

Oscar Wilde's Elegant Republic

Oscar Wilde's Elegant Republic:

*Transformation, Dislocation and
Fantasy in fin-de-siècle Paris*

By

David Charles Rose

Oscar Wilde's Elegant Republic: Transformation,
Dislocation and Fantasy in fin-de-siècle Paris

By David Charles Rose

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2015 by David Charles Rose

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-8360-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8360-3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
Preface.....	ix
Chapter One.....	1
Paris Sighted	
Chapter Two	30
Paris Mutuels	
Chapter Three	47
Anglomania, Francophilia and Anglophobia	
Chapter Four.....	62
Amis & Faux Amis in a Culture of Easy Duplicity	
Chapter Five	77
Converse	
Chapter Six	98
The Theatre of Paris	
Chapter Seven.....	131
Café au Fait	
Chapter Eight.....	151
Pervading Paris	
Chapter Nine.....	190
Walking with an Air	
Chapter Ten	212
Masquerade	
Part 1: Masks and Veils	212

Part 2: The Dancer and the Dance	220
Part 3: ‘C’est “shokin”” ça?’	225
Chapter Eleven	235
The Artist as Crisis	
Part 1: Vision	235
Part 2: Supervision.....	253
Chapter Twelve	261
Paris and the Good American	
Chapter Thirteen.....	308
A Question of Gender	
Part 1: Paris is a Lady	308
Part 2: Paris Lesbos.....	329
Part 3: A Woman’s Place.....	334
Chapter Fourteen	343
Phases of the Moon	
Part 1: Gitanes.....	343
Part 2: A Severed Head.....	347
Part 3: Herodians	349
Part 4: Oscar’s Sarah.....	352
Part 5: Sarah’s Oscar.....	364
Chapter Fifteen	378
Paris as Wilderness	
Part 1: Last Acts.....	378
Part 2: Final Call.....	388
Conclusion.....	423
Notes.....	425
Bibliography	598
Index.....	644

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is customary to conclude an acknowledgments chapter with some such phrase as 'last but not least, my wife'. Here I depart from custom: I salute my wife Danielle first and foremost for her encouragement, support and dedication to my project.

The gestation of this book has been a long one, and it would not have come to term without the encouragement and advice of many friends and colleagues, too numerous and varied to list, but it is proper that I should single out Jane Desmarais, Emily Eells, Regenia Gagnier, Michael Patrick Gillespie, Merlin Holland, the late Mary C. King, W.J. Mc Cormack, John McRae, Maureen E. Mulvihill, John O'Beirne Ranelagh, Philip E. Smith II, Margaret Stetz, Florina Tufescu, Emmanuel Vernadakis and Linda Zatlin, who have kept me committed to the task in hand and to the standards desirable in a scholarly endeavour,

I would also like to thank Daniel Ridley, commissioning editor at Cambridge Scholars Publishing for his enthusiasm, and his colleagues Carol Koulikourdi, Sam Baker, Courtney Blades, Sophie Edminson, Amanda Millar and Anthony Wright for their courtesies, patience and help. The book could not have been written without access to the London Library, the National Library of Ireland and the libraries of Goldsmiths College, University of London; Trinity College, Dublin; the National College of Art and Design, Dublin; the Victoria and Albert Museum; The Royal Academy (London), and Exeter University, so thanks are also due to the librarians there.

Much of my material has also been gathered from museums and galleries, and the thoughts evoked by the paintings, prints and sculptures were greatly stimulated by the conversation of companions, notably the late Benjamin Arnold, Holly Barton, Patrick Bridgewater, Richard Butt, Tine Englebert, Glynne Evans, Valerie Fehlbaum, Amanda Finlay, Margaret de Fonblanque, Brian Lalor, Mathilde Mazau, the late Julian Robinson, Franca Baumann Rodriguez, Eva Thienpont, Tanya Touwen. I must also acknowledge my indebtedness to my colleagues of the Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art.

The book is dedicated to the memory of my parents and to that of Cornelia Touwen-Kroesbergen and Yvette Guérin.

PREFACE

'I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly tell me who I am?'
– *The Importance of being Earnest.*

'I am much indebted to you, sir. Perhaps you will add to your favours by
letting me know where I am.'
– Arthur Conan Doyle: *Uncle Bernac.*

'**BETWEEN** me and life there is a mist of words always.' So wrote Oscar Wilde to Arthur Conan Doyle,¹ and penetrating some of that mist is the present endeavour. What lay behind the mist, behind the words? Is it possible to reach an essential Oscar? Representations of the personality of Wilde, of the existential Wilde, are now innumerable. Much emphasis has been given to it in anecdotal biographies, stage and film representations, and collections of epigrams and aphorisms. Frank Harris, in an unusually sensitive passage, gave the humanist view: 'The hate of his judges was so diabolic that they have given him to the pity of mankind forever; they it is who have made him eternally interesting to humanity, a tragic figure of imperishable renown'.² Perhaps the best insight we have is that of Max Beerbohm when he wrote that 'Wilde's personality was in great measure a conscious and elaborate piece of work, and outshone other personalities by reason of the finer skill that had gone into the making of it';³ and something of this is suggested by Masao Miyoshi's study of the divided self – 'Of all the writers of the nineties, it is surely in Wilde that the art of the self is at its most deliberate, its most artificial'.⁴ The note of artifice is one that fosters an interplay between the real and the constructed, between fact and fiction, where all boundaries blur.

'I treated Art as the supreme Reality and life as a mere mode of fiction.' This famous avowal was written by Oscar Wilde in *De Profundis*. But if Art is real, life in the conjunction is ideal. This philosophical point, tension between the real and the ideal, so frequently obscured by the vernacular meanings of real and ideal, is returned to again and again in Wilde, and one must accord it a central place in finding his self. When he put (in his own estimation) his talent into his work but his genius into his life, was he putting his genius into a mere mode of fiction, himself after all holding optimistically the Prismatic view that the meaning of fiction is that the

good end happily, and the bad unhappily? Or was his really the alternative meaning, that this occurs only in fiction? Although Art was the supreme reality, Wilde had no taste at all for realism in art: 'Yesterday it was Realism that charmed one. One gained from it that *nouveau frisson* which was its aim to produce. One analysed it, and wearied of it,' says Gilbert in *The Critic as Artist*.⁵ The gothic or paranormal elements of *Dorian Gray* change it from what might have been a naturalistic novel in the manner, say, of Moore or Gissing.⁶ For many Victorians, Wilde's specialised dislike of realism was itself perverse, for the conventional attack made upon it was one that explicitly or implicitly defended romanticism – 'the *nec plus ultra* of all art' said Rider Haggard⁷ – and Wilde's romanticism was far more perfumed than his realism: or rather, he used what the Victorians found unpleasant in realism and either impregnated romantic situations with it or else undermined it in new and disturbing ways. In the early plays, and in *Salome*, realism is subordinate to language, and in the comedies, epigrammatic inversion forces realism into retreat until in *The Importance of Being Earnest* it is vanquished altogether. Praising Dostoevsky, Wilde wrote 'we feel, not that fiction has been trammelled by fact, but that fact itself has become ideal and imaginative'.⁸

