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WILDE'S RENAISSANCE: POISON, PASSION, AND PERSONALITY

By Yvonne Ivory

> There were times when it seemed to Dorian Gray that the whole of history was merely the record of his own life. . . . He felt that he had known them all, those strange and terrible figures that had passed across the stage of the world and made sin so marvellous and evil so full of wonder. It seemed to him that in some mysterious way their lives had been his own.
>
> — Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 1890[1]

IN 1877, AS AN OXFORD UNDERGRADUATE, Oscar Wilde was invited to fill out two pages of a "Confession Album," an informal survey of his likes, dislikes, ambitions, and fears. Wilde's answers testify to his deep appreciation for all things Greek: his favorite authors include Plato, Sappho, and Theocritus; he would hate to part with his Euripides; he admires Alexander the Great. But when faced with a question regarding the place he would most like to live, Wilde chooses not Athens or Argos but "Florence and Rome"; and when asked about the historical period in which he would most liked to have lived, Wilde opts for "the Italian Renaissance" (Holland 44–45). As there was no room on the form for Wilde to expand on this statement, we can only speculate as to why he saw Renaissance Italy as a time and a place in which he would have felt at home. But what the response tells us for certain is that while he was at Oxford, Wilde found the culture of *Quattro*- and *Cinquecento* Italy particularly appealing, was comfortable imagining himself as part of that period, and was prepared to acknowledge his enthusiasm for the period to his friends. Moreover, it shows that while Wilde may have treasured the cultural artifacts of ancient Greece as a young man, he was more eager to experience the whole way of life captured in the idea of the Italian Renaissance.

This essay presents a genealogy of Wilde's engagement with the Renaissance, starting with his undergraduate studies and culminating in his Renaissance-themed writings of the 1890s. Over the course of these two decades, Wilde's Renaissance reception moves from one which simply replicates many popular contemporary notions about the period to one which is organized around his own theory of personality. Under this rubric, Wilde unites ideas about self-culture, experimental individualism, style, and aestheticism, defending any number of (ostensibly) socially undesirable phenomena (acting, forgery, lies, illicit passions, criminality, and even murder) by suggesting that their practice can contribute to the full development of a well-rounded individual. The break between Wilde's earlier, derivative representations of the Renaissance and his later, more innovative treatment of the era occurs

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in the mid-1880s, a period that marks a watershed in Wilde's life: 1886 was the year he is thought to have first had a male lover (Ellmann 275; Fryer 19, 25); one year earlier sexual acts between men had been criminalized by the Labouchère Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act.[2] From the point at which Wilde participated in activities designated as criminal, he began in his writings to consider seriously ways of exonerating criminal acts. He developed a theory of personality that defended crime and sexual dissidence in the name of self-realization, and braced this new theory against the legacy of the Renaissance: a time, he now argued, that celebrated individualism, that had an ethics of criminality, and that embraced non-conventional sexuality.

In what follows, I first describe Wilde's encounter with Victorian notions of the Renaissance at Oxford, where he was an undergraduate in the mid-1870s. I go on to delineate how Wilde represented the Renaissance when he first wrote about it during the early 1880s, and show that he consistently associated the period with the set of phenomena (beauty, crime, passion, secrets, and sin) that usually mapped the topography of the Renaissance for Victorian thinkers. I then turn to Wilde's works of the late 1880s and early 1890s – focusing in particular on "Pen, Pencil, and Poison," "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," "The Soul of Man under Socialism," and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – in an effort to illustrate the centrality of ideas about Renaissance individualism to Wilde's rehabilitation of same-sex desire. Ultimately, I suggest that the Wildean aesthetic of the 1890s owes a deep and previously unacknowledged debt to Victorian notions of the Renaissance.

Late-nineteenth-century homosexuals, faced with the criminalization and pathologization of their desires, often looked to earlier periods and cultures to find (by way of historical precedent) justifications for and even the privileging of those desires. Ancient Greece was perhaps the most obvious place for a Victorian intellectual to look for a positive portrayal of eroticized same-sex relations (Crawford; Dellamora, esp. 33, 161–63; Dowling, *Hellenism*; Jenkyns, esp. 221–26). Wilde was well acquainted with the notion of Greek love, having proofread an 1874 study of ancient Greek culture by J. P. Mahaffy in which Mahaffy discusses the Greeks' tolerance of erotic relationships between men (Ellmann 29; Belford 43).[3] There are a number of indications that Wilde was prepared to map his desires onto Greek culture: references to Greek figures in his letters to Lord Alfred Douglas (*Letters* 544, 559), celebrations of male beauty in his poetry (in "Endymion" and "Charmides," for instance), and an eloquent defense of Platonic love in the Old Bailey (Ellmann 463) all point to Wilde's willingness to evoke Greek models of love between men when exploring his own experience of love. Such invocations were not made naïvely, either: Wilde often reflected on the very exercise of appropriating the past to serve the needs of the present (*Notebooks* 152–57). In an 1882 lecture that he delivered on his American tour, "The English Renaissance of Art," he speaks of "that strained self-consciousness of our age . . . that intellectual curiosity of the nineteenth century which is always looking for the secret of the life that still lingers round old and bygone forms of culture" (*Works* 10: 269–70). Wilde goes on here to criticize his own age for being so selective with regard to the past, for taking only "from each [bygone form of culture] what is serviceable for the modern spirit – from Athens its wonder without its worship, from Venice its splendour without its sin" (270). Instead of attempting to exercise such careful management of the role that the past may play in the present, thinkers of the nineteenth century should recognize that "the truths of art cannot be taught: they are revealed only, revealed to natures which have made themselves receptive of all beautiful impressions by the study and worship of all beautiful things" (270). Ultimately, he is suggesting in this

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thoroughly Paterian passage that all aspects of the past are potential sources of beauty – Athens's wonder *as well as* its worship; Venice's splendor *as well as* its sin.

When Wilde reduces ancient Athens to its essential qualities for rhetorical purposes, then, he finds wonder and worship; when he looks at (Renaissance) Venice he finds splendor and sin. It is precisely this association of Renaissance Italy with sin, its contrast with the wholesomeness of Athens, that makes it an extremely resonant historical era for the Victorian homosexual. For, as the original Greek revival, the Renaissance already contains within itself the noble precedent that was Greek love; its added characterization as an era brimful with sin gives it a dimension lacking in representations of ancient Greece and secures its status as an era – in matters of same-sex desire, at least – more resonant for late-nineteenth-century Britain than classical Athens could be. The "sin" of the Renaissance was implicitly justified by many nineteenth-century historians and art historians by references to the unparalleled "splendour" that the period and its excesses produced;[4] in his appropriation of Renaissance models, Wilde makes a similar move, amplifying the standard justification of Renaissance excess so that even the most unmentionable of sins, if committed in order to develop the splendid individual, can be rehabilitated. This reevaluation of the value of crime, this rehabilitation of the criminal act, is already implicit in some of Wilde's early Renaissance-themed works; in his later writings, it becomes part of a more explicit agenda.

