

La divina comedia de Oscar Wilde [The Divine Comedy of Oscar Wilde]

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Oscar Wilde died in Paris in november 1900. He was just 46 years old and he was living in exile after spending 3 years in prison. He was ruined, highly alcoholized and unable to write a single word. The Irish writer and poet said his own life was a piece of art in which he had invested all of his genius, unlike the rest of his work, in which he only put his talent. He liked to reflect on *Divine Comedy* and compare the crucial moments of his life with Dante's work. His life was the drama of someone who peaked and then lost it all.

After a deep research about Wilde, Javier de Isusi surpasses the limits of the facts and imagines the last three years of the writer's life through the eyes and words of those who met him in his final hours. *The Divine Comedy of Oscar Wilde* also honours Wilde's work through quotes and references that elaborate a big part of his thinking.

1900.

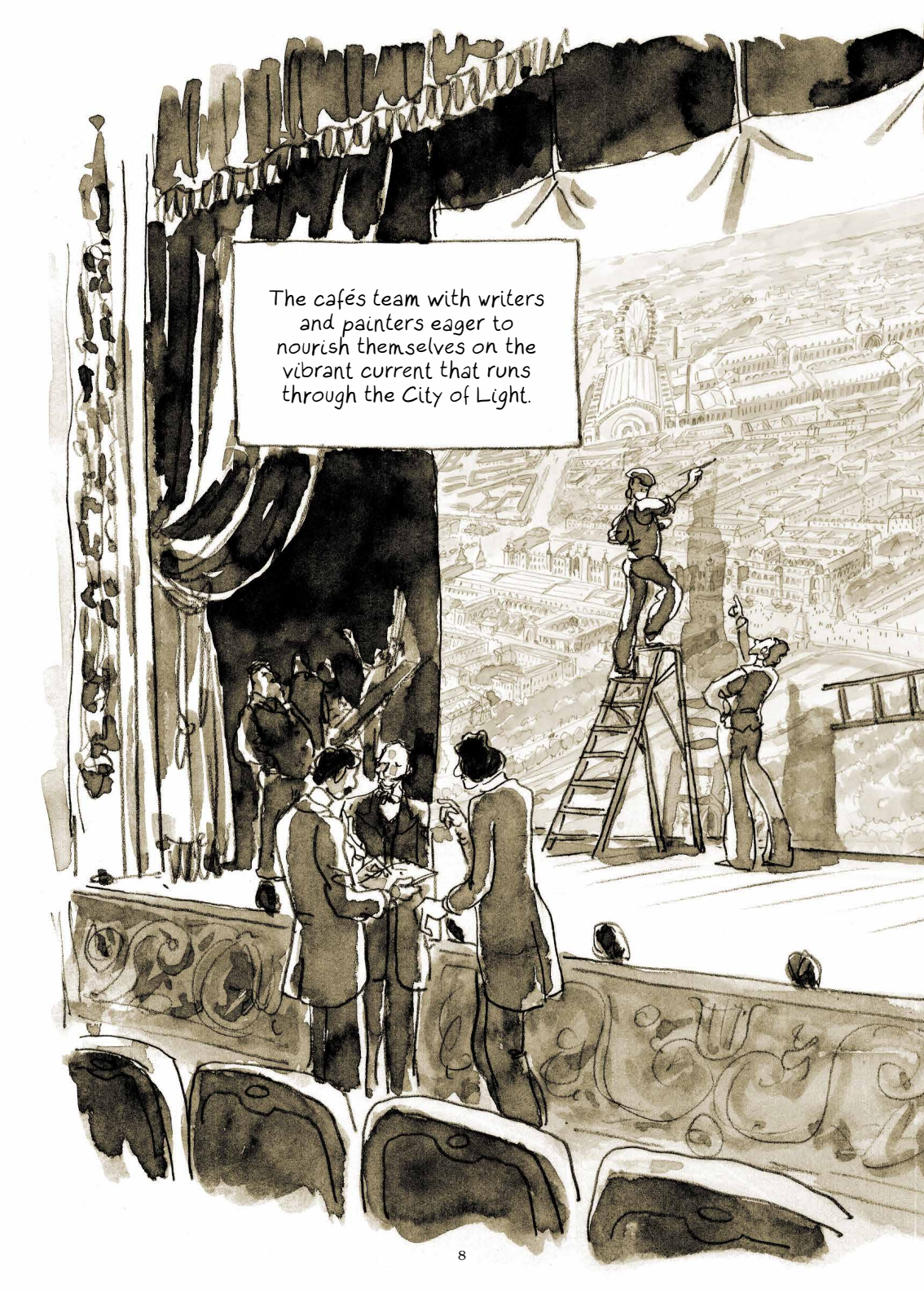


The year of the Paris
Universal Exhibition
and the Paris
Olympics.



Europe takes a look at itself, proud, in the mirror of this city, which was transformed into the capital of western culture.

All of the cutting-edge figures of the art world meet up here.




The cafés team with writers
and painters eager to
nourish themselves on the
vibrant current that runs
through the City of Light.




Because of this,
in those years,
everyone fits
in Paris.

Even the
exiles.




Exiles like this
Irish writer.

Just five years
earlier, in 1895,
he was so successful
on the London scene
that two of his works
were staged at the
same time in the
British capital.



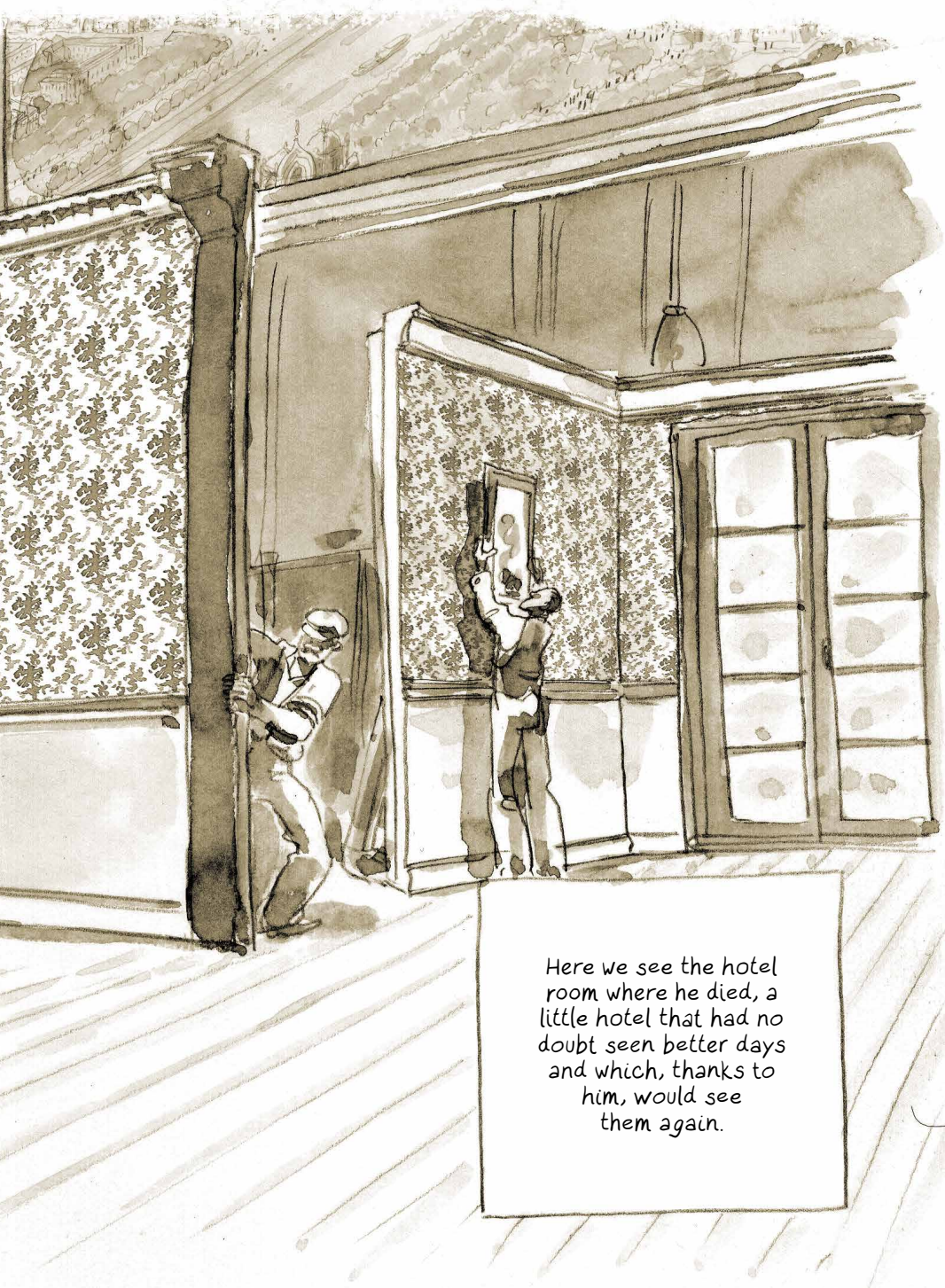
But just a few months later, the same Victorian society that had exalted him showed him no mercy in an enormously high-profile trial in which he was accused of "gross indecency."

