

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

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1 Right to Privacy

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891), Oscar Wilde's only novel, consists of fragmentary episodes, with the book's consistency provided by the protagonist's strange obsession: an obsession with concealing his degenerating portrait. Dorian Gray's anxiety about the revelation is described naturally: "The portrait must be hidden away at all costs. He [Dorian] could not run such a risk of discovery again. It had been mad of him to have allowed the thing to remain, even for an hour, in a room to which any of his friends had access" (267).⁽¹⁾ At the beginning of the novel, Basil Hallward, the painter who admires the youth and beauty of Dorian, also expresses his intention of hiding the portrait. He refuses to exhibit it since he feels he has put too much of himself into it (170). Throughout the nineteenth century, when museums and art galleries were mushrooming, the act of concealing a picture was construed as reactionary, but did evoke a sort of social sympathy. As everything in those times was on display, there was no doubt about why people were concerned about preservation of their privacy.

The desire to protect privacy led to a legal demand for the right to

privacy. In 1890, Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis, two American lawyers, defined privacy as “the right to be let alone” and argued that it should be protected by legislation (193). This idea was the source of the modern concept of privacy.⁽²⁾ These two lawyers proposed a new legislation, to protect the internal landscape of an individual, such as “thoughts, emotions, and sensations” (195), the scope of which had broadened with the development of the social civilisation. Such legal logic might justify Dorian’s act of concealing the evidence that told of the corruption of his soul.

Throughout the Victorian era, an advanced materialistic culture not only enriched life and made it increasingly convenient but also secured individual spaces for intellectual works in urban environments, including the British Museum Reading Room, which was built in 1857.

In the new Reading Room readers sat separated from one another and not face-to-face, with other readers to their sides. The library was designed therefore to facilitate privacy, as well as surveillance. But this surveillance was of a new kind, a self-surveillance that was also collective, one that constituted a community of the self-watching. The creation of the liberal subject in its new and increasingly democratic forms involved the many viewing the many, rather than the one viewing the many. (Joyce 133)

As institutions of “self-surveillance” prevailed in modernised social space, it was inevitable that people in cities developed the desire for seclusion in some parts of their lives, a seclusion that was unlike “privacy” burdened with stressful self-discipline. According to both texts quoted, the desire to turn something private into something secret might be an expression in the defence of free lives and against the self-repressive gaze of the mature urbanised materialistic culture of the late nineteenth

century. We will argue that these two seemingly different texts—an aesthetic work of fiction by a notoriously flippant English artist and a legal article by austere American lawyers—are intellectual responses to the same context of ideas.

In “The Soul of Man under Socialism” (1891), a piece of social criticism in which Wilde claimed the importance of privacy, his vocabulary was almost approximate to that of the supporters of the legal right to privacy. He targeted the brutality of contemporary journalism: “The tyranny that it [journalism] proposes to exercise over people’s private lives seems to me to be quite extraordinary” (255).⁽³⁾ Moreover, he demonstrated that he valued “people’s private lives” by saying, “It knows that people are good when they are let alone” (263). We will investigate a shared ideological basis in these two articles.

Warren and Brandeis sought to establish the legal authorisation of privacy, because they recognised that the long-established and substantial concept of “private property” could no longer cover the entire expansive universe of individual inner lives (Post 667–68): “The principle which protects personal writings and all other personal productions, not against theft and physical appropriation, but against publication in any form, is in reality not the principle of private property, but that of an inviolate personality” (205). Wilde as well considered “private property” useless: “Private property crushed true Individualism, and set up an Individualism that is false” (237–38). He went on to say, “With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things, and the symbols for things. One will live. To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all” (238–39). He appreciated the soundness of individualism in contrast to the harmfulness of “private property.” This view seems

strange because it could be said that “private property is the embodiment of individual liberty in its primordial form” (Gray 61). Was the association between individualism and socialism just Wildean paradoxical rhetoric? We use another text to confirm the historical fact that the connection between the quest for the status of a liberal individual and the negation of private property could be found not only in Wilde’s idiosyncratic use of language but also elsewhere.

