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Allison Lin April 8, 2018

On Masking and Unmasking: The Paradox of Censorship in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray

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Abstract

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This project aims to explicate the ways in which notable Victorian author and playwright Oscar Wilde encoded a critique of the practice of censorship into his seminal novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray.* This process is seemingly at odds with abundant evidence that, contrary to his anti-censorship sentiments, Wilde actually actively and independently participated in the censoring of his own novel. Therefore, the goal of this project is to explore the various sources of censorship to which Wilde's novel was subjected, as well as to conduct a textual analysis to demonstrate the extent to which Wilde thematized censorship and literary oppression into the book.

A multifaceted approach was required to meet these two objectives. Research for this project depended heavily on primary source material, including an early handwritten manuscript of the text, an obscure version of the story that appeared in a literary magazine in 1890, and Wilde's personal correspondence with editors, journalists, and close confidants. A comparative exploration of various versions of the text as it evolved over time reveals how drastically the story changed and at what point in time these changes were imposed, exposing the nature of Wilde's extensive revision process. In concert with these primary sources, literary reviews of the novel and letters exchanged between Wilde and his editors were examined to determine the magnitude of backlash and social pressure exerted against the author to make his story more palatable to public opinion. A more general investigation into Victorian censorship and obscenity law, publication processes, and cultural trends was also conducted in order to foreground Wilde's experience in a historical context.

Ultimately, the thesis concludes that the paradox of censorship that exists within *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—the fact that it thematizes censorship at the same time that it is censored—offers a productive way to think about the practice of literary regulation. A Foucauldian approach is employed to show that censorship, ironically, has the productive capacity to incite the very discourse that it suppresses, encouraging authors to confront and challenge the limitations that censorship proposes.

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Introduction

The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde's enthralling tale about the Faustian bargain a young man makes in exchange for eternal youth and beauty, has captivated, delighted, and occasionally offended readers over the century that has elapsed since the novel's first publication in 1891. But it is a little-known fact that the most popular version of this classic Gothic novel—the one which occupies bookstores and libraries and appears on high school and college curricula around the world—is an almost entirely different story from the one Wilde had initially envisioned and written. A brief investigation into the history of the text shows that in its original form the novel was hardly more than a short story, seven chapters short of the expanded version, and even plotwise significantly different from its more widely known counterpart. This short story, largely obscure to the modern reader, first appeared in the Philadelphia-based literary magazine *Lippincott's Monthly* a year before the now-famous novel went to print. Though this version of *Dorian Gray* failed to affront its American audience, English readers took less kindly to it; upon its initial release in July 1890, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* received immediate and vehement backlash from British journalists and literary critics who lambasted the story—as well as its author—with charges of decadence, indecency and obscenity. Detractors expressed concern that the tale, which they claimed had no discernible moral message, would instigate its readers to follow the life of vice and pleasure adopted by its eponymous antihero.

By the time that these reviews were circulating in the press, Wilde had already signed a book deal with the publishers Ward, Lock & Co. with the promise that he would expand the short story into a full-length novel, but the outcry (some of which went so far as to suggest that Wilde

ought to be subject to a criminal investigation) inevitably complicated Wilde's writing process as he revisited the text. Foreseeably, when the revised and expanded novel came out a little less than a year later, much was changed: Wilde had softened many of the more suggestive aspects of the story and clarified its moral further by detailing Dorian Gray's downward spiral as a result of his hedonism. Perhaps the most noteworthy and well-documented change between the early version and the familiar novel version, though, is the mitigation of Wilde's relatively unabashed allusions to homoerotic sentiments and inclinations. Though none of the newspapers had been willing to say so in as many words, this was undeniably the original story's chief offense—it can be read between the lines in several reviews, which deem it "nauseous" and "effeminate," or accuse it of containing "a penetrating poison" (Stern 2). During the year that passed between the two versions, many such allusions disappeared from the text, or else were reworded and diminished.

It is easy enough to chalk up these alterations to a change of heart: perhaps Wilde saw the merit in these criticisms and acted accordingly, or simply wanted to avoid further censure. But Wilde, as inflammatory as he was ever known to be, recriminates his attackers even as he seemingly yields to their demands. One of the major changes the reader may note upon opening the novel is its incendiary preface, which Wilde added in after the *Lippincott's* version was defaced. The preface, which reads as a series of increasingly provocative epigrams directed quite pointedly as his critics, insists that art should not be subject to moral burdens; it exists only for its own sake and for that of beauty. Wilde was a zealous practitioner of aesthetic philosophy and subscribed to the belief that the significance of art is self-evident instead of borne from its moral worth or sociopolitical commentary. Moreover, a month after the revised novel was published in

April of 1891, Wilde issued another crucial text that further reinforced this stance: *Intentions*, a compilation of four essays of literary criticism which detailed his beliefs on artistry, creative autonomy, and the purposes of art. Wilde's fiery response to the charges brought against him, as well as his clear disinclination towards revising the story in the way that he eventually did, points to one conclusion: Wilde felt that he was being censored.

Censorship can be a loaded word in this day and age: typically, the word literary censorship brings to mind "banned books" lists, when certain controversial texts are prohibited from libraries and bookstores or school reading lists. This is certainly one rather narrow form of censorship, but far more broadly, censorship can be understood as anything that purposely inhibits or alters the way a text was intended to be published, read, and interpreted. Based on this more inclusive definition, a case can certainly be made that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was censored by legal means as well as social ones, and even, perhaps counterintuitively, by its own author. Censorship in this sense encompasses much more than the literal seizure and destruction of works deemed obscene by governmental or public authorities. It reflects a complex, interlocking network of social, cultural, political, and institutional factors that were operating at the time of *Dorian Gray*'s inception, all of which contributed to the stifling of literature and art that was considered subversive in Wilde's era (and eventually, the "stifling" of Wilde as well—he would be imprisoned five years after the publication of *Dorian Gray* for committing acts of "gross indecency" with other men). This project aims to show that censorship emerges from a variety of sources, some more obvious than others—including from within Wilde himself.

Barbara Leckie sums up censorship in Wilde's time succinctly in "The Novel and Censorship in Late-Victorian England": "print censorship in 19th-century England is best under-

stood…in the interrelated contexts of the production of the book (its expense, its size, its prefatory material, its reprint status, its language, its expurgation where relevant, and so on), the reception of the work (the class, gender, age, nationality, and place of readers), and its markets (the periodical journals, the annuals, the newspapers, the circulating libraries, the railway stations, and so on)" (168). The methodology of defining censorship adopted by this essay will largely follow Leckie's recommendation in examining its interrelated contexts: further exploration of journalistic reviews of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and testimony from Wilde's 1895 gross indecency trial concerning controversial passages from the text, as well as an examination of historical, legal and social circumstances relevant to its publication, will all be conducted in constructing a holistic overview of Victorian censorship as it applies to Wilde's novel. Furthermore, the questions raised by this project necessitate a close reading between different available versions of Dorian Gray, from the earliest existing draft of the story to its final fully-expanded novel form, for evidence of *self-censorship*—here, I look for indications that Wilde was changing contentious material without the outside interference of editors or journalists.

Leckie also notes a general pattern that emerged in response to literary regulation at the time of Wilde's writing: "novelists began to take greater risks and also to *thematize* the restrictions they confronted" (170, italics mine). Here, an intriguing conundrum is introduced—the idea that authors who were faced with literary restrictions actually confronted this censorship in the very dialogue of these censored texts. Though Leckie does not choose to expand any further on this contradiction, it is the primary subject of interest in this essay; I posit that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* engages in precisely this paradox. A close reading of the text shows that, however subtly, Wilde *does* confront and denounce his own censorship within the subtext of the story, which

—as I will set out to prove—was heavily censored from the moment of its inception and onward. Wilde's confrontation of censorship within the text is particularly fascinating—and perhaps contradictory—given the ample evidence supporting the fact that he was also engaging in self-censorship, editing out particularly risqué sections of text even before submitting it to his editors for review. The preface is far from the only place where Wilde engages in such a confrontation; I contend that significant portions of the novel revolve around plot points and characters that were devised to symbolize censorship and Wilde's critique thereof.

Logically, I have structured the argument into two distinct parts, each of which proves a separate segment of my thesis: first, accumulating evidence that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was censored and subjected to several modes of social, legal, and even personal regulation and revision. This will involve comprehensive research into all possible modes of censorship in the Victorian era and an examination as to how each of these might have impacted Wilde's writing. Second, I will outline the textual evidence within my primary sources that demonstrates Wilde thematizing and criticizing the practice of censorship from within the confines of the novel. I will rely on theorists such as Eve Sedgwick, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Homi K. Bhaba in these sections of the project not only to clarify the ways that Wilde was censoring the novel, consciously or otherwise, but also to explain the ways in which he was *simultaneously* "unmasking" and ridiculing censorship while doing so.

The first and most crucial step in proceeding with the project is generating a comprehensive definition of censorship which encompasses all the ways in which Wilde's text was regulated. The definition of censorship adopted by my project considers three major aspects: legal, or censorship exercised by government and other official authorities; social, or "informal" censor-

ship exercised by newspapers, journals, libraries, booksellers, publishers, editors, and broader public opinion; and lastly self-imposed, which deals with the censorship exercised by the author over his own work. I maintain that, though it may not be apparent, Wilde's work was actually censored in all three of these ways. An investigation of the historical frameworks and the network of material and cultural practices which gave rise to the practice of censorship is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of *why* censorship was seen as a necessary and appropriate method of eliminating sources of social corruption. Early portions of the project will be dedicated to an examination of Victorian cultural conservatism and widespread concerns in late-19th century England surrounding the failing "moral health" of Wilde's time period, which will in turn shed light on why *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and by extension its author, were seen as symptoms of a larger issue of moral degeneracy in Victorian society.

In the first chapter of my project, I aim to establish the historical framework of censorship in nineteenth-century England. This history will include the first recorded censorship trial in England in 1727, two major censorship trials against Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire that occurred in France in the 1850s, the establishment of the first British censorship law in 1857, the defining of the term "obscene" in 1868, and eventually the publication of *Dorian Gray* in 1890 and Wilde's trials in 1895. I will refer to the cross-examination from Wilde's gross indecency trials, which dealt with *Dorian Gray,* and attempt to show how the legal proceedings against Wilde actually served as a kind of informal obscenity trial of his novel—for instance, passages from the book that were deemed unacceptable were read aloud to the audience, and Wilde's prosecutor would use this text as evidence of the author's own indiscretions. I also consider other forms of "informal" and extralegal censorship that the novel underwent over the

course of its publication history. There are two major examples to which I will dedicate my attention: first, when the story was first published in a literary magazine, the editor of Wilde's story removed about 500 words without Wilde's permission for fear that the story would be too controversial. Even so, this editing was still not satisfactory to some of Wilde's more discerning detractors, who slammed the story upon its release with allegations of corruption, immorality, and blatant homoeroticism. Second, England's leading chain of booksellers, W. H. Smith & Son, refused to distribute the magazine or stock it at any of their stores or libraries after observing these accusations of perversity that were levied against it in newspaper and journal reviews. This occurred a mere several weeks after the magazine was first published, and until the updated and expanded novel version of the story was released a year afterward, the story was not accessible to any reader who sought to purchase it from major booksellers in England. Both of these incidents, and several others that will be discussed in greater detail later on, constitute forms of censorship that were exerted on *Dorian Gray* because they prohibited Wilde's text from being accessed in the way it had originally been written.

In my second chapter, I delve more deeply into the concept of self-censorship and its impact on the novel. Wilde's original holograph manuscript of the story, which is housed at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City, proves crucial in this chapter of the thesis. I was able to visit the library and examine the manuscript, and as I paged through it, I was struck by the fact that, even without the interference of editors or other external authorities, there was substantial proof that Wilde was excising, revising, and changing certain "suggestive" aspects of the novel at least seemingly of his own accord. There were multiple instances, many in fact, in which there was visual evidence that Wilde had crossed out a word, a certain phrasing, even paragraphs that

he was not satisfied with, but his selections did not appear to be random, grammatical, or plot-based. Instead, Wilde seemed to be altering and toning down the homoerotic subtext of the story even without being told to—for example, references to Lord Henry placing his hand on Basil Hallward's shoulder as they talk and Dorian holding Basil's hand as he paints are all slashed out by Wilde's cautious pen. I have taken these self-imposed revisions as evidence that Wilde was engaging in the practice of self-censorship, calibrating his story for public approval even before its exposure to any scrutiny to prevent it from being interpreted in a way that could get him in trouble. I plan to employ a Foucauldian interpretation, which concerns power, hegemony, and discipline, in my analysis of Wilde's self-regulation. I will apply Foucault's theory concerning self-discipline and punishment, which dictates that self-censorship is the product of hegemonic discourse. This hegemony encompasses discursive and punitive forces operating in society which dictate what is and is not eligible to be discussed, implied, or even thought about (as decided by social institutions like the government, schools, prisons, and so on). In other words, discourse can be a regulatory force that teaches its participants to subconsciously censor themselves by setting the boundaries of what is and is not socially acceptable. Eve Sedgwick will also play a significant role in this chapter, as her theory of the "homophobic alibis of abstraction" in Victorian novels demonstrates the ways in which Wilde was attempting to "censor out" the language of homosexual desire by framing it in the guise of intellectual or spiritual mentorship (an homage to the Platonic relationship).

In the last chapter of the essay, I will engage with Wilde's literary criticism, as well as his personal correspondence in the form of a compilation of his letters assembled by Rupert Hart-Davis. The purpose of this section is simply to establish that Wilde was aware of and opposed to

the phenomenon of censorship by referring to many of his critical essays, "The Truth of Masks," "The Critic as Artist," "The Decay of Lying," "Pen, Pencil, and Poison," and, of course, the preface to *Dorian Gray*. Wilde would also frequently write letters in defense of artistic autonomy to the editors of his novel and the journalists who denounced him. All of these writings explicitly criticize the aims of social authorities to influence art, and refute the widely-held opinion that art can be a corrupting influence on its spectators. Wilde's outspoken critiques in these texts lend credence to my argument that Wilde would have embedded similar attacks against censorship in his fiction as well, particularly within the novel that was so significantly affected by it.

Finally, I will perform a close reading of the text itself—its final version, published in 1891. I plan to highlight the similarities between certain phrases used in the novel, and how they echo, almost verbatim, Wilde's sentiments on censorship that were expressed in his literary criticism. I will also draw attention to a character that has very rarely been the subject of any scholarly investigation: James Vane. In undertaking a comparative reading between the early and later versions of the text, I noted that James Vane's character did not exist in the original story; he was added later on during Wilde's revision process. Based on this timing and the conservative, incongruously "macho" nature of the character compared to the other men in the novel, I suggest that Wilde potentially added Vane to the story as a representation (and a mockery) of traditional Victorian moralism and masculinity—a plausible claim, given that one of the allegations against the story was its "effeminacy." My next objective is to provide a critical reading of the story's anti-hero as a satirical object that ironizes the fears behind censorship found in the legal doctrine and literary reviews. I argue that Dorian Gray's character is something of a "parody" of the kind of reader that proponents of censorship feared—an innocent, impressionable, utterly vulnerable in-

dividual who is driven to a life of sin solely because he is influenced by a single book. I suggest here that Wilde, based on Lacan's and Bhaba's theory of mimicry/parody, undermines the idea that art can corrupt its observer by painting an exaggerated portrait intended to ridicule the notion that literature has the ability to deprave its reader.

