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Jméno a příjmení: **Nikola Rolejčková**
Osobní číslo: **H18076**
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Zásady pro vypracování

Autorka se ve své bakalářské práci zaměří na vyobrazení venkova a přírody v dílech Oscara Wildea. V úvodní části využije relevantní odbornou literaturu (např. R. Williams, M.H. Abrams, aj.) a zmapuje základní tendence ve vnímání přírody a venkova před tvůrčím obdobím O. Wildea (např. klasicistní a romantická estetika). Na tomto základě provede detailní rozbor jeho vybrané poezie, divadelních her a prózy. Soustředit se bude na způsob, jakým Wilde přírodu a venkov ve svých dílech stylizuje a na významy, které si s nimi spojuje. Pokud to povaha děl umožní, zaměří se i na kontrast mezi venkovem a městem. Práci završí kapitola, která z dílčích zjištění vyvodí obecnější závěr.

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Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **PhDr. Ladislav Vít, Ph.D.**
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

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doc. Mgr. Jiří Kubeš, Ph.D.
děkan

Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D.
vedoucí katedry

V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2020

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis aims at the depiction of the countryside and nature in the works of Oscar Wilde. The theoretical chapter describes the general perception of nature and the country in contrast with the city. Furthermore, it presents the cultural context of the 19th century England, focusing on industrialisation. This chapter also shows how nature was perceived by different aesthetic approaches of that time. Then, the analytic part of the thesis focuses on Wilde's portrayal of the country in contrast with the city and on Wilde's use of nature across his works in detail.

KEY WORDS

Oscar Wilde, countryside, nature, city, Romanticism, the Enlightenment, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

NÁZEV

Venkov v díle O. Wildea

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vyobrazením venkova a přírody v dílech Oscara Wildea. Teoretická kapitola popisuje obecné vnímání přírody a venkova v porovnání s městem. Kapitola dále představuje historický kontext 19. století zaměřený na industrializaci a také prezentuje, jak byla příroda vnímána různými literárními a uměleckými směry té doby. Následující analytická část se podrobně zabývá tím, jak Wilde vyobrazuje venkov v kontrastu s městem a zaměřuje se na způsob, jak Wilde využívá přírodu napříč jeho díly.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Oscar Wilde, venkov, příroda, město, romantismus, osvícenství, Prerafaelité

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INTRODUCTION

Nature is one of the most used themes that have occurred in literature from the very beginning. That is not very surprising since nature surrounds people far and wide and it is the source of human survival. Therefore, writers use this theme in several ways in their literary output. From writing about the beauty of nature, through using it as a means of symbolism to viewing nature as a neutral aspect that is present in stories in the form of the setting. This only confirms that nature has become an integral part of literature regardless of which functions it fulfils. Nevertheless, the perception of it has changed throughout centuries. The way people view nature today is not the same as the perception that people had three hundred years ago. One of the best-shown contrasts in perceiving nature in literature is seen in the 18th and 19th century aesthetic approaches in England – Classicism and the Enlightenment vs Romanticism. Whereas the former is not interested in nature, the latter admires it.

Apart from these aesthetic attitudes, the perception of nature and the countryside in literature was also influenced by the events that were happening in the society during that time. Victorian England was mostly affected by the Industrial Revolution that lasted approximately from 1760 to 1840. With new inventions and way of life, people moved from the countryside to cities enormously. Mick Gold illustrates this situation by saying: “Around the year 1840, Britain became the first country where the urban population exceeded the rural population.”¹ This only shows how much the countryside was being abandoned since many people yearned for living and working in the city. Moreover, it indicates the rapid changes which the countryside was going through. On that account, it is not surprising that the literary topics of that time were usually connected with this crucial historical event and the changes and consequences that it brought. Even though the theme of the countryside and nature are still observable in several works in Victorian literature, this topic definitely did not belong to the most common ones.

One of the unusual interconnections between the emphasis on nature and a Victorian writer could be attributed to Oscar Wilde. The works of this writer of Irish origin are concerned with themes such as the hypocrisy of the upper-classes or the beauty of art and its moral function. Considering his relationship to nature and the countryside in general, Wilde is connected with city life more than the natural environment. To support this, in *Oscar Wilde in Context* edited by Karry Powel and Peter Raby, Matt Cook presents an example of the way

¹ Mick Gold, “A History Of Nature,” in *Geography Matters!*, ed. Doreen Massey, and John Allen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 23.

of life that Wilde led in London where he lived for most of his life. Cook says that Wilde visited repeatedly the prestigious hotel Savoy for amusing his beaux.² This shows Wilde's interest in entertainment at luxurious places which the city life offered him. In addition to this, it is generally known that Wilde was a member of several London clubs. His most famous membership is connected with the private Albemarle Club. This place was usually associated with Wilde because of the scandal that had happened there. According to Wilde's long-time friend Frank Harris, it was in this very club where Oscar Wilde was publicly accused of sodomy by the father of his alleged lover Lord Alfred Douglas.³ Consequently, all the above said testifies to the fact that Wilde liked the pleasures that London offered to him. Since he was interested in this city and his most famous works are usually set there, the idea of Oscar Wilde as an admirer of nature and the countryside is quite unexpected. Notwithstanding this, his works still present some aspects of nature and even the tension between the country and the city. As this perspective on the Irish author is such an atypical one, it offers a possibility of perceiving Wilde and his literary output from a completely different point of view.

The overall aim of this bachelor thesis is to analyse the presence of the countryside and natural features in the work of Oscar Wilde. It focuses on the way in which Wilde portrays it, on the meanings that he connects it with and on the extent to which nature and the countryside are involved in his work. The first chapter presents a necessary cultural and literary context of the 19th century England. It defines particular events and issues to which the following chapters refer. The second chapter focuses on the comparison between the country and the city. It analyses several examples that help to determine which literary aesthetic approach Wilde was inclined to when it came to depicting the country. For the most part, this chapter is based on the analysis of the play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) and selected fairy tales. The last chapter focuses on Wilde's use of nature in more detail. The characteristics of Wilde's nature are compared with the works created by the representatives of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood since in their works, it is possible to perceive a similarity. This chapter also deals with the way in which Wilde presents natural elements in his works in general and which meanings he connects with them. The analysis draws on Wilde's fairy tales and his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891).

² Karry Powell and Peter Raby, ed., *Oscar Wilde in Context* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 51.

³ Frank Harris, *Oscar Wilde, His Life and Confessions* (New York: Brentano's, 1916), 206.

1. CULTURAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE 19TH CENTURY ENGLAND

This chapter aims at outlining the general perception of nature, the country and the city. It also presents the cultural and literary context of the 19th century Victorian England. It particularly comments on the Industrial Revolution, the legacy of Romanticism in the matter of nature which is contrasted with Classicism and the Enlightenment. Moreover, the chapter is supplemented by the presentation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood which was an influential artistic grouping of that period.

As already said, nature has been around people from the beginning of the ages. Despite this, it is still complicated to define the general perception of this term. The reason for this is clarified by Raymond Williams who says about nature that it “is perhaps the most complex word in the language.”⁴ This statement reveals the fact that the meaning of the word ‘nature’ is not only associated with the natural environment but has several definitions. It carries meanings that are, according to Gold, influencing one another.⁵ Therefore, the definition of nature needs to be handled carefully. Considering the relevance to the topic of this bachelor thesis, a definition of nature as an environment needs to be presented. Williams says:

Nature has meant the ‘countryside’, the ‘unspoiled places’, plants and creatures other than man. The use is especially current in contrasts between town and country: nature is what man has not made, though if he made it long enough ago - a hedgerow or a desert - it will usually be included as natural.⁶

Even though this explanation of the word ‘nature’ demonstrates its meaning sufficiently, it needs to be kept in mind that the perception of nature has changed over the centuries as already mentioned above. Therefore, more specific definitions of nature are not possible to list in short as this would require the context of the period as well. At this point, Williams’s definition suffices as a general explanation of this term since it presents the basic information that helps to understand what belongs to nature.

Since nature is closely associated with the country, this term must be explained too. Williams says that a country can be explained by two definitions. The first one means “a native land”⁷ and the other “the rural or agricultural parts of it [a native land].”⁸ In other words,

⁴ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 219.

⁵ Gold, “A History Of Nature,” 12.

⁶ Williams, *Keywords*, 223.

⁷ Williams, *Keywords*, 81.

⁸ Williams, *Keywords*, 81.

this term is associated with the original place where people were born and also with the land as a place for farming. However, the country is also associated with two different connotations that help to determine its meaning by the positive and negative characteristics of this space. According to Williams, a country is an area “of peace, innocence, and simple virtue”⁹ but also an underdeveloped, uneducated and restricted place.¹⁰ A similar definition of this space is also shown in other works interested in this theme. Lindsay Hamilton presents the countryside “as a simpler place in relation to the sophisticated city.”¹¹ At this juncture, it is also crucial to define the opposite space of the country – the city. The reason why it has to be mentioned is that the city has stood in juxtaposition to the country for centuries. Williams claims that the city is a place “of learning communication, light, [...] noise, worldliness and ambition.”¹² Karen Sayer adds that it is also an area of moral pollution and badness.¹³ From the definitions, it is apparent that the country and the city are opposites to each other. Therefore, it is foreseeable that the process of prioritising one place over the other has been depicted in literature frequently. Moreover, the perception of both spaces has been changing according to the literary preferences and the inclination of the society of the time. Despite this, parts of these basic definitions are possible to reflect in all of them.

One of the decades that presents significant changes in the country and the city is the 19th century Victorian England. Sally Mitchell points out two important aspects of this age. She says that “it was enormously long and that there were significant changes in almost every aspect of politics, law, economics, and society.”¹⁴ These changes are closely connected with the already mentioned Industrial Revolution. The industrialisation changed lives across the whole England as agriculture was being abandoned in favour of industries and manual labour was replaced by newly-invented machines. In Paul Poplawski’s *English Literature in Context*, Peter J. Kitson gives the definition of the Industrial Revolution “as the application of power-driven machinery to the manufacturing of goods and commodities.”¹⁵ During this period, England saw a huge technical expansion. One of the most known and plentifully used features was the steam engine. Thanks to this invention, Victorians accelerated the transportation of people across the whole country. They used steam locomotives which led

⁹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1.

¹⁰ Williams, *The Country and the City*, 1.

¹¹ Lindsay Hamilton, “Ethnography Beyond the Country and the City,” *Ethnography* 17, no. 3 (September 2016): 301.

¹² Williams, *The Country and the City*, 1.

