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Oscar Wilde in Naxos: Revisiting Aubrey Beardsley's Frontispiece for John Davidson's *Plays*

In 1925, the poet Richard Le Gallienne published his book *The Romantic Nineties*, a nostalgic account of an age in which 'the amount of creative revolutionary energy packed into that amazing decade is almost bewildering in its variety'.[1] Of this decade, to which Le Gallienne's own early poetry belonged, one figure contained the multifarious energies and upheavals which Le Gallienne saw in its culture: Oscar Wilde. Wilde was 'the incarnation of the spirit of the '90s . . . Out of the 1890 chaos he emerged an astonishing, impudent microcosm,' he wrote.[2] But Wilde did not merely embody the 1890s for Le Gallienne. Within him, Le Gallienne detected flickers of something far more ancient altogether. Wilde, Le Gallienne remembered, appeared as 'a sort of caricature [of] Dionysus disguised as a rather heavy dandy of the Regency period',[3] drawing equivalences between the writer and the Greek god of wine, fertility and madness.

In what initially seems to be a bizarre coincidence, Le Gallienne was not alone in seeing this connection between Oscar Wilde and Dionysus. André Gide remembered Wilde being compared to 'the Asiatic Bacchus', the Roman name for the Greek deity, during the period of his cultural dominance in the 1890s.[4] Wilde had also appeared in the costume of Dionysus in a curious drawing of 1894 by Aubrey Beardsley – the likeness was confirmed in Robert Ross's 1909 appreciation of Beardsley's work[5] – which was used as the frontispiece to a volume of plays by the writer John Davidson and which also featured a portrait of Le Gallienne as a looming figure in a black mask. It is this third identification which has attracted most attention in the scholarship surrounding Wilde, Beardsley and the somewhat strained relationship between the two men in the fallout of their sole collaborative project, the illustrated edition of Wilde's play *Salome* of the previous year.

Beardsley's decision to cast Wilde as Dionysus has been read as a satirical comment on the writer's heavy drinking in this period, with the phrase 'vine leaves in his hair' being a commonplace euphemism for drunkenness in

Aubrey Beardsley, *Frontispiece Design for John Davidson's* Plays, 1894, ink and graphite on paper, Tate, London

Wilde's circle as Dionysian rites and celebrations typically involved large quantities of wine. The phrase is peppered throughout Wilde's letters in this spirit, appearing, for example, twice in a letter to Reginald Turner from 1898: the first reference on this occasion is to Lord Alfred Douglas who was rumoured to have been seen at 'the Empire, with many vine-leaves in his gilt hair', while the other is to the 'little friend' of a man nicknamed 'Sir John' who is otherwise described as being 'a little Dionysiac'.[6] In seemingly playing upon this, the frontispiece has been viewed as another entry into the annals of the war of wit, words and images between Beardsley and Wilde, whose ambivalence to one another as the most publicly visible representatives of the aesthetic and decadent avant-garde in England had begun when Beardsley appeared to satirise the writer in his *Salome* illustrations and was seemingly attested to again by Wilde's conspicuous absence from the *Yellow Book* in 1894. This certainly is Matthew Sturgis's interpretation of the image in a brief article exploring this fractious relationship between Wilde and Beardsley, and is also the conclusion reached by Chris Snodgrass in his investigation into Beardsley's work, *Aubrey Beardsley: Dandy of the Grotesque*.[7]

Here, I revisit Beardsley's frontispiece design to argue that, within its apparent conflation of Wilde and Dionysus, there are further depths and subtleties in the drawing which have gone hitherto undetected. Within the collective imagination of the aesthetes, the figure of Dionysus had acquired complex meanings by the time Beardsley's frontispiece was produced, suggesting that any equivalences between the writer and the god may speak to wider themes than Wilde's taste for wine. First contextualising Beardsley's frontispiece within these intellectual currents, I examine what the figure of Dionysus meant to the aesthetes of the late nineteenth century to argue that the focus of Beardsley's satire may be Wilde's sexuality. Turning then to the literal context of Beardsley's drawing, the literary content of John Davidson's *Plays*, I argue that the satirical content of the drawing may derive from Beardsley's problematising of a straightforward relationship between Wilde and Dionysus which implicates the other figures, including Richard Le Gallienne, who populate Beardsley's image.

THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT: DIONYSUS AMONGST THE AESTHETES

As Le Gallienne and Gide's comments about Wilde would suggest, an enthusiasm for the figure of Dionysus was far from unique to Aubrey Beardsley. An interest in the myths of classical antiquity in general, and particularly those pertaining to deities such as Dionysus, has been understood to constitute an important aspect of British aesthetic literature and art.

Classical revivalism amongst the British aesthetes of the late nineteenth century can indeed be placed within a broader, pan-European tendency, defined by the literary scholar Margot K. Louis as the 'anti-Olympian topos', an expansion of interest in the transgressive and mysterious cultic rituals surrounding classical deities like Dionysus.[8] Born of a growing frustration with dominant views of classical Greece as a cerebral, harmonious and orderly golden age, within the 'anti-Olympian topos' the trappings of ancient religion 'were no longer [treated] as sober, reverent rituals . . . instead, the focus turned to the orgiastic and ecstatic elements' of ancient practices.[9] The art that responded to this cultural turn was one in which 'Dionysiac revelries proliferated rapidly . . . [and] popularized a headier version of Greece' than ever before,[10] propagated throughout the British art world by Royal Academicians such as Frederic Leighton and Lawrence Alma-Tadema. Beardsley's frontispiece design can, perhaps, be understood as a minor entry into the 'anti-Olympian topos', delighting in what initially appears to be an unruly, crowded composition in which a bizarre cast of characters mingle. On the left, accompanying Wilde in his Dionysian garb of an elaborate arrangement of vine leaves in his hair and a leopard skin covering his body, is a diminutive satyr strutting towards the centre of the composition and a naked woman, perhaps a bacchante, at the caricatured Wilde's shoulder. This latter detail has encouraged Chris Snodgrass to suggest that there is a sly intimation of Wilde's homosexuality at play in Beardsley's drawing, owing to the writer's apparent ignorance of the woman's proximity to him.[11] Indeed, Snodgrass sees Wilde's leopard skin as an extension of this point, 'an ironical sexual pun on the cliché that "a leopard cannot change its spots"'.[12] In order to make this leap, Snodgrass's analysis negates the classical trappings that Beardsley is clearly attempting to foreground here, the inclusion of the satyr making evident his intention for the viewer to accept Wilde's garb as that of Dionysus. Closer examination of the British strain of the pan-European 'anti-Olympian topos' conversely suggests that Beardsley's classical reference is, in fact, central to locating the potential sexual undercurrents at play in the frontispiece.

The most significant text of the 'anti-Olympian topos' is typically understood to have been Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), which saw a dichotomy between two competing tendencies expressed in the figures of Apollo and Dionysus. These tendencies could be located both within the psychology of the individual and the cultural logic of an entire civilisation, with the 'Apollonian' standing for harmony, order and stability, and the 'Dionysian' representing uncivilised, authentic and sensual impulses. Nietzsche's influence over modern conceptions of Dionysus has been enormous: the classicist Albert Henrichs remarked that Dionysus was 'destroyed . . . as a god' but 'preserved . . . as a concept' by Nietzsche's text,

citing the fact that 'the term "Dionysian" can be found much more often in *The Birth of Tragedy* than the name of Dionysus'.[13] Within contemporaneous British writing which constitutes a more direct inheritance for the likes of Beardsley and Wilde, however, the dematerialisation of the god was far less absolute, and a maintenance of interest in Dionysus's person indicates a different thematic focus amongst the aesthetes. The literary scholar Jessica Wood argues that Nietzsche's preference for the 'Dionysian' over Dionysus himself allowed the philosopher to subtract from his considerations the central role of women in myth narratives surrounding the god, such as the nymphs who raise the infant Dionysus and the maddened bacchantes who partake in his later wild festivities.[14] Nietzsche's abstraction of Dionysus also allows him to negate not merely the pronouncedly feminine aspects of Dionysus's train but the pronouncedly feminine aspects of the god himself, the very aspects of Dionysus which would assume recurrent and transgressive importance within aesthetic discourses. This can be traced directly to the essays of Wilde's mentor, Walter Pater, the Oxford don whose writings occupy a central position in the development of British aestheticism and whose interest in Dionysus found expression in his twin essays 'A Study of Dionysus: The Spiritual Form of Fire and Dew' and 'The Bacchanals of Euripides'. Written in the late 1870s, these two essays would appear together for the first time in the posthumously published *Greek Studies* of 1894; the first is a general study of the god and the second an analysis of Dionysus's role in Euripides's play *Bacchae*, in which the god's power is foolishly confronted by the hostile king Pentheus with terrible consequences.

Similarities between Pater's ideas and those of Friedrich Nietzsche, with whose work Pater was nonetheless almost certainly unfamiliar, have been remarked upon by scholars of aestheticism. Pater's writings on the classical past, the literary scholar Stefano Evangelista notes, strive 'to create a place within classicism . . . for the troubled and inharmonious, irrational and fleshy side of the Greek imagination',[15] a goal common to both Nietzsche and the 'anti-Olympian topos' more generally. Pater's innovation, however, was to imaginatively reinvent the classical myths of Dionysus as stories in which issues of homoerotic desire and points of identification for homosexual men played out, with criminalised bodily desires smuggled into an aesthetic vernacular that was sufficiently remote for them to escape unwanted attention. Linda Dowling's study *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Late Victorian Oxford* argues that, within the hands of writers like Pater and their progeny like Wilde, classicism constituted 'a homosexual counterdiscourse'[16] that operated beneath the surface of classical revivals in the late nineteenth century: as those whose writings and paintings embraced the 'anti-Olympian topos' explored the classical past's violent and licentious

rituals, the aesthetes set out to recover its specifically homosexual transgressions. Their dalliances with Dionysus were no different.

Both Pater and Nietzsche conceive of Dionysus as an invading force whose worship was foreign to the civilised world of ancient Greece. Nietzsche characterised Greek Doric art, for example, as 'a permanent war-camp of the Apollonian: only by incessant opposition to the titanic-barbaric nature of the Dionysian was it possible for an art so defiantly prim, so encompassed with bulwarks . . . to last for any length of time'.[17] Conversely, Pater's discussion of Dionysus's entry into Athens has little to do with any 'titanic-barbaric nature' on the god's part. In the account Pater provides in 'A Study of Dionysus', Dionysus 'entered Athens, to become urbane like . . . [the] noble youths' and to 'contribute through the arts to the adornment of life, yet perhaps also in part to weaken it, relaxing ancient austerity'.[18] Rather than facing the resistance that Nietzsche sees as the conceptual drive behind Doric art, Pater's Dionysus is welcomed into the city by its cosmopolitan young men who find through the god's influence new ways of adorning their lives and 'relaxing ancient austerity' in doing so. While she is discussing Pater's essay *The Bacchanals of Euripides* rather than 'A Study of Dionysus', it is not for nothing that the literary scholar Yopie Prins acknowledges that Pater's Dionysus appears to the reader as something akin to a 'prototype of the decadent aesthete'.[19] Dionysus's influence, felt 'through the arts', encourages the beautification of the lives of Athens's urbane young men; it is also evidently an influence which ushers in an age of beautiful decadence, with the new utterances of Dionysian worship 'relaxing ancient austerity'. It is here that we begin to grasp how Robert and Janice Keefe, writing their study *Walter Pater and the Gods of Disorder* in 1988, can refer to Pater's Dionysus as 'a rather Wildean deity . . . an outlandish and highly civilised opponent to cultural philistinism', committing to the scholarship on aestheticism the casually invoked likeness between the writer and the god evidenced in Le Gallienne and Gide's reminiscences.[20]

The decadence of Dionysus also corresponds to the unstable gendering of the god in Pater's formulations, significantly departing from the aggression and machismo of Nietzsche's analogous writings concerning Dionysus and his followers. As studies of critical responses towards aestheticism have shown, the movement was often criticised not merely for the provocative amorality of its philosophical creeds but also for the conspicuously effeminate behaviour of its exponents, thought by suspicious detractors to suggest a proclivity for aberrant sexual practices. While Alan Sinfield's landmark 1994 book *The Wilde Century* suggests that the conflation of effeminate self-presentation and male homosexuality only concretised in the aftermath of the Wilde trial, with Wilde's example defining the male

homosexual in the public consciousness, queer theorists and cultural historians who have expanded Sinfield's temporal remit have argued that these links were in evidence before 1895. Jeffrey Weeks's holistic study *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (1977) sees male effeminacy as 'the most stigmatised form of behaviour' in suspected homosexuals who could already be stereotyped in these terms 'by the nineteenth century', rather than solely in its final years.[21] Dominic Janes, in studying caricatural representations of effeminate men, dedicates a chapter to representations of aesthetes before the Wilde trials to support his thesis statement that 1895 'did not see the immediate creation of a homosexual identity but rather the distribution of an image of the effeminate pervert that was to become a dominant stereotype of the homosexual for much of the twentieth century'.[22] Indeed, even while Linda Dowling's argument seeks to problematise a straightforward relationship between effeminacy and homosexuality before 1895, she does find 'the first in a procession of effeminate English aesthetes . . . which would find its perfect epitome in Oscar Wilde' within the pages of a parodic novel of 1877.[23] This was W. H. Mallock's satire *The New Republic* and the effeminate English aesthete Mr Rose, who openly entertains the notion of a lifelong love for a woman *or* youth and is a blatant caricature of Pater himself.[24]

It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that the decadent Dionysus's effeminacy is insisted upon in Pater's twin essays. Pater describes Dionysus's journey to maturity as the transformation of 'the ruddy god of the vineyard' into a 'white, graceful, mournful figure' whose skin appears 'honey-pale . . . like the flesh of women' in 'A Study of Dionysus',[25] and he figures as 'a woman-like god' in Pater's appraisal of Euripides's *Bacchae*.[26] Followers of the god are discussed in similar terms. Pater's statements in his 'Bacchanals' essay that 'it was on women and feminine souls that [Dionysus's] power mainly fell' and that the band of maddened mortals who follow him 'is *almost* exclusively formed of women' invite questions as to who Pater means by 'feminine souls' just as they open up places within Dionysus's train for possibly homosexual men.[27] Yopie Prins sees a flicker of autobiographical self-revelation in these comments, questioning whether Pater considered himself to possess a 'feminine soul' held in the god's thrall.[28]

Pater's insistence upon Dionysus's effeminacy is not without classical precedent. As Eric Csapo records in relating the story of Euripides's *Bacchae*, the same play Pater studies in his second essay on the god, the mortal king Pentheus who abhors Dionysus is perturbed by the sleekness of his hair, which suggests an 'unfamiliarity with wrestling', and the paleness of his skin, which connotes 'deliberate avoidance of outdoor activities'.[29] The visual counterpart to Euripides's textual Dionysus was broadly treated in like manner in the art of antiquity, as Michael Jameson's essay 'The Asexuality

of Dionysus' indicates. Jameson examines classical representations of Dionysus as a bearded figure whose difference from his Olympian brethren is marked by his ornate costume, in contrast to the 'ostentatious masculinity' of the other male gods' muscular nude bodies; his argument too incorporates later depictions of Dionysus as a naked and beardless youth in which, 'as if to compensate for the absence of the symbolism of dress, his whole image is now even less virile – a graceful, languid figure, a *pais kalos*'.[30]

As Pater himself equally observes, 'the artists of the Renaissance occupied themselves much with the person and story of Dionysus', and these later depictions provide Pater with a constellation of images with which to scaffold his construction of the effeminate and decadent Dionysus.[31] His selected examples, as Elizabeth Prettejohn notes, 'all involved homoerotic connotations' by the late nineteenth century,[32] with his essay 'point[ing] the reader to a rich tradition of homoerotic art for which the myth of Dionysus functions as ur-myth' in Stefano Evangelista's assessment.[33] Pater's remark concerning the Renaissance in 'A Study of Dionysus' is immediately followed by an enthusiastic discussion of Michelangelo's sculpture of the god, a work 'true to certain finer movements of old Greek sentiment . . . [which] may seem to have waited for the hand of Michelangelo before it attained complete realisation'.[34] Just as modern interpretations of Dionysus are foreshadowed in their Renaissance precedents, so Pater's enthusiasm for Michelangelo's sculpture is foreshadowed in its own *Renaissance* precedent: Pater's first book, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, also introduces its reader to Dionysus's 'sleepy seriousness, his enthusiasm, his capacity for profound dreaming' as imagined by Michelangelo.[35] Michelangelo is among the artists noted by Prettejohn as possessing distinctly homoerotic resonances in the culture of the late nineteenth century, as Lene Østermark-Johansen's examination of Michelangelo's status as what she terms the 'patron saint of sexual inversion' has further elucidated.[36]

Despite the absence of Caravaggio's famous and famously homoerotic Uffizi *Bacchus* from Pater's considerations – an omission that Evangelista, noting Caravaggio's transmutation of Greek god to 'debauched molly', highlights as a conspicuous one[37] – Pater finds further examples from the Renaissance in *The Renaissance* to develop his theme. In the same passage of *The Renaissance* which introduces Michelangelo's sculpture, Pater also discusses the qualities of a painting of Dionysus initially attributed to Leonardo. This painting Pater compares to Leonardo's *Saint John the Baptist*, 'whose delicate brown flesh and woman's hair no one would go out into the wilderness to seek'.[38] Owing to the compelling androgyny of this figure, 'we are no longer surprised by Saint John's strange likeness to the *Bacchus* which hangs near it'.[39] This figure certainly conforms to Jameson's account of its precedents in late antiquity, appearing as something of an androgynous *pais*

kalos. 'Leonardesque figures' also feature in Prettejohn's list of homoerotic precedents invoked in Pater's writings on Dionysus, doubtless owing to the accusation of sodomy levelled at the painter.

What is unique about Pater's explorations of Dionysus is his willingness to see within Dionysus's effeminacy and the persecution it causes at the hands of outsiders like Pentheus a parallel for his contemporaries. The most frequently remarked upon element of Pater's engagements with the god is his thinly veiled reference to the Pre-Raphaelite painter Simeon Solomon, whose work was collected by both Pater and Wilde and who had been arrested twice for attempting to solicit sex from men in public lavatories by the time Pater wrote 'A Study of Dionysus'. It is Solomon of all modern painters, Pater argues, who understood best the spirit of Dionysus, exemplified in his paintings of the god in which Dionysus appears as a young and thoroughly androgynous man: as Prettejohn observes, Pater's dating of the canvas he refers to is inexact, so the reference may be to either his head-and-shoulders oil painting or his three-quarter watercolour.[40] These paintings represent for Pater 'a complete and very fascinating realisation' of the figure Pater calls Dionysus *Zagreus*, the term referring to Dionysus in his guise as a bloodthirsty, vengeful hunter.[41] The paintings recall not merely the effeminacy of the Leonardesque figure who concerns Pater in *The Renaissance* but their realisation appears to suggest Solomon as a successor to Østermark-Johansen's 'patron saint of sexual inversion', Michelangelo: Solomon is, perhaps pointedly, the only other artist whose depiction of Dionysus Pater considers to be a 'complete . . . realisation', in this case because of his dwelling upon the darkest aspects of Dionysian myth. 'This image of the beautiful soft creature become an enemy of human kind, putting off himself in his madness, wronged by his own fierce hunger and thirst . . . is the most tragic note of the whole picture', Pater writes of this iteration of the god.[42]

Given that the context of this remark is a passage which praises Simeon Solomon's art and implicitly links it to Michelangelo's, it is difficult not to read this evocative description as a work of homosexual allegory in which the 'fierce hungers and thirsts' – the natural, bodily desires which both drive and torment the god – should be read in relation to the deviant proclivities intimated to Pater's readers by Dionysus's recurrently discussed effeminacy. Such a step has been taken in recent Pater scholarship: Kate Hext observes that Pater portrays the god as 'a terribly vulnerable figure' who 'is simply unable to control his wild desires or the effect he has on others', while Dustin Friedman directly sees in this figure 'a historical prefiguration of the plight of the late Victorian homosexual, doomed to destruction by desires beyond his control by a cruel and oppressive society'.[43] Understood in this way, Pater's imaginative rereading of Dionysus would have tragic and portentous

Simeon Solomon, *Bacchus*, 1867, oil on paper laid on canvas, Birmingham Museums Trust, Birmingham

qualities for Wilde, which would become publicly clear only a year after Beardsley cast him in the role of the god. Equally, it palpably evokes Simeon Solomon's persecution and perhaps Pater's own, narrowly avoided, public exposure concerning rumours of a romantic affair with the undergraduate William Money Hardinge in 1874, the revelation of which to the authorities of Oxford was said by a contemporary to have left Pater 'old, crushed, despairing'.[44]

Pater's hold over Wilde's imagination is well known, and Wilde's enthusiasm for his writings was shared by many of those of his generation. As Richard Le Gallienne was to recall of the 1890s, 'Pater was virtually the founder of the Aesthetic Movement, as he was the most potent influence on the school of young men' of the 1890s.[45] What the extent of Pater's influence would suggest is that Beardsley's conflation of Wilde and Dionysus may have been intended to function on a deeper level than simply indicating Wilde's heavy drinking; as with Pater's pen portrait of Dionysus *Zagreus*, the hungers and thirsts implied by Wilde's Dionysian costume may not need to be understood so literally. In Pater's terms, Dionysus is at once the exemplary aesthete and a cipher for the persecution of homosexual aesthetes. Suggesting that Wilde is a fitting substitute for the god may indicate that the object of Beardsley's satire is, as Chris Snodgrass has ventured without reference to the classical iconographies at play, Wilde's sexuality. A letter between Beardsley and Robert Ross which mentions that Beardsley was working on the frontispiece certainly found Beardsley in the mood for such sly, knowing humour on the theme. 'For one week', Beardsley wrote in relation to a flurry of fractious communication he received from Wilde and John Lane concerning Beardsley's contributions to the English translation of *Salome*, 'the number of telegraph and messenger boys who came to the door was simply scandalous'.[46] The sexual subtext to this, as Matthew Sturgis observes, is thinly veiled in the extreme, given the recency of a public scandal over male prostitution in precisely the professions Beardsley identifies.[47]

Certainly, Beardsley's contemporaneous and comparable work during the period of the *Plays* frontispiece suggests that the author was perhaps open to drawing equivalences between Wilde and other classical figures through the writer's assumption of Dionysus's garb, which would further indicate Wilde's sexuality is the object of Beardsley's attack. 1894 also saw the publication of an illustrated edition of Lucian's *A True History*, featuring Beardsley's interpretation of a scene in which the adventurous sailors of Lucian's narrative encounter a race of hybrid women whose 'hair . . . was nothing else but winding wires and leaves, and clusters of grape'.[48] These women 'kissed [the sailors] with their mouths . . . [and] some of them desired to have carnal mixture with [them]', an invitation which proves fatal for the sailors who give in to temptation.[49] In Beardsley's depiction these women are

leering, thoroughly androgynous grotesques who grasp at the plainly terrified and comparatively diminutive sailors: the grapes and vine leaves atop their heads are clearly redolent of Wilde's own accoutrements in the *Plays* frontispiece, which Linda Gertner Zatlin's dating of the pair suggests would have been completed only a matter of months after the *Lucian* illustration.[50] Beardsley's conferring of this unique headgear on Wilde would appear to draw pointed equivalences which work to support the subtler indication of the writer's homosexuality evinced in his association with Dionysus.

Aubrey Beardsley, illustration for Lucian's *A True History*, 1894. Photorelief print, British Museum, London

Equally, however, the conflation of Wilde and Dionysus is not so straightforward, and could be considered to pay homage to Wilde in a manner less characteristic of Beardsley's witty insults. Pater's Dionysus is effeminate, and perhaps even intended as a cipher for the imperilled homosexual aesthetes who championed Pater's works, and this could easily become territory rife for mockery in Beardsley's hands. But Pater's Dionysus is also a glorious figure and a beautiful ideal: it is Dionysus who inspires a languorous decadence in Athenian culture and throughout Pater's writings the god is treated both sensitively and sensually, misunderstood rather than villainous and described variously as 'beautiful', 'soft', and 'graceful'. It would thus be theoretically possible to argue that Beardsley intended to sincerely indicate the centrality of Wilde to British aestheticism in his frontispiece, casting him in the role of the leader and instigator of the 'women and feminine souls' who would adorn their lives and relax the austere moral standards of their time through the arts and through, moreover, Dionysus's enlivening influence. Beardsley was evidently aware of this more sympathetic treatment of the god. A drawing published in a 1925 collection of previously uncollected works shows an androgynous and handsome man wreathed in vine leaves, indicating Beardsley was depicting Dionysus, which is strongly suggestive of both the influence of Edward Burne-Jones over Beardsley's early career and of continuities with Solomon's painting of the same figure. Indeed, Zatlin

suggests that Beardsley may even have copied the face from Solomon's painting for this drawing.[51]

That such a reading could theoretically be supported would indicate that depicting Wilde as Dionysus could not be read straightforwardly as a satirical gesture: within the discourses of British aestheticism, the god occupied too central a position and was treated too often as an ideal for this to be the case. The intellectual context of Beardsley's drawing therefore both reveals one possible avenue of Beardsley's attack, but equally complicates it; to clarify the joke, we must understand the frontispiece within its literal context too. Examining Beardsley's drawing not only in its intellectual context but by comparing its iconography to the text it accompanied arguably provides the key to understanding the meaning of Beardsley's enigmatic identification of Wilde with Dionysus.

Aubrey Beardsley, *Study of a Head*, c.1891, pencil on paper. National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh

SCARAMOUCH IN NAXOS AND BEARDSLEY'S FRONTISPIECE

In the same letter in which Beardsley mentions the telegraph boys, he also mentions that the drawing he is working on was not initially intended to function as the frontispiece to John Davidson's collection of plays but to illustrate only the final play collected in the volume, Davidson's 1888 pantomime *Scaramouch in Naxos*.[52] This has been acknowledged in scholarly accounts of Beardsley's work by Chris Snodgrass and Linda Gertner Zatlin as it was in Brian Reade's 1966 exhibition catalogue *Beardsley.*[53] However, none of these writers subsequently examine what this may mean for Beardsley's drawing. *Scaramouch in Naxos* is a relatively brief play comprising five scenes and is an idiosyncratic blending of characters from the *commedia dell'arte* – the treacherous, clownish characters Harlequin, Columbine and Scaramouch – with figures from classical myth narratives revolving around Bacchus, Davidson's preferred term for Dionysus. The *commedia* figures are plainly represented in Beardsley's drawing on the right-hand side of the composition: the burly central figure, one leg turned outwards like a conceitedly dandyish sitter in a portrait of the grand manner, is assumedly the showman Scaramouch, while the frilled tutu

of the female figure in the foreground and the black mask of the male figure in the background are consistent with conventional depictions of Columbine and Harlequin, respectively. Essentially a light-hearted farce, Davidson's plot concerns the unscrupulous Scaramouch's efforts to recruit mythological gods to exhibit in his circus shows in London. To this end, he despatches his servants Harlequin and Columbine to the Greek island of Naxos to capture Bacchus, where they also meet a collection of satyrs and bacchantes who are accounted for in the left-hand side of Beardsley's composition.

Beardsley's depictions of each of these figures are known to, or in some cases at least thought to, correspond to other figures in Wilde and Beardsley's overlapping social circles. Richard Le Gallienne has been identified as the figure in the black mask at the back of the group, while the theatre proprietor Augustus Harris has been identified as the imposing figure at the centre of the composition and Beardsley's sister Mabel as the model for the naked woman at Wilde's elbow. The identity of the female figure at the right, with her back turned to the viewer to prevent easy identification, remains unknown: it was once relatively commonplace to suggest that this figure depicted the ballerina Adeline Genée, but this has since been refuted.[54] Similarly, the strutting satyr at Wilde's feet has been the object of considerable disagreement. Snodgrass, Peter Raby, Brigid Brophy and Ian Fletcher all suggest it represents Henry Harland, with whom Beardsley was shortly to publish the first volume of the *Yellow Book*.[55] Fletcher equally, however, entertains the possibility that it should be read as a self-portrait, also the conclusion reached by Brian Reade.[56]

These other caricatures will shortly be of interest to us in exploring the precise mechanics of Beardsley's satirical swipe at Wilde, which they arguably support. Their conspicuousness has certainly long been clear, indicative of their importance in Beardsley's schema. Davidson's play was not performed within his or Beardsley's lifetimes: an anonymous critic in the London journal *Echo* bemoaned that in 'Elizabethan days . . . [Davidson's plays] would have been listened to and appreciated in booth and theatre', but 'now we must be content to read them in our studies'.[57] Indeed, the early historian of aestheticism, T. Earle Welby, could still be found agitating for *Scaramouch in Naxos*'s maiden performance in a 1919 column for *Globe* in which he argued that 'we should lose none of the heartiness of our fooling if we admitted a certain dandyism into [pantomime]'.[58] The only visual material accompanying *Scaramouch in Naxos* was, therefore, dictated by Beardsley. As the play was read in contemplation with the frontispiece close to hand rather than watched onstage, his contemporary audience were assumedly more likely to acknowledge the relationship between his frontispiece and Davidson's text than later scholars. Indeed, the fact that Beardsley was forced to defend himself in the press against charges of poor

taste for unnecessarily including portraits of his contemporaries in the frontispiece would certainly suggest that the identities of his caricatures were not lost on his immediate public.[59]

Before exploring the meaning of these other portraits within Beardsley's frontispiece, we must understand the composition in general through the plot of Davidson's play. It is initially tempting, with these identifications acknowledged, to view the figure thought to be Mabel Beardsley as a bacchante; a figure who is possibly Aubrey Beardsley as a satyr; and Wilde as Bacchus as a homogenous group because they are the only Dionysian figures in the frontispiece. This would appear to negate any attack on Wilde by Beardsley, just as the generally positive interpretations of Dionysus within British aestheticism would. However, recourse to the text of *Scaramouch at Naxos* indicates that this may not be so. In the first scene of the play, which occurs shortly before Harlequin and Columbine arrive on Naxos, we witness a typical bacchanalian revel attended by satyrs and bacchantes; the only missing figure is Dionysus himself. In his absence, the affair is presided over by Silenus, an elderly and perennially drunken member of Bacchus's retinue who in some narratives acts as a teacher to Dionysus and in others is simply a gluttonous, foolish figure. While drunk, Silenus attempts an audacious act of counterfeiting. In the absence of Bacchus, whose return is nonetheless believed to be imminent, Silenus begins to claim that he *is* Bacchus and rules over the satyrs and bacchantes, a conceit which persists until the arrival of the real god.

Bacchus himself does not appear until the third scene and, as the script of the fifth scene is barely over a page in length, is consequently absent for the majority of the play: of the forty-three pages of Davidson's script, Bacchus only makes his entrance in time for the final fourteen pages. The closest approximation that Davidson's reader sees of the god for the majority of *Scaramouch in Naxos* is, therefore, Silenus pretending to be Bacchus. The likelihood of Wilde being compared to this character, and not straightforwardly to Bacchus himself, is further suggested by the conspicuous addition of some form of vine-like plant woven around the legs of the Wilde-like figure in Beardsley's frontispiece. This detail has been read by Snodgrass to suggest that Wilde is 'heterosexually impotent', furthering his argument that this figure is 'impervious to the charms of the nude woman pressed against him', and yet it too is explicable with recourse to Davidson's script.[60] When Silenus's conceit is exposed by the arrival of Bacchus, he is punished by a group of bacchantes who bind him with ivy.[61] Indeed, Davidson's stage direction appears to be a pantomimic reenactment of a commonplace narrative involving Silenus in which, after having fallen asleep while drunk, he is captured by King Midas who binds his legs together to prevent him from escaping. A reference to this narrative would befit a play

in which Silenus is to be carried off to London by the *commedia* characters and would appear to befit Beardsley's own artistic tastes too. While images of Silenus with bound legs are relatively uncommon in art history, a notable counterexample is Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot's 1838 rendition of a bacchanalian scene in which Silenus has been bound about the legs with an ivy-like plant by mischievous bacchantes, as in Davidson's play; Beardsley was later to use a superfluous aside in his novel *Under the Hill* to inform readers that a canvas by Corot is 'an exquisite lyric poem' to express his admiration for the painter.[62]

The implications for Beardsley's drawing are immediately evident. An identification between Wilde and Bacchus has so far been taken at face value. Understanding the drawing through the lens of *Scaramouch in Naxos*, the play Beardsley had intended it to illustrate, would however suggest that such an identification should perhaps not be so readily accepted and that we may instead see Beardsley picturing Wilde as a figure who is merely counterfeiting the role of Bacchus. A comparison between Beardsley's earlier drawing of an androgynous male head which may intentionally recall Solomon's *Bacchus* (page 15) and the figure of Bacchus in Beardsley's frontispiece certainly indicates as much. While the former drawing is, as we have seen, consistent with both Pater's conception of Dionysus and Solomon's depiction of him, the god who appears in the *Plays* frontispiece bears little resemblance to the Dionysus of these wider aesthetic discourses. It is obvious but pertinent to draw attention to the fact that the vine leaves in Wilde's hair are not the most blatant, nor most cruelly observed, indications of overindulgence. Wilde appears in the frontispiece as a distinctly corpulent figure, with the middle-aged writer looking clearly at odds with the ideal of the lithe, youthful and androgynous Dionysus evidenced in Beardsley's earlier drawing, Solomon's painting and Pater's texts. If we understand Beardsley's frontispiece to interact

Aubrey Beardsley, *Frontispiece Design for John Davidson's* Plays, 1894, ink and graphite on paper, Tate, London (detail)

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Silenus*, 1838, oil on canvas,
Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis

closely with Davidson's script, as Beardsley had presumably intended it to do, what is presented to us is less likely to be an image of Wilde as Bacchus than an image of Wilde as Silenus who is dressed up as Bacchus. Given that Wilde was evidently familiar with Davidson's play – his personal copy of an unillustrated version published in 1890 was discovered by chance in the library of Yale University in 1952[63] – this intimation would have been as legible to the target of Beardsley's satire as would the possible intimations of Wilde's homosexuality, which relied primarily on the writings of Wilde's mentor, Walter Pater.

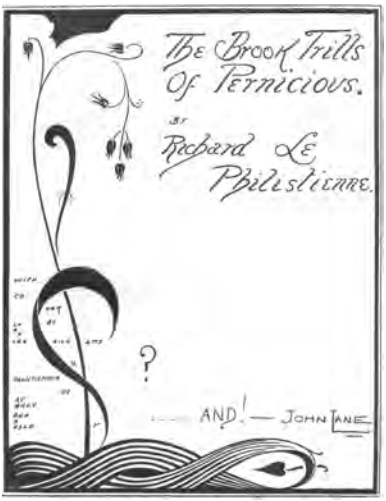
It is not merely the discrepancies between Beardsley's earlier, uncollected drawing of the god and his invocation of him in this frontispiece that would indicate that this is the case. Davidson's play abounds with the comic potentialities of mistaken identities, the most prominent of which is the humour inherent in the elderly Silenus conceitedly believing himself to be a convincing substitute for Bacchus. Silenus's activities when playing this role travesty and parody the dignity and power of the god himself. Silenus decides his chariot will be pulled by a legion of tabby cats, as opposed to the tigers proper to Bacchus, because 'cats will please me better . . . They were dangerous reptiles, those tigers, and I am growing old: my charms have not the power they once had.'[64] As this last comment indicates, the differences between Silenus and Bacchus which are most consistently observed in *Scaramouch in Naxos* are those revolving around ideals of youth and beauty. Harlequin tells Scaramouch that Silenus will make a more convincing Bacchus than the god himself for a philistine public because 'not a soul would believe that the big beardless boy which Bacchus looks was he. Now, this old wine-skin, Silenus, is just the idea your worthy patrons have of what Bacchus must be after a supposed debauch extending from end to end of the Christian era.'[65] When Harlequin is subsequently asked whether Silenus would willingly pretend to be Bacchus before the public, he answers that Silenus would be 'as willing as a grub is in May to be a butterfly',[66] hardly a flattering comparison. Although the physical appearance of Dionysus is never directly described in the script or stage directions of *Scaramouch in Naxos*, an indication that Davidson was thinking of the god in terms familiar to us from the likes of Pater and Solomon is provided by a comment from Columbine, who also works to convince Scaramouch to exhibit Silenus as Bacchus. The real god, she argues, would be of little interest to the public 'unless you passed him off for Ariadne'.[67] As Ariadne is Dionysus's bride in conventional myth narratives, the remark suggests that the Bacchus of Davidson's imagination is as effeminate and androgynous as the god of Pater and Solomon's imaginations. Silenus too, in an echo of Pater, refers to the real Bacchus as 'the maiden-faced Bacchus, who these many generations has roamed about the world striking men with fury and madness'.[68]

The distinctions between Silenus and Bacchus that animate the humour of Davidson's pantomimic play are, therefore, exactly those that similarly suggest a gulf in meanings between Beardsley's earlier drawing of a sensuously pouting god and his depiction of an overweight Wilde ostensibly cast in the same role. What the twenty-two-year-old illustrator seems to be suggesting through the logic of Davidson's play is that the middle-aged Wilde is an unconvincing, buffoonish approximation of the god who, in the wider logic of British aestheticism, represented both the effeminate, homoerotically conceived ideal of the aesthetes and indeed their spiritual leader. The line between god and follower is blurred not merely in the case of Silenus's assumption of Bacchus's role in *Scaramouch in Naxos*, and Silenus provides a glib account of how these elisions of identity (including his own) come about. In the third scene, an incidental character called Glaucus is inspired by Silenus's audacious reinvention and becomes convinced that he too is no mortal creature but is instead a god. 'If you feel confident that you are a god you must be one,' Silenus declares, to which Glaucus argues that 'any one might be a god at that rate'.[69] 'Surely, surely,' Silenus counters: 'confidence makes gods and goddesses of the merest mortality.'[70] If we are to turn back from Davidson's text to Beardsley's drawing, this comment would appear to further illuminate the possibility that Wilde is not really Bacchus at all but an unconvincing pretender, not least perhaps because Silenus's epigrammatic answer to Glaucus gestures towards an approximation of Wildean cadences. Silenus's thinking indicates that what matters is not real divinity but merely its perception, or at least an egotistical and vainglorious self-perception in which a mortal is willing to conceive of themselves as far greater than they are. In Beardsley's frontispiece Wilde is associated with facetiousness and a conceited belief in his own brilliance. Rather than exemplifying the noble person of Dionysus as the likes of Pater and Solomon saw him, Wilde embodies only a cheapened and travestied version which is fit for exhibition in the circus ring.

This may well inform Beardsley's potential intimation of Wilde's homosexuality. There may be, in Beardsley's eyes, something particularly grotesque about the older man's belief that he could possibly be desirable to youthful lovers, as the legitimate figure of Dionysus could be. Wilde, like Silenus, was 'growing old: [his] charms have not the power they once had'. Beardsley's point appears to extend beyond Wilde's sexuality, however, to demonstrate how Wilde fails to embody not merely the homoerotic ideal of Dionysus but the ideal of Dionysus as the exemplary aesthete. Such a reading would certainly explain the interactions between the characters in the frontispiece who, as we have noted, initially appear to be of an idiosyncratic mixture but who correspond literally to both the characters of Davidson's play and the real figures clustered around Wilde and Beardsley. The meaning

of casting the theatre director Augustus Harris as Scaramouch was provided by Beardsley, who defended his decision to include portraits of his contemporaries in the frontispiece by arguing that Harris deserved the treatment because the proprietor 'owes me half a crown' in reference to Harris having sold him a theatre seat that was already booked by someone else.[71] Beardsley's glibly expressed reasoning is at once slightly petty and considerably revealing as to how he suggests Scaramouch's cronies should be viewed in his drawing. His personal gripe could find a ready and amplified answer in Davidson's unscrupulous showman who, as his delight at Silenus's willingness to pretend to be a god to satisfy an audience would suggest, is an avatar of crass, inartistic bluster in *Scaramouch in Naxos*.[72] Tellingly, it is Augustus Harris who holds Wilde's attention in the frontispiece, with the writer grinning at the showman; it is typically Wilde's avoidance of the bacchante's gaze which has been examined for satirical intent, but the direction of *his* gaze is perhaps no less rife terrain.

The inclusion of Richard Le Gallienne as Harlequin is less easily accounted for if we accept Le Gallienne's own account of his dealings with Beardsley, which suggest there would be little reason for animosity: Le Gallienne claimed he 'hardly knew [Beardsley], though I always thought he seemed a likeable chap' many years after the fact.[73] Certainly, however, Beardsley did not blanche at satirising Le Gallienne's pretensions, or lending a hand to those who did likewise. It was Beardsley who provided the front cover design for Arthur Compton-Rickett's book *Lost Chords* (1895), a collection of short satires among which one can find a monologue entitled 'Pose Fancies'. This was an obvious pun on Le Gallienne's recently published book *Prose Fancies*, with Compton-Rickett's version caricaturing the purple hues of Le Gallienne's writing in finding its vacuous narrator mounting such searching questions as 'why brood we not in dusky meditation on the green and cool-veined cabbage?'[74] Beardsley also privately produced a parody cover design for Le Gallienne's 1895 publication *The Book Bills of Narcissus* which becomes, in Beardsley's hands, 'The Brook Trills of Pernicious' by



Aubrey Beardsley, 'The Brook Trills of Pernicious', 1895, pen and ink sketch, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh

'Richard Le Philistienne'; within a movement such as aestheticism, which defined itself aggressively against its 'philistine' detractors, this was a particularly unkind accusation. Beardsley's rationale behind these assumptions about Le Gallienne is unclear, as Zatlin and Robert Ross both mention the parodic book cover but neither delve into the animosity which would appear to animate it.[75] The reason, particularly in the case of the *Plays* frontispiece, may have been that Beardsley was aware of Le Gallienne's idolisation of Wilde, on whom he unashamedly and closely styled himself as an aesthete and poet.[76] It may equally reference the fact that this admiration was to an extent symbiotic. Wilde was evidently somewhat infatuated with the younger writer, lavishing praise on his published work in letters which include the mock-anxiety that Le Gallienne's 'laurels are . . . too thick across your brow for me to kiss your eyelids'; indeed, Wilde's highest praise in this letter is that Le Gallienne's 'thought shows itself stained by colour and passion, rich and Dionysiac'.[77]

A similar line of attack against Wilde himself had been recently rehearsed within Beardsley's broadly contemporaneous depictions of his erstwhile collaborator. Beardsley's sketch of 'Oscar Wilde at work' while writing *Salome* indicates his willingness to mock Wilde's pretensions in precisely the manner implied by the text of *Scaramouch in Naxos*. Sturgis observes that this privately circulated drawing lampooned Wilde's apparent intellectual limitations through including a French dictionary and a linguistic guide titled *French verbs at a glance*, suggestive of Wilde's inability to write fluently in the language he chose for his play.[78] We may equally add that a book clearly labelled *Swinburne*, in reference to the poet of Pater's generation, suggests Wilde's lack of artistic originality, particularly given this volume is literally placed at Wilde's elbow. Beardsley was thus, in this period, no stranger to suggesting that Wilde's public stature dramatically outstripped his talents, befitting his identification as Silenus. Le Gallienne's appearance in the *Plays* frontispiece would thus simply extend this to a loyal member of Wilde's train, satirising both teacher

Aubrey Beardsley, 'Oscar Wilde at Work', 1893. Pen and ink sketch. National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh

and student. Le Gallienne has become a clownish figure, caught in the thrall of Wilde's influence; Wilde, meanwhile, ironically becomes a corrupting figure like Pater's Dionysus, who ushers in a decadent period of Athenian culture, but his corruption of urbane young men is not the languorous decadence of Pater's Dionysus but a squandering of their talent.

What appears to emerge from this pattern is Beardsley's identification of figures he regarded as crass, untalented and philistine with the *commedia* troupe who invade Naxos, taking with them the counterfeit Dionysus. Even the Columbine figure, whose identity remains unknown, may support this. Chris Snodgrass has argued that the butterflies she is distracted by are a reference to Wilde's rival Whistler, whose signature took the form of a butterfly,[79] perhaps to further question Wilde's centrality within networks of British aestheticism. However, we will equally recall that a sign of Silenus's ugliness is that he is a 'grub' compared to the 'butterfly' that Dionysus represents, and thus it is possible that this mysterious figure has similarly been fooled into supposing that the counterfeited god is the real thing. What is left of the smaller party of Dionysian figures in the drawing, reduced to a smirking satyr and a leering bacchante, represents Beardsley's sister and, if some readings are to be believed, also Beardsley himself. Even if the satyr instead represents Henry Harland, Beardsley's fellow *Yellow Book* editor – Beardsley was announcing finalised plans for the publication in a letter to Robert Ross scarcely a month after he first mentions the *Plays* drawing[80] – we still find these figures associated with Beardsley's friends who would exclude Wilde utterly from their new venture. It is likely significant that the Silenus of Davidson's play acknowledges his weakening powers over what he fraudulently claims as his domain, as the power between Silenus and his two fellow Dionysian characters appears to be shifting. Most obviously, the satyr primly struts into the centre of the composition while the distracted Wilde retreats into the background. The symbolism of this is all the clearer when we note that Beardsley, despite Davidson's play never having been performed, suggests an air of theatricality to the indefinite location of his drawing in two economically rendered footlights in the lower right-hand corner of the composition: the satyr is literally taking centre stage.

Within this schema it is also perhaps pertinent to question the traditionally accepted explanation of the relationship between Mabel Beardsley and Wilde in the frontispiece, exemplified by Chris Snodgrass's suggestion that the Wildean figure's ignorance of the bacchante's presence is intended to insinuate the writer's homosexuality or status as being at least 'heterosexually impotent'. However, the notion that the Wilde presented to Davidson's public by Beardsley could be sexually desirable seems unlikely. This detail could perhaps only be included disingenuously to further signify the writer's blinding vanity. Alternatively, the proximity of the bacchante to

Wilde may have nothing to do with sexual attraction and may instead be a veiled threat. Snodgrass's reading of the relationship between Mabel Beardsley and Wilde relied upon the negation of the classical iconographies in the frontispiece and their possible meanings. Restoring these resonances to our analysis of the drawing arguably paints a different picture. Not only are bacchantes prone to violent attacks on male figures, as is dutifully recorded in Pater's essays,[81] but they are equally the figures who bind Silenus's legs in Davidson's play and in paintings such as Corot's 1838 *Silenus*. The proximity of the eerily grinning bacchante to Wilde thus may further, and more forcefully, suggest his removal from the stage of aestheticism. Allowing himself to be exhibited in Scaramouch's circus and thus leaving Naxos, the Wildean Silenus departs from the territory of Dionysus who, as we have seen, represented a powerful ideal to the writers and artists of British aestheticism: Beardsley and his allies, meanwhile, seem poised to take his place.

Revisiting Beardsley's frontispiece by placing it within the context of wider discourses concerning Dionysus provides us with the grounds for arguing that the god is intended to function as a far more complex symbol than simply a signifier of drunkenness. Tracing the figure of Dionysus from the textual foundations of British aestheticism upon which both Wilde and Beardsley built, we have seen that Beardsley's seeming identification of Wilde with Dionysus would suggest a swipe at his sexuality. Equally, examining Beardsley's frontispiece through the lens of the text it was initially intended to illustrate suggests that Beardsley cannily invoked these broader, longer discourses around the figure of Dionysus merely to demonstrate Wilde's fundamental inability to suit the role: he appears, in Beardsley's eyes, too old, too corpulent and too talentless for the identification to survive sustained interrogation. Beardsley's frontispiece remains to an extent mysterious, as the continued debates over the identity of a handful of its figures would indicate. However, reading it through the twin lenses of the broader aesthetic imagination and John Davidson's own words, and examining how Beardsley's interpretation of the latter necessitated bringing the former to bear upon his image, can arguably lead us closer to understanding the subtleties and nuances of its barbed message.

