PUBLISHED TWICE YEARLY SINCE 1986:
19th MAY (WILDE'S RELEASE FROM GAOL)
16th OCTOBER (WILDE'S BIRTHDAY)

Wild About Wilde

Newsletter

ISSN :1068-9737

C. 3. 3.

— One Hundred Years —

May 1895 - May 1995

Number 18 *19th May 1995*

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde

WILD ABOUT WILDE

ISSN: 1068-9737
19th May 1995

Dear Wild Wildeans,

It is a hundred years since we began to lose Oscar Wilde the man. Mercifully, we never lost Oscar Wilde the artist. Uke all great artists his work lives on and will endure as long as the tradition of great literature remains. Wilde should be remembered and celebrated as a writer concerned only with the creation at great art. In a letter to the *Scots Observer*, dated July 1890 and rebuffing criticism of *Dorian Gray*, he said: "I write because it gives me the greatest possible artistic pleasure to write ... I have no desire to be a popular novelist. It is far too easy."

There are many ceremonies taking place across the world this year. On the outside wall of Wilde's childhood home at 1, Merrion Square in Dublin a plaque is going up in his honour - his father's name is currently on the house. Word has it that Guinness Brewery is sponsoring a statue of Wilde to be put up in Merrion Square Gardens, opposite the Wilde house. On page eight you will find Wildean details of the University of Delhi's September issue of *In-between*.

Oscar's reaction to all of this? "There is only one thing worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about." We're talking Oscar. We never stopped. It is a sad anniversary, outrageous and sad but some of us, like you, are looking at the stars.

All the best!

Carmel

Carmel

IN THIS ISSUE

"Looking as if [s]he were alive":
or,

Further Artistic Reflections of "My Last Duchess" in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

A Revisitation

Robert Fleissner

Some time ago Jan B. Gordon related Matthew Arnold to Dorian Gray in terms of the Renaissance spirit: "Just as Arnold had seen in the Renaissance a Hellenic attitude, so we are told of Dorian's relatives named Deveraux who, along with Wotton, provide a perfect lineage of Renaissance nobility for the young devotee of 'lilies and roses'"(36); yet since Dorian's creator, Wilde, himself referred in the novel to another notable Victorian poet, Browning, a master whose work indulges even more in the Renaissance art of making all of life an aesthetic achievement, it is rather more probable that the novelist borrowed his basic aestheticist theme at least to some extent from no less than "My Last Duchess."

Clearly his "New Hedonism" had a basis in the Renaissance cult of the beautiful, a Machiavellian preoccupation as revealed in his protagonist's subtle remedy, namely that "nothing can cure the senses but the soul." As Leonard Wolf has stated: "It is a seductive motto, inventing in its small, epigrammatic space, the mystic as sensualist *and* the sensualist as mystic. Like any good epigram, its *form* has the ring of truth, as Wilde probably knew. But sense and soul, as he juxtaposes the words, perform a juggler's paradox" (66-67). The "epigram" thus serves as an "excuse" for Gray when he turns towards decadence and drugs following the murder of Basil Hallward.

Inasmuch as "My Last Duchess" represents Browning's treatment of a similar manifesto, that of humanistic individualism, namely "making all of life a work of art" - in a sense a rather literal adoption of that formula in that the monologue deals largely with a portrait - Wilde could easily enough have picked up his impressionistic subject directly from the Browning poem, especially because he eulogizes Browning so highly in *The Critic as Artist,* e.g.: "He was great...He is the most Shakespearian creature since Shakespeare ... even now, as I am speaking, and speaking not against him but for him, there glides through the room the pageant of his persons" (Houghton 785). Wilde then alludes to various poems of Browning's, though curiously withholds "My Last Duchess" (it is inconceivable that he did not know this one well too); then he adds that that Victorian giant will be immortalized not as a poet as such but as a writer of fiction: "He will be remembered as a writer of fiction, as the most supreme writer of fiction, it may be,

that we have ever had." It is as if the little pageant of persons in "My Last Duchess" itself glided through the room in which Wilde was composing *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and was thus meant to be remembered in fictive terms in the novel by Wilde.