¹³ Karen Sayer, “Paradoxical Places: Imagining the Urban and the Rural in Victorian Britain,” in *Victorian Paradoxes*, ed. William Findlay (Tour: Presses Universitaires Francois Rebelais, 2005), 61.

¹⁴ Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, 2nd ed. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2009), xiii.

¹⁵ Paul Poplawski, ed., *English Literature in Context*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 280.

to another expansion – the development of the railway. Moreover, the Victorian period is connected with other inventions. Victorians started to use “electricity, petroleum, and the internal-combustion engine”¹⁶ or the “automobile, airplane, telegraph, and radio.”¹⁷ All of these examples show England’s extreme development during that time. As industries were rising, the dwellers from the countryside moved to the cities which caused the urban expansion. Therefore, it is not surprising that the population of the cities increased significantly. Gold explains it by the fact that the poor villagers came to the cities because of the work in industries.¹⁸ All of this led to noticeable economic changes that did not involve only England. To stress it even more, Jarlath Killeen introduces Asa Briggs’s statement about the importance of London during the Victorian period. Briggs says that this city was considered to be “the ‘world city’ due to its enormous influence on the global economy.”¹⁹ This statement only confirms the huge significance of the Industrial Revolution in England in the 19th century that influenced and changed so many human lives. Because of all the above mentioned reasons, it is observable that the attention of Victorians focused more on the city than the countryside.

Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that this revolution did not bring about only expansions and positive development in England. As all things, it had its disadvantages. One of the predominant ones were the overcrowded cities that led to the deterioration in living conditions. In Encyclopaedia Britannica, John P. Rafferty presents the conditions on these examples: people did not have clean water to drink, there was little space to live as people lived very close to each other or there were appalling terms of employment that led to tiredness of the workers. All these aspects were the reason why Victorian citizens suffered from serious illnesses.²⁰ It can be said that all of these factors and many more contributed to the superordinate issue – increasing poverty. This problem and its factors were highly commented on during the Victorian period because poverty could be considered as one of the biggest downsides of the 19th century. Consequently, it is not surprising that these problems appear in many literary outputs of that time as well. Appropriate examples are provided in works like *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens or Charlotte Bronte’s *Shirley*. In these two books from the 19th century, the plight of the poverty and the struggles inflicted

¹⁶ “Industrial Revolution,” European History, Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified May 21, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Industrial-Revolution>.

¹⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Industrial Revolution.”

¹⁸ Gold, “A History Of Nature,” 23.

¹⁹ Jarlath Killeen, *The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 22.

²⁰ “The Rise of the Machines: Pros and Cons of the Industrial Revolution,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/story/the-rise-of-the-machines-pros-and-cons-of-the-industrial-revolution>.

by the industrialisation are presented explicitly. Considering the poverty of that time, Charles Booth is one of the most famous people who addressed this issue. His studies deal mainly with the poverty of the end of the 19th century. Booth created detailed poverty maps that show which parts of London suffered from poverty and to what extent. His most known research is concerned with the reason why people were poor at that time. Killeen says that Booth found out that the reasons were not that Victorians were indolent to work or interested in alcoholism²¹ which would lead them to problems of not having money for a decent life in the city. Booth found out that the real reason for this issue was that the English economic status was to blame for the poverty of Victorian citizens.²² In other words, his research proves that the poor Victorians living in the city were not responsible for their own poverty. All of it implies that life in a Victorian city mainly after the end of the Industrial Revolution meant in many cases living in dreadful conditions unsuitable for any human being. Therefore, this negative side should not be overlooked when speaking about this crucial event of British history.

Because of the massive shift of people to the cities, this space was not the only one that went through changes. The Industrial Revolution had a significant impact on the countryside as well. In this case, it is often spoken about the emptiness of this area together with the country-houses owned by upper-class dwellers. On account of people's migration to the city, the rural space went into decline in comparison to the industrial cities. To present it clearly, the contributor in *The Victorian Countryside*, Huge Prince, comments on the pitiful situation in the countryside during the second part of the 19th century:

Some [young men and girls] moved to newly built farmsteads and cottages at a distance from village centres, but more left the country to settle in neighbouring towns. Village schools were drained of children and churches of worshippers. Rural craftsmen departed and their mills and smithies were closed. Village life stagnated.²³

This shows that life in the country was the exact opposite of the city of that period. Because fewer people lived there, the countryside was not as profitable as it used to be before the revolution. Gordon Edmund Mingay specifies the changes in the countryside even more. He says that the shift from the country to the city caused economic and social issues in the countryside since farming was no longer prominent.²⁴ In addition to this, he presents the earnings in the country during the 19th century. He suggests that even though it differed

²¹ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, 23–24.

²² Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, 24.

²³ Gordon Edmund Mingay, ed., *The Victorian Countryside*, vol. 1 (Chippenham: Antony Rowe, 1981), 17.

²⁴ Mingay, ed., *The Victorian Countryside*, vol. 1, 3.

from place to place, sometimes the low earnings were not even sufficient for a living.²⁵ This statement could be also interconnected with the initial reason of the people to move to the city because of the work and pay which the factories offered. It all suggests that the living conditions became harsher during and after the Industrial Revolution even in the countryside since it was not a profitable space anymore. In other words, some villagers had to fight for their survival as did the poor in the city.

Nonetheless, the wealthy life in the countryside was also possible to perceive during the Victorian period. However, this situation did not concern the villagers but the upper-class Victorians who travelled from the city to the country for their own entertainment. That was because the prices in the countryside were lower which was caused by the changes presented earlier. Patrick Abercrombie explains why the upper-class Victorians decided to buy the country-houses. He says that Victorians used the countryside as a place of recreation from their regular life in the city.²⁶ In addition to this, Osmund Overby stresses Mark Girouard's findings regarding this topic. Girouard claims that the approach of the upper-class Victorians towards the country-houses at the end of the 19th century was connected with the convenience accompanied by new inventions that came into existence.²⁷ This shows that the rich Victorians used the country-houses as a place of their freedom where they could rest from the bustle of the city and also show their wealth as they could afford the new inventions to make their estates thrive. Furthermore, this is also reflected by William Hayley who defines the general perception of a country-house as "a place where one stays over weekends with a small number of other guests. The owner is a fellow city-dweller whom one knows professionally or socially or politically, and the range in class is not wide."²⁸ It shows that for wealthy Victorians, the country-houses were a significant part of their life. These days, something similar is seen in the behaviour of urban citizens. They tend to go to the cottage in the country for a weekend because they needed a break from the demands of their city life. To top this off, Abercrombie says that the dream of the British man has always been to have a country estate,²⁹ which only points out the interest of the upper-class Victorians in going to the country for their own comfort even more.

²⁵ Mingay, ed., *The Victorian Countryside*, vol. 1, 6.

²⁶ Patrick Abercrombie, "The Preservation of Rural England," *The Town Planning Review* 12, no. 1 (May 1926): 5.

²⁷ Osmund Overby, "Review," review of *The Victorian Country House*, by Mark Girouard, *Victorian Studies*, September 1972.

²⁸ William Hayley, "A Place in the Country," review of *The Victorian Country House*, by Mark Girouard, *The American Scholar*, winter 1981.

²⁹ Abercrombie, "The Preservation of Rural England," 10.

As for literature, the Industrial Revolution was preceded by Classicism and the Enlightenment. The former literary approach was based on ideals pursued by ancient Greece and Rome. In Roger K. Caves's *Encyclopaedia of the City*, David C. Prospero says that the representatives of Classicism heightened "form, simplicity, proportion and restrained emotion [...] an explicit appeal to the intellect, and on perfection."³⁰ They were also interested in symmetry which can be best seen in the Classicist gardens. Furthermore, the latter aesthetic approach emphasised the reason and understanding to the point of rejection of emotions. At that time, people praised the reason because they believed that with it, they would be able to understand everything. Likely because of this belief, the period of Enlightenment is also known as the Age of Reason. Brian Duignan specifies this by the fact that the reason was for the representatives of the Enlightenment "the power by which humans understand the universe and improve their own condition."³¹ In other words, the reason was their ideal that could rectify mistakes or find solutions that would help the society to solve its social issues. At this point, it is also important to mention encyclopaedias and dictionaries that could be considered as the highlight of the Enlightenment. In Poplawski's *English Literature in Context*, Lee Morrissey says that knowledge was another crucial aspect of this aesthetic approach. Because of this, encyclopaedias and dictionaries were believed to be a means of achieving the source of knowledge.³² Overall, all the above said shows that the 18th century was centred around the reason and its understanding that was supported by opposing emotions.

In the view of the perception of the country and the city, the social ideal of the 18th century was based on city life. In the book *Romanticism in the City* edited by Larry H. Peer, Alexander Schlutz mentions that during the Enlightenment, people perceived nature as something that needs to be domesticated³³ which is the exact opposite of the Romantic ideals that had their say afterwards. The situation that depicts the portrayal of the city life is shown clearly in the quote of Samuel Johnson presented in the bibliography of this author which was written by James Boswell. Johnson says: "[...] when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford."³⁴ Johnson's quote shows that nature and the landscapes were not so important for people in the Enlightenment period as the city. Because of this, Johnson is an appropriate example of the representative of this aesthetic attitude

³⁰ Roger W. Caves, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the City* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 112.

³¹ "Enlightenment," Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified March 15, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Enlightenment-European-history>.

³² Poplawski, ed., *English Literature in Context*, 248.

³³ Larry H. Peer, ed., *Romanticism and the City* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 113.

³⁴ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, vol. 2 (New York: George Dearborn, 1833), 123.

since he praised the city more. Andrew Varney even describes him “as the urbanite *par excellence*”³⁵ which only confirms his standing against the countryside. Varney continues that at the beginning of the Enlightenment period, people valued the achievements of urban life such as worldliness, friendliness or amusement. Into the bargain, when comparing the city and the country, the former was presented as the better area. Urbanities were seen as noble people with good manners whereas village dwellers as yokels. However, Varney also stresses that this interest in the positiveness of the city was slightly in decline through the 18th century.³⁶ This change headed towards the next major approach – Romanticism. Overall, the city was seen as the ideal place during the Enlightenment. Together with the emphasis on reason, knowledge and good-mannered society, the countryside was not the place that could offer people the possibility to achieve it and therefore they refused nature and the country.

