

## Wilde's Investment in Negation: *The Picture(s) of Dorian Gray*

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As soon as he was alone, he lit a cigarette, and began sketching upon a piece of paper, drawing first, flowers and bits of architecture, and then, human faces. Suddenly, he remarked that every face he drew seemed to have a fantastic *likeness* to Basil Hallward.'

(Wilde *PDG* 197, italics added)

Imagining Hegel as intellectual forefather to Darwin, Wilde wrote in his *Oxford Commonplace Book* of the dialectic as "... natural selection produced by a struggle for existence in the world of thought" (Wilde *ON* Commonplace Book # 204), comparable to the biological model proposed by Darwin. Dorian's "Portraits of Basil" following his murder of the artist of his own portrait *contains* a violent negation as super-cession. Dorian's art frees him (temporarily) from the always competing influences of critic and artist. Perhaps Sir Henry Wotton says it better than I in explaining survival in art or life: "In the wild struggle for existence, we want to have something that endures, and so we fill our minds with rubbish and facts ...." (Wilde, *PDG* 34). Here, the rubbish (the negative) constitutes a continuously expansive notion of art. After his murder of the artist, a novel artist emerges, one form of survival, simultaneously negating (an antecedent) and regenerative. The death of the artist (*pace Foucault*), as an autonomous agent, is thus *contained* in *both* artist and (post-mortem) the sitter/object's belated work, as a "joint project,"<sup>1</sup> mirroring the contest for Dorian's soul. Hallward has a new

life—the life of the negated—in Dorian’s multiple “portraits of the artist.”

Dorian’s sketches of Hallward are one aesthetic response to Lacan’s notion of *foreclosure*, but now applied to the relationship between artist and sitter. The prohibition of their homoerotic desire is *like* the prohibition that prevents the intercourse of the artist with the art object in a similar relational dynamic. Although it rejects the lost object of desire, the negative of *foreclosure* normalizes authorization (and hence submission) to its values. Lacan’s notion of *foreclosure*, like Kristeva’s dynamic of abjection, thus binds an enduring attraction to an inclusive *negation* (or repression) whose persistence is my real *subject*.<sup>2</sup>

Aesthetic “life” in this model would resemble organic life. Warring/worrying elements irrevocably lead to a synthetic Truth invested *by* and *in* the negative, the (empty) remainder (“traces”) as a residue of the struggle between incommensurable alternatives: subject and object. Hegel’s notion of consciousness really involves the negating of negativity, in a dynamic that turns against itself and reproduces itself as a conscious Being that is so riven with negativity that Kojève termed it a “hole in Being.”<sup>3</sup> More is to follow on these “holes” in the supposed project of Decadence, a negation that nonetheless *signifies* a potential return on investment: a “realization...that becomes a new starting point” (Wilde, *CW* 1031), hence banishing the notion of decay.

There is after all, a surplus of radical negations in Wilde: murder; heads

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1 Michel Foucault, “The Death of the Artist,” in *Language, Counter Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald Bouchard (Ithaca, N.Y. Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 87-101.

2 See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), especially pp. 206-207. In her *Hatred and Forgiveness* as well as other works, Julia Kristeva emphasizes that abjection/submission is often not a passive response, but an active power in a reciprocal dynamism. Passivity can obviously be mimed, a kind of false negative. Dorian’s pose of extreme passivity (a “sitter” for a portrait painter) obviously represses the later energies of his energetic motions through the streets of London. See also Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (Palo Alto: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997).

brought in upon platters; accidental deaths (James Vane); suicide (Sybil Vane); institutional decay (Lord Henry Wotton's divorce); the violent end of art and life at the hands of an early "slasher;" or the self-induced deaths of an artistic dwarf ("The Birthday of the Infanta") and the dismemberment of a statue ("The Happy Prince"). The loss of art, life, or ideology is dominant in Wilde's work where he continues to be taught in courses like my first course taught in graduate school way back in 1967, "The Art and Literature of Decadence," and an imperfect essay derived from it, "The Sad Education of Dorian Gray" (*Criticism*, 1967), reprinted at least once. Hence, this essay represents a re-visit to the *closet* of my professional bibliography. What I discover is a deforming change in my image of the novel, limited then to a kind of *Bildungsroman manqué* in which Dorian Gray becomes not the traditional mature artist, but a work of art, at the same time that the portrait becomes mutably human, an impossibly equivalent exchange.

Wilde's novel has only marginally changed in the intervening years, but is subject to a re-reading, in *corporating* a more experienced life with enhanced access to Wilde's reading and numerous *re-visits/reading*. My responses are now more attuned to a recurrent negation, *sur-viving* equitable "economies of exchange" in the ideology of a so-called Decadent Movement 1880-1920. I cannot see the changes or negations of my previous critical essay on Wilde's novel day- by- day any more than Dorian can see small, incremental changes in Basil's portrait. Yet,

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3 Kojève's formulation of desire envisions it as a continuous activity of negation necessary to defining a "self," adapted from a radical reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Desire becomes for him, a "revealed nothingness." In desire, he recognizes beings as unfulfilled, not yet what they are (unrealized), but seeking a completion in a community or collective narrative. His model is that of a disembodied generativity which enables the individual to transcend biological (Darwinian) determination like that which seems to afflict Dorian by virtue of his aristocratic ancestry. The model is perhaps almost too remarkably mimetic. See Alexandre Kojève, *An Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols and introduction by Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980).

it is no more the same novel than Hallward's portrait (or Wilde's novel) is the same, and yet they both are the *same* (phenomenally), except for a new unexpurgated edition published by Harvard Univ. Press. Why, then, does my earlier critical portrait seem so grotesque as to mock me?

