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**“WILDE AND SHAW: NATIONALISM, SOCIALISM
AND SEXUALITY.”**

**A selective comparative study of Oscar Wilde and George
Bernard Shaw’s Identities, Ideologies and Contribution to
Anglo-Irish Literature.**

GEARÓID NOEL PATRICK O’FLAHERTY

**A Thesis Submitted In Fulfilment Of The Requirements For The Degree Of
Doctor Of Philosophy (PhD) In English Literature.**

Supervisor: Thomas Docherty

**SCHOOL OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF KENT AT CANTERBURY
2002**

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ABSTRACT

“WILDE AND SHAW: NATIONALISM, SOCIALISM AND SEXUALITY.”

**A selective comparative study of Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw’s
Identities, Ideologies and Contribution to Anglo-Irish Literature.**

A Thesis Presented To The School of English

The University of Kent at Canterbury

By

Gearóid Noel Patrick O’Flaherty

Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw are two names immediately associated with dramatic comic genius, sartorial brilliance and epigrammatic élan. Yet for all their undoubted talent and international success their reputations as Irish writers remained somewhat ambiguous in relation to the land of their birth. Their nationality or “Irishness” has for the most part been considered secondary as a source of inspiration or influence to their art and ideology.

My dissertation is divided in three sections dealing with Wilde and Shaw’s nationalism, socialism and sexuality (in the case of Wilde). The objective of my research was to analyse the significance of nationality and exile on the political and artistic ideologies of both writers in relation to their literary works and socialist philosophies. The evidence uncovered supports the supposition that their nationality remained an integral constituent in their subsequent socio-political and artistic identities. Indeed their nationality could rarely be segregated from their art and personalities. This became more apparent while researching both the Irish and English literary and critical media responses to Shaw and Wilde as artists and individuals. Questions pertaining to Wilde’s nationality were introduced by the English media during the Wilde trials where they portrayed Wilde’s artistic beliefs as foreign, and part of a “French and pagan plague”¹ on English art and life. Conversely, many Irish cultural and political publications during the Irish Literary Revival

¹ *Daily Telegraph*, 6 April 1895.

castigated Shaw's views of Ireland as antithetical or "uncongenial" (to use Shaw's own words), to their own desired view of establishing an exclusively separatist Gaelic Ireland. In Shaw's case, his nationality and commitment to the Irish Literary Revival was questioned because he refused to condone or endorse certain nationalist philosophies associated with the Gaelic League or Irish Literary Theatre.

Wilde and Shaw personified an archetypal iconoclasm, an artistic-individualism that left them marginalized or ostracised both in Ireland by the Irish Literary Revival, and in England (their adopted country) by problems of identity, nationality, sexual persuasion, and a shared non-conformity towards the establishment. My research has enlightened my understanding of these two fascinating writers immeasurably. Their unique contribution to Irish literature should be acknowledged and recognised, thereby hopefully expurgating Joyce's accusatory inference that Wilde and Shaw's comic genius and astute social commentaries (written admittedly for a predominantly British audience), were often misinterpreted or dismissed by their Irish audience/distracters as ingratiating, sycophantic buffoonery, irrelevant to Ireland and Irish nationalist concerns.²

² James Joyce, *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (eds.), (Faber and Faber, London, 1959), p.202. "In the tradition of the Irish writers of comedy that runs from the days of Sheridan and Goldsmith to Bernard Shaw, Wilde became, like them, court jester to the English."

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Introduction

In 1946, Hesketh Pearson claimed that Wilde and Shaw were “more widely known and appreciated on the continent of Europe than any writer of the English language except Shakespeare.” Pearson added:

The extraordinary fact of two Irishmen, born within two years of one another, coming to London and winning an exampled notoriety with the aid of their wit, humour, and personal oddity, is sufficiently curious; but when it is added that they were two of the greatest personalities in literary history, and further, that they were utterly dissimilar by nature in nearly every respect, the story of their impact on one another has a unique fascination.³

Pearson’s observation identifies the central focus of this thesis – the parallel but unequal development of two Irish literary figures moving with uncanny coincidence, and from different circumstances, to the centre of the London stage. In analysing that development, I have attempted to show that their socio-political, sexual and artistic persuasions could not be entirely separated from Irish identities made more complex and precarious by exile. For Wilde and Shaw, England triggered the condition of comic outsider, one central to their attempts to chasten Victorian society, divorced by their Irish birth and upbringing, from patriotic sentiment. Among the many commentators who have observed this fact, G. K. Chesterton, perhaps sums it up best when referring to Shaw as being “cut off from the soil of Ireland” but retaining “the audacity and even the cynicism of the national type...no longer fed from the roots with its pathos or its experience...with “roots...in the air.”⁴ Such a description applies equally to Wilde, for both men reflected rootlessness in personas that manifested difference in dress, mannerism, speech, language, message and meaning.

Wilde and Shaw, in a strict interpretational sense, however, did not reflect Ireland’s spirit in their works, since their more cosmopolitan world superseded the aims of

³ Hesketh Pearson, *The Life of Oscar Wilde* (London: Methuen, 1946, revised edition, 1954, Penguin, 1960), pp. 159-160.

⁴ G. K. Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw* (Guild Books, London, 1951), pp. 17-18.

organizations such as the Gaelic League. Indeed it might be said that their English domicile, allied to their English themes, at times pushed them beyond the peripheries of their Anglo-Irish identities and into its English counterpart. Philip L. Marcus, in assessing Irish writers' contributions to the Celtic Revival, acknowledges that neither Wilde nor Shaw "wrote out of a conscious desire to contribute to the development of a national literature or indeed identified himself with the Revival." It was, however, possible to argue that their work revealed what he called "an Irish sensibility."⁵ Marcus undoubtedly identifies that sensibility as the main driving force of their dramas - satire. Confirming that view, McHugh and Harmon observe Wilde and Shaw as nineteenth century exponents of a satirical tradition launched in the Restoration period by Congreve, and continued by Farquhar, Goldsmith, and Brinsley Sheridan. Wilde became the "brilliant exploiter of the conventional form of contemporary London society drama" while Shaw utilised "the vehicle of conventional dramatic form" for the projection of his radical ideas. That all of these writers were satirists was "no accident" since they were caught in "a halfway position between two cultures" and thus were "less committed to and more objective about English values, or conventions".⁶

When Wilde and Shaw did focus on Ireland, it was invariably in correspondence, reviews, essays, and expressions of opinion on its political dilemma (and from that perspective Shaw's contribution is considerable).

But though they were outsiders belonging fully to neither country nor its avowed traditions, the patriotic direction, in so much as there was one, was invariably towards Ireland. The paradox kept them squarely in that "curious middle place" applicable to Irishmen in England.⁷ But it also enable them to effect a clinically detached assault on Anglo-Saxon convention that, according to A. E. Malone, gave Shaw (and Wilde) carte blanche to "view English life without preconceived notions and without those

⁵ Phillip L. Marcus, "The Celtic Revival", *The Irish World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1977), p.218.

⁶ Roger McHugh and Maurice Harmon, *A Short History of Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1982), p.143.

⁷ Quoted in David Fitzpatrick, "Britain, The Absorbing Neighbour", *Ireland of the Welcomes*, vol. 41, July-August, 1992, p.372.

prejudices which always encircle a human being in his native environment”.⁸ G. J. Watson, in an analysis of that condition, states the following:

The Anglo-Irishman may pick and choose among the shattered fragments of Irish culture: he may seek identity, but with the freedom of his own inborn detachment. The native Irishman has no such option...⁹

Ireland was too small and provincial to satiate the artistic ambitions of Wilde and Shaw. They both realised that they needed international and cosmopolitan influences to inspire and challenge their imaginations. Shaw, through Ibsen, sought revolutionary drama. His higher aim, however, was to make an impact in almost every sphere, as artist, philosopher, politician, economist, neo-religionist, and in language itself. His refusal to adopt traditional English spelling or even adhere to established punctuation norms could be seen as a standing protest to England’s medium of communication, which he sought to overthrow and replace with his own, more practical version.¹⁰ And his spelling of England’s greatest dramatist and posthumous rival for the playwright’s throne (without its concluding “e”) is further, if little recognised evidence of the iconoclasm beyond patriotic consideration.

In contrast to Shaw’s stated artistic-philosopher aims,¹¹ Wilde sought to influence on a more artistic than philosophical level. His essays *Intentions* framed attempted revolutionary artistic ideals by turning established norms on their head: life imitating art, the paradoxical ‘truth of masks’ and the beauty of fiction (art) over fact in “The Decay of Lying”. In a war of opposites and persistent paradox, Wilde chipped away at societal hypocrisies, and did it with consummate skill in his plays. Shaw, in the same war, took a different route through five novels, which, by *An Unsocial Socialist*, had reached a frustrating climax, which hurled him inexorably in the direction of

⁸ A. E. Malone, *The Irish Drama*, (Benjamin Bloom, Inc., New York, 1965), p.227.

⁹ G. J. Watson, *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival* (Croom Helm Ltd., London 1979), p.152.

¹⁰ See *George Bernard Shaw on Language*, Abraham Tauber (ed.), (London: Peter Owen Ltd., 1963), pp. xvii-xxvi.

¹¹ George Bernard Shaw, “Preface”, *Man and Superman* in *Prefaces* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1934), pp. 161-163. See also Eric Bentley, *Bernard Shaw* (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1950), pp. 126-133.

Wilde's dramatic style. To reach it, he successfully utilised Wilde's epigrammatic techniques, and undoubtedly reaped further advantage from the tragedy of Wilde's premature personal demise, which cleared the stage of the only serious contemporary competition to his maturing dramatic style.

Inherent Irish paradox drove them from unsympathetic native land, on a voyage of discovery that never quite reached the absolutist shores of enlightenment, nor resolved the paradox, in themselves, to each other, or in their art. Their literary fire, lit as much by differences in genre as in genius, burnt its way through universal themes and pre-occupations considerably distant from the parochial peasant mythology of Ireland and its advancing Celtic Revivalism.

For Wilde, there was esoteric, romanticised conflict seeking some kind of enlightened resolution; for Shaw, the conflict between the pragmatic real world and the world of religious and cultural superstition: an attempt to set man free from bondage, to political and economic progress. His novels were a prelude to his socialism; Wilde's poems and first play *Vera*, a prelude to aestheticism and revolutionary views of art.

In the middle of that path, Wilde and Shaw found a mutual but brief political common ground on the socialist platform. Shaw's Fabian, economically-based Marxist variety, was profoundly at odds with Wilde's more artistic, moral or spiritual variety as expressed in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*. Yet both socialist ideals found parallels in opposition to the established pillars of capitalism and so-called democracy, private property, private enterprise and private profit. It was a socialist bridge that led to concepts of individualism, accommodated separately in macrocosmic and microcosmic camps, yet driven by fundamentally equal goals - the betterment of man and mankind.

On the stage their comic genius flowered to full bloom. Outrageous exposure of human imperfection, if not injustice, fuelled for one a comedy of manners that ridiculed the upper classes, and for the other a comedy of ideas that are often placed the last laugh on unsuspecting audiences of the day. There seems little doubt that this capacity for iconoclastic comedy was rooted in the perspective of foreigner. But it was a double-edged comic sword that as much carved out careers leading to fame and

fortune, as it cut through credibility to blunt (with the aid of perennial Irish comic imagery) underlying seriousness of intent.

The tragedy as it related to Wilde's life is self-evident. It struck at the moment of triumph when two plays, *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, ran simultaneously at the Haymarket and St James's Theatre, and were abruptly torn from their theatrical moorings amidst rumour and scandal. The rest, as they say, is history. It needs only be said that the perils of a free wheeling aesthetic sense that ran contrary to the prevailing winds of morality, drew Wilde inexorably to the gutter and an early grave, and deprived the world of an artistic genius still developing.

From that tragedy, Shaw, struggling through his negative phase of pre-dramatic development, eventually triumphed. It is tempting to invoke the metaphor of a career rising up from the ashes of a compatriot's funeral pyre. The uncanny coincidence of the departure of the main, if not only rival for centre-stage, invites it. Cynically interpreted, it was a convenient death, which cleared the way for Shaw¹², and one, which simply enabled him to continue where Wilde left off. Between departure and death, however, lay a period of five years (1895-1900) during which time Shaw wrote five plays of markedly different character to the Wildian variety (*You Never Can Tell*, *The Man of Destiny*, *The Devil's Disciple*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*). And during Wilde's exile to France, Shaw sent him copies of his plays upon publication. With his artistic views well established and his dramatic powers growing stronger at the time of Wilde's fall, it would, perhaps, be more appropriate to suggest that Shaw simply utilised Wilde's techniques to mould his own, uniquely Shavian comedies, and upon doing so, moved in a very different direction to Wilde, had the latter lived on.

¹² William Butler Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977), p.284.

Part One: Nationalism

Chapter One: Wilde's Irish Background and Paternal Influences.

Oscar Wilde was born into a prominent, prosperous Dublin family of the Protestant ascendancy in 1854. Both his parents were colourful, eccentric individuals who achieved recognition in their chosen fields of medicine and the arts. Oscar's father, Sir William Robert Wills Wilde - surgeon, writer and antiquary, was born in 1815. Much of William Wilde's childhood was spent in the West of Ireland. This experience fostered his interest in Irish nature, history and culture. His passion for antiquities was nurtured in the company of the local natives which he enjoyed; they instilled in him a desire to learn more about his country's ancient past, and from them he imbibed a love of folklore and history that would remain with him throughout his life, and which he would pass on to Oscar. He was educated at Elphin grammar school, county Roscommon, where Oliver Goldsmith had studied in the previous century. In 1832 his parents sent him to Dublin to study surgery.¹³

William Wilde was apprenticed to Amraham Colles, the most distinguished Irish surgeon of the nineteenth century. Colles worked at Dr Steeven's' Hospital, one of the oldest voluntary hospitals in Ireland and Great Britain. The hospital had strong literary associations as Jonathan Swift was a member of the first Board of Governors and Esther Johnson (Stella) was a benefactor. The hospital also possessed a remarkable library, which had been bequeathed to it by a physician named Edward Worth. The novelist Charles Lever¹⁴ was a fellow medical student with William Wilde at Dr. Steeven's' Hospital and they developed a friendship that lasted throughout their lives. Lever later abandoned medicine to devote himself entirely to literature. William Wilde also studied at the Park Street Medical School, which was one of the leading private medical schools of the period. Here Wilde came under the influence of the distinguished Irish physicians Robert Graves and William Stokes.

¹³ For a compelling insight into Sir William Wilde's education and subsequent medical career see Davis Coakley, *Oscar Wilde: The Importance of Being Irish*, (Dublin: Town House, 1994), pp.12-20.

¹⁴ Charles Lever, Irish novelist best remembered for *Charles O'Malley*, *The Irish Dragoon* and *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer*.

In his final year of studies, 1837, Wilde, though ill with fever,¹⁵ acquitted himself brilliantly in his examinations - something Oscar would later emulate in his academic studies. His recovery was hastened by a sea voyage in the Mediterranean as a doctor to a wealthy patient (Robert Graves had required a doctor to travel with a patient on a health-seeking cruise to the Holy Land, and had approached Wilde.) Depending on what source you read, Wilde had at least two good reasons for undertaking this voyage. According to Hesketh Pearson:

The trip was a godsend, not only on account of his health, but because of his keen interest in diseases and ancient monuments, Egypt and Palestine supplying him with a varied assortment of both. The number of people in Egypt who were either blind or half-blind from trachoma first aroused his interest in eye-diseases; while the tombs, pyramids, and mummy-pits he was able to explore sharpened his appetite for archaeological research.¹⁶

Davis Coakley argues differently:

It has been suggested that Wilde agreed to the proposition [the Mediterranean cruise], because the change of climate would benefit his health. There was another consideration, however, which may have dictated the expediency of a prolonged absence abroad: a young woman had become pregnant and William Wilde was the father.¹⁷

Whatever his reasons were for going, William Wilde benefited greatly from the experience. Doctor and patient departed in September 1837, and in a little over eight months they visited Madeira, Tenerife, Algiers, Sicily, Egypt, Rhodes, Cyprus, Syria, Palestine and Greece. Each new country they visited allowed William Wilde to combine his two great interests - medical research/observation and the study of antiquity. He took extensive and detailed records of custom, dress code, medical condition, and diet of all indigenous people he came in contact with, as well as

¹⁵ According to Coakley, it was most probably connected with a cholera epidemic that was sweeping through the country at the time.

¹⁶ Hesketh Pearson, *op cit.*, p.15.

¹⁷ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, p.13.

exploring and studying each country's geography, history and archaeology. He found Egypt and Greece overwhelming by the magnitude of the antiquarian treasures just waiting to be studied. Fascination in the antiquities was obviously something he passed on to Oscar, something I will discuss later at further length.

On William Wilde's return to Dublin he passed on the knowledge he had gained by writing a book¹⁸ describing his travels and by lecturing before several scientific societies. His book reveals some interesting evidence, while the vogue of writing is predominantly in the analytical, meticulous style of a man of science; there are distinct passages that have many of the manifestations indicative of Oscar's later characteristic expression and turn of phrase. According to Davis Coakley, William Wilde's obsessiveness in collecting and recording facts is apparent in the book but the work also contains some quite rhetorical passages, usually dramatising the historical and cultural significance of a particular place. He was for instance very moved when he visited the ancient city of Tyre:¹⁹

I asked myself, was this, indeed, the joyous city, whose antiquity was of ancient days; the mart of nations; the strong city of Tyre...Where every precious stone was a covering: the sardius, the topaz, and the diamond; the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper; the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle. Whose ships were constructed of the fir-trees of Senir, the cedars of Lebanon, and the Oaks of Bashan...Whose merchandise consisted of silver, iron tin lead, and the vessels of brass; and whose wares were emeralds, purple, and brodered-work, and fine linen, and agate, and blue cloth, and chests of rich apparel, and the persons of men. At whose fair...Dedan purchased the precious cloths for chariots, in exchange for ivory and ebony.²⁰

What Coakley finds interesting about this passage, is the descriptive similarity it bears to the analogous biblical imagery Oscar Wilde would use when writing many of his short stories and poems; and in particular in his play *Salomé* and narrative poem 'The Sphinx'. In *Salomé*, Jokanaan, according to Salomé, had a mouth that was redder

¹⁸ William Wilde, *The Narrative of a Voyage to Madeira, Teneriffe and Along the Shores of the Mediterranean*. (Curry, Dublin, 1844).

¹⁹ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, p.14.

²⁰ William Wilde, *op cit.*, pp.353-354.

than the “pomegranate-flowers that blossom in the garden of Tyre”, he had eyes “like black holes burned by torches in a Tyrian tapestry”, and his hair was like “the cedars of the Lebanon.” The Syrian wears a ring of agate and Herod calls for “the ivory tables and the tables of jasper”. When Herod makes his appeal to Salomé to spare the life of Jokanaan, he offers her “the largest emerald in the world”, and when she remains unmoved he offers her topazes (yellow as the eyes of tigers), onyxes (like the eyeballs of a dead woman), sapphires (as blue as blue flowers), beryl, sardonyx, turquoise and carbuncle.²¹

Similarly, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian is described as being enthralled by the myriad enchantment of precious stones, and would:

...often spend a whole day settling and resettling in their cases the various stones that he had collected...rose-pink and wine-yellow topazes, carbuncles of the fiery scarlet with tremulous four-rayed stars, flame-red cinnamon stones, orange and violet spinels, and amethysts with their alternate layers of ruby and sapphire.²²

Vyvyan Holland once said that his father viewed words as beautiful baubles with which to experiment, just as a child plays and builds with coloured building blocks. Oscar Wilde’s wonderful use of language, his exceptional descriptive powers, equipped as they were, with a vivid, unerring ability to titillate the reader’s senses, owed much it would seem to his father. William Wilde also imparted a lifelong interest in Egyptology to his younger son, who would later wear an Emerald scarab ring²³ on the little finger of each hand. Sir William Wilde had written in great detail on the scarabaeus or sacred beetle, describing it as “The emblem of creative power, of the earth and the sun...”²⁴ The further one reads about Sir William Wilde, the more numerous certain parallels with his son emerge. His life contains a litany of events that would metamorphose in some form, in his son’s later work. When he returned to

²¹ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, pp.14-15.

²²Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, chapter XI, in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* Introduction by Merlin Holland (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p.102.

²³ A ‘scarab ring’ has a gem cut in the shape of a beetle and is engraved with hieroglyphic symbols on the reverse side.

²⁴ William Wilde, *op cit.*, pp.252-254.

Dublin he did not marry the mother of his child; however he did make arrangements with the mother for the care of the child, who was given the name Henry Wilson²⁵, which was almost certainly derived from “William’s son”; this would have been in accordance with the common practice of the time. Henry Wilson studied medicine with his father’s support and he eventually became an ophthalmic surgeon like his father. Interestingly, in those days there was a pragmatic approach among the upper classes to children born outside wedlock, and it was expected that the father or his family would be responsible for the upbringing and education of such children. “It was considered a much more serious matter to betray one’s class through an ill-advised marriage than to have a mistress and illegitimate children.”²⁶ - Hence the consternation of Dorian Gray’s friend Basil Hallward when he heard of Dorian’s plans to marry the actress Sibyl Vane: “But think of Dorian’s birth, and position, and wealth. It would be absurd for him to marry so much beneath him.”²⁷ I will investigate this class phenomenon concerning homosexuality later in the thesis.

William Wilde’s book and lecturing soon brought him membership of the Royal Irish Academy at the early age of twenty-four. He was taken up by society and especially liked by women, which pleased him well. His success with them, Hesketh Pearson asserts, was not won by any outward physical advantage.

He was none too clean in appearance, and plain enough to be included, at a later date, in a series of caricatures of celebrated ugly men. Clearly he possessed charm of another sort, for the patronage of older women, such as Maria Edgeworth, helped him in his profession, while the favours of the younger ones were an important part of his recreation. But accidents will happen, even to doctors, and in due course several children appeared without the advantage of their father’s name.²⁸

Before he married, William Wilde had two further illegitimate children, two

²⁵ The identity of Henry Wilson’s mother is uncertain, although inference was made of a certain well-known society lady named Mrs Crummels - see Curtin McAuliffe, ‘Henry Wilson’ in *Irish journal of Medical Science*, (Dublin, 1969). [Mentioned in Coakley *op cit.*].

²⁶ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, p.16.

²⁷ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* Introduction by Merlin Holland (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p.63.

²⁸ Hesketh Pearson, *op cit.*, p.16.

daughters. William Wilde's eldest brother, Ralph, accepted them both as his wards. This enlightened approach towards biological children would be replaced as the century advanced by the hypocrisy and intolerance of the Victorian period. In later years, when he was married, William Wilde sometimes took all his children, natural and legitimate, with him on holiday. Coakley deduces that this probably explains Oscar Wilde's fascination, so evident in his plays, with women who have hidden pasts and with children who were born outside wedlock. And so just as Sir William Wilde would eventually employ his illegitimate son Henry as his assistant surgeon, Oscar would later similarly create dramatic scenes of characterization or plot construction borrowed from his own eccentric family's numerous peccadilloes; his portrayal of Lord Illingworth in *A Woman of No Importance* endeavouring to employ his illegitimate son Gerald as his private secretary is an ideal example:

Lord Illingworth: So that is our son, Rachel! Well, I am very proud of him. He is a Harford, every inch of him. By the way, why Arbuthnot, Rachel?

Mrs Arbuthnot: One name is as good as another, when one has no right to any name.

Lord Illingworth: I suppose so - but why Gerald?

Mrs Arbuthnot: After a man whose heart I broke - after my father.

Lord Illingworth: Well, Rachel, what is over is over. All I have got to say now is that I am very, very much pleased with our boy. The world will know him merely as my private secretary, but to me he will be something very near, and very dear.²⁹

This shows how much of an influence Sir William Wilde had on his work. Questions pertaining to identity and legitimacy would again be revisited and scrutinised in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. James Vane, Sibyl's brother, has doubts about the legitimacy of his birth. The matter comes to a head when he finally confronts his mother:

'Mother, I have something to ask you' he said. Her eyes wandered vaguely about the room. She made no answer. 'Tell me the truth. I have a right to know. Were you

²⁹ Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance*, Act II, in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* Introduction by Merlin Holland (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p.489.

married to my father?’ She heaved a deep sigh. It was a sigh of relief. The terrible moment, the moment that for night and day, for weeks and months, she had dreaded, had come at last, and yet she felt no terror. Indeed in some measure it was a disappointment to her. The vulgar directness of the question called for a direct answer. The situation had been gradually led up to. It was crude. It reminded her of a bad rehearsal. ‘No,’ she answered, wondering at the harsh simplicity of life. ‘My father was a scoundrel then!’ cried the lad, clenching his fists. She shook her head. ‘I knew he was not free. We loved each other very much. If he had lived, he would have made provision for us.’ ‘Don’t speak against him, my son. He was your father, and a gentleman. Indeed he was highly connected.’³⁰

Sir William Wilde’s pursuit of knowledge allowed him to combine a medical career with an impressive literary career. His interest in antiquity and folklore was something that his son Oscar would later explore and incorporate his own writing.

³⁰ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Chapter V, in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* Introduction by Merlin Holland (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p.61.

Chapter Two: Irish Nationalism - “Speranza” of *The Nation* and Wilde’s American Lecture Tour of 1882.

Wilde’s mother, Jane Francesca Elgee, reputedly converted to the cause of Irish nationalism after witnessing the funeral procession of Thomas Davis.³¹ Apparently she was so struck to find so many people honouring a poet, and one that she had never heard of, that she turned nationalist and embraced the cause of national liberation. In later years Lady Wilde told a journalist that until her eighteenth birthday she had never written anything:

Then one day a volume of “Ireland’s Library”, issued from *The Nation* office by Mr Duffy, happened to come my way. I read it eagerly, and my patriotism was enkindled. Until then I was quite indifferent to the national movement, and if I thought about it at all, I probably had a very bad opinion of the leaders. For my family was Protestant and conservative, and there was no social intercourse between them and the Catholics and nationalists. But once I had caught the nationalist spirit, all the literature of Irish songs and sufferings had an enthralling interest for me. Then it was that I discovered that I could write poetry. In sending my verses to the editor of *The Nation*, I dared not have my name published, as I signed them “Speranza” and my letters “John Fanshawe Ellis”, instead of Jane Francesca Elgee.³²

The death of Thomas Davis, the horrors of the famine and the collapse of Daniel O’Connell’s movement for reform through parliamentary methods, led to the emergence of an extreme element in the *Young Ireland* movement under the

³¹ Thomas Davis, poet and graduate of T.C.D. He advocated political reform in his nationalist writings. In 1842 he co-founded the nationalist newspaper the *Nation* with the journalist Charles Gavan Duffy, and a young barrister called John Blake Dillon. Their aim was to follow Daniel O’Connell’s campaign politically, who had forced Catholic Emancipation on to Peel and Wellington in 1829, and revive at the same time love of Irish tradition and pride of race. Davis died suddenly of scarlet fever on September 16, 1845. His death was a blow the magnitude of which can never be assessed. Aged thirty-one, a life of dedicated patriotism spread out before him. He was one man who might have healed all the wounds in life and brought together unionist and separatist, Catholic and Protestant, Anglo-Irish and Gael.

³² Terence de Vere White, *The Parents of Oscar Wilde: Sir William and Lady Wilde*, (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1967), p.81. See also Horace Wyndham, *Speranza: A Biography of Lady Wilde* (T.V. Boardman & Co., London 1951), p.23.

leadership of John Mitchell, which began to advocate armed rebellion. By early 1846, within six months of Davis's death Jane Francesca Elgee was submitting nationalist verses to Gavan Duffy that left little doubt where her sympathies lay. In 1848, around the time of the abortive *Young Ireland* rebellion her verses had started to become increasingly militant; yet the government appeared more concerned with the 'nationalist' prose appearing in *The Nation*. Gavan Duffy as editor was put in prison to await trial for sedition. In his absence, Jane Elgee wrote editorials for two successive issues of the paper, which said outright what Gavan Duffy had put circumspectly. In 'The Hour of Destiny', on the 22 July 1848 she announced, "The long pending war with England has actually commenced" and defiantly implored her readers to seize the initiative by taking a more militant stance against their colonial oppressors:

Ireland! Ireland! It is no petty insurrection - no local quarrel - no party triumph that summons you to the field. The destinies of the world - the advancement of the human race - depends now on your courage and success; for, if you have courage success must follow...It is a death struggle between the oppressor and the slave - between the murder and his victim. Strike! - Strike...!³³

However she acquitted the people of England of all blame in the misgoverning and suffering of the Irish:

Not the brave generous English people but the tyrant imbecile ministry are guilty of thus recklessly plunging their own nation and ours into the murderous collision...Let the queen come with all the proud prerogatives of royalty.... Oh! let thy heart speak young queen, there is yet time; hesitate - and the page of history that notes that reign will be scarcely legible to posterity, for the blood of thy subjects will have stained it.³⁴

A week later in 'Jacta Alea Est' ('The Die is Cast') she fiercely exclaimed:

³³ *The Nation*, 22 July 1848.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

The nation has at last decided. England has won us one good service at least. Her recent acts have taken the last miserable pretext for passive submission...Oh! for a hundred thousand muskets glittering brightly in the light of heaven...³⁵

The effusiveness of Speranza's style strikes a modern reader as almost absurd; but one has to allow not only for the taste of the time, but also for the extraordinary excitement that prevailed.

It was the principal defence of the Young Irelanders, and one of the causes of the break with Mitchell, that their agitation was against the government and not against the queen. The essence of treason was not present. Speranza was still prepared to retain, if England capitulated promptly 'the golden link of the crown'; the monarchy was to continue to unite the two nations.

One cannot over-emphasise the importance of that last statement, Speranza was not an instinctive republican, and in her Cassandra mood, even when she was exhorting the men of her generation to be 'freedom martyrs' and to lay down their heads 'a sacrifice for Ireland upon the red battlefield', she did not forget the lessons of history. The most awful responsibility on anyone who encourages a revolution is the dilemma that if it fails lives will have been lost to no purpose; if it succeeds it may lead to anarchy when the mob gets out of hand, then the suppression of mass revolt leads to yet another bloodbath. With this in mind Speranza warned:

you have to combat injustice, therefore you must yourselves be just. You have to overthrow a despot power, but you must establish order, not suffer anarchy. Remember it is not against individuals, or parties, or sects, you wage war, but against a system.³⁶

She struck the same note of caution amid the dithyramb of the 'Jacta Alea Est' article. The fact that between articles with such headings as "How to break down a bridge, or blow up one", "How to buy and try a rifle", "Casting bullets", Speranza possessed a

³⁵ *The Nation*, 29 July 1848.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

sharp political awareness which she exploited to obtain maximum exposure for Irish nationalism. Discounting those paragraphs where enthusiasm carried her off the ground, 'The hour of Destiny' and the 'Jacta Alea Est' articles were notable efforts, a call to arms, a plan of campaign, a plea for restraint in victory. It reveals a noble idealism that would have a profound effect on her son.

Oscar Wilde left Dublin in 1874 for Oxford, he would never return to live permanently in the land of his birth again. "The two great turning points in my life", he wrote in *De Profundis*, "were when my father sent me to Oxford and when society sent me to prison".³⁷ Declan Kiberd has explored the significance of this revealing equation - for in both institutions he learned what it was to be an outsider, an uninvited guest, an Irishman in England.³⁸ Wilde inherited this strong sense of national identity from his parents, and it was to remain with him for the rest of his life.

Wilde had left Ireland because England possessed cultural opportunities and academic challenges that Ireland could no longer offer him. It was during his final year of study at Trinity College Dublin, that Oscar Wilde first became curious and interested in Catholicism, something Sir William Wilde was keen to discourage. Thus, what better way to dissuade foolish, embryonic fancies concerning the Church of Rome than by distancing the son from the temptation?

At Oxford, Wilde displayed little of his Irish background, and revealed even less about his political views, with the exception of signing himself "Oscar Fingal O' Flahertie Wills Wilde"³⁹ - indisputable proof of his Irish Identity. Yet he adopted the persona of a fastidious, artistic Englishman, not the defiant, inflammatory, seditious Irish nationalist one would have expected, given the rebellious nationalism of his mother. Declan Kiberd has suggested that just as: 'His mother had sought to reconquer Ireland, so he would surpass her by invading and conquering England. She

³⁷ Oscar Wilde, *Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (ed.), Rupert Hart-Davis (Oxford University Press, 1979), p.197.

³⁸ Declan Kiberd, 'The London Exiles: Wilde and Shaw' in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing II*. General Editor Seamus Deane (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), p.375.

³⁹ H. Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, (Eyre Methuen, London, 1976), p.21.

had wished to repossess Irish folklore and the native language, but he would go one better and achieve a total mastery of English.’⁴⁰

To achieve this Wilde realised that he had to excel academically, and thus reveal to his fellow Oxonians how ‘Celtic Genius’ could usurp their language, educational establishments and cultural bastions, and in the process challenge the stereotypes of nationality associated with these same institutions. Even before entering Magdalen College, Wilde had surpassed his parent’s expectations with his academic progress. After attending Portora Royal School, Enniskillen (1864-1871) he won a scholarship to Trinity College Dublin. In June 1873 he won the Trinity Foundation Scholarship. By June the following year (1874) he had added the Berkeley Gold Medal (The Blue Ribbon of classical scholarship at T.C.D.) Wilde entered Oxford in June 1874 after winning a Demyship in Classics to Magdalen College. At Oxford, this ostentatious and precocious young Irishman fulfilled his academic promise by repeatedly obtaining excellent results in his examinations. Many of Wilde's friends at Oxford have recalled how partial Wilde was to socialising, and antithetically how adverse he was to work, be it mental or physical. Even without allowing for his alleged slothfulness, Wilde's academic record at Oxford was most impressive; he gained a first class in Classical Moderations (Mods) on July 5 1876, won the Newdigate prize for poetry with *Ravenna*, June 10 1878, and obtained a first class in Litterae Humaniores (Greats) on July 19 1878.

Oscar Wilde’s Lecture Tour of North America 1882/83.

If it was by being sent to Oxford that Wilde first learned what it was to be an outsider, to acknowledge his national identity, then it was his lecture tour of America in 1882 that rekindled in him the desire to express his Irishness.⁴¹ “Having erased his Irish

⁴⁰ Declan Kiberd, ‘Wilde and the English Question’ *The Times Literary Supplement*, (December 16, 1994. no.4785) p.13.

⁴¹ Oscar Wilde set sail from Liverpool on the *Arizona* on December 24th, 1881, for New York; his lecture tour lasted twelve months and he sailed for England on the *Bothnia* on December 27th 1882.

accent at Oxford, he had tended also to minimise the difference between English and Irish.”⁴² In the city of ‘dreaming spires’ Wilde had shown his fellow English Oxonians that this Irishman was their equal, and at times their better in many social and academic spheres. But while Wilde continued to be resented for his individuality and lack of conformity, he refused to be stereotyped regardless of whom his audience was. Just as he subverted the image of the ‘stage Irishman’ in Oxford, he similarly saw America as the ideal environment for furthering his own identity and individuality. The first response of his compatriots was adverse. *The Irish Nation* in New York carried a disapproving headline at the beginning of his tour, on 14 January 1882:

Speranza’s Son
 Oscar Wilde Lecture on What He
 Calls the English Renaissance

 The Utterness of Aestheticism

 Phrasing About Beauty while a
 Hideous Tyranny Overshadows
 His Native Land

 Talent Sadly Misapplied⁴³

Wilde had initially come to America to lecture on his aesthetic ideology, but he soon realised that his nationalism and political ideology were repeatedly under scrutiny. Richard Ellmann describes how Wilde was moved to portray the Irish race as once the “most aristocratic in Europe”, and Ireland as once Europe’s university. He made the debatable boast that rhyme, the basis of modern poetry was entirely of Irish invention and then added, “but with the coming of the English, art in Ireland had come to an end, and it has had no existence for over seven hundred years. I am glad it has not, for art could not live and flourish under a tyrant.” However, he informed his audience that Ireland’s artistic impulse was not dead; it persisted “in every running brook”, and

⁴² Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), p.185.

⁴³*Ibid*, p.185.

in the pervasive esteem of great Irishmen of the past. Wilde declared that when Ireland, which he called “the Niboe of nations”, as Byron had called Rome, regained her independence, her schools of art would also be revived.⁴⁴

However, apparently not all American critics acknowledged his nationalism or praised his work. One such man was Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson⁴⁵, a puritan from Boston, Massachusetts. Two women who were on the list of persons visiting literary figures usually wished to see were Julia Ward Howe, a sister of Wilde’s New York friend Sam Ward, and Harriet Beecher Stowe (of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* fame). Both Julia Ward Howe (editor) and Colonel Higginson were among the original founders and contributors of *The Woman’s Journal*, the literary arm of the American Woman’s Suffrage Association. Higginson was typical of the Brahminism that had settled on Boston once the bonfire of the abolition crusade had burned itself out; for when the civil war had ended in 1865 with the freedom of the Negro assured, the creative impulse in Boston had begun to wane; a more conservative atmosphere had pervaded the city with each succeeding year, becoming a little more dogmatic, philosophically aloof, critical. Conservatives such as Colonel Higginson handed down judgements on art, literature, education - Harvard University in Boston was regarded as its own - and it had become the paradise of the academicians. Higginson was expected by some people to be ready to welcome the young poet, Oscar Wilde.

It is probable that Wilde knew about Higginson’s past, and his present quest for universal suffrage. A story Oscar Wilde could have seen in *The Nation* (Boston, MA) of February 23 1882 read: “Abolitionists, it is universally allowed, have paved the

⁴⁴*Ibid*, p.186. Wilde’s quotations are taken from the *New York World* and the *St Paul Globe*, both dated 18 June 1882.

⁴⁵ Higginson, a puritan, was a fascinating character. A pre-war reformer from the school of Emerson (seeking a better life by community labour, simple living, and high thinking about God and morals.). He had turned his energy in zeal for temperance, and women suffrage with the same passion he once had for emancipating Negroes. ‘Intrepid iconoclast of entrenched abuses’, he had been called by William Winter, the New York drama critic. Higginson had been injured while defending a fugitive slave evade recapture from southern slavers; and had twice gone to “Bleeding Kansas” in the 1850’s to help the fanatic John Brown fight slavery, he had earned his title of “Colonel” by leading a black regiment in the civil war. Twice married, once pastor of “The Free Church of Worcester”, he was a tireless writer of essays, biographies, editorials, histories, a frequent visitor to Europe, and a lover of poetry.

way for the Women's Rights movement and furnished gratis the methods of agitation." When the Abolitionists' work was finished they joined with other reform agitators to organise the American Woman's Suffrage Association. Wilde had inherited not only a strong sense of nationalism from his famous mother, but had been greatly influenced by her feminist beliefs also. These beliefs were also known and admired by Higginson. However, it was inevitable that Higginson's conservative Puritanism would clash with Wilde's liberal aestheticism, regardless of their feminist affinity.

Higginson wrote in an earlier issue of the magazine - it appeared on February 4th, 1882, - an article which he considered to be timely in its wholesomeness. His pen denounced Wilde's poems as 'immoral'; they should not be read; their "nudities do not suggest the sacred whiteness of an antique statue, but rather the forcible unveiling of some insulted innocence." According to Higginson, Wilde was as guilty as Whitman⁴⁶, although "Whitman's offences rest on a somewhat different ground"; Whitman's poem 'Drum Taps,' describing Civil War moods, "always sounded hollow" since Whitman "never personally followed the drum, but only heard it from the comparatively remote distance of the hospital." In his righteousness, the Colonel was ignoring the fact that Whitman had shattered his health nursing wounded soldiers. Higginson, having led Negro troops in the conflict, felt himself to have been especially noble. And, in his martial fury, Higginson went on to ask what kind of Irish patriot was Wilde, for that matter? His mother's fervour for freedom was strong enough to inspire the enlistment of an army; but "is it manhood for her [Ireland's] gifted sons to stay at home and help work out the problem, or to cross the Atlantic and pose in ladies' boudoirs or write prurient poems which their hostesses must discreetly

⁴⁶ On the 17 January, in the Aldine Hotel, Philadelphia, when Wilde was asked by reporters which American poet he most admired, he replied without hesitation - "I think that Walt Whitman and Emerson have given the world more than anyone else." Wilde met Whitman on 18 January, and the next time he was interviewed by a reporter, he said of Whitman, "He is the grandest man I have ever seen, the simplest, most natural, and strongest character I have ever met in my life. I regard him as one of those wonderful, large, entire men who might have lived in any age and is not peculiar to any people. Strong, true, and perfectly sane: the closest approach to the Greek we have yet had in modern times."

ignore?”⁴⁷ The Colonel pointed out that, “In the vicious period of the English Georges, Byron was banished from society, Moore was obliged to purify his poems, for less offences against common decency than have been committed by Oscar Wilde.”⁴⁸

But it was really the beginning of the article that caused a flurry among the cultured neighbours of Boston society. The Colonel had said:

Women are as distinctively recognised as the guardians of the public purity as are the clergy of the public morals. Yet when a young man comes among us whose only distinction is that he has written a thin volume of very mediocre verse and that he makes himself something very like a buffoon for notoriety and money, women of high social position receive him at their homes and invite guests to meet him, in spite of the fact that if they were to read aloud to the company his poem of *Charmides* not a woman would wait in the room until the end.⁴⁹

It was *Charmides* that most roused, at various times during Wilde’s tour, defenders of the ‘pure’ in literature. That symbolic poem, telling of a young man who made love to the statue of Athena and was hurled to death for the profanation, was taken in a very literal way by many a critic who saw it as merely ‘fleshly.’ What was interesting to note about Wilde’s tour, was once again the admiration and respect commanded by his mother, Speranza, outside her own country. For so many Americans she personified the struggle for Irish freedom. Thus Speranza’s son, as he proceeded across the continent, found unexpectedly that he had potential allies among Irish-Americans, who paid no attention to his aesthetics but liked his nationality. Undoubtedly Wilde owed much of his American popularity and public acclaim to his mother’s exploits rather than his own; this was evident when he visited St Paul, Minnesota on 17 March 1882 - St Patrick’s Day. He was introduced to his audience by a Father Shanley as a son “of one of Ireland’s noblest daughters - of a daughter

⁴⁷ Lloyd Lewis, and Henry Justin Smith, *Oscar Wilde Discovers America* [1882], (New York, 1936), p.119

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.119

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.119.

who in the troublous times of 1848 by the works of her pen and her noble example did much to keep the fire of patriotism burning brightly.”

Although Wilde castigated England’s mistreatment of Ireland, many nationalists felt he lacked his mother’s vitriolic, trenchant, condemnation of the English oppressors. This belief was shattered on 6 May 1882 when the Invincibles in Dublin’s Phoenix Park assassinated the Irish Chief Secretary, Lord Frederick Cavendish, and the permanent under-secretary, Thomas Burke.⁵⁰ Wilde responded quickly to the murders; when asked for his reaction by an American journalist, he replied, “When liberty comes with hands dabbled in blood it is hard to shake hands with her”, but then added, “We forget how much England is to blame. She is reaping the fruit of seven centuries of injustice.”⁵¹

What made this statement so extraordinary was not its vituperation; for it lacked the scathing, virulent, acerbic condemnation of English Imperialism more associated with his mother, rather what made this so significant was the individual concerned and the timing of the reply. Significantly Cavendish was acquainted with the Wilde family, and had dined with them at Merrion Square, Dublin. Thus, Wilde’s response was all the more remarkable, indeed unthinkable when the more militant leaders of Irish opinion (including his own mother) denounced the killings. This incident was unusual among Wilde’s political statements on the Irish question, for most of his criticism and condemnation of English policy in Ireland exhibited the rational thought of his sharp analytical mind, whereas this was emotional. Whether it was genuine, or an attempt to exploit the atmosphere for Irish nationalist propaganda is uncertain, but Wilde profited from his outburst, receiving unaccustomed praise from editorial writers.

It is unfortunate that Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s opinion and response to Wilde’s subsequent comments on the murder of Lord Cavendish were never

⁵⁰ The Invincibles were a splinter group of the old *Young Ireland* movement. They were an extremist group influenced by previous militant Fenianism, and they openly advocated the use of violence in the pursuit of Irish independence.

⁵¹ H.Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, (London: Methuen 1976), p.71. Wilde’s quotation taken from the *Philadelphia Press*, 9 May 1882.

recorded - but one could plausibly infer that the Colonel's remarks, questioning Wilde's nationalism influenced the Irishman's answer. As was often the case Wilde had the last say and with an obvious reference to Higginson's critique of *Charmides* Wilde added:

If one wants to realise what English puritanism is - not at its worst, when it is very bad - but at its best, and then it is not very good - I do not think one can find much of it in England, but much can be found around Boston and Massachusetts. We have got rid of it. America still preserves it, to be, I hope, a short-lived curiosity.⁵²

But what must have galled the poor Colonel even more was the fact that Wilde's uncle was a Confederate. John Elgee, the second son of Charles Elgee, Lady Wilde's great-grandfather, followed a successful legal career in Louisiana and played a prominent part in the American Civil War on the Confederate side. This probably explains in part Oscar's own sympathy for the Southern side in the American Civil war. Whatever redeeming [Nationalist] features, Wilde exhibited after Cavendish's assassination, in Higginson's eyes, were surely obliterated when a reporter revealed that Wilde wished to visit the Honourable Jefferson Davis on his way from New Orleans to Mobile.

Wilde's admiration for the former President of the Confederacy offers us more valuable information into his own nationalist ideology. "I have an intense admiration for the chief of the Southern Confederacy," said Oscar, and then continued:

I have never seen him, but I have followed his career with much attention. His fall, after such an able and gallant pleading of his own cause, must necessarily arouse sympathy, no matter what might be the merits of his plea. The head may approve the success of the winners, (the Abolition of slavery), but the heart is sure to be with the fallen.⁵³

Wilde went on to say:

⁵² *Ibid*, p.122.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p.366.

The case of the South in the Civil War was to my mind much like that of Ireland today. It was not a struggle to see the empire dismembered, but only to see the Irish people free, and Ireland still as a willing and integral part of the British Empire. To dismember a great empire in this age of vast armies and overweening ambition on the part of other nations is to consign the peoples of the broken country to weak and insignificant places in the panorama of the nations, but people must have freedom and autonomy before they are capable of their greatest results in the cause of progress. This is my feeling about the Southern people and it is about my own people, the Irish. I look forward to much pleasure in visiting Mr. Jefferson Davis.⁵⁴

Those two quotes provide some interesting material in the context of Wilde's assessment of Anglo-Irish relations. For while Wilde rightly equated the people of the Confederacy with the Irish people - both fought for self-determination against a larger and more powerful neighbour; one would also have to recognise the distinct analogy between the southern plantation owners of the Confederacy and the landlords of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy class - both stood against the tide of history, bulwarks of a bygone time. It is conceivable that Wilde was also alluding here to the inevitable demise of his own privileged class's authority in Ireland.

On the Fourth of July (Independence Day), Wilde once again reciprocated these feelings when recounting his meeting with Jefferson Davis, "He impressed me very much as a man of the keenest intellect, and a man fairly to be a leader of men on account of a personality that is as simple as it is strong, and an enthusiasm that is as fervent as it is faultless."⁵⁵ What is interesting about this description is that it is very similar to the qualities synonymously equated with Charles Stewart Parnell; evidently this was not lost upon Oscar Wilde or the Irish-American population at large.

The Irish Americans had decided to support the Land League movement, whose aim was to win land ownership for the Irish tenant farmers. Stories of evictions fuelled anti-British feeling in America and large sums of money crossed the Atlantic to support the tenants in their conflict. The League's leader in Ireland, Charles Stewart Parnell, and many of his colleagues, had been arrested in October 1881, and they were

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.366-367.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.372.

still in Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin when Wilde began his American tour. Wilde realised, as did his mother, that the Irish Americans were becoming a new and significant force in the age-old dispute between England and Ireland. He told the newspaper reporters why it was so significant that he met Jefferson Davis:

We in Ireland are fighting for the principle of autonomy against empire, for independence against centralisation, for the principles for which the South fought...So it was a matter of immense interest and pleasure to me to meet the leader of such a great cause. Because, although there may be a failure in fact, in ideas there is no failure possible. The principles for which Mr.Davis and the South went to war cannot suffer defeat.⁵⁶

According to Davis Coakley,

Under these circumstances Wilde was only too happy to dilate on “Anglo-Saxon stupidity” in his lectures and to give nationalist answers to the many reporters who interviewed him about relations between England and Ireland. He complained to one reporter in New York that the English took his epigrams as earnest and his paradox as prose. Observations such as this won him many Irish-American friends, but they did not endear him to the readers of the English papers that reported on his American tour. Naturally Speranza was delighted with her son’s high profile.⁵⁷

When Wilde reached California, he once again expressed the importance his mother’s nationalist teachings had on him. Because of her, he was very familiar with the work of the Young Ireland poets, and their influence on him can be discerned in a lecture he gave on Irish poets and poetry in San Francisco on 5 April 1882. In the course of the lecture he spoke of the poetry and music of Ireland, of the country’s ancient ruins, and of the Celtic myths and their impact on European literature. He stirred the Irish patriots by tributes to Daniel O’ Connell and read from that leader’s poem, “Feelings of an Irish Exile”.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.372

⁵⁷ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, pp.183-184.

He criticised Goldsmith for his lack of national feeling and he praised the poets and writers of the 1848 rebellion. He quoted from the works of several of the poets, including Gavan Duffy, James Clarence Mangan, Richard D'Alton Williams and Denis Florence McCarthy. He could remember several of these poets coming to his house, along with political figures such as Smith O' Brien, John Mitchel and Charles Gavan Duffy. He praised these, and the poet he described as the greatest of them, Thomas Davis. He mentioned the poets of the present day, Ferguson, Waller - whose "Little Nell" he considered a perfect treasure and quoted in full - De Vere, and finally his mother: "Of the quality of Speranza's poems I perhaps should not speak - for criticism is disarmed by love - but I am content to abide by the verdict of the nation."⁵⁸ He finished the lecture on a high note:

Indeed the poetic genius of the Celtic race never flags or wearies. It is as sweet by the groves of California as by the groves of Ireland, as strong in foreign lands as in the land which gave it birth. And indeed I do not know anything more wonderful, or more characteristic of the Celtic genius, than the quick artistic spirit in which we adapted ourselves to the English tongue. The Saxon took our lands from us and left them desolate. We took their language and added new beauty to it.⁵⁹

I have stressed how important maternal influence was in arousing Wilde's sense of nationalism, and his lecture tour of America certainly emphasised the importance of national identity. What then did we discover about Wilde's political ideology and did it differ greatly from that of his mother? We know that prior to the death of Lord Cavendish Wilde's advocacy of Irish nationalism lacked the tempestuousness of his vociferous mother; it was only during his lecture tour of North America that Wilde revealed how passionate he felt about Irish nationalism and how his ideology diverged or departed from that of his mother. Speranza may have championed the cause of Irish self-determination, but she still believed that the British monarchy should unite the two nations by - 'the Golden link of the Crown'. Her son, in contrast, generally insisted on his republicanism, as on the 21 February in Louisville, "Yes, I am a thorough Republican. No other form of government is so favourable to the growth of

⁵⁸ Robert D Pepper (ed.) *Irish Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, (San Francisco, 1972), p.33

⁵⁹ M J O'Neill, 'Irish poets of the nineteenth century' in *University Review*, (Dublin, 1955), p.29-33

art.” In his poem “Ave Imperatrix”, he indicated that Britain should also become a republic:

And thou whose wounds are never healed,
Whose weary race is never run,
O Cromwell’s England! must thou yield
For every inch of ground a son?
Go! Crown with thorns thy gold-crowned head,
Change thy glad song to song of pain;
Wind and wild wave have got thy dead,
And will not yield them back again.
Yet when this fiery web is spun,
Her watchmen shall decry from far
The young Republic like a sun
Rise from these crimson seas of war.⁶⁰

Then with a certain amount of pretentiousness he added, “Of course, I couldn’t talk democratic principles to my friend the Prince of Wales, that you understand is simply a matter of social tact.” To which Richard Ellmann rightly observed, “It was less tactful to vaunt his royal connections.”⁶¹ This is what many people find problematic when equating Wilde with the cause of Irish Nationalism; however, one must acknowledge where Wilde was living, and recognise whom his social associates and literary contemporaries were, and more importantly who his audiences were. One must separate his public, social, image from his political beliefs. For was that boastful comment any different from Speranza, rebellious, seditious, inflammatory voice of the *Nation* who had advocated revolution and castigated the British government, only to gratefully accept her nomination to the British government’s Civil List later when she was financially destitute. That decision did nothing to dilute her patriotism, just as her son’s social sphere did not compromise his nationalism.

⁶⁰ Oscar Wilde, “Ave Imperatrix”, in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, Introduction by Merlin Holland (London: HarperCollins, 1994), Stanzas 22, 23, 30, p.853-854.

⁶¹ Richard Ellmann, *op cit.*, p.186.

On the 27 March 1882, the San Francisco *Daily Examiner* interviewed Wilde. The article heading was 'Oscar Wilde: An interview with the apostle of aestheticism.' During the interview "A Dissertation on Poetry" took place, in which Wilde went on to express his political creed:

Reporter: 'Judging from the Tenor of your own poems, I fancy that "Charmides" (pronouncing the name with the soft accent) is your favourite poem, Mr. Wilde?'

Wilde: 'Char - Charmides,' He replied correcting; 'Yes, that is my favourite poem. I think it my best. It is the most finished and perfect. The people of America have taken very kindly to my "Ave Imperatrix", however.'

Reporter: 'Perhaps a feeling of nationality prompts this choice.'

Wilde: 'Probably so.'

Reporter: 'Does the "Sonnets to Liberty" voice your political creed?'

Wilde: You mean the sonnet beginning:

Not that I love thy children whose dull eyes

See nothing save their own unlovely woe,

Whose minds know nothing, nothing care to know -

No, that is not my political creed. I wrote that when I was younger. Perhaps something of the fire of youth prompted it.'⁶²

The reporter went on to say that Wilde's recital of the lines was surprisingly impressive and pleasing, a perfect modulation and an earnest, almost pathetic tone giving the recital tone real interest. Wilde replied, "If you would like to know my political creed," short pause, "read the 'Liberatis Sacra Fames' - I think it is the seventh sonnet."⁶³ The Sonnet referred to is as follows:

Albeit nurtured in democracy,

And liking best that state Republican

⁶² *Daily Examiner*, (San Francisco), 'Oscar Wilde: An Interview with the Apostle of Aestheticism.' 27 March 1882.

⁶³ *Daily Examiner*, (San Francisco), 'Oscar Wilde: An Interview with the Apostle of Aestheticism.' 27 March 1882.

Where every man is Kinglike and no man
Is crowned above his fellows, yet I see,
Spite of this modern fret for Liberty,
Better the rule of One, whom all obey,
Than to let clamorous demagogues betray
Our freedom with the kiss of anarchy.
Wherefore I love them not whose hands profane
Plant the red flag upon the piled-up street
For no right cause, beneath whose ignorant reign
Arts, Culture, Reverence, Honour, all things fade,
Save Treason and the dagger of her trade,
And murder with his silent bloody feet.⁶⁴

Wilde's republicanism is very much evident here, and he would rather accept dictatorship than to yield to demagoguery. When Oscar returned to Britain, his rekindled nationalism remained strongly intact.

Davis Coakley records many of Wilde's visits to Ireland after his year lecturing in America.⁶⁵ On Wednesday, 21 November 1883 Wilde returned to Dublin to give two lectures at the Gaiety Theatre. He stayed at the Shelbourne Hotel and gave the first lecture on 'The house beautiful' on the day after his arrival. The eighteen-year-old W.B. Yeats was in the audience, but more importantly for Oscar, his future wife Constance Lloyd was also there to listen to him. On the evening of his first lecture, Oscar returned to his old university and dined on Commons at the top table with the fellows of Trinity College.

Constance Lloyd also attended his lecture on 'Impressions of America', which was held on the Friday afternoon. One newspaper critic commented on his "strongly-marked English accent" and on the fact that he spoke with considerable rapidity. According to another reporter: "Oscar spoke in a quite conventional tone, but yet so

⁶⁴ Oscar Wilde, "Libertatis Sacra Fames", in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, Introduction by Merlin Holland (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p.858.

⁶⁵ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, pp. 190-192.

distinctly and in such a key that it reached the limits of the theatre.”⁶⁶ Most of the press coverage of the lectures was very favourable, as no doubt Wilde was pleased to be a celebrity in his native city. On Sunday, 25 November Oscar and Constance got engaged. They were married six months later on 29 May 1884 at St James’s Church, Paddington. They had two children, Cyril who was born in July 1885 and Vyvyan in November of the following year.

In January 1883 a group of enthusiasts led by Francis A Fahy established the Southwark Irish Literary Club in London with the intention of cultivating Irish history, art and literature. The club organised a series of lectures, which were given by experts in the field of Irish literature. One of the more memorable lectures took place in September 1887 when Justin McCarthy MP read a paper on ‘the literature of ‘48’. The occasion was a special one because Charles Gavan Duffy, who had returned from exile in Australia, was in the chair. Oscar Wilde was among the group who greeted Duffy on his arrival. Some members of the club saw irony in this, as they viewed Wilde as “the representative of a movement with which Young Ireland could have no sympathy; - the very head centre of aestheticism himself-more curious still, that this same representative should be the son of ‘Speranza’”.⁶⁷

The Southwark club formed the nucleus of the Irish Literary Society, which was established in the early 1890s. This Society played an important role in the Celtic Revival and it attracted some very gifted writers, such as W.B. Yeats, Stopford, T W Rolleston, Dr John Todhunter, Lionel Johnson and Alfred Perceval Graves. W P Ryan, who wrote the first detailed account of the society in 1894, recalled:

When it was suggested that Oscar Wilde should be invited to join the Society, one who knew him said that he would certainly put off the matter with a quip or a paradox, which, however, would be a good one, and worthy of being entered in the minute-book. This friend was a false prophet, for Oscar Fingal O’Flaherty Wills Wilde was soon an honoured name on our register.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Dublin Evening Mail*, 23 November 1883, p.3.

⁶⁷ W P Ryan, *The Irish Literary* (Privately published, London, 1894), p.28.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.119.

Willie Wilde also joined the society and Speranza was elected as the first honorary member. Several members of the society were members of the famous 'Rhymers' Club', and Oscar Wilde occasionally took part in the activities of this club, which had a definite Celtic bias. Wilde, like Yeats, was a firm believer in the hereditary genius of the Celtic race. If some of his contemporaries saw an incongruity between Wilde's enthusiasm for the Celtic Revival and his advocacy of aestheticism, Wilde saw the two interests as complementary. He idealised Celtic life, writing that 'in the whole of Celtic myth and legend... the loveliness of the world is shown through a mist of tears, and the life of a man is no more than the life of a flower'.⁶⁹ In an early biographical sketch published in *The Biograph* in 1880, Wilde is described as:

A believer in the religion of beauty, a marked figure among the newest group of aesthetes, a dweller in the high places of feeling. To take this position he is specially fitted by reason of a singularly enthusiastic temperament and an exceptional education. He is the offspring of a fervid and emotional race, and the child of two persons of unusual character. In him the strong emotional tendency of the Irish nature which with most of the race feeds personal feeling alone becomes, through intellectual development, an ardour for art and its glories.⁷⁰

Wilde's enthusiasm for Celtic art and design was genuine and lasting; Coakley mentions a dinner Wilde attended at the House of Commons in 1891 where he told some Scottish and Welsh members

That to break bread and drink wine together is, as Christ saw, the simplest and most natural symbol of comradeship, *all* of us who are Celts, Welsh, Scotch, and Irish, should inaugurate a Celtic dinner, and assert ourselves, and show these tedious Angles or Teutons what a race we are, and how proud we are to belong to that race.⁷¹

⁶⁹ See *De Profundis*, in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (ed.), Rupert Hart-Davis (London, Hart-Davis, 1962), p.477.

⁷⁰ Anonymous, Oscar Wilde. *The Biograph*, iv, London, 1880, pp. 130-135.

⁷¹ Oscar Wilde in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (ed.), Rupert Hart-Davis (London, Hart-Davis, 1962), p.287.

When an Englishman remarked in Wilde's hearing that in the nineteenth century the Macs had done everything and the Os nothing, Wilde replied: 'You forget. There are O'Connell and O Wilde.'⁷²

Coakley has argued that Wilde's influence on the writers of the Celtic Revival is often underestimated.⁷³ For instance, Yeats' aesthetic theory and his obsession with the importance of the mask or anti-self for the artist were derived almost wholly from Wilde. Yeats was invited by Wilde to join his family for dinner on Christmas Day 1888. After the dinner, Wilde read from the proofs of his essay *The Decay of Lying*, which was being prepared for publication at the time. Yeats was captivated as he listened to Wilde, and the experience had a major influence on the poet's subsequent artistic development. John Millington Synge's great work of the Celtic revival, *The Playboy of the Western World*, the plot of which revolves around 'the power of a lie', was also influenced by Wilde's ideas in *The Decay of Lying*.⁷⁴

Wilde returned to Dublin for the last time to give a number of lectures in January 1885. About 500 people attended Wilde's first lecture at the Gaiety, on the subject of 'Beauty, taste and ugliness in dress'. During the lecture Wilde praised the traditional Irish hooded cloak describing it as a very admirable garment and declaring "it was decidedly Irish in very remote times, as their sculptures in Kilconnell Abbey proved."⁷⁵ Wilde included more references of Irish interest in his second lecture, 'Art in modern life'. He praised the Celtic and Islamic contributions to non-representational art and, according to the following report of the lecture, he received applause from his audience when he praised Irish art over English art.

It was always possible for a nation by artistic power to give to the commonest material vastly increased value. There was no reason why we in Ireland should not do this. There was in all the Celtic races this power of decoration. Whether they viewed the remains of ancient art in the Royal Irish Academy or in the museums of Northern

⁷² Vincent O'Sullivan, *Aspects of Wilde*, (London: Constable, 1936), p.80.

⁷³ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, p.190.

⁷⁴ Declan Kiberd, "The Fall of the Stage Irishman" in *The Genres of the Irish Literary Revival*, (ed.) R. Schleifer (Dublin, Wolfhound Press, 1980), pp. 39-60.

⁷⁵ Robert Harborough Sherard, *The Life of Oscar Wilde* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1906), p.447.

Europe, they would be struck by the far greater sense of beauty evinced in the early Celtic work than in the old English art, which was deficient in delicacy and sense of proportion.[Applause.] And there was no reason why they should not show that those perceptions of the beautiful, and capacities of delicate handling as to hue and colour, were not dead.⁷⁶

A report on the lectures in the *Freeman's Journal* declared that the audience was very appreciative, and the critic went on to observe –

Evidently people have ceased to regard Mr Wilde as the eccentric apostle of a momentarily fashionable craze, to be seen, heard, and laughed at. They have, apparently, come to discover that underneath the extravagances credited to the aesthetic cult there lie principles of truth and beauty applicable to the pursuits and incidents of everyday life.⁷⁷

Wilde's lectures at the Gaiety also received notice in the first issue of *The Dublin University Review*. The writer confessed that he was surprised that the lectures did not attract bigger audiences as he thought their quality was very good. He went on to speculate on the reasons for the apparent lack of interest, and he warned Wilde about the consequences of being earnest!

In the first place the British public, though fond of a joke, has little respect for the joker; and when, as in the present case, the latter turns out to be in earnest, it is very apt to regard him as a fool.⁷⁸

The same reviewer observed that it was widely believed that aestheticism was proving 'a good thing' for its chief apostle, and that a true prophet was not usually financially successful.

However a few more lectures as unfortunate, from a commercial point of view, as those recently delivered in this city, will materially remedy this defect, and will help

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.442.

⁷⁷ W.W. Nelson, *Oscar Wilde From Ravenna to Salomé* (Dublin, 1987), p.20.

⁷⁸ *Dublin University Review*, vol I, 1, 15. 1885.

to restore Mr Wilde to public favour. Meantime he will not regard the decrease in his receipts, for, as he stated in the second lecture, "True art is economical".⁷⁹

Between 1887 and 1889 Oscar, seemed to be concentrating on a career in journalism. He became editor of *The Woman's World* and he pledged to deal "not merely with what women wear, but with what they think, and what they feel".⁸⁰ The new editor made sure that there was a place in the magazine for Irish women. He published work by his mother and by some of her friends, such as an article on Alexandra College by Lady Samuel Ferguson. He also published essays on places of Irish interest, such as Dublin Castle, with illustrations by Walter Osborne, and on the seaside town of Youghal, County Cork. He supported Irish industry by including detailed accounts of traditional Irish crafts, under titles such as 'Irish modern art', 'The poplin-weavers of Dublin', 'The knitters of the Rosses', 'Lace-making in Ireland' and 'A few hints on Mountmellick embroidery'. In the second volume he included a collection of fairy stories written by his mother under the title *Irish Peasant Tales*.

Coakley discloses that during this period Wilde did a considerable amount of book reviewing⁸¹. Some of his criticisms could be very incisive, but he claimed that he always wished to be fair, adding on one occasion the proviso 'as fair as an Irishman with a temperament ever wants to be'.⁸² He could also be very generous and he was particularly generous to the young W.B. Yeats. He reviewed Yeats' *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* in *The Woman's World* in February 1889, and he praised the work highly: "It is delightful", he wrote, "to come across a collection of purely imaginative work, and Mr Yeats has a very quick instinct in finding out the best and the most beautiful things in Irish folklore."⁸³ In the following month he reviewed *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* in both *The Woman's World* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Again Wilde was fulsome in his praise:

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Oscar Wilde in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (ed.), Rupert Hart-Davis (London, Hart-Davis, 1962), p.194

⁸¹ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, pp. 192-193.

⁸² Oscar Wilde in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (ed.), Rupert Hart-Davis (London, Hart-Davis, 1962), p.233.

⁸³ Oscar Wilde (ed.), 1887-1889, *The Woman's World* (London: Cassell, February 1889).

He is essentially Celtic, and his verse, at its best, is Celtic also... It is impossible to doubt, after reading his present volume, that he will some day give us work of high import.⁸⁴

In 1887 Wilde wrote devastating reviews of two books by John Pentland Mahaffy: *Principals of the Art of Conversation* and *Greek Life and Thought*. He dismissed *The Art of Conversation* as a clever little book:

It fascinates in spite of its form and pleases in spite of its pedantry, and is the nearest approach that we know of, in modern literature to meeting Aristotle at an afternoon tea.⁸⁵

He claimed that the book on Greece was inaccurate and provincial, and he went on to say that Mahaffy “is clever, and, at times, even brilliant, but he lacks reasonableness, moderation, style and charm”.⁸⁶ This attack is difficult to understand, as Wilde had written to Mahaffy the previous year asking his former tutor to recommend him as a suitable person to be an inspector of schools. Wilde did not get the job and he may have thought that Mahaffy had not used his influence on his behalf. On the other hand, the motivation for the review may have been a desire to show his independence of his old tutor. There were some fundamental differences between the two men, particularly on Irish politics and culture. Mahaffy strenuously opposed Home Rule for Ireland and he had no appreciation for the richness of Gaelic culture. At the time, it appeared that Home Rule might become a reality because of Gladstone’s support. In reaction, Mahaffy had become an enthusiastic Tory, and his book on Greece bristled with extreme Unionist prejudice. “There is always something peculiarly impotent about the violence of a literary man”, Wilde observed in his review.⁸⁷ He continued the following week with:

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Oscar Wilde, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 December 1887.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 November 1887.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Mr Mahaffy's new book will be a great disappointment to everybody except the Paper-Unionists and the members of the Primrose League... how can there be anything more depressing than Mr Mahaffy's continual efforts to degrade history to the level of the ordinary political pamphlet of contemporary party warfare? There is... no reason why Mr Mahaffy should be called upon to express any sympathy with the aspirations of the old Greek critics for freedom and autonomy... but in his attempts to treat the Hellenic world as 'Tipperary writ large,' to use Alexander the Great as a means of whitewashing Lord Salisbury, and to finish their battle of Chaeronea on the plains of Mitchelstown, Mr Mahaffy shows an amount of political bias and literary blindness that is quite extraordinary.⁸⁸

As Anne Varty argues:

Mahaffy had assaulted two worlds that Wilde cherished: Ancient Greece and Modern Ireland. After pointing out scholarly defects of the work, ridiculing Mahaffy's efforts to draw contemporary parallels, the review ends with a personal attack on the man who was once a friend and teacher. Wilde declares that there is something "if not parochial, at least provincial" about the author's "passion for imperialism", and that Mahaffy had added nothing to "his reputation... as a historian, at critic, or a man of taste". Behind Mahaffy's apparently localised suspicions of autonomy and democracy lurked offensives against large principles which Wilde consistently held to: those of freedom and individualism.⁸⁹

Whatever Mahaffy felt about the reviews at the time, it did not end his friendship with Wilde, as some years later he went to the opening night of one of Wilde's plays at the Haymarket Theatre in London, and he subsequently wrote a complimentary note to the playwright. Wilde responded with generosity:

My dear Mahaffy, I am pleased you like the play, and thank you for your charming letter, all the more flattering to me as it comes not merely from a man of high and distinguished culture, but from one to whom I owe so much personally, from my first and my best teacher, from the scholar who showed me how to love great things. Let

⁸⁸ *Pall Mall Budget*, 17 November 1887.

⁸⁹ Anne Varty, *A Preface To Oscar Wilde*, (Longman, 1988), p.23.

me sign myself, in affection and admiration, your old pupil and your old friend, Oscar Wilde.⁹⁰

Although not given to over-exertion, Wilde's brother Willie also made an impact in the world of journalism. He became a lead writer on the *Daily Telegraph* and he wrote for *The World* and *Vanity Fair*. His greatest journalistic achievement was his reporting of the Parnell Commission in 1889. *The Times* had accused Parnell of being associated with a terrorist conspiracy in Ireland, and they supported their allegations with a number of letters. The Parnell Commission investigated these charges. Oscar Wilde was sufficiently interested in Parnell to attend some of the sessions, and he was sketched by S P Hall as one of the celebrities at the inquiry. Speranza saw Parnell as a man of destiny, and Oscar also supported the Home Rule movement, although he never took an active role in politics. However, 13 volumes of the Parnell Commission were among the books found in Wilde's library when many of his possessions were auctioned in April 1895. The Commission cleared Parnell of any complicity in terrorist activity, but shortly afterwards Captain O'Shea named him as co-respondent when he instituted his suit for divorce. Where lies and forgeries did not succeed, Victorian prudery proved triumphant. Parnell fell from his political pinnacle and he was hounded to his death shortly afterwards at the early age of forty-five. When discussing Parnell's fate on one occasion Wilde remarked: "There is something vulgar in all success. The greatest men fail - or seem to the world to have failed."⁹¹ He believed that the private lives of men and women should not become the subject of public scrutiny.

Wilde once described himself as "a most recalcitrant patriot"⁹² in a letter in which he wrote about his Home Rule sympathies. He objected to any suggestion of Irish inferiority and he ascribed such an opinion to "the insolence with which the English have always treated us" and to the fact that "the Irish among the English-language

⁹⁰ Oscar Wilde in *Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (ed.), Rupert Hart-Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.111.

⁹¹ Vincent O'Sullivan, *op cit.*, p.222.

⁹² Oscar Wilde in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (ed.), Rupert Hart-Davis (London, Hart-Davis, 1962), p.232.

“races was the Celtic race, the race which has not accepted the Reformation”.⁹³ He distanced himself from fanatical patriotism, however, which he described privately as the “most insincere form of self-conceit”.⁹⁴ Two further examples where Wilde revealed Irish nationalist/Home Rule sentiments are reported by Coakley;⁹⁵ the first involved the poet Theodore Wratislaw who spent a weekend with Wilde in Goring-on-Thames in a house named The Cottage. In a short memoir of the visit, Wratislaw described how he gained an unexpected insight into the political philosophy of the Wilde household. It was a philosophy that did not have Wratislaw’s sympathy. He had returned to the house for lunch following a short boat trip on the river Thames with Wilde and his son Cyril, during which Wilde had rowed them both in the sculling-boat:

During lunch an amusing incident occurred, which I have remembered though I have forgotten so much. It is possible that I overlooked at the moment the Irish ancestry of Oscar and made some slighting remark about Home Rule... the small boy flushed with anger, and violently demanded whether I was not a Home Ruler? I was both astonished and amused and was trying to think of some reply suitable for the juvenile politician when Oscar interposed, throwing peace on troubled waters. ‘Ah!’ said he, ‘My own idea is that Ireland should rule England.’⁹⁶

The second involved Ford Maddox Ford who in his memoirs, *Return to Yesterday*, recalled Wilde’s frequent visits to his grandfather’s home: “He would sit beside the high fireplace and talk very quietly - mostly about public matters: Home Rule for Ireland and the like. My grandfather was a rather down-to-the-ground sort of person, so that Wilde to him talked very much like anyone else and seemed glad to be in a quiet room beside a fireplace.”⁹⁷

⁹³ Vincent O’Sullivan, *op cit.*, p.79.

⁹⁴ A H Cooper-Prichard, *Conversation with Oscar Wilde* (London: Philip Allan, 1931), p.20.

⁹⁵ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, p.196.

⁹⁶ Theodore Wratislaw, *Oscar Wilde: A Memoir*. The Eighteen Nineties Society (London, 1979), p.13.

⁹⁷ Ford Maddox Ford, *Return to Yesterday* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1931), pp. 40-45.