The reference to Browning in the story, moreover, is purposefully elusive (even as Browning himself so often is): "'I tell you, Dorian, that is it on things like these that your lives depend. Browning writes about that somewhere'" (Buckler II, 350). Although, true, a few lines later a reference to "sonnets" may call to mind Browning (Elizabeth Barrett, that is),[1] allusions in the same paragraph to carving a statue and painting a picture certainly would recall the sculptor Claus of Innsbruck and the painter Fra Pandolf from the monologue. In addition, to be sure, the references to music recollect the view of Walter Pater, also espoused by Wilde in his celebrated "Preface" to the novel, in that all the arts are said to approach the condition of music, in Pater's terminology, surely then a credo of *L'art pour l'art*.

Although Gray, following the lead of his creator, may be deemed critically a product of self-love and based on a woman, particularly (let us say) a duchess (even in that Duke and Duchess play prominent roles in the novel, too, as friends of the protagonist), the portrait hardly *becomes* Browning's duchess in a surrogate manner similar to the way in which the painting of Gray becomes a surrogate for Wilde's ever-youthful hedonist. Nonetheless, Wilde could well have taken his cue for this effect from the very second line of the Browning monologue with its inviting allusion to painterly verisimilitude :"Looking as if she were alive."

What is more, the basic theme in both works is approximately the same: to keep beauty intact (the portrait in the poem, the body in the novel) can, in effect, be to destroy life itself. What appeals most, however, is the way in which none other than the Bard of Avon enters the scene as an arbiter: just as Browning was akin to Shakespeare," so Wilde, as has been shown, linked up these two poets with such acclaim. Since he made so much of the Stratford "upstart" in Dorian's encounter with Sybil Vane as Juliet, it is fitting overall that his later reference to Browning in the novel underscores this affinity indirectly and so may point to a general debt to one of Browning's most popular dramatic monologues about the Machiavellian Renaissance.

Notes:

1. Thus, Wilde's reference earlier in the paragraph to "a chance tone of colour in a room or a morning sky" with an allusion to what Gray "had once loved" immediately following, could even point back to her Sonnet 43 with its reference "by sun and candle light" and play upon "love." But the parallel is fairly remote, and when Harry does refer to Browning, he clearly has in mind her husband.

2. See my *"Pauline:* Another Merely 'Random relation of Browning to Shakespeare'?" The idea is that the onomastic allusion at least is hardly coincidental. (A very early draft of the present essay also appeared in the same newsletter.)

Works Cited

Buckler, William E. ed., *Minor Classic of Nineteenth Century Fiction. 2* vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.

Fleissner, R.F. *"Pauline:* Another Merely 'Random Relation of Browning to Shakespeare'?" *The Browning Newsletter* #4 (1970):59.

Gordon, Jan B. "Hebraism, Hellenism, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray." The Victorian Newsletter* #33 (1968): 36-38.

Houghton, Walter E., and G. Robert Stange, eds. *Victorian Poetry and Poetics.* 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968.

Wolf, Leonard. A *Dream of Dracula: In Search of the Living Dead.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1972.

Professor Robert F. Fleissner teaches in the Department of English and Communication at the Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio where he includes Oscar Wilde's work in his course material. As a *doctoral student he studied under William E. Buckler at NYU.*

Knox Knocks Wilde: A Long and Unlovely Betrayal

Oscar Wilde:* A *Long* and *Lovely Suicide
Melissa Knox. Connecticut. Yale UP. 1994.
ISBN: 0-300-05905-1

Review by:

