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# W.G. Grace: Sporting Superstar, Cultural Celebrity, and Hero (to Oscar Wilde's Villain) of the Great Public Drama of 1895

Neil Washbourne\*

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**Abstract:** »W.G. Grace: Sportstar, kulturelle Berühmtheit und Held (als Oscar Wildes Schurke) vom großen öffentlichen Drama von 1895«. This article explores the sporting superstardom and cultural celebrity of the Victorian English cricketer Dr. W.G. Grace, who played first-class cricket from 1865–1908. The great attention capital and significant masculine social status associated with his fame were deployed by him and the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) to sideline the then dominant professional cricket teams and ensure that the aristocratic amateur-led MCC controlled the game from the early 1870s. It focuses on the social and cultural organisation of fame and a close analysis of Grace's recognition to explore how Grace's three-decade (1865–1895) superstardom and celebrity allied to a resurgence in his cricket form made Grace the masculine robust hero of 1895 to Oscar Wilde's scandalous villain. It explores how that comparison played out as a public drama involving other celebrities. Wilde was reported as systematically removed from masculine social status and Grace approvingly confirmed in its secure embodiment and possession.

**Keywords:** Cultural celebrity, attention capital, masculine social status, mediated publicness, public drama.

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## 1. Introduction

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William Gilbert Grace was a sporting celebrity (Wenner 1999; Andrews and Jackson 2001a; Vande Berg 1999; Whannel 2001; Smart 2005; Rojek 2006). The central theme is sporting celebrity as a product of the modern era and its key institutional formations; democratic representative government; urban, industrialised societies; and capitalist economies (Andrews and Jackson 2001b, 1-2; Whannel 2001, 1; Smart 2005, 1-2). Some argue that connection of sport celebrity with consumer capitalism forms a 'constitutive link' (Andrews and Jackson 2001b, 4). Sport, it is argued, provided both an organised activity for

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the populace and professional sporting spectacles for the public, established for profit. The sports stars became heroes and even celebrities who manifested ideals of hard work, forms of sanctioned masculinity and productivism, and, also, ideals of consumption. Rojek (2006) is the only contributor to these debates who emphasizes both sporting celebrity *and* Eliasian civilizing processes, the latter of which complicates any account of sporting celebrity as the (simple) by-product of capitalism and modern democracy. I note these contributions and I selectively draw upon them in my own analysis of Grace. I interpret Grace as an “achieved celebrity” drawing upon Rojek’s notion (2000, 12, 18) where he links it to meritocracy and possibilities of open competition.

What is especially important for this chapter is that four of those contributors to understanding sporting celebrity highlight W.G. Grace (Andrews and Jackson 2001b, 6; Corrigan 2001, 234; Smart 2005, 1-2; Rojek 2006, 683). Rojek cites Grace as a notable exception to the general rule that spectators relate to the *team* rather than the *individual*. Andrews and Jackson (2001b) argue for a link between the first modern newspaper sections (in the US) press in 1895 and the rise of Grace in England, Gwyn Williams in Welsh rugby, and Tod Sloan, the jockey, in America. Corrigan (2001, 234) links Grace to the rise of cricket as a valued and specifically *English* sport which produces manly, self-reliant boys endowed with a sense of fair play. Smart has the most sustained analysis of Grace and his emergence in 1865 and dominance for the Gentlemen (amateur cricketers) in matches versus Players (professionals) (2005, 1-2) noting that he “transformed the game of cricket” through “his performances” and became “an historic figure [...] a British sporting hero.”

The civilizing approach sensitizes us to the possibility of pre-modern celebrities – and thus is in tension with the approaches to sports celebrity discussed above which is also the view of major theorists of celebrity itself (Rojek 2000, 16; Marshall 2014; Turner 2014, 11). I take the position that celebrity is a product of modern society *and* the civilizing process and that those approaches usefully be synthesised.

In this article, I explore the sporting stardom and cultural celebrity of the Gloucestershire County Cricket Club (GCCC), Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), and England cricketer W.G. Grace (1848-1915) whose sporting superstardom arose from 1865 and whose cultural celebrity emerged in the 1870s as Grace was recognised as representative of the civilised masculinities manifest in masculine social status. The focus of my own press research is 1895, in which in a great late flourishing of batting form Grace became the civilised masculine antithesis of Oscar Wilde’s perverse, effeminate scandalous persona and representative of cricket’s acclaimed moral and healthy role in constituting British (and imperial) masculinity. Though this story has been briefly noted in some of the literature on W.G. Grace (Kynaston 1990, 5; Rae 1998, 381, 387), it is significantly absent from others (Low 2004; Tomlinson 2016). It also, to my knowledge, remains unmentioned in the vast biographical and analytical

literature on Oscar Wilde (see Bartlett 1988; Ellmann 1988; Sinfield 1994; Sloan 2003; McKenna 2004; Roden 2004; Robbins 2011; Moyle 2012). Freeman (2011) in his nicely judged review of the year of 1895, does not do justice to how sustained Grace's representation as "[c]ricket's morally regenerative influence" (2011, 154) was. Its most perceptive and sustained analysis prior to my work was in Briggs' (1987, 281), where it takes up half-a-page.

In making this argument I draw on concepts and analyses from theories of celebrity (Marshall 1997; Turner 2004; Mole 2009), especially the notion of attention capital developed by van Krieken (2012, 10, 56-7, 59-61). I also draw on research-based biographies of W.G. Grace (Midwinter 1983; Rae 1998; Low 2004; Tomlinson 2016), Norbert Elias's work on sport in society (Mennell 1992, 140-158; van Krieken 1998, 135-6, 144-7, 157-60; Elias and Dunning 2008a;), and focus on cricket as a civilizing practice built upon masculine social status (Hargreaves 1992; Dunning 2008; Brady 2009). Such a status typically made professional cricketers subordinate; as not fully inhabiting the status that was so central to mid to late Victorian life (Brady 2009). It refers to men's independence in relation to others in three arenas – the workplace, clubs, and the household.