In 1889, Wilde reviewed⁹⁸ James Anthony Froude's 'Blue Book' on Ireland.⁹⁹ Few Victorian politicians or intellectuals knew Ireland at first hand as well as J. A. Froude, yet none were denounced more bitterly for ignorance of things Irish than he. His association with Ireland began in 1840, when fresh from Oxford he accepted the post as tutor in the family of an Irish clergyman. Froude later claimed that his first contact with Ireland together with his reading of Carlyle had helped him to break away from the spell of Newman and the Oxford movement. It had brought home to him a realisation of all that was best in Protestantism, and the experience contributed to the formation of his views on Ireland and on Irish history.¹⁰⁰

In 1845 Froude was back in Ireland having agreed to do research on the life of Saint Patrick for Newman's series *English and Irish Saints*. Froude offered himself without success for a professorship in one of the Queen's Colleges and in 1848 he was again in Ireland during the insurrection. As a '48 intellectual and liberal he wrote: 'I have hopes of these young Paddies after all. I think they will have a fight of it',¹⁰¹ meaning, however, against the landlords. Commenting on his work 'The English in Ireland', the liberal *Spectator* wrote:

It may not be unfairly said that Mr Froude simply loathes the Irish people, not consciously perhaps for he professes the reverse. But a certain bitter grudge breaks out despite his will now and again. It colours all his tropes. It adds a bitter sting to the casual allusions of his language. When he wants a figure of speech to express the relations between the two islands, he compares the Irish to a kennel of fox-hounds,

⁹⁸ This review of J. A. Froude's *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy* was published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 April 1889, p.3. Its uncompromising critique of British Imperialism in Ireland may be due, in part, to the influence of Wilde's mother, Speranza, but was inspired mainly by Wilde's admiration for Charles Stewart Parnell, the leader of the Irish party at Westminster, who at the time was already being called 'The uncrowned King of Ireland.'

⁹⁹ James Anthony Froude was a noted nineteenth century historian of the English in Ireland. A '*Blue Book*' was a report on aspects of governmental policy.

¹⁰⁰ Froude's autobiographical notes dealing with his visit to Ireland are given in W.H. Dunn, *James Anthony Froude: A Biography 1818-1856* (Oxford 1961), pp.63-71.

¹⁰¹ W.H. Dunn, *James Anthony Froude: A Biography 1818-1856* (Oxford 1961), p.123.

and the English to their master, and declares that what the Irish want is a master who knows that he is master and means to continue master.¹⁰²

Wilde obviously knew of Froude's work. Ten years before Wilde had toured America lecturing on the 'Genius of the Celtic race' James Anthony Froude had toured America lecturing on Irish history. While he was delivering his lectures on Irish history in the United States, the first volume of his *The English in Ireland* was published in London. The reactions among the Irish in America and at home were perhaps best summarised in the words of the *Nation*: 'at both sides of the Atlantic simultaneously the Irish race find themselves attacked by the tongue and pen of Mr James Anthony Froude. He has managed this matter with skill.'¹⁰³

In *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy; or, An Irish Romance of the Last Century*, published in 1889, Froude used the form of the novel explicitly to preach a homily on the Irish problems of his own time. The novel enabled him to use an even greater amount of poetic licence in dealing with historical documents than he allowed himself in his historical narrative. Bearing in mind Sir William Wilde's great knowledge and love of Irish history, plus Lady Wilde's passionate patriotism, one could infer that Oscar Wilde probably had a good understanding of Irish history; and indeed the intelligent and succinct manner in which he reviews Froude's novel would bear this as testimony.

This critique of British Imperialism reinforced many of Wilde's political beliefs along with epitomising the value of personal experience. I speak of his rekindled nationalism, his acknowledged awareness of the growing importance of the Irish in America, and his increasing admiration for Charles Stewart Parnell and the Irish Home Rule movement. In general, Wilde believed that Blue Books provided dull reading, but that Blue Books on Ireland were always interesting. He believed that these historical journals formed the record of one of the great tragedies of modern Europe.

¹⁰² See Justin McCarthy in 'Mr John [sic] Anthony Froude', *Galaxy*, XIV, no.3 (Cepit), p.298

¹⁰³ *Nation*, 9 November 1872.

In them England has written down her indictment against herself, and has given to the world the history of her shame. If in the last century she tried to govern Ireland with an insolence that was intensified by race-hatred and religious prejudice, she has sought to rule her in this century with a stupidity that is aggravated by good intentions.¹⁰⁴

Froude was well known for his unionist sympathies. He had endorsed Matthew Arnold's comment on the inability of the Celt to cope with the tyranny of fact, to the great disgust of Wilde, in whose moral lexicon the word 'fact' or 'details' enjoyed a low estimate. Wilde displayed intolerance for people who insisted on a strict adherence to facts, and castigated the English for their xenophobic misgovernment in Ireland – "Mr. Froude's resumé of the History of Ireland is not without power, though it is far from being really accurate. The Irish, [Mr.Froude] tells us, had disowned the facts of life and the facts of life had proved the strongest."¹⁰⁵

Wilde argued that Froude's book had no practical relation to present Irish politics, and offered no solution to the political question. Even as a historical novel its value was limited by a defiant political bias, which deprecated Froude's historical judgement on why the Irish were unfit for self government.

It is a vivid picture of Ireland in the latter half of the eighteenth century, a picture often false in its lights and exaggerated in its shadows, but a picture none the less. Mr. Froude admits the martyrdom of Ireland, but regrets that the martyrdom was not completely carried out. His ground of complaint against the executioner is not his trade, but his bungling. It is the bluntness, not the cruelty, of the sword that he objects to.¹⁰⁶

Wilde was critical of the Arnoldian argument that the Irish were, due to their 'racial characteristics', unsuitable for self-rule. Yet Wilde argued that the Irish had never been given a realistic opportunity to disprove this belief; thus how could any English person arbitrarily pass judgement on the practicality of Irish self-determination? This

¹⁰⁴ Oscar Wilde, review of J.A. Froude's *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy*, *op cit.*, p.3.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p.3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p.4.

was a prime example of “a picture often false in its lights and exaggerated in its shadows.” The historical realities, according to Wilde, spoke for themselves; England, unable to tolerate anarchy so near her shores, consulted the Pope. The Pope gave them leave to interfere, and the Pope had the best of the bargain. For the English brought him in, and the Irish kept him there. England’s first settlers were Norman nobles. They became more Irish than the Irish, and England found herself in this difficulty. To abandon Ireland would be discreditable, to rule it as a province would be contrary to [the then] English tradition. She then tried to rule by dividing, and failed. The Pope was too strong for her. At last England made her great political discovery; what Ireland needed was evidently an entirely new population of the same race and the same religion as her own. The new policy was partly carried out:

Elizabeth first, and then James, and then Cromwell replanted the island, introducing English, Scots, Huguenots, Flemings, Dutch, tens of thousands of families of vigorous and earnest Protestants who brought their industries along with them. Twice the Irish tried to drive out this new element. They failed. But England had no sooner accomplished her long task than she set herself to work to spoil it again. She destroyed the industries of her colonists by her trade laws. She set the Bishops to rob them of their religion...As for the gentry, the purpose for which they had been introduced into Ireland was unfulfilled. They were but alien intruders, who did nothing, who were allowed to do nothing. The time would come when an exasperated population would demand that the land should be given back to them, and England would then, perhaps, throw the gentry to the wolves, in the hope of momentary peace. But her own turn would follow. She would be face to face with the old problem, either to make a new conquest or to retire with disgrace.¹⁰⁷

The irony according to Wilde was that English misgovernment had instigated the belief that the Irish were incapable of self-government, rather than Irish incompetence. The Irish had proved that their new and indigenous industries could successfully compete in a market economy, so much so that they had begun to undermine the profitability of some of the mother country’s own industries. The few positive advantages of the ‘Plantations’ such as economic and industrial advancement were repeatedly sabotaged by English rather than Irish policy. English economic

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.5.

policy in Ireland was a regular contributor and harbinger of political discontent amongst the Irish. Historical claims such as these were reasons why Wilde was always sceptical about English 'Facts' concerning the Irish; experience had taught him that in establishing the 'Facts' the truth was often the first victim.

He condemned the English because they were 'always degrading the truth into facts. When a truth becomes a fact, it loses all of its intellectual value.'¹⁰⁸ So, the "fact" that the Irish were unfit for self government, although history had proven that when allowed a certain amount of laissez-faire she could compete at least economically, proved how hollow that prognosis was; for surely economic independence was a practical basis for examining the validity of self government.

Wilde denounced the absurdity of this policy:

His hero, [Froude's] Colonel Goring, has the words Law and Order ever on his lips, meaning by the one the enforcement of unjust legislation, and implying by the other the suppression of every fine natural aspiration. That the government should enforce iniquity, and the governed submit to it, seems to be to Mr. Froude, as it certainly is to many others, the true ideal of political science¹⁰⁹

How could destroying the industries of her colonists by draconian trade laws¹¹⁰ be considered fit governing? It was as if natural aspiration, inventiveness and incentive to better one's position were treasonable crimes. Wilde believed that Froude, like most imperialists, overrated the necessity and effectiveness of military subjugation and punitive, coercive colonial government:

¹⁰⁸ Oscar Wilde, *Saturday Review*, 17 November 1894.

¹⁰⁹ Oscar Wilde, review of J.A. Froude's *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy*, *op cit.*, p.5.

¹¹⁰ Examples would be the English Woollens Act of 1698, which effectively destroyed one of the central industries in the Irish economy by restricting the sale of Irish wool to England and excluding the exportation of Irish wool to other parts of the Empire. The Declaratory Act of 1719 asserted Ireland's dependence on England especially in matters of trade and finance.

Where England has had to struggle she has been wise. Where physical strength has been on her side, as in Ireland, she has been made unwieldy by that strength. Her own strong words have blinded her. She has had force, but no direction.¹¹¹

England had, according to Wilde, lost an invaluable opportunity to really establish a sense of trust and justice in Ireland. She had much more to fear from an Ireland she had economically raped, and whose population (both Catholic and Protestant), she had left politically discontented; than from an economically prosperous colony, which had been allowed to experience the advantages associated with the Empire. What is so interesting about Wilde's review of Froude's Blue Book is that it is not just a revisionist condemnation of British Imperialism, it is also visionary, in the acknowledgement of a new breed of Irish, and what influence they hold in shaping Irish modernity. Wilde was obviously recapitulating the knowledge and experiences he had gained on his tour of America in 1882 when he answered Froude – "The society that he describes has long since passed away. An entirely new factor has appeared in the social development of the country, and this factor is the Irish-American, and his influence."¹¹²

He went on to describe how the new Irish had, through emigration, educated and bettered themselves to the extent that they could now challenge the stereotyped image of their race, and champion the cause of self-determination.

To mature its powers, to concentrate its action, to learn the secret of its own strength and of England's weakness, the Celtic intellect has had to cross the Atlantic. At home it had but learned the pathetic weakness of nationality; in a strange land it realised what indomitable forces nationality possesses. What captivity was to the Jews, exile has been to the Irish. America and American influence has educated them. Their first practical leader is an Irish American¹¹³.

This showed that although seven years had passed since his lecture tour of America, his rekindled nationalism had not waned, and his admiration for Charles Stewart

¹¹¹ Oscar Wilde, review of J.A. Froude's *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy*, *op cit.*, p.5.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p.3.

¹¹³ Wilde was referring to Charles Stewart Parnell whose mother was American.

Parnell had if anything strengthened¹¹⁴. Wilde ended his review with a wicked inversion of the author's original purpose:

If Mr. Froude intended his book to help the Tory Government to solve the Irish question he has entirely missed his aim. The Ireland of which he writes has disappeared. As a record, however, of the incapacity of a Teutonic to rule a Celtic people against their own wishes his book is not without value.....There are some who will welcome with delight the idea of solving the Irish question by doing away with the Irish people. There are others who will remember that Ireland has extended her boundaries, and that we have now to reckon with her not merely in the Old World but also in the New.¹¹⁵

This reference to "doing away with the Irish people" is according to Declan Kiberd, a parodic attempt at remonstrance against a situation by mimicking it to an absurd extreme; similar to Swift's *A Modest Proposal* where the suggestion that Irish infants be roasted as meat for English tables, was intended as a metaphorical account of the realities of English policy at the time.¹¹⁶

With the exception of his comments after Lord Cavendish's assassination, Wilde chose to ignore the direct 'realist' form of criticism in his indictment of British imperialism in Ireland. His use of irony and sarcasm were the literary forms best suited to his style of dissent. Declan Kiberd has explained the reasoning behind Wilde's thinking:

Wilde refused to write realist accounts of that degraded Ireland which he only partly knew, and he took instead Utopia for theme, knowing that this would provide not only an image of revolutionary possibility for Ireland but also a rebuke to contemporary Britain¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ See the influences of Parnell and the Land League on Wilde's first play *Vera* in Part Two of the thesis.

¹¹⁵ Oscar Wilde, review of J.A. Froude's *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy*, *op cit.*, p.5.

¹¹⁶ See Declan Kiberd, 'The London Exiles: Wilde and Shaw' in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing II*. General Editor Seamus Deane (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), pp.376-376.

¹¹⁷ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature Of The Modern Nation* (London, 1995), p.50.

Wilde's nationalism was greatly influenced by his parents' love of Irish mythology recalling romantic folklore and heroic deeds. Yeats would later incorporate this heroic/romantic nationalist sentiment in his writing as an attempt to try and comprehend and stabilise the ever-changing anomaly that was contemporary Ireland. "England will never be civilised till she has added Utopia to her dominions", Wilde concluded in 'The Critic as Artist', adding the vital afterthought that "there is more than one of her colonies that she might with advantage surrender for so fair a land"¹¹⁸ – an obvious reference to Ireland.

Wilde and Yeats would continue to share this common affinity in Irish mythology and folklore, an empathy garnered in the former by his nationalist mother, fostered and encouraged in the latter by that same matriarch and her son. In time Wilde's ideological conviction that only through multiple personalities could an individual expose his true self,¹¹⁹ would prove influential, one could argue integral in Yeats' instigation of his ideology of "Masks". According to Richard Ellmann this was for Yeats "an allegorical victory of imagination over environment and heredity."¹²⁰ Yeats would later voice his opinion on this mode of thinking to Wilde, commenting, "I envy those men who become mythological while still living," Wilde reciprocated his own personal solution to this dilemma, replying, "I think a man should invent his own myth."¹²¹ Wilde and Yeats would continue to adopt this policy of concealing their more intimate selves in both their private/public lives and art; essentially their rationale was that the mask included all the differences between one's own and other people's perception of one's personality and therefore it offered the wearer a form of protection from personal attack.

¹¹⁸ Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic*, in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, Introduction by Merlin Holland (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p.386.

¹¹⁹ See Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist: A Dialogue", Part II, in *The Artist as Critic* – "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person, but give him a mask and he will tell you the truth."

¹²⁰ Richard Ellmann, *Eminent Domain*, (Oxford University Press, 1965), p.12.

¹²¹ Wilde's remark is quoted in the first draft of Yeats' *Autobiography* and became central to his own view. See W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, (London, Macmillan, 1926). The quotation is credited to the unpublished first draft written in 1916-17.

Wilde became an inspirational, heroic figure for Yeats; not only did he artistically and intellectually inspire the young poet, but he challenged Yeats' conceptions about the very nature and function of art. While Wilde and to a lesser extent Shaw's contribution to the Irish Literary Revival was often underestimated, dismissed or ignored by many of their contemporaries, they never-the-less continued to indirectly influence and challenge many Irish writers who were more primarily associated with the movement. Oscar Wilde's nationality would remain an integral part of his identity for the rest of his life.

Illustrations A

Speranza in 1848.



*William Wilde by Erskine Nicol.
(Courtesy National Gallery of Ireland)*

Oscar Wilde's parents:

(Top:) The formidable Lady Jane Francesca Elgee Wilde, who expressed her Irish nationalist sentiments under the pseudonym 'Speranza' for *The Nation* newspaper. **(Bottom:)** Sir William Wilde, eminent surgeon, antiquarian and historian.

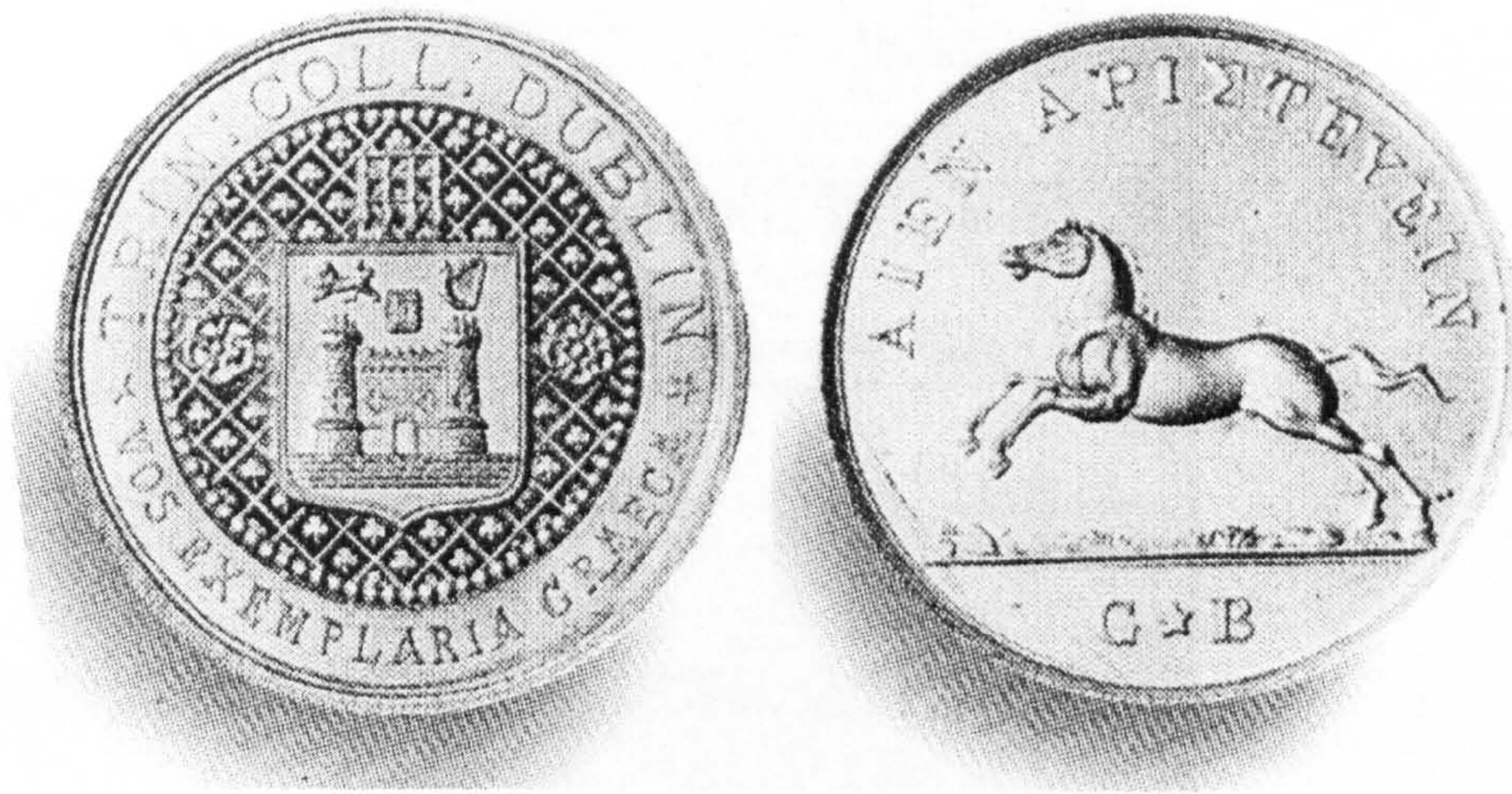


Oscar Wilde's birthplace at 21 Westland Row Dublin.



1 Merrion Square at the beginning of the twentieth century.

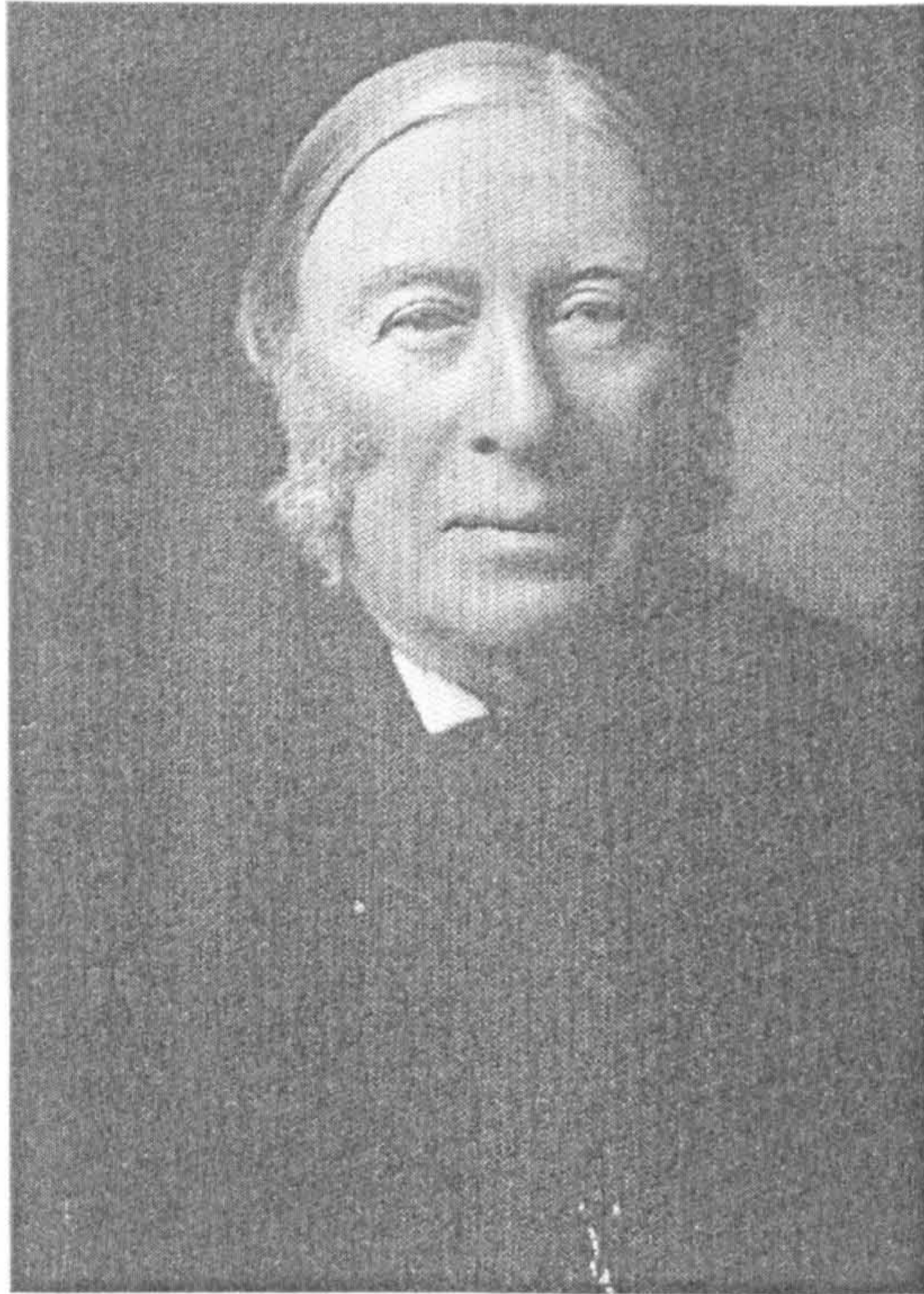
No.1 Merrion Square Dublin at the turn of the century. This was the principal family residence during Wilde's years in Dublin.



The Berkley Gold Medal for Greek won by Wilde in 1874 at Trinity College Dublin. He would pawn and redeem it at moments of financial crisis throughout his life. The Greek inscription, a quotation from *The Iliad*, reads ‘Always to be the best’.



On the 17 October 1874 Wilde matriculated at Magdalen College Oxford, being given rooms No.1, 2 Pair Right in Chaplain’s. He would gain a double First in his exams at Oxford.



The Revd John Pentland Mahaffy (Professor of Ancient History TCD) became Wilde's Classics tutor while studying at Trinity College Dublin. Wilde would later confide to Frank Harris "I got my love of the Greek ideal...at Trinity from Mahaffy...he took deliberately the artistic standpoint towards everything, which was coming more and more to be my standpoint."



The Acropolis in Greece, 'not ruins, but ruins of those ruins', visited by Oscar with J.P. Mahaffy on their Grand Tour of 1877.



Oscar Wilde posing in traditional Greek costume during his tour of Greece with Mahaffy in 1877.

Dedicated

TO

MY SONS

WILLIE AND OSCAR WILDE.



"I MADE THEM INDEED,
SPEAK PLAIN THE WORD COUNTRY. I TAUGHT THEM, NO DOUBT,
THAT A COUNTRY'S A THING MEN SHOULD DIE FOR AT NEED!"

*Dedication page from Speranza's book of poetry which was published when Oscar
Wilde was ten years old.*

Speranza's dedication to her two sons from the title page of her *Poems* in 1864.
The message is overtly nationalistic in tone and reads as follows:

*"I made them indeed, speak plain the word COUNTRY. I taught them, no doubt,
that a country's a thing men should die for at need!"*

Chapter Three: Shaw's Dublin Memories – The Formative Years.

Unlike Wilde's nostalgic and romantic view of his native land, George Bernard Shaw's love-hate relationship with Ireland was much more complex and ambiguous. In certain memoirs of his early childhood in Dublin, Shaw describes "the devil of a childhood" he spent growing up amongst a family in the throes of emotional and financial adversity. He did not have the same privileged and emotionally secure upbringing as Wilde. Shaw's parents married out of convenience. His father, George Carr Shaw, was a financially incompetent dipsomaniac, who alternated at different times between working as a clerk and as a wholesaler; and when he lost his clerkship at Todhunter's, the Dublin ironworks in 1845, "had nothing to fall back on but his pretensions - the social pretensions of landed gentry without land."¹²² Therefore the attraction of marriage was primarily instigated by the lure of money. Shaw's mother, Lucinda Elizabeth Gurly, known as Bessie, was "the daughter of a country gentleman, and was brought up with ruthless strictness to be the paragon of all ladylike virtues and accomplishments by her grand aunt",¹²³ one Ellen Whitcroft. Bessie chose marriage to distance herself from Walter Bagnall Gurly, her vindictive widowed father and her socially inferior, indignant, and very pregnant stepmother-to-be, both of whom blamed her for betraying their wedding plans to the disapproving family (she had innocently revealed the aforementioned plans), which resulted in the postponement of the wedding:

But his fury [at the postponement] carried him beyond all reason. He believed that my mother had betrayed him deliberately so as to stop the marriage...My mother, who was on a visit to some relatives in Dublin at the time, had to choose between two homes to return to. One was the house of a stepmother and an enraged father. The other was the house of her aunt, which meant the old domestic slavery and tyranny. It was at this moment that some devil, perhaps commissioned by the Life Force to bring me into the world, prompted my father to propose marriage to Miss Bessie Gurly. She caught at the straw.¹²⁴

¹²² Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, Volume I 1856-1898, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), p.8

¹²³ George Bernard Shaw, *Shaw: An Autobiography, 1856-1898*, selected from his writings by Stanley Weintraub, (London, 1970), p.20.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p.21

Yet Bessie's own wedding to George Carr Shaw offered little solace from her own personal demons. Her husband's complete ignorance of the most fundamental financial acumen soon left Bessie a grievously disappointed woman, disillusioned and embittered by the family's ridiculous poverty: "We all suffered for it." She believed, and persuaded her son to believe, that "everybody had disappointed her, or betrayed her, or tyrannized over her."¹²⁵

Most of the family woes were blamed on George Carr Shaw and his unfortunate genius for poverty. "I can only imagine the hell into which my mother descended when she found out what shabby-genteel poverty with a drunken husband is like."¹²⁶ Of his mother, Shaw once admitted, "I knew very little about her." According to Michael Holroyd "this was partly because she did not concern herself with him. Her own childhood had been made miserable by bullying, but Bessie never bullied; she made her son miserable by neglect."¹²⁷ Shaw attempted to overlook this absence of maternal affection in his life, and his memoirs often appear to disregard the fact that it must have affected him negatively:

Poverty, ostracism, disgust, three children, a house rented at £30 a year or thereabouts, a drunken husband obviously incapable of improving the situation...it says a great deal for my mother's humanity that she did not hate her children.¹²⁸

Shaw's father however was never afforded quite the same understanding or forgiveness: "...the wrench from my childish faith in my father as perfect and omniscient to the discovery that he was a hypocrite and a dipsomaniac was so sudden and violent that it must have left its mark on me."¹²⁹

His early childhood recollections express an overwhelming sense of frustration and discontent. Whether it was the stifling, obdurate restrictive practices of a church-

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p.23

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p.22

¹²⁷ Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, Volume I 1856-1898, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), p.16.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p.19.

¹²⁹ Stanley Weintraub, *op cit.*, p.22.

going Protestant mentality which he was initially and unwillingly subjected to as a child, his financially destitute and emotionally dysfunctional parents, or his regrettable school experiences, all had a similar effect in producing less than complimentary reminiscences in his later autobiographies:

When I was a little boy, I was compelled to go to church on Sunday; and though I escaped from that intolerable bondage before I was ten, it prejudiced me so violently against churchgoingYes; all the vulgarity, savagery, and bad blood which has marred my literary work, was certainly laid upon me in that house of Satan! The mere nullity of the building could make no positive impression on me; but what could, and did, were the unnaturally motionless figures of the congregation in their Sunday clothes and bonnets, and their set faces, pale with the malignant rigidity produced by the suppression of all expression¹³⁰

He fared little better during the period of his formal education. He attended several schools beginning with the Wesleyan Connexional School and finally completing his education with the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day School (a day school of the Incorporated Society For Promoting Protestant Schools in Ireland). Shaw's amusing recollections of his schooldays reveals a bright inquisitive young boy eager to learn, but frustrated in his opinion by the formal manner in which subjects were taught. Of his time spent at the Wesleyan College he remarked:

At school I learnt nothing from the curriculum...although the school, snobbishly preparatory for the university, took no subjects seriously except Latin and Greek...if asking a boy once a day in an overcrowded class the Latin for a man or a horse or what not, can be called teaching him Latin...with a pretence of mathematics (Euclidean), of English history (mostly false and scurrilous)...The classes were too large, and the teachers untrained in pedagogy, mostly picking up a living on their way to becoming Wesleyan ministers.¹³¹

Shaw then moved from Wesley College to Glashule, an exclusive private school situated between Kingstown and Dalkey, as the family were then residing in Dalkey at

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p.31

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p.48

the time. When they relocated once more back to the city, it was George John Vandeleur Lee¹³², who was an acquaintance living with the Shaw family¹³³, and not his parents, who finally decided which school he should attend:

My parents seem hardly to have considered whether I was educated or not, provided I went to school according to custom. But Lee, though almost wholly preoccupied with music, thought that something ought to be done about it; for I was clearly learning nothing except what I had better not have learnt.¹³⁴

Lee had made the acquaintance of a certain Mr Peach¹³⁵, who was the drawing master at the Central Model Boys' School in Marlborough Street and he had impressed on Lee that the teaching, as far as it went, was skilled and genuine. This Model School,

¹³² George John Vandeleur Lee was a talented music tutor and orchestra conductor, and founder of an amateur musical society. He was first introduced to a six year old G.B.S. when the family were still living in Synge Street. He tutored Bessie Shaw in the art of singing (music was her and the family's one true passion) and he also functioned as Shaw's unofficial musical mentor when he moved in with the family. The full nature of Lee's relationship with Bessie is somewhat ambiguous and the possibility that their relationship transgressed the platonic is most probable. Holroyd states, 'There is little doubt that more than once Sonny', as the young G.B.S. was known, 'speculated as to whether he might have been Lee's natural son; and there is no doubt that G.B.S. was aware of other people's speculations. 'About G.B.S.'s parentage,' wrote Beatrice Webb in her diary for 12 May 1911, 'The photograph published in the Henderson Biography makes it quite clear to me that he was the child of G.J.V. Lee - that vain, witty and distinguished musical genius who lived with them. The expression on Lee's face is quite amazingly like G.B.S. when I first knew him. One wonders whether G.B.S. meant this fact to be communicated to the public.' See Michael Holroyd, *op cit.*, p.24. Lee would later proposition Shaw's sister, Lucinda Frances, 'Lucy'; only to have his advances rejected in a scenario later reminiscent of W.B. Yeats's attraction to Maude and Iseult Gonne.

¹³³ Shaw explained the arrangement as follows - 'my mother's association with Lee, and the *ménage à trois* in which it resulted, would be unpleasantly misunderstood without this clue to it...we left our respective houses and went to live in the same house, number one Hatch Street, which was half in Lower Leeson Street. The arrangement was economical; for we could not afford to live in a fashionable house, and Lee could not afford to give lessons in an unfashionable one, though, being a bachelor, he needed only a music room and a bedroom. We also shared a cottage in Dalkey, high up on Torca Hill.' - Stanley Weintraub, *op cit.*, p.188.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p.52.

¹³⁵ Mr Peach is referred to in Shaw's own memoirs; a Mr Joseph Smeeth is quoted as the drawing-master by Michael Holroyd, *op cit.*, p.35.

which Shaw attended briefly from February to September 1869, is worth mentioning, as it would play a short-lived if influential part in his life. The school claimed to be nondenominational and classless in theory, but according to Shaw Roman Catholics predominantly attended it. Shaw would later refer to his educational relocation as “my snob tragedy” later reminisced under the chapter heading ‘Shame and Wounded Snobbery’, in his *Sixteen Self Sketches* (1949). With typical Shavian wit the calamitous event was reported thus:

It was an enormous place, with huge unscaleable railings and gates on which for me might well have been inscribed “All hope abandon, ye who enter here”; for that the son of a Protestant merchant-gentleman and feudal downstart should pass those bars or associate in any way with its hosts of lower middle class Catholic children, sons of petty shopkeepers and tradesmen, was inconceivable from the Shaw point of view...So I was sent to Marlborough Street, and at once lost caste outside it and became a boy with whom no Protestant young gentleman would speak or play.¹³⁶

In reality Shaw was not the only Protestant studying at the school and indeed in his own class, students who were members of the Established Protestant Church outnumbered their fellow Catholics.

It was in fact as well as theoretically, what Shaw denied it to have been: non-sectarian - an experimental school for persons of modest means, retailer and wholesaler, Protestant and Catholic. What Shaw did, eighty years afterwards, was to transfer to this place the ‘shame and wounded snobbery’ arising from his Catholic-infested home at Hatch Street. He gave us the symptoms but not a diagnosis of his condition.¹³⁷

Two other incidents are worth mentioning from Shaw’s schooldays; the first surprisingly is a confession of Fenian sympathies by the young scholar whilst studying history at that ‘Catholic’ establishment:

At the Model School I had already asserted myself in another direction. The reading lessons in history ignored Ireland and glorified England. I always substituted Ireland

¹³⁶ Stanley Weintraub, *op cit.*, p.53.

¹³⁷ Michael Holroyd, *op cit.*, p.36.

for England in such dithyrambs. The boys wondered what would happen to me. But the teacher smiled and said nothing. I was, in fact, a young Fenian in my political sympathies, such as they were....¹³⁸

Although his stay at the Model School Marlborough Street lasted for only seven months, February to September 1869, he was genuinely enthusiastic about leaving as his experience there had only exacerbated the embarrassment and unorthodoxy of his family's living arrangements at Hatch Street. "His mother was utterly indifferent to public opinion and private gossip...but his father felt acutely ashamed and when G.B.S. demanded changing schools, George Carr Shaw, relishing perhaps the defeat of Lee's programme, supported him."¹³⁹ However from the following quote by Shaw, one could infer that the Model School had none the less influenced this important period in his life:

Far from being a Protestant bigot I was a Boy Atheist, and proud of it, having quite deliberately given up praying as an irrational practice. And my mother's musical activities had cured me of social prejudice against Roman Catholics as well as my inculcated belief that they all went to hell when they died. My political leanings were flatly Fenian. I was not unreasonable: quite the contrary. I was too open to reason.¹⁴⁰

One parting reference on the influence the Model School had on Shaw as a future material source is revealed:

Why did the Model School afflict me with a shame which was more or less a psychosis? I have told elsewhere that my esthetic hatred of poverty and squalor, and of the species of human animal they produce, was acquired not at the Model School, where the boys were not worse clad and fed than I, but in the slums into which my nursemaid took me on her visits to her friends when she was supposed to be exercising me in the parks. I hated these experiences intensely. My artist nature, to which beauty and refinement were necessities, would not accept poor people as fellow creatures, nor slum tenements as fit for human habitation. To me they were places where I could not possibly live. The mental process thus set up culminated

¹³⁸ Stanley Weintraub, *op cit.*, p.58.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p.53

¹⁴⁰ George Bernard Shaw, *Sixteen Self Sketches*, (Constable And Company, London, 1949), p.24

some fifty years later in my play *Major Barbara*, in which the millionaire saint, Andrew Undershaft, thunders his doctrine that poverty is not the natural and proper punishment of vice, but a social crime compared to which our sporadic murders and thefts are negligible....¹⁴¹

To *Major Barbara* one could probably add several of his other plays by association, such as *Mrs Warren's Profession*, which dealt with the subjects of poverty, prostitution and other social ills. Shaw detested these encounters and his experience of the Dublin slums greatly influenced his subsequent interest in socialism. Holroyd even remarks that his nursemaid during these visits would sometimes take him to a public house and (it is suggested) supplement her £8 a year salary by picking up soldiers at the barracks. Shaw's lifelong hatred of poverty was born of these lonely days of slumming. Poverty became a crime responsible not only for prostitution, but lovelessness.¹⁴²

Shaw's childhood years contrasted significantly with those of his more affluent Dublin neighbour, Oscar Wilde. Yet while he did not attend Portora Royal School, or go to Trinity College, his formative years in Dublin educated him in certain distasteful realities of life, and such knowledge would serve him well in his later writings. With the exception of the family's period of residence at Torca Cottage in Dalkey¹⁴³, Shaw had few fond memories of his native city - and by 1876, after a short forgettable clerkship, he decided it was necessary to leave:

¹⁴¹ Stanley Weintraub, *op cit.*, p.56.

¹⁴² Michael Holroyd, *op cit.*, p.27.

¹⁴³ A significant event in the young Shaw's life as St John Ervine quotes a letter from Shaw in 1907 in which he admits that in other eyes Dalkey might appear no more than a quite ordinary and insipid Dublin coastal town, but to him it was wonderland. He would reminisce that moving to Torca Cottage would represent the single moment of "ecstatic happiness" in his childhood. Dalkey's wide open spaces represented personal freedom for the young Sonny Shaw; the freedom to roam the common, bathe in the sea, and to his added delight the family no longer attended Sunday church - he would later boast that he was "a product of Dalkey's outlook". See George Bernard Shaw, "Am I an Educated Person," *Sixteen Self Sketches* (Constable and Company Ltd., London, 1949), p.72. And to Frank Harris he would also reveal the importance of Torca Cottage to his otherwise unhappy memories of growing up in Dublin: "From our cottage on Dalkey Hill I contemplated an eternal Shelleyan vision of the sea, sky and mountain. Real life was only a squalid interruption to an imaginary paradise." See Frank Harris, *Bernard Shaw*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1931), p.236.

In March 1876 I broke loose...I had had enough of Dublin. James Joyce in his *Ulysses* has described, with a fidelity so ruthless that the book is hardly bearable, the life that Dublin offers to its young men, or, if you prefer to put it the other way, that its young men offer to Dublin. No doubt it is much like the life of young men everywhere in modern urban civilization. A certain flippant futile derision and belittlement that confuses the noble and serious with the base and ludicrous seems to me particular of Dublin; but I suppose that is because my only personal experience of that phase of youth was a Dublin experience...Thus, when I left Dublin I left (a few private friendships apart) no society that did not disgust me. To this day my sentimental regard for Ireland does not include the capital. I am not enamoured by failure, of poverty, of obscurity, and of the ostracism and contempt which these imply; and these were all that Dublin offered to the enormity of my unconscious ambition.¹⁴⁴

Therefore the decision to leave was undertaken as a necessity, a process of self-improvement, both economically and intellectually. As would happen later to Joyce, Dublin had become a “centre of paralysis” for Shaw and so he had to leave. However, as he was later to explain:

My business in life could not be transacted in Dublin out of an experience confined to Ireland...London was the literary centre of the English language, and for such artistic culture as the realm of the English language (in which I proposed to be king) could afford. There was no Gaelic League in those days, nor any sense that Ireland had in herself the seed of culture. Every Irishman who felt that his business in life was on the higher planes of the cultural professions felt that he must have a metropolitan domicile and an international culture: that is, he felt that his first business was to get out of Ireland. I had the same feeling. For London as London, or England as England, I cared nothing...But as the English language was my weapon, there was nothing for it but London.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ George Bernard Shaw, *Prefaces*, (Constable and Company Ltd., London, 1934), pp.641-642

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.642.

Chapter Four: Irish Influences in Three Shavian Works

Immaturity, O'Flaherty VC and John Bull's Other Island.

When one considers the prodigious body of work that Shaw produced it remains a surprise that only two of his plays, *John Bull's Other Island* and *O'Flaherty VC*, were set in his native Ireland, though Part IV of *Back to Methuselah*, 'Tragedy Of An Elderly Gentleman', could be added to this list.¹⁴⁶ *John Bull's Other Island* is recognised as Shaw's most important work on Ireland and as such I will be concentrating on that play in this chapter. I will first briefly discuss his novel *Immaturity*, and also mention *O'Flaherty VC*, as both these works possess an important 'Irish Dimension' regarding Shaw's expatriate Irish psyche towards his native land, which becomes more apparent when read in conjunction with *John Bull's other Island*.

¹⁴⁶ Part IV of Shaw's "metabiological pentateuch", *Back to Methuselah*, is set in Galway Bay in the year AD 3000. The play opens with an elderly gentleman talking to a young woman who is obviously his superior in knowledge and insight. The gentleman is a visitor to Ireland. He introduces himself as a Briton living in Baghdad, which he says is the new capital of the British Commonwealth. The young woman, for whom all sense of nationhood is meaningless, listens patiently as the man delivers his version of British and Irish history. Even now, it seems, the two nations are bound in torturous interdependence. Hence, when the British transferred their powers to the East, the Irish actually pursued them, entering all those countries where the national question was still to be resolved as professional agitators. When all nations were free and nationalism itself was a thing of the past, the Irish were in a dilemma, because, as the gentleman said, they had "lost all their political faculties by disuse except that of nationalist agitation". They were, in effect, bores without a cause. They said they were the lost tribe of Israel and tried to claim Jerusalem, upon which the Jews redistributed themselves throughout Europe. Finally, on the advice of an English Archbishop, a group of devoted Irishmen decided to return to Ireland. But on arrival the starkness of the place so shocked them that they left for England the next day - "and no Irishman ever again confessed to being Irish, even to his own children; so that when that generation passed away the Irish race vanished from human knowledge" – see *Back to Methuselah* (London: Constable, 1931), p.151. As the young woman explained, it was not literally so, but the story would suffice as a parable on the fate of the people possessed by the curse of nationalism. In the play, the Irish question was to be solved only by the eradication of both the English and Irish nations from history.

Immaturity

While reminiscing on his reasons for leaving Ireland in the preface to his first novel *Immaturity* (1879), Shaw referred to Joyce's *Ulysses* in an attempt to explain why it was necessary for any aspiring young artist to leave Dublin - that city of "derision and invincible ignorance" as he later described it in a letter to the editor of the *Irish Worker* in 1912.¹⁴⁷ The comparison is interesting as James Joyce was of a similar age when he chose to leave Dublin. For Joyce, Dublin had become a "centre of paralysis", and as if looking through Shavian-tinted glasses the city seemed to repress ambition and in its place offered only lingering obscurity.

Shaw initially struggled to reconcile and objectify his early negative memories of an unhappy childhood and disillusioned adolescence in Dublin when he wrote *Immaturity*. This disillusionment-with-Ireland motif was further promulgated and embodied by Shaw in the novel. He confronted his own previous artistic and socio-political disenchanted youth working as a clerk in Dublin, by incorporating or recreating similar circumstances in a London setting for the main protagonist of his narrative.

Robert Smith, a thinly disguised Shavian figure, finds secretarial employment with Mr Woodward, an Irish Protestant Member of Parliament. By adopting an English persona with an archetypal English surname, Shaw attempted to exorcise his abidingly negative memories of stultifying Dublin, through a process of ironic role-reversal. Smith, described at one stage as "the pale scholar of Islington, whose thoughts were like bloodless shadows of conscience and logic",¹⁴⁸ epitomised the young clerical Shaw of Dublin, struggling to release and fulfill his strong, artistic temperament. In the guise of Robert Smith, Shaw would remember and express his own deep frustration at the clerking profession in *Immaturity*.

¹⁴⁷ George Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters 1911-1925*, (Ed.) Dan H. Laurence. (London: Max Reinhardt, 1972), p.127.

¹⁴⁸ George Bernard Shaw, *Immaturity* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1930), p.136.

“I wonder,” said Smith to himself, as he walked home, “is there any profession in the world so contemptible as that of a clerk! It offers no work to the cleverest man that the stupidest could not do as well, or perhaps better...here am I spending my life in making entries of which a thousand will never be referred to again, for every one that will...we are a mean and servile pack of dogs...if that abominable office and every book, carpet, clerk, and partner were consumed to ashes tonight, I would contemplate the ruins tomorrow morning with the liveliest satisfaction.”¹⁴⁹

In *Immaturity* Shaw initially appears to reaffirm the conventional Victorian belief that the Irish disposition was antithetical to the demands and requirements of efficient and effective self-government. On Smith’s arrival Mr Woodward’s household exhibited all the characteristics of a gregarious, disorderly domicile; personified by the Woodward’s butler, Cornelius Hamlet, portrayed as a very un-English manservant - being as he was irreverent, opinionated and so unpredictably susceptible to social solecisms and indiscretions that we are informed he could not be trusted to answer the door after three in the afternoon in South Kensington. The consequences of introducing the industrious Smith with his English pragmatism and matter-of-factness into this environment are predictable enough - the unconventional Irish household only extenuated Smith’s Englishness thus allowing Shaw to explore Smith’s own latent comic potential and therefore disparage national stereotyping by deviously experimenting with notions of Stage-Irishness and Stage-Englishness. Yet the fact remains that it took the introduction of the empirical Smith to bring a sense of order and stability to Mr Woodward’s otherwise chaotic public life, and consequently Shaw could be accused of unintentionally falling victim to the very conventions of English cultural imperialism he wished to discredit and which he would return to more emphatically in *John Bull’s Other Island*. Indeed Smith’s interactions with the Woodward household, if viewed as an investigation of Anglo-Irish relations, perhaps assumes a further precursory importance or influence over his more detailed analysis of that subject in *John Bull’s Other Island*.

While the novel is ultimately concerned with the artist-philosopher Smith’s search for a positive identity, it also contains one of Shaw’s earliest artistic (fictional or dramatic) expositions on the complexity of Anglo-Irish relations, and examines the

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 49-50.

inadequacies and incongruities of English sensibility towards the Irish. Shaw satirically portrayed Smith rather negatively as an individual going nowhere fast, which was perhaps analogous to Shaw's own impression at his lack of success as an author of fiction. His ambivalence towards his Irish identity during his early years of exile took on a much sharper rejectionist tone despite his later assertive declarations of his Irishness. The original manuscript in the National Library of Ireland discloses the extent of Shaw's identity crisis since it reveals revisions in the published version apparently designed to obfuscate if not repudiate origin. According to Nicholas Grene:

In one sense, Shaw could be seen in the novel as the provincial with the cultural inferiority complex, deliberately refurbishing himself as more English than the English themselves...Shaw was not able to make out of his own Irishness the sort of outsider's distinction he was to achieve with it eventually...In so far as Shaw is Smith...he takes to himself that superiority of his English persona. He de-Hibernianises himself and is distanced from what he is ashamed of and dislikes in his own nationality...Shaw creates...an imagined alter ego, partly wish-fulfilment model allowing him to escape from his provincial status as Irishman, partly caricature of the uptight Anglicized prize he aspired to become...Shaw has cast off his family as well as his nationality; the novel represents a blotting out of aspects of the author's life he wanted to forget.¹⁵⁰

Mr Woodward's daughter Isabella is also portrayed as an unconventional Irish woman equipped with distinctively Shavian objectivity in her opinion of Ireland. She identifies the very things that Shaw despised about Ireland and castigates them mercilessly:

But don't fancy that I am disposed to defend my country. I hate Ireland. It is the slowest, furthest behind its time, dowdiest, and most detestedly snobbish place on the surface of the earth.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Nicholas Grene, "The Maturing of *Immaturity*: Shaw's First Novel" in *The Irish University Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 231-233.

¹⁵¹ George Bernard Shaw, *Immaturity* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1930), p.262.

By portraying Isabella Woodward as a convert to Catholicism, Shaw publicized the complexity of diverse religious traditions in Ireland as a further dimension of Irish politics. Isabella personified the multi-faceted nature of the Irish question, being of the Protestant ascendancy ruling class, but also a convert to Catholicism. She sees Ireland in much the same negative light as Shaw saw it, culturally backward and consumed by political, religious and ethnic segregation. Isabella stands in sharp contrast to the other conventional whimsical 'Irish' characters in the novel, and in certain respects she is very much a forerunner to Larry Doyle in *John Bull's Other Island*. As if echoing Shaw and Larry Doyle's own sentiments, Isabella ultimately concluded that the only sensible institution in Ireland was absenteeism.

John Bull's Other Island

The fact that Shaw lived in Ireland for only twenty of his ninety-four years, and that only one of his major dramatic works directly concerned Ireland has tended to prejudice his contribution to Irish literature. Much conjecture has been made of what if Shaw had stayed to witness the resurgence of Gaelic nationalism, would he too have been swept up in the Irish Literary Revival? Later he at least admitted the possibility. "If I had gone to the hills nearby to look back upon Dublin and to ponder upon myself, I too might have become a poet like Yeats, Synge, and the rest of them".¹⁵² In reality Shaw's iconoclastic artistic temperament and distinctive sense of Irishness was never suited to Yeats's romantic vision of Ireland. In 1906, two years after he completed *John Bull's Other Island* Shaw wrote:

John Bull's Other Island was written in 1904 at the request of Mr William Butler Yeats, as a patriotic contribution to the repertory of the Irish Literary Theatre. Like most people who have asked me to write plays, Mr Yeats got rather more than he bargained for...It was uncongenial to the whole spirit of the neo-Gaelic movement,

¹⁵² George Bernard Shaw, *The Matter With Ireland*, David H. Greene & Dan H. Laurence (eds.), (Rupert Hart-Davis Soho Square London, 1962), p.x.

which is bent on creating a new Ireland after its own ideal, whereas my play is a very uncompromising presentment of the real old Ireland.¹⁵³

Undoubtedly the complexities facing the Abbey in producing and staging *John Bull's Other Island* were immense. The stage direction presented several logistical and financial problems, which were "at that time beyond the resources of the Abbey Theatre".¹⁵⁴ However, according to Philip O'Leary, Shaw's comment's concerning the play's uncongeniality towards "the whole spirit of the neo-Gaelic movement" is revealing as:

What is most interesting is not the accuracy of Shaw's reading of either his own play or the cultural program of Yeats's theatre, but rather his perception that the work would have encountered certain defensiveness and outright hostility from a contemporary Irish audience - reactions which, it should be noted, he must have felt would have been shared by Abbey directors Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory.¹⁵⁵

O'Leary's essay is a very interesting exposition on the trials and tribulations Shaw experienced in search for involvement in the Irish cultural revival. It is especially informative on what individual leading Irish literary and political figures, and certain Gaelic language activists had to say in their own words on the person, persona, and plays of George Bernard Shaw during those years - some of which I will quote later. It is important to try and define the major participants involved in the Irish cultural revival and attempt to distinguish between their wide-ranging and differing objectives. According to O'Leary the Irish cultural revival of the first decade of this century was championed by an often bewilderingly diverse, complex, and very loose alliance of different groups, each with its own agenda, and whatever Shaw may have meant by the "neo-Gaelic" movement, the actual Gaelic language revival movement on the ground was but one among them. Because, however, some commitment to the restoration of the Irish language was shared by virtually all of those organizations, of which the Gaelic League was one of the largest and most visibly active, there is

¹⁵³ George Bernard Shaw, *Prefaces*, (Constable and Company Ltd., London, 1934), p.439.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.439.

¹⁵⁵ Philip O'Leary, "Lost Tribesman Or Prodigal Son?: George Bernard Shaw And The Gaelic Movement", *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies*, St. Paul, MN (Eire). 1994 Summer, 29:2, 51-64

considerable justification for seeing the language issue, even if only symbolically, as a prime catalyst behind all the cultural ferment - and hence, doubtless, Shaw's choice from the further distorting distance of London, of "neo-Gaelic" as a blanket term for the whole enterprise.

From the beginning Shaw was ostracised by certain cliques within the Irish literary revival who were too narrow-minded to even consider accommodating views that had even the slightest suggestion of "uncongeniality" and difference to their own agenda. Shaw was determined that his opinion would be expressed regardless of the opposition that stood in his way. Thus with regard to the commissioning and subsequent rejection of *John Bull's Other Island* in 1904-5 and the controversial production of *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet*, against the wishes of Dublin Castle in 1909, Shaw succeeded in annoying many provincial Irish nationalists of the "neo-Gaelic" movement, the Lord Chamberlain and the British colonial administration in the space of four years.

Dion Boucicault, the playwright whom Shaw accused of creating a sham Ireland, introduced for American consumption the quintessential stage Irish lead in the role of Myles-na-Coppaleen in the 1860 première of *The Colleen Bawn*. Versions of this Stage Irish stereotype were prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic and Shaw understood their political role and the negative imagery they tended to elicit. As with Wilde before him, Shaw realised that by deconstructing the stereotypical stage Irishman he could eventually expose the hollow charade of this ultimately racist caricatured stage convention.

Boucicault had raised the Stage Irishman from a minor role to a mock-heroic lead and recently arrived Irish emigrants were eager to accept the former comic minor character in new melodramatic heroic roles. But was this just the old stereotype in a new setting? David Krause admits Boucicault's excesses, but insists that generally his dramas are free from the stage Irish burlesque:

Like Lever and Lover, Boucicault occasionally moved across that fine but distinct line which separates the archetype from the stereotype of the Stage Irish peasant. The archetype is a legitimate fictional or theatrical character, an Irish clown following in

an ancient tradition; but the stereotype is a vulgar parody of the original, a burlesque figure usually invented for the benefit of gullible Englishmen and Americans.¹⁵⁶

Dublin reviews of Boucicault's work also congratulate him for his avoidance of caricatures: "It has too long been the habit of those who create 'Irishmen' for stage representation, to produce an extravagant compound of fun, frolic, recklessness and folly, confounding vulgarity and coarseness with humour and wit...not so with Mr. Boucicault."¹⁵⁷ Although today mainly remembered for the pervasiveness of the stage Irish stereotyping in his work, Boucicault, according to Jean McMahon, also claims a knowledge and a desire to reform: "The fire and energy that consist of dancing round the stage in an expletive manner, and indulging in ridiculous capers and extravagancies of language and gesture, form the materials of a clowning character, known as 'the Stage Irishman', which it has been my vocation as an artist and as a dramatist to abolish".¹⁵⁸

So Boucicault transforms the Stage Irishman but he does not abolish him from his plays, because the character is popular with his audiences, and popularity equates to commercial success. 'Teague' or 'Paddy' now metamorphoses from minor stage character into a mock-heroic figure, defiant instead of obsequious, eloquent instead of blundering, thoroughly at home in his native soil instead of floundering in English society...but he remains presenting a romantic fantasy picture of Irish peasant life. The commercial viability of the character also had political consequences. John Millington Synge admitted the influence of Boucicault and the Stage Irish character on the burgeoning theatre movement in Ireland, "the Irish National Theatre Society is sometimes accused of degrading Ireland's vision of herself by throwing a shadow of the typical Stage Irishman upon her mirror",¹⁵⁹ and Sean O'Casey openly exploited Boucicault's stage devices, which Krause makes reference to, including his use of idiom, his use of sensational scenes, ballads and broad Irish humour.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ David Krause (ed.), *The Dolmen Boucicault* (Dublin, 1964), p.40.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.41.

¹⁵⁸ Jean McMahon, "The Wearing of the Green: The Irish Plays of Dion Boucicault," in *Eire/Ireland*, 2 (1957), p.10.

¹⁵⁹ David Krause, *op cit.*, p.44.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.45.

Regarding the play itself, Shaw realised all too well the political implications of the Stage Irish conventions. He included them all in *John Bull's Other Island*: the returned ambitious exile, the industrious if sentimental Englishman, the exploited peasant, the priest and the Irish colleen. He sets them all in motion and then invites us to examine them with what Brecht called, "the ordinary man's calm and incorruptible eye".¹⁶¹ In a review of an 1896 revival of Dion Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn* (1860) Shaw announced, "I am quite ready to help the saving work of reducing the sham Ireland of romance to a heap of unsightly ruins",¹⁶² and in 1916 he once again reiterated this fact "Ireland is in full reaction against both servility and the stage Irishman".¹⁶³ Using the same method he employed in *Arms and the Man* and *Mrs Warren's Profession*, Shaw discovered what Martin Meisel has called "a genre anti-type." He did so "by the method of systematic counter-conversion...designed to make the conventional uses of the materials artistically unacceptable to men of intellectual conscience."¹⁶⁴

According to Norma Jenckes, the significance of this reaction exposed:

Shaw's profound understanding of Irish history enabled him to recognize the political role of the stage Irish stereotype - drunken, generous and good-hearted, but dumb, superstitious, irresponsible, and obviously incapable of self-rule. This insight he translated into a depiction of Ireland complete with moonlit round tower, Irish priest, soft-voiced colleen, superstitious peasant, and Irish pig. Every convention begun by Thomas Heywood in the *Four Prentices of London* (1593?) and perfected by Boucicault appears in Shaw's play to participate in its own unconventional destruction.¹⁶⁵

John Bull's Other Island is a perceptive, analytical study of the Irish émigré confronting the notion of national identity and Anglo-Irish relations. The play is

¹⁶¹ John Willett (ed.), quoting Bertolt Brecht in *Brecht on Theatre*, (New York, 1964), p.11.

¹⁶² George Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, II (New York, 1931), p.33.

¹⁶³ George Bernard Shaw, *The Matter With Ireland*, *op cit.*, p.99.

¹⁶⁴ Martin Meisel, *Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Theater* (Princeton, 1963), p.141.

¹⁶⁵ Norma Jenckes, "The Political Function of Shaw's Deconstruction of Stage Irish Conventions in 'John Bull's Other Island'", in *Essays In Theatre*, Volume 5, Number 2, May 1987, p.115.

preoccupied with understanding and revealing modes of national performance, both Irish and English, which have judiciously been constructed and perfected over the centuries by colonizer and colonized alike in a manic attempt to disarm the other for further financial advantage – it is all a question of expediency. Therefore adopting the Wildean maxim that - “man is least himself when he talks in his own person but give him a mask and he will tell you the truth”¹⁶⁶ – Patsy Farrell assumes the persona of the stupid, superstitious Irish peasant, which as Shaw reveals in his stage direction “is not his real character, but a cunning developed by a constant dread of a hostile dominance, which he habitually tries to disarm by pretending to be a much greater fool than he really is. Englishmen think him half-witted, which is exactly what he wants them to think”,¹⁶⁷ and similarly the empirically minded Broadbent portrays to perfection the role of the good-natured, well-intentioned, liberal Imperialist – and so the performance continues, each pandering to the other’s preconceptions of superiority. But just as at the beginning of the play when Larry Doyle mocks and undermines the traditional stereotype of the stage Irishman by exposing the Glaswegian Tim Haffigan as a fraud...the mask has a tendency to slip revealing the truth.

Man alive, don’t you know that all this top-o-the-morning and broth-of-a-boy and more-power-to-your-elbow business is got up in England to fool you, like the Albert Hall concerts of Irish music? No Irishman ever talks like that in Ireland, or ever did, or ever will. But when a thoroughly worthless Irishman comes to England, and finds the whole place full of romantic duffers like you, who will let him loaf and drink and sponge and brag as long as he flatterers your sense of moral superiority by playing the fool and degrading himself and his country, he soon learns the antics that take you in.¹⁶⁸

Broadbent too is susceptible to this imperfection at times, proclaiming to Doyle that “Home Rule will work wonders under English guidance” before cynically and hypocritically adding the proviso “We English must place our capacity for

¹⁶⁶ Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic*, Richard Ellmann (ed.), (London, 1970), p.389.

¹⁶⁷ George Bernard Shaw, *The Complete Plays of Bernard Shaw* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1931), p.436.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.410.

government at the service of nations less fortunately endowed; so as to allow them to develop in perfect freedom to the English level of self-government".¹⁶⁹

Against that, however, Shaw, with his exposure of an idiosyncratic peasantry (for English mirth), inadvertently depicted an Irish stereotype the play intended to remove. The disappointed Yeats reminded Shaw "Ireland is still an island" with a people not concerned or interested in Irish and English character differences.¹⁷⁰ And in so far as Shaw was an Irish writer writing about the country yet left, he could fall into the category of "collaborators" who, in the words of Corkery, were given to "acquiescence in the economy of imperialism" and with damaging "psychic effects" on Ireland's already dissipated culture. Corkery writes:

On the one hand, a writing directed toward an English market seems to perpetuate the alien stereotype of the Irish: it is a colonial literature, written to exploit the quaintness of the humankind that was not quaint, that was standard. On the other hand, and more significantly, it is not simply that their presentation as alien to an English market is a misrepresentation but that in the dissymmetry of representation what is left in Ireland is not the true identity of the Irish, unmasked and intact, but rather its absence.¹⁷¹

Corkery's argument is correct, however, only in so far as he, like Yeats, sees Irish identity in its more pristine cultural sense. Shaw, and indeed Wilde, was interested in Ireland politically and socially, and Shaw's play while incorporating that vital cultural dimension, was essentially a political exposé, farcically powered. Within that framework, it was an attempt to explain Irishness to a hitherto deaf audience, as G.K. Chesterton points out:

Why Englishmen cannot understand Mr Shaw is that Englishmen have never taken the trouble to understand Irishmen. They will sometimes be generous to Ireland; but

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.431.

¹⁷⁰ Declan Kiberd, 'The London Exiles: Wilde and Shaw', *op cit.*, p.421.

¹⁷¹ *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35, I, (Spring 1989), pp.71-86; review of Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1931). For a more detailed examination see the first chapter of Corkery's book "On Anglo-Irish Literature" in *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1931), pp.1-27.

never just to Ireland. They will speak to Ireland; they will speak for Ireland; but they will never hear Ireland speak. All the real amiability which most Englishmen undoubtedly feel towards Irishmen is lavished upon a class of Irishmen which unfortunately does not exist. The Irishman...with his brogue, his buoyancy, and his tender-hearted irresponsibility, is a man who ought to have been thoroughly pampered with praise and sympathy, if he had only existed...Unfortunately, all the time that we were creating a comic Irishman in fiction, we were creating a tragic Irishman in fact. The more we saw...a sort of warm and a weak fidelity, the more he regarded us with a sort of icy anger. The more the oppressor looked down with a somewhat unamiable contempt...it is needless to say that such comic cross-purposes could be put into a play...they have been put into what is perhaps the most real of Mr Bernard Shaw's plays.¹⁷²

As the symbolic representative of Shavian exile, and a repudiator of antiquated Irish dreams, Doyle is trapped between his genuine national affinity for his country and his abhorrence of it as a failed economic entity. It is the agony of an Irishman "whose heart is nothing but his imagination",¹⁷³ against English practicality and self-serving Imperial efficiency. Keegan, the clerical, symbolic representative of the visionary-dreamer, imagines an idealized de/post-colonized future for Ireland, a utopian alternative to replace the reality which under current conditions is a "hungry...naked...ignorant, oppressed land".¹⁷⁴ Ironically, this is also Doyle's most secret vision, for "a country to live in where the facts were not brutal and the dreams not unreal."¹⁷⁵ But it is Keegan who, perhaps in a reflection of Doyle's guilt, sees through this Broadbentian scheme as one which will "drive Haffigan to America very efficiently",¹⁷⁶ and deliver Roscullen into the possession of his syndicate for developmental exploitation. Shaw was acutely aware of the exploitative side of colonialism, as indicated by the following discussion between Broadbent and Haffigan:

¹⁷² G.K. Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw* (Guild Books, London, 1951), p.9.

¹⁷³ George Bernard Shaw, *The Complete Plays of Bernard Shaw* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1931), p.410.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.455.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.415.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.470.

“You know the English plan, Mr Haffigan, don’t you” Broadbent inquires. “Bedad Sir, I do. Take all you can out of Ireland and spend it in England: thats it”. Broadbent’s chagrined response had something of a hollow ring to it: “My plan sir will be to take a little money out of England and spend it in Ireland”.¹⁷⁷

The visionary Keegan understands the reality of the situation; Broadbent is a harbinger of doom for people like Matt Haffigan. They are totally expendable as there is no room in this new world order, or post-syndicated Roscullen, for inefficiency. Keegan acquiesces to this fact; even suggesting that he may vote for Broadbent, because he understands that it is already a *fait accompli* regarding Broadbent’s commercial redevelopment plans for Roscullen:

For me there are but two countries: heaven and hell; but two conditions of men: salvation and damnation. Standing here between you the Englishman, so clever in your foolishness, and this Irishman, so foolish in his cleverness, I cannot in my ignorance be sure which of you is the more deeply damned; but I should be unfaithful to my calling if I opened the gates of my heart less widely to one than to the other.¹⁷⁸

Similarly Doyle the cynical realist is left bitter but totally impotent. By the end of the play he has lost both Nora, and the opportunity to represent Roscullen in Westminster to Broadbent. He is as guilty of complicity in Broadbent’s Machiavellian machinations yet like Keegan he accepts Broadbent as Roscullen’s most viable option for future economic advancement - resistance is futile, as the alternative does not even bear contemplation:

If we can’t have men of honour own the land, let’s have men of ability. If we can’t have man of ability, let us at least have men with capital. Anybody’s better than Matt (Haffigan), who has neither honour, nor ability, nor capital, nor anything but near-brute labor and greed in him.¹⁷⁹

Thus, *John Bull’s Other Island*, with its satirical powers and dispassionate air, dexterously balances the Anglo-Irish condition from the perspective of a disillusioned

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.407.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.451.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.430.

expatriate. It is not an Irish play in as much as it is an Anglo-Irish one - an exact division of two cultures, traditionally opposed, but harmoniously brought together in a game of mutual practical expediency. Shaw established the efficiency of the invader, but he taps subconscious forces from the Irish psyche, which in the character of Keegan, and to a lesser extent in Doyle, transcend that efficiency, and might also represent the more repressed passionate nature of Shaw himself. Politics is the winner, but Shaw makes clear that the Irish intellect given to dreaming, as exemplified by Keegan, need play no second fiddle to anybody, least of all the quixotic Broadbent who, in tilting at Irish windmills, goes charging into battle with not the least notion of the ultimate consequence of his actions for the country he fools himself into thinking he is helping. Elsie B. Adams identifies Keegan as “the most remarkable of Shaw’s heroes of heart” and adds:

Just as earlier Shaw identified heart with will, in this play he identified it with imagination... Keegan’s Irish heart is wrung by a vision of heaven which makes him unable to accept earth as it is; and he breaks his heart brooding over “The dead heart and blinded soul of Ireland.” Finally, as he watches plans for the commercial development of Ireland by Broadbent and Doyle, he is in despair, but he nevertheless gives his heart to them.¹⁸⁰

Nicholas Grene has examined the intricacy of Shaw’s own position as émigré writer in *John Bull’s Other Island*: “Larry Doyle is the most subtle study of the emotions of the Irish exile before Joyce”, Shaw equates the returning Doyle with “the dream of escape and the fear of return, the guilty shame and self-disgust of nationality.”¹⁸¹

Critical research suggests that as well as being his quintessential work on Anglo-Irish relations, *John Bull’s Other Island* also encompasses an internationalist dimension; Shaw intended to revive a national concern for oppressed nationalities abroad. Sometimes Shaw would exemplify a particular social problem endemic to all societies such as poverty or persecution, and by using one country then universalise the consequences of political apathy and indifference. In his *Essays in Fabian Socialism*

¹⁸⁰ Elsie B. Adams, “Heartless, Heartbroken and Heartfelt, A Recurrent Theme in the Plays of Bernard Shaw”, *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 16-25, (1982-83), pp. 8-9.

¹⁸¹ Nicholas Grene, *Bernard Shaw: A Critical View* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.75.

(1889) he referred to “taking the world as one country”.¹⁸² There is much evidence to suggest that *John Bull's Other Island* is as much concerned with a Shavian anti-materialist philosophy and universal class struggle, as it is with national self-determination and Anglo-Irish relations - epitomised by Matt Haffigan and the English valet Hodson's verbal fencing match over the respective social hardships and sufferings of the Irish peasant and English labourer. Hodson, representing a distinctively Fabian stance, argues that the grievances of the dispossessed, landless Irish peasant pale in comparison with the injustices suffered by the English. Hodson passionately recounts his own familial misfortune - his grandfather's eviction at the hands of a capricious landlord, his wife's premature death and his own constant financial insecurity and uncertainty of seasonal employment - which is now further threatened and exacerbated by an ever increasing Irish emigrant workforce, all too willing to accept the exploitative capitalist status quo of lower wages, tenement housing and terrible working conditions in industrial Britain. As Tramble T. Turner has remarked: “Shaw had wanted his audience to question the assumptions of materialistic systems, both English and Irish, and to think about the plight of the common man within such a system”.¹⁸³

If *John Bull's Other Island* was Shaw's attempt to expose the hollowness of racial stage stereotypes through the inversion of national character-types, and a desire to ultimately re-educate his British audience, then it was also a damning condemnation of the threat of myopic nationalism. Shaw wrote his *Essays in Fabian Socialism* between 1888 and 1904; if these essays which represent Shaw's political, economic and religious theories are studied alongside some works he reviewed dealing with the ‘Irish Question’,¹⁸⁴ and his own collection of critical essays *The Matter With Ireland* one obtains a more definitive understanding of Shaw's ‘Irishness’ and what he was

¹⁸²George Bernard Shaw, *Essays in Fabian Socialism*, Ayot St. Lawrence ed., Vol. XXX of *The Collected Works of Bernard Shaw* (New York: Wm. H. Wise & Co., 1932),p.25.

¹⁸³ Tramble T. Turner, “Bernard Shaw's ‘Eternal’ Irish Concerns,” *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies*, St. Paul, MN (Eire). 21:2, Summer 1986, p.58.

¹⁸⁴Shaw's two unsigned reviews were of J.A. Partridge's, *The Making of the Irish Nation* in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 September 1886; and Robert Oliver's, *Unnoticed Analogies: A Talk on the Irish Question* published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 September 1888. Both are anthologised in David H. Greene and Dan H. Laurence, *The Matter With Ireland* (1962).

hoping to achieve with *John Bull's Other Island*. The reviews, according to George Mills Harper, present his detailed description of nationalism's function within his theory of Political Evolution¹⁸⁵ and place the late Victorian fascination with the "Irish Question" within the perspective of Fabian Socialism.¹⁸⁶ Rereading the play in the context of these topics, Tramble T. Turner suggests this was a typical Shavian process of "generating lively plays from topical debates. His intent of focusing the audience's attention on long-term issues, through comedy also becomes clearer".¹⁸⁷

Shaw placed little value on "nationalism"; he saw it more as an unfortunate socio-political aberration, essentially relevant only as a means to an end – although the end in this case was the desired establishment of Irish Home Rule which he fully supported. In his review of J.A. Partridge's book, *The Making of the Irish Nation*, Shaw analysed the nature of English Imperialism and concluded that the "Imperial instinct" which governed by the "appetite for new markets abroad, cheap native labor, and official appointments, civil and military, in newly annexed districts" which were then exploited; are contrasted with the "philosophical Imperialist", who "recognises that Federation is a step higher in social organization, and that we must inevitably and quite desirably come to it unless we are content to go backward." Therefore Shaw only accepted nationalism as beneficial if its ultimate consequence was the formation of a "federation of nations, each subject only to the whole empire, and not to the nucleus or strongest member of it".¹⁸⁸ As early as 1900 Shaw had acknowledged the status quo of global imperialism in his article *Fabianism and the Empire*: "The partition of the greater part of the globe among such powers is, as a matter of fact that must be faced, approvingly or deploringly, now only a question of time".¹⁸⁹ In his review of Robert Oliver's *Unnoticed Analogies: A Talk on the Irish Question*, published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 September 1888, Shaw surmised, "Nationalism

¹⁸⁵In brief, these theories were developed in his Hyde Park speeches and espoused the common bonds amongst the international working classes, and the necessity of an anti-materialist religious perspective.

¹⁸⁶For further insight see George Mills Harper, "'Intellectual hatred' and 'intellectual nationalism': the paradox of passionate politics," in *Theatre and Nationalism in twentieth-century Ireland*, (ed.) Robert O'Driscoll (Toronto and Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1969), p.49.

¹⁸⁷Tramble T. Turner, *op. cit.*, p.59.

¹⁸⁸George Bernard Shaw, *The Matter With Ireland*, *op. cit.*, p.59.

¹⁸⁹Fabian Society, *Fabianism and the Empire* (London: Grant Richards, 1900), p.3.

is surely an incident of organic growth, not an invention".¹⁹⁰ Shaw succinctly recapitulated these sentiments sixteen years after he first formulated them in his review of Oliver's *Unnoticed Analogies*:

A conquered nation is like a man with cancer: he can think of nothing else, and is forced to place himself, to the exclusion of all better company, in the hands of quacks who profess to treat or cure cancer. The windbags of the two rival platforms are the most insufferable of all windbags. It requires neither knowledge, character, conscience, diligence in public affairs, nor any virtue, private or communal, to thump the Nationalist or Orange tub: nay, it puts a premium on the rancour or callousness that has given rise to the proverb that if you put an Irishman on a spit you can always get another Irishman to baste him...Nationalism stands between Ireland and the light of the world... A healthy nation is as unconscious of its nationality as a healthy man of his bones. But if you break a nation's nationality it will think of nothing else but getting it set again. It will listen to no reformer, to no philosopher, to no preacher, until the demand of the Nationalist is granted. It will attend to no business, however vital, except the business of unification and liberation.¹⁹¹

Militant nationalism was not the only worry that Shaw forewarned the populace of; he alluded to the potential threat which cultural nationalism posed:

The great movements of the human spirit which sweep in waves over Europe are stopped on the Irish coast by the English guns of the Pigeon House Fort. Only a quaint little offshoot of English pre-Raphaelitism called the Gaelic movement has got a footing by using Nationalism as a stalking-horse, and popularizing itself as an attack on the native language of the Irish people, which is most fortunately also the native language of half the world, including England. Every election is fought on nationalist grounds; every appointment is made on nationalist grounds; every judge is a partisan in the nationalist conflict; every speech is a dreary recapitulation of nationalist twaddle; every lecture is a corruption of history to flatter nationalism or defame it; every school is a recruiting station; every church is a barrack; and every Irishman is unspeakably tired of the whole miserable business, which nevertheless is

¹⁹⁰ George Bernard Shaw, *The Matter With Ireland, op cit.*, p.21.

