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HOMOPHOBIC DISCOURSE IN THE PRESS COVERAGE OF THE 1895 TRIALS OF OSCAR WILDE

ABSTRACT

By means of implementing the instruments of Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black 2004), the following study analyses an excerpt of the late Victorian homophobic discourse on the basis of the press coverage of the 1895 Oscar Wilde trials. The analysis of the source made it possible to distinguish two categories of conceptual metaphors prevalent in it. The first category highlights the emerging image of a late 19th-century Victorian homosexual. The second category concerns conceptual metaphors regarding emotions, feelings, and attitudes that surrounded the scandal. The study shows that homophobic discourse present in the examined press publications was rich in conceptual metaphors and that homosexuality evoked mainly pejorative associations. Homophobia relied on objectification and dehumanisation of non-heteronormative individuals by constructing them as, e.g., POISON, DIRT, DECAY and DESTRUCTIVE FORCE.

KEYWORDS: Oscar Wilde, Late Victorian Period, homophobia, discourse, Critical Metaphor Analysis

STRESZCZENIE

Wykorzystując narzędzia Krytycznej Analizy Metafory (Charteris-Black 2004), niniejsze badanie analizuje fragment dyskursu homofobicznego późnej epoki wiktoriańskiej na podstawie doniesień prasowych z procesów Oscara Wilde'a z 1895 roku. Analiza pozwoliła na wyodrębnienie dwóch dominujących kategorii metafor poznawczych. Pierwsza kategoria uplastycznia wyłaniający się obraz homoseksualisty z końca XIX wieku, natomiast druga dotyczy metafor poznawczych emocji i uczuć, które ten skandal wzbudzał oraz postaw, które kreował. Badanie wskazuje, że dyskurs homofobiczny obecny w analizowanych publikacjach prasowych był bogaty w metafory poznawcze, a sam homoseksualizm wywoływał głównie pejoratywne skojarzenia. Homofobia opierała się na uprzedmiotowieniu i dehumanizacji osób nieheteronormatywnych, konstruuąc je jako np. TRUCIZNĘ, BRUD, ROZKŁAD i SIŁĘ NISZCZĄCĄ.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Oscar Wilde, Późny Okres Epoki Wiktoriańskiej, homofobia, dyskurs, Krytyczna Analiza Metafory



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INTRODUCTION

Although the following study discusses historical sources, homophobia in public discourse is anything but a thing of the past. “European Union survey of discrimination and victimisation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons” by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights emphasises that “almost half of all respondents (93,076 participants in total) believe that offensive language about LGBT people by politicians is widespread in their country of residence” (FRA 2013: 24). Sabatini (2018) in the article “Homophobia and Logophobia. Constructing Homosexuality in European Public Discourse” studies cases of verbal homophobia (or, as alternatively called in the paper, “gaycism”) in socio-cultural contexts and by looking at museum discourse, popular culture, and politics, shows how prevalent homophobia and logophobia “strengthen stigmatisation, consolidate heteronormativity and prejudice” in public discourse. Baker (2004), in like manner, highlights that homophobia is still present in the public sphere. The author examines a political debate over the law reform striving to lower the age of consent for homosexual sex to sixteen years old and thus align it with the age of consent for heterosexual sex. Linguistic analysis indicates that the opposition to the reform constructed homosexuality as DANGER, ILL HEALTH, CRIME, and UNNATURAL BEHAVIOUR.

“[T]he love that dare not speak its name,” a quote by Lord Alfred Douglas (1892), accurately recapitulates the status of homosexual love in the late 19th-century Great Britain. Homosexuality, treated as an open secret, was considered “a corruptor of youth,” a menace to traditional family values and the overall integrity of Victorian society (Tin 2008: 744). The 1871 trial of two cross-dressers, Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park, the 1884 Dublin Castle scandal, and the Cleveland Street scandal of 1889–90 were only some of the “crimes against nature” that the late 19th-century Great Britain witnessed. One of the most infamous cases is that of Oscar Wilde. The 1895 trials for the crime of gross indecency, resulting in imprisonment, constituted the apogee of Victorian-era homophobia. The newspapers from around the world were attentively following the trials of a person whose name, within a few days, had become one of the most abhorred in the country. Consequently, the newspapers from this period stand a representative section of social moods, providing an adequate research material for the analysis of homophobic discourse.

While some researchers (Adut 2005; Rives 2015) have chosen to focus their studies on the persona of Oscar Wilde, Wilde’s works have also been extensively analysed in terms of metaphors (Mkrtchyan 2013; Majeed, Dabbagh 2019). Similarly, scholarly publications have explored the topics of homophobia and the prevailing understanding of sexuality in the 19th century (Struk 2005; Lauren 2020). However, the 1895 trials, as a testament to the homophobic discourse of the late Victorian period, have been largely overlooked.