2 Against Private Property

In an essay titled “Individualism and Socialism” (1889), Grant Allen fiercely criticised the Liberty and Property Defence League (LPDL), established by Lord Elcho (the tenth Earl of Wemyss, known as an organiser and fundraiser for anti-socialist and anti-trade union causes) in 1882 to defend *laissez-faire*. This organisation was responsible for bringing the term “individualism” into general use: “W. C. Crofts, the first secretary of the LPDL, claimed responsibility for introducing ‘Individualism’ into general usage in 1883 in the League’s lectures at working-men’s clubs and in its publications” (Bristow 761). The organisation appeared to Allen to conserve the unequal distribution of wealth and the unbalanced sharing of land that was protected by the state; individualism seemed to be a mask for conservatism. He clearly defined the basis of true individualism: “Individualism ... is only logically and consistently possible if it starts with the postulate that all men must, to begin with, have free and equal access to the common gifts and energies of Nature—soil, water, air, sunshine; and to the common stock of raw material—stone, wood, coal, metal” (731). A man possessing the right to direct access to Nature should respect the same right of other people: “An indi-

vidualist is a man who recognizes without stint the full, free, and equal right of every citizen to the unimpeded use of all energies, activities and faculties, provided only he does not thereby encroach upon equal and correlative right of every other citizen" (732). Allen supported natural equality for every man, as opposed to the artificial inequality of wealth, which was presupposed by the LPDL.

The confrontation between these two types of individualism can be regarded as a historical phenomenon that occurred during the transfiguration of liberalism. Since the 1880s, the mid-Victorian liberalism that was embraced mainly by the middle class, who wanted to avoid any intervention of the state, had been gradually replaced by a new liberalism, in which the working class sought positive freedom with the state's aid. In 1889, L. A. Atherley-Jones, the author of "The New Liberalism," said, "Now, indeed, for the first time in the history of English politics, we find Liberalism almost exclusively identified with the particular interests of the working class" (187). The ideas of Allen and the LPDL could be seen as attempts to seek an alternative status for the free individual in contrast with trends of new liberal thought and politics.

Although both Allen and the LPDL intended to do away with the protective authority of the state exercising its transparent repressive power, there was a vital distinction; the LPDL thought of individualism as a conservative idea to maintain the liberalist economic system, whereas Allen associated individualism with socialism. What led to this distinction? It is significant to note that Allen targeted the concept of property suggested by the LPDL. He argued for a true individualist: "Property, as conceived by the Individualist, means the product of man's own labour, exerted upon his fair share of the common stock of raw material. That common stock is not and cannot itself be Property: for nobody made it, and it

belongs in equity to all of us equally” (734). “True Property,” according to him, “consists of the product of labour, and it can be owned only by the producer himself, or by the person to whom the producer himself has freely given, bartered, or bequeathed it” (735). Therefore, it was only natural that property as conceived by the LPDL, which implied the conservation of the institution of land ownership of the aristocracy, contradicted true individualism. Allen’s essay reveals the discursive chaos of the 1880s and 90s, when the foundation of individualism as well as the concept of property were fluctuant as liberalism was being reconstructed.

Basing the notion of property upon labour, which was attributed to an irreducibly individual body, Allen was more individualistic, at least philosophically. Following Allen’s link between individualism and socialism (Guy 78), Wilde also groped for a form of true individualism without any conservative implications. We interpret *Dorian Gray* as an expression of seemingly contradictory associations between individualism and socialism, rather than an affinitive one between individualism and aestheticism.

3 The Pride of Individualism

On the first page of *Dorian Gray*, the protagonist appears not as himself but as “the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty” (169). It is remarkable that “extraordinary personal beauty” is the phrase modifying “a young man,” which suggests an absent person in the scene. Because of the lack of an imperfect living body, the picture can be seen as a transparent medium carrying the absolute value, which Dorian, who enters the novel in chapter 2, will come to embody. Fascinated by the exuberant eloquence of Lord Henry

Wotton, he identifies himself with “a young man” in the abstract sense, supporting the absolute value of beauty. For Dorian, beauty and youth are externalities that he is forced to possess: “I know, now, that when one loses one’s good looks, whatever they may be, one loses everything. Your picture has taught me that. Lord Henry Wotton is perfectly right. Youth is the only thing worth having” (190). The indirect and delusional possession of the absolute is disguised by his ownership of his own portrait.

