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OSCAR WILDE
A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE

EDITED BY IAN SMALL

BLOOMSBURY

NEW MERMAIDS

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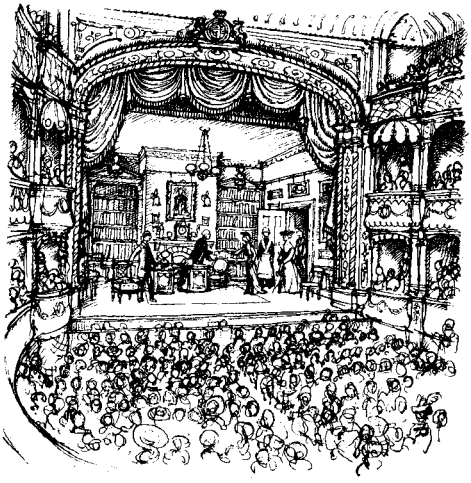

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NEW MERMAIDS

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The Tragedy of Mariam
Volpone
The Way of the World
The White Devil
The Witch
The Witch of Edmonton
A Woman Killed with Kindness
A Woman of No Importance
Women Beware Women

NEW MERMAIDS

OSCAR WILDE

A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE

edited by Ian Small

School of English, University of Birmingham

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PREFACE

This revised edition of *A Woman of No Importance* supersedes that published in the New Mermaid Drama Series in 1983 in the volume *Two Society Comedies*. Like Russell Jackson's revised New Mermaid edition of *An Ideal Husband*, it has a new introduction to the play, and the section on the play's composition takes account of recent textual research. Apart from the correction of minor errors, the text itself and the footnotes remain unaltered. The collations do not include Herbert Beerbohm Tree's typescripts of the play which Russell Jackson and I identified in the Theatre Collection in the University of Bristol, although their nature and extent are described in the appropriate section of the introduction. This archive provides material for scholars in the future to reconstruct the first performance text of the play. The two revised editions share a biographical note on Wilde by Russell Jackson, and a section on the theatrical and intellectual background to the 'society comedies' written by Russell Jackson and myself.

I am grateful to Merlin Holland, the author's grandson, for permission to quote from unpublished drafts; and to the following institutions for access to materials in their possession: Birmingham Public Library; the British Library; the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California; the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas; and the University of Bristol Library.

I have taken the opportunity of a reprint to correct some errors and to add to the list of Further Reading (pages xliv-xlv).

IAN SMALL

ABBREVIATIONS

Reference to *A Woman of No Importance* (abbreviated to *Woman* in the annotation) is to the line numbers of the present edition. Reference to *An Ideal Husband* (abbreviated to *Husband* in the annotation) is to the edition by Russell Jackson in the New Mermaid Series (1993). Reference to *The Importance of Being Earnest* (abbreviated to *Earnest* in the annotation) is to the edition by Russell Jackson in the New Mermaid Series (1980). Reference to *Lady Windermere's Fan* (abbreviated to *LWF* in the annotation) is to the edition by Ian Small in the New Mermaid Series (1980). Reference to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (abbreviated to *Dorian Gray* or *DG*) is to the edition by Isobel Murray (Oxford, 1974). Reference to other fiction by Wilde is to *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Oscar Wilde* edited by Isobel Murray (Oxford, 1979) (abbreviated to *CSF* in the annotation). Other works by Wilde are referred to by the title of the volume in which they appear in Ross's edition of the *Works* (14 vols, 1908). I have followed the recent practice of giving additional reference to page numbers of the Collins *Complete Works* (1967) (designated *CW*). *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. R. Hart-Davis (1963), is abbreviated to *Letters*. The drafts and texts of *A Woman of No Importance* are designated as follows:

BLMS Manuscript draft under the title of *Mrs Arbuthnot*: British Library, MS Add. 37944.

BLi Typescript with manuscript revisions under the title of *Mrs Arbuthnot*: British Library, MS Add. 37945 (ff.1-91).

BLii Typescript with manuscript revisions under the title of *Mrs Arbuthnot*: British Library, MS Add. 37945 (ff.92-178).

C Typescript with manuscript revisions under the title of *Mrs Arbuthnot*: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library: Finzi 2465.

T Typescript under the title of *Mrs Arbuthnot* with manuscript revisions (not in Wilde's hand): Humanities Research Center, University of Texas. The various typescripts of Act II are designated Ti, Tii and Tiii.