Surely, my critical negation is an inherited (critical) characteristic after all, given the unproven assassination (via an arranged duel) of Dorian Gray's own father, financially enabling a grandson's extravagant tastes and lifestyle as heir presumptive. No negation, including the concept of *Decadence* permanently disappears, but *persists* as an "attachment of the negative," where the grandfather's vestigial (Darwinian?) investment persists as a functional remainder, a sacrifice to the "new." These deaths, even if apparently accidental, seem (perhaps in some double sense in the case of Sybil Vane and Hallward) *staged*, but with an inevitable supplement. Since the displaced always germinates the new, a totalizing Decadence would be impossible.<sup>4</sup>

As Hallward's life ebbs away drop by drop (circulatory decay), his aesthetic (and life) partner, Dorian Gray, sketches flowers, then bits of architecture, before finally proceeding to human faces—a kind of progressively humanized aesthetic of plenitude that displaces the already displaced "subject" of a slowly dying artist. The emergent artist, born from the death of his own portrait painter,

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4 The notion of Decadence as an entropic counter-impulse effecting both material as well as cultural or ideological production has been challenged recently by sophisticated methods of gathering, storing, and selectively re-deploying informational units, the realization of which retrospectively conforms to Darwin's thought. Yet, if there is some "living" residue that survives entropy by a re-generation, then both radical negation (loss) and the radically new (gain) would be systemically limited. In announcing his divorce near the end of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Sir Henry Wotton remarks that, though marriage is a bad habit, we are constituted by our bad habits. We lose partners, but we never fully *realize* the loss as a loss, because "they are an essential part of one's personality" (Wilde, *PDG* 251) and hence have a kind of half-life in our singular lives. This notion of *realization* seems of a piece with "realized" (versus unrealized) losses and gains in economic transactions: irreversible, but perhaps re-invested.

now (correctly) imagines Basil Hallward's face to be simultaneously *everywhere* and *nowhere*, much as did Wordsworth in the fictional "Lucy" sequence that bears her name. Dorian's replicated sketches of Hallward have the same universally representational (in the sense of correlational) value as did Hallward's "picture" of Dorian Gray, for his posthumous portrait(s) of the artist constitute the mechanically repetitious "multiple," the same face assuming different *forms*. The aesthetic co-incident resembles the multiple identities of two Earnest's in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the singular made multiple, to be overcome by a radically negative "rub-out"! Transcendence occurs in the restoration of the deceased as a multiple, a negative re-inscribed, transforming Dorian from sitter to portrait to artist. Negation generates the potential of the surplus: Hegel's *aufgehoben* writ large. Sir Henry Wotton's reading of Pater's aesthetic is instructive: "to teach man to concentrate ... upon the moments of life that is itself but a *moment*" (Wilde *PDG* 162, ital. added), a plural totally saturated by its *negation*, the singular.

This co-incident of negation(s) suggests a foundational, even invested, negation in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a negation that persistently *sur-vives*, thereby resisting negation. In accounting for Dorian's significance, Basil Hallward informs Sir Henry Wotton that *nothingness* and the fictive pluralities of *totalization* constitute a set:

'You might see *nothing* in him. I see *everything* in him. He is never more present in my work than when *no image* of him is there. He is a suggestion ....*of a new manner*. I find him in the curves of certain lines, in the loveliness and subtleties of certain colours. That is all.'

(Wilde, *PDG* 33, italics added)

For both the painter and the sitter-become-painter (upon the painter's death) the

Other is never more present than when absent, even violently absent, an uncanny correspondence to the productive (culturally-assisted) negation invested in Hallward's initial self-imposed refusal to exhibit the portrait. Everywhere we look, absence *tracks* presences as *cohabitants*: oppositional can be read as equivalence and vice-versa.

The portrait itself is originally a *conflated* presentational offering, given its divided possession. Though Hallward, the painter, has confessedly "put too much of myself into it" (Wilde, *PDG* 33) he also claims to have given it to Dorian, "before it existed" (Wilde, *PDG* 52). It is simultaneously then, an investment, an *a priori* dedication (gift) and, after the murder, an expectation/inheritance. Furthermore, Dorian Gray is neither solely aesthetic object nor mere recipient of impressions, but its creator antecedent to its existence (as an influence and hence supportive of Wotton's enhanced evaluation of influence as a concept). Intention (or presentational attitude) constitutes, in part, its meaning. Basil Hallward has similarly depleted (negated) himself in the portrait (a sexual investment?) in the love of both model and painting. Its existence preceding its essence, Basil's infamous portrait embodies what Hegel (and what such post-Hegelians like Kojève and Sartre) term, *intentionality*. The subject of art exhibits a hemorrhage of *subjectivity* as it becomes a composite of shared partners in the productive process: artist, sitters, audience, critics, productive agents and their spaces.

Let us address briefly the conundrum of *intentionality*. After Hume's unfortunate identification of "reality" with "sensible reality," western philosophy found itself in a bind. The ontological difference between consciousness and the world was a difference between differential kinds of objects. Consciousness confronts the world as non-actuality confronting actuality. Hegel's great contribution, expanded by the European Hegelians (Jowett, Husserl, Kojève, Sartre, Deleuze, Foucault, and Derrida) have progressively given consciousness a kind of direc-

tionality, a variable comportment toward the world, but at some cost. In one sense, what had been an a priori ego bound to a solipsistic existence was replaced by a model of an *intentional being*, our desire to be enthralled by the world. The subject was re-constituted as, to borrow from the title of Judith Butler's exploration of the contributions of the French heirs of Hegel, "subjects of desire"<sup>5</sup> as opposed to what Sartre termed the "digestive model of the ego," processing the "inputs" of sensory reception.<sup>6</sup> We are aware of consciousness retroactively, for the world is never presented as itself, but only as the mirror of our engagement in a process termed self-reflexiveness. In the imagination, the factic or perceptual world is put out of play in a kind of Husserlian bracketing (framing?) procedure by which it is (provisionally) re-constructed.

The world paradoxically gains a kind of temporary presence to consciousness through this imaginary de-realization (akin to Freud's notion of *Idealization* in the *Essays on Narcissism*) of the world. This de-realization is nothing less than the image sustained through a belief that the image has a real existence. The need to believe in the existence of the image and the inability to sustain the belief creates the anxiety-laden inducements (and splitting) that constitute consciousness as self-consciousness. Even if the object is to be considered objectively, it must be *intended* as such, the object construed in terms of conditional modes of appearance.

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5 See Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

6 Jean-Paul Sartre, "Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea in Husserl's Phenomenology," trans. Joseph Feel, *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology* 112(May, 1970): 4-5. One problem with Sartre's explanation is that the excessive consumption in Wilde's novel of the objects of desire is just as often saved (as collectibles) by Dorian. As economic models traditionally place consumption and saving at opposite ends of desire, one wonders: is it possible that Dorian Gray's rejection of Wotton's hedonism has a material component—literally, shelving (framing) objects—which would imply negation as a foundation of his exotic consumption?