My conclusion will consider the implications of what I have aimed to prove: what is the significance of the cognitive dissonance that emerges when censorship is discussed and thematized in a censored work? Is there a potential for subversion and protest that lies within this very dissonance? And, more broadly, is there any work, given the extremely far-reaching definition of censorship provided by this essay, that can be considered "uncensored"? Ultimately, I am trying to contextualize the objective of this project within the greater tradition of censorship as a whole, and posit a way for literature to be read, interpreted, and valued not *in spite of* its censorship, but *because* of it. After all, censorship—in which we define that which is prohibited from the public sphere of our society—reveals so much merely by circumscribing what *cannot* be said. Foucault has a compelling theory on the counterintuitively productive capacity of censorship, in which he comments on its paradoxical facility for inciting the very discourse that it aims to subdue. In closing, I will employ Foucault's theory to suggest that Wilde embodies this very notion—I find it ironic and noteworthy that censorship actually provided Wilde with the opportunity to call into discourse censorship itself.

Chapter I: Defining Censorship; A History

To undertake a comprehensive scrutiny of contemporary English censorship in Wilde's time, it is imperative to first examine the concrete legal restraints that operated around the publication of creative works and novels in particular. It is of note that, until the 19th century, censorship law in England pertaining to novels did not exist at all, in letter if not in practice. In 1727, the controversial book publisher Edmund Curll was put on trial for his publication of the French erotic novel *Venus in the Cloister or The Nun in Her Smock* and convicted. His punishment—a small fine, and an hour in the pillory (Jenkins)—was the subject of some confusion, however, as there was at the time no legally specified penalty in either civil or common law for the publication or distribution of obscene works. Curll's conviction would thus set a common law precedent for more than a century, and established that the publication of "obscene libel" was a punishable misdemeanor. By the 1820s, literacy rates in England were reaching record highs—more than half of all men at this time could read, and only slightly less than half of women could as well (Mitch 344)—and with them, so too were blossoming concerns surrounding the exposure of the newly-literate population to the variety of dubious influences potentially circulating in printed material. The Vagrancy Act of 1824, whose primary intention was to illegalize the practices of sleeping in the street and panhandling among "rogues and vagabonds" ("Vagrancy Act 1824"), encoded among its precepts discouraging various troublemaking behaviors the prohibition of "willfully exposing to view, in any street, road, highway, or public place, any obscene print, picture, or other indecent exhibition" ("Vagrancy Act 1824"). Though not principally a law concerning censorship, the Vagrancy Act constitutes the first reference in English legal doctrine to the

obscenity and indecency of printed material, and paved the way for future civil regulation of art and literature in the Victorian period.

The year 1857 was a significant one in the history of European censorship law: the inauguration of England's first law primarily concerning the obscenity of printed works and two prominent French censorship trials all occurred within months of each other. *Madame Bovary,* Flaubert's racy satire of the French bourgeoisie, was put on trial in Paris in January, followed shortly thereafter in August by a similar (though much truncated) obscenity trial against Charles Baudelaire's decadently suggestive volume of poetry, *Les Fleurs du mal.* The outcomes of the two trials diverged—Flaubert was acquitted, while Baudelaire was convicted, made to pay along with his publishers a several hundred-franc fine, and several poems of *Les Fleurs* were removed from subsequent editions (Hannoosh 375)—but their significance is identical: both reveal a tradition, however scant, of obscenity trials against works of fiction in Europe in the years predating the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. At the same time, England was taking a crucial step towards a more sophisticated and rigorous system of legal censorship that expanded upon the vague precedent set by the trial of Edmund Curll and the Vagrancy Act. The Obscene Publications Act of 1857 was instituted by Lord Chief Justice John Campbell, who apparently felt compelled to pass such a law in response to a recent influx of obscenity trials relating to libel, coupled with the passage of a bill regulating the dealing of poisons (J. Williams 632). These circumstances led Campbell to famously liken the publication and distribution of obscene works—from suggestive literature and artwork to blatant pornography—to the "sale of poison more deadly than prussic acid, strychnine, and arsenic" (J. Williams 632).

The bill was met with considerable opposition in Parliament before its passage, as Campbell's law suggested that the distribution of "pornography" would be most effectively averted through a policy of destruction upon the finding of obscenity (Jenkins). The Obscene Publications Act was unprecedented in that it provided for the seizure of offending works, as well as a formal search warrant that would permit law enforcement to investigate any institution—public businesses and private property alike—suspected of carrying such works (J. Williams 631). The hunting down and destruction of any material deemed to be obscene differed from the prior dealings with "offensive" work determined by Curll's conviction, wherein the sale of obscene literature or artwork was prosecuted solely as a common-law misdemeanor instead of a statutory offense. Campbell was able to overcome the initial resistance to the bill by affirming that it was "intended to apply exclusively to works written for the single purpose of corrupting the morals of youth and of a nature calculated to shock the common feelings of decency in any well-regulated mind" (Jenkins). Despite this tightly circumscribed purpose, a formal definition of obscenity was not actually furnished by Campbell's act, instead left to the interpretation of legal courts based on judicial precedent; the only specification supplied within the act dictates that obscene material must be "of such character and description that the publication of them would be a misdemeanour, and proper to be prosecuted as such" (J. Williams 633).

Only eleven years after the passage of the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 would a definitive litmus test for the precise meaning of "obscenity" come into being in English courts. The establishment of a conclusive evaluation of obscenity was prompted by the trial of Henry Scott in 1868, in which the defendant was charged with the distribution of a sacriligious pamphlet entitled "The Confessional Unmasked" and the pamphlet was summarily ordered to be destroyed.

Scott appealed this decision in a higher court, and the magistrate Benjamin Hicklin overturned the prior decision with the justification that Scott's intention was neither perversity nor debasement, but a genuine desire to address the corruption of the Catholic church (Bartee 65). Eventually, John Campbell's successor, Lord Chief Justice Alexander Cockburn, again overturned Hicklin's decision in the landmark court case *Regina v. Hicklin* (1868), reinstating the lower court's ruling that "The Confessional Unmasked" was, indeed, obscene; Cockburn declared that "the test of obscenity is this, whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall" (J. Williams 632). The phrasing of Cockburn's decision was pivotal in that it removed the author's agency and intention in publishing the offending material—Scott's intentionality of corruption, or lack thereof, in this matter was of no consequence—and looked only to "the *tendency* of the matter charged…to deprave and corrupt those whose *minds are open to such immoral influences*" (632, italics mine). Such an interpretation denoted a fundamental shift in emphasis from the author's *intent* to corrupt his reader to the *effect* of potentially corrupting material on a mind predisposed to such degenerate thoughts, regardless of the innocence or ignorance of the author's motive.

Though *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was never formally charged with obscenity by way of the Hicklin test, traces of the modes of thought which underlie Cockburn's rationale can be found in the language of the critics who vocally attacked Wilde's work. The British newspaper *The Scots Observer* wrote a particularly damning critique of *Dorian Gray*, acknowledging its literary merits while insinuating that its subject matter ought to be a source of criminal investigation, and solely of interest to "outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph-boys" (Ross). In

much the same way as Cockburn, the *Observer* seems to attribute blame for the corrupting influence of certain literary works at least partially to their readership. The efforts of Campbell and Cockburn to strangle potential sources of social corruption through legalized censorship, as well as the *Observer*'s reference to the perversion of aristocrats and errand boys alike, were symptomatic of concerns over a larger cultural issue—the general deterioration, from the highest rungs of the social ladder down to the lowest, of moral standards in every sense of the term. The novel, as Leckie explains, was viewed as having a crucial role in the degeneration of moral health around this time period. This association between the novel and degeneracy in the late Victorian era had a twofold attribution, as Leckie notes: "Fears related to the novel…were inflamed…by what was perceived to be at once a broadening of topics novels chose to address […] and a broadening of the audiences for whom the novel was available" (Leckie 169). The increasingly risqué and experimental subject matter of literary works in the latter decades of the 1800s, as well as the expansion of readership due to the growing circulation of literary material and rising literacy rates, ignited consternation over the capacity of literature to debauch its readers; Leckie writes that "sensitivity to audience reflects a persistent feature of the censorship debates in the Victorian period" (169).

This sensitivity to audience was predominantly geared towards a certain subset of the population: members of the lower classes. Social critics were particularly concerned about the adverse influence of literature on those who were viewed as more likely to be susceptible to it, and the uncultivated masses that constituted a large portion of contemporary readership fell into this category. This had much to do with the rapidly changing nature of print culture: fiction now dominated the market, especially the embroidered tales of romance, crime, and violence which

were being produced cheaply and distributed widely at circulating libraries and railway booksellers that catered largely to the working class (Flint 17). The emergence of this subgenre of fiction marketed towards working-class readers produced a dichotomy between two types of literature, which Kate Flint describes as the "distinction […] between intellectually, psychologically, and aesthetically demanding fiction, and that which primarily served the needs of escapism and relaxation" (16). The former was considered the exclusive purview of the upper classes, while the latter appealed mostly to the ostensibly less adept "common" reader. In her essay "The Victorian Novel and Its Readers," Flint explains that a genre that was both widely accessible and widely popular amongst common Victorian readers was the romance novel, and in his 1865 essay collection on the natural inclinations and duties of the genders *Sesame and Lilies,* John Ruskin wrote: "The best romance becomes dangerous, if, by its excitement, it renders the ordinary course of life uninteresting, and increases the morbid thirst for useless acquaintance with scenes in which we shall never be called upon to act" (Flint 22). Ruskin's warning echoes the popular moralist sentiment that fiction provided a potentially dangerous mode of escapism for the impressionable reader that could breed dissatisfaction with the mundanity of real life. This fear would have been seen as expressly pertinent to common people who might have yearned for the glamorous aristocratic—or criminal—lives that they experienced through the author's pen, and Edward Salmon remarks in his 1886 article "What the Working Classes Read" that the cheaply-produced novelettes favored by the lower classes "thrive on the wicked baronet or nobleman and the faithless but handsome peeress, and find their chief supporters among shop-girls, seamstresses, and domestic servants" (Flint 27).

The shop-girls and seamstresses cited by Salmon in his article reveal another subset of the print market around which considerable anxiety arose—youth and women. Perhaps surprisingly, women comprised a significant if not a majority segment of fiction-readers in the latter half of nineteenth century England (Flint attributes this to their unemployment), and their literary preferences largely aligned with those favored by the working classes as a whole. Flint describes a penetrating stereotype that pervaded late Victorian culture, "the woman who gorged herself on romances as though they were boxes of sugarplums, at first deliciously palatable but increasingly inducing an unhealthy, sickly saturation" (23), which speaks to qualities like the proclivity towards overindulgence, lack of self-control, and ignorance of danger that many women of the period were widely viewed as possessing. Somewhat counterintuitively, however, women were also thought to be morally superior to men because of their highly restrictive and domestic lifestyle, which was not as conducive to corrupting influence as the public spheres in which men worked (Flint 23). As such, debates regarding the appropriateness of content in literary works revolved markedly around considerations of their suitability to women as both vulnerable subjects and moral arbitrators—after reading Wilde's first manuscript of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for instance, the editor of *Lippincott's,* J. M. Stoddart, commented to the publisher that "in its present condition there are a number of things an innocent woman would make an exception to" (Frankel 45). In much the same way that obscene literature might have fostered a tendency towards crime and violence in working-class men, it had the potential to corrupt women and youth in its frank portrayals of sexual relations and the opportunities for misbehavior even in domestic life.

The trial of Henry Vizetelly that occurred in 1888, only one year before Oscar Wilde began penning a first draft of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, epitomized these fears of reader corrup-

tion outlined by Justice Cockburn and later by the critics of Wilde's novel. Vizetelly's trial, which concerned the publishing of cheap "two-shilling" English translations of the novels of French author Émile Zola (Nelson), stands alone in the Victorian period as the only example of a formal obscenity trial conducted against a novel in England. Alongside translations of Zola, *Madame Bovary* was among the titles published by Vizetelly, all of which were—perhaps ironically—marketed with the particular intention of underscoring their immodesty and uncensored nature (Leckie 166). During the parliamentary debate that preceded Vizetelly's trial, a cautionary tale of supposed truth was invoked by Samuel Smith, a Member of Parliament, in support of the debauching effects of obscene literature: "A boy comes across two open pages of a Zola novel in a store window and stops to read: '[t]he matter,' Smith claims, 'was of such a leprous character that it would be impossible for any young man who had not learned the divine secret of self control to have read it without committing some form of outward sin within twenty-four hours after'" (Leckie 166). Smith's avowal, as Leckie remarks, "captures many of the fears and assumptions animating appeals for print censorship or regulation" (166), including the corruption of youth (or, interchangeably, women) and the ease of accessibility of offensive material (as represented by the shop window). The most significant of these, though, is the connection between impure thought and physical action that would occur in a crucial type of impressionable reader, here signified by the young boy. As revealed by Smith's statement, it was widely believed at this time that, should a reader lack sufficient self-discipline, the seductive powers of an indecorous novel would invariably incite him or her to act out accordingly. A review of *Dorian Gray* that appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* in 1890 echoes this sentiment of immoral literature causing outward activity: "Man is half angel and half ape, and Mr. Wilde's book has no real use if it be

not to inculcate the 'moral' that when you feel yourself becoming too angelic you cannot do better than *rush out and make a beast of yourself*" (*Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage* 71, italics mine).

Vizetelly was found guilty during the 1888 trial and subsequently ordered to pay a hundred-pound fine, then again convicted and this time imprisoned for three months the following year for the same crime, even after expurgating several of the Zola translations that had been under investigation in his first trial. The legal proceedings were initiated by the National Vigilance Association, a reform group which dealt with issues of public and social morality (*Records of the National Vigilance Association*), who reasoned that Vizetelly's translations were not only obscene, but actually imposed a danger on the safety and security of Victorian society. The association was successfully able to argue that the Zola translations were at least partially responsible for a host of social problems that had plagued England in recent years, including the prevalence of child prostitution and even the Whitechapel murders of 1888 (Nelson). The translation of Zola's *La Terre* in particular provoked debate in the House of Commons over what was interpreted to be "the rapid spread of demoralising literature" (Nelson) throughout English society. Vizetelly, it was argued, was a principle culprit as the purveyor of a large body of shamelessly immodest books. Brian Nelson argues that "[t]he Vizetelly affair both emerged from, and deepened, the divisions between mass and elite readerships that the 1870 Education Act [which exponentially increased literacy in England after its establishment] had opened up." The National Vigilance Association argued that the Education Act's beneficiaries – "the lower classes" – needed protection from the explicit descriptions of sex contained in novels like *La Terre* (Nelson).