LC Typescript of *A Woman of No Importance* submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's Office: British Library, MS Add. 53524 (N).

HBT Typescripts, prompt copies and property lists of *A Woman of No Importance* held at the University of Bristol Theatre Collection.

1st ed. *A Woman of No Importance* by Oscar Wilde (London: John Lane, 1894).

Other abbreviations
OED *Oxford English Dictionary.*
s.d. stage direction(s).

In the notes the names of some characters are abbreviated to initials.

INTRODUCTION

THE AUTHOR

ANDRÉ GIDE DESCRIBES Oscar Wilde as he appeared in 1891, when 'his success was so certain that it seemed that it preceded [him] and that all he needed do was go forward and meet it':

> . . . He was rich; he was tall; he was handsome; laden with good fortune and honours. Some compared him to an Asiatic Bacchus; others to some Roman emperor; others to Apollo himself – and the fact is that he was radiant.[1]

The melodramatic contrast between this triumphant figure and the pathetic convict serving two years' hard labour was drawn by Wilde himself in *De Profundis*, the letter written from prison to his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas. He described his transfer in November 1895 from Wandsworth to Reading Gaol, little care being taken for his privacy:

> From two o'clock till half-past two on that day I had to stand on the centre platform at Clapham Junction in convict dress and handcuffed, for the world to look at. I had been taken out of the Hospital Ward without a moment's notice being given to me. Of all possible objects I was the most grotesque. When people saw me they laughed. Each train as it came up swelled the audience. Nothing could exceed their amusement. That was of course before they knew who I was. As soon as they had been informed, they laughed still more. For half an hour I stood there in the grey November rain surrounded by a jeering mob.[2]

Wilde insisted that his life was as much an artistic endeavour as his works – in *De Profundis* he claimed to have been 'a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age', and in conversation with Gide he remarked that the great drama of his life lay in his having put his talent into his works, and his genius into his

[1] André Gide, 'In Memoriam' from *Oscar Wilde*, translated Bernard Frechtman (New York, 1949): quoted from the extract in Richard Ellmann, ed., *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1969), pp. 25–34. The principal sources for the present account of Wilde's career are H. Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde* (1975), Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (1987) and Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (revised ed., 1963). Subsequent references to Wilde's *Letters* are to this edition.

[2] Wilde, *Letters*, pp. 490–1. This long letter was written in Reading Gaol in January–March 1897. An abridged version was published by Robert Ross in 1905 as *De Profundis*; the most reliable edition is that contained in *Letters*, pp. 423–511.

life.[3] For an author who returned as often as Wilde to the proposition that art transforms and is the superior of Nature, such claims were more than boasting – they were an affirmation of faith.

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin on 16 October 1854, second son of Sir William and Lady Wilde. The father was an eminent surgeon, the mother a poetess and fervent Irish nationalist who wrote as 'Speranza'. To medical distinction Sir William joined notoriety as a philanderer.[4] Both parents were enthusiasts for the study of Irish legend, folk-lore and history, an interest reflected in the first two of the names given to their son, Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde. He was educated at Portora Royal School and Trinity College, Dublin, where he became a protégé of the classicist John Pentland Mahaffy. In 1875 he won a scholarship – a 'Classical Demyship' – to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he subsequently took first-class honours in the final school of *Literae Humaniores* (Greek and Roman literature, history and philosophy). He picked up a reputation for wit, charm and conversational prowess. Most important, he came under the influence of two eminent writers on art and its relation to life, John Ruskin and Walter Pater. Ruskin, the most distinguished contemporary art critic, championed the moral and social dimensions of art, and its ability to influence men's lives for the better. Under Ruskin's supervision, Wilde and a few other undergraduates had begun the construction of a road near Hinksey, as a practical demonstration of the aesthetic dignity of labour and the workmanlike qualities essential to the labours of the artist. From Pater, Wilde learned a conflicting interpretation of art as a means to the cultivation of the individual, an idea which received its most notorious statement in the 'Conclusion' to Pater's book *The Renaissance*. There the fully-developed sensibility is claimed as the expression of a full existence: 'To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life'.[5] These two theories of the relation between art and life were to dominate Wilde's writing. The arguments of the painter James McNeill Whistler against the conservative critics' insistence on moral significance and pictorial verisimilitude in art also influenced Wilde deeply.[6] The close of his Oxford career was marked by two

[3] Wilde, *Letters*, p. 466; Gide, 'In Memoriam', ed. cit., p. 34.