Wilde attended Oxford from 1874 to 1878, a period when Hellenism was on the rise and when the Renaissance – seen as the first revival of antiquity – was being studied enthusiastically. Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* had appeared in 1873, and already had something of a cult following by the time Wilde arrived at Oxford, where Pater was a fellow; John Ruskin had already been expounding on the evils of the Renaissance for several decades by the time Wilde took a course in Florentine art with him in 1874; and the first volumes of John Addington Symonds's *Renaissance in Italy* were published in 1875.[5]

Where Pater and Symonds embraced the period's aesthetic and cultural legacy for the modern era, Ruskin rejected Renaissance art both in content and in form, claiming the Renaissance destroyed the achievements of medieval artists. Although Wilde became something of a disciple of Ruskin during his early years at Oxford (Ellmann 49), his Bible as an undergraduate was Pater's *Renaissance*, a volume he often referred to as his "golden book" (Yeats 80; Wilde, *Works* 13: 539). Despite the fact that Pater in his *Studies* and Ruskin in his lectures and essays offer very different appraisals of the Renaissance, as an undergraduate Wilde managed to embrace them both and make the tensions between their theories productive. Indeed, their respective views on the Renaissance do not have to be seen as mutually exclusive, rather together they can be seen as constituting a reading of the Renaissance that maintains its integrity despite the rhetoric of division that frames it. Though one condemns and the other valorizes the period, in attempting to describe it both offer visions of the Renaissance that, for the most part, complement one another. For Ruskin, for instance, over-emphasis on the human form is to be criticized in Renaissance artwork (12: 353; 22: 86, 94–97); for Pater a new concentration on the human form is the source of much of his excitement about Renaissance artwork (*Renaissance* xxxii, 3, 27, 80). They may disagree about what a preoccupation with physicality might mean, but they agree that the body is the typical subject matter of Renaissance art. Wilde seems to concur when he writes in his Oxford "Commonplace Book" that while sculpture and painting reached new heights in the "full tide of the Renaissance" at the hands of Michelangelo, this could only have happened in "the South

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where the human body was seen and was loved" (*Notebooks* 143–44). Thus when Richard Ellmann writes that Ruskin and Pater "stood like heralds, beckoning [Wilde] in opposite directions" (51) he misses the important possibility that Wilde could thrive on the seeming contradiction their interpretations of the Renaissance offered; that the danger with which Ruskin associates the period is precisely what makes it so attractive to a Pater enthusiast.[6]

It is clear from the notebooks kept by Wilde at Oxford that his concept of the Renaissance began to crystallize in the mid-1870s. Three main characteristics distinguish artists and thinkers of the Renaissance for the young Wilde: their infusion of Greek forms with human passions, their privileging of the intellectual over the moral, and their capacity for sin and violence. On more than one occasion he praises the "humanity" of the art of the period. What "the Italian art . . . added" to Greek "colour" and "form," he writes, was "the pity and the passion, the human background to all art" (*Notebooks* 115). He singles out Michelangelo in particular as someone whose work gave "voice" to "all the utterances of humanity" (144): his sculpture, according to Wilde, expressed "passionate humanity and mysticism" (170). At the same time, however, the Renaissance "was an intellectual movement" (124), a fact which explains, Wilde believes, the unconventional mores of the period, for it was "an intellectual movement in which speculation was of more value than conduct" (123), in which "humanity demanded . . . free scope for the intellect – the throwing off of authority to breathe again in the free frank air where nothing stood between men's eyes and the sun of truth" (124). Benvenuto Cellini and Niccolo Machiavelli were two men who fully understood the implications of this new order of things: "the Renaissance" as an era where intellectual endeavor took precedent over moral principle "was served better by Machiavelli than by Savonarola, by Cellini than by Francis," he notes (124). Elsewhere in the notebooks Wilde elaborates with similar language on why Machiavelli was a stellar representative of the spirit of the Renaissance: "He employed the legitimate method of abstraction and isolated his problem from the disturbing effects of morality" (158). Finally, Wilde acknowledges that pursuits less noble than those of an intellectual nature also profited from the setting aside of morality during the Renaissance. Wilde's Renaissance is a period whose "tyrannicides" (130) would seem to be common knowledge to judge by his notes; a time when "order," "virtue," and "authority" were thrown off in the face of "things evil" (124). The sins of Renaissance despots and "the nameless horror of the Vatican of the cinquecento" were paralleled only by the worst excesses of the ancient Greek world (124).

Already by the late 1870s, then, Wilde's conception of the Italian Renaissance reproduces a number of the topoi commonly associated with the Renaissance by Victorian historians and art historians: it is peopled by individuals who are eager to cultivate their aesthetic sensibilities; it is a period when the most perfect forms of Greek beauty are adopted and imbued with "human" (sometimes illicit) passion; and it is crime-ridden, an era when sin is common in even the most sacred of places.[7] In the representations of the Renaissance produced by Wilde in the early 1880s, in *The Duchess of Padua* and the unfinished drama "The Cardinal of Avignon,"[8] these are the themes which prevail.

The aestheticization of life during the Renaissance was a concept that had already captured Wilde's imagination before he began working on his Renaissance plays. While touring in the United States in 1882, Wilde read aloud from the autobiography of the Renaissance goldsmith Benvenuto Cellini to silver miners in Colorado (Ellmann 205), hoping, as he explains in "House Decoration," to persuade them to make something more beautiful, "more permanent," than coins out of their precious metals. If they only would do

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so, they would be on a footing with the artisans of Renaissance Florence, whose "golden gates . . . are as beautiful to-day as when Michael Angelo saw them" (*Works* 10: 288). The fact that Cellini and Michaelangelo are the exemplary figures in Wilde's call for an "art . . . which hallows the vessels of everyday use" (281) illustrates the extent to which the Renaissance is intrinsically connected with this principle for Wilde. When, during the same lecture tour, he tries to justify his claim that England is experiencing a "Renaissance of Art," he ventures a characterization of the Italian Renaissance that replicates accepted Victorian notions of the *Quattrocento* (that it was a "new birth of the spirit of man" which unleashed "new intellectual and imaginative enjoyments" [243]) but emphasizes in particular that period's "desire for a more gracious and comely way of life, its passion for physical beauty, its exclusive attention to form" (243).

These principles are worked into Wilde's Renaissance plays: sets are described in lavish detail, the form of any prop would appear to be of no less importance than its function within the play, and beauty is a constant theme on each character's lips. *The Duchess of Padua*, for instance, opens on the marketplace of Padua, a space filled with statues, marble steps, and colorfully decorated houses (*Works* 6: 1). When the action moves to the Ducal Palace, opulent décor is even more in evidence, with stage directions calling for "a large canopy . . . with three thrones; . . . the ceiling . . . made of long gilded beams; furniture of the period, chairs covered with gilt leather, and buffets set with gold and silver plate, and chests painted with mythological scenes" (37). The Paduan Court of Justice, with its velvet hangings, painted ceiling, decorated canopies, and gilded caryatides, is also designed to please the eye (129). Wilde's attention to rich decorative detail in each of these locations makes for a coherence among the sets of the play that transcends their functional differences and confirms the status of the Renaissance as the preserve of the beautiful. The props of the play come in for similar treatment. *The Duchess of Padua* opens with a secret first meeting between the central character, Guido Ferranti, and his murdered father's loyal friend, Count Moranzone, in which the latter is to make himself recognizable by wearing "a violet cloak with a silver falcon broidered on the shoulder" (2–3). Lavishly decorated cloaks and daggers appear to have become something of a theme when Guido remarks upon first holding his father's dagger: "my . . . uncle . . . told me a cloak wrapped round me when a babe bare too much yellow leopards wrought in gold; I like them best in steel, as they are here" (16). These elaborate descriptions are more evidence of an attempt to represent the Renaissance as a time when even utilitarian objects were beautifully adorned.