Obviously, this *intentional* model of consciousness re-constitutes objects at the same time that it (consciousness) is re-constituted in their re-constitution. If this sounds like gibberish, please allow me to offer a model familiar to readers of Husserl. When I view an ashtray from one consistent angle, the other side of the ashtray is not visible and hence provides no sensory object. But having seen a number of ashtrays, I “anticipate” (desire) the existence of the other side in an *intentional* posture toward the object which is part of its *presentational* reality, but not its *sensible* reality. I therefore invest in something that is absent (Hegel’s negative), indicated perhaps, as with twentieth century Cubism after “Les Demoiselles d’Avignon,” by a vanishing line or in Cezanne with those precariously disappearing apples. Consciousness presents the world through variable modes without ever (consciously) denying a distinctiveness of the two worlds. One *intends* the world in modes of desiring, fearing, possessing, assuming, yet the ashtray cannot intend me in the modes of desiring, fearing, or possessing. Hence, only this model of consciousness affirms my freedom from facticity.

Nor can I enclose myself in the ashtray without denying consciousness, for that would prove the existence of consciousness—the *power to negate*. The image is thus never an object, but rather a signifier of a *changing relationship* involving a variety of de-realizations. As we shall see, re-realizations and de-realizations are the crucial, informing *agon* of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Desire from one perspective represents an attempt to possess the object by magically creating it as an image that might be manipulated in a variety of ways, the “idealization” that is an adjunct to narcissism in Freud. Dorian Gray is pictorially re-produced as an echoing, representational image in Hallward’s portrait and ideologically in the materialistic theories of Sir Henry Wotton each of whom wars for “influence” imagined as ideological seduction.

Desires as defined in Hegel and his heirs are not contingent features of a self-sufficient subject, as is the case say, when I desire a nightly glass of wine. They



are rather the modes through which the subject comes to subsist (as opposed to exist). Desire does not indicate a pre-conscious self, but rather reveals a self-in-the-making. The original desire or the force of history having no ontological status, the desire of being is always realized as Sartre alleges in *Being and Nothingness*, as “the desire of a mode of being” (Sartre, *BN* 567), creating and being re-created. As a modality or posture of relating to the world, one might suspect that the bisexual is in a unique position insofar as the recovery of the self might be equated to the discovery of the self in a multiply-faceted relationship—a plenitude of ways—to other beings. Because desire demarcates some original lack or absence which prevents the interaction of consciousness with materiality, the negative is inscribed *within* desire as a prohibition.

The portrait in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* thus has a complex status: simultaneously autobiography (the repository of the painter's “self”); denial (for the portrait never enters public circulation and consumption); a pre-transactional gift (an *a priori* presentation to Dorian); and finally, a token of the exchange of their hidden, private relationship as well as the metaphysical and aesthetic relationships between creative artist, aesthetic object, and the productive economy of the representational “copy”—the image—that they share. And each image is a de-realization. Otherwise, it would be impossible to give an object—as Basil Hallward alleges—prior to the existence of the object, save as part of its *presentational* reality. The portrait cannot be publicly or metaphorically exhibited because its (repressed) negations are part of how it *means*: confined out of sight (blindness and foreclosure as the “negative”) in the nursery of Dorian Gray's childhood as the last infamous orphan of the Victorian novel.

Temporally, by contrast, Dorian's artistic post-mortem production mediates between the murder of the artist and Alan Chapman's supplementary erasure, a chemically-induced near (but not quite, for there remains a stain) negation of the body. Chapman's scientific artistry creates the presence-in-absence of the per-

sistent “trace,” the fleeting representation within negation which Dorian copies in his sketches. Negations leave traces. In a novel filled with violent death and *erasure* there is a radical investment *of* and *in* the *negating erasure* considered simultaneously as “varnishing” (Basil Hallward’s painting); stage cosmetics (the heavy prussic acid make-up which, ingested, is the immediate cause of Sybil Vane’s death but also her life as an actress); ideological conversion (Sir Henry Wotton) and Alan Chapman’s chemically-induced near-negation of a corpse, similar to Sybil’s chemical demise. After these radical negations, the lover reproduces the beloved’s face everywhere in a novel that is about, well, another beautiful face gone to seed. But it is an interesting seed! I say “seed” because death, or at least one model of the death of the artist, leads to the birth of a new kind of artist who had begun his career as a mere sitter for a portrait.

This re-birth of a new kind of artist is compatible with Hegel’s Imaginary, nothing less than an aesthetic resurrection of the artist in art. Dorian’s compensatory sketches of Hallward constitute another instance of the “Undead Dead.” This figure of *fin de siècle* culture is the real/symbolic subject of my speculative reason’s “worrying” of an aesthetic “model.” Lord Henry Wotton, when apprised of the artist’s unexplained absence while ostensibly on a holiday in Paris, had remarked, with the critic’s judgment, “...you know I don’t think he would have done much more good work. During the last ten years, his painting had gone *off* very much” (Wilde, *PDG* 252). Yet, early in the novel Basil Hallward had told Sir Henry Wotton that Dorian Gray has a presence less as an aesthetic or sexual object, than as the occasion of a shift in productive capacity in the history of art. Dorian marks a companionable shift in both technique and potential subject matter, like that say, inaugurated by the lithographic pencil after 1860 or the ink-jet printer in our own age::

‘What the invention of oil-painting was to the Venetians, the face of

Antinous was to late Greek sculpture and the face of Dorian will someday be to me .... It is not merely that I paint from him, draw from him, sketch from him .... He is much more to me than a model or a sitter.'

(Wilde, *PDG* 32)

Whereas early in the novel, Dorian exists as a new *mode* of aesthetic expression, the symbol of a quantum leap in aesthetic history, by the time of Hallward's prolonged absence, his career has already been invested with the (critical) negative. In a novel dedicated to the corruptive influence wrought by the consumption of reputation and the dating of fashion and ideas by gossip and scandal, Wotton uses a British euphuism for spoilage and decay, as in the phrase, "this milk has gone off," the inverse of progressive aesthetic paradigm shift. Giving birth to a new medium is apparently not dissimilar from the death of an aesthetic fashion: one dissimulates — as it disseminates — the other. Hence, in a culture that so closely elides beginnings and endings, Dorian's murder and radical *disposal* of Hallward's body appears initially as the antithesis of Dorian's ostentatious posing which both grounds the portrait and opens its narrative double, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Yet, portrait and novel share a titular bondage.

