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Bakalářská práce

**The portrayal of homosexuality in novels *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Call Me by Your Name***

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**Prohlášení**

Slavnostně prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala sama, a to jen za použití zdrojů uvedených v seznamu literatury.

Dále souhlasím, aby byla práce uložena na Univerzitě Palackého v Olomouci a zpřístupněna ke studijním účelům v souladu s příslušnými normami.

V Olomouci dne .....

.....

vlastnoruční podpis

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## **Abstract**

Even in the 21st century, homosexuality still lacks the recognition it rightfully deserves in mainstream media, especially in literature. That is why this work focuses on the portrayal of homosexuality in two novels from different eras. As expected, due to the Victorian society and its censorship, the portrayal of homosexuality in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) is much more subtle than the explicit fantasies in André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name* (2007). Each era influenced both authors and the stories differently. Wilde suffered from the censorship and hateful judgemental mindset of Victorian England, while Aciman was given more freedom and acceptance in modern society and therefore could express himself more freely.

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# 1. Introduction

Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, homosexuality is still not considered to be on an equal level with heterosexuality. It is still often viewed as an eccentric personality trait rather than a valid sexual orientation. One of the reasons might be a lack of exposure, for example in mainstream literature. The number of successful gay books, in contrast to the masses of works published every year, is very low. People usually treat unfamiliar phenomena with reserve and caution. Separating ‘gay romance’ and ‘romance’ as literary genres instead of simply labelling them both as ‘romance’ only creates the feeling of foreign in the eyes of public.

I have chosen the topic of my bachelor thesis based on personal experience. I was fortunate enough to have grown up in an environment that viewed homosexuals positively without discriminating them or being judgemental. That is why it is not surprising that I have been surrounded by numerous people who have been openly homosexual since a very young age. Not only I have close friends who are a part of the LGBTQ community but also a few acquaintances.

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to bring awareness of this topic to people who have not educated themselves about it yet. The medium I will use for the demonstration are two literature works, namely *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Oscar Wilde and *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) by André Aciman.

My work will consist of four main points. Firstly, I will introduce both authors and talk about their personal lives and their influence on both novels. Then, I will focus on the two stories themselves and explore the homosexual elements in them. The contrast in the portrayal will most likely be evident considering the eras both books were published in. Next, I will take a closer look at both the social environment at that time and the reactions both books received. At last, I will briefly mention other authors from 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries that also have works with homosexual elements in them.

## **2. Oscar Wilde's life**

Oscar Wilde is one of the most significant authors coming from Dublin. Even though his family had deep religious roots in Irish evangelism and he was raised in this environment, he found an interest in Roman Catholicism in his adulthood. (Wilde, 2015, p. 211)

From 1874 to 1879 he acted as a student at Magdalen College, studying at Oxford after he had received a scholarship. To blend better with the crowd, he had to keep his Irish accent at minimum. (Wilde, 2015, p. 211)

Oxford's environment clearly complimented Wilde and allowed him to lead a glamorous lifestyle. He quickly became well-known for his manners and the ability to speak with confidence. His talent for hosting dandyish soirées also put him high on the social chart. (Wilde, 2015, p. 211)

These years gave him an opportunity to create a generous number of connections in various social circles. It was thanks to this that he was able to become a Freemason. (Wilde, 2015, pp. 211-212) According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a Freemason is defined as ‘a member of a large and old secret society for men in which all the members help each other and use secret signs to communicate with each other’’. (Cambridge Dictionary)

Wilde's carefree days at Oxford were quickly dimmed by several events, the main one being his father's death in 1876. Wilde was also suffering from a religious confusion, not being able to find a solid ground in what to believe. His close college friend David Hunter Blair might have the answer he was looking for in a form of Catholicism. As tempting as it sounded it came with great risks. It put him in front of a complicated equation with two variables. On one hand he might have finally found the solution to his problem but on the opposite side stood the knowledge that both his friends and family back in Ireland would not accept his decision to convert to Catholicism. (Wilde, 2015, p. 212)

## 2.1. Aestheticism

Wilde had shown an interest in a developing movement called ‘aestheticism’. This movement was mainly based on a passion for antique objects and the Pre-Raphaelites. (Wilde, 2015, p. 212) As stated in the Cambridge Dictionary, a Pre-Raphaelite is ‘‘a member of a 19th-century group of British painters who were influenced by the style of painting of the 14th and 15th centuries’’. (Cambridge Dictionary)

Wilde’s stay at Oxford played a crucial role in his personal development. Both his philosophical and artistic views were shaped into something brand new. For this would be credited two scholars that Wilde met during his time at Oxford, namely John Ruskin and Walter Pater. Nevertheless, these two were not the only ones who had a big influence on aestheticism. Others worth mentioning would be figures such as the painter James McNeil Whistler and a French poet Théophile Gautier. (Wilde, 2015, p. 212)

Although it cannot be simply cut down to a certain belief alone, the quote which would guide the main thought of aestheticism was ‘‘art for art’s sake’’. This is also a phrase that would make Wilde widely popular. However, his overall thinking cannot be classified as only this concept alone. Unlike the ideals of the Victorian era where art did not serve merely as an entertainment but also took up the role of enlightening and educating people, aestheticism did not put morality on the top of its main priorities. (Wilde, 2015, p. 212)

Together with his mother and brother Willie, Wilde moved to London, after he made the decision to leave university in 1879. Wilde turned into someone who was high on the fashion chart of the contemporary society because of his mother opening a new salon. Despite being mocked and ridiculed on daily basis, he carried on dressing himself in the spirit of aestheticism. These parodies did not slow him down, it was quite the opposite. They were used as a stepping tool in his success as they provided him with a notorious reputation. His mentioned wardrobe would consist of ornate hats, knee-breeches and bow ties. (Wilde, 2015, p. 213)

Wilde’s popularity kept gradually raising as he would spend his nights out with people that are considered a ‘higher’ society. The opportunity to establish connections with editors was created for him by his older brother William who worked as a journalist at that time. Thanks to him, Wilde’s works were well-known within the London’s society. However, with all these social changes also came a complicated love life. (Najmanova, 2020, p. 16)



## 2.2. Relationships

A marriage would help to surpass the rumours that had been created because of Wilde's sex life which other people would strongly disapprove of. Although we cannot certainly say that Wilde found entertainment and a way to satisfy his needs through homosexual relationships, his heterosexual ones were questionable enough. Many of his sexual encounters were shocking and had a great potential in becoming scandalous. On one side of a possible spectrum there was a famous actress Lillie Langtry and on the other a prostitute from Oxford who had supposedly given him syphilis. (Wilde, 2015, p. 213)

Regarding his marriage affairs, we are introduced to them at the beginning of the 1880s. It was around this period when reports began to come to the surface. It was said that during this time there were at least two different women who Wilde sought to marry. In 1881, in London, Wilde met a rich Queen's Counsel, Horace Lloyed. His daughter, Constance Lloyed, became another thing to achieve. (Wilde, 2015, p. 213)

