



OSCAR WILDE: HIS LIFE AND CONFESSIONS

HARRIS

Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions

by Frank Harris (1856-1931)

Consumers of biography are familiar with the division between memoirs of the living or recently dead written by those who “knew” the subject more or less intimately, and the more objective or scholarly accounts produced by later generations.

In the case of Wilde, as presented to us by his contemporary Frank Harris in his 1916 biography, we are in a way doubly estranged from the subject. We meet Oscar the charismatic talker, whose tone of voice can never be reproduced – even if a more scrupulous biographer accurately sets down his words – and we are already aware of Wilde as the self-destructive celebrity who uneasily fills the place of the premier gay icon and martyr in our contemporary view.

Neither of these images will do. We need to read as many accounts as possible. Harris, though himself a self-advertising literary and sexual buccaneer, takes a wincingly representative view of Wilde’s homophile activity: for him it is a patrician excrescence, the abominable vice of the few, contracted at English boarding schools. He nevertheless condemns the brutal punishment, physical and psychological, meted out to Wilde by an unsympathetic public and justice system.

Total running time: 16:11:43

Read by Martin Geeson

Cover design by Kathryn Delaney



HARRIS

OSCAR WILDE: HIS LIFE AND CONFESSIONS