Fewer than ten years after Vizetelly's conviction, Oscar Wilde would go on trial for charges of "committing acts of gross indecency with other male persons" under accusations that recall, almost exactly, elements from Vizetelly's trial. Wilde's 1895 trial was not principally about his literary work, obscene or otherwise, yet certain parts of his cross-examination and other places in the trial testimony are indistinguishable from the earlier censorship trials of Vizetelly, Flaubert, and Baudelaire. Logically, any or all questionable material in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* had little to do with proving its author's inclination towards sodomitical acts, but its contents were nevertheless adduced as evidence of Wilde's "indecency." Because of this Wilde's personal trials became, informally, a kind of censorship trial that highlighted and problematized certain passages of the novel that were deemed unacceptable by Wilde's prosecutors. Furthermore, in the tradition of a true censorship trial, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was taken off of shelves in Europe for a decade following Wilde's conviction as its author's name became synonymous with vulgarity, even following Wilde's death in infamy in 1900 (Mackie 980). In "Publishing Notoriety: Piracy, Pornography, and Oscar Wilde," Gregory Mackie notes that "Wilde's lingering posthumous disgrace had tainted his literary output with a kind of obscenity…even several years after his death, conventional publishers took little interest in Wilde" (980). In their stead, opportunistic pornographers like Leonard Smithers in England and Charles Carrington in France became, almost exclusively, the publishers of Wilde's work in Europe between 1900 and 1908. According to Mackie, Carrington was at one point the *only* authorized publisher of *Dorian Gray* in Europe, as he had purchased the copyright from its original publisher Messrs. Ward, Lock & Co. for a mere sixty pounds shortly after Wilde's imprisonment (986). Mackie also describes an incident relayed by Robert Ross, the executor of Wilde's estate (and an ex-lover of

his), in which an "official at the Court of Bankruptcy assured in 1901 that Wilde's works were of no value; and would never command any interest whatsoever" (908). At least in the years following Wilde's imprisonment, this seems to have been true: even Smithers, a known publisher of smut, refused to publish Wilde's post-imprisonment poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* under Wilde's own name in 1897, fearing it would not sell due to Wilde's notoriety. Instead, he attributed it to "C. 3. 3."—Wilde's cell number at Reading Gaol jail. These various consequences in concert with each other evidence the fact that, though Wilde's trial may not have *officially* concerned matters of censorship, it had brutal implications regarding Wilde's authorial reputation and the distribution of his work in subsequent years to the effect of a true censorship trial.

Before Wilde went on trial, however, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was already being subjected to various sources of literary censorship. A major instance occurred prior even to *Dorian Gray*'s first publication in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890. J. M. Stoddart, the editor of *Lippincott's*, had encountered Wilde at a dinner party in August 1889 and, like so many others before him, been enchanted by Wilde's inimitable presence and evident literary talent. The dinner ended with a commission; Wilde was to write a 35,000 word story and contribute it to *Lippincott's* the following year. But Stoddart grew alarmed upon receiving the typescript of the short story that Wilde sent him in spring of 1890, at this time far more risqué than the comparatively watered-down version with which modern readers are familiar. Although American publications (*Lippincott's* was based in Philadelphia, although it circulated widely in England as well) were more open-minded than their notoriously intolerant British counterparts (Frankel 12), even Stoddart could not help but object to some of Wilde's more flagrant allusions to homosexual desire, among other vices. He proceeded to take it upon himself to excise approximately five hundred

words from the typescript without consulting Wilde, and Nicholas Frankel in *The Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray* seems positive that "Wilde almost certainly never saw any of the edits to his novel until he opened his personal copy of [the magazine]" (27). That we can be sure of Stoddart's censorious intentions lies in his choice of deletions, which Frankel describes as "sexual and political [in] nature" (Frankel 7), as well as his correspondence with his employer, the owner of *Lippincott's*, in which Stoddart assures him that "I will…make [the story] acceptable to the most fastidious taste" (7). Stoddart also apparently assigned the story to five different editors, one of whom was specifically instructed to "[pick] out any objectionable passages" (7). As a result, references to Sibyl Vane being Dorian's "mistress" evaporated from the text, as well as the particularly revealing line that Basil's portrait of Dorian had "love in every line, and in every touch there was passion" (Frankel 136)—among many others.

But despite Stoddart's best efforts, outcry over the moral turpitude of Wilde's story resulted in another form of censorship mere days after it was published. The literary reviews published in British journals and newspapers concerning the version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that appeared in *Lippincott's* ranged from unkind to downright vicious; several even suggested legal proceedings against the author which would, unbeknownst to them, come to fruition five years later. The *Scots Observer* complained that *Dorian Gray* dealt exclusively with "matters only fitted for the Criminal Investigation Department or a hearing *in camera,*" while *The St. James Gazette* pondered aloud whether "the Treasury or the Vigilance Society will think it worth their while to prosecute Mr. Oscar Wilde or Messrs. Ward, Lock & Co." for the heady contents of Wilde's tome (Stern 7). In much the same way that Vizetelly's trial connected his publication of Zola's salacious novels to the infamous Whitechapel murders (perhaps better known as the mur-

ders of Jack the Ripper), the *Scots Observer's* reference to "outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph-boys" forged a link between Wilde's novel and a recent scandal concerning a homosexual male brothel on Cleveland Street that had been exposed the year prior to *Dorian Gray's* publication. The brothel's discovery was particularly noteworthy not only because of its employment of young male prostitutes, but because many prominent figures, including members of the British aristocracy, were rumored to have been patrons (Hindmarch-Watson 594). W. E. Henley, the editor of the *Scots Observer*, evidently found an apposite analogy in the circumstances of the Cleveland Street scandal, likening the defiling of young "telegraph-boys" at the hands of lecherous aristocrats to the perversion of suggestible readers by the seduction of Wilde's florid, luxurious prose. This concern over the vulnerability of a naive mind to the sway of Wilde's pen is another common thread shared amongst the vilifying reviews: "[*The Picture of Dorian Gray* contains] one element which will taint every young mind that comes into contact with it," wrote the *Daily Chronicle* in reference to the story's homoerotic undertones (Stern 8).

The effect of these reviews was apparently so penetrating that they caught the attention of W. H. Smith & Son, England's leading bookseller at the time. Under Smith & Son's purview was not only a circulating library that boasted 15,000 subscribers at the height of its popularity, but a network of railway station bookstalls that serviced the "clerks and artisans, shop girls, dressmakers, and milliners, who pour into London every morning by the early trains" (Flint 18). The market of "railway readers" was immense, so much so that their desire for affordable fiction to read during the commute to and from work was a decisive factor in "put[ting] pressure on publishers to change their pricing system" in the 1880s (Flint 18). By the time that the reviews condemning *Dorian Gray* hit newsstands in the wake of its publication, Wilde had already made a deal with

London publishers Ward, Lock & Co. to write an expanded version of the story for publication the following year. On July 10, 1890, however, the publisher informed Wilde that W. H. Smith & Son had "removed all copies of *Lippincott's Magazine* from their shelves because the story had been 'characterized in the press as a filthy one'" (Bristow XLIX). The magazine thus would no longer be available to some hundreds of thousands of British readers who made use of Smith's circulating library and railway bookstalls as a chief source of their reading material. In this manner, the press's influence coupled with Smith's removal of *Dorian Gray* from its shelves served as a censoring force against public access to Wilde's work.

Though the media frenzy did not deter George Lock, one of the chief publishers at Ward, Lock & Co., from securing a deal with Wilde for the publication rights to a full-length novel version, it must have given him pause; in a letter he wrote to Wilde three days before relaying the news that W. H. Smith would no longer stock *Lippincott's,* he urges Wilde to make changes in order to "counteract" the damage done by its current reputation: "I have read the conclusion of your story as I told you I would. Perhaps you will pardon my making a suggestion […] it is for you to determine as to its value. You surely propose to add to the story so as to counteract any damage that may be done by it being always on sale…as it first appeared in *Lippincott's*" (Bristow XLIX). Wilde's chief editor at Ward, Lock & Co., Coulson Kernahan, echoed these sentiments; Kernahan was the person who oversaw Wilde throughout the entirety of the revision process, and the person with whom Wilde consulted extensively about the changes and additions he was making to the novel. Kernahan, having worked so closely with Wilde, authored the introduction to a 1925 edition of *Dorian Gray*, published long after Wilde's trials and his death, and in it he reveals that over the course of Wilde's revision process he urged Wilde to remove many

of Lord Henry's more sordid lines about capitulating to temptation, which he was concerned would be "whisper[ed] into the ears of readers, possibly of impressionable age and inflammable passions" (Stern 8). To Kernahan's chagrin, however, Wilde decided to preserve these lines under the counsel of "other influences, whether within himself, or in the form of so-called friends" (8). There also exists rather terse correspondence between Wilde and Kernahan, preserved in Rupert Hart-Davis' exhaustive compilation of Wilde's letters, in which Wilde addresses—and dismisses—Kernahan's suggestion: "I have changed my mind about the passage about temptation. One can't pull a work of art about without spoiling it," (Hart-Davis 288), he argues in one such letter.

But beyond these numerous instances of informal censorship, both attempted and successful, the importance of Wilde's trial cannot be underestimated. Although it occurred nearly five years after *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—both the short story and the novel version—had been published, the trial had an immense impact on the availability of the text in Britain in the two decades that followed. It should be noted that the trial was not, at least in theory, about the novel or any of Wilde's writings. It was Wilde's relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, a young man of noble birth almost fifteen years his junior, that set off a fatal chain of events. The Marquis of Queensberry, Douglas' father, caught wind of their relationship in February of 1895 and, infuriated, dropped by a club at which Wilde's enormously successful comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest* was playing with a card left for the playwright, marked "For Oscar Wilde, Posing as Somdomite." Despite the misspelling, his meaning could not have been clearer, and Wilde responded in kind under the misguided influence of Douglas himself—he launched a charge of libel against Queensberry for the accusation. Wilde's ill-fated countersuit proved the impetus of his demise. Queensberry's own lawyers hunted, and found, extensive evidence of Wilde's ex-

travagant homosexual affairs, not only with Douglas, but with young male prostitutes and other intimate friends of his, and used this to prove that Queensberry's allegations were founded. Wilde's status as a prominent writer, critic, and artist made these allegations a *cause célèbre* in British society, and Wilde's prosecutors took the opportunity to turn Wilde into a scapegoat, a representation of the depravity of homosexuality in its enticement of naive youths by the efforts of perverted older men.

The primary strategy used by Wilde's main prosecutor, Edward Carson, was to construct a narrative that painted Wilde as a "habitual" sodomite—one who partook in such acts customarily, often, and without shame. Perhaps unexpectedly, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* proved instrumental in this part of the interrogation. Though ostensibly Wilde's fiction had little to do with his real-life proclivities, homoerotic or otherwise, Carson used the story that had drawn such controversy five years before to prove its author's debauchery, to demonstrate a pattern of unscrupulous beliefs and convictions that colored Wilde's work. Carson brought a copy of the text to court—notably, the earlier *Lippincott*'s version which contained the unmitigated declarations of infatuation voiced by Basil Hallward. (We can only imagine what he would have done with Wilde's even more explicit manuscript, had he had access to it.) Triumphantly, Carson read aloud to the courtroom several of the story's most telling passages: ones about Basil's wonderstruck reaction to his first meeting with Dorian, ones in which he declares that he "worshipped [Dorian] with far more romance of feeling than a man usually gives to a friend" (Hyde 111), ones where he describes his adoration for Dorian as mad, absurd, extravagant. Carson even called the *Lippincott's* version "purged" (111). Interspersed with these passages, Carson queried Wilde insistently about their contents. "Do you consider [these descriptions] of the feeling of one man towards a youth

just grown up [to be] a proper or an improper feeling?" "You have never known the feeling you described?" "Have you ever adored a young man madly?" "You don't think flattering a young man, making love to him, in fact, would be likely to corrupt him?" (113-5).

Carson's aim is obvious enough, if somewhat suspect. He tries to conflate Wilde with a character of his own creation, to attribute Basil's illicit feelings of same-sex passion and adulation to their author. But dubious though this connection may be, it was undisputedly effective. After Wilde's guilty adjudication, *Dorian Gray* vanished off the shelves of mainstream bookstores and libraries, circulating only amidst the underworld of literary contraband and pornography until 1908, when his collected works were published by Methuen & Co. (Mackie 980). Readers who revisited Wilde's story after his imprisonment could not help but do so with a "reception of Wilde…[that was] inevitably coloured by extraliterary matters" (Mackie 989), as well as by the illegitimate manner of acquisition that Wilde's notoriety now made obligatory. According to the trials, Wilde is not only the author of his book, he *is* his book—the two are inseparable, and meet similar fates. Wilde's incarceration naturally seemed to necessitate the book's prohibition, perhaps for good reason; it is not difficult to imagine, under the circumstances, that any person caught reading Wilde after the trials might be suspected of the same crimes that lead to Wilde's own downfall. And so *The Picture of Dorian Gray* became as much of a pariah as Wilde was himself, a byword for the capital crimes of an unapologetic artist whose imprisonment became the death knell of his art.

Chapter II: Self-Censorship, Conscious & Unconscious

"The sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban. Anyone who has lived long in a foreign country will know of instances of sensational items of news—things which on their own merits would get the big headlines-being kept right out of the British press, not because the Government intervened but because of a general tacit agreement that 'it wouldn't do' to mention that particular fact," wrote George Orwell in his 1943 essay entitled "The Freedom of the Press." This statement by Orwell captures another critical facet of fin de siècle British censorship—the practice of *self* censorship, and the fact that Wilde was altering drafts of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for sensitive content even before ever showing it to an editor or opening it up to public opinion. Orwell's argument is relevant for a number of reasons: first, it establishes that the act of self-inhibitive censorship was was not anomalous nor isolated to Wilde, but in fact an extensive phenomenon that affected artists both before and after Wilde's time; and second, it opens up a conversation about *how* such practices came into operation, how "unspoken" censorship was enforced, and how Wilde's work can be contextualized within and illuminated by the broader social discourses, particular those relating to sex and sexuality, of his time. Orwell's assertion also introduces the idea of hegemony, which offers a framework through which we can understand censorship as something that functions invisibly—something so ingrained in political and cultural discourse that it becomes enshrined in the ways we speak, behave, and even think.

