

## Summary

Oscar Wilde's place among the Victorians has been more or less firmly established by critics and the general reading public alike. Usually, he is seen as a rebel playwright and one-time novelist defragmenting the English society from the inside and presenting its numerous flaws and weaknesses. Wilde, however, stood outside this very society as much as he was inside it. Born in Ireland, he brought to London with him a perspective different from those of the natives. However he tried to become more English, he never became an inherent part of the society which ultimately expelled him from its core and thrown him into gaol. Yet, by leaving Ireland and focusing on his art he ceased to be a part of the Irish society as well – a fact loudly voiced by the politically active part of the diaspora whose expectations for the son of Speranza, one of the most notorious nationalist poets, has been left somewhat unfulfilled. This thesis analyses Wilde's short fiction, an early drama and poetry in terms of his Irishness and presents his Irish identity through his writing. As recent criticism reveals, Wilde's Irishness is in his work more palpable than it might seem on the surface. It is perhaps less obvious in his most famous plays and the novel which were, after all, written primarily for the English audience. In his less known works, however, he seems to have allowed himself into a more personal space and given us a clue to his personal ideas, emotions and conflicts.

In the first chapter, a general introduction to the topic and critical context is given together with a brief historical and biographical overview. The second chapter deals with his early, and probably the least-known play *Vera; or the Nihilists* and the influence of Wilde's mother, the nationalist poet Speranza who is by critics considered the template for the title character of the play. The third chapter studies Wilde's collections of fairy-tales *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, and *A House of Pomegranates*, of which Wilde himself proclaimed that it was "intended neither for the British child nor the British public."<sup>1</sup> In the fourth chapter, Wilde's collection of poems *Poems* and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" is discussed and Wilde's persona as an Irish poet is focused on. Together with his Irishness, Wilde's Englishness is often discussed as his relationship with England is important to understand that with Ireland and Englishness often serves as a "double" for Irishness – a concept Wilde more or less rejected for most of his career.

The thesis references subject-specific critical literature such as Jerusha McCormack's collections of essays *Wilde the Irishman*<sup>2</sup> as well as important works in Irish studies as Richard Kearney's *The Irish Mind*,<sup>3</sup> and works specific to the themes of the individual chapters such as Seamus Heaney's *The Redress of Poetry*<sup>4</sup>. By focusing on the non-canonical and less often debated works, this thesis aims to provide a different perspective to the general discussion.

**Keywords:** Oscar Wilde, Ireland, Irishness, fairy tales, drama, poetry, Irish literature

<sup>1</sup> David Stuart Davies, Afterword in *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* (London: CRW Publishing, 2008) 299.

<sup>2</sup> Jerusha McCormack, ed., *Wilde the Irishman* (London: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Kearney ed., *The Irish Mind* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Seamus Heaney *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).

