to an unfortunate

misunderstanding, both she and Romeo commit suicide. This is not the case in *The Duchess*. She descends to the prison with the intention of saving Guido at the expense of her own life, and her decision to drink his poison is almost immediate. Even before that, in Act 3, she shows suicidal behaviour which ends in the Duke's murder. Guido, too has already decided to drink the poison to avoid public execution and is at peace with his fate. In Romeo and Juliet, only Romeo comes to the tomb with the intention to poison himself.

Wilde chooses an interesting take on the famous scene where he gender-bends the characters in a way. The Duchess takes the place of Romeo and Guido Juliet's. This is reflected in two ways. First – it is the Duchess who comes to the prison (who is also to become a place of Guido's death) to see Guido, just like Romeo comes to Juliet's tomb. Her method of suicide is also the same as Romeo's.

Similarly, in Act 5, we meet Guido while he's already in prison (just like Juliet is in the tomb) and when the Duchess enters, he is asleep, and the Duchess admires his appearance before he wakes up, she consumes the poison.

Then the scenes differ. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the couple never gets to talk to each other again, but Wilde wrote a long dialogue between the Duchess's poisoning and her death in Guido's arms. The scene in the Duchess would not work had he not done so. The couple still had to make up, and Guido had to forgive her and describe the possibility of them being together, after all, not knowing she was already dying. Just like Wilde wrote in his letter, it is this conversation that partially redeems the Duchess in the viewer's eyes, making them feel sympathy towards her.

Once the poison does its job, Wilde continues the way we know the story. Guido takes the Duchess' dagger and kills himself. The play ends right after, without any continuation, similarly to *Romeo and Juliet*.

The death scene of the two main characters is an intentional retelling of the last act of *Romeo and Juliet*. The link to the original text is so strong, that we can talk of hypertextuality. Wilde was not only inspired by Shakespeare's play; he wrote his own reimagining of it, switching the gender of the characters. At the same time, he paraphrases the original text. For example: "O treacherous love, why have you not left a drop for me? --- Is there no poison still upon your lips that I may draw it from them?"[88] comes from "O churl, drunk all, and left no friendly drop to help me after? I will kiss thy lips. Haply

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[88] WILDE, Oscar. *The Duchess of Padua.* Project Guttenberg. (26. 10. 2014) [2022-02-01] The Duchess of Padua, by Oscar Wilde (gutenberg.org)

some poison yet doth hang on them."[89] So, in one act, we can find signs of intertextuality and hypertextuality.

However, while Act 5 is the most reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet, Wilde uses references to the play in other parts of the text. One interesting example is in Act 3, after Guido finds out about the murder and the Duchess tries to defend her action. She says: "A storm will break upon this house before the morning, so horrible that the white moon already turns grey and sick with terror."[90] This reminds me of "Arise fair sun and kill the envious moon/ Who is already sick and pale with grief."[91] spoken during the famous balcony scene (Act 2, Scene 2) in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Wilde's play with intertextuality in this part immediately makes the viewer think of the scene. However, the context is vastly different. While in *Romeo and Juliet,* this is a moment of declaration of love and hope for love, although mixed with fear brought because of their situation, in *The Duchess,* the scene marks the fall of the characters, especially the Duchess. It is possible, as is common in Wilde's work, that he approached this scene with irony, or perhaps he viewed the original scene as a beginning of the end for the main characters, too.

Nevertheless, it is interesting that he chose to allude to a romantic scene, unfurling shortly after the main character's first kiss with a scene full of terror and tragedy where the Duchess wishes to kiss Guido now that she is free, but he is terrified by what became of her.

5.4. Conclusion

Considering Bloom's theory, Wilde's play presents an interesting case. As we know from his letter, and the many praises he spares for Shakespeare, Wilde wrote the play with respect. Unlike what I observed in *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.,* there does not seem to be irony in his words nor the play. This might be because the Wilde, who wrote *The Duchess of Padua,* was 6-7 years younger. His views might have changed, and his reason for writing the text might have been different.