The sources I use are press from the entirety of 1895 (daily newspapers such as the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Gloucestershire Echo*, the classic weekly comic magazine, *Punch*, and various Australian and New Zealand newspapers) contemporary books and magazines (Fitzgerald 1873; Brownlee 1887; Grace 1891, 1895, 1899; Falconer-King 1895; Strand 1895; Waring 1895). I am also indebted to Webber's (1998) monumental statistical analysis of his entire career. I follow Sandiford (1993) in using published materials from the time in the absence of archive materials from the cricket clubs and institutions. My focus anyway is on the public understanding of Grace. The press dynamically expanded and transformed in the 1870s-1890s and increasingly playing a constitutive role in society and culture (Bingham 2003, 2009; Conboy 2002; Adut 2009) requiring a notion of "mediated publicness" (Washbourne 2010, 18-25).

I argue that it is worth distinguishing two overlapping phases in the attention given to Grace – as sporting superstar and as cultural celebrity. Further, during his life, cricket became increasingly the site of civilizing claims. These claims were made both within cricket and by its association with other spheres of society such as public schools (Mangan 1981; Holt 1992, 74-5, 81-2, 96-7; Lowerson 1995, 19), the Royal family, aristocratic patrons and players (Coldham 2003; Packham 2009), the army (Campbell 2012) and churches, in imperial governance (Mangan 1986; Allen 2015), and via a wide process connecting the others of the "literaturisation" of cricket (Allen 1981; Laughton 2008; Bateman 2009) whereby cricket (and its assumed virtues) became rendered in poetry, prose, and song. As Elias and Dunning have argued, cricket increasingly became an "integral part of 'social reality'" (2008b, 55).

Grace became a sporting superstar almost immediately upon playing first-class cricket in 1865 and in the decade following, during which he played cricket in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Canada and the United States (1872-1873), and Australia (1873-1874) (Rae 1998, 56; Low 2004, 61; Tomlinson 2016, 57-8). By 1869, he was noted as “the best-all round player in England” and by 1870 as “the most wonderful cricketer who ever handled a bat” (Rae 1998, 56). Grace scored 50 first-class centuries in the 1870s – the 7 scored by A.N. Hornby of Lancashire is the next best. Grace was so *extraordinarily* superior to other cricketers that he attracted the keen *attention* of cricketers and the cricket public and provided the attraction that funded international tours. For example, Australian cricket interests were desperate to see first-hand “the player of the age.”<sup>1</sup> In Max Weber’s sense he was *literally* extraordinary – his charisma producing a duty to treat him as a leader and make him subject to “hero worship” (Weber 1978, 242; Swedberg 2005, 31-3; van Krieken 2012, 68-9).

Grace’s prowess was put to work in defending amateur / MCC control of cricket in challenge to the professionally managed touring cricket sides emerging from 1846 onwards which had made big cricket a national phenomenon in the UK. Professional-led cricket declined from the late 1860s with Grace playing a key role. There are five main reasons for this. Firstly, from 1870, the professional United South of England Eleven became by far the most popular of the touring elevens through having W.G. Grace play for them (Rae 2001, 73). Secondly, County cricket clubs, within the fold of the MCC, played an increasing number of matches thereby advantaging the employment prospects of professionals ‘in house’ – for example, Sandiford notes that the MCC itself increased its employment of ground bowlers fourfold between 1867 and 1900 (1993, 72). Thirdly, the MCC imposed qualifications for playing county cricket (birth / residence) and enforced a rule allowing play for only one county club during any season; professionals were required to make decisions about the likely source of future employment rather than select amongst a very wide array of options. Fourthly, Grace made himself available to play in professionals’ benefit matches. This ensured they were well-attended, had high quality play, and a great deal of press attention – thus maximising the chance of a good payday and encouraged a paternalistic relationship to the professional beneficiaries (Sandiford 1993, 88.) Grace took these matches very seriously and scored massively in them (Webber 1998, 118, 182, 812-3). Fifthly, the growth of interdependencies that were unifying counties as social, political, and economic arenas side-lined the specific conditions that had led to the rise of professional touring teams (Sissons 1988, 74, 82).

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<sup>1</sup> The Mercury [Hobart, Tasmania] 10th September 1872, 3.

Grace's access to the first-class cricket that made him a superstar, however, was conditional on social connections he made through his family links to the aristocracy and his own cricket-based friendships with them. He had to pass as a gentleman with the correct demeanour to be allowed access to the MCC and the opportunities it controlled. Grace was brought up in a provincial middle-class family of doctors and teachers and in an atmosphere centred upon cricket – playing the games and organising fixtures as well as creating cricket clubs that were an object of public attention (Fitzgerald 1873; Brownlee 1887). Grace continued to be involved not merely as a player, but also as a captain and important organiser of cricket. The family also had links to the aristocracy. Grace's father hunted with the Duke of Beaufort (Holt 1992, 101). Involvement in hunting gave W.G. keen experience of the self-control necessitated by the complex set up of people, horses and hounds, and knowledge of the rituals involved (Elias 2008, 30) as well as important social skills and confidence. The family also had links to Lord Fitzhardinge at Berkeley castle. Both he and Beaufort were devoted to 'games and sports' – and both served in the 1870s as president of cricket's leading and aristocratic body, the MCC. These relationships supported Grace through his life and were manifest in their promotion of his national testimonials of 1879 and 1895. Grace as an eminent cricketer was also promoted by Lord Sheffield who was a major patron of cricket (Packham 2009) and president of the Sussex county side variously between 1857-1896 (*ibid.*, 29, 31).