Patrick M. Horan

"I love Oscar Wilde, and yet as his biographer I betray his conflicts, his weaknesses, his childishness, his fears, and his deep shames and secrets - in order to make it possible for the reader to love him" (xix), writes Melissa Knox in her recent psycho-biography *Oscar Wilde,* A *Long and Lovely Suicide.* Ms. Knox's betrayal of Wilde is apparent; her love is less obvious. In her study, Ms. Knox employs antiquated Freudian psychology to explore the psychological ramifications of Wilde's relationship with his parents and younger sister Isola (who died when the Irish poet was thirteen years old). For instance, she even goes so far as to hint that Wilde saw his young sister "as an 'impure' seductress" (11) because he desired her sexually. She also maintains that Wilde believed he had contracted syphilis and thus lived "under the shadow of the horror" (xx) that he had committed a crime. Consequently, according to Knox, Wilde continually protested his innocence as a means of relieving his guilt, and he used his writings "to stem the despair that overwhelmed him in the face of the disease" (xx).

As a literary critic, Ms. Knox forms defensible observations; for example, she quite aptly acknowledges that Wilde's early poetry is reminiscent of the famous works of Keats and Byron as well as the Irish nationalist poetry of his mother, whose pen name was Speranza. Ms. Knox supports her assertion by identifying volcano imagery that runs through the writing of all these Romantic, "heroic" writers. In a later chapter, she accurately concludes that "dialectical reasoning is not just a basic source of Wilde's wit but the underlying structure of all his work" (114). And, any Wilde aficionado would agree that the Irish poet's genius is evidenced in his dialectical reasoning, which is manifested in his expert use of paradox.

Throughout her study, Ms. Knox identifies recurring imagery in Wilde's literature, yet her psychological explanations for these images are reductive. For example, she notes that the image of the grave occurs repeatedly throughout Wilde's poetry; however, she hastily concludes that death imagery primarily illustrates Wilde's continual grief over the loss of Isola. Nevertheless, these images

have universal as well as personal significance, and to attach only one reference to them is superficial. Certainly, this is not the only way to "read" Wilde's preoccupation with mortality.

Unfortunately, Ms. Knox appears to consider only early Freudian psychology in her assessment of Wilde's lifestyle. For instance, she concludes that Wilde's homosexuality was caused by a dominating mother and the lack of a "strong father figure." Modern psychology has certainly moved past such simplified explanations of homosexuality. Ms. Knox even theorizes that "the element of anality, well known as having an important role in homosexuality, is striking in Oscar's personality and was demonstrably a family characteristic" (22). No doubt "anal" personalities exist; however, to brand homosexuals as members of a group that is associated with "anality" and to consider homosexuality a "handicap," as Ms. Knox calls it (75), is clearly ignorant.

In her first chapter, Ms. Knox concludes that Speranza dressed young Wilde in feminine attire because she must "have passed on her wish that he be a girl" (20). This outdated idea is cited from T. G. Wilson's *Victorian Doctor,* a 1942 publication that is not only archaic but written with much conjecture on Wilson's part. Other biographers, such as Martin Fido, acknowledge that Speranza was merely following the fashion of the time when she clothed her son in "feminine" baby dress. Yet, this explanation is not included in Ms. Knox's analysis. Ms. Knox also maintains that Speranza and her son exhibited "conflicting images of self" (20) because they identified with both sexes. Yet, given the fact that both mother and son lived in the patriarchal, homophobic environment of Victorian England, their conflicting images of what constitutes "masculine" and "feminine" behavior were most likely culturally conditioned and not the result of some deep-seated psychological problem.

Rather than praise Speranza's feminist writing and her heroic attempts to change the convergent thinking of the patriarchal society of nineteenth-century London, Ms. Knox discusses Lady Wilde's preponderance for wearing outlandish clothing and concludes that the revolutionary mother of Wilde "apparently adorned herself excessively to conceal, perhaps even from herself, her wish to be a man" (21). This idea is quite simplistic; none of the biographies about Wilde or his mother suggest such wish fulfillment on Speranza's part. Furthermore, most of her essays and letters in manuscript suggest that Speranza was proud to be a woman, even given the challenges that she faced as the wife of a philanderer and the mother of sons who were *often* at odds with each other.

