

Oscar Wilde's Society Comedies With a National Socialist Message

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Oscar Wilde's society comedies are among the plays most often translated, adapted and staged in the 20th century. Of each of the four comedies – *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) – there exist fifteen to twenty German versions whose differences reflect the ideological shifts that marked the 20th century as a whole. One of the most striking developments in the German reception of Wilde occurred during the National Socialist era, when the translations and adaptations done by Karl Lerbs (1893–1946) started a veritable wave of Wilde productions.¹

Lerbs translated and adapted Wilde's three "serious" society plays² in such a way that they corresponded to the core ideas of the theatre ideology in place after 1933 – "völkische Gemeinschaft" (ethnic community) and "heroische Haltung" (heroic stance) (Dussel 1988:106ff.).³ The tenor of Lerbs' versions can be gleaned from two short essays by Lerbs which were regularly printed in theatre programs and titled *Warum spielen wir heute Oscar Wilde?* (*Why are we performing Oscar Wilde today?*) and *Der zeitnahe Wilde* (*The contemporary Wilde*). The Wilde image they project can be characterized as follows:

(a) Wilde's individualism is turned on its head. While Wilde in his plays and essays, especially in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, undermines the puritanical spirit and the collective clichés of Victorianism, endorsing a utopian, anarchic individualism, Lerbs maintains that in Wilde's plays "the mockers, the cynics, the ruthlessly self-centered are soundly defeated." Whereas Wilde criticizes the anti-individualistic stance of collective Victorian morality, Lerbs makes him out to be an enemy of individualism.

(b) Wilde is declared to be a forerunner of National Socialism, as in his plays "the coming great conflict of the irresponsible with the responsible is foreseen and decided in favor of a future-oriented responsibility."

(c) Lerbs justifies his interpretation – and hence his text – by claiming that it is particularly authentic: his concept of Wilde, he argues, goes directly "to the source", overcoming "almost four decades of interpretation" which showed the writer "in a completely false light." Wilde's formalistic indulgences ("Formschwelgereien") are rather irrelevant, a mere "shell": the true Wilde is to be found below the surface of aphorisms and poses.

Comparing Lerbs' three versions one by one, it becomes clear that beginning with *Lady Windermere's Fan*, through *A Woman of No Importance*, to *An Ideal Husband*, his ideologizing modifications of and additions to the text become more and more obvious. Lerbs starts out translating and ends up adapting. I will confine my analysis to two tendencies in his adaptations: the heroification of man and woman and the ethnic–nationalistic (*völkisch*) social model.

1. Heroification of Gender Roles

Lerbs gives the Wilde texts a dimension that they had not possessed previously: the heroic element. The heroic male and female characters display self–discipline and strength of will. The characters speak "strongly", "genuinely", "resolutely", "with fanatical resolve", "with the chill of unrelenting resolve", "with a steely tension of will", etc.; they repeatedly move "with a start", "with an abrupt start", etc. As for the men in particular, Lerbs' additions to or modifications of the text stress that Wilde does not favour the decadent dandies but rather the "real men". Two typical examples will have to suffice here:

In *Lady Windermere's Fan*, the Duchess of Berwick maintains that all men are bad,

all of them, without any exception. And they never grow any better. Men become old, but they never become good. (Wilde 1980:19)

Lerbs has her say:

Alle, ohne Ausnahme. Sollten Sie mal eine Ausnahme treffen, dann ist es kein richtiger Mann. Und damit kann man ja auch nichts anfangen. (Lerbs 1934a:19)⁴

In the final scene of *An Ideal Husband*, Mabel does not want to ascribe to Lord Goring the role of an "ideal husband" – "An ideal husband! Oh, I don't think I should like that" – and accepts him as an autonomous individual: "He can be what he chooses" (Wilde 1983b:270). Lerbs, on the other hand, has Mabel, acting as a representative for the women in the audience, adopt the martial male ideal: "Ich will keinen idealen Gatten. Ich will einen richtigen Mann" (Lerbs 1935a:157).

The male ideal in Lerbs is basically the upright soldier – or, as in Lerbs' description of the appearance of Lord Goring: the "makelloser Dandy bester Zucht" (Lerbs 1935a:19). The word "Zucht" connotes biological and military selection and discipline.

As for the female ideal, the glorification of womanhood practiced by Lerbs tends to posit the virtual equality of man and woman. On this point, Lerbs' translation differs from the earlier ones, in that it displays a certain modernizing impulse. Compare, for example, the passage in *A Woman of No Importance* where Lady Caroline and Lady Hunstanton use a letter by Mrs. Arbuthnot in order to analyze her handwriting and character:

LADY CAROLINE (looking at it): A little lacking in femininity, Jane. Femininity is the quality I admire most in women.