Seeing how conceptual metaphors can reflect a user's underlying belief system (Cameron 2009), this study seeks to classify, categorise, and analyse the conceptual metaphors identified in the aforesaid source. This paper examines the discourse used in newspaper accounts to broadcast the trials and investigates whether the identified metaphors reflect homophobic tendencies prevalent in the society represented by the authors of the articles. Additionally, it explores the possibility of these metaphors being employed as a tool to shape the perception of homosexuality in a desired manner by the authorities.

The structure of the remainder of the paper is as follows. Section two aims to outline the historical background, focusing on the aspects of the period relevant to the purpose of this study. Section three discusses the adopted approach, while section four presents the methodology. Sections five and six respectively contain the corpus and the analysis proper. The final sections of the paper consist of concluding remarks, in conjunction with suggestions for further research, as well as a list of references.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On July 4, 1887, a statement claiming that the English people were the precursors of civilised people saw the daylight (Roberts 2004). "Between 1780 and 1850 the English ceased to be one of the most aggressive, brutal, rowdy, outspoken, riotous, cruel, and bloodthirsty nations in the world and became one of the most inhibited, polite, orderly, tender-minded, prudish, and hypocritical," writes Perkin (2002: 280) about the profound changes across the Victorian Britain, which only perpetuated the complex nature of Victorian society. Reforms that had had the intended effects in one of the components, influenced the perception of and desire to "improve" the rest of them. In the 1880s, it became clear that the moral reform which had taken place had also taken root in the public self-image of the English people, going as far as to characterise and distinguish them. Simultaneously, for many moral reform leaders, it was a period of moral standards crisis (Roberts 2004). The following excerpt endeavours to touch upon the most important points in determining the moral standards of the late Victorian era with consideration of their subsequent influence on the perception of homosexuality.

"It was sunk in promiscuity and squalor, jailers' tyranny and greed, and administrative confusion," says Checkland (1989: 277) describing the penal system of the early Victorian era. The middle and late Victorian eras shifted the focus from severe punishment to rehabilitation. Despite objections from the public, a series of legislative reforms were introduced between 1877 and 1914. Prisons were nationalised in the Home Office under the Prison Commission in 1877. In 1898, *the Prison Act* empowered the Home Secretary to implement many reforms without

going through the Parliament. The 1907 probation of *the Offenders Act* drastically reduced the prison population and streamlined the rehabilitation process.

The arguments regarding (female) prostitution could be found all over the spectrum. For some, a woman actively engaging in it was the embodiment of mortal sin, while for others, it was an act of bravery in the pursuit of economic independence (Walkowitz 1982). In 1885 *the Criminal Law Amendment Act*, or “An Act to make further provision for the Protection of Women and Girls, the suppression of brothels, and other purposes,” was passed. An act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom with the territorial extent to England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland assumed the rise of the age of consent from 13 to 16 years old, laid down penalties for sexual offences against women and minors, and strengthened the already existing legislation against prostitution and homosexuality. That legislation provided the legal basis for Oscar Wilde’s conviction 10 years later for committing acts of “gross indecency with male persons”. That piece of legislation, also known as *the Labouchere Amendment*, was in effect in English law until 1967 and perpetuated the discrepancy in the age of consent between homosexual and heterosexual men, a disparity that persisted until the early 2000s.

The late 19th century was a period of the dynamic activity of the Social Purity Movement seeking to abolish prostitution and other sexual activities that it regarded immoral, including homosexuality. Initially, the movement opposed the regulation and legislation of prostitution. Later, however, it significantly expanded its activities to the age of consent, segregating prisoners according to their gender, opposing contraception, censoring pornography, and preventing “white slavery” (Gordon 2002: 72–86). The movement, having its roots in the early 19th-century moral reform movements, influenced the perception of feminism, eugenics, and birth control (Olasky 1992: 127). Roberts (2004) recapitulates how the ambitious expectations of the proponents of the moral reform met the reality of the late Victorian period using the following words: “the realities of public life after 1885 came as a shock to those who had prophesied a moral millennium, and a sobering experience even to those who saw their role as one supportive of existing authority”.

In the late 19th century, the word *homosexuality* emerged to identify the category of people attracted to members of the same sex (Sharma 2020). It did so in response to the need for a new concept determining a semi-public identity. While discussing the topic, Weeks (1977: 2) emphasises that “homosexuality has existed throughout history, in all types of society, among all social classes and peoples.” The 19th century did not invent homosexuality but gave it proper terminology. A plethora of offensive counterparts also developed at the time. According to Weeks (1977: 3), these were not merely “new labels for old realities: they point[ed] out to a changing reality, both in the ways a hostile society labelled homosexuality, and in the way, those stigmatised saw themselves”.

The 19th-century public opinion favoured strict legal regulations concerning homosexuality, seeing them as protective measures against decadence and

licentiousness in a society facing changing standards (Weeks 1977: 18). Lust was said to be the source of all evil. Both prostitution and homosexuality were treated as determinants of the degradation of society by moral purity campaigners during the 1880s (Liggins 2003). Robert Peel, who served as British Prime Minister in 1834–1835 and 1841–1846, publicly addressed homosexuality as a crime that “should not be mentioned among Christians”. This statement, coming from a person of such high position, categorically deemed homosexuality as an abnormality (Sharma 2020).