It took several years of courting before he asked for her hand in marriage in Dublin towards the end of 1883. Paddington was the location where their wedding took place on 29th May a year later. One of the points that would influence Wilde's life as a writer happened during their honeymoon in Paris. *The epitome of decadence literature*, a novel written by Huysmans, *À Rebours (Against Nature)* was what greatly helped him to form both his perspective and fiction. It was allowance provided by Constance that made it possible for them to live more comfortably than before after returning to England. Other big events in two consecutive years were the births of their sons. Cyril was born in 1885, while Vyvyan a year later in 1886. (Wilde, 2015, p. 213)

The year 1886 also marks the time Wilde was supposedly introduced to homosexuality, by a common belief. The one responsible for this is supposed to be Robert Baldwin Ross, a mere seventeen-year-old boy. Despite carrying the burden of tempting Wilde and seducing him in the process while suffering from guilt from facing the consequences that would affect Wilde's two children, Ross was a young man with an everlasting loyalty to Wilde. (Wilde, 2015, p. 213)

In 1890, Wilde released a novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* which had certain similarities between him and its main character, Dorian. His contemporary life was influenced by meeting John Gray, A young man who could make Wilde fall for him. Not only is John's surname the same as the one of the novel's protagonist but also the letters that Wilde had received from John

Gray were signed with the name 'Dorian'. This deepened the theories regarding the parallels of Wilde's life with the life of his main character. (Wilde, 2015, p. 215)

### **2.3. Bosie**

Another chapter of Wilde's life story revealed itself in 1891. This year he met the Marquess of Queensberry's son, Lord Alfred Douglas, alternatively known as 'Bosie', who was a big fan of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, reading it passionately multiple times to the point where he was given a deluxe copy of the book by Wilde himself. It did not end there. After hearing that Douglas was taking 'Greats', also known as (Wilde, 2014, p. 215) 'Literae Humaniores' (University of Oxford) at the Oxford University, Wilde decided to offer him his services as a mentor. Looking back, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* had greatly influenced his contemporary love life. (Wilde, 2015, p. 215)

The year 1892 marks the point when their relationship became completely developed. However, there never really was a space for loyalty between the sex partners. Bosie would use himself as an example when encouraging Wilde to take advantage of the services of young male prostitutes, considering that he already had a tendency of doing so himself. (Wilde, 2015, p. 215)

One of their earlier problems was the inability to have a decent relationship with Wilde's past love interests, namely Robert Ross and John Gray. This resulted in a widening gap between them and Wilde. His relationship with Bosie was far from perfect. However, despite their constant arguments and numerous threats of ending what they had between them, every time it got close enough to the point where it would not be possible to recover, they managed to pull back. (Wilde, 2015, p. 215)

Since Wilde was able to find love in his life with him so great being able to take all his time and attention, he would turn a blind eye to Bosie's faults. Bosie is often labelled as the protagonist in the story of Wilde's destruction. This is regarding the situation with Wilde's imprisonment. The efforts that Bosie put into the petition in attempts to get forgiveness for Wilde, together with the fact that the two of them stayed as companions even after Wilde was released from prison, make the accuracy of these judgements debatable. (Wilde, 2015, p. 216)

What helped to shape this image, however, was Wilde's *De Profundis*, a work of his in the form of a letter to Bosie that was released later. Despite being one-sided, for obvious reasons, it confirmed that Bosie had an explosive and arrogant character, loved arguing, and had a very

narcissistic nature. It also showed how the relationship they both led rather foolishly, was eventually destructive for both sides of the equation. (Wilde, 2015, p. 216)

18th February 1895 describes the day when Bosie's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, made his appearance and greatly changed Wilde's life for good. The reason behind this was Wilde's relationship with Bosie. A year prior, Wilde was confronted by a very angry Marquess who had enough of them displaying their affections openly in public. What did not help was the way both Wilde and Bosie had behaved. They were anything but subtle, careless about the communication going on between them, and living together in hotels. His wife, Constance, did not even have the knowledge of Wilde's address anymore as he, as of now, was regularly not coming back home to his family. (Wilde, 2015, p. 217)

At the beginning of 1895, Bosie and Wilde travelled to Algiers. The Marquess was quietly getting ready for his moment to strike, awaiting a perfect chance to either completely humiliate Wilde in the eyes of public or a way to prosecute him. Making his first move only 4 days after *The Importance of Being Earnest* was premiered, he visited one of Wilde's clubs. "for Oscar Wilde posing Sodomite" was what was written on the calling card he had left for Wilde before leaving the club. As the act of sodomy was illegal in contemporary Victorian England, the accusation made against Wilde was very serious. (Wilde, 2015, pp. 217-218)

The Marquess was not only a man with a great influence, he was also very wealthy. That was one of the factors that made Wilde's plan ineffective before it even started. There was no solid ground to build this case on as there was no evidence of Wilde committing the act of sodomy produced at the trial, and Wilde seemed to be in the right and have the upper hand. (Wilde, 2015, p. 218)

However, a turn of events occurred. Wilde's denial of the accusations made against him did not matter much to Queensberry's counsel. Several young men, willing to testify that they had sexual history with Wilde, appeared after being found by investigators paid by Marquess's side of the equation. Despite the fact there was no evidence of sodomy, this was used as a plea of justification. (Wilde, 2015, p. 218)

Wilde felt overpowered by Queensberry's lawyer while he was in the witness box because of his believed activities with young men. Not even after skilfully proving wrong to the accusations that were supposed to prove the appearance of immorality in his works was Wilde prepared for this kind of situation. The working-class rank of the mentioned young men was given an important role in this case. (Wilde, 2015, p. 218)

## 2.4. Imprisonment

The charge of “committing acts of gross indecency with other male persons” was made in 1895 on 6th April as well as Wilde’s arrestment. This led to two trials. The first one became memorable as the trial that contained Wilde’s legendary “the love that dares not speak its name” speech. This time the jury was not able to reach a verdict. However, during the second trial, Wilde was found guilty of gross obscenity and that led to his sentence of two years filled with hard labour. (Wilde, 2015, p. 218)

During his imprisonment Wilde wrote a letter to Bosie after he was given permission to use a pen and paper. The letter contained an impressive number of 50,000 words. It could not be sent while was Wilde still staying in prison. He, however, could keep it until the day he was released and send it then. (Wilde, 2015, p. 218)

His time in jail had a tragic impact on his family. Their personal possessions together with their family house were taken back as a compensation for legal costs. Wilde together with his family lost everything and found themselves in both social and financial ruins. It got that far that in desperate hopes to sever any connection with Wilde, Constance took her children, emigrated with them to Switzerland, and changed their surname to Holland. Despite all of that, Constance did not seem to be in favour of getting divorced and even found time to visit Wilde during his time spent in prison. (Wilde, 2015, p. 218-219)

Wilde’s final years began to countdown on 19th May 1897 following his release from prison. His next three years were filled with his poor condition linked with living in poverty and suffering banishment from both artistic and social life. His only support was provided by friends who remained by his side after all this time, the most prominent one being Robert Ross. Ross was also the one who would supervise the editing process of Wilde’s last works. He managed to make peace with Bosie in 1897 while he was writing his final major piece, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, a famous poem of his. (Wilde, 2015 p. 218-219)

Pope blessed Wilde when he came to him after moving aimlessly around both Italy and France. This flow of events was preceded by Constance’s death in 1898. On 30th November 1900, an Irish Catholic priest gave him his last rites while he was lying on his deathbed. The cause of his death was stated to be cerebral meningitis, and a few biographers have given credit to syphilis. (Wilde, 2015, p. 219)

On 2nd December 1900 was Wilde buried at Bagneux. However, today we can see a famous monument created by Jacob Epstein, an American sculptor, at the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris where was Wilde moved to in 1909. (Wilde, 2015, p. 219)

### 3. The Picture of Dorian Gray

Due to the era and its society, homosexuality, and everything related to it was viewed negatively. Wilde was even forced to edit his story, otherwise it would not be published. Due to censorship, the portrayal of homosexuality is not as apparent as it would be nowadays.

