

In an 1893 letter to Reggie Turner thanking him for the gift of a copy of *Salome*, the young Max Beerbohm parodied the influence Wilde and his writing had over him: “The book that they have bound in Parma violets and across whose page is the silver voice of the master made visible – how could it not be lovely? I am enamoured of it. It has charmed my eyes from their sockets and through the voids has sent incense to my brain.” Since that era, the heady incense of Wilde and his work has never stopped seducing new audiences. With *Studying Oscar Wilde*, Josephine Guy and Ian Small hope not only to clear the academic air of some of this scent, but also to encourage more than a few Wilde scholars to stick their critical eyes back in their sockets.

Guy and Small direct their attention to important but under-explored facets of the author’s life. In doing so, the book complements their past scholarship on the man, most notably *Oscar Wilde’s Profession* (2000), in which they focussed on the materiality of Wilde’s literary production. In this earlier work, they closely scrutinized a mass of archival materials including letters, publishing contracts, and related paraphernalia in order to demonstrate the intricate and shifting market forces and commercialism that influenced some of Wilde’s choices regarding his writing, reaffirming the main insights that scholars such as Jonathan Freedman, Regenia Gagnier, and others had established and theorized before them. This sort of focus reflects Guy and Small’s ongoing efforts to establish Wilde as an author who had no greater understanding or control of the culture industry than any other. Many scholars today would not be prepared to contest this view, but for Guy and Small, it carries notable repercussions – ones that potentially undermine the methodologies and concerns of a huge portion of Wilde scholarship from the past decade and a half, an issue taken up repeatedly in this latest book.

In *Studying Oscar Wilde*, a key concern for Guy and Small is the fact that today’s popular audience for Wilde is attracted by notably different elements than those that seem to be most important for academics. Seeking to bridge the gap, they have adopted some strategies they hope will make their study accessible to as broad a spectrum of readers as possible. They have chosen, for example, not to “provide a survey or map of past and current research on Wilde.” Of course, it is not expected that every work on Wilde would produce such a survey, although a demonstration of solid knowledge in the specific area of study is recognized as a reflection of scholarly rigour. As part of this attempt to position their work outside what they feel is an alienating academic context, when they do find themselves using what they see as less accessible language – such as the phrases “the relationship between academic specialization and social utility” or “to ‘re-try’ him, or to deconstruct Wilde the cultural icon” –