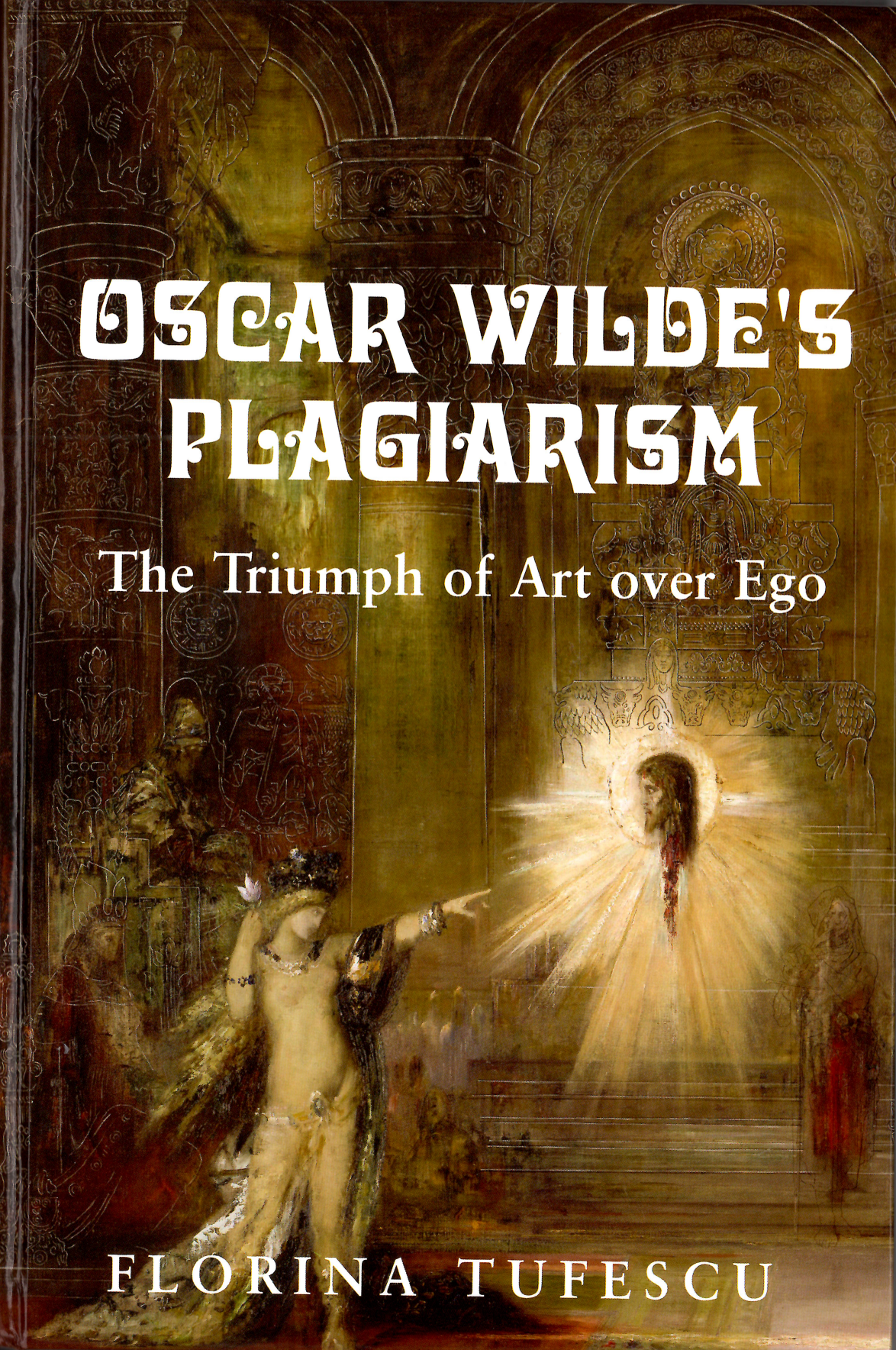
OSCAR WILDE'S
PLAGIARISM
The Triumph of Art over Ego
FLORINA TUFESCU

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Contents

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Florina Tufescu
July 2007

Is Oscar Wilde a Plagiarist? Four Answers and a Biased Opinion

> It is only about things that do not interest one, that one can give a really unbiased opinion; and this is no doubt the reason why an unbiased opinion is always absolutely valueless. (Wilde, 'Mr Pater's Last Volume', in *The Soul of Man*, p.24)

This study aims to settle the last remaining dispute in the field of Wilde studies, to remove the last objections to Wilde's canonization. To most readers it might seem that the canonization has been completed this year, with the inclusion of his aphorisms in the book compiled by Father Leonardo Sapienza, the Vatican head of protocol and editor of Pope John Paul II's writings. Many of the Wildean maxims, distilled from a thousand sources and still downplayed by some scholars as expressive of his limited, magpie-like imagination, are included in *Provocations: Aphorisms for an Anti-Conformist Christianity*, and deemed poignant enough to turn modernity-loving Christians to their faith.[1]

However doubtful the originality of Wilde's writings in the light of past and current academic standards, they have been at the core of European literature from the time of their creation. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has been criticized for its plagiarisms and its mixture of genres, as 'a mosaic hurriedly made by a man who reached out in all directions and [...] used in his book whatever scraps of jasper or porphyry or broken flint, were put into his hand'.[2] Yet it remains one of the most poignant re-tellings of the Faust myth since Goethe and one of the few non-realist novels to retain the attention of the reading elite prior to magical realism. *Salomé*, which derives its inspiration from the entire wealth of decadent art and literature, was dismissed in a once influential study – Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony* – as 'childish prattle' and as an unsuccessful imitation of Maeterlinck and Flaubert,[3] yet it is now acknowledged as a turning-point in Irish and indeed European symbolist drama. The blatant appropriations of his first volume of *Poems* scandalized some of his contemporaries, who

voted against its inclusion in the library of the Oxford Union, yet Wildean practice and theory have created a precedent for some of the most interesting experiments of the twentieth century: T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland*, Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and Marianne Moore's poetry, which is often built around properly sourced quotations and textual fragments. The Wildean comedies, created from the odds and ends of the well-made plays, have been criticized from the opening night reviews to the present for their repetitiveness and excessive reliance on old-fashioned stage tricks, yet they have inspired writers as different as George Bernard Shaw, Tom Stoppard and Joe Orton, just as they continue to provide the financial sustenance of avant-garde Irish theatre.[4]

Oscar Wilde's theory of creativity has been downplayed as merely a witty re-packaging of the ideas of Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater or as an apology for 'the particular nature (and limitations) of his own writing talent',[5] yet its influence can be perceived in some of the most innovative critical writing of the twentieth-century, namely that of Jorge Luis Borges, Northrop Frye, Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette and – with a Freudian twist – Harold Bloom (see Chapter 7).