Lord Henry and Basil the painter talk about the ownership of the picture: “I will give you anything you like to ask for it. I must have it.” / ‘It is not my property, Harry.’ / ‘Whose property is it?’ / ‘Dorian’s, of course,’ answered the painter” (189). This “of course” is rather biased. It is only natural that a picture is the property of its painter, who has spent time working on it and has the right to sell it to buyers at his will. However, in the last decades of the nineteenth century in Britain, when the concept of property came to be variously redefined as the notions of conventional landed property became less secure (Harris 97), the problem of who had ownership rights over “art” was much discussed. While the Museums Association insisted that there was no private property in a work of genius (Bailkin 14), W. H. Mallock argued that “a fine house, and pictures, if a man is otherwise destitute, are to him property in the common sense of the word, only on the supposition that he can sell them” (384). If selling a picture made it the property of the artist or buyer, Basil’s refusal to sell the portrait bestowed ownership in a purified form on its model, a form in which its absolute value or aura would not be diminished in the marketplace. In this peculiar form of property, the appearance and preservation of an absolute would depend upon the exclusive relationship of the possessed and the possessor, a relationship

very similar to that present in forms of religious worship.⁽⁴⁾ The plot of the novel, wherein his portrait ages while Dorian's looks remained unchanged, seems highly fictitious; however, this could be interpreted as a revelation on the characteristics of the relationship between the two, the private possession of a medium of beauty that appeared to Dorian as the possession of beauty itself.

However fiercely Dorian was detested in high society, "His great wealth was a certain element of security" (287). We could also say that his security was his great wealth, on the grounds that the safety of the absolute source of value upon which his consumption of vice and fascination was based was crucial to Dorian: "He would be safe. That was everything" (258).⁽⁵⁾ Dorian acquires a sense of "secret pleasure" by confirming the secure structure of possession and concealment: "On his return he would sit in front of the picture, sometimes loathing it and himself, but filled, at other times, with that pride of individualism that is half the fascination of sin, and smiling, with secret pleasure, at the misshapen shadow that had to bear the burden that should have been his own" (286).⁽⁶⁾ The exquisite evocation of complex emotion here is extraordinarily natural. An aesthetic self with the "pride of individualism" is fixed upon the cognitive structure that the portrait controls. The solidity is in stark contrast with the fluidity of aestheticism illustrated by Walter Pater in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* (1873):

Analysis goes a step further still, and assures us that those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more

truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is. To such a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down. It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off—that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves. (188)

In the “art for art’s sake” manifesto first published in 1868 as part of “Poems by William Morris,” an aesthetic self is defined not as a solid subject, but as an oscillating being forming and re-forming itself in “the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations” fleeing in time. One might think that Pater presented a more liberal image of an aesthetic individual than Wilde did. But, of course, *Dorian Gray* should not be confused with Wilde, the author. The difference between Pater and Wilde must be examined in a historical context of ideas.

As observed, Wilde supported individualism by associating it with socialism and targeting private property. Based on the author’s stance against private property, which is consistent in *Dorian Gray*, we could regard Wilde above all as a critic of aesthetic conservatism. Did literary and art criticism, which resulted in aestheticism, while stressing individualism, share the rotten root of secured private property with the conservative upper classes? Although *Dorian* gradually grows tired of his life, he cannot exit the structure, which is like a prison house. The act of finally destroying his portrait, the icon of private property, signifies his loss of beauty, the absolute source of his symbolic wealth. *Dorian Gray* illuminates the social limits of aesthetic criticism, which could not transcend the economic system supported by private property. If Wilde

wrote the essays in *Intentions* as works of art in themselves, he intended *Dorian Gray* to be a criticism of the social basis upon which his preceding critical writings were founded.

