

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-51692-1 - Acting Wilde: Victorian Sexuality, Theatre, and Oscar Wilde

Kerry Powell

Frontmatter

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ACTING WILDE

“I love acting – it is so much more real than life,” Oscar Wilde famously wrote. *Acting Wilde* demonstrates that Wilde’s plays, fiction, and critical theory are organized by the idea that all so-called “reality” is a mode of performance, and that the “meanings” of life are really the scripted elements of a dramatic spectacle. Wilde’s real issue was whether one could become the author of his own script, the creator of the character and role he inhabits. It was a question he struggled to answer from the beginning of his career to the end, whether in his position as the pre-eminent dramatist in English or as the beleaguered defendant on trial for “gross indecency.” Introducing important new evidence from Wilde’s career-launching tour of America, the often tortured revisions of his plays, and the recently discovered written record of his first courtroom trial, this book reconstructs Wilde’s strategic dramatizing of himself.

KERRY POWELL is Professor and Chair of English at Miami University. He is the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre* (2004), and the author of *Women and Victorian Theatre* (1997) and *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s* (1990).

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To Felice

“The woman I love ...”

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|---|---------|
| 1. Drawn in a “feminine” pose and surrounded by images of femininity, Wilde was satirized as “The Bard of Beauty” in the July 1880 edition of <i>Time</i> , well before being parodied by Gilbert and Sullivan in <i>Patience</i> as well as before publishing anything of significance himself. (British Library) | page 18 |
| 2. Napoleon Sarony’s portraits of Wilde were appropriated by commercial firms to advertise their products. “Oscar Wilde, No. 18” was transformed into an ad for hats by a New York department store, generating a lawsuit by Sarony alleging violation of his proprietary rights in the posed image of Wilde. (Library of Congress) | 24 |
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| 5. Salomé holds aloft the head of John the Baptist in an early production of <i>Salomé</i> . (New York Public Library) | 63 |
| 6a and b. Photograph of the recently discovered transcript of Oscar Wilde’s first courtroom trial. (British Library) | 133 |
| 7. Wilde appears subdued and thoughtful as sketched from a side view in the courtroom by an unidentified artist in 1895. (Uncataloged item in the Clark Memorial Library, UCLA) | 145 |

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8. An early French edition of <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> (Paris: Charles Charrington, 1908) visualizes the key moment in which Dorian stabs himself in the heart in the act of stabbing his own portrait, changing places for the second time in the novel with the posed representation of himself. (British Library)		150
9. Wilde's carefully modeled celebrity persona was shattered by his courtroom trials and imprisonment. The <i>Police News</i> drew him on its front page of April 20, 1895, as a besieged and chastened man. (British Library)		156
10. The <i>Police Budget</i> published a drawing of Wilde having his hair cut by the prison barber in its edition of June 1, 1895, thus capturing a moment in which institutional discipline interrupted, and disrupted, Wilde's theatrical self-presentation. (British Library)		161

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Acknowledgments

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