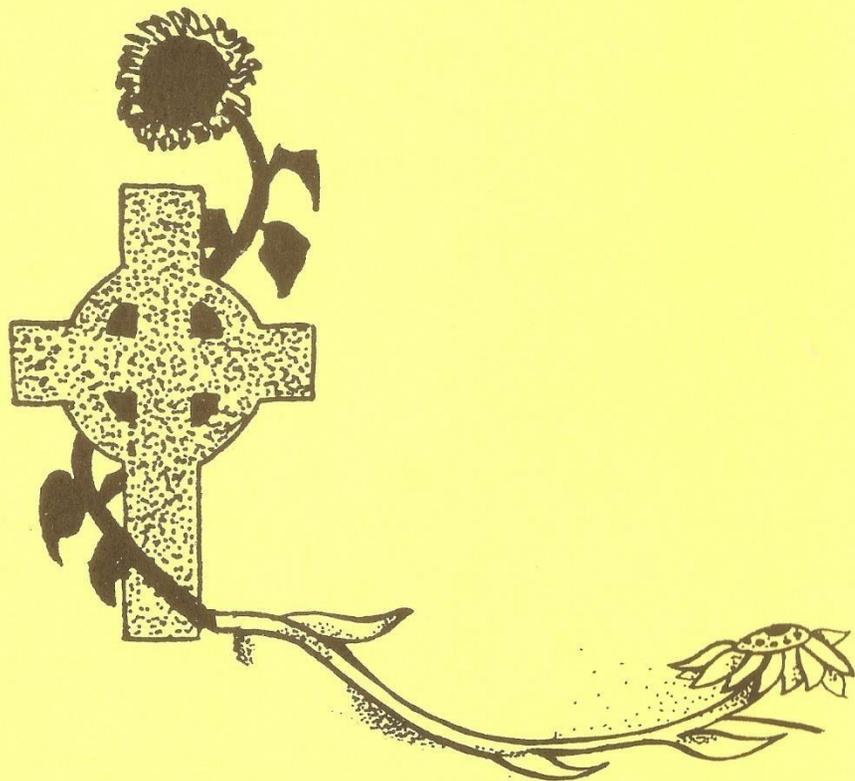


**PUBLISHED TWICE YEARLY;
19TH MAY (WILDE'S RELEASE FROM GAOL)
16TH OCTOBER (WILDE'S BIRTHDAY)**

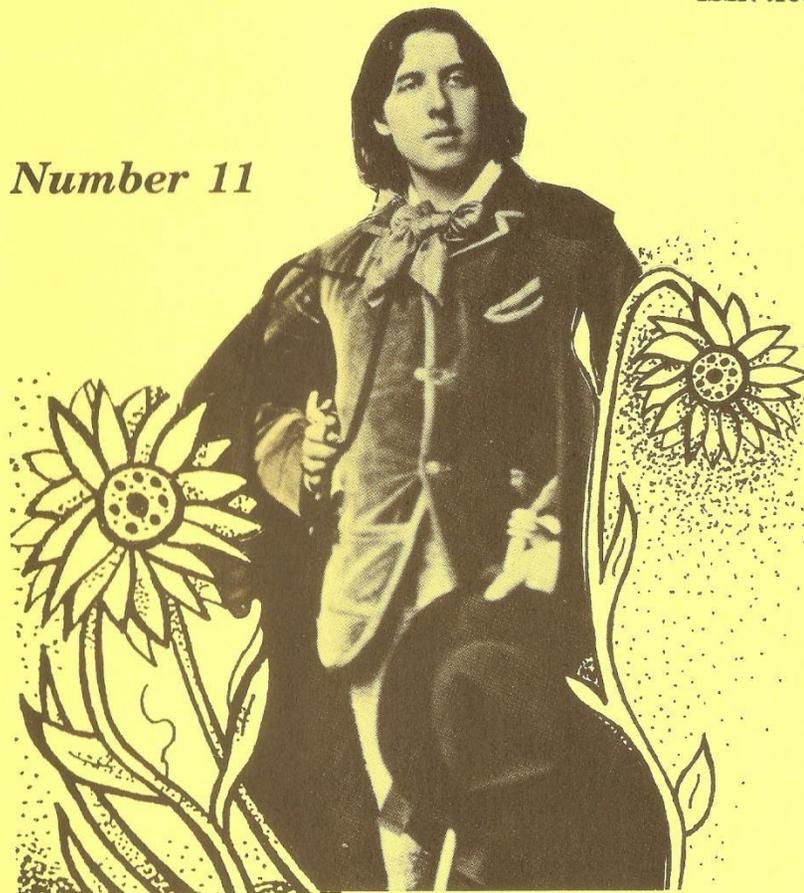


Wild About Wilde Newsletter

16th October 1991

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Number 11



Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Mills Wilde

WILD ABOUT WILDE



ISSN:1068-9737

Dear Wild Wildeans,

We are on such a wonderful voyage of serendipity! This year marks a hundred years since *Dorian Gray* was published and, as Richard Ellmann said, the English (language) novel was never the same again. Looking back over the past hundred years it is very easy to agree with that statement. Before *Dorian Gray* the English language novel could be described as an underdeveloped art form which dealt only with the periphery of human life. Societal structures or how people related to their communities were popular topics. Novelists never dealt with the depth or complexity of human emotion or thought. Wilde had many comments to make about this: "one should not be too severe on English novels; they are the only relaxation of the intellectually unemployed" and again, "I quite admit that modern novels have many good points. All I insist on is that, as a class, they are quite unreadable." Perhaps his most revealing remark is in *The Critic as Artist*: "Anybody can write a three-volume novel. It merely requires a complete ignorance of life and literature." Although many modern novelists fail in the effort, with *Dorian Gray* Wilde showed what the novel could become and shocked and outraged lesser minds in the process. But isn't that what we Irish are here for?

When I was in Dublin this past summer I attended a meeting held at the delightful South Bank restaurant in Dun Laoghaire where a committee was formed with the purpose of setting up an Oscar Wilde museum in the Westland Row house where he was born. Although this has been talked about in the past it does seem as if something may very well happen at last. I shall keep in touch with events over there and continue to bring news of any remarkable happenings. We all sat and talked and drank wine so already you see we were in the Wilde custom and should expect extraordinary things in the future.

