



**Contribution to
'Books of the Year: Who Read What in 1987?'**

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Oscar Wilde by Richard Ellmann (H Hamilton £15) and *Argufying* by William Empson (Chatto £25).

Ellmann and Empson were, in their wholly different ways. critics of the highest distinction, and literally everything they have written is, to say the least, worth reading. One may say that Ellmann goes too far in his idealisation of some of Wilde's view and actions – he allows virtually no measure of justice to his critics and opponents – and that Empson's ferocious attack on Milton's God, and in particular on the moral values of *Paradise Lost*, is too ferocious. Nevertheless, they were critics of the highest order. Their deaths are a very great loss.

Behind the Wall by Colin Thubron, (Heinemann £10.95)

This travel book seems to me to have the quality of complete authenticity. Everything rings true – the rarest of virtues.

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