We must read a relationship between *bodies* and *images of bodies* in their *relative disposition* to each other so that the *posing* with which the novel opens and Alan Chapman's radically incomplete (for it leaves a stain) *disposal* are not indifferent to each other. This is what Wilde urges us to do in his entries in the *Commonplace Book*, so many of which are in the spirit of Hegelian speculative reason. Essences no longer have an essential (material) quality but rather consist of shared or imaginatively shared relationships: hatreds, gossip, imagined intimacies, ideological betrayals by the negative, even the imaginary or real negation of the *relationship* (which would still remain a *relationship*):

But Hegel rendered the protest useless in his second part of the Logic, the Theory of Essential Being, of substances, causes, forces, essences, matter, in their essential relativity.

(*ON* Commonplace Book #199, Wilde's underlining)

To borrow from Gilbert's explanation of Browning's genius to Cyril in the dialogue, *The Critic as Artist*, "It was not thought that fascinated him, but rather the processes *by which thought moved*" (Wilde, *CW* 1012), a defining feature of the dramatic dialogue.

In the *Commonplace Book*, in an adjacent entry, Wilde also noted a particularly relevant comment attributed to Hegel by way of a footnote in W. Wallace's extensive commentary upon the "Prolegomena" to *The Logic of Hegel*, closely read by Wilde:

'If Philosophy aims at doing good to man it comes *too late in the day* for that: for while religions preside over the birth of nations, philosophy often follows them to their grave, it is not till the twilight comes that the owl of Athena begins its flight.'

(Wilde, *ON* Commonplace Book #204, italics added)

For those familiar with Hegel's work, the twilight flight of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, has a familiar resonance. As various movements (and artists) "go off," however radically the negating waning may occur, something takes flight: new forms or traces of consciousness or a belatedly new art form heretofore conceived, but inconceivable (the negative). The death of whatever movement or object (like the statue of a rich prince in "The Happy Prince") brings about the birth of a new material dispensation-cum-distribution, which is *always-already* present in the decaying historical impulse as a negation/repression/interruption,

*unrealized* (save after the “going off”). There can be no totalizing aesthetics of Decadence: every movement is both present and super-ceded by its successor, which is a self-contained supplement as it were, like Sir Henry Wotton's complaint that women always demand a “sixth act” of romance, after the curtain has fallen on a relationship (Wilde, *PDG* 131). Oscar Wilde surely needed either Hegel's owl or me to address D.P.P. Carson during his three trials. Decay and decadence can surely give birth during this unforeseeable sixth act—beyond the twilight—never mind our moral fatigue. But logically, such a metaphysic would suggest that nothing is entirely new, even the so-called *avant garde*.

Exhibit #1 might be the scene in *Salomé* wherein the lecherous stepfather, Herod, asks his stepdaughter to sit beside him. When she declines the invitation, having been warned by her mother, the Tetrarch admits that he has in fact “forgotten desire” and is merely going through the motions (Wilde, *Salomé*, CW 562) in a court whose luxurious entertainments and sexual practices would seem to embody it. Sensuality has *already* “gone off,” apparently, illustrated in the Tetrarch's lament that his marriage to his brother's wife, Herodias, having produced no offspring, is a consequence of her “sterility” (CW, 567), an assertion to which Salomé's very presence gives the lie. Wilde endows Herod's share of a gouty, “decadent” Caesar's kingdom with the lost desire, imagined sterility, and attraction/prohibition of incest in a “take” more Oedipal than is warranted by anything in the Gospel version. The disciple, John the Baptist, becomes the imprisoned curse upon the kingdom, held in a cistern/baptismal font, his iconic emblem.

The voluptuous daughter embraces the court's lost desire by differentially embracing the philosopher of desire's negation, Jokanaan (John the Baptist), as an alternative disciple. As the *a-filiative* (adopted) son of God's mysteriously, even incestuously- born only son, Jokanaan is in some sense Salomé's “double.” No wonder she is physically attracted to the monstrously deformed, desert-dwelling

and emaciated Jokanaan, (as in Infanta was attracted to a malformed dwarf) with his extreme doctrine of the denial of the senses. This radical severance-in-bonding of corporeal love which denies faith (*eros*) and spiritual love which denies corporeality (*agape*) is overcome in embrace: her kiss of a severed head brought in upon a charger. As a desiring subject, she *intends* what is in some sense already-present in the Tetrarch's court, a desire to embrace death, *already-anticipated* in the suicidal interruption by suicide of the homoerotic relationship of a Syrian soldier and Narraboth celebrated in one of Beardsley's illustrations to *Salomé*. The Tetrarch's court in the first half of *Salomé* is a house of death and prohibitions all of which share the foreclosure of the desired object of love (Salomé). Her sensuality appears as the doomed derivative of a once historically vital artistic and social practice (sensuality) in a court grown fearful of both noisy Hebraic textual disputations and fledgling Christian asceticism, now bound as allies.

Hence, the privileging of sensual love is already *contested* when Salomé kisses the severed head (which male physiological "head"?), desiring not St. John the Baptist's body, but the severance of desire from the body that his unique death (and doctrine) *embodies*, and which is *already* ideologically present, as a *dis-embodiment*. Physical desire for the prophet in Salomé's utterances assumes the imprecision of describing the physical save as the murder of all metaphoric "likeness." Identity (the literal kiss of death *à la Judas*) would be the end of *likeness* and hence, metaphor. Otherwise, Salomé can never recover what the reality of her seduction by the prophet really *is*; only what it is *like* in its persistently undefinable ugliness which can be only metaphorically represented. She falls in love with the indescribable deformities (an anti-art) of both the disciple's body and his theological ideology, which *always-already* exists in her mother's prohibitions. Hence, Salomé "inherits" the prohibitions reflected in Jokanaan's beliefs:

Salomé: 'Thy body is hideous. It is *like* a plastered wall where vipers have

crawled; *like* a plastered wall where scorpions have made their nest. It is *like* a whitened sepulcher full of loathsome things.'