In actuality, Wilde was as proud to be a man as his mother was proud to be a woman. Neither writer, however, was proud that their colleagues were so intolerant of diversity and unappreciative of their artistic temperaments. Towards the end of his life, Wilde denounced the "shallowness" of his peers, bravely affirmed his homosexuality, and regained his self-esteem when he wrote *De Profundis.*

Although Ms. Knox calls Wilde's homosexuality "his perversity" (127), I am sure that the Irish poet did not view his sexuality in such a negative manner. And, most enlightened twentieth-century readers understand that homosexuality is not perverse; moreover, they recognize that Wilde's ability to affirm his unorthodox lifestyle was both heroic and healthy. Therefore, I conclude that Richard Ellmann's 1987 biography remain the definitive study for Wilde scholars. As Ellmann's work proves, Wilde's life should not be viewed as "a long and lovely suicide," as Ms. Knox suggests, but rather a long and lovely birth.

Patrick Horan recently received his PhD in English Literature from Drew University. His dissertation was entitled "The Importance of Being Paradoxical: A *Study of Maternal Presence in the Works of Oscar Wilde." He is an English Instructor at Sussex County Community College in Newton, New Jersey.*

Works Cited

Ellmann, Richard. 1987. *Oscar Wi/de.* New York: Vintage Books.

Fido, Martin. 1973. *Oscar Wi/de.* London: Hamlyn.

Knox, Melissa. 1994. *Oscar Wi/de.* A *long and lovely suicide.* Connecticut: Yale UP.

Melville, Joy. 1994. *Mother of Oscar.* London: John Murray.

Wilson, T. G. 1942. *Victorian doctor; being the life of Sir William Wi/de.* London: Methuen.

Wyndham, Horace Boardman. 1951. *Speranza:* A *biography of Lady Wilde.* T. V. Boardman & Company Ltd.

OF SPECIAL INTEREST!

CLEARING UP A MISCONCEPTION ABOUT OSCAR WILDE:

Remember the photograph which appeared in Richard Ellmann's *Oscar Wilde* depicting Wilde dressed as Salomé? Well, in fact it was not Oscar Wilde at all. But who was it? Horst Schroeder of the Technische Universität, Braunschweig, Germany has done careful research on the subject and has published the results in a beautiful little book called *Alice in Wildeland.* Packed with interesting information, including a detailed account of the 1906 Cologne production of Strauss's *Salomé* and nine photographs, it is a limited edition of 100 copies, signed by the author, and is available exclusively through:

Jacqueline Wesley, Bookseller, 75 Camberley House, Redhill Street, London NWI 4AX ENGLAND Tel: 0171 387 3520, Fax: 0171 383 4879.
Price £25 sterling. She specializes in 1890s, Decadent and Gothic literature and a catalogue is available on request.

FROM INDIA:

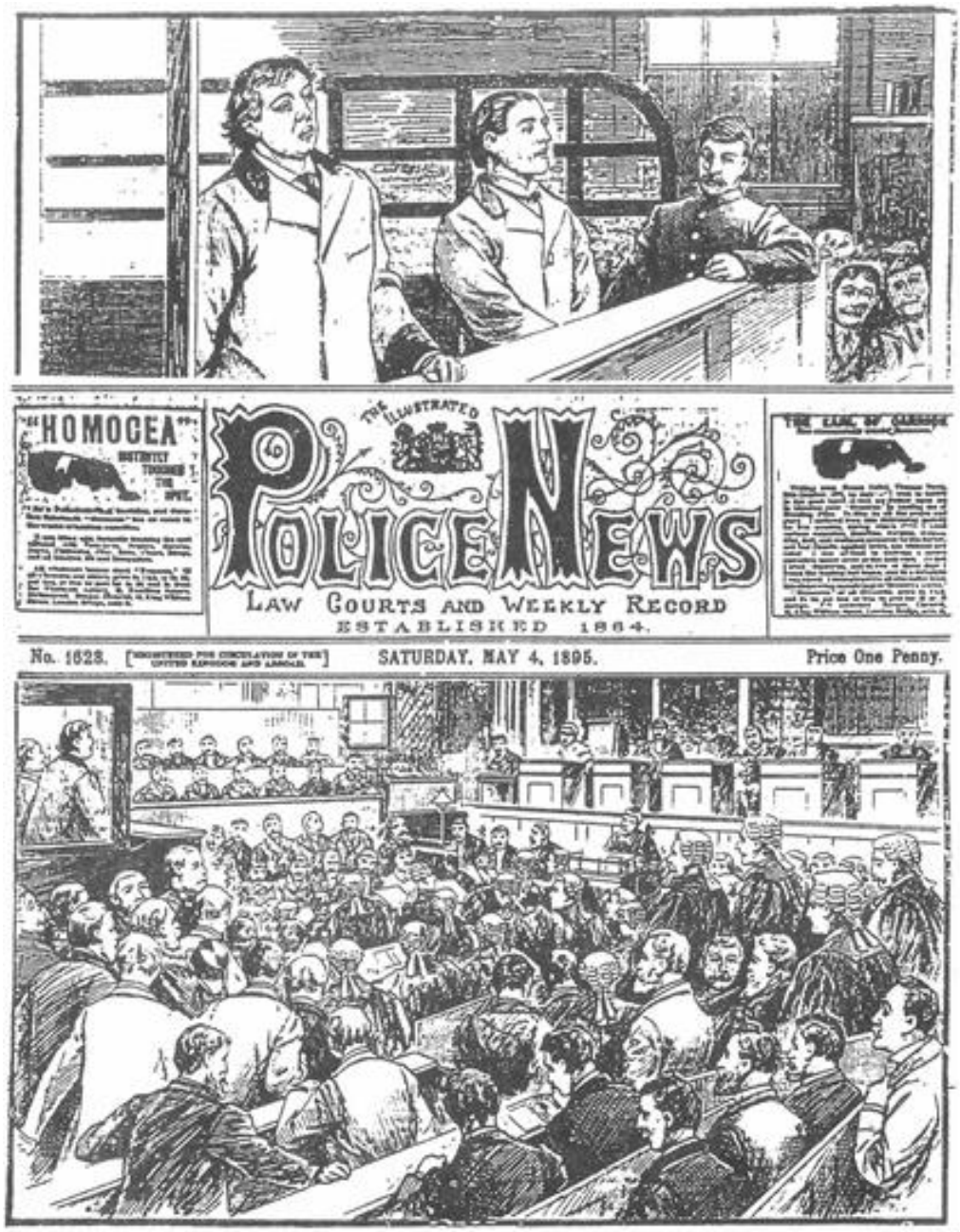
In India the University of Delhi is dedicating the entire September issue of their magazine *In-between* to Oscar Wilde. Anyone interested in submitting something should direct enquiries to:

G.R. Taneja, Editor
In-between
Department of English,
RLA College University of Delhi
New Delhi 110 021, INDIA

STUDENTS OF THE 1890's:

Kar1 Beckson has recently published *London in the 1890s:* A *Cultural History.* Available through any bookstore it is published by W.W. Norton & Co.

ISBN:0-393-03397-x. Price $27.50. An excellent and comprehensive study of the period and the personalities who made it. Professor Beckson is currently working on an Oscar Wilde encyclopaedia. More about this in a later issue.



Scene at the Old Bailey

This too I know - and wise it were
If each could know the same -
That every prison that men build
Is built with bricks of shame,
And bound with bars lest Christ should see
How men their brothers maim.

From *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*
Oscar Wilde

SAVILE'S CRIME REVIVED

Vito A. Lanza

Prevailing critical opinions on "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" find OW's early (1891) short story mainly a portent of greater things to come. Despite definite mentions of German anarchism and Russian nihilism, it is difficult to find anybody who has taken these points seriously in this tale of a man who discovers from a palm reader that he will one day commit a murder, and who then sets out to kill someone - usually one of his own relatives - without compunction or remorse.

