

Press Contacts

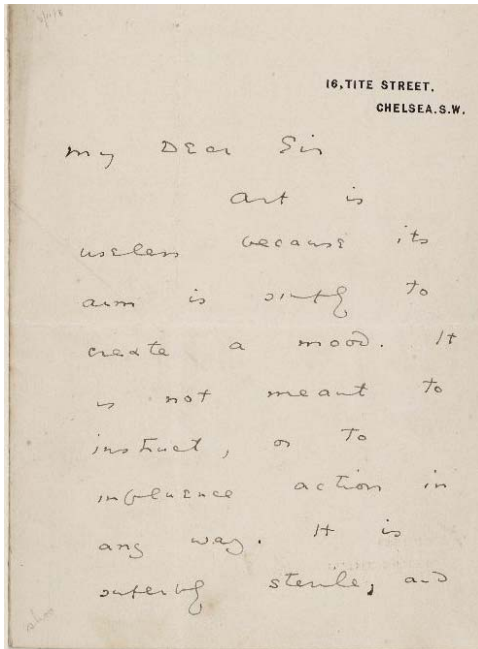
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**THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM RECEIVES DONATION
OF RARE “LOST” OSCAR WILDE VOLUME**

**Contents Include Poems and Prose Pieces as well as Important Letters
Related to Wilde’s Art and Stormy Personal Life**

Volume to Go on Special Exhibition in April 2009

New York, NY, December 2, 2008—The Morgan Library & Museum announced today that it has received the gift of a highly important bound collection of Oscar Wilde’s letters and manuscripts, the whereabouts of which has been unknown to scholars for over half a century.



Letter from Oscar Wilde to Bernulf Clegg, 1891, beginning with the line “Art is useless because its aim is simply to create a mood.” From a volume of manuscripts and letters of Oscar Wilde from the collection of the 11th marquess of Queensberry. Gift of Lucia Moreira Salles, The Morgan Library & Museum.

The magnificent red-leather-bound volume, totaling just over fifty handwritten pages, will be placed on exhibition beginning April 17, 2009. The volume comprises nine manuscripts of poems and prose pieces and four important letters that illuminate the life and work of the celebrated writer, dramatist, aesthete, wit, and self-proclaimed “lord of language.” Of special note are the earliest surviving letter from Wilde to his lover Lord Alfred Douglas (called “Bosie,”); a manuscript of the story “The Selfish Giant” in the hand of Wilde’s wife, Constance; the only surviving autograph manuscripts of Wilde’s *Poems in Prose*; and a letter in which Wilde reiterated his famous claim that art is “useless.”

The volume is the gift of Lucia Moreira Salles, a Brazilian-born philanthropist who acquired the manuscripts with her late husband, Walter Moreira Salles, a Brazilian banker, diplomat, and book collector. Mrs. Moreira Salles chose to donate this treasured volume to the Morgan because of the institution’s renowned

commitment to scholarship and accessibility as well as the strength and reputation of its Wilde holdings. These include the earliest manuscript of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and, among its extensive collection of

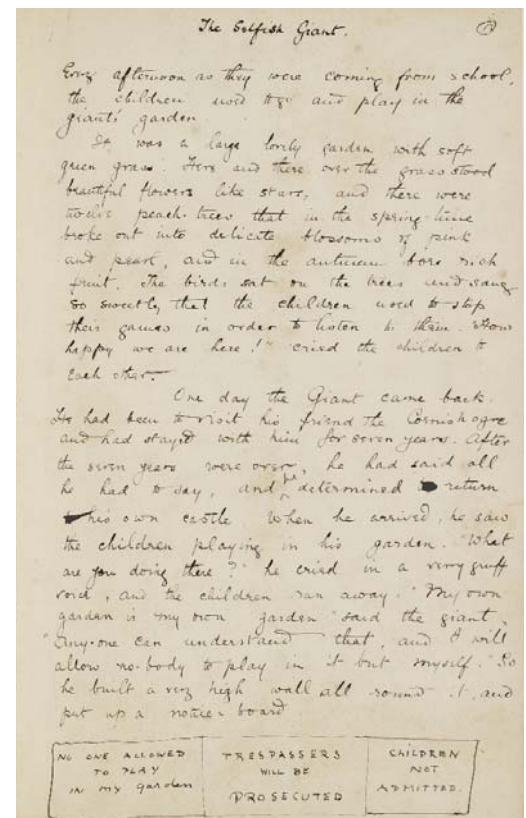
letters, the only surviving letter from Wilde to his wife, Constance. The Morgan featured its Wilde collection in the 2001 exhibition *Oscar Wilde: A Life in Six Acts*, organized in cooperation with The British Library.