Two other aristocrats, Lord Harris and Lord Hawke, played ongoing crucial roles in Grace's cricket career and his relation to MCC. We can usefully see the three as respectively cricket's "ultimate exponent" (Grace), its "foremost administrator" (Harris), and its "great exporter" (Hawke) (Coldham 2003, 8). Grace and Harris had become close (and as it was to prove, lifelong) friends on a cricket tour of Canada and the United States in 1872-1873 where Grace was accepted both as sporting superstar and a welcome social companion for middle-class and aristocratic gentlemen who were team-mates (Fitzgerald 1873). They played with and against each other in 53 first-class matches, including tests (Webber 1998, 1076). Harris, who became a Conservative party politician, Governor of the Presidency of Bombay between 1890-1895, and Chancellor of the Primrose League in 1887, 1888, and 1896 (Sissons 1988, 89; Prior 2006) as well as a local worthy in Kent, was taken to best represent the links between imperial cricket governance and cricket's role in civilising bodies and minds. For Elias this highlights the linked processes of non-violent handover of power and the internalisation of that conduct present both in "parliamentarisation" and the civilising of games Elias calls "sportisation" (Elias 2008, 6, 13, 30; see also van Krieken 1998, 144). In both, Elias notes the involvement of the aristocracy and gentry (2008, 13-14) and prestige rationality. Aristocrats were closely associated with both processes and provided the major link between cricket and local administration of the state (Guttsman 1969, 27-8, 34, 37, 199, 204; Gash

1979, 330, 349; Beckett 1989, 9-10). Their association was mutually beneficial in enhancing their statuses (cf. van Krieken 2012, 67). Images of Grace most often represented him wearing an MCC cap – with its bright red and yellow (gold) stripes even though he played significantly more cricket for Gloucestershire – 360 first-class matches to 127 for MCC (Webber 1998, 751, 752). Such was Grace’s identification with them that he even wore an *MCC* buttonhole at the *Gloucestershire* celebration banquet to him on 24th June 1895.

However, Grace bridged these worlds tensely, as he was ambiguously placed class-wise (Huggins 2004a, 180); from the *provincial* middle-class and having attended neither a public school nor Oxbridge. He needed to make money out of cricket if he was to play throughout the summer as his family was *not* wealthy. This tension paradoxically sometimes even enhanced Grace’s relationship to slightly disreputable lower-middle class audiences and the publications serving them (Huggins 2004b, 143). However, this was in contradiction with the civilizing role imputed to cricket – and led to fears that the trained body and the moral comportment could drift apart (Hughes 1865, 365, Grubb 1994 [1933]).

Grace himself did not merely *passively* accept amateur control of cricket. In a sense he was more a demotic than democratic figure (Turner 2004; 2014).<sup>2</sup> Grace enforced a firmer cricketing and social divide between amateur and professional than was strictly necessary (Midwinter 1983, 113-114). This led to criticism from the Australian press and some tensions among the touring side themselves (Whimpress 1994). Such a rigid cricketing and social distinction had the unintended consequence of contributing to a growing sense of masculine Australian national identity based upon ‘mateship’ (Cashman 2002, 24-5), especially when Australian teams could best the English champion in so doing (ibid., 107).

Grace played an enormous role in the development of international cricket. Grace’s special skill and reputation was important to the rise and development of cricket between England and Australia and crucial to its intensity. His recognisability (very tall, massively built sporting a full raven beard), compelling personality, and hyper-competitive nature added distinct emotional tones and extra motivation to the competition. Cricket is a peculiar game here. It provides *very extended* possibilities for the display of personality since first class games then lasted (usually) three days; each of more than six hours play and Test series may extend over months (see Connor 2011, 71, 73, 75; Washbourne 2018). Further, the Australian and UK press covered tests partially – with support for the ‘national’ team evident. Grace has been called the “godfather of gamesmanship” (Huggins 2004a, 182) though there is a *systemic* aspect to this

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<sup>2</sup> British society was more demotic than democratic, generally, both in terms of everyday social relations and political life where as late as 1918, more than 40% of adult men still did not have the right to vote let alone women (Bentley 1984; Ball 2018).

too – the competitive exploration of the limits of the framework of rules (Elias and Dunning 2008c, 81). Such was the interdependence created that such tensions encouraged further tours. In short there was an intense colonial rivalry as well as fraternity expressed. We find an example in a speech given in 1897 by Grace’s Gloucestershire aristocratic mentor and reported in the press. In it he asserts that there had been no “falling off in the *proverbial British supremacy* in games and sports,” though in making that claim interpreted imagined victories by Australian teams as really being beaten “by *our own* kith and kin.”<sup>3</sup>

As Grace increasingly became representative of cricket itself, he became also a cultural celebrity. He increasingly came to symbolise the virtues of the game and the forms of masculine identity associated with it – and his family was increasingly noted alongside concern with his batting and bowling (Washbourne 2018). Cricket played an even more profound role in moral regulation than in the development of the commercial economy. Grace was not only very famous but explicitly referred to as a “celebrity” from as early as 1869 (Brownlee 1887, 36). His superiority was such that the *Daily Telegraph* in 1869 noted with shock a score of 0 by Grace, bowled third ball – and added that one must:

Imagine [Adelina] Patti [the opera star] singing outrageously out of tune; imagine Mr Gladstone violating all the rules of grammar – and you have a faint idea of the surprise created by the incident. (Low 2004, 58)

He is also referred to in *Sporting Life* in 1872 as the object of the British public’s “love of mobbing celebrities” the crowd rushing to the pavilion madly clapping “*like a swarm of bees* [... to] applaud and *stare* at the Gloucestershire gentleman” (Low 2004, 79, my italics); the journalist expresses an ambivalent relation to the public’s enthusiasm, *not* to Grace. Grace’s home life as well as cricket exploits became objects of attention in celebrity columns in the 1870s<sup>4</sup> and he was represented as avoiding self-promotion – in a society increasingly experiencing, and being troubled by, consumption as a key dynamic of self-identity (Anderson 2012; Washbourne 2013, 114-5). His portrait became seen in society magazines not just in the press or cricketing papers (March 1993). Songs about him were performed and piano scores published (Allen 1981). Grace regularly published articles in the *Boy’s Own Paper* (Boyd 2003), he dominated as the main subject of cricket verse (Laughton 2008).

