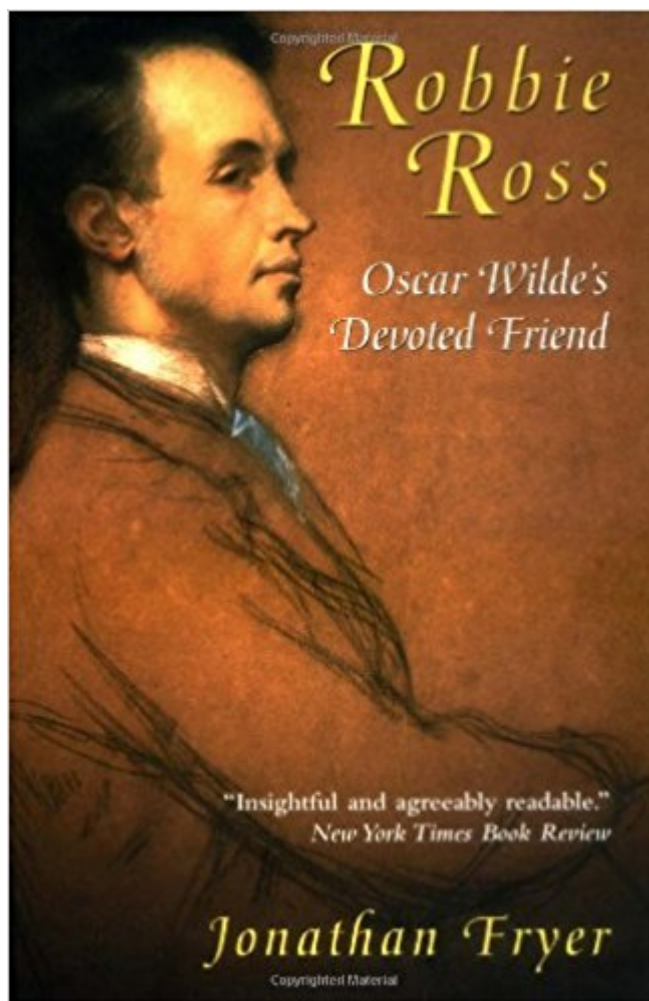


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# Robbie Ross: Oscar Wilde's Devoted Friend



## Synopsis

In a compelling narrative of moral courage and personal integrity, this biography tells the story of Robert Baldwin Ross, the man who first seduced Oscar Wilde and never wavered in his loyalty to the flamboyant wit and playwright. Unfailingly, Ross stood by Wilde through the scandals that shocked a nation, through his much-publicized trials and imprisonment, at his deathbed in Paris, and thereafter dedicated himself to defending the reputation of his famous friend.

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## Customer Reviews

Fryer (André; and Oscar: Gide, Wilde and the Gay Art of Living) looks at a minor figure in literary history, Robbie Ross, the object of Oscar Wilde's first homosexual liaison. Wilde's sexual relationship with Ross (1869-1918) began when the latter was a 17-year-old student and Wilde was a 33-year-old married man. Their friendship deepened when Ross moved in with Wilde and his wife, Constance (with whom Wilde was deeply in love and to whom he was still sexually attracted), while Ross was cramming to get into Cambridge. The author also documents the many affairs the two men went on to have both with male members of London's literary circles as well as with lower class "rent boys." Although this biography is ostensibly about Ross, equal or more space is devoted to Wilde's highly successful literary career, as the subtitle suggests, covering such high points as the publication of his then highly sensational novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as well as his ill-fated compulsive love for "Bosie" Davis. Bosie's father, who despised Wilde, was instrumental in having him tried for sodomy. Throughout Wilde's trial, prison term and release, Ross, who maintained a