A somewhat cruel postscript to the caricature can be found in the pen portrait of Wilde we began with, Richard Le Gallienne's suggestion that Wilde resembled Dionysus. Like Beardsley, Wilde does not represent a straightforward stand-in for Dionysus in Le Gallienne's eyes but rather 'a sort of caricature [of] Dionysus disguised as a rather heavy dandy of the Regency period' who exhibited 'a certain fat effeminacy'.[82] Readers of Le Gallienne's reminiscences of the 1890s are invited to directly contrast this heavily caveated equivalence with Le Gallienne's earlier description of the poet

William Sharp as 'probably the handsomest man in London . . . [with] the complexion of a girl . . . a veritable young Dionysus'.[83] In Sharp's case, the god is invoked in his familiar role as a homoerotic ideal of androgynous, youthful beauty, like the 'woman-like god' of Pater's writings or the 'maiden-faced' figure alluded to in Davidson's text; in Wilde's case, the writer again can only function as a poor substitute. It is indeed tempting to imagine that Le Gallienne, Wilde's old acolyte writing some thirty years after the fact, was thinking of Beardsley's frontispiece as he penned this description, looking in his mind's eye at his own masked features grinning back at him.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Le Gallienne, 137
2. Le Gallienne, 269
3. Le Gallienne, 243
4. Gide, 22
5. Ross, 90
6. Holland & Hart-Davis, 1107–1108
7. Sturgis (1998) 19; Snodgrass, 240
8. Louis, 341
9. Louis, 341
10. Louis, 353
11. Snodgrass, 240
12. Snodgrass, 240
13. Henrichs, 23
14. Wood, 54
15. Evangelista, 202
16. Dowling, xiii
17. Nietzsche, 42
18. Pater, 39
19. Prins, 42
20. Keefe, 11
21. Weeks, 37
22. Janes, 3, 171–191
23. Dowling, 104
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25. Pater, 40
26. Pater, 57
27. Pater, 57
28. Prins, 52
29. Csapo, 261
30. Jameson, 44–45, 50
31. Pater, 11
32. Prettejohn, 46
33. Evangelista, 41
34. Pater, 11
35. Pater, 65
36. Østermark-Johansen, 205–238

37. Evangelista, 211

38. Pater, 97

39. Pater, 98

40. Prettejohn, 38

41. Pater, 47

42. Pater, 47

43. Hext, 101; Friedman, 67

44. Inman, 2

45. Le Gallienne, 97–98

46. Beardsley (1970), 58

47. Sturgis (1999) 162

48. Lucian, 21

49. Lucian, 23

50. Zatlin, 173, 218

51. Zatlin, 106

52. Beardsley (1970) 58

53. Snodgrass, 240; Zatlin, 219; Reade, 340–341

54. Zatlin, 219

55. Snodgrass, 240; Raby, 56; Brophy, 78; Fletcher, 131

56. Fletcher, 131; Reade, 340

57. Anon., 1

58. Welby, 4

59. Zatlin, 218

60. Snodgrass, 240

61. Davidson, 281. I am grateful to the second reader of this article during the review process for bringing this point to light.

62. Beardsley (1904) 26

63. Townsend, 219

64. Davidson, 257

65. Davidson, 261

66. Davidson, 262

67. Davidson, 261

68. Davidson, 256

69. Davidson, 276

70. Davidson, 276

71. Zatlin, 218

72. Augustus Harris took over Drury Lane in 1879 when it was a failing concern and turned it into a profitable business. He was criticised for ignoring Drury Lane's status as the 'National Theatre' and the home of Shakespeare with his programme of spectacular melodramas and even more spectacular pantomimes. He responded to his critics by pointing out that the managers of Drury Lane had never lacked for calls from theatre lovers to produce the 'legitimate drama', but said theatre lovers were not bearing the financial risk, which stayed solely with the manager. If his critics would like to risk their own capital, or perhaps persuade the government to give him a subsidy, he would reconsider his position, but as long as he was paying the bills he would continue to take 'the taste of those I endeavour to please' as his guiding star. (Augustus Harris, 'The National Theatre', *The Fortnightly Review* 18, July–December 1885, 630–6/635)

73. Whittington-Egan, 252

74. Compton-Rickett, 36

75. Zatlin, 161; Ross, 100

76. Whittington-Egan, 44–46

77. Holland & Hart-Davis, 457

78. Sturgis (1998) 19

79. Snodgrass, 240

80. Beardsley (1970) 69

81. Pater, 48–49

82. Le Gallienne, 243

83. Le Gallienne, 148

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ELEANOR FITZSIMONS

The Pastoral Players

Methinks I play as I have seen them do
In Whitsun pastorals
William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, IV: 4

In May 1885 an article appeared in *The Nineteenth Century* about the history of the literary genre of pastoral – that curious tradition of writing about shepherds, sheep and other country matters in an idyllic style that has little to do with the realities of rural life. The author starts with Hesiod, an ancient Greek poet who lived about 900 B.C. and wrote a 'shepherd's calendar . . . as he fed his father's flocks on the slopes of Helicon', but pastoral really took off with Theocritus, whose idylls, written in the third century B.C., 'form the basis of the whole fabric of pastoral writers from the idyll to the opera'.[1]

The revival of interest in classical learning that marked the Renaissance led to a significant flowering of pastoral drama in fourteenth-century Italy. It reached its zenith in the late sixteenth century with plays such as *Aminta* (1573) by Torquato Tasso, set during a garden party at the court of the Duchy of Ferrara; *La Mirtilla* (1588) by Isabella Andreini, who was a popular actor and the first woman to publish a pastoral play; and *Il Pastor Fido* (1590) by Giovanni Battista Guarini, a tragicomedy exploring the loves and fates of shepherds and hunters. English playwright John Fletcher (1579–1625), who succeeded William Shakespeare as house playwright for the King's Men, was influenced by *Il Pastor Fido*, which was translated and performed widely, when he wrote *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608). It was performed first by the Children of the Queen's Revels, a popular troupe of boy-actors at the Blackfriars Theatre. There are pastoral elements in several of Shakespeare's plays too, notably *As You Like It* (1599), much of which is set in a romanticised version of the Forest of Arden, a place connected with Shakespeare's mother, Mary.

These pastoral plays fell out of fashion for two centuries. Their revival towards the end of the nineteenth century should be credited to Scottish writer and influential patron of the arts Lady Archibald Campbell (1846–1923), the author of the *Nineteenth Century* article, who was born

Janey Sevilla Callander and known affectionately as 'Lady Archie'. Her production of *As You Like It*, performed in the grounds of Coombe House, in the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames, in July 1884, was the first outdoor pastoral play staged in Europe for many decades, and one of the earliest and most influential outdoor performances of Shakespeare's work. Its success inspired her to form the Society of Pastoral Players, with herself as president and prominent cast member. The only other permanent member was progressive architect/designer Edward William (E.W.) Godwin, whom she invited to help her with the staging of *As You Like It* in the spring of 1884.

Campbell was introduced to Godwin by their mutual friend James McNeill Whistler, a central figure in the aesthetic movement. Whistler influenced Campbell's progressive ideas on art which she developed in her aesthetic treatise *Rainbow Music or The Philosophy of Harmony in Colour-Grouping* (1886). Such was her contribution to aestheticism in her writing, her patronage and her revival of pastoral plays, that historian Susan Weber describes her as 'one of the most important women in the aesthetic movement' and John Stokes calls her 'the queen bee of the aesthetes'.[2] Campbell's patronage helped Whistler restore his artistic position in London after he was declared bankrupt in 1879. He worked with her on the decoration of Coombe Hill Farm, her two storied, gabled, ivy-draped family home, with dining room, drawing room, library, eight bedrooms, kitchen, cellar and offices, parts of which could be dated to around 1650.

Orphaned as a child, Campbell had become a ward of George John Douglas Campbell, 8th Duke of Argyll, and had grown up in Inveraray Castle in Western Scotland. In 1869, aged twenty-two, she married Campbell's second son, Lord Archibald Campbell (1846–1913), a soldier, writer and businessman who became a partner in the banking firm of Coutts and Co. in 1873 and one of the senior managing partners in 1894. The couple had two children, a son and a daughter. Lord Archibald Campbell was a talented amateur artist who recorded his extensive travels using watercolour paintings in notebooks and showed remarkable skill in rapidly producing outdoor paintings in what is known as the 'plein air' style. It is thought that he may have had training in sketching as a means of recording terrain for military purposes while serving in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders as a young man.[3] He too was friendly with Whistler, who called him 'Little Archie'.[4]

American actor Eleanor Calhoun (1862–1957), a regular weekend visitor and a key player in the revival of pastoral drama, described the extraordinary interior of the Campbells' home in her memoir *Pleasures and Palaces*:

> On the hall walls Lord Archibald painted armored knights, boar-hunts, and Tennysonian tapestry-like subjects. There hung, too, a portrait he had made of Lady Archibald at an earlier time, 'a beauteous faire

> ladye' of the knight-errantry age, with golden hair towered high. He painted the dining-room walls with a rich Japanese subject – the sea and flamingos; the walls of his own room, with its hangings of rich Elizabethan broideries, were painted around with heaving, flowing waves of the sea, in the azure and aquamarine of which played dolphins – golden, I think they were – amid mermaids and sporting fishes.[5]

A profile of Campbell in *The Lady* included a description of her extraordinary dining room: 'It is coloured throughout a glowing red, the floor is red, the window frame is red, the doors are red, the letter-case on the table is red, and there are winged creatures all of red in panels on the walls.'[6] With Whistler's help, Campbell painted irises in various colours and sizes on the walls of her 'Iris parlour' where, according to *The Lady*, 'she studies her parts, reads books on a variety of out-of-the-way subjects and here she has written for the new number of the *Nineteenth Century* a delightful paper on "The Faithfull Shepherdesse" which shows that she is very well read in the old dramatic literature that she is now bringing before the attention of Society'.[7] Whistler designed a trellis for Campbell's lovely gardens, with their sweeping bowers and arcades of jasmine, clematis, rose and wisteria, although his exacting specifications posed a challenge for local craftsmen.[8] Regrettably, this extraordinary house, surrounded by extensive pleasure grounds and gardens, three-acre paddock and cornfields leading down to nearby New Malden, was demolished in 1969, and replaced by Coombe Hill Infants and Junior School in 1970.

Proximity to train stations at nearby Malden and Norbiton put Coombe Hill Farm within easy reach of visitors from London. As Campbell had access to Coombe Wood, which was owned by the Duke of Cambridge, who was absent for much of the time, she was in the habit of taking guests from London on long walks through this virtual wilderness. One regular visitor was a young actor named Eleanor Calhoun who had made her stage debut as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* at the Grand Opera House in San Francisco in 1880, when she was just eighteen. In 1882, Calhoun travelled to London, where she hired the Imperial Theatre in Westminster for two weeks, opening as Hester Grazebrook in Tom Taylor's *An Unequal Match* on 14 October 1882, and playing Rosalind in *As You Like It* during her second week.[9] These were audacious choices. Weeks earlier, Lillie Langtry, 'professional beauty' and former mistress of the Prince of Wales, had played the same parts on the same stage. Several critics regarded Calhoun's interpretation of Rosalind as more intelligent than Langtry's, although the reviewer for the *Illustrated London News* thought she was a little young to take on one of Shakespeare's greatest female roles.[10]

It was during one of Calhoun's walks in the woodlands adjoining Coombe

Lady Archibald Campbell from *The Lady*, 4 June 1885

Hill Farm with Campbell, in the summer of 1883, that, by her own account, she suggested an outdoor performance of *As You Like It*. At the time, she was wearing the costume she had designed to play Rosalind disguised as male shepherd Ganymede, complete with high leather boots. In *Pleasures and Palaces*, she recalled:

> Certainly the delight of stepping out freely is one which mere skirted woman can never know. I remember what astonished sensation was mine when I took my first trembling, and for an instant, self-conscious steps in the costume of *Ganymede-Rosalind* – when first I embodied the part . . . Swift upon the first sense of charmed surprise, came the new joy of going along free, like treading the air, next to flying – never to be forgotten.[11]

'Rambles that Lady Archibald and I used to enjoy in the glorious warren', an illustration from Eleanor Calhoun's autobiography which shows her wearing her Rosalind/Ganymede costume

She goes on to describe how she would bring this costume to Coombe for the weekend, and wear it 'high leather boots and all, under a long ulster during the rambles that Lady Archibald and I used to enjoy in the glorious warren'.[12] Out of London and away from the public gaze she must have delighted in this comfort and freedom. She recalled the moment of inspiration for the

staging of *As You Like It* outdoors, which occurred while she was wearing her costume:

> [I]t seemed to me that in such an English forest must the vision of *Rosalind* have first come to Shakespeare. In an impulse at the thought, I threw off my wrap and began to speak *Rosalind's* words. Lady Archibald stood far back as audience, while I acted through the scenes.
>
> As I heard the words I was speaking ringing through the woods, the idea flashed upon me, 'Why not give the play so, here, on this very spot?' I called out to my friend, 'I want to act this play right here among these trees.' I ran to her and began to expound the matter. 'What if I bring actors and realize Shakespeare's own dream out here in the forest itself!'[13]

Campbell too claimed to be the originator of the idea, writing in her *Woman's World* article, 'When I first thought of open air plays . . .'[14] Whether it was her idea or Calhoun's, Campbell, a champion of rational dress and a keen advocate for women's participation in sports and outdoor pursuits, adopted it with great enthusiasm. She agreed to fund and organise the venture. According to Calhoun, Campbell always conducted herself with an 'absolute independence and sense of detachment from the ordinary leashes of social obligation in all that related to entertaining and being entertained'.[15] It was not until the spring of 1884 that Campbell invited Godwin to help her 'arrange the play, select and rehearse the company, and manage the whole business'.[16] During the intervening months, she and Calhoun embarked on what the latter described as 'a year's happy cooperation by Lady Archibald and myself'.[17] Naturally, Calhoun would play Rosalind. According to Calhoun, when they struggled to cast Orlando, Campbell suggested herself for the part. It is possible that this account was concocted for respectability and she always intended to play the part. Calhoun described her appropriately androgenous appearance:

> The voice itself was rich, though harsh and blurting at that time, and there was plenty of it. Her close-cropped, curling hair, prematurely tinged with silver, showed a noble, well-poised head. She was tall, lean, and could easily convey the figure and aspect of a slender youth of gentle lineage.[18]

Calhoun wore the costume she had designed for her production at the Imperial Theatre and Campbell also designed her own costume, which she commissioned Arthur Lazenby Liberty, founder of Liberty & Co.,[19] to make in browns and greens to harmonise with the woodland. Whistler's portrait of her wearing her costume, *Note in Green and Brown. Orlando at Coombe* (see front cover), is in the Hunterian in Glasgow. Orlando was

the first in a series of heroic male roles Campbell took on. She also played Perigot in Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* in 1885, Oberon in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1887, and Pierrot in Theodore de Banville's *Le Baiser* in 1888. In 'Queer Pastoral Soundscapes and the Idyllic Voice', Fraser Riddell explores queer aspects of Campbell's performances, which, he writes, 'occurred at a historical juncture at which women were increasingly coming to articulate a distinct sense of modern lesbian identity through their playful experiments with male clothing'.[20] Riddell points out that: 'while there was a well-established Victorian theatrical tradition of women playing the parts of young boys and adolescents, including Romeo and Hamlet, her [Campbell's] cross-dressing performances of adult male leading roles were more unconventional'.[21] Calhoun recalled several of Campbell's relatives and friends objecting to her crossdressing theatricals. Lady Gladstone refused to buy a ticket, complaining: 'Certainly not, my dear Janey. I, for one, won't go down to see you make a fool of yourself – and in boy's get-up too!'[22]

Lady Archibald Campbell and Eleanor Calhoun as Orlando and Rosalind in *As You Like It*, from Eleanor Calhoun, *Pleasures and Palaces: The Memoirs of Princess Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich* (New York: Century, 1915)

The Pastoral Players performed for charity. Yet, in 'E. W. Godwin and Design for the Theater', Fanny Baldwin writes that Campbell signed a contract with Godwin specifying that he would 'be remunerated by payment of a sum equal to one half of the net profits and that his duties shall be those usually undertaken by theatrical managers'.[23] He had a role in *As You Like It* too, as the wise friar who returns Rosalind at the end. An exchange of letters with Wilde highlights how sensitive Godwin was about the extent of his involvement. Godwin had taken issue with Wilde's article 'Shakespeare and Stage Costume', published in the *Nineteenth Century* (May 1885), and revised as 'The Truth of Masks' in *Intentions* (1891). Although Wilde had praised Godwin for 'creating the marvellous loveliness of the first act of *Claudian*',[24] Godwin objected to his assertion that

'Lady Archibald Campbell's production of the same play in Coombe Wood was, as regards mounting, far more artistic [than 'the recent production of *As You Like It* at the St James's Theatre']. At least it seemed so to me.' In a letter dated 20 May 1885, Wilde assured him: 'The reason I spoke of "Lady Archie's" production was this. I had spoken before of you in *Claudian*, and was afraid that a second mention would look as if you had put me up to praise you. But everyone knows you did it all. The glory is yours entirely.'[25] When this essay was included in *Intentions*, Wilde changed the sentence to: 'Lady Archibald Campbell's production, under Mr E. W. Godwin's direction, of the same play . . .'[26]

In 'Shakespeare and Stage Costume', Wilde, with his passion for dress, had been particularly complimentary about the 'perfectly appropriate attire' of 'every character'. 'The whole production showed once and for all that, unless a dress is archeologically correct, and artistically appropriate, it always looks unreal, unnatural, and theatrical in the sense of artificial,' he declared.[27] He praised the way in which 'the brown and green of their costumes harmonised exquisitely with the ferns through which they wandered, the trees beneath which they lay, and the lovely English landscape that surrounded the Pastoral Players'. Although it has been suggested that the costumes worn by the lead characters, played by Calhoun and Campbell, were designed by Godwin, it seems certain that both women's assertion that they had designed their own costumes is accurate. Calhoun already had her costume for Ganymede. She wrote in her memoir:

> As Orlando, she [Campbell] fashioned herself a costume somewhat in the style of mine [her Ganymede costume from her 1882 production of *As You Like It*], taking for its color the gray-green of my mantle, which I then changed to the tint of autumn leaves. Thereby Orlando and Rosalind together made up my original color scheme of 'brown bud and leaf of green'. In these costumes we rehearsed in the woods.[28]

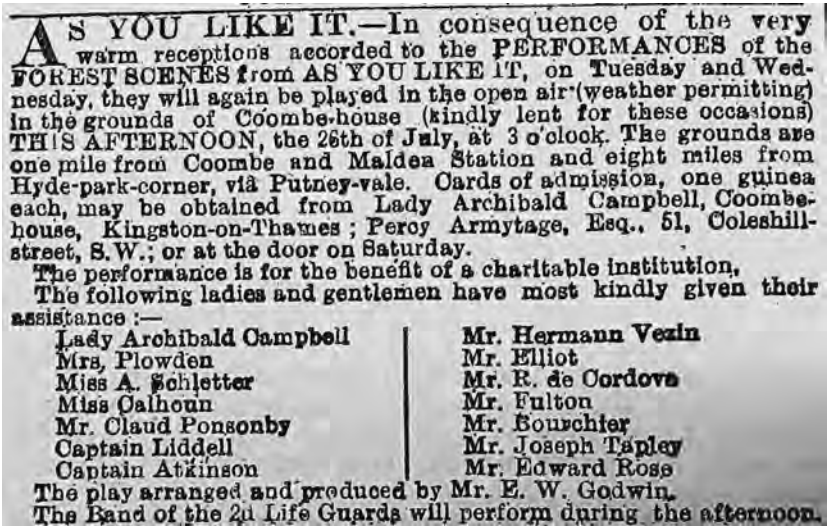
Godwin's sketchbook, which is held in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, contains sketches of the women wearing their costumes for *As You Like It*, but the description attached is 'drawings of the open air theatre at Coombe Wood and of the forest scenes in the artist's production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, with portraits of Lady Archibald Campbell as Orlando and Eleanor Calhoun as Rosalind, together with costume studies copied from sources in the British Museum etc.'.[29] The V&A dates the drawings in Godwin's sketchbook to between June 1884 and June 1885, coinciding with the staging of performances of *As You Like It* rather than the months during which costumes and settings were designed. One lovely portrait Godwin made of Campbell wearing her costume is dated in pencil 'Orlando – July 27. 1884 Coombe House/', which suggests that he sketched

it during a performance. An unattributed article in *The Theatre*, September 1884, quoted a 'well-informed correspondent' who reported that all costumes selected by Godwin for these outdoor performances of *As You Like It*, with the exception of the costumes worn by Campbell and Calhoun, both of which resembled Albrecht Dürer's 'Saint Hubert', were supplied by Mays, the leading theatrical costumier of the time. Most came out of stock and were adapted by Godwin to harmonise with his woodland colour scheme. The only costume made from scratch to Godwin's design was the costume worn by Touchstone, the court jester.[30] Three of the sketches Godwin made in his sketchbook of players in their costumes were turned into line drawings used to illustrate 'The Woodland Gods', Campbell's article for the November 1887 issue of *The Woman's World*.

The first Pastoral Players' performance of *As You Like It* took place in the grounds adjoining Coombe House on Tuesday 22 July 1884 at 2.30 p.m. Two further performances were organised for Wednesday 23 July and Saturday 26 July. The venue had been switched from Coombe Wood, their preferred location, when the Duke of Cambridge returned unexpectedly to find preparations underway and refused its use. Fortunately, another neighbour, Dr B. S. F. MacGeagh, offered them the use of woodlands in the grounds of Coombe House, where he ran a hydropathic facility that attracted wealthy visitors from London. MacGeagh had hosted several local events previously, including a charity garden fête in July 1883, attended by Lord and Lady Campbell, at which Calhoun had given a poetry recital. As Campbell had royal connections – Queen Victoria's daughter Princess Louise was married to her brother-in-law John Campbell, 9th Duke of Argyll – the Princess Louise Home for the Protection of Young Girls benefitted from money raised through ticket sales for performances of *As You Like It*. The Prince and Princess of Wales, accompanied by their children, attended the first performance, an

One of three line drawings produced by Godwin that appeared in Lady Archibald Campbell's article about the Pastoral Players that appeared in *The Woman's World*, November 1887

‘Orlando – July 27. 1884 Coombe House’, from E. W. Godwin’s sketchbook, reproduced by courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, accession number E.264-1963



AS YOU LIKE IT.—In consequence of the very warm receptions accorded to the PERFORMANCES of the FOREST SCENES from AS YOU LIKE IT, on Tuesday and Wednesday, they will again be played in the open air (weather permitting) in the grounds of Coombe-house (kindly lent for these occasions) THIS AFTERNOON, the 26th of July, at 3 o'clock. The grounds are one mile from Coombe and Malden Station and eight miles from Hyde-park-corner, viâ Putney-vale. Cards of admission, one guinea each, may be obtained from Lady Archibald Campbell, Coombe-house, Kingston-on-Thames; Percy Armytage, Esq., 51, Coleshill-street, S.W.; or at the door on Saturday.

The performance is for the benefit of a charitable institution.

The following ladies and gentlemen have most kindly given their assistance:—

Lady Archibald Campbell	Mr. Hermann Vezin
Mrs. Plowden	Mr. Elliot
Miss A. Schletter	Mr. R. de Cordova
Miss Calhoun	Mr. Fulton
Mr. Claud Ponsonby	Mr. Bourchier
Captain Liddell	Mr. Joseph Tapley
Captain Atkinson	Mr. Edward Rose

The play arranged and produced by Mr. E. W. Godwin.

The Band of the 2d Life Guards will perform during the afternoon.

Classified advertisement from *The Times*, 26 July 1884

occasion described by Max Beerbohm as the 'very Derby day of aestheticism'.[31]

Fortunately, the summer of 1884 was warm and dry. At each performance, an audience numbering more than 500, described by *Stage* as 'a goodly company of fashionable folk', sat on tiered benches arranged in a glade that was sheltered by lime trees.[32] Green drapes hanging from surrounding trees created the illusion of a theatre. At the signal of a bell, a dark green curtain that had been suspended between two elm trees was dropped to the forest floor to reveal the 'stage', a long, shaded glade dominated by a giant elm. Commentators, among them pastoral poet Alfred Austen, admired the superiority of this natural woodland over the painted scenery more familiar to theatregoers.[33] Such was the acclaim of critics and audience alike that Campbell and Godwin decided to form the Society of Pastoral Players, under the patronage of the Prince of Wales, with a committee and a subscribing membership.

Keen to repeat *As You Like It* in 1885, Campbell and Godwin approached Stratford-upon-Avon town council and proposed they perform in the town most closely associated with Shakespeare. A sub-committee was convened and talks were held but the project was deferred, and ultimately abandoned.[34] Coombe House was the venue once again in the summer of 1885. That year, however, the weather was disappointingly blustery and unsettled. A

Lady Archibald Campbell as Orlando and Eleanour Calhoun as Rosalind in *As You Like It*. Wood engraving by William Palmer for Campbell's article 'The Woodland Gods' in *The Woman's World*, November 1887

young jackdaw fell to the stage during one performance, obliging a member of the cast to retrieve it and toss it back up towards its nest. The *Nottingham Evening Post*, which reported this incident, proclaimed, 'people are however sadly wearying of *As You Like It* with guinea tickets, a twenty mile drive, and the chance of a wetting'.[35] At least one spectator enjoyed the experience. Wilde, writing for the *Dramatic Review*, declared: 'Few things are so pleasurable as to be able by an hour's drive to exchange Piccadilly for Parnassus.'[36] He described the delightful setting for each performance:

> Through an alley of white hawthorn and gold laburnum we passed into the green pavilion that served as the theatre, the air sweet with the odour of the lilac and with the blackbird's song; and when the curtain fell into its trench of flowers, and the play commenced, we saw before us a real forest, and we knew it to be Arden.[37]

Wilde too recognised the advantages of staging this play in a woodland glade, a liminal space, writing:

> One distinct dramatic advantage also was gained by the *mise-en-scène*. The abrupt exits and entrances, which are necessitated on the real stage by the inevitable limitations of space, were in many cases done away with, and we saw the characters coming gradually towards us through break and underwood, or passing away down the slope till they were lost in some deep recess of the forest; the effect of distance thus gained being largely increased by the faint wreaths of blue mist that floated at times across the background. Indeed I have never seen an illustration at once so perfect and so practical, of the aesthetic value of smoke.[38]

This outdoor, cross-dressing production of *As You Like It* reminded Wilde of a fictional counterpart, performed in the orangery of a French country house in Chapters 8 and 9 of Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), a controversial novel he praised as 'that golden book of spirit and sense, that holy writ of beauty'.[39] How interesting that the reviewer for the *Era*, who also suggested this possibility, assured readers that Campbell surely would not have read this 'very free-and-easy romance'.[40] Wilde also hailed Campbell's sexually daring Orlando as 'a really remarkable performance'. Riddell regards his observation 'still in the low music of Lady Archibald Campbell's voice, and in the strange beauty of her movements and gestures, there was a wonderful fascination' as evidence of his recognition and approval of the gender fluidity inherent in her performance.[41]

That summer, the Society of Pastoral Players added a second play to its repertoire, an adaptation of Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* of which the last known professional performance in England took place at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane on 26 February 1669. In her article 'The Faithfull Shepherdesse,' which she wrote for *The Nineteenth Century* (June 1885), Campbell explained her decision to stage what she regarded as 'one of the most striking and beautiful plays in our language', one in which Fletcher had 'contrived to indicate a wonderful variety of relationship between his personages, which variety is not contrived from the caprice of the author, but is based on the different effects which love produces on the human heart'.[42] Describing Fletcher's original as 'essentially a sketch, and only a sketch, of shepherd life', she explained the process of adapting it:

> I have selected for our next revival *The Faithfull Shepherdesse*, which it has pleased Fletcher to call a *pastoral tragi-comedy*. To make the pastoral play dramatic, it is certain that action must often take the place of declamation. In *The Faithfull Shepherdesse* much re-arranging and adaptation has been necessary, in some parts single lines having to supply the dramatic purpose of long speeches, while some little strengthening of character has been imperative, even at the risk of writing in a few lines. It has to be regretted that many lovely

> passages in the original have had to be given up; for, had they been retained, dramatic force would have been more or less sacrificed, and the difficulties which attend the launch of this old seventeenth-century craft would hardly have been avoided.[43]

Although she never mentioned Godwin by name, she did refer to 'our acting adaption of this play'.[44] Godwin designed the costumes and accessories too, among them his replica of a statue of Pan from the British Museum, which he engraved with a Latin inscription composed by classicist Jane Harrison. Once again, Campbell played the heroic male role, the shepherd Perigot, this time opposite Princess Helen Rundeer Singh Ahluwalia, daughter of the late Randhir Singh, the ruling Maharajah in the state of Kapurthala in Punjab, who played Perigot's lover, Amoret.[45] They were supported by a cast of dozens of Greek shepherds and shepherdesses, priests, satyrs and river gods, along with most of the sheep from Coombe Farm. A professional orchestra of forty musicians provided musical accompaniment.

Among the 'large audience' that attended the first performance were the Prince and Princess of Wales with their family and assorted nobility.[46] A heavily illustrated article in the *Lady's Pictorial* of 4 July 1885 included a pencil sketch of Wilde, annotated: 'a familiar presence in the Audience'.[47] Also present were several influential stage managers and theatre critics from London, actors Sarah Bernhardt, Lillie Langtry and Henrietta Hodson, who was the partner, and later wife, of Henry Labouchere. There too, accompanied by John Singer Sargent, was Vernon Lee (1856–1935), an essayist and novelist best remembered for her works on aesthetics. Lee was introduced to Campbell by her close friend Alice Callander who was Campbell's sister-in-law. She found Campbell to be 'a very clever, delightful, fantastic wayward creature'.[48] According to Riddell, 'Lee was so struck by Campbell's cross-dressing performances that she took them as the starting point for a number of essayistic pieces in which the pleasures of the pastoral genre are closely bound up with those of lesbian theatrical spectatorship'.[49] The following summer, Lee watched the Society of Pastoral Players production of *Fair Rosamund* alongside poet A. Mary F. Robinson and her sister, novelist, critic and translator Frances Mabel Robinson. Afterwards, they talked of staging their own pastoral performance, possibly in the gardens of the Villa Rondinelli, near Florence, where Lee spent much of her time. Lee even suggested to her brother poet Eugene Lee-Hamilton that he write a play based on *La Fabula di Orfeo* (1480).[50] She planned to cast Campbell as the male lead, Orpheus, an ancient Greek poet, prophet and musician.

Reviews were poor for *The Faithful Shepherdess*, which was less popular than *As You Like It* with audiences and critics alike. The critic in *The Era* noted:

Lady Archibald Campbell as Perigot and Mrs George Batten as Amaryllis in *The Faithful Shepherdess*. Wood engraving for Campbell's article 'The Woodland Gods' in *The Woman's World*, November 1887

> An ex-cabinet minister (it positively rained royalties and cabinet ministers at Coombe on Saturday) audibly remarked 'I'm hanged if I know what it's all about', and this pithy criticism only expressed the general feeling. What indeed, was it all about?[51]

Fletcher's original five acts had been cut to three. Describing the play as 'to some extent Bowdlerized', the *Pall Mall Gazette* quoted Godwin's explanation:

> . . . to arrange and adapt John Fletcher's pastoral play of 'The Faithfull Shepherdesse' in order to make it presentable to a modern audience has not been a very easy task, for it was necessary to exclude much that belonged to the vocabulary of his time – unnecessarily strong for ours – as, also, to condense some and excise other beautiful passages, which, had they been retained, would have hampered the dramatic element in the work, and rendered the speeches of some of the characters prolix, if not tedious.[52]

'A familiar presence in the Audience', *The Lady's Pictorial*, 4 July 1885

Poor reviews may have prompted the reduction in prices for three additional performances from the usual guinea each to 10*s*. 6*d*. for the stalls and 5*s*. for the gallery. A book of the play was made available for just 1*s*. A further performance on Saturday 25 July, added at the request of the Prince of Wales, was the final performance the Society of Pastoral Players ever gave at Coombe House. Afterwards, the Prince, the Princess and their three daughters joined the cast for tea on the lawn of Coombe Hill Farm.

Undeterred by the poor response to *The Faithful Shepherdess*, the Society of Pastoral Players planned a season for the summer of 1886, although it was put in jeopardy by the unavailability of Coombe House and disruption caused by the general election that was held in July following the defeat of the Government of Ireland Bill. An alternative, even more convenient venue was provided by Mary Schuster (1814–1896), the wealthy widow of German-born Leo Schuster, a former Director of the Union Bank of London and Chairman of the London and Brighton Railway, who offered the use of

Cannizaro House in Wimbledon, the home she shared with her daughter Adela (1851–1941). Cannizaro House, known originally as Warren House, had been built in 1708 on a section of the three hundred acres of poor quality common-held land that became Wimbledon Common. From 1817, it was home to the Sicilian-born Duke of Cannizzaro and his Scottish wife, Sophie, Duchess of Cannizzaro. After the Duke fled to his native Italy with his Milanese mistress, the Duchess, an important patron of the arts, stayed on and organised a series of lavish concerts. Her guestlist included the Duke of Wellington and Lucien Bonaparte. The house was renamed after she died in 1841, albeit with a misspelling.

During her time at Cannizaro House, from 1879 until her death in 1896, Mary Schuster continued to promote it as a centre for music and the arts. Among her guests were Oscar Wilde, Henry James, Max Beerbohm and publisher John Murray, who lived just off Parkside, less than ten minutes' walk away.[53] Wilde's affection for Mary is evident in a chatty letter expressing his disappointment in having to turn down an invitation to dinner at Cannizaro House.[54] He once described her to Lord Alfred Douglas as 'swathed in lace, jewels, and flowers: quite extraordinary to look at'.[55] He developed a particularly close friendship with Schuster's daughter, Adela, known as Minnie, or Miss Tiny to her friends. She must have been introduced to him as Miss Tiny, since she recalled: 'Wilde would not naturally know me by my real Christian name, which he has never heard in his life – he has never heard me called – or seen my name signed – by any other name than my nickname – too ridiculous to mention.'[56] He inscribed a copy of *The Happy Prince* (1888): 'To Tiny, from her sincere friend Oscar Wilde. Sept. 89,' and he also took to referring to her as 'the Lady of Wimbledon'.[57]

Adele Schuster's great sympathy with Wilde may have stemmed in part from her close relationship with her younger brother Frank Schuster (1852–1927), a gay man who was prominent in British musical society. Siegfried Sassoon, a close friend, called him 'something more than a *patron* of music, because he loved music as much as it is humanly possible to do'.[58] Frank Schuster often took charge of the musical programme for his mother's entertainments in Cannizaro House. Describing him as 'an exceptionally able amateur musician', *Vanity Fair* reported on how he organised 'a great afternoon concert' that his mother hosted in November 1886, four months after the Pastoral Players first performed in Cannizaro Wood.[59] Wilde moved in the same circles as Frank Schuster, who lived in Tite Street for a time.[60] Writing to Lady Monckton in 1888, to ask if she would consider contributing to *The Woman's World*, Wilde mentioned that he could not go to 'Frank Schuster's'.[61] In a letter to Robert Ross, dated 28 May 1898, he wrote about 'Robert d'Humières, a very charming young French-man, whom I first met, years ago, at Frank Schuster's'.[62]

The final performances by 'Lady Archibald Campbell's Pastoral Players, under the management of Mr E. W. Godwin,' as the *St Stephen's Review* called them, took place in Cannizaro Wood in July 1886.[63] Their presence was announced by a series of 'green bannerets' set along the Wimbledon roadside.[64] The play was a new one, *Fair Rosamund*, a love pastoral in a prologue and three acts, which took slightly less than two hours to perform. This was Godwin's adaptation of *Becket* (1884), Alfred Lord Tennyson's historical play inspired by the murder of Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket by agents of Henry II in 1170. Tennyson sanctioned Godwin's adaptation and even travelled down to Wimbledon on the day before the first performance to inspect arrangements. By then, Campbell and Godwin had introduced a new subscription scheme to fund their enterprise. Members paid an annual subscription of two guineas in return for an entitlement to two tickets at half the usual price of one guinea each. Tickets could be obtained by written application to a number of society women, Mary Schuster among them. Prominent subscribers, listed in the programme for *Fair Rosamund*, included the Sultan of Johore, the ambassadors of Germany, Turkey and Spain, ministers from Portugal, Persia and the Netherlands, the Dukes of Westminster and Wellington, the Marchioness of Stafford, Lady Randolph Churchill, and the president of the Royal Academy.[65] The Prince of Wales continued as a patron.

The first performance of *Fair Rosamund*, planned for Monday 19 July, was delayed until the following day as 'it was found impossible to complete the arrangements by that day'.[66] Perhaps this was for the best, since it rained heavily during the afternoon, when the performance was to have taken place. Although Tuesday 20 July was a lovely day, the ground was so wet underfoot that ferns had to be spread over the worst of the puddles. A report in *Vanity Fair* described a 'smart company, including the Prince and Princess of Wales, and their daughters, assembled to do honour to Lady Archibald Campbell and her sylvan disciples'.[67] Declaring the 'freshness of the open-air plays has not diminished nor has their charm diminished', their review opened with a lovely description of the venue:

> In the beautiful woods of Cannizaro there is a wooded dell covered with briar and bracken, which trend up the hill among the trees till they are lost on the broken sky-line. It is a delightful spot on a summer's afternoon when the sun sends slanting shafts of soft green light through the leaves; and here it was on Tuesday last that the Pastoral Players made the third of their yearly essays in woodland play-acting.[68]

Wimbledon was exceptionally busy that week because the National Rifle Association, based on Wimbledon Common at the time, was holding its

annual national rifle meeting.[69] On reaching Cannizaro House, members of the audience followed a crimson cord to a glade that contained tiered seating arranged in horse-shoe shape with an awning overhead. The 'stage', an enchanting woodland glade, was dominated by an enormous oak. Although the performance was scheduled to begin at 3.30 p.m., it was delayed until 4 p.m. to await the arrival of the royal party, who only took their seats as the first act was coming to a close. Afterwards, they were introduced to Mary Schuster by the Duchess of Sutherland, who was accompanied by her son, Wilde's friend, Lord Ronald Gower. They stayed for high tea at Cannizaro House and enjoyed the 'considerable attraction' of Campbell, who had played Rosamund, 'walking about gracefully in thirteenth-century silken attire'.[70] There were two subsequent performances, on Wednesday 21 and Thursday 22 July. It is likely that Wilde attended the second of these. Certainly his wife, Constance, was there and, according to the *Durham County Advertiser*, her 'weird costume and tan-coloured shoes were the subject of much respectful wonderment'.[71]

Several commentators had noticed by then that Campbell and Godwin appeared to be the only permanent members of the Society of Pastoral Players. Noting that 'originally the Pastoral Players were a company of amateurs assisted by a few professionals', *Vanity Fair* lamented, 'they are now a company of professionals relieved and improved by one rare amateur [Campbell], which to some extent detracts from the interest of the performance'.[72] Several amateurs, among them a Mrs Plowden, who had played Phoebe in *As You Like it*, and whom Calhoun described as 'one of the most famous and exquisite beauties of the day', and Miss Fulton, who was the cook from Coombe Hill Farm, and whom Wilde had praised as a very realistic Audrey, had severed their connection with the company.[73] Anglo-Irish peer and Conservative Member of Parliament Lord Kilmorey was to have played Henry II opposite Campbell but he had withdrawn in favour of Bassett Roe, a commercial traveller turned professional actor.

The company's most prominent professional member that year, Lady Wilde's friend, soprano and actress Genevieve Ward, played Queen Eleanor, her only London performance of the season. It was reported that her annoyance at having her name billed in smaller type than Campbell's resulted in 'conspicuous red tickets' being added to placards and programmes at the last minute.[74] Another professional actor, Maud Millett, who played Margery, would play Mabel Chiltern in Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* at the Haymarket Theatre almost a decade later. F. H. Macklin, who had been a partner in a firm of shipbrokers before becoming a well-known actor in London's West End, stepped in to play Becket after the actor originally cast had to withdraw following an accident during rehearsals. This was reported in *Vanity Fair*:

> The life of the Pastoral Players is not, as some have supposed, all lutes, blue ribbon, sheep, and greenwood trees. On Monday last, as Lady Archibald Campbell, Mr Godwin, Mr Blundell of Crosby, and a number of ladies and gentlemen were returning from rehearsals in the Cannizaro Woods, the large brake which contained the party was violently overturned. The ladies escaped with a severe shaking, but some of the gentlemen were badly cut about, while Mr Leonard Outram, a professional actor [who was to play Thomas A. Beckett], had his arm broken in two places. Mr Godwin was missing for some time, but was subsequently discovered sitting alone on a damp mile-stone amidst the irretrievable wreck of his umbrella. 'And to think,' as he said, 'that I gave 18*s*. 6*d*. for it only last week!'[75]

Miss Milton as Geoffrey and Geneviève Ward as Queen Eleanor in *Fair Rosamund*. From the *Illustrated London News*, 31 July 1886

Reviews were mixed. According to *Truth*, the 'only two performers who distinguished themselves were Lady Archibald Campbell and Miss Maude Millett, the former as the Fair Rosamund, and the latter as her "bower maiden"'.[76] Observing that Campbell 'looked Rosamund to perfection', their reviewer advised her 'always to play ladies' parts in preference to boys, because she is so gracefully undulating, and her movements are so picturesque and apparently unstudied'. Criticising Genevieve Ward's Queen Eleanor as 'far too stagy and conventional for anything but the footlights', he observed: 'Unless a professional actress be a perfect mistress of the art, she is out of place and out of time in this sort of pastoral entertainment.' In 1893, Ward revived the part indoors on the stage of the Lyceum and earned positive reviews. According to the *Globe*: 'Miss Genevieve Ward made an ideal Queen Eleanor' on that occasion.[77]

Once again, Godwin's adaptation was not well received. 'Lord Tennyson's "Beckett" is a fine poem,' the *St James's Gazette* declared, 'but it does not make at all an effective play.'[78] Calling it 'dull' and 'full of coarse

language', *Vanity Fair* concluded that it 'tears a most pitiful and tragic tale into tatters of fustian'. The *London Daily Chronicle* believed Godwin's cuts had reduced it to 'mere sketches'.[79] The *Athenaeum* pointed out that it was 'a little bewildering when Queen Eleanor, upon surprising the young son of Henry and Rosamond, draws from him the secret of how to find her way to the spot at which she already is'.[80] Nevertheless, Anna Pruyn, a wealthy widow from Albany, New York, was so impressed that she bought the American rights, reportedly from Campbell, and staged *Fair Rosamund* in the garden of her home at 13 Elk Street, Albany, New York in 1895.[81]

On 6 October 1886, less than three months after *Fair Rosamund* was performed in Cannizaro Woods, Godwin died from complications following an operation to remove kidney stones. He was just fifty-three. When his widow, Beatrix, who later married Whistler, attempted to assert her rights to his adaptation of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, Campbell responded robustly. 'The rights of production I registered and they belong to me,' she wrote, 'just as much as the adaptations of "Fair Rosamund".' The adaptation 'cost the Manager [Godwin] and myself almost a whole years brain work thinking & rethinking, altering & re-altering', she insisted, adding that she had 'slaved' her 'very soul out' over it.[82] Campbell did take the opportunity to pay tribute to Godwin, the 'art director of our natural stage', in 'The Woodland Gods', the article she wrote for *The Woman's World* of November 1887, the first issue under Wilde's editorship. Her article was hailed as 'a skilful argument in favour of pastoral plays'.[83]

As a mark of respect, Campbell decided not to stage a pastoral play in 1887, although she did act in one, playing Oberon in the second of two evening performances of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, on Saturday 5 August 1887, in the grounds of Pope's Villa in Twickenham, home to former actor Henrietta Hodson and her by-then husband Henry Labouchere. Hodson, who was stage manager, may have been attracted to the idea of staging Shakespeare outdoors while rehearsing scenes from *As You Like it* with her protégée Lillie Langtry in the grounds. It was Wilde who had persuaded her to take Lillie on as a student of acting.[84]

This production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* differed from Campbell's staging of Shakespeare, which had inspired it, in its use of electric lighting to combat the encroaching darkness during evening performances. According to *The Stage*, these lights 'threw strange, uncanny shadows and mists beneath the branches of the great elms and bathed the faces and figures of the performers in mysterious hues'.[85] Ill health prevented Wilde's artist friend Louise Jopling from playing Hermia but she was well enough to watch the second performance. 'The mise en scène was charming,' she remembered, 'just the natural wooded garden of the Villa.'[86] By then,

several copycat pastoral companies, unconnected with Campbell or her Society of Pastoral Players, had emerged. As Calhoun recalled:

> The new idea was immediately copied throughout England, on the Continent, and in America, resulting in many similar attempts, and in the revival of out-of-door pageantry, garden performances, and open-air plays that to-day have come to take an important place in general educational and cultural development.[87]

Prominent among these was the Woodland Players, led by Shakespearean actor, director, impresario and actor-manager Sir Philip Barling Greet (1857–1936), known professionally as Ben Greet and credited by Michael Dobson, Director of the Shakespeare Institute, as the 'single most important popularizer of outdoor Shakespeare'.[88] Greet took several of Shakespeare's plays on the road during the 1880s and 1890s, among them *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Tempest* and *As You Like It*. His company performed in college gardens, in the parks of great houses, and on village greens. During the summer of 1888, they acted out scenes from *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the grounds of Alexandra Palace, retreating indoors in inclement weather. Although adamant that the decision to stage pastoral plays was his own, Greet did admit that 'the idea, though, was revived by the amateur and semi-amateur performances got up by Lady Archibald Campbell'. He elaborated in an interview with the *Era*:

> The fact is, we used to give out-of-door performances at school, and – when I first went on the stage, the idea of open-air entertainments went with me. Lady Campbell revived the old notion, and knowing that she would never want to take out a professional company I thought I would, and, as you know, I did, and very successful and encouraging the out-of-door performances have been.[89]

However, Calhoun refuted this in a letter to the *New York Times*, writing:

> Mr Greet was not the originator nor the initiator of the pastoral production of plays. The summer representation, in the early eighties, of 'As You Like It', in Coombe Grove, Surrey, England, imagined first by me, and in which I acted Rosalind, while the Hon. Lady Archibald Campbell of Argyll, took the part of Orlando, was the very first forest production of any play, and was hailed in England and on the Continent as the initiation of a new form of poetic representation arousing a new aesthetic emotion.[90]

On 7 August 1888, Campbell returned to the woods at Cannizaro House to appear in *Le Baiser*, a popular one-act, symbolist play by Theodore de Banville, opposite Pastoral Players regular Annie Schletter, who had played Celia in *As You Like It*. On hand to assist her was Jenny Thénard of the

Comédie-Française, where *Le Baiser* had been performed three months earlier. The plot is slight. Urgèle, a fairy, played by Schletter, is trapped in extreme old age and can only escape if a pure and innocent young man bestows his first kiss upon her. When Pierrot, the hapless youth played by Campbell, kisses her, reluctantly, she is transformed. He proposes marriage but she flees, lured by the siren-calls of her fairy sisters. Few among the audience spoke sufficient French to enjoy the play fully. According to *The Speaker*, 'there was much rustling of the leaves of the few "books of the play" that were handed about'.[91] The reviewer for the *Era*, acknowledging that Campbell played Pierrot 'surprisingly well, considering the difficulties of the part and the foreign language of the dialogue', claimed to have overheard one lady, on her way to her carriage, denounce it as 'rot'.[92] Eleanor Calhoun was among the audience that day. So too were Henry James and Oscar Wilde.[93] James McNeill Whistler was there with his close friend and mentee, the French-born artist Theodore Roussel. Whistler introduced Campbell to Roussel and she became his muse for a time. During her performance that day, Roussel completed an etching of Campbell, titled 'The Pastoral Play', on a copper etching plate. She also sat for him for a series of etchings wearing her Pierrot costume.[94]

Pierrot en Pied, Portrait of the Lady A.C., 1888, by Theodore Roussel

There is no further record of Campbell staging an outdoor pastoral play. In June 1889, the *Nottingham Evening Post* lamented:

> We have missed this summer the accustomed performances of Lady Archibald Campbell's Pastoral Players. I suppose the death of Lord Walter Campbell [her brother-in-law] would in any case have prevented Lady Archibald from taking part; but beyond that, I fear that the Pastoral Players have not succeeded in replacing the late Mr E. W. Godwin, their art director, whose services were invaluable to the society.[95]

In July 1891, at the invitation of Mary Schuster, the woods surrounding Cannizaro House played host to two amateur performances of Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*, organised by the Countess of Radnor on behalf of St Andrew's Convalescent Home at Folkestone and the Oxford Mission at

Poplar. The appearance of Lawrence Irving, younger son of the great Sir Henry Irving, as Boyet generated huge interest. The reviewer for *The Theatre* found it 'possible to descry a corner of his father's mantle gracing his boyish form', although he also remarked disparagingly that 'the ladies looked their characters better than they played them'.[96]

It would seem that the last pastoral plays staged in Cannizaro Woods were an afternoon performance of *As You Like It*, followed by an evening performance of *Twelfth Night*, performed on Monday 20 July and Wednesday 22 July 1899, in aid of the Wimbledon Parochial Schools. As Mary Schuster had died by then, and Adela had moved away, permission was granted by Colonel and Mrs Mitchell, the new leaseholders. That same year, on 27 November, Campbell played the male title role in her one-act play, *Tamlin* at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh.[97] After the turn of the century, she turned increasingly to researching and writing about the occult. She joined the Society for Psychical Research and, between 1905 and 1914, she published several articles on esoterica and Celtic mythology in *The Occult Review*. She remained at Coombe Hill Farm until her death in 1923.