Wilde peppers both *The Duchess of Padua* and "The Cardinal of Avignon" with lovers' declarations about each other's physical beauty (*Works* 6: 57–65; "Vera" 13r)[9] ; more interesting, though, are the (rare) occasions in these plays on which Wilde allows a character to reflect on the nature of beauty, or on its function in society. The Cardinal of Avignon at one point criticizes his ward Beatrice for sharing her thoughts on how one should treat one's dreams:

> Why what sweet wisdom hangs upon your lips! / Yet do not change to a philosopher. / It is enough that you are beautiful; / The world is oversick with good advice. / But beauty is the doctor of the world – / Without whose medicine we w[oul]d fall sick / To know one's evil is not to be cured. (9r)

Two ideas are important here: first, that the aesthetic and the didactic should not mingle, that beauty is only marred when coupled with advice – a key tenet of nineteenth-century

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aestheticism; and second, the corollary (aestheticist) idea that beauty in and of itself is enough to cure the world of its evils – a notion fully in harmony with Wilde's advice to the American public in "House Decoration" and "The English Renaissance of Art." In the mouth of the Cardinal it becomes a Renaissance idea, written into that period by an intellectual committed to principles outlined in Pater's *Renaissance*. In *The Duchess of Padua*, Wilde adds love to this equation, presenting the argument that beauty is not necessarily natural, but that it must be worked at by man, and that the element without which this work is futile, is love. As Guido puts it: "Without love / Life is no better than the unhewn stone / Which in the quarry lies, before the sculptor / Has set the God within it. Without love / Life is as silent as the common reeds / That through the marshes or by rivers grow / And have no music in them" (*Works* 6: 63–64). This principle ultimately offers a mechanism by which everyday Renaissance life might have come to be so highly aestheticized: where openly expressed love is commonplace, the commonplace can be elevated to an art form.

Wilde not only reproduces a Renaissance that gives new vigor to human passion in Guido's theory of the aesthetic: throughout his Renaissance-themed works Wilde associates the period with love, with sexual profligacy, and with (often illicit) desire. The very image he takes up in "The English Renaissance of Art" to describe the nature of a Renaissance, such as was experienced in early-modern Italy or (in Wilde's view) in nineteenth-century England, is one that implies sexual congress: borrowing from Goethe (via John Addington Symonds and Vernon Lee [Fraser 225]), Wilde compares the Renaissance to the "beautiful boy Euphorion" who "sprang" from "the marriage of Faust and Helen of Troy" (*Works* 10: 244). The plots of both of Wilde's Renaissance plays turn on the development and concealment of erotic passion. In *The Duchess of Padua*, Guido's love for the Duchess complicates the simple task of revenge set before him in Act I, while her reciprocation of that forbidden love causes the Duchess to become a murderer; in "The Cardinal of Avignon" the Cardinal's secret passion for his ward Beatrice causes him to manipulate his son, her suitor, Astone, into rejecting her, and thus indirectly brings about the suicides of the two young figures.

Unlike the "noble" love between Guido and his best friend Ascanio (*Works* 6: 29, 33), the love between Guido and the Duchess, for all its poetry and intensity, is clearly marked as adulterous. In the context of this drama, however, adultery is not necessarily seen as a great evil. Although the Duke insists on having a wife who is seen to be "faithful" and "patient" (79–80), his attitude toward adultery is not categorical: he warns the men of Padua to keep a close eye on their wives with such a handsome man as Guido about; and, when told in response that "the wives of Padua are above suspicion," he seems perturbed by the fact that "they [are] so ill-favoured" (26), a flippant comment that suggests that in his ideal world wives would always attract the attention of other men and, thus, ought always be objects of suspicion.[10] When Guido and the Duchess declare their love for one another, they express no sense of guilt or concern about the adulterous nature of their relationship; Guido's fear that he has been "too daring" (57) in approaching the Duchess is the only indication that either of them senses their encounter might be inappropriate. Only Guido's mentor, Moranzone, is cold enough to deride the affair, which he disparagingly refers to as Guido's "traffic with the Duchess" (96).

Innocence is the hallmark of the affair between Beatrice and Astone in "The Cardinal of Avignon," but the passion of the Cardinal for his ward, on the other hand, smacks of incest. Beatrice is as a daughter to him and, nevertheless, he tries to win her, going so far even as to deploy conventional taboos about incestuous desires (he persuades her that she is Astone's

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sister) in order to remove her current lover from the scene ("Vera" 15r). The Cardinal does this despite the fact that he has been haunted by a dream in which he was welcomed to the gates of Hell with the accusation that he lived an incestuous life (6r). And incest is not the only sin the Cardinal has committed in the name of love: earlier in the same dream he was pursued by a leprous monster (2r) "fresh sent from hell" (3r) which announced – to the Cardinal's horror – that it was his own soul: "this hath thou done to me" (3r). The Cardinal realizes that his soul changed from something "angelic" (2r) into something "hideous" and "foul" (3r) as a direct result of excesses committed (or perhaps yet to be committed) at Rome:

> I [fled] from my soul whom I myself / Had with mine own hands murdered in my days / Of gorgeous pomp and majesty at Rome[,] / Ay, stretched upon the rack of secret sin[,] / Sold as a slave to lust and made a thing / Dishonoured and defiled and desecrate[.] / My soul that should have been the incarnate God / Dwelling within my body[.] (4r)

In the case of the Cardinal, sexual exploits are almost always mentioned in the same breath as criminal activities. He is addressed by the gatekeepers of Hell as "thou murderous and incestuous Pope" (6r), he plans to "poison" Astone with an "incestuous plague" (15r), and twice he is aligned with the Borgia family, notorious for their sexual and violent excesses: in his dream he is told that "No guiltier man hath come from Rome to Hell / though bloody Nero and the Borgia / Howl here in utter Darkness" (6r) and, reflecting later on "the poisons / Of that fair fiend Lucrezia [Borgia]," he declares "How easy can one kill one's enemies: / The Borgias have done that much for the world" (10r). Regardless of the regret he expresses at his misdeeds in hindsight, the Cardinal never resolves to change and, by the end of the play, has added yet another set of sins to those already written on the body of his dreamed soul.

Aligned with the Borgias, the Cardinal of Avignon is a quintessential Renaissance figure for Wilde, a position he makes clear in his lecture on "The English Renaissance of Art." In a paean to Michelangelo's paintings in the Sistine Chapel, Wilde claims that

> Those strange, wild-eyed sibyls fixed eternally in the whirlpool of ecstasy, those mighty-limbed and Titan prophets . . . tell us more of the real spirit of the Italian Renaissance, of the dream of Savonarola and of the sin of Borgia, than all the . . . boors and . . . women of Dutch art can teach us of the real spirit of the history of Holland. (*Works* 10: 258–59)

Michelangelo's terrifying mythical creatures more realistically represent the Renaissance than the best Dutch realist painting ever represented Holland; Savonarola's fiery vision of the destruction of a Sodom-like Florence is the epitome of the Renaissance; and the "real spirit" of Renaissance Italy becomes clear to us when we consider the sins of the Borgias. The Cardinal of Avignon, we can presume, is another expression of the Renaissance's "real spirit."

The tyrannical and corrupt Duke of Padua springs from the same mould. He is implicated in a number of violent crimes, one entire scene is dedicated to his brutally repressive policies (*Works* 6: 37–54), and the very plot of the play revolves around a fatally treasonous act he committed against Guido's father (9–10). The Duke openly acknowledges his tendency toward evil, joking to his courtiers that "God would grow weary if I told my sins" (20). Such a figure is necessary to the structure of *The Duchess of Padua*, as it is against such

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unscrupulous acts that the crime of the Duchess is to be measured. If there is any conventional psychological development in the plot, it is Guido's gradual acceptance of the fact that the Duchess's circumstances – namely, her love for him – mitigate her murder of the Duke, and make the act forgivable. His initial position, that murder makes love impossible, that "[t]he wicked cannot love" (98), is reversed by the end of the play. When the Duchess asks him whether he thinks "that love / Can wipe the bloody stain from off my hands, / . . . And wash my scarlet sins as white as snow?" he replies that "They do not sin at all / Who sin for love" (209), the closing message of the play.