Grace’s cultural celebrity was fully in existence by the mid-1870s yet the 1880s saw the *relative* decline of him as a sporting superstar though his fame only consolidated more. This was in part because of an increase in intensiveness of both reading and press coverage in the same period (Williams 1977, 76-7; Bingham 2001; Bingham and Conboy 2015) and popular newspapers – the *Daily Telegraph* was in the forefront – responded to this by producing cam-

<sup>3</sup> *Press* [New Zealand] January 17th, 3; italics added.

<sup>4</sup> See *The Mercury* [Hobart, Tasmania] 2nd January 1877, 3; *Wanganui Herald* [New Zealand] 13th January, 2).



painging “journalism” (Burnham 1955; Smith 1979, 123, 125). The press increasingly sought to speak *for* the people in a language they understood (Conboy 2002, 7, 112) and gave them space (however controlled) to respond with their own views (Robson 1995, 17, 241, 267).

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## 2. The Year of Grace: The Celebrity Public Drama of 1895

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By 1895, Oscar Wilde had emerged as key representative of the aesthetic type and an internationally known, somewhat paradoxical, celebrity personality (Morris Jr. 2012; Friedman 2015). In the later 1880s, Wilde had even become part of a celebrity power couple built on the feminist campaign for rational clothing for women (Moyles 2012; Friedman 2015). His celebrity was further shaped by responses to the 1890 publication of his novel *The Picture of Dorian Grey* about which few critics could be sure whether it was an exceedingly moral or immoral book, making him more notorious. By 1895, Wilde had several successful satirical plays on in London’s West End, was a figure of great interest to society and the public, and was regularly caricatured by the comic magazines though also, increasingly, the object of shocked (but not fully public) gossip (Ellmann 1988; McKenna 2004; Edmonds 2015).

Cricket was in the news late in 1894 because – led by W.G. Grace – county captains had demanded an extension of the county championship with Essex, Derbyshire, Hampshire, Leicestershire, and Warwickshire newly granted first-class status for the 1895 season (Low 2004, 242) ensuring that significantly more county matches would be played than ever before (Sandiford 1993, 53).

Furthermore, cricket was very much in the news in the winter of 1894 as what Frith (1994) calls “the first great test series” was raging over the Australian summer. England went two matches up but Australia pulled it back to two-all before, in a very tense fifth match in Melbourne between the 1st and 6th of March 1895, England won to the intense excitement of the crowd of thousands and the millions reading about it. Grace commented that “news was telegraphed every few minutes [and] was awaited with *extraordinary* interest” (Rae 1998, 381, italics added). The conclusion to the match had exactly coincided with the news of the Wilde scandal as the warrant for and arrest of the Marquis of Queensberry was reported during “The Final Struggle” of the Test<sup>5</sup> and reports of “most shocking and abominable charges” circulated.<sup>6</sup> The next day the *Gloucestershire Echo* reported on the great interest the cricket was arousing and offered a “summary of the previous four matches.”<sup>7</sup> Cricket was certainly providing opportunities for the “controlled decontrolling of emotions”

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<sup>5</sup> Gloucestershire Echo 1st March, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Gloucestershire Echo 4th March, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Gloucestershire Echo 5th March, 4.

and it continued to do so as Grace regained his form (van Krieken 1998, 146-7).

The next day, a “brilliant triumph” was reported in the Gloucestershire Echo: “*the excitement was intense*, while the disappointment at the failure of the home team to secure the rubber was very great. Still the Englishmen received a great ovation at the close” (*Gloucestershire Echo*, 6th March, 4, italics added). The team remained in Australia playing for nearly a month before we find details of the “Close of the Tour” with the averages promised to us (*Gloucestershire Echo* 3rd April, 3) and further excitement to follow after the return from the long voyage of the victorious team.

The *Gloucestershire Echo* reported<sup>8</sup> in its headlines: “The Society Scandal / sensational climax / Prosecution Accept a Verdict of Not Guilty / The Jury Find Defendant Justified” – and then go on to detail:

He [Carson – Queensberry’s barrister] would show that Taylor acted as a procurer for Wilde [... He] remarked with much emphasis that it was a wonder that man Wilde has been tolerated in London society so long. He regretted to have to call the *young man* Parker, because he had joined the service of his country and now bore an excellent character [... He] yesterday said he hoped he had said enough regarding Mr Wilde’s *letters and literature* to influence the jury, and the relieve the necessity of dealing in detail with other issues [...] ‘Posing as a \_\_\_\_\_.’ [...] withdrawal of the prosecution and submit verdict of not guilty ‘produced *profound sensation* in court’ – ‘Justice Collins said that if the jury found a verdict of not guilty they would also find that the justification set up was true in substance [...] and that the statement was published for the *public benefit*. (italics added)