(Wilde, "Salomé," *CW* 559, italics added)

Once physical desire can only be expressed with the imprecision of a metaphoric *likeness* whereby recovery is reduced to a perpetual re-covering—hence its easy lapse into repetition, plagiarism, and relativity—we are not far removed from the incessant doctrinal squabbles by which the new dispensation of Christianity is debated *ad nauseam* among the Jewish sects over whom the Tetrarch governs in Wilde's *Salomé*. The disputations among the Jews at Herod's court, with their over-determined legal *dissimulations*, are entirely dedicated to questioning an abstract God who allegedly raises the dead, among other acts attributable to a New Savior who may or may not be the Hebrews' promised Elias. In one sense, Salomé's description of her increasing attraction to a deformed body *in situ* (made prophetic by Jokanaan's denunciation of bodily desire) is a kind of Elizabethan love sonnet in reverse: "How do I hate thee/let me count the ways." There could be no better expression of the axiom, "every hatred is a lost love." But it seems not unlike Dorian Gray's admission that he no longer seeks women who love him, but opts instead for the far more interesting "women who hate one" (Wilde, *PDG* 224). Abject dedication is not far from hatred, after all.

It is into this twilight realm between the death of the Old Law and "Old Sensuality" and the birth of the New Dispensation of Christ and his differentially plagiarizing disciples that Salomé advances a new wisdom. The end of metaphor being the end of graduated *differences* (resemblance), Salomé embraces the negative. Jokanaan's denial of sensual life (a living "whitened sepulcher") has become simultaneously both loathsome and desirable in his loathsomeness. As negatives attract, a form of counter-love is born in Wilde's sixth act of historical relationships.

These moments during which apparently antithetical values attract are marked by the rhetorical device of the aphorism, a next-of-kin to plagiarism, which Wilde's life practice would appear to have embraced. For the aphorism, a common instrument of prophetic discourse, the coded speech of both prophets and quacks in its kinship with the riddle insofar as its truth is entirely contained in the question, transforms the speaker into the *empty* (in the sense of derivative) messenger of a "Word" that has its origins elsewhere. If in evolutionary theory, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny (so that the best traits are never lost), so in Wilde's aesthetic (via Gilbert in "The Critic as Artist"), "the tendency of creation is to repeat itself" (Wilde, *CW* 1021), even instrumentally. The critic becomes then a medium or disciple (like Jokanaan), agent of an antecedent sacred and hence irrecoverable as sacred. The utterer of the aphorism appears as a transparent (mindless) agent, entrusted with spreading a homily as he is reduced to a cipher in which virtually anything might be read.

The Origin acquires meaning only when it is socially or biologically reproduced thereby potentially becoming part of a *canon* to be committed to collective memory or belief. Like Coleridge, Wilde was a notorious plagiarist, suggested (posthumously) by the progressively diminishing volume of his *Collected Works* including the deletion of a near perfect reproduction of a poem by Dante Gabriel Rossetti previously included under his own name. Wilde had a unique defense of simulation, even before Dorian Gray's friendship with "coiners" (Wilde, *PDG* 173), given that exact reproduction would be genetically as well as aesthetically or critically, impossible. Perhaps Dorian's late flirtation with counterfeiters, like Wilde's intellectual seduction by Gide, the author of *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, rep-

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7 The late Richard Ellmann claims (albeit it with sketchy evidence) that Wilde had an intimate relationship with Andre Gide, the author of *The Counterfeiters*. See Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Penguin, 1988), pp. 335-340. See also Andre Gide, *Oscar Wilde* (Paris: 1938).



resents the persistence of a life interest in the dynamics of dissimulation and its carriers.<sup>7</sup> No wonder that Wilde defended plagiarism:

'...accusations of plagiarism ... proceed either from the thin, colourless lips of impotence, or from the grotesque mouths of those who, possessing nothing of their own, fancy that they can gain a reputation for wealth by crying out that they have been robbed.'

(Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," *CW* 1019)

The effect of such a doctrine would be its impact on the concept of aesthetic depth, eliminating any distinction between the surface meaning and putatively "deep" or "real" meaning in a maneuver that would have been anathema to say, another figure of the 1890's, Ferdinand Saussure. To create an identical *surface* in a differential historical, semiotic or critical context, given the passage of time and temporal re-citation, is to alter "deep meaning" The copy could never be superficial:

'All art is at once surface and symbol.

Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.

Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.'

(Wilde, "Preface" *PDG* 22)

For Wilde, as for an artist like David Hockney, who once proclaimed that "the surface is deep enough for me," the superficial would be, paradoxically, a *final source* of meaning.

"Peril" being the shared trait, "surface" and "symbol" (traditionally in opposition) become virtual equals here, the radical shallowing of any notion of depth or meaning as "layered meaning." The shared *imaginary relationship*, not

unlike that which exists between so-called “real” and “imaginary numbers in Alain Badiou’s persuasive model, ultimately suggests that all numbers are imaginary.<sup>8</sup> There is surely a similar valence that exists between *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a novel and the painting which is its (only ostensible) referent, insofar as both novel and painting comprise a hyphenated “joint representation” invested by/in the negative. Similarly, at least at the outset, Hallward’s painting appears to the viewer as the joint representation of the myth of aesthetic bonding termed “realism” and an emergent homosexual bonding between artist and object, equally unstable. Realism would constitute the ultimate hypocrisy for Wilde, as for Roland Barthes, because nothing can be re-produced *as is*, save a silly myth of the *réel*.<sup>9</sup> Hence, very early on in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, this imaginary bonding is under threat; the former, by the suggestion that Dorian represents a “quantum leap” in art history and the latter by the ideological usurpation of Sir Henry Wotton as a “new dimension” in what had been an exclusive relationship. The

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8 Alain Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, trans. Robin Mackay (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008). In a little known book review, Wilde praised the philosophy of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. quietest, Chuang Tzu, who dedicated himself to the reconciliation of all opposites so completely that the truly wise man did *nothing* (a truly radical investment in the negative), but sought a balance by continued *ad hoc* marginal adjustments in life, perhaps a feature of Chinese foreign policy, even today. Only the unknowable has value, for the Chinese sage. In Wilde’s appraisal, for the philosopher, “morality went out of fashion when people began to moralize” which sounds as if it could have come from Wotton. See Wilde, “A Chinese Sage,” *The Speaker*, (February 1890), p. 14. The negative negates, producing a positive inflected by negation. I wish to thank my colleague, Prof. Fumihiko Kato, for introducing me to this essay.