While in *The Portrait,* Wilde wanted to critique literary theorists while exploring a theory that he found interesting, he does not seem as bound to Shakespeare's legacy in it

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[89] SHAKESPEARE, William. *Romeo and Juliet.* Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000. p. 121.
[90] WILDE, Oscar. *The Duchess of Padua.* Project Guttenberg. (26. 10. 2014) [2022-02-01] The Duchess of Padua, by Oscar Wilde (gutenberg.org)
[91] SHAKESPEARE, William. *Romeo and Juliet.* p. 58.

as in *The Duchess. The Duchess,* however, appears to be written from a place of deep admiration.

I think it shows signs of *clinamen*, especially in the final act. To a certain extent, Wilde follows the original course of the story, but it is interrupted by the added dialogue, hence Wilde takes a slightly different route, even though it circles back to Shakespeare's ending. The addition of this scene (which was not needed in *Romeo in Juliet*) could, however, also be a sign of *tessera* because Wilde might have felt like he was completing Shakespeare's text in that way.

After *The Portrait of Mr. W. H., The Duchess of Padua* shows the most signs of intertextuality out of all the discussed texts. It is present in the plot of the story, the characters, the language, and the dialogues, which at places quote or paraphrase Shakespeare's texts.

Conclusion

In the introduction, I asked myself: How did Shakespeare influence Oscar Wilde's work? And how did Wilde work with Shakespeare's themes? For this, I worked with Harold Bloom's theory about influence and Gérard Genette's theory about transtextuality. By examining Wilde's complete work and his letters, as well as the transcription of his trial, I chose four texts that include the biggest number of Shakespearean references.

On these works, I was able to get a clearer picture of this problem. I have considered the Shakespearean influence and its presence in Wilde's work, using Bloom's terminology as an inspiration. I also put this in the context of the traditional views of the 19th century – mainly the Victorians since this is the era in which Wilde lived.

In the first chapter, I wrote about Shakespeare's unique position in this society. The Victorians revered Shakespeare almost as a saint. They held large celebrations for him, and masses and many periodicals used Shakespeare to create an ideal of the "perfect Englishman", which the general public should use as an idol. This being said, we can see how protective the late nineteenth century British society was of Shakespeare. During Wilde's trial, this was used against him.

But does that mean that Wilde used Shakespearean references as a satire or to diminish the importance of Shakespeare? No.

In *De Profundis*, one of the rawest of Wilde's works, Wilde writes: "Shakespeare, the most purely human of all the great artists." His letters further press on the idea of Shakespeare's talent and genius, mainly when he describes how well Shakespeare develops characters and uses their good character traits to create a more profound image of a villain like in the case of Othello. I have discussed this in the last chapter, which concerns itself with *The Duchess of Padua.*

Wilde's love for Shakespeare (but also theatre in general) was also well seen in the *Truth of Masks* which I wrote about in the second chapter. After discussing the prevailing ideas about Shakespeare, I wanted to put them in the context of Wilde's writing and what I found was that Wilde had a deep respect for Shakespeare. Still, unlike the general idea, he concentrated on his work – mainly his plays – while Victorians tried to create this persona which could be twisted and turned as they needed. Because of that, they often used Shakespeare as an argument on social and political issues (something which is still done) but rather than sticking to his plays, they also turned to Shakespeare as a person, even though we know so little of him and his opinions.

On the other hand, Wilde built his arguments on the content of the plays and their notes. While praising Shakespeare's approach to the topic, he did it based on facts rather than creating a possibly fake image of Shakespeare. I think that this proves that Wilde respected Shakespeare, but he did not do it blindly.

The aim of the following three chapters was to study intertextuality more carefully and what I found is that Wilde's texts include many cases of different types of intertextuality. Simultaneously, I was able to see how Bloom's theory fits into Wilde's relationship with Shakespeare.