It is this alchemy that Wilde tried to achieve in his life, through all his various phases, as he believed John Keats to have achieved it in his.⁹ Understanding of this quest was for long restricted either by insufficient knowledge of the period, from the props of which Wilde constructed his personæ, or by the undeveloped critical methods of days gone by: these drawbacks have not always been overcome even now. How undeveloped may be judged from the critical agenda set by Robert Ross when he first regretted that there had been an inability to 'separate the man and the artist' and then praised the reception given to *De Profundis* in 1905: 'English critics have shown themselves ready to estimate the writer, whether favourably or unfavourably, without emphasising their *natural* prejudice against his later career.'¹⁰ George Orwell commented that 'Wilde is a difficult writer to judge, because it is very hard to disentangle his artistic achievement from the events of his life'.¹¹ This is to miss the point: such statements fly in the face of the Wildean project of career as the outward expression of inner life – a project in which one critic has seen 'not only a resemblance but a clear analogy between the Sufi idea of the art of the personality and Wilde's'.¹² This is worth emphasising, for it forms the core of much Wildean criticism. For example, in his essay on Yeats, Sir Maurice Bowra wrote that 'Even in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, Wilde failed to free himself of his literary associations and mixed the real poetry of a grim experience with the false verbiage of his earlier

work'.¹³ I suggest that this should be expressed 'Even in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, Wilde was able to suffuse the real poetry of a grim experience with the highly stylised language of his earlier work'.

In reaching an understanding of the personality of Oscar Wilde, it therefore becomes desirable to distinguish personality as a term from its associative cognates: the personality of Wilde from Wilde as 'a personality', Wilde's persona (or personæ) from his self. This is a *social* approach, one I find more rewarding than those other dictates of personality exploration, the psychological one of interaction between the conscious and unconscious, the post-structuralist one of self and sexuality.¹⁴ Wilde himself licenses this, when through his mouthpiece Lord Henry Wotton he suggests that it is more rewarding to be oneself than to know oneself. The distinctions can be made thus: Wilde as a personality is the Wilde constructed by others;¹⁵ the personality of Wilde is the Wilde constructed by himself for the consumption of others; the persona of Wilde is what those others received or thought they received; the self of Wilde was the integration of the man and his art that made the rest possible. 'The egoistic note is, of course, and always has been to me, the primal and ultimate note of modern art,' wrote Wilde, adding in what was clearly self-approval 'but to be an Egoist one must have an Ego'.¹⁶ Looming over all was his admission that he operated within a social framework: 'Having lost position, I find my personality of no avail.'¹⁷

The anecdotal approach to Wilde has been superseded by what one may broadly characterise as the sociological approach, the attempts at construction of Wilde's sexual identity or identities, and the decodification of male homosexual representation.¹⁸ Michéal Mac Liammoir, who saw deeply into Wilde and took on much of a Wildean manner, regarded him as a many-layered entity: 'at once artist and fop, jester and sage, philosopher and foolhardy adventurer [...] a magician, a dreamer, a poet. Above all he was a born teller of tales'.¹⁹ André Maurois (married to the daughter of Gaston Arman de Caillavet) took this a little further: for him Wilde 'a été un grand poète au sens le plus complet du mot, c'est-à-dire un créateur de mythes',²⁰ one of which was, obviously, himself. There is something of Odysseus here: 'Oscar, the wily man' Robert Graves called him in recognition of this, and Oscar indeed had his period as No Man – 'We no longer talk of Mr Oscar Wilde,' said Mahaffy.

Oscar Wilde himself understood that he was a self-made man, indeed, as a whole succession of self-made men, a series of constructions (or as we now say for some reason, constructs). But to be a construct is also to be an

artifice, as noted by Margot Asquith, no mean artifice herself – ‘I have no face, only two profiles,’ she once said.²¹ ‘There was *no* Oscar Wilde,’ she decided. ‘He was not a human being [...] because his best life lay in his mind, and his mind was non-conducting clay in which more artificial than real roses flourished’.²² Richard Ellmann has called such construction ‘the process by which Oscar Wilde became Oscar Wilde’.²³ It is a process that still continues, and the present work is itself a part of that process, both survey and analysis, a recovery of props from which, as I have said, Wilde constructed himself. As such, it is intended as the first of a trilogy; the other volumes having as provisional titles *City of Light*, *City of Darkness: Cultures of Paris in the Age of Oscar Wilde* and *Paris as a Work of Fiction*.

Nevertheless, to paraphrase a well-known phrase of Karl Marx, if men make history but are not completely free as to the way they make it, so Wilde was not completely autonomous in the way that he made himself. Three of the props from which Wilde was formed were the cities of Dublin, London and Paris, where Wilde, the archetypal man of urbanity, negotiated different identities for himself. For Richard Ellmann, Wilde could be defined, with Yeats, Joyce and Beckett, as one of his ‘four Dubliners’.²⁴ Of London, more pertinently, Wolf von Eckardt and his colleagues have written that it was ‘the city that made Oscar Wilde Oscar Wilde’.²⁵

Be that as it may, my concern is Paris, the City of Light, but also of the crepuscular and the nocturnal, of conflict between the artist and the system that sustained him, the unique city for the working out of all these themes. Realism, as it had evolved in France, was a reaction against romanticism, a change from seeking liberty in art to seeking sincerity. The route to this was through documentation, which is why Marx admired Balzac. By 1870, the school of Realism had given ground to Naturalism, with its pessimistic depiction of society as invariably squalid and vicious, Flaubert succeeded by Zola. This was the catalyst by which Æstheticism turned into Decadence instead of developing as a Morrisian arts and crafts movement. Can one imagine William Morris having a live tortoise set with jewels? Arts and crafts in England retained much that had been present in Romanticism; in France the reaction against Naturalism took various forms, Symbolism, Naturism, fantaisism. The Decadent hero is the Romantic hero gone wrong, and Wilde was inevitably the moth – the Melmoth if one proceeds by way of free association or semantic happenstance – drawn to the lights of Paris.