This summary of the conclusion to the Libel trial brought by Wilde against the Marquis of Queensberry – the father of his lover Lord Alfred Douglas – is representative of UK press coverage and of the contents (as very widely and intensively reported in the press though in varying formats: Cohen 1993, 252 footnote 6) of the libel and two further, criminal, trials (Anonymous 1920; Holland 2004). It gives us a view of some of the key aspects of all three trials – all of which concern masculine social status. Firstly, concern is expressed for ‘young men’ and ‘boys’ who are represented as part of the coterie of Wilde who are presented (at least symbolically) as more corruptible than adult men. Secondly, although the concept of ‘sodomy’ (‘sodomite’) was present in the Libel perpetrated by Queensberry and that word and variants were used dozens of times in the first trial (Holland 2004), they are *not* printed in the press. Brady (2009, 54, 215) argues that between 1872-1885, the British press did *not* cover cases involving indecency between males at all and after 1885 *only* if they involved vulnerable young males (a fear of *imitation* guided the press’s concerns). Readers would have to guess what ‘shocking and abominable charges’

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<sup>8</sup> Gloucestershire Echo 5th April, 4.

are meant. F.G. Prange, the art dealer, clearly understood the implications of the trial when he wrote in a gossipy and ironic way to the artist James McNeil Whistler on the 24th June:

We, who are all for purity – sobriety & infamy generally, mean to agitate for the prosecution of several notorious Dames who have [very?] Wilde moments & lead away the young demoiselles from their *natural destinations*. What is sauce for the gander – Shall be sauce for the goose. (italics added)

He also explicitly linked the public discussion of the hero cricketer and disgraced playwright, the one receiving the public's shillings ('Bob' is a slang word for that coin) and other incarcerated and performing manual labour as part of his sentence: "Oscar has gone to where beyond those voices there is piece (work) = W.G. Grace has become 'Bob' Grace" (Macdonald, de Montfort, and Thorp 2012.) Thirdly, the context of the trial raises the theme of fathers and sons – Queensberry presents himself as seeking to protect his son, Lord Alfred Douglas, from Wilde's pernicious influence highlighting the importance of paternal responsibility. Fourthly, he does so in large part by making his concern *public* – which changes societal dynamics because it becomes impossible for people to pretend not to know – there is no space for plausible denial once it is (widely) made public (Adut 2009, 39-41). Strong incentives exist for people to signal their (public) disapproval (ibid., 63). The mediated publicness (Washbourne 2010, 18-25) created by the vast numbers of newspapers and magazines aided by the telegraph and attended to by the great reading public made the news (and updates) of the scandal speed around the world. Wilde was widely and intensely vilified by the public signalling its disapproval (Ellmann 1988, 446, 450). He was abandoned by most of his friends (Sturgis 2005, 228, 251), was treated at best as either mad or sinful by sympathetic feminists (Caine 1992, 192), and received no defence even from socialist radical movements who preferred secure masculine social status (Hunt 2004, 203, 209-211). Grace and Wilde were caught up in a public drama in which they became hero and villain respectively (Klapp 1964).

Such was the potential challenge to masculine social status that examples were sought to reassure that Wilde's type was not predominant in Britain in 1895 (Stratmann 2013, 246; see also Brady 2009, 82). Though Queensberry was a celebrity from the 1870s associated both with equestrianism and the civilising of boxing (Milne-Smith 2013), he could not be such a candidate as he was "not a very dignified or heroic figure" in spite of the debt of gratitude felt and expressed by press for his challenge to Wilde<sup>9</sup> and, further, however grateful they were, they were also aware that he had brought the whole shameful phenomenon to *public attention*. Furthermore, a street brawl with his son, Per-

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<sup>9</sup> *St. James's Gazette*, 5th April, p. 4; cited in Stratmann 2013, 236.

cy, which was widely reported in the press, reinforced existing views that he was difficult, even dangerously unstable.<sup>10</sup>

One who had proper masculine social status was Drew Stoddart – amateur captain of the recently victorious England cricket team (and Rugby international). When he arrived home from Australia, he was feted with a dinner at the Café Monaco (Frith 1994, 197) which the press noted was also attended by Grace. Stoddart also had a successful summer batting in England. He was also included as a waxwork in Madame Tussauds ready for the Bank Holiday weekend (Frith 1977, 119) as a pair with W.G. as “the two cricketing celebrities of the day [...] presenting these famous sportsmen as they appear on the cricket field and in very natural postures” (*Times* 6th August, 5). Stoddart was always paired with Grace though definitely subordinate to him.<sup>11</sup>

Though Wilde had not then been found guilty, he was treated as such and press focus on his published work as symptom of aesthetic decadence led *Punch*<sup>12</sup> to reflect in verse on “a misused term; viz., ‘Art’ as recently applied to a certain form of literature.”:

Is this, then, ‘Art’ – ineffable conceit,  
Plus worship of the Sadi-tainted phrase,  
Of pseud-Hellenic decadence, effete,  
Unvirile, of debased Petronian ways?  
If such be ‘Artists,’ then may *Philistines*  
*Arise, plain sturdy Britons as of yore,*  
*And sweep them off and purge away the signs*  
That England e’er such noxious offspring bore! (Emphasis added)

Grace had a great season of batting form in his 48th year and the responses to this – for example – “A five-shilling cricketer” thanked both the newspaper and Grace “in showing that the English are really a manly race [...] all participators in a game which is above reproach” (*Daily Telegraph* 10th June, 7) – and against Wilde produced the answering poem in the pages of *Punch* (17th August, 83) which noted Grace as the plain sturdy Briton able to challenge such debased ‘art’:

Then here’s for cricket in this year of Grace,  
Fair play all round, straight hitting and straight dealing  
In letters, morals, arts, and commonplace

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<sup>10</sup> Gloucestershire Echo 22nd May, 3.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that Wilde expressed his ironical aestheticism in opposition to athleticism when he told Robert Sherard, almost certainly in 1895, that “he objected to cricket because the *attitudes assumed* were so indecent” (Sherard 1906, 104, italics added).