After leaving Cannizaro House, Adela Schuster lived quietly in Cottenham, a handsome villa in nearby Copse Hill, close to Raynes Park railway station, to the south of Wimbledon Common, for the remainder of her life. She had purchased it in 1898, and extended it in 1899. A friend recorded in his diary: 'Miss Schuster has a lovely house, nice garden, & a small wood. For the first time this year I was able to get as many strawberries as I wanted; straight from the beds.'[98] After she died there in 1941, her niece Violet D'Arcy recalled:

> Even in this mad war-time world of breathless striving the passing of Adela (Tiny) Schuster in her ninety-first year is an event to be recorded. The tragedy of old age is the outliving of all one's friends. And what a brilliant crowd they were . . . How often has it been said 'One is better to have known her', but never so true as of Adela Schuster. Not all the angels are in Heaven, as one she walked this earth in beauty without and within.[99]

On 14 October 1900, Cannizaro House suffered a catastrophic fire that raged for twelve hours and destroyed several valuable artworks. The house was restored and it was used as an American Red Cross Hospital during WWI. In 1920, E. Kenneth Wilson, a director of the Ellerman and Wilson shipping line, and his wife became the last private owners of house and gardens together. In 1948, their daughter, Hilary FitzClarence, née Wilson, Countess of Munster, sold the house and 13.5 hectares of land to the Corporation of Wimbledon. The grounds became a public park extending to 34 acres and containing a beautiful garden laid out by the Wilsons, as well as woodland

areas containing specimen trees planted during the Victorian era, and older specimens, among them a number of large oaks that date back several hundred years. The house was leased to Surrey County Council and used as a municipal home for the elderly, then an arts and leisure centre, before it was sold to Thistle Hotels. It opened in June 1987 as London's first country house hotel.

Undoubtedly, Janey Sevilla Campbell left a valuable theatrical legacy, which is somewhat neglected. In *Acting Wilde*, Kerry Powell argues that 'in moving the production out-doors they [Campbell and Calhoun] were introducing a drama beyond the reach of male actor-managers and the theatres they ruled'.[100] Their initiative inspired other women, among them Australian-born actor Agnes Booth (1843–1910), who was the wife of Junius Brutus Booth, Jr., a member of the Booth theatrical dynasty. An article in *The Illustrated American* in June 1891 included the following:

> To Lady Archibald Campbell, daughter-in-law of the Duke of Argyll, belongs the credit of giving us modern pastoral plays performed in the open air. When, in 1884, her ladyship announced that she and her 'pastoral Players', as she called them, would produce 'As You Like It' on the lawn of an English country-house, people were rather inclined to scoff at the idea that a body of amateurs, even though leavened with a few professionals, could make anything but a fiasco of Shakespeare's immortal comedy; and then, the idea of playing it in the open air! It was too ridiculous. An English summer consists of two fine days and a thunder-storm.

Praising Campbell for her boldness, the author of this article described how she had inspired Booth:

> Stimulated by the success of Lady Archibald Campbell's performances, Miss Agnes Booth, the celebrated actress, organised an out-of-door production of 'As You Like It', which was given by the entire cast of professionals at Manchester-by-the-Sea, near Boston, Mass. [at The Masconomo House, a 103-room hotel she owned]. It too made a hit.[101]

Two professional members of Booth's cast went on to major roles in Wilde's plays: Rose Coghlan, who played Rosalind, was Mrs Arbuthnot in *A Woman of No Importance* in New York in 1893–94, and Viola Allen, who played Celia, was Gwendolen in the original Broadway production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the Empire Theatre in 1895.

PASTORAL PLAYS, DATES AND VENUES

THESE plays were subject to cancellation or postponement due to bad weather at very short notice. The summer of 1885 was wet and blustery, and several performances at Coombe House were cancelled. The planned date for *Le Baiser* was 25 July but bad weather caused its postponement. This table, compiled using newspaper reports, is as accurate as possible. Productions by the Pastoral Players are shown in red.

YEAR	VENUE	PLAY	DATE
1884	Coombe House	*As You Like It*	Tuesday 22 July Wednesday 23 July Saturday 26 July
1885	Coombe House	*As You Like It* *The Faithful Shepherdess*	Saturday 30 May Thursday 11 June Saturday 27 June Saturday 4 July Monday 6 July Thursday 16 July Friday 17 July Saturday 18 July Saturday 25 July
1886	Cannizaro House	*Fair Rosamund*	Tuesday 20 July Wednesday 21 July Thursday 22 July
1887	Pope's Villa	*A Midsummer Night's Dream*	Sunday 24 July Saturday 6 August
1888	Cannizaro House	*Le Baiser*	Tuesday 7 August
1891	Cannizaro House	*Love's Labour's Lost*	Monday 20 July Wednesday 22 July

Addendum: Oscar Wilde and Adela Schuster – A Lasting Friendship

In a letter dated 14 August 1896, which she sent to their mutual friend More Adey, Adela Schuster described the 'real affection' she felt for Oscar Wilde, and her 'immense admiration for his genius':

> I do and always shall feel honoured by any friendship he may show me . . . Personally I have never known anything but good of O . . . and for years have received unfailing kindness and courtesy from him – kindness because he knew how I loved to hear him talk, and whenever he came he poured out for me his lordly tales & brilliant paradoxes without stint and without reserve. He gave me of his best, intellectually, and that was a kindness so great in a man so immeasurably my superior that I shall always be grateful for it.[102]

On hearing Wilde was bankrupt, she sent a cheque for £1,000 [over £110,000 today] to Ernest Leverson so that Wilde could direct that this money be used to pay some of bills, among them his mother's rent and her funeral expenses. She insisted that this was 'only inadequate recognition of the pleasure she had had through his delightful talks'.[103] She also persuaded her friend Ernest Flower, Conservative M.P. for Bradford West, to make serious representations to the Home Secretary about Wilde's health. She was even willing to bribe a doctor attached to HMS Prison Reading to certify to its perilous state.[104] Crucially, she encouraged him to write, suggesting to Adey: 'Could not Mr Wilde now write down some of the lovely tales he used to tell me? . . . I think the mere reminder of some of his tales may set his mind in that direction and stir the impulse to write.'[105]

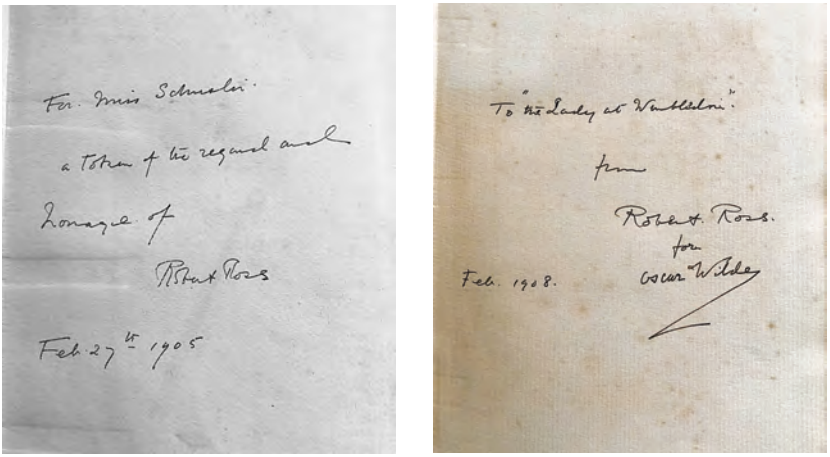
Wilde told Adey he was 'greatly touched by the extract from the letter of the Lady of Wimbledon. That she should keep a gracious memory of me, and have trust or hope for me in the future, lightens for me many dreadful hours of degradation or despair.'[106] He made an attempt to write down the stories he had told her, as she suggested. In *De Profundis*, he described her as:

> . . . one of the most beautiful personalities I have ever known: a woman, whose sympathy and noble kindness to me both before and since the tragedy of my imprisonment have been beyond power of description: one who has really assisted me, though she does not know it, to bear the burden of my troubles more than anyone else in the whole world has: and all through the mere fact of her existence: through her being what she is, partly an ideal and partly an influence, a suggestion of what one might become, as well as a real help towards becoming it, a soul that renders the common air sweet, and makes what is spiritual seem as simple and natural as sunlight or the sea, one for whom Beauty and Sorrow walk hand in hand and have the same message.[107]

He asked Robbie Ross to send excerpts from *De Profundis* and 'whatever of remembrance and reverence she will accept, to the Lady of Wimbledon, whose soul is a sanctuary for those who are wounded, and a house of refuge for those in pain'.[108] He even sent her a letter via Adey, but he worried it had not reached her since he received no reply; 'how ungrateful a churl I must seem to that gracious and wonderful personality,' he told Adey.[109] Perhaps she had received it; she wrote to ask Adey how Wilde was, saying she 'had heard nothing of him since last May [1897]'.[110] In August 1898, she told Adey:

> A friend of mine – a lady living in Paris – has written to ask me whether Oscar Wilde is endeavouring to lead a more respectable life, and whether I think she could invite him to her house. Of course I know nothing and therefore find it difficult to answer. She is very sorry for him and wants to be of use to him if possible . . . what happened about the life interest [which she had agreed to purchase if appropriate]? I never heard how it was settled.[111]

Ross included Schuster's name on a funeral wreath: 'From the admirers of his genius, a tribute to his literary genius'.[112] He even asked her for her 'views as to the advisability of a memoir'.[113] In fulfilment of Wilde's desire to thank her for her 'infinite kindness', Ross dedicated *The Duchess of Padua* to her, although Wilde had worried it was 'unworthy of her and unworthy of me'.[114] He had wanted her to have his limited-edition copy of *The Importance of Being Earnest* too.[115]



Robert Ross inscribed copies of *De Profundis* and *The Duchess of Padua* to Adela Schuster. Collection of Jeremy Mason

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Notes

1. Janey Sevilla Campbell (1885) 1032

2. Soros, 36; Stokes, 47

3. https://www.lismoregaelicheritagecentre.org/museum-display-2024-the-30th-anniversary/ Accessed on 10 March 2025

4. Profile of Lord Archibald Campbell available as part of 'The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler' from the University of Glasgow. Accessible at the website https://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/people/biog/

5. Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich (Eleanor Calhoun), 65. In 1903, Calhoun married Prince Stephan Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich of Serbia.

6. 'Lady Archibald Campbell', *The Lady*, 4 June 1885, 464

7. Ibid

8. *New Malden's Village Voice*, 12 Sept 2012 https://issuu.com/maldenmedia/docs/sept_vv_12 accessed on 11 February 2025

9. It was rumoured that the whole enterprise had been funded with a payoff Calhoun had received from Phoebe Hearst after agreeing to end her engagement to Hearst's son, William Randolph Hearst, later a prominent newspaper magnate and politician. For more on this see David Nasaw, 62–3

10. For example in the *Echo*, 23 October 1882, 4; *Illustrated London News*, 28 October 1882, 7

11. Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich, 69–70

12. Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich, 70

13. Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich, 71

14. Janey Sevilla Campbell (1887) 1. The August 1884 issue of *The Theatre* contained a review of *As You Like It* which told readers that: 'To the energy and good taste of Lady Archibald Campbell the credit of this innovation belongs' (anon, *The Theatre*, August 1884, 107–8). The issue of the following month contained a detailed account of the production by 'a well-informed correspondent' who said: 'The idea of the performance originated entirely with Lady Archibald Campbell, and we are indebted to her for a nineteenth-century novelty in the matter of stage-plays' (Anon, *The Theatre*, September 1884, 158). The insistent tone and repetition of the claim to the original idea suggest that the matter had already become a contested one.

15. Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich, 77

16. *The Graphic*, 2 August 1884, 14

17. 'Pastoral Shakespeare: Princess Lazarovich Tells of the Earliest Productions in England', *New York Times*, 18 March 1916

18. Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich, 77

19. John Stokes points out that Oscar Wilde felt the Liberty influence had gone too far: 'Celia paraded in what one spectator described as "Liberty silks and violet silk stockings", and another, Oscar Wilde, as "a sort of panegyric on a pansy", remarking at the same time: "I am afraid that in Shakespeare's Arden there were no Chelsea China Shepherdesses, and I am sure that the

romance of Phoebe does not need to be intensified by any reminiscences of porcelain.'" (Wilde [1885b] 58 quoted in Stokes, 50)

20. Riddell, 127

21. Ibid

22. Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich, 78–9

23. Baldwin, 333. It seems Godwin had entered into a similar contractual arrangement with Wilde when he agreed to mount a London production of *The Duchess of Padua* in 1885. For more on this see Joseph Donohue, 'E. W. Godwin's Failed Production of *The Duchess of Padua*', *The Wildean* 30, January 2007, 36–44.

24. This was *Claudian* (1883), a collaboration between Henry Herman, who devised its structure and narrative, W. G. Wills, who provided the dialogue, Godwin, who provided 'the archaeology of costumes &c.', and actor-manager Wilson Barrett.

25. Holland & Hart-Davis, 260

26. Wilde (2007) 225

27. Oscar Wilde (1885a) 816

28. Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich, 78

29. https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O699207/sketchbook-godwin-edward-william Three of the sketches Godwin made in his sketchbook were replicated in 'The Woodland Gods', Campbell's article for *The Woman's World*, November 1887.

30. Anon, *The Theatre*, September 1884, 158–60

31. Max Beerbohm (1895) '1880', *The Yellow Book* IV, January 1895, 275–283/280

32. Grimalkin, 'Chit Chat', *The Stage*, 25 July 1884, 12–13

33. Alfred Austen, 'In the Forest of Arden,' *National Review*, 19 September 1884, 128. Austen would be appointed Poet Laureate in 1896.

34. 'Lady Campbell's Pastoral Players', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 2 September 1885, 4

35. *Nottingham Evening Post*, 2 June 1885, 2

36. Wilde (2013) '"As You Like It" at Coombe House', *Dramatic Review*, 6 June 1885, reproduced Stokes & Turner, 296–7

37. Oscar Wilde (2013) 57

38. Oscar Wilde (2013) 57–8

39. Oscar Wilde (2013) 57 & 263n. Wilde admired Gautier and quoted from his work frequently. His influence is evident in Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

40. *The Era*, 26 July 1884, 8

41. Oscar Wilde (2013) 58. Riddell, 134

42. Campbell (1885) 1038. Campbell used this rather antiquated form of spelling for the name of the play, although this was not generally replicated in newspapers of the day.

43. Campbell (1885) 1035

44. Campbell (1885) 1037

45. The princess died of tuberculosis, aged only twenty-three, two years later, on 16 October 1887 while staying in Brighton, probably for her health.

46. 'The Pastoral Players', *The Era*, 4 July 1885, 8

47. *The Ladies Pictorial*, 4 July 1885, 8

48. Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) and Matilda Paget, 'Violet Paget (Kensington, England) to Matilda Paget (Bagni di Lucca, Italy)' (1885) in *Vernon Lee: Letters Home*, 219. https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/letters_home/219

49. Riddell, 127. 'Vernon Lee's "Aristocratic Pastorals: Notes from London" (1885) – An Introduction and Translation' in *Studies in Walter Pater and Aestheticism* 7, 73–86. Lee also responded to *Fair Rosamund* in 'Perigot: Random Notes on the Dramatic and Undramatic', which is reprinted in *Vernon Lee [Violet*

Paget], Juvenilia, 2 vols (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), vol. 1, pp. 21–45.

50. An early vernacular pastoral play written by Renaissance poet Angelo Poliziano for court entertainments at Mantua in Lombardy during carnival. Lee was fascinated by this tale. Her essay 'Orpheus and Eurydice: The Lesson of a Bas-Relief' begins: 'No Greek myth has a greater charm for our mind than that of Orpheus and Eurydice.' (Lee, 49)

51. 'The Pastoral Players', *The Era*, 4 July 1885, 8

52. 'The Pastoral Players at Coombe', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 June 1885, 12

53. Adrian Margaret Brune, 'The Italian Inn of Wimbledon' in *Courts no. 4*, Summer 2023. https://courts.club/the-italian-inn-of-wimbledon/ Accessed on 4 February 2025.

54. Holland & Hart-Davis, 557

55. Holland & Hart-Davis, 621

56. https://www.peterharrington.co.uk/blog/happy-prince-tales-oscar-wilde-first-edition-1888-peter-harrington-rare-books/ Accessed on 4 February 2025

57. For example, see Wilde's letter to Robbie Ross in Holland & Hart-Davis, 671.

58. Fuller, 235

59. *Vanity Fair* 36, 13 November 1886, 282

60. The suggestion that Frank Schuster lived on Tite Street for a time is mentioned in several accounts, including in J. G. P. Delaney (1999) *Glyn Philpot: His Life and Art*, London: Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd., 55. There is no indication given of what number he lived at.

61. Oscar Wilde and Maria Louisa Monckton, 'An Autographed Signed Letter Sent from Oscar Wilde to Lady Monckton. 1888', in National Library of Ireland, Department of Manuscripts, MS 41,868

62. Holland & Hart-Davis, 1077

63. *St Stephen's Review*, 10 July 1886, 18

64. *Hampshire Telegraph*, 31 July 1886, 11

65. Ibid

66. *Cambria Daily Leader*, 17 July 1886, 3

67. 'The Pastoral Players', *Vanity Fair* 36, 24 July 1886, 54

68. 'The Pastoral Players', *Vanity Fair* 36, 24 July 1886, 54–55

69. Walford, 489–503

70. *Hampshire Telegraph*, 31 July 1886, 11

71. *Durham County Advertiser*, 23 July 1886, 6

72. *Vanity Fair* 36, 17 July 1886, 55. One of the professionals involved with the earliest productions was Willliam Elliott, who played Touchstone in *As You Like It*. Elliott, like Eleanor Calhoun, was at the time a member of Squire and Marie Bancroft's company at the Haymarket Theatre where they had been appearing in a revival of *The Rivals* (Calhoun was playing Lydia Languish.) This ended the season on 19 July 1884 so the Haymarket was closed during the initial run of *As You Like It* at Coombe. However, when the production was revived in May/June 1885, the Bancrofts were in the middle of their farewell season at the Haymarket, mounting short runs of their greatest hits. Saturday 30 May 1885 was the first night at the Haymarket of a triple bill of short pieces: *Katharine and Petruchio* (David Garrick's version of *The Taming of the Shrew*); *Sweethearts* by W. S. Gilbert; and *Good for Nothing* by J. B. Buckstone. Elliott had to hurry back to London after the afternoon performance of *As You Like It* to play four parts in these three pieces. He described it as 'the most strenuous day's work I ever did' (Elliott, 91, quoted in Wilde [2013] 263–4). Nevertheless, he was back at Coombe a few months later playing the Satyr in *The Faithful Shepherdess*, despite the fact that he was still appearing every night at the Haymarket in *Diplomacy* by Clement Scott and B. C. Stephenson.

73. Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich, 76

74. *Hampshire Telegraph*, 31 July 1886, 11

75. 'The Pastoral Players', *Vanity Fair* 36, 24 July 1886, 54

76. *Truth*, 29 June 29 1886, 184

77. 'Becket at the Lyceum', *Globe*, 7 February 1893

78. *St James's Gazette*, 21 July 1886, 4

79. *London Daily Chronicle*, 21 July 1886, 4

80. *Athenaeum & Literary Chronicle Part 2*. *The Athenaeum*, number 3065, 24 July 1886, 124

81. 'Tennyson's "Beckett": Its new adaptation as first produced in America', *The Argus*, 9 June 1895, 15

82. Letter from Janey Sevilla Campbell to Beatrix Whistler, 4 April 1890, held at Glasgow University Library, Call Number: MS Whistler C16

83. *North Devon Journal*, 10 November 1887, 2

84. Fitzsimons, 9–10

85. *The Stage*, 29 July 1887, 20

86. Jopling, 133. Jopling was replaced by Dorothy Dene, who would alternate in the roles of Mrs Allonby and Mrs Arbuthnot in a touring production of *A Woman of No Importance* in 1894.

87. Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich, 72

88. Michael Dobson (2011) *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance: A Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 172. Greet's company also toured in the US, performing in the grounds of the University of California at Berkeley and even on the White House lawn, during Roosevelt's presidency, in November 1908.

89. *The Era*, 2 December 1899, 15

90. 'Pastoral Shakespeare: Princess Lazarovich Tells of the Earliest Productions in England', *New York Times*, 18 March 1916

91. *The Speaker* 3, 21 March 1891, 342

92. *The Era*, 11 August 1888, 13

93. '"Le Baiser" at Cannizaro Wood, Wimbledon', *Lady's Pictorial*, 11 August 1888

94. See M. Parkin, Theodore Roussel, Exhibition Catalogue, London, 1997, no. 64

95. *Nottingham Evening Post*, 30 July 1889, 2

96. *The Theatre*, 1 September 1891, 142

97. This was a stage setting of 'The Young Tamlane', a Scottish ballad included in Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders*.

98. Violet D'Arcy quoted in Collier, 93

99. Violet D'Arcy quoted in Collier, 94

100. Powell, 154

101. 'As You Like It in the Open Air', *The Illustrated American*, 13 June 1891, 7, 157

102. Letter from Adela Schuster to More Adey, 14 August 1896, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, UCLA. Quoted in Robins, 200

103. Harris, 2:290

104. In February 1898, in a letter to Robert Ross, Wilde wrote: 'There was an MP who was nice about me, through Miss Schuster; I forget his name. Would you have a copy [of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*] sent to him also, with a slip?' (Holland & Hart-Davis, 1022)

105. Holland & Hart-Davis, 663

106. Holland & Hart-Davis, 666

107. Holland & Hart-Davis, 738

108. Holland & Hart-Davis, 671

109. Holland & Hart-Davis, 904

110. Letter from Adela Schuster to More Adey, 16 March 1898, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, UCLA. Quoted in Robins, 201

111. Letter from Adela Schuster to More Adey, 9 August 1898, William Andrews

Clark Memorial Library, UCLA. Quoted in Robins, 201

112. Holland & Hart-Davis, 1222

113. Holland & Hart-Davis, 1230

114. Holland & Hart-Davis, 1091, n.1

115. 'I will send you a Japanese paper for Miss Schuster. I would like to give her my copy.' Letter from Oscar Wilde to Robert Ross, Sunday [26 March 1899], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1136.

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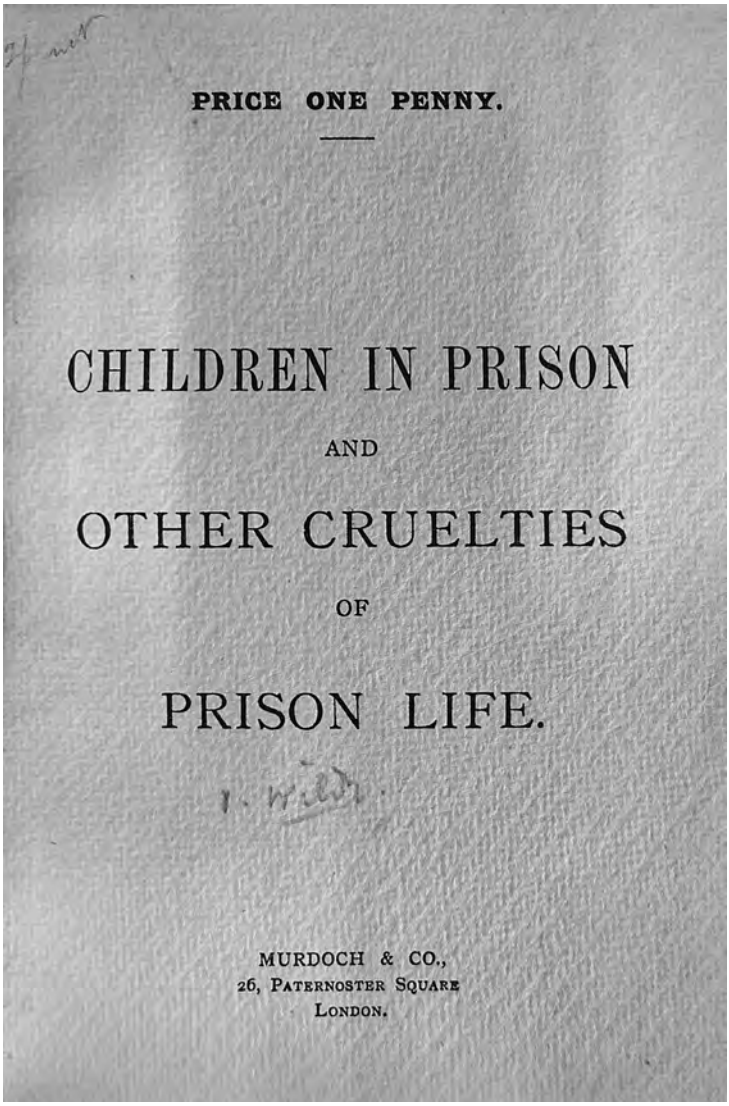
GEOFF SAWERS

Why Was Warder Martin Sacked?

Oscar Wilde's release from Reading Prison[1] in May 1897 was followed, almost immediately, by a furore in the national press about the treatment of prisoners. Thomas Martin, a warder who had befriended Wilde in the last few weeks of his two-year sentence, was dismissed from his post within days of Wilde's release. He wrote a letter in protest to the *Daily Chronicle*, a Liberal-aligned newspaper with a circulation of around 100,000.[2] Questions were asked about it in the House of Commons, and Wilde himself weighed in with a substantial letter in the same paper chiefly about the imprisonment of children, then housed in adult prisons. Martin's dismissal is largely known today due to Wilde's writings about it, and it is hard to understand the national response to this seemingly provincial event without at least a glance at the context of broad popular debates around prison conditions, particularly with relation to the treatment of children.

Two years before this a Home Office Committee of Inquiry into the Administration of the Prison System, set up by the Liberal Home Secretary H. H. Asquith and headed by W. E. Gladstone, had delivered its highly critical report into prison conditions on 10 April 1895, just as the country was gripped by coverage of Oscar Wilde's arrest for gross indecency and committal for trial. The Conservative government elected later that year was tasked with acting upon the Gladstone Committee's recommendations, such as the development of prison education programmes. These fed directly into the Prison Bill brought before Parliament early in 1897; the proposed changes came, of course, too late for Wilde himself to benefit from them.

There had been heated debate in the House of Commons on 22 January 1897 about the morality of flogging prisoners, particularly in relation to who should be entrusted to order such measures.[3] In another debate on 3 May, J. M. Paulton, Liberal MP for Bishop Auckland and a close associate of Asquith, asked a question about the treatment of juvenile offenders on remand. The Home Secretary, Sir Matthew White Ridley, was pleased to answer that 'an experiment is now being tried at Holloway by which the ordinary discipline for unconvicted prisoners is mitigated in the case of those that are under sixteen. The modifications are, briefly, that the cell doors are left open, under, of course, proper supervision; more time is allowed for



Oscar Wilde's two letters to the editor of the *Daily Chronicle* about conditions in prison were reprinted as a penny pamphlet. Image courtesy of The London Library. Catalogue reference: Wilde, Ocar (1854–1900) *Children in Prison and Other Cruelties of Pirson Life*. Murdoch and Co., 1898. Title page

exercise, and the exercise itself is more varied; special arrangements are also made for their instruction and generally for giving them occupation . . .'[4]

Convict life, however, was still very controlled. It was supposed that a prisoner should spend their entire sentence without communication with any other. They should pass 'through a season of remorse in their seclusion'; 'their own bitter reflections' should inflict 'a punishment severe in every case and generally proportional to their guilt'.[5]

Wilde spent the first six months of his two-year sentence in Pentonville and Wandsworth, before being transferred to Reading Prison for the remainder. Reading was, however, unusually lenient to Oscar Wilde, from the very first: they found him on arrival 'totally unfitted for manual work, or hardships of any kind, and he was treated accordingly', one of his warders (not Martin) later wrote. The work that he was given in the library was a great privilege, this warder wrote, 'for it meant that he could take charge of the books and go round with them to other prisoners [but] . . . he failed to accomplish even this task satisfactorily'.[6]

Although prisoners were supposed only to be allowed to write and receive five or six letters a year, the two governors at Reading Prison allowed Wilde dozens. If we include *De Profundis* (97 pages) then they comprise 184 pages of his *Complete Letters*; not a single letter of his survives from either Wandsworth or Pentonville. Thomas Martin would later contribute an account of Wilde's last few weeks in Reading to Robert Sherard's biography, and long after its first publication he wrote to the author to correct a point:

> I notice that on one page you assume that I may have posted a letter for Oscar. This I never did. In the first place he never asked me, and if he had I certainly should have refused. It is always dangerous to post letters for prisoners, as their friends, when writing back, are likely to mention something or other which the prisoner has said in his letter which was posted surreptitiously. And as official copies are always taken of prisoners' letters this would soon be discerned.
>
> No, if anybody posted letters for Oscar it was Major Nelson himself. I am certain that he received letters addressed to himself, for Oscar and these he would deliver personally and wait in the cell until they were read then bring the letter away with him, but sometimes forgetting the envelope.
>
> Oscar, when short of paper, would sometimes use one of these envelopes to write one of his notes on, which he passed under the door to me. I sent Ross several of them.
>
> I know for a positive fact that the Governor infringed the rules of the prison (in regard to Oscar) quite as much as I did – who got the sack![7]

Although it seems extraordinary to picture a Governor waiting on a prisoner

like this, a memo does appear in the inspection records at Reading prison for 4 May 1897, very soon before Wilde's release: 'The Envelopes of Prisoners' letters are not to be given them and all blank sheets are to be removed. Any part of the paper not written upon is to be defaced.'[8]

In context, this could be read as though the prison inspectors were reprimanding the Governor, but had they wished to do that then it would likely have been a quiet word in the ear, leaving no paper trail. There is no trace to be found today of official copies of any of Wilde's prison correspondence; the notes Martin passed on to Ross are presumably those printed on page 798 of Wilde's *Complete Letters*. Martin found himself caught between his desire to please his persuasive friend and the need for self-protection. This next anecdote refers to the few days before Wilde's release:

> Oscar's experience of picking up crumbs (and he soon became adept at the job) was due entirely to my serene (sic) admonitions. A single crumb of contraband food found in a cell would have transformed the whole prison staff into Sherlock Holmes.
>
> The note which he asked me to deliver to the young prisoner, who was treated in another block, and which I tore up, was merely a request for him to call at the post-office and ask for a letter, and he would find a little money in it which would help him. I told the youth verbally what Oscar had said in the note and several months afterwards I was glancing through the pages of a new penny weekly Journal (I have forgotten its name) when I noticed a headline entitled: "Curious Letters From Oscar Wilde". On reading through I learned that the two letters quoted were written from Berneval to this youth, who wanted to sell them. The contents, though not compromising, were indecent, and I wrote to Oscar immediately and advised him to be more careful.[9]

Martin's description of his warnings as 'serene (sic)' make it clear that he found his prisoner frustrating to deal with at times. It seems likely that Oscar Wilde had seldom before known a necessity for picking up his own biscuit crumbs, and he had not – famously – been especially discreet about correspondence either. The letters in question printed in the *Newbury Express* (not actually all that new; it had been going since 1886) were possibly written to Henry Bushnell (there are variant spellings of his name in the prison records; Bushall or Bushell), a career criminal.[10]

On the day before his release from Reading (Monday 17 May 1897) Wilde wrote five letters that we know of. The shortest of those was to Thomas Martin, offering to pay the fines for three boys who had been imprisoned for poaching rabbits. The editors of the *Complete Letters* state that he secured the boys' release this way but show no evidence for this, and the offer was probably irrelevant: children were not infrequently imprisoned for offences

of this kind but for very short sentences. For instance, in September 1891 we find a ten-year-old boy committed to Reading prison for scrumping cherries; he was given three days with hard labour.[11]

Wilde left the country immediately upon his release. On Thursday 20 May, just as he was arriving in France, the British Home Secretary informed the Commons that there would probably not be time to pass the new Prison Bill within that Parliamentary session, and it would have to be held over until the following year.[12] On the Monday of the following week (24 May) the *Daily Chronicle* printed Thomas Martin's protest at his dismissal from his job, which had presumably happened before the weekend:

> . . . I was employed as an assistant warder at H.M. prison Reading. And in that prison three boys were incarcerated, whose ages were registered as twelve, but looked much younger. The other evening, on entering the cell in which one of them was located, I was astonished to find him in tears, and in answer to my query as to what was the matter, [he] told me he was hungry. (By the way, I may here add that children in prison receive just the same treatment as adults, with the single exception of being allowed a mattress.) Taking pity on the poor little chap – who in no sense of the term could be a criminal – I gave him a few biscuits. And for this 'grave' breach of the regulations the commissioners could find no other punishment to meet the case but dismissal. It was the first occasion on which I ever gave anything to a prisoner in the prison, food or otherwise, only the fact of the child being so young, and crying for food, made me do so . . .[13]

Martin is not telling the truth here. Both he and Wilde recount that he used to bring his prisoner newspapers, biscuits and beef-tea or cocoa.[14] Martin had not been in this job very long (Wilde said seven weeks), and he seems barely to have understood prison rules. It is possible that the authorities knew this and that it was only Wilde's presence that prevented them from dismissing Martin before. The other warder who wrote anonymously about Wilde a few years later appears to have been a more established career officer; he mentions that he knew Wilde throughout his time in Reading, having cut his hair upon his arrival. There is no way to check or confirm this warder's accounts, but his stories are of an intimate, unspectacular nature and I have chosen to take them as reliable. 'Warders have feelings, although their duty will not always allow them to show it,' he wrote, and this circumspection enabled him to keep his job when Martin lost his.[15] (This warder can be tentatively identified: Wilde sent copies of the *Ballad of Reading Gaol* on its publication to Nelson and another prison officer, a George Groves;[16] in his article the warder wrote, 'I have good reason to know that Oscar Wilde was satisfied with the way two of his warders treated him. After his release he sent us through the Governor copies of his soul-stirring poem . . .')

Note that Martin says that the young boys 'were' incarcerated; Wilde said that he saw them 'on the Monday preceding my release' which would have been 17 May. They had quite probably finished their sentences by the time Martin's letter was even published. This letter was referred to in the House of Commons the very next day. Michael Davitt, MP for South Mayo (he had actually been elected for two constituencies in 1895 and had had to choose one) was an Irish Home Rule activist who had been imprisoned himself, a very different man from the aristocratic, Harrow and Oxford-educated Ridley whom he was questioning:

> I beg to ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether a warder in Reading Prison has been dismissed the service for having given some bread to a youthful prisoner whom he found crying for food in a cell . . .?

Ridley closed this question down firmly: 'It is the case that a warder has been dismissed at Reading. The circumstances of the dismissal, of which the hon. Member appears to have received a very incorrect account, have been reported to me, and I am satisfied that the dismissal was fully justified.'[17]

The *Daily Chronicle*'s reporting is useful here because it then adds a brief exchange not recorded in Hansard:

> MR DAVITT: Will the right hon. Gentleman say what were the circumstances?
> THE HOME SECRETARY: The circumstances were simply these – the explanation of the warder was not satisfactory.
> MR DILLON: What is the offence in giving two or three biscuits to a poor boy?
> THE SPEAKER: Order, order.[18]

The new voice here was John Dillon, MP for East Mayo, leader of the Irish Nationalist Federation and a close associate of Davitt. Both were deeply mistrustful of the government.[19] Wilde wrote to Davitt privately, to encourage him in his questioning on prison issues.[20]

On the Thursday (27 May) Davitt returned to Martin's case in Parliament, inquiring '. . . what other circumstances, if any, led to such dismissal; and whether in case the giving of the food in the manner mentioned was the only breach of discipline committed by the warder, he will reconsider the penalty inflicted . . .' This time Ridley denied that the food – bread or biscuits seem interchangeable in this debate – was the issue, but once again coolly shut it down: 'I think it would be very undesirable to enter in detail into the circumstances attending the dismissal of prison officers. I have already informed the hon. Member that the account which he appears to have received is an incorrect one, and that I am perfectly satisfied that the dismissal of this warder was a proper step.'[21]

Why was Ridley so determined not to answer?

A telling anecdote may come in here from an often-unreliable source: Frank Harris. He says that he had visited the new Conservative Prison Commissioner (Evelyn Ruggles-Brise) some months earlier to ask if it would be possible to remit the last few months of Wilde's sentence. 'We live,' Harris says that he was told, 'under parliamentary rule. Suppose the question were asked in the House [. . .] What should we answer?'[22] Whilst Harris's vivid accounts of Wilde's life inside prison were later described by Warder Martin as 'incomprehensible' and 'ridiculous', on the matter of a personal conversation he may perhaps be trusted.[23] Questions in Parliament appear to have been an embarrassment the authorities were keen to avoid. Even before Wilde's transfer to Reading, Ruggles-Brise had been in touch with R. B. Haldane (Liberal MP for Haddington; he had visited Wilde in prison personally) about the case, and had reported to Sir Kenelm Digby, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Home Office:

> Of course it is possible for a man of Wilde's abnormal disposition to go mad and perhaps not unlikely – though from causes quite unconnected with prison life. Still it would not be wise for us to expose ourselves to the charge of not having taken any necessary precautions . . .

Digby then briefed Ridley that Haldane might be preparing to raise the matter in Parliament.[24]

To smooth Wilde's path within the prison system was not all that difficult, and the public need know nothing about it; but an early release for him, for which he had been petitioning, would have made headline news. Affirming that Martin had been sacked merely because of the biscuits might make the prison authorities look unwontedly harsh, but admitting that it had been because he had bent the rules so flagrantly to accommodate one prisoner would have opened them up to criticism from another side. That the Governor was himself bending the rules was impossible to admit. It is no wonder that Ridley wished to say as little as possible; it was surely easiest for the most junior person involved – warder Martin – to take the blame.

If this was the establishment trying to nail the issue down and contain it, then it failed, because on 28 May the *Chronicle* published Wilde's first long letter on prison conditions. He opened with Martin's case but moved swiftly on to decry the imprisonment of children and to rail against the corrupting influence of authoritarian systems. Finally he addressed the flogging of a prisoner with learning disabilities ('idiocy' was then the technical term) and the fear that he might be driven insane.[25] Wilde's letter was followed immediately on the page by a somewhat anguished note from Martin again, stating that 'I most emphatically protest against the misleading answers

which were given by the Home Secretary to Mr Davitt last night anent my dismissal from the Prison Service. The account which the hon. Member received was a facsimile of what appeared in the *Daily Chronicle*, and that account I defy either the Home Secretary or the Prison Commissioners to refute.'[26]

Neither responded. But Wilde's letter seems to have caught the authorities on the hop, precisely because it did not dwell on his own circumstances at all but on punishments meted out to others. If he had complained about his own treatment then they could have easily countered that; Ridley had been holding that card up his sleeve but it was useless now.

Wilde's letter was widely quoted and discussed.[27] Some responses, such as that from Henry Labouchere's *Truth*, echoed the *Westminster Gazette*'s earlier focus on Martin.[28] But both openly questioned the transparency of Ridley's answers to Davitt in Parliament too; *Justice* (later the *Social Democrat* and aligned with the nascent Labour Party) was utterly dismissive of Ridley.[29] *The Sketch*, on the 2 June, congratulated the *Chronicle* on its bravery in printing Wilde's letter and went on to praise 'the still greater courage and, let me add, humanity of Mr Oscar Wilde in writing it [. . .] the whole literature of the Howard Association has not put the case more clearly, or more sincerely'.[30]

On 26 July 1897 the Home Secretary updated the Commons to say that 'I received last week a most satisfactory report of the work of this experiment at Holloway, and I have in consequence approved the proposal of the Prison Commissioners that it shall be at once extended to all prisons in England and Wales.' This speech was greeted with cheers; presumably from all sides although the accounts do not state this.[31] The new Prison Bill finally became an Act the following year (1898);[32] it restricted hard labour and corporal punishment and introduced remission of sentences for good behaviour, but not before another lengthy missive from Wilde in the *Chronicle*, and the publication of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.[33]

Wilde's public letters were devastating and justified critiques, but they do contain inconsistencies. In the first Wilde states that children are kept out of sight of all other prisoners; and yet he says that he saw these particular ones several times, and that he saw another child's face in his cell.[34] Actually, older prisoners were supposed to stand facing the wall when any new inmate passed, whether child or not.[35] In Wilde's second letter he stated that 'No prisoner has ever had the smallest relief, or attention, or care from any of the official visitors.'[36] They had excused him from hard labour, supplied books from his long lists, allowed him to keep those books in his cell, to have the gas lamp on in the evenings, pen-and-ink, and a chair. To Wilde's credit, his central argument here was that others should have some of the privileges that he had just been given. When T. P. O'Connor (MP for Liverpool, Scotland

Division) had said, during the Prison Bill debates in the Commons on 4 April 1898, 'I have spoken in vain if I have not proved to the members of this house that the prison system is directly calculated to produce insanity,' he was quoting Wilde's second letter.[37]

On prison reform, O'Connor did not give up the fight. On 7 June 1906 he again addressed the House of Commons, arguing that 'the first principle of the current system' was starvation; he told a story of convicts seeking out and eating snails in their cells to keep themselves going.[38]

Wilde's words, especially lines from the *Ballad*, continued to be quoted in debates on prison reform. Many decades later, once Wilde's letters had appeared in print, his words to George Ives of March 1898 ('I have no doubt we shall win, but the road is long, and red with monstrous martyrdoms . . .') would be quoted too in Parliament: in the Commons during the debates around the Wolfenden report, and yet again in the Lords at the time of decriminalisation.[39]

WHAT HAPPENED TO THOMAS MARTIN?

Thomas Martin had been born on 15 April 1871 in Dromore, County Down, the youngest of four children[40] and grew up in a 'seaside town not far from Belfast', possibly Bangor.[41] He would therefore have been approaching his twenty-sixth birthday when he met Wilde in March or April 1897 (assuming that Wilde's 'seven weeks' is correct). It is tempting to imagine that the Irish family connection might have helped the two men to become friends.

It took some time for Martin to find himself a new job after Reading, but the 1901 National Census finds him at St George's Union Workhouse on the Fulham Road, Chelsea, employed as the stoker for the stationary engine. Years later he told Sherard that while in London he had written a three-act play called *The Lady M.P.* and sent it to several managers without success. He wrote a one-act play titled *An Angel of Light* but felt that it was 'too religious in tone for the secular stage, it might do for the "Talkies".'[42] He also drafted a novel.[43] None of these survive.

His next few years are unclear but he worked at some point, and possibly as a nurse, at Dartmoor Prison, and then at the Romford Union Workhouse (later Oldchurch Hospital). By 1921 he had moved to Norfolk where he was employed by Aylsham Board of Guardians, classified as an 'officer, male attendant' in the census, for about eighteen months.[44]

Martin developed a deep and ongoing interest in spiritualism,[45] even at one meeting being convinced that Wilde's spirit had appeared to stand beside him, although they did not speak. When the medium Hester Travers Smith published a book recounting a sequence of messages from Oscar beyond the grave, Martin found it fully convincing.[46] There are passages however in

Travers Smith's book relating to prison that, in describing the ability to transcend the physical and be a purely spiritual being, bear much closer relation to Wilde's pre-prison writings on the subject that anything we find him saying once he had suffered incarceration himself.[47]

From the early 1920s Martin was living in Norwich, where he was employed as a male nurse at the workhouse on Bowthorpe Road. In early 1933 he rekindled his correspondence with Robert Sherard, lapsed some decades before, who was working on a new book about Wilde. Martin was grateful to have someone with whom he could discuss books but he kept a slight formality or deference throughout; never using the name Robert, always 'Mr Sherard' or 'My Dear Sherard'. Around 1936 he was able to retire on a small pension but he found himself deeply unhappy in Norwich, the few people he knew 'dull and uninteresting'. Although he had once been 'glad to get away from London on account of its many temptations',[48] he now longed to return. 'Another winter here would kill me,' he bluntly told Sherard in July 1938.[49]

It nearly did. Later that year he suffered a stroke and spent some time in the town infirmary. Within a few months he had partially recovered, could walk a little with a stick, and was released back to his lodgings. He grew petulant at Sherard's slowness in writing; unaware at first that his correspondent had serious health issues of his own.[50] When pressed again for intimate information on Wilde, Martin, who had always been willing to talk in the past, for once began to kick back. This is an extraordinary passage:

> In regard to the other subject of your letter I may say that I have no knowledge whatever of Oscar ever having indulged in any such practices as you mention.
>
> I am well aware that in convict prisons especially this vice is prevalent. When I was at Dartmoor I heard the warders speak about it. In fact these sexual problems presented a never ceasing worry to the officials and necessitated constant vigilance. For instance, two prisoners were never allowed to be left alone together. It was a sure 'half-sheet' for the warder in charge and a subsequent heavy fine, if a principal warder made the discovery [. . .] In regard to Oscar I never heard his name mentioned in connection with anything of the sort [. . .]
>
> No, I think if I were you I should taboo this subject altogether. Nothing of a downright, convincing, unassailable declaration could be made either way; and I am sure Oscar would feel annoyed at this kind of publicity whatever the motives. You see I write as a Spiritualist who believes that those who have passed over know quite well what is going on in the world they have left.[51]

It reads as though he had entirely forgotten why Wilde went to prison in the first place.

