T.C.
ORDU ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI

AN EXAMINATION OF THE REFLECTION OF ADAPTATION THEORY IN MARK RAVENHILL'S HANDBAG ON OSCAR WILDE'S THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

Yeşim YILMAZ

DANIŞMAN
Assist. Prof. Dr. Cüneyt ÖZATA

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

ORDU 2021

ÖĞRENCİ BEYAN METNİ

Yüksek Lisans tezi olarak savunduğum "An Examination of the Reflection of Adaptation Theory in Mark Ravenhill's Handbag on Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest" adlı çalışmamın, tarafımdan bilimsel ahlak ve geleneklere aykırı düşecek bir yardıma başvurmadan yazdığımı ve yararlandığım kaynakların "Kaynakça" bölümünde gösterilenlerden farklı olmadığını, belirtilen kaynaklara atıf yapılarak yararlandığımı belirtir ve bunu onurumla doğrularım.

09/07/2021

Yeşim YILMAZ

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my special thanks of gratitude to my thesis advisor Assist. Prof. Dr. Cüneyt ÖZATA for his support and motivation.

I would also like to thank our head of department, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Turgay Han for his invaluable guidance in academic research and writing throughout the writing of this dissertation.

In addition, I would like to thank my family, my mother and sister for their emotional support as they have always been by my side during all my studies. Finally, I could not have completed this dissertation without the support of my friend Büşra Yurtalan, Seda Açıkgöz and Nazlı Nur Yalmıç who always motivated me whenever I felt down.

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to focus on discussing Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag* as an in-yer-face adaptation of Oscar Wilde's Victorian comedy play, *The Importance of Being Earnest.* To count *Handbag* among the other British plays of the 1990s, the play is investigated through Aleks Sierz's coinage of in-yer-face theatre along with the adaptations theories of Julie Sanders, Catherine Rees and Linda Hutcheon. Firstly, *Handbag* is examined in the decade which it emerges in and becomes one of the plays that represent the new writing movement in British theatre that starts to become fashionable again among the young people in the 1990s, right after the fall of Thatcher's government. After such an investigation of *Handbag* as an in-yer-face play, it is also explored as an adaptation of Wilde's canonical Victorian play. The adaptation theories of the aforementioned theoreticians are used to investigate how Ravenhill uses a comedy play that was written a century earlier in order to create a shocking and provocative play. In short, this study analyzes Ravenhill's play as an in-yer-face adaptation that opens new windows to read and interpret Wilde's Victorian play.

Key Words: British theatre, In-yer-face theatre, Adaptation, Ravenhill, Wilde

ÖZET

Bu çalışma Mark Ravenhill'in *Handbag* adlı oyununu Oscar Wilde'ın *The Importance of Being Earnest* adlı komedi oyununun bir in-yer-face uyarlaması olarak incelemeyi hedefler. Julie Sanders, Catherine Rees ve Linda Hutcheon gibi önde gelen kuramcıların adaptasyon teorilerinin yanı sıra, 1990'ların diğer İngiliz oyunları arasında değerlendirebilmesi için, *Handbag* Aleks Sierz'in in-yer-face theatre (suratına tiyatro) terimi üzerinden incelenir. Öncelikle, yazıldığı dönem içerisinde İngiliz tiyatrosunda ortaya çıkan ve Thatcher hükümetinin düşmesinin hemen ardından 1990'lı yıllarda tiyatroyu gençler arasında yeniden popüler yapan yeni yazma türünü temsil eden diğer oyunlar arasında incelenir. *Handbag,* in-yer-face tiyatro oyunu olarak incelenmesinin ardından, Oscar Wilde'ın klasik Viktoryan oyununun bir uyarlaması olarak ele alınmıştır. Yukarıda bahsedilen kuramcıların adaptasyon teorileri Ravenhill'in şok edici ve provokatif bir oyun yaratmak için yüz yıl öncesinde yazılmış bir komedi oyununu nasıl yeniden yazdığını analiz etmek için kullanılmıştır. Kısacası bu çalışma Ravenhill'in oyununu, Wilde'ın oyununu okumak ve yorumlamak için yeni pencereler açan bir uyarlama olarak ele alır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngiliz tiyatrosu, Suratına Tiyatro, Uyarlama, Adaptasyon, Ravenhill, Wilde

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary English playwright Mark Ravenhill has great many contributions to the Contemporary British drama. The playwright deals with significant political, cultural, and aesthetic movements as main sources to direct, feed and nourish his art being one of the most crucial taste makers of theatre world in Britain. This study first examines Ravenhill's way of adapting an old British play to the modern British theatre by restating its place in the emergence of "in-yer-face" theatre in 1990s. By doing so, it investigates how Ravenhill brings the past and present together in one single play- *Handbag* where he blends two parallel stories, one of which is from the past and the other as a new one. *Handbag* is an adaptation that is derived from *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde; however, it is not merely a reprising of it. In his play, Ravenhill both rewrites the original play by reimagining the events from the adapted play in one part of *Handbag* and also creates a new contemporary story line in parallel to it. These two parallel stories in *Handbag* create a tangible and clear dialogue between the past and present, which makes it way different from many other adaptations. The Victorian plot of the play bearing many allusions to Oscar Wilde's play accompanies Ravenhill's contemporary characters as an illusion and fantasy in *Handbag*. Ravenhill's play needs a considerable attention in that it plays a vital role in British theatre of the 1990s and needs an extensive analysis as an adaptation of an old classic.

Examining the methods that Ravenhill uses while adapting Wilde's Victorian play from the late 1890s, this thesis also analyzes the play in terms of the possible discussions about social issues such as mother and parent figures, family and sexual relationships bearing in mind that it is an adaptation, thanks to the fact that two parallel plots in the play help raise questions about the relationship between our contemporary society and the Victorian society back in time. This study also brings *Handbag* up as an in-yer-face play in contrast to Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* which is a comedy play. Being one of the most famous forerunners of British theatre in the 1990s, Mark Ravenhill's plays are categorized as in-yer-face within the context of both its content and structure.

Suggesting the years after 1950s as the new writing era in British theatre, Alex Sierz puts forward five different waves in general forming this 'new writing' movement. The fourth wave brings out "a new generation of in-yer-face

playwrights, such as Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, emerged in the 1990s, [...] (Sierz, 2011, p. 19)". In-yer-face theatre, which is often associated with concepts such as violence and sexuality, has the most comprehensive and iconic definition by Sierz in his book, *In-yer-face Theatre: British Drama Today:* "[...] any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it till they get the message" (Sierz, 2000, p. 4). In addition to that, theatre critics and audiences attribute words such as 'scandalous' and 'disgusting' to in-yer-face plays because of their frankness and boldness, thus labelling them as unusual compared to the conventional plays that are supposed to amuse the audience and help them enjoy their time. Together with this, adapting old canonical texts to the British Theatre has also been one of the most common ways of producing theatre plays under this new writing wave in the 1990s.

As a result, there was a recession in the production of original plays, which is described by David Edgar as "a nationwide epidemic of adaptations" (Edgar, 1999, p. 18-19, as cited in Sierz, 2011) during the late 1980s. Rewriting old classics and adapting them to the British theatre became a very common way during those years afterwards. Sierz says young writers such as Mark Ravenhill and Sarah Kane having a significant impact on British Theatre "introduced a new sensationalism: whatever you think of in-yer-face theatre- a sensibility which was characterized by explicit portrayals of sex and violence, with a fresh directness of expression, rawness of feeling and bleakness of vision-[...] (2011, p. 21)". In-yer-face is referred to as a sensibility rather than a movement as there is no obvious coming together of these writers and planning what they are doing. Kan says that "also, the fact that in-yer-face is not a movement, but a sensibility corresponds wonderfully to this idea of coolness; these writers are not constrained under any manifesto or any leader, their plays are the expression of their individuality, not a movement's ideals (Kan, 2015, p.14)". This individuality of the in-yer-face plays is a reflection of the time and culture of the society in which it emerges.

This study deals with Ravenhill's *Handbag* as an in-yer-face play adapted from Oscar Wilde's play; so, it is no wonder that the fact that *Handbag* is an adaptation which brings new perspectives into the analysis of the adapted play. 'The adaptation' refers to Ravenhill's *Handbag* and 'the adapted play' refers to the source play, so these expressions are used to make clear which text is referred to

throughout this study. Ravenhill in his *Handbag* gives his readers an opportunity to compare and contrast the past and present contexts in order to analyze mother, family, marriage, and parenting issues through his violent and fierce play. The twofold storyline in the adaptation reminds the reader to evaluate the play in reference to the original play. Additionally, these two plots present in *Handbag* creates a chance for the reader to compare two different centuries. Two different parts in the play make the reader compare them to each other while comparing the whole play to the adapted play at the same time. As *Handbag* re-imagines the events from Wilde's Victorian play as a parallel story to the contemporary story in it, the common social images present both in Wilde's play and Ravenhill's version of it will help reflect the oscillation between the Victorian and contemporary ways of parenting and familial relations in this study.

In *Handbag*, Ravenhill recasts some of the characters from Wilde's play. Through these characters laying a bridge between two plays, Victorian values are dealt through a new perspective in a different context and compared to the contemporary world. Values and social norms are what the characters in both plays are being criticized for by the playwrights from a common point of view. In the adapted play, the Victorian values are dealt with in a satirical way and the society's reaction to them are made fun of implicitly. The supposed importance of familial background and relations are one of the main points being satirized by Wilde in his play because it is just for financial concerns. However, the main point had better be the responsibility of the family toward their children. Making fun of this kind of exaggerated Victorian ideals, Wilde misses one important issue to deal with and focus on in his play on purpose. It is the ignorance of parenting responsibility. This kind of ignorance that is superficially touched upon in the original play resonates and is taken on board again in a hundred years later context in Ravenhill's version of it. In Ravenhill's play, there is another baby ignored by his parents although his parents' intention is to provide a safe and caring environment for him. However, they end up in a disaster when they lose the baby at the end of the play. Their concerns and attention do not lead them to be good parents as they are driven by their own earthly pleasures. So, the original play and its adaptation are arguable from the same perspectives as much as different ones.

Following this, it is critical to compare two plays in terms of common and distinct content and structure to find out and analyze how Ravenhill makes *Handbag*'s reader remember Wilde's play. Ravenhill's choice to adapt a comedy play from the late 19th century satirizing Victorian age values cannot be counted as a coincidence. However, Ravenhill's choice might seem hard to account for, his purpose seems to be intentional regarding the fact that adapting a text from a totally different age is a very convenient way to compare two different periods in terms of common problems in society. It looks like a specific choice made to demonstrate and prove the fact that our society is not that distinct from the Victorian society in the 1890s. So, *Handbag* offers a complicated, but absolute portrait of Victorian way of living with a contemporary twist to it and lets us open a road today to guide our own contemporary society.

In addition to Aleks Sierz's coinage of in-yer-face theatre, the main source of this thesis is analyzed through several adaptation theories. There are various types of ideas generally held by adaptation theoreticians, however, this study is confined to cover three of them which are the theories of Julie Sanders, Linda Hutcheon, and Catherine Rees.

To the author's best knowledge, few studies have directly addressed Ravenhill's *Handbag* as an in-yer-face adaptation of Wilde's play in detail. It has been less frequently examined through adaptation theories alongside Aleks Sierz's coinage and categorization of in-yer-face theatre. Although there are several studies that deal with *Handbag*, just like many other plays of Mark Ravenhill, as an in-yer-face play, most of the previous researches do not take it into account as an in-yer-face adaptation of Wilde's play. A key limitation of this research is that it mainly covers certain adaptation theories and Aleks Sierz's coinage of in-yer-face theatre; but leaves out the theories of intertextuality which would need a totally new perspective and area of research.

This study has two main aims. First, it tries to examine how the playwright deals with social issues such as family, marriage, parenting responsibility, hypocrisy, and women's position in society in Ravenhill's play adapted from a century older play by Oscar Wilde. For that, it questions what kind of different methods Mark Ravenhill uses while "rewriting" Wilde's play and tries to find out what purpose and motivation he might have. Secondly, it tries to analyze how this

purpose and these methods come together and help him create an in-yer-face play. For these two aims, this thesis mainly seeks to answer the following questions. What are Ravenhill's methods in making use of Wilde's play? What is his purpose and motivation behind? Why does he adapt a comedy play? How do his purpose and methods come together and help place the play among others of the same period as an in-yer-face play?

The first chapter of this thesis gives information about the contemporary British drama covering the 1980s and mostly the 1990s with a specific focus on Mark Ravenhill and his *Handbag*. It begins with introducing Mark Ravenhill as one of the forerunners of the new writing style and sensibility in the 1990s. Then it presents a short introduction of his *Handbag*. After summarizing how in-yer-face drama emerges after British drama gets rid of Thatcher's censorship, it finally examines *Handbag* through Aleks Sierz's coinage of in-yer-face theatre in detail.

The second chapter examines Ravenhill's *Handbag* as an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest.* This analysis of the play consists of two main parts. In the first part, several ways that Ravenhill resorts to while using Wilde's play are explored. The way Ravenhill uses Wilde's characters, story line and context to recreate the original play in a different dimension is explored in detail. The second part discusses *Handbag* through similar social issues such as marriage, family, parenting responsibility, women's position in society and hypocrisy to the source play. The social values in the Victorian society are reinterpreted in a contemporary context in *Handbag* taking Wilde's play as a reference. So, this chapter finally explores how Ravenhill reinterprets them in his contemporary play.

CHAPTER 1: CONTEMPORARY BRITISH DRAMA AND MARK RAVENHILL AS AN IN-YER-FACE PLAYWRIGHT

1.1. Mark Ravenhill and His Plays

Mark Ravenhill is one of the forerunners of British Theatre in the nineties as a contemporary British playwright with his plays as examples of in-yer-face drama. His explicit way of dealing with the social and economic issues of his time through his violent and reckless characters who are only concerned with their own pleasure has led him become one of the most famous playwrights of his time. He was mentioned in Aleks Sierz's guide to the 1990s British theatre and labelled as an in-yer-face playwright. English theatre after the 90's is when in-yer-face theatre was in its peak and gained its fame among the contemporary British playwrights. The period right after Margaret Thatcher who was the first woman prime minister of England is referred to as naughty nineties because of the offensive, disturbing, pessimistic, and violent plays of the time. Being one of the three prominent writers of in-yer-face theatre, Mark Ravenhill is most known for his plays such as *Shopping and Fucking, Handbag, Some Explicit Polaroids, and Mother Clap's Molly House* where the characters erase and go beyond the conventional gender roles and family structures.

Being one of the most known playwrights of British theatre in the 1990s and the 2000s, Mark Ravenhill has become an iconic figure of in-yer-face theatre with his use of a violent language and controversial scenes. He is especially famous with his 1996 play *Shopping and F*cking* which has succeeded in drawing the attention of theatre critics and the audience with its provocative title and irritating unusual content and has become one of the first in-yer-face plays that comes to mind. The play deals with four main characters who are named after pop stars, and thanks to their way of living they are a striking reflection of young people who casually shop and fuck in a consumer society. *Faust is Dead* (1997), *Handbag* (1998) and *Some Explicit Polaroid*s (1999) are Ravenhill's subsequent other plays. Another play by Ravenhill that has been a smash hit is Mother Clap's Molly House (2001) which in the first half deals with the gay sub-culture of 1700s and happenings inside a male/gay brothel that runs secretly. The second half describes a gay sex party in modern London, which presents a criticism for "the transformation of sex into a dirty business" through Billington's words, "that innocent games have turned into

fetishistic rites and that a onetime celebration of otherness has now led to a world of pink pounds and commercialized sex in which love is a precarious survivor (2001)". After his plays *Totally Over You* (2003) *and Citizenship,* (2005) that he wrote for teenagers, one other famous play of Ravenhill is *The Cut* (2006). The main character of this play is Paul, an ordinary man that hates his job yet loves his family and gets stuck in between his conscience and telling his shocking secret. It presents the reader with a dystopia through a plotline around Paul's great distress and misery in addition to the oppression of system. Paul's occupation is to cut people in return for money. "The piece articulates the way a pervasive sense of fear circulates through society- from torturer to victim and from victim to torturer, from husband to wife and from wife to husband, and from father to son and from son to father (Sierz, 2011, p. 77)". *Product* (2005) and *pool (no water)* (2006) are the other in-yer-face plays that Ravenhill wrote being influenced by Martin Crimp's plays.

Ravenhill has become an iconic figure in in-yer-face theater with his plays' much-discussed scenes and use of a violent language. "His dramatic project is less about scandal, shock and awe than about unnerving his audience and crossing boundaries of authority and moral license in order to expose the licentiousness of the times (Svich, 2011, p. 419)". The present thesis examines Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag* (first published in 1998) dealing in general with a new consumer society, deconstruction of gender distinctions, family structures in the contemporary era. Sex and violence coexist in the modern world revolving around young adults who are more concerned about their own sexual desires and economic needs in Ravenhill's *Handbag*. Additionally, it is a play that uses some of the characters and certain parts of the storyline from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. *Handbag* has two parts that bring the Victorian time and the modern day together. In the part where Ravenhill re-uses the elements such as the baby hero found in a handbag in Victoria Station in Wilde's play whereas in the modern-day part, there is a gay man donating his sperm to a lesbian couple to have a child that matches and goes parallel with the misplaced and ignored baby in Wilde's play. These two plots intermingle with each other in that there is an abandoned child in both, which contributes to the extraordinary and creepy atmosphere of the play.

New writers of this 1990s period emerged with a kind of revolt -regarding especially their writing style and the themes that they dealt with- against classical

writing styles, old forms, and Aristotelian dramatic theater. Alex Sierz theorizes and sets the framework of in-yer-face theatre which paradoxically does not have any certain border lines and leaves the writers in a vast area of freedom in using whichever elements to use and how. Sierz says "blank fictions of American culture – with their emphasis on the extreme, the marginal and the violent – applied equally to today's Britain, [and] that Ravenhill has blended the bleakness of 'apocalypse culture' with more traditional humanistic concerns (2001, p. 151)". Ravenhill as one of those playwrights of the 1990s, blends the violent with the humanistic in a paradox.

After the 90's, the eradication of the distinctions of gender, race, and class forming modern societies in a new consumer and media society, the changing roles of art and aesthetics and changes in politics and culture created a different society changing cultural and social life. These changes and a new society formed have had reflections on contemporary plays. "As theorized and historicized by Sierz, their political agenda boiled down to a shock therapy, both in terms of theatrical form and content, whereby the audiences were to be awaken from their (post)ideological slumber by being exposed to violent images (Kielawski, 2013, pp. 26,27)". The playwrights in this period tend to use some unique elements to criticize this brand-new society through a kind of shock and terror and reflect these sentimental impressions. Especially in this specific play by Ravenhill, "... the sacrificial practices attaching to it all bear witness to the fact that the body has today become an object of salvation. It has literally taken over that moral and ideological function from the soul (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 129)". The characters in *Handbag* try to take responsibilities of their lives in the society, but the changing understanding of morality and social norms are all challenging them to manage a decent and proper life in the modern world where they live in Ravenhill's play.

1.1.1. Handbag

Written by Ravenhill in 1998 being one of his early plays, *Handbag* is derived from Oscar Wilde's Victorian play, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1898). In the contemporary English drama, rewriting the classics is a very common way of producing theatrical texts among the playwrights of the decade. *Handbag* as an in-yer-face adaptation of the old play consists of two parallel stories. It mainly deals with the issue of parenting in the modern society. In the modern-day part of

the play, Ravenhill uses an unconventional parenting story where two homosexual couples have a child through a gay man donating his sperm. The play has fourteen scenes, and two different storylines. Ravenhill does not directly transpose the original storyline of Wilde's play that has three acts originally. The Victorian storyline of the original play is retold in two different scenes out of fourteen in *Handbag*. They are scene two and scene five which consist of only the Victorian storyline. In scenes nine, ten and fourteen, the Victorian and contemporary storylines come together whereas the other scenes only form the contemporary part of the play.

Parenting, the role of women in parenting and a new kind of family are some of the important focal points of the play. An unconventional way of forming family is demonstrated, and violence is in the center as in every single in-yer-face play. The role of parents and family in an unconventional world which indeed reflects the modern-day situation is portrayed in the play. Additionally, there are neglected and abused children and violence in the center of the play that serves as a tool to criticize the contemporary rotten society.

The play goes back and forth between two parallel stories each in different scenes separately with different characters; however, they mingle in certain scenes where some of the characters are common and show up in out of a sudden. It has a kind of strange plot making it hard for the reader to follow the events and reason of the actions. Apart from the chaos that Ravenhill presents, characters are like in a parenting game where they create the rules themselves by rejecting and violating the conventional rules of parenting and ways of forming a family.

Ravenhill uses a juxtaposition of two narrative lines implying two parallel stories from different time zones as a tool to remark that parenting is still a problem even if the time changes however much progress the humanity has made and even if the conventions change. It was a problem during the Victorian times where there were strict rules, and it is still a problem in modern day where those strict rules have been broken down. The playwright uses scenes of violence practiced on children, sexual and physical child abuse, and neglected children in his play so as to demonstrate this ongoing problem. In other words, the play uses two different story lines to demonstrate how parenting in unconventional families in the modern world go parallel with the old ones in the Victorian times.

1.2. The Legacy of Thatcher's Government: The 1980s Preparing Background for the 1990s

Margaret Thatcher who was the first female prime minister of England had a huge effect in the British theatre in the 1980s regarding both style and content. So, the eighties in the British drama are always mentioned together with Thatcher. She leads many economic changes during her government such as strengthening the free market, cutting on the social benefits and funds provided by the state. Her impact in theatre is explained by Peacock naming the British theatre in the eighties as Thatcher's theatre in his book. He says that "Thatcher's respect was given to people like Andrew Lloyd Webber, a composer and theatre impresario, who fulfilled some of her ideological criteria (1999, p. 28)". Thatcher's government focused on the economic growth and used theatre as a marketplace where they can invest. She in a sense transformed the theatre into a marketplace that brings money to the country. She supported people like Lloyd who brought money to the country by "the so-called mega-musicals" (Saunders & Bull, 2015, p. 31). Having the focus on the economic gain, theatre plays were mainly consisted of lyrics and musicals fed on popular culture instead of lines in the British theatre during Thatcher's government. Her strict rules in governing the country and the pressure that she exerts on people and even in understanding of arts and theatre is often likened to the Victorian times. It is explained by Evans through these lines: "One of the prevailing lines of commentary upon Thatcherism is that it possessed essentially Victorian attributes (1997, p. 601)". It is obvious that Thatcher has a Victorian vision. Her authority leading even in arts and theatre is like the Victorian authority that oppressed the society with strict rules and social norms. Rabey also supports this claim stating that "England adopted a pseudo-American enterprise and business culture which was expressed and supported by Thatcher's assurance that there was 'no such thing as society' only the self-interest of the individual and the family to which she appealed with the invocation of 'Victorian values' that directly supported monetarism (2003, p. 108)". The effect of a prime minister who has a Victorian attitude and rules the theatres just like a business in the 1980s carries on in the nineties.

