

The Happy Prince **B2**



*Ruper Evereth
as Oscar Wilde*

Ocean Films



The title of the latest biopic about Irish author Oscar Wilde is *The Happy Prince*. Yet it is about an extremely unhappy period of Wilde's life.

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was one of the most popular, successful and recognisable writers in Victorian London. His comic plays, such as *The Importance of Being Earnest*, were extremely popular in his lifetime and continue to be regularly played, and filmed, today. Wilde was a real celebrity, in an era when mass literacy and mass media in the form of newspapers and magazines allowed millions to glimpse the lives of the rich and famous.

Wilde had a comfortable and aristocratic upbringing in Dublin. His mother was a well-known Irish poet and supporter of independence, while his father was a doctor, an eye specialist so eminent that he treated Queen Victoria, and became Sir William Wilde.

Oscar was a brilliant student, first at Trinity College, Dublin, and then at Oxford, and he became known for his flamboyant clothes, long hair and brilliant conversation.

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glimpse (v) discover, get to see

upbringing (n) the way a child is cared for and taught how to behave while growing up

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Wilde married Constance Lloyd, a wealthy young Englishwoman, in 1884, and they had two sons. It was for his sons that Wilde wrote a collection of children's stories called *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*.

Rupert Everett's first encounter with Wilde was as a child, when his mother read him "The Happy Prince". When he became an actor, he played in several of Wilde's plays, and felt a real affinity with him. So when he had no acting work, he started to write a biopic about the author.

Fame and Notoriety

There were already three biopics about Wilde, two from 1960 and one from 1997. However, Everett decided to focus on the final years of Wilde's short life, a particularly difficult period.

In 1895, Wilde was at the height of his success, with four hit plays in three years, but a tragic fall was approaching.

Since 1891, he had been having an affair with an Oxford student, Lord Alfred Douglas. Douglas's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, had discovered the affair and tried to warn Wilde off. Homosexuality was illegal in England, but perhaps Wilde thought his fame protected

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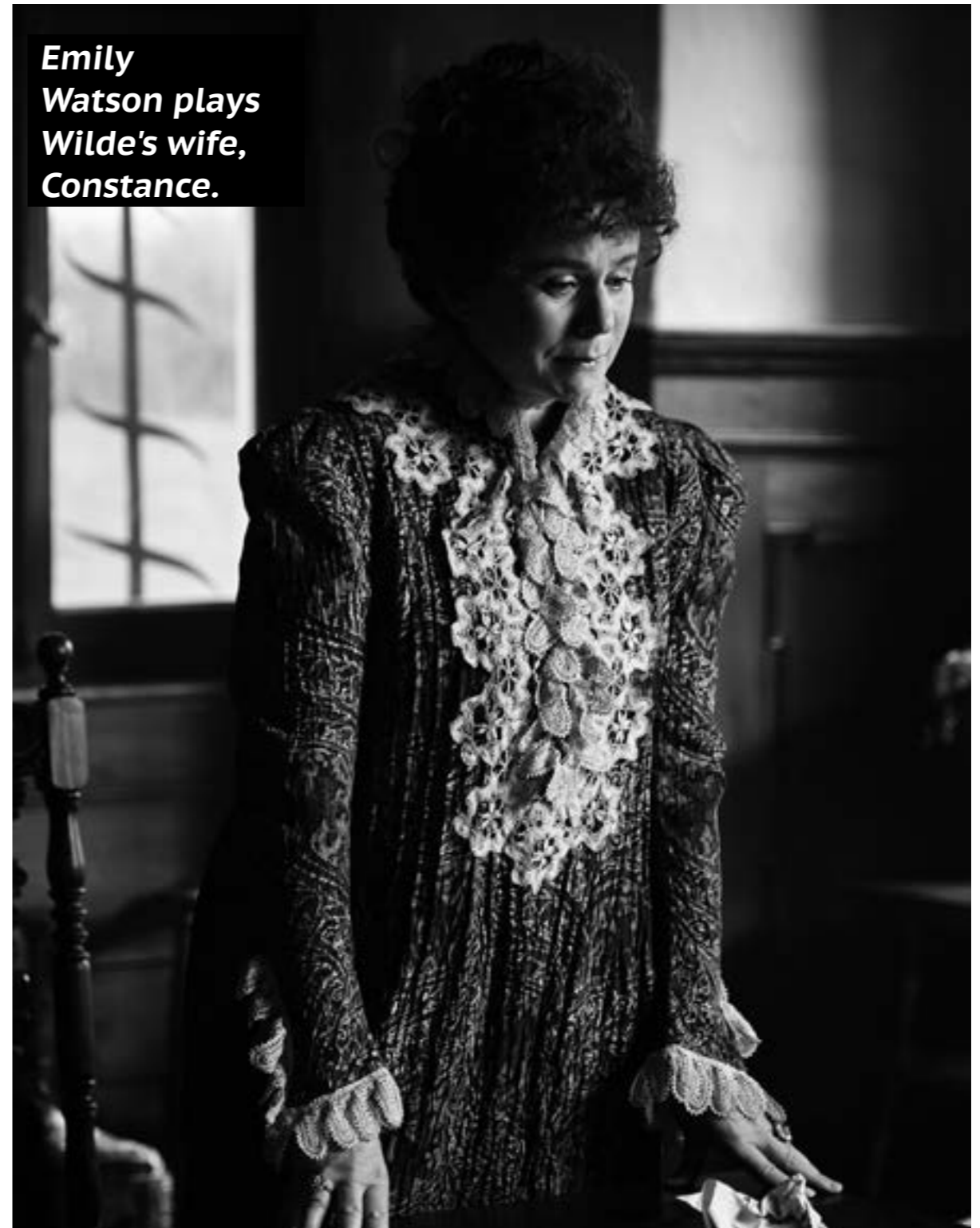
wealthy (adj) rich

