

Oscar Wilde's Profession: Writing and the Culture Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century by Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. x, 314 pp. ISBN 0-19-818728-9. \$74.00.

The dominant perception of Oscar Wilde's life and career over the last quarter century appears in the two-part structure of H. Montgomery Hyde's 1976 biography: "Success" followed by "Nemesis." *Oscar Wilde's Profession*, co-authored by Josephine Guy and Ian Small, does much to undo and revise this distorted perception of one of Victorian Britain's most compelling figures. First, the authors show, through a meticulous study of publishing and production history, that Wilde's success was never as great as popularly believed. Second, the book makes a convincing argument that Wilde's career was not ended by his imprisonment for "gross indecency" in 1895, but that he continued to publish after emerging from prison and indeed that "his most popular and most profitable book" was *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), published the year after his release.

The first challenge confronting the reviewer of *Oscar Wilde's Profession* is to identify the book's genre. The authors begin by stating, "This book is an account of a writer's career, but it does not claim to give a complete explanation of Wilde's creativity, nor does it aspire to be a biography (as that term is usually understood)." Yet the book does, in fact, present a biographical argument that is specifically designed to refute the orthodoxy established by Richard Ellmann's momentous 1987 biography. Asserting that Ellmann's "unapologetic revaluation of Wilde's sexuality placed desire at the centre of both his personal and creative life," Guy and Small lament the consequence that Ellmann "overlooked many of the details often thought to be important to a writer's life." This insistence on separating the professional and personal lives of Wilde is central to both the strengths and weaknesses of Guy and Small's argument.

The book presents substantial evidence in support of its central thesis: that Oscar Wilde, far from being either a remote dandy-aesthete solely concerned with the purity of his works' form and style, or a sexual outlaw seeking to introduce oppositional meanings into his works, was a professional man of letters concerned to the point of obsession with the commercial aspects and material qualities of his work. Rather than emphasizing the eclectic nature of Wilde's career--as poet, journalist, novelist, playwright--Guy and Small stress the underlying continuity of his commercial concerns, interpreting his "apparent flitting from one genre to another" as "an attempt to explore or 'keep up' with rapidly changing market conditions." What this book demonstrates for the first time is that Wilde was preoccupied not just with the commodification of his own image or persona as "aesthete," as Regenia Gagnier argues in *Idylls*