There is some news from Britain about an Oscar Wilde Society

which has been formed and promises to be of interest not only because of its dedication to Oscar's memory but also because they intend setting up a permanent memorial in the way of a Literary Award. You can read about it on page 12.

I quite enjoyed discovering Kerry Ashton's work *The Wilde Spirit* and hope you all like reading about him and his devotion of the past 14 years. Perhaps *some* of you will get a chance to see him perform. Manus Nunan is also travelling with his lecture on Wilde and has been quite successful. He talks about his experiences on page 11. It is really so important to keep Wilde's art alive with live performances such as these which involve reading from his prose and poetry as well as his dramas. Sadly, here in the United States it is not so easy to experience this and therefore not so easy for the public to know or appreciate his genius. Apart from college theatres which infrequently stage *Earnest* or the directors who seem obsessed with misrepresenting *Dorian Gray* very little of Wilde's work is ever performed, which is quite a tragedy.

Enjoy this issue. Please write or call for information on any of the articles.

All the best,

Carmel

Carmel



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THE WILDE SPIRIT - ONE MAN PLAY

Gordon Blackwell

Kerry Ashton's critically acclaimed *one man play*, *The Wilde Spirit*, which last summer became the longest running play in Cape Cod's history, was presented again this summer at the historic Unitarian Universalist Meeting House in Provincetown, Massachusetts. It opened August 1 and was held over twice by popular demand running on through October 19th, completing its 8th record-breaking month in Provincetown.