It may be surprising to some that the terms *homosexual* and *heterosexual* were not first "invented" nor utilized until 1869, almost fifteen years after Oscar Wilde had been born, in a pamphlet by Austrian-Hungarian journalist Karl-Maria Kertbeny. A vocal defender of human rights, Kertbeny coined the term *homosexual* as an alternative to earlier pejorative terminology, originating in Greek and French, used to refer to men who engaged in same-sex sexual activity, such as "sodomite" or "pederast." The term was borrowed and subsequently popularized in 1886, becoming the standard term by which to refer to same-sex orientation by the turn of the century, by the German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his popular book on sexual pathologies entitled *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Furneaux). With the creation of a sexual binary catalyzed by the publication of this book, the late Victorian period saw a growing association of personal identity with sexual identity, and sexual orientation played an increasingly central role in assessing an individual's character. As evidenced by the novelty of sexual terminology at the time of Wilde's writing, the preoccupation with sexuality as a defining character trait was something new during Wilde's lifetime, and the late nineteenth century occupies a significant place in the emergence of sexual discourses. Holly Furneaux also points out that the newness of our contemporary sexual lexicon is further proof that the prominence of sexuality is not something inherently found in human history, but unique to the past few centuries: "By attending to the history of terms we now take for granted we can recognise the social construction, rather than naturality, of our emphasis on sexual identity" (Furneaux).

Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet,* a canonical work of queer theory which identifies the reductive binarisms present in both modern and historical conceptions of sexuality,

offers a brief explanation as to how the invention of the term "homosexual" galvanized a new language which pivots on this very homo/heterosexual binary:

> New, institutionalized taxonomic discourses—medical, legal, literary, psychological—centering on homo/heterosexual definition proliferated and crystallized with exceptional rapidity in the decades around the turn of the century, decades in which so many of the other critical nodes of culture were being, if less suddenly and newly, nonetheless also definitively reshaped. […] Furthermore…modern Western culture has placed what it calls sexuality in a more and more distinctively privileged relation to our most prized constructs of individual identity, truth, and knowledge, it becomes truer and truer that the language of sexuality *not only intersects with but transforms* the other languages and relations by which we know. (Sedgwick 2-3, italics mine)

Here, Sedgwick argues that the emergent sexual binary and its associated language has not merely altered the ways in which sexuality itself is conceived and described, but far more broadly altered how humankind and social relations are thought of, discussed, and written about. Sedgwick is particularly interested in how the binary manifests itself in literature and fiction-writing, and the title of her work is an homage not to what has been explicitly written in reference to homosexuality, but what has remained "closeted"—omitted, avoided, silenced, and absent altogether from homosexual discourse. She writes:

> An assumption underlying the book is that the relations of the closet—the relations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit around homo/heterosexual definition—have the potential for being peculiarly revealing, in fact, about speech acts more generally. […] But, in the vicinity of the closet, even what *counts* as a speech act is prob-

> lematized on a perfectly routine basis. As Foucault says: "there is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things…. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. "Closeted-ness" itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of silence. (Sedgwick 3)

Sedgwick observes that censorship—or as she would call it, the closeting of homosexual reference in literary works—complicates an understanding of "homoerotic" texts by leaving crucial moments "inexplicit." But she agrees with Foucault that the unspoken says just as much, if not more, than what is spelled out in black and white; the "silences" in a text indicate that which is notably *absent* from discourse, and push us to question why. Sedgwick takes the view, as does this essay, that "what one does not say" is of equal and decisive importance to a holistic understanding of discourse.

There are many "silences" to be found in *Dorian Gray.* Certain segments of the plot are shrouded in intentional obscurity, and the reader must look between the lines to guess at what Wilde is implying. Wilde never gives a name to the feelings that Basil harbors for Dorian, nor does he ever detail the activities that lead to Dorian's whispered infamy within his social circles (many scholars presume that sodomy is among Dorian's vices, given the allusions to him ruining the lives of many young men). Even more noteworthy, perhaps, are those passages which never made it to the story to begin with, even without the interference of prying editors or apprehensive booksellers. In examining the earliest draft of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, housed in original holograph manuscript form at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City, one encounters substantive evidence (the details of which later will be explored in greater depth) that Wilde was

making considerable changes, excisions, and omissions to the text regarding debatably suggestive material before ever submitting it to his editor. Barbara Leckie briefly comments on the awareness and practices of self-inhibitive censorship in "The Victorian Era and Censorship," noting that "targets of censorship in the late-Victorian censorship debates knew well the toll that censorship exerted on their production and publication, even in the absence of legal force and sensational trials" (168). In this way, Leckie posits that authors like Wilde were cognizant not only of the incredibly restrictive moral demands placed on literature, but of the fact that they themselves were the primary targets of such constraints. She broaches the idea of "calibration"--the fact that novelists of the time frequently made *preemptive* modifications and excisions of questionable material before publication to satisfy unspoken standards of morality and "ensure the widest possible circulation for their works" (168). Wilde was no exception in engaging in this practice.

Alex Ross, in his *New Yorker* article "Deceptive Picture," describes some of the changes made to Wilde's first manuscript as follows: "Wilde's revisions to the opening dialogue between Basil and Lord Henry betray a rising anxiety, an urge to lower the emotional temperature. Exclamations over Dorian's beauty give way to more reserved remarks about his 'good looks' and 'personality.' 'Passion' becomes 'feeling,' 'pain' becomes 'perplexity'. Wilde's pen stops Basil from mentioning the time Dorian brushed against his cheek and from announcing that 'the world becomes young to me when I hold his hand…'." Ross's summary offers a brief yet inclusive account of the kinds of changes Wilde can be seen making in this early, revealing manuscript, unseen, as far as we know, by the editor of *Lippincott's* before the story was published in July 1890. This manuscript was not sent directly to *Lippincott's* but typed up, revised again, and then re-

typed (this is the version that will hereafter be called the "typescript," and was published as a book with annotations by Nicholas Frankel in 2011) and submitted for publication in early spring of 1890. Based on these circumstances, and the amount of self-revision that occurred even between this manuscript and publication, we can be fairly confident that the edits made to this holograph are Wilde's own and no one else's. Donald Lawler, in his article, "Oscar Wilde's First Manuscript of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," advances the argument that even this manuscript was not, in fact, Wilde's first attempt at writing the story down—there is evidence, which I also observed upon reviewing the manuscript myself, that Wilde was copying the story down from an earlier version, now lost. For example, there were several occasions where Wilde mistakenly recopied the first sentence of the prior paragraph and crossed it out, his eye evidently getting lost on the page from which he was copying. These seemingly minor fragments of visual evidence point to the fact that Wilde's independent revision process was immense, carefully thought out over many versions that have not all survived to this day. Such a process also indicates that the changes Wilde made were very deliberate and carefully considered, not merely offhand changes of mood or taste—and thus worthy of further investigation.

If anything of substance has been edited out of this early version, it is the embellishments of passion that are noticeably watered-down in the *Lippincott's* edition and almost entirely erased in its novel form. Wilde is notorious for the extravagance of his prose, and there are clear-cut indications of the self-restraint that he exercised in some of his more descriptive passages, particularly when it comes to Basil Hallward's lengthier speeches. For example, in the first chapter as Hallward explains to Lord Henry the rapturous effect Dorian has had upon his art, the painter exclaims feverishly: "The merely visible presence of this lad—for he seems to me little more

than a lad, though he is really over twenty—his merely visible presence—ah!" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 15). A glance at the manuscript reveals that "though he is really over twenty" was initially "though summers have showed him roses less scarlet than his lips" (autograph manuscript, 1890) in the manuscript, scraped over by Wilde's pen. Tellingly, Wilde does not merely strikethrough an omitted passage with a single line, but scribbles over it as if to completely obscure its readability. Several pages later, a reference to Basil taking hold of Lord Henry's hand as they speak is similarly erased, and the phrase "[Dorian's] beauty had so strangely stirred me" is softened to "[his] personality had so strangely stirred me" (autograph manuscript, 1890). Soon thereafter, the artist's passionate sentiment that "I would never leave [Dorian], till rather he was dead" is replaced with a milder confession: "I would become absolutely devoted to him, and…I ought not to speak to him" (autograph manuscript, 1890). Hallward's exclamation that "The world becomes young to me when I hold [Dorian's] hand, and when I see him, the centuries yield up their secrets!" (autograph manuscript, 1890) is blackened out entirely.

Many of the changes Wilde self-inflicted upon his manuscript occur in the first chapter. This chapter is instrumental in setting the tone and establishing a foundation for Dorian and Basil's relationship, which lasts until Basil's unceremonious murder in one of the closing chapters of the story. Unsurprisingly, Wilde would have approached this initial chapter with particular caution, establishing platonic and aesthetic boundaries early on that confirm Basil's attraction to Dorian as sensual in the artistic sense only. However, Wilde's approach seems to vacillate at various points throughout the book. The most significant—and damning—thing that Wilde edits out are a few words at the end of chapter *seven*, the chapter in which Dorian is able to wrest the truth about Basil's affections from the painter, and forbids him from ever looking upon his portrait

again. Basil replies, sadly, "[…] good-bye, Dorian. You have been the one person in my life who has really influenced my art" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 171). Wilde evidently brooded over this line intently, as there are several crossed out iterations of the phrase next to the one he finally settled on, one of them being, "You have been the one person in my life of whom I have loved" (autograph manuscript, 1890). This is the first unequivocal, unambiguous name that Wilde gives to Basil's ardor, but it ultimately did not survive Wilde's anxious amendments. This scratched-out declaration provides convincing evidence that Wilde initially intended for Basil to harbor a romance for his muse that was more than aesthetic, and lends robust support to the hypothesis that Wilde was being cautious specifically against the book being interpreted as a homoerotic text.

A few pages earlier, though, another explicit reference to love is actually preserved in Wilde's typescript, as Basil explains why he was so hesitant to show Dorian's portrait at art exhibitions when he had first painted it: "[…] as I worked at it, every flake and film of color seemed to me to reveal my secret. There was love in every line, and in every touch there was passion. I grew afraid that the world would know of my idolatry" (Frankel 136). Wilde did not delete this line before sending it to J. M. Stoddart, the editor of *Lippincott's*, I suspect because here "love" is used ambiguously; it is not clear whether that love is directed towards the painting, the fictive image of Dorian, or the subject himself. Wilde's equivocation might have convinced the himself that the line was tame enough to keep, but Stoddart was not so easily satisfied—this line was among those he struck, without Wilde's permission, from the text before it went to print.

Other evidence of Wilde's self-censorship extends beyond textual changes and requires a far more nuanced analysis. This censorship is rooted not individually in Wilde's tastes or artistic

choices, but far more broadly within the tradition of queer discourse as a whole. As a gay author (or at least one who had strong homosexual predilections), Wilde claims a place in the history of queer literature and creative expression, and one needs to consider how Wilde sustains the conventions established by this history, particularly considering Wilde's own status as a closeted man and the general prohibition of explicit homoerotic references in published work at his time. *Epistemology of the Closet* provides more insight into this subject, as Sedgwick discusses common "alibis" for homoerotic allusions in written works, which she describes as a form of literary closeting. Among these, Sedgwick mentions the aestheticization of homosexual relationships and the use of the Platonic alibi, both of which feature prominently in *Dorian Gray.* The pursuit of beauty and of a return to the "Hellenic ideal" are two extraordinarily common motifs of homoerotic works, to the point that such a desire is explicitly expressed by Wilde in the story, voiced by Lord Henry:

> I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream -- I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of mediaevalism, and return to the Hellenic ideal -- to something finer, richer than the Hellenic ideal, it may be…The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful. (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 26)

It is not difficult to guess at what "monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful" between the time of ancient Greek society and that of Wilde's writing, although Lord Henry never names

these temptations. Sedgwick is interested in these kinds of "silences"—those that dance around and suggest the notion of homosexual desire, but refuse to say so in so many words. She argues that encoding homoerotic inclinations and allusions into broader discussions of art, beauty, culture, and history is "closeting," which for the purposes of this project is being treated as synonymous with self-censoring.

Epistemology of the Closet cites *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a critical demarcation in the inception of modernist queer literature. It is not, Sedgwick claims, "the degree to which [the text] partakes of the paranoid-associated homophobic alibi 'I do not love him; I am him'," that makes it modernist, but its performance of a "different though intimately related…alibi of abstraction" (Sedwick 164). Sedgwick details the concept of the "open closet" operating at the time of Wilde's writing, initiated by the newly public yet increasingly discriminatory, marginalizing discourse (partially catalyzed by events like the Cleveland Street scandal of 1889) surrounding male homosexuality in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The open closet thus represents the paradox of male homosexual desire at the turn of the twentieth century becoming at once highly visible and widely reviled. Sedgwick argues that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* "occupies an especially symptomatic place in this process…it is in a sense a perfect rhetorical distillation of the open secret, the glass closet, shaped by the conjunction of an extravagance of deniability and an extravagance of flamboyant display" (165). The adjacency of passages detailing Dorian's interests in beautiful, arcane objects cemented in the history of homosexual sensibility—Roger Luckhurst lists "references to Alexander the Great, decadent Roman Emperors and Latin poets, Edward II and his lover Piers Gaveston" and more among them—to those which categorically deny the existence of homosexual attraction produces the paradox of the "open closet" that

Sedgwick describes. Wilde frequently uses the "alibis of abstraction" cited by Sedgwick in mediating this homoerotic content, finding excuses to redefine or else completely rescind many of his allusions to homosexuality.