As has been already suggested, Romanticism was the reaction to Classicism and the Enlightenment. This aesthetic approach lasted from the end of the 18th century until the end of the first half of the 19th century. Before this period, some works that were against the dominance of reason and praised nature already came into existence. These works are included into so-called Pre-Romanticism. Morrissey says that in the 18th century, poetry which admired country life was usually classified as Pre-Romantic.³⁷ Even Morse Peckham says that the Romantics themselves considered the 18th century ideas that admired the emphasis on nature and emotions as Pre-Romantic ideals.³⁸ Since Pre-Romanticism is based on the admiration of nature that is the crucial theme for Romanticism, the former is considered to be a presage of the latter as the name itself suggests. Nevertheless, the admiration of nature is not the only major characteristic of Romanticism. Peer says that this aesthetic attitude also “clearly represents a desire for identification with the elemental natural world.”³⁹ In addition to this, Encyclopaedia Britannica clarifies that apart from the emphasis on nature, Romanticism also favoured emotions and feelings or the individuality of a person.⁴⁰ Comparing it with the characteristics of the previous aesthetic attitude, the turn to nature, the highlighting of emotions and the individualism is impossible to overlook in the Romantic ideals. Therefore, one could claim that these three aspects create the legacy of Romanticism.

³⁵ Andrew Varney, *Eighteenth-century Writers in Their World: A Mighty Maze* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1999), 198.

³⁶ Varney, *Eighteenth-century Writers*, 198.

³⁷ Poplawski, ed., *English Literature in Context*, 224.

³⁸ Morse Peckham, “Toward a Theory of Romanticism,” *PMLA* 66, no. 2 (March 1951): 21.

³⁹ Peer, ed. *Romanticism and The City*, 1.

⁴⁰ “Romanticism,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified February 2, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Romanticism>.

Looking closer into the Romantic perception of nature and the countryside, it drew on Rousseau's philosophy. This philosophy claims that all people are born good and the factor that spoils them is the society. According to Williams, this is one of the main themes that the Romantics followed.⁴¹ This is also proved by Peter Bishop who says that the corruption of humans and their return to nature in order to be good again is one of the crucial topics in *Lyrical Ballads* that were written by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.⁴² Therefore, this important point proves that Romantics perceived nature as a space that helps people to regain their moral identity again. A similar idea is also presented by Gold who claims that Romantics viewed nature as something that impersonates ethical principles.⁴³ This suggests another quality of this area – its purity. This could be topped by Bishop's claim that Romantics viewed the countryside "as a form of Eden – a natural habitat for humankind to live in innocent harmony with nature."⁴⁴ His comparison of the country to the garden of Eden stresses the Romantic idea of nature as a good space even more. It is based on the fact that Eden is connected mainly with paradise created by God. Therefore, all the presented examples show that Romanticism prioritised nature and the countryside over everything else. In other words, they perceived it in the exactly opposite way to Classicists and the representatives of the Enlightenment.

To present Romanticism more concretely, works of poets demonstrate the romantic view of nature most aptly. They did not only appreciate the beauty of nature but it was also a symbol of a good life for them. One of the most prominent English Romantic poets are the already mentioned S. T. Coleridge and W. Wordsworth. Their importance is even supported by the fact that Meyer Howard Abrams perceives Wordsworth as "the first great romantic poet."⁴⁵ It is well known that Coleridge, Wordsworth and Robert Southey were called the Lake poets since they lived in Lake District that is situated in today's Cumbria. This untamed natural landscape was the source of inspiration for their works. The example of the importance of natural environment is outlined by Abrams who presents Wordsworth's view on nature. He says: "Nature is the common denominator of human nature; it is most reliably exhibited among men living 'according to nature' (that is to say, in a culturally simple, and especially a rural

⁴¹ Williams, *Keywords*, 223.

⁴² Peter Bishop, "A Lost Arcadia: the Historical Emergence of Green Belt Thinking in the UK," in *Repurposing the Green Belt in the 21st Century*, ed. Catherine Bradley (London: UCL Press, 2020), 6–7.

⁴³ Gold, "A History of Nature," 19.

⁴⁴ Bishop, "A Lost Arcadia," 6.

⁴⁵ Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 103.

environment) [...].”⁴⁶ For Wordsworth, nature and the countryside symbolise a place that has a good influence on people. Therefore, it stresses the importance of life in the countryside as it follows the ideal of Romantics presented earlier. Moreover, Wordsworth devoted many of his works to nature in several forms. Apart from the famous collection of poems *Lyrical Ballads*, his sonnet “The World Is Too Much with Us” or the poem “Daffodils” that is associated with the landscape of Lake District are examples of poems where nature is the central theme. Wordsworth’s works and even his life as a Lake poet are the appropriate examples of Romanticism. It demonstrates the importance of the connection with nature for the representatives of this aesthetic approach.

Considering other influences on Victorian literature, this period was affected by several aesthetic attitudes. One of them was the Pre-Raphaelite movement that is better known under the name of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Even though this brotherhood lasted only a few years, they influenced several authors of that time and produced major works that are admired to this day. The brotherhood is described as a:

[...] group of young British painters who banded together in 1848 in reaction against what they conceived to be the unimaginative and artificial historical painting of the Royal Academy and who purportedly sought to express a new moral seriousness and sincerity in their works.⁴⁷

In fact, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood did not have many members. In *English Literature in Context*, Maria Frawley explains that when talking about the Pre-Raphaelites, the following seven artists are usually referred to: “John Everett Millais, William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, James Collinson, Thomas Woolmer, Ford Madox Brown and William Holman Hunt.”⁴⁸ A crucial fact about this brotherhood is connected with their professions since the members did not incline only to one profession. Frawley says that they were a group of “painters, poets and sculptors.”⁴⁹ Upon a deeper study, it is possible to notice that even the painters differed in style which makes their works even more diverse. In addition to this, John Ruskin needs to be mentioned in connection to this brotherhood as well, even though he was not its member. The reason why is presented by Hilary Fraser who says that this Victorian art critic advocated the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in their beginnings⁵⁰ since the brotherhood

⁴⁶ Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 105.

⁴⁷ “Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified July 1, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Pre-Raphaelite-Brotherhood>.

⁴⁸ Poplawski, ed., *English Literature in Context*, 404.

⁴⁹ Poplawski, ed., *English Literature in Context*, 404.

⁵⁰ Hilary Fraser, *Beauty and Belief: Aesthetics and Religion in Victorian Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 112.

was abundantly criticised at that time. Fraser continues with the fact that Ruskin was also an inspiration for the Pre-Raphaelites. She claims that Ruskin “encouraged artists and laymen alike to appreciate the beauty of nature, art, and architecture.”⁵¹ Therefore, his influence on this group of artists could be considered as one of the core ones and should not be omitted. Another paramount influence is observable in the name of this group. The artists were interested in the Italian artworks created before the period of the Italian painter Raphael. This admiration was the reason why they named their brotherhood as they did – it refers to the period before Raphael straightforwardly.

In terms of the significance of the Pre-Raphaelites, they are considered to be one of the most influential artistic groups of Victorian England. Robyn Cooper introduces an article from 1858 where the author enumerated the sections of the Victorian society which the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood managed to alter by their influence: writing, the government, faith and art.⁵² Regarding art and literature, Frawley also claims that the Pre-Raphaelites were the ones who assisted with energizing the ascent of the Aesthetic movement that developed later in the 19th century.⁵³ The well-known representatives of Aestheticism are D. G. Rossetti, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. Overall, it can be seen that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had an extensive influence as they tried to revolt against the Royal Academy and became a successful and influential group for many authors of that time.

To sum up, the 19th century perception of nature and the country was not influenced only by the aesthetic attitudes but also by the society and events that happened during that time. The Victorian period was a time of industrialisation but also the time of poverty that affected both the urban and the rural space. Therefore, these swift changes influenced the view of nature as well. The differences in the perception of this theme can be seen in literary approaches since they did not share the same view on nature and the countryside. Classicism and the Enlightenment tend to see nature as something that needs to be tamed whereas Romanticism extolled it. In addition to this, the typical Victorian group called the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood shows that artists of that time were not interested in nature and its elements to such extent as the Romantics. Nevertheless, this group might be characterised as an influential movement that was followed by both artists who were and the ones who were not interested in nature.

⁵¹ Fraser, *Beauty and Belief*, 112.

⁵² Robyn Cooper, “The Relationship between the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Painters before Raphael in English Criticism of the Late 1840s and 1850s,” *Victorian Studies* 24, no. 4 (summer 1981): 426.

⁵³ Poplawski, ed., *English Literature in Context*, 447.

2. THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY

The country and the city have been juxtaposed for decades. The reason is not only their different landscapes but also contrasting views, assumptions about existence and way of life. These two spaces also form a theme in some of Oscar Wilde's works. This chapter discusses his portrayal of the country and the city and the meanings he associates with them. It is mainly focused on the analysis of several examples that point out the way he uses to do so. Moreover, the chapter is concluded by the view that presents which of these two places Wilde prioritises and which literary approach prevails in his work.

The most significant contrast between the country and the city is evident in the comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest* where both environments stimulate different types of the characters' behaviour. To do so, Wilde puts two pairs of people of the same sex in contrast – Jack vs Algernon (the more prominent pair) and Cecily vs Gwendolen. Their difference is presented right at the beginning of the comedy where Algernon does not feel bad about looking into Jack's cigarette case. When Jack expresses his displeasure with Algernon's behaviour as a well-mannered man would not do it, Algernon defends himself: "Oh! it is absurd to have a hard and fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't."⁵⁴ A different belief on respecting privacy by a person from the country and the city is presented clearly. Jack's reaction suggests that he was country-bred and therefore well-mannered so he would not do such a thing. Whereas Algernon, influenced by the corruptness of the city, considers reading someone else's cigarette case as nothing serious. Their different points of view on this situation reflect the general conceptualisation of the differences between these two areas. More concretely, Jack's inclination to respect moral values represent the goodness and innocence of the country people. On the other hand, Algernon's disinterest in others shows his corrupted behaviour that represents the negative side of the city – the wickedness of its inhabitants.

