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SEXUAL POLITICS AND THE AESTHETICS OF CRIME: OSCAR WILDE IN THE NINETIES

BY SIMON JOYCE

At the center of G. K. Chesterton's *The Man who was Thursday* (1908) is a band of master anarchists, each named for one of the days of the week, all of whom are ultimately revealed in the course of the novel to be undercover detectives. One of them explains what they think they are fighting against:

This new movement of ours is a very different affair. We deny the snobbish English assumption that the uneducated are the dangerous criminals. We remember the Roman Emperors. We remember the great poisoning princes of the Renaissance. We say that the dangerous criminal is the educated criminal. We say that the most dangerous criminal now is the entirely lawless modern philosopher. Compared to him, burglars and bigamists are essentially moral men; my heart goes out to them. They accept the essential ideal of man; they merely seek it wrongly. Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more properly respect it. But philosophers dislike property as property; they wish to destroy the very idea of personal possession.¹

This passage usefully introduces my essay, because I will be arguing that the idea of the criminal as an intellectual or artistic genius (which had seemed so radical when Thomas De Quincey first offered it in his 1827 essay, "On Murder, Considered as One of the Fine Arts") had become a conservative and reassuring notion by the end of the nineteenth century—quite literally in this case, since there are ultimately no philosopher criminals in Chesterton's book, only philosopher policemen.

The idea of an aesthetic of crime had begun to pick up steam again about 40 years after De Quincey, in part as a response to falling crime rates. By 1869, Leslie Stephen (writing under the pseudonym of "A Cynic") was bemoaning the "perceptible decline" in the style of murder, while *The Spectator* echoed the same theme thirteen years later, predicting a more prosaic era in the

history of crime, “in which evil is stolid, and careful, and prudent, and obtuse.”² Late Victorian readers could of course look to popular fiction—to Gothic novels, sensation fiction, and the Sherlock Holmes detective stories—for a more elevated style of criminality, or to newspaper accounts of Jack the Ripper: indeed, it became a commonplace of contemporary commentary to highlight how strikingly *literary* these murders appeared, with noticeable parallels to Poe, Sade, and especially to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886).³ Stevenson’s earliest critics and reviewers had mainly praised his formal construction and prose style, while advancing mild concerns about the text’s possible impact on popular audiences. Two years later, though, the five murders ascribed to Jack the Ripper seemed to correlate closely with the recorded actions of Mr. Hyde, and thus incited a retroactive rereading. Soon after the second victim, Annie Chapman, was discovered, the *East London Advertiser* speculated that “a murderous lunatic [is] concealed in the slums of Whitechapel, who issues forth at night like another Hyde, to prey upon the defenceless women of the ‘unfortunate’ class”; a month (and two deaths) later, the same paper looked for parallels in Gothic fables and vampire legends, noting that “the most morbid imagination can conceive nothing worse than this terrible reality; for what can be more appalling than the thought that there is a being in human shape stealthily moving about a great city, burning with the thirst for human blood, and endowed with such diabolical astuteness, as to enable him to gratify his fiendish lust with absolute impunity?”⁴

At its most literal level, the connection between Jekyll and Jack the Ripper was made in September 1888 after the second murder, when a sensationalistic dramatization of Stevenson’s story was closed down. Indeed, some newspaper correspondents even suspected the actor Richard Mansfield for the murders, because he performed the role of Hyde so well.⁵ Other high profile figures were also considered in the Ripper investigation, once the usual suspects (Leftists, Russian Jews, and other European immigrants) were dismissed: among them Samuel Barnett of Toynbee Hall, the trade unionist John Burns who would lead the successful dockers’ strike in the following year, children’s campaigner Dr. Barnado, and a director of the Bank of England who entered the area in disguise in an ill-judged attempt to catch the murderer.⁶ Such speculations about the Ripper’s identity—and his presumed resemblance to other literary figures—suggest a renewed interest in

crime as not only imaginative and aesthetic, but as the province of the privileged classes: by the turn of the century, for example, we get the first appearance of Raffles, E. W. Hornung's aristocratic cat burglar, to place alongside Dr. Jekyll, Dorian Gray, and all those hard-up minor aristocrats who usually turn out to be the culprits in Conan Doyle.⁷ What I take to be distinctly conservative about this renewed conjunction of crime, class, and aesthetics is the way that it explicitly sets itself against a causality rooted in socioeconomic conditions, with a consequent refusal to rethink strategies of policing.⁸ Having reluctantly conceded that the Ripper probably didn't live in Whitechapel, and that he was far more likely a professional man exploiting the increasing exposure of East End life as a screen for his crimes, the authorities proceeded to tear down the slums anyway—in a move which was trumpeted by the *Daily Telegraph* under the slogan of “A Safe Four Per Cent” profit margin—and did little to investigate the more privileged suspects.⁹ Hence, of course, a continuing conspiracy industry surrounding these murders which is second only to that associated with J. F. K.

The privileged offender is, in a sense, a cultural fiction, the product of a wish fulfillment which had the useful effect of diverting attention away from genuine social problems of poverty, unemployment, and labor unrest that had recently begun to reassert themselves. The desire to see crime itself as a fine art is key here, since it concentrates on exceptional and essentially motiveless actions. In this essay, I want to think through some of the implications of this renewed aesthetic interest in crime by focusing on and around Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), a text which is generally thought to embody it through the main character of Dorian, but which in fact offers an exemplary critique of its tendency to shift attention away from lower-class crime. In a sense, Wilde fits the picture almost too perfectly, especially when considered in retrospect after his trial in 1895, when he literally became a criminal aesthete and jokingly insisted that “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” be offered for publication to *Reynolds's Magazine*, which “circulates widely amongst the criminal classes, to which I now belong, so I shall be read by my peers.”¹⁰ He also wrote an essay called “Pen Pencil Poison,” which is often paired with De Quincey's, in which the poisoner Thomas Wainwright is described as “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.”