As a result of that trial, he spent two torturous years in prison.




In 1897 he was released
and he exiled himself in
France in order to shelter
himself from the public
scorn that he was treated
with in England.

His name
had become
synonymous with
depravity and
shame.



Here we see the hotel room where he died, a little hotel that had no doubt seen better days and which, thanks to him, would see them again.



Oscar Wilde.
That was his
name.

Writer, poet,
playwright, art
critic, arbiter of
elegance...

He had proclaimed
himself "the King
of Life."

His striking aesthete's
mannerisms and
his skills as a
conversationalist
made him famous even
before he had ever
published anything.



He wandered among this furniture, stripped of the green carnation he used to wear during his time as an aesthete.


And among it also moved some of the few faithful friends that accompanied him in the final years of his life.

Each one of them played a role in the final act of the drama of his life.

And for Oscar, each one of them, in his way, was an ingredient in the most exquisite distillation of friendship, that good that he valued above all else.

Only a very few remained of the innumerable mass of followers that he had had in his glory days.



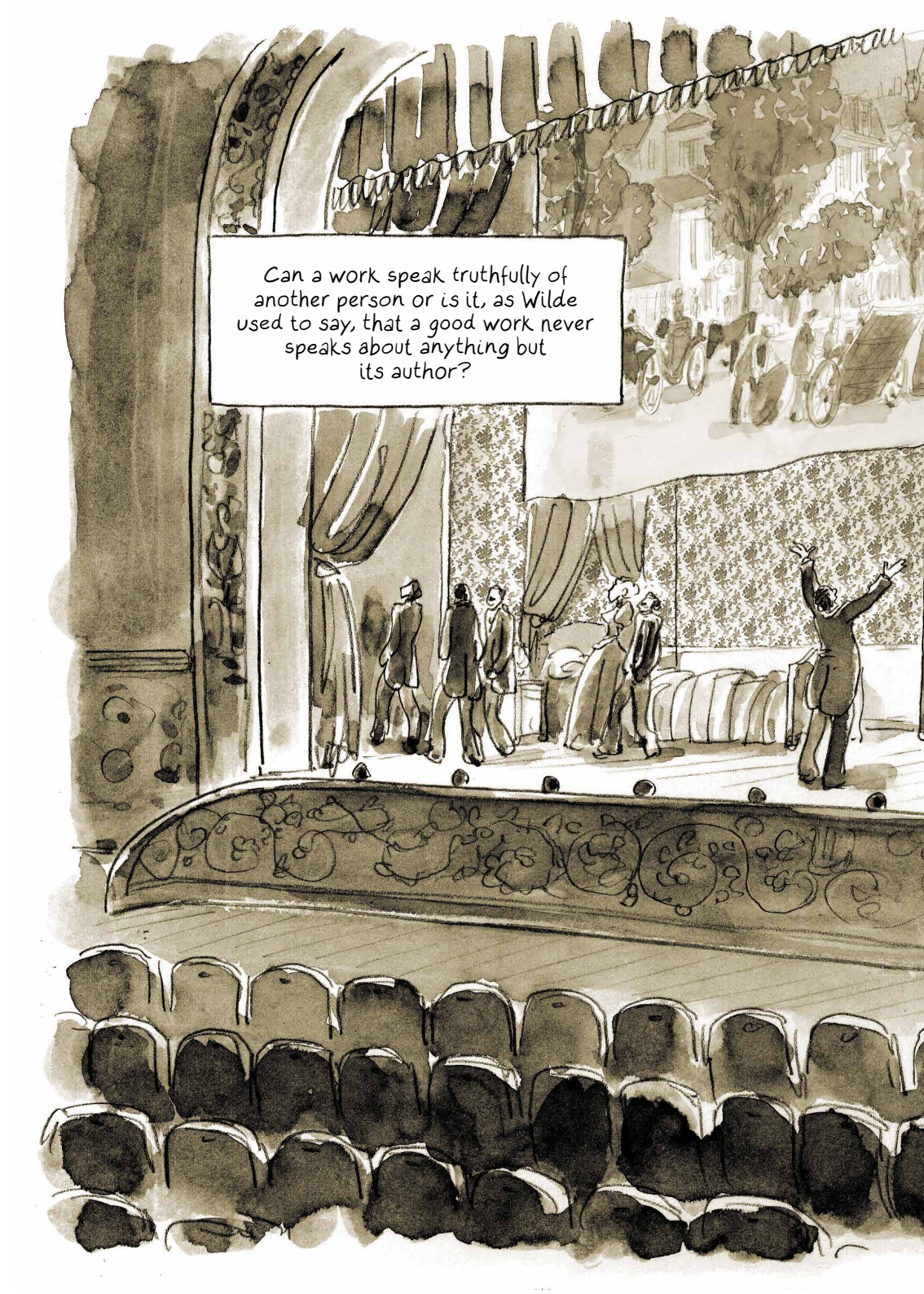


Because innumerable were the people whom he dealt with in life and innumerable are the books that have been written about him since his death.

Biographies, psychological studies, historical and sociological investigations, analyses of his correspondence... Information to try and get nearer to the man.

But is such a task even possible?


Can a book approximate a man, or will it be that it can never speak of more than his mask?




Can a work speak truthfully of another person or is it, as Wilde used to say, that a good work never speaks about anything but its author?



Ought art imitate life or, as he declared, is it the reverse, that life imitates art far more than art imitates life?



Are the worlds
produced by imagination
more real than
reality itself, as he
maintained?

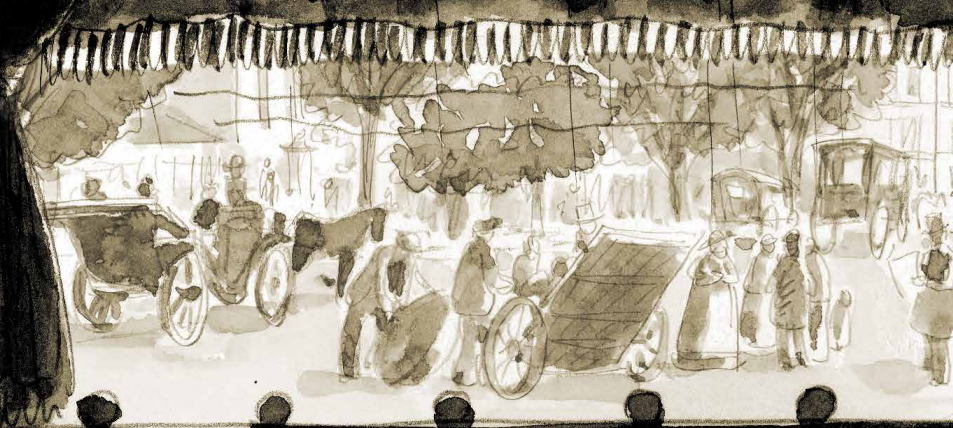


Turn the page
and see, turn and
read...