These big musicals, which dominate the British stages during Thatcher's government, were very easy to sell and make profit of, so they helped the

imperialism to grow in England just like Thatcher envisioned and planned. Even if they were fun to watch for the people as they made them cherish at the end of the day, this craze of musicals keeping people away from the reality because of their apolitical content drew the attention of many theatre critics. This political and governmental situation inevitably prepared the background for a kind of search for a new style and movement in theatre towards the beginning of the nineties.

After the eighties, a more rebellious and groundbreaking period for the British drama emerged. Shepherd-Barr explains this change with these lines below:

> Blasted helped to usher a new era of more violent, overtly sexual drama exemplified by the work of playwrights such as Mark Ravenhill, Martin McDonagh, Jez Butterworth, Patrick Marber, Tracy Letts, David Greig, David Harrower, Anthony Neilson, Joe Penhall, Philip Ridley, Conor McPherson, Martin Crimp, Simon Stephens, and Sebastian Barry. (2016, p. 104)

Listing in-yer-face playwrights of the nineties, Shepherd-Barr defines this new theatre movement as violent. It was an era that was dominated by rebellious playwrights that wrote disgusting plays putting violence, sex, death, and horror on stage. These shocking plays even making the spectators run out of the theatre halls came out as a rebellion to the perfect musicals and shows of the previous decade that brought money to the state. In her MA thesis, Buchler says "British Theatre of the late 1980s chose to reflect the ideology of commercial gain rather than create (2008, p. 21)". This commercial concern was not the focus of the playwrights of the 1990s anymore as there was a new wave of rebellious young playwrights. However, they still had something from the Thatcher's period. "The plays were never overtly political, although they were certainly intent on characterising Post-Thatcher 90s culture; plays which 'make it clear, through descriptions of characters by age, that […] they are by and about "Thatcher's children" (Sierz, 2008, p. 28-9)". Labelling the generation in the 1990s as "Thatcher's Children", Sierz claims her continuing impact on the British theatre.

1.3. The 1990s in the British Stage: In-yer-Face Drama

Relieved of the boundaries that limited the playwrights for monetary purposes and of the burden of creating something nice, young writers of the nineties did not need to be approved or supported by the government anymore. This freedom let them produce anything they wanted; as a result, a new form emerged in the British theatre in the early nineties. This new style in theatre, theorized and defined

in Alex Sierz's book, *In-yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001) is not a concept that Sierz himself invented and brought into use as an expression. Sierz says "I certainly did not invent the phrase: indeed, I have made the point (more than once) that my choice of the label "in-yer-face theatre" — as opposed to "new brutalism" or "neo-Jacobean" — to describe this style of avant-garde new writing was precisely dictated by the fact that other people were already using the phrase (Sierz, 2009)". Contrary to the popular belief saying Sierz comes up with the In-yer-face theatre concept, he is the first theoretician who defines it as a new writing style in theatre that naturally became popular through the mid-nineties, announces it to the literary communities, and theorizes and conceptualizes it. In addition to this, the name of that theatre writing style commonly used by playwrights has been derived from an exclamation expression that was used widely in the popular culture in the nineties, and it took place even in the dictionaries. "In your face!" is a slang expression. "In-your-face" is also defined as an adjective "used to describe an attitude, a performance, etc. that is aggressive in style and deliberately designed to make people react strongly for or against it: in-your-face action thrillers" in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Hornby, 2006, p. 788). Used as an adjective by theatre critics for a while, "in-yer-face" has transformed into a new writing style employed by the playwrights in the nineties. Sierz introduced this expression as a new writing style and a theatre concept.

Through the end of the nineties, Robert Butler used "in-yer-face" for the Dutch director Alize Zandwijk's remake of Maxim Gorky's 1903 play The Lower Depths at Rotterdam RO Theatre. "This is the "In Yer Face" version of The Lower Depths, that tells us as much about the 1990s as the 1900s (Butler, 1999)". Also, Paul Taylor became one of the first theatre critics who used "in-yer-face" as a term in the mid-nineties when he wrote a criticism for Philip Ridley's play, *Ghost from a Perfect Place* in Independent. (Taylor, 1994) In-yer-face theatre as the new writing style started to be the star of its time and took its place everywhere in the most popular theatre stages. "And then in 1995, the floodgates opened. A new breed of writers in their twenties and early thirties burst through from nowhere, filling the stages (most notably those of the Royal Court and the Bush) with sickening acts of sexual and physical violence, obscene language and a despairing view of contemporary society that seemed entirely nihilistic (Spencer, 2001)". Even if he

claims this new style is sickening and horrendous, Spencer also praises it saying "I have to admit that in the best of them something fresh, strong, and even valuable was stirring. (2001)" in the same article.

In-yer-face theatre, which appears as a style that terrifies and shocks the audience, blatantly deals with issues that society prefers not to talk about and find immoral. Charles Spencer, claiming Sarah Kane as one of the most known, powerful, and troublesome in-yer-face playwrights, suggests that it should be the psychiatrists, not the theatre critics that examine and analyze her plays. "Reviewing one of her plays, I complained that it wasn't a theatre critic that was needed to examine her work, but a psychiatrist (Spencer, 2001)". As a matter of fact, in-yer-face plays are works that frankly and overtly deal with behaviors and words that are often veiled and unmentioned publicly. These behaviors and words exist yet they are covered and hidden because they are considered to be disgusting and scandalous. In-yer-face playwrights like Ravenhill write about these issues and unearth them.

Sierz likens British theatre in the 1990s to a nuclear reactor saying "inside, everything is bouncing off the walls; common sense flies out of the window; paradox rules okay (2011, p. 26)". Playwrights in the nineties offer a new world for the British theatre where experimentality, innovation, and imagination have been improved and contradictions and irrationality have been considered normal. Additionally, these "new writers transformed the language of British theatre, making it more direct, raw and explicit (Sierz, 2011, p. 53)". On the contrary to Sierz's claim of a new language created by the playwrights in the nineties as a more explicit one, Tomlin argues about "a negative incommunicability" in the twentieth-century. She states that

> Whilst, for the most part, the use of language to communicate a more or less coherent dramatic narrative in a more or less recognizable world is maintained in the 1990s work of writers such as Mark Ravenhill, Jez Butterworth or Joe Penhall, the communication of explicitly ideological intentions, as had been the case in the 1980s political drama of Churchill, David Edgar, David Hare and Howard Brenton, was overwhelmingly rejected. (Tomlin, 2013, p. xxi)

She puts forward that explicit communication of ideological arguments do not exist in the 1990s anymore as opposed to the 1980s.

The plays of the 1990s are provocative and irritating. To understand how direct and obscene the language in the in-yer-face plays is, it is important to analyze

what the Germans call this new style of writing plays. As Spencer says, it is "blood and sperm theatre, which is both nastier, and more accurate (2001)". As a result, it could be stated that in-yer-face theatre has characters that break taboos, speak the forbidden, talk about uncomfortable and hidden, undress and make love, commit suicide, and perform violence.

Claiming there is a new tendency in writing plays at the beginning of 1990s, Sierz chooses to name it in-yer-face and focuses on novelty and a kind of breaking up with the past. "Often in-yer-face drama makes use of various shock tactics which give this particular theatre a flavor that is bolder or more experimental than what audiences are used to (Sierz, 2001, p. 4)". In-yer-face plays that shock and bother its audience appealed to the young population with an intention to attract their interest back in theatre as the previous generation considered theatre out of fashion. Relatively younger playwrights made theatre plays become popular again (Buchler, 2008, p. 5)". In addition to the fact that it is defined as a new style changing how the theatre plays were considered over the course of years, it has one most iconic and comprehensive definition referred to almost in every work that deals with in-yer-face theatre.

> It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm. Often such drama employs shock tactics or is shocking because it is new in tone or structure, or because it is bolder or more experimental that what audiences are used to. Questioning moral norms, it affronts the ruling ideas of what can or should be shown onstage; it also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating discomfort. Crucially, it tells us more about who we really are. Unlike the type of theatre that allows us to sit back and contemplative what we see in detachment, the best in-yer-face theatre takes us (Sierz, 2001, p. 4)

Sierz depicts this new style in his book, *In-yer-Face Theatre* as different from the conventional plays that amuse people, make them guess what will happen in the next scene thanks to a linear plotline, need a group of audience that sits far from the stage and enjoy the performance. Contrarily, in-yer-face plays provoke and shock the audience that sits silently and so break the convention of a passive audience.

There is no good and bad in in-yer-face plays as this sensibility in writing theatre plays emerges against the conventional theatre that classifies everything according to binary oppositions. Buchler says "This can be particularly upsetting for an audience as it violates our sense of safety, directly opposing the views that underpin most of mainstream societies' thought (Buchler, 2008, p. 28)". The

conventional audience is used to sit and relax in the theatre halls as they know that the playwright will spot the good and bad characters at the end of the play and the message will be resolved. However, an in-yer-face play bothers the audience with this burden of deciding how the play ends and which characters will be good and/or bad. As it is hard to categorize the characters as good or bad, and to decide and justify if what they are exposed to on stage is proper or no, the audience feel worried and disturbed.

The young playwrights of the nineties that create and lead this new style going beyond the limits of conventional plays and breaking the rules are the children of Thatcher. They grew up and became an adult during Thatcher's government, so their in-yer-face plays mirror the freedom that they gained afterwards. As the theatre critic Michael Billington points out "At its most extreme, and 'in a society where commerce is the prime criterion of artistic value', market populism 'amounts to censorship' (as cited in Sierz, 1997, p. 5)". The cut for the funds from the government affected the theatre plays. Getting rid of the must to get approval from the government and the censorship, these young writers had the right to write freely, which allowed everything to be produced and staged. "Those writers unveiled their anger via their plays which grabbed truth instead of degenerate bourgeoisie theatre and gave voice to social and political issues of the period in which they lived (Doğan, 2016, p. 3)". Consequently, in-yer-face plays walked away from the normal and dealt with the problematic and the undefined.

In the nineties, in-yer-face plays that gradually dominated the new writing were staged in several theatre halls such as the Royal Court, Bush, Hampstead, Soho Theatre, Finborough, Tricycle, and Theatre Royal Stratfort East. The three most known playwrights having plays among these in-yer-face plays are Sarah Kane making her debut in "Blasted" having terrifying scenes of cannibalism and anal rape in 1995; Mark Ravenhill who is most known with his "Shopping and F*cking" (1996); and Anthony Neilson who wrote shockingly brutal "The Penetrator". "In rebellion against the classic well-made play, and against more recent literary traditions, most 'nineties writers preferred to write work which doesn't finish with a climax in the 'right' place, doesn't have a clear message and doesn't obey the dictates of naturalism (Sierz, 2002, p. 5)". One of the most distinctive features of this new writing style that is common among these writers is the telegraphic

sentences. The dialogues are shorter, direct, and telegraphic in this new style, and Mark Ravenhill's plays are good examples for short dialogues. As a result, a new language for theatre emerges that makes it fashionable again. After the Thatcher's censorship in theatre, in-yer-face theatre is what the generation in the nineties created in their own ways and imagination.

1.3.1. Adopting Recreative Impulses of the Victorians: "We The Other Victorians"

The late 1980s were the years when adaptations rose in numbers as Sierz states that there was a halt in the production of original plays through the end of the nineties. While describing the history of new writing in his book, *Rewriting the Nation*, he says that "[…] this relentless rise of the new did sometimes suffer a hiccup. In the late 1980s, for example, there was a crisis in new writing (Sierz, 2011, p. 20)". David Edgar also supports the idea that new writers did not want to create new plays suggesting this decade as a prolific one regarding the adaptations. "a nationwide epidemic of adaptations (up from 6 per cent of the repertoire in the 1970s to 20 per cent in the late 1980s) suggesting that theatre lost confidence in itself and was turning to other media for validation. Then it became harder and harder to see original plays you didn't know by heart. (Edgar, 1999, as cited in Sierz, 2011)". This great rate of adaptations starts to go down in the 1990s; however, adaptations kept their place in the British theatre. So, it is still tempting to count *Handbag* as one part of this bonanza of adaptations.

Hutcheon says that "The Victorians had a habit of adapting just about everything-…. We postmoderns have clearly inherited this same habit, but we have even more new materials at our disposal- […] (2006, p. xi)". In addition to Hutcheon, Sanders says that contemporary British playwrights adopt the recreative impulses of the Victorians. Implying the importance of canonicity for the source text for adaptations, Sanders brings into discussion "a shared (re)creative impulse" under the chapter titled 'We "Other Victorians"'; or, Rethinking the Nineteenth Century in his book, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006). She suggests that to take pleasure in reading an adaptation in comparison with the source text, "it requires prior knowledge of the text(s) being assimilated, absorbed, reworked, and refashioned by the adaptive process (2006, p. 120)". So, having read the source text is crucial in labelling the adaptation as *adaptation*. Putting an emphasize on the

awareness of the relationship of the adaptation to the adapted text, Sanders states that a common motivation in reviving old canonical texts may appear in a particular period of time and gives the Victorian age as an example. Adaptations keeps coming into the stage from time to time "and it was not only the writers of previous eras who were subject to the recreative impulses of the Victorians: […] (Sanders, 2006, p. 121)". So, she implies that adaptations are also common in the contemporary world.

Describing adaptations as the "afterlife" of the source texts and dealing mostly with the novels in this part of her book, Sanders handles the adaptations "that revisit the nineteenth century or seek to voice marginalized or repressed groups suggest something similar in their search to reveal 'hidden histories', the stories between the lines of the published works of fact and fiction (2006, p. 124)". Ravenhill's *Handbag* revisits a nineteenth century classic play to question and reveal the hidden story of the baby lost in a handbag. In his novel *The French lieutenant's woman,* Fowles describes Victorian society as "An age where woman was sacred; and where you could buy a thirteen- year-old girl for a few pounds … Where more churches were built than in the whole previous history of the country; and where one in sixty houses in London was a brothel […] (Fowles, J. 1969, as cited in Sanders, 2006, p. 127)". Sanders uses this description of the Victorian society as a reference to "explain the ongoing fascination with appropriating the modes of nineteenth-century fiction more generally in contemporary writing (2006, p. 128)". So the reworkings and adaptations of the Victorian literary works in the contemporary world is not incidental as "The Victorian era throws into relief some of our own more contemporary concerns with class and social hierarchy and with questions of empire and imperialism (Sanders, 2006, p. 128)". Ravenhill's contemporary play *Handbag* sets an example for an adaptation that deals with such concerns. It is an adaptation that looks back to the Victorian age to rethink and revision Victorian cultural and social values.

1.4. Handbag as an In-yer-face Play

Ravenhill's *Handbag* has been selected as the primary source and main focus of this study because it tells the reader several important points about the change of society over one hundred years in the same nation/country. Ravenhill's perspective and style in adapting is also worth examining because it is unusual in

that he creates a parallel storyline in addition to rewriting the storyline of a classic play by Oscar Wilde with a remarkable twist. Also, even if there are a lot of studies and research done and written about most of Ravenhill's plays, *Handbag* is not specifically examined as an in-yer-face adaptation of Wilde's play in a comprehensive study. Ravenhill succeeded in creating a play that is loyal to the in-yer-face tradition, but at the same time an original literary work reflecting a century older society from a totally different perspective. *Handbag* is explored more in detail in the second chapter as an adaptation of Wilde's play, and it is also crucial to start with analyzing it as an in-yer-face play.

Analyzing Sierz's coinage of in-yer-face theatre in her M.A. thesis in an interesting way by quantifying certain tactics of in-yer-face playwrights and using diagrams, maps, and tables along with conventional close reading of the texts, Chippendale solidifies Sierz's formulations to label a play as an in-yer-face. Doing this kind of reading and analysis, she looks for the frequency of certain tropes that are present in certain corpus of plays by in-yer-face playwrights classified as so by Aleks Sierz in his book *In-yer-face Theatre* (2001). Sierz explains how to label a play as an in-yer-face in his book:

> ...the language is filthy, there's nudity, people have sex in front of audience even homosexual intercourse, violence is seen, one character humiliates another, taboos are broken, unmentionable subjects are broached, conventional dramatic structures are subverted. Expect tales of abuse; don't worry about the subversion of theatre form; expect personal politics, not ideology. Above all, this brat pack is the voice of youth. At its best, this kind of theatre is so powerful, so visceral, that it forces you to react - either you want to get on stage and stop what's happening or you decide it's the best thing you've ever seen and you long to come back the next night. As indeed you should. (2001, p. 5)

So, shock tactics used by the playwright are the most distinctive features for an in-yer-face play. Chippendale clarifies these shock tactics and make them more objective to refer to. "Unmentionable subjects" and "unpleasant emotions" are some of the most common expressions used to define in-yer-face plays; however, Chippendale mentions about more specific tropes such as cannibalism, rape, torture, humiliation, nudity, child abuse, violence, vomiting, drug injecting, filthy language (Chippendale, 2020, p. 18). Then she counts how many tropes each play has and how many times each trope is identified in each play. As these comprehensive calculations are impressive, it is tempting to make use of these tropes in the present

part of this thesis which seeks to analyze Ravenhill's *Handbag* as an in-yer-face play through the conventional method of close reading.

Ravenhill creates one of his main characters, Phil as a drug abuser travelling between different time periods in *Handbag*. As British drama in the 1990s wanted to shock people, the drug abuse is a rather common topic dealt with in in-yer-face plays. The use of drugs in in-yer-face plays refers to the ecstasy culture of the 1990s. Even if the scenes where Phil takes injections are not horrible, the presence of a young person using drugs and his contact with drug dealers break taboos. It is revealed first when David scolds Phil after finding his gear in the cistern in scene nine. They have a big fight and David leaves. In this scene, it is the first time when the Victorian and contemporary part of the play come together. Phil's time travels and hallucinations do not seem fierce and violent in nature until he mentions about a weird story about his baby daughter and drug dealers. In this story, he reveals something horrific.

> **Handbag, Scene 10**
> **Phil** ... My kid. She's five. … But I'm behind with my payments. And my dealer's giving me hassle. I mean, he's supplying but he's giving a lot of grief. And I'm, 'You'll get your money. You'll get it.' Fuck knows how. And one day he goes: 'Let me fuck the kid. Quick fuck with the kid. I'll be careful- it's not like I'm gonna split her or nothing. Ten minutes and I'll let you off.' (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 200)

He keeps saying that he was not a good dad throughout the play and this weird scandalous story he tells when he is on drugs is like a confession what he did with his daughter in the past. In addition to this drug dealer story offering to get payment through having sex with the baby, the ecstasy that Phil is feeling really harms someone when he is supposed to take care of the baby when Lorraine is out for shopping in scene fourteen. De Buck says that "in most of his plays, Ravenhill focuses on the absence of reliable ideologies and the link between sex and consumerism. Sexual transactions, omnipresent in contemporary British society, are emphasized, whereas political viewpoints are neglected to entirely left out (2009, p. 4)". Additionally, even if Phil takes the responsibility of the baby with Lorraine and Phil starts to take good care of the baby in scene thirteen, through the next scenes it turns out to be a real disaster. They take the responsibility of the baby despite their addiction to drugs.

> **Handbag, Scene 14**
> ***Phil** is bathing the baby.*

> **Phil** And so now there's three of them. The mum and the dad and the kid. And they've got a flat. Because that's important. And the mum and the dad have got a habit. But that's alright. Listen it's alright. And there's a dealer. He's a bad man. And there's a dealer. He's a bad man. And he wants to do really bad things to the kid. And the dad says: 'No. I'm not going to let you do that. I'm a father. No.' (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 218)

The way he handles the new situation in which he becomes the father for a child that he kidnaps with his partner is very interesting in that he is both a protective father and a dangerous man having contact with drug dealers at the same time. In this scene above, he is trying to prove that he is carrying out his responsibilities and protecting the baby from bad people. However, he is the one that brings the danger closer to the child at the same time.

Violence is one of the most striking in-yer-face tropes that is present in *Handbag*. Use of violence on the baby in the play makes this trope connected to child abuse. In addition to the characters' rejection of parental responsibility in both narrative lines, the nannies, whom parents entrust their children to, practice violence on the babies. Victorian nanny, Prism gives the baby to a pedophile; and the contemporary nanny, Lorraine kidnaps the baby with her partner Phil who kills it at the end of the play by burning him with cigarettes. "... *Handbag*'s cruel indictment of a society overrun with adolescent adults who are more concerned with satisfying their sexual and/or economic needs (and in Ravenhill's work, these go hand in hand) than taking responsibility for the children left in their wake (Svich, 2003, p. 86). The parents or guardians who are supposed to take care for the babies are only worried about getting a life for themselves, concerned about their own hobbies, or/and go after their sexual desires in the play.

> **Handbag, Scene 14**
> **Phil** Oh no. Can't get me like that. Know how to make you start again. See I know how.
> *He stubs the cigarette on the baby. Nothing.*
> Come on. Come on.
> *Stubs the cigarette. Nothing. Again. Again. Again.*
> Come on. Come on.
> *He pushes the cigarette into the baby's eyes.*
> Just gonna be awkward? Just gonna breathe, eh?
> Alright. Alright.
> *He sits, looks at the baby. Long pause.*
> *He puts the baby in a bin-bag.* (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 226)

In this last scene of the play, Phil time-travels again because of the ecstasy, which brings the two narratives together. The baby who has a chronic breathing problem

since his birth cannot breathe and Phil decides to burn him with cigarette first on the body and then on the eyes. This is a really brutal expression of what is happening to the baby after being kidnapped. This kind of violence practiced on the child is shocking for the audience. Sarah Kane says in her interview with Rodolfo di Giammarco that "Violence is the most urgent problem we have as species, and the most urgent thing we need to confront. Personally, I say there is nothing better to write about (as cited in Biçer, 2011, p. 82)". This scene literally makes its audience confront violence.