Regrettably, OW never rewrote this one for the stage, but one Constance Cox filled the gap in 1952 at London's Royal Court Theatre with a rollicking sledge-hammer adaptation of the same name. In the *Annotated Oscar Wilde* H. Montgomery Hyde even reprints the title page of the printed programme. None of the original cast went on to international fame.

The Shaw project, which since 1986 has presented staged readings of all of George Bernard Shaw's plays in chronological order and now concentrates primarily on those of his contemporaries, revived the play on August 3 and 4, 1994, at the John Houseman Studios in New York City. While OW's story was cool, ironic, and calm, the adaptation was blunt and daffy and true to neither OW's tone or facts. It was probably not supposed to be. The ten member cast of the mostly Equity members carried on valiantly and elicited huge guffaws from the invited audience.

Young Kevin Connell in the title role struggled hard to fulfill the prophesy of murder only to see his attempts backfire on himself. Most of this is not in OW's original. In one of the funniest scenes, he tries to kill off his Aunt Clemintina (Joanna Brown) with a poisoned candy only to mistakenly eat it himself and then nearly die. In the story, Clemintina dies of natural causes instead of murder, thus causing Arthur to look for another innocent victim. In the play, which is more conscious of routine sensibilities, she lives through to the end.

The most winning performance came from the groups' artistic leader, David Seatter, who also directed the play, as Winckelkopf, the German anarchist who aids Arthur in his attempts at murder with hilarious results. Wearing a deerstalker cap and looking like a befuddled Sherlock Holmes, Seatter and his German accent accounted for the evening's biggest laughs.

Alan Gilbert aided him mightily as Baines, Arthur's valet, who is an unnamed minor character in the original story. In the play, Baines also helps blithely with

the attempted murders and eventually finds happiness anyway in marriage with Nellie (Tiffany Gentry), another servant who does not even appear in OW's story. OW eventually allows Arthur to kill Podgers (Lee Winsten), the "chiromantist" or palm reader who caused all the trouble, by actually throwing him off a bridge and then watching him drown without a tear. Since the entire three-act play takes place in Arthur's drawing room in Grosvenor Square, this is only described with typical glee.

As Cox is no OW, she gives a more politically correct ending by making Podgers a good swimmer who eventually returns to his own apartment only to kill himself when faced with exposure as a blackmailer and fraud. In the play, not the story, Arthur immediately tries to dispatch another relative with one of Winckelkopf's handy bombs only to get caught, again by mistake, and carted off to prison. Although this got a huge laugh, it remains untrue to the original story. OW, who was never politically correct, allows Arthur to get away with murder and then marry Sybil (Carolyn Pasquantonio) and live happily ever after without ever paying for his crime. Cox probably could not get away with this in 1952, so we never discover if he ever gets married or even gets out of prison. The audience did not seem to care much about this amid all the merriment, but Wild Wildeans would probably be dismayed.

The original story remains in print in many readily available editions. The play was printed in 1963 by Samuel French, which controls the performance rights, and is still in print.

For more information about the Shaw Project, which performs in various Manhattan venues, write 90 Park Terrace East, #2B, New York, NY 10034 or phone (212) 569-0129.

Vito Lanza lives in New York and frequently contributes theatre reviews to this publication.

Oscar Wilde: The Importance of Being Irish
By Davis Coakley. Dublin 1994. Town House.
ISBN: 0-948524-97-9

Review by:

Mary Norris

In 1943 when Hesketh Pearson mentioned to George Bernard Shaw that he wished to write a life of Oscar Wilde, Shaw's reply was "My advice is don't....· Looking back on some of the Wildean publications throughout the last fifty years if other biographers had taken Shaw's advice we would not have been deprived of knowledge - an entertaining read perhaps, but that is all. Oscar would have enjoyed those biographers who beautified truth for the benefit of the unimaginative as Oscar himself did to entertain. Of those who wrote about Wilde many tried to condense his life into one slim volume giving an overall picture but not concentrating on any particular area.