Despite shifting perceptions of social roles, the cultivation of traditional gender norms remained a prominent expectation. Men were encouraged to embrace traits associated with masculinity and patriotism. Due to the misconception that homosexuality draws from femininity, it was stigmatised as a “corruptor of young boys’ minds” (Tin 2008: 744). The military, being the epitome of those desirable values, was the strictest in terms of the penalisation of homosexuality. Even though capital punishment had been abolished for several other offences, it remained a standard procedure when a homosexual act was proven in the ranks of the armed forces.

In the 19th century, homosexuality was an open secret. While almost everyone knew about its existence, any manifestations were concealed to avoid public scrutiny. The case of Oscar Wilde became one of the first so widely reported in the press, and as noted by Weeks (1977: 21), his trials formed a “public image for the homosexual,” which forcefully granted the newly formed subculture limelight, presenting it in a unilateral and deprecating manner.

THE THEORETICAL APPROACH

The focus of the present study, conceptual metaphor is taken to be a way of understanding a complex issue by means of a less elusive, better delineated one (Lakoff, Johnson 1980). In certain circumstances, however, metaphor can be understood as much more than only a tool facilitating people’s perception of the surrounding reality. Identification, interpretation, and explanation of a metaphor together with its context, i.e., analysing it critically, may provide an insight into the “nature of particular ideologies,” and thus, work as a tool for explaining the potential motives behind certain messages. The author of this study shares the understanding of a metaphor proposed by Charteris-Black (2004), establishing it as essential to critical discourse analysis for it being concerned with “forming a coherent view of reality”. In other words, metaphor, in this paper, is understood as a cognitive instrument, a discursive phenomenon constituting part of ideology texts. Van Dijk (2011: 2) suggests that analysing discourse allows for the inspection of the use of “real language used by real language users,” for it incorporates “the study of language use, verbal interaction, conversation, texts, multimodal messages and

communicative events” highlighting that the discourse research is not only based on the abstract structures but “is part of an integrated account of a socially and culturally situated and cognitively based multimodal discourse interaction and human communication.” Cognitive linguistics provides Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with tools crucial for examining the complex relationships between language, cognition, and society. “Discourse shapes and reshapes the thought and practice of the speech community who owns it” (Hassen 2015), which means that critical analysis of a metaphor can reveal “insight into the beliefs, attitudes, and feelings of the discourse community in which they occur” as well as “the underlying intentions of the text producer [...] to identify the nature of particular ideologies” (Charteris-Black 2004: 13–24).

Fairclough *et al.* (2011: 357–378) point out to discourse as a powerful instrument to “produce and reproduce unequal power relations” characterised by “shared interest in the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political-economic cultural change in society”. Homophobia is an example of such an unequal power relation and the social problem that this paper addresses. Discourse, while reflecting reality, at the same time contributes to its creation (*ibidem*: 357–378).

The press coverage, nonetheless, represents only a one-sided point of view. Execution and spreading of biased ideology contributed to its consolidation in which distinguishing whether homophobic discourse was used to reflect, motivate, and/or shape proves nearly impossible. Although Wilde’s homosexuality had long been common knowledge, his downfall was ultimately precipitated by the trials and public allegations regarding his sexual preferences (Adut 2005). The “conspiracy of tolerance” of the middle class had long perpetuated the situation in which so long as his homosexuality had not been publicly acknowledged it did not threaten Victorian Puritanism. And even public acknowledgement did not allow the press to openly discuss the matter. Not once did the word *homosexuality* appear in the newspaper coverage of the trials. The censorship surrounding the coverage, combined with the intricacy and multidimensionality of metaphorical messages drastically hindered the process of examining the newspaper discourse. Yet, for the lack of recordings or living witnesses, newspaper accounts serve as a primary historical source of the 1895 trials, constituting a glimpse into 19th-century society. Analysing them in terms of discourse and being cognisant of the complexity and multifacetedness of the message can provide an insight into the underlying belief system of the late 19th-century society regarding the discussed matter.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis employs a corpus-based approach to identify metaphors and metaphorical expressions. The process involves four primary steps: retrieving research-relevant lexical material that exemplifies the target domain of the metaphor

in interest, determining which of the retrieved examples constitute parts of metaphorical expressions, identifying the metaphors realised by these expressions, and assessing the possibility of coherent grouping.

The traditional corpus-based approach assumes the retrieval of word forms. But because metaphors are “shaped by their linguistic context, genre, culture, and ideology, as well as their informational context” (Deignan 2008), establishing an empirical basis for their conceptual manifestations from a purely linguistic perspective proves problematic. Stefanowitsch (2006), for example, suggests a corpus-based approach to overcome these “methodological shortcomings”. To apply the method, a lexical item referring to the target domain under investigation must be determined. Further, its occurrences must be extracted from the corpus with all metaphorical expressions that the search word is a part of, to later group them into sequences that represent general mappings. Metaphorical Pattern Analysis (MPA) provides “a basis for target-domain oriented studies based on corpus data,” which allows for “retriev[ing] a large number of instances of a target domain item from a corpus and exhaustively identify the metaphorical patterns that it occurs with” (Stefanowitsch 2006). Using MPA, the reproducibility of source and target domains can be used for the emergence of “a candidate for a truly conceptual metaphor”.