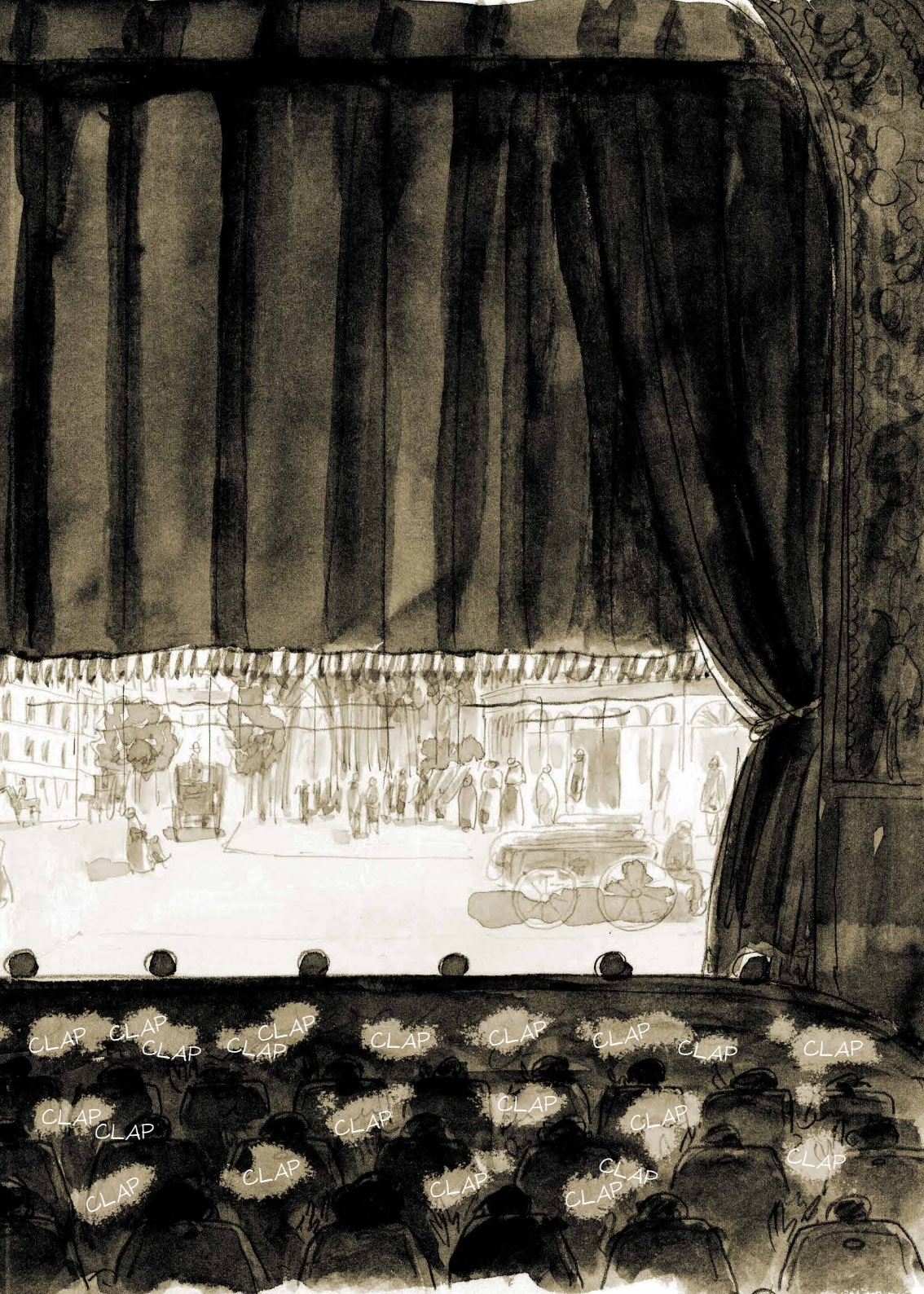
But do not let
yourselves be moved
by what you find, this
is no more than an
invention, a fiction,
a fantasy...

Because of that, you
are not going to
believe anything you
read, since everything
could be absolutely
and completely...

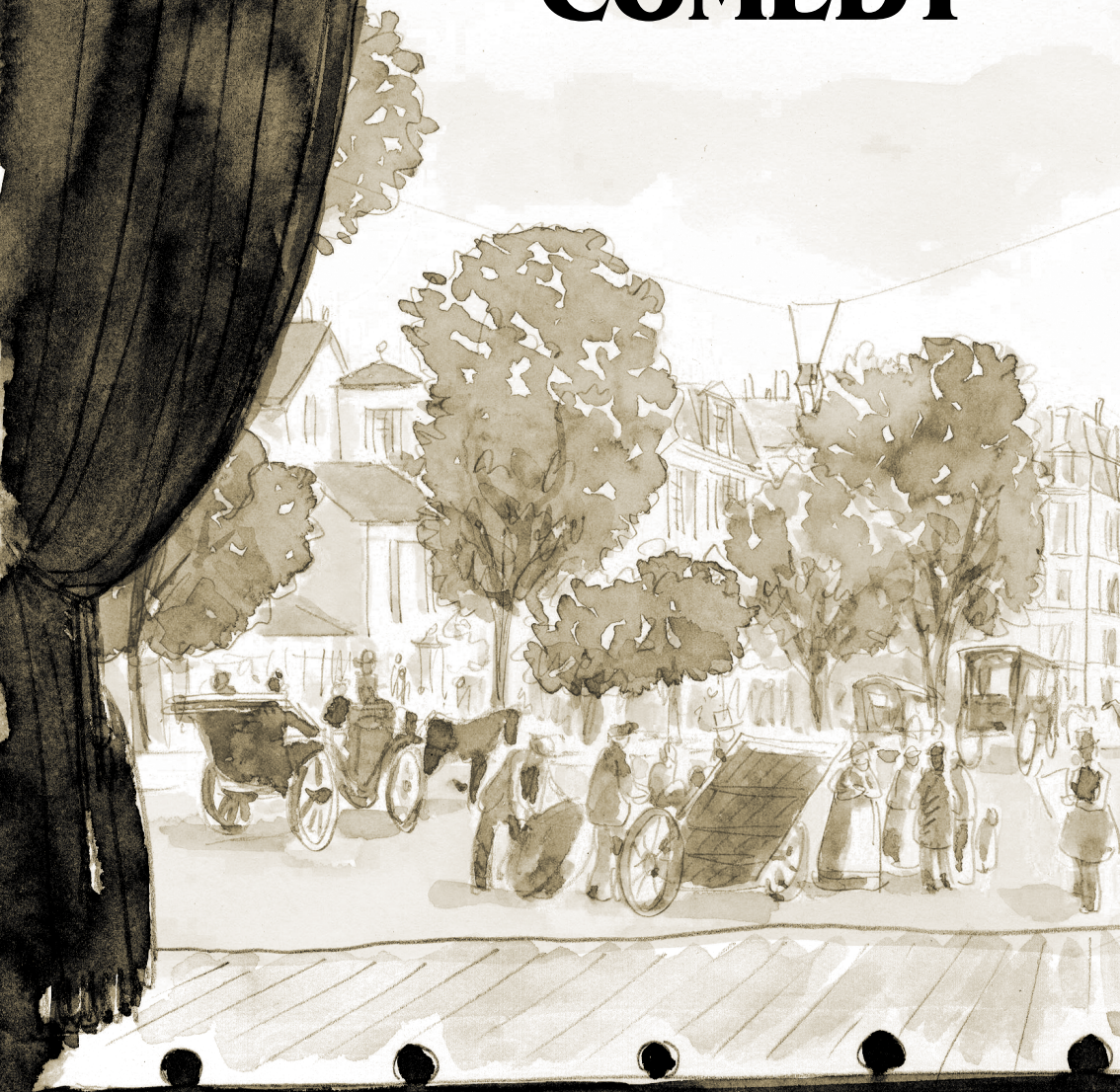
...true.



CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP
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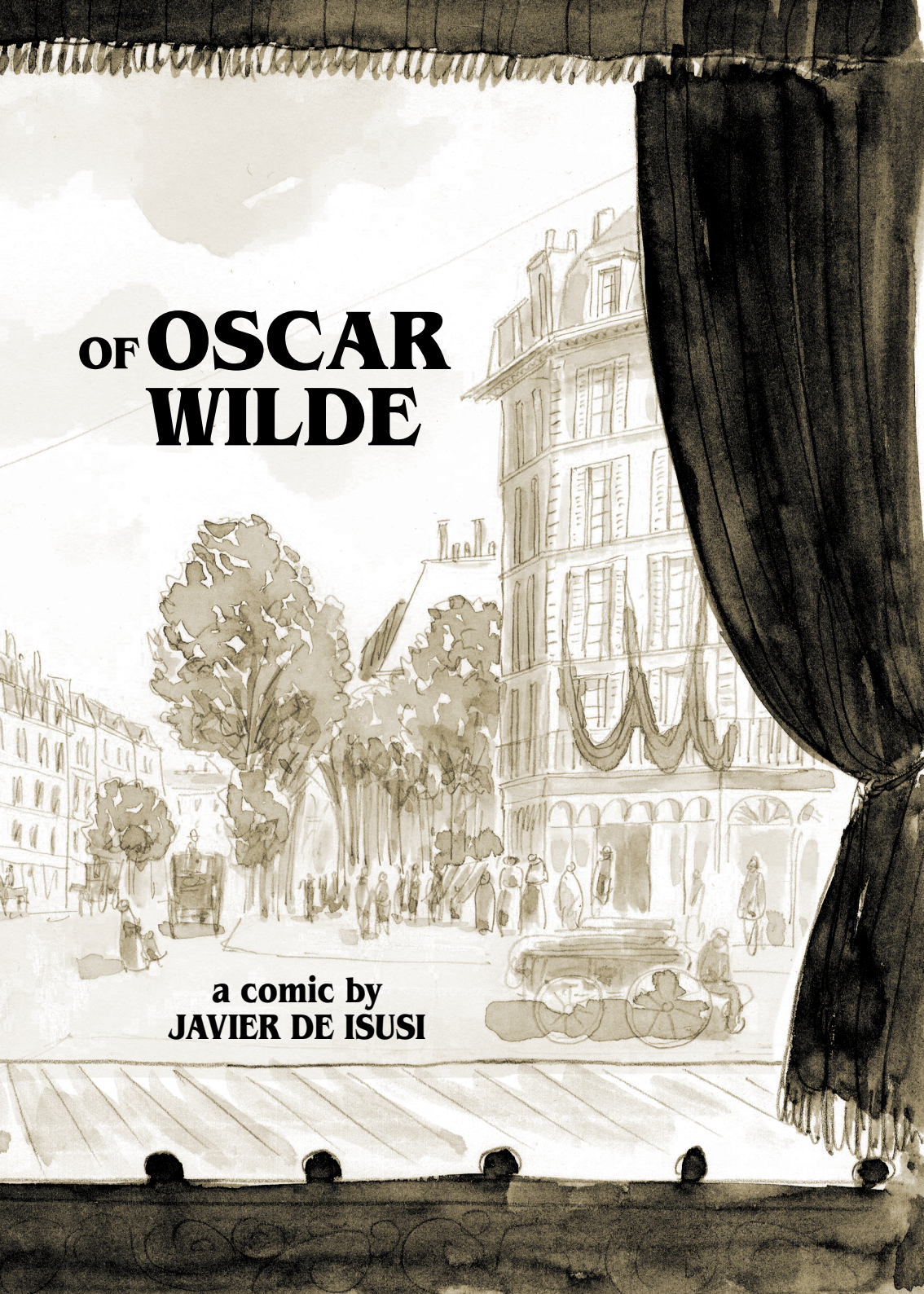