Guido's absolution of the Duchess offers a new spin on the Machiavellian notion of the end justifying the means; one in which love, not power, is the individual's object. Of course, this love-object is acceptable as long as it comprises love between a man and a woman. Absolution is an unlikely outcome, however, when the love in question is of one man for another. The controversial passage in 1885 of a law prohibiting "indecent" acts between men meant that Wilde's 1886 affair with Robert Ross was not merely an act of adultery, but also a crime in its own right. Under the strain of two men desiring one another, the trope of romantic love, never a prominent element in dominant Victorian discourses of homosexuality, could not hold up: in the late 1880s Wilde would find a more robust trope in the idea of self-culture, an idea which would provide absolution after the revised formula "they do not sin at all, who sin for personality."

A particular notion of personality lies at the heart of a theory developed by Wilde during these years and laid out in such essays as "Pen, Pencil, and Poison," "The Critic as Artist," and "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," as well as in the fictional works "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." and, to a lesser extent, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It is a notion Wilde connects with the Renaissance at every turn, and one which breathes new life into and forges new connections among the topoi automatically associated with the Renaissance by Wilde in *The Duchess of Padua* and "The Cardinal of Avignon": criminality, dissident sexuality, and the cultivation of the aesthetic. Once carefully assembled, this set of ideas becomes the structure on which Wilde's theory and praxis of self-aestheticization can comfortably hang, allowing Wilde, with the very simplest of gestures and the very vaguest of cues, to invoke an entire cosmology within which dissident sexuality and criminal activity are not merely defensible, but are in fact privileged aspects of experience.

Before 1886 Wilde has little to say about self-culture, individualism, or strong personalities. One comment in his Oxford notebooks, however, carries the germ of an idea with which he will concern himself much more intensely later in life. He notes that:

> Progress in thought is the assertion of individualism against authority, and progress in matter is the differentiation and specialization of function: those organisms which are entirely subject to external influences do not progress any more than a mind entirely subject to authority. (*Notebooks* 121)

Individualism, here a potential property of both matter and mind and a force essential to progress, is characterized as a movement away from external influences, as a questioning and sometimes a rejection of authority. In "The English Renaissance of Art" Wilde uses the word in a similar way, although in this case he does not link it with philosophy and biology but with artistic endeavor, arguing that "it is not enough that a work of art should conform to the æsthetic demands of its age," rather that it must show "the impress of a distinct individuality, an individuality remote from that of ordinary men" (*Works* 10: 251). In this lecture for the

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first time, too, Wilde lines up individuality with personality, adding as something of an epitaph to his paragraph on aesthetic individuality the comment "*La personalité*, said one of the greatest of modern French critics, *voilà ce qui nous sauvera*" (251; "personality, that's what will save us"). Individualism is not associated with the Renaissance in this lecture (just as it does not appear as a theme in either Renaissance play); rather it is – as Ruskin would have it – a characteristic of medieval life: Wilde cites Mazzini's claim that "mediævalism" is nothing more than "individuality" (244), and finds that the Pre-Raphaelites surpassed the individuality of the pre-Renaissance painters they were trying to emulate, displaying "an individuality more intimate and more intense" than those "early Italian masters" (251).

When Wilde next broaches the subject, he has pushed the emergence of individualism forward in time, out of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. In an 1886 review of the final volumes of John Addington Symonds's *Renaissance in Italy*, Wilde finds that "[Mr. Symonds] is fascinated by great personalities," a fact that should not surprise the reader, Wilde reasons, when "the age itself was one of exaggerated individualism" (*Works* 13: 106). Three years later Wilde repeats this observation in a review of Lady Dilke's *Art in the Modern State*. After quoting a passage in which the author claims that the Middle Ages made self-renunciation the ideal, while "the queenly Venus of the Renaissance" saw a revival of interest in "the joys of life" (*Works* 13: 470), Wilde declares that the "whole subject is certainly extremely fascinating. The Renaissance had for its object the development of great personalities. The perfect freedom of the intellect in intellectual matters, the full development of the individual, were the things it aimed at" (471). Wilde strikes a new note here when he twice draws attention to the fact that the individual (or the great personality) did not occur naturally during the Renaissance but that it had to be developed, suggesting that individuality represents the realization of a person's potential. Wilde is touching on the Victorian notion of self-culture here, an idea that is implicit in much of his writing on individualism in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Individualism, personality, and self-culture are braided together so tightly for Wilde by this time that when, in the 1890 essay "The Critic as Artist," he wishes to repeat the observations he made on individuality and personality in the Symonds and Dilke reviews, he has Gilbert assert that "the one thing that made the Renaissance great" was "self-culture" (*Works* 8: 187).

Wilde lays out a programmatic theory of individualism in his 1891 essay "The Soul of Man Under Socialism." It is a piece that adds a new wrinkle to a contemporary intellectual debate in which socialism was generally pitted against the individualism thought to lie at the heart of capitalism. Wilde's position is that individualism is not the antithesis of socialism, but that socialism is a stage on the road toward an ideal society in which individualism will flourish (*Works* 8: 293). Socialism, by stripping the wealthy of their possessions, will at last bring about a society in which "we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things. . . . One will live" (285). For "*the true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is*" (283–84; emphasis in original). Once "man's personality" is no longer "completely . . . absorbed by his possessions" (284), he will be able freely to "develop what is wonderful, and fascinating, and delightful in him" (285). Wilde emphasizes throughout "The Soul of Man" the importance of realizing each person's potential individualism. He writes of a "great actual Individualism latent and potential in mankind generally" (283), calls for an individualism that will provide "for the full development of Life into its highest mode of perfection" (276), and laments that under current conditions only a privileged, wealthy, gifted few "have been able to realise their

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personality, more or less completely" (283). Wilde's position is that this "partial realisation" of "Humanity" (277) is not enough; that each individual should have the opportunity to realize him- or herself fully, to develop into a personality.

This same concept of individualism as the realization of one's potential – a lifelong project – underlies the plot of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which appeared a year earlier than "The Soul of Man." The lines Wilde will later claim as his own in that essay are rehearsed by Lord Henry Wotton when he tells Dorian Gray that:

> The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly, – that is what each of us is here for. . . . I believe that if one man were to live his life out fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream, – I believe 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, – to something finer, richer than the Hellenic ideal. (*Dorian Gray* 185–86; ch. 2)

For the first time here we have a description of what the work of self-development entails, namely giving "form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream." This definition of self-culture is at odds with other contemporary definitions of the practice, most of which recommend self-control and self-denial and almost all of which presume self-culture is an intellectual – not a practical – pursuit.

Wotton's praise of self-development is an offshoot of his conviction that "all influence is immoral" (185; ch. 2), a thesis on which he is given a chance to expand in the 1891 version of the novel. Here Wotton adds that "[t]o be good is to be in harmony with one's self. . . . One's own life – that is the important thing. . . . [O]ne's neighbours . . . are not one's concern" (64; ch. 6). Wilde supports Wotton's position in "The Soul of Man," where he argues that the cultivation of a personality can only occur when dominant moral standards are ignored (*Works* 8: 293, 334). In Wilde's utopia individualists will not seek to influence one another, but will celebrate difference: "It will be a marvellous thing – the true personality of man," he writes, "[i]t will not always be meddling with others, or asking them to be like itself. It will love them because they will be different. . . . The personality of man will be very wonderful" (287).

