



Introduction

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A Reuter telegram from Paris states that Oscar Wilde died there yesterday afternoon from meningitis. The melancholy end to a career which once promised so well is stated to have come in an obscure hotel of the Latin Quarter. Here the once brilliant man of letters was living, exiled from his country and from the society of his countrymen. The verdict that a jury passed upon his conduct at the Old Bailey in May 1895, destroyed for ever his reputation, and condemned him to ignoble obscurity for the remainder of his days. When he had served his sentence of two years' imprisonment, he was broken in health as well as bankrupt in fame and fortune. Death has soon ended what must have been a life of wretchedness and unavailing regret.

—Unsigned obituary, *London Times*, 1 December 1900

JUST BEFORE the end of the nineteenth century, Oscar Wilde died in trying circumstances, as unsympathetic obituaries in the British press were prompt to note. To the *London Times*, Wilde's demise from an infection of brain tissue at age forty-six did not come soon enough. How could a man who suffered such degradation continue a life that was anything other than shameful and remorseful? How could this once-fêted author ever have stood again before the public with any measure of dignity? From this perspective, the attack of meningitis is portrayed as a blessing that put Wilde, once and for all, out of his misery. Yet if

this notice of Wilde's death seems at best dismissive, it appears more favorable than the brief commentary that appeared a week later in another well-regarded publication, the *Academy*, which could not bring itself to mention Wilde's identity. Here he figures only as "the unhappy man who died in Paris the other day."¹ To be sure, the *Academy* concedes that, regardless of what we think of Wilde as an individual, it is "what he did in literature" that "remains in witness for or against him." Such wording suggests that even when critics recognize that they must separate the quality of Wilde's writings from his scandalous disgrace, his achievements will never escape the judgmental attitude that makes naming him impossible.

At the time of Wilde's decease, on 30 November 1900, the idea that he would soon become a legendary figure was for most commentators inconceivable. But the urgency with which a group of devotees salvaged his reputation quickly turned public attention on the injustice that had led to the incarceration, exile, and premature demise of an immensely talented writer. The restoration of Wilde's standing, however, hardly went uncontested, even among the friends who were closely attached to him. The contending efforts among his loyal companions, ardent followers, and estranged acquaintances to recount the story of Wilde's career were often hampered by bouts of infighting, which led in turn to plenty of mythmaking about the kind of man Wilde actually had been. On several awkward occasions in the 1910s, the closest of Wilde's associates developed such animosity toward each other that they rushed into court praising and blaming a genius with whom all of them—whether emotionally or professionally—had been involved. Such squabbles ensured that modern audiences would never forget the scandal attached to Wilde's much-maligned person and concentrate instead on the high quality of his work.

Such publicity fascinated the public at a moment when Wilde's writings had been translated into many languages. In 1905, even Wilde's symbolist play *Salomé*—which the British censor had banned from public performance in June 1892—reemerged in Richard Strauss's opera, which premiered to acclaim in the Dresden production and was transferred to Covent Garden, London, a year later. John Lane, who had issued several of Wilde's volumes in the 1890s, promptly released a guide to Strauss's opera, which alludes to the still-censored drama as "a remarkable *tour de force*."² Try as it might, the British press, no matter how embarrassed by the thought of Wilde's homosexuality, could not hush up his legacy. As numerous editions of his works began to circulate, Wilde's stock rose so sharply that his manuscripts began to fetch high prices on both sides of the

Atlantic. By the 1920s, the Wilde legend, elaborated in biographies of varying quality, had become so alluring that various eccentrics managed to pass off convincing forgeries to unsuspecting experts. Even though Wilde died next-to-penniless in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century, he was transformed into one of the most lucrative modern authors of the twentieth. Wilde, who observed in late 1900 that he was “dying above his means,” would have been appalled by the idea that his much-needed rise from rags to riches was a posthumous one.³

Wilde not only died above his means but also passed before his time and in near isolation. When he lay on his deathbed at the shabby Hôtel d’Alsace in the Latin Quarter of Paris, he had few friends and no family members to take care of him. During his brutal sentence, his devoted mother, Irish poet Jane Francesca Wilde, passed away. Two years later, in April 1898, his estranged wife, Constance, died from complications arising from a spinal injury. The following year, his elder brother Willie was sent to his grave through alcoholism. Meanwhile, from the time of his entry into prison on 25 May 1895 until his death, Wilde remained incommunicado with his two teenage sons, who, like their mother, changed their name to Holland. (His children, Cyril and Vyvyan, learned of their father’s death through the press.)

The other person who remained absent was the one whose intimacy with Wilde complicated his legacy more than anybody else. Wilde met his beloved “Bosie,” the young aristocrat Alfred Douglas, at Oxford in 1891, and it was Douglas’s father—the hot-tempered Marquess of Queensberry—who left the offending visiting-card that attacked Wilde for posing as a “sodomite”: an insult that precipitated, with much encouragement from Douglas, the perilous libel suit that exposed Wilde’s homosexuality and landed him in jail for two years. During Wilde’s imprisonment, Douglas—who fled England when the Crown subsequently prosecuted Wilde—followed advice not to make any visits to his lover, though in the French press he tried to protest Wilde’s incarceration as unapologetically as possible.⁴ Even though Wilde and Douglas were reconciled in September 1897, four months after Wilde’s release, news of their renewed attachment so inflamed Constance Holland (the name she had taken) that she threatened to withdraw her modest allowance from her disgraced husband. At the end of that year, for practical reasons, Wilde and Douglas bade each other farewell once more. After Constance’s death, the two met on many occasions around Paris until the summer of 1900. There is no record that Bosie visited Wilde during his decline.

In late 1900, Reggie Turner and Robert Ross were the two remaining people who ministered to their dying friend. Both were anxious about meeting the fees of the doctor and the surgeon who made frequent visits to the patient during September, October, and November that year. Moreover, they made certain that Wilde did not go without any material comfort. The steadfast Ross pointed out that he and Turner ensured that “Wilde wanted for NOTHING during the last weeks of his life.”⁵ In Ross’s view, although Wilde’s death was “melancholy and dreadful . . . in many ways,” rumors about the late writer’s “poverty” were “exaggerated” (65). Fortunately, the hotelkeeper, M. Jean Dupoirier, turned a blind eye to bills that had been owed to him for months. Receipts show that Wilde was still able to obtain a supply of reading matter from a local bookseller, which added to his personal library of three hundred books.⁶

In these final weeks, Wilde understood that not only his health but also his finances were worsening, and his mind focused on how he might settle the mounting debts. In the last of his letters, he fixates on why a recent business transaction should alleviate the financial pressure. He tells Frank Harris (who published some of Wilde’s more insubordinate writings) that the expense of his illness is “close on £200”; the surgeon’s fee, he says, amounts to “1500 francs.”⁷ To defray these substantial sums, Wilde insists that the time has come for Harris to fulfill an agreement that they made earlier that year. Even Harris, an ally who had given Wilde two new suits on his release from prison, apparently did not treat the author respectfully during this grueling time. Wilde needed cash, and Harris was obliged to help—or so Wilde wished to suggest.

Wilde’s reason for seeking money from Harris relates to the fact that on 25 October that year, a play titled *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry* opened at the Royalty Theatre, London, with the well-known Stella Campbell (“Mrs. Pat”) in the leading role. This drama, which received mixed reviews but ran for 116 performances, was the result of a problematic collaboration (if one can call it that) between the two men. The play, which Wilde sketched out in a scenario in August 1894, had come to hold a troublesome position in his career. Before he finished *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), Wilde had opened discussions with actor-manager George Alexander—the director of this brilliant society comedy—about the prospect of a drama focusing on marital discord, an adulterous husband’s suicide, and a wronged wife’s desire to elope with her lover.⁸ “*I want the sheer passion of love to dominate everything,*” he emphatically informed Alexander.⁹ “No morbid self-sacrifice,” he added. “No renunciation.” In no respect

was the woman protagonist to subscribe to the Victorian moralizing that Wilde did everything he could to resist in his work. Clearly, the subject matter, for its time, was risk-taking, as Laurel Brake explains in chapter 8 of the present volume.

In all likelihood, Wilde would have developed the scenario into a full-fledged drama had the trials of April–May 1895 not taken place. His sketch of this ambitious play counts among the small number of dramatic works that Wilde left unfinished at the time of his death.¹⁰ In February 1895, just after the opening of *Earnest*, Wilde tried to interest Alexander in “the vital parts” of *A Florentine Tragedy*, the fragment of which would appear in the fourteen-volume *Collected Works* (1908), edited by Ross.¹¹ Wilde appears to have continued working on this revenge drama, which follows the style of a Jacobean tragedy, until his hazardous libel suit interrupted his career. Besides resulting in his imprisonment, Wilde’s failed case against Queensberry incurred massive damages. On 24 April 1895, his belongings went up for sale outside his beautifully furnished home at 16 Tite Street, Chelsea. Wilde therefore entered jail a bankrupt man, and at the end of his life, more than £1,000 was still owed to the official receiver. After his release from prison, when he moved around France and Italy incognito as “Sebastian Melmoth,” Wilde never recovered pecuniary stability, even though friends were at times generous to him.

Once Wilde left England for the Continent, he realized that the scenario he had shared with Alexander in 1894 could reap much-needed rewards. In the summer of 1897, while he resided near Dieppe, Normandy, he sold the performance rights to American actress Cora Brown-Potter. The following year, when his expenses outstripped his income, he did the same thing to English theatrical manager Horace Sedger, who promptly sold on the rights to another agent. At the end of 1898, Leonard Smithers—a dubious figure who was the only publisher to accept Wilde’s *Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898)—relieved the other agent (his name was Roberts) of the deal and quickly took steps to ensure that Wilde would settle at Paris, where he could work on the script. But even Smithers’s support did not inspire Wilde to finish the drama. Laurence Housman, who enjoyed Wilde’s company in September 1899, reports Wilde’s demoralization at the prospect that there was no further market for his literary works: “If I could write what I have been saying to you, if I could hope to interest others, as I seem to have interested you, I would; but the world will not listen to me—now.”¹²

Around this time, Wilde was so hard-pressed for cash that the proprietor of the Hotel Marsollier (where he had been staying during the early summer of 1899)

was withholding his clothes until bills were paid. In these straits, Wilde sold the copyrights for the publication of two of his plays—*Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *A Woman of No Importance* (1893)—to Smithers for a paltry £20 apiece. But as James G. Nelson reminds us, with the completion of this deal Smithers's business began to fail, and therefore "the relationship between Smithers and Wilde as publisher and author appears to have ended for all practical purposes."¹³ Twelve months later, on 18 September 1900, Smithers went bankrupt, leaving Wilde without any publisher. By the time Smithers's business collapsed, Harris had become deeply involved in what Wilde in June 1900 called "our collaboration."¹⁴ The plan was for the two of them to work together on drafting the play based on the scenario, with Wilde composing the first act and Harris the remaining three. At this point, Harris knew that Wilde had already sold an option on the drama to Cora Brown-Potter, who had some months earlier petitioned Wilde to turn over to her what she called "my play."¹⁵ Toward the end of September, however, when Wilde's inability to complete his part of the bargain became clear, the situation with Harris grew more complicated. Although Harris had no previous experience of writing for the stage, he was eager to gain the best financial return. He steamed ahead and finished the drama without Wilde "seeing a line of it."¹⁶ Moreover, Harris sent Stella Campbell his script, and she quickly agreed to take the lead role at the Royalty, whose management she had just taken over. At this juncture, Wilde agreed that Harris should buy the plot and scenario for the following terms: £200 as down payment, £500 worth of "shares in the Reserve," and 25 percent of the profits of the play.¹⁷

This was, by any account, an advantageous deal, and the promised down payment was substantially larger than the sums that George Alexander had advanced Wilde during his heyday on the London stage from 1892 to 1895.¹⁸ Although Wilde admitted to Harris that he had already taken money from Cora Brown-Potter and her performance partner, English actor Kyrle Bellew, he was not explicit about other options that he had sold. As Harris soon learned, Wilde had in addition received handsome payments for various publishing and performance rights not only from Smithers but also from Australian theater manager Louis Nethersole (December 1899) and American actress Ada Rehan (February 1900).¹⁹ Once the forthcoming performance of *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry* was announced in the press, each of these individuals made a claim (rightfully or not) on Harris.²⁰ Ross, for one, took a negative view of Wilde's behavior. In a letter written two weeks after Wilde's death, he explains to his roommate More Adey that "Oscar,

of course, deceived Harris about the whole matter,” having used the scenario to raise sums of £100 on repeated occasions.²¹ To make matters worse, the aggrieved parties “threatened Harris with proceedings.” Such information troubled Ross because he had been doing his best to support Wilde by administering an allowance of £150 a year from Constance Holland’s estate.

In any case, Harris had his own reasons for not fulfilling his side of the bargain. Like Wilde, Harris—a habitually extravagant man—was hard up. Pressed for funds, in 1898 Harris sold the *Saturday Review*, in which he had made space for some of the most gifted authors of the day. During his four-year editorship, Harris had brought George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and Max Beerbohm into the public eye; there, too, he had published Wilde’s “A Few Maxims for the Instruction of the Over-Educated” (1894). Meanwhile, among Harris’s riskier business ventures was the recent acquisition of a costly hotel in Monte Carlo, which ended up emptying his pockets. With his finances at a breaking point, Harris sensed that he had been swindled, and he “wrote rather sharply to Oscar for having led [him] into this hornets’ nest.”²² He had little faith in how Wilde might dispose of any monies he might send to the Hôtel d’Alsace, where Wilde had been staying since August. In his memoir about Wilde’s last days, Harris’s secretary, T. H. Bell, recalls that the only solution to Wilde’s writer’s block was to have had a “combination nurse, guardian, and amanuensis” to ensure that Wilde completed his part of the collaboration.²³ Above all, in Bell’s view, Wilde should “have been kept encouraged and from getting drunk too early in the day” and “kept in good humor” (143). (During his exile in France, Wilde indulged his taste for absinthe and cognac.)²⁴ Whether fairly or unfairly, all that Harris would part with before Wilde’s death was £25, a fact that Wilde repeats in letters that enumerate his surgeon’s fee (£50), the bill for his consulting physician (£35), and his bill at the chemists (£35) (*Complete Letters*, 1201, 1204). Ross records that in November 1900, Wilde’s hotel expenses stood at £190 (*Complete Letters*, 1223).