¹⁹¹ George Bernard Shaw, *Prefaces*, (Constable and Company Ltd., London, 1934), pp.454-455

and perforce must remain his first business until Home Rule makes an end of it, and sweeps the nationalist and the garrison hack together into the dustbin.¹⁹²

Shaw continues again in 'organic' analogous terms: "There is indeed no greater curse to a nation than a nationalist movement, which is only the agonizing symptom of a suppressed function"¹⁹³ Larry Doyle best epitomises this Shavian anti-nationalist stance in a conversation with his partner Broadbent in Act I of *John Bull's Other Island*:

You keep clear of your father because he differs from you about Free Trade, and you don't want to quarrel with him. Well, think of me and my father! He's a Nationalist and a Separatist. I'm a metallurgical chemist turned civil engineer. Now whatever else metallurgical chemistry may be, it's not national. It's international.¹⁹⁴

Espousing this internationalist position, he appeals to the English Broadbent, as a fellow civil engineer, to consider that "The one real political conviction that our business has rubbed into us is that frontiers are hindrances and flags confounded nuisances."¹⁹⁵ Shaw remained an Irishman first and foremost throughout all his life; perhaps it was his innate experience and awareness of the 'curse of nationalism' that allowed him to be more objective regarding the manner in which he defined his nationality.

Shaw believed that the Irish nationalism had to be ancillary to the more essential objectives of international socialism. The constant grievances of Irish nationalists exasperated him, as he truly believed that compared to the hardships endured by the British, the Irish peasant/labourer never had it so good. As Declan Kiberd has remarked:

Although they numbered one tenth of the population of Britain, the Irish held the balance of power in the House of Commons, whose business seemed dominated by

¹⁹² *Ibid*, p.455.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p.455.

¹⁹⁴ Bernard Shaw, *John Bull's Other Island*, (Penguin, 1984 edition), p.84.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.84.

Irish grievances and questions. Shaw for his part, was perfectly convinced that Ireland was a far happier and freer country than England. He believed that Britain, too, had unresolved national questions: and Home Rule for England became one of his more lasting hobbies.¹⁹⁶

Yeats maintained that Shaw lacked a passionate vision, and his portrayal of Irish peasant life was not in the spirit of the Celtic Revival, which stressed a lifestyle, uncorrupted by modern progressivism. Shaw condemned this idealisation of Irish life and his position he felt was legitimated by his intolerance for the “alleged Arcadian virtues of the half-starved drudges who are sacrificed to the degrading, brutalizing and...entirely unnecessary pursuit of unscientific farming”.¹⁹⁷

Oscar Wilde had also recognized the class bias for the Stage Irish caricature and commented on it years earlier:

Croker and Lover, full of the ideas of the harum-scarum Irish gentility, saw everything humorised. The impulse of the Irish literature of their time came from a class that did not - mainly for political reasons - take the populace seriously and imagined the country as a humorist's Arcadia; of its passion, its gloom, its tragedy, they knew nothing. What they did was not wholly false; they merely magnified an irresponsible type, found offenest among boatmen, carmen, and gentleman's servants, into the type of a whole nation, and created the stage-Irishman. The writings of 'Forty-eight and the famine combined, burst their bubble.'¹⁹⁸

Wilde had set about inverting the whole stereotypical ideal concerning the 'Stage-Irishman' the moment he arrived in England, and Shaw was now adopting the same strategy in *John Bull's Other Island*.

¹⁹⁶ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland, op cit.*, p.62.

¹⁹⁷ George Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, II (New York, 1931), p.31.

¹⁹⁸ Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, edited by Richard Ellmann (New York, 1967), p.130.

Shaw and Yeats – Two Unlikely Bedfellows

From the very beginning Shaw's association with the Irish Literary Revival was somewhat equivocal; even on a strictly personal level Shaw and Yeats were two of the most unlikely bedfellows. Shaw's first reference of acquaintance is laconically mentioned in his diary for 12 February 1888, whilst having supper with William Morris at his property on the Mall in Hammersmith: "he met an Irishman named Yeats."¹⁹⁹ The young Yeats (he was twenty-two at the time, Shaw was thirty-one) was more forthright and informative in revealing his first impressions on meeting Shaw in a letter to Katharine Tynan: "[Shaw] is certainly very witty. But, like most people who have wit rather than humour, his mind is maybe somewhat wanting in depth. However, his stories are good, they say".²⁰⁰

The history behind *John Bull's Other Island* is worth examining. In those early days Yeats' poetic mannerisms irritated Shaw and he mischievously alluded to this in his parody depiction of Eugene Marchbanks, his unworldly young poet in *Candida* (1894). Relations were further strained when later Yeats began to socialise with the actress Florence Farr who was Shaw's current mistress and five years older than Yeats. The fact that Shaw had still not disentangled himself romantically from the possessive Jenny Patterson²⁰¹ apparently bore no relation to the fact that Yeats, in Shaw's eyes, had become an intrusive nuisance. The whole scenario of two famous-to-be Irish writers vying for the attentions of one lady was to some extent reminiscent of Oscar Wilde and Bram Stoker's courting Florence Balcombe. However on this occasion passion and love were not the only motives, a certain amount of intellectual pride was also at stake. By 1893 Florence Farr had begun meeting Yeats regularly at occultist gatherings. Shaw who had been instructing and influencing Farr's acting career in an Ibsenite direction now resented her wasting her time and energy at

¹⁹⁹ References to Shaw's 1885-97 shorthand diaries are from the Stanley Rypins transcript in the collection of Stanley Weintraub.

²⁰⁰ Allan Wade (ed.), *The Letters of W.B. Yeats* (Macmillan, 1954), [L 59].

²⁰¹ Ironically Jenny Patterson would play the character Grace Tranfield to Florence Farr's Julia Craven in Shaw's autobiographical *The Philanderer* in 1893.

sessions of the occultist “Golden Dawn”. Shaw feared that Farr was restricting her full theatrical promise with her excursions into theosophy and Egyptology; and her recurrent occultist activities in the company of Yeats was also limiting the frequency of occasions when Shaw could consort outside of work with her. Farr was generally careless in keeping her emotional and intellectual interests focused, something Shaw obviously realised all too well:

She set no bounds to her relations with men whom she liked, and already had a sort of Leporello list of a dozen adventures...she was in violent reaction against Victorian morals, especially sexual and domestic morals.²⁰²

Shaw was concerned that Farr might decide to initiate the still-virginal Yeats sexually. His diary refers to an occasion where he felt it necessary to outstay Yeats at Farr’s Brook Green flat. Ironically in a scene of art imitating life, just a year after the 13 July 1893 reference to an evening at Florence’s in Dalling Road where “Willy Yeats came in about 21 [9:00 p.m.] and stayed a long time chatting”, Shaw’s *Candida* would mirror Florence Farr and threaten to initiate sexually Eugene Marchbanks, the play’s inexperienced Yeats-like character. Similarly Farr exhibited some of the “wilful, violent” virtues of Blanche Sartorius who introduces her diffident admirer, Harry Trench, to some facts of carnal knowledge and Shaw would later identify Farr as “the heroine in my first play [*Widowers’ Houses*] in 1892”.²⁰³

Yeats was not above poking fun and satirising his older and domineering compatriot and rival as Stanley Weintraub pointed out: “In an essay on Wilde, he referred waspishly to a certain notorious and clever, but cold-blooded ‘Socialist’”.²⁰⁴ In March 1894 Florence Farr, with the financial backing of Miss Annie Horniman, rented the Avenue Theatre in London for the purpose of producing a season of drama. She had requested Yeats rather than Shaw to write an opening play and on the 29 March 1894 Yeats’s *The Land of Heart’s Desire* opened a double bill of Irish drama

²⁰² Stanley Weintraub, *op cit.*, p.165.

²⁰³ Shaw, “An Explanatory Word,” in *Florence Farr/Bernard Shaw/ W.B. Yeats: Letters*, ed. Clifford Bax (London: Hone and Van Thal, 1946), p.ix.

²⁰⁴ Stanley Weintraub, “Uneasy Friendship: Shaw and Yeats” (1983), p.127, The British Library Document Supply Centre, source of reference 9418.036000.

with John Todhunter's *A Comedy of Sighs*. Yeats's short play obtained a certain modest success, "an exquisite curtain raiser," Shaw recalled,²⁰⁵ but it was overshadowed by the failure of Todhunter's play. Shaw then came to Florence's assistance; he hurriedly completed his *Arms and the Man*, all performances were suspended for a week as the new play was rehearsed with Florence as the seductive, feisty maid Louka; such a natural role for her to play and probably written with her in mind. The substitution of *Arms and the Man* for *A Comedy of Sighs* stole all the headlines and Yeats's play would be eclipsed as a result.

Far from being disillusioned, Yeats was pragmatic about his first collaboration with Shaw and concluded that if Shaw's play was as successful as the critics expected it to be, Shaw's success could provide him with the opportunity to produce a more ambitious Yeatsian play. What I find interesting about their early personal relations and professional associations is that they offer a valuable insight into their respective opinions of the other, all very informative when examining *John Bull's Other Island*. Yeats offers many interesting observations on their early relationship in his *Autobiographies*. Later, in *The Trembling of the Veil*, Yeats captured how the opening of the play, which Shaw had planned for *Arms and the Man* "to confound his enemies", worked precisely as its creator had intended:

For the first few minutes *Arms and the Man* is crude melodrama and then just when the audience are thinking how crude it is, it turns into excellent farce...On the first night the whole pit and gallery, except certain members of the Fabian Society, started to laugh at the author and then, discovering that they themselves were being laughed at, sat there not converted - their hatred was too bitter for that - but dumbfounded, while the rest of the house cheered and laughed. In the silence that greeted the author after a cry for a speech one man did indeed get his courage and boo loudly. "I assure the gentleman in the gallery," was Shaw's answer, "that he and I are of exactly the same opinion, but what can we do against a whole house who are of the contrary opinion?" And from that moment Bernard Shaw became the most formidable man in modern letters, and even the most drunken of medical students knew it.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Shaw, "An Explanatory Word", *op cit.*, p.ix.

²⁰⁶ W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, (London, Macmillan, 1926), pp. 281-282.

What is most revealing about this extract is what Yeats observed and remembered of the pit and gallery's reaction to the play; they "started to laugh at the author and then, discovering that they themselves were being laughed at, sat there not converted - their hatred was too bitter for that - but dumbfounded." Yeats may very well have remembered the audience's reaction to *Arms and the Man* when later he was considering *John Bull's Other Island* for the Irish literary revival. The controversy²⁰⁷ surrounding *Arms and the Man* perhaps exacerbated Yeats's concern about the possible reaction of an Irish audience to *John Bull's Other Island*. This worry, coupled with the more obvious financial and logistical problems associated with the stage direction of the play, if the fledgling Irish National Theatre Society were to undertake the project at all, probably dampened Yeats's initial enthusiasm. In 1907 J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* would incite even more extreme reactions from theatrical audiences reminiscent of what happened with *Arms and the Man*. Ironically, in the *Prospectus of the Irish Literary Theatre* (1899) Yeats proposed an objective and function of the new national theatre as follows: "We hope to find, in Ireland, an uncorrupted and imaginative audience, trained to listen by its passion for oratory - we will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of ancient idealism." Although his concern regarding the subject matter and audience reaction was probably justified, and even Shaw had these concerns, Yeats had also misgivings about Shaw's artistic and philosophical ideology that was so contrary to his own. With *Arms and the Man* Yeats admitted that he was confused and bewildered listening to the play:

With admiration and hatred. It seemed to me inorganic, logical straightness and not the crooked road of life, yet I stood aghast before its energy as to-day before that of the *Stone Drill* by Mr. Epstein or of some design by Mr. Wyndham Lewis...Presently I had a nightmare that I was haunted by a sewing-machine, that clicked and shone, but the incredible thing was that the machine smiled, smiled perpetually. Yet I delighted in Shaw, the formidable man. He could hit my enemies and the enemies of

²⁰⁷ Yeats wrote to his friend John O'Leary on the 15 April informing him that the play would be controversial since "chuckers out" - bouncers - had been hired for the opening night: "They are to be distributed over the theatre and are to put out all people who make a row. The whole venture will be history anyway for it is the first contest between the old commercial school of theatrical folk and the new artistic school.", See Allan Wade (ed.), *The Letters of W.B. Yeats* (Macmillan, 1954), 231.

all I loved, as I could never hit, as no living author that was dear to me could ever hit.²⁰⁸

Yeats was not alone in finding the play peculiar; he recalls one evening the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Edinburgh arrived for a performance much to the delight of the theatre manager - until the Duke began muttering his displeasure at Shaw loudly enough to be heard in the stalls. "The man is mad," he kept repeating, until the future Edward VII ushered him away.²⁰⁹

In any event, Shaw's experiences of working with Yeats and their triumvirate relationship with Florence Farr would contribute to Shaw's next play *Candida*. As previously mentioned one could infer that Shaw constructed at least part of the play's emotional young poet, Eugene Marchbanks to parody Yeats's poetic affections.²¹⁰ In all likelihood Yeats probably never knew that he was Marchbank's model, but ten years later Yeats would confide to his friend AE (George Russell) that in *The Land of Heart's Desire* and some of his lyric verse of that time "there is an exaggeration of sentiment and sentimental beauty which I have come to think unmanly".²¹¹ In 1896 the Farr-Shaw love affair was beginning to dissolve; Shaw had failed to win Florence over to Ibsenist drama. She had remained close to Yeats through their mutual occultist activities while Shaw had developed other interests, one of which would lead to marriage in 1898.

Around this time Shaw turned "his Pygmalion energy toward others, never losing his impatience with Yeats, although retaining respect for Yeats's abilities and vision".²¹² By 1899 Yeats and Lady Gregory had formed the experimental Irish Literary Theatre

²⁰⁸ W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, *op cit.*, p.283.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.283.

²¹⁰ See Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.130, Richard Ellmann notes that Yeats would, by the end of the 1890s, begin "to generate more activity in his verbs, throwing out most of those which, like 'sighing,' 'waning,' 'brooding,' 'weeping,' were liable to Shaw's criticism that while he had worked to alleviate human distress his Irish contemporaries had sung sad songs about it."

²¹¹ *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, Allan Wade (ed.) (Macmillan, 1954), [L 434].

²¹² Stanley Weintraub, "Uneasy Friendship: Shaw and Yeats", *op cit.*, p.131.

and Shaw graciously promised them a play. Early in 1900 Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory and informed her:

I saw Shaw today. He talks of a play on the contrast between English and Irish character which sounds amusing. He came to the 'Three kings' on Saturday. I replied to a speech of his...by proving that Shaw's point of view belonged to a bygone generation - to the scientific epoch - and was now 'reactionary.' He had never been called reactionary before. I think I beat him. He was not in very good form however.²¹³

In Yeats's eyes, Shaw always represented a sort of rival. In October 1901, in a bid to persuade or influence Shaw to write a play appropriate for an Irish production/audience, Yeats wrote encouraging him to "come over and see our Theatre".²¹⁴ By late 1902 Shaw had completed *Man and Superman*, which would be his next big work, and the subject of an Irish play emerged once more. "Bernard Shaw talks again of writing a play for us," Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory. "Certainly it would be a great thing for our company if he will do us an Irish play."²¹⁵ In 1903 with Shaw writing by now, Yeats was encouraged enough to write in *Samhain*, the journal of the Irish Literary Theatre:

A play Mr. Bernard Shaw has promised us may be ready to open the summer session. His play will, I imagine, unlike the plays we write for ourselves, be long enough to fill an evening, and it will, I know, deal with Irish public life and character. Mr. Shaw, more than anybody else, has the love of mischief that is so near the core of Irish intellect, and should have an immense popularity among us. I have seen a crowd of many thousands in possession of his spirit, and keeping the possession to the small hours.

As Yeats awaited Shaw's completed manuscript, Shaw offered to let the company perform *Arms and the Man*, *Widowers' Houses* or *The Devil's Disciple* (although not

²¹³ *The Letters of W.B. Yeats, op cit.*, p.335.

²¹⁴ Yeats to Shaw, October 1901, in M.J. Sidnell, "Hic and Ille: Shaw and Yeats," *Theatre and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, Robert O'Driscoll (ed.), (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p.171

²¹⁵ *The Letters of W.B. Yeats, op cit.*, [L387].

The Man of Destiny, which Yeats wanted but which Shaw felt was beyond the company's means to handle at that time). Undeterred Yeats would persuade, convince and cajole Shaw into granting him the reprint rights to an 1885 Shavian short story with an Irish setting, "The Miraculous Revenge", which he wanted for the inaugural edition of the Irish compilation, *The Shanachie* (1906). Finally by mid-1904, the completed manuscript of *John Bull's Other Island* was ready for review. One could assume from the enthusiasm that had echoed from Dublin that the Irish Literary Theatre would produce and perform his play; thus Shaw wrote to Yeats enquiring about any perceived technical problems - whether changes of scene in the second and fourth acts could be handled mechanically. "I am greatly touched," he added, "by learning that history is repeating itself in the manner of our backer. It was revealed to me in a dream (this is literally true) that Miss Horniman backed *Arms & The Man* & *The Land of Heart's Desire*; and now I see that she is the benefactress of the I.L.T. also."²¹⁶ A copy of the manuscript was promptly forwarded to Yeats who asked W.G. Fay, the company manager, to carry out a feasibility study on the manuscript and explore the production possibilities.

Fay reported back to Yeats with several reservations. He believed that it was "full of good things," but "the difficulty of getting a cast for it would be considerable."²¹⁷ Thomas Broadbent, Shaw's excessively exaggerated romantic Englishman would pose the greatest problem; but Fay was also concerned that the play's cast was too large for the company's small stage. J.M. Synge also perused the script and concurred with the worried and cautious management's reservations on the feasibility of actually producing the play. However, Yeats did inform Shaw that Synge predicted that the play would "hold a Dublin audience, and at times move them"; although Synge was adamant that the prophetic Father Keegan scene with the grasshopper, in which Shaw strives towards the future theatre of the absurd, and the "Handy Andy"²¹⁸ scene involving the transportation of the pig in the recently invented automobile should be excluded from the production. According to Norma Jenckes in

²¹⁶ *Bernard Shaw Collected Letters 1874-1897*, Dan H. Laurence.(ed.), (London: Max Reinhardt, 1972 & New York: Viking, 1985, 1988), p.452.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.452.

²¹⁸ See Norma Jenckes, "The Political Function of Shaw's Destruction of Stage Irish Conventions in 'John Bull's Other Island'" in *Essays In Theatre*, Volume 5, Number 2, May 1987, pp. 115-126.

his letter to Shaw delineating the problems of the play, W.B. Yeats referred to John Millington Synge's aforementioned disapproval of "the Handy Andy business with the goose"²¹⁹ And in Patsy Farrell, Synge had immediately recognised the model of the Irish peasant that Shaw was invoking. *Handy Andy* is the title of one of Samuel Lover's novels and a play by W.R. Floyd. The main character in Floyd's play is a peasant who acts as a serving-man in the squire's big house; he is described as "a bold rider and curious fellow, who never does anything without a blunder. The tenants have nicknamed him 'Handy Andy'." One of the farcical routines of Handy Andy is his shopping problem at the opening of the second act of Floyd's play: "And I'll carry the gander under this arm, and the ham under this wan - and be me scowl, I think I'll be loaded down." He proceeds to become thoroughly confused, dropping, breaking, and losing various items. Handy Andy has some heroic rescues, but all in all he provides comic relief of the crudest kind. Shaw leans on these farcical tendencies when he shows Patsy nearly dropping the salmon, being scolded by Aunt Judy, and offering to carry a goose in his mouth. He also breaks his fingers in the farcical scene involving the pig in the automobile. Perceived by even Synge as only slightly better than the "earl of scatterbrain" of Floyd's play, Shaw's peasant (we learn through stage directions) has adopted foolishness as a camouflage tactic learned from centuries of struggle. It's an Irish version of shuffling and head scratching and an indicator of the political realities of English power and Irish submission. However, Synge realised that these scenes could be misinterpreted by an Irish audience and recommended to err on the side of caution and cut the scenes from the play.

Yeats had his own suggestions, as he carefully distanced himself from his earlier eagerness for production. In a letter to Shaw he explained how the first act and the beginning of the second disappointed him, "The stage Irishman who wasn't an Irishman" amused him, but then, he asked himself, "What the devil did Shaw mean by all this [sentimental] Union of Hearts-like conversation? What do we care here in this country, which despite the Act of Union [with England] is still an island, about the English Liberal party and the Tariff, and the difference between English and Irish

²¹⁹ For a discussion of this letter and the politics surrounding the first performance of the play, see Norma Jenckes, "The Rejection of Shaw's Irish Play: *John Bull's Other Island*," *Eire/Ireland*, 10 (1975), pp. 41-59.

character, or whatever else it was all about. Being raw people, I said, we [Irish] do care about human nature in action, and that he's not giving us." Yeats agreed that the length of the play was too long and would require cutting, but he assured Shaw, his interest began to pick up after the first act:

That young woman who persuaded that Englishman, full of the impulsiveness that comes from a good banking account, that he was drunk on nothing more serious than poteen, was altogether a delight. The motor car too, the choosing the member of Parliament, and so on right to the end, often exciting and mostly to the point. I thought in reading the first act that you had forgotten Ireland, but I found in the other acts that is the only subject on which you are entirely serious. In fact you are so serious that sometimes your seriousness leaps upon the stage, knocks the characters over, and insists on having all the conversation to himself. However the inevitable cutting (the play is as you say immensely too long) is certain to send your seriousness back to the front row of the stalls. You have said things in this play which are entirely true about Ireland, things nobody has said before, and these are the very things that are most part of the action. It astonishes me that you should have been so long in London and yet have remembered so much. To some extent this play is unlike anything you have done before. Hitherto you have taken your situations from melodrama, and called up logic to make them ridiculous. Your process here seems to be quite different, you are taking your situations more from life you are for the first time trying to get the atmosphere of a place, you have for the first time a geographical conscience.²²⁰

To his own surprise, Yeats then confessed, "I do not consider the play dangerous. There may be a phrase, but I cannot think of one at this moment. Here again, you show your wonderful knowledge of the country. You have laughed at the things that are ripe for laughter...I don't mean to say that there won't be indignation about one thing or another, and a great deal of talk about it all, but I mean that we can play it, and survive to play something else"²²¹

Shaw was too experienced to believe that Yeats was seriously committed to staging the play in Dublin and he easily read between the lines. Even excluding all

²²⁰ *Bernard Shaw Collected Letters 1874-1897, op cit.*, pp. 452-453.

²²¹ *Ibid*, p.453.

production and cast difficulties, Shaw was all too aware, as he would later voice in the preface, that *John Bull's Other Island* regardless of all the great comic moments and acceptable truths still remained “uncongenial to the whole spirit of the neo-Gaelic movement, which is bent on creating a new Ireland after its own ideal, whereas my play is a very uncompromising presentment of the real old Ireland.”²²² Shaw accepted that the play was difficult to cast and that the draft reviewed by Yeats was extremely long and required shortening. These were problems which a little patience, compromise, editing, courage and conviction could have overcome, but fundamental differences of ideology were more difficult to accommodate.

“The insuperable problem, however,” as Stanley Weintraub phrased it, “was that Shaw was seeing past the Ireland of poets and dreamers (the play’s Larry Doyle) to a reality in conflict with sentimental Celticism, a reality that Synge himself would soon dramatize in *The Playboy of the Western World*.”²²³ Shaw’s Irish peasant, unlike the one of folklore, was the play’s Matt Haffigan, whose tragedy, bluntly explained by Larry Doyle in the play, “is the tragedy of his wasted youth, his stunted mind, his drudging over his clods and pigs until he has become a clod and a pig himself - until the soul within him has smouldered into nothing but a dull temper that hurts himself and all around him. I say let him die, and let us have no more of his like.”²²⁴

But Yeats was not willing to risk a negative reaction from the general public at such an early stage in the Irish Literary Theatre’s history²²⁵; the fear of damaging the image and future of the company was enough to make him sever all connections with the play’s production, and not even the fact that Shaw was its author would convince him that it was worth taking the gamble. After some months of negotiations during which the play achieved great success and praise from its performances in London²²⁶; Yeats

²²² George Bernard Shaw, *Prefaces, op cit.*, p.439.

²²³ Stanley Weintraub, “Uneasy Friendship: Shaw and Yeats” *op cit.*, p.135.

²²⁴ George Bernard Shaw, *John Bull's Other Island*, Act IV.

²²⁵ Synge’s conflict with outraged Irish morality had begun as early as 1903, when the portrayal of Nora in *The Shadow* was felt by some moral guardians to be a slur on Irish womanhood.

²²⁶ Ironically, W.G. Fay, who had initially stressed his reservations about the I.L.T’s. abilities to produce the play, would eventually play Matt Haffigan in an English production; and *John Bull's Other*

agreed to drop any claims to the play and agreed to allow Louis Calvert, of the Royal Court Theatre Production, to tour and perform it in Ireland. "All right," Yeats replied to Shaw somewhat reluctantly, "give that queer elephant to Calvert. We all admire it but don't think we could do the English men at all." (Although there were only two significant English characters in the play.) "We might be able to play it but it is all uncertain and the great thing is to get it done here. Calvert will do it far better than we could."²²⁷ By then Yeats had seen a London performance, after which he wrote to Lady Gregory in November 1904 and stated that it acted "very much better than one could have foreseen...I don't really like it. It is fundamentally ugly and shapeless, but certainly keeps everybody amused".²²⁸

Shaw was completely antithetical to the Yeats's vision of the 'Celtic Twilight'; and as a progressive modernist he had little time for the romantic sentimentality associated with certain aspects of the Irish Literary Revival. Shaw's portrayal of Irish womanhood completely negated the Yeatsian mythology of Cathleen ní Houlihan; this mythologized, venerated and apotheosised representation of Irish nationalist femininity - whose purpose was to inspire and incite young Irishmen to battle for the greater glory of Ireland - this was utterly anathema to Shaw; and probably most vividly and brutally exemplified by Larry Doyle's description of Nora in *John Bull's Other Island* as "useless, sexless, an invalid without the excuse of a disease, an incarnation of everything in Ireland that drove him out".²²⁹ He later satirized the image of Cathleen Ni Hoolihan in his short 1915 play *O'Flaherty V.C.*

O'Flaherty VC

In this short play, which was intended, however whimsically, as a recruiting pamphlet for the British Army during the Great War, the main protagonist O'Flaherty, an Irishman, joins the British army to fight the Germans on the Western Front. And just

Island would establish Shaw's reputation in England and only later becoming one of the Abbey Theatre's perennial box-office successes.

²²⁷ *Bernard Shaw Collected Letters 1874-1897, op cit., p.453.*

²²⁸ W.B. Yeats, *Letters* (London: Macmillan), p.442.

²²⁹ George Bernard Shaw, *The Complete Plays of Bernard Shaw* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1931), p.436.

as Isabella Woodward in *Immaturity*, Larry Doyle in *John Bull's Other Island* and Shaw himself had already done, enlistment and war were now added to absenteeism or emigration as preferable alternatives to living in Ireland and facing a life of provincial ignorance, disillusionment and obscurity. The outbreak of war offered O'Flaherty the opportunity to escape from his parochial life in Ireland unbeknown to his Cassandra-esque mother who - in her Cathleen ní Houlihan guise - represented that uncompromising romantic nationalism that Shaw abhorred in Ireland. It later becomes apparent that the fervently nationalistic mother actually believed her son was fighting on the German side in the war, and she is appalled when she later finds papers revealing her son shook hands with the English King at Buckingham Palace. By inferring that O'Flaherty preferred to join the British army and face German guns in the trenches, rather than listen to further belligerent nationalist rhetoric at home, Shaw was attempting to undermine the Anglophobia of militant Irish nationalism and thereby challenge the traditional prejudice and suspicion towards the British by portraying them in a more favourable light. In a letter to Lady Gregory written in 1915 he confessed that:

The picture of the Irish character will make the Playboy seem a patriotic rhapsody by comparison. The ending is cynical to the last possible degree. The idea is that O'Flaherty's experience in the trenches has induced in him a terrible realism and an unbearable candour. He sees Ireland as it is, his mother as she is, his sweetheart as she is; and he goes back to the dreadful trenches joyfully for the sake of peace and quietness.²³⁰

Shaw was wary of the myopic, prejudiced, cultural nationalism establishing a firm foothold in Ireland, so he projected an internationalist or trans-nationalist vision for Ireland that was often interpreted as unpatriotic, but only because it was modern and certain elements within the Irish Literary Revival/Gaelic League were antagonistic and repugnant of Ireland having any association with modernity. James Joyce would also articulate Shaw's concerns, attacking what he construed as the insularity of the Irish Literary Revival, maintaining that its provincial and reactionary driving force was consumed by narrow nationalistic considerations, which consequently stymied

²³⁰ George Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters 1911-1925*, *op cit.*, p.309.

the development of a true universal Irish art. Joyce might well have been speaking for Shaw when he wrote the following in his essay "The Day of the Rabblement":

If an artist courts the favour of the multitude he cannot escape the contagion of its fetishism and deliberate self-deception, and if he joins in a popular movement he does so at his own risk. Therefore the Irish Literary Theatre by its surrender to the trolls has cut itself adrift from the line of advancement. Until he has freed himself from the mean influences about him - sodden enthusiasm and clever insinuations and every flattering influence of vanity and low ambition - no man is an artist at all.²³¹

Gareth Griffith has expanded this analogous relationship between Shaw and Joyce to the next stage, referring to similarities in theme and characterization:

The comparison with Joyce is interesting. Joyce and Shaw are so different, yet in some ways they share the same bleak outlook on Ireland as a land which has missed the boat to modernity. In 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room' from *Dubliners* Joyce reproduced much of what we find in *John Bull's*, the same useless rhetoric, the sense of political futility and, too, an argument based on the overriding need for capital in a country which seems only to produce dreams and anger. Though in Joyce the scene has shifted to an urban landscape, we still encounter similar characters, most notably the shadowy Father Keon, 'a person resembling a poor clergyman or a poor actor', who drifts in and out of the narrative in a manner reminiscent of Shaw's Father Keegan. It is essentially a different scene haunted by the same ghosts.²³²

Irish Critical Reaction to Shaw and his Work

I believe that much of the problem with Shaw, as with Wilde, was that they were ahead of their time. Because he was wary of the myopic, prejudiced, cultural nationalism establishing a firm foothold in Ireland, Shaw projected an internationalist

²³¹ James Joyce, "The Day of the Rabblement", *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (eds.), (London: Faber & Faber Ltd and New York: The Viking Press Inc., 1959), pp. 68-72.

²³²Gareth Griffith, 'The Irish Question' in *Socialism and Superior Brains* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.206. See James Joyce, *The Essential James Joyce* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p.439.

vision for Ireland which often was interpreted as unpatriotic, but only because it was modern and certain elements of the Irish Literary Revival and the Gaelic League were antagonistic and repugnant of Ireland having any association with modernity. Before exploring more closely what I believe Shaw was trying to portray to an Irish audience with the play, I want to examine how he was perceived by those elements of the literary revival that Yeats probably feared would be the source of much of the expected hostility.²³³

That is not to say that all members of the pan-nationalist movement were opposed to those Irish writers who chose to leave Ireland and/or write in English. In 1901 Arthur Griffith, a leading member of Sinn Féin, included Shaw with George Russell (“AE”) and George Moore as one of “the three Georges” in his *United Irishman* editorial response to a letter asking him to name “the greatest Irish literary men of the present day.”²³⁴

Shaw had his admirers within the Irish Literary Theatre and other sections of the literary revival, but he had been ostracised by sections of the Gaelic movement due to his uncongenial and uncompromising opinion regarding the Irish language. Whilst generally being wary and critical of the Gaelic League’s objectives²³⁵ much of the controversy surrounding Shaw’s opinion of the Irish language revival stemmed from comments he wrote in a letter/article to *The Freeman’s Journal* in 1910:

May I take this opportunity of setting right another misunderstanding. This time it is not the fault of the reporter, but the fault of the general ignorance of Irish life which prevails in Dublin. The remark which I made about the artificial language propagated

²³³ For a fascinating and more in-depth examination of Shaw’s relationship with The Gaelic Movement see Philip O’Leary, “Lost Tribesman Or Prodigal Son?: George Bernard Shaw And The Gaelic Movement”, *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies*, St. Paul, MN (Eire). 1994 Summer, 29:2, 51-64.

²³⁴ Arthur Griffith, “Answers to Correspondents,” *United Irishman*, 7 September 1901.

²³⁵ “An organisation founded in Dublin in 1893 by Douglas Hyde and others for the purpose of preserving the Gaelic language and literature of Ireland. The League encouraged the study of Gaelic by sponsoring classes of instruction in that language and, at the same time, attempted to eradicate illiteracy among native Gaelic speakers.” [Bernard Shaw, *The Matter With Ireland*, edited with an introduction by David H. Greene and Dan H. Laurence (London: Rupert Hart-Davis Soho Square, 1962), p.10].

by the Gaelic League has been taken as applying to the Irish language as actually spoken in the West of Ireland. In August last I asked some children on the north coast of Sligo Bay what language they spoke. Before asking the question I had found from their conversation that they spoke what is invidiously called the English language very much better than most English of their age; they seemed to have that natural command of it which is perhaps the most tremendous weapon at present in the hands of Ireland. They informed me that they spoke Irish to their parents at home. I asked if they could understand a stranger's Irish, meaning by a stranger a person from another county. They said they could not, and they thought that some strangers had more Irish than they. Their third language, which they did not speak to anybody, was the Gaelic which they were taught at school. They complained of it as being very difficult to write, and when I asked them whether they preferred to write English they gave a perfect whoop of assent.²³⁶

The suggestion, however true, that native Gaelic speakers were critical of formal Gaelic educational practices and actually preferred writing in English was obviously antithetical to the whole Gaelic League ethos. Shaw went on to argue:

It happened that long before the Gaelic League was thought of I learnt something about Gaelic from the late James Lecky, one of its rediscoverers. It presented itself to him as a highly artificial literary exercise, comparable to fifth-century Latin, and having about as much to do with vernacular Irish as fifth-century Latin had to do with the vernacular Italian of that period, or as Trinity College Greek has to do with the Greek actually spoken today in the streets of Athens. I know that in Donegal some of our Gaelic League enthusiasts are trying hard, by setting native Irish speakers to work on their literary exercises, to produce a sort of Gaelic Esperanto which can be imposed on us as our native language; and it is possible that they may succeed so far as to convert the local dialects into some sort of standard speech, and even to produce a state of things in which a traveler, confronted with cryptic Gaelic noticeboards in all directions, may be able to ask the nearest Irish-speaking laborer what they mean without receiving a confession of hopeless ignorance. It is also possible that the Gaelic League may stimulate Englishmen to study Anglo-Saxon, and throw off the yoke of that foreign language which managed to impose itself on Shakespear [sic] as

²³⁶ George Bernard Shaw, to *The Freeman's Journal*, Dublin, 17 October 1910. (Quoted in *The Matter With Ireland*, edited with an introduction by David H. Greene and Dan H. Laurence, London, 1962), p.59

it imposed itself on Swift, and on Pitt, and Gladstone, as on O'Connell and Parnell. And I do not doubt that an Anglo-Saxon League would do a great deal of good incidentally, as the Gaelic League has done. The Gaelic League has give most excellent advice to our country-men, and I believe that the remarkable increase of personal self-respect and genuine patriotism, of which I have seen unmistakable signs almost everywhere in Ireland except in Dublin, has been largely guided by that advice. But the advice was not written in Gaelic; it was written in the language of half mankind.

Along with that increase of self-respect there has arisen a new and very foolish fashion in Ireland. I have heard several Irishmen say, when the question of language was mooted, that if other nations were to have a language of their own, they did not see why Ireland should not have one. I quite expect before long to see the beginning of a movement to establish an Irish sun and moon, on the grounds that the present articles are English.

Yours truly,
Bernard Shaw.²³⁷

The editorial response in the Gaelic League's publication *An Claidheamh Soluis* five days later was as reassuringly condemning and dismissive of Shaw's comments as was expected.

Mr. Shaw made himself ridiculous when a couple of weeks ago he betrayed an unusual prejudice, for one claiming to be Irish, against the national language of this country...What is really wrong with Mr. Shaw is that he has been a West Briton quite unknown to himself. He discovered the fact a fortnight ago and is very angry ever since.²³⁸

This rather frivolous retort masked a more serious intent, which becomes apparent when Seán Mac Giollarnáth, editor of *An Claidheamh Soluis* in 1910 confronted Shaw's perceived suspicions concerning a Gaelic language revival:

²³⁷ Ibid, p.59

²³⁸ "Mr. Shaw Angry," *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 22 October 1910.

Mr. G.B. Shaw seldom makes himself ridiculous. He has won fame and made a fortune by ridiculing other people in his very clever plays. On Monday night last, however, he dropped to the level of the ordinary Britisher, when he expressed his disbelief, in the worth of the Irish language. The revival of Irish would, he said, place additional barriers between England and this country, and he failed to see that is just why Ireland is reviving her language. Up with the barriers, they will protect us against a thousand plagues that, like the Poor Law, have come from the land to whose service Mr. Shaw has given himself. They will save us from the new nationality of the author of 'John Bull's Other Island,' and from the politics of Whig, Tory, and Fabian.²³⁹

The roots of this attitude towards Shaw, according to Philip O'Leary, "lie in one of the most important, vigorously debated, and resolutely unresolved literary and ideological issues of the early Gaelic revival, and after - what was the proper attitude to adopt towards Anglo-Irish literature, the work of those Irish authors who by either linguistic necessity or personal choice wrote in the English language."²⁴⁰ O'Leary further argues that there is no question of fundamental principle here and that doctrine was categorical on this point as pronouncements from leading Gaelic intellectuals would clarify. In 1899, the historian Eoin Mac Néill wrote in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, of which he was then editor: "there are to be found people who try to persuade themselves that Irish literature may mean literature in the English language. This heresy has done more to provincialise Ireland than has the Act of Union."²⁴¹

Yet evidence of Gaelic fundamentalism expressing and embracing provincialism and intolerance of any non-Gaelic/Anglo-Irish influences also abounded; in 1904 the lexicographer Father Patrick Dinneen proposed that "With a foreign language come foreign modes of thought, foreign ideals in art and literature, foreign customs, foreign manners, the spread of all that is debasing in foreign literature...no genuine native

²³⁹ "Up with the barriers," *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 10 August 1910. This piece appeared in the editor's weekly summary of the news entitled "Gleó na gCath" ("The Tumult of the Battles").

²⁴⁰ Philip O'Leary, *op cit.*, p.54. For a more complete discussion of this issue see Philip O'Leary, "Uneasy Alliance: The Gaelic League looks at the 'Irish' Renaissance," in *The Uses of the Past: Essays on Irish Culture*, ed. Audrey S. Eyler and Robert F. Garratt (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), pp.144 -160.

²⁴¹ "Debasing Literature: Its Antidote", Editorial, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 29 April 1899.

school of literature, or of art, can ever be created from foreign or Anglo-Irish models.”²⁴²

Thus a certain amount of animosity and distrust tended to run both ways in Anglo-Irish/Gaelic League relations. From the very beginning an atmosphere of antagonism, at times bordering on open hostility, pervaded the relations of the outspoken socialist and the Gaelic League. He was undoubtedly a formidable antagonist quite adept at infuriating those on whom he vented his wrath; Lady Gregory recalled one such incident in 1897; addressing the Irish Literary Society in London Shaw proposed that Irish was “an effete language”.²⁴³ His comments provoked the expected emotional retort and irate reprimand from the nationalist weekly, *Fáinne an Lae (The Dawning of the Day)*, in April of 1898. For Shaw, the Irish language debate as advocated by the majority of the Gaelic League represented the conventional, parochial, insular, prejudiced thinking of extreme nationalism, which he abhorred.

This conservative Gaelic obstinacy was posited most unambiguously by Patrick Pearse²⁴⁴ in the aftermath of the controversy over *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907: “Literature which is in Irish is Irish literature; literature which is not in Irish is not Irish literature.”²⁴⁵ But not all the Gaelic League activists were of this opinion; indeed Douglas Hyde the president of the League was also one of the original “guarantors” of the Irish Literary Theatre. Philip O’Leary refers to other enlightened Gaelic Leaguers such as William Rooney who urged his fellow Gaels to provide Anglo-Irish writers a role in the revival:

It is a narrow view, considering the circumstances, to say that men who themselves might do good, men with sympathies wholly Irish, are to be shut off from all participation in the uprising of the nation because fortune did not favour them with a

²⁴² Father Patrick Dinneen, “The Irish Language Revival Movement,” in *Lectures on the Irish Language Movement* (Dublin: M.H. Gil and Son, 1904), pp. 42-43

²⁴³ Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), pp. 35-36.

²⁴⁴ Patrick Pearse (1879 -1916), poet, playwright and one of the executed leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising.

²⁴⁵ Patrick Pearse, Editorial response to a letter from Éamonn Ceannt, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 13 April 1907.

Gaelic mother, and consequently they cannot reach above mediocrity in the language of their own land.²⁴⁶

Therefore, O'Leary argues that, "despite the rigidity of movement orthodoxy, many Gaelic writers and intellectuals were sensitive to, even proud of, the virtues and successes of Anglo-Irish literature and correspondingly reluctant to expel its creators from the emergent nation."²⁴⁷

On occasion, even Patrick Pearse, in a letter to Lady Gregory exhibited a more inclusive attitude; "I have been trying in *An Claidheamh Soluis* to promote a closer comradeship between the Gaelic League and the Irish National Theatre and Anglo-Irish writers generally. After all we are all allies."²⁴⁸ However most Gaelic League sources did not agree with this tripartite alliance, and even where certain Anglo-Irish writers were recognised as contributing to the revival, their efforts were not afforded the same praise as those Gaelic brethren. The weekly *Fáinne an Lae* (*The Dawning of the Day*) expressed just such sentiments:

The English writings of three or four neo-Celts do not make up a Celtic movement such as is stirring the Celtic nations to their very depths. They may be forerunners, scouts, or what you like. In future ages they may be looked upon as apostles of the Transition.²⁴⁹

A week later *Fáinne an Lae* returned to this theme in a more condescending manner:

Anglo-Irish literature must and will suffer in this time of transition. Our poets and prose writers feel that they are something which is only half the real thing. They stand aside to await the coming of the Gaelic school.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ William Rooney, "A Recent Irish Literature," in *The Prose Writing of William Rooney* (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1909), p.68.

²⁴⁷ Philip O'Leary, *op cit.*, p.54.

²⁴⁸ Patrick Pearse to Lady Gregory, 29 April, 1905, in *The Letters of P.H. Pearse*, ed. Séamas Ó Buachalla (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1980), p.94

²⁴⁹ "Notes," *Fáinne an Lae*, 16 June 1900.

²⁵⁰ "Notes," *Fáinne an Lae*, 23 June 1900.

O'Leary refers to one Gaelic Leaguer who suggested that while the Anglo-Irish writers were waiting for this "transition" to come about, they could do something positive and useful - learn Irish:

I suggest that future Anglo-Irish poets should be compelled to append to each lyric, as a guarantee of good faith, a certificate stating what part of O'Growney [the standard learner's text of the time] they had arrived at, e.g., "A Sonnet to Leonora" (guttural aspiration). "The Rejected Lover's Complaint" (eclipsis). We would thus be enabled to gauge accurately the fervour of the lyrist's enthusiasm for the Gaelic language.²⁵¹

Regrettably Shaw never heard of this suggestion, as he would undoubtedly have provided a memorable response. But as O'Leary astutely surmises:

in the absence of such a willingness to hasten the extinction of their own literary species, to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the secondary role of interpreting "the new thoughts and conceptions evolved from the heart of the Gaelic race to an outside world through the medium of a *lingua franca* inferior in power and subtlety, but more widely disseminated,"²⁵² Anglo-Irish writers were seen as doomed to become mere anachronisms in, to use Pearse's phrase, "a movement of defeat."²⁵³ Henceforth, the touchstone for assessing the acceptability of Irish writing in English was to be its success in capturing its ineffable Gaelic essence beneath its alien "sgreamh Sagsbhéarla"²⁵⁴ ("English language crust").²⁵⁵

The problem remained for many Anglo-Irish writers who wished to contribute to the new cultural revival, that their efforts were denigrated and demoted to the role of

²⁵¹ O'Leary quotes from W.T. Stead, "Gaelicophile Poetry and Two New Poets," rev. of *Through the Ivory Gate* by Thomas MacDonagh and *Lays of the Moy* by Gerald Griffin, *The Leader*, 31 January 1903.

²⁵² "Notes," *Fáinne an Lae*, 23 June 1900.

²⁵³ Patrick Pearse, "A Movement of Defeat," *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 6 February 1904. This piece is unsigned, but a letter to Tomás Ó Flannghile (Thomas Flannery) Pearse claimed all unsigned material in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, during his editorship (1903-1909) as his own. See Pearse to Tomás Ó Flannghile, 30 September 1905, in *Letters of P.H. Pearse*, p. 98.

²⁵⁴ Pádraig Ó Séaghadha ("Conán Maol"), rev. of *The Four Winds of Eirinn* by "Ethna Carbery" (Anna Johnston), *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 21 June 1902.

²⁵⁵ Philip O'Leary, *op cit.*, p.56.

“interpretation”; or worse, totally ostracised and excluded from revivalist participation by elements of the Gaelic League. Therefore Gaelic activists like Peadar Mac Fhionnlaoich (Peter McGinley) could acknowledge that the plays of Sheridan, Goldsmith, and Shaw were “of the highest quality”, but still question, “What appeal have they to an Irishman more than Shakespeare’s or J.M. Barrie’s?”²⁵⁶ This feeling was not only restricted to Gaelic Leaguers who had a political agenda influencing their opinion; the progressive journalist William P. Ryan, discussing the criteria for recognising authentic Irish literature developed by Thomas MacDonagh in *Literature in Ireland* (1916), stated:

“Tá iomadh sgríbhneoir a rugadh i nÉirinn - ó Goldsmith agus Sheridan go dtí George Bernard Shaw - agus do bheadh sé fánach againn bheith ar lorg an Mhodha Éireannaigh seo i n-a sgríbhinní.”²⁵⁷

“There are many writers who were born in Ireland - from Goldsmith and Sheridan to George Bernard Shaw - and it would be futile for us to seek this Irish mode in their writing.”

Shaw’s comic genius and artistic creativity was recognised by most people involved in the Irish literary and cultural revival. Whilst his ability was never in doubt, for some activists Shaw’s own views on the revival coupled with his indifference towards the Irish language did question his sincerity and commitment. The problem tended to be one of identification, a sentiment expressed in one *Sinn Féin* review as the lost opportunity and regret at what - “the author of *Widower’s Houses* might have written if he had stuck to his country.”²⁵⁸

Evidence suggests that Shaw was possibly the most vilified of all the Anglo-Irish writers and for some revivalists he was beyond redemption regardless of his efforts to contribute to the literary revival. Even when in 1909 the Abbey Theatre decided to

²⁵⁶ Peadar Mac Fhionnlaoich, “Feis Bhéilfeirste” (“The Belfast Festival”), *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 2 May 1914.

²⁵⁷ William P. Ryan, “Tomás Mac Donnchadha,” *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 2 September 1916.

²⁵⁸ Quoted by Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years: Recollections of Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh as Told to Edward Kenney* (Dublin: James Duffy and Co., 1955), p.99.



produce Shaw's *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* which had been banned from production in England, his role in defying the Lord Chamberlain and the wishes of Dublin Castle were overshadowed or ignored and it was Yeats, Lady Gregory and the independence of Irish theatre which won approval from the Gaelic League and other nationalist organisations. Pearse epitomised this feeling in an editorial for *An Claidheamh Soluis*:

We take no more interest in the literary fate of Mr. George Bernard Shaw than an orthodox Hebrew of the house of Judah may be imagined to have taken in the fate of an erring member of one of the mislaid Tribes. So far as the Gael is concerned, Mr. George Bernard Shaw belongs "to the legion of the lost ones, to the cohort of the damned"...Yet we are interested in the situation which the putting on of Mr. Shaw's play by the Directors of the Abbey Theatre has precipitated. The action of the directors may have been wise or foolish, but the fact remains that they are now making a fight for Irish freedom from an English censorship. Mr. Shaw and "Blanco Posnet" have no more to do with the case than the flowers that bloom in the spring.²⁵⁹

Even Yeats did not escape criticism for his, and the Abbey Theatre's part in the *Blanco Posnet* furore, D.P. Moran, the insuperable, belligerent editor of *The Leader*, blasted Yeats for embroiling the Abbey in a purely English altercation, which Moran feared would lead to the imposition of British-style stage censorship in Ireland.²⁶⁰ The *Sinn Féin* leader Arthur Griffith, who had lauded Shaw as "one of the three Georges" and one of "the greatest Irish literary men of the present day,"²⁶¹ had now become "England's chartered jester" and "the cleverest flatterer England has hired,"²⁶² Writing in *Sinn Féin* five months later Griffith again returned to the subject: "Bernard Shaw is a very brilliant Irishman who gave up his country to capture the British public. Now that he and the British public have quarrelled, there is no reason why we should take part in the squabble."²⁶³

²⁵⁹ Patrick Pearse, "An English Censorship in Ireland," *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 28 August 1909.

²⁶⁰ See "Current Affairs," *The Leader*, 4 September 1909.

²⁶¹ Arthur Griffith, "Answers to Correspondents," *United Irishman*, 7 September 1901.

²⁶² "The New Stage Irishman," *Sinn Féin*, 19 March 1910.

²⁶³ Arthur Griffith, "The Castle and the Theatre," Editorial, *Sinn Féin*, 21 August 1909. This notion that Shaw, and others, had sold out to the British for personal gain is expressed several times in this period, as in the 1911 editorial note in *An Claidheamh Soluis*: "Write in English and you immediately qualify

It is interesting to contrast how the Gaelic League in Ireland perceived Shaw in comparison with the Gaelic movement in London. Due to his immense popularity and success in Britain, London Gaels tended not to ignore him as much as their Dublin brethren, but their attention was sometimes as opprobrious as any *Sinn Féin* or *An Claidheamh Soluis* editorial:

He has just sufficient Irish nature to feel out of his element, but he has not enough to enable him to interpret Irish ideas or Irish character...Not wholly through his own fault he is lost to his own race, and, through that fact, is virtually lost to humanity - it is highly improbable that he can make any permanent contribution to literature.²⁶⁴

However certain London Gaels were appreciative of Shaw's efforts to disclose the fallacy of the 'Stage Irish' to an English public accustomed to racial stereotyping. Many London Irish regarded Shaw with respect rather than contempt for his enterprise in attempting to re-educate and refashion English perceptions of the Irish. An article in the *Daily Chronicle* reporting on the Gaelic movement in London reported that "the abolition of the stage-Ireland of the pre-Bernard Shaw days is one of the little items on the programme of the Gaelic League."²⁶⁵ Philip O'Leary refers to one humorous incident that epitomised this 'bemused affection', which certain Gaels held for Shaw:

as an intellectual tin god, you are hailed as an Irish Ibsen by the 'Art for Art's sake' votaries, your plays are hawked all over Anglo-Saxondom, from Canada to New Zealand, you may even get a Civil List Pension*, you may, in a word, become a Bernard Shaw, a W.B. Yeats, or a Padraic Colum." See "A Word of Encouragement," *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 29 April 1911.

*Ironically, "Speranza" (Lady Wilde), the ardent poetic fomenter of Irish nationalism and revolutionary journalist of *The Nation* newspaper, also received a Civil List Pension. She was grateful when she received "on 24 May 1890 a Civil List Pension of £70 a year from the Prime Minister of the nation against which she had once sponsored a revolution. It was given 'in recognition of the services rendered by her late husband Sir William Wilde, M.D., to statistical science and literature.'" Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, (London, 1987), pp. 120-121.

²⁶⁴ "The Sad State of G.B.S.," *Inis Fáil: A Magazine for the Irish in London* (December, 1904), p.4.

²⁶⁵ Quoted in Donncha Ó Súilleabháin, *Conradh na Gaeilge i Londain, 1894-1917 (The Gaelic League in London, 1894-1917)* (Baile Átha Cliath: Conradh na Gaeilge, 1989), p.104.

In the little 1905 skit “Two Dramatists - A Tragic Moment on a Mountain,” in *Guth na nGaedheal (The Voice of the Gaels)*. Set on “a mountainside along which mystic shadows are flitting,” the playlet spoofs the pretensions of both Shaw and Yeats with clever good humour. Frustrated by his inability to shock the Yeats figure with his iconoclasm, the Shaw character pledges that “this day must I eat a steak, make a commonplace remark, and die,” and then exits “tearing his latest hundred-page preface.”²⁶⁶

O’Leary mentions other examples which confirm that Dublin Gaels were not entirely immune to Shaw’s irreverent wit. In 1913 “An Clóca” wrote,

Is eól do gach aonne gur b’iongtach an duine Bearnard Seágh. Níl daoine ar aon aontadh i dtaobh cuid dá chluichidhibh gidheadh go n-aontuigheanngach aonne gur mór an ghoimh atá ‘n-a pheann.

Everyone knows that Bernard Shaw is an extraordinary person. People disagree about some of his plays although everyone agrees that there is great venom in his pen.

Noting that a French critic had referred to the dialogue in *You Never Can Tell* as “úrlabhra uathbhásach cóbaigh feallsamhnaigh” (“the shocking speech of a philosophical clown”), “An Clóca” commented: “Sid é an saghas fógraidh is mó thaitheann le Seágh.” (“That’s the sort of publicity Shaw likes best.”)²⁶⁷

Enlightened individuals such as P.S. Ua hÉigearthaigh (O’Hegarty) had a different yet compromising approach to Shaw’s ‘Irishness’, an approach that was far more accommodating than the popular Gaelic League opinion of Shaw then. In 1907 he wrote, “Many will resent my saying that his genius is essentially Irish, but at any rate it isn’t English.”²⁶⁸ Contrast this view with another London Gael, “D. O’D.” (Probably Delia O’Dwyer according to O’Leary²⁶⁹) who denied Shaw any genius at all in a generally positive review of a London production of *John Bull’s Other Island*:

²⁶⁶ Philip O’Leary, *op cit.*, p.59. The quote is taken from “Iniscreabhain,” “Two Dramatists - A Tragic Moment on a Mountain,” *Guth na nGaedheal* (March, 1905), pp. 23-24.

²⁶⁷ See “An Clóca”, “Fada Fánach,” *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 8 February, 1913

²⁶⁸ P.S. Ua hÉigearthaigh, “Holding the Mirror,” *Inis Fáil*, (June, 1907), p.5

²⁶⁹ Philip O’Leary, *op cit.*, p.59. (See next footnote.)

I find an intellectual character in Oscar Wilde's wit quite absent from Bernard Shaw's. And Oscar Wilde had genius - however superficial the character of his mind. Bernard Shaw has brilliancy, but not a spark of genius.²⁷⁰

Surprisingly enough, this review essentially ignored the question of Shaw's Irishness. Yet in 1909 it was Shaw's nationality that was the subject of praise from Ua hÉigearthaigh when he congratulated the Abbey Theatre for staging *Blanco Posnet*:

The Abbey Company has been criticised a good deal for accepting the play and criticised most unjustly. As for the work of an Irishman offered to them, they are quite right to take it and play it, and the event has justified them, as in the case of the "Playboy."²⁷¹

Gaelic League activists remained divided on the manner, if any, that Shaw could or should contribute to the literary revival. Finding a way to accommodate Shaw, with his all too often critical, antithetical views was problematic. Even his indomitable stubbornness could not deter certain Gaels from somewhat admiring that most Shavian recalcitrance. Daniel Corkery believed that Shaw's work exhibited the quintessential characteristics of deracinated "Colonial literature,"²⁷² and he went on to write in his influential *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* that:

Mr. Shaw has described himself as a faithful servant of the English people; is it not a strange thing that servitude could eventuate in brilliancy? Yet is it not an old and constant theme in literature? – the jester, just because he is not one of ourselves, is privileged to loosen his tongue – only that the jester in literature has a secret sorrow in the background, as if to preserve the natural roundness of life – heart as well as brain. All those writers [i.e. Sheridan, Wilde, *et al.*] were, as much as Shaw, servants of the English people: one wonders if their desertion of the land that most required their services was not their secret woe.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ See "D.O'D.," Review of *John Bull's Other Island, Inis Fáil*, (November, 1909), p.9.

²⁷¹ P.S. Ua hÉigearthaigh, "The Oireachtas Dramas - and Others," *Inis Fáil*, (September, 1909), p.5.

²⁷² Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature: A Study* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1931), p.8

²⁷³ *Ibid*, p.35.

However this rather sympathetic view of Shaw was all too often adumbrated by more common disapproval and denunciation by other major Gaelic literary figures. Philip O'Leary²⁷⁴ refers to one such incident involving Seosamh Mac Grianna who in 1926 serialised a diatribe directed at the Anglo-Irish writers of his own day, calling them at one point "the Frog-Spawn School of Irish Literature"²⁷⁵ and at another "Clann Shaw," explaining why "Shaw and his tribe are condemned to sit by the waters of Babylon."²⁷⁶ Of Shaw himself Mac Grianna wrote:

Joyce, O'Casey, O'Flaherty etc. are, it must be admitted, really Irish. They could have been writers of value to Irish literature. But there is no such hope that Shaw can ever mean anything for us...Shaw is a complete alien, like his intellectual forebears, Wilde, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Burke, Steele and Swift. They are the writers of the West Britons. Their writings mean no more to Ireland's literary history than the campaigns of the Duke of Wellington and the campaigns of Kitchener and French mean to Ireland's military and political history.²⁷⁷

The myopic logic underlying this sentiment is demonstrated in another Mac Grianna publication, cited by O'Leary, which aptly illustrates the absurdity of what they constituted "Anglo-Irish literature".

Arguing that "the Anglo-Irish literature that really matters" had not come from "the English spoken for hundreds of years in the Pale, in Dublin and its surroundings by the English garrison in Ireland, but from the new English speakers of the country whose fathers or grandfathers spoke only Irish,"²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Philip O'Leary, *op cit.*, p.61. (The following footnotes are taken from this page)

²⁷⁵ Seosamh Mac Grianna, "The Frog-Spawn School of Irish Literature," in *Filí agus Felons (Poets and Felons)*, ed. Nollaig Mac Congáil (Cathair na Mart [Westport]: Foilseacháin Náisiúnta Teoranta, 1987), p.110. This piece originally appeared in *An Phoblacht (The Republic)*, 11 June 1926, as part of a series entitled "The Filí and Felons of Our Land."

²⁷⁶ Seosamh Mac Grianna, "Reputations beyond the Seas," in *Filí agus Felons*, p.107. This piece originally appeared in *An Phoblacht*, 4 June 1926.

²⁷⁷ Seosamh Mac Grianna, "West British and Anglo-Irish Literature," in *Filí agus Felons*, p.111. This piece originally appeared in *An Phoblacht*, 18 June 1916.

²⁷⁸ Philip O'Leary, *op cit.*, p.61.

And so Mac Grianna logically concluded that on the subject of Anglo-Irish literature:

There is no room for George Bernard Shaw in a literature of this kind. An Emily Bronte or an Edgar Allen Poe has a much stronger sympathy with such a literature: even Keats has left a poem which comes nearer to Anglo-Irish poetry than anything that has come from the Shavian mind comes to its kind in our literature. Of course it is not suggested that Irish patriots should be total abstainers from Shaw. But we should read Shaw as we read Chesterton, or Papini, or Maeterlinck, or Ibsen or Dostoievsky, or any other modern foreign writer. The fact that he was born in Ireland is the one fact of his life which should weigh least with us when reading him. Having absolved him from any duty towards the Irish nation, we can consider him impartially as a democratic thinker and a writer who adds writing of value to English literature.²⁷⁹

One final Gaelic Leaguer's opinion which O'Leary mentions, and whose commentary is worth reiterating here is that of Pádraic Ó Conaire.²⁸⁰ O'Leary proposes that one of the clearest expressions of the notion that an Anglo-Irish writer of Shaw's ilk must be 'one of us' because he could not possibly be 'one of them', came from Pádraic Ó Conaire:

Go deimhin, níl aon duine nach Sasanach a scríobh sa mBéarla nach n-aithneodh an Sasanach ó dhúchas ar a chanúint nár dá chine féin é, dá ndéanadh sé scrúdú domhain air. Agus tá sé sin fíor, cuma an Béarla a bheith ag an scríbhneoir sin ó dhúchas nó gan a bheith. Níl orm ach Goldsmith agus Sheridan agus Shaw a lua leis an méid sin a chruthú. Ach is amhlaidh is mó a thaitníos na scríbhneoirí sin le lucht labhartha an Bhéarla toisc an *éagsúlacht* sin a bheith le fáil ina gcuid saothair.

Indeed there is no one not English who has written in English whose language would not be recognised as alien by a native Englishman on close examination. And that is true whether the writer is a native English speaker or not. I need only mention

²⁷⁹ Seosamh Mac Grianna, "West British and Anglo-Irish Literature," in *Filí agus Felons*, pp. 113-4.

²⁸⁰ Pádraic Ó Conaire, one of the most respected and accomplished Gaelic literary writers during the early decades of the Gaelic language revival. He was greatly admired for his dedication to the truth, that, coupled with his avoidance of sentimentality in his writing once prompted *An Claidheamh Soluis* to comment "he may one day become a Gaelic Swift, or a Shaw." - See "Gleó na gCath," *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 6 November 1909. The specific work commented on here was Ó Conaire's story collection *Nora Mharcuis Bhig agus Sgéalta Eile*.

Goldsmith and Sheridan and Shaw to prove that. But English speakers enjoy those writers more because of that *strangeness* to be found in their work.²⁸¹

Pádraic Ó Conaire, like P.S. Ua hÉigearthaigh, respected Shaw's work and indeed admired and acknowledged an intrinsically 'Irish' even 'Gaelic' characteristic of subversive humour, and social consciousness incorporated in his writing. The bifurcation of the Gaelic/literary revival, initiated a dichotomous Gaelic/Anglo-Irish response that was ideologically conditioned and ultimately concerned with the question of representation. Although Shaw championed the cause of Home Rule, self-government and national self-determination throughout his life; defied the Lord Chamberlain and Dublin Castle by staging *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* in 1910; ardently and compassionately defended Roger Casement in 1916; and co-founded the Irish Academy of Letters with Yeats in 1932, he remained for many Gaels an obstinate, opinionated outsider. However, if they "were always more aware of his prodigality than his patrimony...most Gaelic revivalists remained in the end willing to accept him on his own terms as one of their own,"²⁸² with illustrative Shavian sarcasm, "a genuine typical Irishman of the Danish, Norman, Cromwellian, and (of course) Scottish invasions".²⁸³ Much of the Gaelic opinion concerning Shaw that I have referred to emanated from a particular or distinctive nationalist outlook. The Gaelic revival and the Anglo-Irish literary revival may have had their differences and their own objectives; yet as was often his want, Shaw somehow managed to circumvent representing either of them, whilst ultimately earning their admiration and respect.

²⁸¹ Pádraic Ó Conaire, "Conrad agus Smaointe faoi Litríocht," ("Conrad and Thoughts about Literature"), in *Astí Phadráic Uí Chonaire (The Essays of Pádraic Ó Conaire)*, ed. Gearóid Denvir (Indreabhán: Cló Chois Fharráige, 1978), p.213. This essay originally appeared in *Fáinne an Lae*, 30 August 1924. The italics are O'Leary's, *op. cit.*, pp.63-64

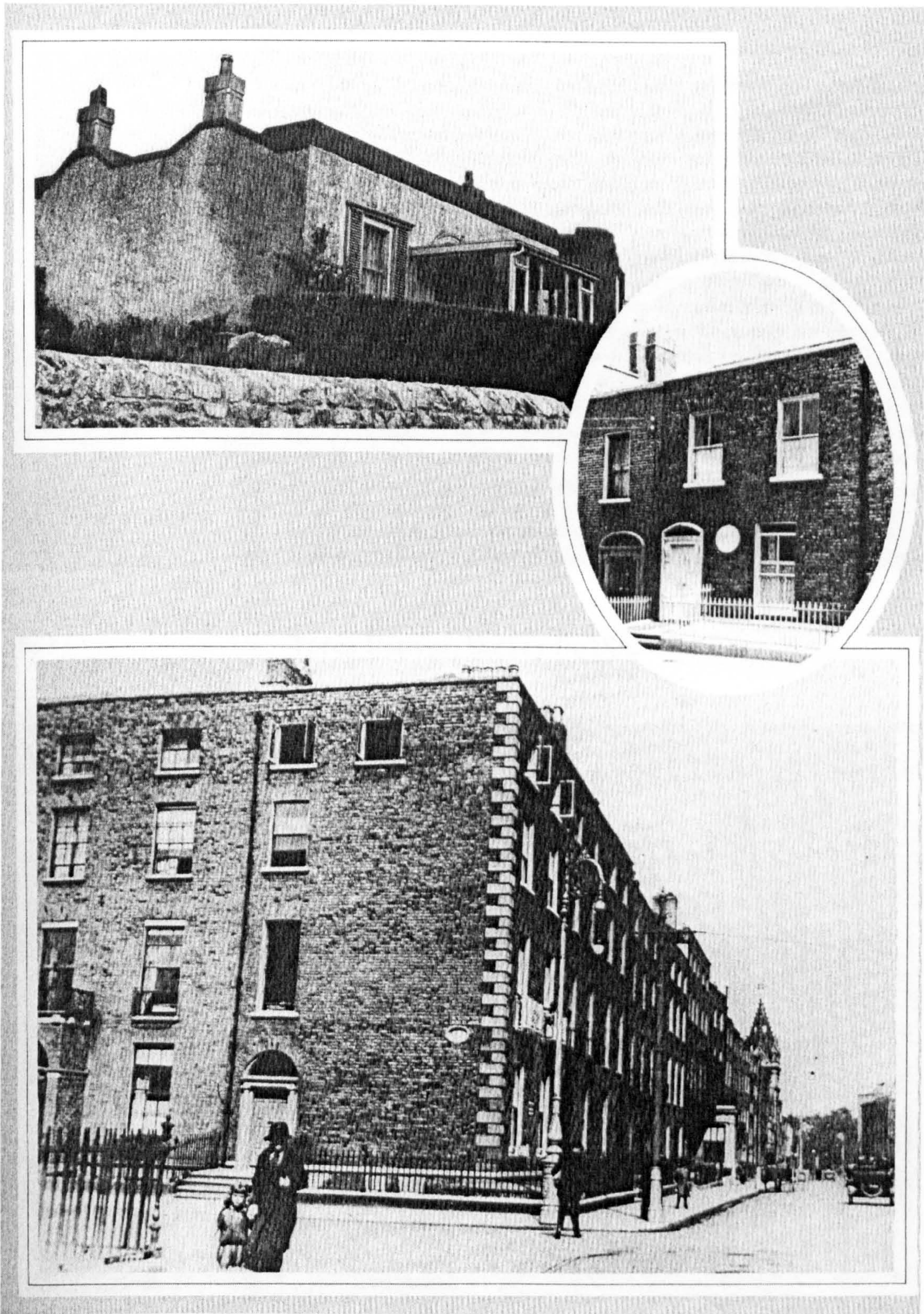
²⁸² Philip O'Leary, *op. cit.*, p.64.

²⁸³ George Bernard Shaw, *Prefaces*, *op. cit.*, p.440.

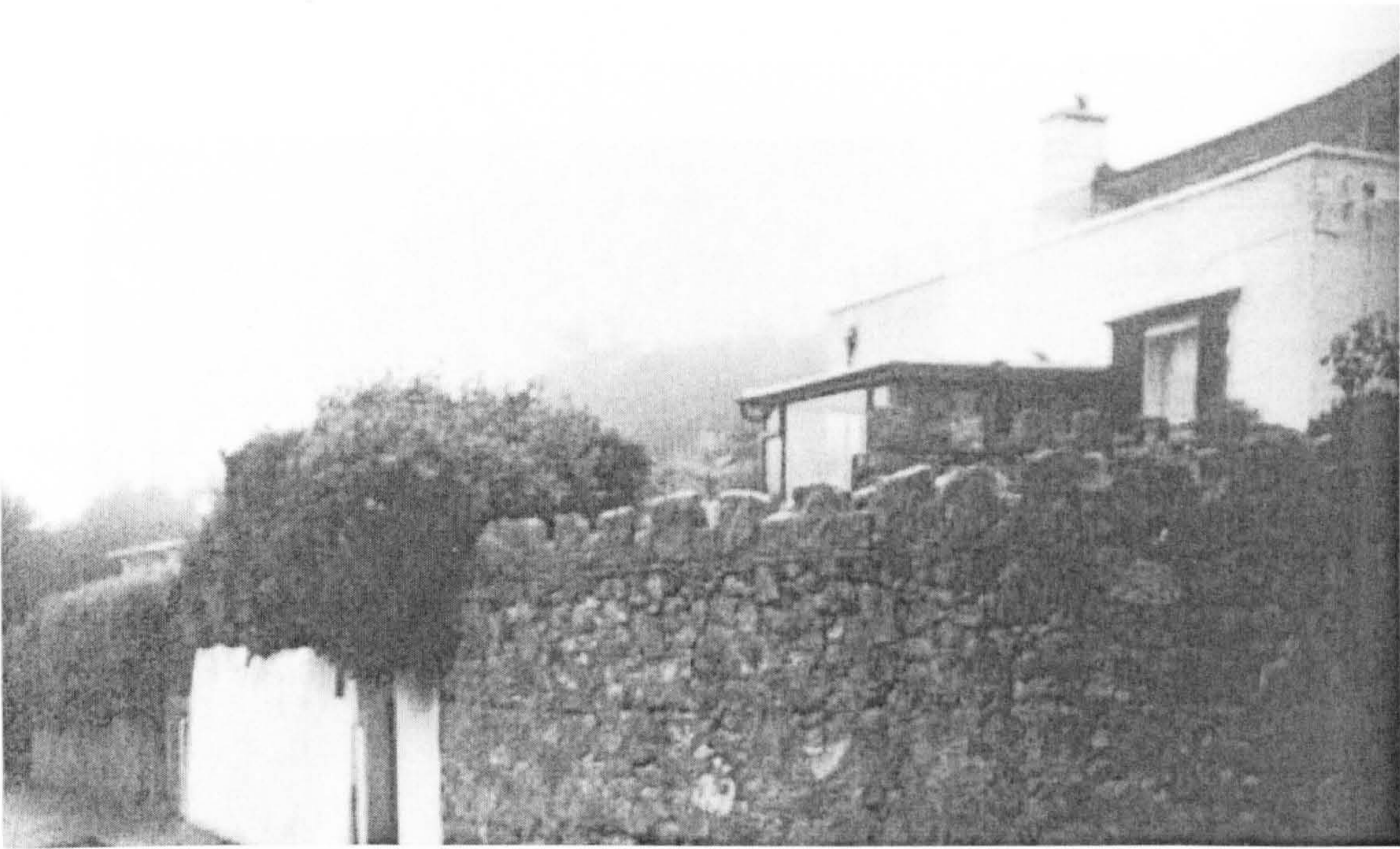
Illustrations B



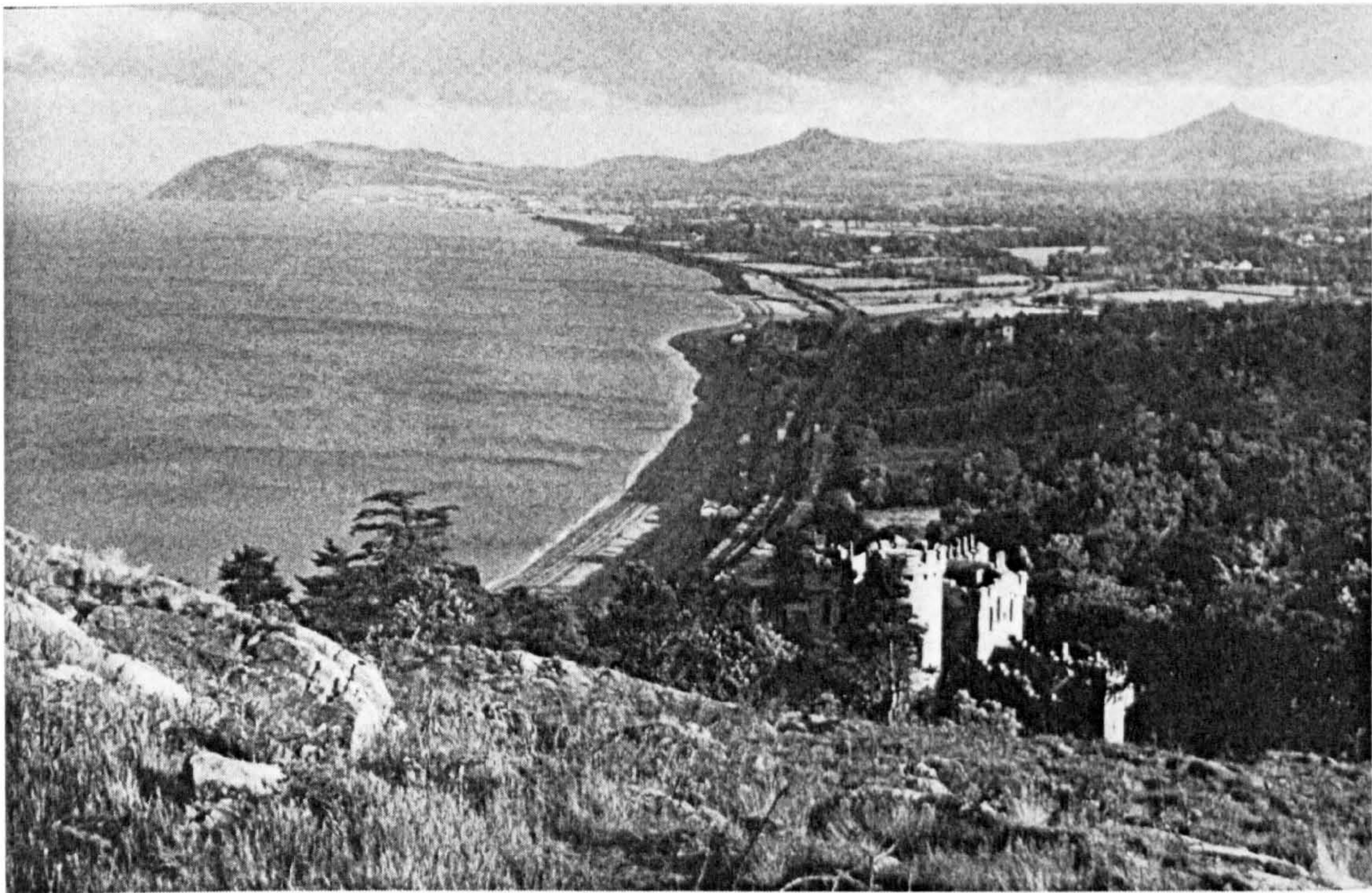
George Bernard Shaw's Parents: George Carr Shaw and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw



The three different addresses of the Shaw family residence during Bernard Shaw's childhood years spent in Dublin, (*Top:*) Torca Cottage, Dalkey; (*Inset:*) 33 Synge Street where Shaw was born on 26 July 1856; (*Bottom:*) No.1 Hatch Street.