THE DIVINE COMEDY



OF OSCAR WILDE

a comic by
JAVIER DE ISUSI

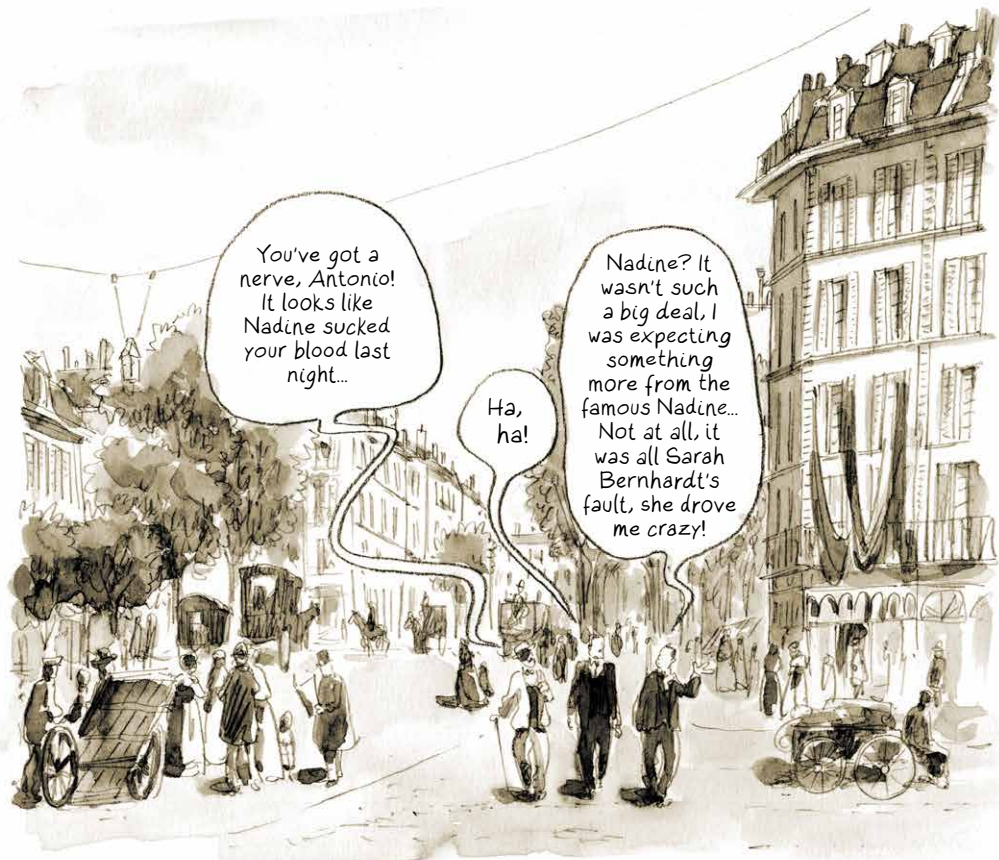


I hope to live long enough and to produce work of such a character that I shall be able at the end of my days to say, "Yes! This is just where the artistic life leads a man!"

Oscar Wilde
(De Profundis)

Paris.
June 1899.





You've got a nerve, Antonio! It looks like Nadine sucked your blood last night...

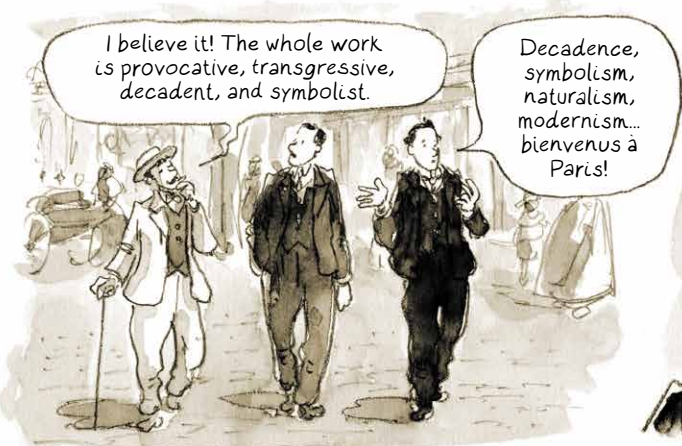
Ha, ha!

Nadine? It wasn't such a big deal, I was expecting something more from the famous Nadine... Not at all, it was all Sarah Bernhardt's fault, she drove me crazy!

Ah! What did I tell you? I don't think there is an actress in all the world like her. Bernhardt has only disappointed me once and it was when she turned down the role of Salome, that part was written for her.


Salome! I've read that work! Very disturbing... and it had some very provocative illustrations...






I believe it! The whole work is provocative, transgressive, decadent, and symbolist.

Decadence, symbolism, naturalism, modernism... bienvenus à Paris!




Who wrote it?



The King of Life!
The most acclaimed writer in England only three years ago!

Today, by contrast, they publicly despise him in his country.




Oscar Wilde, Antonio, Oscar Wilde.

Hey!
I already know who Oscar Wilde is! Excuse me for not being familiar with his entire bibliography.


I met him here, in Paris, precisely when he was writing Salome.

If you're lucky, you will meet him too, he doesn't plan on returning to his country.



Well, we've already arrived to Calisaya. I hope we haven't kept that friend of yours who wants to be a writer waiting too long.

We'll know straight away. Pio can't stand lateness.



I don't see him... I fear that our nocturnal escapade has taken its toll.

Well, I think that if I have to choose between Bernhardt and that Baroja fellow that I don't even know what he writes about...



Ah!

Look who we have here instead...!





It's always a pleasure to find yourself with Enrique Gómez Carrillo...

He insists on calling me Maestro!

I am trying to set a fashion, Maestro, so that everybody will end up calling you that.



Ah, yes!

Enrique hopes to turn me into the new Verlaine.

Ah! Paul Verlaine! Le Prince des Poètes!

Excuse me, but I don't understand how Oscar Wilde could become Paul Verlaine... Nor why...

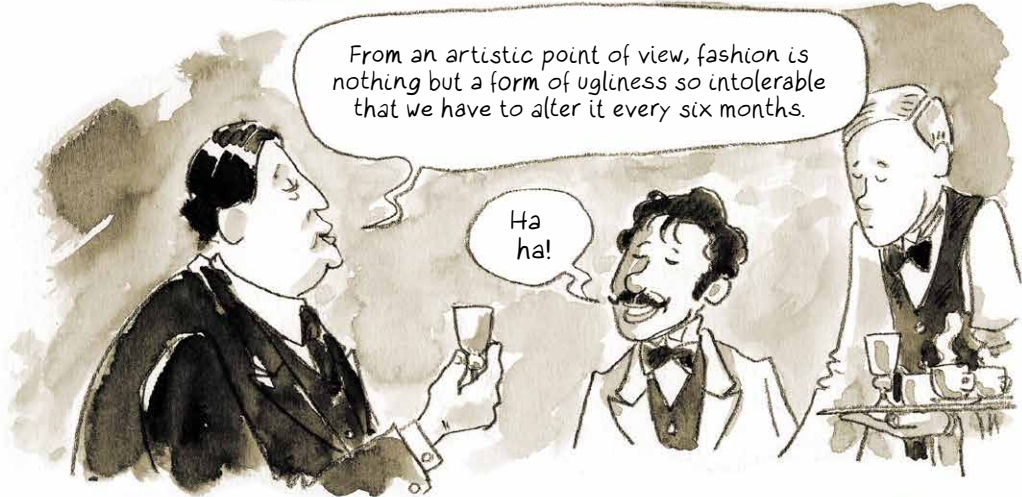


I agree, Verlaine was a great poet, I daresay even a great man, but he did not have even the remotest idea of how to pair a tie with a jacket. Please, have a seat. Would you care to join me for my breakfast?

Breakfast?
Of... Absinthe?