After *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry* enjoyed the best part of a month’s performances, Harris capitulated to the demands that Wilde made in an urgent letter dated 21 November 1900. Harris dispatched Bell to travel from London to Paris with the sum that was owing to Wilde. Even at this stage, Harris suspected that Wilde was feigning illness. (The truth of the situation became known to Harris at the eleventh hour, for on 27 November Ross wired him about Wilde’s perilous condition.) Bell recalls the instructions that his employer wanted him to follow once he reached the Hôtel d’Alsace:

If I found Oscar's illness humbug, I was to talk things over with him, show him the documents in regard to Bellew and Smithers. If I found him drunk I was to hold the money till I saw him sober. Get his signature for it. Yes, surely, I was to use my own judgment a bit. But I must be aware of the people around him, parasites and blackmailers. I should be sure to go directly to Oscar's room (Harris somehow had the number of it) so as not to give him any chance to stage a sickness.

These warnings disheartened me not a little. Harris knew Wilde certainly much better than I did; and, alas, I knew enough myself to realize that these suspicions were not unreasonable. But I was being disillusioned about Harris, too. I felt that poor Oscar had been treated very badly. (149)

After entering the Alsace by a side entrance, Bell made his way to Wilde's room, only to find a "white-coiffed nun . . . sitting at one side with candles burning before her" (149). "And there before me," Bell adds, "lay Oscar—dead" (149). If ever there was a parable of too little arriving too late, this must surely be it. After speaking with Ross and Turner, as well as with Wilde's friend Henry-D. Davray, Bell headed back to London, and the money appears to have returned with him as well.²⁵ Everyone whom Harris needed to reimburse from the takings of *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry* was paid off, including the bankrupt Smithers, who received his £100 after the fiftieth performance. (According to Ross, Harris said he would settle the bills owing to Dupoirier.²⁶ But this promise appears to have gone unfulfilled because the debts were still owed to the hotelkeeper in 1902.²⁷) This ending to Wilde's life is as poignant as it is pitiful.

In his letter to Adey, Ross records Wilde's painful dying hours. He mentions that after he returned to the Hôtel d'Alsace after a two-week absence, he learned from two doctors that "Oscar could not live for more than two days" (*Complete Letters*, 1201). Furthermore, Ross, a faithful Catholic since 1894, recalls how he quickly arranged, with the Protestant Wilde's consent, a deathbed conversion to the Church of Rome, in which Father Cuthbert Dunne performed the first and last sacraments (1223–24). Ross's most vivid memory concentrates on the "death rattle" that began during the early morning of 30 November: "[I]t sounded like the turning of a crank, and it never ceased until the end" (1220). After Wilde expired, Ross writes, "the appalling *débris* . . . had to be burnt" (1220). There was, however, another mess that he had to clear up, because French officialdom made "[d]ying in Paris . . . a very difficult and expensive luxury for a foreigner" (1221). Particularly problematic was the signing of Wilde's death certificate. He had reg-

istered at Dupoirier's hotel as "Sebastian Melmoth"—a violation of French law, which forbade taking rooms under an assumed name. Technically, then, Wilde died a criminal, and Ross feared that his friend's body might be carried off to Paris's most lurid tourist destination, the morgue.

Fortunately, with help from an undertaker connected with the British embassy, Ross managed to cajole the district doctor, appease another official, and arrange the funeral as a matter of necessity (doctors advised him "to have the remains placed in the coffin at once, as decomposition would begin very rapidly" [*Complete Letters*, 1221]). Two days later, Wilde was buried in a modest grave at Bagneux Cemetery, four miles from Paris, in a coffin on which the inscribed plate misspelled his first name. As Ross informed Adey, the ceremony was a muted affair, with fifty-six people in attendance (Douglas was chief mourner) and twenty-four wreaths. There is no question that Ross's dedication to Wilde had turned into a labor of love. In the end, as he admits in a letter to painter William Rothenstein, Ross "had begun to feel, rather foolishly, a sort of responsibility for Oscar."²⁸ "[H]e had become for me," Ross adds, "a sort of adopted prodigal baby." At the time, Ross also sensed that his friend's prodigality would involve far more than defraying debts. Certainly, Ross knew that he could not tackle writing a memoir, which publisher Arthur Humphreys encouraged him to produce. "I am not alas a Boswell," Ross confides in his correspondence with Adela Schuster (who had generously put up £1,000 for Wilde's defense at the Old Bailey).²⁹ He also believed that it might prove inadvisable to embark on telling Wilde's life story, since that could appeal unhealthily to "morbid curiosity" (1230). In making this observation, Ross was mindful of Wilde's chilling foresight in a line that reverberates in "The Critic as Artist" (1890, revised 1891): "Every great man nowadays has his disciples, and it is always Judas who writes the biography" (*CW*, 8:102).³⁰ Such devotion could well lead to betrayal. Ultimately, the only succor Ross took from the "silence in the press" that met Wilde's death was the prospect that at some later point "everyone will recognise his achievements; his plays and essays will endure" (1229).

From every angle, Wilde's demise could not appear more wretched. Yet what is obscured in the depressing accounts of his death is that at the time, Wilde was in part responsible for a money-making play, starring a leading actress, which attracted audiences because it was rumored to have originated with him. To be sure, the idea that he could keep raising cash on the scenario of *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry* may well point to his unscrupulousness when he was in need of funds.

But evidence suggests that the repeated selling of his outline occurred when Wilde was trying to restore his professional standing after the success of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, which Smithers issued in seven successful editions between 1898 and 1899. After his release from prison, Wilde expressed his intention to complete a libretto for *Daphnis and Chloë*, a play, and an essay for the *North American Review*.³¹ To be sure, no drafts or sketches of these works have survived—a fact that may indicate that Wilde was prepared to make false promises at a time when he frequently lost hope in his literary prospects. Yet it is worth bearing in mind Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small’s observation that “[i]n the light of his attempts to restart his career as a dramatist, and the number of managers still interested in his work, we should perhaps be cautious about writing off the post-1897 years as straightforward failure.”³² Nor did Wilde’s works die with him. No matter how dismissively the *Times* and the *Academy* treated Wilde in their obituaries, such dismissiveness hardly prevented George Alexander—who obtained performance rights to two of Wilde’s plays—from arranging productions of both *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and *Earnest* at the Coronet Theatre, London, in 1901.³³

Alexander stated on 11 December 1900 that he wished Ross to accept “10 per cent of the sums” that came from a new edition of these society comedies.³⁴ In making this gesture, Alexander wanted to ensure that Ross did not remain out-of-pocket when trying to settle Wilde’s debts. Moreover, Alexander wrote in his will that on his death the copyright of the two dramas would return to Wilde’s estate. When Alexander first revived Wilde’s society comedies, the author’s identity was omitted from the program, yet everyone attending Alexander’s productions more than likely knew who had written the plays. In other words, even if publicizing Wilde’s name in the months following his death was problematic, his writings plainly survived journalistic condescension. Even more to Wilde’s credit, his works eventually managed to rise above the noisy public frays that would follow—in which, as Ross suspected, several Judases would betray not only the great man but also the other disciples.

*“The Truth of What I Prophesied When Wilde
Died in 1900”*—Robert Ross (1914)

Not all quarters of the London press treated Wilde’s passing with disdain. On 8 December 1900, one of his closer acquaintances, the young satirist Max Beer-

bohm, provided an unapologetic defense of Wilde's achievements. Beerbohm courageously devoted the second half of his theater review in the *Saturday Review* to a thoughtful assessment of a man whose death "extinguishes the hope that the broken series of his play might be resumed."³⁵ (Beerbohm cleared these remarks with his editor in advance, lest there be any objection to mentioning Wilde's name.)³⁶ Even if, in Beerbohm's judgment, Wilde was not "what one calls a born writer," this was not a hindrance to Wilde's art. Wilde, Beerbohm observes, came to creating drama "when he was no longer a young man," and the playwright correspondingly brought to the form not only his skills "as a thinker and a weaver of ideas" but also his established prowess "as the master of a literary style" (230, 231). No matter how much Wilde might be faulted for writing in a manner that bore "too close a likeness to the flow of speech," Beerbohm judged that "this very likeness . . . gave him in dramatic dialogue as great an advantage over more careful and finer literary stylists as he had over ordinary playwrights with no pretence to style" (231). In other words, for Beerbohm it is unquestionable that "now Wilde is dead" the public "will realise . . . fully, what was for them involved in his downfall"—namely, "how lamentable the loss to dramatic literature" (232).

Three days after this supportive notice appeared, a one-act play by Beerbohm opened as a forty-minute curtain-raiser for *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry*. In November of that year, Stella Campbell had approached Beerbohm to provide a dramatic adaptation of his story "The Happy Hypocrite" (1896), which was first published in the *Yellow Book*—the initially controversial quarterly magazine that, in its earliest issues, helped focus attention on an emergent body of Decadent writing in Britain. Beerbohm's witty narrative amounts to a playful inversion of Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, revised 1891). Whereas Wilde's Dorian Gray remains youthfully unblemished as he commits increasingly heinous crimes, Beerbohm's Sir George Hell dons the mask of a saint to conceal that he is no longer an infamous Regency libertine but a man who lives instead in marital bliss under the hypocritical pseudonym "George Heaven." At the end of Wilde's story, Dorian Gray comes face to face with the portrait hidden away in his home, where it has grown hideous through acts of violence and betrayal. By comparison, when a former lover threatens to destroy the saintly-looking George Hell's happiness, the demand that he remove his mask leads to a surprising outcome: his face beneath has become as impeccable as the flawless waxen device affixed to it. Instead of hiding under the mask, Sir George therefore has come to embody it, in a style that strikingly runs against the grain of the moral that sends Dorian Gray to his

grave. Even though Wilde's downfall had made him an unspeakable figure in polite society, Beerbohm had no hesitation in going into print with what amounts to a homage to a writer whom he generally held in esteem. Beerbohm's career, after all, began in 1893 with a respectfully amusing piece that asserts that "a more complete figure than Oscar Wilde has not been known since the days of Byron."³⁷ That the one-act version of "The Happy Hypocrite" introduced *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry*, a play that impressed Beerbohm, reveals his enduring commitment to Wilde.³⁸

Beerbohm belonged to a fairly tight-knit group of Wilde's disciples, which included Ross, Turner, Adey, and Rothenstein, all of whom moved in similar circles. On hearing of Wilde's demise, Beerbohm commiserated with his friend Turner: "You must have had an awful time in Paris. Poor Oscar! I wish he were here, alive and superb—the Oscar before the fall."³⁹ Similarly, in 1901, Rothenstein wrote to Ross to say that he had "read a most interesting letter . . . about poor Oscar's death, and felt deeply how good you and Reggie had been."⁴⁰ During this period, Ross and Adey took over the fashionable Carfax Gallery at Ryder Street, St. James's, London, where they mounted Beerbohm's well-received 1901 exhibition of one hundred caricatures. In 1902, they showed a range of Rothenstein's works. This turn of events marked the beginning of Ross's rise in the art world, which in 1906 led to his regular reviews in the *Academy*, the journal that at one time could not mention Wilde's name.

Meanwhile, as Ross began to establish a successful career as a critic, he informed Adela Schuster that he had "for some time been in communication with the Official Receiver in regard to Oscar Wilde's copyrights of his books and plays."⁴¹ Even in early 1902, Ross already had interest from two publishers who wanted to buy the copyrights "*en bloc*." These companies promised to purchase all of them so long as the official receiver did not make unreasonable demands. By pursuing these deals, Ross was fulfilling a duty that Wilde had assigned to him shortly before leaving jail, in a detailed letter dated 1 April 1897: "I want you to be my literary executor in case of my death, and to have complete control over my plays, books and papers."⁴² In particular, Wilde had wanted Ross to "be in possession of the only document that really gives any explanation of my extraordinary behaviour with regard to Queensberry and Alfred Douglas" (*Complete Letters*, 780). The document in question is the 55,000-word prose work written on twenty folio sheets of blue prison notepaper. Wilde explained that this was his precious gift to posterity, a means of unveiling the truth someday, though

not in his or Douglas's lifetime. To ensure the preservation of this work, Wilde gave Ross specific instructions on how it should be copied on that "thoroughly modern" machine, the typewriter (781). The typed copy, he insisted, should contain "a wide rubricated margin" in which one could insert all corrections; this directive suggests that Wilde probably wished to make emendations to the work at some point in the future (781). Thereafter, as Wilde states in this letter, Ross should dispatch the original manuscript to Douglas. "There is no need," Wilde adds, "to tell A.D. that a copy has been taken" (782). Once this was done, a further typewritten copy was to be kept in Ross's hands for safekeeping, while shorter typewritten sections were to be sent to two cherished friends. Wilde had given a title to his work: "[I]t may be spoken of as the *Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis*" (Letter: In Prison and In Chains) (782). The title certainly accords with the fact that the document is a letter addressed to "Dear Bosie." At the same time, the choice of title shows that this work, in a more general sense, comprises a self-standing epistle (one that Wilde believed should be conserved in typewritten form). Consequently, the careful naming of this lengthy manuscript implies that its meaning exceeds that of a regular item of correspondence.

In 1897, Ross followed all of Wilde's directives bar one. In what may or may not have been an act of disobedience—one that, at any rate, had serious consequences—Ross held onto the original manuscript; he also may have failed, deliberately or otherwise, to send a copy to Douglas.⁴³ Although he was not officially recognized as Wilde's executor until 1906, Ross assumed responsibility for the maintenance of the literary estate upon Wilde's death, and he kept in his hands papers belonging to Wilde, including several personal letters written by Douglas. Probably because German culture expressed the greatest interest in Wilde's work (Max Reinhardt's 1902 production of *Salomé*, which inspired Strauss's opera, is one example), Ross released to Max Meyerfeld—who translated several of Wilde's writings—a typewritten copy of the prison letter to Bosie. As Horst Schroeder has explained in detail, Meyerfeld's tactful selection of excerpts from this work appeared in *Die neue Rundschau* in January–February 1905.⁴⁴ Presumably in compliance with Ross's wishes, Meyerfeld's translation makes no mention that the entire work is addressed to Douglas. Ross later informed Meyerfeld that, after he first submitted his transcription of the prison document to respected publisher Algernon Methuen, he "anticipated refusal, as though the work were my own."⁴⁵ Methuen's reader, E. V. Lucas, however, had faith in the manuscript and recommended publication, as well as suggesting that it should be called *De*

Profundis. (Taken from Psalm 130, the Latin phrase means “out of the depths.”) Both Meyerfeld’s and Methuen’s respective editions, which appeared within weeks of each other, bear this title.

