

Final Report—Faculty Development Research Grant
Oscar Wilde’s Romantic *Intentions*
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As I noted in my grant application, my faculty development research grant aimed at producing a chapter’s worth of material for a larger a book-length project tentatively entitled *The Importance of Being Romantic*. I am happy to report that the grant did in fact serve me well, allowing me to make substantial progress toward completing what I hope will be the second chapter in the book. As I did not have any non-stipend/course release budget expenditures, this report will consist solely of a review of the results of the grant activities.

My grant project focused on Wilde’s major critical work, *Intentions*, a collection of four essays he published in 1891. These four wonderfully-titled essays are “The Decay of Lying,” “Pen, Pencil, and Poison,” “The Critic as Artist,” and “The Truth of Masks.” Both “The Decay of Lying” and “The Critic as Artist” are widely anthologized and are regarded by scholars as together constituting the two most crucial texts for any “serious” delineation of Wilde’s aesthetic theory. In my article/chapter for the grant project, I worked to demonstrate how Wilde’s understanding of and affinity for Romantic aesthetics fundamentally informs the ideas within both of these essential texts, as well as those of the other essays in this landmark volume of late nineteenth-century literary criticism.

When I originally applied for the grant, I asked for a summer stipend, but based on changing summer plans for 2009 I asked for a course release during Fall 2009 instead (which Dr. Morello very graciously agreed to switch for me). Obviously, this change affected the timetable for my goals/objectives. After learning of the success of my application, I had crafted a conference paper proposal in order to present part of my grant work at The Midwest Conference on British Studies meeting at the University of Pittsburgh in early October 2009. When I switched from a summer stipend to a fall course release, this required an adjustment to my objectives’ timetable. If I had taken the stipend, the whole article/chapter would have been written by the end of the summer, and completing the conference paper would have been a matter of excerpting from the larger whole. With the course release, I needed to shorten my initial research period (which now was just starting in September) in order to ensure the paper would be written in time. As my paper proposal promised a presentation on the two major pieces from *Intentions*, I focused only on research relevant to those essays during roughly the first three weeks of September. I then turned to writing the paper itself, which I successfully delivered on 10 October.

At that point, I went back to the rest of my research, and in November I returned to writing, first expanding the conference paper into an even more substantial treatment of “The Decay of Lying” and “The Critic as Artist” and then working in the other two texts (which turned out to be primarily focused on “Pen, Pencil, and Poison”). I struggled a bit with this last part, as I had presented a separate conference paper on this essay in Spring 2009 (focused on its application of color imagery), which I had begun expanding into its own article-length argument during Summer 2009 at the encouragement of noted Wilde scholar Chris Snodgrass, who had been in the audience for that presentation. I wanted to ensure that there would be no overlap between the two readings of “Pen, Pencil, and Poison.”

Ultimately, I was able to finish a draft of my grant project’s chapter by the end of the semester, but it was not yet in the shape I would have liked it to be before sending it out to a journal. While I hoped to finish the relatively short amount of work I expected it would take to polish it properly during Spring Semester, when the big snows (and, in particular, the incredible

number of days Fredericksburg City Schools were canceled, each representing a day in which I only had time to meet classes and office hours—all my time for prep, grading, and research during the day lost due to my needing to be with my kids) pushed everybody and everything behind schedule, my other professional responsibilities (including another grant project, this one on Disability Studies for the Teaching Center) needed to take precedence. I would turn my attentions to the Wilde project immediately after graduation.

As you may recall, my only surviving brother died the weekend after finals week, requiring me to be out of town for a little over two weeks—and to submit *G* grades for my classes. By the time I returned, completed my final grading, and wrote up my Faculty Annual Activities Report, it was June and I was wiped out. As I slowly began to start work again, two other projects (both chapters already submitted as part of edited collections) unexpectedly required new revisions before their next review stages. Suffice it to say, I have not sent out the grant chapter yet to a scholarly journal. I still expect to do so this fall, as (again) I do not see the work remaining as particularly time intensive.

Regardless, I can say partial results (in the form of the conference paper) were disseminated even before the grant project period was over, and (as I stated on the application) my ultimate goal for dissemination of the results was (and remains) the form it will take within my own book project, so I am not particularly worried about the delay in getting an article-length version of the results out for consideration at a journal.

This project has enriched my delivery of course material for my catalog course ENGL 478 (Seminar in Oscar Wilde) in that I assign three of the four essays that comprise *Intentions*. The grant has enabled me to offer students in this course a more nuanced engagement with these texts. It also will impact my delivery of ENGL 336 (British Victorian Literature) and ENGL 382 (British Literature Since 1800), since I assign Wilde texts in both of these as well. Without this project, then, I would not have been able to give this tour de force collection of Wilde's mature literary criticism the same sort of intensive re-examination that my sabbatical allowed me to pursue where his early poems and lectures were concerned.

I am confident that this article/chapter, and (even more substantially) the book project of which hopefully it will become a part, will help lead to the sort of disciplinary recognition that I hope to achieve as I make the transition to full professor. Since my participation in a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar on The Oscar Wilde Archive at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library in Los Angeles in Summer 2007, my scholarship within my specialty area has gained a direction and focus that is exactly what I need at this point in my career (post-tenure). I have presented four conference papers and generated three article-length essays out of this work to date, one of which has been accepted to *The Oscar Wilde Archive*, a book collection currently being pitched to the University of Toronto Press. To the best of my knowledge, my book project will represent the most substantial examination of the Romantic Wilde to date. As such, it not only would be a huge step in my own personal development as a UMW faculty member but also a genuine contribution to the fields of Wilde studies in particular and Victorian studies in general.

I believe this project's funding has been a worthwhile investment for the University, then, owing to its potential to advance scholarship in my discipline and owing to the personal and institutional benefits (in particular, name recognition) that theoretically go along with such advances. In sum, I believe this grant project represents the sort of ongoing research in the service of academic excellence that the University is committed to supporting.