In the play, which stars Ashton as Oscar Wilde, the spirit of Wilde returns from the dead during a dream to talk to his audience about his triumphs and tragedies and to draw parallels between his own experiences and those of today. Appearing as Wilde's ghost, Ashton wears a moustache - something Wilde tried only briefly in his youth. In the play Wilde's ghost explains, "For a man who died in 1900, I believe I appear remarkably refreshed, though hardly clean shaven. In truth, grooming facial hair was one of the few pleasures I missed in life; I Simply could not resist the chance to experience it now." According to Ashton, "If Wilde could appear to us today - as if in a dream - I'm certain he would dress in some way we wouldn't expect. The mustache is a Wildean twist - my way as a playwright of being faithful to the spirit of the man, to his individualism and essence."

The Wilde Spirit contains excerpts from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *De Profundis*, several original songs and much of the wit for which Wilde was famous.

Ashton, who wrote the play, music and lyrics and designed, produced and directed the production, has performed *The Wilde Spirit* for the last 14 years throughout the United States. First produced in Los Angeles in 1977 it ran for two seasons, was produced in New York City and has toured many of America's colleges and universities including U.C.L.A., George Washington University and Cornell, as well as several regional theatres including the Las Vegas Cultural Arts Center. In 1990 Ashton presented his play and was Guest Lecturer at the first National Convention of Performance Artists in St. Paul, Minn.

Research for *The Wilde Spirit* began in 1975 with the first draft of the play completed in 1977. Since then, in what amounts to over 16 years of research, Ashton has continued to study Wilde's letters and biographies revising the play where appropriate. "My task as playwright and actor is to allow Wilde to speak through me as honestly and faithfully as I can - that is a task and a challenge that I take very seriously. Some, for example, have misinterpreted Wilde's wit and personality as being arrogant. Anyone who has

studied Wilde's work and letters knows that in actuality he was the kindest of men and one of the most compassionate souls our world has ever known. The Richard Ellmann biography was among the first to point out Wilde's kindly nature - but this is the slant I have taken in my play for the last 14 years."



Kerry Ashton as Oscar Wilde in *The Wilde Spirit*
Photo by Denise DeMirjian ©Kerry Ashton.
Reprinted by permission.

Acclaimed by critics nationwide for both his play and performance Ashton has won several awards for *The Wilde Spirit* including 3 Los Angeles Civic Star Awards for Best Play, Best Actor and Best Direction and an Award of Merit from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers.

Curt Davis of the New York Post said, "This happens to be the finest one man play I have ever seen in New York or anywhere! Ashton sets the stage ablaze with talent!"

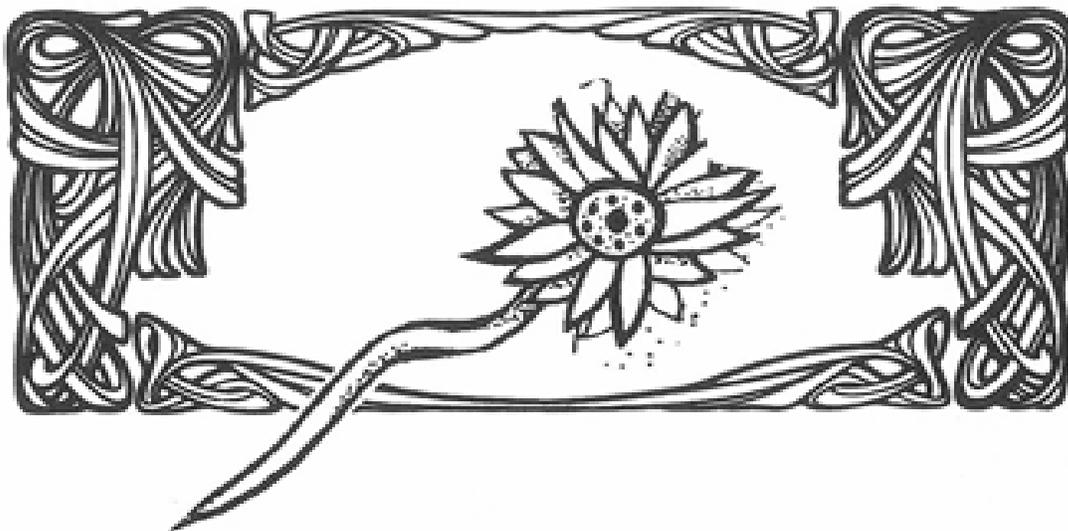
New York critic, Martin Schaeffer, proclaimed the show, "Remarkable and superb! We see Wilde resurrected before our very eyes. Ashton's style and wit are so quick as to leave us dazed. If the renaissance man has returned to our midst, his name must surely be Kerry Ashton."