LADY HUNSTANTON (...). Oh! she is very feminine, Caroline, and so good too. You should hear what the Archdeacon says of her. He regards her as his right hand in the parish. (Wilde 1983a:32)

LADY CAROLINE (betrachtet den Brief). Ich weiss nicht recht, ob ich sie nicht ein bisschen zu fest finde, Jane. Ich bin ja nicht für eine Übertreibung der weiblichen Eigenschaften, (sie schiesst einen Seitenblick auf Lady Stufield ab) – aber schliesslich sind sie doch das, was ich an einer Frau am höchsten schätze.

LADY HUNSTANTON (...). Oh, sie hat alle weiblichen Eigenschaften, die man verlangen kann; aber sie ist dabei ein durchaus selbständiger Mensch. (Lerbs 1934b:29)⁵

This stress on the independence of women becomes even more pronounced when one looks more closely at the melodramatic climax of this play. The unscrupulous Dandy, Lord Illingworth – Lerbs equips him with a "diabolical smile" and thereby already identifies him with the unheroic group – , has tried to kiss the 18– year–old puritanical American, Hester, as the result of a bet. Wilde has Hester storm into the room "in terror" and throw herself into the arms of her swain, Gerald, in search of protection, crying: "Oh! Save me – save me from him! (...) He has insulted me! Save me!" (Wilde 1983a:95).

Lerbs rewrote this melodramatic scene thoroughly, making Lord Illingworth – in the stage directions – more cynical and filthy, and Hester, on the other hand, much more independent:

HESTER (draussen). (...) Lassen Sie mich augenblicklich los. (sie kommt erregt herein)

GERALD (tritt vor). Was ist geschehen?

HESTER. Lassen Sie nur, Gerald. Ich kann mich allein schützen, wenn man mich beleidigt.

GERALD. Wer hat es gewagt – ?

(Illingworth kommt langsam von der Terrasse herein und bleibt an der Tür stehen, mit gekreuzten Armen, an die Wand gelehnt und Gerald gelassen und aufmerksam betrachtend)

HESTER. Er. Ihr Held und Abgott, Ihr Vorbild und Meister. Ich schien ihm wohl ein geeignetes Objekt, um seine Ansichten über die Würde der Frau in die Tat umzusetzen. (Plötzlich heftig) Befreien Sie mich doch endlich von diesem Menschen. Sehen Sie denn nicht, wie er mich immer noch ansieht? (Lerbs 1934b:107)⁶

Wilde has Hester flee from the seducer in almost neurotic panic. In Lerbs' text, she distances herself in cold contempt from the lecherousness of a decadent creature. The psychological contrast has turned into an ideological one. For Lerbs, Illingworth is not an individual but a National Socialist stereotype: the proponent of unhealthy "opinions about the dignity of women", from which youth has to be "set free". In Lerbs' translation, Hester wears the armour of ideological orthodoxy.⁷

It is probably justified to say that the liberation of women, insofar as it became a

topic in the National Socialist era, meant in the last analysis that women took the image of masculine self-discipline and heroic self-denial as their model. It was a liberation which went hand in hand with a kind of martial denial of the erotic element in the relationship between the sexes.

2. The National Socialist Model of Society

The heroification of the rather positively presented male and female figures in Lerbs' treatment also has an obverse side, which negates the modernistic and emancipatory impulses which may be contained in the aggressive independence of the female pro-agonists: The obverse of the heroic is subordination. In Lerbs' versions of *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*, the females-as-heroes, Mrs. Erlynne and Mrs. Arbuthnot, are portrayed chiefly as mothers prepared for sacrifice and struggle; their other character traits are suppressed. Furthermore, the truly – i.e., also sexually – liberated women, like Mrs. Allonby in *A Woman of No Importance*, are censored and devalued. Particularly conspicuous are Lerbs' manipulations of the structure of *An Ideal Husband*, through which he changes the moral balance between dandy and politician significantly.