Within this context of international appreciation, the publication in 2000 of the first volume of the Oxford edition of the *Complete Works* under the general editorship of Ian Small seemed to strike a disconcertingly anachronistic note. The introduction essentially reproduces the denunciation of Wilde as an opportunistic and unimaginative plagiarist which is fully articulated by Ian Small and Josephine Guy in *Oscar Wilde's Profession*:

> Wilde was a writer who did not have an abundance of either intellectual resources or material. There is little sense of the *fecund creativity* which we associate with the works of Dickens and Balzac. Equally significantly, it appears that Wilde's creative imagination worked best in what was a fairly narrow area, that of the aphorism or the polished one-liner.
>
> These conclusions may seem to justify some of the judgments of Wilde made by his contemporaries and by critics in the first half of the twentieth century, that he was a writer of relatively slender talents, whose work was derivative, and who would not stand the test of time. It certainly is true that Wilde was not a writer who possessed the same *seriousness* and range of Arnold or Shaw, nor the protean inventiveness of Joyce.[6] (emphasis added)

In fairness to the academic community, it should be pointed out that the general editor's views are at odds with those of most Wildean scholars and with his own earlier interpretations. In fairness to Ian Small, it

should be emphasized that his views would find greater support amongst the general public if only Oscar Wilde were a contemporary author and the evidence of his verbatim copying were advertised on the first page of the *Times Literary Supplement*.

In *Flaubert's Parrot*, Julian Barnes writes eloquently on the dangers of specializing in a single author, who may thus become as tedious as family – to paraphrase Wilde and Barnes, a relation who annoyingly postpones dying. Yet in the same novel, Barnes writes as persuasively of the scholars' love for their subject, the love which seeks to know 'the worst'. In Wilde's case, that 'worst' is plagiarism. The majority of Wildean scholars have preferred to concentrate on other topics. Those who have approached it have changed either their interpretation of Wilde's oeuvre and of its place within the canon or their views on plagiarism, originality and creativity. The scholarly disagreement on Wilde's textual strategies has broad cultural significance as it illuminates the ongoing struggles over the definitions and re-inventions of originality, creativity and authorship. Oscar Wilde himself stated that 'the public is wonderfully tolerant: it forgives everything except genius'.[7] This book pays tribute to Oscar Wilde's plagiaristic, androgynous genius and sets it in its meaningful literary context.

IS OSCAR WILDE A PLAGIARIST?

The Romantic, Classical, Minimalist and Post-Modernist Definitions

The answer depends on one's chosen perspective. In his address to the British Academy, Christopher Ricks, the Oxford Professor of Poetry, insisted that the only plausible definition of plagiarism is unacknowledged and deliberate borrowing of any significant element of a previous work. This definition, which only gained credibility during the romantic period, has been contested almost from the time of its first enunciation by influential critics such as Samuel Johnson and Sir Joshua Reynolds and it bears demonstrably little connection to the reality of the writing process. Yet it remains the official definition in academic circles, upheld in the 2003 handbook issued by the Modern Language Association, self-advertised with only slight exaggeration on its back cover as 'the style bible for most college students':

> Derived from the Latin word *plagiarius* ('kidnapper'), *plagiarism* refers to a form of cheating that has been defined as 'the false assumption of authorship: the wrongful act of taking the product of another person's mind, and presenting it as one's own' (Alexander Lindey, *Plagiarism and Originality*...). Using another person's ideas, information, or expressions without acknowledging that person's work constitutes intellectual theft.

> Passing off another person's ideas, information, or expressions as your own to get a better grade or gain some other advantage constitutes fraud. Plagiarism is sometimes a moral and ethical offence rather than a legal one since some instances of plagiarism fall outside the scope of copyright infringement, a legal offense.[8]

It may seem surprising, given the increasing centrality of plagiarism to academic concerns, that the prestigious Modern Language Association should be content with a definition within brackets – however properly attributed. And that this definition should be taken from a nearly sixty-year-old survey of plagiarizing practices in the arts, largely based on second-hand information and conducted by a lawyer intrigued by the absence of recent studies on the subject. The situation has in the meantime been rectified and it seems odd that none of the recent specialist studies is cited, though less striking when it is noted that they have reached different conclusions from those officially supported by the MLA and by academic guidelines on plagiarism.

The romantic bias of the definition is clear, in its focus on authorial intentions and on individual authors as plagiarists and plagiarized rather than on texts and in its understanding of plagiarism as covering the theft of ideas, motifs, themes or potentially any element of a previous work. The assumption that all one's ideas can be traced to their individual sources is at odds with contemporary critical theory, as indeed with the experience of most academic writers.

The 'new' chapter on plagiarism, advertised on the back cover as one of the attractions of the 2003 edition, brings no recent analysis or research findings. The incomplete etymology and the muddled discussion of copyright infringement versus plagiarism revealingly give way to metaphor and psychologization:

> Plagiarism is almost always seen as a shameful act, and plagiarists are usually regarded with pity and scorn ... We also recognize degrees of theft. These distinctions allow us to urge leniency for a person who steals a loaf of bread and to approve a substantial prison term for a wealthy CEO who steals from employees' pension funds ... Moreover, although many of us would agree that a starving person who steals a loaf of bread can be rehabilitated, plagiarists rarely recover the trust of those they try to deceive.[9]

The tentativeness of the defence for the starving man who steals a loaf of bread – a rather worn-out romantic example, lifted straight out of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* – is indicative of the unease and of the loss of nerve and imagination experienced by the defenders of the author-oriented definition.

While Christopher Ricks cited Martial to prove the literature-long revulsion to plagiarism, Stephen Orgel demonstrated that the epigrams on the subject reveal a very different perspective, hinging on aesthetic rather than ethical criteria. Whereas romantically-biased criticism condemns unacknowledged and deliberate appropriation, classical criticism condemns artistically unsuccessful appropriation. In Martial's epigrams, the plagiarist is a shameless thief not because of the theft itself, but because of his incompetence in his chosen art. Thus, Fidentinus foolishly recites Martial's published poems, which are already freed, i.e. in the public domain, in the manner of a 'plagiarius', of one who would try to kidnap free men and sell them into slavery.[10] Martial helpfully offers to sell him some unpublished manuscripts instead, since 'a well-known book cannot change masters'.[11] In his recitation, Fidentinus can only spoil what he is artistically incapable of improving upon;[12] his ludicrous attempts at artistry and at occupying the author position are compared to the attempts of a crow among Ledean swans, a magpie among nightingales, of a woman decking herself with false teeth and hair.[13] In short, the plagiarist is a foolish impostor and 'a clumsy thief' – 'voleur maladroit' – the definition proposed by Voltaire in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*.[14]

The classical view of plagiarism is distinctly unethical, as acknowledged by T.S. Eliot's often-quoted aphorism: 'Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal'.[15] What is criticized by classical readers is not the insufficient acknowledgment of sources, but rather the insufficient concealment of sources, as recommended in Seneca's influential epistle: 'This is what our mind should do: it should hide away all the materials by which it has been aided, and bring to light only what it has made of them'.[16]

In addition to the romantic, ethical definition and to the classical, primarily aesthetical definition, a third definition is currently proposed by *The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*:

> Because most artists are affected by other artists, it is not always easy to decide where legitimate influence ends and plagiarism begins. The term is usually reserved, however, for the flagrant lifting of material in an unchanged or only slightly changed form and its dissemination as the plagiarist's own work.[17]

The fact that nearly all recent academic, journalistic and literary scandals have hinged on verbatim copying, while those cases in which looser parallels had been alleged were for the most part immediately dismissed by readers, suggests that this is the preferred definition, albeit not the official one.[18] It represents an uneasy and ultimately

impossible compromise between the romantic and the classical view, for while it expands authorial freedom to any procedures short of verbatim or wholesale copying, it contrives to maintain the signifier plagiarism and the boundaries between texts and authors for the sake of what the classicists regard as the delusions of originality and of solitary authorship. It is also purely technical, that is, not literary, and quite as arbitrary as the tests anciently devised for identifying witches, insofar as it raises a criterion of no particular significance to either the romantic or the classical camp to the value of an essential distinction. For while romantic doctrine is averse to all borrowings, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged, wholesale or creative, and scarcely distinguishes between them, as in John Pinkerton's definition of imitation as 'only a decent and allowed plagiarism' differing merely 'in the degree of disrepute', classical doctrine does not proscribe any type of appropriation, provided there is improvement of the source.[19] In the case of successful authors, this could consist simply in re-contextualization of the source, justified by the metaphors of imperial conquest, used until the end of the nineteenth century, and of rescue and resurrection, applied to the rewritings of ancient or obscure works.[20]

The rules of *imitatio*, as formulated by Seneca, were meant to guide the less experienced authors – the only ones who might plagiarize or be overly influenced. For himself, Seneca had claimed the right to use all 'common property', by which he understood all extant writings.[21] The same attitude would be struck by Montaigne[22] and by Molière: 'I take my property wherever I find it.'[23] The classical view of plagiarism has been maintained by a significant number of artists to the present, some of whom are discussed in this study. Yet it has seldom been defended in academic writing, undoubtedly because literary scholars are usually also teachers, expected to maintain ethical as well as professional standards.

Given the amorality of the classical definition, the mere technicality of the verbatim copying definition and the implausibility of the romantic definition, recent studies have proposed the abolition of the concept of plagiarism or at least the dilution of the plagiarism taboo. In his 2003 study of the contemporary art world, Joost Smiers rejects the concept of plagiarism, linked to the excesses of romantically-inspired copyright legislation:

> In all cultures it has always been quite normal to incorporate ideas and 'quotations' from the works of predecessors. Only the system of copyright hampered this self-evident process of ongoing creation. This freezes the on-going creation and pretends there is culturally an endpoint, i.e. a specific work that has been made at a specific moment in his-

> tory and that should not be changed any more. Infringement on this static situation is what we call plagiarism.[24]

Marilyn Randall denies the usefulness of plagiarism as a term of literary criticism:

> plagiarism can be defined purely as a matter of reception, where the actual textual determinants are relatively unimportant. In other words, plagiarism is what has been accused of being and condemned as plagiaristic; it is an institutional judgment which creates its own object as an expression of the limits of tolerance with respect to norms such as propriety, originality, and authenticity.[25]

In her book *Pragmatic Plagiarism*, Randall demonstrates that the plagiaristic text cannot be deciphered in the absence of a plagiarist – a point first made by Neil Hertz in relation to student plagiarism. This means that both the romantic and the classical definitions are implicitly reader-oriented since it is the reader's role to distinguish between 'condemnable, excusable, or in some instances praiseworthy' borrowings.[26]

Christian Vandendorpe, editor of a collection of wide-ranging essays on *Le plagiat*, similarly argues for the instability of plagiarism as a term, stating – somewhat prematurely – that it has been replaced by intertextuality in literary criticism for all but polemical purposes.[27]

Laura J. Rosenthal's study of *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England* leads her to conclude that plagiarism cannot be meaningfully defined.[28] The composition scholar Rebecca Moore Howard similarly argues on the basis of fourteen years' research on academic writing practices that plagiarism should be abolished as a term of academic writing and replaced by more rigorously defined categories, since its meaning is not contaminated or complicated by, but constituted through, metaphors.[29]

K.K. Ruthven's conclusion in *Faking Literature*, a wide-ranging survey of forging and plagiarizing practices from Romanticism to the present, is only slightly less provocative: 'Seeing that plagiarism in the domain of literature does not create the problems caused by comparable practices in the sciences or even in literary studies, I see no harm in trying to think more positively about so ubiquitous a practice.'[30]

Depending, then, on one's preferred textual or minimalist, romantic, classical or post-modernist definition, the answer to the seemingly straightforward question, 'Is Oscar Wilde a plagiarist?' will be a resounding affirmative, a qualified affirmative or a resolute negative. If the romantic definition is adopted, Wilde is indeed the arch-plagiarist, on account of the deliberateness and outrageousness of his borrowings.

This was the initial response to Wilde's poems, perhaps also because lyrical poetry is the field most closely associated with the triumph of the romantic doctrine. If the minimalist or verbatim copying definition is adopted, Wilde is one of the minor plagiarists, on account of his verbatim borrowings in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* The more extensive borrowings in his American lectures and in the enlarged version of *The Portrait* can be defended since these were published posthumously and it may be argued that Wilde had intended to acknowledge his sources. If the classical definition is adopted, Wilde cannot be a plagiarist simply because he is a great artist. This is, of course, Wilde's own view: 'The true artist is known by the use he makes of what he annexes, and he annexes everything'.[31] Finally, from the perspective of post-modernist scholarship, neither Wilde nor anyone else can be regarded as a plagiarist, yet his critical writing intriguingly anticipates contemporary thinking on authorship and creativity.

WHOM OR WHAT DID HE PLAGIARIZE? WITH A FEW REMARKS ON SELF-PLAGIARISM

Oscar Wilde plagiarized the authors that he paid tribute to in his criticism, such as Walter Pater, John Addington Symonds and Charles Baudelaire. He also drew on a wealth of now obscure texts, from museum catalogues and books on the history of embroidery and of precious stones in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to nineteenth-century Shakespearean scholarship in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* In the judgment of Ian Small, Oscar Wilde's favourite victim was ... Mr O.W. himself. All three volumes so far published of the Oxford edition of the *Complete Works* dedicate considerable attention to this topic, a highly debatable decision since these self-plagiarisms may be easily noticed by any reader in possession of the *Complete Works* or of an online concordance, whereas most of us would need editorial assistance in becoming aware of the countless sources of his creativity, from the Greek and Latin literature which Wilde had mastered to the Irish folklore collected by his parents, to the wealth of modern European culture that Wilde – unlike most of his twenty-first century readers – could uninhibitedly draw upon in his work as a truly cosmopolitan artist, versed in several languages.

