Dear Wild Wildeans,

It would seem that the impact of Richard Ellmann's biography is still being felt (certainly among Wildeans) and that discussion on the value of the biography will continue for quite some time - if not for all time. It was so rewarding to see Oscar Wilde on the best-seller list even if one suspects that all who bought the book did not in fact read it! Which really is a shame because it would make such a change from all those novels that are devoured nowadays: "However one should not be too severe on novels; they are the only relaxation of the intellectually unemployed."

As previously mentioned in an earlier Wild About Wilde the Gate Theatre in Dublin ran An Ideal Husband during the Spring and early Summer months to full houses. I got to see it in early June and thought it an excellent production with some of Wilde's best lines being delivered with great punch and flair. It is always good to see a production of Wilde's work being well done because it demonstrates that Oscar's work is for all times. There was also a black cast version of The Importance of Being Earnest touring Britain and Ireland with great success and although I couldn't get to see it, it got very favourable reviews.

Some very interesting things are happening in this edition of Wild About Wilde. In literature mere egotism is delightful! Robert Maguire has very kindly sent me a letter written by Robert Ross's housekeeper about his final hours. It is previously unpublished and so I have the great privilege of publishing it here in full for the first time. Ross, as Wilde's most loyal friend and literary executor who paid off Oscar's debts and recovered the copyrights for the family, is buried with Oscar at Pere Lachaise. I was fascinated and delighted to read this warm and loving letter and know you all will be also.

A new publication of interest to every Wildean (and I can tell you it's difficult to get at the regular bookshops) is Oscar Wilde's Oxford Notebooks. With permission from the publisher, Oxford University Press, and one of the editors, Professor Philip E. Smith, Chairman of the English Department, University of Pittsburgh, I am reprinting part of the Preface. It is an excellent and new account of how Wilde's philosophy developed during his early years and is an absolute must for all Wilde scholars. It is a much needed work in the study of Wilde and his art. Whereas the genius of Oscar Wilde has always been known to the discerning few, this work also does much to promote a fuller understanding for those who have been in lamentable ignorance. Should you have any trouble getting a copy of this book you can order it
Recently I purchased an original copy of an 1882 newspaper, *The Sun*, which features on the front page Oscar's arrival in America. Although there is a fold in the paper I am reproducing it for you all to see. It is a funny and entertaining account of Wilde's comments to the reporter who greeted him on his arrival in the New World. Many of you will of course be familiar with quotes from this article used often in biographies but I thought it might be of interest to see it as it originally appeared.

Well, Wildeans, enjoy this issue. And please remember that essays (or comments) are always welcome!

All the best,

Carmel

Carmel

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October 15th, 1918

40, Half Moon Street,
Mayfair, W.I.

Dear Sir,

Thank you so very much for your kind sympathy. It is such a dreadful shock. I feel I can never recover. Mr. Ross came in at 4 o'clock in the afternoon of Oct 5th, and said he had indigestion and asked if I had any of Mr. Arnold Benneths tablets. I said no. He said never mind the pain is better now and talked quite cheerful. I stayed talking to him till 5 o'clock. Then he said I'm going to lay down now which he did every day. He put his head on my shoulder and we went to his bedroom together, having I think both forgotten about his indigestion. He layed (sic) on the bed. I covered the eiderdown over him and he said I'm out to everyone who calls but my brother. If I'm not up by 7 o'clock come in and wake me and I'll dine at 7.30 - I went in at 7. Called. No answer. Switched on the light and was horrified to find him. He had not moved. Just went to sleep and looked so peaceful. I sent for his brother and doctors etc. We were obliged to have an inquest. No doubt you know my examination. In the paper, "Durrants Press Cuttings are so interesting." The verdict was Syncope, brought on by chronic asthma and indigestion. He got very excited about his trip to Australia and after his Military Examination to be or not to be graded to obtain his passport, 5 doctors said we cannot grade you at all and I wonder you are alive. By your state of health you are totally unfit. This worried him. But oh I am so thankful he had not started.

I did have the last of him but my life can never be the same without him. It was my home. Have you a good photograph of him. If not you shall have one. He was cremated on Friday and after the war his ashes are to be taken to Paris and buried
with his friend. I am very grieved about your son and hope he will soon recover. Please tell him how sorry I am. He will be very shocked about Mr. Ross.

With very many thanks,

I am yours faithfully,

Nellie Burton

From The Decay of Lying

All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals. Life and Nature may sometimes be used as part of Art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to Art they must be translated into artistic conventions. The moment Art surrenders its imaginative medium it surrenders everything. As a method Realism is a complete failure, and the two things that every artist should avoid are modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter. To us, who live in the nineteenth century, any century is a suitable subject for art except our own. The only beautiful things are the things that do not concern us. It is, to have the pleasure of quoting myself, exactly because Hecuba is nothing to us that her sorrows are so suitable a motive for a tragedy. Besides, it is only the modern that ever becomes old-fashioned.