In *Handbag*, not only the contemporary baby, but also the Victorian baby is abused when he is unhesitatingly entrusted to an ignorant and young nanny, Prism. Mr. Moncrieff's ignorance as a father who arranges an inexperienced nanny immediately after the birth results in a disaster when this nanny is interested in nothing other than her manuscripts. So, at the end of the play, she gives the baby to a pedophile man justifying herself through putting the blame on the baby's ignorant parents.

> **Handbag, Scene 14**
> **Prism** To who needs the child, the child shall be given. That is what justice means. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 226)

The child becomes an object that is abused and used by others just like a commodity that changes place. In other words, we have two unfortunate children in the play and two unsuccessful families. Even though they live in different time zones that are connected to each other occasionally when Phil uses ecstasy and time travels, these two families have parallel mistakes, and both fail in parenting.

Most of the characters are young adolescents who are escaping or trying to be parents. Jitka Sedláková says "Ravenhill makes the characters infantilized and self-centered (2010, p. 38)". The characters are young people who are not mature yet to take the responsibility of a child as a parent. Phil, for example, acts like a baby and needs someone to wipe him when he wets himself. He is like a child who needs to be cared by an adult and admits that while mentioning his child.

> **Handbag, Scene 3**
> **Phil** I can't even take care of myself. I can't work it out. There's so much to do, isn't there? You've got to clean yourself, your clothes, your room. You've gotta buy things and pay for things and order things. All this stuff just to take care of yourself. I mean, I can't see how anyone does it. I just can't cope. How do you cope? (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 158)

Phil's inability to even take care of himself clears itself out when he and Lorraine kidnap the baby to form a happy family through the end of the play. They both are aware of their own inadequacy and little capacity to raise a child and to take on responsibilities, but they still experience with the child and use it to satisfy themselves.

Sex scenes demonstrated so vividly is another shock tactic that Ravenhill uses in *Handbag*. How open and direct the language that Ravenhill uses to describe the sex scenes between Phil and David is shocking for Ravenhill's reader. The way how Phil fucks David in his office in scene three, and scene ten where Phil and Lorraine have sex is described quite explicitly in stage directions.

> **Handbag, Scene 3**
> **Phil** kneels down, undoes David's flies. Sucks David's cock. Almost instantly, David's pager goes off. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 157)

> **Handbag, Scene 10**
> **Phil** No. Some things you gotta do together.
> *He slips his hands inside Lorraine's knickers and starts to masturbate her.* (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 204)

De Buck says "Moreover, in-yer-face playwrights use direct, filthy language. Words like "fuck" and "cunt" figure prominently in their plays. (2009, p. 6)" *Handbag* has more than these words throughout the whole play. Sierz (as cited in De Buck, 2009, p. 6) says that "it (the word 'cunt') also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating discomfort." Use of filthy language is another shock tactic that is mentioned by Sierz saying "the language is filthy, characters talk of unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each other, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent (2001, p. 5)". For example, the immediate use of the word 'wank' in the very first scene of the play may shock the reader. Tom is donating his sperm for the child who is going to have two fathers and two mothers including Tom in scene one.

> **Handbag, Scene 1**
> **David** And when it means so much ... to all of us... then it must be difficult to have a wank.
> **Suzanne** ... A wank?
> **David** Alright. It must be hard to spill your love seed. Summon up the spirits of the ancestors of fertility.
> **Suzanne** I'm not saying... no. Just wank's a bit... functional. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 145)

Erdem Ayyıldız says "Another significant characteristic of in-yer-face theatre is the filthy language used in plays. The usage of taboo words is very important in confusing and shocking the spectators, because "humans are language animals" in Sierz's words, and the words can offense them more as an act itself (Erdem Ayyıldız, 2019, p. 190)". Throughout the play, such words are used quite often, and they create a shock effect as they are used very explicitly without any censorship. Sierz describes in-yer-face theatre as follows: "It usually involves the breaking of taboos, insistently using the most vulgar languages, sometimes blasphemy, sometimes pornography, and it shows deeply private acts in public. These have the power to shock and constitute anthropology of transgression and the testing of the boundaries of acceptability (Sierz, 2002, p. 19, as cited in Doğan, 2016, p. 117)". This power of such words to shock is observable in almost every page of the play. The play starts with two couples (one gay and one lesbian) trying make their decision to have a child together sound more meaningful and sentimental; however, they need to carry out some functional responsibilities before that. Their decision to have a child comes from their desire to raise a child who would never be ignored and left alone. Suzanne and Mauretta are more interested in having this child than David and Tom -the gay couple- who stay more like in the functional part of the process because of the problem that they have in their own mutual relationship. Even while waiting for Tom to do his part in this plan of having a child together, they talk about 'porns' and 'wanking' explicitly. It gets even worse when Suzanne rebukes David for his idea of making use of porns to help Tom.

> **Handbag, Scene 1**
> **Suzanne** I'm not having my… our baby is not being/ conceived with some oiled-up, fake-tanned rent-a-dick porn model. I'm not having that. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 146)

Sexist swear words and slangs are plenty in the play. For example, David and Suzanne fight after David sees Lorraine in their office and understands there is something between them. He blames Suzanne of cheating on Mauretta and expresses these suppositions by using a filthy language.

> **Handbag, Scene 8**
> **David** Miss Kookyfuckingkookybitch. I reckon she's taken a bit of a shine to you.
> **Suzanne** Oh come on.
> **David** That's what I reckon. And I reckon you've taken a bit of a shine to Miss Kooky Bitch.
> **Suzanne** Lorraine.
> **David** Miss Kooky/ Bitch Lorraine.

Suzanne Sexist cunt. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 183)

In addition to that, when Tom visits David in his bedsit, David tries to ignore Phil that arrives home and knocks on the door. While Tom is trying to learn and asking questions about who the person on the door might be, David tries to convince him saying:

Handbag, Scene 9
David "Nutters. Yeah, nutters or junkies from the park. Or prostitutes. Pissed prostitutes. (Handbag, Scene 9, Page 188)"

Additionally, in the Victorian part of the play Cardew is revealed to be a bad man, not a Samaritan. So, the people star protesting him. Augusta is one of these people who catches him and kicks him while insulting him.

Handbag, Scene 14
Augusta He is here. The invert is here.
She kicks Cardew.
Augusta Pervert. Boy lover. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 221)

This use of filthy language adds on to the fierceness and brutality of the play. It is one of the elements that keep reader sticked to what is happening in the play. The extremeness of what the characters are saying adds to the intensity of the play and make the reader respond and react to it. The reason why language of the play is so shocking for the reader of the decade might also be the censorship of Thatcher's theatre. This oppression was no more felt in the theatre in the 1990s, yet it was only a decade ago, so its effect was still prevailing. This rough and blatant language that Ravenhill's characters help count the play as an in-yer-face play. It is a rude language, and these vulgar expressions contribute the play to be an in-yer-face play.

All the violence and use of a filthy language towards someone include humiliation. Humiliation is one other trope that Chippendale quantifies in his thesis. Sierz says that "Violence becomes impossible to ignore when it confronts you by showing pain, humiliation and degradation. Sometimes this is a question of showing violent acts literally; at other times, the suggestion of extreme mental cruelty is enough to disturb (2001, pp. 8-9)". If no physical violence is exerted on someone, humiliation results from an emotional abuse. "The harm can be both physical, such as cutting oneself with a razor blade or knife, pulling out hair or scratching, and mental, including insults and humiliation aimed at oneself (Fiľáková, 2015, p. 47)". This kind of mental harm and humiliation could be

exemplified in the scene nine where Tom despises Phil after learning the relationship of David and Phil.

> **Handbag, Scene 9**
> **Tom** *(to David)* Come on then. You too-trousers off. Come on. Don't mind me. Trousers down and off you go.
> This I have got to see. Stick his smeggy little rancid cock up you. Come on. Come on.
> **David** No.
> **Tom** Because if that's what you want. If this little piece of human garbage is all you can aspire to then fine. (Ravenhill, 2001, pp. 190-191)

The fight among them is disgusting and shocking for the readers and audience of the 1990s. It does not harm any of the characters physically; however, it degrades and humiliates Phil. The unpleasant emotions expressed blatantly and use of a filthy language together with the other tropes such as drug abuse, violence and child abuse investigated in detail contribute to classification of *Handbag* as an in-yer-face play.

CHAPTER 2: REWRITING IN BRITISH STAGE: MARK RAVENHILL'S *HANDBAG*

2.1. *Handbag* as a Rewriting of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Adaptations of classics have been abundant in the contemporary British theatre since the mid twentieth century. Especially after 1950s, the intention of most of the playwrights like Mark Ravenhill has become to revision social issues such as the significance of family and parenting from a new perspective while remaking old texts and adapting them to the contemporary British stages. In such a way, British playwright Mark Ravenhill, in his play *Handbag*, re-imagines such topics as neglected children, parenting, family, alternative families, marriage, women's position in society and moral values from the Victorian world where all the Victorian ideals were dominating life back in the history within a postmodem British society.

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* sets a good example as a play mirroring the social life in the Victorian age. With flashbacks to Wilde's Victorian world in this Victorian play of him, Ravenhill gives his readers the chance to reexamine the period. Appropriating the plot into Ravenhill's *Handbag* and revisiting the characters in a century-old play reimagines a feckless parenting practice and negligence for children. Babies that are mislaid in a handbag or put in a black plastic bag in *Handbag* demonstrate babies struggling for survival through two similar parallel incidents from different centuries. Repeating the mislaid baby in a handbag story, Ravenhill creates a relationship between Wilde's Victorian storyline and *Handbag's* contemporary plot. This dialogue between the past and present is made possible by Ravenhill rewriting Wilde's play in his very own way. Despite this kind of relationship between the two plays, the quality of Ravenhill's play is not compared to Wilde's play as a copy or secondary in this research. Hutcheon despises and refuses "the unproductive nature of both that negative evaluation of popular cultural adaptations as derivative and secondary and that morally loaded rhetoric of fidelity and infidelity used in comparing adaptations to "source" texts (2006, s. 31)". Fidelity of *Handbag* to the source text will be explored in order to examine and analyze the playwright's motivation and purpose in adapting an old play.

The second chapter of the thesis will be carrying out a twofold examination. In addition to Ravenhill's way of reviving Wilde's play into the contemporary British theatre through creating an adaptation as a first step, it will also analyze how the playwright deals with social issues such as family, marriage, and parenting in the second part with reference to a century older play by Oscar Wilde. Ravenhill bridges two texts and two different time periods through Phil character travelling both worlds in *Handbag*.

Adaptation is an inclusive term that will be used to describe *Handbag* in this part of the study, it will be analyzed through mainly such related theories as Catherine Rees' theory of adaptation for theatre, the adaptation theories of Julie Sanders and Linda Hutcheon.

The relationship between texts is known to be originally brought forward and coined as "intertextuality" by Julia Kristeva who defines a text as "a permutation of texts" (1980, p. 36). Raj summarizes Kristeva's intertextuality through following lines: "Intertextuality, though surfaced as a poststructuralist concept, existed as a universal phenomenon that elucidates the communicative interconnections between a text and the other and text and context (Raj, 2015, p. 77)". Julie Sanders refers to intertextually originally to frame her adaptation theory. She claims adaptation and appropriation practices as subcategories of intertextuality saying: "The processes of adaptation and appropriation that are the concern of this book are in many respects a sub-section of the over-arching practice of intertextuality (Sanders, 2006, p. 17)". Arguing all texts are connected to a chain of already existing texts in a way or other, Sanders in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation* examines mainly several definitions and practices of adaptation and appropriation, the impulse to adapt and different methods to adapt and reimagine other works.

First, Sanders makes a difference between adaptation and appropriation focusing on if the texts directly state their adaptational nature or not. She clarifies this difference saying: "Many of the film, television, or theatre adaptations of canonical works of literature that we look at in this volume openly declare themselves as an interpretation or re-reading of a canonical precursor (2006, p. 2)" whereas "in appropriations the intertextual relationship may be less explicit, more embedded […] (p. 2)". She adds that adaptations "enable the ongoing process of

juxtaposed readings that are crucial to the cultural operations (p. 25)" and are "frequently involved in offering commentary on a source text (p. 18)". Additionally, Sanders says that "appropriation carries out the same sustained engagement as adaptation but frequently adopts a posture of critique, even assault (p. 4)". As a result, *Handbag* is analyzed not as an appropriation but as an adaptation in this study. Sanders also compiles a very rich list of terms for the vocabulary of adaptation such as rewriting, refashioning, homage, reworking, revision, reevaluation. After exploring several definitions for adaptation and appropriation practices in her book, Sanders analyzes some cultural politics behind the motivation to adapt. Finally, she calls for respect for the adaptations and appropriations saying "They are not merely belated practices and processes; they are creative and influential in their own right. And they acknowledge something fundamental about literature: that its impulse is to spark related thoughts, responses, and readings (p. 160)". In other words, she rejects degrading adaptations and appropriations as secondary and derivative works.

In the same year with Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation (2006)*, Hutcheon publishes her book titled *A Theory of Adaptation*. Hutcheon's work mainly deals with adaptation regarding the fidelity issue. She argues and rejects any degradations of adaptations as "a secondary mode—belated and therefore derivative" in her approach to adaptations. So, she prefers using "adapted text" instead of "source text" or "the original" as she finds the negative evaluations of adaptation and the rhetoric of fidelity as unproductive. On the contrary, she supports adaptations saying: "Stories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments; like genes, they adapt to those new environments by virtue of mutation—in their "offspring" or their adaptations. And the fittest do more than survive; they flourish (2006, p. 32)". She also examines adaptations as "deliberate, announced, and extended (p. xiv)". In line with this, she questions the reasons of the motivation behind adaptation as adapters know their work might be scorned. One other concern of her is the process of adaptation and how audiences enjoy the retold stories.

Even if the adapted text is known, adaptations are still autonomous works that are not just reproductions of other works. Hutcheon says that "although adaptations are also aesthetic objects in their own right, it is only as inherently

double or multilaminated works that they can be theorized as adaptations (2006, p. 6)". Describing adaptations as multilayered texts, she deals with three main definitions of adaptation: "An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works; a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging; and an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work (p. 8)". After that, Hutcheon mentions three main motives behind the urge to adapt: "the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying (p. 7)". She explains more attractions that convince anyone to adapt an old text under such subheadings: The Economic Lures, The Legal Constraints, Cultural Capital, Personal and Political Motives.

Catherine Rees in her book *Adaptation and Nation* (2017) examines adaptation and nation in the contemporary context of theatre. She mainly focuses on the adaptation from one nation to another and transpose one text into a different culture. Although *Handbag* is not adapted from a text belonging to a different nation, Rees' work contributes to this thesis in that it also includes the cultural and temporal aspects in adaptation. *Handbag* is adapted from the Victorian British culture to the contemporary British culture. Rees says that "the adaption is not an act of sly plagiarism; it is a deliberate and self-conscious attempt to engage with an original text and offer a new approach or direction (2017, p. 3)". She also explains why it is tempting to adapt an old text claiming that "Another attraction of adaptation is the opportunity it offers for presenting texts in a new context (p. 3)". It reveals the unseen and unmentioned in the original texts. Just like the other theoreticians, also Rees states that adaptations are self-claimed and directly stated. So, their engagement with other works is obvious.

Additionally, Rees discusses the importance of fidelity only when the adaptational nature of a text is obscured and it is not claimed to be an adaptation clearly. By referring to the adaptation theories of both Hutcheon and Sanders, she also mentions Kristeva's intertextuality for the discussions about adaptation. However, she says that "while it is true that Kristeva would not have seen intertextuality as a conscious choice by the writer, and that such connections between texts are the inevitable outcome of textual systems in society and history […] (2017, p. 7)". Contrarily, she argues that "adaptation requires a degree of

cognition on the part of the writer (p. 9)". In line with her assertions, adaptation is a more apt term than intertext for *Handbag* as it is a self-claimed and overtly stated reworking of Wilde's play.

Rees also argues that reworking an old text claims and supports the idea that the readings of canonical works are endless and never complete suggesting that "whereby a writer may wish to destabilise the concept of an author imposing a 'finished' or completed version or reading onto a text (2017, p. 8)". In other words, she emphasizes the importance of authors and adapters in the process of meaning making. So, she states that "intertextuality, and adaptation more widely, can offer writers playful and modern ways of engaging with textual systems and of examining their own roles within the creation of meaning and interpretation (p. 9)". Accordingly, Rees argues that adaptations offer different readings of the original texts. *Handbag* is evaluated in this light as a reworking of Wilde's play offering a contemporary reading of it.

There could be several ways of practicing and defining adaptation; yet still the main point of this study is to investigate and analyze the way Ravenhill uses to adapt the original play. Whatever the method being used to adapt an old text, the motivation behind writer's decisions and their reasons in producing an adapted text is what really matters. Reading *Handbag* as an adaptation of Wilde's play will help define its place in in-yer-face drama even if both the original text and the adaptation may seem like worlds apart at first sight. As a result, the methods that have an impact upon the way Ravenhill makes use of Wilde's 19th century play will help define *Handbag*'s place in the contemporary British drama.

2.1.1. Using Oscar Wilde's Text as a Source in the 20th Century

In order to determine Wilde's play as a source text for Ravenhill's *Handbag*, it is critical to compare these two plays in terms of common and distinct content and structure to find out and analyze how Ravenhill makes *Handbag*'s reader remember Wilde's play. Hutcheon defines adaptation simply as "An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works" (2006, s. 8). To call *Handbag* an adaptation is inevitable regarding this definition and so Ravenhill's choice to adapt a comedy play from 19th century satirizing Victorian age values cannot be counted as a coincidence. However hard Ravenhill's choice might seem to account for, his purpose is obviously relatable regarding the fact that adapting a text from a

totally different age is a very convenient way to compare two different periods in terms of common social issues/problems. It looks like a specific choice made to demonstrate and prove the fact that our society is not that distinct from the Victorian society in the 1890s. *Handbag* is a postmodern adaptation of Wilde's play that offers a complicated, but absolute portrait of Victorian way of living and its adaptation by Ravenhill lets us open a road today to guide and criticize our own contemporary society.

Mark Ravenhill obviously uses Oscar Wilde's play as a source text to create his *Handbag*. The direct and clear reference to Wilde's a century older Victorian play starts right at the beginning of Ravenhill's play, in its title. Sanders states that "most formal adaptations carry the same title as their source text (Sanders, 2006, p. 22)". However, it is not always completely the same title. The title of the original play on which Ravenhill builds his *Handbag* is used as a subtitle for it with a slight difference. The original play is titled as *The Importance of Being Earnest* with a subtitle *A Trivial Comedy for Serious People.* However, the adaptation by Ravenhill has a totally different yet referential title: *Handbag*. Handbag is one of the best-known symbols of Wilde's play in which one of the main characters is lost in a handbag because of his young and careless nanny. So, Ravenhill's readers would certainly catch this handbag reference upon reading the title and get to know its reference for sure after reading its subtitle: *The Importance of Being Someone*. This wordplay of changing *Earnest* with *Someone* implies and foreshadow an imitation with an alteration in *Handbag*.

In addition to its title, *Handbag* has many other parts and aspects that remind the original play. In the following part, the characters, setting, storylines in *Handbag* will be examined in comparison with Wilde's play to identify its adaptational nature. Ravenhill starts reminding his reader that they are reading an adaptation in its title. Catherine Rees states that "There would be little point in offering a new version of a play in which nothing has changed, and so adaptation must always offer a new outlook or interpretation, self-consciously pushing the audience to keep at the front of their minds the new context or approach (Rees, 2017, s. 117)". Creating a new version of Wilde's play, Ravenhill brings a new outlook to it on purpose even if he directly borrows certain same elements in his adaptation. Although the title is not the biggest leap between the adaptation and the

adapted text, it still implies that this postmodern version of the original text will give a twist to it. As a result, the original play flourishes in a new cultural environment rather than simply fitting into it.

2.1.2. Using Oscar Wilde's Characters

Ravenhill's adaptation of Wilde's play could be approached as a complex response to the source text. Adapting Wilde's play as a conscious and deliberate attempt, Mark Ravenhill overtly presents it as engaged with the original play offering a new approach and direction to it. Rees claims that readers enjoy reading familiar stories in a new play saying: "We want there to be a clear and obvious relationship between the new text and the old that inspired it (2017, s. 2)". To create a new approach for one of Wilde's classics by rewriting it, Ravenhill borrows some of Wilde's characters and recreates them in his *Handbag*. Through this borrowing of the characters, Ravenhill keeps his readers conscious of the origin of his new play. As a result, Ravenhill achieves a complicated interplay between the adapted text and his adaptation regarding the characters he chooses to include and exclude in his *Handbag*. For Julia Kristeva, relationships and references between texts are inevitable and the writers do not always consciously refer to other texts regarding her theory of intertextuality. However, *Handbag* has a deliberate relationship with Wilde's play and Ravenhill obviously keeps his reader informed about this fact. And the reading of both the original play and the adaptation is bound to affect each other.

As Ravenhill creates two different story lines in his play, there are two sets of characters to examine in comparison with Wilde's play. The contemporary part of the play has a totally different set of characters from Wilde's play. Ravenhill's choice of characters in this part is not one of the elements that remind its readers of Wilde's play and reveals it as an adaptation. However, it is the Victorian part of the play reflecting back in order to bring the source material to light in different ways. Ravenhill's decision about how to adapt and use Wilde's characters in his contemporary play is worth examining in understanding his purpose and way of adapting an old play.

Ravenhill does not take Wilde's Victorian characters and put them in a contemporary setting. On the contrary, he reanimates them in the same Victorian society similar to the one that Wilde originally creates them in a century ago. Yet,

Jack is an exception. He is a baby that is present both in the Victorian and the contemporary part of *Handbag*. He is one of the characters that Ravenhill includes in his play as a more vague and faint character having no lines than Wilde's play. In Wilde's play, Jack is one of the main characters, and he is depicted as a powerful young man who is respected in society. However, he deceives people by changing his name and so escaping the social responsibilities that the Victorian society of the time expects him to abide by. Ravenhill puts him in a more passive position as a baby that is made use of by all the other adults for their own interests. In the contemporary part, he is born in a contemporary family with four parents that promise to take good care of him, but they all fail at the end. In the parallel Victorian part of the play, he is entrusted to an inexperienced and careless nanny by his own parents, which leads him to be exploited at the end when the nanny gives him to a pedophile.