However, it is important to mention that despite Jack's moral behaviour in the previous example, he is not an entirely an innocent countryman since he escapes to London to chase pleasure. This shift to the city induces certain changes in his behaviour which are associated with the unfavourable influence of this place. One of the most significant aspects of this influence is Jack's use of two different names. In London, he uses the name of his imaginary brother Earnest. In the countryside, he goes by his real name. Michèle Mendelssohn explains that Jack's use of the two names is a motivation to retain his well-being, satisfaction and high

⁵⁴ Oscar Wilde, *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 360.

status as these three aspects form his position as a protector to young Cecily.⁵⁵ It shows that Jack has to behave immorally if he wants to escape to the city for pleasure and be seen as a respectable guardian at the same time. For this reason, he aims at keeping himself and Ernest as two separate identities. Whereas the former is described by Mrs Prim as: “He is not one of those whose sole aim is enjoyment [...],”⁵⁶ the latter focuses exactly on this matter. Alison Milbank adds that the doubles of his and Algernon’s personify the only possible way how the main male characters can accomplish their wishes without the society judging them.⁵⁷ This only emphasises the differences between Jack and Ernest’s behaviour even more. As Jack cares about his impression on others, he uses his double Ernest as the representative of his wicked self that was created to enjoy the pleasures that London offers. Jack describes his double as follows: “Ernest is one of those chaps who never pays a bill.”⁵⁸ Using these words and examples provided earlier, the immoral influence of the city on an unspoiled person from the country is evident. Jack would not do such a thing as a guardian from the countryside but Ernest does not care about such wicked behaviour. This shows that Jack’s innocence is not as pure as the innocence of other inhabitants of the countryside where he lives because he is tempted by city pleasures. At this point, the city represents an awful element that entices innocent people from the countryside to become immoral and is also presented as a place for pleasures that cannot be achieved in the countryside. On the contrary, Jack’s behaviour also refers to the negative perception of the country. Jack escapes to the city because the country does not offer enjoyment to him. Therefore, Wilde also presents the countryside as a place of boredom. To conclude, Jack’s reasons for his immoral behaviour evince the general negative conceptualization of both spaces.

The other main male character of this comedy, Algernon, also uses his double for achieving what he desires. However, his reasons for pretending to have an invalid friend Bunbury are not influenced by temptations that the city offers. In comparison to Jack, there is no possibility of seeing any change in Algernon’s personality because he is already a corrupted person from the city. In Act I, he informs Jack about the way how he uses his invalid friend. Algernon says: “If it wasn’t for Bunbury’s extraordinary bad health, for instance, I wouldn’t be able to dine with you at the Savoy to-night, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta

⁵⁵ Michèle Mendelssohn, *Henry James, Oscar Wilde and Aesthetic Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 169.

⁵⁶ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 377.

⁵⁷ Alison Milbank, “Positive Duality in The Picture of Dorian Gray,” *The Wildean* 44, no. 2 (January 2014): 25.

⁵⁸ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 362.

for more than a week.”⁵⁹ This shows the hedonistic nature of Algernon’s city life as he cares only about his pleasure that he achieves by dishonest behaviour towards others, even his family members. The roots of it stem from the city where he has been living for his entire life. By comparison to Jack’s immoral behaviour, Algernon is a more wicked person than Jack as has been already presented in the example with the cigarette case. The difference between them is that Jack still has a connection with the innocent environment of the countryside where he grew up. Algernon has not experienced it yet so he remains a spoiled urban dweller who embodies the negative influence that the city can have on a person.

Nonetheless, *The Importance of Being Earnest* does not only present the differences between the country and the city through the behaviour of its characters. The comedy is based on the shifting between these two areas. However, the main reason why Jack and Algernon switch locations like this is associated with the 19th century society, not the differences between these two spaces. Powell points out that Algernon’s imaginary friend aids him to avoid his obligation to the society⁶⁰ which is equally true of Jack’s situation. Both male characters enjoy their secret lives otherwise they would be judged by the society and their reputation would be harmed. As that is something that they want to prevent, Jack and Algernon shift between the country and the city by using their doubles as they see fit. Therefore, this shift is crucial for the overall outcome of the play. The country and the city function there as destinations that the characters use when they want to escape from the rigidity of moral norms of the Victorian society. At this point, it is not possible to determine the different perception of these two spaces because Wilde uses them as means of commenting on the Victorian society. Nevertheless, this is not true of the collective shift to the countryside that happens later in the comedy. This shift is seen by Otto Reinter as the realisation of the characters’ true nature along with the recapturing of the steadiness and becoming honest again.⁶¹ Even though most shifts between the country and the city do not display information relevant to this topic, this final shift portrays the countryside as the only place that can help the characters to regain the moral nature that they have lost due to the corruptness of the city. Although this collective shift does not have the same reason as all other shifts, it highlights the positive virtue of the countryside – its pureness.

⁵⁹ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 362.

⁶⁰ Powell, and Raby, ed., *Oscar Wilde in Context*, 169–170.

⁶¹ Otto Reinert, “Satiric Strategy in the Importance of Being Earnest,” *College English* 18, no. 1 (October 1956): 18.

To emphasise the negative side of the city in Wilde's works even more, the corruption of urban people is presented in other works naturally, for example in the fairy tale "The Star Child" (1891). This tale starts with the royal son behaving horribly towards villagers who helped him to survive when he was an abandoned new-born child. When older, he is arrogant, conceited and cruel to others. Despite his horrible behaviour, some children from the village start to do everything that the Star Child asks them to do. For instance, children harm animals or throw stones at blind and disabled people.⁶² The royal child, as a person representing the city, has vast influence over these children. Here, Wilde aligns with the romantic perception of the city and the countryside in terms of the latter representing the purer and unspoiled type of physical environment again. Without knowing the royal child, the village children would have most likely remained unspoiled since they would have lived in the innocent countryside. As Killeen puts it when writing about "The Star Child" tale:

In 'The Star-Child' the demarcation of the city and the country demonstrates why social action became a necessity in the nineteenth century. While the city has traditionally been read as the source of moral pollution, the country has usually been seen as a place of moral safety and regeneration.⁶³

Indeed, Wilde depicts villagers and the countryside in terms of innocence, whereas the royal child is portrayed as a corrupted person who does not belong there and who spoils the pureness. Overall, it suggests that Wilde emphasises two things: the significant moral difference between these two spaces and the unfavourable influence that the city and its inhabitants can have on the villagers in the countryside.

Further juxtaposition of the country and the city is achieved by the presence of a wall in some of Wilde's works. An example is presented in the fairy tale "The Star Child" where the city is surrounded by walls. Killeen comments on it: "[...] the wall around Wilde's city demarcates the place where the country ends and the city begins."⁶⁴ It indicates that villagers should not mix with the urban dwellers because these two spaces are strictly separated. The behaviour of the gate guards that do not want to let the royal child into the city⁶⁵ is a good example of it. However, it is crucial to mention that the Star Child is not as handsome at this stage of the fairy tale as he used to be in the countryside where he behaved cruelly. Since he acted horribly towards his mother, his beauty faded so he looked like a beggar.⁶⁶ This fact

⁶² Wilde, *Complete Works*, 261–263.

⁶³ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, 159.

⁶⁴ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, 162.

⁶⁵ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 266.

⁶⁶ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 264–265.

suggests that the appearance of the royal child prevents the guards from letting him inside the city since he has nothing to do there. In other words, the Star Child is perceived as someone who is not qualified as a proper urban dweller because he comes from the countryside. Because of this, he is not let inside the city walls. This only agrees with Killeen's statement that the wall around the city is the item that keeps the country closed apart from this place.⁶⁷ Therefore, that wall functions as another means that Wilde uses for the creation of a symbolic zone that separates the city and the country from each other and it also presents the different attitude of the former in comparison to the latter.

These two spaces are also divided by the different behaviour of their inhabitants as has been already suggested in the beginning of this chapter. One of the cases is Wilde's suggestion of the superiority of city inhabitants over village dwellers. This is best seen in the behaviour of the royal child in "The Star Child". When the child is in the country, he treats some villagers as secondary people – he calls other children as "his servants."⁶⁸ Even though he is not aware of his royal background yet, he claims himself noble-born as he was born from the star.⁶⁹ This could be perceived as the possible reason for his snobbery and arrogance towards others from the countryside – he is highborn. His behaviour in the story might suggest some form of narcissism of urban residents who consider themselves to be better than villagers. Moreover, the conversation between Cecily and Gwendolen in *The Importance of Being Ernest* provides another example of this urban superiority. In Act II, Gwendolen tries to show her high social status by commenting on rural life contemptuously: "I had no idea there was anything approaching good taste in the more remote country districts. It is quite a surprise to me."⁷⁰ And Cecily reacts promptly: "I am afraid you judge of the country from what one sees in town. I believe most London houses are extremely vulgar."⁷¹ Cecily's wit makes Gwendolen's ridicules more difficult. She defends her background by saying that Gwendolen has wrong assumptions about the countryside based on her life in the city. And Gwendolen replies to it: "I suppose they do dazzle the rural mind. Personally I cannot understand how anybody manages to exist in the country – if anybody who is anybody does. The country always bores me to death."⁷² In this short excerpt, Gwendolen presents the countryside as a place that is neither fashionable nor important or civilised. She acts as a patronizing urbanite who suggests that

⁶⁷ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, 163.

⁶⁸ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 263.

⁶⁹ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 262–263.

⁷⁰ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 399.

⁷¹ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 399.

⁷² Wilde, *Complete Works*, 399–400.

important people do not live in the country as it is a place of boredom. Overall, both examples prove that Wilde puts emphasis on the disdainful attitude of urban dwellers towards people who do not live in the city. However, his depiction again presents two general associations that are connected with the city and the country. The former is connected with behaving superiorly which corresponds with the immoral behaviour, the latter with its uncivilization and boredom.

The fact is that the uncivilised status is one of the negative aspects of the countryside that Wilde comments on plentifully. For example, the conversation between Dorian and Lord Henry in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* presents it clearly. Lord Henry makes an equation between good-heartedness of villagers and their lack of desire to be civilised. He says to Dorian:

‘My dear boy,’ said Lord Henry, smiling, ‘anybody can be good in the country. There are no temptations there. That is the reason why people who live out of town are so absolutely uncivilised. Civilisation is not by any means an easy thing to attain to. There are only two ways by which man can reach it. One is by being cultured, the other by being corrupt. Country people have no opportunity of being either, so they stagnate.’⁷³

According to Lord Henry, villagers cannot be civilised if they are not educated and behave morally. As the country is connected with innocence and it is harder to be educated there than in the city, he suggests that it is impossible to become civilised in the country. As Lord Henry’s words refer to the underdevelopment of this place, Wilde uses him for the depiction of the negative perception of the countryside. On the other hand, Killeen interprets Lord Henry’s words as a fear of his connection with nature and the rural life.⁷⁴ It suggests that the idea of not being civilised in the countryside does not have to be only seen negatively. Lord Henry’s behaviour can be perceived as a delusion of believing that life in the countryside cannot be fully valuable. For this reason, this excerpt of Lord Henry’s conversation can be interpreted in both ways. However, the interpretation of the countryside as an uncivilised place absolutely predominates.