Sherard's letters to Martin have not survived but nevertheless there are unmissable tones of melancholy in both men at this point. Martin's very last letters find him propped up in bed, commiserating with Sherard on the state of his own health, fearful of the onset of a new World War but enjoying the sound of his landlady's young daughter singing on the landing outside. He was utterly scornful of news that Alfred Douglas was to write yet another book about the old story: 'Surely, the world must by now be surfeited with biographies! He can't have much which is new to say – that is fit for publication.' And then he set to wondering sadly why he himself had never married. At the age of seventeen he had been in love with a married woman of twenty-two. On an arduous visit back to Ireland, not long before he retired, he had met this woman once more, now a widow with grown-up children, and they had discussed marrying but it had not come to pass.[52]

There are no more letters after this, and he died in early 1940. Why was he sacked from Reading Prison in 1897? We might never have a definitive answer, but the question is still worth asking. It was very probably an attempt to hold a lid on a scandal, which then blew out in a different direction anyway. This is of course speculation but, if my analysis is correct, then Martin was not the only person bending the rules for Wilde inside the prison walls; just the most junior person doing it.

Many years before all this played out, the judge in one of Alfred Douglas's libel trials had offered the remarkable statement: 'If you belonged to the Court of Criminal Appeals, like I do, you would know that most people in gaol think that the most virtuous people are in prison and that the most wicked people are those that put them there.'[53] It is a statement that one can imagine the spirits of both Thomas Martin and Oscar Wilde greeting with at least a wry smile.

Notes

1. The prison was generally known as 'Reading Prison' or 'HMP Reading'. Wilde chose the slightly more archaic term 'Gaol' for his poem (along with a number of conscious medievalisms, e.g., 'seneschal') to match the ballad form. With the popularity of the poem and the prison's later changes of name as it changed use, 'Reading Gaol' gained currency as the more widely recognised name, although 'Reading Prison' is more historically appropriate.

2. Ed King, British Newspapers 1860–1900 (Detroit: Gale, 2007), 4

3. House of Commons Hansard Deb, 22 January 1897, vol 45 cc280-2

4. House of Commons Hansard Deb, 3 May 1897, vol 48 c1411

5. RBA Q/SO 23 (15 October 1849)

6. 'In the Depths. Account of Oscar Wilde's Life at Reading. Told by his Gaoler.' [Part 1] In the *Evening News and Evening Mail* (London), 1 March 1905, 4; Martin, *The*

Poet in Prison, 388; Holland & Hart-Davis, 1,012

7. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, 23 January [1937]; Holland & Hart-Davis 683n confirms that Nelson was extending special privileges to Wilde

8. RBA P/RP/8/1/1

9. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, 25 August 1938

10. Holland & Hart-Davis, 861–2; Wilde's friendship with Bushnell is described in Stoneley (2014) 464, 476–7

11. Holland & Hart-Davis, 831n; Hitchings, Sawers & Stokes, 69, 74

12. House of Commons Hansard Deb, vol 49 cc939-40

13. 'Punishing a Warder For Humanity', *Daily Chronicle*, 24 May 1897, 5

14. Holland & Hart-Davis, 798; Martin, 'The Poet in Prison', 393–6

15. 'In the Depths', reference above. The same author wrote a second article in the same paper the following day, 2 March 1905, which contains an important story about Constance Wilde's visit to her husband in Reading

16. Holland & Hart-Davis, 1,012

17. House of Commons Hansard Deb, 25 May 1897, vol 49 cc1266-7

18. 'Alleged Harsh Penalties', *Daily Chronicle*, 26 May 1897

19. '. . . the Dillon-Davitt section will have been justified in their refusal to credit Tory sincerity . . .', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 30 May 1897, 4

20. Holland & Hart-Davis, 870

21. House of Commons Hansard Deb, 27 May 1897, vol 49 cc1420-1

22. Frank Harris (1930), *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions*, NY: Garden City, 241

23. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, 16 September 1938

24. Robins (2011) 31–9 has an account of these behind-the-scenes discussions; the original correspondence is in the National Archives at Kew, PCOM 8/432

25. Holland & Hart-Davis, 847–55

26. *Daily Chronicle*, 28 May 1897; the two long letters are reprinted in Holland & Hart-Davis 847–55 and 1,045–9.

27. For one example, 'A Warder Dismissed For Kindness' in *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 30 May 1897, 11; other accounts appeared as far afield as the *Wells Journal*, 3 June 1897, 7, the *Lincolnshire Echo*, 31 May 1897, 2, and the Anarchist journal *Freedom* (London), 1 July 1897, 4

28. *Truth*, 3 June 1897, 15; 'The Gaol Cradle' in *Westminster Gazette*, 28 May 1897, 4

29. *Justice*, 5 June 1897, 1

30. *The Sketch*, 2 June 1897, 12

31. House of Commons Hansard Deb, 26 July 1897, vol 51 cc1085-6

32. The Prison Act 1898 (61 & 62 Vict. c. 41); after the Children Act 1908 (8 Edw. 7 c. 67) no one under the age of fourteen could be committed to an adult prison.

33. The second letter was also widely discussed; see for instance the *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 24 March 1898, 3.

34. Holland & Hart-Davis, 848–49

35. Martin, 'The Poet in Prison', 390

36. Holland & Hart-Davis, 1,045

37. Holland & Hart-Davis, 1,047; House of Commons Hansard Deb, 4 April 1898 vol 56 cc55-121

38. House of Commons Hansard Deb, 07 June 1906, vol 158 cc605-10

39. Holland & Hart-Davis, 1,044; these later quotes were by Montgomery Hyde, House of Commons Hansard Deb, 26 November 1958, vol 596 cc388-99 and Lord Arran in House of Lords Hansard Deb, 21 July 1967, vol 285 cc522

40. Date of birth from the 1939 War Register, also Ireland Select births and

Baptisms records. His father was John Martin, his mother Sarah Patterson, married in Dromore on 1 March 1856

41. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, 1 February [1937]

42. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, letter undated but early 1933

43. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, 2 August 1938

44. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, letter undated but early 1933

45. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, 3 April 1933

46. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, 23 December [1937]

47. Travers Smith, 15; Hitchings, Sawers & Stokes, 71

48. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, letter undated but early 1933

49. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, 24 July 1938

50. For example, Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, 7 June [1939]

51. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, 12 September 1938

52. Thomas Martin to Robert Sherard, 13 July 1939, 23 October 1939

53. Justice Charles Darling, quoted in 'Lord A. Douglas: Failure Of His Libel Action' [against Arthur Ransome] *London Evening Standard*, 23 April 1913, 5

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Thomas Martin's letters to Sherard are in the Robert Harborough Sherard Archive, University of Reading Special Collections, MS1047/1/1/M

The *Daily Chronicle* is currently being added bit-by-bit to the British Newspaper Archive and may well be there in full by the time this paper is published, but I had to rely on Karen Waddell at the British Library's help with the microfiche, so many thanks to her. I have only screenshots of some of the *Chronicle* pieces, and so page numbers for those will have to wait. My thanks too to Jackie Bishop at the University of Reading Special Collections, Mark Stevens and the staff at Royal Berkshire Archives, and to Liz Swain for finding the Census returns.

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TINE ENGLEBERT

‘Serenade’ and the Birth of Oscar Wilde’s Legacy in Music

The relationship between music and poetry is deep-rooted and multifaceted. Both art forms share rhythmic and melodic qualities, merging words and sounds to convey emotions and stories that transcend literal meaning.[1] When composers set poetic texts to music, they add a new dimension to the literary expression, enriching the atmosphere and emotional weight of the words. Although poetry is often set to music, other literary forms, such as prose and drama, have also inspired musical adaptations, showcasing the creative possibilities of merging literature with music.

One notable example is the work of Oscar Wilde. Even during his lifetime, Wilde’s poetry attracted composers, sparking a stream of musical adaptations that later extended to his prose and plays. Wilde’s writings inspired operas, ballets, musical comedies, incidental music and a diverse range of other musical genres.[2] These works range from verbatim text settings to purely instrumental pieces that evoke Wilde’s spirit. Although most are vocal and dramatic, there is significant diversity in genre, style and fidelity to Wilde’s originals. Despite their impact, these musical adaptations have received limited scholarly attention, though they offer fresh interpretations of Wilde’s work. This article focuses primarily on the early musical settings of Wilde’s poetry, particularly ‘Serenade (For Music)’, which established the foundation for a long-standing tradition of musical reinterpretations of his entire oeuvre. At the same time, it links the past to the present by examining how ‘Serenade (For Music)’ has been reimagined as a key element in a twenty-first-century film score. This reinterpretation, realised in Charlie Mole’s ‘Lady Come Down’ for Oliver Parker’s adaptation of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, highlights the enduring resonance of Wilde’s poetry in contemporary music and storytelling.

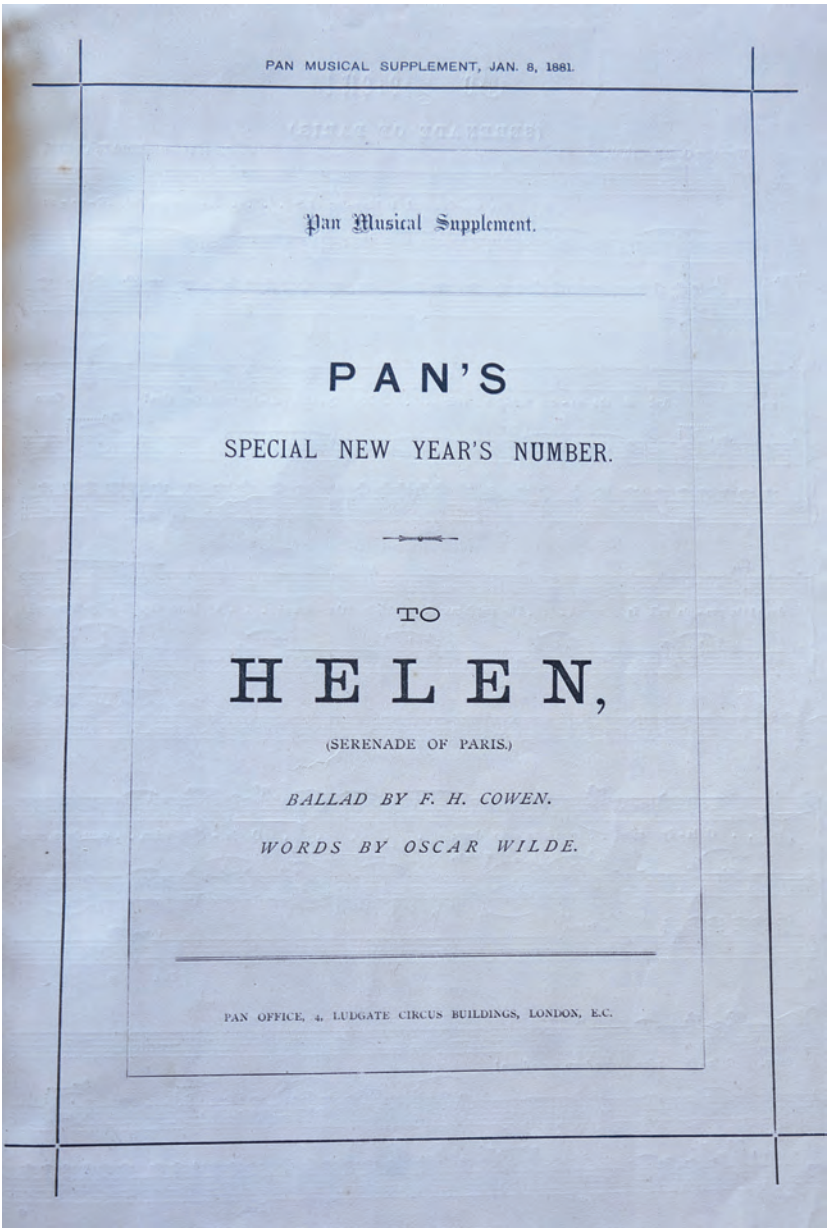
The practice of setting Oscar Wilde’s words to music began with a request made on 2 December 1880 by Alfred Thompson, the editor of *Pan: A Journal of Satire*. Thompson asked Wilde to write verses for a romantic melody associated with composer Frederick H. Cowen:

My dear Wilde
Will you do me two or 3 verses of eight lines each for a romance music by F. H. Cowen we mean to publish in PAN – as soon as possible – Title, *Happy Tears*. Subject, a young lady not certain of love discovers it exists to her delight, hinc illae lachrymae.[3]
Yrs ever A. Thompson.[4]

This phrasing suggests that Thompson might already have been familiar with Cowen's melody when he approached Wilde, implying that the music could have been composed prior to the poetry. Supporting this interpretation is the fact that Cowen's melody and Wilde's verses were published just over a month later. However, it is equally plausible that Cowen composed the melody shortly after receiving Wilde's text, given his reputation for composing quickly. An article in *The Musical Times* underscores this skill, noting: 'No less remarkable is the rapidity with which he throws off these vocal gems: in five weeks he composed three sets of six songs.'[5] Whether the music predated the poetry or followed it, Cowen likely set Wilde's verses to music within a short timeframe. Their collaboration stands as the earliest documented musical adaptation of Wilde's work. At the time, Wilde was an emerging author, but his selection for this task was not surprising, as he had already published numerous poems. Although some critics later dismissed his early work as derivative, Wilde achieved significant success in placing his poetry. Between 1877 and the release of *Poems* in 1881, he published approximately forty poems in various periodicals across Ireland, America and England – a notable accomplishment for a poet in his mid-twenties.[6] Of particular relevance, Wilde's poem 'Pan, a Villanelle' had already appeared in the inaugural issue of *Pan* on 25 September 1880, so Alfred Thompson was familiar with his work.

In the *Pan Musical Supplement* (Vol. I, No. 16), dated 8 January 1881, Wilde's response to Thompson's request – his poem 'To Helen (Serenade of Paris)' – was published with the notation, 'Ballad by F. H. Cowen. Words by Oscar Wilde'. Issued as a separate supplement, it included a title page labelled *Pan's Special New Year's Number*, with the inner pages containing Wilde's lyrics set to Cowen's music. The score, described as a ballad, was written for voice and piano in C major. The poem was also repeated on the reverse of the second leaf (p. 4).[7] *The World* announced on 5 January 1881: 'The New Year's Number of PAN will contain drawings by Sir Frederick Leighton, P.R.A., and Frederick Sandys. Ballad by F. H. Cowen; Words by Oscar Wilde.'

As can be seen from Box A, Wilde did not stick very closely to the brief he had been given by Alfred Thompson whose requested 'subject' was 'a young lady not certain of love discovers it exists to her delight'. The title



PAN MUSICAL SUPPLEMENT, JAN. 8, 1881.

Pan Musical Supplement.

PAN'S

SPECIAL NEW YEAR'S NUMBER.

TO

HELEN,

(SERENADE OF PARIS.)

BALLAD BY F. H. COWEN.

WORDS BY OSCAR WILDE.

PAN OFFICE, 4, LUDGATE CIRCUS BUILDINGS, LONDON, E.C.

A. *The poem supplied by Wilde to Alfred Thompson for publication in PAN 8 January 1881*

TO HELEN
(Serenade of Paris)

The Western wind is blowing fair
Across the dark Aegean sea,
And at the secret marble stair
My Tyrian galley waits for thee!
Come down! The purple sail is spread,
The watchman sleeps within the town;
O leave thy lily-flowered bed,
O lady mine come down, come down!
O lady mine come down.

The waning sky grows faint and blue,
It wants an hour still of day;
Aboard! aboard! my gallant crew,
O Lady mine away, away!
O noble pilot, steer for Troy,
Good sailor ply the labouring oar;
This is the queen of life and joy,
And we must leave the Grecian shore.
O noble pilot steer for Troy,
Good sailor ply the labouring oar;
O loved as only loves a boy!
O loved for ever, evermore.

changed from 'Happy Tears' to 'To Helen (Serenade of Paris)' and Wilde wrote a poem about Paris, the youngest son of Priam, King of Troy, who is waiting in his ship for the arrival of Helen, wife of King Menelaus of Sparta, with whom he is planning to elope. 'Hinc illae lachrymae', Thompson had written (hence these tears), and to that bit, at least, Wilde had responded, because the elopement led to a ten-year siege ending with a wooden horse and the total destruction of the city of Troy.

Wilde's interest in Helen of Troy was connected to his admiration of Lillie Langtry, the 'Jersey Lily' whose great beauty enabled her to become, upon her arrival in London, the mistress of the Prince of Wales. In 1879 Wilde's poem 'The New Helen' had been published in *Time*,[9] hailing Mrs Langtry as the reincarnation of the most beautiful woman of ancient times, 'Lily of Love, pure and inviolate!'[10] The 'lily-flowered bed' in the first verse of the 'To Helen' lyric was a coded reference to Langtry, and 'the queen of life and joy' in the second echoed another poem about Helen of Troy written by Wilde

B. The poem as it appeared in Oscar Wilde's *Poems* printed by David Bogue and published in June or July 1881

SERENADE
(For music)

The western wind is blowing fair
  Across the dark Ægean sea,
And at the secret marble stair
  My Tyrian galley waits for thee.
Come down! the purple sail is spread,
  The watchman sleeps within the town,
O leave thy lily-flowered bed,
O Lady mine, come down, come down!

She will not come, I know her well,
  Of lovers' vows she hath no care,
And little good a man can tell
  Of one so cruel and so fair.
True love is but a woman's toy,
  They never know the lover's pain,
And I who loved as loves a boy
  Must love in vain, must love in vain.

O noble pilot tell me true
  Is that the sheen of golden hair?
Or is it but the tangled dew
  That binds the passion-flowers there?
Good sailor come and tell me now
  Is that my Lady's lily hand?
Or is it but the gleaming prow,
  Or is it but the silver sand?

No! no! 'tis not the tangled dew,
  'Tis not the silver-fretted sand,
It is my own dear Lady true
  With golden hair and lily hand!
O noble pilot steer for Troy,
  Good sailor ply the labouring oar,
This is the Queen of life and joy
  Whom we must bear from Grecian shore!

The waning sky grows faint and blue,
  It wants an hour still of day,
Aboard! aboard! my gallant crew,
  O Lady mine away! away!
O noble pilot, steer for Troy,
  Good sailor, ply the labouring oar;
O loved as only loves a boy!
O loved for ever evermore!

at about the same time as 'The New Helen' but never published in his lifetime, beginning: 'O Golden Queen of Life and Joy/O Lily without blot or stain!'[11] Six months after the publication of the song sheet in *Pan*, Wilde's volume of *Poems* was published containing an expanded version of the lyric, now consisting of five verses of eight lines and called 'Serenade (For Music)' (see box B). Wilde sent a copy of the book to Mrs Langtry inscribed: 'To Helen, formerly of Troy, now of London'.[12]

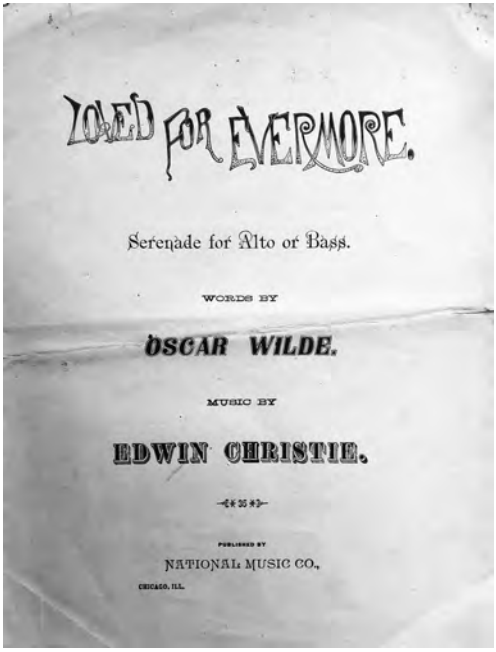
Frederick H. Cowen (1852–1935) was a near contemporary of Wilde's but he was already a seasoned figure in the musical world, having achieved early fame as a prodigy. Born in Jamaica, Cowen moved to England at the age of four and soon gained renown as a wunderkind pianist, performing publicly by age ten. His studies in Germany brought him into contact with Franz Liszt and Johannes Brahms, and he launched his career as a piano virtuoso in his teens. Primarily known as a conductor, Cowen rose to prominence in 1880 when he succeeded Arthur Sullivan as director of the autumn season of the Promenade Concerts at Covent Garden Theatre, becoming one of Britain's leading conductors.[13] His subsequent appointments included prestigious positions with the Philharmonic Society of London, the Hallé Orchestra, the Liverpool Philharmonic Society and the Scottish Orchestra. He was also a regular conductor and composer at numerous British music festivals. As a composer, by 1869, Cowen had debuted in England with both a symphony and a piano concerto. His Symphony No. 3 'The Scandinavian' (1880) played a significant role in establishing British Victorian music on the European stage. Cowen's extensive body of work includes operas, cantatas, six symphonies, as well as incidental, choral and chamber music and over 300 songs.[14] *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* highlights the widespread popularity of Cowen's songs, noting: 'Mr Cowen's songs have carried his name throughout the length and breadth of the land. It is difficult, if not impossible, to say how many lyrics he has set to music. He probably does not know himself.'[15] Cowen's career was characterised by his skill in setting music to the works of popular poets, including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Robert Browning, Lord Alfred Tennyson, Christina Rossetti, Thomas Moore and Algernon Swinburne. Today, Sir Frederic Hymen Cowen is unjustly forgotten, but before the rise of Edward Elgar at the close of Queen Victoria's reign, late-nineteenth-century British music was dominated by five composers: Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, Sir Hubert Parry, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Sir Arthur Sullivan and Sir Frederic H. Cowen.[16] Sullivan is still recognized for his Savoy operas, and his other music has seen a revival in recent decades. Parry and Stanford are remembered for their church music, which has also experienced a resurgence, and Mackenzie's works, including his notable *Scottish Concerto*, have been rediscovered. However, the once-popular music

of Frederic H. Cowen has largely remained silent, overshadowed by the dramatic shifts in aesthetic and idiom following the First World War. In this context, it is significant to recall that Cowen's collaboration with Wilde marked Wilde's first venture into musical adaptation, paving the way for many subsequent settings of his work.

Although nearly all of Wilde's works have repeatedly inspired composers, it is particularly noteworthy that within two years of the original setting of 'Serenade (For Music)', two additional musical adaptations were published in the United States. Wilde's 1882 tour in America created a sensation; his image was widely circulated in newspapers, magazines and even on sheet music covers.[17] At the time, the sheet music industry was thriving, and Wilde's popularity made him a marketable figure for publishers, who used his likeness to sell a variety of compositions. Alongside humorous and satirical songs such as 'The Oscar Wilde Galop' by F. H. Snow, 'Oscar Wilde, Forget-Me-Not Waltzes' by Amy Henry, and 'Oscar Dear!' by M. H. Rosenfeld,[18] musical settings of Wilde's poetry also emerged. This trend included 'Serenade (For Music)' and other poems, as composers drew inspiration from Wilde's evocative language. Wilde's *Poems*, published in America by Roberts Brothers in 1881, found an even broader audience early in 1882 with an unauthorized New York edition, sold at a fraction of the authorized price. This pirated edition, produced by George Munro as part of his Seaside Library Budget Series,[19] featured also a significant portion of Wilde's lecture on the English Renaissance and was priced at a mere ten cents compared to the authorized edition's $1.25. Wilde later expressed his frustration over this unauthorized distribution in his essay 'Personal Impressions of America.'[20] However, these affordable editions played a key role in introducing Wilde's work to a larger American public,

making his poetry an accessible source of inspiration for musical compositions.

In 1882, during Oscar Wilde's American lecture tour, a second version of 'Serenade (For Music)' was published under the title 'Oscar Wilde's Serenade' by Brentano Brothers in New York. This arrangement, in A-flat major, intriguingly attributes both the words and music to Wilde, leaving the actual composer unidentified. The setting for voice and piano includes only the first, second and fifth stanzas of 'Serenade (For Music)'.[21] The sheet music cover, presented in an aesthetic style, features a design with a drooping lily in a pot, a garland of plants, a sunflower and decorative figures. The title reads, 'Oscar Wilde's Serenade Words and Music by O. Wilde, New York: Brentano Brothers, 5 Union Square (Copyright 1882 by Brentano Bros.)'. The widespread popularity of Wilde memorabilia during and after his tour resulted in the production of numerous unauthorised items, including this particular sheet music.[22] Wilde's personal copy of 'Oscar Wilde's Serenade' was later discovered among his papers by Robert Ross, who subsequently passed it on to Christopher Millard. Millard, in turn, sold it to Walter Ledger on 29 December 1908.[23] Correspondence between Millard and Brentano Brothers, preserved in the Robert Ross Memorial Collection, sheds light on this edition.[24] In the first letter, dated 10 September 1908, a Brentano's representative acknowledges receipt of Millard's inquiry and states they are investigating the matter. In the second letter, dated November 9, 1908, the representative responds in more detail, confirming that 'Oscar Wilde's Serenade' was copyrighted by Brentano's in 1882, with copies deposited at their offices and the Library of Congress. He suggests it was 'quite likely that we performed this service for Mr Wilde himself, or for someone authorized to act on his behalf', noting that Brentano's music department


LOVED FOR EVERMORE.

Serenade for Alto or Bass.

WORDS BY

OSCAR WILDE.

MUSIC BY

EDWIN CHRISTIE.

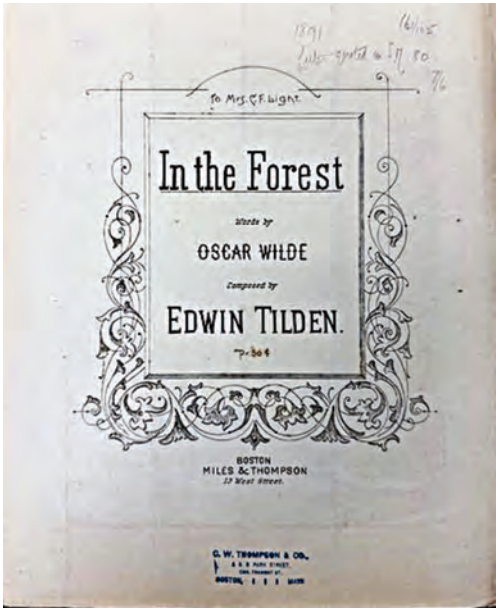
PUBLISHED BY

NATIONAL MUSIC CO.,

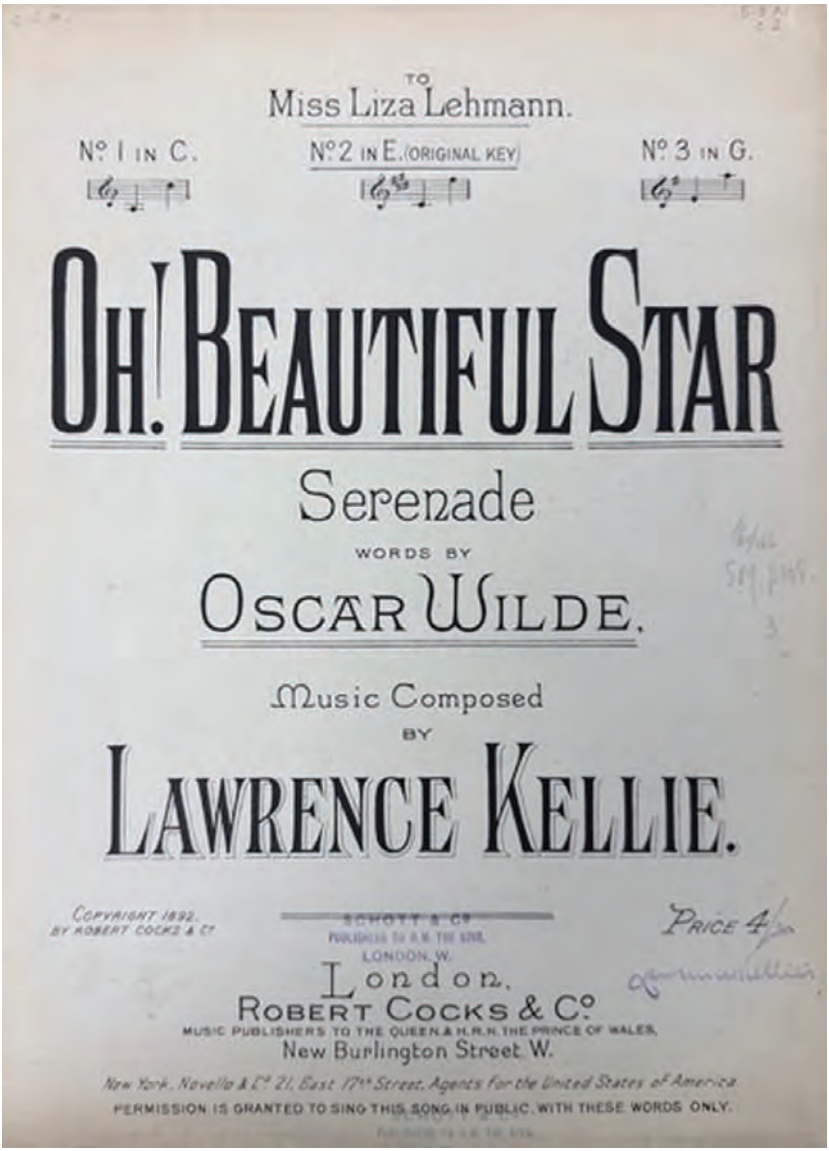
CHICAGO, ILL.

– later sold to Charles H. Ditson & Co. – handled the copyrighting. Although they could not verify any general sale or publication, the representative expressed confidence that the copyrighting was authorised. He also offered to furnish Millard with a copy, but noted that none were available and they were unable to locate one. Mason later remarked: 'It is doubtful if this was actually published. Messrs Brentano can give no particulars of it; the only copy examined is apparently a rough proof.'[25]

Recordings of both musical settings – the one by F. H. Cowen from 1881 and the anonymous 1882 version – are available on the website of University College, Oxford.[26] The latter was also performed by tenor James Liu at the Oscar Wilde Society Birthday Dinner on 18 October 2024 and is available on the Society's YouTube channel.[27] There are notable differences in the musical treatment of the text between the two versions.



A year later, another musical setting of the poem appeared, once again for voice and piano. In 1883, Edwin Christie, thought to be an American songwriter and composer from Boston, arranged all five stanzas of 'Serenade (For Music)' under the title 'Loved for Evermore: Serenade for Alto or Bass'. Christie chose a low vocal range – alto or bass – accompanied by piano. The piece, composed in F major, was published by National Music Co. in Chicago. This Edwin Christie, distinct from the minstrel performer Edwin Christy, belonged to a Boston family of performers that included George, Henry, Kate and Helen Christie.[28] He contributed significantly to American instrumental music, notably co-composing *Ryan's Mammoth Collection* (1883), a comprehensive compilation of reels, jigs, hornpipes and other popular forms. Research highlights Christie's versatility in American popular music, including waltzes, polkas, songs and ballads.[29] The cover of the sheet music with the text 'Loved for Evermore: Serenade for Alto or Bass, Words by Oscar Wilde, Music by Edwin Christie', is notably simple, with no



TO
Miss Liza Lehmann.

No. 1 IN C. No. 2 IN E. (ORIGINAL KEY) No. 3 IN G.

OH! BEAUTIFUL STAR

Serenade

WORDS BY

OSCAR WILDE.

Music Composed

BY

LAWRENCE KELLIE.

SCHOTT & Cº
PUBLISHERS TO H.M. THE KING,
LONDON, W.
London.
ROBERT COCKS & Cº
MUSIC PUBLISHERS TO THE QUEEN & H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES,
New Burlington Street W.
New York, Novello & Cº 21, East 17th Street, Agents for the United States of America

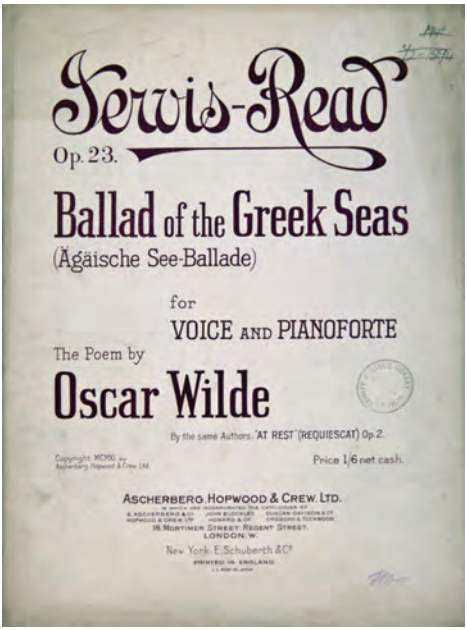
PRICE 4/-

PERMISSION IS GRANTED TO SING THIS SONG IN PUBLIC, WITH THESE WORDS ONLY.

illustration. The title page is unadorned, printed on white paper with black lettering. It lists 'National Music Co.' at Chicago, Illinois as publisher.

The 1890s saw a modest rise in musical adaptations of Wilde's works, continuing a trend that paired his literary creations with music. Two notable compositions from this period are the songs 'In the Forest'[30] (1891) by American composer Edwin Tilden (1823–1901) and 'Oh! Beautiful Star'[31] (1892) by English composer Lawrence Kellie (1862–1932), both arranged for voice and piano during Wilde's lifetime. Tilden, deeply inspired by Wilde's poetry, sent copies to Wilde, saying that the poem had profoundly influenced him.[32] 'Oh! Beautiful Star' was a setting by Kellie of Wilde's poem 'Under the Balcony', said to have been written by Wilde specifically for musical setting,[33] but omitting the second stanza. It was praised as 'much above the average'[34] in the *Saturday Review* and described as a 'fresh and clear song'[35] by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and was dedicated to soprano Liza Lehmann, an influential figure in late nineteenth-century English music. This connection foreshadowed Lehmann's own compositions in 1908 and 1911 as incidental music for recitations of Wilde's 'The Happy Prince' and 'The Selfish Giant'. In 1892, *The Poet and the Puppets*, a burlesque parody of *Lady Windermere's Fan* by Charles H. E. Brookfield with music by Jimmy Glover, brought musical elements to the stage.[36] This Comedy Theatre production, which premiered in May 1892, cleverly satirised Wilde's style, portraying him both as an author and as a flamboyant character. Glover's music included a song set to the Irish tune of 'St Patrick's Day', later revised after Wilde objected to a particular line.[37] As one of the musical parodies published during Wilde's lifetime, it skilfully blended humour with musical critique. Another significant composition from this period was the incidental music for the 1896 premiere of *Salomé* at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in Paris[38] composed by René Darlay, a young and relatively unknown composer of chansons. His music for Lina Munte's dance was described by a contemporary critic as having 'a curious rhythm, with an original melody, played on an out-of-tune piano and a flute which ignored the pulse.'[39] Beyond this description, little is known about the music accompanying the first portrayal of Wilde's *Salomé* as no copy of the score is known to survive. However, it set the stage for Richard Strauss's *Salome* (1905), which became the most celebrated musical adaptation of Wilde's work, influencing generations of composers and cementing Wilde's legacy in the world of music.

The musical adaptation of Wilde's poetry, which began during his lifetime, flourished throughout the twentieth century. Numerous compositions were created, with particular attention given by various composers to poems such as *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, 'The Harlot's House' and 'Requiescat'.



These adaptations highlight the richness of Wilde's oeuvre as a source of inspiration for composers, encompassing not only his poetry but also his novel, short stories, plays and his literary letter *De Profundis.* Returning to the first poem to receive musical attention, in 1911 British composer Harold Vincent Jervis-Read (1883–1945) included 'Ballad of the Greek Sea', based on 'Serenade (For Music)', in his *Songs for Voice and Piano with Poems by Oscar Wilde*, Op. 23, published in London by Ascherberg, Hopwood and Crew, Ltd. This work was later translated by Maurice Fanshawe into German as 'Ägäische See-Ballade', providing a rare twentieth-century example of the musical legacy of 'Serenade (For Music)'.

MUSICAL ADAPTATIONS OF POEMS BY OSCAR WILDE DURING HIS LIFETIME

Poem	Song	Composer	Publisher	Place	Date
To Helen (Serenade of Paris)	To Helen (Serenade of Paris)	Frederick H. Cowen	Pan Musical Supplement	London	1881
Serenade (For Music)	Oscar Wilde's Serenade	unknown	Brentano Brothers	New York	1882
Serenade (For Music)	Loved for Evermore	Edwin Christie	National Music Co.	Chicago	1883
In the Forest	In the Forest	Edwin Tilden	Miles and Thompson	Boston	1891
Under the Balcony	Oh! Beautiful Star	Lawrence Kellie	Robert Cocks & Co.	London	1892

LADY COME DOWN

In the 21st century, Wilde's 'Serenade (For Music)' resurfaced in popular culture through composer Charlie Mole's 2002 adaptation, which transformed the poem into the song 'Lady Come Down' for the soundtrack of Oliver Parker's film *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Music played a central role in Parker's vision for the film, as he explains:

> When we were building the world of the film, I always felt music would have a big role to play. I knew Rupert Everett could play spirited piano, and so I imagined the opening chase being underscored by Algy himself playing the score. Rupert, like Algy, is wonderfully stylish and mischievous in contrast to his sensible brother, Jack. Algy seems so modern and playful, and in discussion with my friend and regular collaborator, the composer Charlie Mole, we turned to jazz as the genre to explore. We're both fans of the wonderful work of Nino Rota. I sought out how to weave its character into the film. I liked the idea that even the servants play it. Musical lessons became an opportunity for Algy to flirt with Cecily.
>
> And then as I wanted to increase the playful romance and seduction in the countryside, I imagined the young men serenading. It seemed natural to turn to Wilde for the lyrics, and it was Charlie who suggested that particular poem. At first we wondered if the lyrics were too obscure, but then found some strong hooks within the language. Of course, 'Lady Come Down' suggested the geography and the blocking of the scene, and there was no shortage of 'marble stairs' in the intriguingly Italianate villa we chose for our location. As an aside, I always privately enjoyed the reference to the dark Aegean Sea, as in my mind the trip to the country always reminds me of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the lovers escape to the woods outside Athens . . .[40]

Mole's jazz-inspired score masterfully captures Wilde's wit and style, with the song 'Lady Come Down' enriching both the comedic and romantic aspects of the story. Instead of Wilde's original suggestion to whistle a popular British opera tune, Parker and Mole adapted 'Serenade (For Music)' into a playful jazz piece, repeating the refrain, 'O Lady mine, come down, come down'. The melody, introduced in Act III, underscores a crucial scene where John Worthing (Colin Firth's character) and Algernon 'Algy' Moncrieff (Everett's character) attempt to win back Gwendolen and Cecily after their real identities are exposed. Mole's adaptation, utilizing the first two verses of the poem, infuses the film with humour and charm. As Gwendolen and Cecily remain upstairs reading, Algernon and Jack perform 'Lady Come Down' in the garden, with Algernon playing a harpsichord carried by servants and Jack accompanying him on guitar. This whimsical staging,

including the antics of a mischievous dog, heightens the comedic tone. When the women retreat indoors, the music continues as the harpsichord is humorously relocated inside. After just two stanzas, Gwendolen and Cecily finally descend, leading to a light-hearted resolution. As Matilde María Olarte Martínez explains, the scene transitions from diegetic music – performed and heard by the characters – to non-diegetic orchestral accompaniment, adding emotional depth while maintaining the humour.[41] The song, far from being a stand-alone number, is intricately woven into the narrative, reinforcing the score's cohesion and resolving the romantic tension between the protagonists and their love interests. Introduced in Act I as part of a big-band performance in Algernon's kitchen, the song also features during the end credits, creating thematic unity. Mole's vibrant composition contrasts with the Victorian setting but remains true to Wilde's lyrical spirit, transforming 'Serenade (For Music)' into a pivotal moment with a burlesque twist. Ultimately, 'Lady Come Down' serves as a key narrative device, blending humour and romance while highlighting the timeless charm of Wilde's poetry.

Rupert Everett as Algy and Colin Firth as Jack in Oliver Parker's 2002 film version of *The Importance of Being Earnest*

In recent years, 'Serenade (For Music)' has inspired reinterpretations across diverse musical genres, from Colin Rudd's 2008 folk rendition on YouTube to Brazilian musician Fernanda Lyra's popular version on SoundCloud. American artist Darwin Prophet featured 'Serenade (For Music)' in the 2011 album *Oscar Wilde's Serenade*, blending Wilde's poetry

with contemporary rock/pop influences. Meanwhile, platforms like YouTube and TikTok have opened up new avenues for both professional and amateur musicians to share their takes on Wilde's work. In 2022, British composer Michael Maxwell Steer contributed a classical setting for women's voices and harp as part of a series of Wilde-inspired pieces, alongside 'Impression de Voyage' and 'Shelley's Tomb'. These recent adaptations highlight the enduring appeal of 'Serenade (For Music)' and its ability to resonate with modern audiences.

In the early 1890s, some ten years after the first three musical settings of 'Serenade (For Music)' Oscar Wilde was approached by Alfred H. Miles, who was compiling his ten-volume *The Poets and the Poetry of the Century* (1891–1897), in which he wanted to include a selection of Wilde's poems. Wilde replied to his request:

> You are quite at liberty to make any use of the poems you mention, with the exception of 'The Dole of the King's Daughter', the 'Ballade de Marguerite', the 'Serenade', and 'La Bella Donna'. These four I do not consider very characteristic of my work.[42]

Characteristic or not, the 1880 request for Oscar Wilde to provide lyrics for Cowen's melody marked the beginning of a remarkable tradition of transforming Wilde's literary creations into music. 'Serenade (For Music)' inspired additional compositions in the years that followed, reflecting an early recognition of the poetic qualities that make Wilde's work ideally suited for musical interpretation. This initial enthusiasm laid the foundation for a legacy of musical adaptations that has endured for nearly a century and a half. Composers and artists across genres – from classical to contemporary – have continued to find inspiration in Wilde's words. The journey of 'Serenade (For Music)', from Cowen's Victorian setting to modern reinterpretations by artists like Steer, Mole and Prophet, highlights the timeless and universal appeal of Wilde's oeuvre. This enduring engagement affirms Wilde's cultural legacy, illustrating how his poetic voice continues to inspire new creative expressions and enrich the world of music well into the twenty-first century.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Taylor Wright for sharing her research on early musical settings of 'Serenade'. I would also like to thank Sandra Leonard, Rachel Short and Elizabeth Adams, the Librarian of University College, Oxford, for their assistance with this article. The covers of the sheet music of the first two musical settings of 'Serenade (For Music)' by Cowen and Anonymous are reproduced by courtesy of the Master and Fellows of University College,

Oxford; the cover of ‘Loved For Evermore’ is reproduced by courtesy of Jeremy Mason; the covers of ‘In the Forest’ and ‘Oh! Beautiful Star’ are reproduced by courtesy of the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

Notes

1. Wider, 168

2. Tine Englebert, *Music for Wilde: An Annotated Listing of Musical Adaptations of Works by Oscar Wilde*: in ‘Musical adaptations’ at https://oscarwildesociety.co.uk/resources/ [retrieved 26 December 2024]. An earlier and more limited attempt to compile the musical adaptations of Wilde’s work can be found in Gooch and Thatcher, 809–823.

3. ‘Hence those tears’ – a line from the Roman playwright Terence’s play *Andria* (*The Woman from Andros*), 166 BC, in which a character explains that his son’s tears at a neighbour’s funeral are feigned for the benefit of the deceased’s attractive sister.

4. Mason, 171

5. *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 717

6. Wilde (2000), xi

7. Mason, 171

8. Mason, 173

9. Oscar Wilde, ‘The New Helen’, *Time: A Monthly Miscellany of Interesting and Amusing Literature*, July 1879, 400–2. See Wilde (2000) 106 & 272

10. Oscar Wilde, ‘The New Helen’, line 91 in Wilde (2000) 109

11. Oscar Wilde, untitled poem in Wilde (2000) 109

12. Wilde (2000) 272

13. Potts, 353

14. Spencer, 13–14

15. *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 717

16. Forman, liner-notes

17. Morris, Jr., 5

18. Morris, Jr., 109

19. *Poems by Oscar Wilde. Also, His Lecture on the English Renaissance*. The Seaside Library, LVIII. (1183), 19 January 1882. New York: George Munro, Publisher. See: https://www.danielpwilliford.com/wilde/bibliography/book/poems-lectures-on-the-english-renaissance-pr5821-a1-r4-1882/ [retrieved 26 December 2024].

20. Wilde (1999), 939: ‘Perhaps the most beautiful part of America is the West, to reach which, however, involves a journey by rail of six days, racing along tied to an ugly tin-kettle of a steam engine. I found but poor consolation for this journey in the fact that the boys who infest the cars and sell everything that one can eat – or should not eat – were selling editions of my poems vilely printed on a kind of grey blotting paper, for the low price of ten cents. Calling these boys on one side I told them that though poets like to be popular they desire to be paid, and selling editions of my poems without giving me a profit is dealing a blow at literature which must have a disastrous effect on poetical aspirants. The invariable reply that they made was that they themselves made a profit out of the transaction and that was all they cared about.’

21. Mason, 173

22. Mendelssohn, 288 n. 32

23. Robert Ross Memorial Collection: Ross Env b.10.iv: A set of notes (1 leaf,

manuscript) in Walter Ledger's hand: 'Serenade. Words & music by Oscar Wilde. N.Y. Brentano Brothers. 1882. Bought of Millard, 29 Dec. 1908 5/- This copy belonged to O.W. & was found recently by Ross in a box with other papers. He gave it to Millard.' Envelopes-containing-Miscellanea-28.11.24.pdf [retrieved 26 December 2024]

24. See Robert Ross Memorial Collection: Ross Env b.10.ii: Envelopes-containing-Miscellanea-28.11.24.pdf [retrieved 26 December 2024]

25. Mason, 173

26. A recording of the two settings of 1881 and 1882 made by Emelye Moulton (BA, Music) and the Library Assistant, Phil Burnett, is available for listening on the website of Oxford University: https://www.univ.ox.ac.uk/news/wilde-songs/ [published 16 January 2019; retrieved 26 December 2024]

27. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1dUdHpsmJw [retrieved 1 November 2024]

28. Wells, 415

29. Performing Arts Encyclopedia: https://www.loc.gov/search/?fa=contributor:christie,+edwin [retrieved 5 January 2025]

30. Poem *In the Forest* first published in the *Lady's Pictorial* (Christmas Number 1889). See Wilde (2000) 169–70. Song published by Miles and Thompson, Boston, USA, in 1891.

31. Setting of the poem *Under the Balcony*, which first appeared in J. S. Woods, ed., *Shakspearean Show Book*, Manchester: George Falkner & Sons, 1884. The Shakespearean Show was a charity fundraiser staged at the Royal Albert Hall on 29–31 May 1884. Wilde's poem was inspired by the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. See Wilde (2000) 164–5. Song published by Robert Cocks & Co, New Burlington Street, London, in 1892.

32. Mason, 104: 'Dear Sir, Some time since a copy of an illustrated magazine was sent to me from London, in which I found your most unique and original poem "In the Forest." Upon reading it the thought struck me at once that it might be set to music effectively. Whether or not I have been successful will be seen in the copies forwarded to you in the same mail with this letter, and which I trust you will do me the honor to accept, with my sincere regards.'

33. Mason, 198

34. 'New Music', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* (Volume 74), 10 September1892, 316

35. Back cover of *Tired. Sacred Song. Poetry by Miss Helen Burnside, Music Composed by Miss Lindsay.* The back cover promotes *New Songs by Lawrence Kellie*, published in London by Robert Cocks & Co., featuring *Under the Balcony* along with the following reviews: *St James's Gazette* – 'He has never written anything better,' and *Pall Mall Gazette* – 'A fresh and clear song in which the popular singer-composer is at his best.' Accessible at https://search.heritageburnaby.ca/link/museumartifact33091 [retrieved January 2025].

36. For the most comprehensive account of the text, as well as details about the cast, costumes, staging and music of the sole 1892 production, see Seeney.

