This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights and duplication or sale of all or part is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for research, private study, criticism/review or educational purposes. Electronic or print copies are for your own personal, non-commercial use and shall not be passed to any other individual. No quotation may be published without proper acknowledgement. For any other use, or to quote extensively from the work, permission must be obtained from the copyright holder/s.

Oscar Wilde and Frederick Rolfe:
Two Catholic Converts in 1890s' English Literature

Colin Cruise

Doctor of Philosophy Thesis.

Department of English Language and Literature
University of Keele

1986

Contents

Preface — pp. i-v

Chapter 1 — Thomas Arnold jnr and 'John Oliver Hobbes'

(i) — p. 3
(ii) — p. 19

Notes

Chapter 2 — Oscar Wilde

(i) Wilde's conversion — p. 43
(ii) *Intentions*, Truth and Religion — p. 51
(iii) *The Sphinx* and its Iconography — p. 61
(iv) *A House of Pomegranates* and the Idea of the Soul — p. 70
(v) Wilde's Christ-identification — p. 85
(vi) The Myth of Dorian Gray — p. 91
(vii) Christ and Dionysus: *De Profundis* and Paganism Christianized — p. 101
(viii) Christ and Wilde: *De Profundis* as Self-Justification — p. 117

Notes

Chapter 3 — Frederick Rolfe

(i) *Hadrian the Seventh* and the author's Identity — p. 129
(ii) *Hadrian the Seventh* - the Secondary Personality — p. 138
(iii) Friendship, Boyhood, Saintliness: Three themes in Rolfe's fiction — p. 152
(iv) 'Wholeness' in Rolfe's last novel — p. 190

Notes

Chapter 4 — John Gray and Aubrey Beardsley

(i) Wilde, Raffalovich, Gray — p. 199
(ii) Death and Nature Images in *Silverpoints* — p. 204
(iii) *The Person in Question* as an Image of Conversion — p. 222
(iv) Gray, Huysmans and Beardsley — p. 234
(v) Beardsley's Conversion — p. 244

Notes

Conclusion — p. 258

Notes

List of Illustrations

Bibliography

Abstract

This thesis begins with an examination of a theme crucial to the understanding of the role of Catholicism - its drawbacks and attractions - for the English would-be convert. I choose to look initially at two converts, Thomas Arnold jnr and 'John Oliver Hobbes', one a predecessor, the other a contemporary of Wilde and Rolfe. In their work the theme of truth is important because, I claim, they are reacting to the chief prejudice against Catholics in 19th century England.

From this examination I turn to my two main subjects separately, beginning with the work of Oscar Wilde. My starting point is in the fascination that truth has for Wilde. I concentrate on three works: The Sphinx, which introduces ideas of duality: the spiritual and the physical, Dorian Gray, which further develops these themes, and the short 'soul' stories in which I see Wilde preoccupied by duality and the separation of the soul from the body. In these works I stress Wilde's borrowing from both classical and Christian traditions. I bring these observations to bear upon my analysis of De Profundis and Wilde's identification with Christ as the Man of Sorrows.

In looking at Rolfe my starting point is again truth. I take each of the major novels and see that Rolfe's awareness of his own truthfulness is in opposition to the prevailing feeling in England of the inherent untruthfulness of Catholicism. Rolfe is at pains, I claim, to invent a personalized Catholicism in which he draws, like Wilde, on classical mythology to unite his English Protestant background to the 'foreign' elements of Catholicism. The key to this process I find in Hadrian the Seventh and with it I unlock the Toto stories and the complexities of Don Renato and The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole, in which a personal vision of Catholicism is given a universal application and which unites the duality of soul and body.

I append a chapter on John Gray and Aubrey Beardsley in which I take up points covered in my writing on Wilde and Rolfe. I see similarities in their approaches to the problem of individual conversion to Catholicism in the 1890s.

The thesis seeks to show that there are similarities in the writings of Wilde and Rolfe which are connected to their religious beliefs: attitudes to truth and to continuity in religious beliefs from classical antiquity which finds expression in Catholicism. Conversion allows these writers to reconstruct their identities in a society hostile to them as individuals. I attempt to complete this argument by claiming that the personality reconstruction, by Wilde in De Profundis and by Rolfe in the autobiographical sketches in his novels, unites both men in a new, hybrid, aesthetic Catholicism.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following people without whose help this thesis would have remained unfinished. Firstly, my thanks to Professor Andor Gomme, my supervisor, who gave me much encouragement and support throughout the many changes of direction in my work. Mr. Frank Doherty of the University of Keele and Professor R. K. R. Thornton of the University of Newcastle deserve special thanks for their considerate attention to an earlier version of the thesis. Thanks, too, to Professor Ian Fletcher and Fr. Brocard Sewell who corresponded with me at the beginning of my research; to Fr. Anthony Ross OP who made me welcome in Edinburgh and allowed me access to the Dominican collection of material on John Gray and André Raffalovich; to Mr. Stephen Gilbert in N. Ireland who showed me his collection of Raffalovich letters; to Dr. Charles Swann at Keele and Mr. Pat Brady who read earlier drafts of the thesis; to Mr. John Killham and Mr. J. H. Y. Briggs, both at Keele, who encouraged me at the start of the project. Finally, my thanks go to Hilary Allman for her careful work in piecing together my manuscript for typing and for her support throughout.

Preface

This thesis is not a series of biographical studies of converts to Catholicism, neither is it an attempt to trace what Yeats, in his introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1893-1935, has described as the 'tradition' of conversion to Catholicism at the turn of the nineteenth century. This thesis was originally conceived of as a comparison between the conversions of the 1840s and 50s, the post-Newman conversions, and those of the 1890s, the decadent conversions. The Nineties eventually, and perhaps inevitably, took over and I began to concentrate on writing an overall view of the conversion phenomenon of that decade. This soon became too vast an undertaking, presenting, as it did, the problem of reading so many texts and biographies and of providing original and worthwhile interpretations of both, that I abandoned this plan. (When I began, in 1977, little had been published on 'John Oliver Hobbes' and John Gray. This has changed, particularly in Gray's case; in my chapter on his poetry I hope I add something to the current state of Gray scholarship.)

During the second stage of my research I became involved with the interpretation of well-known texts - Dorian Gray, for example - or texts often referred to but not often explained or analysed - Hadrian the Seventh, for example. As a result the thesis has become, in the main, a thematic analysis of works by Wilde and Rolfe, works which reveal idiosyncratic responses to ideas of spirituality and to Catholicism. Biography, of course, has helped to illuminate certain points; for example, the date of a conversion or the author's circumstances at the time of writing particular works; so,

where necessary, I give biographical information. But I stress that I am not concerned with biography except as a way of commenting on the texts. Rolfe's novels have been neglected, unjustly I think, because too great an emphasis has been placed on his life story. I hope to redress this imbalance in the third chapter of this thesis by concerning myself, almost entirely, with his novels. In particular I became fascinated by Don Renato, a work of almost astonishing complexity of symbol and language.

Traces of earlier approaches remain within this thesis with indications of the layers of importance that conversion has for the particular people involved. I have planned the thesis in a way that presents the individual characters separately following a first chapter which presents an issue in nineteenth-century English thinking on Catholicism. In this chapter I present an historical prologue to the problem of conversion to Catholicism while at the same time concerning myself with two characters: one a predecessor, the other a contemporary of Wilde and Rolfe. In doing this I hope to draw attention to two things: firstly, how conversion was regarded in England from the 1840s to the 1890s; secondly, how the convert regarded himself vis à vis a predominantly Protestant culture. I have chosen both of my introductory characters because they allow me to present these two views clearly: Thomas Arnold jnr and 'John Oliver Hobbes' (Mrs. Craigie) are writers who have had novels written about their conversion experiences (by, respectivley, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, Arnold's daughter, and George Moore, an erstwhile admirer of Mrs. Craigie). At the same time their own writings contain statements about their own conversions.

Central to the understanding of these documents of conversion - i.e. both biographical and autobiographical writings - is the issue of 'truth'. This issue has a theological history which had a popular expression in mid and late-Nineteenth century England. This popular expression is an extension and a generalization of the theological objections to Catholicism and turned upon a perception of the individual Catholic. This gives the 'truth' issue an ambivalence which I see as particularly significant in relation to conversion. The theme is one that permeates the fiction of 'John Oliver Hobbes' which I examine at length in the second part of my first chapter.

I have presented Wilde and Rolfe separately in order to explore fully the theme of 'truth' in their works, while, in keeping with the introduction, observing external influences and attitudes to them and their works. I hope to show that both men were formed by culturally accepted ideals of truthfulness, ideals seen as, at once, 'manly' and 'English'. Yet both were drawn to a religion seen, in England, as inimical to 'truth', and foreign and effeminate too. There is a difficulty in writing on issues of 'truth': this thesis is neither a philosophical enquiry into the nature of 'truth' nor an examination of Catholic and Protestant beliefs. The fact that Catholicism was seen as 'untrue' (by, among others, Charles Kingsley)and that Catholics were believed to be liars, has provided me with a basis - and a very earth-bound one too - for my exploration of the work of converts to Catholicism. Yet, in saying this, I must add immediately that there is, underlying my exploration of the theme of 'truth', an assumption that, in mystical terms, an absolute truth cannot be perceived anyway and that one's perceptions of the truth of any religious dogma are formed, or clouded indeed, by culturally accepted ideas of what is true and what is untrue. (Wilde's most important statements on truth

are the paradoxical statements, wrongly called epigrams, which often turn upon the conventional truths of English society). This thesis is not, therefore, a claim that these new Catholics found 'truth' in any absolute sense. I see the process of conversion from Protestantism to Catholicism as a move away from those culturally accepted ideas of 'truth' to other 'truths' which belong essentially to another culture, another tradition. How this tradition was perceived by the convert is, in itself, interesting and how it was woven into the fabric of the native Protestant culture is what ultimately concerns me here. In dealing, in the main, with themes of 'truth' as being central to conversion I hope to make links between my two main characters, Wilde and Rolfe, which have been unnoticed hitherto, links which are a product of their individual religious conversions.

I should mention here one further problem in the writing of this thesis. As a Catholic myself I have found certain difficulties in addressing the subject of conversion to Catholicism at all. I have had to check a tendency to approve of any movement towards Rome as necessarily good in itself. I have been aware, too, that in the eyes of many critics approving of the conversion of Wilde or Beardsley is not only to fly in the face of a critical orthodoxy but also to support the acceptance of what appears to be demoralizing, foolish - even duplicitous - elements in Catholicism. This awareness has led me to deal with the conversion of all of my various subjects in as detached a way as possible and to see each conversion as idiosyncratic, distinct and, importantly, as open to change and modification. Is it possible, anyway, to rejoice in the Catholicism of Frederick Rolfe when he himself did not rejoice in it? I think not, and yet the writing he produced is clear and brilliant. One

can, at least, rejoice in that. For me, then, the understanding of the Catholic mind has not, in itself, been a difficulty. The understanding, however, has its disadvantages too.

The following series of notes, more or less critical, on life has been given to me.

The writer wished to tell the truth - a desire which may be regarded as a legitimate claim to any reader's consideration and indulgence.

('John Oliver Hobbes' introduction to Letters from a Silent Study (London 1904))

(i) In Religious Trends in English Poetry Hoxie N. Fairchild takes up a decidedly anti-aesthete position particularly in relation to the aesthetic interest in the Catholic Church. The adjective "weak" is appendended to descriptions of aesthetes. For Fairchild this weakness is itself a reason for conversion. He agrees with Irving Babbitt's description: "The affinity of certain romantic converts for the Church is that of the jelly-fish for the rock."

> [Conversion is] a means of transforming a sense of weakness into a sense of power, of enjoying vicarious self-assertion at the cost of merely nominal self-surrender. (1)

For Fairchild, therefore, conversion is a means of converting weakness into power. Certainly Newman, Thomas Arnold, and in his own way, Frederick Rolfe, do not fit this pattern of Fairchild's, whose thesis is close to that of extreme muscular Christians in the mid, and late nineteenth century. Here is an echo of Kingsley:

> On the whole, what a disciple of Pater expected from religion was not eternal objective truth but novel sensation embodied in impressive symbols which possessed the only reality he firmly believed in - the reality of imaginative creation. (2)

This syndrome, which we could rename a self-fulfilling superstition, is not without some justification in the 1890s. I shall let Fairchild finish his thinking:

> There was also the temptation to conceive of sin as the self-expression of the tragically distinguished individual, thus transforming the Christian basis of human brotherhood into a source of pride. (3)

But although this generalization seems clearly observed it is but a generalization after all. Wilde, who most closely fulfills Fairchild's thesis, is aware of the sins he commits and of the hubris which makes these sins possible. Wilde's resisting of everything but temptation is part of his awareness that the human imagination can liberate as well as enslave. (This is the essence of the Paterian philosophy which led Kenneth Clark to describe The Renaissance as a liberating book.) Yet in conventional terms Wilde's attitude is grossly immoral, as his need for "the intensification of personality" as an artist seems simply proud. (4)

Fairchild, although not reliable on the subject of nineties Catholicism (he describes Henry Harland, John Gray and Vincent O'Sullivan as cradle-Catholics!), is full of the kinds of generalizations which have brought about the need for this thesis. For example, Fairchild describes Richard le Gallienne's defence of the Protestant tradition in The Religion of a Literary Man and continues :

> With this feeble exception the religious orientation of the aesthetes, when they possess any at all, is toward the Church of Rome. Anglo-Catholicism seems not to appeal to them except, in rare instances, as a half-way house. The age-old glamour, visible grandeur, majestic authority, and Continental flavour of the Roman communion were more attractive. (5)

When this is set beside Fairchild's attitude to Lionel Johnson we can see the lines his argument follow. It would be difficult to think of a more insulting way of describing the poet:

"... it cannot be said that at Oxford the Catholicism of this young sex pervert and incipient alcoholic was mere aesthetic play acting." (6) The fatuosity of this comment is matched by the following by Philippe Jullian in his biography of Wilde:

> An inclination towards Roman Catholicism was not unusual among English homosexuals at this time. Some, the sentimental ones, found that the Protestant religion left them too much alone with their consciences. They needed to be listened to and forgiven; several of Oscar's friends chose this road after having been disappointed in love. Some, frustrated by not being able to dress in silk and laces, wished at least to play a part in the ballet of the Mass or in the operatic services performed in the Cathedrals on the great Feast Days ... (7)

Both Fairchild and Jullian echo Victorian distrust of Catholicism, and converts to Catholicism. G. F. A. Best in his essay 'Popular Protestantism in Victorian Britain' succinctly analyses this distrust. He traces a mixture of political and religious objections to Catholicism. (8) Among the strictly moral objections he notes that Catholicism was seen as unmanly (as Fairchild would seem to support) and as inimical to the truth (the theatricality of the Mass as seen by Jullian's spurious converts is itself an untruth). Charles Kingsley's attack on Catholicism was launched at two targets: the unmanliness of the religion and the inimicality to truth. Catholicism, embracing as it does the ideal of the celibate clergy, appears to reject marriage and sets up a monastic and conventual system to contain and educate this clergy. Since the Reformation Protestantism had rejected the Roman sacerdotal system. The English Protestant tradition was one of joint education for clergy and laity. Much popular Protestant literature deals with

the darker, and spicier, side of conventual life. Perhaps the most famous of these novels The Awful Disclosure of Maria Monk, an import from the United States, is still in print, and is still seriously read as a warning to unwary young ladies. In another novel, Almost a Nun by Julia McNair Wright (London 1890?) a young heiress is beleaguered by Catholic relatives who, wanting her fortune for the Church, determine to confine her to a convent. The story is thinly-disguised propaganda begging Protestant parents to be careful in the education of their girls. Significantly convent education is seen as inadequate in scholarly subjects, dwelling on 'artistic' subjects like embroidery and music, themselves suspect to the evangelical mind. It is worth quoting here two short passages from this obscure work, passages which illustrate how enduring was the myth of Catholic untruthfulness and how suspicious was the evangelical of the Catholic priesthood. In the first quotation Mrs. Reyburn, an evangelical, is speaking to her friend, Mrs. Rose, about a Catholic acquaintance, Mrs. Duval (a suspiciously foreign name):

> "Mrs. Rose, 'no faith with a Protestant' is a cardinal point with Papists. A lie told to a Protestant is no lie; and the end justifies the means used to attain the end; the lie rises to a virtue if told to aid the Romish Church." (9)

In the second quotation the heroine of Almost a Nun, Elleanore, is talking to a nun on doctrinal points in Catholicism:

> "... Now to begin with your Pope, claiming to be a successor of Peter: why can he not have a wife, as Peter did, as you know the Bible tells us?"
>
> "In this matter the Pope does not follow the example of what St. Peter did before he was called to the apostleship, but the example of Peter's Lord."

> "There may be this point and one or two others in which Christ did not intend to be thus followed. Your Popes and priests do not think it needful to terminate their lives by crucifixion as Christ did. Paul says expressly that he has a right to have a wife, like Peter and other apostles. I think that by thus decrying marriage, you virtually accuse God of instituting and supporting a wrong." (10)

This is not the place for a study of anti-Catholic literature, a field already well dug-over by others, notably Robert Lee Wolff. (11) However, I would like to examine briefly those two aspects of Catholicism - its insincerity (*sic*) and its support for a celibate clergy - which so interested and offended nineteenth-century writers. Generalizations such as Fairchild's quoted above (page 1) might be traced back to Charles Kingsley and earlier to the reform of the English public school. In his study of the public school, *Godliness and Good Learning*, David Newsome explains the relationship of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Church* (1825) to Thomas Arnold's reform of Rugby School and, later, to Kingsley's advocacy of muscular Christianity.

> In the *Aids to Reflection* manliness is portrayed as the opposite of childishness: to be manly was to be mature, to be conscious of the duties of manhood...
> The influence of [Coleridge's] teaching on Arnold is plain. Here is the source of Arnold's educational ideals, the explanation of his passion for converting unruly boys into Christian *men* ... Yet to Kingsley and to Hughes manliness meant something very different ...
> Whereas Colerdige had regarded manliness as something essentially adult, Kingsley and Hughes stressed the masculine and muscular connotations of the word and found its converse in effeminacy. (12)

When Kingsley turned his muscularly Christian mind to the criticism of Tractarians and Roman Catholics he revealed how much his thinking was dominated by ideas of masculinity correlated to

ideas of cleanliness and strength. (13) The ideal of manliness was Arnold's alternative to the viciousness he found in the old public schools. It became, through Kingsley, an antidote to Tractarianism, and in doing so it turned inwards upon itself and manliness became its own reward. It is strange therefore that the Kingsley revealed by his modern biographers shares many of the predelictions to suffering and cruelty with Edward Bouverie Pusey from the Tractarian enemy camp. Stranger still, these predelictions are shared by Frederick Rolfe, albeit translated into homosexual fantasies. (14) The point to make here is that all three men were the products of the English Victorian school system. It is no coincidence that Rolfe's focus on sadistic details in his prose appears to be a restatement of Kingsley's focus on the muscular deeds of Hereward. I shall discuss this matter further when writing at length about Rolfe. But it will be sufficient to say here that Rolfe's Catholicism is as muscular and fastidious as Kingsley's Protestantism (and is in fact influenced by it) and both equally avoid effeminacy. At times Rolfe bewails a tendency to untruth in the character of certain Catholics: "What you have said is another matter - an example of the Lie Officiose, which is told to excuse oneself or another, and merely a Venial Sin according to your Jesuit catechism ..." (15) This quotation demonstrates amply how completely Rolfe absorbed evangelical fear of and subsequent attack upon the Catholic Church. There is some amount of truth in D. H. Lawrence's overstated judgement on Rolfe:

> If ever a man was a Protestant in all his being, this one was. The acuteness of his protest drove him, like a crazy serpent, into the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church. (16)

Rolfe's fastidiousness, his fixation with faithfulness in friends, his scrupulous concern for Truth are striking elements of his character. I would suggest that Thomas Arnold junior is seen as a precursor of Rolfe's type of Catholic. Born in 1823, Arnold rebelled against the evangelical basis of his father's thinking, yet he retained that manly (in the Coleridge meaning) sense of responsibility and honesty. Arnold's life is remarkable for the shifts in his thinking, all of them prompted by his earliest conscientiousness. As he himself said about the "instability and weakness" of his proceedings:

> The only plea I can urge is, that I acted in good faith, and that the taint of self-interest never attached to what I did. With folly, weakness, obstinacy, pliancy I may be charged, and more or less justly; but no one can say that any one of my changes was calculated with a view to worldly advantage. If it were not so, I should not feel that I had a right to hold up my head amongst honest men. (17)

Thomas Arnold junior was first converted to Catholicism in 1856. After Rugby he had gone to Oxford and although a student there during Newman's celebrated vicariate at St. Mary's he could recall only one occasion when he went to hear Newman preach. He had heard Manning preach too and was not impressed. (18) But shortly afterwards Arnold experienced a crisis of faith inspired initially by a passage from the First Epistle of Peter (he doesn't tell us in his autobiography which passage triggered off the crisis). From St. Peter he turned to <u>Tracts</u>

for the Times in an effort to understand the organization and ideals of the early church, thus turning to the very influence his father abhorred. It is worth quoting here a passage from his autobiography explaining how Thomas Arnold junior was deeply affected by Butler's Lives of the Saints which he came across by accident while staying at an inn:

> Never having heard of the book before, I took out a volume at random, and opening it, happened to fall upon the Life of St. Brigit of Sweden. This saint, who was aunt or cousin to the reigning King of Sweden, was married, and had eight children; nevertheless she lived a most holy and self-denying life, adhering to and obeying the Catholic Church as strictly as St. Ignatius or St. Irenaeus ... The impression which this life made upon me was indelible. Looking more closely into the matter, I found that the Festival of St. Brigit, whose life I had thus happened to read, as it seemed, by mere accident, fell on the same day in October on which a decisive change in my mind had been produced through my suddenly remembering words in the first Epistle of St. Peter. (19)

Like many things in his autobiography Arnold's account of his conversion is slight. Significantly his conversion experience hinges upon coincidence, and he challenges neither the coincidence nor the elements which make it a telling one - the openness of his mind or the nature of the "decisive change" in his thinking. He trustingly accepts the coincidence - of his discovery of St. Brigit's story on the anniversary of his reappraisal of a passage in St. Peter's Epistle - and just as trustingly displays it for critical readers. The result was that Arnold was received into the Catholic Church at Hobart Town in January 1856. Later he was to leave the church only to reconvert some years after. The following quotation from Passages in A Wandering Life

demonstrates how Arnold combines his cultural heritage (Milton) with a discovered Catholic culture. He is describing his period of disenchantment with Catholicism:

> ... I cannot doubt that this period of uncertainty would have passed away in due time if I had adopted the means proper for dealing with it. One of those means indeed - labour - I did not put from me, and this was my salvation in the end; but the weapon of prayer - being attacked by a certain moroseness and disgust and weariness of existence, - I began unhappily to use less and less. I did not, like Milton, 'still bear up and steer right onward' but wavered, - doubted -, and fell back. (20)

Some sentences later he informs us that he was "able to return to the firm ground of the Catholic communion." "Fell back" is a variation on "lapsed" and "return" is a disguise for re-conversion. There are two reasons, I believe, for this simple disguise. Firstly, Arnold was covering his tracks for those who did not know the full history of his lapse and reconversion. He returned to the church on the eve of the election for an Oxford Professorship which he was expected to win. Although brief and coded, Arnold leaves some trace in his autobiography of a difficult period in his life for those who might be interested in his shift back and forward to Catholicism. Secondly, the whole subject was too painful to go into in great detail, a fact borne out by his daughter, the novelist Mrs. Humphrey Ward. I shall in due course briefly examine Mrs. Ward's novel Helbeck of Bannisdale which was, in part, based on her father's spiritual difficulties. But in the non-spiritual decisions resulting from his spiritual struggles Arnold is typical of Catholic converts as diverse as Newman and Rolfe, Gerard Manley Hopkins and John Gray. Arnold was, perhaps, more remarkably single-minded in the destruction of any worldly advantage his

social position might give him - a social position as the son of the famous headmaster of Rugby and, consequently, as a member of the Church of England. Arnold's first romance, with Henrietta Whately, was terminated by her parents because of the young man's refusal to accept the Articles of Religion. In Equator Letters Arnold wrote:

> Take but one step in submission, and all the rest is easy; persuade yourself that your reluctance to subscribe to Articles which you do not believe is a foolish scruple, and then you may take orders and marry, and be happy: satisfy yourself that you may honestly defend an unrighteous cause, and then you may go up to the Bar, and become distinguished, and perhaps in the end sway the counsels of state; prove to yourself, by the soundest of arguments of political economy, that you may lawfully keep several hundred men and women and children at work for twelve hours a day in your unwholesome factory, and then you may become wealthy and influential, and erect public baths and patronize artists. (21)

Interestingly here Arnold moves from a religious protest - "one step in submission" - to an attack upon Victorian hypocrisy and its more obviously social consequences. Arnold was always aware of how his conversion to Catholicism would lead to his ostracization from society. In his autobiographical writings he admits to a great restlessness in his youth which took the form of semi-exploratory journeys in Australia and New Zealand. He had instantly to resign his post as school inspector upon his conversion in New Zealand. And, as I have observed, his reconversion in England led to the loss of an Oxford Professorship. The following conversation imagined by the novelist 'John Oliver Hobbes' may illustrate decisions made by converts and would-be converts in the mid-nineteeth century. Disraeli opens the conversation. He is advising a protégé, Robert Orange:

> "... you will become a Roman Catholic because you will find nowhere out of Rome, poetry and the spirit of democracy and a reverence for authority all linked together in one irrefragable chain.. But I must warn you that such a step would prejudice your whole political career. It would be throwing down the gauntlet to fortune herself."
>
> "That", said Robert, flushing, "is the strongest argument you could bring forward in Rome's favour. It seemed to me that I had everything to gain by acknowledging her claims. Now you tell me - and I could ask for no better judge - that it would mean a severe blow to my worldly prospects my way seems clearer." (22)

Wilde was extremely aware of the social disadvantages of conversion to Catholicism, which might account for his last-minute submission. Early in his adult life he was forced to reject the Catholic influence in his life when it threatened an inheritance. Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower's ridicule of Wilde's leanings to Catholicism was also instrumental in diverting him from conversion. And he confesses

> "Much of my moral obliquity is due to the fact that my father would not allow me to become a Catholic. The artistic side of the Church would have cured my degeneracies." (23)

Arnold's faith is both wavering and steadfast - he holds to the idea of Catholicism in the face of opposition and loss of favour. When he falters it is due to no external opposition but because of internal doubt. This is characteristic not only of Arnold but of other Catholic converts. Perhaps the profundity of their original devotion makes the sense of loss of faith more profoundly painful. Gerard Manley Hopkins is an obvious example of this development from joy to pain. In an early poem, pre-conversion, he imagines a nun about to take the veil. In her rejection of the world is an acceptance of a more perfect spiritual life.

I have desired to go
  Where springs not fail,
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail
  And a few lilies blow.

And I have asked to be
  Where no storms come,
Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,
  And out of the swing of the sea. (24)

Elsewhere in Hopkins' pre-conversion poetry we see a rapturous acceptance of the joys of asceticism, a rejection of sensuality as in 'The Habit of Perfection' of 1866. Later, the materialist despair of the Leaden Echo is answered by the Golden Echo: 'Give beauty, back ... back to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver." (25) Hopkins decided on a difficult and narrow course early in his life. He chose celibacy, discipline and a curbing of his creativity (perhaps the "elected silence" of 'The Habit of Perfection'). But the spiritual gloom and the self-disgust that permeate the later sonnets can be compared to Wilde's cry from the depths. I am aware that to mention Hopkins so briefly in this manner may seem to reduce him. But I believe him to be the most striking example of that self-cancellation so characteristic of Rolfe. The great difference is that Hopkins writes from within the Catholic Church whilst Rolfe, for all his devoutness, feels himself outside.

To return to Thomas Arnold, his daughter, the novelist Mrs. Humphry Ward, recognized early her father's religious difficulties. Helbeck of Bannisdale (1898) is based on the memory of those difficulties, and I mention it here as an example from the 1890s, of how much opposition to Catholicism there was still, at this date, in England. Yet, Mrs. Ward's novel is not entirely sympathetic; she applies much of the painstaking method she brought to the writing of

Robert Elsmere, to the writing of Helbeck of Bannisdale. That is to say, it is a novel which attempts to find areas of agreement where there might appear to be none. Mrs. Ward peoples her novel with characters of various religious persuasions. Often these persuasions are fine gradations of each other: Helbeck is of old Catholic stock, an aristocrat with ascetic tendencies; Laura Fountain is of non-Conformist stock; Fr. Leadham is a convert to Catholicism; Ted Williams is a lapsed Catholic Convert.

Alan Helbeck represents "Catholicism at its best ... No mean or puerile type, with all its fetichisms and unreasons in its head - no! - a type sprung from the best English blood, disciplined by heroic memories, by the persecutions and hardships of the Penal Laws" (Helbeck of Bannisdale Book V, Ch. 1, p. 367). Laura's friend, Dr. Friedland, fears she has fallen in love with Helbeck because she is ill-educated and can't argue against the iniquity of the Catholic system. He almost paraphrases Mrs. McNair Wright's fears about English education (see above p. 4).

> "She feels herself an infidel - a moral outcast. She trembles before the claims of this great visible system. Her reason refuses them - but why? She cannot tell. For Heaven's sake, why do we leave our children's minds empty like this? If you believe, my good friend, Educate! And if you doubt, still more - Educate!" (Ibid, pp. 367-8).

Laura represents Thomas Arnold's wavering will. Ultimately she rejects Catholicism and commits suicide rather than openly reject her fiancé. She leaves behind a note which echoes Arnold's painfully conscientious tone.

> "I! - only I /have been cruel7! To open the old wounds - to make him glad for an hour - then to strike and leave him - could anything be more pitiless? ... But to live a lie - upon his heart, in his arms - that would be worse." (Book V, Ch. 4, p. 462).

The lie is not that Laura loves Helbeck but that she loves Catholicism. She has to sacrifice her life rather than lie in that way. She simply cannot accept the Catholic Church, even for the love of Helbeck.

What is striking about Mrs. Ward's novel is the continuity she feels between the past and present state of Catholics and converts. Dr. Friedland's comments, quoted above, on Alan Helbeck are similar to those of Laura's father when he first meets his second wife. "She was a Catholic, he discovered; but her Catholicism was not that of a convert, but of an old inherited sort which sat easily enough on a light nature". (Book 1, Ch. 2, p. 24). Mrs. Ward feels no need to update her father's doubts and fears (echoed by Laura Fountain) for an 1890s public. Catholicism seems a foreign land and one should not venture in. In this Helbeck of Bannisdale strongly recalls Charlotte Brontë's Villette.

Mrs. Ward uses Catholicism as a symbol of the past, a past redolent with aristocracy. The title of the novel is the title of an old family whose roots are inextricably linked with 'Romanism'. She sees the old faith (never quite wholly damnable) as the prey of arrivistes: the young Ted Williams, for example, whom Helbeck takes up, uses the religion for his own ends and then lightly discards it. Laura herself represents

earnestness, Arnoldian humanism. She is beyond dogma, struggling now and ignored into the twentieth century. Her progress is upset by the re-emergence of the past (saints, prayers, penance - Catholicism, in fact). Significantly Alan Helbeck lives in Westmoreland, Mrs. Ward's idea of an earthly paradise. His asceticism cannot, therefore, be totally disapproved of, although there is a feeling that the mainstream of life has passed him by. On the other hand, Laura constantly appears in the outside world and much of the action in the novel which concerns her is associated with modernity - trains, iron foundries, the Oxford intellectual world. After a fatal accident in an iron foundry Laura's humanism makes her capable of consoling the dead man's wife. Helbeck's Catholicism leaves him isolated, contemplating saints and his own sins. Laura finds his charitable involvement with orphanages "distant".

Mrs. Ward's dislike of Catholicism shows most in her depiction of the Catholic clergy as dark, menacing, devious and courteous. Helbeck as a devout and introspective layman appears to be the innocent victim of an institution. His individuality and, eventually, his love, are taken away by the Catholic priests who have only their own interests at heart. In this view Mrs. Ward comes close to popular Protestant opinion recorded above (pages 5-7). But her viewpoint relates back to the agnosticism of Mark Pattison and his dislike of organized religion and to the agnostic humanism of her uncle, Matthew Arnold.

After the publication of Helbeck of Bannisdale Mrs. Ward retained an interest in Catholicism. In a letter to Louise

Creighton in 1907 she wrote

> ....what interests and touches me most - in religion - at the present moment is Liberal Catholicism. It has a bolder freedom than anything in the Anglican church, and a more poetic outlook. It seems to me at any rate to combine the mystical and scientific powers, in a wonderful degree. (26)

The "poetic outlook" is at the basis of Laura's fascination with Catholicism in Helbeck of Bannisdale. But ultimately her disagreement with Helbeck's religion is over the loss of her liberty and freedom of thought. "For she had been bred in that strong sense of personal dignity which is the modern substitute for the abasements and humiliation of faith." (Book IV, Ch. 3, p. 319).

In a review essay of Helbeck of Bannisdale George Tyrrell contrasted it with a novel published a year later by the Catholic novelist Mrs. Wilfrid Ward, One Poor Scruple (1899). Tyrrell sees some good in Helbeck but points out that it is, in its conception, a book for non-Catholics. His observation exposes the rigid expectations of the spiritual in the Protestant mind:

> That such a character as Madge Riversdale's /in One Small Scruple/ should cover a small, firm core of faith and fear under a cortex of worldliness and frivolity; that religion should have such a hold on one so entirely irreligious by nature, is something quite inconceivable to a mind like, let us say, Mrs. Humphry Ward's; and yet absolutely intelligible to the ordinary Catholic. ('Two Estimates of Catholic Life' (1899) reprinted in The Faith of Millions (Lond. 1901), pp. 70-71).

Tyrrell points to the fact that, when a person belongs to a strongly dogmatic Church a return to that Church is always a possibility. The core of faith he speaks of is itself a symbol of the solidity of the Church at the centre of religious life. This contrast of the impermanence of human foibles and the permanence of the Church is one of the themes of the novelist 'John Oliver Hobbes' whose work I turn to in the next part of this introduction.

(ii) In his pamphlet What, Then, Does Dr. Newman Mean? Charles Kingsley writes about the idea of 'truth' in the writings and sermons of J. H. Newman. Not only does Kingsley analyse a number of Newman's sermons, he provides also a personal commentary on their effect, which makes for equally interesting reading. He describes his disenchantment in 1844 with Newman after the latter's sermon 'Wisdom and Innocence' (27) which formed the basis of his attack on Newman in the famous article in Macmillan's Magazine. His article, as is well known, led to the correspondence between the two men which culminated in Newman's Apologia pro Vita Sua (1864). Kingsley's attack might be broadly described as Popular Protestant, but that is not to relegate the pamphlet to the ranks of transparently anti-Catholic propaganda. However, on quoting Newman's Lectures on Anglican Difficulties (1850) Kingsley comments:

> In one only way can Dr. Newman reconcile this passage with the teaching of his Church; namely by saying that the licence given to equivocation, even on oath, is so complete, that to tell a downright lie is the most superfluous and therefore most wanton of all sins. (28)

Although this is contrary to what Newman actually says in the relevant passages, Kingsley takes the opportunity to have a general upbraiding of Catholic attitudes to 'truthfulness'. In this and many other instances Kingsley's punch is aimed not simply at Newman but at Catholicism in general. And central to his attitude is that Catholicism is "inimical to the truth." One of the most generalized, and necessarily unsubstantiated, of his comments is on Newman, the Oxford Movement and the

influence of both on English youth.

> ... his teaching [Newman's] had this outcome. Whatever else it did, it did this. In proportion as young men absorbed it into themselves, it injured their straightforwardness and truthfulness. The fact is notorious to all England. It spread misery and shame into many an English home. (29)

It is this tone that is not only Protestant but Popular. The appeal to the head of the Protestant family, veiled but apparent, is to see that the breakdown of Protestantism does not happen. Kingsley goes to the extent of implying (and not denying) that Newman's Anglican sermons were aimed at converting susceptible hearers to Catholicism. (30) This idea is echoed in Walsh's charges against Newman in The Secret History of the Oxford Movement (1899). Certainly Kingsley's writings on the subject represent the paranoia of the English Protestant when faced with the subject of Catholic 'truths'. One might say that his original comments in Macmillan's Magazine were so much of an over-reaction as to discredit Kingsley himself and elevate Newman. Kingsley was expressing an objection lying at the heart of all fears of Catholicism in nineteenth-century England. One can find many similar expressions of this fear in Kingsley's fiction, notably in Westward Ho! where the Catholic infidel has his come-uppance. As I have observed above, anti-Catholic literature is an important sub-genre of nineteenth-century English literature. Throughout this sub-genre there is the claim that Catholics are, because of the teachings of their Church, intrinsically untruthful.

Wilde and Rolfe share an interest in the nature of truth - Wilde most obviously in his humorous reversal of commonplace truths.

"Friendship is far more tragic than love. It lasts longer." (31) A maxim which, tragically, could not apply to Rolfe, but which illustrates Wilde's technique of startling his readers by playing on their preconceptions, in this case of what is tragic about the span of human relationships. In De Profundis Wilde assesses these and similar attempts at arriving at truths :

> ... to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. I treated Art as the supreme reality, and life as a mere mode of fiction ... (32)

Rolfe, as I shall point out in the section which deals with his novels, expresses his concern for truth in more directly religious ways. He was haunted by the suspected duplicity of Catholics. In its most convoluted form - Apistophilos Echis ("untruth-loving viper") - it is a description of the painter Trevor Haddon, the dedicatee of Don Renato.

Here I shall turn my attention to Pearl Maria-Teresa Craigie, the novelist 'John Oliver Hobbes', as an example of a Catholic convert writer whose work is permeated with a fear of untruth. Her novels indeed, I would claim, are an attempt to establish a fixed and true 'truth' (like a true North), to discover an ideal which relates to the life she, as a Catholic, a socialite, as an artist, lived. Like Wilde, Mrs. Craigie lived a publicly successful life. Like Rolfe, she was painfully conscious of her conversion to Catholicism and, disillusioned by social success, sought a religious life. (33) In reading the work of any

convert to Catholicism one is unsure of how much of the tone is inherited from past beliefs and principles. Mrs. Craigie's family were Non-conformist. She was born near Boston, Massachusetts in 1867, and on both sides her parents had strong connections with the Non-conformist ministry. Although for most of her short publishing life Mrs. Craigie was a Catholic, it must be borne in mind that her initial attempts at fiction were made from within a Non-conformist circle.

Some Emotions and a Moral, which was published in 1891, was the first of Mrs. Craigie's mature works to be read by the public. Like the subsequent short works - The Sinner's Comedy (1892), A Study in Temptations (1893), A Bundle of Life (1894) - this first work was an attempt to explore the 'inner tragedy' of life, or rather, the pointlessness of human activity which leads to tragedy. The love life of all Mrs. Craigie's characters can be said, without exception, to be peculiarly unfixed: all change their allegiances quickly, almost inevitably to change back to their original choice later, but too late. Some Emotions sets this pattern. From the beginning we sense a distortion of 'ordinary' values. We feel a justifiable insecurity at the first meeting of Cynthia and Godfrey. Not only is the setting, at dusk with nightingales singing, too serene, the implication is that the serenity is the wish projection of both minds. Appearances are unreliable. Godfrey sees Cynthia as fresh and gauche because her dress is too short and her hair untidy, while to the reader Cynthia reveals herself as so artificial that she verges on being a figment of her own imagination.

Godfrey Provence is a dilletante, a representation of the aesthete of the 80's and 90's. Much of his conversation, and that of other

characters, is epigrammatic and curiously hard and characterless. Mrs. Craigie delights in bullying cardboard figures into relationships and then contorting their mouths with epigrams. Yet her letters reveal her to be far from shallow, perhaps preoccupied with her own sensitivity but not insensitive. The coldness of Cynthia is a product of fear, fear of her own feelings and of demonstrating them, which may parallel Mrs. Craigie's own fears. (34) Of Cynthia's distorted vision we have innumerable examples, yet it is difficult to say whether she is totally perplexing because of the lies she tells herself or because of her honesty about those lies. 'John Oliver Hobbes' is obsessed with the deceit her characters, Cynthia included, play upon themselves. Cynthia sees life as a series of lulls and climaxes centered, to some extent, on her ego. But when her power over Godfrey is threatened she examines her conscience:

> ... she had lived her amusement with Provence from day to day, taking small thought for the morrow and having still less for the yesterday. Now she felt she ought to prepare in some way for a climax. It was a revelation to her to find that preparation was necessary. She usually left climaxes to the hour, her mood and fate. (35)

Cynthia arranges her life in the way she arranges her clothes (which "betrayed her mood", a lie put into the mind of the susceptible Godfrey). The most startling example of this aesthetic arrangement of life follows Cynthia's interview with Godfrey when she attempts to bribe him with her love into accepting the editorship of an influential journal. Her lover storms out but Cynthia waits, sure that he will return to bow to her wishes :

> She waited a few moments, not so much in the hope that he would return, but because she felt that to stand there alone - determined if sorrowful - was not only the most artistic, but the most picturesque thing to do. (36)

When praised for her honesty Cynthia is at her most Wildean:

> "Love me for my faults and not my virtues, dearest, and then I shall never disappoint you. I can always live up to *them*." (Author's italics). (37)

Eventually Cynthia breaks off her relationship with Godfrey and he believes the whole world is a lie. But she explains to him

> "No, Godfrey, not the whole world - only me. Besides, I never said I didn't like you: I couldn't say that. But then there's a difference between liking and loving. I can't love any one - I have tried. I have no love to give, and I am not worth loving. Believe me; do believe me." (38)

The repetition of "believe me" confuses Godfrey and the reader for we can really no longer assess Cynthia's honesty. The situation is complicated too by the moral of the title. The dialogue we are discussing here is the result of a revealing conversation between Cynthia and her aunt, Lady Theodosia, who advises her niece to give Godfrey up. So, when she carries out her aunt's advice, is Cynthia lying about her emotions or acting on a moral instruction?

That Cynthia acts morally for once may seem, in conventional terms, good. But, as I have pointed out, she breaks Godfrey's heart and leads him to believe that "the whole world is a lie".

So what is the moral of Some Emotions and a Moral? If the emotions are true love and self-love - love proper and amour-propre - then the moral must be that true love must never be thwarted. True love, in the words of Cynthia (for once, perhaps, speaking the truth), has no etiquette. But the novel has a tragedy at its centre. Its central theme is the inability of the characters to test the truth of their own statements or of their own emotions. To some extent, says 'John Oliver Hobbes', all our gestures, notions and feelings are sham. Just as we start to speak the truth our words contort themselves. (39) Morality is little help: if we believe that Cynthia really loves Godfrey then it is her sense of morality (instigated by Lady Theodosia) that makes her reject him and tell lies about her feelings.

It is odd that a woman who was soon to be received into the Catholic church should want to see life and relationships with such a jaded eye, although the tragic waste of human emotions portrayed expresses something of the author's own life. (40) In its inversion of the conventional use of Love as a life-giving force the novel, though slight, is an interesting document of the Decadence in England. The novel also has strong thematic similarities with Ford Madox Ford's The Good Soldier; they share in particular a quietly despairing tone. (41) But it is the attempt to study 'truth' and 'honesty' in human relationships that makes the novel worthy of study.

Ritual and Truth in the Novels of 'John Oliver Hobbes'

Mrs. Craigie's two major novels, The School for Saints (1898) and Robert Orange (1900) are major in scale and intent only; artistically they are failures. Essentially they are historical novels with religion as a central theme. Religion is seen as being beyond philosophy: "If the Church taught philosophy only, the Catholic faith would not be a religion ..." explains the hero. (42) The major characters are fictional but minor characters are historical personages. Disraeli features not only as a politician but as a writer. Mrs. Craigie regards Disraeli as an idealist and remarks on the qualities that his 'foreign' mind brought to English political thinking. It is not accidental that both Robert Orange and his wife Brigit are also 'foreign' - Brigit is of Irish,Alberian and French extraction, and Robert is,to all intents,an anglicized Frenchman. This has obviously fed their religious opinions,and in Chapter twenty eight Lord Reckage talks to Robert about the un-Englishness of Catholicism:

> "As a matter of fact, I don't think that religion ever has reached, or ever will get hold of, the English mind and imagination. No Englishman at any period has been able to paint either a Christ or a Holy Family ... there is nothing spontaneous about his conceptions of Divinity. We are not a religious nation. It isn't in us. It never was in us - we were never good Catholics at our best." (43)

Reckage's attitude to religion is contrasted to Robert's. Reckage had been a ritualist "when Ritualism was by no means popular. To be irreligious was, in his opinion, to be ungentlemanly. To deny God and blaspheme was the cad's part." (44)

As an Anglican ritualist Reckage views the Bona Mors ceremony at Farm Street with an almost professional interest:

> "... the service itself is no doubt interesting. Very touching too, I daresay. Who can deny that Rome understands a ceremony better than we do - at present? But we shall have all these things in time. A great many people have already given in about the candles! And that's a tremendous concession." (45)

Mrs. Craigie is here satirising an attitude to ritual which she contrasts with the actuality of the Catholic ritual. In a piece of powerful descriptive prose which presages the best of Rolfe's descriptions in The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole, she evokes the Bona Mors ceremony which honours the passion of Christ. The passage begins with an image "like a dream imprisoned in a rock" which has an extraordinary visionary quality.

> As the two young men [Robert Orange and Lord Reckage] crossed the threshold of the Church, the sight which opened before them was like a dream imprisoned in a rock. The dark stone cavernous building, where shadowy forms were kneeling in prayer and praise, seemed a hollow made not with hands, and the light on the high altar shone through the mist of incense as something wholly supernatural yet living and sacred.

After the Benediction comes a hint of supernatural forces:

> One by one the lights upon the Altar were extinguished and the Church grew so dark that it was impossible to discern the faces of the congregation. A terrific clap of thunder shook the whole building. It was followed by another, and yet another ... The men looked out only to find the streets deluged with rain and the skies frightful with lightning. Such a storm had not been seen in London for years. (46)

As the Church empties only three people are left; Robert, Reckage and Disraeli. Disraeli was "apparently lost in thought" and was so moved that he did not see his two acquaintances.

Mrs. Craigie was an aspiring playwright and had a certain talent as an actress, numbering amongst her friends Ellen Terry. Her interest in the theatre provides her with themes for The School for Saints and Robert Orange. Ritual and the theatre interest her as performances but they are never confused. In fact the 'truth' of the Farm Street ritual quoted above, backed up by natural phenomena - thunder, darkness, rain - is contrasted with the very artificiality of the theatre. Lord Reckage's grasp of ceremony is extremely weak; he believes that it is simply a matter of candle-power. The School for Saints opens with Robert falling in love with an actress, Henriette Duboc. She invites him to her villa but she herself disappears to Paris with her lover the Archduke Charles of Alberia. Robert is warned that Henriette is a cocotte. He asks what that means and is told "They are very pretty, and they want money, and they tell lies." (47) In chapter two Robert meets Henriette again and he follows her to Paris to see her perform the part of Oriana in a 'legend' in two tableaux. Ironically Henriette is performing the part of the most faithful of women.

> The 'legend' bore no kind of resemblance to the Amadis of Gaul, and its falseness to the great original marred, for Robert, even such merits as it may have possessed in the way of mere scenic effect. For the moment it seemed to him that he had misread, not a book only, but the whole universe. He doubted his own judgement, his own feelings, his own sight ... (48)

When he sees Henriette after her performance she sat before him "in all the radiance of tinsel and sham jewels." Robert's great love, Brigit Parflete, develops her own theatrical abilities in Robert Orange while still trying to retain her simplicity, her candour and her religious devotion.

Robert and Brigit tend towards asceticism. When their marriage is annulled (Brigit's previous husband is found to be still alive, having faked his suicide), Robert turns to the Imitation of Christ and then to the Exercises of St. Ignatius. But Robert's Catholicism is a disadvantage politically. After the marriage scandal Reckage uses Robert's asceticism to ruin his political career by constantly referring to the "fanaticism" of his religion. For example, he writes to Lady Sara,

> "[Robert] may throw up the political game and bury himself in a monastery where his dreams may find their sole expression in prayer ... Will the rank and file ever trust a person so far above their comprehension? The very word 'mystical' is a word of reproach in the mouth of the world." (49)

This is the first sign of a plan to get rid of Robert as a political rival and he confides to Sara later, believing her to be in sympathy with him, that Robert "is a Cardinal in petto. The Catholics want spirit everywhere, and Orange has got spirit." (Robert Orange Chapter XIV, page 269). Little does he know that Sara, because of her love for Orange, is part of a contrary plot, to steer Robert from the Jesuits, ostensibly because she and the Alberian Ambassador don't want "any more strong men in the Church just now." (Page 264).

Sara baits Robert about his asceticism when they meet at a dinner party. She compares the egotism of the saints with the egotism of Montaigne.

> "They were selfishly bent on pain and renunciation,
> he was selfishly bent on pleasure and indulgence.
> Isn't that the one difference between them Mr. Orange?"

Orange refused to be drawn, but he promised to lend her the Acta Sanctorum of the Bollandists in sixty volumes in folio.

> "After you have read them," he said
> "I will tell you my ideas about Montaigne."
>
> (Robert Orange, Chapter XIX, page 280)

The difference between both Brigit and Robert and the remainder of the novel's characters is their ability to put aside their own desires (including their desire for each other) to gain self-knowledge. Reckage recognises the grandeur of Robert's character when he tells him on his deathbed:

> "You are different from the rest. You have the priest's element in you; there is an incessant struggle and toil to cut one another's throat among us - among us average men - all striving after success. You weren't built that way."
>
> (Robert Orange, Chapter XXIV, Page 333).

For Brigit too this ability has been a noticeable advantage, and Sara, apart from her jealousy for Robert's affection, actually despises this elevated coldness of Brigit's. She, Sara, reveals her dislike of the human race and the example of Christ she finds

"too sublime". She attacks the ascetic ideal which lies at the heart of Brigit's nature:

> "We are a grotesque compromise between gods and creatures ... those of us who find this out get a little impatient with the false position. You are less sentimental than I am. You take what I call the hard view. It is too frigid for me."
> (Chapter XXVI, page 365).

Yet how does this "hard view" benefit the two characters who hold it? It destroys their love for each other. After months of separation Robert allows himself to forgo seeing his paramour because "the training of a lifetime and constant habits of thought were stronger still than any mood." (Chapter XXVII, page 386).

In other words both Robert and Brigit tend towards celibacy and renunciation generally. Thus Brigit allows Robert to go on a continental retreat which she feels will force him towards the Jesuits rather than tell him one fact that will make him turn back and re-marry her. Her friend Pensée tells Brigit that he dislikes Catholicism:"Your Church seems so selfish. Forgive me, but I do resent these celibate views. They are unnatural." (Chapter XXIX, page 392.)

Brigit burns Robert's letter announcing his intentions, and in the process sears the skin on her hands with flame, thus bearing forever the mark of her renunciation. Pensée is appalled yet she had known Brigit's state of mind. Earlier they had spoken of the possibility of Robert's vocation to the priesthood, and the younger woman tries to explain how right she thinks this decision to be. It is the result of natural justice and she

resigns herself to it: "His father sinned, and my father sinned. We were born for unhappiness. Unhappiness and misgivings are in our very blood." And when she tries to expand on this she tells Pensée: "His father was a Dominican. The Church will have her own again. Be sure of that! ... In God's way, all will come right. Every debt must be paid."
(Chapter XXIX, pages 394-5).

It is interesting to see how the themes dear to Mrs. Craigie in The School for Saints and Robert Orange were exploited by George Moore in his two novels Evelyn Innes and Sister Teresa. Moore and Mrs. Craigie had been close friends but as her identification with Catholicism grew she drifted away from him. To Moore Mrs. Craigie revealed the complexity of her personality:

> If I could only be natural once I should feel rested, but this eternal restraint - this unending 'shall I say this?' 'is it wise to say that?' 'is this right?' 'is this wrong?' 'will this be misunderstood?' 'will that give a wrong impression?' - tires me to death. I am too wise for my years! (50)

In the same letter she confides "I believe I am a lover of souls, but people scare me out of my wits."

The difficulty about being honest about oneself, with oneself, is a theme of Moore's Evelyn Innes, as is the clash between theatre and ritual. Moore transposes Pearl Richards (the young 'John Oliver Hobbes') into Evelyn Innes,a beautiful but 'unfinished' girl bounded by religious scruples and respect for her father. She becomes, for a brief period, the greatest interpreter of Wagner's soprano roles. In the process she becomes the mistress of Sir Owen Asher who has discovered her operatic talent. The high society life in which Evelyn must steep herself is as harmful to her spiritual life as the world of the stage. This is true also for Brigit in Mrs. Craigie's own two-volume novel. What is obvious about Moore's work is, as Robert Lee Wolff points out, Moore himself did not believe in the moral scruples suffered by his heroine. (51)

Sir Owen is a total atheist and he attempts to convert Evelyn to his thinking, partly by surrounding her with material comfort of Aubusson carpets and Sheraton furniture, partly by lending her books by Spencer, Darwin and Huxley. It is the material world, rather than the world of ideas, that woos Evelyn from Catholicism. It is Moore's irony that de-converts Mrs. Craigie from Catholicism, if only momentarily. Evelyn is not simply won over by the comfort of the life of a diva but by the sexual excitement of singing Wagner and indulging in an 'illicit' sexual relationship. Her loyalties gradually revert to her former life partly because of her attachment to a young Irish composer. She visits Sir Owen to broach the subject of their separation or marriage (because she believes that a conventional marriage might reconcile her to her moral responsibilities). She suddenly sees through his world.

> There were beautiful painted tables and chairs and marble and ormolu clocks, the refined and gracious designs of the best periods; and the sight of Owen sitting amid all these attempts to capture happiness, revealed to her the moral idea of which this man was but a symbol; and the thought of life without a moral purpose is but a passing spectre, and that our immortality lies in our religious life, occurred to her again. (52)

Her new lover, Ulick Deane, encourages her spiritual ideas. His opera 'Grania' is based on Celtic myths and he regards himself as a pagan, believing, as he says, in "all the gods". Obviously a sexual relationship with him becomes as impossible as with Sir Owen, because the same moral doubts exist. The weariness of Evelyn Innes's life at this point most closely

follows Mrs. Craigie's - the acceptance of the authority of the Catholic Church, her rejection of feminism and of any loosening of conventional moral ties. At the height of her success Evelyn is a woman without a definite moral code. She is confused by her own culture's acceptance of immorality and by the Catholic moral code she had been brought up with. For example, she became convinced that the sensuality of her singing is directly due to the "sexual excesses" of her relationship with Sir Owen. To be successful on the stage has been impossible without the sacrifice of her personal morality. Even the playing of repentance or purity demands such singularity on the part of the singer as to place her apart from convention. And this sensuality is accepted and applauded by the intellectual and powerful. This worries her, as it did Mrs. Craigie whose very fears of self-consciousness are expressed by Evelyn. When she is reconciled with her father during a successful season at Covent Garden, Evelyn

> Knew she was expressing all that was most deep in her nature, and yet she had acted all that she now believed to be reality on the stage many times. It seems as true then as it did now - more true for she was less self-conscious in the fictitious than in the real scene.
>
> She knelt at her father's or at Wotan's feet, she could not distinguish; all limitations had been razed. (53)

So there are more possibilities for 'truth' on stage than in real life, because in reality Evelyn is self-conscious. Yet her fears of the treachery of the stage and of the immoral life of the stage - "the fierce egotism of the stage" - lead her to think: "Why had the Church not placed stage life under the ban

of mortal sin? It would have done so if it knew what stage life was, and must always be." (54)

Evelyn's answer at the end of the novel is prayer. She prays in the hope that she might be like the nuns in the Passionist convent where she goes on retreat. From the staged religious scenes she hopes to progress to a life, a real life dedicated to God. Already the eighteenth-century scenario at Sir Owen's - rationalism and leisured beauty - has given way to Dulwich and her father's home there. From her father's early music studies it is only a step further back into the Gothic world of the convent chapel. This chapel, a reconstruction of a 13th century building by a Victorian ecclesiologist, becomes significantly central to Evelyn's religious concern. Its erection had caused the near-bankruptcy of the convent and Evelyn's talent is required to raise funds to save the community. Thus it is a pretend Gothic that becomes the scenario for Evelyn's search for truth.

> ... falling through the pointed windows, the long rays slanted across the empty chapel; in the golden air there was a faint sense of incense; it recalled the Benediction and the figures of the departed watchers who had knelt motionless all day before the elevated Host. (55)

In this way Moore (defiantly Protestant himself) parodies not only Mrs. Craigie (compare her description quoted below page 39) but the Wilde of Dorian Gray, the Dowson of 'Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration' and the Johnson of 'The Church of a Dream'.

The example of the nuns - their chastity, obedience, their dedication to prayer - Evelyn finds chastening. In watching them she comes to the conclusion that "it is by the denial of the sexual instinct that we become religious." (56) Thus the second part of Evelyn's story, Sister Teresa, begins with this new, chastened heroine. Moore is particularly dead-pan in this novel. It is possible to read it and feel that he is supporting the conventual ideal, yet it is oddly bitter in tone. At the beginning of the novel Evelyn has abandoned her stage career to do good works among the poor. Gradually she comes to believe that she must take a nun's vows to truly live a good life. Thereafter her story is a description of convent life and her role within it, the rivalries she triggers off and the personal difficulties she has with the Church's teaching on the Real Presence. Before she enters the convent her ex-lover Ulick pleads with her to give up the idea of becoming a nun. "... the nuns are my Succubi," he tells her,"as the fauns and nymphs are yours. The gods we deny are demons that pursue us." (57) And of course, he is right. Having denied her theatricality she finds it intruding upon her convent work.

> "... I felt I had adapted myself to the convent as I might to a new part; I do not say that the new part is not the part I shall play to the end, but now and again I catch myself playing a part. We are always playing parts in our life, no one is ever perfectly natural; we are all conscious of our actions - at least I am ..." (58)

The denial of her sexuality is a great difficulty too. Towards the end of the novel, in fact, Sister Teresa (as Evelyn Innes has become - Teresa was one of Mrs. Craigie's confirmation names)

is thought to be dying. The Last Sacrament is administered. But Sister Teresa has made herself ill through worry. Her mind is filled with sexual images, with guilt, with a fear of having blasphemed against the eucharist. There are too her doubts about the Real Presence. She worries herself almost to death.

When she recovers it is only to lose her famous singing voice and, more importantly, her self will. She plans an escape and when her chance comes she relinquishes it. "She felt that something had broken in her ..." It is here, above all, that Moore seems confused. His picture of convent life is one of trivial worries and pursuits, of the sisters failing in any significant spiritual exercise (meditation for example). Evelyn's breakdown and subsequent acceptance of her enclosed (and by implication, imprisoned) life, seems an indication of a broken will. Yet she tells a visitor, an operatic _prima donna_,

> "The important thing to do is to live, and we do not begin to know life, taste life, until we put it aside ... Life is the will of God, and to enter into the will of God we must forget ourselves, we must try to live outside ourselves in the general life." (59)

The polarities which Moore deals with in _Evelyn Innes_ and _Sister Teresa_ are contained in separate volumes, as it were, the actress and the nun, the theatre and the ritual. These polarities as I have observed are typical preoccupations of 'John Oliver Hobbes'. She too uses two novels, closely linked, to polarise her themes of worldly versus unworldly, symbolized as theatre versus ritual. Her last novel, which falls slightly outside the scope of this thesis, being published in 1906, was _The Dream and the Business_.

But I would like to make the following observations. Firstly, it is a much more successful novel, in artistic terms, than its predecessors. The mixture of humour and deep, one might say, depressed, sadness, a mixture so often promised by Mrs. Craigie's choice of themes, for once is successful. Beneath the farcical confusion and fun is Mrs. Craigie's embittered sadness. In what comedy would all of the loving partners end up bored, depressed, separated, or worse, together and disillusioned? Secondly the title signifies polarity. A first reading shows an obvious polarity: the Dream is the ideal life dreamed by the young (love, success, happiness) and the Business is reality (work, disappointment). But a further reading reveals the Dream as an ideal certainly, but an ideal of goodness, moral goodness and truth. The Business, on the other hand, is the theatre ('the business' is slang for 'theatre-business', 'show business'). Theatre is an important element in the novel. The strictly comic character is an actress, the romantic hero is an opera singer. The Firmalden Family are musical but have religious scruples about the theatre. The Marlesfords are _so_ worldly and _so_ Catholic that they have an other-worldly, theatrical air about them. For Mrs. Craigie theatre seems to be the very antithesis of truth-telling. Her own Non-conformist background continues to show through her fascination with all things theatrical. In her last novel Mrs. Craigie's description of the second-rate theatre life resembles Wilde's descriptions in _Dorian Gray_. In _The Dream and the Business_ Lord Marlesford scolds his young (and morally motivated) young wife:

> "If others heard you, at your age, talk like that, they would think it unnatural, or at least, insincere."
>
> "Whatever one says of life must be insincere because life is itself insincere. But death is sincere." (60)

Sophy's answer lacks the sparkle of Lord Henry's "Being natural is only a pose, and the most irritating pose I know" in Dorian Gray, but it has the serious, not to say morbid, characteristic of its author. Sybil Vane's statement to Dorian Gray " ... before I knew you, acting was the one reality of my life. It was only in the theatre that I lived. I thought that it was all true ... I believed in everything." (61), is present in Mrs. Craigie's novels, in various states of disillusionment.

In 1896 there appeared Mrs. Craigie's short novel The Herb Moon. It is slight yet contains in its opening pages a description of a religious experience that leads to a sort of conversion. I shall explain; The novelist had been converted to Catholicism four years before, in 1892, apparently without discussing the matter with her family. Mrs. Craigie's Catholicism, according to her friend Lord Curzon,"... supplied her with a philosophy of conduct and a rationale of existence. She found an inspiration in its ideals, and a solace in its authority." (62) Rose Arden, the leading character of The Herb Moon, is not a Catholic. But the one great event in her life was a chance visit to a little Catholic chapel in a fishing village in the South of England. It is worthwhile to quote here the passages which deal with this.

> It was an Easter Sunday, and she had wandered in to hear the Mass sung. Her seat faced the high altar, and when she gazed upon the cross it seemed, not an emblem of sorrow, but the mysterious key to the city of eternal happiness. There were lilies below and around; flame-coloured azaleas and deep-purple flowers of some homelier variety; the gold in the priest's vestments shone in the candle-light, and, through one stained-glass window, a ray of the sun lit up a wooden figure of the Virgin, curiously carved, with onyx eyes and a robe of some glittering stuff embroidered by nuns. (63)

The cross as key image is the most serious image in this passage, and the rest seems only a setting for that idea. The memory continues

> Rose observed all these things just as one scans the features of a well-worn face or a familiar spot: if there had been no visible flowers, no sun, no candles, or no gold, their meaning, nevertheless, would still have seemed there - like the true elements in a fantastic dream. (64)

If we recall the image used to describe the church in The School for Saints, "a dream imprisoned in a rock", we see that there are two recurring features in Mrs. Craigie's description. One is the dream-like nature of the experience of looking at a Catholic church. The other is that there is something fixed - "true", so fixed and true in fact that the dreamy unfixed images are held in place "imprisoned". In the above passage, if we take away the theatrical elements, the props of ritual, we are left with the cross. Rose observes - a passive state indicating some sort of trance until she is left alone in the little chapel.

> She prayed without words: her spirit sang its song of thanksgiving in silence; life was so sweet; eternity, so brief; heaven, so like a fairer earth. She thought of the saints and martyrs till her heart thrilled with passionate admiration and a fearful longing for the power to suffer, endure, and conquer similarly. (65)

Almost immediately the thrill begins to subside and doubts oppress the exhilaration. She thinks of those martyrs who are unacknowledged and the saints "who had no day". But although the moment of vision has gone Rose resolves to try to follow the vision that has been revealed to her:

> "...why not forget the crowning victory or the final humiliation, whichever it might be: the task was the thing - the task - a faithful answer to one's calling." (66)

(i) There are certain problems in writing about Oscar Wilde as a convert to Catholicism. He was, after all, a deathbed convert, although I hope to show in the chapter which follows an approach to Catholic ritual and belief throughout Wilde's writings which holds a promise of conversion. To many of Wilde's contemporaries, using the criteria of muscular Christianity, the Catholic church may have seemed a fitting end to a career theatrical, extravagant and effeminate. Wilde's epigrammatic wit must have demonstrated a dangerous attitude to truth. His most conspicuous talent was in writing dialogue for his plays, and the archness, the theatricality of this, was brought into his day-to-day conversation. The theatre itself was not completely approved of, and bringing it out of Shaftesbury Avenue into Society was not designed to win Wilde friends. On the other hand, in bringing Society into Shaftesbury Avenue, Wilde was close to expressing his true disdain of the English middle-classes. (Mrs. Erlynne, who performed "one good thing in [her] life", in Lady Windermere's Fan, is a fallen woman whose bright, brittle tone masks her real feelings. At times she expresses her dislike of her class and its hyprocrisy. Her son-in-law tells her "... I used to think that with all your faults you were frank and honest. You are not", this at a time when she is being her most honest. (1))

Wilde was seduced by glamour and, as Robert Ross noted of him, needed a comfortable lifestyle. (2). Yet he was not willing (and in this he resembles his heroine, Mrs. Erlynne) to accept all of the predominant Protestant cultural mode in accepting the luxuries with which capitalist England rewarded the successful. Wilde's sense of Irishness, of otherness (which

I discuss further, below page 45-6) was accepted in France as, I believe, a type of the Romantic personality. (The Ossianic promise of his name: Celtic, a wanderer; the âme damnée whose name he borrowed - Sebastian Melmoth). W. B. Yeats was particularly ambiguous about his fellow countryman:

> We have the irresponsible Irishman in life, and would gladly get rid of him. We have him now in literature and in the things of the mind, and are compelled perforce to see that there is a good deal to be said for him ... here now is Mr. Oscar Wilde, who does not care what strange opinions he defends or what time-honoured virtue he makes laughter of, provided he does it cleverly. (3)

Certainly less ambiguous is André Raffalovich. His account of the Wilde 'scandal' reveals how much the Russian-Jewish writer borrowed from the prejudices of his adopted nationality to describe the Irishman.

> Oscar Wilde ... a toujours été très Irlandais, pouvant parler plusieurs heures sans se fatiguer, aimant le son de sa voix lente, riant violemment à ses plaisanteries incessantes, faisant souvent l'effet de mâcher ses mots commes s'ils étaient des bonbons. ((4)

The most interesting thing about Raffalovich's lengthy essay on Wilde is that it is an affirmation of social prejudices, indeed of personal prejudices, dressed up as scientific study. As such it reveals what we would call today masculist or even homophobic elements mixed, bizarrely, with uranian propaganda. Raffalovich's attitude to Wilde shows clearly that he doesn't regard Wilde as inverti supérieur but, rather, belonging to the lower orders of homosexuals the vulgaires, the efféminés or the

passifs. Indeed this 'scientific' sexual terminology, borrowed from Uranisme et Unisexualité, enters into Raffalovich's criticism of Dorian Gray.

> On regimba un peu quand il écrivit Dorian Gray, roman peu original (Oscar Wilde n'a jamais été bien original), artificiel, superficiel, efféminé. L'unisexualité y régnait, mais sans rigueur, dans le clair-obscur, dans l'affectation et la crainte. (5)

Wilde's literary effeminacy is here enough to damn him and certainly to banish him permanently from a homosexual Pantheon. Unusual as this attitude seems, coming from André Raffalovich (who was writing, after all, a vindication of sorts of homosexuality), if we see it stemming from the Arnoldian attitude to maleness, the whole thing becomes more understandable. But the following from Arthur Symons is an extraordinary piece, a mixture of the mysogynistic and the homophobic.

> Wilde's vices were not simply intellectual perversions, they were physiological. This miserable man had always been under the influence of one of those sexual inversions which turned him into a kind of Hermaphroditus. That distress which he tried to express in his writings after his condemnation had nothing virile in it; and his best known tragedy Salomé reveals in its perversion of a legend his own sexual perversion. As he grew older the womanish side of him grew more and more evident ... [His mouth:] no such mouth ought ever to have existed: it is a woman's that no man who is normal could ever have had ... (6)

Wilde was made amply aware of the prevailing social prejudice against the Irish and the homosexual. His own trial may have performed the twofold task of highlighting the homosexual question ('A Problem in Modern Ethics' as Symonds described it)

and, as a consequence, of leading to the direct and legal persecution of homosexuals. In 1874 a work by Wilde's old tutor at Trinity College, Dublin, J. P. Mahaffy, contained a striking passage on the matter of the Irish, the Catholic and the relation of both to 'the truth'. The book, Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander, also contained a chapter largely dealing with Greek homosexuality, 'The Social Position of Boys in Attic Life'. On the first of these subjects I quote from page 91 :

> Hundreds of times have I myself been warned not to trust the 'false papists', whose religion was full of lies, and whose word could not be believed, who had been known to betray their best friends, and to violate the holiest ties. Unfortunately, there are certain real facts sufficient to vamp up such a frightful theory ..... the pure Celt, who is always a Catholic, has less regard for truth than the Protestant, with his touch of Saxon breeding.

To the second of these subjects, Attic homosexuality, or rather pederasty, the first edition devotes some twelve pages. Subsequent editions were silent on the subject due to complaints made to the publisher, Macmillan and Co., despite the unsalacious nature of Mahaffy's account. Two of Wilde's choices in life - I use the word choices here advisedly - are, in certain ways, vetoed by Mahaffy: the retention of what we would now think of as a racial slur (the Celtic Catholic's untruthfulness) is significant; the public can have no quarrel, surely, with that. Homosexuality is cancelled due, perhaps, to too much interest, and that of an unhealthy sort.

Wilde's homosexuality is, of course, not a 'choice' as such. He was not 'converted' to homosexuality but, at least on one

occasion, Wilde placed his homosexuality and his leanings to Catholicism in opposition. Some months before the end of his life Wilde wrote to his friend and future literary executor, Robert Ross:

> My mouth is twisted with kissing and I feed on fevers. The Cloister or the Cafe - there is my future. I tried the Hearth, but it was a failure. (7)

Wilde's moral abandon is scarcely shocking, but it is puzzling when seen in conjunction with his self-conscious desire for 'the Cloister'.

It would be easy to forget that Wilde eventually succumbed to the cloistral element in his life. Easy, because his conversion to Catholicism is often ignored, as are his early leanings towards 'Rome'. Hoxie N. Fairchild notes Wilde's conversion briefly as an "inarticulate and barely conscious last-minute submission." (8) The spirit of this observation is denied by Wilde's contemporaries, notably W. W. Ward and Sir David Hunter Blair. The former, remembering letters from Wilde at Oxford, observed that :

> They show ... that his final decision to find refuge in the Roman Church was not the sudden clutch of the drowning man at the plank in the shipwreck, but a return to a first love, a love rejected, it is true, or at least rejected in the tragic progress of his self-realization, yet one that had haunted him from early days with a persistent spell. (9)

In the same reminiscence Ward recalls the story of the promise, by Hunter Blair, of the presentation of a diamond to the Madonna of the Church of S. Agostino in the event of Wilde's reception into the Catholic Church. This, when both Hunter Blair and Wilde were yet undergraduates. Blair's own comments are also illuminating although adjusted, perhaps, by the benefit of hindsight.

> Beneath his superficial veneer of vanity and foolish talk there is, I am convinced, something deeper and more sincere, including a genuine attraction towards Catholic belief and practice. (10)

Yet John Gray, writing of Wilde's conversion to André Raffalovich, does so in such cryptic terms - "the Paris incident" he calls it - and without mentioning Wilde's name, that the conversion appears to be a secret shame (11). The 'Michael Fields' do not refer to their old friend's conversion in their journal published as Work and Days in 1933. Wilde does not appear in the list of notable converts published in 1924, a list which contains Frederick Rolfe and Mabel and Aubrey Beardsley.

Two accounts of the death-bed conversion exist. Robert Ross wrote a lengthy account to Wilde's admirer, Adela Schuster, revealing something of the persistence of the writer's desire for conversion.

> He wanted me then [March or April 1900] to introduce him to a priest with a view to being received into the Church, and I reproach myself deeply for not doing so, but I really rather dreaded a relapse, and having known so many people under the influence of sudden impulse aesthetic or other emotion become converts, then cause grave scandal by lapsing that I told him I should never attempt his conversion until I thought he was serious. (12)

Ross continues his description unconsciously prefiguring, but from a somewhat different angle, a comment made by Eric Gill on his own conversion (13),

> I did [not] know any priest in Rome sufficiently well to prepare for a rather grave intellectual conflict. It would have been no use getting an amiable and foolish man who would have treated him like an ordinary person and entirely ignored the strange paradoxical genius which he would have had to overcome or convince. Mr. Wilde was equipped moreover for controversy being deeply read in Catholic philosophy especially of recent years.(14)

This pre-conversion attempt at conversion, foiled by Ross's scrupulous conscience, shows - if further evidence were needed - that, in one sense, Wilde's conversion was neither last-minute nor inarticulate in intent. Circumstances indeed led to this being the case in fact. But although Wilde was scarcely conscious when an Irish priest was brought by Robert Ross to his bedside (in Paris: Wilde had moved there from Rome), the priest was satisfied that the writer knew his own wishes.

> I was fully satisfied that he understood me when I told him I was about to receive him into the Catholic Church and give him the Last Sacrements. From the signs he gave as well as from his attempted words, I was satisfied as to his full consent. (15)

To the hard-and-fast decadents this must have seemed less a submission and more of a capitulation. The very secrecy - and the confusion - surrounding Wilde's religious thinking has allowed him to retain a hold over the minds of would-be decadents. The brief history of Wilde and Catholicism charted recently by H. Montgomery Hyde, shows a confused man trying to come to terms with the life of the spirit - a life which he regarded as most important - and, at the same time, with the physicality of the world. "Those who see any difference between soul and body have neither" - one of Wilde's 'Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young' (1894). (16)
This phrase denies his deeply felt pull towards the Cloister and the Cafe, the houses of the soul and body respectively. After his downfall, writing in prison, Wilde confides:

> Religion does not help me. The faith that others give to what is unseen, I give to what one can touch, and look at ....When I think about Religion at all, I feel as if I would like to found an order for those who cannot believe: the Confraternity of the Fatherless one might call it ....(17)

Wilde might have felt himself 'fatherless' in a spiritual sense but everywhere in his writing we can find references to the idea of 'soul' and, more generally, 'spirit', ideas which are fundamental to the creation of his works and which are discussed at length throughout this chapter. There is a certain biographical interest in the quotation regarding Wilde's Confraternity of the Fatherless. Although he felt himself 'fatherless' Wilde was deeply attached to his mother. According to H. Montgomery Hyde, both Oscar and his brother Willie were secretly baptised in a Catholic Church when very young. This was at their mother's request. Oscar, who was solicitous of his mother's affection and heart-broken at her death, may have been influenced by this early adventure with his mother, accepting Catholicism as a part of his fate and his inheritance (18). Fatherless he might have felt, in a spiritual sense, while in prison. One of his first actions on leaving prison was to contact the Jesuit church at Farm Street about the possibility of a six month retreat. The request was refused, much to Wilde's dismay. (19)

Notes

Introduction Part (i)

1 Hoxie N. Fairchild Religious Trends in English Poetry (Vol 5 1880-1920) (Columbia 1962), p. 166.

2 Ibid, p. 166.

3 Ibid, pp. 166-7.

4 Kenneth Clark introduction to Walter Pater The Renaissance (Fontana ed. London 1975).

5 Fairchild op cit pp. 164-5 .

6 Ibid, p. 175 .

Fairchild continues with this passage, showing a remarkable dislike of homosexuality: "Since the question obviously is open to guesswork, it is permissible to conjecture that Johnson continued to be a homosexual but that his growing addiction to liquor gradually sapped his urge to act upon his abnormal inclinations. His religion, one fears, was a less effectual deterrent than his second vice." (pp. 175-6).

7 Philippe Jullian Oscar Wilde (trans. Violet Wyndham) (London 1969), p. 53.

8 G. F. A. Best 'Popular Protestantism in Victorian Britain' in Ideas & Institutions of Victorian Britain (ed. R. Robson) (London 1967).

9 Julia McNair Wright Almost a Nun (London 1890?) Chapter 1, p. 23.

10 Ibid, Chapter 6, pp. 187-8.

11 Robert Lee Wolff Gains & Losses: Novels of Faith & Doubt in Victorian England (New York 1977).

12 David Newsome Godliness and Good Learning (London 1961), p. 196-7.

See also S. T. Coleridge Biographia Literaria (Everyman edn. London 1962) Chapter 1, p. 3: "... the manly simplicity of the Grecian and of our own elder poets ..."

13 For a discussion of this subject see: Bruce Haley The Healthy Body in Victorian Culture (London 1978).

14 For Kingsley see Brenda Colloms Charles Kingsley (London 19 75) .

For Pusey see Rev. Dr. David Forrester 'Dr. Pusey's Marriage' in The Ampleforth Journal, Summer 1973 pp. 33-48.

For the subject of homosexuality within the Ritualist and Oxford Movements see Geoffrey Faber Oxford Apostles (London 1954) and Brian Reade Sexual Heretics (London 1972).

Rolfe's homosexuality is obviously written of in the numerous biographical studies of him but see below page 175 et seq for a discussion of this subject.

15 Frederick Rolfe Nicholas Crabbe (London 1969), p. 178.

16 D. H. Lawrence 'Review of Hadrian VII' in Phoenix (London 1936), pp. 327-33.

17 Thomas Arnold Passages in a Wandering Life (London 1900), p. 186.

18 Ibid, p. 150.
On Newman "the delicacy and refinement of his style were less cognizable by me than my brother."

19 Ibid, pp. 154-5.

20 Ibid, pp. 185-6.

21 Quoted by Meriol Trevor The Arnolds (London 1973) pp. 58-9.

22 'John Oliver Hobbes' The School for Saints (London 1898) Bk. 1, Chap. VII, p. 115.

23 Quoted by H. Montgomery Hyde Oscar Wilde (London 1976) p. 368.

24 Gerard Manley Hopkins 'Heaven Haven: A nun takes the veil' (1864-5).

25 Hopkins 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' (1882).

26 Quoted in W. S. Peterson Victorian Heretic: Mrs. Humphry Ward's 'Robert Elsmere' (Leicester 1976), p. 188.

Introduction, Part (ii)

27 Published as No. XX of Sermons on Subjects of the Day (1844).

28 Charles Kingsley 'What Then Does Dr. Newman Mean?' reprinted in Cardinal Newman Apologia Pro Vita Sua (Fontana edn. 1972), p. 51.

29 Ibid, p. 40.

30 Ibid, p. 38.

31 Oscar Wilde 'A Few Maxims for the Instruction of the Over-Educated' Complete Works (Collins Edn.) (London 1968), p. 1203.

32 Oscar Wilde De Profundis, Ibid, p. 912.

33 See Morgan Richards Life of 'John Oliver Hobbes' (London 1911)

34 In a letter to George Moore dated 8th March 1894, Mrs. Craigie wrote :

"... Life has made me fearful of my own best impulses. I hate to be reserved, distant and mysterious, and yet I not only think twice before I speak or move - but twenty times.' Ibid, p. 83.

Owen Seaman's belief was that the novelist "felt too deeply, had come closely in contact with the poignancies of life to wear her heart on her sleeve." Ibid, p. 369.

35 'John Oliver Hobbes' Some Emotions and a Moral (London 1891), pt. 1, chap IV, p. 82.

36 Ibid, pt. 1, chap. IV, p. 92.

37 Ibid, pt. 2, chap. II, p. 145.

38 Ibid, pt. 2, chap IV, p. 174.

39 See for example " ... It is so disheartening to see a woman with any amount of honesty about her wilfully and deliberately contorting it all into something very different." (Godfrey to Cynthia). Ibid, pt. 2, chap. II, p. 145.

40 See Vineta Colby The Singular Anomaly: Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century (New York 1970) Mrs. Craigie's unhappy marriage is sketched with some detail.

41 Ford Madox Ford The Good Soldier (1915) The obvious parallels are in the themes of marriage breakdown, fickleness and the power of Catholicism over the conscience.

42 'John Oliver Hobbes' School for Saints, p. 505.

43 Ibid, p. 215.

44 Ibid, p. 215.

45 Ibid, p. 216.

46 Ibid, pp. 217-221.

47 Ibid, p. 18.

48 Ibid, p. 30.

49 'John Oliver Hobbes' Robert Orange (London 1900), p. 189.

50 Morgan Richards op cit, p. 83.

51 Wolff op cit.

52 George Moore Evelyn Innes, Bk. II, p. 49.

53 Evelyn is actually remembering the words from the repentance scene (Act 3) of 'The Valkyrie' as she asks her father's forgiveness.
Ibid, pp. 271-2.

54 Ibid, p. 110.

55 Ibid, p. 135.

56 Ibid, p. 285.

57 Moore Sister Teresa, Vol 1, p. 78.

58 Ibid, Vol. 1, p. 236.

59 Ibid, Vol. 2, p. 253.

60 'John Oliver Hobbes' The Dream and the Business (London 1906), Bk. 3, chap. IV, p. 170.

61 Oscar Wilde Dorian Gray Complete Works, p. 74.

62 Morgan Richards op cit.

Lord Curzon was speaking at the unveiling ceremony for a memorial to Mrs. Craigie in University College.

63 'John Oliver Hobbes' The Herb Moon (London 1896) Chap. 1, p. 13.

64 Ibid, pp. 13-14.

65 Ibid, p. 14.

66 Ibid, p. 15.

"Among the Galelareese, half-grown lads and girls may not look at themselves in a mirror, for they say that the mirror takes away their bloom and leaves them ugly. *And as the shadow may be stabbed, so may the reflection.*"

Frazer: *Golden Bough* (London 1900), Vol. i, p. 293.
[My italics]

(ii) Oscar Wilde: Intentions , Truth and Religion

To the young Max Beerbohm presented with a copy of Intentions on his birthday, the book was "the one thing above all others I should love." (20) So impressed was he by Thomas Wainewright, the subject of Wilde's 'Pen, Pencil and Poison', that Beerbohm wished he had written one of the more turgid pieces of Wainewright's prose. Max was later to escape the full enthralment of Wilde, but never to wholly forget his debt to him. The debt was mainly one of style, as David Cecil points out,(21) and style is, at all times, a theme and a presence in Intentions. It is interesting to see how the younger writer was able to distort Wilde's message while making a genuine use of his stylistic effects. In 'A Defence of Cosmetics' published in The Yellow Book, Number 1, 1894, Max praised artifice and lies. But the outcry which greeted the first issue, and which centered on Beerbohm and Beardsley, led Max to publish a defence in issue Number 2. There he described his essay as "a burlesque upon the 'precious' school of writers." (22) The problem is that, unlike Beerbohm, it is difficult to judge when to take Wilde's prose as a mere accident of preciousness and self-mockery, and when to take it seriously. This is immediately to treat Wilde in a way different to that in which he would like to be treated. But it is a recurring problem. Can one really allow oneself to be carried away by the flow of words? And if one stops to analyse the words isn't one taking the works too seriously? For Wilde's contemporaries this must have seemed even more dangerous, as there must always have been suspicion that Wilde was laughing at their ponderousness. (23)

In Intentions and elsewhere Wilde creates the illusion of youth (he was 37 when the essays were published in book form). He writes always with a youthful tone,
and is always self-consciously a supporter of the young. As has often been pointed out, The Importance of Being Earnest is a "young man's play" full of flirtations and food and wisecracks. In 'The Decay of Lying' Vivian tells Cyril that a young man is ill-fated to fall into "careless habits of accuracy, or takes to frequenting the society of the aged and the well-informed. Both things are equally fatal to his imagination, as indeed they would be fatal to the imagination of anybody." (24) Thus, the appeal to Beerbohm and his set. But while this youthfulness in Wilde's prose is engaging it is, at the same time, disturbing. Wilde's tone and his ideas are frequently at odds. Dorian Gray, the symbol of gilded youth, desires to see his fiancée's suicide from the artistic standpoint, and he explains: "To become the spectator of one's own life ... is to escape the suffering of life." (25) True, this idea has been shown to Dorian by Sir Henry Wootton, the tired aesthete, but it has its parallels in the instructions given by Wilde to his young followers. The two major essays in Intentions are dialogues between young men, one seemingly slightly older than the other, who tells the younger "wonderful" things.

Pater's concluding statement in The Renaissance is that "art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake". (26) A "wonderful" doctrine itself. Yet Max Beerbohm was disappointed by Pater on meeting him. How

much more impressive must Wilde have seemed! Wilde had read and inwardly devoured Pater's message - the influence of The Renaissance upon his thinking is well-known - and he attempted to live out the ideas he found in Pater's writings. The Picture of Dorian Gray is the best example of the use Wilde made of Pater. In like manner Beerbohm's 'The Pervasion of Rouge' (from Works 1896) shows the use that humourist made of Wilde's Intentions. But the bitter distortions of Mrs. Craigie's early fictions can also be traced to Wilde. The half-truths of Some Emotions and a Moral are Wildean:

> "Love me for my faults and not my virtues, and then I shall never disappoint you. I can always live up to them." (27)

Intentions dates from 1891, the same year that saw the publication of The Picture of Dorian Gray in book form, and the collection of stories Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and A House of Pomegranates. All four of the essays in Intentions had appeared elsewhere, so the novel dialogue form of 'The Decay of Lying' and 'The Critic as Artist' was no longer novel by 1891.

From its opening, 'The Decay of Lying' is an onslaught on the nineteenth-century idea of Nature and the 'natural'. For example:

> Cyril: "Let us go and lie on the grass, and smoke cigarettes, and enjoy Nature."
>
> Vivian: "Enjoy Nature! I am glad to say that I have entirely lost that faculty ... What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design ... (28)

The dialogue continues with Cyril taking, as Truth, the accepted opinions regarding Art's debt to Nature, and Nature a measure of Truth. Vivian, on the other hand, advocates

the artifice of Art, the enslavement of Nature to Art's standards and the imaginative quality of lies. He pours scorn on what passes as lies told by politicians:

> "[they] actually condescend to prove, to discuss, to argue. How different from the temper of the true liar, with his frank, fearless statements, his superb irresponsibility, his healthy, natural disdain of proof of any kind! After all, what is a fine lie? Simply that which is its own evidence." (29)

Typical Wildean tricks of humour are used here - "true liar"; lies are "frank", "fearless", "fine" and irresponsibility "superb", the liar "healthy". He hides not only behind this obvious irony but behind the mask of the youthful Vivian who is reading an essay to his friend- the essay is entitled 'The Decay of Lying: A Protest' - allowing both its authors to remain, as it were, anonymous. Vivian attacks artists in the nineteenth century for their dependence upon factuality. He polarises ancient and modern creativity in the following way:

> "The ancient historians gave us delightful fiction in the form of fact; the modern novelist presents us with dull facts under the guise of fiction." (30)

For Wilde this trend in fiction was characterized by Mrs. Ward's <u>Robert Elsmere</u> in England, and in France by the works of Emile Zola. It is because of the factuality of these works, argues Wilde, that they are inartistic, or, to put it more bluntly, they are <u>not</u> Art. He denigrates George Eliot (the great model for Mrs. Ward while she wrote out <u>Robert Elsmere</u>) and shows a studied indifference to "the doings of the lower orders" - his term - as illustrated in the modern novel. For Wilde the work

of his contemporaries was "moralistic" because they were too interested in the subject matter. (31) From this he leaps to the idea that modernity as such is damaging when it encroaches on art. One can only grant that the peculiar nature of The Picture of Dorian Gray relegating life, as it does, to the theatre and opium dens, fulfils Wilde's demands.

> "We have mistaken the common livery of the age for the vesture of the Muses, and spend our days in the sordid streets and hideous suburbs of our vile cities when we should be out on the hillside with Apollo". (32)

Taking the visual arts as an example, the young Vivian sets about to invert popularly-held beliefs on nature and decadence. The thesis is characteristically perverse. First, Art begins with abstract decoration (as in Islamic decoration). Then it is joined (although the image is poor for Wilde) in "the charmed circle" by Life who is "fascinated by this new wonder." At this stage says Wilde/Vivian "Art takes life as part of her rough material." But Art is usurped; Life gets the upper hand and drives Art out "into the wilderness." But it is the concluding statement of this potted history of Art that inverts traditional belief. This final stage "is the true decadence, and it is from this that we are now suffering." (33)

In this way Wilde pre-empts criticism of himself as the archetypal aesthete and decadent, while at the same time enjoying a joke by inverting the terminology of criticism. It is part of the complexity of Wilde's prose that makes it difficult to grab hold of him and demand "Is this really what you mean?" If the Decadence is not what we thought it was, if in fact it

was something else completely (what we had always thought was good, healthy Realism) then what does that make Wilde? And Wilde can laughingly tell us that it is he and his school that are healthy, energetic and vital in terms of creativity. At this point 'The Decay of Lying' is a thinly-disguised defence of Wilde himself. He very cleverly turns the argument upon Truth and creativity.

In the pre-history of art he tells us

> "Old myth and legend and dream took shape and substance. History was entirely re-written, and there was hardly one of the dramatists who did not recognize that the object of Art is not simple truth but complex beauty. In this they were perfectly right. Art itself is really a form of exaggeration; and selection, which is the very spirit of art, is nothing more than an intensified mode of over-emphasis." (34)

Part of Wilde's over-emphasis is to take the story of George Washington and the cherry tree and expose it, wittily of course, as a harmful myth. Because of this tale, Wilde informs us, America is doomed to an eternal lack of imagination. But this is all part of the essay's point that literature and the visual arts tell us, not only how to behave, but how to <u>see</u> the world. A fairly obvious idea perhaps, but the emphasis which Wilde places on this aspect of art renews its power as a tool for shaping life. In this I would claim the essay's true value lies. But Wilde, not content with this simple triumph, extends his thinking to new interpretations of the power of art over life. One of the most memorable of Wilde's sayings illustrates this idea:

> "Schopenhauer has analysed the pessimism that characterises modern thought, but Hamlet invented it. The world has become sad because a puppet was once melancholy." (35)

Vivian's essay seeks to prove this by an ingenious method. Wilde writes a number of lies, all with some great coincidence in them. These stories are all supposedly from Vivian's own experiences, the best being an obviously untrue 'true' account of Vivian's friend Mr. Hyde finding himself in a 'real-life' reconstruction of the opening of Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Wilde would obviously have defended himself for using this method of 'proof' on the grounds that it is useless to argue the power of lies if one is going to use real examples. "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" is the point he makes. "(It) realizes in fact what has been dreamed in fiction." (36) One can see the influence of Pater, and of Huysmans here. (Both writers feature in The Picture of Dorian Gray as guiding spirits to the hero.) The entire tone of the above quotation is from Pater. Not, I stress, in what it says, but in what it implies. I return to the 'Conclusion' of The Renaissance

> ... if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further: the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind. (37)

Strangely, at the end of 'The Decay of Lying' Wilde claims that the doctrine that Life Imitates Art "has never been put forward before, but it is extremely fruitful, and throws an entirely new light upon the history of Art." Yet Vivian's enthusiasm

for fogs and his use of them as an example of how artists teach us how to appreciate "the mysterious loveliness of such effects" is derived from both Whistler and Huysmans. (38)

For all the perfection of Impressionistic fogs and dazzling gardens in the sun, and Pre-Raphaelite faces, Vivian concludes that the nineteenth century "is certainly the dullest and most prosaic century possible." This dullness blankets everything, even religion:

> "As for the Church I cannot conceive anything better for the culture of a country than the presence in it of of body of men whose duty it is to believe in the supernatural, to perform daily miracles, and to keep alive that mythopoeic faculty which is so essential for the imagination. But in the English Church a man succeeds, not through his capacity for belief, but through his capacity for disbelief. Ours is the only Church where the sceptic stands at the altar, and where St. Thomas is regarded as the ideal apostle ... The growth of common sense in the English Church is a thing very much to be regretted. It is really a degrading concession to a low form of realism ... Man can believe the impossible, but man can never believe the improbable." (39)

If in art one has to return to the age when "old myth and legend and dream took shape and substance", then in religion one must return to a similar period. It is not difficult to read Wilde's condemnation of Anglicanism as a longing to return to the poetic beauty of the Catholic Mass. At the end of his life, in fact, Wilde told a reporter:

> "Much of my moral obliquity is due to the fact that my father would not allow me to become a Catholic. The artistic side of the Church would have cured my degeneracies." (40)

In 'The Decay of Lying' Wilde's anti-Anglicanism is rather a back-handed compliment to Catholicism - the power of "the impossible" over "the improbable." It is also difficult to accept an essay on this theme, by this writer, as entirely trustworthy. (41) Wilde tries to create the impression that behind the studied perfection of lying in 'The Decay of Lying' there is really a refined love of the truth. Similarly in 'The Critic as Artist', for all the dislike of Life, as opposed to Art, Wilde inserts clues that, in fact, it is contemplation and asceticism that really interest him.

Yet the surface of Wilde's essay, highly polished as it is, reflects the aesthetic pose of the 90's - the power of thought over action, of surface over depth, of ordered beauty over sordid life. Wilde demonstrated, almost convincingly, that anything can be true - "I am prepared to prove anything" he tells us. (42) In fact, the impossible is preferable to the improbable (or for that matter, the probable). But Wilde's stance indicates a profound confusion. He was, in his life, unable to decide what was true, and therefore, relevant to him. His equivocation about Catholicism generally is an indication of that. In 1877 he dreams of a visit to Newman and of the "quiet and peace" in his soul after being received into the Church. But, he confesses, "I shift with every breath of thought and am weaker and more self-deceiving than ever." (43)

I believe this self-deception is due to the great eclecticism of Wilde's thinking throughout his life. He explores, though not relentlessly, the implications of Epicureanism, of his ritualistic tendencies, of paganism, of socialism, of

individualism. It is, I hope, sufficient here to point out the affinities with Pater to show how that proto-type of aestheticism is carried through to the 1890's. Pater's famous "gemlike flame" with which the young are advised to burn to achieve success, is an image of inconstancy. In religious matters (as Marius bears out) change is everything. We must bear in mind Wilde's attitude to Anglicanism quoted above, and then turn to Pater's statement to a friend of his youth:

> How amusing to take orders without believing a word of it. (44)

(iii) The Sphinx and its Iconography

The Sphinx is a curiosity in the body of Wilde's work. Its composition extends from his days as a student at Oxford to his heady days of success. It is therefore a work which in intent predates Poems (1881) but postdates Salomé (1893) in publication. (45) As the manuscript of The Sphinx is lost, any deciphering of what is early or late in the composition is a matter of interpretation of internal evidence. The Sphinx is not a great work, but the process of deciphering the periods of composition is important because we can uncover persistent themes in Wilde's writing and see how the experienced writer dealt with these themes.

The Sphinx relates to Poems (1881) chiefly in the theme of the extinction of the Gods of the past and their continuing power over the modern imagination: "a godlike spirit of history" Epifanio San Juan has called it (46). Even allowing for the heavy-handed Hellenism of his early poetry, Wilde is obsessed with the Gods of Ancient Greece. He parallels the attributes of the 'dead' Gods with Christ and the saints of Christianity. They are all Gods and all are approached by Wilde in a similar way. (47) One juxtaposition illustrates this well:

> Ah! What else had I to do but love you,
> God's own mother was less dear to me,
> And less dear the Cytherean rising like an argent lily
> from the sea.
>
> ('Flower of Love' Poems 1881)

In another poem the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin is marvelled at for its lack of drama:

> Was this His coming! I had hoped to see
> A scene of wondrous glory, as was told
> Of some great God who in a rain of gold
> Broke open bars and fell on Danae.
>
> ('Ave Maria Gratia Plena' Poems (1881))

The poet continues to express disappointment that the annunciation was not more like the consummation of Semele. He ends, however, suitably impressed that Christ's coming should be both mysterious and peaceful. (This poem is obviously a reference to a painting in Florence - perhaps by Fra Angelico - and as such resembles Rossetti's dramatizations of paintings.)
The poem 'Santa Decca' begins

> The Gods are dead: no longer do we bring
> To grey-eyed Pallas crowns of olive leaves!

And continues:

> Pan is dead, and all the wantoning
> By secret glade and devious haunt is o'er:
> Young Hylas seeks the water-springs no more;
> Great Pan is dead, and Mary's son is king.

Wilde concludes, rather preciously, that "perchance" in this "sea-tranced isle" a forgotten God "lies hidden in the asphodel". ('Santa Decca' Poems (1881)).

This is similar to the sentiment that England - land of Keats, Rossetti, Morris and other heroes of Wilde - is the refuge of Persephone when she is "wearied of the flowerless fields of Dis!" ('The Garden of Eros' Poems (1881)). In this case classical ideals are contrasted with modernity Godless and barbaric, a modernity which has, by implication, lost all old and new Gods. (48)

In 'The Burden of Itys', again from Poems (1881), Wilde bids Pan ("the heavenly herdsman") play to him in Oxfordshire:

> Then sing to me thou tuneful chorister,
> Though what thou sing'st be thine own requiem!
> Tell me thy tale thou hapless chronicler
> Of thine own tragedies! do not contemn
> These unfamiliar haunts, this English field,
> For many a lovely coronal our northern isle can yield
> Which Grecian meadows know not ...

This is strikingly similar to Wilde's technique of bidding the Sphinx sing. He begins in meditation and then confronts his protagonist (Pan in one case, the Sphinx in another) and asks them to reveal history: "thine own tragedies" from Pan, the lives and loves of the Sphinx.

The Sphinx does not sing her own requiem, the poem remains in Wilde's voice. It is his hymn to the many gods of ancient societies. His sphinx is of the Greek type but has, as is implied in the poem, more ancient origins in Egypt. Her more immediate forebears - Flaubert and Moreau amongst others - should not be ignored. W. E. Henley describing the improbable nature of Wilde's sphinx made it apparent that he believed her to be "an effect of (1) an indigestion of Flaubert's Tentation and Gautier's Roman de la Momie and (2) an heroic resolve to make 'talc' rhyme with 'orischalch'." (49) In other words this already hybrid animal is an assortment of the work of others and of a high-blown and artificial style of writing. The Moreau influence is less obvious but is nevertheless important. Wilde's decision to publish his poem as an illustrated book hints at its strong visual origins. He chose Ricketts as designer and illustrator

and that artist had already produced a drawing of Oedipus and the Sphinx which is immediately reminiscent of Moreau's treatment of the same theme. Moreau's sphinx predates Wilde's first attempts at the theme as his Salomé predates Wilde's play. (50)

Moreau's painting is a prototype for symbolist art. [See Plate 1]. As José Pierre has written: "If we did not know the story, we might have doubts about his (i.e. Oedipus') final victory ..." (51) Likewise Wilde's sphinx is victorious until her banishment in the final stanza. Even then she is not totally vanquished nor is she driven to destroy herself (as Moreau's sphinx must surely do). (52) Wilde's sphinx leaves him for some other victim.

Both writer and painter polarise masculinity and femininity, the bestial and the human, the physical and the spiritual. Moreau's sphinx nestles compactly at the centre of the canvas pushing against the rocky Oedipus who has to support himself against her pressure. He is almost pushed out of the painting altogether. But he fixes her challenging look with a look of strength. At the same time the sexuality of the contact is expressed vividly. The sphinx is about to consume Oedipus sexually; her breast is already upon his and her feet press against his thighs. In discussing the meaning of the Symbolist sphinx Robert Goldwater writes that (for Moreau): "She has lost some of her original meaning: she stands less for life's mystery, more for the material, sinful existence that is the enemy of the spirit. The Sphinx was the obvious symbol of all the fleshly, tempting baseness that Moreau put into the rhythmic ornamental poses of his 'Salomé' and 'Delilah'." (53) She becomes therefore a type of the fatal woman, as Praz would

describe her. Wilde, on the other hand has attempted to re-establish the mystical side of the Sphinx. (54)

In one other essential Wilde differs from Moreau. The painter selects a story from the past; he reworks it as an illustration of the event. In doing so he modernises. The attitude of Oedipus owes something to Mantegna but an aestheticized Mantegna. Moreau's sphinx is a beast with a mid-nineteenth century lady's head. Wilde however introduces the sphinx to modern society albeit to a solitary student's room. She might be as old as time itself but the 'I' is definitely Oscar Wilde. He is alive and watching his sphinx as fixedly as Oedipus his. Moreau's myth remains a myth, Wilde's is given new possibilities in a new world.

I have already noted Wilde's debt to Rossetti. It is important to see Wilde as Moreau's heir also. In many ways The Sphinx is a painter's poem although the narrative "I" obtrudes. Wilde is caught between the protagonists - the Sphinx and Christ - as a kind of master-of-ceremonies. He is self-consciously the artist introducing his characters and interpreting their actions. It is the sense of design which he inherits from painting. In his composition the Sphinx fills most of the space pushing Christ almost out of the picture. If we didn't know this story we would be confused by the result. Wilde, like a boxer's referee, declares Christ the victor after winning a mere two rounds and being ignored by a successful sphinx for eighty-five. The idea of the poem's space being filled by the sphinx is too all important

for Wilde. It is interesting that Holbrook Jackson citing The Sphinx describes Wilde as having "polished and engraved and added to the luxuriant imagery of that masterpiece of baroque poetry..." (55) And elsewhere describes the poem as "really a poetic design, an arabesque ... expressing sensations which have hitherto been enshrined in art rather than in life." (56)

Wilde meditates upon the Sphinx's life and in doing so achieves what would be impossible for Moreau in painting, a sense of time, of eternal activity. The stillness of Moreau is there:

> Inviolate and immobile she does not rise she does not stir
> For silver moons are naught to her and naught to her the
> suns that reel.

But there is more than stillness for when she comes out of the "shifting gloom" which is time itself (57) Wilde lists her adventures which are full of violent action. Wilde lists these actions obsessively, seemingly unaware that the sphinx is a myth and a symbol and that the descriptions lie within himself.

Gods and cultures clash, are destroyed and vanish, and Wilde jumbles them into a multi-coloured mound and then selects items at random to show us. Thus Jesus and Mary are positioned between "moon-horned Io" and Adrian and Antinous. This sleight of hand was obviously designed to shock but it is reminiscent of those earlier juxtapositions which I have noted from Poems (1881):

Sing to me of the Jewish maid who wandered with the Holy Child,
And how you led them through the wild, and how they slept
beneath your shade.

Wilde decides that if any of the gods was the Sphinx's lover then that god was Ammon:

You kissed his mouth with mouths of flame:
you made the hornéd god your own:
You stood behind him on his throne:
you called him by his secret name.

To this love Wilde consecrates twenty seven stanzas, many of which catalogue Ammon's wealth. Like Shelley's King Ozymandias, Wilde's Ammon is a fragmented giant. Ammon is dead and broken up, and the Sphinx is advised to piece together his image and "wake mad passions in the senseless stone." (This part of the Sphinx's story owes something to the myths of Isis and Osiris.) But the moment is not without sadness:

The god is scattered here and there: deep hidden in
the windy sand
I saw his giant granite hand still clenched in
impotent despair.

Wilde's mockery of the Sphinx at this stage is disturbing. One feels that he has set her up like some monumental Aunt Sally only to knock her down again. In recoiling from her he very rightly recoils from himself (as he has created her). In stanza eighty five Wilde asserts that meditating upon the Sphinx has somehow lessened him:

You make my creed a barren sham, you
wake foul dreams of sensual life,
And Atys with his blood-stained knife
were better than the thing I am.

That Atys (or Attis) emasculates himself implies that Wilde is here acknowledging the wilfulness of his mediatations. The guilt is not the Sphinx's but Wilde's. The poet's guilt about his homosexuality which has further echoes within the poem leads him to accuse the Sphinx of robbing him of his masculinity.

Previously, in 'The Garden of Eros' (Poems 1881), Wilde greeted the Spirit of Beauty with a promise of self-emasculation:

.... there are a few

Who for thy sake would give their manlihood
And consecrate their being, I at least
Have done so, made thy lips my daily food ....

The final stanzas of the poem are perhaps the most famous. Here too Wilde reveals a personal quirk. Let us look back briefly at the Poems published in 1881. One of the surprises is that this collection has many references to Christ and his mother, even allowing for the strong Pre-Raphaelite and High Church influence on the young poet. Wilde's Christ is not simply gentle and beautiful. He is not Burne-Jones' Christ with sad, hurt eyes. Wilde's Christ is as much the fatal man as the Sphinx (or Salome or La Sainte Courtisane) is the fatal woman. He insists on Christ's humanity: "the wounded hands, the weary human face" ('E Tenebris', Poems (1881)). In 'Humanitad' the poet stresses that "the Word was Man":

Nay, nay, we are but crucified, and though
The bloody sweat falls from our brows like rain,
Loosen the nails - we shall come down I know,
Staunch the red wounds - we shall be whole again,
No need have we of hyssop-laden rod,
That which is purely human, that is Godlike, that is God.

When we return to The Sphinx, to the two stanzas that the poet allows Christ, we are dealing with images more condensed and personalized than those that have gone before:

> False Sphinx! False Sphinx! By reedy Styx old
> Charon, leaning on his oar,
> Waits for my coin. Go thou before, and leave me
> to my crucifix,
> Whose pallid burden, sick with pain, watches
> the world with weary eyes,
> And weeps for every soul that dies, and
> weeps for every soul in vain.

Wilde banishes the Sphinx and concentrates briefly on his sin (as Atys). He identifies the crucifix ambiguously as "my crucifix" while Christ is a nameless "pallid burden."

In mystifying the Sphinx for modern minds, Wilde personalizes Christ and unifies their sufferings (his and Christ's). In humanizing Christ he deifies himself.

(iv) A House of Pomegranates was published in 1891, originally intended as a children's book. One critic challenged the book's intention with a direct question: "Is A House of Pomegranates intended for a child's book ... the ultra-aestheticism of the pictures seems unsuitable for children - as also the rather 'fleshly' style of Mr. Wilde's writing." (58) Wilde disowned his original intention with the reply "I had about as much intention of pleasing the British child as I had of pleasing the British public." (59) Of the four stories in the collection 'The Fisherman and his Soul' is perhaps the least orthodox as a children's story. It is often compared to the work of Hans Christian Andersen, but one cannot imagine the Danish writer showing such scant concern for his reading public. In translation Andersen's diction has a matter-of-factness at variance with the supernatural and fantastic elements in the plots. The Pall Mall Gazette reviewer dwelt on Wilde's prose style and praised the "deep meaning which 'he who runs might read' " and the "underlying allegory" in the stories which was "their chief beauty." In replying to his anonymous critic Wilde upheld his aestheticism:

> No artist recognises any standard of beauty but that which is suggested by his own temperament. The artist seeks to realise in a certain material his immaterial idea of beauty, and thus to transform an idea into an ideal. That is the way an artist makes things. That is why an artist makes things. The artist has no other object in making things. (60)

Wilde rather overstates his point - the stories, being his own, are obviously the product of his own aesthetic sense. But I think the overstatement is due to the unease felt by the author in presenting four stories to the public which were in such an

accessible form. It is as if only the prose makes them 'art' as the plots are hybrid. Reviews of A House of Pomegranates referred to Wilde's sources - Andersen and von Chamisso - for 'The Fisherman and his Soul'. Andersen is an obvious source for the mermaid with whom the fisherman falls in love. Von Chamisso's enduring idea of being shadowless is echoed by Wilde in the main theme of his story: the shadow is the soul. However, Andersen's tale 'The Shadow' might also have been influential, particularly as the shadow brings about the ignominious death of the hero. Wilde himself does not reveal his sources - in fact, he ignores them and dwells on the personal aesthetic which produced the work. But to Andersen and von Chamisso we can add a third name - Lady Wilde. Oscar's mother compiled two books of stories from her husband's collection of folk tales. The first of these Ancient Legends of Ireland (1887) contained the story of 'The Priest's Soul' which Yeats included in his Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland (1888). For the actual personality of the soul - a kind of wandering raconteur - Wilde may have had in mind Hermotimus of Clazomenae's soul mentioned by Lucian (61). I will explain these references in full later, but stress here that Wilde's letter of self-defence in the Pall Mall Gazette is really an attempt to explain the aesthetic impulses of the artist and in doing so draws the reader away from the actual sources. In fact the existence of literary sources for a work "suggested" by the artist's own personality seems contradictory. In her introduction to The Complete Shorter Fiction of Oscar Wilde Isobel Murray notes that previous critics have, in the main, read into Wilde's tales only the author's personal development. (62) This would, it might seem, please Wilde, but is it true? What does a story like 'The Fisherman and his Soul' tell us of Wilde's development? An outline of the story is necessary at this point.

A fisherman catches a little mermaid and is struck by her beauty. She is frightened and begs him to release her. He extracts a promise from her that she must sing for him when he calls if he lets her return to her father who is a King. They both keep their promises and in due time the fisherman falls in love with the mermaid. He proposes marriage but the mermaid tells him that as he has a human soul he cannot be her husband. At this the fisherman resolves: "I will send my soul away ... and you shall be my bride." (63)

To lose his soul the fisherman visits a priest and asks his advice. The fisherman believes that his soul is valueless: "Of what use is my soul to me?" he asks. "I cannot see it. I may not touch it." But the priest assures him that there is nothing more precious than a human soul. The young man is not convinced and on his way through the market offers to sell his soul to the merchants. They only confirm his own valuation of the human soul: "it is nought, nor has it any value for our service."

It should be remembered that Wilde's tales are generally Christian in tone. Apart from the floridness of detail and the highly-coloured prose they are usually orthodox stories of self-sacrifice and suffering. One of the other stories in <u>A House of Pomegranates</u> was described by a contemporary reviewer as "of half-mediaeval, half-modern Socialist strain " (64) and that might remain an accurate description of the genre exemplified by 'The Happy Prince'. A quaintness pervades Wilde's tales, a quaintness part and parcel of the bric-à-brac which critics objected to. What else should a young king scorn but cloth-of-gold? (In the late nineteenth century! the reader gasps - and in a socialistic story!) Likewise what

else should a young fisherman most want to win than a young mermaid, and most want to lose than his soul? This ornamental framework is necessary for Wilde's morality. The soul of the fisherman - at the point we have reached in the story - is a prop like the cloth of gold and the jewels of the other stories.

Rejected by the priest and the merchants,the fisherman visits a young witch to seek her advice. She falls in love with him and wants him for her own. She tells him that it is necessary for him to dance with her at a sabbath that evening. The festivities are disrupted when the fisherman on meeting Satan (a nineties dandy) mutters the holy name and crosses himself. Left alone the young man forces the witch to tell him how to lose his soul:

> "What men call the shadow of the body is not the shadow of the body, but is the body of the soul. Stand on the sea-shore with thy back to the moon, and cut away from around thy feet thy shadow which is thy soul's body, and bid thy soul leave thee ..."

Here Wilde's story closely resembles von Chamisso's Peter Schlemihl (usually in English the tale is called The Shadowless Man). But important though this German source was to Wilde, the folk-story 'The Priest's Soul' is an equally important though a less obvious source for the dispute between the fisherman and his soul. In Lady Wilde's story a priest becomes so proud of his learning that "the pride of arguing got hold of him..."

> so that from one thing to another he went on to prove that there was no Purgatory, and then no Hell, and then no Heaven, and then no God; and at last that men had no souls, but were no more than a dog or a cow ... (65)

In Wilde's tale the fisherman has lost faith in his soul, so much so that he may as well not have one. As he has become infatuated with a soulless creature he has to deny the soul (rather than deny its existence) to join his love. Thus the doomed hero cuts the shadow-soul from beneath his feet "... and it rose up and stood before him, and looked at him, and it was even as himself." The fisherman is frightened by this mirror image and orders it away. The shadow asks for a heart to take with him on his wanderings but the fisherman needs it to love the mermaid with and the two part.

The soul returns to the beach each year at the same time. Here Wilde would seem to be borrowing the story of Lucian's on the soul of Hermotimus. For each year the shadow relates a new adventure. The first year his story concerns the Mirror of Wisdom which he has in his possession. He offers the gift to the fisherman if he can return to the body of his old friend. After the second year the shadow again returns and offers the Ring of Riches but the fisherman will not be bribed. His love for the mermaid is worth more than wisdom or riches. On his third visit the soul simply offers to bring the fisherman to a city where a young girl dances with naked feet "like little white pigeons". This is a temptation for the fisherman and he remembers that the little mermaid has no feet. So he agrees to let the soul enter into him and travel to the city to return to the mermaid after the journey.

It is interesting to note that the fisherman's soul is an exact image of himself. For Rossetti the soul, or rather the image of the soul, was a beautiful woman, as portrayed in his story 'The Hand and the Soul'. For Poe, one of Rossetti's literary heroes,

the soul was the girl Psyche as in 'Ulalume'. Could Wilde, however, have described a feminized soul, an 'anima' rather than a 'psyche' roaming the world so independently and so ruthlessly as the fisherman's soul does? Would a female character have used the story of the dancing girl's feet to lure the fisherman back to dry land? There is also the strongly sexual, or rather homosexual, relation between soul and body. When the fisherman agrees to reunite with his soul he holds out his arms: "And his Soul gave a great cry of joy and ran to meet him, and entered into him..."

After travelling for three days the fisherman still does not find the dancing girl but in each town the soul tells him to commit a crime, a process which culminates in murder. (Here is an echo of The Picture of Dorian Gray where the hero's final crime is murder (66)). When confronted the soul explains: "When thou didst send me forth into the world thou gavest me no heart, so I learned to do all these things and love them." And he reveals to the fisherman that he cannot be sent away a second time. Of course the fisherman is too late to return to his love - when he reaches the shore she will not answer to his calls. For three years the young man lives by the seashore. Wilde's dependence on the number three as a magical number is a little heavy-handed. He might have learned from Hans Andersen that occasionally the rule must be broken - in one of his fairy tales Andersen lets the fourth mouse recount his tale before the third, resulting in 'What the Fourth Mouse, who spoke before the Third, had to say'. (67) During the first year the soul tempts the young man with evil; during the second year the soul tempts with good. Then the soul asks if he can enter the heart of the fisherman but it is too

full of love for the mermaid. At last the mermaid reappears, but she is dead; her body is washed up on the shore. Deep in grief the fisherman nurses the body until his heart "through the fulness of his love" breaks and the soul enters in.

The entrance of the soul into the heart is one of the oddest features of the story. Previously the soul had asked for a heart so that he would not wander the world heartless. That was when he was a shadow-soul. At the end of the story the soul is the very life-force - and more importantly - the love-force of the fisherman. This latter concept flies in the face of religious beliefs from Homeric times to modern Christianity. The Homeric viewpoint is that the soul escapes with the dying breath, that it is an invisible image which gains its freedom only at death. Here the soul is very much a life-force and in its spiritual form finds a parallel in Lady Wilde's 'The Priest's Soul'. There a child stabs the priest through the heart until he breathes his last: "Then the child, who was watching, saw a beautiful living creature, with four snow-white wings, mount from the dead man's body into the air and go fluttering round his head." (68) This, the first butterfly to be seen in Ireland, is a poeticized 'psyche' fluttering around until it can enter Purgatory and "so pass through torture to purification and peace." The Homeric 'psyche' has little to do with the actual life of the man (69) and in the Irish tale the priest's soul is likewise inactive, it is a beautiful creature jeopardized by sin but unable to save <u>itself</u> from Hell. The fisherman's soul is a radical reversal of this order. He enters the broken heart of his 'host' seconds - presumably - before the fisherman dies. The soul is not mentioned again and

the references to the fisherman are as a corpse. The life/love-force goes back in and disappears rather than comes out and is made visible.

In the concluding episode there is evidence that the soul is still at work. The priest, who had been consulted at the start of the story, refuses to bless the sea when he finds the fisherman and the mermaid dead on the shore. He wishes to preach to his congregation about the wrath of God. But when he arrives at the chapel he finds the altar covered with flowers strangely scented.

> And after that he had opened the tabernacle, and incensed the monstrance that was in it, and shown the fair wafer to the people, and hid it again behind the veil of veils, he began to speak to the people ... But the beauty of the white flowers troubled him, and their odour was sweet in his nostrils, and there came another word into his lips, and he spake not of the wrath of God, but of the God whose name is Love. And why he so spake, he knew not.

The priest is subsequently told that the flowers came from the grave of the fisherman and the mermaid. The energy of soul-love has obviously produced them and the miracle produces a conversion of feeling in the priest (polarising the Love of God with the Wrath of God). The priest is convinced that he should bless the seas "and all the wild things that are in it", and Wilde adds:

> The fauns also he blessed, and the little bright-eyed things that peer through the leaves. All the things in God's world he blessed, and the people were filled with joy and wonder.

The miracle is the soul made visible, and the repercussion is that the priest is reconciled to the world of love, a world which,

by Wilde's implication, is an ancient, pagan Kingdom. But the priest's blessing although being a symbolic approval of this world banishes the kingdom: "... never again in the corner of the Fullers' Field grew flowers of any kind, but the field remained barren even as before. Nor came the sea-folk into the bay as they had been wont to do, for they went to another part of the sea." Blessing is banishment. As the fisherman must receive his soul into his heart so the priest must receive love into his soul - i.e. his religion. Wilde's use of the externals of the priest's religion - the tabernacle, the incense, the monstrance, "the fair wafer" and the veil, and later the layers of vestments - is in contrast to the immediacy of the fisherman's death and the urgency of his love. The message would seem to be that Christianity (in this form, Catholicism, or, at the very least, the Highest of Anglicanism) must be paganized. Christopher Nassaar sees the story in a different light. For him the moral ends when the fisherman "by following the road of love ... finally manages to put an end to fragmentation within a framework of total purity ... It is the lesson of total love that the priest learns in the end ..." (70) Of course, that is _part_ of the story but Nassaar believes that the mermaid "acquires a soul - the fisherman's" a conjecture which is not upheld in Wilde's text. In fact, this is contrary to Wilde's intention here and elsewhere in his writing. The mermaid, as the inhabitant of a different, soulless world does not need a soul. A soul would destroy her beauty, even in the grave. The fisherman, by responding to the mermaid's beauty, forfeits his soul by necessity and becomes a kind of aesthete _par excellence_. But by harmonizing the pagan (soulless) aesthetic (the recognition of the beauty of the visible world) with Christianity, the ideal balance is achieved. This is a much

larger - and more Wildean - theme than "the framework of total purity", and has parallels in Wilde's other stories and his poems. One of the great charms of the 'fairy story' (to use an inexact term) is that the fairies, the spirits, are remnants of an old world, a world that has vanished. The belief in fairies, fauns, mermaids and the like is the affirmation of the former existence of a world of extreme beauty. Nowhere is this world so longingly reflected upon than in the Irish folk story. In 'The Fisherman and his Soul' Wilde borrows from this source ; the priest, the sea-folk, the lost world of beauty ; and uses it to uncover his own aesthetic.

In his work The Moral Vision of Oscar Wilde Philip Cohen writes that the death of the fisherman expresses "Wilde's subconscious wish for wholeness, for union with Isola, for peace with himself." (71) (Isola was Oscar's dead sister to whom he had been deeply attached). And without totally disagreeing with Cohen I would like to return to the question "What does 'The Fisherman and his Soul' tell us of Wilde's personal development?" It is not overloading the short story to see in it Wilde's feeling of being outlawed for his aestheticism (a form of pagan involvement with beauty) and his homosexuality (the love of the fisherman for a creature outside the blessing of Christianity). The plot is a challenge to conventional morality and conventional Christianity. Wilde numbers himself among the wild things of the sea and the other half-seen, half-unseen creatures of the forgotten world. (72)

In another story which deals with a similar subject Wilde seems to equate the soul with creativity. This story, related to Laurence Housman and Robert Ross in Paris, in 1899, appeared in Housman's reconstruction of his last meeting with Wilde. The conversation had been concerned with the snare of money and fame, particularly for the artist. Wilde had had personal experience of this snare. In his conversation the writer dealt with Burns, Scott and Carlyle and the difficulty, not only of being rich, but of being Scottish too. (Wilde was surely lapsing playfully into his Irishness, his otherness, at this point). For Wilde, a successful Burns would have been an "appalling figure".

> "Riotous living and dying saved him from that last degradation of smug prosperity which threatened him." (73)

Wilde accused Scotland of inspiring Scott to "a terrible betrayal (for which the tradespeople of literature still praise him)". The betrayal was of art for commerce. And in speaking of Carlyle, in terms calculated to astonish his listeners, he rang the changes upon the theme of the artist and commercial success applying his argument more generally.

> "Great success, great failure - only so shall the artist see himself as he is, and through himself see others; only so shall he learn (as the artist must learn) the true meaning behind the appearance of things material, of life in general, and - more terrible still - the meaning of his own soul." (74)

The "meaning of his own soul" is a phrase with a Wildean vagueness. There is no evidence that Wilde had concerned himself with mysticism or mystical concepts of the soul before his imprisonment. Wilde uses 'soul' in its popular meaning:

'essence', 'essential personality', even, at its vaguest, 'life'. Is not the statement recorded by Housman a reiteration of Christ's speech to His disciples recorded by Matthew (16:24-28)? :

> "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life."

The ambiguity of this passage - the conclusion is sometimes rendered as: "If he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul", is played with by Oscar Wilde in his conversation.

In the story which Wilde related after this conversation the soul appears to be the creative power of the artist. The story was called 'The Story of the Man who Sold his Soul'. It opens with a man wanting to rid himself of his soul: "for it hates me, and I hate it". He sells it to a traveller, who tells him that "every soul has its true price; and only at that, neither more nor less, can it be bought." The soul is duly sold for thirty pieces of silver (adding another shade of meaning to 'soul' within the story) and the traveller goes off with it.

> "Presently the man, having no soul, found that he could do no sin. Though he stretched out his arms to sin, sin would not come to him. 'You have no soul', said sin, and passed him by. 'Wherefore should I come to you? I have no profit in a man that has no soul?' "

The man, therefore, wanted his soul back and when he met the traveller again asked to buy back his own soul. But the traveller had sold it to another, and for a smaller sum, reminding the man that only the 'just price' can be paid for

Near despair the man wanders until he meets, in a bazaar, a woman who asks him why he is so sad. When she is told why she says that she has bought a soul only the other night "a soul that had passed through so many hands that it had become dirt-cheap...". A price cannot be set for the purchase of this soul - it _is_ the hero's - because it was sold for so little, literally for a song. "What is worth less than a song?" But the man beseeches the woman, begging: "If you will sell it to me I will give you my body, which is worth less than a song from your lips." The transaction is made and a sort of panic of un-recognition fills the man: he fails to recognize the soul as his.

> "The woman laughed and said: 'Before you sold your soul into captivity it was a free soul in a free body; can you not recognize it now it comes to you from the traffic of the share-market?.... your soul has all the greater charity, since it recognizes and returns to you, though you have sold your body miserably into bondage!' "

In 'The Fisherman and his Soul' Wilde used the soul as image of what is free, enduring and, in popular terminology, 'alternative'. Although magic and religion could draw the soul, the soul is seen as distinct from them and independent. But two ideas converge in 'The Man who Sold his Soul'. As I have observed, Wilde had been speaking to his friends on commercialism and art; Scott had been inspired "to break his art on the wheel of commercial rectitude" (75). Wilde is speaking here post-prison and somewhat in the manner of _De Profundis_. More strikingly, if we carry through the heart/art pun (perhaps unconscious, but surely not) the story of the man selling his soul and its conversational context bring to mind _The Ballad of Reading Gaol_.

But God's eternal Laws are kind
And break the heart of stone.

And every human heart that breaks,
In prison-cell or yard,
Is as that broken box that gave
Its treasure to the Lord,
And filled the unclean leper's house
With the scent of costliest nard.

Ah! happy they whose hearts can break
And peace of pardon win!
How else may man make straight his plan
And cleanse his soul from Sin?
How else but through a broken heart
May Lord Christ enter in?

The curious ambiguity, in 'The Fisherman and his Soul', of the broken heart with the soul entering in, is used in the poem to a more conventional end. Wilde's own art (and heart) had been broken and not only on a commercial wheel but by the powerful glare of public scrutiny. His image of the soul made "dirt-cheap" by passing through so many hands alerts us to a moment in Wilde's trials when the letter to Lord Alfred Douglas was read out in court. The letter begins: "My own Boy, your sonnet is quite lovely...." (Incidentally the letter continues:"Your slim gilt soul walks between passion and poetry.") This 'prose poem', as Wilde described the letter, fell into the hands of a blackmailer and was instrumental in Wilde's downfall when a copy was sent to Lord Queensbury.

The breaking of Wilde's art on the wheel of commercialism produced two late flowerings of his art, De Profundis and The Ballad of Reading Gaol. In the former, contrasting his days of material success with his present poverty, he wrote:

I am conscious now that behind all this Beauty, satisfying though it be, there is some Spirit hidden of which the painted forms and shapes are but modes of manifestation, and it is with this Spirit that I desire to become in harmony. I have grown tired of the articulate utterances of men and things. The Mystical in Art, the Mystical in Life, the Mystical in Nature - this is what I am looking for, and in the great symphonies of Music, in the initiation of Sorrow, in the depths of the Sea I may find it (76)

(v) It is important to repeat here that it was not his homosexuality that placed Wilde apart. Had he wished, that side of his life could easily have been hidden from public view. But Wilde's sexuality was simply a part of that 'otherness' which placed him outside society. He was a dyed-in-the-wool bohemian. His family background was markedly eccentric, especially his mother's acceptance of Sir William Wilde's lovers and his illegitimate children. (77) Oscar could have embraced Victorian morality and religiosity as a way of escape from this world. Instead, he enlarged upon it, and became, not only more notorious than his father and mother, but one of the most notorious figures of English literary history.

The outcast theme is repeated in the children's story 'The Star-Child', also from A House of Pomegranates, although here it is within a more conventional religious framework. The stories generally are written as if the Brothers Grimm collaborated with the author of Exodus for a series in a socialist journal. The good get their come-uppance as well as the evil. It is as if Wilde, unsure of his moral stance, but pretty sure he is a martyr, doles out penance to all his characters good or ill. The Star-Child, for instance - almost a child of aestheticism itself - suffers greatly for his beauty and journeys through the world repenting. At last he is reunited with his parents because he has reformed his evil character sufficiently to be welcomed by them. His reign as King however, lasted only three years because the penance has worn him out, and he dies prematurely. "And he who came after him ruled evilly" adds

Wilde, unnecessarily perhaps, but with a consistently Old Testament tone nevertheless. For G. Wilson Knight the theme of youthful beauty is a key to Wilde's moral stance. Young male beauty "though a window into the eternal [is] in earthly terms transient; and so is the purity, or virtue, which it appears for a while to express." (78)

If the story 'Our Lady of Sorrows' can be attributed to Wilde, as Charles Ricketts claims,(79) then we have another document of Wilde's curiously paganized Christianity. In this prose poem the writer draws parallels between Venus and the Virgin Mary. The Virgin leaves a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of the Sorrows, to visit the sea-folk who worship her. After a long night of revelry she leaves them - like the moon - to return to the shrine. It is her closing words that raise the story from its obviousness: "I must again return to the place from whence I came, for I know I have another son who has suffered greatly!" (80)

Wilde never attains the unity of design and purpose found in, for example, Lionel Johnson's 'The Church of a Dream', or even, to take another extreme, Beardsley's Under the Hill. Oscar's work straddles the devout and the profane gracefully. The key to this ability is, I think, his Christ-identification. This trait has been noted by Wilson Knight in the essay 'Christ and Wilde'. Knight believes Wilde's Christ-identification to be tragic but added that it must be judged "in relation to the

difficulties inherent in his life's central, Blakean, aim: to make of the senses elements of a new spirituality, to cure the soul by the senses and the senses by the soul". (81) But Wilde's relation to Christ's teaching and the extent of his personal identification with it is only tragic if one considers Christ to be tragic - a human definition surely - if Christ is regarded as being all human. A misguided human idealist, Wilde would, in turn, become tragic too, if not more tragic, for following in Christ's footsteps to a pointless martyrdom. No doubt history is full of misguided martyrs. Knight's addition to the martyr theory in regard to Wilde is useful because he points out that not only is Wilde's aim Christ-like, and Blakean, but that it is new too. Wilde's is a new synthesis. It is a post-Pater, post-Baudelaire, synthesis of devotion and profanity, Christianity and paganism. Wilde quotes Pater in De Profundis (82) that "failure is to form habits." Yet the basis of ritualistic religion - a thing that attracted both men - is habit.

In Dorian Gray Wilde wrote of Dorian's embracing Catholicism for its aesthetic thrill; Wilde's own behaviour while in Rome was ambivalent — his desire to see the Pope/his desire to pick up Italian boys. In his life and his literature Wilde demonstrates his ability to embrace both the worldly and the other-worldly at once. In his poems 'Easter Day' and 'E Tenebris' Wilde stresses the humanity of Christ. In the former poem he does so at the expense of the Pope (whom he supposedly revered):

> Like some great God, the Holy Lord of Rome
> Priest-like, he wore a robe more white than foam
> And, King-like, swathed himself in royal red,
> Three crowns of gold rose high upon his head. (83)

This contrasts with Christ who "back across the wide wastes of years"

> ...wandered by a lonely sea,
> And sought in vain for any place of rest.

In 'E Tenebris' the poet suffers a Christ-like remorse and he feels the bitterness of life: "For I am drowning in a stormier sea/Than Simon on thy lake of Galilee." He continues this uncharacteristic tone with the confession:

> ...well I know my soul in Hell must lie
> If I this night before God's throne should stand.

But he ends:

> Nay, peace, I shall behold, before the night,
> The feet of brass, the robe more white than flame,
> The wounded hands the weary human face.

To return to Wilson Knight's thesis, Wilde believes not only in the youth-beauty-goodness triangle and its inherent difficulties (84) but in the dominating human-ness of Christ. Christ is a beautiful and good child but is nevertheless essentially human. That is what makes Christ so believable a teacher for Wilde in a century that bordered on disbelief. And Wilde, rather than imitate a God, imitates (and identifies

himself with) the Divine Human with his "weary human face". The two conflicting views of Wilde - that he was an evil and corrupt degenerate and that he was the sweetest, kindest and most complete of men can easily be the identikit for one person. It was as if he saw himself as the personification of both human weakness and human strength.

Wilde imitates the literary form of Christ, the parable (hence the prose poems), and many of his ideas (hence the unconventional, even by nineteenth-century standards, brand of socialism). Wilde's theorizing in its epigrammatic form attempts to be more wise than the wise. He inverts wisdom and destroys the texture of truth:

> ... to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. I treated Art as the supreme reality, and life as a mere mode of fiction. (85)

Perhaps it is here that Knight's term 'tragic' really applies to Wilde's Christ-identification. Certainly before his death-bed conversion Wilde chose to see the Bible as a colour-chart to match his purples. Christ became for him a literary genius who had oddity on his side. Wilde paraded himself across the later years of the century like an admonishing angel. In 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' he wrote that "Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known" (86), and followed that with

> Christ made no attempt to reconstruct society, and consequently the Individualism that he preached to man could be realised only through pain or in solitude. (87)

In one way this approach to Christianity by Wilde was sensible. It must, after all, be more astonishing to be confronted by a gross, over-dressed Christ, than a silently starving one (as Francis Thompson was to the Meynells). In that Wilde was right. To have Christ right there in the salon, goading his hosts by saying the most outrageous things was a tactic necessary for an attack upon the middle classes. And Wilde was a thorough Arnoldian in his desire to rout, or at least denigrate, the Philistine.

Salomé enshrines some of these aspects of Wilde's personality. Although it has been pointed out that the playwright saw himself as Herod, (88) it is more accurate, when looking at Wilde's cult of personality and Individualism to see him as John the Baptist. John is a Christ-substitute. Presenting the Baptist with a sensual temptation, Wilde follows the traditional/Romantic interest in the relationship of the Magdalen with Christ. (89) Wilde, in one of his most famous sayings, could "resist anything but temptation", and in his writings referred often to the creative force of sin. Certainly in *Salomé* sin and temptation are the catalysts for the drama. In 'The Critic as Artist' the writer tells us that without sin

> the world would stagnate, or grow old, or become colourless. By its curiosity Sin increases the experience of the race. Through its intensified assertion of individualism it saves us from monotony of type. (90)

(vi) The Myth of Dorian Gray

It would be wrong to overstress the importance of Wilde's brushes with the religious world (always with Catholicism), yet to ignore them robs his writing of a certain edge, one might even say of a certain _frisson_. For example

> ... nothing makes one so vain as being told that one is a sinner. Conscience makes egotists of us all." (91)

This is a characteristic statement by Lord Henry Wootton in _The Picture of Dorian Gray_. I shall examine this, the only novel by Wilde, at some length, for it represents an attitude, not only of the writer's but of his 'school'. We must keep in mind that Wilde himself was averse to the attribution of his character's words to himself. This viewpoint had the virtue of necessity - the general critical reception to _Dorian Gray_ was one of disapproval of Wilde's immoral opinions. Wilde was at pains to rid one reviewer of the confusion between the artist and his subject-matter. (92) Nevertheless _Dorian Gray_ is a mine for those interested in Wilde's moral stances (the word must be plural). Whereas Huysmans' _A Rebours_, which had such an influence on Wilde's novel and its hero, presents its message in an entirely self-articulated way, Wilde chooses to obtrude an alien morality into the body of his story. In other words Huysmans has no truck with the morality he has locked out of Des Esseinte's world. Dorian is, on the other hand, locked in -

symbolically and literally - with the moral judgement of the society he has rejected: it consumes and kills him. This may have had a great deal to do with the reactions of the English and American audience whom the serialized version reached. (Although he believed that journalism was unreadable and literature unread, Wilde was guilty in the serialized Dorian Gray of writing an aestheticized journalism). Wilde presents us with a dramatization of the cloister/cafe theme. The moral duality (sometimes a moral duplicity it must be admitted) is deliberate, thematic. The material and the spiritual are constantly at war, Hellenism versus Mediaevalism. Lord Henry's ruminations on Dorian's youth lead to the following passage:

> Soul and body, body and soul - how mysterious they were! There was animalism in the soul, and the body had its moments of spirituality. The senses could refine, and the intellect could degrade. Who could say where the fleshly impulse ceased, or the physical impulse began? How shallow were the arbitrary definitions of ordinary psychologists! And yet how difficult to decide between the claims of the various schools! Was the soul a shadow seated in the house of sin? Or was the body really in the soul, as Giordano Bruno thought? The separation of spirit from matter was a mystery, and the union of spirit with matter was a mystery also. (93)

Dorian himself will continue these ruminations of his mentor. Ironically, with the images of his soul and body quite graphically distinct (the soul locked in the attic, the body in a brothel), Dorian can allow himself the luxury of never arresting "his intellectual development by any formal acceptance of creed or system." He found "a curious pleasure in tracing the thoughts and passions of men to some pearly cell in the brain, or some white

nerve in the body ... He knew that the senses, no less than the soul, have their spiritual mysteries to reveal". (94)

Lord Henry is an advocate of an Hellenic ideal to which he would like to return :

> "I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream ... we would forget all the maladies of mediaevalism". (95)

This is a kind of paganism where one sins and forgets, one sins to forget: " 'for action is a mode of purification.' " Lord Henry is restating his maxim that one can cure the soul by the senses and vice versa. One can compare a passage from The Critic as Artist where Gilbert tells Ernest that action has as its basis "lack of imagination. It is the last resource of those who know not how to dream" - a typical Wildean challenge to a generation of Muscular Christians. (96) Both statements, Gilbert's and Lord Henry's, are informed with Wilde's feeling for individualism - Lord Henry is not suggesting canoeing or mountaineering as "a mode of purification."

Lord Henry, and later Dorian, are representatives of the Hellenic ideal. Dorian's friend, the painter Basil Hallward, is Mediaevalism in person. The following dialogue is opened by Lord Henry:

> 'Beautiful sins, like beautiful things, are the privilege of the rich.'
>
> 'One has to pay in other ways but money.'
>
> 'What sort of ways, Basil?'
>
> 'Oh! I should fancy in remorse, in suffering, in ... well, in the consciousness of degradation'.

> Lord Henry shrugged his shoulders.
>
> 'My dear fellow, mediaeval art is charming, but mediaeval emotions are out of date.' (97)

When the Hellenized, or paganized, Dorian kills his old friend Basil, it is not so much the murder of the friend that shocks as the fact that Dorian has dealt a blow to Christianity. He murders an unselfish, Christ-like figure. The murder remains undetected even at the end of the novel (the narrator believes that Basil has simply disappeared some years before the story is related). The ultimate shock is that murder is the latest in a long line of experiments in sensation. An old friend tells Dorian "You have gone from corruption to corruption and now you have culminated in crime." (98) When Dorian performs one really moral act he wonders if that too was for the sake of sensation. Although the picture - "the mirror of his soul" - reflects Basil's murder, it does not reflect the one moral act for in "hypocrisy he had worn the mask of goodness. For curiosity's sake he had tried the denial of self." (99) In anger Dorian attempts to stab the portrait, his soul, but the knife inverts and he commits suicide. (Wilde would have been aware of the work of contemporaries, particularly John Addington Symonds, attempting to redefine the nature of homosexuality. Symonds decided on the word 'invert' to best describe the homosexual type, and he was distressed by 'the morbid and perfumed manner of treating such psychological subjects' in Dorian Gray. (100) Yet,as Symonds' biographer points out, the critic was influenced by Wilde's novel when describing an incident in his own life. 'I am a soul, he is a soul, we shall never meet,' wrote Symonds of a lost opportunity to love. (101))

The ironies that Wilde plays with are many, not the least being that Dorian has been "poisoned by a book" and that Dorian Gray his fictional biography, is itself an attempt to write a poisonous book. One remains certain of that, if only as a misguided joke on Wilde's part, even after reading his refutation at the trials. In its most Huysmans-like section the book is Wilde's exercise in analysing the perverse. (102) I shall quote at length from this section as it expresses an attitude to Catholicism almost archetypal of nineties converts:

> ... in his search for sensations that would be at once new and delightful, and possess that element of strangeness that is so essential to romance, he [Dorian] would often adopt certain modes of thought that he knew to be really alien to his nature, abandon himself to their subtle influences, and then, having, as it were, caught their colour and satisfied his intellectual curiosity, leave them with that curious indifference that is not incompatible with a real ardour of temperament ...

One of these modes of thought was Catholicism:

> ... and certainly the Roman ritual had always a great attraction for him. The daily sacrifice, more awful really than all the sacrifices of the antique world, stirred him as much by its superb rejection of the evidence of the senses as by the primitive simplicity of its elements and the eternal pathos of the human tragedy that it sought to symbolise. He loved to kneel down on the cold marble pavement, and watch the priest, in his stiff flowered vestment, slowly and with white hands moving aside the veil of the tabernacle, or raising aloft the jewelled lantern-shaped monstrance with that pallid wafer that at times, one would fain think, is indeed the "panis caelestis", the bread of angels, or, robed in the garments of the Passion of Christ, breaking the Host into the chalice, and smiting his breast for his sins. The fuming censers, that the grave boys, in their lace and scarlet, tossed into the air like great gilt flowers, had their subtle fascination for him. As he passed out, he used to look with wonder at the black confessionals, and long to sit in the dim shadow of one of them and listen to men and women whispering through the worn grating the true story of their lives. (103)

It is notable that Dorian wishes to listen rather than confess, and it is easy to see why, having read the above, John Gray sued a newspaper that named him as the inspiration for Dorian Gray. (104) Of course Dorian, never falling into the error of accepting any creed or system, was not received into the Church.

Throughout these quotations it is easy to identify the strain of self-consciousness passed down to Wilde from Walter Pater. One might see The Picture of Dorian Gray as a parable of self-consciousness, a reworking of the myth of Narcissus. Here the narcissism is all-consuming. The importance of the Mass for Dorian is as a series of self-consciously expressed gestures and symbols. Each symbol with its adjective is a sumptuous though inadequate explanation of Mass: 'stiff, flowered vestments', 'jewelled monstrance', 'grave boys', 'black confessionals'. These motifs were as dear to the anti-Catholic Evangelical Protestant as they were to Dorian. The 'black' shadow of the confessional fell across the imagination of those who hated Catholicism and links Dorian Gray with their fascination rather than the fascination of the would-be convert. (105)

In her essay on the composition of Dorian Gray, Isabel Murray ignores the Narcissus myth altogether. (106) But the myth is there and the flower is not painted beyond recognition. Fabulous beauty, lovers and admirers of both sexes, self-love, inability to see beneath the superficial image - all are there. Lord Henry's belief in the importance of individualism leads to a life-style dedicated to the self. (John Rothenstein, writing in 1928, recognized nineties individualism to be a necessary reaction to Victorianism, but which

was totally irrelevant to modern life thirty years later. (107))
"Conscience makes egotists of us all" - I repeat the quotation from Dorian Gray to clarify the link that Wilde is making. When Sybil Vane kills herself because of Dorian's rejection of her, Dorian chooses to see her suicide from an artistic standpoint. In a totally Paterian phrase he tells Basil his ideal

> 'To become the spectator of one's own life, as Harry says, is to escape the suffering of life.' (108)

But being a spectator has its own sense of suffering,as Narcissus was to find out. Dorian becomes aware of his own beauty because it is demonstrated to him by Basil's portrait. He becomes aware of the beauty of youth because Lord Henry values his, Dorian's, so highly. When alone, he kisses the portrait and his idle wish, that it should grow old and he remain young, is granted. In Ovid, Narcissus while drinking "being attracted with the reflection of his own form, seen in the water, ... falls in love with a thing that has no substance; and he thinks that to be a body which is but a shadow." (109)

Sybil Vane is Dorian's Echo. When she falls in love with him she forfeits her talent as an actress. Her love is real, her talent ephemeral. But Dorian was in love with the artistry, the shadow, and when Sybil reveals to him: "before I knew you, acting was the one reality of my life... you taught me what reality really is", (110) Dorian is repelled.

Dorian's suicide - the attempted murder of his soul - is inspired by Narcissus and the obsession with the mirror. "Thy portrait is

an unjust mirror, this mirror of his soul." (111) And when he attacks it only the cry of the dying Narcissus is missing: "Ah, youth, beloved in vain" - but it is implied:- "It was his beauty that had ruined him, his beauty and the youth that he had prayed for." (112)

Dorian has just flung a mirror to the floor in a fit of loathing his own beauty, crushing the mirror "into silver splinters beneath his heel." He is a Narcissus who has stared too long into the pool. And he realizes that he has lost his soul in the process. This is a realization which has recently dawned on him. In an incident in Chapter 19 Lord Henry tells his friend of hearing a preacher at Marble Arch proclaim "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Dorian is disturbed, aware that he has, literally, lost his soul (or rather has locked it away). Henry continues "I thought of telling the prophet that Art had a soul, but that man had not." But Dorian retorts "The soul is a terrible reality. It can be bought, and sold, and bartered away. It can be poisoned, or made perfect. There is a soul in each one of us. I know it." (page 161). In this Dorian resembles the fisherman who wishes to cast his soul loose. Dorian becomes aware of the essential unity of the body and soul. His portrait is the "face without a heart", and his face, presumably, the "face without a soul." In 'The Fisherman and his Soul' the soul has begged the fisherman for a heart so that he might not wander the earth without a heart. Dorian wanders London without a soul and this makes him "heartless" (e.g. his behaviour to Sybil Vane).

Dorian has not sold himself to the devil, this is important to remember. In Chapter 16 a prostitute tells Sybil's brother James "They say he /Dorian/ has sold himself to the devil for a pretty face." But this comment is included as the observation of someone who does not understand Dorian's tragedy, the tragedy of Narcissus trapped by his own reflection.

To remark on the dying fall -"Ah, youth, beloved in vain" - and to leave it ringing in the reader's ears is not enough. I stress the importance of Dorian Gray as containing a cluster of images, suggestions of myths, into a complete story of the human soul. Indeed, the propensities of myth - to multiply meanings - makes it important to recount some of the themes that this reading of the novel allows us. The Dorian-Narcissus is a step away from the Ovidian Narcissus; Wilde is writing for an audience acquainted with the writings of Max Müller on mythography. In the 'soul stories' I have examined - 'The Fisherman and his Soul', 'The Man who Sold his Soul' and Dorian Gray - Wilde is engaged in something more than mythmaking for its own sake. In his very consideration of the soul and body as a duality, as absolutely distinct entities, Wilde is addressing himself to the idea of the soul itself. To do this he has to incorporate previously constructed myths. Hence the incorporation of Ovid's Narcissus in a story of modern life. Central to this story is a society portrait (the most innocuous form of painting in the 1880s and 90s). The painting, which collects sin rather than dust, has before it the prostrate figure of its subject, caught by his own image: this is Wilde's synthesis of Ovidian myths of looking, of transformation.

Although Dorian is not himself an artist he is an inspiration for art and for artistic theory: he inspires both the painter Basil Hallward and the aesthetician Lord Henry Wootton. The separation of Dorian from his portrait, a seemingly obvious prerequisite for art, is the beginning of the tragedy. In this duality lies separation and Dorian is as surely severed from his soul as if he had sold it in the market-place or, like the fisherman, cut around his shadow with a knife. (Dorian eventually attacks the portrait, the "monstrous soul-life" with a knife.) This theme of separation underlines the estrangement

from society that Oscar Wilde felt: he is at once individual and dual. Part of the process of intensification of his own individuality lies in cutting himself free from the seemingly mundane soul, a cultural soul.

The tragic moment of Wilde's confrontation with that part of himself he would have lost, was yet to come. I shall examine the results of the moment, his trial, when discussing *De Profundis*.

(vii) Apart from The Ballad of Reading Gaol Wilde's De Profundis is his farewell to literature: it is his final piece of prose although it contains ideas for two projected essays. (113) Like Ruskin's Praeterita or Nietzsche's Ecce Homo it is an open-ended summary of life and work, although it must be stressed that for Wilde the opportunity of summarising his life is, in the main, overlooked in the attempt to analyse his 'fatal friendship' with Lord Alfred Douglas.

The peculiar circumstances of the writing of De Profundis - in prison, with little chance of revision or indeed of planning - have led to a peculiarly constructed work. (114) There are two main characters (Wilde and Douglas) but the author's plan encompasses a personal review of the significance of Christ to his (Wilde's) art and an attempt to reform Douglas in the light of Wilde's discovery of 'Sorrow'. There are three main themes - Love (including friendship and the fatal friendship in particular), Humility and Sorrow. These are linked in the following way. Wilde was conscious of Love because of his friendship with Douglas. He was sure that Douglas loved him but "In you Hate was always stronger than Love." (115) "Only what is fine, and finely conceived, can feed Love" Wilde observes, "But anything will feed Hate." It is this Hate (someone else's) which destroys Wilde and not "the Love that dares not speak its name." "I had given you my life, and to gratify the lowest and most contemptible of all human passions, Hatred and Vanity and Greed, you had thrown it away ... I know, if I allowed myself to hate you, that in the dry desert of existence over which I had to travel, and am travelling still, every rock would lose its shadow, every palm tree be withered,

every well or water prove poisoned at its source." (page 453)

Wilde's trial proves his love to himself. His strength is tested and the analogy is that Love is strength and Hate weakness. In his ruminations on Christ Wilde decides that Christ is "the leader of all the lovers":

> He saw that love was that lost secret of the world for which the wise men had been looking, and that it was only through love that one could approach either the heart of the leper or the feet of God. (page 479)

But it is not Love that leads Wilde to Christ but Sorrow. He dwells first on his own sorrow, then turns to the value of sorrow for the artist and then falls to considering Christ as the man of sorrows and as an artist. The contrast between Wilde's former life and his life as a prisoner can be appreciated easily. Prison is the other side of the garden, which, in its sunlit side, had represented Wilde's life up until his trial. Now in prison "there is only one season, the season of Sorrow." (page 458) Unlike other prisoners, Wilde assures the reader, he cannot escape sorrow while locked away: "they are left to suffer undisturbed. With me it has been different. Sorrow after sorrow has come beating at the prison doors in search of me. They have opened the gates wide and let them in". (p. 464) The discovery which helped Wilde to cope with sorrow and suffering was humility. "It is the last thing left in me, and the best: the ultimate discovery at which I have arrived: the starting-point for a fresh development. It has come to me right out of myself, so I know that it has come at the proper time." (p. 467)

When Wilde describes humility as coming "right out of myself" he

s direct experience of suffering rather

than any learnt theory of Christianity. Thus it is "the last thing left in me" implying that all other resources (will, pride, anger for example) had been used up and were useless. The discovery that humility is a reality and not a theory is important to the author of De Profundis, yet his cry from the depths is the cry of an agnostic. Sorrow and Humility are discoveries the personal nature of which is of the greatest significance to Wilde. In his famous phrase "the two great turning-points of my life were when my Father sent me to Oxford, and when Society sent me to prison", we are made aware of how valuable prison was to the reconstruction - rather than destruction - of Wilde's personality.

In the same place Wilde wrote "I would sooner say, or hear it said of me, that I was so typical a child of my age that in my perversity, and for that perversity's sake, I turned the good things of my life to evil, and the evil things of my life to good." (p. 469)

Before turning to the significance of Christ for the now sorrowful and humble Wilde, it is best to note here an anomaly in the writing of De Profundis. Wilde purports to find humility within himself. At this, and similar points in his prose Wilde is writing a confession. "Neither Religion, Morality, nor Reason can help me at all," he assures us, "... I have to get it all out of myself". (page 468).

Writing of his agnosticism Wilde says:

> ...agnosticism should have its ritual no less than faith. It has sown its martyrs, it should reap its saints, and praise God daily for having hidden Himself from man. But whether it be faith or agnosticism, it must be nothing external to me. Its symbols must be of my own creating ... If I may not find its secret within myself, I shall never find it. If I have not got it already, it will never come to me" (p. 468).

Yes, this is the open confessional technique yet Wilde belies his own labour. He is writing to Lord Alfred Douglas in an attempt to make him recognize love and humility within himself. But this attempt is doomed to failure if Douglas must, like Wilde, go beyond theories of sorrow and humility, and experience these things directly himself. In his attempt to address Douglas to the problem Wilde constantly asks his friend to "realise", to "see" his argument. This technique culminates in phrases: "Am I right in saying that Hate blinds people. Do you see it now? If you don't, try to see it." (p.452), or "The supreme vice is shallowness. Whatever is realised is right."(p.469). Although in literary terms this constant repetition of "to realise" has a certain compulsive rhythm, as an honest bid for Douglas's soul it is a failure. It is in truth an harangue masquerading as advice. It is not through the words of others - it is Wilde's own admission - that one comes to humility. "Had anyone told me of it, I would have rejected it. Had it been brought to me, I would have refused it ... one cannot give it away, and another may not give it to one." (p.467).

To return to the main themes of <u>De Profundis</u>. In his discovery of Love and its absoluteness, the symbolic value of sorrow and the "ultimate discovery", Humility, Wilde is drawn into a personal relationship with Christ. This relationship I maintain is

"Christ identification." "Humility in the artist is his frank acceptance of all experiences, just as Love in the artist is simply that sense of Beauty that reveals to the world its body and soul" (p.476) is a restatement of aestheticism, a reworking of Pater's 'Wincklemann' and 'Conclusion' from The Renaissance. Wilde continues his argument:

> I see a far more intimate and immediate connection between the true life of Christ and the true life of the artist, and I take a keen pleasure in the reflection that long before Sorrow had made my days her own and bound me to her wheel I had written in The Soul of Man that he who would lead a Christ-like life must be entirely and absolutely himself....

It is perhaps too grossly apparent in this passage that Wilde is not simply aestheticising Christ but shifting their images (his and Christ's) closer and closer until the faces blur and the result is a confusing composite. Holbrook Jackson describes Wilde at this stage as having "learnt the meaning of pain" and arriving "at a conclusion similar to that of Nietzsche." (116) Is this to say that Wilde in his extreme identification with Christ is actually Anti-Christ?

Wilde's idea of Christ is derived from his interpretation of "the four prose-poems about Christ", the Greek Testament: "When one returns to the Greek it is like going into a garden of lilies out of some narrow and dark house." (p. 483). That he read Renan,"that gracious Fifth Gospel, the Gospel according to St. Thomas one might call it",is evident too although he disregards Renan in some of his comments on Christ. (117) Wilde's prose had already revealed his love of parable and of Biblical language.

I shall comment here on Wilde's use of Dionysus. Of all the Greek gods to appear in his poetry Wilde (in De Profundis) selects Dionysus to stand next to Christ. But it is next to and not instead of. It is true Wilde prefers Dionysus to Apollo (and here, I believe, is a basic contrast between Wilde and Rolfe) but Christ is "one far more marvellous than ... the son of Semele." (p. 481) Elsewhere Wilde observes that "Christ's place indeed is with the poets. His whole conception of Humanity sprang right out of the imagination and can only be realized by it." (p. 477) It can be seen that Wilde is escaping from the Classical escape of fellow Victorians into the idea of a Hellenised Christ, a Christ who is Dionysian and who speaks Greek. (118) In his autobiography Friedrich Nietzsche describes The Birth of Tragedy as "profoundly and politely silent concerning Christianity: the latter is neither Apollonian or Dionysian; it denies all aesthetic values, which are the only values that The Birth of Tragedy recognises. Christianity is most profoundly nihilistic, whereas in the Dionysian symbol, the most extreme limits of a yea-saying attitude to life are attained." (119)

In their acceptance and rejection of Christ Nietzsche and Wilde are totally opposed. For Wilde the most perfect image of Christ is as 'the man of sorrows'.

> His desire was to be to the myriads who had found no utterance a very trumpet through which they might call to Heaven. And feeling, with the artistic nature of one to whom Sorrow and Suffering were modes through which he could realise his conception of the Beautiful, that an idea is of no value till it becomes incarnate and is made an image, he makes of himself the image of the Man of Sorrows, and as such has fascinated and dominated Art as no Greek god ever succeeded in doing. (p. 481)

Nietzsche would see this as being in fine a redefinition of Christianity as the religion of the "subjugated and oppressed." (120) But Wilde's is a personal God, a God of Individualism. (121) Nietzsche's is a God of power for "a nation that still believes in itself." (122)

> The monstrous castration of a God by making him a God only of goodness, would lie beyond the pale of the desires of such a community. The evil God is just as urgently needed as the good God: for a people in such a form of society certainly does not owe its existence to toleration and humaneness ... (123)

If any doubt were left one has only to look to the final sentence of Nietzsche's _Ecce Homo_: "Have you understood me? _Dionysus_ versus _Christ_". (Nietzsche's italics) (124)

Wilde, like Rolfe, finds a religious symbol in youth itself. But unlike Rolfe, whose ideal is Apollo, Wilde is interested in the Dionysus symbol, the symbol of "uninhibited unleashing of desire". (125) In a revealing passage in De Profundis Wilde tells us that the Greek gods (to whom, as I have explained, Wilde has appealed in his poetry) "were not really what they appeared to be." (126) Apollo's brow "was like the sun's disk crescent over a hill at dawn, and his feet were as the wings of the morning, but he himself had been cruel to Marsyas and had made Niobe childless." (Ibid). Wilde continues: "in the steel shields of the eyes of Pallas [i.e. Athene] there had been no pity for Arachne: the pomp and peacocks of Hera were all that was really noble about her: and the Father of the Gods himself had been too fond of the daughters of men." (Ibid). But Wilde does not write off the ancient gods completely: "The two deep suggestive figures of Greek mythology were, for religion, Demeter, an earth-goddess, not one of the Olympians, and, for art, Dionysus, the son of a mortal woman to whom the moment of his birth had proved the moment of her death also." (127) Elsewhere Wilde had compared the Annunciation with the appearance of Zeus to Semele and found the Christian story lacking in drama. (128) Moreau's painting of Jupiter and Semele (1895) has exactly the suggestive quality Wilde would desire in religious drama. It is an extremely synthetic image of religion: Jupiter is flanked by small brass Buddhas while elements of Christianity and paganism are found in other portions of the painting. The implication is that the release of Dionysus from his mother's womb is an act of extreme symbolic importance not only for ancient Greece but for Paris in the 1890's and for this history of the world. By allowing Demeter to be "suggestive"

only for religion and Dionysus only for art, Wilde artificially reduces their sphere of influence. Demeter's motherhood (of the earth, of Kore/Proserpine) is a potent image for sculptors and painters, while the worship of Dionysus gives way to an ascetic worship, Orphism, which is extremely "suggestive" for religion. Wilde is keen to artificially divide these spheres of influence because it gives greater weight to his reasoning about Christ.

> ... Life itself from its lowliest and most humble sphere produced one far more marvellous than the mother of Proserpina or the son of Semele. Out of the carpenter's shop at Nazareth had come a personality infinitely greater than any made by myth or legend, and one, strangely enough, destined to reveal to the world the mystical meaning of wine and the real beauty of the lilies of the field as none, either on Cithaeron or at Enna, had ever done it. (129)

Here we can detect a note of caution in Wilde's writing. Although Christ is "infinitely greater" than other figures before (or since), Wilde's examples and the language he uses are extremely tame: "the mystical meaning of wine and the real beauty of the lilies of the field as none ... had ever done it." It is in these areas that Christ can be seen as a rival to Dionysus and the other gods of vegetation but not greatly excelling them.

Wilde quotes Isaiah: "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ..." and tells us that, by a process of imagination, Christ fulfils the prophecy.

> Every single work of art is the fulfilment of a prophecy. For every work of art is the conversion of an idea into an image. Every single human being should be the fulfilment of a prophecy. For every human being should be the realisation of some ideal, either in the mind of God or in the mind of man. Christ found the type, and fixed it, and the dream of a Virgilian poet, either at Jerusalem or at Babylon, became in the long progress of the centuries incarnate in him for whom the world was waiting. (130)

This is really the core of Wilde's thesis. Christ is a man who imagines himself as the Messiah: he converts the idea ("man of sorrows") into an image (himself) and thereby creates a work of art. This process has a real significance for Wilde's theories of art. It is a form of transubstantiation; the artist is a priest who converts his ideas into images. And yet this process is not as logical as it would at first seem. Why does the idea come first? Wilde ignores the possibility of image predating idea. Olympus can be seen as a reconstruction of a series of images (of earth, sky, fire and water) forged into an idea. The narcissus exists before Narcissus.

De Profundis is a work of self-justification rather than confession. It is an attempt to justify the Wildean personality by the owner of that personality. Christ is "like all fascinating personalities" (131); He has "all the colour-elements of life: mystery, strangeness, pathos, suggestion, ecstasy, love." (132) "The strange figures of poetic drama and ballad are made by the imagination of others, but out of his own imagination entirely did Jesus of Nazareth create himself." (133) Wilde attempts to create or rather recreate his own personality in Christ's image. I would not deny that this is, in itself, an extremely interesting process, but it remains an image or an intention. The intent behind the writing of De Profundis is revealed in two places. At his trial, Wilde confesses, he was sickened by what he heard of himself. "Suddenly it occurred to me, '*How splendid it would be, if I was saying all this about myself!*' " [Wilde's italics]. He continues:

> I saw then at once that what is said of a man is nothing. The point is, who says it. A man's very highest moment is, I have no doubt at all, when he kneels in the dust, and beats his breast, and tells all the sins of his life. (134)

But what he reveals of himself in De Profundis is never to his detriment, or if it is, it is quickly explained and explained away. As R. A. Scott-James has noted,"there is a touch of proud defiance of self-confidence and inalienable egotism, the utmost that the Greeks meant by 'hubris' in the manner in which he reads nineteenth century aestheticism into the personality of Christ." (135) Between the intention (to confess) and the 'image' (the written confession) Wilde has become involved in tracing links between his own downfall and Christ's sacrifice. Christ is the obvious god-man with whom the stricken playwright could identify himself. Would it have been possible for him to draw parallels between his sense of loss and the myths of Dionysus (or for that matter Demeter.)?

The second moment of revelation for the reader as to the intent of De Profundis takes place after a lengthy explanation by Wilde of the value of sorrow. "Behind Joy and Laughter there may be a temperament, coarse, hard and callous. But behind Sorrow there is always Sorrow ... there is no truth comparable to Sorrow. There are times when Sorrow seems to me to be the only truth." (136) What Wilde tells us about his own sorrow - the loss of his mother, his family and particularly his son Cyril - and of his standing as an artist - is all extremely interesting. For Wilde what distinguishes Christ from the gods of ancient Greece is his sympathy with the oppressed.

> And feeling, with the artistic nature of one to whom Sorrow and Suffering were modes through which he could realise his conception of the Beautiful, that an idea is of no value till it becomes incarnate and is made an image, he makes of himself the image of the Man of Sorrows, and as such has fascinated and dominated Art as no Greek god ever succeeded in doing. (137)

For Wilde Christ is a Dionysus who listened to the prophets and from their prophecies and by a process of imagination becomes a god. But to understand the Man of Sorrows one has still to understand Wilde's Dionysus.

There are two notable attempts by Wilde (in his writings) to create a young god. 'The Happy Prince' and 'The Young King' are types which also appealed to Rolfe (who gives to peasant boys the qualities of Apollo or St. John). 'The Young King' is rescued, like Dionysus, twice. Brought up by peasants he is rediscovered in the forest by hunters. He is rescued from obscurity but even as a Prince he resembles "a brown woodland Faun, or some young animal of the forest..." (138) He has a "strange passion for beauty", and a propensity for eclecticism in religion and culture. He is discovered "kneeling in real adoration before a great picture that had just been brought from Venice, and that seemed to herald the worship of some new gods." Again he is found "as one in a trance" gazing "at a Greek gem carved with the figure of Adonis." He was seen to kiss a statue of Antinous and had "passed a whole night in noting the effect of the moonlight on a silver image of Endymion."

The Young King is rescued from this life of indolence and luxury (and paganism) by a dream. Before the dream he is a proto-aesthete. After the dream he becomes a man of sorrows but of a peculiar woodland type. He changes one idyll for another.

The dream is the famous Wildean dream of industry and toil to make beautiful objects. The robe, the sceptre and the crown appear to the prince in his dream - or rather the elements that make them

up - the cloth, the pearl, the ruby. Men suffer enslavement and death to acquire these objects. After dreaming, the Prince decides he cannot wear the coronation robes or carry the regalia. Instead he wears the clothes he wore as a goatherd and carries a shepherd's staff. His crown is a spray of briar rose. He is, of course, mocked and even threatened with death because he is bringing disgrace to the office of King. When the crowd burst in upon him he is kneeling "before the image of Christ, and the great candles burned brightly by the jewelled shrine and the smoke of the incense curled in thin blue wreaths through the dome." The Young King turns to face the crowd and changes before their eyes : "through the painted windows came the sunlight streaming upon him, and the sunbeams wove round him a tissued robe that was fairer than the robe that had been fashioned for his pleasure. The dead staff blossomed, and bore lilies that were whiter than pearls. The dry thorn blossomed, and bore roses that were redder than rubies."

When the King descends from the altar the Bishop tells him "A greater than I hath crowned thee." One resists the temptation to see "the greater" as being Wilde himself and actually to see the story as an attempt to Christianize paganism. Here Dionysus (the young king) has become an aesthete. But only when he realizes the cost of his aestheticism for the oppressed does he return to a simple form of his own image. This is not enough. The woodland god is rejected and ridiculed by modernity (close parallels here to Pater's Denys L'Auxerrois) which can accept him only when he is transformed by Christianity. (139)

'The Young King' can be seen as a metaphor for Wilde's attitude to Christianity. It begins with a natural, almost animal, beauty.

The return to the court is an awareness of civilization and with it comes an awareness of art which then becomes a fascination for beauty and beautiful things. Seeing the implications of beauty, both positive and negative, is not enough and the young king temporarily transforms himself back to an idealized and paganized self. This, in a society with complex economic structures ("To toil for a master is bitter, but to have no master to toil for is more bitter still") is plainly laughable. Dionysus must be Christianized (and in a plainly Romanist setting) before Wilde envisages his acceptance by his subjects. It is this moment of the pagan become Christian that Wilde finds fascinating. In De Profundis he confides that "one of the things in history the most to be regretted is that the Christ's own renaissance which had produced the Cathedral of Chartres, the Arthurian cycle of legends, the life of St. Francis of Assisi, the art of Giotto, and Dante's Divine Comedy, was not allowed to develop on its own lines but was interrupted and spoiled by the dreary classical Renaissance [which gave us] everything that is made from without and by dead rules, and does not spring from within through some spirit informing it." (140)

Here the origins of Wilde's choice (of the late mediaeval over the classical, or, more correctly, the neo-classical) are clear if somewhat passé for 1897. It is the choice of the Romantic artist: Romanticism was built, one might say, out of the ruins of the mediaeval world despite the Enlightenment and the formal neo-classical style (itself the heir to the "dreary classical Renaissance"). Wilde's statement on the two renaissances: Christ's renaissance and the Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries,

reads slightly like pique. Certainly to see the classical as entirely synonymous with dreariness is to fly in the face of post-Paterian orthodoxy, embodied by 'Vernon Lee' ('A Painter of Pagan Perfection'), and, to some extent, Frederick Rolfe who sees the real links between the mediaeval and Renaissance worlds. In his essay on Pico della Mirandola Pater writes that the essence of humanism "is that belief ... that nothing which has ever interested living men and women can wholly lose its vitality" (p. 68). Wilde, oddly, takes a Puginesque line in contrasting the "spring from within through some spirit" with the dead rules that make up Renaissance art "from without". The move here is from an aesthetic choice (architecture, poetry, painting) to a real religious choice, a denominational choice. Wilde, however, modifies his tone in the remainder of this passage, extending his "Christian renaissance" references to include Shakespeare, Coleridge, Keats and Chatterton:

> ... wherever there is a romantic movement in Art, there somehow, and under some form, is Christ, or the soul of Christ.

This is an interesting shift from the Puginesque into a stance more befitting the fin de siècle decadent. More importantly, the implications of this welcoming back of Christ into the sphere of art signals the return of the Dionysiac quality, of that personality "suggestive" of the production of art. Hence Wilde can make the switch in this theoretical section of De Profundis (discussing, as he does, his theory of art) from Dionysus to Christ:

> ... it is the imaginative quality of Christ's own nature that makes him this palpitating centre of romance ... He has all the colour-elements of life: mystery, strangeness, pathos, suggestion, ecstasy, love. (page 929)

The sum of this description adds up to a mystical power in art and this is the closest that Wilde gets in a personal statement to the prevailing aesthetic of the new French school of mysticism. (In prison he had read En Route and, although he found it overrated, was impressed enough to want copies of the mystical books mentioned by Huysmans. See pp.234-8 below).

To return to an earlier, exploratory phase of De Profundis: Wilde wrote: "Neither Religion, Morality, nor Reason can help me at all." (p. 914) The discovery of sorrow helped him and, in doing so, suggested the Man of Sorrows, Christ, as his patron. This Wilde-Christ could feel justified in being cast out of society. Already Pater had shown what could happen to other versions of Christ - Apollo appearing in Picardy, Denys/Dionysus. Wilde ties these themes together: the de-aestheticized world, the un-Romantic world, has cast out art, the spirit of art, the very saviour of art.

(viii) Christ and Wilde: De Profundis as Self-Justification.

The Catholicism of the Nineties can be aptly described as a form of that 'Catholick Diabolism' represented by Enoch Soames in Max Beerbohm's Seven Men. (141) Soames is a minor poet, 'dim', pretentious, to-be-forgotten. The characteristic he shares with Wilde is Catholicism/Diabolism, although strictly speaking Wilde can only be termed a 'Christian Diabolist' until his actual conversion, on his deathbed. But Wilde himself used the term 'Catholicism' to describe his beliefs. On leaving prison, for instance, he was seen by a French writer as "flouting his Catholicism and his Irish origin" (142) - this in 1897, three years before his conversion. On that occasion he wore two emeralds, one on each hand, engraved with cabbalistic symbols. He told Gideon Spilett: "To enter Paradise you only have to knock once at the door, but you must knock three times to get into Hell. Believe me, love the green, love Hell. The colour green and Hell are both made for thieves and artists." (143) Here Wilde touches, though fleetingly, on the similarity he felt existed between criminals and artists, an interesting and idiosyncratic belief that he had developed and one to which I will make further reference.

To understand Wilde's religious beliefs and this curious artist/criminal belief it is best to see him as basically an anti-bourgeois thinker. (144) At one point in his life he describes himself as "...rather more than a Socialist ... something of an anarchist." (145) Even in his essay to support a socialistic future, The Soul of Man Under Socialism, revolution is seen as an act whereby the individual can recognize and develop his own unique personality.

Later, in De Profundis Wilde was to repeat the opinion that art is the most intensely individual act that the world has ever known. (146) He saw individualism as an alternative to bourgeois anonymity and thus art, as intense individualism, is totally anti-bourgeois. It is important to remember that this opinion came more easily to Wilde than it would have to many other late-Victorians. His family were singularly eccentric and bohemian. It is strange that when Oscar first became interested in the Catholic Church his father exhibited such fierce anti-papist feelings that conversion was made impossible without a family rift. Catholicism can be seen as an anti-bourgeois indulgence too, like the aesthetic pursuit of intense beauty. It could also have been seen by the young Oscar as more individualistic than Anglicanism. He would have been one (Catholic) amongst the many (Anglican) infidel. It is true to say that his 'Catholick' tendencies at Oxford singled him out from the other undergraduates.

I shall attempt here to identify certain strains in Wilde's writings, particularly De Profundis, to show how they, in combination, provide a basis for his religious beliefs. The strains are (a) individualism and (b) aestheticism. I shall also return, from time to time, to Wilde's anti-bourgeois tendencies and how they emerge at crucial points in his work.

It is possible to see Wilde as engaging in a personal anti-bourgeois struggle, not simply in the public areas of his life: his writings, his lectures, his public behaviour, but in private areas too: his sexuality and his religion. (147) He was capable of benefiting financially from 'cocking a snook' at the establishment. Part of

his charm was that the cultivation of his individuality was so engaging for the public. All the money used to treat the boy prostitutes and criminal spongers was drawn from the middle-classes he despised. In writing,his bohemianism was ambiguous as is the homosexual element in Dorian Gray. But there was little ambiguity about Wilde's lifestyle and the odd thing about it, as Rupert Croft Cooke points out, was that he wasn't arrested long before. (148) It would, however, be wrong to see Wilde as totally un-snobbish or as anti- bourgeois or anti-aristocratic, although his defence of his boy companions from Carson's class-ridden taunts was admirable. As an undergraduate though, Wilde was impressed by the social standing of Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower who introduced him to Society. Later he admitted to liking Lord Alfred Douglas for his title "like a flower." But by the time he wrote De Profundis Wilde chose to see Douglas as an enemy in the aristocracy. Lord Alfred's wealth is contrasted to his own poverty. Wilde sees himself as emerging from an intellectual family and inheriting its strength, whereas Douglas springs from a 'race' or a 'clan'. (149) Thus Wilde is cast as an individual, an artist, while Douglas is one of a group with no particular talent, a mass of racial quirks. One might go even further and claim that within Wilde's scheme he sees himself as Christ and Douglas as Satan. Sections of De Profundis contrast Love and Hate, and Good and Evil in this personalized way.

The 'epistola in carcere et vinculis' is a letter which can be read, as I have previously observed, as self-justification, as a private communication to a lover, or as a personal footnote to a philosophy that had set the literate world talking. It is, of course, all these things at once. Perhaps the least interesting

section is that which deals directly with Lord Alfred Douglas. Certainly the most interesting are those sections where Wilde reshuffles aestheticism and Christianity. These are what concern us here.

In earlier writings Wilde revealed a love and knowledge of the Bible through his use of the parable form. Many of his short pieces indeed mythologize Christ even more than the accounts in the gospel. This was a late nineteenth-century Christ, compounded of Renan and Ruskin. There is too a colouring of the French symbolist painters. But Wilde's synthesis of himself and Christ in *De Profundis* is a pure *fin de siècle* creation. In terms of mythology it might be true to call Wilde the Christ of the 1890s.

Elsewhere, when Christ makes an appearance in Wilde's work it is as a human failure figure. The Doer of Good (whose deeds perversely misfire) or the Master (whose gifts are duplicated in all but one detail) are of this type. (150) In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* Christ's message is seen as the cult of the Individual:

> "Know thyslf!" was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world, "Be thyself" shall be written. And the message of Christ to man was simply "Be thyself." That is the secret of Christ. (151)

These elements - the flawed nature of Christ's teaching and the isolating and painful effects of following it truly - are still present in *De Profundis*. Imprisonment and fall from public grace were seen as parallels to Christ's suffering and death. Christ's periods of contemplation and self-perception are echoed in the needs of the artist "the quality of whose work depends on the intensification of personality"; the artist "requires for the development of his art the companionship of ideas, and intellectual atmosphere, quiet, peace and solitude." (152) The intensification of personality led Wilde to a different world from Christ's, until he

was chastened by sorrow. Wilde on 'Sorrow' (his capital letter) is not startlingly original, but it is unnerving to hear the Apostle of Aestheticism use the standard terms of religious conversion. Sorrow was for him a blinding light:

> Sorrow ....and all that it teaches one, is my new world. I used to live entirely for pleasure. I shunned sorrow and suffering of every kind. I hated both. (153)

Suffering is :

> ....really a revelation. One discerns things that one never discerned before. One approaches the whole of history from a different standpoint. (154)

Despite the conventionality of these expressions, Wilde from time to time hits upon an original mode of expressing an old truth:

> Behind Joy and Laughter there may be a temperament, coarse, hard and callous. But behind Sorrow there is always Sorrow. Pain, unlike Pleasure, wears no mask ....(155)

Earlier I have referred to the idea that Wilde's Christ-identification takes the form of self-martyrdom. In reading De Profundis it is important to see how Wilde also identified with Christ as an artist. It was never enough for Wilde to accept Christ as either a myth or as a God incarnate. He needed to synthesize these two approaches. For example:

> ....there was nothing that either Plato or Christ had said that could not be transferred immediately into the sphere of Art and there find its complete fulfilment. (156)

This statement says so much about Wilde that it is possible to ignore its relevance to Plato or Christ. Wilde here exhibits such a monomania for 'art' that all other branches of knowledge or expression are subjected to it, and two moral philosophers become

artists to make their teaching more palatable. Rupert Croft-Cooke has pointed out the number of times Wilde used the word 'Art' in essays, in an attempt to demonstrate just how often that subject, in its most exalted sense, was on his mind. (157) Instead of believing that Christ was a constant, inviolable character of history, open to interpretation by all, Wilde chooses to see the real realization of Christ to be open only to the artist - because Christ himself was an artist:

> Christ's place is indeed with the poet. His whole conception of Humanity sprang right out of the imagination and <u>can only be realized by it</u>. What God was to the Pantheist, man was to him. (158)

Wilde stresses the human love and socialist politics and makes them Christ's theory for poetry. To the twentieth-century reader this reasoning, although striking, reads like a literary theory rather than an attempt to deeply understand Christ. Wilde uses the technique he had perfected in <u>The Portrait of Mr. W. H.</u> - literary archaeology. Wilde had not, even in prison, abandoned the belief which he thought he had left behind him - that Art could be treated as reality and reality as a mode of fiction. (159) In other words he swapped one mode of fiction for another. In one of his early sayings (if one can term his pre-prison days 'early') Wilde claimed to be able to resist "anything but temptation." He referred to the inspirational force of sin in terms familiar to us from the piece on Sorrow quoted above (page 111):"... through its [sin's] intensified assertion of individualism it saves us from a monotony of type. In its rejection of the current notions about morality it is one with the higher ethics". (160)

Should one treat De Profundis as the definitive Wildean viewpoint as it comes later than all the other published prose? Or should the similarity in dealing with such diverse topics as Sin, Sorrow and Suffering (a suitably purple Wildean list, and alliterative) make us suspend any trust in the so-called moral-regeneration of the artist while in prison? Was the earlier sin-entranced Wilde more true to himself because he was free from the pressures of a public repentance? It is surprising to read in Mario Praz's The Romantic Agony that Pater and Wilde, "immured in a Palace of Art", sought "in vain to resume practical life by means of a religious ideal, through a return to Christianity." (161) What is true for Pater is definitely not true for his admirer. In Wilde's case it was immurement in Reading gaol that made him seek a religious ideal, at least in any conventional sense, for previously, as I hope I have shown, religion was simply an aesthetic thrill. This is not to say that Wilde had only frivolous feelings towards Catholicism. His long romance with the motifs of the Church bear witness to his seriousness. His personal history is a case of delayed or thwarted conversion rather than one simply "put off" until deathbed. (162) But it is important to remember Wilde's adherence to the principle of individualism, the cultivation of the self. The common Protestant fear of losing control over one's own actions, sensationalized in hundreds of anti-Catholic tracts, must have been Wilde's fear too. The process of 'indoctrination' envisaged by Newman, to bring about a conversion (163) was not a process that would come easily to the Irish writer.

The emphasis which Wilde placed upon Christ's individualism shows that it was that which drew the writer and not the idea of celebrating Christ's divinity within the Church:

> Christ is the most supreme of Individualists.
> Humility, like the artistic acceptance of all
> experience is merely a mode of manifestation. (164)

Suffering helps the artist reach his soul "in its ultimate essence", and by a nice process of logic the example of Christ enables Wilde to express his individuality even more:

> People used to say of me that I was too individualistic.
> I must be far more of an individualist than I ever was.
> I must get far more out of myself that I ever got,
> and ask for less of the world than I ever asked. (165)

How is this desire for Individualism, linked as it is here with Christ, linked also to aestheticism? Art depends on the intensification of personality; intensification of personality leads to individualism; Christ is the supreme individualist; Christ's place is with the poet. All these ideas are related in <u>De Profundis</u>. But Christ's story had always been important to Wilde who took special delight in the humane and political aspects of the gospel stories and who admired the great human qualities that Christ revealed. (166) In <u>De Profundis</u> admiration takes the form of a justification of aestheticism by quoting incidents from the gospels to show the 'beautiful' in Christ's teaching. Christ is not simply revered for his 'unique' qualities, his 'individualism' and 'poetical nature', but for his consciously anti-Philistine stance too: "Those whom he saved from their sins are saved simply for beautiful moments in their lives." (167) And Christ becomes simply a forerunner of Arnold in the following:

> All that Christ says to us by 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. (168)

To his own mind Wilde's imprisonment and consequent repentance ranked him with the prodigal son. His own consorting with criminals is justified by Christ's example. So too is his flouting of social norms. (169)

One could continue to quote passages from De Profundis where Wilde's at-oneness with Christ is not exactly a religious state. Instead it seems the stance of a man who feels himself outside society, a leper indeed, with all the powers of a healing saviour within him. Hence the elaborately coded study of Christ's life - it is Wilde, the rejected, the anti-Philistine, the great teacher, who is represented.

It is easy to see why Wilde should want to justify his life in this way. The law under which he was prosecuted was a disgrace, the evidence against him suspect. His fall from riches and fame was spectacular. To be totally maudlin in these circumstances would have been forgiveable. To reconstruct one's life entirely so that is appeared to echo the hero of our morality is an artistic feat.

I have suggested earlier that Wilde's tendency to anti-bourgeois sentiments in his writings should be regarded as a key to other sentiments. It should be stressed that for Wilde the sinner is almost invariably as anti-bourgeois as himself. (170) His

conception of sin - theft in particular - is that it has an overtly political tendency. 'Poor' and 'criminal' are confused categories to Wilde. In The Soul of Man Under Socialism he positively urges the poor to ignore the laws protecting private property,(171) while the difference between the poor and the rich is that the rich are those "who have not developed their personalities" (172) - a viewpoint he attributes to Christ. That Wilde saw himself as a criminal and art as an expression akin to crime has been noted by Richard Ellmann (173) who also draws attention to the similarity of Jean Genet to Wilde. I do not want to expand on this similarity here except that the reader might find it useful to keep Genet in mind while reading the following. To see Wilde as a forerunner of the more openly anti-social Genet is illuminating:

> ... it is when he /Christ/ deals with the Sinner that he is most romantic, in the sense of 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 ... To turn an interesting thief into a tedious honest man was not his aim ... 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. (174)

Despite this, there is no evidence in Wilde's life (until his spell in Reading) that he was drawn to the poor in Christ-like sympathy. Rather, the poor were an alternative to the Philistinism of the middle and upper classes. The working classes are badly served in Wilde's plays and stories, and in The Picture of Dorian Gray, where there is ample room for a picture of impoverished London too, they scarcely appear. Yet Wilde constantly referred to the poor

in his essays and conversation. Many of the elements found in the previous quotations from De Profundis occur in an interview given to a reporter from The Theatre in 1894. In this lively piece of journalism Wilde discloses that:

> He feels 'considerable sympathy' with burglars ...
> ... he is 'very sorry Smugglers have gone out of fashion'...
> ... Pirates, too, are 'very fine fellows' ...
> ... Beggars are remarkable people ...
> ... He likes Jews ... (175)

A list of outcasts, of course, and Wilde uses it to shock the bourgeoisie while keeping his tongue in his cheek. But in the same interview he states that Christ "In his utmost humanity ... approaches nearest the divine" (176) - a more serious view and truer to Wilde's approach to Christianity.

Oscar Wilde firmly believed in the value of individualism. His passion for art was a monomania. But his cult of the poor and the criminal, at times an equally passionate belief, seems less to do with the poor and the criminal themselves than in their challenge to the prevailing Philistine culture. Hence Wilde's desire to insult the rich by referring to the virtues of the poor, of their ability to 'develop their personalities.' His sexual encounters with working-class boys is both an expression of his homosexuality and his distaste for the middle-classes. Art, too, is an alternative to Philistinism, is,indeed,the antithesis of Philistinism. The deep distaste he felt for conventional morality and behaviour led Wilde to two extremes. The chief of these was his unconventional life-style especially the indiscreet homosexual activity at a time

when this placed him outside Society, and the extremes that the aestheticism of Lord Henry Wootton brought him to. The second extreme is the one I have been examining in this essay - embracing a particularly human and loving form of Christianity. This was an almost mediaeval form: loving the outcast, defending the poor and challenging the powerful.

De Profundis should be seen as Wilde's attempt to parallel the actual and theoretical in his life, his attempt to remodel his life upon Christ's and to adjust Christ's actions in Wilde's own terms. Christianity, the mediaeval and therefore Catholic form that attracted Wilde, was a literary image in much the same way as the ancient Greek image was. This latter has too often dominated our way of seeing Wilde and his work. Yet Newman, the Pope and Francis of Assisi were all heroes of his. In De Profundis Wilde praises St. Francis as being the only Christian since Christ. (177) After prison he saw his own poverty as similar to Francis' symbolic marriage to Poverty:

> "... but in my case the marriage is not a success: I hate the Bride that has been given to me: I see no beauty in her hunger and her rags: I have not the soul of St. Francis: my thirst is for the beauty of life: my desire for its joy." (178)

Thus, even after the period in prison, Wilde again delayed a formal acceptance of Catholicism and waited until his final illness.

Chapter 1, Part (i)

1 Oscar Wilde *Complete Works* *Lady Windermere's Fan* Act 4 p.424.

2 Robert Ross *Friend of Friends* (Lond. 1952) p. 67; quoted below p. 259.

3 W. B. Yeats review of *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* quoted in Karl Beckson *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage* (Lond. 1970), p. 110.

4 André Raffalovich 'L'Affaire Oscar Wilde' *Uranisme et Unisexualité: Etude sur differentes manifestations de l'instinct* sexuel p. 243.

5 *Ibid*, p. 246

6 Arthur Symons 'Sex and Aversion' *The Memoirs of Arthur Symons* (Pennsylvania 1977), pp. 138-139.

7 Quoted by H. Montgomery Hyde *Oscar Wilde* (Lond. 1976), p. 360.

8 Hoxie N. Fairchild *Religious Trends in English Poetry* Vol. v. 1880-1920. (Columbia 1962), p. 165.

9 W. W. Ward 'Oscar Wilde: an Oxford Reminiscence' quoted by E. H. Mikhail in *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections* (Lond. 1979), p. 13.

10 Sir David Hunter Blair 'Oscar Wilde at Magdalen College Oxford' *Ibid*, p. 7.

11 John Gray to Andre Raffalovich from the Scots College, Rome. Letter dated 17th December 1900. "The Paris incident is a matter of the greatest joy for me. It will be such a happiness to say mass in thanksgiving." National Library of Scotland.

12 Ross *Friend of Friends* pp. 62-3.

13 Gill records his first introduction to a priest performed by "a certain eminent catholic":

> he had the great wisdom not to send me to some notably cultured person who might have been supposed to understand 'art', but to the parish priest at Ely Place, and thus the first priest I ever spoke to as a father in God was, like one of the disciples, a simple fisherman, and I a child and a nobody.

Eric Gill *Autobiography* (Lond. 1940) footnote to p. 169. Ross was perhaps too scrupulous on Wilde's behalf.

14 Ross *Friend of Friends*, p. 63

15 Fr. Dunne, the priest in question, is quoted here from Hyde *Oscar Wilde*, p. 373.

16 Oscar Wilde Complete Works
(Lond. 1968), p. 1205

17 Oscar Wilde De Profundis Ibid, p. 915

18 A recurring theme of De Profundis is the downfall of Wilde's 'house' used in a Biblical genealogical sense. The Douglasses he refers to as 'a race'.

19 Hyde Oscar Wilde, p. 324.

Chapter 1, Part (ii)

20 Letter: postmark 24 August 1893. See Max Beerbohm Letters to Reggie Turner, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London 1969), pp. 56-7.

21 David Cecil Max (London 1964), pp 60-1.

22 The Yellow Book, vol. 2, July 1894, p. 281

23 For example see Richard Le Gallienne's review of Intentions in Oscar Wilde - The Critical Heritage ed. Karl Beckson (London 1970), p. 101:

" ... (I) am in danger of growing quite 'heated', as they say of politicians, while Mr. Wilde is doubtless smiling in his sleeve."

24 'The Decay of Lying' From Intentions. I am quoting from The Artist as Critic (Wilde's Critical writings) ed. Richard Ellmann (London 1970), p. 294.

25 The Picture of Dorian Gray (Collins Edition) (London 1968), p. 91.

26 Walter Pater The Renaissance [Fontana Edition] (London 1975), p. 224.

27 'John Oliver Hobbes' (Mrs. Craigie) Some Emotions and a Moral (London 1891), p. 145.

A curious piece of evidence at Wilde's trial involved a copy of The Sinners Comedy by 'John Oliver Hobbes'. It had been inscribed by Wilde 'From the Author to dear Edward Shelley'. Shelley was one of the boys giving evidence against Wilde. For some, still unknown, reason Wilde had chosen to inscribe the novel in that way. See H. Montgomery Hyde Oscar Wilde, p. 215.

28 Oscar Wilde 'The Decay of Lying' Intentions in The Artist as Critic, p. 290.

29 Ibid, p. 292.

30 Ibid, p. 293.

31 "... the mere fact that they are interested in these things makes them unsuitable subjects for Art. The only beautiful things, as somebody once said, are the things that do not concern us ... To art's subject-matter we should be more or less indifferent.' Ibid, p. 299.

32 Ibid, p. 300.

33 Ibid, p. 301.

34 Ibid, p. 302.

35 Ibid, p. 308.

36 *Ibid*, p. 311.

37 Pater *op cit*, p. 221.

38 Compare Chapter XI of Huysmans' *A Rebours* where Des Esseintes attempts a visit to London inspired by Dickens' version of the fogs there. He settles for an imaginary journey instead.

39 'The Decay of Lying', p. 317.

40 Quoted in H. Montgomery Hyde, *op cit*, p. 368.

41 As Wilde says elsewhere in *Intentions* "Not that I agree with everything that I have said in this essay. There is much with which I entirely disagree. The essay simply represents an artistic standpoint, and in aesthetic criticism attitude is everything." ('The Truth of Masks')

42 'The Decay of Lying', p. 312.

43 From a letter to Wm. Ward *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London 1962), p. 31.

44 Quoted in Kenneth Clark's introduction to *The Renaissance* p. 11.

Chapter 1, Part (iii)

45 See Rupert Hart-Davis ed. The Letters of Oscar Wilde (Lond. 1962), p. 144 & n.

46 Epifanio San Juan The Art of Oscar Wilde (Princeton 1967), p. 32.

47 See De Profundis, p. 889 re Hylas and Wilde's vision of Douglas as a young god.

48 See also the poem 'Canzonet' which is one of the poems headed 'Uncollected Poems (1876-93)' in the collected edition of Wilde' works 1910-12.

Max Beerbohm satirizes the tendency to romanticize the Gods in 'Hilary Maltby & Stephen Braxton' Seven Men.

49 See Karl Beckson ed. Oscar Wilde - The Critical Heritage, p. 170.

50 Moreau's painting dates from 1864

51 Jean Paladihle and José Pierre Gustave Moreau (Lond. 1972), p. 94.

52 As Moreau is illustrating the story the sphinx must destroy herself when Oedipus solves her riddle. The painter depected this event in 1878 with 'The Sphinx's Riddle Solved'.

53 Robert Goldwater Symbolism (Lond. 1979) pp. 53-4.

54 See Mario Praz The Romantic Agony (Lond. 1933) especially chapter 4 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'.

55 Holbrook Jackson The Eighteen Nineties (Lond. 1939), p. 67.

56 Ibid, p. 75.

57 San Juan op cit, p. 31. The reading of "shifting gloom" to be an image of time is San Juan's.

'Chapter 1, Part (iv)

58 Unsigned review Pall Mall Gazette 30.11.1891. quoted in Karl Beckson ed. Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage (London 1970), p. 113.

59 Oscar Wilde: Letter to the editor of the Pall Mall Gazette The Letters of Oscar Wilde (London 1962), p. 301-2.

60 Ibid, p. 302.

61 Hermotimus is mentioned by Lucian 'The Fly'. Works (trans. A. M. Harmon) (London, n.d.), Vol. 1, pp. 90-91.

62 The Complete Shorter Fiction of Oscar Wilde (Oxford 1979), p. 17.

63 All quotations from 'The Fisherman and his Soul' are from The Complete Shorter Fiction of Oscar Wilde.

64 Unsigned review Saturday Review 6.2.1892. in Beckson op cit, p. 115.

65 W. B. Yeats Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry (London 1888), p. 216.

66 See Dorian Gray (Oxford 1974) Chap. xiv, p. 172.

Alan Campbell tells Dorian "You have gone from corruption to corruption and now you have culminated in crime."

67 The story is called 'Soup from a Sausage Skewer'.

68 Yeats, op cit. p. 220.

69 See Bruno Snell The Discovery of the Mind - The Greek Origins of European Thought (Oxford 1953) Chap. 1. for a clarification of Homeric views of the soul, and Erwin Rohde Psyche (trans. W. B. Hillis) (London 1925) for a survey of Greek beliefs and the nature of the soul.

70 Christopher S. Nassaar Into the Demon Universe (New Haven 1974), p. 19.

71 Philip K. Cohen The Moral Vision of Oscar Wilde (New Jersey 1978), p. 102.

72 Here Wilde seems at his most Romantic, most anti-Rationalist. His vision of wild Nature receiving the spirit of the dead had been more fashionable a century before. But the continuation of the fairy tradition should be noted here, particularly in the paintings of Richard Dadd, J. Noel Paton, and even in Beardsley's drawing 'The Abbé' where the butterfly-fairy characters resemble William Blake figures.

73 Laurence Housman Echos de Paris (Lond. 1923), p. 28.

74 Ibid, p. 32.

75 Ibid, p. 29.

76 De Profundis Collected Works p. 955.

Chapter 1, Part (v)

77 The commentary by R. H. Sherard in his Life of Oscar Wilde (London 1906) on Wilde and his parents with regard to the writer's homosexuality should be ignored, as should other of Sherard's 'pathological' asides.

78 From the essay 'Christ and Wilde' by G. Wilson Knight reprinted in Richard Ellmann ed. Oscar Wilde: a collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey 1969), p. 143.

79 In his Recollections of Oscar Wilde (London 1932). There is no reason to believe that Ricketts, a close friend of Wilde, would have fabricated the story and the incident of Wilde's relating of it.

80 These lines Wilde could only imagine in French - according to Ricketts, who publishes his translation of them. This dissatisfaction led him never to publish the story. Ibid, p. 18-21.

81 Especially in Dorian Gray see Knight op cit, p. 149.

82 Pater was one of Wilde's mainstays in prison, a fact recorded by many of his biographers.

83 Compare stanza three of Wilde's 'Rome Unvisited', and see also the ending to 'The Sphinx'.

84 'The Star Child' is the best example of this idea.

85 De Profundis Complete Works, p. 912.

86 'The Soul of Man...' The Artist as Critic, p. 270.

In this quotation and the one that follows the underlining represents Wilde's italics.

87 Ibid, p. 286.

88 Especially by Richard Ellmann in his essay 'Overtures to Salomé' in Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays.

89 Charles Ricketts found that Wilde did not think highly of Salomé "till the praises of some(Maeterlinck for instance) and the stupid misrepresentation and attacks it met with here [in England], made him declare it a new masterpiece of the stage." Ricketts op cit, p. 51.

90 'The Critic as Artist' Complete Works, p. 1023. He continues: "In its rejection of the current notions about morality it is one with the higher ethics."

Chapter 1, Part (vi)

91 Oscar Wilde Dorian Gray p. 85.

92 Oscar Wilde Letters (Lond. 1962), pp. 265-267.

93 Oscar Wilde Dorian Gray p. 56.

94 Ibid, p. 106.

95 Ibid, p. 29.

96 Oscar Wilde The Critic as Artist p. 1023.

97 Oscar Wilde Dorian Gray p. 69.

98 Ibid, p. 132.

99 Ibid, p. 166.

100 Phyllis Grosskurth John Addington Symonds (Lond. 1964), p. 267.

For Oscar Wilde's views on his own homosexuality and the idea of madness see his letter to the Home Secretary (July 1896) in Letters, pp. 401-405.

That Oscar Wilde knew John Addington Symonds was homosexual is obvious from Oscar Wilde's letter Ibid, p. 827.

101 Grosskurth op cit, p. 2.

102 In De Profundis Oscar Wilde lists Poe - creator of 'The Imp of the Perverse' as one who would have 'treated' boy prostitutes as he himself had.

In this section of the book - the listing of experiences and sensations - Isobel Murray has noted that Oscar Wilde had quoted verbatim from Kensington museum handbooks on various subjects (e.g. muscial instruments, jewels) see Murray's introduction to Dorian Gray (Oxford 1974).

103 Oscar Wilde Dorian Gray pp. 105-6.

104 See H. Montgomery Hyde The Other Love (Lond. 1970), p. 163.

105 Much of this tone is similar to that of Walsh Secret History of the Oxford Movement and earlier from Mrs. Radcliffe.

106 Isobel Murray 'Some Elements in the Composition of The Picture of Dorian Gray' Durham University Journal, IX iv (1972).

107 John Rothenstein The Artists of the 1890s (Lond. 1928), p. 5. This ignores, of course, the possibility of a return to a society absorbed by self - the 1970s has been seen as the age of the 'Me' generation.

108 Oscar Wilde Dorian Gray p. 91.

109 Ovid Metamorphoses iii (trans. H. T. Tiley) (Lond. 1905), p. 106.

110 Oscar Wilde Dorian Gray p. 74.

111 Ibid, p. 166.

112 Ovid, op cit, p. 107.

Chapter 1, Part (vii)

113 "If I ever write again, in the sense of producing artistic work, there are just two subjects on which and through which I desire to express myself: one is 'Christ, as the precursor of the Romantic movement in life": the the other is 'the Artistic life considered in its relation to Conduct.' " (Oscar Wilde *De Profundis* in Oscar Wilde *Letters* (ed. Rupert Hart-Davis) (Lond. 1962) p. 484.

114 See the note by Rupert Hart-Davis *Ibid*, pp. 423-4

115 *Ibid*, p. 445. Hereafter I will give the pagination after the quotation.

116 Holbrook Jackson *The Eighteen Nineties* (London 1939) p. 79.

117 *De Profundis*, p.479.

cf. *Ibid*, pp. 478-9 and Renan *Life of Jesus* p. 8 re. miracles.

cf. *De Profundis* pp. 283-4 and Renan pp. 54-5 and the use of the Greek language by Jesus.

And see also p. 756 re. Frank Harris on the "Greek Passions of Christ".

118 "It is a delight to me to think that as far as his conversation was concerned, Charmides might have listened to him, and Socrates reasoned with him, and Plato understood him ..." (*DP*, p. 483).

119 Friedrich Nietzsche *Ecce Homo* (1888) (trans. A. Ludovici) (Edinburgh 1911) p. 70.

120 Friedrich Nietzsche *The Twilight of the Idols and The Antichrist* (trans. A. Ludonici) (Edinburgh 1911) 'The Antichrist' 21. p. 149.

121 *DP*, p. 207.

122 Nietzsche 'The Antichrist' 16. p. 142.

123 *Ibid*, p. 143.

124 Nietzsche *Ecce Homo*, p. 143.

125 See J. E. Cirlot A Dictionary of Symbols (Lond. 1967), p. 78.

126 Oscar Wilde De Profundis p. 481.

127 Ibid, p. 481.

128 'Ave Maria Gratia Plena' Poems (1881)

129 De Profundis, p. 481.

130 Ibid, p. 481.

131 Ibid, p. 484.

132 Ibid, p. 483.

133 Ibid, p. 484.

134 Ibid, p. 502.

135 R. A. Scott-James from Modernism and Romance quoted in Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage (Lond. 1970), p. 279.

136 De Profundis, p. 473.

137 Ibid, p. 481.

138 Oscar Wilde The Complete Shorter Fiction (Lond. 1979), p. 171.

139 Denys l'Auxerrois has many of the physical characteristics of the young King. He charms both men and women: "The man who noticed the crowd of women at his stall, and how even fresh young girls from the country, seeing him for the first time, always loitered there, suspected - who could tell what kind of powers? hidden under the white veil of that youthful form; and pausing to ponder the matter, found themselves also fallen into the snare." Walter Pater 'Denys L'Auxerrois' in Imaginary Portraits (Lond. 1890), p. 67.

140 De Profundis, p. 482.

Chapter 1, Part (viii)

141 Max Beerhohm's story 'Enoch Soames' appears in Seven Men and Two Others (Oxford: World Classics 1966). Soames is spirited away by the Devil at the end of his brief history.

142 Gideon Spilett 'An Interview with Oscar Wilde' Gil Blas 22.11.1897 reprinted in E. H. Mikhail (ed) Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections (London 1979) p. 355.

143 Ibid.

144 See the review by Arthur Symons (unsigned) for The Speaker on Intentions, reprinted in Karl Beckson (ed) Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage (London 1970), pp. 94-6:

"Mr. Wilde, with a most reasonable hatred of the bourgeois seriousness of dull people, has always taken refuge from the commonplace in irony."

145 Mikhail op cit, p. 232.

146 Oscar Wilde Intentions text from Richard Ellmann (ed.) The Artist as Critic (London 1970), p. 270.

147 For a discussion of Wilde's attitude to socialism and anarchism see Masolino d'Amico 'Oscar Wilde between "Socialism" and Aestheticism' English Miscellany 18. pp111-141

148 See Rupert Croft-Cooke The Unrecorded Life of Oscar Wilde (London 1972).

149 De Profundis See especially pp 446-447 on Lord Queensberry, Lord Alfred's father:

"his very passion for notoriety was not merely individual but racial."

150 These characters appear in stories bearing their names reprinted as Poems in Prose.

151 Oscar Wilde The Soul of Man Under Socialism text from Ellmann (ed.) The Artist as Critic (op cit), p. 286.

152 De Profundis, p. 425.
Compare the description of contemplation and the aesthetic critic in The Critic as Artist Collected Works p. 1042: "From the high tower of Thought we can look out at the world ... etc."

153 De Profundis, p. 472.

154 *Ibid*, p. 473.

155 *Ibid*, p. 473.

156 *Ibid*, p. 476.

157 Raffalovich claimed Wilde equated the word 'artistic' with homosexual. *Urianisme et Unisexualité* p. 188.

158 *De Profundis*, p. 477. My italics.

159 *Ibid*, p. 466.

160 'The Critic as Artist' *Intentions*, p. 1023.

161 Mario Praz *The Romantic Agony* (London 1962), p. xvii.

162 For evidence of the intermittent but intense nature of Wilde's pro-Catholic sympathies see above pp. 47-9

163 "... as regards matters of politics, of education, of general expedience, of taste, he does not criticize or controvert."
(J. H. Newman *Lectures on the Difficulties of Anglicans* Fourth edition, p. 370).

164 *De Profundis*, p. 479.

165 *Ibid*, p. 491.

166 See Percival W. H. Almy 'New Views of Oscar Wilde' reprinted from *The Theatre* (London March 1894) in Mikhail *op cit*, p. 231.

167 *De Profundis*, p. 486.

168 *Ibid*, Wilde's underlining.

169 See *Ibid*, p. 485: "His [Christ's] chief war was against the Philistines. That is the war every child of light has to wage. Philistinism was the note of the age and community in which he lived ... the Jew of Jerusalem in Christ's day was the exact counterpart of the British Philistine of our own."

170 The great sinners of *Salomé*, especially Herod, are really guilty of the sin of vulgarity. They are Philistines *par excellence*.
Beardsley's caricature of Wilde as Herod in his drawings for the play must have deeply wounded the playwright's self-love.

171 "... it is almost incredible to me how a man whose life is marred and made hideous by such laws can possibly acquiesce in their continuance"
The Soul of Man ... p. 251.
See also p. 261 for Wilde on the adverse effect private property has had on individualism.

172 *Ibid*, p. 263.

173 Ellmann introduction to *The Artist as Critic*, pp. xix-xxvi.

174 *De Profundis*, p. 486.

175 Mikhail, *op cit*, pp. 231-2.

176 *Ibid*, p. 231.

177 *De Profundis*, p. 487.

178 Oscar Wilde to Frances Forbes-Robertson [June 1899] *Letters* p. 802.

"The superstition of the uneducated Italians, the severity of the convents, the relics of paganism in the Catholic ritual, these and a dozen objections caused the average English man to turn from Catholic Italy with disgust."

(C.P. Brand _Italy and the English Romantics_ (Cambridge 1957), p. 219)

Come d'Annunzio, il Rolfe vedeva in sé un uomo del Rinascimento nato fuori tempo.

(Mario Praz _Il Patto con Serpente_ (Rome 1973), p. 302)

(i) Rolfe's writings have proved fascinating to those who see beneath the restrained floridness of his prose an identifiable human being. We can become fascinated by the geometry of this life/art relationship. Writing is a tangent drawn from a tightly circumscribed life. This relationship has created a certain pattern in critical writings on Rolfe. Biographical details are concentrated on while the novels are used for footnotes. (1) Most of these critical works pose the question: who is behind this literary identity? This has become the basis of a cult, beginning with A. J. A. Symons's The Quest for Corvo in 1934. Half a century later we can agree with Julian Symons that Rolfe is "more read about than read". (2) I would like to look chiefly at Rolfe's novels to examine themes within them. But it will be necessary to pursue the identity of the writer too. It is not simply tradition that forces this role upon me so I will start by explaining why identity is itself a crucial theme in Rolfe's fiction.

It might be argued that rather than revealing his identity Rolfe deliberately obscures himself from his reader. The use of pseudonyms might be cited as an example. But the personality revealed in Rolfe's writing is so consistent that the various disguises - including Baron Corvo and the ambiguous Fr. Rolfe - are redundant. Because of this I refer to the writer by name as Frederick Rolfe or Rolfe throughout this chapter.

Hadrian the Seventh, Rolfe's most widely read novel, is a work of self-vindication. Its subject is the rise of a neglected and impoverished writer. His rise (to the Papacy) is achieved through a series of loosely connected events. The writer is Rolfe in thin

disguise, and the rise to power, his use of power and his death are all a part of a great wish fulfilled. The novel opens with an anonymous character reading newspapers in his room. He is exhausted rather than bored. For the first eighteen pages this character - a writer - soliloquises, sometimes addressing his God, then himself, at other times his cat:

> Why, O God, have you made me strange, uncommon, such a mystery to my fellow creatures, not a 'man among men' like other people (3)
>
> Why can't you be honest and simple instead of subtile and complex? You're just like your own cat ambuscading a ping-pong ball ... don't try to deceive yourself. It's all very well to pose before the world: but there's no one here to see you now. (4)

The reader is given an intimate look at the 'writer's' room. There is something oddly intimate about knowing the opinions and tastes of a character without knowing his name; certain preconceptions are missing. For Rolfe, as I hope to explain later, names had a deep significance, sometimes amounting to a magical distillation of character. This 'writer' is still nameless when we examine the corners of his room, the titles of his books, his furniture, the subjects of his pictures. Rolfe includes a list of photographs and picture postcards pinned to a sheet of brown packing paper - the Hermes of Herculaneum, St. Sebastian in terracotta, Donatello's David, Verocchio's David, Perseus by Cellini, Andrea del Sarto's St. John and, oddly and provocatively placed amongst them, "an unknown Rugger XV prized for a single example of the rare feline-human type". (5)

The first part of the introductory chapter ends with the writer falling asleep. Significantly Rose (that is the hero's surname) drifts to sleep during his meditation on the Finding of Christ in the Temple.

Rose has already informed us that he possessed "complete psychical detachment from other men" (6), adding that a man is exasperating (to other men) if it can be said of him "A chiel's amang ye takin' notes". While meditating the image of a child confronting his superiors the author begins the impossible dream which is the plot of Hadrian the Seventh. Rose is awakened by the arrival of Church dignitaries who, having weathered Rose's questioning, offer him ordination. Here Rolfe extends his meditations on Christ among the elders and substitutes Rose. The 'writer' becomes not simply a child taking notes but the child undergoing a great test.

Nothing in Rolfe's life had greater importance than his desire for ordination. "He believed with all his heart and soul and strength that he had been called by God to minister to Him in the office of a priest of the Catholic and Roman Church. To fulfil this vocation was his ruling passion". (7) Yet passion can be silent. Rolfe filled his writings with this passion and his failure to receive ordination is passionately defended in Hadrian the Seventh and elsewhere. His writing springs from a need to vindicate himself and confess his stainlessness publicly. Enough of Rose's ramblings are revealed to convince the reader that Rose is Rolfe. Many of the 'writer's' musings and much of the plot touch upon details of Rolfe's earlier life - particularly his days in seminaries and meetings with clerics. Yet these details are not gripping or sensational. There are no compelling historical reasons for Rolfe to confront the reading public with his life history. Rolfe's life, though not uneventful, was so personal, so circumscribed, so tiny in its scope that it should have no intrinsic interest for other people. This is not to deride the importance Rolfe put on his own life. On the contrary, I hope it

underlines the nature of Rolfe's self- absorption. The most trivial conversation, the unintended slight, the most subjective opinion - all are felt worthy of reiteration. (8)

It is important to read Hadrian the Seventh as a series of confessions, rather than a set of impressions or images. Its success lies in involving the reader in Rose's intensely personal dispute with the world, particularly the Catholic world. Rolfe's fears of persecution by Catholics - clerics and laity alike - are passed on to Rose. Six years before the publication of Hadrian the Seventh Rolfe had written to his superior at Holywell:

> ... I am chiefly concerned at present with your Curse, and with your Oath to Saint Winefride that you will ruin me, make me suffer, have me hounded out of the town, and prevent me from ever earning a living.
>
> ... as for your Curse, I spit upon it, and defy you; and you may rest assured that I shall fight against it as long as I can hold a pen. (9)

When Dr. Talacryn comes to Rose with an offer of the priesthood which he believes has been denied Rose in error and from spite, he is confronted by the writer:

> "I've been stabbed and stung so many years that, now I am able to retaliate I am as touchy as a hornet with a brank-new sting ... I seem to take an impish delight in making my brother-Catholics, especially clerks, smart and wince and squirm as I myself have squirmed and winced and smarted." (10)

Throughout his long dialogue with Dr. Talacryn, Rose displays the Rolfe-ish hatred of Catholics that led D. H. Lawrence to describe Rolfe as "a Protestant in all his being". (11) This diatribe is, however, a way of acquainting the reader with vital information

about George Arthur Rose while allowing Rolfe a personal attack on English Catholics. By page fifty, Rolfe/Rose has confessed, one way or another, almost endlessly. He describes himself with such detail that we should easily recognise him in the street. With a pretend-innocence (half bravado, half fear) he hints that he is homosexual with a tendency to pederasty. (12) These passages are revealing rather than truly confessional, but they give way to Rose's diatribe - "I am what you and your Catholics have made me" - where he reveals himself to his listeners.
Beneath the precise physical description is an amorphous wound.

Despite his daunting reproaches Rose is regarded as suitable for ordination and he makes a formal confession. The reader hears all: the confession itself, the absolution, the penance and the blessing. It is a confession conducted very much on Rose's own terms, allowing his scope for explanation of his beliefs. He touches on aestheticism and his own homosexuality, albeit obliquely, but his chief concern is a trifling encounter with a woman who tries to seduce him. The references to this incident are puzzlingly disproportionate. It is only much later that the woman, Mrs. Crowe, becomes of great importance to the plot.

To the question "... do you love God?" Rose answers "I don't know. I really don't know", but continues to propound how deeply personal his idea of God is (13). To "do you love your neighbour?" Rose answers "No, I frankly detest him, and her... " (14) So, within the confessional Rolfe reveals his hero, endowing him further with his own characteristics. Once more - this time towards the end of the novel - at a time of press attacks on Hadrian, Rose confronts his cardinals and removes his pontifical ring. In that manner he sheds his papal identity for the length of their questioning. Once

more past events are reappraised. Rose "confesses" to the cardinals. Yet there is still that strange need to confess and defend at the same time. Trifling events are described, trifling surely to the listeners. Yet in personal terms these events have bitten deep; their reappearance so late in the novel indicates their importance to Rolfe. His sense of mature achievement (as Rose becomes Pope) is threatened by the nightmarish reappearance of figures from the past. Their triviality is itself an indication of great and symbolic value they have for the author. The ills are hinted at but not described, yet there is a tacit understanding of them by Hadrian's court. This vagueness is a serious weakness in the novel yet is suggestive of Rolfe's mental state which feeds on this lack of definition. In part Hadrian feels it necessary to explain his past. One of Rose's traits was the use of pseudonyms in order to gain work. This was, par excellence, a trait of Rolfe himself. In terms of creating identities Rose was as prolific as Rolfe:

> "... as Catholic malfeasance drove me from one trade, I invented another, and another; and I carried on each of these under a separate pseudonym. In fact I split up my personality ... There were four of me at least ... And of course my pseudonymity has been misunderstood by the stupid, as well as misrepresented by the invidious. Most people have only half developed their single personalities. That a man should split his into four and more; and should develop each separately and perfectly, was so abnormal that many normals failed to understand it." (15)

Rose's pseudonyms are King Clement, Austin White and Francis Engle. These names correspond to Rolfe's Baron Carvo, Frederick Austin and Uriele de Ricordi. It is interesting to note that while Rose is so open that his every statement appears to be a confession, his adversaries manipulate innocent actions into

wrongdoings. Even in the confessional Mrs. Crowe cannot confess; instead she uses the opportunity to state her love for "her Georgie", her confessor Pope Hadrian VII. (16)

Rose's self-defence for the cardinals constitutes eighteen pages of text. He wins their respect and faith but dreads their sympathy. Yet these eighteen pages, following as they do, so many other reworkings of the same history, of the same self-defence, leave Rose still unsure of himself. He wonders if he "for once had made His argument clear and convincing" (17). There still remains a need to explain, to seek approval, to vindicate.

Rolfe appears in three other forms in Hadrian the Seventh. The first of these is as Cardinal della Volta. Rose is della Volta's double. Cardinal Courtleigh is reminded of Rose's existence by seeing della Volta. Later the Italian is mistaken for the new Pope and the circumstances are used against Hadrian. More importantly Rose meets himself in a youthful form at St. Andrew's College in Rome (i.e. the Scots College from which Rolfe was expelled in 1890). Rolfe returns as the hero of his own fiction to visit the site of one of his most disappointing failures. He finds (as Rose) the college as soul-destroying as ever, but he singles out two students to speak to privately. One of these is "the fastidious person" whom the Pope learns is William Jameson. (This is Rolfe in coded form; William was his second name, he was the son of James Rolfe). The student is older, as Rolfe was, than the others. At their meeting he feels it necessary to defend himself for the Pope's benefit; at the same time Rolfe's brief career at the Scots College is vindicated.

"Sanctity, I have not complained" says William Jameson; and in this he differs noticeably from Rolfe. Yet, as the story of Hadrian is one of wonderful wish-fulfilment, it follows that Jameson's path is to be made smooth. Hadrian secretly settles money on his protégé to place him "on a more satisfactory footing." (18)

Another version of Rolfe appears as Flavio, Rose's cat, just as Nicholas Crabbe sees himself as a crustacean. Flavio is a familiar reacting to events with super-human understanding. Rose, on the other hand, has cultured himself into stillness, cleanness, watchfulness - the qualities of a cat. The adjective Rolfe uses most often to describe his hero is "feline". Rose's enemies are described as "dogs"; they bay, yelp and yap. Confronted with an article in 'The Catholic Hour', Hadrian's indignation is aroused:

> "Who could have attacked Him with such malignant ingenuity? The names of half a dozen filthy hounds occurred to Him in as many seconds: but He was not able to recognise any particular paw." (19)

While pondering the libellous article Hadrian determines not to bend or break. But the pressure proves too much. Before he swoons he moans "Oh, have I ever been such a dirty - beast?" (20) It is as if his fastidious cat-nature is repelled before his human-nature is.

Rolfe's technique in Hadrian the Seventh is autobiography written with wish-fulfilment. The novelist is raised to a position of great power, power almost without limit being spiritual and temporal. Yet his exertions to rearrange Europe are mingled with attempts to vindicate his hazy past. Revolutions in Europe are nothing compared

to his personal feud with Maryvale (i.e. Oscott College) or St. Andrews (The Scots College). The incipient fear of fellow Catholics makes Hadrian appear a victim of the Spanish Inquisition. Rolfe's fiction reflects his highly personalised religion. It is not the faith of the masses, or the clerics. He raises aloofness to a virtue and encourages it in his alter-ego William Jameson. His first public statement as Pope (in the 'Epistle to all Christians') stresses "the principle of the Personal Responsibility of the Individual". (21)

It is difficult to criticise a novel where most of the statements about the leading character are thinly-disguised self-praise or blatant self-defence. Hadrian's enemies and critics draw him further and further into the need for explanation. Yet Rolfe cannot explain him sufficiently; his guilt is always shifting but remains within him. When others defend him it is still very much in Rose's own words. This is an indication of how difficult Rolfe found it to project his fiction out of the battlefield within him. The undying love of his aides James and John and the protectiveness of Iulo are wishes. And so too is Cardinal Carvale's pronouncement on Hadrian:

> "Shall I tell you the difference between our Holy Father and ourselves? We see things from a single view-point. He sees things from several ... you must have noted how that every now and then, when He deigns to explain, He makes mysteries appear most wonderfully lucid." (22)

And the statement upon Rose's becoming Pope: "I think that he has found his proper niche at last" would be ironic used by another writer. (23) With Rolfe it is a further attempt at elevating himself in our eyes. Fictional friends - disciples in all but name - pay tribute to Hadrian-Rose-Rolfe.

(ii) Hadrian the Seventh - the secondary personality

In a letter to James Walsh following the publication of Hadrian VII Rolfe asks his correspondent to read the novel and when "you have studied it carefully ... send me a long psychiatric prognosis of Hadrian. There is a distinct assertion of a secondary personality there, which greatly puzzles me ...". The editor of the letters to Walsh, Donald Weeks, notes that this secondary personality is the character William Jameson who appears in Chapter XV. (24) But this note ignores the fact that Rolfe appears in the character of Rose (Hadrian) in the first place and that the portrait of the Pope is itself a "secondary personality" for Rolfe. If we admit that Hadrian is the primary personality and as such Jameson is secondary to him, the latter is still an obvious self-portrait. So obvious is this that Rolfe could not possibly regard it as an "assertion" or as puzzling. Symons, Weeks and Benkovitz ignore this important note in their biographies of Corvo. And yet it is important, for Rolfe outlines Hadrian and his other novels in letters to friends, yet rarely refers to the inspiration behind them. In this case Rolfe's own note is mysterious. Who is the secondary personality who puzzled the writer himself? Rolfe's puzzlement is, I believe, a red herring. Hadrian VII is a meticulously constructed novel; that there should be an element introduced which Rolfe himself could not understand is inconceivable. I believe that he was playing with Walsh, hoping that Walsh would pick up a theme connected with the writer's own personality which would otherwise lie hidden.

In his essay 'Metrical Pattern in Rolfe', John Glucker writes " ... it looks as though Rolfe's real acquaintance with the classical languages, their literatures, and the more technical sides of these literatures

has never been seriously examined". (25) It is true that none of the novelist's biographers have concentrated on the vast numbers of classical allusions in the novels, particularly in Hadrian VII. In this essay I would like to examine these allusions in Hadrian VII and in doing so I hope to uncover the "secondary personality".

The novel begins with a long Prooimion which deals with George Arthur Rose before his canonization. Here we learn that Rose has a cat called Flavio and keeps a private dictionary compiled by taking "Greek words from Liddell-and-Scott and Latin words from Andrews". (26) Rose's God is referred to a number of times in this introduction and in unorthodox ways. Firstly we have this odd outburst, part of an internal monologue: "Strong? But why do I name my splendid master. Strong of nature and Strong of name and station, Strong of body and Strong of mind".
Rose continues:

> It is only grand indulgence and urbanity on his part which makes him know me; and, when the sun lacks splendour, only then will Megaloprepes need me, only then Kalos Kagathos perchance may need me. (Hadrian VII p.15)

To the question "My son, do you love God?" Rose replies:

> I don't know. I really don't know. He is Δημιουργος Maker of the World to me. He is Το' Αγαθον to me, Truth and Righteousness and Beauty. He is Πανταναξ Lord of All to me. (Ibid p. 53).

We must wonder why Rolfe makes his hero speak in such a way, particularly as Rose has slighted the cardinal who has come to help him by quoting the line "it is not I who have lost the Athenians: it is the Athenians who have lost me", only to add

"I would say that in Greek if I thought you would understand me." (Ibid p. 33). D. H. Lawrence writes of Rose "affectedly praying in Greek" but Rolfe's use of Greek appears to be more of a snobbery on page 52 and as a challenge to the Catholic clergy on page 33. (27)

In the confessional Rose unburdens himself of the following sins (amongst others):

> "I confess that I have broken the sixth commandment, once, by continuing to read an epigram in the Anthology after I had found out that it was obscene". (Ibid, p. 46).

He has not avoided "dangerous occasions of sin":

> "In regard to the fine arts, I study the nude, human anatomy, generally with no emotion beyond passionate admiration for beauty". (Ibid, page 51).

In literature:

> "no effect has been produced on me, save the feeling of disgust at writers who write grossly for the sake of writing grossly, like Straton, or Pontano ... I have delighted in impure thoughts inspired by some lines in Cicero's Oration for M. Coelius..." (Ibid, p 51).

In the second of these confessions Rose implies that the ancient world is alive and real for him and can actually tempt him to sin. In the first Rose inserts this sentence into his confession although it is not a sin. But it reveals a tendency in Rose which is later to become more apparently classical in Hadrian. Asked by the Cardinal if he (Rose) loves himself, the writer replies "I certainly don't admire my person. That's all wrong. I can pick out a hundred deviations from the canon of proportion in it. Lysippos would have had a fit". (Ibid pp 54-5). Again, Rose uses the antique as a gauge. The classical standard of beauty is applied in a most

unorthodox manner much later in the novel. In the following quotation Rolfe's prose has an uncharacteristic Wildean tone, particularly in the phrase 'Beautiful Things'. Hadrian has met a goldsmith whom he escorts around the Vatican:

> They walked about the sculpture galleries for coolness; and spoke of Beautiful Things. Hadrian revelled ... They came to the Apoxyomenos: stood: raved; and became dumb, feasting on the lithe majesty of perfect proportion. The artificer first spoke. "Holiness", he said, "can You see that body and those limbs crucified?" ... The splendid forms of the marble seemed to re-arrange themselves in the new pose ...
>
> "Yes", he answered: "but soaring and triumphing ... and not the head and bust." He took the goldsmith's arm and hurried to the Antinous of the Belvedere ... (Ibid, p. 177)

The outcome of this conversation is a gold cross combining the body of Apoxyomenos and the head and bust of Antinous. "Sometimes He [Hadrian] remained rapt in contemplation of the perfect beauty of His new cross..." (Ibid, p. 263). Much later, towards the end of the novel, the Pope who is ill with a "psychical disturbance" spends a long time alone with the cross in a mood very similar to Des Esseintes in A Rebours. Hadrian planned "combinations of lights and shades and backgrounds of book-backs: placing the golden symbol there".

> It pleased Him to think that He had created a type of incarnate divinity, which neither was the Orpheys of the catacombs, nor the Tragic mask of the Vernicle, nor the gross sexless indecencies wherewith pious Catholics in their churches insult the One among ten thousand, the Altogether Lovely ... (Ibid, pp. 369-70).

Hadrian continues with a diatribe against the illproportioned figures of Christ,"emasculate noodles whom you would slap in the face on sight." By combining the creations of Lysippos and Praxiteles the new Pope can achieve the image of a perfect divinity

in much the same way that Serapis combined Osiris and Apius. In returning to the antique for the ideal Christ, Rolfe runs counter to 19th-century opinion: "The highest element of truth and beauty, the Spiritual, was beyond the soar of Phidias and Praxiteles ... Faith, Hope and Charity, those wings of immortality, as yet were not". (28)

'The new cross' combines the body of an athlete with the perfectly proportioned body and is the representation of a disciplined harmony. The face of the Belvedere Antinous noted for its "sweetness and innocence of expression" (29) is not characteristic of other representations of Antinous where the impression is sulky and moody. The Belvedere statue is probably not a portrait of Antinous but a representation of Mercury. But what is important is that Rolfe should choose what he supposed to be the head of the Emperor Hadrian's lover as the head of Christ. Antinous is both human and divine in terms of sculptural representation. His image was sculpted both during his life and afterwards, when he became a new god. According to both Spartian and Dion Cassius images of Antinous were sculpted to comfort Hadrian on his beloved's death. (30) Why then should a portrait of Antinous comfort George Arthur Rose during a "psychical disturbance"?

Rose chooses the name Hadrian VII because "The previous English pontiff was Hadrian the Fourth: the present English pontiff is Hadrian the Seventh. It pleases Us; and so, by Our Own impulse, We command." (<u>Hadrian VII</u>, p 86). It is true that within the novel much play is made of Hadrian VII's Englishness but there are no further references to Nicholas Breakspeare, the previous English pontiff. The "secondary personality" of the novel is Emperor Hadrian. Rose becomes not simply Pope but Roman Emperor too.

This secondary personality gives the novel a different emphasis and is a further demonstration of Rolfe's myth-making propensities. The elevation of Emperor Hadrian to the Papacy gives the Rolfe Pope (Hadrian VII) much greater power than, say, Pio Nono would have had. Rolfe makes Hadrian VII out of clay already mythologized and he models it into an image of conventional saintliness. Yet, although the result is a powerful, even superhuman being, it is a tribute - and I use the word warily - to Rolfe's paranoia that his Pope is assassinated. It is here that the true significance of the accreted image of Emperor Hadrian and Pope Hadrian can be seen: the cultured, saintly, seemingly superhuman only seems superhuman; he can, and does, die. With his death comes barbarism. The death is, in fact, a product of that oncoming tide of barbarism which only Hadrian VII could have held back.

I do not want to labour this point, yet I think it important to see how much Rolfe identifies the power of Catholicism with that of the ancient world and learning. His striving for classical scholarship, his disapproval of socialism (notably his answer to Edward Carpenter's Towards Democracy which was to be called Towards Aristocracy) are examples of his reaction to English life in its modern, liberalized form. In the face of what Rolfe saw as philistinism he threw down the gauntlet of Catholicism; in the guise of Pope Hadrian VII, representative of both the modern papacy and ancient patrician temporal power, he threw down his life.

In bringing Emperor Hadrian into a relationship with the Papacy Rolfe's aim is twofold; (1) it puts the Papacy in touch with a non-Christian past and, consequently with other forms of knowledge and of learning: magic, for example; (2) in doing so a kind of neo-Renaissance is born, a concept dear to Rolfe's creative heart and one central to the writing of Don Renato (discussed below pp.162-7). Wilde, as I have previously observed, thought of the Mass as a survival of ancient Greek drama. Rolfe, singularly untheatrical in his thinking (not for him the music hall motif that appears in so much writing of the 90s), is always concerned with the Mass as a celebration, as consecration, as part of the mystery of transubstantiation. Rolfe's original cover for Hadrian the Seventh shows the Pope celebrating Mass (plate7) watched by a cat. Directly above the cat is a crescent moon, partly obscured by clouds; to the left, above the Pope, is the sign of Cancer. In this context Rolfe's rather amateur representation of the Pope's vestments and their

symbols, the triple-crowned tiara and the rings, stresses the magical qualities of these objects. He chose too the dark purple of the cloth boards for the first edition, perhaps with an eye to its imperial, rather than its pontifical, significance.

One of the characteristics which impressed itself most on outside observers was Emperor Hadrian's love of Greek. Hadrian VII demonstrates a similar love abundantly, as did Rolfe ("passionate love for Greek literature" Symons calls it. (31)) Emperor Hadrian caused a renascence of Greek studies because of his enthusiasm for Greek art and literature. "He understood and loved the Greeks, showered on them a thousand proofs of his Imperial favour, exalted them higher than even the Romans." (32) This corresponds to Hadrian VII's wish to have "no barrier erected between Christians of the Roman obedience and Christians of other denominations." (Hadrian VII, pp. 146-7). The Emperor's embracing of many gods and creeds as well as his interest in astrology is reflected by the Pope. Hadrian VII combines the Hadrianic Antinous with Christ, analyses himself and others in terms of the Zodiac, uses Buddhist emblems on his pontifical stole and on two occasions refers to "the gods" (although we should note the lack of capital letters). "They say He says His prayers in Greek ..." says the German Emperor of the new Pope. (Ibid, p. 248). The new Greeks do not appeal to Rose/Hadrian but I have noted his enthusiasm for Greek literature and he regards the Italians of Eastern Italy as "Italian Greeks": "lineal descendants of the Athenians of Perikles' day". (Ibid, p. 230). (33).

The "psychical disturbance" of Hadrian VII which makes him "lethargic, dulled, blunted, listless, eager for nothing" also leads to thoughts of death and suicide. All accounts of Emperor Hadrian's last weeks are extremely painful - numerous failed suicides and a sensation of great tiredness. (34) Rolfe's Hadrian feels tired at the start of the novel (page 55) and later retires to Castel Gandolfo to rest (page 107). In fact the Pope might be characterized as having

great bursts of energy followed by exhaustion. The last words of the novel: "Pray for the repose of this soul. He was so tired" sum up this exhaustion. (Page 413).

We can see that the eccentricities of Hadrian VII are not necessarily Rolfe's own. The hidden portrait of Emperor Hadrian that it contains compares with Marguerite Yourcenar's. (35)

Let us return to the part of Rose's confession where he reveals his interest in the nude: "I study the nude, human anatomy, generally with no emotion beyond passionate admiration for beauty."(page 51) Two things strike us in this sentence. First is the important qualification "generally" which we can only conjecture to mean that at other times Rose's emotion is baser than "passionate admiration for beauty." Is this lust? - to put the alternative "emotion" at its most extreme. If it is lust that Rose means, why is this left out of the confession and this harmless statement inserted in its stead? Secondly, is a "passionate admiration for beauty" possible in itself - with "no emotion beyond"? Or rather, in a response to beauty each of us brings his own individuated imaginations. We have previously [above p130] seen that Rose's lodging is decorated with various pictures of youths.

> On this background [of packing paper] were pinned photographs of the Hermes of Herculaneum, the terra-cotta Sebastian of South Kensington, Donatello's liparose David and the vivid David of Verrocchio, the wax model of Cellini's Perseys, an unknown Rugger XV ... and the OUDS Sebastian of Twelfth Night of 1900 ... post-cards presenting Andrea del Sarto's young St. John, Alessandro Filipepi's Primavera ... Friant's Wrestlers ... Boucher's Runners ... an olive-skinned black-haired corn-flower-crowned Pancratius ... (Hadrian VII, p. 8).

Yet not only does Rolfe not add the qualification "male" - "a passionate admiration for male beauty" - but his confession includes the detailed retelling of an incident where he was the passive victim of an adulterous wife. (36) Of course the "confession" is a device for telling us more about Rose and his previous life, but even so this incident is neither a sin nor a peccadillo. Rose is the victim. But his retelling of the incident is violent and hateful. (37)

In his writings Rolfe is generally open about his enjoyment of male nudity - in his "modern" works undressing and bathing or swimming have a ritualized or celebratory significance, while in the historical novels he delights in the words "connudate", "enucleate", "inloricate", "nude", all of which mean unclothed. (38)

The central image of <u>Don Renato</u> is one of youth (hence Renato - he who is reborn.) Adolescence is observed closely. Renato's tutor, Dom Gheraldo, observes his pupil and describes his physical beauty in words. But the boy's father has a painter's interest in anatomy, and he watches Renato obsessively. On a number of occasions Gheraldo and the Prince discuss the exact colour of Renato's flesh contrasting it with his half-brother's and comparing it to the rest of nature. On one occasion the Prince has the two boys placed in various environments to examine the colour changes on their hair and flesh. Gheraldo notes:

> When I had looked and meditated during the space of one paternoster, I responded saying that the head of the little Lord [Renato] blazed in that obscurity as though some rutilant nimbus clustered in crisp flamelets on his brow of ivory but that the head of his venustous foster brother exhibited the profound nigritude of the ravens cursed by Divine Phoebus Apollo. (39)

On another day the Prince obtains a "convex cristall" and proceeds to inspect Renato "in every art and part." On completion of this exercise Renato's father remarks on the "ineptitude of poets"

> who compare human skin to milk or cream or lilies or almonds and such matters, which being inanimate, lack that very quality of vivid ardor and nitidity wherein their whiteness differs from the whiteness of immaculate puerice. (40)

Renato is suspended, upside down, from the ceiling in order that his body can be viewed in empty space. The result of this exercise is the Prince's painting of Saint Agapitus. (41) In this incident Rolfe exploits the Renaissance interest in the nude, the bel corpo ignudo. Renato's father is no Michelangelo but he is steeped in the learning of his time particularly in the various spatial discoveries of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael. (42) The neoplatonic love of beauty which is Michelangelo's driving force is present in both Prince Marcantonio and Dom Gheraldo - one is tempted to say in a provincial form, but this qualification cannot do as both men are Romans. No, the neoplatonism of the Prince and the tutor is the echo of great minds of the Renaissance. Rolfe deliberately dwarfs his characters by mentioning great historical personages. Here Rolfe's fictional-historiographical approach is helped by contemporary 19th-century research. Pater's work on Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino provided for the 1880's and 1890's an insight into the revival of Platonic thought in the 15th century. Rolfe relates to Pater in the way his character Gheraldo relates to Pico.

> It is because the life of Pico, thus lying down to rest in the Dominican habit, yet amid thoughts of the older gods,

> himself like one of those comely divinities, reconciled indeed to the new religion, but still with a tenderness for the earlier life, and desirous literally to 'bind the ages each to each by natural piety' - it is because this life is so perfect a parallel to the attempt made in his writings to reconcile Christianity with the ideas of paganism, that Pico, in spite of the scholastic character of those writings, is really interesting. (43)

Gheraldo sees the antique "rise from the earth" and attempts to relate paganism to Christianity. (44) Rolfe himself, as we have seen, combines the Apoxyomenos and the Antinous Belvedere to create a new image of Christ crucified.

What is striking about Rolfe is how involved he is with this process: how much his fiction is an expression of this synthesis of Platonism and Christianity. (We can compare Wilde's use of the beautiful face/goodness and Rolfe's use of the beautiful body/goodness)

Rolfe's understanding of the beautiful is through his appreciation of the nude. In Don Renato Michelangelo lurks as a ghost; Rolfe adopts his vision of the divine character of the male nude and enjoys revealing the vision twice: once as Dom Gheraldo and secondly as himself. (45) As Gheraldo is awoken to this vision by Michelangelo and the humanist writers of the 15th century, so Rolfe is stirred by 19th-century writing on the Renaissance and the rediscovery of the antique.

The exactness with which Gheraldo approaches the nuances of Renato's skin colour shows a striving for scientific truth told in an aesthetic way. Rolfe strove to express nakedness as the very image of truth itself. (46) In Hadrian VII this image is more of an unequivocal statement of fact. In his diatribe against

the Catholic hierarchy Rose reveals

> '...I neither whimpered penitence, nor whined for mercy, but actually had the effrontery to tell them the blind and naked truth about myself. Truth nude and unadorned, is such a rare commodity among Catholics, as you know, and especially among the clergy ...' (47)

Further on in the novel Rolfe describes Hadrian's 'Epistle to All Christians' as "very piquant, not on account of novelty, but because of the nude vivid candour with which the old and trite truths were enunciated dogmatically." (Hadrian VII, page 145). (48)

Perhaps it is symptomatic of Rolfe's paranoia that he feels well-qualified to tell the truth in this way: as if he alone were capable, because he has been set apart, to observe truths even "old and trite" ones. (49) In setting out to write historical fiction Rolfe sees no discrepancy between fiction and fact. His aim in writing Hubert's Arthur was to present "history as it wasn't but as it very well might have been." (50) And if we turn briefly to Don Tarquinio we see the novelist quoting Roger Bacon on the four stumbling blocks to truth

> The influence of fragile or unworthy authority:
> Custom:
> The imperfection of undisciplined senses:
> Concealment of ignorance by ostentation of seeming wisdom. (51)

The third is particularly interesting in this context, although the fourth is a stumbling block Rolfe fell over often. "Undisciplined senses" are dealt with further

> ... as to what truth is, I will say that, apart from the truths of our most holy faith which are of divine revelation

> and therefore not to be questioned, the truth is that which every man may acquire from the apprehensive nature of perfectly cultivated senses; or, as Zeno the Stoic saith, the test of truth is the Kataleptic Phantasm. (52)

In Don Renato Rolfe paraphrases the Kataleptic Phantasm as "Sensuous Apprehension". (53) That novel depends on the acute observations of a diarist and represents, in a modified form (that is, allowing for the diarist's pecularities) Rolfe's ideal type of historical fiction. Gheraldo's observations, his sensuous apprehensions, become most acute when he writes of Renato and Eros, their beauty and their characters. High Renaissance experiments in pictorial space interest him when they are allied to the naked human figure. Robert Harbison is particularly interesting when he writes of Don Renato and the parallel between the painter and the physician and their relation to the human body. Renato is more than once described as "the example". An interesting glimpse at Rolfe's coupling of writing and painting as acts of perception is contained in the introductory letters to Don Renato addressed to the Academician Trevor Haddon. Rolfe is describing himself as "a single-minded writer concentrated on the moment of which he writes"

> pondering and meticulously selecting each word, discriminating the exact shade of its meaning ... using it in a primary sense, placing it in such juxtaposition as that its meaning is in no wise modified by circumstances, (as you are used to place your pigments on your portraits in such considered relation, as that chymical change cannot affect them nor alter their just and constant value). (54)

Images of truth, nakedness and painting are further extended by Rolfe's use of "whiteness" in combination with nakedness images in Desire and Pursuit of the Whole and Hadrian himself as an art object:

> There was not a man on the earth who would have dared to risk rebuff, to persist against rebuff, to soar to him with that blessed salve of human sympathy - for which, - underneath his armour, - and behind his warlike mien, - he yearned ... he only had emphasized his own fastidious aloofness. He had cleared-off the mire: but he had disclosed the cold of marble, not the warmth of human flesh. (Author's italics). (Hadrian the Seventh P 395.)

We are reminded here, again, of the secondary personality within the novel, the Emperor Hadrian, so often represented in marble. It is as if Rolfe feels that in memorializing Hadrian he marmorealizes himself. And in this odd mixture of the divine and the human, the marble and the flesh, there lurks another idea. We are reminded again of Pater's Denys l'Auxerrois and his Appollo in Picardy, reappearances from the past into the late-Victorian literary world. The fact that both are reappearances of the god of the sun alerts us to the sun theme in Rolfe's work, a theme which I will discuss in section iii of this chapter. Certainly Don Renato is a symbol of the sun, his 'rutilant nimbus' of hair heralding the dawn of a new age. Hadrian, in his white and gold, may be an elderly form of the sun grown cold with age and dying exhausted, the lost symbol of a neo-Renaissance attempt to combine the Knowledge - or Knowledges - of paganism and Catholicism.

(iii) Rolfe's second work of fiction In His Own Image was dedicated to 'The Divine Friend, Much-Desired' (55). The history of this dedication can be found in Nicholas Crabbe which is, above all, a novel about friendship. The Divine Friend himself makes an appearance in response to the dedication of the earlier book. But it would be wrong to think of Nicholas Crabbe as a eulogy of friendship. As in religion, so in friendship. Rolfe desires friendship as much as the priesthood but makes the attainment of either almost impossible. His stay in the Catholic Church was tempestuous, his opinions of Catholics vitriolic. His friendships were equally tempestuous, but unlike his faith they were very short-lived. (56)

Hadrian the Seventh relates the history of Nicholas Crabbe at earlier phases of his career (although Crabbe has been transposed as George Arthur Rose). (57). Although part of a series, Nicholas Crabbe is not, in the real sense, a sequel. The hero refers to Rose as a "man ... whom I once used to know." (58) The other references to Rose are as a magician who had taught the magical art to Crabbe. There is a sense of loss, of shedding which makes Rose seem a purer, more distant form of Crabbe. (59). Yet when Rolfe commits fictional suicide and kills off his idealized self, Pope Hadrian, the autobiographical nature of his art demands a rebirth. Nicholas Crabbe is that rebirth, and he is a much more mundane character than his predecessor. This difference can be perceived at once by Rolfe's habit of naming characters in significant ways. Rose is accompanied by the saint's name George and the royal Arthur, while Crabbe's christian name is Nicholas, a name with ambiguous saintly and devilish connotations.

The patterns of the two novels are easily contrasted. In Hadrian Rose, unloved and insecure at the beginning, at the end is an internationally recognized figure. Despite his tendency to confess, Hadrian holds a secret part of his life closely. Crabbe on the other hand is comparatively secure at the beginning of his history. By the end he has been betrayed and rejected by his closest friend. Crabbe is earthbound by nature. Rose, despite his florid name, is more feline than flower-like.

Nicholas Crabbe begins the story of his four tortured years comparatively rich (he has just inherited £250). He walks around the West End ending up in Kensington Gardens where a mysterious occurrence bemuses him. It is dawn and he watches the early morning swimmers in the Serpentine. A young boy asks him to mind a bundle of clothes and disappears. He reappears in swimming costume and changes into the uniform of a telegraph boy. This boy is for Crabbe "the most vivid and most dainty personality which he had ever seen". (60). On changing clothes he swears Crabbe to secrecy and runs off, leaving the older man to muse on the meaning of the incident. Then the novel proceeds with a more mundane theme - how to earn money, a Rolfean preoccupation.

In his descriptions of the boy Rolfe indulges in his most 'aesthetic' writing. Rolfe, like J. A. Symonds, is fascinated by the play of light upon the skin (an interest shared by the painter Henry Tuke). (61) The swimming incident has the clarity of a vision, sharp and intensely personal. Physical beauty had a meditational use for Rolfe which he explains in his last novel:

> ... surrounding himself with an image of his ultimate ideal of earthly beauty, he made this - his very best - a spring-board, his eyes became fixed, his body rigid and insensible; and on the wings of the incessant spells Deusmeus et Omnia, he shot with impetus on words, soaring away till, somewhere very high, beyond illimitable space he floated in face-to-face communion. (62)

Crab-like the hero observes the young swimmer and like a crab returns to his cave. (63) He inhabits both the earth and, in imagination, the divine water-world. In both he is friendless. But Crabbe sees the boy "like a flash of pearl-coloured flame", his head "shining", while the rest of humanity is simply "pink" (64). He intimates later that "physical beauty was the only 'Open Sesame' to Crabbe's heart" (65). In the incident with the swimmer Crabbe's enthusiasm allows a glimpse into his heart.

The crypto-pederastic images at the opening of Nicholas Crabbe are typical of others in Rolfe's work. Usually the author is the spectator of boyish exercise or play, most often by lakes or the sea. In watching Rolfe loses much of his insistent, egocentric tone. This ego-loss gives the incidents their clarity. Coming, as it does, at the beginning of the novel the meeting with the boy should be a forewarning of its predominant theme. Yet the theme is disguised by Crabbe's need for friendship and his poverty and hard work. We meet the boy again in Chapter 6 where he gives his name as Robert Fulgentius Kemp. He looks 14, but in reality is 23 and is a recent graduate from Oxford. This ambivalence is confusing and recurs in The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole as an ambivalence of gender. On one hand Kemp's appearance is that of a working-class adolescent. On the other his age and social standing qualify him as a friend in the conventional sense. His story too is confusing.

He had been sent down. ("I wish you to know that there is no necessity for placing an unwarrantable construction upon the reason given for my being sent down." (66)). But he had completed his degree eventually. For no good reason Kemp had decided to cut himself off from his past, hence "the transmigration of my personality" - his becoming a telegraph boy. (67).

Significantly, Robert Fulgentius Kemp is friendless. So, on their second meeting, Crabbe offers the boy a room. But he hopes to retain his reserve:

> His companion had won him strangely. He was attracted to the dainty little person who sat beside him ... His impulse was to offer help and friendship: but second thoughts denied the latter. He remembered what friendship actually is, as at present understood, and he would have none of so foul a thing. He had his own way to make. (68)

Although they share rooms the two men avoid each other. Crabbe continues his battle with publishers and he is consumed by hard work. It is another incident in the early hours of morning ("just before white dawn") that makes Kemp more central to his life. The melodramatic discovery of his lodger's blindness is a dream-like episode in the novel. As in their meeting in Kensington Gardens the commercial, coarse and adult world is asleep. Crabbe had taken to sleeping in daylight, working through the night for the sake of quietness. The silvery-in-between is the time for Rolfe's fantasy. (69) The fantasy is that Kemp is almost totally blind and is now dependent on his friend.

> Now he /Crabbe/ was going to turn over another page of the book of his life; and the gods of his stars alone knew what he would have to write there. The delicious feeling came

> upon him, which comes upon the swimmer who stands ready to plunge on the brink of a new stream. (70)

For Kemp and Crabbe the image of a diver heralds a new life about to begin.

Crabbe's sense of commitment does not imply ideal friendship. Kemp represents at this stage a different type of friendship, not the ideal. Kemp is "prey". Crabbe tells him: "I want a friend - one who will be <u>useful to me in my work</u> ..." (71). Although they plan to live together, Crabbe sharing his finances and caring for his friend, Kemp is not the Divine Friend. Crabbe's forthcoming book 'Daynian Folk-Lore' will, Crabbe hopes, be dedicated to his publisher and friend Schlim Schlem. Rolfe's own experience is reconstructed in Nicholas Crabbe's. Rolfe had wanted to dedicate <u>In His Own Image</u> to Henry Harland and Crabbe's 'Daynian Folk-Lore' represents this book. Harland refused and Rolfe offered the dedication to James Hannay. He too refused, and for the same reason as Harland: that there was "a flavour" about the book that neither wanted to be associated with. (72). The flavour was pederasty. In <u>Nicholas Crabbe</u> both Sidney Thorah and Arkush Annaly refuse the dedication of 'Daynian Folk-Lore' because of a 'flavour'. Crabbe denies such a construction, describing it as "frightfully degenerate" although the inclusion of this incident in a novel with a distinctly pederastic theme is scarcely an apt defence. Later in the novel Crabbe admits that 'Daynian Folk-Lore' reveals "personal temperamental trouble". (73) The controversy over this second set of Toto stories provides an odd flash of self-awareness for Rolfe as in the following exchange. Crabbe has kept Kemp as a secret from all his acquaintances:

> '...what would you say if I told you that I'd found another Daynian who's got a whole heap more stories to tell me?'
> 'Here? In town? Where did you pick him up? A Daynian like the one who told you the other tales? I should say that you ought to be ashamed of yourself'.
>
> Crabbe never knew which Kakodaimon had tempted him to the verge of a disclosure of his invention of Kemp. (74)

The comparison of Kemp with Toto is odd because their only similarity is their beauty. Kemp is considerably older than Toto and is fair while Toto is dark. The statement appears to be a sly hint that Crabbe has a new boy-lover and that Schlem is interested enough in the news to pass comment. The publisher's reaction: "Where did you pick him up?" is ambiguous. Schlem was based on Henry Harland, the editor of The Yellow Book. This portrayal can be dated around 1900 at a time when the Wilde trial and its outcome would still have been a threat. Harland would have noticed the homosexual content of the Toto stories and could not have let it pass. The short conversation quoted above is Rolfe defying convention by challenging those who were trying to help him. (75)

The dedication to 'Daynian Folk-Lore' - To the Divine Friend, Much-Desired - is described by Crabbe as "his little visiting card of Lodgings to Let'. (76) One of the novel's plans is that when the Divine Friend actually appears the reader is told very little about him, except that he is a painter and a Catholic. Crabbe was wary of the painter's Catholicism but "Proof of divinity was given by inability to be rebuffed". (77) Inevitably, (Crabbe being Rolfe) they part as enemies. The painter (Trevor Haddon in reality) has become enshrined as the "untruthloving viper", the ex-dedicatee of Rolfe's Don Renato. (78)

Nicholas Crabbe catalogues Rolfe's failure to keep friends. Crabbe resists the overtures made by Schlem and his wife (the Harlands) or Church Welbeck (Temple Scott), because any constructive relationship with agents or publishers was impossible for him. (79) The painter suffers because he interferes with Crabbe's literary career by introducing him to a second-rate agent. In his closest friendship, with its sexual and marital overtones Crabbe is also a failure. He is usurped by Kemp's old Oxford friend Theophanes Clayfoot. Clayfoot whips Kemp off to luxury and idleness in Cornwall. Crabbe cannot understand Kemp's preference for gentility, a lack of comprehension matched by his bewilderment at social gatherings:

> "He had a delightful evening and came away utterly failing to understand what it was all about, or what return was expected from him". (80)

Likewise his exclusion from Kemp's relationship with Clayfoot makes Crabbe feel that he "understood nothing".

> He was prevented, by those 2, by 8-9 months of wearisome labour, by the necessity of continuing heart-sick and lonely, and by the fact of long starvation - he was prevented both from knowing and understanding what was expected. (81)

In these two instances Rolfe's inherent separateness from ordinary social interaction is most apparent. He can look with total incomprehension at a party. He fails to see a real friendship at work. Crabbe's loss of Kemp is the novel's tragic ending. Even if he was not the Divine Friend Kemp "was an ideal collaborator - and ... an ideal comrade". (82) Their joint literary production, 'Notes on Posthumous Literature', would have to appear anonymously as Kemp refuses to be associated with it. Crabbe "will not sail under false colours - a false friend's

colours", hence no name can appear on the cover. (83) Crabbe's language is that of a disappointed parent: "You withdraw your friendship from me ... To get what you wanted was the reward for which I worked. Nothing more ... ". (84) When Kemp walks from his room for the last time Crabbe begins to write automatically. First he inscribes Kemp's full name and its meaning: "Famous in counsel", "the Radiant One", "the Champion". These in themselves express the mixture of admiration and love felt for his friend. But he continues writing, obliviously transcribing Tusser's lines on friendship, ending:

> Wouldst have a friend? Wouldst know what friend is best?
> Have God thy Friend, Who passeth all the rest. (85)

So Nicholas Crabbe, the hermit crab, ends his story: "all alone with The Alone".

Kemp is the character who in this novel most closely approaches the status of Divine Friend (86). This makes the reference to him as 'Daynian' even stranger for Rolfe implies 'Uranian' in his use of this word. Kemp is Rolfe's social equal, whereas Toto, like Iulo in Hadrian the Seventh, is a servant. Toto and Iulo, Renato and Eros (in Don Renato) and Tarquinio (in Don Tarquinio) are all lost to Rolfe in the same way. They must grow up, become men. Kemp has the qualities of youth while being fully grown. He is also totally dependent (for a while) upon Crabbe. Rolfe invented a domestic relationship in Nicholas Crabbe where his hero serves the boy. Toto (short for Theodoro) is, on the other hand, a little golden god who serves his master. The striking difference between

these two types of relationship can be seen most clearly in Rolfe's reaction to their dissolution. In Stories Toto Told Me Toto tells his master that he intends to marry a dentist's daughter (87). Rolfe accepts the loss of his boy calmly. Likewise in Hadrian when his bodyguard tells the Pope that he has fallen in love with a local girl, Hadrian is moved to blessing the youth and presenting him with money (88). The romance of Renato and Marcia in Don Renato is seen as the achievement of an ideal relationship and the Rolfean mentor to Renato actually marries the boy to his love. But the loss of Kemp in Nicholas Crabbe destroys the hero's trust in friendship. This is the only instance in Rolfe's work where a friendship is destroyed by the intervention of a male admirer.

The narcissist in Corvo was capable of projecting outwards and recognizing himself in images of youth and beauty. "He is to himself beautiful", as Lawrence wrote of him (89). But this element isolates him too, making him, in his own words, the One against the Many. Lawrence crudely asserts that as women "were physically repulsive" to Rolfe "chastity cost him nothing" - a theory which strangely ignores all but heterosexual desire (90). Perhaps Lawrence was wilfully ignoring Rolfe's homosexuality, apparent even in the commercially successful Hadrian the Seventh. He chooses therefore to believe that the Church was an asylum for Rolfe.

Rolfe tried to tie his narcissism to celibacy, but he fought in vain against 'pagan' elements in himself. In this he closely resembles both Wilde and Beardsley (whose best self-portrait

shows him tethered to a satyr). John Gray could accept the Church as an institution and the priesthood as a part of that institution. Rolfe could do neither. His vocation was isolated from the rest of his life and his hatred of his fellow- Catholics has become legendary. (91) Gray and his friend Raffalovich and their friends 'Michael Field', could put their paganism behind them and see it as an inescapable part of their youth. (92) Rolfe's paganism was an essential part of his worship which his self-made vows of celibacy could not alter.

Rolfe's inherent paganism is best illustrated by Stories Toto Told Me, Don Renato and The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole. Of these only the Toto stories were published during the author's lifetime. In writing historical fiction (as in Don Renato) it would be wrong to think that Rolfe lost any of that ego-centric obsessiveness revealed in Hadrian or Nicholas Crabbe. Yet a study of Don Renato allows the reader to see more clearly Rolfe's technique of fiction without the constant reminder that the author's biography is being presented once more but in thin disguise. Rolfean preoccupations of theme and design can be appreciated more quickly (as can be his lack of design). In another sense, in the words of G. P. Jones,"the reader is prevented from unthinkingly imposing on the era [i.e. the 16th century] peculiarly modern assumptions such as would be embodied in a more conventional idiom". (93) It would be easy to see Rolfe as a totally individual writer - one who wrote, for the most part, in isolation and who was virtually unpublished. And having made this judgement it would be even easier to see him working only within the English confessional - autiobiographical tradition, if in any tradition at all. But Rolfe wrote what he believed were commercial works and could not

understand their lack of success, and indeed, their rejection by publishers. Don Tarquinio and Don Renato were two published, but commercially doomed works. The first was published after many rejections in 1905, the second printed in 1907 but never issued. (94) Their creation owed much to the fact that Rolfe saw historical fiction as an immensely popular form. He saw an opportunity to tap his interest in the Renaissance in Italy to produce fluently convincing accounts of the careers of two youths of the 16th century. But true to form Rolfe did not produce easy, readable fiction.

The paraphernalia of historical novels - introductions, footnotes, explanations by 'editors', the discovery of manuscripts - begins with Scott and therefore with the form itself. In Don Renato we have these characteristics underlined by the author's attempts to explain their use. At the same time Rolfe tried to maintain the 'truth' of the history he invents. Introductory letters 'To Apistophilos Echis' (95) set out to explain the origin of the writer's task, to describe the form and content of the work and clarify his method of working. (96) Other writers of historical fiction are cited - Scott, Reade, Thackeray - and their work analysed to find its particular contribution to the form. Scott is seen as producing works "new and strange" and his attempt at mediaeval and Tudor English "convinced the primal clients that they were so written" (97). Newness itself was, for Rolfe, a great asset. He hoped that Don Renato would explore history in such a startlingly new way that it would be a great financial success. Rolfe studied Waverley, Twain's Joan of Arc, Sienkiewicz's Quo Vadis, and Thackeray's Esmond to understand the writings of financially successful historical novels. The results of this

scrutiny are disappointing as far as a thesis on fiction is concerned. Don Renato, while observing the general rules extracted by its author from his reading, became in the writing a highly original and complex work.

> I had learned that historical romance must be true, apparently if not actually, accidentally if not essentially, implicitly if not explicitly. I had learned that the Form of it must be appropriate to the Matter in order to give it individual existence; and that with these must be included Potentiality and Actuality, all in a most correct Aristotelean formula. But above all I had learned something about the PUBLICK has not much relish for the normal, but for the abnormal: asks of writers 'some new thing', and leaves retailers of 'chestnuts' in the gutter. (98)

This analysis would imply that Rolfe saw the origins of Don Renato in an astute reading of the market and other novelists' successes. But he had amassed material on 16th century Italy during his research for Chronicles of the House of Borgia. Rolfe, like Reade in The Cloister and the Hearth, is interested in the shifts of consciousness that the Renaissance offers as a subject. Reade tells a story which depends upon the Renaissance although Erasmus, the novel's major historical figure, is mentioned only at the end. Reade's vision of late mediaeval society rushes forward to the Renaissance expectantly. Rolfe, on the other hand, although he outlines the years 1528 to 1530, maintains an awareness that the Renaissance looks back to the middle ages and antiquity. Towards the end of his journal Dom Gheraldo decides against the use of pagan names for the days of the week and adopts the 'Roman Kalendar' (99). While writing of his nephew Christoforo the priest claims "he already is capable of performing the 12 labours of his dival patron: though heretofore, those of our House who have borne the name of our tutelary, have had the sacerdotal form" (100)

Rolfe's footnote attempts to explain this conceit "In the subtiley simple mind of Dom Gheraldo Pinarj, Hercules the 'Strong Man' of antiquity, and St. Christopher the 'Strong Man' of Christianity, are one and the same." (101)

Dom Gheraldo is a singularly confusing narrator, but he is confusing chiefly because he embodies old and new forms, of worship, of learning, of ethics. He quotes gossip and superstition as truth, yet invents (without medical precedent) a method of blood transfusion. The odd melange of Latin and Italian and Greek which Rolfe designates 'macaronicks' shows Gheraldo's confusion clearly. Rolfe's tendency to use slang sharply and vividly must have been given impetus by Reade whose use of slang in The Cloister and the Hearth enlivens the narrative greatly.

Don Renato remained unpublished at Rolfe's death, and the public did not have to rise to the task he had set them. In his introductory letters Rolfe had asked his reader to conceive of the main characters himself. (102) As the characters are completely fictional this process is essential. The process of conceiving of these figures allows the reader to endow them with a history which must otherwise be lacking. In Thackeray's Esmond, for example, the process is not important for fictional characters mix freely with historical personalities in a time marked out by real political affairs and real wars. There is very little of this kind of reality in Don Renato. Dom Gheraldo's existence is felt only through those written impressions 'discovered' by Rolfe. Pater might be seen here, and elsewhere in Don Renato, as an example for Rolfe. Where Scott and Thackeray rely heavily on 'real'

history, the main interest of Marius the Epicurean is the mind of its fictional hero. Marius relates the impressions he receives intellectually from the events around him. Dom Gheraldo records his impressions of physical beauty, descriptions of colour, light and water, fleeting things. Rolfe mocks himself and the priest when he appends the note "This is my own stile. Rather lucid", or "This is the verbose stile of the prudent Don Francisco Tarugi when he sermonized; and unworthy of imitation" (103). These impressions are only truly made historical when the priest's body is found in a secret passage nearly four hundred years later. The discovery is Rolfe's. Apart from this anchoring device - where the character is finally anchored in time and to the story he has told - Don Renato is not about history at all. Dom Gheraldo's narrative is about vision and the intellect (104), while Don Renato's narrative is about love and the life of the spirit. Like Marius, Gheraldo has virtually no physical existence, he is almost entirely cerebral. The two have this characteristic in common although Rolfe's description of the priest as "so refreshing, so comically contagious" make them seem worlds apart. In his essay on Pater Peter Dale describes Marius the Epicurean as "Pater's most ambitious effort at reviving the past through a process of almost mystic self-projection into that past." (105) Likewise Rolfe, having pondered the How of Art and considered the 'Efficient Cause', finds his inspiration outside logic:

> Suddenly, Divine Mnemosyne entered and illumined that arcana where are stored the affairs of Don Tarquinio, of Dom Gheraldo, of Duke Renato, of Don Ruggiero, the affair of the opening of the oubliette ... (106)

It is fitting that Rolfe should be led back to the past by the pagan goddess of memory and that his hero should be discovered in a "forgotten" dungeon.

Rolfe projects himself into the 16th century to understand it more fully and to enjoy the fictional drama. He appears in disguise in the novel. He enters the process he demands of his readers:

> Conceive of Dom Gheraldo Pinarj, if his name actually was Pinarj, (for you know that most observable persons of his day assumed, if they had not already, a classick name) ... Conceive him as chaplain, physician, and confidential familiar of Prince Marcantonio; as a white magician; as governor of Duke Renato, but not tutor or confessor ... Conceive that he wrote a journal of events in the private life of Roman patricians of the Sixteenth Century. (107)

The name of the novel's eponymous hero contains ideas of generation and regeneration. The past acts upon the present and the future even if accident has to play a part in this process. Dom Gheraldo's skeleton is discovered in Rolfe's lifetime during the renovation of the palace of the Countess of Santa Cotogna. The Countess is described as "the most beautiful woman in the world ... now alive and blooming like a great white flower in Golden Rome". (108) She and Rolfe appear together at the end of the novel to discover historical evidence which makes Dom Gheraldo and the rest of the novelist's inventions "true". But perhaps more important than the shift from the sixteenth to the twentieth century is the leap backwards in time. Rolfe conveys this by genealogy. The Countess is descended from a Roman consul who lived "five centuries before Christ: but tradition (another form of history) carries her genealogy into the mists of the Heroick Age". (109) Here Rolfe's vagueness is actually suggestiveness. In <u>Don</u>

Tarquinio this reference to the "Heroick Age" is clarified. (110) The countess belongs to the Santacroce Family (or Hagiostayros which Rolfe suggests they preferred as a surname). The Roman Consul (Publius Valerius Poplicola) found the house of Santacroce at Ardea. Ardea was said to have been founded by Danaë, mother of Perseus ('Perseys') of Seriphos. St. George's legend is inextricably linked with the legend of Perseus. In his genealogy of the Countess of Santa Cotogna Rolfe draws a sketchy family tree rooted in mythology and extending to the twentieth century. Don Renato stands between these two - the spurious and the actual - and the novel attempts to bring him to life. At times Don Renato stands as a symbol of his divine or mythic progenitor. He is, for example, to model for a sculpture by Michaelangelo. The "supernal resplendent adolescence" becomes "the figure of his own very illustrious progenitor St. George of Seriphos" (111). The sculpture is broken up by Renato's father in a fit of jealousy directed against the sculptor. Rolfe's elusive history has evidence therefore in a fictional (and therefore missing) work of art.

The Hagiostayros family are obsessed with their ancestry. So too is the diarist Dom Gheraldo Pinarj. He is a Roman of Rome and his "classic name" is "descended from the patrician Gens Pinaria which shared with the Gens Potitia the hereditary priesthood of Hercules..." (112) Gheraldo takes his nephew from the Trinitarians so that he might marry and continue the line of Pinarj.

Although many of his prejudices and much of his personality is revealed, Rolfe is not all-pervasive in Don Renato. His voice is apparent in Gheraldo's voice, as Pater can be heard through Marius.

In its published form the novel has two sections - Gheraldo's and Renato's. Originally a third "manuscript" was to be included completing the history of Don Renato. This was to have been written by Don Ruggiero Rodolfo, a "firm English bravo" at the court of Prince Marcantonio. Rolfe didn't include Ruggiero's account and the character was relegated to a minor role in the novel. Not only does Ruggiero share Rolfe's surname (in a Latinized form) but he resembles other self-portraits of Rolfe. (113) By projecting himself back in time Rolfe reconstructs his own genealogy. Ancestry is as important to him as it was to Renato or Gheraldo. The dedicatory letter which prefaces the novel begins: "These are the words of the book which I, Frederick William, the son of James, the son of Nicholas, the son of William, the son of Robert wrote in London and Rome." (114) We are told in Don Renato's manuscript that Rodolfo has married "a little Greek princess, whom in Sicily he saved from shipwreck", (115) a story which has similarities to Rolfe's later self-portrait in The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole. Rodolfo names his sons Roberto, Niccolo and Giorgio, two for Rolfe's forbears, one for the patron saint of his homeland and the founder of the house of his adopted family. In this way Rolfe weaves himself into the narrative of Don Renato. He then is on equal footing with the chief protagonists. He (like the Countess of Santa Cotogna) generates from them. St. George fathers them all. In fact Don Ruggiero, the English stranger owes his life to Don Renato, the symbol of St. George. Subsequently Ruggiero swears his allegiance to the adolescent who has saved him. (116)

St. George is a constantly recurring emblem in the novel's embroidery. Rolfe thought highly of his bit of knowledge about

the origins of the Santacroce. He used it elsewhere - in Don Tarquinio, as we have seen, and in a letter to James Walsh (117) - an example of Rolfe using the little he knew with show. The cover for Don Renato was designed for the 1907 suppressed edition by Rolfe himself. Until the links with St. George are discovered the design is puzzling. [See Plate II] Then the meaning of the heron and the cross can be decyphered. Dom Gheraldo relates the story of the heron to Don Eros, Renato's foster-brother. The heron is the symbol of Ardea the area where the Santacroce originate. Eros has been raised to the position of "locumtenens and signifier" in Renato's household and can therefore use the surname Ardeati. But he is troubled by his lack of christian name (Eros being pagan) and he would like to be called Giorgio, or Sebastiano or Maurizio, all three the names of soldier-martyrs. To cheer him up Gheraldo tells the full history of Ardea and the Santacroce including the tale of the angel guiding Danaë to the countryside outside Rome. He ends:

> "In what form did the angel manifest himself? He responded saying, In the form of a heron. Finally, I announced, In the Roman tongue we name that heron Ardea; but in the Greek tongue, and Saint George of Seriphos deigned to be a Greek, the said heron was called Erodios. And, all incontinent at this, he cried, Oh, but mine is the name of that angel, and I am the Heron of Ardea." (118)

In this incident Rolfe not only continues his obsession with St. George but also with his obsession with names and naming. The future sexuality of Eros is foretold by his name and contrasts with Renato's name and nature. But by tracing the history of the boy's name he links him not only with the pagan past (Danaë and Perseus) but with Christianity (St. George) and the present (the

obscure relevance of the name to the Santacroce household). Rolfe takes similar delight in listing the household personnel of Duke Renato. To these names he appends qualities - 'Robust', 'Stabile', 'Equal-handed', christening and re-christening until a name has multiple significations. Ruggiero Rodolfo as a pseudonym for Rolfe has, as we have previously seen, personal significance for the author. The name Ruggiero may further imply relation to Ariosto's character in Orlando Furioso although this would be ahistorical. (119) Ariosto's Ruggiero did however rescue a princess (Angelica) in a story resembling the myth of Perseus and the dragon. Rolfe's Ruggiero marries a Greek princess (as opposed to a French one as in Ariosto) again implying links with Perseus and St. George.

In using the story of Ardea Rolfe reveals a mediaeval tendency to telescope time. Dom Gheraldo ignores the fact that St. George is simply a replacement for Perseus. The incident demonstrates the priest's simplicity; he ignores the fact that other towns had been founded by the gods. (120) At the same time the story has two uses for Rolfe: it demonstrates the idea of ancestry as historical data, no matter how dubious the ancestry actually is. More importantly, the story reaffirms the idea that adolescents have a god-like beauty. In this instance Eros is both a messenger of the gods (the heron/the angel) and a minor god himself (Eros). This theme, a recurring one in Rolfe's novels, I will discuss in relation to Don Renato and The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole.

Rolfe's last novel The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole was written entirely in Venice. His return to Italy, which had inspired Stories Toto Told Me and In His Own Image, inspired further

development of the master/servant theme in Rolfe's fiction. Venice offered art, religion and the possibility of mixing with youth. In creating his 'Romance of Modern Venice' Rolfe poured many of his fixations into the narrative. In particular his vision of beautiful youth and recreating this vision precisely in art becomes important to him. Ruskin had found in Venice, in Carpaccio's 'St. Ursula's Dream', the idealization of Rose la Touche. He endowed this image with great personal significance until he was forced to recognize its obsessive nature:

> Mere overwork or worry might have soon ended me but it would not have driven me crazy. I went crazy about St. Ursula and the other saints, - chiefly young lady saints, - and I rather suppose I had offended the less pretty Fors Atropos, till she lost her temper. (121).

Although Ruskin was fiercely anti-Romanist, at this stage in his life he turned to the saints to illustrate his obsessions. In Hadrian the Seventh Rolfe had described George Arthur Rose's room as displaying pictures of two Davids, a St. Sebastian, a St. John and a St. George, all mixed up with Hermes, Primavera, Perseus and various rugby players and wrestlers. (122). A Catholic view of youth indeed. The saints are Rolfe's counterparts to Ruskin's "young-lady saints". Rolfe's knowledge of hagiography, particularly the individual symbols of saints, was important especially in the painting of banners which he had undertaken in Christchurch. (123) Catholicism had opened up the world of saints to him in a way that Anglicanism could not have. (124) It is, in the main, the beauty of these young saints that draws Rolfe to them. Where Wilde found an equation between beauty and evil (125), Rolfe equated beauty only with good. As the chief type of beauty was, for him, that of youths, it becomes true for Rolfe that

all young men are good. Their beauty is a form of moral integrity and it is always unselfconcious. He never writes of plain or ugly boys: by implication all youths are beautiful. The quaintness of Toto, for instance, is the quaintness of a mediaeval saint and there is no difference between his high-spirited behaviour and that of St. Sebastian in the story 'About the Lilies of Sanluigi'.

Rolfe rarely writes about Christ. Instead he chooses those who, like Christ, died for Christianity. It is extremely difficult to decide which of the two elements Rolfe contemplates with most fervour: the beauty of young male martyrs or the cruelty of their deaths. (126) In The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole Crabbe and Zildo speak of Carpaccio's 'The Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand on Mount Ararat' in the Accademia. In Crabbe's words, "a myriad of the ordinary stalwart Venetian nudes who adorn all time, dilate in divers demeanours on the trees of wooded hills." (127) Where Ruskin chooses one of Carpaccio's gentlest images, Rolfe chooses the crudest (128). Both Crabbe and Zildo find the painting most beautiful yet it is simply a horror picture without grace or beauty. The appeal is in the cruelty and vastness of the cruelty: 10,000 young men dead or dying, crucified on trees. The magnitude itself would have appealed to Rolfe. In a drawing to illustrate his poem 'A Ballade of Boys Bathing' Rolfe depicts hundreds of boys diving, swimming, exercising in the moonlight:

"the sea seems alive with them". (129) The drawing is the work of a dwarf Carpaccio.

Rolfe's poetry exhibits his interest in martyrdom, particularly in the helpless nakedness of the martyr. It is for this theme that I quote Rolfe's poetry here; I do not claim any talent for him as a poet. There are three versions of a poem to honour St. William of Norwich, whose martyrdom strongly appealed to Rolfe as an image because of the victim's youth and because it allowed him to express his feelings against Jews. (130) One version ends:

> And, stripped and bound, they bore him to the wood,
> Nailed to a cross his white limbs stained with blood,
> As in the ages dim they nailed his Lord.
> And, while the angels watch his agony,
> To God's sweet Mother breathes his last faint sigh.
> <u>Sancte Gulielme ôra pro me</u> (131)

In 'Sestina yn honour of Lytel Seynt Hew', an early English pastiche, Rolfe remembers the murder of a young boy "crucyfyed by ye Jews atte Lincoln":

> "Wyth craftye wyle they syssyd ye Fayre Syr Hew,
> And ye theyr dwellynges baryd his youthfulle bloome." (132)

Rolfe was inspired by Guido Reni's painting of St. Sebastian, and here the nakedness of the subject is more apparent and more important:

> A Roman soldier boy, bound to a tree
> His strong arms lifted up for sacrifice,
> His gracious form all stripped of martial guise.
> Naked, but brave as a young lion can be.
> Transfixed by arrows he gains the victory. (133)

The poet's interest in nudity is exhibited in his other writings and his photography. Two of his studies of naked youths appeared in the first edition of The Studio (134). Don Renato sees the eponymous hero posing for his father's paintings. It is as if Rolfe is rediscovering the beauty of the nude male body by study of Renaissance paintings. At the same time the study unearths a delight in cruelty. But Rolfe's attraction is easy to understand if one remembers that the male nude was almost absent from nineteenth-century art. The Renaissance then becomes a golden age while Rolfe himself can achieve the simply mechanical through his photographic studies.

In her book The Nude Male Margaret Walters writes:

> Grace, for the Renaissance, is a quality of soul and of body. Christian art, from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries can be seen as a series of attempts to demonstrate this unity, to reconcile flesh and spirit. The fusion is achieved, but only occasionally and precariously. (135).

In Don Renato two boys are taken to represent this division of soul and body, of spiritual and physical. The half-brothers Renato and Eros are the products of different expressions of love. Renato is born in-, Eros out-of-wedlock. Renato's love story is the central theme of the novel: he falls in love with Marcia, and marries her secretly although she is from a class beneath his own. Eros, on the other hand, has early sexual experiences, becomes promiscuous sexually and has fourteen "spurious" sons by the close of the narrative. The division of spiritual and physical is illustrated on the cover of the book. The armorials drawn there represent Renato's cross (St. George's - red on white). Eros has

"the profound nigritude of the ravens cursed by the Divine Phoebus Apollo". (136) Renato's hair "blazed in that obscurity as though some rutilant nimbus clustered in crisp flamelets on his brow of ivory." (137) Eros is black, Renato red.

The difference between the two boys is explored most particularly in relation to sex. Rolfe's deep understanding of boys and boyhood is here very much in evidence. There is little to differentiate the boys until adolescence - little, although the writer closely observes the differences there are. But it is Eros' adolesence that produces the greatest distinction between the brothers. The choices open to them are limited by astrology. Their destinies are in their stars and in their names. Eros (as his name would indicate) pursues a life of uncomplicated sexual promiscuity. He is the slave of his sexuality. (138) Don Renato 'falls in love' and his single passion (for Marcia) dominates his life until death separates them. On Marcia's death Renato turns to religion and becomes a Trinitarian. Renato's greater spirituality is heralded early in Gheraldo's diary, while Eros is precociously like his namesake. The sexual immorality of Eros is perhaps more tolerable for Rolfe because he appears to be bisexual. (139) Nevertheless Rolfe is never dismissive and never judges the youth, although it is Renato who more closely follows Rolfe's own ambitions and enters the priesthood. By joining the Trinitarians Renato gives up his own life that his son may inherit the Santacroce title. Furthermore Renato may have to ransom himself to the Moors to redeem the lives of captive Christians. (140) This is the kind of self-forgetfulness which Renato has displayed throughout the novel. His beauty is not a

complication to his humility. He wears his beauty easily and does not abuse it. At the end of the novel his transformation from boy to man is complete and he fulfils his name-destiny. By becoming Fra Giorgio Renato is nearer his patron saint and sacred forebear St. George.

Rolfe's beautiful boys differ in one major respect from Wilde's. Dorian Gray's youthful beauty is retained only at the cost of his soul. The Little Prince disfigures his beauty while doing good works. The Happy Prince is forced to realize that beauty can lead to insensitivity and selfishness. The erotic value of male beauty is balanced against morality. Thus although Wilde values the eroticism he devalues it by comparing it with goodness or worthiness. This is ultimately pernicious - one could contrast the different attitudes to the male beauty of Dorian and the female beauty of Sybil Vane to see how Wilde operates a double-standard. In his essay on Christ and Wilde, G. Wilson Knight writes:

> 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 realized this. (141)

I would see Wilde as generally incapable of envisaging the co-existence of beauty and goodness. He censors his own erotic vision and substitutes a stylized Christianity. As I have previously noted, Rolfe's <u>Don Renato</u> is, in part, concerned with the duality of the spiritual and the physical. But these qualities are not mutually exclusive. There is nothing to suggest that Rolfe did not find Renato less erotic a subject than Eros. Physical beauty is not a prerequisite of spiritual beauty, neither is

one dependent on the other. Although Rolfe finds boys sexually attractive, there is no sense in Don Renato that admiration will lead to action. On the contrary he is the spectator, the diarist, the painter always. He poses his models (Prince Marcantonio), he closely observes their habits (Dom Gheraldo), he protects them (Ser Ruggiero). It is the unselfconsciousness of youth that appeals to Rolfe. An entry in Dom Gheraldo's diary reads:

> Gheraldo, which one of mortal men ever anticipated, ever penetrated, ever moved, the mind of puerice? Not Dom Gheraldo Pinarj, whose office, whose onerous office, it is to follow, to smooth difficulties, to adapt circumstances, to assist inexperienced innocence, or, on more rare occasions, to obstruct with inremeable interdictions. (142)

The very delicate nature of youth itself is recognized, and Rolfe in no way wants to impede youth's natural growth. In Dorian Gray the hero has the "wonder of youth" and the "wonder of beauty" explained to him in a single afternoon. (143) The explanation destroys him.

A boy is the author of Rolfe's Toto stories. It is Toto who narrates Stories Toto Told Me and In His Own Image. This boy is Rolfe's servant yet his name - short for Theodoro - indicates that he is a gift from God. Toto's is not the blinding beauty of a god, but we can recognize in Rolfe's description the voluptuous beauty of humanity. It is Rolfe's perception of Toto and his friends that translates this earthly beauty to celestial beauty. After the alchemy of earth to gold Rolfe becomes subservient to his servant. Toto's stories reveal a heaven occupied almost solely by youths. These youths have obvious parallels with Toto and his entourage.

In the story 'Being an Epick of Sangiorgio, Protector of the Kingdom' the author speaks through Toto to describe a beautiful youth whose goodness becomes legendary. St. George was, as I have previously pointed out, one of Rolfe's favourite saints and is a keystone in his writing on youths. Here Rolfe describes St. George heraldically but includes idiosyncratic details and a fin-de-siècle prose-style. For example "... Ser Giorgio stood, with hair most beautiful to see, and shining with the purple light of youth, equipped with arms, and ready for his knightly quest". (144) The "purple light" is closer to nineties London than to conventional hagiology. (145)

The epic of St. George depicts a boy saint whose adventures take place before his adolesence is complete. The conventional end of boyhood - loss of virginity - marks the end of his life. On his wedding night George is called away by Raphael to win his belt and spurs of gold. "Ser Giorgio veiled the ivory of his skin beneath the tunic which he wore in peaceful days. It was as white as snow ..." (146) But despite the purity of this imagery George is no longer a virgin. George has not sinned ("my heart is pure, my eyes are keen, and clear, and innocent of sin" (147)) but his symbolic value, for Rolfe, has been lost. This is George's last battle and he is defeated. As with Eros, it is the pre-adolescent George that interests Rolfe. He can no longer be the spectator nor can he legitimately "follow", "adapt", "assist" or "obstruct" youths fast-growing into adult males.

The Toto stories appear to be concerned with retelling legends of the saints. In this process many of Toto's versions become an

alternative, pederastic, hagiology. The project is based on Rolfe's wish-fulfilment - he has boys at his command. These are the earthly boys (Toto, his brother and their friend). In turn he redraws heaven for all of them. It is a heaven which reflects both pagan and Catholic mythology, the intersection of Rolfe's interest in Latin and mediaeval Italian. Young male beauty becomes a vivid fixation, heaven a place full of this beauty with the old scarcely in evidence. The Padre Eterno supervises in a suitably Rolfean manner. When Toto says "There are, of course, very many boys in heaven..." his off-handedness is itself revealing. (148) The multiplicity of boys is underplayed by this "of course", but is the most important single factor. For Rolfe boys <u>are</u> good, so heaven is naturally a community of boys. In this heaven one would expect to find Carpaccio's ten thousand martyrs as well as all the other martyrs who were, for the writer, so important a sexual and religious symbol.

Wilde's youths are Endymion, Narcissus, Charmides; Rolfe's are almost exclusively Christian - Sebastian, George, Agapito, Maurice. They are often martyrs and their beauty remains unhurt by martyrdom. The Greek ideal, as both Rolfe and Wilde would have seen it, is present in the depiction of these favourites of Rolfe. The Greek influence is "ineradicable" in the part of Italy which Rolfe travels with Toto, and it is ineradicable too in his vision of the boy.

Two of Rolfe's photographs illustrate the article 'The Nude in Photography' in <u>The Studio</u> No. 1 (1893). In the accompanying article the writer,

deploring the absence of the nude in contemporary art, mentions a few subjects which "have enjoyed a suspiciously wide and lasting popularity". (150) Such a subject was St. Sebastian. His sexual attractiveness is underlined, with contrasting effect, in two of the Toto stories. In one, 'About Sanvenanzio, Santagapito and Padre Dotto Vagheggino SJ', a picture of Sebastian is a positive draw for a little church. The peasant women are greatly impressed. "The beautiful figures of Sansebastiano in his picture inflamed their hearts, sometimes to madness, sometimes to death." (151) Rolfe gently mocks the women, the priest and the picture, as does Toto. However, in the tale 'About the Lilies of Sanluigi' Sebastian is used as a personal sex-symbol by the writer. Sebastian is decidedly not cherubic. Toto stresses the martyr's age: he was "eighteen years old when he went to heaven, and so he is always eighteen years old." (152) Sebastian's ally is Pancrazio, aged fourteen. When they greet St. Luigi on his entry into heaven they arrive with their arms locked together:

> /they/ said how pleased they were to see him, he looked up at them shyly and said "Many thanks", and then the vision of Sansebastiano so shocked him that he blushed deeply and re-veiled his eyes... (153)

Toto explains that St. Luigi is shocked by Sebastiano's nakedness:

> When the pagans made a target of him, they stripped him of his clothes, and so he came to heaven like that. You may see his picture in the duomo whenever you choose ...But he was so beautiful and muscular, and straight and strong, and his flesh was so white and fine, and his hair like shining gold, that no one had ever thought of him being naked. (154)

'About the Lilies of Sanluigi' is both a defence of male nudity in art and a stimulus for Rolfe's erotic imagination. He places the reader in St. Luigi's place and defies him not only to see Sebastian's nakedness, but to acknowledge its beauty. This is done with such good humour that it appears to be the simple fairy-like tale that the title announces.

Much of the effect of the Toto stories depends on the reader's awareness of the originals of Toto's yarns and how he, in his innocence, has distorted them. But it is not Rolfe's intention that the reader should mock Toto. The boy's reworkings of classical and Christian mythology often reveal essential elements contained in the originals. For Rolfe these essentials are connected with his homosexuality. The society he depicts is almost totally male. The boys are reliving Rolfe's ideal mediaeval society with master-servant, knight-page relationships. Rolfe's court is like a boy scout troop. (155) The title of the collection of tales - Stories Toto Told Me - could not be more direct, more about the substance and origin of the work. Yet I believe the stories reveal a Rolfe uncharacteristically arch, enjoying the ambiguities of his Italian scenario and using his innocent narrator to expound Rolfe's pederastic vision. We know that there was a Toto (Rolfe recorded his existence in letters and photographed him), and storytelling may have been part of his personality. But Rolfe presents the stories carefully as Toto's own with authorial asides and descriptions of landscape settings.

In many of the tales of Stories Toto Told Me Rolfe is conscientiously following a pattern of Italian story-telling.

In his notes to Italian Folk Tales, Italo Calvino tells us this about folk-tales with a religious theme:

> The cycle of popular legends about Jesus and the Apostles who go about the world is common throughout Italy, and almost always these short narratives pivot around St. Peter, with whom the people are on very familiar terms. Popular tradition makes of Peter a lazy man, glutton, and liar, whose elementary logic is always contrary to the faith preached by the Lord, whose miracles and acts of mercy never fail to put Peter to shame. (156)

Rolfe generally makes the clergy lazy and gluttonous but, interestingly, St. Peter's mother, who features in story number four of Stories Toto Told Me, is singularly mean and avaricious; but I do not want to get involved here with a thematic analysis of Rolfe's Italian stories and their similarities to Italian folk-tales. Suffice to say that these similarities exist, most obviously in Rolfe's St. George story. Calvino reprints two related stories - 'The Dragon with Seven Heads' and 'The Sorceress's Head' - which clearly have origins in the myth of Perseus and Andromeda. (157)

Those parts of Toto's narratives which are teasingly pederastic are Rolfe intruding his tastes on the folk-tale. (A similar intrusion takes place in Don Renato, as we have seen.) But Rolfe unites his learning to Toto's innocence and this unification leads to a complex literary style. The complexity is not hinted at in the simple title Stories Toto Told Me. In story number four 'About Beata Beatrice and the Mamma of Sampietro' we have previously noted the links with the Italian folk tradition. But Beatrice suggests Dante and, importantly for The Yellow Book audience who read the stories, suggests

Dante G. Rossetti, whose paintings and translations had created an aesthetic vogue for Dante. The story deals with Toto's love for Beatrice,"a flower of paradise" (Stories Toto Told Me, p. 379) - a paraphrase of Dante. The boy introduces his girlfriend to Rolfe and asks his permission for Beatrice to accompany them. Toto has known her "since they were babies together" (Ibid, p. 385). Rolfe's recording of the situation - "It was not a boy and a girl who approached me, but a couple of boys - apparently, at least" (ibid, p. 385)- indicates his unwillingness to permit a feminine influence in his world.

Beatrice is dead by the time of the main series of stories which form the collection called Stories Toto Told Me. In story number sixteen, 'The Key and Purgatory', Toto confesses that he used Beatrice as a sort of medium for access to the spirit world. "Not now - Sir, my throat aches when I think - Excuse Me - '✝' Requiescat in pace." (p. 213)

The implication is that in Toto Rolfe has found a source of European story-telling, poetry and romance. Toto is Dante, just as he is Ovid. And more than that - Toto is the inspiration of stories - the boy-hero, the boy-saint, the little woodland god. He is like the snake who consumes himself - the ourobouros.

In a story like 'About these Tales, the Key and Purgatory' the author both reveals and conceals his sources, playing a game with the reader. The composition of the story is as hybrid as those peculiarly Corvine words. Rolfe's pederastic tone

is taken over by Toto. When speaking of his friend Desiderio Toto describes his eyes :

> "Eyes are very good; and the flavian eyes of Desiderio suit me better than all other eyes, better even than the pure eyes of that dove, my brother Guido. That is why I make the creature ride astride my knees, when I recite histories in these forests. I wrap him in my arms, and hold him still, and I look into his eyes. And what I see there, is told by my lips. O, eyes of a glorified cat! O lovely eyes! Eyes clear as the golden wine of Nido di Corvo!" (158)

Here, not only is the tone Rolfe's own but the use of the word 'flavian' (used in Don Renato too and meaning yellow) and the unresisted self-reference 'Nido di Corvo' are obviously Rolfe's. But there is also the densely-worded symbolic world which is at the heart of Don Renato and The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole - "... the flavian eyes of Desiderio suit me better than all other eyes." The desirability of Desiderio is here underlined, and desirability already contained in the boy's name itself. Furthermore, as Toto speaks to his master, his young friend lies asleep in the shade. Toto uses him in a séance, which I shall discuss shortly, and Desiderio is dragged out of a siesta. He "had a little lazy smile playing on his half-open rosy lips ... He appeared to be aware of drowsy pleasures in store." (pp. 214-5)
This is the suggestive pederastic tone; the youth is the living embodiment of the voluptuous Barberini Satyr. The naming process - so much the essence, almost the creative spring of Don Renato - is present in this early work. Desiderio: the desired one. Desiderio: the slothful. Rolfe unites two Latin words: the noun desidero - desire, longing, yearning, and the adjective desidiosus - slothful, idle, lazy. Toto

addresses Desiderio as "Monster of Sloth." (p. 227). Toto's narrative is too densely worded to be a peasant boy's.

'About these Tales, the Key and Purgatory' is significant in other ways. As the title suggests, the story relates facts about the tales themselves. Toto reveals how he has learnt the art of storytelling and indeed, how he gains wisdom. This information is given verbally to Rolfe and is then demonstrated in a bizarre manner. I shall give the verbal information in a contracted form. Toto is speaking.

> "... Frat' Innocente-of-the-Nine-Quires has told me many tales ... he taught me to watch the world with diligent eyes, but especially the people who are on it ... He said that I should learn wisdom by observing people without their skins ... at times I must go away in loneliness, and think, and listen to the wind, or to the sea, or to the voices of the trees and the flowers, or to the whispers of the earth." (pp. 207-8).

Toto tells Rolfe :

> "You have called me improvisatore ... and you are wrong. It is simply the histories which I have from Frat' Innocente-of-the-Nine-Quires, given in his proper words; or in my own words, descriptions of what I know, having seen, having heard ... I am not Domeniddio, who can create things from nothing. I must have grapes and clean feet, before I can make wine." (p. 208)

There is also the matter of Our Lady of Dreams (dealt with in story number nineteen) who "sends a dream-angel to put wisdom into me, and to show me things by night." (p. 209)

So much for the externals of Toto's 'Knowledge' (<u>sic</u>) - the

knowledge of how to tell a story, of how to watch with "diligent eyes". But all knowledge must be renewed and this process Toto explains too. There follows perhaps the most extraordinary pages in all of Rolfe's extraordinary *oeuvre*, where the novelist reveals himself and his inspiration while explaining the inspiration of his Italian peasant. First Toto dives alone into "whatever water may be near." (p. 209).

> "...while I am down there, my eyes pierce the shadows of the depths, and I see; there are voices and I hear them sing ... Afterward, I gain the bank, and I spread myself in the sun like one crucified, until my face is dry; and I stare into the sky, or the sun, or the moon, or a star which I shall choose ... Then I nail myself face downward, stretching hands and feet far and wide; and I breathe the breath of the earth. All the time I keep my eyelids open to the full ... till I see new things, as well as things that I have seen before. And so I learn." (p. 210)

We should note the near-sacreligious "like one crucified" and "I nail myself face downward", Christ-identifications which Rolfe makes by proxy. The theme of bathing (or diving) is a recurrent one for Rolfe. Usually he is the spectator of these exquisite, youthful sports. (In story number seventeen 'About Some Friends' the theme is used in a more conventional way and represents the renewal of baptism.)

Then begins the sequence of disjointed sentences, Rolfe's record of Toto's séance. The séance is a journey to Purgatory and if the reader isn't already alerted by the idea of a journey to Purgatory itself, Rolfe slyly scatters references to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Compare for example, Toto's addressing the angel: "I live. Take me through the Gate of Death" (p. 215) and "*Io non morie non rimasi vivo*" and "*Non*

omo, omo già fui", from Canto xxxiv. (159) Sometimes the references to Dante are obvious. In the following quotation Toto is rambling in his self-imposed trance.

> "Poor souls, in the dark silence and the ice-cold water. (160)
>
> "I shall come here. Oh, yes!
>
> "Yes, ready.
>
> "A grey ladder.
>
> "Light fixed to my head. Hands free.
>
> "I follow you. (p. 222).

In its main details this is a transcription of the Purgatorio, even to "Più lunga scala convien che si saglia" (xxxiv: 54) As he leaves Purgatory Toto sees "Glimmering sparks" which represent the stars seen by Dante on returning to the earth (xxxiv: 133). Subtler references there are too. Toto refers to his brother at the start of the story, "I was a little child then, like Guido" (p. 207), which may be a reference to Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's "first friend". (161)

Carried into the depths of the earth by a Grey Angel (this may be a reference to Virgil depicted as a magus by Botticelli in his illustrations for The Divine Comedy) Toto is anxious to avoid "the Brown Kingdom". However, the underworld he enters is noticeably brown. Rolfe uses 'brown' sixteen times to describe the descent: "Brown cave", "brown darkness", "Brown rocks streaked with veins all white, or patched with lumps of glittering grey", "little brown hole", "Brown Nothingness", "solid wall of brown". "Is that brown bottomless abyss a lake?" (p. 221) is Rolfe's reconstruction of Dante's

boiling lake of pitch in Hell (xxi: 97). The reader is tempted to see the 'Brown Kingdom' as a synonym for anal intercourse, an expression, perhaps, of Rolfe's sexual fears. But more certainly this extraordinary landscape - brown walls, grey ladders, "streaks glittering grey" - is an evocation of Dante's eighth circle of Hell.

> <u>Luogo è in inferno detto Malebolge,/Tutto di pietra di color ferrigno,/Come la cerchia che dirtorno il volge</u>.
>
> (xviii: 1-3)

Malebolge (the evil pouch) is the colour of iron - <u>ferrigno</u> (iron-grey). C. S. Singleton translates this iron-grey colour as "dark stone", ferrigineous - the colour of iron or iron-rust - may have suggested to Rolfe this brown-ness.

The important thing in all this close reading of <u>Stories Toto Told Me</u> is to reveal a little of the cultural thread that makes up Rolfe's <u>fin-de-siècle</u> tapestry. In creating Toto - or re-creating him - two processes are taking place. First, Rolfe sees the beauty of the boy and is inspired by it. He endows the boy's beauty with a cultural signification. Theodoro is born, 'God's gift'; Toto he becomes, diminutive - the little (golden) god. So begins the second process, for Toto, omniscient as a god, can relate cosmological truths, revealing as he does,

Rolfe's creative springs, European cultural history. Like Toto gazing into Desiderio's eyes, Rolfe gazes into his favourite boy's eyes and sees his story.

(iv) Rolfe's last novel begins with an explanation of its title: "In the Symposium of Plato, 193, you will find these words:- '_Tou holou oun tei epithumai kai dioxei eros onoma_': The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole is called Love." (162) In his commentary on the _Symposium_ Sir Kenneth Dover describes this phrase as "an English cliché of much wider application than in this context". (163) But it is fairly obvious from a quick perusal of Rolfe's text that Plato's sentence is used quite literally by Rolfe and that the novel which bears the title is, in fact, an explanation, a restatement, of Aristophanes' lecture in the _Symposium_.

By quoting only the start of 193 Rolfe quietly ignores the context of Plato's statement. This context is the speech by Aristophanes on the nature of Love to explain which the speaker invents a fable which basically illustrates the need of a lover to be with his loved one. But the speech is also a defence and an explanation of homosexual love; indeed, this is its _raison d'être_ within the _Symposium_.

> But they who are a section of the male follow the male, and while they are young, being slices of the original man, they hang about men and embrace them, and they are themselves the best of boys and youths, because they have the most manly nature .... When they reach manhood they are lovers of youth, and are not naturally inclined to marry or beget children ... (164)

This passage informs Rolfe's novel as much as 193, the desire and pursuit of the whole. (Symonds: "we may turn aside to wonder whether modern European nations ... are wise in making Greek literature a staple of the higher education". _A Problem in Modern Ethics_ (1891)). The romance (Rolfe subtitles his novel

'A Romance of Modern Venice') is a homosexual love story but with such a remarkable gender change (the beloved changes from boy to girl at the author's will) that the true nature of the author's affections is not always apparent. I agree with Miriam Benkovitz that in disguising the gender of his love object, Rolfe demonstrates the high commercial hopes he had for The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole: "which will have to be read at least by everyone who comes here [to Venice]." (165) In other words the impetus to write a novel which explained his homosexuality, informed by Aristophanes' defence of homosexuality, was changed by his awareness that such a novel would not sell.

I have said that Rolfe used the sentence from the Symposium quite literally. He restates his title during the novel. For example the hero, Nicholas Crabbe, has an "ever-present sense of incompleteness" and again wonders "when the gods would have done with sending him such detestable samples, masking his desire and impeding his pursuit of alliance."(166) The sense of incompleteness begins when, in the opening chapter, Crabbe is caught in an earthquake while at sea. Alone in his topo he is woken by his angel-guardian and "without further warning, four catastrophic phenomena of incredibly frightful violence tore his life in two." (167) This would correspond with the fabulous description of the gods tearing apart the earliest form of man (or man/woman) contained in the Symposium.

In these opening pages Crabbe is an ancient man. Not only is he, as his name implies, a cancerian, caught like some early form of life between the water and the land, but this dependence on astrology for an identity allies his knowledge

to ancient learning, a sort of pre-science. The scene of his voyage is the scene of a civilization older than Crabbe's own Northern European civilization. He sights "ancient Rhegium" and "ancient Messana". He relaxes by reading Pindar "about the Runner of Thessaly" and then sleeps. "Sleep came with no wooing that night; and, on the soft warm breast of the dusky god, he attained thrice-blessed oblivion". (168) And then comes his prescience (prompted by his angel-guardian: "Like all great and singular men, Nicholas Crabbe maintained a familiar spirit") and the earthquake which splits his life in two. Rolfe makes his hero the victim of the gods: "Never, no never before, had he sailed on a sea lifted so haughtily high as this sea, whose unfaltering billows rolled with velocity by, like high gods in pursuit". (169)

Crabbe's life has been torn in half and he is aware of a new life beginning for him. The narrative echoes this splitting and tearing and after the earthquake two plots emerge with two modes of writing to explicate them. W. H. Auden recognized this when he described the novel: "The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole interweaves a nightmare and a daydream". (170) The new life is Venice and Zildo whom he rescues from the earthquake. Remnants of the old life are represented by persecutions from the past, thinly-disguised caricatures of R. H. Benson and Harry Pirie-Gordon, and letters from solicitors and editors. Auden's image of "interweaving" is correct, and "nightmare" is certainly a description, for the reader, of Rolfe's persecutions. But the opposition of "nightmare" and "daydream" is scarcely apt for Rolfe's romance. Auden ignores the origins of the novel in Plato's Symposium. Despite all we know of Rolfe's life and the way he uses it quite directly in The Desire

and Pursuit of the Whole, the novel is, nevertheless, an illustration of Aristophanes' speech. Auden's briefly stated theory on Rolfe's romance ignores other expressions of dichotomy in the novel - Body and Soul, Love and Hate, the Cloister and the Hearth. More dramatically Rolfe illustrates the differences between reality and the Ideal. But one is not represented by "nightmare" and the other by "daydream".

Crabbe is the victim of the gods. So Rolfe presents the solution (the solution of Aristophanes in the Symposium) - your life has been split in two; find your other half! This happens almost immediately - Crabbe rescues his other half from the wreckage of a village. But of course the story does not end there. Apart from those remnants of his past life which must be confronted and destroyed, Crabbe is not sure if he wants to pursue the wholeness of romantic and physical love. In Chapter XVII for example, he has an insight into Zildo's love for him, Nicholas Crabbe, but he does not act upon this insight: "This indeed was his desire. But, what whole was he pursuing. Priesthood? Or marriage? Neither: till able to choose." (171) Rolfe states his dilemma in a way similar to Wilde, although is is obviously a more sincere statement than Wilde's [see above on Wilde]. Venice marked for Rolfe an end to his hopes of priesthood so dearly sought after in the years previous. Along with the crushing of his hopes for priesthood there came an awareness of his sexuality not in oblique references to friendship or Platonic love, but in the fulfilment of his desires. Venice itself may have contributed to the possibility of actively pursuing his homosexuality. [cf. Symons and his moment of vision]. Refusal of ordination fired Rolfe's paranoia and is the force behind the creation of Hadrian the Seventh. Likewise Rolfe's ideal

of friendship - "the divine friend much-desired" - impossible though it was, when destroyed, leads to the writing of Nicholas Crabbe. Of course there are elements of each of these traits in all Rolfe's writings. But in Venice, along with these traits, is this new statement of Rolfe's hopes. The wholeness he seeks may be the priesthood, but it may also be marriage. Marriage is Rolfe's easily understood code for homosexual relationship - not, it should be stressed, the friendship with Kemp (Nicholas Crabbe) or with Toto (Stories Toto Told Me). Again there are elements of both these friend/servant relationships in Crabbe's relationship with Zildo. The difference in The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole is the (almost) fully-stated sexuality of the friendship. If we are to believe the contemporary letters written to England Rolfe was experiencing his first sexual encounters with youths. Rolfe's long-cherished celibacy had ended, most probably with the recognition that he was much too old for ordination. But the statement of this sexual adventure is not without its poetry, a poetry it must be acknowledged directly lifted from Plato. Compare the Symposium with Rolfe:

> ... when one of them meets with his other half, the actual half of himself, whether he be a lover of youth or a lover of another sort, the pair are lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy, and one will not be out of the other's sight, as I may say, even for a moment: these are the people who pass their whole lives together; yet they could not explain what they desire of one another. For the intense yearning which each of them has towards the other does not appear to be the desire of lovers' intercourse, but of something else which the soul of either evidently desires and cannot tell and of which she has only a dark and doubtful presentiment. (172)

> ... They both /Crabbe and Zildo/ became more rigid as they crossed the Grand Canal: for the most usual unusual thing had happened ... so far, Nicholas had known himself for Nicholas. He was himself; and his body was his own habitation - his own. Other people's were theirs. One could deal with other people's, take them, use them, given or by force: but they remained other people's: they never became one's own .../Zildo & Crabbe/ were bewitched. They were startled beyond measure. (173).

Rolfe's restatement of Plato stresses his previous separateness but he adds: "a blast, as of ram's horns, sang in their ears and rang in their beings, and down went all sorts of separations." (174)

The gods, as I have previously noted, mock and impede Crabbe, and it is only at the end, with a quick change of gender for his beloved, that Crabbe can marry his Zildo. The earthquake gives him an understanding of what Rolfe calls "that ever-moving instability of human things", as well as splitting his life in two. (175) The novel is punctuated with glimpses of beauty - in particular images of dawn which indicate Rolfe's Platonic desire to see in the world intimations of eternity. For example he describes Zildo's eyes as "lovely mistful pellucid ... which, somehow, seemed to be beginning to know all things hidden since the world began." (176) A religious experience one might call this, comparing it to Crabbe's meditations on the icon of Mary of Nikopoieia (see pp. 147-151). This experience of looking into Zildo's eyes implies vision on both sides: Zildo looks out omnipotent and Crabbe by looking into has a glimpse of this omnipotence.

<u>The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole</u> marks a split with the past. Certainly it formulates a new classicized Catholicism hinted at in

Hadrian and *Don Renato*. On his desire for wholeness with Zildo Crabbe meditates:

> What was this hunger, this thirst, this ravenous sense of desire for the Χτημα ες αει of that soul and body? It was not mere everyday lust: his admiration was as great for the naive spring-like soul, for the mind as gently and firmly bright as a star ... Nor was it mere vulgar recognition in the humble manner of Christians (that *latebrosa et lucifruga, natio*, as Minucius Felix calls them) of any inferiority in his own soul or his own body. (177)

The wholeness sought by Rolfe reveals a great difference between him and Wilde. It is a difference between the narcissist and the dandy and it may help to clarify their differing attitudes to Catholicism. Both writers elaborate upon Pagan images - Narcissus becomes Dorian, Apollo Don Renato. And in this elaboration both take advantage of the homosexual suggestion of the classical pattern. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* shows the error of narcissism. The young man, held in awe by his own image, is destroyed by it. Wilde's moral uncertainty is expressed by the division of his personality into two characters, Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wootton. Although Rolfe too represents himself as various characters in his novels they, the characters, all have similar reactions towards the young men at the inspirational centre of the stories. Thus, the entire court is fascinated by the young Renato. But as the boy is an idealized version of Rolfe (red-haired, athletic, a servant of St. George), the novelist is both lover and beloved. Trapped by an image of his former, youthful self Rolfe was the narcissist *par excellence*. While Wilde the dandy plays to his audience Rolfe is so self-engrossed that he forgets his audience. This would help to explain Rolfe's self-cancellation, the withdrawal of *Don Renato* prior to publication and the difficulties made over other works while still in manuscript form.

Rolfe's photographic work follows in the wake of Baron von Gloeden, the most famous photographer specializing in classicized pin-ups. Bruce Russell says of von Gloeden:

> ... for him as for numerous other homosexuals of his class and education, the classics and the world they document offered not only a legitimization of their sexuality but also a vision of the possibility of a new age as different from the present as that of Pericles. (178)

Rolfe had been involved briefly with the men behind the Uranian publication The Artist, so he was aware of the acceptably classicized nature of work produced by contemporary homosexual artists and photographers. (179) Neverthless there is one great difference between Rolfe and von Gloeden. Rolfe's images are produced for paintings (he was a poor draughtsman) and his paintings are all, with a few exceptions, of young saints. His technique - one favoured currently by the painter David Hockney - was to project transparencies onto walls or canvasses and to trace around the projected outlines. In one of Rolfe's existing photographs the image of a young man has the pencilled addition of wings, a shield and a spear making the youthful naked figure into an improbable Michael Archangel. Thus, by a very personal, very Rolfean preference, he transformed potentially classical images into Christian images. His boys are transformed into saints of the Catholic church and as such are quite foreign to the English Protestant eye.

W. E. Houghton states that the Greek myths offered two things to the Victorian mind, "inspiration and escape". (180) Wilde's updating of the Narcissus myth in The Picture of Dorian Gray shows the inspiration clearly, but the myth offers no escape from reality. Indeed the hero's own escape from the reality of ageing is ultimately barred and the hero has his come-uppance at the grim ending of the novel. In the series of Toto stories Rolfe describes a mediaeval paradise with Hellenic accoutrements. As in Don Renato his aim in the Toto stories is to reveal an Italy at once Pagan and Christian. Like an Italian Renaissance scholar Rolfe watches the white bodies of the ancient gods rise from the soil. But by the time of The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole Rolfe had resolved, to some extent, this clash of Christian and Pagan. At the close of the novel Ermengildo says "Nikè!" and in this word, a triple-yolked pun, explains the victory of the mediaeval over

the Hellenic world. Rolfe's hero is called Nicholas and here Ermengildo addresses him affectionately (Nicky) and, in doing so, expresses the victory of love over lust. The two halves are made whole, triumphantly.

Notes

Chapter 2, Part (i)

1 Writings on Rolfe tend towards the purely biographical. Starting with A. J. A. Symons *The Quest For Corvo* (London 1934) this tradition continues through to Miriam J. Benkovitz *Frederick Rolfe: Baron Corvo* (London 1977). Benkovitz stresses her work is not a critical biography. Her title is explained thus: "Baron Corvo is a myth. Behind him is the reality, Frederick Rolfe" (p. xi). Earlier Donald Weeks *Corvo* (London 1971) fired by Symons displays an obsessional interest in Rolfe as a personality. Amongst recent essays G. P. Jones 'Frederick Rolfe's Historical Gallimaufry' *Papers on Language and Literature*, Vol. 14, 1 tries to avoid the purely biographical by concentrating on Rolfe's historical fiction alone.

2 Julian Symons review of *Venice Letters* *TLS* 3/1/75, p. 4.

3 Frederick Rolfe *Hadrian the Seventh* (London 1904). (All quotations in this thesis are from the Chatto & Windus reprint 1971). p. 15.

4 *Ibid*, pp. 13-14.

5 *Ibid*, p. 8.

6 *Ibid*, p. 13.

7. Cecil Woolf and Brocard Sewell 'The Clerk Without a Benefice' - a study of Rolfe's conversion and vocation in *New Quests for Corvo*, ed. Woolf and Sewell, (London 1965), p. 11.

8 This tendency has been loosely labelled 'paranoia'. See for example Pamela Hansford-Johnson 'The Fascination of the Paranoid Personality' *New Quests for Corvo*, pp. 7-11.

9 A. J. A. Symons, *op cit*. (Folio Society edn. London 1952). Appendix 'Rolfe at Holywell', p. 277.

10 Rolfe *op cit*, p. 32.

11 D. H. Lawrence, review of *Hadrian the Seventh*, *Phoenix* (London 1936), p. 327.

12 These references would have been easily recognized by other homosexuals. For Rolfe's sexuality seen in a wider cultural context see Timothy d'Arch Smith *Love in Earnest* (London 1970), particularly chapters 2 & 3.

13 Rolfe *op cit*. p. 53.

14 *Ibid*. p. 53.

15 *Ibid*. p. 392.

16 *Ibid*. p. 335.

17 *Ibid*. p. 397.

18 *Ibid*. p. 293.

19 *Ibid*. p. 301.

Rolfe's feline characteristics are touched upon by David Lodge (Rolfe's Bestiary' in Woolf & Sewell *op cit*, pp. 69-78

20 *Ibid*, p. 303.

21 *Ibid*, p. 146.

22 *Ibid*, pp. 340-1.

23 *Ibid*, p. 153.

Chapter 2, Part (ii)

24 Rolfe *Letters to James Walsh* (London 1972) letter dated 3 November 1904, p. 28 & n.

25 John Glucker "Metrical Pattern in Rolfe" *The Antigonish Review* (Nova Scotia 1970), p. 51.

26 Rolfe *Hadrian the Seventh* (London 1971), p. 2 other references to the novel in this essay shall appear in brackets at the appropriate places.

27 D. H. Lawrence 'Review of Hadrian the Seventh' in *Phoenix* (London 1936), p. 330.

28 Lord Lindsay *Sketches in the History of Christian Art* (London 1847), pp. xiv-xv quoted in Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny *Taste and the Antique* (Yale 1981), p. 121.

29 *Ibid*. p. 142.

30 See: Spartianus *Ecrivains de l'Histoire August* (Paris 1844). [Dion Cassius] Dio's *Roman History* viii (trans. E. Cary) (London 1925).

Also:

Sir Ronald Syme *Emperors and Biography: Studies in the Historia Augusta* (Oxford 1971).
B. W. Henderson *Life and Principate of the Emperor Hadrian* (London 1923).

31 A. J. A. Symons _The Quest for Corvo_, p. 209.

32 _Cambridge Ancient History_ (Cambridge 1954), Vol XI, p. 305.

33 The following exchange takes place in Chapter XVIII [Cardinal Leighton]:" 'Would to Heaven that you would grant me a trifling favour' His Eminency quoted in Greek. It was a most awful and invariably successful dodge to approach the Pontiff in His favourite tongue. He recognized the quotation; and capped it ..." Hadrian VII, p. 323. [Aeschylus?]

34 Spartian (_op cit_), pp 62-3.

35 Marguerite Yourcenar _Mémoires d'Hadrian_ (Paris 1951).

36 This is, of course, apart from the veiled references to _The Greek Anthology_ where Rolfe could mean _any_ of the epigrams, not necessarily the homo-erotic epigrams.

37 Rose's confession at this point is based on Rolfe's experience with Nancy Gleeson-White, the wife of J. W. Gleeson-White the art critic. See Benkovitz _op cit_. pp. 50-52.

38 In his Glossary to _Don Renato_ these terms denote "stark-naked", "stripped", "unclothed in mail", and "unarmed, bare, wearing a single garment". Rolfe's word "vesticipal" means "clothed, pubick, manly". See _Don Renato_ pp. 329-344

39 _Ibid_, pp. 50-1.
See also p. 156.

40 _Ibid_, pp. 105-106.

41 _Ibid_, pp. 67-8.
Agapitus was a 15 year old martyr whose cult particularly flourished in early Christian Rome. Rolfe's use of an obscure saint at this point fits into the pattern in _Don Renato_ of boy saints.

42 _Ibid_, p. 49.

43 Walter Pater 'Pico della Mirandola' _The Renaissance_ [Fontana edition (London 1975)] p. 64.

44 "rise from the earth": this phrase of Vasari's is quoted by Erwin Panofsky _Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art_ (London 1970), Chapter 1, p. 32.

(See above for further evidence of Gheraldo's sense of history of the pagan past particularly the origins of his family the Pinari).

45 As we experience the Prince's actions through Gheraldo's diary, I refrain from adding his observations as a third revelation of the "godlike character of the male body." For this description of Michelangelo's viewpoint see Kenneth Clark The Nude (London, 1956), p. 54.

46 Note here Rolfe's attitude to historical fiction: particularly Don Renato, p. 23 & pp. 37-8 and his aim in writing Don Tarquinio .

47 Hadrian VII, p. 33.

48 Further examples of this combination of truth with nakedness: Hadrian VII, p. 276, p. 393.

49 See Pamela Hansford Johnson 'The Fascination of the Paranoid Personality' in New Quests for Corvo (London, 1965), pp. 7-11.

50 See Rolfe Desire and Pursuit of the Whole Chapter 12, p. 119 and also Symons and Firie-Gordon quoted in Cecil Woolf: Baron Corvo: a Bibliography (London 1972), p. 124.

51 Rolfe Don Tarquinio, p. 5.

52 Ibid. p.5.

53 Rolfe Don Renato, p. 30.

54 Ibid, pp. 37-8.

Chapter 2, Part (iii)

55 The dedication is actually: "Divo Amico Desideratissimo D. D. D. Fridericus". The dedication was accompanied by an extract from a sonnet by Michaelangelo.

56 Only in his friendship with Dr. E. G. Hardy did Rolfe break this pattern. See Miriam J. Benkovitz Frederick Rolfe: Baron Corvo (London 1977).

57 In his 'Prologue' to Nicholas Crabbe Rolfe divides Crabbe's life into four. Hadrian the Seventh is the second of these ("the period when the vernacular multitude came about him (like bees) and were rapacious." Rolfe Nicholas Crabbe (London 1958), p. 13.

58 Ibid, Chapter 15, p. 114.

59 "I've lost touch with him" Ibid

60 Ibid, Chapter 1, p. 18.

61 Symons In the Key of Blue (London 1893) is an obvious forerunner of Rolfe's descriptive prose. The collection of essays contains 'Among the Euganean Hills' which has similarities with Rolfe's Toto stories. The two men share much (although Symons was an atheist).

Tuke is mentioned enthusiastically by Rolfe in Venice "... can't he have here better, and different, flesh, shapes, sun, sea, light, shade, opportunities, pleasures, than he can have at Falmouth?" Undated letter [1909]. Venice Letters, ed. Cecil Woolf (London 1974), p. 20.

62 Rolfe The Desire and Pursuit of The Whole (N.Y. 1953), pp. 130-1.

63 Throughout the novel the hero refers to his claws and his carcapax and his eyes which "shoot out."

64 Nicholas Crabbe, Chapter 1, p. 14

65 Ibid, Chapter 9, p. 66

66 Ibid, Chapter 6, p. 50.

No reason is ever given for Kemp's rustication, but his reference to "an unwarrantable construction" may be an allusion to the incidence of homosexuality at English Universities at this date and the stigma attached to it.

67 Ibid, Chapter 6, p. 50.

Timothy d'Arch Smith has noted the recurrence of the telegraph boy as a Uranian sexual ideal at this period. See Love in Earnest, (London, 1972).

68 Ibid, Chapter 6, p. 52.

69 For Rolfe's obsession with dawn and the rising sun see Encyclopaedia of Philosophy on Giordano Bruno "The sun is frequently mentioned in the Hermetic writings as a god, and it is the chief of the astral gods worshipped in the religion in the Asclepius ..." Rolfe would have encountered Bruno in his research into magic.

70 Nicholas Crabbe, chapter 14, p. 101.

71 Ibid, chapter 15, p. 103. my italics.

72 See Benkovitz op cit, p. 122

73 Nicholas Crabbe, chapter 24, p. 163

74 Ibid, chapter 17, p. 120.

75 For Harland see: Karl Beckson Henry Harland; his life and work (Lond. 1978).

76 Nicholas Crabbe, chapter 20, p. 129.

77 Ibid chapter 24, p. 164.

78 The novel was prefaced with four letters dedicated to 'Apistophilos Echis'.

79 See Nicholas Crabbe, chapter 6, p. 52 and chapter 22 p. 154. Crabbe perceived that Welbeck could not be both publisher and friend." For Rolfe's attitude to collaborators see Rolfe Letters to Harry Pirie-Gordon ed. Cecil Woolf (London 1958) which charts the collaboration of Rolfe with the young Pirie-Gordon and the failure of their friendship.

80 Nicholas Crabbe

81 Ibid. chapter 33, p.238

82 Ibid chapter 33, p. 237.

83 Ibid chapter 34, p. 245.

84 Ibid chapter 34, p. 244.

85 Ibid. chapter 34, p. 246.

86 See Benkovitz op cit, p. 167 & pp. 129-32 on Rolfe & 'Kemp'/Douglas.

87 Rolfe 'About Beata Beatrice and the Mamma of Sampietro' in Stories Toto Told Me, ed. Christopher Sykes (London 1969), pp. 157-166.

88 Rolfe Hadrian the Seventh, chapter 33, p.

89 D. H. Lawrence, op cit, p. 328.

90 Ibid.

91 See Woolf and Sewell 'The Clerk without a Benefice' op cit.

92 In a letter, undated, but probably 1907, 'Michael Field' wrote with regret of "Those eighties, and their damnable aestheticism", but rejoices in the Church she might help to build for her friend from that period, John Gray. (letter in the National Library of Scotland collection). See also below page 226 n.54.

93 G. P. Jones, op cit, p. 99

94 The publication history of Don Renato - first edition issued 56 years after it was first printed - is detailed in Cecil Woolf's introduction to the novel. (London 1963).

95 Rolfe had planned to dedicate the novel to Trevor Haddon, a painter who had contacted Rolfe after reading the dedication to *In His Own Image.* When their friendship ended the dedicatory letters addressed to Haddon were headed 'To Apistophilos Echis' (the untruthloving viper).

96 See Alexandra Zaina 'Don Renato' in Woolf and Sewell *op cit*.

97 Rolfe *Don Renato*, p. 21.

98 *Ibid*, p. 24.

99 *Ibid*, p. 273

100 *Ibid*, p. 46

101 *Ibid*, p. 46, n.2.

102 *Ibid*, pp. 27-30

103 *Ibid*, p. 51, and p. 47

104 cf. Rolfe 'The Armed Hands' *The Armed Hands and Other Stories* (London 1972), pp. 19 & 22.

105 Peter Dale *The Victorian Critic and the Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), pp. 194-5.

106 *Don Renato*, p. 26.

107 *Ibid*, p. 29.

108 *Ibid*, p. 27.

109 *Ibid*, p. 27.

110 Rolfe *Don Tarquinio* (London 1969), Chapter 2, p. 19, n.1.

111 *Don Renato*, p. 119.

112 *Ibid*, p. 29.

113 Particularly in the short story 'The Armed Hands'. Here Rolfe is a "small grey man" who uses his fists (armed with rings) to defend himself against Jesuits. Rodolfo in *Don Renato* becomes celebrated for the introduction of *fist-fighting* to the court of Prince Marcantonio.

114 *Don Renato*, p. 15.

115 *Ibid*, p. 312.

116 *Ibid*, pp. 80-81.

117 "I suppose you know that Santacroce is actually descended from St. George (whom it calls 'of Seriphos' and says that his previous name was Perseys!)"

Rolfe to James Walsh 23rd March, 1903.
Letters to James Walsh (London 1972), p. 12.

118 Don Renato, p. 178.

119 Orlando Furioso was first published in 1516. Ruggiero appears in Don Renato in December 1526. Rolfe's character could not be based in the strict sense, on Ariosto's, although there are parallels between the two.

120 "... many nations were so bold as to derive the beginning of their stock from the Gods (as especially the Romans did), to the entent the original of their people and cities might be more princely and prosperous ..."

From P. Vergil History of England quoted, with modernized spelling in Peter Burke The Renaissance Sense of the Past (London 1969), p. 72.

121 From a letter to Charles Eliot Norton quoted in Robert Hewison: John Ruskin: the Argument of the Eye (London 1976), p. 166.

122 Frederick Rolfe Hadrian the Seventh (London 1971), pp. 8-9.

123 See Benkovitz Fr. Rolfe, Baron Corvo (Lond. 1977).

124 Wilfrid Ward believed that "admiration for the Saints of the Roman Church" was a major element in influencing Hurrell Froude's Rome-ward tendencies. "The worthies of the English Church, even when sharing the tender piety of George Herbert or Bishop Ken, fell short of the heroic aims, the martial sanctity, gained by warfare unceasing against world, flesh, and devil, which they found exhibited in Roman hagiology." Quoted in Louise Imogen Guiney Hurrell Froude (London 1904), p. 285.

125 See above pp.176-7.

126 This cruelty towards beautiful youths is a reflection of Pater in 'Denys L' Auxerrois' from Imaginary Portraits. But I think it is important to note Kingsley's interest in the sufferings of St. Elizabeth of Hungary; for this see Brenda Colloms Charles Kingsley (London 1975).

127 Rolfe The Desire and Pursuit of The Whole (London 1953), p. 181.

128 The painting is hardly recognizable as the work of Carpaccio; it has been over-painted and was most probably the work of pupils. For a modern opinion of the work see Jan Lauts Carpaccio (London, 1962).

129 Rolfe 'Ballade of Boys Bathing' Collected Poems (London 1974), p. 42.

130 This is a theme in both 'The Boy Martyr of Norwich' and 'Sestina yn honour of Lytel Seynt Hew.' 'Sancte Guilelme Norwichiansis Ora Pro Nobis'

131 Rolfe Collected Poems, p. 52.

132 Rolfe 'Sestina yn honour of Lytel Seynt Hew' Ibid, p. 38.

133 Rolfe 'Two Sonnets, for a Picture of Saint Sebastian the Martyr by Guido Reni, in the Capitoline Gallery of Rome' Ibid, p. 57.

134 The Studio (London 1893), Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 105-6.

135 Margaret Walters The Nude Male (London 1978), p. 82.

136 Rolfe Don Renato, p. 57.

137 Ibid, p. 51.

138 Rolfe had been deeply impressed with Reade's The Cloister and the Hearth. In Don Renato he presents these two choices to his characters but complicates the theme by presenting both to Renato (who takes both in time) while presenting Eros with the choice of the bordello or the hearth.

139 For the qualities of Eros see Robert Graves The Greek Myths (London 1960) Vol. 1, p. 58.

140 This was one of the vows taken by Trinitarians. See Don Renato, p. 321.

141 G. Wilson Knight 'Christ and Wilde' in Oscar Wilde: a Collection of Critical Essays ed. Richard Ellmann. (New Jersey 1969), p. 143.

142 Rolfe Don Renato, p. 123.

143 Oscar Wilde Dorian Gray in Collected Works (London 1968), p. 121.

144 Rolfe Stories Toto Told Me (London 1969), p. 29.

145 St. George, in Rolfe's version, has red hair "like an orange in the light of noon" (Ibid, p. 26). This colour scheme, orange and purple, is reminiscent of Rossetti and was in vogue during the nineties.

146 Ibid, p. 41.

147 Ibid, p. 43.

148 'About the Lilies of Sanluigi' Ibid, p. 72.

149 One of his photographs was compared to the delicacy of silverpoint The Studio op cit, p. 108.

150 Ibid, p. 104.

151 For a story about a painting of Saint Sebastian rather similar to Rolfe's see R. & M. Whittkower Born under Saturn (London 1963), p. 179. They quote from Vasari.

152 Rolfe 'About the Lilies of Sanluigi' Stories Toto Told Me p. 71.

153 Ibid, p. 73.

154 Ibid, p. 73.

155 See Mark Girouard The Rise of the English Gentleman (London 1982) for the links between the growth of interest in chivalry in the 19th century and boys' clubs.

See also the essay 'The New Chivalry' reprinted from The Artist in Reade Sexual Heretics.

156 Italo Calvino Italian Folk Tales (trans. George Martin) (New York 1980), p. 724.

157 Ibid, see footnotes to story numbers 58 & 84.

158 Rolfe In His Own Image, p. 213.

159 I have used here a recent edition of Dante The Divine Comedy (trans. C. S. Singleton) (London 1971) but have compared it to the Cary translation which Rolfe would most probably have used himself.

160 cf. Dante Canto xxxii.

Chapter 2, Part (iv)

161 See D. G. Rossetti Dante and his Circle in Collected Works (London 1890), Vol 1., p. 5.

162 Frederick Rolfe Desire and Pursuit of The Whole, Chapter 1, page 1.

163 Sir K. Dover commentary on 193 Plato Symposium (Cambridge 1980)

164 See Plato Dialogues (trans. B. Jowett) (Oxford 1891), 192 p. 561.

165 Quoted by Benkovitz op cit, p. 254.

166 Desire and Pursuit of The Whole

167 Ibid, p. 5.

168 Ibid, p. 5. Rhegium & Messana = Scylla & Carybdis.

169 Ibid, p. 6.

170 W. H. Auden introduction to Desire and Pursuit of The Whole

171 Ibid, Chapter XVII, p.

172 Plato Symposium

173 Desire and Pursuit of The Whole, pp. 117-8

174 Ibid, p. 118.

175 Ibid, p. 175.

176 Ibid, p. 283.

177 Ibid, p. 177.

178 Bruce Russell 'Wilhelm von Pluschow and Wilhelm von Gloeden: Two Photo Essays' Studies in Visual Communications Vol. 9, 2. (Spring 1982), p. 63.

179 Gleeson White, Charles Sayle and others. See Brian Reade Sexual Heretics (Lond. 1972) and Timothy d'Arch Smith Love In Earnest (Lond. 1972).

180 W. E. Houghton The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven 1957), p. 332.

"My master is an unfortunate man;
he would have been a minor poet,
only there is too much competition."

Lady Augusta Smalz on her poetry
teacher from André Raffalovich
and John Gray _A Northern Aspect_

(i) The priesthood so longingly sought after by Frederick Rolfe and abandoned only in the closing years of his life was achieved by John Gray with relative ease. Gray followed on the heels of Rolfe to the Scots College in Rome and he was conscious of this fact. He wrote to his friend and patron, André Raffalovich, from the college in 1901.

> Baron Corvo was one of us. There is a distinct legend of him, but you must have heard all the jokes.

And again.

> Your Corvo book is Toto I presume. Very famous - There is almost litigation about the ownership of one copy I know of ..... The mise en scène is Rocca di Papa and our students without knowing it give passable extracts from Toto when they tell of days at Hannibal's camp. (1)

There are a couple of other references to Rolfe in the Gray-Raffalovich correspondence which have not been commented on before. Gray's comment,"Rolfe was most entertaining. Like the Arabian nights" in a letter dated 25th May 1905 most probably refers to a novel and not to the novelist himself. <u>Don Tarquinio</u> had been published the week before and this comment would demonstrate a certain keenness on Gray's part for Rolfe's intermittent output. But more puzzling is the reference to Rolfe from some months before. Gray is writing to Raffalovich again.

> I also got the Rolfe press-cuttings, calligraphy and seal complete. What he would like to know also, but must not, is that I have lent my copy to the Vatican - to Vatican as he would say. (2)

There is nothing in the context to illuminate this passage. It seems to imply that Rolfe had been written to by either Gray or Raffalovich. Which book was sent 'to Vatican' is open to conjecture although the choice is not wide. The title of most obvious interest would have been <u>Hadrian the Seventh</u>. There are other scattered references to Rolfe in later letters which imply that both Gray and Raffalovich kept an eye on his adventures in a humourous way.

Perhaps, in the light of this evidence, Rolfe was right in thinking that the Catholic community was plotting against him. I mention him here at the start of this chapter on Gray to show something of Gray's own character, his interest in figures from his 90s' past (Rolfe and he had both been published in The Butterfly) and in fellow homosexuals. This interest, curiosity even, was stimulated by André Raffalovich.

I want to examine at this point some of Raffalovich's comments on Oscar Wilde which, I hope, will show the nature of Raffalovich's hatred of Wilde, a hatred which would account for Gray's censoring of parts of his life that had included Wilde. Raffalovich's essay, 'L'Affaire Oscar Wilde', first appeared in 1895. I quote here from the version published as a chapter in Uranisme et Unisexualité: Etude sur différentes manifestations de l'instinct sexuel in 1896. Ironically this was the year of Raffalovich's baptism (upon his reception in the Catholic Church), an event which evidently did not lead to the development of Christian charity in his nature. To us the criticism may seem ludicrously misplaced and misjudged but the context of Raffalovich's comments give them a wide interest. Raffalovich's thesis is that there is not one, single, type of homosexual but several types, the highest of which is the inverti supérieur.

> Le Christianisme naturellement ne changea pas l'uranisme, mais pendant bien longtemps il permit aux invertis supérieurs de suivre frénétiquement et saintement le principle de Platon. ('Rôle historique de l'inversion' p.30)

Later this category - inverti supérieur - and others, were used in his correspondence with Gray in discussing public figures. He writes to Gray.

> Entre nous the 3Bs are a well assorted trio: Dodo: inverti vulgaire; Arthur: superieur et vertueux. Father Hugh in between. The father was very emotional (3)

These thumbnail sketches are hardly scientific in intent. Yet in the context of a scientific work, Uranisme et Unisexualité (which was published by the "Bibliothèque du Criminologie: Publicé sous la Direction du Dr. A. Lacassagne"), Raffalovich showed

himself to be equally sweeping and cavalier. More, he was guilty of including the most damning subjective criticism of Oscar Wilde for whom he had a personal antipathy. One is tempted to see his attitude as inspired simply by jealousy of Wilde's pre-eminent literary success (Raffalovich was a slave in the galleys of various private presses). Wilde was simply not of the inverti supérieur type and that he had once had John Gray in his circle of young admirers must have been especially galling for Raffalovich. The essay 'L'Affaire Oscar Wilde' is headed by a quotation from Lacassagne: "Les sociétés ont les criminels qu'elles méritent." Raffalovich, who had been naturalized as a British subject only in 1891, could congratulate himself, perhaps, on not being responsible for the success of his rival.

> ..... la tragédie qui a Oscar Wilde pour titre est d'une autre nature. Oscar Wilde a été encouragé, toléré par la société anglaise. On l'appelait une institution. Il s'est détraqué de plus en plus, et sous l'empire de la vanité et l'impunité il en était arrivé à la vie plus audacieuse et la plus dangereuse pour la salubrité publique comme pour lui. Il a été victime de lui-même, de la société et de ses amis. (p. 243)

This may seem like fair comment, perhaps a truism, but when he addresses himself to Wilde's literary output and his personality Raffalovich's judgement is a very subjective one.

> On regimba un peu quand il écrivit Dorian Gray, roman peu original (Oscar Wilde n'a jamais été bien original), artificiel, superficiel, efféminé. L'unisexualité y régnait, mais sans rigueur, dans le clair-obscur, dans l'affectation et la crainte. (p. 246).

> Oscar Wilde n'ayant ni le sens de la vie, ni un talent à lui, n'a pu traiter l'inversion ou la perversion sexuelle que faiblement, sournoisement, languissement. (p. 247).

Oddly Raffalovich seems to have absorbed quickly the prejudices of his adopted country. One might say that the whole notion of the inverti supérieur is simply a reworking of the prevailing ethos of the English public school at the time: there is certainly a class bias to the theory. In the following quotation Raffalovich reveals a prejudice close to the heart of the prevailing anti-Irish feeling that had dogged Wilde and which I have previously commented upon. (See above page 46.)

> Oscar Wilde ... a toujours été très Irlandais, pouvant parler plusieurs heures sans se fatiguer, aimant le son de sa voix lente, riant violemment à ses plaisanteries incessantes, faisants souvent l'effet de macher ses mots commes s'ils étaient des bonbons. (p. 243).

As I have said above, this attitude of Raffalovich's may have stemmed from his earlier jealousy of Wilde over John Gray. The exact nature of Gray's relationship with Raffalovich does not concern me here, nor is it possible to do anything more than conjecture upon it. It is interesting to see that their first acquaintance was not especially amicable. This is evident from a number of published comments on the young writer by Raffalovich, linking him, though obscurely, with the Wilde circle.

To my knowledge these comments have not been referred to in recent criticism of Gray. Brief though they are they are revealing:

> Oh, Mr. Spectator, oh, Mr. John Gray, take chestnuts for gems, green carnations for the blue flowers of the ideal .... but do get someone to translate you into good, into rational English. (4)

The connection with Wilde is made quite definitely and seems to affect Raffalovich's attitude to Gray's style. A brief review of Ecstasy: A Study of Happiness translated by John Gray and Alexander Teixeira de Mattos from the Dutch of Louis Couperus is equally unflattering:

> This is a beautiful book so beautiful that I am not going to pause and ponder over the problem: who translated Mr. John Gray's preface? Was it written in English once and then handed over to a Dutchman. (5)

I am tempted to agree with Raffalovich's judgement here: what is sometimes difficult in Gray's poetry becomes simply precious and obscure in his prose, even in letters (and particularly those to 'Michael Field' (6)). It is a judgement however that would not be voiced again by Raffalovich. Soon after the appearance of the above the two men were to become close friends, become, indeed, famous for their friendship. Like Rolfe, and, to some extent. Wilde, Gray has been rather a victim of his own biography.

In Gray's case this has been inevitable: his conversion and subsequent ordination drew a curtain across his life, obscuring the past. Thereafter his life was relatively public and his private life secret to a marked degree. Peter Vernon remarks on Gray's censoring his first collection of poetry, Silverpoints, by buying up copies and destroying them, then coyly remarking to a correspondent on the rarity of his early works. To some extent Gray's biography, in his own lifetime, was a consciously self-constructed one, almost a denial of his humble origins, certainly an evasion. It is due mainly to the researches of Brocard Sewell that we know so much of John Gray today, yet even these researches began, in their earliest published form, with many inaccuracies due to Gray's covering his tracks so carefully (7). I mention this here because Gray's conversion allowed him to change identity as well as his religion. His reception into the Catholic church - and I say this not in judgement of his sincerity - allowed him a conversion of personality.

Despite a recent rash of critical appraisal of Gray's work and three appearances of his story 'The Person in Question', two new editions of his obscurantist novel Park (which because of its first publication date of 1932 I don't deal with in this thesis), and various anthology appearances, I think there is still a great deal to say about Gray's writing, particularly about Silverpoints (1892).

(ii) Silverpoints opens with an epigraph: "en composant des acrostiches indolents", a line from Verlaine's 'Langueur'. In this poem Verlaine is at his most symboliste, his most decadent.

> Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la decadence
> Qui regarde passer les grands Barbares blancs
> En composant des acrostiches indolents
> D'un style d'or ou la langeur du soleil (8)

Gray's poems are not indolent, that is they are not descriptive of idleness; one of the recurring images of the collection is of the tendril, the tangle which I refer to below (pp.211-4) as the natural urge which springs out of nature. It is certainly of interest that Gray chose Verlaine, a poet whose Catholicism was the subject of contemporary discussion in both France and England. "Je suis catholique, mais catholique du moyen-âge" said Verlaine to Arthur Symons (9). Perhaps it is the mixture of the Catholic and the mediaeval with more than a hint of that nostalgia for the eighteenth century that makes Verlaine the presiding genius of Silverpoints (10). Gray had been a Catholic since 1890 and it is difficult to see much of his character, Catholic or otherwise, in Silverpoints. We look at the highly polished, perfectly presented, volume and we see a mask. The poems are in no sequence; the volume is no journal intime; perhaps acrostics would have yielded, on close examination, something more of the young poet's mind. The poems seem, instead, a record of his achievements in sophistication, a parade of swanky dedications.

Ian Fletcher, in his essay 'The Poetry of John Gray', writes that the title derives from a "technical term from engraving" (11). In fact it is a term for a type of drawing where a delicate, nearly invisible mark is produced from the contact of silver wire on prepared paper. It is the near-invisibility that, I would think, drew Gray to the term. The poems in this collection occupy small dark islands on hand-made paper. As Ada Leverson commented,

> There was more margin, margin in every sense of the word was in demand, and I remember, looking at the poems of John Gray (then considered the incomparable poet of the age), when I saw the tiniest rivulet of text meandering through the very largest meadow of margin, I suggested to Oscar Wilde that he should go a step further than these minor poets, that he should publish a book all margin, full of beautiful unwritten thoughts .... (12)

It isn't the promise of "elegant minutiae", as Fletcher would have it, that leads Gray to the term 'silverpoints', but of an image made more difficult by its delicacy of line rather than its tininess. This may be part of the acrostic nature of the volume: the image is obscured by the delicate technique and made more precious too; Gray's poems are made obscure by their language. The title is an echo of Verlaine's Eaux-fortes (Etchings) (c. 1866). Three years previously, in 1890, Stuart Merrill had published Pastels in Prose and later Pierre Louÿs was to continue the drawing analogy with a collection of prose called Sanguines. Gray's use of the term adds something to the list of influences on the volume - Verlaine, Catholicism, the middle-ages, the eighteenth century. Here we have too the Renaissance when silverpoint was most used. Some fin-de-siècle artists rediscovered the delicate drawing technique - one thinks of the Symbolist painters Armand Point (1861-1932) and Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921). Khnopff was, in fact, the recipient of Gray's poetry and wrote to thank the poet for his gift. (13) The mediaeval and Renaissance worlds are united in Point's quaint restatements of Leonardo. The indistinct illustrations by Charles Ricketts for Wilde's The Sphinx may be seen as supporting the rather eclectic imagery of the poet while itself borrowing from various sources, notably the pale grey line of silverpoint. It was Ricketts who designed Gray's first collection of poetry.

The poem which opens Silverpoints is particularly interesting if one keeps in mind the range of cultural references Gray was drawing upon. 'Les Demoiselles de Sauve' is one of Gray's best-known poems and I shall spend a little time examining it, and its context, here. From its opening line:

Beautiful ladies through the orchard pass,

Gray suggests the world of Verlaine:

<u>Beauté des femmes, leur faiblesse et ces mains pâles</u> ....

from <u>Sagesse</u> (14). As Gray's poem continues this late-Romantic mood of Verlaine's, with its ambiguity towards women, intensifies:

<u>.... ces mains pâles</u>
<u>Qui font souvent le bien et peuvant tout le mal</u>

as Verlaine has it. Gray gathers together his images without speaking either of good or bad but implying much. It is an odd poetic world: French, as I have pointed out, but drawing inspiration from Rossetti too. For Rossetti German influences (from, in painting, the Nazarenes) and Italian influences (from late-mediaeval poetry) combined to produce an art suggestive of both the spiritual and the voluptuous. In France the revival of interest in the <u>style troubadour</u> recreated not only the ascetic world of religious seriousness and devotion but also the world of courtly and sentimental love: "<u>l'âge de la féerie et des enchantments</u>" as Chateaubriand described the middle-ages. (15) (In <u>Silverpoints</u> this revived style is most apparent in 'Heart's Demesne' (p. vi) which is dedicated to Verlaine). The English, Rossettian, style influenced the French and the two modes meet in Gray's 'Les Demoiselles de Sauve'.

The first beautiful woman in the poem is the dedicatee Princess Alice de Monaco to whom Gray sent the volume as a birthday present. She was "quite an old woman now" in her own words (it was her thirty-fifth birthday). The poet sent her his photograph with the book.

> I can't say what pleasure both give me - since I first heard you recite, that evening Frank Harris gave us a dinner I was most enthusiastic. They carried me very far away[.] Since then, I saw you again, heard more of that soft music and the charm was to me greater. Now I get that lovely work of art and am intensely grateful and happy. It is <u>all</u> art inside and out .... How gifted you are! (16)

Perhaps the Princess somewhat lessens the poet's pleasure when she adds her opinion that the book was sure to be a success among a "little number of élite". Perhaps this exclusivity would have been a final, and gilded, stamp on the poetry.

The brief correspondence with Princess Alice de Monaco is revealing. The current motif for examining Gray's career is to imply the poet's links with Dorian Gray, a connection I shall myself examine later in this chapter. But although this approach is understandable, the John Gray revealed, in part, by Silverpoints and, more completely, in the correspondence with the Princess is extraordinarily reminiscent of Lucien de Rubempré in Balzac's Les Illusions Perdus. That is not to say that the similarity was at all self-conscious - the links with Dorian Gray are of a different order, belong to a different logic; either Gray imitated Wilde's character or Wilde based Dorian on John; perhaps even both of these possibilities are true, perhaps neither. The similarities to Balzac's fictional hero point to how much, however unconsciously, Gray had absorbed a French style. The comparison is not greatly to Gray's credit but then neither is the traditional comparison with Dorian Gray.

Geoffrey Grigson is among those who speculate on how John Gray, on his salary as a librarian at the Foreign Office, achieved his rapid social climb to become a "poetical, aesthetical, social dandy" (17). Like Lucien de Rubempré John Gray was a poet, handsome, intelligent, and possessing great determination to succeed. It would be tempting to see André Raffalovich as Gray's Madame de Bargeton with her determination to live an artistic life, although not herself an artist. Both the fictional (Madame de Bargeton) and the real (Princess Alice) remind us that Gray's world, like Lucien's, was not bohemian. Rather, it aspired to aristocracy. From the Palais de Monaco Gray received the following letter dated January 15th 1893. He treasured it and it is one of the few letters pertaining to Silverpoints in Gray's collection. (18)

> Dear Poet,
>
> Yes. do send me a copy of your verses, I will treasure it more than words can tell and it will be a rare delight to me to send them. You know what intense pleasure you gave me interpreting to me your strange, weird, fascinating verse ...
> Ne m'oubliez pas Alice de Monaco.

This is reminiscent of the infatuated Madame de Bargeton on hearing Lucien's poetry read in her provincial salon. An interesting confusion is revealed in the second letter of the Princess - the one from which I have already quoted (above p. 206). It rather enhances the impression of Gray as a French poet rather than an English one: indeed Gray becomes several French poets in Princess Alice's eyes.

> Your 'Fleurs' are a chef d'oeuvre - 'Green' also, 'Charleville' is quite beautiful, your 'crucifix' 'wings in the dark' and those gems no. 16-17 but I could quote all; I love every one of them. How gifted you are! .... I like your poetry as much as I do some of the poemes saturnians [sic] it is quite beautiful,
>
> Yours admiringly and devotedly
> Alice de Monaco.

The Princess' eyes have been dimmed by admiration; nowhere does she imply that more than half of the poems she singles out for praise are translations from the French.

Perhaps she was misled by Gray's description of these translations as 'Imitations'. They are impressive translations but not his own verse: 'Green' and 'A Crucifix' were from Verlaine, 'Charleville' from Rimbaud, 'Fleurs' from Mallarmé. This makes the Princess' last sentence rather grim than otherwise, referring as it does to Verlaine's Poèmes Saturniens while ignoring the fact that although seven of the poems from Silverpoints are 'imitations' of Verlaine none of them is from the collection she names as her favourite and only one is in that particular Baudelairean mode ('Clair de Lune' from Fêtes Galantes).

I do not want to draw the reader too much further away from 'Les Demoiselles de Sauve' but shall mention here one final coincidence in the John Gray-Lucien de Rubempré complex. Gray confided in his friend, the poet Pierre Louÿs, in November 1892. This letter and the short story of the same time, 'The Person in Question', have led critics to speak, I think somewhat too freely, of a "breakdown" suffered by Gray at this time.

> Naguère j'ai frequenté les morts[.] Maintenant c'est La Mort qui m'aime main tenant. Ce sont La Folie et La Calomnie qui m'accompagnent. Je suis heritier [sic] . Le terrain riche qui pend entre La Vie et La Mort est presqu' à moi Je vais jouir de mes nouveaux biens présentement .... Je suis bien malheureux. Il y a quelque jours j'étais presque décidé à quitter l'Angleterre, à rétirer me poèmes, [sic], pour devenir citoyen français, pour ne parler jamais plus un mot d'anglais ... J'ai perdu mon père. Je suis très content de la perte. (19).

There was obviously a crisis of some sort in Gray's life at this time. The last sentence, on his father's death, reveals an unattractive element in Gray's personality. This mention of his father reminds us again that Wilde's character, Dorian Gray, although he exists in a familial vacuum, was certainly de bonne famille. John Gray was the son of a journeyman carpenter but did not rejoice in his working-class origins nor, obviously, in his father. We are reminded of Balzac's young poet and his shame of his lowly origins. (20). But the letter to Pierre Louÿs, more importantly, reveals Gray's suicidal thoughts on virtually the eve of the publication of Silverpoints, thoughts which echo Lucien's in Les Illusions Perdus. And both young men fall back into the arms of the Catholic church at this point: our real hero experienced a second conversion (leading to the publication of Spiritual Poems) while our fictional hero is adopted by the demonic Abbé Carlos Herrera. (21)

In confiding to Louÿs that he wanted to become a French citizen and to never speak another word of English, Gray was simply following the poetic urge that had made him fashion his poetry - and his personality - after French models. He must have been gratified at the reception given to Silverpoints by Louÿs.

> Ton livre est admirable. Le jour où je l'ai reçu, je l'ai mis sur une planche au dessus de mon lit, où je ne place que douze auteurs aimés: Chenier, Keats, Shelley, Racine, Ronsard et quelques autres .... je l'ai mise dans un grand cadre en peluche de paurpre et elle est sur mon bureau .... (22)

It is this letter too that gives us evidence that Gray had already broken with Wilde, this only two weeks after the publication of Silverpoints which Wilde had been instrumental in having published. (23).

> Que signifie cette brouille avec Oscar? existe-t-elle encor? écris moi à ce sujet, j'en suis très triste.

To return finally to 'Les Demoiselles de Sauve': not only does Gray evoke the Verlaine of Sagesse but - and one thinks of Madame de Bargeton and her love of Hugo's verse - the whole attempt by the Symbolistes to reinterpret the middle-ages.

> Beautiful ladies through the orchard pass;
> Bend under crutched-up branches, forked and low;
> Trailing their samet palls o'er dew-drenched grass.
>
> (Silverpoints p. v)

This vision - to use the word loosely - might be a description of a painting by a French Symbolist, Aman-Jean, for instance. But this vision is directly related to Rossetti too, the Rossetti whose femme fatale lures men to their deaths.

> In the soft dell, among the apple-trees,
> High up above the hidden pit she stands,
> And there forever sings, who gave to these,
> That lay beneath, her magic hour of ease,
> And those her apples holden in their hands. (24).

R. K. R. Thornton included Gray's poem in the Penguin anthology Poetry of the Nineties in the section headed 'Love and Death'. Others have not seen what would appear to be the poem's true theme: Ian Fletcher, for example, who sees the poem's device without its message.

> The world of Gray's earlier poems is partly the world of Beardsley, melting into Watteau's _fêtes galantes_, but without that melancholy in Watteau which had become accessible to the later nineteenth century .... The ladies of de Sauve are enclosed in the perfection of their own artifice, protected or terribly insulated from nature and human response; yet the theme is treated with heraldic unconcern (25).

Fletcher's mention of Beardsley and Watteau and his use of the word 'heraldic' point to the possible inspiration of the poem in the visual arts, but he fails to see the basically Pre-Raphaelite nature of the _memento mori_, the corruption of death, which ensnares us at the poem's end.

> Courtly ladies through the orchard pass;
> Bow low, as in lord's halls; and springtime grass
> Tangles a snare to catch the tapering toe.

Is this not nature reminding the young, the beautiful and the rich of their final destiny? And this conclusion leads us back to the opening lines to re-examine our perceptions.

> Beautiful ladies through the orchard pass;
> Bend under crutched-up branches, forked and low;
> Trailing their samet palls o'er dew-drenched grass.

Eve is recalled in her original state. Indeed, a Rossettian conceit this, a whole troupe of Eves, beautiful and timeless when nature has grown old and needs support. Gray's opting for a reduced version of samite, "samet", also recalls Rossetti in his early poem 'The Blessed Damozel'.

> Into the fine cloth white like flame
> Weaving the golden thread,

and goes one further in archaism (26).

The ambiguous "palls" are trailed behind reminding us that the mediaeval garment has a modern - funerary - meaning trailing uneasily behind it. Uneasily we think: if this is spring and early morning then why is the pace so measured, so deathlike?

The faded world of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood is renewed in newer, more modern colours in 'Les Demoiselles de Sauve', a process achieved by the introduction of French poses into an English composition. A good example of this francification can be seen in Gray's abrupt introduction of a mediaeval saint into the poem:

> High-crested Berthe discerns, with slant, clinched eyes,
> Amid the leaves pink faces of the skies;
> She locks her plaintive hands Sainte-Margot-wise.

Berthe imitates here Saint Margaret the popular virgin-martyr of the middle ages. This not simply a piece of _chic_ picked up from Verlaine or from the _Symboliste_ neo-troubadours. I think this is a darker _chic_ than either of those and is reminiscent of the device Huysmans uses in _Là-Bas_, studding his demoniac fantasy with references to mediaeval saints. In his description of the chateau of Gilles de Rais Huysmans reconstructs the furnishings of his hero.

> Here and there were high-backed signorial chairs, thrones, and stools. Against the walls were side-boards on whose carved panels were bas-reliefs representing the Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi. On top of the side-boards, beneath the lace canopies, stood the painted and gilded statues of Saint Anne, Saint Marguerite, and Saint Catherine, so often reproduced by the wood-carvers of the Middle Ages. (27).

In _Là-Bas_ too Madame Chantelouve is transformed from a modern Catholic bourgeoise to a mediaevalized devil-worshipper. Gray's Berthe is transformed from _femme fatale_ to saint in a line, a reverse process it is true but none the less alarming, none the less abrupt.

Some of this ambiguity is brought forward into the fourth stanza which bears all of the hallmarks of the post-Fleshly School of poets. Here Gray adds an idiosyncracy: his use of the perverse word that flies in the face of the verse. I refer to the word "bursting" here.

> Ysabeau follows last, with languorous pace;
> Presses, voluptuous, to her bursting lips,
> With backward stoop, a bunch of eglantine.

There is something else - other than Gray's perverse mood - to note here. As Cevasco notes of _Silverpoints_:

> Several of the poems ... can be read as self-conscious critiques of inherited aesthetic assumptions about autonomous art and impoverished nature. (28)

Fletcher speaking of Gray's dandyism as an inheritance of Baudelaire and Barbey D'Aurevilly writes:

> For such a philosophy the natural is the bad; all that is good is acquired and artificial. Life and art are one: thus the self becomes an icon .... (29)

Dowling notes of the collection:

> Throughout _Silverpoints_ Gray dramatizes his sense of the dangerous limitations of late-Romantic Aestheticism by pitting its inflated notion of Art against a subtly rebellious nature (30).

I think the fourth stanza of 'Les Demoiselles de Sauve' is interesting precisely because of how it undercuts the pose of _ennui_ of the neurasthenic Ysabeau with the natural rigour of the honeysuckle (the unstated colour, the unstated curve of the trumpets) in its rather prosaic "bunch". If we return to Fletcher's analysis the links with the Baudelairean dandy become more complex if we recall Baudelaire's own _Journaux Intimes_.

> _La femme est naturelle, c'est-à-dire abominable. Aussi est-elle toujours vulgaire, c'est-à-dire le contraire du dandy._ (31).

Behind their beauty, their voluptuousness, their pretence at saintliness are not Gray's women "vulgar" in this Baudelairean sense? Indeed, I would go as far as to cite Huysmans once more.

In Gray's story 'The Person in Question' the hero, shadowed by a _dopplegänger_, meets his double for the last time on a switchback railway.

> A sudden waft across the still, dusty air, of foin coupé, made me turn my head with revulsion and hate. A strange woman sat beside him! You may guess I soon looked away again; only thankful I was to be windward of the hated odour. A natural, rational woman riding by herself on the switchback! ... (32)

Here the image of hatefulness is coupled with the very naturalness of the woman (the ambiguous "mown hay" of her perfume) and is as expressive of unbridled hatred of woman as Huysmans who regarded woman as _instrumentum diaboli_ (33).

Cevasco misreads 'Les Demoiselles de Sauve' so totally that he writes of the final stanza

> ... this garden, which has been enchanted by Jacqueline, Berte /_sic_/, and Isabeau, becomes more like a palace. (34)

This ignores the point of the final stanza and relegates the entire poem to a mere decoration, a caprice. Having avoided the internal meanderings of the short poem the three demoiselles are tripped up in the last line and are precipitated: where? Not into the dewy freshness of spring grass but surely into fallen apples and the earth. In its ornate, yellow-and-pinkish way, the poem has a moral. Not a moral to be drawn entirely from Catholicism but one from Poe and from both the Rossettis (Christina as well as Gabriel). I was struck by an echo from English poetry some twenty years before _Silverpoints_, from Christina Rossetti's 'Amor Mundi' and its more familiar, now, accompanying illustration by Frederick Sandys. (Fig 8) This is the perfect combination of a contemporary anxiety (in the poem) with the mediaevalized image of human fragility (in the illustration, a pseudo-mediaeval woodcut).

'Oh, what is that glides quickly where velvet
flowers grow thickly,
Their scent comes rich and sickly?' - 'A
scaled and hooded worm',
'Oh, what's that in the hollow, so pale I quake
to follow?'
'Oh, that's a thin dead body which waits
th'eternal term'. (35)

It is not, therefore, French and dandaical elements alone which form Gray's imagination and not only the contemporary *symbolistes.* 'On a Picture: To Pierre Louÿs,' (*Silverpoints* p. xxi) more obviously continues the Pre-Raphaelite tradition and adds a little of the mediaeval 'Demoiselles' tone to Millais' painting.

Pale petals follow her in very faith,
Unmixed with pleasure or regret, and both
Her maidly hands look up, in noble sloth
To take the blossoms of her scattered wreath.

I find the first poem in *Silverpoints* interesting because of what it reveals about Gray, what it hints at, even, about the mysticism of *Spiritual Poems* (1896). Although it - 'Les Demoiselles de Sauve' - isn't a religious poem, its use of the *vanitas* theme, though obscure, has its root in a religious ground. Certainly 'The Vines' (*Silverpoints* p. xvi) isn't about religion or religious experience but its elaborate and obscure motifs suggest a pre-Creation story, a landscape without Adam, without Eve or a troupe of Eves for that matter. The ruminations are all from the vegetable world.

'Have you seen the listening snake?'
Bramble clutches for his bride,
Lately she was by his side,
Woodbine, with her gummy hands.

The snake is listening "in the ground", "listening death away". When the bramble reaches his bride, in the fourth stanza, she is dead, "withered in his grasp." Then the vegetable conversation recommences.

'Till the day dawn, till the tide
Of winter's afternoon.'
'Who tells dawning?' - 'Listen, soon'
Half-born tendrils, grasping, gasp.

I think Linda Dowling is right when she suggests that in this poem Gray distances nature "rendering her less familiar, not more." (36) Yet the unpeopled landscape is important, surely, because the renewal of vegetable life in the 'dawn' of Spring is suggestive of - though admittedly different to - the rebirth of the human spirit after death. In other words the corruption of the flesh is not simply akin to the withering of a vine but they both contain the idea of regeneration. The natural imperative of plant growth is the subject of Gray's 'The Song of the Seedling' (Silverpoints p. vii), a poem which so attracted Katherine Bradley ('Michael' of 'Michael Field') that she wrote to the poet in March 1893:

> Dear Sir,
>
> There are poems in Silverpoints that give me a quite peculiar pleasure, and there is one poem that you have certainly stolen away out of my mind.
>
> When I read - it was read aloud to me - your Song of the Seedling, I said within myself An enemy hath done this. Yes, taken away and printed as his own what I 'feel within myself.' (37)

In the poem the poet addresses a seed, a "murmuring germ" in terms both Blakean and Rossettian. (38)

Tell, little seedling, murmuring germ,
Why are you joyful? What do you sing?

The seedling's answer is at once, oddly, impassive and urgent; I quote all of the second and final stanza to illustrate this:

Rain drops patter above my head -
  Drip, drip, drip.
To moisten the mould where my roots are fed -
  Sip, sip, sip.
No thoughts have I of the legged thing,
  Of the worm no fear,
  When the goal is so near;
Every moment my life has run,
The livelong day I've not ceased to sing:
  I must reach the sun, the sun.

Into the "Blakean world of innocence" as Linda Dowling describes it (op. cit. p. 164) Gray introduces a modern, realist, yet fin-de-siècle note. His repetition of the seed's cry seems to echo, self-consciously, the last cry of Ibsen's Ghosts. This quotation would certainly be possible for Gray who had connections with J. T. Grien and the Independent Theatre Club where a translation of Ghosts was performed in March 1891. (39) Gray's imperative is stated in simple, urgent tones it is true: "the sun, the sun" and not "The Sun! The Sun!" but the inclusion of the words is further evidence of Gray's attitude to nature and to his state of mind during the early Nineties. As Blake addressed the Rose: "O Rose, thou art sick!" so does Gray the seedling with its hectic, syphilitic, energy. The life-force here is intimately linked to death-wish: growth forces the life out, literally and metaphorically. This attitude to nature is present too, and in a clearer statement, in 'Poem - to Arthur Edmonds' (Silverpoints p. xx), the most famous poem in the collection. I quote the work in its entirety.

Geranium, houseleek, laid in oblong beds
On the trim grass. The daisies' leprous stain
Is fresh. Each night the daisies burst again,
Though every day the gardener crops their heads.

A wistful child, in foul unwholesome shreds,
Recalls some legend of a daisy chain
That makes a pretty necklace. She would fain
Make one, and wear it, if she had some threads.

Sun, leprous flowers, foul child. The asphalt burns.
The garrulous sparrows perch on metal Burns.
Sing! Sing! they say, and flutter with their wings.
He does not sing, he only wonders why
He is sitting there. The sparrows sing. And I
Yield to the strait allure of simple things.

Here the vegetable kingdom has no voice, but it is so prodigious, so malign that it needs constant attendance. The medical imagery "leprous stain" and, by association, "burst again", transform the gardener into a surgeon. By using "leprous" at all Gray was being self-consciously decadent. The Daily Chronicle had claimed, only two years before, that Dorian Gray had been produced by "the leprous literature of the French decadents", Enid Starkie commented on the Chronicle's description:

> 'Leprous' was the favourite term of abuse used against any literature coming from France. (40)

Only the sparrows give voice in Gray's poem. In contrast to the undergrowth in 'The Vines' they, the sparrows, make only the simplest of statements describing what in fact their activity should be: " 'Sing! Sing!' they say." Art too is as prosaic as nature and as jaded - "metal Burns" can neither speak nor sing but only ponder. If the poet has no voice in this grim and threatening world then he gives himself up to the inevitable.

> I
> yield to the strait allure of simple things.

This note of yielding to simplicity comes after Gray's more familiar pose of disenchantment with nature. Here the poet personalizes the splenetic, the névrose, giving to its Baudelairean tone overtones, as I have already noted, of Poe and Rossetti; its most extraordinary manifestation is in the untitled poem which I quote here from Silverpoints p. xvii.

> Did we not, Darling, you and I,
> Walk on the earth like other men?
> Did we not walk and wonder why
> They spat upon us so. And then
>
> We lay us down among fresh earth,
> Sweet flowers breaking overhead,
> Sore needed rest for our frail girth,
> For our frail hearts; a well-sought bed.

So Spring came, and spread daffodils;
Summer, and fluffy bees sang on;
The fluffy bee knows us, and fills
His house with sweet to think upon.

Deep in the dear dust, Dear, we dream:
Our melancholy is a thing
At last our own; and none esteem
How our black lips are blackening.

And none note how our poor eyes fall,
Nor how our cheeks are sunk and sere....
Dear, when you waken, will you call?....
Alas! we are not very near.

There is here an indication that Gray knew more about Laforgue's biography than was generally known. Indeed it was 1965 before David Arkell 'rediscovered' Leah Lee Laforgue, the poet's English wife. His discoveries throw an interesting light on this poem of Gray's if read alongside Laforgue's own sequence of poems that make up the Derniers Vers (41). In 'Summer Past' Gray had taken up a note already sung by Oscar Wilde to whom the poem is dedicated.

The beetle humming neath the fallen leaves.
Deep in what hollow do the stern gods keep
Their bitter silence?

Gray suggests the gods-in-exile theme of much English late-nineteenth century verse. Gray's Laforgue poem likewise seems to be about to conjure up the same long summer:

The fluffy bee knows us, and fills
His house with sweet to think upon.

Yet the Wildean theme is not delivered. Instead Gray evokes a mid-Victorian vision - Christina Rossetti springs to mind again, and even Poe - a vision of love corrupted by death.

and none esteem
How our black lips are blackening

And none note how our poor eyes fall,
Nor how our cheeks are sunk and sere ...

The poem's inspiration is more complex than might first appear.

I take a clue from the epigraph printed above the text:

> _Je pleure dans les coins; je n'ai plus goût à rien;_
> _Oh! j'ai tant pleuré, Dimanche, en mon paroissien!_

No writers on Gray have commented on the place these lines have in Laforgue's _oeuvre_. They are from '_Oh! qu'une d'Elle-même, un beau soir_ ....' (Poem ix of _Derniers Vers_). Gray might have quoted from memory as his punctuation differs slightly from the text in a recent edition of Laforgue's poems. I quote the entire stanza here.

> "_Je pleure dans les coins, je n'ai plus goût à rien;_
> "_Oh, j'ai tant pleuré Dimanche dans mon paroissien!_
> "_Tout me demandes pourquoi toi et non un autre,_
> "_Ah, laisse, c'est bien toi et non un autre._" (42)

Gray's reference to the lines could be seen simply as a demonstration of the acuteness of his knowledge of current French poetry. Laforgue had died only five years before the publication of _Silverpoints_. The lines in question had been published in _La Vogue_ in 1886 but it is more likely that Gray knew them from the publication of _Derniers Vers_ in 1890. Gray's untitled poem is not a translation (or 'imitation' as he would have it) of Laforgue's, nor is it dedicated to him or to his memory. The two men had little in common,coming closest perhaps sailing to Cythère under the banner of Watteau with Baudelaire on board.

The movement through time from Spring to Summer at the centre of the poem pushes death out, and forms, like the fresh earth, heaps at the head and foot of the poem. The brief idyll of summer - one stanza long - is broken by death. The corruption of the body hints at the mortality of the summer, of the body and of the earth itself and reflects, obliquely, Laforgue's fixation with autumn and winter in his late verse. (43)

Whose voice narrates this poem? The style is not an imitation of Laforgue's: there is no hint of _vers libre_ or the complex

Shakespearean or Baudelairean imagery of the French poet. Yet it would seem that Gray is eulogising Laforgue by using his own - Laforgue's - poeticized and etherealized voice. This implies that Gray knew some of the details of the sequel to Laforgue's death, the death of his wife which followed some months later. If we read the last line literally - "Alas! We are not very near" - it seems that Gray knew that Leah Laforgue had returned to England to die and had been buried in Teignmouth. The obscurity of the couple - "little people whose lives were essentially little and who lived in a little apartment" as George Moore described them (44) - is underlined by the feeling of isolation in death, not only from the world but from each other: "Our melancholy is a thing/At last our own."

It is not the biographical nature of the poem which alone is of interest: here Gray describes the poet's own, actual, death while at the same time he paraphrases the content of the *Derniers Vers* with Laforgue's Hamletian hesitation and his ruminations on the death of love. In the poem '*Sur Une Defunte*' lies one of the germs of Gray's poem.

> *Je me dirai: Oh! à cette heure,*
> *Elle est bien loin, elle pleure*
> *Le grand vent se lamente aussi,*
> *Et Moi je suis seul dans ma demeure,*
> *Avec mon noble coeur tout transi,*
> *Et sans amour et sans personne,*
> *Car tout est misère, tout est automne,*
> *Tout est endurci et sans merci.* (45)

In his poem Gray translates Laforgue's statement "*Elle est bien loin*" into the sigh: "Alas! we are not very near." The bleakness of Laforgue's vision of his life and dead love are softened by Gray, perhaps in recognition of the real end of the French poet and his wife. He avoids autumn imagery and, in keeping with the remainder of *Silverpoints*, concentrates on the world in spring and summer which contains its own treachery, as we have seen in 'Les Demoiselles de Sauve'.

(iii) Gray's use of death imagery in _Silverpoints_ in conjunction with flower and plant imagery is, I think, revealing. It reveals a poet who, despite a tendency to dandaical posing in his verse and borrowings from the French _avant-garde_, writes poems with sentimental, Romantic attitudes to death. Spleen, one might say, gives way to dream. Perhaps we have here further evidence of the emotional crisis which commentators on Gray's life note at this time. Certainly the letter to Louÿs, which I quote above page 209, is a clear indication of the death-fixated nature of Gray's vision in the winter of 1892. "_Le terrain riche qui pend entre La Vie et La Mort est presqu'à moi_." The rich earth of _Silverpoints_ producing flowers both healthy and diseased is also a place to moulder in. Gray's vision of social life (to which Dowson thought Gray was given over to incurably (46)) was as jaded as his vision of nature. The short story 'The Person in Question' (c. 1892-3) deals with individual or personal mortality. It is a _doppelgänger_ tale in a London high society setting. The narrator of the story meets a version of himself - "any existing likeness between us was well obscured" - at lunch in the Café Royal (47). Subsequently he becomes obsessed with this older, more tired and worldly version of himself. The plot is presented not as a story but as a document. This is borne out by the story's ending: "This is a fair statement of my 'experience', I hope you will think I have fulfilled my promise." There are two possible origins for this documentary, even confessional, tone. One is the pseudo-documents of pathology that make up a part of the work of Edgar Allan Poe.

> As well as I remember, the first time I saw - or to be quite accurate, the first time I observed - the person in question must have been in the last days of last August twelvemonth; or it may have been at the beginning of September. (p. 13)

A characteristic of this style is a pretence to accuracy in all details, a pseudo-scientific accuracy. But a more contemporary model may have been the kind of documentary evidence being amassed by Gray's friend André Raffalovich. (48)

Again the origins of these statements - personal accounts of one's own psychopathology - is in science. Gray tells us: "I am thoroughly sincere as a student of psychiatry." (p. 18)

Vernon attributes Gray's "psychological crisis" at the time of the publication of Silverpoints as stemming from a rejection of his working-class father (op. cit p. 119). It is interesting to see how this analysis helps us read 'The Person in Question'. The social climber in Gray may have been embarassed by the existence of such palpable evidence of his humble origins. Likewise, in the short story, Gray's narcissism - here very evident - is challenged by the arrival on the social scene by an imperfect version of himself.

> .... I gave myself up to observe this so complete illusion; for such I supposed it to be. The coincidences offered me nothing new, unfortunately - in principle I had for months been accustomed to see my own face suddenly, unexpectedly, younger and better looking, or quite old, looking into my own and very close to me, healthy or haggard, puffed and spotted, or poor and transparent like an angel's. (pp. 15-16)

In citing this as an example of Gray's narcissism I may seem to be giving weight to the argument, current among Gray scholars that 'The Person in Question' and Wilde's Dorian Gray are in some way connected. Certainly the essay on Gray by Isobel Murray is most thorough and convincing on this theme (49), but I agree with Peter Vernon that the analogy is superficial and doesn't get us nearer an understanding of 'The Person in Question' (50). There I see further examples of those themes of mortality which lie almost hidden in Silverpoints. After his first encounter with 'the person in question' the narrator records his emotions quite precisely.

> On Sunday morning I was singularly well. I had slept soundly, the dreamless sleep of the happy dead; dreamless for me at least. Subjects of my complaint enjoy a great many mitigations. Giving to each shock we have the importance it seems to claim, it looks as though a tithe of our experiences would kill us in a very short time. Yet often a perfectly horrible crisis vouchsafes a long sweet sleep of a little child.

> The fact being that outward symptoms mean nothing, beyond their use to come at the disease itself, the shy, silent thing, lurking and working ceaselessly night and day, through sleeping and waking, fair and foul, health and weariness, always just the same. (pp. 18-19)

This paragraph is a good example of what I mean by the documentary (or pseudo-documentary) feeling of the story. The hero's experience leads him to describe his symptoms in terms medical and scientific and nature is seen as relentless, autonomous, deadly. And yet the experience - that of seeing 'himself' - has woken him; he has "the dreamless sleep of the happy dead" (echoes here of the poem on Laforgue's death), but the dreamlessness and the sleep itself are nought: beneath this existence is mortality. Yet curiously, given what we subsequently know of Gray's life - and it is this, I think, that makes the story, though flawed, compelling - there is no direct reference to religion or to the author's comparatively recent conversion to Catholicism (two or three years before).

The following statement is so ambiguous that it could refer either to 'the person in question' or to Christ, either of whom could have acted as a father-figure to the disorientated and fatherless poet.

> At whatever cost I must find him, or know why I ever saw him, who he was, something about him .... Infatuated wretch that I was to think that I could walk alone into the possession of rare knowledge and experience; worse, that I should have been jealous of my fortune. As a matter of fact there is one person to whom I could turn, one person who could tell me what I would know, who could tell me something at all events. (p. 26).

This strikes me as so odd, so strange a note: like the Salvation Army playing for Salome's dance. Yet who this person is who could supply the answer is never named. This evasion makes 'The Person in Question' an interesting document, a story about remorse with no repentance. The entire plot is shrouded in a <u>symboliste</u> mist until the obscurity of the theme

enters into the writer's pen and then the story ends with that rationalist ending I have previously quoted. A retrospective view of this shrouded personal landscape - and a contrast to the despairing letter to Louÿs - shows the scene again with Gray using the more familiar language of religious conversion. The recipient was 'Michael Field'.

> I ran about the world seeking the objects of my desires: and the longer they were unfulfilled increasing my demands. And when it was clearly of no use for me to continue kicking up the dust of the desert and there seemed nothing left but to hide my self and my failure without delay the heavens opened and the world revealed is so wonderful .... (51)

Seeing the world made new and wonderful is indeed a symptom of the convert. (52) After that other <u>attoucnement</u> with 'the person in question' the hero is still, to all intents and purposes, dead. In fact the experience leaves him worse off. While his life had previously been narcissistic, empty in a rather conventional way (<u>ennui</u> being the order of the day), he had appetites which were fed by his vision of the aesthetic life. Witness his fussing about food to please his "fainting appetite" (p. 13); Gray writes of eccentric whims of appetite:

> ....a whim has only life for one occasion. I once had a beautiful dinner; it cost ten and a penny: a pint of claret and a piece of bread, <u>un bout bien cuit</u> .... (p. 14)

This whim of bread and wine, at once so cheap and so expensive, is a one-off; pandering to his appetite is not the way to enlightenment as both his fictional counterparts, Des Esseintes and Dorian Gray, also found out. What is odder in this already odd short-story of Gray's is how the table is set for one course, one experience, and the course, the experience, is not served. The bread and wine are not transformed, the wine, for instance, is always particularized: claret, Niersteiner (drunk with soda-water); the bread is to eat with <u>hors d'oeuvre</u>. This hero of Gray's is truly an aesthete in the Huysmans mould. (53)

Yet Gray denies him - and himself, presumably - the inevitable spiritual rather than culinary experience. "On this occasion I was not quite the hero of the bread and wine", Gray tells us (p. 14), and the failure of the whim of appetite is surely an indication of the failure of this aesthete's world. (54) As I have said, the meeting with 'the person in question' leaves the hero worse off, his fugitive appetite changed to an unchanging obsession.

> Hysteria soon set in, as from hour to hour I had this unappeased craving for what had once been so unpleasant to me ....
> .... That is the tragedy of my life now: what shall I do? I am so broken in my health that I have every cause for concern. For weeks, feeling myself drooping, and in the violent conviction that a sight of him would calm me, I moved from place to place, to every spot where I had ever seen him. (pp 25-6)

Gray's letter to 'Michael Field' some 18 years later (quoted above p.225) unconsciously echoes this hectic pursuit: "I ran about the world seeking the objects of my desires."

'The Person in Question' is a story of unfinished business: thirst and hunger, appetites unsatisfied and of dust and heat, creativity clogged. There is no flourish of conversion, no renaissance, although that was to come with the writing of the four Blue Calendars and Spiritual Poems. For the time being however the narcissist was still to be caught looking, if not at himself, then for himself. The hysteria upon losing 'the person in question' is reminiscent of Francis Thompson's description of the hectic avoidance of the Lover in 'The Hound of Heaven' (which had appeared in print in 1893). An explanation, or resolution, of the hysteria can be found in Spiritual Poems which Gray commenced that same year. (55)

> Lord, if thou art not present, where shall I
> Seek thee the absent? If thou art everywhere,
> How is it that I do not see thee nigh? (56)

In the interval between 'The Person in Question' and Spiritual Poems Gray had decided what, or who, he was looking for even if, as 'Lord, if thou art not present ...' shows, he was not sure where to find it. The conclusion of Thompson's ode might well have been taken to heart by Gray.

> "Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
> I am He Whom thou seekest!
> Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me."

Repentance - the recognition and acceptance of Christ - came about in a second conversion. Gray had, ominously, dealt with the theme of conversion in his translation of Verlaine's 'Le Chevalier Malheur' (Silverpoints p. xxiv). There a cavalier heals a fatal wound by placing his mailed finger into it.

> Suddenly, at the freezing touch, the iron smart,
> At once within me bursts a new, a noble heart.

The drawback to this experience is that it is unique. The cavalier shouts at the healed man:

> "Once only can the miracle
> avail. - Be wise!"

But, as Brocard Sewell has observed, in Gray's case "a second, more effectual conversion" had followed the lean and decadent period of his life: "a common enough happening in the spiritual life." (57)

The repentance theme is treated in three autobiographical poems in Spiritual Poems: 'The Two Sinners: Godfrey & Oliver', 'Repentance: Godfrey & Oliver' and 'Epigram'. What is immediately striking about these poems is that Gray has transferred himself and his friend André Raffalovich into the middle-ages by the use of favourite mediaeval names. (It would be tempting to see Gray's adopting of 'Oliver' to be in some way inspired by Pearl Craigie's use of the name in her pseudonym 'John Oliver Hobbes'). Certainly both names - Oliver and Godfrey - stress peace, accentuating, I believe, the peaceful end to frantic searching. In 'The Two Sinners' the men meet in the darkness of a church ("Darkness cannot smother sin..."). Godfrey is praying

and Oliver banters him, but it is Oliver whose prayer ends the poem:

> "Jesus, hear my prayer;
> Fix and nail my errant
> Feet upon thy cross for my advantage;
> Stay them from their hurrying here and there." (58)

Here Gray is expressing his fear of the purposelessness that led to the 'person in question' incident. Perhaps, seen in this light, Gray was right to turn his back so completely on most of his Nineties friends. After his conversion - his first conversion in 1890 - his lifestyle had not changed: he had been still ambitious, still a dandy. The meeting with his other self had alerted him to the lack of progress in his spiritual life. The close friendship that had grown up between the poet and André Raffalovich allowed Gray to discuss fundamental questions of faith and belief. Such discussion is the basis of the poem 'Repentance' a dialogue between 'Oliver' and 'Godfrey' as to the meaning and purpose of repentance:

> G. Is it his mercy or his judgment rod?
> O. Repentance is an unsought gift of God.
> G. Is it application, in his righteousness,
> Wrought upon man by God, for pardon?
> O. Yes.
> G. Vain my salvation, vain the holocaust;
> If I repent not truly, I am lost.

Repentance allows Gray to concentrate on himself as a whole person: before he had felt split. In the last of his own contributions to <u>Spiritual Poems</u> (the others being translations) Gray again wrote in dialogue form but this time the dialogue is between his own soul and spirit. The autobiographical nature of the poem is underlined by the opening:

> When Oliver was twenty-eight years old,
> Spirit and soul made speech, and this was told:

Gray was twenty-eight when <u>Spiritual Poems</u> was published. The poem refers obliquely to the poet's immediate past and suggests the momentous promise of the spiritual life:

SPIRIT. Of all the moments I have held most brave,
I hold this one most critical, most grave.
SOUL. My tale is wrought of chequered shame and bliss;
But all my moments culminate in this.

In seeing a split between the spirit and the soul Gray hints at his investigations into the mystical writings of John of the Cross whose 'Obscure Night of the Soul' Gray translated for Spiritual Poems. The entire poem rests upon the identification by John of the Cross of two stages of meditation upon God, two 'Nights of the Soul'. In fact Gray's reading of the Spanish mystic may have allowed him to express the extraordinary, and unsatisfying, spiritual state that is described in 'The Person in Question': the first 'Night of the Soul' which is, in fact, a 'Night of the Senses':

> This first kind of night ... belongs to the soul according to its sensual part, which is one of the two parts ... through which the soul must pass in order to attain to union.
>
> ... the soul that has desires is wearied and fatigued; for it is like a man that is sick with a fever, who finds himself no better until the fever leaves him, and whose thirst increases with every moment. (59)

This state corresponds to the sufferings of the narrator of 'The Person in Question':

> Days and evening and nights I passed,
> haggard, looking for him. My senses
> grew painfully keen as I strained
> sight and hearing for a trace of him ...
> Wherever I was my poor skin, with a
> false sense it should never had had,
> shuddered and queried for a
> symptom of his neighbourhood.
>
> (Gray's italics) (60)

The second 'Night' - 'Night of the Spirit' - brings the sinner close to a true realization of God although he is still in darkness. St. John tells us that this night is the more obscure and dark of the two. One of Gray's recurring images in Spiritual Poems is of darkness penetrated by light:

> Thou dwellest in a light remote and fair.
> How can I reach that light, Lord? ...

as Gray writes in 'Lord, if thou art not present'. It is this second stage of spiritual night that Gray describes in 'Epigram' and other of the Spiritual Poems.

> SPIRIT. Strange, we, of various origin and tide,
> In fear and aspiration coincide.
> SOUL. Here, as we tenant Oliver's clay frame;
> Soul, wraith and body, are we not the same?

This is a promise of wholeness after the period of splitting and spiritual aridity.

St. John of the Cross is the subject of the long poem 'My patron came to Heaven' where Gray describes the consumption of the Saint by the fire of the Sacred Heart. Images of darkness and fire are central to this poem.

> He met the Lover of the Dark Night's tryst;
> Saint John was folded in the hands of Christ.
> He lay upon their wounds, and wept the whole
> Of longing that was in his holy soul.
> Those molten hands were silent ....

This is a reworking of images from St. John's own poem 'The Obscure Night of the Soul' which was extremely suggestive for Gray's own poetry. I quote from Gray's translation of St. John's poem (Spiritual Poems p. lxvii)

> Under the night's dark wing,
> In secret, seen of no one in my flight;
> Nor saw I anything;
> No lantern and no guide,
> Save that which in my heart was all my light.

In his poems in honour of John of the Cross Gray plays with images of light and darkness. In one, describing a picture - "A jewel of the painter's art" (61) - which shows the saint with the infant Christ, Gray uses light to symbolize the love of Christ for the Spanish mystic:

Such company in scope so small
Hold and behold Thee, Sun!
One light is the desire of all,
And John is every one.

Another bears that round, rich name,
Thine eye may light upon; (62)

The living flame of love which inspired John of the Cross is here personified by the son of God made Sun, illuminating everything (63). This is in contrast to the image of St. John in the poem in his honour published in 1896:

Thou art a flame on Carmel; thou'rt a wing
Thyself of contemplation; thou dost fling
All pediments aside; thy wealth is loss.

Thine ecstacy demands the utmost night,
Wherein to espy the Lover's glimmering light;
Thy dearest hope abandonment of men,

Whereby to know the beauty beyond ken. (64)

That Gray was interested in mysticism even while writing Silverpoints is evident, I believe, from 'Complaint: To Felix Fénéon'(p. ix) where Gray combines Blakean images with a motif from the Spanish mystic. Certainly the poem is impenetrable as a love poem yet its hybrid, fleshly mysticism is arresting. Ruth Z. Temple finds it 'inept ... full of padding ... and nonsense." (65)

Men, women, call thee so or so;
I do not know.
Thou hast no name
For me, but in my heart a flame

Burns tireless, neath a silver vine.
And round entwine
Its purple girth
All things of fragrance and of worth.

Thou shout! thou burst of light! thou throb
Of pain!....

It is not ineptness that is striking in this poem but the uneasy relationship between the concepts of mystical love (with Christ as the Lover with his heart in flame) and concepts of conventional, earthly, love. The evocation of the Sacred Heart - the tireless flame, the silver vine, with their overtones of the sanctuary

lamp and altar decoration - is in questionable taste. But the intensity of love is there waiting to be translated back into the mystical writing from whence the image had sprung. (66)

Gray's patron saint, John of the Cross, offered both a source of poetic imagery and, in consequence, a real experience of conversion and its difficulties. Other saints confirmed Gray's experience of conversion - loss of vanity, the world made new, the certainty of Christ's goodness. In *The Fourth and Last Blue Almanack* Gray addressed Mary Magdalen as the very type of penitent seeing in her repentance her loss of vanity and consequent growth of holiness. She experiences the true repentance which had evaded Gray himself.

> .... and though the years
> Gutter thy cheeks and wreck thine eyes with grief,
> There was vouchsafed continual relief,
> To raise a monument of grief so fair
> Blessed be God who gave such wealth of tears. (67)

Elsewhere martyrdom is seen as purification. Two poems in the *Blue Calendars* deal with martyrs killed by order of the Emperor Diocletian: Saint Sebastian (in *The Third Blue Calendar*) and Saint Agnes (in *The Fourth and Last Blue Almanack*). In the poem on St. Agnes, Gray uses the image of Christ's love as a flame which overpowers the actual flames of death by burning. Gray also uses St. Agnes' voice to tell us of the loss of physical beauty in martyrdom and its replacement by faith and grace until the saint is refashioned and renewed:

> Counting death sweetness sooner than deny
> The blessed stigma of the blessed name
> Which quenches flame without with inward flame,
> Challenged to choose, Saint Agnes made reply:
>
> My Lord has set His seal upon my face,
> Engaging all my love to make me sure;
> He set the ring of faith upon my hand,
> Upon my neck the necklace of His grace. (68)

The point I am trying to make here is that there is a continuation of theme from 'The Person in Question' to *Spiritual Poems*. To read 'The Person in Question' simply as an appendage to *Dorian Gray* is to disregard the fact that it points as much to Gray's future (repentance, the priesthood) as it does

to his past (self-indulgence, decadence). In its very incompleteness the story gives us the same feeling of unsatisfying incompleteness that the author actually suffered from. It is, as I say above, a description of a stage in Gray's spiritual development, a stage which I describe as remorse without repentance. The certainty which Gray allows St. Agnes, the certainty that one beauty could be exchanged for another, could not be felt by Gray in his most narcissistic phase. (69)

(iv) It is interesting to see how Gray writes about the conversion of two contemporaries much more famous than he: J.-K. Huysmans and Aubrey Beardsley. In 1896 the publication of *Spiritual Poems* coincided with the publication of the English translation of J.-K. Huysmans' *En Route*. Gray reviewed the novel (first published in France in 1895) with *Là-Bas* (first published in 1891) for *The Dial* (70). There is more than a little irony in a review of novels by the author of the fatal book in *Dorian Gray* by the original - or spurious original - of Dorian himself. The reviewer addresses himself chiefly to the later of the two novels partly because it, *En Route*, is a correction of the impressions contained in the former. The subject was certainly of interest to Gray: Durtal, the hero of both novels, as Gray tells us, "is thrown upon silence and solitude" after the deaths of his two closest friends.

> From the desolation immediate upon his loss, by way of a projected life of Blessed Lidwine, he comes to a point of spiritual uncertainty, that is to say, to the only spiritual situation possible for him. Then begins the story of any conversion in the world's memory .... (71)

Yet Gray was not wholeheartedly in favour of the signs of conversion that Huysmans showed in *En Route*. There is, in the review, a doubt of the French novelist's sincerity. This might be because Huysmans' conversion is based to a large extent on his appreciation and understanding of ecclesiastical artefacts. Durtal's disappointment with the modern church "darkened by the neglect of those altars at which no saint has ever said mass" (72) is almost a parody of that self-consciously aesthetic stance of Nineties converts described by Philippe Jullian (above p. 5).

> Ah, those charitable churches of the Middle Ages, those chapels damp and smoky, full of ancient song, of exquisite painting, of the odour of extinguished tapers, of the perfume of burning incense! (73)

Durtal had been brought back to Catholicism by art:

> More even than his disgust for life, art had been the irresistible magnet which drew him to God. (74)

Yet this aspect, the aesthetic beauty of religion, had been the least attractive part of the novel for Gray. It is revealing - given what I have observed about 'The Person in Question' - that Gray was interested in the spiritual biography contained in the novel to the exclusion of its other themes; he commented:

> Of the study of Durtal himself one feels that, isolated, it would have been more interesting than the whole presentment as it stands. (75)

Gray takes Huysmans to task on the subject of repentance, a subject of particular interest to him. Here Gray shows a confusion, perhaps deliberate, about the identity of the penitent: is it Durtal or Huysmans himself? (76) I quote at some length from the closing sentences of Gray's review:

> The Trappistes were right who told Durtal that every wonder was small beside the fact of his being in any disparition of penitence soever ... His confessor at La Trappe told him that he had been so sick that one might say of his soul: _Jam foetet_; he did not tell him that no other thing could be said of his body. The body of Durtal is as lost as is possible; there is no more hope for that. The soul of Durtal has to make a journey so long that a view of it would ruin him. At the point of utmost progress in _En Route_ he is at the beginning of the purgative life. In a very long time he will still be at the beginning. (77)

If he were writing of anything other than a religious question - spiritual progress - Gray's lack of enthusiasm might be regarded as hostile. As it is there is perhaps less enthusiasm for a fellow convert, a fellow traveller, than is understandable or appropriate. It may be that Gray believed that Huysmans was, like Durtal, "profoundly base". Durtal reveals temptations of the flesh during his particular 'night of the senses', temptations that Gray would never seem to have suffered. It may be also that Gray honestly felt that Huysmans had been too easily attracted by the artefacts of Catholicism. Occasionally

in En Route the novelist was at his most characteristic, seizing on the decorative and manufactured with his penchant for the arcane and mediaeval. Huysmans took the middle-ages much more seriously than Gray whose mediaeval poses in Silverpoints are overlaid, as I have observed earlier, with a Paterian sense of cultural history - more catholic than Catholic. Gray noted Durtal's discernment of "a whole new facet of a mysterious gem at any moment", a reference to the jewel imagery in En Route.

> And turning over his prayer-book, seeing the extraordinary circle of offices, he thought of that prodigious jewel, that crown of King Recceswinthe preserved in the Museum of Cluny.
> The liturgical year was, like it, studded with crystals and jewels by its admirable canticles and its fervent hymns set in the very gold of Benedictions and Vespers. (78)

The spiritual biography which Gray approved of was the result of Huysmans' distaste for the sensuality of his former life. As Robert Baldick notes in his biography of Huysmans:

> The pleasures of life, all of which he had tasted in fact or in fancy, had not only failed to content him, but had awakened in him feelings of shame and self-disgust .... (79)

These were feelings shared, with equal painfulness, by Gray. Yet in his review, 'The Redemption of Durtal', Gray quotes a long passage from En Route describing Trappist monks at meditation; it is a description of great power, yet Gray comments:

> This can only delight, not surprise, coming from the master of this mode. And though it will inform no one, the flawlessness must be noted of the nevropathy which is so important a feature of the book. (80)

Two things strike me here. Firstly, Gray, in his analysis of En Route, ignores the artistic formula which had been worked out for Là-Bas: the "spiritual naturalism" as a way of defeating the monotony and mediocrity of Zolaesque naturalism. Durtal ruminates:

> "We must ... retain the documentary veracity, the precision of detail, the compact and sinewy language of realism, but we must also dig down into the soul and cease trying to explain mystery in terms of our sick senses. If possible the novel ought to be compounded of two elements, that of the soul and that of the body, and these ought to be bound together as in life." (81)

Secondly, Gray fails to see the subtlety of Huysmans' characterization of Durtal which results from the new 'spiritual naturalism'. Durtal's encyclopaedic knowledge often makes him reduce the world to a catalogue or a handbook, while, at the same time, he is left with feelings of inadequacy and failure. Gray reduces En Route to a record of Huysmans' own 'nevropathy' much in the same way as contemporary critics have viewed 'The Person in Question', as solely a glimpse at Gray's nervous, rather than spiritual, state.

Andre Raffalovich sent Gray's review essay to Huysmans explaining, with a hint of embarrassment:

> *Il n'est pas assez sympathique parce que le procédé de savante et tourmentante observation appliquée aux détails de l'Eglise peut froisser malgré lui un Catholique Anglais, plus méfiant à cause du protestantisme tout autour, mais il admire et respecte vivement l'artiste que vous êtes*. (82)

Huysmans had the article translated into French and, in time, replied drily to Raffalovich:

> *Il ne s'étonna pas d'y rencontre, sous la plume de John Gray, des signes de l'incompréhension, fréquente chez les critiques, de tout le côté mystique et simplement réel aussi du livre*. (83)

Gray's involvement with the conversion of Aubrey Beardsley was of a different kind; he was directly connected with the events leading up to Beardsley's conversion to Catholicism and he commented publicly on this event in the introduction to Last Letters of Aubrey Beardsley in 1904 (84). I stress the public nature of the comment because Gray, by this time an ordained priest, was identifying himself with his Nineties past. This might account for the extreme scrupulosity of Gray's introduction with its all but veiled references to the actual career of Beardsley as an illustrator. The artist had been converted in 1897 slightly more than a year before his death. For some time he had been supported financially by André Raffalovich who introduced him to Fr. David Bearne who received him, Beardsley, into the church, and also to Fr. Coubé who was Beardsley's confessor in Paris (85). Both these priests were Jesuits which caused some degree of opposition from others in the Beardsley circle. (86) Raffalovich was the recipient of the majority of the letters contained in Last Letters, the other recipient being Gray himself. Both were anonymous in the published volume.

The publication of Last Letters was an attempt to rescue Beardsley's reputation or, at least, put a different gloss on it. Already the attentions of Frida Strindberg had been turned towards Beardsley's letters and the attention had worried both Gray and Raffalovich. She had purchased the letter to Smithers, the last known letter in Beardsley's handwriting, quoted below page 242. She had made overtures to Mabel Beardsley to write a biography of her brother, a project which Raffalovich advised Mabel on, and, presumably, against. (87) (Raffalovich was the confidante

of both the sister and the mother of the artist both of whom were eventually converted to Catholicism (88)).

> Aubrey Beardsley, about whom much has been written since his death in the month of March 1898, now speaks for himself.

So wrote Gray, ignoring the fact that the letters he reproduced had been severely edited. (89) Gray's disapproval of the former baseness of the penitent, Durtal, was replaced by understanding and acceptance of the failings of another sinner. He writes of the artist:

> Not even the sternest of his critics will deny his sincerity or his sobriety, but such an outspoken man as he was with incorrigible youthfulness of spirit will sometimes shock the anxious, and arouse the suspicion that he is perpetrating a malicious mystification; but it is truer to say that Beardsley's chief preoccupation was to communicate in his drawings the surprise and delight which the visual world afforded himself. (90)

Is this true? Surely Gray is begging more than a few questions about the nature of Beardsley's work, its literary nature in particular as opposed, or in opposition to, "the visual world." This is a theme I shall examine in detail in the final section of this chapter.

Gray dwells on the doomed nature of Beardsley's life as an explanation of his change from the worldly to the spiritual. "What person with any experience of mortal sickness in men and women" he asks:

> will not look a priori for a modification of character in this rare soul under the scourge of disease? (Last Letters p. vi)

In the last illness of the artist Gray sees Beardsley's vision - again I think wrongly - as shifting from the material to the inner and spiritual. The mention of Watteau "his [Beardsley's] master", in the quotation below, is a misrepresentation of both artists and, curiously, for one so interested in Watteau's Voyage à Cythère, it implies a false distinction between Watteau's Catholic persona and his former Cythèrean self:

> ... the accustomed supports and resources of his being were removed; his soul, thus denuded, discovered needs unstable desires had hitherto obscured; he submitted, like Watteau his master, to the Catholic Church. (Last Letters p. viii)

Beardsley's attempts at pinning down the moving, even unstable, visual world are on a par with Watteau's attempts at depicting, not the fleeting visual world alone, but the temporal, the aural, the fleetingness of the sensation of music.

One of the people Raffalovich sent Last Letters to was Henry James who approved of Gray's introduction. He wrote to Raffalovich:

> ...the personal spirit of him, the beauty of nature, is disclosed to me by your letters as wonderful and, in the conditions and circumstances, deeply pathetic and interesting. (91)

Not everyone was so approving of Gray or so moved by Beardsley's piety. Robert Ross, himself a convert and, as I have observed above (page 49), scrupulous in the matter of the conversion of others, reflected on the letters:

> I do not doubt Beardsley's sincerity in the religion he embraced, but his expression of it in the letters. At least, I hope it was insincere. (92)

As Ross continues his argument we discover that his objections are to the recipient of most of the letters, and he makes it clear that he knew only too well the identity of that recipient:

> The letters left on some of us a disagreeable impression, at least of the recipient. You wonder if this pietistic friend received a copy of the _Lysistrata_ along with the eulogy of Saint Alfonso Liguori and Aphra Behn. A fescennine temperament is too often allied with religiosity. It certainly was in Beardsley's case, but I think the other and stronger side of his character should, in justice to his genius, be insisted upon.... If we knew that the ill-advised and unnamed friend was the author of certain pseudo-scientific and pornographic works issued in Paris, we should be better able to gauge the unimportance of these letters. (93)

Ross certainly must have borne in mind Raffalovich's attitude to Wilde in writing the above. The 'pseudo-scientific' work is _Uranisme et Unisexualité_, and it falls as a shadow across the sincerity of the Gray-Raffalovich joint project, _Last Letters of Aubrey Beardsley_. Raffalovich had sent Beardsley a copy of his essay _L'Affaire Oscar Wilde_ at the time of its first publication and Beardsley's answer is missing from Gray's collection. The essay had contained a footnote representing Beardsley's attitude to the _Salomé_ drawings. I quote from the version printed in _Uranisme et Unisexualité_ (footnote 2), p. 249:

> _M. Aubrey Beardsley, un jeune artiste du plus grand talent, eu la malencontreuse chance d'illustrer cette Salomé mediocre de douze dessins que je déplore en les admirant. Mais il n'a pas été dupé de cette publication._

Beardsley's reply to this was as brisk as it could be, given his financial dependence on Raffalovich:

> As to the passage you send me I don't think it could possibly do me any harm; besides I in no way regret my pictures to Salomé. (94)

The last, most famous letter of Beardsley's, shows, however, the urgency of the artist's remorse about other drawings. He wrote to the publisher, Leonard Smithers, nine days before his death:

> Jesus is our Lord and Judge
>
> Dear Friend,
> I implore you to destroy <u>all</u> copies of Lysistrata and bad drawings. Show <u>this</u> to Pollitt and conjure him to do same. By all that is holy <u>all</u> obscene drawings.
>
> Aubrey Beardsley
> In my death agony. (95)

The circumstances of the writing of this letter - the death agony - make the sentiments at once clear and problemmatic. The only way one could have a single, clear statement from Beardsley on his spiritual progress would be to isolate, by editing, certain statements in the letters. This is what Gray did for <u>Last Letters</u>. (96) Otherwise there is a continual conflict going on in the artist's mind. For example, one has only to look at the juxtaposition of letters to H.C.J. Pollitt and to Raffalovich in March 1897 to see how varied Beardsley's reponses to religion were. In a letter to Pollitt, postmarked 26th March 1897, the artist discusses a drawing of Bathyllus which Pollitt had commissioned; it was hardly a subject which would have met with Raffalovich's approval. (Beardsley was secretive with Raffalovich about his drawing perhaps fearing his patron's censorship). Beardsley confides in Pollitt:

> This morning I was closeted for two mortal hours with my Father Confessor, but my soul has long since ceased to beat. (97)

Five days later Beardsley was received into the Church, an event which he described to Raffalovich thus:

> This morning I was received by dear Father Bearne into the Church, making my first confession, with which he helped me so kindly ... This is a very dry account of what has been the most important step in my life, but you will understand fully what those simple statements mean. (98)

Beardsley explained his feelings to Gray, the day after his first communion:

> It is such a rest to be folded after all my wandering. (99)

The differing attitudes to Huysmans and Beardsley, on Gray's part, must originate in this simple confidence of Beardsley's. It would not have been appropriate for Gray to dampen the artist's spiritual fervour and say, as he had of Huysmans' hero, Durtal:

> At the point of utmost progress in En Route he is at the beginning of the purgative life. In a very long time he will still be at the beginning. (100)

Writing retrospectively in the introduction to Last Letters, Gray noted in Beardsley's final illness

> the gradual humiliation of the physical economy ... accompanied by the proportionate emancipation of the spiritual. (101)

As Gray perceived it, the beginning of Beardsley's spiritual life came at the end of his physical life.

(v) It would be easy to see Oscar Wilde not only as the leading figure of Nineties art but as the archetypal one. However, I feel that Wilde has such strong links with mainstream Victorian culture that to make him the hero of such an autonomous and isolated period as the 1890s is to do the period an injustice. As I have pointed out previously, Wilde can be identified with the mid-Victorian sage-figure. Learning from Ruskin and Arnold in particular, he developed a form of criticism which differed from them chiefly in form. His first weapon was irony. This irony itself underlines his self-identification as 'sage', an identification which culminated in Christ-identification. An ironic Christ may seem a confusing image but it is one which lends itself to Wilde.

The character who best expresses the separateness of the Nineties is Aubrey Beardsley. In fact the period is often referred to as the 'Beardsley period' from Max Beerbohm's quip. (102) Beardsley differs from Wilde chiefly in that he has little continuity with his immediate predecessors (except for Edward Burne-Jones, a relationship I shall discuss here.) If Oscar is 'sage', Aubrey is 'knowing'. Like Max, Aubrey Beardsley had that quality of precocity that makes the child seem adult and the adult child-like, a quality noted by Brigid Brophy. (103) Beardsley quite consciously rejects the wisdom of his elders, and in fact his own wisdom (when, for example, he changes style so rapidly and so conflictingly.) For wisdom he substituted reading. Instead of rhetoric he developed style. This is why both Beardsley and Max appear so opinionated and so arch. They knew the confidence of the widely-read and few of the scruples. Beardsley's

'knowingness' is very different from knowledge. For example, he rarely takes himself, or anyone else, seriously. (104) Even 'serious' subjects like life and death he dismisses in caricature, sometimes compressing both into a single image, as in the foetus-skeleton motif. Often he used a comic-cut technique. His approach to sexuality was always off-hand, always the stance of the unshockable sophisticate.

'Knowingness' implies that the subject has read 'everything'. This seemed to be the case for Beardsley, vouched for by his contemporaries. And here I must note that Beardsley's art depends on literary knowledge. He was an illustrator by temperament, if not by choice. Even among his adolescent drawings there are scenes from Manon Lescaut, Madame Bovary and other novels. It was not enough simply to read everything - Beardsley needed to memorialize his reading, to fix it in visual images. His work ranges from Morte Darthur to Volpone, but one could draw up an alternative list of projects that were never started, or if started, never completed. It would be true to say that whatever the literary subject tackled Beardsley managed to make it his own. There was a tendency in him to personalize the common cultural store to which Volpone, The Lysistrata and the rest belong. Added to these literary-illustrative projects, Beardsley attempted to illustrate Wagner's Das Rheingold. Here again he did not simply stick to a textual evocation, his approach was textural. The whole fabric of plot and music became his subject and although the project was barely begun the results are extremely illuminating both as examples of the illustration of the non-visual and as a key to Beardsley's other work where a simple text accompaniment is the intention.

The drawings for Under the Hill must form a separate category. (105) Here Beardsley is illustrating his own literary efforts with a similar approach to his Wagnerian text/texture experiments. So closely do the three drawings - 'The Abbé', 'The Toilet of Venus' and 'The Fruit-bearers' follow the verbal description that there is a rare confusion as to which is illustrating which. This, I believe, is Beardsley's major attempt at the tendency in the aesthetic movement to merge the arts - especially music and painting - into one. In this case the label 'illustrator' is scarcely apt. It would be a truism to say that the drawings for Salomé can be enjoyed without referring to Wilde's play. But there is indeed something spontaneous, independent about these and other Beardsley illustrations, particularly The Rape of the Lock. It must be added that many of the artist's strangest inventions are contained in borders, grotesques and cul-de-lampes themselves illustrative only of the artist's imagination.

It remains a problem for the critic to find a way into Beardsley's work. This is difficult in two ways. Firstly, Beardsley has been exposed more than any other late nineteenth-century artist to a wide audience in the twentieth century. The availability of the work and the value put upon it is not in itself a block. Anyone interested in the Nineties must have welcomed the Beardsley exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1966. But the subsequent adaptation of illustrations for posters and tea-towels, although a tribute to that very independence from literary text which I have just praised, nevertheless tended to blur the real qualities of the designs. This, I believe, has to do with scale. Beardsley was not essentially a poster designer (although he did design posters). He belongs in books, just as his work springs

from books. His only real training as an artist was in copying from illustrated books and magazines. (106) So to 'blow-up' these designs is to rob them of their real scale. It may be that they work well as large posters but that is not what they were designed for. They are for scrutiny. The eye has access to the space - the chinks and cracks that white marks make on black - but the spectator should be restricted physically, only the eye can explore the space properly.

Secondly, the critic needs an access to Beardsley's language. Like many other 'internalized' artists - Burne-Jones and Rossetti in particular - Beardsley furnishes pictorial space with personal symbols, which are usually, but not always, of constant meaning. It is the process of measuring this space and decoding the symbols that becomes important in dealing with Beardsley. And it is this that chiefly concerns me here.

Beardsley was something of a prodigy - at an early age he drew, played the piano and composed music. But his youthful drawings are not astounding, or even good. The technical brilliance that emerged in Salomé and that was hinted at in Morte Darthur is invisible in his early sketches. They totally lack Beardsley's greatest asset, a feeling for line. Drawings like 'Hamlet' (his first published work, 1892) are intense, finished designs but essentially juvenile productions, although the artist was twenty at the time. The drawings of angels undertaken for the Rev. Alfred Gurney are derivative from Simeon Solomon rather than Burne-Jones and are thereby interesting as the last link in a chain that begins with D. G. Rossetti. They indicate too a tendency which stayed with the artist. Even at the beginning of

his career this ritualistic tendency was allied to an interest in decadence. As Robert Ross says of Solomon: "His whole art is, of course, unwholesome and morbid, to employ two very favourite adjectives." (107) To the young Beardsley 'Adoramus Te' and 'Hermaphroditus' are equally fitting subjects. He deals with both in his pseudo-Solomon style and gives the first to his ritualist friend Gurney and the other to his transvestite friend Julian Sampson. Similarities between Beardsley's work and Solomon's are rarely reflected upon. Burne-Jones is most often cited as the great early influence on the young illustrator. But the similarities are too extreme to be ignored. 'Hermaphroditus', for instance, is much more Solomon than Burne-Jones pastiche. This is evident even from the title. It shows a seated figure, but with no indication of what it is seated on. The figure is completely isolated from background and refers to nothing outside itself, yet it is full of implications. It is a drawing unconcerned with "any fidelity to nature beyond the human frame" to use Ross' description of Solomon's work. (108) The general pre-Raphaelite atmosphere is particularized and Solomon himself is evoked, at a time indeed when his name was scandal and his fame a memory. Strangely, although 'Hermaphroditus' is not a typical Beardsley drawing, the impetus to produce it is one which reappears later in life. When 'broke', he bluntly asks Smithers whether he wants any erotic drawings, and this after his conversion to Catholicism.

Burne-Jones may have become a more conscious model for the young illustrator after the interest the painter showed in his drawings. (109) Beardsley's first commission, the Morte Darthur for Edward Dent, shows how the illustrator had assimilated the

tricks and tendencies of the later pre-Raphaelites. Although the vignettes rival the designs of the Kelmscott press, and although the full-page illustrations are lively and vibrant, they remain, on the whole, what they always were - fake woodcuts.

There is in the Morte Darthur a prevailing motif in the borders and vignettes - the characters caught in the decoration entrelac. This mediaevalized forest of briars and boughs gives way to finer threads, still entrapping the human, but defining a larger space in 'Siegfried' (plate 3), a drawing originally produced in The Studio. Here, the thread-lines of ridges and coastline are reproduced and repeated. It seems that each defining line in the scheme has its echo and that each decorative flourish is itself flourished upon. The drawing vibrates like music played by a full orhcestra - fine and high-pitched at times, at others it can resound deeply. This is not Beardsley's own space - it is Wagner's. Wagner creates a space within the illustrator and this is the exploration of that. 'The Achieving of the Sangreal' is likewise a 'musical' drawing but calmer. The space-defining lines here are horizontal echoes of the base. In 'How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink', one of Beardsley's most familiar early drawings, the scene is successfully depicted because it is so reminiscent of the stage and of Wagner. This makes it one of the less self-consciously mediaeval of the drawings. The border takes too great a liberty with Kelmscott, but the illustration itself is interesting for its complete lack of naturalism. For example, Isolde's hair is an odd, interlaced design. She and Tristram stand on boards like actors and one feels that Beardsley's own Wagnerites are watching the scene from the dress circle. This makes the drawing more ironic than

any of the others in the series. Nature, for instance, is ironically represented by two flowers appliquéd onto two massive curtains. (110) Beyond them (where the audience is, or should be) unearthly waves ripple on a backcloth and a familiar perspective of birds graces the sky. This perspective of birds, which appears in the other two Wagnerian/Arthurian designs discussed here, changes from drawing to drawing. In 'Siegfried' there are three flocks of these birds, closely echoed, perhaps to imitate the vibrations of stringed instruments. In 'The Achieving of the Sangreal' they almost disappear behind the trees, the angle of their flight suggesting peace. In 'The Love Drink' apart from the irony of this personalized, internalized, anti-natural Nature, their notation is sharp, singular, central.

The line-defined space in these and other drawings from this period (c. 1892-3) shows Beardsley's struggle into his own 'space'. The critic must follow if he is to understand Beardsley's work. After the Morte Darthur drawings Beardsley's work never returns to conventionally-expressed space, to Burne-Jones mediaevalism or Simeon Solomon spacelessness. That is not to say that Aubrey's exploration of space in his drawings remains the same from that time onward. One of his characteristics is that he changes style often and dramatically.

The circumstances surrounding the illustrating of Oscar Wilde's Salomé are too well-known to be related here. The illustrations have been described as better than or superfluous to, the text. I believe that it is only relevant to say that the drawings are only tenuously linked to the text and are interesting mainly as evidence of Beardsley's developing skill as a draughtsman.

Two of the plates have links with the Morte Darthur - 'John and Salomé' (suppressed for the first edition in 1894) and 'The Climax' (originally drawn as 'J'ai baisé ta Bouche' in the style of 'Siegfried'). The former drawing has strong similarities to 'The Love Drink' but makes no attempt to define space around the two characters. (111) In the second version of 'J'ai baisé ta Bouche' the artist rids himself of the threaded line which was such a feature of his early work and presents the image in a newer, crisper form. This crispness was to be his trademark henceforth. Despite a new clarity the spatial field is even more confusing and suggestive. For example, in 'The Climax' is Salomé kneeling at or hovering above the edge of a lake of blood? Is it a lake of blood? The white curve too, with its black circles is reminiscent of a peacock's neck, but that would obviously be totally out of scale. It is not important to pursue this line of thinking. It is enough to demonstrate that this new spatial exploration meant that, for Beardsley, conventional space could be disregarded completely. Thus in the entire Salomé collection published by John Lane (112) only two out of twelve illustrations have either a horizon or a floor depicted. This was a technique pursued by Beardsley in his drawings for The Lysistrata where the artist, more sure of his abilities, creates less unintentional ambiguities of space. All the drawings which have some relevance to the text (113) share a theme of interaction between characters in an undefined space. The interaction is most often one of contrast. The rich, fantastic dress of one character vies with the nudity or raggedness of another. There is no sense of continuity either; Salomé changes her costume in every design and in one, the Toilette, changes period to the eighteenth century in dress and the nineteenth

century in reading material. This 'perversion' of things is itself a further element in the unease which the spectator feels. (114) Where exactly in space - or time - do these drawings take place?

I think it is important to pace around these drawings in this way in an attempt to understand their author. We must keep in mind the construction of the images and what Beardsley's method of working was. Early in his career Beardsley discovered a technique of elaborate doodling with pencil which could then be amended by erasing and working with indian ink. In this way the artist could select which elements to retain and which to reject without making new studies (this is the reason why so few working drawings exist for Beardsley's completed illustrations.) It is an original technique for beginning a drawing - I say beginning because Beardsley had a remarkable way of working up a drawing, of finishing, quite apart from his compositional skills. In this way his finish never knew his beginning; the beginning is eradicated. That is why I believe the early drawings are so impressive, they are intermediate stages, hit or miss and Beardsley's adult style allowed no intermediate stage. But this method allowed him almost physically to explore his imagination. In some respects this is similar to the method adopted by Rossetti and Burne-Jones, although theirs is less a method of working than a method of thinking. The intimate spaces of Rossetti arrived at after tortuous adventure with more complex forms of picture-making, are spaces where he can hang symbols of his interests - scrolls of Dante, necklaces, flowers. And he filled the space with a symbol of his own soul, a beautiful woman. (115) Burne-Jones makes private thoughts public,

while personalizing myths and legends common to us all - Perseus, The Round Table, the Sleeping Beauty. This is perhaps Burne-Jones' greatest gift to the Symbolist movement. In their study of Burne-Jones Martin Harrison and Bill Waters refer to works by the painter as "a collection of chiselled images welded into a total composition - 'a reflection of a reflection of something purely imaginary' as the artist put it." (116) It is an indication of our visual and cultural limitations that we speak of the 'Rossetti woman' or the 'Beardsley woman' but not of 'Rossettian pictorial space' or 'Beardsleyesque pictorial space'. For Beardsley particularly the narrative is totally allied to the space it takes place in.

The two versions of 'The Toilette of Salomé' allow us to see different treatments of a theme which was to dominate Beardsley's work for the four remaining years of his life. (Pls 4, 5). This is important because it is here in his second major commission that the illustrator decided to depart from the assigned text, not simply as caprice, but to satisfy a personal taste. Malcolm Easton has written fully of Beardsley's fetishist tendencies. (117) The artist who began to introduce them into Salomé finally wrote his own fetishistic work Venus and Tannhäuser, and illustrated his visions. In this first 'Toilette of Salomé' Beardsley touches upon two other themes dear to his heart - the hermaphrodite and the foetus. The drawing was rejected by John Lane because of its suggestiveness, yet it seems on a par with some of the illustrations for the volume. The second, and published, version is, although less suggestive much more extraordinary. Beardsley arbitrarily changes the period of the play and creates an ultra-modern interior. With its huge negative/positive space, leading

the eye upwards and into the drawing through Salome's cloak. What remains constant in both versions is the grimacing, masked coiffeur (named Cosmé in Venus and Tannhäuser).

It is only when Beardsley opens up the space of the drawing that he can allow this personal fixation to enter. I believe that, despite what one believes to be the immorality of the drawings, they are stranger images for this new idiosyncratic theme. After Salomé Beardsley used the toilette theme in designs for The Rape of the Lock (twice), his poem The Ballad of a Barber, his novel Under the Hill as well as in a cover design for The Savoy, and with the addition of an hermaphrodite reflection for Raffalovich's The Thread and the Path. The theme awoke the curiosity of Brigid Brophy:

> "... his imagination seems to be in at the actual infantile origin of fetishism. His vision is permanently that of a child lying in bed watching his mother dress for a dinner party. His fantasy hangs this here, tries the effect of that there: everything is a jewel, everything is a sexual organ ... The very fastidiousness of his line demonstrates the importance of touching and the fear that has to be overcome in order to do it." (118)

The desire to include such startling private fetishist detail in public work is due to the status that Beardsley already enjoyed by 1893. He was capable of working to amuse himself (119) after the Morte Darthur which had paled for him. His one aim was the grotesque. "If I am not grotesque I am nothing." (120) He liberated his imagination through use of the grotesque and approached illustration as a means of shocking other people and of fulfilling a sexual fantasy. That fantasy was partly fulfilled in the fastidiousness itself as Brigid Brophy has pointed out.

The fastidiousness shifted from exactness in line as in Salomé to the nightmarish massing of detail in Venus and Tannhäuser.

The dressing-table theme in Beardsley has an odd parallel. In an early drawing (c. 1892) 'The Litany of Mary Magdalen' the Saint is depicted kneeling at a prie-dieu. She is trying to concentrate on her prayers but is tormented by sneering onlookers. It is not a successful drawing, yet Beardsley returns to it two years later for 'The Repentance of Mrs. ..... '. There is an ambiguity about this version as it is difficult to know whether Beardsley himself is sneering or whether he is simply recording, as in the earlier version, the scorn of others. However, another scene of repentance, an illustration for Zola's L'Abbé Mouret, is very similar. It too is in an early style, rather similar to a work by Simeon Solomon. Beardsley's drawing shows a priest pleading to a saint at whose effigy he kneels. The saint is probably the Virgin Mary as her image decorates the headpiece of the drawing, where she keeps company with a satyr. The priest's hands are closed, his expression of beseeching. Behind him is an altar flanked with candles. In the design for The Mirror of Love the dressing-table candlesticks are supported by an immense chalice, which reappears (along with a candlestick and an ornamental box) as the frontispiece to Venus and Tannhäuser. 'The Baron's Prayer' from The Rape of the Lock and the frontispiece to Volpone testify further to uses of the altar in various forms. In 'The Baron's Prayer' in fact the twin ideas of ritualism and fetishism meet when the Baron

> —— to Love an Altar built,
> Of twelve vast French Romances, neatly gilt,
>
> There lay three Garters, half a Pair of Gloves;
> And all the Trophies of his former Loves.

The altar with its candles, effigies and tabernacle is disturbingingly likened to the dressing-tables that abound in Beardsley's work. The figures that approach both are always in profile or three-quarters profile. Beardsley appears to be drawing our attention to a perceived similarity of the ritual of the Mass to the ritual of the Toilette. (Plate 6). This may simply be to shock. It may be that so deep is his involvement with female attire that there is a genuine confusion with a religious theme. There is this great difference: the facial expressions of the women dressing are always secretive and pleased, while the faces at the altars are generally tortured or brutalized.

Although I do not believe, as many critics do, that Beardsley's conversion to Catholicism is surprising or questionable, I see the links that he made visually between his religious ideals and his worldliness as bizarre. John Gray's belief that his friend "..came face to face with the old riddle of life and death" and that that led to his conversion (121) is too simple. The difference between his letters to Leonard Smithers his publisher, and André Raffalovich his benefactor, show that he continued to live a double-life even in the face of death. (Not that there is any great evil to be found in Beardsley's collected letters). This duality can be seen in works of a religious character - 'The Mysterious Rose Garden' or 'The Ascension of St. Rose of Lima'.

When Wilde wrote of Beardsley that "[behind] his grotesques there seemed to lurk some curious philosophy..." (122), I think he perceived the coded nature of Beardsley's visual language,

And Wilde had been decoded by Beardsley, not only in the Salomé drawings where Oscar is both Herod and a full, bloated, moon but in a caricature too. Significantly Wilde is seen as plodding through various French sources, and the Bible, to produce, presumably, a hybrid literature of his own. Beardsley's implied criticism has not a xenophobic source; he himself admired the French and borrowed from French eighteenth-century illustration. Perhaps it represents an uneasy recognition that both he, Beardsley, and Wilde had borrowed much of their decadence from foreign sources. In this stark black-and-white world of Beardsley the religious differences, the crisis of faith indeed, of the early and mid-century seem grey and distant. The ascetisicm of Digby Mackworth Dolben and Gerard Manley Hopkins is not simply faded but forgotten. In 1848 Newman feared that (123) English Catholics would reject foreign saints. This fear was not expressed by converts of the 90s. Raffalovich, Wilde and Gray with their interest in St. Sebastian, Beardsley's interest in St. Theresa (124), Rolfe's vision of heaven almost entirely populated with boy saints, few of whom are English: all of them welcome the foreigners of Catholicism with open arms. Beardsley expresses this catholicity, this new Paterianism, when discussing the nature of a Catholic quarterly review with his sister:

> The pictures should be few. Illustrations to such poems as the 'Burning Babe', events from lives of the saints, designs for Church decorations etc. could appear occasionally. The reviews must deal not only with English Catholic work and works, but with all that goes on of importance all over the world. (125)

Notes

Chapter 3, Part (i)

1. From John Gray to André Raffalovich letters dated 9/3/01 and 18/3/01 respectively headed 'Collegio Scozzese'. From unpublished letters lodged in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. I had tried throughout this chapter to use letters not quoted by Peter Vernon (see below note 6) or by Ruth Z. Temple (see below note 10).

2. From Gray to Raffalovich from St. Patrick's Rectory, High Street, Edinburgh. Letter dated 3/12/04. National Library of Scotland.

3. From Raffalovich to Gray dated 11th July (1905?). National Library of Scotland. A. C. Benson would represent the type upheld by Raffalovich's own behaviour and taken a step further by John Gray. (Raffalovich approved of celibacy for the homosexual).

   On p. 238 of Uranisme et Unisexualité Raffalovich comments on A. C. Benson's novel Arthur Hamilton BA which Raffalovich ascribes correctly, at this early date, to "le fils de l'archevêque de Cantorbery [qui] a décrit la vie d'un uraniste supérieur avec beacoup de vérités et de hardiesse."

4. I owe the use of this and the following footnote to Fr. Antony Ross, former Catholic chaplain of the University of Edinburgh, who gave me access to a scrapbook of Raffalovich's which contained various odds and ends of reviews by Raffalovich himself. Unfortunately the source and date are missing from both of the pieces I quote from. From the typeface I suggest both are from Smart Society but I have not checked this. The reference to the Spectator in this extract may be a reference to a review of Wilde's Lady Windermere's Fan which opened on 20 February 1892. The week before Wilde had been present at a meeting of the Playgoers Club when John Gray had delivered a speech on the Modern Actor (see Oscar Wilde Letters pp. 310-311 for the controversy surrounding this occasion.) Although Raffalovich's tone is dismissive here less than 5 months later (if my dating is correct) he and Gray had collaborated on a short play 'The Blackmailers.'
   Smart Society? February 1892?

5. See note 4 above.

   This would appear to be an adverse comment on the preface to Louis Couperus Ecstasy: a study of happiness translated from the Dutch by A. Teixeira de Mattos and John Gray (1892). Smart Society? 1892.

6. Peter Vernon makes this point in his unpublished Ph.D. Thesis 'The Letters of John Gray' (University of London 1976). He quotes Katherine Bradley from the ms. journal (published in part in 1933) Works and Days. "Monday and Tuesday filled with distracting letters from Father Gray. Not one of the simple sentences gives a simple meaning the meaning is scattered as the leaves of the pythoness" p. 13.

7. See Brocard Sewell Two Friends (Aylesford 1963), Footnote to the Nineties (Lond. 1968) and In the Dorian Mode (Padstow 1983).

Chapter 3, Part (ii)

8. 'Langueur' is poem no. 2 in 'A la Manière de Plusieurs' Jadis et Naguère; it was first published in 1883.

9. Recorded by Symons in The Symbolist Movement in Literature (Lond. 1911) p. 98. Wilde's belief that Verlaine was "the one Christian poet since Dante" was revealingly misquoted by 'Michael Field' in an undated letter to Gray: "I fear Oscar is right - the real Catholic poet is Verlaine." n.d. Letter National Library of Scotland.

10. See Ruth Z. Temple The Critic's Alchemy (NY 1953) p. 147 on the relationship between the decadence and the 18th century. "The Dandy of the Decadence harks back to an age when the national ideal was not the prosperous business and empire-builder ...."

11. Ian [Iain] Fletcher 'The Poetry of John Gray' in Brocard Sewell ed. Two Friends (Aylesford 1963) p. 51.

12. Ada Leverson Letters to the Sphinx from Oscar Wilde: With Reminiscences of the Author (Lond. 1930) p. 19.

13. Khnopff wrote twice, in 1895 and 1897, thanking the poet for Blue Calendars. Letters in the National Library of Scotland.

14. I quote from the Garnier edn. Verlaine Oeuvres Poétiques (Paris 1969).

15. Quoted by Hugh Honour Romanticism (Harmondsworth 1979) p. 184.

16. Letter in the National Library of Scotland.

17. Geoffrey Grigson 'Dorian Gray: John Gray' in The Contrary View (Lond. 1974) p. 177.

18. Letter in the National Library of Scotland.

19. John Gray to Pierre Louÿs. Letter dated 24th Nov. 1892. Quoted by Peter Vernon in Letters of John Gray 'Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London 1976).

20. Lucien is only ashamed of his father's family; he adopted his mother's family name (de Rubempré) rejecting his patronymic Chardon.

21. The Abbé tells Lucien "If I wear the priest's habit, I have not the priest's heart. I like to devote myself to some one; that is my weakness." Balzac Les Illusions Perdus((Lost Illusions) trans. Ellen Marriage (Everyman edn. Lond. n.d.) p. 355. Although I have ironically cast Raffalovich as Mme. de Bargeton he is as much John Gray's Abbé Herrera. Oddly enough Raffalovich was interested in the homosexual overtones of Les Illusions Perdus and commented on them to Forrest Reid. (Information from the Reid-Raffalovich correspondence in a private collection in N. Ireland).

22. Pierre Louÿs to John Gray. Letter dated 15th March 1893. National Library of Scotland.

23. In footnote 41 to her article 'The Other Choice' Ruth Z. Temple doubted the accuracy of Peter Vernon's assertion (op cit. p. 25) that Gray had broken with Wilde "two weeks after the publication of Silverpoints." The letter I quote from Louÿs to Gray shows this to be the case: it's date - 15th March 1893 - is evidence of the break. For Wilde's role in the publication of Silverpoints see Vernon op cit p. 8 and Appendix A.

    Louÿs himself had withdrawn from Wilde's company some weeks before the letter I quote. His rejection of Wilde's dedication of Salomé to him had understandably hurt the playwright. (See Wilde Letters pp. 334-5).

24. D. G. Rossetti 'The Orchard-Pit' Collected Works Vol. 1. (Lond. 1890) p. 377.

    This subject was treated by Rossetti in his mural for the Oxford Union 'Sir Lancelot's Vision of the Sanc Grael' in 1857.

25. Ian Fletcher 'The Poetry of John Gray' p. 53.

26. I quote from the 19th stanza of 'The Blessed Damozel' where Rossetti explains the activities of the five handmaidens of the damozel, who

    .... fashion the birth-robes for them
    who are just born, being dead.

    Rossetti gives almost a dictionary definition in this stanza of the nature of samite. Gray's version of the word - 'samet' can be seen a more Malory-esque than Rossetti although Malory uses the spelling 'samyte'.

27. J.-K. Huysmans *Down There* (*Là-Bas*) (anonymous translation: London 1974) p. 102.

28. George A. Cevasco *John Gray* (Boston 1982) p. 51.

29. Ian Fletcher 'The Poetry of John Gray' p. 51.

30. Linda Dowling 'Nature and Decadence: John Gray's *Silverpoints*' in *Victorian Poetry* Vol. 15. No. 2 Summer 1977, p. 164.

31. Charles Baudelaire 'Journaux Intimes' in *Oeuvres Complètes* (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edn.) (Paris 1961) p. 1272.

32. John Gray 'The Person in Question'. I quote from the 1st published edn. (Buenos Aires 1958) p. 24.

33. See Robert Baldick *The Life of J.-K. Huysmans* (Oxford 1955) p. 148. The idea of the diabolic woman occurs in *Là-Bas* in the form of Madame Chantelouve.

34. Cevasco *John Gray* p. 54.

35. Christina Rossetti 'Amor Mundi' first appeared in *The Shilling Magazine* in 1865 with Sandys' illustration. I quote the fourth stanza.

36. Dowling *op cit.* p. 164

37. Katherine Bradley to John Gray. Letter dated March 21st 1893. National Library of Scotland.

38. Both poets have occasion (like Gray here) to address nature directly:

    Little Lamb, who made thee?
    Dost thou know who made thee?

    or

    What thing unto mine ear
    Wouldst thou convey, - what secret thing,
    O wandering water ever whispering?

    Yet neither are nature poets, as such.

39. See David Crackanthorpe *Hubert Crackanthorpe and English Realism in the 1890s* (Columbia, Missouri 1977) p. 40.

40. Enid Starkie *From Gautier to Eliot* (Lond. 1960) p. 106. See also p. 112 where Starkie quotes Richard Le Gallienne's *English Poems.*

    Art was a palace once, things great and fair
    And strong and holy, found a temple there;
    Now 'tis a lazar-house of leprous men!
    O shall we hear an English song again!

41. See David Arkell 'Leah Laforgue' in TLS 10th June 1965, p. 480.

    For a commentary on the themes continued in Laforgue's Derniers Vers see J. A. Hiddleston's introduction to Jules Laforgue Poems (Oxford 1975).

42. Jules Laforgue Poems (Oxford 1975) pp. 208-9.

43. Ibid.

44. Quoted by David Arkell Looking for Laforgue (Manchester 1979), p. 238.

45. Laforgue op cit.

Chapter 3, Part (iii)

46. Actually "I fear given over to social things". See Ernest Dowson The Letters of Ernest Dowson (Lond.1967), p.295.

47. Throughout the section I quote from the edn. of 'The Person in Question' privately printed by Patricio Gannon (Buenos Aires 1958). This quotation is from p. 15. Hereafter I shall put the page number in brackets after the quotation.

48. For example Raffalovich sent a questionnaire to Huysmans while researching Urianisme et Unisexualité: for the result see Pierre Lambert 'Trois Lettres Inédites de André Raffalovich a J.-K. Huysmans' in Two Friends (Sewell ed.), pp. 190-193.

    There is too a tenuous link between Gray's story and a collection of poems by Raffalovich published in 1889. Raffalovich's collection was called It is Thyself and it contains the single most important poem he wrote 'Put on that languor which the world frowns on.' This poem deals with the difference between the seeming shallowness of the homosexual in the face of opposition from the world. It ends:

    > Since twixt the world and truth must be our choice,
    > Let us seem vile, not be so, and rejoice.
    > (It is Thyself p. 144).

    Gray had met Raffalovich during the crisis time of his Silverpoints period and might be unconsciously echoing Raffalovich on p. 20 of 'The Person in Question' when he writes "This person is to be classed in one of several categories; in some near or remote sense he is myself." (Gray's italics).

49. Isobel Murray 'John Gray: The Person and the Work in Question' in Durham University Journal June 1984 pp. 261-275. Murray is particularly interesting in tracing a small but significant theme shared by Wilde and Gray (see p. 264). Patricio Gannon in his introduction to the edn. I am using is most urgent in his pursuit of similarities between Wilde's novel and Gray's story but his argument is conjectural.

50. Vernon op cit p 38.

Vernon quotes Katherine Bradley's story of Gray seeing Wilde in Rome while he was a student at the Scots College; he ignored him. Perhaps his fears expressed in 'The Person in Question' were suddenly justified: that is, meeting with a version of oneself. This story is similar to that at the centre of Housman's Echos de Paris where Wilde is again at the receiving end of a snub.

51. From John Gray to 'Michael Field'. Letter dated May 13 1911. Quoted by Temple 'The Other Choice' p. 43 from letter in Berg Collection NY Public Library.

52. A selection of statements on conversion by religious converts has recently been published. See Hugh T. Kerr and John M. Mulder (eds.) Conversions (Lond. 1984).

53. Rather more of a Durtal (Là-Bas and En Route) than a Des Esseintes (A Rebours), particularly in the matter of food. In Là-Bas Durtal describes the meals he eats almost as meticulously as he does the excesses of Gilles de Rais.

54. I am not implying that after his conversion Gray abandoned aestheticism. In many ways the building of St. Peter's Church in Morningside is a culmination of the aesthetic fastidiousness nurtured by both Gray and Raffalovich in the Nineties. However if comments made by Katherine Bradley are anything to go by Gray's clerical aestheticism did not lend to great spiritual joy. "The altar at Benediction a picture of beauty ... I feel I have no God, no church .... when I am near St. Peter's or in it! The creative passion has stopped at the making of the church .... The Church though raised with devotion is raised in the spirit of caprice ...." (Quoted by Vernon op cit pp. 31-2).

55. See Ruth Z. Temple 'The Other Choice' n. 66, p. 37.

56. Spiritual Poems, p. xxi.

57. Brocard Sewell Two Friends, p. 17.

58. Spiritual Poems, p. lxi.

59. John of the Cross Ascent of Mount Carmel in Complete Works (trans. E. Allison Peers) (Lond. 1964). The first quotation is from Vol. 1 Chap. iii, p. 23, the second from Vol. 1, Chap. vi, p. 35. Ascent of Mount Carmel is a treatise on the idea of perfection of the soul in its journey towards union with God. It provides, too, a commentary on St. John's poem 'Obscure Night of the Soul' which so attracted Gray.

60. Gray 'The Person in Question' p. 20.
There is some evidence that Gray shared his reading of John of the Cross with Raffalovich. For the title of the poem 'Joy of Hearing' Raffalovich borrowed a concept from the Spanish mystic and combined it in a rather tasteless (but nonetheless interesting) way:

> And let the hands that swing the censer
> sometimes touch me sweetly
> That all my senses may in them rejoice,
> dear Joy of Hearing,
> None envying the other, and in them my
> spirit also.

Raffalovich The Thread and the Path (Lond. 1895) p. 104.

St. John uses the term "delight of hearing" (in Allison Peers' translation). op cit. Vol. 1, p. 21.

61. I have been unable to trace the picture Gray describes unless it is a caprice on the portrait of St. John of the Cross by Joaquin Canedo of 1795.

62. 'For October' The Second Blue Calendar (for 1896) (Lond. 1895) pp. 30-31.

63. I am thinking of St. John's poem 'O living flame of love' ('Songs of the soul in the intimate communion of the union of the love of god'):

> (1) O living flame of love
> That, burning, dost assail
> My inmost soul with tenderness untold,
> Since thou dost freely move,
> Deign to consume the veil
> Which sunders this sweet converse that we hold.
>
> (3) And O, ye lamps of fire
> In whose resplendent light
> The deepest caverns where the senses meet,
> Once steep'd in darkness dire,
> Blaze with new glories bright
> And to the lov'd one give both light and heat!

I quote from Allison Peers' translation op. cit vol. 2, pp. 424-5.

63. cont'd

cf. too 'Complaint' Silverpoints (p. ix) (referred to further in note 65 below). Gray uses the images of the flame and the veil but adds a 90s touch:

> Thou shout! thou burst of light! thou throb
> Of pain! thou sob!
> Thou like a bar
> of some sonata, heard from far
>
> Through blue-hue'd veils! When in these wise,
> To my soul's eyes,
> Thy shape appears,
> My aching hands are full of tears.

64. 'St. John of the Cross' (for November) The Third Blue Calendar (for 1897) (Lond. 1896) p. 25. The poem was written to celebrate St. John's feast day 24th November.

Ian Fletcher is interesting on this sonnet: "What is remarkable here is the quick mutation of the Saint from a flame into a wing, then into a violent architecture of contemplation .... " ('The Poetry of John Gray' Two Friends p. 62). (Fletcher's quotation of the poem shows punctuation considerably different from Gray's published version and he spells exstacy 'ecstasy').

Gray had used the wing image previously in the long opening poem of Spiritual Poems 'The Tree of Knowledge' which I do not discuss in the text above. In this poem Gray combines the wing and the seed (echoes here of the fatalism of 'The Song of the Seedling' in Silverpoints). I quote from the first stanza:

> From what meek jewel seed
> Did this tree spring?
> How first beat its new life in bleak abode
> Of virgin rock, strange metals for its food,
> Towards its last hewn mould, the bitter rood?
> First did it sprout, indeed,
> A double wing.

The seed in its germination sprouts wings "green/sweet wings" (stanza 3) in the natural process of plant growth. The tree, however, mutates, first into Christ's crucifix and then, in a final accretion, into fruit, flame and Christ himself. I quote from the final stanza:

> "Passion! thou'rt come to me again too soon;
> "Too hot thou givst me back the fiery boon
> "I gave thee; love consumes me, that I swoon;
> "Thou, on my topmost bough,
> "My fruit again."

65. Ruth Z. Temple 'The Other Choice' p. 53.
Temple ignores the complexity of this poem, hybrid though it is. When I use the term Blakean here I am referring to the echo of Blake's 'Infant Joy':

'I have no name:
'I am but two days old',
What shall I call thee?

There is an odd juxtaposition in Silverpoints: 'Complaint' follows 'Lady Evelyn', a poem which opens "I know of no Name too sweet to tell of her." The two poems have different aspirations: 'Complaint', as I claim above, is a promise of the mystical work of Spiritual Poems while 'Lady Evelyn' belongs to the pseudo-troubadour love poems of the decadence.

66. There is a slight confusion in Gray's writings, a kind of ahistoricism which enters in his poem for St. John of the Cross 'My patron came to Heaven'. The saint is described as "cradled in the Sacred Heart"; this is not particularly apposite as the iconography of the Sacred Heart dates from the century after the saint's death; the result of apparitions of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. This is not to say that the Sacred Heart was invented by Saint Margaret Mary and that in ecclesiastical terms the Sacred Heart has not existed eternally. However, devotion to the Sacred Heart increased from the mid-nineteenth century after the papal extension of the cult to the universal Church. In 1891 there was a clarification of the iconography of the Sacred Heart and henceforth the Heart could be depicted alone, apart from the body of Christ. This contemporary attention to the doctrine of the Sacred Heart may account for the inclusion of the image in a number of Gray's poems 'Complaint' among them.

67. 'Saint Mary Magdalen' (For July)
The Fourth and Last Blue Almanack (for 1898) (Lond. 1897) p. 17.

68. 'Saint Agnes' (For January) Ibid, p. 5.

69. Cevasco misreads Gray's short story seeing not only overtones of Dorian Gray but Wilde himself in the story: "... the figure of Wilde, to some extent at least, can be discerned in 'The Person in Question'.... The narrator's disgust with the person in question .... is Gray's perception of himself becoming another Wilde - not the witty Wilde .... but the Wilde who had taken up with roughs, renters and stable boys." Cevasco John Gray p. 38.

70. There was no English translation of *Là-Bas* until the American edn. in 1924. See George A. Cevasco *J.-K. Huysmans in England and America* (Charlottesville 1962) for bibliographic information on Huysmans' translations.

71. John Gray 'The Redemption of Durtal' *The Dial* No. 4, (1896), p. 7. Huysmans in fact published *a life* of Saint Lydwine of Shiedam in 1901.

72. J.-K. Huysmans *En Route* (trans. C. Kegan Paul) (London 1896) Chap. 2, p. 28.

73. *Ibid*, p. 28.

74. *Ibid*, p. 22.

75. Gray 'The Redemption of Durtal' p. 9.

76. Huysmans' own conversion to Catholicism had been made public by the Parisian press in 1891. *Le Figaro* had carried the following item:

> Rumour .... has it that one of our writers whose last novel [*Là-Bas*] created a sensation, but whose work, on account of its extreme subtlety, is known to only a limited public, has immured himself in a Trappist monastery, determined never to leave the shelter of its walls.

Quoted by Robert Baldick *The Life of J.-K. Huysmans* (Oxford 1955) p. 203.

77. Gray 'The Redemption of Durtal' pp. 10-11.

78. Huysmans *En Route* p. 277.

79. Baldick *op. cit*, p. 179.

80. Gray 'The Redemption of Durtal' p. 9.

81. J.-K. Huysmans *Down There* (*Là-Bas*) Chap. 1, p. 10.

82. Raffalovich to Huysmans. Letter dated 21 avril [1896] from 'Trois Lettres Inédites de André Raffalovich a J.-K. Huysmans' (Pierre Lambert ed.) in Brocard Sewell *Two Friends*. pp. 190-193.

83. Huysmans to Raffalovich. Letter dated April 1896 from a footnote by Pierre Lambert to the letter quoted above (see note 82). *Ibid*.

84 *Last Letters of Aubrey Beardsley* (Lond. 1904) was the brain-child of Gray. The royalties were paid to Aubrey's mother.

85 References to both priests are contained in numerous letters from Beardsley to Raffalovich. See Aubrey Beardsley *Letters* (Maas, Duncan & Good eds.) (Lond. 1970).

There are two letters in the National Library of Scotland from Fr. Coubé to Raffalovich dealing with Beardsley's spiritual and physical state in 1897 when Beardsley met the priest in Paris.

86 "I am receiving long lectures here [Bournemouth], from pillars of the Anglican faith, a propos of my communications with the kind Fathers of the Sacred Heart." Beardsley to Raffalovich [25 February 1897] *Letters* p. 259.

The fact that he had been received into the church by a Jesuit led Beardsley to express an interest in the order and in St. Aloysius a saint who had died while in training as a Jesuit. See *Letters* p. 339.

87 Frida Strindberg was the wife of the Swedish playwright August Strindberg. Raffalovich nicknamed her "Mrs. Swindelbag" after protecting Mabel, herself bisexual, against the sapphic invitations of Mme. Strindberg. (Information from Raffalovich to Gray, Letter dated Sunday Oct. 9th 1904, National Library of Scotland). An example of Raffalovich's idiosyncratic attitude to homosexuality can be seen in an undated letter of, presumably, the same period. He confides to Gray: "[Mrs. Swindlebag] is also 'what we thought'. She is also an introducer: would have introduced Mabel to strange princesses." (National Library of Scotland).

88

> Mrs. Beardsley was received last Thursday! Her first communion is on Friday March 3rd. March is a great month for them. Aubrey received March 31st 1897, dies March 16th 1898 ....

Raffalovich to Gray. Letter n.d. [Feb? 1899]. National Library of Scotland. Gray replied from the Scots College in Rome:

> It is very happy for Mrs. Beardsley ... I'm sure her conversion in any case will be vastly more to her than she expects: then what conversion is not.

Letter dated 20th Feb. 1899. National Library of Scotland.

89 Gray's introduction to *Last Letters*, p. v.

90 *Ibid*, pp. v-vi.

91 Henry James to André Raffalovich. Letter dated Nov. 7th 1913. National Library of Scotland.

92 Robert Ross 'Aubrey Beardsley' in Masques and Phases (Lond. 1909) p. 154.

93 Ibid, p. 154.

94 Beardsley to Raffalovich [circa 11th May 1895] Letters p. 84.

The passage I have quoted from Raffalovich is quoted by the editors of Beardsley's letters in a slightly different form. (See Ibid. n.2 p. 85).

95 Letter postmarked 7th March 1898.

96 Gray's reasons for editing are explained in his introduction:

> In many [letters], passages have been suppressed, but such omissions have been made with one aim, to avoid giving pain or displeasure to living people ... Last Letters p. viii.

97 Ibid, p. 286

98 Letter dated Wednesday [31 March 1897] Ibid, p. 288.

99 Ibid, p. 293.

100 Gray 'The Redemption of Durtal' p. 11.

101 Gray's introduction Last Letters, p. vii.

apter 3, rt (v)

102 And hence the title of Osbert Burdett's book on the Nineties.

103 Brigid Brophy Black and White (Lond. 1968), p. 21.

104 See Symons Aubrey Beardsley (Lond. 1966).

105 I am not concerned here with illustrations for Beardsley's own verses The Ballad of a Barber or The Three Musicians. These represent a more conventional form of illustration.

106 See for example The Early Work of Aubrey Beardsley (London 1920) and compare Malcolm Easton Aubrey and the Dying Lady (London 1972), p. 4: "The drawings which belong to the immediate post-school period have more to do with books and plays. Aubrey was a Mannerist: he created his images from within."

107 Robert Ross Masques and Phases (London, 1909), pp. 144-5.

108 Ibid, p. 145.

109 By 1897 however Beardsley could write to Smithers of his policy in The Peacock:

> "On the art side I suggest that it should attack untiringly and unflinchingly the Burne-Jones and Morrisian medieval business, and set up a wholesome seventeenth and eighteenth-century standard of what picture making should be." (Letter dated 26 December [1897])

Letters of Aubrey Beardsley, ed. Maas, Duncan and Good (London 1970), p. 413.

This attitude can be compared to the youthful Beardsley who believed himself to be "the beloved of Burne-Jones". Ibid, p. 45.

110 Stanley Weintraub quotes from an interview given by Beardsley to the Idler in 1896:

> "...I am so used to working by artificial light that if I want to work in the daytime I have to pull the blind down and get my candles in order before I begin ..."
> See Weintraub Beardsley (London, 1967), p. 203.

111 Beardsley later reworked 'The Love Drink' as Tristram and Isolde deleting all the details except for one branching flower, thus making the similarities to 'John and Salomé' more apparent.

112 I am here using the drawings published in The Best of Aubrey Beardsley (London, 1948), and am discounting those rejected by Lane.

113 The beautiful drawing 'The Black Cape' is quite irrelevant to the play.

114 I choose the term Robert Schmutzler uses in Art Nouveau (London 1964) where he discusses Beardsley's "pleasant estrangement" of styles. See p. 86 and n. 58.

115 See Rossetti's story The Hand and the Soul

116 Martin Harrison and Bill Waters Burne-Jones (London 1973), p. 145.

117 Particularly in the chapter 'A Flutter of Frilled Things' Easton op cit.

118 Brigid Brophy op cit. p. 36.

119 Weintraub op cit. p. 204.

120 Ibid, p. 205.

121 Ibid, p. 242.

122 Ed. Rupert Hart-Davis Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde (London 1979), p. 149.

Wilde is writing to More Adey.

123 Newman wrote to Fr. Faber about the latter's *Lives of the Saints*

"It appears there is a strong feeling against it on the part of a portion of the Catholic community in England, on the ground, as we are given to understand, that lives of Foreign Saints, however edifying in their respective countries, are unsuited to England, and unacceptable to Protestants. To this feeling we consider it a duty, for the sake of peace to defer."

Letter dated October 30, 1848 quoted in 'John Oldcastle' *Cardinal Newman* (London, n.d.)

124 See Beardsley to Raffalovich, letter dated 12/4/1897 *Letters*, p. 301.

125 Beardsley to Mabel Beardsley 16 January [1898] *Ibid*, p. 427.

Duke: Come hither, fellow! What is your name?

First Citizen: Dominick, sir.

Duke: A good name! Why were you called Dominick?

First Citizen: Marry, because I was born on
Saint George's day.

(Oscar Wilde *The Duchess of Padua* Act 2.)

Conclusion

In this thesis I have not sought to find one, single, unifying factor which would explain the conversions to Catholicism of all the characters I have written about. Instead I have begun with two elements: firstly, the nature of conversion and secondly, the nature of the chosen religion, Catholicism. There follows upon these observations a qualitative appraisal of what happens to the writing of the convert - in what ways, in other words, does the convert demonstrate his new-found religion, how it becomes, or does not become, a theme, conscious or unconscious, in the work. I have tried to distinguish between the personal conversion and the translated or fictional conversions contained in the written works. The circumstances of individual conversions and their repercussions need to be re-examined at this point before summarizing my thematic analysis of the works themselves.

I hope I have shown that conversion is not simply a matter of a transformation of "a sense of weakness into a sense of power", as Fairchild describes it (see above p. 3). Certainly conversion is about change, not only in the "world made new" of the "born again", but in a new sense of identity. Wilde is the most difficult of my subjects to define in this way. It is not alone the fact that his was a deathbed conversion that makes him so difficult: I have shown that there are areas of Wilde's work that express the problematic nature of conversion and areas which express self-dissatisfaction, long before his actual reception into the church. In some ways Wilde had already invented himself for the English public and, in doing so, became a 'star', perhaps inspired by the fabulous 'stars' of the stage with their monstrous exoticism -

Bernhardt, in particular, spings to mind. There is no doubt that a self-consciousness on the part of artists since the Romantic movement made this kind of stardom feasible for poets and playwrights - again, one figure springs to mind, Byron. For Wilde, once the process of change, of transformation into 'star' began, there was no need, or no time, to continue with the Catholic tendencies that had shown themselves earlier. The demotion of Wilde from 'star' to criminal led to his adoption of a bohemian lifestyle completely at odds with his former life. One recalls Robert Ross on Wilde:

> Two things were absolutely necessary for him, contact with comely things, as Pater says, and social position. Comely things meant for him a certain standard of living ... Social position, he realized after five months [after his release from Reading Gaol] he could not have ... It galled him to have to appear grateful to those whom he did not, or would not have regarded, before his downfall ... He chose therefore a Bohemian existence entirely out of note with his genius and temperament. (1)

It was, however, aspirations to social position that had already prevented Wilde's conversion earlier (see above p. 13). The tragic end to Wilde's social ascendency helped him towards a final decision to convert to Catholicism.

In terms of conversion Frederick Rolfe presents fewer problems than Wilde; his conversion took place early enough in his life to become incorporated as an autobiographical theme in his fiction. Yet Rolfe is involved more completely than Wilde in the process of self-change, self-construction, and, as I have pointed out, self-cancellation. Rolfe is, indeed, an author in search of a character, a writer at no loss for a pseudonym but having no name or identity of his own. He emerged from the obscurity of an English lower-middle-class background to become, for the purposes of attracting [illegible] Italian aristocrat. The scrupulousness of

Baron Corvo - his clothes, his speech, his very handwriting - bears evidence to the reconstruction of his personality. The most pathetic and telling of Rolfe's attempts to change himself can be seen in the simple conversion of his Christian name to a title: Frederick to Fr., in an attempt to reach the priesthood.

The point of these observations is to remind the reader of the personal, idiosyncratic nature of conversion, its effect on the convert and the social context of conversion. In this latter category there is, however, a wider problem to be addressed, the reaction, understood and invited, of his contemporaries towards the convert and his adopted religion. I shall return to this, the starting point of my investigation, before proceeding further. In what way is the thematic analysis of works by converts to Catholicism affected by contemporary, that is 1890s, perceptions of Catholicism?

In Chapter 1 I have written at some length on attitudes to truth in Protestant England, particuarly the perception that truth and Catholicism were inimical. Of course, the idea of the Protestant seeking conversion to Catholicism because it is "untrue", and, presumably, because it allows greater scope for the potential liar, is absurd. It had, nevertheless, a popular currency from the time of Newman's conversion onwards, in much the same way as popular prejudices against race and sexuality have today. Indeed, as I have demonstrated, in Wilde's case the trinity of prejudices - racism, sexism and religious bigotry, were all actively employed. In this popular viewpoint conversion is a kind of treachery or treason with all the connotations of unfaithfulness to one's country,

race or religion. One might expect anything from the convert-traitor. Kingsley charged Newman with injuring the "straightforwardness and truthfulness" of young men by his preaching Roman doctrine covertly (see above p. 20). Yet, as we have seen, a cavalier attitude is not a characteristic of these 'early' converts, least of all Thomas Arnold jnr. who chose a difficult path vis à vis Anglicanism. His scrupulosity in matters of religious adherence is underlined by his re-conversion at a time when such a move was most disadvantageous. An awareness of the social disadvantages of becoming a Catholic is shared by Wilde and Rolfe who were aware also of the reputation of Catholics as liars. Rolfe was greatly inlfuenced by the prevailing English Protestant perceptions of Catholicism. He includes his disapproval in Hadrian the Seventh and Nicholas Crabbe while clinging to the source - as Kingsley would have identified it - of the treacherous untruthfulness itself. Rolfe, in his desire to see himself as an Englishman, recreates a pre-Reformation identity for the English Catholic. George Arthur Rose, in becoming Pope Hadrian VII, heals the rift between England and the Catholic Church in Rome, an early example of Rolfe's attempting to unite the two separate entities that must be united to make the whole. (This theme I explore at length in Chapter 2, Section iv). Aware of the current perceptions of English Protestants Rolfe makes his English Pope a model of English truthfulness. He, Hadrian, embodies the purity of both Classical and Anglo-Saxon. In this paradox Rolfe embodies familiar images of racist concepts of purity. Hadrian, importantly, speaks the truth in the face of the greatest opposition. It is not Protestantism or paganism that this clean and truthful Pope fears but socialism and - as Rolfe characterizes it - the

untruths of socialism, the pressurizing and special pleading that belong to the materialist's view of life. In reclaiming truthfulness - and in its most scrupulous form - as a Catholic habit and reflex, Rolfe takes on some of the predominant English anti-Catholic feeling with its racist overtones. It is not the Celt alone who is admonished for untruthfulness but the French and the Italians too; the 'foreign', in other words, which is synonymous with the Catholic. Hadrian is as much an emblem of Englishness as he is of Catholicism. The combination of the two - religion and race - is seen as a purification of both.

I have suggested in my thesis that Kingsley and Rolfe share attitudes to manliness and truth. Rolfe adopts the characteristics of the English gentleman, a Kingsley role model: at all times unambiguous as regards the truth, graceful and - another paradox - democratic in that aristocratic way which reveals itself in the proper handling of the master-servant relationships which lie at the heart of Rolfe's novels. The Rolfe hero is scrupulously fair as a master, revealing a patrician temperament which he shares with the oldest (only the very oldest) families of Europe (those who can trace their ancestry back into the mists of time).

There is one other way in which Rolfe includes 'truth' as a theme in his novels. For Rolfe steadfastness or faithfulness in friendship is a practical application of truthfulness; its antithesis is faithlessness. The novels are permeated by the theme of friendship: in Nicholas Crabbe, Crabbe-Rolfe is very much the model of steadfastness; he is deserted, ultimately, by the evasive, secretive and opportunistic object of his affection. In this, and in other

instances, the novelist uses friendship as a tangible symbol of truth, as an ideal of the truthful. I shall pick up this theme again in this conclusion, but I would like first to turn my attention to Wilde whose place in this debate on 'truth' is decidedly more difficult to locate.

Wilde's thinking on truth obtrudes on his writing style and on his formulation of a decadent aesthetic which hinges upon truth as a central issue in the production of art. The epigram is Wilde's written and conversational ploy.

> In aesthetic criticism attitude is everything. For in art there is no such thing as a universal truth. A truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true.
>
> (The Truth of Masks)

Wilde is addressing himself here to the philosophical relationship between art and truth. His flippant tone is itself part of the denial that his prose presents. The statement is as much a challenge to the prevailing social hypocrisy as it is an attempt to explore the problem. Wilde recognizes the ambiguity of creating art in a society where 'realism' robs story-telling of its fantastic element. The recognition is a challenge and Wilde presents his challenge in terms teasing and ambiguous. If one can transpose, momentarily, his literary style into visual terms, his ambiguity is like the space-defined/space-denied draughtsmanship of Beardsley. There is no vantage point from which one can survey truth, truth is evasive: "A truth ceases to be true when more than one person believes in it", Wilde tells us in 'Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young'. Truth is not, therefore, absolute. Wilde

can be seen at these moments, struggling with the prosaicness of English fiction and religion. The dogged pseudo-realism of Mrs. Humphrey Ward and the "low form of realism" current in Anglicanism, are alike abhorrent to him. In his statements contrasting "simple truth" and "complex beauty" (see above p. 56), we have another challenge to the English Protestant mind. Truth and beauty are opposed; beauty is only beautiful for Wilde when its complexity sets it apart from the simplicity of truth: art is equated with the untruthful if not with the downright devious. This thinking on truth is part of a series of 'epigrammatic' - or rather inverted - values which Wilde throws at his bourgeois audience.

It is in their personal identification with the problem of truth-telling that Wilde and Rolfe come together: they are not engaged in the same struggle but their struggles are similar. Wilde's open letter to his friend, Lord Alfred Douglas, for example, is a Rolfeian scolding of unfaithfulness. The friend has led to the writer's downfall and is admonished: the answer lies within Douglas, says Wilde in the most didactic section of De Profundis. "The supreme vice is shallowness. Whatever is realised is right" (see above p. 104). This theme alerts us to the great similarity between my two characters: it is a similarity that begins with perceptions of truth, continues with images of friendship as an ideal of truth and extends these images into images of a self-constructed, renewed personality. This new personality is brought about by an identification with Christ as the Man of Sorrows, cast out by a society grown crass and indifferent to truth. In this way it would be true to say that religion offered both Wilde and Rolfe the

simple and conventional "born again" mode of the religious convert but to say only that would be to ignore a complexity inherent in their work. I shall, however, examine the theme of personality and translation of identity here before moving on to the crux of my thesis.

In reconstructing himself, in the way that I maintain that he does, Wilde chooses to see himself not as a saint, or a holy man, nor even as Christ himself. He identifies himself with such signs of human frailty and failure as he felt himself to embody - Christ as the Man of Sorrows. Wilde's adaptation of Christ's "literary form", the parable, is illuminating. The ambiguities of the parable are played with, the obscurities actually enjoyed and incorporated into the narrative. In his examinations of truth, notably in 'The Decay of Lying', there is no ideal of ultimate truth. Yet in the parable form we can see Wilde's Christian heritage at work. He takes on the traditional role of storyteller (coming as he did from a culture with a living tradition of storytelling, one much satirized in the Victorian novel) and uses much of the imagery of Christ's parables. In combining the Christian parable with non-Christian, even pagan, themes, Wilde suggests a harmony, a continuation of traditions. A sense of tradition - in the various cultural expressions of spirituality - is of importance to both Wilde and Rolfe although neither worries about the apostolic succession, the question that so exercised the minds of the Oxford Movement in the 1840s. For both, however, the idea of succession was important in itself:

> The presence of every bishop suggests a long history of conflicts and trials, sufferings and victories, hopes and fears, through many centuries. His presence at this day is the fruit of them all. He is the living monument of those who are dead. He is the promise of a bold fight and a good confession and a cheerful martyrdom now, if needful, as was done by those of old time. (2)

There is some of Newman's feeling in Rolfe, who, after all, fantasizes himself as Pope. Like Wilde, Rolfe was interested in the roots of Catholicism in non-Christian ritual and in the roots of sacred art in pagan art. In many ways this attitude is characteristic of the last decades of the nineteenth century; the theme of the 'dead gods' is one which preoccupied Post-Romantic, proto-Decadent art and literature, inspired by the decay of Christianity as a living force in industrial society. Christ, in this vision of religion, is just about to join Apollo and all the other pagan deities, in a cultural limbo, neither heaven nor hell, but a resting place for their reputations. Rolfe and Wilde, as I have shown in my thematic analysis of their writings, try to harmonize the seemingly polarized, Christian and pagan. For Wilde, this process of harmonization is in progress throughout his career, beginning as a debt to the classical culture so admired by Victorian academics. In *The Sphinx* the two polarities are kept apart with the poet as referee. The contest is won by Christianity; the poet chooses a weary, humanized Christ - an example of "simple truth" triumphing over "complex beauty" of the Sphinx. (The Sphinx, like Pater's archetypal Mona Lisa, has multiplied her personalities, her attributes, but to no avail). *Dorian Gray* and Wilde's 'soul stories' continue this thematic use of polarity exemplified in the theme of separation of body from soul and echo, as I have pointed out at some length, themes from classical mythology in harness with Christian morality.

Wilde paraphrases Ovid, Rolfe re-enacts the life of Emperor Hadrian. Rolfe develops, what is in Wilde an understatement, a suggestion, that the Catholic church is a continuation of the classical and pagan, particularly in the revitalization of Platonic humanism in the Renaissance. Rolfe pursues the truth "nude and unadorned" and brings the idea of classical nudity to bear upon his vision of a reformed Papal rule (reformed and enriched by the example of the emperor Hadrian).

These extensions of Catholicism (extending from before the establishment of the religion, before the apostles, before Christ even) is inspired by Pater who sees European culture as a cabinet of creeds of varying degrees of curiosity. We see an obvious restatement of Pater in Dorian Gray, albeit a restatement with a French accent: European culture is there translated into a series of sensations justified by novelty. In Rolfe's Hadrian the Seventh we see another example of the Paterian recycled humanism of the Renaissance which is reconstructed more accurately in Don Renato. Yet both my subjects develop this Paterianism towards a renewed Catholicism, a Catholicism annotated, rather than rewritten, in the light of an awareness of the significance of ritual and sacrifice in religion. This awareness was given a less-aestheticized impetus by the contemporary work of anthropologists like J. G. Frazer, whose Golden Bough first appeared in 1890, and Max Müller, although Wilde was wary of the value of the latter:

> I have no desire to underrate the services of laborious scholars, but I feel that the use Keats made of Lemprière's Dictionary is of far more value to us than Professor Max Müller's treatment of the same mythology as a disease of language. (3)

Dorian Gray, The Sphinx, The House of Pomegranates and Rolfe's entire published work owe much to awareness of the function and importance of myth in society. What distinguishes Rolfe from the other (often 'Uranian') writers of novels and verse on the 'dead gods' theme, or the historical novelists whose subject was the early days of Christianity (one thinks of Sienkiewicz, Wiseman and Newman in this category) is that on one hand Rolfe approves of Christianity and on the other he approves of paganism. In other words, he writes not one of these categories of fiction but a subtle combination of the two. The same can be said of Wilde although to a much less extent; Dorian Gray has marked characteristics, certainly, of this hybrid style although the two halves - the Christian and the pagan - are not allowed to meet and mingle. At this time in his life, as I have noted, Wilde sees Catholicism as simply another sensation for Dorian, an idea for his hero to toy with and discard.

The theory of mythology as a "disease of language" which Wilde, with some justification, attributes to Müller, certainly seems to have infected Rolfe who has a tendency to name his fictional characters by attribute, letting the character-name provide a kind of name-destiny. It is a tendency shared by Wilde at one significant moment in his life. On leaving England for France after his release from Reading Goal, Wilde took the same 'Sebastian Melmoth', the surname after the character in his great-uncle Robert Maturin's novel Melmoth the Wanderer, the christian name after the martyr-saint. To the signification of the wanderer Wilde adds persecution. Sebastian's persecution stemmed from the very soldiers he had once had power over. In being both characters at once Wilde stresses his feelings of alienation. Beardsley recognized the martyr element in Wilde's persona when he referred to him, in a letter to Smithers, [illegible] (4)

It is in this way that Wilde and Rolfe consolidate the similarities that I have suggested they have: both feel themselves cast out and, as a consequence, begin a process of reinvention of themselves. They become the new martyrs of an aestheticized, crypto-Catholicism. Dorian and Hadrian are the victims of their own aestheticism. So too are their creators. Rolfe's many personalized statements in his novels and Wilde's self-dramatization in De Profundis bear this out. Here the identification with the Man of Sorrows is overlaid with identification with martyrs, Sebastian, in particular, but Saint John the Baptist and Saint George too (see above p. 90 and p. 178). The development of an aestheticism of martyrdom has significance in both the fiction and the private lives of Wilde and Rolfe: we can see too how the identification with certain martyr-saints is important to the understanding of the conversions of John Gray, Raffalovich and Beardsley (see Chapter 4). (5)

As I have shown, Rolfe identified his spirituality through martyrs whose goodness (and beauty) is punished by death. His Catholicism is centred on the saints, and by a curious trick of the pen, he makes himself a martyr, though an as yet uncanonized one. The scrupulous Pope Hadrian dies, a victim of the ugly and Philistine modern world. Wilde's Christ (in De Profundis) is not the Christ of the crucifix but the Christ of the desert, abandoned but not yet martyred; but the abandonment is not simply a prelude to martyrdom, it is, in itself, a kind of martyrdom. Wilde sidesteps the physicality of the martyr-allusion for greater literary style; Rolfe, characteristically, accentuates the actuality of martyrdom with a consequent loss of subtleness. So, although Rolfe and Wilde differ in their use of "beauty and goodness as a formula" (see above pp. 176-188), there is in their work an attempt to identify with

spirituality, with spiritual beauty in fact, in a palpable form. What, after all, is more palpable than dying for a cause (making the abstract 'real', the thought concrete)? In the martyr's death or abandonment, our actual lives, with their inadequacies, are underlined, and, at the same time, are justified. Both men are caught up in a process of identification in which Catholicism can help, having an already constructed mythography for that purpose.

This brings me to the crux of my thesis. The process of reinvention and reidentification which I find important in Wilde and Rolfe, and which I stress here, takes place within the framework of a mythography of Catholicism which itself has been redefined in an English context (the reintroduction, so to speak, of the religion following the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829). English perceptions of Catholicism had been changed by the new historical and anthropological writings of the latter half of the century (Pater and Müller, as I have suggested above, among others), as well as Newman's writings, particularly the Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine. This emphasis upon the historical role of Catholicism brought irony to Newman's statement, in Lectures on the Present Condition of Catholics, that to the anti-Catholic Englishman, converts

> cease to have antecedents; they cease to have any character, any history to which they may appeal; they merge in the great fog, in which, to his eyes, everything Catholic is enveloped; they are dwellers in the land of romance and fable ... (6)

It is precisely that history, those antecedents, that Wilde and Rolfe achieve in converting to Catholicism. In my thesis I maintain that

both men are united in reacting to hypocrisy and philistinism in English life. Moreover, in reacting as they do they recreate themselves in the image of what they perceive to be more noble, extending the history of the Catholic church into a truly classical history. Outside bourgeois Protestant (or Anglican) society they become noble and individual.

Central to this new religion is the idea of sacrifice. They, Rolfe and Wilde, become the priests of the sacrifice, the drama of the Mass, as Wilde called it, and the drama of the martyr's death become fused and are enacted by the writers themselves. This process is important to the two elements I began with in this thesis: the actuality of conversion and the nature of the chosen religion. For Wilde conversion comes as a solution, providing a final resting place where the café and the cloister are unimportant constructs of a social morality. For Rolfe conversion, while not giving peace, allows him to project his personality into new identities contained in complex narratives. Neither writer lost sight of the mythographic nature of Catholicism - the literary power of hagiography, the 'history' that this hagiography reveals, the pantheonic nature of the saints in heaven, the obscure mysticism of religious writing - which has a personal significance to the seeker of spiritual truths. This mythography can, and did, provide images for the struggle with their - Wilde's and Rolfe's - own natures, if not with some absolute force of evil.

Notes

Conclusion

1 Ross Friend of Friends p. 67

2 J. H. Newman Parochial Sermons quoted by O. Chadwick in The Mind of the Oxford Movement (Lond. 1963), p. 143.

3. Oscar Wilde 'The Truth of Masks' Intentions p. 1068

4 Aubrey Beardsley Letters p. 439.

5 In André Raffalovich we have another example of a convert who makes numerous attempts to change identity - in his religion, his nationality and his name. He was the son of Russian-Jewish parents and was born in Paris where he lived until the 1880s when he settled in London (thereby giving Wilde an opportunity for an unsubtle quip at his expense). Along the way Marc-André became André. He was naturalized as a British subject in 1891 and converted to Catholicism in 1896. Raffalovich's choice of a baptismal name is interesting. He could have chosen Ignatius or Aloysius (received, as he was, by Jesuits), or Philip (he and Gray were originally drawn to the Oratorians). But Raffalovich chose Sebastian and, in fact, signed his letters to Gray, for some time, using that name: "your loving brother Sebastian". Upon admission to the Dominican Third Order he took, formally, the name Brother Sebastian. He took an active interest in the spread of the cult of Saint Sebastian in Britain, notably in the financing of the church and monastery of Saint Sebastian in Pendleton in Manchester and undertook to donate a large sum of money to the Dominican community there every year. He commissioned a statue of the saint by Eric Gill. He began a biography of Sebastian, perhaps in a misguided attempt to emulate his acquaintance, J-K. Huysmans, but it was never completed. His friend John Gray was also an avid collector of Sebastiana. Beardsley helped in the quest and on one occasion sent a photograph of a wall painting of the saint. On another occasion he wrote to Raffolovich: "I suppose Gray knows of Callot's singularly interesting eau-forte of the martyrdom of St. Sebastian. There is a charming soldier in the background picking up the arrows that have missed the saint." (Beardsley Letters p. 314).

6 J. H. Newman Lectures on the Present Condition of Catholics (Lond. 1851). I quote from the 4th edition (1874) p. 243.

List of Illustrations

1 Gustave Moreau 'Oedipus and The Sphinx'.

2 Frederick Rolfe's design for the cover of *Don Renato*.

3 Aubrey Beardsley: 'Siegfried'.

4 Aubrey Beardsley: 'The Toilette of Salomé' I.

5 Aubrey Beardsley: 'The Toilette of Salomé' II.

6 Aubrey Beardsley: 'The Baron'.

7 Frederick Rolfe's design for the cover of *Hadrian the Seventh*.

8 Frederick Sandys: 'Amor Mundi' for a poem by Christina Rossetti.

Plate I

Plate 2

Plate 3

Plate 4

Plate 5

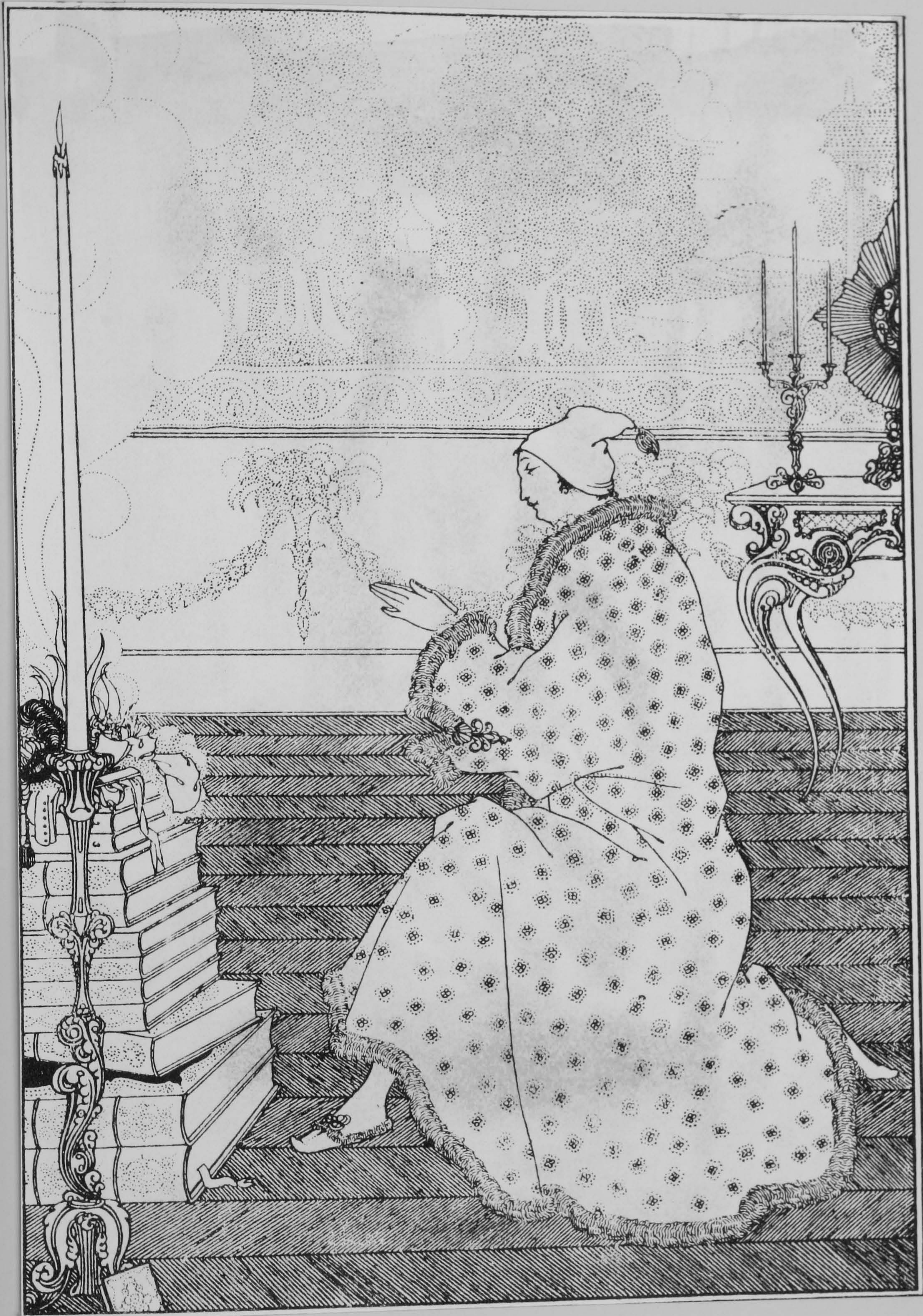

Plate 6

Plate 7

Plate 8

Books

Alford, Norman The Rhymer's Club
(Victoria BC 1980)

Alighieri, Dante The Divine Comedy
(trans. C. Singleton) (Lond. 1971)

[Alighieri, Dante] The Vision of Dante Alighieri
(trans. H. F. Cary) (Lond. 1892)

Allard, John Stenbock, Yeats and the Nineties
(Lond. 1969)

Allan Dale, Peter The Victorian Critic and the Idea of History
(Harvard 1977)

Altholz, Josef L. The Liberal Catholic Movement in England 1848-1864 (Lond. 1982)

d'Arch Smith, Timothy Love in Earnest
(Lond. 1970)

Arkell, David Looking for Laforgue
(Manchester 1979)

Arnold, Thomas Passages in a Wandering Life
(Lond. 1900)

Aveling, J. C. H. The Handle and the Axe
(Lond. 1976)

Baldick, Robert The Life of J.-K. Huysmans
(Oxford 1955)

de Balzac, Honoré Lost Illusions (Les Illusions Perdus)
(trans. Ellen Marriage) (Dent Everyman edn. London n.d.)

Baudelaire, Charles Oeuvres Complètes
(Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edn.) (Paris 1961)

Beardsley, Aubrey Last Letters
(John Gray ed.) (Lond. 1904)

Beardsley, Aubrey, Letters
(Maas, Duncan, Good Eds.) (Lond. 1970)

Beardsley, Aubrey Under the Hill
(Lond. 1977)

Beerbohm, Max Letters to Reggie Turner
(Rupert Hart-Davis ed.) (Lond. 1964)

Beerhohm, Max Seven Men and Two Others
(Lond. 1960)

Beerbohm, Max *Works and More*
(Lond. 1946)

Beck, G. A. (ed.) *The English Catholics 1850-1950*
(London 1956)

Beckson, Kark (ed.) *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*
(Lond. 1970)

Beckson, Karl *Memoirs of Arthur Symons*
(Pennsylvania 1977)

Benkovitz, Miriam J. *Fr. Rolfe, Baron Corvo*
(London 1977)

Benson, R. H. *Confessions of a Convert*
(Lond. 1920)

Bergonzi, Bernard *Gerard Manley Hopkins*
(Lond. 1977)

Bossy, John *The English Catholic Community 1570-1850*
(Lond. 1929)

Bowra, C. M. *The Heritage of Symbolism*
(Lond. 1947)

Bridges, Robert *Three Friends*
(Lond. 1932)

Brophy, Brigid *Black and White: A Portrait of Aubrey Beardsley*
(Lond. 1968)

Burdett, Osbert *The Beardsley Period*
(Lond. 1925)

Calloway, Stephen *Charles Ricketts*
(Lond. 1979)

Calvino, Italo *Italian Folk Tales*
(trans. G. Martin) (NY 1980)

Cecil, Lord David *Max*
(Lond. 1964)

Cevasco, George A. *J.-K. Huysmans in England and America*
(Charlottesville 1962)

Cevasco, George A. *John Gray: A Biography*
(Boston 1982)

Chadwick, Owen *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*
(Lond. 1963)

Chamberlain, J. E. *Ripe was the Drowsy Hour*
(NY 1977)

Chapman, Raymond Faith and Revolt
(Lond. 1970)

Chapman, Raymond The Victorian Debate
(Lond. 1970)

Charlesworth, Barbara Dark Passages: The Decadent Consciousness in Victorian Literature
(University of Wisconsin 1965)

Chesterton, G. K. The Catholic Church and Conversion
(Lond. 1926)

Clark, Kenneth The Nude
(Lond. 1956)

Clarke, Austin The Celtic Twilight and the Nineties
(Dublin 1971)

Clive, K. P. Pierre Louÿs (1870-1925): A Biography
(Oxford 1978)

Colby, Vineta The Singular Anomaly: Woman Novelists of the Nineteenth Century
(NY 1970)

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor Biographia Literaria
(Lond. 1956)

Cohen, Philip K. The Moral Vision of Oscar Wilde
(Cranbury NJ 1978)

Colloms, Brenda Charles Kingsley
(Lond. 1975)

Colonna, Francesco Hypnerotomachia
(1592 reprint NY 1969)

Courtenay, W. L. The Feminine Note in Fiction
(Lond. 1904)

Crackanthorpe, David Hubert Crackanthorpe and English Realism in the 1890s
(Univ. of Missouri 1977)

Croft-Cooke, Rupert The Unrecorded Life of Oscar Wilde
(London 1972)

De Laura, David Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England
(Austin 1969)

Dolben, Digby Mackworth Poetical Works
(Robert Bridges ed.) (Lond. 1915)

Dowson, Ernest _Letters_
(Flower and Maas ed.) (Lond. 1967)

Dover, K. J. _Greek Homosexuality_
(Lond. 1978)

Easton, Malcolm _Aubrey and the Dying Lady_
(Lond. 1972)

Einstein, L. _The Italian Renaissance in England_
(Lond. 1902)

Ellmann, Richard (ed.) _Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays_
(NY 1969)

Faber, Geoffrey _The Oxford Apostles_
(Harmondsworth, 1954)

Fairchild, Hoxie N. _Religious Trends in English Poetry_
(Vol. 5, 1880-1920) (Columbia 1962)

Farmer, A. J. _Le Mouvement esthétique et 'décadent' en Angleterre 1873-1900_
(Paris 1931)

Ferrey, Benjamin _Recollections of A. W. N. Pugin and his father Augustus Pugin_
(Lond. 1861)

'Michael Field' _Work and Days: From the Journal of 'Michael Field'_
(ed. T. & D.C. Sturge Moore) (Lond. 1933)

Fleishman, Avron _The English Historical Novel_
(Baltimore 1971)

Fletcher, Ian (ed.) _Decadence and the 1890s_
(Lond. 1979)

Fletcher, Ian _Romantic Mythologies_
(Lond. 1967)

Gautier, Theophile _Mademoiselle de Maupin_
(trans. Joanna Richardson) (Harmondsworth 1981)

Gawsworth, John _Frederick Rolfe and Others_
(Lond. 1969)

Gide, André _Oscar Wilde_
(Lond. 1951)

Gill, Eric Autobiography
(Lond. 1940)

Gill, Eric Letters (Walter Shewring ed.)
(Lond. 1947)

Girouard, Mark Return to Camelot
(Yale 1981)

Gray, John The Person in Question
(Buenos Aires 1958)

Gray, John Silverpoints
(Lond. 1893)

Gray, John Spiritual Poems
(Lond. 1896)

Grigson, Geoffrey The Contrary View
(Lond. 1974)

Green, Graham Collected Essays
(Lond. 1969)

Grosskurth, Phyllis John Addington Symonds: A Biography
(Lond. 1964)

Harbison, Robert Eccentric Spaces
(Lond. 1977)

Harris, Bruce S. Collected Drawings of Aubrey Beardsley
(NY 1967)

Harrison, Martin and Walters, Bill Burne-Jones
(Lond. 1973)

Haskell, F. and Perry, N. Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900
(Yale 1981)

Henderson, B. W. Life and Principate of the Emperor Hadrian
(Lond. 1923)

Hewison, Robert John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye
(Lond. 1946)

'John Oliver Hobbes' The Dream and the Business
(Lond. 1906)

'John Oliver Hobbes' The Herb Moon
(Lond. 1896)

'John Oliver Hobbes' Robert Orange
(Lond. 1900)

'John Oliver Hobbes' The School for Saints
(Lond. 1898)

'John Oliver Hobbes' Some Emotions and a Moral
(Lond. 1891)

Hopkins, Gerard Manley Notebooks and Papers
(Humphry House ed.) (2 vols) (Oxford 1959)

Hopkins, Gerard Manley Poems
(Oxford 1956)

Hough, Graham The Last Romantics
(Lond. 1949)

Houghton, W. E. The Victorian Frame of Mind
(New Haven 1957)

Housman, Laurence Echos de Paris
(Lond. 1923)

Howard, Clare English Travellers of the Renaissance
(Lond. 1914)

Hunter Blair, Sir David Flying Leaves
(Lond. 1906)

Hutton, Edward Catholicism and English Literature
(Lond. 1942)

Huws Jones, Enid Mrs. Humphry Ward
(Lond. 1973)

Huysmans, J.-K. A Rebours
(trans. Robert Baldick) (Lond. 1962)

Huysmans, J.-K. Down There (Là-Bas)
(anonymous translation) (Lond. 1974)

Huysmans, J.-K. En Route
(trans. C. Kegan Paul) (Lond. 1896)

Hyde, H. Montgomery Famous Trials: Oscar Wilde
(Lond. 1962)

Hyde, H. Montgomery Oscar Wilde
(Lond. 1976)

Hyde, H. Montgomery The Other Love
(Lond. 1970)

Jackson, Holbrook The Eighteen Nineties
(Lond. 1939)

Jenkyns, Richard The Victorians and Ancient Greece
(Lond. 1980)

John of the Cross Complete Works
(trans. E. Allison Peers) (Lond. 1964)

Jullian, Philippe Oscar Wilde
(trans. Violet Wyndham) (Lond. 1969)

Kendall, Guy Charles Kingsley and his Ideas
(Lond. 1947)

Kerr, Hugh J. and Mulder, J. M. Conversions
(Lond. 1984)

Kingsley, Charles Hereward the Wake
(Lond. 1887)

Kingsley, Charles Yeast
(Lond. 1848)

Laforgue, Jules Poems
(Oxford 1975)

Lambert, Eric Mad with Much Heart
(Lond. 1967)

Lawrence, D. H. Phoenix
(Lond. 1936)

'Vernon Lee' Renaissance Fancies and Studies
(Lond. 1895)

Le Gallienne, Richard Romantic Nineties
(Lond. 1926)

Levey, Michael The Case of Walter Pater
(Lond. 1978)

Lunn, Arnold Catholic Converts
(Lond. 1924)

MacGregor, J. Geddes Aesthetic Experience in Religion
(Lond. 1947)

Mackworth, Cecily English Interludes
(Lond. 1974)

de la Mare, Walter (ed.) The Eighteen Eighties
(Cambridge 1930)

Mahaffy, J. P. Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander
(Ldon. 1874)

Maison, Margaret 'John Oliver Hobbes': Her Life and Work
(Lond. 1976)

Maison, Margaret Search your Soul, Eustace
(Lond. 1961)

Martindale, Fr. C. C. The Life of Monsigneur R. H. Benson
(Lond. 1916)

May, J. Lewis John Lane and the Nineties
(Lond. 1936)

McClelland, V. A. English Roman Catholics and Higher Education
(Oxford 1973)

McNair Wright, Julia Almost a Nun
(Lond. 1890)

Meynell, Everard The Life of Francis Thompson
(Lond. 1926)

Mikhail, E. H. M. Oscar Wilde: an Annotated Bibliography of Criticism
(Lond. 1978)

Mikhail, E. H. M. (ed.) Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections (2 vols)
(London 1979)

Mitchell, David The Jesuits
(London 1980)

Mix, Katherine Lyon A Study in Yellow
(Lawrence, Kansas 1960)

Moore, George Evelyn Innes
(Lond. 1898)

Moore, George Sister Teresa
(London 1901)

Morley, Sheridan Oscar Wilde
(Lond. 1976)

Nassaar, Christopher Into the Demon Universe
(New Haven 1974)

Nelson, J. G. The Early Nineties: A view from the Bodley Head
(Harvard 1971)

Newman, Cardinal Apologia Pro Vita Sua
(Lond. 1972)

Newman, Cardinal Loss and Gain
(Lond. 1962)

Newsome, David On the Edge of Paradise: A. C. Benson the Diarist
(London 1980)

Nietzsche, Frederick Ecce Homo
(Edinburgh 1911)

Nietzsche, Frederick The Birth of Tragedy
(trans. W. A. Haussmann) (Edinburgh 1909)

Nordau, Max Degeneration
(London 1895)

'John Oldcastle' Cardinal Newman
(London, n.d.)

[Ovid] Metamorphoses
(trans. George Ferguson)
(Edinburgh 1871)

Pater, Walter Essays on Literature and Art
(London 1973)

Pater, Walter Imaginary Portraits
(London 1890)

Pater, Walter Marius the Epicurean
(London 1934)

Pater, Walter The Renaissance
(London 1975)

Pearson, Hesketh Life of Oscar Wilde
(London 1946)

Peroune, Stewart Hadrian
(London 1960)

Pindar Odes
(trans. G. S. Cznway) (London 1972)

Plato The Dialogues
(trans. Benjamin Jowett) (Oxford 1891)

Poggioli, Renato The Theory of the Avant-Garde
(Cambridge, Mass., 1968)

Praz, Mario The Romantic Agony
(London 1962)

Prickett, Stephen Victorian Fantasy
(Sussex 1979)

Raffalovich, André It is Thyself
(Lond. 1889)

Raffalovich, André The Thread and the Path
(Lond. 1895)

Raffalovich, André Uranisme et Unisexualité
(Lyons 1896)

Raffalovich, Sophie Silhouettes d'autrefois
(Paris 1926)

Reade, Brian *Aubrey Beardsley*
(Lond. 1966)

Reade, Brian (ed) *Sexual Heretics*
(Lond. 1970)

Reed, John R. *Victorian Conventions*
(Ohio 1975)

Richards, John Morgan (and others) *The Life of 'John Oliver Hobbes'*
(Lond. 1911)

Ricketts, Charles & Raymond, Jean-Paul *Oscar Wilde - Recollections*
(Lond. 1932)

Robson, Robert *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain*
(Lond. 1967)

Rohde, Erwin *Psyche*
(trans. W. B. Hillis) (Lond. 1925)

Rolfe, Frederick *The Armed Hands and Other Stories*
(Lond. 1972)

Rolfe, Frederick *Collected Poems*
(Lond. 1972)

Rolfe, Frederick *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole*
(New York 1953)

Rolfe, Frederick *Don Renato*
(Lond. 1963)

Rolfe, Frederick *Don Tarquinio*
(Lond. 1969)

Rolfe, Frederick *Hadrian the Seventh*
(Lond. 1971)

Ross, Robert *Friend of Friends*
(Lond. 1952)

Ross, Robert *Masques and Phases*
(Lond. 1909)

Rossetti, Christina *Goblin Market, and other Poems*
(Oxford n.d.)

Rossetti, D. G. *Collected Works*
(Lond. 1890)

Rothenstein, William *Men and Memories*
(Lond. 1932)

Ryskamp, Charles (ed.) *Wilde and the Nineties: An Essay and an Exhibition* (Princeton 1966)

de Saix, Guillot Le Chant du Cygne: Contes parles d'Oscar Wilde (NY 1976)

Sanders, Andrew The Victorian Historical Novel (Lond. 1978)

San Juan jnr., Epifanio The Art of Oscar Wilde (Princeton 1967)

Schmutzler, Robert Art Nouveau (London 1964)

Sewell, Brocard A Footnote to the Nineties (Aylesford 1969)

Sewell, Brocard In the Dorian Mode (Padstow 1983)

Sewell, Brocard Olive Custance: Her Life and Work (Lond. 1975)

Sewell, Brocard Two Friends - John Gray and André Raffalovich (Aylesford 1961)

Seznec, Jean The Survival of the Pagan Gods (NY 1961)

Sherard, Robert Life of Oscar Wilde (Lond. 1906)

Snell, Bruno The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought (Cambridge, Mass., 1953)

Speaight, Robert The Life of Eric Gill (Lond. 1966)

Starkie, Enid From Gautier to Eliot: The Influence of France on English Literature 1851-1939 (Lond. 1960)

Sturgeon, Mary 'Michael Field' (Lond. 1921)

Symonds, J. A. In the Key of Blue (Lond. 1893)

Symonds, J. A. The Renaissance in Italy (Vol 3) (Lond. 1877)

Symonds, J. A. Sketches in Italy and Greece (Lond. 1879)

Symons, A. J. A. An Anthology of 'Nineties' Verse (Lond. 1928)

Symons, A. J. A. Essays and Biographies (Lond. 1969)

Symons, A. J. A. The Quest for Corvo (Lond. 1952)

Symons, Arthur _Memoirs_
(Karl Beckson ed.) (Pennsylvania 1977)

Taunton, E. L. _The Jesuits in England_
(Lond. 1901)

Temple, Ruth Z. _The Critic's Alchemy_
(NY 1953)

Thomas, Keith _Religion and the Decline of Magic_
(Lond. 1971)

Thompson, Francis _Selected Poems_
(Lond. n.d.)

Thornton, R. K. R. _The Decadent Dilemma_
(Lond. 1983)

Thornton, R. K. R. (ed.) _Poetry of the Nineties_
(Harmondsworth 1970)

Trevor, Meriol _The Arnolds: Thomas Arnold and his Family_
(Lond. 1973)

Turner, Frank M. _The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain_
(Yale 1981)

Tyrrell, George _The Faith of Millions_
(London 1901)

Tyrrell, George _Hard Sayings_
(Lond. 1900)

Vaughan, Cardinal _Roads to Rome_
(Lond. 1908)

Verlaine, Paul _Oeuvres Poétiques_
(Paris 1969)

Verlaine, Paul _Sagesse de Paul Verlaine: Texte établi, présenté et commenté par P.-H. Simon_
(Fribourg 1982)

Walters, Margaret _The Nude Male_
(Lond. 1978)

Walsh, Walter _The Secret History of the Oxford Movement_
(Lond. 1898)

Ward, Mrs. Humphry _Helbeck of Bannisdale_
(Lond. 1989)

Ward, Mrs. Humphry _A Writer's Recollections_
(Lond. 1918)

Watkins, E. J. Catholic Art and Culture
(Lond. 1947)

Weeks, Donald Corvo
(Lond. 1971)

Weeks, Jeffrey Coming Out
(Lond. 1982)

Weintraub, Stanley Beardsley: A Biography
(Lond. 1967)

Weintraub, Stanley Aubrey Beardsley: Imp of the Perverse
(Pennsylvania 1976)

Wilde, Oscar The Artist as Critic
(ed. Richard Ellmann) (Lond. 1970)

Wilde, Oscar Complete Shorter Fiction
(Lond. 1979)

Wilde, Oscar Complete Works
(Oxford 1968)

Wilde, Oscar The Letters of Oscar Wilde
(Lond. 1962)

Wilde, Oscar The Picture of Dorian Gray
(Oxford 1974)

Wilde, Oscar Selected Letters
(Oxford 1979)

Wind, Edgar Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance
(Lond. 1968)

Winters, Yvor Primitivism and Decadence
(Lond. 1937)

Wolff, Robert Lee Gains and Losses
(Lond. 1977)

Woolf, Cecil A Bibliography of Frederick Rolfe Baron Corvo
(Lond. 1972)

Yeats, W. B. Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry
(Lond. n.d.)

Yorke, Malcolm Eric Gill
(Lond. 1981)

Yourcenar, Marguerite Mémoires d'Hadrien
(Paris 1951)

Periodicals

Arkell, David 'Leah Laforgue' Times Literary Supplement 10 June 1965 p. 480.

Baker, Houston A. 'A Tragedy of the Artist: The Picture of Dorian Gray': Nineteenth Century Fiction Vol. 24. 3. (1969)

Burke, Fr. Edmund 'Oscar Wilde: The Final Scene' The London Magazine (May 1961)

Burstein, Janet 'Victorian Mythography' Victorian Studies Vol. 18:3 (1975)

Croft-Cooke, Rupert 'Oscar Wilde Discoveries'. Books & Bookman (February 1974)

Dowling, Linda C. 'The Aesthetes' Victorian Studies (Summer 1977)

Dowling, Linda C. 'Nature & Decadence: John Gray's Silverpoints' Victorian Poetry, Vol. 15:2 Summer 1977.

Forrester, Rev. Dr. David 'Dr. Pusey's Marriage' The Ampleforth Journal, Vol. 78, 2. Summer 1973.

Frank, Thomas 'Elizabethan Travellers in Rome' English Miscellany 4 (1953)

Gilbert, Elliot L. ' "Tumult of Images": Wilde, Beardsley and Salomé'. Victorian Studies, Vol. 26.2. Winter 1983.

Glucker, John 'The Metrical Pattern in Rolfe' The Antigonish Review Spring 1970.

Hart, Rev. Dominic 'Some Memories of John Gray' The Innes Review, Vo. 26.2. 1975.

Hartley, A. J. 'Christian Socialism and Conversion' Theology 70. 1967.

Healy, P. W. J. 'Uranisme et Unisexualité: a late Victorian View of Homosexuality' New Blackfriars Vol 59. 693. Feb. 1978.

Hunter Blair, Rev. Sir David 'More light on Baron Corvo' London Mercury (May 1934)

Jones, G. P. 'Frederick Rolfe's Historical Gallimaufry' Papers in Language and Literature 14.

Kissane, James 'Victorian Mythology' Victorian Studies, Vol. 6:1. 1962.

Machin, G. I. T. 'The Last Victorian Anti-Ritualistic Campaign 1895-1906' Victorian Studies Vol. 25.3. Spring 1982.

MacWilliams Very Revd. Alexander Canon 'Frederick Rolfe and the Scots College, Rome' _Innes Review_ (Autumn 1979)

Martin, Robert K. 'Parody and Homage: The Presence of Pater in _Dorian Gray_'. _Victorian Newsletter_ 63 Spring 1983.

Mitchell, R. J. 'Italian _nobilità_ and the English Idea of the Gentleman in the XV Century' _English Miscellany_ 9 (1958)

Murray, Isobel 'John Gray: The Person and the Work in Question' _Durham University Journal_ June 1984.

Murray, Isobel 'Oscar Wilde's Absorption of 'Influences'.' _Durham University Journal_, Dec. 1971.

Murray, Isobel 'Some Elements in the Composition of _The Picture of Dorian Gray_'. _Durham University Journal_ June 1972.

Reich, John R. 'Baron Corvo and the Classics' _English Miscellany_ 23 (1972)

Russell, Bruce 'Von Pluschow and von Gloeden' _Studies in Visual Communication_ Vol. 9 No. 2 (Spring 1983)

Temple, Ruth Z. 'The Other Choice: the Worlds of John Gray, Poet and Priest'. _Bulletin of Research in the Humanities_ (1981)

Watkin, Dom A. 'Dolben and the Catholic Church' _Dublin Review_ 225 (1951)

Weeks, Donald 'More Light on _Hadrian the Seventh_' _The Antigonish Review_ (Spring 1970)

d'Amico, Masolino 'Oscar Wilde between "Socialism" and Aestheticism' _English Miscellany_ 18 (1967)

Unpublished Sources

a. Manuscripts

I have consulted the John Gray correspondence lodged in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. The correspondence is in 4 sections:

1. 'Michael Field' to John Gray.
2. John Gray to André Raffalovich.
3. André Raffalovich to John Gray.
4. Miscellaneous correspondents to John Gray.

In addition I have consulted the letters to André Raffalovich from miscellaneous correspondents (also in the Edinburgh collection) and Raffalovich's letters to Forrest Reid (in a private collection in N. Ireland).

b. Thesis

Vernon, Peter <u>The Letters of John Gray</u> (University of London Ph.D. Thesis 1976)