Considering other negative sides of the city that help to maintain the positive portrayal of the countryside, Wilde writes about the unsatisfactory living conditions that counterbalance the superior status of this place. Killeen quotes Wilde’s son Vyvyan Holland saying that his father had lived in Tite Street which was one of the areas in London where the poor lived.⁷⁵ This fact makes Wilde’s depiction of the negative aspect of city poverty more significant as he

⁷³ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 150.

⁷⁴ Jarlath Killeen, *The Faith of Oscar Wilde: Catholicism, Folklore and Ireland* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 102.

⁷⁵ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, 24.

experienced it himself. Wilde also comments on the consequences of industrialisation in the 19th century. The fairy tale “The Happy Prince” (1888) is one of Wilde’s works that reacts to poverty in cities that was caused by industrialisation. Killeen says that Wilde based this fairy tale on London suffering from issues of the English economy in the 19th century.⁷⁶ Indeed, it is well-known that London was one of the largest and most dynamic cities in the world during this period. Killeen continues to say that this fairy tale was based on “Victorian facts concerning the poverty so evident in London.”⁷⁷ At the beginning of the story, Wilde introduces the setting and the life of the Prince who lived in a palace called Sans-Souci bounded by a wall. The Prince never cared about what was behind the wall because he played in the garden, danced in the Great Hall and enjoyed his life. After his death, his statue was put behind the wall so that the Prince would have to watch the opposite side of his city that he had never seen – the city full of poverty.⁷⁸ At this point, the fairy tale provides the first glimpse of the living conditions in the 19th century. By telling the life story of the Prince, Wilde implies that not all people who came to the city attained the desired lifestyle enabled by a good job. He warns that poverty is a part of city life as well. In the story, the Happy Prince and the Swallow try to solve four cases of people who suffer from poverty. Furthermore, Wilde includes the presence of the rich. He writes about a woman who vainly indulges in thinking about her fancy dress for an upcoming ball. At the same time, a poor woman living not far from her struggles for survival and does not have money to buy an orange for her ill son.⁷⁹ Thanks to this fairy tale, it is clear that the city in Wilde’s work is not always the place of development and entertainment as it is possible to observe in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Wilde focuses on serious living conditions of the poor to provide the difference between them and the rich. Due to this, Wilde’s depiction of poverty in the fairy tale “The Happy Prince” presents an aspect that undermines the generally positive perception of the city. However, it must be noted that this situation was highly influenced by the Industrial Revolution that was changing the perception of the city of that time rapidly.

Moreover, the Industrial Revolution influenced the life in the countryside. It led to the fact that this space was not so prosperous as it used to be because of its economic situation. Wilde presents this problem as a fact, stating that that the countryside was a very cheap place to live for upper-class Victorians. In this case, Wilde connects this with the shift of the wealthy

⁷⁶ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, 22.

⁷⁷ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, 24.

⁷⁸ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 272.

⁷⁹ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 273.

urban inhabitants from the city to the country. He usually focuses on the way how these people perceive the countryside. Moreover, the way they use this area for pleasure and entertainment. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* exemplifies it well. Dorian Gray invites his city friends to his country-house called Selby Royal for a party. The house is described as a luxurious place. More concretely, it is depicted as a country-house where “the mellow light of the huge lace-covered lamp that stood on the table lit up the delicate china and hammered silver of the service [...] Lord Henry was lying back in a silk-draped wicker chair looking at them.”⁸⁰ These luxurious items symbolise the standard of wealthy people. At the same time, they also represent something that could not be found in any ordinary household in the countryside of that time. This description of Dorian’s luxurious country-house symbolises something quite common for wealthy people in the 19th century since they came to the countryside where they could entertain themselves. In other words, these country-houses enabled the possibility of escaping from real life in the city and yielding to desires without the society watching them.

Even though Dorian Gray uses his country-house for hosting and entertaining friends, the novel also suggests that something immoral happens there. An example of this is hinted on by Basil who asks: “What about your country house, and the life that is led there? Dorian, you don’t know what is said about you.”⁸¹ This indicates that the Victorian society noticed that Dorian’s appearances in the countryside are not so innocent as they should be according to his social status. Daniela Velez comments that even though Basil talks about gossip concerning Dorian’s behaviour at Shelby Royal, the novel does not provide any explanation of what happens there in fact. She also comments that the only thing that is mentioned about it is Dorian’s disinterest in his standing.⁸² Even though the novel does not provide any information about Dorian’s immoral behaviour in the country, Basil’s speech is the proof of Dorian’s possible corruption. The citation also suggests that Dorian did some things at Shelby Royal that would be highly inappropriate in the city. For example, Neil McKenna associates Dorian’s behaviour in his country-house with sexual intercourse between men.⁸³ These speculations over hidden meanings of Dorian’s doings in the novel still present the corrupted behaviour of the higher society in the countryside. Wilde depicts wealthy urban people in the act of demoralizing the countryside, contaminating it with vices and depriving it of romantic

⁸⁰ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 139.

⁸¹ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 113.

⁸² “Selby Royal, Nottinghamshire – Dorian’s Country Home,” Final project, Hawksite, last modified December 2, 2015, <https://hawksites.newpaltz.edu/virtuallylondon/2015/12/02/selby-royal-nottinghamshire-dorians-country-home/>.

⁸³ Neil McKenna, *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), chapter Scarlet threads.

innocence as they escape from their city life to indulge in wicked pleasures. In Wilde's work, they remain urbanities but they also want to use the country as a place that would better cater for the satisfaction of their lust than the city where they feel more exposed and watched.

To sum it up, this chapter shows that in his drama and prose, Wilde adds to the tradition of conceptualizing the country and the city as contrasting spaces. He uses various examples that help to construct this picture. Although defying the notion of a simplified binary, he tends to prioritize the countryside as an environment that is superior to the city. The corruption of urban dwellers, their patronizing dominance over villagers, the enormous poverty in the city or the exploitation of the country by city pleasure seekers are among the major aspects of his conceptualization. Despite his association with intellectual London clubs, in his depiction of the countryside, Wilde aligns with the 19th century Romantics insisting on its status as an environment that is purer and superior to the city.

3. WILDE'S NATURE AND THE PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD

Prioritising the country over the city is not the only aspect that reveals Wilde's interest in nature and the countryside. Even though his works are not devoted to this theme directly, Wilde's literary output evinces extended use of natural elements. The features that he uses for the representation of nature and its elements are also present in the works of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood that functioned before Wilde's creative period. According to Joseph Bristow in *Oscar Wilde in Context*, Oscar Wilde considered himself to be a legatee of Pre-Raphaelite's heritage.⁸⁴ Therefore, the chapter shows the similarity between Wilde's works and the works of the Pre-Raphaelites. But for the most part, this chapter discusses Wilde's various uses of nature and its elements and presents the meanings that they signified.

Oscar Wilde usually uses nature as an introduction to the background or the atmosphere of a story which he achieves by a detailed description. Harris claims that Wilde's ability to describe was far better than others' during his years as a juvenile⁸⁵ so when reading his works, it is possible to observe that Wilde describes more aspects of his stories in detail, not just nature. An example of Wilde's detailed description of nature can be found in the beginning of the fairy tale "The Selfish Giant":

It was a large lovely garden, with soft green grass. Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach-trees that in the spring-time broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them.⁸⁶

This example shows that Wilde does not describe nature and its elements blandly. On the contrary, he uses various aspects that make the description colourful and engaging. Another clear representation of a detailed nature delineation is in the fairy tale "The Devoted Friend" (1888). There, Wilde uses a different technique than the one introduced in the previous example. For the description, he uses the listing of all plants that grew in Hans's garden:

In all the country-side there was no garden so lovely as his. Sweet-Williams grew there, and Gilly-flowers, and Shepherds'-purses, and Fair-maids of France. There were damask Roses, and yellow Roses, lilac Crocuses and gold, purple Violets and white. Columbine and Ladysmock, Marjoram and Wild Basil, the Cowslip and the Flower-de-luce, the Daffodil and the Clove-Pink bloomed or blossomed in their proper order

⁸⁴ Powell, and Raby, ed., *Oscar Wilde in Context*, 75.

⁸⁵ Harris, *Oscar Wilde*, 24.

⁸⁶ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 283.

as the months went by, one flower taking another flower's place, so that there were always beautiful things to look at, and pleasant odours to smell.⁸⁷

As an enormous number of flowers is mentioned, Narain Prasad Shukla perceives this excerpt more as “a catalogue than a description of the characteristics of individual flowers.”⁸⁸ Although listing of flowers is what dominates in this description, it is by this very listing that Wilde manages to create a certain atmosphere of the setting and shows certain characteristics of the whole garden. The biological terms of the blooms imply the fact that Hans's garden must be enormous and full of colours and smells. Moreover, many bees and other insects probably fly around these flowers as they are blossoming. Likely because of this, the garden is considered to be the most beautiful in the countryside. Therefore, this description of Hans's garden still provides a detailed characterization of it even though ‘just’ plants are portrayed. Given both citations, the gardens show that Wilde is not afraid to describe nature in various aspects to achieve a diverse description that helps readers to imagine the setting. The first case presents his usual depiction of nature including colours and similes. The second example shows that the details of nature can be described in such an unfamiliar manner that only names of the flowers are provided along with their colours in some cases. Nevertheless, both descriptions prove that Wilde uses nature as a means of presenting a detailed setting. It is also obvious that by these descriptions, he aims at affecting readers' perception of nature.

Looking at the stylistic devices in Wilde's detailed description of nature, he uses rich and extensive vocabulary along with adjectives, similes and colours that intensify the portrayal. These aspects help readers to imagine the smallest details of those natural elements. It could be said that Wilde describes the natural setting of the story as a picture that was painted by somebody. He does not leave out any information that complement the full picture of nature which he draws by means of words. To achieve this, Wilde's interest in attention to detail is crucial. The same attentiveness is perceived in the works of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood whose interest in detail is enormous. The style of one of the major representatives, William Holman Hunt, is described as “a near-photographic reproduction of minute details.”⁸⁹ From his works, it is noticeable that Hunt wanted to reflect reality with his paintings including all possible details. The definition of his style could be applied to Wilde's description of nature as well. In addition to this, the contributor to *Oscar Wilde in Context*, Leon Litvak, claims that

⁸⁷ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 286–287.

⁸⁸ Narain Prasad Shukla, “Stylistic Devices in Oscar Wilde's Prose,” *The Wildean* 35, no. 6 (July 2009): 81.

⁸⁹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.”