(a) *The Dandy Lord Goring*. Wilde portrays Lord Goring by his looks, relaxed demeanor, anarchistic aphorisms – "I don't like principles, father, I prefer prejudices" (Wilde 1983b:260) – and actions (for example, a deceptive word of honor) as a contrasting figure to the ambitiously tense politician. A philosopher is hidden behind the mask of the dandy: Goring is the aesthetic personification of Wilde's individualistic aesthetics and ethics. He embodies something which Wilde conceptualized in his Utopian essay *The Soul of Man under Socialism*:

Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine. (Wilde 1990:19)

In Lerbs' version, however, Goring is stylized as a "makelloser Dandy bester Zucht" (Lerbs 1935a:19), whose mask conceals an authoritarian officer. The stage directions indicate this at several points:

Das blasierte, dandyhafte, zynische Gehabe, eine vollkommene, zur wesenhaften Erscheinung gewordene Maske, fällt für Augenblicke von ihm ab. Sein Gesicht ist wach und gespannt. (92)

Sein ganzes Benehmen ändert sich mit einem Schlage – wird knapp, straff, bewusst. (97)

Wieder begibt sich mit ihm die erstaunliche Verwandlung, die das Spielerische und Dandyhafte wie eine Maske fallen lässt. (149)⁸

Lord Goring is, in Lerbs' version, not the opposite, but the aesthetically packaged image of the politician. Lerbs not only eliminates the relaxed attitude of the dandy, but also does away with his anarchistic aphorisms and his false word of honour; in addition, he suppresses Goring's final sentence, in which he distances himself expressly from any political career. In Wilde's text, Lord Goring clearly pities the politician several times; in Lerbs' version, he becomes his admirer and emulator: "Es gibt also doch noch so etwas wie eine heroische Haltung in der Welt. Ob ich das wohl jemals auch lerne?" (130)⁹ In the confrontation with the blackmailer who threatens Robert Chiltern's career, Lord Goring proves to be a dutiful functionary of a we-group whose biological-religious imagery and, presumably, ideology he has made his own:

Sie haben das Verbrechen begangen, das zu vergiften, was selbst dem Unheiligsten unter uns heilig sein sollte: die Quelle, aus der die Kraft wahrhaft lebensgläubiger Menschen strömt. (119)¹⁰

Lerbs introduces Lord Goring as a kind of political leader in waiting. Beneath the aesthetic disguise hides a functionary who can be relied upon in times of need.

(b) *The Politician Sir Robert Chiltern*. Even more decisive for the ideological interpretation of the play is the way in which the politician Sir Robert Chiltern is changed by Lerbs. Wilde presents him as a psychologically damaged human being, whose "passion for power" (Wilde 1983b:178) became his downfall in his youth; Lerbs stylizes him as the type of politician whom fate itself equipped with the charisma of a Nietzschean "will for power and achievement" ("Wille zur Macht und zur Leistung") (Lerbs 1935a:54) – Lerbs' translation or ideologization of the expression "passion for power".¹¹

Concrete information about the Chilterns' political commitment to women's liberation and social legislation, which Wilde supplies, is omitted by Lerbs and replaced by vague, frequent and emotive references to Chiltern's "ideals," his "achievements," his "task," his "life's work," his "fate," and his "goal".

In Lerbs' version, Lord Goring the dandy turns into a propagandist for the politician Robert Chiltern, especially towards the end of the play, when he sets about convincing Gertrude Chiltern to cease being an obstacle in the path of her husband's career. In Wilde's text, Goring appeals to the principled Gertrude in order to move her to understanding, love and forgiveness with regard to Robert's dark past. Lerbs rewrote the persuasion scene and transposed it, full of ideological connotations, into the National Socialist present. In Wilde's play, the ambitious Chiltern needs politics for existential reasons; for Lerbs, politics needs Robert, the "creative human being" ("schöpferischen Menschen") (150). For Wilde, the issue is the psychological liberation from the weight of the past; what matters to Lerbs is a clean slate for the political future. In Wilde's text, Gertrude's task is to love and forgive; Lerbs charges her with the "great duty of carrying the work of her husband to completion". Goring's reply to Gertrude's helpless question "What shall I do then, Goring?" sounds, in the context of the years 1935 and after, like instructions for the (female?) audience concerning the ideologically correct attitude toward the *Führer* of the hour:

GORING. Ihn arbeiten lassen – ihn endlich einmal, zum ersten Mal in seinem Leben, mit leichtem Herzen und befreiten Händen arbeiten lassen. Alles, was Sie für ihn fühlen, müssen Sie einsetzen, um ihm dazu die Kraft zu geben. Robert ist ein Mensch, der ein Ziel hat. Das Gefühl der Frau hat die grosse Pflicht, die Arbeit des Mannes ans Ziel zu tragen. (151)¹²

Wilde's dandy has changed from a subversive non-conformist into a propagandist for the National Socialist model of society. He no longer preaches the anti-authoritarian Utopia of individual autonomy, but delivers the affirmative message of collective duty to heroic subordination to the goals of a male leader personality.