The essay goes on to detail some of his literary and art criticism, his friendships with Hazlitt, Lamb, and others around the *London Magazine*, in addition to his early successes on the social scene, before stating quite bluntly that “if we set aside his achievements in the sphere of poison, what he has left to us hardly justifies his reputation.”¹¹ As Regenia Gagnier has persuasively argued, though, Wilde’s insouciant tone has led most critics to miss the sense of irony, and thus to misinterpret statements like this or to take them at face value; Richard Ellmann, for instance, suggests that “forgery was a crime which perhaps seems closest to Wilde’s social presentation of himself,” and concludes that this essay demonstrates that “Wainewright’s criminal craft revealed a true artist.”¹² The key point here is not that he might be more appropriately considered to be an artist in the particular sphere of poisoning, but rather that there is no basis for considering him an artist at all; thus, while “[t]he fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose,” it is also not an argument in its favor.¹³

Wilde, moreover, is equally critical of claims concerning Wainewright’s status as a master criminal, and of his celebrity among the intelligentsia of the Romantic era. His cell at Newgate, the essay notes, “was for some time a kind of fashionable lounge,” yet Wainewright himself felt isolated from those around him. He apparently told visitors that “I have been determined through life to hold the position of a gentleman. I have always done so. I do so still. It is the custom of this place that each of the inmates of a cell shall take his morning’s turn of sweeping it out. I occupy a cell with a bricklayer and a sweep, but they never once offer me the broom!” On leaving Newgate, he was transported to Van Diemen’s Land and felt a similar sense of superiority over the “country bumpkins” on board, so different from the “poets and artists” with whom he was used to associating when he was still a celebrity criminal. Commenting on this last quote, Wilde repeats his dictum from “The Soul of Man under Socialism” (to which I shall return) in order to explain Wainewright’s sense of alienation from his fellow criminals: “The phrase that he applies to his companions need not surprise us,” he notes, since “[c]rime in England is rarely the result of sin. It is nearly always the result of starvation.”¹⁴ Despite his pretensions to culture and celebrity status, then, the artist/poisoner ultimately emerges from this essay as a rather sad

anomaly, whose claim to fame rests on his combination of disparate qualities rather than on his abilities at anything in particular. Wainwright might stand in this respect as a prototype for Dorian Gray, who aims for a similar accommodation of crime and culture. But the conjunction tells us little about either one: crime, Wilde seems to be saying, is best left to those with purpose and motive, while the cultural kudos which come from a criminal reputation cannot finally compensate for a lack of artistic talent.

“ALL CRIME IS VULGAR”: THE WILDEAN CRITIQUE

Envisaged as a the poster boy for a “new Hedonism,” Dorian ranges freely between aesthetic pursuits (like the study of perfumes, music, jewels, and embroidery) and criminal ones, beginning in the opium dens of the East End docklands and climaxing in murder. Lord Henry Wotton, who many have wrongly taken to be a disguised portrait of Wilde himself, hopes that his protégé will “live out his life fully and completely . . . give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream” without fear of conscience, the law, or public censure, and Dorian certainly does his best.¹⁵ He articulates a fashionable contempt for the poor, for example, while exploiting the landscape of London street-life as his inspiration after the manner of the Baudelairean *flâneur*, and is quick to disassociate himself from any philanthropic enterprise which is designed to improve working-class lives. (We can hardly blame him, though, for canceling an engagement to play piano duets in Whitechapel with Lord Henry’s Aunt Agatha.)

Dorian’s relationship with the actress Sibyl Vane condenses these attitudes towards the poor and represents an early—but flawed—attempt at converting social experience into aesthetic pleasures. He first discovers Sibyl while on a ramble about town: “One evening about seven o’clock,” he later recalls, “I determined to go out in search of some adventure. I felt that this grey, monstrous London of ours, with its myriads of people, its sordid sinners, and its splendid sins . . . must have something in store for me” (42). Sibyl (from Euston Road, we are told, to clarify her lower-class, North London background) is performing in a shabby theater, whose patrons he later describes as “common, rough people, with their coarse faces and brutal gestures” (66). The audience is humanized only when Sibyl acts Shakespeare for them, and this performance is also what enables Dorian to maintain a slummer’s fantasy of love between the classes; as soon as she stops

acting, he loses interest and leaves her to commit suicide over her departed “Prince Charming.” Later, he uses this same alias on nocturnal trips to the opium dens around the docks, one of which is described in some detail. Dorian hails a cab late one night in Bond Street and lies back in the seat, “his hat pulled over his forehead.” In imagery which is familiar from the period’s obsessive investigations of East London, including such complex acts of disguised infiltration as James Greenwood’s “A Night in the Workhouse” (1886), C. F. Masterman’s *From the Abyss* (1902), or Jack London’s *The People of the Abyss* (1903), the journey takes him through “streets like the web of some sprawling spider,” past monotonous brickfields and along “rough-paven streets” which are home to “monstrous marionettes,” who only remind Dorian in turn of how much “[h]e hated them” (142–43).¹⁶

From passages like this, it is easy to imagine Dorian—contemptuous of the people around him, in disguise, and out for immediate gratification—as another Doctor Jekyll, or even a possible Ripper suspect; elsewhere, for example, the litany of his sins include “brawling with foreign sailors in a low den in the distant parts of Whitechapel,” as if to solidify the connection to the recent murders (110).¹⁷ But if Dorian has some success embodying the goals and attitudes of the aesthetic movement, he’s a major disappointment as a criminal, and thus, in a sense, the reverse of Thomas Wainwright. Dorian’s criminal centerpiece, the murder of the painter Basil Hallward, is particularly poor and undertaken for the most pedestrian of motives. Having confronted Dorian with a list of his rumored (and typically vague) indiscretions, Hallward wonders about the quality of his friend’s soul, at which point he is invited to view the picture and see it for himself; but Dorian suddenly feels an intense hatred towards the painter for having set the process in motion and kills him out of resentment, before hastening to cover up his crime. Commenting on this incident, Alan Sinfield concludes that it arises “from sentimental self-indulgence and want of intelligence and self-control, not from aestheticism and amorality. . . . Dorian arrives at disaster not because he abjures conventional moral principles but because he remains under their sway.”¹⁸ As we shall see, this is a judgment with which Wilde himself would reluctantly concur.