Methuen, who knew that he was testing the water, hoped that the volume would “take an enduring place in the literature of misfortune.”⁴⁶ Unexpectedly strong sales proved him right. By the end of the year, the sixth edition was in print. The immense commercial success of *De Profundis* marks the first decisive step toward Wilde’s rehabilitation in modern British culture. In the next few years, the work was translated into numerous languages, including Dutch, French, Italian, Russian, Spanish, and Yiddish. Its wide circulation, however, involved no small measure of risk. Even though in his 1905 text Ross carefully omits any allusion to Douglas, he nonetheless quotes from correspondence by Wilde that shows that the work had its origins in a letter. Ross’s preface, though, avoids any suggestion that the epistle in question largely amounts to the indictment of a specific individual. Instead, he states that this document “renders so vividly, and so painfully, the effect of social *débâcle* and imprisonment on a highly artificial and intellectual nature” as Wilde’s.⁴⁷ As the biblical title indicates, Ross aimed to show that Wilde’s reflections on his solitary confinement emerged from a deeply Christian anguish, which contrasts sharply with the image of Wilde as an exclusively “witty and delightful writer” (ix). Not surprisingly, the line that opens Ross’s edition runs as follows: “Suffering is one very long moment” (11). In the eloquent passages that follow, Wilde proceeds to expose both the reprehensible manner in which the legal system treated him and the recklessness with which he had brought about his ruin: “Terrible as was what the world did to me, what I did to myself was far more terrible still” (21). Such finely balanced phrasing presents a gifted stylist in full command of a self-reproachful, almost penitent mood in which he accepts much of the onus for his downfall.

When *De Profundis* appeared from Methuen, most reviewers revealed an eagerness to reclaim Wilde in ways that might appear to have fulfilled Beerbohm’s wish that the author who died in 1900 would arise again “alive and superb.” Even those commentators who acknowledged the “evil associations” attached to Wilde’s name felt obliged to speak of the book as a “work, tragically written, of a genius whose ruin was one of the saddest tragedies in” one’s “lifetime.”⁴⁸ In similarly cautious vein, Lucas observes in his review that Wilde’s manifest genius lay “in his lawlessness.”⁴⁹ What appear to redeem the writer for Lucas are those passages that show that “everything which Wilde says of Christ in this little book” is

“worth reading and considering and reading again” (247). To radical politician R. B. Cunninghame Graham in the *Saturday Review*, the religious resonance of Wilde’s prose is instructive, if for different reasons. In Graham’s eyes, one of the most appealing aspects of the volume is that any individual, if charitably disposed, can study the suffering that Wilde records and find in it “his martyrdom, and read it as a thing that might have happened to himself.”⁵⁰

Beerbohm was not slow to catch the irony of Wilde’s reinstatement in British culture through *De Profundis*. In the popular weekly *Vanity Fair*, in which some of his famous caricatures appeared, Beerbohm observes that the 1905 volume has ensured “that all the critics are writing, and gossips gossiping, very glibly . . . about the greatness of Wilde.”⁵¹ Beerbohm’s wording suggests his serious doubts about this frenzied “magnifying” of a man “whom we so lately belittled” (249). He refuses to join the consensus that Ross’s welcome edition of *De Profundis* expresses what Wilde “really and truly felt” (249). Astutely, Beerbohm concludes instead that even in a state of supposed humility Wilde remained admirably conceited: “Even ‘from the depths’ he condescended. Nor merely to mankind was he condescending. He enjoyed the greater luxury of condescending to himself” (250). Beerbohm sees this hyperbolic self-humbling evident in remarks that emphasize Wilde’s continuing rhetorical authority despite his harsh sentence: “I, once a lord of language, have no words in which to express my anguish and my shame” (*De Profundis*, 13–14). As Beerbohm could see, *De Profundis* hardly presented Wilde as a crushed man: “It is a joy to find in this last prose work of his the old power, all unmarred by the physical torments that he had suffered” (251). Moreover, the punitive system that left Wilde “broken, and powerless, and aimless” could not eradicate “the invincible artist in him” (251). If the 1905 edition of *De Profundis* proved one thing for Beerbohm, it was that even in the face of hardship Wilde remained “immutable” (251).

Responsibility for the widespread reception of *De Profundis* lay mostly with Ross. He launched a campaign to put this work into the hands of a broad circle of friends and editors, as well as influential people with whom he was not acquainted. The positive responses that he promptly received bears out George Bernard Shaw’s canny observation, made on 13 March 1905, that the “British press is as completely beaten by” Wilde “*de profundis* as it was *in excelsis*.”⁵² “The unquenchable spirit of the man,” Shaw enthuses, “is magnificent.” Within fifteen months, handsome royalties discharged Wilde’s debts. At this time, however, Ross’s edition of *De Profundis* and Strauss’s *Salome* were not all that helped restore

Wilde's reputation. Altogether more quietly, though with far-reaching consequences, two dedicated researchers were beginning to piece together the immense scope of Wilde's bibliography. The labors of these two men, Christopher Sclater Millard and Walter Ledger, made a decisive contribution to the next phase of Ross's initiative to do justice to his "prodigal baby." By 2 February 1906, when Ross's tireless work resulted in the annulment of Wilde's bankruptcy, the path had been cleared for him to begin editing the fourteen-volume *Collected Works*, which Methuen agreed to issue in an *édition de luxe*, with designs by Charles Ricketts, whose distinctive motifs appeared in several of Wilde's first editions in the 1890s.⁵³ The *Collected Works*, which remains fairly authoritative to this day, would become one of the lasting tributes to Wilde's memory.

Millard, who published under the pseudonym Stuart Mason, came to notice with his 1905 English edition of André Gide's "Oscar Wilde," an essay that had appeared three years earlier in the French review *L'ermitage*. Gide's reminiscences, which date back to his first meeting with Wilde in 1891, scarcely present an admiring picture ("Wilde was not a great writer," Gide insists).⁵⁴ Gide's emphasis falls instead on tracing the downward transformation of a onetime "wonderful creature" (22) into an individual who eventually grew "reckless, hardened, and conceited" (45). When he recalls his unexpected meeting with Wilde at Blidah, Algeria, in January 1895, Gide dares not be too explicit about what instilled his horror at a man whose "lyrical adoration was fast becoming frenzied madness" (46). For those early-twentieth-century readers acquainted with homosexual tourism, Gide's meaning would have been clear enough. Pursued in Algiers, as Gide remembers, "by quite an extraordinary mob of young ruffians," Wilde shocked the French author by making the following scandalous declaration: "I hope to have thoroughly demoralized this town" (47). Gide recalls that several years later, when he enjoyed cocktails with Wilde at a Parisian café, "[n]othing remained in" Wilde's "shattered life but a mouldy ruin" (83). It is almost as if Gide predicted that Wilde's presumed dissipation could only result in this piteous spectacle. Therefore it may appear strange that Millard chose to disseminate Gide's largely negative account. Millard, however, no doubt recognized that Gide's memoir is valuable because it stands among the earliest documents that flesh out what had already become, by 1905, a contested biographical record. More to the point, Gide's comments touch upon sexual intimacy between men, which in the early 1900s was undeniably the most sensitive aspect of Wilde's troubled life story. In the closing pages of his edition, Millard balances Gide's candid remarks by including a

fairly comprehensive bibliography of Wilde's works, which showed for the first time the striking extent and diversity of the Irish writer's oeuvre.

In other ways, too, Millard's efforts provided a scholarly alternative to the emerging body of biographical writing on Wilde, which began with Robert Harborough Sherard's unreliable 1902 memoir. Sherard, who had become closely acquainted with Wilde in Paris in 1883, remained loyal to his friend throughout the two-year prison sentence. Sherard recalls, however, that their long-standing association deteriorated when Wilde made "a great and unfortunate mistake" by reuniting with Douglas at Posillippo, near Naples.⁵⁵ After Sherard voiced stern disapproval, Wilde responded with a searing letter denouncing him as a "Tartuffe": the kind of petty-minded moralist whose prissiness is clear at the start of Sherard's high-minded biography (259).⁵⁶ "Of his aberration which brought this fine life to shipwreck so pitiful," Sherard intones, "I have nothing to say" (10). Such "cruel and devilish madness," he declares, belongs to "the domains of pathology" (10). Instead, he depicts a man whose "supreme delicacy of tongue" always enchanted him (12). Regardless of his straitlaced attitude, Sherard—who did his utmost to become the leading authority on Wilde—was an important contact for Millard.⁵⁷ Together, in the summer of 1904, the two men visited the Hôtel d'Alsace, where Dupoirier showed them the room in which Wilde had died, which had become, in Millard's words, "a place of pilgrimage from all parts of the world for those who admire his genius or pity his sorrows" (in Gide, *Oscar Wilde*, 10).

By the time Gide's essay appeared in English, Millard had been in touch with Ross, though their initial meeting was stymied by Millard's arrest on the charge of "gross indecency" at Iffley, near Oxford. Ross, who was probably Wilde's earliest male lover, remained only too aware of the hazards facing homosexual men; upon receiving Millard's wire for help, he rushed to Oxford to see whether this thirty-four-year-old Wilde scholar would be sent down for "10 years' penal servitude."⁵⁸ Millard was jailed for three months with hard labor. On his release, he followed in Wilde's footsteps by exiling himself in Dieppe. The following year, however, he returned to London, found employment at a bookstore, and soon began researching the publication history of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for Ross's *Collected Works*. The upshot of his inquiries was the noteworthy volume *Oscar Wilde: Art and Morality—A Defence of The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1908). In this remarkable book, which was issued again in 1912, Millard brings together the handful of hostile reviews that encouraged newsagent W. H. Smith to remove the 1890 edition of Wilde's story from its shelves. Moreover, Millard reprints the

lengthy exchanges about immorality and modern fiction that stemmed from the furor that exploded around *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in W. E. Henley's *Scots Observer*. His study reveals that the violence Wilde suffered at the hands of the state in 1895 was in some ways anticipated by the notorious shot that one of Henley's journalists had fired at Wilde's novel five years earlier: "The story—which deals with matters only fitted for the Criminal Investigation department or a hearing *in camera* is discreditable alike to author and editor. Mr. Wilde has brains, and art, and style; but if he can write for none but outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph boys, the sooner he takes to tailoring (or some other decent trade) the better for his own reputation and the public morals."⁵⁹ Numerous commentators have pointed out that these sentences allude to the Cleveland Street Affair of 1888–89, in which at least one well-known aristocrat fled the country because he was suspected of having sex in a brothel with young men from the nearby post office.⁶⁰ By reminding readers of the *Scots Observer's* sexual enmity, Millard, a man who experienced further persecution for his homosexuality, became an outspoken apologist for Wilde.

Ross, who later employed Millard as his secretary, was the first to acknowledge the significance of this scholar's contribution to the edition that reestablished Wilde's literary standing. The *Collected Works* provided influential reviewers with the chance to draw an informed overall picture of Wilde's diverse canon. Given the uneven quality of some of Wilde's earlier works, it is no surprise that the most engaged assessments were keenly critical. As dramatist St. John Hankin observes in the *Fortnightly Review*, these volumes show that "Wilde as a playwright was always an imitator rather than an original artist"—though Hankin admits that the "nearest approach to absolute originality" occurs in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.⁶¹ Arthur Symons, who had written sympathetic reviews of Wilde's work in the past, furnished a lengthy notice in the respected *Athenæum*, in which he states that only now is the "artificial world Wilde created" beginning to "settle down in any sort of known order."⁶² Symons appears to have been taken aback by what he saw as the patchy quality of Wilde's canon, and he was quick to remark on the "bad epigram" that too often mars the work of a "prodigious entertainer" (294). Less impressed, Harold Child in the *Times Literary Supplement* states that even in "the most thoughtful, the most illuminating things" that we might find in an essay such as "The Soul of Man under Socialism" (1891), Wilde seems superficial; from Child's perspective, Wilde lacks "that conviction,

that deeper personality, without which a man must be content to go on saying what other people have said before him.”⁶³

No matter how many deficiencies these commentators identified in Wilde’s oeuvre, the fact that they expended so much energy on the *Collected Works* served Wilde’s legacy well. Just after the final two volumes of this major edition appeared in late 1908, Ross delivered a speech at a large dinner held in his honor. His audience comprised more than 160 guests—among them Wilde’s sons (then in their twenties), Frank Harris, W. Somerset Maugham, William Rothenstein, and H. G. Wells. This was distinguished company. Once he gave his thanks, Ross disclosed that he had received a large anonymous gift of £2,000 “to place a suitable monument to Oscar Wilde at Père Lachaise” in Paris.⁶⁴ This generous donor stipulated that the commission should go to the young American sculptor Jacob Epstein. In the course of disclosing this good news, Ross stressed that there were three people in particular “to whom this dinner should really have been given—Mr. Methuen, Mr. Stuart Mason, and [Ross’s] solicitor, Mr. Holman” (156). None of these men, as Ross observed, had had any personal contact with Wilde.

Noticeably, Ross made no tribute to Douglas. As it turned out, Douglas chose to stay away from an “absurd dinner” that, as he informed Ross, brought together people who either had no connection with Wilde or were “not on speaking terms with him” when he died.⁶⁵ But at the time, Douglas’s relations with Ross were under strain, not least because this literary executor, as soon became clear, had not treated Wilde’s former lover with sufficient respect. Certainly, as Ross said in his after-dinner speech, he had fulfilled the promise he made to himself “at the deathbed of Oscar Wilde” (154). Eight years after his friend’s impecunious passing, Ross made sure that both Wilde’s estate and his reputation were in good order. This was more than Douglas ever did. Certainly, Douglas helped reverse the *Academy*’s former antipathy toward Wilde by using his recent editorship of that journal to print his fine sonnet “The Dead Poet,” which honors his former lover’s memory.⁶⁶ Moreover, in the *Academy* he went out of his way to expose the recently deceased Henley as a man whose repeated attacks on Wilde’s works had not “the smallest nobility of soul.”⁶⁷ Yet Douglas soon held an extremely vexed, if on occasion misunderstood, place in Wilde’s legacy. Ross had knowingly taken risks in publishing *De Profundis*, and in the *Collected Works* he included a slightly expanded version of this text, which once again made no mention of Douglas’s name.