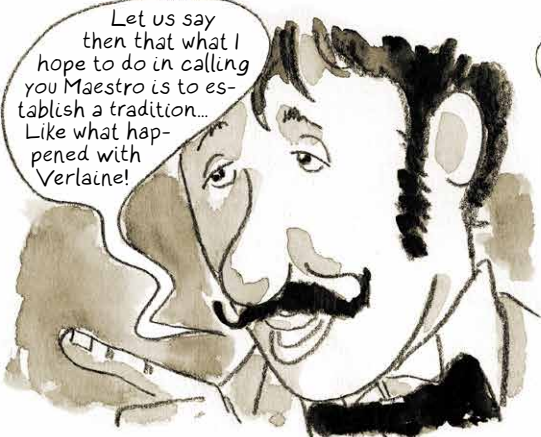


However, what I do not understand is why someone as open as you, Enrique, would want to set a fashion, whatever the fashion may be.

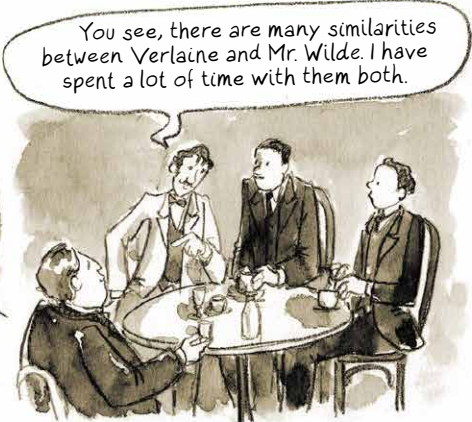


From an artistic point of view, fashion is nothing but a form of ugliness so intolerable that we have to alter it every six months.

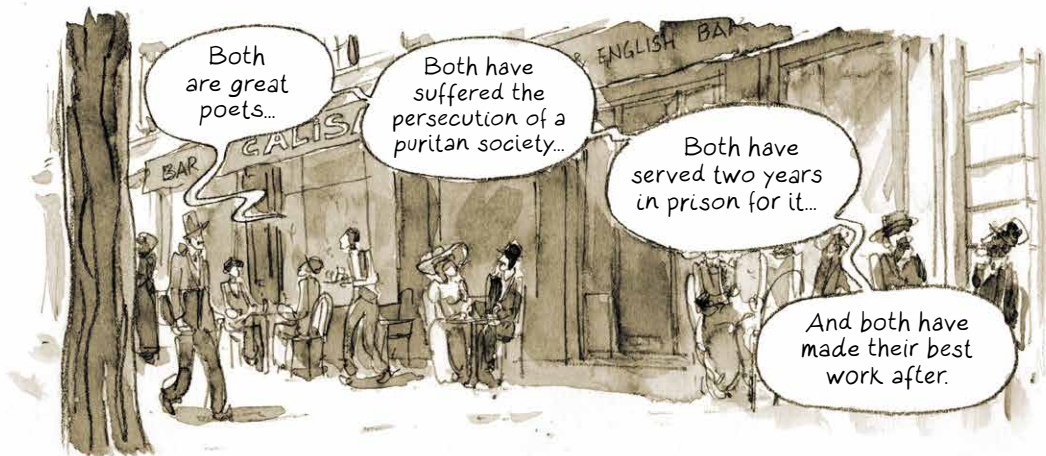
Ha ha!




Let us say then that what I hope to do in calling you Maestro is to establish a tradition... Like what happened with Verlaine!




You see, there are many similarities between Verlaine and Mr. Wilde. I have spent a lot of time with them both.







In reality what brings me closest to the great Verlaine is our Uranian passion for someone who was not worthy of our affections...



That we both died in 1896...



And that we both spent the end of our lives wandering around cafés drinking absinthe, ha ha!



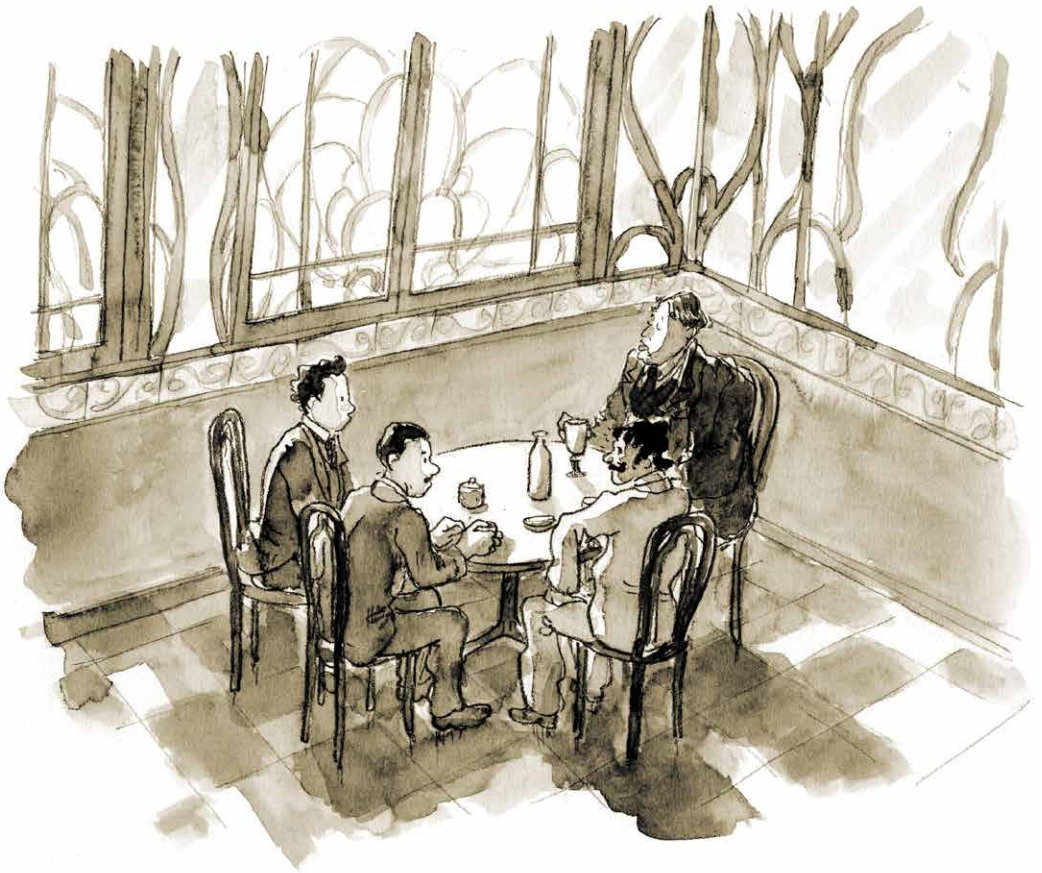
And yet, you are right about one thing, Enrique

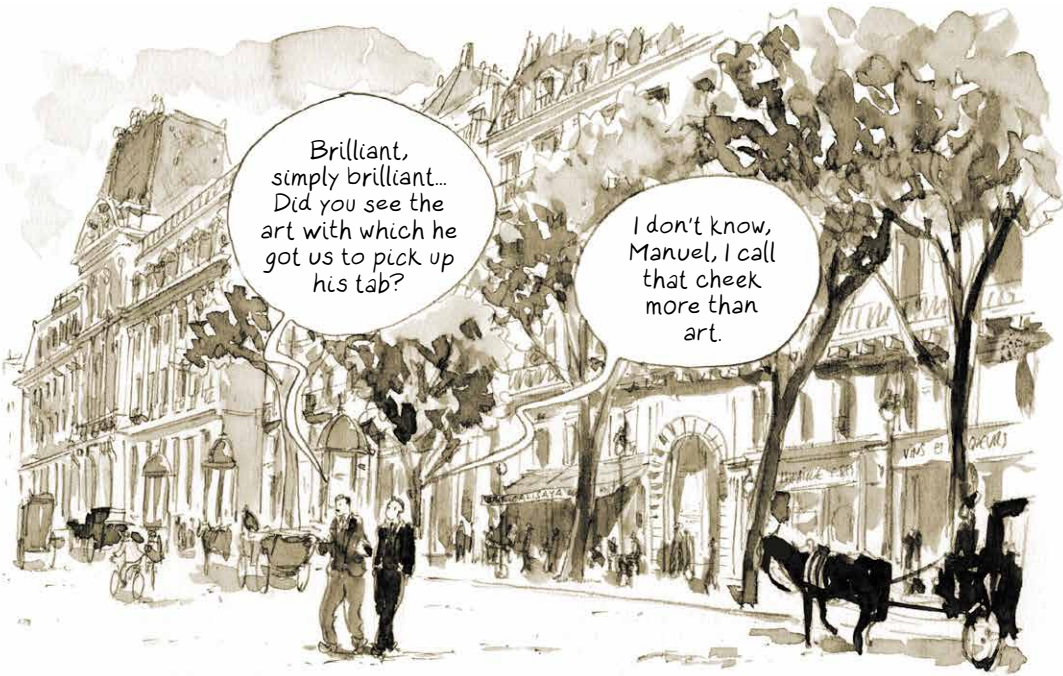
How different was the treatment we received from society! It is true that the existence of Verlaine was unspeakable, terrible; he did everything to excess; he was drunk, dirty, and libertine...