Wilde takes this logic a step further when he uses it to challenge directly the authority of law and to call for a reconsideration of the function of crime in society. He argues that this utopian state, the "personality of man," "will not . . . admit any laws but its own laws; nor any authority but its own authority" (287). Once authority and private property have been dismantled, all crime will disappear, as crime owes its existence on the one hand to the unequal distribution of wealth under capitalism (which makes people envious of one another's possessions), and on the other to attempts by those in authority to enforce uniformity where they ought not do so.

This representation of crime, though bold, is far less radical than its representation in Wilde's biographical study of Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, "Pen, Pencil, and Poison" (1889). Whereas in "The Soul of Man" Wilde sees crime as something that brings little good to the world, in "Pen, Pencil, and Poison" crime is a positive phenomenon that can contribute substantially to the project of self-culture. Wainewright, an early-nineteenth-century writer, artist, forger, and murderer, is portrayed sympathetically by Wilde, who places Wainewright's illegal acts in the same category as his drawings and writings, as manifestations of aesthetic sensibilities (*Works* 8: 90). But his crimes were not just a by-product of his aesthetic judgements, they also resulted in a broadening of his aesthetic

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horizons: "His crimes . . . gave a strong personality to his style, a quality that his early work certainly lacked" (91–92). Not only did his "style" become more personalized through his criminal activities, his personality itself became ever more successful as a creative project: "One can fancy" writes Wilde, "an intense personality being created out of sin" (92).[11] The lesson of Wainewright's tale is ultimately that "[t]here is no essential incongruity between crime and culture" (93).

One particularly striking example of the compatibility of crime and culture brings the figure of Wainewright into a context that is indicatively Renaissance: he once forged a signature in order to obtain money to improve his collection of Florentine majolica – an act that would eventually be the cause of his arrest and trial (69, 86–87). Majolica was just one of the Renaissance art forms that attracted Wainewright: he wrote about "La Giaconda . . . and the Italian Renaissance" (68), about Tintoretto, Michaelangelo, Giorgione, and Corregio (73); his décor included reproductions of Michelangelo's engravings and Giorgione's "Pastoral" (69); in short, "the art of the Renaissance [was] always dear to him" (73). This should not surprise us, in Wilde's opinion, as a figure such as Wainewright is more suited to the Renaissance than he is to the nineteenth century; and "had he lived . . . at the time of the Italian Renaissance . . . we would be quite able to arrive at a perfectly unprejudiced estimate of his position and value" (93–94). It is historical distance that enables us to focus less on the gruesome aspects of crime and more on its potential charms and benefits:

> At present I feel that he is just a little too modern to be treated in that fine spirit of disinterested curiosity to which we owe so many charming studies of the great criminals of the Italian Renaissance from the pens of Mr. John Addington Symonds, Miss A. Mary F. Robinson, Miss Vernon Lee, and other distinguished writers. (94–95)[12]

In such passages as these, Wilde situates the concept of crime as a positive force, as an agent of beauty, and as a creator of great personalities firmly in Renaissance Italy. We must read histories of the Renaissance to appreciate the importance of crime for self-culture, just as we must, Wilde will suggest elsewhere, look to the Renaissance if we are to appreciate the importance of sexual transgression for self-realization.

The project of self-culture, the path to the personality of man, is a project, then, that often runs through the territory of crime; at the very least it will involve deception; most likely it will mean encounters with "sin" – including those of the flesh. Dorian Gray is "haunted" by the fact that the world "sought to starve [the senses] into submission," and longs for a "new hedonism" which will "never . . . accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of *any mode of passionate experience*" (*Dorian Gray* 244; 1890, ch. 9; 1891, ch. 11; emphasis added). In "The Soul of Man," Wilde offers the story of Jesus and the adulteress as an example of the "suggestive things in Individualism": Jesus forgave her her sins "not because she repented, but because her love was so intense and wonderful" (*Works* 8: 291). The implication here is that illicit acts, when driven by intense feeling, are not sins at all but rather acts of individualism – a fact even God must concede.

As was the case with crime, when it comes to sexual transgressions and individualism Wilde has two (not necessarily consistent) theories. On the one hand, he describes how illicit sexual acts can lead to the intensification of personality (as in the case of the adulteress); on the other hand, he hopes that a world in which the personality of man has been realized will not recognize such encounters as sinful, aberrant, or criminal at all. In Wilde's utopia the

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barrier that divides legally sanctioned acts of love from all other acts of love will no longer be necessary for non-conventional relationships, romantic and erotic, will be an important aspect of experience for the fully realized personality (292).

In his 1889 review of Walt Whitman's *November Boughs*, Wilde links the development of personality explicitly to a notion of love between men. Wilde reads Whitman's essays as "a record of his spiritual development" (*Works* 13: 397) that provides us with insights into his work, Whitman's "poetry of the future" whose "central point . . . seemed to him [Whitman] to be necessarily 'an identical body and soul, a personality,' in fact, which personality, he tells us frankly, 'after many considerations . . . I deliberately settled should be myself'" (398). The language of the review is replete with metaphors and images that reappear in "The Soul of Man": the American Civil War provided Whitman with "the necessary stimulus for the quickening and awakening of the personal self" (399); "the true creation and revealing of his personality" (398) was his great task; his project of using literature "to build up the masses by 'building up grand individuals'" is an ongoing masterpiece (401). Whitman's enterprise is firmly linked to male friendship, in Wilde's view: he sees "Comradeship" as an important "'impetus-word'" (399) for Whitman, and praises *Leaves of Grass* for introducing the "new theme" of "the relation of the sexes, conceived in a natural, simple and healthy form" (400). When Wilde describes a "more wonderful, more beautiful, and more ennobling [love of man and woman]" (*Works* 8: 292) in "The Soul of Man," he is clearly echoing Whitman's "new theme."

Gilbert's opening observations in "The Critic as Artist," meanwhile, tie together individualism and sexual autonomy under the banner of the Renaissance. Gilbert praises autobiography on the grounds that, in literature, "egotism is delightful" (*Works* 8: 100) – especially when the subject is a personality. He illustrates his point by referring to Benvenuto Cellini, whose autobiography has given humanity "more pleasure" than his artworks (100). It is the prospect of hearing "the supreme scoundrel of the Renaissance" relate "the story of his splendour and his shame" that appeals to the modern reader: "The opinions, the character, the achievements of the man, matter very little . . . but when he tells us his own secrets he can always charm our ears to listening and our lips to silence" (100). Cellini's own secrets, of course, are stories of sexual and gender transgression. He is not the only Renaissance figure linked to same-sex desire in Wilde's writings around 1890. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Dorian reflects that "the love that [Basil] bore him – for it was really love – had something noble and intellectual in it. . . . It was such a love as Michael Angelo had known, and Montaigne, and Winckelmann, and Shakespeare himself" (*Dorian Gray* 236; 1890, ch. 8; 1891, ch. 10). Three of these figures lived during the Renaissance; the fourth, Winckelmann, is closely associated with the Renaissance through his inclusion in Pater's *Renaissance*.