3. Reception of Lerbs' Versions by Theatre Critics

The critical reception of the three plays was by no means as homogeneously

favourable as one might have expected, given the deliberately functionalistic strategy Lerbs used in his adaptations. The first two plays, in which Lerbs had reduced the dandyistic, playful traits in favour of the central mother role, were the most positively received. A critic wrote about Hilde Hildebrands portrayal of Mrs. Erlynne in Berlin that Wilde himself would have

had to bow in silent tribute to the great actress (...), who, out of his fireworks of esprit, wit and cold pretense let arise a timeless, great soul experience beyond all sentimentality. (Dietzenschmidt 1934)¹³

The *Völkische Beobachter*, too, was satisfied:

First of all: Oscar Wilde is still alive. Secondly: the good old theatre (...), which wants nothing more than to create suspense and emotion, is still alive as well. (Grube 1934)¹⁴

On the occasion of the Frankfurt performance of *A Woman of No Importance*, the contemporary nature of the text was remarked on positively:

It is not to say that this comedy has to be played as a comedy of morals, as it was here, with such clearly defined, black-and-white roles. But it seems more contemporary in any case when (...) the Bad appears bad and the Good appears good. (Ziesel 1935)¹⁵

The critic of the Mannheim performance, however, roundly rejected the Lerbs adaptation:

The performance remained a hybrid, as most actors were not Wilde's, but seemed removed from him and his spirit. The adaptation may be partly to blame for this. (C.O.E. 1936)¹⁶

When the play was staged in Berlin, the *Völkische Beobachter* was thrilled about Lerbs' black-and-white depiction:

The woman with her purity, with her authenticity and honesty, with her belief and her passion, defeats Lord Illingworth, who is representative for a whole caste, for the salon as such. (Rainalter 1936)¹⁷

Lerbs' *Ideal Husband*, which had been most strongly functionalized and ideologized to comply with the spirit of National Socialism, received the most contradictory critical reception. With a reference to Lerbs' essay which was printed in the program, one critic of the German opening night performance in Frankfurt wrote that Wilde did not need "this moral rescue" and that the moralistic impulse of the adaptor had left a rather negative impression:

Haltingly and almost ceremoniously, the comedy moves today, (...) with very assiduous expansion of the moral content, if you will. (...) the c o m e d y is not exactly served by throbbing pauses and the search for deeper meaning. (Rudolf Geck 1935)¹⁸

After a performance at the Thalia–Theater in Hamburg, too, a critic longed for the pre–Lerbs Wilde:

So Wilde the mocker turns into a prosecutor and world– improver. One could see Wilde like that, but it is not necessary and hardly an improvement. (..) Result: three hours of a lecture, seriously meant by Lerbs, delivered to the people by Lord Goring–Wilde (...). All this time one recalls – and not even without fondness – the times when he still walked through life breezily and merrily. (Küster 1935)¹⁹

One month after the staging at the Thalia–Theater, the theretofore probably most illustrious performance of the *Ideal Husband* took place at the *Staatstheater* in Berlin. The critiques were positive on the whole, praising mostly the staging, the set, and the actors. Herbert Ihering, however, also specifically praised Lerbs' stage adaptation:

The content of the play is long since antiquated. Its philosophy, though, is reasserting itself now, as in this skillful adaptation by Karl Lerbs (...). (Ihering 1935)²⁰

Apparently, however, the ideological and moral lines were not as clearly drawn in the Berlin staging as they had been in Frankfurt and Hamburg. Viktor de Kowa's Lord Goring was universally praised for his dandyistic nonchalance. Berlin's *Staatstheater* under the jurisdiction of Goebbels and under the management of Gustaf Gründgens was the least ideologized theatre in the Germany of that time – much to Goebbels' dismay.