In the third chapter, where I spoke about *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, I found several cases of intertextuality, mainly in the character of Sibyl Vane – an actress who played several Shakespearean roles during the novel. Her own character is pushed back in favour of the Shakespearean heroines. This culminates right after her death when Lord Henry starts referring to her with the names of these characters instead of her real name. Dorian also admits that he loved the characters she played more than her. This is accompanied by quotes and paraphrases. Her death alone is also a case of intertextuality. It carries allusions to Ophelia's death in *Hamlet,* where the reader also cannot be certain that her death was a suicide, although it is heavily implied.

Other cases of intertextuality in *Dorian Gray* are not as crucial for the development of the story or the characterizations, however, we can still point many of them out. Just like Sibyl, Dorian and Henry show similarities with several Shakespearean characters. An especially interesting is the parallel between their dynamic and that of Desdemona, Othello, and Iago, which I also discussed in the chapter.

The Portrait of Mr. W. H., which I have concerned myself with in the fourth chapter, shows different intertextualities. Although it also includes quotes – in this case mainly from *The Sonnets* – and paraphrases of several lines from various Sonnets which Wilde used in his prose, it heavily relies on the character of William Shakespeare. This was a particularly important text to study. As I said in the first chapter, the Victorians often created a version of William Shakespeare that fit their needs without having enough evidence to prove he either had the traits they described or that he had the opinions they claimed he had. Wilde also created a character of William Shakespeare, but the narrator of the text abolishes his statements right after making them. Therefore, there are no definite claims made about the character of Shakespeare or the real Shakespeare.

I consider the title of the short story to be a case of metatextuality as it is taken from the dedication of the first print of *The Sonnets* and that the story itself is a case of

hypertextuality both in the connection to *The Sonnets* and Thomas Tyrwhitt's theory which also heavily inspired the text.

Lastly, *The Duchess of Padua* is also heavily intertextual. Wilde wrote using elements of Elizabethan English which I consider to be architextuality. Like *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.,* there is also hypertextuality, which is mainly in the last act of the play, which uses the last act of *Romeo and Juliet* by genderbending the two main characters, so the play directs the viewer to the original play. There are also plenty of cases of intertextuality in quotes and paraphrases from Shakespeare's plays (again, mainly *Romeo and Juliet* as it was the main inspiration) and in the characters where we can once again find references to *Othello,* which Wilde described himself in one of the letters.

To put this in the context of Bloom's theory, in his *Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom uses Freud's idea of the Oedipal complex to compare the relationship a writer has with his precursor. Bloom argues that this makes the later writer anxious as they try to create an original text. It was this anxiety of influence that I much pondered about while writing this thesis.

Personally, I don't like making universal claims which were my issue with the theory from the beginning. I think that it is hard, if not impossible, to make such claims in a field like creative writing. At the same time, I agree with Bloom to a certain extent. I think that the feeling he describes was and is real to many writers, and it may create issues during their careers. I also believe that using Shakespeare as an example of a precursor who influences many English writing writers is on point. His influence on the English language can create unintentional (and intentional) intertextuality in texts.

But I'm afraid I have to disagree with the fact that the latter writer must feel anxiety because of it. I think that writers can welcome the influence, and by accepting it, they rid themselves of the feeling of debt toward the precursor or the need to decline their work in order to create original work. I also believe that Wilde is the perfect case of this.

Although I found that some of his works may be types of *clinamen* (*The Duchess of Padua*), *tessera* (*The Duchess of Padua, The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*), and *apophrades* (*The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*), I think that the overall course of these texts is a proof of Wilde's acceptance of Shakespeare's influence and not only that his letters show the excitement he felt when writing these references to Shakespeare's plays. Similar excitement can be felt in the *Truth of Masks.*

Wilde's writing was also not limited to Shakespeare's influence. He created original works which are more *Wildean* than Shakespearean. His combination of aesthetical

elements and irony created a unique style of writing. The only time when he tried to move away from this style was in *The Duchess*.