<sup>12</sup> *Punch* 13th April, 177.

Reversion into type in deed and feeling

A path of true Reaction to retrace.

*Punch*, here, expresses the dominant aesthetic idealism (truth is beauty is morality) to which Wilde's decadent aestheticism was opposed (Moi 2008).

Grace raced to his 100th career century, a thousand runs, in May and his cricketing triumphs became precisely coordinated with Wilde being found guilty in his second criminal trial. Grace scored 257 and 73\* against Kent – the latter innings to win the match at the end of day on 25th May 1895. On the same pages of the local and national press praise for Grace mingled with vitriolic reflections on Wilde. For example, a *Times* encomium of Grace (27th May, 9) jostles with details of the sentencing of Wilde (“two years hard labour”). The *Gloucestershire Echo*<sup>13</sup> picks up on themes that are present across coverage of Grace's great scores:

[J]ust such an innings as ‘W.G.’ might have played in the *zenith of his fame* and before half the present generation of cricketers were born. At the close of a long and tiring day for him ‘W.G.’ played the game with the *keenness of a schoolboy*.

*Punch*<sup>14</sup> indexes press talk of enthusiastic crowds and joyful celebrations when Mr. Punch himself asks Grace directly whether he was nervous as he raced towards his hundredth century:

You've done the trick! Did your pulse beat quick  
As you crept notch by notch within reach of the nick?  
Did *ever* your heart feel squiffy?

[...]

*Punch* frankly owns *his* went pit-a-pat  
As he followed the ball and watched your bat

Two days later,<sup>15</sup> discussion of how to commemorate Grace's heroic achievements and editorial comments on the Wilde trial occurred side by side:

['Notes and notions'] After two costly trials [...] Oscar Wilde has been found guilty and sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour [...] a fair exterior hid the corruption within [...] There is] inexpressible horror at the lives of men like Wilde and his associates [...]

Yesterday he [Dr. W.G. Grace] made another great score of over a hundred runs, and it looks as though his thirty-second year of cricket will rival in interest his own *annus mirabilis* of 1876. [...] a correspondent makes a rather happy suggestion: – ‘The thought has occurred to me, how appropriate it would

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<sup>13</sup> Gloucestershire Echo 25th May, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Punch 25th May, 241.

<sup>15</sup> Gloucestershire Echo 27th May, 3.

be for the cricketing world to commemorate Dr. Grace's position as 'one of our national heroes' and 'the embodiment of the genius of cricket.'

The press and cricketing institutions started to think how they could mark Grace's great achievements and celebrate the meanings associated with his public personality. Though the press emphasised the spontaneity of the response to Grace, the testimonial obviously required organizing and some even wrote to the papers seeking people better suited than themselves to arrange it.

There were three main forms of the celebration of Grace in each of which there was manifest a dominant mood or tone and, often, implicitly, denigration of Wilde. The call for Grace to be knighted was followed by a populist comparison of Grace's virtues and the unworthiness of literary second-raters and official hangers-on (who were knighted). The public banquets were marked by defence of Grace's association with the manly outdoors and explicitly and implicitly showing that Grace was the rare (even *only*) individual who could unite diverse sectors of British society. The national shilling testimonial showed the amateur supporters of Grace's cricketing status (GCCC, MCC) to be out-manoeuvred by the *Daily Telegraph* which acted promptly and provided space for self-promotion by subscribers and fully recognised the desire for public involvement deemed necessary to heal the breach made by the public scandal (Adut 2009).

Existing analyses of celebration and commemoration of Grace leave much to be desired; they have been neglected as topics of discussion by biographers (Midwinter 1983; Rae 1998; Low 2004; Tomlinson 2016). Tomlinson's (2016, 272-279) account of the national testimonial is by far the best and the richest because he investigates how it emerged quite slowly and how and why it proceeded as successfully as it did thereafter whereas Low (2004, 249) takes the *Daily Telegraph* leading it for granted even though the early calls for a testimonial came from Gloucestershire.<sup>16</sup>

My argument is that these three interweaved ways of responding to Grace's exploits and role involve naming them and finding social and organisational forms satisfactory to what his exploits (were taken to) mean. All three of the celebrations referenced other celebrities in the telling of Grace's story. The banquets revealed that Grace was perhaps the only man who could bring such varied spheres of the social world and representatives of its various parts together – from the established and non-conformist churches, cricket, politics, education, and literature, Grace was the symbol of the unity of that world (against the values that Wilde represented).<sup>17</sup>

The testimonial also showed the mixture of prestige expression and commercial advertising motives amongst what *The Sydney Morning Herald* noted

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<sup>16</sup> *Gloucestershire Echo* 27th May, 3; 31st May, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Times* 25th June, 6; *Gloucestershire Echo*, 25th June, 3.