Linda Dowling points out the “dilemmas” of liberalism as “the danger that all universals, even those of tolerance, liberty, and equality cherished at the very heart of liberalism, would come in time to seem like arbitrary and oppressive constructs beside the infinitely various and ceaselessly proliferating particulars of actual individual experience” (93). It is certain that “Pater and Wilde ... found themselves caught in one of the irreducible dilemmas lying at heart of liberalism” (93). This painful paradox led Wilde to construct the end of *Dorian Gray* with a seemingly ethical implication, and Pater would stress the will to a cultural order in his later works such as *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). Regarding these supposed conversions, we must also take an account of the transformation of liberalism in the late-Victorian period. Having focused upon the purified mode of being and been criticised for his radical or revolutionary thoughts, Pater became a sort of cultural conservative. His intellectual journey was parallel to the shift in liberalism from the old mid-Victorian liberalism that favoured the free individual over the repressive state, to the new liberalism that required the intervention of the state to maintain the common people’s liberty. On the other hand, for Wilde, an inheritor of Spencerian individualism,⁽⁷⁾ who concentrated upon the selling his literary writings as free economic activity in a consumer society,⁽⁸⁾ and who at the same time advanced socialism as if eschewing political conservatism, the fate of *Dorian Gray* could undermine the basis of the unconscious cultural conservatism implied in old Paterian aesthetic liberalism.

The right to privacy was a brand new expression of liberalism based upon individualism, but it was no doubt conservative, as “privacy” guar-

anted the interests of the upper-class through the juridical framework and “protected the individual’s right to enjoy an identity forged by the existing social institutions of family and community, which embodied chosen social standards and morality” (Bezanson 1138). In that moment, it was extremely difficult to establish individualism in a pure form, in other words, one that avoided the protection of the state as well as conservative social and economic attitudes. Wilde embarked upon the pursuit of an alternative and sustainable form of individualism at the end of *Dorian Gray*, in which he proved that the material condition of private property constrained the aesthetic type of individualism through religious or metaphysical influence.

4 Fantastic Form of a Relation

Mrs Erlynne, a mysterious woman in *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892), has several parallels with Dorian Gray: the ageless attraction, the bold self-confidence and the notoriety in high society. Both Mrs Erlynne and Dorian are alien to the conventionally polite upper-class circles. If “Individualism is the true doctrine of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, a doctrine subtly disguised by the surface melodrama of this work” (Eltis 58), Mrs Erlynne is the protagonist as an individualist just as Dorian is. However, Wilde did not create Mrs Erlynne simply as a feminised Dorian. Dorian immerses himself into the purified form of private property, in which the absolute value of beauty is firmly fixed and from which the exchanges of value are excluded. On the other hand, Mrs Erlynne appears to eagerly desire a flow of cash. She demands that Lord Windermere, her abandoned daughter’s husband, make her “a handsome settlement” and says, “But seriously, what do you say to £ 2000? £ 2500, I think. In modern

life margin is everything. Windermere, don't you think the world an intensely amusing place? I do!" (92).⁽⁹⁾

Mrs Erlynne is defined by the words of another lady, who remarks "I assure you, women of that kind are most useful. They form the basis of other people's marriages" (74). Like money, she functions, without intending to, as a circulating medium that connects people with each other. She could be referred to as a Dorian liberated for the marketplace, living a positive and free life via relative human relationships. Her secret of being the mother of Lady Windermere is a source of wealth to utilise, rather than a sacred privacy never to be invaded. In contrast to her, Lady Windermere uses monetary or economic terms negatively: "Nowadays people seem to look on life as a speculation. It is not a speculation. It is a sacrament. Its ideal is Love. Its purification is sacrifice" (9-10). Therefore, she detests her husband's immoral love for Mrs Erlynne as "the love that is bought" (35). However, she is not utterly innocent of the economic view of life. As soon as she hears rumours of her husband's adultery, she obtains evidence by examining his "private" and "locked" bank book (32). Her act of invading her husband's privacy is justified by her assumption that the expenditure of money translates to love. She also reveals her economic stance of life when she accuses of him by saying, "Oh! the house is tainted for me! I feel that every woman here sneers at me as she dances by with my husband. What have I done to deserve this? I gave him all my life. He took it—used it—spoiled it!" (76). It appears that she complains of the economic imbalance of life as money; she invests too much but does have disadvantages. Her implicit economic mode of thought matched by her intense morality could be attributed to Puritanism.

