



Wilde Imaginations

Oscar Wilde as a Character in Victorian Fiction

'I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me.'

Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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University of Adelaide
August 2003

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Abstract

This thesis considers the previously neglected topic of Oscar Wilde as a character in Victorian fiction, with a view to providing new insights into Wilde's contemporary context. The consultation of a diverse range of sources—biographies, memoirs, monographs, manuscripts, journals, newspapers, bibliographies, printed reference works and electronic databases and academic forums—has led to the identification of a remarkable number of 'Wildean' fictions. Thirty-five novels and short stories by Victorian authors such as Joseph Conrad, Arthur Conan Doyle, Henry James, George Bernard Shaw and Bram Stoker, as well as many lesser-known writers, are examined and critiqued here. Works are discussed in chronological order and have been divided into three sections corresponding with distinct phases in Wilde's public life.

Most of the fictions examined—especially the lesser-known works—will be of significant historical interest to Wilde scholars; many little-known biographical and literary details and connections are revealed in the following pages. Wilde's 'fictionalisers' were often personally acquainted with him and in their fictions make observations about the controversial aesthete that they do not record elsewhere. Extensive analysis of these works, both individually and as a discrete genre, has yielded some rare and subtle insights into Wilde's place among his contemporaries; a contextual consideration that is often overlooked as a result of the modern critical practice of viewing Wilde as 'one of us'. This study is intended to demonstrate the value and aptness of biographical and new historical approaches to Wilde and constitutes a unique academic resource with many potential applications.