There were other reasons why Ross's relations with Douglas were deteriorating after several years of reasonably friendly, if intermittent, contact between them. Even though Douglas invited Ross to his secret marriage to poet Olive Custance in 1902 (her father disapproved of the match because of Bosie's former attachment to Wilde), five years later a breach opened up. The rift occurred, somewhat ironically, after Ross suggested that Douglas should assist Harold Child in editing the *Academy*. (Ross also suggested that Douglas's cousin by marriage, Edward Tennant, should take over proprietorship of the journal, which he did.) When Child joined the London *Times* later that year, Douglas took his place and needed an assistant. Douglas's choice was seasoned polemicist T.W.H. Crosland, a moral crusader who was determined to make the journal—in the words of his admiring biographer—an organ for “conducting a campaign against all sorts of evil and wickedness.”⁶⁸

Ross appears to have been among the first contributors to succumb to Crosland's blue pencil, on the grounds that his submission did not maintain “sound morality” (*Genius of T.W.H. Crosland*, 218). Unhesitatingly, in the *Academy*, Crosland embarked on a series of attacks against all forms of supposed immorality. Ross's second book, *Masques and Phases* (1909), was just the kind of study that would have met with his disapproval. (It was a sign of Ross's growing prominence that his first monograph, on the sexually controversial fin-de-siècle artist Aubrey Beardsley, appeared earlier that year.) *Masques and Phases*, which Beerbohm found a “joy from first to last,” comprises twenty-five essays and reviews that Ross had contributed to various journals over the years, including one edited by Douglas, *The Spirit Lamp* (1893), a homoerotically oriented journal whose contents include three of Wilde's short works.⁶⁹ Although none of Ross's succinct pieces was aimed at generating scandal, one does touch upon homosexuality, which Crosland abominated. The essay in question, which dates from 1905, outlines the life of London artist Simeon Solomon, whose career was cut short when he was arrested for sexual contact with another man in a public restroom in 1873. To be sure, Ross does not spell out the events that led to Solomon's imprisonment. Nonetheless, he comments that for “poor Solomon there was no place in life,” not least because this artist—who once enjoyed the company of Walter Pater and Algernon Charles Swinburne—was “an inverted Watts.”⁷⁰ The description is apt because much of Solomon's greatest art explores patterns of same-sex desire in mythological scenes that share elements of G. F. Watts's eminently heterosexual representations of Classical legend.

By the time Harold Child favorably reviewed *Masques and Phases* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Ross had begun to enjoy some prominence as an expert on modern art.⁷¹ Margot Asquith, spouse of the recently elected prime minister, invited Ross into her influential circle, which in turn led to his acquaintance with high-ranking officials whose clout ultimately resulted in Ross's appointment as a trustee of the Tate Gallery in 1917. Since Crosland and Douglas, as they put it, could not stand "the tee-total, socialistic, and wild-cat Premier," the battle lines with Ross became sharply defined.⁷² In these hostile circumstances, Ross decided to bequeath the complete manuscript of *De Profundis* to the British Museum; the director, Sir Frederic Kenyon, accepted Ross's gift on 15 November 1909. Under the terms of this bequest, the museum agreed to keep the document sealed for fifty years. Moreover, as Maureen Borland discloses, the director and his colleagues acknowledged that in parting with this manuscript Ross was making considerable financial sacrifice. Furthermore, the trustees understood that Ross wished to ensure that no members of Douglas's family would be hurt by the contents.⁷³ In the manuscript, after all, Wilde mercilessly attacks Douglas for supposed negligence: "Why did you not write to me? Was it cowardice? Was it callousness? What was it?" (*Complete Letters*, 725). Nowhere does Wilde appear to have understood that Douglas might have been legally compromised had this aristocrat sent any mail to the prison authorities, who as a matter of course vetted incoming and outgoing correspondence with inmates.⁷⁴ In the process of berating Douglas for his incomprehensible silence, Wilde heaps praise upon Ross for writing at twelve-weekly intervals "real letters"—ones that "have the quality of a French *causerie intime*" (something greater, it seems, than any of Douglas's literary efforts) (726). Yet no matter how flattering Wilde's comments are toward Ross, it is strange to think that Ross assumed authority over a manuscript that ostensibly takes the form of a personal letter that begins "Dear Bosie." To the end of his days, Douglas protested (perhaps rightly) that the document initially placed in Ross's hands, and then handed over to the museum, was his.⁷⁵

In any case, Ross, in his role as Wilde's literary executor, had been entrusted with a manuscript that he seems not to have handled with due caution. In 1909, a German translation edited by Meyerfeld presented an extensively annotated text of a larger portion of the document than had previously appeared. This edition opens with a long, complimentary letter from Ross to Meyerfeld, dated 31 August 1907, in which Ross discloses who has been privy to the complete manuscript: "With the exception of Major Nelson [governor of Reading Gaol], myself, and

a confidential typewriter, no one has read the whole of it” (“To Max Meyerfeld,” xi). “Contrary to a general impression,” he adds, disingenuously, “it contains nothing scandalous” (xi). Ross proceeds to characterize the work as “desultory”: “a large portion of it is taken up with business and private matters of no interest whatever” (xi). But when we learn that Max Meyerfeld, along with Algernon Methuen and Hamilton Fyfe (editor of the popular *Daily Mirror*), had also seen the manuscript, it becomes clear that word may well have begun to spread about the truly consequential nature of this document. Meyerfeld was the first to reveal that *De Profundis* was “ein Brief Oscar Wildes aus dem Zuchthaus in Reading an seinen Freund Lord Alfred Douglas” (“a letter written by Oscar Wilde at Reading Gaol to his friend Lord Alfred Douglas”) (xvii). Moreover, Meyerfeld reveals that the work was originally called “Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis,” and he places this title at the head of his translation. So that readers can comprehend the autobiographical import of this work, Meyerfeld introduces his notes by filling in the background to Wilde’s involvement with Douglas, from their earliest meeting in 1891 to the events that resulted in the failed libel trial of 3 April 1895. Since this edition was quickly translated into English and became available in New York, though not in London, its appearance doubtless spurred Ross to put the manuscript out of public reach until 1959.

Matters came to a head in 1912 with the first serious critical inquiry into Wilde’s achievements, which quietly disclosed to the British audience what Meyerfeld had explicitly revealed to the German-speaking world three years earlier. In *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study*, by Arthur Ransome (the author who later earned fame for his children’s classic, *Swallows and Amazons* [1930]), readers learned that the “book called *De Profundis* . . . is not printed as it was written, but is composed of passages from a long letter whose complete publication would be impossible in this generation.”⁷⁶ In preparing this book, Ransome drew on Ross’s comprehensive knowledge of Wilde’s career, as well as important documents such as the letter that Ross sent to Adey two weeks after their friend’s death. In a document that relates to his dealings with Ransome, Ross asserts, “I did not show Ransome the typewritten copy of the unpublished portions of *De Profundis*.”⁷⁷ Caspar Wintermans is probably right to say that Ross’s statement sounds dishonest, especially when we compare Ransome’s recollections of what happened (Wintermans, *Alfred Douglas*, 123).⁷⁸ On the evidence that exists, Ross seems to have given Ransome a free hand, since *Oscar Wilde*:

A Critical Study contains the following indiscreet assertions: “The letter, a manuscript of ‘eighty close-written pages on twenty folio sheets,’ was not addressed to Mr. Ross but to a man whom Wilde felt he owed some, at least, of the circumstances of the public disgrace. It was begun as a rebuke of this friend, whose actions, even subsequent to the trials, had been such as to cause Wilde considerable pain. It was not delivered to him, but given to Mr. Ross by Wilde, who also gave instructions as to its partial publication” (157). Once he learned of Ransome’s insinuations, Douglas was indignant. He launched a libel suit against the publisher, the printer, the Times Book Club of London (which distributed copies), and the author. In 1913, when he stood before the court, Douglas confronted the fact that much of the work from which Ross had taken extracts was exactly as Ransome characterized it—a wholehearted rebuke of himself. As lengthy transcripts in the *Times* show, the defense read out large sections from those parts of *De Profundis* that Ross had suppressed in his edition. Under cross-examination, Douglas withstood a further barrage in the form of letters that he had sent to Wilde, which Ross had appropriated at the time of their friend’s death. With such questionable evidence held against him, Douglas had no chance of a verdict in his favor, even when he revealed from his passbooks that during the last ten months of Wilde’s life he had generously given his friend “£390 in cheques (in addition to a lot of ready money).”⁷⁹ Years later, in 1925, Douglas informed Harris that at the start of the Ransome trial he had “not the slightest idea that it was a letter addressed by Wilde” to him—though this is a claim open to some question.⁸⁰ Douglas, it is worth noting, reviewed the 1905 volume in *Motorist and Traveller*. There he shrewdly remarks, “If Oscar Wilde’s spirit, returning to this world in a malicious mood, had wished to devise a pleasant and insinuating trap for some of his old enemies of the press, he could scarcely have hit on a better one than this book.”⁸¹ He adds, almost as if the point hardly mattered at all, that “this interesting post-humous book . . . takes the form of a letter to an unnamed friend.”

Although Douglas lost his case in 1913 (the judge took delight in humiliating him, and the costs were a hefty £1,500), Methuen tried to settle matters by emending the offending paragraphs in a second imprint of *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study*.⁸² But there was no smoothing over the conflict. In 1912, in preparation for the trial, Crosland had access to the manuscript of *De Profundis*, and he quickly issued an invective in verse, titled *The First Stone: On Reading the Unpublished*

Parts of "De Profundis." In his foreword, Crosland (who does not mention Douglas as the recipient of the prison document) states that the "parts cut out of" Ross's 1905 edition "are sufficiently discreditable to render the whole ignominious."⁸³ "Wilde is dead," Crosland adds. "[L]et his crowning devilry die with him—yes, Mr. Robert Ross, I say, devilry!" (6). Given that this agent provocateur seldom left Douglas's side, no one could appease the impulsive aristocrat. As a precautionary step against Douglas making any attempt to issue his own edition of the prison document (he had already approached an American publisher), Ross brought out in New York an edition of fifteen copies of the "suppressed portion of *De Profundis*," which satisfied the Library of Congress's guidelines on copyright.⁸⁴ Matters worsened because Douglas was declared bankrupt not long before the court proceedings began. Soon enough, to defend his blemished reputation and to raise urgently needed funds, Douglas went into print with a book, largely written by Crosland, lambasting Wilde in general and denouncing in particular "the disgraceful document which Mr. Ross has so generously bestowed upon the nation."⁸⁵ Consequently, the hostility between Douglas and Ross intensified, leading them into further bruising legal battles—as well as several poetic tirades—until Ross died in 1918.⁸⁶

As we can see, the Ransome trial vented in public the animosity between Ross and Douglas that had intensified during the previous four years. The tumult in the courtroom extended the vendetta that Douglas had already spearheaded against the increasingly successful Ross, who in 1912 was appointed valuer of pictures for the Board of the Inland Revenue. Even before Ross's defense began quoting at length the unpublished parts of *De Profundis*, Douglas employed a private detective to monitor Ross's movements. The purpose was to find incriminating evidence of improprieties between Ross and his young lover, Freddie Smith. Douglas's campaign, in which Crosland was involved, included the attempted blackmail of a male prostitute to confess that he had been sexually intimate with Ross. In March 1914, Ross—who counted "litigation" among his interests in *Who's Who*—decided to sue Douglas for criminal libel; he also issued writs for criminal conspiracy and perjury against Crosland and Douglas together. Jonathan Fryer points out that while Douglas escaped the proceedings by staying in France, Crosland in court "portrayed himself as a decent, upright man who was fighting a moral crusade against those who were trying to whitewash Wilde and legitimize his filthy practices."⁸⁷ Accordingly, Crosland's counsel focused the jury's attention on the questionable morality of Wilde's work, which

Millard, among others, was asked to defend. It must have been somewhat eerie for Millard to find himself in a courtroom situation similar to the one in April 1895, when Wilde was asked to explain whether sections of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were “sodomitical.”⁸⁸ The fact that the jury acquitted Crosland came as a terrible shock to Ross and his supporters.

Toward the end of the year, however, a noteworthy event gave Ross cause for celebration. Millard’s magnificent bibliography, which he had compiled over the years with Ledger’s help, appeared from independent publisher T. Werner Laurie.⁸⁹ The *Library Association Record* extolled it as “the most comprehensive bibliography that exists in English.”⁹⁰ Meanwhile, in the scholarly world, Ernst Bendz—who produced some of the most informed early research on Wilde’s oeuvre—celebrated the manner in which this great work gives “one anew a sense of Wilde’s amazing versatility and the wide scope of his talents, of his increasing importance as an intellectual and literary power, and of the immense vogue his works have had during the past decade,” which led in turn to individuals being willing “to pay large sums for signed copies of first editions.”⁹¹ It thus comes as no surprise to learn that for Ross, as he remarks in his introductory note to that fine bibliography, Millard’s labors afforded him “peculiar pleasure”: “They emphasise the truth of what I prophesied when Wilde died in 1900—that his writings would in a few years’ time excite wider interest than those of almost any of his contemporaries. Indeed, with the possible exception of Dickens and Byron, I doubt if any British author of the nineteenth century is better known over a more extensive geographical area.”⁹² Ross does not overstate matters when he says that by 1914 Wilde’s reputation had few rivals on a global scale. Were it not for Ross’s extraordinary efforts together with those of Millard, which occurred in the face of attacks against their sexual preference, Wilde’s literary standing could not have resurged so triumphantly.

