

Re-Reading Wilde:
Unisexual Culture in Late-Victorian England

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INTRODUCTION

The present paper discusses a state of mind concerning male sexuality in late-Victorian England from 1870s to 1895. More specifically, it is a transgressive sexual subculture, which centred round Oscar Wilde that is in the focus of interest: a group of literary men, who were writing in accordance with a shared theoretical framework regarding their sexuality and its literature.

It is indisputable that “men have had sex with men, and women with women, for centuries the world over, but the invention of homosexuality as a distinct identity in England and elsewhere took place during the last decades of Queen Victoria’s reign.” (Sharon Marcus “At Home with the Other Victorians” 119) With the lead of Foucault the twentieth-century “has argued, the late nineteenth century saw an explosion of discourses on sex and sexuality... Victorian society wanted to explain and codify sexual practices and desires not previously publicly acknowledged.” (Sanna 21-22) As a result, Foucault famously declared in *The History of Sexuality* (1976) that “[t]he sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.” (43) More specifically, it is argued that the homosexual as an identity appeared with Wilde’s trials in 1895: “the Wilde trials... represent an important moment in the history of modern male homosexuality, providing for historians a marker to locate the emergence of a distinct homosexual identity. In fact, the trials are often implicitly credited as the event where *the* Homosexual emerged.” (Schulz 37) It is this narrow scope that the nineteenth century invented with which Oscar Wilde’s works and his subculture are still seen.¹

It is agreed that same-sex relations were not something that first emerged in the nineteenth century. It is also agreed that by the end of the century, these relations were not only individual cases but they became a cultural phenomenon among those with homoerotic interest as they had lost their temporary nature and started to create a significant amount of discourse. However, the paper disputes that a homosexual *identity*, especially regarding Wilde and his circle, emerged with Wilde’s trials. As a result, the paper shall argue for a change in terminology when discussing the Wildean subculture and its literature.

The paper, however, will not base its investigation on the mainstream sexology of the era to substantiate its thesis. Such theories and the homosexual identity constructed are regarded as an “official fantasy which... went by the name of scientific knowledge... This thinking... rests upon a mass of unargued, unexamined and largely unconscious assumptions;

¹ See Brinkley 61-82, Sisko 1-25, Carroll 286-304, Sanna 21-39.

its logical proceedings are loose and associative rather than rigorous and sequential” (Steven Marcus 1). The paper would rather turn to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Wilde as a response to Richard A. Kaye’s call:

In a culture increasingly indifferent to the strictly literary, a writer such as Wilde, whose work translates so smoothly into non-literary modes, has a promising future. Moreover, with his fascination with questions of truth and artifice in the presentation of social selves, he seems to have anticipated the concerns of many Gender-Studies critics. For Gay-Studies and Queer critics alike, there are still sizable parts of Wilde’s life, *oeuvre*, and reputation that cry out for new interpretations. (219)

In addition to Wilde’s well-regarded novel, the paper also investigates two related erotic novels: *Teleny* (1893) and *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* (1881). These two pieces are considered valuable sources for such research as “pornography can be claimed as a source of knowledge, pleasure, and power... The Victorian era has proven, with good reason, to be an especially crucial period for such investigations.” (Frederickson 304). Furthermore, as a form of “intellectual production... [p]ornography has acted as a constituent part of how the Victorian period negotiated not only ‘sexuality’ as such, but also phenomena as diverse as expert culture, radical politics, science, race, and psychology, among others.” (Frederickson 305)

WILDE’S EROTIC LITERATURE

It must be seen that from the 1870s different sexual subcultures appeared with prominent homosexual interest. The scandals related to these subcultures – yet unknown and basically not understandable to the Victorians – were the part of public discussions. For example, Cook reports that the trials of Thomas Earnest Boulton and Frederick William Park in 1871 received great attention at the time (18). Boulton and Park were known to dress up in women’s clothes and parade in public places. They were also assumed to have sex with men. They were charged; however, justice did not know how to convict them based on their behaviour (Delgado 30). On the one hand, cross-dressing was not a criminal offence; on the other hand, the prosecution could not prove that Boulton and Park had also engaged in sodomy with men, which was the only criminal charge in this case. Another example is the case of Henry Vizetelly in 1889. He had Zola’s erotic writings including homosexuality translated and also published them. He was fined and convicted for this ‘crime’, in accordance with the legislation on the censorship of the era. The Cleveland Street scandals were also

reported to the public. It was known that telegraph boys doubled as prostitutes. This did not involve homosexual ‘crime’ only, but also the crossing of class boundaries (Sharon Marcus, “Sexuality” 436-437). The latter, of course, was not a crime; however, it shows that a wide range of society was involved. These are just a few of the known public scandals involving homosexual acts mentioned by Cook, Delgado, and Sharon Marcus.

Wilde was a member of the rising middle-class, which was dominant in shaping the ideology of the Victorian era (C. Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* 6). Moreover, he was also part of the popular culture of the time, a public figure famous for his literary achievement, public appearances, wit, and of course, scandals including his trials in 1895. Therefore, Wilde “functioned as a cultural lightning rod for an anxious fin de siècle England.” (Schulz 38) Wilde was fully aware of his importance; he was writing in the belief that “[t]he morality of an artwork becomes a function of its artistry” (Arata 127). However, he could not communicate this in public. Wilde’s contemporaries were worried about these morals. They argued that reading popular literature including Wilde’s works would lead to young consumers committing the same crimes as the protagonists and the author, which would categorise them as criminals straight away (Denisoff, “Popular Culture” 150).

Wilde’s novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* received great attention. It was first published in 1890 in *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* and drew much attention to the protagonist and the moral of his story. So much so - as Hyde claims - that this piece of work was used against Wilde to establish his moral liability (109). It is exactly these morals in which the paper is interested, as the story itself is the covert initiation of Dorian Gray to a homosocial society in the paper’s reading.

Although it is not part of the canon, *Teleny or The Reverse of the Medal* (1893) is attributed to Oscar Wilde. However, it is more likely that his very circle wrote the piece under his supervision. According to J. G. Nelson, *Teleny* is a “tale told in the ‘round-robin’ tradition... [as] the manuscript was written in a number of different hands, which suggests that it was the work of several members of Wilde’s coterie... including Wilde himself.” (35) The manuscripts were exchanged in a bookshop on Coventry Street around 1890, the time Wilde was working on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Due to its erotic content, *Teleny* could not be published because of the law on censorship. It was printed privately in two hundred

copies by one Leonard Smithers² in 1893; subsequent editions appeared in 1899, 1903, and 1906. These were mainly published under Wilde's name as author (Cook 104). The novel features two protagonists: René Teleny, a pianist and Camille de Grioux, who is initiated into a homosocial society by Teleny. The two meet at a concert where Teleny performs. They fall in love in the presence of Briancourt, who later blackmails the lovers out of jealousy. The style of discourse regarding their love and separation constantly varies between detailed aesthetic description and sheer pornography, from intimate love through casual sexual affairs to an orgy scene. The novel ends in Camille's suicide attempt after he catches his mother and Teleny in the act, and Teleny's suicide.