Wilde was influenced by Walter Pater, William Morris and John Ruskin⁹⁰ who were closely connected with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. As Wilde's connection with these people was close, there is an enormous possibility of their influence on Wilde's interest in details. Since this is the crucial aspect of paintings created by the Pre-Raphaelites and also Wilde's nature, attention to detail should be considered as the most significant similarity between their works.

As has been already presented, the Pre-Raphaelites aim at depicting things realistically. Considering this in Wilde's description of nature, he tries to make his nature as accurate as possible. However, some of his works contain examples of natural elements that do not always correspond with biological facts. One of them occurs in the first edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* published in 1890. A British botanist Earnest Charles Nelson compares the description of Basil's blossoming garden during June in the first and the second edition of the novel. He focuses on the exchange of hollyhocks in the former to woodbine in the latter.⁹¹ Nelson claims that it is improbable to see hollyhock in blossom at the beginning of June. Therefore, he explains the replacement of hollyhocks by woodbine by someone having pointed out the mistake to Wilde. Nelson also does not exclude the possibility that Wilde could have realised the aberration himself.⁹² Even though the reason for this change is unknown, it suggests that Wilde's realistic description of the garden was of great importance to him. This helps him to induct the ambiance more profusely. However, in favour of Wilde's accuracy, Nelson says: "Oscar Wilde demonstrated in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* sound knowledge and close observation of contemporary garden plants and even lawn weeds."⁹³ It shows that despite the incorrect use of hollyhocks in the first edition, Wilde's delineation of the garden is still very detailed and of high quality. When Wilde published the second edition of this book with the appropriate replacement of the flower a year after the first edition, Basil's garden was made flawless. It shows that Wilde values the biological truthfulness of the description after all. It is also supported by the fact that most of his works are without any aberrations concerning nature elements which demonstrates how experienced an observer Wilde was in this domain. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that he is not an expert in this field. Overall, this fact only confirms Wilde's admiration of the Pre-Raphaelites and their interest in depicting

⁹⁰ Powell, and Raby, ed., *Oscar Wilde in Context*, 41.

⁹¹ Earnest Charles Nelson, "The Garden in 'Dorian Gray' and the Question of Oscar Wilde's Plantsmanship," *The Wildean* 37, no 7 (July 2010): 103.

⁹² Nelson, "The Garden," 105.

⁹³ Nelson, "The Garden," 105.

the reality of details even more since he honours this aspect in the descriptions of natural features in his works as much as they did.

Another significant aspect of Wilde's nature is colour as has been already hinted at the previous examples. Wilde enriches descriptions of natural elements by involving different shades of colours to make the portrayal intense. Shukla even says that Wilde's use of colours for description distinguishes his works from ordinary ones.⁹⁴ An excellent example of his use of colours in describing the natural scene is presented in the fairy tale "The Birthday of The Infanta" (1891):

The purple butterflies fluttered about with gold dust on their wings, visiting each flower in turn; the little lizards crept out of the crevices of the wall, and lay basking in the white glare; and the pomegranates split and cracked with the heat, and showed their bleeding red hearts. Even the pale yellow lemons, the hung in such profusion from the mouldering trellis and along the dim arcades, seemed to have caught a richer colour from the wonderful sunlight, and the magnolia trees opened their great glove-like blossoms of folded ivory, and filled the air with a sweet heavy perfume.⁹⁵

This excerpt demonstrates how Wilde plays with various shades of colour to create a vivid image of nature. He does not use only colour basics for describing – he also uses brighter colours and even the colour of the sunlight to achieve the detailed picture. Shukla says that Wilde generally uses these vivid colours more than drab ones⁹⁶ and tends to use them in contrast which induces intense discernible feeling.⁹⁷ In this excerpt, the contrast of colours is introduced between "the bleeding red hearts"⁹⁸ of the pomegranates and "the pale yellow lemons."⁹⁹ Wilde uses bright colour against a dull one which creates the visual contrast. This shows that colours are important for Wilde's nature as they make his description more vivid and intensify the affection of the reader's emotions even more.

Therefore, it is observable that colours and attention to detail are not independent of each other in Wilde's nature. Moreover, he does not use this connection of the detailed description and colours only in his prose but also in poetry. One of such poems is "From Spring Days to Winter" (n. d.) where the first line of every verse shows it:

In the glad springtime when leaves were green,
[...]
Between the blossoms red and white,

⁹⁴ Shukla, "Stylistic Devices," 83.

⁹⁵ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 223.

⁹⁶ Shukla, "Stylistic Devices," 76.

⁹⁷ Shukla, "Stylistic Devices," 77.

⁹⁸ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 223.

⁹⁹ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 223.

[...]
The yellow apples glowed like fire,
[...]
But now with snow the tree is grey,¹⁰⁰

These first lines of the poem testify to the significance of nature descriptions for Wilde since he usually includes them at the beginnings of his works. Even though colours do not function as intensifiers or contrastive elements in this poem, Wilde uses them to provide a detailed depiction where colours underline the beauty of nature. Since poems generally appeal to readers' senses, colours act as a means by which this is achieved. It is noticeable that Wilde aims at this because he connects nature with colours in his works plentifully. Comparing his use of colours with the Pre-Raphaelites, the brotherhood was interested in the use of various colours as well. Mostly, Wilde's interest in colours could be attributed to his fondness of the work of Hunt who is famous for his use of vivid colours. In his article about the art exhibition where Hunt's works were displayed, Wilde says that Hunt is one of the two "greatest masters of colour"¹⁰¹ that England has ever had.¹⁰² Because of this assertion, the similarity between the colourfulness of Hunt's and Wilde's works can be attributed to Wilde having been inspired by Hunt himself in this aspect.

The last major characteristic of Wilde's use of nature that needs to be analysed is symbolism. Wilde usually uses the natural elements to provide a deeper meaning that contributes to the meaningful outcome of the story. His use of natural symbolism could be divided into two groups. The first group concerns natural elements referring to Christianity. The second group perceives nature as a means that provides the hidden meaning conveyed by the language of flowers. Speaking of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and symbolism, Sharyn R. Udall claims that symbols were aspects of an ordinary language of this group.¹⁰³ As symbols are an integral part of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, the representatives of this brotherhood connect them with several topics, also including religion. For this reason, one can see that their works embody a similar perception of the use of symbols as Wilde creates in his works. Therefore, this aspect might be also seen as a proof of their possible influence on Wilde.

Even though Oscar Wilde is not considered to be a writer interested in the theme of religion, some of his stories present Christianity as a crucial element for a meaningful conclusion of the plot. This is perceived mainly in his fairy tales. The Garden of Eden might be

¹⁰⁰ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 748.

¹⁰¹ Oscar Wilde, "The Grosvenor Gallery," *The Dublin University Magazine* 90, no. 13 (July 1877): 118.

¹⁰² Wilde, "The Grosvenor Gallery," 118.

¹⁰³ Sharyn R. Udall, "Between Dream and Shadow: William Holman Hunt's 'Lady of Shalott'," *Woman's Art Journal* 11, no. 1 (spring – summer 1990): 34.

seen as displaying the most prominent interconnection between Christianity and nature in Wilde's works. He usually does not use any hidden references to the Garden of Eden – he includes the presence of the garden directly in the story. Wilde does so in the fairy tale “The Selfish Giant” about which Killeen says: “The Garden of Eden is, of course, the prototype of the utopian Garden in ‘The Selfish Giant’.”¹⁰⁴ The same idea is presented by Hope Howell Hodgkins who describes Giant's garden as a garden that is the initial prohibited one in the Book of Genesis.¹⁰⁵ Even though the connection between Giant's garden and the Garden of Eden is interpreted straightforwardly, Wilde enriches the garden by a short description about its unbelievable beauty. However, he does not use the Garden of Eden as a direct connection to Christianity only. The natural aspects that are evident in the Garden refer also to other issues. Killeen stresses that the Garden of Eden in the tale “The Happy Prince” does not involve any Tree of Knowledge.¹⁰⁶ In this case, the natural symbol from the Garden comments on the fact that the Happy Prince did not know about the life behind the wall that was around his garden when he lived. His ignorance refers to the poverty in the cities during the 19th century discussed in the previous chapters. This example shows that Wilde uses the theological symbol of the Tree from the Garden of Eden as a way of stressing the unfavourable living conditions in the city during his time. For this reason, Wilde's use of natural aspects connected to biblical context is quite evident. In the first case, Wilde uses the presence of the garden to refer to Christianity in his works forthrightly. In the second case, he writes about the garden and its biblical natural element to comment on an issue connected with the city which is presented rather indirectly. These examples show that Wilde's garden does not have to be perceived only as a setting of the story but it can have a hidden meaning connected to Christianity.

Another significant medium of this symbolism connected with nature are flowers. An example of it is shown at the end of the fairy tale “The Selfish Giant”. Wilde writes: “And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms.”¹⁰⁷ The allusion of Christianity is hidden in white blooms that lie on the Giant. John Allen Quintus believes that these flowers symbolise God's abundant forgiveness of human failures.¹⁰⁸ It means that the Giant is invited to “the Paradise”¹⁰⁹ – Wilde

¹⁰⁴ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, 75.

¹⁰⁵ Hope Howell Hodgkins, “White Blossoms and Snozzycumbers: Alternative Sentimentalities in the Giants of Oscar Wilde and Roald Dahl,” *CEA Critics* 65, no. 1 (fall 2002): 43.

¹⁰⁶ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, 25.

¹⁰⁷ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 285.

¹⁰⁸ John Allen Quintus, “Christ, Christianity, and Oscar Wilde,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 33, no. 4 (winter 1991): 523.

¹⁰⁹ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 285.

denotes the actual Garden of Eden. Moreover, the white blooms present God's admission of the Giant in his garden. However, Hodgkins perceives the ending of the tale differently from Quintus. She believes that if the Giant had not been embellished and concealed by white blooms, he could not be hallowed.¹¹⁰ In this case, the blooms are used as a condition of the Giant's admission in the Garden of Eden. As the Giant is surrounded by these white blooms, the condition is fulfilled. Even though these two interpretations of blossoms differ slightly, both suggest the same result – the Giant appears in the actual Garden of Eden after his death. It is clear that Wilde uses these flowers in a way that provides an ending of the fairy tale open to interpretation. However, the understanding of the meaning of the white blooms should refer to Christianity. To sum it up, the blossoms represent another important aspect of Wilde's nature where flowers and Christianity interconnect.