We can see the alibi of abstraction enacted in *The Picture of Dorian Gray'*s passages which explicate the painter Hallward's aesthetic attraction to Dorian. "The love that [Basil] bore [Dorian]…had nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual. It was not that mere physical admiration of beauty that is born of the senses and that dies when the senses tire. It was such love as Michael Angelo had known, and Montaigne, and Winckelmann, and Shakespeare himself," wrote Wilde in one such passage (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 176). It is worth noting that, in Wilde's manuscript, the original wording of the line was "the love that he bore him, for it was really love, had *something* noble and intellectual in it" (autograph manuscript, 1890). Perhaps Wilde was agitated by the implication of *something else* that this earlier phrasing indicated. Notably, Wilde would make recourse to a nearly identical justification of male-male affection in his defense of Lord Alfred Douglas' poem "Two Loves" at his own trial: "[Love] is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo" (Hyde 201). In fictional and real worlds alike, Wilde continually relied upon the kind of language that cloaks the unspeakable act of homosexual desire in the drapes of intellectual mentorship and aesthetic appreciation. Simultaneously, he takes great pains to distance the love described in both speeches from the "*mere* physical admiration" which characterizes the baseness of erotic desire, belittling the mechanisms of sexual attraction in favor of a comparatively tame spiritual or artistic affection. When questioned about his relationship with

Douglas at his trial, Wilde's responses again mirror, to a significant degree, those of Basil Hallward scrambling to frame his devotion to Dorian in as sterile a manner as possible:

> 'I was fond of him. I have always been fond of him.'
>
> 'Do you adore him?'
>
> 'No, but I have always liked him.' (Hyde 115)

Sedgwick also identifies the alibi of abstraction employed in the passage in which Basil attempts to explain to Dorian the inexpressible quality the youth purports to have seen in the portrait:

> I had drawn you as Paris…as Adonis…And it had all been what art should be—unconscious, ideal, and remote. One day—a fatal day I sometimes think—I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you as you actually are…as I worked at it every flake and film of color 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…. Well, after a few days the thing left my studio, and as soon as I had got rid of the intolerable fascination of its presence it seemed to me that I had been foolish in imagining that I had seen anything in it, more than that you were extremely good-looking, and that I could paint. Even now I cannot help feeling that it is a mistake to think that the passion one feels in creation is ever really shown in the work one creates. Art is always more abstract than we can fancy. Form and color tell us of form and colour—that is all. (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 128-9)

According to Sedgwick, "Basil Hallward perfectly captures the immobilizing panic" (166) inherent in the alibi of abstraction. At the precipitous moment of confession the painter voids his ad-

mission of adoration almost in simultaneity as it is expressed, and in "interrupting his own confession of love and desire for Dorian" (Sedwick 166), in denying his devotion before it can even be actualized verbally, in "fram[ing his desire] anachronistically, Classically" (166) through references to Paris and Adonis, Basil engages in the act of abstraction. Such Hellenic abstraction presents itself before the book begins—Nicholas Frankel points out that even the titular character's name, Dorian, is just another word for "Greek." In the opening pages of *Dorian Gray* as well, Lord Henry admires the beauty of the young man in Basil's painting (whose identity he does not yet know), referring to Dorian as a "young Adonis" and "a Narcissus." Wilde would use a similar strategy in his testimony at the trials: "'The love that dare not speak its name' in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man…such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy…. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an elder and a younger man, when the elder has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope, and glamour of life before him" (Hyde 201). The fact that Wilde relied so frequently on the Platonic alibi both in writing and in life is a testament to just how deeply embedded such a practice was in Wilde's mind, and in gay culture more generally.

This invocation of a Classical vindication of same-sex love, as used by Wilde, appears frequently in the canon of LGBTQ literature. The first modern literary work in the Western world that alludes explicitly to homosexuality is Antonio Rocco's *Alcibiades the Schoolboy*, a defense of sodomy published in 1652 which was modeled after the Platonic dialogue and featured well-known classical figures like the eponymous Alcibiades and Socrates as characters. Neil McKen-

na, in *The Secret Life of Oscar* Wilde, comments on the trend among Wilde's contemporaries, too:

> [Poetry] was the medium in which the erotic, the spiritual and political collided and coalesced. Homoerotic poetry was the *lingua franca* of many men who loved men. They read it, they wrote it, they talked about it and wrote about it; and they used poetry as…a camouflage for their sexual desires…[they] were constituted the 'leaders of Hellas'—Walt Whitman, John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter and Oscar Wilde. […] The body of homoerotic poetry created a taxonomy of homoerotic desire which centered on the classical model of Greek *paiderastia* and celebrated the spiritual and sexual love of an older man for a youth. (88)

It would be both time-consuming and redundant to trace the entire history of Hellenic references used in LGBTQ art and literature, but it might suffice to say that Marcel Proust, W. H. Auden, and E. M. Forster were also prominent gay (and closeted) authors who leaned heavily on Classical allusions in their own work. E. M. Forster even thematized and implicitly denounced the preoccupation with classical antiquity in homosexual culture in his famous 1914 Bildungsroman *Maurice*, wherein a deeply closeted character, Clive, refuses the natural inclination to physically consummate his relationship with Maurice in deference to the Platonic ideal. Forster's frank discussion of gay eroticism and acknowledgement of the sexual elements of male-male relationships were radical in his day, and *Maurice* would not be published until 1971 after its author's death, decades after it had first been written.

Writers were not the only artists for whom the Hellenic alibi became a crutch. A famous Jewish painter and a contemporary of Wilde, Simeon Solomon, possesses a life story that almost

eerily mirrors Wilde's own. Like Wilde, Solomon was born into an upper-middle class family of artists and intellectuals, and experienced a nearly meteoric rise to artistic celebrity once his paintings, inspired heavily by the classical tradition of the popular pre-Raphaelite style at the time, were exhibited at the Royal Academy of Art. Solomon fraternized with some of the most fashionable painters of his day, many of whom are still known and studied: John Everett Millais, Edward Burne-Jones, and William Holman Hunt numbered among them (Ferrari). Yet, Solomon's name is largely obscure to most modern scholars. This is because, in 1873, at the height of his success, Solomon was arrested on charges of attempting to commit sodomy with another man in a public urinal in London (Conroy). Solomon paid a fine and was jailed briefly, then released and promptly institutionalized—with little success. Close to a year later, Solomon was again arrested for the same crime in Paris, this time with a male prostitute, and spent three months in prison in France. The experience catalyzed Solomon's lifelong battle with alcoholism, and he died destitute at St. Giles Workhouse in Covent Garden in 1905 (Conroy). Solomon's abrupt, and very public, fall from grace shares many parallels with Wilde's own lapse into disrepute, although Solomon has yet to experience the same posthumous distinction and appreciation. Wilde, though, admired Solomon's work and even owned several of his pieces. He would have been familiar with Solomon's story, which occurred almost exactly twenty years before his own trials, and he mentions the painter's name briefly in *De Profundis* when recounting the consequences of his imprisonment and subsequent bankruptcy: "[…] all my charming things were to be sold: my Burne-Jones drawings: my Whistler drawings: my Monticelli: my Simeon Solomons: my china: my Library…" (*De Profundis* 72). However, Wilde's connection with Solomon goes far deeper than the personal.

Solomon's story is relevant here because the themes of his works and the risks he took in depicting them are extremely similar to Wilde's own, and as Wilde's predecessor, Solomon offers evidence of a tradition that preceded Wilde by which gay artists might often have approached their work. By today's standards, Solomon's works are fairly graphically homoerotic; one of his most famous paintings portrays the ancient Greek (and famously lesbian) poet Sappho locked in a passionate embrace with another woman. Though none other of his public paintings were quite so explicit, much of Solomon's work is characterized by the androgyny and even effeminacy of his classical male figures, often depicted with "languorously draped youthful bodies and heavy-lidded, languid expressions" (H. Williams). It is clear that Solomon was exploring his identity as a homosexual man through these paintings in much the same way that Wilde used his writing as a medium through which to express his own sexuality. But the homoeroticism of Solomon's paintings is encoded within the myth and legend of Greek antiquity, and the perfection of the male form is—at least purportedly—celebrated not sexually but artistically. Critical reception to Solomon's work, as described by Holly Williams, was "uneasy": "Words like decadent or feminine or sickly often come up – there are lots of suspicions," she says, quoting Tate curator Claire Barlow. Wilde's critics would use almost identical language in their own reactions to *Dorian Gray*. But though critics might have detected something perverse, their suspicions were merely that—suspicions. Solomon still enjoyed public and commercial success until the incident in 1873 despite these whispered controversies. "As long as there was a degree of ambiguity—in both the work, and the artist's proclivities—19th Century society was prepared to turn a blind eye. Or, at least, confine themselves to a raised eyebrow. Even works which, to the modern viewer, look blatantly homoerotic could be respectably contained within the framework of the classical male

nude, the ideal of Hellenic youthful beauty, or celebration of noble male friendship. Such narratives 'veiled the potential homoeroticism of the works'," Williams writes in sum, and this seems accurate insofar as Wilde was concerned. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, despite initial controversy, enjoyed immense popularity once it was published as a novel, and interest in Wilde as an author only died away once he had actually been convicted of the same crime at which he had hinted in the story.

It is not difficult to imagine that Wilde might have subconsciously observed the manner in which Solomon, and other queer artists before him, were able to "closet" the homoerotic undertones in their work with the classical image. It would be impossible to suggest that Solomon was actually Wilde's direct inspiration for his representation of classical sources, but his efforts do establish a convention, a ritual of artistic closeting with which Wilde would have been familiar and could have sought to emulate. We can see Wilde doing with his pen what Solomon did with his brush: in establishing Dorian as Adonis and as Narcissus, in modeling male beauty on the classical, academic form, he is able to make a respectable "excuse" for Basil Hallward's fascination—as well as his own. Solomon's relation to Wilde's work is just one aspect of a major question: if Orwell's analysis is correct and censorship is largely discretionary, how are artists, Wilde more specifically, taught or incentivized to censor/closet themselves? How was Wilde's self-censorship shaped by the canon of queer culture (here represented by Solomon, Whitman, Carpenter, and Symonds, among others) which is more broadly rooted in social and cultural discourse? French philosopher Michel Foucault's theories on power, discipline, and discourse shed some light on these questions, and offer explanation as to how these discursive trends proliferate through modern systems of knowledge, conformity, and punishment.

Wendy Grace and Alec Mchoul, in *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject,* define Foucault's thinking on discourse as thus: "…in any given historical period we can write, speak or think about a given social object or practice…only in certain specific ways and not others. 'A discourse' would then be *whatever* constraints—but also enables—writing, speaking and thinking within such specific historical limits" (71). Foucault argues that discourse is a conduit of power, acting as something of a censoring force which implicitly dictates not only what can be physically expressed (through speech or writing), but what modes of thinking are possible. Such discourse, by Foucault's estimation, shapes human society and fundamentally constructs the ways we view ourselves and the world around us; it is through discursive, constructed means that we establish what we assume to be truth, knowledge, and "reality," and organize ourselves around these markers. That truth is manmade, not universal or essential, is supported by the fact that it is historically (and to an extent, culturally and geographically) contingent: what is regarded as fundamental truth changes drastically with space and time. Along these lines Foucault also contends that ideas cannot exist until we define them through language, and they enter discourse. By way of example, as Sedgwick described earlier, the idea of sexuality—gay or straight, homo or heterosexual—did not exist at all until terms designated to represent it entered our language, changing the way we verbally and cognitively identified ourselves and others around us. Foucault's theories of discourse offer a way of thinking about language not as an impartial or static entity, but as a dynamic, dependent site of politics, power relations, and marginalization.

Foucault's analysis is useful here because it concerns the intersections of language, social institutions, and power—the precise conjunction at which censorship can be found. He maintains

that dominant institutions, such as the government, legal courts, schools, and so on, hold the power which defines discourse, as well as the punitive and disciplinary measures to enforce this dominance. Foucault outlines two major objectives of discipline in his seminal work *Discipline and Punish*: the constant surveillance of disciplinary subjects, and the *internalization* of discipline within these subjects so that they might be shaped voluntarily into acceptable form without the use of violence or excessive force (which would disrupt this system and undermine its validity). Subjects are incentivized to conform and behave "correctly" through a systematized scale of punishments, ranging anywhere from school suspension to the death penalty. We can see this mechanism at work in revisiting the literary reviews of *Dorian Gray* and considering how these critics respond to Wilde's deviance from discursive parameters: "the Treasury or the Vigilance Society will think it worth their while to prosecute Mr. Oscar Wilde or Messrs. Ward, Lock & Co.," *The St. James Gazette* predicts, while the *Scots Observer* decrees that the subject matter of the story is "fitted for the Criminal Investigation Department or a hearing *in camera"* (Ross). These statements reveal much about the extent to which nonconforming discourse was policed and punishable in late nineteenth-century England.

The policing of aberrant discourse leads to another crucial tenet of Foucault's theory on the *hierarchy* of discourses. According to Foucault, along with the "dominant" discourse there also exist marginalized, "subjugated" forms of knowledge and expression, such as those of "the madman, the patient, the delinquent, the pervert, and other persons who, in their respective times, held knowledge about *themselves* which diverged from the established categories" (Grace and Mchoul 16). These discourses are alienated from the status of "truth" or "normalcy" as defined by the dominant discourse, and instead trivialized and disenfranchised as abnormal or unhealthy.

In the literary criticism directed against *Dorian Gray*, the *Daily Chronicle* calls the story "unclean" and "poisonous," "heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction" (Ross) which we can compare to *The Spectacle*'s critique of Solomon's painting *Summer Twilight,* described featuring a "repulsive sentiment which all too frequently marks Mr Solomon's compositions" (H. Williams). Such phraseology, as Foucault predicts, frames the latent homoeroticism—sharply at odds with the contemporary, mainstream discourse that privileged virtue, piety, heterosexuality, and marriage—found in both works in terms of disease, decay, and malady.

Foucault actually takes issue with the notion that Victorian culture, as illustrated above, repressed sexual discourse; on the contrary, he contends that there was a "veritable discursive explosion" (*The History of Sexuality* 17) that occurred with the inception of inhibitive sexual codes. Ironically, he states, sexual discourse was *not* suppressed in the Victorian period, despite its reputation for stringent puritanism, but in fact subject to obsessive discussion, if only for the purposes of control. "By mid-century the Victorian conjunction of moralism and scientific investigation produced ideas of orthodox human sexuality based on a combination of social and biological ideas," writes Jan Marsh in "Sex & Sexuality in the 19th Century." Among topics frequently discussed by Victorian scholars and social scientists were masturbation, venereal disease, prostitution, promiscuity, and sexualities. For example, common Victorian anti-masturbation discourse associated "self-vigilance" with higher degrees of virility, morality, and intelligence, and such restraint was thought to inspire mental acuity and even artistic genius. The opposite was also true—in *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*, published by William Acton in 1867, the author proclaims sanctimoniously, "That insanity is a consequence of [mas-

turbation] is now beyond a doubt" (Acton 62). In a similar vein, social concern over prostitution flared up around mid-century as urbanization surged and with it, the practice of streetwalking. Marsh describes "a sustained cultural campaign, in sermons, newspapers, literary and visual art, to intimidate, shame and eventually drive 'fallen women' from the streets by representing them as a depraved and dangerous element in society, doomed to disease and death." Marsh's assessment reveals the degree to which discourse in areas like art, journalism, and religion play an imperative part in creating the narrative of the "fallen woman," establishing her as an object of fear and loathing. To reinforce this narrative yet further, the Contagious Diseases Act (CDA) was established in 1864, a law which declared that a woman suspected of being a prostitute could be arrested, medically examined for sexually transmitted diseases, and held at a special hospital until she was cured or her sentence ended (Hamilton 14). Although the Act itself was repealed in 1886, the sentiments and discussions motivating it was not—the National Vigilance Association, the same group who prosecuted Henry Vizetelly for his Zola translations, continued its vigorous anti-prostitution and anti-trafficking work well into the twentieth century. The discourses surrounding prostitution and masturbation reveal a key contradiction: sexual deviancy might have been more commonplace and more widely debated than ever before, but the regulatory forces controlling it were also harsher than they had ever been.