Before the paper can demonstrate similarities between the two novels, the covert homoerotic reading of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* shall be established in terms of the strategies Wilde applied to tackle the legislation on censorship. According to Bristow, the law on publications regarding sexual material saw three major changes in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first step was the 1853 Customs Consolidation Act protecting the Isles from pornographic content coming from the Continent. This was confirmed and further developed by the 1857 Obscene Publication Bill, which basically declared a ban on publishing any material considered "obscene". This meant that there was no genre that could publish sexually explicit material. The Obscene Publication Bill was refined in 1868 by the invention of the Hicklin Standard, which aimed to prevent the publishing of any material that the *reader* might consider obscene ("Homosexual Writing on Trial" 22). The consequences were alarming:

[The Hicklin Standard] opened a door for judges to apply the insidious verbs 'deprave' and 'corrupt' to any printed work that touched on sexual subject-matter, regardless of whether it had pornographic content. It was in this legal context that works on homosexual topics that could scarcely be labelled pornographic proved especially vulnerable to prosecution... it became increasingly difficult to circulate publicly several important volumes (both action and non-action) that represented emergent understandings of male and female homosexual identity. In the meantime, works of homosexual pornography could escape the grasp of the law through clandestine publication

² Smithers is also assumed to belong to Wilde's circle as the "lawyer turned publisher and bookseller" employed Beardsley at *The Savoy* after he was fired from *The Yellow Book* in 1895. Beardsley lost his job due to the Wilde trials, as he was strongly associated with the convicted author (Reade 9).

with small presses that sold their titles to exclusive lists of private subscribers. (Bristow, "Homosexual Writing on Trial" 23)

While this quote's emphasis is on homosexual writing, it must be noted that any literary work touching on the slightest sexual content was objectionable, as it is known from Vizetelly's trials. The "sexually promiscuous alcoholic" lifestyle of the female protagonist of George Moore's *A Mummer's Wife* (1884) banned the novel from all libraries (Bristow, "Homosexual Writing on Trial" 24). Based on the above, one might assume that the law managed to suppress any discourse on sexuality, but in practice it did not happen at all. For one thing, as Leckie claims, the authors were aware that from the Hicklin Standard it is the reception, more importantly, the readers' supposed interpretation that decides whether a literary piece was immoral or corruptive. Furthermore, while novels with any hint at sex could not be published, newspapers were able to publish "if not sexually explicit, then sexually suggestive material" (3). Therefore, the determined Wilde could have his work, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* published in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in series, even if not as a novel first. As a result, Wilde tackled the interpretation oriented law and the "interrelated contexts of the production of the book" (Leckie 2), the morals of the reader. Wilde indeed presented the unnamed sins of Dorian Gray to the public in a coded form.

Joe Law takes this idea even further. He claims that writers were not only aware of the importance of interpretation but even developed strategies to encode the risky topics (175). Oscar Wilde confidently relied on at least three strategies. This system of symbols shared by *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Teleny* shows that these two novels are closely related. None of the three symbols was Wilde's own invention; therefore, like-minded sinners could decode what was written down.

The first thing Wilde could rely on was the concept of Greek love. The idea originates from John Addington Symonds, who was an early advocate of modern same-sex desires. To help the cause, he did some research regarding homosexuality in ancient Greek culture. This way he tried to explain the nature of homosexual relations. His studies were published in two significant books of the time, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1884) and *A Problem in Modern Ethics: Being an Inquiry into Phenomenon of Sexual Inversion* (1891). Bristow claims that Oscar Wilde was familiar with Symonds's research ("Homosexual Writing on Trial" 28). What is more, it is known that Wilde not only "greatly admired" but "started a correspondence with" Symonds (McKenna 10). Besides Wilde, his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas (Bosie) was also an admirer of Symonds. Bosie's "love that dare not speak its name" from his poem "Two Loves" resembles the idea of *l'amour de l'impossible* from Symonds's

Animi Figura (1882). Symonds's relevance is indisputable and Wilde used his ideas to camouflage eroticism in his works. In *A Problem in Greek Ethics* Symonds writes that "Greek love" is "a passionate and enthusiastic attachment subsisting between man and youth..., which, though it was not free from sensuality, did not degenerate into mere licentiousness" (8). Furthermore it was "the Dorians [who] gave the earliest and most marked encouragement to Greek love" (13). As a result, Wilde gave the protagonist the name, Dorian, which consequently refers to Greek love. Besides the protagonist's, another reoccurring name also has reference to homosexuality. Dorian meets Adrian Singleton in a curious opium den (Wilde, *The Collected Works Of Oscar Wilde* 130), a place whose further importance will be explained later. Adrian is a clear reference to the young lover of Antonius. Their homoerotic story is told in *Teleny* (Wilde et al 4, 11).

Music was also a very important motif to encode the desires that should be unnamed. Giving emphasis to music was, yet again, not Wilde's idea but Walter Pater's in *The Renaissance* (1873). According to Pater, "[a]ll art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (106), by which statement he basically declares music as the highest and most important form of art. Music was present in the private and public sphere as well. On the one hand, music had become overly professionalised giving the modes and institutions for musical education (Solie 104). Music was divided into two categories in this era: authorised and low. These two categories were associated with moral values as well, the authorised music being regarded as moral and the low as immoral music (Zhang 50). It must be emphasised that musical - and therefore authorised moral - education was available for both boys and girls (Zhang 51-52). Moreover, the fact that a household had a piano meant that the family adapted the Victorian domestic values (Zhang 52). On the other hand, the emergence of music halls in the public sphere was also very important. The middle class could represent themselves, their wealth, and cultural dominance in music halls (Zhang 53).

Music in a novel is worth investigating as it may serve as a "moral monitor or diagnostic tool" (Solie 115). Concerning the relationship of music and its representation in literature, Joe Law claims that, "[a]s a nonverbal medium, music may evoke emotion but it cannot speak. As such, it is readily cognate with a condition that was not to be named" (180). This idea perfectly aligns with the concept of homoeroticism as "love that dare not speak its name". The close relationship of music and sexuality is clear in the novels under discussion. Wilde makes the two protagonists, Dorian and Teleny pianists. According to Law, having a character appear at the piano makes the character feminine (180). Wilde builds on this stereotype to establish the protagonists' homoerotic interest. Furthermore, the presence of

music and the musician is highly erotic. At the end of the century “[physiological aesthetics] sought to put the study of aesthetics on a scientific basis by mapping the bodily changes produced by artistic stimuli” (Arata 136). Zhang goes as far as stating that while Victorian music and watching the performer were inseparable; it was not the visuals but music that could bring one to orgasm (55). This is certainly supported by the text of *Teleny*, which begins with Camille having an orgasm while listening to Teleny playing. He later exclaims that “[Teleny] was remarkably good-looking” (Wilde et al. 2) but “having *heard* [him] play, [he] cannot listen to any more music [that night][emphasis added]” (Wilde et al. 8). The sexual (hence by contemporary standards) immoral nature of this experience is expressed by the nationality and genre of the music, the Hungarian csardas, the “effect [of which]... was perfectly entrancing. In fact, in no music is the sensuous element so powerful as in that of the Tsiganes.” (Wilde et al. 2).³ Dorian Gray’s taste of music takes a very similar turn. While he is interested in Schumann’s *Forest Scenes* at the beginning (Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* 14), which foreshadows his change and ease from repression, later he turns from authorised music to foreign low music as “[t]he harsh intervals and shrill discords of barbaric music stirred him at times when Schubert’s grace, and Chopin’s beautiful sorrows, and the mighty harmonies of Beethoven himself, fell unheeded on his ear.” (Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* 94)