One might speculate that the very concept of self-plagiarism originates in the anxieties of romantically-minded critics, since one of the most familiar arguments against creation *ex nihilo* is the poverty to which art would be reduced:

> The greatest natural genius cannot subsist on its own stock; he who resolves never to ransack any mind but his own, will be soon reduced, from mere barrenness, to the poorest of all imitations; he will be obliged to imitate himself, and to repeat what he has before often repeated. When we know the subject designed by such men, it will never be difficult to guess what kind of work is to be produced.[32]

The term has recently gained a degree of plausibility in academic writing since the system of evaluating research in terms of quantitative as well as qualitative output has unsurprisingly led to the multiplication of publications as well as to diminished research time and thus to increased impatience towards seemingly recycled material which artificially increases one's reading load. Patrick M. Scanlon notes that the duplication of results can even be dangerous in the field of medicine, as it inflates the importance of the research and findings on a particular topic. The problem is perceived to be significant in other fields as well, for example computer science, having led Christian Collberg and other members of the Arizona University team to create SPLAT, a self-plagiarism detection tool.

While academic anxieties over the value and integrity of scholarly research might explain the emergence and current prominence of the term, they fail to justify it. In light of its metaphorical and etymological meaning, self-plagiarism is as illogical a concept as self-kidnapping, or the stealing of credit from oneself. Anya Clayworth's edition of *Selected Journalism*, which pays tribute to Ian Small and Josephine Guy's 'groundbreaking' study, formulates an opportunistic interpretation of Wilde's self-plagiarism:

> the idea of reusing materials in different forums probably originated as a result of Wilde's work in the periodical market place. The pressure to produce material in order to earn money may well have inclined him to take shortcuts and recycle good material where he could.[33]

Yet it is not at all obvious why plagiarism would not have served as well as self-plagiarism. If Oscar Wilde, who treated the whole of European literature as the raw material for his creativity, chose to repeat his own words, it is far more plausible to regard this as authoritative self-quotation, as Anne Varty has argued in *A Preface to Oscar Wilde* (London: Longman, 1998). If imitation is paying homage to the master, self-quotation would have appealed to Wilde as an extravagant strategy of anticipating his classical status. Such repetition is polemical, implying that one's best lines bear repetition, that the writer can be his own best critic. It also puts literature on the same level as other art

forms such as music or painting, by asserting that all the artists' variations upon the same theme are valuable and illuminating, in proportion to his ultimate achievement – that they should be thought of as subtly different originals and not as recycled texts.

WHY DID HE PLAGIARIZE I.E. WHY DID OSCAR WILDE RESORT EVEN TO THE VERBATIM COPYING THAT IS STILL REGARDED AS PLAGIARISTIC TODAY?

In *Idylls of the Market Place: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*, Regenia Gagnier emphasized the elaborate provocation of Wildean derivativeness, relating it to Situationist diversion as practiced and theorised in the 1950s by Guy Debord and others.[34] Sos Eltis has patiently read through the well-made drama of Wilde's day and demonstrated Wilde's scintillating originality. His use of hackneyed plots and motifs in the comedies is a strategy of defeating censorship by concealing subversive (anarchist, feminist and socialist) suggestions underneath a deceptively familiar surface.[35] Declan Kiberd has read Wilde's plagiarism as a deliberate identification with Irish and Catholic values at the expense of Protestant culture,[36] an interpretation also pursued by Deirdre Toomey.[37] Paul Saint-Amour has understood Wilde's plagiarism in the Chatterton lecture and in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* as a deliberate critique of the romantic ideal of creativity and of the commodification of art works as intellectual property. Finally, Ian Small's earlier research viewed Oscar Wilde's plagiarism and 'self-plagiarism' as 'deeply subversive' of the emergent, academic criticism of art and literature.[38]

All these interpretations, which attribute political and cultural meaning to Wilde's textual transgressions rather than pathologizing them, have enriched my understanding of his work. The answer given in this book stresses the literary context of Wilde's transgressions: he plagiarized because, like many of the writers he admired, he refused to accept the romantic redefinitions of authorship and creativity and constantly opposed them in his theory and practice.

HISTORICAL USES OF PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is a legitimizing function. During the pre-romantic period, accusations of plagiarism served to differentiate the justified from the inappropriate uses of the canon, thereby asserting one's superiority to fellow-authors, or one's authority as a critic in the unveiling of obscure, ancient or foreign sources. Although the criteria were primarily aesthetic,

Laura Rosenthal has shown that judgment could be influenced by non-aesthetic considerations: women writers, for instance, were far more likely to be cast as plagiarists since they were deemed to have no legitimate access to the canon – a tendency which is not absent from the 2003 *MLA Handbook*.[39] The female authors sometimes responded by downplaying the value of tradition and of the imitation of ancient models and by emphasizing the merits of novelty and originality.

These earlier paeans to originality were, however, essentially a rhetorical trick, a means of carving a space for oneself on a lower plane of the canon and were not employed consistently and with full conviction. Laura Rosenthal notes that the playwright Susanna Centlivre employed imperialist topoi in defending her use of French sources for works published anonymously such as *Love's Contrivance* and *The Gamester*, yet pleaded the minor merits of novelty and originality when writing in her own name, as in *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*.[40] Margaret Cavendish sometimes presented herself as a poetess in her own right, superior to the male imitators of the ancients, for example in the dedicatory poem to the *Playes* (1662) while in other texts, such as 'A Poet I am Neither Born Nor Bred' (*Poems and Phancies*) she was content to pose as a modest gatherer of flowers in her poet-husband's garden.[41]

It was only with the advent of romanticism that originality, itself reinterpreted as a break with tradition and not as the critical/masterful use of tradition, became the most important criterion of literary achievement and indeed the unmistakable sign of genius. Because originality itself was elusive and indefinable, plagiarism acquired far greater importance as the supremely undesirable illuminating the ultimately unattainable.

It has been plausibly suggested that the romantic ideology of authorship is 'less a nineteenth-century actuality than a twentieth-century construct designed for polemical and anti-Romantic purposes'.[42] The fantasy of solitary authorship failed to persuade most of the authors now labelled as romantic: some, like Shelley, Byron and Keats explicitly rejected it in the name of classical values, while others, like Goethe, came to parody their own romantic excesses in their later writing (see Chapter 6). All failed to live up to it to some extent, most spectacularly and perhaps purposefully Coleridge in his extensive plagiarisms. Even its staunchest defenders abandoned it on occasion: William Wordsworth in defending Coleridge's thefts on the classical grounds that 'he gave to Schiller 50 times more than he took' and in admitting to Henry Crabb Robinson that 'We are all in spite of ourselves a parcel of thieves'.[43]

The romantics, like the neo-classicists, oscillated between the fantasy

of self-creation and the desire to create great art by relying on the rich literary tradition, the texts of their contemporaries, and on the collaboration of fellow-artists. Some of the best poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* are least original in the romantic sense of the term: 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is clearly reminiscent of previous ballads, while 'Lines Written A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey' has been criticized by Christopher Ricks for the reluctant acknowledgement of its debt to Edward Young's 'Night-Thoughts'.[44] The ideal of solitary authorship is paradoxically denied even to the seminal texts of this tradition, not only the *Lyrical Ballads*, but also the *Conjectures on Original Composition*, penned as a letter to the novelist Samuel Richardson and indebted to his collaboration.[45] Even Coleridge's definition of the work of art as an organic, autonomous whole seems to contradict its apparent meaning, being plagiarized from A.W. Schlegel (see Chapter 4).