In Wilde's theory of individualism, then, personality is developed through a practice of experimentation that involves the rejection of social norms; once law and authority have been bracketed, the path is clear for personality-enhancing activities that may merely be unconventional, or that may conventionally be condemned as criminal, sinful, or sexually dissident. For examples of how this system works, we need look no further than the Renaissance. These are the mechanics of Wilde's theory of personality.[13] But the development of personality is not just a mechanical process, something that can be reduced to a set of guidelines; it is also a fundamentally aesthetic process, one which demands creativity and makes the self a medium of (original) expression. This is one of the aspects of Whitman's

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work that Wilde most admires: "Whitmanism" is a "poetry" of "personality" (*Works* 13: 398); Whitman himself is "the precursor of a fresh type" (401). In "The Soul of Man," art "*is the most intense mood of Individualism that the world has known*" (*Works* 8: 300–01; emphasis in original). Good art both fosters and requires individualism; bad art is mere imitation (300; 304; 308; 310). As Gilbert puts it in "The Critic as Artist," "there is no art where there is no style, and no style where there is no unity, and unity is of the individual" (127). Thus as his work becomes more of a locus of disturbance and disintegration, the personality of the artist exhibits more cohesion and integrity.

Again, this idea is mapped onto the Renaissance by Wilde in "The Soul of Man." The Renaissance is exemplary as a period when self-culture and aesthetics were intertwined:

> the Renaissance was great, because it sought to solve no social problem, and busied itself not about such things, but suffered the individual to develop freely, beautifully, and naturally, and so had great and individual artists, and great and individual men. (325)

The self-sacrifice at the heart of medieval (Christian) ideology was replaced by self-indulgence during the Renaissance, which "brought with it the new ideals of the beauty of life and the joys of living" and produced men who "could not understand Christ" (331). Painters like Raphael expressed the new ideology of their era by painting the Pope and not Christ; a real beauty-loving individualist, not a pain-worshipping anti-individualist (332). The "bad Popes" of the Renaissance "loved Beauty . . . passionately"; and, like those other despots of the Renaissance, the Princes, were "individuals," and hence thoroughly capable of appreciating "culture" (322). Indeed, if the Renaissance failed to bring about the full realization of the personality of man – true individualism in all areas of life – it did achieve this end in one realm: the "new Individualism" writes Wilde "will be what the Renaissance sought for, but could not realise completely except in Art" (335).

If there is one text in which Wilde weaves together all of the strands of his theory of individualism, its underwriting of crime and deception, its privileging of non-conventional sexual expression, its aesthetic dimension, and its debt to the Renaissance, it is his 1889 short story "The Portrait of Mr. W. H."[14] Three characters appear in this story: a narrator, his friend Erskine, and Erskine's deceased friend Cyril; the plot revolves around a theory of Cyril's regarding the identity of the "Mr. W. H." to whom Shakespeare's Sonnets are dedicated.[15] The short story is mostly taken up with the presentation of arguments that prove (or disprove) the existence of a child actor named Willie Hughes with whom Shakespeare was in love. In the course of these discussions, much is theorized about Renaissance life, about the power of personality, the meaning of art, the implications of love between men, and the nature of deception. The personality of Willie Hughes is at the center of Cyril's (later the narrator's) theory. His genius as an actor lay in his ability to move with great versatility from personality to personality, and it was this gift that made Shakespeare so attracted to him in the first place (*Portrait* 26). When Shakespeare reflected on how it could be that Hughes had "so many personalities," he came to the conclusion that Hughes's was "a beauty . . . that [seemed] to realise every form and phase of fancy, to embody each dream of the creative imagination" (26). In the case of Willie Hughes, personality is inextricably linked to beauty, it is that which comes from beauty, and this is why it so enchants Shakespeare. The narrator later develops a theory that goes some way to explaining the symbiotic relationship between personality and aesthetics, arguing that "[i]t is Art, and Art only, that reveals us to ourselves"

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(77). By this logic, Shakespeare was not only an admirer of Hughes's personalities (the art made possible by Hughes's beauty), but by appreciating those personalities he developed his own personality. Beauty thus simultaneously stimulates and is a product of personality.

There is an erotic element to the relationship between art and personality, too. The realization of personality through contact with art only works because it brings to the admirer awareness of new passions and new pleasures waiting to be tried out:

> We sit at the play with the woman we love, or listen to the music in some Oxford garden, or stroll with our friend through the cool galleries of the Pope's house at Rome, and suddenly we become aware that we have passions of which we have never dreamed, thoughts that make us afraid, pleasures whose secret has been denied to us, sorrows that have been hidden from our tears. (77)

Throughout "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," the pleasures and passions that are waiting to be aroused include intense relationships between men. The first secret revealed through art to the narrator falls into this category. As he reads the Sonnets, he finds himself initiated into a homoerotic secret that has previously "been denied" to him – the "secret of that passionate friendship, that love of beauty and beauty of love, of which Marsilio Ficino tells us, and of which the Sonnets in their noblest and purest significance, may be held to be the perfect expression" (77–78). Ficino, the narrator goes on to explain, translated Plato's *Symposium* in 1492, a work which "certainly . . . fascinated" Shakespeare (42); a "wonderful dialogue" that, upon being published, very quickly

> began to exercise a strange influence over men, and to colour their words and thoughts, and manner of living. In its subtle suggestions of sex in soul, in the curious analogies it draws between intellectual enthusiasm and the physical passion of love, in its dream of the incarnation of the Idea in a beautiful and living form . . . there was something that fascinated the poets and scholars of the sixteenth century. (42)

For the narrator, the sixteenth century is marked by a rediscovery by men of the beauty of other men, and by a flowering of art inspired by that rediscovery. Michelangelo's sonnets to Tommaso Cavalieri (44); Montaigne's essay on his friendship with Etienne de la Boétie (45); Ficino's translations of Plotinus, inspired by an encounter with Pico della Mirandola (47); and Winckelmann's coming to understand Greek art through a "romantic friendship with a young Roman of his day" (47) are just some of the examples produced by the narrator to illustrate the fact that "the Renaissance . . . sought to elevate friendship to the high dignity of the antique ideal, to make it a vital factor in the new culture, and a mode of self-conscious intellectual development" (42). Intense male friendship was another way to tap into one's creativity and to cultivate one's personality during the Renaissance. It should come as no surprise, according to the narrator, "that Shakespeare [was] stirred by a spirit that so stirred his age" (46): the "vital factor" in the "new culture" that began with Shakespeare's Sonnets was Willie Hughes, in whom "Shakespeare found not merely a most delicate instrument for the presentation of his art, but the visible incarnation of his idea of beauty" (47).

An appreciation of male beauty may have been the inspiration behind Shakespeare's Sonnets, but it is no static beauty. It is rather a beauty enriched by its own malleability, by its ability to represent different personalities, by its "insincerity" (37). Indeed, deception and forgery lie at the very heart of "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.": the portrait is a forgery, designed to deceive others into accepting the existence of someone who is in all likelihood a phantom; Willie Hughes is the work first of Cyril's, then of the narrator's, imagination; and Erskine

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attempts to force the narrator to accept the Willie Hughes theory by deceiving the narrator about his intention to commit suicide. The short story opens with a discussion of the merits of literary forgeries; the narrator learns Cyril's story after having defended the forgeries of MacPherson, Ireland, and Chatterton (3). His defense of these literary forgers touches on issues that will resonate throughout the narrative:

> I insisted that . . . all Art being to a certain degree a mode of acting, an attempt to realise one's own personality on some imaginative plane out of reach of the trammelling accidents and limitations of real life, to censure an artist for a forgery was to confuse an ethical with an æsthetical problem. (3)

Life limits us in unexpected ways; if we are to be artists we must learn how to deceive, how to act, how to commit crimes, how to use our imagination to achieve life's main goal: the development of personality. Forgery should not be mired in debates about right and wrong; if it helps the (aesthetic) project of self-development, it is a justifiable act. When the narrator first learns that Cyril committed a forgery in order to prove a theory, he presumes the act was not aesthetic and therefore is reluctant to defend it; when, however, he understands the aesthetic nature of Cyril's project he is more sympathetic. Cyril's is another case that can be defended along the lines of Wainewright's crimes: just as Wainewright's acts might have seemed more charming and acceptable if they had been committed during the Renaissance, so too Cyril's forgery is an act of one who belongs to the Renaissance; just as the end of Wainewright's creating a splendid personality justifies the means of its attainment (murder, poisoning), so too does Cyril's end of realizing the personality of Willie Hughes justify the means of its attainment (forgery, deception).