The third symbol is the colour green. While it is known that Wilde used a green carnation to indicate homoerotic interest in 1892 during the premier of *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (McKenna 227), little is it known that, despite what Wilde claimed, he did not invent but

³ Hungary and products of Hungarian culture are remarkably present in relation to the homoerotic literature of this era. Teleny plays a Hungarian csardas (Wilde et al 8), which he later plays even better after making friends with Camille (Wilde et al 33). But stereotypic Hungarian rural clothing (Wilde et al 9) and food (Wilde et al 81) also appear in the novel. Joe Law also mentions two works that connect homoerotic English literature to Hungary. One is *The True Story of a Vampire* (1894) by Eric Stenbock in which “Gabriel and Vardalek are drawn to each other immediately” when Vardalek plays a Hungarian csardas (Law 188). The other work is *Imre* (1903) by Edward Stevenson in which the male protagonist and a Hungarian soldier are brought together by music (Law 193-194). In *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, “Hungary water” is mentioned while discussing homoerotic fetishism (85). A remark on perfumes is not surprising as Briot reports that perfumes became widely and financially available, fashionable products at the end of the nineteenth century (273). However, this meant the cheap production of new fragrances while, according to Robinson, Hungary water was the first alcohol-based perfume first made in 1370 for Queen Elizabeth of Hungary (264). The insistence of mentioning the Hungarian perfume seems curious and at the same time very much suggestive regarding the symbolic status of Hungary in English homoerotic literature in this period.

stole the idea from 1891 Paris. This means that he did not adopt but adapted the symbol. In Paris men with similar same-sex interests wore the green carnation. It is even less known that in 1890 green cravats were used for similar purposes in Paris (McKenna 226); therefore, it is not how the colour is embodied that is interesting, but the symbol itself, the colour green. It must be emphasised that the symbolism of the colour green does not have anything to do with the author's Irish origins as it has been seen above. Furthermore, Wilde's contemporary, Dowson also turned to France for the meaning of this symbol: "'Dorian' Gray [saw] some very beautiful & obscure versicles in the latest manner of French Symbolism." (Dowson 182-183) Wilde used the symbol in other literary works as well; for example in *Salome*, in which Salome mentions a "little green flower" (Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* 723) to the Syrian, who is surrounded with the homosexual love of the Page. The green flower of the text is also featured in Beardley's black and white close illustrations to *Salome*, "The Woman in the Moon" and "The Platonic Lament". The colour green is prominently there in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as well. While it has already been assumed that Adrian Singleton was given a telling name, Wilde reassures our assumption by letting us know that Adrian gave a green book covered in pomegranates (an exotic fruit) to Dorian (Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* 113). This explains the homoerotic nature of their relationship. What is more, when later Dorian meets Adrian it is in an opium den where he has to pass through a "tattering green curtain" (Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* 129).

A similar green, supposedly private, space is mentioned in *Teleny*. Teleny and Camille meet in the green room of the music hall (Wilde et al. 6). According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, the green room is a "room in a theatre or studio in which performers can relax when they are not performing" (625). While it is supposed to be a private and calm place, the green room seems rather highly frequented in the novel. Therefore, it is Wilde's conscious choice of words to call the space in which they meet a green room, which is, by tradition, green and belongs to the musician, both indicating the homoerotic relationship.⁴

Many similarities regarding the homosexual implications of the two novels have been demonstrated so far. Cook warns the readers, however, while he as well admits that there are "similar conceptualisations... of... homosexual experimentation", the two books were written for different audiences; therefore, their comparison must be done with caution (105). The

⁴ Margot Norris in *Suspicious Readings of Joyce's "Dubliners"* writes about the importance of green and the search for green eyes indicating the children's homosocial interest in "The Encounter" (38-39). Norris establishes that Joyce knew and liked Wilde's works very much (31) and counting on the topic's invisibility (30) he used Wilde's symbolism, "the homosexual significance of green." (39)

paper disputes whether it is true that the two novels were intended for different audiences. The key difference was the way of publishing, which does not entail that the audience for a particularly sexual reading was different. It is the details of the content that caused this significant difference. The authors' intention might have been to write the story of homosocial men in London. On the one hand, censorship could not let this happen unless Wilde wrote about the secrets of Dorian Gray the way he did. On the other hand, the story needed deciphering, which eventually took place in *Teleny*. The similarities are easily demonstrated: Teleny's frame narration serves the purpose of protecting the protagonist's privacy (Sharon Marcus, "At Home with the Other Victorians" 132-133). Similarly, Dorian Gray is obsessed with hiding his portrait. The two protagonists, Dorian and Teleny are both pianists. Furthermore, the idea of a double is apparent in both. Dorian has a portrait bearing his corruption. Camille's "doppelganger" (Wilde et al 91) is Teleny, who corrupts him; both of the aforementioned doubles die by a dagger. Moreover, both novels are about the initiation of a young man into homosocial society. The description of the city in both stories is also similar; the obsession with perfumed spaces in both works, an element which features prominently during Wilde's trials (Cook 56) are all very close and straightforward similarities. Based on the unmistakable parallels, I would like to argue that what could not be written down in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – as it would have prevented the publication of the book – is overtly explained with graphic porn in *Teleny*.

The third novel, which I would like to use to substantiate my hypotheses, is the anonymously written *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*. First published privately by one William Lazenby in two hundred and fifty copies in 1881 (Cook 19), the novel itself is the collection of stories without an overall plot about a male prostitute, Jack Saul's sexual encounters from childhood until adult age. These recollections are followed by short essays writing about the sexual practices of the time. This novel was definitely read by Wilde (Setz vii) and it is often referred to in *Teleny* (Wilde et al. 5, 34, 66). More importantly, the following is exclaimed in *Teleny*: "what pleasures can be compared with those of the Cities of the Plain?" (Wilde et al. 108) This indicates that *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* is a reference point for the sexual practices in *Teleny*. These recollections are further related to *Teleny* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* through music. Music in this novel as well enhances pleasure. In one scene, the receiver is playing the piano and singing a parody during homosexual intercourse (50); in another scene, a piece called "Slap-Bum Polka" is being played during foreplay (59). It is important to note that my references are to the original text

and not the so-called “Badboy” edition from 1992 (republished in 2006), which turned all the female characters of the original story into males. (Setz xxiv)