The Los Angeles Times hailed the play as "an entertaining and moving evening in the theatre with a very talented actor," while The Hollywood Reporter described it as "the consummate performance, mesmerizing, breathtaking and utterly magnificent!"

Local reviews during the play's eight month run in Provincetown were no less enthusiastic. The Cape Cod Register called *The Wilde Spirit*, "Nothing short of spectacular! This play is one no one should miss. Ashton gives a mind-numbing performance."

Kerry Ashton believes that "Faithful to his own individualism, Wilde rose to fame and brought about his ruin by challenging the false morality in Victorian Society." This is a performance well worth catching if it comes your way.

For information about performance schedule and availability or videotapes of the performance contact Kerry Ashton by mail at P. O. Box 753, South Orleans, MA 02662



The following is from a new article on Wilde by Dr. Horst Schroeder of Technische Universität Braunschweig, Germany.

Oscar Wilde - a Lord of Literature

Horst Schroeder

... A central notion of Wilde's, as he said in *The Portrait of Mr. W H.*, was that "by finding perfect expression for a passion (you) exhaust (...) the passion itself" or, as he put it in *The Critic as Artist*, "When one has found expression for a mood, one has done with it." In the Shakespearean narrative the notion underlies the final turning-point of the story, and in the dialogue it is drawn upon to account for the rise and fall of literary and artistic movements such as "Realism" which at first "charmed one" - "One gained from it that *nouveau frisson** which it was its aim to produce" -, but which in the end, when "analysed" and "explained", one "wearied of."

At first glance, the French phrase seems to be just an off-hand remark, but there is more in it than meets the eye: it is an expression of Hugo's who, on 6 October 1859, wrote to Baudelaire to thank him for the two poems which the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal* had dedicated to him:

"Que faites-vous quand vous ecrivez ces vers saisissants *Les Sept Vieillards* et *Les Petites Vieilles*, que vous me dediez, et dont je vous remercie? Que faites-vous? Vous marchez. Vous allez en avant. Vous dotez le ciel de l'art d'on ne sait quel rayon macabre. Vous creez un frisson nouveau." Baudelaire published the letter in the very same year as a preface to his essay on Gautier, and thus, almost overnight, the collocation *frisson nouveau* became a household word in literary circles. See, for example, Alphonse Daudet, who in *Trente Ans de Paris a travers ma vie at mes livres* said of Baudelaire that "Victor Hugo a dit de lui qu'il a invente un frisson nouveau." Wilde, as we know from "The Decay of Lying" was well acquainted with Daudet's autobiography, but from references above to Baudelaire's essay on Gautier it follows that Wilde's familiarity with Hugo's phrase does not stem from Daudet or some other literary critic, but was first-hand ...