as “a *curious* list [of subscribers]” noting that “side by side in one day [on the same page of the *Daily Telegraph*] one finds Cardinal Vaughan and Charley’s Aunt (Mr. Penley) sending in their mites.”<sup>18</sup> The testimonial was active for more than four months – Grace’s continued high scoring both promoted the testimonial and provided fresh media representations through which to engage with him. The financier and philanthropist, Henry C. Burdett, praised Grace since “he *practices what he preaches* in regard to health [...] and he has contributed to the health, strength and happiness of the nation”<sup>19</sup> and a twelve-year-old schoolboy noted of Grace that “as an amateur [he] plays only for the love of the game.”<sup>20</sup> One key addition was the father-son relationship that was embodied through Grace being a spectator to his eponymous son’s first-class cricket. W.G. Grace Jr. was reported as having success batting in a college match at Cambridge and for Cambridge University.<sup>21</sup> He also appeared for Gloucestershire in the match against Surrey<sup>22</sup> and is listed in the averages toward the end of the season.<sup>23</sup> The press took an especially keen interest when father and son played in matches together. Such was described as “pathetic” (promoting pathos) by *Punch*,<sup>24</sup> who cited a poem in which elder W.G. advises the younger on batting and declares “[y]ou must help [...] keep up the family name.” The following week *Punch* published an encore poem after a match in which the son (79) out batted his father (34) and gently chides him “Seventy-nine, my potent pater, Seventy-nine!”<sup>25</sup> W.G. subsequently is “one spectator more delighted than any other” at the varsity match and is seen in clothes suitable for such a social occasion “frock coat, and silk top hat.” ‘Wanderer’ speculates about the pleasure he had “to have seen his son ‘Bertie’ [...] make such a successful start in both innings.”<sup>26</sup> The interest in Grace as a father is also fostered in an interview in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. When giving his thoughts on ‘ladies cricket,’ Grace discussed his daughter, Bessie, saying “[she] was a real good bat, a splendid fielder, and a fair underhand bowler [...] but as she is now 17, her cricket days are over” mixing personal revelation, cricket judgment, and gendered social attitudes. As well as being linked to his son and daughter in cricketing contexts, a publication emerged advertising itself as presenting the greatest number of photographs of his *family* ever published (Falconer-King 1895). Brownlee’s (1887) biography, which portrays his boyhood and family,

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<sup>18</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald* 27th July, 5, italics added.

<sup>19</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 17th June, 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 10th June, 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Gloucestershire Echo* 27th April, 3; 30th April, 3; 25th June, 3; 5th July, 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Gloucestershire Echo* 26th August, 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Gloucestershire Echo* 2nd September, 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Punch* 22nd June, 293.

<sup>25</sup> *Punch* 29th June, 310.

<sup>26</sup> *Sportsman Magazine* cited in *Gloucestershire Echo* 9th July, 4.

was also reissued to great interest and to an additional 21,000 sales (Rae 1998, 396).

Grace was understood in his relationships to other celebrities; his cricketer son had emerged as a minor addition to that world in the summer of 1895 (Rojek 2000). Those celebrities included politicians, actors, writers, rogues, and fictional characters whilst the press coverage of Wilde dwindled and was increasingly marked by his systematic removal from masculine social status.<sup>27</sup> Grace was represented as manly, a “good father,” a family man, a hero, the cricket embodiment of all that is right and proper, and, in contrast to Wilde’s bankruptcy, was seen soundly investing his £5,000 testimonial money in an endowment policy.<sup>28</sup> The theme uniting W.G and youth was enhanced when the schoolboy Gloucestershire cricketer Charlie Townsend was interviewed about his younger years and said he and his brother “used to imitate the various players we had seen [...] it was by copying ‘W.G.’ that I first learned to bowl a leg-break.”<sup>29</sup> Grace was also reported as a spectator of a fine attacking innings by the young Gloucestershire star batsman Gilbert Jessop (“No lovelier cuts were ever seen / On England’s cricket fields”):

Our Champion sat and viewed it all

The picture of content<sup>30</sup>

Grace is also associated with slightly more roguish characters – such as two celetoids – the fictional reprobate Ally Sloper who, holidaying in Clacton in 1895, passed himself off as Grace to cadge money (Huggins 2004a, 143-4) – and ‘Arry, E.J. Milliken’s work-shy, gambling, and horse-racing mad creation – whose ballads had graced the pages of *Punch* since 1877. ‘Arry is presented as watching and appreciating Grace’s manly strokes and tenacity in the heat (Marks 1993, 1996);<sup>31</sup> Real life Jabez Balfour, who had established his respectability thorough pious religious non-conformity, establishing cricket clubs, and giving all the appearance of being a scrupulous businessman, was on trial for fraud and quizzed journalists about Grace’s scores during his own trial as reported in Labouchere’s *Truth* newspaper (Powell & Caple 1974, 129-30; cf. McKie 2005). Grace was also linked through the *Daily Telegraph*’s daily pages updating subscriptions and printing letters from subscribers<sup>32</sup> to those *public* declarations of support. The ‘curious’ lists allowed those writing in to publicise

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<sup>27</sup> *Gloucestershire Echo* 23rd August, 4 ‘Oscar Wilde’s Failure’; 23rd September, 4 ‘Oscar Wilde in Prison’; 24th September, 4 ‘Oscar Wilde’s bankruptcy’; 13th November, 4 ‘Oscar Wilde’s Bankruptcy’).

<sup>28</sup> *Gloucestershire Echo* 13th November, 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Gloucestershire Echo* 16th August, 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Gloucestershire Echo* 24th August, 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Punch* 22nd June, 298.

<sup>32</sup> The *Gloucestershire Echo* updated the testimonial more often than weekly and the *Times* less often.



themselves as being for Grace (and almost certainly against Wilde). They included Royalty, aristocracy, Members of Parliament, artists, the military, educationalists, business and religious leaders, local worthies, journalists, those in theatre-land, and children as well as the more obvious candidates in sports.<sup>33</sup>

In handing over the cheque for £5,000 in October, Sir Edward Lawson, editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, noted some key meanings of these celebrations of Grace:

your [...] high and worthy qualities as an English cricketer [...] and] a very notable and emphatic expression of the general love for those *out-of-doors sports* [...] which – free from any element of cruelty, greed or coarseness – serve so admirably to develop our British traits of *manliness*, good-temper, *fair play* and the *healthy training of mind and body* [...] the masses and classes alike [...] have an] abiding preference for *wholesome and honest amusements* in contradistinction to *sickly pleasures* [...] a public approval of your *salutary example* to the *youth and manhood* of your time.<sup>34</sup>

Though Lawson's sentiments clearly had powerful and sustained public support, some raised their eyebrows. For instance, noting that the attention capital and obvious commercial motives of the newspaper made some of its claims "humbug,"<sup>35</sup> and A.G. Steel, the Middlesex and England amateur all-round cricketer, made it known that he thought the domination of the national testimonial by the *Daily Telegraph* rather than the MCC compromised "the dignity of our great game" (Rae 1998, 390). Thus was revealed the felt tensions between the roles of cricket in moral regulation and in commercial life.