Overall, metaphor identification is a contentious issue that has been widely debated in the academic community (e.g., Cameron 1999; Steen 1999; Pragglejaz Group 2007). Cameron (1999) suggests the application of clear criteria to ensure the validity of research on metaphor. Pragglejaz Group (2007) expands on the assumption with their suggestion of a Method for Identifying Metaphorically Used Words in Discourse (MIP). The analysis in this paper follows the procedure suggested by Wolf *et al.* (2010), which stems from Cameron (1999) and Pragglejaz Group (2007).

The validity of a metaphorical expression is assessed through a five-step procedure. First, the expression is examined alongside the target items to determine the overall meaning. Next, the sentence is analysed to identify the parts that collocate with the target domain items. Then, the parts of the sentence are checked in terms of collocating with more concrete category. If such collocation occurs, the procedure proceeds to establish if the target domain, despite contrasting with the concrete category, can be understood in these terms. In this process, the concrete category serves as the source domain for the formulated metaphor, which is used to facilitate the understanding of the complex item, i.e., the target domain. The analysis focuses on conceptual metaphors, specifically those relevant to the study of homophobic discourse, to uncover potential underlying homophobic premises within society.

As stated previously, the term *homosexuality* never appeared in the newspaper reports. Hence, it became imperative to acquire the necessary data by searching for keywords related to homosexuality and examining its the linguistic representations. To that end, following the example of Charteris-Black (2004), out of all the articles (367 in total), half underwent manual examination, which allowed for determining

the context and extract reoccurring key vocabulary items typical for homophobic discourse. The extracted key items addressing the issue were used to automatically search for them in the latter half of the articles.

The initial retrieval of key vocabulary items was predicated upon prior research that analysed homophobic discourse. This approach aimed to ascertain both historical and contemporary conceptualisations of homosexuality and investigate any potential correspondences between these conceptualisations and those internalised by individuals during the Victorian era. Hart-Brison (2016) distinguishes two conceptualisations of homosexuality typical for the America in the period between 1969 and 1992, i.e., medicalisation (i.e., comparing homosexuality to a mental illness) and deviation (i.e., treating homosexuality as something unnatural). Lhomond, Michaels (2006) in "Conceptualisation and measurement of homosexuality in sex surveys a critical review," determine the conceptualisation of homosexuality as a general social problem that has to be addressed (i.e., a threat). And Baker (2004) distinguishes all the above. All in all, the analysis revealed both differences and similarities. To the best of the author of this paper's knowledge, there are no conceptual metaphors in the trials that would suggest that Victorians understood homosexuality in terms of a mental illness. They did however understand it as a form of deviance and a social issue in need of addressing.

THE CORPUS

Wilde Trials International News Archive (<https://dhil.lib.sfu.ca/wilde/index.html>) constitutes the corpus for the analysis. The archive is affiliated with SFU's Digital Humanities Innovation Lab and Transfopress and operates out of Simon Fraser University Library. The development of the database began in 2014 and has continued since. The project was originally initiated by Colette Colligan, Michael Joyce, Sarah Bull, and Cécile Loyen.

All data for the analysis was retrieved between December 2021 and April 2022. Thus far, the corpus includes newspaper accounts from the period between April 1 and December 31, 1895, in five languages – French, English, German, Italian, and Spanish. The materials come from 28 countries and include 6764 articles from 346 newspapers, amounting to nearly 1.5 million words. Since the corpus is constantly developing, there are discrepancies in terms of data distribution. For example, there is only one article from Turkey and 1668 from France, which may be the result of the initial interest and relevance of the story, as well as the availability of the materials.

Notwithstanding the wide publicity that the trials received worldwide, the analysis focuses on British society exclusively and therefore does not take into consideration how they were reported elsewhere. The data for this analysis comes from four England-based newspapers: *The Times*, *The Standard*, *London Daily*

News, and *The Star*, and five Ireland-based newspapers: *The Belfast News-Letter*, *Irish Daily Independent*, *The Cork Examiner*, *Evening Herald*, and *The Freeman's Journal*, which accounted for a total of 367 articles. The decision to rely on these titles was made based on the language in which they were originally written and regional relevance for the study.

THE ANALYSIS

The goal of analysing 367 newspaper accounts of the 1895 trials was to investigate the discursively constructed image of homosexuality and its conceptualisations based on the language used therein. The analysis revealed two core groups of conceptual metaphors present in the press releases: those related to homosexuality, including homosexual acts, love, tendencies, and preferences, and those pertaining to the emotions, feelings, and attitudes surrounding the trials and public discussion of homosexuality.