The main factor of how we can spot homosexual elements throughout the story is primarily through the desire for an attractive male body created by other men. Beauty plays the main role in this. The protagonist, Dorian Gray, is repeatedly admired for his beauty and many are attracted to it.

There was something about Dorian that charmed everybody. It was a pleasure even to see him. (Wilde, 2015, p. 110)

Basil is the primary example of this. Since the moment he met Dorian, he was fascinated by him. When Henry asked Basil to describe what he feels about Dorian in general, the attraction in Basil's words is clear.

I turned halfway round, and saw Dorian Gray for the first time. When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. (Wilde, 2015, p. 10)

Suddenly I found myself face to face with the young man whose personality had so strangely stirred me. We were quite close, almost touching. Our eyes met again. It was reckless of me, but I asked Lady Brandon to introduce me to him. Perhaps it was not so reckless, after all. It was simply inevitable. We would have spoken to each other without any introduction. I am sure of that. Dorian told me so afterwards. He too felt that we were destined to know each other. (Wilde, 2015, pp. 10-11)

Basil openly told Henry how often he compliments Dorian. How satisfying it is for him and how much delight it brings him. However, he also shared the guilt he feels every time he does this. It could be that he himself is aware that he does something 'immoral' in the eyes of the Victorian society. This alone suggests homoerotic undertones.

I know he likes me. Of course, I flatter him dreadfully. I find a strange pleasure in saying things to him that I know I shall be sorry for having said. As a rule, he is charming to me, and we sit in the studio and talk of a thousand things. (Wilde, 2015, p. 14)

Despite all this, Basil's attraction was one-sided as Dorian did not feel any similar feeling towards him. However, Dorian seemed to be fascinated by Lord Henry from the moment they

met, and this continued throughout the whole story. Even at its dark ending, Henry was someone Dorian was closest to.

Dorian Gray never took his gaze off him, but sat like one under a spell, smiles chasing each other over his lips, and wonder growing grave in his darkening eyes. (Wilde, 2015, p. 41)

Dorian bowed to him shyly from the end of the table, a flush of pleasure stealing into his cheek. (Wilde, 2015, p. 37)

When Basil finally gathered enough courage, he confessed his honest feelings to Dorian. His confession took more than a page in the novel. The confession did not include any romantic terms which is not that surprising, but it carried the meaning, nevertheless. Basil then felt rightfully hurt when Dorian called it a disappointing and strange confession.

It was not intended as a compliment. It was a confession. Now that I have made it, something seems to have gone out of me. Perhaps one should never put one's worship into words. (Wilde, 2015, p. 107)

How much that strange confession explained to him! The painter's absurd fits of jealousy, his wild devotion, his extravagant panegyrics, his curious reticences – he understood them all now, and he felt sorry. There seemed to him to be something tragic in a friendship so coloured by romance. (Wilde, 2015, p. 108)

As stated in the biography part of this work, Oscar Wilde seemed to parallel his own persona with the one of Dorian Gray. He wrote this book during the time he was experiencing his problematic homosexual experiments and was not able to express his thoughts openly in the contemporary hostile society. That is why he might have used Dorian as his escape and justification, in a sense. Dorian was a naive and pure character since the moment we met him. This could be taken as Wilde's own sexuality. Henry's words addressed to Dorian feel like they could project onto Wilde's situation in real life.

...The body sins once and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure or the luxury of a regret. The only way to get rid of the temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful... (Wilde, 2015, p. 20)

Gender roles are adequate to the ones created by the Victorian society where men are the dominating and superior ones. It is clear, that all women are looked down upon throughout the whole story. Dorian is influenced by Henry's explanation on this matter earlier on in the story.

My dear boy, no woman is a genius. Women are a decorative sex. They never have anything to say, but they say it charmingly. Women represent the triumph of matter over mind, just as men represent the triumph of mind over morals. (Wilde, 2015, p. 46)

A different view on Victorian gender roles can be found in Emilé Zola's *Nana*, a story with lesbian elements filled with themes ranging from prostitution and sexuality to cross-dressing and reversed gender roles. Zola dismisses both gender differentiation and sex as a mere idea created by humans. Contrasting both the Victorian society and Wilde's portrayal of them in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, women become the dominating ones as the story goes on, pushing men into submission. (Marlow, 2006, p. 25)

The story itself is set in a heterosexual environment. However, there is an intense focus on male friendships and their deep structure. Heterosexual couples are almost portrayed as some sort of a burden that is not meant to have a happy ending, be it Dorian's relationship with Sibyl Vane or Henry's excuse for marriage. This could be another parallel with Wilde's disastrous one. Wilde got married only after his mother's long persecution to escape the rumours about his love life that followed him everywhere. Lord Henry even gives a piece of advice to Dorian regarding this topic.

Never marry at all, Dorian. Men marry because they are tired, women because they are curious: both are disappointed. (Wilde, 2015, p. 45)

...I never know where my wife is, and my wife never knows what I am doing... (Wilde, 2015, p. 8)

There was also a part in the story, where Dorian's confusion about his real feelings was clear. Dorian, as pure as a blank sheet of paper was suddenly introduced to sexuality and did not know which path to choose. He subtly addressed this problem while he was talking to Henry.

Your voice [Henry] and the voice of Sibyl Vane are two things that I shall never forget. When I close my eyes, I hear them, and each of them says something different. I don't know which to follow. (Wilde, 2015, p. 49)

Another parallel with Wilde's life that is worth mentioning are the rumours. After years have passed, Dorian's reputation continued getting more and more tarnished. All the men Dorian had a connection with became empty shells of their old selves. They either became suicidal, disappeared out of the town, or were left with nothing but a stained name, shame, and regret. Dorian Gray became a name of a man that was not someone to let near any pure girl. Basil, who was displeased with Dorian's antics, decided to confront him with this topic.



Why is your friendship so fatal to young men? (Wilde, 2015, p. 137)

Then there are other stories – that you have been seen creeping at dawn out of dreadful houses and slinking in disguise into the foulest dens in London. (Wilde, 2015, p. 138)

Dorian did not hide the annoyance that was caused by Basil's words and proceeded to blame the society for its double standards. The Victorian society was causing problems to Dorian as it was to Oscar Wilde. That is why Dorian's words in this quote may feel as if they were shared by Wilde himself and this makes them carry even more meaning.