Oscar Wilde
The critical essay and the notebooks which follow it describe and present a far different Oscar Wilde than the dandy, aesthete, and homosexual who has become a myth for modernist sensibilities. The Wilde of the notebooks is a precocious Victorian humanist, an Oxford undergraduate studying in the Literae Humaniores program and later, a postgraduate competing for a faculty position at Oxford, immersed in a year's research and writing for the Chancellor's English Essay Prize of 1879. He studies a number of controversies which concerned contemporary intellectuals; for instance, evolution and human descent, historical criticism, and the opposition of philosophical idealism and materialism.

In our critical essay we reinterpret Wilde's work in the context of this moment in nineteenth-century intellectual history. We argue that the foundations of his later work were laid in the reading and writing he did during and after his years at Oxford. Our primary evidence for this claim comes from Wilde's previously unpublished Commonplace Book and Notebook kept at Oxford, which we have edited for this volume. These neglected documents contain the records of Wilde's education and serious reading in the late 1870s and early 1880s, as well as raw materials, drafts, and fragments used for his later writing. We have spent years identifying many of Wilde's sources for notebook entries; they include writers often associated with Wilde - Plato, Aristotle, Baudelaire, Swinbourne, Pater, Ruskin - as well as humanist philosophers, and social scientists not usually associated with him - H. T. Buckle, W.E.H. Lecky, Benjamin Jowett, William Wallace, T.H. Huxley, John Tyndall, W.K. Clifford, E.B. Tyler, Herbert Spencer, Ernest Renan, Theodor Mommsen, J.A. Symonds, G.W.F. Hegel, and many others.

We argue that Wilde's later critical and creative works have been misunderstood and undervalued because critics and scholars have not taken Wilde's education as seriously as he did, Wilde's aestheticism, usually thought of as derived from Pater,
Arnold, Ruskin, and the French decadent poets, is shown by the notebooks to be based on a carefully reasoned philosophical and political stance, a synthesis of Hegelian idealism and Spencerian evolutionary theory which fundamentally shaped his criticism and fiction. We believe that publication and interpretation of this material will provide the basis for a revaluation of Wilde's significance in the history of literature and criticism.

Our critical essay is divided into three sections: "The Text," "The Context of the Text," and "The Text as Context." In "The Text" we present a brief physical description of the manuscripts, historical evidence for dating, and the editorial principles which have guided our practice. We begin "The Context of the Text" by describing the vital intellectual influence of Wilde's parents and their circle in Dublin and his later associations with J.P. Mahaffy at Trinity College (Dublin). Even before he entered Oxford, Wilde was introduced to subjects he continued to study: classical literature, philology, history, the newly developing social sciences, and the history of ancient and modern philosophy. While he may have abandoned some early theories, he nevertheless derived from them an expectation that any account of human experience had to have systematic and synthetic explanatory power. This theoretical expectation can help explain Wilde's interest in the theories of two of his teachers at Oxford, Max Muller and John Ruskin. In different ways both men attempted to accommodate their idiosyncratic idealist beliefs with certain findings of modern science about historical philology, myth, and the racial inheritance of morality, imagination, and the "art-gift."

At Oxford Wilde also found in Hegelian philosophy a variety of idealism better suited than Muller's and Ruskin's to incorporate the materialist assumptions and findings of science - especially evolutionary theory. Two of the Oxford Hegelians, William Wallace and Benjamin Jowett, recognized, taught, and wrote about the affinities between the theories. Wilde tested their suggested synthesis of idealism and science primarily by investigating the philosophical writings of critical materialists like Huxley, Tyndall, and Spencer. He found support for the synthesis in the scientists' own admission of the limitations of their knowledge and theories. However, he also found in Spencer's evolutionary theory - and especially in W. K. Clifford's revision of it - a scientific explanation for the development in history of Hegel's "Idea" namely, the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Wilde developed a position very close to Clifford's, but he added to the latter's incipient reconciliation of idealism and positivism the conception of absolute idea slowly evolving toward perfection in history. The inheritance of acquired characteristics provided the mechanism for this progressive development, and the assumption of a unity between mind and matter, ego and non-ego, "mind-stuff" and the organic molecules of the brain gave him the physical and spiritual location in individuals for absolute mind. These ideas also
supported Wilde's belief in a racialist theory of cultural improvement. By adopting the Spencer-Clifford line of evolutionary theory, Wilde embraced an essentialist tradition of biological explanation (organic purposiveness) which began with Aristotle. His revisions to the tradition in his notebooks, criticism, and fiction demonstrate his critical practice of Hegelian theory.

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Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word.
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!

Some kill their love when they are young,
And some when they are old;
Some strangle with the hands of Lust,
Some with the hands of Gold.
The kindest use a knife, because
The dead so soon grow cold.

Some love too little, some too long,
Some sell, and others buy;
Some do the deed with many tears,
And some without a sigh:
For each man kills the thing he loves,
Yet each man does not die.

He does not die a death of shame
On a day of dark disgrace,
Nor have a noose about his neck,
Nor a cloth upon his face,
Nor drop feet foremost through the floor
Into an empty space.