*new thrill

For a copy of the complete article write to the publishers:

Dr. Koenigshausen + Dr. Neumann,

P.O.8. 6007, Leistenstr. 3,

0-8700 Wurzburg,

Germany

cost: OM 12.00 (includes postage)

THE AGE OF DORIAN

John Gray
Poet, Dandy and Priest

by

Jerusha Hull McCormack
Brandeis University Press \$35
tel: 1 800 421 1561

Review by **Manus Nunan**

In his biography of Oscar Wilde Richard Ellmann observed: "In the eighties aestheticism suffered from lack of example: Dorian Gray filled the need." A model, if not *the* model, for the principal character in Wilde's only novel was John Gray one of Wilde's more abject disciples and probably his lover before being replaced by Lord Alfred Douglas. Ellmann suggests that the use of the name of Gray was a form of courtship and Gray in his letters to Wilde took the hint and signed himself 'Dorian'. His performance as 'Dorian' was a brilliant success and was his entree into fashionable society and literary circles.

The story of John Gray is fascinating in its own right. Previous attempts to tell it have been obstructed to some extent by Gray himself. Mrs. McCormack sets the facts straight. Born in Bethnal Green in 1866 the son of a carpenter Gray left school at thirteen to become a manual labourer. He studied languages, music and painting at night and entered the civil service by examination becoming a clerk in the library of the Foreign Office. Alongside this respectable career ran his life in homosexual literary circles. He was a poet and translator of Verlaine, Rimbaud and Mallarmé. Conversion to Roman Catholicism, *de rigueur* for the nineties aesthete, followed.

His association with Wilde began in 1889 and was to make his name. Gray produced what Ernest Dowson described as some very beautiful and obscure versicles in the latest manner of French Symbolism. Wilde liked his verse, thought he had achieved a "perfected mode of expression" and subsidised his first book of Poetry *Silverpoints*. Shortly after its publication Gray flew from extreme aestheticism, broke with Wilde and took Catholicism seriously. He was ordained a priest in 1901 and spent many years as Canon Gray, rector of St. Peter's in Edinburgh, until he died in 1934. His ministry did not interrupt his

(continued on page 10)

E TENEBRIS

Come down, O Christ, and help me! reach thy hand,
For I am drowning in a stormier sea
Than Simon on thy lake of Galilee:
The wine of life is spilt upon the sand,
My heart is as some famine-murdered land
Whence all good things have perished utterly,
And well I know my soul in Hell must lie
If I this night before God's throne should stand.
"He sleeps perchance, or rideth to the chase,
Uke Baal, when his prophets howled that name
From mom to noon on Carmel's smitten height."
Nay, peace, I shall behold, before the night,
The feet of brass, the robe more white than flame,
The wounded hands, the weary human face.

OSCAR WILDE



THE DEATH OF SEBASTIAN MELMOTH

He drowned, you know,
in spite of what they say.
He drowned
in death-giving waters
from within.

All saints and heroes
and significant sinners
pass through the water.
Twice.
At birth, at death.

Mystic Mister Jung
went to Ravenna.
On a baptistery wall
he said he saw
in mosaic
Peter's desperate outreach:
"Save me. I sink."
There is no such mosaic
in Ravenna
and never was
(except in Jung's fear).
What was most sad
in Sebastian was washed -
bright, clean inverted words -
and presented as the work,
his terse commentary on the world.

JACK KINSELLA



(from page 7)

literary efforts and there were other volumes of poetry and a surreal novel.

This search for the real John Gray concludes that the many masks are more real and more telling of his generation than what lay behind them. The problem of identity is its recurring theme: the truth of masks indeed.

This finely written book should be read by all students of the eighteen nineties - that decade invented by Oscar Wilde and which in fact lasted from 1889 to 1895, the period of Wilde's reign in London. Their last meeting was in Rome six months before Wilde's death. Gray was walking with his fellow seminarists when he passed "a large form planted as if to waylay him. There was complete silence - but mockery dangled it." Gray had escaped the fate of Dorian.

Jerusha Hull McCormack is a graduate of Brandeis University and Wellesley College. She lives in Ireland and is Lecturer in Modern English and American Literature at University College, Dublin.