The realization of the personality of Willie Hughes is achieved not just through literature (through Shakespeare's Sonnets or the narrator's essay), but, ultimately, through art – through the medium of portraiture, to be specific. The forged painting, a "small panel picture" depicting "a full-length portrait of a young man in late sixteenth-century costume" (4), holds a "strange fascination" (5) for the narrator from the first time he sees it. In the closing lines of the narrative, he reveals that the painting is still so convincing to him that even though he has abandoned his theory of Mr. W. H., he occasionally looks at the forgery and thinks "there is really a great deal to be said for the Willie Hughes theory of Shakespeare's Sonnets" (90). While reflecting on "neo-Platonism" (43) – specifically, on how during the Renaissance love between men could generate great works of art – the narrator relates how Hubert Languet kept a "portrait [of Philip Sidney] by him some hours to feast his eyes upon it," and found that "his appetite was 'rather increased than diminished by the sight'" (45). Portraits, then, can amplify the presence of an individual; a person's portrait – even when forged – gives an immediacy and an authenticity to their existence.[16] A portrait can also express most eloquently the passion of lovers: Michelangelo, once asked whether he could paint a portrait of the deceased close friend of Luigi del Riccio, Cecchino Bracci, responded, according to the narrator, that he could "only do so by drawing you [Luigi] in whom he [Cecchino] still lives" (45). By this logic, a portrait of the lover is the most legible expression of the passion with which the beloved has been invested, just as in the example of Languet and Sidney a portrait of the beloved is an expression of (and stimulus for) the passion of the lover. The portrait of Willie Hughes is at once the sign of Shakespeare's love for Willie Hughes, a sign of Hughes's love of Shakespeare (Hughes is holding the Sonnets in the portrait [17]), and, not least, a sign of Cyril's (later the narrator's [34]) love for Willie

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Hughes. Ultimately, "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." reveals that of all forms and examples of artistic expression – including even that most "perfect expression" of "passionate friendship" that is Shakespeare's Sonnets (77–78) – it is the *portrait* that best captures the exchange of love that can occur between two men.

If one particular type of portraiture is favored for the portrayal of that exchange in "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," it is late Renaissance, specifically mannerist, portraiture. The forged portrait is in the style of the sixteenth-century artist François Clouet, whose portrait of Francis I is generally considered an important example of the influence of Italian mannerism on French art. The portrait of Mr. W. H. is described as

> a full-length portrait of a young man in late sixteenth-century costume, standing by a table, with his right hand resting on an open book. . . . In manner, and especially in the treatment of the hands, the picture reminded one of François Clouet's later work. The black velvet doublet with its fantastically gilded points, and the peacock-blue background against which it showed up so pleasantly, and from which it gained such luminous value of colour, were quite in Clouet's style. (4)

It is not merely the name of Clouet that points to the painting's mannerist origins: certain words and phrases in the passage serve the same function. One of the clearest markers of a mannerist style is a certain "treatment of the hands," which involves making them prominent and gracing them with long, stylized fingers; the exaggerated decoration on the clothing of the subject, as well as the color of the background (peacock-blue, elsewhere described as "*bleu de paon*" [18]) evoke the style and the color typical of Italian mannerist painting; and Wilde writes, moreover, of the painting's "manner" as opposed to its "style."

In his 1889 essay on "Style," Walter Pater clarifies how mannerism can be understood as a function of style and what might make a work of art earn the designation "mannerist" in Victorian Britain. Here he observes that mannerist is a term used to criticize artists seen as having too distinct a style – as being too individualistic (*Appreciations* 36). But style is what distinguishes a good (original) artist from a bad (derivative) artist for Pater, and it can only exist when an artist's works are both original and an honest expression of the artist's "self" (10, 36). Wilde reviews Pater's essay in 1890, praising Pater for showing "us how, behind the perfection of a man's style, must lie the passion of a man's soul" (*Works* 13: 541). Once again, Wilde's conviction that passion is essential to self-development comes to the fore here, allowing the concept of an exaggerated style or manner to augment Wilde's larger concept of personality.

Style is bound up with personality in Wilde's writings of the late 1880s and early 1890s. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* we are reminded that style is an outworking of personality, and that both style and personality are best expressed in painting when Basil Hallward claims that Dorian's "personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style" (*Dorian Gray* 180; ch. 1). In "Pen, Pencil, and Poison," Wilde puts forward the argument that Wainewright was a good art critic because he always "spoke for himself" instead of copying the opinions of others – that he, as Wilde puts it, "tried to revive *style* as a conscious tradition" (*Works* 8: 73; emphasis added) in art criticism. Wilde's praise of Wainewright's other journalistic writings not only illustrates again the close connections between style and personality, but also identifies exaggeration as an attribute of style. If Wainewright were successful as a journalist it was because he shared with the public the details of his own life in an original and ornate style: "He was the pioneer of Asiatic prose,

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and delighted in pictorial epithets and pompous exaggerations. . . . He also saw that it was quite easy by continued reiteration to make the public interested in his own personality" (80–81). Wilde goes so far as to claim that Wainewright invented "a style so gorgeous that it conceals the subject" (80), a phrase, again, suggestive of the mannerist school of painting and of the possibility of mannered self-representation as forgery.

Forgery is one of the nodes connecting style, personality, crime, and aesthetics in Wilde's writings from 1886 onward. It is an aesthetic practice justified in the name of self-realization, a mode of exaggeration that privileges beauty, and a crime made guiltless by the legacy of the Italian Renaissance. It is at the heart of a notion often volunteered by Wilde during these years: the notion that living is an art unto itself. Wilde praises Wainewright, for instance, for recognizing "that Life itself is an art, and has its modes of style no less than the arts that seek to express it" (67). When Lord Henry Wotton admires Dorian Gray, it is because "Life has been your art. You have set yourself to music. Your days have been your sonnets" (*Dorian Gray* 277; 1890, ch. 13; 1891, ch. 19). Wilde himself had been dubbed "a walking work of art" (Blanchard 18) by the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* during his American tour; and if we are to believe the report of the *New York World*, that walking work of art might have been a Clouet, for Wilde's new suit had "a plain black velvet doublet fitting tight to the body, without any visible buttons, after the style of Francis I" (Ellmann 186n). In his autobiography, W. B. Yeats also remembers Wilde's costume for its evocation of a Renaissance aesthetic: "I think he seemed to us . . . a triumphant figure, and to some of us a figure from another age, an audacious Italian fifteenth-century figure" (Yeats 79–80).