IMMORALITY

The ensuing section addresses how homophobic discourse was shaped and articulated during the late Victorian era, following the example of the Oscar Wilde trials. Since newspaper censorship from the examined period never allowed an unsolicited use of the word *homosexuality*, it does not feature in the studied excerpts and conceptual metaphors structuring the image of a homosexual. Given the preoccupation of the Victorian society with morality and how homosexuality was regarded as deeply immoral, for the purpose of the present analysis the umbrella term *immorality* was used instead. Factors that determine a society's morality, influence, and shape each other, at the same time conditioning the definition of the phenomenon itself. The Social Purity Movement, which was active in English-speaking nations around the late 19th century and sought to abolish any activities that opposed Christian understanding of morality, including homosexuality. Consequently, it contributed to the perpetuation of the idea linking non-heteronormativity with immorality.

Conceptual metaphors discussed in this section include IMMORALITY IS POISON, IMMORALITY IS DIRT, IMMORALITY IS A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE, FIGHTING IMMORALITY IS A CRUSADE, IMMORALITY IS DECAY, and IMMORALITY IS DOWN. All utilising a range of pejorative source domains (i.e., POISON, DIRT, A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE, A CRUSADE, DECAY, and DOWN) to conceptualise a common target – *immorality*, i.e., *homosexuality*.

IMMORALITY IS POISON

The IMMORALITY IS POISON metaphor dehumanises homosexuals and constructs homosexuality as danger that should be neutralised. It assumes the presence of a victim, which in this understanding would be any person negatively affected by someone else's homosexuality, and a perpetrator, i.e., the homosexual who causes harm to the experiencer. This metaphor, based on the frame HARM TO A LIVING ENTITY, allows to talk about the abstract concept of *immorality* (homosexuality) in terms of a concrete experience related to bodily harm (i.e., poisoning). The mapping of concepts related to physical harm inflicted upon living organisms onto other domains that may not involve literal harm, highlights the underlying metaphorical mapping between physical and non-physical forms of harm. The use of relevant lexical units, e.g., *poison*, *poisonous*, *toxic*, *toxin*, *venom*, *venin*, *sting*, or *noxious* suggests that somehow homosexuality is as dangerous in terms of dissemination and being deadly as a poisonous animal or poison itself.

- (1) "We shall have purchased the pain and shame [...] those, who under the name of art or some other pretence, insidiously *poison our stage*, our literature, our drama, and the outskirts of our Press." (*Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Apr. 1895; Northern Ireland, Belfast).
- (2) "He referred to the defendant's letter to Lord A. Douglas, which Wilde said was a prose poem, and declared that it was *poison for a young man*." (*The Star*, 28 May 1895; Britain, Guernsey).

IMMORALITY IS DIRT

The IMMORALITY IS DIRT metaphor complements the MORALITY IS PURITY metaphor in expressions like, e.g., "pure heart," or "tainted reputation," which draw on the association between physical purity and moral goodness. Based on the mapping of concepts related to physical cleanliness and purity onto the domain of morality, this conceptual metaphor perpetuates the premise that following socially acceptable and desirable norms is reflected by the person's purity and, reflectively, not following them may result in one's spiritual contamination. It dehumanises homosexuals and structures homosexuality as dirt that should be cleaned and clearly determines the hierarchy of what is right and wrong. Lexical units relevant to this metaphor include *dirt*, *filth*, *filthy*, *grime*, *muck*, *unclean*, *sordidness*, or *squalor*.

- (3) "MINIMISE THE EVIDENCE of crime while condemning the pose, *the dalliance with filth*, which permitted Wilde to address to a youth like Lord

- Alfred Douglas the “madness of kissing” and “red and yellow wine” letters.” (*London Star – Special Edition*, 27 May 1895; Britain, London).
- (4) “The learned counsel who represented Lord Queensberry called attentions to a story, *a filthy narrative of the most disgusting character*, called “The Priest and the Acolyte,” of which the author, who signed himself “X,” should be thoroughly ashamed.” (*London Star – Special Edition*, 1 May 1895; Britain, London).
- (5) “It was a matter for the grave consideration of the jury as to whether the letter referring the madness of kissing pointed as *unclean relations and appetites* on both sides.” (*Irish Daily Independent*, 27 May 1895; Ireland, Dublin).
- (6) “If such revelations are in any way typical of aristocratic taste and high life, or even sections of it, what an amount of, seething *sordidness remains* veiled and hidden under the dark shadow of prudence and dread of publicity.” (*The Cork Examiner*, 05 Apr. 1895; Ireland, Cork).

IMMORALITY IS A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE

The IMMORALITY IS A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE metaphor dehumanises homosexuals and likens homosexuality to natural forces. This strategy is commonly applied in the immigrant discourse in which immigrants are conceptualised as a flood (Mujagić 2018; Rogos-Hebda 2020). It aims to evoke a sense of powerlessness, fear, and apprehension. Operating within the frame of MORAL CORRUPTION, which is understood as engaging in behaviours that digress from what is socially acceptable, this metaphorical framework conceptualises immorality as a destructive force that harms individuals, societies, and moral values. The mappings draw on the association between physical acts of destruction, and negative moral behaviour, suggesting that immoral actions may have detrimental consequences akin to the damaging effects of physical destruction. Expressions reflecting this understanding (e.g., “moral decay”), further perpetuate the intertwined evaluation of immoral behaviour in terms of physical destruction. In consequence, it may evoke negative emotions and reinforce the moral imperative to avoid immoral actions, and thus, work as a deterrent. The metaphor of a DESTRUCTIVE FORCE can be realised with the use of the following lexical units: *ruin, destroy, disastrous, destructive*.

