

OSCAR WILDE ON SCREEN



Week Three

Nihilists, Duchesses and Heads on Plates

Welcome to *Oscar Wilde on Screen*

Week Three

Welcome back. We've spent a couple of weeks looking at Oscar Wilde's prose work (and, of course, there's still *Dorian Grey* to come in a week or so) but I thought it was time that we turned our attention to the field in which Oscar is most regularly lionised: the theatre.

We'll start not with the most famous plays – those most regularly thought when the phrase Wildean gets chucked about – but three early plays: *Vera*, *The Duchess of Padua* and *Salomé*.

Together, though adaptations – particular of the first two are sparse – they form a fascinating look at an artist in development. *Vera, or the Nihilists* was written in 1880 and first staged in 1883.

It was, to put it mildly, not a success, folding after the first week's performances.

The Duchess of Padua was written in 1883 but not staged until 1891. To the day, it is rarely staged – although it has been adapted for opera more than once.

And then there is *Salomé*. Written in 1891, Wilde would never see it staged. Initially falling foul of the censors due to its depiction of biblical characters, it finally came to the stage in 1896, by which time Oscar was already in prison. It also bears the distinction of having been originally written in French, largely because Oscar wanted to see if he could.

It is perhaps the element of sensuality in *Salomé* that has, though it is less often revisited than the comedies, drawn certain writers and directors to it over to years, often with one eye on a particular side of Oscar Wilde's life.

It is certainly a fascinating play that, in many ways, captures the contradictions at the heart of Oscar the writer and Oscar the human

being better more succinctly than some of the works for which he's better known.

FILMS WEEK THREE

Wilde in New York (2024)
Dir. Erik Ryding & John Cooper

The Gilded Age (2023)
Dir. Michael Engler

The Duchess of Padua (2024)
Dir. Fleur Snow

Salomé (1918)
Dir. J. Gordon Edwards

Salomé (1923)
Dir. Alla Nazimova & Charles Bryant

Salomé's Last Dance (1988)
Dir. Ken Russell

Salomé (2013)
Dir. Al Pacino