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OSCAR WILDE AND ANCIENT GREECE

From his boyhood Oscar Wilde was haunted by the literature and culture of ancient Greece, but until now no full-length study has considered in detail the texts, institutions and landscapes through which he imagined Greece. The archaeology of Celtic Ireland, explored by the young Wilde on excavations with his father, informed both his encounter with the archaeology of Greece and his conviction that Celt and Greek shared a hereditary aesthetic sensibility, while major works such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* maintain a dynamic, creative relationship with originary texts such as Aristotle's *Ethics*, Plato's dialogues and the then-lost comedies of Menander. Drawing on unpublished archival material, *Oscar Wilde and Ancient Greece* offers a new portrait of a writer whose work embodies both the late nineteenth-century conflict between literary and material antiquity and his own contradictory impulses towards Hellenist form and the formlessness of desire.

IAIN ROSS teaches English, Latin, Greek and Classical Civilisation at Colchester Royal Grammar School.

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For my parents

CANON CHASUBLE: Such details are perhaps better referred to in a
dead language.

MISS PRISM: I am decidedly of your opinion. That, I
conceive to be the use of Latin and Greek.

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Note on transliteration

All Greek words are given in the Roman alphabet (of the long vowels only omegas and etas are indicated, with a circumflex), except (1) when they are embedded in a quotation, in which case the method of the author quoted is preserved and (2) in transcriptions of MS material. In the second case Wilde's cavalier way with breathings, accents and iota subscripts has been preserved.

Greek names have not been Latinised, but neither have they been literally transcribed: hence 'Aischylos' rather than 'Aischulos' or 'Aeschylus', 'Thukydides' rather than 'Thoukudidês' or 'Thucydides'. (See Chapter 2 for the origins of the practice.)

Abbreviations

<i>Artist as Critic</i>	R. Ellmann (ed.), <i>The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde</i> , New York: Vintage, 1970
<i>CL</i>	M. Holland and R. Hart-Davis (eds.), <i>The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde</i> , London: Fourth Estate, 2000
<i>CW</i> , I	B. Fong and K. Beckson (eds.), <i>The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde</i> , I, <i>Poems and Poems in Prose</i> , Oxford University Press, 2000
<i>CW</i> , II	I. Small (ed.), <i>The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde</i> , II, <i>De Profundis and 'Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis'</i> , Oxford University Press, 2005
<i>CW</i> , III	J. Bristow (ed.), <i>The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde</i> , III, <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> , Oxford University Press, 2005
<i>CW</i> , IV	J. Guy (ed.), <i>The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde</i> , IV, <i>Criticism: Historical Criticism, Intentions, The Soul of Man</i> , Oxford University Press, 2007
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> – consulted online: www.oxforddnb.com
<i>Earnest</i>	O. Wilde, <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> , ed. R. Jackson, London: A. & C. Black, 1980
<i>Lady Windermere</i>	O. Wilde, <i>Lady Windermere's Fan</i> , ed. I. Small, London: A. & C. Black, 1999
<i>Miscellanies</i>	O. Wilde, <i>Miscellanies</i> , ed. R. Ross, London: Methuen, 1908
<i>Reviews</i>	O. Wilde, <i>Reviews</i> , ed. R. Ross, London: Methuen, 1908
<i>Society Comedies</i>	O. Wilde, <i>Two Society Comedies</i> , ed. I. Small and R. Jackson, London: Ernest Benn, 1983