But when he found himself in a café, here in Paris...

Everyone who entered greeted him by the name of "Maestro" and seemed proud at the slightest of his attentions...

Simply because he was a great poet...





Brilliant,
simply brilliant...
Did you see the
art with which he
got us to pick up
his tab?

I don't know,
Manuel, I call
that cheek
more than
art.



By the way,
what do you
suppose a Uranian
passion is?

Hell,
Antonio, it
means he's a
queer.

INTERVIEW
WITH

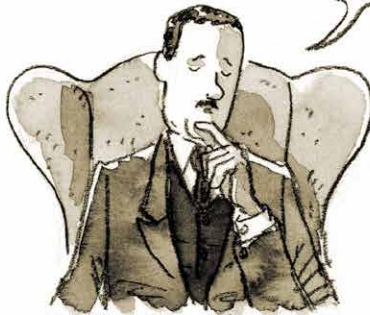
**MANUEL
MACHADO**

I met
Wilde, yes.



In those days I was twenty-five years old, living in Paris and completely seduced by the French symbolist poets, among whom Verlaine was the great master. And Oscar Wilde was the closest thing to that that England had produced.

By then, he was already only a shadow of himself. You know: at the height of his fame, which had been immense, he had the arrogance to file a suit against the Marquis of Queensberry, his lover's father, who had publicly insulted him, accusing him of "posing sodomite" [sic].



The trial went poorly for him: Queensberry managed to produce evidence demonstrating that his accusation was reasonably founded, for which he was absolved. But things didn't end there. Given that sodomy was a crime at that time, Wilde was in turn accused by the prosecutor and, after a tremendously high-profile trial, he was handed down the harshest possible sentence: two years of prison, which he served in their entirety.



As soon as he got out of prison, he left England for good and changed his name.



When I met him, although he was properly dressed, he was no longer the extravagant dandy he had once been. His past pursued him wherever he was, and a profound pain could be read in the features of his face.



One day, at Calisaya, he told us a story...



Well, Wilde endlessly told stories. That one was about a very flashy ring that he always had on, a gold ring with a large green gem.



According to what he told us, it had belonged to a rajah from India who had been killed by the English.



The ring in question carried a horrible curse: whosoever possessed it would forever be a hopeless wretch, unless he lost it against his will.



I think Wilde may well have invented that story to force himself not to pawn the ring the first chance he got. In those days he was short on money.



However, as was always the case with him, I think the story contained within it a profound truth...



He was at that moment terribly wretched, and he was prisoner to his dazzling and exaggerated jewel...



Except his jewel was none other than his own character, Oscar Wilde.



Paris.
March, 1898.







Hey, look...

Shit. This fucking guy.

What's up?

Nothing. Just the boozier poet.



Anybody gonna ask him?

Pass. Last time he didn't even touch me. He had me balls out for three hours while he told me stories. I nearly froze!

That's because he doesn't like slobs like you. If you would just clean yourself up!



Yeah, yeah, yeah... well he's all yours, clean boy!

Yeah well, for me, as long as he's paying, if he wants me to sing the Marsellaise in a tutu...

I'm telling you, the guy may be a weirdo, but he's very generous...



Hey! Monsieur!
Are you alone
tonight?

Call him mister. His name
is Sebastian... Montmouth, or
something like that. An English
name.

No, no way!
He's Irish.

Melmoth...

Irish? And
how would you
know?

From his accent. My mom had
an Irish boyfriend who broke
my ass when I was eleven. I'll
never forget his accent...

Shit, well if I remembered
the accent of every guy
who broke my ass...

You'd be
exactly the
same as you
are now.
You'd still be
bending over!



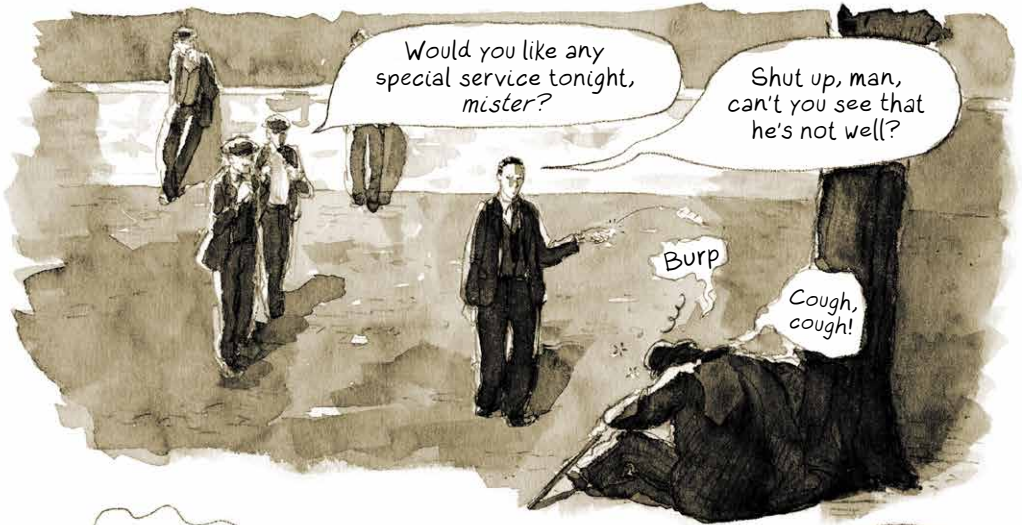
cOugh,
cough!

burp...

Hey, monsieur!

Mister...

What's wrong,
mister?











But if you're a poet, I have to listen to you, I'm learning good French from poems! For example, I've already read Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*.

Could you gift me one of your flowers, monsieur?



I'll do you one better...

I will gift you an entire garden!



Let's see, the first flower starts like this...

Aquella noche, víspera del día fijado para su coronación, el joven rey se hallaba solo, sentado en su cámara...



INTERVIEW
WITH

**MAURICE
GILBERT**



I don't know,
I feel a little
strange... I...
I don't know...

That is to
say, I've
never done
an interview
before.



Yes, of course I knew Mr.
Melmoth, that is to say, Mr.
Wilde, but... what is it that you
want to know? I don't... I don't
know, I don't feel comfortable.



Well, I can tell you that
Oscar Wilde was the most
generous person I ever met.



Thanks to him, I traveled to London, met important people like Lord Alfred Douglas, Mr. Ross, Mr. Turner...



All of them were very good to me.



I... don't... I refused to read any of those books that were written about him after his death and...



I'm sorry, I don't feel comfortable. I'd like to end this interview.



Paris.
April, 1898.



Merci !

*Merci
beaucoup,
monsieur
Melmoth !*



How can I thank you?
I... I don't know...

Seeing you so happy is enough
for me, Maurice. I know how
much you like photography.



Although you
haven't told me
about the *ménage
à trois* that you're
a part of now.
Tell me, Maurice,
how do you all fit
together?

Mr. Melmoth!
That question is
very indiscreet!

Oh, no, nothing of
the kind. Questions are
never indiscreet. Answers
sometimes are.

My question
is merely of a...
practical nature.



Well...

Um...

Ha, ha!
Do not answer me, I did not wish to embarrass you.

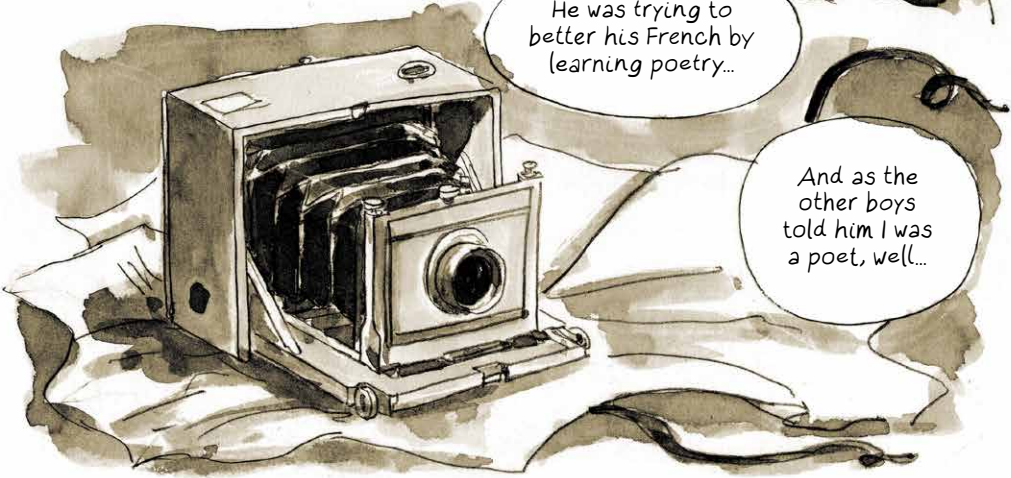


However, there is a favor I should like to ask you...


