

**THE HAPPY PRINCE 2018**

105 `minutes

Directed by **Rupert Everett**

Starring: Rupert Everett, Colin Firth, Emily Watson

Born in 1854, in Dublin, Oscar Wilde was an author, playwright and poet, a popular literary figure in late Victorian England. The film portrays the last years of his life and starts out with Wilde in near-destitution having flashbacks of his glory days. As a framing device, *The Happy Prince* threads that children's story throughout, read by Oscar to his enthralled sons in flashbacks. The devastating physical and mental effects of Wilde's imprisonment and two years of hard labor on charges of gross indecency come back in memory shards of that hellish experience. The lowest point that sealed his contempt for Britain was a prison transfer, recalled in vivid images of him remaining chained to a guard at a train station, abused and spat upon by the gathering crowd. Those incursions from the past continually lurch into the present as Oscar ignores the advice of Robbie and Reggie, choosing to run off to Italy with Bosie. When his refusal to quit his male lover causes Constance, in Heidelberg with the boys, to cut off his allowance, Oscar blindly trusts in Bosie's empty assurance of his family income. But that money source also dries up, leaving Oscar to retreat back to Paris to die.

Critics' comments:

The last days of Oscar Wilde are brought to the screen by Rupert Everett, who has embodied the playwright before on stage in David Hare's play *The Judas Kiss*, as well as having taken part in onscreen adaptations of Wilde's work, most notably in Oliver Parker's versions of *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

He obviously feels a kinship with the noble and ultimate tragic wit that was Wilde and relishes recounting a semi-imagined final few years for him. Following his infamous libel trial against the Marquess of Queensberry (with whose son Bosie Wilde had had a torrid affair), Wilde was imprisoned in Reading Gaol, and after his release into an exiled life in Paris, Wilde was a broken man.

Nevertheless, this film follows Wilde as he re-embarks on his love affair with the aristocratic Bosie, played with glee by Colin Morgan, despite their lives now being one of squalor and illness rather than effete frippery and critical plaudits. Friends Robbie Ross (Edwin Thomas) and Reggie Turner (Colin Firth) attempt to come to Wilde's aid but they are rebuffed, with Wilde enduring homophobic encounters and hypocrisy all around him.

Class had made Wilde a victim, and ultimately his hubris and his tragic love for Bosie brought him down. His wife Constance, played with quiet fire by Emily Watson, cuts him off from any money, leaving him in the gutter looking up at the stars. He recounts his fairytale *The Happy Prince* to the rent boys he encounters, his ego dented.

In Everett's hands, not just as a lead but also as writer/director, Wilde discovers redemption, raging at his fall from grace, but also damaged and perhaps less arrogant than he had been. Wilde had thought he could take on the establishment and win. He could not. In *The Happy Prince*, Wilde's final years become an edifying portrait of an unjust society and a man coming to terms with who and what he is. (from *Buzz*, Keiron Self)