In similar fashion, certain scholars of the Victorian era contend that the thriving homosexual subculture of the latter half of the nineteenth century, of which both Solomon and Wilde were a part, is sufficient evidence that the period was not as puritanical as contemporary historical accounts would depict. It is true that on the fringes of both high and low society gay communities congregated alternately around clubs or brothels (such as in the Cleveland Street scandal),

but it was only within these highly clandestine meeting places that homosexuality was tolerated, and even these "molly houses" or "cruising grounds," as they were so called, were predominantly clustered in areas rife with theft, violence, and prostitution. A commentator from the *Yokel's Perceptor* took note with marked disgust in 1850: "The increase of these monsters in the shape of men, commonly designated margeries, poofs etc., of late years, in the great Metropolis, renders it necessary for the safety of the public that they should be made known…Will the reader credit it, but such is nevertheless the fact, that these monsters actually walk the street the same as the whores, looking out for a chance? Yes, the Quadrant, Fleet Street, Holborn, the Strand etc., are actually thronged with them!" (McKenna 79). Homosexual activity was mostly geographically marginalized to dangerous and crime-ridden areas, which points to the fact that gay subculture was just that: a marginal subculture, in no way representative of prevailing attitudes of the time. The *Yokel Perceptor*'s demeaning references to "margeries" and "poofs" (understood to be gay men) underscores the prejudice, even revulsion, with which homosexuality was still regarded in the mid- to late Victorian period, despite its increasing visibility in discourse. Indeed, sodomy was a capital crime—punishable by death—until 1861, and was punishable by life imprisonment until 1885. Some scholars have interpreted the establishment of the Labouchere Amendment in 1885, which reduced the penalty for homosexual activity to two years' hard labor, as a sign that attitudes towards homosexuality were easing. On the contrary—the Labouchere Amendment actually criminalized acts of "gross indecency" that had *not* been illegal before, such as oral or other forms of non-penetrative sex, instead of just sodomy, where prosecutors would have to prove that penetration occurred (McKenna 78). This new law was much more broadly and easily enforced, and was the key to Wilde's own imprisonment a decade after it was established.

Evidence indicates that in the fin-de-siècle period, Foucault is correct that issues concerning sexuality and associated acts were more visible and more vital in literature, law, and language than ever before, but that is not to say such discourses exhibited tolerance, much less acceptance, of these behaviors. In this sense, "mainstream" Victorian discourse—that which structured society and issued commonly held perspectives on morality and acceptability—was every bit as conservative and hidebound to virtuous ideals as its reputation would indicate, regardless of whether it was actually successful in extinguishing the behaviors it condemned. Foucault proposes that, due to this moralism, "a whole rhetoric of allusion and metaphor was codified" (*The History of Sexuality* 17) into something of a new language, constituting a "whole restrictive economy, one that was incorporated into that politics of…speech—spontaneous on the one hand, concerted on the other—which accompanied the social redistributions of the classical period" (18). This restrictive language was the product both of conscious editing and expurgation and of the fact that words to describe certain sexual inclinations and acts did not yet exist. Although the term "homosexual" was coined in 1869, when Wilde was fifteen, it was not until the twentieth century began that the term gained real currency, and it is obvious in reading Wilde's personal writings from his university days in the 1870s that the word had not yet entered his vocabulary even as he was admiring his fellow classmates at Oxford. Neil McKenna says thus: "At Oxford, the word 'Greek' began to creep into Oscar's vocabulary, invariably to describe youthful male beauty, present and past. There was Armitage, 'who has the most Greek face I ever saw', the athlete Stevenson, whose 'left leg is a Greek poem'…and Harmodius, 'a beautiful boy in the flower of Greek loveliness'" (McKenna 6). "Greek" became a catch-all term for Wilde, an ardent classicist, to refer to his growing attraction—only spiritual and emotional at first, then eventually

erotic—towards other young men. Alhough the conventional lexicon failed to provide Wilde with a word to use to describe these attractions, which up to this point had yet to be consummated and made "sodomitical," Wilde was able to find an alternative name for these feelings through his own literary and historical studies.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde's self-censorship, in the form of closeting Basil's attraction to Dorian as an intellectual or aesthetic preoccupation in the spirit of Greek affection (as Wilde himself had done in his school days), represents Wilde's last-ditch attempt to vindicate homosexual love in a language that Victorian culture could tolerate. As McKenna confirms, "Oscar lived in an age when the *only* intellectual and historical justification for love and sex between men was the tradition of Greek *paiderastia*" (127, italics mine), as it had been for Solomon and the generations of queer authors and artists who preceded him. In the act of closeting, we can see Wilde (and Solomon, and others) coding illicit same-sex desire into the *only* thing that could make it more appropriate, more palatable, easier to swallow: the classical tradition. By re-channeling the "unacceptable," marginalized discourse of homosexual proclivity into something academic, even admirable, by broader Victorian standards, Wilde inherently acknowledges the authority of these standards (even while trying to disrupt them). The fact that Wilde felt he needed an "intellectual and historical justification" for the suggestive relationship between Basil and Dorian that manifests itself in the novel is evidence enough of the supremacy of hegemonic discourse, proof that such discourse governed even the way an iconoclast like Wilde thought, spoke, and acted, as Foucault's conception of the phenomenon dictates.

This is self-censorship: that Wilde electively defers to institutionalized forms of discourse to both express and conceal the felonious desire of Basil Hallward—and of himself. Whether or

not this can be constituted as "voluntary," in the words of George Orwell, is more questionable since the harshly disciplinary nature of Victorian law and society was likely an effective stimulus for Wilde's obedience. But the fact that Wilde independently undertakes drastic changes to both form and content, clearly with an eye to mitigating the story's initial obscenity, and even formulates the text under the considerations of Victorian hegemony shows the staggering power of censorship. Even without its deliberate presence, censorship still makes itself known through the cultural and historical frameworks that shape artists, as well as the acts of creative expression that they produce. Though Wilde may not have consciously perceived such an experience as a form of censorship, it is undeniable that he—like any other individual—felt the social and cultural pressures that urged him towards conformity while prohibiting him from and punishing him for his true desires, and this sensation becomes palpable in his literary work.

Chapter III: Thematizing Censorship in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

If, by this point in the essay, we have established that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was subject to numerous and varied forms of censorship—legal, social, and independent—a final question thus remains: how is literary censorship thematized, overtly or covertly, throughout the novel? A cursory read would hardly characterize the story of Dorian Gray, in which the titular young man makes a devil's pact to retain his youth forever in exchange for the aging of his portrait, as one that engages extensively in discourses surrounding censorship and the modalities of social control which produce it. Of course, it would have been rather uncharacteristic of Wilde, who delighted in symbolism, allegory, and turns of phrase deliberately intended to perplex and direct the reader away from his true meaning, to confront this issue central to a "proper" reading of his text so straightforwardly. Accordingly, the way in which Wilde encodes a critique of censorship into the novel is rather subdued, although there are brief moments—perhaps Wilde could not resist—of more overt commentary on the subject.

Wilde's reluctance to make the changes imposed by his editors, largely in response to public opinion, is well-documented in his letters. He maintained frequent correspondence with Ward, Lock & Co.'s copy editor, Coulson Kernahan, who was overseeing Wilde's revisions and additions to the extended *Dorian Gray*. In March of 1891, a month before the book went to print and as final edits were being made, the author's letters to Kernahan take on a tone of distress—Wilde grapples morally, and intellectually, with the changes that have been made to the novel as its publication date closes in. One such letter reads, "I have changed my mind about correcting the passage about temptation. One can't pull a work of art about without spoiling it…It has both-

ered me terribly, [Ward, Lock & Co.] suggesting changes, etc. One can't do it…As soon as I get the revise, and pass it, the book may go to press, but I must pass it first. *This is essential*" (Hart-Davis, 288-9). Wilde's opposition here is self-evident, and his tone is territorial. The final lines show an attempt to reclaim ownership over the final product, which evidently he feels he has lost throughout the revision process. Perhaps he was thinking of Stoddart here, and the alterations he made without Wilde's permission right before the story was printed in *Lippincott's*. At any rate, Wilde's resentment here is palpable; he is "bother[ed] terribly" by the emendations and seems fully conscious of the fact that the text is, however gradually, being censored for content—it seems unlikely that such a strong reaction could be provoked by standard revisions to grammar and spelling. Several days after the first letter, Wilde again wrote to Kernahan, "Your telegram was most welcome—the proposal of alterations really had vexed and worried my nerves to a point beyond bearing" (289).

As established in the preceding chapters, there were both external and internal sources of censorship working against the novel over the course of Wilde's writing process and afterwards. Some of these changes were adopted by Wilde independently (though perhaps not willingly), while some were imposed upon him without his permission, but both would have been anathema to Wilde's convictions as an artist and as an individual. Beyond his fictional works, Wilde was a rather prolific essayist and literary critic, authoring seven essays on various cultural, political, and literary subjects, the most relevant of which being "The Critic as Artist," "The Decay of Lying," "Pen, Pencil and Poison," and "The Truth of Masks," all published in a collection Wilde entitled *Intentions*. In these essays, Wilde details his views on the relationship between art and life, and critics and artists, some of which are subtly interwoven in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

but are outlined far more explicitly in these writings. It is unnecessary to explore every single one of these essays in depth, but a common message runs throughout: Wilde insists upon the necessity of artistic autonomy and the freedom of art from the burden of morality in each. For example, "The Decay of Lying" focuses primarily on the relationship between nature and art, where Wilde judges art to be superior because it is not confined to fact or reality, but can commit itself to the beautiful truths of something more profound and philosophical. In a similar vein, "Pen, Pencil, and Poison" explores the artistic temperament, which Wilde dictates should be purely aesthetic in its aims. To critics in "The Critic as Artist," Wilde notes, "The critic should be able to recognise that the sphere of Art and the sphere of Ethics are absolutely distinct and separate" (*Intentions* 191). In this way, Wilde insistently reminds the reader that art should exist in its own exalted, unconstrained sphere apart from the petty concerns and principled guidelines that shape every other aspect of human life.

Perhaps the most confrontational of all of these critiques, though, is the preface added to the expanded novel version of *Dorian Gray* itself—a brief manifesto of sorts, enumerating Wilde's views on art, its significance, and how it ought to be interpreted. If Wilde's views on censorship were not made obvious enough through his critical essays, the message of the novel's preface could not be more clear—evidently, Wilde was incensed, or at the very least vexed, by the critical reception that the *Lippincott's* version received and the hoops through which he had to jump in amending it for public approval. The preface, by Wilde's design, makes a deliberate strike on the journalists who so vehemently attacked his story the year before—he says so quite explicitly in a letter to J. S. Little, the Executive Secretary of the Society of Authors of which Wilde was a member, dated March 1981: "The attempt made by the journalists to dictate to the

artist and to limit his subject matter is of course quite monstrous, and everyone who cares at all for Art must strongly protest against it…I am curious to see whether these wretched journalists will assail it so ignorantly and pruriently as they did before. My preface should teach them to mend their wicked ways" (Hart-Davis 290). And indeed some of Wilde's declarations in the preface seem directed, quite pointedly, at those who, apparently to their own detriment, read "beneath the surface" of *Dorian Gray*, looking for evidence that would incriminate its author:

> Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault. […]
>
> There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all. […]
>
> Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.
>
> Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.
>
> It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors. (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* XIII-XV)

Some of these sentiments, among others in the preface, are echoed quite closely by Lord Henry in the expanded novel version. In the penultimate chapter, for instance, Dorian mourns the fact that the poisonous yellow book which Lord Henry gave him as a young man has dogged him throughout his adulthood, inspiring him to pursue the life of pleasure and vice that eventually ruins him. Lord Henry replies, "My dear boy, you are really beginning to moralise…it is no use. You and I are what we are, and will be what we will be. As for being poisoned by a book, there is no such thing as that. Art has no influence upon action…. It is superbly sterile. The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame. That is all" (*The Picture of*

Dorian Gray 323). On the same flippant note with which Wilde himself punctuates his declaration, Lord Henry, speaking on Wilde's behalf, dismisses the notion that literature could have such lethal power. Instead, he suggests that the evil was within Dorian—the spectator—all along. It is also crucial to note that, when reviewing Wilde's initial manuscript and the 1890 *Lippincott's* version, these lines are nowhere to be found. Wilde expanded on the 1890 version significantly, adding seven entirely new chapters, but this exchange between Lord Henry and Dorian *does* exist in the original manuscript, just more briefly. In the early typescript, Lord Henry's speech ends with "You and I are what we are, and will be what we will be" (323)—only when Wilde was revisiting the text, with the critiques of the journalists fresh in his mind, did he feel compelled to add the lines concerning the sterility of art, the impossibility of its influence on action. Such additions, among others, mount evidence that Wilde was consciously and deliberately thematizing censorship, and his critique thereof, over the course of his revision process.

Wilde made another significant addition in his rewrites, an entire character: James Vane, Sybil Vane's staid, overprotective older brother. This character is, notably, completely absent from the original draft of the story, added in later as Wilde sketched out multiple chapters of new material. Ostensibly, James Vane's importance in the extended story lies in his utility in giving further context to Sibyl's socioeconomic background, as well as his significance as a plot device in the newly-added final chapters of the novel. The last third of the book primarily revolves around Dorian's fear, largely inspired by his confrontation with Vane, of being held accountable for his abuse of Sibyl and her subsequent suicide, as well as every other one of his villainies that has colored the past two decades. Vane's poverty and rough mannerisms, in stark contrast to Dorian's wealth and sophistication, paint a vivid distinction between the two's backgrounds that fur-

ther emphasizes the cruelty of Dorian's early behavior in exploiting a penniless, ingenuous young girl. It has been proposed that the nature of Vane's character and his interactions with Dorian imbue the story with a hint of class struggle, a popular theme in Victorian literature, and an indication that Wilde was attempting to indulge his critics in crafting a more orthodox, blatantly moralistic story.

Yet, Vane's fate at the end of the novel would suggest otherwise. He is shot dead mistakenly by a hunter on Dorian's hunting trip, effectively freeing Dorian from his culpability in Sibyl's death, and leaving him at liberty to continue his life as is until his own obsession with the portrait drives him to an inadvertent suicide. The aforementioned interpretation is complicated by such an event. If Wilde was trying to simplify the moral message of *Dorian Gray*, why kill off Vane in such a manner? Why not let justice be served, and allow virtue to triumph over vice once and for all? Given such difficulties, an alternative explanation is necessary. I propose instead that Vane, though superficially a foil for Dorian's evil, actually serves as Wilde's implicit critique of uncompromising masculinity and morality in the Victorian age. Upon further critical analysis, James Vane stands in almost diametrical opposition to every other male character in the book. He is antithetical to everything embodied by the Wildean dandies Dorian and Lord Henry: he is conventionally virile while they are effete; he is strongly, almost offensively moralistic while they celebrate debauchery and liberty; he is deeply loyal and committed to family while they deride its outdated ideals; he participates in masculine, physical labor while they philosophize, attend plays, read literature, and observe art. It is not difficult to see the kind of man with whom Wilde would have identified more, as a writer and as a closeted homosexual, trapped in an unsatisfying marriage. Wilde even speaks to his kinship with these characters in one of his letters: "Basil

Hallward is what I think I am; Lord Henry what the world thinks me; Dorian what I would like to be—in other ages, perhaps" (Hart-Davis 352). Apparently, Wilde saw "much of [himself] in [the novel]" (352).