My references throughout this book to a romantic and a counter-romantic or neo-classical tradition emphasize the fact that it was during the romantic period and in the writings of a few romantic poets and theorists that the fantasy of solitary authorship, dimly present from the beginning of written literature, acquired its most seductive form. The romantic presentation of the work of art as the expression or flowering of the artist's personality captivated the public imagination and replaced the lesser evils of short-sighted criticism, bound to classical rules and conventions, by the crudity of biographical – and indeed indulgently autobiographical – readings, a trend greatly strengthened by the emergence of psychoanalysis in the late nineteenth century.

Although the best of psychoanalytical and author-oriented criticism may be said to approach the ideal posited by Oscar Wilde for independent criticism, consisting of scarcely plausible fictions which take literary texts as a mere starting point, much of it is self-indulgent writing, either relying on the author-function to restrict the meaning of the text, as Roland Barthes noted,[46] or else complaining of the inability to do so and censuring the artist for insincerity, artificiality and lack of spontaneity – in the view of Baudelaire, for the unwillingness to mirror the reader's own feelings and ideas.[47]

Most regrettably, the romantic concept of absolute originality, absolute ownership of artistic forms, provided an emotionally powerful – if deeply flawed – basis for the legislation that has come to privilege individual creators and copyright holders masquerading as authors over communities of readers and solvent estates over new creators. Paul K. Saint-Amour remarks that Thomas Noon Talfourd's Copyright Bill (1837) deliberately echoed Wordsworth's critical theory in its plea for

copyright extension and that William Wordsworth as well as Robert Southey were active participants in the copyright debates – debates which must have provided a delightfully objective reflection of their individual fantasies of authorship.[48] In her incisive chapter 'Wearing the Parisian Hat: Constructing the International Author', Eva Wirtén Hemmungs has shown that the French national genius and perhaps most widely-acknowledged representative of the romantic movement, Victor Hugo, played a major role in the debates that led to the European agreement on the copyright of literary and artistic works, as to the consolidation of the French notion of the author's moral rights – rights that are deemed to be perpetual, like the work of the romantic artists.

In discussing the counter-romantic movement from Edgar Allan Poe to Peter Ackroyd, which included Wilde among its flamboyant practitioners and theorists, it is not implied that these writers failed to appreciate the aesthetic suggestiveness or indeed the sensationalism of romantic theory, but rather that they have sought to resist its crude application and often disastrous effects upon literary criticism, copyright legislation and litigation and ultimately upon creativity itself. They objected to the shift of critical attention from the text to the author and from aesthetics to ethics, and to the devaluation of tradition, knowledge and craft. Recognizing the centrality of plagiarism as originality's dark double, the counter-romantics adopted it as a provocative banner for what was essentially a return to the classical principles of text production and reception. For them as for the romantic theorists of authorship, plagiarism designated both the previously legitimate imitations and allusions and the covert, sometimes verbatim, annexation of other people's texts. They preached and practiced both, regarding them as useful correctives to the expectations of originality, sincerity and spontaneity of a romantically-biased public and as a reassertion of the authors' right to use all that is valuable in extant literature.

BEYOND PSYCHOLOGICAL SPECULATION: THE NEO-CLASSICAL, PLAGIARIZING MOVEMENT. WILDE'S THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PLAGIARISM IN THE CHATTERTON LECTURE

The question of whether plagiarism, as practiced by the counter-romantics, may be distinguished from merely opportunistic or 'pathological' plagiarism, can be answered in the affirmative. First, many of the counter-romantics penned explicit apologies of plagiarism and of artistic deception. Individual examples have long been dismissed either as mere jokes or as rationalizations of personal flaws, but in the light of the accumulating evidence, this seems extremely unlikely. It is scarce-

ly conceivable that Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, Andrew Lang, Anatole France, James Joyce and T.S. Eliot should all have suffered from pathological symptoms which had the same outcome of determining them to plagiarize and to write persuasively in defence of plagiarism, or that all these influential authors were simultaneously afflicted with a sterility of the imagination.

Secondly, the meaningfulness of plagiarism as deployed by the counter-romantics may be differentiated from the practice of their contemporaries. Many of their plagiarisms were clearly designed to be discovered by some readers, for whom various clues were provided, while simultaneously deceiving the Philistine. This intertextual use, halfway between classical imitation and plagiarism, is a decadent innovation leading to the creation of double texts. The works in which the most innovative ideas are inextricably woven with other people's texts, changed, in conformity with classical economy principles, only as much as was necessary to fit the author's purpose, are an implicit rejection of the romantic doctrine supplementing the explicit refusal in the critical works, yet the possibility that plagiarism, rather than a pathological tendency, was a shared strategy of the counter-romantic authors, has scarcely been acknowledged.

Wilde's awareness of this transgressive tradition emerges in the notes for his Chatterton lecture of 1886.[49] The manuscript formulates the classical commonplace that all of literature is plagiarized. This is exemplified by Wilde with reference to the romantic poets, transforming, as Saint-Amour has noted, 'the English Romantic tradition from a patrilineage into a litany of theft: Scott stole from Coleridge, who stole from Chatterton; their thefts, in turn, begot Keats and Tennyson and Morris'.[50] Wilde's examples are scrupulously and ironically correct, since Walter Scott's imitation of the meter of 'Christabel' was regarded as 'plagiarism' by Dorothy and William Wordsworth, albeit of the 'unconscious' variety, and the other parallels discussed by Wilde in his lecture would have been treated in that manner by the romantics.[51]

His argument is that the romantics themselves are classicists at heart, insofar as they engage in artistic acts of deception. The interpretation culminates with the presentation of Thomas Chatterton, the archetypal romantic hero, as a self-effacing artist and thus implicitly a classicist. The difference between the romantics and the counter-romantics or the neoclassicists consists only in the image they choose to project, i.e. their intentions, rather than in their actual practice, since all artistic works depend for their achievement on the art of lying. The guilt-ridden, ambivalent forgeries and plagiarisms perpetrated by the romantics are

implicitly compared with the perfectly self-conscious plagiarism of the counter-romantic authors, since underlying the litany of romantic thefts, there is a different genealogy which might be described thus: *Pater stole from Baudelaire who stole from Poe who stole from Coleridge; and their thefts begot Wilde.*

This very technique of concealment had been learnt by Wilde from Pater. In his unfinished novel *Gaston de Latour*, Pater had paid tribute to Baudelaire under the guise of the Renaissance poet Pierre de Ronsard in a manner which, as Patricia Clements has demonstrated in her wonderfully illuminating *Baudelaire and the English Tradition*, was meant to be deciphered by the elect and to remain opaque to the Philistine majority. Wilde was certainly aware of Pater's knowledge of Baudelaire, which scholars were unable to prove until the 1960s, and he would show this awareness, in 'The English Renaissance of Art' lecture, in *Intentions* and in *Dorian Gray*, by plagiarizing the same passages from Baudelaire which Pater had already rewritten.[52] It is certain that he would have discovered at least some of Baudelaire's plagiarisms from Poe, in the 'Théophile Gautier' essay, for instance, which inspired some of his own critical theory, just as he would have noted the echoes of Poe and other French and English authors in Baudelaire's poetry (see Chapter 2). As for the plagiarisms of Poe and Coleridge, they were common knowledge at the time. Wilde recognized the pervasiveness of plagiarism and its subversive potential as a means of undermining the authority of romantically-biased criticism.

