

‘Mark This Man’*

Richard Best

I remember another curious meeting with Synge in Paris. We were walking down the Avenue de L’Opéra one sunny day and I saw a man coming towards us whom I recognised – a portly man, with a bowler hat and a plain suit. I had just time to say to Synge, ‘Mark this man,’ because he was on us almost. Synge looked at him, and I looked at him, and this man looked at us very closely, and I said, ‘Oscar Wilde,’ and Synge said, ‘Oh, how interesting, let us go back and meet him again.’ I hated this, but Wilde had stopped I remember, and was looking into a big window with Greek vases in it and bronzes. So we turned around and we met him again, a minute afterwards, and Wilde looked at us hard, and I knew Wilde was thinking, ‘These two men know who I am.’ He was living under the name Sebastian – he had been pointed out to me some months before in the street, that’s how I knew him. So I took him in, but I lowered my eyes and I noticed his brick-coloured complexion and his stained teeth which have been described. Well, Synge was immensely impressed by this appearance of Wilde.

* *Irish Literary Portraits*, ed. W. R. Rodgers (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972) p. 99.

NOTE

Dr Richard Irvine Best (1872–1959), distinguished Gaelic scholar and linguist who was long associated with the National Library of Ireland. A well-known Dublin character and friend of James Joyce, he appears under his own name in *Ulysses* (the National Library episode). J. M. Synge, the Irish dramatist, met Best in Paris and became his friend.