Dorian’s crime doesn’t sound very elevated and artistic because—like the portrait itself—it needs to remain hidden from the public. This is presumably Lord Henry Wotton’s point, when he

tells his protégé that “murder is always a mistake. One should never do anything that one cannot talk about after dinner.” Behind the familiar rhetoric of inversion which underpins the epigram, though, Lord Henry has another reason for disbelieving Gray’s hypothetical confession: “I would say,” he replies,

that you were posing for a character that doesn’t suit you. All crime is vulgar, just as all vulgarity is crime. It is not in you, Dorian, to commit a murder. I am sorry if I hurt your vanity by saying so, but I assure you it is true. Crime belongs exclusively to the lower orders. I don’t blame them in the smallest degree. I should fancy that crime was to them what art is to us, simply a method of procuring extraordinary sensations. (162)

That last line can mislead us into thinking that Wilde is offering up his usual blend of rhetorical insouciance and imagining a world in which only “extraordinary sensations” count. But there’s a more serious point here, which he expresses in “The Soul of Man under Socialism” as well as in the essay on Wainewright: that, given the harshness of working-class life, and especially the constant search for the means of subsistence rather than pleasure, Wilde felt that the poor criminal was entirely exonerated. But for someone like Dorian to commit murder is ultimately to borrow a form of justification which is unwarranted in his case, and which cannot be secured by simply renaming murder as an art form: since he has the wealth, leisure, and cultural training which are necessary for finding enjoyment in the aesthetic, an aristocrat really has no business committing crimes which can be supported only as a response to material need and suffering.

Rather than endorsing the notion of an aesthetics of crime, then, Wilde seems instead to offer here a powerful critique of the tendency to flatten out the differences between crime and culture. By acting out the role of the privileged offender, Dorian is simply taking to extremes a process of slumming that Wilde consistently attacked in political terms, since it effectively enabled and justified an ongoing exploitation of the real miseries of East End life. His critique of charitable philanthropy, which aimed to make the lives of the poor more bearable instead of abolishing the conditions under which poverty is allowed to exist, develops along similar lines. Part of the current problem, he notes in “The Soul of Man,” lies with those same forms of fashionable altruism, which “have really prevented the carrying out of this aim”; like kindly slave-

owners in the earlier part of the century, 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.” If this superficially reads like a standard Wildean paradox, the essay goes on to suggest a more precise 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 demoralizes. They are perfectly right. Charity creates a multitude of sins.”¹⁹

Instead of placing the onus back on the poor and demanding from them a more thrifty attitude toward household economics (as many of the Christian philanthropists and neo-Benthamites of the period would do), Wilde concludes that labor is as inherently unpleasant as poverty; that the goal of life is individual fulfillment, especially through a cultivation of art and the aesthetic; and that society must therefore be reconstructed on the basis of socialist cooperation. One important step in this process entails a recognition that crimes are committed as a result of “starvation, and not sin.” Punishing criminals is therefore counter-productive, and the mark of a debased society: “*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.*”²⁰ Echoing an argument which was simultaneously being worked out in response to the Ripper murders by Leftists like H. M. Hyndman of the Social Democratic Federation, William Morris, and George Bernard Shaw, Wilde insisted that since most crimes arise out of economic hardship and are therefore mainly directed against property (which the legal system has been developed in turn to protect), they should largely wither away under socialism: “When there is no punishment, crime will either cease to exist, or if it occurs, will be treated by physicians as a very distressing form of dementia, to be cured by care and kindness.”²¹ Morris makes an almost identical argument in his Utopian novel *News from Nowhere* (1890), arguing from the other end that the abolition of private property would mean that “all the laws and all the legal ‘crimes’ which it had manufactured of course came to an end,” thereby ending the necessity for the punitive apparatus of criminal justice and the courts.²²

I realize that I am conjuring up an unfashionably sincere (even *earnest*) Wilde here, which doesn't sit too easily with our dominant image of him as a kind of proto-postmodern jester who was largely uninterested in ethics or politics, or sacrificed both at the altar of aesthetics. As with the character of Lord Henry Wotton, it is easy to misread Wilde's more overt political commentary as articulating a callous indifference to human suffering and a corresponding delight in the trivialities which attended upon a more privileged lifestyle. Around the same time that he was writing *Dorian Gray*, Wilde was also engaged in furnishing a grand home in fashionable Chelsea. Adrian Hope reported after his first visit to the house in Tite Street, with its white high gloss paint, Japanned lacquer work and elaborate furnishings, that one room at the back (Wilde's study) incorporated a Turkish motif, but unfortunately looked out onto a slum, so its windows were "covered with a wooden grating on the inside copied from a Cairo pattern which considerably reduced the little light there was."²³ The gesture would seem to be an impatient one which wanted to abolish poverty in the here and now by simply hiding it from view, although a more generous reading might suggest that Wilde instead wanted the home to serve an exemplary function as a show house for the new aesthetic movement; in this sense Tite Street, the contents of which were ultimately auctioned to pay off Wilde's legal costs, might be seen as embodying the principles of pleasurable self-realization which he outlined as the utopian aim in "The Soul of Man."