- (7) “If it is so you are the author of the scandal, and no one else. The letters you have written about me are infamous, and I see that you are merely trying to *ruin your son* through me.” (*Irish Daily Independent*, 4 Apr. 1895; Ireland, Dublin).

- (8) “As to “Dorian Grey,” the moral of that was that the man who tried to *destroy his conscience* destroyed himself.” (*London Star*, 3 Apr. 1895; Britain, London).
- (9) “[...] and if the facts which he stated in his letter as to Mr. Wilde’s reputation and acts were correct, then not only was he justified in doing what he could to cut short what would most probably prove *a most disastrous acquaintance* for his son, [...]”. (*The Times*, 5 Apr. 1895; Britain, London).

FIGHTING IMMORALITY IS A CRUSADE

The FIGHTING IMMORALITY IS A CRUSADE metaphor is based on the analogy to a series of religious wars in the medieval period. It clearly sets a boundary between “us and them,” construing homosexuals as nonbelievers, sinners, and heterosexuals as superior warriors fighting in the name of the greater good, which was potentially employed to justify one’s behaviour. It mystifies and glorifies the homophobic campaign, putting it on a par with the fight for one’s soul.

- (10) “The management of the Lyceum, New York, has *led the crusade* by discontinuing the performances of ‘An Ideal Husband.’” (*Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Apr. 1895; Northern Ireland, Belfast).
- (11) “*The crusade in this country* against Oscar Wilde is spreading far beyond the limits of the theatre.” (*Belfast News-Letter*, 10 Apr. 1895; Northern Ireland, Belfast).

IMMORALITY IS DECAY

In the IMMORALITY IS DECAY metaphor, immorality is conceptualised as a form of decay that progressively eats away moral values, principles, and ethical standards. The mappings draw on the association between physical decay and the gradual deterioration of moral integrity. The metaphor implies that engaging in homosexual acts, i.e., “corrupted activities,” may leave a symbolic stain on one’s character and lead to the decomposition of one’s soul. DECAY naturally evokes disgust, which successfully both represents the perception and attitudes towards homosexuality, but also operates as a tool perpetuating the emotion. Furthermore, DECAY as a source domain used to structure homosexuality stands in opposition to thriving in life, which is achieved by pursuing high moral standards. Some of the relevant lexical units may include *rot*, *decay*, *decaying*, *rust*, *corrosion*, *spoil*.

- (12) “I thought the treatment rotten and *the subject rotten*.” (*The Standard*, 4 Apr. 1895; London).
- (13) “Miss Edwardes said: “I see in your hand *a sudden spoil of extraordinary notoriety*, whether for good or for evil I can’t tell. Shortly after that you will die.”” (*Evening Herald*, 8 Jun. 1895; Ireland, Dublin).

IMMORALITY IS DOWN

The IMMORALITY IS DOWN metaphor employs the source domain of verticality to structure homosexuality. The mapping draws on the irrevocable association of verticality and valence (as in e.g., “the lowest of the low”). It operates on the prevalent cultural premise that what is up and high on the scale is good, for example, the concept of Christian heaven. Accordingly, whatever is down and low on the scale must be bad, e.g., hell. The employment of this metaphor established the hierarchy, which determines which side is superior and applies moral value to one's sexual preferences.

- (14) “It is clear that if we are to tread safely the slippery path of civilisation, if we are not to *fall back into decadent paganism* – we must harden and simplify our lives.” (*Belfast News-Letter*, 28 May 1895; Northern Ireland, Belfast).
- (15) “The Solicitor-General said that it appeared as if counsel for the defence desired that *one man should go down* and another be saved because of a false glamour of art.” (*Irish Daily Independent*, 27 May 1895; Ireland, Dublin).
- (16) “HIS OWN STORY was that he wanted to get away from the evil company into which *he had fallen*, and that Wilde gave him £21 to take him to America.” (*London Star – Special Edition*, 1 May 1895; Britain, London).
- (17) “*The collapse of the case is a terrible fall for a man* of the lofty ambitions of Oscar Wilde.” (*Belfast News-Letter*, 6 Apr. 1895; Northern Ireland, Belfast).
- (18) “From all parts of the United States expressions of disgust towards *the fallen dramatist Oscar Wilde* are being reported, and whenever any of his works are in theatre bill they are being hastily withdrawn.” (*Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Apr. 1895; Northern Ireland, Belfast).

