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Gregory Mackie, *Beautiful Untrue Things: Forging Oscar Wilde's Extraordinary Afterlife* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 287 pp.
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One hand at his hip, the other touching the side of a knowing smile, a Beardsleyan portrait of a confident Oscar Wilde graces the cover of Gregory Mackie's book. Like the many representations of Wilde that Mackie details within, the portrait is a counterfeit. In his study of Wilde's earliest biographers, impersonators, forgers, and mediums, Mackie explores various efforts at appropriating and re-forging Wilde's legacy.

Portraiture, real and faked, is an apt recurring metaphor for the efforts to recast Wilde in a desired role. Mackie commences his investigation by recounting the story of the doubly-forged portrait of 'Willie Hughes', the fictional lover of Shakespeare within Wilde's 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.', a story centered around questions of authenticity and aesthetic interpretation. When Charles Ricketts painted an artificially-aged portrait to accompany the story, Wilde treated it as a real artifact and called it an 'authentic Clouet' to match its description within his fiction (p. 20). Thus, Mackie's study begins with Wilde himself rewriting history to match his own aesthetic designs. As Mackie notes throughout his study, Wilde's aesthetic philosophy often privileges the artificial over the real and consequently seems to invite forgeries of his work. After the portrait was lost following the Tite Street sale, there were a flurry of attempts to recover it resulting in Ricketts making a sketch of the lost painting. This re-forged portrait, created after Wilde's death, is emblematic of the manner Wilde's 'fans' picked up where Wilde himself left off in artificially creating and recreating his legacy, while entangling themselves in a fraternity of Wilde worship often fraught with conflict.

Following the introduction, the chapters – themselves re-forged titles of Wilde's works – are organized around particular methods of creating posthumous legacy. The first chapter, 'The

Importance of Being Authentic', deals with the efforts of Robert Ross, Christopher Millard, and Walter Ledger to form an accurate and authoritative literary canon. Engaging in what Mackie labels 'restorative biography', this 'queer circle' of Wilde's defenders sought to recover and legitimize Wilde's literary legacy by correcting misinformation, releasing and defending an expurgated version of *De Profundis*, purging spurious works such as *The Priest and the Acolyte*, painstakingly reconstructing biographical information, and writing an authoritative *Collected Works* and *Bibliography*. In a book that otherwise deals with forgeries, this chapter on these champions of authenticity may, at first, seem an illogical starting point; however, Mackie soundly justifies this inclusion by noting that 'forgery has no meaning without authenticity' (p. 32). Ultimately, the book's organization is ingenious as this pairing of authentic and inauthentic allows the reader to see how Wilde's early biographers attempted to police his legacy while at the same time providing forgers with the very material that would be used to create convincing fakes.

Chapter Two, 'The Picture of Dorian Hope', deals primarily with a composite and forged persona that engaged in appropriation and 'queering the Wilde archive' that Ross, Millard, and Ledger had worked so hard to stabilize and legitimize, though often at the cost of downplaying Wilde's homosexual identity (pp. 70–71). Dorian Hope emerged first as the purported author of *Pearls and Pomegranates*, a volume of poetry that referenced Wilde's work in its title and dedication but was otherwise plagiarized from a number of other poets. Later, the name was also associated with the drag performances of Brett Holland (no relation to Constance's family who took on the name Holland after Wilde's trials) and forged letters and manuscripts that fooled several collectors. Though long thought to be Arthur Cravan (born Fabian Lloyd), Wilde's nephew by marriage, Mackie theorizes that Dorian Hope was likely the product of a circle of forgers primarily including Brett Holland. The Dorian Hope forgeries are notable in Mackie's study for being more than simply fraudulent copies. Instead, they fabricate an alternate reality, playfully inserting additional homoerotic trysts and other scenarios that even involve the personage 'Dorian Hope' receiving

Wilde's endorsement. Mackie interprets these creative efforts as 'myth-making' by a community of Wilde fans (p. 117).

Mackie builds upon of this idea of the forgery as fan fiction in Chapter 3, 'Pen, Pencil, and Planchette', which explores how mediums and spiritualists in the 1920s attempted to become the author's literal 'ghostwriters'. Using automatic writing and Ouija boards, Hester Travers Smith and Geraldine Cummins produced many conversations with Oscar Wilde's spirit as well as a play supposedly written by him. The play's title, 'Is it a Forgery?', supposedly justified by Wilde's ghost stating that 'the author himself is debating the question', is also an appropriation of a line from 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.' (p. 154). The doubt introduced by the title corresponds well with the fact that the mediums were put in the problematic situation of arguing for both the originality and the authenticity of 'their Wilde' in comparison to that of their rivals. Ultimately, Mackie concludes that the play achieved more originality than authenticity in that the forgeries reflect much more of the mediums' desires than Wilde's own character.

In Chapter 4, 'The Devoted Fraud', Mackie reaches the culmination of his titular 'beautiful untrue things' produced by a fanatic desire to write oneself into Wilde's legacy with Mrs Chan-Toon's forged 'fairy play', *For Love of the King*. Like Dorian Hope, Mrs Chan-Toon acted the role of decadent successor to Wilde's 'life as art' persona as well as attempting to write herself into Wilde's history through an imagined friendship. The play, which Mrs Chan-Toon claimed was a wedding present from Wilde, was written in a decadent style inspired by *Salomé* and *The Sphinx*, and set in Burma. Mackie interprets this play as a work of 'biofictional allegory' which blends reality and fiction by placing the biography of a real person at the centre of the work. Mackie reads the central character – who undergoes a magical transformation into a peacock – as an amalgamation of both Wilde and Mrs Chan-Toon. The sex- and species-change from woman to male peacock becomes representative of Mrs Chan-Toon's efforts to embody Wilde through forgery (p. 182).

In his conclusion, Mackie reiterates his thesis that many of these Wilde forgeries can be understood as forms of fan fiction. Additionally, he returns to the idea that Wilde himself

encouraged such forgeries by noting that Wilde supervised some of the earliest forgeries of his work by having Maurice Gilbert (a loyal friend and possible lover at the end of Wilde's life) forge Wilde's signature on some of the 'author's editions' of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Again privileging the artificial over the authentic, Wilde joked to his publisher that the forged signatures would fetch a better price since they were more skilfully written. Comparing previous examples to Gilbert's fraudulent act of signing Wilde's name, Mackie sees these fan fictions as a mode of 'performing' Wilde. In closing, Mackie offers one final 'note' on Mitchell Kennerley's edition of *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* which was recently discovered by Ian Small to have potentially been subject to editorial tampering. Mackie suggestively leaves this example as an open question deserving of further study.

Mackie's application of the modern concept of 'fan fiction' to Wilde forgeries provides a useful framework that lends some measure of legitimacy to the study of works often labelled 'spurious'. Mackie's readings of 'Is it a Forgery?' and *For Love of the King* offer a starting point for further work in reception studies. One potential target of criticism might be the omission of *Teleny*, the collaborative work of homoerotic fiction often attributed to Wilde, which is often treated with some prominence among Wilde apocrypha. Of course, Mackie is under no obligation to be exhaustive in his coverage of Wildean forgeries and it is quite possible this work would not neatly fit with Mackie's model of forgery as fan fiction. Overall, however, scholars would be hard-pressed to find a more fascinating book of literary curiosities, and those interested in Oscar Wilde, in particular, will find Mackie's work a treasure-trove of under-studied Wildeana.