



Ceremonies of Bravery: Oscar Wilde, Carlos Blacker, and the Dreyfus Affair

J. Robert Maguire

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Ceremonies of Bravery is a study of the friendship between the prolific writer Oscar Wilde and Carlos Blacker. The two men met in the 1880s, the period when Wilde was judged by many to be 'at his best', and Blacker went on to become a trustee of Wilde's marriage settlement. Wilde declared Blacker 'the truest of friends and the most sympathetic of companions', and diaries and letters show that the men were close confidantes for almost two decades, a period during which both endured personal crises and disgrace. However, the relationship came to an abrupt end in June 1898. Carlos Blacker recorded prophetically in his diary, 'After lunch just before dinner letter from Oscar which put an end to our friendship forever'.

Robert Maguire draws on Blacker's diaries to paint a rich portrait of Wilde's dear friend in their shared social milieu, providing an account that adds much to the already vivid picture of Wilde's life. He devotes the first half of the book to the formative years of the friendship, showing the two men attempting to support each other in disgrace, with personal crises unfolding in parallel in their lives. Maguire then turns his attention to the men's reunion in Paris in March 1898, some three years after Wilde's arrest. Here, the Dreyfus Affair was at its peak, and Wilde and Blacker found themselves with very different perspectives. Maguire weaves together court records, letters, and diaries to propose a new account of the way in which Dreyfusard Blacker, working on a secret plan to establish Dreyfus's innocence, drew his old friend Oscar Wilde into his confidence. Wilde, on the other hand, was developing increasing interest in and sympathy for the real traitor Esterhazy, and it is most likely that this led him to betray Blacker's confidence, ending the friendship between the two men.

The obscurity surrounding Carlos Blacker's role in the Dreyfus affair, as well as the attendant circumstances of his painful breakup with Oscar Wilde, was mainly due to Blacker's own rigidly maintained silence to the time of his death in 1928. The full story did not come to light until the transcription beginning in 1989 of Blacker's diaries. Using these diaries, alongside other archival sources, *Ceremonies of Bravery* provides new insight into a special relationship while also offering a unique perspective on the Dreyfus Affair.

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