While Wilde’s and the three works’ importance and interrelations have – hopefully – been demonstrated, it still has to be established how these works relate to the reality of the era. Of course, when considering the literary pieces of the time, it may be automatically assumed that they reflect cultural reality. For instance, Wilde’s *ekphrasis*, the description of the picture in *Dorian Gray* is so realistic that it might endanger one’s morals (Robbins 102). The picture, therefore, must be hidden, as that is how the heteronormative patriarchy might have seen Dorian’s unnamed sins. However, when analysing pornography, it must be noted that the genre does not automatically entail that what is read is fact and not just fiction or fantasy. Despite this, the paper would still argue that reading the aforementioned works reveals facts concerning the sexual reality of the last few decades of the nineteenth century. It is not simply “a study of human fantasies” (Steven Marcus 1). Cook in his book, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* argues in details that Wilde draws a factually very correct map of homosocial London in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Teleny* (106-107). Furthermore, *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* is a “pornographic text and also an important cultural and historical document” (Setz xix). It reflects reality with accurate names and places. Therefore, if it is accepted that the *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* is the sexual reality of the time that is often referred to in *Teleny* as a reference point of desires; and *Teleny* explains what could not be written down in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* due to the Hicklin Standard; the conclusion is that all three works write about the factual sexual reality of Wilde and his circle, these stories are not mere fictions and fantasies.

In order that the paper can demonstrate how important it is to decode the *Picture of Dorian Gray* with *Teleny* so that facts on reality can be gained, the following example is offered. It is known that Alfred Taylor, who was convicted with Oscar Wilde, organised orgies in “darkened, perfumed rooms”, which were “repeatedly evoked in court and described by the press” (Cook 56). The following straightforward description of such an event can be found in *Teleny*: “on mattresses... men, young and good-looking, almost all naked, were lounging by twos and threes” in “[t]he perfume of that over-heated atmosphere” (Wilde et al. 98). There is one fragrance, heliotrope that is often mentioned and used before Teleny and Camille consummate their love (Wilde et al. 75). In the beginning, Camille and Teleny agree that their favourite fragrance is *heliotrope blanc* (Wilde et al. 12), which became very popular in the 1880s (Briot 281). It is known that the smell of heliotrope reduces anxiety (Rose 100), which apparently is taken advantage of by both Teleny and Dorian Gray. In chapter eleven of

The Picture of Dorian Gray, Wilde gives the reader a long description of Dorian's mysterious business: "he would now study... a real psychology^[5] of perfumes... he devoted himself entirely to music... and in a... room, with... walls of olive-green lacquer, he used to give curious concerts, in which mad gypsies tore wild music from little zithers..." (Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* 94) The description continues with different ethnic groups playing different types of music. The perfume in question is an interesting problem in the novel. Henry Wotton explains the following to Dorian:

But a chance tone of colour in a room..., a particular perfume that you had once loved and that brings subtle memories with it..., a cadence from a piece of music that you had ceased to play – I tell you, Dorian, that it is on things like these that our lives depend... There are moments when the odour of *lilas blanc* passes suddenly across me, and I have to live the strangest month of my life over again. [*italics in the original*] (Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* 150)

However, the very original, uncensored typescript of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*⁶ by Wilde reveals that "[t]here are moments when the odour of *heliotrope* passes suddenly across [Wotton], and [he has] to live the strangest *year* of [his] life over again [emphasis added]." (Wilde, *The Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray* 212) Considering that the colour green denotes the Wildean subculture with homoerotic interest, heliotrope is the signature fragrance of Wilde's circle, and music denotes sensuality and yielding to pleasures (Law 183), the paper concludes that the above quote (Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* 94) is a coded narrative of an orgy.

The three novels reveal that the term, "homosexual" is inadequate to label the sexual reality of Wilde and his circle. Assuming a homosexual identity excludes the possibility of having sexual relationship with women. However, Teleny is having sex with women as well (Wilde et al. 37, 133), and Dorian Gray is accused of having sex with Sybil Vane (Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* 132). Moreover, *The Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray* shows that numerous "instances in which Wilde refers to Dorian's female lovers" were deleted by the magazine's editor, J. M. Stoddart. (Frankel 46) There are also intercours

⁵ The word, "psychology" was used in relation to men with homosexual interest around Europe and Wilde also used the word with the same connotation in a letter in 1876 (McKenna 9).

⁶ The editor of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, "Stoddart struck words, phrases, and whole sentences from Wilde's typescript", which was first published as *The Picture of Dorian Gray: An Annotated, Uncensored Edition* by Harvard University Press in 2011. (Frankel ix)

The Sins of the Cities of the Plain (24, 59-62) where the male can engage in sex with both a man and woman assuming the active and passive roles simultaneously (36). Strictly speaking, as a result, the term “homosexuality” can be used as an adjective only (Cook xiv), which denotes a particular same-sex focus within a broader pattern of behaviour. At this point, it could be assumed that Wilde’s subculture was bisexual. The problem with this term is that it suggests the dichotomy of gender and sexual roles. However, the novels under investigation unravel these oppositions.

As opposed to the scientific view of the era, the Wildean subculture did not “invert” but combined the different features of feminine and masculine gender roles. However, they eliminated the dichotomy of the two extremes considering the identical potential to perform equally and reciprocally at the same time. Therefore, the key feature of this subculture was that they were capable of reciprocal sexual actions.⁷ This is also what Symonds finds the essence of this circle: “[t]here was less scope for the emergence of passionate enthusiasm between men and women, while the full conditions of a spiritual attachment, solely determined by reciprocal inclination, were only to be found in comradeship” (63). The blurring of the male-female, active-passive binaries is best seen in scenes when in a love triangle, including two men and a woman, men can simultaneously be active and passive in their actions (*The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* 36). The members of the Wildean subculture could also assume the passive role while having sex with a man; therefore, the sex of the penetrated was irrelevant. The fact that men could assume the active role needs no explanation; however, it is very interesting to see that women could also and were desired to assume the active role, which results in the fact that these men could engage in reciprocal pleasures with woman as well.⁸ In conclusion, there is no need for a dichotomy when describing the sexual practices of Wilde’s circle. Although the paper’s focus is on a special aspect of male sexuality, I would like to add that a similar blurring of gender roles is discernible in female same-sex relationships (“Tribadism” *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* 88-89). Such a woman, “[t]he tribade is... a part of the history of the masculinization of certain

⁷ See *Teleny*, “And now you must take my place. You must make me feel what you felt. You will now be active and I passive” (Wilde et al. 83).

⁸ “‘And you, love, won’t you allow me to kiss and return you the exquisite pleasure you have just afforded me?’ she asked, as she kissed me excitedly...

‘Oh, do have me [Boulton], Miss Murray. I should so like you to ravish me; my blood is on fire; I’m not in my right senses; the sight of such darling fills me with such a longing that I can’t restrain myself. If you don’t do it for me, you shall never love my little fanny again!’” (*The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* 47-48)

female sexual practices, and she exemplifies the problems of determining their meanings” (Halberstam 61).