Just at the point when World War I would wreak havoc across Europe (the subsequent bloodbath would take the life of Cyril Holland), one further event completed Ross’s important efforts to commemorate Wilde. After months of wrangling with French authorities (first, customs officers wished to levy a heavy customs duty, then cemetery officials objected to the sexual aspects of the design), Ross witnessed at long last the unveiling of Jacob Epstein’s imposing memorial to Wilde. At Père Lachaise, Epstein’s distinctly modernist sphinx—an icon derived from Wilde’s 1894 poem—finally paid a monumental tribute to Wilde’s legendary reputation.

“*Being Dead Is the Most Boring Experience in Life*”—Oscar Wilde’s
Spirit Channeled by Hester Travers Smith (1925)

By 1914, some of the legends about Wilde had come to prove untrustworthy, and during the war many (and much more disreputable) tall tales would come into circulation, sometimes courtesy of close friends such as Ross. Among the earliest myths were those that claimed that Wilde had escaped an early death. Soon after Ross’s edition of *De Profundis* appeared, George Sylvester Viereck—later notorious as an American supporter of Nazism—explored the question “Is Oscar Wilde Living or Dead?” In light of the success of *De Profundis*, Viereck speculates, “[I]f now, crowned with the world’s admiration, he should come back, would it not pardon the re-arisen poet who had died at least one death for his sin?”⁹³ It is almost as if Viereck were trying to will the Christ-like Wilde back to life to make the world repent for its wrongdoing. Viereck’s essay counts among numerous accounts featuring Wilde’s wished-for resurrection. In 1908, for example, the *Los Angeles Times* devoted a full-page spread to apparent sightings of Wilde on the West Coast.⁹⁴ Stranger by far than these tales of Wilde *redivivus* are those involving the various oddballs who believed that they could forge a living connection with a man whom they did not know. Their insurgence into what became the increasingly fictitious memory of Wilde does not merely make plain the degree to which his extraordinary legacy activated almost delusional, cultish fantasies. This colorful cast of characters—which includes a practiced forger who traded palm oil in West Africa, a surrealist boxer who disappeared into the Pacific, and a perfidious, parrot-loving English widow who sported a Thai name—also throws light on the escalating material value attached to Wilde’s legacy.

In the same year that Viereck claimed Wilde had become “famous all over the world” (87), a young poet called J. M. Stuart-Young published the first of several editions of a peculiarly named book: *Osrac the Self-Sufficient*. In his introductory memoir (dated 1 May 1905 from Conakry, West Africa), Stuart-Young records his earliest meeting with Wilde—or “Osrac,” as he specially names his hero: “We went to the Haymarket after dinner [supposedly in June 1894 to see *A Woman of No Importance*], and he had my hand clasped within his all evening, when a more than usually happy aphorism had been uttered by the players he would turn to me for approval, and I recall his manifest pleasure when I repeated a few lines between the acts. ‘The book of life begins with a man and a woman and ends—with Revelation.’”⁹⁵ Later, Stuart-Young claims to have been in Wilde’s

company at the Hôtel d'Alsace in 1898, when he glimpsed the manuscript of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* on a table. To prove his intimacy with this much-loved friend, Stuart-Young included facsimile plates that supposedly reproduce Wilde's handwritten letters to him.

To anyone closely acquainted with Wilde, some of this account would look absurd. The first run of Wilde's play finished at the Haymarket in August 1893, and his fine Greek hand scarcely resembles the scrawl that Stuart-Young attributes to him. Yet as Stephanie Newell observes, through *Osrac* Stuart-Young—who was thirteen in 1894—managed to hoodwink Hesketh Pearson, whose respected biography of Wilde appeared in 1946.⁹⁶ Pearson, who believed these fabrications, draws harsh conclusions about Wilde's decision, as we are told in *Osrac*, to escort Stuart-Young to the rooms of male prostitute Alfred Taylor (with whom Wilde was tried in May 1895). "Wilde," Pearson observes, "must be regarded . . . as . . . one whose innocence approaches imbecility."⁹⁷ To be sure, Pearson assumed that Stuart-Young, whose poetry on "Osrac" accompanies his memoir, must have been middle class. Little did he understand, as Newell reveals, that Stuart-Young—a working-class youth from Manchester—began his extraordinary career as a lowly clerk and exiled himself from England in 1901 after a period in jail. The local magistrate had found him guilty of theft by forgery; he had used the monies to buy luxurious books and furnishings for his modest rooms. Once settled in West Africa, Stuart-Young elaborated fantasies about the aesthetic life in the imperial homeland that he had already tried, through criminal activity, to make real. The eccentric story of Stuart-Young, who by 1919 had reinvented himself as the wealthiest palm producer in Nigeria, presents an extreme but telling example of the lengths to which individuals could go to make Wilde the object of their obsessive wish fulfillments.

Stuart-Young's strenuous tale telling, however, pales by comparison with the legends that two of Wilde's closest acquaintances enlarged upon. Harris's *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions*, a truly unreliable work, became a best seller in 1916. When Douglas heard that Harris planned to publish a biography of Wilde that drew on materials held by Ross, he sought to prevent it. For this reason, Harris's *Oscar Wilde* appeared in New York instead of London, and—if we are to believe Harris—it sold 40,000 copies (Douglas and Harris, *New Preface*, 6). As Wintermans reminds us, there is plenty of "bad taste . . . unreliability, and venom" in Harris's sensational two volumes, and "most of the nonsense written about Bosie over the years" can be traced back to this influential source (*Alfred*

Douglas, 161). Harris asserts, for example, that Douglas—who in 1894 became Lord Cromer’s honorary attaché in Egypt—returned to London because there had been some implicitly homosexual “disagreement” between them (*Oscar Wilde*, 1:159). More to the point, Harris paints a negative picture of Douglas’s supposedly fatal influence when he reunited with and then parted from Wilde at Posilippo in 1897: “[T]he forbidden fruit,” Harris writes, “quickly turned to ashes” in Wilde’s “mouth” (2:406). Harris is least trustworthy when expounding his intimate acquaintance with Wilde. He claims, for instance, that he witnessed the sickening scenes that took place outside the courtroom on 25 May 1895 when Wilde was sentenced: “We had not left the court when cheering broke out in the streets, and when we came outside there were troops of the lowest women of the town dancing together and kicking up their legs in hideous abandonment, while the surrounding crowd of policemen and spectators grinned with delight” (1:319–20). Unfortunately, as Sherard points out, at the time Harris was nowhere near this grisly spectacle at the Old Bailey.⁹⁸

The most untruthful parts of *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions* relate to the circumstances of Wilde’s painful death, which Harris learned about from Ross. In his letter to Adey, Ross reports that “[f]oam and blood came from [Wilde’s] mouth,” and the “painful noise became louder and louder” (Wilde, *Complete Letters*, 1220). “[H]e passed,” Ross states, at “10 minutes to 2 p.m. exactly” (1220). To Harris, this gruesome episode could not have made for a “more degrading” episode: “Suddenly, as the two friends sat by the bedside in sorrowful anxiety, there was a loud explosion: mucus poured out of Oscar’s mouth and nose, and—Even the bedding had to be burned” (*Oscar Wilde*, 2:539). No sooner has he amplified the “death rattle” into an explosion than Harris turns to another remarkable legend that Ross circulated about Wilde’s corpse. Harris claims that at the Alsace the doctors told Ross “to put Wilde’s body in quicklime, like the body of the man in ‘The Ballad of Reading Gaol’ [1898]” “The quicklime, they said, would consume the flesh and leave the white bones—the skeleton—in tact, which could then be moved easily” when the time came to take Wilde’s remains to Père Lachaise (2:540). Harris states that in 1914 Ross discovered that “the quicklime, instead of destroying the flesh, had preserved it.” “Oscar’s face,” he declares, “was recognisable, only his hair and beard had grown long” (2:540). Ross seems to have not been far from believing that Wilde might arise and walk forth from the tomb.

Such an anecdote beggars belief, and even Harris—who made capital from exaggerating the story of Wilde’s life—would later take pains to correct this extravagant tale. In the mid-1920s, Harris decided to approach Wilde’s former lover, Alfred Douglas, with the intention of toning down the unflattering picture of the aristocrat. In 1925, Harris hoped that Douglas could be persuaded that the time had come for a fresh edition of *Oscar Wilde*—one furnished with a preface that made appropriate apologies for defaming Douglas—to be published in Britain. Harris duly supplied Douglas with the text of his preface. But Douglas, after their meeting at Nice in April that year, stated that he would capitulate to Harris’s demands only if the new edition of *Oscar Wilde* included “marginal notes and the modification of the worst passages” that would counter the “mass of malicious lies and misrepresentations” of him (*New Preface*, 8).

According to Douglas, Harris responded by stating that such changes “would involve the destruction of a great many of the stereotyped plates,” and thus the expense of such revisions would be well in excess of what he could afford (*New Preface*, 8). In the circumstances, Douglas refused Harris permission to print a new edition of the biography in Britain. As a consequence, Harris’s *Oscar Wilde* was not issued in the United Kingdom until 1938. Douglas, however, took the publication of Harris’s recantation into his own hands, and the resulting short volume comprises Douglas’s foreword, Harris’s new preface, and Douglas’s letter to Harris dated 30 April 1925, which aims to set the record straight. One event that particularly irked Douglas puts Ross in a very poor light. Douglas explains in some detail to Harris what happened before he turned up at the Hôtel d’Alsace on 2 December 1900:

While Wilde lay dead, and before I arrived in Paris, Ross went through the papers and manuscripts he found in Wilde’s rooms. Among them he found a quantity of my letters to Wilde. These letters he appropriated without a word to me. I naturally had not the slightest idea that he had found and stolen letters written by me to Wilde, and I suppose that even those queerly misguided persons who profess to admire Ross as a model of “faithful friendship” . . . will admit that to steal or appropriate letters written by one of one’s friends to another friend, and to keep them secretly and finally use them against their writer in a law court, is a wicked, disgraceful, and dishonourable action. The facts as to this business cannot be denied. Ross took my letters, and his executors or heirs have got them to this day. How many letters he found and kept

I have no idea. When the Ransome case . . . came on, some of these letters were produced in Court during my cross-examination by Sir James Campbell, Ransome's counsel. (*New Preface*, 31–32)

Douglas adds that this unexpected development in the courtroom agitated him even more because the pilfered letters were ones that by 1913 he felt “ashamed” of (32)—since he had, for more than a decade, repudiated his homosexual past.

Harris, when he caught up with Douglas in April 1925, was willing to admit that Ross was not as reliable as he had thought, particularly in connection with certain facts about Wilde's last hours. In his self-congratulatory new preface, Harris states that during a meeting two months earlier, Reggie Turner—who regarded *Oscar Wilde* as “one of the best biographies in the language” (*New Preface*, 12)—had asked him to “cut down the death scene of Wilde by omitting a few lines” about the “explosion” that allegedly took place when Wilde expired (13). “This,” Harris said, “was an elaboration of Robert Ross[’s]: he told me that all Oscar’s bowels came away in the bed, and the smell was so disgusting that it made him violently sick, and he had to cleanse the place and burn the bedding” (14). In Turner’s view, “the whole scene” was “an invention of Robbie’s,” the kind of episode that was characteristic of a man “afflicted with a dramatic imagination” (14). As Turner remarked, the truth was that “Oscar’s end was as quiet and peaceful as that of an innocent child” (15). Similarly, Turner put Harris to rights on the transfer of Wilde’s remains to the coffin that was interred at Père Lachaise. If, Turner suggested, Harris contacted Coleridge Kennard, who had been present during these proceedings, then he would learn that this too was “an invention of Ross[’s]” (14). When Harris spoke to Kennard, he learned that “Ross’s story was mere fiction” because Ross “did not go into the grave or move the body with his own hands: he left all that to professional grave-diggers” (16–17). Yet such correctives to Ross’s mythmaking did not deter Richard Ellmann, in the most substantial biography of Wilde to date, from expressing considerable sympathy with Harris’s reckless account of Wilde. No doubt this is why Ellmann perpetuates Harris’s unreliable tale of Wilde’s exploding corpse and depicts Douglas as a wholly treacherous figure.⁹⁹

Douglas did serious disservice to Wilde by dragging the deceased’s name back into several libel suits. He also made himself appear altogether undependable by reacting to the Ransome trial with a book in which he claims that Wilde possessed a “shallow and comparative feeble mind, incapable of grappling unaided with

even moderately profound things, and disposed to fribble and antic with old thoughts for lack of power to evolve new ones" (*Oscar Wilde and Myself*, 62–63). Douglas confused matters further in his 1929 *Autobiography* by stating that in 1914 he did "not tell the whole truth" about his relations with Wilde (25); he thus began what amounts to a partial recantation in two further autobiographical works. In 1940, five years before his death, Douglas's volte-face became complete when he went into print declaring that the "assurance that Wilde died a Catholic . . . enabled" Douglas "to undertake the task" of defending Wilde, since Douglas had been a convert to Rome since 1909. "When I speak of defending Wilde," Douglas writes, "I do not mean defending his vices. . . . I mean defending his character apart from his vices."¹⁰⁰ Even though in this later work Douglas disavows that he had any homosexual involvement with Wilde, he goes out of his way to claim that when reading the critical essays gathered in *Intentions*, "all the time one is conscious of an alert and well-informed intelligence which is not exploiting merely personal prejudices but is unobtrusively testifying to profound intellectual and artistic principles" (108). Understandably, the fact that Douglas engaged in tedious squabbles with other biographers has often discredited him as a reliable source in the study of Wilde.

Yet Douglas, for all his tempestuousness, was more honest than the two (or, depending on how we count them, three) individuals who in the 1920s were responsible for committing serious frauds in Wilde's legendary name. One of them, Arthur Cravan, happened to be a relative. Born Fabian Avenarius Lloyd, he was the second son of Constance Wilde's brother, Otho Holland Lloyd, and he was raised in Switzerland. Even though Cravan had no contact with Wilde (he was thirteen when his uncle by marriage died), he brought Wilde's spirit alive in a posthumous interview published in his Surrealist magazine, *Maintenant: Revue littéraire*, in 1913.¹⁰¹ A performance artist, he delivered lectures, which involved bizarre displays of dancing and boxing. By all accounts, he cut an imposing figure; Blaise Cendrars recalled the amazing spectacle of Cravan doing the tango at a Paris nightclub "in a black shirt with the front cut away to reveal 'bleeding tattoos and obscene inscriptions on his skin.'"¹⁰² After traveling to New York in 1917, Cravan fell in love with and subsequently married American poet Mina Loy. They moved to Mexico City, where he became a competition boxer, and in 1918 he set sail to meet his spouse, who awaited him in Buenos Aires. It appears that he was lost at sea; at least, Loy, who recalled her marriage as the happiest period of her life, thought so.