Allegiance to the classical camp is marked by the structure of his lecture, a visible collage of his own ideas with sentences clipped from biographies of Chatterton by Daniel Wilson (1869) and David Masson (1874), modified only as far as necessary to create the overall effect of modern, Wildean style. It is a perfect example of the double work of art: presumably received by most of the audience as a homogenous artefact, expressing the romantic enthusiasm of the speaker-author, it appeared to the few, i.e. the scholars who consulted the manuscript, still buried in the archives, as an elaborate collage. It was thus an implicit and powerful refutation of the romantic expectations of originality and individuality. Nor was such implicit collage unprecedented: Baudelaire's elegy 'Le guignon' as well as his critical essays, Pater's *The Renaissance*, Poe's poetic manifesto titled 'Letter to B–', had all used patch-writing and implicit collage techniques (see Chapter 2).

Lawrence Danson was dismayed by the lecture, regarding it as 'unimaginative and earnest'.[53] Merlin Holland, tentatively suggesting a political interpretation for its method of composition, nevertheless

confessed himself troubled by Wilde's literal destruction of the previous biographies in the creation of his cut-and-paste lecture. The most illuminating interpretation to date is Paul Saint-Amour's article, published as late as the year 2000. The following chapter considers the literary context within which Wilde's transgressions become meaningful: the plagiarizing theory and practice of his immediate predecessors.

NOTES

1. Father Leonardo Sapienza, *Provocations. Aphorisms for an Anti-Conformist Christianity* (Rome: Rogate, 2007).
2. Arthur Ransome, *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study* (London: Secker, 1912), p.84.
3. Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 2nd edn trans. Angus Davidson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p.298.
4. See William Tydeman and Steven Price's *Salome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) for the performance history of the play and of the Strauss opera it inspired, and Katharine Worth's *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (London: Athlone Press, 1978) for the European context and significance of Wilde's symbolist drama. The history of the reception of the other Wildean texts mentioned here is discussed in subsequent chapters.
5. Josephine Guy and Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde's Profession: Writing and the Culture Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.272.
6. Ibid., p.280.
7. Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic As Artist', in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. Linda Dowling (London: Penguin, 2001), I, p.213.
8. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, ed. Joseph Gibaldi (New York: Modern Language Association, 2003), p.66.
9. Ibid., p.67.
10. Martial, *A Commentary on Book I of the Epigrams*, trans. Peter Howell (London: Athlone, 1980), ep.52.
11. Ibid., ep. 66.
12. Ibid., ep. 38.
13. Ibid., ep. 53, 72.
14. Voltaire, 'Plagiat'. *Dictionnaire philosophique*, ed. Louis Moland (Paris: Garnier, 1878–79).
15. 'Philip Massinger', in T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. 1920 (London: Methuen, 1934), p.125.
16. Seneca, LXXXIV, 'On Gathering Ideas', in *Moral Epistles*, Vol.2, trans. Richard M. Gummere (London: Heinemann; New York: Putnam, 1920), p.281.
17. 'Plagiarism', *The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. Tom McArthur (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
18. In literature, the winner of the Goncourt Prize Calixthe Beyalla was found guilty of copyright infringement on account of the verbatim copying in her novel, *Le Petit Prince de Belleville* (1992) from Howard Buten's *When I Was Five, I Killed Myself* (1981) (Hélène Maurel-Indart, *Le plagiat*. http://www.leplagiat.net.). D.M. Thomas was criticized by some readers for his verbatim incorporation of material in *The White Hotel* from A. Anatoli's *Babi Yar* (see Chap.7). Jacob Epstein was accused of plagiarism on account of the verbatim copying in his debut novel *Wild Oats* (1979) from Martin Amis's *The Rachel Papers* (1973) (Thomas Mallon, *Stolen Words: Forays into the Origins and Ravages of Plagiarism* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989, pp.105 ff).

    In politics, the publication by the UK government of the war-justifying dossier on 'Iraq – Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Detection and Intimidation' (January 2003) and of the scholarly edition of Martin Luther King's writings were rendered problematic by the discovery of extensive verbatim copying. On Martin Luther King, see Clayborne Carson, 'Editing Martin Luther King, Jr: Political and Scholarly Issues'. In George Bornstein and Ralph G. Williams (eds), *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp.305–16. *The Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Projects*. Stanford University http://www.stan-

ford.edu./group/king/. On the Iraq dossier see Glen Rangwalla, 'Intelligence: The British Dossier on Iraq's Security Infrastructure'. Online posting 5 February 2003. *Casi Discussion List Archive.* http://www.casi.org.uk/discuss. index.html.

In academia, the plagiarism scandals involving historians Doris Kearns Goodwin (Doris Kearns Goodwin, 'How I Caused That Story'. *Time Online Edition*, 27 January 2002. http://www.time.com/) and Stephen Ambrose (Fred Barnes, 'Stephen Ambrose, Copycat'. *The Daily Standard*, 14 January 2002. Online version 1 April 2002. htttp://www.weeklystandard.com/) hinged on verbatim copying, while in the corporate world, William Swanson, the chief executive of Raytheon, was sanctioned by the board of directors once it emerged that his book *The Unwritten Laws of Management* (2006), distributed to company employees, was found to copy, often verbatim, W.J. King's *The Unwritten Laws of Engineering* (1944).

By contrast, the accusations made by John Frow (who nevertheless refrained from using the word plagiarism) against Graham Swift were dismissed by most readers, on account of the looseness and explicitness of the imitations of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* in *Last Orders* (London: Picador, 1996) (Stina Teilmann, 'Proprietærer og Plagiarister. En indføring i nyere litteraturtyveri'. *Kritik*, 34, 150 (2001), pp.4–12). The accusations against Yann Martel, based on a similarity of plot rather than of treatment and phrasing were dismissed once his *Life of Pi* (2002) was compared to the alleged source, Moacyr Scliar's *Max and the Cats* (1981; first English trans. 1990) (Yann Martel, 'How I Wrote *Life of Pi*'. http://www.powells.com/ fromthe author/martel.html).