37. Lawrence, 22

38. Schneider, 3. Darlay's name is also listed as Darlé both here and in other sources.

39. Quoted in Rowden, 10 n. 50: 'musique au rythme curieux, à la mélodie originale, jouée par un piano faux, et une flûte qui ignorait la mesure'.

40. Personal email of Oliver Parker, 30 September 2024. The arrangement can be seen on YouTube by searching on 'Colin Firth singing'.

41. Martínez, 658

42. Holland and Hart-Davis, 542, date unknown: [?1892–1893]

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ROBERT WHELAN

‘Every Theatre in London Has Its Own Audience’ Oscar Wilde at the Haymarket

Oscar Wilde was a passionate theatregoer who was keenly aware of the unique atmosphere of every theatre. In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891) he wrote:

> To certain theatres, such as the Lyceum and the Haymarket, the public seem to come in a proper mood. In both of these theatres there have been individual artists, who have succeeded in creating in their audiences – and every theatre in London has its own audience – the temperament to which Art appeals.[1]

The Lyceum under Henry Irving had come to be regarded as the national theatre in all but name, and the Haymarket, which enjoyed a unique prestige amongst the West End theatres, had been run by Wilde’s friend the actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree since 1887. The most famous productions of Tree’s management were Oscar Wilde’s plays *A Woman of No Importance* and *An Ideal Husband*. Tree produced *A Woman of No Importance* himself in 1893 and starred as Lord Illingworth. Oscar said Tree liked the part so much he got stuck in it and tried to be Lord

Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Lord Illingworth

16 Tite Street
Chelsea
20th April 1894

Dear Waller and Morell,

I hereby agree to assign to you the sole English and Australian rights in my play called "An Ideal Husband" on the following terms:-

1. It is understood you pay me the following fees:-

In the West end of London.

Nothing unless the gross receipts exceed £600.
6% on the gross receipts when they exceed £600.
7½% on the gross receipts when they exceed £900
10% on the gross receipts when they exceed £1,100
When the gross receipts exceed £1,500 you are to pay me 20% on any excess over £1500.

The above sums refer to a week of six performances. When more than six performances are given in one week the sum of £100 shall be added (for purposes of calculation) to the above sums for each extra performance.

2. In the English provinces and outlying London Theatres you are to pay me one third of any profits received by you.

3. In Australia you are at liberty to let the play on any terms exceeding 4% of the gross receipts,

The contract between Oscar Wilde, Lewis Waller and Harry Morell to produce *An Ideal Husband*. Reproduced by courtesy of the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles

which 4% you are to pay me and to divide with me any excess on 4%.

4. You are to arrange for the production of the play not later than February the first 1895 and I am to be consulted as to the theatre and as to the cast of the play. It is understood that I shall have no objection to its being produced at the Trafalgar or Shaftesbury or Court Theatres but that I should object to the Avenue Theatre.

Yours truly
(signed) Oscar Wilde

I hereby acknowledge the sum of five hundred pounds (£500) on account of future author's fees.

(signed) Oscar Wilde

Illingworth in real life, peppering his conversation with cynical epigrams. 'Every day dear Herbert becomes *de plus en plus oscarisé*,' Wilde observed. 'It is a wonderful case of Nature imitating Art.'[2] The play opened on 19 April and ran for 113 performances, closing on 16 August.

However, Tree did not produce *An Ideal Husband* because he had taken his company on tour to the USA and sub-let the theatre in his absence to the popular actor Lewis Waller and his business partner Harry Morell. Waller and Morell had already signed a contract with Wilde in the previous April to produce *An Ideal Husband* although they did not know at the time which theatre they would be using. As well as the statement of royalties that would be paid, the contract contains a clause that shows how particular Wilde was about the theatres in which his plays would be seen:

> You are to arrange for the production of the play not later than February the first 1895 and I am to be consulted as to the theatre and as to the cast of the play. It is understood that I shall have no objection to its being produced at the Trafalgar [now the Duke of York's] or Shaftesbury [now gone] or Court [now Royal Court] Theatres but that I should object to the Avenue Theatre.[3]

The Avenue, now called the Playhouse, has always had a reputation for being a hard theatre to succeed in. (The current production of *Cabaret* is very much an exception to the historical rule.) When the contract was drawn up none of the signatories knew that Beerbohm Tree was planning a US tour at the beginning of 1895 and that the Haymarket would be available, but Wilde must have been delighted when he learnt that his play would be seen in a theatre which created 'the temperament to which Art appeals'. *An Ideal Husband* opened at the Haymarket on 3 January 1895 and it was a great success, promising another long run. Sadly, events got in the way.

Lewis Waller as Lord Darlington and Florence West as Mrs Cheveley

Waller and Morell had the Haymarket from January to April, when Beerbohm Tree and his company would be returning from America. When it became obvious that the success of

An Ideal Husband meant that it could run beyond that, they made arrangements to transfer the production to the Criterion Theatre, run by Charles Wyndham. The last performance at the Haymarket was to be on Saturday 6 April and the first at the Criterion on Saturday 13 April. On Wednesday 3 April Wilde's ill-advised action for criminal libel against the Marquess of Queensberry began in the Central Criminal Court of the Old Bailey and was withdrawn on the Friday morning when it became clear that Queensberry's counsel was going to call Alfred Taylor's rent boys to give evidence. Wilde was arrested at 6:30 p.m. at the Cadogan Hotel on the same day and taken to Bow Street Police Station where he was held overnight. He appeared before the Bow Street Magistrate the next morning.

An enterprising reporter from the *St James's Gazette* went to the Haymarket Theatre and St James's Theatre (where *The Importance of Being Earnest* was running) to see what effect this was having on business. Morell showed him the poster advertising the transfer to the Criterion and the journalist pointed out that it made no mention of the author, which was unusual. 'Quite true,' replied Morell, 'The author's name has disappeared from the bills, nor does it figure any longer in the advertisements in the daily papers.' The journalist then saw George Alexander at the St James's who insisted that there was no problem, although he confirmed that Wilde's name had come out of the press advertisements and would be removed from the posters 'as soon as the printers can complete the alterations'.[4]

On Monday 8 April 1895 the *Times* published a statement issued by Waller and Morell on the previous Saturday to confirm that the transfer was going ahead:

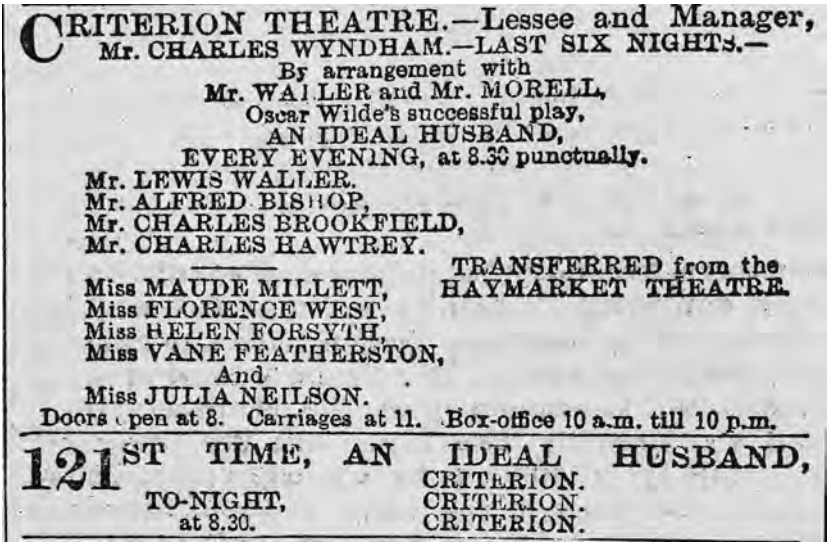
> As there appears to be some misconception as to whether we intend to carry out our arrangements entered into some time ago to transfer *An Ideal Husband* at the end of our tenancy of this theatre to another house, we should like to state that we do not feel justified in making large numbers of people suffer by altering our plans, and that we shall, therefore, adhere to our engagements, and play the piece at the Criterion on Saturday, April 13. *An Ideal Husband* is an entirely innocent play, which has been accepted by the public and the Press as an agreeable evening's entertainment, and has already been performed over 100 times.[5]

Once again, there was no mention of the author's name, although when the play opened at the Criterion it had been restored to the newspaper advertisements.[6]

With or without Wilde's name, the production could not survive the scandal and ran for only two weeks at the Criterion.

The design of the programme for *A Woman of No Importance* changed during the run of the play from a simple text-only arrangement to an architectural design incorporating a scene from *The School for Scandal* that was painted onto the drop curtain and a Latin motto that translates as: 'It is the height of art to conceal art.' This legend is of medieval origin but is often incorrectly attributed to Horace's *Ars Poetica* or Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*. Top image courtesy of Theatre Royal, Haymarket; bottom image courtesy of Jeremy Mason

Herbert Beerbohm Tree let the theatre to Lewis Waller and H. H. Morell while he was touring in the USA and they produced *An Ideal Husband*. They styled themselves on the programmes as Sole Managers, but Tree must have objected to this as he was still Lessee and Manager. The word 'Sole' had to be overprinted with green ink. Top image courtesy of Jeremy Mason; bottom image digitally restored by Paul Collicutt


CRITERION THEATRE.—Lessee and Manager,
Mr. CHARLES WYNDHAM.—LAST SIX NIGHTS.—
By arrangement with
Mr. WALLER and Mr. MORELL,
Oscar Wilde's successful play,
AN IDEAL HUSBAND,
EVERY EVENING, at 8.30 punctually.
Mr. LEWIS WALLER.
Mr. ALFRED BISHOP,
Mr. CHARLES BROOKFIELD,
Mr. CHARLES HAWTREY.
TRANSFERRED from the HAYMARKET THEATRE.
Miss MAUDE MILLETT,
Miss FLORENCE WEST,
Miss HELEN FORSYTH,
Miss VANE FEATHERSTON,
And
Miss JULIA NEILSON.
Doors open at 8. Carriages at 11. Box-office 10 a.m. till 10 p.m.
121ST TIME, AN IDEAL HUSBAND,
TO-NIGHT, at 8.30.
CRITERION.
CRITERION.
CRITERION.

The classified advertisement for *An Ideal Husband* in *The Times* of 22 April 1895 contains Oscar Wilde's name as author

Since then, as the table on pages 116–7 shows, the Haymarket has staged numerous productions of Oscar Wilde's works and can claim to be more closely associated with him than any other London theatre. Notable productions have included a modern-dress *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1923, directed by Allan Aynesworth who played Algy in the original production in 1895; Peter Hall's production of *An Ideal Husband* which had three runs at the theatre in 1996, 1997 and 1998; *Lady Windermere's Fan* in 2002 with real-life mother and daughter Vanessa Redgrave and Joely Richardson as Mrs Erlynne and Lady Windermere; and Kip Williams' cine-theatre reimagining of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 2024, with Sarah Snook playing all twenty-six parts, that broke box-office records for its weekly gross. Noel Coward described the Haymarket as 'not only the nicest theatre in London but probably the nicest in the world. It is neither too large nor too small, its acoustics are perfect and it is rich in tradition.'[7] Oscar Wilde is an important part of that tradition.

OSCAR'S GREATEST HIT

THE Haymarket can lay claim to the most successful production of an Oscar Wilde play ever in terms of a continuous run at one theatre: *Lady*

In 1995 Sir John Gielgud unveiled a plaque at the stage door of the Haymarket commemorating the 100th anniversary of the first performance of *An Ideal Husband*. He is seen here with Merlin Holland, Oscar Wilde's grandson

Windermere's Fan, directed by John Gielgud and designed by Cecil Beaton, which opened on 21 August 1945.

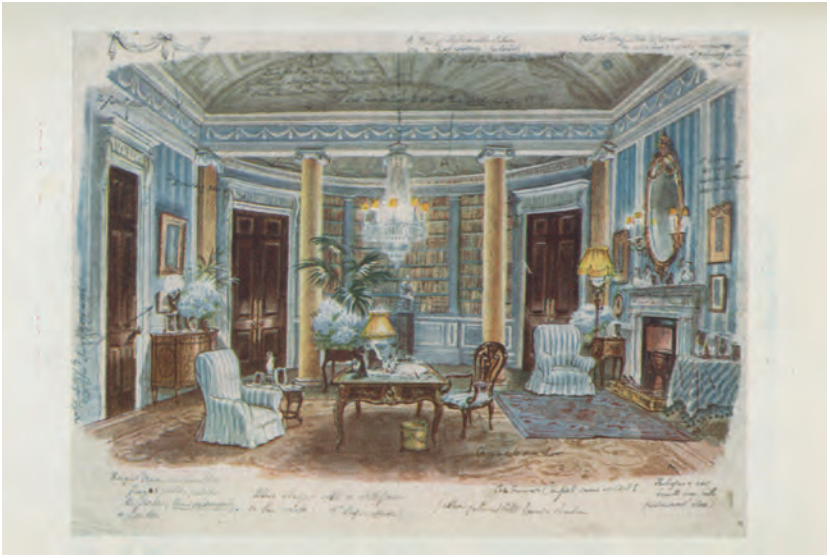
When World War II broke out in September 1939 the government ordered all theatres and places of public entertainment to close. This decision was quickly reversed as it was clear that keeping up people's morale during what could prove to be a long war was of vital importance and the theatre could play a part in that. Theatres reopened and remained open throughout the war although they were forced to operate within new parameters. Performances started earlier as people had to make their way home in the blackout and there were more matinees.

No one did more to provide the plays that would help audiences to carry on than Binkie (Hugh) Beaumont (1903–1973). In 1936 he went into partnership with Harry Tennent to form the producing management H. M. Tennent Ltd. In 1941 Tennent died so Beaumont assumed complete control, but without changing the name of the company or putting his own name anywhere on the publicity. He was an obsessively private man and as a result his influence over the London theatre scene is underestimated, but for more than thirty years he was the most powerful producer in the West End, who

could make or break anyone's career. His policy was to have as many plays as possible running in London at any given time with brilliant scripts, star-studded casts and the highest production values. His network of stars, directors, playwrights and theatres (especially the Haymarket, where he was in virtually full-time residence) gave him a degree of control over the theatrical landscape that has never been equalled.

In the early part of his career Beaumont formed a strong bond, personal and professional, with John Gielgud, who took him up-market culturally. Beaumont had little formal education and his interest in theatre was initially simply as a business, but Gielgud persuaded him to try the classics as well as modern plays. In 1943 Beaumont produced and Gielgud directed a revival of William Congreve's Restoration comedy *Love for Love* which opened at the Phoenix Theatre in April and then, on 9 August, moved into the Haymarket where it ran continuously for ten months. As usual with Tennent productions, it looked wonderful, with exquisite sets by Rex Whistler, and had a superb cast including, as well as Gielgud himself, Leslie Banks, Yvonne Arnaud, Isabel Dean and Rosalie Crutchley. Beaumont then persuaded Gielgud to stay at the Haymarket and produce a year-long repertory season that would include *Hamlet* (Gielgud's fourth appearance as the Dane), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (with Gielgud as Oberon), Somerset Maugham's *The Circle* and *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster, plus some extra performances of *Love for Love*.

While this repertory season was still running, Beaumont and Gielgud attended a dinner party in Prunier's Restaurant in St James's Street at which one of the other guests was Cecil Beaton. They were discussing the death of Rex Whistler, killed by a shellburst on his first day of active service with the Welsh Guards in Normandy, and the great success of the last show he had designed, a revival of Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* at the Westminster Theatre.[8] Beaumont thought that perhaps there was still unmet demand for epigrammatic comedies to cheer people up between the bombing raids, but it was too soon for another *Ideal Husband*, Gielgud had already directed and starred in the famous production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* with Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell and *A Woman of No Importance* was regarded as too creaky. That left *Lady Windermere's Fan*, which had not been seen in the West End since 1911 when George Alexander had revived his own original 1892 production at the St James's Theatre. Gielgud said he would direct it and Beaumont wondered about having Oliver Messel as designer. Cecil Beaton had a particular dislike of Oliver Messel, probably because both men specialised in nostalgic evocations of the elegance of a bygone age. (Kenneth Tynan, the acid-tongued critic, claimed that: 'Modern English décor, as we have smiled at it in many a Victorian revival, amounts to little more than a duel with icing-guns between Cecil Beaton and Oliver Messel.'[9])



Rex Whistler's designs for *Love for Love* (1943, top) and *An Ideal Husband* (1943, bottom)

THEATRE ROYAL
HAYMARKET

LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN

A Play in Four Acts

by

OSCAR WILDE

6D.

JOHN GIELGUD'S Production

Decor by CECIL BEATON

Programme

THEATRE ROYAL
HAYMARKET

Manager and Licensee STUART WATSON

EVENINGS at 6.45 p.m. Matinees at 2.30 p.m.

By arrangement with FREDERICK HARRISON TRUST LTD.
TENNENT PLAYS LTD. in association with C.E.M.A.

present

LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN

By OSCAR WILDE

LADY WINDERMERE	DOROTHY HYSON
PARKER	... STUART BULL
LORD DARLINGTON	GRIFFITH JONES
THE DUCHESS OF BERWICK ...	ATHENE SEYLER
LADY AGATHA CARLISLE	PATRICIA DICKSON
LORD WINDERMERE	GEOFFREY TOONE
MISS GRAHAM	... GILLIAN RAINE
SIR JAMES ROYSTON	... HARROP ALLIN
LADY JEDBURGH	... PHYLLIS RELPH
LADY PAISLEY	HILDA BRUCE-POTTER
LORD PAISLEY	THOMAS HUTCHESON
LADY PLYMDALE ...	GLADYS WYKEHAM-EDWARDS
MR. CHARLES DUMBY	DEERING WELLS
LADY STUTFIELD	DIANA MARSHALL
MRS. COWPER-COWPER	FELICITY GOWER
MR. HOPPER	... HUGH STEWART
LORD AUGUSTUS LORTON	MICHAEL SHEPLEY
MR. CECIL GRAHAM	DENYS BLAKELOCK
MRS. ERLYNNE	ISABEL JEANS
ROSALIE	HILDA BRUCE-POTTER
FOOTMEN	ANTONY MASSIE LESLIE SANDERS

Directed by JOHN GIELGUD

Decor by CECIL BEATON
The Play lit by WILLIAM CONWAY

Beaton therefore very quickly volunteered his services to design *Lady Windermere's Fan* and Beaumont agreed. After the meal Beaton walked down the Haymarket with Gielgud going over his ideas for an extravaganza of Edwardian elegance and, having got Gielgud's agreement, he drove home and spent an intense week coming up with designs for sets and costumes that would recreate an imagined lost world for which he entertained a lifelong and passionate nostalgia, although as he was born in 1904 he could scarcely remember it.[10] He described it as 'the great and glorious moment for which I had been waiting all my life'.[11]

The production opened in Manchester in March 1945 and toured for five months before coming into the Haymarket on 21 August. It was not part of the repertory season, it was intended for a continuous run, and Beaumont's biographer Richard Huggett described it as 'the first of Binkie's post war productions'[12] as the war in Europe was over and the atom bomb had fallen on Hiroshima two days before. It was a glamorous first night with George Alexander's widow telling everyone who would listen about her husband's 1892 production and Vyvyan Holland, the Wildes' youngest son, 'happily drawing twelve and a half per cent of the gross receipts, for the play was still in copyright and would be another five years'.[13]

The play had a strong cast and Gielgud was always a sympathetic director of Wilde's plays, but what really struck people was the beauty of the sets and costumes. Coming after years of wartime austerity, rationing and 'utility' clothing, the effect was overwhelming. Gielgud had to re-block the second act – Lady Windermere's ball – in order to give each female character a separate entrance, as every dress was getting a round of applause. Beaton's biographer Hugo Vickers described it as 'nothing less than a fashion parade'.[14] Isabel Jeans, who played Mrs Erlynne, had a reputation for being able to wear clothes better than any other woman on the London stage and her morning dress in Act Four, dyed to a shade devised by Beaton called Flamingo Pink, stopped the show every night. 'Never has a dramatist been better served than Wilde by Isabel Jeans,' gushed the author of a tribute in *Theatre World*. 'Wilde would be the first to pay tribute to this Haymarket "Mrs Erlynne" . . . Isabel Jeans conveys so much that Wilde left unsaid.'[15] But so did Cecil Beaton.

Lady Windermere's Fan ran for eighteen months at the Haymarket, closing on 8 February 1947 after 598 performances. It was replicated in America, starting in Santa Barbara on 23 August 1946, moving to San Francisco on 26 August and then on to Broadway where it opened at the Cort Theatre on 14 October 1946. The cast and director were different but the designs were the same. Beaton was so exhilarated by the triumph of the production that he wanted to be in it, taking the role of Cecil Graham in his one and only appearance on the professional stage. He only played the part

Isabel Jeans as Mrs Erlynne, costume and set designed by Cecil Beaton, photo by Cecil Beaton, Theatre Royal Haymarket 1945, Cecil Beaton Archive © Condé Nast

Décor for *Lady Windermere's Fan* by Cecil Beaton, Theatre Royal Haymarket, 1945, Cecil Beaton Archive © Condé Nast

for a few months as he had to return to England in January 1947 to design the costumes for Alexander Korda's film version of *An Ideal Husband*.

AH YES, I REMEMBER IT WELL

HAMLET describes actors as 'the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time' when the players arrive at Elsinore. 'After your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live,' he tells Polonius.[16] I have often thought that this relationship between actors and people in the wider society is quite similar to the relationship between theatregoers and actors. When I say 'theatregoers' I don't mean people whose involvement with the theatre consists of an annual visit to a pantomime while the children are small plus the occasional trip to see a musical that was running before they were born. I mean the serious, hardcore fanatics who can tell you what is on at every London theatre, who is in it and what they were in before. When two or three of these are gathered together they regale each other with the details of every show they have ever seen going back to childhood. People who struggle to recall the events of last week can tell you who was in the original cast of *The Chalk Garden* in 1956. I had reason to be grateful for this when I was writing this article.

Cecil Beaton was famous as a photographer before he was famous as a designer for stage and screen, so he usually took the production photographs

of his own shows. His archive is now managed by the magazine publishers Condé Nast so I approached them when I was searching for photographs of the 1945 Haymarket production of *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Katie Smith-Marriott, Condé Nast's Archive and Digital Collection Coordinator, could not have been more helpful. She told me there were two folders for the play marked 'London' and 'New York'. I said I was only interested in the London production, so Katie scanned all the photographs in that file and turned them into a pdf. About a third of the photographs were of the 1969 revival of the play at the Phoenix Theatre in which Coral Brown played Mrs Erlynne. There was no connection between this and the Haymarket production apart from the fact that Beaton designed them both, but the designs were different. However I became suspicious of the other photographs when I spotted several of Beaton as Cecil Graham, a part he only took over in America. I had the programme for the Haymarket production but I couldn't be sure if the people in the photographs were members of the London cast as, although I have been going to the West End theatres for several decades, 1945 is a bit early even for me. The Haymarket cast was a strong one but none of the actors went on to become film stars with the exception of Athene Seyler who played the Duchess of Berwick, and there were no photographs of her.

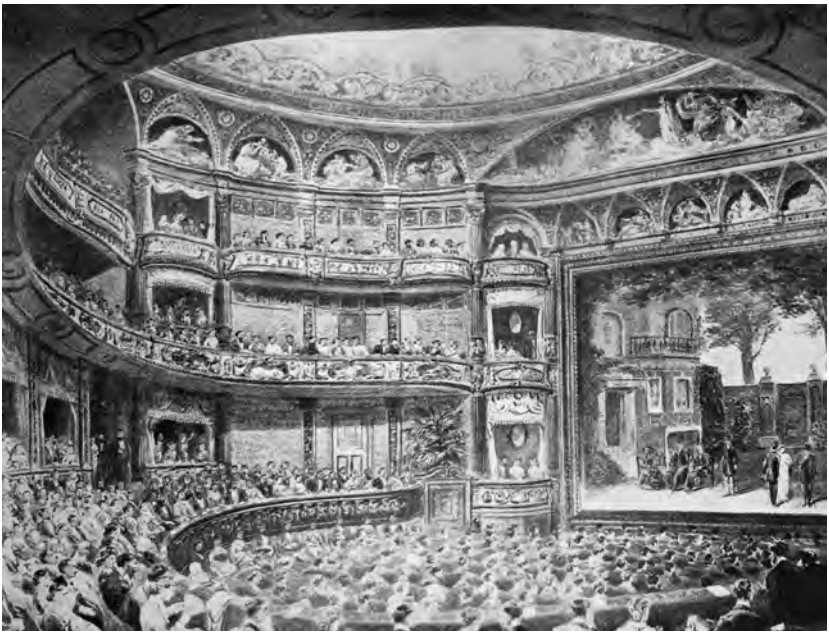
Fortunately for me, my friend Bryan Richardson, now ninety-four, saw the Haymarket production as a schoolboy and Bryan has perfect recall when it comes to actors' names and faces. I therefore took my laptop down to Guildford and scrolled through the scans with him. He was able to assert, without fear of contradiction, that none of the photographs were of the London production. When I passed this on to Katie she very kindly went through the 'New York' folder and found the photograph reproduced on page 109 which has 'Isabel Jeans' written on the back.

> Let fame, which all hunt after in our lives,
> Live registered upon our brazen tombs.[17]

Or at least in the memories of theatregoers.

A NOTE ON THE BANCROFT PICTURE FRAME

When Herbert Beerbohm Tree was running the Haymarket he was working with an auditorium that had been built for Squire and Marie Bancroft when they took over the theatre in 1879. The original 1821 auditorium was decayed and old-fashioned, so the Bancrofts tore it out and started again. Their architect, C. J. (Charles James) Phipps, was the most experienced theatre architect of his time so he was a natural choice for the job. He created for his clients an auditorium that was both beautiful and comfortable and which had a big golden picture frame around the proscenium. It symbolised the idea,



The Bancroft auditorium on its opening night of 31 January 1880. The picture frame can be seen with its original four sides

widespread at the time, that the relationship of audience-members to actors was the same as that of a spectator to a painting: they were looking into an imaginary world which was quite different from the real world they were sitting in. The frame formed a liminal divide between these two worlds. Unfortunately it was quickly discovered that the bottom bar of the frame was muffling the sound of the orchestra who were sitting underneath the stage so it was removed.

In 1896 Tree sold the lease of the Haymarket to his business manager Frederick Harrison because he had raised enough money to build his own theatre – Her Majesty's on the other side of the road. Harrison continued to use the Bancroft auditorium for eight years until he decided to tear it out and replace it with the present auditorium which gave him more seats in the stalls and dress circle – the most expensive parts of the house. The only part of the Bancroft auditorium that he preserved in the new structure was the golden picture frame which had become iconic, although it remained the three-sided frame left after the removal of the lower bar. It is still there, which means that Wildeans watching Kip Williams' production of *The Picture of Dorian*

The restored four-sided picture frame created for *Waiting for Godot* in 2024

Gray in 2024 were seeing it through the frame which surrounded the first performances of *A Woman of No Importance* and *An Ideal Husband* so many years before.

Towards the end of 2024 the Haymarket presented James Macdonald's production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* for which Macdonald asked his designer, Rae Smith, to recreate the bottom bar of the picture frame – although he thought it was a creation rather than a recreation as he didn't know its history. Smith took silicon moulds from the existing frame and the lower bar was moulded in polystyrene. The frame was brilliantly lit throughout the performance, partly to emphasise the contrast between the rich decoration of the Haymarket auditorium and the bleak world inhabited by Estragon, Vladimir, Lucky and Pozzo, and partly because the reflection of the light from the gold paint created a slight 'blinding' effect, making the darkness behind it more dense, as if it extends into infinity. The bottom bar had to be removed after the run of *Godot* as it was blocking access to the under-stage storage area, but it has been put into store, ready to be brought out again when a director needs it.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sir Leonard Blavatnik, Danny Cohen, Nigel Everett and Mark Stradling for allowing me to access the archive of the Theatre Royal Haymarket and Steve MacGuire for his help with the photograph of the restored picture frame. I would also like to thank Katie Smith-Marriott, Archive and Digital Collection Coordinator at Condé Nast, for help with picture research in the Cecil Beaton archive; Bryan Richardson for sharing his pin-sharp memories of Lady Windermere at the Haymarket eighty years ago; Paul Collicutt for digital retouching; Vanessa Heron and Anne Anderson for help with the images; and Iain Ross for the Latin translation.

Notes

1. Wilde (2007) 257–8

2. Pearson, 71

3. The contract stills exists and forms part of the collection of the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library in Los Angeles.

4. 'Arrest of Oscar Wilde', *Western Mail*, 6 April 1895, 6 quoted in Bristow, 150

5. 'Haymarket Theatre', *The Times*, 8 April 1895, 10. *An Ideal Husband* had been performed 111 times at the Haymarket and received 15 further performances at the Criterion making a total of 116 performances.

6. I have been unable to find any surviving poster for *An Ideal Husband* either at the Haymarket or the Criterion so it is not

possible to say if Wilde's name was appearing on the posters at the Criterion.

7. Coward, 238

8. After Whistler's death Beaton was lavish in his praise of a man who, had he lived, would have been a close rival. He described Whistler's style as 'magic realism . . . A strange perfume wafted down the corridors of past centuries . . . In *An Ideal Husband*, the combination of ceremonious Georgian rooms with absurd Victorian furnishings caught the style and wit of the dramatist . . . Whistler's production of *An Ideal Husband* was designed in his army tent, and the drawings sent by mail for execution.' (Cecil Beaton [1950] 'Rex Whistler 1905–1944', *The Masque Library*, London: The Curtain Press.)

9. Spencer, 48

10. Gielgud almost immediately began to have reservations about moving the action of the play forward from the Victorian to the Edwardian era and wrote to Beaton that: '. . . we shall make a very great mistake if we alter the period of the play by more than a very little. The play is so very definitely a Victorian story that I think we should be much blamed if we take it out of its proper setting.' (Letter from John Gielgud to Cecil Beaton, 23 February 1945, in Mangan, 81) Cecil Beaton paid little attention to these concerns. 'He liked to get his own way,' Gielgud remembered. 'Both he and Oliver Messel were terrible *prima donnas*.' (Vickers, 300). However, when Beaton designed the same play in 1969 at the Phoenix Theatre it was more definitely Victorian.

11. Spencer, 34

12. Huggett, 356

13. Ibid.

14. Vickers, 300

15. Eric Johns (1945) 'My Lady's Dress', *Theatre World*, October 1945, 18

16. *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, act II, scene 2, 520–2

17. *Love's Labours Lost* by William Shakespeare, act I, scene 1, 1–2

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Appendix: Productions of Oscar Wilde's Works at the Theatre Royal Haymarket

DATE	PLAY	DIRECTOR	CAST	FIRST PERFORMANCE
1893	A Woman of No Importance	Herbert Beerbohm Tree	Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Lord Illingworth, Mrs Bernard-Beere as Mrs Arbuthnot, Rose Leclercq as Lady Hunstanton, Fred Terry as Gerald Arbuthnot, Julia Neilson as Hester Worsley	PREMIERE 19th April
1895	An Ideal Husband	Lewis Waller	Lewis Waller as Sir Robert Chiltern, Florence West as Mrs Cheveley, Charles Hawtrey as Lord Goring	PREMIERE 3rd January
1923	The Importance of Being Earnest	Allan Aynesworth	Leslie Faber as John Worthing, Margaret Scudamore as Lady Bracknell	21st November
1945	Lady Windermere's Fan	John Gielgud	Isabel Jeans as Mrs Erlynne, Geoffrey Toone as Lord Windermere, Griffith Jones as Lord Darlington, Dorothy Hyson as Lady Windermere, Athene Seyler as the Duchess of Berwick	21st August
1968	The Importance of Being Earnest	Robert Chetwyn	Daniel Massey as Jack Worthing, John Stride as Algernon Moncrieff, Flora Robson as Miss Prism, Isabel Jeans as Lady Bracknell	8th February
1992	A Woman of No Importance	Philip Prowse	Carol Royle as Mrs Arbuthnot, John Carlisle as Lord Illingworth	24th June
1996	An Ideal Husband	Peter Hall	Martin Shaw as Lord Goring, Anna Carteret as Mrs Cheveley, Michael Denison as the Earl of Caversham, David Yelland as Sir Robert Chiltern, Dulcie Gray as Lady Markby	11th January

DATE	PLAY	DIRECTOR	CAST	FIRST PERFORMANCE
1997	Lady Windermere's Fan	Braham Murray	Gabrielle Drake as Mrs Erlynne	25th March
	An Ideal Husband	Peter Hall	Martin Shaw as Lord Goring, Kate O'Mara as Mrs Cheveley, Simon Ward as Sir Robert Chiltern, Michael Denison as the Earl of Caversham, Dulcie Gray as Lady Markby	30th July
1998	An Ideal Husband	Peter Hall	Christopher Cazenove as Lord Goring, Susannah York as Mrs Cheveley, Richard Todd as the Earl of Caversham, Barbara Murray as Lady Markby	25th September
1999	The Importance of Being Earnest	Christopher Morahan	Patricia Routledge as Lady Bracknewll, Adam Godley as John Worthing, Jonathan Cecil as Canon Chasuble	4th August
2002	Lady Windermere's Fan	Peter Hall	Vanessa Redgrave as Mrs Erlynne, Joely Richardson as Lady Windermere, Jack Davenport as Lord Darlington, David Yelland as Lord Windermere, Googie Withers as the Duchess of Berwick	14th February
2003	A Woman of No Importance	Adrian Noble	Rupert Graves as Lord Illingworth, Samantha Bond as Mrs Arbuthnot, Joanne Pearce as Mrs Allonby, Julian Ovenden as Gerald Arbuthnot, Rachel Stirling as Hester Worsley	10th September
2024	The Picture of Dorian Gray	Kip Williams	Sarah Snook	5th February

NOTE: There was one matinee performance of John Gielgud's production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* with Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell on 11 April 1946. It was to raise funds for the King George's Pension Fund for Actors and Actresses.

FÁBIO WAKI

An Unpublished Letter by Oscar Wilde Found in Brazil

The XIX Symposium of Irish Studies in South America, organised by the Brazilian Association of Irish Studies, took place at the University of São Paulo from 14 to 16 October 2024. During this event, Peter O'Neill, an independent researcher, informed me of the existence of a letter by Oscar Wilde to Dame Millicent Fawcett (1847–1929) currently held at the Biblioteca Nacional in Rio de Janeiro.[1] Mr O'Neill said it came to light in March 2023 in the context of the exhibition *Irish in Brazil/Irlandeses no Brasil*, of which he was the intellectual author and a co-curator, on display at the library from 16 March to 16 June 2023. The goal of the exhibition, organised by the Consulate General of Ireland in São Paulo with support of the Biblioteca Nacional, was to showcase material from the library's collection about the physical and intellectual presence of the Irish in Brazil since 1578, the year Thomas Field (1549–1625), an Irish priest and explorer, first set foot on its shores. Upon examining Wilde's letter at the Biblioteca Nacional, I realised it was likely an unpublished piece by the writer, a suspicion I soon confirmed by comparing it with his other letters and manuscripts. For this confirmation, I specifically relied on the letters compiled in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (2000), edited by Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis, as well as on the manuscripts held at the British Library in London, the Morgan Library in New York, the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, and the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library in Los Angeles.

DESCRIPTION AND TRANSCRIPTION

Oscar Wilde's letter housed today at the Biblioteca Nacional in Rio de Janeiro is a four-page paper manuscript, unbound, 7in × 8.85in (18cm × 22.5cm), written in black calligraphic handwriting, no images or marginalia by the author, circular stamps and minor pencil marginalia by the library. Wilde's address, 16 Tite Street – Chelsea S.W., is printed in a black letterhead at the top of the first page, while his signature can be clearly read at the

bottom of the last one. The letter bears no date, but it was probably written between May and July 1887 (see below).

This letter is included in an Autograph Album (BNMS Reg. 50/1274) purchased by Luiz Leopoldo Brício de Abreu (1903–70) from a man named Carlos Ribeiro in Brazil on 15 September 1950 for Cr$ 30,000.

Brício de Abreu, one of the most influential men of letters in mid-twentieth century Rio de Janeiro, was notable for his role as chief editor of *Dom Casmurro* (1937–44), a literary magazine that, despite its left-wing leanings, remained one of the most significant cultural publications during the Estado Novo (1937–46). The name Carlos Ribeiro, exceedingly common in Brazil, probably refers to the original owner of Livraria São José, a bookshop in Rio de Janeiro celebrated as the oldest in the city and as home to one of the largest rare books collections in Latin America until its closure in 2021 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no known provenance for the letter before it came into the possession of Carlos Ribeiro.

16. TITE STREET.
CHELSEA. S.W.

Dear Mrs Fawcett.
Allow me to thank you for your kind promise to write. Any subject you choose is sure to be interesting.

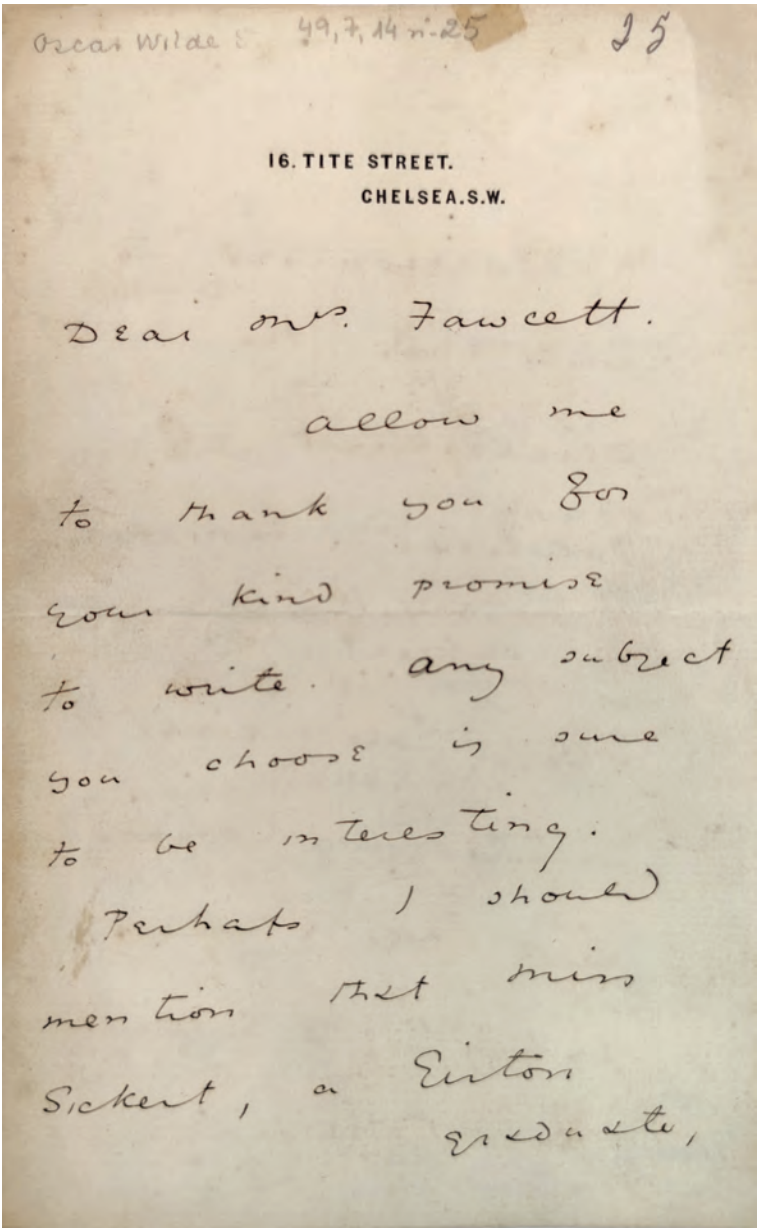
Perhaps I should mention that Miss Sickert, a Girton graduate, has promised to write on the Development of Political Economy, a subject on which she gives lectures in connection with the University Extension Scheme.

I would esteem it a great favour, and so would Messrs Cassell & Co. the proprietors of the magazine, if you would favour us from time to time with any suggestions that may occur to you – or send me the names of any ladies whose work could be of value, or who would wish to have an opening in literature. The magazine will always be open to any of your friends or protegés, and I am anxious to get some young writers, especially any who have received a University Education—

Believe me
yours very truly
Oscar Wilde

CONTEXT

When Oscar Wilde took on the role of editor of *The Lady's World* in 1887, one of his first changes was to rename it *The Woman's World*. While the original title suggested a magazine tailored for elite women, with content centred around fashion and household management, the new one indicated it

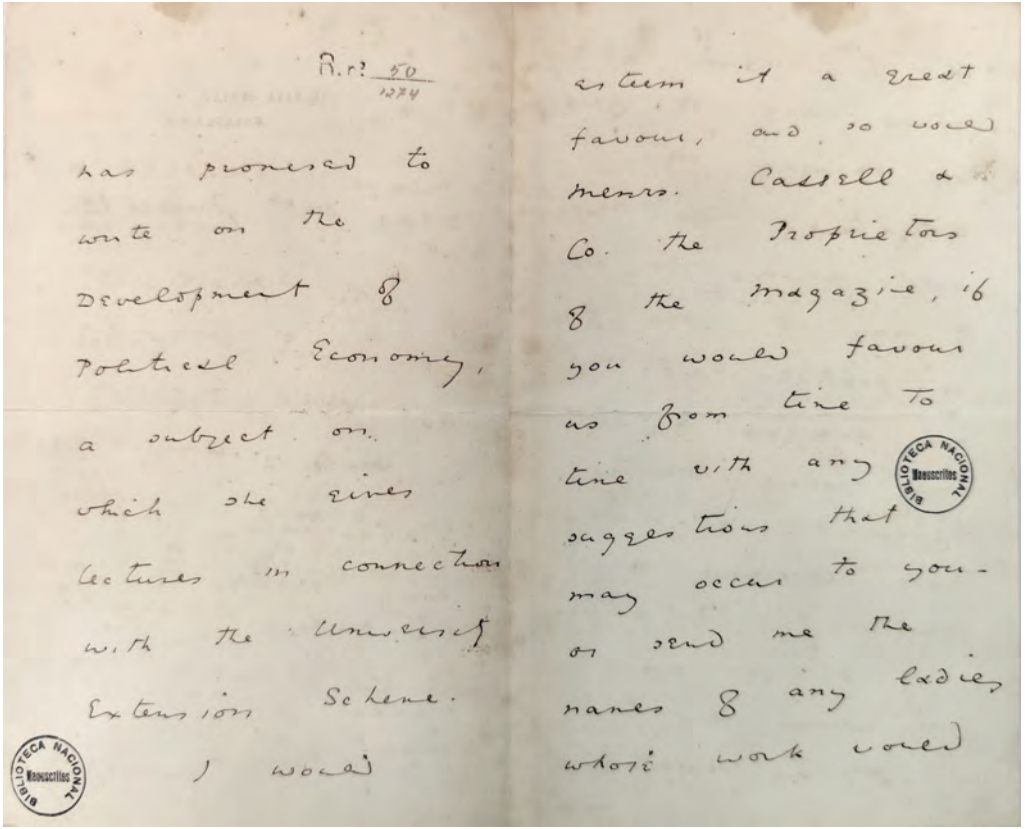


Oscar Wilde 49,7,14 n-25 25

16. TITE STREET.
CHELSEA.S.W.

Dear Mrs. Fawcett.

allow me
to thank you for
your kind promise
to write any subject
you choose is sure
to be interesting.
Perhaps I should
mention that miss
Sickert, a Slade
graduate,



R.I. 50
1874

has promised to
write on the
Development &
political Economy,
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which she gives
lectures in connection
with the University
Extension Scheme.
I would

esteem it a great
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may occur to you -
or send me the
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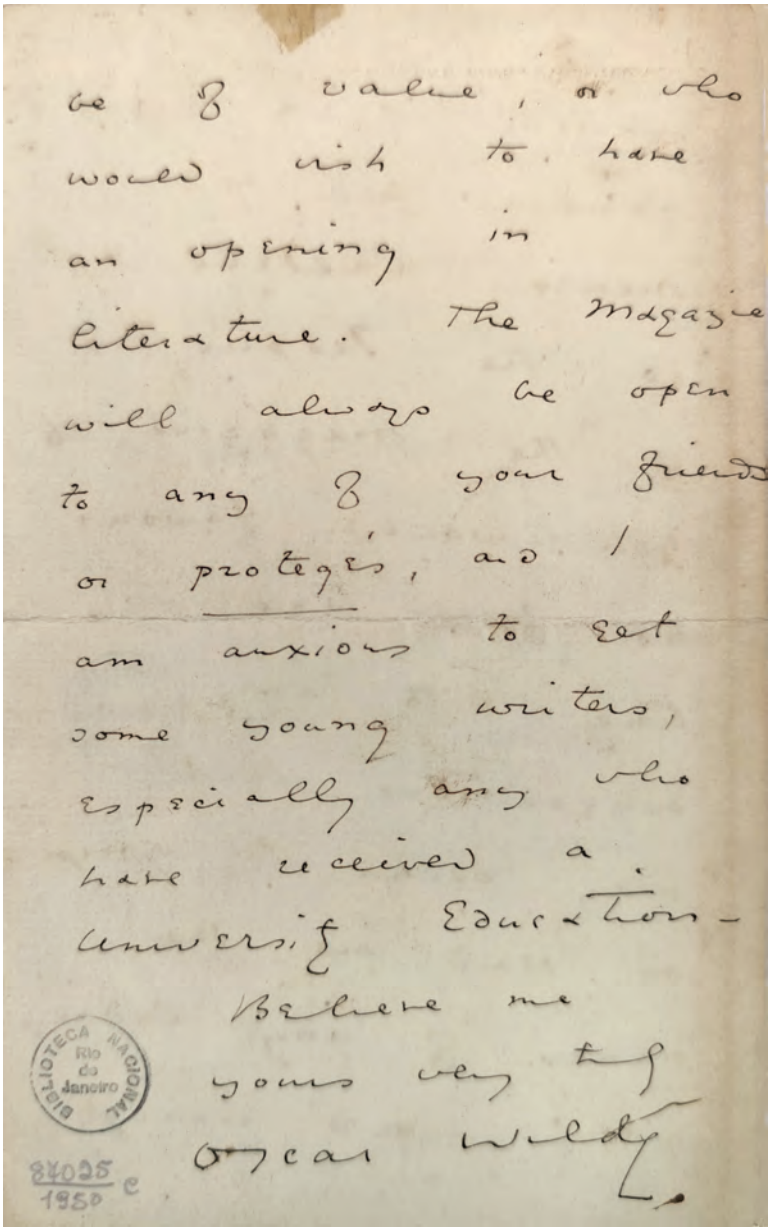
whose work would



be of value, or who would wish to have an opening in literature. The Magazine will always be open to any of your friends or protegés, and I am anxious to get some young writers, especially any who have received a University Education.

Believe me
Yours very truly
Oscar Wilde

would now be targeted at a broader female readership, encompassing topics such as society, politics, ethics, education, work and art. This transformation of the periodical from what Cassell & Co. originally planned as a 'new high-class magazine for ladies' into what Wilde conceived as a new 'organ of women of intellect, culture, and position'[2] was also evident in the modifications made to its front cover. While the original layout featured an idealised woman admiring herself in a hand-held mirror, a book only casually placed in her other hand, the new one would now headline a list of contributors, showcasing within a frame of siren-caryatids the women who had authored articles for that edition. Wilde's project, therefore, was to redesign both the form and content of the magazine to explicitly connect the authors' names to their perspectives on issues that resonated with the interests of an increasingly complex class of women in *fin-de-siècle* reality. This approach was truly bold for its time. Not only did it acknowledge women as competent individuals capable of sharing their own experiences of and opinions about modern society, but it also recognised the ever-growing stratification of this society in ways that could no longer be understood solely from the perspective of its higher echelons.