In this country it is enough for a man to have distinction and brains for every common tongue to wag against him. And what sort of lives do these people, who pose as being moral, lead themselves? My dear fellow, you forget that we are in the native land of the hypocrite. (Wilde, 2015, p. 138)

Another author who portrayed homosexuality in a moderate way similarly to Wilde was Charles Dickens in his novel *Bleak House*. Throughout the book we can see lesbian undertones, mainly shown through the relationship between Ada and Esther. Occasional kisses shared by them point out that there is something more than a mere friendship between them. Acts related to love, such as blushing or touching, are also more exaggerated. (Brown, 2005, p. 32)

To conclude, various factors influenced the way homosexuality was portrayed in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Due to the pressure put on Wilde by the Victorian society, all homosexual motifs in the novel are mostly subtle. There are homosexual undertones throughout the whole story in the form of strong male friendships and emphasised attraction to a desirable male body.

## 4. Reception

In the 19th century the concept of homosexuality was something that truly terrified the Victorian society. Their puritan beliefs made them create laws with very strict punishments. This old-fashioned way of thinking can be also proved by the fact that Britain was the only country located in Western Europe in the 20th century that still carried on with harsh penalties for breaking these laws. Anything that could be classified as a homosexual act between two males was severely punished with respect towards the forbidden action. (Adut, 2005, p. 214)

All of this considered, the contemporary government seemed to be rather hesitant when dealing with these cases. The idea of homosexuality was nothing new to the London society, therefore its cases were not as unusual as it might seem. In the Victorian society, any homosexual standards were only unwillingly forced and even these cases were rare. (Adut, 2005, p. 214)

Due to the annual digit of cases that were charged with the act of sodomy during the 1840s, the nonchalance on the government part was apparent. The number of sentences, in this decade, was on the range between 12 to 18. It is these conditions and atmosphere that make the case of Oscar Wilde seem so biased. (Adut, 2005, p. 214)

An example of a person who suffered and had his life completely ruined because of the puritan ideals in contemporary Victorian England would be Oscar Wilde. The double standards were clearly displayed when Wilde was being targeted for his actions, while famous actors of a high status were rarely convicted as the police would turn a blind eye on them instead. Unlike them, Wilde was punished by these laws in 1895 without any sign of mercy. (Adut, 2005, p. 214)

The knowledge of this side of Wilde, however, was nothing new to the London people. It cannot be said that Wilde had been exactly subtle with the way he behaved either as his tendencies were generally quite known. All this information was fully on display long prior to the misfortune and pain that would hit him hard later in his life. (Adut, 2005, p. 214)

The theme of homosexuality was not only hinted at in his literacy works but it also represented something that was permanently built in his public persona. Despite that, he was still labelled as a sweetheart in the eyes of London people. Both critics and people expressed their approval of his art despite it being undermined and labelled as corrupted. Before the day when his arrestment took place his works continued being popular to a high degree, no matter the social class. (Adut, 2005, p. 214)

The hatred and repulsion aimed at the topic of homosexuality continued throughout the Victorian era. A sudden change of heart or stances was nowhere to be seen. The only change that perhaps cannot even be labelled as an improvement happened no sooner than in 1861. That year, the laws regarding the punishment for an act of sodomy were changed from a death penalty to imprisonment for life. Even though there was not a single execution related to this problem since the 1830s, the suggestion of abolishing the former law, introduced in 1841, did not make it through the contemporary parliament. (Adut, 2005, p. 215)

It is good to take a notice of the difference between the strictness of the laws and their enforcement. One of the reasons why there were relatively fewer cases than would be expected, was the problem with proving guilt. There were documented cases of group violence directed towards the convicts of homosexuality by various historians. Accomplice witnesses had the value of gold as they were one of the factors the prosecutors had to depend on. (Adut, 2005, p. 215)

The problem with them was that they either had no intentions of cooperation or the English law of evidence considered them non-credible to be used at court. The second reason might have been the harshness of punishments that came with committing the crime that made both prosecutors and juries think twice. Juries were rather hesitant when it came to convicting people and prosecutors did not have the enthusiasm about pressing charges. These conditions together with Wilde's high status within contemporary society might be the reason why he had little to no problems to get away with his deviant behaviour despite it being commonly known. (Adut, 2005, p. 215)

People in the Victorian period were unwilling to take any serious action against homosexuals in general. This statement would be twice as strong if the homosexual in question belonged to a group of people who could pride themselves with a high status within the social ranks. The fact that Wilde was one of these people was no surprise. Even before his infamous trials took place, Wilde's homosexuality was no secret to the public eye. His whole public persona that had quite a few feminine qualities could be used as an example of what a homosexual stereotype stood for by the Victorian era's standards. (Adut, 2005, p. 227)

Thanks to Wilde's personality trait of pretending that he is something he is not, the feeling of uneasiness awoke in hearts of his audience. As the early years of the 1880s enrolled, Wilde's audience began to feel anxious as his real sexuality became the centre of their doubts. His sexual

stance was something that generally served as a mere speculation in London. The only people for whom it was more than that were those that Wilde held close to him. (Adut, 2005, p. 227)

Wilde was forced to face to one of his biggest criticisms with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a novel released in 1890. The work that awakened a tremendous number of reactions was published in Lippincott's Magazine. Scots Observer and St James's Gazette were two newspaper outlets that provided the public with passionate criticism regarding Wilde's novel. More specifically, the homoerotic characteristics spotted in the relationship of Basil Hallward and Dorian Gray were the main point of this argument. (Wilde, 2015, p. 215)

The critics did not back down, so once the novel was given its book form, Wilde sat down and edited it. He moderated this aspect and overall toned it down which led to a positive review from Walter Pater, a critic. However, W.H. Smith, a retailer, still said no to stocking it, despite Wilde's efforts. Thanks to this, the book's notorious reputation only grew. (Wilde, 2015, p. 215)

*Punch*, "a magazine of humour and satire" with its first edition published in 1841, (Punch Magazine) was one of the publications that would use Wilde's sexuality as a source of a public satire. However, these suggestions were not clear but ambiguous. This could be rather taken as a mere mockery of Wilde's feminine character traits. (Adut, 2005, p. 227)

This aside, Wilde, with the decade coming close to its end, would be seen wearing a queer symbol on his lapel while walking in public. It was a green carnation boutonniere, something that French homosexuals would use as a badge. (Adut, 2005, p. 227)

Oscar Wilde was an individual with a powerful personality which was unfortunately chained down by the Victorian society. Its zero tolerance for homosexuality was what caught up with Wilde despite him being quite a prominent persona among high-ranking people at that time. If he lived in contemporary era, his innovative and influential mind would be greatly appreciated.