Thus, the ideologically correct head of the cultural section and theatre critic of the *BZ am Mittag* paper distanced himself in no uncertain terms from Lerbs' interpretation of Wilde as it could be read in the program notes of the *Staatstheater*; Lerbs was at-tempting

nothing less than an ethical rehabilitation of Wilde; he wants to make him a social revolutionary at the turn of the century. A dangerous undertaking! (...) It will not do to portray the moral pragmatism of Wilde as an ethic that could have an educational effect. (...) We want to continue to take Wilde's plays as what they really are: plays which ironically portray a calcified society and offer actors roles with which they can demonstrate their ability. (Hesse 1935)²¹

In summary, one can say that the ideologizing text manipulations by Lerbs were, insofar as they were recognized, largely rejected by critics. Most critics bemoaned the loss of the supposedly unpolitical Wilde; some praised the contemporary adaptation; the critic of the *BZ am Mittag* did not consider the ethical message of Lerbs, or of Wilde, rigorous enough. It may be of great interest that the critical and ideological landscape of the first three to four years of National Socialism was by no means as uniform as might be supposed. This only changed at the end of 1936, when the traditional criticism of the arts was forbidden by the *Reichskulturkammer* to be replaced by a state– influenced "Kunstaberachtung" ("view of the arts") (Wulf 1983:87). Thus not only the production, but also the critical reception of literature was subject to censure. The aesthetic canonization process was stripped of the last remnant of a division of power.

Conclusion:

(a) The political functionalization of art seems to be successful only in those cases where there is no pluralism on the reception side either.²²

(b) The great success particularly of the Lerbs texts on German stages after 1933 can be explained partly by the fact that Lerbs had an established position in the National Socialist art scene, which gave his stage manuscripts the advantage of official endorsement.

After the Second World War, Lerbs' versions of *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance* were staged in numerous provincial theatres up until the end of the Fifties without Lerbs' latent ideologization of women's roles being noticed by the critics. This is an indication that the National Socialist image of women was simply carried over into the Adenauer era. In discussing Hilde Hildebrand's portrayal of the mother role in the *Windermere* premiere at the *Schauspielhaus* in Wiesbaden on Christmas Day 1949, the critics tellingly report in the same "jargon of essentiality" ("Jargon der Eigentlichkeit") (Adorno) as fifteen years before in Berlin:

"It was impressive how Hilde Hildebrand lifted the figure of Mrs. Erlynne out of the realm of colportage into the truly human. (...) When suddenly a tear wells up in the eye, it is not the sentimental one of the cheap novel, but rather, thanks to just such a production which sends blood rushing to every fiber of the deeply moved being, a flow of true feeling" (DrHK 1949).²³

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[1](#) In the 1934/35 theatre season, *Lady Windermere's Fan* was performed a total of 345 times, almost as often as all of Shakespeare's plays put together (350 performances), and in 1936/37, Oscar Wilde was the "most often performed author of the theatre season" (Pitsch 1952:245). In 1935 and 1936, three of Wilde's society plays were brought to the screen with excellent directors and actors.

[2](#) I will portray the reception in translation and theatre of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* separately in a monograph which will be published soon.

[3](#) Karl Lerbs, who became a producer at the *Schauspielhaus* in Bremen in 1933, was a zealous National Socialist, attaining considerable success as a writer in the Third Reich; when the occupation authorities began to inquire about his National Socialist past, he took his own life.

[4](#) "All of them, without exception. Should you happen to meet an exception, it will not be a real man. And there is nothing you can do with that, either."

[5](#) LADY CAROLINE (looking at the letter). I am not sure if I don't find it a little too firm, Jane. Of course, I am not in favor of an exaggeration of feminine traits, (she darts a look at Lady Stufield) – but in the end, they are still what I value most in a woman.

LADY HUNSTANTON (...). Oh, she has all the feminine traits you could ask for; but even then, she is quite an independent person.

[6](#) HESTER (outside). (...) Let go of me this instant. (She enters in a state of excitement)

GERALD (steps forward). What happened?

HESTER. Let me be, Gerald. I can protect myself against insults.

GERALD. Who dared to – ?

(Illingworth enters slowly from the terrace and stops by the door, leaning against the wall with crossed arms, looking at Gerald in a relaxed and attentive fashion)

HESTER. He. Your hero and idol, your model and master. It seems that he considered me the proper object to turn his opinions about the dignity of women into practice. (Suddenly fierce) Set me free at last from this person. Don't you see how he is still looking at me?

[7](#) In Hans Steinhoff's film *Eine Frau ohne Bedeutung* (1934), Hester (played by Marianne Hoppe) was even more pronouncedly presented as an emancipated and modern type of woman, with whom especially those women striving for independence could and were meant to identify. In the film, Hester and Gerald form an athletically trained team moving in rhythmic symmetry: She wants to become a sports physician, he a waterworks engineer.

[8](#) "The blasé, dandylike, cynical behavior, a perfect mask which has become his essential appearance, drops for a moment. His face is aware and tense."