One of the major charges leveled against the novel in its first iteration was the discomfiting effeminacy of its major male characters, as well as the same-sex inclinations they clearly harbored. In his own life, Wilde's particular brand of queerness was similarly intertwined with femininity, from the way he spoke to the way he dressed, acted, and carried himself. Alan Sinfield, in *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment*, reveals that though effeminate men were not yet associated with homosexuality at the time, they were associated with idleness, wantonness, and depravity (Hanson). It is not difficult to imagine that such critiques would have struck Wilde personally, alerting him to the hypocrisy of such claims —Wilde perceived just as many problems with, and found distasteful, the traditional notions of masculinity and morality that were touted in late-Victorian culture. According to John Tosh, in his article "Gentlemanly Politeness and Manly Simplicity in Victorian England," the mid- nineteenth century saw a gradual movement away from a definition of masculinity that esteemed genteel "refinement and sociability" (the kind epitomized by English dandies like Wilde, as well as Lord Henry and Dorian), instead moving towards one that valued "rugged individualism," athleticism, valor, independence. This conceptual shift apparently "gained in social and political weight as the century proceeded" (Tosh 458), and indeed still shapes contemporary understandings of manliness to this day. As this conception of masculinity attained currency, becoming the hegemonic, overarching standard to which men were measured up, Tosh argues that "birth, breeding and education [became] secondary, compared with moral qualities which marked a truly manly charac-

ter" (458). He then proceeds to outline a more comprehensive elucidation of late Victorian masculinity:

> Manly vigor included energy, virility, strength—all the attributes which equipped a man to place his physical stamp on the world. Next came the moral qualities which enabled men to attain their physical potential—decisiveness, courage and endurance...These qualities of physique and character—what Carlyle called 'toughness of muscle' and 'toughness of heart'—were in turn yoked to some notion of social responsibility— whether loyalty to one's peers or chivalry towards women. The desired outcome was the 'independent man'—one who was beholden to no one, who kept his own counsel and who ruled his own household. (460)

Two other major attributes that were viewed as promoting manliness were commitment to work (specifically, making an honest living through labor and punishing self-discipline) and to family (providing materially for wives, mothers, and children and serving as a patriarchal figure of authority in the household). James Vane's character seems to typify these descriptions almost perfectly. A stoic man from the lower classes, a sailor by profession, with little formal education but strong familial values, Vane captures the "modern" Victorian masculinity that disregarded social status, revered brawn over brains and "moral sturdiness" over gentlemanly breeding. A major critique against "gentlemanliness" at the time, in Tosh's estimation, was its negative association with "being caught up in considerations of status and appearance, whereas *manliness* [had] to do with interiority and authenticity" (458, italics mine). Wilde's ardent commitment to Aesthetic principles—essentially an homage to the import of beauty and appearance—both in his literary work and in his personal life (Wilde's love of fashion and interior design are well-documented by

Ellmann) would have been extremely at odds with such a definition. Thus, We see Wilde embed a disparaging rendition of the quintessential Victorian "manly man" into the novel through Vanes' character.

Accordingly, the way James Vane is described in the novel certainly does not inspire awe. He is introduced as "a young lad with rough brown hair...thick-set of figure, and his hands and feet were large, and somewhat clumsy in movement. He was not so finely bred as his sister" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 90). In contrast, Dorian's introduction: "he was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candor of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity" (22). Juxtaposing these two passages, Wilde seems to celebrate Dorian's feminine, almost surreal beauty while disparaging the dullness of conventional virility embodied by Vane, who is alternately described as "coarse," "sullen," "stern," and "heavy" (94-5). This is significant, as Vane serves as the only noteworthy representation of traditional Victorian masculinity in the entire novel, and Wilde's characterization of him seems to subtly undermine him in every passage that he appears. He is described as ungainly, puerile, and ignominious to his older sister, seemingly unaware or perhaps uncaring about his crude, disreputable behavior.

This choice on Wilde's part aligns with another contention made by Tosh—that "one other attribute was critically important in distinguishing manliness from gentlemanliness [in the Victorian age]: frank straightforwardness, not only in action...but also in speech" (460). Tosh goes on to assert that a hallmark of manly speech was its directness, a reflection of inner thoughts or feelings without regard for social delicacy or propriety—"it came from the heart, unbridled by

fear of reprisal or ridicule," often appearing "brusque or even rude" (460). Along the same lines, if a man did not feel in his heart that he needed to speak, then he should not: "manliness often meant taciturnity" (460). A man of few words who spoke honestly, bluntly, and only when necessary was thus praised as an epitome of proper masculinity. And indeed James Vane is such a man; in the passage where he and Sybil walk through the park together and she tells him of her love affair with Dorian (known to her only as "Prince Charming"), he is described as staying largely silent, unmoved by her words as she babbles on. By Wilde's portrayal, though, Vane's taciturnity seems to be less of an indication of virile self-restraint than simply a dearth of intellect. For example, when Vane does speak, Wilde describes him as doing so "slowly and with effort" (100)—a suggestion that Vane tends to speak infrequently not because he does not want to, but because he *cannot*. (This provides a sharp contrast to Lord Henry's captivating ability for oratory and his frequent, lengthy, often philosophical musings on the nature of life.) On top of this, over the course of the siblings' conversation, Vane's speech is also characterized by inappropriate outbursts, such as the violent oath that he will kill "Prince Charming" should he ever bring harm to Sybil: "[His words] cut the air like a dagger. The people round began to gape. A lady standing [closeby] tittered" (100). In the spirit of masculine speech recounted by Tosh, Vane speaks out of love for his sister instinctively, passionately, without concern for decency or decorum. But his vow, valid though his suspicions might be, is risible in such a context, described as "exaggerated folly...mad melodramatic words" (104). Even Sibyl looks at him with "pity in her eyes that [becomes] laughter on her lips" (101) after he makes this absurd declaration, calling him a foolish little boy. Though, as preached by Victorian ideals, James Vane views himself as the chivalrous protector of his family, the head of household and breadwinner in his father's absence, his efforts

at asserting this status are depicted as misguided, even ridiculous. In this way, Wilde reveals an aversion to this standard of masculinity which privileges brawn, ruggedness, heroism, and familial devotion over intelligence, refinement, and mental or artistic cultivation.

The critique of James Vane, and the overbearing brand of masculinity and morality that he symbolizes, is more deeply embedded in an overarching critique of the practice of censorship as a whole. Like the conservative cultural critics who fretted over the "wicked baronet or nobleman and the faithless but handsome peeress" (Flint 27) that populated penny-fiction, or denounced the dishonorable aristocrats who "exploited" the young male prostitutes exposed by the Cleveland Street Scandal, James Vane expresses a similar deep-seated suspicion, even open hostility, towards high society and the social circles that Dorian, Lord Henry, and Basil (and in real life, Wilde himself) occupy. His antagonism towards Dorian for this very reason is palpable — inwardly, Vane reflects that "the young dandy who was making love to [Sibyl] could mean her no good. [Dorian] was a gentleman, and [James] hated him for that, hated him through some curious race-instinct for which he could not account" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 96-7). Pages later, he is again described as harboring "a fierce, murderous hatred" for this "Prince Charming," feeling as though Dorian has come between himself and Sibyl and is attempting to manipulate her. He also expresses a distaste for the "shallowness and vanity" of his own mother, who fantasizes about Sibyl being whisked away by this wealthy suitor and lifting herself and her family into an aristocratic lifestyle. In such a manner, Vane reveals himself to be something of a censoring force within the world of *Dorian Gray*, a traditionalist whose adherence to values, strong sense of moralism, and deep distrust of nobility fosters a profound sense of fear and animosity towards the anonymous lover, though he knows nothing of him. His quest to kill Dorian at the end of the

novel can be symbolically interpreted as an act of censorship in itself— the desire of a highly orthodox, patriarchal figure to rid the world of a poisonous, corrupting influence.

But Wilde, through Vane, seems to comment on the ineffectuality of censorship's execution. Though supposedly well-intentioned, Vane's attempts to halt Dorian's behavior, or at least warn those around him of his danger, fail not one but three different times. The first time, Vane's urgent caution against Dorian to his mother and sister goes unheeded, and Sibyl commits suicide as a result—but because she and her family never knew Dorian's real name, he is exonerated. The second time, Vane is almost successful in bringing Dorian to justice for this crime twenty years after the fact, but again Dorian slips through his fingers as he claims innocence through his preternaturally youthful appearance. The last time, as Vane attempts to stalk Dorian while on a hunting trip, Vane is accidentally shot and killed by one of Dorian's companions, effectively freeing Dorian forever from culpability in Sibyl Vane's death. And even if Vane had been successful in murdering Dorian at one of these points, Wilde implies heavily that his target is misplaced—Dorian's soul, the root of his evil, the origin of his cruelty to Sibyl Vane, is not located in the eternally youthful vessel of his physical body, but the hidden painting, to which no one has access but Dorian himself. Metaphorically speaking, Vane's ineptitude can be read as Wilde's intimation that censorship is ultimately a fruitless pursuit, an attempt at superficially eliminating sentiments or feelings or behaviors that, nonetheless, will continue to exist beneath the surface. Wilde, albeit obliquely, is thus able to encode a condemnation of the practice of censorship into the novel as not only misguided but, by and large, utterly pointless.

As it happens, it can be argued that the entirety of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is actually founded upon a plot device which pivots on a mockery of censorship and the claims of its propo-

nents. In "The Victorian Novel and Its Readers," Kate Flint suggests that in the Victorian period "[f]iction itself...was frequently the medium for mocking those who took its premises too seriously, a disingenuous way of asserting its status as truth while apparently deriding the genre's capacity to absorb the reader into its viewpoints" (27). Flint proceeds to claim that some Victorian novelists would pointedly comment within their works on the insufficiency of fiction to provide an effective model for living one's life, but there is another issue of interest here, one that is highly applicable to a more nuanced reading of the novel in question. Like Wilde, the author mentioned by Flint's essay—George Eliot—seems troubled by the immense moral and philosophical burdens placed upon literature, and fiction especially as a genre unconstrained by truth or fact. Flint observes that Eliot cautions against deferring to fictional tales for counsel in reality by ironically writing of instances in which reading fiction *cannot* produce the adequate knowledge needed in a difficult situation, and in doing so "anticipate a readership sophisticated enough to recognize...the slippage between fictional conventions and their own lives" (Flint 26). These sentiments provide a lens through which to analyze the hidden satire of censorship that is, in fact, built into the very heart of Wilde's novel. I contend that Wilde uses a method similar to Eliot's by thematizing an intentionally unrealistic, almost parodic portrayal of the effect of literature on its readers, if only to drive home the point that literature *cannot* affect its audience in this way, and consequently should not be looked to as a source of moral instruction. It is a reading of *Dorian Gray* which recognizes the crucial slippage between fiction and real life that reveals the irony inherent in a story premised on a young boy irreversibly corrupted by a book—a premise which, by all accounts, was fundamentally in conflict with Wilde's own beliefs about art's impact on morality and behavior.

The novel reads, in many ways, as a study of the mechanisms of corruption, of influence, and of the nature of evil itself. *How does wickedness manifest itself*?, Wilde seems to ask, and he answers: *Instantly.* When Dorian listens to Lord Henry's words upon their first meeting or immerses himself in the little yellow book, the transformation that overcomes him is practically instantaneous, taking place right before the reader's eyes. In "The Trial of Dorian Gray," Simon Stern writes the following about this notion of immediate, irrevocable corruption that furnishes the foundation of the story's drama:

> Throughout the story, and particularly in elaborating the dynamics of Dorian's interactions with the painting and the French novel lent by Lord Henry, Wilde interweaves questions of influence, corruption, and addiction—and at the same time that he retraces the logic by which jurists and legislators purported to diagnose the agency of obscene works, he also makes this logic appear utterly fantastic. At each step, Wilde plays on contemporary characterizations of the obscene work as a kind of ingestible "poison" that performs its alchemy effortlessly and immediately, and in doing so he casts doubt on the supposed efficacy of this process. [...] When seen as the easy prey of whatever immoral influences come his way—as the novel often invites us to see him— Dorian presents a thoroughly ironized portrait of a young person complying with the predictions of the obscenity police. The irony stems from the observation—trite today, but perhaps not in 1890—that anything might provoke an erotic reverie, including a discourse on the immorality of influence, if only it finds the right ear, and hence this reaction becomes the touchstone for identifying obscene works...Wilde's ironic perspective on the agency of art is developed,

> in part, through an ironic account of the agency of the obscene work, a work that appears to dominate the imagination without the intervention of the will. (Stern 6)

In deferring to the text, Stern's analysis rings true. Dorian's reaction to hearing Lord Henry's panegyric on the merits of youth and beauty, and to reading the "poisonous" yellow book that fills him with such vile urges, is metamorphic, exaggerated, overwrought—perhaps purposely so, Stern suggests. For example, upon Lord Henry and Dorian's first meeting, Lord Henry's captivating words, spoken in his "low, musical voice" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 25), work their magic on Dorian's infinitely malleable mind swiftly; as he talks, Dorian "stood there, motionless, with parted lips, and eyes strangely bright. He was dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him. Yet they seemed to him to have come really from himself. The few words that Basil's friend had said to him—words spoken by chance, no doubt, and with willful paradox in them—had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before" (27). Here the rhythmic, musical tempo of Lord Henry's voice seems to take on the tone of an incantation, his terrifying ideas weaving their way into Dorian's heart like a curse. In another crucial scene, in which Dorian reads the life-altering book Lord Henry has given to him for the first time, Wilde describes his transformative response: "It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb-show before him. [...] It was a poisonous book. The heavy odor of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of the lad...a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming" (186). By Wilde's account, Dorian is hypnotized, bewitched by some kind of unseen, inevitable toxicity, an invisible alchemy hidden in the seductive prose of

this mysterious book. And again the experience is not only intellectual but sensory—sound, sight, and smell, as if by some poisonous magic, intertwine around Dorian's mind, spellbinding his soul.