## 5. André Aciman's life

André Aciman is an Italian-American author formerly from Egypt. One of his most memorable works as well as one of his earliest ones is his memoir called *Out of Egypt* (1995). The book describes Aciman's hardships he went through as a child and the process of growing up as a teenager in Alexandria. It is also viewed as the 1st major published book of his. (Library of Congress, 2018, 8:39-8:42)

While he was still living in Egypt, he was bad at school and expresses his hatred for it. Even now, despite being a professor, his hatred for the concept of school remains and he feels anxious every year during the fall as the school year starts. (Library of Congress, 2018, 8:15-8:33) He was deeply invested in the idea of writing ever since he was merely 10 years old. (Library of Congress, 2018, 6:35-6:40) However, his 1st poem was not the best piece of poetry. He describes it as "dreadful" after reading it years later. (Library of Congress, 2018, 6:09-6:30)

At the age of sixteen he concluded that his poetic skills are simply insufficient and decided to focus on prose instead. He likes to refer to himself as "a failed poet" while bringing up two names of two remarkable "failed poets", namely Joyce and Proust. Aciman praised them for their ability to successfully apply their previous poetry knowledge in their prose. (Channel 4 News, 2019, 23:23-24:44)

After publishing his memoir *Out of Egypt* he continued to write a great amount of both short stories and essays. The critical point in his career as a writer that helped him tip over the edge was a single chapter of a novel. The novel that focused on a heterosexual relationship in which they both meet at a party with unanswered questions regarding their love in the future. (Library of Congress, 2018, 8:42-9:42)

This situation was caused by Aciman's inability to decide which way is the plot of the story going to go. However, all it took was a publication in the *New Yorker* for him to get offer for a contract. He signed the contract with a publisher who saw a potential in this story and contacted him. (Library of Congress, 2018, 8:42-9:42)

Aciman continued writing this story but eventually lost all inspiration. This resulted in him taking a break that was very much needed at that point. To take his mind of that story he decided to start another one which is today known as *Call Me by Your Name*. (Library of Congress, 2018, 8:42-9:42)

The former concept of *Call Me by Your Name* was supposed to be a simple story of a 17 year old boy and a girl of an unknown age but something did not feel right. That is why he decided to change the relationship into a homosexual one. (Library of Congress, 2018, 10:00-11:05)

A relationship between two men was simply a more exciting path to take. (Goldman Sachs, 2018, 5:02-5:07) The moment this change happened, the words came flying and soon the pile of pages kept growing. ‘‘As if it was waiting since my, you know birth, to be written.’’ is what Aciman had to say about the writing process. The entire story was finished very quickly. Not even 3 months passed, and the story was complete. Afterwards he did return to his former story that had been on hold in the meantime, however its fate was tragic. (Library of Congress, 2018, 10:00-11:05)

Aciman himself is not part of the LGBT+ community, he is a happily married who has a family with his wife and three grown children. (Library of Congress, 2018, 9:50-9:54) Despite not being homosexual, he found it more natural to use homosexual characters in the story. However, the fact that he was a heterosexual made people question his credibility. (Library of Congress, 2018, 11:00-11:05)

He was not the only one whose fiction featuring homosexual characters was judged based on his sexual orientation. Becky Albertalli, the author of *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015), faced a lot of criticism for being a heterosexual woman. People doubted the authenticity of the characters for this reason. After years of pressure, she came out as a bisexual. She addressed this matter with the following words: ‘‘...if you think I’m the only closeted or semi-closeted queer author feeling this pressure, you haven’t been paying attention.’’(Albertalli, 2020)

*Call Me by Your Name* was inspired by a house he saw while he was visiting Italy. (Library of Congress, 2018, 11:00-11:05) The country itself serves as a symbol of the body for Aciman. It stands for all the amazing things that are needed in life to make it worthy. Italy is the embodiment of pleasure and desire. (Library of Congress, 2018, 45:15-45:32)

The concept of this story is somewhat a parallel of his own experience as a child. Back then he was a boy around the age of 9 or 10 who was staying in the beach house in Egypt. There was a volleyball team whose captain awoke a big interest in him. Aciman did not know the boy who was probably 17 or 18 but he longed to be his friend. (Library of Congress, 2018, 13:10-14:23)

Even now he is not sure what this feeling was and described the whole situation as ‘‘very disturbing’’. He did know anything about him but the moment he suspected something would immediately destroy it. Therefore, it is so hard to figure out what was it that he wanted from him in the end. This served as a templet for *Call Me by Your Name*. A story that describes the feelings of an adolescent boy who is clearly desiring a connection with an older man. (Library of Congress, 2018, 13:10-14:23)

The characters of *Call Me by Your Name* have quite a few similarities with Aciman’s personal life. Not only they can speak the same languages, although Elio speaks French only in the movie, but Aciman also relates to Elio’s personality, describing himself as hesitant and shy with a lot of insecurities. The exact opposite of what Oliver is like. Aciman said that he has always had a hard time grasping the personality of people like him, expressing his distaste to even indicate anything close to a conversation with them if not needed. (Library of Congress, 2018, 16:48-17:48)

One of the characters that was heavily inspired by a real figure was Elio’s father. Aciman admires his father so it comes as no surprise that he put his features into this character. In his words his father was a brilliant man. A businessman with a blooming career who was also well-read on an exceptional level. In addition to that he could be labelled as a person with a very opened mind. His only flaw was probably his Casanova like tendencies that were highly unappreciated by his wife. (Library of Congress, 2018, 23:20-23:55)

The difference between his father and him is that Aciman would never go as far as doing such unfaithful activities. However, as the desiring person he is, he likes to think about these things. He does not have to execute them, just the idea arouses him. (Channel 4 News, 2019, 6:55-8:40) There is no doubt that lot of things his father had said to him over the years inspired Aciman’s writing. (Library of Congress, 2018, 23:20-23:55)

The biggest impact had a piece of advice that would shape his mindset for the rest of his life. His father had greatly influenced Aciman but the words that stuck with him until today were ‘‘Whatever you do with a human being, once your clothes are off, there is no shame left.’’ (Library of Congress, 2018, 23:20-23:55)

He heavily emphasises the importance of parents’ understanding while dealing with delicate topics involving their child. He thinks that the speech made by Elio’s father is something that could help any parent whose daughter or son come out as gay. Its value was also commented on by Aciman’s older fans who shared with him the desire of hearing these words from their

parents earlier in life. ‘‘I wish my father had given me that speech, it would have changed my life.’’ Aciman paraphrases mail sent to him by his 60 and over old fans. If there was a message he would like to deliver with his story, it would be this one. (Goldman Sachs, 2018, 10:15-10:45)

What is prioritized in Aciman’s writing are not the characters, plot or even the story, it is the style. He views style as a tool that makes it possible for the author to act as a guide for the reader, helping them step by step throughout the story to reach a better understanding to what is happening. ‘‘I’ve known it, you’re not telling me anything new. But I never quite considered it.’’ (Library of Congress, 2018, 43:00-44:50)

This is exactly what is Aciman trying to awake in people who read his books. He is not feeding them any new information, nor he is saying anything overly innovative. He simply drops subtle hints in his writing that make the reader aware of what they have subconsciously known already. (Library of Congress, 2018, 43:00-44:50)

His achievements and fame did not stop him from continuing the things he had loved before. Thanks to his adoration for his students and teaching in general, he works as a professor to this day, despite having no need to do so anymore. (Channel 4 News, 2019, 32:55-33:10)



## **6. Call Me by Your Name**

*Call Me by Your Name* is one of Aciman's novels that made it possible for him to be referred to as an award winning writer. This book also achieved the title of a bestseller in the novel category and was transformed into a movie years later. The work was also adapted to an Academy Award as a nominee for the best picture category and a winner of the screenplay one. (Library of Congress, 2018, 1:20-1:29)

Aciman was fortunate enough that today's society is much more accepting towards the topic of homosexuality than it used to be in the past. Thanks to this, he was able to fully express himself in this story without being held back. The freedom he had while portraying homosexuality, and sexuality in general, in *Call Me by Your Name* is evident from the descriptions of the characters' wild fantasies and the sexual acts themselves.