In the mid 1880s, Wilde met the novelist Olive Schreiner, one of a loose network of "New Women" who found a liberatory potential in charity work in East London, and asked why she lived in the East End; on hearing her say, "Because the people there don't wear masks," he supposedly replied, "And I live in the West End because the people there do."²⁴ Again, such a statement might be seen as registering a simple preference for artifice and triviality at the expense of human misery or the sincere effort towards its amelioration; or, as my reading of *Dorian Gray* might conclude, it is instead a powerful critique of Schreiner's assumption that she could know a transparent truth about the East End, either through a transferential identification or the voluntary divestment of social privilege. It is fair to say, of course, that Wilde's critiques do little to offer an alternative to the charitable philanthropy which dominated the liberal agenda of the 1880s and 1890s, besides a rather vague call for revolution and the more

fundamental insistence that the poor would need to enact it on their own terms. To his credit, though, there is also considerable evidence that he was committed to basic principles of social justice, both before and after his imprisonment. In his biography, for example, Ellmann reports that Wilde signed a petition circulated by Shaw against the Haymarket massacres and attended a Hyde Park demonstration with his wife in support of the dock strike of 1889, two years prior to “The Soul of Man” essay, and just one year before *Dorian Gray*.²⁵

By this point, he had also rejected the simplistic calls for “art for art’s sake” and was engaged in a self-critical reappraisal of the aesthetic movement, which he parodied in “The Decay of Lying” (1889) through the figure of the Tired Hedonists club. That same essay discusses the influence which crime stories about Jack Sheppard and Dick Turpin have held over the imagination of impressionable youths in order to illustrate the thesis that life can sometimes imitate art, although this is saying something very different from the clichéd sentiment that the aesthetic is entirely divorced from the realm of morality.²⁶ In defending *Dorian Gray* to the press, moreover, Wilde reluctantly admitted that the novel had a moral, namely that “all excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment”: Basil Hallward, he notes, dies because of his excessive investment in beauty, “by the hand of one in whose soul he has created a monstrous and absurd vanity.” Dorian Gray suffers from a flawed attempt to “kill conscience” by living “a life of mere sensation and pleasure”; while even Lord Henry finds it hard to maintain the absolute separation of his actions from their effects, or to remain “merely the spectator of life.”²⁷ This renunciation of all responsibility for events in the story involves much the same kind of mystification which enabled criminals to be read in purely aesthetic terms, but it is finally insupportable, as Wotton ends up suffering collateral damage from events which he helped to set in motion. Far from representing a celebration of crime as one of the fine arts, I think these statements suggest its opposite, and argue convincingly for a systematic critique of aestheticism—with its ideological underpinnings of disinterestedness, an overinvestment in pleasure and beauty, and the denial of material consequences for one’s actions—as a basis for living. Like Wainwright, Dorian is here denied the cover of art and culture, which might otherwise have excused him, and is held to account for his crimes by something as uncharacteristic of Wilde as a “conscience.”

As I have tried to suggest, I am suspicious of readings of Wilde that retrospectively position the author as a criminal aesthete and thus *Dorian Gray* as a kind of exercise in self-justification. Beginning with Wilde's own trials, discussions of this text in particular have largely tried to identify a model of pernicious influence that might correlate with his supposed corruption of Lord Alfred Douglas and a network of lower-class rent boys. At the first aborted trial—brought by the author himself for libel against Douglas's father, the Marquis of Queensberry—defense counsel repeatedly cross-examined Wilde about whether a novel might be immoral or perverted, holding the same kind of influence over impressionable readers that an unnamed French novel, modeled after J. K. Huysmans's *A Rebours*, is shown to have had over Dorian. Since that text is given to him by Lord Henry, the alignment of Wotton/Wilde and Dorian/Douglas seems clear enough; and even though Wilde would not meet the latter until the year after the book was published, he so strongly resembled Gray that Neil Bartlett has described the real life Douglas as “a fiction” who “already existed in [Wilde's] books.”²⁸ If we consider, though, that it is Dorian who both engages in (generally unspecified) criminal practices and functions as a public figurehead for the new Hellenism, then biographical criticism points in another direction, to the identification of the author with his protagonist.²⁹

Again, the details refuse to fit neatly into place. If Wilde's transgressions were importantly both homosexual and across class lines, the same clearly cannot be said either for Dorian's relationship with Sibyl Vane or the few hints the text offers about his dangerous influence over other aristocratic youth like Sir Henry Ashton, Adrian Singleton, and Lord Kent's only son. There is, however, the possible detection of a homosexual subtext in a contemporary review from the *Scots Observer*, which commented that *Dorian Gray* was fit only for the C. I. D. and had been written for “none but outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph-boys.”³⁰ Here, though, the reference is not to Wilde himself but the Cleveland Street scandal of 1886, in which the seduction of a young telegraph delivery boy led to the discovery of a gay brothel, frequented by illustrious clients like Lord Arthur Somerset. It seems—again in retrospect—like an uncanny foreshadowing of Wilde's own fate, in which he played the part of the “outlawed

nobleman” who engaged in the seduction of working-class boys supplied to him by Alfred Taylor; indeed, even the question of location seems appropriate, since the social significance of Cleveland Street (on the fashionable edge of London’s Regent’s Park) was picked up in Wilde’s trial, with constant references to Taylor’s rooms in Little College Street, “near the Houses of Parliament” or “close to Westminster Abbey.”³¹ One way to explain the connection is Bartlett’s—that Wilde is working out first in fictional terms the life he would come to live after the novel was published, and which would emerge into public consciousness in the most dramatic ways after his trial and conviction; alternatively, we could argue that the same drama of revelation has retroactively conditioned anything that we might say about Wilde up to that point, as inevitably signaling the concealment, suggestion, or coded revelation of his central secret.³²

In essays on *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has cautioned against such singlemindedness, arguing in the case of the latter text that its presumed possession of “a thematically full ‘homosexual’ meaning” (“*this* insistence on narrative content, which means the insistence on *this* narrative content”) sits awkwardly against a counteracting assumption of high modernist “emptiness.”³³ The impulse to discover a gay subtext seems almost irresistible, given that Wilde was—probably still is—the most famous homosexual of our century. Even the imposition of discrete silences about his precise transgressions fuels this impulse, as two almost identical anecdotes suggest: in the first, a young Beverley Nichols is discovered by his father with a copy of *Dorian Gray* before World War One and accused of being a “pretty little boy,” a remark which the parent can only explain by reference to “*Illum crimen horribile quod non nominandum est*” (a variation on “the love that dare not speak its name”—here, the horrible crime which is not to be named); in the second, a character in Nancy Mitford’s *The Pursuit of Love* (1945) is told not to mention Wilde’s name by his father and is told by his mother only that whatever he had done “was worse than murder, fearfully bad.” Echoing Lord Henry’s comments about murder and secrecy, he is further asked, “And darling, don’t talk about him at meals, will you?” Name and crime coincide, then, as synonyms which both need to be suppressed, since they so directly conjure each other.³⁴