Look, a few days ago, on the banks of the Seine, I met a boy... a very special boy.




He was trying to better his French by learning poetry...




And as the other boys told him I was a poet, well...



Well, I was in a shameful state, I had vomited all over myself...




And well, he took charge of me, brought me to the hotel, cleaned me up...



Put clean clothes on me and tucked me into bed.

He was like an angel!



I told him stories, one by one, and we both fell asleep.

If you could see how tenderly he embraced me! That night, I had the most beautiful dreams you can imagine.

I felt the greatest peace...



However, when I awoke in the morning, he was not there...

An infinite sadness poured over me, had it all been a dream? Had it only been a hallucination brought on by alcohol?

But then I found this note, atop the mountain of books on my desk.




Mil mercis pour me leisser jouer dans votre jardin.
J'ai pri un libre pour continuer a apprendre.
Le libre s'apelle "Les nouveutives terrestres" et l'auteur est André Gide.
Pardon et merci.

Is it not charming?

Parbleu!
He writes horribly!




* (Written with spelling errors): "Many thanks for letting me play in your garden. I have taken a book to keep learning. The book is called The Fruits of the Earth and the author is André Gide. Pardon me and thank you."



The poor thing!
He hardly knows French!
From time to time, he
fired off words in an
incomprehensible
dialect...

Where would
he come from
and what would
the poor boy's
story be?


I've spent weeks
looking for him, I feel
indebted to him.



It oc-
curred to
me that...


Perhaps
you...

Since you know
the boulevard
boys better...



It's alright,
I understand.
You want me to
make inquiries...

Not to
worry, monsieur
Melmoth, we will
find him.



And,
by the way...

She fits
in the
middle.

Damn it,
Mr. Melmoth!
I think you
shouldn't drink
so much...

Hic!
You're
talkin'gg like
my...doctor?

But if the alcohol
is the only thing
that can soothe
the sting...

HmMph...
Since when did they
p-put a sh-slope on
this street?

A slope?
Come on, I
think I'll walk
you back to
your hotel.

I'm shorry to do this
to you, Maurice,
I ha-haven't a
penny left...

I gave my last coins
to the waiter...

Ha-handsome,
wasn't he?

Come
along...



SShh!

Don't make any noise,
Maurice, monsieur Dupoirier is
very good t'me and I don't want
there to be any...

¡Pues cálese y
ponga algo de su parte,
caramba! Well then be
quiet and make a bit of
an effort, damn it!

Ooph!

Maurice,
you are the
gentlesht soul I
know...

Nurbody is as good
to me as you are...

What are you
talking about?
You have very
good friends.



Bah, half of them don't speak to me and the other half no longer listen...



Maurice, before you go... could you do me a favor?

Yes?



Would you permit me...? I mean to say...

Could I...

...see you?

How so?

Only see you... only look...

You understand? That'd be enough...



Of course.



I am a... slave to beauty, do you understand?

Mmh, I'm not sure.



A slave, yes... Do you know Shakespeare, Maurice?

I haven't had the pleasure. Is he a friend of yours?



Ha, ha! Ah, yes... Of course... A great friend, he has never failed me.

He wrote some sonnets to someone who must have looked much the same as you...



Sonnets?

Why?



Well, because Shakespeare was also like me...

He too was a slave to...



Ah...

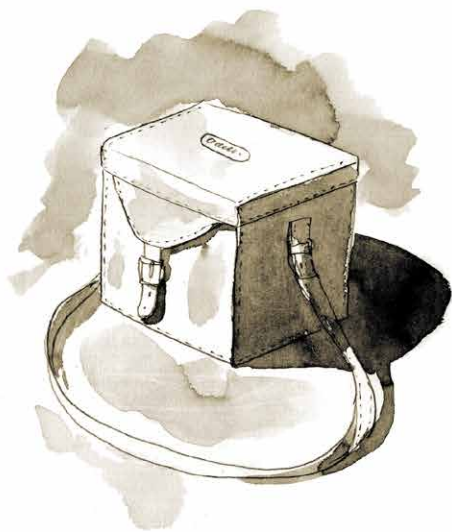
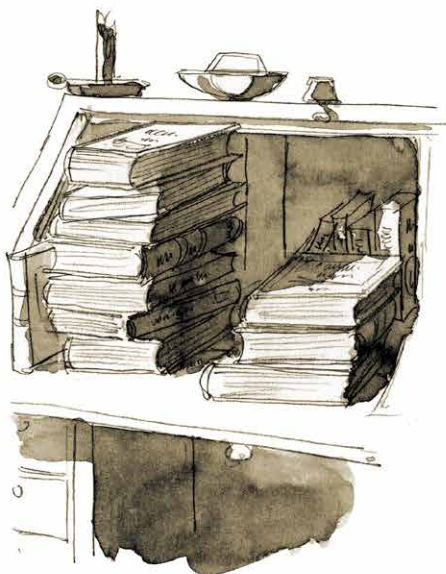
Beauty...



Thank
you,
Maurice...

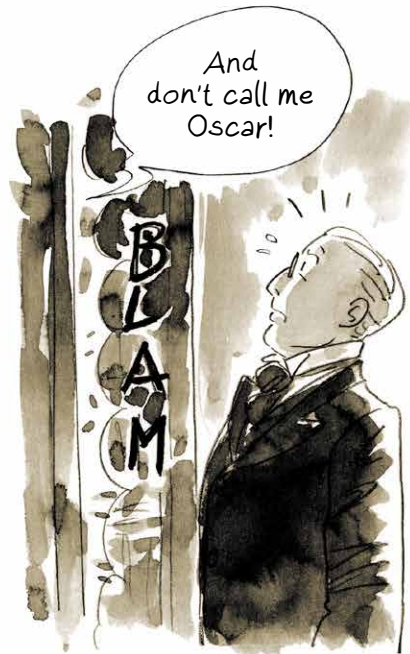
You're
too kind...

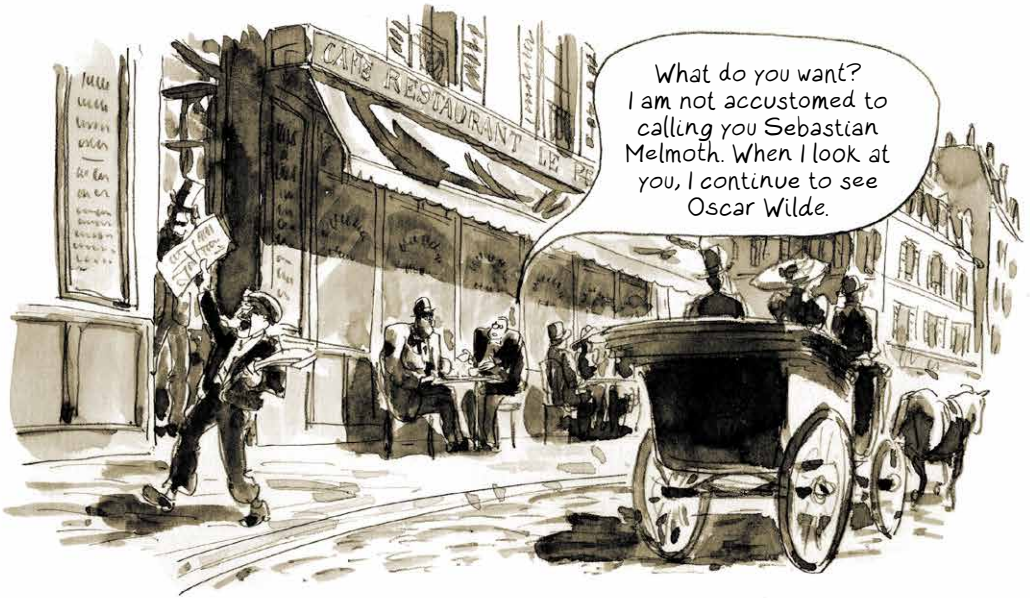












What do you want?
I am not accustomed to
calling you Sebastian
Melmoth. When I look at
you, I continue to see
Oscar Wilde.



Ah.
Oscar
Wilde...



He also looks
at me from the
other side of
the mirror.
And sometimes
it becomes so
intolerable to
me that I have
to avert my
gaze from him
when I shave...



...Giving great slashes then to Melmoth's face...

Well!
At least that's something!

Robert, dear, what are you saying?

Well, that at least you are admitting that Melmoth feels shame in recognizing himself in Wilde's face and falling to his same vices.

CRUNCH

SLURP

CRUNCH
CRUNCH

My goodness!
You speak like any Puritan philistine!

The supreme vice is shallowness!

?
What do you mean by that?
I don't understand you.



Whatever is realized is right.

And you won't, Robert, and you won't.



Let's see,
"Sebastian."
Changing your
name is useless if
you don't change
your style of
living.

You've no
idea of the
titanic efforts
I have to make
to defend you!