Such an effect, Stern points out, takes the metaphor of obscene literature as a kind of poison (as it had been described in the Obscene Publications Act of 1857) and runs with it to its most extreme, literal interpretation. This sensationalized description, dramatically compelling though it may be, is undeniably hyperbolized. Readers both in our day and in his cannot help but to discern a "slippage," as Flint so calls it: the difference between lived experiences and the amplified world of fiction in which Dorian Gray resides. Yet this extreme consequence, Dorian's peremptory "poisoning," is exactly what champions of print regulation feared; here we can recall Samuel Smith's parliamentary speech in favor of Henry Vizetelly's prosecution, in which he argues that "it would be impossible for any young man who had not learned the divine secret of self control to have read [Vizetelly's translation of Zola's *La Terre*] without committing some form of outward sin within twenty-four hours after" (Leckie 166). In the same vein, the "secret chord" which Lord Henry strikes in Dorian's soul, apparently "by chance," recalls the phrasing of the Hicklin test as stated by Justice Cockburn, "[that] the tendency of the matter charged...is to deprave and corrupt *those whose minds are open to such immoral influences*" (J. Williams 632, italics mine). Dorian epitomizes, to a tee, the expectations of the "obscenity police" (as Stern refers to them): an impressionable youth with an internalized tendency towards evil that is lured out almost immediately by some provocative prose, manifesting itself in unspeakable crimes. As Wilde plays out the inflated conjectures of censorship advocates like Smith and Cockburn within the confines of the novel, however, he is able to "[make] this logic appear utterly

fantastic" (Stern 6), to ridicule these illogical assumptions in a way that escapes immediate attention and is thereby all the more successful in undercutting their premises.

In employing such a strategy throughout *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde utilizes a method which French poststructuralist philosopher Jacques Lacan has termed "mimicry." Lacanian theory on mimicry and its consequences has heavily shaped the work of the influential postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhaba, whose watershed essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" discusses the unexpectedly subversive potential of colonial mimicry—the tendency of colonized people to adopt the style of dress, customs, and even mannerisms of the dominant culture. A statement by Lacan opens the essay:

> Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage...It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled—exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare. (Bhaba 125)

Bhaba explicates this passage in light of postcolonial discourse, arguing that "mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal" (126). Essentially, he maintains that the very act of colonial impersonation reveals its own inadequacy. For instance, an Indian person wearing British clothing, eating British food, or speaking with a British accent is, in actuality, no more "British" than she was before; she is still Indian, and this crucial difference makes the act of imitation absurd, ineffective. Furthermore, she has revealed the meaninglessness of the markers—such as language, physical appearance, and social or cultural traditions—which define the ruling culture, thereby undermining the dominant culture's sovereignty. Bhaba main-

tains that mimicry underscores "a difference or recalcitrance which...poses an imminent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (126). The unanticipated consequence of mimicry is an illumination of the hollowness of hegemonic signifiers, revealing that they are performative, insubstantial, culturally constructed symbols of superiority. Thus the act of mimicry undoes itself, undermining the very object of its imitation.

In the same way, Wilde's own version of mimicry has subversive power. Bhaba's take on mimicry reveals the mechanism by which it necessarily disturbs the authority that it seeks to emulate, and Wilde's replication of the object of censorship's concern (a pliant, suggestible youth with a flimsy moral compass) in the form of *Dorian Gray*'s protagonist has an identical effect. The character is an imitation of the "victim" of a suggestive book, but as in the case of the colonized subject imitating her oppressors, the imitation rings false, or is "mottled," as Lacan describes it in Bhaba's essay. Dorian's immediate, inflated reaction to reading the book, or to listening to Lord Henry's words, reads like a bad performance: hollow, artificial, exaggerated, a poor simulation of life—just as colonial mimicry is a flawed, incongruous performance of hegemonic identifiers like language and clothing. It is precisely the incongruity, the failure of the performance to be a convincing imitation, that supplies it with disruptive potential, that reveals the fabrication that lies behind it. In depicting Dorian's transformation towards wickedness as almost farcically instantaneous, as censorship's champions tended to diagnose it, Wilde is able to "[cast] doubt on the supposed efficacy" (Stern 6) of the novel's ability to infect its readers in this very manner. Wilde's imitation becomes a form of parody, a caricature which highlights and lampoons the most irrational threads that comprise the logic surrounding censorship. Concomitantly, Wilde begins to unravel the driving narrative behind censorship's aims. The fortuity with which Lord

Henry's tantalizing monologue on hedonistic pleasure finds its perfect, vulnerable recipient through Dorian Gray—touches the "secret chord" within him that was waiting to be set free—mocks the "[trite] observation" which inspired the touchstone of artistic obscenity: that "anything might provoke an erotic reverie, including a discourse on the immorality of influence, if only it finds the right ear" (Stern 6). And Wilde's framing of the yellow book as a kind of physical poison, a "poison more deadly than prussic acid, strychnine or arsenic" (J. Williams 632), plays out like a spoof as he brings the notion to life that literature has the ability to perform some sort of sorcery on its reader. Wilde, then, is able to destabilize these legal and cultural narratives (or "'normalized' knowledges," as Bhaba would call them) regarding the corrupting capacity of art in a way that does not read overtly as a denunciation, but must be investigated closely for its ironic potential. Such an oblique approach allows Wilde to deride these claims without facing pushback or retaliation from the very critics who demanded the novel's censorship to begin with.

The fact that Wilde was staunchly and vocally opposed to the notion that art could "poison" the spectator, yet constructed a novel around this very premise, lends credence to the theory that his motive was rebellious and the work an ironization of the objectives of literary regulation. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is therefore, in the manner of Wilde's later social comedies such as *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Importance of Being Earnest,* equally as satirical in its mockery of an aspect of Victorian culture to which Wilde took particular objection. Although *Dorian Gray* lacks the blatantly comedic features of farce which manifested, with great success, in the social comedies, the novel nevertheless finds a space to deride and depose the mainstream narratives (such as literary reviews in widely-read newspapers, or even legal phraseology concerning censorship) which situated literature and other modes of creative expression as dangerous sources of

social corruption. Wilde is able not only to undermine these claims but more broadly the conservative modes of thought and social frameworks which underlay them, critiquing the extremely restrictive ideals regarding masculinity and morality privileged by his contemporaries. Furthermore, he is able to effectively raise doubts in the subtext of the novel over whether censorship, even if properly executed, would be an effectual remedy to the social issues of corruption and indecency that it aims to address. Thus, we see Wilde thematizing and in fact *protesting* censorship within the very confines of a novel that was, to a considerable extent, subjected to its many limitations—a phenomenon which calls into question the consequences of such a paradox, and forces the reader to grapple with the notion that censorship could, counterintuitively, *produce* the very discourse that it attempts to suppress.

Conclusion

In the early months of 1897, Wilde's imprisonment for gross indecency at Reading Gaol was coming to an end. Perhaps he felt optimistic about his impending release or hoped that he could renew his literary career despite all that had transpired, and at this time Wilde began to write again: a now-famous letter to the former lover who had catalyzed his downfall, Lord Alfred Douglas, entitled *De Profundis* ("From the Depths"). Wilde maps out the path of his downfall in this lengthy epistle, attributing it both to Douglas' reckless extravagance and his own inability to refuse Douglas' demands. Even more importantly, Wilde rededicates himself to establishing an artistic identity within the confines of his position as a social pariah. Wilde's letter is marked by equal parts of hope and resignation; within it, he writes, "In the very fact that people will recognise me wherever I go, and know all about my life, as far as its follies go, I can discern something good for me. It will force on me the necessity of again asserting myself as an artist, and as soon as I possibly can" (*De Profundis* 102). If Wilde's prosecutors and the judge who decided his case (calling it "the worst he had ever tried" when he did so) hoped that imprisonment would rob him of his genius, or at the very least, his ambition, they would have been disappointed. Though Wilde was enfeebled physically over the course of his incarceration, his conscience, the one dedicated to championing art and its role in the world, persevered as passionately as it ever had. Wilde continues vehemently, "If I can produce only one beautiful work of art I shall be able to rob malice of its venom, and cowardice of its sneer, and to pluck out the tongue of scorn by the roots" (102).

It is unclear whether *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, Wilde's post-imprisonment poem on the brutality of prison conditions and the necessity of penal reform, as well as his last work, accomplished this goal. Although it became a commercial success (in large part due to the anonymity of its author) and earned the destitute Wilde a little money, Wilde gave up writing shortly thereafter and died in disrepute, of meningitis, in 1900. But despite Wilde's unfortunate demise, the vow he makes in *De Profundis* resonates as a symbol of Wilde's artistic spirit: his commitment, to the very end, to defending his aesthetic philosophy and exposing the flaws that he perceived in his society. If anything, Wilde's positioning of art as a vehicle of truth and protest runs counter to his prior contention that "art has no influence upon action" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 323). Unlike his detractors, however, he saw this influence as something beautiful and important instead of corrupting or malicious. Wilde neither aims to merge art and life nor divide the two entirely; he settles somewhere in the middle, and suggests that the line between them is blurred. Perhaps we can glean Wilde's judgment on the function of art and its place within life from his preface to *Dorian Gray*: "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* xv). Evidently, Wilde conceived of art not as autobiography nor as journalism, but as a reflection, a mirror that society could have held up to itself to see its true nature—and perhaps been displeased with what it saw. As Wilde continues, "The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass" (xiv). Art is the medium through which we see our true selves, and are either satisfied or infuriated by what we find, Wilde seems to say.

Nevertheless, Wilde's rebellious agenda is undeniably muddled by his eventual submission to public approval. After all, he did agree to censor *Dorian Gray* when he could have out-

right refused—there is even evidence that he undertook some of these changes of his own accord while drafting the very first version of the story. And after the chaos surrounding that story had died down, Wilde never produced another work that was quite so controversial, veering instead towards lighthearted social comedies like *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Lady Windermere's Fan,* which brought him widespread popularity and launched his career as a successful playwright. In my view, however, Wilde's capitulation to social acceptability reflects not a weakening of his convictions, but simply a change in strategy. Richard Ellmann captures it effectively, declaring that "[Wilde] submitted to the society he had criticized, and so earned the right to criticize it further" (Ellmann 471). Ellmann posits Wilde's ingratiation not as a symptom of surrender but a tool of infiltration, a way of insinuating himself into the society he aimed to ridicule in order to do so from its own vantage points. Alex Ross, in "Deceptive Picture," draws upon Ellmann to attribute the same motive to Wilde's choice to go on trial in 1895 instead of fleeing Britain for good: "It was not an act of martyrdom, or of arrogance or self-delusion, but, rather, an exercise in intellectual consistency" (Ross). *Dorian Gray* serves as perhaps the most striking example of this phenomenon. Even as Wilde ostensibly modified the text to meet the public's demands and make the story more palatable to his readers, essentially "submitt[ing] to the society he had criticized" (Ellmann 471), Wilde uses the sanitized version of the story to embed an even more damning attack against his now-unsuspecting critics. In doing so, he performs an unmasking of society—the same society of which he has made himself a part. Wilde's exposé becomes subversive for this very reason: significant portions of it are, for the most part, imperceptible.

Wilde's response to his own censorship—thematizing it, making it the subject of his censored work—introduces another complication, one that forces us to question the very mecha-

nisms of censorship and its functionality as a practice. Nicole Moore tackles a similar question in "Censorship and Literature," in which she traces a genealogical history of censorship and recounts its role in the formulation of both world and modern literatures. Moore writes that "contemporary scholarship [on censorship] emphasizes the dynamic interplay between literary expression and forms of cultural recognition, recognizing its paradoxically productive capacity to *generate as well as suppress meaning*" (Moore, italics mine). Here, Moore references censorship's ability to circumscribe literature, to define it by what it *cannot* be through prohibition, persecution, even tyranny. She does not deny that censorship has a colored history of "brutal repression…of writing, writers, performance, and cultural producers by sovereign power underwritten by violence" (Moore), but she also acknowledges a hidden side to censorship, one that is more obscure and, indeed, seemingly self-contradictory: its ability to galvanize the very discourse that it attempts to eradicate. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault observed such an effect in his own analysis of the Victorian era, noting the irony of the discursive explosion that occurred with the inception of the restrictive policies and discourses by which the period was marked. For example, although sex was neurotically policed at this time, discourse on the topic did not wane, in fact proliferating with various attempts to curb and confine the boundaries of human sexuality. That such attempts to restrict sexual freedom and discussion actually produced a contrary discursive outcome supports Foucault's hypothesis that prohibition has "the paradoxical ability…to call into discourse, or interpolate, that which was otherwise unnamable" (Moore).

Foucault essentially postulates a way to view censorship as having a *constructive* impact on art and literature instead of a destructive one, framing it not just as a conduit of "brutal repression" but as an opportunity to redefine the very limitations that it establishes. Because censorship

defines and specifies what cannot be said—naming the "unnamable," so to speak—it inherently opens itself up to be questioned, challenged, contested. And since censorship is often exercised legally or hegemonically on the basis of some kind of moral justification, Moore observes that its practice places "not only art in opposition to the law…but also culture in opposition to morality." This inverse relationship is problematized by Wilde and other like-minded authors (such as Thomas Hardy, whose essay "Candour in English Fiction" shares much in common with Wilde's anti-censorship literary criticism), who protest this imagined opposition between art and ethics and find a space to allude to such within their works. Thus, I find that Wilde takes Foucault's postulation a step further—in Wilde's case, censorship does not merely inspire him to "call into discourse" that which has been censored (such as sex), but actually spurs him to interpolate *censorship itself* into *Dorian Gray.* The novel stands as a paradigm of the constructive power of censorship; without it, the version of the tale that readers know today would likely be without its impassioned, infinitely quotable preface, and immortal lines such as "The books that the world calls immoral are the books that show the world its own shame" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 323). The censoring of the book and the existence of censorship as a practice are in many ways the catalysts that set the story in motion, and that give it its subversive, reactive potential.

Because censorship has historically and sociologically figured as a repressive, silencing force within culture, it can be difficult to assess its productive power. But Moore brings up the intriguing point that censorship is actually vital to the very fabric of human communication: "The mundane acts of selection, prioritization, authorizing, and refusal that occur in every piece or act of communication are understood as at once essential to it and all forms of censorship. Without such editorial sanctions and control, whether unconscious, individual, collective, or po-

litical…communication would be impossible, and sociality too, not to mention culture" (Moore). Given this fact, I believe it is possible to view censorship not only as important, but actually *essential* to any act of creative expression or communication—literature included, even perhaps especially. There is a new way to appreciate *Dorian Gray* in light of this interpretation: not despite the fact of its censorship, but *for* this very reason. Looking closely, the novel could not be such a perfect "rhetorical distillation" (as Eve Sedgwick termed it) of its cultural moment had it not been subjected to such dictatorial forces, or been "pulled about," as Wilde himself would say. Wilde's era was characterized at once by some of the strongest attempts at oppression, as well as some of the fiercest protests against it. As it exists now, his novel manages to express these complicated dualities, the ones that force us to reconcile the period's self-righteous, sanctimonious surfaces with the dissident and revolutionary beliefs that they disguised. From our vantage point in history, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* consummately—if unintentionally—captures the Zeitgeist of the Victorian age: its culture and its subcultures, its conflicts and its contradictions, its nuances and its paradoxes. On the one hand, we can see reflected the struggle to stifle the artist, to smother his voice, to preserve some illusion of decency or virtue. On the other, we can find Wilde, fighting to be heard. ♠

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