

THE THREE SHADOWS FROM *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY**

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ABSTRACT. Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) becomes especially interesting when one analyzes it through the hermeneutical lenses of The Garden of Eden complex. The comparison between Dorian's decreation and the Fall of Adam and Eve was not yet researched taking into consideration the Hegelian-Kierkegaardian insights about "lost innocence" and "revolutionary freedom". I have also investigated the ideal of "total existence" proposed by Lord Henry Wotton and his Symbolist eulogy of Beauty. Moreover, the Jungian concept of the shadow was used to explain the dynamics between the two main characters of the novel. The destruction of ethics, which reminds us of Nietzsche and Rimbaud and the final Kierkegaardian collapse of aestheticism transforms Oscar Wilde into a complex author who deserves a thorough philosophical analysis.

Keywords: The Fall, Jungian shadow, decreation, awakening, individualism, aestheticism, ethics, symbolism, new Hedonism, nihilism, transfer of personality, psychology of influence, demonism, theosis, existentialism

*„To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame,
to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.”*
(Walter Pater)

“Your Eyes Shall Be Opened”

There are three Jungian shadows in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: Lord Henry Wotton, *Dorian Gray 2*, Lord Henry's Luciferian creation and – of course – the physical portrait, the mirror of Dorian's decadence. The “unspotted”¹ Dorian, the hero before his Fall, can be called *Dorian Gray 1*, in contrast with his demonic and nihilist

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¹ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Robert Mighall, Penguin Books, London, 2000, p. 19, henceforth abbreviated as DG.

version, *Dorian Gray* 2. In my reading the 2nd Chapter is the philosophical key of the whole novel: the original shadow (Lord Henry) recreates here Dorian from the innocent prototype of a charming but unaware young man. This section is as important as the 3rd Chapter from *Genesis*, where the snake seduces Adam and Eve, staining their primary innocence.

One cannot say too many things about *Dorian Gray* 1: "There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity" (DG 19). Before being "awaken" by Lord Wotton from the abyss of "self-unawareness" (an awakening just as brutal as Neo's from *The Matrix* when he chooses the red pill²), Dorian Gray was not yet a character. His fabulous beauty makes him a desirable erotic object. The ones around him project in his being their passion, love or friendship [*éros, agápe, philía*], charging and symbolizing Dorian affectively. "Before meeting Henry, and his own likeness, Dorian is indeed a brainless beautiful creature. He is somewhat spoiled but spoiled in a childlike way; he is good-natured, spontaneous, and generous, an absolute innocent."³ *Dorian Gray* 1 is truly a non-person, a "pre-individual", a child who is still sleeping in the night of unconsciousness.

Fortunately, Dorian is an ambiguous non-person: if he were pure void or absolute nothingness, he would never be able to change. The first Dorin has a huge, unknown well of potentiality: a quality which fascinates us in children in the same measure as the "dead end" actuality scares us in elderly people. This potentiality contains an almost perverse feature resulting from the contradiction between purity and *the thirst for infinity*: innocence sings its swan song before awakening. One can almost say that a seducer like Henry Wotton smells the perfume of anxiety (the Kierkegaardian dream of the soul about the spirit) just as the snake from *Genesis* has a nose for the incompleteness and the desire for transgression of the original couple. In a self-referential quote, Lord Wotton, the one who will eventually turn Dorian into his own shadow, speaks of the nature of influence: "Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul ... He becomes an echo of some one else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him" (DG 20).

To influence someone is to provoke a personality transfer, impressing oneself in the texture of someone else's being, reduplicating the other in one's own image. From this perspective, the snake from *Genesis* wanted to impress his own face on Adam and Eve, desiring to become their spiritual creator. If God physically created

² „You take the blue pill, the story ends. You wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.” (*The Matrix*, directed by Larry and Andy Wachowski, 1999.)

³ J. Carol Oates, "The Picture of *Dorian Gray*. Wilde's Parable of the Fall", *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (2), 1980, p. 423.

them, the snake would spiritually *de/recreate* them. The snake pushes our ancestors to the brink of the abyss with a most tempting offer: "But of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Gen.3: 3-5).

"Ye shall be as gods" [*eritis sicut Deus*], "your eyes shall be opened" [*aperientur oculi vestri*]: the snake promised Adam and Eve *everything*, self-awareness and the access to the absolute Being, where essence and existence do coincide. "To be man means to reach toward being God. Or if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God."⁴ The origin of this incommensurate desire derives from the promise of the Enemy. Seen from the causal perspective of lost innocence, the Fall is a tragedy; seen from the teleological perspective of the birth of self-consciousness the *decreation* from Eden is a Hegelian revolution. We shouldn't cry for the wasted paradise, we should be grateful for the gifts of awareness and autonomy. For Hegel, the Garden of Eden was "a prison animals who are bound by natural necessity ... By partaking of the tree of knowledge, humanity transcends its animal nature and becomes like God"⁵.

Just like the tempter, Lord Wotton offers „the Adam-like Dorian"⁶ what the young man so lacks, i. e. *being*: "The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly – that is what each of us is here for. People are afraid of themselves, nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one's self" (DG 20). The aim of life consists in self-transformation and self-consciousness; the fundamental duty of the *Dasein* is towards himself: we register here Henry Wotton's unique temptation for the main character of the novel. The "pre-individual" Dorian is fascinated by the virtuality of this personal America, i. e. his own personality. When the Lord promises selfhood to the young man, the painter Basil Hallward (liaison between tempter and tempted) becomes "conscious only that a look had come into the lad's face that he had never seen there before" (DG 21).

Dorian is attracted with the ideal of intense and full existence, which strongly contrasts with the un-lived life of *Dorian 1*, spent in the incubator of unawareness:

I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream – I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of mediævalism, and return to the Hellenic ideal (DG 21).

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel Barnes, Routledge, London, 1958, p. 566.

⁵ Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 412-413.

⁶ J. Carol Oates, "The Picture of Dorian Gray. Wilde's Parable of the Fall", 423.

“We” must overcome repression and denial, “the mutilation of the savage” (DG 21), the ascetic mortifying and the draconic superego of the Christian morals. “Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us” (DG 21), notes Wotton, echoing an aphorism from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: „He who desires, but acts not, breeds pestilence”⁷. The paradigmatic conflict of the Victorian age, the one between duty and passion is ruined with the unconditional and almost nihilist cult of temptation. “The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it” (DG 21).

As we have seen, Wotton has a nose for the perfume of anxiety, understood as a Kierkegaardian dream of the soul about the spirit, for the innocent’s desire of transformation and “sin” (“if there are such things as sins”) (DG 20):

You, Mr Gray, you yourself, with your rose-red youth and your rose-white boyhood, you have had passions that have made you afraid, thoughts that have filled you with terror, day-dreams and sleeping dreams whose mere memory might stain your cheek with shame (DG 21).

The impact of the Lord’s speech on Dorian is devastating: the words “had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before, but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses.// Music had stirred him like that” (DG 21-22). The repressive reign of ignorance (to echo Hegel) comes to an end: “There was a look of fear in his eyes, such as people have when they are suddenly awakened” (DG 23). The “Adam-like” Dorian awakens in the garden while Lord Henry explains the ontological principle of hedonism: “Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul” (DG 23) (Only sensation can heal the imbalance provoked by intellectual pursuits.)

The episode from the garden reminds us the atmosphere of The Doors’ track *Newborn Awakening* and Louis’s state of mind from *Interview with the Vampire* before his transformation:

That morning I was not yet a vampire, and I saw my last sunrise. I remember it completely, and yet I can’t recall any sunrise before it. I watched its whole magnificence for the last time as if it were the first. And then I said farewell to sun light, and set out to become what I became.”⁸

Jekyll’s rebirth as Hyde derives from he same spiritual territory: “I crossed the yard, wherein the constellations looked down upon me, I could have thought, with wonder, the first creature of that sort that their unsleeping vigilance had yet disclosed to

⁷ William Blake, *Collected Poems*, ed. W. B. Yeats, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 165.

⁸ *Interview with The Vampire*, directed by Neil Jordan, 1994.

them”⁹. Dorian’s second birth (his conversion from *Dorian Gray 1* to *Dorian Gray 2*) is the essential one: Dorian turns from an object, a beautiful, “unspotted” thing into a fascinating and powerful subject, into an exceptional individual, who will both live and act “beyond good and evil”. We easily forget that recreation is endorsed by *decreation*, which means that before his rebirth, Dorian suffered in the garden a spiritual death, an ontic break-up with his primary and anxious innocence. *Dorian Gray 2* will become, as Lord Wotton, a *shadowy* personality, attracted to the dark realm of existence.

“New Hedonism”

Lord Henry adds to the hedonistic ideal of a total existence the promise of a consistent being (“Ye shall be as gods”) and the praise of Beauty and Youth, two qualities that are for the first time perceived by Dorian in their fundamental ephemerality. “You have a wonderfully beautiful face, Mr Gray ... And Beauty is a form of Genius – is higher, indeed, than Genius, as it needs no explanation” (DG 24), argues the descendant of the snake in a shocking way, speaking for the absolute superiority of the Beauty, seemingly transgressing not only the moral register but also the realm of the creative excellence. This extreme eulogy seems to open the way for the surrealist vision, which presupposes a Beauty both visceral and numinous, a “convulsive” one¹⁰. Beauty is an astral and cosmological event, being one “of the great facts of the world, like sunlight, or spring-time, or the reflection in dark waters of that silver shell we call the moon” (DG 24). This preeminence of the visible (“The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible” – DG 24) seems to turn the Irish novelist into one of Heidegger’s forerunners, who defined the “phenomenon” as “that which shows itself in itself”, showing that “‘phenomena’ are the totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to the light – what the Greeks sometimes identified simply with *tà ónta*”¹¹.

Wotton reveals Dorian to himself, inspiring in him the faithfulness to the present moment, when “the world belongs” to him “for one season” (DG 25), faithfulness which coincides with an enormous horror of the destructive character of time. Seemingly Dorian has met Beauty and Youth only for one second as poisoned

⁹ Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Other Tales of Terror*, ed. Robert Mighall, Penguin Books, London, 2002, p. 58.

¹⁰ André Breton, *Nadja*, Gallimard, Paris, 1998, p. 161.

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Blackwell, Oxford, 2001, p. 51.

gifts that would mean nothing “tomorrow”, when Wilde’s character will be banished in the mediocre abyss of old age:

You have only a few years in which to live really, perfectly, and fully. When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it ... Every month as it wanes brings you nearer to something dreadful. Time is jealous of you, and wars against your lilies and your roses. You will become sallow, and hollow-cheeked, and dull-eyed. You will suffer horribly. . . . Ah! realize your youth while you have it ... Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing. . . . A new Hedonism – that is what our century wants. You might be its visible symbol. (DG 24-25)

From the perspective of the “new Hedonism”, the difference between youth and seniority coincides with the distinction between life and death. The old man becomes “unclean because of his vicinity with death” and is considered “a subhuman, a creature who has lost the right to belong to the human race or an imbecile who has forgotten to claim the right to euthanasia”¹². The fear of old age is a subspecies of the fear of death. It would be fairer to say that the fear of old age is a mask of the fear of death because it stains the seemingly limitless potentiality of youth, jamming it with the reality of its ephemerality, whispering to this youth that in the essence it is truly moribund and “sick unto death”. Every instant hides its own *memento mori*:

For there is such a little time that your youth will last – such a little time ... But we never get back our youth. The pulse of joy that beats in us at twenty, becomes sluggish. Our limbs fail, our senses rot. We degenerate into hideous puppets, haunted by the memory of the passions of which we were too much afraid, and the exquisite temptations that we had not the courage to yield to. Youth! Youth! There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth! (DG 25)

Dorian Gray 1 was young, beautiful and unaware – *Dorian Gray 2* became aware of his two main qualities (“The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation” – DG 27) and would do anything to preserve them. On account of his fear of old age – a metonymy of fear of death as I have shown above – (“Yes, there would be a day when his face would be wrinkled and wizen, his eyes dim and colourless, the grace of his figure broken and deformed. The scarlet would pass

¹² Ciprian Vălcan, *Elogiul bâlbâielii [Eulogy of Stammering]*, (București: All, 2011), 44-45.

away from his lips, and the gold steal from his hair. The life that was to make his soul would mar his body. He would become dreadful, hideous, and uncouth” – DG 27), the hero of the novel breaks away completely from the first version of his personality (what I have called *decreation*), becoming *Dorian Gray 2* and recreating himself through the Faustian ontic transfer¹³ between him and the picture: “If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that – I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!” (DG 28).

“Ethics Become Aesthetics”

Dorian Gray 2, the dark, shadowy, Luciferian personality, who would even break the sixth commandment, is the impeccable creation of Lord Henry, this follower of the “Dark Force”, who “had begun by vivisectioning himself, as he had ended by vivisectioning others” (DG 56). For Dorian’s master, as for Protagoras, “man is measure of all things”. “Human life – that appeared to him the one thing worth investigating. Compared to it there was nothing else of any value” (DG 56). Wotton uses the method the natural science to fortify his psychology: he deconstructs his own psyche and the one of their acquaintances to increase his self-knowledge. Another 19th century “biologist”, Turgenev’s nihilistic hero, Bazarov, reaches antihumanism, applying the principles of natural science: “Each one of us has a brain, a spleen and lungs made in the same way and the so-called moral qualities are the same in all of us. The minor variations don’t mean anything”¹⁴. Bazarov’s brutal materialism claims that man is a “thing”. The Kierkegaardian distinction between individual and species that becomes essential for the difference between man and beast is irrelevant for Turgenev’s character: “One human example is sufficient to judge all the rest”¹⁵. The Russian nihilist is, therefore, an *anti-psychologist*. *Au contraire*, Lord Henry is a *connaisseur* of the human soul and a disciple of individualism: he increases his insight practicing spiritual deconstruction. Moreover, like Baudelaire, Gautier and Huysmans, Wotton (and his partisan Dorian with him) flirts with the negative, plucking “flowers of evil”¹⁶:

¹³ He gives away his soul to gain his spirit.

¹⁴ I van Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991, Kindle Edition, Kindle Locations 1772-1774.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ “There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realize his conception of the beautiful” (DG 140).

“There were poisons so subtle that to know their properties one had to sicken of them. There were maladies so strange that one had to pass through them if one sought to understand their nature” (DG 56).

Lord Henry is a pure aesthete and as we have seen in Nietzsche’s case, aestheticism brings along the destruction of ethics¹⁷ or, in other words, is morally indifferent. “No artist has ethical sympathies” (DG 3), we read in Wilde’s bold *Preface*. Dorian’s transformation, his reconstruction in the shape of his second personality, is a conscious creation of Wotton, which has nothing to do with the realm of the contingent. *The Shadow*-Wotton projects himself in the innocent young man to de/restructure him as *Dorian Gray 2*: “Talking to him was like playing upon an exquisite violin. He answered to every touch and thrill of the bow” (DG 37). The exercise of influence is compared once again with the identity transfer, with the “cloning” of the other, who becomes one’s “replica”: “There was something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence. No other activity was like it. To project one’s soul into some gracious form, and let it tarry there for a moment; to hear one’s own intellectual views echoed back ...” (DG 37).

I must make three observations at this point: first, when I influence the other, when I impress my personality in his spiritual code, the other does not become an *alter ego*, “another me”. He would evolve in his own terms, “becoming who he is” (not what I am), using what I gave him to find his unique and personal direction. He honors me by becoming himself. Second, the one I transform would not be able to rise above himself, would not be able to receive my influence if he hadn’t possessed in himself a certain capital to welcome this influence (an imbalance, an undeniable disproportion, an inner unrest). Even before receiving my influence, the other is – in a way – *already* like me: from a certain point of view, the other is spoiled, spotted, turned towards ontic mischief before knowing me. Thus we should not overestimate the influence of the master: a version of the shadow is encrypted in the spiritual code before the archetypal Shadow (this eye of Sauron) exerts its influence. In fact this pre-shadow prayed from the depths for the archetypal descending of the Shadow. We see here that the disciple influenced the master to influence him. Third, when I change the other, I am – in a certain measure – changing myself. The relation between Wotton and Dorian (or the one between Mephistopheles and Faustus) is always dynamic. Any transformation presupposes an inner metamorphosis.

The picture is the third shadow from *Dorian Gray*. Wilde doesn’t give too many details concerning the strange correspondence between Dorian’s spirit and the fabric of the painting, which assumes the moral decomposition of the perpetual

¹⁷ “Bedelia: You no longer have ethical concerns, Hannibal. You have aesthetical ones.

Hannibal: Ethics become aesthetics.” (*Hannibal*, created by Bryan Fuller, Season 3, Episode 1, *Antipasto*, 2015.)

young man: “Was there some subtle affinity between the chemical atoms, that shaped themselves into form and colour on the canvas, and the soul that was within him? Could it be that what that soul thought, they realized?” (DG 93) The “new Hedonism” and the ideal of a total existence are experienced by Dorian through the identification with the Jungian function of sensation, through the endless pursuit of pleasure. “Eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins – he was to have all these things” (DG 102). “The more he knew, the more he desired to know. He had mad hungers that grew more ravenous as he fed them” (DG 124).

Through the picture, “the most magical of mirrors” (DG 103), Dorian will keep track of his decadence sometimes with horror, other times with a sick perverted pleasure:

On his return he would sit in front of the picture, sometimes loathing it and himself, but filled, at other times, with that pride of individualism that is half the fascination of sin, and smiling, with secret pleasure, at the misshapen shadow that had to bear the burden that should have been his own (DG 135).

In fact the portrait is the true *Dorian Gray 2* while our character seeks disguise under the mask of *Dorian Gray 1*. From another perspective, the picture is the living corpse of Dorian, a true *zombie* which feeds with negativity, with “sins”: “What the worm was to the corpse, his sins would be to the painted image on the canvas” (DG 113). While Dorian grows as a sensation type, satisfying his thirst for life, the shadow of the picture grows, becoming “blacker and denser”. “Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is.”¹⁸

The portrait symbolizes a certain anthropological truth: on the way towards individuation any person must become his or her own demon before becoming a god. The shadow reveals our inner devil. The painter Basil, observing the horrifying degradation of the portrait, the collapse of the absolute ideal in the inferno of moral decay, exclaims: “You were to me such an ideal as I shall never meet again. This is the face of a satyr” (DG 150). He reminds us of the famous verses from Baudelaire’s *Une charogne* which also commemorate the hellish decomposition of a sacred ideal:

- Yet you will come to this offence,
this horrible decay,
you, the light of my life, the sun
and moon and stars of my love!

¹⁸ Carl Gustav Jung, *The Collected Works. Complete Digital Edition* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2014, Kindle Edition, Locations 141205-141206 (CW11 §131).

Yes, you will come to this, my gueen,
after the sacraments,
when you rot underground among
the bones already there.¹⁹

Maybe this is the fate which modernity has reserved for the intelligible: to be dumped at the junkyard, like a “carrion”. Maybe all ideals are entwined with their putrefaction in a world constructed on the Nietzschean affirmation “God is dead”.

Towards the end of the novel, Lord Henry praises Dorian’s aesthetic-existential fulfillment, who abstained from creating poetic, sculptural or musical *oeuvres*, transferring his creating *libido* into his own life, turning himself into a genuine work of art. “Life has been your art. You have set yourself to music. Your days are your sonnets” (DG 207), says the Lord, emphasizing his previous reflections: “But now and then a complex personality took the place and assumed the office of art, was indeed, in its way, a real work of art, Life having its elaborate masterpieces, just as poetry has, or sculpture, or painting” (DG 57). The argument of the Irish writer reminds us both of Nietzsche (“Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art”²⁰) and Rimbaud (“I became a fabulous opera”²¹). Dorian achieves the absolute fulfillment of the aesthetical, becoming one of “Life’s masterpieces”. Despite this *realisatio*, his melancholy (the discrepancy between *Dorian Gray 2* and the ghostly *Dorian Gray 1*, the nostalgia for the lost paradise) leads him to suicide. “He loathed his own beauty” (DG 210), writes Oscar Wilde, almost in Rimbaud’s fashion: “One night, I sat Beauty on my knee. -And I found her bitter. -And I hurt her”²². “It was his beauty – reflects Dorian – that had ruined him, his beauty and the youth that he had prayed for. But for those two things, his life might have been free from stain” (DG 210).

Coda: The Ethical Reef

In the manner of Søren Kierkegaard, who discovers the ethical at the end of the aesthetical stage, Wilde contradicts his whole aesthetical nihilism, also deprecating his “beyond good and evil” eulogy of Beauty. Dorian becomes ethical at the end, a splinter of *Dorian Gray 1* “finding bitter” the Beauty that “destroyed” his life. The

¹⁹ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, trans. Richard Howard, David R. Godine, Boston, 2006, p. 36.

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy And Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. by Ronald Speirs, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 18.

²¹ Arthur Rimbaud, *Rimbaud Complete*, ed. and trans. Wyatt Mason, Random House, New York, 2003, p. 349.

²² *Ibid.*, 195.

identity between *Dorian Gray 2* and the picture, on one hand, and the split between the *uncreated Dorian Gray 1* and the *de/recreated Dorian Gray 2*, on the other, lead the main character to demise. The young man senses the identity with the horrible portrait, living in the existential dimension of the "dead soul": "It was the living death of his own soul that troubled him" (DG 210).

If Dorian Gray had been reduced to his identity with *Dorian Gray 2* and the portrait, things would have been much easier: the character would have advanced to a sort of absolute demonism, transgressing any anthropological register. But in the end Wilde revolts against the necessity of the Genesis, against self-affirmation through original sin, against self-awareness and *theosis*, *contra* Hegel, Bakunin and Onfray, rediscovering like Cioran and Kierkegaard, the nostalgia of paradise. *Dorian Gray 1*, the one sacrificed by the Lord Wotton's *decreation*, returns from the unconscious, possessing the autonomy of a shadow's shadow and kills himself, destroying the picture.

Why does not Wilde ends his novel in a Nietzschean fashion, like Maupassant's *Bel Ami*? Why does he punish his character, who has fulfilled an aesthetic ideal and has achieved excellency, despite his immoralism? "But the bravest man amongst us is afraid of himself" (DG 21). The writer born in Dublin was also afraid of himself: his demonism hardly foretells an anti-theology, his philosophy of the "Dark Side" is only a symptom of the repressed Christianity. Like Baudelaire, whose *Litanies of Satan* mark a progression to Catholicism, Wilde destroys his ship in the ethical reef. The nihilism of his characters is only a mask of an Eden complex: their sophisticated freedom hides an infantile nostalgia for nonage. Their duality reproduces the quartering of their author, torn between the cult of Beauty and the worship of "Adam-like" purity.