"His whole attitude changes instantly – it becomes terse, strict, conscious."

"Again, an astonishing change takes place in him, where the playful and dandylike behavior drops like a mask."

[9](#) "There exists, after all, something like heroism in the world. Will I ever learn it myself?"

[10](#) "You have committed the crime of poisoning something which should be holy even to the most unholy of us: the source from which springs the power of men who truly believe in life."

[11](#) About Lerbs' translation strategy of "ideological disambiguation" ("ideologische Monosemierung"), cf. Kohlmayer (1990), 273–77.

[12](#) GORING. To let him work – to let him at last, for the first time in his life, work, with a light heart and freed hands. You have to devote everything you feel for him in order to give him the strength to do that. Robert is a man with a goal. A woman's feeling has the great obligation to carry the man's work to its completion. (151)

[13](#) "(...) in schweigender Ergriffenheit vor der großen Künstlerin (...) neigen müssen, die aus seinem Feuerwerk des Esprits, Witzes und kalter Mache ein überzeitliches, großes Seelenerlebnis, fern aller Sentimentalität, erstehen ließ."

[14](#) "Erstens: Oscar Wilde lebt noch. Zweitens: Das gute alte Theater (...), das weiter nichts will als Spannung und Rührung erzeugen, lebt auch noch."

[15](#) "Es ist nicht ausgemacht, daß diese Komödie, so wie es hier geschah, als Komödie der Moral gespielt werden muß, mit so deutlich, Schwarz gegen Weiß, verteilten Rollen. Aber zeitgemäßer wirkt sie auf jeden Fall, wenn (...) das Schlechte schlecht und das Gute gut erscheint."

[16](#) "Die Aufführung blieb ein Zwitter, weil die meisten Darsteller nicht bei Wilde standen, sondern ihm und seinem Geist entfremdet schienen. Daran mag die Bearbeitung einen Teil der Schuld tragen."

[17](#) "Die Frau siegt mit ihrer Reinheit, mit ihrer Echtheit und Ehrlichkeit, mit ihrem Glauben und ihrer Leidenschaft über Lord Illingworth, der eine ganze Kaste, der den Salon schlechthin repräsentiert."

[18](#) "Zögernd und fast feierlich kommt die Komödie heute daher, (...) mit sehr beflissener Ausbreitung der sittlichen Gehalte, wenn man so will. (...) der K o m ö d i e ist mit bebenden Pausen und dem Bemühen um Abgründigkeit nicht eben gedient."

[19](#) "Der Spötter Wilde wird bei Lerbs also zum Ankläger und Weltverbesserer. Man kann Wilde so sehen, notwendig ist es nicht und besser – kaum. (...) Ergebnis: drei Stunden einer von Lerbs ernst gemeinten Belehrung des Volkes durch Lord Goring–Wilde (...). Man denkt dabei – und nicht einmal ungern – öfter an die Zeit zurück, da er noch hurtig und lustig durch das Leben lief."

[20](#) "Der Inhalt des Stückes ist längst veraltet. Seine geistige Haltung aber behauptet sich jetzt wieder, auch in dieser geschickten Bearbeitung von Karl Lerbs (...)."

[21](#) (Lerbs versucht) "nichts weniger als eine ethische Ehrenrettung Wildes; er möchte ihn zum sozialen Revolutionär an der Jahrhundertwende stempeln. Ein gefährliches Unternehmen! (...) Es geht nicht an, den moralischen Pragmatismus Wildes als ein Ethos hinzustellen, das erzieherische Wirkungen haben könnte. (...) Wir wollen Wildes Theaterstücke weiterhin als das nehmen, was sie wirklich sind: Theaterstücke, die eine verkalkte Gesellschaft ironisieren und Schauspielern Rollen bieten, an denen sie ihr Können entfalten können."

[22](#) This condition also applies to functionalistic translation strategies, which presume that the target audience is transparent, homogeneous and static. This essay demonstrates that these assumptions do not even apply under totalitarian conditions. Cf. also Kohlmayer (1988)

[23](#) "Es war bestechend, wie Hilde Hildebrand die Gestalt der Mrs. Erlynne aus dem Bereich der Kolportage ins Wahrhaft Menschliche hob. (...) Wenn mit einmal die Träne im Auge quillt, dann ist es nicht die rührselige des Familienblattromans, sondern dank ebensolcher Gestaltung, die jede Faser des erschütterten Wesens noch mit Blut durchdringt, Ausfluß wahrhaftigen Fühlens" (DrHK 1949).