9 In a series of lectures and lecture notes delivered at the College de France (1978-79) published under the title *The Neutral*, Barthes pleaded for the *realization* that every paradigm is always badly put, tantamount to an improper framing. Side-stepping all modes of affirmation, Barthes argued, could be achieved by an assertion of the “no.” Tropes would be a way of withholding both dissent and affirmation, replacing the grammar of assertion by a new kind of subjunctive mode. See Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*, trans. Rosalind Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2005), pp. 44, 59.

production/inclusion of the negative is *always-already* at work, creating a unity with a "hole" in it: the euphuism for a negative resistant to traditional representation.

Stylistically, the same "bonding" might be suggested in the impossibly hyphenated adjectives present from the outset in the near oxymoronic: "honey-coloured blossoms;" "golden white-feathered disk;" "tussore-silk curtains;" and "pallid jade-faced painters" (Wilde, *PDG* 23-25), often regarded in misdirected critical appraisals of Wilde as "philological overemphasis" or "verbal overload."<sup>10</sup> But as Dorian's post-murder sketches reveal, unity-in-multiplicity is *effectuated* by an impossible elision with the negative which remains present as an *after-affect*. Yet, how do we *account for* (as a "counting") this curious bondage of *totality* and *negation* producing the zero-sum game that binds art and its negation/reproduction, literary criticism? Given the proliferation of doubles, should we not read *doubly*, in such a way that negations are *countable*? If all utterance is *already* bonded to an antecedent which it simultaneously negates and reproduces in a recognizable or unrecognizable copy, then plagiarism (the succession of the barely differentiated response) as a legitimate form of social reproduction is validated. Gilbert perhaps says it best in "The Critic as Artist:"

'...so the critic reproduces the work that he criticizes in a mode that is *never*

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10 The excessive proportionality of language to action, cited by Jeff Nunokawa as part of the persistently antagonistic readings of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as either a "straight" (realistic) or a "gay" (exaggerated style) novel, unfortunately maintains a distinction between language and action. Language is surely a form of discovery (and hence action) for both homosexual and heterosexuals in social encounters which attempt to mold (as in actively framing) the object as accessible or inaccessible. We talk until we discover whether the other is accessible or malleable, often accomplished in interviews, ordinary conversation, and business negotiations. The exaggerated verbal "pose" may well be a disguised strategic "act." See Jeff Nunokawa, *Tame Passions of Wilde: The Styles of Manageable Desire* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 71-72.

*imitative*, and part of whose charm may really consist in the rejection of resemblance and shows us in this way ... the mystery of Beauty, and by transforming each art into literature, solves once and for all the problem of Art's unity.'

(Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," *CW* 1032, italics added)

Precise imitation is an impossibility given the passage of time, historically-induced change of context and hence style and perception. To recite is always to *re-site*.

In imitation of Dorian's repeated visits to the sequestered portrait in his nursery, let us take a second look at both Hallward's portrait not merely as representational portrait of an Apollonian youth, but as another "portrait" of a *relationship* between artist, sitter, and the social reproduction of art known as criticism. In our haste to advance the decadent claim that Dorian's life becomes art at the same time that Basil's portrait assumes the mutable quality of life, we err on the side of an ideology of decadent *Pygmalionism* which demands that life become art as art becomes life. But, in fact, the portrait (as a portrait) *never really changes*, unless we count some relationship between "chemical bonds" present in the paint and "the soul that was within him" (Wilde, *PDG*, 124), a theory that would find a shared DNA between paint and life. If true, to "call a spade a spade" would be in fact to become one, producing a radical transparency between *sign* and *signified*. Each would find its subjectivity in the Other.

After the suicide of Sybil Vane, Dorian draws aside the screen which guards the painting in his childhood nursery and Wilde's text makes clear that "there was no further change to the picture" (Wilde, *PDG* 134), asserting that it is perhaps "indifferent to results" (Wilde, *PDG*, 134). Dorian hopes to perceive the (surely imaginary) changes with the hope that he might, "some day ... see the *change taking place before his very eyes*" (Wilde, *PDG* 134, ital. added), an impossibility for

any critic given that changes occur only *after* shifts in critical consciousness or perspective, rather than in visual day-to-day (market) fluctuations. But *intentionality* (desire) fulfills the experientially absent, as it does perhaps perversely, in the Darwinian model of continuity.

After the disappointing performance of Sybil Vane that leads to his broken engagement, Dorian replaces Sir Henry Wotton as tutor with Basil's portrait, but whether the portrait actually changes or not is left open in Dorian's attitude:

The picture, changed or unchanged, would be to him the visible emblem of conscience .... He would not see Lord Henry any more—would not, at any rate, listen to those subtle, poisonous theories ....

(Wilde, *PDG* 121, italics added)

For Wilde, it does not matter in the least whether the portrait changes or not, for it has now become, as it had previously been for Basil Hallward, an emblem—in the sitter's case, displacing Wotton as philosophical tutor. That is to say, the portrait has come to have a metaphoric value (conscience) that subverts its metonymic value as a pictorial diary. The critic-viewer with a new agenda, grounded in additional reading or experience, symbolically removes the portrait from its frame and gives it a wider circulation—as emblem—than its value as representational "realism" might confer.

This occurs just before his partner in the portrait's production, Basil Hallward, changes his mind about the gift that he has given Dorian. The artist unexpectedly demands its return for a retrospective exhibition of his greatest work to be organized by George Petit "on the Rue de Seze which will open the first week in October" (Wilde, *PDG* 142-3). The revelation (a showing forth) which will open their relationship (identical to the relationship between aesthetic subjects and objects) to public criticism or gossip (another form of criticism) sends Dorian into

what the late Eve Sedgwick has termed homosexual panic.<sup>11</sup> Sensing betrayal, he begs Hallward to allow him to keep the portrait “closeted” as it were, out of public view. Once it has become an emblem—be it teaching tool or a reclaimed life gift, like Kelso’s estate, another inheritance—the portrait can never remain a mere “picture” of Dorian Gray. The second possible interpretation would involve a kind of critical “double-bind,” which demands a double-reading. Exposed to either public view and appraisal by an art-attending public or the attempt to remove or suppress it entirely from circulation (the “missing piece” in a retrospective of greatest hits) both alter how the portrait *means*, just as the theft of a Monet and its absent space at the Gardiner Museum in Boston adds to its value to such an extent that it is unlikely to enter the market as an auction item. Absence is aesthetic presence in the same way that that the copy can never be mere copy, but *means* in production and reception.

