

The Premature Burial of Liberalism: Inadequate Fetishists in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and a legal article "The Right to Privacy" (1890) could evoke the same social sympathy among liberals desiring their privacy in Britain and America. On the other hand, following Grant Allen's opinion, Wilde targeted the concept of private property, the economic basis of liberalism, in "The Soul of Man under Socialism" (1891). Accordingly, in *Dorian Gray*, he revealed the social limits of aestheticism, which depends on private property and its implicit connection with the middle-class liberalism, by describing the fate of an aesthetic individualist who loses the absolute source of his values when he destroys his portrait as an icon of private property. Although Wilde began to pursue a sustainable form of individualism as the essence of liberalism in *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), he witnessed the failure of Mrs Erlynne as a radical individualist. Wilde sought an anarchic form of liberty in the entanglement of fatality and contingency in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). He retained a sense of liberty beyond individualism, which associates itself with conservatism as a view of life, while liberalism as a political idea might be done away with in the ironical itinerary.