To understand Wilde's place in Paris, and that of Paris in Wilde, calls, not for an annalistic approach that simply records meetings and conversations and quotations, but for an analytical understanding of how Paris functioned. This is not always easy to determine after a century and more has passed: names, dates, places are confused, historians contradict one another. Much is inevitably left speculative, fruit (one may hope) for future plucking, for even in 1896, Thomas March in his attempt to give a day-by-day history of the Commune of 1871, wrote 'of the very many instances I have met with in the course of this work, where even a simple question of fact appears to be beyond the range of absolute denial or affirmation.'²⁶ One seeks to be authoritative, not definitive, for, inevitably, in the fulfilling of an agenda, a new agenda is adumbrated; and in seeking to correct what W.J. Mc Cormack has defined as the 'transmission of ignorance',²⁷ there remains the possibility of the creation of new errors. My task, therefore, has been more to explore ambiguities than to establish orthodoxies, or even orthographies.

Jacques Barzun has written

The process of historical verification is conducted on many planes, and its technique is not fixed. It relies on attention to detail, on common sense, reasoning, on a developed feel for history and chronology, and familiarity with human behaviour, and with ever enlarging stores of information.

This, therefore, is a work of recuperation approached prosopographically, and I have adopted as method 'thickened narrative', where analysis, interrogation of sources and critical commentary are integrated with recovered histories; and broader interpretative flights (the 'over-view') and minute attention to detail alternate and are complementary; the theory growing out of the history, rather than the history deconstructed to support or conform to the theory. Methodologically, this oscillation also allows a certain identification between the telling and the tale. In the course of this, many existing narratives are challenged or corrected. This reading of these recovered histories, their integration, and the revisionism implicit, indicate that mine is chiefly an empirical enquiry, but one that recognises that that empiricism is not enough: one cannot ignore the dilemmas of historicism. The recovered histories, together with the *hypothèse* of the dominance and ubiquitousness of transformation and fantasy as the ruling spirit of time and place, move the work beyond an anthology of anecdote, and form what I offer as an original contribution to the scholarship of the Wilde period.

In some small way, this work must also be informed by the question posed over forty years ago by Theodore Zeldin, namely that of the significance of the special, the peculiar place in French self-consciousness of the intellectual, and of the life intellectual,²⁸ as my citations from Wilde (above) compel. It may also answer to Isobel Armstrong's call for a 'biography of networks', rather than of individuals: here certainly, will be found networks of fellowship and friendship, if not of kinship, the intellectual interdependences of Armstrong's phrase, the 'filiations de l'esprit [s'associées] l'histoire simple de la socialité et des réseaux de rencontre' of Marylène Delphis-Delbourg.²⁹ Although Armstrong's further distinction between networks and coteries is not always easy to sustain, it is an approach that sits more readily within the traditions of French historiography than in England. While avoiding determinism, I have also tried to provide some ideas of *mentalité*, of that dynamic which Hippolyte Taine called 'le moment', in context a happier usage than *zeitgeist*. This should demonstrate that when pursuing Wilde among the Parisians we enter a world different from that which has hitherto been composed by his biographers, a world in some ways larger and in others smaller, more tightly-knit, more complex, more tapestried, an intricate skein of propinquities, associations, affinities and referents.

Cette ville est une source infinie de représentations, une forêt de signes, un intense réseau de correspondances [...] Correspondances entre le Paris réel et le Paris représenté, Paris matériel et Paris comme Idée [...] Paris de l'ombre et Paris de la lumière, Paris du jour et Paris de la nuit, Paris de l'opulence et Paris de la misère [...] Paris masculin et Paris féminin, Paris des vivants et Paris des morts.³⁰

What follows, therefore, is an attempt, largely through contemporary sources, to reconstruct the Parisian social and cultural milieu in which Wilde was explorer, participant, hero, and ultimately victim, and to chart his wanderings there.

Notes

¹ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: *Memories and Adventures*. London: Hodder & Stoughton n.d. [1924] p.80.

² Frank Harris: *Oscar Wilde*. New edition, London: Robinson Publishing 1992 p.322. Hereafter cited as Harris.

³ Max Beerbohm: *Mainly on the Air*. London: Heinemann. New enlarged edition 1957 p.75.

⁴ Masao Miyoshi: *The Divided Self, A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians*. New York: New York University Press 1969 p.290. This particular sentence comes in Part III: 'The Art of the Self' Chapter VI: 'Masks in the Mirror', in which §.3 is an extended discussion of Wilde. This has not yet found its way into any Wilde bibliography, as far as I have discovered.

⁵ This was perceptive enough, even if it was the day after the fair. The schools of Naturalism and Realism were reaching exhaustion by the end of the 1880s, giving place to the Symbolism and Æstheticism of the 'yellow nineties'.

⁶ *New Grub Street* appeared in the same month as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, April 1891. Gissing only read Dorian Gray in the summer of 1893. Pierre Coustillos (ed.): *London & the Life of Literature in late Victorian England, The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*. Hassocks: The Harvester Press 1978. Diary entry for Sunday 23rd July 1893.

⁷ Peter Berresford Ellis: *H. Rider Haggard, A Voice from the Infinite*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1978 p.122.

⁸ Reviewing *Insult and Injury* in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2nd May 1887, reprinted in John Wyse Jackson (ed.): *Aristotle at Afternoon Tea: the Rare Oscar Wilde*. London: Fourth Estate 1991 p.90 (hereafter cited as Wyse Jackson).

⁹ Reviewing William Rossetti's *Life of John Keats in the Pall Mall Gazette* (27th September 1887), Wilde wrote 'Mr Rossetti commits the great mistake of separating the man from the artist.' Wyse Jackson p.101.

¹⁰ Robert Ross to Max Meyerfeld, Prefatory Dedication to *De Profundis*. London: Methuen 1908 (thirteenth impression) pp.x, xii. My italics.

¹¹ George Orwell: 'Lady Windermere's Fan, A Commentary'. W.J. West (ed.): *Orwell, The War Broadcasts*. London: Duckworth / BBC 1985 p.168.

¹² Frantisek Deak: *Symbolist Theater, The Formation of an Avant-garde*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1993 p.260. Hereafter cited as Deak. Wilde gave a copy of Hafiz 'the divinity of poets' to Bosie. Oscar Wilde to Lord Alfred Douglas 5th/6th November 1894. Rupert Hart-Davis (ed.): *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*. London: Hart-Davis 1962 p.377, hereafter cited as Hart-Davis 1962; Merlin Holland & Rupert Hart-Davis: *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*. London: Fourth Estate 2000 p.621, hereafter cited as Holland & Hart-Davis.

¹³ C.M. Bowra: *The Heritage of Symbolism*. London: Macmillan 1963 p.182. Hereafter cited as Bowra.

¹⁴ The psychological approach adopted by Melissa Knox can hardly be superseded, or even, given the controversy that it roused, emulated. Melissa Knox: *Oscar Wilde, A Long and Lovely Suicide*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press

1994; hereafter cited as Knox. There is much in Knox of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, and much circular argument, but she also has flashes of insight that illuminate. Her remark (p.98), part of a larger discussion concerning Jack-Ernest-Algy-Oscar that ‘identity is unstable: easily assumed, carelessly discarded’, is one that particularly appeals to me.