Torca Cottage, Dalkey Dublin.



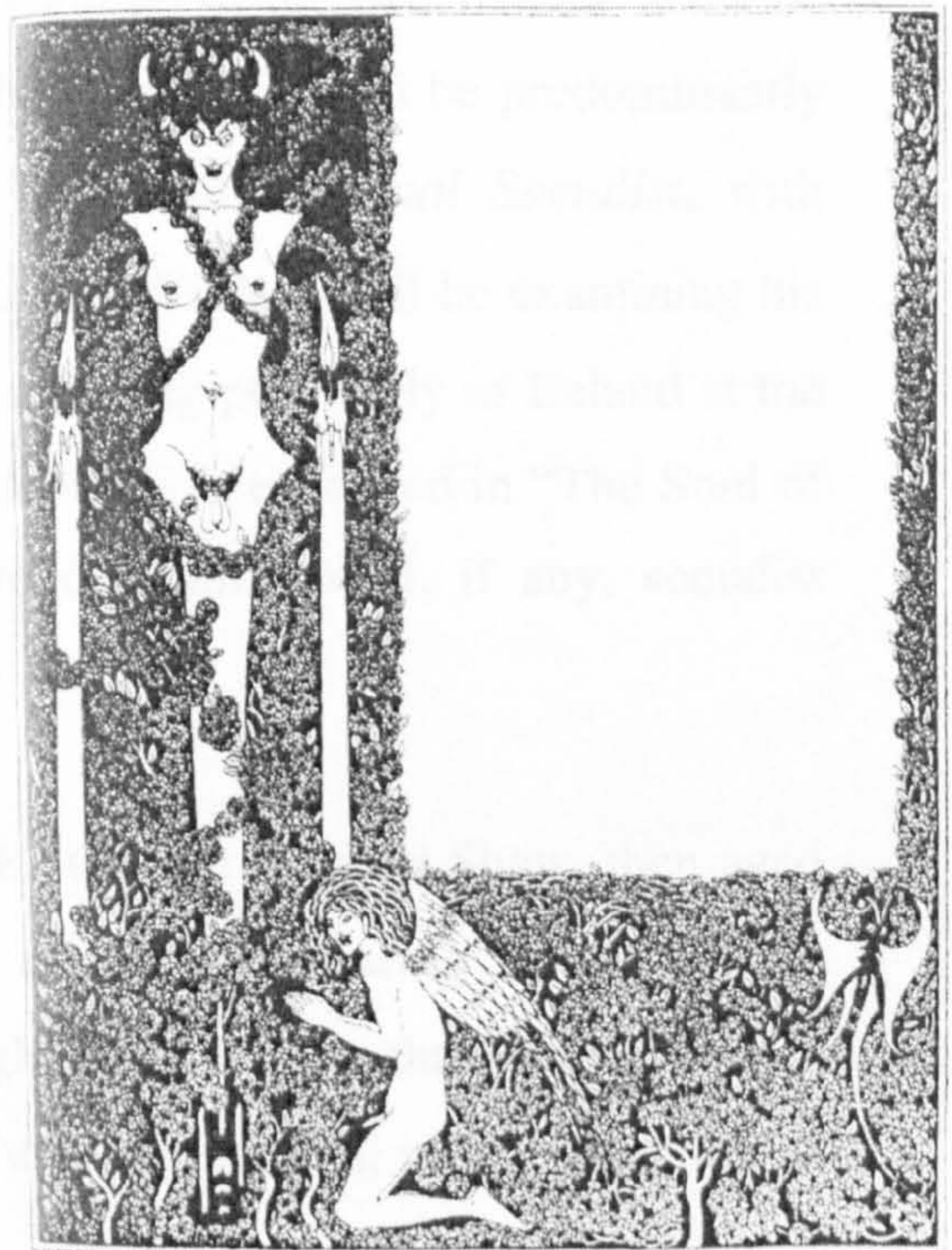
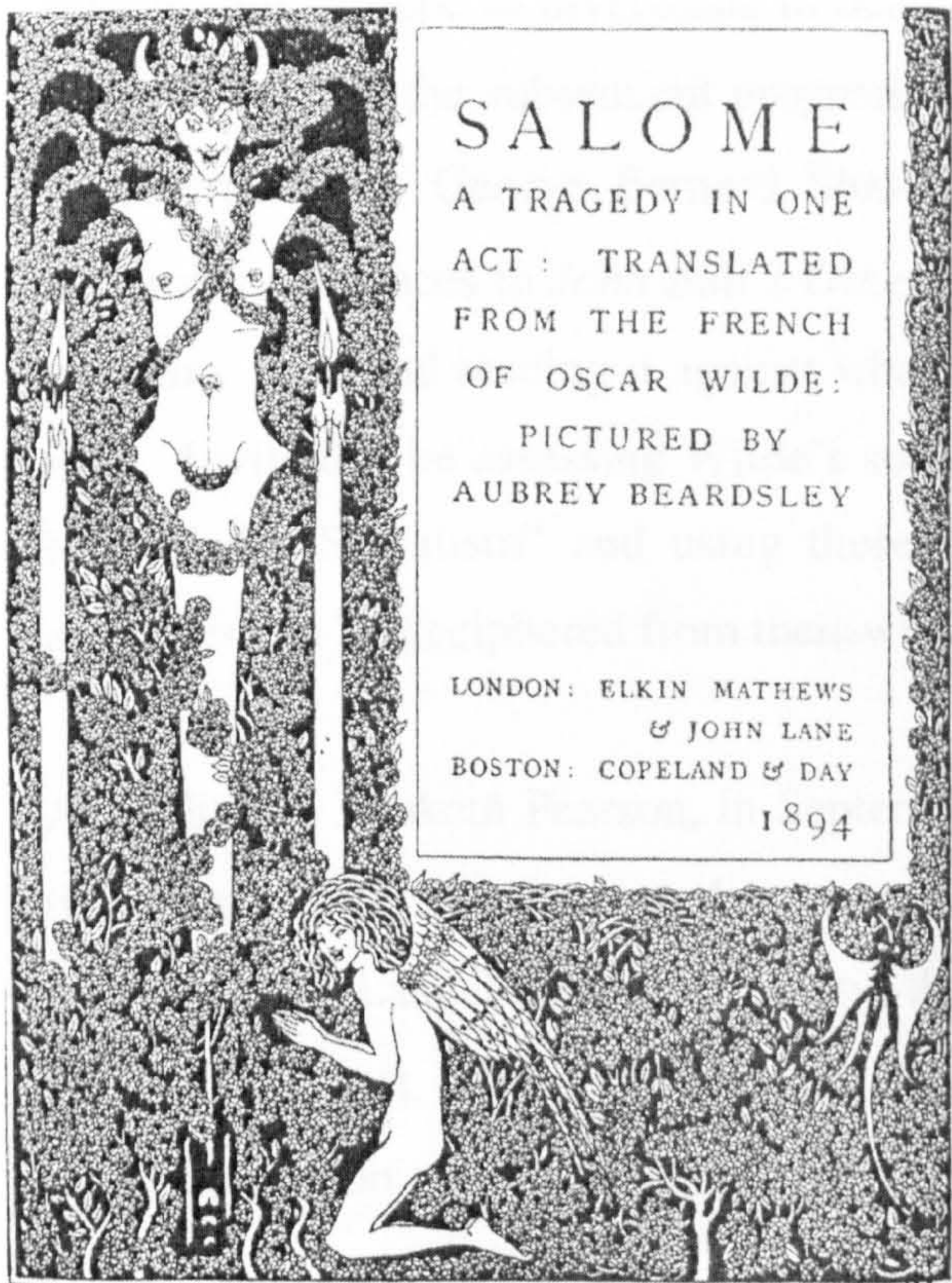
The view of Killiney Bay that Shaw could view from the top of Torca Hill. Shaw later admitted that his only happy childhood memories of Dublin were of the time he lived with his family at Torca Cottage.



“John Bull’s Other Playwright” from *Punch*, 3 October 1906.



Cover design for Fabian Essays 1889 by Walter Crane



Opposite The title page for the English edition of *Salomé* as bowdlerised by the publisher. Above Aubrey Beardsley's original design showing the genitals of the two figures which were only restored in the 1906 edition.

A surprisingly elaborate cover design for an 1889 edition of *Fabian Essay in Socialism*. Although predating Wilde's Beardsley-illustrated *Salomé* by four years, it more closely resembles the more elaborate decadent style and taste of Wildean aesthetics.

Part Two: Socialism

Chapter Five: Socialist Writings - Idealism And Realism.

The formation and evolution of George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde's socialist beliefs influenced so much of their art and ideology. Whilst both writers were attracted to socialism for different reasons, and although their socialist ideologies varied greatly, one still finds many surprising and illuminating examples where their work held a similar or complementary socialist stance. Shaw's early socialism evolved from a traditional Marxist perspective regarding the inevitability of class struggle associated with the division of labour and capitalistic modes of production, consumption and exploitation. Wilde's ideology was more concerned with social theories of individuality and aesthetic emancipation than with detailed economic analysis and subsequent consequences of capitalism's producer/consumer relationship. I hope to investigate in detail the evolution of the two writers' socialist theories through the subsequent progression of their works. I will be predominantly concentrating on George Bernard Shaw's last novel *An Unsocial Socialist*, with additional references to *John Bull's Other Island*. For Wilde, I will be examining his first play *Vera* and reading it against what was happening politically in Ireland at the time. I will also be assessing Wilde's socialist ideology as espoused in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" and using these texts to determine what, if any, socialist analogies can be deciphered from their writings.

According to Hesketh Pearson, in September 1882 George Bernard Shaw, then aged twenty six, was first converted to the socialist cause after hearing Henry George preaching on 'Land Nationalisation and the Single Land Tax' at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street. The importance of this event was monumental in the formation of Shaw's embryonic socialist ideology:

Until I heard George that night I had been chiefly interested, as an atheist, in the conflict between science and religion. George switched me over to economics. I became very excited over his *Progress and Poverty*, which I got for sixpence, so excited that I brought the subject up at a meeting of Hyndman's Democratic

Federation, where I was told that no one was qualified to discuss the question until he had read Karl Marx...That was the turning-point in my career. Marx was a revelation. His abstract economies [sic], I discovered later, were wrong, but he rent the veil. He opened my eyes to the facts of history and civilization, gave me an entirely fresh conception of the universe, provided me with a purpose and a mission in life.²⁸⁴

Undoubtedly reading *Das Kapital* had a tremendous effect on Shaw, and Pearson believes that this experience was the precursor which indeed “converted him to socialism, turned him into a revolutionary writer, made him a political agitator, changed his outlook, directed his energy, influenced his art, gave him a religion, and as he claimed, made a man of him.”²⁸⁵

If Henry George and Karl Marx were recognised as the initial instigators of Shaw’s own conversion to socialism, apparently eight years later it was Shaw himself who awakened in Wilde the enormous social, political and artistic potentiality of socialism. Supposedly Wilde, after hearing Shaw give a lecture on socialism, was so influenced by his fellow Dubliner that it ultimately resulted in him writing *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*. Michael Holroyd believes that Wilde’s socialist conversion took place “after hearing Walter Crane and Shaw speak at a Fabian meeting in Willis’s Rooms.”²⁸⁶ Shaw remembered it differently and believed that this incident took place:

At a meeting somewhere in Westminster at which I delivered an address on socialism, and at which Oscar turned up and spoke. Robert Ross surprised me greatly by telling me, long after Oscar’s death, that it was this address of mine that moved Oscar to try his hand at a similar feat by writing *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*.²⁸⁷

The accuracy of Shaw’s version of events is open to question. According to E.H. Mikhail, another time, during another Shavian reminiscence, Shaw recalled a story that when the poet and artist William Morris was dying the only person he could bear

²⁸⁴ Hesketh Pearson, *Bernard Shaw, op cit.*, p.68.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.68.

²⁸⁶ Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw, op cit.*, p. 327.

²⁸⁷ E.H. Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, Volume II, (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), p. 400

to see was Wilde - the fact that Wilde had already served almost eighteen months of his two year prison sentence when Morris died, questions at times the accuracy of Shaw's recollections.²⁸⁸ Regardless of when and where Wilde heard Shaw's lecture on socialism, the fact remains that he was persuaded enough by what Shaw said to pursue the subject of socialism further.

Shaw's socialist awakening in the 1880s was somewhat inevitable when one considers the changes that were happening in almost every aspect of British society. The security and complacency of the Victorian establishment were torn asunder by the emergence and advancement of new theories and ideologies concerning science, religion and socio-economic politics:

The revolt of the 1880s and 1890s grew into a collectivist movement of social reconstruction with many interconnected aesthetic, moral and political themes. New clubs and societies sprang up in London, catering for all talents and temperaments.... All were agreed that there was a crisis in the land. Thirty per cent of the population of London - the richest city in the world - were living in poverty. Such was the magnitude of capitalism's failure.²⁸⁹

After reading Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* Shaw turned to Marx in 1883 and in his own words "devoted about four years to the study of abstract economics so as to get my foundations sound for my work as a socialist in devising practicable methods of industrial and political reconstruction."²⁹⁰ Holroyd argues that now for the first time Shaw realises that all the controversy between Science and Religion, Darwin and the Bible, was barren ground occupied by the middle class - "The importance of the economic basis dawned on me."²⁹¹ Shaw still needed a platform from which he could express his socialist theories. Organisations such as the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League did not appeal to him; of the former he said, "I was in doubt about throwing in my lot with the SDF, not because of

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, note no. 5, p.410.

²⁸⁹ Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw, op cit.*, pp.124-125.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.129.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, p.128.

snobbery, but because I wanted to work with men of my own mental training”.²⁹² It was then that he came across the first tract, ‘*Why are the Many Poor?*’ written by the newly formed Fabian Society. Here was an educated body of people whose ideology appealed to middle-class intelligentsia; “my own class in fact” was Shaw’s response after reading the tract. On the 16 May 1884 Shaw attended the next Fabian Society meeting. Shaw quickly set about making a name for himself in the new organisation. The Fabians had no programme only a “state of mind” according to Shaw, and he set about changing that.

By the 5 September Shaw had formally enrolled and before the end of the year had published what amounted to his first address to them - an unsigned two-page leaflet entitled *A Manifesto*, which is listed as Fabian Tract No. 2. Never again was Shaw so succinct. In a thousand words he tabulated seventeen propositions that, though debated clause by clause by the Fabians, remained in Edward Pease’s²⁹³ words - ‘unqualified “Shaw”’. The manifesto, Holroyd argues, had a trenchancy and wit, giving it a different sound from all other socialist documents. Under present circumstances, it stated, “wealth cannot be enjoyed without dishonour or foregone without misery”; the most striking result of nineteenth-century capitalism in Britain had been to divide society “into hostile classes, with large appetites and no dinners at one extreme and large dinners and no appetites at the other”; nationalization of the land “is a public duty”; under *laissez-faire*, competition “has the effect of rendering adulteration, dishonest dealing and inhumanity compulsory”; instead of leaving National Industry to organize itself, the state should therefore compete “with all its might in every department of production”, and also with private individuals, “ - especially with parents - in providing happy homes for children, so that every child may have a refuge from the tyranny or neglect of its own custodians”; there should be equal political rights for the sexes, since “Men no longer need special political privileges to protect them against Women”. The Manifesto ended with two quintessential statements:

²⁹² *Ibid*, p.131.

²⁹³ Edward Pease was the first secretary of the Fabian Society.

(i) “That the established Government has no more right to call itself the State than the smoke of London has to call itself the weather.”

(ii) “That we had rather face a Civil War than such another century of suffering as the present one has been.”²⁹⁴

When Pease nervously objected at this last proposition, Shaw reassured him that the Fabians were only committed to *discussing the practical consequences* of such an opinion - no such revolutionary alternative would be offered in practice. By the beginning of 1885 two things had been achieved. The Fabians had found a programme - and Shaw a platform.²⁹⁵ While his introduction into the Fabian Society represented a new departure in his socialist ideology, Shaw had written and published his last novel a year earlier which subsequently illuminated the direction he was already inclined towards: *An Unsocial Socialist* written in 1883 offers us an interesting retrospective of Shaw’s earlier socialist beliefs.

²⁹⁴ Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw, op cit.*, pp. 132-133.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 132-133.

Chapter Six: Shaw's *An Unsocial Socialist* – A New Departure.

Although Shaw's final novel did not achieve literary success, one publishing company Kegan Paul, Trench & Co. replied in their letter of rejection, "It appears to us written in good style and language...but it suffers, in our opinion, from the fatal effect on a novel, of not being interesting."²⁹⁶ Shaw actually remarked later, "People who will read *An Unsocial Socialist* will read anything"²⁹⁷ – a claim to which the critic Richard Farr Dietrich rightly replied "thus relieving himself of the burden of defending it," because defending it "*as a novel* is indeed a burden. There is first of all a discrepancy between Shaw's professed intentions and the seemingly different results"²⁹⁸. This novel was to act as a watershed, a new departure of sorts in both his socialist and artistic outlook. *An Unsocial Socialist* represented a new beginning and he was determined:

to give up mere character sketching and the construction of models for improved types of individual, and at once to produce a novel which should be a gigantic grapple with the whole social problem. But, alas! At twenty-seven one does not know everything! When I had finished two chapters of this enterprise - chapters of colossal length, but containing the merest preliminary matter - I broke down in sheer ignorance and incapacity.²⁹⁹

Among its earliest readers, the Macmillan critic declared it "a clever trifle" and hoped that Shaw would try something "more substantial".³⁰⁰ In response to Macmillan, Shaw replied with a letter of indignation and protest:

Your reader, I fear, thought the book not serious - perhaps because it was not dull. If so, he was an Englishman.... You must admit that when one deals with two large

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.118.

²⁹⁷ George Bernard Shaw, *Prefaces*, *op cit.*, p.661

²⁹⁸ Richard Farr Dietrich, *Bernard Shaw's Novels: Portraits of the Artist as Man and Superman* (University Press of Florida, 1996), p.148.

²⁹⁹ "Mr Bernard Shaw's Works of Fiction. Reviewed by Himself" in *Selected Non-Dramatic Writings of Bernard Shaw*, Dan H. Lawrence (ed.), (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p.313.

³⁰⁰ Archibald Henderson, *George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1956), pp. 116-117.

questions in a novel, and throws in an epitome of modern German Socialism as set forth by Marx as a makeweight, it is rather startling to be met with an implied accusation of triviality.³⁰¹

Bernard Shaw, the mature dramatist, may have been able to look back at this literary attempt with an objective eye; but for the young Shaw, the unsuccessful struggling novelist, the criticism was irritating - especially as he believed at the time that it contained a fundamental socialist message that should be taken seriously. Leaving aside Shaw's own self-deprecating humour and personal critique of the work, the majority of critical analysis has dismissed the novel precisely for being no more than "the merest preliminary matter." It was not the momentous socialist work he had hoped for, it lacked serious, credible character development and plot construction, and ultimately it was not a very interesting novel. Henderson called it "a brutal burlesque, full of mad irresponsibility and cheap levity".³⁰² Stanley Weintraub says that, in writing it, "the gaily paradoxical Shaw had overreached himself, attempting to erect his ponderous economic edifice on a foundation of whipped cream."³⁰³ But this is not a unanimous consensus. One critic has remarked:

The book does not square with this account of its origin. It contains indeed a considerable amount of socialist preaching, but it is also a good story, with a plot as unified and symmetrically developed as any which Shaw had produced, and with some of his best drawn characters. The fact seems to be that in spite of himself he was still more interested in the characters and what happened to them than he was in the socialist theories.³⁰⁴

The main protagonist of the novel, Sidney Trefusis - a wealthy, flawed, eccentric pseudo-socialist character, rebels from within against his own privileged social position, thus embodying Shaw's neo-Marxist ideology and initiating his literary tirade of abuse against the political status quo. Trefusis's objective is the promotion

³⁰¹ *Bernard Shaw Collected Letters 1874-1897, op cit.*, p.111.

³⁰² Archibald Henderson, *George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century, op cit.*, p.107.

³⁰³ Stanley Weintraub (ed.), *An Unfinished Novel* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1958), p.12.

³⁰⁴ Homer E. Woodbridge, *G.B. Shaw: Creative Artist* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), p.18.

of socialism, though he admits, “whether I am advancing the cause is more than I can say.” According to Michael Holroyd:

He recognises the natural inequality of man but condemns England’s social inequality for failing to correspond to it. This artificial inequality strangling the human spirit - and particularly in women - will vanish, he claims, once “England is made the property of its inhabitants collectively.” All economic roads led to socialism, though few economists saw their destination.³⁰⁵

But is this attempt to construct a socialist anti-hero from within the ruling class hegemony given enough substance and credibility by Shaw? I fear not, as there is far too much levity and frivolity involved to take it seriously. As Dietrich has written:

That the characters, supposedly created for the sake of demonstrating an economic theory, nevertheless come to life and exist independently of their intended economic allegory may account for the sense of frivolity that many critics detect. The characters do seem rather startled by the heavy Marxist intrusion, and the economic situations into which the author throws them so as to demonstrate his theory seem so ludicrous that the only response to this farcicalizing form of Marxism can be laughter. So wildly disconnected seem theme and character that readers of such ponderous tomes as Marx’s *Capital* and Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty*, or even the Fabian tracts, must by comparison think Shaw’s work a Peacockian *jeu d’esprit*.³⁰⁶

But Dietrich counterbalances that criticism when acknowledging that Shaw did not need to go into the manufacturing jungles of Manchester or Liverpool to make his economic point; that would have been too easy and too obvious. So utterly confident was he of the Marxist point of view that he dared to show its relevance in the places and situations farthest from Manchester - in a country school for girls and on the rural estate of landed gentry. One would expect to find Marx in a Manchester factory, but transporting him to the drawing room of the aristocracy was much more radical. Therefore, “the critical confusion has been caused by another Shavian paradox: the

³⁰⁵ Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw, op cit.*, p.116.

³⁰⁶ Richard Farr Dietrich, *op cit.*, p.148.

relevance of Marx at his most substantial where the life of England is most insubstantial.”³⁰⁷

William Archer once remarked that the first time he met Shaw, in the reading room of the British Museum, Shaw appeared to be simultaneously reading from Marx's *Capital* and Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. This personified the paradox of Bernard Shaw, and *An Unsocial Socialist* epitomises that same juxtaposition. Much of the comedy of the book, in fact, comes from the juxtaposition of romance and economics, and the dizzying rapidity with which the hero moves from one to the other. This is not to imply that the two are unconnected; they are juxtaposed because their ironic reflection upon one another contributes to a unified theme. A recent feminist and poststructuralist reading of this novel by Eileen Sypher, although it misinterprets the aforementioned juxtaposition of romance and economics, by implying no connection between the two, nevertheless argues cogently that:

the novel exposes economic relations in the most unlikely place: at the level of everyday domestic gender relations, the scene of the Victorian novel. *An Unsocial Socialist* is a novel which powerfully and subtly links capital with patriarchy... which suggests that the position of workers, who sell their labour, is linked with that of middle and upper-class women, who sell themselves in the marriage market.³⁰⁸

Sypher goes on to argue that Shaw was ultimately frustrated in his politically radical and deconstructed agenda by the built-in patriarchal and antisocialist bias of the Victorian novel.³⁰⁹ Such an exclusively feminist/idealist reading ignores contradicting detail (detail that, for example, points an accusing finger at a matriarchal bias behind the Victorian novel as well). Such a reading also ignores Martin Meisel's³¹⁰ demonstration of how Shaw drew satiric strength from his permeation and

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.150.

³⁰⁸ Eileen Sypher, "Fabian Anti-Novel: Shaw's *An Unsocial Socialist*" in *Literature and History* (Autumn 1985), p.242.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.243.

³¹⁰ "Shaw turned to the popular genres of the nineteenth-century theater to provide the vehicle for his social and intellectual concerns. The simplest way of exploiting a popular genre for revolutionary purposes was by the method of systematic counter-convention, by the creation of a genre anti-type." See Martin Meisel, *Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Theater* (Princeton University Press, 1963),

subversion of Victorian genres (something which he shared with Oscar Wilde, although as has been noted, Shaw would revert to examining the consequences of a patriarchal society in his dramatic works, and the antithesis returns quite forcefully in *John Bull's Other Island*); it provides, however, a way of accounting for Shaw's abandonment of the novel that deserves further investigation.

At any rate, the opening scene certainly is an unlikely one for a novel purporting to be a Marxist analysis of a rotting capitalist society. The novel begins, in 1875, with three schoolgirls sliding down the banister at Alton College, Lyvern, the banister serving as a launching pad for a certain feminine rebelliousness that Shaw hoped would support his socialist agenda. The schoolgirls are Agatha Wylie, a spirited nonconformist whose talents of mimicry, ventriloquism, and candour keep her forever in trouble with the authorities; Jane Carpenter, a stout, practical, simple-minded creature whose inevitable comment on everything is "I never heard of such a thing"; and Gertrude Lindsay, a self-conscious young woman who insists a bit too much upon her good breeding, the mark of the under bred. The hero, Sidney Trefusis, manages to find time to romance all three and ultimately marries their ringleader, Agatha.

Before that development, the millionaire Trefusis busily works his Marxist wiles among the English peasantry, making converts and generally laying the groundwork for the revolution. He has just run away from his new bride, Henrietta Jansenius (who curiously shares Shaw's birthday), and has assumed the disguise of Jeffrey Smilash, humble peasant, who abides in an equally humble cottage near Alton College. As Henrietta's father, a wealthy merchant, is also the guardian of Agatha Wylie, Trefusis does not long remain undetected in his disguise. When Agatha is threatened with expulsion for sliding down the college banister, Mr. and Mrs. Jansenius, accompanied

p.141. Meisel refers to *Mrs Warren's Profession* in which Shaw ignored the stereotypical Victorian sanitised view of prostitution – the "Courtesans and Magdalens" portrayal – for a much more honest and realistic examination of prostitution in society. "I am not a pandar posing as a moralist," he wrote to Golding Bright (the pose of the officially allowable Courtesan Play was exceedingly moral). "I want to make an end, if I can, of the furtively lascivious Pharisism of stage immorality, by a salutary demonstration of the reality". Letter of 4 November, 1895, advice to a Young Critic, pp. 41-42 quoted in Meisel, *Ibid*, pp.141-142.

by their newly deserted daughter, Henrietta, visit Alton College to plead for Agatha's reinstatement. Trefusis/Smilash has by this time made the acquaintance of Agatha and has been hired to do odd jobs around the college. Not long after arriving, Henrietta recognises Smilash as her recently lost husband and faints in his arms. While Agatha, the only observer of this scene, scurries for help, Trefusis grabs Henrietta and runs for cover. After eluding a posse, Trefusis at great length explains to his lovely young wife why he had to desert her. Briefly, Marx and marriage do not mix (as art and marriage did not mix in the previous novels). Henrietta is simply too distracting. Although he somehow talks her into returning to London without giving away his disguise to the others, the police eventually capture him for abducting her. Fortunately, a telegram from Henrietta in London assuring her safety facilitates his acquittal.

Agatha meanwhile has been conjuring up a romance about the mysterious Smilash. In her presence Trefusis frankly drops his yokel accent and speaks as the well-bred son of an aristocrat of trade that he is, a technique that causes Agatha to imagine all sorts of heroism. The romance is heightened when one stormy night Trefusis bangs on the door of Alton College and pleads for hospitality for a peasant and his family whose flimsy house was destroyed in the storm. Such heroism causes Agatha to fall adolescently in love. Trefusis as Smilash encourages her with some pretty words, calling her his "golden idol".³¹¹ This is harmless flirtation so far, but trouble ensues when Agatha writes a letter to Henrietta confessing her secret lover. As Henrietta knows whose Smilash is, she immediately embarks for Lyvern in a rage to confront her husband with the incriminating letter. Trefusis explains the harmlessness of his philandering, protests his undying love, and sends her back to London.

As this all occurs on the coldest day of the year, Henrietta comes down with pneumonia and shortly, as well as conveniently, dies. Trefusis returns to London for the funeral but behaves in a most scandalous way. He quarrels with Jansenius over his hypocrisy and over the matter of a tombstone epitaph. To make an economic point, Trefusis searches for a mason who will provide a tombstone at a fair price. When he refuses to attend the funeral, he quickly develops the reputation of a beast, exactly what would be expected of a socialist. Agatha meanwhile has learned the truth

³¹¹ George Bernard Shaw, *An Unsocial Socialist*, (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1950), 104.

about Trefusis and withdraws into herself. After several seasons in London society she remains unmarried.

The novel was originally divided into two books, a division unacknowledged in the 1932 edition except by a shift of scene and the lapse of a few years. As Irvine describes the change, "Sylvan fairy tale becomes Marxist-Ibsenite social drama.... Shavian intellectual drama is obviously struggling to be born."³¹² Most of the action of the second part takes place either on the estate of Sir Charles Brandon, baronet husband of the former Miss Jane Carpenter, or at the family mansion of Trefusis, called Sallust's House (no doubt to evoke the licentious Roman). After Jane developed into a handsome, ample woman, Sir Charles married her, under the delusion that her beauty and sensuous charms promised great sympathy with his own artistic aspirations. Jane is still stout in mind, however, and she quickly disillusioned him as to her sexual and intellectual talents, at which Sir Charles tries "to drown his domestic troubles in art criticism."³¹³

The Brandons first encounter Trefusis leading a pack of labourers in a march across one of Brandon's fields, claiming it as a right of way. Jane "never heard of such a thing," but she is so susceptible to Trefusis's flirtations that she invites him to visit her. Later she also invites Agatha and Gertrude, ostensibly for a class reunion but in fact to rescue them from a life of maidenhood. The rest of the novel is concerned alternately with the evangelistic attempt by Trefusis to convert Sir Charles and his poet neighbour, Chichester Erskine, to socialism, and with the involved philanderings of Trefusis among the women. Gertrude mistakes his intentions and plans suicide when she learns that he has proposed to Agatha, but Trefusis sweet-talks her into marrying Erskine, who all along had been harbouring a tragic love for her. The novel ends with an ironic letter to the author from the "real" Sidney Trefusis, appended to the 1888 "cheap edition," protesting that Shaw had misrepresented him as a heartless brute. The letter congratulates Shaw for his talent, regretting however, that Shaw has no better employment for it than the writing of novels.

³¹² William Irvine, *The Universe of G.B.S.* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1949; Russell & Russell, 1968), p.32.

³¹³ George Bernard Shaw, *An Unsocial Socialist*, *op cit.*, p.187.

Sidney Trefusis is the driver of this plot because he is himself a driven man, his motives rooted in overcoming family circumstances. He seems to be aware of his parentage only because of its economic significance. One of the earliest examples of the ruling class recruit to socialism in the Victorian novel, Trefusis has inherited from his parents a considerable wealth and has a sense of guilt or moral discomfort about the way in which the money was collected. His father was:

a shrewd, energetic, and ambitious Manchester man, who understood an exchange of any sort as a transaction by which one man should lose and the other gain. He made it his object to make as many exchanges as possible, and to be always the gaining party in them.³¹⁴

As a cotton manufacturer the elder Trefusis was responsible for the involuntary slavery of many wretched Englishman, and now his son is left with the awful burden of a wealth he did not earn:

whilst the children of the men who made that wealth are slaving as their father slaved, or starving, or in the workhouse, or on the streets, or the deuce knows where.³¹⁵

The guilt is further compounded on his mother's side of the family, landed gentry. His mother's father had inherited considerable land that had first been settled by a fairly prosperous race of peasants, who paid him enough rent "to satisfy his large wants and their own narrow needs without working themselves to death."³¹⁶ But Trefusis's maternal grandfather was a shrewd man.

He perceived that cows and sheep produce more money by their meat and wool than peasants by their husbandry. So he cleared the estate.... he drove the peasants from their homes.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.68.

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.71.

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.73.

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.73.

If anything, this is more wicked than what Trefusis's father did, for his grandfather was born free and wealthy and could at least have lived and let live. His father, on the other hand:

had to choose between being a slave himself and enslaving others. He chose the latter, and as he was applauded and made much of for succeeding, would dare blame him? Not I. Besides, he did something to destroy the anarchy that enabled him to plunder society with impunity. He furnished me, its enemy, with the powerful weapon of a large fortune. Thus a system of organising the industry sometimes hatches the eggs from which its destroyers break.³¹⁸

The destroyers of capitalism were in such a minority, however, that they have first to build an engine of destruction - namely, a party of revolutionaries. Candidates for such a party are, according to Marxist theory, to be found among the exploited proletariat - thus Jeffrey Smilash becomes a pseudo-Marxist-Socialist recruiter. The pretext for the Smilash disguise is that Trefusis is hiding from his wife, but there is no reason why some other disguise would not have accomplished the same purpose, nor even a reason why any disguise at all is needed. In fact, Trefusis becomes Smilash really because, in Shavian fashion, as Dietrich phrases it - "he has decided to play the economic fool to the madness of King Capitalism, a strategy that is not recommended in Marx."³¹⁹

Trefusis explains, in Shaw's final revision, that he chose the name Smilash because he thought it gave a pleasant impression: "It is... at compound of the words smile and eyelash. A smile suggests good humour; eye lashes softened the expression and are the only features that never blemish a face. Hence Smilash is a sound that should cheer and propitiate. Yet it exasperates. It is really very odd that it should have that effect, unless it is that it raises expectations which I am unable to satisfy."³²⁰

Holroyd proposes that by separating his socialist hero into two people, Shaw reflected the division he felt existed in his own character. Shaw introduces Trefusis, the son of

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.204.

³¹⁹ Richard Farr Dietrich, *op cit.*, p.156.

³²⁰ George Bernard Shaw, *An Unsocial Socialist*, *op cit.*, p.104.

a millionaire, as a man who wishes to break all connection with his class and the system of exploitation that has made him rich. But this class inversion also offered some of the most entertaining pages of the novel where Trefusis/Smilash becomes an insufferably talkative, low comedian of a labourer - a Dickensian character whose very pseudonym elicits laughter. In this partnership, Shaw the comedian and Shaw the reformer are brought together for the same ends. The character of Smilash appeals to the “vagabond impulse” in Trefusis, and the actor in Shaw. “I am just mad enough to be a mountebank,” Trefusis explains. “If I were a little madder, I should perhaps really believe myself Smilash instead of merely acting him...With my egotism, my charlatanry, my tongue, and my habit of having my own way, I am fit for no calling but that of saviour of mankind...”³²¹

With deft persuasion, Holroyd investigates the significance of the Trefusis character in comparison to Shaw’s other novelistic “heroes”, and I quote at length:

Trefusis is the great man who had lain asleep in Smith (the tentative hero of *Immaturity*), and wakes up by the light of Marxist economics. Shaw’s novels had been experiments to find a political framework in which to spin his thought and personality. Conolly, the engineer of *The Irrational Knot*, had been ‘a monster of the mind’ embodying rationalism; Owen Jack, the composer from *Love Among the Artists*, was ‘a monster of the body’ representing unconscious instinct; in *Cashel Byron’s Profession* Shaw had toyed with a romantic fusion of mind and body in the marriage of his prize-fighter and educated lady. In *An Unsocial Socialist* the union takes place not between two people but within one. Trefusis is Shaw’s first socialist hero and Don Juan figure in whom he attempts to reconcile his sexual and political attitudes. The novel foreshadows *Man and Superman*, with Trefusis a prototype of Tanner. Shaw was to speak of socialism as having given him a ‘religion’. From the hour of his conversion, he wrote, ‘I became a man with some business in the world.’ He used this business like a magnet to shift his various contradictory impulses into new shapes, and line them up towards a political end. Within himself this achieved some harmony, but as a saviour of mankind Trefusis is largely unemployable. His ineffectiveness, like that of Tanner, is fixed in the futility of ‘Talking!’ and the ‘*Universal laughter*’, rather than action that it prompts.³²²

³²¹ Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, *op cit.*, p.118.

³²² *Ibid*, p.118.

Yet Trefusis has a tendency to protest too much his peasant humility. At times Shaw overplays this ironic scenario by constantly stressing his inferiority through the sarcastic use of drawing-room clichés about the poor. The problem is that the joke runs thin after a while. For example, Smilash is deliberately reckless with the truth, for he is “of the lower orders, and therefore not a man of my word.”³²³ He confesses to one of the Alton College teachers that he is a:

natural born liar - always was. I know that it must appear dreadful to you that never told a lie, and dont hardly know what a lie is, belonging as you do to a class where none is ever told. But common people like me tells lies just as a duck swims.³²⁴

When hired to do a menial job, Smilash advises his employer: “I am honest when well watched.”³²⁵ When a local parson protests that paying Smilash too much for a job “would only set him drinking,” Smilash humbly agrees and argues that a lesser wage would keep him drunk until Sunday morning, which is all he desires until religion can take over. After all he is a common man, who “understands next to nothing,” and since “words don’t come natural to him,” he can expect nothing more than the other dumb brutes of creation.³²⁶ As for the accusation by a neighbouring farm boy that Smilash had been seen kissing Henrietta, Smilash effectively refutes it by reminding the police that “a lady... dont know what a kiss means,”³²⁷ as physical stuff like that is practised only by the lower classes. And of course the poor’s indulgence in sex is directly responsible for their poverty, in the form of mouths to feed, so they’ve no one to blame but themselves. “Reverend Mr. Malthus’s health!” toasts Smilash.³²⁸

The poor have gotten themselves a bad character, and Smilash “humbly” agrees that it is largely a result of their lack of thrift. After rolling the lawn at Alton College for a few pence, he announces that he’s going to “put up all this money in a little wooden

³²³ George Bernard Shaw, *An Unsocial Socialist*, *op cit.*, p.35.

³²⁴ *Ibid*, p.97.

³²⁵ *Ibid*, p.39.

³²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 39-40.

³²⁷ *Ibid*, p.60.

³²⁸ *Ibid*, p.90.

savings bank I have at home, and keep it to spend when sickness or old age shall... lay their 'ands upon me."³²⁹ But when he uses some of Sidney Trefusis' s saved money to improve the dilapidated peasant's cottage he has rented to go with his disguise, the landlord warns him that the rent will be raised, as "a tenant could not reasonably expect to have a pretty, rain-tight dwelling house for the same money as a hardly habitable ruin."³³⁰ Struck by the truth of this, Smilash later chides the rector of Alton College for "flying in the face of the law of supply and demand" by overpaying him "threppence."

If you keep payin' at this rate, there'll be a rush of laborers to the college, and competition'll soon bring you down from a shilling to sixpence, let alone ninepence. Thats the way wages go down and death rates goes up, worse luck for the likes of us, as has to sell ourselves like pigs and the market.³³¹

The Smilash sarcasm shows through bitterly in places, a revelation that contributes to his acquiring a bad character. On one such occasion Smilash replies to his socially superior chastiser:

I am grateful to your noble ladyship. May your ladyship's goodness sew up the hole which is in the pocket where I carry my character, and which has caused me to lose it so frequent. It's a bad place for men to keep their characters in; but such is the fashion. And so hurray for the glorious nineteenth century!³³²

Perhaps because the relatively understated irony of the "humble" Smilash persona was not really his style, Shaw soon developed the opposite strategy of playing the "arrogant" devil's disciple, overstatement being more natural to him. But the principles of ironic impersonation and smiling attack were consistent in both guises, and at least Smilash was an interesting experiment in impersonation. "G.B.S." is not fully born at the end of this novel, but Trefusis/Smilash is clearly the penultimate stage in that birth.

³²⁹ *Ibid*, p.39.

³³⁰ *Ibid*, p.82.

³³¹ *Ibid*, p.164.

³³² *Ibid*, pp. 40-41.

The Smilash disguise may have been dismissed, for one reason, because it does not allow for a direct enough attack. At times Trefusis finds that he must abandon his Smilash disguise to speak directly, as when he explains to Henrietta about the clichés with which they have been brainwashed.

At Cambridge they taught me that [my father's] profits were the reward of abstinence - the abstinence which enabled him to save. That quieted my conscience until I began to wonder why one man should make another pay him for exercising one of the virtues.³³³

Beyond that was the question, what did his father abstain from?

The workmen abstained from meat, drink, fresh air, good clothes, decent lodging, holidays, money, the society of their families, and pretty nearly everything that makes life worth living.... Yet no one rewarded them for their abstinence. The reward came to my father, who abstained from none of these things, but indulged in them all to his heart's content.³³⁴

The only thing his father abstained from "more and more as he grew richer and richer" was work. As for his father's argument that his fortune was the reward for "his risks, his calculations, his anxieties, and the journeys he had to make at all seasons and at all hours," Trefusis came to realise that this argument would better fit a highway robber.³³⁵

Trefusis is a kind of advanced Shelley who sees that the masks of anarchy have shifted from the faces of kings to the faces of capitalists. He has no use whatsoever for the old style liberalism, as represented by the poet Erskine, author of *The Patriot Martyrs*. Erskine is eager to show that he is just as revolutionary as Trefusis: "Is it not absurd to hear a nation boasting of its freedom and tolerating a king? ... I admire a

³³³ *Ibid*, p.71.

³³⁴ *Ibid*, p.71.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, p.72.

man that kills a king. You will agree with me there, Trefusis, wont you?" Trefusis certainly does not agree:

A king nowadays is only a dummy put up to draw your fire off the real oppressors of society, and the fraction of his salary that he can spend as he likes is usually far too small for his risk, his trouble, and the condition of personal slavery to which he is reduced. What private man in England is worse-off than the constitutional monarch?³³⁶

He then goes on to detail the trials and tribulations of being a modern king. Fifty years later Shaw would expand this paragraph into a play entitled *The Apple Cart*, in which King Magnus gets his way with his cabinet by threatening to abdicate and run for office. Shaw was then accused of turning Tory in his old age, but this novel proves that his contempt for the old-style anti-monarchical liberalism was there from the beginning.

Erskine also provides Trefusis the occasion for debunking artistic affectation. Erskine believes "that the sole refiner of art is human nature. Art rises when men rise, and grovels when men grovel."³³⁷ Trefusis heatedly denounces "the tyranny of brain force" by which less clever men are enslaved, The Artist being "the worst of all." "No men are greater sticklers for the arbitrary dominion of genius and talent than your artists."³³⁸ An artist

Wants to be fed as if his stomach needed more food than ordinary stomachs, which it does not.... He talks of the higher quality of his work, as if the higher quality of it were of his own making... as if, in short, the fellow were a god, as canting brain-worshippers have for years past been assuring him he is. Artists are the high priests of the modern Moloch.

And Shaw adds to the 1887 version, in corroboration of Yeats's "tragic generation":

³³⁶ *Ibid*, p.199.

³³⁷ *Ibid*, p.165.

³³⁸ *Ibid*, p.74.

Nine out of ten of them are diseased creatures, just sane enough to trade on their own neuroses.³³⁹

Shaw was willing to consider the possibility of genius being a gift that, as Trefusis says, “costs its possessor nothing; that it was the inheritance of the whole race incidentally vested in a single individual; and that if the individual employed his monopoly of it to extort money from others, he deserved nothing better than hanging.” Trefusis exclaims that artists were foolish “in fancying themselves a priestly caste when they were obviously only the parasites and favourite slaves of the moneyed classes.”³⁴⁰ Though he trimmed his share-the-wealth programme a bit later, here is proof that Shaw was inclined toward sharing before there was anything like Fabian policy. At this point, anyway, he believes that exceptional gifts, whether they be gifts for writing novels or gifts for making money, should not, in the socialist state, be rewarded by exceptional salaries.

Trefusis illustrates his contempt for the merely artistic by his neglect of Sallust’s House. When Erskine and Sir Charles visit him for a lecture on socialism, they are scandalised by the state of disrepair to the old ornate mansion. It seems Trefusis has contributed to the normal decay by using the statuary for target practice. To the horror of his visitors, he demonstrates his iconoclasm literally by taking out a pistol and decapitating a statue of Hebe. He further startles these art lovers by declaring photography the art form of the future. In photography

The drawing counts for nothing, the thought and judgment count for everything; whereas in the etching and daubing processes, where great manual skill is needed to produce anything that the eye can endure, the execution counts for more than the thought.³⁴¹

In Trefusis’ own photographic collection is proof of the superiority of photography over painting. He converts Sir Charles to socialism, at least temporarily, by overwhelming him with seemingly matter-of-fact photographs of working class

³³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 74-75.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.135.

³⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.159.

conditions, the effect being heightened by a contrast with photographs of his father's immaculate stables full of well-fed horses. Another collection is devoted to pairs of identical faces, one of which belongs to the nobility, the other to the peasantry, thereby illustrating "the fact that Nature, even when perverted by generations of famine and fever, ignores the distinctions when set up between men."³⁴² A third collection contrasts the noble faces of "Nihilists, Anarchists, Communards," and such with the coarse, vapid faces of European royalty, thereby illustrating "the natural inequality of man, and the failure of our artificial inequality to correspond with it."³⁴³ Sir Charles is much impressed by the thoughtful art of Trefusis's photography, but the conversion is not clinched until he is appraised that Mr. Donovan Brown, the famous artist, is also a socialist. The Donovan Brown character is obviously influenced, if not based on William Morris, who for Shaw was the symbol of the regeneration of art through political commitment.

When Erskine earlier calls upon Trefusis for his opinion on the future of the arts, Trefusis responds with a vision of the future:

Photography perfected in its recently discovered power of reproducing colour as well as form! Historical pictures replaced by photographs of *tableaux vivants* formed and arranged by trained actors and artists, and used chiefly for the instruction of children! Nine-tenths of painting as we understand it at present extinguished by the competition of these photographs, and the remaining tenth only holding its own against them by dint of extraordinary excellence! Our mistuned and unplayable organs and pianofortes replaced by harmonious instruments, as manageable as barrel organs! Works of fiction superseded by interesting company and conversation, and made obsolete by the human mind outgrowing the childishness that delights in the tales told by grown-up children such as novelists and their like! *An end to the silly confusion, under the one name of Art, of the tomfoolery and make-believe of our play hours with the higher methods of teaching men to know themselves!*³⁴⁴ Every artist an amateur, and a consequent return to the healthy old disposition to look on every man

³⁴² *Ibid*, p.205.

³⁴³ *Ibid*, p.206.

³⁴⁴ The sentence in italics was only added to the 1887 edition of the novel.

who makes art a means of money-making as a vagabond not to be entertained as an equal by honest men!³⁴⁵

It is easy to explain this as a young novelist's reply to the Victorian art establishment that would not let him publish, or even as an expression of his recent conversion to the new pragmatic politics, which had small use for pure art, but Shaw returned in his sixties to the notion, that all works of art are no more than dolls for children.³⁴⁶ Doubtless here he is having a little joke at his present state of being unpublished, but he also really meant it. In the short run Shaw was as much the "Artist" as the "high priests of the Modern Moloch" denounced by Trefusis, but in the long run he envisioned the ultimate disappearance of art (as the production of commercial or museum objects) from the list of man's serious occupations. Whenever Shaw exaggerates or deflates the importance of the artist, it is relative either to the short run or the long run.

Trefusis combines the visionary quality of the Shavian futurist with a sometimes straight, sometimes comic involvement in the present. After a long dissertation on the future of the arts or the future of England under capitalism, he can abruptly turn to the practical work of political conversion or to the frivolous play of flirtation. In the latter case, he has a way of making females think that they are his favourite. In regard to women, Trefusis curses himself for being unable to "act like a rational creature for five consecutive minutes."³⁴⁷ His trifling often misleads women, brought up on the idea that the only interest a man can have in woman involves matrimony. Therefore "he had no conscientious scruples in his lovemaking, because he was unaccustomed to consider himself as likely to inspire love in women."³⁴⁸ More to the point is his love for a holiday. Trefusis's "natural activeness" is heightened by the sternly ascetic work of the political revolutionary, so that holidays are essential to his health. Trefusis tells Henrietta that he has left her because:

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp.160-161.

³⁴⁶ See *Back to Methuselah*, Part V.

³⁴⁷ George Bernard Shaw, *An Unsocial Socialist*, *op cit.*, p.98.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.239.

I have too much Manchester cotton in my constitution for long idylls... The first condition of work with me is your absence. When you are with me, I can do nothing but make love to you. You bewitch me.³⁴⁹

But the separation is not to be permanent, for he will occasionally return to her for a holiday. A solemn feminist reading of this as patriarchal backsliding on Trefusis's part is less than a half-truth; Trefusis's flirtatious nature mostly exemplifies the susceptibility of certain men to beautiful women and has much less to do with gender politics than with biology and the complexities of the future Shavian 'Life Force' ideology. Trefusis is at the best of times a repellent hero figure and Shaw himself infers that it was necessary and indeed inevitable that Trefusis was a rather incorrigible, roguish character:

He came out of me a liar, just as I came out of the womb of Nature what I am and not otherwise; I assure you his actions raise the whole insoluble problem (or unsolved problem let us say) of free will as formidably as any actual deed of my own.... Trefusis is only a liar as the novelist or the comedian is a liar. His bad side is the side on which he is an incorrigible mountebank; but his burlesques are burlesques of shams, intentionally satirical and destructive - burlesques of the sham laborer and the sham lover of middle class romance. Have you noted, too, that it is always his terrible truth telling, and never his lying, that gets him into trouble.³⁵⁰

Shaw continues:

As to making my hero repellent, that was inevitable. Our social conditions do not produce attractive characters in the fighting ranks of the great class war. Injustice and scorn in one camp; degradation and ignorance in the other; cupidity, fear and mistrust in both: the struggle with these leaves its mark on all who engage in it - and indeed the qualities that enable a man to engage in it are not exclusively the amiable qualities. There are splendid compensations for the fighter on the right side; but the evil remains.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.77.

³⁵⁰ Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw, op cit.*, p.117.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.117.

Shaw cleverly realised the reactionary potential of the Trefusis character when compared to some of his other literary protagonists -

A clerk for my hero (my first) was not a recommendation but at least he accepted the world as it was and wore a white linen collar in its social eddies. I was perhaps to be encouraged. But my second, a working electrical engineer crashing through the castes and mastering them: that was distasteful and incorrect. I was going wrong. Then a British Beethoven, careless of his clothes, ungovernable, incomprehensible, poor, living in mean lodgings at an unfashionable address: this was absurd. The next, a prizefighter, wooing and marrying a priggishly refined lady of property, made a bit of romance, without a dying child in it but with a fight or two. But a Socialist! A Red, an enemy of civilization, a universal thief, atheist, adulterer, anarchist, and an apostle of the Satan he disbelieved in!! And presented as a rich young gentleman, eccentric but not socially unpresentable. Too bad.³⁵²

The complexity and absurdity of the Trefusis character allows the novel to present examples of typical Shavian socialism, coupled with strong feminist beliefs and juxtaposed with Shaw's unique and often eccentric theories on sexual relations.³⁵³

Shaw allows his protagonists to turn some of their eccentric flirtations into didactic occasions, though he keeps it within the characterisations. Anticipating the gender politics of the coming age, Trefusis's objection to monogamy is that it is monopolistic. After the death of Henrietta, he makes some of his flirtations become occasions for lectures on socialism; unfortunately it is done in an acutely politically incorrect and sexist manner:

If you want to make a cause grow, instruct every woman you meet in it. She is or will one day be a wife, and will contradict her husband with scraps of your arguments. A squabble will follow. The son will listen, and will be set thinking if he be capable of thought. And so the mind of the people gets leavened.³⁵⁴

³⁵² *Ibid*, p.119.

³⁵³ For further insight into the latter subject see "Shaw's Sex Credo" in Frank Harris *Bernard Shaw*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1931), pp. 223-239.

³⁵⁴ George Bernard Shaw, *An Unsocial Socialist*, *op cit.*, pp. 215-216.

Furthermore, Trefusis is genuinely shocked when Gertrude Lindsay mistakes his philanderings for a serious proposal because, as far as he is concerned, his attentions to her are only a means of liberating her from her false pride. He believes that she has good instincts that only need instruction to cause her to throw off the bondage of “convention, laws, and lies” (matriarchal as well as patriarchal) that fence her round.³⁵⁵ His attentions are to make her see that the formal and false “Miss Lindsay” is the bitterest foe of the natural “Gertrude,” in that the aversions of the conventional Miss Lindsay are forever contradicted by the natural sympathies of Gertrude. Miss Lindsay looks with disapproval upon “Bolshevists,” but Gertrude is powerfully attracted to Sidney Trefusis. In this she should trust Gertrude. “I used to flirt with women,” says the “reformed” Trefusis; “now I lecture them, and abhor a man-flirt worse than I do a woman one.”³⁵⁶ This is hard to swallow, but Trefusis *has* undergone some sort of change.

The distinction between Trefusis’s first and second marriages seems based on a change of attitude toward “romance.” The marriage to Henrietta was a horrible mistake because it was supported only by romance; the marriage to Agatha has a better chance because it is grounded more in reality. Agatha succeeds with Trefusis because she is instructed by the outcome of her first, teenage romance with him. Both had believed in the grand passion of the other but knew that they felt nothing of the sort themselves. “That is the basis of the religion of love,” Trefusis explains, “of which poets are the high-priests. Each worshiper knows that his own love is either a transient passion or a sham copied from his favourite poem; but he believes honestly in the love of others for him. Ho, Ho! Is it not a silly world my dear?”³⁵⁷ Of all the women Trefusis knows, Agatha is “the only one not quite a fool.”³⁵⁸ He decides to marry her upon the sudden realisation that he “was made to carry a house on his shoulders.”³⁵⁹ The proposal is more like Ned Conolly’s or John Tanner’s than the early Trefusis’s. The couple will spend their honeymoon at a socialist conference in Geneva. Agatha has one month to prepare for the wedding.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.192.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.216.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.114.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.224.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.225.

Shaw is seeing the world differently, and not the smallest detail escapes his new economic vision. But his lively sense of the comic anticlimactic feeds on his own obsession. Although as a Marxist he knows the seriousness of the economic motive, as a comic novelist he knows the absurdity of the economic obsession. By 1888, when he wrote the joking postscript for the Swan Sonnenschein “cheap edition,” Shaw even seems to have realised that his straight presentation could have been misconstrued, for the postscript consists of a letter from character Trefusis to author Shaw complaining that the novel has been taken as a satire on socialism. It definitely was not so, but Shaw has gone enough overboard that his enthusiasm could have been misread as comic exaggeration for satirical purposes. Certainly it would not have been his last satire on socialism. One wonders how facetious the 1930 preface is as well. The Shaw of 1930 declares,

The contemplated fiction is now fact. My unsocial socialist has come to life as a Bolshevik; and my catastrophe has actually occurred in Communist Russia. The opinions of the fictitious Trefusis anticipated those of the real Lenin³⁶⁰

The opinions perhaps did so, but hardly the character. The differences between a Trefusis and a Lenin are profound. While both were thought “Machiavellian” in their ethics, Trefusis inherits from Robert Smith and the other Shaw heroes an aristocratic sense of propriety that is anything but Leninist in its concern for the proper way of doing things. For example, when Trefusis violates the conventional code of telling the truth by going back on his promise to Erskine that he would not take the same train Gertrude is on – he is still not violating his own, higher moral sense. He has misled Gertrude to the point that she may ruin her life, so he feels obligated to restore her by selling the marriage to Erskine. The deception of Erskine was a harmless way to prevent him from ruining Trefusis’s campaign on Erskine’s own behalf and interest – hardly a Machiavellian ploy.

³⁶⁰ George Bernard Shaw “Preface” to the 1930 Edition of *An Unsocial Socialist*, (London: Constable and Company Ltd.), p.v.

Shaw seems to have rejected several other Marxist-Leninist attitudes and principles right from the beginning. Trefusis talks in campaign style about a revolution, but his methods are strictly pre-Fabian. By nature he is a permeator, permeation being an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary method – later to evolve into the ideology of “Fabian Gradualism”. Through the processes of argument and debate, the “body politic” is gradually to change its mind until it becomes something quite different in character. Bleeding of the body politic is to be avoided. According to Trefusis,

Socialism is often misunderstood by its least intelligent supporters and opponents to mean simply unrestrained indulgence of our natural propensity to heave bricks at respectable persons.³⁶¹

Trefusis is also quite unconventional in his refusal to adopt the Marxist melodrama of villainous capitalists and virtuous proletariats. According to the formula, his father should be a villain, but Trefusis instead congratulates him for avoiding the common lot of slavery and bringing order out of chaos. Furthermore, he does not romanticise the working classes as virtuously heroic but sees them as individuals. When one of the labourers apologises to Sir Charles for the protest demonstration led by Trefusis, Trefusis calls him “a grovelling famine-broken slave.”³⁶² He will go “as gently as you please with any man that is a freeman at heart...but slaves must be driven, and this fellow is a slave to the marrow”.³⁶³

As for the wage-slaves employed in the inherited Manchester factories, Trefusis is not about to set them free, for if he did they would simply become the slaves of some other factory owner undoubtedly less interested in their ultimate welfare. Worse yet, by freeing his wage slaves, Trefusis would himself become a slave and lose the opportunity his money affords to carry on the work of reform. If the old commandment was “Give all that ye have to the poor and follow me,” the new commandment is “Keep all that you have and work for the establishment of socialism,” for the poor will ultimately benefit more from that than from private charity. People who misunderstood socialism liked to accuse the wealthy Shaw of

³⁶¹ George Bernard Shaw, *An Unsocial Socialist*, *op cit.*, p.79.

³⁶² *Ibid*, p.148.

³⁶³ *Ibid*, p.149.

later years of not practising what he preached, as if socialism were a private ethic that the individual could practice in isolation. Shaw apparently understood from the beginning, when he was as yet a very poor young man, the principle that if wealth is to do any lasting good it must be invested in economic reform, not diffused by transient charity (however much he contradicted the principle in practice). When Erskine reprimands Trefusis for not selling all and giving to the poor, Trefusis replies:

A man cannot be a Christian in this country. I have tried it and found it impossible both in law and in fact. I am a capitalist and a landholder. I have...shares...and a great trouble they are to me. But these shares do not represent wealth actually in existence: they are a mortgage on the labor of unborn generations of laborers, who must work to keep me and mine in idleness and luxury. If I sold them, would the mortgage be cancelled and the unborn generations released from its thrall? No. It would only pass into the hands of some other capitalist, and the working class would be no better off for my self-sacrifice. Sir Charles cannot obey the command of Christ; I defy him to do it. Let him give his land for a public park; only the richer classes will have leisure to enjoy it. Plant it at the very doors of the poor, so that they may at least breath its air, and it will raise the value of the neighbouring houses and drive the poor away. Let him endow a school for the poor, like Eton or Christ's Hospital, and the rich will take it for their own children.... Sir Charles does not want to minister to poverty, but to abolish it. No matter how much you give to the poor, everything except a bare subsistence wage will be taken from them again by force. All talk of practising Christianity, or even bare justice, is at present mere waste of words.³⁶⁴

Because one cannot be a Christian in modern society, Trefusis finds that it is easy enough to be a "Christ." In his final version Shaw draws out the potential for martyrdom³⁶⁵ in his original characterization by having Trefusis say, "With my egotism, my charlatanry, my tongue, and my habit of having my own way, I am fit for no calling but that of saviour of mankind,"³⁶⁶ the trouble being that mankind doesn't

³⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pp.212-213

³⁶⁵ Wilde was also interested in the connection between suffering/sacrifice/martyrdom and its potential benefits to artistic creativity – I will discuss it later in the thesis.

³⁶⁶ George Bernard Shaw, *An Unsocial Socialist*, *op cit.*, p.104.

have much use for saviours except to crucify them and take their name in vain. Trefusis has already had a taste of this reaction:

The British workmen showed their sense of my efforts to emancipate them by accusing me of making a good thing out of the Association for my own pocket, and by mobbing and stoning me twice.

Then with a distinctly Fabian resonance he adds:

I now help them only when they show some disposition to help themselves; I occupy myself partly in working out a scheme for the reorganisation of industry, and partly in attacking my own class.³⁶⁷

Yet in Shaw's case the attack on his own class was that of the clown-prophet. There are perhaps more differences than similarities between the characters of Jesus and Bernard Shaw, but no difference is more significant than the attitude towards martyrdom.³⁶⁸ Shaw's strong sense of anticlimax (one might almost say "antimartyrdom") was directly responsible for his long life. After scarifying the Romans and Pharisees in a very Christ-like manner, he would always relieve the tension with a joke, thereby winning acceptance or at least toleration rather than "crucifixion."

This was a very Wildean technique, by introducing comedy the objective was to disarm the criticism at the intended audience while still emphasising the point, and this was often best achieved by adopting a dual persona such as a clown-prophet.

Quite the fashion in modern criticism is the theme of "mask" and "face." "The man and the mask" approach implies a "real" face behind a "false" mask, the mask merely serving a public function that the face is too sensitive to endure or too earnest to handle. Shaw criticism is full of this sort of apology for the "real" Shaw – the shy, gentle, gracious hermit of Ayot St. Lawrence. Archibald Henderson assures us that

³⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.206.

³⁶⁸ I will contrast this image of martyrdom with Wilde's references to martyrdom in *De Profundis* later in the thesis.

the real Shaw of his infrequent visits was nothing like the imaginary creature of common fame. Shaw himself chimed in with a debunking of "G.B.S.," claiming him to be a fantasy of journalism.

The confusion is brought about, according to Richard Farr Dietrich by a misunderstanding of the art of personality:

Hypocrisy is pretending to be something you are not, whereas Bernard Shaw pretended to be something that he really was and then for strategic reasons pretended that he was only pretending. He really was the clownish, aggressive, loquacious G.B.S. as surely as he was the shy, careful Robert Smith. The principle of antinomy accounts for their coexistence, as Yeats loved to point out in his own behalf, and neither was more real than the other. If anything, Shaw's public character was more real than the private if we define "the real" in terms of intensity and lasting quality. If, however, we define "the real" as that which exists legitimately within the individual being, then certainly Robert Smith was as legitimate to the being of Shaw as Ned Conolly, Sidney Trefusis, Owen Jack, Cashel Byron/Lydia Carew, or G.B.S. even if less intense than they.³⁶⁹

Even as he was playing with the Smilash role, Shaw understood that it was an act of hypocrisy to play a role illegitimate to one's being; illegitimacy is the source of the "phoney." In going outside the limits of his own rightful being, the phoney invades and violates the character rights of others by creating the impression of falsity about the general character he is impersonating, which after all may be legitimate to someone else. Bernard Shaw seemed sometimes to understand about the reality of his mask, but at other times he seemed not to. Occasionally he would declare his public self to be a sham, a "mere" fiction, and a deliberate calculation in his propaganda war against folly. He would fight folly with folly. But that is not the whole truth. Eric Bentley explains it commendably:

True to Shavian formula the force that moved Shaw without his knowing whence or why was wiser than his unconscious intention. If one can see this, one can see that even the creation of the "fantastic personality" was not merely the mistake of a bad

³⁶⁹ Richard Farr Dietrich, *op cit.*, p.169.

strategist. Shaw's creation of "G.B.S." was not solely the deliberate, Machiavellian, creation he tells us about. It too was created by the Life Force, by the World's Will. By all means it is a mask. But then it is part of the Shavian philosophy that life offers us not a choice between face and mask but only a choice between one mask and another. The "natural character" which he calls "impossible on the great London stage," the stammering blushing young Protestant, this also was a "role," though a bad one. Silly and self-defeating as "G.B.S." can be, he too has his divine spark. "Every jest is an earnest in the womb of time" – even the jests of a foolish-looking mask.³⁷⁰

Bentley feels that it is more accurate to speak of the alternation of juxtaposition of masks rather than of the mask overlaying the face. For example, there is a scene in *The Unsocial Socialist*, when Smilash goes into the cottage and seconds later Trefusis comes out - but which is the disguise? We are told that Smilash is really Trefusis; but is it not equally true that Trefusis is really Smilash? Bentley's way out is to declare both versions impersonations. As Dietrich mentions, metaphorically borrowing from Shakespeare, "Smilash is an expression of Shaw's decision to play the economic fool to the madness of a 'Lear-esque capitalist'".³⁷¹ Bentley explains this perfectly in another context:

If modern life was as unreasonable to King Lear, Shaw would cast himself as the Fool. Trace the word 'mad' through his plays and you find that many of the finest characters and the finest actions have it applied to them.... Bernard Shaw resorted to some very bizarre shifts. Living in this queer, disgusting age he found he had to give the impression that his highest quality – a sort of delicate spirituality, purity, or holiness – was fooling when what he meant was that his fooling was holy. The devil's advocate was almost a sort of saint. The clown was something of a superman.³⁷²

Yet for all its failings, *An Unsocial Socialist* was an extraordinary book to have been produced in the 1880s, and Shaw recognised this fact referring to the work as "The

³⁷⁰ Eric Bentley, *Bernard Shaw, 1856-1950*, Revised edition, (New York: New Directions, 1957), p.217.

³⁷¹ Richard Farr Dietrich, *op cit.*, p.170.

³⁷² Eric Bentley, *op cit.*, pp. 210-211.

first English novel written under the influence of Karl Marx with a hero whose character and opinions forecast those of Lenin".³⁷³ Although *An Unsocial Socialist* was not artistically acclaimed or commercially successful, its importance lies in the fact that it marked a departure in Shaw's socio-political ideologies, which contain valuable early Shavian Marxist critiques.

³⁷³ Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw, op cit.*, p.118.

Chapter Seven: Parnell, Home Rule, and the Irish Agrarian Struggle - Analogies Towards Wilde's *Vera*?

Wilde's admiration for Charles Stewart Parnell was all the more interesting when one considered their quite contrasting personalities. Wilde was a man who glorified life lived for art's sake, by fulfilling his artistic self he proposed to obtain fame, wealth and admiration. He dazzled people with his brilliant, spontaneous wit and social grace, attributes that allowed him to infiltrate London society with audacious ease. Charles Stewart Parnell appeared to be Wilde's countertruth: aloof, solitary, uninterested in literature, and as John Morley noted, "No public man of his time was more free of the evil arts of prose, nobody more disdainful of playing to the gallery."³⁷⁴

Is it not the least of Irish history's many ironies then, that Parnell - perhaps the least literary of any Irish leader - should have generated myths which engaged a host of Irish playwrights, novelists and poets of the twentieth century, the most notable being W.B. Yeats. Why then did this politician of Anglo-Irish Ascendancy attract such interest from his contemporaries in both the political and literary fields? The answer lies in Parnell's personality and ideology; Charles Stewart Parnell, Anglo-Irish Protestant and fervent Home Ruler, had by the late 1800's convinced the majority of Ireland's catholic population that national self-determination was at last a reality, which was obtainable through parliamentarianism rather than insurrection.

Wilde, in his review of *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy*, argued that successive British governments had repeatedly undermined the political and economic position of the Ascendancy class in Ireland to the extent that it had made Home Rule untenable. A policy of archaic and shortsighted punitive taxation imposed by Westminster on Irish export produce had crippled the Irish economy to the extent that the very concept of Irish Home Rule had become politically and financially impractical. The result was an erosion of the political status quo enjoyed by the Irish Protestant minority since the plantations. The Anglo-Irish were progressively deprived of political hegemony by

³⁷⁴John, Viscount Morley, *Recollections* (New York: Macmillan, 1907) p.241. Also see F.S.L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (Oxford University Press, 1970) p.16.

the passage of such bills as the Act of Union in 1800, the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869, and the land acts which culminated in the Ashbourne Act of 1885 and its successors, all of which empowered the Irish Catholic majority at their expense. Yet, the majority of Ireland's political nationalists were of the Protestant faith - Edward Fitzgerald, Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet; historically the Celtic Irish had found their leaders less often among themselves than amongst the Anglo-Irish. This was probably due to Ireland's long history of disunity that stemmed from an inherent distrust after the "Flight of the Earls" during the reign of Elizabeth I. Michael Davitt, unmistakably a Gael and an Irishman, who had suffered terribly for his country, said with bitterness unusual to him, "The Irish would never accept me as a leader because I belong to the ranks of the people."³⁷⁵ Irish distrust of each other made them reluctant to accept a leader from their own ranks, and their instinctive love of aristocracy made them look for a leader from the ranks of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy.

Parnell brought with him a sense of purpose, a sense of destiny. He was determined to bring the case of Irish Home Rule to Westminster. Parnell with the assistance of two other Irish M.P.'s, Isaac Butt and Joseph Biggar, initiated a policy of 'Obstructionism' in the House of Commons in order to ensure that the question of Home Rule was prioritised; these three revolutionised the I.P.P. (Irish Parliamentary Party). By 1878, Parnell had all but usurped Isaac Butt as leader of the I.P.P. He had already been elected president of the Home Rule Confederation of Great Britain instead of Butt who had been seeking re-election. Parnell realised that the political status quo was changing in Ireland and that nothing could prevent its transformation. He understood that the biggest grievance the Irish had concerned land, the question of rent and peasant proprietary.

This was the dual question that fuelled the Irish quest for Home Rule. Parnell's political opponents now acknowledged that he was a master tactician, and a most able parliamentarian. However, Parnell realised that constitutionalism had to provide positive results; otherwise the threat of militant Fenianism could become a reality. Just as Wilde was to experience four years later, the America dimension had obtained

³⁷⁵M. M. O' Hara, *Chief and Tribune: Parnell and Davitt*, p.224

a position of importance as regards the 'Irish question'. While Parnell continued to seek support for his fledgling Land League in Ireland, he sent Michael Davitt across the Atlantic to canvass the all-important Irish-American community for support. He was preparing for what was afterwards called 'The New Departure', the recognition of the land question as an integral part of the national question. For Davitt the main concern was the agrarian question and peasant proprietorship, while Parnell was essentially preoccupied with obtaining a political mandate in the pursuit of Home Rule. In the face of enormous difficulties Davitt persuaded the American Fenians, who were more doctrinaire in their beliefs than the Irish and English Fenians, because, no doubt, they were farther away from Ireland, to let Parnell have his chance with constitutionalism. Not all of them were persuaded, but the majority were, and they promised to work for the "new departure" and to help Parnell.

Towards the end of 1879 Parnell had firmly established and outlined the primary tenants of the 'new departure', a common demand for 'the three F's' - Fair Rent, Free Sale, and Fixity of Tenure; Michael Davitt who was incarcerated in Dartmoor came to the belief that they were not enough, despite the fact that they were more than the English Parliament seemed likely to grant. The Irish peasant was penalised by his own industry; if he improved his land, his rent was raised. Yet, if he refused or was unable to pay the increased rent, he was summarily ejected from his holding, and his landlord without compensation confiscated his improvements. Davitt demanded the nationalisation of land, but was prepared to accept peasant proprietorship. He believed that the problem of the land would not be satisfactorily solved until the State owned every inch of the country, but he acknowledged that State ownership of land, if it ever came at all, must first be preceded by peasant proprietorship. Parnell knew all too well that after Catholic Emancipation it was only a matter of time before the Irish would turn their attention to the agrarian question. His belief, so far as the land question was concerned, did not extend beyond the common proposal of his time - namely, "the three F's"; and probably he would never have gone beyond this belief had not the potato crop failed in 1879. In the midst of that distress there were to be evictions, and the hungry were to be made homeless.

Parnell has often been described as a poor speaker, and, indeed, he must have seemed such to people accustomed to the abundant rhetoric of his contemporaries, but he had

a power of riveting men's minds with a single sentence that more ornate orators never possessed. A sentence, which he used on this occasion, became the password of the Land League, which was formally founded at the Imperial Hotel, Dublin, on October 21, 1879. He produced his agrarian resolution:

A fair rent, is a rent a tenant can reasonably pay according to the times; but in bad times the tenant cannot be expected to pay as much as he did in good times three or four years ago.... Now, what must we do in order to induce the landlords to see the position? - You must show the landlords that you intend to hold a firm grip on your homesteads and lands. You must not allow yourselves to be dispossessed as you were dispossessed in 1847.³⁷⁶

He may have lacked eloquence and rhetorical style in his public speaking, yet it was out of those dull, discoloured sentences that the peasant farmers drew the slogan of the Land League: "Keep a Firm Grip on your Land." He realised that he would never be an entertaining raconteur; his personality was more suited towards direct talking, something his supporters appreciated. Once he attempted to quote Portia's speech on the quality of mercy to his audience – it was not a success. He said to Katharine O' Shea: "I lost the quotation you gave me and brought it out sideways, and there it was all the time crushed up in my hand! Then I forgot the fellow's name, and called him 'the poet'." "Well, Shakespeare can be called 'the poet'," she replied. "Yes? Is that so?" Parnell replied, "It seemed to worry some of the reporters; one came and asked me what I meant. You must make me learn it better next time".³⁷⁷

Parnell once admitted that he not only preferred a carpenter's bench and tools to "all the poets, novelists and sages" but he was also fond of pointing out that "literature has no chance against the Freeman."³⁷⁸ His ignorance of Irish history astonished Gladstone and embarrassed his friends; he preferred watching walking contests to visiting the theatre, and Youalt's *The Horse* is the only book he is known to have read

³⁷⁶F.S.L. Lyons, *op cit.*, p131

³⁷⁷Katharine O' Shea, *Charles Stewart Parnell, his Love Story and Political Life*, 2 vols., (London, 1914), p.174

³⁷⁸William O' Brien, *Recollections*, (London, 1905), p.400.

all through.³⁷⁹ Katharine O' Shea, noted that the one book she saw Parnell read seriously was *Alice in Wonderland*.³⁸⁰ Yet both Parnell and Wilde shared a heroic style greater than the distance between aesthetics and agrarian reform. Both were aristocratic Protestants, attacked by the mob, the Press, and the state for violating moral and sexual codes. Wilde's position greatly resembled Parnell's defiance of the controlling forces in Irish life; defending artistic freedom, Wilde was attacked by a similar regressive nationalism, rigid religion, and expedient politics that oppressed Parnell. While Wilde, like Yeats, admired Parnell's attempts to remove the sterile regressiveness from Irish politics, both Wilde and Yeats ultimately believed that politics was still an unworthy distraction of Irish energies.