Looking closer at the use of other flowers, the most used one in Wilde's works is the rose. Considering Christianity, the connection between the symbolism and this flower is best shown in the fairy tale "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888). The Nightingale (to which Wilde refers not as 'it' but 'she') meets a student who wants to give a red rose to a girl he likes so she would dance with him. The Nightingale decides to help so she tries to procure the rose for the student.¹¹¹ As no red rose is found, the Nightingale sacrifices herself – her blood colours the white rose which creates the desired red rose.¹¹² Killeen presents Guy Willoughby's interpretation of the sacrifice for the creation of the red rose. He says that Willoughby's perception is that "the rose-tree's thorn should clearly be read as a version of the crucifixion of Christ."¹¹³ In this case, the red rose embodies the crucial and the most frequently depicted event in Jesus Christ's life in Christianity. In addition to this, Killeen also comments on the red rose tree which is not able to produce any red roses. He sees it as a symbolism of Mary, the mother of Jesus. He adds that she has been connected with roses throughout history¹¹⁴ therefore her presence in this story is expected as it already has a Christian undertone. It is most likely that Wilde uses the rose as a means of connecting his story with Christianity. The rose stands there as an important natural aspect that is impossible to disregard. The symbolism of the rose and Christianity is crucial for the outcome of the story in much the same way the white blooms are in the fairy tale "The Selfish Giant".

¹¹⁰ Hodgkins, "White Blossoms and Snozzcumbers," 45.

¹¹¹ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 278–279.

¹¹² Wilde, *Complete Works*, 280.

¹¹³ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, 42.

¹¹⁴ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, 50.

Considering the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, they shared the religious symbolism with Wilde. They painted tens of paintings in the light of this religious theme where they used symbolism plentifully. Some of them also include the motive of the garden which is perceived as the Garden of Eden, such as Hunt's painting "The Light of the World" (Appendix A). However, the motif of Jesus Christ is even more prevalent in their paintings. Apart from the aforementioned painting, Millais's "Christ in the House of His Parents" (Appendix B) and Hunt's "The Shadow of Death" (Appendix C) depict different stages of Christ's life. In Pre-Raphaelite works, it is easier to perceive the symbolism than in the works of Wilde whose speech of symbols is less evident, more subtle. In some cases, the readers can fail to notice the connection to Christianity. Even though Wilde's symbols connected with Christianity are similar to Pre-Raphaelites' use of symbols, it is important to stress that Wilde does not always present them plainly. The readers need to be focused on this theme to perceive Christianity depicted through various natural elements otherwise they might miss it.

However, in Wilde's works, the use of flowers predominates – he bountifully uses similes that present all sorts of hidden meanings by utilizing the floral language. S. Theresa Dietz claims that during the Victorian era, people loved to use the language of flowers although it was sometimes misinterpreted.¹¹⁵ As symbols, the works portray roses, lilac, laburnum and many more. In most cases of the use of floral language, Wilde likes to use roses. He usually uses this flower as a love symbol which is also the general perception of it. He presents the rose symbolism at the beginning of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where he writes simply: "The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses [...]."¹¹⁶ Even though it is not expressed explicitly, this description refers to the owner of the studio – Basil Hallward. Rachel Pearson says that Wilde uses roses there as a description of this male character. She claims that roses symbolise Basil's inceptive size of love¹¹⁷ that readers understand later in the story. Another rather straightforward example is presented in the fairy tale "The Nightingale and the Rose." The rose also functions there as a means of showing the Nightingale's sacrifice for the young love. To sum up, these two examples demonstrate that Wilde honours the general perception of this flower as he uses it as an intensifier in his story.

Picture of Dorian Gray is a story that presents countless examples of this floral symbolism. To prove it on several examples of flowers that have not been mentioned yet, Wilde

¹¹⁵ S. Theresa Dietz, *The Complete Language of Flowers: A Definitive and Illustrative History* (New York: Wellfleet Press, 2020), 6.

¹¹⁶ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 18.

¹¹⁷ "The Petals of Dorian Gray," Boston University ePortfolios, Digication, last modified December 4, 2011, https://bu.digication.com/rpfin-de-Siecle/The_Petals_of_Dorian_Gray.

includes the narcissus when he describes Sibyl Vane's behaviour towards Dorian. He claims that she "shook like a white narcissus."¹¹⁸ In this case, it could be said that Wilde hints at an event that happens later in the story. Dietz says that this flower can symbolise "unrequited"¹¹⁹ or "unreturned love"¹²⁰ which actually happens between Sibyl and Dorian as Dorian ceases to love her. Another symbolism is presented through lilac-blooms. At the beginning of the novel, Wilde writes: "Lord Henry went out to the garden, and found Dorian Gray burying his face in the great cool lilac-blossoms, feverishly drinking in their perfume as it had been wine."¹²¹ The connection of Dorian and lilac could symbolise his current, at that moment still unchanged personality. Dietz claims that this flower apart from other meanings symbolises "youthful innocence."¹²² These two examples prove Wilde's deep interest in the floral symbolism as the appropriate use of flowers corresponds with the plot of the story. It also shows that Wilde is not interested only in general and obvious meanings commonly associated with the best-known flowers. He uses the interpretations that need to be found and learned and which make his stories more thought-out and thorough.

To conclude, this chapter shows that Wilde is deeply interested in nature as he uses it commonly and with absolute precision. His works are full of examples that present several ways of how nature and its elements are portrayed. The most prominent division of these ways are his attention to detail, the use of various colours and symbolism. As has been presented, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was most likely the one body of artists which played an enormous role in influencing Wilde's portrayal of nature since their works embody the above mentioned features. Overall, although natural elements are presented in Wilde's works plentifully, they should not be considered to be the main topic of his works. However, this chapter shows that nature is inseparable from Wilde's works since he uses it variously with many meaningful outcomes that add quality to his narrative. Therefore, the representation of nature and its elements in Oscar Wilde's works is of significance and should not be neglected.

¹¹⁸ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 65.

¹¹⁹ Dietz, *The Complete Language of Flowers*, 147.

¹²⁰ Dietz, *The Complete Language of Flowers*, 147.

¹²¹ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 30.

¹²² Dietz, *The Complete Language of Flowers*, 211.

CONCLUSION

Even though Oscar Wilde is not widely connected with the portrayal of nature and the countryside, the thesis demonstrates that he is devoted to this theme more than what is generally expected. This statement is valid despite the fact that Wilde incorporates the presence of nature and the country unevenly as some of his works do not involve natural features at all. Still, this theme is present in some of Wilde's literary output. This is due to the fact that Wilde uses several interpretations of nature. As the thesis proved, nature is an important element in many of his stories. For the most part, it helps to create the atmosphere or the meaningful outcome of the story. Therefore, one could claim that Wilde and nature are closely connected as he uses this topic repeatedly and with absolute precision.

The first part of the portrayal of Wilde's nature is presented through the representation of the countryside. This representation is based mainly on the general perspective of this place which is then contrasted with the city. This is best seen in *The Importance of Being Earnest* that could be considered the main source devoted to this theme since it involves the most examples where the differences are presented. However, it is crucial to stress that it is not possible to perceive Wilde's preference of one place over the other only from one or two works. His views of the country and the city differ across his literary output. Therefore, the general proposition of Wilde being inclined to the Romantic depiction of the countryside can be achieved only after creating a wide image from the analysis of several aspects. His descriptions are frequently grounded in the general positive perception of this place. This is complemented by the depiction of the negative side of the city that usually suffers the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, especially poverty. This representation of the adverse side of the city helps to promote the good side of the country. Nevertheless, the analysis proved that Wilde also mentions the drawbacks of the country as well as the positive sides of the city. This shows that Wilde's writing finds itself near the borderland between the representation of the country by Romanticism and the Enlightenment and Classicism. However, comparing the representation of both spaces in his works, Wilde inclines more to the former whereas the latter's approaches towards the country and nature are presented less significantly. Therefore, Wilde's depiction of the country should be attributed to the ideals of Romanticism as he perceives it mainly as a place of virtue and one that helps people to restore their morals.

The second main area of Wilde's portrayal of nature is devoted to the various ways that he uses for its depiction. Most likely, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was crucial in inspiring

Wilde to create his own descriptive style of nature and its elements. The attention to details, the use of various colours and the symbolism are the crucial aspects that characterise his portrayal. These features can be attributed to the works of the Pre-Raphaelite artists as well. In these three aspects, it is possible to best observe Wilde's dedication to the topic of nature. It is also important to highlight that his devotion to the theme can be observed in the richness of his descriptions. Instead of describing nature in one sentence, Wilde presents several sentences or he even dedicates a whole paragraph to this theme. The analysis shows how he plays with the language and uses colours that affect the reader's imagination during the reading of his stories. Therefore, his enthusiasm for the detailed and various descriptions of nature is impossible to overlook since it creates the basics of his use of nature.

Most often, however, Wilde interconnects natural elements with symbolism. He pays attention to flowers which are undoubtedly the most evident aspect of nature in his works. Probably, it is because the symbolism of flowers helps him to make his stories even more meaningful. The analysis touched two main areas: Christianity and the language of flowers. Wilde provides so many examples of the flower language that a whole separate chapter would be needed to analyse the several perceptions of the flowers with their actual function in detail. This only confirms the fact that flowers are important to Wilde since he uses them plentifully and also carefully. His interest in this theme can be also proved by one of his quotes. In the letter "De Profundis" (1897) that Wilde wrote a few years before his death, he says: "With freedom, books, flowers, and the moon, who could not be happy?"¹²³ The indispensability of nature and its elements for Wilde transpires from the quote.

To conclude, all the above said proves that even though the 19th century did not consider the theme of nature of crucial importance, writers did not overlook it. Wilde's depiction of the countryside and nature combined several aspects that together shows its importance in his works. Since he usually portrays this topic according to the romantic ideals and he also interconnects his stories with natural elements very often, all of it presents this author of Irish origin in a different light. In other words, this bachelor thesis argues that Oscar Wilde – an urbanite – was devoted to nature and the countryside to a surprisingly great measure.

¹²³ Wilde, *Complete Works*, 1039.

RESUMÉ

Oscar Wilde je známý zejména jako dramatik s vytrženým smyslem pro humor, schopností detailního popisu či jako představitel komedie mravů. I přes to, že se jeho díla zpravidla zaměřují na kritiku vyšší Viktoriánské společnosti a krásu s morální funkcí umění, tvorba tohoto irského autora obsahuje i motiv venkova a přírody. Právě tímto tématem se zabývá tato bakalářská práce. Analyzuje, do jaké míry Wilde ve svých dílech přírodu využívá, k čemu a jak ji stylizuje a ke kterému literárnímu či uměleckému směru se přiklání ve vyobrazení venkova a přírody.