THE DAMAGE WILDE HAD DONE

In what follows, it shall be explained that Wilde’s work and his trials meant a great damage to his community. First, by hinting at their sexual practices, Wilde posed his subculture as a threat to the heteronormative society in which men wanted to marry chaste women. Furthermore, this circle recognising that they were against the ideological standards used addictive substances unsupervised. Second, the term he used, “sodomite” incriminated and posed his subculture as sexually aberrant individuals. Third, the trials drew much attention to Wilde’s circle; however, his subculture could not be distinguished from other sexual subcultures related to homoerotic desires. Wilde collected the ideas of his circle and published a book that did not translate as theoretical knowledge about their sexuality but reported their non-conventional actions only.

What Wilde writes about compared to the ‘temporarily aberrant’ sodomite (Foucault 43) was a permanent personal quality and behaviour with dangerous potentials. It is evident that sodomy did not mean having sex with men only.⁹ In *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* a female side character explains the following to a man: “I own I have often wanted to feel what a man is like, and you can oblige me without any risk if you will.” (48) For women, physical relationship with a man from a circle like Wilde’s may have meant safe sex without evidence, pregnancy or obligations of marriage which posed considerable threat to heteronormativity, and to patriarchal prerogatives, in particular. The literature of the 1890s was not only interested in male sexuality but in the life and punishment of the fallen woman: Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891), Zola’s *Nana* (1880), but Oscar Wilde punishes the fallen woman in *Salome* (1891) as well. Wilde also discusses the presence of the evidence of having had sex with the suicide of Sybil Vane in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and a female side character, Catherine in *Teleny*. While Catherine’s loss of virginity is graphic and unambiguous (Wilde et al. 57-59), Sybil’s is only suspected from his brother accusing Dorian Gray with that “[he] wrecked the life of Sybil Vane... She killed herself. [He] know[s] it.” (Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* 132). As a consequence, having no prospects of

⁹ See *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* (49)

a marriage, they inevitably needed punishment. Therefore, it was very important that, if penetration had happened, it would not have had any evidence.¹⁰

The men in the aforementioned works knew that their behaviour was against the standards of the era. To ease both the physical and the mental tensions (C. Nelson, “Sex and the Single Boy” 532), alcohol and opium were frequently used as means of self-medication. Opium was widely available and used during the nineteenth century. It was only after the 1868 Pharmacy Act when the medical profession started strictly supervising its usage (Berridge, “Victorian Opium Eating: Responses to Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England” 450). “Opiates... have the common property of relieving pain and inducing euphoria” (Berridge, *Opium and the People: Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England* xvi), which physical effects were why they were used. In both *Teleny* (Wilde et al 82) and *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* (74), sodomy is often depicted as something supposedly painful with the appearance of blood; however, the passive party does not express any feeling of pain but euphoria.¹¹ What is more, of the many types of physical relationships, it is only before sodomy that there are references to smoking in oriental settings.¹² But lovemaking is preceded with taking alcohol as well, as stimulant, in both novels. These two substances offered remedy to both the medical and moral dangers of sex. Opium was known to “make the residual pain more tolerable and generally produce a lessening of emotion distress” (Berridge, *Opium and the People* xxi). As it will be demonstrated in details, one’s non-conventional sexuality was seen to originate from one’s learned transgressive behaviour; opium can be seen as self-medication. Reed claims that in this period “[b]utressing nutritional arguments for the benefits of intoxicating drink were medical ones. Alcohol was widely and, in many respects, legitimately regarded both as pain-killer and as a palliative for psychological as well as physiological stress.” (49) The need to ease distress is also expressed by the fragrance, heliotrope and the choice of the term, “green room”, where Camille and Teleny fall in love with each other, as green is known for its calming effect. However, opium and alcohol eased only the symptoms but did not treat the causes of transgressive behaviour. The last three decades of the nineteenth century did not find a solution for the anxiety that the appearance of, for example, Wilde’s subculture caused. Neither the legal measures introduced by the

¹⁰ In *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, it is graphically and well explained that a woman, in order that she can have sex with a man without evidence or pregnancy, she directs the man to sodomise her (20-21).

¹¹ For the most graphic and extreme case, see the Spahi’s accident in *Teleny* (Wilde et al. 109-110)

¹² See *Teleny* (Wilde et al. 81-82)

heteronormative patriarchal society of the late-Victorians or the ‘quasi medical’ practices of Wilde’s circle could alleviate the cultural tensions.

Although it was the word, “sodomite” the subculture in question used and it was also how the law initially labelled them, it did not represent the subculture adequately for either purposes. Wilde and his circle declare in *Teleny* that “[Camille] was born a sodomite” (Wilde et al. 34). Their desires are also described as “sodomy” in the essays of *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*. However, a distinction must be made between the culture of these sodomites and the earlier, ‘temporarily aberrant’ sodomites (Foucault 43). This need was what the law also recognised and attempted to broaden its terminology to be able to convict the members of this subculture towards the end of the nineteenth century: “[while] men were not labelled as homosexuals or inverters by the newspapers or courts during the period and the emphasis continued to be on what they had done” (Cook 59).

In general, it must be noted that there was a great shift in the tendency of punishment in the nineteenth century. On the one hand, over a century the severity of punishment had been moderated, the punishment changed from capital punishment to two years in prison with hard labour at most. On the other hand, while rarely had the law taken action until the middle of the century, the number of charges and conviction multiplied at the end of the century (Adut 214). According to Cook, the shift happened in three major steps. Until the nineteenth century, sodomy was dealt with by a 1533 legislation basically convicting anyone engaging in anal intercourse with man, woman, or beast. The 1823 Offences Against the Person Act confirmed this, sentencing sodomites to capital punishment in the first half of the century. (42) This was changed in 1861 when the possible sentence was changed to imprisonment from ten years to life or to a two-year imprisonment with hard labour (Cook 42). The “authorities rarely and only reluctantly enforced... laws” regarding homosexual acts up to this point (Adut 213). However, the prosecution faced a major issue when proving the criminal act of sodomy. Boulton and Park, for example, could not be convicted due to the lack of evidence in the 1870s. For this very reason, as it is demonstrated by Table 1, prosecution for (intent of) sodomy rarely led to conviction. One could be convicted only if caught in action. According to Cook, while the 1861 change in the law claimed authority over the public places only, towards the end of the century domestic space was understood as something governed by the lord of the household and not the law (43). This left plenty of opportunities to criminal sexual practices in private houses (Cook 28). Furthermore, the law could not determine the sex of the charged cross-dressers or sodomites based on their transgressive behaviour. Therefore, it could not decide how to charge them either (Delgado 30).

The Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885 extended the provision of the law on sexual practices to the private sphere as well. Section eleven of the Act invented the charge of “gross indecency” under which one could be sentenced to a maximum of two years in prison with or without hard labour (Cook 42). However, this term did not have any specific legal definition, which led to the fact that the law could punish anybody who was assumed to have sex disregarding the marital heteronormative conventions. In practice, of course, this was used to convict those against whom there was no evidence. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, more precisely the Lebouchere Amendment reclaimed the private sphere for the provision of the law (Cook 43), and the Vagrancy Law Amendment reinforced the power of law in the public sphere in the 1890s (Cook 45). The prosecution was not more successful with the charges of “gross indecency” than it had been with “sodomy”; however, the number of cases concerning homosexual activities multiplied (see Table 1). It must be noted that the Criminal Law Amendment Act was not a law on male same-sex desires primarily. As it has been seen, the patriarchy wanted to protect their women, and this is what the act was for as well: “The purpose of the Act of 1885 is described in the preamble as an Act ‘to make further provision for the Protection of Women and Girls, the suppression of brothels, and other purposes’.” (Moran 99) The same Act was also applicable to women engaging in sexual acts with minors, for instance. Therefore, it covered sexuality with a much broader scope and criminalised substantially more acts than what fell within the practice of the subculture under my investigation. Nonetheless, it must be pointed out that Wilde’s circle choosing the term, “sodomite” in *Teleny* clearly incriminated itself.

Foucault writes that, for example, Wesphal used the term, “invert” in his studies about homosocial cultures in the 1870s (43). It must be noted that it strongly effeminised the transgressor and overly emphasised that the male assumed a feminine, passive sexual role. Sharon Marcus claims that “[b]efore the 1890s, sexuality was a biological term whose primary meaning indicated a type of reproduction in plants and animals. For most of the Victorian period, sex meant the quality of being male or female, not the act of sexual intercourse.” (“Sexuality” 422) Therefore, one party was the impregnator (active), the other was the impregnated (passive). However, she also notes at the same time that theorists separated the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality from the twentieth century only (Sharon Marcus, “Sexuality” 422). By implication, then, only a female participant could assume the passive role. Cook states that masculinity was defined by having sex with women and femininity by having sex with men (7-8). What this meant was that during sexual intercourse there was the masculine, active participant and the feminine, passively receiving participant.

According to Cook and Sharon Marcus; therefore, when two men engaged in intercourse, the receiver automatically assumed a stereotypically feminine role. The essence of the invert was that he assumed a fundamentally feminine sexual and gender role while effacing his masculinity. This is not applicable to the sexual phenomenon that centres round Wilde. Writing about Greek love, Symonds claims that “[t]he distinctive feature of Dorian comradeship [that is the Greek love Wilde writes about in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*] was that it remained on both sides masculine, tolerating no sort of softness.” (Symonds 18).

Much of the cultural anxiety – which had arisen from the rearing of the “invert” – in the Wildean subculture originated from the institution of marriage, which the Victorians considered the only legitimate and proper institution in which one’s sexuality could be practiced:

The Victorians held that the sex instinct is a powerful force that needs to be channeled in the proper way to be beneficial to humanity. Because marriage was thought to involve a relationship of love and permanent responsibilities, it was considered the ideal sphere for sexual expression. Sex was, accordingly, an expected and necessary part of marriage...

To preserve the spiritual essence of marriage, the Victorians felt compelled to desensualize sex or to erect elaborate barrier to contact erotic desires...

The Victorians imagined a drama of an omnipresent powerful sex drive propelled towards pleasure but susceptible to the dangers of excess and ruin. Self-control and the spiritualization of desire would make possible an autonomous self and a healthy society.” (Seidman 48-49)

The rearing of the boy, however, did not result in the masculine, authoritative, active behaviour that would have been expected from a man in a marriage, as he had been raised by female standards. Female sexuality was conducted by standards from a much earlier period. For example, according to King and Rabil Jr., Vives’s *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual* (1524) was translated into English in the same century (43), which book covered a woman’s life and duties during girlhood, adolescence, womanhood, marriage, and widowhood pointing at chastity as the primary virtue of the unmarried woman. It was not until the nineteenth century that boys’ chastity was required as well. It was believed that “judicious education may raise male standard to a womanly level” as “the mid-Victorians customarily saw sexual abstinence as both feminine and desirable” (C. Nelson, “Sex and the Single Boy” 528). This incorporated the idea of – hitherto female – chastity into the desirable

male masculinity. Contemporary theory held that not only premarital sex was undesirable, but autoeroticism could not be practiced either. Doctors insisted on the idea that masturbation made the self-abuser vulnerable to several types of diseases; what is more, autoeroticism led to moral decay and the damage of the mind and soul (C. Nelson, "Sex and the Single Boy" 532). A similar idea is echoed in *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, Saul gives the amount of time he spends with rest, as it is explained at some point, "too much of [sex] might injure [his] health" (22). Men's sexual appetite was equated with sin (C. Nelson, "Sex and the Single Boy" 540), which meant physical and psychological danger.

The private domestic sphere had become more feminine towards the end of the century with the help of the law intruding to the private sphere from 1885. Firstly, the law wanted to influence private sexual practices for the sake of health and morals. Secondly, the law was needed to intervene and demonstrate some form of authority as the lord of the house was weakened while the mother gained more and more importance in the household. While men's and women's rights were still far from close, the change in the authority of the lord of the house was, nonetheless, significant. According to C. Nelson, the 1839 Custody of Infants Act was the first sign that it is the law and not the father who rules over the children (*Family Ties in Victorian England* 8). Later on, in 1857, the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act "gave to women who had separated from their spouses the legal status of spinsters, who, unlike wives, could own property and control their own money. It also established a divorce court, making the termination of marriages substantially easier" (C. Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* 8). Eventually, the 1870 and 1882 Married Women's Property Acts declared that the husband or "Man of Property"¹³ had no longer overall control over the woman's finances (C. Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* 9). Besides the law, the private sphere was becoming more feminine due to the mother's role to give sexual education to her children, even to the boys (C. Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* 51) as the morals for both sexes were based on chastity and continence. Referring to this, Camille tells in *Teleny* that "[a]nother hinted that [he] was tied to [his] mammy's apron-strings, that [his] dad had not allowed [him] to take the latchkey" (Wilde et al. 26), which explains that he was expected to be chaste and not assume the role of the masculine penetrator. No wonder, then, that in the novels, one's sexuality is intricately connected to family matters. Camille exclaims in *Teleny* that "[he] was born a sodomite" (Wilde et al. 34). This, however, did not mean that

¹³ *The Man of Property* (1906) was the first novel in John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* which title referred to Soames Forsyte, the man with the High-Victorian values.

one's homosexual desires were linked with genetics or biology, although theories were formed on a biological ideology as well (Bristow, "Homosexual Writing on Trial" 26). The novels' explanation is psychological and goes back to family relations: "[Teleny's] mother actually rode a gentleman under [his] very eyes" (Wilde et al. 84); Briancourt and his father both have homosexual interests (Wilde et al. 100); and Camille also has intelligence on his mother's overheated sexual "adventures" to which he keeps referring and with which he concludes his narration, but only promises to tell it "some other time" (Wilde et al. 138). Dorian Gray's family background and the parents' unauthorised sexual scandal are also revealed (Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* 26). Such references to family history are not absent from *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* either. One of Saul's clients, Mr. Carton (whose address is given in the novel) explains that "[he] come[s] of a very curious family. Both [his] father and mother... had the most erotic fancies... [he] is the youngest... and [has] two sisters... [t]he eldest seduced [him], her brother, before [he] was sixteen, and soon let her sister into the secret" (75).