[4] On Sir William and Lady Wilde, see Terence de Vere White, *Parents of Oscar Wilde* (1967).

[5] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (1873; Library ed., 1910), p. 236. This 'Conclusion' was omitted in the second edition (1877) and restored, in a modified form, in the third edition (1888).

[6] Whistler later quarrelled with Wilde, accusing him of plagiarism. Some of their exchanges appeared in Whistler's *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890) and in *Wilde vs. Whistler* (1906).

triumphs – his first-class degree and the Newdigate Prize for his poem 'Ravenna' – and two failures. Wilde was not given the Chancellor's English Essay Prize for his essay 'The Rise of Historical Criticism' and he was not offered a fellowship at Magdalen.

Moving to London, Wilde set about making himself a name in the capital's fashionable artistic and literary worlds. He had enough poems to make a collected volume, published at his own expense in 1881, and he was seen at the right parties, first nights, and private views. Occasionally he wore the velvet coat and knee-breeches, soft-collared shirt and cravat, that became fixed in the popular imagination as 'aesthetic' dress (and which derived from a fancy-dress ball he had attended when an undergraduate). In December 1881 he embarked on a lecture-tour of the United States organised by the impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte. This was a shrewd back-up to the tour of Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *Patience*, but it was also a simple exploitation of the American appetite for being lectured to. Although *Patience*, which satirised the Aesthetic Movement, featured rival poets dressed in a costume closely resembling that adopted by Wilde, the lecturer was taken seriously as a prophet of the 'new renaissance' of art. In his lectures he insisted on comparing the new preoccupation with life-styles with the aspirations of the Italian Renaissance and the Romantic Movement – this was 'a sort of new birth of the spirit of man', like the earlier rebirth 'in its desire for a more gracious and comely way of life, its passion for physical beauty, its exclusive attention to form, its seeking for new subjects for poetry, new forms of art, new intellectual and imaginative enjoyment . . .'[7] The blend of aesthetic theory and enthusiasm for reform of design and colouring in dress and decorative art was derived from a variety of sources, not all successfully synthesized. In addition to Ruskin, Pater and Whistler, Wilde had absorbed the ideas of William Morris and the architect E. W. Godwin. The lectures were exercises in *haute vulgarisation* and not all the sources were acknowledged. Japanese and other oriental art, eighteenth-century furniture, distempered walls in pastel colours, stylised floral motifs – all had made their appearance in English art before Wilde became their advocate. But the influence of his popularising talents was, for all that, considerable. 'In fact,' wrote Max Beerbohm in 1895, looking back on 1880 as though it were a remote historical period, 'Beauty had existed long before 1880. It was Mr Oscar Wilde who managed her *début*'.[8]

As well as establishing him as a popular oracle on matters of art

[7] Wilde, 'The English Renaissance of Art', in Ross's edition of his *Essays and Lectures* (1909), pp. 111f. The text was edited by Ross from four drafts of a lecture first given in New York on 9 January 1882.

[8] Max Beerbohm, *Works* (1922), p. 39.

and taste, Wilde's lecture-tour made him a great deal of badly-needed money – he had no prospect of inheriting a family fortune, and would have to make his own way. On his return the velvet suits were discarded, and his hair, worn long and flowing in his 'Aesthetic' period, was cut short in a style resembling the young Nero. The figure described by Gide was beginning to emerge. After a holiday in Paris, Wilde moved into rooms at 9 Charles Street, Grosvenor Square. He returned briefly to New York for the first performance of his melodrama *Vera; or, the Nihilists* and then prepared for an autumn lecture-tour of the United Kingdom. On 26 November he became engaged to Constance Lloyd, and they married on 29 May 1884. In January 1885 they moved into a house designed by Godwin at 16 Tite Street, Chelsea. Two sons, Cyril and Vyvyan, were born in 1885 and 1886 respectively. In the early years of his marriage Wilde was working hard as a journalist. He contributed reviews to magazines (including the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Dramatic Review*) and even for a while undertook the editorship of one, *Woman's World*, which he hoped to turn into 'the recognised organ through which women of culture and position will express their views, and to which they will contribute'.[9] By and by Constance came into a small inheritance, but money was never plentiful. The life of a professional journalist was laborious and demanded a high degree of craftsmanship, but it offered a training from which Wilde, like Shaw, Wells and many others, profited immensely. Wilde became a fastidious and tireless reviser of his own work, and his reviews show him as an acute critic of others'.