19. John Pinkerton [Robert Heron], Letter XLI in *Letters Of Literature* (1785), quoted in Richard Terry, '"In pleasing memory of all he stole": Plagiarism and Literary Detraction, 1747–1785'. In Paulina Kewes (ed.), *Plagiarism in Early Modern England* (London: Macmillan, 2003), pp.197–8.
20. For a detailed account of the use of the imperial conquest metaphor in English literary criticism, see Marilyn Randall's 'Imperial Plagiarism' chapter in *Pragmatic Plagiarism: Authorship, Profit and Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). The rescue and resurrection metaphors are employed, for example, in Macrobius's *Saturnalia* in reference to Virgil's borrowings from obscure poets (Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, trans. and ed. by Percival Vaughan Davis [New York: Columbia University Press, 1969], Bk. 6); by the Romantic poet and critic Walter Savage Landor and by Ralph Waldo Emerson in defence of Shakespeare (Landor 'Quotation and Originality', quoted in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* [New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983]); and by the critic and poet John Addington Symonds in defence of the Elizabethan playwrights (*Shakespeare's Predecessors*, p.31 see Appendix).
21. Seneca, LXXIX, 'On the Rewards of Scientific Discovery', in *Moral Epistles*, p.205.
22. Michel de Montaigne, II, 10, 'Of Books', in *Essays* (1595), trans. Charles Cotton and ed.William Carew Hazzlitt (1877). *Project Gutenberg*, ed. David Widger. http://www.gutenberg.org.
23. This *bon mot* is attributed to Molière, in defence against the accusations of having plagiarized Cyrano de Bergerac's *Le pedant joué* in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. According to one version of the anecdote, Molière was simply re-appropriating a scene which he had described to Cyrano prior to the completion of his own play and which the latter had stolen from him: 'Je *re*prends mon bien où je le trouve'. Both Cyrano de Bergerac and Molière figure in Roland de Chaudenay, *Dictionnaire des plagiaires* (Paris: Perrin, 1990).
24. Joost Smiers, *Arts Under Pressure: Promoting Cultural Diversity In The Age of Globalisation* (London: Zed, 2003), p.70.
25. Marilyn Randall, 'Appropriate(d) Discourse: Plagiarism and Decolonisation'. *New Literary History*, 22, 3 'Undermining Subjects' (Summer 1991), p.535.
26. Randall, *Pragmatic Plagiarism*, pp.18–19.
27. Christian Vandendorpe, 'Plagiat'. In Jean Marie Grassin (ed.), *Dictionnaire International des Termes Littéraires* (PPF Théorie et Terminologie Littéraire University of Limoges), http://www.ditl.info/.
28. Laura J. Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England: Gender, Authorship, Literary Property* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).
29. Rebecca Moore Howard, 'Sexuality, Textuality: The Cultural Work of Plagiarism'. *College English*, 62, 4 (March 2000), pp.473–91.
30. Kenneth K. Ruthven, *Faking Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.144.
31. Oscar Wilde, 'Olivia at the Lyceum', in *Selected Journalism*, edited by Anya Clayworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press: Oxford's World Classics, 2004), p.54.
32. Joshua Reynolds, Discourse VI. The Royal Academy, 10 December 1774, in *The Complete Works* (London: 1824), vol.1, pp.124–5.

33. Wilde, *Selected Journalism*, edited by Anya Clayworth, p.xxvi.
34. Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Market Place: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), pp.41ff.
35. Sos Eltis, *Revising Wilde: Society and Subversion in the Plays of Oscar Wilde* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), pp.61ff.
36. Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, 2000 (London: Granta, 2001), pp.326ff.
37. Deirdre Toomey, 'The Story Teller at Fault: Oscar Wilde and Irish Orality', in Jerusha McCormack (ed.), *Wilde the Irishman* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), pp.24–36.
38. Ian Small, *Conditions for Criticism: Authority, Knowledge, and Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp.116ff.
39. The *MLA Handbook* selects the stigmatization of a female historian as evidence that plagiarism is punished in academia:

    > For example, a well-known historian charged with plagiarism was asked to resign from prominent public positions even though she admitted responsibility for the theft, compensated the author whose work she took, and announced her intention to issue a corrected edition of her book.(p.67)

    The decision not to name the 'well-known historian' effectively denies the reader's right to reach his/her own verdict on the case. If this does refer to Doris Kearns Goodwin, it is worth noting that while she did apologize and offer to issue an amended version of her book, she has never admitted plagiarism, pleading a confusion in the note-books between paraphrased and quoted passages (Goodwin, 'How I Caused That Story'). It is significant that a female historian was singled out, although the same year yielded the equally publicized scandal of historian Stephen Ambrose's plagiarism (Barnes, 'Stephen Ambrose, Copycat').
40. Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England*, pp.208–11.
41. Ibid., pp.60; 71.
42. Ruthven, *Faking Literature*, p.91.
43. William Wordsworth, 10 March 1840, Letter 240, p.402 and December 1838, Letter 220, p.374 in *Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, vol. 1, edited by Edith J. Morley (Oxford: 1927), quoted in David McCracken, 'Wordsworth on Human Wishes and Poetic Borrowing'. *Modern Philology*, 79, 4 (May 1982), pp.393–5.
44. Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.110.
45. The collaborative nature of Young's *Conjectures* has been analyzed by Joel Weinsheimer, 'Conjectures on Unoriginal Composition'. *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 22, 1 (Winter, 1981), pp.58–73. Collaborative practices in Romantic literature generally have been illuminatingly discussed by Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Ruthven, *Faking Literature*.
46. Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author'. *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p.147.
47. Charles Baudelaire, 'Théophile Gautier', iv, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Marcel A. Ruff (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p.465. Baudelaire, *Baudelaire As A Literary Critic*, trans. Lois Boe Hyslop and Francis E. Hyslop, Jr. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1964), p.169.
48. Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Copywrights: Intellectual Property and the Literary Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), Chap.1.
49. [Essay on Chatterton] [1886] Ms. Wilde W6721M3E78, William Andrews Clarke Memorial Library UCLA. The information on the Chatterton manuscript is derived from Paul K. Saint-Amour, 'Oscar Wilde: Orality, Literary Property and Crimes of Writing'. *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 55, 1 (June 2000), pp.59–91.
50. Saint-Amour, 'Oscar Wilde', p.77.
51. Dorothy Wordsworth, 'To Lady Beaumont', 27 October 1805, letter 282 in *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, vol. 3, *The Later Years 1821–1828*, ed. Alan G. Hill (Oxford: 1978), p.633, quoted in McCracken, 'Wordsworth on Human Wishes and Poetic Borrowing', p.394.
52. 'Wilde', in Patricia Clements, *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).
53. Lawrence Danson, *Wilde's Intentions: The Artist in His Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), p.90.