EMOTIONS, FEELINGS, AND ATTITUDES

Koschut (2017) sees emotion discourse as one of the tools for constructing social hierarchies. While drawing attention to the importance of language in “the construction of reality, identity, and power relations,” the author argues that “the scope of meanings that emerge from discourse analysis” may be greatly enhanced with the supplementary viewpoint of emotions. He regards emotions as “socially constructed representations of meaning that are linked to conceptions of identity and power”. Hence, the analysis of the newspaper accounts in terms of emotions, feelings, and attitudes, has had the potential to uncover the conceptualisations of the taboo topic of homosexuality, commonly referred to as “nameless offence,” “grave issue,” “a charge of the most serious kind,” or “indecent offence,” and facilitate the understanding of the effect the public display of the trials had on the public and the individuals involved.

The analysis revealed an overwhelming presence of intensive negative emotions surrounding the case. The set of conceptual metaphors discussed in the ensuing section is composed of the following: DISGUST IS FLUID IN A CONTAINER, HATE IS HEAT, FEAR IS COLD, GUILT IS A BURDEN, SORROW IS A BURDEN, and ANXIETY IS AN OBJECT.

DISGUST IS FLUID IN A CONTAINER

The DISGUST IS FLUID IN A CONTAINER metaphor interacts with the BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTIONS metaphor operating on the premise that EMOTIONS ARE SUBSTANCES. In this conceptual metaphor, disgust is understood as fluid, the intensity of disgust as the level of the fluid, and the body as a container for the disgust. This relates to the emotions that encountering homosexuality evokes in some people, and how they explain what they feel through the prism of bodily experiences. Just like any container has its capacity and can overflow, this analogy can stimulate or express the feeling of overwhelm and loss of sense of control.

- (19) “The story *filled me with disgust.*” (*The Standard*, 4 Apr. 1895; Britain, London).
- (20) “[A]nd the imperturbable coolness, the flippant epigrams, and the audacious ideas so cleverly expressed by Oscar Wilde – in short, the Oscar Wilde pose, *filled every right-thinking man with disgust*, if not dismay.” (*Belfast News-Letter*, 6 Apr. 1895; Northern Ireland, Belfast).

HATE IS HEAT

The HATE IS HEAT metaphor addresses bodily reactions to intense emotions, which may result in the rise of temperature seen in the EMOTIONAL INTENSITY IS TEMPERATURE metaphor. Commonly used examples of such a metaphor include expressions like “breathe fire,” or “blood boil”. The heat of the body is applied as a source domain to explain the intensity of hate formed in response to contact with homosexuality. The level of hate is understood utilising the heat level. The higher the temperature, the more intense the hate towards someone. Usually, being mild, inert, and indifferent towards a situation does not evoke such bodily reactions. Thus, it could be argued that the individual applying the HATE IS HEAT metaphor must have felt strong emotions regarding the discussed matter.

- (21) “*MADE HIS BLOOD BOIL TO SEE HIS SON'S AND WILDE'S [...]*”
 (*Belfast News-Letter*, 22 May 1895; Northern Ireland, Belfast).

Also visible were linguistic metaphors emphasising the emotionally charged nature of the matter with *hate* at their cores (as shown in examples (22) and (23)).

- (22) “The studied fairness of the summing up had not prepared anybody for *the burning, scathing words* in which his lordship passed the sentence.” (*Irish Daily Independent*, 27 May 1895; Ireland, Dublin).
- (23) “A large crowd assembled and listened to *the heated language*. Raising his voice to a loud pitch, the Marquess, turning to the people around him, exclaimed, “I tell all these strangers that you have been a bad son from your birth, and that I now publicly disown you.”” (*Irish Daily Independent*, 12 Apr. 1895; Ireland, Dublin).

FEAR IS COLD

The FEAR IS COLD metaphor is motivated physiologically. It is related to the fact that FEAR and COLD may evoke the same sensation in the body, i.e., share the same physiological representations. Thus, one’s body may react in the same way to the feeling of FEAR and COLD, e.g., shake. Furthermore, the expression “turned my blood cold” may refer to the feeling of helplessness and inability to move when faced with something scary, which is reflected by the metaphor of blood congealing and slowing down one’s reactions. FEAR IS COLD and HATE IS HEAT metaphors reflect how, depending on a person’s personal opinions and experiences, various people may conceptualise the same concept differently. However, it does not imply that those are mutually exclusive despite the semantic contrast.

- (24) “It *turned my blood cold*. Never have I seen such a sight in human nature as I saw in your horrible faces.” (*Irish Daily Independent*, 5 Apr. 1895; Ireland, Dublin).
- (25) “[...] the defendant called upon his son to cease his intimacy with the man Wilde. His *blood had turned cold* at the sight of their faces.” (*The Dublin Evening Mail*, 4 Apr. 1895; Ireland, Dublin).