I think that when a writer invites the precursors' works into their own creative process, as Wilde did, they can only benefit from it by creating a text with many different layers, which allow the text to remain attractive for the reader on the second or the third reading as they can continue finding more connections and references.

To summarize this, in my opinion, Wilde's immense respect for Shakespeare is in line with the traditional Victorian respect for Shakespeare, however, his approach to the idea of him was much more based on facts rather than presumptions. He does not attempt to create his own version of Shakespeare to support any of his claims, and when he does it through *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.,* it comes with critique and doubt. His daring attempt of writing Shakespeare as a character of a queer love story is also by no means a traditional portrayal of Shakespeare. It could also be the case of Wilde using Shakespeare for his own agenda, but the doubts the narrator shows in the short story suggest that Wilde was not trying to do so.

At the same time, it was not common to write about Shakespeare as a character in general in the Victorian Era. Shakespeare was written about abundantly, but not in fiction. There were cases where Shakespeare appeared as a ghost – these we can find in texts since around the beginning of the nineteenth century.[92] However, Wilde's take on Shakespeare in Mr. W. H. is entirely different. Shakespeare is not just a ghost, nor is he an active character in the text. He is a speculation, a theory, projected onto the real Shakespeare. The line between the character and the real person is often blurred, making it hard for the reader to separate accurate proof-based assumptions from fictional theories. But even when the reader may feel like he is reading a study of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, that is not the case since the story was published as fiction, and Wilde never claimed it to be otherwise. Therefore (even when the reader may feel inclined to read the text as non-fiction), it must be approached as fictional.

Wilde's play *The Duchess of Padua* is also not a common take on Shakespeare's work. Here, Wilde doesn't work with the character of Shakespeare, instead, he works with Shakespeare's writing style – combining it with his own – and the themes of Shakespeare's plays (which also differentiates *The Duchess* from Wilde's other plays).

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[92] Shakespeare Institute Library. *Raising the Ghost: Shakespeare as a fictional character.* (2019-09-05) [1. 6. 2022] https://silibrary1.wordpress.com/2019/09/05/raising-the-ghost-shakespeare-as-fictional-character/

In the Victorian Era, we can find many cases of Shakespearean references and quotes in fiction (for example, in Charles Dickens' work). However, Wilde's attempt to revive this dramatic style in *The Duchess* was not commonly seen.

I think that this is what differs Wilde from other nineteenth century authors who worked with Shakespearean themes. He did not limit himself to references and inspirations for the plot of his stories; Wilde took the trend further by almost trying to create another Shakespearean play, by incorporating theories about Shakespeare's texts and life into his work, by making Shakespeare a character that is so tightly interwoven with the real person, that the assumptions made about the character were taken seriously by the court.

I do not wish to limit Wilde's work to the Shakespearean references in them because I think there are many other interesting aspects that could be discussed. However, I think they are so abundant that it was fruitful to see the extent of their role in Wilde's writing. We saw less of it in *Dorian Gray* than in *The Duchess* or *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.,* but even there, his usage of Shakespearean heroines to create a new character was imaginative and unique. *The Duchess* and *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* are so heavily linked to Shakespeare, his *Sonnets*, and his plays that they could not exist without them. In these cases, the role of Shakespearean themes is immense, but what is, of course, also present is Wilde. Even when reading *The Duchess,* which strives to be styled as Elizabethan text, we are still aware of reading Wilde because his clever, irony-threaded prose still comes through.

In conclusion, we might not automatically think of Shakespeare when discussing Wilde's work, but I believe that the Shakespearean themes in it should not be omitted. Wilde's take on them is undoubtedly innovative. He does not limit himself to simple references. The intertextuality in his texts runs deeper. He builds characters from Shakespeare's characters, and intertwines elements of Shakespeare's writing with his own, and presents a new Shakespeare as a character that was not commonly present in literature until that time, even though the stakes of doing so were high.

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