Ravenhill's transposition of one of Wilde's main characters into his contemporary play as a shadowy little baby character demonstrates Ravenhill's objective to make an inversion about Wilde's focus of the play. Through depicting Wilde's adult Jack as a baby Jack in *Handbag*, Ravenhill sheds light on the unmentioned parenting responsibility. Ravenhill uses the same character but reverses the focus of the play as Wilde's adult Jack is a hypocrite whereas Ravenhill's baby Jack is ignored by his parents and left at the mercy of young nannies. Wilde also mentions Jack's childhood and reveals how he is lost in a *Handbag* by his nanny, but this fact is not taken as a serious and dramatic issue as he is an adult in the play. As it is told as something that happens in the past, the focus is never on the ignorant nanny or the parents of the baby. The focus and all the discussions are on finding his familial roots for him to gain respect in the society and get a chance to marry. Ravenhill creating Wilde's Jack as a baby brings his parents' ignorance to light and puts the focus on the parental responsibility.

On the contrary to Jack, Cardew is a character that Wilde uses as a shadowy one that is only mentioned by the other characters. He is not even on the character list of the play, so he does not have lines. Cardew is referred to as an old gentleman who finds Jack when he is a baby, raises him up and consequently makes him guardian to his granddaughter. Wilde's depictions of Cardew as a philanthropist conflict with Ravenhill's Cardew who is a pedophile. Although he is visited by the

contemporary character Phil from time to time, Cardew is one of the Victorian characters Ravenhill creates as one of the main characters who is in dialogue and interaction with the other characters in his *Handbag*.

Apart from creating Cardew as a more evident and significant character in the Victorian part of his play, Ravenhill creates his own version of Cardew as a foil character for Wilde's. Even if this might seem like infidelity to the original play, Catherine Rees argues that "It is also the case that adaptations need not be 'faithful' to their original material, but rather that they offer a new interpretation (Rees, 2017, s. 84)". Ravenhill's interpretation of the Cardew character can be considered just like the same way in which any of Wilde's readers might read it in the original play. Adapting a play is like reading it from another perspective, which makes the playwright free of the must or need to be loyal to the original text. Just like readers who are active in the meaning making process, adapters are also free in reading a text and adapting/interpreting it in a new way. With an obvious decision on making use of this freedom of interpretation, Ravenhill revisions Cardew as a pedophile in contrast to Wilde's compassionate and caring Cardew.

Reading about a pedophile Cardew after Wilde's philanthropist Cardew would be a great surprise and shock for the audience. This shocking reaction might be what Ravenhill intended to create; yet it still would not be possible to claim that Ravenhill totally changes and reverses Wilde's Cardew character. Whereas Cardew is only present through how other characters mention him in Wilde's play, the reader observes Cardew talking and acting in Ravenhill's adaptation. The conscious attempt of Ravenhill to rewrite an already existing play does not only mean to create a similar play with the exact same characters. As Rees states, "the process of adaptation as one in which transposition between one text and another necessarily involves gaps as much as it involves duplication (2017, s. 1)". In line with this, Ravenhill's revisioning of Cardew character might be read not as a false interpretation, but it could be suggested that he is unfolding some facts about Cardew and his past. He could have revealed Cardew not as a pedophile, but as a psychopath or as a lunatic, which would not still be a false interpretation either, because it would be just one interpretation or prediction about his past. It could be stated that this gap between Ravenhill's Cardew and Wilde's Cardew is only a part of the adaptation process. Cardew is still Jack's guardian and the old man that will

find him -supposedly- in the train station in Ravenhill's play; however, he will be lying about how he finds and adopts Jack later. Wilde's reader who reads Ravenhill's adaptation might want to look back on the original play to double check if Ravenhill's interpretation or way of reimaging Cardew might have a chance to be right. By this means, Ravenhill leads to new ways of discussing and examining Wilde's play.

Like the other characters Ravenhill borrows from Wilde's play, also Lady Bracknell maintains her Wildean name in *Handbag*. However, she is named as Augusta in the character list and before her lines. Augusta, who is Miss O'Flaherty at the beginning of Ravenhill's play is revealed to be Lady Bracknell when she marries Lord Bracknell through the end, which makes it certain that she is a revisioning of Wilde's Lady Bracknell. Ravenhill's Augusta is a young woman who is planning to stay with her pregnant sister and live with them after the birth. She is just like any other Victorian young woman who is obsessed with marrying a rich man and changing her name. She even makes fun of Prism who is not interested in marriage at all but in her manuscripts. So, she is just like the typical Victorian women depicted in Wilde's play where women are only interested in marriage. Instead of creating a different Lady Bracknell in his *Handbag*, Ravenhill creates her at a younger age when she is still unmarried and looking for a husband. She is a consistent character when compared to Wilde's Lady Bracknell who is obsessed with her daughter's marriage to a rich man. It is inevitable to read Ravenhill's Augusta as the younger self of Wilde's Lady Bracknell when Ravenhill demonstrates her obsession with her own marriage in the Victorian strand of the play.

In addition, the temptation to make comparisons between how Ravenhill and Wilde depict this same character helps examining Ravenhill's Augusta like a flashback for Wilde's Lady Bracknell regarding her obsession with marriage. As the characters are the same having the same names, the switch in the time period seems to be the main change in the Ravenhill's play. It seems to be what makes the characters seem different from Wilde's. However, this obvious link between Ravenhill's Victorian characters and Wilde's characters demonstrates that the play only shifts in time and the characters stay the same. Exploring several definitions for adaptation and appropriation practices in comparison to each other in her book,

Sanders implies that adaptations are more explicit in stating their purpose of rewriting an old play saying, "In appropriations the intertextual relationship may be less explicit, more embedded, but what is often inescapable is the fact that a political or ethical commitment shapes a writer's, director's, or performer's decision to re-interpret a source text (2006, p. 2)". The playwright's decision in using Wilde's characters in his *Handbag* demonstrates his explicit strategy to adapt the original play.

Miss Prism is another character that Ravenhill borrows from Wilde's Victorian play. Together with Ravenhill's loyalty to the text while recreating Lady Bracknell, he also lets Wilde's Miss Prism glimpse back into her youth that makes fun of the Victorian women whose only expectation in life is getting married. Wilde's Miss Prism is a dignified governess of a young lady, and she is unmarried. Ravenhill also creates her as an unmarried woman; however, she is younger in Ravenhill's version. Ravenhill's Prism is an idealist young woman who is interested in her novel more than anything else. Although she is reimagined as the same character in *Handbag*, she differs from Wilde's Miss Prism in her approach to marriage. Whereas Wilde's Miss Prism is a more obedient older lady who is ready for marriage and gives it a chance, Ravenhill's Prism makes fun of Augusta as a shallow woman who is obsessed with marriage. Ravenhill takes Wilde's characters to a journey in time, and the characters are the ones who experience this repositioning in time.

Ravenhill's adaptation of Miss Prism might be read as a critique of the Victorian women who do not have their own aspirations and goals in life other than marriage. As Miss Prism's younger self, Ravenhill's Prism criticizes Augusta as one of these Victorian women. This revisit of Wilde's play through Prism character creates a harsh and irritating critique of this passive role and position of women in society. Wilde's way of criticizing this fact is to make fun of it through his comedy play; however, Ravenhill criticizes it through a franker and more brutal nanny character. Wilde's Miss Prism is sorry and feeling guilty of her confessions about how she loses baby Jack by mistake. Her way of telling what happens in the train station is funny and dramatic at the same time. On the contrary, Ravenhill's Prism relentlessly arranges to give the baby to a pedophile as she wants to focus more on her manuscripts. This cold-blooded confession of Ravenhill's younger Prism makes

the reader think about the accuracy of Wilde's Miss Prism's innocent confession one more time. This version of Prism by Ravenhill makes the reader question whether Wilde's Prism is telling the truth about her experience as Jack's nanny or not. So, it could be concluded that Ravenhill's shift in time by revisioning Wilde's characters at their younger ages in his *Handbag* helps him create some questions to ask about Wilde's play and answer them through his own interpretations at the same time. Ravenhill envisions a renewed society that is freed of pretentious but polished Victorians. On the contrary to Wilde's sympathetic Victorians, Ravenhill's Victorians are indifferent and uncaring.

2.1.3. Using Oscar Wilde's Plot

Despite retaining character names in *Handbag*, Ravenhill plays with the plot of the original play while adapting it to the contemporary British theatre. Hutcheon referring to the writers that adapt old texts states that "they are just as likely to want to contest the aesthetic or political values of the adapted text as to play homage" (2006, s. 20). Ravenhill obviously challenges the plot of the adapted play by jumping from the Victorian plot to the contemporary one and back throughout the whole play. As Ravenhill's *Handbag* has two parallel story lines; as a result, the interplay occurring at the plot level between the adaptation and the adapted play is worth examining in a twofold manner because Ravenhill creates two different plots in his contemporary play. The first story line is set in a contemporary world including characters different and apart from Wilde's play although some of Wilde's characters visit this contemporary part from time to time. The other story line has Wilde's characters from the Victorian age, and it forms the Victorian part of the play. Through these two different storylines, Ravenhill creates a twofold similar and parallel plot lines in one single play.

In some of the scenes through the end of the play, some of the characters from both parts of the play come together and these two story lines meet from time to time. So, the story line goes back and forth like a time travel thanks to Phil character taking drugs and hallucinating. It takes the reader from the contemporary world to the Victorian time and back again. This situation helps the reader relate between these two different story lines in the same play- *Handbag*- and also connect and associate both of them with Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* from 19th century. The two plots in *Handbag* create a chance for the reader to

compare both two different plays and two different centuries in terms of similar social issues. In addition, they make the reader compare two parallel stories with each other while comparing the whole play to Wilde's play at the same time.

Ravenhill both creates a new story with different characters from Wilde's play in the contemporary half of *Handbag*, and he also rewrites Wilde's play to an extend in the Victorian part of his play with obvious references to it. For the contemporary part of the play with an alternative family and same sex relationships, there are great many differences in the storyline where the characters, context and the time period are totally different from Wilde's play; yet, it still has many implicit references to it. For example, in the contemporary part of Ravenhill's play, there is a little baby stolen from its parents by its nanny who puts the blame on its ignorant parents. The little baby is not adopted but kidnapped with a purpose to take better care of it. Unfortunately, the baby is ignored even worse by its kidnappers who torture and kill it at the end of the play. Until there, there is no direct or indirect reference to Wilde's Jack who is lost by his nanny and later adopted by a gentleman. However, the fact that Ravenhill's contemporary baby is taken out of the house in a handbag is referential to Wilde's play. Wilde's Jack Worthing is mistakenly put in a handbag and lost in the Victoria train station. Ravenhill's nanny, Lorraine and her bisexual boyfriend Phil put the baby in a handbag and run away with him to set up a new life for themselves. These two young people kidnapping the baby in a handbag and plan to make use of it to sort themselves out are in parallel with the Victorian part of the play regarding Cardew character.

These obvious handbag references going back to Wilde's Victorian play makes *Handbag* a self-proclaimed adaptation. Hypertextuality is one of the five types of the transtextual relationships that Genette theorizes in his *Palimpsests* as "any text derived from a previous text either through simple *transformation* which I shall simply call from now on transformation, or through indirect transformation, which I shall label *imitation* (1997, s. 7)". Through this definition, *Handbag* could be called a hypertext of Wilde's play which happens to be a hypotext accordingly. There is a transformation that leads from Wilde's play to *Handbag* which is not simple yet direct. Accordingly, Ravenhill's contemporary play is a transformation that does not imitate the genre or style of the original text. However, it is a transformation of the content of source text. The transformation that is present in

the adapted play is a direct and obvious one regarding the characters. Gerard Genette categorizes the Aeneid and Ulysses as two hypertexts of the same hypotext, the Odyssey through his theory of textual transcendence. Ravenhill does a similar transposition in the Victorian part of his *Handbag* as Genette mentions for the transposition in Ulysses. Even so, there is not a direct transposition in the contemporary part of the adapted play as it is a whole new story created by Ravenhill. Without the Victorian part of the play, the only noticeable reference to the original play would be the handbag and lost baby. This coexistence of both parts makes Ravenhill's Handbag readable both separately and in relation to its hypotext. Ravenhill orchestrating a twofold storyline in one single play creates a transformation of Wilde's play into the contemporary British theatre.

Ravenhill's Cardew acknowledges his need for boys at the end of *Handbag* when he accepts having the baby Prism offers to him. Prism just like Lorraine puts the blame on the baby's parents to steal it away from them. Unlike Lorraine, Prism does not steal the baby for herself as she is quite more interested in her manuscripts. As a result, she arranges to give the baby to Cardew who is obviously and clearly protested by the society as a pedophile. Even if her disinterest in the wellbeing of the baby contrasts with Lorraine's concerns about the baby's health problems, these two nannies together in the different parts of Ravenhill's play help create a twist in the plot line of Wilde's original play. The change in the nanny image in Ravenhill's play takes its reader back to Wilde's play to check the loyalty of adaptation regarding the plot. Even though this might look like an apparent switch and alteration in plot at first sight, Ravenhill does not create a wrong or diverse story considering the baby that is lost in a handbag. On the contrary, he creates an alternative story without touching the original plot. Thanks to these two nannies stealing the babies on purpose, Ravenhill suggests an alternative claim saying Wilde's Miss Prism might be lying to Lady Bracknell and Jack when she confesses how she loses the baby years ago in a moment of mental absence in the original play. This kind of transposition of Wilde's plot into a contemporary play demonstrates how different adaptations of old classic plays might bring new interpretations and comments to them.

There is an obvious transposition of the action from Wilde's Victorians to Ravenhill's Victorians. This altered Victorian story line in *Handbag* is a direct

transposition whereas the contemporary story line is an indirect transposition as it has implicit references to the plot of original play. Ravenhill mingles a direct and an indirect transposition of the action of Wilde's play in his *Handbag*. The powerful connection between the Victorian and the contemporary revisioning of Wilde's play contributes to a reexamination and reinterpretation of the original play in the contemporary world.

The parallels between the two plays are quite evident regarding the Victorian part of *Handbag* with the same basic plot, however, it is only five Victorian scenes out of fourteen scenes in total. There are five Victorian scenes derived from Wilde's original plot and keeping the basic story line in it whereas there are nine contemporary scenes that bring an altered and up to date perspective to the original story. Ravenhill takes the Victorian plot and lets it speak to his own contemporary British audience in parallel with a contemporary plot differing from the Victorian one.

The original play having the focus on marriage and hypocrite characters who lie all the time to pretend being morally decent Victorians, Ravenhill's plot switches the focus to parenting responsibility. He, in a sense, creates contemporary references to the underestimated parenting responsibility in the Victorian Age. Even so, Ravenhill setting the story of Wilde's play with a different focus in his version of it transposes the basic plot as it is in the original play. Rees explains how the adaptations are still different keeping the same plot with these words: "While the plot remains essentially the same, the audience's understanding of the character can, in the process of adaptation, be radically altered, […] (Rees, 2017, s. 62)". The characters maintain their original names and the plot is basically unchanged in the Victorian part; yet the understanding of the characters and the plot could change to a great extent. Ravenhill changes this understanding of the reader by mixing this Victorian plot and the contemporary plot that he creates in parallel to each other and the original play.

The rewritten basic Victorian plot keeps haunting the contemporary part of *Handbag* like an experience from the past that is long time ago. It demonstrates how Ravenhill's own experience reading Wilde's play and his own interpretation of it keeps haunting his mind while writing *Handbag*. This interruption seems like an unintentional and unplanned visit paid to the adaptation process because the

Victorian scenes are just scattered among the contemporary ones. By interrupting the contemporary plot of *Handbag* first after scene one, then after scene four, Wilde's Victorian plot reaches the contemporary part in scene nine where they meet and totally merge finally. Their coexistence keeps two more scenes in scene ten and fourteen. These two entangled plots converging finally help Ravenhill keep the basic plot structure of Wilde's play in an interesting way. The way he orchestrates these two different plots in parallel to each other creates a radical retelling of Wilde's plo2t.

2.1.4. Using Oscar Wilde's Setting and Context

Changing the context of the original play while rewriting it in a different period of time is a way to change the focus of the reader for Ravenhill. Not only the characters or the plot and story line, but also the context a play is transposed into is what makes the new play an adaptation. This change of context is made thanks to a temporal shift in *Handbag* as Ravenhill places the original storyline in Wilde's play in a contemporary context. Discussing the change in the representation of human being on the stage, in his thesis Bal states that

> It (drama) has carried out these actions on the stage differently in different times: actors have changed, characters have remained; ideas have changed, stories have remained; theatres have changed, spectators have remained; settings have changed, stage has remained; times have changed, space has remained; and people have changed, human nature has remained. (2009, p. 206)

Despite any changes in time, ideas, theatres, audiences, readers, settings, people, and especially the time, he claims that the 1990s British Drama brought a new sensibility of differences in the portrayal of humans.

Wilde's play is not recreated in a different nation; on the contrary, the national context stays the same. Rees explains this change in the focus through a change in the context with these lines:

> Indeed, the resemblances between texts, the places where they are similar but not exact, are the spaces in which adaptation can occur—these fissures are the moments into which a new writer can pour new and divergent narratives, creating new contexts and posing different questions, shifting the audience's focus between the original text and the adaptation. (Rees, 2017, s. 1)

In general sense, *Handbag* is set in a different time and context. Even if surely, there is a shift in the time period in *Handbag*, Ravenhill does not rewrite the same original story in a different national context. That is because Wilde's Victorian plot is revived in the same Victorian context in the Victorian part of *Handbag*. So, it

might be inferred as there is no change in the context from this perspective. Ye, there is not just one Victorian plot which is adapted from Wilde's play, but also there is a contemporary plot with a contemporary context in *Handbag*. So, it has two different contexts and time periods at the same time. This introduction of a contemporary context in parallel to the Victorian context adapted with a twist in the plot and characters helps create a harmony between the contemporary context and the Victorian context in Ravenhill's adaptation.

Despite it might seem like a confusing coexistence, Ravenhill overtly exposes a new frame of producing something new and bringing a new interpretation to an already existing classic play. By choosing an old play to adapt from the same nation and culture, Ravenhill demonstrates how the mentality of the society for certain social issues stays the same even in the same country despite the time changes. As a result, Ravenhill is not only an originator of a new work of art but an orchestrator rearranging the present material together with the contemporary material he creates in his own way. Together with this interpretation, it is obvious that Ravenhill does not completely modernize everything in Wilde's play. On the contrary, he keeps the same Victorian context in the Victorian plot of his *Handbag.* As Hutcheon points out, "Major shifts in a story's context—in national setting or time period— can change radically how the transposed story is interpreted, ideologically and literally (2006, s. 28)". There is a major shift in the contemporary story of *Handbag*, which creates a radical change in how the adapted play could be interpreted (Sierz, 2011).

In addition to creating a storyline in a contemporary context, Ravenhill keeps Wilde's Victorian plot with some major shifts not in the context but in characters and storyline on purpose. This is how he flirts with Wilde's play self-consciously through reframing and rewriting its characters. His insistence on keeping the Victorian context in the Wildean part of the play could be explained with a need for keeping the reader in a constant interaction and association with the original play. Thus, the reader could go back and forth while reading *Handbag* with a haunting idea in mind saying and reminding them that it is an adaptation. This creates an awareness in reading the play as an interpretation of Wilde's play.

The alternative context Ravenhill creates in the contemporary part of the play speaks directly to the contemporary audience. This contemporary context

makes the reader get a chance to encounter the similar issues from Wilde's play such as parenting, family, social norms, and moral values in a context that they are more familiar with. The contemporary reader knows the Victorian world only through reading history books, works of art describing it and maybe the stories that their grandparents tell them; however, the contemporary world is what they live in. So, this confrontation with Ravenhill's contemporary story coexisting with Wilde's Victorian story in parallel to each other transforms the readers' understanding of Wilde's play.

The undisguised flashbacks to Wilde's play in scene two, five, nine, ten and fourteen make it easier to relate the different representations of family, parenting and all the other thematic references to each other in two different time periods and contexts. Through this two-winged storyline, Ravenhill creates a contextual shift. David Lane defines Ravenhill's *Handbag* as "an alternative approach to transposing the context of the story world- where it is fractured and almost completely removed from its original structure- […] (Lane, 2010, p. 159)". This alternative approach of Ravenhill could be explained through examining how he starts the play with independent scenes he creates in a contemporary context, and then making these scenes parallel with the Wildean scenes again in the Victorian context through the end of the play where they both meet in the same narrative and storyline finally.

The fragmented twofold context of *Handbag* existing separately in certain scenes and meeting through the later scenes inspires the readers to discover new readings of Wilde's play. In addition to the possibilities of different kinds of readings, the interpretive nature of adaptation also contains a cultural perspective within itself. "Writ large, adaptation includes almost any act of alteration performed upon specific cultural works of the past and dovetails with a general process of cultural recreation (Fishlin & Fortier, 2000, p. 4)". This cultural recreation that Fishlin mentions while defining adaptation can be investigated and analyzed in terms of Ravenhill's way of recreating Victorian context.

It could be claimed that the Victorian context is recreated without any transformation if the Victorian scenes are read separately. However, there is an obvious transformation when they are read in harmony with the contemporary context. It is obviously inevitable to read both parts of the play together as they complete each other and come together in the same timeframe and narrative through

the end. This mixture of two different contexts makes it possible to claim Ravenhill shifts the context in *Handbag*.

Hutcheon claims that "Time, often very short stretches of it, can change the context even within the same place and culture (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 144)". It is the time that creates a shift in the context in *Handbag* as the original play is rewritten in the same nation and genre. So, Ravenhill's readers are the British audience just like Wilde's. However, they are the grandchildren of Wilde. Even if Wilde's play is not a recreated in a different nation, *Handbag* could be still considered as a transcultural adaptation. Hutcheon asserts that "Even within a single culture, the changes can be so great that they can in fact be considered transcultural, on a micro- rather than macrolevel (s. 147)". This great cultural change in *Handbag* results from a time gap of a hundred year.