career as a minor writer and art critic, remained a loyal friend and frequently assisted the somewhat irresponsible Wilde financially. Ross was with Wilde when he died several years later; afterward he became Wilde's literary executor and befriended Wilde's sons. He was frequently subjected to vicious attacks from Bosie, who married and repudiated his former life. Written in a style that is fresh and exuberant but not sensational, Fryer's biography is particularly interesting for its in-depth look at London's late Victorian gay society. Photos not seen by PW. (Jan.)Forecast: 2000 marked the centenary of Wilde's death, and if this is packaged with other recent books on Wilde it might get some sales, but Ross is a minor figure and not likely to attract much attention.Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As yet another commemoration of the centennial of Oscar Wilde's death, journalist, broadcaster, and biographer Fryer (*Andre and Oscar: The Literary Friendship of Andr Gide and Oscar Wilde*) has written a biography of Ross (1869-1918), the writer, critic, and art dealer who as a young man introduced Wilde to homosexual love and later served as his literary executor. Descended from a prominent Canadian family, Ross was raised in England, where he lodged with the Wildes while preparing to study at Cambridge. His friendship with Wilde endured through Wilde's trial and imprisonment resulting from his homosexual relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas. Present at Wilde's deathbed, Ross successfully revived Wilde's works so that the royalties could pay off his many debts. As much about Wilde as Ross, the book reveals the changing attitudes and mores of late 19th- and early 20th-century England and includes a cast of figures well known in the arts, such as Sassoon, Graves, Beardsley, Gide, Shaw, and Whistler. Recommended for academic and larger public libraries.DDenise J. Stankovics, Rockville P.L., Vernon, CT Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a lovely tribute to Robbie Ross, Oscar Wilde's confidant, soul mate and staunch, stalwart friend. It is a well researched and thoroughly enjoyable read, particularly if you enjoy biographies. The author does not impart judgment or opinion, but provides the facts of Ross's interesting, and at times tumultuous, life in a compelling manner allowing the reader to formulate their own opinion. The book is an easy read and a conduit into the social, political and aesthetic nature of the late 1800's and early 1900's.I would recommend this book to any lover of wit, aesthetics and literature. It provides an intimate portrait of not only Ross, but of the many great minds and artists of the period. It celebrates Ross the nonconformist; one who chooses not to bend his ideals to the social rules

and regulations defined by "modern" society, but rather defines his life by his own thoughts and passions. It also paints a lovely picture of true love between men for modern man to examine. Not necessarily in the romantic sense, although it does pay tribute to the brief physical love affair between Ross and Wilde. More importantly, it reminds us of the unfailing and unfaltering capabilities of true friendship. In essence, the book tells the tale of a man that in the stead of great hardships, and at the risk of being utterly ostracized by society, remained true to himself and his friendships. Ross was a man who deeply understood the meaning of humanity; the power we have the capacity to either wield or deny, and the deep and profound effect of kindness and generosity on our fellow man.

Jonathan Fryer is quickly becoming my favorite biographer of the late Victorian world. This life of Robbie Ross is kindly managed, researched with tenacity and told with honest and loving intellect. I have read the Fryer biography of Oscar Wilde and it was brilliant, but even more treasures of observation are unveiled in this book. It is truly a gem of detail and clarity in the myriad of volumes dedicated to Oscariana.

This is probably the most enjoyable biography I've read in years. Robbie Ross was a man who respected all people and especially his friend Oscar Wilde.

Oscar Wilde was author of some of the merriest jests and plays in the English language and subject of one of the saddest banishments and deaths in literature. Oscar was unfortunate in his enemies, and in many of his friends, but he was very fortunate in the friendship of Robbie Ross, a friendship that displayed itself throughout Oscar's successes and worst trials, and for long after Oscar's death. It cannot be said that Ross was a particularly important figure, but as a friend to Wilde, he influenced Oscar in many good ways. Ross is a footnote, but he was an exceptionally good friend and a good man, and now he has a good biography, *Robbie Ross: Oscar Wilde's Devoted Friend* (Carroll and Graf Publishers) by Jonathan Fryer. It will be a welcome volume for any interested in Oscar's life. As a youth, Robbie met Oscar and introduced him to homosexual lovemaking. Oscar took other lovers afterward, as did Robbie, and Robbie had not the slightest jealousy about Oscar's affections. Throughout Oscar's life, Robbie was there to give him help and good counsel, although Oscar sadly didn't often take his advice. When Oscar wound up in jail, Robbie came back, and made himself indispensable with visits to the jail and with taking up collections from the friends Oscar still had. Robbie received the deserved admiration of Oscar's friends, and of Oscar: "When I

see you, I shall be quite happy, indeed I am happy now to think I have such wonderful friendship shown to me," and "Your love, your generosity, your care of me in prison and out of prison are the most lovely things in my life." Robbie oversaw the publication of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" and of *De Profundis*. He was on hand at Oscar's death, and oversaw the temporary internment and the arrangement of the final resting place in Paris. He befriended Oscar's sons, who from him heard the first kind things about their father since they were taken from him and had their name changed. He was determined that Oscar's work would be read and performed again, and that the sons would get the benefit; his efforts to remove Oscar's estate from bankruptcy were eventually successful. He edited the twelve volume set of Oscar's collected works, and the books were a commercial and critical success. There is much in this affectionate biography about Robbie's writing career, his running an art gallery, or his becoming an influential art critic. He would be forgotten, however, if it were not for his devotion to Oscar, and it is quite possible that we would remember Oscar less vividly if Robbie had not performed him such faithful service. This book is a fit testimony to that service. He was faithful to Oscar's memory until his own end, and when that end came, his ashes were eventually placed, fittingly and sweetly, in the cavity he had requested in the design of Oscar's monument.

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