But there are distinct interpretive consequences to the search for subtextual truth. Consider, for example, Bartlett's criticisms of the East End scenes in *Dorian Gray*: its author, he notes,

was involved in the daily, ordinary realm of "other" (homosexual, criminal) London in 1891, so for him discovering the truth, the secret life of the city, was a pleasure rather than a missionary or journalistic employment. His researches, though, were not made public; he kept his personal account of the lower depths a secret until it was forced out of him in 1895 [at trial]. In print all he did was to repeat the clichés of the descent into London's underworld in one of its most hackneyed locales.³⁵

This is precisely the imposition of a continuity between text and trial that I have been discussing, and it rests in this instance on a false premise. As we have seen, Wilde's own subcultural forays took him only to the vicinity of Parliament, which has a resonant political symbolism but is not actually that far from his Chelsea home or the gentleman's clubs of Mayfair; to assume he had any direct knowledge of the opium dens of the East End docklands is not only to enforce an identification with Dorian Gray, but also to leave entirely uninterrogated the slide Bartlett makes here between the homosexual and the criminal. It is one thing to insist, as Wilde's case made tragically clear, that homosexuality was (and still is, in some cases) criminalized, but another entirely to force a self-identity between the two categories.

The impulse is certainly understandable, especially as applied to a figure like Wilde who seems to stand more obviously at the beginning of a peculiarly modern sense of personal identity as a form of political affiliation, rather than at the back end of the Victorian era. Jonathan Dollimore, for example, sees in him the transvaluation of dominant categories of subjective depth (truth, essence, substance, authenticity, sincerity) which a deconstructive postmodernism has also famously subjected to critique; in their place, Wilde offers up fiction, artifice, difference, style, pastiche.³⁶ It is easy to extend such an approach to more overtly political categories, to forge a "chain of democratic equivalence" (in the terms developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe) or the "Great Refusal" (in a less-fashionable Marcusean terminology): thus, if the exercise of power is normatively associated with white, middle-class, heterosexual males, with colonial authority, or the rule of law, then resistance might variously be ascribed to racial

and ethnic minorities, women, the working class, colonial subjects, the criminal, and so on.³⁷ Such categories are clearly not mutually exclusive, but neither can they be presumed to share common interests which somehow pre-exist the political practices which might engender them. Contemporary critical theory has sometimes made that presumption, however, which helps to explain the modern fascination for Wilde: as Irishman, homosexual, criminal, and self-professed socialist.

His socialism is of an idiosyncratic kind, however, the weak spot of which is precisely its refusal to consider how alliances among different groups or subject positions might be formed. Its basis is in individualism, which Dollimore suggests maintains a close and often mutually generating relationship with crime to the extent that it emphasizes nonconformism.³⁸ But it is also consciously solipsistic, because its foundation is personal self-development in isolation from social pressures and obligations: "It is to be noted also," Wilde comments in "The Soul of Man,"

that Individualism does not come to man with any sickly cant about duty, which merely means doing what other people want because they want it; or any hideous cant about self-sacrifice, which is merely a survival of savage mutilation. *In fact, it does not come to man with any claims upon him at all. It comes naturally and inevitably out of man.* It is the point to which all development tends.

Here, as we shall see, there are echoes of the critique of charitable philanthropy discussed earlier, alongside an evolutionist rhetoric which is used to describe individual rather than species development. The problem is that each individual will develop according to idiosyncratic tastes and desires, which leaves little room for cooperative action, or even sympathetic identification: "a man," the essay continues,

is called selfish if he lives in the manner that seems to him most suitable for the full realisation of his own personality; if, in fact, the primary aim of his life is self-development. But this is the way in which everyone should live. *Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live.* And unselfishness is letting other people's lives alone, not interfering with them. Selfishness always aims at creating around it an absolute uniformity of type. Unselfishness recognizes infinite variety of type as a delightful thing, accepts it, acquiesces in it, enjoys it.³⁹

Any attempt at claiming Wilde for a modern collectivist socialist or queer politics would need to come to terms with this theory of individualism, which seems if anything to be a precursor of more extreme forms of contemporary identity politics, in which anyone can ultimately speak only for themselves.

Wilde is not quite so naïve, however, and does allow for one interesting exception: that of political agitation, which ought logically to be animated by the same egoistic condescension for which he criticizes philanthropy. Yet, “Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without them . . . there would be no advance towards civilization.” The explanation of this exceptional case demonstrates Wilde’s materialist commitment, even when he is arguing within an apparently idealist framework of abstract categories. It is that poverty and starvation, which are also at the roots of justifiable crime, cause a paralysis on the part of the poor, who are not even conscious of suffering. Self-realization is not for all, then, at least under present conditions, because it requires a freedom from a labor which is “absolutely degrading”; it is private property which places the fortunate few “under no necessity to work for a living,” thereby enabling them to lead in its place a life of culture—that which (as *Dorian Gray* insists) is the privileged equivalent of what crime represents to the lower classes.⁴⁰ In a version of vanguardist accounts of the Party, then, Wilde rejoins a mainstream Marxist tradition here by defining the difficulties of attaining class consciousness and the need for leadership from outside the class itself: the difference is that those leaders are the possessors of economic and cultural capital, and they agitate for individualism!

Wilde’s revolution, then, would seem to be a curiously bourgeois one, even Arnoldian in its ultimate goal. As I have argued, it is not easily assimilable to a modern politics, despite the best efforts of contemporary cultural theorists. But it is fully comprehensible when relocated into the appropriate historical context of a wide-ranging debate about the direction of middle-class liberalism in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Broadly speaking, two responses emerged out of the rediscovery of extreme poverty that was necessitated by the economic downturn of the 1860s and 1870s. On the one hand, an older model of welfare provision continued to insist on the obligations of wealth and felt

that the poor were best served by face-to-face charity on behalf of concerned citizens who could also act as role models for the poor—a tendency that was well represented by the university settlement movement, by umbrella groups like the Charity Organisation Service, the Salvation Army, or by Lord Henry's fictional Aunt Agatha. On the other hand, the inability of such agencies to cope with systemic problems meant the beginnings of a more statist position associated with Fabian Socialists like Beatrice and Sidney Webb, the so-called New Liberalism, and Charles Booth and early British sociologists like L. T. Hobhouse.⁴¹ It is against the backdrop of this larger debate that Wilde's discussions of crime and his critique of philanthropy need to be screened.