The mysteries of art and its reception work in strange ways. Re-reading, as we all know, brings its horrors. Social reproduction—the creative evolution of cultural meaning by way of critical re-assessment—develops even in closeted relationships. Particularly if the decision “not to expose” also means, *exposes*.

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11 Eve K. Sedgwick, *Epistemology in the Closet* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990). Although Sedgwick remarkably describes homosexual panic, I am unsure whether she distinguishes it from heterosexual panic (“I have been caught in a hotel with someone who is not my wife”) or the Jew “outed” by his colleagues after attempting to disguise his ethnic identity. All are in some sense “caught out” when a secret (the closet) secretes. But Dorian (like Wilde) makes no attempt to hide his homosexuality, rather openly using it to blackmail other homosexuals, Alan Chapman and Basil Hallward. He rather does not want the artistic record of his sin to be publicly consumed in order to resurrect Basil’s fading career with speculation about some “new mode” of aesthetic expression: thus, he resists being used in someone else’s “retrospective-cum- -collection.” The panic is rather like that accompanying the release of a private aesthetic diary, albeit one whose changes are not detectable day-by-day. It is like that, of the critic (or teacher) who suspects that his “reading” of the portrait in the nursery is nonsense, if not informed by his singular, private experience.

Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, not too far distant chronologically, will advance the same idea in a more inclusive format. Absent critical intelligence or fear of its chronologically progressive revelations, art can only be socially reproduced *as is*; thus the "restoration" of the portrait in the novel's last paragraph, describing the responses of coachmen and servants who make their way posthumously into Dorian's nursery, seem to anticipate a collective urge to "clean up" art by critically scrubbing it:

When they entered they found, hanging upon the wall, a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty.

(Wilde, *PDG* 264)

Hallward's portrait has undergone no mimetic change, only progressive critically-induced re-appraisals from which the serving classes, un-afflicted by these life experiences, are aesthetically immune. The public sees only what is socially uninflected, really *there*. The work of art is thematically amplified by the critic (Dorian), and upon the death of the critic, it can only be what it is, for the critic is an artist. Divested of both, art adheres to solely representational value.

Wilde leaves no doubt that insofar as art criticism releases unconscious motives, it is reborn as the Unconscious to which the access of the insensitive is limited. The best criticism never confines itself to discovery of the artist's intention, for even Hallward is as conflicted about his intention in creating the portrait as he is about the ownership of the completed art object. As Gilbert informs the skeptical Earnest in "The Critic as Artist," "the meaning of any beautiful created thing is, at least, as much in the soul of him who looks at it as it is in the soul who wrought it" (Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," *CW* 1029). The (changing) judgment of reader/critic, no matter how distorted by behavior, ideology, vindictive-

ness, or false perception is always as important as the creator in the production of art's meaning. Reproduction always rules meaning.

Hallward is surely correct when he asserted that his portrait (both visual and derivatively and mimetically, Wilde's novel) contains, in some surely double sense, the history of art. Dorian begins the novel as the object of Hallward's aesthetic and physical contemplation before evolving to become a "motive" for a movement, then developing his "collection" of antiques and exotic books. From one perspective, of course, the serious collector is a kind of artist, if art is determined by taste. He arranges dissimilar objects on a palette (considered as a life-style) to which his name may be affixed (e.g., the "Barnes' Collection") for perhaps eventual inheritance by others as a totalization which may be imaginary. The "collection" represents one attempt to create aesthetic unity by organizing randomness under a signature, even though the collector has created *nothing*, but only labeled it (to which later critics and historians may adduce a unity).

Hence, the question as to who owns the portrait/image intermittently abandoned and claimed by Basil Hallward is not at all an idle question, given both the history of litigation over ownership of the objects of aesthetic production as well as how meaning is created and dispersed through variable agents in the productive process. Dorian is either liberated to become his "own" artist after the murder of his partner, going into the art production business for himself as it were, or belatedly discovers that death is the mother of beauty in "seeding" the sketches of flowers which restore/ become images of Hallward. A later phase in Dorian's evolution occurs when the figure becomes a fashion model whose neckties are worn by the very people who scorn him because of his private behavior or rumors about it, proof enough of "life having its elaborate masterpieces, just as poetry has, or sculpture, or painting (Wilde, *PDG* 83). Dorian *has evolved* from the artist as *collector* of the various oriental saddle bags, cigarette boxes, and exotic library which had furnished his house and later a *donor* of his collection of miniatures to



an exhibition at (co-incidentally?), Whistler's gallery, "the Dudley" (Wilde, *PDG* 183). But his "effects"/"affects" come to be collected and exhibited by others, either as a fashion "label" or as the label of a collector. Collecting and being collected are a set.

This progressive commodification of art due to its re-productive practices, the real subject of Wilde's novel (proving Hallward's claim that Dorian is a "new motive" in art), ends of course in the novel's last paragraph with the (rather radical) hollowing out of what had been the art object: "it was not until they examined the rings that they recognized who it was" (Wilde, *PDG* 264). Dorian's identity is now literally, Kojève's "hole" in being, the "remains" of a negative that constitutes part of the Imaginary from Hegel through Lacan's slippages and beyond. The conclusion of Wilde's novel suggests that criticism, perhaps like nature for De Sade, rushes in to fill a vacuum that it in some sense creates.<sup>12</sup> This is why Wilde's work demands, as does the accusation of plagiarism or libel, both a double-reading and a re-reading. One example comes quickly to mind in a dialogue between Basil Hallward and Wotton:

'That is quite true, Dorian,' cried Hallward.

'Nothing is ever quite true,' said Lord Henry.