The fall of Parnell in 1891 showed that a new era had dawned in Irish political and cultural thinking. Politics was often blamed as an all-consuming obsession that was antithetically confronting and stagnating Irish art and culture. Just as Parnell had offered a "new departure" in Irish politics, so did the Anglo-Irish literary elite set about reasserting their position, their importance of necessity in Irish cultural affairs. The suddenness with which interest in Irish literature and culture revived may appear to corroborate Yeats view that the Irish Revival was an almost miraculous outcome of the political upheaval of 1891, attendant upon a "moment of supernatural insight", but this is not so. It had long been taken for granted that a lull in politics would lead to renewed vigour in cultural life, but neither Yeats nor others who held this opinion could foresee that the lull would come about not as expected through the success of the Home Rule movement but through the abrupt fall of Parnell and political disunion. And political disunion and failure were key factors in shaping the new response to cultural identity.

The two years following the events in Committee Room 15³⁸¹ saw a particular reversal in the value attached to the relative merits of literature and politics in defining an Irish identity. This reversal was grounded in the conviction that Irish culture, like

³⁷⁹John Kelly, "Parnell in Irish Literature" in *Parnell in Perspective*, D. G. Boyce & Alan O'Day (eds.), (London, 1991), p.242.

³⁸⁰F.S.L Lyons, *op cit.*, p.16.

³⁸¹This referred to the confidence vote held by the Irish Parliamentary Party (I.P.P.), which resulted in John Redmond usurping Parnell as leader of the I.P.P.

Irish politics, must free itself from English influence. The perceived cultural desolation of the 1880s, no longer complaisantly accepted but now regarded as a matter of national shame, is ascribed not as hitherto merely to the siphoning of intellectual energies into politics, but to the fact, as John Kelly stated, the *United Ireland* could claim on 14 February 1891, "We do not work in our own material." The contrast between English cultural decrepitude and decadence and native wholesomeness, nature and spirituality becomes a recurrent theme, an opposition that was to harden into a cliché of Irish criticism in the later 1890s, and to cause Irish dramatists a good deal of trouble at the beginning of the new century.

Commentators in publications such as the *United Ireland* were critical when what they perceived as potentially fine Irish writers squandered their talents in a vain attempt to be English. It was even worse when those same Anglo-Irish writers appeared to succeed; when, that is, Irish elements were assimilated into the literature of the enemy, and *United Ireland* insisted:

We want our own literature made known to our own people, so that their genius may be bent into its natural and true grove. We want furthermore to let the world know that intellectually and artistically the Irish are a distinct, and a distinguished race with their own laws and literature.³⁸²

Literature was no longer merely "ornamentation" but an essential ingredient of national identity. There was now no question of disregarding it until after Home Rule. On the contrary, Irish critics began to look back upon the literary barrenness of previous decades with distress and shame. Culture was no longer regarded as peripheral to the political struggle - rather as of a more or equal importance. "We do not see why it should not be possible to establish a standard of patriotism in Irish art and literature as well as in Irish politics."³⁸³ In 1891 *United Ireland* had argued "that a mere parliament alone would not make Ireland the nation we longed to see her" and maintained "that all true and thinking Nationalists are striving not alone for independence in politics, but for independence in literature and art...that without these we could never become the independent people we hoped one day to be."

³⁸²*United Ireland*, 14 April 1894.

³⁸³*United Ireland*, 14 April 1894.

By April 1892 it went even further, expressing what only two years earlier would have been the heretical view that:

An Irish parliament is only one means to the end we have in view; we are convinced that, in comparison with literature and art - and especially literature - its influence would be small in creating the sturdy Irishism amongst our people which will be the ultimate guardian of our national liberties.³⁸⁴

As a result the Anglo-Irish turned to cultural hegemony to retain their social-political position within a changing Ireland which, influenced by the tenets of romantic nationalism, increasingly defined its identity in cultural terms. By teaching the Anglicized middle-class native Catholics the language, history, and culture of Ireland on which the romantic nationalist claim to Irish nationhood rested, as well as by expressing that claim in art and politics, they not only asserted their right to inclusion within an Irish nation from which the romantic nationalist definition excluded them on the grounds of native language, ethnic origin, class and religion, but also asserted their right to continue to lead the nation.

Both Parnell and Wilde were amongst the forefathers of this political and cultural change of thought in Ireland. This according to Yeatsian ideology, allowed Wilde and Parnell to temporarily balance art and politics - Yeats found the resolution of the contraries of private aestheticism and public nationalism that T.S. Eliot praised:

Born into a world in which the doctrine of "Art for Art's sake" was generally accepted, and living on into one in which art has been asked to be instrumental to social purposes, he held firmly to the right view which is between these, though not in any way a compromise between them, and showed that an artist, by serving his art with entire integrity, is at the same time rendering the greatest service he can to his own nation and the whole world.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ *United Ireland*, 9 April 1892.

³⁸⁵ T.S. Eliot, "Yeats", in *Yeats: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Unterecker (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963) p. 62-63

Edouard Roditi in his biography of Wilde mentions how revered Parnell was held in the Wilde household, and was apotheosised as Ireland's saviour. While hosting her social gatherings in her salon, which Oscar regularly attended, Speranza often spoke deferentially on the subject of Parnell's endeavours to obtain Home Rule for Ireland, and she strongly believed that Parnell possessed the political influence, talent and charisma to achieve that objective.

Patrick Horan believed that:

Wilde admired Parnell not for his nationalistic goals, but for his charismatic personality and leadership ability. He identified with Parnell (as did Shaw, Yeats and Joyce) because he believed that they were both misunderstood, unappreciated saviours. Tellingly, one of Wilde's favourite sayings came from Parnell: "There is something vulgar in all success. The greatest men fail – or seem to the world to have failed."³⁸⁶

I would argue that while Wilde did indeed admire and praise Parnell's leadership qualities, he was genuinely supportive of Parnell's nationalistic goals. Wilde often appeared apathetic to the daily political issues happening in England, but on matters of personal interest relating to Ireland he was never shy or reserved in letting his opinion be known. In 1889 Parnell was falsely accused of condoning political murder when 'stolen' letters, allegedly written in his own hand, were published in *The Times* newspaper. The letters were in fact forgeries, written by a man named Pigott and all part of a 'character assassination' plot instigated by the newspaper to discredit Parnell's considerable political reputation. A public enquiry, which was also known as the "Parnell Commission", acquitted Parnell of all charges that were brought against him. We know that Wilde attended some of those hearings with his brother Willie who was working for the *Daily Chronicle*. Willie was also a great admirer of Parnell and he reported and wrote influentially in support and defence of Parnell throughout the enquiry. On one occasion the artist S.P. Hall sketched Oscar Wilde as he was attending one of the hearings. (See Illustrations A: page 156).

³⁸⁶ Patrick M. Horan, *The Importance of Being Paradoxical: Maternal Presence in the Works of Oscar Wilde*, (Associated University Presses, 1997), p.39. The Parnell quote is taken from Vincent O'Sullivan, *Aspects of Wilde*, (New York: Holt & Co., 1936), p.204.

Another interesting fact is that after Wilde's arrest in 1895, amongst his possessions that were seized for public auction was a complete set of volumes of *The Irish Land Acts*. Not only was he an admirer and supporter of Parnell, but he was also knowledgeable and informed about the Westminster parliamentary proceedings pertaining to the Irish agrarian question. One could hypothesise that not only was he aware of Davitt's endeavours to gain agrarian proprietorship for the landless peasants, but that he thoroughly supported it. There is a precedence for this school of thought because Coakley mentions the fact that Wilde's father left the family a small property in the West of Ireland and Wilde (both father and son) were known for their consideration and magnanimity when their tenants couldn't pay their rent – Wilde recalls one occasion when his father accepted some background information on local folklore in lieu of payment of rent. One could argue that this influenced his thinking when writing *Vera*, as the play although set in Tsarist Russia, mirrors the twin struggles of the Irish peasant and Russian serf demanding agrarian reform in their native lands.

It is interesting to note that in 1883, the same year that Shaw wrote *The Unsocial Socialist*, Oscar Wilde's first play *Vera or The Nihilists* was first performed; and similarly to Shaw's last novel, Wilde's first play did not achieve financial success. Wilde did not publish his major socialist work, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* until 1891, but *Vera* reveals a powerful and socialist message evident in his later work. *Vera* remains an important if neglected and often ignored reference source when critiquing Wilde's burgeoning republican and socialist philosophies. If examined from a socialist point of view, both *Vera* and *The Unsocial Socialist* exhibit some striking similarities and social concerns over the exploitation of the working classes. The plight of the landless serfs in Tsarist Russia and tenement-dwelling factory workers in industrial England share a story of common suffering. Characterisation and plot development are also comparable as the main protagonists, both members of the aristocracy/monarchy ruling classes, embrace socialism and anarchism, in an attempt to implement social equality in their respective countries.

When Wilde completed his first play *Vera* in 1880; that same year Ireland experienced an increase in agrarian unrest as Irish tenant farmers campaigned first for

reduced rents and later demanded proprietorial rights for the land they worked. With the formation of the Irish National Land League under the direction of Michael Davitt, and endorsed by Charles Stewart Parnell the new leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party (Home Rule Party), the quest for Irish land reform gathered momentum. Both Parnell and Davitt possessed the ability, charisma and political savoir-faire to motivate and organise mass movements of popular protest, something not seen in Ireland since the triumphs of Daniel O'Connell and the securing of Catholic emancipation.

During his lecture tour of America where *Vera* was to be first staged a journalist in New York requested him to comment on the forthcoming production:

Vera is a prose play in five acts, which I wrote seven years ago. It was not produced in England because its political sentiments would not have found favor [sic] there. Heretofore the passion portrayed in the drama has been altogether personal, like the love of a man for a woman, or a woman for a man. I have tried to show the passion for liberty. For this purpose I have chosen the most extreme expression of liberty, the Nihilism of Russia, which is akin to the anarchism of old France. All art takes an aristocratic view of life, for civilization belongs to the higher classes. I want to show how far the aspirations of an uncultivated people can be made a subject for art. Life under a good government is rarely dramatic; life under a bad government is always so.³⁸⁷

Although *Vera* is set in late eighteenth-century Moscow, many of Vera's lines bore the hallmarks of Lady Wilde's revolutionary rhetoric. The drama of the play arises from the tension between the plot of a revolutionary group planning to assassinate the Czar and his son the Czarevitch and Vera's love for the latter. Vera is torn between her loyalty to the revolution and her loyalty to the Czarevitch, who promises reform by constitutional methods. The analogy between the Czarevitch and the Irish parliamentarian reformer Charles Stewart Parnell is very plausible. Furthermore, the grievances of the Russian serfs mirrored those of the Irish peasantry so conveniently that the latent agrarian unrest in a Russian setting can be read as an astute political

³⁸⁷ See Oscar Wilde, "Oscar Wilde Returns", *The World* (New York: 12 Aug 1883), p.5, in *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections, Volume I*, E.H. Mikhail (ed.), (Macmillan, 1979), p.115.

commentary analogous to the state of Anglo-Irish relations at that time.³⁸⁸ The fact that Wilde refers to the underlying sentiment of the play as “the passion for liberty” and emphasises the “personal” significance of the play, adds further credence to the possibility that his thoughts and sympathy were as much with the landless peasants of Ireland as with the serfs of Tsarist Russia.

The play had been withdrawn from its scheduled production in London in 1881³⁸⁹, deemed politically too sensitive in the period following the assassination of Czar Alexander II (*Vera* predicts such an incident, although it was written the year previous to the Czar’s death.) The assassination received massive coverage in English journals, portraits of the Czar and his family and of the Nihilists responsible for the murder (all were hanged) dominated the April and May issues of the *Illustrated London News*. While the play proved to be a financial failure when staged unsuccessfully in New York in 1883, it still offers the reader a rare insight into Wilde’s embryonic socio-political and artistic philosophy.

The play has often been criticised for being overly melodramatic, but then melodrama did feature at times in both Wilde’s art and life. *Vera*, with its revolutionary heroine, discloses a manifest interest in social reform and an enlarged conception of women’s capabilities - this as I have argued can easily be seen as analogous to the Irish

³⁸⁸Both the Russian serfs and Irish peasants were demanding the right to own their own land at this time. History has proven that national self-determination cannot prevail if the question of agrarian ownership is not addressed first. It may be that mankind will not rid itself of “the mania for owning things”, as Whitman called it, until it has been fully satisfied in every man. Parnell knew this all too well that after Catholic Emancipation; it was only a matter of time before the Irish would turn their attention to the agrarian question.

³⁸⁹The following notice appeared in *The World*, at that time edited by Wilde’s brother, William: “Considering the present state of political feeling in England, Mr Oscar Wilde has decided on postponing for a time the production of his drama, *Vera*.” (*The World*, London, 30 November 1881.) Wilde later told the American press, at the time when the play was about to open in New York, that he had not been able to find a suitable cast in London, and it was rumoured that unsatisfactory rehearsals were the real reason behind the cancellation - more plausibly, Wilde probably correctly judged the nation’s reaction to the assassination and as the Czar’s daughter was a member of the English royal family and Wilde himself was a personal acquaintance of the Prince of Wales, decided that the play could not possibly be staged in such circumstances.

situation and to his mother's "heroic" past deeds. The play offers more than the impression of a woman who extravagantly sacrifices herself for her lover and her country, it also offers a glimpse of Wilde's feminism; the female protagonists in his works are invariably portrayed as independent, intelligent, characters of purpose and action, whilst the male characters are often depicted as the weaker sex, indecisive, and lacking the verve and vigour of their female counterparts. Also, Vera is the first example of the "heroic-martyr" figure which Wilde was fascinated with, and which featured so prominently in *Salomé* (Iokanaan), and on a more intimate level in *De Profundis* by his own incarceration and suffering. The immense interest in the subject of nihilism in the 1880s was an integral part of *Vera's* ideological message. He wrote to Mary Prescott, who was staging his play in New York in 1883:

I have tried to express within the limits of art that Titan cry of the peoples for liberty, which in the Europe of our day is threatening thrones, and making governments unstable from Spain to Russia and from north to southern seas. It deals with no theories of government, but with men and women simply; and modern nihilistic Russia...is merely the fiery and fervent background in front of which the persons of my dream live and love.³⁹⁰

Hypothetically speaking had Wilde written *Vera* in an Irish setting rather than a Russian one, it seems almost certain that it too would have been political, perhaps with a Republican hue considering his advocacy and subsequent Republican sentiments during his lecture tour to North America in 1882. According to Katharine Worth, Wilde came closest with his first play, *Vera* or *The Nihilists* whose revolutionary Russian theme could easily be transposed to the land war and agrarian unrest, which was dominating Irish politics at that time. Worth writes:

When he was writing his play about nihilism, the pages of the *Illustrated London News* were filled with pictures and commentary on the Russian Nihilists and also on the Irish troubles. It is unlikely that Wilde failed to make connections between the two.³⁹¹

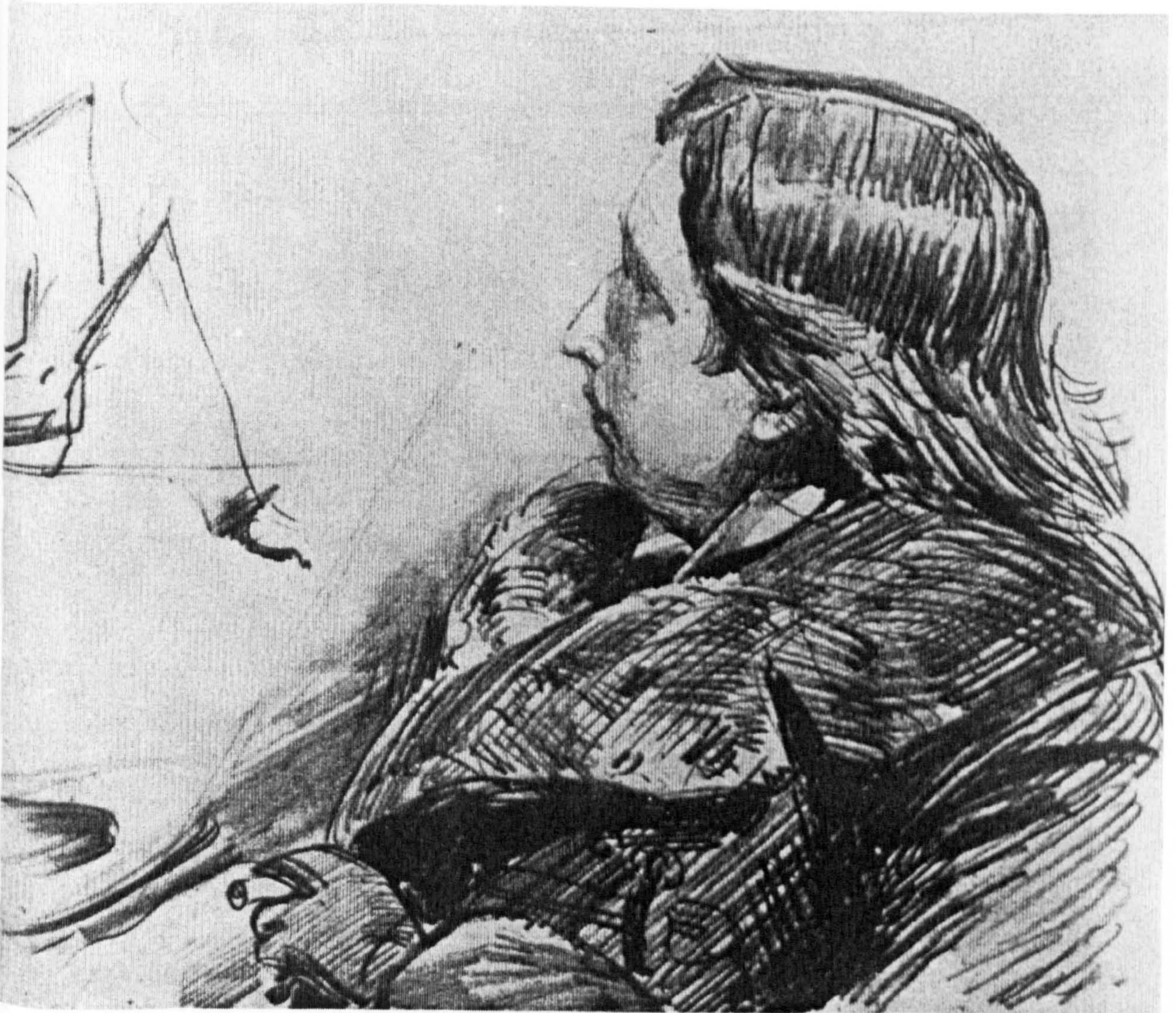
³⁹⁰H. Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976) p.89.

³⁹¹ Katharine Worth, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Macmillan, 1980; New York: Grove Press Inc., 1983), p.10.

Wilde himself, perhaps, makes that clear when his President of the Nihilists, Peter Tchernavitch declares to a doubting Vera that “every nation is fit for a Republic”, and also in the author’s description of the play as his “first attack on tyranny”. Written twenty-four years earlier in 1880, it merits comparison with Shaw’s play, however, only insofar as both works are thematically political, and both attack tyranny. For Wilde, it is the tyranny of corrupt, dictatorial monarchy; for Shaw it is the tyranny of misunderstanding between two islands. A more appropriate parallel might be drawn between *John Bull’s Other Island* and Wilde’s career itself, since both reflected “a radical socialist critique of the Anglo-Irish antithesis.”³⁹² In *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* Declan Kiberd has suggested that *Vera* represented a form of artistic and social manifesto. It succeeded, even if unwittingly so, in combining an Irish spirit of defiance, a dandified posturing, an artistic interest in nihilism (equality, individual and artistic freedom) and a private, psychic fascination with disguise, into a solitary statement - not yet unified or achieving satisfactory dramatic form, but giving voice to the thematic singularity. As with all his later stage works, the interrelationship of these elements is striking.

³⁹² Declan Kiberd, “The London Exiles”, *op cit.*, p.422.

Illustrations C



Oscar Wilde at the Parnell Commission, from a drawing by S P Hall. Wilde had great admiration for the Irish politician Charles Stewart Parnell and he supported his Home Rule policies. (Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London)

BY ORDER OF THE SHERIFF.

A.D. 1895.

No. 6907

16, Tite Street, Chelsea.

Catalogue of the Library of 1.2.6
Valuable Books, .4.0
8.0
18.0

Pictures, Portraits of Celebrities, Arundel Society Prints, 2.7.6

HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE

CARLYLE'S WRITING TABLE,

Chippendale and Italian Chairs, Old Persian Carpets
and Rugs. Brass Fenders.

Moorish and Oriental Curiosities,

Embroideries, Silver and Plated Articles.

OLD BLUE AND WHITE CHINA,

Moorish Pottery, Handsome Ormolu Clock,

and numerous Effects.

The Property of Oscar Wilde,
Which will be Sold by Auction,

By Mr. BULLOCK,

ON THE PREMISES,

On Wednesday, April 24th, 1895,

AT ONE O'CLOCK.

May be Viewed the day prior, and Catalogues had of Messrs. CLARKE & Co.
16, Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn; and of the Auctioneer,

211 HIGH HOLBORN. W.C.

Chapter Eight: Socialism, and Individualism in Oscar Wilde's 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism'

'The Soul Of Man Under Socialism' first appeared in *The Fortnightly Review* of 1891. Anne Varty has remarked that with this essay Wilde was:

participating in the national polemic about the values of socialism, promoted by George Bernard Shaw and the Fabian Society on one hand, and F. D. Maurice and the Christian Socialists on the other. William Morris had just published his noble Utopian romance, *News From Nowhere* (1890), and Annie Besant was pamphleteering with *Modern Socialism* (1886). Public debates such as 'Socialism verses Individualism' between Annie Besant representing the Fabians, and Frederick Miller representing the Liberty and Property Defence League, which took place in Nottingham mechanics' Hall on 25 October 1890, represented the polarisation of opinion between radicals and conservatives.³⁹³

Wilde hoped to establish his own orthodoxy in the face of raging socialist factions. He set out, Varty argues to:

Dismantle the dichotomy between 'socialism' and 'individualism'; he emphasised the spiritual gains of socialism, relegating as an incidental advantage their material gain associated with the redistribution of wealth; he characterised Christ as a subversive, asocial agent, and grants Christianity a relative position in the march of progress rather than one of absolute authority. Even when his message resembles that of orthodox Fabianism, his aphoristic manner removes him from the pulpit.³⁹⁴

On the subject of socialism versus individualism Wilde was very clear: "The true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is."³⁹⁵ 'Socialism', for Wilde, is a means to this end, not an end in itself: "Socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to Individualism".³⁹⁶

³⁹³ Anne Varty, *A Preface to Oscar Wilde* (London and New York: Longman, 1998), p.51.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.52.

³⁹⁵ Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p.1178.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.1175.

'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' turns this aestheticism into a subversive political force, anarchic in function and aim. Wilde declared in 1894 "We are all of us more or less Socialists now-a-days... I think I am rather more than a socialist. I am something of an Anarchist, I believe; but, of course, the dynamite policy is very absurd indeed."³⁹⁷ His ideology is only superficially linked with the Utopian vision of William Morris expressed in *News From Nowhere*, the literary culmination of the practical Arts and Crafts movement, which Morris supported. Whereas Morris focuses on man as a social animal, and postulates ideal forms of action in which man can engage to promote the health of the society, balancing productive labour with creative work and turning creativity into a means to produce wealth and health, Wilde focuses on ideal man as supremely antisocial. He dismisses action as a lower form of existence than inaction, and prizes contemplation, 'being' rather than 'doing', as the end to which man should strive and which the ideal State should facilitate.

In a perfect twist of irony Shaw, through his character Erskine in *An Unsocial Socialist*, first castigates the 'antisocial inactive artist' who values the artistic-cerebral over the physical, and who believes that in an ideal society the State would actually facilitate his requirements:

[The Artist] wants to be fed as if his stomach needed more food than ordinary stomachs, which it does not.... He talks of the higher quality of his work, as if the higher quality of it were of his own making... as if, in short, the fellow were a god, as canting brain-worshippers have for years past been assuring him he is. Artists are the high priests of the modern Moloch.³⁹⁸

However in the Fabian Society's own words (in a volume edited by Shaw), the Fabians had clearly defined the relationship between socialism and individualism:

If we could imagine an individual absolutely isolated, and having no relation at all with other sentient beings, we could not say that it was moral or immoral for him to eat, drink, sleep, breathe, wash himself, take exercise, cough, sneeze, and the like,

³⁹⁷ See E. H. Mikhail, (ed.), *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, Vol. I. (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), p.232.

³⁹⁸ George Bernard Shaw, *An Unsocial Socialist*, *op cit.*, pp. 74-75.

just as much or as little, when or where he felt inclined. His conduct in these activities must appear to us absolutely indifferent. We must have some vague reflected suppositions as to what is necessary for the dignity and development of the man's 'self', as we might call it; but this is a matter about which the man may pretend to know as much as we do; and we have really no valid ground for prejudice against the habits of the recluse Indian fakir, who has, on the other hand, considerable claims to be regarded as a peculiarly holy individual. But of every man living in society we can say, that if he starves himself into inefficiency; if he gorges or fuddles himself; if he sleeps unseasonably; if he abstains from the fresh air, the cleanliness, and the exercise, necessary to keep his body healthy and his presence pleasant.³⁹⁹

Yet paradoxically, according to Varty, this equips Wilde with a vocabulary and a strategy to counter fierce opponents of Socialism. These were the Liberals, who viewed the ideal of the conversion of "private property into public wealth", and the substitution of "co-operation for competition"⁴⁰⁰ as gross interference by the state into the favourite British occupation of 'doing as one likes', that tolerant liberalism which John Stuart Mill had outlined so eloquently and persuasively in *On Liberty*.⁴⁰¹ From the start Wilde makes 'Individualism' into the keystone of his argument. But he takes the vocabulary of the opposition in order to redefine it, discriminating a "true Individualism" from "an Individualism that is false."⁴⁰²

As previously mentioned, Wilde believed "Socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to Individualism".⁴⁰³ And the Fabian Sydney Oliver also stressed the importance of individualism's relationship to socialism in Bernard Shaw's edited volume of *Fabian Essays*.

Socialism appears as the offspring of Individualism, as the outcome of individualist struggle, and as the necessary condition for the approach to the Individualist ideal.

³⁹⁹ Sydney Olivier, "The Relationship between Socialism and Individualism" in George Bernard Shaw (ed.), *Fabian Essays* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948), p.138.

⁴⁰⁰ Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p.1175.

⁴⁰¹ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859).

⁴⁰² Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', *op cit.*, p.1178.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid*, p.1175.

The opposition commonly assumed in contrasting the two is an accident of the now habitual confusion between personality and personalty, between a man's life and the abundance of things that he has. Socialism is merely Individualism rationalized, organized, clothed, and in its right mind. Socialism is taking form in advanced societies and the social revolution must be brought to its formal accomplishment through the conscious action of innumerable individuals seeking an avenue to rational and pleasant existence for themselves and for those whose happiness and freedom they desire as they do their own. All conscious action, all conscious modification of conditions, is inspired by the desire of such personal relief, satisfaction, or expression, by the attempt to escape from some physical or intellectual distress. 'Subjective volition, passion it is', says Hegel, 'that sets man in activity: men will not interest themselves for anything unless they find their individuality gratified by its attainment.' This common end, this desire of personal relief or satisfaction, we see throughout recorded or indicated history impelling every living creature on the earth; merging itself, as we trace it backwards, in the mere apparent will to live of organisms not recognized as conscious, and in the indestructible energy of the inorganic. The field of activity thus conceived presents a panorama of somewhat large extent; but a very small division of it is all that we shall have to do with. For morality, whatever be its nature and basis, certainly does not become recognizable to us, we cannot attribute the quality of rightness or wrongness, until the formation of society has begun, until individuals are in conscious relation with individuals other than themselves.⁴⁰⁴

It is interesting that Oliver quotes Hegel who stresses that man will totally ignore or chose to avoid an object/subject unless their individuality desires it. For Wilde too was greatly influenced by Hegel in furthering his ideology of artistic individuality. According to Philip E. Smith II and Michael S. Helfand, in their edited *Oscar Wilde's Oxford Notebooks*⁴⁰⁵, "Wilde's political and cultural theories...developed directly from the synthesis of Hegelian idealism and evolutionary theory sketched in [Wilde's college] notebooks."⁴⁰⁶ But as they also say, "Throughout the eighties Wilde had moved freely in radical, socialist and anarchist circles and had participated in or

⁴⁰⁴ Sydney Olivier, *Fabian Essays, op cit.*, p.138.

⁴⁰⁵ Philip E. Smith and Michael S. Helfand, *Oscar Wilde's Oxford Notebooks: A Portrait of Mind in the Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p.82.

otherwise supported their causes.”⁴⁰⁷ ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’ is Hegelian in practice - as a work of synthesis - rather than coherently in theory. It rewrites the history of the future on Wilde’s terms: it proposes the abolition of private property in order to invest the individual with the right of total self-possession.

Wilde operates at a consistently intellectual level, never appealing to the emotions, never appealing to the moral conscience, “All Sympathy is fine, but sympathy with suffering is the least fine mode. It is tainted with egotism”.⁴⁰⁸ His argument begins with this point: “It is much more easy to have sympathy with suffering than it is to have sympathy with thought.”⁴⁰⁹ He rejects sympathy as a motive for political action, castigates altruism and its practical social corollary under capitalism, ‘acts of charity’. Charity, he argues, in line with Fabians such as Shaw⁴¹⁰, is iniquitous because it simply prolongs the degradation of the poor under an unjust political regime. The first principle he establishes is that “The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible.”⁴¹¹ This is the proper course of action for dealing with poverty. Part of the problem, he adds, lies with fashionable forms of altruism, which “have really prevented the carrying out of this aim”; like kindly slave-owners, whose actions and attitudes delayed a recognition of the systematic basis of slavery, “the people who do most harm are the people who try to do most good.” So far, this is either good revolutionary politics or typical Wildean paradox (or perhaps both), but the essay goes on to suggest a more precise and contemporary target: in recent years, he noted, “we have had the spectacle of men who have really studied the problem and know the life - educated men who live in the East-end - coming forward and imploring the community to restrain its altruistic impulses of charity, benevolence, and the like. They do so on the ground that such charity degrades and demoralises. They are perfectly right. Charity creates a multitude of sins.”⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.81.

⁴⁰⁸ Oscar Wilde, ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’, *op cit.*, p.1195.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.1174.

⁴¹⁰ A good example would be to refer back to my discussion on *An Unsocial Socialist* where both Sir Charles and Trefusis are of the same opinion that charity is a waste of money, and only financial investment in economic reform can ever bring about an end to poverty.

⁴¹¹ Oscar Wilde, ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’, *op cit.*, p.1174.

⁴¹² *Ibid*, p.1176.

He has managed to erect a standard tenet of socialism on what looks like the ideology of the opposition. He drives this method home by looking at charity from the point of view of the supposed beneficiary who then emerges as the victim of precisely that kind of interference which the Liberals purport to resent. "Charity they feel to be a ridiculously inadequate mode of partial restitution, or sentimental dole, usually accompanied by some impertinent attempt on the part of the sentimentalist to tyrannize over their private lives." He regards the ungrateful, rebellious poor, and criminals, as positive agents of change: forces to overthrow the various tyrannies, which restrict personal freedom, "Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue."⁴¹³

Both Shaw and Wilde were in essence espousing the philosophy of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon the nineteenth century French socialist. Proudhon had published a pamphlet entitled "What is Property?" His economic philosophy contentiously concluded, "Property is theft."⁴¹⁴

A community is infinitely more brutalised by the habitual employment of punishment, than it is by the occasional occurrence of crime... The less punishment, the less crime... Starvation, and not sin, is the parent of modern crime... When private property is abolished there will be no necessity for crime, no demand for it; it will cease to exist... When each member of the community has sufficient for his wants, and is not interfered with by his neighbour, it will not be an object of any interest to him to interfere with anyone else.⁴¹⁵

Wilde is then free to consider what benefits will accrue to the individual in such a system, and to outline a cult of self-development, open to every individual only when freed from the constraints of material poverty or concern:

With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things and the symbols for

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, p.1176.

⁴¹⁴ See J. Hampden Jackson, *Marx, Proudhon and European Socialism*, (New York, 1957), p.25.

⁴¹⁵ Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', *op cit.*, pp. 1182-1183.

things. One will live. To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.⁴¹⁶

But the arrogance of tone here permitted reviewers to take exception to Wilde's definition of 'individualism': "The sort of individuality to which Oscar attaches great moment is that which recognises no law or authority. He wants the world to be all Oscar Wilde."⁴¹⁷

For Wilde, the highest expression of individualism, and of life, is art. "Art is the most intense mould of individualism that the world has known"⁴¹⁸ - a principle reached by careful economic argument and not vague or idealistic aestheticism. The rest of the essay is devoted to an exploration of the relationship between the artist and the State. Wilde considers the real terms of late nineteenth-century Britain, where intolerant, ignorant 'Public Opinion' expressed through journalism exercises tyranny over the artist, and compels degenerative art forms to dominate a false cultural life. He contrasts this with the ideal terms of his revisioned Utopia: "The form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all".⁴¹⁹ This is the most radical expression of his anarchism, given that he envisions a classless society in which every member is an artist devoted to the development of his or her 'personality'.

Throughout the essay Wilde uses a rhetorical technique, which he learned from Matthew Arnold, whose *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) he is implicitly criticising. Arnold, neglecting economics, addressed exclusively the middle class, and promoted 'culture' as a means of elevating its spiritual life; his argument proceeds by repetition and the refrain 'Sweetness and Light' is pitted against 'Barbarians' and 'Anarchy'. Wilde too uses repetition, setting the prize term 'personality' against the 'demoralising' factors that inhibit its development. Both these terms acquire a resonance in the course of the essay. The distance at which Wilde situates himself from Arnold, even while deploying his rhetorical tactics, can be seen in his rejection of all external forms of authority, and his promotion of anarchy as the only form of

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.1178.

⁴¹⁷ *Weekly Dispatch*, 8 February 1891.

⁴¹⁸ Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', *op cit.*, p.1184.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.1192.

government which will allow the individual to develop fully. A concrete example of Wilde's rejection of Arnold's vision is given by their opposed attitudes to the 'classics' of literature. For Arnold these provided the ultimate resource of 'sweetness and light' available to all who could read; for Wilde they are simply another form of iniquitous authority, inhibiting spiritual growth. "The fact is, the public makes use of the classics of a country as a means of checking the progress of Art."⁴²⁰ "Progress," he argues, "is the realization of Utopias."⁴²¹ This perpetual state of departure for undiscovered terrain is made possible by an attitude of dynamic criticism, not complacent or fearful obedience.

On the ideological differences between Wilde's socialist beliefs and those of the Fabians, Shaw had this to add:

It is a curious fact that of the three great propagandist amateurs of political economy, Henry George, Marx and Ruskin, Ruskin alone seems to have had no effect on the Fabians. Here and there in the Socialist movement workmen turned up who had read *Fors Clavigera* or *Unto This Last* and some of the more well-to-do had read the first chapter of *Munera Pluveris*. But Ruskin's name was hardly mentioned in the Fabian society. My explanation is that, barring Olivier, the Fabians were inveterate Philistines. My efforts to induce them to publish... Oscar Wilde's *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*... fell so flat that I doubt whether my colleagues were even conscious of them.⁴²²

⁴²⁰ *Ibid*, p.1186.

⁴²¹ *Ibid*, p.1184.

⁴²² Anne Fremantle, *This Little Band of Prophets: The British Fabians* (New York: Mentor Books, 1960), p.49.

Part Three: Sexuality

It is really only in the last two decades that Wildean and Shavian scholars have examined in greater detail the significance and consequence of sexual preference in influencing or determining artistic ideology. This new awareness and willingness to consider fresh psychoanalytical, cultural and gender studies research techniques, in relation to previous literary/socio-political interpretations of Wilde and Shaw, has uncovered further evidence of the influence which sexual preference played in the lives and art of both Wilde and Shaw.⁴²³ As Anne Varty rightly states:

The way in which any reader after 1895 responds to Wilde's work is radically altered by knowledge of his homosexuality. For some, his writing became eclipsed by his life, and both became unmentionable; for later generations, more open sexual politics have brought the work back into view, but have changed his frame of reference.⁴²⁴

In this section I will assess the connection between homosexuality and artistic ideology in Wilde's life and art. I will also examine the trials and the reaction of the press to Wilde's downfall, and consider the impact and consequences that prison had on Wilde. Finally, I will also briefly examine Shaw's opinion and interaction with Wilde with respect to their individual sexual identities. Did Wilde's sexuality have any bearing on their relationship? Did Wilde's homosexuality threaten Shaw in any conceivable way, or as Sally Peters has argued, did Wilde and Shaw possibly share the same sexual orientation, differing only in its overt or latent manifestation?

⁴²³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London: Yale University Press, 1990); Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century. Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994); Anne Varty, *A Preface To Oscar Wilde*, (Longman: 1998), pp 28-34. For an examination of the influence which Shaw's sexuality had on his ideology and art; and more importantly how sexual preference influenced, and at times determined, the relationship between Shaw and Wilde see Sally Peters, *Bernard Shaw: The Assent of the Superman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996)

⁴²⁴ Anne Varty, *op cit.*, p.28

Chapter Nine: Exploring Wilde's Sexual Representation

It was while at Oxford that both Wilde and later Douglas explored and embraced certain influences that cultivated their latent homosexual identities. It was here in the 'city of dreaming spires' that the genesis of Wilde's ideology towards art and life took shape, an ideology predicated on the power of personality - that only through the total expression of individualism, free from the restraints of convention, could one achieve the complete, harmonious development of the human self. Wilde's literary ideology, concerning art and individualism, came from two distinct intellectual schools of philosophical thought, namely Hellenism/Platonism associated with the study of Greek Classics⁴²⁵ under the auspices of Pater⁴²⁶, and Hegelianism as adopted by T. H. Green⁴²⁷ and Matthew Arnold.⁴²⁸

On the former, Wilde was already well versed from his days at Trinity College Dublin. A fellow student, (later Sir) Edward Sullivan, remembers Wilde reading Symond's *Studies of the Greek Poets*, the first volume of which appeared in 1873, and which championed the aesthetic dimension of Greek thought and behaviour. Wilde's tutor at Trinity was Professor of Classics, John Pentland Mahaffy, who published *Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander* in 1874, acknowledging the assistance of 'my old pupil Mr. Oscar Wilde' for his 'improvements and corrections through the book.'⁴²⁹ According to Richard Pine⁴³⁰, Mahaffy's *Social Life in Greece*

⁴²⁵ *Literate Humaniores*, an Oxford course of study devoted to the philosophical and historical thought of ancient Greece and Rome.

⁴²⁶ Walter Horatio Pater (1839-84) English essayist and critic, noted especially for his ornate prose style, described by Wilde as 'the holy writ of beauty.' Pater was a strong influence on the Aesthetic Movement and Wilde both parodied and paid homage to him in his own work.

⁴²⁷ T. H. Green, English philosopher, was the prime mover of Oxford Hegelianism and was fond of enjoining his students 'to close up their Mills and Spencer and to turn to Kant and Hegel.' See A. M. Quinton, "Absolute Idealism" *Proceedings of the British Academy* 57 (1971), p.34. Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and his Age* (London: Penguin, 1990).

⁴²⁸ Matthew Arnold (1822-88), English poet and critic. He was the son of Thomas Arnold (1795-1842) and became one of the most important commentators on Victorian society along with Ruskin.

⁴²⁹ John Pentland Mahaffy, *Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander* (London, Macmillan, 1874), p.viii.

from *Homer to Menander* was the first frank discussion in English of Greek homosexuality, quoting Mahaffy: “the peculiar delight and excitement felt by the Greeks in the society of handsome youths...the same sort of agreeable zest which young men of our time feel in the company of young females.” He went on to add, “But such an entertainment as the modern ball would have appeared to the old Greek profoundly immoral and shocking, just as we are apt to regard his attachments as contrary to all reason and sense of propriety. There is no field of enquiry where we are so dogmatic in our social prejudices.”⁴³¹ Mahaffy based his argument on the fact that the texts under discussion:

are the writings of men of like culture with ourselves, who argue with the same logic, who reflect with kindred feelings. They have worked out social and moral problems like ourselves.... They are thoroughly modern, more modern than the epochs quite proximate to our own.⁴³²

At Oxford Wilde further expanded his knowledge concerning the relationship between individualism and artistic expression modelled on the ancient Greek paradigm. Pater's *The Renaissance* and *Marius the Epicurean* were two seminal works on ancient Greek culture which Wilde would repeatedly make reference to in his later work *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Indeed the *Picture of Dorian Gray* has been considered, rightly, to be indebted to Pater. In John Pick's words, it “is largely a novelised form of the ‘Conclusion’ to the *Renaissance*...Lord Henry Wotton...represents the very voice - and indeed not infrequently the very words of the ‘Conclusion’ and through him Dorian identifies his own acts with the philosophy of life presented there.”⁴³³ As Robert K. Martin has observed *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is at once a homage to the author of *The Renaissance*, which Wilde spoke of as

⁴³⁰ Richard Pine, *The Thief of Reason: Oscar Wilde and Modern Ireland* (Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1995), p.125.

⁴³¹ John Pentland Mahaffy, *op cit.*, p.305.

⁴³² *Ibid*, p.1.

⁴³³ John Pick, “Divergent Disciples of Walter Pater”, *Thought*, XXIII (March, 1948), p.121. See also Christopher S. Nassaar's comment that ‘the entire novel [*Dorian*] seems to be structured with Pater's book [*The Renaissance*] as its focal point.’ In *Into the Demon Universe: A Literary Exploration of Oscar Wilde*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p.39.

“my golden book”⁴³⁴ echoing Pater’s own description of the tale of Cupid and Psyche in *Marius the Epicurean*, and simultaneously a parody of Pater which draws specifically on what Wilde perceived as Pater’s coy homosexuality.”⁴³⁵

Davis Coakley has commented on several incidents where Wilde, like many other writers including Shakespeare, borrowed from different historical and literary sources, and the borrowed material was usually absorbed into a work of far greater brilliance.⁴³⁶ Of Shakespeare’s borrowings, Wilde observed:

Shakespeare had chronicles and plays and novels from which to work, but they were merely his rough material. He took them, and shaped them into song. They became his, because he made them lovely.⁴³⁷

Robert Ross remembered that Wilde openly acknowledged his own borrowing:

Wilde complained to me one day that someone, in a well-known novel, had stolen an idea of his. I pleaded in defence of the culprit that Wilde himself was a fearless literary thief. ‘My dear fellow,’ he said, with his usual drawling emphasis, ‘when I see a monstrous tulip with four wonderful petals in someone else’s garden, I am impelled to grow a monstrous tulip with five wonderful petals; but that is no reason why someone should grow a tulip with only three petals.’⁴³⁸

When a novelist spoke of adapting Bunyan, Wilde gave him the following advice:

Never say you have ‘adapted’ anything from anyone. Appropriate what is already yours - for to publish anything is to make it public property - but never adapt, or, if you do, suppress the fact. It is hardly fair to Bunyan, if you improve on him, to point

⁴³⁴ Wilde’s remark was made to Yeats in 1888. He was probably echoing Pater’s *Marius* consciously.

⁴³⁵ Robert K. Martin, “Parody and Homage: The Presence of Pater in *Dorian Gray*” *The Victorian Newsletter* (Spring 1983), p.15.

⁴³⁶ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, pp. 186-187

⁴³⁷ Oscar Wilde, “The Critic as Artist”, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* Introduction by Merlin Holland (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p.1119.

⁴³⁸ Vyvyan Holland, *Oscar Wilde and his World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979), pp. 82-84.

out, some hundreds of years after, how much cleverer you are than he; and it is even more unfair, if you spoil what he has said, and then hold him accountable.⁴³⁹

In *The Critic as Artist*, Gilbert pointed out that even in ancient Greece people without true artistic ability interfered in matters of literature and art: “for the accusations of plagiarism were endless, and such accusations proceed either from the thin colourless lips of impotence, or from the grotesque mouths of those who, possessing nothing of their own, fancy that they can gain a reputation for wealth by crying out that they have been robbed.”⁴⁴⁰ Recent analysis of Wilde’s society comedies has shown that the playwright ‘borrowed’ more extensively from his own work than from the work of any other author.⁴⁴¹

Wilde’s career underwent a significant alteration in the late 1880s, in part because of his recognition of his blossoming homosexuality (whether that recognition was sudden or gradual is still a matter of biographical debate). He continued to remain indebted to Pater’s prose but began to distance himself from Pater’s aestheticism. A growing inner confidence in his sexuality was a major contributing factor, a factor that Robert K. Martin refers to in Wilde’s ‘The Portrait of Mr. W. H.’:

here is a work obviously indebted to Pater, but one which equally clearly offers a parody of Pater’s method. In Wilde’s story, works of art are used as a means to the discovery of personality, in the best Pater manner, but the portrait which is at its center is a fake. Do the characters, whose critical approach borrows from the *Renaissance*, deduce meaning from the artefact, or do they read back from their own lives into the works that they purportedly read? By laying particular emphasis on the homosexual meaning of the sonnets, Wilde was engaging in a bit of fun at the expense of Pater, who hints repeatedly at the subject but always skirts it delicately.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁹ Kernahan, *In Good Company; Some Personal Recollections* (London: John Lane, 1917), pp. 189-235. – Cited in Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, pp. 186.

⁴⁴⁰ Oscar Wilde, “The Critic as Artist”, *op cit.*, p.1119.

⁴⁴¹ Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde Revalued: An Essay on New Materials & Methods of Research* (Greenboro, NC: ELT Press, 1993), p.99.

⁴⁴² Robert K. Martin, “Parody and Homage: The Presence of Pater in *Dorian Gray*” *The Victorian Newsletter* (Spring 1983), p.15-16.

An argument runs that the Greek term *poikilos*, like Greek studies generally at Oxford and Cambridge, belonged to a homosexual vocabulary or code that served to widen the terms of late Victorian erotic and aesthetic expressiveness. Linda Dowling examines the validity of this accusation in "Ruskin's Pied Beauty and the Constitution of a 'Homosexual' code"⁴⁴³ What she exposes is revealing in the sense that both Pater and Ruskin had definitive if differing views concerning *poikilia* and *paidierastia* and their understanding when associated with terms such as 'Inversion,' 'Uranism,' 'Dorianism,' 'pederasty,' 'New Chivalry' and a host of other terms which came under the rubric 'Greek Love'. To refer to the concept of 'homosexuality' at that time would constitute an anachronism; as David Halperin⁴⁴⁴ has explained, both the term and the concept of 'homosexuality' are very new: the term dates from 1892, an awkward half-Latin, half-Greek neology introduced to translate an only slightly older German coinage, Krafft-Ebing's *Homosexualität*⁴⁴⁵. In 1893 Pater published *Plato and Platonism*, which consisted of a series of lectures (chapter 8 'Lacedaemon') he had given to 'some young students of philosophy' at Brasenose College, Oxford in 1891-92. In it Pater explains his version of Dorian *paidierastia*, and although Pater's account of Dorian *paidierastia* is taken from K. O. Müller's 1824, *The Histories and Antiquities of the Doric Race*, Pater's version sufficiently warms Müller's 'coldness' to make it sound less austere and aloof:

The clean, youthful friendship, 'passing even the love of women' which, by system, and under the sanction of [Lycurgus'] name, elaborated into a kind of art, became an elementary part of education. A part of their duty and discipline, it was also their great solace and encouragement. The beloved and the lover, side by side through their long days of eager labour, and above all on the battlefield, became respectively *aitas*, the hearer, and *eispnélas*, the inspirer; the elder inspiring the younger with his own strength and noble taste in things.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴³ Linda Dowling, 'Ruskin's Pied Beauty and the Constitution of a "Homosexual" Code', *The Victorian Newsletter*, (Spring 1989), pp.1-8.

⁴⁴⁴ David Halperin, "One Hundred Years of Homosexuality", *Diacritics* 16 (1986), pp.34-45.

⁴⁴⁵ R. Von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis with especial reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study*, trans. Charles Chaddock, 7th edition, (London: F. J. Rebman, 1892).

⁴⁴⁶ Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism: A Series of Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp.231-32.

Wilde incorporated this theory of ‘ennobled companionship’ into his own personal ideology governing intimate relationships; unfortunately, sometimes the *aitas* were indifferent to what the *eispnélas* had to teach, and were only inspired at the thought of procuring financial remuneration from their mentor and host. When Wilde indulged in excessive bouts of “feasting with panthers”, as he called the occasions when he fraternized with rent-boys, the mask of the *eispnélas* began to slip - however, that is not to say that he did not truly believe in the elevating, noble relationship between two men as espoused in the tenets of Dorianism. Indeed, during Wilde’s second trial at the Old Bailey (*Regenia v. Wilde and Taylor*) he presented an *apologia* for *paidierastia* in classic Paterian rhetoric:

‘The love that dare not speak its name’ in this century is such a great affection of an older for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michaelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art.... It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as ‘the love that dare not speak its name’ and on account of it I am placed where I am now. 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, where the elder has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope and glamour of life before him. That it should be so, the world does not understand. The world mocks at it, and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it.⁴⁴⁷

As Anne Varty has commented⁴⁴⁸ the speech, anticipated in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Dorian’s interior monologue about Basil’s love for him,⁴⁴⁹ met with applause (according to Max Beerbohm) and, though too late for Wilde himself, it marks a turning point in the cultural representation of same-sex passion, and the social understanding of it, as Alan Sinfield has argued recently.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁷ Harford Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Eyre Methuen), p.201.

⁴⁴⁸ Anne Varty, *op cit.*, p.29.

⁴⁴⁹ Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, op cit.*, p.92.

⁴⁵⁰ Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century. Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment*, (London, 1994)

It was Wilde's greatest triumph, as a reformer, to have been able to deliver such an *apologia* which drew a burst of spontaneous applause for the small public gallery when one considers the mental stress he was under. However, it was his greatest misfortune to have done so in a forum where he was on trial not for advocating Greek *paidierastia* but for committing sexual offences contrary to the laws of the land.

Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, an act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and, being convicted thereof, shall be liable, at the discretion of the Court, to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years with or without hard labour.⁴⁵¹

Wilde's public emphasis on the cultural misunderstanding that surrounded homosexual love was quite different from Douglas' expression of the social embarrassment that encumbered it. The refrain "the Love that dare not speak its name" which Wilde uses in this speech comes from one of Douglas' poems, 'Two Loves', published in *The Chameleon*, the single issue of a homosexual journal circulated among his coterie but still manifestly inhibited by a certain coy and covert form of expression. Much of the contents of *The Chameleon*, to which Wilde had contributed the sequence of maxims; 'Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young' were used as evidence against him in the libel suit. The short story, 'The Priest and the Acolyte', published there anonymously but thought to be by Wilde, (actually by Jack Bloxam)⁴⁵² was also used against him. Wilde described the story as "disgusting twaddle",⁴⁵³ and objected to its poor literary taste. It, even more than Douglas' poem, is a distressed *apologia* for homosexual love. The melodrama of the scenario, the extreme aestheticism of vision and the clumsiness of discourse, are all products of a desire struggling to find acceptable expression. A 28-year-old priest is in

⁴⁵¹ Henry Labouchere, M.P., editor of the journal *Truth* was also the author of section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 - the statute under which Wilde was prosecuted; quoted in Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), p.368.

⁴⁵² John Francis Bloxam of Exeter College, Oxford, was the editor of *The Chameleon*, which lasted for just one issue.

⁴⁵³ See Jonathan Goodman, *The Oscar Wilde File* (London: Allison & Busby, 1988), p.53.

love with a 14-year-old acolyte. Their guilty love, discovered by the priest's superior, is defended:

You do not understand me: I have never been attracted by a woman in my life. Can you not see that people are different, totally different, from one another? To think we are all the same is impossible; our natures, our temperaments, are utterly unlike. But this is what people will never see; they found all their opinions on the wrong basis. How can the deductions be just if their premises are wrong? One law laid down by the majority, who happen to be of one disposition, is only binding on the majority *legally*, not *morally*. What right have you, or any one, to tell me that such-and-such a thing is sinful for me?

In God's eyes we are martyrs, and we shall not shrink even from death in this struggle against the idolatrous worship of convention.⁴⁵⁴

More accomplished in expression and designed for wider circulation was Robert Hichens' novel *The Green Carnation* (1894). It parodies the open secret of Wilde's relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas through the leading characters Mr Esme Amarith (Wilde) and Lord Reggie (Douglas). Amarith announces:

A child is unnatural if it hates its mother. A mother is unnatural if she does not wish to have children. A man is unnatural if he never falls in love with a woman. A boy is unnatural if he prefers looking at pictures to playing cricket, or dreaming over the white naked beauty of a Greek statue to a game of football under Rugby rules... if our vices are not according to rule, they are unnatural.⁴⁵⁵

When Lord Alfred Douglas returned to the subject of Wilde's homosexuality in 1940 with his book *Oscar Wilde. A Summing Up*, he surveyed the hysteria, and also the courage with which Wilde met it, "Wilde was never in the least degree ashamed of his homosexuality. On the contrary he gloried in it and was not above attributing the same tastes to Shakespeare... and even to Plato".⁴⁵⁶ Douglas announced that:

⁴⁵⁴ *The Chameleon*, December 1894, pp. 42, 44.

⁴⁵⁵ Robert Hichens, *The Green Carnation*, (London: Heinemann, 1894), p.108

⁴⁵⁶ Lord Alfred Douglas, *Oscar Wilde. A Summing Up*, (London: Duckworth, 1940), p9.

The exaggerated horror [of homosexuality] which prevailed in Wilde's time and in my youth was mainly hypocritical and squared very imperfectly with the private lives of a large proportion of those people who most loudly condemned it.⁴⁵⁷

While he may have had it in mind his own elder brother's suicide in 1894 as a consequence of the threatened revelation of his alleged affair with the then Foreign Minister, Lord Rosebury, as a tragic result of this hypocrisy, Douglas failed to admit Wilde's remarkable part in dismantling the double standards of the era and clearing the way for the more 'open atmosphere' Douglas observes between 1914 and 1940.⁴⁵⁸

An Aside

In Denial: Shaw as Wilde's Homosexually Repressed Doppelganger?

Sally Peters in her interesting and thought-provoking work *Bernard Shaw: The Ascent of the Superman* (1996) infers that Shaw may have been a latent homosexual or at least inclined towards homosexuality. Peters provides much material that does indeed allude to the possibility that Shaw may have had sexually ambivalent thoughts regarding his own alleged/understood (hetero)sexuality when examined in conjunction with his interest in the 'study' of the homosexual condition and juxtaposed with his many homosexual friends and acquaintances, including Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas. The problem is that much of the evidence is circumstantial, and I am not convinced that her argument contains enough indisputable evidence to question the accepted view held by other Shavian scholars and biographers I have researched. That said, Peters' hypothesis, which in effect infers that Shaw was repulsed yet fascinated by Wilde, still makes compelling reading and as such shouldn't be dismissed outright. Wilde represented so much that Shaw abhorred in human nature, his extravagance and audaciousness irritated Shaw greatly, yet

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.14.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.17.

according to Peters, for a period of time during the early 1890s Shaw was morbidly enthralled by Wilde's powerful personality and precarious lifestyle.

In 1893, Shaw sent *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* to Wilde just as, according to Peters, he had sent it to women he wished to impress. Wilde found it "such a delight," so "stimulating and refreshing." They were both Celtic, and Wilde liked to think that they were friends and he wished to reciprocate the gesture by sending in return a copy of *Salomé*, "for these and many other reasons Salome presents herself to you in purple raiment. Pray accept her with my best wishes."⁴⁵⁹ Wilde was not only reciprocating Shaw's gift with his own work, he was expressing gratitude for Shaw's support. For only Shaw and Archer had defended *Salomé*, Wilde's macabre 1892 tale of passion, against the censors.

Reading the above reference to *Salomé* as a defining moment in their inferred homoerotic correspondence, Peters, proposes a far more radical supposition when Shaw's next correspondence to Wilde arrives informing him that he never received the book:

"Salomé is still wandering in her purple raiment in search of me," wrote Shaw as he played with Wilde's personification of his book. Then the usually circumspect Shaw assumed a surprising persona: "I expect her to arrive a perfect outcast, branded with inky stamps, bruised by flinging from hard hands into red prison vans, stuffed and contaminated..."⁴⁶⁰ The fragment breaks off tantalisingly in mid-sentence. Shaw's letter is rife with uncharacteristically blatant sexual imagery that centers on Wilde's creation - sexual imagery absent from Wilde's letter. There are double entendres in each of the four clauses composing the line - double entendres that are specifically homoerotic. *Outcast*, a term with homosexual connotations, is reinforced in that interpretation by similar connotations of Shaw hoping to send along *Widowers' Houses*, which Wilde will find "tolerably amusing," a blasé phrase that not only

⁴⁵⁹ Oscar Wilde to Shaw, 23 February 1893, in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, Ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (New York, 1962), p.332

⁴⁶⁰ To Oscar Wilde, 28 February 1893, see *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters*, vol. 1, (1874-1897), p.384.

sounds more like Wilde than Shaw but also shows Shaw wanting to pursue the relationship.⁴⁶¹

Peters adds the following:

Wilde responded to the double entendres by linking Shaw's work and with his own. Having received the promised copy of *Widowers' Houses*, Wilde labelled it "Op.2 of the great Celtic School," and his own highly successful *Lady Windermere's Fan* being Op.1. Wilde admired the "flesh and blood" of Shaw's characters [in *Widowers' Houses*] and looked forward to Op.4, Shaw's next work; his own *A Woman of No Importance* was Op.3. As for Op.5, Wilde was "rather itching to be at it."⁴⁶²

The more complete transcript of Wilde's letter for May 1893 to George Bernard Shaw thanking him for a copy of his play *Widowers' Houses* reads as follows:

I must thank you very sincerely for Op. 2 of the great Celtic School. I have read it twice with the keenest interest. I like your superb confidence in the dramatic value of the mere facts of life. I admire the horrible flesh and blood of your creatures, and your preface is a masterpiece - a real masterpiece of trenchant writing and caustic wit and dramatic instinct. I look forward to your Op. 4. As for Op. 5, I am lazy, but am rather itching to be at it.⁴⁶³

For the record and further elaboration and deciphering of "the Great Celtic School" and of the works exchanged between Wilde and Shaw, Hesketh Pearson arranges their current and forthcoming plays in an alternating pattern - *Lady Windermere's Fan* as Op. 1, *Widowers' Houses* by Shaw as Op. 2, *A Woman of No Importance* as Op. 3, *The Philanderer* by Shaw as Op. 4, and Op. 5 as *An Ideal Husband*.⁴⁶⁴

Many critics among them David J. Gordon refute Peters' homoerotic reading of this incident and I would tend to agree with him. Indeed Gordon disagrees with her complete theory on Shaw's latent homosexual urges or yearnings.

⁴⁶¹ Sally Peters, *op cit.*, pp. 225-228.

⁴⁶² *The Letters of Oscar Wilde, op cit.*, p.339.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid*, p.112.

⁴⁶⁴ Hesketh Pearson, *op cit.*, p.446.

The record of his life and work does not support such an inference, nor do these words in context, which respond to Wilde's diction, require it. Shaw's sexual imagination was governed not by homoerotic but by mother-related incestuous wishes. Shaw's view of Wilde's homosexuality, moreover, was emotionally neutral, unlike his view of Wilde's drinking, and other personal failings. His most direct comment on Wilde's homosexuality reflects the prejudices of its time, mitigated by a measure of enlightened doubt.⁴⁶⁵

The "direct comment" by Shaw that Gordon uses as evidence to negate Peter's proposal states:

My impulse to rally to him in his misfortune, and my disgust at "the Man Wilde's" scurrilities of the newspapers, was irresistible: I don't quite know why; for my charity to his perversion, and my recognition of the fact that it does not imply any general depravity or coarseness of character, came to me through reading and observation, not through sympathy.

I have all the normal violent repugnance to homosexuality - if it is really normal, which nowadays one is sometimes provoked to doubt.⁴⁶⁶

These subtle changes do not go unnoticed by Peters who analyses them thus:

Writing Harris about Wilde, Shaw offered that his own recognition that homosexuality "does not imply any general depravity or coarseness of character" came to him through "observation and reflection." Toned down for Harris's biography of Wilde, the passage becomes "through reading and observation," adding "not through sympathy," a change continued in *Pen Portraits and Reviews*. In all three versions, Shaw noted self-protectively if revealingly, "I have all the normal

⁴⁶⁵ David J. Gordon, "Shavian comedy and the shadow of Wilde", in *The Cambridge Companion To George Bernard Shaw*, ed. Christopher Innes, (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 124-144.

⁴⁶⁶ George Bernard Shaw, "My Memories of Oscar Wilde" from the *Preface* of Frank Harris, *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions* (printed and published by the author: New York, 1916; revised edition, London: Constable, 1938). The line in *italics* was added in the later *Pen Portraits and Reviews* version. I have included Shaw's original *Preface* of the Harris publication as an *Appendix* at the end of the thesis for further reading.

violent repugnance to homosexuality - if it is really normal, which nowadays one is sometimes provoked to doubt.⁴⁶⁷

She also makes reference to the fact that Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, influenced Shaw when he was writing *You Never Can Tell*. Granted the two plays have similar examples of comedic plot construction that confront the subjects of search for identity and ancestry. However the suggestion that Shaw's use of the word(s) *earnest/earnestness* in *You Never Can Tell* was an intentional act of homoerotic wordplay on his part – a secret homage or perhaps simple mimicry of Wilde – is rather tenuous to accept.

When William Archer accused Shaw of being “monstrously and fantastically wide of the truth” on the issue of serious drama and eroticism, Shaw protested that except for those of Wilde, Shakespeare, and himself he could hardly think of any plays that did not have love as the sole motive. Wilde's influence can be seen in the joyous farce *You Never Can Tell*, in which Shaw included correspondences to *The Importance of Being Earnest* despite his initial disparagement of Wilde's play. Like Wilde, he employed name changes, a search for a father, and repeated wordplay on *Earnest*.⁴⁶⁸

Wilde's wordplay has been linked to a volume of Uranian poetry entitled *Love in Earnest*. Given Shaw's overlapping circles of acquaintances and his understanding of Wilde and his work, surely Shaw was aware of the homoerotic resonance of Wilde's wordplay. In *You Never Can Tell*, Gloria Clandon insists that love gives the lover earnestness and beauty. Her lover, Valentine, who earlier had declared himself in earnest, plays with gender as he wonders: “do you really think it would make me beautiful?” Then he tells her she's “not in earnest. Love cant give any man new

⁴⁶⁷ To Frank Harris, 7 August 1916, in *The Playwright and the Pirate: Bernard Shaw and Frank Harris: A Correspondence*, Ed. Stanley Weintraub, (1982) p.33. Frank Harris, *Oscar Wilde, His Life and Confessions* (1916), p.393. George Bernard Shaw, *Pen Portraits and Reviews*, p.303. Sally Peters notes that Stanley Weintraub attributes the editing of the letter to Harris; but she argues that Shaw's retention of the revision indicates his tacit agreement that it was indiscreet (*The Playwright and the Pirate: Bernard Shaw and Frank Harris: A Correspondence*, Ed. Stanley Weintraub, p.27).

⁴⁶⁸ To William Archer, 18 and 22 February 1901, see *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters*, vol.2, (1898-1910), pp.217-219. For a detailed examination of the parallels between *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *You Never Can Tell*, see Stanley Weintraub, “The Hibernian School” in *SHAW: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies*, vol. 13, (1993), pp.42-45

gifts.” His own gift is lightness of heart, to which Gloria adds lightness of head and faith and “everything that makes a man,” haughtily attacking his manhood.⁴⁶⁹

Although Shaw may have socialized in the same circles as Wilde and knew his reputation and his work, it is still questionable, bordering on improbable that he was fully aware of the homoerotic resonance of Wilde’s wordplay in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The whole point of Wilde’s wordplay necessitated it being an illicit private joke for a very selective group of friends who may be in the audience. Shaw was certainly never one of Wilde’s close confidants and it is doubtful that he understood the intended significance behind some of Wilde’s double entendres.

Peters mentions other sources of “evidence”, such as Shaw’s homosexual friends and acquaintances, his interest and awareness of Ellis and Carpenter’s scientific studies on homosexuality:

Shaw crossed paths with the Uranian poet Marc-Andre Raffalovich...he [Raffalovich] became an enemy of Wilde. Raffalovich’s survey on homosexuality in literature and history was published in France in 1896 as *Uranisme et Unisexualite*. His writings included collaborations with his companion, John Gray, who had been Wilde’s lover and a model for Dorian Gray. Eventually Raffalovich, who thought everyone had a duty to understand the place of inversion in society, escaped social and personal turmoil by becoming Brother Sebastian, a Dominican monk. One evening in 1893, Shaw attended a performance of Raffalovich’s *Roses and Shadows*. Perhaps the work piqued Shaw’s interest in literature written by homosexuals, for Shaw went on to the lodgings of the ever-amiable Florence Farr, where they “read a lot of Walt Whitman and were very happy,” until the late hour forced him to make a desperate dash for the train. Reading Whitman in no way compromised him, since Havelock Ellis maintained that Whitman was “strenuously masculine.”⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁹ Sally Peters, *op cit.*, p.227, footnote no. 28 - d’Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest*, xix; *You Never Can Tell, Collected Plays I*: 765. The editor of the volume of poetry, John Gambriel Nicholson, came to know Edward Carpenter at some point, and, of course, Shaw was acquainted with a number of Uranians.

⁴⁷⁰ See reference to Raffalovich’s mother in Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York, 1988), p.282. Shaw derided Wilde’s lofty attitude toward Gray and other “more abject disciples”; see letter of 7 August 1916, *The Playwright and the Pirate, op cit.*, p.32. Marc-André Raffalovich, *Uranisme et*

Even Shaw's earlier campaigns in the press against the excessively harsh legal penalties faced by homosexual offenders are forwarded as further proof. But Shaw campaigned against social injustices throughout his life regardless of the subject's age, gender, race, religion, politics or sexual persuasion:

I appeal now to champions of individual rights...to join me in a protest against a law by which two adult men can be sentenced to twenty years penal servitude for a private act, freely consented to and desired by both, which concerns themselves alone.

George Bernard Shaw - To the Editor of *Truth*, 1889

Using a description that Frank Harris first coined, Peters alludes to Shaw's transformation into a "Jaegerized Butterfly."⁴⁷¹ But if this was part of Shaw's ambivalent desire to mimic Wilde's flamboyant costumes, then one could counter-argue that it was just as much to establish distinctive difference.

Though the impulse persisted, Shaw would give up at the extreme style of the combination suit and return to somewhat more conventional tailoring. Nevertheless, he favoured knee breeches instead of trousers*...Meanwhile, even Oscar Wilde had forsaken artistic dress for the suave appeal bestowed by impeccable and more conventional tailoring. The editors of *Punch* had mocked Wilde's change with an 1883 notice announcing the retirement of a successful aesthete. For sale was a "large Stock of faded Lilies, dilapidated Sunflowers, and shabby Peacock's Feathers, several long-haired Wigs, a collection of incomprehensible Poems, and an number of impossible Pictures."⁴⁷²

If Wilde was the dandy, Shaw was the ascetic, but both used clothes to advertise themselves - and with famine display. Since the end of the eighteenth century, men

Unisexuality, quoted in Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women*, pp.133-134; 26 January 1893, *Diaries* 2: 898. Ellis is quoted in Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1977), p.68

⁴⁷¹ Frank Harris, *Bernard Shaw*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1931), p.102.

* A fashion also favoured by Wilde and other aesthetes early on.

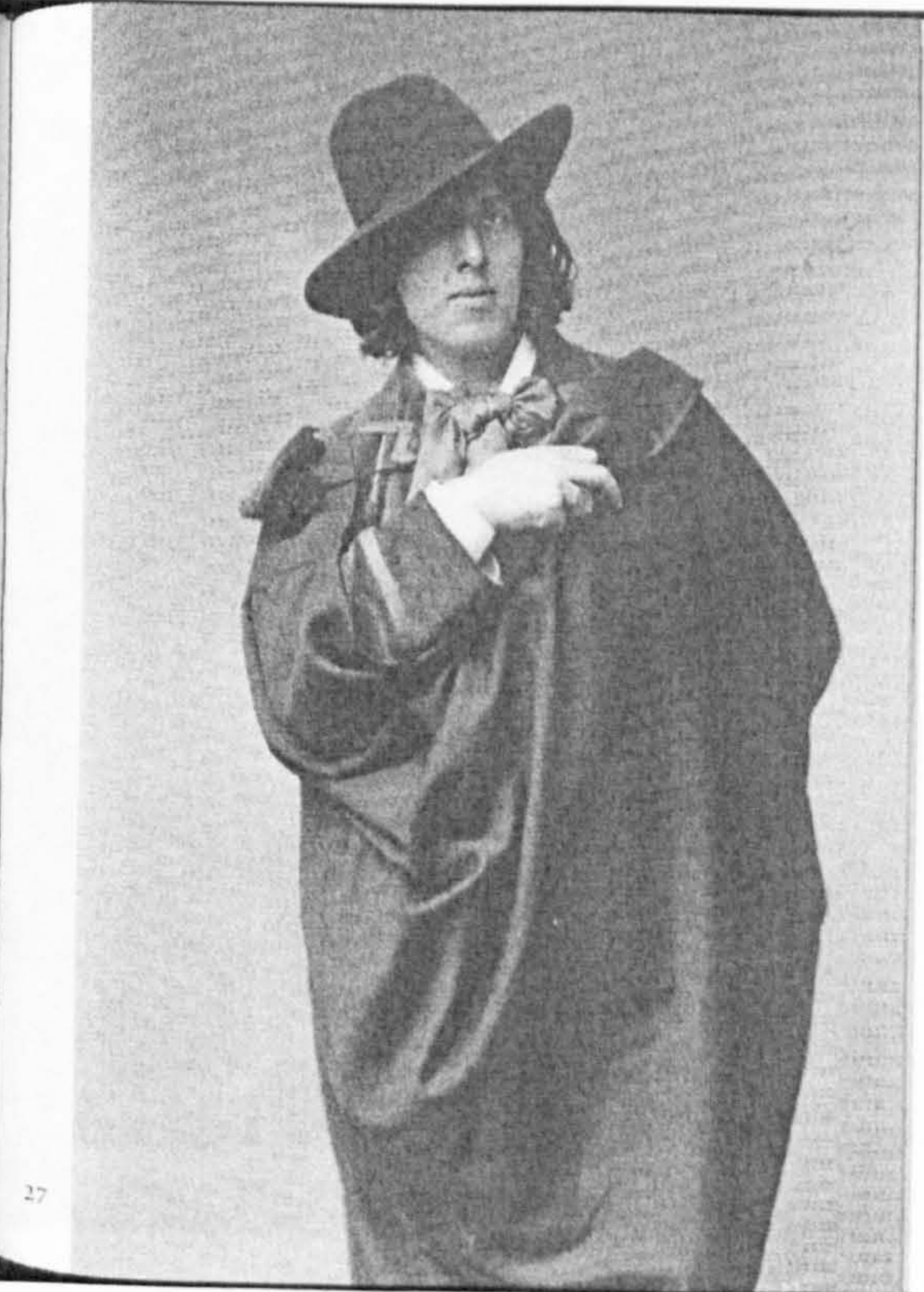
⁴⁷² *Punch*, 31 March 1883

had dressed uniformly, allowing women the privilege of striking dress. Shaw's clothes exposed that with a vengeance...⁴⁷³

However all these examples can only be viewed as circumstantial evidence of any perceived homosexual urges on Shaw's part. Wilde and Shaw were after all fellow Dubliners, and there was an obvious and artistic and intellectual rivalry, or at least competitiveness between the two men. I would argue that because Shaw had to struggle so long for success, fame and fortune, unlike Oscar who appeared to succeed so effortlessly at almost everything he did, it is conceivable that Shaw resented Wilde's apparent unrestrained profligacy and excessive lifestyle whilst at the same time coveting his recognition, fame and fortune. At times it must have been very difficult for Shaw always standing in Wilde's shadow so to speak. Perhaps a more plausible hypothesis to this imitating or mimicry of Wilde (rather than latent homoerotic or homosexual feelings) is that Shaw craved some of the attention and recognition so easily expected and commanded by Wilde. Conceivably it was Wilde's recognition, fame and fortune that Shaw coveted rather than his precarious, extravagant lifestyle - which certainly ran contrary to everything Shaw believed in.

⁴⁷³ For Shaw's conversion to Jaegerism and fashion style see Sally Peters, *op cit.*, pp.101-104.