Eleanor Fitzsimons writes about Wilde's conception of the magazine:

> Under Wilde's editorship, *The Woman's World* featured regular columns and commissioned articles, almost all of them written by identifiable rather than anonymous women. [. . .] Authors were identified by their forename and surname at the bottom of each article, with no mention of title or marital status, following the convention used by professional writers, who were generally men. This put women writers on a level with their male counterparts, allowing them a status not often offered to them.[3]

Wilde outlines this plan in his first response to Thomas Wemyss Reid (1842–1905), general manager of Cassell & Co. who in April 1887 had formally invited him to take on the post of editor of the magazine. He first writes about his conception of the publication as a whole:

> It seems to me that at present it is too feminine, and not sufficiently womanly. No one appreciates more fully than I do the value and importance of Dress, in its relation to good taste and good health: indeed the subject is one that I have constantly lectured on before Institutes and Societies of various kinds, but it seems to me that the field of the mundus muliebris, the field of mere millinery and trimmings, is to some extent already occupied by such papers as the Queen and the Lady's Pictorial, and that we should take a wider range, as well as a high standpoint, and deal not merely with what women wear, but with what they think, and what they feel. The Lady's World should be made the recognised organ for the expression of women's

> opinions on all subjects of literature, art, and modern life, and yet it should be a magazine that men could read with pleasure, and consider it a privilege to contribute to.

He then explains his ideas on how to reconstruct it:

> We should get if possible the Princess Louise and the Princess Christian to contribute to it: an article from the latter on needlework for instance in connection with the Art School of which she is President would be very interesting. Carmen Sylva and Madame Adam should be got to write: Mrs Julia Ward Howe of Boston should be invited to contribute, as well as some of the other cultured women of America, while our list should include such women as Lady Archibald Campbell, a charming writer, Lady Ardilaun, who might give us some of her Irish experiences, Mrs Jeune, Miss Harrison, Miss Mary Robinson, Miss Olive Schreiner, the author of South African Farm; Lady Greville, whose life of Montrose is a very clever monograph, Miss Dorothy Tennant, Lady Verney, Lady Dilke, Lady Dufferin, Lady Constance Howard, Matthew Arnold's daughter, Lady Brassey, Lady Bective, Lady Rosebery, Lady Dorothy Nevill, who could write on the Walpoles, Mrs Singleton (Violet Fane), Lady Diana Huddleston, Lady Catherine Gaskell, Lady Paget, Miss Rosa Mulholland, Hon Emily Lawless, Lady Harberton, Mrs Charles McLaren, Lady Pollock, Mrs Fawcett, Miss Pater (sister of the author of *Marius*) and others too numerous to name in a letter.[4]

Wilde agreed terms with Cassell & Co. in May 1887 and Reid wanted to start paying him from 1st June, ready for the appearance of the first issue edited by him in November. However, Wilde asked that his pay be backdated to 1st May as he was already doing a great deal of work for the magazine,[5] much of which involved writing letters to the women he had mentioned in his proposal and others, asking them to contribute articles. In his letter to Fawcett, Wilde mentions that he has already invited Helena Sickert to contribute an article, and Holland and Hart-Davis propose a date for this letter of 27 May 1887.[6] He also wrote to Eleanor Sidgwick (1845–1913), campaigner for women's suffrage and higher education who would later serve as principal of Newnham College at the University of Cambridge (1892–1910):

> [July 1887?] 16 Tite Street
>
> Dear Mrs Sidgwick, I am very anxious to have your assistance in a scheme I am engaged in. I have been asked by Messrs Cassell to edit one of their monthly magazines and am anxious to make it the recognised organ through which women of culture and position will express their views. Mrs Fawcett, Miss Thackeray, Lady Dorothy

> Nevill, Lady Wentworth, Miss Orme, Mrs Francis Jeune, Lady Archibald Campbell and others have promised to write, and I hope you will allow me to add your name to the list of contributors, and, when you have leisure, write an article on any modern subject, or indeed on any subject you select.[7]

As Wilde tells Sidgwick that Mrs Fawcett has already agreed to write for *The Woman's World*, his letter to Fawcett must have been written after 27 May (the date of the letter to Helena Sickert proposed by Holland and Hart-Davis) and before July 1887, the proposed date for the letter to Sidgwick.[8] Furthermore, the letter to Fawcett is clearly a response to one he has already received from her agreeing to his proposal, so there were at least two other letters before this of which the location is unknown.

DAME MILLICENT GARRETT FAWCETT

Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett was an English feminist, activist and writer, who became particularly known in Victorian society for her leading role in the women's suffrage movement. She began her activism in 1868, with the London Suffrage Committee, and delivered her first public speech in 1869, at a women's suffrage meeting in this city. In 1870, her connection to Oscar Wilde became evident through her association with Sir William Wilde (1815–76) and Lady Jane Wilde (1821–96) during a suffrage meeting in Dublin after which she spoke at the Wildes' house on Merrion Square in Dublin. She later maintained her relationship with Lady Wilde in London, where they attended further gatherings focused on women's suffrage and political participation.[9] In 1888, the year in which her article appeared in *The Woman's World*, Millicent Fawcett and Constance Wilde were both on the Committee of Women 'formed in connection with the international Peace and Arbitration Society'.[10] This close association and shared interests probably influenced her decision to accept Wilde's invitation to contribute an article to the magazine.

Gillian Wearing's statue of Millicent Fawcett (2018) was the first statue of a woman to be erected in Parliament Square

Fawcett led the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies from 1897 to 1919, frequently suggesting nonviolent initiatives for legislative reforms to secure women's voting rights. Her arguments often challenged tired contrary claims such as that women's physical differences made them unfit for political participation. She refuted these claims by dismissing the idea that physical combat should be a prerequisite for political involvement, emphasising, instead, the complementary roles of men and women in society and their shared responsibility for the nation's welfare. Her reasoning was that women's perspectives and contributions were essential for balanced and effective governance precisely because they so often contrasted with those of their male counterparts.

Fawcett also championed the political involvement of women through organisations such as the Primrose League and Women's Liberal Associations, emphasising their growing power to influence political discourse and election outcomes. Interestingly, she noted that, although political corruption was typically driven by men, women were often compelled to shoulder the financial burdens that resulted from it, all while being denied the very voting rights these men enjoyed.

Fawcett's advocacy for women's suffrage extended to global issues, tackling oppressive practices in places like British-controlled India, where women were often called upon to challenge injustices such as child marriage. This perspective reflected her conviction in the universal applicability of women's rights and the moral responsibility of English women to influence reforms in foreign communities.

Also an advocate for equal rights in education, Fawcett co-founded Newnham College at the University of Cambridge in 1871, furthering higher education opportunities for a growing class of women in the country. In his letter, Wilde seems especially interested in her work on women's education as a topic for the magazine, but her contribution would eventually focus on her broader interest in women's political rights.

Fawcett's article 'Women's Suffrage', which appeared in the November 1888 edition of *The Woman's World*, was a lightly edited transcript of a paper Fawcett had delivered at a meeting of the Cambridge Women's Suffrage Association at the Guildhall on Wednesday 16 February 1887.[11] It offered a strong critique of the exclusion of women from political enfranchisement, describing it as both an 'absurdity' and an 'anomaly'. She argues that, while men of all capabilities, including uneducated men, are normally granted the right to vote, women, regardless of their intelligence, responsibility, contribution or education, are denied this basic right, even when they actively contribute to society. She ultimately advocates for incremental reforms of truly realistic nature, such as the Women's Suffrage Bill, which sought to enfranchise female householders.

A distinctive aspect of her perspectives on the advancement of women's rights, as evident in this essay, is in fact their pragmatism. Her ideas ultimately gravitate around the idea that granting women the right to vote is less about fairness and more about challenging laws unjust to women. While fairness may be a moral premise too abstract to yield tangible results, challenging unjust laws inevitably leads to the reorganisation of society into a more beneficial and productive collective structure.

Fawcett was throughout her life a tireless advocate for equality, education and justice, especially as a pathway to a more effective enfranchisement of women as integral members of society. Her efforts culminated in significant recognitions, including her appointment as Dame Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire (GBE) in 1925 and her memorial in Westminster Abbey. In 2018, she became the first woman honoured with a statue in Parliament Square, a testament to her enduring legacy in the fight for women's rights.

CONCLUSION

Oscar Wilde's letter to Dame Millicent Fawcett, recently found in Brício de Abreu's manuscript collection at the Biblioteca Nacional in Brazil, confirms Wilde's relationships with important figures in Victorian society, sheds new light on his work as a magazine editor, reaffirms his commitment to women's interests, and hints at the possible existence of yet other letters that could further help reconstruct the mosaic of his life. This manuscript, however, is not the first one to come to light in connection with Brazilian sponsors.

In 2008, Lúcia Moreira Salles (?–2009), widow of businessman Walther Moreira Salles (1912–2001), gifted a collection of Wilde's letters and manuscripts to the Morgan Library & Museum in New York. This volume compiles messages Wilde exchanged with Alfred Douglas (1870–1945) along with early versions of several of his shorter prose works. Despite its remarkable content, however, few Brazilian scholars seem to be aware of its provenance and existence.

It is widely recognised in Brazilian literary studies today that Wilde deeply influenced writers such as João do Rio (1881–1921) and Mário de Andrade (1893–1945),[12] both of whom drew inspiration from his works and used them as a creative resource to reaffirm their homosexuality within Brazilian society. Still, his letter in Rio de Janeiro and his manuscripts in New York indicate that the active role played by Brazilian collectors in bringing his literature into Brazilian culture remains an unexplored subject. His letter has been housed at the Biblioteca Nacional for more than seventy years but has only recently been recognised as a subject of scholarly interest. Similarly, his manuscripts have been housed at the Morgan Library for nearly two

decades, yet only a handful of Wildean scholars, even in Brazil, are currently aware of their preservation.

Tracing the exact origins of Wilde's writings is not always possible, but their eventual acquisition by figures such as Brício de Abreu and Moreira Salles highlights his lasting impact as an artist within cultural circles reaching as far afield as Latin America. This article therefore seeks to bring to light the discovery of Wilde's letter in Brazil while emphasising how this finding also exposes the need for further investigation into the influence of his literature and its enduring presence in cultures beyond his own.

Acknowledgements

My research would not have been possible without the invaluable support of the University of São Paulo, the W. B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies, the Brazilian Association of Irish Studies, the Embassy of Ireland in Brazil, the Consulate General of Ireland in São Paulo, the Biblioteca Nacional in Rio de Janeiro, and the Foundation for Research Support of the State of São Paulo (FAPESP). I am particularly grateful to Peter O'Neill, Prof Laura Izarra (USP), and Prof Tarso do Amaral (UFF) as well as the staff of the Biblioteca Nacional. My thanks are also due to Merlin Holland, for agreeing to the publication of the letter, to Joseph Bristow and Eleanor Fitzsimons for helpful suggestions, and to Vanessa Heron for the photograph of the statue of Millicent Fawcett.

Notes

1. Wilde's manuscript can be found online on Biblioteca Nacional's portal: https://objdigital.bn.br/objdigital2/acervo_digital/div_manuscritos/mss87025/mss87025.pdf

2. Holland & Hart-Davis (2000) 297

3. Fitzsimons, 11–12

4. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Wemyss Reid [April 1887] in Holland & Hart-Davis, 297

5. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Wemyss Reid [late May 1887] in Holland & Hart-Davis, 299

6. Holland & Hart-Davis, 301n. The letter is dated but not in Wilde's hand.

7. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Eleanor Sidgwick [July 1887] in Holland & Hart-Davis, 307

8. Like the letter to Helena Sickert, the letter to Eleanor Sidgwick is dated but in another hand. Helena Sickert would write 'The Evolution of Economics: Competition – Combination – Cooperation' which appeared in the February 1889 issue of *The Woman's World*. No article by Eleanor Sidgwick appeared.

9. In 1880 they were on the platform for a meeting on female enfrachisement at the St James's Hall, Piccadilly (*Morning Post*, 7 May 1880, 2); in 1883 they attended a meeting in the Prince's Hall, Piccadilly on the relative freedoms of women in the USA

and Britain (*Morning Post*, 26 June 1883, 3).

10. *Echo*, 20 February 1888, 1

11. Fawcett in Fitzsimons, 75–9. It was also reproduced in full on page six of the *Cambridge Independent Press* on 12 February 1887, with the heading 'Mrs Henry Fawcett on Women's Suffrage. Meeting at Cambridge'. Her speech, one of several delivered in support of the movement by members of the university and others, was applauded frequently throughout.

12. See Braga-Pinto and Vergara

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ELEANOR FITZSIMONS

A Significant Letter, Previously Unknown, from Oscar Wilde to Agnata Ramsay

The discovery in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge of a significant letter, previously unknown, from Oscar Wilde to Agnata Ramsay (28 January 1867–27 May 1931), suggests that Ramsay, a brilliant young classics scholar, may be 'A Girtonian', a contributor to *The Woman's World*, the magazine Wilde edited from 1887 until 1889. An article titled 'Life at Girton' by 'A Girtonian' was published in the September 1889 issue of *The Woman's World*, the second last issue to appear under Wilde's editorship.[1] His undated letter to Ramsay, eight pages long, was sent from his Tite Street home, but not on Tite Street headed paper. It was acquired by the library, without its envelope, in October 2024, following the death of Lady Oonah Sophia Elliott (née Butler), who was Ramsay's granddaughter.[2] This generous bequest, which augmented an earlier donation of family papers to the library, was reported on in the Trinity College Cambridge Annual Record 2023–2024 as follows:

> Finally, we received a bequest from Oonah Lady Elliott, widow of Sir John Elliott, consisting of papers of her father Sir Nevile Montagu Butler and of his parents Henry Montagu Butler and Agnata Ramsay, the brilliant classicist of Girton who married the Master of Trinity at the age of 21.[3]

The text of the letter is as follows:

16 Tite Street
Chelsea.

Dear Madam,

I am anxious to obtain your cooperation in a scheme in which I am much interested. I have been asked by Messrs. Cassell to edit one of their monthly magazines for them, and wish to make it the recognised

organ through which women of culture and position will express their views, and to which they will contribute.

All women's magazines and journals that I have seen are confined to trivial records of Fashion and Society – I think the 'mundus muliebris' has passed beyond this, and that women should have a magazine really expressive of their culture and learning. Will you send me an article for my first or second number – about eight or ten pages in length, the honorarium for writers being a pound a page. Any subject you select is sure to interest – the heroines of the Greek stage for instance – from the women of Aeschylus, with their Titan proportions, to the women of Euripides with their strange modernity.

Or, the relation of the study of the ancient classics to the study of modern literature – how we have changed the song but kept the pipes – how to the Greek we owe the forms of art . . . etc. Or on the history of pastoral poetry? Or on life at Girton College?

The magazine will be illustrated, so if you would prefer to write on Girton there could be some pretty pictures –

The magazine will not appear under my guidance till November but if [you] could let me have your article before September it would be a great convenience.

In conclusion, pray allow me to congratulate you on the brilliant success you have achieved.

I have the honour to remain

faithfully yours
Oscar Wilde

Wilde's interest in having Ramsay as a contributor was almost certainly related to her success in the Classical Tripos at the University of Cambridge, the equivalent to Literae Humaniores, the undergraduate course Wilde had excelled in at Oxford University a decade earlier, although, as a man, he, unlike her, was awarded his degree.[4]

When the Classical Tripos results were published on 18 June 1887, it was revealed that Ramsay, aged twenty, and a student at Girton College, Cambridge, a women's college only fully integrated into the University of Cambridge in 1948, was the only student, male or female, to be ranked in the First Division of the First Class in the First Part of the Classical Tripos that year. As Wilde ends his letter to her by congratulating her on 'the brilliant success' she had achieved, we can safely date it to sometime after 18 June 1887. It was discovered in a larger envelope along with several more letters of congratulations, among them one containing a proposal of marriage from Henry Montagu Butler (1833–1918), the Master of Trinity, which she accepted.

From Oscar Wilde
1887 ?

16 Tite Street
Chelsea.

Dear madam,

I am anxious to obtain your coöperation in a scheme in which I am much interested. I have been asked by Messrs. Cassell to edit one of their monthly magazines

for them, and wish
to make it the
recognised organ
through which
women of culture
and position will
express their views,
and to which they
will contribute.

All women's
magazines and journals

that I have seen
are confined to
trivial records &
Fashion and Society-
I think the mundus
muliebris has passed
beyond this, and feel
women should have
a magazine really
expressive & This
culture and
learning. will

you send me an
article for my first
or second number -
about eight or ten
pages in length, the
honorarium for which
being a pound a
page. Any subject
you select is sure
to interest - The
heroines of the
Greek stage for

instance - from the
women of Aeschylus,
with their Titan
proportions, to the
women of Euripides with
their strange modernity.

Or, the relation
of the study of the
ancient classics to
the study of modern
literature - how we
have changed the
but kept the
song

pipes - how to the
Greek we owe the
forms & art ... etc.
—
or on the history
& pastoral poetry?
or on life at
Eton College?
the magazine will
be illustrated, so
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pretty pictures —

The magazine will not affect under my guidance till November, but if could get me have your article before September it would be a great convenience.

In conclusion

pray allow me to
congratulate you on
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you have achieved.

I have the honour
to remain

faithfully yours
Oscar Wilde

Ramsay was born into a scholarly family in London on 28 January 1867, the youngest of three daughters of Sir James Ramsay, 10th Baronet, of Bamff, in the County of Perth, in Scotland, and his wife, Elizabeth Mary Charlotte, née Scott-Kerr. Sir James Ramsay was distinguished at Oxford, where, like Wilde, he took a double first, in his case in Greats and Modern History. Her uncle, George Gilbert Ramsay, was Professor of Humanity in the University of Glasgow and had been preceded in that post by his uncle, William Ramsay, the author of *Ramsay's Roman Antiquities*. Her grandfather, Sir George Ramsay had published several works on philosophy. Tragically, her mother died in 1868, before Agnata had reached her second birthday. Her father remarried in 1873.

A promising scholar, Ramsay was educated at home in Perthshire before being accepted as a pupil at St Andrews School for Girls, later St Leonards, in October 1880.[5] One of her teachers there was Eugénie Sellers Strong (1860–1943), herself a Girtonian (1877 to 1882) who had read for the Classical Tripos and afterwards trained for a career in archaeology in which she enjoyed great success.[6] Wilde knew Sellers and described her as a 'young Diana' on account of her beauty.[7] According to several newspaper accounts, Ramsay was also tutored privately in Greek by classical scholar Janet

Janet Case as Sophocles' Electra (1883) and as Athena in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus (1885). Both images from 'Greek Plays at the Universities' by Janet Case, *The Woman's World*, January 1888, pages 128 and 125 respectively

Elizabeth Case (1863–1937), another Girtonian (1881 to 1885) and a fellow contributor to *The Woman's World*.[8] Wilde commissioned her to write 'Greek Plays at the Universities' for his January 1888 issue, a task for which she was perfectly suited. She had played Electra in an enterprising production of Sophocles' play at the new Girton College in November 1883, with women playing the main characters and a chorus of women. In 1884, she had co-founded Girton College's classical club. When she played the part of Athena in *Eumenides* in 1885, she made history as the first woman actor to be cast in the annual Cambridge Greek Play Committee production; another woman would not be included in the cast until 1950. Virginia Woolf, to whom Case also taught Greek, called her 'a noble Athena, breaking down the tradition that only men acted in the Greek play'.[9] This exclusion of women followed the ancient Greek tradition where only men were actors.[10]

Case had placed in the First Division for Part II of the Classical Tripos in 1885. She must have been an excellent tutor since Ramsay only took up the study of Greek in 1883, the year before she was sent to Girton College to read classics as the Misses Metcalfes' Scholar for 1884.[11] As a student, Ramsay was described as 'a very hard worker' who 'delighted in open air and exercise, being good at tennis and excelling in skating'. For a time she was President of the Debating Society and it was noted that 'she did not speak very often but on occasion she could rise to real eloquence'.[12] Her achievement in the Tripos attracted considerable attention and prompted Emily Davies, founder of Girton College, to form a committee to press once more for the formal admission of women to degrees.

Ramsay received a signed photograph and letter of congratulation from Queen Victoria.[13] Several newspapers carried news of her success and the satirical magazine *Punch* published a special cartoon, albeit with her first name misspelled. In her memoir *What I Remember*, the great suffragist Millicent Garrett Fawcett, herself a contributor to *The Woman's World*,[14] recalled:

Punch, 2 July 1887, page 326

> I had been full of rejoicing when, three years previously, Miss Agneta [sic] Ramsay, now Mrs Butler, had been placed in the first division of the first class in the Classical Tripos at Cambridge, and that she had occupied this position in solitary grandeur so that *Punch* had been justified in a good cartoon showing a first class carriage and the guard turning back all masculine aspirants with the words 'For Ladies Only'.[15]

The contents of Wilde's letter, albeit eight pages long, suggest that he did not know Ramsay well, if at all. Certainly her name is not mentioned in any of the numerous biographies or scholarly works on Wilde. The first four pages of his letter consist largely of the stock sentences that he included in many of the speculative letters he sent to potential contributors during the months that followed his acceptance of the editorship of *The Woman's World* in April 1887. There are several examples of similar letters to people who were not well known to him, among them his letter to young classicist Anne Wakefield Richardson, who wrote 'Roman Women at the Beginning of the Empire' for the September 1888 issue of *The Woman's World*.[16] As Ramsay is not likely to have come to Wilde's attention before news of her success reached him, he had not included her name among the list of potential contributors he had suggested to Thomas Wemyss Reid, general manager of Cassell & Co., in his letter of April 1887. He had, however, affirmed: 'From time to time also we must have news from Girton and Newnham Colleges from Cambridge, and from the Oxford colleges for women'.[17] Much of the remainder of his letter to her is taken up with possible topics she might like to write about. As a fellow classicist, he was writing with authority when he suggested:

> Any subject you select is sure to interest – the heroines of the Greek stage for instance, from the women of Aeschylus, with their Titan proportions, to the women of Euripides in their strange modernity.
>
> Or, the relation of the study of the ancient classics to the study of modern literature – how we have changed the song but kept the pipes – how to the Greek we owe the <u>forms</u> of art . . . etc. Or on the history of pastoral poetry? Or on life at Girton College.[18]

Promising her 'a pound a page,' he asked for 'eight to ten pages,' and suggested that, should she chose to write about her experiences at Girton, the article could be illustrated with 'some pretty pictures'. It is clear that he was keen to secure something for an early issue under his editorship; he suggests his 'first or second number', and asks that she let him have her article 'before September'. Always conscious of the value of publicity, he may have realised that news of this young woman's great academic success would leave the public consciousness before too long.

Although no letter of response from her has been discovered, there is

Monthly, price One Shilling.

The Woman's World.

EDITED BY

MR. OSCAR WILDE.

Part I ready OCTOBER 25, 1887.

EVERYTHING that is likely to be of interest to Englishwomen, everything that may conduce to the welfare of all classes among them, will be dealt with as fully as possible in **The Woman's World.** Contributions will be received from all women who are engaged in any practical work tending towards the intellectual and social advancement of the community; whilst the Contributors who have hitherto dealt in so able and satisfactory a manner with questions of Fashion and Dress will continue to render their valuable assistance to the Editor.

Among the ladies who have already promised their co-operation are the following:

MISS THACKERAY.
MRS. FAWCETT.
THE COUNTESS OF PORTSMOUTH.
MISS ANNA SWANWICK.
THE AUTHOR OF "JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN."
MRS. FRANCIS JEUNE.
THE COUNTESS OF MEATH.
THE COUNTESS OF ZETLAND.
JULIA, MARCHIONESS OF TWEEDDALE.
THE DOWAGER COUNTESS OF CAITHNESS.
LADY WESTWORTH.
LADY ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL.
MRS. PFEIFFER.
MRS. JACOB BRIGHT.
THE COUNTESS MARTINENGO-CESARESCO.
MRS. HENRY SIDGWICK.
LADY DOROTHY NEVILL.
LADY DIANA HUDDLESTON.
MISS EMILY FAITHFULL.
LADY LINDSAY.
MRS. SINGLETON (VIOLET FANE).
MISS AGNETA RAMSAY.
MISS A. MARY F. ROBINSON.
MRS. MARSHALL, M.D.
LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE.
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LADY GREVILLE.
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LADY VIRGINIA SANDARS.
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MRS. CHARLES MCLAREN.
LADY CONSTANCE HOWARD.
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THE HON. MRS. JOYCE.
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THE VISCOUNTESS HARBERTON.
LADY GREGORY.
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MRS. GUGGENBERGER (LOUISA BEVINGTON).
MISS SARAH TYTLER.
MISS MARIE CORELLI.
MISS LEROY (ESMÉ STUART).
LADY HARDY.
MRS. BARNETT.
MRS. ORMISTON CHANT.
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MISS AGNES SMITH.
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MISS LUCY GARNETT.
MRS. VERNON D. BROUGHTON.
MISS CONSTANCE DIXON.
MRS. W. W. STORY.
MRS. ALFRED EARL.
MISS FLORA SHAW.
MRS. HAMILTON KING.

Arrangements have been made for the appearance in the first number of this Series of the opening chapters of a Novel, entitled "The Truth about Clement Ker," from the pen of George Fleming (Miss Constance Fletcher), the accomplished author of "Mirage: A Nile Novel," &c.

Alike in the illustrations and in the literary department of the Magazine, every effort will be made to constitute **The Woman's World** one worthy of its name, of its object, and of the reputation of Editor and Publishers.

CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED, *Ludgate Hill, London; and all Book ellers.*
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Advertisement from *Macmillan's Magazine*, October 1887. Colour added

strong evidence that Ramsay promised to contribute. If so, she appears to have chosen the last of Wilde's suggestions, the least scholarly as it happens. Her name features prominently, as 'Miss Agneta [sic] Ramsay', among a list of women 'who have already promised their co-operation', in a sizable advertisement for *The Woman's World*, placed widely by Cassell and Company in October 1887, the month before the first issue under Wilde's editorship appeared in November 1887. One newspaper responded to this advertisement by noting that Wilde had secured 'a goodly list of contributors, all of them ladies, and most of them well known in literature,' adding: 'Among them I notice the name of Agneta Ramsay'.[19]

In 'Life at Girton', which is six pages long and attractively illustrated, 'A Girtonian', who is possibly Ramsay, gives a wide-ranging account of life at Girton College, although she questions 'why an interest and a mystery attaches still to women's colleges, while University life is taken as a matter of course for men?' She is careful to dismiss the notion that 'only exceptionally gifted women go to college,' and she is keen to account for the many hours spent on activities other than study.[20] Responding to her article, the *Somerset Standard* remarked: 'The hours devoted to study do not appear by any means to be needlessly long, and plenty of time is allowed for the delights of lawn-tennis and other out-door amusements. The most popular form of entertainment appears to be a students' tea-party'.[21] A long excerpt appeared in several newspapers and periodicals, among them the *St James's Gazette*, which introduced the piece: 'The mysteries of life at Girton are unveiled "by a Girtonian" to all who thirst to know them in the September number of the *Woman's World*. They do not seem to be very dreadful mysteries: nothing worse than tea and small-talk.'[22] The *North Devon Journal* responded that: 'Girton is evidently the centre of serious work, whilst recreation and the graces are not neglected.'[23]

The reason for omitting the actual name of 'A Girtonian' from the bottom of her article, unlike almost every other article in *The Woman's World*, is unknown, but it is interesting that Janet Case was identified only as 'A Graduate of Girton' at the bottom of 'Greek Plays at the Universities' in the January 1888 issue. Although 'Life at Girton' did not appear until September 1889, Ramsay's name is mentioned several times in early issues of *The Woman's World*. Wilde himself paid tribute to her in his 'Literary and Other Notes' for December 1887, when he wrote: 'I am glad to see that Miss Ramsay's brilliant success at Cambridge is not destined to remain an isolated instance of what women can do in intellectual competitions with men'.[24] In that same issue, in her article 'The Fallacy of the Superiority of Men', Laura McLaren drew attention to how: 'The recent success of Miss Ramsay at Cambridge has had its full effect in contributing to remove the stigma of inferiority from women in popular estimation.'[25] The following month, in her

Illustrations from ‘Life at Girton’ in *The Woman’s World*, September 1889

article 'Alexandra College, Dublin', Mary Catherine, Lady Ferguson, mentioned 'Miss Ramsay's great victory at Cambridge'.[26]

'IT IS HER GOODNESS, NOT HER GREEK AND LATIN, WHICH HAVE STOLEN MY HEART'

WILDE had asked for an article for his first or second issues – November or December 1887 – but Ramsay's article did not appear until nearly two years after that. Wilde often held on to articles for several months but, if Ramsay did write this article, its inclusion in a later issue than Wilde intended may have had something to do with her preoccupation with other matters, principally her marriage to Henry Montagu Butler. Butler, aged fifty-five and a widower, was thirty-four years older than Ramsay, and she was two years younger than his oldest daughter. He had taken a great interest in her scholarly success and had met her for the first time on 24 November 1887, when, at his invitation, and among a party of forty-two, she dined at Trinity Lodge before attending a performance of *Oedipus Rex* at the college.[27] They were engaged by the following July, and were married at St Margaret's, Westminster on 9 August 1888.

It is clear from Butler's letters to his second wife, and to others, that theirs was a happy marriage. They spent their honeymoon in Switzerland, where, Butler wrote: 'we walk a great deal with lunch in my pocket, and read a great deal of Greek together'.[28] It seems he was somewhat troubled by the difference in their ages since he told a friend:

> I pondered long and earnestly and prayerfully before I decided that it could be right to ask this bright young gifted girl to link her life with my later years. I am *certain* that with God's help I can make her happy. You will pray for us both. She has a strong, simple, devout character, and has stood the ordeal of much flattery without being spoiled. She is withal bright and playful and will help, I trust, to make this historic house a home to all that is gracious and noble.[29]

'It is her goodness,' he told another friend, 'not her Greek and Latin, which have stolen my heart.'[30]

In September 1888, *The Academy* reported that Ramsay had been 'able to finish her edition of Herodotus, at which she had been working for the past year; but she finds herself compelled to resign her appointment as classical tutor at Girton, to the great disappointment of the college authorities'.[31] While working on her annotated translation, she had given birth to her first child, prompting another cartoon from *Punch* in which she is portrayed as ordering 'a crib for Herodotus'.[32] In 'Lesson in Love' for the *Independent*, historian Mary Beard observed that 'Agnata Ramsey was one of the most notorious casualties of the university marriage market,' as she 'did very little

The Punch cartoon 'A Pardonable Mistake' (7 December 1889, 270) puns on crib as a cradle and as 'a translation of a classic for the illegitimate use of students' (OED).
Young Mother (lately from Girton). 'Come in, dear. Excuse me for one moment. I'm just ordering a crib for Herodotus.'
Fair Friend (not from Girton). 'Oh, that's what you're going to call the dear baby, is it?'

classics ever after'.[33] This is true, although, in her private life, she continued to discuss classical works with her husband and their friends, among them Poet Laureate, Alfred, Lord Tennyson. In 'A Visit to Farringford, January 1892', Ramsay described a conversation she had with Tennyson, one described by Cornelia Pearsall as 'ranging from Horace's Alcaics to Sappho'.[34] While she may have turned her back on publishing and teaching, she did help those who followed her by establishing, with her husband, the Agnata Butler Prizes for Classics, a sum of money, £8 and £7 respectively, to be spent on books, for the best classics students in their second or third year.[35]

Ramsay had three children with Butler, all of them sons. Their oldest, James, who was placed in Division I of the First Class of the Classical Tripos, Part I, in 1909, became Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University. Their middle son, Gordon, who was placed in Division I of the First Class of the Classical Tripos, Part I, in 1913, was killed in action in

Egypt in 1916. Their youngest, Nevile, also a brilliant scholar, served as British Ambassador to Brazil and, later, to the Netherlands.[36] Agnata Butler, née Ramsay, remained in Cambridge after her husband's death in 1918, living at 109 Chesterton Road. During the remainder of her life, she became very involved with Christian Science. Her mother and her two sisters were also Christian Scientists, as was her son, Sir James Butler.[37] She died in Sunny Lodge in Harrow, a Christian Science sanatorium, on 27 May 1931.

Acknowledgements

Ramsay's letter is listed in the Trinity College Library under: Deposit 2024/30, box 4, and will be catalogued in due course. It is reproduced by kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge. My thanks to Dr Nicolas Bell, Librarian, and Dr Anne McLaughlin, Digitisation Services Manager, of Trinity College Library for their assistance; to Anne Anderson for help with illustrations; and especially to Dr Wolfgang Maier-Sigrist for bringing this important discovery to our attention.

Notes

1. 'A Girtonian' (1889) 'Life at Girton', *The Woman's World*, September 1889, 601–6

2. Oonah Sophia Butler was the daughter of Sir Nevile Butler, the youngest of three sons born to Agnata Butler née Ramsay and Henry Montagu Butler. In 1958 she married the historian and Hispanist John (later Sir John) Elliott (1930–2022), also a fellow of Trinity College.

3. Trinity College Cambridge Annual Record 2023-2024, page 211. https://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/TRINITY-2024-AR-text-AA-web-spreads.pdf Accessed on 12 May 2025

4. It was not until 1948 that Cambridge began to offer degrees to women.

5. The school changed its name to St Leonards while she was a pupil there.

6. Sellers studied and worked at the British School at Athens and in Germany. In 1909 she was appointed Assistant Director of the British School at Rome, the city where she spent the rest of her life. She was elected Girton's first Research Fellow in 1910 and was also a Life Fellow of the College. She received many honours, among them a CBE in 1927, and the Serena gold medal for Italian studies, awarded by the British Academy, in 1938. She died in Rome in 1943. For more see https://beyond-notability.ikibase.cloud/wiki/Item:Q23

7. Dyson, 13

8. *The Queen***,** 5 March 1892, 66; *Pall Mall Gazette***,** 23 February 1892, 6; *Bayswater Chronicle***,** 27 February 1892, 5. Janet Case's article 'Greek Plays at the Universities' by 'A Graduate of Girton' appeared in the January 1888 issue of *The Woman's World* pages 121–8. She discusses the details of the productions with which she had been involved but does not mention the fact that she was the first female performer in the Cambridge Greek Play.

9. Henry M. Alley (1982). 'A Rediscovered

Eulogy: Virginia Woolf's "Miss Janet Case: Classical Scholar and Teacher."' *Twentieth Century Literature*, 28:3. Wilde mentions Case by name in a letter to Edith Simcox, philosopher, writer, trade union activist and feminist, sent in the summer of 1887, around the same time he was writing to Ramsay. Keen to recruit Simcox as a contributor, he told her that he had secured several articles, among them 'Miss Case on the Production of a Greek Play at Girton'. (Holland & Hart-Davis, 314)

10. Given Wilde's targeting of women who studied Classics, among them several Girtonians, there is the potential for further research examining the discussion of Classics in *The Woman's World*, assessing womens' involvement in the staging of Greek plays in the nineteenth century, and documenting the lives of Girton graduates who pursued a career in Classics.

11. *Dundee Advertiser*, 21 June 1887, 5; the information on her being the Metcalfe Scholar comes from Stephen, 173. The Metcalfe scholar was named for pioneering educator of women Fanny Metcalfe, who had set up Hitchin College in 1869, which later became Girton College, Cambridge, and her older sister, Anna, who assisted her.

12. All from Stephen, 173

13. This signed photograph was given to the College by her surviving sons, James and Nevile Butler.

14. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, 'Women's Suffrage', *The Woman's World*, November 1888, 9–12. The article is amongst those published in Eleanor Fitzsimons (ed.) (2024) *Articles from The Woman's World, Edited by Oscar Wilde*, London: The Oscar Wilde Society. See Fábio Waki's article in this issue.

15. Fawcett, 140–41. Her daughter Philippa achieved similar success in mathematics at Newnham College, Cambridge.

16. Holland & Hart-Davis, 321. Anne Richardson's article 'Roman Women at the Beginning of the Empire' is amongst the articles published in Eleanor Fitzsimons (ed.) (2024) *Articles from The Woman's World, Edited by Oscar Wilde*, London: The Oscar Wilde Society.

17. Holland & Hart-Davis, 297–8

18. For more on Wilde's credentials as a classicist see: Iain Ross (2012) *Oscar Wilde and Ancient Greece*, Cambridge University Press; Kathleen Riley, Alastair J. L. Blanshard and Iarla Manny (eds) (2017*) Oscar Wilde and Classical Antiquity*, Oxford University Press; Rosario Rovira Guardiola (2019) 'Oscar Wilde's letters to the British Museum and the Illustrations in *The Woman's World*' in *The Wildean* 54, January 2019, 16–52.

19. *Cumberland and Westmorland Advertiser, and Penrith Literary Chronicle***,** 18 October 1887, 3

20. 'A Girtonian', 'Life at Girton', *The Woman's World*, September 1889, 601–606. The article has been digitised at https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100640413

21. *Somerset Standard***,** 31 August 1889, 8

22. 'The Girton Girl's Day', *St James's Gazette***,** 27 August 1889, 6

23. *North Devon Journal***,** 5 September 1889, 2

24. Oscar Wilde (1887). 'Literary and Other Notes', *The Woman's World*, December 1887, 85

25. Laura McLaren (1887) 'The Fallacy of the Superiority of Men', *The Woman's World*, December 1887, 57. The article is amongst those published in Eleanor Fitzsimons (ed.) (2024) *Articles from The Woman's World, Edited by Oscar Wilde*, London: The Oscar Wilde Society.

26. Mary Catherine, Lady Ferguson (1888) 'Alexandra College, Dublin', *The Woman's World*, January 1888, 130

27. Butler, 29

28. Butler, 32

29. Butler, 30. The 'historic house' referred to is the magnificent Master's Lodge which

occupies half of one side of Great Court in Trinity College.

30. Ibid

31. Reprinted in the *Methodist Times*, 13 September 1888, 13. In 1891 Macmillan published her annotated version of *Herodotus IV* under her married name, Agnata F. Butler, as part of their Classical series for colleges and schools. It is digitised and available to read at https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006506879

32. *Punch*, 7 December 1889

33. Mary Beard (2006) 'Lessons in Love', *The Independent*, Saturday 19 August 2006, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/mary-beard-lessons-in-love-412453.html Accessed on 18 May 2025.

34. Pearsall, 162

35. 'Girton College, Cambridge', *Ladies' Field*, 10 October 1908, 38. This was the sum of money on offer in 1908, equivalent to £820 and £717 respectively today according to the Bank of England Inflation Calculator.

36. Henry Montagu Butler's great-nephew Richard Austen (Rab) Butler was Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1965 to 1978.

37. As reported in Claire F. Gartrell-Mills (PhD thesis, 1991) *Christian Science: an American Religion in Britain, 1895–1940*

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GIOVANNI DOLCI

Constance Wilde in Exile

After Oscar Wilde's conviction for 'gross indecency' and his subsequent imprisonment in May 1895, his wife Constance had to cope with social scandal, legal consequences and financial problems. She concluded that a future life in England would be impossible for her and she decided to escape and find a home on the continent with her sons Cyril and Vyvyan. She initially imagined this to be a temporary solution. Three destinations in Europe were eligible for consideration: one would have been the German city of Freiburg im Breisgau, where Carlos Blacker's family lived, who were old friends of both Constance and Oscar; a second Bevaix on the borders of the Swiss Lake of Neuchâtel, where Constance's brother Otho rented an apartment together with his family; or Bogliasco, close to Genoa, the residence of her friend Lady Brooke (the Ranee of Sarawak) on the Italian Riviera. Constance's choice fell on Switzerland to be close to her brother. But she must have been aware that, after Otho's Leasehold Investment Company had issued a final call in January 1895, her brother and his family were living under modest conditions there. She hurriedly sent her boys, accompanied by a governess, to a hotel near her brother's home, where she intended to join them a month later after making final arrangements for a life in exile.

On 12 January 1893, Otho, registered as Holland Lloyd Otho, had obtained the 'permis de domicile no. 120' in Bevaix, a rural and isolated village in the French-speaking part of Switzerland with merely 1,000 inhabitants (3,700 today). This residence permit was renewed twice, on 12 September 1894 (no. 166), and 5 September 1896 (no. 262), until it expired on 8 August 1898.[1] His family was living on the top floor at Mademoiselle Benguerel's 'Maison', far from the glamorous Swiss destinations of Montreux, Lucerne or Interlaken, which in those days were promoted by German travel books publisher Baedeker and British tour operator Thomas Cook. These Swiss destinations were the first choice for British tourists and expatriates who felt attracted by what local doctors called 'Luftkuren' (fresh air treatments) in the Swiss mountains, a region with breathtaking natural scenery. However, the remoteness of Bevaix must have represented to Otho

an ideal place to evade his creditors and retire in peace with his second wife Mary Winter and their two children, Hester and Eugene.

This part of Europe was not unknown to Otho. In May 1887 in London, after he decided to leave his first wife Helene 'Nellie' Hutchinson and his two sons, the painter Otho Lloyd and Fabian Lloyd (poet, amateur boxer and artist, who from 1912 called himself Arthur Cravan), Constance's brother moved to Lausanne, where Fabian had been born at Riposte Cottage only a few months before. Otho's second wife Mary Winter had spent her early years in a boarding school with Nellie in this city on the borders of Lake Geneva.

This area had already aroused interest amongst well-situated English citizens in the eighteenth century. Before Byron visited Lausanne in 1816, there existed a Bibliothèque Britannique, renamed to Bibliothèque Universelle des Sciences, Belles Lettres et Arts in 1816.[2] Post-Vienna Congress anglophobia may be presumed as the reason for this change. The historian Edward Gibbon lived in Lausanne from 1783 to 1793 where he wrote much of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1789).

The days of visiting the Alps on a 'Grand Tour' after the publications of Jean Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1778) works promoting life in line with natural beauty came to a halt with Napoleon's invasion of what was then a confederation of independent cantons. The French emperor founded the République Helvétique or Confoederatio Helvetica on 12 April 1798. The Latin name was chosen to do justice to the plurilingualism of the citizens. A systematic looting of the conquered territories followed, making Switzerland one of the poorest parts of Europe.[3] Shortly after meeting Constance for the first time in 1883, Oscar Wilde described Switzerland to her as a dreadful and vulgar place, 'with its big ugly mountains, all black and white like an enormous photograph'.[4] Later on, when Oscar was himself living in exile, and following an invitation by Harold Mellor to Villa Luisenburg (today Chemin de la Falaise 35) in 1899 at Gland on the borders of Lake Geneva, he said: 'I don't like Switzerland: it has produced nothing but theologians and waiters,'[5] as he had met with a population who considered emigration to countries with better prospects as the only way to escape poverty.

TURNER AND RUSKIN

AFTER the Vienna Congress in 1815, at which the leading European countries decided that Switzerland should become a neutral and independent buffer state, the Swiss Alps became one of the nineteenth-century benchmarks by which to measure one's taste for scenery. Two of the British pioneers promoting this destination were J. M. W. Turner (1775–1856) and John

Ruskin (1819–1900). In 1833, at the age of fourteen, Ruskin made his first visit to Switzerland. In his autobiography *Praeterita* he describes himself as having 'so much of science mixed with feeling as to make the sight of the Alps not only the revelation of the beauty of the earth, but the opening of the first page of its volume'.[6] Although Ruskin is perhaps more closely associated with Italy, chiefly through his devotion to Venice, his passion for Switzerland and the Alps was always vivid. Ruskin's great admiration for Turner, one of the greatest British painters, was undoubtedly the foundation of his devotion to the Alps. In 1866 Ruskin had chosen a position for his painting *Afternoon in Spring with South Wind at Neuchatel* only a few miles from Bevaix, where Otho and his family stayed in 1895.

John Ruskin, *Afternoon in Spring with South Wind at Neuchâtel, 30 April 1869*, © Ashmolean Museum Oxford

Ruskin loved the Swiss landscape, especially as depicted in the watercolours of J. M. W. Turner which he and his father collected. He therefore became a keen traveller to Switzerland and even followed in the painter's footsteps to better understand Turner and his art, on several occasions visiting sites painted by Turner to see for himself the changes Turner had made to the landscape in his paintings. Ruskin took on a considerable amount of administrative work from 1856 to 1858 as chief artistic executor of Turner's estate. Later he occupied the respected position

of Slade Professor of Fine Arts at Oxford, where the young Oscar Wilde mentioned that the two principal persons he wanted to meet were Ruskin and Pater: 'For an undergraduate, they were the inevitable poles of attraction.'[7] Wilde's friendship with Ruskin was expressed in a letter to him saying: 'The dearest memories of my Oxford days are my walks and talks with you, and from you I learned nothing but what was good.'[8] Later, Constance also became very fond of Ruskin, asking him to become godfather to their son Vyvyan, born in November 1886. Ruskin replied that owing to his age and ill health he was unable to accept. However, he signed her autograph book on 28 January 1888 with the lines: 'It is thought that Imagination reigns in a world lovelier than we have known. But no imagination is clear or bright enough to conceive the glory of the world we see, yet know not.'[9]

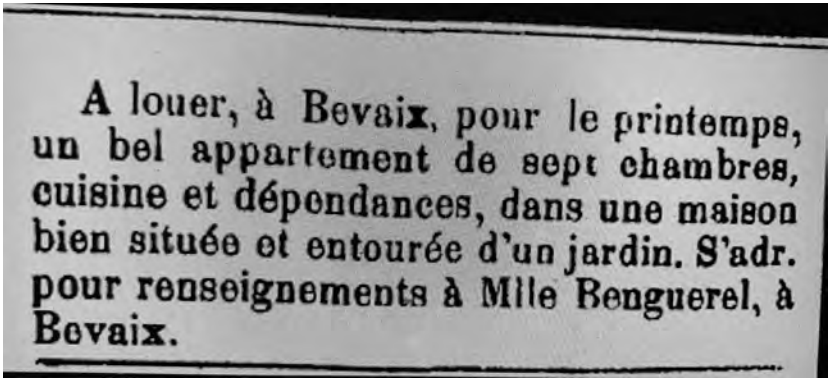
Behind Ruskin's love particularly for Chamonix (which is in France although Ruskin considered it to be in Switzerland all his life) and Venice, we must understand that the former represented for Ruskin the beauty of nature, and the latter that of art. There is an intriguing connection to the present day in that, although he died in 1900, Ruskin was able to see the first effects of climate change in the mountains, writing in a letter in 1879 that he felt betrayed by the glaciers that were beginning to melt. As Thomas Crauwels puts it: 'The shock must indeed have been strong for him who considered the Alps and especially Chamonix as a timeless haven of peace.'[10] Ruskin was also one of the first people to photograph the Alps, using the daguerreotype, which he discovered in 1845. Ruskin even claimed to have been the first to take a photograph of the Matterhorn on 8 August 1849, or indeed of any Swiss mountain.

Ruskin's daguerreotype of the Matterhorn 1849, Musée Gruérien Bulle

BROTHER OTHO IN BEVAIX

Quite apart from the beautiful scenery which had inspired Ruskin and Turner, Switzerland was a very cost-effective place for British expats like Otho not only to visit but also to hide. He might have spotted the

advertisement for the apartment lease in the 'Feuille d'Avis de Neuchâtel'[11] during his stay in Lausanne, only 60 km from Bevaix.


A louer, à Bevaix, pour le printemps, un bel appartement de sept chambres, cuisine et dépendances, dans une maison bien située et entourée d'un jardin. S'adr. pour renseignements à Mlle Benguerel, à Bevaix.

