



The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde: Volume IV: Criticism: Historical Criticism, Intentions, The Soul of Man

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Volume IV of the Oxford English Texts Complete Works of Oscar Wilde is the first variorum edition of Wilde's major critical writing; it includes the critical essays which were re-published in book-form in his life-time - that is, those anthologised in *Intentions* and *The Soul of Man* - as well as his graduate essay usually known by the title The Rise of Historical Criticism, but which this volume titles Historical Criticism. The Introduction gives a detailed account of the composition of each of the essays: it gives a new explanation for the relationship between the 'The Decay of Lying' and 'Pen, Pencil, and Poison' (arguing that they are best understood as companion pieces); it provides the first concrete demonstration that Wilde did, on occasions, knowingly 'copy' his own work; and it reveals that substantial cuts were made to some of Wilde's essays (without his full consent) by the periodical editors with whom he worked. The edition also provides, for the first time, a full collation of the textual variants between the published versions of Wilde's essays (that is, both book and periodical), and all extant manuscripts; in addition it establishes a new, authoritative text for Historical Criticism, based on an examination of the original manuscript, which differs significantly from that printed by Robert Ross in his 1908 Collected Edition (and subsequently reprinted in the Collins Complete Works). The annotation to the edition reveals the full extent of Wilde's 'borrowings' both from his own work, and from other writers; it also reveals that much of Historical Criticism is in fact paraphrasing or translating well-known classical texts, and that the some of denseness of the argument is due to ellipses in Wilde's text that were disguised by earlier editors.

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