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OSCAR WILDE, THE AUTHOR

Comments by Jack Parrish

The British film *Oscar Wilde* is playing to capacity audiences at the Presidio Theater. The general response is that Robert Morley plays the chief role superbly and that John Neville does a fine job of acting, but is a little too old to be completely convincing as Lord Alfred Douglas.

Because of his public martyrdom, Wilde is virtually the only figure of modern times whom everyone has to acknowledge as a homosexualist. That side of Walt Whitman's nature can be ignored or glossed over, can be dismissed with Edward Fitzgerald, or tactfully ignored with Tchaikowsky. But Wilde's deviation is blatantly, nakedly there and cannot be ignored, no matter how much one wishes to. For most people he is The Homosexual in a way that no other known homosexual is.

It seems a pity that he is the only important person of this type of whom most people are aware. He is not a good person for homosexuals to identify themselves with nor was he typical of the species, as some heterosexuals seem to think.

He admittedly was a brilliant man and one of the greatest wits in the history of English literature. However, he was also lazy, something of a poseur and dabbler and inclined to live on the surface of life. While there is no other play like "The Importance of Being Earnest" in the English language, his other plays are completely conventional in their plots and characters and are only noteworthy for a few of the epigrams to be found in them.

With the exception of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" and one or two other

poems most of his poetry is highly derivative and characterless. Only a few of his stories are on the level of "The Birth of the Infanta" and "The Happy Prince." It was not that he lacked the ability to do more work of a better quality as that most of his life and gifts were frittered away on unimportant matters.

Bernard Shaw once commented, and it is hard to disagree with him, that if it had not been for Wilde's unfortunate tragedy he would only have been remembered as a wit, in the style of Congreve. There have been many far nobler homosexualists than Wilde, persons who were greater and more conscientious artists and who lived more in accordance with their concept of right ideals. Unfortunately, however, it is Wilde who is paid attention to by both heterosexuals and homosexuals and not they.

"A mystic bond of brotherhood makes all men one."

—THOMAS CARLYLE

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