### **6.1. San Clemente syndrome**

Aciman explains the usage of a concept called "San Clemente syndrome," in *Call Me by Your Name*. It was inspired by architecture and its appearance, particularly a Roman church built of four different parts, as it went through reconstructions over the years. One object thus separated into individual elements. Aciman applies this to people. (Goldman Sachs, 2018, 2:57-3:58)

According to Aciman, our personality, sexuality, and identity are not autonomous units. We try to make sense out of our own sexuality, questioning how we got to the point where we are now and where it has begun. Desiring a person, we want to be with, while wondering if that is what we truly wish for. And if so, can we do this with multiple people, each time in a different way that we might have not even imagined before? We can never fully merge these dispersed parts together, yet that is what we desperately try to do every time. (Goldman Sachs, 2018, 2:57-3:58), (TIFF Talks, 2018, 45:10-45:48)

### **6.2. Identity**

Aciman describes the concrete idea of the book, in an ideal scenario, as swapping of identities. Exchanging your names, stripping yourselves of your own identity and lending it to another person. It should be an illustration of two bodies combining, erasing the line that had distinguished them until now. The inability to say where one ends, and the other starts shows how connected they are. (Library of Congress, 2018, 14:32-16:25)

He got this idea from a lesbian couple he befriended, where both females shared the same name, awaking questions related to their sexual life in him. According to Aciman, the fact that you can be intimate with someone else without any hint of shame is the most beautiful thing you can experience in your life. This thought is portrayed in a great number of situations throughout the story. (Library of Congress, 2018, 14:32-16:25)

### **6.3. Desire**

Desire is a feeling that follows us throughout our whole life. It is something indescribable and most of the time even illogical. We are often left unsatisfied with the result we had been craving for so long, yet we cannot do anything to stop us having this feeling. People desire things no matter how old they are but as they get older, it becomes easier to have these feelings under control.

Adolescence, especially, is a difficult part of our lives and it is even more complicated when feelings are involved. *Call Me by Your Name* is a story that revolves around the theme of desire. It describes the torn feeling whether you truly need someone or if it is only an impulsive idea that you will forget tomorrow. The enjoyment that comes from these two types of desire going against each other is what Aciman introduces as the fuel for this book. (Channel 4 News, 2019, 1:55-2:30)

Love in teenage years is straight-forward and simple-minded. Adolescents in love tend to overlook the negative aspects of this connection just to keep holding onto it. It is a feeling of longing for the other person, in some cases to the point of expressive possessive behaviour. We can see all of this in Elio's long and detailed inner monologues.

Since the beginning of the story where Elio meets Oliver for the first time, his mind is subconsciously filled with thoughts of Oliver. Trying to figure out who he really is, what is he working on, or what is he doing at this very moment. Throughout the story it seems as if Elio was desiring some form of recognition from Oliver and tries to prove his worth to him. He often displays it with his knowledge of books. Elio is aware of the age gap between them as he tells Oliver to take him seriously and not to treat him as a child.

Elio knows that he should not have any feelings for this man, yet he cannot help himself to wish to know everything about him. He wants to be as close to Oliver as possible, however his inner conflict of what is right does not allow him to do so. That is why he chose to desire him from a distance in secret without letting him know everything.

This can be seen in scenes where Elio goes to Oliver's room by himself while he is out. For example, in the scene where he tries on Oliver's swimsuit just to feel him on his own skin. He also knows what the different colours of all his swimsuits mean, thanks to his observation of Oliver. However, this behaviour makes him more paranoid as he keeps creating his own scenarios of what might have happened or might happen in the future. Although he himself knows they are ridiculous, he cannot help it.

Elio's inner monologue often shows the conflict he is going through. Questioning if he should or should not speak. Overthinking every little action towards Oliver. Speculating if he is doing too much or too little, whether he comes off as annoying or too needy. This can be demonstrated by many scenes, for example the one where he decided to slip a note under Oliver's door.

I tore out a sheet of paper from a school notebook.

*Please don't avoid me.*

Then I rewrote it:

*Please don't avoid me. It kills me.*

Which I rewrote:

*Your silence is killing me.*

Way over the top.

*Can't stand thinking you hate me.*

Too plangent. No, make it less lachrymose, but keep the trite death speech.

*I'd sooner die than know you hate me.*

At the last minute I came back to the original.

*Can't stand the silence. I need to speak to you.* (Aciman, 2017, pp. 118-119)

## **6.4. Sexuality**

In this story, sexuality is not described as something that should be divided. There is no clear difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality. It seems that people are together because they want to regardless of their gender. Sexuality is purely about the feeling of desire. That is why while reading this story, the characters might appear unpredictable when it comes

to their sexuality. It is written in a way that any of them could get attracted to both genders at any point in the story.

Elio's girlfriend, Marzia, can be used as one of the examples of bisexual elements present in the story. Elio still goes on dates and even sleeps with her while his heart is longing for Oliver. However, Marzia confronts him about the lack of attention he gives her, and it is only then when Elio realises, he has been giving her the same silent treatment Oliver has done to him.

According to Aciman, sexuality is not something definable. It is a liquid that is always flowing without stopping. As soon as we try to label our desires, they change again. We are not able to make up our minds on what we really want. We desire one thing but we long for another just a moment later. It is in human nature to want all of it. People falsely boast with the ability to understand its logic. However, sexuality is an undefined form and attempting to give it a name only makes us look like fools. (TIFF Talks, 2018, 34:17-34:48)

Aciman explained the parallels between sexuality and ambiguity in the story. Most things in the book have no names. The name of the city is not given, using only the letter 'B' when referring to it. We do not know the exact year when the story is happening. Not even the last names of the characters are revealed. Nothing is defined, just as nothing is defined in sexuality. (TIFF Talks, 2018, 36:24-37:31)

## **6.5. Intimacy**

Aciman describes intimacy as a concept that is difficult to achieve in everyday life. With many distracting factors, such as separation during the day due to working hours and fatigue that comes afterwards, getting in the way. Coexisting perfectly without thick walls separating two individuals is the true power of intimacy. This occurrence mostly happens when we are young and gets harder to achieve with growing age. (TIFF Talks, 2018, 52:00-53:25)

The level of intimacy in Elio's and Oliver's relationship is as high as it can be. Not only in their love life but also their everyday life. Moments such as Oliver supporting and comforting Elio who was vomiting or using the toilet while the other is still in the room with them are very private things, so sharing them with someone else just shows how close the two people are.