Yet in 1921 Cravan may have done something far more surreal than anything found in his art. If commentators are right, he managed to resurrect himself in the guise of Dorian Hope: a mysterious forger, exposed in New York, whom Vyvyan Holland, for one, assumed was his first cousin. At the time, two well-known antiquarian book dealers—Hodges, Figgis and Co. of Dublin and Maggs Brothers of London—received communications from a gentleman trying to pass himself off as André Gide. The senior partner of the firm, William F. Figgis, learned from this masquerader that certain manuscripts of Wilde's were available for purchase. Noticeably, all of the documents on offer were not ones that had gone up for sale in April 1920 at Mitchell Kennerley's Anderson Galleries in New York City, when John B. Stetson Jr.—son of the Philadelphia hat-making magnate—parted with what was the largest collection of Wilde materials in the world, much of which had been acquired from the Wilde estate through Ross. Matthew J. Bruccoli points out that all 423 lots brought the astonishing sum of \$46,686: "The top item, twenty-five letters to Lord Alfred Douglas . . . went to Dr. R [Abraham Simon Wolfe Rosenbach] for \$7,900."¹⁰³ Over the years, the value of some of these items would go sky-high, with the corrected typescript of *The Importance of Being Earnest*—which Dr. Rosenbach acquired for \$500—fetching the equivalent of \$99,000 at Christie's of London in 1981. In 1921, then, the market for Wilde materials was more buoyant than ever before, and it is perhaps no accident that this was the year that Kennerley—who as a teenager worked for John Lane—issued the thoroughly revised manuscript of Wilde's "Portrait of Mr. W.H.," which had remained in Lane's office at the time of the trials.¹⁰⁴

In the early 1920s, the time was only too clearly ripe for opportunists to capitalize on what they knew of Wilde's life, his extant manuscripts, and his contacts. The fact that readers had since 1902 learned of Gide's acquaintance with Wilde provided the pretext for the scam that duped Figgis. In his letters, the pretender to Gide's identity declared that he had acquired the earliest manuscript of *The Importance of Being Earnest* through a mutual contact, the French author Octave Mirbeau. Figgis bought up everything that was offered to him, and he subsequently sold on the manuscripts of two works—"The Tomb of Keats" (*CW*, 14:1–4) and "The Disciple" (*CW*, 7:206–7)—to a London dealer. Dudley Edwards observes that once the London booksellers, Davis and Orioli, concluded that these documents were forgeries, further information arose about this fraudster.¹⁰⁵ Earlier that year, the charlatan had made overtures to Maggs Brothers, asking for checks to be made out either to "Monsieur Sebastian Hope" or "Mon-

sieur Dorian Hope”—pseudonyms likely to arouse suspicions among Wilde’s followers.¹⁰⁶ Figgis, as we can see from the large file of materials containing these forgeries held at the Clark Library, contacted a colleague at Brentano’s in Paris to establish whether the real André Gide knew anything of this matter. Since Figgis wanted to track down the forger, he expressed interest in further offers of manuscripts, including ones supposedly in the possession of Octave Mirbeau’s widow. After telling the so-called M. Gide that he needed to see the manuscripts before agreeing to the sum of 8,000 francs, Figgis traveled to Paris. After dinner at his hotel, Figgis was greeted by a gentleman going by the name of Dorian Hope: “He was dressed like a Russian count with a magnificent fur-lined overcoat; a plausible and well turned-out youth of about 25.”¹⁰⁷ This individual purported to be Gide’s secretary. Once the real Gide learned that someone was exploiting his good name, he took legal advice. Meanwhile, as matters were turned over to the police, Figgis sought to entrap the forger—who was at the time based at Amsterdam—by trying to persuade him to notarize an affidavit, which would of course disclose the man’s true identity. It comes as no surprise to learn that Figgis never heard again from Dorian Hope, whoever this imposing young man was. Elsewhere, in 1920, someone using this pseudonym had managed to fool G. P. Putnam’s of New York into publishing a volume of poems, *Pearls and Pomegranates*, which the publisher withdrew from sale just before Figgis received the impostor’s letters. This small volume contains poems that other writers, notably Miriam Vedder, had previously published in journals such as the *Wellesley Review*. The fraud, according to the *New York Times*, had been committed by one of their overseas salesmen, Bret Holland, who put up \$500 for an edition of 700 copies.¹⁰⁸ Was this Bret Holland any relation to Fabian Lloyd? Was this the same Hope who had joined Figgis after dinner? Were all of these impersonations the elaborate prank of a surrealist who had faked his death at sea?

While resolving these tantalizing questions remains impossible, one thing is for sure. Some of the forgeries look so convincing that Millard, a recognized authority on Wilde’s bibliography, was at first eager to believe they were authentic. Although unable to muster funds to purchase all of these documents, Millard (who at the time ran his own antiquarian business) acquired the manuscripts of “The Tomb of Keats” and “The Disciple,” which he then sold to American customers, and he convinced the Paris branch of Brentano’s that other documents of this kind were genuine. In July 1921, however, Millard abruptly went back on his word. After a discouraging meeting during which Maggs Brothers informed

him of their dealings with “M. Hope,” Millard finally conceded that all of the manuscripts that had passed through the Dublin and London book dealers’ hands were fakes. As Vyvyan Holland observes, many of these documents, which at first seduce a practiced eye, could never have come from Wilde’s pen because his father did not write in the purple ink that covers many of their pages.¹⁰⁹ Yet while one can see that Millard’s initial enthusiasm may have been the result of a bibliographic fantasy that spun out of control, the forger could very well have laid his hands on some genuine manuscripts. In other words, if we choose to imagine that Dorian Hope was the reinvented persona of Arthur Cravan, then we might be led to believe that this surrealist litterateur had sufficient contacts in Paris, such as publisher Charles Carrington (who at one time had held rights over the authorized edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*), to acquire some authentic manuscripts upon which he could develop impressive forgeries. These frauds, as Edwards suggests, are so good that they maintain “a place among the immortals in the ranks of forgers” (*Wilde Goose Chase*, 14). Even to this day, forgeries of similarly high quality come onto the market with sellers hoping—as they were in the summer of 2007—to command prices as high as £200,000.¹¹⁰

Millard, however, was quick to spot another forgery, which appeared in *Hutchinson’s Magazine* in 1921. This is the “Burmese masque” titled *For Love of the King*, which he discovered came from the hand of “Mrs. Chan Toon,” who purported to be the widow of a nephew to the Thai king. (This individual’s legal name was Mabel Wodehouse Pearse; her second husband died in the war.) Among the ludicrous claims made by the person who, in 1873, was born Mabel Cosgrove were that the masque had been received in Burma as a Christmas play in 1894 and that she had at one time been engaged to Willie Wilde. Few reviewers could believe that this appalling piece was by an author who in the 1920s commanded considerable respect. Ever intent to press her case, in 1925 Wodehouse Pearse tried to sell Millard six letters supposedly from Wilde to herself. No sooner had she turned up at Millard’s home with her constant companion, the parrot Co-Co, on her shoulder than he realized that everything about her was bogus. At this point, Millard decided to launch a campaign against Methuen, who in 1922 issued an edition of the masque in a binding that complemented the 1908 *Collected Works*. Millard’s letters appeared in the daily press, and he circulated a provocative pamphlet and poster exposing the fraud.

The moment that Millard accused the publisher, with whom Ross worked so closely, of “foisting” this book on the public, Lucas at Methuen responded with



Figure 1. Press clipping on Mrs. Mabel Wodehouse Pearse, from *Daily Sketch*, 6 January 1926. Courtesy of William Clark Andrews Memorial Library, M645Z W6286 [1908–26], Boxed.

a libel suit. The company won in November 1926, with damages of £100. Since Millard was not a wealthy man, several supporters—including Figgis, Symons, Turner, and Wells—set up a fund for him. Meanwhile, Methuen’s victory took place ten months after Wodehouse Pearse had been charged with stealing £240 from underneath the mattress of her neighbor, Mrs. Bridget Wood, at Aldwych Buildings, London (fig. 1). Millard plainly suffered rough justice, and after 1927, when he died of heart failure, “Mrs. Chan Toon” was released from jail and traveled around England under several aliases, including the fanciful “Princess Arakan.” George Sims, in his study of this controversy, remarks that the only contact that “Mrs. Chan Toon” had with Wilde came when his spirit was channeled by Hester Travers Smith, whose “psychic messages” from the long-deceased writer were pieced together from scraps of information about him that had come into circulation.¹¹¹ “Tell us about Mrs. Chan Toon,” the medium was asked. “I want you,” Wilde is supposed to have said, “to make enquiries about that lady.”¹¹² But on the basis of these psychic encounters, by 1922 Wilde’s ghost seems to have become exhausted by a hereafter that had begun to look much more

bizarre than his mortal existence: “Being dead,” he informed Smith, “is the most boring experience in life” (9).

The following contributions to this volume show that Wilde’s reemergence in modern culture has not always taken the eccentric forms that I have outlined here. But as this introduction indicates, the more that disciples such as Ledger, Millard, and Ross tried to establish a firm bibliographical basis on which to appreciate Wilde’s career, the more readily this legendary author became the object of peculiar fantasies, including their own. In the discussions that follow, twelve scholars explore the ways in which Wilde’s relations with the modern world often proved precarious both during and after his lifetime. There is no question that at times readers have frequently wanted him to return from the past to answer present needs. But there is much to be said in favor of Ellmann’s claim that Wilde is “not one of those writers who as the centuries change lose their relevance” (*Oscar Wilde*, xvii). Unquestionably, Oscar Wilde is with us still, and he will remain so into the foreseeable future. His epigrams, his iconic presence, his rise and fall—all cast their spell on our times, just as they did in his own. Even if, as he admitted on his deathbed, it was painful to think that he “would never outlive” the nineteenth century, little could Wilde have guessed the extraordinary ways in which his spirit would live on in modern culture (*Complete Letters*, 1212).

Notes

1. [Anon.], “Bibliographical,” *Academy*, 8 December 1900, 542; later quotations also appear on this page. I discuss this and other materials mentioned in this introduction in “Memorialising Wilde: An Explosive History,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 5 (2000): 311–22.

2. Lawrence Gilman, *Strauss’s “Salome”: A Guide to the Opera with Musical Illustrations* (London: John Lane, 1907), 26.

3. Robert Ross to More Adey, 14 December 1900, in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 1212; further page references appear in parentheses. Ross claims that Wilde made this remark when he received two visitors, Aleck Ross (Robert Ross’s brother) and Wilde’s recently remarried sister-in-law, Lily, and her second husband, Texeira de Mattos, on 25 October 1900.

4. Wilde, through Robert Harborough Sherard, put a stop to Douglas’s attempts at publishing a polemical article in French on Wilde’s sentence in *Mercure de France*. The typescript of this remarkable document, held at the Clark Library, contains Douglas’s impenitent comments on his intimacy with Wilde: “I say, frankly (let my enemies interpret it as they will!) that our friendship was love, real love, love, it is true, completely pure but extremely passionate” (“Oscar Wilde,” trans. Christopher Sclater Millard, Clark Library, D733M3 091 1895, f. 2). In two letters to politician Henry Labouchère, editor of *Truth*, Douglas expresses his contempt for the dismissive manner in which he was represented in this journal. In the first letter, dated 31 May 1895, he attacks

Labouchère for adding the clause to the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, under which Wilde was given the maximum sentence. In the second letter, dated 9 June 1895, Douglas comments on male homosexuality: “[T]hese tastes are perfectly natural congenital tendencies in certain people (a very large minority) and . . . the law has no right to interfere with these people provided they do not harm other people” (quoted in Robert Ross’s “Statements of Evidence” for the Ransome trial, typescript, Clark Library, MS Wilde Uncataloged Box No. 2, folder 22 [there are two documents of this kind in the folder]). Douglas published “Une introduction à mes poèmes, avec quelques considérations sur l’affaire Oscar Wilde,” *Revue blanche*, 1 June 1896, 484–90.

5. Robert Ross to Adela Schuster, 23 December 1900, in *Robert Ross, Friend of Friends: Letters to Robert Ross, Art Critic and Writer, together with Extracts from His Published Articles*, ed. Margery Ross (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 64; further page references appear in parentheses hereafter cited as *Robert Ross, Friend of Friends*.

6. An invoice from Brentano’s, Paris, dated 3 December 1900, shows that Wilde wished to keep in touch with recently published works of literature: John Oliver Hobbes, *The Ambassador*; Beatrice Harraden, *Hilda Strafford*; Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago*; E. W. Hornung, *The Amateur Cracksman*; Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Works* (four-volume edition); Bret Harte, *Colonel Starbottle’s Client* and *A Protégé of Jack Hamlin’s*. The amount owing was 22.50 francs, which Ross duly paid (Clark Library, Wilde B8392 W6721). Wilde’s earliest biographer, Robert Harborough Sherard, who visited the Hôtel d’Alsace in 1904, claims that Dupoirier stowed some “three hundred odd volumes in two trunks” that “showed little sign of usage.” Robert Harborough Sherard, *Twenty Years in Paris* (London: Hutchinson, 1905), 456–57.

7. Oscar Wilde to Frank Harris, 21 November 1900, *Complete Letters*, 1206.

8. The text of the play that Harris developed, adhering closely to Wilde’s scenario, was first published as Frank Harris, *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry: A Play in Four Acts, Based on a Scenario by Oscar Wilde* (London: Richards Press, 1956); this edition contains an introduction by H. Montgomery Hyde.

9. Wilde to George Alexander, [August 1894,] *Complete Letters*, 600; further quotations also appear on this page. The editors’ dating of this and other letters appears in square brackets.

10. Wilde’s plays that remained unfinished at the time of his death include the scenario that Harris transformed into *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry*, *A Florentine Tragedy*, *La Sainte Courtesane*; or *the Woman Covered with Jewels*, and *The Cardinal of Avignon*. In 1922, Methuen, the publisher of the 1908 fourteen-volume *Collected Works*, added a fifteenth volume containing a play titled *For Love of the King: A Burmese Masque*. This work was eventually exposed as a forgery.