Men could, however, assume a stereotypically feminine position without having been given the motherly sexual education. For example, McDonald writes about "spooning" at Eton. She writes about Reginald Brett's diary entry from 1868, which reports experimenting with sex and romance between boys and housemasters. She also remarks that "[i]n 1878 Johnson [a housemaster] hurriedly resigned from Eton. The exact reason why is undocumented." ("Spoonings" at Victorian Eton") This might suggest that the housemaster had to leave due to his sexual interest in the boys of Eton. Banerjee cites literary examples from novels in which the same phenomenon between boys is discussed. For example, E. F. Benson is writing about his own homosocial experience during his school years in *David Blaize* (1916). But Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) and George Meredith's *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* (1871) are also *bildungsromans* with such subtexts in Banerjee's reading. In *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, Saul also explains his initiation into homosocial society at Colchester boarding school. He graphically tells the story of his initiation into reciprocal penetrative intercourse with a group of boys (12-15). Later in the novel such schools are called "back-door-mitory" (67) and yet again the same sexual actions are told in a graphic way, also emphasising that, for instance, a junior teacher also joined the

orgy. The reader also learns that these boys, when they had the relatively rare chance, had sex with the female staff as well (67-69).¹⁴

Wilde, however, did not offer any theory explaining the sexuality of his very circle, although he as a public figure and his trials represented it. As expressed in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde addressing the members of his subculture rejected the idea of even trying: “[Henry Wotton] began to wonder whether *we* could ever make psychology so absolute a science that each little spring of life would be revealed to us. As it was, *we* always misunderstood ourselves, and rarely understood others [emphasis added].” (Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* 43) This did a considerable damage to him and his circle:

Wilde was not intelligibly a specific type of deviant sexual being when he embarked on his disastrous libel suit... Only during the trial proceedings did a hostile press manage to produce... an image of Wilde as someone whose sexual preference styled him as a definitionally different, morally degenerate and thus utterly contemptible kind of man. (Bristow, “‘A Complex Multiform Creature’: Wilde’s Sexual Identities” 200)

However, as it has been noted, he was not labelled as “homosexual”. If the number of convictions is compared to the number of arrests, it can be concluded that legislation was the most successful with sodomy and gross indecency charges in 1895 (see Table 1), which is the year of the Wilde trials by chance. In the following years, as a result, having no public theory opposing them, sexology experienced a shift in terminology, which incorporated all sexual varieties with same-sex desires: the invert was transformed into the homosexual (Cardon 186). Rarely is it discussed, however, that one member of the circle, Marc-André Raffalovich tried to control the damage done to the Wildean subculture.

¹⁴ It must be noted, while it was not necessarily a part of the “invert’s” childhood, that there was a close relationship between being separated from women and their sexuality. Cook reports that a significant number of the gross indecency charges included soldiers (26), hence the plot of Stevenson’s *Imre*. According to the Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1866, 1869), the “legislation intended to protect members of the British armed forces from sexually transmitted diseases.” (“The Contagious Diseases Act”) British soldiers were examined by doctors and categorised whether they were allowed to marry. As a result, many chose to find relief in unconventional sexual practices. Consequently, about one third of the soldiers contracted venereal diseases, which might have been the result of sodomy with men or women. Similarly, sailors were believed to have homoerotic interests (Norris 39).

RAFFALOVICH AND UNISEXUALITY

Marc-André Raffalovich came from a wealthy Russian Jewish banking family (Pearce 256). While he was still living in Paris (and had not yet moved to London), he heard Wilde's lectures in the United States in 1882 (Pearce 257). Moving to London two years after, Raffalovich "established a literary salon frequented by... Oscar Wilde" (Rosario, "Inversion's Histories | History's Inversions: Novelizing Fin-de-Siècle Homosexuality" 98). Their apparently intimate relationship, however, changed over time. According to Pearce, Raffalovich and Wilde grew apart due to the alarming presence of Wilde's wife, Constance; eventually, the two men's friendship came to an end due to Wilde's offensive remark on Raffalovich's salon (256-259). Roden also assumes some anti-Semitic attitudes towards the Jewish Raffalovich from Wilde's side. This argument is based on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in which the Jew's description is fairly gruesome. At the same time, Roden refutes himself by stating that it is known that Wilde had close Jewish friends without such attitude (127-138).

The friendship of Wilde and Raffalovich ended; however, they still belonged to the same circle. Around the publishing of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde was intimate with a young writer, John Gray, on whom, allegedly, Wilde based the protagonist of his novel (Pearce 259). Their romance lasted until "Wilde met the younger and more angelic Lord Alfred Douglas" (Rosario, "Inversion's Histories" 98) in 1892. It was Raffalovich who "got the suicidal Gray on rebound, and they became inseparable." (Rosario, "Inversion's Histories" 98). It was also Raffalovich, who supported Aubrey Beardsley having been dismissed from *The Yellow Book* due to his relations to Wilde after the trials in 1895. Raffalovich "became a patron of Aubrey Beardsley... when Beardsley was on his deathbed, Raffalovich sent a monthly check so that his mother could stay at home to look after him." (Denisoff, "Raffalovich, Marc-André") And Raffalovich was the one, who tried to control the damage that the Wilde trials had done to his circle by turning to Roman Catholicism in 1896 (Senelick 207)¹⁵ and writing his theoretical work, *Uranisme et Unisexualité* (1896).

Raffalovich was very much aware of the meaning of Wilde's aforementioned symbols including Greek love, music, and the colour green. Firstly, he "saw himself as a rival of Wilde's [flamboyant manners]; it has been suggested that he and Gray began playwriting in emulation of Wilde's recent success as a dramatist." (Senelick 207) Secondly, "Gray and

¹⁵ It is assumed that Wilde's circle also had great influence on Wilde, not only the other way around. John "Gray had converted to Roman Catholicism in 1890" (Senelick 207), Raffalovich in 1896, Beardsley not long before his death in 1898 (Landow), and Wilde, eventually, in 1900 before his death (Sloan xiii). Therefore, it might be assumed that Wilde also followed Gray and Raffalovich.

