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# Passing

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OSCAR WILDE. By Andre Gide. Bernard Fretman, translator. Philosophical Library. 50 pp. \$2.75.

If old scholar Gide were given to subtitles, he could call this one: "Mr. Wilde and Mr. Melmoth."

In 50 pages—a few brief conversations the young Gide had with Wilde at the turn of the century and a few words of commentary by Gide—the noon and midnight of the great poet-playright-novelist is delineated.



There is the precious gold-and-silk Wilde in his heyday, the maker of bon mots, the salon wit, the toast of the continent. And then the famous trial in which Wilde was found guilty of sexual perversion and sentenced to Reading Gaol (Gide lets this go by without much comment) and finally there is the somber, resigned Wilde (now calling himself Sebastian Melmoth) who turns up at Berneval, a dull, cold village on the French coast, to do penance for his sins.

"Oscar Wilde" is a brilliant study in contrasts, a penetrating dissection of extreme extroversion turned sour, a high spot chronicle of a tragedy still the subject of conversation among writers.

Gide's prose, of course, is faultless, exciting and sure-footed.

—R. S.