Every human has their own identity and that is what makes them unique. It is our own irreplaceable characteristics that no one can take away from us and we take pride in it. The fact that Elio and Oliver decided to give away this privilege just to exchange their names during

sex, shows the level of respect they have for each other. That is because if we are stripped of our own identity, we are left completely naked and vulnerable to the outside world. Therefore, this displays the amount of love and trust they share with each other.

...when I must have begun using obscenities that he [Oliver] repeated after me, softly at first, till he said, “Call me by your name and I’ll call you by mine,” which I’d never done in my life before and which, as soon as I said my own name as though it were his, took me to a realm I never shared with anyone in my life before, or since. (Aciman, 2017, p. 134)

The need to have someone else to call you by your own name can also show the possibility of narcissism. The idea of your name leaving your own lips can arouse you more than anything else. Every praise and every obscene remark are followed by your name. It feels as if you were committing this act with yourself entirely. That is why giving away your identity to someone else is the equivalent of putting your life in someone else’s hands. There is nothing more intimate than that.

## **6.6. Explicitness**

Aciman describes how the sexual theme in *Call Me by Your Name* is not something he was planning on doing at the beginning of the story. He wanted to write about a fantasy, as we all have some, with no deeper relationship between Elio and Oliver. However, gradually he kept adding more and more romantic and sexual elements. (TIFF Talks, 2018, 10:18-11:30)

The gradation is clear as the story progresses. The moment Oliver stops holding himself back which he was doing for multiple reasons, for example their age gap, the sexual elements can be seen more often and bolder each time. What started as gentle and cautious touches turned into an intense lovemaking without a hint of shame.

Aciman prides himself with keeping everything realistic. He describes his writing as fundamentally honest and shameless. While describing the mentality he holds while writing he quotes Jesus “If you are without sin, cast the first stone at me.” Although his thoughts can be seen as daring or outright obscene, they represent nothing new. (TIFF Talks, 2018, 12:42-13:54)

In Aciman’s words, he does it with the knowledge that people can relate to his thoughts even if they do not want to admit it publicly. You might have not committed the act yourself, but you surely have thought about it before, and deep down you know it. He tries to write the things he feels in an authentic, possibly vulgar way, and the reader has no right to judge him and “cast

the stone at him’’ as they might have thought or done things that are far worse. (TIFF Talks, 2018, 12:42-13:54)

The whole novel is filled with fantasies, some more daring than others. Aciman does not show any sign of restriction and therefore describes everything in detail. People who read this story might, and probably will, do a double take at numerous points of the story. Scenes that might make you feel uncomfortable and flustered. A great example of that is the peach scene where Elio’s actions are described very vividly.

The fruit was leaking all over my cock. If Oliver walked in on me now, I’d let him suck me as he had this morning. If Marzia came, I’d let her help me finish the job. The peach was soft and firm, and when I finally succeeded in tearing it apart with my cock, I saw that its reddened core reminded me not just of an anus or a vagina, so that holding each half in either hand firmly against mine cock, I began to rub myself, thinking of no one and of everyone, including the poor peach, which had no idea what was being done to it... (Aciman, 2017, p. 146)

The bruised and damaged peach, like a rape victim, lay on its side on my desk, shamed, loyal, aching, and confused, struggling not to spill what I’d left inside. It reminded me that I had probably looked no different on his bed last night after he’d come inside me the first time. (Aciman, 2017, p. 147)

I watched him put the peach in his mouth and slowly begin to eat it, staring at me so intensely that I thought even lovemaking didn’t go so far. (Aciman, 2017, p. 149)

As disgusting as this scene might seem to some people, it displays a lot of things. We can see the amount of detail Aciman puts into the sexual scenes in this book. Secondly, there is shown the theme of bisexuality that is present throughout this story. Elio does not seem to care whether it is Oliver or Marzia who catches him in this shameful act, he would ask either of them to participate.

It also describes Elio’s inner conflict as he compares himself to the abused peach including its confused feelings and a wrecked body. Lastly, it shows the level of intimacy and shamelessness in their relationship. From Elio’s fantasy of Oliver walking on him and what would happen then to Oliver eating the peach while looking into Elio’s eyes. We can feel the amount of desire these two characters have for each other in this passionate relationship.

Similarly descriptive sexual scenes can also be found in a lesbian novel *Fingersmith* (2002) by Sarah Waters. The novel showcases a different kind of pleasure that happens between two

women. Waters also criticizes the unrealistic representation of the human body in porn, for example the removal of pubic hair. (Armitstead, 2017)

Homosexual elements are easy to find in *Call Me by Your Name*, from the characters' feelings to sexual acts between them. Aciman had a lot of creative freedom while he was writing this novel, and this aspect is clearly seen throughout the story.

## 7. Reception

When Aciman decided to write *Call Me by Your Name* he was not aware of the fact that this topic is still considered a taboo in a big part of our society. (Channel 4 News, 2019, 13:02-13:06) It was mainly because of the life he led when he lived in Alexandria. Aciman himself had friends that belonged to the LGBT+ community during the 1950s. There was no restriction to what one could do in his circle of friends as none of them judged the others' decisions. The mindset was much more open and other people accepted who one was. At that time, Egypt was far more welcoming in this area contradictory to Europe, where a man would not be able to call himself a gay in public with ease. (Channel 4 News, 2019, 11:10-12:52)

The book is most often viewed in a positive light, going as far as being labelled as a gay novel done right, successfully portraying what many before could not achieve. (Library of Congress, 2018, 18:05-18:12) ‘‘Aciman writes arousal so beautifully, you miss it when it’s gone.’ was said by the *New York Times*, in one of the many reviews of this book. (Library of Congress, 2018, 7:08-7:15)

While some find this love story refreshing, others would welcome a more realistic approach, especially since the story is set in the 1980s. (TIFF Talks, 2018, 16:30-17:13) Unlike what we are usually used to with LGBT stories where hardships such as STDs, abuse, mockery, and other tragic circumstances make their appearance, there are barely any present in *Call Me by Your Name*. (Library of Congress, 2018, 19:47-20:02)

The idea of a teenager falling for a man that is years older than him and his parents not having a single issue with it also made many people question the realistic aspect of the story. (Channel 4 News, 2019, 13:30-13:45) Aciman uses a quote by Aristotle ‘‘Art is not about what happens but about what should and ought to happen’’ as an explanation for the choices he had made. Parental acceptance is one of the factors that Aciman thinks should be a standard as many of his fans can relate to it and find it helpful when coming out to their own parents. (Channel 4 News, 2019, 13:47-14:20)

Aciman was not aware that the role of an antagonist was needed in his story. Aciman was surprised when this was pointed out as he had never thought of adding this kind of character into the main cast before. There was no reason for him to include this type of character as it is completely possible to have a good relationship between two men without any complications. (Channel 4 News, 2019, 13:07-13:29)



*Call Me by Your Name* shares similarities with a comic novel *Less* (2017) by Andrew Sean Greer in its optimistic plot. Greer shared the reason for his choice of a happy ending later: “There’s a gap on my bookshelf for a story about two men in love that isn’t about trauma and despair and I wanted to write that book.” This statement has a similar feeling to Aciman’s reasons. (Beckerman, 2018)