In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Matthew Arnold contrasted the spiri-

tual bent towards Puritanism, an English version of Hebraism, with his vital concept, "culture." He identified the Puritan inclination towards ideals with the mid-Victorian liberalist mechanical pursuit of "stock notions":

But in the policy of our Liberal friends free-trade ... is specially valued as a stimulant to the production of wealth, as they call it, and to the increase of the trade, business, and population of the country. We have already seen how these things, —trade, business, and population,—are mechanically pursued by us as ends precious in themselves, and worshipped as what we call fetishes. ... (169)

For Arnold, the fictional ideals the liberalists pursued as practical goals, instead of "sweetness and light," "perfection" and "culture," should be called "fetishes."⁽¹⁰⁾ His fetishism in the political attack against liberalism seems rather different from that of Karl Marx's in the economic analysis of the status of commodities.

There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, as soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. (Marx 83)

Marx argued that people could be attached to fetishism by commodities, whose order dissociated from human labour became "independent beings endowed with life" as they would adore the figures of religious worships,

to borrow Arnold's phrase, "as ends precious in themselves." It might be thought that Dorian submerges himself in this type of fetishism if he worships the absolute beauty embodied in his own portrait as the icon of "the fantastic form of a relation." However, Basil, the painter, confesses the secret of his creation:

One day, a fatal day I sometimes think, I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you as you actually are, not in the costume of dead ages, but in your own dress and in your own time. Whether it was the Realism of the method, or the mere wonder of your own personality, thus directly presented to me without mist or veil, I cannot tell. But I know that as I worked at it, every flake and film of colour seemed to me to reveal my secret. I grew afraid that others would know of my idolatry. I felt, Dorian, that I had told too much, that I had put too much of myself into it. Then it was that I resolved never to allow the picture to be exhibited. (264-65)⁽¹¹⁾

First, Basil, who worships Dorian, draws the picture not as a substitute but as an embodiment of the beautiful man himself "directly presented to" the painter "without mist or veil"; this process of creation is the result of a mystic correspondence between the artist and the object. If Basil is caught in an illusion that a substitute *is* a living entity, is the imaginary structure completely harmonised with the fetishism of commodities? That is not the case, mainly because here "a relation" presents itself not as an abstract form in the commercial universal space, but as a concrete tie in a specific and intimate site. The painter resolves "never to allow the picture to be exhibited" as it will lose its absolute value if it becomes a commodity by being shown, seen, sold and bought under the public gaze. In this sense, the "idolatry" of Basil and of Dorian is different from fetishism as defined by Marx. To escape from the metaphysical

trap of ownership into which Dorian falls, Wilde in his comedies managed to present the sustainability of radical individualism in modern capitalist society, which is abundant in commodities as fetishes. Wilde achieved this by depicting individual actions relatively and examining the religious or moral functions in the social relationship with others.

5 Fetishism and Liberalism

Another major theorist of fetishism is Sigmund Freud, who recognised in its origin a man's persistence in the search for an impossible representation of the woman's (the mother's) penis: "Fetish is a substitute ... for a particular and quite special penis that had been extremely important in early childhood but had later been lost" (152). The subtle and erotic metapsychological mechanism that invokes the absent through images can be understood through literary and linguistic theories. In the section on Freudian fetishism in *Stanzas*, Giorgio Agamben indicates the analogy between "a mental process of fetishistic type" and the common tropes of poetic language, like synecdoche and metonymy. In metonymic substitution, "the substituted term is, rather, at once negated and evocated by the substitution through a process whose ambiguity closely recalls the Freudian *Verleugnung*, and it is precisely from this kind of 'negative reference' that the peculiar poetic character that invests the word arises" (32). Additionally, in the mental mechanism of fetishism, the substituted object is a "negative reference." Beauty, the concept for which Dorian Gray sacrifices himself, could be considered a negative reference.

Agamben further comments on Freudian fetishism: "The difference with respect to normal linguistic metonymy is that the substituted object (the 'whole' to which the fragment alludes) is, like the maternal penis,

nonexistent or no longer existent, and the unfinished therefore reveals itself as a perfect and punctual pendant of the fetishist denial” (32). In the structure dominated by the negativity of psychoanalytical fetishism, the substituting must be fragmentary in relation to the absent “whole.” Although Basil and Dorian devote themselves to the picture as a sort of erotic object, they are nearer to Marxian fetishism, as they are ready to involve themselves in the present wholeness of their atemporal fantasies, in which the dialectic of loss is eliminated. As pointed out, the men in *Dorian Gray* are inadequate fetishists in a Marxian sense because they exclude the relative connection with other objects from their quasi-religious place.