11. Wilde to George Alexander, [February 1895,] *Complete Letters*, 633.

12. Laurence Housman, *Echo de Paris: A Study from Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1923), 34. Housman’s book comprises a dialogue that derived in part from his memories of his second meeting with Wilde, which took place at a café near the Place de l’Opéra, Paris, in late September 1899; he claims that the dialogue “has a solid basis in fact” but is recorded in a manner that amounts to “free rendering of what was then actually said” (9). In a lengthy “Footnote” to this dialogue with Wilde, Housman provides a defense of the nonpathological nature of homosexuality (55–60).

13. James G. Nelson, *Publisher to the Decadents: Leonard Smithers in the Careers of Beardsley, Wilde, Dowson* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 222. Nelson’s study provides the most complete account of Wilde’s dealings with Smithers.

14. Wilde to Frank Harris, 20 June 1900, *Complete Letters*, 1189. At the time, the working title of the play was *Love Is Law*.

15. *Complete Letters*, 1190n1.

16. Wilde to Frank Harris, [c. 20 September 1900,] *Complete Letters*, 1198; the later quotation also appears on this page.

17. The “Reserve” was the Cesari Réserve, Monte Carlo, which Harris’s secretary, T. H. Bell, describes as a “high class restaurant with several apartments attached; and with a tank cut into the side of the rock, where, with the sea washing, a supply, a réserve, of live fish was retained.” This restaurant was part of a costly tourist venture, including the Cesari Palace Hotel, in which Harris had invested money with Jules Cesari, whom Bell calls “a splendid *maitre d’hôtel* . . . but . . . no businessman.” Bell, “Oscar Wilde without Whitewash,” quoted in Philippa Pullar, *Frank Harris* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), 195. Bell’s study was published as *Oscar Wilde: Sus amigos, sus adversarios, sus ideas*, trans. S. Schijman (Buenos Aires: Editorial Americalee, 1946).

18. George Alexander commissioned *Lady Windermere’s Fan* with an advance of £50 and *The Importance of Being Earnest* with an advance of £150. See Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde’s Profession: Writing and the Culture Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 102, 127.

19. The most complete accounts of Wilde’s dealings with Louis Nethersole and Ada Rehan can be found in Russell Jackson, “Oscar Wilde’s Contract for a New Play,” *Theatre Notebook* 50 (1996): 113–14; and Guy and Small, *Oscar Wilde’s Profession*, 205–9.

20. The question of which individuals had rights to specific options—whether for publication or performance—on Wilde’s scenario are not entirely clear, and by September 1900, Smithers may have had no rights to the scenario because of sums that were to be refunded from the deal that Wilde had struck with Brown-Potter and Bellew. The degree to which Wilde was involved in “double-dealing” or deliberately “deceiving and misleading” the various interested parties such as Nethersole and Rehan is open to question. Guy and Small take a counterintuitive view of the situation, stating that throughout his negotiations with these literary and theatrical figures, Wilde may have imagined that “the same scenario could be worked up to produce quite different plays” (*Oscar Wilde’s Profession*, 208).

21. Robert Ross to More Adey, 14 December 1900, in Wilde, *Complete Letters*, 1211; further page references appear in parentheses.

22. Frank Harris, *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions*, 2 vols. (New York: privately published, 1916), 2:534; further volume and page numbers appear in parentheses. For Harris’s detailed account of his version of these events, see “The Story of ‘Mr. and Mrs. Daventry,’” in *Oscar Wilde*, 2:589–94.

23. T. H. Bell, “Oscar Wilde’s Unwritten Play,” *Bookman* 61 (1930): 143; further page references appear in parentheses.

24. Dupoirier mentions that “[t]owards the end it became very difficult for [Wilde] to write, and he used to whip himself with cognac. A litre bottle would hardly see him through the night” (quoted in Robert Harborough Sherard, *The Real Oscar Wilde* [London: T. Werner Laurie, 1915], 415). Dupoirier’s memories of Wilde appear in a number of places, including an interview with Michelle de Royer, *L’intransigeant*, 30 November 1930, 1–2, reprinted (in English translation) in *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. E. H. Mikhail, 2 vols. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), 2:453–54.

25. Bell, however, did forward Ross “the tenner [£10] that Mr. Harris spoke of . . . to pay restaurant, nurse, or whatever you find immediately necessary” (Bell to Robert Ross, Clark Library, Wilde B435L R825). In a 1938 letter to Reggie Turner, Bell says he cannot recall whether Harris gave him a check or cash when he was dispatched to Paris to meet Wilde (Clark Library,

Wilde B435L T951). Davray produced many important translations of Wilde's works: *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (*Mercure de France*, May 1898), five prose poems (*Revue blanche*, 1 May 1899), and *De Profundis* (1905). His co-translation (with Madeleine Vernon) of Frank Harris's *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions* appeared in 1928.

26. Ross makes this observation in his 23 December 1900 letter to Adela Schuster (Ross, *Robert Ross, Friend of Friends*, 64). Dupoirier's final bill is reproduced in Robert Harborough Sherard, *The Life of Oscar Wilde* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1906), facing 421.

27. In a letter dated 3 January 1902, Ross informs Adela Schuster that "Dupoirier is still owed £56[,] half of his original bill." He adds that Dupoirier will be "cheered by the smallest contribution" and asks Schuster to address any check she might wish to send him "in favour of Jean Dupoirier." Ross, *Robert Ross, Friend of Friends*, 74.

28. Robert Ross to William Rothenstein, 11 December 1900, quoted in Jonathan Fryer, *Robbie Ross: Oscar Wilde's Devoted Friend* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2000), 169; the later quotation also appears on this page.

29. Robert Ross to Adela Schuster, 23 December 1900, in Wilde, *Complete Letters*, 1229; further page references appear in parentheses.

30. Wilde's remark originally appeared in his review of Walter Dowdeswell's comments on the life of James Whistler: "Every great man nowadays had his disciples, and it is usually Judas who writes the biography" (*Court and Society Review*, 20 April 1887, 378).

31. During the years following his release, in letters to Dalhousie Young and to Robert Ross, Wilde (in collaboration with Douglas) appears to have made some progress on the libretto for *Daphnis and Chloë* (Wilde, *Complete Letters*, 936, 946, 949, and 1049); he told Reggie Turner that he had begun a play and informed Leonard Smithers that he wished to secure a contract for a drama with American director Augustin Daly (976, 998); and he informed the editor of *North American Review*, William B. Fitts, from whom he accepted £75, that he planned to contribute an essay (1147).

32. Guy and Small, *Oscar Wilde's Profession*, 209.

33. Details of these productions can be found in Robert Tainitch's invaluable *Oscar Wilde on Stage and Screen* (London: Methuen, 1999), 103, 261. In 1902, *Earnest* reopened at the St. James's Theatre, London (where it had debuted on 14 February 1895), with Alexander in the role of Jack Worthing. Alexander promised Ross that he would pay the remaining debts owing to Dupoirier from the proceeds of this production (Ross, *Robert Ross, Friend of Friends*, 74). Alexander obtained performance rights for the two plays from the official receiver.

34. George Alexander to Robert Ross, 11 December 1900, in Ross, *Robert Ross, Friend of Friends*, 61.

35. "Max" [Max Beerbohm], review of *The Swashbuckler*, by Louis N. Parker, *Saturday Review*, 8 December 1900, 720, in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Karl Beckson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 231; further page references to this volume appear in parentheses.

36. Max Beerbohm to Reggie Turner, 1 December 1900, in Beerbohm, *Letters to Reggie Turner*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1964), 137.

37. Max Beerbohm, "Oscar Wilde," *Anglo-American Times*, 25 March 1893, in Beerbohm, *Letters to Reggie Turner*, 291.

38. "Mr. Harris is to be congratulated on a perfect essay in psychology"; Beerbohm, review of *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry*, by Frank Harris, *Saturday Review*, 3 November 1900, quoted in Harris, *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry*, 29. As Hyde points out, Beerbohm's counted among the most favorable reviews that Harris received. Hyde claims that part of the success of Harris's play derived from

the fact that “the rumour persisted that Wilde was its real author” (30). Beerbohm’s dramatic version of “The Happy Hypocrite” had a successful run until 23 February 1901 (excluding the fortnight between 22 January and 5 February that year, when the theaters closed in honor of Queen Victoria’s death).

39. Max Beerbohm to Reggie Turner, 11 December 1900, in *Letters to Reggie Turner*, 139.

40. William Rothenstein to Robert Ross, 14 February 1901, in Ross, *Robert Ross, Friend of Friends*, 69. Rothenstein read the letter from Ross to Adey at the lodgings that the two men shared in Kensington, London.

41. Ross to Adela Schuster, 3 January 1902, in Ross, *Robert Ross, Friend of Friends*, 74; the later quotation also appears on this page.

42. Wilde to Robert Ross, 1 April 1897, *Complete Letters*, 780; further page references appear in parentheses.

43. In one of the typewritten statements he prepared for the 1913 Ransome case (which I discuss below), Ross makes the following claim about what happened during a meeting with Wilde in Normandy in 1897: “I pointed out to Wilde that Douglas would be sure to destroy the MS and that it would be better to send him a copy. This was done by Wilde’s instructions and I retained the MS” (Clark Library, Wilde MS Uncataloged Box No. 2, folder 22, f. 25).

44. Horst Schroeder, “The ‘Definitive’ Edition of Oscar Wilde’s *De Profundis*,” <http://horst.schroeder.com/DeProfundis.htm> (accessed 24 July 2007). Schroeder’s essay amounts to a critique of the editorial principles that Ian Small adopts in *De Profundis*: “*Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis*,” in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

45. Robert Ross to Max Meyerfeld, 31 August 1907, in Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis—Neue deutsche Ausgabe von Max Meyerfeld* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1909), ix; further page references appear in parentheses. I discuss aspects of Meyerfeld’s 1909 edition below.

46. Methuen’s comments appear in a publisher’s announcement, quoted in Maureen Duffy, *A Thousand Capricious Chances: A History of the Methuen List, 1889–1989* (London: Methuen, 1989), 36.

47. Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, ed. Robert Ross (London: Methuen, 1905), ix; further page references appear in parentheses. By *artificial*, Ross does not mean “superficial” or “inauthentic” but “interested in artifice.”

48. G. S. Street, “Out of the Depths,” *Outlook*, 4 March 1905, 294–95, in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde*, 255.

49. [E. V. Lucas,] review of *De Profundis*, by Oscar Wilde, *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 February 1905, 64–65, in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde*, 246; further page references appear in parentheses.

50. R. B. Cunninghame Graham, “Vox Clamantis,” *Saturday Review*, 4 March 1905, 266–67, in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde*, 256. Graham, who served time as a prisoner for defending workers’ rights during the riot at Trafalgar Square in 1887, wrote a supportive letter to Wilde in which he praised *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (see *Complete Letters*, 1021).

51. Max Beerbohm, “A Lord of Language,” *Vanity Fair*, 2 March 1905, 309, in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde*, 248; further page references appear in parentheses. Beerbohm begins his review by discussing the ways in which both Oscar Wilde and James Whistler were given the same treatment in the press at this time. The retrospective exhibition of Whistler’s paintings opened at the New Gallery early that year. Ross’s edition of *De Profundis* appeared on 23 February 1905.

52. George Bernard Shaw to Robert Ross, 13 March 1905, in Ross, *Robert Ross, Friend of Friends*, 111; the later quotation also appears on this page. In this letter, Shaw mentions the young American sculptor Jacob Epstein, who was eager to exhibit his work at Ross’s Carfax Gallery,

London. As I mention below, at the celebratory dinner in honor of Ross's editing of *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde*, held at the Ritz Hotel in London on 1 December 1908, he would announce Epstein's commission to design Wilde's tomb at Père Lachaise.

53. Ricketts designed the title page and binding of the single-volume edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Ward, Lock, 1891), *Poems* (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1892), and *The Sphinx* (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1894), as well as the binding of *Intentions* (London: Osgood, McIlvaine, 1891) and *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories* (London: Osgood, McIlvaine, 1891). Later, Ricketts designed the sets for the 1906 productions of *A Florentine Tragedy* and *Salome*. He published (with his pseudonymous alter ego John Paul Raymond) *Oscar Wilde: Recollections* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1932).

54. André Gide, *Oscar Wilde: A Study*, trans. Stuart Mason [Christopher Sclater Millard] (Oxford: Holywell Press, 1905), 16; further page references appear in parentheses. Gide subsequently discussed his memories of Wilde in *Oscar Wilde: In memoriam (souvenirs)* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1910) and in the final chapter of his autobiography, *Si le grain ne meurt* (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1924). The relations between Gide and Wilde are explored in Jonathan Fryer, *André and Oscar: Gide, Wilde, and the Gay Art of Living* (London: Constable, 1997).

55. Robert Harborough Sherard, *Oscar Wilde: The Story of an Unhappy Friendship* (London: Hermes, 1902), 258; further page references appear in parentheses.

56. Wilde came across Sherard some months after Constance Holland forced her husband to part from Douglas in late 1897; in May 1898, Sherard indulged in an anti-Semitic outburst at Campbell's Bar, Paris, in the company of both Wilde and Douglas (who reunited once more a month after Constance Holland's death). See Wilde, *Complete Letters*, 1076.

57. There is not space here to address in detail Sherard's numerous forays into debates about the record of Wilde's life. Sherard's contributions to these disputes include *The Life of Oscar Wilde* (1906); *The Real Oscar Wilde: To Be Used as a Supplement to, and in Illustration of "The Life of Oscar Wilde"* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1916); *André Gide's Wicked Lies about the Late Oscar Wilde in Algiers in January 1895* (Corsica: Vindex, 1933); and *Bernard Shaw, Frank Harris, and Oscar Wilde* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1937). Sherard's mission, which culminated in his 1937 volume, was to condemn Harris, defend Douglas, and uphold Wilde's reputation. In the last of these works, Sherard exposes many of Harris's fabrications while also, quite unfairly, taking Bell to task for publishing a memoir of Wilde's last days that was "pure fake" (306).