In 1891 four of Wilde's books appeared, all consisting of earlier work, some of it in a revised form: *Intentions*, a collection of critical essays; *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*; *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, considerably altered from the version published in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1890; and a collection of children's stories, *A House of Pomegranates*. In the same year a verse tragedy written in 1882, *The Duchess of Padua*, was produced in New York by Lawrence Barrett under the title *Guido Ferranti*. Like *Vera* it was poorly received, but Wilde was already turning away from the pseudo-Elizabethan dramatic form that had preoccupied so many nineteenth-century poets and contemplating a newer, more commercially acceptable mode. In the summer of 1891 he began work on the first of a series of successful plays for the fashionable theatres of the West End: *Lady Windermere's Fan* (St James's, 20 February 1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (Haymarket, 19 April 1893), and *An Ideal Husband* (Haymarket, 3 January 1895). The refusal of a performance licence to the exotic biblical tragedy *Salomé* (in 1892)

[9] Wilde, *Letters*, p. 202 (to Mrs Alfred Hunt, August 1887).

proved a temporary setback: acclaim as a dramatic author confirmed Wilde's career in what seemed an irresistible upward curve.

The summer of 1891 was also remarkable for the beginning of an association that was to be the direct cause of his downfall: the poet Lionel Johnson introduced him to 'Bosie', Lord Alfred Douglas, third son of the Marquess of Queensberry. Wilde appears to have been already a practising homosexual, and his marriage was under some strain. The affair with Douglas estranged him further from Constance, and the drain it caused on Wilde's nervous and financial resources was formidable. Douglas was happy to let Wilde spend money on him after his father stopped his allowance; more seriously, he made ceaseless demands on the time set aside for writing. In *De Profundis* Wilde described his attempts to finish *An Ideal Husband* in an apartment in St James's Place:

> I arrived . . . every morning at 11.30, in order to have the opportunity of thinking and writing without the interruptions inseparable from my own household, quiet and peaceful as that household was. But the attempt was vain. At twelve o'clock you drove up, and stayed smoking cigarettes and chattering till 1.30, when I had to take you out to luncheon at the Café Royal or the Berkeley. Luncheon with its *liqueurs* lasted usually till 3.30. For an hour you retired to White's [Club]. At tea-time you appeared again, and stayed until it was time to dress for dinner. You dined with me either at the Savoy or at Tite Street. We did not separate as a rule till after midnight, as supper at Willis's had to wind up the entrancing day.[10]

This was in 1893. A year later Wilde was working on what was to prove his last play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the first draft of which had been composed during a family holiday (largely Douglas-free) at Worthing. In October, Constance had returned to London with the children. Wilde and Douglas stayed together in Brighton, first at the Metropole Hotel, then in private lodgings. Douglas developed influenza and Wilde nursed him through it. He in turn suffered an attack of the virus, and Douglas (by Wilde's account) more or less neglected him. The result was what seemed like an irrevocable quarrel, with Douglas living at Wilde's expense in a hotel but hardly bothering to visit him. In hindsight Wilde claimed that this cruelty afforded him a moment of clear understanding:

> Is it necessary for me to state that I saw clearly that it would be a dishonour to myself to continue even an acquaintance with such a one as you had showed [*sic*] yourself to be? That I recognised that ultimate moment had come, and recognised it as being really a great relief? And that I knew that for the future my Art and Life would be freer and better and more beautiful in every possible way? Ill as I was, I felt at ease.[11]

But reconciliation followed.

[10] Wilde, *Letters*, p. 426.
[11] Wilde, *Letters*, p. 438.