Orchises Press Publishes *Earnest*

Orchises Press has announced an offset reprint of the Leonard Smithers, 1899 edition of *The Importance of Being Earnest* which Wilde himself worked on with Smithers. It is available in hardbound and paperback. The hardbound (case bound) edition is sewn, with headbands and costs \$19.95 including postage. The paperback (perfect bound) costs \$7.95 including postage. Anyone interested should write or call:

Orchises Press P.O. Box 20602

Alexandria, Virginia 22320-1602 tel: (703) 683 1243

Manus Nunan who wrote the John Gray book review is an Irishman living in France. He travels extensively and lectures on Oscar Wilde. Here he talks about his experiences.

LECTURING ON OSCAR WILDE

Manus Nunan

Early retirement brings problems. I decided to move to a better climate and built a wooden chalet in the French Pyrenees near the Mediterranean where I now live. I needed an occupation beyond housebuilding and perfecting my French. My experience and abilities lay in public speaking, but not in French. As a young man I had seen Micheál MacLiammoir in his one man show about Oscar Wilde called *The Importance of Being Oscar*. His performance was quite wonderful. It is said that his voice and accent were like those of Wilde and in effect he played the part of Wilde in his show. I thought I might do something on Wilde, but instead of playing the part I would tell the story. My legal experience at the bar would be invaluable in dealing with the trials and as I speak French fluently I could easily quote from *Salomé*. With hard work over about a year I built up the lecture. In small literary societies in England I tried it out and it worked. Ann Bates, a theatre director, saw it and liked it and together we built it into a theatrical production with other actors playing excerpts from Wilde's plays. That was put on at the Edinburgh Festival and later at the New End Theatre in London. The review in *The Stage and Television Today* was favourable. "Manus Nunan was excellent as the main presenter of the piece, charming, witty and always entertaining."

So far so good, but I needed a title for the lecture. MacLiammoir had taken the obvious one. His *The Importance of Being Oscar* had everything - the name and the word "Importance" which of course appears in the title of two of the comedies. However, after much thought I came up with my own title - "An Oscar of Great Importance." It had the name and an echo of *A Woman of No Importance*. I also wanted to travel with my "Oscar". Letters to literary societies in Australia brought an avalanche of invitations. In 1986 I made a very successful tour of that continent. In 1988 a lecture tour was organized by the English Speaking Union of the United States and I toured New York, New York State and Pennsylvania. In 1990 The American-Irish Historical Society honoured me by an invitation to lecture on Wilde. 1991 began my association with the National Portrait Gallery in London.

UNITED KINGDOM OSCAR WILDE SOCIETY

Andrew McDonnell

An Oscar Wilde Society has been formed in the United Kingdom and I am part of a committee made up of society members. As far as we know, prior to this, no society devoted to Wilde existed in this country which is both astounding and to be expected given our historical moral beliefs.

Our mission is to bring about a lasting memorial to Wilde. When the Memorial Committee first met earlier this year we tried out several ideas - a plaque or bust in Poets' Corner in Westminster: Some sort of commemoration at the Bracknell Theatre, etc. etc. I suggested an Annual Literary Prize and have been working on this ever since. Methuen, the publishers, have provisionally agreed they should print whatever winning entry made it through.

The basic idea is to have An Annual Literary Prize which would be awarded for a piece of literature submitted to a committee of judges, selected from a category suggested by that year's panel. The categories for entrants would be along the lines of Wilde's own works - Prose Poems, Short Stories, Children's Stories, etc.

A single category would be selected to be published in the national newspapers inviting entrants to submit work. This category would change from year to year so that eventually we covered the whole gamut of Wilde's range. Entrants could be anybody and would definitely not necessarily be from well known or published authors. We would like to encourage new people wherever possible. There are enough prize giving bodies who award only their own "known" winners.

Methuen would publish the winning entry as part of the prize and maybe - if we can get enough subscription - there would be a cash reward or some sort of memorabilia. It has been suggested that the panel of judges be made up of two writers, a critic and two members of the Oscar Wilde

Society. This seems an excellent idea and one which we will (hopefully) eventually adopt.