The other day, I had to intercede
for over an hour so that Lady
Chapman would include you on
the guest list for her soirée, but
if you don't even bother to try, my
efforts are all for nothing!



Ah, your efforts!
The sure way
of knowing
nothing about
life is to try to
make oneself
useful.

What?

Lady
Chapman.

Need I congratulate
you that the most banal
of England's ladies
invited me to the most
tedious soirée
in France?

At least
I had the
honor of
meeting
mademoiselle
de Bovet, the
ugliest woman
in the world.





Agh!
When you get
cynical, you
infuriate me,
Oscar!

Cynical!
How could I be cynical?
As delightful as cynicism
is from its intellectual
side, it never can be
more than the perfect
philosophy for a man
who has no soul.

Soul! Do you
understand,
Sherard? Sins
of the flesh are
nothing. Sins of
the soul alone are
shameful.

But I agree
with you! I only
ask that you
are a bit more
reasonable
and learn from
your mistakes...



We commit the most
fatal errors in life, almost
always, by being logical,
Robert.





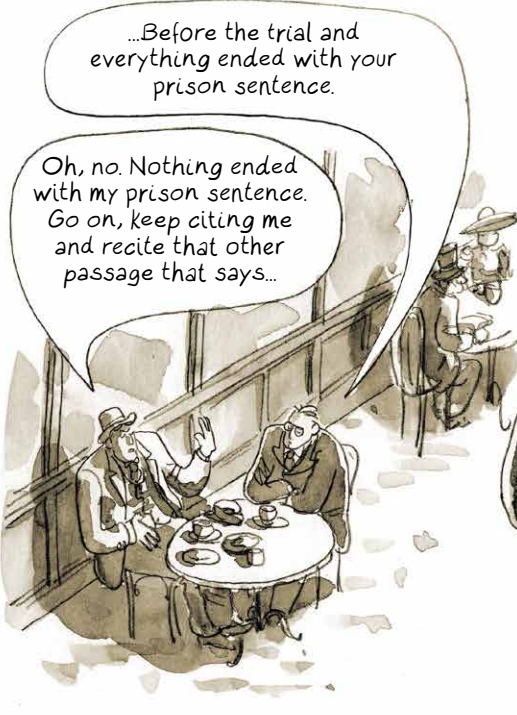
Well, now that we've come to maxims, tell me your opinion of this one.

"Misfortunes one can endure—they come from outside, they are accidents. But to suffer for one's own faults—ah!—there is the sting of life."



I think I ought to ask you about copyright. It's from *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

Exactly! You yourself wrote that when you were at the height of success...



...Before the trial and everything ended with your prison sentence.

Oh, no. Nothing ended with my prison sentence. Go on, keep citing me and recite that other passage that says...

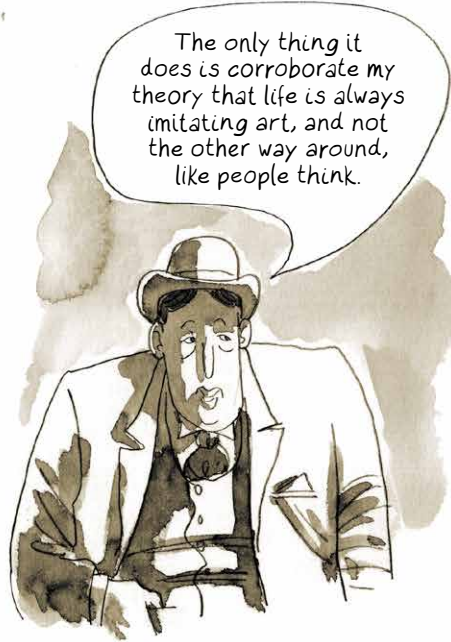


"You don't know what it is to fall into the pit, to be despised, mocked, to be an outcast! And all the while to hear the laughter, the horrible laughter of the world. One pays for one's sin, and then one pays again, and all one's life one pays."



That's it, Oscar, that's it! And you don't extract any lesson there for your life?

A lesson? But what can you mean?

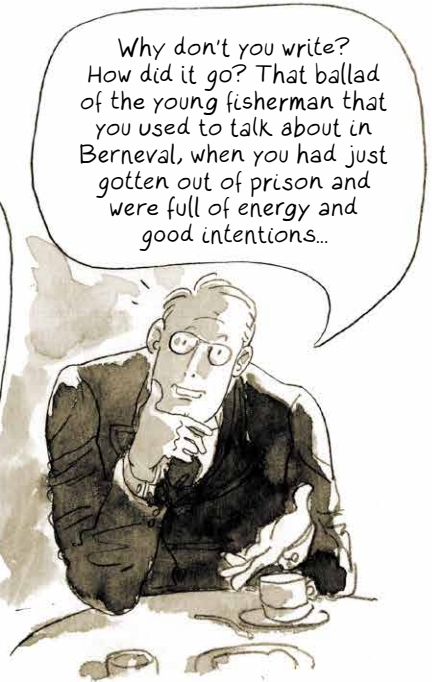


The only thing it does is corroborate my theory that life is always imitating art, and not the other way around, like people think.



How can I help it if my life persists in imitating the things that I've written?

That's precisely it! Write! That you could do! Write one of your delicious stories and let your life imitate it!



Why don't you write? How did it go? That ballad of the young fisherman that you used to talk about in Berneval, when you had just gotten out of prison and were full of energy and good intentions...



Look, Robert,
it is always a silly thing
to give advice.

But to give
good advice is
absolutely fatal.



CAFE RESTAURANT
LE PETIT BISTROT

Please,
Oscar...

I only want to see
you pull yourself
out of the gutter
you've sunk into...





Mr. Sherard,
we are all in the
gutter. But some of
us are looking at
the stars.

Bonne
journée.





Robert...
ahem...

Lately I've
been undergoing
some economic
difficulties...

Would you mind
lending me a
few francs?

INTERVIEW
WITH

**ROBERT
SHERARD**

Ah,
Oscar,
Oscar...

I was one of his best
friends, did you know
that? Of course, the
oldest of those who
accompanied him until
the end of his life.



And I was also his greatest
defender, I've always been ready
to trade blows with whomever
I needed to in order to defend
him. He was a great genius!
An incomparable talent!
A misspent treasure!

Yes, well, Lord Alfred
Douglas, [Bosie] was partly
to blame; his presence
alienated him. He was a
fateful influence for him,
and Oscar was... weak.



When he was released from prison, in June, 1897, we all marveled at the fortitude he was giving off. We had never seen him in such good shape! That summer in Berneval was his happiest moment.



But in the autumn, he left for Naples to reunite with Bosie and... Everything began to fall apart. I wrote to him, anxious for him to reconsider and come back, I advised him that he was putting the whole world against him.



He accused me of being a Puritan and a philistine, but I... I was only trying to make him see things as they were. Not as he wished them to be!



What do you mean?



No, nonono, no! Don't misinterpret me! I never said that Oscar had sexual deviancies nor anything of the kind. Those are the defamations of Bosie's father, the Marquis of Queensberry, that the press later magnified.



What Oscar did have was... some sort of... epileptoid attacks that made him adopt... at times... somewhat strange behaviors... Only that... Yes...

But he loved his wife and children profoundly. He was a doting father.



In fact, when Constance died, he fell into a terrible depression.

I even feared he might attempt the worst.



Fortunately...

His friends were always close by.



Paris.
April, 1898.







You've got enough to deal with torturing your sight with this wallpaper. Take care at least of your sense of smell.

Good God! Anyone would think you've slept with a panther!

Ah... Yes... Ha, ha... A panther... Something of the kind.



Come here, not to worry, *mon chéri*.

I would like to introduce you to someone very special.

My great friend Robert Ross.



Léon?

Ah... you know each other already? Then introductions aren't needed.

As you can see, it wasn't quite a panther... although almost. Ha, ha!

He, he.

Bonjour, monsieur Robert.

Bonjour, Léon...

Well, I, if you'll excuse me...

Of course, Léon, see you later.

Be a good boy and do not forget what I told you.

Not to worry, monsieur Melmoth. I will ask after that boy. Someone has to know him.





My hope of
returning to a new
life ends in
her tomb.

Where did they
bury her?




In Genoa, where
she was living. You know that
ever since your trial, she too
refused to return
to England.



And... do you know what it
says on her tombstone?





Yes... "Constance Mary, daughter of Horace Lloyd."

You are not mentioned.

Poor Constance...
Even to the grave the shadow of my shame has followed her.

That's not the worst of it, Oscar.

You know I have for a time been trying to convince Constance to authorize you to see Cyril and Vyvyan...

But I didn't manage it...
And now that she's died, the restraining order keeping you from your own children cannot be revoked...
At least not until they reach majority...

!



Driver!

Stop!

¡BleuErGH!





You want to pray in a Catholic church?

Why not?

It's all the same to Constance now...





Anyway, Catholic pomp is much more appropriate than the Anglican tradition for funerary rites.

In fact, I'm thinking of becoming baptized in the Catholic faith, if only to have a good burial.