His criticisms of the first position should be clear from the foregoing discussion of *Dorian Gray*, and it is echoed in those passages on duty and selfishness in "The Soul of Man under Socialism." It is picked up again in "The Critic as Artist" (1891) in terms of a critical disinterestedness that has traditionally been the hallmark of aesthetic appreciation. But prejudice enters in this instance, in hypothetical cases of the "noisy politician," "brawling social reformer, or poor narrow-minded priest," whenever one tries to act on others' behalf out of an "emotional sympathy" which is always (for Wilde) condescending, misguided, and ineffectual. More systematic efforts, such as those measures of Gladstonian Liberalism which helped form the bedrock of the modern welfare state, are less egotistical in their conception, but still represent futile attempts to "stave off the coming crisis, the coming revolution as my friends the Fabianists call it, by means of doles and alms" because they are grounded in statistical abstractions rather than any real knowledge of social conditions.⁴² Wilde's critique of this second tendency is less developed, although it presumably appears in his invocation of an imaginary Authoritarian Socialism, in which "an inspector should call every morning at each house to see that each citizen rose up and did manual labour for eight hours."⁴³

With this background in mind, we can better understand a brief discussion of the East End which occurs in chapter 3 of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (the first that Wilde added for the revised 1891 edition) after Dorian's refusal to perform in piano recitals in Whitechapel. Aunt Agatha is a clear representative of the sentimentalist school of personal philanthropy, which believes that high culture provides a role model for the starving poor. "But they are

so unhappy in Whitechapel,” she laments, as if that were the only measure of human life, and later she seconds the rather clichéd sentiment that the wealthy “have such grave responsibilities.”⁴⁴ Lord Henry’s response echoes “The Soul of Man” by insisting that it is “morbid” to sympathize with human suffering rather than “the beauty, the joy of life.” At this point, he is engaged by a Radical M. P. Sir Thomas Burdon, who I take to be representative of the statist tendency on account of his support for the “reasonable” Americans with their “practical” outlook on social problems. “Still, the East End is a very important problem,” he interjects, only to receive what seems initially like another flippant response from Lord Henry: in fact, his reply—that “[i]t is the problem of slavery, and we try to solve it by amusing the slaves”—speaks directly to Wilde’s wider critique of the egoism of self-sacrificing charity and to his invocation of the kindly slave-owners as those that do the most harm. Badgered into staking a counter-proposition, he claims first not to “desire to change anything in England except the weather,” and then more seriously that it is to science that we should look to restrain the present “over-expenditure” of emotion and sympathy (36–37). All of this looks like an evasive forestalling of discussion, especially when a Duchess compliments Wotton for absolving her guilt at taking “no interest at all in the East End” (37), but Wilde surely had a more serious point in mind when he added this scene for the first English edition: it is, I think, that there is no interest that she can take which could short-circuit self-interest, and nothing to propose (taking literally the parallel of slavery) other than the outright elimination of poverty that he proposes in “The Soul of Man.” He is, of course, vague about exactly how science or Socialism might accomplish that, but consistently insistent about the defects of the alternatives on offer.

IN THE DOCK AGAIN

In the ways that I have outlined, Wilde was seriously engaged in the early 1890s with working through questions of personal and social ethics and considering the relative merits of socialism, individualism, and aestheticism. Unlike Ellmann, who concludes his monumental biography with the thought that Wilde “belongs to our world more than Victoria’s . . . a towering figure, laughing and weeping, with parables and paradoxes,” my reading of the texts of this period argues that his conclusions are reasonably consistent (remarkably so, if we accept that he was an unsystem-

atic thinker, and one who even celebrated insincerity), but that they are obscured if we see him only in light of current concerns rather than those of the time.⁴⁵ The evidence of *Dorian Gray* and “The Soul of Man under Socialism” would particularly question the idea that Wilde adopted the perspective of the outlaw or transgressor at this time, as Dollimore has argued, when he is in fact interrogating the valences of that position and seeking to make fine distinctions about who is entitled to take it up and on what basis. His insistence on the justifiable criminality of the underclass in the face of crushing social conditions speaks to a commendable materialism, especially as the dominant political thinking sought to ameliorate, moralize about, or wish away those same conditions.

In a landmark article, Gareth Stedman Jones has attempted to trace elements of an ideological “remaking” of the working class, which included the origins of a distinctive commercial culture within which the new music halls featured prominently, the more reformist emphasis of the new unionism, the beginnings of a marked working-class conservatism and patriotism (articulated especially in support of the Boer campaign), and the powerful appeal of “respectability” among the working poor.⁴⁶ Of course, we should not see this as constituting an epochal shift that entirely eradicated those political and cultural associations which had been attached in particular to the poor in London’s East End throughout the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, Stedman Jones’s analysis usefully anticipates the very different image of that region which has circulated in this century: as strongly pro-family, traditionalist, hard-working, and loyal to the crown, while still sometimes mildly criminal (most notably in its resentment of state interference in its affairs). This is the general context, I think, in which we need to situate the renewed interest in the idea of the aristocratic criminal with which I began this essay, as an attempt to disarticulate crime from a socio-economic etiology and consider it instead as rooted in discrete pathologies or the topic for mass-market fictions and detective stories. In this sense, Wilde seems almost anachronistic in his insistence on the former approach and more closely aligned with a minority Leftist position.