Raffalovich were accustomed to pitching their literary works at coterie audiences... [wearing] green carnations... This same crowd, used to leading a double life, could read between the lines and decipher the code.” (Senelick 210-211) As a result, Raffalovich based his arguments on very stable grounds when he challenged the originality of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Eells 84). He must have been aware of Symonds’s research on Greek love. Symonds developed *liber amoris* based on Plato (Evangelista 232). Such research used the concept of Greek love in order that the nineteenth century may consider tolerating them (Evangelista 235). Raffalovich also writes about the same notion as “[t]hese experiences of creating a homosexual identity through reading Plato [were] summed up... in *Uranisme et Unisexualité* (1896)” (Evangelista 242-243); furthermore, “Raffalovich’s book was partly intended as an analysis of the Wilde case” (Evangelista 243). As a close friend of Pater (Denisoff “Raffalovich, Marc-André”), Raffalovich must have been aware of the notions of Wilde’s circle on music. Therefore, he could conclude that “musical... have become a synonym... to indicate a submission to all those pleasures, all the sexual caprices or their practice” (Law 183). He also made remarks on the importance of odours and perfumes as well in *Uranisme et Unisexualité* as he “eroticize[d] the floral through the physicality of scent.” (Madden 18)

It must be noted that Raffalovich by writing *Uranisme et Unisexualité* “worked both with and against contextual forces in the time period leading up to the Wilde trial and through that of the socio-medical ‘construction’ of a homosexual identity” (Hall 7). He was criticising Wilde and converted to Roman Catholicism but at the same was living with John Gray and tried to legitimise the sexual desires of Wilde and his circle to which he, nevertheless, belonged.¹⁶ He conceptualised their sexuality as unisexuality.¹⁷ This unisexuality meant that

¹⁶ Raffalovich was not the only one who tried to legitimise non-heterosexual desires. For example, the Order of the Chaerona was a “pressure group” trying to legitimise theirs (Cook 32). But Edward Carpenter was also a significant figure regarding the legitimisation of same-sex desires. However, Carpenter cannot be related to Wilde’s literary circle or its ideas. Carpenter writes about a “a new sexual type, intermediate between the normal male and female... [Intermediate sex] can mediate between men and women” (Thiele 109). However, the intermediate sex is yet again based on binary oppositions, which the Wildean subculture disregarded: “The potential for revealing the *social* construction of gender was blocked by the assumption that masculinity and femininity were fixed, and the androgynous intermediate sex became just another fixed stereotype, albeit some mixture of the two extremes” (Thiele 109). Furthermore, Carpenter only acknowledged male same-sex desires (“Uranianism”) and writes about its “Democracy” to legitimise his devotion to a lower-class man (Carpenter 114-115). He explicitly damned female same-sex desires (Thiele 109-110).

¹⁷ The term was not Raffalovich’s invention. For instance, it was used by Peirce in his letter to Symonds in 1891. However, it must be noted that this usage was somewhat different from Raffalovich’s. Peirce wrote that

the members of this circle did not abide by the stereotypical gender roles and did not wish to recognise the dichotomy of biological sexes as they could perform equally and reciprocally. He claimed that it was the heteronormative ideology “by [its] example and behaviour” that created inverts (Rosario, “Inversion’s Histories” 100). In this sense, the term invert will always be a comparison of two sexes while, in Raffalovich’s view, there is only one when the identical potentials of the “two” are considered. As a result, the term, “unisexual” can “be applied to the large subset of ‘inverts’ who... were healthy, moral, fully cognizant of their sex, and would still experience same-sex love even if they belonged to the opposite sex” (Rosario “Trans (Homo) Sexuality? Double Inversion, Psychiatric Confusion, and Hetero-Hegemony” 41). He also compares unisexual thinking to the bisexual one. The bisexual is “more corrupted than the normal sexual man who tries unisexuality. Perversion is the passage from the one to the other; he also makes the distinction between the unisexual... [who can be educated and must not be repressed (Cardon 185)] and the effeminate who can’t [be] as debauched.” (Cardon 187) The same way the characters explained their behaviour in the discussed literary works, Raffalovich also emphasised the importance of education on the way of becoming the acceptable unisexual (Cardon 189). This theory completely opposed “Geddes and Thomson [who] stated [in *The Evolution of Sex* (1889)] that ‘hermaphrodism is primitive; the unisexual state is a subsequent differentiation.’” (Somerville 248) In his view, as a result, the term, “homosexual” has a different meaning as well:

He disengages inversion from perversion and adopts the word homosexuality... There exists henceforth a... (deep difference between homosexuality and hétérosexualité)... They are semantic twins and no more the monster or the invert of the other... And so the general law of the attractions of sexes is abolished. (Cardon 187)

Despite Raffalovich’s efforts, the heteronormative ideology’s label, the “homosexual identity” remained. In the light of the above, however, it is suggested that the scope on Wilde’s circle and his literature should be broadened to “unisexual”. It was Raffalovich’s model that incorporated the ideas of this subculture and formed a theory that takes the full potential of their sexual performances and preferences into account, which “ideology” failed

“*unisexual* love (a love for one sexuality)... [was] a perversion. The normal men love[d] both...” (Kennedy 32) Therefore, it must be seen that Peirce was thinking in the ideological dichotomy of biological sexes and gender roles. In this context unisexuality could be either heterosexuality or homosexuality, while bisexuality might have meant the loving of both.

to do. Raffalovich's unisexuality, as he suggested, should not "express abnormality anymore but a sexual variety" (Cardon 184). In 1993, Cardon still complains about the following:

[Raffalovich] to this very day is ignored simply because people are still tied to the compartmentalization of disciplines and we still find it incongruous to exhume a literary man who is mired in a scientific magazine, who prided himself on being more scientific than the scientists themselves on the subject of homosexuality. (191)

Ten years after Cardon's complaint, the *Encyclopedia of Lesbian and Gay Histories and Cultures* still draws our attention to the fact that Raffalovich's work should not be ignored but considered as opposed to the ideological "medicalization and persecution" of the nineteenth century. (1125) *Uranisme et Unisexualité*, however, has not been fully translated to this day. This is being changed by Fred Roden, who is working on the edition and translation of Raffalovich's work.¹⁸ This interest in Raffalovich might clarify the Wildean subculture and its literature's mistaken conceptualisation by the nineteenth-century unscientific heteronormative ideology.

CONCLUSION

The paper has explored a form of sexual behaviour in England from 1870 to the trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895 and its aftermath. It has been seen that Wilde was a prominent figure in this sexual subculture that was investigated as homosexuals from his trials in 1895. This term, however, has proven to be inadequate to capture the sexual reality of the Wildean subculture. His well-regarded novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* serves as a rich source on their sexuality. However, it has been pointed out that the novel's sexual subtext must entail the investigation of two non-canonical erotic novels, *Teleny or The Reverse of the Medal* and *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*. These books decipher the sexual desires of Wilde's circle that had to be hidden from censorship and the law.

It has been demonstrated that "the Homosexual" identity (Schulz 37) cannot be derived from the sexual subculture Wilde was part of. The paper proposes to use the term "unisexual", with which a member of this subculture, Raffalovich tried to legitimise their desires in *Uranisme et Unisexualité*.

While the paper's aim was not a biographical study of Oscar Wilde, it is also worth studying what effect he had on popular gay culture as his importance as the role model of our

¹⁸ "Fred Roden." *University of Connecticut: Stamford Campus*. Web. 7 Dec 2014.

contemporary homosexual culture is undeniable (Schulz 38). It also seems promising to explore the relationship between the medicalization of the addict at the end of the nineteenth century and the unisexual consuming opium and alcohol. It is hoped that the paper's research proves to be a well-established introduction to fruitful further research on the Wildean sexual subculture and its literate with a larger scope that is not the homosexual but the unisexual.

Table 1. “Annual arrest (arr.) and conviction (con.) figures for ‘sodomy’, ‘intent to commit sodomy’ and ‘gross indecency between males’, 1880-1915” (Cook 151)

[illegible]

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