Handbag serves as a reflection of the contemporary British society while at the same time it creates a provocation to it just like Wilde's play did a hundred years ago. Biçer says that "Ravenhill is a true representative of contemporary world, a world of conspicuous consumption, postmodern globalised community, and the chaotic state of humanity (2012, p. 116)". Accordingly, *Handbag* mirrors the society which it emerges in just like *The Importance of Being Earnest* reflects the Victorian society. Both plays mirroring the society they emerge in reveal how the society has changed during the time. So, the shift in time and as a result in the context demonstrate that adaptations have a role of witnessing and revealing the change in a society. One of the four elements of travelling ideas is "a transformation of the idea in its new time and place (Said, 1983, p. 226-227)" says Edward Said. By looking at this, the transformation of Wilde's play in a new time but the same place transforms the ideas in the original play. Wilde's Victorian story travels to the contemporary world, but Ravenhill does not bring Wilde's ideas without making any transformations. On the contrary, there is a huge transformation of culture and society represented in the play.

2.1.5. Creating an Alternative Past for Wilde's Characters

There is an obvious invitation by Ravenhill to consider *Handbag* in dialogue with Wilde's play depending on the fact that he uses Wilde's characters, plot, and its Victorian context in this contemporary play. However, recognizing this overt relationship does not mean that Ravenhill stays totally faithful to the original play.

Even so, "one of the main questions that concern adaptation theorists is the evaluation of an adaptation in regard to the original (Dedebaş, 2013, p. 251)". This fidelity issue is challenged by many adaptation theorists who come up with new ways of assessing and analyzing adaptations. Sanders names a process as "appropriation" defining "the appropriated text or texts are not always as clearly signaled or acknowledged as in the adaptive process (2006, p. 26)". With this term, she makes the playwrights get rid of the fidelity questions while revisioning old plays. There are many changes in Ravenhill's version of Wilde's play, and even these changes clearly signal the original play. Yet, questioning Ravenhill's play in terms of fidelity to the original play would be useless as Ravenhill does not rewrite the original story with loyalty concerns; on the contrary, he creates an alternative past for Wilde's characters with many twists to the original version. So, analyzing *Handbag* as an adaptation thanks to these conscious references transform the readers' understanding of Wilde's play when they are read together as Ravenhill creates contemporary doubles for the Victorian characters and make them live together in his play. This way, he creates a chance for the reader go back and forth among the original play and the adapted play. Ravenhill's inspiration for doing this might be investigated through analyzing what he achieves by doing this. He does not simply recreate the Victorian play making a shift in the characters, context, and the plot; on the contrary, he creates something that is not present in the original version. This creation is not free and separate from the original play, but it is like an extension backwards. Opposed to the common way of letting the storyline grow up and extend towards the future in adaptations, Ravenhill makes this extension backwards. He takes Wilde's readers travel back in time to demonstrate how it all starts according to his own imagination and interpretation.

While rewriting Wilde's play in a different dimension, Ravenhill alludes to the Victorian storyline of Wilde intermittently. In addition to these occasional returns to it, he also creates the contemporary part of *Handbag* in the light of the same Victorian plot of Wilde. For example, he creates Lorraine as a contemporary double for Wilde's Miss Prism. Creating a contemporary nanny who is not experienced in childcare or has no education in child development does not obviously refer to Wilde's Victorian governess, Miss Prism as she is depicted as dignified, well-educated, and respected lady. That is why Ravenhill's Lorraine may

not remind the reader of Wilde's Prism at first sight. What makes Lorraine a contemporary counterpart for Miss Prism is the Prism character Ravenhill creates in the Victorian part of *Handbag*. Miss Prism's younger self that Ravenhill creates as a self-centered and disinterested nanny for the baby Jack entrusted to her in the Victorian part help readers find a parallel between Prism and Lorraine and then between Ravenhill's Prism and Wilde's Miss Prism. So, the contemporary strand of the play is rather in a supportive position for the Victorian part in order to investigate it as a rewriting that demonstrates a different dimension of Wilde's play. The contemporary story is supporting the message in the parallel rewritten and altered Victorian story. Ravenhill shows lots of things change with an alternative perspective to the original play, and he adds on to it by creating the contemporary plot.

To revision Wilde's Victorian play for his own contemporary British reader, Ravenhill first creates an alternative past for Wilde's Victorian characters. By this means, he succeeds changing the readers' understanding of Wilde's classic play. This creates a complex interplay between the source text and the adaptation. The complexity is a result of how Ravenhill responds to the original play. His reimagination of the Victorian characters 28 years younger than they are in Wilde's play offers a playground that sets the reader free in interpreting and understanding the original text. Creating their younger selves, Ravenhill reveals an alternative way of reading Wilde's canonical play. Presenting his reading of Wilde's play, Ravenhill also reminds the reader of their own freedom of interpreting it. He achieves this by creating a fishy background that speculates about Wilde's characters. *Handbag* asks questions about Wilde's play and answers them by unveiling some unmentioned facts about the incidents. Paul Taylor suggests in his review of the play staged on Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith that "Ravenhill provides darkly droll answers in a prequel to Wilde's play, set 28 years earlier, which punctuates and counterpoints the episodes involving two gay couples and their disputes around the baby (Taylor, 1998)". These answers are intended to provoke the readers and might lead them to read Wilde's play from this new perspective of Ravenhill.

The contemporary world that keeps colliding with the Victorian world in *Handbag* seems to go in parallel with Wilde's Victorian play. However, it is in

parallel with the Victorian world that Ravenhill creates in parallel to Wilde's Victorian world. In this recreated Victorian world, Ravenhill not only creates what is not present in the original play, or supports and verifies some facts but also, he refutes or denies some others. In order to get to this, he takes the reader to a journey back in time starting from the youth of Lady Bracknell and Prism in scene two. Augusta is young and unmarried looking for a rich man to marry while Prism is a young unexperienced nanny who is more interested in writing a book. This first scene of Victorian revival does not reveal much about how these two characters connect with Wilde's Lady Bracknell and Miss Prism. However, Augusta is revealed to be the revival of Wilde's Lady Bracknell when she announces that she meets Lord Bracknell, and she will be Lady Bracknell soon while she is protesting and kicking Cardew at the same time in scene fourteen. Ravenhill's Augusta is a parallel character that does not collide with Wilde's play because the past that he creates for Lady Bracknell does not change anything in the original play. Unlike Lady Bracknell, Ravenhill's version of Prism does not have a parallel story with what Miss Prism tells in Wilde's original play.

Prism yet as a young nanny in Ravenhill's play has a totally different experience with the Victorian baby from what she recounts as a 28-year older governess in Wilde's play. Upon confronting Lady Bracknell, she excuses how she loses the baby by mistake in the original play, and nobody questions or ever accuses her of doing such a thing and disappearing without telling anything. Ravenhill creates an alternative past for those who never understand or question why Miss Prism does not tell anything about the perambulator while she explains how she leaves her handbag in a train station in Wilde's play. In his *Handbag*, Ravenhill takes the reader to the venue of the incident and shows one possible reality about the incident which is told in the original play. This time young Prism does not place the baby in her handbag by mistake and forget it in the cloakroom or the train station; however, she arranges to give it to a pedophile in Ravenhill's play. Ravenhill's version of the Victorian story regarding the story of the mislaid baby in the handbag refutes Miss Prism's claims in Wilde's original play. Ravenhill's invention of the lost baby in a handbag not as a mistake but as a plan of his nanny leads to a reexamination of the original play. As a result, it can be suggested that

Ravenhill discovers some uncertainties in Wilde's play and creates ways through which any of them could be clarified in his contemporary version of it.

Ravenhill also invents how Cardew plans to escape to Worthing after being protested by the society in *Handbag*. In Wilde's play, Lady Bracknell asks about Jack's parents and familial relations upon learning his interest in marrying her daughter. He mentions how he is named after a first-class ticket by the old gentleman that founds him in the train station. This ticket is for a seaside resort called Worthing, and that is why he has the name Worthing. Ravenhill using this fact from Wilde's play supports and reveals an obvious relationship between his play and Wilde's original play. So, he shows overtly how he imitates Wilde's play in addition to transforming and shifting some elements in it.

In addition to creating an alternative past for Miss Prism, Ravenhill creates the baby's parents in *Handbag*. They are shadowy characters who are only mentioned by Lady Bracknell in Wilde's play, however, they are revealed to be cold Victorian parents who entrust their newborn baby to a young woman about whom they know almost nothing. Especially, Moncrieff mentioning the world of childhood as "a burden" in scene five while leaving the responsibility of their baby to Prism opens a new way for questioning Wilde's play regarding irresponsible parents. Dedebaş says that "[...] the theory of adaptation struggles with problems of bridging the gaps between two texts and contexts (2013, p. 251)". Ravenhill's alternative depiction of the baby's parents which does not exist in the original play at all fills in the gaps from the original play.

Creating parents for the Victorian baby and demonstrating how he gets lost, Ravenhill does not draw Wilde's Jack's attention because he does not question his parents' whereabouts and/or accuses Miss Prism of her negligence in the original play. Ravenhill draws his readers' attention to an unmentioned parenting responsibility that might be the reason why the baby gets lost in Wilde's play. He achieves this by creating an alternative past for Wilde's characters. To support this alternative Victorian plot, he also creates a parallel contemporary plot which might be read as an alternative future for Wilde's characters, or as an alternative contemporary plot for it. As a result, Ravenhill makes his reader think about different possibilities regarding for example Miss Prism's actual intention in putting the baby in a handbag in Wilde's play.

2.1.6. Using Oscar Wilde's Comedy to Create a Disturbing In-yer-face Play

Ravenhill's motivation to create a disturbing in-yer-face play out of Wilde's one of the best comedy plays seems to be not coincidental and unintentional. Whatever his objective is, what he achieves is obviously a plot twist in his adaptation. Ravenhill uses Wilde's characters, plot and setting to create an alternative past for the original story line in Wilde's play in addition to creating a contemporary parallel part to this alternative Victorian story in *Handbag*. Employing these elements in his *Handbag*, Ravenhill responds to the comedy that is present in the original play through adding shock and violence elements to his version of it. It would be a surprise for Wilde's characters if they learnt how coldblooded and comfortable Miss Prism was when he arranged to give the baby to a pedophile 28 years ago. Obviously, *Handbag* is not a comedy play, and reading it is not fun at all depending on all the violence exercised on the babies in it. In this part of the chapter, the way Ravenhill deals with the comedy aspect of the original play is examined.

The Importance of Being Earnest is one of Wilde's most successful comedy plays; on the contrary, *Handbag* is an in-yer-face play that is full of adultery, child abuse, cheating, drug use and pedophiles. While the original Victorian play makes fun of the superficiality of the Victorian aristocracy, their artificiality and obsession with money touching upon serious issues such as family, marriage, moral values and honesty, *Handbag* depicts the society in a more frustrating and depressing way. The play with a full tittle of *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* makes fun of the way how the upper-class society of the time live with the norms and values that only work for the rich people. Wilde depicts the aristocracy that keeps emphasizing how these morals are important yet behaving indifferently to them in a satirical way. Different from the way Wilde criticizes the Victorian society, Ravenhill criticizes the contemporary society by demonstrating violence, sexuality, disgusting scenes, and tortured babies in a catastrophic atmosphere in *Handbag*.

The reaction of the readers to these two plays would not be the same as one is funny and the other is shocking. *Handbag* is Ravenhill's reaction to the "trivial" comedy of Wilde, and he brings this play back to the British stage in a more serious

tone. Thus, he leads his reader to rethink Wilde's play in a contemporary context with a critical perspective. On the contrary to the Victorian readers enjoying Wilde's comedy, Ravenhill's characters are to be criticized harshly as their attitudes and behaviors are annoying and irritating. All the same, it does not mean that Wilde's characters are not annoying. They are irritating because they are pretentious and artificial. For example, Lady Bracknell says that she does not approve mercenary marriages, yet she allows her nephew marry Cecily only when she learns how rich she is.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act 3**
> **Lady Bracknell.** [Sitting down again.] A moment, Mr. Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. Few girls of the present day have any really solid qualities, any of the qualities that last, and improve with time. We live, I regret to say, in an age of surfaces. (Wilde, 1989, p. 78)

Even if she mentions how unimportant money is while deciding to marry someone, she implies she marries Lord Bracknell because she herself does not have money. This funny description of how Lady Bracknell approaches marriages with a focus on money and fortunes- even if she denies it- revisited in *Handbag* through Augusta character kicking Cardew who rejects marrying her. She announces how she draws Lord Bracknell's attention and attracts him while at the same time protesting Cardew as a pervert and boy lover in scene fourteen (p. 221).

The superficial mercenary marriages portrayed in a funny way in Wilde's play is adapted through an alternative family of one lesbian and a gay couple in *Handbag*. Ravenhill's way of creating characters who are happy to build a lovely family for their baby soon turns into a dreadful kidnapping of the baby at the end. Annette Pankratz states that "On the one hand, the story of the mislaid baby in the handbag forms the basis of a comedy; on the other, the Victorian adoption/abduction theme mirrors the fatal kidnapping of Jack (2002, p. 232)". Dealing with the lost baby in a more serious way makes Ravenhill's adaptation different from a comedy play. It demonstrates Wilde's trivialized subjects and themes from a perspective through which the readers would not have fun but feel disgust and anger for. Rabey claims that "England adopted a pseudo-American enterprise and business culture which was expressed and supported by Thatcher's assurance that there was 'no such thing as society' only the self-interest of the individual and the family to which she appealed with the invocation of 'Victorian

values' that directly supported monetarism (2003, p. 108)". *Handbag* clearly mirrors this individuality and absence of society in the 1990s whereas Wilde makes fun of the society in the 1890s when people behaved as if there were values and social norms that they sticked to.

Both the adapted play and the adaptation have their own ways to mirror the society that they emerge in. Wilde criticizes the superficiality of the Victorian society in his comedy whereas Ravenhill attacks both the same Victorian society and the contemporary society in his in-yer-face play. Yet, the contemporary society that Ravenhill depicts is brutal and they do not hide this fact. Abbott calls adapters as raiders and says that "they don't copy, they steal what they want and leave the rest (2002, p. 105)". Even if Ravenhill uses Wilde's characters and story line, he leaves out the comedy factor. The frankness of Ravenhill's characters about how relentless and cold they are in terms of family, children, loyalty, and sentiments is irritating. Not only Ravenhill but also Wilde wants their readers to think about their own societies in a critical way, and they both use theatre plays to make it. However, Wilde chooses to create a comedy whereas Ravenhill chooses to "take(s) the audience by the scruff of the neck and shake(s) it until it gets the message (Sierz, 2001, p. 4)" through his in-yer-face play.

2.2. Discussing *Handbag* through Similar Social Issues to Wilde's Play

Handbag borrows some elements from Wilde's play such as characters, story line, setting and context. In addition to these elements, it also deals with many social issues which are also present in Wilde's play. So, it can be suggested that Ravenhill clearly makes use of *The Importance of Being Earnest* from a thematic perspective as well as being an inspiration and source for *Handbag* regarding the aforementioned elements. This paves the way for any discussion suggesting it as an adapted text that is grafted on *The Importance of Being Earnest.* As Sierz says, "Like other fiction, theatre is not just a response to the real world, but still less a simple reflection of it; plays also relate to other plays (2011, p. 9)". *Handbag* reflects the contemporary world in addition to the Victorian world it recreates. Mirroring the social issues of their times, both Wilde's play and Ravenhill's play relate to each other from a thematic perspective. It would be too simple to claim Ravenhill rewrites Wilde's play in his *Handbag* because it is not what he only does.

He obviously takes some elements from the original play yet creates another original play in the 20th century.

Oscar Wilde creates a funny play, a comedy out of social problems whereas Mark Ravenhill shocks the audience by showing nudity, sex, violence so as to react and draw attention to the same social problems. Despite the absence of such issues in the adapted play, Ravenhill openly deals with them in his version of the original play. Sarah Kane in an interview with Rodolfo di Giammarco (1997) states that "Violence is the most urgent problem we have as species, and the most urgent thing we need to confront. Personally, I say there is nothing better to write about (as cited in Biçer, 2011, p. 82)". In line with Kane's motivation to write about violence and to include such a striking issue in her plays, Ravenhill also confronts his contemporary reader with striking and scandalous issues such as violence and child abuse by revisiting the social issues from the Victorian age thanks to the elements he borrows from Wilde's play. Ravenhill revisits the social issues from the Victorian time through Wilde's play and discusses them in a contemporary context in his *Handbag*. Social issues such as family, parenting, marriage, hypocrisy, and moral values reappear in *Handbag* with a different perspective. Sanders defines adaptation practice as offering a commentary for the original text. She says that "it (adaptation) can parallel editorial practice in some respects, indulging in the exercise of trimming and pruning; yet it can also be an amplificatory procedure engaged in addition, expansion, accretion, and interpolation (2006, p. 18)". Ravenhill expands and adds to the original play in his *Handbag* regarding the thematic perspective. In this part of the chapter, the themes that Ravenhill borrows from Wilde's play, amplifies, and consequently unearths the silenced topics and themes in his adaptation are explored.

2.2.1. Marriage and Having a Child as a Way to Form a Family

This part of the chapter tries to analyze how Mark Ravenhill with a twist re-exposes the contemporary reader to the family structure Wilde creates in his a century older play. With this purpose, marriage and having a child will be discussed in the frame of family. Rees adds intertextuality into her discussion of adaptation claiming that "here we can see that intertextuality has its place in discussions of adaptation in that it can refer to the placing of one text in another (2017, p. 7)". She mainly takes into consideration the intertextuality theory of Julia Kristeva who

defines a text as a "mosaic of quotations [where] any text is the absorption of another (1980, p. 66)". Although Kristeva's intertextuality is not based on any conscious attempt by the writers, she states that "the writer can use another's word, giving it a new meaning while retaining the meaning it already had" in her book (1980, p. 73). The problematized family and parenting image gain a new meaning in the modern world in *Handbag*. This way, Ravenhill gives the original play a new meaning while retaining the meaning it already had. So, the authority of the original text is undermined in its new version with a new meaning in the 20th century.

So as to bring Wilde's family representation up in a totally new context, Ravenhill consciously uses two different ways. First way is to create an entirely contrasting family structure which has nothing to do with Wilde's. Second one is to recreate Wilde's Victorian family in parallel to this new contemporary family. In this way, he has two different but parallel parts in his *Handbag*. The Victorian family is revisited in parallel to the contemporary one in *Handbag* as a conscious attempt by Ravenhill so as to draw attention to similarities and differences between two different time periods. Hutcheon explores adaptations "as deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works (2006, p. xiv)". *Handbag* fits in this definition of her as a deliberate rewriting of Wilde's play.

Ravenhill creates an alternative family in opposition to Wilde's conventional family so that he provides a chance to discuss two different time periods through the same social issues. This alternative family living in an age of sperm donors and different types of sexual orientations is not shocking for its contemporary readers; however, it would be a scandal for Lady Bracknell, and she would go crazy if she happened to read Ravenhill's play where her younger self is also one of the characters. "Because adaptation is a form of repetition without replication, change is inevitable, […] (2006, p. xvi)". In line with this, Ravenhill's reviving of Wilde's conventional family in the Victorian part of the play is way different from Wilde's original family in that Ravenhill creates Wilde's characters at their young ages.

Having a child is either a way to form a family or to start a new life for Ravenhill's characters. They have a child or claim to own a child for these purposes. What it means to have a child for his characters can be argued through the very first

lines in scene one. A child is what makes Ravenhill's same sex couples a family in *Handbag*.

> **Handbag, Scene 1**
> **David** And when it means so much... to all of us...then it must be difficult to have a wank? (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 146)

Boz claims that "There have been great alterations in family dynamics and structures from the twentieth century onwards due to the massive feminisation of workforce, reforms in legislation, liberation movements and technological advancements (2019, p. 44)". Ravenhill demonstrates this change in family structure by creating an alternative family in parallel to Wilde's Victorian family. The literal process of having a child stands as a crystal-clear image there, and how it happens is not a conventional and usual way. It is very straightforward and weird to talk about wanking, porn movies and making jokes about child abusers while making plans about having a baby and raising it in a calm and safe environment. The way they put this unconventional way of "wanking in a cup" issue in words is so frank and shocking, thus seems irritating not only for Wilde's age, but also for the contemporary audience.

Handbag differs from Wilde's text in terms of this whole new way of making child. The alternative family Ravenhill creates in parallel to the Moncrieffs is not yet implied to be in parallel to Wilde's play in the first scene of the play. This gay and lesbian couples choose an unconventional and interesting way to bring a child into the world, which is to donate sperm in a laboratory environment. As a result, the couples planning to have the child lack of any preset images of this kind of parenting in their minds. This leads them to a kind of search for meaning. So, they try to make an emotional meaning out of it and make the process sound more sentimental and meaningful. The process of making child is not mentioned at all in the original play by Wilde as there is nothing interesting and talkable about it. Only how to form a family is one of the arguments and the birth labor is mentioned in it and also in the Victorian part of *Handbag*.

Tom "wanks" in a cup, which is not a natural way to have a baby. David (one of the four parents in Ravenhill's play) oversimplifies what Tom is doing by claiming it only as a physical involvement in the process and uses slang words to define it. Suzanne finds David's words "functional" and tries to make it sound more

emotional. They are doing and asking something normal but in an unusual way. However, they are still after making it feel more sacred and divine. Mauretta, Suzanne and David are discussing about whether to help Tom *"spill his love seed"* using some porn to keep him in mood for this functional part of forming a family. Suzanne rejects "porn" and tries to keep this process away from dirty sordid things despite David's ease at it.

On the contrary, marriage is the only way to form a family in Wilde's play. It is more like a prerequisite whereas it is not mentioned at all in Ravenhill's contemporary story. Ravenhill creates a new meaning for creating a family in *Handbag*. As a reader of Wilde's play, he creates an individual and unique understanding of the play. Roland Barthes' famous theory about "the Death of the Author" leaving the authority to the reader in the meaning making process reminds Ravenhill as a reader of the original play in addition to being a playwright rewriting it. Rees clarifies the position of writers in the meaning making process as follows: "In this way, intertextuality, and adaptation more widely, can offer writers playful and modern ways of engaging with textual systems and of examining their own roles within the creation of meaning and interpretation (2017, p. 8)". Ravenhill kills Wilde and creates his own interpretation and meaning of the original play in his *Handbag*.

Constance and Moncrieff are married in scene five of *Handbag*, and they are expecting a baby that day. Augusta is with her sister, Constance. Constance is having labor pains, but the men do not give attention to it and they even find it annoying, so they find the noise and her cries unbearable. Moncrieff is almost absent during the labor even if he is present there because he does not help Constance feel better in one way or another. It is parallel with the contemporary part of the play in that some of the parents are indifferent and negligent when Mauretta is giving birth to the baby. Ravenhill's Suzanne and David are late to the hospital for the birth as they are more concentrated on their own business and pleasures. Moncrieff is just like these ignorant parents of the baby in Ravenhill's alternative family.