It is a cruel irony, then, that his own trials and conviction did so much to secure the image of the privileged and pathological offender in the public imagination. As Ed Cohen has argued, the persecution of Wilde “could be perceived, both politically and popularly, as the symbolic reversal” of the Cleveland Street trial,

which caused widespread anger that the brothel's wealthy clients like Lord Arthur Somerset were able to escape prosecution amid rumors that Prince Albert Victor had also been implicated in the scandal.⁴⁷ Six years later, this popular anger was wholeheartedly directed against Wilde himself, in reports that sought to establish a hostile working class opposed to the decadence of an aristocracy which the accused had come to symbolize. The final day of the trial, coming in the midst of a patriotic fervor that marked the Queen's birthday, saw jubilant celebrations outside the Old Bailey when the verdict was read, with prostitutes dancing in the streets. "E'll 'ave 'is 'air cut reglar *now!*" was shouted by one, in a remark which almost seems crafted to emphasize the cockney dropped aspirates and thus demonstrate that it was the common Londoner who most actively sought Wilde's conviction. "Further up the social scale," the report reads, "feelings were more decently disguised, except perhaps by Lord Queensberry and his friends."⁴⁸

There is a very distinct dialectic working itself out here, in which a degenerate upper class is confronted by the image of a respectable working class who can henceforth be appealed to in the name of a post-Victorian bourgeois morality. In a variety of ways, this new alignment works itself out in the early years of this century, for example in Lloyd George's so-called "People versus Peers" election campaign of 1910, and it surfaced most spectacularly in yet another scandal trial in which Wilde made a posthumous appearance: the Pemberton Billing libel trial of 1918, in which a Wildean decadence was once again criminalized, this time as potentially traitorous in a context of wartime paranoia. This case was set in motion by the ravings of a far-right M. P. Noel Pemberton Billing, a Georgian Queensberry who declared in print—under the heading of "The Cult of the Clitoris"—that the subscribers to a private performance of Wilde's *Salome* would closely overlap with an alleged list of 47,000 prominent members of British society whose sexual preferences rendered them open to German blackmail. Among Billing's supporters was an apostate Lord Alfred Douglas, who now declared Wilde to be "the greatest force for evil that has appeared in Europe during the last 350 years."⁴⁹ During the libel proceedings, Billings also slandered (among others) the trial judge and prosecuting counsel, former Prime Minister Asquith and his wife, along with his War Minister Lord Haldane, and (by implication, at least) members of the royal family. All were lined up with surviving members of the Wilde

circle and cast in a massive establishment conspiracy. Amazingly, Pemberton Billing won the case. He did so in part by appealing to an orchestrated gallery of wounded soldiers, and to a wider xenophobia and *ressentiment* outside the courtroom: according to Philip Hoare, the class dynamic of the campaign consciously targeted “the upper classes, and sought to exploit the distrust of the middle classes (whom, ironically, Douglas hated) which the war had exacerbated,” though it crucially also enlisted the support of “respectable” working-class opinion.⁵⁰

The privileged offender becomes a charged position again in this trial, with Wilde once more figured in the background. Between 1895 and 1918, the collapsing of categories of deviance—homosexuality’s supposedly “natural” associations with criminal conduct, avant-gardist art, foreign influences, and pacifism, socialism, or treason—proved once more hard to defend against or disentangle. It is not a new equation by any means, but one which was deployed with a virulence and a sophistication which has since been replicated throughout the twentieth century. Despite what modern queer theorists have sometimes suggested, it was not always an affirmative mark of individual or collective identity or a playful subversion of the dominant discourse; when it was adopted as such by fractions of the English upper class, in the decadent 1890s or the Georgian echo which preceded World War One, there was a heavy price to pay. In a sad irony, it was Wilde himself—prior to his own conviction and exile—who would have been best placed to understand the limitations of such a position, and to anticipate the form of the backlash.

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NOTES

Among the many people who have helped me to sharpen and revise my thinking in this essay, I would especially like to thank Bonnie Blackwell for her comments on an earlier draft.

¹ G. K. Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday* (New York: Dover Publications, 1986), 25.

² A Cynic [Leslie Stephen], “The Decay of Murder” (1869), and “The Fenayrou Trial” (1882), both cited in Martin Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England, 1830–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 224–25.

³ W. T. Stead’s article on “Murder and More to Follow,” which appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in September 1888, referred to the Ripper as “a Mr. Hyde of Humanity,” as well as a “plebeian Marquis de Sade at large in Whitechapel.” See

Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992), 196, 206–7.

⁴ *East London Advertiser*, 8 September, and 6 October 1888.

⁵ See Donald Rumbelow, *The Complete Jack the Ripper*, with an introduction by Colin Wilson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), 113.

⁶ See Christopher Frayling, “The House that Jack Built: Some Stereotypes of the Rapist in Popular Culture,” in *Rape*, ed. Sylvia Tomaselli and Roy Porter (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 201. The incident of the Bank director was reported in the *East London Advertiser*, 17 November 1888.

⁷ In his *Atlas of the European Novel, 1880–1900* (London: Verso, 1998), Franco Moretti points out the astonishing fact that Holmes only once ventures into the East End, and even this is presumably in the doppelganger story, “The Man with the Twisted Lip,” in which the culprit turns out to be a bourgeois journalist disguised as a beggar (Moretti, 34).

⁸ Wiener has noted that the professionalization of policing brought with it a corresponding upgrade in the public image of criminals, who needed to be apprehended: “As crime detection, in both fact and fiction, was being removed to an expert and esoteric real, suspicions appeared that there existed much hitherto unsuspected expert and esoteric crime. The increasing sense of conquest of the external criminality of the streets combined with the blurring of the stark moral certainties of the early nineteenth century to turn middle-class attention inward . . . from the unruly populace to persons and scenes of apparent respectability” (244).

⁹ As Walkowitz notes, “despite the theories about upper-class perverts and maniacal reformers, the police still arrested the same collection of motley East End down-and-outers . . . They conducted a house-to-house search of Whitechapel, but not of the areas where the Ripper, if he were a ‘toff’ (that is, a gentleman) would be lodging. Long-standing patterns of deference and assumptions of bourgeois respectability ultimately prevailed over speculations about bourgeois criminality circulating in the press” (212).

¹⁰ Oscar Wilde to Leonard Smithers, 19 October 1897, in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1962), 663.

¹¹ Wilde, “Pen Pencil Poison,” in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellman (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), 321.

¹² Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1986), 34; Ellman, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), 282–83.

¹³ Wilde, “Pen Pencil Poison,” 339.

¹⁴ Wilde, “Pen Pencil Poison,” 337–38.

¹⁵ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 20. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

¹⁶ Masterman’s subtitle, *Of the Inhabitants by One of Them*, nicely illustrates the ambivalent attitude of these studies, which desire to simultaneously collapse and reassert the distance between their respectable authors and the disreputable objects of inquiry.

¹⁷ Sure enough, Wilson reports on a new theory in his introduction to *The Complete Jack the Ripper* that the Ripper was Wilde’s one time friend and housemate Frank Miles, on whom the character of Dorian was supposedly based; and “that Wilde knew Miles to be Jack the Ripper, and dropped clues about it in

the novel—for example, Dorian's murder of the painter Basil Hallward with a knife" (13–14).

¹⁸ Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), 100.

¹⁹ Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism," in *The Artist as Critic*, 256, emphasis in original. I have discussed this passage in a different context in "Castles in the Air: The People's Palace, Cultural Reformism, and the East End Working Class," *Victorian Studies* 39 (1996): 513–38.

²⁰ Wilde, "The Soul of Man," 267, emphasis in original.

²¹ Wilde, "The Soul of Man," 267. *Justice*, the newspaper of the Social Democratic Federation, commented, for example, that "[w]hoever may be the wretch who committed these sanguinary outrages, the real criminal is the vicious bourgeois system which, based on class injustice, condemns thousands to poverty, vice and crime, manufactures criminals, and then punishes them!" Cited in William Fishman, *East End 1888: Life in a London Borough among the Labouring Poor* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1988), 226. George Bernard Shaw wrote to *The Star* that "if the habits of duchesses only admitted of their being decoyed into Whitechapel back-yards, a single experiment in slaughterhouse anatomy on an aristocratic victim might fetch in round half a million and save the necessity of sacrificing four women of the people. Such is the stark-naked reality of these abominable bastard Utopias of genteel charity, in which the poor are first to be robbed and then pauperized by way of compensation, in order that the rich man may combine the idle luxury of the protected thief with the unctuous self-satisfaction of the pious philanthropist." Shaw, "Blood Money to Whitechapel," reprinted in *Agitations: Letters to the Press, 1875–1950* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985), 10–11.

²² William Morris, *News from Nowhere, and Other Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 112–13.

²³ Cited in Philippe Jullian, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Constable, 1969), 145–46.

²⁴ Reported by Ellmann, 243.

²⁵ See Ellmann, 273, 268.

²⁶ See Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," in *The Artist as Critic*, 293, 308.

²⁷ Wilde to the editor of the *St. James's Gazette*, 26 June 1890, in *Dorian Gray*, 339.

²⁸ Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man?: A Present for Mr. Oscar Wilde* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1988), 195–96.

²⁹ To complicate matters further, Wilde himself thought that he more closely resembled the painter Basil Hallward, although he acknowledged that the world thought of him as Wotton.

³⁰ *Scots Observer*, 5 July 1890. Wilde's response (on 9 July) was that "[t]o keep this atmosphere [of 'moral corruption'] vague and indeterminate and wonderful was the aim of the artist. . . . What Dorian Gray's sins are no one knows. He who finds them has brought them." Both are reprinted in the Norton edition of *Dorian Gray* which I am using here, 346–47.

³¹ See H. Montgomery Hyde, *Famous Trials: Oscar Wilde* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), 203, 250.

³² This is the sense in which Sinfield has suggested that a text like *Dorian Gray* helped "to constitute just those terms in which we might wish, subsequently, to read it" (103).

³³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), 166. See also her essay "Tales of the Avunculate: *The Importance of Being Earnest*," in her *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1993), 52–72.

³⁴ These incidents are cited respectively in Phillip Hoare, *Wilde's Last Stand: Decadence, Conspiracy, and the Trial of the Century* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1997), 25; and Michael Bracewell, *England is Mine: Pop Life from Wilde to Goldie* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), 14. The most famous version of this trope appears in E. M. Forster's *Maurice* (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), where the protagonist's declaration that "I am an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort" nicely highlights the relationship between Wilde, silence, and affirmative identification (145). For the origins of the discreet silence of Wilde's transgressions, in the trial itself but more particularly the reporting of it in the press, see Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1993), chap. 5 and 6.

³⁵ Bartlett, 144. He goes on to suggest that Dorian's opium den might be Tiger Bay in Limehouse, which had already been described by James Greenwood in the *Daily Telegraph*, and by Richard Rowe in *Found in the Streets* (1880); the implication, of course, is that Wilde had simply "borrowed the details from another book" (144).

³⁶ Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 15. His categories deliberately echo Fredric Jameson's celebrated definition of postmodernism in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1991).

³⁷ See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985); and Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

³⁸ Dollimore, 8–9.

³⁹ Wilde, "The Soul of Man," 284–85, emphases in original.

⁴⁰ Wilde, "The Soul of Man," 259, 268.

⁴¹ I discuss these rival approaches to the question of welfare in "Victorian Continuities: Early British Sociology and the Welfare of the State," in *Disciplinary at the Fin de Siecle*, ed. Amanda Anderson and Joseph Valente (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002), 261–80.

⁴² Wilde, "The Artist as Critic," in *The Artist as Critic*, 385–86.

⁴³ Wilde, "The Soul of Man," 260.

⁴⁴ This emphasis on personal happiness, and its source in the pleasures furnished by high art, is the foundation of Walter Besant's East End novel, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1881), and of the People's Palace, the real life institution which it inspired.

⁴⁵ Ellmann, 553–54.

⁴⁶ Gareth Stedman Jones, "Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870–1900: Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class," in his *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 179–238.

⁴⁷ Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*, 175, 121–25.

⁴⁸ See Hyde, 273.

⁴⁹ Hoare, 152.

⁵⁰ Hoare, 188.