GUILT IS A BURDEN

Kövecses (2000: 61) points out to the fact that GUILT and SORROW are often conceptualised as BURDEN. Following the assumptions of Force Dynamics (Talmy 1988), Kövecses suggests that the implementation of this conceptual metaphor implies the imbalance in the hierarchy of power that exhibits a force dynamic pattern between two elements, the agonist and antagonist. Kövecses further suggests that “the external pressure caused by BURDEN on the body-container corresponds to the stress or difficulty caused by the emotion on the self,” which explains the relation in which the agonist (the weaker entity) is losing the battle with the stronger entity. In the GUILT IS A BURDEN metaphor entitles physical restraints that come with experiencing the emotion. Thus, the emotion itself may become realised into a physical object depending on this intensity. In the face of homophobic discourse, the use of such a metaphor implies that homosexual tendencies are wrong and have serious consequences, the greatest of which should be shame for one’s transgressions.

- (26) “[...] not for the jury, but for the learned Judge, as to what amount of *blame as for a criminal action should be thrown upon* the defendant in respect to the matter [...]”. (*The Times*, 4 Apr. 1895; Britain, London).
- (27) “The London Evening News has received from Oscar Wilde a letter stating that it was impossible to prove his case without putting Lord Alfred Douglas into the witness box, and avoid this, he withdrew from the case and will *bear on his own shoulders the blame* [...]”. (*The Star*, 6 Apr. 1895; Britain, Guernsey).
- (28) “Rather than put him in so painful a position I determined to retire from the case and to *bear on my own shoulders whatever ignomy and shame* might result from my prosecuting Lord Queensberry.” (*The Cork Examiner*, 6 Apr. 1895; Ireland, Cork).

SORROW IS A BURDEN

In addition to what has been stated in section GUILT IS A BURDEN, not only does the implementation of the notion of BURDEN imply that homosexuals should experience guilt for the gravity of their offences, but also implies that their family members also suffer the consequences of their actions. It could be argued that this conceptualisation denotes that having a homosexual family member is or should be mourned as experiencing the death of the loved one.

- (29) “The utmost sympathy is felt for his wife and his two boys, [...], and there is a general feeling that something should be done for them to lighten *the great load of sorrow*, which, through no fault of their own, is a great deal more than they can bear.” (*Belfast News-Letter*, 25 May 1895; Northern Ireland, Belfast).
- (30) “The smart appearance, and smiling, alert manner of the new comer contrasted very strongly with *the utter dejection* exhibited by his fellow prisoner who moodily acknowledged him as he stepped to his side.” (*London Daily News*, 8 Apr. 1895; Britain, London).

ANXIETY IS AN OBJECT

In the metaphor ANXIETY IS AN OBJECT, ANXIETY is understood as a physical entity and manifested by the use of verbs typically associated with physical entities, i.e., *give* and *have*. The source domain takes the form of “possession” and the target domain “experiencing a state”. So, the experiencer of anxiety is also its possessor. Emotions, feelings, and attitudes are complex. People’s typically analytical brains usually structure them as objects to facilitate the process of organising and comprehending them, but also to avoid being overwhelmed by them. Representing ANXIETY accompanied by a lexical unit “terrible” could underline the extent to which a person has to struggle with it.

- (31) “It must have been present to your lordship’s mind that those representing Mr. Oscar Wilde in this case *had before them A VERY TERRIBLE ANXIETY* that they could not conceal from themselves [...]” (*London Star*, 5 Apr. 1895; Britain, London).
- (32) “He is still suffering from a form of depression, but is said to be improving daily, although for a time his mental state *gave the prison officials [...]* some anxiety.” (*The Cork Examiner*, 8 Jun. 1895; Ireland, Cork).

CONCLUSIONS

Although considerable improvements in terms of equality and mutual respect have taken place, both Sabatini (2018) and Baker (2004) examine the persistence of homophobia in the public discourse. The extent to which the progress falls short of expected progressiveness became evident when the similarities between the discourse analysed by Baker (2004) and the one analysed in this paper emerged. During the debates over the age of consent for non-heteronormative sex, opponents of the reform constructed their arguments by drawing upon target domains that often overlapped with the ones that date back over a hundred years ago, present in the context of the Oscar Wilde trials, e.g., DANGER.

The otherness and deviation from the generally accepted social norms have always resulted in the ostracisation of the involved individuals. The world is governed by laws that determine and establish a clear hierarchy of power that sets boundaries between the weaker and the stronger, or more precisely – the majority and minority. Discourse is a powerful tool to “produce and reproduce unequal power relations” (Fairclough *et al.* 2011) and homophobia is an example of such an unequal power relation and the social problem that this paper aimed to address.

Through extracting, analysing, grouping, and explaining the conceptual metaphors found in the press coverage of the 1895 Oscar Wilde trials, this study intended to show how the late Victorian society constructed homosexuality. The analysis confirmed preliminary assumptions regarding the pejorative picture of homosexuality and a homosexual in the late Victorian era, as well as the emotionally charged attitude towards the matter. All that under the cover of euphemisms and conceptual metaphors supporting the ubiquitous censorship, further perpetuated the existence of an open secret and ensured the safety of Victorian morality, never publicly and officially admitting to the existence of homosexuality.

This analysis opens the discussion concerning the 1895 Oscar Wilde trials as a source of homophobic discourse. Further research is needed to develop an even more in-depth understanding of the topic at hand.

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