> **Handbag, Scene 5**
> **Moncrieff** Thank goodness the modern age has realised the importance of dividing up our lives. Former ages, I believe, quite muddled up the aspects. Now we men can play billiards in the billiards room, smoke in the smoking room and relax in

> the library. And the ladies... well the ladies have their own worlds too. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 169)

He gives this speech during labor and arranges a nanny for the baby to get rid of the responsibility. Reading these lines, it is impossible to think about Wilde's Moncrieff keeping in mind that he is never depicted as a father figure who would tell such things as a father. He does not have lines in the source play and there is only a little information about him as a father. However, he plans to leave the burden to take care of the baby to an inexperienced nanny in Ravenhill's version. Hutcheon says that "if we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly (2006, p. 6)". Thinking about Wilde's Moncrieff is inevitable and what happens when they entrust Jack to the nanny is never known in the original play. So, reading the adaptation without referencing and thinking about the original play is almost impossible if one reads the original first. Ravenhill creates an ignorant family to hold responsible for the baby being lost in Wilde's play. This issue of ignorant parents will be discussed in a much deeper sense in the following part. Yet, it is obvious that Ravenhill recreates Wilde's Victorian family as an ignorant and dysfunctional one on purpose so as to put the blame on for the ignored children. This ignorant family that Ravenhill creates is obviously related to the original Victorian family, which makes the reader start questioning about the original play. This impulse and desire to reread the original play after and even while reading the adapted play shows that *Handbag* does not follow the original play hierarchically.

Ravenhill brings some questions about the attitude of Wilde's Victorian family in terms of parenting and creates answers for them. As Wilde's family depiction does not make the reader think about any kind of ignorance about children, and it is not even mentioned at all, Ravenhill opens a window for discussion both through his alternative family and the Victorian family he reconstructs in *Handbag*. As Sanders claims, "For consumption need not always be the intended endpoint of adaptation; the adapting text does not necessarily seek to consume or efface the informing source (2006, p. 25)". On the contrary, the adapted text contributes to the ongoing readings of the source text by expanding and adding to it. Hutcheon says that this does not mean that "adaptations are not also autonomous works that can be interpreted and valued as such; […] (2006, p. 6)". On the contrary, *Handbag* could be read as an original play without any prior

knowledge about the original play, "[…] but the viewer could not appreciate the knowing in-jokes, the sense of irony and destiny, the reversal of focus away from the major protagonists […] (Rees, 2017, p. 3)". So as to catch the referential quality and intertextual messages, it is crucial to have read the original play. Moreover, it might be even better to read the original text after reading the adapted play because it makes the reader to need to go back to the original play and read it once again. It is because *Handbag* is like a backward extension of the original play.

In Wilde's play, it is not the children, but the marriage that is discussed throughout the play in terms of family. Cardew is an important character regarding both marriage and having child. He is one of the characters present in both plays. Ravenhill's Cardew is depicted as a bad man never thinking of marriage but having a child to look after and protect. As marriage seems to be a burden for him, he resists Augusta's insistence on marriage. She is obsessed with marrying a nobleman, and changing her name, so she tries to flirt with Cardew in Ravenhill's play. She is obsessed with changing her name through marriage to gain respect and to form a family. In spite of Prism's disinterest in marriage as an idealist young woman having ideals about becoming a writer in Ravenhill's Victorian story line, Wilde's Miss Prism makes Rector Chasuble think about marrying her. Depicting Miss Prism's youth in a totally different perspective from Wilde, Ravenhill creates an idealist young Prism in *Handbag*. Just like Ravenhill's Augusta almost proposing Cardew for marriage in scene five, Wilde's Prism demonstrates her interest in marrying Chasuble very clearly. She is so obsessed with marrying a respectful man just like all the other Victorian women in Wilde's play.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act II**
> **Miss Prism.** You are too much alone, dear Dr. Chasuble. You should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a woman**t**hrope, never! (Wilde, 1989, p. 42)

Cecily and Gwendolen are also obsessed with marrying. They wish to find a noble man named "Ernest" in Wilde's play, and their partners Jack and Algernon; on the contrary to Cardew's disinterest in marriage in Ravenhill's version, are very eager to marry the girls. However, they both use a fake name to hide their identities from the society and especially the women whom they want to marry.

Despite Cardew and Moncrieffs who find parenting and marriage as a burden in *Handbag*, women are obsessed with marrying a noble man in Wilde's

play. It is not only the men but also the women who imply marriage as a burden in Wilde's play.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I**
> **Lady Bracknell.** I'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger. ... (Wilde, 1989, p. 17)

This implication about marriage as something that makes women get older resonates when Ravenhill's characters escape loyalty in their relationships. Ravenhill's alternative family is not loyal to each other and not responsible as parents. They reject taking their family's responsibility by cheating on each other and ignoring their responsibility as parents. The time they are supposed to make concessions to their own pleasures and take some responsibility for the family, they escape because they find it confining. Just like Wilde's Victorian family being useless and dysfunctional in protecting their baby, Ravenhill's alternative family does not work out, either.

In Wilde's play, marriage is depicted as something that keeps people under control and limits their behaviors, which prevents one from taking pleasure in life. Through these lines below, Lady Bracknell reassures that her friend Lady Harbury is happier now as a widow as she gets rid of the responsibilities of marriage.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I**
> **Lady Bracknell.** It really makes no matter, Algernon. I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now. (Wilde, 1989, p. 17)

In addition to Lady Bracknell's thoughts about marriage as something that takes pleasure from one's life, Miss Prism also implies marriage is not for the ones whose purpose in life is to get pleasure.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act II**
> **Miss Prism. [Bitterly.]** People who live entirely for pleasure usually are (unmarried). (Wilde, 1989, p. 45)

Just like a standard Victorian woman, for Lady Bracknell marriage is the most important thing even if it takes pleasure out of a person's life. The way she puts it in words is funny because it implicitly criticizes Victorian attitude towards family. She says living an unmarried life gives pleasure, but she does not praise, rather condemns it because marriage is necessary for forming a family and family is an

important unit in the Victorian society. This repeats in Ravenhill's Victorian family when Augusta is so insistent about marrying.

Interview is another repeating element in Ravenhill's play. Wilde uses it as a way to question a man's eligibility for marriage in his play. Thus, it makes a tool to criticize Victorian attitude towards marriage as a transaction between families. This kind of material approach in Wilde's play is borrowed by Ravenhill in both parts of his play. In the Victorian part of *Handbag*, it is used in the completely same way. For example, in scene five Augusta tries to marry before the season is over and she insists on asking Cardew about his possessions and questions his eligibility to be a husband talking about Burke's Peerage even if she gets rejected several times. When Augusta first meets Cardew in this scene, he mistakes him for a respectable available man to get married to. So, she asks him questions to try her chance and to understand his interest in marriage. These questions are similar to the ones that Augusta asks Jack/Ernest to evaluate him as a prospective husband for her daughter Gwendolen in Wilde's play.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I**
> **Lady Bracknell.** [Pencil and note-book in hand.] I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke? (Wilde, 1989, p. 24)

Lady Bracknell questions Jack through these lines. She starts questioning if Jack is eligible for her daughter regarding his belongings. She does not question about his personality at all. Marriage is seen as a kind of business deal between families depending on what Lady Bracknell says in Act I.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I**
> **Lady Bracknell.** Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing! (Wilde, 1989, p. 28)

She looks obsessed with the family name and familial roots so as to consent him marry her daughter. In addition to family name and roots, Lady Bracknell is also obsessed with money as a quality for one to look attractive. After learning his nephew Algernon's engagement with Cecily, she starts questioning about her familial roots. Not contented with what she learns from Jack, she keeps needling the fact that Jack's origins are restricted to a handbag found in the train station. Jack

is frustrated and mentions about Cecily's fortune, the amount of which really attracts Lady Bracknell. It changes her whole idea about Cecily, and she even finds her attractive. This superficial interview only focused on belongings and familial roots is mocked in Wilde's play; however, in the Victorian part of *Handbag* interviewing for marriage is handled in a serious manner by Augusta. On the contrary to the Victorian context, for the contemporary part of Ravenhill's play, interview and questioning is used as a tool before starting a relationship and/or having sex. In the Victorian part of the play, interview is used before the marriage arrangements/proposals, and in the contemporary part it is used before having sexual intimacy with someone. It repeats in both halves of the play.

The interrogation of Cardew by Augusta for marriage in the Victorian part of the play resonates in the contemporary plot when David interviews Phil and have sex with him afterwards, and also when Suzanne interviews Lorraine and they have an intensive kiss afterwards.

In scene nine, Tom visits David in his bedsit after they start living apart. He is here to make peace with David. Tom suggests accepting the difficulty of being parents willingly to take responsibility; however, he does not want to be alone in parenting, and David is the first one who gives up on it. So, Tom is trying to make this alternative family work by giving one more chance to David. However, they start fighting upon Phil's show up, which makes Tom learn that David cheats on him. Tom needs commitment in their relationship; however, David does not behave like an adult and is not truthful. In this part of the play, David criticizes traditional family structures upon Tom's insistence on keeping the family.

> **Handbag, Scene 9**
> **David** So- up with the Wendy House. Up with the Wendy House and how did Mummy and Daddy do it and their mummy and daddy do it and let's be like them. Yeah and let's move to suburbia and/ bleach those nets and twitch, twitch, twitch. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 191)

This alternative family that Ravenhill creates for his characters is not a good one for David. Rejecting being called as Dad in scene seven, in this scene above he rejects playing good families and parents. Conventional daddy and mommy figures are what David is escaping from the beginning of the play which shows that these conventional figures do not work for Ravenhill's alternative family. David's rejection for repeating the conventional family pattern upon Tom's wish for it leads

to a breakup between them. It is not only Tom's resistance on playing happy family to grow the baby together, but it is also David who contributes to this break up by cheating on Tom. David despises conventional families for copying the previous generations and living the same life in their little Wendy Houses. Moncrieffs in the parallel part of *Handbag* play happy family by doing everything according to the rules. In the original play, the woman and man are married, and they are expecting a baby for whom they arrange a nanny so that they can keep their own lives while baby is taken good care and growing. Hutcheon says that "The adapted text, therefore, is not something to be reproduced, but rather something to be interpreted and recreated, often in a new medium (2006, p. 84)". Even if not in a new medium, *Handbag* interprets the family notion in a new cultural environment. Family is presented as something that is achieved after marrying in the original play, yet it is interpreted and depicted as something that does not need any formal procedures or/and mercenary worries in *Handbag*. Having a child in whatever way adopting, kidnapping etc. is sufficient to build an alternative family to the conventional one.

Not only David, but also Mauretta wants to end this alternative family after Lorraine escapes with the baby collaborating with her boyfriend Phil because they cannot succeed in creating a safer family environment than the conventional families. In her M.A. thesis, Pınar Boz says that "Heavily influenced by heterosexual norms, these characters cannot manage to create an alternative family because their family are based on homonormative relationships and shaped by domestinormative practices (Boz, 2019, p. 101)". These two homosexual couples have a baby to create an alternative family but cannot create their own homonormative way to make it work because having a child to create this alternative family does not help on its own.

Both the conventional family and the alternative family that Ravenhill creates do not provide a safe and happy environment for the babies in the play. Boz says that "-however, although family structures have changed considerably, family problems have remained the same as reflected in Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag* (2019, p. 85)". Even if they claim the reason why they have a child is to grow him in a happy family, they use this baby as a tool to prove their homosexual relationships work. Unfortunately, it does not end as they expect because the baby in this alternative family is left at the mercy of an inexperienced nanny just like the one in

the Victorian part. The baby of the alternative family is kidnapped by Lorraine and her boyfriend; and the other one in the Victorian part is given to a boy lover by his nanny. This kind of ignorance for babies demonstrates that different contexts and alternative families do not ensure good parenting. At the same time, the Victorian part of the play is similar to Wilde's play in that the baby entrusted to an inexperienced nanny gets lost. The conventional family where both parents and a nanny are present does not ensure the baby's safety as it gets lost and grows up without his real parents in Wilde's play. All the same, Wilde's Victorian family is not depicted as an explicitly ignorant one, and it is not even implied. Yet, Augusta's coldness towards the fact that Jack as a baby is left in a handbag unattended in a train station could be read as a clue for a kind of ignorance coupled with Ravenhill's version of the same story.

In scene fourteen, Phil and Lorraine are with the baby they kidnap from Ravenhill's alternative family. Mauretta's fear comes true as she has been crazy about the baby snatchers right after the birth in scene seven. Phil is high on drugs again. He washes the baby and tells the same strange story about drug dealers who want to abuse his own child sexually. It is the same story he tells Prism in scene ten while rejecting to take the responsibility of the baby. Through this strange story, he is confessing his experience as dad for the second time when he happens to take the responsibility of another baby. He is a drug addict and tries to get rid of the drug dealers and his addiction. Even at the end of the play, he is still trying to sort himself out and make a decent responsible father out of himself using the baby. As Rebellato states, for the post-Thatcher era, "the disappearance of this paternalism shows up codedly in many plays of the 1990s in the form of absent, failing, or abusive fathers […] (2001, p. xiii)". Ravenhill like many other in-yer-face plays of the decade, creates abusive and unsuccessful parents especially fathers in his *Handbag*. His depictions of inadequate parents are fiercer and more shocking contrary to Wilde's. Lorraine and Phil decide to be good parents for the baby after kidnapping it from its real parents; however, they end up abusing the baby at the end of the play.

Everyone who owns the baby use him to sort themselves out and be a good person. Baby has just one role which is to make the others good parents and help them create a happy family throughout the whole play. And so, whoever decide to

be a parent for the baby, they make use of him as a way to sort themselves out. All the characters claiming to be either a father or a mother for the baby, they all try to play the good parent. Characters in the play are motivated to be parents so as to deal with life, which ends up as a huge mistake. Having a child is something on which the characters try to put aside their weaknesses and build a nice family. For example, Lorraine thinks that she helps and saves the baby as his real parents are busy and cannot take care of him.

> **Handbag, Scene 11**
> **Lorraine** He's needy. They're busy. He's ill. They can't cope. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 204)

In parallel with this, in the Victorian part of the play Prism ignores the baby on purpose by justifying herself thanks to his ignorant parents so as to work on her novel in scene fourteen. Phil is hallucinating in this last scene of the play and Prism visits the contemporary part of the play. He tries to take care of the baby as Prism rejects to do so in order to take care of her own business, but he is not successful in helping him breathe. Lorraine and Prism is mixed, and they are like the same person as their characters overlap as two nannies coming from different time periods through Phil's hallucinations. So as to get rid of this responsibility of the baby, Prism decides to give him to Cardew on purpose.

> **Handbag, Scene 14**
> **Prism** Bags become so easily muddled at Victoria Station. It is quite possible, in a moment of mental abstraction, I should place my manuscript in the perambulator and the baby in this *Handbag*. What a confusion. And that, similarly abstracted, you should mistake my bag for your own. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 225)

She justifies herself claiming that the baby is ignored and forgotten by its parents. This alternative family founded voluntarily by four young people without any social pressure does not provide a safe environment for their baby. Cardew plans to live in another city which is called Worthing to escape the rumors about his boys society, but he needs a boy to take with him. So, he is interested in getting the baby from Prism. The baby this time serves as a tool to help Cardew to make a good life and a new start for himself. The family Cardew has in Wilde's play has Jack as an adult. He is a nice old man taking good care of his family, but Ravenhill goes into the past in his version of the story and depicts him as a totally different character, which is explained in a deeper sense in the first part of Chapter 2 of the thesis.

To sum up, child plays a key role in Ravenhill's alternative family. It is used by Cardew as a way to escape and start a new life, and for the Moncrieffs it is just a result of the marriage in the Victorian part of the play. Despite marriage is a big issue for forming a family in the Victorian context, it is not mentioned even once in the contemporary part of *Handbag*. As a result, it can be suggested that Ravenhill creates a totally different image of family institution in contrast to Wilde's play. Even by pulling Wilde's family depictions down to create an alternative to it, Ravenhill does not make this new family more functional than Wilde's conventional family which is dysfunctional when it comes to taking care of their child. Ravenhill's alternative family does not make a better family, either.

2.2.2. Parenting Responsibility

Directly in connection with the family discussion in terms of having a child, the way Ravenhill dramatizes parenting responsibility in the contemporary world in comparison to the Victorian context in Wilde's play is explored in this part of the chapter. Mark Ravenhill dramatizes the changing human relationships, the conventional family, and the model of traditional family in the contemporary world through his play. Boz says that "in his works, Ravenhill comments on and criticises the relationships in today's world which are heavily determined by the market forces and consumerism […] (2019, p. 82)". This change in relationships in the contemporary world is mirrored in *Handbag*, too. His contemporary adaptation of Wilde's play problematizes the way parents take care of their children as a familial relationship, which is not mentioned in the original play at all. This problematic representation of parenting in *Handbag* through an alternative, yet unsuccessful family coupled with the Victorian family with a focus on their ignorance toward their baby asks the viewer to doubt and question this missing focus in the original play. In other words, Ravenhill dramatizes the role of family through the alternative family he creates in parallel to the Victorian family he adapts from Wilde play. In addition, Ravenhill rewrites the unsuccessful Victorian family losing their baby in Oscar Wilde's play with a special focus on the parenting responsibility evaded clearly by the baby's parents.

Oscar Wilde's play does not clearly and specifically focus on the irresponsible parent topic in a critical way; however, it rather makes fun of the way the characters react to the fact that Jack is obviously ignored as a baby and gets lost

in a handbag. In Ravenhill's rewriting of the same Victorian family, this negligence is harshly and clearly demonstrated in a critical tone. This altered portrayal of the same Victorian family coupled with an unsuccessful alternative family prepares a ground for discussion of parental responsibility in comparison in *Handbag*.

Ravenhill makes parenting one of the main issues in his play whereas it is barely mentioned in Wilde's play. The Victorian family rewritten by Ravenhill fills a missing part in Wilde's play where the ignorance of Jack's parents is never mentioned. Yet, the mistake is confessed to be Prism's as she loses the baby in the train station by mistake in the last act of Wilde's play. However, she is not blamed for her negligence to such a big extent. Instead, it is a relief for Lady Bracknell to learn about Jack's family roots. The extent of Miss Prism's disinterest in babysitting and her enthusiasm for the manuscripts is implied in Ravenhill's Victorian storyline of *Handbag* in a more obvious way. Even if it cannot be assumed directly that Ravenhill reveals the hidden reality about how she loses the baby in his play a hundred years after the original play, it could be possibly suggested that he creates an alternative play to open a new window for rereading Wilde's play. The kind of ignorance that causes Jack grow up without parents is out of concern for Lady Bracknell as she still questions about his family's rank and their wealth.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I**
> **Lady Bracknell.** Both? To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy? (Wilde, 1989, p. 26)

These lines demonstrate that she is so cold and indifferent about any emotional dimension for Jack growing up without parents. Even while interviewing him as a prospective groom for her daughter, she doesn't care about his honesty, personality, or feelings, yet her only focus is on the money and name of his family. This kind of coldness and indifference to personality repeats in Ravenhill's play when Augusta questions Cardew as a prospective husband with a focus on his wealth.

In Wilde's play, having no parents is never questioned by the children from an emotional perspective although it is repeatedly taken into consideration with an emphasize on how growing up without parents affect their lives emotionally in *Handbag*. Having no family is only an obstacle for Wilde's Jack to get married as

familial roots are quite important for being a trustworthy and respectable man in his society as it is unacceptable for a young man to have no family relations in the Victorian times. In other words, it helps having and knowing one's status in the society. Jack never complains about his unknown parents of being ignorant enough to lose him as a baby. That is why Augusta questions Jack's parents before letting him marry her daughter. She is not even interested in how he survives without parents, as the key point for her is just to make sure that he has a family.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I**
> **Lady Bracknell.** I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over. (Wilde, 1989, p. 27)

Lady Bracknell's reaction to the uncertainty about Jack's parents mirrors the Victorian times. It is a really cold statement that does not care about Jack's feelings and loneliness. Victorian rules and values predominate their dialogue to such an extent. The reaction to his parents losing him in a handbag as a baby is not critical for the parents, but the child. Jack is the one who suffers the consequences of his ignorant parents not as a child but as a young man trying to marry in Wilde's play.

Jack is an obviously ignored baby in Ravenhill's version on the contrary to his portrayal as a young respectable man in the original play. Ravenhill reinvents Wilde's Jack as a baby so creating an alternative past for him in *Handbag*. With this purpose, he takes the reader to a journey back to the past of Wilde's characters. Moncrieff who is a shadowy character in Wilde's play is reinvented obviously as an ignorant father in *Handbag*. Growing a child up is a burden for Moncrieff and opposes her wife's resistance to get a nanny or a wet nurse for the baby, which makes him an ignorant father as he is insistent on getting rid of the responsibility to take care of the baby. This same scene is not present in Wilde's play as this time period when Jack is a baby is not mentioned in it. However, it is explicit that Moncrieffs also have a nanny for Jack who ignorantly loses him in the Victoria station. She is not explicitly mentioned as an inexperienced nanny in the original play; but it is implied regarding the fact that she has an interest in writing novels when she is younger and takes care of Jack as a baby.

Moncrieff's ignorance towards his baby in the Victorian part of *Handbag* could also be discussed in scene fourteen. Moncrieff brings Prism to take care of

the baby as he thinks that it is her job so that the real parents can enjoy their own time again. It is just like in scene five when Moncrieff leaves the baby to Prism for the first time. Their ignorance as parents repeats in this last scene. Even when the baby cries, they leave the responsibility and the burden to an inexperienced nanny. Moncrieff suggests the baby to be shown to them from time to time for the affection and bond between the baby and his parents to form. It is similar to the contemporary part of *Handbag* in that the baby is left to Lorraine, and they watch him from time to time through a video record to compensate the time they are absent. Prism complains about the baby's parents as they are ignorant just like Lorraine complains about the parents in the contemporary part of the play.

