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Páraic Finnerty

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Emily Dickinson and
Oscar Wilde**

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Páraic Finnerty

The Daisy and the Dandy: Emily Dickinson and Oscar Wilde

Particularly during the early months of 1882, as the reclusive Emily Dickinson engaged in her daily ritual of reading *The Springfield Republican*, her Amherst home was invaded by the name, Oscar Wilde.¹ From the time Wilde stepped onto American soil on January 3rd, dressed in great green coat almost down to his feet, and throughout his eleven-month lecture tour of America's major towns and cities, America's journalists were anxious to see, hear and record the wit of the personification of English aestheticism.² Similarly, America's leading literary and cultural figures met him, attended his lectures, or at the very least expressed their opinions about him.³ Dickinson's extant letters do not mention Wilde, and predictably she did not attend his lectures in nearby Boston or Hartford. Yet such was the publicity that his tour generated she must have been aware of what Wilde represented in America at the time. On one level, Dickinson and Wilde appear to be antithetical literary figures, embodying opposite orientations towards art and life. Yet this American poet, who spent most of her life avoiding publicity, publication and the public eye, had more in common than at first appears with the Irish self-publicist, public provocateur and first modern celebrity.⁴ The following constructs a hypothetical path-crossing between the woman who dressed in white and fashioned herself as an unobtrusive, shy 'Daisy,' and the man who, at the time, was the flamboyant dandy of aestheticism. It surveys particular aspects of Wilde's reception in America through reference to *The Springfield Republican* and to the journals Dickinson most avidly read: *Harper's New Monthly*, *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The Century*.⁵ It also considers the specific responses of Dickinson's brother, Austin, who attended Wilde's