“This extraordinary volume provides new insight into the life and work of one of the great geniuses of the English language,” said William M. Griswold, Director of The Morgan Library & Museum. “It is an extremely significant addition to the Morgan’s outstanding Wilde collection and will give scholars the opportunity to examine primary source material that was thought lost. The Morgan is deeply grateful to Lucia Moreira Salles for her magnificent generosity in choosing the Morgan to be the repository for this important work.”

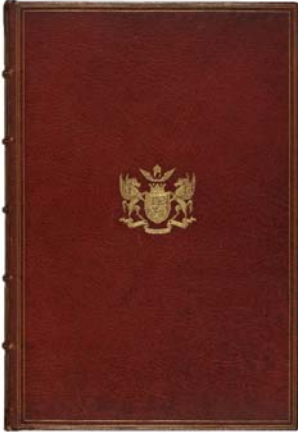
“The discovery, or, more correctly in this case, the rediscovery of manuscripts by Oscar Wilde is always an event,” commented Merlin Holland, Wilde’s only grandson, who has co-edited *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* and written several books about his grandfather. “There is a feast of research to be savored in these manuscripts and to have such a privileged glimpse at Oscar Wilde’s working methods is rare.”

The volume will be on public display from April 17 to August 9, 2009, as part of the Morgan’s exhibition *Recent Acquisitions*, which will highlight important additions to the institution’s holdings in the last five years. The Morgan will also create an online exhibition of the contents of the volume, with photographs and transcriptions, to be available through its Web site in 2009.

An outstanding highlight is the earliest surviving letter documenting the start of one of the most famous and tragic intimate relationships of all time—between Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, the Magdalen College undergraduate with whom Wilde became passionately involved in the early 1890s. Writing on stationery of the Albemarle Club, probably in late 1892, Wilde expresses candid yearning to be with Douglas (“I should awfully like to go away with you”) and hopes that Douglas likes the visiting-card case he has given him, perhaps for Douglas’s twenty-second birthday. Douglas later destroyed many of the letters Wilde wrote to him. Virtually all those he retained are now in the Clark Library at UCLA, so the reappearance of this early letter is highly significant.



“The Selfish Giant.” Manuscript in the hand of Constance Wilde, signed and revised by Oscar Wilde. From a volume of manuscripts and letters of Oscar Wilde from the collection of the 11th marquis of Queensberry. Gift of Lucia Moreira Salles, The Morgan Library & Museum.



Cover of a volume of manuscripts and letters of Oscar Wilde, stamped in gilt with the Queensberry arms. Gift of Lucia Moreira Salles, The Morgan Library & Museum.

The volume has both a distinguished and intriguing provenance. It was Douglas's father, the ninth marquess of Queensberry, whose rage at his son's involvement with Wilde led to one of the most notorious criminal trials of all time, resulting in Wilde's conviction on charges that he had committed acts of "gross indecency." It is therefore striking to find, on the cover of the volume, stamped in gilt, the arms of the marquess of Queensberry—the shield flanked by two winged horses over the motto Forward. The manuscripts and letters housed in the volume were collected and preserved by the eleventh marquess of Queensberry, the grandson of the man who played a major role in instigating Wilde's downfall.