Advertisement for Mlle Benguerel's seven-room apartment in the 'Feuille d'Avis de Neuchâtel', 1882

La Maison Benguerel as it is today, the community centre of Bevaix. In 1895 the building contained a dairy. The owner, fifty-six-year-old Mlle Benguerel, lived there with her tenant Mlle Monnier and a maid. Otho's family with their maid Elisabeth Pitton lived on the top floor

Before Otho moved in with his family, two English women, Mary Susan Philipps and Catherine Swayne Beckwith, lived there. The house had a beautiful orchard in the back where a picture of Constance was taken with an annotation by her son Vyvyan ('MOTHER'), where, as Constance's biographer Franny Moyle puts it: 'Gone are the beautiful dresses and hats. She wears a plain dark skirt and a white shirt. She looks like a governess.'[12]

The fountain beside the house was the setting for the photograph of Otho's family presumably taken by Constance.

Otho's family in Bevaix and the fountain today (opposite). Photographs on this page reproduced by courtesy of The Oscar Wilde Estate.

HÔTEL DU PARC GLION

In May 1895, Constance had hurriedly sent her boys, accompanied by a governess from London, to the Hôtel du Parc at Glion in Switzerland, a small village high above Lake Geneva. It was the first hotel to be built on a promontory in French-speaking Switzerland, offering a panoramic view of the lake. The hotel complex was part of the former villa of German-born pharmacist Henri Nestlé, who established in 1866 what is today one of the largest worldwide food and beverage companies. The hotel was advertised as 'établi magnifiquement, avec tout le confort moderne: grandes salles à manger, salons, billard et établissement de bain' (beautifully set up, with all modern comforts: large dining rooms, lounges, pool tables and bathroom facilities).[13] It offered a splendid view of the Mont Blanc Massif, the highest mountain in Europe. The tourists of the Belle Epoque did not follow in the footsteps of Rousseau and his Nouvelle Heloise, but enjoyed nature in a luxurious setting.

Hôtel du Parc 11

(Ancienne villa Nestlé)

—

Téléphone

M^lle Schuwer, England
M. Cyrel Wilde, »
M. Vivian Wilde, »
M. Sternheim, Allemagne
M. C. D^r Mangold, Allem.
M. et M^me de Sainte-Marie, (Arceuil, France)
M^me Pigner et demoiselles, (Copenhagen-Danemark)
M., M^me et M^lle Rocher, Angleterre
M^me Wilde, England

A list of visitors published by the Hôtel du Parc in the *Journal et Liste des Étrangers*

Cyril and Vyvyan arrived at Glion on 18 May 1895, accompanied by their governess, Mademoiselle Schuwer, when the hotel had just opened its doors for the tourist season and had welcomed only five guests. Glion could be reached by the funicular line Territet-Glion which had opened in 1883, making it one of the oldest in Switzerland. It took visitors from the borders of Lake Geneva just outside Montreux to a terrace 300m above, overlooking the lake. By the time of Constance's arrival on 22 June 1895 the number of guests had increased to fifteen, but the grand premises were still far from being crowded. In a letter to her friend Emily Thursfield, Constance wrote after her arrival that: 'It is terrible to be here free in the heavenly air, and to think of those four walls round him [Oscar].'[14]

The Hôtel du Parc listed among its visitors the Empress Elisabeth of Austria and Queen Emma of Holland and was part of the complex Hôtel du Righi Vaudois. In the early days of Swiss tourism, visitors' names were published in local papers, so

the names of the Wilde family appeared in the *Journal et Liste des Étrangers*. When the hotel manager eventually found out who the Wildes were he feared that their presence could damage the name of the establishment. They were asked to leave and departed the Hôtel du Parc on 14 September 1895.

MOVE TO OTHO'S APARTMENT

AFTER a short holiday at a hotel in Nervi on the Ligurian coast, arranged by her friend Lady Brook, Constance took her children to her brother's apartment in Bevaix so Otho could give them some education. According to her youngest son Vyvyan:

> He was a scholarly man who devoted his whole life to the study of the Greek classics. He had been at Oxford at the same time as my father, though they never met there, and he resumed our education which had been almost entirely neglected during the previous three months.[15]

During her short sojourn in Bevaix, the process of changing the name from Wilde to Holland took place. Vyvyan remembered:

> My mother and my uncle were so solemn about it all that I realised something was wrong . . . Holland was an old family name on my mother's side. Her family did not want her to take her maiden name of Lloyd because, I suppose, they thought it might lead to complications and misinterpretation.[16]

After handing over her two boys into Otho's custody, Constance made her way to London where she visited her husband Oscar in Wandsworth Gaol on 21 September. Travelling in Europe at the end of the nineteenth-century by train had become more comfortable with the introduction of new railroad lines, but a journey from Bevaix to London would have taken thirty-two hours including an overnight stop in Paris. As most railway companies were private, several changes of trains were inevitable. Nowadays we can hardly imagine how arduous such a trip must have been for Constance, marked by worries and ill health, in a wagon with limited insulation against noise and soot.

She only stayed five days in England. In a letter to Emily Thursfield, Constance wrote on 12 October 1895:

> I do not wish to sever myself entirely from Mr Wilde . . . But I have my own money now over which I have perfect control and the life interest has been renounced by Mr Wilde in favour of the boys, so if I find it impossible to live with him I can always leave him.[17]

Back in Switzerland, where she had decided never to live in England again, she moved into Otho's apartment in Bevaix which was conveniently close to

Villa Barbagelata at Sori at the end of the nineteenth-century. The Holland family apartment was on the upper floor. The house was demolished in 1914, leaving space for the widening of the railway line Spezia-Genoa

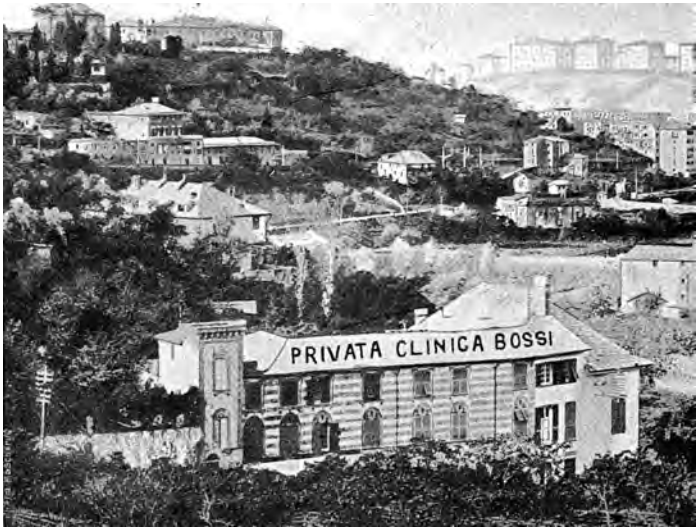
the spa village of Yverdon-les-Bains, a suitable place to soothe her increasing physical pain. At this point, no doctor had diagnosed her with multiple sclerosis, a diagnosis made more than a century later in an article by Ashley H. Robins and Merlin Holland.[18] Yverdon-les-Bains was known for its sulphurous thermal spring (29°) and a sub-thermal spring from the Jura, a mountain range that is older than the Alps with a name derived from the Celtic root *ior (wooded mountain), a name also given to the Jurassic Age by the French chemist, mineralogist, geologist, palaeontologist, and zoologist Alexandre Brongniart. It seems that the Romans built a 500m pipeline to the thermal baths in their fortified camp. Remains of a temple and inscriptions to Apollo, the healing god, have been found on the spa site, which would indicate that the sulphurous spring of the Gallo-Roman city of 'Eburodunum' was frequented by the Gallo-Romans in what is now the French-speaking region of Switzerland.

ITALIAN EXILE

At an altitude of 475m, Bevaix was not an ideal place for Constance to spend the winter, especially considering that 1895 experienced one of the coldest autumns in this area for decades.[19] So, after the grape harvest, the whole extended family consisting of Constance with her children, her brother, his wife and children, made their way to sunnier Italy where Constance's friend, Lady Brooke, had arranged an apartment in the Villa Barbagelata for them in the small fishing village of Sori on the Roma-Genoa railway line, only a few miles from her home, Villa Raffo in Bogliasco.

The Villa Raffo in Bogliasco today

Villa Elvira at the end of the nineteenth-century, Constance's last residence before her death



The Clinica Bossi in the early twentieth century

The Italian Riviera thus marked the next step for Constance's involuntary exile, with a steadily deteriorating state of health, worries about the education of her children and an uncertain future in her relationship with Oscar. She eventually secured an apartment for two years in the Villa Elvira at Bogliasco on the Ligurian coast, almost next door to Lady Brook's Villa Raffo. At Villa Elvira she spent the final months of her life before undergoing the fatal operation at the Clinica Bossi in April 1898.[20]

CHRONOLOGY OF CONSTANCE WILDE'S YEARS IN EXILE

	GLION (Switzerland)
1895 May 18	Cyril and Vyvyan arrive at Hôtel du Parc in Glion, Switzerland, together with Mlle Schuwer; Constance stays in England
1895 June 22	Constance Wilde arrives in Glion
1895 August 17	Mlle Schuwer leaves Hôtel du Parc after Constance's dismissal
1895 September 14	Constance, Cyril and Vyvyan's last day at Hôtel du Parc
	BEVAIX (Switzerland)/LONDON
1895 September	Constance, Cyril and Vyvyan leave for a short holiday in Italy, after a few days back to Otho's apartment at Bevaix, change of names for all from Wilde to Holland
1895 September 21	Constance visits Oscar in Wandsworth prison
1895 October	Constance at Bevaix with her children
	SORI (Italy)
1895 November	Constance moves with children and brother Otho's family into the apartment in Villa Barbagelata
1895 December	First operation at Clinica Bossi in Genoa before Christmas
1896 February 19	Constance visits Oscar in Reading Gaol
1896 March	Hotel Eden at Nervi (18 francs/day), after a few days Hotel Nervi (9 francs/day)

	HEIDELBERG (Germany)/BEVAIX (Switzerland)
1896 April	Constance settles her children at Neuenheim College, Heidelberg
1896 May/June	Visit to Heidelberg, split time between Nervi and Bevaix
1896 September	Constance back at Bevaix
1896 December	Constance back in Heidelberg to collect Vyvyan, a few days in Verona
	NERVI (Italy)
1897 January	Constance back at Hotel Nervi
	BOGLIASCO (Italy)
1897 May	Constance is invited to Villa Raffo by Lady Brooke
	BEVAIX (Switzerland)
1897 July	Constance with her brother Otho's family
	BLACK FOREST (Germany)
1897 August/September	Constance with children and the Blackers in Feldberg (Schwarzwald, Germany)
	BOGLIASCO (Italy)
1897 October	Constance secures Villa Elvira with a two-year lease, large terrace, four bedrooms, hall used as a dining room, small drawing room
1898 April 2	Constance's second operation at Clinica Bossi in Genoa
1898 April 7	Constance dies at Clinica Bossi
1898 April 9	Constance is buried at Staglieno cemetery in Genoa

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank: Mr Pier Luigi Gardella, local historian in Bogliasco, who guided me during my visit to the various places associated with Constance Wilde, and who provided photos of the nineteenth-century Ligurian coast; Commune de Montreux, Nicole Meystre-Schaeren, Archiviste communale, for various documentation; Germain Hausmann, Bevaix, for helping me to dig into the archives of the canton Neuchâtel.

Notes

1. Office des archives de l'Etat, Neuchâtel

2. The *Bibliothèque Universelle* was originally an academic journal. It enjoyed a wide audience in various French-speaking countries during the 19th century. The initial form was the *Bibliothèque Britannique*, which began publication in 1796 and focussed on British science, technology, literature and agriculture.

3. Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv: Epoche des Wandels zwischen 1798 und 1848

4. Ellmann, 222

5. Holland & Hart-Davis, 1133

6. Ruskin, 116

7. Ellmann, 46

8. Holland & Hart-Davis, 349

9. Cox, 22 & 191–4

10. Quoted in Crauwels, blogpost. English translation from the German by the author.

11. The 'Feuille d'Avis de Neuchâtel' was issued two or three times per week; apart from local news it advertised lodgings.

12. Moyle, 282

13. Archives de Montreux

14. Letter from Constance Wilde to Emily Thursfield, 25 June 1895, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles

15. Holland, 75

16. Holland, 76

17. Letter from Constance Wilde to Emily Thursfield, 12 October 1895, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles

18. *The Lancet*, 385, 3 January 2015. See also Robins & Holland.

19. Wetterarchiv der Schweiz

20. Robins & Holland, 56

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ROB MARLAND

‘Just the place for me’: Oscar Wilde at San Fruttuoso

On 7 April 1899 Oscar Wilde bought four picture postcards. On the back of each he affixed a ten-cent stamp and inscribed the same address – 11 Upper Phillimore Gardens, Kensington, W. Londra, Inghilterra – the home of his friend Robert Ross. ‘I send you specimens of the views to tempt you’, he wrote on one, beside three overlapping photographs of Santa Margherita Ligure, a town of 3,600 inhabitants thirty km east of Genoa.[1] He signed the postcard with the initials of the ‘fantastic name’, Sebastian Melmoth, he had assumed upon his release from Reading Prison two years earlier (not to conceal his identity but ‘to prevent postmen having fits’).[2]

For the previous month Wilde had been the guest of Harold Mellor, a wealthy Englishman he had met on the Côte d’Azur. Wilde found Mellor charming company in Napoule, where his table was graced with Pommery-Greno champagne, but at his villa in the unaesthetically-named Swiss village of Gland he was dull, miserly, and served ‘horrid’ Swiss wine or Swiss beer.[3] Although Wilde managed to undertake what would be his final literary work in Gland – correcting the proofs of *An Ideal Husband* – he was bored by Mellor, by the ‘obvious, old-fashioned’ scenery, and by the locals, who appeared to have been ‘carved out of wood with a rough knife, most of them; the others are carved out of turnips’.[4] He looked forward to exchanging the ‘chill virginity’ of Switzerland for Italy, where ‘the red flowers of life . . . stain the feet of summer’.[5] Using money wired by his publisher Leonard Smithers, he was able to make good his escape. But within days of installing himself in rooms above the Ristorante Christofero Colombo in Santa Margherita (pension, 6 fr.)[6] he was writing to Ross and Smithers that he wished he had moved to Paris, despite the greater cost that the city would have imposed on his wallet and, he suspected, his soul.[7] He felt ill and lonely, perhaps because he had overindulged, blowing Smithers’ money on necessary luxuries, and because in late spring the men of Santa Margherita sailed en masse for the coasts of Sardinia and North Africa to work as coral-fishers.[8] He begged Smithers and Ross to visit him. Ross refused at first

as he too was feeling under the weather, though Smithers came. He and Wilde met in Genoa to discuss a new play that Wilde was persistently promising to write (and just as persistently selling to those who believed the promises).[9] For a while it seemed as though Smithers would clear the bill at the Christofero Colombo, bring Wilde back to Paris, and provide a stipend so that he could work on the play, but the plan was abandoned.[10] Wilde fell into greater despond: 'Whatever I do is wrong: because my life is not on a right basis', he wrote to Ross. 'I wish I could see you. A few days with you would be a tonic.'[11] Ross was eventually persuaded that his friend's financial and psychological woes, so often exaggerated, were genuine. By early May, Wilde was in Paris and writing to Ross that 'it was really most sweet of you to come to Italy to save me from Santa Margherita'.[12] Ross had apparently done for Wilde what Smithers would not.

There is a lacuna in the tale of Ross's rescue of Wilde because there was no reason for the pair to correspond once they were together. All that is known is that Ross took the opportunity to lecture Wilde about his drinking. Wilde was 'inclined to take too much alcohol at times', Ross told Adela Schuster shortly after Wilde's death in November 1900: 'When I was with him in Genoa in the spring of 1899 . . . I managed to frighten him so much on the subject that he quite reformed for six months.'[13] Had Ross, like Smithers, only met Wilde in Genoa, or had he been tempted by Wilde's postcards to venture to Santa Margherita and spend a few days there?

One of the postcards Wilde sent to Ross depicted a church in Portofino: 'a really lovely little place: only reached by mules or boats'. Rapallo was

A map of the Ligurian coast from Genoa to the Portofino Promontory, showing the locations of Santa Margherita Ligure, San Fruttuoso, and other towns mentioned by Wilde in his correspondence with Ross. Image: Baedeker's *Northern Italy* (1899)

'just a mile from Santa Margherita along the coast: it is quite delightful'. Wilde had evidently visited both of these places by 7 April. He may have reached Rapallo on foot: although he often affected never to walk,[14] during his stay in Gland he had regularly hiked to Nyon – a round trip of 12 km.[15] Portofino was linked to Santa Margherita by a flat coastal road and, at a distance of five km, was also well within Wilde's range. That he would have ridden there on a mule is implausible. Never much of a rider, Wilde had probably been out of the saddle for decades.[16] What about a boat? Sailing was one of his favourite holiday activities,[17] and only a few weeks earlier he had told Frank Harris that 'I love to be on the water'.[18] But he may have been put off by the expense – three to four francs, according to Baedeker.[19] Most likely he caught the omnibus that ran six times daily and cost only twenty-five cents. To suggest this, it must be admitted, is to conjure an image rather less romantic than Wilde would have hoped for (in his dialogue 'The Critic as Artist' he imagined that a fit subject for William Powell Frith, the painter of realistic crowd scenes favoured by the Philistine masses, might be 'Waiting for the Last Omnibus').[20]

Wilde's fourth and final postcard depicted another day trip destination: the Abbazia di San Fruttuoso. This Romanesque abbey is situated in a narrow inlet 3.5 km along the coast from Portofino. A Benedictine monastery of the

San Fruttuoso today. Photo: Alessandro Capretti © FAI

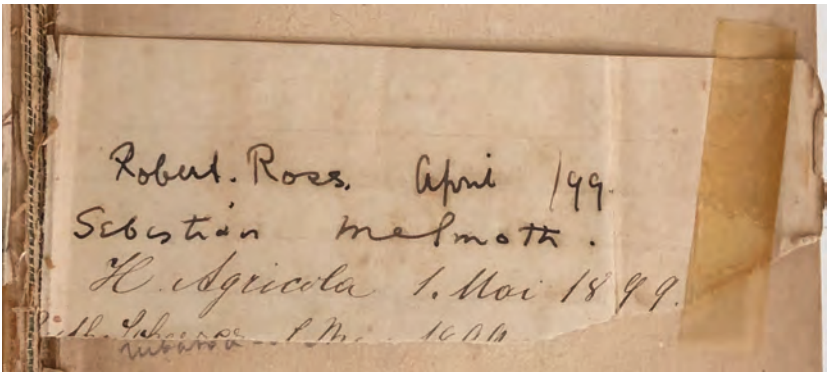
One of four postcards sent by Oscar Wilde to Robert Ross on 7 April 1897, showing views of San Fruttuoso.
Image: The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles

tenth–thirteenth centuries, it houses the ashes of the martyred Saint Fructuosus, who in 259 CE was burnt alive in the amphitheatre at Tarraco.[21] A slow decline began in the fourteenth century and in 1467 the monks abandoned the abbey. In the sixteenth century the noble Genoese Doria family received the patronage of Pope Julius III and promoted the settlement of several families of fishermen. In 1885 a parish was established in the village and the abbey was inhabited by the priest.[22] Wilde's postcard features four photographs: of the abbey itself; of the inlet as viewed from the abbey; of the white and black striped Doria tombs; and of the white-arched 'chiostro', or cloister. 'Have not yet been here', Wilde wrote, 'but have decided to enter the chiostro – just the place for me.'

On the day of his release from prison, Wilde's request to undertake a six month religious retreat, probably at the Brompton Oratory, had been refused.[23] But his suggestion that he might enter the chiostro of San Fruttuoso was surely intended as a joke. He had always found the juxtaposing of opposites, especially as they related to his own life, both amusing and aesthetically appealing.[24] A year after his sojourn in Santa Margherita he would write to Ross: 'The Cloister or the Café – there is my future.'[25] Perhaps, too, the photograph of San Fruttuoso's chiostro had reminded him of the cloisters of his beloved Magdalen College.

The only way to reach San Fruttuoso, today as in Wilde's time, is by boat or by hiking what Baedeker described as a 'steep and trying path' over the Monte di Portofino for which a guide was desirable.[26] The advice of Baedeker was to rent a boat at Portofino (5–6 fr.) and row for one-and-a-quarter hours to the 'prettily situated' abbey. Wilde may have been discouraged from attempting the trip on his own by the cost or by the physical exertion it would demand (his university rowing career had been brief and undistinguished and twenty years earlier).[27] But evidence has recently come to light suggesting that he did visit San Fruttuoso, and in the company of Ross.

Ann Witheridge, a London-based artist, brought to the notice of the Oscar Wilde Society a quite fascinating piece of paper that is the only surviving evidence of Wilde and Ross's visit to the abbey. Ann's mother, Françoise, told me how it came to be in her possession. Ethel 'Lolo' Brown, Françoise's grandmother, was born in the Castello di Paraggi near Portofino in 1887 and went on to study at London's Slade School of Fine Art. 'Sometime in the 1930s' Lolo took a boat to San Fruttuoso with her Dutch husband. At that time the abbey was almost derelict – an old fisherman and his wife were serving as custodians. Leafing through an old visitors' book, Lolo spotted the signatures of Robert Ross and Sebastian Melmoth. A fan of Wilde, she recognised the names. 'She rushed to her husband, borrowed his nail scissors and, to his horror, cut out the two names because, as she said, the book wasn't looked after, nobody would know who Sebastian Melmoth was, but, worse,



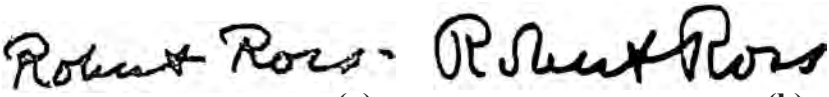
A piece of paper cut from a visitors' book at San Fruttuoso, signed by Robert Ross and Oscar Wilde as Sebastian Melmoth

if the Roman Catholic Church knew they would destroy it as Wilde was a homosexual.' When Lolo got home she taped the cutting onto the flyleaf of her copy of Robert Sherard's *Oscar Wilde: The Story of an Unhappy Friendship*. Underneath the cutting her husband wrote in pencil 'Donderdag 20 Maart' (Dutch: 'Thursday 20 March' – the unspecified year must have been 1930)[28] and 'rubato a San Fruttuoso' (Italian: 'stolen from San Fruttuoso'). In 1965, Françoise was visiting her grandmother's home in Camogli. 'There was a film on her little black and white television in Italian: the play *L'Importanza di essere Franco* [*The Importance of Being Earnest*]. I was transfixed and loved it. The next day, after my grandmother had told me so much more about Oscar Wilde, she gave me the book and told me to guard it preciously.' Françoise has done just that, and the book has accompanied her through her many moves between the countries of Europe, the Middle East and South America over the past sixty years.

The abbey's visitor book no longer survives, and a retired fisherman whose mother and grandmother were in charge of the visits to the Doria tombs before the abbey was donated to the Fondo Ambiente Italiano (FAI; equivalent to the UK's National Trust) in 1983 does not recall seeing or hearing of such a book.[29] Nevertheless, the signatures on the cutting have every appearance of being genuine. Robert Ross signed his name in at least two different ways – the signature on the cutting matches one of these. Wilde sometimes signed letters 'Sebastian Melmoth' roughly or neatly, and the signature on the cutting corresponds with the neater version. After his name, Ross has written the date: 'April 99'. The day of the visit is likely to have been late in the month because underneath Wilde's signature is that of another person, who visited the abbey on 1 May.

The parish church within the Abbey complex. Photo: Alessandro Capretti © FAI

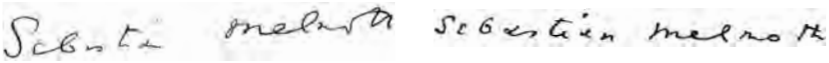
The Doria tombs and the lower cloister. Photo: Santi Caleca © FAI



(a) **(b)**

Robert Ross's two types of signature, both taken from letters in the Bodleian Library. The signature on the cutting is closer to (a) than (b)

(a) **(b)**



(c) **(d)**

(a,b,c): signatures of Oscar Wilde as Sebastian Melmoth; (d) Wilde writes his pseudonym in the body of a letter. Wilde varied in how neatly he wrote the name. The signature on the cutting matches (c) in joining 'eb' and in abbreviating the form of the first 'a'. It matches (d) in not joining the second 'a' to the 'n', and in not joining the 'o' to the 'th'

Wilde enjoyed explaining his mysterious pseudonym to old and new friends alike.[30] 'Melmoth' was taken from the novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Maturin, Wilde's great-uncle. Ross, who had anonymously co-authored an introduction to an 1892 reprint of the novel, claimed in a letter to *T.P.'s Weekly* in 1910 that it was he who had 'suggested the name of Melmoth. Wilde was amused at the idea, and eagerly adopted it.'[31] The name interested Wilde both because he anticipated that his post-prison existence would be peripatetic and because his great-uncle's novel had fascinated many of his literary heroes, such as Balzac, Baudelaire and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.[32] He is likely to have chosen his new Christian name in homage to the twice-martyred saint (Saint Sebastian was first shot with arrows; after recovering from his injuries he was clubbed to death). Wilde had adored Guido Reni's painting of Saint Sebastian on his first visit to Genoa in 1877, describing the saint as 'a lovely brown boy, with crisp, clustering hair and red lips, bound by his evil enemies to a tree, and, though pierced by arrows, raising his eyes with divine, impassioned gaze towards the Eternal Beauty of the opening heavens'.[33] Richard Kaye has noted that the broad arrows imprinted on the prison garb worn by Wilde can be seen as a grim parody of the arrows shot at Saint Sebastian,[34] and perhaps Wilde, having withstood

these arrows, considered the name of Sebastian particularly fitting. What's more, at the fin de siècle Saint Sebastian was increasingly being appropriated by decadent writers and androphile men,[35] and Wilde may have felt that he was reclaiming an identity that had always been his own – just as Jack Worthing resolves to take the name Ernest only to discover that he has been Ernest all along.[36] Wilde, having thus canonised himself, conferred the same honour on Ross, dubbing him Saint Robert of Phillimore: 'Love can canonise people. The saints are those who have been most loved.'[37]

Wilde and Ross's visit to San Fruttuoso likely served multiple purposes. Wilde had grown more inquisitive about Ross's Catholic faith since his release from prison,[38] and may have considered the visit an opportunity to demonstrate to his friend that he was serious about his desire to convert. But the pair would also have taken in the abbey for the same reason that tourists flock there today: to admire the architecture and enjoy the seclusion, the sand, the sea and the sun. In that sense it would be no different to Wilde's sightseeing excursions in Rome during the following spring, which are documented in a series of snaps taken – possibly by Ross – on Wilde's new Kodak.[39] That Wilde and Ross visited San Fruttuoso together means that they must also have visited Portofino and, most likely, Rapallo, which was nearer to Santa Margherita.

Saint Sebastian (c.1615) by Guido Reni. Wilde saw this painting at the Palazzo Rosso in Genoa in 1877 and considered it the ideal of male beauty. He probably adopted the name Sebastian in homage to the saint

What are we to make of Lolo's cutting of Ross and Wilde's names from the San Fruttuoso visitors' book almost a century ago? As is so often the case, we might profit by consulting Wilde, who warned that instead of moralising over ancient misdeeds we should treat of them in a 'fine spirit of disinterested curiosity'.[40] He also observed that '[t]here is no essential incongruity between crime and culture'.[41] And what crime could be evidence of a more refined taste, and a more enchanting sense of humour, than this? I can imagine Oscar and Robbie now, couched in the limestone tomb they

share in Père Lachaise, chuckling at the idea of a latter-day pilgrim passing by the silver reliquary of an early Christian martyr and instead taking, preserving and treasuring a relic of Saint Oscar of Oxford and Saint Robert of Phillimore. What a delightful addendum to this story of a friendship that was anything but unhappy.

Note

Françoise Witheridge has offered to return the cutting and the FAI has expressed its willingness to accept it and to keep it at the Abbey of San Fruttuoso.

Acknowledgements

I thank Ann and Françoise Witheridge for sharing information about the cutting and Alessandro Capretti (Property Manager FAI – Abbazia di San Fruttuoso) for his kind efforts to investigate its provenance. I am also grateful for the assistance of Jen Elliott-Bennett, Gino Scatasta, Sandra M. Leonard, Wolfgang Maier-Sigrist and Darcy Sullivan.

Notes

1. Four postcards from Oscar Wilde to Robert Ross, [postmark 7 April 1899], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1140–1. The originals are at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, UCLA, Wilde W6721L R825; images can be viewed on Gale's British Literary Manuscripts Online. Population of Santa Margherita Ligure in 1899: Baedeker, 95.

2. 'fantastic name': letter from Oscar Wilde to Louis Wilkinson, [postmark 14 December 1898], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1109; 'to prevent postmen having fits': letter from Oscar Wilde to Louis Wilkinson, [postmark 4 January 1900], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1169–70, 1169.

3. 'Pommery-Greno': letter from Oscar Wilde to Robert Ross, [27 December 1898], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1112; 'Swiss wine': letter from Oscar Wilde to Leonard Smithers, [postmark 18 March 1899], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1130; 'Swiss beer': letter from Oscar Wilde to Frank Harris, [c. 27 March 1899], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1136–7, 1137.

4. Letter from Oscar Wilde to More Adey, [March 1899], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1129

5. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Robert Ross, 1 April [1899], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1139–40

6. Baedeker, 95

7. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Leonard Smithers, [?8 April 1899], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1141; letter from Oscar Wilde to Robert Ross, [April 1899], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1142.

8. Baedeker, 95

9. Frankel, 251, states that Wilde and Smithers dined at the Concordia restaurant in Santa Margherita; Sturgis, 696, places the meal in the Café Concordia in Genoa. Smithers, in a 4 May [1899] letter to Wilde, refers to 'our conversation that night at the Restaurant Concordia', without mentioning the location of the restaurant (Nelson, 217). Baedeker, 65, would seem to settle the matter: he lists a Concordia restaurant in Genoa, on the Via S. Giuseppe, where dinner including wine could be had for 4 fr.

10. Sturgis, 696

11. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Robert Ross, [April 1899], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1142

12. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Robert Ross, [c.16 May 1899], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1143–4, 1143

13. Letter from Robert Ross to Adela Schuster, 23 December 1900, in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1225–30, 1225

14. E.g. 'the only possible form of exercise is to talk, not to walk.' (Gilbert Burgess, 'An Ideal Husband at the Haymarket Theatre', *The Sketch* [London, UK], 9 January 1895, 495, in Marland, 643–7, 647).

15. Letter from Oscar Wilde to More Adey, [March 1899], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1129

16. In 1877 Wilde crossed the Peloponnese with John Pentland Mahaffy, partly on horseback, and rode in the Campagna with Julia Constance Fletcher (Sturgis, 104–5, 108). David Hunter-Blair mocked Wilde's claim that, on the same trip, he had ridden into Ravenna: 'You know you never mounted a horse in your life; you would tumble off at once if you did.' (Mikhail, 10.)

17. He had sailed on Lough Corrib while staying at his father's holiday home (letter from Oscar Wilde to Reginald Harding, [?16 August 1876], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 30), from Zante to Katakolo in 1877 (letter from George A. Macmillan to Alexander Macmillan, 4 April 1877, Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies), and during an 1894 family holiday in Worthing (Sturgis, 516–17).

18. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Frank Harris, [c. 19 March 1899], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1131

19. Baedeker, 95

20. Wilde (2007), 128.8

21. Gorse, 236

22. Blanchard, 559; Email from Alessandro Capretti (Property Manager, Abbazia di San Fruttuoso) to Darcy Sullivan, 10 February 2025

23. Sturgis, 846, n. 4, summarises the conflicting accounts of this request and addresses suggestions by modern scholars that it is a myth.

24. Wilde, in his early poetry, had dramatised his struggle between what his tutor, John Pentland Mahaffy, termed 'Popery and Paganism' (Grech, 31–63). This impulse took on greater significance during his imprisonment, when he sought to comprehend or impose meaning on the catastrophe that had befallen him. For example, in the prison document that would be published as *De Profundis* he asserted that 'the two great turning-points of my life were when my father sent me to *Oxford*, and when society sent me to *prison*', and that 'Tired of being on the *heights* I deliberately went to the *depths*' (my emphasis) (Holland & Hart-Davis, 730, 732).

25. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Robert Ross, 14 May [1900], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 1187

26. Baedeker, 95. Blanchard, 559, estimates that the 'moderately strenuous' walk from Portofino to San Fruttuoso takes between 1 hr 30 mins and 2 hrs.

27. Sturgis, 63

28. Although Lolo's husband did not record the year, the only years in which 20 March

fell on a Thursday during this period were 1924, 1930 and 1941. Françoise has informed me that 1924 would have been too early and that by 1941 Lolo and her husband were living in Holland.

29. Email from Alessandro Capretti (Property Manager, Abbazia di San Fruttuoso) to Darcy Sullivan, 10 February 2025. Mr Capretti, on the possibility that the visitors' book was kept in the church, kindly checked the parish archive but did not find the book.

30. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Edward Rose, [postmark 29 May 1897], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 863–4, 864

31. 'Melmoth', *T.P.'s Weekly* (London, UK), 4 November 1910, 610. Holland & Hart-Davis, 832, n. 1, identify Ross and More Adey as authors of the introduction. Wilde and his mother helped Ross and Adey with biographical details (Maturin, v).

32. 'Society, as we have constituted it, will have no place for me, has none to offer; but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed.' (Holland & Hart-Davis, 777–8.) Letter from Oscar Wilde to Edward Rose, [postmark 29 May 1897], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 863–4, 864.

33. Wilde (2013), no. 2, ll. 56–61

34. Kaye (1999), 296

35. Holland & Hart-Davis, 832, n. 1; Kaye (1996), 85–8; Kaye (1999).

36. Wilde (2019), 850.395–6

37. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Robert Ross, [28 May 1897], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 858–61, 859

38. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Robert Ross, 31 May [1897], in Holland & Hart-Davis, 865–70, 866

39. See Holland, 182–3

40. 'Pen, pencil and poison': Wilde (2007), 121.36

41. 'Pen, pencil and poison': Wilde (2007), 121.11–12

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REGINA M. PONCIANO

Revaluing Oscar Wilde's Short Fiction: A Call for Collaboration

A curious paradox emerges when one delves into the reception of Oscar Wilde's three short story collections *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888), *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories* (1891) and *A House of Pomegranates* (1891), or his stand-alone story 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.' (1889). On the one hand, his stories have enjoyed enormous popularity since he first started telling them and, later, writing them down. If contemporary accounts are to be believed, Wilde's stories were so memorable that they lingered in people's minds long after they were told, while the posthumous publication of illustrated editions of the fairy tales was fundamental in restoring Wilde's reputation in the early twentieth century, when his name was still taboo in many social circles.[1] Since their appearance, countless editions of Wilde's short fiction have been produced, with many of his stories translated, anthologised and adapted for cinema, television, radio, mime plays, ballets and other media 'in their millions'.[2] Scholars have debated the relationship of individual stories and collections to questions of ethics and aesthetics as well as psycho-biographical aspects, such as Wilde's queerness, (Anglo-)Irishness, religious beliefs, socio-political convictions, views on art and beauty, truth and lies, morality and forgery, or his experiences as a father and a lover of men. This diversity of perspectives, often at odds with one another, uncovers the multi-layered meanings that Wilde deliberately wove into his short fiction, a genre particularly suited to revealing such productive tensions.

On the other hand, Wilde's short stories are rarely considered an important part of his authorial identity or aesthetic philosophy or as serious engagements with a developing genre: indeed, they are not considered as a 'coherent entity'[3] but viewed as a series of individual items[4] in a variety of accounts which – explicitly or implicitly – frame them as testing grounds for greater works to come, or as a springboard for Wilde's career as (commercial and/or literary) author. Take, for example, Philip K. Cohen's assertion that 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' and 'The Canterville Ghost' 'embody, if only in embryonic form, some of the ideas he [Wilde] would fully develop' in his

essays,[5] or Michael Gillespie's definition of the fairy tales 'as *gymnopédies*: limbering-up exercises that could offer the reader a measure of beauty but hinted at rather than displayed the full imaginative power of the author'.[6] The reasons for this critical oversight, according to John Sloan:

> are not hard to find. The short story form is generally regarded as slight in comparison with the more expansive forms of the novel and drama. In addition, Wilde's choice of romance and fairy tale was a conscious preference for a type of fiction that has often been regarded as less substantial than the sophisticated form of psychological realism. Crucially too, criticism was influenced by the traditional view handed down by Wilde's friends and contemporaries that the written versions of his stories were inferior to the versions he told.[7]

As Ian Small notes in the opening paragraph of the only *variorum* edition of Wilde's short fiction, another reason for the overlooking of *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.', *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories* and *A House of Pomegranates* is a lack of thorough and reliable material evidence that sheds light on how Wilde composed his short stories, when he composed them, what his perspective on the genre was, or what role he believed it could play in his career.[8] References to his short fiction in his private correspondence (with the exception of 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.') are sparse and do not conclusively reveal his creative processes or the pragmatic conditions of their publication. Despite the abundant anecdotes of Wilde as a talented storyteller,[9] there is no way to systematically verify these accounts, as we cannot discern which anecdotes are true and which are not, nor can we be certain of their accurate documentation.[10] There are also, again with the exception of 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.', no extant contracts or other types of transactional documents that could shed light on the material conditions of Wilde's career as a short story writer. Finally, bibliographical descriptions of Wilde's short story publications have not been significantly updated since Stuart Mason's critical bibliography, published over a century ago, while only a very limited number of primary sources (such as contemporary reviews) have been recovered to provide further insights into their trajectory.

The paradox of Wilde's short fiction being both familiar and unfamiliar calls for two new avenues of research. First, there is a need to reconsider Wilde's short stories from the point of view of genre: not discussing Wilde's short fiction *as short fiction* misses the important point that this eclectic body of work demonstrates Wilde's profound interest in the 'creative transaction between brevity and complexity – the art of saying less but meaning more',[11] which characterises not only his short fiction but also other parts of his *oeuvre*: whether in the form of anecdotes, aphorisms, epigrams or parables, brevity is one of the most effective means by which Wilde makes meaning

in his oral and written texts in works such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, 1891), *Intentions*, the society comedies (1892–1895), *Poems in Prose* (1893), *A Few Maxims for the Over-Educated* (1894), *Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young* (1894) and beyond.

Second, a promising area of research that remains largely untapped for Wilde's short fiction is the wealth of resources available in digital databases. Jokingly, Matthew Sturgis captures the ostensible ease afforded by this type of research:

> For anyone who can recall the long trek out to Colindale to visit the old British Library Newspapers archive, and the exhausting hours spent hunched over the microfilm reader in an eye-wearying search for a single stray mention of one's subject, there seems something almost indecent about the new ability to type in a 'search term' and bring up, in an instant, dozens, if not hundreds of new references.[12]

Digital archives offer opportunities through easy searchability, but they also present critical and methodological challenges related to the questions of curation and accessibility. While large-scale, commercial and/or institutional archives offer an ever-increasing number of resources, they replicate the same biases seen in traditional archives by prioritising mainstream, Western and major publications over minority, regional and non-Western ones. This imbalance reflects a larger issue described by Patrick Leary as the 'offline penumbra' – the liminal space where texts may fall if they are not digitised or readily accessible – where legal, commercial and institutional interests collide to determine which materials are available, to whom and under what terms.[13] Indeed, the cost and/or exclusivity of subscription-based and institutional repositories, as well as the quality and ease of use of underpinning technologies and interfaces, make it difficult or even impossible for some scholars and enthusiasts to consult or interpret many resources.[14] Finally, the vast amount of data is not only 'indecent' but also overwhelming, making it difficult for researchers to navigate and sift through effectively or to maintain a clear sense of direction in their research.

Challenges notwithstanding, the vast and ever-growing number of digitised Victorian periodicals offer a new way forward. Although primary sources retrieved from digital databases do not provide, in and of themselves, definitive insights into Wilde's views on the short story or the role he believed the genre played in his career, they do offer great opportunities to confirm, correct and complete existing bibliographical descriptions and publishing histories of Wilde's short fiction. Book announcements and advertisements, which are by far the most numerous types of primary sources to be found, shed light onto how Wilde's collections were marketed by their publishers if one considers the kind of periodicals they appear in, their target readership,

their circulation numbers or their placement within the periodical and page. Reviews, in turn, give a plethora of revelations about the (contemporary or posthumous) reception of the short story collections, their interpretation, their role in the negotiation of Wilde's literary and commercial identity as an author of books, and their relationship to and influence over contemporary genre expectations. In the case of original (re)publications, digital repositories also provide more contexts than canonical sources, as they allow seeing and reading the stories and collections as they were seen and read by their original readerships, thus uncovering hypotexts or contexts that are not as readily recognised by present-day readers.

In other words, the largely untapped wealth of digitised materials holds much potential to illuminate the original publishing landscape in which Wilde's short stories were written, published and received – thus addressing Small's concern that a combination of limited evidence and critical oversight has led to a scholarly approach that often neglects their immediate contexts and has led to unfounded claims.[15] Building on this potential, I have created the freely accessible website Wilde Short Fiction (wildeshortfiction.com). Like critical bibliographies, it compiles an exhaustive enumerative bibliography of published scholarship and provides a detailed descriptive bibliography of the periodical publications of Wilde's short stories between 1887 and 1889, as well as the first American and British editions of the three short story collections. It also compiles contemporary reviews of the collections (eighty to date) in American, British and Irish periodicals.[16] In its current form, it provides a more systematic and detailed overview of the publishing histories of Wilde's short fiction than any other account, and provides ten times more transcribed contemporary reviews than what had thus far been made available in secondary and tertiary sources.

Everything on the Wilde Short Fiction website has been manually transcribed between early 2020 and late 2023. The sources are primarily public domain materials available through the open-access databases HathiTrust Digital Library, Google Books and Internet Archive. Additionally, subscription-based content was sourced from the website Newspapers.com, by Ancestry, and from my own university's interlibrary loan programme. Other freely accessible databases such as Europeana, Trove and The Curran Index to Victorian Periodicals did not yield results, while trial- or subscription-based archives such as British Library Newspapers Archive or Irish Newspapers Archive could not be consulted due to financial constraints. To locate the materials, I employed the 'search terms' of Wilde's individual short stories as well as the three collections, implementing filters to narrow down the hundreds of new references to encompass the months preceding and the year following each publication in American, British and Irish periodicals. Contemporary reviews were prioritised, but a selection of other

types of primary sources such as book announcements and advertisements were sampled to complete bibliographical descriptions that complement, correct and/or contextualise standing accounts.

The most notable aspect of Wilde Short Fiction is its dataset of contemporary reviews, which are made available on the website as well as a public repository on the linked hosting service GitHub. On the website, the dataset includes search, sorting and filtering functions that are designed to help users navigate the extensive collection: one can search for specific terms related to Wilde's short fiction, sort the results by different criteria such as date or publication, and/or apply filters to narrow down the results to specific collections or types of reviews. On the public GitHub repository, the curated dataset, including standardised metadata, can be consulted and downloaded. The history of updates is available due to version control being enabled, and people can contribute to the repository through comments and 'pull requests'.[17] It thus provides enhanced accessibility by removing geographical and institutional barriers while improving efficiency, ensuring transparency in terms of the data provenance, and using a standardised format (.csv), which allows for easy integration with other research tools and databases. Because of its openness and transparency, the dataset is a sustainable resource which can be used in a variety of educational and research contexts ranging from Wilde studies to short story theory and criticism, periodical studies and cultural studies.

In contrast to analogue equivalents, Wilde Short Fiction is a living resource that is continually updated, seeking to inspire new avenues of quantitative as well as qualitative research on *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*, 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.' and *A House of Pomegranates*. Most recently, the project received a grant from the Spanish Association for English and American Studies (AEDEAN) to redesign, restructure and expand the website and database. Over the course of 2025 and 2026, this grant will enable me to further quantitative as well as qualitative research into the processes of production, distribution and reception of Wilde's short fiction in the American, British and Irish press across three periods: the years between the publication of the short story collections and the trials (1888–1894), the years between the trials and his death (1895–1900), and the decade after his death (1900–1910). This expansion also includes the addition of more categories of metadata (such as the circulation numbers, target audiences, price points or political affiliations of the periodicals in which the contemporary reviews were published) and, of course, making all data publicly available. In short, Wilde Short Fiction will continue to address the paradox mentioned at the beginning of this article by providing a comprehensive and accessible resource for understanding the context of Wilde's short stories better, complementing our current

understanding of how this trajectory developed across regional and socio-economic contexts.

Beyond the scope of this grant, future plans for Wilde Short Fiction would involve compiling primary sources from broader cultural, socio-economic and historical contexts. At least as important, however, is fostering a collaborative and inclusive community where resources are shared. For this reason, this article is a call for collaboration for those with access to both analogue and digital repositories, including paywalled or institutional databases, or private collections. Collaboration can take the form of contributing any primary or secondary sources related to Wilde's short stories (such as contemporary reviews, anecdotes, reports, letters and bibliographic references) that have not yet been compiled on the website. It can also take the form of advice, petitions and suggestions, which are not only welcome but encouraged. Everything can be submitted through a dedicated form on the website or via GitHub, and will be made publicly available as soon as the content is verified.

Notes

1. Joseph Bristow (2017) has shown how illustrated editions of *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* and *A House of Pomegranates* published in the decades after Wilde's death greatly contributed to the restoration of Wilde's posthumous reputation, not least through the quality of illustrations by Charles Robinson (Duckworth, 1913), Jessie M. King (Methuen, 1909) and Ben Kutcher (Moffat, Yard and Company 1918, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1928).

2. Murray, 1

3. Markey, 73

4. Small, xi

5. Cohen, 53

6. Gillespie, 31

7. Sloan, vii

8. Small, xi–xvi.

9. The possibility that Wilde wrote a larger number of short stories is further suggested by the existence of a considerable number of anecdotes of Wilde telling (presumably unpublished) stories: the volumes 'Oscar Wilde: Contes et Propos' (1949) and *Le Chant Du Cygne: Contes Parlés d'Oscar Wilde* (1942), edited by Léon Guillaume de Saix, collect more than a hundred such stories, while *Table Talk: Oscar Wilde* (2000), edited by Thomas Wright, collects forty-two, claiming that some were written by Wilde himself while the majority were recorded by his friends and acquaintances. These texts have not been recognised as having Wilde's authority, and are therefore never included in any of the complete editions or considered part of Wilde's short story production. Although it is not my suggestion to include such stories in the discussion of Wilde's short fiction, their existence, combined with the lack of certainty about the number of short stories Wilde published anonymously, should suggest that short fiction was an integral part of Wilde's creativity throughout his life and career, on the one hand, and that his collections were more carefully put together than is generally acknowledged, on the other.

10. Small, xiv

11. Hunter, 2

12. Sturgis, 118

13. Leary, 2005, 73, 82–83. However, this tendency requires nuance, as the abundance and variety of newspapers from metropolises such as London complicate the apparent divide between global and local, while the growing critical interest in women's, queer and postcolonial magazines has begun to recover and make accessible historically marginalized print cultures.

14. See James Mussell for a more in-depth discussion of methodological issues related to digital resources for researchers and teachers, and the financial, technological, legal and commercial factors which make such resources accessible to which groups.

15. Small, xxi–xx

16. To put this into perspective, the critical bibliographies by Stuart Mason (1914), Edward Halim Mikhail (1978) and Thomas Mikolyzk (1993) had jointly identified twenty-one bibliographies, of which only eight had been reprinted in Karl Beckson's *The Critical Heritage of Oscar Wilde*.

17. On Github, you can create a pull request on any repository to suggest that certain changes be added to the original project. Other contributors can then review, discuss and eventually merge (add) your changes to the main codebase if they are approved.