¹⁵ Wilde himself was not always content with this, writing to George Curzon that he *feared* that Edward Stanhope to whom he was applying for a post, shared the public perception of what Wilde was like. My italics. Holland & Hart-Davis p.264.

¹⁶ Oscar Wilde to Lord Alfred Douglas, perhaps 2nd June 1897. Hart-Davis 1962 p.590; Holland & Hart-Davis p.874. Wilde liked this conceit, saying of Gide that he was an Egoist without an Ego. Curiously, the point had been made earlier by Gide’s cousin Albert Démarest, who ‘did not quite see what interest I had in life beyond myself; that that was the mark of an egoist, and he had a strong suspicion that that was what I was’. André Gide: *Si le grain ne meurt*. Translated by Dorothy Bussy as *If It Die...An Autobiography*. 1935. New York: Vintage Books 2001 p.67. We need further analysis of how the terms were understood at the time. Meredith’s *The Egoist* was published in 1879.

¹⁷ I have not found the origin of this, and quote from John Sparrow: ‘Oscar Wilde after fifty years’ in *Independent Essays*. London: Faber & Faber 1963 p.123.

¹⁸ This has travelled a long way from the naïf remark of Joyce Bentley on Robbie Ross when first meeting Wilde: ‘He was also homosexual. As yet, Oscar was not’. Joyce Bentley: *The Importance of being Constance*. London: Robert Hale 1983 p.173. Hereafter cited as Bentley 1883.

¹⁹ Michéal Mac Liammoir: ‘An Introduction to the Author’ in *The Happy Prince and Other Stories*. Harmondsworth: Puffin Books 1962 p.7. My italics. Wilde was Mac Liammoir’s ‘hero [...] Lunching with Mac Liammoir gives one an idea of what Oscar Wilde must have been like’. Ulick O’Connor: *The Ulick O’Connor Diaries 1970-1981*. London: John Murray, new edition 2003 pp.21-2. Hereafter cited as O’Connor.

²⁰ André Maurois: ‘De Ruskin à Wilde’, in *Études anglaises*. Paris: Bernard Grasset 1927.

²¹ Quoted with the photograph of Margot Asquith at the Cecil Beaton Exhibition, National Portrait Gallery, spring 2004.

²² Margot Oxford [Asquith]: *More Memories*. London: Cassell & Co 1933 p.120. Hereafter cited as M.Oxford.

²³ Richard Ellmann: *Four Dubliners*. London: Hamish Hamilton 1987; New York: George Braziller 1988 p.1. See also Vyvyan Holland: Introduction to *The Portrait of Mr W.H.* London: Methuen 1958 p.xiv.

²⁴ Richard Ellmann: *Four Dubliners*. Yet, paradoxically, the chapter on Wilde is ‘Oscar Wilde at Oxford’, and one may think that the common characteristic of the four was the amount of their lives spent away from Dublin.

²⁵ Wolf von Eckardt, Sander L. Gilman & J. Edward Chamberlin: *Oscar Wilde’s London: A Scrapbook of Vices & Virtues 1880-1900*. New York Anchor Press / Doubleday 1987 p.ix. Despite the eminence of the three authors, this is a very

superficial survey of London life, highly dependent on lavish illustrations for effect, and written in a journalistic style that soon palls. The impact of Wilde upon what Dixon Scott called the 'peculiarly priggish and self-assertive world of the intellectual London of the eighties' is too well explored to recall here, save for the purpose of pointing up the counter-attraction of Paris. Dixon Scott: 'The Innocence of Bernard Shaw'. *The Bookman* 1913, reprinted in Dixon Scott: *Men of Letters*. London: Hodder & Stoughton 1916 p.2, Hereafter cited as Scott. This essay (pp.1-47) also reminds one of the very different accommodation made by Shaw from the one made by Wilde in the attempt of each Dubliner to find his way.

²⁶ Thomas March: *The History of the Paris Commune of 1871*. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co 1896 p.143n. Hereafter cited as March.

²⁷ W.J. Mc Cormack: *Yeats's Politics since 1943, Approaches and Reproaches*. *The Yearbook of English Studies* volume 35 2005 p.138. My thanks to Professor Mc Cormack for sending me an off-print of this.

²⁸ Theodore Zeldin: *France 1848-1945* volume I: Ambition, Love and Politics. Oxford: The Clarendon Press 1973 pp.1-3.

²⁹ Isobel Armstrong: Unpublished lecture at the University of Exeter, 29th November 2004; Marylène Delbourg-Delphis: *Masculin Singulier, le dandysme et son histoire*. Paris: Hachette 1985 p.71. Hereafter cited as Delbourg-Delphis.

³⁰ Jean-Pierre Arthur Bernard: *Le gout de Paris*. Paris : Mercure de France 2004 p.11.

CHAPTER ONE

PARIS SIGHTED

‘Was it really possible that only this morning, those quiet English fields had been dozing round one, those sleepy villagers spreading their slow words out, in expressing an absence of idea, over the space of time in which a Parisian conveyed a pocket philosophy?’
– Mona Caird.¹

‘In London, twenty or thirty years ago are old times; in Paris, ten years or five.’
– Thomas Hardy.²

‘One’s time is occupied differently in Paris ... Time is differently disposed of there.’
– The Duke of Marlborough, giving evidence in *Campbell v. Campbell* 1886.³

‘It has come to me to think that Paris and May are one.’
– George Moore.⁴

THIS is a tale of two cities, and both of them are Paris. It is also the tale of two men, and both of them are Oscar Wilde. Or, rather, one of them is Oscar Wilde, and the other is his shadowy alter ego, Sebastian Melmoth. Each of these, city and man, operated on a physical and a metaphysical level. These are not opposites, or if they are, they are not polar opposites, forever fixed, forever divided, but binary opposites, in orbit about each other, constantly presenting different and reflecting facets to each other. Their interaction and their intersecting with other layers and levels of fact and fantasy, is an exploration to be undertaken both on foot and in the mind: wandering and wondering. First, there is the Paris of survey maps, its twenty arrondissements contained within what remained of twenty-five miles of enclosing walls – ‘les fortifs’, dating from the reign of Louis Philippe with their fifteen forts and six detached redoubts – or bounded by the periphery boulevards that replaced the sixteen miles of the old octroi wall, and by the railway known as the ‘petite ceinture’.⁵ Here the Parisians (774,000 of them in 1831; 1,053,000 in 1846; 1,825,000 in 1866;