(Wilde, *PDG* 107)

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12 The Divine Marquis, in a parody of the logic of Rousseau and Voltaire, imagined the world of man to be totally in opposition to that of nature. The only way in which man and nature might communicate would occur when we mime not some "natural law," but rather participate in the universal destruction (and recreation) that is the disorder of nature. Man must rush to fill a vacuum, later incorporated. This might account for the penchant to fill vacuums, much as does Dorian with his sketches after murdering Basil Hallward, or the Marquis de Sade does on one occasion in *The 120 Days of Sodom* by positing at one point an (imaginary?) fourth corporeal passage through which sexual congress with a woman might be initiated.

“Truth never exists” might be one interpretation, but a double-reading is possible: “nothing” *is* (the troubling copulative) the only everlasting truth. When Dorian’s thoughts are indistinguishable from those of his tutor, Wotton, the critical “body” has been doubly hollowed-out: as a transparent agent; plagiarism suggests a seamless invisible transfer of names and ideas. That might be one definition of “branding.”

A (Hegelian)double-reading is necessary For example, John Reed in his book, *Decadent Style* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1985) is unable to comprehend how Beardsley’s lovely “The Climax of Salomé,” used to illustrate Wilde’s play, captures fully the investment in the negative. He prefers to see her being swept off her feet as a kind of Keatsian moment: “suspended forever, agonizingly close to a fulfillment she can never know” (Reed, 165). Yet, Wilde makes it perfectly clear in *Salomé* that she has indeed lost her virginity to the dead disciple:

‘I was a virgin and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste and thou didst fill my veins with fire ....Ah! ah! Wherefore didst thou not look at me Jokanaan?’

(Wilde, “Salomé,” *CW* 574)

Virginity being a presence that defines a *lack* (the *negative* of sexual experience), in blaming a dead head (a radical impotence) for the loss/gain of her experience, Wilde bonds loss and gain, perfectly *realized* (that loaded Hegelian word that came to be applied to Victorian theatre) in Beardsley’s illustration of the scene. The disciple’s loss of blood at her command fertilizes the lily, emblem of the Annunciation (the announcement of an impossible pregnancy, suggested in the uterine- shaped cloud) and derivatively, of the ovulation and coming-to-term of Christianity and its perverse challenge to unchallenged *eros*: a “Leda and the Swan” moment. In Wilde’s play the deaths of Salomé and Jokanaan are inter-

dependent. "Dying together" and mutual ecstasy being a common metaphor for the sex act, one presumes that we are watching the (historically pivotal) climax-as-necrophilia on both sides. The loss of virginity is the "kiss of death." Or, as Wilde might have said in the other half of an aphorism he did not write, but could have: "but the maintenance of virginity is also the kiss of death." There are two concluding stage black-outs (climaxes?) in the last one-hundred lines of the play: a kind of visually "empty," albeit supplementary, marginal "sixth act" in a relationship governed on both sides—including the audience—by those "who have eyes and see not." *Loss* and orgasmic *blackouts* (sensory gain) are now a "set."

Dorian Gray's post-conversion behavior similarly seems riddled with the negative. After expressing a new desire to "be good" (influenced by dissenting preachers near Hyde Park) so as to convert a life heretofore dedicated to seducing or being seduced, Dorian's supposedly new-found conduct consists of his *non-seduction* of Hetty, a country lass whose overtures he rejects at Selby as surely as he did Sybil Vane. It is a fulfillment of Sir Henry Wotton's dictum, "... when we are good, we are *not* always happy" (Wilde, *PDG* 105, ital. added). Negation is now an investment, incorporating both *sub-jection* and a critique of it that would re-instantiate the negative as potentially constitutive.<sup>13</sup> At novel's end Dorian has "evolved" to a mere remainder, now the hermeneutic circle: his identifying rings, yet absent the recognizable body. The "ultimate indivisible remainder" occupies

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13 In a remarkable chapter, Philippe Ariès has suggested that the mid-nineteenth century Gothic novel in Europe re-imagined the "beautiful death" common in tomb sculpture in the late medieval Gothic period in more physical terms. The body of the deceased as it decayed was made more sexually attractive and thereby more potentially re-generative of life, while still retaining traces of decay. Is it possible that Dorian's drawings of Hallward represent not a career change, but an attempted aesthetic re-figuration (aesthetic resurrection) of the artist-as- (former) lover? See "The Age of the Beautiful Death" in Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1981), pp. 409-471.

a lot of ideological space for a wit that always privileged “the last word” as a *realization*.

As with Alan Campbell’s aesthetic, chemical reduction of Hallward’s corpse leaving scarcely a trace, Dorian becomes a radical negation *through which* a public stares. Such near-empty transparency resembles Wilde’s wish, to Ada Levenson, to write a poem that was “all margin,” later perfected in practice of course by Mallarmé.<sup>14</sup> A poem by the Robert Lowell student, Frank Bidart, entitled “Ellen West,” takes its title presumably from one of the first patients historically to be diagnosed with the disease now known as anorexia. But it fulfills Wilde’s model of a potentially emptied body wherein the hole is represented, even typographically, as a hollowing out of physiological and poetic bodies, resistant to digestion. But it may have relevance to a “Wilde style:”

Perhaps it says: the only way

To escape

The History of Styles

is not to have a body.<sup>15</sup>

Robert Ross, a devoted disciple present at the laying out of Wilde’s remains following his death in Paris, noted that prior to internment, the corpse virtually exploded, oozing appalling debris “from every orifice”:<sup>16</sup> So live the holes in

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14 The suggestion came to Wilde from Ada Levenson in response to the publication of John Gray’s very slight *Silverpoints*. Wilde’s unwritten (cancelled, incomplete?) text, a marvelous instance of the transparency-as-negation, was to be illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley. See Ada Levenson, *Letters to the Sphinx from Oscar Wilde and Reminiscences of the Author* (London: 1930), pp. 19-20.

15 Frank Bidart, *Metaphysical Dog* (New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 2013), pp. 57-58.

16 Ellmann, *op. cit.*, p. 549.



*The Climax for Salome.* (private Collection)

Being. Neither Basil's portrait, nor Basil, the artist, nor the critic/sitter, Dorian Gray, survives the negative. Yet Dorian's "Portraits of Basil" presumably survive (where?) as a productive transparency, disappearing into Wilde's, meta-critical hole, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

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