To Davis Coakley we are indebted for clarifying the common misconception of Wilde's origins. Oscar Wilde always stated that he was Irish or Celtic. In anthologies of literature Wilde is very often listed as an Anglo-Irish or English writer. In Harold Bloom's book, *The Western Canon,* published in 1994, he classified Wilde as English. *The Importance of Being Irish* deals specifically with the influence that his Irish background had on his life and works. This is an area which has been very much neglected. Many people forget that Wilde was born in Dublin and spent the first twenty years of his life there where he was influenced by his extraordinary parents whose many interests included Celtic folklore, old Irish superstitions and customs. So, from the cradle the Wilde children were influenced by Irish traditions and by the artistic and literary life of Dublin which congregated in Speranza's drawing room.

Davis Coakley gives a fresh insight into how Wilde used his Irish background and so presents an entirely new infrastructure for study. Wilde's Irishness is not as obvious in his work as that of James Joyce or Sean O'Casey who are never classified as being anything other than Irish but Shaw reminds us " .. .it must not be forgotten that though by culture Wilde was a citizen of all civilized capitols, he was at root a very Irish Irishman, and as such a foreigner everywhere but in Ireland."

There is no doubt that Oscar read the works of his parents and his grand-uncle Charles Maturin. In William Wilde's first book, *The Narrative of the Voyage to Madeira, Tenerife and Along the Shores of the Mediterranean,* he describes how

moved he was when he visited the ancient city of Tyre. He uses similar biblical imagery as Oscar was later to use in *Salomé,* "The Sphinx" and *Dorian Gray*.

For those readers unfamiliar with Dublin, Merrion Square, where Oscar grew up, surrounds a beautiful park where he would have played as a child. Despite the post-famine poverty and bleakness existing in Dublin at this time Oscar was protected from the harsh realities of life and like the Happy Prince in his famous story Oscar's life was surrounded by pleasure as he played in the garden. In the "Selfish Giant," Oscar weaves his story around a garden forbidden to the children by the selfish giant. Entrance to the park in Merrion Square was restricted to residents of the Square until recent years. Throughout this book Davis Coakley relates Wilde's work to his background and leaves us in no doubt that while Wilde's geographic location may have changed, the influence on his writing and later life was established by the time he left Ireland. It is an extremely well researched book and while most of the information can be found in other books, what puts this new publication ahead of many of the Wilde books is that Davis Coakley has concentrated on a specific area and produced an excellent work of scholarship.

The originality of the illustrations in *The Importance of Being Irish* will be welcomed by Wildean fans. My particular favourite is "The Chapel Royal and the Bermingham Tower, Dublin Castle" by Walter Osborne, a place which would have been familiar to Oscar. The child in the picture is representative of him. Even in his choice of quotations, Davis Coakley has veered away from many of those too often used epigrams. How appropriate that the opening quotation from the final chapter should come from Speranza; "Of what value to the world are the petty details of their weaknesses and failings? We want to know simply what great thoughts a man has added to the world's treasures, what great impulses he gave to the world's progress ... let us gather the eternal treasures, but leave the rest to the waters of oblivion."

Mary Norris lives in Dublin, Ireland and is actively involved in the running of the Oscar Wilde Society there.

WAWN Editor's note: *Oscar Wilde: The Importance of Being Irish* is available in the United States from Irish Books and Media, Minneapolis Tel: 1 800 229 3505. $24.95 plus postage. Catalogue of books available on request. Many imported books from Ireland not otherwise available in the United States.

SOME LITERARY NOTES

Oscar Wilde

(Being an extract from an article written by Wilde for ***Woman's World****, the magazine he edited, April* 1889.)