In another letter in the volume, written to a young man named George Kersley, Wilde captured the intergenerational appeal of his 1888 collection of stories *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, calling them "studies in prose, put for Romance's sake into a fanciful form: meant partly for children, and partly for those who have kept the childlike faculties of wonder and joy."

Though none of Wilde's own manuscripts for the tales in *The Happy Prince* survive, the volume contains an intriguing manuscript of one of the stories—"The Selfish Giant"—in the handwriting of Constance Wilde, who also had been writing some children's stories at this time. Oscar Wilde wrote the title and his own name on a cover sheet and signed the manuscript at the end, and he made small changes in pencil within the text penned by his wife. Additional, more substantive changes were made to the text before publication, indicating that the manuscript is an early draft—but by whom? Does the existence of an early version of the text in Constance Wilde's hand indicate that she had a role in the composition of the story? This manuscript is sure to stir speculation about the authorship of one of Wilde's best-known prose works.

Wilde's conviction that works of art ought to exist for their own sake is expressed dramatically in an 1891 letter to a young man, Bernulf Clegg. Wilde told him, "Art is useless because its aim is simply to create a mood. It is not meant to instruct, or to influence action in any way. . . . A work of art is useless as a flower is useless. A flower blossoms for its own joy. We gain a moment of joy by looking at it." This important letter, offering a concise expression of Wilde's artistic credo, is an extraordinary companion to one of the Morgan's greatest treasures, the manuscript of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde's fictional exploration of this very idea.

The volume also contains several literary manuscripts, never before studied by scholars, that offer a remarkable insight into Wilde's composition process. Included are working drafts of five of the six short

compositions that Wilde called his *Poems in Prose*, heavily revised and several bearing ink smudges and compositors' marks that indicate that they were used by a printer. Wilde wrote these pieces in the mid-1890s in an effort to commit to paper some of the stories he had related to a range of listeners who had been dazzled by his verbal acuity.

The titles in manuscript are "The Doer of Good," "The Disciple," "The Master," "The House of Judgment," and "The Artist." Wilde wrote "The Doer of Good" at the height of his fame, with three successful plays running at once, but on the verge of his downfall. W.B. Yeats was impressed by its "terrible beauty" and recorded, in *The Tragic Generation*, that Wilde called it "the best story in the world" and would repeat it "to himself on getting out of bed and before every meal."

In a working draft of "La Dame Jaune," one of several poems in which Wilde explored the lyric possibilities of yellow—a color associated with decadence—Wilde described a woman removing her jewelry, letting down her hair, and loosening her clothes. He worked through various color possibilities—pale blue, rose pink, amber, and boxwood—before settling on "lemon yellow" and "ivory." The volume also includes manuscripts of "Roses and Rue," a poem Wilde composed for the actress Lillie Langtry, and "Under the Balcony," a poem written for a hospital fund-raiser and published on the day of his marriage to Constance Lloyd. It also contains a letter from Wilde to his publisher John Lane about the publication and American copyright of his play *A Woman of No Importance*.

Mrs. Moreira Salles has commissioned a limited edition facsimile of the manuscripts printed this month by the distinguished Veronese firm Stamperia Valdonega. The work, with introduction and commentary by Merlin Holland, is bound in Tyrian purple, inspired by Wilde's choice of binding for the first edition of his play *Salomé*. A copy of the facsimile is included in the Grolier Club's current exhibition *The Work of the Stamperia Valdonega, 1948–2008*, on view from November 21, 2008, through January 9, 2009.

The Morgan Library & Museum

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, musical venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. A century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 b.c. to the twenty-first century.

General Information

The Morgan Library & Museum

225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405

212.685.0008

www.themorgan.org

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve.

Admission

\$12 for adults; \$8 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children, 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop.