

Beautiful Untrue Things: Forging Oscar Wilde's Extraordinary Afterlife by Gregory Mackie. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2019. xii + 287 pp. + 21 black and white illus. ISBN 978-1-4875-0290-4. \$80.

The title of Gregory Mackie's volume gives the key to its ambition, which is to invite the reader to view his ostensible subject-matter – the forgery of documents and narratives by and about Wilde in the early decades of the twentieth century – in Wildean terms. This means understanding such activities not as shabby attempts to exploit the Wilde legacy for financial gain, but as ingenious acts of creativity in their own right, undertaken, Mackie suggests, more in homage than in malice, by what he prefers to see as a series of devoted (if eccentric) fans.

Mackie's volume begins, however, with an account of the activities of what might seem a very different group of devotees: Wilde's literary executor, Robert Ross, and his bibliophile companions, Christopher Millard (who published as Stuart Mason) and the collector Walter Ledger. These men positioned themselves at the opposite pole to literary forgery insofar as they assumed the roles of guardians of Wildean authenticity, via Ross's 15-volume *First Collected Edition of the Works of Oscar Wilde* (1908-22) and Millard's companion *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde* (1914). These joint projects centred on the identification and authorization of Wilde texts – an important task, given that after his death a significant body of Wilde's writings was either out of print, had never been published in his lifetime, or (like his journalism of the 1880s) had been published anonymously. A further and related undertaking was the exposure of texts considered fraudulent. Thus, following a section devoted to "Original Editions and Authorised Reprints," Millard's *Bibliography* provided a comprehensive catalogue of what he described as "Pirated Editions." Through these activities, a remarkably enduring Wilde *oeuvre* was established, Ross's and Millard's scholarship providing the bedrock of Wilde academic studies for much of the twentieth century. It was not until the 1980s that Wilde's works were systematically exposed to modern editorial scrutiny, and it will not be until the mid-2020s that the completion of the multi-volume Oxford English Texts edition of the *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* will stake a new claim as curator of the Wilde canon.

What is the role, then, of Ross and his companions, and of authorized editions in general, in a history of fakery? Mackie persuasively argues that the Wilde forgers of the early twentieth century were enabled – encouraged into being, as it were – by the very activities that had been designed to put them out of business: in short, and in an appropriately Wildean paradox, that there was a strange co-dependency between forger and authorizer. Most obviously, Ross and Millard's attempts to make Wilde respectable – textually, at least –