2,500,000 in 1890⁶) lived in close proximity, walking, dining, drinking, quarrelling, entertaining themselves and even each other. Beyond lay Arcadia: ‘Now we are really in the country,’ exclaims Maupassant’s M. Dufour when his day-tripping family reach Neuilly from their *quincaillerie* in Montmartre.⁷ ‘The air of the country, it is exquisite, sublime,’ exclaims J.F. MacDonald’s M. Durand, who with great *empressement* has moved his family for August to Marie-le-Bois, even by slow train only thirty-five minutes from the Gare St Lazare.⁸ Similarly, Maupassant’s Chavelin and Lesable move to Bezons: ‘the mere word “Country” seemed to have a mystical significance’.⁹

The physical Paris was intersected by the ‘grands boulevards’¹⁰ of Baron Haussmann¹¹ and his successors, while the rebuilding of the quays to give a river frontage integrated the Seine with the city, the twenty-nine bridges promoting the flow and reflow of traffic and pedestrians. The city was opening up to light and air, or ‘to light, air and infantry’, Philip Guedalla’s identification of the interplay of strategies of control.¹² This effect at least of light and air was also achieved by the increase of parks and gardens under the direction of Adolphe Alphand.¹³ The parc Montsouris, the second largest in Paris, was laid out by him between 1865 and 1878, an alteration from Paris formalism to the English style; his park of the Butte Chaumont was a deliberate piece of social engineering, an alteration from slum to parkland, just as in 1877 the Butte des Moulins was removed to make way for the extension of the avenue de l’Opéra.¹⁴ The ‘wildernesses’ of the Bois de Vincennes and the Bois de Boulogne were similarly tamed in this period, ‘transformed into ornamental parks’.¹⁵

These were not the first such endeavours at altering the relationship between the real and the ideal. A century earlier, the father of King Louis Philippe, that duke of Orléans known as ‘Philippe Égalité’ until he lost his head, had employed the landscapist Carmontelle to lay out the parc Monceau in the English fashion, saying ‘I want a land of illusions. Only illusions can amuse one.’ Edgar Allan Poe in ‘The Mystery of Marie Rogêt’ (1842) transposed New York into a Paris that was neither the same size nor the same shape as the French capital, and a century later André de Fouquières compared Paris to ‘une carte de muette’, a map where no feature is given a name, presumably not even to La Murette.¹⁶ Thomas Hardy noted a slippage in chronological time between London and Paris as a literary conceit, but here one recalls that France did not adopt Greenwich Mean Time (plus an hour) until 1911, and on French maps the prime meridian ran through Paris not Greenwich, despite the latter having been established for international use by the Washington Conference in October

1884.¹⁷ Wilde made an aphoristic link between time and space, between the perceived and the imagined, when he said ‘In Paris one can lose one’s time most delightfully; but one can never lose one’s way.’¹⁸ The symbolic attack on the Greenwich Observatory in February 1894, so discussed in the literature on Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*, takes on a particular significance in this context, for the would-be destroyer of the Observatory, Martial Bourdin, was from Paris. In the present work, therefore, spatial/temporal relationships are mutable and the Paris of geography cohabits with Paris imagined, a metaParis, where illusions, echoes, reflections and bizarre coincidences predominate, and where time’s slippage could also be time’s fusion, as noted by Dumas when, writing of courtesans, he remarks ‘news of their death, when they die young, reaches all their lovers at the same instant’.¹⁹ Carolyn Steedman has made of this a cultural conceit: ‘A new kind of time came into being in the ’nineties, a form of time that was born both of recastings and rewritings of the historical past, and also of a long nineteenth century development, of an interior space or place within human beings’.²⁰ This internal / external nexus combined with a loosening definition of time embraces an important approach to the period.

‘Subjected to the rigid classification of place name and geography,’ Arthur Trottenberg has perceptively remarked, ‘the rich sensory world shrivels in meaning’.²¹ That is why Paris tangible and Paris intangible are themes that run through this work: the Paris of Haussmann and the Paris of Huysmans. Even the term ‘belle époque’ is one set loose from time. Edmund Wilson saw a thematic unity that lasted from 1870 to 1930; Charles Rearick dates the beginning of the belle époque to the 14th July 1880; but Raymond Rudorff shifts it forward ten years and Dominique Lejeune a further six.²² Serge Pacaud precisely dates it from the 1st May 1889 to the outbreak of war in 1914.²³ Jean-Jacques Leveque is not quite as precise, preferring 1890-1914; Michel Winock suggests 1900-1914.²⁴ Jean-Paul Crespelle prefers the term ‘grande époque’ but also applies it to what we would call the Edwardian age.²⁵ Malcolm Bradbury sites it in ‘the Third Empire, in these changeable years at the close of the nineteenth century and start of the twentieth’.²⁶ The Third *Empire*? Whether historical inaccuracy or social critique, this revealing phrase fully encapsulates the idea of the mutability of time and place. For these were changeable years indeed: although the celebration of the centenary of the French Revolution brought about no return to the revolutionary calendar, the introduction of the twenty-four hour clock for railway trains (the *Notation Nouvelle*) proved just as confusing, especially when it was expressed in such terms as half-past fifteen or a quarter to twenty.²⁷

Within this scheme of signification, the identification of places become elusive. Renoir's 'Place Clichy' of 1880 may in fact be the place Pigalle.²⁸ In 1904 Clive Bell stayed in a pension 'in a street which I can no longer find, though it is said to exist.'²⁹ Carl van Vechten once went to the Bal Musette, perhaps in the rue Jessaint, although he could never find it again,³⁰ possibly because 'bal musette' was a type of fairly low dance hall, or a bar with a dance floor, rather than the name of any particular one.³¹ 'There is not much stability in such French names, I fancy,' wrote George du Maurier,³² whose own were George Louis Palmella Busson du Maurier – of which du Maurier had been assumed slightly fraudulently by his grandfather. This aspect of Paris as limbo spills over into fiction: in Zola's *Le Rêve*, Hubert searches for Madame Foucart at the end of the rue des Deux-Ecus, and finds no such name in the directory, and that the end of the rue des Deux-Ecus has been pulled down.³³ Du Maurier himself caught this note: 'He and I would explore the so changed Bois de Boulogne for the little "Mare aux Biches" [...] but we never managed to find it: perhaps it had evaporated'.³⁴

As for Paris as heaven: it was certainly that for many at many times and Robert Louis Stevenson was not alone in drawing attention to the wordplay made possible by Paris making up so much of Paradise.³⁵ In 1887 the ruins of the Théâtre Latin, destroyed in 1870, were rebuilt by Gustave Eiffel as the Paradis Latin³⁶ for the forthcoming Exposition Universelle; the shop 'Le Paradis des Dames' anticipated the 'Bonheur des Dames' (1883) of Zola's novel, and was there not a toyshop called Le Paradis des Enfants?³⁷ 'As I stood within the shadow of the Louvre I was murmuring that Paris was another name for Paradise,' wrote the Dubliner Chris Healy, who moved to the 'city of my dreams' in July 1896.³⁸ One cannot, however, neglect the notion of this Paradise as an artificial one, its Elysian fields a commodified space, nor can one exclude Paris as hell: Verlaine once 'spoke as if Hell is a city much like Paris'.³⁹ On the boulevard de Clichy the cabarets Ciel and Enfer were side by side, Zola anticipates Marcel Proust in his identification of Paris-Sodom and Paris-Gomorrah, the avenue Denfert-Rochereau was once the rue d'Enfer, and the gates intended for the new museum of decorative arts were Rodin's Gates of Hell.⁴⁰ It was always a place in which to spend a season.