Further, the capacity for talk of Grace to squeeze out other worthy objects of public attention was noted, more with sorrow than anger (and more in Australia than in the UK). The "W.G. Grace of Australia," George Giffen – who scored 475 runs and took 34 wickets in the 1894-5 test series – was having a testimonial too but the Australian press was so preoccupied with Grace that one Arthur J. Diamond feared for its progress and noted it had raised only £5 in Western Australia.<sup>36</sup> A journalist in a Brisbane paper was more pointed. In noting the paucity of subscriptions for the Cromwell Statue and relief for the distressed Armenians "besides the claims of Dr. Grace" added "but a man who can make a century of centuries on the cricket field is something really to go wild about,"

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<sup>33</sup> Boorstin's 1992 [1961] analysis of pseudo-events is of little help in thinking about the social organisation of such commemorations since he assumes an automaticity and undebunkable quality to such events which they do not possess. Further, neither Grace nor Wilde is "nothing greater than a more-publicized version of us" (74) which for Boorstin is a defining feature of this new form "the celebrity." Other theorists of celebrity suggest the limited usefulness of Boorstin (van Krieken 2012, 2, 55; Marshall 2014, 11; Turner 2014, 5).

<sup>34</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 18th October, 7, italics added.

<sup>35</sup> *Gloucestershire Echo* 17th June, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *The Western Australian* 18th June, 6.

concluding that it is “a nice problem for the moralist this apotheosis of the willow.”<sup>37</sup>

The cricket year ended with a celebration of Grace (and cricket itself) in verse form and the sadness that these great pleasures were gone for another long winter.

Good-bye to the season! ‘Tis over [...]  
Till Grace, Gunn, Stoddart turn out,  
I must cultivate fireside enjoyment,  
And read up old scores and grow stout.<sup>38</sup>

But Grace reappears in the public eye not just to thank Sir Edward Lawson for the proceeds of the testimonial fund but also to hold out the offer of owning a holy relic – his run-making bat: “I played nearly all year with the same bat for which I have already been offered £20 but *money won’t purchase it* although I did tell a gentleman at The Oval that he could have it for £1,000” (italics added).<sup>39</sup> Though the end of the cricket season was like a small death, Grace could at least be consumed even before cricket started again the following spring – his “splendid portrait” was to be the highlight of *Wisden’s Cricketer’s Almanack* of 1896.<sup>40</sup> An exhibition reshewed “Mr Stuart Wortley’s [1890 portrait] ‘Dr. W.G. Grace.’”<sup>41</sup> Grace’s prose could be read in the *Hood Annual* reviewing the 1895 season.<sup>42</sup> Truly the year was Grace’s (and cricket’s).

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### 3. Conclusion

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W.G. Grace became a sporting superstar between 1865-1875 and the greatest player ever in a game in which public interest expanded and intensified throughout the rest of the century. He tested his skills in many countries in tours which would *not* have taken place without his participation – such was the interest in his literally extraordinary skills. The expanded media and societal interest in cricket ensured that daily and periodical press took an interest in cricket in addition to the narrowly sporting press and cricket became associated with civilising values articulated through masculine social status. These formed key conditions for Grace to become a cultural celebrity. Attention was given to aspects of his family and private life and his expertise as a medical practitioner.

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<sup>37</sup> *The Queenslander* 10th August, 251.

<sup>38</sup> The New Budget cited in Gloucestershire Echo 21st September, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Gloucestershire Echo 23rd September, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Gloucestershire Echo 23rd December, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Times 11th October, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Times 20th December, 13.

Grace's sporting stardom and cultural celebrity were manifest in the meanings associated with him and uses made of stories about and images of him and other celebrities in 1895. Grace's great late cricket form, his achievement of spectacular seasonal and career feats (1,000 runs in May, his hundredth first class hundred), and his identification as a hero ensured he became the key candidate to play the role of masculine role model to counteract the felt damage the mere existence of Oscar Wilde's perfervid and decadent identity appeared ready to wreak. Grace's masculinity, outdoorsiness, and family wholesomeness counteracted the feeling that 'Wilde' was anything more than an aberration. He had had cross-generational appeal and sedimentation in the minds, practices, and associations of the Victorian public.

The cricketing institutions of the MCC, GCCC, and Sportsman magazine were too slow off the mark to dominate the moral regulatory celebration of Grace's great achievements and the meanings of those achievements in the Wildean context. The *Daily Telegraph* made Grace the object of another of their great campaigns in organising a shilling testimonial fund for him. The benefit of the fund went both ways. Subscribers to the *Telegraph* fund had their names publicised and the *Telegraph* gained publicity for its public-mindedness. The *Telegraph* testimonial gave Grace supporters the space to celebrate the values associated with his outdoors masculinity and cricket as a game of civilizing influence and dissociate from the values associated with Wilde.

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# Historical Social Research

## Historische Sozialforschung

### All articles published in HSR Supplement 32 (2019): Celebrity's Histories: Case Studies & Critical Perspectives

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