"In modern life," said Matthew Arnold once, "you cannot well enter a monastery; but you can enter the Wordsworth Society." I fear that this will sound to many a somewhat uninviting description of this admirable and useful body, whose papers and productions have been recently published by Professor Knight, under the title *Wordsworthiana.* "Plain living and high thinking" are not popular ideals. Most people prefer to live in luxury and to think with the majority. However, there is really nothing in the essays and addresses of the Wordsworth Society that need cause the public any unnecessary alarm; and it is gratifying to note that, although the society is still in the first blush of enthusiasm, it has not yet insisted upon our admiring Wordsworth's inferior work. It praises what is worthy to praise, reverences what should be reverenced, and explains what does not require explanation.

One paper is quite delightful; it is from the pen of Mr. Rawnsley, and deals with such reminisces of Wordsworth as still linger among the peasantry of Westmoreland. Mr. Rawnsley grew up, he tells us, in the immediate vicinity of the present Poet-laureate's old home in Lincolnshire, and had been struck with the swiftness with which,

As year by year the labourer tills
His wonted glebe, or lops the glades,

the memories of the poet of the Somersby Wold had "faded from off the circle of the hills"- had, indeed, been astonished to note how little real interest was taken in him or his fame, and how seldom his works were met with in the houses of the rich or poor in the very neighbourhood. Accordingly, when he came to reside in the Lake Country, he endeavoured to find out what of Wordsworth's memory among the men of the Dales still lingered on - how far he was still a moving presence among them - how far his works had made their way into the cottages and farmhouses of the valleys. He also tried to discover how far the race of Westmoreland and Cumberland farm-folk - the "Matthews" and the "Michaels" of the poet, as described by him - were real or fancy pictures, or how far the characters of the Dalesmen had been altered in any remarkable manner by tourist influences during the thirty-two years that have passed since the Lake poet was laid to rest.

With regard to the latter point, it will be remembered that Mr. Ruskin, writing in 1876, said that "the Border peasantry, painted with absolute fidelity by Scott and Wordsworth," are, as hitherto, a scarcely injured race; that in his fields at Coniston he had men who might have fought with Henry V at Agincourt, without being distinguished from any of his knights; that he could take his tradesman's word for a thousand pounds, and need never latch his garden gate; and that he did not fear molestation, in wood or in moor, for his girl guests. Mr. Rawnsley, however, found that a certain beauty had vanished which the Simple retirement of old valley days fifty years ago gave to the men among whom Wordsworth lived. "The strangers," he says, "with their gifts of gold, their vulgarity and their requirements, have much to answer for."

... Mr. Rawnsley asked one of the Dalesmen about Wordsworth's dress and habits. This was the reply, "Wudsworth wore a Jem Crow, never seed him a boxer in my life, - a Jem Crow and an old blue cloak was his rig, and as for his habits, he had noan; niver knew him with a pot i' his hand, or a pipe i' his mouth. But he was a great skater, for a' that - noan better in these parts - why he could cut his own name upo' the ice, could Mr. Wudsworth." (sic)

... Skating seems to have been Wordsworth's one form of amusement. He was "over feckless i' his hands" - could not drive or ride -"not a bit of fish in him," and "nowth of a mountaineer."(sic). But he could skate. The rapture of the time, when as a boy, on Esthwaite's frozen lake, he had

wheeled about,
Proud and exulting like an untired horse
That cares not for his home, and, shod with steel,
Had hissed along the polished ice,

was continued, Mr. Rawnsley tells us, into manhood's later day; and Mr. Rawnsley found many proofs that the skill the poet had gained was of such a kind as to astonish the natives among whom he dwelt. The recollection of a fall he once had, when his skate caught on a stone, still lingers in the district...

Every day I said to myself, *"I must keep Love in my heart today, else how else shall I live through the day."*

Oscar Wilde on his prison term. From *De Profundis.*

****

https://carmelmccaffrey.com/

Wild About Wilde Newsletter is listed in the *Modern Language Association [MLA] International Bibliography* and the *MLA Directory of Periodicals* under the acronym WAWN.