On 3 January 1895 *An Ideal Husband* was given its first performance. Meanwhile George Alexander, actor-manager of the St James's Theatre, had turned down the new comedy. It found a taker in Charles Wyndham, who intended to bring it out at the Criterion. Then Alexander found himself at a loss for a play to replace Henry James's *Guy Domville*, which had failed spectacularly. Wyndham agreed to release *The Importance of Being Earnest* on the condition that he had the option on Wilde's next play, and it was put into rehearsal at the St James's. At first Wilde attended rehearsals, but his continual interruptions made Alexander suggest that he might leave the manager and his company to their own resources. He agreed with good grace and left with Douglas for a holiday in Algeria. There they encountered André Gide, who was told by Wilde that he had a premonition of some disaster awaiting him on his return.[12] Although his artistic reputation was beyond question, and he was shortly to have two plays running simultaneously in the West End, Wilde was already worried by the activities of Douglas's father. Queensberry was a violent, irrational man, who hated his son's lover and was capable of hurting both parties. Bosie insisted on flaunting his relationship with Wilde to annoy his father and he was reckless of the effect of this public display of unconventional behaviour. Homosexuality was no less a fact of life in 1895 than it is now: moreover, the artistic and theatrical world accommodated it better than society at large. It had a flourishing and varied subculture and a number of sophisticated apologists. The double life that it entailed was by no means a simple matter of deceit and guilt for Wilde: it suited the cultivation of moral independence and detachment from society that he considered essential to art. None the less, if his affair with Douglas should ever come to be more public, and if the law were to be invoked, Wilde would be ruined. There had been scandals and trials involving homosexuals of the upper classes, which had to a degree closed their ranks to protect their own. But Wilde had made powerful enemies in a country whose leaders, institutions and press seemed devoted to Philistinism and where art itself was always suspect as constituting a threat to the moral fibre of the nation. *Dorian Gray* in particular had aroused violent mistrust, especially in its original form, and a satirical novel by Robert Hichens, *The Green Carnation* (1894), had hinted at a homosexual relationship between two characters obviously based on Wilde and Douglas. Queensberry had made his feelings about

[12] 'I am not claiming that Wilde clearly saw prison rising up before him; but I do assert that the dramatic turn which surprised and astounded London, abruptly turning Wilde from accuser to accused, did not, strictly speaking, cause him any surprises' (Gide, 'In Memoriam', ed. cit., p. 34).

his son's private life well known in Clubland. On the first night of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which opened on 14 February 1895, he tried to cause a disturbance at the theatre, but was thwarted by the management. The play was a great success – according to one of the actors, 'The audience rose in their seats and cheered and cheered again'.[13] As it settled down to what promised to be a long run, Wilde's career was at its height.

A fortnight later, on 28 February, Queensberry left a card at the Albemarle Club 'For Oscar Wilde posing as a somdomite' [*sic*]. The club porter put the card in an envelope, noting on the back the time and date, and Wilde was given it when he arrived at the club later that evening. The events that followed ruined him within a few months. Urged on by Douglas, but against the advice of most of his friends, Wilde sued Queensberry for criminal libel. The case went against Wilde, who found himself answering charges under the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, which made both private and public homosexual relations between men illegal. Significantly, the accusations against him did not include his affair with Douglas: he was alleged to have committed acts of gross indecency on a number of occasions and to have conspired to procure the committing of such acts. The men involved were 'renters', young, lower-class, male prostitutes, and there was a strong sense in the proceedings that Wilde was being tried for betraying his class's social as well as sexual ethics. Much was made of the alleged immorality of his works, especially *Dorian Gray*. The jury at what was effectively the second trial of Wilde (after the hearings in his charge against Queensberry) failed to agree, and a retrial was ordered. Finally, on 25 May 1895, Wilde was convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour. In the autumn he was declared bankrupt and all his effects were auctioned, including drafts and manuscripts of published and unpublished works. On 19 May 1897 he was released, and took up residence in France. During his imprisonment he had composed a long, bitter letter to Douglas, later published under the title *De Profundis*. Shortly after his release he completed a narrative poem, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. These and a few letters to the press on prison reform apart, Wilde published nothing new after his imprisonment. He did manage to arrange for the publication of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *An Ideal Husband*, which appeared in 1899. Projects for further plays came to nothing. The affair with Douglas was taken up again and continued sporadically. They led a nomadic life on the continent, Wilde often chronically in debt despite the good

[13] Allen Aynesworth, quoted by Hesketh Pearson, *The Life of Oscar Wilde* (1946), p. 257.

offices of his friends. His allowance from Constance was withdrawn when he resumed living with Bosie. His plays were not yet being revived in England and his published works brought in little by way of royalties.

Wilde died on 30 November 1900 in Paris, from cerebral meningitis which set in after an operation on his ear. The day before he had been received into the Roman Catholic Church. He was buried at Bagneux, but in 1909 his remains were moved to the Père Lachaise cemetery, where they now rest under a monument by Jacob Epstein. R.J.