58. Robert Ross to Walter Ledger, 29 April 1906, quoted in Maureen Borland, *Wilde's Devoted Friend: A Life of Robert Ross, 1869–1918* (Oxford: Lennard, 1990), 105.

59. Unsigned notice, *Scots Observer*, 5 July 1890, 181, in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde*, 75. This notice was likely written by Henley's deputy, Charles Whibley.

60. For a reliable and detailed account of the Cleveland Street Affair, which encouraged Lord Arthur Somerset to flee the country, see Morris B. Kaplan, *Sodom by the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 186–213.

61. St. John Hankin, "The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde," *Fortnightly Review*, n.s. 83 (1908): 791–802, in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde*, 284.

62. [Arthur Symons,] review of *Collected Works*, by Oscar Wilde, *Athenæum*, 16 May 1908, 598–600, in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde*, 294. Symons's thoughtful reviews of *Intentions* (1891) and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898) are reprinted in Beckson's volume (94–96 and 218–21).

63. [Harold Child,] review of *Collected Works*, by Oscar Wilde, *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 June 1908, 193, in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde*, 304.

64. "The Speech of Robert Ross," in Ross, *Robert Ross, Friend of Friends*, 157; further page references appear in parentheses. This generous sum came from Helen Carew, mother of Vyvyan Holland's close friend Coleridge Kennard.

65. Quoted in Fryer, *Robbie Ross*, 200. Fryer does not date this correspondence.

66. "A.D." [Alfred Douglas], "The Dead Poet," *Academy*, 21 September 1907, 917.

67. "A.D." [Alfred Douglas], "The Genius of Oscar Wilde," *Academy*, 21 July 1908, 35, in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde*, 309. In this notice, Douglas echoes Beerbohm's 1893 essay when he states, "We unhesitatingly say that his influence on the literature of Europe has been greater than that of any man since Byron died" (310). Ross's 1909 edition of Wilde's poetry also elicited Douglas's staunch support. Douglas observed that "at his best," Wilde "was a great poet whose immortality is assured as long as the English language exists." Douglas, *Academy*, 23 January 1909, 703.

68. W. Sorley Brown, *The Life and Genius of T.W.H. Crosland* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1928), 216; further page reference appears in parentheses. Douglas's and Crosland's antipathy toward Asquith was not in Tennant's interests; as Caspar Wintermans points out, Tennant soon sold the journal to Douglas for £500. Wintermans, *Alfred Douglas: A Poet's Life and His Finest Work* (London: Peter Owen, 2007), 110; further page references appear in parentheses.

69. Beerbohm to Robert Ross, 17 October 1909, in Ross, *Robert Ross, Friend of Friends*, 168. Wilde published the following works in the Oxford undergraduate periodical *The Spirit Lamp*: "The New Remorse" (6 December 1892, 97), "The House of Judgment" (17 February 1893, 52–53), and "The Disciple" (6 June 1893, 49–50). The moralistic Crosland, who had at times had to confront Douglas's history of close involvement with the homosexual literati of the 1890s, commented that it was not possible to assert that "the whole of the verses Lord Alfred Douglas published in *The Spirit Lamp* were impeccable, faultless and distinguished verses"—though this remark served as a preface to his view that the literary contents of Douglas's journal were superior to two current undergraduate periodicals: *Granta* (Cambridge) and *Isis* (Oxford). T.W.H. Crosland, "Poppycock and Sniggs," *Academy*, 6 March 1909, 848.

70. Robert Ross, *Masques and Phases* (London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1909), 147; Ross's essay on Solomon originally appeared in the *Westminster Gazette* in 1905.

71. [Harold Child,] review of *Masques and Phases*, by Robert Ross, *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 October 1909, 398. Child observed that Ross's "style . . . belongs to yesterday rather than to the present," and he linked Ross's name with the *Yellow Book*, Beardsley, and Wilde.

72. "Asquith and Anarchy," *Academy*, 20 February 1909, 798.

73. Borland, *Wilde's Devoted Friend*, 147.

74. Douglas had good reason to be cautious about any correspondence he might mail to Wilde. Letters that blackmailers had stolen from Douglas's coat at the Café Royal were quoted by the defense in Wilde's libel suit against the Marquess of Queensberry; the letters were, of course, used as incriminating evidence of Wilde's "sodomitical" desires. See, in particular, Merlin Holland, ed., *Irish Peacock and Scarlet Marquess: The Real Trial of Oscar Wilde* (London: Fourth Estate, 2003), 268–70.

75. "[T]he MS. now residing in the British Museum quite plainly belongs to me." Douglas, *Autobiography*, 325.

76. Arthur Ransome, *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1912), 157.

77. Ross, "Statement of Evidence," ff. 37–38.

78. Ransome's recollections of Ross are very favorable ("He seemed sure that mine would be a good book"); Ross introduced Ransome to a broad range of contacts, including Wilde's sons, Ada Leveson, Robert Harborough Sherard, and Walter Ledger. "Later," Ransome recalled, "he

entrusted me with the complete typescript of *De Profundis* and let me take it away to Wiltshire, where we had taken at a very low rent an old farmhouse.” Arthur Ransome, *The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), 142, 143.

79. The *Times* reports of the court proceedings (18 April 1913, 4; 19 April 1913, 3–4) reveal that Douglas claimed to have given Wilde substantial sums during Wilde’s exile in Italy and France. Douglas inherited a substantial fortune of almost £20,000 on the Marquess of Queensberry’s death in January 1900. Douglas makes the claim about the monies he gave to Wilde in 1900 in Alfred Douglas and Frank Harris, *New Preface to “The Life and Confessions of Oscar Wilde”* (London: Fortune Press, 1925), 33; further page references appear in parentheses. Douglas itemizes the payments he made to Wilde in 1900 in his *Autobiography* (London: Martin Secker, 1931), 323.

80. Alfred Douglas to Frank Harris, 30 April 1925, in Douglas and Harris, *New Preface*, 34. During the Ransome trial, Douglas stated that Ross had handed him a copy of the prison document, which he had subsequently destroyed (*Times*, 18 April 1913, 4d). Later in the trial, Douglas declared, “I got one long letter from Wilde, enclosed from Ross; but it was not that document, it was not one-fifth so long. I read about the first three lines of it and then threw it in the fire, writing at the same time to Ross that I resented very much his having interfered, and if Wilde wanted write to me he could do it direct. I always thought *De Profundis* was written to Ross, not to me” (*Times*, 19 April 1913, 4f). Whether Douglas knew about Meyerfeld’s 1909 edition is unclear.

81. “A.” [Alfred Douglas], review of *De Profundis*, by Oscar Wilde, *Motorist and Traveller*, 1 March 1905, in H. Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde: The Aftermath* (London: Methuen, 1963), 208; the later quotation also appears on this page.

82. In the second edition of Ransome’s book, the sentence that declares that *De Profundis* is a “rebuke of this friend” is omitted. Ransome, *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1913), 171.

83. T.H.W. Crosland, *The First Stone: On Reading the Unpublished Parts of “De Profundis”* (London: privately published, 1912), 5–6; further page reference appears in parentheses.

84. Wilde, *The Suppressed Portion of “De Profundis” by Oscar Wilde, Now for the First Time Published by His Literary Executor, Robert Ross* (New York: P. R. Reynolds, 1913). Two copies were placed at the Library of Congress; Ross kept the remaining thirteen.

85. Alfred Douglas, *Oscar Wilde and Myself* (London: John Long, 1914), 179; further page reference appears in parentheses. Douglas discloses Crosland’s coauthorship in his much later *Autobiography*, 25; further page reference appears in parentheses. The publisher John Long offered Douglas an advance of £500 for the book.

86. Douglas’s privately published poetic satire, *The Rossiad*, first appeared in 1916; three further editions appeared through 1921. This insulting poem charts Douglas’s and Crosland’s conflicts with Ross. Douglas sought to wage warfare against Ross once more during a highly publicized libel trial of 1918, in which dancer Maud Allan and director J. T. Grein issued a writ for obscene libel against Independent MP Noel Pemberton Billing for describing a private performance of Wilde’s *Salome* in London as representing “The Cult of the Clitoris.” The case is recorded in Michael Kettle, *Salome’s Last Veil: The Libel Case of the Century* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, and Granada, 1977); see also chapter 7 of the present volume.

87. Fryer, *Robbie Ross*, 235.

88. See, for example, Holland, *Irish Peacock and Scarlet Marquess*, 93.

89. Ledger’s name does not appear on the title page of the volume. Ransome recalls that Ledger was an “eccentric individual”—an “efficient seaman” dressed in a sailor’s outfit—whom

Ross claimed suffered from “homicidal mania and was accustomed to having himself shut up.” Ransome, *Autobiography*, 142.

90. Quoted in H. Montgomery Hyde, *Christopher Sclater Millard: Bibliographer and Antiquarian Book Dealer* (New York: Global Academic Publishers, 1990), 40.

91. Ernst Bendz, review of *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde*, by Stuart Mason, *Englische Studien* 49 (1915–16): 318. Bendz’s important contributions to scholarship on Wilde are brought together in *Oscar Wilde: A Retrospect* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1921).

92. Stuart Mason [Christopher Sclater Millard], *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1914), v–vi. Millard acknowledges the considerable help that Ledger gave him in preparing this volume (viii).

93. George Sylvester Viereck, “Is Oscar Wilde Living or Dead?” *Critic* 47 (1905): 87; further page reference appears in parentheses.

94. “Oscar Wilde Alive?” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 November 1908, in uncataloged press clippings collection, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library.

95. J. M. Stuart-Young, *Oscar the Self-Sufficient and Other Poems, with a Memoir of the Late Oscar Wilde* (London: Hermes Press; Paris: Charles Carrington, 1905), 12. Stuart-Young corresponded with both Ross and Millard in 1905 and 1907, respectively. In his letter to Ross, he claims that he enjoyed a friendship with Wilde (Clark Library, Wilde S9321L R825).

96. Stephanie Newell, *The Forger’s Tale: The Search for Odeziaku* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 63.

97. Hesketh Pearson, *Oscar Wilde* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960), 263. This edition is a reprint of the 1954 revised edition of Pearson’s original 1946 biography.

98. Robert Harborough Sherard, *Bernard Shaw, Frank Harris, and Oscar Wilde*, 23. Sherard’s depiction of the scene of the dancing prostitutes appears in *Oscar Wilde: The Story of an Unhappy Friendship*, 200.

99. Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 584. Ellmann insists that the underlying cause of Wilde’s death was syphilis; in this regard, he follows the views of Harris, Ross, and Ransome (92). Ellmann’s negative portrayal of Douglas is evident on pages 384–96.

100. Alfred Douglas, *Oscar Wilde: A Summing-Up* (London: Duckworth, 1940), 12, 13; further page reference appears in parentheses.

101. Arthur Cravan, “Oscar Wilde est vivant!” *Maintenant: Revue littéraire* (October–November 1913): 1–26.

102. Charles Nicholl, “The Wind Comes Up out of Nowhere,” *London Review of Books*, 9 March 2006.

103. Matthew J. Bruccoli, *The Fortunes of Mitchell Kennerley, Bookman* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 135. Full details of the sale are given in *The Oscar Wilde Collection of John B. Stetson, Jr., Elkins Park, PA* (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1920). The copy held at the University of California Southern Regional Facility (Z8975 S8) contains notes on the prices that the 423 lots fetched. Some of Stetson’s collection had been acquired in 1913 through Bernard Quaritch, who disposed of many letters and books that Douglas had sold him.

104. Wilde ran into conflicts with Elkin Mathews, who, with John Lane, formed the partnership that published under the Bodley Head imprint. In November 1894, the partners declined to publish Wilde’s revised manuscript. Later that year, however, when the partners decided to go their separate ways, Wilde informed them that he wished Lane to publish *The Sphinx, Salome*, and the revised “Portrait of Mr. W.H.” and Mathews to issue his plays (*Complete Letters*, 613). On this matter, see James G. Nelson, *The Early Nineties: A View from the Bodley Head* (Cambridge,

MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 274–75. The manuscript of “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.” was waiting to go into production when news broke about Wilde’s failed libel suit in April 1895. Brucoli states that Kennerley knew that the revised version had been in the hands of Lane’s office manager, Frederic Chapman, and he sold it for Chapman’s sister to Dr. Rosenbach for \$3,000. Brucoli, *Fortunes of Mitchell Kennerley*, 141–42.

105. Dudley Edwards, “The Wilde Goose Chase,” *American Book Collector* 7, no. 5 (1957): 3–14. Edwards’s commentary relates to the stack of forgeries held at the Clark Library (Wilde 6271 C687).

106. These pseudonyms suggest an insider’s knowledge of Wilde’s circle. “Sebastian” is, of course, taken from Wilde’s own incognito, “Sebastian Melmoth”; “Dorian” comes from Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; and “Hope” is a name belonging to Constance Wilde’s family through marriage (Adrian Hope [1858–1904] became the guardian of Cyril Holland and Vyvyan Holland after their mother’s death).

107. Quoted in Edwards, “Wilde Goose Chase,” 5. Cravan would have been about thirty-three years of age at the time of this meeting.

108. “‘Dorian Hope’ Verses Filched by Clerk,” *New York Times*, 5 April 1921. The previous owner of my copy of Hope’s volume identified the author of each work that Hope plagiarized.

109. Vyvyan Holland made this observation in a letter to William Figgis, 23 Sept 1955 (Clark Library, Wilde 6271 C687).

110. Anthony Gardner, “The Oscar Sinners,” *Sunday Times* [London], 8 July 2007. Gardner reports that at the New York Antiquarian Book Fair, a manuscript of Wilde’s “Happy Prince” was expected to command this figure until Ed Maggs of the famous book dealers exposed it as a fake.

111. George Sims, “Who Wrote *For Love of the King*? Oscar Wilde or Mrs. Chan Toon,” *Book Collector* (Autumn 1958): 276–77. Wilde’s translator, Henry-D. Davray, inquires into the activities of “Mrs. Chan Toon” in *Oscar Wilde: La tragédie finale—suivi de épisodes et souvenirs et des apocryphes* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1928), 173–237.

112. Hester Travers Smith, *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1924), 13; further page reference appears in parentheses. For further commentary on Smith’s book, see John Stokes, *Oscar Wilde: Myths, Miracles, and Imitations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5–8.