Parents in Ravenhill's play assign inexperienced nannies who they find by chance with parenting duty to take of their babies. That is the way they both get rid of the responsibility and relieve themselves by thinking that their baby is safe with the nanny. Accusing the real parents of being ignorant, both of the nannies give up on taking good care of the baby in parallel to each other. This ignorance is neither present nor even implied in Wilde's play; so, these two ignorant nanny figures invented by Ravenhill could be used to rethink Wilde's play in the frame of ignorant parents.

Lorraine is Ravenhill's contemporary nanny he creates for the alternative family. Phil is with Lorraine in scene eleven. He travels back from the Victorian setting into the contemporary part back. He flirts with Lorraine in scene eight when they first meet at the office of Suzanne and David, and in scene eleven, they are together in the house of Suzanne and Mauretta. Lorraine is supposed to take care of the baby; however, she has sex with Phil. They ignore the baby while they are having sex. She somehow knows her responsibility, yet she is still seduced by Phil. She likes having Phil; but she keeps mentioning how the baby needs her. She complains that the baby's parents do not take care of him although he is ill and needy. His parents' role and their absence are questioned here by an ignorant nanny and her boyfriend. Even the nanny does not look after the baby, and this alternative family's journey in parenting end up quite different from what they plan.

At the beginning of their decision to have a baby, Mauretta criticizes her own father for leaving her when she is a baby, and Tom is angry at the ignorant families who are always mad at their children on the streets. So, their motivation is

to bring their baby up in a healthy and calm environment. However, this motivation disappears when they are supposed to take on the responsibility. Unfortunately, they are more interested in their own pleasures and personal responsibilities instead of the baby. Lorraine finally pulls away and leaves to look after the baby at the end, but her ignorance is obvious even by bringing her boyfriend over during the time she is supposed to take care of the baby. However, it is clearly observable that in both parallel parts of *Handbag*, there are two ignorant families that make some mistakes in parenting.

Prism is the Victorian nanny that Ravenhill creates in *Handbag* with regard to Miss Prism in Wilde's play. Miss Prism is portrayed as a caring and well-educated governess of Cecily throughout Wilde's play until she reveals how she loses a baby that is entrusted to her when she is younger. Even when she confesses, she is not mentioned as an ignorant nanny because it seems like a mistake in Wilde's play. In Ravenhill's version of this Victorian story, Prism is portrayed at a younger age when she is a nanny for baby Jack. She is an ignorant and disinterested young woman who cares more for her manuscripts. In scene ten where Phil travels to the Victorian plot of the play, he is high because of the drugs, so he calls Prism "Fallen Woman" when she says she has had an accident during which a big car overturns and deposits her on the pavement. Out of a sudden, he starts telling an interesting story about some drug dealers who want to have sex with his kid and Prism does not understand what he is saying. Although Phil is portrayed both as high and weird and despite all the nonsense he is mentioning, Prism still leaves the baby alone with him. Phil rejects taking the baby's responsibility mentioning himself as untrustworthy. He confesses that he sold his own baby to drug dealers in exchange for some drugs. He accepts that he let his dealer to fuck his baby and talks about it. However, this does not prevent Prism to leave the baby alone with a stranger who himself claims to be untrustworthy. In addition, Prism arranges a much bigger ignorance towards the baby in the last scene of the play where she makes a plan to give it to Cardew. This is her plan so as to get rid of the baby's responsibility because she wants to deal with her own business just like all the other characters who take any kind of parental responsibility on in *Handbag*.

In scene ten, Augusta and Constance talk about their own mothers through which mother figure can be argued. Whereas Constance is one of the shadowy

characters in Wilde's play, she is one of the characters in Ravenhill's Victorian setting. As a result, this kind of dialogue is not present between these two sisters in Wilde's play. Augusta is angry at her mother and uses lots of harsh words towards her because Augusta thinks that she has been a cold and ignorant mother for her and Constance.

> **Handbag, Scene 10**
> **Augusta** Really, this modern mania for acknowledging one's parents after birth seems to me to be quite senseless. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 202)

Also, Augusta's rejection for familial relations only as a result of some simple physical involvements shows that parenting needs more than that.

> **Handbag, Scene 10**
> **Augusta** Our mother is of the sorry opinion that Ireland is a woman in spirit and that the spirit of Ireland resides in her. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 202)

Augusta rejects her family roots and mother through the lines above. So, it could be discussed that giving birth to a baby does not guarantee the feeling of being a parent, or even claiming to be a parent in Ravenhill's play. As Barret and McIntosh describe the family characteristics of the nineteenth century, "the currently dominant model of the family is not timeless and culture-free (1991, p. 33)". Ravenhill's family descriptions are time-specific according to his presentation of this alternative gay and lesbian family.

Augusta claims that giving birth to a baby does not make someone "mother" if she is blind and does not take good care of the baby after the birth. Ravenhill might be using this kind of hatred towards one's mother to draw attention to the importance of parenting responsibility that is out of mention in Wilde's play. All the same, Augusta still tries to convince Constance in that she will be a good mother. Constance wants to assure herself as being a good mother, too; however, she discovers that she feels nothing when she holds her own baby. Mother image is usually a sacred and divine one that women convince themselves of having innately. Constance weighs her own feelings by holding the baby in her arms and tries to feel something. She pushes herself to feel these supposedly innate mothering feelings, however, she feels alienated to him as long as she stays away from it. She tries to be a caring parent for her baby; yet her husband interferes it by insisting on the nanny. Additionally, she ends up feeling nothing for the baby.

> **Handbag, Scene 10**

Constance Yes. This is of me. This came from me.
She picks up the baby.
Nothing. I feel nothing. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 202)

Constance upon her husband's interference leaves all the responsibility of her own baby to Prism. It is because of her husband who does not want to take on any responsibility of the baby. So, no connection between the baby and his mother forms. The baby's responsibility is left totally to his nanny.

Parenting is a questionable term also in the contemporary part of the play when Ravenhill's alternative family questions about the meaning of parenting through the end of the play. Physical involvement of Tom is not a criterion to being parent for Mauretta in scene thirteen, and also the fact that David is not physically involved in the process makes him only an uncle not a father.

Phil also confesses to be an ignorant parent himself. He is just one of the characters Ravenhill creates to bring the parenting issue up. Creating so many ignorant parents, Ravenhill opens a new window in reading Wilde's play. This almost unmentioned parental ignorance in Wilde's play is attacked by Ravenhill in his play where he uses a different way to mirror the society and to criticize it from Wilde.

Parenting issue could be questioned regarding Phil and David characters throughout scene three in *Handbag*. David is helping Phil in this scene, but they somehow start having casual sex in David's office after David asks him lots of questions about his identity as they do not know each other. During sex, David's pager beeps and he learns the baby is coming. He tries to go and catch up with all the others while their baby is coming to world; however, Phil does not let him go. They keep having sex while Phil tells his own experience in being a father. He complains about life saying he cannot even take care of himself. He was not present when his kid was born as her mother did not let him know about it. He both rejects being a parent as it has several hardships and at the same time resents his partner for not letting him be present during the labor. In addition to what he tells David about his baby in this scene, in the later scenes he confesses his shocking experience with his baby regarding the drug dealers while he is on drugs and hallucinating.

Phil acts like a baby when he makes David wipe him when he wets himself. There is an issue with growing up and rejecting to be an adult here. Phil has some

personal problems as he claims that he tries suicide from time to time. All the characters try to deal with their own problems individually with no help from others. Sorting out, working it out, trying hard to keep a normal standard life, getting a life are common problems among Ravenhill's young characters. In this respect, it mirrors the people who are trying to find themselves in the nineties. There is a huge pressure on people overburdened to discover their existence all alone not as a part of the society. So, Phil is one of the characters who is not content with life and is in emotional need in Ravenhill's play. He is one of the characters who are trying to work things out and cope with the daily responsibilities and his own basic needs and there is no authority forcing him to do so. Although he is free about what to do with his life, he cannot deal with life and live a normal contented life in a healthy environment. So, he looks for an authority figure to look after him. He is younger than the other characters and is still in need for protection, the reason is revealed later as he grows up without a father figure guiding and protecting him.

The problem about growing up and having no real parents is presented in a very different way from Wilde's play. The importance of having parents is considered as something for having a good and respectful image in Wilde's play. However, in *Handbag* it is related to emotions. Wilde's characters are not looking for parents to take care of themselves, however, they need parents to be respected in society. Characters wish they had parents because they feel lost in life in *Handbag,* and they need the feeling of being protected by parents. However, in Wilde's play it is a wish for gaining respect and become an eligible man for marriage in Jack's case as having no relations and familial roots is not something that would be accepted. This kind of change in depicting characters in the adaptation is recognized only when the source text is known by the reader. Hutcheon says that "For the reader, spectator, or listener, adaptation as adaptation is unavoidably a kind of intertextuality if the receiver is acquainted with the adapted text (2006, p. 21). It is an ongoing process that lets the reader compare the play that they already know with the one that they are reading. Wilde's Victorian characters that are powerful and strong are replaced by young people who are in an emotional need and searching for meaning in life.

David's irresponsibility in being a good parent for the baby that they (Mauretta, Suzanne, Tom, David) are all expecting starts at the time the labor

begins. Even if he wants to leave Phil and be present in the hospital during the labor, he cannot help having sex with Phil upon Phil's persistence. Jack's father when he is a baby does his duty as a father by giving all the responsibility to an inexperienced nanny. He does his part as the father to the extend where the Victorian rules need him to do. He behaves as if his role is just providing good physical conditions for his family and bringing money for them and so it seems unnecessary for him to care about emotional needs in the family. This way, he veils his irresponsibility in parenting. Even if the Victorian rules and values limit Wilde's characters' behaviour and they are supposed to lead them to be good citizens, most of the characters in Wilde's play are not honest and they all hide behind their identities. They lie most of the time and all the values imposed end up being artificial. Hypocrisy is a real issue that needs discussion at this point regarding parenting. Responsibilities are emphasized in both of the plays so much because of either the rules dictated or innate motivation. However, in both cases, parents end up ignoring or manipulating their responsibility in being good parents.

David wants to be a good parent for the child, but he cheats his partner and rejects being present in his part. A similar kind of ignorance starts for Suzanne in next scene when she meets Lorraine. David and Suzanne both ignore parenting because of their personal pleasures. Jack's parents' ignorance towards him as a baby is not clearly and explicitly expressed throughout Wilde's scenes. However, it is implied as his nanny is found out to be an inexperienced and indifferent young woman towards the end of Wilde's play. Jack's parents' part in his nanny ignoring him is revealed in the Victorian part of *Handbag* in scene five when Moncrieff puts an emphasis on the nanny as an escape for the parents to lighten their burden in looking after the baby.

Phil's parenting experience is not only limited to her own child, yet he fails in being a good father for the baby he kidnaps from Ravenhill's same sex couples together with Lorraine. Their new start with the baby ends up in a disaster, too when he kills the baby by lighting a cigarette on him when he is high on drugs. Even the small family Lorraine and Phil builds by using a baby that does not even belong to them cannot help the baby survive. This is another little alternative family that Ravenhill creates for the baby as a second chance to survive. So, it could be suggested that Ravenhill's alternative families for Wilde's Victorian family does

not help babies survive or protect them getting lost. Even a much closer reexamination of Wilde's Victorian family and creating an entirely new alternative family do not make parenting responsibility performed any better in *Handbag*.

Mauretta, one of the parents in Ravenhill's alternative family, is herself an ignored child. As a result, she desires forming a happy environment for the baby with references to her own neglected childhood. However, not good parenting, but the importance of knowing who the parents are is more important in the original play by Wilde. Having parents is symbolic in it as having family is a proof of being a decent person. But growing up in a happy family with affectionate parents, the emotional and developmental part in it is not mentioned as an important point in Wilde's play. Ravenhill unearths this missing part in his play. Even so, it does not make things even better.

Tom is also so sensitive about being father. He wants everything to be calm and positive. They promise each other to be good parents band hope for growing up a healthy child. Growing a happy child is never questioned in the original play by Wilde. The only important part of having parents is to have respect during adulthood in the society in Wilde's Victorian play. It has nothing to do with child's emotional development. Familial relations and roots are important so as to show one's place in society.

Their sensitivity for forming a safe family for the baby could be discussed through scene twelve and thirteen. In scene twelve, the characters are in the box room where Lorraine sleeps. She gets ready to meet her boyfriend outside at a restaurant. Suzanne helps her get ready. Suzanne tries to learn about this boyfriend and wants to talk to her about him because they do not want him to visit her while working. She implies that Mauretta and Suzanne want her whole attention to be on the baby while working. Even if they do not spare time to be with the baby, they still try to have an eye on it so as to compensate their absence. Their concerns might be read as pretentious since they ignore the baby not always because of their jobs, but also because of their own pleasures from time to time. Mauretta enters and explains the situation more explicitly than Suzanne. They reveal that a camera is watching Lorraine during daytime when she is alone with the baby. So, they want Lorraine to leave as it is not proper for her to bring over her boyfriend and have sex when the baby needs care. She gets angry at being monitored.

This camera watching the nanny shows Mauretta and Suzanne try to be caring and responsible parents although their business and other interests prevent them from spending more time with him. Even if it is arguable, female parents of the baby do what they can to be good parents to some extent although they might seem like two ignorant parents at first sight. Their worries about the baby and precautions after realizing how the baby is left unattended and ignored show that they are trying to be good parents in one way or another. This alternative family that Ravenhill creates in *Handbag* presents the problem of ignorant families from a different perspective. However, when Ravenhill brings some references and characters from Wilde's text into his own play, this makes the problem of ignorant parents relatable and connected beyond the time. This helps explain why a playwright needs to try relocating an old play in a different context.

> The answer is often that they wish to use the original to comment upon a contemporary concern, to use the audience's pre-existing knowledge of the original text and its assumed meaning to reflect upon analogous events in a different era and new location. (Rees, p. 88)

Through *Handbag*, Ravenhill reveals that the problem seems not to be the changing family structures and the alternative family units that cause such ignored children growing up alone in the contemporary world. The blame is explicitly put on the ignorant families for the lost babies in Ravenhill's play; however, families' part in it is never implied in the Victorian context that is created by Wilde in his play in the 19th century. Ravenhill brings this never implied possibility into question thanks to especially the Victorian part of his *Handbag*.

Lorraine and Phil kidnap the baby in scene thirteen. This new kind of alternative family that Ravenhill creates end up in a disaster just like conventional family in the Victorian part of the play when the parents are ignorant, cheat each other and do not know their responsibilities. They find out that Lorraine has kidnapped the baby together with her boyfriend, Phil. They watch the video and try to make David recognize and remember the boy. Tom arrives and realizes that Lorraine's boyfriend is the one whom he saw at David's bedsit. They all start blaming each other so as to get out of the responsibility. David is never present to take care of the baby, but he still does not take the blame on himself. On the contrary, he blames the mommies for being ignorant of the baby as the only thing they do is to watch the video they record while they are absent.

Suzanne starts blaming David for bringing Phil into their lives because of his desires. But Suzanne is the one that brings Lorraine into their lives, too. Their motivation to bring up the baby in a healthy environment turns out to be a disaster because of their ignorance of the parental responsibility.

Mauretta blames Suzanne for not being a responsible and trustworthy partner as she cheats on her with Lorraine. She also questions Tom's part in parenting. Tom tempts to defend himself for being the real father as he donates her sperm for the baby. However, Mauretta despises him for only wanking into a cup to be involved it.

> **Handbag, Scene 13**
> **Mauretta** You wanked into a cup.
> **Tom** It makes me Dad. I'm a father.
> **Mauretta** It makes you nothing. You're like him. You're like her. You're nothing. All of you. I had him. And I want him back. And we're going to live together, him and me and I'm going to watch him grow and I won't even tell him that you exist. And maybe you'll interview him one day, and maybe you'll teach him one day, and maybe you'll try and keep with him one day and you won't even know who he is. He won't know you. Just me. That's all he needs. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 217)

So, through Mauretta this scene questions the importance of having physical involvement in bringing a baby into the world. The meaning of being a parent is not directly connected to providing ovary or sperm for the biological process of parenting. It is similar when Augusta criticizes her mother of being a cold woman in scene ten in the Victorian part of the play. This kind of representation of parenting keeps throughout the whole play regarding the ignored children and ignorant parents. By this means, Ravenhill deals with things more seriously and draws attention to a parallel parental ignorance in a more harsh and striking way in contrast to Wilde's play which is seemingly only about courting, flirting, bunburrying, lying and marriage of the young ladies before the season is over.

2.2.3. Women's Position in the Society

The representation of women characters in *Handbag* and how it is adapted from Wilde's play is another important point of discussion as it is one of the elements that Ravenhill plays with while using Wilde's play as a source. Ravenhill's stronger women characters who earn their own money and have the authority to decide about their own lives might look different compared to Wilde's women who need the guidance of men. However, they have many things in common.

To discuss the way Ravenhill re-images Wilde's women characters in his *Handbag*, it might be more illuminating to start with Ravenhill's Victorian women. He uses Wilde's Lady Bracknell and Miss Prism in his Victorian strand of the play as the same two characters, but they are different in that Lady Bracknell is mentioned as Augusta and governess Miss Prism as nanny Prism. Ravenhill projects their younger selves in his reinvention of the storyline, which is missing in Wilde's play. Miss Prism is a dignified governess who is praised and esteemed by the society in Wilde's play. Jack mentions her as an admirable governess in charge of Cecily.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act II**
> **Jack.** [Interposing.] Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell, has been for the last three years Miss Cardew's esteemed governess and valued companion. (Wilde, 1989, p. 84)

In addition to her advisory position in Cecily's life, she is also trying to attract Dr Chasuble for marriage and flirting with him. She seems to have a leading role in their courting, too. In contrast to her enthusiasm as a governess and her eagerness in marriage, Ravenhill's Prism is portrayed as a more powerful young woman having ideals for her own life. She is quite inexperienced and uninterested in her occupation as a nanny for the baby of the Moncrieffs in *Handbag*. Ravenhill plays with the dignified governess image who complies with the values of the Victorian society and reimagines her as a young woman who is more interested in her manuscripts than marriage or/and babysitting in *Handbag*. She makes fun of Augusta (Miss O'Flaherty) as she is obsessed with marriage.

> **Handbag, Scene 5**
> **Prism** I am not very much interested in marriage. At least not while there are novels to be written. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 171)

Through reinventing Prism character in the same Victorian context, Ravenhill challenges the woman image that does not have dominant roles in society.

In addition to Prism, Augusta is portrayed as a similar character who is obsessed with marriage. In *Handbag*, she is obsessed with her own marriage different from Wilde's Augusta who is obsessed with her daughter's marriage. In scene fourteen, Augusta enters and starts kicking Cardew and calls him to account for the bad things he does with the boys. Augusta (Miss O'Flaherty) announces that she finds an eligible man who is interested in marrying her while she protests Cardew's terrible activities with boys whom he supposedly takes care of in his society. In scene five, Augusta almost proposes him and tries to draw his attention

by singing even if he is not interested in her at all. This time, she is the one who attacks him and proudly declares that she finds Lord Bracknell who is impressed by her voice which has an extraordinary volume. In this part of the play, it becomes possible to make a direct connection between Wilde's Augusta- Lady Bracknell and Ravenhill's Augusta- Miss O'Flaherty. Women who are obsessed with marriage is a recurrent theme in both plays. It is demonstrated that their only concern and engagement is to make profitable marriages.

As a result of their obsession with marriage, Wilde's representation of women in his play might seem despising for women. However, this is the way Wilde plays with the gender roles that are imposed to Victorian people. His way of making fun of them help criticize the Victorian society. Also, the way men see women in the play could be read through the dialogue between Jack and Algernon below.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I**
> **Algernon.** By the way, did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?
> **Jack.** [In a very patronising manner.] My dear fellow, the truth isn't quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice, sweet, refined girl. What extraordinary ideas you have about the way to behave to a woman! (Wilde, 1989, p. 30)

Gwendolen and Cecily are two young women who are governed and guarded by male and older female characters. They do not even have a right to decide for their lives. However, they still keep the authority in their relationships with men. Gwendolen helps Jack in proposing her as she waits for a man to marry just like a standard Victorian woman.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I**
> **Gwendolen.** I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.
> **Jack.** Well . . . may I propose to you now? (Wilde, 1989, p. 22)

Wilde makes fun of the rigid Victorian conventions through Gwendolen when he portrays a reversal of Victorian way of proposing. She leads and teaches Jack how to propose which is unusual in a Victorian context where women are normally passive in such situations. For Wilde, it is a way to criticize the situation in his time; and Ravenhill borrows and repeats this irony in almost the same way through Augusta proposing Cardew in the Victorian part of *Handbag*.

Just like Wilde's Gwendolen and Ravenhill's Augusta, there is another female character who leads her marriage proposal. Cecily building castles in Spain

does not even let Algernon propose her as she is already engaged to him in her imaginary world. Algernon disguised as Jack's bad-tempered brother named Ernest finds out that Cecily has a world of illusions where she is engaged to someone who does not ever exist.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act II**
> **Cecily.** On the 14th of February last. Worn out by your entire ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the matter one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself I accepted you under this dear old tree here. The next day I bought this little ring in your name, and this is the little bangle with the true lover's knot I promised you always to wear. (Wilde, 1989, p. 54)

Ravenhill makes use of the way Wilde makes fun of Victorian rigidity about gender roles and how he projects them in his comedy play. Gender roles are turned upside-down completely in Ravenhill's alternative family which mirrors the contemporary society where same sex relationships and marriages are being discussed and advocated freely. So, it is Ravenhill's way of criticizing gender roles through Mauretta and Suzanne embracing the mommy role in the family however much unconventional it is.

Although Ravenhill's alternative family is a whole new thing that supposedly challenges the traditional way of forming a family, the mommy role is still given to the female parents of the baby. It is not given, yet it is taken by them willingly. They both are economically independent women gaining their own money and making their own decisions. In contrast to Cecily and Gwendolen, they do not let the society design their lives in thinking; however, they end up accepting the conventional role that is the most suitable for their biological gender in a family. It is to take care of the baby. They end up having the whole responsibility of the baby without the daddies because they are more interested in their own business just like Colonel Moncrieff is in the Victorian part of *Handbag*.

2.2.4. Hypocrisy

Another flashback to the Victorian time could be explored through Ravenhill's way of dramatizing hypocrisy in his *Handbag*. Hypocrisy is one of the moral issues that is dealt in a critical way in Wilde's play. Although it is employed in a satirical and funny way by Wilde, Ravenhill represents it in a more serious way. Also, it is not described as a social problem in Ravenhill's contemporary context, but rather as an individual one. Wallace says that "Ravenhill openly defines himself as a materialist committed to social observation and compelled to write about the

present (2005, p. 270)" by referring to what Ravenhill admits as his motivation write in one of his articles for The Guardian.