Victor Hugo expressed the sense of liberation from rigid classification of geography in his *Appeal to the Germans* of 1870 as, fortunately, not many could:

Burn our buildings, they are only our bones; their smoke will take shape, become huge and alive, and rise up into the sky; and there will be seen for ever on the horizon of the nations, above us, above you, above all things, above all people, asserting our glory, asserting your shame, this great phantom composed of darkness and light: Paris!⁴¹

James Laver in his study of Huysmans made this distinction: ‘There is a poetry of cities which has nothing to do with the things that receive three stars in the guide books: a personality behind the public personality [...] Paris reveals its secret only to pedestrians, with time on their hands. Huysmans was an indefatigable pedestrian [...]’⁴² Exploration of the French capital as poetry is a satisfying pastime in metaParis.

It is little wonder that for Émile Zola, ‘all-devouring’⁴³ Paris became its own personification, taking on ‘an other-worldly aura of impenetrable mystery [in] shifting, manifold aspects’.⁴⁴ The Paris of the imagination thus defines itself both in the imagination of the Parisians and of those who found in Paris the site of their dreams and fantasies; where, repelled, the observer was fascinated by his repulsion; where, fascinated, the observer was repelled by his fascination; where the acts of creation and recreation became acts of re-creation, or of desecration. Thus Arthur Symons was drawn again and again to ‘that city of perdition which is Paris’,⁴⁵ where, as the American painter Will Low noted among his associates, ‘project and purpose outweighed action and accomplishment’.⁴⁶ These layers of Paris combine in Eugen Weber’s later careful phrase ‘In the enchantment of the Third Republic, words were equated with acts’ and in E.V. Lucas’s contemporary apostrophe ‘A little apartment overlooking the parc Monceau – there is *tangible heaven*, if you like!’⁴⁷ Into this Wilde, as representative of ‘a nation of brilliant failures’ who ‘are the greatest talkers since the Greeks’ (his own phrases) could slip observed; although the French taste for intellectual speculation differs from the Irish taste for heaping upon one another conversational flights of fancy.

Paris is an intellectual Brighton. There the wind blows through your thoughts as at Brighton it blows through your clothes.

There you may talk at random. Think aloud, and amid the *sans-gêne* of the French mind, have the glorious sensation of the open sea and the mountain top, of a broad unending landscape in which facts fade into a horizon of mystery and conjecture roams amid a freedom that knows no bourn.⁴⁸

Paris in these readings becomes a place ungrounded, more ungrounded indeed than any of the balloons in which the photographer Nadar ascended to photograph his panoramas of the city. Paris as a phantom haunts the

imagination. In his own photographic evocation of the city, Arthur Trottenberg takes images, phantoms composed of light and darkness, by the street photographer Eugène Atget and illustrates them with phrases taken from Marcel Proust: ‘Hence the Paris considered here is not carefully defined in terms of its metropolitan borders. It is rather a fusion of time and place that must sometimes touch on areas important enough to be included in the Proustian dimension of Paris’.⁴⁹ Yet the Proustian dimension was but one of many, interlaced, layered, like a game of three-dimensional chess, superimposed upon the Proust quadrilateral, from the parc Monceau to the place de la Concorde, to Auteuil, to the Bois de Boulogne. Baudelaire had noted that for the stroller, ‘the street becomes a dwelling [...] news-stands [the] libraries and the terraces of his cafés are the balconies from which he looks down’, and the lingering presence of Baudelaire is central to an understanding of *fin-de-siècle* Paris.

Because Baudelaire died in 1867 he is in these pages very largely *l’auteur absent*, but the appreciation of him by Leon Chai explores with telling economy what my own work expands upon, and forms a benchmark in the remeasuring of Wilde:⁵⁰

I attempt to show how all the elements of a nascent æstheticism can be found in the work of Baudelaire. Here consciousness dissolves the external world into impressionistic motifs, producing an initial chaos. Beneath the chaos, however, a formative impulse progressively manifests itself in the arrangement of the motifs. Impression passes over into emotion, which in turn is embodied in symbolism.⁵¹

It is, however, necessary to factor in as a complement to this an awareness of the physicality of Paris, the sound of the *frou-frou* as well as the sight of the *chiffonnier*, the smell of the asphalt as well as the taste of the madeleine.



Round the boulevards paced the Parisians, mapping their city, bringing actors and diplomats, poets and scientists, princes and librarians, artists and jockeys, courtesans and duchesses into conjunctions where influences can be suggested, affinities discerned, proximities charted. When, for example, Maupassant in *Bel-Ami* calls his newspaper proprietor M. Walter,⁵² or Gide published his *Cahiers d’André Walter*, they must have done so in the knowledge that Judith Gautier wrote under the name Judith Walter; and when Zola in *Germinal* named one of the pit-horses ‘Trompette’, he would have been doing it knowing (as a sufficiency of his

readers would have known) that ‘La Trompette’ was the ensemble for which Saint-Saëns had written his 1880 Septet in E Flat. Such coinciding knits together the metaphysical as much as the boulevards knitted the physical Paris, although one must be careful about overstressing this: for example, Gide first met Proust in 1891, but the two men did not meet again until 1916. This, however, also forms part of metaParis, the visible shadow of the person invisible round the corner.

Théodore Duret⁵³ is quoted as saying that in Édouard Manet the sentiments and customs of Parisians were personified.⁵⁴ Assuming that ‘customs’ is a translation of the rather more resonant ‘mœurs’, this (apart from giving a centrality to Manet) licences an interplay of place, time, persons, names, shapes, mentality. The proverb ‘Il n’y a qu’un Paris’ will answer less and less satisfactorily. Paris is established not so much as a state of being as a state of seeming, and John Augustus O’Shea, looking back on 1889 only from 1892, understood Paris not to have, but to be, its own spirit of place: ‘It was mine to pass that summer in Paris, and to me now it is as a dream. Very hot and very crowded the gay city was; as wicked, delightful, luxurious and expensive as during the zenith of the Second Empire’.⁵⁵ For Félicien Rops, ‘Paris vous agriffe par mille côtés et l’on ne sait jamais quitter cette ville diablée’.⁵⁶ Sisley Huddleston, Paris correspondent of *The Times*, thought that ‘Paris, better than them all, bewitches those who have once fallen under its spell – and what visitor or resident does not succumb to that spell?’⁵⁷ The Paris to which Oscar Wilde came, first as explorer, then as would-be conqueror, and finally as exile, was one where the existing cultural forms, whether in theatre, literature, music or the visual arts were challenged by the new movements that bubbled up through the crust, became harbingers of the modern movement.⁵⁸ Modernism, modernity, though nourished by a ferment of German, Austrian, Belgian, Scandinavian, Italian and American origins, could not have assumed the form it did without the influence of Paris. The French themselves, like Maupassant’s provincial Maître Saval in ‘A Night Out’, or the anonymous heroine of ‘Une aventure parisienne’ were perfectly alive to this:

As soon as he set foot in the rue d’Amsterdam, he felt blissfully happy [...] ‘The air of Paris is quite different from any other. There’s something about it which thrills and excites and intoxicates you, and in some strange way makes you want to dance and do all sorts of other silly things. As soon as I get out of the train, it’s just as if I had drunk a bottle of champagne. What a time one could have here, surrounded by artists! How happy those lucky people must be, the great men who have made a name in a city like Paris! What a wonderful life they have!’ And he indulged in dreams.⁵⁹

She thought constantly about Paris and avidly read all the society pages in the papers [...] She was fascinated by what these reports merely hinted at. The cleverly phrased allusions half-lifted a veil beyond which could be glimpsed devastatingly attractive horizons promising a whole new world of wicked pleasure.⁶⁰

Here Saval materialises both aspects of Paris: it is the rue *d'Amsterdam*, a name which suggests not France but a different country altogether; and, on levels as much symbolic as geographical and cultural, it leads straight from the Gare St Lazare to the place Clichy.

This cultural restlessness both emerged from and helped enlarge other social changes: the loss of influence (if not the self-confidence) of the aristocracy, the enrichment of the bourgeoisie to the point where it dominated the Third Republic, the social and political emancipation of the working class. Although no coherent feminist movement can be readily discerned, in all the cultural forms women were in the vanguard: Sarah Bernhardt and Réjane, Berthe Morisot and Louise Abbéma, Louise Michel and Séverine, Yvette Guilbert and Jane Avril, Marguerite Eymery ('Rachilde') and Colette all have their claims upon our attention.⁶¹ Paris was thus the appropriate site of Wilde's first metamorphosis, enabling him to proclaim after his residence there in 1883 that the Oscar of the first period was dead. It was therefore also the appropriate site of Wilde's last metamorphosis, for 'Paris killed him'.⁶² Abroad is an Other country; we order things differently there.

'Where has he been living all these years?'

'In that rookery of pomp and vanity, Paris, I believe.'

'Yes, Paris must be a taking place. Grand shop-windows, trumpets, and drums.'⁶³

Although we will not be treating much of drums, we shall return again and again to the grand shop-windows, and to the strumpets.



The city itself was in a state of continual transformation, so much so that its metaphysical formation seemed often to usurp its physical state. Ralph Nevill reckoned that 'Of all the great European cities, Paris changes her aspect the most'.⁶⁴ There is a subtext here, the feminisation of the city, reinforced by the suggestion of the 'feminine' characteristic of maquillage. Although Paris was not a *tabula rasa*, the Siege and Commune of 1870-1871 created an inelegant sufficiency of destruction for a new Paris to be

erected. ‘Dirty, draggled, starved, broken-hearted and mad with despair,’ was how Lord Dunraven found it in January 1871, staying at the Hôtel Chatham where furniture and pianos, comfort and culture, were being burned for fuel.⁶⁵ Towards the end of the Commune another British visitor ‘walked [...] along the boulevard des Italiens [...] We got as far as the rue Montmartre; but there we were stopped [...] because there was an unbroken barricade in front. So back we came [...] listening to the screeching of rifles, the grating jar of mitrailleuses, and the crackling of our own steps. Could that be Paris? We were, in reality, in the boulevard des Italiens’.⁶⁶ But even the reality of the boulevard des Italiens was subverted when old people still called it the boulevard de Gand, young fashionables called it the Boul’ des It, and in general it could be referred to simply as ‘the boulevard’,⁶⁷ a name possibly more commonly used than that given it by the Goncourts, to wit, ‘the clitoris of Paris’.⁶⁸ There was another answer to Callwell’s question, however, but one that is no less subversive of reality. ‘Paris is no longer Paris,’ wrote Jules Claretie in a confused passage in February 1871. ‘All Paris is at Bordeaux [...] This city is at once exotic and Parisian, a boulevard des Italiens at San Francisco’.⁶⁹ This idea of a mobile Paris strangely echoes a guide book of 1868:

Trouville is the boulevard des Italiens of the Norman beaches. If the *flâneur* of the city pavement, dozing on a divan in the Café Richelieu while digesting his succulent dinner, were suddenly transported by the rug of the One Thousand and One Nights to the Casino in Trouville, he would not believe he had left Paris when he awakened there.⁷⁰

This reinforces Robert Lethbridge’s characterisation of the boulevard des Italiens as the epitome of ‘Parisian social values in the second half of the nineteenth century’, and finding it virtually inevitable that *Bel-Ami* should begin there, an alignment of ‘urban geography’ and ‘fictional destiny’.⁷¹ The boulevard des Italiens will be referred to in this sense again in this work.

The great department store ‘Au Bonheur des Dames’ in Zola’s novel of that name, although set in the Second Empire, is also a metaphor for the Paris of the period in which it was written,⁷² a place of continual rebuilding and renewal, filled with frantic energy. No sooner had the new boulevards been more or less completed, work began (1st November 1898⁷³) on Ligne 1 of the Métro. The children of light were resistant to being driven down into the dark, although visits to the Catacombs provided a frisson for those who like that particular form of Orphism. The proponents of an underground system were opposed by those who

advocated an aerial one, though Deligny, one of a commission sent to London in 1876, reported that underground was the only possible choice, 'even though the flâneurs who stroll between the Madeleine and the rue Montmartre will not use it.'⁷⁴ The alluring entrances by Henri Guimard, the white tiles and abundant lighting of the platforms, were designed to counteract this resistance, and the fear of epidemics, flooding from the Seine, and of course drafts; while the concerns of the Academicians that the works might disturb their labours on their Dictionary caused a loop to avoid the Institut, the pen in Paris being mightier than the spade. Curiously this dislocation is hardly referred to in the paintings or literature of the time: under ground was sub text.⁷⁵