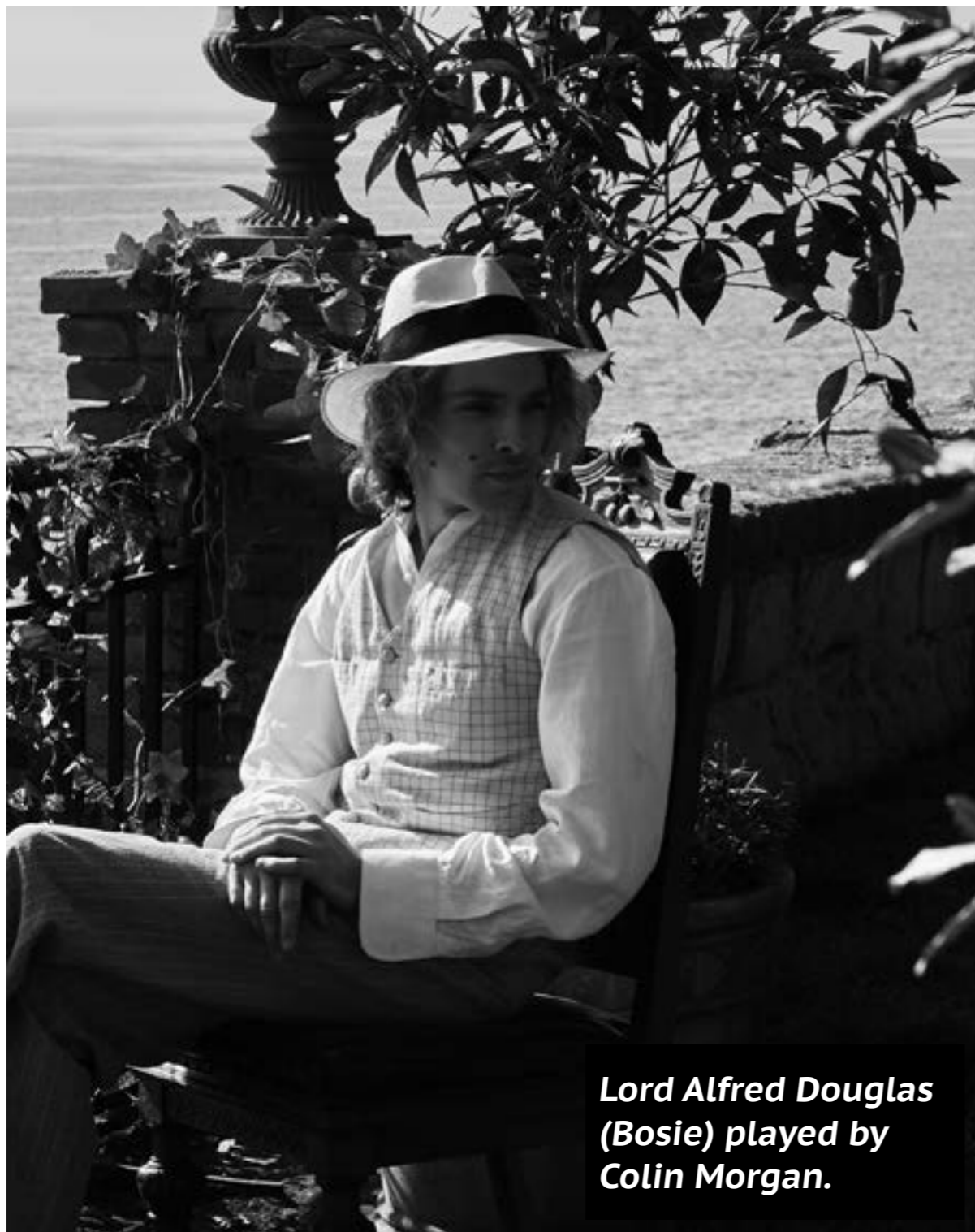
at the height (exp) the maximum

fall (n) decline, drop

warn off (v) to advise sb not to do sth, or stop doing it

**Emily
Watson plays
Wilde's wife,
Constance.**





**Lord Alfred Douglas
(Bosie) played by
Colin Morgan.**

him. In any case, not only did Wilde continue the affair, seeing “Bosie”, but when Queensberry sent Wilde a card accusing him of homosexuality, Wilde took Queensberry to court.

It was a fatal mistake. It opened Wilde to being prosecuted for homosexuality. In 1895, he was sentenced to two years’ hard labour in prison. It broke the brilliant, elegant man who appreciated all the finest things in life.

Telling Wilde’s Story

Whereas the three previous films about Wilde ended with his imprisonment, Everett was interested in looking at the author’s life after he was released. For the three years he had left to live, he lived in exile in Europe, before dying in poverty in Paris on 30 November, 1900. In those years, he tried to reconcile with his wife, before her death in 1898. She had fled to Europe, too, and had changed her name and the boys’ to Holland, to avoid the humiliation of being connected to Wilde. But when Bosie got in touch with him, he seemed drawn inexorably to repeat his mistakes.

Everett explains, “That’s what I find so appealing about him, the humanity of him, the mistakes that he makes... And they include incredible snobbery, incredible vanity,

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inexorably (adv) in a way that cannot be stopped or changed



incredible ego. But all these things I find very appealing about him. It's not just the work for me, it's the whole character.”

The short story “The Happy Prince” is about a prince who lives a happy, carefree existence within the walls of his palace. When he dies, he is transformed into a statue on a high column above the city. From this viewpoint, he can see his subjects, and discovers how poor and difficult their lives often are. In Wilde’s case, he discovered how poor and difficult life could be.