Práci zahajuje teoretická kapitola, která nejprve na obecné rovině vymezuje základní pojmy. Jedná se o pojmy „příroda“ a „venkov“, které jsou vydefinovány v kontrastu s pojetím „města“. Vykreslení těchto tří pojmů slouží k obecnému porozumění a náhledu do problematiky, na kterou se zaměřuje analytická část práce. Kapitola dále pokrývá kulturní a literární kontext 19. století v Anglii. Jedna z nejdůležitějších událostí tohoto století je nepochybně průmyslová revoluce, která má svůj počátek již v druhé polovině 18. století. Během tohoto období Anglie zaznamenala obrovský rozmach, a to v několika oblastech. Změny, které tento rozvoj doprovázely, ztlačily i život obyvatel, jelikož se venkované začali stěhovat do měst za prací. Tato masivní migrace zapříčinila to, že v městech postupně docházelo k přelidnění, které vedlo ke zhoršení životních podmínek a následně i chudobě obyvatel. S chudobou se potýkal i venkov, který již nebyl tak prosperujícím místem, jako tomu bylo před průmyslovou revolucí. Velkou roli hrálo to, že venkov byl téměř vyhlazen. Z této situace ale těžila Viktoriánská šlechta, která si zde levně pořizovala venkovská sídla. Tyto domy Viktoriánům sloužily jako místo pro pobavení a zároveň i jako prostor, kde si mohli odpočinout od města a tehdejší společnosti.

Teoretická kapitola dále mapuje, jak byla příroda s venkovem vnímána v literatuře před tvůrčím obdobím Oscara Wildea. Konkrétně se jedná o zmapování vnímání přírody dle klasicistů a osvícenců ve srovnání s romantiky. Zatímco se klasicismus s osvícenstvím zaměřuje na velebení města, zkrocení přírody a pojmání světa rozumově a strojově, romantismus opěvuje krásu přírody a vidí ji jako jediné místo, kde se člověk může stát dobrým jedincem. Příklad romantismu v literatuře je následně hlouběji prezentován na pojetí přírody dle básníka Williama Wordswortha, jehož Lyrické balady, které napsal spolu se Samuelem Taylorem Coleridgem, by se daly považovat za jádro romantismu. V závěru se kapitola zaměřuje na hnutí Prerafaelitů, které vzniklo na začátku druhé poloviny 19. století

a je považováno za jedno z nejvýznamnějších a nejvlivnějších uměleckých uskupení Viktoriánské éry.

První analytická kapitola této bakalářské práce porovnává Wildeovo vyobrazení venkova v kontrastu s městem. Analyzuje, jak Wilde nahlíží na venkov, ke kterému literárnímu vyobrazení tohoto místa se přiklání a zda ve svých dílech nadřazuje venkov nad město či naopak. Hlavním zdrojem pro zpracování této kapitoly je divadelní hra Jak je důležité mítí Filipa, pohádka Dítě hvězdy a Wildeův jediný román Obraz Doriana Graye. Kapitola nejprve prezentuje rozdílné chování postav z města a venkova a zaměřuje se na vliv města, který kazí venkovskou počestnost. Jelikož se lidé kvůli tomuto špatnému vlivu města chovají nemorálně, Wilde vnímá nevinné prostředí venkova jako jediné místo, kde se zkažení měšťané a venkované mohou opět stát lidmi s morálními zásadami. Kapitola se dále zaměřuje na negativní aspekty města, které podporují tvrzení, že venkov je ve Wildeových dílech vyobrazován lépe než město. Jedná se zejména o chování měšťanů, kteří kazí vesničany a povyšují se na ně. Neméně důležité je i zobrazení městské chudoby a nemorální chování Viktoriánské šlechty na jejich venkovských sídlech. Je třeba zmínit, že tato kapitola taktéž nabízí poznatky, které se zabývají negativním pohledem na venkov. Wilde ve svých dílech poukazuje na necivilizovanost venkovanů a také nepodnětnost venkova, jelikož dle něj venkov nenabízí tolik prostoru k zábavě jako město. Po zvážení všech prezentovaných poznatků lze usoudit, že Wildeovo vyobrazení venkova a města se z velké části přiklání k romantismu. Wilde ve svých dílech prezentuje různé tváře obou míst, nicméně pozitivní vlastnosti venkova a negativní vyobrazení města v jeho dílech převažují. Toto zjištění by mohlo působit neočekávaně, jelikož Oscar Wilde je obecně spojován s městem. Z tohoto důvodu by se dala tato jeho náklonnost k romantickému pojetí venkova považovat za překvapující.

Druhá analytická kapitola této bakalářské práce se zaměřuje na obecné vyobrazení Wildeovy přírody. Kapitola sleduje, jak Wilde využívá přírodu a jaké významy si s ní spojuje. Jeho využití přírody je také porovnáváno s dílem Prerafaelitů, jelikož mezi jejich díly a vyobrazením přírody Wildem je možné zpozorovat určitou podobnost. Protože se sám Wilde s Prerafaelity ztotožňoval, porovnání jejich tvorby tedy nabízí určité zamyšlení nad vlivem, které bratrstvo Prerafaelitů mohlo mít na tohoto spisovatele irského původu a jeho pojetí přírody. Kapitola konkrétně rozebírá tři charakteristické znaky: detailní a reálný popis, barvitost a symbolismus. V některých případech Wilde věnuje popisu celý odstavec, což pouze potvrzuje jeho zájem o toto téma. Význačným aspektem je zejména detailnost popisu, který je ve většině případů spojen i s využitím široké škály barev. Wilde si pohrává s barvitostí objektů, které mu pomáhají vytvořit živější popis, což je možné zpozorovat jak v jeho próze, tak poezii. Propojení

detailů s barvami má za následek to, že Wilde vytváří popis přírody, který působí na smysly čtenářů. Nicméně je třeba dodat, že nejvíce využívaným aspektem přírody ve Wildově tvorbě je symbolismus. Wilde ho využívá ve spojení s květinami a přírodními elementy dvěma způsoby. Prvním z nich je křesťanství, kde Wilde skrz přírodní symboly odkazuje zejména na Rajskou zahradu či Ježíše Krista. Druhé využití symbolismu je propojeno s květomluvou, která byla během Viktoriánské doby velice oblíbená. Pravděpodobně z tohoto důvodu ji Wilde hojně zapojuje do svých děl. Symbolismus květin tak odkrývá významy, které zrcadlí děj příběhu či osobnost nebo pocity postav. Dohromady tedy všechny tři zmíněné charakteristické znaky definují, jakým způsobem Wilde přírodu pojímá a s čím přesně si ji spojuje. Analýza následně ukazuje, že i když se Wilde ve svých dílech nevěnuje tomuto tématu explicitně, s tématem přírody pracuje velice precizně a zapojuje ho do své tvorby s jasným záměrem.

Veškeré analyzované příklady v této bakalářské práci poukazují na skutečnost, že Oscar Wilde měl vřelejší vztah k přírodě, než je obecně známo. Jeho díla namnoze dokazují jeho romantické vnímání venkova. Vztah k přírodě je pak prezentován třemi výše zmíněnými charakteristikami, které dokládají, jak dovedným pozorovatelem Wilde při popisu přírody byl a jak smysluplně ji dokázal začlenit do své tvorby. Výsledným zjištěním je neobvyklý pohled na tohoto irského dramatika, o kterém by se dle poznatků dalo tvrdit, že byl do určité míry přírodou zaujat a ve svých dílech ji patřičně ctil.

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Appendix A – “The Light of the World”¹²⁴



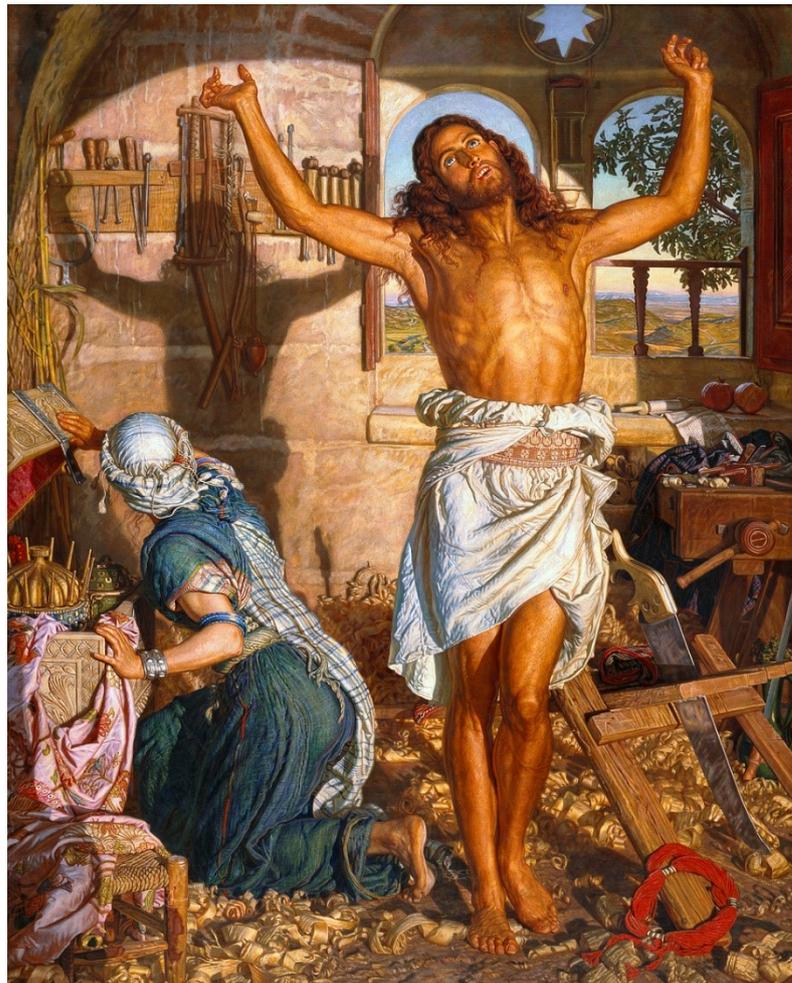
¹²⁴ William Holman Hunt, “The Light of the World,” *Keble college*, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.keble.ox.ac.uk/about/chapel/light-of-the-world/>.

Appendix B – “Christ in the House of His Parents”¹²⁵



¹²⁵ John Everett Millais, “Christ in the House of His Parents,” *Tate*, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-christ-in-the-house-of-his-parents-the-carpenters-shop-n03584>.

Appendix C – “The Shadow of Death”¹²⁶



¹²⁶ William Holman Hunt, “The Shadow of Death,” *ART UK*, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-shadow-of-death-205248>.