On the other hand, some upper-class characters in Wilde's social comedies resemble Freudian fetishists, as they display particular emotions towards fragmentary things or images. For example, Lord Windermere, who privately steals a photograph of his wife (170–71), appears to be a fetishist, while Lord Henry Wotton in *Dorian Gray* openly collects many photographs of Dorian (208).⁽¹²⁾ When Lord Windermere detests the fan that he thinks has been soiled by the vice of Mrs Erlynne, he seems not only a Freudian fetishist but also an Arnoldian one, in assuming a partial or Puritan perspective of life. He has already wanted to prevent his wife from seeing Mrs Erlynne again, because he supposes the latter to be a worthless and vicious woman. This judgment suggests that he inexplicably pays good money to Mrs Erlynne because he is probably afraid of the public exposure of his wife's stained birth. The Puritanism of Lady Windermere, who lives in a fantastic order invented by social morality, corresponds to that of her husband.

Lady Windermere's fetishism, as Puritanism, is destroyed by the self-sacrificing act of Mrs Erlynne as her mother. The daughter comes to an

insight into the fragility of fantastic security: "There is the same world for all of us, and good and evil, sin and innocence, go through it hand in hand. To shut one's eyes to half of life that may live securely is as though one blinded oneself that one might walk with more safety in a land of pit and precipice" (180–81). The realisation of her former blindness and partiality due to the teaching of her own mother surely suffices to meet the condition of a happy ending. However, a conclusion, in which a wife recognises the importance of love with her respectable husband, and her notorious but good mother goes abroad without revealing her identity to her daughter, appears too simplistic and ordinary to illuminate the world without fetishism. While treating the moral fetishism of *Lady Windermere*, Mrs Erlynne herself desires the fan and the photograph of her daughter as souvenirs. Her awareness of the forgotten familial affinity summons the fetishistic preference for the things, even if this cannot be psychoanalytic fetishism.

The ending of this play is like that of *Dorian Gray*, in verifying there is nothing outside the world structure that is embedded in a story. While in *Dorian Gray*, Wilde clarified that an aesthete who believes in sensible beauty is determined by the metaphysics of private property, in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, he implied that metaphysical moral nature is permeated with the modern popular bent towards materiality as fetishism. The metaphysical perspective of partial persistence in an imaginary wholeness, which was structurally implanted in the life of Dorian, came to be understood in the comedies as a pathology of fetishism, which could be treatable. In this respect, fetishists in Wilde's fiction are similar to liberalists in Arnold's political criticism. While Arnold produced the concept "culture" as the panacea for the fetishism of liberalism, Wilde found only one elusive woman for fetishists to consult. The notion of Mrs Erlynne as

a radical individualist collapses when she proves her maternal love and leaves English society with her new, younger husband and admirer. Her seemingly opportunistic actions might come across as fatalistic, as her name “Margaret” is inscribed on the fan. Wilde, through his fictional characters, sought an anarchic form of liberty in the entanglement of fatality and contingency after confronting the hardship of individualism as the ideal essence of liberalism.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), a play with the most delicate and complex plot of all those of Wilde’s comedies, the predilection for an ordinary name, “Ernest,” manifested by two women appears a type of Marxian fetishism, but its power of bizarre excess transcends the order of “exchange value.” The nature of the indefinite world is epitomised in a character definition Lady Bracknell makes with regard to her nephew, Algernon: “He has nothing, but he looks everything” (*Collected Works* 6: 165). Although Wilde recounted the comical aspect of the floating and relative world, he would demonstrate his fatalistic vision; Jack’s real name is Ernest, the name for which his lover was anxious. Having reiterated the impossibility of exiting the narrative world through *Dorian Gray* and *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, Wilde did not deride from his outsider position the world destined by fates appearing as contingencies, where personal will appears to be impossible.