Aciman acknowledged the negative aspects, however, he showed no interest in them. He finds no need for realistic elements in literature. Just because these unfortunate circumstances exist, does not mean we cannot have a harmonious homosexual relationship, where the couple is not persecuted, put into dangerous situations, or followed by diseases. He introduces a place where any form of love is welcomed with opened arms without any prejudice instead. (TIFF Talks, 2018, 17:14-18:17)

This story is also narrated from a teenager’s point of view. At that age when it comes to it, all we see, and feel is attraction towards the other person. To satisfy our sexual desires and to create a bond between the two of us. Everything and everyone else become a side character of that story. Any disturbance thrown at us only takes away the focus from what we are feeling, and Aciman did not want that while writing Elio’s relationship with Oliver. (Library of Congress, 2018, 21:22-22:10)

He chose to bring attention to the theme of desire rather than focusing on fearsome aspects that two lovers could potentially encounter. If we are speaking of what is politically correct, then yes, a distraction is needed. However, it is not essentially necessary which is why romance is so wonderful. Love can bloom in tragic situations as well as in positive circumstances. (Library of Congress, 2018, 21:22-22:10)

There are many opinions circling in the writing industry regarding gay novels. Alan Hollinghurst, the winner of the Booker prize in 2004, said “The gay novel is dead.” However, a writer from the Guardian, a news outlet, expressed that “Gay stories still need to be told.” (Library of Congress, 2018, 18:15-18:45)

It is also often pointed out that there should not be a differentiation between ‘novels’ and ‘gay novels’, we do not call them ‘heterosexual novels’ either after all. Andrew Sean Greer, a Pulitzer prize winner, criticized the creation of the gay sub-genre: “There should be no gay fiction or gay erotica or gay non-fiction, they should all just be fiction and non-fiction and erotica.” (Library of Congress, 2018, 18:15-18:45)

Aciman, however, disagrees with the statement that the novel is dead. ‘‘Oh, nobody writes a love novel any longer, those are dead.’’ These are the words Aciman often hears from people around him, he explains. In his opinion today’s readers are no different to those in the 19th century when novels were widely popular. People still look for romance, not caring if the story is realistic or not. (Library of Congress, 2018, 18:46-19:30)

The reason why the story of *Call Me by Your Name* is so appealing to the reader, according to Aciman, is reassurance. What people usually hear regarding the topic of gay love is that we should not judge those who are involved and show them some respect. We should tolerate them and not segregate them. This story introduces us to a new option, a different view. It shows that there is a type of love in the world that is worth to long for and that can be craved by many. This concept is something that awakes deep feelings in people’s hearts and that is why this story is as moving as it is for many of them. (Library of Congress, 2018, 52:45-53:10)

Although there are still some people, who find the concept of homosexuality hard to understand, even borderline unacceptable, the society is much more open-minded than it used to be. This gives authors creative freedom and allows them to express their feelings and ideas more openly.

## 8. Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a noticeable difference in the way homosexuality is portrayed in the selected novels. Both stories have been influenced by their authors to a certain degree, reflecting events they went through at some point in their lives.

The homoerotic theme in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is more subtle in comparison to *Call Me by Your Name* which is far more explicit. The main reason for this is the era both novels were published in. The historical period also affected the overall feeling of each story. While the plot of *Call Me by Your Name* was more on the positive side, the ending of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was rather tragic.

How far both authors could go with their portrayal of homosexuality was influenced by their surroundings. The Victorian society was highly homophobic; therefore, censorship was necessary. However, contemporary society, although still not perfect in accepting homosexual literature, is much more comfortable with authors writing about this topic without needing to hold themselves back.

As of the year 2021, homosexuality as a sexual orientation is accepted and acknowledged in most countries in the world. However, there is still an existing stigma around it that should be addressed and talked about more. Many people still do not consider homosexuality to be on the same level of importance as heterosexuality. That is why writing and publishing LGBT stories should be encouraged, to help familiarize the public with this topic. Today's era, unlike the Victorian one, allows authors to write more openly and that is how it should be. Homosexuality in both life and literature should be viewed as a common concept rather than an eccentric trait.

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## Resumé

Bakalářská práce je zaměřena na zobrazení homosexuálních motivů v literárních dílech *Obraz Doriana Graye* (1890) Oscara Wilda a *Dej mi své jméno* (2007) André Acimana. Analýzou životů obou autorů, jejich románů a společenské odezvy na ně byly odhaleny aspekty, ve kterých se tyto dvě knihy liší. Rezervovanost a hostilní Viktoriánské prostředí nejen negativně ovlivnilo Wildův život, ale také zapříčinilo cenzuru jeho díla, a proto je homosexualita v *Obrazu Doriana Graye* spíše ve formě náznaků. Naopak Aciman sklidil za svou knihu především pozitivní ohlasy a vzhledem k době, ve které žije, si mohl dovolit popsat homosexualitu v *Dej mi své jméno* velmi barvitě.

## Annotation

<b>Jméno a příjmení:</b>	Kristýna Petrůsková
<b>Katedra:</b>	Ústav cizích jazyků
<b>Vedoucí práce:</b>	Mgr. Petr Anténe, M.A., Ph.D.
<b>Rok obhajoby:</b>	2021

<b>Název práce:</b>	Zobrazení homosexuality v románech <i>Obraz Doriana Graye</i> a <i>Dej mi své jméno</i>
<b>Název práce v angličtině:</b>	The portrayal of homosexuality in novels <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> and <i>Call Me by Your Name</i>
<b>Anotace práce:</b>	Cílem této bakalářské práce je analýza zobrazení homosexuality v dílech <i>Obraz Doriana Graye</i> (1890) od Oscara Wilda a <i>Dej mi své jméno</i> (2007) od André Acimana. Tato práce věnuje pozornost životu obou autorů, analýze těchto románů a reakci společnosti na ně. Výsledkem je posouzení vyobrazení homosexuálních motivů v dílech a zjištění, jak odlišný společenský kontext ovlivnil nejen životy autorů, ale také jejich psaní.
<b>Klíčová slova:</b>	homosexualita, viktoriánská společnost, Oscar Wilde, Dorian Gray, André Aciman, LGBT, román, sexualita, <i>Dej mi své jméno</i> , gay
<b>Anotace v angličtině:</b>	The aim of this bachelor thesis is an analysis of the portrayal of homosexuality in works <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> (1890) by Oscar Wilde and <i>Call Me by Your Name</i> (2007) by André Aciman. This thesis focuses on the lives of the authors, the analysis of the novels, and the reaction of the society to them. The result will be a consideration of the portrayal of homosexual motifs in these works, and how different societies influenced not only the lives of the authors but also their writing.
<b>Klíčová slova v angličtině</b>	homosexuality, Victorian society, Oscar Wilde, Dorian Gray, André Aciman, LGBT, novel, sexuality, <i>Call Me By Your Name</i> , gay
<b>Rozsah práce:</b>	39 stran
<b>Přílohy:</b>	