For further information please contact this publication.



from **The Nightingale and the Rose**

Oscar Wilde

..."What a silly thing Love is!" said the Student as he walked away. "It is not half as useful as Logic, for it does not prove anything, and it is always telling one of things that are not going to happen, and making one believe things that are not true. In fact, it is quite unpractical, and, as in this age to be practical is everything, I shall go back to Philosophy and study Metaphysics. "

So he returned to his room and pulled out a great dusty book, and began to read.

JULY 1991 SOTHEBY SALE RESULTS

Lot 252 Oscar Wilde. Autograph letter signed to W.E. Henley, about Wilde's review article of Henley's *A Book of Verses*. Wilde mentions his review of Sharpe's *Romantic Ballads* ("...as fair as an Irishman with a temperament ever wants to be..."). Sold for £1,760.

Lot 253 Oscar Wilde. *Children in Prison and other Cruelties of Prison Life*. Scarce pamphlet in unusually good condition. Originally appeared under another title in the Daily Chronicle, dated 27th May 1897. It was written from Dieppe where Wilde had gone after his release from prison on 19th May. His warder, Martin, was dismissed from his post for giving food to children prisoners and he had evidently been kind to Wilde. Murdoch & Co. 1898. Unsold. Valued at £500 - £700.

Lot 254 Oscar Wilde. *Poems*, first edition, (one of 250 copies), presentation copy, inscribed by the author to Violet Vane and consists of a signed four-line poem addressed to her. Sold for £5,500.

Lot 255 Oscar Wilde. *Poems*. Author's edition, number 205 of 220 copies. Signed by the author. Elkin Mathews & John Lane, 1892. Sold for £440.

Lot 256 Oscar Wilde. *Poems*. Fourth edition, presentation copy inscribed by the author to Edgar Fawcett. David Bogue 1882. Sold for £825.

Lot 257 Oscar Wilde. *Salome, Drame en un Acte*. First edition. One of 600 copies. Inscription reads "St. John E.C. Hawkins. Given me by A.B. Ross May 1893". Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1893. Unsold. Valued at £500 - £700.

- Lot 258** Oscar Wilde. A collection of Periodical and Ephemeral publications, including *Dublin University Magazine*, 4 issues, November 1875 one of which contains the first appearances of *Chorus of Cloud Maidens*, the earliest known of Wilde's published writings. *The Woman's World* volumes I and II (of 3 published under Wilde's editorship). Also included a collection of articles, extracts and news cuttings relating to Wilde's life, death and works. Sold for £550.
- Lot 259** Max Beerbohm. Early caricature of Oscar Wilde, signed with his early monogram. Sold for £2200.
- Lot 260** Oscar Wilde. *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, third edition, number 97 of 99 copies Signed by the author. Leonard Smithers, 1898. Sold for £770.
- Lot 261** Oscar Wilde. Autograph letter signed to Mr. Niles of the publisher Joseph Knight in Boston, Massachusetts requesting a copy of his own poems to be sent to an enclosed address. Together with an autograph apothegm ("Public opinion exists only in countries where there are no ideas"). Sold for £660.
- Lot 262** Oscar Wilde. *Poems*. Author's edition, number 98 of 220 copies signed by the author. Elkin Mathews & John Lane, 1892. Unsold. Valued at £800 - £1,000.



from **The Critic as Artist**

Oscar Wilde

... What has been done up to now has been chiefly in the clearing of the way. It is always more difficult to destroy than it is to create, and when what one has to destroy is vulgarity and stupidity, the task of destruction needs not merely courage but also contempt. Yet it seems to me to have been, in a measure, done. We have got rid of what was bad. We have now to make what is beautiful. And though the mission of the aesthetic movement is to lure people to contemplate, not to lead them to create, yet, as the creative instinct is strong in the Celt, and it is the Celt who leads in art, there is no reason why in future years this strange Renaissance should not become almost as mighty in its way as was that new birth of Art what woke many centuries ago in the cities of Italy.



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