The radical pursuit of individualism as, philosophically, the purest type of liberalism led Wilde to the importance of the equilibrium of ordinary happiness based upon extraordinary accidents. Liberalism as a political idea was in fact killed in the ironical itinerary. But he retained a sense of a liberty beyond individuals, which would associate itself not with economic and political conservatism but with a view of life as a series of ordinary and wonderful events. Wilde lived too briefly for his conserva-

tive relativism, which could have been extremely radical or anarchic, to mature. We can consider G. K. Chesterton and E. M. Forster as his successors.

Notes

- (1) The first edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which was published in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* (1890), and the lengthened edition published in 1891 exhibit several differences. In citing *Dorian Gray*, we note the page numbers of the 1891 edition, which was printed along with the 1890 edition in vol. 3 of *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. If there is a difference, we pay attention to all the necessary changed words. For the publishing history of this novel, see Joseph Bristow's "Introduction" to the volume mentioned above.
- (2) Warren and Brandeis' commentary on the concept of privacy was not unprecedented. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, privacy was the subject of commentary by several philosophers, jurists and writers, including James Fitzjames Stephen, who some argued was the first modern philosopher, as he discussed the concept explicitly in *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity* (1873) (Turkington, Trubow and Allen 32).
- (3) In citing "The Soul of Man under Socialism," we note the page numbers of vol. 4 of *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*.
- (4) On the other hand, Dorian, who "is made to be worshipped" (265), is expected to be a mediator of the absolute idea. In this theological structure, he assumes the role of Jesus Christ.
- (5) Some scholars point out that *Dorian Gray* presented a fin-de-siècle economic man deeply committed to consumerism (Bowlby 14-15; Gagnier, *Instability* 110-11). The economic rhetoric in *Dorian Gray* is surely consumerist: "Each man lived his own life, and paid his own price for living it. The only pity was one had to pay so often for a single fault. One had to pay over and over again, indeed. In her dealings with man Destiny never closed her accounts" (329-30). This could be noted as a specific metaphysical feature of aesthetic consumerism, in which life is regarded as private property to be protected as much as possible.

- (6) The word “individualism” was first introduced in the 1891 edition, in place of “rebellion” in the 1890 edition (118-19). This revision justifies our assumption of the thematic consistency in “Soul of Man” and the 1891 edition of *Dorian Gray*.
- (7) In “The Soul of Man under Socialism,” we detect the influence of Herbert Spencer, one of the originators of British individualism (Donisthorpe 73), as well as Auberon Herbert, who converted to individualism after his discovery in the mid-1870s of the work of Spencer and who claimed voluntarism (Guy 72-73). M. W. Taylor distinguished between two kinds of individualism: “Spencerian” individualism and “empirical” individualism. Adherents to the former, who took their lead from Spencer’s writings, attempted to establish abstract and *a priori* reasons for curtailing the functions of government by deduction from “scientific” first principles. Adherents to the latter adopted the orthodox utilitarian position that no moral or political principle could be absolutely true because it would not maximise utility in all conceivable circumstances; hence, they believed that *a priori* objections to state interference were unavailable (17-18).
- (8) For Wilde’s literary and economic activities in the contemporary marketplace, see Gagnier, *Idylls*.
- (9) In citing *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, we note the page numbers of vol. 3 of *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde*. We consulted the recent edition edited by Ian Small.
- (10) For the social and cultural role of the concept of fetish in the Victorian period, see Logan, *Victorian Fetishism*.
- (11) We observe a tone of intellectual explanation of the transparency of the picture as a medium in this passage. In the 1891 edition, Wilde increased the number of Basil’s words to Dorian in this scene, even as he eliminated the vivid phrases suggesting outspoken homoeroticism that we see in the 1890 edition: “Somehow, I had never loved a woman” (90); “I quite admit that I adored you madly, extravagantly, absurdly. I was jealous of everyone to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you. When I was away from you, you were still present in my art. It was all wrong and foolish. It was all wrong and

foolish still" (90).

- (12) The number of photographs in the 1890 edition ("twenty-six" or "twenty-seven") was reduced to "seventeen" or "eighteen" in the 1891 edition (35-36). The monomaniac and homoerotic impression of Lord Henry's desire for the whole of Dorian's body, which could have disturbed the metaphysical theme of this novel, was somewhat weakened by this change.

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