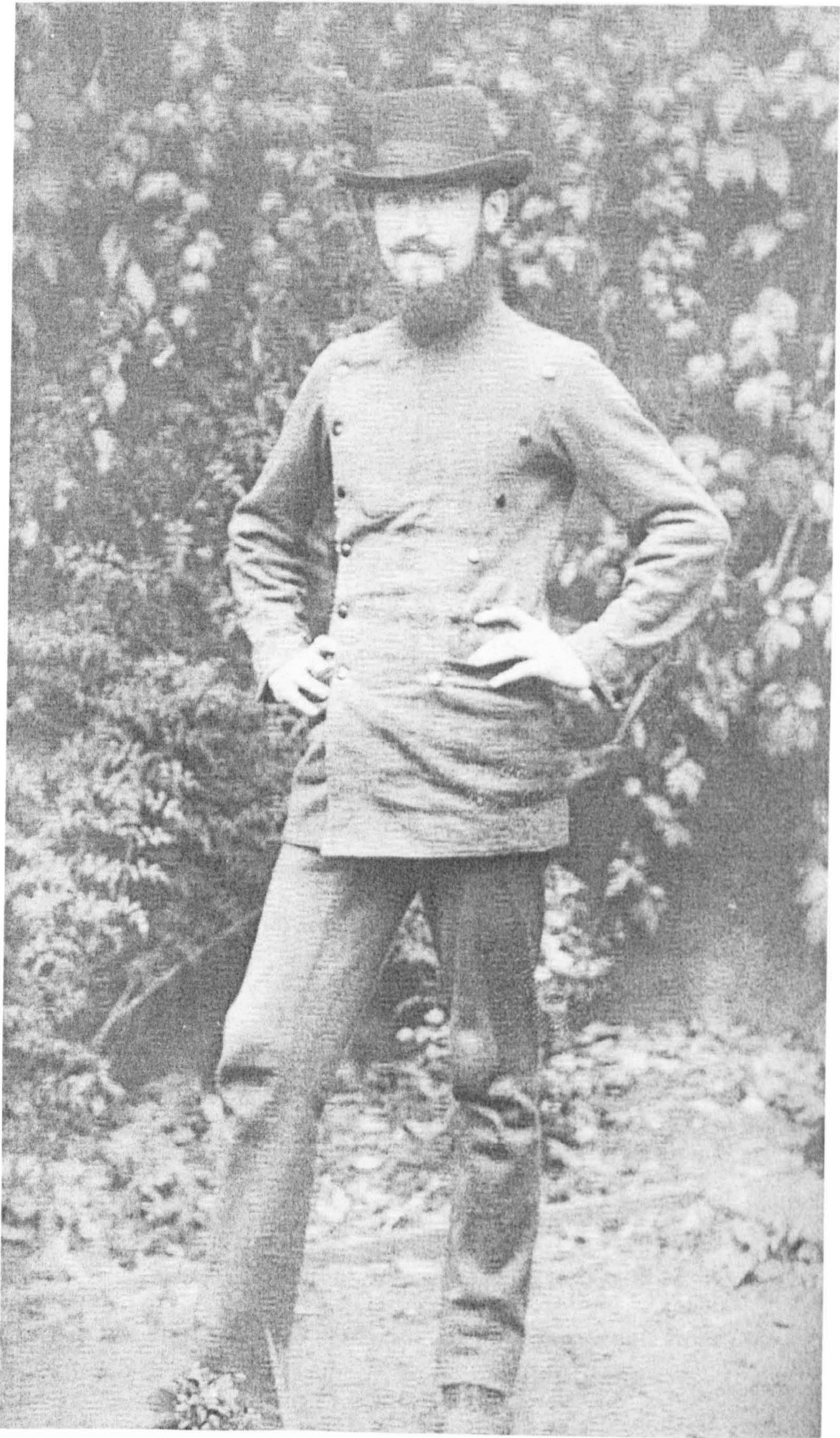
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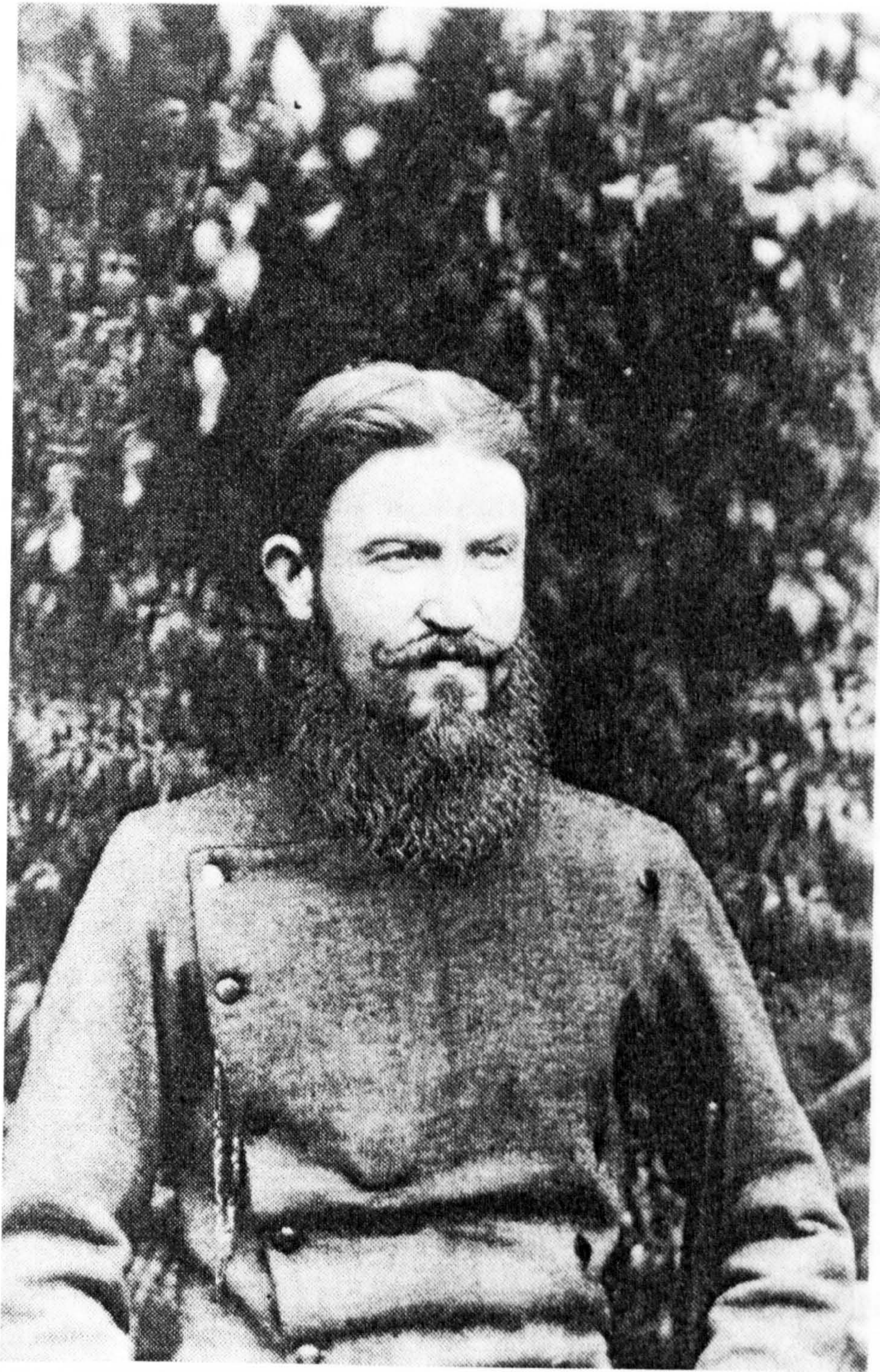
Wilde photographed by Napoleon Sarony in New York in 1882. His knee breeches and silk stockings epitomised the luxurious, ostentatious style of the “Aesthetic Dandy”.



Wilde in silk suit and matching silk knee breeches and stockings.



The “Jaegerized-Butterfly” as Frank Harris called him.



George Bernard Shaw in his new all-wool Jaeger suit circa 1885.

Chapter Ten: Background To The Trials – Queensberry Blackmail and Governmental Collusion.

Although all the major London newspapers covered the trials, much of the trial testimony was not reported due to the sexual content involved, which was considered improper and inappropriate. Similarly the *Central Criminal Court Sessions Papers* “declined to print the proceedings of any of the [Wilde] trials on the ground that the details disclosed by them were ‘unfit for publication.’”⁴⁷⁴ Therefore the most reliable source remains H. Montgomery Hyde (ed.), *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (London: Hodge, 1948). Hyde referred to Stuart Mason’s *Oscar Wilde: Three Times Tried* (London, 1912) and Charles Grolleau’s *The Trial of Oscar Wilde* (Paris, 1906) for his publication; but Hyde’s book is the most definitive and reliable both substantially, regarding purported unexpurgated accounts of unpublished “original shorthand reports”, and chronologically. I also refer to Michael S. Foldy’s excellent, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde Deviance, Morality, and Late-Victorian Society* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), especially regarding his convincing argument of British governmental collusion in convicting Wilde in order to avoid a political scandal. John Stokes, *In The Nineties* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf; and Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1989) offered a wealth of indispensable information concerning the 1890s and was an invaluable reference source regarding late Victorian attitudes towards the perceived threat of moral degeneracy, and on the relationship between the British Press and the public, especially regarding the Wilde case.

On the 28 February 1895 Oscar Wilde arrived at his club, the Albemarle, and was presented with an envelope containing the Marquess of Queensberry’s ⁴⁷⁵ calling card. On the back of the card, written in Queensberry’s almost illegible handwriting, were

⁴⁷⁴ “Introduction” to H. Montgomery Hyde (ed.), *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (London: Hodge, 1948).

⁴⁷⁵ John Sholto Douglas, the 9th Marquess of Queensberry; is best remembered for introducing the “Queensberry Rules” to boxing, which established a common set of rules governing punching, weight categories and the length and number of rounds per contest for all pugilists in Great Britain and North America.

scrawled the words: 'For Oscar Wilde Posing as a Somdomite [sic].'⁴⁷⁶ Little did Wilde know that this incomprehensible dyslexic scrawl would set in motion a chain of events which would expose his excessive sexual proclivities to a hypocritical vengeful society bent on retribution, that would ultimately lead to his incarceration and premature death. Incensed by the calling card and encouraged by Douglas who hated his father – who had been harassing them for months as a sign of protest against Wilde's friendship/intimacy with his youngest son, Lord Alfred Douglas - Wilde foolishly allowed his emotions to get the better of him and incited him to instigate legal action against its author. Unfortunately for Wilde, he could not have chosen a more irascible, recalcitrant adversary as his harbinger of doom. Queensberry was far more than an eccentric Scottish aristocrat; he was a law unto himself. According to Ellmann, 'He made himself known as a fulminator against Christianity, and was always raging publicly and indecorously against someone else's creed. He fancied himself as an aristocratic rebel, socially ostracized because of his iconoclasm.'⁴⁷⁷

In 1880 the Scottish Lords voted not to re-elect Queensberry as one of their representatives to the British House of Lords (something he and their ancestors considered their due because of their ancient title), on the grounds that he had publicly denied the existence of God. He argued that he never denied the existence of God, but preferred to call him the 'Inscrutable'. Ellmann elaborates on this further and goes on to define the doctrine that Queensberry espoused - the idea of the Inscrutable mostly concerned a theory that "the soul is not distinct from the body, but is a result of the body itself. Consequently, one must choose one's mate carefully so that the descent will be as eugenic as possible, since we produce not only our children's bodies but their souls."⁴⁷⁸ The fact that Douglas initiated, and openly flaunted his

⁴⁷⁶ The handwriting on the card was found to be so illegible that at the committal hearing the court was forced to ask the Marquess of Queensberry to read it aloud in order to verify the alleged libel. Much conjecture has been devoted to the validity of what Queensberry allegedly informed the court as to the contents of the message read out, and what may have actually been written. There is some speculation that the message read "For Oscar Wilde - Poseur and Somdomite." see Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*. Or "For Oscar Wilde - Ponce and Somdomite." See Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Towards a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.250.

⁴⁷⁷ Richard Ellmann *Oscar Wilde, op cit.*, p.365.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.365.

dalliance with Wilde obviously enraged Queensberry and negated his eugenic desire regarding at least one of his progeny. A glimpse of Queensberry's eccentric iconoclasm is afforded by his attempt to break up a performance of Tennyson's *The May Queen* in December 1885 on the grounds that an atheist was badly treated in it. A weekly *The BAT*, editorialised, "the more the Marquess of Queensberry orates to his own class the less effect he seems to create. His celebrated speech on his brother peer's play only succeeded in obtaining for him ejection from the theatre". The next issue contained Queensberry's reply:

Sir, - I thank you for your advertisement in your scurrilous journal - Conservative, I presume. You say I was ejected from a certain theatre. So I was. Also another advertisement. I believe the play was taken off three week afterwards...thanking you for further advertisement, yours faithfully,

Queensberry.⁴⁷⁹

It was clear that this man would prove a formidable antagonist, eager for public gestures, as arrogantly indifferent as Wilde to what the world thought of him, and much less vulnerable. On 22 January 1887 his wife won a divorce from him on the grounds of his adultery with one Mabel Gilroy of 217 Hampstead Road, Camden town. Though he had made a poor husband to his first wife, to whom he was not at all suited, he had paid for his children's needs and pleasures and taken considerable, if distanced interest and attention in their development. He was delighted when Alfred, his third son, went up to Oxford, and distressed when his career there showed signs of coming to nothing.

Queensberry's familial association with "Inversion" did not rest with his third son Douglas; his oldest son, Drumlanrig, was private secretary to Lord Rosebery, then Foreign Minister under Gladstone but to be Prime Minister the following year (1894). Queensberry had begun to see homosexuals everywhere, and suspected that Rosebery was influencing Drumlanrig in this direction. Quick to go on the rampage, and hearing that Rosebery was at Bad Homburg, Queensberry followed him there in

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.366.

August 1893 with a horsewhip. The Prince of Wales intervened, and the police asked the Marquess to leave.

Misfortune continued to follow Queensberry; on the 11 September 1893, his second son Percy married the daughter of a Cornish clergyman, an alliance opposed by the atheist Queensberry because he considered the family both too paltry and too pious. His own personal life was also agitating. On the 1 November 1893 Queensberry married for the second time. His wife was Ethel Weedon, a young woman of a respectable Eastbourne family, none of whom came to the wedding. She left him immediately, and started proceedings for an annulment, alleging "malformation of the parts of generation" as well as "frigidity and impotency." To be called impotent seven years after having been judicially declared adulterous, and after having begotten four children, was a heavy load for this active man of fifty. He contested the suit, claimed the marriage had been consummated and hired the eminent George Lewis to defend him. Queensberry's personality continued to exhibit erratic signs of vacillation, juxtaposing the rational, concerned paternal figure, with the irrational, maniacal, iconoclast. A letter he wrote to Douglas epitomizes his emotional instability:

1 April 1894

Alfred - It is extremely painful for me to have to write to you in the strain I must, but please understand but I decline to receive any answers from you in writing in return. After your recent hysterical impertinent ones I refuse to be annoyed with such, and I decline to read anymore letters...Firstly, am I to understand that, having left Oxford as you did, with discredit to yourself, the reasons of which were fully explained to me by your tutor, you now intend to loaf and loll about and do nothing? ... It appears to me that you intend to do nothing. I utterly decline however, to just supply you with sufficient funds to enable you to loaf about. You are preparing a wretched future for yourself, and it would be most cruel and wrong of me to encourage you in this. Secondly, I come to the more painful part of the letter - your intimacy with this man Wilde. It must either cease or I will disown you and stop all money supplies. I am not going to try and analyse this intimacy, and I make no charge; but to my mind to pose as a thing is as bad as to be it. With my own eyes I saw you both in the most loathsome and disgusting relationship as expressed by your own manner and expression. Never in my experience have I seen such a sight as that in your horrible

features. No wonder people are talking as they are. Also I now hear on authority, but this may be false, that his wife is petitioning to divorce him for sodomy and other crimes. Is this true, or do you not know of it? If I thought the actual thing was true, and it became public property, I should be quite justified in shooting him at sight. These Christian English cowards and men, as they call themselves, want waking up. Your disgusted so-called father,

Queensberry.⁴⁸⁰

Naturally, Douglas's short flippant replay contained nothing but impertinence, for which he had just been admonished in the letter, and disdain for his father's meddling. He promptly dispatched a telegram to Queensberry the next day with one single message: "What a funny little man you are."⁴⁸¹ On 20 October 1894, the final decree of nullity of Queensberry's second marriage was granted.

Two days earlier Queensberry's eldest son, Francis Archibald Douglas, Viscount Drumlanrig, heir to the title, and the only one of his four sons for whom, in spite of quarrels, he had any respect, had died under mysterious circumstances. The newspapers reported a shooting accident, but suicide was generally suspected. Drumlanrig who had served as private secretary to Lord Rosebery, then Foreign Minister, may have been afraid of blackmail over his relations with Lord Rosebery, of which his father had long been suspicious, and (unlike his brother) feared a scandal which would bring down the Foreign Minister as well as himself. It was believed by persons in a position to know that Drumlanrig had been threatened with exposure over his alleged affair with Rosebery and had elected instead to take his own life in order to avoid implicating him.⁴⁸² It has also been surmised that the pressure on the Crown to convict Wilde at all costs came from Queensberry. Both of Wilde's major biographers, H. Montgomery Hyde and Richard Ellmann, intimate that Queensberry possessed some sort of evidence implicating persons high in the government, and in

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.394.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.394.

⁴⁸² Hyde reports his own conversation with Francis Douglas, the 11th Marquess of Queensberry, who "was positive his uncle Drumlanrig had taken his own life in the shadow of a suppressed scandal." See H. Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Methuen and New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975), p.171.

particular, Lord Rosebery, then Prime Minister. The evidence itself, of unknown form and content, was suspected of containing information confirming a “homosexual” link between Rosebery and Drumlanrig.⁴⁸³ Ellmann reports that Queensberry had long been suspicious of Rosebery’s influence on his favourite and most successful son and was furious with him because of it.⁴⁸⁴ In a letter written to his first wife’s father, Alfred Montgomery, shortly after Drumlanrig’s death, Queensberry consumed by paranoia and suspicions concerning Rosebery alluded to possessing evidence against him:

November 1st 1894

Queensberry Estate Office

Comloncon Castle

Ruthwell, N.B.

Sir,

Now that the first flush of this catastrophe and grief is passed, I write to tell you that it is a *judgment* on the whole *lot of you* Montgomery’s, the Snob Queers like Rosebery & certainly Christian hypocrite Gladstone the whole *lot of you*/set my son up against me indeed and make bad blood *between* us, may it devil on your own heads that he has gone to his *rest* and the quarrel not made up between him and myself. It’s a gruesome message: If you and his Mother did not set up this business with that cur and Jew friend [?] *Liar* Rosebery as I always thought -

At any rate she [Lady Queensberry] acquiesced in it, which is just *as bad*. What fools you all look, trying to ride me out of the course and trim *the sails* and the poor Boy comes to this untimely end. I smell a Tragedy behind all this and have already *got Wind* of a more *startling one*. If it was what I am led *to believe*, I of all people could and would have helped him, had he come to me with a confidence, but that was all stopped by you people - we had not met or spoke frankly for more than a year and a half. I am on the right track to find out what happened. *Cherchez la femme*, when these things happen. I have already heard something that quite accounts *for it all*.

*Queensberry.*⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸³ *Ibid*, p.171; and also see Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde, op cit.*, p.426.

⁴⁸⁴ Richard Ellmann, *Ibid*, p.404.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.402.

Queensberry included his addressee as one of those deserving his contempt. H. Montgomery Hyde theorises that Queensberry suspected Montgomery of being homosexual probably because he was a patron of the arts and a close personal friend of the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII.⁴⁸⁶ Ellmann and Hyde both suggest that the shock of Drumlanrig's death, exacerbated by Queensberry's belief that his son had died in order to avert a homosexual scandal, contributed significantly to his resolve to terminate his son Alfred's relationship with Wilde, at whatever cost.⁴⁸⁷ It was shortly after Drumlanrig's death that Queensberry became Wilde's *bête noire*, relentlessly pursuing and persecuting him, hounding him at every turn throughout the entire ordeal of the three trials, and after. It was Queensberry who tried to disrupt the opening-night performance of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It was Queensberry's insulting card at the Albemarle Club, accusing Wilde of "posing as a sodomite [sic]," which prompted Wilde to initiate the ill-conceived libel suit against him. It was Queensberry, aided by information provided by two actors with grudges against Wilde, Charles Brookfield and Charles Hawtreay, who hired the detectives who uncovered the damning connection between Wilde and Taylor.⁴⁸⁸ It was Queensberry who apparently paid each of the witnesses against Wilde £5 per week from the beginning of Wilde's prosecution of Queensberry until Wilde's own conviction.⁴⁸⁹ It was Queensberry who, after Wilde had been granted bail following the second trial, hired a small gang of thugs to follow him and prevent him from securing admittance to any hotel in London.⁴⁹⁰ And even after Wilde's release from Reading Gaol after serving two years hard labour, it was Queensberry who hired a detective to follow him to France in order to prevent, if possible, a reunion between him and Douglas.⁴⁹¹ Ellmann claims that it was Queensberry's letters which were read into evidence in the first (libel) trial, introducing the names of Rosebery and Gladstone into the case, that

⁴⁸⁶ H. Montgomery Hyde, *Lord Alfred Douglas: A Biography* (London: Methuen, 1984), p.8. See also Rupert Croft-Cooke, *Bosie: The Story of Lord Alfred Douglas, His Friends and Enemies* (London: W.H. Allen, 1963), pp. 22-30.

⁴⁸⁷ H. Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde, op cit.*, p.171; and Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p.427.

⁴⁸⁸ Richard Ellmann, *Ibid*, p.441.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.475.

⁴⁹⁰ H. Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde, op cit.*, p.270; and Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde, op cit.*, p.467.

⁴⁹¹ Richard Ellmann, *Ibid*, p.538.

made it impossible for the government to dismiss the case against Wilde.⁴⁹² Michael S. Foldy believes Ellmann is correct in arguing that Queensberry was at the center of the government's "plot" against Wilde, but not for the reasons that he provides⁴⁹³. According to Foldy the letter introducing the names of Rosebery and Gladstone into evidence had nothing to do with Queensberry's accusations against Wilde, but rather with Queensberry's anger over a perceived "Rosebery-Gladstone-Royal insult handed to [him] through [his] other son [Drumlanrig]."⁴⁹⁴ In his opening statement for Queensberry's defence, Edward Carson was very clear on this point:

It was clear now that the letters were before the Court and jury, that if ever there were any impression of that kind [that Rosebery or Gladstone had in any way been linked to Wilde], the letters connected with these distinguished individuals were quite distinct from the allegations as regard Mr. Wilde; that they related to purely political matters, arising out of the fact that one of Lord Queensberry's sons, Lord Drumlanrig, had been made a member of the House of Lords, of which Lord Queensberry was not a member, and felt aggrieved that such an honour could be conferred upon his son while not given to him; and that was why these names of eminent politicians were introduced.⁴⁹⁵

Queensberry's vendetta against Wilde has never been doubted and is therefore relatively easy to document. However, the evidence asserting Queensberry's influence over Rosebery represents the heart of the matter but is much sketchier and more circumstantial in character. Nevertheless, Foldy argues very convincingly that the evidence available can support the speculation that such influence existed and was palpably felt by Rosebery - and, more importantly, that such influence had a deleterious effect on both Rosebery and, through him, on the Liberal Party. It is clear that whatever leverage Queensberry had against Rosebery was deployed tactically to achieve two different aims. At Wilde's first criminal trial, Queensberry's evidence

⁴⁹² *Ibid*, p.450.

⁴⁹³ Michael S. Foldy, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde Deviance, Morality, and Late-Victorian Society* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp.23-24.

⁴⁹⁴ Letter from Queensberry to Alfred Montgomery, dated July 6, 1894. See Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde, op cit.*, p.450.

⁴⁹⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, April 5, 1895.

was used to keep his son Alfred's name completely out of the case.⁴⁹⁶ This was one instance in which Wilde and Queensberry's interests were in complete accord. Both wanted to protect "Bosie" (Lord Alfred Douglas), Queensberry as his father, and Wilde as his friend and lover. Queensberry's leverage was used a second time at the end of the first criminal trial to pressure the government to re-try Wilde and, this time, to obtain a conviction.

All knowledge of Queensberry's role in the threat of blackmail consists entirely of the allegations and insinuations previously listed. With this known, the question then becomes, how much is documented about Rosebery's role?

The honest answer is that there is no paper trail or "smoking gun" linking Rosebery to Queensberry in any way. This much said, there might exist evidence of another sort. Curiously, the period of the Wilde trials and the hypothetical pressure from Queensberry coincides with a "breakdown" in Rosebery's health from late February until the end of May.⁴⁹⁷

Historian David Brooks attributes Rosebery's nervous collapse -which manifested itself chiefly as depression and insomnia that lasted for months, and which seriously affected Rosebery's performance of his public duties - to an influenza epidemic which laid Rosebery low on February 24, 1895.⁴⁹⁸ Peter Stansky notes the possibility that Rosebery's depression stemmed from the effect of a young nephew's death in mid-January.⁴⁹⁹ The insomnia was to keep Rosebery out of action - either absent altogether, or distracted and ineffectual when he was present - for most of the month of March. It also forced him to take an additional three weeks off in May and June to go sailing in order to try and repair his health.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁶ Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p.463.

⁴⁹⁷ Michael S. Foldy, *op cit.*, p.24.

⁴⁹⁸ David Brooks, *The Destruction of Lord Rosebery* (London: The Historian's Press, 1986), p.220.

⁴⁹⁹ Peter Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies: The Struggle for the Leadership of the Liberal Party in the 1890s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p.148.

⁵⁰⁰ David Brooks, *op cit.*, p.60.

Michael S. Foldy's argument is based on the assumption that Queensberry was somehow putting pressure on Rosebery, exactly how and in what way he cannot be sure, but most likely by threatening public exposure of the alleged incriminating evidence. A direct correlation can be found between Rosebery's health, especially his mental health, and the events surrounding the Wilde trials.⁵⁰¹ It can be argued that it was Queensberry's pressure - assuming for the moment that pressure was indeed applied and that it did, in fact, originate from Queensberry - that severely affected Rosebery and made him ill, and that Rosebery's illness manifested itself in physical and psychological symptoms (disorder of the stomach, nervousness, extreme anxiety, depression, and insomnia). As Foldy admits, "The evidence is hardly overwhelming, but it is plausible enough to warrant consideration."⁵⁰²

On February 19, 1895, Rosebery threatened to resign as Prime Minister, claiming insufficient support in the House of Commons.⁵⁰³ Already by this time, however, Rosebery seems to have been suffering from the severe anxiety and acute insomnia that would haunt him until the end of May. The Diary of Sir Edward Hamilton, the Assistant Financial Secretary and close friend and confidant of Rosebery⁵⁰⁴ provides the best independent documentation of the progression of Rosebery's illness. On March 8, 1895, Hamilton reported seeing Rosebery for the first time in quite a while. He told Hamilton he "attributed his illness, or at any rate his predisposition to becoming ill, to the harassing time he had had in seeing all his colleagues individually, & hinting to them that he must be better supported...."⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰¹ The comparative chronology between the events surrounding the three trials and Rosebery's "break-down" is close enough to be very suggestive. Rosebery's illness lasted from late February to late May. Although Queensberry had left the infamous card for Wilde at the Albemarle Club on February 18, Wilde did not receive it until the 28th. Two days later, on March 2, Queensberry was arrested and indicted at Wilde's behest. The Queensberry libel trial went from April 3-5, and Wilde's first criminal trial from April 26 to May 1. Wilde's second trial began on May 22, and he was finally convicted on May 25.

⁵⁰² Michael S. Foldy, *op cit.*, p.25.

⁵⁰³ Peter Stansky, *op cit.*, p.153; also see David Brooks, *op cit.*, p.59.

⁵⁰⁴ Beatrice Webb claimed that Rosebery saw no one but "Eddy Hamilton, a flashy fast Treasury Secretary, his stud-groom, and various non-political fashionables." - Beatrice Webb, *Our Partnership* (London, 1948), p.121; quoted in Peter Stansky, *op cit.*, p.147.

⁵⁰⁵ David Brooks, *op cit.*, p.224.

A March 10 entry concerned Wilde:

A case of some disagreeable interest came before Newton, the Police Magistrate yesterday. Queensberry had left an insulting card the other day on Oscar Wilde at his club. O. Wilde now desires to bring an action for libel against that eccentric peer; and the case was committed for trial. Queensberry with some reason objects to the intimacy between one of his sons and Oscar Wilde, and in giving expression to his objections he used some opprobrious epithet which can be more easily grasped than written. Oscar Wilde was of course bound to take notice of the insult, and Queensberry declares that he intends to stand by what he said, no matter how difficult it may be to prove justification.⁵⁰⁶

On March 17, Hamilton expressed concern about Rosebery, who was getting only two hours' sleep a night. A doctor, Sir W. Broadbent, said he had never seen such an acute case of insomnia. Broadbent claimed to have identified the cause of the mischief as "a want of nervous muscular power in the stomach which in consequence fails to fulfill its functions properly."

He [Broadbent] accounts for this stomachic derangement by Rosebery's being given to take his meals alone and reading while eating, with the result that nervous power has gone from the stomach to the brain.⁵⁰⁷

On Sunday, March 31: "Rosebery had a very bad night last night. He only got about 2 hours sleep." On April 4 and 5, the Wilde trials figured prominently in Hamilton's diary.

The Oscar Wilde case is proceeding; and some horrible disclosures are being made. It seems impossible that a British Jury can do otherwise than acquit Queensberry of defaming O. Wilde's character by imputing to him the character of "posing as" an unmentionable creature. The net seems to be closing round the brute; though he certainly is a very clever one, and has given utterance to many smart sayings in his

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p.225.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.228.

cross-examination by Carson who is conducting the case for Queensberry with great skill.⁵⁰⁸

The Oscar Wilde case came to a somewhat unexpected end this morning. Queensberry's Council, Carson - was proceeding to discuss the miscreant's relations with the young men, when Sir E. Clarke intervened, and announced that those who were prosecuting felt that, what with the literature involved in the case and O. Wilde's own admissions, they could not expect a verdict. Accordingly the prosecution was withdrawn and a verdict of "not guilty" given.... The Public Prosecutor was at once communicated with, and a warrant was granted this afternoon with the resolve that O.W. was arrested in a Hotel in Sloane Street- (he seems to have been acquainted with innumerable of London Hotels)-and taken to Bow Street. He is said to have been aware that the police have been watching him for some time, and that he took proceedings in the hope that he would win in the action which he brought against so crack-brained a man as Queensberry, and that he would thus stave off Police proceedings.⁵⁰⁹

A letter written by George Wyndham, M.P., to his father within forty-eight hours of Wilde's arrest indicates that other well-placed persons knew that the wheels of government had already been set in motion against Wilde.

I ought to tell you that I know on the authority of Arthur Balfour [Conservative M.P., later Prime Minister in 1902], who has been told the case by the lawyers who had all the papers, that Wilde is sure to be condemned, and that the case is in every way a very serious one, involving the systematic ruin of a number of young men. Public feeling is hostile to him among all classes.

There is no case against Bosie [Douglas], but he has associated himself with Wilde up to the last moment; and is spoken of as having known the witnesses who will be called. Men like Arthur [Balfour] and Lord Houghton, who have spoken to me, speak in kind terms of him; but are unanimous in saying that he had better go abroad for a year or two. ...

But Wilde is, humanely speaking, sure to be imprisoned. I told Bosie so; and he agreed that it was almost certain.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.236. Entry: April 4, 1895, diary of Sir Edward Hamilton.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.236. Entry: April 5, 1895, diary of Sir Edward Hamilton.

...Whatever is proved, it is common knowledge in London that there was a sort of secret society around the man Taylor.⁵¹⁰

To deviate from Rosebery's predicament for a moment; Balfour's desire to see Wilde incarcerated is not that surprising, as Davis Coakley has exposed a historical precedence for Balfour's resentment towards Wilde.⁵¹¹

Coakley explains that in the mid 1880s Anglo-Irish affairs were going through a very difficult phase. Gladstone had begun to indicate his support towards some form of limited Home Rule for Ireland, and with this purpose in mind he introduced a Home Rule Bill at Westminster in 1886. It was very limited in scope, as the Parliament in London would retain control over defence, foreign policy, trade and coinage. Despite its limited nature, the bill raised a storm of vituperation in England.

There was a deep-seated belief among many English intellectuals at the time that the Irish or 'Celts', being an emotional and unstable race, were fundamentally unsuited for self-government. In contrast, the Anglo-Saxons, who were at that time managing an empire, were sober and steady and therefore ideal rulers. Gladstone's bill collapsed and he resigned as Prime Minister. He was replaced by Lord Salisbury at the head of a Tory government that was determined to restore 'law and order' in Ireland. Arthur Balfour was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland and he introduced a ruthless policy of coercion.⁵¹² Around this time Balfour met Edward Carson, who was already making an impression as a barrister. Balfour made Carson his crown prosecutor and the latter performed his task with such effectiveness that he became known as 'Coercion Carson'.⁵¹³

One of those who became a victim of the programme of coercion, Coakley reveals, was the English poet Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. Blunt, who was also a wealthy English landlord, had become very involved in the struggle of the Irish Land League on behalf of Irish tenants, and he became a founder member of the British Home Rule

⁵¹⁰ The letter dated April 7, 1895 [less than two days after Wilde's arrest] is quoted in H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, (London: Hodge, 1948, 1962 edition), p.161.

⁵¹¹ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, pp. 197-199.

⁵¹² F S L Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, *op cit.*, p.189.

⁵¹³ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, p.197.

Association. He travelled to Ireland on a number of occasions to campaign against evictions and he sent letters to the *Pall Mall Gazette* describing the scenes he witnessed. In 1887 Blunt was arrested for speaking at a meeting in Woodford near Loughrea, County Galway, which had been banned by the authorities. He was sentenced to two months imprisonment by a magistrate's court, but he appealed to Portumna Quarter Sessions and he was released on bail. The authorities decided to use the Blunt case to show that they were determined to suppress the tenant campaign. A senior legal team was sent to support the prosecution, and it included the new crown prosecutor, Edward Carson. The case lasted five days. The judge dismissed the appeal and confirmed the sentence. Blunt denounced his trial as a travesty of justice and in his book *The Land War in Ireland* (1912) he recalled Carson's role:

The case against me was conducted by Atkinson and Carson, two of the Castle bloodhounds, who for high pay did the evil agrarian work in those days for the Government by hunting down the unfortunate peasantry when, in connexion with the eviction campaigns, they came within reach of the law. It was a gloomy role they played, especially Carson's, and I used to feel almost pity for the man when I saw him, as I several times did, thus engaged in the West of Ireland Courts.⁵¹⁴

The establishment was jubilant over Blunt's imprisonment, (as they would later be over Wilde's). Lord Salisbury wrote to Arthur Balfour telling him of his delight that Blunt had been "run in". Salisbury thought it would go down well with the electors, "The great heart of the people always chuckles when a gentleman gets into the clutches of the law."⁵¹⁵

Blunt spent the first weeks of his prison sentence in Galway Gaol, before being transferred to complete the sentence in Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin. Whilst in prison he wrote a number of poems on the flyleaf of his prayerbook, and it was these poems that formed the basis of a collection that he published under the title *In Vinculis* (1888). The book bore the following dedication: "To the priests and peasantry of

⁵¹⁴ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *The Land War in Ireland* (London, Swift, 1912), p.365.

⁵¹⁵ H. Montgomery Hyde, *Carson: The Life of Sir Edward Carson, Lord Carson of Duncairn*, (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1953), p.80.

Ireland who for three hundred years have preserved the tradition of a righteous war for faith and freedom.” In the preface Blunt wrote:

Imprisonment is a reality of discipline most useful to the modern soul, lapped as it is in physical sloth and self-indulgence. Like a sickness or a spiritual retreat it purifies and ennobles; and the soul emerges from it stronger and more self contained.⁵¹⁶

Coakley discloses that many of Blunt’s friends and contemporaries felt he had betrayed his side and had given comfort to the enemies of English rule in Ireland. A short time before his imprisonment, Blunt had met Arthur Balfour at the house of a friend and both men had discussed Ireland. Balfour told Blunt that he intended to suppress the Land League movement by subjecting the parliamentary leaders, some of whom were in poor health, to long terms of imprisonment with hard labour. Blunt was shocked by Balfour’s cold-blooded approach to Irish politics, and the following day the men had a bitter argument as they played tennis. Following his release from prison Blunt published details of this conversation with Balfour, an action that made him even more unpopular with the British establishment.

It is against this background that the significance of Oscar Wilde’s decision to write an enthusiastic review of *In Vinculis* in the *Pall Mall Gazette* must be assessed. It is a review that did not pull any punches and that certainly did not ingratiate Wilde with Arthur Balfour or with his protégé Edward Carson, both of whom had been determined to make ‘an example’ of the English poet.⁵¹⁷

Wilde’s review, which appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* under the title ‘Poetry and Prison: Mr Wilfrid Blunt’s *In Vinculis*’ satirises and ridicules Balfour as an intellectual, author and member of the establishment.

The opening sonnets, composed in the bleak cell of Galway Gaol, and written down on the fly-leaves of the prisoner’s prayer-book, are full of things nobly conceived and nobly uttered, and show that though Mr Balfour may enforce ‘plain living’ by his prison regulations, he cannot prevent ‘high thinking’ or in any way limit or constrain

⁵¹⁶ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *In Vinculis* (London: Kegan, Paul and Trench, 1888), pp. vii-viii.

⁵¹⁷ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, p.199.

the freedom of a man's soul... Literature is not much indebted to Mr Balfour for his sophistical *Defence of Philosophic Doubt*, which is one of the dullest books we know, but it must be admitted that by sending Mr Blunt to gaol he has converted a clever rhymmer into an earnest and deep-thinking poet. The narrow confines of a prison cell seem to suit the 'sonnet's scanty plot of ground', and an unjust imprisonment for a noble cause strengthens as well as deepens the nature.⁵¹⁸

Wilde in more serious mood was deeply influenced by Blunt's prison experience – revelations which may very well have been the catalyst that inclined Wilde to consider the connection between crime, suffering and artistic creativity⁵¹⁹. Coakley recognised Blunt's influence on Wilde's prison writings all too well.

In a review of a book on Confucius, which was published in *The Speaker* in February 1890, Wilde speculated on how the Chinese philosopher would have viewed Anglo-Irish relations:

it is possible that, were he [Chuang Tzu] to come back to earth and visit us, he might have something to say to Mr. Balfour about his coercion and active misgovernment in Ireland.⁵²⁰

Wilde's contemporaries must have been surprised by such direct and open criticism, of Balfour once more, as it was often claimed that the playwright was reluctant to face reality or to speak bluntly - yet on issues concerning Ireland Wilde was always vocal.

When Wilde was in prison eight years later, he expressed his feelings in a prose elegy rather than in a series of sonnets, but it is significant that he suggested that the work should be entitled *Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis*. Robert Ross changed the title to *De Profundis*.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁸ Oscar Wilde, 'Poetry and Prison: Mr Wilfrid Blunt's In Vinculis' in *Pall Mall Gazette*, xlix, p.3.

⁵¹⁹ I will examine this in more detail in Chapter Thirteen.

⁵²⁰ Oscar Wilde, 'A Chinese Sage', review of *Chung Tzu*, translated from the Chinese by Herbert A Giles, *The Speaker*, 1; 6, 1890, pp. 144-146.

⁵²¹ Davis Coakley, *op cit.*, p.199.

Returning to Foldy's hypothesis concerning Rosebery's increasing ill health and poor mental state in connection with the Wilde case, on April 12, Hamilton recorded that Rosebery had been thinking about suicide, at least in the abstract.

Rosebery seems to have made little or no progress; the last 3 nights have been very bad again; and meanwhile Broadbent does nothing and tries nothing.... He is certainly more depressed about himself than he was - and no wonder. He says he can quite appreciate the feelings which prompt suicide, where night after night he lies awake.⁵²²

On April 25, the day before Wilde's criminal trial was to begin, Rosebery was feeling better. "If he sleeps fairly well, he is much less depressed about himself."⁵²³ On May 9, two days after Wilde was released on bail following the jury's inability to agree on a verdict, Hamilton's entry described an assembly the previous night at the National Liberal Club, and

Rosebery, who having already appeared again in public was bound to show himself, came to a full stop in the middle of his speech. Something put him off & he lost completely the thread of his thoughts. It must have been most painful for those who were present.⁵²⁴

From May 13 to 20, Rosebery went yachting to get away from things for a week. On May 21, Hamilton recorded that

The Oscar Wilde & Taylor cases have been brought forward again; & unless there is some cantankerous jury-man a verdict is confidently expected this time. A verdict of guilty would remove what appears to be a wide-felt impression that the Judge & Jury were on the last occasion *got at*, in order to shield others of a higher status in life.⁵²⁵

And on may 25:

⁵²² David Brooks, *op cit.*, p.239.

⁵²³ *Ibid*, p.243.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid*, p.247.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid*, p.250.

On our return I met F [rank] Lockwood at the station (Charing Cross). He had just won his case and was very triumphant over it. Oscar Wilde & Taylor have each got 2 years with hard labour. I am more glad than I can say about the verdict; for I never had a shadow of a doubt about the guilt of the two beasts, and there was I am sure a very prevalent suspicion abroad that the Government were trying to hush up the case in order to screen certain people of higher rank in life.⁵²⁶

On Tuesday, May 28, immediately after the conclusion of the Wilde case, Hamilton's entry begins, somewhat surprisingly, with "Rosebery seems better." After this date, there is no further mention of Rosebery's ill health. Foldy comments:

While less than airtight, this evidence certainly suggests, that one viewpoint at least was that the (hypothetical) threat of exposure which had privately haunted and publicly paralysed Rosebery for the previous three months had been lifted, and that he had received a psychological reprieve.⁵²⁷

The entries of May 21 and 25 seemed to confirm Lockwood's assertion, quoted in Hyde, earlier, that disinformation had been circulating to the effect that the government had somehow conspired to influence the judge and jury during the first criminal trial, in order to acquit Wilde and thereby protect certain unnamed, but important, persons.

These rumours suggested (falsely) that it was Wilde himself who was blackmailing the government with incriminating information about the unnamed but highly placed persons, when it seems clear it was the other way around. If the evidence presented here is to be believed, then what was apparently happening was that a peer of the realm was blackmailing the head of government. It was not Wilde's acquittal, but rather his conviction that was the aim of the blackmail. That Hamilton and Lockwood were ignorant of who was being protected, and of who was pulling the strings, is probably not as surprising as it might appear at first.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁶ *Ibid*, p.250.

⁵²⁷ Michael S. Foldy, *op cit.*, p.28.

⁵²⁸ Michael S. Foldy, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde Deviance, Morality, and Late-Victorian Society* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p.28.

One stray piece of evidence that might suggest Rosebery may have indeed shared Wilde's sexual predilections mentioned by Foldy, is contained in a curious letter written on December 30, 1897 by the British Consul to Italy, E. Neville-Rolfe, and sent to Lord Rosebery, who was at that time vacationing at his own private villa near Naples:

Oscar Wilde calling himself Mr. Sebastian Nothwell [sic] is in a small villa at Posillipo [sic] fully two miles from you. He and Alfred Douglas have definitely parted and Wilde lives a completely secluded life. He came here as Mr. Nothwell for some business and I let him suppose that I did not know him by sight. He looks thoroughly abashed, much like a whipped hound. He has written a volume of poems, but no one in London would publish them and I hear he is printing them at his own expense. I really cannot think he will be any trouble to you, and after all the poor devil must live somewhere.⁵²⁹

Whether the information regarding Wilde's whereabouts was solicited by Rosebery or volunteered by Neville-Rolfe has not been established by any source. From either point of view, however, this represents an intriguing communiqué. Clear knowledge of Wilde's relationship with Douglas is evinced in the letter. One must ask what possible trouble Wilde could have been to Rosebery in Naples? They were both far from England. Wilde had been out of prison for only six months and had chosen to live in exile on the Continent, and Rosebery was out of office, but still a public figure. It seems likely that they would have moved in different social circles, especially since Wilde's public disgrace deprived him of the social cachet he had previously enjoyed.

This interpretation suggested that the public might misconstrue any interaction with Wilde, no matter how casual. Wilde was now a social pariah, and any contact between the two would have tainted or contaminated Rosebery.

A second interpretation would insinuate the opposite - that any contact between Wilde and Rosebery in Naples might be construed *properly*, indicating that it was possible that Wilde and Rosebery were both in Naples for the same reason: not only to escape the cold English winter, but also to take advantage of the prevalence of

⁵²⁹ Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde, op cit.*, pp. 557-558.

many young, willing, beautiful boys. At this time, Naples, along with Algiers and other towns in Algeria, was a popular destination for English “homosexuals” and pederasts.⁵³⁰ Even though Rosebery and Wilde doubtlessly moved in different social circles, it is possible that they moved in the same sexual circles. Ellmann records that before their devastating break-up, Wilde and Douglas spent “most of their time dawdling about the cafes or the beaches, good-humouredly competing for Neapolitan boys.”⁵³¹ The chance is that if Rosebery were indeed a “homosexual,” he may have been engaged in similar pursuits, and if that were so, it would not have been in his best interest to be seen in the company of Wilde.⁵³²

If we accept for the moment the possibility of Rosebery’s “homosexuality,” and advance the hypothesis that Rosebery and Drumlanrig had been lovers, and if we accept as Hyde and Ellmann suggest, the likelihood that Queensberry did indeed possess incriminating evidence regarding Rosebery’s relationship with his son, then Foldy’s alternative explanation for Rosebery’s strange behaviour from the period following Drumlanrig’s death to the end of the Wilde trials demands serious consideration. This explanation would suggest that Drumlanrig’s death had severe psychological effects on the Prime Minister.

If they had been lovers, Drumlanrig’s death would be expected to have elicited great feelings of loss and mourning, and possibly even remorse or guilt if Rosebery had felt himself to be responsible for the accident in one way or another. Secondly, if Queensberry was indeed blackmailing Rosebery, this might account for Rosebery’s private anxiety, nervousness, dyspepsia and insomnia, as well as his public dysfunction, all of which seem to have abated, coincidentally enough, immediately after Wilde’s conviction.⁵³³

Foldy further suggests that:

⁵³⁰ *Ibid*, pp.429-431, 557-558.

⁵³¹ *Ibid*, p. 551. In December 1897, Wilde had experienced a devastating break-up with Douglas (for the last time), and he recorded his anger, bitterness, and “paralysis” in a letter to Robert Ross, March 2, 1898 – see Rupert Hart-Davis (ed.), *Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.330. This probably accounts for Wilde’s seclusion in Neville-Rolfe’s report to Rosebery.

⁵³² Michael S. Foldy, *op cit.*, p.29.

⁵³³ *Ibid*, p.29.

the anger Queensberry felt toward Rosebery (ostensibly as a “homosexual”), as demonstrated in the letter to Alfred Montgomery, was displaced onto Wilde. Certainly there were several inescapable associations that Rosebery shared with Wilde - an aristocratic bearing, cultured tastes, education, a certain effeminacy. After all, Drumlanrig was dead, and for Queensberry the present and perhaps still preventable danger was that posed by Wilde to his still living other son, Lord Alfred Douglas. Queensberry obviously demonized Wilde, and certainly spared no expense or effort to bring pain and humiliation into his life. In all likelihood, Rosebery may have looked upon Queensberry’s persecution of Wilde as an object lesson, which foreshadowed his own fate if the government failed to convict Wilde.⁵³⁴

George Ives, an acquaintance of Wilde’s and one architect of the nascent “homosexual cause” in the eighteen-nineties,⁵³⁵ claimed that Rosebery considered doing something to help Wilde (perhaps, from Ives’ point of view, as one “homosexual” helping another) during his initial prosecution of Queensberry for libel, but was warned off by Arthur Balfour, the Chief Secretary, who claimed such interference would be a bad political decision which might cost the Liberals the election.⁵³⁶

In the general election of 1895, the Liberals did, of course, suffer the worst defeat of any party since 1832. Historian Peter Stansky has commented that the most powerful influences working against the Liberals in the election were those of “Bible, Beer, and Bad Trade.”⁵³⁷ It is interesting to speculate on the possible effect of the Wilde trials on the outcome of the general election. It is clear from the diary entries of Edward Hamilton that Rosebery’s political effectiveness was greatly impeded by his physical

⁵³⁴ *Ibid*, p.29.

⁵³⁵ George Cecil Ives founded a secret homosexual society, “The Order of Chaeronea,” which was supposedly organized according to Masonic principles. One of the major concerns of the society was the reform of laws pertaining to homosexuality – see Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex Politics and Society* (London: Longman, 1989), pp. 112-114.

⁵³⁶ Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde, op cit.*, p.462.

⁵³⁷ Peter Stansky, *op cit.*, p.177. “Beer” referred to Sir William Harcourt’s (Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the Commons) crusade on behalf of local opinion. Harcourt’s 1894 budget also raised taxes on brewers and distillers, and was thus widely perceived as “taxing the poor man’s beer.” – see David Brooks, *op cit.*, pp. 16-18.

and psychological breakdown in the crucial months leading up to the election. In effect, his illness had rendered the government a “rudderless ship”. While it is clear that Rosebery’s government suffered from a general apathy and internal discord long before the Wilde trials, it may also be supposed that a sharp, healthy, and vigorous Rosebery might have been able to make a difference in many of the local elections, especially those that were very close.⁵³⁸ If pressure was coming from Queensberry, as Foldy proposes, then it can be suggested that the Wilde trials indeed affected the outcome of the elections, albeit in an indirect manner.

The second, and more direct, effect of the Wilde trials on the outcome of the general election may have had to do with what Peter Stansky identified as the influence of the “Bible.” It might be argued at this point that the public spectacle surrounding the Wilde trials - which dragged on for the better part of three months - caused a moral “backlash” against the Liberal Party. The party, for example, may have been perceived as having departed from its Gladstonian heritage of evangelism and temperance and, for that reason, be considered too permissive in regard to moral matters. Or perhaps a majority of the voting public simply felt that the Liberal Government, under Rosebery’s tenure, had not been vigorous enough in its prosecution of Wilde. Thus it is difficult to say whether the voters were merely expressing their dissatisfaction with Rosebery’s government in particular, or if in fact the results of the general election signified a “protest” vote against the whole sordid state of affairs, over which the Liberal Party had temporarily, and arbitrarily, presided.

⁵³⁸ Although poor in seats, the Liberals were rich in votes. The Liberals received 2,380,000 votes out of 4,800,000, indicating that only 221,000 accounted for the Unionist majority of 152 seats in Parliament – see Peter Stansky, *op cit.*, p.178.

Illustrations E



Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas at Oxford circa 1893.



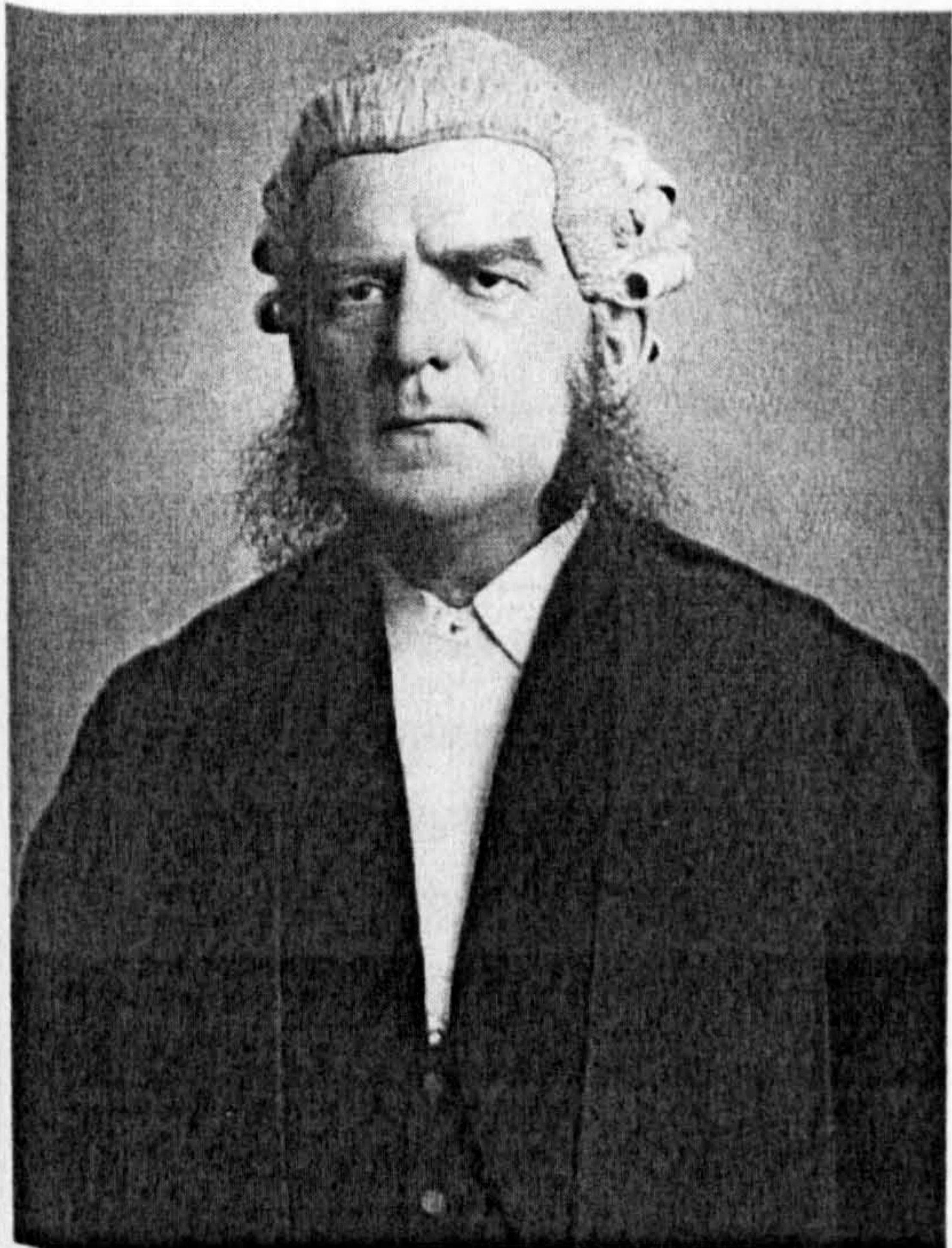
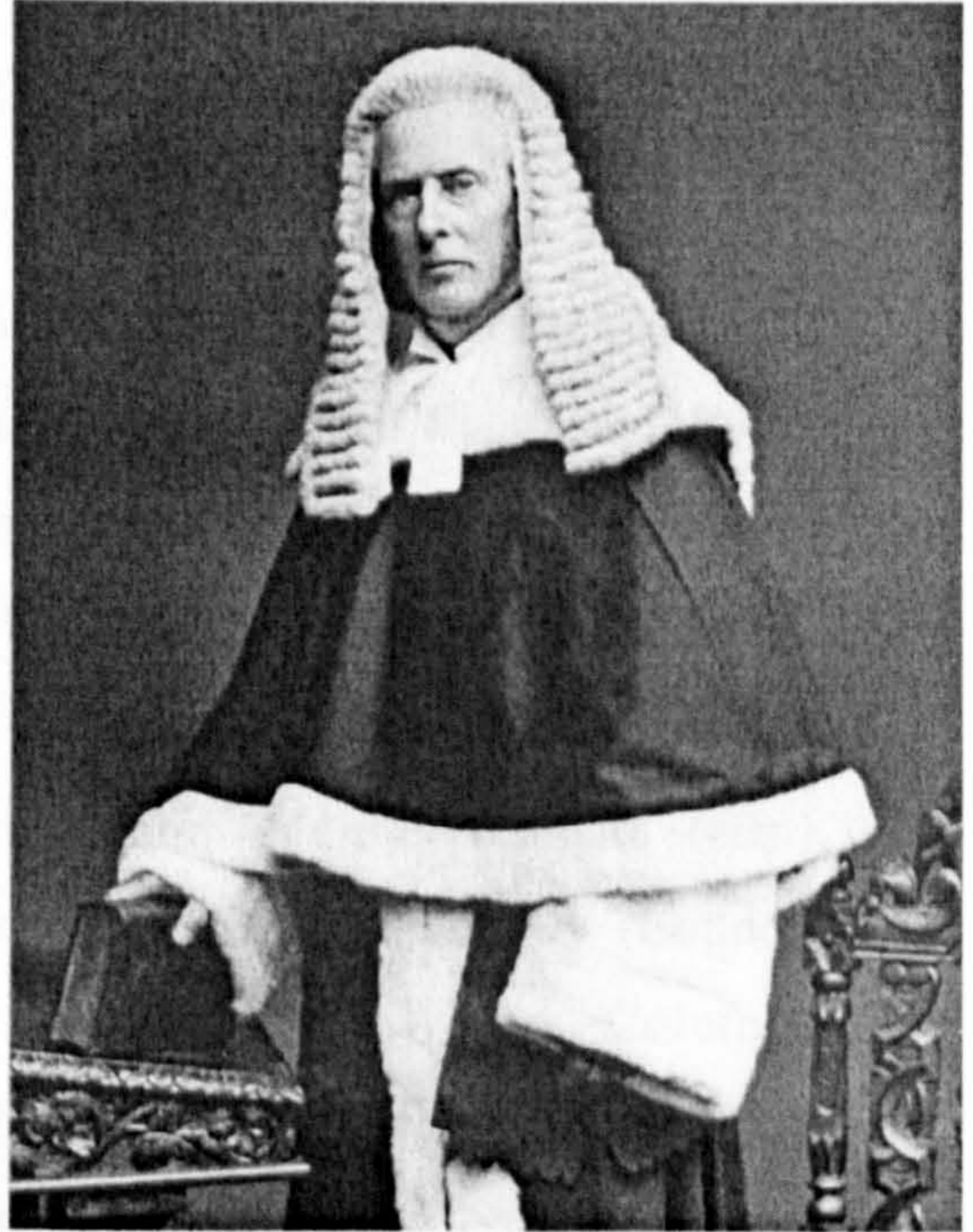
The Marquess of Queensberry.



*That 'funny little man,' the
Marquess of Queensberry, as seen
by Max Beerbohm in 1894.*



Lord Alfred Douglas with his older brother Viscount Drumlanrig. Drumlanrig was private secretary to Lord Rosebery, the Liberal Foreign Minister and future Prime Minister. It was rumoured that Drumlanrig was having a homosexual affair with Lord Rosebery when he died under suspicious circumstances, which was officially reported as a shooting accident, but suicide was strongly suspected. This is a plausible hypothesis if Drumlanrig, possibly under the threat of blackmail, desperately wanted to spare both Rosebery personally, and the Liberal Government, the embarrassment and detriment of a very public and political scandal.



TOP LEFT: *Edward Carson, prosecuted. In the first trial Oscar ran rings around him.*

ABOVE: *Sir Alfred Wills, Mr Justice Wills, presiding judge: 'It is the worst case I have ever tried.'*

LEFT: *Sir Edward Clarke represented Oscar for no charge, a gesture both men were to regret.*

Chapter Eleven: Reaction In The British Media To The Trials.

In analysing the reaction of the British Press to Wilde's libel trial and subsequent arrest and conviction I concentrated most extensively on the reports in the following papers: *The Star*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Illustrated Police Budget* and *Illustrated Police News*. Some essential publications such as John Stokes, *In The Nineties* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf; and Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1989), Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855-1914* (London: Croom Helm), and George Boyce, James Curran, and Pauline Wingate (eds.), *Newspaper History: From the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Constable, 1978), Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), Steve Chibnall, "Chronicles of the Gallows: The Social History of Crime Reporting," in *The Sociology of Journalism and the Press*, Sociological Review Monograph 29 (October 1980), augmented with the Foldy and Hyde analytical texts of the trials, provided excellent reference sources regarding how the British popular press covered the trials.

A limited sense of public reaction to the trials can be obtained by examining the contents of editorials, and the contents of the letters written in response to them, which were published in the correspondence columns of the major London newspapers.⁵³⁹ In 1895, the correspondence column itself was a relatively recent

⁵³⁹ Alan Lee stresses the fact that the London Press was not a "national press" in the modern sense. Although a newspaper's importance and influence is not a direct correlative of circulation figures, they are useful for gauging the relative popularity of the various newspapers. Presenting circulation figures of the 1880s, Lee notes that of the London morning "penny dailies," the *Daily Telegraph* had a circulation of over 300,000; the conservative *Standard* was 250,000; the *Daily Chronicle* and the *Daily News* were just under 100,000; and *The Times* was 60,000. No figures are given for the major evening dailies: the paper of the club set, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Evening News*, and the more plebeian and radical papers, the *Echo*, and the *Star*. Of the weekly press, the Sunday papers – although this was a strictly honorific title since it was illegal to sell newspapers on the Sabbath – had the widest circulation. In 1896, *Lloyd's Weekly News* circulation topped 1,000,000, quickly followed by *News of the World* and *Reynold's News*. See Alan Lee, "The Structure, Ownership, and Control of the Press, 1855-1914," in George Boyce, James Curran, and Pauline Wingate (eds.), *Newspaper History: From the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Constable, 1978), pp. 120-123.

innovation within the world of print journalism. As John Stokes suggests, the mid-nineties was “a time when the correspondence column was widely offered as providing the ideal structure for democratic debate, a newspaper forum which would allow individuals to express themselves in a manner entirely appropriate to modern conditions.”⁵⁴⁰ Along with the “bye-line, the headlines, the enquiries [investigative pieces], the pictures, and the interviews,” the correspondence column was one of the devices developed by the “New Journalists” of the 1880s and 1890s to humanise the Press, to broaden its appeal, and to involve its readers.⁵⁴¹ All these innovations represented concessions to the economic realities faced by newspaper publishers during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as well as a dilution of, or disenchantment with, the liberal ideal of the didactic function of the press.⁵⁴²

In the 1860s, “most newspapers were still written by and for the middle classes,” but in the 1870s, “readership was beginning to be taken more into account by those who started and ran newspapers” because publishers were becoming increasingly dependent upon advertising revenue to keep afloat financially, and that revenue depended in part upon an accurate assessment of their readership.⁵⁴³ Newspapers such as *The Times* (of London), for example, occupied a special niche in news reporting, specialising, as it did, in international news and diplomatic and political intelligence. This was what its readership - predominantly upper middle-class professionals and the governing elites of Europe - demanded.⁵⁴⁴ *The Times* aside, however, the other major London daily and Sunday editions felt a greater

⁵⁴⁰ John Stokes, *In The Nineties* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf; and Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1989), p.9.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.21. Raymond Williams attributes the application, “New Journalism” to Matthew Arnold; see Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p.195.

⁵⁴² Although Lee states that “the ideal [the penny paper as the organ of educated democracy] had always been a provincial rather than a metropolitan one, and one born directly from the repeal of the stamp.” See Alan Lee, *op cit.*, pp. 118, 122.

⁵⁴³ Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855-1914* (London: Croom Helm), p.38.

⁵⁴⁴ Michael Palmer, “The British Press and international news, 1851-99: of and newspapers,” in George Boyce, James Curran, and Pauline Wingate (eds.), *Newspaper History: From the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Constable, 1978), p.211. *The Times* was unique in that regard, however, because foreign news and analysis was expensive to come by, and *The Times* was the only paper to employ its own legion of foreign correspondents.

responsibility to their shareholders than to the public, and “placed crime second only to war in their hierarchy of selling values.” This led one observer to comment wryly “in times of peace a first class sex murder is the best tonic for a tired sub-editor on a dull evening.”⁵⁴⁵

By the time of Wilde’s criminal trials, it can be claimed that the “sex scandal” was already well established as a sub-genre within the genre of crime reporting. W.T. Stead, maverick editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, had earlier pioneered an exploitative brand of investigative journalism in the service of the more mercenary goals of the “New Journalism” in his 1885 expose of white slavery and child prostitution, entitled “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon.”⁵⁴⁶ From a historical perspective, the Wilde trials should be seen as one in a long line of (mostly) sex-related scandals involving important persons that gripped the public imagination in the 1880s and 1890s: “the divorce case of the radical politician Charles Dilke in 1886; the unsolved Ripper murders of 1888; the divorce case of the Irish Home-Rule leader Charles Stewart Parnell in 1890; the scandal of the Cleveland Street homosexual brothel, 1889-90, said to involve the eldest son of the heir to the throne⁵⁴⁷; and the Tranby-Croft gambling scandal of 1891, which involved the Prince of Wales himself.”⁵⁴⁸ Without a doubt scandals such as these, and sex crimes in general, made excellent copy for the newspapers, and often boosted circulation to record levels.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁵ Attributed to Kingsley Martin, see Steve Chibnall, “Chronicles of the Gallows: The Social History of Crime Reporting,” in *The Sociology of Journalism and the Press*, Sociological Review Monograph 29 (October 1980), p.206. Raymond Williams quotes Burnham’s history of the *Daily Telegraph*, “Reviewing the files, the honest biographer cannot dispute that the *Daily Telegraph* thrived on crime.” - Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p.196.

⁵⁴⁶ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). See also Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain Since 1700* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1977), pp. 106-110.

⁵⁴⁷ Prince Albert Victor, elder son of the Prince of Wales, heir to the throne.

⁵⁴⁸ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London: Longman, 1989), p.86.

⁵⁴⁹ Steve Chibnall describes how Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe, who was one of the driving forces behind the creation of a tabloid press with the founding of the national morning halfpenny paper, the *Daily Mail*, in 1896) had interviewed the murderer of a pregnant girl, and how his

Of course, from a contemporary perspective, most of the major metropolitan penny daily newspapers, which catered to a predominantly middle-class readership, were more or less responsible in their reporting of events.⁵⁵⁰ Publishers of these papers generally saw themselves as providing a genuine public service, and claimed that the reporting of crime stories served the general purposes of social control.⁵⁵¹ Other newspapers, however, especially the Sunday papers and the “non-political sensation sheets” such as the *Illustrated Police Budget* and the *Illustrated Police News*, which were aimed primarily at an uneducated working-and lower middle-class audience, were more often guilty of sensationalising a story. As with their tabloid successors today, the more lurid and disgusting the story, the more newspapers were sold, and their primary function, then as now, was not to stimulate thought, but to amuse and entertain their readership.⁵⁵²

It was not surprising that Wilde held the lowest opinion of journalists and their function in society:

There is much to be said in favour of modern journalism. By giving us the opinions of the uneducated, it keeps us in touch with the ignorance of the community. By carefully chronicling the current events of contemporary life, it shows us of what very little importance such events really are. By invariably discussing the necessary, it makes us understand what things are requisite for culture, and what are not.⁵⁵³

reports of the interview helped double the circulation of the recently taken over *Evening News* to almost 400,000; Steve Chibnall, “Chronicles of the Gallows: The Social History of Crime Reporting,” in *The Sociology of Journalism and the Press*, Sociological Review Monograph 29 (October 1980), p.206.

⁵⁵⁰ Raymond Williams states that in the period from 1855 to 1896, “an attention to crime, sexual violence, and human oddities made its way from the Sunday into the Daily papers...”, Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, *op cit.*, p.195.

⁵⁵¹ Steve Chibnall, “Chronicles of the Gallows” *op cit.*, p.209.

⁵⁵² *Ibid*, p.209.

⁵⁵³ Richard Ellmann, *The Artist as Critic: The Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.393. Wilde also commented “Somebody – was it Burke? – called journalism the fourth estate...at the present moment it is the only estate. It has eaten up the other three. The Lords Temporal say nothing, the Lords Spiritual have nothing to say, and the House of Commons has nothing to say and says it!” – Oscar Wilde, “The Soul of Man Under Socialism”, in Isobel Murray (ed.), *The Soul of Man and Prison Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.23.

The leading articles of the newspapers, said Wilde, were “full of prejudice, stupidity, cant, and twaddle,” and journalism itself was a most degrading profession.⁵⁵⁴ For Wilde, the Press represented the tyranny of public opinion over and against the self-realised artistic individual, and symbolised everything that was wrong with England:

England has done one thing; it has invented and established Public Opinion, which is an attempt to organise the ignorance of the community, and to elevate it to the dignity of physical force.⁵⁵⁵

Michael Foldy maintains that this Wildean view echoes that of Søren Kierkegaard, who similarly argued that the Press creates the public, and the public lives only through the Press. The levelling power of the public emerges through the Press, but while the Press poses as the organ of the public, in reality it is the powerful voice of a handful of influential individuals.⁵⁵⁶ Wilde noted that while the Press, ostensibly representing public opinion, constrained artists and rationed beauty, it paradoxically encouraged and extolled journalists who were purveying the worst sort of trash and ugliness.⁵⁵⁷

Wilde was incensed at the journalistic predisposition to dig into the lives of private citizens and to exploit the pain and suffering of others for the amusement of their readers. He believed instead that “the private lives of men and women should not be told to the public...private life should not be for public consumption.”⁵⁵⁸ Wilde understood full well that public scandals meant increased circulation for the papers, and that this in turn represented increased revenues and increased power to influence public opinion. He also believed that most journalists, as individuals, were decent human beings who were merely victims of an oppressive and patronising capitalist economy. He described journalists as:

⁵⁵⁴ Isobel Murray, *Ibid*, p.23.

⁵⁵⁵ Ellmann, *op cit.*, p.403.

⁵⁵⁶ Michael S. Foldy, *op cit.*, p.51. For the similarities with Kierkegaard see Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, translated by Alexander Dru (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp.60-66.

⁵⁵⁷ Isobel Murray, *op cit.*, p.24.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.25.

men of education and cultivation, who really dislike publishing these things, who know it is wrong to do so, and who do it because the unhealthy conditions under which their occupation is carried on oblige them to supply the public with what the public wants, and to compete with other journalists in making that supply as full and satisfying to the gross popular appetite as possible.⁵⁵⁹

Wilde considered it outrageous that “earnest, solemn, thoughtful journalists” were pressed by their employers to drag before the reading public incidents in the private lives of public figures,

and invite the public to discuss the incident, to exercise authority in the matter, to give their views, and not merely to give their views, but to carry them into action, to dictate to the man upon all other points, to dictate to his party, to dictate to his country, in fact to make themselves ridiculous, offensive, and harmful.⁵⁶⁰

Ironically, of course, only four years after writing these words in “The Soul of Man Under Socialism,” Wilde found himself the unwilling subject of a lengthy journalistic inquisition, and had his own soul lain bare before a rabid and self-righteous public.

Of course there was precedence for the reaction/coverage of the English press to the Wilde trials which had been played out before when Wilde had published *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In 1890 the novel had met with a storm of revolted abuse from the English media: “not being curious in ordure, and not wishing to offend the nostrils of decent persons, we do not propose to analyse *The Picture of Dorian Gray*” (*St James’s Gazette*, 24 June 1890); “it is a tale spawned from the leprous literature of the French Decadents” (*Daily Chronicle*, 30 June 1890); “why go grubbing in the muck-heaps?” (*Scots Observer*, 5 July 1890); “a truer art would have avoided both the glittering conceits, which bedeck the body of story, and the unsavoury suggestiveness which lurks in its spirit.” (*Punch*, 19 July 1890).

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.25.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.24.

Wilde in response wrote a series of incandescent letters to the press and later put his rage into the gnomic 'Preface', published in advance of the appearance of the book in Britain, "My preface should teach them to mend their wicked ways".⁵⁶¹ The epigrammatic form of the 'Preface' defies simplistic interpretation, and places the work firmly in the French "art for art's sake" tradition. The concluding *homage* was to Gautier's Preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, in which the French poet had defended his own aestheticism to a utilitarian age with the words, "all art is quite useless". Wilde characterised or equated the baying English press (representing the voice of the public and claiming the high moral ground) to Shakespeare's 'Caliban' left enraged equally by its own reflection as by its lack. At the time Wilde drew particular attention to the vexing relationship between art and morality, the issue that had so spectacularly incensed his detractors. He argued that "Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art".⁵⁶²

Wilde's assertion that "There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all" ('Preface' to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*) called attention to style at the expense of content in a provocative gesture of amorality. He had already used this assertion once before in self-defence, when asked by an interviewer during his 1882 American lecture tour to respond to the charge that his poetry was "immoral". He replied, "A poem is well written or badly written. In art there should be no reference to a standard of good or evil".⁵⁶³ Nevertheless this was the aphorism, which Wilde claimed during his trial, when asked whether the novel was "proper" or "improper", to have added at the advice of Walter Pater. His Oxford mentor had pointed out to him that certain features of the story were open to misconstruction of precisely the kind for which Wilde later stood in the dock. Within the novel Lord Henry, Wilde's Mephistophelean voice, explains the prefatory maxim further:

⁵⁶¹ Oscar Wilde, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p.290.

⁵⁶² Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p.17.

⁵⁶³ *The Daily Examiner*, San Francisco, 27 March 1882.

Art has no influence upon action. It annihilates the desire to act. It is superbly sterile. The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame".⁵⁶⁴

Gilbert, in 'The Critic as Artist' also engages in this point, declaring that, "Art does not hurt us. The tears that we shed at a play are a type of the exquisite sterile emotions that it is the function of Art to awaken"; Gilbert uses this to lead up to his statement that "All art is immoral"⁵⁶⁵, seemingly to contradict the terms of the 'Preface' to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. But as Anne Varty has explained, "both pieces mean the same: responsibility for interpretation and any consequent action must lie with the individual who has misconstrued the ideal terms in which art operates."⁵⁶⁶

Wilde argued this point writing to the press, "Each man sees his own sin in Dorian Gray. What Dorian Gray's sins are no one knows. He who finds them has brought them".⁵⁶⁷ Wilde's perplexity at the reception of the book was justified and real. To Arthur Conan Doyle he wrote: "I cannot understand how they can treat *Dorian Gray* as immoral. My difficulty was to keep the inherent moral subordinate to the artistic and dramatic effect, and it still seems to me that the moral is too obvious"⁵⁶⁸. On the 26 June 1890 he even had tried to explain this to the readers of the *St James's Gazette*:

the moral is this: All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment. The painter, Basil Hallward, worshiping physical beauty far too much, as most painters do, dies by the hand of one in whose soul he has created a monstrous and absurd vanity. Dorian Gray, having led a life of mere sensation and pleasure, tries to kill conscience, and at that moment kills himself. Lord Henry Wotton seeks to be merely the spectator of life. He finds that those who reject the battle are more deeply wounded than those who take part in it.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁴ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, op. cit.*, p.156.

⁵⁶⁵ Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, op cit* pp.1135-1136.

⁵⁶⁶ Anne Varty, *op cit.*, p.113.