THE SOCIETY COMEDIES AND THEIR BACKGROUND

Wilde's society plays, written and performed between 1892 and 1895, are products of a period when authors and critics viewed the state of the London theatre with a degree of optimism – qualified, however, with misgivings as to the direction in which development was to be desired. On one side the advance guard of the New Drama clamoured for social commitment and psychological verisimilitude; on the other, conservative critics, anxious not to lose the newly-regained support of the middle classes, mounted a last ditch defence of sentimental idealism; meanwhile puzzled, earnest craftsmen like Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones sought out the middle ground in order to occupy it in the name of good sense and moderation.

By the 1890s the distinct genres of the earlier decades of the century had undergone some modification, corresponding both to changes in the social composition of audiences and to the size of the theatres. The values represented in melodrama became more overtly middle-class; from extravaganza, farce and comic opera the musical comedy evolved; pantomime began to accommodate more and more music-hall performers, adapting itself to the display of their talents. Although 'purer' examples of the old-style melodramas, farces and burlesques survived, it was to the new, hybrid forms that aspiring dramatists turned. Of these the 'society play' offered settings in a fashionable *milieu*, literate and witty dialogue and the opportunity to discuss manners and morals. It had the appeal of topicality and a glamour that reflected its audience's tastes. More often than not, it concerned itself with the discrimination between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, the qualifications for entry into 'society' – particularly those concerned with sexual *mores* – and the requirements of public duty. The sentimentalism of Tom Robertson in the 1860s was supplanted by a smart, ironic perception of the ways of the world, but there was still scope for the

impassioned defence of a cherished principle: Pinero or Jones could allow themselves redeeming patches of earnestness. The stylish, well-made French plays from which British dramatists learned (and which they not infrequently copied) provided technical devices and set a high standard of urbane dialogue. References to sexual misdemeanours that provided motivation in French plays usually became less explicit in their British imitations. Adultery was likely to become flirting or – so as to remove all but the slightest suspicion of error – thinking about flirting. Too often it was the machinery of the well-made play – information 'fed' carefully to the audience, surprising revelations which arrive by post, telegram or word of mouth in time for each act to end on a point of suspense – that survived the channel crossing. Grace, wit and sophistication did not travel so easily.[14]

The stage's endorsement of its audience's values took appropriate forms. The *couturière*, tailor and interior decorator often took over from the theatrical costumier and property-maker, and insisted upon receiving their proper credit. Some women's magazines carried reviews of the dresses worn on stage by actresses, as though they constituted a fashion-show. The area formerly occupied by the benches of the pit – cheap seats, occupied by knowing, enthusiastic but not necessarily well-to-do playgoers – now accommodated the *fauteuils* of the stalls, offering drawing-room comfort to those prepared to dress formally and pay their half-guinea. The long, cheap playbill with its bold black type and ink that came off on the hand had been superseded by a small programme, more like an invitation or greeting-card and sometimes perfumed by Rimmel. The air of the auditorium was no longer heavy with the smell of gas – cooler, safer electric lighting had taken over in the mid-1880s and the standards of ventilation and safety had been improved. The producers of Wilde's society plays, George Alexander, Herbert Beerbohm Tree and Lewis Waller, were members of a new breed of actor managers. In the stalls and

[14] For a useful account of the genre, see John Russell Taylor, *The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play* (1967). Wilde's borrowings from French dramatists are discussed by E. H. Mikhail, 'The French Influences on Oscar Wilde's Comedies', *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 42, 2 (1968), 220–33; Charles B. Paul and Robert D. Pepper, 'The Importance of Reading Alfred: Oscar Wilde's Debt to Alfred de Musset', *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 75 (1971), 506–42; Katharine Worth, *Oscar Wilde* (1983); and Kerry Powell, *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s* (1990). For further accounts of Wilde's transactions with French thought and literature, see Ruth Temple, *The Critic's Alchemy: A Study of the Introduction of French Symbolism into England* (1953); Christophe Campos, *The View of France from Arnold to Bloomsbury* (1965); Malcolm Bradbury and Ian Fletcher, eds., *Decadence and the 1890s* (1979); Patricia Clements, *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (1985); and Peter Raby, *Oscar Wilde* (1988).