In 1886 a party of soldiers from the English Staff College visited Paris to look at 'the ground where some of the unsuccessful sorties had taken place which were attempted during the great siege; but owing to the numbers of buildings which had sprung up in the interval, the progress of the different combats was not always easy to follow satisfactorily'.⁷⁶ The Parisians, in fact, had other forms of progress to follow satisfactorily. Paris, in Walter Benjamin's now tired phrase the capital of the nineteenth century,⁷⁷ was where the cultural development of much of the twentieth century was enwombed. This was recognised even by the British. That Lord Dufferin should have called Paris 'the Mecca, the Holy City of the arts, the sciences, the graces and the inventive energies that create civilization'⁷⁸ is not perhaps surprising, given that he was Ambassador at the time, but that he should have done so in an address to the British Chamber of Commerce⁷⁹ in Paris suggests an appeal to a solidarity of cultural interest between speaker and audience that one can only hope was reciprocated. Dufferin's predecessor had been even more laudatory: 'In all that relates to the grace and enjoyment of social life, Paris seems to me a much more civilised capital than London.'⁸⁰

It is thus not surprising that the phrases that shape much of our cultural discussion are nineteenth century French. 'Art for art's sake' ('l'art pour l'art') and 'the well-made play' ('la pièce bien faite') are by Victor Cousin⁸¹ and Eugène Scribe respectively. 'Naturalism' first occurs⁸² in the preface to the second edition of Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* and 'Symbolism' was first used by Jean Moréas⁸³ in *Le Figaro* on 18th September 1886. That aspect of Naturalism, the literary work that was 'a slice of life', owes the sobriquet ('tranche de vie') to Guy de Maupassant,⁸⁴ although Marvin Carlson suggests that 'a slice of life' and indeed 'fourth wall' first occur in Jean Julien's review *Art et Critique* at this time.⁸⁵ It is 'unlikely that "avant garde" occurred much before 1890 in French or other languages'.⁸⁶ We

call the interior monologue ‘monologue intérieur’ because its originator was Edouard Dujardin,⁸⁷ ‘vers libre’ was an innovation variously claimed by Gustave Kahn,⁸⁸ Marie Kryszynska, Jean Moréas and Jules Laforgue – the term itself by the Franco-American Francis Vielé-Griffin, as ‘le vers est libre’, the opening words of his *Joies*.⁸⁹ ‘On a polémique sur le fait de savoir qui était “l’inventeur” du vers libre,’ remarks de Paysac.⁹⁰ The fashionable photograph size known as ‘carte de visite’ was expressed in French because it was invented by André Disdéri.⁹¹ ‘Operetta’ was first applied to Jules Boverly’s *Madame Mascarille* in 1866, although it is not clear whether this or ‘opérette’ was the word used.⁹² Even ‘demi-monde’ is from the play of that name (1855) by Alexandre Dumas *fils*:⁹³ a half world in half light. *Fin-de-siècle* itself occurs as the title of a novel by A. Claveaux in 1889; a play called *Paris, fin-de-siècle* caught the attention of Ada Leveson – Wilde’s friend ‘Sphinx’ – and she persuaded her husband to buy the translation rights.⁹⁴ Other phrases slipped between French and English. ‘Grand revue’ in Paris became known as ‘Music-Hall’, while ‘Art Nouveau’, a term familiar to all English speakers, by one of those inversions that will be found a characteristic of the period, was not perhaps quite so familiar in its country of origin: ‘[...] ce qu’on a appelé en France le Modern Style, en Angleterre l’Art Nouveau, et, dans les pays germaniques, le Jugendstil’.⁹⁵ Introducing his translation of Huysmans’ *À Rebours*, P.G. Lloyd asserts that it ‘contains the essence of the current ideas of the time’:⁹⁶ it is significant that the book is usually referred to by its French title.

Nor is it surprising that ‘restaurant’ and ‘café’ may be read as French cultural terms, and the social relationships engendered by Parisian congregation are both significant in themselves, and explain much of the attraction of Paris for the more gregarious of the English visitors. Francis Parkman,⁹⁷ the Bostonian historian of French Canada, was forcibly struck by the contrast between the eating houses of London and Paris:

The one being a quiet dingy establishment where each guest is put into a box, and supplied with porter, beef, potatoes and plum pudding. Red faced old gentlemen of three hundredweight mix their ‘brandy go’ and read *The Times*. In Paris the tables are set in elegant galleries and saloons and among the trees and flowers in a garden [...] The waiters spring from table to table as noiselessly as shadows, prompt at the slightest sign; a lady, elegantly attired, sits in an arbor to preside over the whole. Dine at these places – then go to a London ‘dining room’ – swill porter and devour roast beef!⁹⁸

A key word here is ‘dingy’: that Paris was better lit indoors as well as out is a frequent comment of contemporaries. It was not merely a question of larger windows, more daylight, though it is to be remembered that the introduction of plate glass (‘grand shop windows’) made novel our familiar view of ourselves reflected, and allowed the passer-by to see the world within, the customer the world without: indeed, an even more intimate relationship is suggested by the French phrase for window-shopping, *lèche-vitrine*, licking the window. Although the sobriquet ‘city of light’ (‘ville lumière’) dated to its mediæval reputation for learning, Paris led in its artificial lighting: so much so that by the end of the nineteenth century the man known as ‘le roi de lumière’ was not Bergson or Sorel but Pataud, the Secretary of the Union of Electricians. The Café des Boulevards in the boulevard Poissonnière had had gas lighting installed by a Scottish engineer⁹⁹ as early as the 1830s; the rue de Rivoli, two miles long, was famous for its ‘cordon de lumière’, the long flickering ribbon of flame from the gas lamps in every arch of its arcade. The ‘brilliantly lit’ shop windows of the rue de la Paix and the rue de Rivoli were especially recalled by Ralph Nevill as attracting visitors’ attention in the 1880s when his Parisian memories began.¹⁰⁰ The change from gas to electricity intensified the light, but reduced the phantasmal effect of the flickering. Zola caught the latter in describing Les Halles: ‘All along the pavement the only things that were truly awake were the lanterns dancing at the end of invisible arms, spanning in leaps and bounds the presence of sleep that lingered there, in the outlines of bodies and the shapes of vegetables, awaiting the coming of day’.¹⁰¹ Zola also saw very clearly how artificial light moved between the planes of the physical and the metaphysical, when he sends Pierre Froment one afternoon into the house in the avenue Hoche¹⁰² of the princesse de Harn:

What surprised Pierre was that every window shutter of the mansion was closed, every chink stopped up so that daylight might not enter, and that every room flared with electric lamps, an illumination of supernatural intensity. [...] And to Pierre, who felt both blinded and stifled, it seemed as if he were entering one of those luxurious, unearthly Dens of the Flesh such as the pleasure world of Paris conjures from dreamland.¹⁰³

The supernatural, conjuring ... but Zola was not the only one who drew upon the magical properties in scientific achievement. Gabriela Zapolska, viewing Paris at dusk from the second stage of the Eiffel Tower in 1889, wrote that she was the

witness of a truly fabulous vision. For, at this moment, Paris began to light up as though under the effect of a magic wand. It became an ocean of light,