⁵⁶⁷ Oscar Wilde, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (ed.), Rupert Hart-Davis (London, Hart-Davis, 1962), p.266.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.292.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.259.

Undoubtedly certain elements of the English press remembered and resented Wilde's scornful, dismissive comments towards their moralising angst, in his defence of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* five years earlier. They knew that this time around Wilde's intellectual and artistic ideologies would not be able to save him.

In many ways, the editorial reactions to the results of the Queensberry libel trial were amazingly prescient. Across the board, the metropolitan newspapers were unanimous with praise for the Marquess of Queensberry, and critical of Wilde to greater or lesser degrees. For example, the *Illustrated Police News* characterised the trial as “th[e] most gruesome tragedy of the nineteenth century”.⁵⁷⁰ It was felt that Queensberry's actions during the trial, motivated as they were by his “natural” paternal desire to protect his son from the evil influence of Wilde, may have also been undertaken in order to ameliorate his controversial patronage of prize-fighting and perhaps even his cantankerous reputation in the House of Lords.

... he is a man, despite his peculiarities, to be admired for the fact that he has had in his public life the courage of his convictions, and thus stands head and shoulders above the majority of hereditary personages of his own rank.⁵⁷¹

While Queensberry was redeemed in the public eye, Wilde was prematurely mourned. The *Illustrated Police News* waxed nostalgic over the fact that Wilde's distinguished and brilliant career as a poet, novelist, and dramatist now seemed to be over, and lamented the possibility that Wilde, “a man whom a month ago thousands would have been glad to have known, a man who was fawned and cringed to and lionised by many, today stands without a friend in the world.”

It seems ironic that the comments of the *Illustrated Police News*, which catered (theoretically) to an educated lower class readership, displayed a greater sensitivity toward Wilde's existential predicament than any of the major dailies. On the other hand, the majority of metropolitan dailies, oriented primarily toward an educated

⁵⁷⁰ *Illustrated Police News*, 6 April 1895

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*

middle-class readership, generally treated Wilde as if he had already been convicted. The *Echo*, for instance, considered Wilde “damned and done for,” and suggested that:

...the best thing for everybody now is to forget all about Oscar Wilde, his perpetual posturings, his aesthetical teachings, and his theatrical productions. If not tried himself, let him go into silence, and be heard of no more.⁵⁷²

W.T. Stead’s *Pall Mall Gazette*, the predominant “Clubland” newspaper,⁵⁷³ did not want to condemn Wilde before he had been convicted, but still “could not overlook the fact that the jury found a verdict of guilty against him [Wilde] on his own admissions, and before any witnesses were called.”⁵⁷⁴

Wilde, and what was described loosely as “his school,” were most harshly criticised by the *Daily Telegraph*, the metropolitan daily newspaper with the largest circulation:

We have had enough, and more than enough of MR OSCAR WILDE, who has been the means of inflicting upon public patience during the recent episode as much moral damage of the most offensive and repulsive kind as any single individual could well cause. If the general concern were only with the man himself - his spurious brilliancy, inflated egotism, diseased vanity, cultivated affectation, and shameless disavowal of all morality - the best thing would be to dismiss him and his deeds without another word to the penalty of the universal condemnation.⁵⁷⁵

To this point in this rather lengthy editorial, Wilde was admonished as more of a public nuisance than as someone who posed a serious threat to society. The *Daily Telegraph* seized upon the implications contained in the evidence against Wilde and used them as a filter through which to view Wilde’s past accomplishments. With perfect hindsight, the *Telegraph* was able to detect a pattern in Wilde’s past behaviour. The “just verdict” of the trial confirmed the suspicion that Wilde had all along been trying “to establish a cult in our midst,” a cult, moreover, that would

⁵⁷² *Echo*, 6 April 1895.

⁵⁷³ John Stokes, *In The Nineties*, *op cit.*, p.17. The other so-called “Clubland” papers were the *St. James Gazette* and the *Westminster Gazette*.

⁵⁷⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 April 1895.

⁵⁷⁵ *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 April 1895.

influence and subvert the nation's youth. "These men," said the *Telegraph*, referring to Wilde and his crowd, "linking a certain real sense of beauty with profligate tastes and profane mockery, have undoubtedly exercised a visible influence upon the generation cursed by their presence."⁵⁷⁶ Even worse was that this cult was somehow under the French sphere of influence. Since England and France had been "natural" enemies for centuries, and since it was well known that France had always been a hotbed of vice, permissiveness, and radical ideas, Wilde's "cult" was viewed as unpatriotic if not treacherous, and as necessarily immoral and irreverent as well. The French and pagan roots of this "plague" were explored in depth, and the analogy was drawn: "have we to look further than to the declining population of France; the decay there of religion, reverence, obedience, and legality...?" What was perceived as the present "(im)moral condition of France" was thereby portrayed as an object lesson for England.

The sense of moral outrage at Wilde's "crimes" was only exacerbated by Wilde's nationality and political ideologies (a self-proclaimed Irish nationalist and Republican), his satirising of the establishment, his Francophile admiration, his aesthetic/artistic sensibilities – long before his sexual proclivities were made public. The timing was perfect for the press to fuel the nation's xenophobia. As Anne Varty succinctly phrased it:

The iconic overlap between green, the national colour of Ireland, and the green carnation, the badge of aestheticism and homosexuality, allowed Wilde to wear both his nationalism and his sexuality on his lapel. But few saw it, and fewer saw both. Unlike his political sentiments about Ireland, Wilde was not able to openly articulate his feelings about the analogous imperialism, which criminalised his sexuality. But the means by which he queried the heterosexual politics of the day afford, in retrospect, a challenge to the legislation that restricted his own freedom of expression and identity.⁵⁷⁷

The *Daily Telegraph's* analysis was driven by a heightened moral conviction and an exaggerated sense of outrage at the real or imagined violation that Wilde had

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid*, see in Jonathan Goodman (ed.), *The Oscar Wilde File* (London: Allison & Busby, 1989), p.76.

⁵⁷⁷ Anne Varty, *op cit.*, p.28

perpetrated against an unwitting and vulnerable public; a violation that threatened not only the “family values” of the domestic sphere, but the very fabric of society:

It will be a public benefit, compensating for a great deal that has been painful in the reports of this trial, if the exposure of a chief representative of the immoral school leads to a clearer perception of its tendency and a heartier contempt for its methods... The aestheticism that worships a green carnation or a perfume has lost so much the sense of what is precious in parental and filial relations that we saw in this case a son addressing his father in terms which in ancient days would have involved his death. The superfine Art which admits no moral duty and laughs at the established phrases of right and wrong is the visible enemy of those ties and bonds of society-the natural affections, and the domestic joys, the sanctity and sweetness of the home... ⁵⁷⁸

Like the *Star*, the *Daily Telegraph* was quick to interpret the meaning of the trial, and to draw the appropriate moral lessons from it. The moral was presented in terms which juxtaposed the productive social values of diligence, industry, sobriety, and duty - values essential to the smooth functioning of a market driven, capitalist economy and the maintenance of the Empire - with the anti-social cultural values which emphasised play, leisure, hedonistic self-indulgence, and narcissism. In the midst of preaching intolerance toward deviants of all stripes, the *Telegraph* inadvertently became the first to record of Wilde’s social demise:

A nation prospers and profits by precisely those national qualities which these innovators deride and abjure. It goes swiftly to wreck and decay by precisely that brilliant corruption of which we have just had the exposure and demonstration. All the good literature and the noble art in our own and other countries has been sane, moral, and serious in its object; nor can life be wholesomely lived under guidance of brilliant paradoxes and coercive epigrams. To those who know how to observe, this man WILDE in the act of his defence condemned himself and his system by his vanity, egotism, artificiality, and distorted perceptions, before the Judge and jury had pronounced upon him the indirect sentence which eliminates him from the society he has disgraced. We shall have purchased the pain and shame of such an exhibition at a price, perhaps, not too high if it lead the youth of our generation, on the one hand, to graver thoughts of duty and propriety, and the public, on the other, to a sterner

⁵⁷⁸ The *Daily Telegraph*, 6 April 1895, quoted in Jonathan Goodman, *op cit.*, p.76.

impatience with those who, under the name of Art, or some other pretence, insidiously poison our stage, our literature, our drama, and the outskirts of our press.⁵⁷⁹

The pronouncement of such grave sentiments was not the prerogative of newspapers alone. The *National Observer*, a weekly political journal, published a leading article viciously attacking Wilde, even going so far as to suggest that Wilde kill himself, thereby sparing society the pain and embarrassment of another trial.

There is not a man or woman in the English-speaking world possessed of the treasure of a wholesome mind who is not under a deep debt of gratitude to the Marquess of Queensberry for destroying the High Priest of the Decadents. The obscene impostor whose prominence has been a social outrage ever since he transferred from Trinity Dublin to Oxford his vices, his follies, and his vanities, has been exposed, and that thoroughly at last. But to the exposure there must be legal and social sequels. There must be another trial at the Old Bailey, or a coroner's inquest – the latter for choice; and the Decadents, or their hideous conceptions of the meaning of Art, of their worse than Eleusinian mysteries, there must be an absolute end.⁵⁸⁰

Art's celebration of the virtues of decadence and dissolution was simply too much for this writer to bear. Still, it remains a mystery why the writer of the article, knowing, as he pretended to, the truth about Wilde's character, would have thought Wilde capable of an act of "honour" such as suicide.

Given the sensational nature of the Wilde story and its popularity with the reading public, the newspapers seemed to feel obliged constantly to supply their readership with detailed updates regarding the numerous smaller practical matters which arose after the Queensberry libel trial. Beneath a long column announcing the arrests of

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

⁵⁸⁰ *National Observer*, 6 April 1895, quoted in H. Montgomery Hyde (ed.), *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p.156. Hyde notes that Charles Whibley, whom Donald L. Lawler refers to as the "henchman" of W.E. Henley, probably wrote the article. Whibley and Wilde had been at each other's throats previously in their extended literary debate in July 1890 over the artistic merits of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* which was conducted in the pages of the *Scots Observer*, a newspaper also edited by Henley.

Wilde and Alfred Taylor, the *Star* ran four separate paragraph-length articles, each with its own headline. Under “Lord Queensberry’s Threat” was printed Queensberry’s final message to Wilde, which had been sent at the close of the trial, but before the warrant had been issued for his arrest: “If the country allows you to leave, all the better for the country, but if you take my son with you I will follow you wherever you go and shoot you.”⁵⁸¹ “About ‘The Chameleon’” contained a notice from Messrs. Ward, Perk, and McKay, the publishers of the *Chameleon*, stating that they had stopped the sale of the magazine “directly as they were aware of the contents.”⁵⁸² “The Family Feud” stated Lord Percy Douglas’ position that he “and every member of [his] family, excepting [his] father (Queensberry), disbelieve absolutely and entirely the allegations of the defence.”⁵⁸³ Finally, “Oscar’s Plays Still Run” announced that Wilde’s plays were produced the previous night as usual (*An Ideal Husband* was being performed at the Haymarket, and *The Importance of Being Earnest* was at the St. James). “At neither place was there any hostile demonstration,” although the audiences appeared “much smaller than usual.” At the St. James Theatre, it was noted that:

at one or two places slightly discordant remarks were made, especially when references were made to the town of Worthing [where Wilde’s alleged indiscretions with one Alphonso Conway took place], but these chiefly came from the gallery and were of a trifling character.⁵⁸⁴

Wilde had been arrested on the evening of April 5, and had been interned in Holloway Gaol awaiting his arraignment and news of whether or not he would make bail.⁵⁸⁵ It was still not known at this time whether Wilde would be brought up on felony (sodomy) or misdemeanour (acts of “gross indecency”) charges. After three separate hearings before Sir John Bridge, the magistrate at the Bow Street Police Court, it was

⁵⁸¹ *The Star*, 6 April 1895.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁵ Wilde remained in custody from the date of his arrest through the end of his first criminal trial nearly a month later. After the jury failed to reach a verdict, Wilde was finally granted bail – see H. Montgomery Hyde (ed.), *The Trials of Oscar Wilde, op cit.*, p.162.

decided to charge Wilde with the misdemeanour and commit him to trial on April 19. Although he was technically obliged to grant bail since the offence was not a felony, Justice Bridge refused it because of the extreme gravity of the case, stating, "There is no worse crime than that with which the prisoners [referring also to Alfred Taylor] are charged."⁵⁸⁶

In the meantime, Lord Queensberry said in an interview with the *Star* that since the trial he had "been overwhelmed with congratulations from all quarters of the globe."⁵⁸⁷ He added:

You know, I have not much to do with distinguished people, but I had a very nice letter from Lord Claud [sic] Hamilton, and a kind telegram from Mr Charles Dandy, the actor, with "Hearty Congratulations," et cetera. Various clubs have telegraphed also. Here is a message: "Every man in the City is with you. Kill the ----!"⁵⁸⁸

Queensberry also said that he was "astounded at the abrupt conclusion [of the trial] and did not think Wilde half so bad a man as he had proved to be." He further noted that his son's (Lord Percy Douglas') statement that the family sided with Wilde was incorrect, for "his brother, Rev. Lord Archibald Douglas had written to the contrary." In a statement that he would later qualify, Queensberry reportedly "expressed his sorrow at the position of the strange apostle of aestheticism."⁵⁸⁹

The *Star* also printed an excerpt from the journal *Truth*, in which its editor, Henry Labouchere, M.P. (and author of section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, the statute under which Wilde was prosecuted), reflected on Wilde's extremely enjoyable but otherwise warped personality which was driven by what he interpreted as a pathological need for attention:

I have known Oscar Wilde off and on for years... clever and witty he unquestionably is, but I have always regarded him as somewhat wrong in the head, for his craving

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p.157.

⁵⁸⁷ *The Star*, 8 April 1895.

⁵⁸⁸ H. Montgomery Hyde (ed.), *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p.156.

⁵⁸⁹ *The Star*, 8 April 1895.

after notoriety seemed to me a positive craze. There was nothing he would not do to attract attention... "Insult me, throw mud at me, but only look at me" seemed to be his creed; and such a creed was never acted upon by any-one whose mind was not out of balance. So strange and wondrous is his mind when in an abnormal condition, that it would not surprise me if he were deriving a keen enjoyment from a position which most people, whether really innocent or guilty, would prefer to die rather than occupy.⁵⁹⁰

Labouchere's statement ironically contained a kernel of truth. As a result of the trial, Wilde had certainly received all the notoriety he could possibly desire, and more. Certainly, in a contrary moment, Wilde may have relished the spotlight, for he was doubtlessly the most discussed man in England,⁵⁹¹ but the enjoyment of his celebrity status must have been tempered by the knowledge of just how serious his predicament actually was, and ruined by an increased awareness of the pain, anguish, and humiliation which potentially lay in store for him.⁵⁹² Speculation was rife at the time, too, that Lord Alfred Douglas would also be charged along with Wilde and Taylor⁵⁹³. Such speculation was ill-informed, however, as indicated in this letter from George Wyndham, M.P., to his father:

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 11 April 1895.

⁵⁹¹ *Illustrated Police Budget*, 4 May 1895 - A caption under the illustration entitled "Scene at the Old Bailey" refers to the first criminal trial of Wilde as "the most sensational trial of the century"

⁵⁹² *The Illustrated Police News*, 20 April 1895. This issue reported that a "fortnight's confinement in Holloway Gaol has told severely on Wilde. He has lost a great deal of flesh. His face looks almost bloodless, and his eyes heavy and weary. He entered the dock [for his committal] with faltering steps, and, having obtained Sir John Bridge's permission to be seated, sank with a sigh of relief upon the narrow oak plank which does duty for a seat in the dock."

⁵⁹³ An excerpt from a letter from Charles Gill, the attorney who led the Crown's prosecution of Wilde and Taylor, to Hamilton Cuffe, the Director of Public Prosecutions, dated the 19 April 1895: "My dear Cuffe ...having regard to the fact that Douglas was an undergraduate at Oxford when Wilde made his acquaintance - the difference in their ages - and the strong influence that Wilde had obviously exercised over Douglas since that time, I think that Douglas, if guilty, may fairly be regarded as one of Wilde's victims.... I am afraid there is little room for doubt that immoral relations existed between them, yet if an attempt we made to prove anything definite, it would be found, I think, that the evidence available only disclosed a case of grave suspicion. ...Comments will no doubt be made as to Douglas not being prosecuted, but these comments are made by people who do not understand or appreciate the difficulties of proving such a case. ...". See Jonathan Goodman, *op cit.*, p.95.

I ought to tell you that I know on the authority of Arthur Balfour [Conservative M.P., later Prime Minister in 1902], who has been told the case by the lawyers who had all the papers, that Wilde is sure to be condemned, and that the case is in every way a very serious one, involving the systematic ruin of a number of young men. Public feeling is hostile to him among all classes.

There is no case against Bosie [Douglas], but he has associated himself with Wilde up to the last moment; and is spoken of as having known the witnesses who will be called. Men like Arthur [Balfour] and Lord Houghton, who have spoken to me, speak in kind terms of him; but are unanimous in saying that he had better go abroad for a year or two. ... But Wilde is, humanely speaking, sure to be imprisoned. I told Bosie so; and he agreed that it was almost certain.

Whatever is proved, it is common knowledge in London that there was a sort of secret society around the man Taylor.⁵⁹⁴

The fact that Balfour, a very influential and respected M.P., as well as a major player in the Conservative opposition to Rosebery's government, was at this early date closely following the developing situation surrounding the trial, indicates just how important and potentially explosive the case seemed to many in the highest government circles. I have already referred to Wilde's public criticism of Balfour in the Blunt trial and also while reviewing a book on Confucius - perhaps that explains Balfour's vested interest in the case, if one excludes the political significance. Wilde satirised, ridiculed, and castigated the establishment at every opportunity he got, and especially if the opportunity contained an Irish context. The anti-establishment epigrams found in many of Wilde's works had been stimulated by the ill treatment of Charles Stewart Parnell and by the anti-Home Rule bias of many English politicians. After the banning of *Salomé*, Wilde's motivation became more personal and he continued to satirise the establishment whenever an opportunity presented itself. Although *A Woman of No Importance* is not one of Wilde's best plays, it contains some of his most memorable anti-establishment epigrams, such as, "The English country gentleman galloping after a fox - the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable".⁵⁹⁵ He uses characters such as the American Hester Worsley, to castigate

⁵⁹⁴ The letter dated April 7, 1895 [less than two days after Wilde's arrest] is quoted in H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, pp. 161-162.

⁵⁹⁵ Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, pp. 465-483.

the shallowness and base materialism of the English establishment, delivering a scathing attack on the English upper classes:

You love the beauty that you can see and touch and handle, the beauty that you can destroy, and do destroy, but of the unseen beauty of life, of the unseen beauty of a higher life, you know nothing. You have lost life's secret. Oh, your English society seems to me shallow, selfish, foolish.⁵⁹⁶

Leading politicians including Arthur Balfour and Joseph Chamberlain attended the opening night of *A Woman of No Importance*. During the curtain calls, the actors received enthusiastic applause, but when the author was called there were boos. Richard Ellmann suggests that the audience may have been irritated by Hester's declaration that England 'lies like a leper in purple'.⁵⁹⁷ Wilde appears to have realised that he had gone too far, as the line was subsequently removed from the script. However, he returned to the attack in his next play *An Ideal Husband*, which is a satire on political corruption. Here again, Wilde uses epigrams most effectively to castigate the establishment. 'My dear father', Lord Goring remarks, 'Only people who look dull ever get into the House of Commons, and only people who are dull ever succeed there.'⁵⁹⁸

Returning to Wyndham's letter, the fact that there was apparently no case against Lord Alfred Douglas is perhaps less surprising, as Foldy indicated (and which I referred to in the previous chapter), since it was Queensberry who had directed the investigation which had uncovered all the evidence on Wilde. Given that Queensberry's reason for pursuing the attack on Wilde was to protect his son, it is only logical that he would have suppressed any evidence that might have incriminated Lord Alfred Douglas.

Wyndham's remark referring to the public hostility toward Wilde confirms other comments to this effect, which appeared repeatedly in newspaper accounts throughout

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 465-483.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 465-483.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 570.

the trials.⁵⁹⁹ While the palpability of hostile public feeling toward Wilde cannot be denied, neither can it be accurately determined whether such animosity preceded the trial or resulted from it. In a retrospective attempt to explain the psychological dynamics of what Frank Harris described as “an orgy of Philistine rancor” directed at Wilde, William Butler Yeats, who was living in London at the time of the trials, recalled that:

The rage against Wilde was also complicated by the Britisher’s jealousy of art and the artist, which is generally dormant but is called into activity when the artist has got outside his field into publicity of an undesirable kind. This hatred is not due to any action of the artist or eminent man; it is merely the expression of an individual hatred and envy, become collective because circumstances have made it so.⁶⁰⁰

What is most important is that although private opinion seems to have been divided as to whether Wilde was courageous or foolhardy to have pursued the case against Queensberry, and then to have refused to flee the country after the failure of his prosecution, public support for Wilde was virtually non-existent. The sad fact of the matter was that at this most crucial moment of his life, virtually all his friends had abandoned Wilde.⁶⁰¹ The social stigma attached to the alleged crime was so severe that it would have been unthinkable for anyone to defend Wilde’s lifestyle. To do so would have been to invite the panoptic eye of society to examine one’s own life. Efforts to differentiate between the man and his work seemed equally fruitless, which made it virtually impossible for anybody to speak out publicly on his behalf. Any defence of Wilde would necessarily have been construed as implying a defence of Wilde’s lifestyle.

⁵⁹⁹ On 24 April, Mr Charles Mathews, one of Wilde’s solicitors, applied for a postponement of the criminal trial against him until the next criminal sessions, on the grounds that the present state of public feeling against Wilde would prohibit an impartial trial. Mathews suggested that “the lapse of a month or so will give time for that feeling to subside and increase the chances of a fair and impartial trial.” Quoted in *The Star*, 24 April 1895.

⁶⁰⁰ H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p164n.

⁶⁰¹ Some of the notable exceptions were Bosie Douglas, Robert Ross, More Adey, Robert Sherard, and Ada and Ernest Levenson. See Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p.457.

One of the very few who dared speak out publicly on his behalf was Robert Buchanan, a well-known gadfly, progressive thinker, poet, playwright, novelist, and “frequent contributor to the *Daily Telegraph*.”⁶⁰² Courageously, Buchanan became Wilde’s foremost public champion between the end of the libel trial and the beginning of the first criminal trial. However, even Buchanan’s support was limited and qualified. His public defence of Wilde arose out of a deeply felt respect for the democratic principles of equality before the law, and from an admiration for Wilde’s literary contributions to society. Buchanan in no way defended Wilde’s alleged behaviour. Nevertheless, as the lone voice in Wilde’s corner, Buchanan is significant for sparking a spirited debate in the correspondence columns of the *Star*, an exchange of ideas whose main subject was the issue of Wilde’s pre-trial conviction by the Press. The main points of Buchanan’s argument were set forth in the first of his four letters to the newspaper:

Is it not high time that a little charity, Christian or anti-Christian, were imported into this land of Christian shibboleths and formulas? Most sane men listen on in silence while Press and public condemn to eternal punishment and obloquy a supposed criminal who has not yet tried or proved guilty.... I for one wished to put on record my protest against the cowardice and cruelty of Englishmen towards one who was, until recently, recognised as a legitimate contributor to our amusement, and who is, when all is said and done, a scholar and a man of letters. He may be all that public opinion avers him to be; indeed, he stands convicted already, out of his own mouth, of the utmost recklessness and folly; but let us bear in mind that his case still remains *sub judice*, that he is not yet legally condemned. Meanwhile, we are asked by the advocates of orthodox sensualism not merely to trample an untried man in the mire, but to expunge from the records of our literature all the writings, which, only yesterday, tickled our humour and beguiled our leisure...⁶⁰³

This passage can, of course, be read in any number of different ways. Two ways, however, stand out. In the first instance, Buchanan can be seen as generally chastising the public for its sheepishness and for the shortfall of clear Christian sentiments, especially faith, love, and charity. In the second instance, Buchanan can be seen as

⁶⁰² A pseudonymous correspondent of Buchanan’s, who signed himself “DIKE,” remarked, “Mr. Buchanan’s pen has often adorned the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*.” *The Star*, 25 April 1895.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid*, 16 April 1895.

criticising the Press and the government for the obviousness of their bias against Wilde, and as humanely sympathising with Wilde as the victim of an unfair trial.

Buchanan closed his letter with these words, "Let us ask ourselves, moreover, who are casting these stones, and whether they are those 'without sin amongst us,' or those who are themselves notoriously corrupt."⁶⁰⁴ Interestingly, Buchanan's closing remarks struck a nerve with Lord Queensberry. As was his wont, Queensberry responded immediately, shooting from the hip:

I have not the pleasure of Mr. Buchanan's acquaintance, but he seems to address a question to myself in this letter to your paper of 16 April when he says, "Who are casting these stones?" and are they without sin... is Mr. Buchanan himself without sin? I certainly don't claim to be so myself, though I am compelled to throw the first stone. Whether or not I am justly notoriously corrupt I am willing patiently to wait for the future to decide.⁶⁰⁵

This letter prompted a rejoinder from Buchanan who, while reiterating his claim that Wilde should be considered innocent until proven guilty, assured Queensberry that the Press, and not he had been the target of his ire. Even more importantly, Buchanan introduced a new issue into the debate. He suggested that Wilde, who was still technically innocent at the time, was being treated by the State as if he had already been convicted, and thus that he was being unnecessarily deprived of his civil rights:

I should like to ask on what conceivable plea of justice or expediency an accused person, not yet tried and convicted, is subjected to the indignities and inconveniences of their common prison, and denied, while a prisoner, the ordinary comforts to which he has been accustomed when at large? Why should his diet be regulated unduly? Why should he be denied the sedative of a harmless cigarette, more than ever necessary to a smoker in times of great mental anxiety? Why should not his friends visit him? Why, in short, should he not enjoy, as far as is practicable, all the privileges of an innocent man?⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 19 April 1895.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 20 April 1895.

Buchanan's plea on behalf of Wilde's legal rights was echoed in a letter from Lord Alfred Douglas to the editor of the *Star*. It lacked originality as Douglas did little but reiterate the basic points of Buchanan's first letter. No doubt the letter was intended to help Wilde, and while Douglas' hyperbole was not outrageous for the time, it is hard to imagine that such a sarcastic diatribe would have done much to enhance Buchanan's thoughtful and carefully reasoned argument:

When the great British public has made up its great British mind to crush any particular unfortunate whom it holds in its power, it generally succeeds in gaining its object... I feel therefore, that I am taking my life in my hands in daring to raise my voice against the chorus of the pack of those who are now hounding Mr. Oscar Wilde to his ruin; the more so as I feel assured that the public has made up its mind to accept me, as it has accepted everybody and everything connected with this case, at Mr Carson's valuation. I, of course, am the undutiful son who, in his arrogance and folly, has kicked against his kind and affectionate father... I appeal to interfere and to stay the hand of "Judge Lynch." And I submit that Mr. Oscar Wilde has been tried by the newspapers before he has been tried by a jury, that his case has been almost hopelessly prejudiced in the eyes of the public from whom the jury who must try the case will be drawn, and that he is practically being delivered over bound to the fury of a cowardly and brutal mob....⁶⁰⁷

This letter is perhaps more important and interesting for what it reveals about Douglas. The letter reflects Douglas' own narcissistic injury and his own suffering, arising from being deprived of his lover, best friend, and alter ego. He portrayed himself as a victim along with Wilde, and lashed out, on behalf of both of them, at their perceived oppressors, the British public and the Press. That he linked the perceived oppressors in a conspiratorial fashion can probably be attributed to the more or less justifiable paranoia, which usually accompanies the choice of a clandestine lifestyle. Psychologically, Douglas' attempt to appear publicly in the guise of Wilde's saviour might be seen as an attempt to compensate for possible feelings of inadequacy or helplessness resulting from his inability to alleviate Wilde's situation. From another perspective, it might also be seen as a way of belatedly assuming

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 19 April 1895.

responsibility in order to assuage possible guilt feelings about his own complicity in Wilde's predicament.⁶⁰⁸

The letters of Buchanan and Douglas apparently drew a number of responses, many of which, for reasons that were never articulated, the *Star* decided not to print.⁶⁰⁹ Two that were printed, either because they were seen to have expressed what might be regarded as "representative" views, or else because of their potential to incite further public comment, were signed with the upper-case pseudonyms, COMMON-SENSE and HELVELLYN. The use of pseudonyms in correspondence columns was a Victorian commonplace. John Stokes points out that correspondence columns provided many opportunities for professional writers, and that there is really no way of distinguishing between an ordinary reader and a professional writer, who may have been hired by the newspaper "to whip up heated debate" on a given topic in order to boost circulation.⁶¹⁰

The *Star's* headline, "Oscar Wilde: Two views of his Present Position," with the sub-headline, "Has he been Unfairly or Prematurely Judged by Magistrate and Public, or does "His Case Illustrate the Need of Prison Reform?" - framed the issues very neatly around the contents of the letters the editors had elected to print. COMMON-SENSE attacked Douglas' character and used his reputation as a "scoundrel" as a basis for rejecting the serious points that Douglas had raised on Wilde's behalf. Responded in particular to Douglas' description of the crime with which Wilde had been charged as "comparatively trifling," COMMON-SENSE retorted:

I apprehend, however, that the majority of decent English folk will fully endorse Sir John Bridge's sentiments as to the gravity of the offence with which Wilde is charged. Be that, however, as it may, it seems to me that Lord Alfred Douglas is the very last man on the face of creation who is entitled to express an opinion on the case whatever. His allegation of unfairness again Sir John Bridge - one of the kindest-

⁶⁰⁸ Isobel Murray, *op cit.*, p140. "In *De Profundis*, Wilde also postulates Douglas' secret guilt over his complicity in Wilde's downfall".

⁶⁰⁹ The *Star*, 22 April 1895. An editor's note reads: "We have received a host of other letters bearing on the Wilde case, which, for various reasons, we have decided not to publish."

⁶¹⁰ John Stokes, *In The Nineties*, *op cit.*, pp. 10-11.

hearted and most just magistrates that ever sat on the Bench - will be met by your readers with the disdain it merits.⁶¹¹

Whereas Douglas' lack of good character provided suitable grounds for the dismissal of his argument, Buchanan's "position, disinterestedness, and ability" entitled his opinions to "respectful attention" and serious consideration. COMMON-SENSE was more concerned with what Buchanan described as the unduly harsh and unfair treatment Wilde had been subjected to while in prison awaiting his arraignment and trial.

If he [Buchanan] considers that the regime of our prisons, as regards persons awaiting trial, is unduly severe, he has every right to say so; and for aught I know there may be much to be advanced both from his and other points of view. As a general question it is one that may very properly be discussed, but why it should be in any way be attached to the case of Wilde more than to that of any poor wretch who is awaiting "presentation at court" I altogether fail to see. I am not aware that it has been alleged that Wilde has been subjected to different treatment from that accorded to any other individual in precisely similar circumstances. If there were any such evidence, there might be some grounds for raising the question in connection with this case... I daresay Wilde misses his cigarettes, but not one whit more than "Bill Sykes" would his "clay." I confess my sympathies would be rather with the latter; but that, again, is neither here nor there.

Despite his protestations to the contrary, one cannot help thinking that it was precisely his contempt for Wilde's reputed sexual proclivities which incited COMMON-SENSE to prefer to sympathize with Bill Sykes, the "manly" murderer, rather than with Wilde, the effeminate dandy and alleged sodomite. The criticism of Buchanan's advocacy of special treatment for Wilde was certainly valid, as it effectively juxtaposed popular notions of the "natural" equality of all men with the elitist conception of the exceptional status of intellectuals in society. However, COMMON-SENSE'S assertion that Buchanan's criticisms of Wilde's treatment in prison were analogous to an indictment of the entire prison system appears almost as hyperbolic as

⁶¹¹ The *Star*, 22 April 1895.

Douglas' paranoid claim that the British public and Press were in conspiratorial collusion against himself and Wilde.

In contrast to COMMON-SENSE, HELVELLYN agreed with Buchanan and Douglas that the Press was prejudging Wilde. More interestingly, HELVELLYN compared Wilde's alleged criminal exploitation of young men to the widespread and culturally acceptable exploitation of young women by men, and in this way alluded to the deeply ingrained hypocrisy of the entire society, especially on matters of sex.

... in sexual errors, as in everything else, the real offence lies, and must always lie, in the sacrificing of another person in any way, for the sake of one's own pleasure or profit; and judged by this standard - which though not always the legal standard is certainly the only true moral standard - the accused is possibly no worse than those in society who condemn him. Certainly it is strange that a society which is continually and habitually sacrificing women to the pleasure of men, should be so eager to cast the first stone-except that it seems to be assumed that women are always man's lawful prey, and any appropriation or sacrifice of them for sex purposes quite pardonable and "natural."⁶¹²

On April 23, the editors of the *Star* noted that that they had again received "another large batch of letters on this subject, some of them from Liverpool, Middlesborough, and other far-off centres, but none expresses views different from those which have been published from other correspondents."⁶¹³ The heading of the column-"Oscar Wilde: Mr. Buchanan Pleads for a Brother Artist," and sub-heading, "And Says That Wilde Has Already Lost Everything That Can Make Life Tolerable" - Another Correspondent Holds Different Views of 'Christian Charity'" - summarises, for the most part, the contents of the letters. Buchanan, responding to the comments by COMMON-SENSE, paradoxically suggested that while he agreed that Wilde's exceptional status as an artist did not necessarily entitle him to any special treatment in prison, his natural sensitivity as an artist precluded him from handling the punishments as well as would a common criminal such as "Bill Sykes." In other words, Buchanan was worried that Wilde, despite his immense physical size, was too

⁶¹² *Ibid*, 22 April 1895.

⁶¹³ *Ibid*, 23 April 1895.

delicate and too highly-strung to tolerate the rigours of imprisonment, and suggested that if the Court could not provide Wilde with clemency, it should at least provide him with mercy.⁶¹⁴

Buchanan's next correspondent signed himself, "DIKE." It was DIKE'S intention to counter what was described as HELVELLYN'S "epistle," and to advance the notion that "Christian charity does not mean weakness and toleration of pagan viciousness." DIKE re-emphasized the seriousness of the alleged crime, and contested the charge of hypocrisy levelled by HELVELLYN. He also took the opportunity further to demonise Wilde on behalf of Christians everywhere. "DIKE" suggested that public outrage could only be mollified by the proverbial "pound of flesh."

When a man has offended the ears of all decent people, in the most ordinary sense, by openly flaunting the universal and not too exacting code of this world's morals, and by posing as the apostle of corruption, and all that is opposed to civilisation itself, it is not Christian Charity that has anything to do with it-until he has reversed his ways and rendered some satisfaction to an outraged public. The howls of execration, if they have reached "Helvellyn," are a healthy sign; and as to the erasure of a name from playbills, I say emphatically that I wonder why the productions themselves have not been withdrawn....⁶¹⁵

On the same day that a notice announced the sale of Wilde's possessions in order to help with expenses relating to the trial, Buchanan responded vigorously to DIKE'S "lying perversions of truth."⁶¹⁶ After characterising DIKE as an "anonymous coward" and someone who "snaps and gnaws at a fallen man," Buchanan addressed himself to "the only serious statement in 'DIKES' letter," which interpreted Wilde's abandonment of his prosecution of Queensberry as an admission of guilt. Buchanan argued that by withdrawing in the face of "unexpected evidence" Wilde had only done what was prudent and reasonable, and that DIKE had jumped to conclusions

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24 April 1895. The sale of Wilde's effects was described as a "sorrowful sight," in part because "the buyers were for the most part brokers of a very ordinary character with loud voices and much chaff, and they smoked shag to the general discomfort. Shag in Oscar Wilde's sanctum!"

based on evidence whose precise contents and sources had yet to be examined and understood. He further defended Wilde by saying that “two thirds of all Mr. Wilde has written is purely ironical, and it is only because there are now told that the writer is a wicked man that people begin to consider his writings wicked [also].”⁶¹⁷ Although Buchanan may not have been aware of it, his sentiments echoed those expressed by Walter Pater in his review of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Pater suggested that rather than being a work of decadence, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was a “work of the highest morality,” since its “whole purpose [was] to point out the effect of selfish indulgence and sensuality in destroying the character of a beautiful human soul.” Pater had said that the “story [was] also a vivid, though carefully considered, exposure of the corruption of a soul, with a very plain moral, pushed home, to the effect that vice and crime make people coarse and ugly.”⁶¹⁸

In closing his letter, Buchanan claimed that he had even “heard from the Marquess of Queensberry’s own lips that he would gladly, were it possible, set the public an example of sympathy and magnanimity [sic].” This, of course, prompted an immediate rebuttal from Queensberry, never one to let an error go uncorrected, who took “exception to the word sympathy that [was] placed in [his] mouth.”

In my time I have helped to cut up and destroy sharks. I had no sympathy for them, but may have felt sorry and wished to put them out of pain as soon as possible. What I did say was that as Mr. Wilde now seemed to be on his beam ends and utterly down I did feel sorry for his awful position, and that supposing he was convicted of those loathsome charges brought against him that were I the authority that had to mete out to him his punishment, I would treat him with all possible consideration as a sexual pervert of an utterly diseased mind, and not as a sane criminal. If this is sympathy, Mr. Wilde has it from me to that extent.⁶¹⁹

Appearing on the same page as Queensberry’s letter was a curiously obsequious reply to Buchanan from DIKE, who, in essence, claimed that he had been responding to

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁸ Walter Pater, “A Novel by Mr. Oscar Wilde,” in Jennifer Uglow (ed.), *Walter Pater: Essays on Literature and Art* (London: Everyman’s Library, 1990), pp. 163-164.

⁶¹⁹ *The Star*, 25 April 1895.

HELVELLYN'S letter and not Buchanan's, and therefore that he did not deserve to be the object of Buchanan's scathing remarks. It is difficult to say with what regard opinions expressed in the columns of the *Star* were held by their readership, but in any event, it was DIKE who had the last word on Wilde, and that word was negative.

Wilde's own opinion of how the trial was being perceived by the public was more or less in concert with the sentiments there were being expressed in the newspapers. Recalling his feelings in *De Profundis*, he wrote that

... outside a small set in those two cities [London and Oxford], the world looks on you [Douglas] as the good young man who was very nearly tempted into wrong doing by the wicked and immoral artist, but was rescued just in time by his kind and loving father.⁶²⁰

Wilde saw the trial as a family quarrel between father and son which should have been contained within the domestic sphere, but which had spilled over instead and was now "being played on a high stage in History, with the whole world as an audience, and [himself] as the prize for the victor in the contemptible contest."⁶²¹ The public debate over Wilde ended as the criminal trial began. Despite the inconclusive results and the need for a retrial, once this first criminal trial was over there seemed little else that could be said about him, or on his behalf. Most of Wilde's secrets had been bared, and his dirty linen aired, all to the general disgust of the British public. Yet, even after five gruelling days of the most amazing revelations, the *Morning* could still write, "Society feels that a gross public scandal has not yet been probed to its depths; and that a great mass of loathsome evidence must once more be heard in open court."⁶²² Surely by this the *Morning* was expressing the opinion that the proper conclusion of the trial had not yet been reached. Certainly, the Press's handling of the criminal trial served to raise public expectations that Wilde would be found guilty, and since Wilde's conviction was already, in most minds, a *fait accompli*, it came as a bit of a with surprise when the first criminal trial ended in a hung jury.

⁶²⁰ Isobel Murray, *op cit.*, p.140.

⁶²¹ *Ibid*, p.147.

⁶²² *Morning*, 2 May 1895.

By the end of the second criminal trial, though, most people had grown tired of having the details of Wilde's private life constantly thrust before them on the pages of their daily newspaper. There was a little suspense regarding the outcome of the second trial given what had happened in the first, and a collective sigh of relief must have escaped when Justice Wills pronounced sentence on Wilde and thus put an end to one of the most difficult and fascinating cases in British legal history. The harsh sentence seemed to satisfy the public's need for retribution, and this, along with the public's loss of interest in the case due to its overexposure in the Press for two long months, reasonably explains the muted public reaction to Wilde's sentencing and imprisonment. While there were no doubt a few, such as Robert Buchanan and most of Wilde's close friends, who privately feared that Wilde would not be able to handle the conditions in prison, the overwhelming general sentiment was that Wilde had simply got what he deserved.

Wilde lost his libel suit against Lord Queensberry on 5 April 1895. On 6 April he was immediately arrested, accused of practising 'gross indecency', and prosecuted by the Crown. He had to endure two further trials: the jury, which met 26 April 1895, was unable to reach a unanimous verdict at the end of the trial on 1 May. The second trial opened on 20 May 1895 and five days later Wilde's fate was sealed.

Public outrage, registered by the press, at how the darling of the aristocracy and prince of aesthetes had conned their admiration and respect, was astonishing. Journalists reported every detail of the libel case as it was tried and on 6 April 1895 Wilde's name, "The Man Wilde", was emblazoned in headlines and dragged through leader columns in zealous acts of public purification. Vilification did not stop at Wilde ("pestiferous *poseur*"); the entire literary school with which he was associated fell instantly into the same disrepute (" 'Decadence' among us has received a death-blow"). "Great names" had to be rescued from contamination: Keats, Ruskin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and the figure "as pure and high as the name of CHRISTINA ROSSETTI" were dragged from the mire.⁶²³

The *Daily Telegraph* was typical in its method of attack:

⁶²³ *Chronicle*, 6 April 1895. Cited in Anne Varty, *op cit.*, p.32.

The pranks of POSTLETHWAITE... were innocent so long as they were merely aesthetic. But, in spasmodic search for ancient graces...the worst and boldest of these innovators set themselves to import into the healthy and honest English art and life the pagan side of bygone times, with all its cynicism, scepticism and animalism. Everybody can see and read for himself, and every wholesome-minded Englishman must grieve to notice how largely this French and Pagan plague has filtered into the healthy for the ills of British life.

The superfine 'Art' which admits no moral duty and laughs at the established phrases of right and wrong is the visible enemy of those ties and bonds of society - the natural affections, the domestic joys, the sanctity and sweetness of the home.⁶²⁴

English culture is pictured as innately and essentially 'wholesome', only temporarily corrupted by the plague-ridden foreigner, whose vices are exposed by the native individual (The Marquis of Queensberry) and punished by native justice. The suggestion which even the conservative critic Matthew Arnold made - that the role of literature is to "teach us how to live" - is forgotten in the rush to claim the moral high ground. 'Postlethwaite's' pranks were 'innocent' as long as merely 'aesthetic': that is, without bearing on conduct. But Wilde's enterprise had been to force the link that Arnold observed between literature and life.

The *Morning* was a lonely voice expressing a sense of the loss to cultural life, which would result from Wilde's fall:

Yet, with the contempt that one feels for such a person as Wilde, taking him only at his own estimate, there necessarily mingles an element of sadness. Let the result of the criminal proceedings now taken against him by the police be what they may, the world already sees in him a man who was writing his way to an assured literary position, who held a conspicuous place in the better sort of Bohemian society, who, both in a social and literary sense, had the ball at his foot, and who has flung all his chances away. It is inexplicable. For its own sake the stage may well regret this turn of events.

People laughed at, as well as with, him, but they crowded to see his plays. And now farce has turned to tragedy.⁶²⁵

⁶²⁴ *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 April 1895.

⁶²⁵ *The Morning*, 6 April 1895.

Rather belatedly after the trial the *Chronicle* announced that “[e]verybody has suspected and feared: nobody - no decent person - has known.”⁶²⁶ Wilde’s arrest forced the visibility of his sexual practice, and homosexuality in general, into the public arena. And the public was shocked, having been forced to acknowledge what it chose to disregard regarding the revelations about the private life of a prominent cultural player. But Wilde had been skilful in concealing the nature of his conduct from friends to whom his private sexuality was irrelevant. One of his oldest friends and earliest biographers, R.H. Sherard, had failed to see this aspect of Wilde’s life until the trials and later adopted a number of strategies to explain away Wilde’s homosexuality. Lord Alfred Douglas, self-appointed guardian of Wilde’s posthumous reputation, wrote to Sherard on 17 October 1929:

You are not and never have been competent to write about Oscar, because obviously you never knew what his real life and character were. Oscar knew you well and at one time liked you very much, *but he carefully concealed from you the side of his life and character which governed his conduct.*⁶²⁷

Sherard published this letter, together with his own extraordinary defence of Wilde in 1933, in a pamphlet where Sherard is fighting several enemies at once, including the interpretation *Oscar Wilde*, offered by the French psychologist, Renier in 1933:

Renier... disregards the fact that when by the hideous alchemy of *psychopathia sexualis* the benign Jekyll in Wilde was transmuted into the depraved Mrs Hyde, his acts were manifestly Masochist and feminine and in no wise the virile and sadist performances of a Sodomite.

The squalid details of Wilde’s offences are available to all and the perusal of them establishes as clear a case of feminine masochism as is anywhere recorded...and as Renier ought to know, no offences other than those were charged are proven against

⁶²⁶ The *Chronicle*, 6 April 1895.

⁶²⁷ Cited in Robert H. Sherard, *A Letter From Lord Alfred Douglas on André Gide’s Lies About Himself and Oscar Wilde. Set forth with comments by Robert Harborough Sherard* (Calvi (Corsica): The Vindex Publishing Co., 1933), p.7.

Mrs Wilde-Hyde. Wilde was homosexual and irresponsible. Gide and Renier wish to send him down to posterity as a sodomite and the criminal.⁶²⁸

In grasping at the explanations offered by a prejudiced 'psychology' about homosexuality, Sherard seeks to restore the honourable reputation of his friend. Although his account now sounds so bizarre as to be laughable, Sherard was building on a branch of serious psychological discipline, which circulated during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Wilde had mocked related disciplines in 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime', while he availed himself of it in his desperate plea to the Home Secretary in 1896 for an early release from prison:

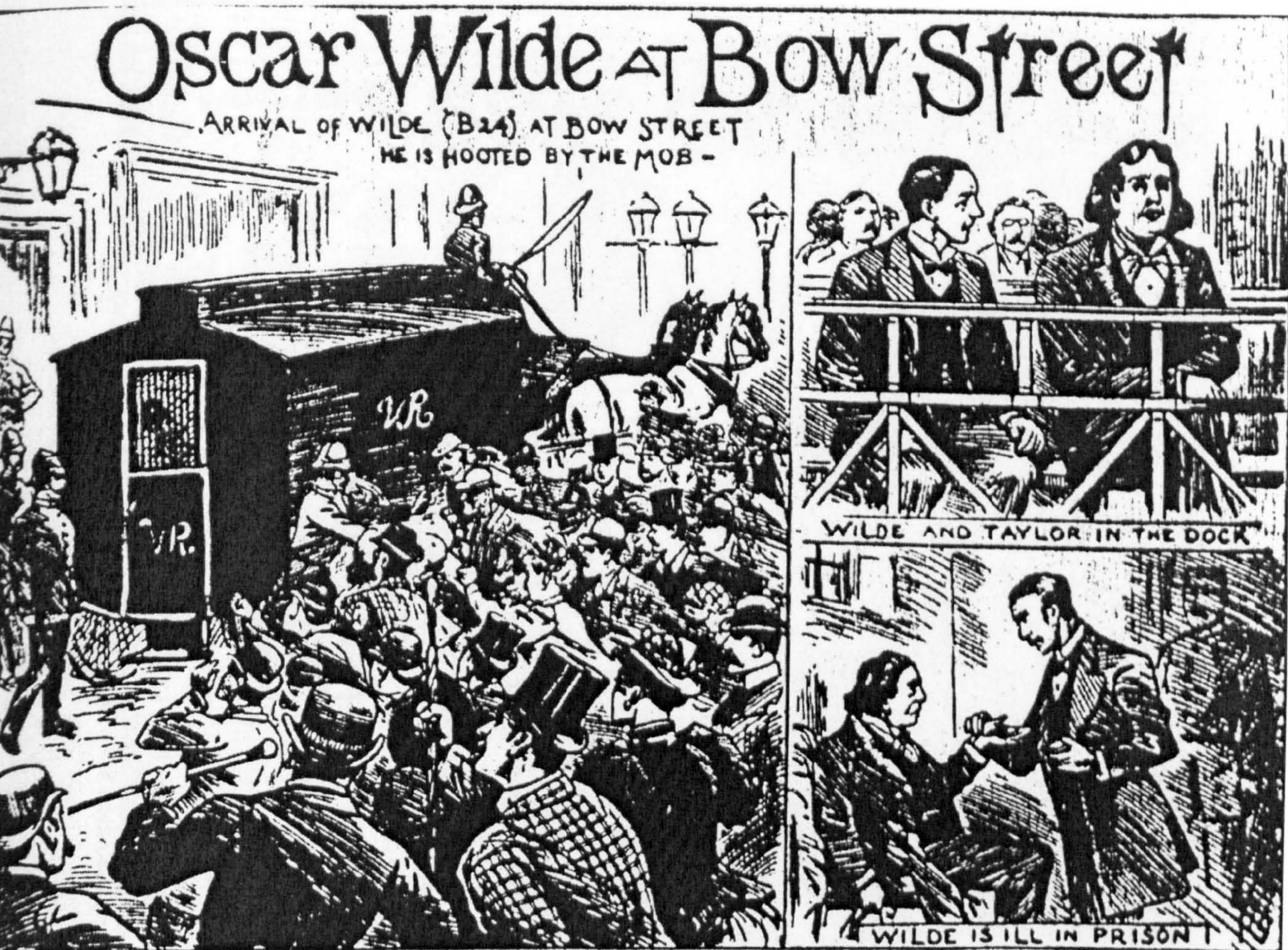
The petitioner is fully conscious now... that his whole life, for the two years preceding his ruin, was the prey of absolute madness - the insanity of perverted sexual instinct is the one most dominant in its action on the brain.⁶²⁹

In an earlier petition to the Home Secretary for release (I examine this petition in greater detail in the next chapter), Wilde argued that he had suffered from a form of sexual madness, that his punishment was inappropriate, and that he should be treated as a patient suffering from an illness rather than imprisoned as criminal. He named new studies by the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso and Nordau's controversial work *Degeneration*, which inferred that an artistic mind and temperament such as his was most susceptible to this malady, this sexual illness. *Degeneration* (1895), the English title of *Entartung* (1893), contained a chapter called 'Decadents and Aesthetes', which discussed Wilde at length as an example of the neurotic whose diseased art was provoked by too fine a sensitivity to the stressful urban environment of modern Europe. Nordau responded wholeheartedly to the evidence supplied in support of his theories by Wilde's trials, and updated his study accordingly for the third edition in 1896. There were many sceptical responses, most distinguished among which in Britain was Shaw's 'A Degenerate's View of Nordau' (July 1895), revised as *The Sanity of Art* in 1908 and which I will speak more about in the next chapter.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid*, p.4.

⁶²⁹ *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (ed.), Rupert Hart-Davis (London, Hart-Davis, 1962), p.411.

Illustrations F



The end of the First Act of Wilde's legal drama. Wilde experiences the less adulatory attention of the London mob as he is taken to Bow Street after Queensberry's acquittal.

Chapter Twelve: Crime, Sin and Suffering in Wilde's Writing

Wilde referred to as the two great turning-points of his life as when his father sent him to Oxford, and society sent him to prison; it is understandable then why the relationship between suffering, crime and art, permeates Oscar Wilde's writings. The genesis of this triumvirate originates from the second school of philosophical thought - Hegelianism, which greatly influenced Wilde's artistic ideology. According to John Edward Towes, Hegel "redefined the absolute as the dynamic self-embodiment of [human] reason rather than the self-expression of infinite life and insisted that philosophy rather than religion...was the ultimate medium in which the reconciliation of the autonomous subject with nature, society and God was finally accomplished."⁶³⁰

The impact of Hegel on late-Victorian Oxford, his replacement of John Stuart Mill as the bright undergraduate's philosopher of choice, produced what one contemporary called the "Second Oxford Movement." Arnold and, far more knowingly Wilde, participated in that movement - See his *Oxford Notebooks*, the preface concludes that Wilde "never gave up the Hegelian humanism he learned at Oxford."⁶³¹ Wilde adapted Hegel to the two essential forms of Oxonian cultural ideology, namely the political and the aesthetic. I have previously discussed the influence of Hegel on Wilde's socialist ideology, especially regarding artistic individualism; I wish to follow this by examining why Wilde concluded that criminality and artistry somehow complemented one another, or as he phrased it: "There is no essential incongruity between crime and culture."⁶³² And "crime... under certain circumstances, may be seen to have created individualism".⁶³³ Finally I wish to hypothesize on Wilde's theory of suffering as an essential act in artistic creativity.

There is an unfortunate lack of in-depth scholarship devoted to this particular area of Wilde's work at present, and a more serious re-examination regarding Wilde's incarceration is long overdue and would provide a welcome addition to the rubric of

⁶³⁰ John Edward Towes, *Hegelianism: The Path Towards Dialectical Humanism 1805-1841* (Cambridge, 1980), p.4 & p.51.

⁶³¹ Philip E. Smith & Michael S. Helfand, *Oscar Wilde's Notebooks, op cit.*

⁶³² Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p.93.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, pp.300-301.

Willean studies. Three noteworthy exceptions which do discuss this important facet of Wilde's life are Regenia Gagnier's edited volume of critical essays on Wilde,⁶³⁴ Isobel Murray's edited volume on Wilde's "Prison Writings";⁶³⁵ and Peter Allan Dale's essay 'Oscar Wilde: Crime and the "Glorious Shapes of Art" '.⁶³⁶ Dale's essay not only examines Wilde's early preoccupation with the potentiality which crime offered as integral subject matter for plot, but he also equates Wilde's personal experiences with crime and suffering, with his earlier ideologies concerning crime and art. According to Dale, amongst the many Victorian writers of fictions about crime, Oscar Wilde has the distinction of being perhaps the only one who was himself a criminal, criminal, that is, in the literal sense of having broken the law and being condemned to prison for it. He was in this remarkably like Thomas Griffith Wainwright, the subject of his essay "Pen, Pencil, and Poison": Thomas Griffith Wainwright -

Though of an extremely artistic temperament, followed many masters other than art, being not merely a poet and a painter, an art-critic, an antiquarian, and a writer of prose, an amateur of beautiful things and a dilettante of things delightful, but also a forger of no mean or ordinary capabilities, and as a subtle and secret poisoner almost without rival in this or any age.⁶³⁷

No less remarkable is Wilde's conclusion in that essay that criminality and artistry somehow complement one another, or as he words it:

That he had a sincere love of art and nature seems to me quite certain. There is no essential incongruity between crime and culture. We cannot re-write the whole of history for the purpose of gratifying our moral sense of what should be.⁶³⁸

Wilde could never have fully grasped the significance of those words when he wrote them in 1888, more than seven years before being remanded to Pentonville prison for

⁶³⁴ Regenia Gagnier (ed.), *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde*, (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1991).

⁶³⁵ Isobel Murray, *op cit.*

⁶³⁶ Peter Allan Dale 'Oscar Wilde: Crime and the "Glorious Shapes of Art" ', *The Victorian Newsletter*, (Fall, 1995), pp.1-5.

⁶³⁷ Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p.1093.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid*, p.1106.

crimes of his own. Later, in the period immediately preceding his imprisonment and during it, he came to have a much clearer understanding of the congruity between art and crime. It is this understanding and its bearing on the development of late-Victorian aestheticism which Dale explores so well:

That crime is, in fact, a constant preoccupation of Wilde's writing may not be immediately evident. Yet, if we consider, there is scarcely a fiction or drama or even an essay of his that does not touch upon the problem of hidden crime and the fear of its discovery. From Guido Ferrante's desire to tell the "dreadful tale of sin...upon [his] soul" in the very early *Duchess of Padua* (157), to Lord Arthur Saville's realization that "another could decipher...[his] fearful secret of sin, [his] blood-red sign of crime..." (16) to Gilbert's admiration for Stendhal's ability to "track the soul into its most secret places" and "make life confess its dearest sins", in *The Critic As Artist* (*Intentions* 215), all Wilde's writing is a kind of rehearsal for *De Profundis*, which seems to say, like the *Inferno* to which it repeatedly alludes, that there is no higher writing than writing about crime.⁶³⁹

Wilde was not the only one to believe that crime and art were intrinsically linked; the prosecution in the trials believed it, a hostile press believed it, and as Regenia Gagnier has observed:

Popular criminology also linked crime and art - thereby conditioning middle-class suspicion of art and encouraging their divorce; and today it is impossible to know who took the vocabulary of disease, degeneration, and genius from whom.⁶⁴⁰

Several books by the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1836-1909) had been translated into English and were popular enough that in prison Wilde cited Lombroso's theories on "the intimate connection between madness and the literary and artistic temperament" in his appeal to the Home Secretary for an attenuated sentence. I have already referred to this letter in the last chapter, and I have included it here in its entirety as I wish to expand further on my comments from Chapter Eleven.

⁶³⁹ Peter Allan Dale, *op cit.*, p.1.

⁶⁴⁰ Regenia Gagnier (ed.), *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde*, (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1991), p31

To The Home Secretary

2 July 1896

H.M. Prison, Reading

To the Right Honourable Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department. The Petition of the above-named prisoner humbly sheweth that he does not desire to attempt to palliate in any way the terrible offences of which he was rightly found guilty, but to point out that such offences are forms of sexual madness and are recognised as such not merely by modern pathological science but by much modern legislation, notably in France, Austria, and Italy, where the laws affecting these misdemeanours have been repealed, on the grounds that they are diseases to be cured by a physician, rather than crimes to be punished by a judge. In the works of eminent men of science such as Lombroso and Nordau, to take merely two incidents out of many, this is specially insisted on with reference to the intimate connection between madness and the literary and artistic temperament, Professor Nordau in his book on "Degenerescence" [sic] published in 1894 having devoted an entire chapter to the petitioner as a specially typical example of this fatal law.⁶⁴¹

It is difficult to believe that Wilde was sincere, and really believed that his sexual proclivities were induced by some sort of disease or mental illness. This response was undoubtedly the result of the terrible physical and mental torment experienced by Wilde during his incarceration - it reveals the anguished state of mind he was in, it exposes the desperate feeble attempts he was willing to try on the chance of obtaining an early release, and thus end his torment and suffering. However, his moving, and emotionally charged defence of Hellenic love, the "love that dare not speak its name" during the trials, negates any credence that he actually believed in, or was sincere about the content of that first paragraph in the petition. Rupert Hart-Davis infers as much in a footnote:

If this appeal seems a little desperate and exaggerated, the reader should remember that Wilde had already been in prison for more than a year, a shattering experience for one of his temperament and circumstances, and had begun to suffer from the painful ear-disease which was to kill him four years later.⁶⁴²

⁶⁴¹ Rupert Hart-Davis, *Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (Oxford University Press, 1979), p.142

⁶⁴² *Ibid*, p.142

Typically, Wilde had the last word on the subject; a few weeks after he left prison a journalist in Paris asked his opinion on “Nordau’s firm belief that all men of genius were mad.” “I quite agree,” the exile reportedly said, “with Dr. Nordau’s assertion that all men of genius are insane, but Dr. Nordau forgets that all sane people are idiots.”⁶⁴³

Gagnier has revealed that Lombroso’s *Man of Genius*, included in the Contemporary Science Series edited by Havelock Ellis, specifically addressed itself to the connection between education, superior intelligence, art, and crime.

His enumeration of symptoms of insanity reads like a checklist of the elements of Wilde’s style, literary and personal: “In literature and science, a tendency to puns and plays upon words, an excessive fondness for systems, a tendency to speak of one’s self, and substitute epigram for logic, an extreme predilection for the rhythm and assonances of verse in prose writing, even an exaggerated degree of originality may be considered as morbid phenomena. So also is the mania of writing in Biblical form, in detached verses, and with special favourite words, which are underlined, or repeated many times, and a certain graphic symbolism.”⁶⁴⁴

Similarly in Lombroso’s *Crime: Its causes and Remedies*, sexual crimes and crimes of fraud - a crime associated with Wilde’s Thomas Griffith Wainwright - are “the specific crimes of advanced civilization.” Regarding the former, he wrote,

It seems that the more a man’s psychic activity increases, the more the number of his needs and tastes for pleasures grows, especially when his mind is not occupied with great scientific and humanitarian ideas, and when his wealth permits an over-abundant diet. Of all these, the sexual need is certainly that which is most keenly felt, and this is that which, throughout the whole animal world, is in the closest connection with the cerebral system.⁶⁴⁵

Although these descriptions eerily, and uncannily to a certain extent, ring true of Wilde, the proposal is preposterous and no more than a quirk of ironic coincidence.

⁶⁴³ Chris Healy, “Oscar Wilde and Zola,” *Today*, 26 November 1902, p.145.

⁶⁴⁴ Regenia Gagnier, *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p.31

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.31

Gagnier gives other examples of criminal or sexual deviancy that is later linked with art or education and obviously Wilde. The term 'pervert', which, as Lombroso might have said, was a special favourite, underlined and repeated so many times in the press and popular criminology, had been once reserved for the Oxford converts to Roman Catholicism; genius, mysticism, and surreptitious sexuality formed another notorious triad in representations of colleges as well as those of monasteries and convents in gothic novels. By the 1890's, the *Spirit Lamp*, to which Wilde contributed, and the *Chameleon*, which included "The Priest and the Acolyte," the two poems by Douglas that elicited such scrutiny during the trials, and Wilde's "Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young," seemed to indicate to the middle classes that the products of "genius" and "education" required some immediate control.

As previously mentioned, George Bernard Shaw totally refuted Nordau's ideology espoused in *Entartung* (1893) and translated into English as *Degeneration* (1895). Chapter 3 ("Decadents and Aesthetes") of Book Three ("Ego-Mania") referred to Wilde most unfavourably in these contexts and included explicit attacks on artists as criminals, but Wilde's trials quickly rendered such judgements obsolete. Shaw answered Nordau's claims in the American paper *Liberty* (1895) and later republished his essay for the New Age Press (1908) under the title *The Sanity of Art: An Exposure of the Current Nonsense About Artists Being Degenerate*.⁶⁴⁶

In *De Profundis*, Wilde, still a master of the epigram, wonderfully epitomises his career. He summarises, once again the two great turning points of his life, as when his father sent him to Oxford and when society sent him to prison. If the first institution helped to formulate the young Wilde's ideology concerning art and life, then his personal experience with the second establishment both strengthened and radically altered his embryonic doctrine concerning crime, suffering, and art. Wilde returned to the dualistic relationship of suffering (sacrifice) and beauty (art).

⁶⁴⁶ Shaw's attack on Nordau uses the scientific/literary critic's weapons against him. Nordau claims that rhyme, poetic inconsistency, and repetition indicate general softening of the brain and body, and Shaw cites examples of Nordau's own echolalia (*Sanity of Art*, p.80) Nordau denounces socialism and other forms of discontent and social critique in the arts as stigmata of degeneracy, and Shaw cites Nordau's own lengthy passages expressing dissatisfaction with the social order *Sanity of Art*, pp.94-97.

You came to me to learn the Pleasure of Life and the Pleasure of Art. Perhaps I am chosen to teach you something much more wonderful, the meaning of Sorrow, and its beauty.⁶⁴⁷

Wilde's chronological treatment/experience of suffering, as derived from his writing, is even more interesting than that of his ideology on crime. Much of Wilde's work features the themes of sorrow and suffering. His poems, fairy tales, prose poems, his play *Vera*, and essays, all contain examples of human suffering, the one experience above all else which Wilde detested yet repeatedly experienced after his fall from grace, an experience which he eventually came to accept and even embrace for its latent qualities of individual integrity and artistic inspiration when modelled on Christ. According to Richard Ellmann, until his conviction Wilde liked to picture himself as the type of artist-criminal, although an iconoclastic, non-conforming artistic rebel was probably closer to the mark.

But afterwards [the conviction] he saw himself in the nobler role of sufferer, of scapegoat instead of scapegrace. His thoughts revolved increasingly around Christ, whom in *De Profundis* he called the supreme artist because of his recognition and forgiveness of all aberrant behaviour. This spirit of forgiveness animates "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," where the malefactor is identified with the other prisoners and then with all humanity. Wilde avoided putting himself forward bluntly as society's victim, but his early death hallowed his life for others who took the hints he had so prodigally broadcast. He became, then, for many an embodiment of the Christ-like artist.⁶⁴⁸

Probably some of the earliest examples of Wilde discussing the theme of suffering can be found in his fairy tales. *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888) includes many stories, which evoke the emotions of human suffering. Although "The Happy Prince" began as a story Wilde told to students at Cambridge, the published version contains a reference to "Charity Children" (95). These are, according to H. Montgomery Hyde, "foundlings and orphans" (*Plays, Prose and Poems*, p.105) The story also refers to "two little boys...lying in one another's arms to try and keep

⁶⁴⁷ Oscar Wilde Rupert Hart-Davis, *Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (Oxford University Press, 1979)

⁶⁴⁸ Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde A Collection Of Critical Essays* (Prentice Hall International, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1969), p.5.

themselves warm beneath a bridge.” They are hungry and chased out into the rain by a watchman (p.102) Here Wilde shows a concern for issues he would discuss in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891).

Clifton Snider in his essay “Eros and Logos in Some Fairy Tales by Oscar Wilde: A Jungian Interpretation”⁶⁴⁹ describes the period in which Wilde was writing these fairy tales. Snider argues that Wilde wrote during a time when a large number of children were homeless and forced to do adult work and Snider refers to the authors of *Oscar Wilde’s London*⁶⁵⁰, to describe the conditions in London’s East End during that period:

The degradation’s, and above all the overcrowding, of the East End slums led to indiscriminate sexuality, incest, and child abuse. Constantly fighting for their existence and inured to pain and brutality, a shocking large number of women and even children became night house tarts, courtesans, sailor’s whores, dolly-mops (promiscuous servant girls), synthetic virgins (whose hymens were repaired), and catamites (boy prostitutes).⁶⁵¹

Squalor, suffering, starvation and exploitation were daily challenges confronting the underprivileged in Victorian Britain. Wilde had always defended and championed the most repressed sections of society - the poor, the weak, women, children, the disadvantaged - as they were the most susceptible to human suffering. Wilde repeatedly used his fairy tales to metaphorically emphasise the terrible discrepancies between the social classes of his day, between those who lived in luxury and those who lived in misery. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, children’s literature was mainly religious and instructional and according to Snider who quotes Jack Zipes, one of the foremost contemporary fairy-tale scholars, ‘if literary fairy tales were written and published, they were transformed into didactic tales preaching hard

⁶⁴⁹ Clifton Snider, “Eros and logos in Some Fairy Tales by Oscar Wilde: A Jungian Interpretation, *The Victorian Newsletter*, (Fall, 1993), pp.1-8.

⁶⁵⁰ Von Eckhardt, Wolf, Sander L. Gilman and J. Edward Chamberlin, *Oscar Wilde’s London: A Scrapbook of Vices and Virtues, 1800-1900*, (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1987)

⁶⁵¹ Clifton Snider, *op cit.*, p.4.

work and pious behaviour.’⁶⁵² As late as 1820, a Mrs. Sherwood of the “anti-fairy-tale school” wrote in her book *The Governess, or The Little Female Academy*:

Fairy-tales...are in general an improper medium of instruction because it would be absurd in such tales to introduce Christian principles as motive of action.... On this account such tales should be sparingly used, it being difficult, if not impossible, for the reason I have specified, to render them really useful.⁶⁵³

Both Snider and Zipes acknowledge that this attitude totally changed as the century progressed - artists realised the potential of the fairy tale, as an attractive medium for conveying a message to the reader, young or old. The vast majority of

Victorians who wrote fairy tales were concerned with promoting both imagination and moral improvement in middle-class children, as well as middle-class adults, yet many tales sought also to “convey both individual and social protest and personal conceptions of alternative, if not utopian, worlds”⁶⁵⁴

Zipes reveals that from 1840 to 1880 the important fairy tale writers such as John Ruskin and George MacDonald tended to use the genre “in innovative ways to raise social consciousness about the disparities among the different social classes and the problems faced by the oppressed due to the industrial revolution.” And at the same time, many of these writers wanted “to recapture and retain childhood as a paradisiacal realm of innocence.”⁶⁵⁵

Snider believes that Wilde wrote his fairy tales not only to amuse and entertain his children, but also to undermine stereotypical Victorian values. Zipes notes that “Wilde was highly disturbed by the way society conditioned and punished young people if they did not conform to the proper rules.... he had always been sensitive to the authoritarian schooling and church rigidity which most English children were expected to tolerate.” To Zipes, Wilde’s “purpose” in writing his fairy tales was

⁶⁵² Jack Zipes, (ed.), *Victorian Fairy Tales: The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves*, (New York: Methuen, 1987), p.xiv.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. xvi-xvii.

⁶⁵⁴ Clifton Snider, *op cit.*, p.2. Also see Jack Zipes, *op cit.*, pp. xviii-xix.

⁶⁵⁵ Zipes, *Ibid* , pp. xix-xx.

“subversion”: “He clearly wanted to subvert the messages conveyed by [Hans] Andersen’s tales, but more important his poetical style recalled the rhythms and language of the Bible in order to counter the stringent Christian code.”⁶⁵⁶

In June 1888 Wilde wrote to G.H. Kersley informing him that *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* were, ‘meant partly for children, and partly for those who have kept the childlike faculties of wonder and joy, and who find in simplicity a subtle strangeness.’⁶⁵⁷ He later told the American novelist, playwright and poet, Amelie Rives Chanler, that the tales were “written, not for children, but for childlike people from eighteen to eighty.”⁶⁵⁸ Wilde understood the universal popularity which fairy tales held for both children and adults as a medium for enchanting entertainment; alternatively, he shrewdly recognised the potentiality which they possessed for exposing the evils of society - poverty, starvation and suffering to his audience, who were predominately from the privileged classes. Using the fairy tale as a subtle form of subversion, Wilde paradigms Christ’s use of the parable as his favourite *modus operandi* in informing and instructing his people.

In this final section I will briefly examine Wilde’s fascination and preoccupation with Christ, personal suffering and art. I hope to establish how Wilde sought succour, comfort and enlightenment from Christ’s suffering and crucifixion; and used Christ as an inspirational exemplar in achieving some form of contrite inner peace with his troubled inner-self. Two of the best essays examining Christ’s influence on Wilde are G. Wilson Knight’s “Christ and Wilde”⁶⁵⁹ and Br. John Albert, O.C.S.O., “The Christ of Oscar Wilde.”⁶⁶⁰ While Wilde’s attraction and relationship with religion vacillated

⁶⁵⁶ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*, (New York: Methuen, 1983), p.114.

⁶⁵⁷ Rupert Hart-Davis, (ed.), *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (New York: Harcourt, 1962), p219.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.237.

⁶⁵⁹ G. Wilson Knight, “Christ and Wilde”, *The Christian Renaissance*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962), pp.287-300. Source reference, quoted from Richard Ellmann, ed., *Oscar Wilde A Collection Of Critical Essays*, *op cit.* pp.138-149.

⁶⁶⁰ John Albert, O.C.S.O., “The Christ of Oscar Wilde”, reprinted in part from *American Benedictine Review* 39, no.4 (December 1988): pp.372-403. Source reference, quoted from Regenia Gagnier, (ed.), *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, pp. 241-257.

from Freemasonry to Catholicism, his admiration of Christ, as the consummate embodiment of the ideal individual artist, never waned. According to Knight:

Throughout Wilde's thought-adventures there is this analysis of the interrelationship of soul, beauty and Christian goodness. Somehow there must be a harmony and a permanence and a creative result. But how? Perhaps the truth can only be tragically defined; and perhaps, from the depths, he realised this. Not only was Wilde's a quest of a high order, but it had strong Christ-like affinities. The New Testament wavelength and biblical style of the Parables is obvious; and from his youth onwards Wilde was deeply attracted, and in his works again and again engaged, by the Christian religion.⁶⁶¹

Wilde said in *De Profundis*, "tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation"; he realised the dangers of 'feasting with panthers', yet he continued to recklessly exhibit his irreverence for social convention. This, according to Knight, does not mean that he did not suffer, but simply that he was impelled from the depths to put in train and abide by a sequence of events which would lead to suffering. As Lewis Broad put it, "the vision of St. Sebastian, 'the youngest of the martyrs,' had vividly impressed him, years before."⁶⁶² While Wilde did not embrace his martyrdom like Sebastian, it remained, in the words of Knight, 'A martyrdom, a crucifixion, a self-exhibition in agony and shame. The shame may be of the essence; at the least it shatters all the pseudo-dignities and masks of our lying civilization.'⁶⁶³ Knight argues that Wilde's *De Profundis* is a commentary written from a Nietzschean standpoint on the consequential tragedy of experience:

Sorrow and suffering are now experienced as revelations of the creative purpose; the wholeness of his own drama is accepted and ratified; the deep insights of his parables, which he recalls, are lived. There is no repentance, no morality in any usual sense, but there is a lengthy and profound concentration on Christ. From the start Christian sympathies had run concurrently with his Hellenic and aesthetic passions. Now Christ is his central interest. He is seen as, above all, the supreme artist; more, as the first and greatest romantic...He notes his respect, so like Wilde's own - as indeed he

⁶⁶¹ G. Wilson Knight, *op cit*, p.143.

⁶⁶² Lewis Broad, *The Truth About Oscar Wilde*, (London, 1957), p.175.

⁶⁶³ G. Wilson Knight, *op cit.*, p.145.

himself says (*De Profundis*; *Works*; 875) - for children as exemplars for us all; and his insistence on wholeness, recalling how he himself had written in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* "that he who would lead a Christ-like life must be entirely and absolutely himself" (*Works*, 867). Christ has a strange sympathy with sinners:⁶⁶⁴

And again I quote *De Profundis*:

All that Christ says to us by the way of a little warning is that every moment should be beautiful, that the soul should always be ready for the coming of the bridegroom, always waiting for the voice of the lover.... But it is when he deals with a sinner that Christ is most romantic, in the sense of the most real. The world had always loved the saint as being the nearest possible approach to the perfection of God. Christ, through some divine instinct in him, seems to have always loved the sinner as being the nearest possible approach to the perfection of man. His primary desire was not to reform people, any more than his primary desire was to relieve suffering. To turn an interesting thief into a tedious honest man was not his aim... Indeed, that is the charm about Christ, when all is said: he is just like a work of art. He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into his presence one becomes something. And everything is predestined to his presence... The conversion of a publican into a Pharisee would not have seemed to him a great achievement. But in a manner not yet understood of the world he regarded sin and suffering as being in themselves beautiful holy things and modes of perfection.⁶⁶⁵

Here Wilde is trying to see life-as-art, with tragic form - that within the criminal there may exist certain elements of fire and courage necessary to perfection but too often absent from morality. His main emphasis on Christ's repudiation of legality and hypocrisy is valid, and his relation of Christ's Judaea to his own Britain reasonable.⁶⁶⁶ Hesketh Pearson convincingly compares the personalities of Christ and Wilde. He argues that Wilde was drawn to the personality of Christ, he identified himself with Christ, often speaking in parables:

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.146.

