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### ***Wilde Men: Performing Wilde's paradigm of masculinity in the Twenty-First Century***

Wilde has reached iconic status within the fields of English literary and cultural studies; the secret of his success is given by the artist's capacity of translating his life into a form of writing and his writing into a vital gesture which articulates a complex critique of late Nineteenth Century English society. According to Waldrep (2004: xiii): "Wilde's legacy as both a writer and a literary figure of social, political and cultural significance is such that Wilde the man cannot be readily separated by Wilde the careerist. His roles, as aesthete, lecturer, businessman, family man, poet, editor, playwright, seducer, prisoner and exile are part of a broader role of writer as performer that he used self-consciously in an attempt to destroy the binary opposition, separating art and life". In this sense, the Anglo-Irish writer chose London as the stage for the performance of the most important of his plays: *Oscar Wilde*; it is not a chance that theatre – as a space in which the literary word is enacted – gave the author of *The Importance of being Earnest* enormous fame. Interestingly, in the Twenty-First Century, Wilde's self-conscious construction of his identity and his performance of an ironic masculinity - which sharply contrasted with the imperial one embraced by many of his contemporaries (Beynon) - have become sources of inspiration for many artists (Stephen Fry, David Bowie, Morrissey, Pete Doherty and Russell Brand, just to name a few) in key fields such as literature, cinema, television and music. This paper analyses Wilde's life and works focusing on the interplay of performance and identity, showing the complexity and importance of a literary and artistic experience which has often been misunderstood.