If the idea of forging a Renaissance-inspired personality had been apparent to Wilde from the early 1880s, it was only in the latter half of that decade that he began to write about the possibilities afforded by such a forging, about the license it provided for crime and the justification it lent to sexual dissidence. Wilde's purposeful cultivation of his own personality meant that he could with his person – with his unique style – telegraph a whole system within which sexual experimentation and criminal activity were laudable acts of self-development. That this unique style owes much to a revived Renaissance aesthetic, an aesthetic that in his writings conjures up a world of justifiable sin, crime, and vice, can no longer be ignored. Wilde's engagement with the Renaissance goes deeper than the practice of looking to the past for themes or material on which to base new works; in his writings of the late 1880s and early 1890s, Wilde weaves a set of Victorian notions of self-culture into a set of Victorian notions of the Renaissance and produces a new notion of Personality that is at once (for the criminalized homosexual) an incitement to act (to deceive, to commit crimes, to sin) and an invitation to deploy Renaissance justifications (individualism, style, beauty) to defend those acts.

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NOTES

I would like to thank both the William Andrews Clark Memorial library at UCLA and Princeton University for their generosity in allowing me to work with the extant manuscript fragments of Wilde's "The Cardinal of Avignon." My thanks are due, too, to Joseph Donohue for directing me to material relating to the "Cardinal" of which I had not been aware; and to Joseph Bristow for his careful reading of an earlier draft of this piece.

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1. With very minor changes, this passage appears in both the 1890 (*Dorian Gray* 254; ch. 9) and 1891 (113; ch. 11) versions of Wilde's novel. Citations from *Dorian Gray* throughout this article will be taken from the 1890 text.
2. Ellmann uses textual evidence from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to argue that Wilde himself considered 1886 a watershed year (276–77).
3. See Danson for a discussion of Wilde's contributions to Mahaffy's original volume.
4. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Ivory, "Inverting the Renaissance" 37–38. For examples of same, see Pater 66–68; Symonds, *Renaissance* 1: 306.
5. Wilde probably read parts of the study as an undergraduate and would review the project in its entirety in 1886 (*Notebooks* 115, 180; *Works* 13: 105–10).
6. That both Ruskin *and* Pater contributed much to Wilde's vision of the Renaissance can be seen in his 1877 review of the Grosvenor Gallery. In the piece, Wilde praises the work of the anti-Renaissance Pre-Raphaelites, a group championed by Ruskin, by comparing their work to that of Michelangelo, a High Renaissance artist despised by Ruskin and loved by Pater (*Works* 10: 6–7).
7. For a full discussion of how these particular topoi are woven into Victorian notions of the Renaissance, see Ivory, "Inverting" 8–78.
8. Little has ever been written about "The Cardinal of Avignon," as scholars have generally been aware only of the scenario Wilde wrote for it around 1896 (Mason 583–85; Small 120–23). In their recent publication of another scenario for the play that dates to the early 1880s, however, Joseph Donohue and Justine Murison provide the first sustained – if short – discussion of the work, summarizing what is known of its inception, partial execution, and reception. Donohue and Murison argue convincingly that Wilde worked on the play in the early 1880s – a fact borne out by the as yet unexplored resonances between the "Vera" manuscript and sections of Wilde's 1883 play *The Duchess of Padua*, and – even more significant – his 1881 work, *Poems*. Based on the 1896 scenario, "The Cardinal of Avignon" has been described as medieval (Belford 232) and as Jacobean (Ellmann 386); but an examination of *actual drafts* of the dialog (see footnote 9 for details) places the work more squarely between these two eras and confirms its setting as the mid to late sixteenth century. The Hundred Years' War (ca. 1337–1453) is over, but still has an immediacy in the imagery of the Cardinal: he laments the evils that have come "from England into France since the sun set on bloody Agincourt" ("Vera" 7r) and he wishes that one could banish disturbing dreams "by the natural use of spear and shaft . . . as we drove the Englishmen from Calais" (7r) – events which occurred in the early fifteenth and mid sixteenth centuries respectively. References are made to other historical phenomena that are firmly associated with the Renaissance: when looking for an image that will convey the height of a cliff from which he dreamed that he had jumped, the Cardinal settles on a structure "which overtops the Arno, hung in the air by Brunelleschi" (4v), a clear reference to the (fifteenth-century) *Duomo* at Florence; and when describing a cruel storm at sea in that same dream, he compares it to the (early sixteenth-century) experiences of Hernando Cortez and his Conquistadors (1r). Finally the Borgias, whose influence was felt throughout the closing decades of the fifteenth century and the opening decades of the sixteenth century, are proffered twice as examples of the evils which surround the Papal throne (6r, 10r).
9. Here and in footnote 8 I am citing an unpublished draft of "The Cardinal of Avignon" that is held by the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library at UCLA. The 32-leaf draft is at the back of the notebook in which Wilde wrote his first play, *Vera* (Shewan 214; Reed xliv; Small 153). It is thus filed under that title and referred to by me throughout the current piece as "Vera." In addition to the early 1880s scenario published by Donohue and Murison, Princeton University holds a 61-leaf notebook (Small 107, 117) containing a fair copy of some sections of the Clark manuscript. For the present purposes, however, I am quoting from the more extensive Clark manuscript. This discussion will soon be moot: in the upcoming edition of Wilde's early plays that Joseph Donohue is preparing for Oxford University Press, "The Cardinal of Avignon" will finally make its debut. For more on Wilde's "Cardinal" fragment, see Ivory "Oscar Wilde's Cardinal."

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10. This replicates a theory put forward by Jacob Burckhardt that the proper Renaissance wife was practically expected to commit adultery (371, 413–14).
11. This is essentially the premise of Wilde's last Renaissance-themed work, the fragment "A Florentine Tragedy." Here, a woman's adultery makes her more attractive to her husband, while his murder of her lover reinvigorates his character in her eyes (*Works* 14: 114).
12. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian becomes obsessed with a novel which contains just such a charming study of the great criminals of the Renaissance (*Dorian Gray* 254–55; 1890, ch. 9; 1891, ch. 11).
13. Alan P. Johnson has argued that Wilde's appreciation of the Renaissance constituted "the extreme of admiration for satanic egoism" (23) and that Wilde's Renaissance reception was nothing more than an "ethic of . . . self-satisfaction" (26). To argue thus is to misunderstand the utopian nature of Wilde's theory of personality and to ignore completely the implications for a criminal of the rehabilitation of criminal acts.
14. The short story first appeared in 1889, but may have been a project of Wilde's from as early as 1887 (Ellmann 296). Wilde added to the story after its publication and it is from that revised version, first published in 1921, that I am citing here.
15. "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." has not received as much critical attention as other short works by Wilde, but it has not been neglected, either. Scholars have tended to focus on the nature of forgery itself (Dowling, "Imposture"; Ellmann 296–300; Joseph), on the narrative techniques and framing devices in the text (Ellmann, Joseph), or on the function of criticism and interpretation as elucidated in the story (Bashford; Buckler; Gagnier 39–46). Almost all commentators note that love between men is a central theme of the work, although only Danson and Bristow have thought through the implications of this fact. See Bashford (412n) and Schroeder for further discussion of critical responses to "The Portrait of Mr. W. H."
16. Several critics have attempted to interpret the trope of the portrait as it appears in "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." Joseph, while using Wilde's own words from the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to warn us against explicating the "symbolic meaning" (61) of the portrait, nonetheless ventures a reading of the portrait's "intentionality" (61): it is an element that simultaneously puts framing and forgery at the center of the work. Dowling argues that the forged portrait is "the presiding symbol for secrets" in the story, and that it renders visible the notion at the heart of "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." that "absence is presence" ("Imposture" 27). She goes on to claim that if there is anything filling the absence – the "imaginative space" (28) – at the core of the story, it is the "apologia for passionate friendship" (28) presented by the narrator. Thus Dowling sees the portrait as an indirect representation of same-sex desire.

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