

Oscar Wilde and a Death of No Importance

GYLES BRANDRETH. Touchstone, \$14
paper (368p) ISBN 978-1-4165-3483-9

Oscar Wilde makes a stylish sleuth in this clever series debut from Brandreth, a British author best known as a biographer (*John Gielgud: An Actor's Life*, etc.). Narrating the tale from his old age, poet Robert Sherard enjoys recalling the summer of 1889, when his friend Wilde was still celebrated and happily married. After discovering the butchered body of handsome young Billy Wood, Wilde fetches Sherard and his new friend Arthur Conan Doyle, but upon returning to the scene, they find neither body nor blood. Wilde and Sherard urge charismatic Scotland Yard Det. Insp. Aidan Fraser to investigate, but without concrete evidence, Fraser refuses to act until another murder occurs. Undeterred, Wilde interviews suspects from Wood's stepfather to his pimp, and sets a trap that helps reveal the truth. Brandreth blends history and invention, integrates a nicely complex solution with entertaining subplots and delivers the whole in witty, precise prose. This tale should please readers partial to period mysteries, literary heroes and deft writing. (Jan.)