He does not sit with silent men
who watch him night and day;
Who watch him when he tries to weep,
And when he tries to pray;
Who watch him lest himself should rob
The prison of its prey ...

In Reading gaol by Reading town
There is a pit of shame,
And in it lies a wretched man
Eaten by teeth of flame,
In a burning winding-sheet he lies,
And his grave has got no name.

And there, till Christ call forth the dead,
In silence let him lie:
No need to waste the foolish tear,
Or heave the windy sigh:
The man had killed the thing he loved,
And so he had to die.

And all men kill the thing they love,
By all let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!

Oscar Wilde
Oscar Wilde in New York.

His Definition of Aestheteism—Disappointed in the Atlantic Ocean.

A drenched reporter of The Sun climbed from a small rowboat to the high dock of the Arizona, when she lay off Quarantine last evening, and sought Mr. Oscar Wilde, the apostle of aestheticism, among the passengers. He was met by a tall young man, who was standing outside of the cabin, room saying:

"Ha ha! Ha! I wish to interview you, does he stay?"

Mr. Wilde's laugh and accent were remarkable. It was a low laugh, full of indubitably good nature, yet seeming somewhat forced. He stood at least six feet two inches tall, with broad shoulders and erect carriage. He wore a long coat lined with two kinds of fur, patent leather boots, and had small round fur caps set squarely on his head. He stood at ease with one hand thrust into his outer pocket and the other, with a large black ring on its little finger, held a cigarette which he occasionally puffed vigorously. He wore his hair long. It was brown and falls somewhat lankly on his shoulders. He wore a coat that can only be described as inconceivable inasmuch as it opened as very far down on his chest. It was caught at the bottom with a brilliant bit of sky-blue plissé, which hung down negligently. His face, scooped by the round fur cap and framed by the yellow hair, was that of a man about twenty-six years of age. He has small blue eyes that are rather expressive, and a straight nose. The line is very strong, and terminating in a way of unusual size, which is the most prominent and striking feature of his countenance. He threw his head back occasionally when he talked, in a way that made the jaw distinctly prominent and gave the face an expression of extraordinary strength. Mr. Wilde accepted my words very coldly, with an entire disregard of the customary compliment, and continually relaxed in his peculiar manner, without any apparent reason.

"What is aestheticism, Mr. Wilde?"

Laughing again, he replied: "Aesthetics is the science of the beautiful. It is a search for the secret of life. By the, by, do you know, I was very much disappointed in the Atlantic Ocean. It was very tawny. I expected to have it pour rain and be beautiful in its storms. I was disappointed in it."...
Oscar Wilde in New York

His Definition of Aesthetics - Disappointed in the Atlantic Ocean.

A drenched reporter of THE SUN climbed from a small rowboat to the high deck of the Arizona, while she lay off Quarantine last evening, and sought Mr. Oscar Wilde, the apostle of aestheticism, among the passengers. He was met aft by a tall young man, who was coming out of the Captain’s room, saying:

"Ha, ha, ha! wishes to interview me, does he?"

Mr. Wilde's laugh and accent were remarkable. It was a loud laugh, full of indubitably good nature, yet seeming somewhat forced. He stood at least six feet two inches tall, with broad shoulders and erect carriage. He wore a long ulster, lined with two kinds of fur, patent leather boots, and had a small round fur cap set squarely on his head. He stood at ease with one hand thrust into his ulster pocket and the other, with a large signet ring on its little finger, idly holding a cigarette which he occasionally puffed vigorously. He wore his hair long. It is brown and falls somewhat lankly on his shoulders. He wore a collar that can only be described as low-necked, inasmuch as it opened so very far down on his chest, It was caught at the bottom with a brilliant bit of sky blue plush, which hung down negligently. His face, topped by the round fur cap and flanked by the falling hair, was that of a man about twenty-six years of age. He has small blue eyes that are rather expressive, and a straight nose. His face is very long and terminates in a jaw of unusual size, which is the most prominent and striking feature of his countenance. He threw his head back occasionally when he talked, in a way that made the jaw doubly prominent and gave the face an expression of extraordinary strength. Mr. Wilde accented his words very oddly, with an entire disregard of the customary emphasis, and, continually relapsed into his peculiar laugh, without any apparent reason.

"What is aestheticism, Mr. Wilde?"

Laughing again, he replied: "Aestheticism is the science of the beautiful. It is a search for the secret of life. By the by, do you know, I was very much disappointed in the Atlantic Ocean. It was very tame. I expected to have it roar about and be beautiful in its storms. I was disappointed in it."
“Do not the disciples of aestheticism exhibit marked peculiarities in costume in England?”

“Yes: the movement has brought out individualities, but it is because of its force. If a movement has not sufficient force to develop individual characteristics it is of little worth as a movement of improvement. What am I to do? I'm to lecture through the country if I find that I like lecturing, and intend to produce my play."

At the termination of the interview, as the reporter descended over the side of the steamship, a crowd of passengers chanted:

A pallid and lank young man,
And screamed rough jibes about aestheticism.