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RICHARD HASLAM

Oscar Wilde, Parnellite Home Ruler and Gladstonian Liberal: Wilde's Career at the Eighty Club (1887–1895) by Thomas Wright and Paul Kinsella

'Charming' – that is one of Wilde's favourite adjectives, and Thomas Wright and Paul Kinsella's compact yet cogent book commences with a charming account of the origin of their multi-year quest to delineate the key co-ordinates of Wilde's Irish political ideology and activity. In 'the early 2000s', Wright recollects, he was pursuing archival research at UCLA's Clark Library, when a receipt fell out of a book he was inspecting. The receipt documented that Wilde had paid his 1889 'annual membership dues to the Eighty Club, a Liberal party organisation founded in 1880', and this clue prompted Wright to pursue additional archival investigations in the University of Oxford's Bodleian Library. Ultimately, he found compelling proof that Wilde had been a member of the Eighty Club from 1887 to 1895, a period that intersected with the organisation's active endorsement of 'Gladstonian Liberal causes, most notably the promotion of Home Rule for Ireland'.

The detective-narrative resonances of the book's preface may call to mind 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.', Wilde's arch exploration of the allure and agony of literary-critical obsession. However, the evidence Wright and Kinsella produce is valid, unlike the forged portrait that Cyril Graham commissions in order to convert Erskine to his theory. With that evidence, the authors demonstrate decisively that 'from the late 1880s to the early 1890s, Wilde adopted the public persona of a party political animal', in addition to continuing his roles as 'author, journalist, socialite and raconteur'.

Wright initially announced the findings in a 2014 article in the *Times Literary Supplement*, which was followed by a 2014 conference co-presentation with Kinsella, and the duo's lengthy 2015 essay on the Oscholars website. That website's eventual discontinuance motivated the essay's eventual republication (with a few updates and revisions) in book

form. Following the preface and introduction, Wright and Kinsella arrange the material in ten sections, examining first the Eighty Club's origins and operations, Wilde's possible reasons for joining in 1887 and his pre-membership perspectives on Irish politics, especially as expressed during his 1882 USA speaking tour. Then follow sections on Wilde's 'early views on English political parties', his 'reaction to Tory coercion' policies in Ireland, his attendance at the 1889 Parnell Commission and his political engagements as '[a]n active Eighty Clubber' from 1889 to 1892. The closing sections comprise Wilde's reaction to Parnell's tribulations between 1889 and 1891, his gradual withdrawal from on-the-ground political activity following Parnell's death in October 1891, his ongoing support from 1891 to 1895 for Home Rule and the cessation of his Eighty Club membership, due to his imprisonment in 1895.

The book's many strengths include its nuanced exploration of the ambiguities and ambivalences haunting Wilde's and his parents' ancestral, class, caste and religious inheritances, and its analysis of how these legacies affected the family's attitudes to nationalism, republicanism, imperialism, Fenianism and democracy. Another strength is the succinct account of Gladstone's 1885 switch to supporting Home Rule openly, his partnering with Charles Stewart Parnell's Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) and the resulting split within the Liberal Party (and, in 1887, within the Eighty Club) concerning the 'Irish question'. Indeed, the authors infer that Wilde's opportunity to join the Club in 1887 arose because eighty of its Liberal Unionist members had resigned earlier that year.

Wright and Kinsella explore in some detail Wilde's 1882 USA tour in order to ascertain how the interviews and speeches he delivered there foreshadow his active support for Home Rule five years later, when he joined the Eighty Club. They focus especially on his 27 February 1882 interview with the *St Louis Globe Democrat*, in which he agrees that he is a Home Ruler and expresses support for the Land League's overall goals but not its No-Rent Manifesto. As Wright and Kinsella observe, Wilde declines to spell out how his own family's property might be negatively affected by an anti-rent agenda. When asked whether he favoured 'the total separation of Ireland from the United Kingdom', he replied that '[a]t present . . . it would be unwise . . . to claim total separation, because . . . he did not think' Ireland 'would be able to preserve it', and '[t]he first step . . . should be a local Parliament', an approach shared (as the authors note) by Parnell.

With respect to 'Wilde's early views on English political parties', Wright and Kinsella mention his self-description in 1885 as 'a Radical', which they define as 'the most progressive faction of the Liberal Party, being vociferous advocates of social reform'. They also highlight his strong stand against 'Tory policy' – especially 'coercion' – as expressed in various book reviews

in the later 1880s. In addition, Wright and Kinsella point out that Wilde attended 'a nationalist meeting of the Southwark Irish Literary Club on 21 September 1887', where he praised the evening's guest speaker IPP MP Justin McCarthy, whose own talk on 'the poets of '48' predicted an imminent 'National Government for Ireland'. According to Wright and Kinsella, Wilde's decision to join the Eighty Club is therefore 'comprehensible in the light of his longstanding nationalism, his often expressed Parnellite Home Rule views', 'his increasing preference for the Liberals over the Tories' and 'his hostility towards Tory coercion in Ireland'.

These political commitments underpin Wilde's attendance in February 1889 at a number of meetings of the Parnell Commission, which had been convened to investigate charges that Parnell supported 'terrorist violence'. Following Parnell's vindication, the Eighty Club invited him to a congratulatory dinner, where guests (including Wilde) heard a speech that Parnell was pressed into delivering. The book also diligently traces Wilde's participation (including the giving of speeches and toasts) at many other Eighty Club events, until what appears to be 'his last ever appearance at a club meeting' on 15 June 1892. Wright and Kinsella speculate that Wilde's withdrawal from club activities (but not membership) may have been due to the widespread divisiveness that followed Parnell's political disgrace and death.

Stepping back from club attendance did not impede Wilde from expressing pro-Home Rule positions in private and in public from 1892 to 1895, but his imprisonment put an end to his Eighty Club membership and to his ability to take a public stand for Home Rule. Wright and Kinsella maintain that 'Wilde's downfall' was 'not simply another example of Tory coercion against an Irishman' but – ironically – 'his prosecution was a thoroughly Liberal affair, being engineered and expedited primarily by his friends from the Eighty Club': Charles Russell, Russell's father Sir Charles Russell, Sir Robert Reid, Sir Frank Lockwood and Herbert Asquith. Concerning Lockwood's decision to re-try Wilde and to lead the prosecution at the second trial, the authors raise the possibility of 'a Liberal conspiracy', a strategy to combat rumours about the homosexuality of the Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery. Nevertheless, Wright and Kinsella point to one redeeming postscript: Richard Haldane, another Eighty Club member, consoled and aided Wilde during his two-year imprisonment, and in return Wilde sent Haldane a copy of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

Overall, the authors make a persuasive case for Wilde as 'Parnellite Home Ruler' and 'Gladstonian Liberal', but the book includes some puzzling omissions and interpretations. For example, in an endnote Wright and Kinsella claim that Wilde 'echoed' his 1882 response to the *St Louis Globe Democrat* (about a possible subsequent 'step' from 'a local Parliament'

towards 'total separation') 'on a later occasion when he remarked that "the case of the South in the civil war was to my mind much like that of Ireland today. It was a struggle for autonomy, self-government for a people"'. The first puzzle is that, in this later interview, Wilde says nothing about 'total separation'; instead, he states he does 'not wish to see the empire dismembered, but only to see the Irish people free, and Ireland still as a willing and integral part of the British Empire'. The second puzzle is that Wright and Kinsella omit some key context: Wilde makes the comparison between Ireland and the American South while discussing his plan to visit Jefferson Davis, for whom he has 'an intense admiration', and whom he praises effusively again several days later, in an interview following his visit. Like Deaglán Ó Donghaile, in his book *Oscar Wilde and the Radical Politics of the Fin de Siècle*, Wright and Kinsella quote from Wilde's Davis-connected interviews without mentioning Davis, as though naming him might disfigure the picture they seek to paint. With respect to omissions, it might also have been helpful for the book to acknowledge the anarchist strain that sometimes surfaces in Wilde's politics, as documented in Kristian Williams's *Resist Everything Except Temptation: The Anarchist Philosophy of Oscar Wilde*.

In another puzzle, the authors argue that, after the 1886 Liberal Party split, following Gladstone's Home Rule advocacy, Wilde 'began to introduce party-political references into his literary works', including 'a number of snide allusions to the Radical Liberal Unionists who, it seems, he could not forgive for leaving the Liberal Party and allying themselves with the Conservatives, in opposition to Home Rule'. They contend that the phrase 'violent Radicals' in the opening paragraph of Wilde's 1887 short story 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' refers specifically to those Radicals who had defected from the Liberal Party, rather than to Radicals in general (in the same way Wilde had described himself as a Radical, two years earlier).

Here is the passage from Wilde's story, followed by Wright and Kinsella's reading:

> Six Cabinet Ministers had come on from the Speaker's Levée in their stars and ribands . . . It was certainly a wonderful medley of people. Gorgeous peeresses chatted affably to violent Radicals, popular preachers brushed coat-tails with eminent sceptics, a perfect bevy of bishops kept following a stout prima-donna from room to room, on the staircase stood several Royal Academicians, disguised as artists, and it was said that at one time the supper-room was absolutely crammed with geniuses.
>
> . . . Wilde describes a fashionable society reception to which 'violent Radicals' are now admitted, **by virtue of their support for**

> **Salisbury's government**. They chat away 'affably' with 'Gorgeous peeresses', and mix with 'Six **[Tory]** cabinet Ministers . . . in their stars and ribands'. This is the first of many Wildean jibes against the Radicals, his criticisms characteristically emphasising their hypocrisy. [my emphasis]

However, in his editorial note on the phrase 'violent Radicals' for the OUP *Complete Works*, Ian Small states that Wilde 'uses the term "Radical" frequently, but never with any precise political or social reference'. This broader sense of 'Radical' fits better with the passage's comic meeting-of-opposites spirit, and it also accords with the word's use later in the same story, when the cheiromantist Mr Podgers correctly infers that Sir Thomas is a 'strong Conservative' with '[g]reat aversion to cats and Radicals', and the Dean of Chichester's daughter Jane Percy complains in a letter to her aunt that 'everybody is so Radical and irreligious nowadays'. (The term is used in a similarly comic way in 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.' and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.)

However, these lapses detract little from the overall effectiveness of Wright and Kinsella's argument. Their case for Wilde as a consistent Home Ruler is significantly more probable than claims that he was a 'terrorist by another name' (Jerusha McCormack), 'a militant Irish republican' (Declan Kiberd) or 'an Irish republican' whose 'ideology' was 'shared with the militant Fenian movement' (Ó Donghaile). By juxtaposing 'the active years of Wilde's membership (1887–1892)' in the Eighty Club with 'his other Home Rule activities and statements', Wright and Kinsella persuasively document Wilde's 'overarching narrative of commitment to the Home Rule cause' from the late 1870s onwards.

Thomas Wright and Paul Kinsella, *Oscar Wilde, Parnellite Home Ruler and Gladstonian Liberal: Wilde's Career at the Eighty Club (1887–1895)* (Oxford: Danaher Books, 2025), hbk UK £14.99, USA $19, 101pp, ISBN-13: 978-1-0369-0723-5

ANGELA KINGSTON

Devon Cox (ed.) *Aesthetic Movement Satire: A Dramatic Anthology*

Many *Wildean* readers will be familiar with Devon Cox, the writer and historian whose first biographical work, *The Street of Wonderful Possibilities: Whistler, Wilde and Sargent in Tite Street* (2015), won the London Historians Book of the Year Award. He is also the editor of *Constance Wilde's Autograph Book 1886–1896*, published by the Oscar Wilde Society (2022). Cox has once again put his research, writing and editing skills to good use with *Aesthetic Movement Satire: A Dramatic Anthology*, an annotated collection of four satiric plays responding to the aesthetic craze of the 1870s and 1880s: *The Grasshopper* (1877) by John Hollingshead, *Where's the Cat?* (1880) by James Albery, *The Colonel* (1881) by F. C. Burnand and *Patience: Or, Bunthorne's Bride* (1881) by W. S. Gilbert. Cox's book is not a comprehensive anthology of such works, omitting plays such as *Victims* (1857) by Tom Taylor and George Grossmith's *Cups and Saucers* (1876). Cox also excludes 1892's *The Poet and the Puppets* by Charles Brookfield, which has been reproduced in Richard Schoch (ed.), *Victorian Theatrical Burlesques* (2003) and Michael Seeney (ed.), *Spoofed: Oscar Wilde, Charles Brookfield and* The Poet and the Puppets (2018). *Aesthetic Movement Satire* is perhaps the most significant publication about dramatic versions of Wilde since Robert Tanitch's *Oscar Wilde on Stage and Screen* (1999), which provides some valuable notes on aesthetic satires in Cox's period, as well as commentary on theatrical depictions from 1936 to 1999.

Cox states his aim in amalgamating these works is to show the evolution of stage satires about aestheticism and encourage critical attention, so the relationships between Victorian theatre, art and the Aesthetic Movement can be further explored. He sees the volume as:

> . . . a critical first step in understanding [the] symbiotic relationship between theatre and the Aesthetic Movement with a potential to yield

> valuable insights not only in the history of British theatre and visual art, but also in nuancing our understanding of the role of satire in negotiating shifting norms of gender, fashion, emotion, and sexuality at this pivotal turning point at the end of the nineteenth century.

The editor's readable and engaging introduction makes good inroads towards this end, providing an overview of the Aesthetic Movement and its early theatrical connections, as well as canny observations on how the dramatic satires simultaneously reflected, criticised and popularised the movement and its male leaders. In these plays, Wilde-like figures with a variety of names, such Scott Ramsay, Lambert Streyke and Reginald Bunthorne, are often outlandish and 'intense', pontificating in 'quixotic, wistful, declamatory speech'. Moving chronologically through the satires, these characters become increasingly weak, effeminate, disingenuous, fraudulent and ridiculous, in contrast with more strapping, virile, straightforward men, aligned with the 'normal' Victorian moral order.

Cox provides helpful profiles and short analyses of the plays, including plot summaries and run times. The plot summaries are particularly useful, given the frequently complex and convoluted story lines, which, on the whole, don't translate well to modern tastes. The editor has also compiled a handy chronology of performances, related publications and events from 1862 to 1903.

Having read passing references to the lesser-known, out-of-print satires over the years, this reviewer found it fascinating to read them in full, with Cox's relevant and informative annotations. However, readers may be disappointed that some notable Wilde links aren't mentioned: for example, those relating to 1877's *The Grasshopper*, a burlesque prompted by the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in April of that year. While Cox provides extensive notes on the artist character Pygmalion Flippit, a satirical version of James McNeill Whistler, this play is often said to contain depictions of the young Wilde and his friend, the artist Frank Miles. The up-and-coming Wilde, temporarily suspended from his Oxford college, attended the Grosvenor opening, quite likely with Miles, and his bold review of this event appeared in the *Dublin University Magazine* in July 1877. Wilde's biographer Richard Ellman avers that *The Grasshopper* contained 'a dance of three persons . . . reputed to be Whistler, Miles, and Wilde', a statement echoed by Tanitch and other scholars. In the version Cox provides – the published 1877 version, not the one submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's Office – the character of Adonis Stipple, Flippit's 'friend and unworthy Pupil', seems a likely candidate for Miles, although Cox doesn't identify him as such. Likewise, he doesn't point to a Wilde-derived character in the play; the only possibility I could identify was The Hon. Mr Sydney Morass, the son of the

Earl of Bogland. Morass is 'not half such a fool as he looks' and denies being 'a very good young man'; indeed, he attempts to filch money from his father, who says his son is 'useless' as well as 'weak and easily led'. Morass's love for Adelina Gushington, an artist's model and the 'Pet of the Photographers', recalls Wilde's contemporary infatuation with Lillie Langtry; Flippit and Stipple also admire Adelina. While Morass doesn't demonstrate a strong similarity to the Wilde we know, this may be due to the fact that, in 1877, Wilde was still emerging as a public figure.

Certainly, for the Wilde scholar, reading *The Grasshopper* raises more questions than it answers. While the 'wild Can-can' features twice in the play, once with Morass and the titular female acrobat, and then with Morass and Adelina, there is no three-person dance involving the male characters. Was there one in the version submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office? Was the dance performed as an encore, perhaps? Was Morass intended to be an imitation of Wilde? And is the character of Adelina, whose 'portrait is in every print shop – at one time as an angel of mercy – at another as a Bacchanalian nymph', referencing 'Professional Beauty' Langtry, who Wilde, Miles and Whistler were all enamoured with at the time? Cox may have considered these questions topics for future research, but they should be flagged in a work of this nature.

Three years after *The Grasshopper*, in 1880, *Where's the Cat?* by James Albery was first performed. Scott Ramsey, a 'society poet' and 'strange boy' who 'went to London to turn author' was played by Herbert Beerbohm Tree with Wilde's mannerisms. Cox relates that one of these quirks was Wilde's habit of turning one trouser leg up at the bottom. Tree's Ramsey, with his admiration of blue-and-white china, adoption of classical attitudes and love of sunflowers, was quickly recognised as a caricature of Wilde, with whom Tree was acquainted. The plot of *Where's the Cat?* is revealed to be an 'elaborate piece of silliness' (a quote from the *New York Tribune*), built around a fortune-teller's cat and several misunderstandings and pretences. In the course of the story Ramsay develops a rapturous love for the aesthetic Dagmar, whom he kisses at the end of the play; perhaps another echo of Wilde's admiration for Lillie Langtry and other Victorian beauties.

Many readers will be interested in Tree's brief career mimicking Wilde in dramatic satires; in addition to playing Scott Ramsey in *Where's the Cat?* he also appeared as the Wildean Lambert Streyke in F. C. Burnand's *The Colonel* in 1881, replacing James Fernandez, who also played the character with Wilde's characteristics. Tanitch relates that Tree later wrote a parody of Wilde's affected manner for the satirical magazine *Punch*, which was edited by Burnand, in 1882. (Before writing *The Colonel*, Burnard had been satirising aestheticism in *Punch* with the characters of Maudle and Postlethwaite.) Tree went on to play key roles in Wilde's plays in the 1890s;

as the actor-manager of the Haymarket Theatre, he commissioned *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) and in 1895 he sub-let the theatre to Lewis Waller and H. H. Morell who produced *An Ideal Husband*. After Tree played the Wildean Lord Illingworth in *A Woman of No Importance*, Wilde commented: 'Every day Herbert becomes *de plus en plus oscarisé*. It is a wonderful case of nature imitating art.'

The Colonel, adapted from a French farce, depicts the effect of aestheticism on the middle-class Forrester household, the women of which are drawn into a scheme devised by Streyke and his nephew Basil, of the 'Aesthetic High Art Company'. Streyke speaks of living up to his teapot, and proposes a new art gallery for those who 'heedless of the world's neglect, sigh out their souls in glorious colour symphonies'. Prefiguring Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*, women are portrayed as more susceptible to the aesthetic leader's charms; men are more clear-eyed. Richard Forrester refers to Streyke as 'more asthmatic than aesthetic' and derides his 'ultra pre-Raphaelite, mock-hysteric, super-aesthetic school of art'. The duplicitous Streyke and Basil are ultimately exposed by stalwart American cavalry officer Colonel Woottweell W. Woodd, who calls Streyke 'Mr Snake', the 'mouldy master' of an 'unnatural and false aestheticism'.

There are some interesting descriptions of aesthetic décor for *The Colonel*'s staging, and mention of aesthetic preferences for 'cold greys and sad yellows'. E. W. Godwin, who designed Wilde's Tite Street interiors, found the stage set 'harmonious and pleasing'. The play also contains intriguing parallels with Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). Streyke identifies the name Gwendoline as aesthetic, and Cox notes its later use in Wilde's society play. In addition, redolent of John Worthing's dual identity in *Earnest*, Burnand's Richard Forrester uses a country subterfuge to explain his absences, saying: 'I'm Forrester at home; Fisher in the country.'

The Colonel was a theatrical success, with 550 performances in London and a successful tour of the provinces, being performed from 1881 to 1883, with a revival in 1887. Wilde dismissed the play as 'a dull farce', but the general public clearly thought otherwise, as did the Prince of Wales (who also saw *Where's the Cat?*) and Queen Victoria. Cox provides an absorbing account of the special performance for the Queen, as well as an excerpt from her diary, where she wrote that she was

> . . . much amused [by the] very clever play, written to quiz and ridicule, the foolish aesthetic people, who dress in such an absurd manner, with loose garments, large puffed sleeves, great hats, & carrying peacock feathers, sunflowers and lilies.

Wilde probably realised, like other commentators, that the successful satire possibly revived the waning Aesthetic Movement, proving the maxim that

there is no such thing as bad publicity. He certainly rode the wave of hype surrounding Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience: Or, Bunthorne's Bride* (1881) while following the comic opera on its American tour. In *Patience* Wilde is clearly referenced in the lily-loving poet and 'aesthetic sham' Reginald Bunthorne, who is surrounded by a bevy of worshipping 'love-sick maidens' hanging on his every word. As with the corresponding characters in *Where's the Cat* and *The Colonel*, the character of Bunthorne, with his flowery speech and 'affectation/Born of a morbid love of admiration', was soon recognised as a version of Wilde, with a dash of the 'fleshly poet' Algernon Swinburne.

The plot of *Patience* will be familiar to many readers. Archibald Grosvenor is a rival aesthetic poet to Bunthorne, as well as his rival in love for the heart of Patience, a dairymaid. A troop of dragoon officers try converting to aestheticism to court the love-sick maidens. By the end of the play all except Bunthorne have returned to 'normal' and Bunthorne has no bride. *Patience* is a merciless mockery of aestheticism and aesthetic tastes; as Cox observes, it presents 'a pastiche mix of a mythical and quasi-Medieval setting reminiscent of those in the works of Rossetti, Leighton, Alma Tadema, Burne-Jones, Luke Fildes, and Walter Crane'. Wilde attended the first night and was seen to laugh, though he later said he was '[jeering] at it as it deserved'. Cox notes Wilde's haste to publish his poetry in the wake of *Patience*, presumably to contradict the poetaster depiction in the opera and other satires. Cox briefly mentions the revival of *Patience* in London in 1900, just weeks before the disgraced Wilde's death, but includes no further information about this production. One can't help but wonder how it reflected Wilde's dramatic fall from grace.

Queer theorists will be interested in some of the 'aesthetic attitudes' in the plays that hint at a homosexual orientation. For example, in *Patience*, Bunthorne 'remains icy insensible' to the 'hopeless' love of his female followers; apart from his declared interest in the milkmaid Patience, 'the love of maidens is, to him, as interesting as the taxes!' On this subject, *Where's the Cat?* was adapted from a play with the arresting title of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, written by the Austrian actor and playwright, Franz von Schönthan (1849–1913). Cox writes that Albery's adaptation of the play:

> was faithful to Schönthan's original in terms of plot and characters with several small but significant alterations for British audiences designed to satirize the fashions, decorations, literary tastes, and amatory dialogue of the intense, flower-worshipping aesthetes.

Curiously, there is no obvious allusion in Albery's play to the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, or any suggestion of homosexuality or sodomy. (Ramsay does state that he never kisses his wife, but he is referring to a character who is pretending to be his spouse.) While Cox thanks Yvonne

Ivory 'for her translation and insights on the German original', he doesn't elaborate on the German title. It seems a strange omission, considering that Wilde was famously accused of posing as a 'somdomite' by Lord Queensberry, and was subsequently incarcerated for 'gross indecency'. Is there the suggestion of homosexuality in Ramsay's German counterpart? Cox refers the reader to two texts on gender and sexuality in the plays (Carolyn Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody* (2012) and Dominic Janes, *Oscar Wilde Prefigured: Queer Fashioning and British Caricature, 1750–1900* (2016)), then puts this topic aside.

Dramatic representations of Wilde continued long after 1881 into the twentieth century and beyond, creating rich material for analysis. While Cox's anthology of early aesthetic satires has some limitations with respect to Wilde, there is no doubt that, with its little-known works and high-quality editing, it is a worthwhile purchase for anyone interested in the Aesthetic Movement or nineteenth-century theatre, and will encourage further research.

Devon Cox (ed.), *Aesthetic Movement Satire: A Dramatic Anthology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024), hbk £75, pbk £23.99, 288pp, ISBN-13: 978-1-3504-1776-2

TINE ENGLEBERT

Gerald Barry's *Salome*

In March 2025 Irish composer Gerald Barry, composer in residence at Theater Magdeburg in 2022/23, presented the premiere of his new opera *Salome* – a playful yet radical musical reimagining of Oscar Wilde's play. Composed between 2017 and 2020, the planned 2021 premiere in Los Angeles was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Magdeburg performance more than made up for this delay: Barry's fascination with the grotesque and the absurd found full expression in an opera that is as disorienting as it is irresistibly witty. With *Salome*, Barry revisits Wilde's work for the second time, following his acclaimed opera *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which premiered in 2013. While markedly different in tone, both operas share his signature blend of surreal humour, sharp irony and audacious theatricality.

Nearly 120 years after Richard Strauss, Barry adds a bold, uncompromising and ironic interpretation to the long tradition of *Salome* adaptations (including operas by Antoine Mariotte, John Becker, Enjott Schneider and Gérard Massini). Whereas Strauss was swept away by sensual orchestration, Barry opts for playful directness. He opens with an overture, distils Wilde's text into concise statements, and deliberately fragments the narrative, making it unpredictable and disorienting. Characters lose their names and are reduced to their function – except for Salome herself – while musical emphasis shifts unexpectedly. The female figures, Salome and the queen (Herodias), are musically downplayed, whereas the male figures, particularly the king (Herod) and the prisoner (Jokanaan), take on a more prominent role. Salome remains the driving force, but in a fragmented and ironic manner.

SUMMARY OF THE PLOT

During a royal banquet, a young Syrian and a soldier discuss Princess Salome. The Syrian becomes obsessed with her while, in the background, the

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The reviewer attended the premiere on Saturday 15 March 2025 at the Opernhaus of Theater Magdeburg. Other performance dates were 23 March, 6 and 21 April, 4 and 10 May 2025.

voice of a prisoner resounds in an incomprehensible language. Unsettled by the king's gaze, Salome leaves the banquet. She is fascinated by the prisoner's voice and attempts to imitate his sounds, longing to speak with him despite the young Syrian's warnings. Her obsession grows, leading to chaos: the young Syrian attempts suicide but survives, the king slips on his blood and the queen, increasingly agitated by the prisoner's cryptic words, descends into hysteria.

The scene spirals further into absurdity with an odd request for Salome to type something on a typewriter, a collective performance of *An der schönen blauen Donau [The Blue Danube]*, and the king lamenting his melancholy in metronomic rhythm. Eventually, the king dictates lines from Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* to Salome. When the telephone rings, Salome demands the prisoner's head as compensation. The king, bewildered, denies having made any promise, triggering the queen's aggression. Salome relentlessly repeats her demand, culminating in a feverish climax. To a military rhythm, body parts are sung about, while Salome, the young Syrian, and the soldier type on typewriters. In the end, Salome receives the severed head and kisses it. The opera concludes with all characters singing in unison her final words: 'I have kissed your mouth.'

Alison Scherzer's Salome. Photo: Edyta Dufaj

A TYPEWRITER DICTATION

One of Gerald Barry's most radical interventions in *Salome* is the replacement of the iconic *Dance of the Seven Veils* with a typewriter dictation, exposing the king as a powerless manipulator. He fantasises about Salome as his secretary, distorting a banal bureaucratic act into a desperate attempt at seduction. This scene in which Salome types fragments from *De Profundis* on a typewriter is a brilliant invention – an ironic shift that contrasts sensory desire with moral reflection.

Barry's multilingual libretto further enhances the opera's quirkiness: the singers perform in English, the prisoner sings exclusively in French – heightening his sense of isolation – while key citations appear in German. By

incorporating fragments from *De Profundis*, a diary note from Beethoven, and a parody of the lyrics to *The Blue Danube*, Barry situates *Salome* within a broader art-historical and philosophical context. The pastiche of *The Blue Danube* functions as an ironic commentary on European cultural history, with Vienna as its symbolic centre. The result is an opera that is both a sharp parody of art and morality and a playful, provocative reflection on our times. The finale is just as subversive: whereas Wilde concludes with Salome's demise, Barry lets her triumph with the victorious cry: 'I have kissed your mouth.' An unexpectedly witty and jubilant ending to an opera that amused, challenged and astonished its audience.

A VISUALLY EXUBERANT ABSURDITY

DIRECTOR Julien Chavaz elevates the absurdity of Barry's *Salome* to a visually extravagant level with a playful, caricatural staging. Scenes unfold at a feverish pace, centring on irony and overstatement. Characters appear as exaggerated comedy archetypes, clad in extraordinary costumes and wigs. Salome herself is a distorted caricature in a world brimming with bold provocations and dark humour.

Costume designer Severine Besson draws inspiration from the opulent gold patterns of Gustav Klimt, enriching the production with tarot symbolism that playfully underscores the psychological layers of the characters. The court appears as a cult-like assembly: cream-colored robes with gold accents symbolise mortality, while sacred and supernatural figures glow in neon green and yellow. Once the young Syrian dies, his costume changes colour, and he remains present on stage. Scenographer Anneliese Neudecker contributes to this extravagant aesthetic with an enchanting starry sky as a backdrop. Floating elements – a bright yellow cloud for the prisoner and an equally vivid lightning bolt that Salome uses to pursue him – evoke an almost otherworldly atmosphere. Everything is turned upside down: the prisoner does not emerge from a dark dungeon but from the clouds. The grotesque costumes and caricatural movements heighten the eccentricity of the staging, while the striking visual elements intensify the sense of estrangement and inject an irresistible energy into the performance. The spectacle reaches a macabre climax when multiple characters simultaneously receive a bloodied severed head – a surreal twist that provokes both shudders and amused bewilderment. At the end, all characters hold up a single head of John the Baptist as they sing Salome's closing words, creating a haunting tableau that underscores the blurring of identity and reality.

The Magdeburg Philharmonic, under the baton of Jérôme Kuhn, brings Barry's complex sonic experiment to life with surgical precision. The title role, performed by Alison Scherzer, pushes the soprano to the limits of both

Timur, Alison Scherzer and Amy Ní Fhearraigh. Photo: Gianmarco Bresadola

technique and expression, with vocal lines teetering between control and emotional rawness. Amy Ní Fhearraigh, as the queen, adds a crystalline vocal layer and shines in her hysteria scene, while Timur, as the king, effortlessly transitions between tenor and falsetto. Vincent Casagrande impresses as the prisoner, his vocal and theatrical presence reinforcing the opera's fragmentary nature. The outstanding cast is rounded out by Stefan Sevenich as the young Syrian, David Howes as the soldier, and Norman Groll and Héctor Bazo, who take on various smaller roles (guests, servants, slaves . . .).

A RADICAL REINTERPRETATION OF *SALOME*

Gerald Barry dismantles the psychological depth of the classic narrative, reconstructing it as a vibrant collage of styles and influences. Embracing the spirit of Dadaism – an art movement that subverted traditions through absurdist experiments and sound poetry – the composer strips *Salome* of its conventional theatricality. He replaces traditional arias with short, punchy melodic fragments and natural speech rhythms, at times reminiscent of Stravinsky but infused with biting, anarchic humour. His orchestration is raw and uncompromising: dynamic brass timbres, unexpected transitions and a constant subversion of musical expectations create a profoundly disorienting experience. In this opera, the boundaries between music and theatre dissolve

entirely. The orchestra is not merely an accompanist but actively participates in the drama through spoken and sung interjections, while nonsensical outbursts like 'Aah', 'Deedee' and 'Dada' undermine operatic conventions. Soloists occasionally take on the role of the chorus, thoughts and emotions blur between characters, and even the conductor becomes part of the action.

Barry's intuitive approach lends the opera a cinematic dynamism: rather than following a classical structure of acts and arias, the narrative unfolds in a sequence of fragmented moments where tempo and mood shift unpredictably. With a runtime of just seventy minutes, *Salome* is a short yet intensely immersive experience in which music, theatre and surreal elements merge into a feverish, playful provocation. Rather than offering a conventional adaptation of the drama of Wilde, Barry crafts an entirely new work – one that defies expectations through its instinctive expressivity and clever unconventionality. The result is an unpredictable yet masterfully executed reinterpretation of *Salome* – an opera that is as intellectually stimulating as it is genuinely entertaining. The audience was swept away by its sharp irony and spontaneous inventiveness, responding with both laughter and a well-deserved, enthusiastic applause.

Correspondence

A LETTER FROM THOMAS BIRD MOSHER

I WAS intrigued by one of the notes in John Cooper and Philip R. Bishop's piece in the January edition of *The Wildean* (No. 66) and would like to add some information about Thomas Bird Mosher and his correspondence with Walter Edwin Ledger.

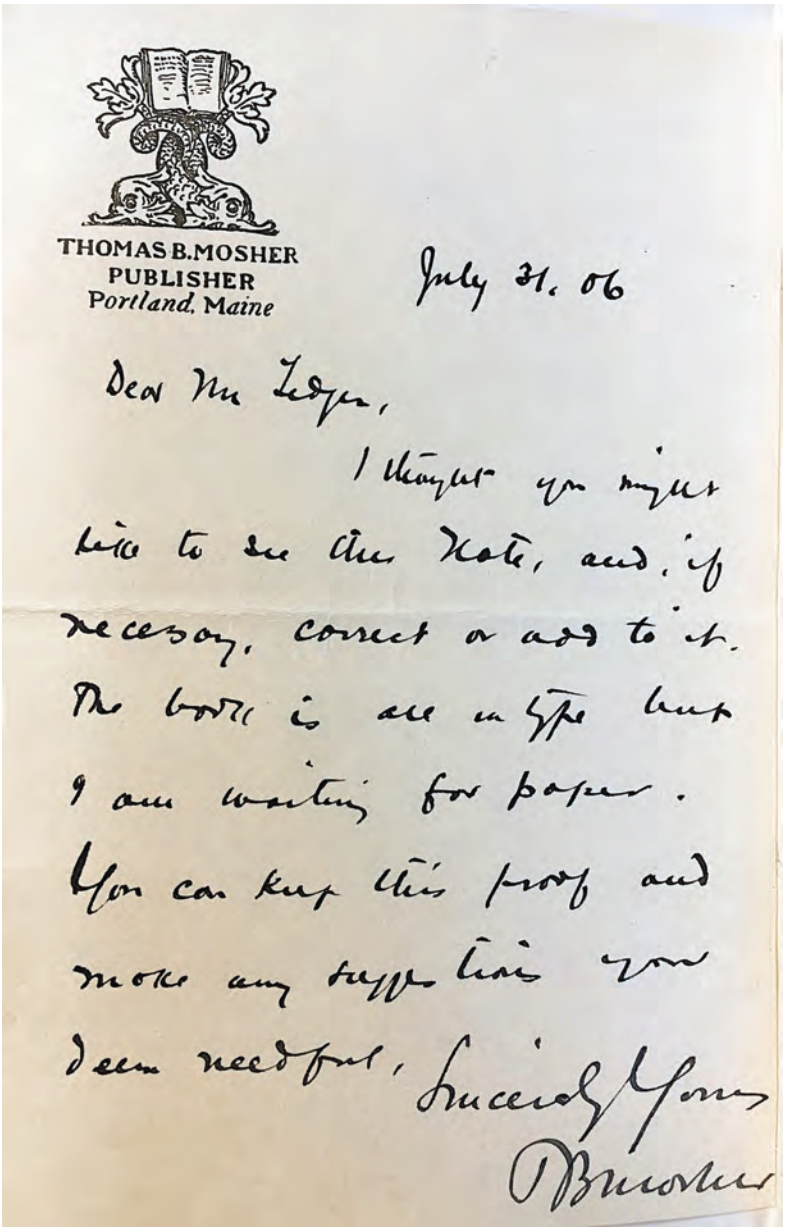
In the Robert Ross Memorial Collection at University College Oxford, we have so far found one of Mosher's letters to Ledger. It is tipped into Mosher's 1906 reprint of Rennell Rodd's *Rose leaf and apple leaf* (Ross e.454). On 31 July 1906, Mosher writes that, although the book is already set in type, he would like Ledger to proof the 'Note' which was to be printed at the end of the volume. The 'Note' in question is the 'Bibliographical Note' written by Mosher which can be found on pages 95–100.

In Ledger's typically meticulous style, he has pasted Mosher's letter facing page 95 of the volume. Attached carefully to the reverse of the letter with paper tabs are the two folded sheets containing the galley proofs of the 'Bibliographical Note' that Mosher sent to Ledger for comment.

Ledger has done as he was asked, marking up a couple of changes to the text which have duly been transferred into the final printed work. Even his eagle-eyes, however, did not pick up on the error in section II of the galley proof, where 'Rennell Ross' has been printed instead of 'Rennell Rodd'. Curiously, in a letter dated 8 November 1906, now kept in the Houghton Library at Harvard University (MS Am 1096 Box 5: 842–850), Ledger points out the typo to Mosher, without mentioning that he, also, failed to spot it.

So far, this letter from Mosher to Ledger is the only known example. Also rare, is the survival of a Wildean galley proof. Proofs like these were printed directly from the galley (a metal tray where metal type was arranged before printing). The magnets which have been used to keep the type from moving on the galley have printed – a happy accident which helps to demonstrate the process (Ross e.454) (see below). Each sheet measures 63.5cm long and 12.8cm wide. Once properly printed, this translated into eight pages. Galley proofs were printed quickly on a proofing press in small numbers: just enough copies for the text to be checked, corrected and then divided into pages for printing. Once the text had been corrected, the proofs were discarded or, more likely, reused as scrap paper.

A brief online search only brings up one other galley proof relating to Oscar Wilde (with thanks to Dr Wolfgang Maier-Sigrist).[1] This was listed in the auction catalogue of the collection of Richard Le Gallienne in 1905.[2] One



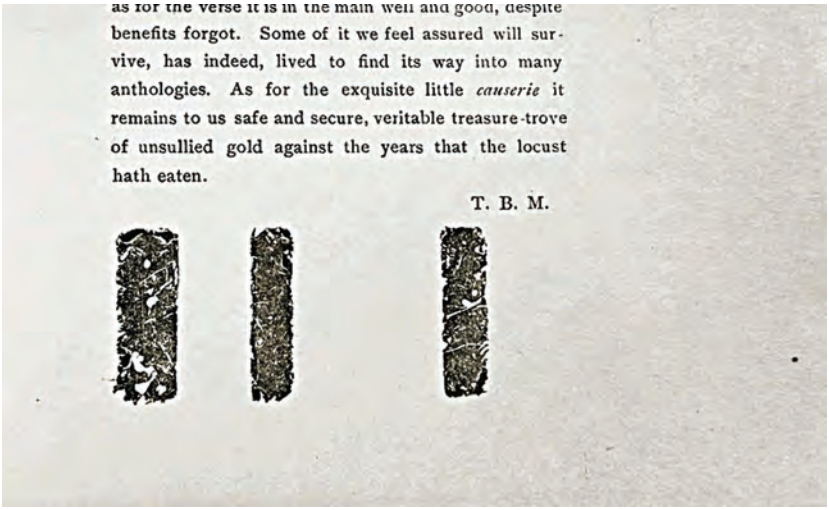
THOMAS B. MOSHER
PUBLISHER
Portland, Maine

July 31. 06

Dear Mr Ledger,

I thought you might like to see the Note, and, if necessary, correct or add to it. The book is all in type but I am waiting for paper. You can keep this proof and make any suggestions you deem needful.

Sincerely Yours
T B Mosher


as for the verse it is in the main well and good, despite benefits forgot. Some of it we feel assured will survive, has indeed, lived to find its way into many anthologies. As for the exquisite little *causerie* it remains to us safe and secure, veritable treasure-trove of unsullied gold against the years that the locust hath eaten.

T. B. M.

of the lots is a galley proof, with Wilde's manuscript corrections, of four chapters of 'The Fisherman and His Soul'. If anyone knows of others, I'd be interested to hear about them.

University College Oxford ELIZABETH ADAMS

EDITOR'S NOTE: Since this letter was written, another letter from Mosher to Ledger has come to light. It will be covered by Ms Adams in a future issue.

Notes

1. See https://www.wilde-manuscripts.org/introductory-notes/

2. *Books, Letters and Manuscripts from the Private Library of Richard Le Gallienne*, The Anderson Auction Company, New York, June 5–7, 1905

Contributors

Elizabeth Adams is the Librarian at University College Oxford, responsible for collections ranging from medieval manuscripts to early printed books and the Robert Ross Memorial Collection of Oscar Wilde material. Since its repatriation from the Bodleian Library in 2014, a programme of cataloguing and research has increased the profile of Walter Ledger's collection.

Giovanni Dolci was born in the German-speaking part of Switzerland to parents immigrated from Italy. He lives in Switzerland, where he studied English linguistics and literature at the University of Zürich, specialising in nineteenth-century literature. In Franny Moyle's biography *The Tragic and Scandalous Life of Mrs Oscar Wilde*, Giovanni's curiosity was aroused by the caption 'photographed in exile . . . probably in Switzerland'. This was the initial spark for his research on Constance's life in exile. The information that the photo was indeed taken in front of the house where her brother lived in Switzerland eventually reached Merlin Holland, who introduced Giovanni to the Oscar Wilde Society, some of whose members encouraged him to record his research in writing.

Tine Englebert obtained her PhD in Literary Studies at Ghent University, Belgium, in 2017 with the dissertation *Music for Wilde: The relationship between literary text and libretto: an analysis of the themes and the typology of the female protagonists in* The Birthday of the Infanta *by Oscar Wilde*. Her research interests include the relationship between literature and libretto, the presence of music in Wilde's works, and the musical adaptations of his oeuvre. Her database of musical adaptations of the works of Oscar Wilde can be accessed from the Resources section at www.oscarwildesociety.co.uk

Eleanor Fitzsimons is an Irish researcher and biographer who specialises in recovering women's lives. She has an MA in Women, Gender and Society from University College Dublin. She is the author of *Wilde's Women: How Oscar Wilde Was Shaped by the Women He Knew* (Duckworth, 2015) and her biography *The Life and Loves of E. Nesbit* (Duckworth, 2019) won the Rubery Prize for non-fiction. It was a *Sunday Times* Book of the Year 2019, and was included in the *Washington Post* Top 50 Non-Fiction Books of 2019. She edited *Articles from The Woman's World* (2024) for the Oscar Wilde Society and co-edited (with Eibhear Walshe) an annotated collection of the poetry of Lady Wilde, *Speranza: Poems of Jane Wilde*, which was published in February 2025. She was a contributor to *The Importance of Being Oscar*

(BBC2, April 2019), she is an honorary patron of the Oscar Wilde Society, and is on the editorial board of the Society's journal *The Wildean*.

Richard Haslam is an Associate Professor of English at Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, USA. His essays on Oscar Wilde have appeared in *Studi Irlandesi: A Journal of Irish Studies* (2023), the Norton Third Critical Edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2020), *English Literature in Transition* (April 2020; January 2014), *Victorian Literature and Culture* (June 2014), the First Norton Critical Edition of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2005), *The Explicator* (Winter 2003) and *Irish Studies Review* (Summer 1995).

Angela Kingston has a PhD in English literature and writes non-fiction, creative non-fiction and fiction. She is the author of *Oscar Wilde as a Character in Victorian Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) and publishes essays and articles on Wilde. Angela also has a bachelor's degree in education and has worked as an English teacher and tutor, a writing coach and mentor, an editor, an academic researcher, a peer reviewer and a writer-in-residence. Her writing has won a range of awards and scholarships, including the Penguin Varuna Scholarship (Australia). A draft of her novel about Wilde's childhood was shortlisted for the Impress Novel Prize (UK).

Samuel Love has recently completed his doctoral thesis, 'Outraged Beauty: The Dionysian Retinue and the Lineages of British Aestheticism, 1918–1930', at the University of York. He was awarded the Aubrey Beardsley Society's inaugural Emerging Scholar Prize in 2021 and has spoken on his research at conferences organised by the British Association for Decadence Studies, the International Walter Pater Society and the British Association for Victorian Studies.

Rob Marland is the editor of *Oscar Wilde: The Complete Interviews* (2022) and the author of *Oscar Wilde: The Season of Sorrow* (2018), a graphic biography dealing with Wilde's imprisonment. He maintains a web-based list of Wilde's uncollected letters. For more information see robmarland.co.uk

Regina M. Ponciano completed her PhD, *Oscar Wilde, the Short Story Writer*, at the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (Spain). Her doctoral dissertation combined archival research – examining the conditions of production, publication and reception of Wilde's short story collections – with critical readings that explored the liminality in and of his short fiction. Her work was awarded the Inés Praga 2025 Prize for Best Doctoral Dissertation in Irish Studies by the Spanish Association for Irish Studies

(AEDEI). She also received the María Teresa Turell Research Prize from the Spanish Association for Anglo-North American Studies (AEDEAN), which supports the continuation of her archival research and the development of wildeshortfiction.com, a digital project where she makes publicly available the materials uncovered through her research. Regina is currently a substitute lecturer at the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela.

Geoff Sawers was the author, with two colleagues, of 'Before and After Oscar Wilde: Life in the Berkshire Prisons 1850–1920' (in *The Wildean* 58, 2021) and also 'Oscar Wilde, Class, and Blackmail for Homosexuality in Victorian Berkshire' (in *Berkshire Old and New* 40, 2023). He lives in Reading and divides his time between the gutter and the stars.

Fábio Waki holds a BA in Literary Studies, an MA in linguistics/classics from the State University of Campinas and a PhD in Materialities of Literature from the University of Coimbra. He has been a visiting scholar at King's College London, Stockholm University and the University of California Los Angeles. Currently, he is a postdoctoral researcher in the W. B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies at the University of São Paulo. His research focuses on the influence of the classics on Oscar Wilde and his circle, as well as Wilde's impact on Portuguese and Brazilian writers.

Robert Whelan is the editor of *The Wildean* and the archivist/historian of the Theatre Royal Haymarket.

Acknowledgements

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About *The Wildean*

FIRST issued in 1992, *The Wildean: A Journal of Oscar Wilde Studies* is a leading peer-reviewed print journal published biannually in January and July by the Oscar Wilde Society. It is funded solely by the subscriptions of members of the Oscar Wilde Society. It is MLA registered and indexed, and is held by leading academic libraries world-wide. All issues of *The Wildean* (apart from those published in the last three years) are available on JSTOR.

It publishes articles, essays, criticism, reviews and correspondence on a wide range of topics relating to Wilde and his circle. Articles are submitted to members of the editorial board and other expert commentators for evaluation before acceptance and are listed in the Contents page under 'Articles'.

Acceptance of other contributions – essays, reviews, letters and notes – is at the discretion of the Editor or Reviews Editor. They are listed in the Contents page under 'Essays', 'Reviews' or 'Correspondence'.

The members of the editorial board are:

Contributions are invited both from established and from new writers. Submissions should be sent to:

Robert Whelan, Editor, email: jacobtonson@googlemail.com

THE OSCAR WILDE SOCIETY, founded in 1990, is a literary society devoted to the congenial appreciation of Oscar Wilde.

It is a non-profit-making organisation which aims to promote knowledge, appreciation and study of Wilde's life, personality and works. It organises lectures, readings and discussions about Wilde and his works, and visits to places associated with him.

Its publications include books and journals. *The Wildean*, a peer-reviewed journal of Oscar Wilde studies, is published twice a year. *Intentions*, a print newsletter, is published four times a year. There is also an occasional e-newsletter called *Oscariana*.

Above: Alison Scherzer as Salome in Gerald Barry's opera. Photo: Edyta Dufaj

Front cover: *Note in Green and Brown: Orlando at Coombe* (1884) by James McNeill Whistler, oil on wood, reproduced by courtesy of The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA:46393

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