⁶⁶⁵ Rupert Hart-Davis, *Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 214-215.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.146.

Both thought and taught in stories, and both had a strong intuition of their tragic destiny...One of his parables, *The Doer of Good*, was on Christ...He saw himself in the role of Christ, the shouts of his first-night audiences being his hosannas, with Calvary to follow...He felt that his life needed a tragic completion and woeful disaster under the influence of a mystical concept...While there was still time to flee, "He has resolved," said his brother, "to stay, to face it out, to stand the music like Christ."...Finally his own condemnation and sufferings had completed the parallel with Jesus which for many years he had instinctively drawn.⁶⁶⁷

According to Br. John Albert, for Wilde, Christ is above all the "most supreme of individualists." Humility, says Wilde - like the artistic acceptance of all experiences - is merely a mode of manifestation: "It is man's soul that Christ is always looking for. He calls it 'God's Kingdom,' and finds it in every one." He compares it to little things, to a tiny seed, to a handful of leaven, to a pearl. That is because one realizes one's soul only by getting rid of all alien passions, all acquired culture, and all external possessions, be they good or evil.... When one comes in contact with the soul it makes one simple as a child, as Christ said one should be. Albert continues:

In *De Profundis*, Wilde portrays Christ as going beyond the artist's mode of expression by which he conceives life. As we now know, in prison Wilde continued to read John Henry Newman's writings. The influence of Newman - whom Wilde revered from the beginning of his Oxford years - is evident in *De Profundis*. Far more than just the *genre* of the confessional mode⁶⁶⁸, Oscar Wilde also found in Newman a mode of thinking that becomes a doctrine of Christ's nature for Wilde: universal sympathy.⁶⁶⁹

Knight sums up Wilde's resemblances to Christ perfectly - "his love of children, his egotism blended with humility, his repartee, his utter lack of malice, his forgiveness and Timon-like generosity, his magnanimity, his refusal to save himself, and patient

⁶⁶⁷ Hesketh Pearson, *The Life of Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, pp.188-323.

⁶⁶⁸ See Jan B. Gordon, "Wilde and Newman: The Confessional Mode," *Renascence* 22 (Summer 1970) p.183-91.

⁶⁶⁹ John Albert, O.C.S.O., *op cit.*, pp.372-403. Source reference, quoted from Regenia Gagnier, ed., *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p.248.

endurance of shame.”⁶⁷⁰ His record of defending the repressed and the weak is exemplary, he voiced concerns about child imprisonment and the need for overall prison reform as expressed in his *Letters to the Daily Chronicle* of March 1898. When set against the system, there was no question as to Wilde’s moral superiority over the society that condemned him. Long before his own fall, he had like Christ a natural sympathy with all outcasts. Pearson refers to his natural friendliness for the rough and the low from his American tour onwards; his fellow criminals were rapidly deflected by his courteous and kindly reception. One of the Reading Gaol warders, a man called Martin, who befriended him during his sentence, wrote of him:

What that poet was before he went to prison I care not. What he may have become after he left prison I know not. One thing I know, however, that while in prison he lived the life of a saint, or as near that holy state as a poor mortal can ever hope to attain.⁶⁷¹

Vincent O’Sullivan received the same impression, which is quoted by Pearson: “If terrible suffering courageously borne, the enduring of dire injustice and reviling without complaint, be matter of saintliness, then Wilde was a saint.”⁶⁷² Gagnier has emphasised the importance of Wilde’s prison writings, and why there is still so much to be discovered and learned from his period of incarceration, much of which still applies to us today:

I learned while writing about *De Profundis*: that by far Wilde’s largest audience is not academic and not primarily concerned with his wit or his super subtle subversions of the status quo. Wilde saw in Jesus Christ the Man of Sorrows “who made of himself the mouthpiece of those who are dumb under oppression,” and many readers go to Wilde for the same reason. Although criticism, after Auden, found the bits about Christ in *De Profundis* “tedious,” I have learned that prisoners and prisoners of war do not. Time after time, as I lectured on the letter from prison, prisoners and former prisoners taught me new levels of appreciation of its accuracy of emotional description in the precise conditions of solitary confinement and mass convict labor under a strong centralized prison system....I have been haunted by Wilde’s own

⁶⁷⁰ G. Wilson Knight, *op cit.*, p.147.

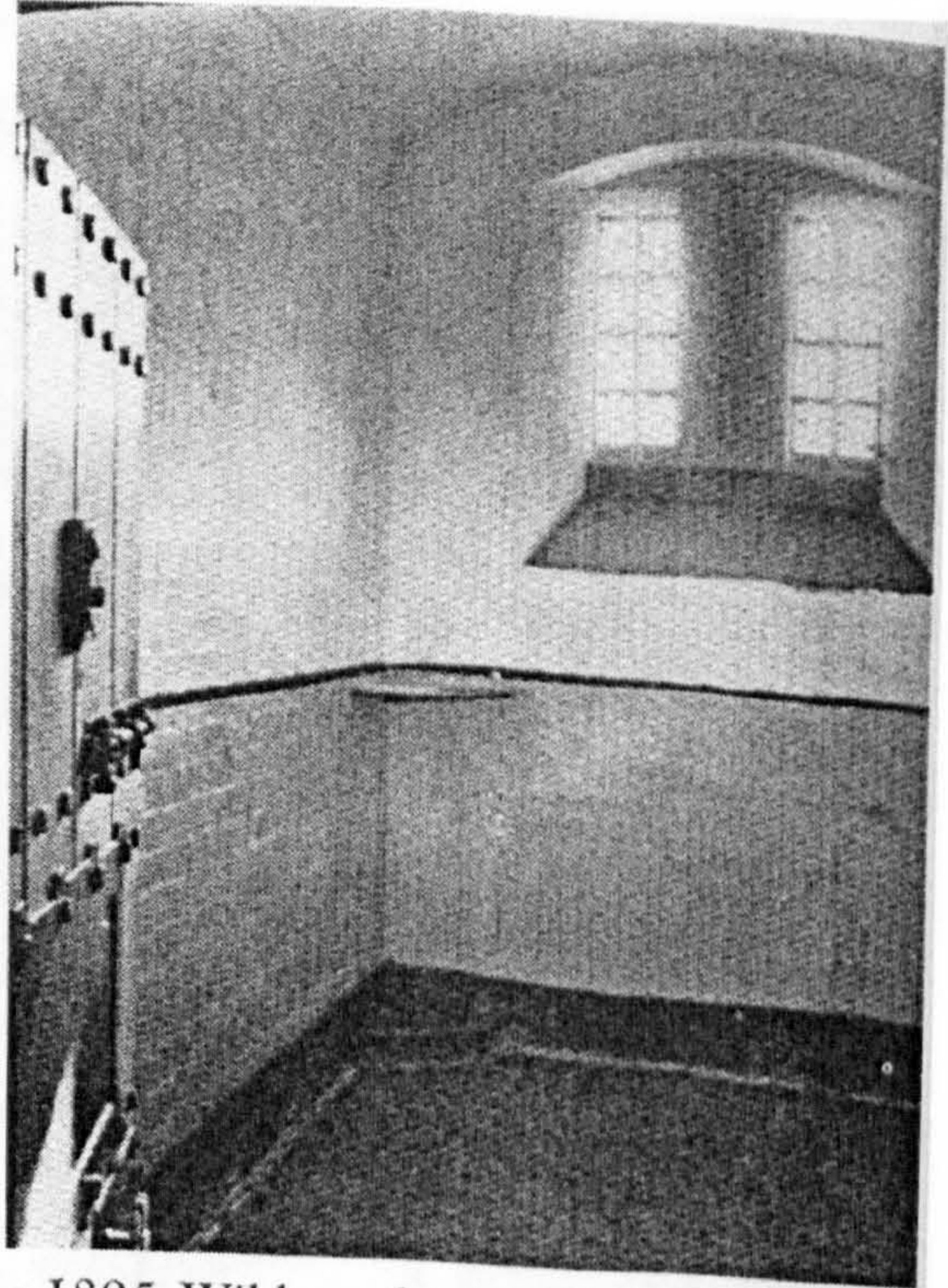
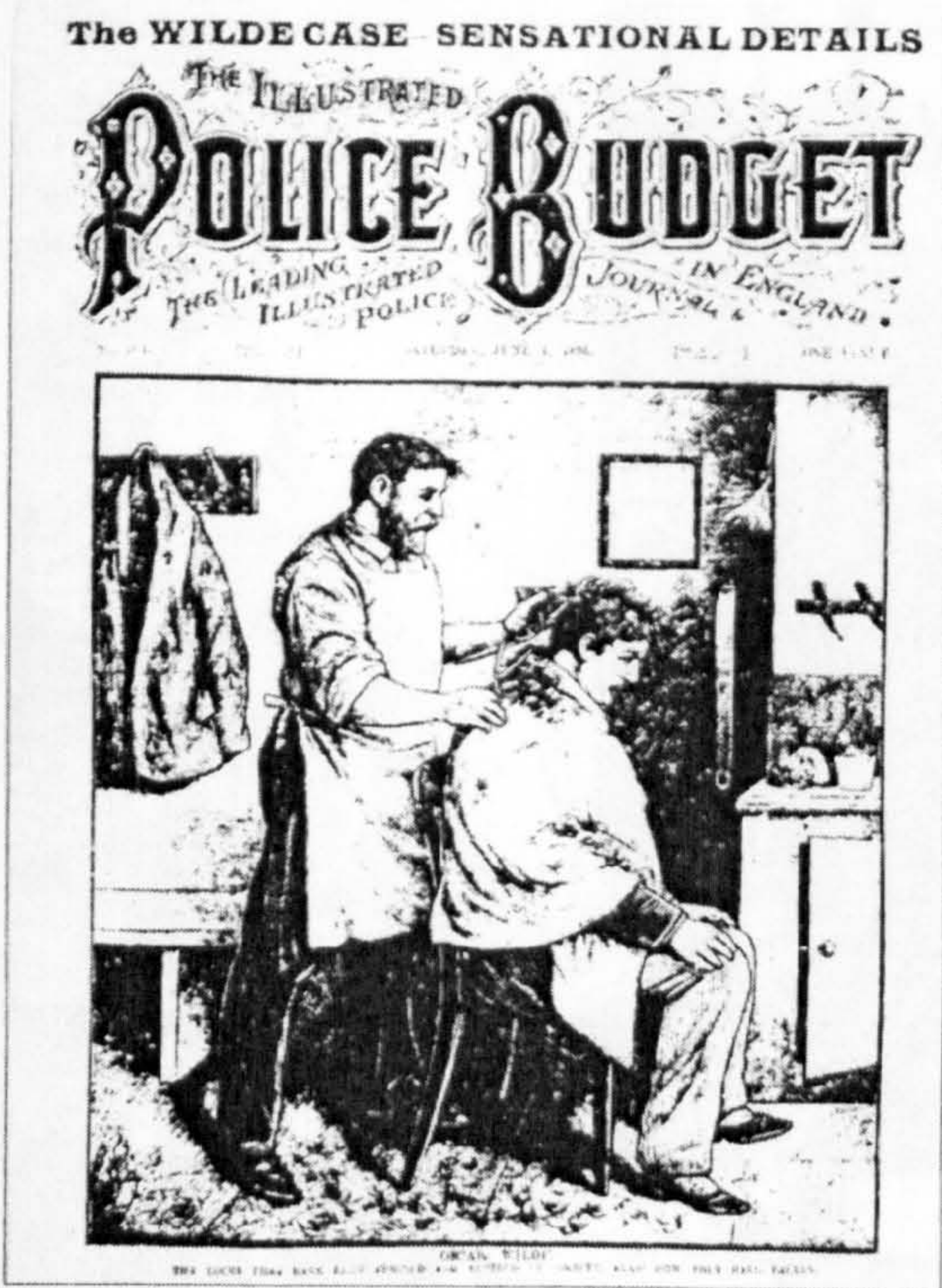
⁶⁷¹ Lewis Broad, *op cit.*, p.193.

⁶⁷² Hesketh Pearson, *The Life of Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p.358.

realist statement to Robert Ross from prison: "In point of fact, Robbie, prison life makes one see people and things as they really are." If from a certain standpoint - that of the outcast - one can in fact see the mainstream or the center as it really is, more people will soon be enlightened.⁶⁷³

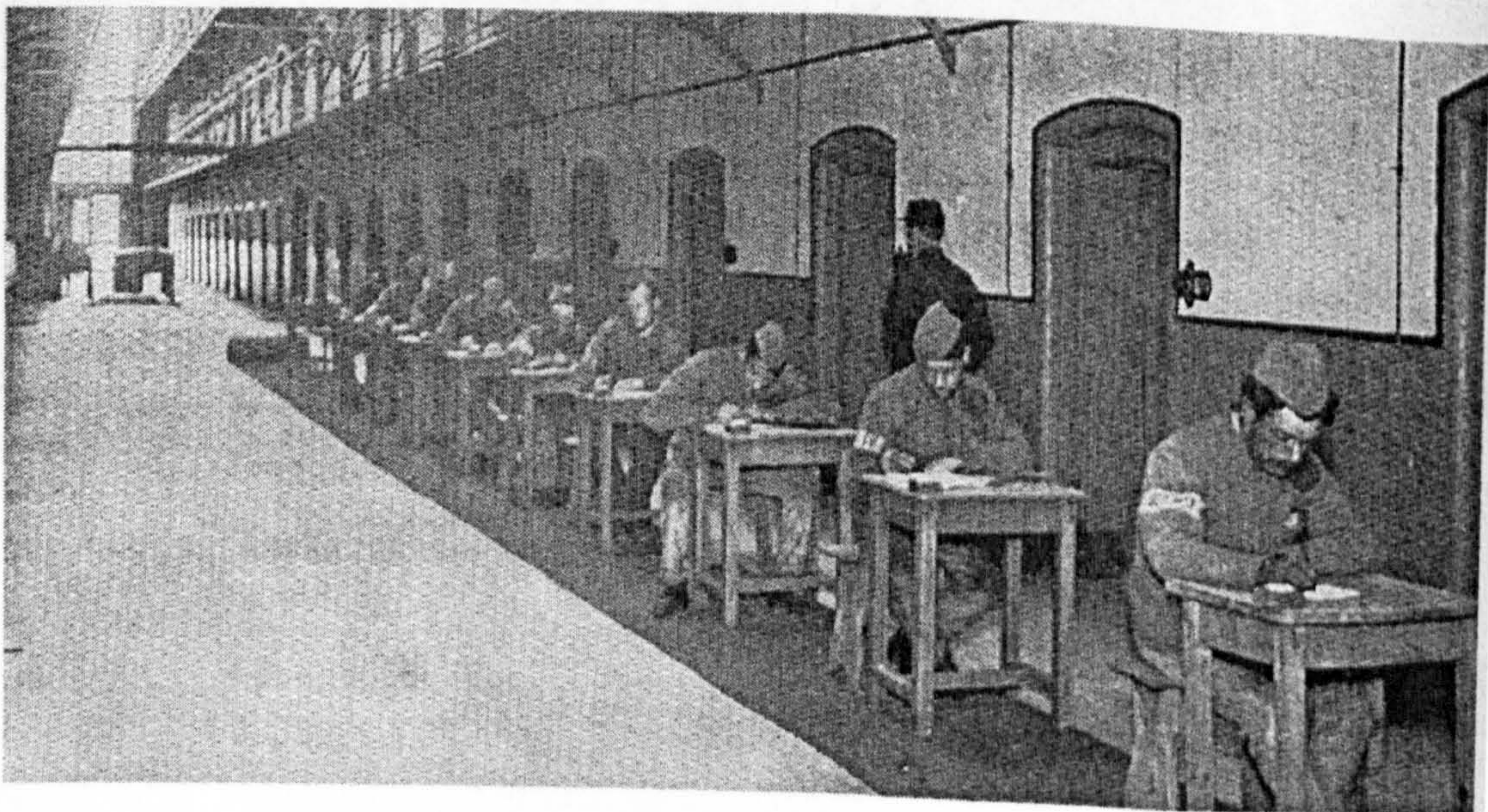
⁶⁷³ Regenia Gagnier (ed.), *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p.17.

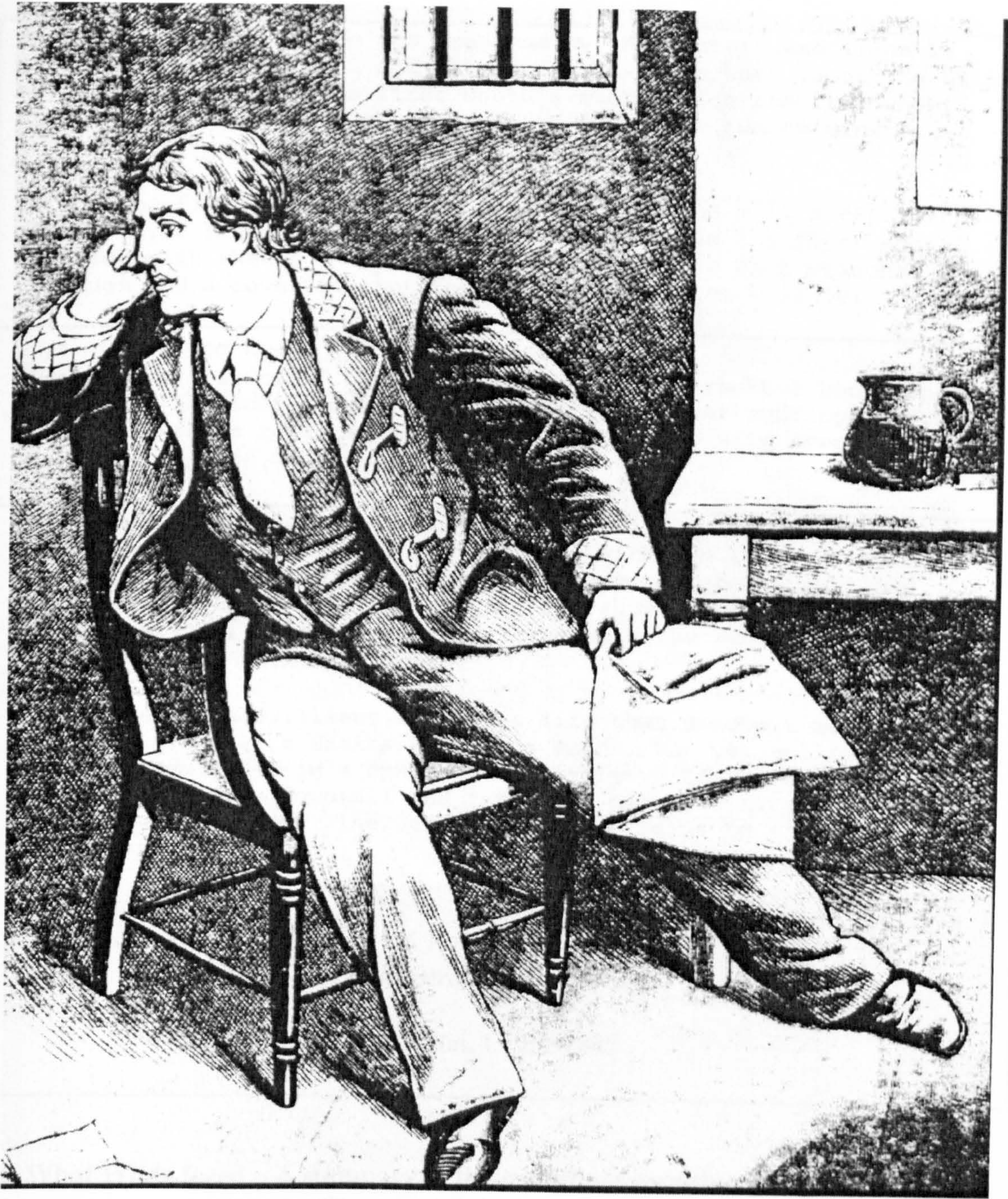
Illustrations G



Above left *The Illustrated Police Budget* of 1 June 1895. Wilde undergoes the indignity of a prison haircut after his final trial and conviction. Above Right Wilde's cell (C.3.3.) in Reading Gaol to where he was transferred from Wandsworth in November 1895.

Below Prisoners at a letter-writing session in Wandsworth Gaol. Wilde was permitted to write and receive one letter every three months.





Wilde imagined in his cell by the *Illustrated Police Budget* of 20 April 1895. The reality was far worse: no armchair and certainly no newspapers.

On Monday morning, Wilde was examined by the doctor, and if he is passed as sound and well and fit for first-class hard labor, he will be compelled to take his first month's exercise on the treadwheel; six hours daily; making an ascent of 6,000 feet; twenty minutes continuously and then five minutes' rest...

During the first month, while on the wheel, Wilde will sleep on the plank bed, a bare board raised a few inches above the floor and supplied with sheets -- clean sheets are given to each prisoner -- two rugs and a coverlet, but no mattress. His diet will be:

- Cocoa and bread for breakfast at 7:30.
- Dinner, at noon, one day bacon and beans, another soup, another cold Australian meat, and another brown suet puddings, with the last three repeated twice a week, potatoes with every meal. And
- Tea at 5:30.

After he has finished his spell on the wheel, he will be put to some industrial employment, not play-writing, although it might be the most profitable to the prison department, but probably post-bag making, tailoring, or merely picking of oakum. He will exercise in the open air daily for an hour, walking with the rest of his ward in Indian file, no talking allowed.

Thus has ended a brilliant life -- a life that at one time might have become as great as a Shakespeare or a Bacon, but yet a life ruined by the evil indulgence in a sphere of immorality. If the moral to be drawn from Wilde's downfall and fate only deters others from following in the same line, the law will at least be revenged and the public satisfied.

The Illustrated Police Budget,

London, 1 June 1895

What Wilde faced – A summary of the conditions awaiting Wilde in prison as reported by *The Illustrated Police Budget*, London 1 June 1895.

412 C. L. P.

Register No. 761
Present Age. 41

PETITION.

A56887
22

Date, 22nd April 1897

Name, Oscar Fingal O'Flaherty Wills Wilde
Confined in Reading Prison.

Convicted		Crime	Sentence	Conduct	
When	Where			During last 12 months	Previously
20. 5. 95	B. B. C.	Gross indecency	2 Years 12h	"Good"	"Good"

PREVIOUS CONVICTIONS.

(Those proved in Court to be marked *)

[Handwritten signature/initials]

Convicted		Crime	Sentence	Name
When	Where			
<i>Nil</i>				

The Petitioner not to write on this margin.

To the Right Honourable Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department.

THE PETITION OF THE ABOVE-NAMED PRISONER

HUMBLY SHEWETH—

That the petitioner was sentenced to two years imprisonment on the 20th May 1895, and that his term of imprisonment will expire on the 19th of next May, four weeks from the date of this petition.

That the petitioner is extremely anxious to avoid the notoriety and annoyance of newspaper interviews and

Oscar Wilde's petition to the Home Office requesting early release from prison, 22 April 1897, which was rejected.

My Dear Friend,

I send you a line to show you that I haven't forgotten about you. We were old friends in gallery C3, were we not? I hope you are getting on well and in employment.

Don't, like a good little chap, get into trouble again. You would get a terrible sentence. I send you 2 crowns just for luck. I am quite poor myself now, but I know you will accept it just as a remembrance. There is also 10s. which I wish you would give to a little dark-eyed chap who had a month in, I think, C4-14. He was in from February 6th to March 6th -- a little chap from Wantage, I think, and a jolly little fellow. We were great friends. If you know him give it to him from C33.

I am in France, by the sea, and I suppose I am getting happy again. I hope so. It was a bad time for me, but there were many good fellows in Reading. Send me a line c/o my solicitors to my own name.

Your friend,

C33 (Oscar Wilde)

A letter from Wilde to an unidentified former fellow prisoner at Reading Gaol. Written following his release from prison on 19 May 1897, and subsequent exile to France. Wilde had always detested human suffering and the capacity of man to inhumanely treat his fellow man.

Conclusion.

By 1905, Shaw had overtaken Wilde at the box office, despite the latter's revived productions. It was an achievement that signalled the beginning of Shaw's pre-eminence as a playwright. As David J. Gordon has commented during the half century between Wilde's death (1900) and Shaw's (1950), Shaw's reputation was high and Wilde's depressed. But this has been reversed during the second half of the twentieth-century, and Shaw may be said once again, in a different way, to be shadowed by Wilde. Since Wilde is not self-evidently a stronger writer, and was certainly a less prolific one, the change is worth inquiring into by way of concluding this dissertation.

Wilde's increased appeal in our day has to do primarily, I think, with his tapping into our postmodern scepticism regarding objectivity, truth, and art. One is inclined to trace the scepticism back to Nietzsche, and, in so far as this is justified, it is significant that Nietzsche's influence in the first half of the century (on such writers as Yeats, Lawrence, Dreiser, London, and O'Neill) concern mainly the question of power whereas in the second half it has concerned mainly the question of truth. Although Wilde remains a late Romantic and not a postmodern figure, he wrote with memorable flair about objectivity as an aspect of subjectivity, of truth as an aspect of fiction, and of art as an aspect of criticism.

Matthew Arnold famously told us, in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," that the critic's aim is "to see the object as in itself it really is." Walter Pater subtly altered this in his Preface to *The Renaissance*: "in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's impression as it really is..." And Wilde, in "The Critic as Artist," sharpens Pater's idea to the point of wit and at the risk of absurdity: the true aim of the critic is "to see the object as in itself it really is not."⁶⁷⁴ Criticism has long wrestled with the problem that fiction can be seen as either a kind of truth or kind of lying, but Wilde with engaging boldness puts this question to the side and, in "The Decay of Lying," locates as crucial the distinction between splendid lying and a vulgar misrepresentation. As for Art, of course that word is often a shibboleth in Wilde's work, but in "The Critic as Artist" (a title phrase meant to startle but which would pass today as *unremarkable*), art is shown to be,

⁶⁷⁴ Oscar Wilde in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, op cit.*, p. 1030.

paradoxically, and aspect of an activity traditionally considered subordinate to it: “There is no such thing as Shakespeare’s Hamlet,” his Gilbert declares, going on to develop the idea not only that critics see different things but that they ought to, because individuality is developed in the act of reading.⁶⁷⁵ Shaw could never have written, as Wilde did, “It is the spectator and not life that art really mirrors.”⁶⁷⁶ And such a view is flattered by the critical biases of our own time.⁶⁷⁷

On the other side of the equation, some Shavian values, especially those involved with socialism and communism, have suffered a clear loss of prestige and the latter half of the twentieth century. The fault of course is not Shaw’s. A socialist ethos was in the intellectual air at the turn of the century whether one was strictly a socialist or not, but it is in the air no more. Our society, or technological civilisation, faces problems that seem intractable to us and that Shaw was not in a position even to recognize. We hope now for survival or mitigation, hardly for the sort of moral progress that formed the basis of his vision. Self-improvement is not a dead idea, but the notion of collectively improving the quality of human beings by either political or biological means seems to most of us impracticable, perhaps even dangerous.

Harold Bloom sums up sharply the current reputation of the two writers: “The Aesthetic vision of Pater and Wilde now appears to be Ruskin’s abiding legacy, while Shaw’s Fabian Evolution seemed to have been a Ruskinian dead end.”⁶⁷⁸ Bloom, however, underrates Shaw both as stylist and as artist (vs. propagandist). Where the comedies of the nineties now appear weakest is not in being too doctrinaire but too timid. The Petkoff pretensions (library, bell, bathing more than once a week) and the seductions at century’s end of “Byronism,” the weak Victorianism of the parental generation in *You Never Can Tell*, the attempt to establish Richard as “the devil’s disciple” because he is said to consort with smugglers and gypsies – such stuff is too easy, not vigorously enough imagined. But where the dramatic effect centres, in the

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 1034.

⁶⁷⁶ Oscar Wilde in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, *op cit.*, p.268.

⁶⁷⁷ David J. Gordon, “Shavian comedy and the shadow of Wilde”, in Christopher Innes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion To George Bernard Shaw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898), p.142-143.

⁶⁷⁸ Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Views: George Bernard Shaw* (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) p.2.

tension between a heroic style of feeling and thinking and what resists or opposes it, the plays still come alive.

Yet, despite Shaw's long period of triumph, a period in which he held a foremost position in the world as dramatist and influenced an entire generation of "fellow travellers"⁶⁷⁹, the word tragedy, arguably, holds greater applicability for Shaw than Wilde, since his loftier aims fell short on the rock of philosophical (or propagandist) failure.

In contrast Wilde's tragic end has only added to his mystique and regard. Today Wilde is revered and established as arguably the most important, and definitely one of the most popular literary artists of the 1890's. His enduring popularity with the public is a testament to his life and art. His readers love him as much for his weakness and his fallibility, as they do for his wit, his satire and his *fin de siècle* daring, and they remain endlessly fascinated by his outrageous behaviour and tragic demise. The same public that crucified him for his lack of conformity and respect for Victorian values in 1895 today holds him up as a martyr for individuality. His social and literary rehabilitation has been championed by such diverse organisations and sections of society, as academia, the gay rights movement, socialists, Irish nationalists and prison reform bodies. Wilde mania has never been healthier – in the last few years he has been ensconced in that most revered of commemorative literary bastions, Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. New monuments celebrating Wilde have been erected in both Ireland and England, and there was even talk of a planned campaign to petition the Home Office to posthumously grant him a pardon.

Wilde never had the same great designs to save humanity, which Shaw harboured. It is a factor that has been commented upon widely by critics, observers and biographers, and appropriately, reflected upon by Shaw himself. Eric Bentley, indicating how Shaw was conscious of a great mission in life, states that when attention was given "to the ego of Shaw, and not to the message of Shaw" a sense of "ultimate catastrophe ensued".

⁶⁷⁹ See J. Gassner, "Shaw's Fellow-Travellers", *Masters of the Drama* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1954.), pp. 616-628.

Bentley continues:

Shaw's aim was to change our minds and save civilisation; but we are still in the old ruts and civilisation has gone from bad to worse. For Shaw this must be the cardinal fact of his career. 'I have produced no permanent impression because nobody has ever believed me... this is as complete a confession of failure as the ageing Carlyle's famous sentence: 'They call me a great man now, but not one believes what I have told them'... In 1932 Shaw was again addressing the Fabians. He said: 'for 48 years I have been addressing speeches to the Fabian Society and to other assemblies in this country. So far as I can make out, those speeches have not produced any effect whatsoever'.⁶⁸⁰

Julian B. Kaye writes:

Bernard Shaw is one of the few contemporary writers whose position in world literature is almost universally believed to be secure. He has been one of the most important formative influences on all generations of intellectuals of the twentieth century, and his works have demonstrated his profound understanding of the underlying forces of modern civilisation. Nevertheless, the specific advice of the sage was often unsound. His praise of Hitler and his enthusiastic support of Mussolini and Stalin were...the most disturbing of the many pronouncements on contemporary events...that have...proved erroneous...Here...is...the paradox of Shaw's career: A man of profound understanding and personal shrewdness gave...the wrong answers to almost all the questions that have perplexed our age.⁶⁸¹

Michael Holroyd, Shaw's foremost biographer, observed the following:

A man of letters who craved to influence the political climate of Britain, Ireland and the world...who believed in the power of words to enforce action...he was an isolated man out of touch with Ireland, with England, and the world he wished to influence... although he stimulated several generations of young people to question the ideas of

⁶⁸⁰ Eric Bentley, "The Fool in Christ" in *Bernard Shaw* (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1950; New York: Limelight Editions, 1985), pp.127-133.

⁶⁸¹ Julian B. Kaye, "Preface", *Bernard Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Tradition* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), pp. vii-xii.

their parents and to begin thinking for themselves, almost none of his political ideas, from the new alphabet to equality of income...came near to being implemented.⁶⁸²

Thus, the tragedy so perversely applicable to Shaw in life - contrasted by the brevity of Wilde's in death, and the obliteration of it in eventual posthumous triumph. Across that paradoxical divide, identity itself remain symbolic, since it represents conflict between native Irish and Anglo-Irish, native English and exiled Irish, and between the parochial and the cosmopolitan. In these factors is manifested, perhaps, the root of Wilde and Shaw's paradoxically triumphant and tragic condition, and the latter seem central. In a comment to an American newspaper in 1882, Wilde, by way of clarifying the contradiction, stated:

I live in London for its artistic life and opportunities. There is no lack of culture in Ireland, but it is nearly all absorbed in politics. Had I remained there my career would have been a political one.⁶⁸³

Considering Shaw's political interest in Ireland, it is likely, had he stayed, that he too would have gravitated towards a career and politics. Significantly, his reason for exile is identical, if not differently expressed from that of his fellow Dubliner:

Every Irishman who felt that his business in life was on the higher planes of the cultural professions felt that he must have a metropolitan domicile and an international culture: that is, he felt that his first business was to get out of our Ireland.⁶⁸⁴

The corollary is that politically both Wilde and Shaw belonged to Ireland. But England claimed them artistically. Ireland may have nurtured their artistic development, but her parochialism and provincialism also restricted further growth – cosmopolitan England in contrast was a utopia for their artistic imaginations. This created a duality that could not quite separate the politics from the art, nor the art from

⁶⁸² Michael Holroyd, "Shaw and Biography" in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 22 April 1983.

⁶⁸³ "Wilde and Politics" in *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, E. H. Mikhail, (ed.) 2 volumes, (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), p.62

⁶⁸⁴ George Bernard Shaw, "Preface" to *Immaturity* in *Prefaces*, *op cit.*, p.674.

the politics; or for that matter, the exile from its effects. As already illustrated, Wilde and Shaw paid homage to their Irishness, but in the ultimate sense of identity they were rootless outsiders. In a comment on Wilde's identity, Shaw declared:

It must not be forgotten that though by culture Wilde was a citizen of all civilised capitals he was at root a very Irish Irishman, and as such a foreigner everywhere but in Ireland.⁶⁸⁵

Shaw, however, might well have been talking about himself, considering the innumerable references he has made to his own Irish place in English society. Towards the end of his life he commented that he had lived in Ireland for twenty years and seventy-two in England, but "the twenty came first, and in Britain I am still a foreigner and shall die one"⁶⁸⁶. But such affirmation finds patriotic sentiment contradicted in his "Preface" to *Immaturity* in which he admits to being "a sojourner on this planet rather than a native of it", and he projects the concept of the complete outsider in the following Christian parody:

Whether it be that I was born mad or a little too sane, my Kingdom was not of this world: I was at home only in the realm of my imagination, and at ease among the mighty dead.⁶⁸⁷

Side by side with such contradictions, the English domicile of Wilde and Shaw, bolstered by English artistic subject matter, suggests that Ireland's loss was England's gain: a tragedy for the former in terms of artistic deprivation (their loss to the Irish Literary Revival), and a triumph for the latter in terms of artistic gain (their contribution to the English Dramatic Renaissance). But in an internationalist sense in which they moved and identified, both Wilde and Shaw espoused and evolved a tradition of drama, which through the vicissitudes of history and its consequent commonality of language, forged an artistic bridge between England, Ireland and the rest of the English speaking world. Viewed from that perspective, the tragedy of their

⁶⁸⁵ St. John Ervine, *Oscar Wilde: A Present Time Appraisal* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1951), pp. 37, and 83-86.

⁶⁸⁶ George Bernard Shaw, *The Matter With Ireland*, *op cit.*, p.295.

⁶⁸⁷ George Bernard Shaw, *Prefaces*, *op cit.*, p.680.

exile proved a triumph for their art, and a world that inherited it. Both Wilde and Shaw established a benchmark that future Irish émigré writers would have to reach for. They prepared the way for a future generation of brilliant Irish writers from Yeats and Joyce to Beckett – all of whom left their native land.

Wilde and Shaw were simply born ahead of their time, these “neo-modernists” were too determined, radical, iconoclastic original and talented to be denied, ignored, usurped or appropriated by any single genre, period or nation. They more than any other Irish writers before them, transcended nationality, sexuality and social/artistic ideology. Perhaps it was their extraordinary lives as much as their memorable works, which have guaranteed them their place in the annals of the literary greats – but the undisputed fact remains that it is their continuing ability to connect in some way with such a diverse audience; to share some kind of affinity, to be capable of representing something, anything, and everything to anyone and everyone – this gift, more than any of their deeds has guaranteed their popularity for years to come. As David J. Gordon has phrased it:

The difference between the artistic goals of these two masters of dramatic comedy should not, I think, be expressed in terms of aesthetic evaluation but in psychological and historical terms. Shavian comedy seeks to resolve the will and firm up ego boundaries, Wildean comedy to dissolve the will and loosen ego boundaries - and both goals, although entailing different comic effects, can give audiences pleasure. Historically, Shaw derives from the Enlightenment; his test for art is whether it is true to “real life” and the “real world”- phrases used repeatedly in his 1894 essay, “A Dramatic Realist to His Critics.” Wilde, in contrast, derives from the Romantic movement and tests art by its on reality, the vividness of its artifice: in his “Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young,” he tells us that “The first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible.”⁶⁸⁸ I wish to avoid stating the comparison invidiously. One may have a preference here but it is not one that can be defended on strictly aesthetic grounds. As far as we can see, both playwrights will continue to hold their audiences for some time to come.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁸ Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p.1205.

⁶⁸⁹ David J. Gordon, *op cit.*, p.144.

Appendix: Shaw's Opinion Of Wilde

When George Bernard Shaw finally acquiesced to the requests of Frank Harris to contribute to his new biography.⁶⁹⁰ Shaw provided Harris with a letter entitled "My Memories of Oscar Wilde". Although Harris is regularly criticised by Wildean scholars for his notorious unreliability and fabrication of facts, this body of work still offers one of the best insights into Shaw's opinion of Wilde, both as an artist and a person and I include it here in its entirety.

My Memories of Oscar Wilde
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

My Dear Harris: -

I have an interesting letter of yours to answer; but when you asked me to exchange biographies, you take an unfair advantage of the changes of scene and bustling movement of your own adventures. My autobiography would be like my best plays, fearfully long, and not divided into acts. Just consider this life of Wilde which you have just sent me, and which I finished ten minutes ago after putting aside everything else to read it at one stroke.

Why was Wilde so good a subject for a biography that none of the previous attempts which you have just wiped out are bad? Just because his stupendous laziness simplified his life almost as if he knew instinctively that there must be no episodes to spoil the great situation at the end of the last act but one. It was a well made life in the Scribe sense. It was as simple as the life of Des Grieux, Manon Lescaut's lover; and it beat that by omitting Manon and making Des Grieux his own lover and his own hero.

Des Grieux was a worthless rascal by all conventional standards; and we forgive him everything. We think we forgive him because he was unselfish and loved greatly. Oscar seems to have said "I will love nobody: I will be utterly selfish; and I will be not merely a rascal but a monster; and you shall forgive me everything. In other words, I will reduce your standards to absurdity, not by writing them down, though I could do that so well-in fact, *have* done it-but by actually living them down and dying them down."

⁶⁹⁰ Frank Harris, *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions* (printed and published by the author: New York, 1916; revised edition, London: Constable, 1938).

However, I mustn't start writing a book to you about Wilde; I must just tumble a few things together and tell you them. To take things in the order of your book, I can remember only one occasion on which I saw Sir William Wilde, who, by the way, operated of my father to correct a squint, and overdid the corrections so much that my father squinted the other way all the rest of his life. To this day I never notice a squint; it is as normal to me as a nose or a tall hat.

I was a boy at a concert in the Ancient Concert Rooms in Brunswick Street in Dublin. Everybody was in evening dress; and-unless I am mixing up this concert with another (in which case I doubt if the Wildes would have been present)-the Lord Lieutenant was there with his blue waistcoated courtiers. Wilde was dressed in snuffy brown; and he had the sort of skin that never looks clean, he produced a dramatic effect beside Lady Wilde (in full fig) of being, like Frederick the Great, Beyond Soap and Water, as his Nietzschean son was beyond Good and Evil. He was currently reported to have a family in every farmhouse; and the wonder was that Lady Wilde didn't mind - evidently a tradition from the Travers case, which it did not know about until I read your account, as I was only eight in 1864.

Lady Wilde was nice to me in London during the desperate days between my arrival in 1876 and my first earning of an income by my pen in 1885, or rather until, a few years earlier, I threw myself into Socialism and cut myself contemptuously loose from everything of which her at-homes-themselves desperate affairs enough, as you saw for yourself-were part. I was at two or three of them; and I once dined with her in company with an ex-tragedy queen named Miss Glynn, who, having no visible external ears, reared a head like a turnip. Lady Wilde talked about Schopenhauer; and Miss Glynn told me that Gladstone formed his oratorical style on Charles Kean.

I asked myself where and how I came across Lady Wilde; for we had no social relations in the Dublin days. The explanation must be that my sister, then a very attractive girl who sang beautifully, had met and made some sort of innocent conquest of both Oscar and Willie. I met Oscar once at one of the at-homes; and he came and spoke to me with an evident intention of being specially kind to me. We put each other out frightfully; and this odd difficulty persisted between us to the very last, even when we were no longer mere boyish novices and had become men of the world with plenty of skill in social intercourse. I saw him very seldom, as I avoided literary and artistic society like the plague, and refused the few invitations I received to go into society with burlesque ferocity, so as to keep out of it without offending people past their willingness to indulge me as a privileged lunatic.

The last time I saw him was at that tragic luncheon of yours at the Café Royal; and I am quite sure our total of meetings from first to last did not exceed twelve, and may not have exceeded six.

I definitely recollect six: (1) At the at-home aforesaid. (2) At Macmurdo's house in Fitzroy Street in the days of the Century Guild and its paper *The Hobby Horse*. (3) At a meeting somewhere in Westminster at which I delivered an address on Socialism, and at which Oscar turned up and spoke. Robert Ross surprised me greatly by telling me, long after Oscar's death, that it was this address of mine that moved Oscar to try his hand at a similar feat by writing "The Soul of Man Under Socialism". (4) A chance meeting near the stage door of the Haymarket Theatre, at which our queer shyness of one another made our resolutely cordial and appreciative conversation so difficult that our final laugh and shake-hands was almost a reciprocal confession. (5) A really pleasant afternoon we spent together on catching one another in a place where our presence was an absurdity. It was some exhibition in Chelsea; a naval commemoration, where there was a replica of Nelson's Victory and a set of P&O cabins which made one seasick by mere association of ideas. I don't know why I went or why Wilde went; but we did; and the question what the devil we were doing in that galley tickled us both. It was my sole experience of Oscar's wonderful gift as a raconteur. I remember particularly an amazingly elaborate story which you have no doubt heard from him; an example of the cumulation of a single effect, as in Mark Twain's story of the man who was persuaded to put lightning conductor after lightning conductor at every possible point on his roof until a thunderstorm came and all the lightning in the heavens went for his house and wiped it out.

Oscar's much more carefully and elegantly worked out story was of a young man who invented a theatre stall which economized space by ingenious contrivances which were all described. A friend of his invited twenty millionaires to meet him at dinner so that he might interest them in the invention. The young man convinced them completely by his demonstration of the savings in a theatre holding, in ordinary seats, six hundred people, leaving them eager and ready to make his fortune. Unfortunately, he went on to calculate the annual saving in all the theatres of the world; then in all the churches of the world; then in all the legislatures; estimating finally the incidental and moral and religious effects of the invention until at the end of an hour he had estimated a profit of several thousand millions: the climax of course being that the millionaires folded their tents and silently stole away, leaving the ruined inventor a marked man for life.

Wilde and I got on extraordinarily well on this occasion. I had not to talk myself, but to listen to a man telling me stories better than I could have told them. We did not refer to Art, about which, excluding literature from the definition, he knew only what could be picked up reading about it. He was in a tweed suit and low hat like myself, and had been detected and had detected me in the act of clandestinely spending a happy day at a Rosherville Gardens instead of pontificating in his frock coat and so forth. And he had an audience on whom not one of his subtlest effects was lost. And so for once our meeting was a success; and I understood why Morris, when he was dying slowly, enjoyed a visit from Wilde more than from anybody else, as I understand why you say in your book that you would rather have Wilde back than any friend you have ever talked to, even though he was incapable of friendship, though not of the most touching kindness⁶⁹¹ on occasion.

Our sixth meeting, the only other one I can remember, was the one at the Cafe Royal. On that occasion he was not too preoccupied with his danger to be disgusted with me because I, who had praised his first plays handsomely, had turned traitor over "The Importance of Being Earnest". Clever as it was, it was his first really heartless play. In the others the chivalry of the eighteenth century Irishman and the romance of the disciple of Theophile Gautier (Oscar was really old-fashioned in the Irish way, except as a critic of morals) not only gave a certain kindness and gallantry to the serious passages and to the handling of the women, but provided that proximity of emotion without which laughter, however irresistible, is destructive and sinister. In "The Importance of Being Earnest" this had vanished; and the play, though extremely funny, was essentially hateful. I had no idea that Oscar was going to the dogs, and that this represented a real degeneracy produced by his debaucheries. I thought he was still developing; and I hazard the unhappy guess that "The Importance of Being Earnest" was in idea a young work written or projected long before under the influence of Gilbert and furbished up for Alexander as a potboiler. At the Cafe Royal that day I calmly asked him whether I was not right. He indignantly repudiated my guess, and said loftily (the only time he ever tried on me the attitude he took to John Gray and his more abject disciples) that he was disappointed in me. I suppose I said, "Then what on earth has happened to you?" but I recollect nothing more on that subject except that we did not quarrel over it.

When he was sentenced I spent a railway journey on a Socialist lecturing excursion to the North drafting a petition for his release. After that I met Willie Wilde first at a theatre which I think must have been the Duke of York's because I connect it vaguely with St Martin's Lane. I spoke to him about the petition, asking him whether anything of the sort was

⁶⁹¹Excellent analysis. (Frank Harris.)

being done, and warning him that though I and Stewart Headlam would sign it, that would be no use, as we were to notorious cranks, and our names would by themselves reduce the petition to absurdity and do Oscar more harm than good. Willie cordially agreed, and added, with maudlin pathos and an inconceivable want of tact: "Oscar was NOT a man of bad character: you could have trusted him with a woman anywhere." He convinced me, as you discovered later, that signatures would not be obtainable; so the petition project dropped; and I don't know what became of my draft.

When Wilde was in Paris during his last phase I made a point of sending him inscribed copies of all my books as they came out; and he did the same to me.

In writing about Wilde and Whistler, in the days when they were treated as witty triflers, and called Oscar and Jimmy in print, I always made a point of taking them seriously and with scrupulous good manners. Wilde on his part also made a point of recognising me as a man of distinction by his manner, and repudiating the current estimate of me as a mere jester. This was not the usual reciprocal-admiration trick. I believe he was sincere, and felt indignant at what he thought was a vulgar underestimate of me; and I had the same feeling about him. My impulse to rally to him in his misfortune, and my disgust at "the Man Wildes" scurrilities of the newspapers, was irresistible: I don't quite know why; for my charity to his perversion, and my recognition of the fact that it does not imply any general depravity or coarseness of character, came to me through reading and observation, not through sympathy.

I have all the normal violent repugnance to homosexuality - if it is really normal, which nowadays one is sometimes provoked to doubt.

Also, I was in no way predisposed to like him. He was my fellow-townsmen, and a very prime specimen of this sort of fellow-townsmen I most loathed: to wit, the Dublin snob. His Irish charm, potent with Englishmen, did not exist for me; and on the whole it may be claimed for him that he got no regard from me that he did not earn.

What first established a friendly feeling in me was, unexpectedly enough, the affair of the Chicago anarchists, whose Homer you constituted yourself by *The Bomb*. I tried to get some literary men in London, all heroic rebels and skeptics on paper, to sign a memorial asking for the reprieve of these unfortunate men. The only signature I got was Oscar's. It was a completely disinterested act on his part; and it secured my distinguish consideration for him for the rest of his life.

To return for a moment to Lady Wilde. You know that there is a disease called gigantism, caused by "a certain morbid process in the sphenoid bone of the skull - viz., an excessive development of the anterior lobe of the pituitary body" (this is from the nearest encyclopaedia). "When this condition does not become active until after the age of twenty-five, by which time the long bones are consolidated, the result is acromegaly, which chiefly manifests itself in an enlargement of the hands and feet." I never saw Lady Wilde's feet; but her hands were enormous, and never went straight to their aim when they grasped anything, but minced about, feeling for it. And the gigantic splaying of her palm her was produced in her lumbar region. Now Oscar was an overgrown man, with something not quite normal about his bigness-something that made Lady Colin Campbell, who hated him, describe him as "that great white caterpillar." You yourself describe the disagreeable impression he made on you physically, in spite of his fine eyes and style. Well, I have always maintained that Oscar was a giant in the pathological sense, and that this explains a good deal of his weakness. I think you have affectionately underrated his snobbery, mentioning only the pardonable and indeed justifiable side of it; the love of fine names and distinguished associations and luxury and good manners.⁶⁹²

You say repeatedly, and *on certain planes*, truly, that he was not bitter and did not use his tongue to wound people. But this is not true on the snobbish plane. On one occasion he wrote about T. P. O'Connor with deliberate, studied, wounding insolence, with his Merrion Square Protestant pretentiousness in full cry against the Catholic. He repeatedly declaimed against the vulgarity of the British journalist, not as you or I might, but as an expression of the odious class feeling that is itself the vilest vulgarity. He made the mistake of not knowing his place. He objected to be addressed as Wilde, declaring that he was Oscar to his intimates and Mr Wilde to others, quite unconscious of the fact that he was imposing on the men with whom, as a critic and journalist, he had to live and work, the alternative of granting him an intimacy he had no right to ask or a deference to which he had no claim. The vulgar hated him for snubbing them; and the valiant men damned his impudence and cut him. Thus he was left with a band of devoted satellites on the one hand, and a dining-out connection on the other, with here and there a man of talent and personality enough to command his respect, but

⁶⁹² Harris - "I have touched on the evil side of his snobbery, I thought about saying that it was only famous actresses and great ladies that he ever talked about, and in telling how he loved to speak of the great houses such as Clumber to which he had been invited, and by a half a dozen other hints scattered through my book. I had attacked English snobbery so strenuously in my book "The Man Shakespeare", had resented its influence of the finest English intelligence so bitterly, that I thought if I again laid stress on it in Wilde, people will think I was crazy on the subject. But he was a snob, both by nature and training, and I understand by snob what Shaw evidently understands by it here."

utterly without that fortifying body of acquaintance among plain men in which a man must move as himself a plain man, and be Smith and Jones and Wilde and Shaw and Harris instead of Bosie and Robbie and Oscar and Mister. This is the sort of folly that does not last forever in a man of Wilde's ability; but it lasted long enough to prevent Oscar laying any solid social foundations.⁶⁹³ Another difficulty I have already hinted at. Wilde started as an apostle of Art; and in that capacity he was a humbug. The notion that a Portora boy passed on to T.C.D. and hence to Oxford and spending his vacations in Dublin, could without special circumstances have any genuine intimacy with music and painting, is to me ridiculous.⁶⁹⁴ When Wilde was at Portora, I was at home in a house where important musical works, including several typical masterpieces, were being rehearsed from the point of blank amateur ignorance up to fitness for public performance. I could whistle them from the first bar to the last as a butcher's boy whistles music hall songs, before I was twelve. The toleration of popular music-Strauss's waltzes, for instance-was to me positively a painful requirement, a sort of republican duty.

I was so fascinated by painting that I haunted the National Gallery, which Doyle had made perhaps the finest collection of its size of the world; and I longed for money to buy painting materials with. This afterwards saved me from starving. It was as a critic of music and painting in the *World* that I won through my ten years of journalism before I finished up with you on the *Saturday Review*. I could make deaf stockbrokers read my two pages on music, the alleged joke being that I knew nothing about it. The real joke was that I knew all about it. Now it was quite evident to me, as it was to Whistler and Beardsley, that Oscar knew no more about pictures⁶⁹⁵ than anyone of his general culture and with his opportunities

⁶⁹³ Harris - "The reason that Oscar, snobbish as he was, and an admirer of England and the English as he was, could not lay any solid foundations in England was, in my opinion, his intellectual interests and his intellectual superiority to the men he met. No one with a fine mind devoted to things of the spirit is capable of laying solid social foundations in England. Shaw, too, has no solid social foundations in that country."

G.B.S. - "*This passing shot at English society serves it right. Yet able men have found niches in London. Where was Oscar's?*"

⁶⁹⁴ Harris - "I had already marked it down to put in my book that Wilde continually pretended to a knowledge of music which he had not got. He could hardly tell one tune from another, but he loved to talk of that 'scarlet thing of Dvorak,' hoping in this way to be accepted as a real critic of music, when he knew nothing about it and care even less. His eulogies of music and painting betrayed him continually though he did not know it."

⁶⁹⁵ Harris - "I touched upon Oscar's ignorance of art sufficiently I think, when I said in my book that he had learned all he knew of art and of controversy from Whistler, and that his lectures on the subject, even after sitting at the feet of the Master, were almost worthless."

can pick up as he goes along. He could be witty about Art, as I could be witty about engineering; but that is no use when you have to seize and hold the attention and interest of people who really love music and painting. Therefore, Oscar was handicapped by a false start, and got a reputation⁶⁹⁶ for shallowness and insincerity which he never retrieved until it was too late.

Comedy: the criticism of morals and manners *viva voce*, was his real forte. When he settled down to that he was great. But, as you found when you approached Meredith about him, his initial mistake had produced that “rather low opinion of Wilde’s capacities,” that “deep-rooted contempt for the show-man in him,” which persisted as a first impression and will persist until the last man who remembers his esthetic period has perished. The world has been in some ways so unjust to him that one must be careful not to be unjust to the world.

In the preface on education, called “Parents and Children”, to my volume of plays beginning with *Misalliance*, there is a section headed “Artist Idolatry”, which is really about Wilde. Dealing with “that powers enjoyed by brilliant persons who are also connoisseurs in art,” I say, “the influence they can exercise on young people who have been brought up in the darkness and wretchedness of a home without art, and in whom a natural bent towards art has always been baffled and snubbed, is incredible to those who have not witnessed and understood it. He (or she) who reveals the world of art to them opens heaven to them. They became satellites, disciples, worshippers of the apostle. Now the apostle may be a voluptuary without much conscience. Nature may have given him enough virtue to suffice in a reasonable environment. But this allowance may not be enough to defend it against the temptation and demoralization of finding himself a little god on the strength of what ought to be a quite ordinary culture. He may find adorers in all directions in our uncultivated society among people of stronger character than himself, not one of whom, if they had been artistically educated, would have had anything to learn from him, or regarded him as in any way extraordinary apart from his actual achievements as an artist. Tartufe is not always a priest. Indeed, he is not always a rascal; he is often a weak man absurdly credited with omniscience and perfection, and taking unfair advantages only because they are offered to him and he is too weak to refuse. Give everyone his culture, and no one will offer him more than his due.”

That paragraph was the outcome of a walk and talk I had one afternoon at Chartres with Robert Ross. You reveal Wilde as a weaker man than I thought him. I still believe that

⁶⁹⁶ Harris – “Perfectly true, and a notable instance of Shaw’s insight.”

his fierce Irish pride had something to do with his refusal to run away from the trial. But in the main your evidence is conclusive. It was part of his tragedy that people asked more moral strength from him than he could bear the burden of, because they made the very common mistake - of which actors get the benefit - of regarding style as evidence of strength, just as in the case of women there are apt to regard paint as evidence of beauty. Now Wilde was so in love with style that he never realise the danger of biting off more than he could chew. In other words, of putting up more style than his matter would carry. Wise kings wear shabby clothes, and leave the gold lace to the drum major. You do not, unless my memory is betraying me as usual, quite recollect the order of events just before the trial. That day at the Café Royal, Wilde said he had come to ask you to go into the witness box next day and testify that *Dorian Gray* was a highly moral work. Your answer was something like this: "For God's sake, man, put everything on that plane out of your head. You don't realize what is going to happen to you. It is not going to be a matter of clever talk about your books. They are going to bring up a string of witnesses that will put art and literature out of the question. Clarke will throw up his brief. He will carry the case to a certain point; and then, when he sees the avalanche coming, he will back out and leave you in the dock. What you have to do is to cross to France tonight. Leave a letter saying that you cannot face the squalor and horror of a law case; that you are an artist and unfitted for such things. Don't stay here clutching at straws like testimonials to *Dorian Gray*. *I tell you I know*. I know what is going to happen. I know Clarke's sort. I know what evidence they have got. You must go." It was no use. Wilde was in a curious double temper. He made no pretence either of innocence or of questioning the folly of his proceedings against Queensberry. But he had an infatuate haughtiness as to the impossibility of his retreating, and as to his right to dictate your course. Douglas sat in silence, a haughty indignant silence, copying Wilde's attitude as all Wilde's admirers did, but quite probably influencing Wilde as you suggest, by the copy. Oscar finally rose with a mixture of impatience and his grand air, and walked out with the remark that he had now found out who where his real friends; and Douglas followed him, absurdly smaller, and imitating his walk, like a curate following an archbishop.⁶⁹⁷ You remember it the other way about; but just consider this. Douglas was in the wretched position of having ruined Wilde merely to annoy his father, and of having attempted it so idiotically that he had actually

⁶⁹⁷ Harris – "This is an inimitable picture, but Shaw's fine sense of comedy has misled him. The scene took place absolutely as I recorded it. Douglas went out first saying - 'Your telling him to run away shows that you are no friend of Oscars.' Then Oscar got up to follow him. He said good-by to Shaw, adding a courteous word or two. As he turned to the door I got up and said: - 'I hope you do not doubt my friendship; you have no reason to.' 'I did not think this is friendly of you, Frank,' he said, and went on out.'"

prepared a triumph for him. He was, besides, much the youngest man present, and looked younger than he was. You did not make him welcome. As far as I recollect he did not greet him by a word or nod. If he had given the smallest provocation or attempted to take the lead in any way, I should not have given twopence for the chance of you keeping your temper. And Wilde, even in his ruin - which, however, he did not yet fully realize - kept his air of authority on questions of taste and conduct. It was practically impossible under such circumstances that Douglas should have taken the stage in any way. Everyone thought him a horrid little brat; but I, not having met him before to my knowledge, and having some sort of flair for his literary talent, was curious to hear what he had to say for himself. But, except to echo Wilde once or twice, he said nothing.⁶⁹⁸ You are right in effect, because it was evident that Wilde was in his hands, and was really echoing him. But Wilde automatically kept the prompter off the stage and himself in the middle of it.

What your book needs to complete it is a portrait of yourself as good as your portrait of Wilde. Oscar was not combative, though he was supercilious in his early pose. When his snobbery was not in action, he liked to make people devoted to him and to flatter them exquisitely with that end. Mrs Calvert, whose great final period as a stage old woman began with her appearance in my *Arms and the Man*, told me one day, when apologising for being, as she thought, a bad rehearser, that no author had ever been so nice to her except Mr Wilde.

Pugnacious people, if they did not actually terrifying Oscar, were at least the sort of people he could not control, and whom he feared as possibly able to coerce him. You suggest that the Queensberry pugnacity was something that Oscar could not deal with successfully. But how in that case could Oscar have felt quite safe with you? You were more pugnacious than six Queensberrys rolled into one. When people asked, "What has Frank Harris been?" the usual reply was, "Obviously a pirate from the Spanish main."

Oscar, from the moment he gained your attachment, could never have been afraid of what you might do to him, as he was sufficient of a connoisseur in *Blut Bruderschaft* to

⁶⁹⁸ Harris - "I am sure Douglas took the initiative and walked out first."

G.B.S. - "I have no doubt you are right, and that my vision of the exit is really a reminiscence of the entrance. In fact, now that you prompt my memory, I recall quite distinctly that Douglas, who came in as the follower, went out as the leader, and that the last word was spoken by Wilde after he had gone."

appreciate yours; but he must always have been mortally afraid of what you might do or say to his friends.⁶⁹⁹

You had quite an infernal scorn for nineteen out of twenty of the men and women you met in the circles he most wished to propitiate; and nothing could induce you to keep your knife in its sheath when they jarred on you. The Spanish Main itself would have blushed rosy red at your language when classical invective did not suffice to express your feelings. It may be that if, say, Edmund Gosse had come to Oscar when he was out on bail, with a couple of first class tickets in his pocket, and gently suggested a mild trip to Folkestone, or the Channel Islands, Oscar might have let himself be coaxed away. But to be called on to gallop *ventre à terre* to Erith - it might have been Deal - and hoist the Jolly Roger on board your lugger, was like casting a light comedian and first lover for *Richard III*. Oscar could not see himself in the part. I must not press the point too far; but it illustrates, I think, what does not come out at all in your book: that you were a very different person from the submissive and sympathetic disciples to whom he was accustomed. There are things more terrifying to a soul like Oscar's than an as yet unrealized possibility of a sentence of hard labour. A voyage with Captain Kidd may have been one of them. Wilde was a conventional man; his unconventionality was the very pedantry of convention; never was there a man less an outlaw than he. You were a born outlaw, and will never be anything else. That is why, in his relations with you, he appears as a man always shirking action - more of a coward (all men are cowards more or less) than so proud a man can have been. Still this does not affect the truth and power of your portrait. Wilde's memory will have to stand or fall by it. You will be blamed, I imagine, because you have not written a lying epitaph instead of a faithful chronicle and study of him; but you will not lose your sleep over that. As a matter of fact, you could not have carried kindness further without sentimental folly. I should have made a far sterner summing up. I am sure Oscar has not found the gates of heaven shut against him. He is too good company to be excluded; but he can hardly have been greeted as "Thou good and faithful servant." The first thing we ask a servant for is a testimonial to honesty, sobriety and industry; for we soon find out that these are the scarce things, and that geniuses⁷⁰⁰ and clever people are as common as rats. Well, Oscar was not sober, not honest, not industrious. Society praised him for being

⁶⁹⁹ Harris - "This insight on Shaw's part makes me smile because it is absolutely true. Oscar commended Bosie Douglas to me again and again and again, begged me to be nice to him if we ever met by chance; but I refused to meet him for months and months."

⁷⁰⁰ Harris - "The English paste in Shaw; genius is about the rarest thing on earth whereas the necessary quantum of "honesty, sobriety and industry," is beaten by life in nine humans out of ten."

G.B.S. - "If so, is the tenth who comes my way."

idle, had persecuted him savagely for an aberration which it had better have left unadvertized, thereby making a hero of him; for it is in the nature of people to worship those who have been made to suffer horribly. Indeed I have often said that if the crucifixion could be proved a myth, and Jesus convicted of dying of old age in comfortable circumstances, Christianity would lose ninety-nine per cent of its devotees. We must try to imagine what judgment we should have passed on Oscar if he had been a normal man, and had dug his grave with his teeth in the ordinary respectable fashion, as his brother Willie did. This brother, by the way, gives us some clue; for Willie, who had exactly the same education and the same chances, must be ruthlessly set aside by literary history as a vulgar journalist of no account. Well, suppose Oscar and Willie had both died the day before Queensberry left that card at the Club! Oscar would still have been remembered as a wit and a dandy, and would have had a niche beside Congreve in the drama. A volume of his aphorisms would have stood creditably on the library shelf with La Rochefoucauld's Maxims. We should have missed the "Ballad of Reading Gaol" and "De Profundis"; but he would still have cut a considerable figure in the dictionary of National Biography, and being read and quoted outside the British Museum reading room. As the "Ballad" and "De Profundis," I think it is greatly to Oscar's credit that, whilst he was sincere and deeply moved when he was protesting against the cruelty of our present system to children and to prisoners generally, he could not write about his own individual share in that suffering with any conviction or sympathy.⁷⁰¹ Except for the passage where he describes his exposure at Clapham Junction, there is hardly a line in "De Profundis" that he might not have written as a literary feat five years earlier. But in the "Ballad", even in borrowing form and melody from Coleridge, he shews that he could pity others when he could not seriously pity himself. And this, I think, may be pleaded against the reproach that he was selfish. Externally, in the ordinary action of life as distinguished from the literary action proper to his genius, he was no doubt sluggish and weak because of his gigantism. He ended as an unproductive drunkard and swindler; for they repeated sales of the Daventry plot, in so far as they imposed on the buyers and were not transparent excuses for begging, were undeniably swindles. For all that, he does not appear in his writings a selfish or based-minded man. He is at his worst and weakest in the suppressed⁷⁰² part of "De Profundis"; but in my opinion it had better be published, for several reasons. It explains some of his personal weakness by the stifling narrowness of his daily round, ruinous to a man whose proper place was in a large public life. And its concealment is mischievous because, first, it leads people to imagine all sorts of horrors in a document which contains nothing worse than any record of the squabbles of two touchy idlers; and, second, it is clearly a monstrous thing that Douglas

⁷⁰¹ Harris – "Superb criticism."

⁷⁰² Harris – "I have said this in my way."

should have a torpedo launched at him and timed to explode after his death. The torpedo is a very harmless squib; before there is nothing in it that cannot be guessed from Douglas's own book; but the public does not know that. By the way, it is rather a humorous stroke of Fate's irony that the son of the Marquis of Queensberry should be forced to expiate his sins by suffering a succession of blows beneath the belt.

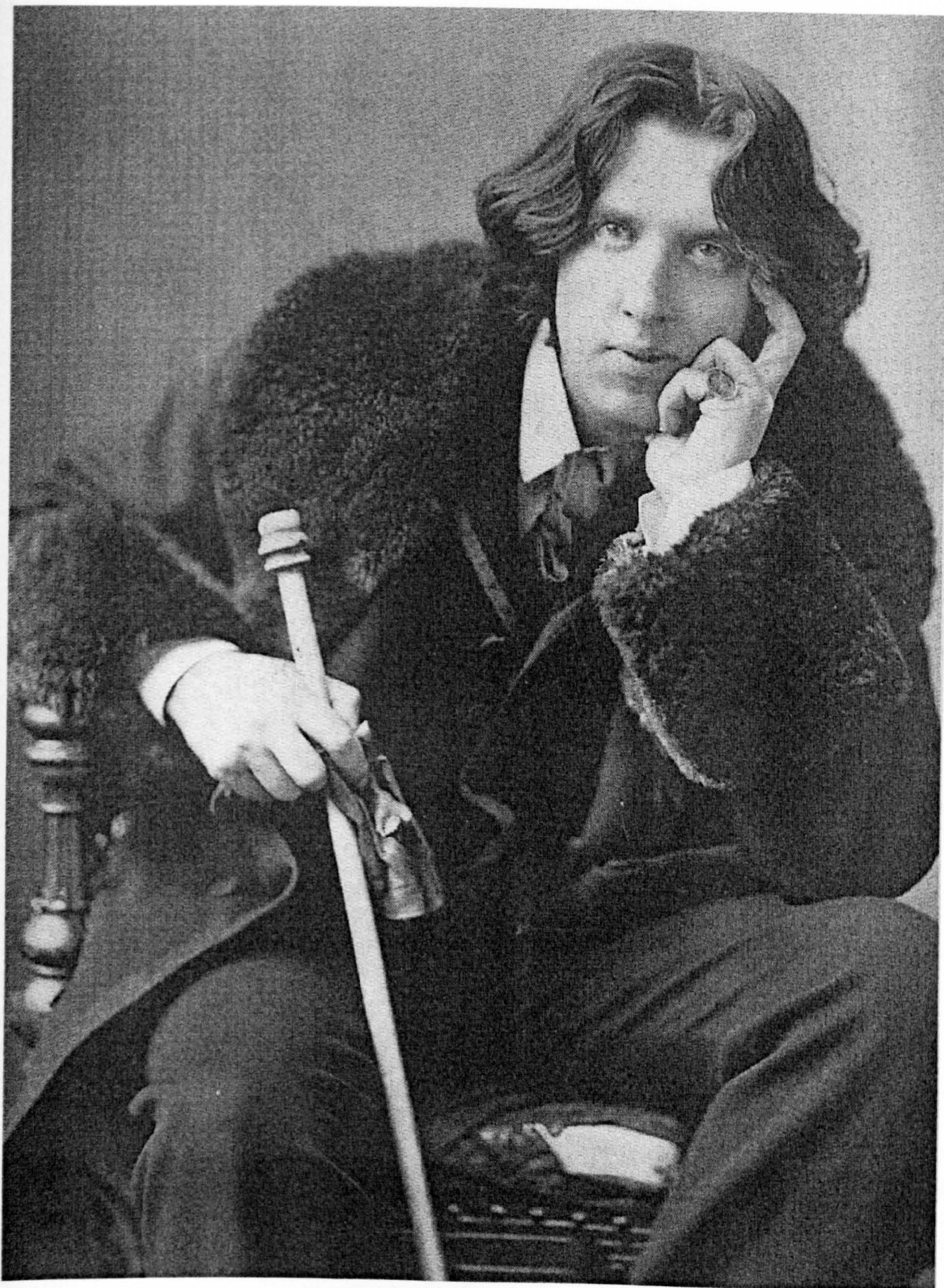
Now that you have written the best life of Oscar Wilde, let us have the best life of Frank Harris. Otherwise the man behind your works will go down to posterity⁷⁰³ as the hero of my very inadequate preface to "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets."

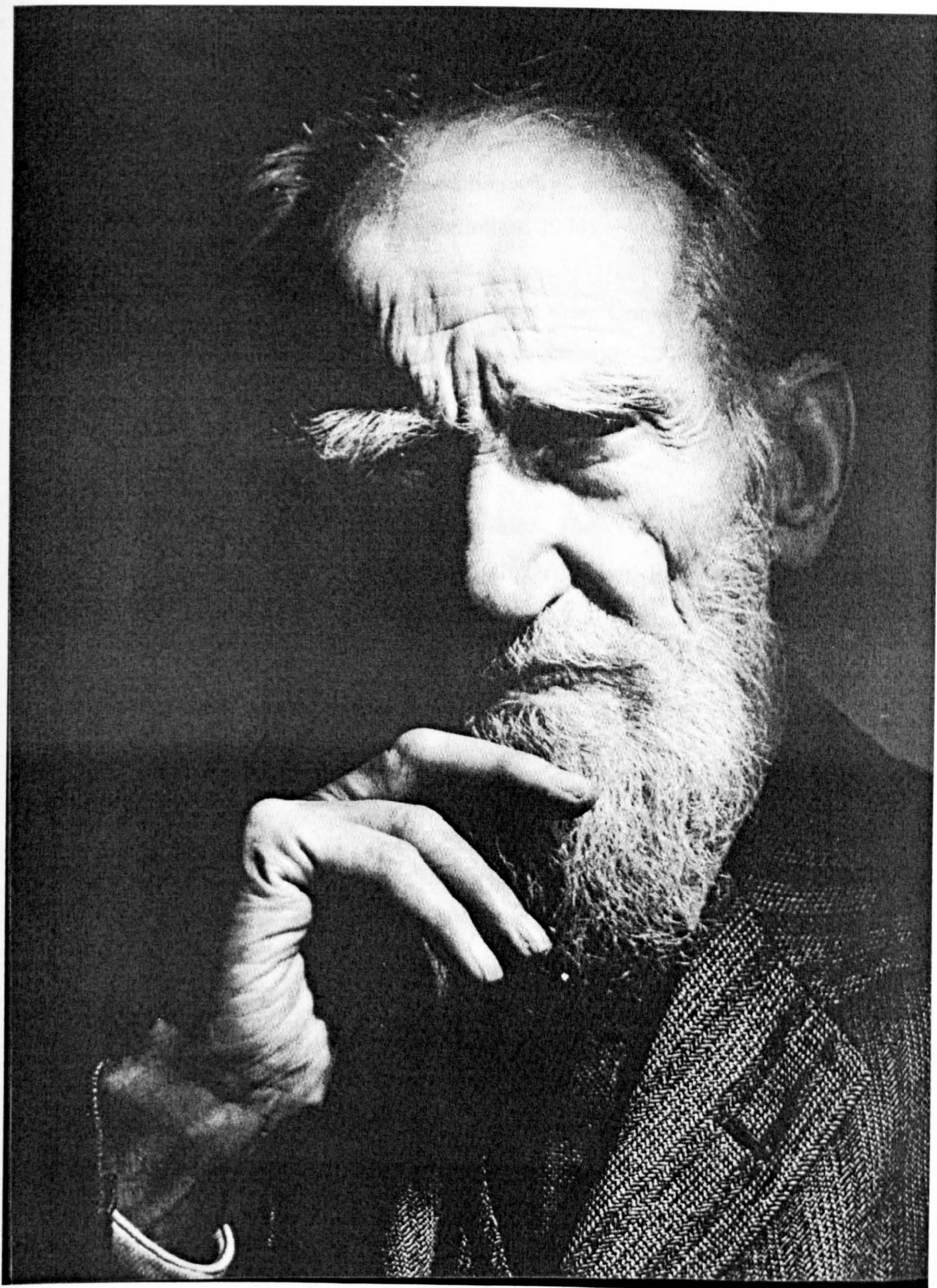
G. Bernard Shaw⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰³ Harris – "A characteristic flirt of Shaw's humour. He is a great caricaturist and not a portrait-painter. When he thinks of my Celtic face and aggressive American frankness he talks to me as pugnacious and a pirate: 'a Captain Kidd'. In his preface to 'The Fair Lady of the Sonnets' he praises my 'idiosyncratic gift of pity'; says that I am 'wise through pity'; then he extols me as a prophet, not seeing that a pitying sage, prophet and pirate constitute an inhuman superman. I shall do more for Shaw than he has been able to do for me; he is the first figure in my new volume of 'Contemporary Portraits'. I have portrayed him there at his best, as I love to think of him, and henceforth he'll have to try to live up to my conception and that will keep him, I'm afraid, on strain."

G.B.S. – "God help me!"

Illustrations H:





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