> But what compels me to write? And what do I want to write? The same as most of my fellow playwrights. Ambitious plays, plays that attempt to cram all the contradictions of the world on to a stage. I want to write about globalisation or, to give it a more honest name, Americanisation. To capture the truth of this new world we live in is an exciting ambition. To write about the virtual markets of images and information spinning around us and threatening to drag us into perpetual postmodern giddiness. To write about the hypocrisy of our calls for universal freedom and democracy as we destroy the world for profit. (Ravenhill, 2003)

To demonstrate the contemporary hypocrisy, Ravenhill creates characters who hide their real identities in parallel with Wilde's play in the contemporary part of *Handbag*. And his way of reworking the hypocrisy theme in *Handbag* is discussed in a twofold manner in this part of the chapter. In addition to his reviving of Wilde's characters as hypocrites in the Victorian part of *Handbag,* Ravenhill also creates a contemporary world where the characters lie and pretend being loyal to each other.

Wilde's characters live in a society where there are lots of rules and social values to behave accordingly. This is a burden for them to always watch their own behaviors so as not to make mistake. Their reaction to the strict rules and how they deal with them is often referred to as moral hypocrisy by critics. There are morals that are claimed to organize behaviors of the people in Wilde's play, and all of his characters suggest that they are invaluable and inevitable for a decent and respectable person in the society. Their insistence on the necessity and importance of these morals could be criticized when they change the rules of being a moral person in their own favor when it comes to their personal interests. They are being hypocrite when they claim that they are decent people complying with the rules despite they happen to do the opposite. Wilde's characters have certain moral motives; however, Ravenhill's characters do not acknowledge the presence of society that limits and/or organizes their behaviors. On the contrary, they reject any kind of conventions or rules that put them in a certain shape. Dealing with Ravenhill's *Some Explicit Polaroids* in the perspective of postmodernism in his article, Doğan argues that "Ravenhill's aim is questioning the possibility of morality which is scrutinized in his plays by focusing on dark humor, and the postmodern, post-ideological, and postconsumerist world in terms of ethical values (Doğan, 2014, p. 261)". Ravenhill deals with ethical values of his time in his *Handbag,* too. For example, David resists Tom's insistence on keeping the family

as two daddies because it is the conventional way of forming family. In a more general sense, they create a unique way of forming family which does not comply with any norms or social values as they do not exist in their world. So, their hypocrisy and motives for lying and disguising are different from Wilde's characters in this sense. What they resist or stand opposite to is not the social norms or moral values. At least, there is no such big emphasis on morals in Ravenhill's play. The emphasis is on a more personal perspective.

The contemporary part of the play presents us Suzanne and David as two characters lying their partners. They are normally two members of the alternative family they create in order to prepare a healthy environment for the baby. The other two are Mauretta and Tom having sincere motives for the family depending on their claims about how much intense feelings they have for the baby and the family. However, Suzanne and David are more distant and irrelevant to it. Their irrelevance to this family project is resolved when they cheat on their partners and behave irresponsibly for parenting the baby. They have certain personal motives for cheating their partners such as other pleasures and business.

Disguising and changing name to escape one's responsibilities is a recurring subject in Wilde's play. Because of the moral codes and the high moral tone, he has to have as a guardian for Cecily and a nobleman, Jack changes his name to disguise. It could be claimed that utmost morality does not bring happiness, so Wilde's characters need other identities to escape all these codes and moral values to chill. Wilde's Jack reveals his motives in disguising and using another name in the country with these lines below:

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I**
> **Jack.** My dear Algy, I don't know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple. (Wilde, 1989, p. 13)

However, there are no moral codes that Ravenhill's characters escape, but they escape their responsibilities excusing their jobs, business, earthly pleasures. In scene four, Suzanne is with Lorraine when she learns about the labor. She decides to leave for the hospital as a responsible parent even if hesitantly, but she cheats on

Mauretta by kissing Lorraine. She seems like a responsible parent keeping her word, but still an unfaithful partner. Hypocrisy can be discussed in this scene as a family issue in comparison to Wilde's play as Jack and Algernon lie about their real identities. In addition to the fact that they hide their real identities to escape the social rules, Algernon also mentions cheating as a normal thing in marriage in Act I in Wilde's play. Although Algernon and Jack are known as two respectable, decent, and trustworthy young men in society, and they claim themselves being decent and trustworthy, Algernon claims that marriage of two people is nothing.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I**
> **Algernon.** Then your wife will. You don't seem to realize, that in married life three is company and two is none. (Wilde, 1989, p. 15)

He says Jack that either husband or wife will for sure want to know Bunbury, which is his imaginary friend, to cheat in a marriage. He mentions cheating as a normal thing for him. Using Bunbury to escape family dinners is Algernon's way of getting rid of social obligations. As a result, Jack condemns him as a hypocrite emphasizing the false impression that he creates about himself. However, Jack confesses that he leads a double life as he disguises as Ernest in town. So, using different names in different parts of the city also refers to a kind of infidelity. They both blame each other for lying just like Ravenhill's Suzanne and David. In scene eight when Lorraine visits Suzanne to give back her jumper. David persuades Suzanne to help Lorraine and let her stay at their home for some time until she finds some other place. After witnessing their discussions and guessing that they might have some kind of intimacy, David starts blaming Suzanne for cheating on Mauretta. Upon this accusation, Suzanne starts blaming David for cheating on Tom. They fight and project the blame on each other just like all the other characters lying and cheating on each other.

Lorraine is another character Ravenhill creates as a liar and hypocrite. First, she disguises like her mom after her death so as to keep getting her flat and staying safe. Yet, she is not doing this to comply with anything or to look like a nice decent person, yet she invents this as a way to benefit from. She is actually defrauding the institution. In scene eight, Lorraine visits Suzanne in her office after their meeting at Lorraine's flat. Suzanne is in the middle of a presentation and does not want to talk to her. Lorraine is angry with her as she causes her to lose her home. She blames Suzanne on reporting her; however, she does not take the blame on as she is not

aware of the fact that Lorraine hides something from the council. The reality is Lorraine defrauds the council answering the phones as if she is Maggie- her late mother. She lies and behaves like her dead mother so as to make use of this situation. Just like most of the characters in Ravenhill's play, she is not happy with taking on responsibilities in her life. Suzanne is not taking the responsibility of a loyal relationship because she meets Lorraine and kisses her. Lorraine is deceiving the council to keep her mother's house. Partners cheat on each other because they are not loyal in their relationships. Lorraine's disguise and the cheating of David and Suzanne resemble Wilde's Jack and Algernon. They disguise and use different names to be free and at ease while behaving. By disguising, these male characters of Wilde also cheat on their partners to get rid of the responsibility of proving themselves as being earnest because they both introduce themselves as being Ernest to the girls whom they are flirting with.

> **The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I**
> **Algernon.** I shall probably not be back till Monday. You can put up my dress clothes, my smoking jacket, and all the Bunbury suits [. . .] (Wilde, 1989, p. 33)

Normally Algernon uses this Bunbury friend as an excuse to escape family dinners and undesired responsibilities. This time Algernon disguises to meet Cecily and use her interest in a man called Ernest to draw her attention. Cecily thinks that her guard Jack really has a friend named Ernest as he claims so, and she fantasizes being in love with him. Learning about her obsession about this "unreal" Ernest, Algernon disguises, changes her name and visits Cecily. His motive is to attract Cecily by escaping to prove himself being earnest by using the name Ernest.

Ravenhill's Lorraine also pretends being a caring and kind nanny for the baby that is entrusted to her. However, she brings her boyfriend Phil over and they have sex during the time she is supposed to take care of the baby. She lies Suzanne and Mauretta to have sex with Phil freely. Otherwise, they won't let her bring him over. Her motive in lying and pretending is her own interest and personal pleasures because she is not trying to be a good citizen as opposed to Wilde's Jack and Algernon. She is in two minds while with Phil as she keeps complaining about her own ignorance towards the baby. Phil seduces her in staying with him in bed while baby cries and needs her.

> **Handbag, Scene 11**

> **Lorraine** Please. I've got a kid to look after. I don't want to let them down. I was only supposed to be here for a few days. But they asked me to stay on. 'Cos I'm good with him. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 203)

Even if she mentions her responsibilities as a nanny, she does not stop sleeping with Phil and ignoring the baby. So, she lies Suzanne and Mauretta when they ask her about Phil because she wants to keep her job as she does not have money or house. Her motive in lying and pretending to be a caring nanny is quite personal and has nothing to do with any kind of moral values.

The hypocrisy demonstrated in Wilde's play is to deceive the society, but in Ravenhill's play the characters try to deceive themselves about being good partners and parents or they deceive the others for their own interests like money or sex. Ravenhill's contemporary setting is a world where the individuality prevails, and the society is not an integrative and essential unit. However, the society is the unit that shapes the individual through certain obligations and restrictions in Victorian age both in Wilde's play and in *Handbag'*s Victorian part. For example, Cardew introduces himself as a philanthropist in the Victorian part of *Handbag*, however, in the last scene it is obvious that he is faking when he accepts Prism's offer to exchange bags in the train station; however, Cardew is not revealed to be a hypocrite in Wilde's play as opposed to Jack and Algernon. So, it is also important to discuss the Victorian part of *Handbag* regarding the hypocrisy issue as Ravenhill does not only create contemporary foils for Wilde's characters, but he also reinvents Wilde's Victorian characters.

In contrast to Wilde's satirical characterizations of his Victorian characters who claim they are both honest and deceptive at the same time in whatever way it fits in, Ravenhill's contemporary characters never accept being irresponsible parents or confess lying. They never confess doing wrong even when they are caught in the act. For example, David does not accept that he is an ignorant parent and a cheating partner when Tom visits him in his bedsit. He rejects the responsibility that the conventional society obligates him by giving his "Wendy Houses" speech, so he justifies himself for behaving without rules. However, Ravenhill's Victorian character, Constance questions her own motherhood and finds that she does not feel the way a mother is supposed to feel towards her own baby. She is portrayed as a caring mother because she pushes herself hard to feel like a mother even if her husband keeps interrupting her efforts in creating a bond

with the baby. Constance is not present in Wilde's play as one of the characters playing, but she is rather a shadowy figure. So, she is not reinvented but created as an ignorant mother by Ravenhill in *Handbag*. She is not pretentious, yet she is frank about her feelings towards her baby.

> **Handbag, Scene 14**
> **Constance** Oh yes! Come here. Come here. Let me feel something.
> *She takes the baby.*
> And now, of course, it should flow through me. Now I should feel overwhelmed by a mother's love.
> **Phil** And what do you feel?
> **Constance** Nothing. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 223)

Contrarily, in the alternative family where the baby is supposedly taken good care of and all of the four parents claim to be responsible, they cannot even help the baby survive because it is kidnapped and killed at the end of the play. Despite their obvious failure, they all keep claiming being responsible and caring parents even when they lose the baby.

Cardew is reinvented in a totally opposite personality in *Handbag*. His difference as a character to Wilde's Cardew is discussed in the first part of the second chapter in more detail. Cardew is described as a dreadful hypocrite by Ravenhill just like Wilde's Algernon and Jack. However, Cardew's hypocrisy revealed by Ravenhill is shocking and scandalous compared to Wilde's comedy play. Ravenhill's version of the original play implies there might be more than Wilde's innocent hypocrite characters lying their partners, disguising to escape family dinners, and lying for money. Cardew is presented as a good samaritan in Wilde's play who helps and raises an abandoned baby in Wilde's play; yet he is a man who is being suspected of being a boy lover from the beginning of Ravenhill's play. He presents himself as a man looking after many orphan boys in his society, but it is revealed that he is running a society where he carries out some dirty business in scene fourteen. This situation is implied by Moncrieff for the first time in scene five.

> **Handbag, Scene 5**
> **Moncrieff** A soldier can bear almost anything. A great many of your boys run off, don't they? What can you be doing to them? (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 168)

However, in the last scene, he almost verifies what is being told about him. In scene fourteen, Cardew enters, and this time he is not looking for Eustace, but asking for help. As his Belgrave Square Society where he claims to save and help

homeless boys is being attacked by people who think that he is performing horrible activities there. This is the second place in the play where Cardew is claimed to be a pedophile and accused of misusing the boys whom he claims to take care of in his society. In this scene he keeps refusing his bad activities and asks for help from Phil to hide him from the crowd, however, he is not interested in helping as he thinks that he is a bad man just like the crowd. This is the part where Cardew is revealed to be a pedophile in this scene. As Phil is one of his boys for a short period of time, he knows the reality about Cardew. Cardew claims his boys think he is a good man in scene five when Moncrieff accuses him.

> **Handbag, Scene 5**
> **Cardew** I shall find Mr. Wilton. I shall find him and bring him here and he will tell you, he will tell all of you, what an excellent guardian I am. You shall hear it from his mouth. (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 169)

Phil as one of his boys calls him "nonce" in scene fourteen (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 221). This supports the claims about Cardew's dirty works to an extent. Cardew claims that he has helped Phil by giving him everything that he lacks and so pushes him to help in return saying Phil is nothing without him as he has no parents. Phil rejects this obligation as he feels like a grown up now in this scene and reveals Cardew's real identity not as a philanthropist but a pedophile. His reason for hiding his real identity as a pedophile is to escape the society, so here social norms and the presence of the society play a role in preventing bad people in their acts in the Victorian context of the play. The society oppressing the people and pushing them to lie in Wilde's play helps revealing and punishing disgraceful people. Borrowing the Cardew character from Wilde's play does not guarantee *Handbag* to be faithful to the original play regarding the change in his personality and behaviors. Also, Hutcheon explores possible intentions of the writers while adapting and she mentions one as "the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question […] (2006, p. 7)". This is a relatable one regarding the Cardew character that is revealed to a bad guy at the end of Ravenhill's play because he is a philanthropist in the original play. This contemporary adaptation of the original play makes Cardew a bad man for the reader after reading it in this new version.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has proposed to seek answers for questions about the method, purpose, and motivation that Ravenhill might have had while adapting a Victorian play by Wilde. It has presented several answers to them by analyzing *Handbag* first as an in-yer-face play and then as an adaptation mainly through the adaptation theories of Sanders, Rees, and Hutcheon. Particular attention is paid to Ravenhill's use of Wilde's characters, plot, and context to figure out his methods in adapting. This approach has suggested that Ravenhill picked up some of the characters and one specific part of the original play so as to transform our reading of the original play regarding certain social issues. Such explicit references to the original play as characters, ignorant baby-sitters and the handbag image have clearly led the discussion suggesting that there is an obvious invitation by Ravenhill to consider his play in dialogue with Wilde's play. Consequently, *Handbag* as an adaptation brings Wilde's play back to the British stage making a contribution to its reputation.

A close reading of *Handbag* has revealed how it serves as a reflection of the contemporary British society while at the same time creating a provocation to it. This has been possible by investigating how the way playwrights create a play, and also how the approach of the society to social issues such as family and parenting has changed throughout years. In this light, it has been found out that Ravenhill creates a powerful yet complicated connection between the Victorian age and the contemporary British society in his *Handbag*. Creating a play that reflects the society of his time, Ravenhill also succeeds in comparing it to the same British society that lived a century ago. Through this comparison present in *Handbag*, the play becomes a playground that helps its reader analyze and see both societies from Ravenhill's perspective regarding certain social issues.

Prevailing common attitudes and social issues that are shared by people in the same culture and society are affected by drastic happenings and unexpected events like wars, natural disasters, and pandemics. It has always been like this throughout the history. Covid-19 is one of those big phenomena that has affected the way people live and think in the recent two years all over the world. The way family institution works and parenting responsibility that kept being even a bigger burden for the mothers rather than fathers during the pandemic demonstrate how certain social issues continue being even more problematic during in a time of crisis.

Together with the changing time periods and cultural changes, big crises such as pandemics also affect shared social attitudes of people that live together. For example, parents who work and employ babysitters for their toddlers when they are at work have stayed at home with their babies because of health and monetary concerns during the pandemic. Some parents did not want babysitters or any other people outside the household. Some others found it unnecessary to pay for someone to take care of their child when they were home. Working parents started to work from home, yet they missed the fact that they still needed someone to take care of their babies or children. So those children who left without even nannies or babysitters did not get enough attention from their parents because they worked even if they were at home. Whatever the situation and time is, parenting responsibility is one of the most critical issues that is overlooked. Ravenhill in his *Handbag* reveals this issue as a never-ending debate and problem thanks to his temporal comparisons in the play. *Handbag* presents social reflections of parenting responsibility, marriage, and family in two different time periods, so its readers in the twenty-first century can relate them to the present time.

In addition to parenting responsibility, families and the conventional marriages also changed together with the pandemic. The way people marry has also changed because it was not allowed to arrange huge celebrations for the weddings. Due to the governmental restrictions for gatherings, people postponed their wedding parties and only had the official marriage ceremony. This made couples had many marriage events at different times for celebrating their togetherness after the restrictions. So, Covid-19 pandemic also changed the way people marry, the traditions and practices of starting a family.

From a deep analysis and a close reading of the play that has been carried out to reach these objectives, it is possible to conclude that Ravenhill creates a fishy background and an alternative past for Wilde's play. Turning upside-down the conventional way of reading an adaptation chronologically, *Handbag* almost needs reading the original play afterwards. That is because the events happen to start in Ravenhill's play and keep in Wilde's play 26 years later even if it was written a hundred years ago. Ravenhill takes Wilde's characters back in time and make them confess the reality that Ravenhill creates. Ravenhill uses these flashbacks in the Victorian part of the play whereas he creates a new set of characters and plotline in

the contemporary part which goes parallel through his unique way of orchestrating two parts in harmony in addition to the shock tactics and disruptive elements that he adds into the play.

Exploring Ravenhill's interpretation of Wilde's play and a new representation of Wilde's characters in the contemporary world has been found out to lead the readers towards different readings of Wilde's canonical play. So, it has been found out that adaptations lead to a reexamination and rediscussing of the older texts. Barbara Goward claims that (as cited in Cole, 2016, p. 7) "There have been few productions, adaptations or imitations to stimulate critical discussion or arouse a general interest' (Goward, 2004, p. 32)". However, Ravenhill's adaptation of Wilde's play has been found out to lead to a reexamination of the original play. It has been revealed that Ravenhill's methods in adapting Wilde's play is to create a self-claimed adaptation bringing new perspectives for reading the original play. Even if it gives many twists to the original play regarding the time period, characters, happenings and contexts, *Handbag* does not criticize the adapted play. On the contrary, it has been concluded that Ravenhill appreciates the greatness of the original play by helping it live in a different century with a fresh new look.

Ravenhill transposes the action of Wilde's play to the 20th century. First, he creates a contemporary storyline with new characters and then he recreates Wilde's Victorian storyline. The contemporary part contains less obvious references and allusions to the original play while there is a direct transposition of characters and the action in the Victorian part. In his *Handbag*, Ravenhill mingles a direct and indirect transposition of the action and characters of Wilde's play. In addition to envisioning a new society freed of Victorian values, Ravenhill also reflects back to the Victorian time to bring back the adapted play to light in new ways. This way, he alters our understanding of the original play.

In his adaptation of Wilde's Victorian comedy play, Ravenhill does not completely modernize everything. Not only the use of characters and the storyline but also the themes and social issues borrowed from the original play have been closely analyzed under specific subtitles in this study. These thematic readings of *Handbag* in the second chapter of the thesis have indicated that the play creates an interplay between the contemporary and Victorian society. In addition to rewriting the Victorian storyline of Wilde's play, Ravenhill creates a new action to respond

to the contemporary reader and throws a chance to discuss the same social issues in a completely different context in the contemporary strand of the play. As a result, despite modernizing them, Ravenhill makes Wilde's Victorians live together with their contemporary doubles in *Handbag*.

The close reading of *Handbag* has revealed that with full conscious, Ravenhill admits his *Handbag* is not a unique and original play by looking at how he flirts with Wilde's characters and plotline. By alluding to the original play intermittently, Ravenhill makes Wilde's readers think twice about the original play by providing answers to some tricky questions that Ravenhill himself creates in his adaptation. It offers a contemporary reading for the original play. Thus, Ravenhill eliminates some ambiguities in Wilde's play by highlighting them in *Handbag*. He also as a way of adapting Wilde's play creates an alternative family in a contemporary world in parallel to Wilde's Victorian family with a purpose to compare both time periods. Additionally, Ravenhill creates younger selves, who are actually bad people, for Wilde's seemingly decent Victorian characters. In a way, he makes Wilde's characters confess their real identities and personalities in *Handbag*. Hypocrisy, supposedly well-structured family life, familial relationships, and the importance of marriages to form a family are all reversed in *Handbag*, which slaps Wilde's audience with the background that he creates by interpreting the original play.

Wilde's comedy play satirizing the society of its time in a funny way becomes a shocking and irritating in-yer-face play thanks to the way Ravenhill adapts it. His motivation and unconventional methods to adapt an old play help create an in-yer-face play that is loyal to the new writing movement of the 1990s. His use of filthy language, slang words, and unpleasant emotions simply align *Handbag* among other in-yer-face plays. Additionally, this research is important in that it analyzes *Handbag* as an in-yer-face adaptation of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* in such detail for the first time.

Ravenhill reanimates Wilde's characters and brings certain social issues back to the twentieth century. He resists and reacts to Wilde's way of making fun of the Victorian values. He is so fierce with how superficial the Victorian society is in addition to his representations about the society in his time. He also depicts the society in the twentieth century not as an alternative and much better one in

comparison to the Victorian society. On the contrary, he shows that they both fail in terms of parenting and forming a happy family. So, he handles social issues as a way to show nothing changes even if the time and culture change.

Ravenhill changes the funny tone that Wilde employs while representing his own time. He uses a fiercer and stronger voice to depict the parents and families of the twentieth century. In addition to this change from funny to irritating ways of mirroring the reality, Ravenhill also creates a complex dialogue between past and present. His motivation in reimagining Wilde's play seems to be revisiting the Victorian times and compare it to the present. He adapts a comedy play to the in-yer-face writing sensibility which is irritating so as to present a different approach to the same issues. Ravenhill's way of using Wilde's Victorian play as a story that haunts the present in a provocative way adapts the old play among others of the same period as an in-yer-face play.

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