2

Plagiarism: A Decadent Tradition

The romantic redefinition of originality pathologized plagiarism as a symptom of moral and aesthetic decay, associated with the newly-invented sins of insincerity, artificiality and shallowness. This merging of ethical and aesthetical categories and the extensive use of the author function to simplify the text met with perhaps the first sharp riposte in the writings of Edgar Allan Poe.[1]

Poe's seemingly unjustified denunciations of the plagiarisms of fellow-authors, combined with his own extensive plagiarisms, have defied critical interpretation in the romantically-biased climate of literary criticism. Not until 1970 was it persuasively suggested, in an essay by Robert Regan, that Poe's plagiarisms and denunciations of plagiarism were one of his elaborate games of deception. This was followed, as late as 1995, by the first examination of the plagiarizing theory informing his practice, which suggested that Poe had deliberately and repeatedly staged and allegorized plagiarism in order to 'devalue, revalue, or realign our ambivalence toward "originality" in literature'.[2] Meditating on the belatedness of his own studies, Stephen Rachman related it to the scholarly reluctance 'to recognize the centrality of plagiary to Poe's *modus scribendi*', a reluctance ascribed by him to the professional bias of critics who are also, in most cases, academics and thus prone to 'pedagogical anxieties'.[3]

Poe, being by choice a classicist, was comfortable with the 'double standard' which praised the masters' borrowings while deriding the clumsy imitators. Once this is acknowledged, the apparent inconsistencies of his denunciations of fellow-authors, combined with his own extensive plagiarisms, vanish. The circumstances which led Poe to plagiarism were, first, his own admiration of the romantic poets and of the romantic ideal of authorship, combined with his knowledge of the plagiarisms of Coleridge, which confirmed the untenability of the romantic proposition; and secondly, his own situation as an American

writer, who wished to be a poet and a scholar, and was forced to turn out articles and reviews for the benefit of a wide commercial audience.[4] Plagiarism appealed to him possibly as a strategy of overcoming his own romantic fascination, by turning the anxiety of influence into the comedy of deception, and certainly as a means of creating an elect, classically-minded audience while being forced to address a wider, romantically-biased one.

In 'Marginalia' 35, Poe echoes Voltaire's view of the plagiarist as a clumsy thief, providing his own variation on this image, itself a paraphrase from Butler's *Hudibras*, and he describes these despicable thieves as 'Fellows who really have got no *right* – some individuals *have* – to purloin the property of their predecessors'.[5] In 'Marginalia' 160, he distinguishes between the poetic sentiment, what might be called artistic intuition or the poet's ability to respond to extant works of art, and the poetic power:

> Keen sensibility of appreciation – that is to say, the poetic *sentiment* (in distinction from the poetic *power*) leads almost inevitably to imitation. Thus all great poets have been great imitators. It is, however, a mere *non distributio medii* hence to infer, that all great imitators are poets.[6]

The statement anticipates Wilde's in 'The Critic as Artist' which André Gide would reconsider decades later, in his journal entry:

> 'The imagination imitates. It is the critical spirit that creates', said Wilde ... Of all Wilde's aphorisms there is none that seems more paradoxical at first and less worthy of being taken into consideration. By defending it, one runs the risk of passing for a sophist oneself. What was my astonishment, my joy, to find, most unexpectedly, this same profound and fecund truth when thumbing at random through Diderot' s *Complete Works* – and set forth by him in almost the same terms: 'Imagination creates nothing; it imitates'.

Significantly, Gide does not assume that Wilde has plagiarized Diderot, but regards this discovery as a confirmation of Wilde's brilliant intuition. He goes on to note:

> I took pleasure in quoting this sentence opposite Wilde's paradox in an article on 'the forsaking of the subject in the plastic arts'. This morning, opening the first number of the sumptuous review *Verve*, in which that article appears, my eyes fall at once on the sentence: 'Imagination creates nothing; it invents.' A zealous reader, too zealous, thought he was doing right to correct a text that was obviously faulty in his eyes.[7]

This journal entry (15 December 1937) refreshingly shows the relative rather than absolute originality of Wilde's views on creativity and the resistance of most readers, including those as sophisticated as Gide, to counter-romantic criticism and practice.

Of course, these statements by Poe, Wilde and Diderot are reformulations of a classical commonplace, and the fact that they have reverberated so strangely for so long proves the extraordinary fascination of the romantic ideal for readers and authors, who can never acknowledge that the greatest poets and writers generally are also the greatest imitators – undoubtedly because of the opposition posited by influential thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and William Wordsworth.[8]

Romantic theory is ridiculed by Poe already in the 1831 preface to *Poems*. Quoting Wordsworth's highly questionable definition of genius as 'the act of doing well what is worthy to be done, and what was never done before', Poe criticizes it in a seemingly incoherent manner:

> – indeed? then it follows that in doing what is *un*worthy to be done, or what *has* been done before, no genius can be evinced; yet the picking of pockets is an unworthy act, pockets have been picked time immemorial, and Barrington, the pickpocket, in point of genius, would have thought hard of a comparison with William Wordsworth, the poet.[9]

Poe glosses 'unworthy to be done' as plagiarism, recognizing the centrality of plagiarism to romantic concerns, and alludes to the genius of transgression, humorously juxtaposed with the earnestness of William Wordsworth. He disapproves of Wordsworth's author-oriented criticism of Ossian, noting that in 'estimating the merit of certain poems, whether they be Ossian's or Macpherson's, can surely be of little consequence, yet, in order to prove their worthlessness, Mr. W. has expanded many pages in the controversy'.[10] Poe refuses the direct relationship between the author and his work, sincerity and artistic value, posited by the romantics.

Coleridge is also taken to task for the aesthetic imperfections of the *Biographia Literaria*, anticipating Pater's comments on this very theme. Poe would have noted at least Coleridge's plagiarisms from A.W. Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, which he had also plundered in 'Marginalia' and this is probably what the following lines allude to:

> He [Coleridge] goes wrong by reason of his very profundity, and of his error we have a natural type in the contemplation of a star. He who regards it directly and intensely sees, it is true, the star, but it is the star without a ray – while he who surveys it less inquisitively is conscious of all for which the star is useful to us below – its brilliancy and its beauty.[11]

What is blameworthy, from the classical perspective of Poe and, later, Pater and Wilde, is not Coleridge's plagiarism per se, but his excessive admiration of the sources, his inability to achieve critical distance and artistic mastery. By contrast, Poe's admiration of Coleridge is both sufficiently imitative, incorporating romantic ideas and theory, sometimes verbatim, and sufficiently critical, perfectly self-conscious and ironic. Floyd Stovall has interpreted Poe's echoing of Coleridge combined with his apparent dismissal of Coleridge's poetic theories in psychological terms, as stemming from the Poe's unwillingness to acknowledge the extent of his indebtedness.[12] Yet his technique may also be understood as a rewriting of Coleridge, anticipating the doctrine of the OULIPO group that even the masterpieces need updating.[13]

The 'Letter to B' may be considered as a manifesto of the counter-romantic movement. It makes poignant criticisms of the romantic concept of genius and of the stress on priority, originality and authenticity, and it resists the temptation of replacing romantic authority by a different one. The explicit fragmentariness of its structure, imitating and commenting upon the reluctant fragmentariness of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, is a measure of Poe's modernity, a recognition, and celebration, of the dissolution of all texts, briefly extricated from the web of intertextuality and always on the verge of being re-absorbed into it.

Poe's most memorable rewriting of Coleridge, and of romantic theory generally, is 'The Philosophy of Composition'. The essay gives a scarcely plausible account of the genesis of his most famous poem, 'The Raven', to be set beside Coleridge's equally doubtful and influential account of the genesis of 'Kubla Khan'. The contrast is emphasized by Poe:

> Most writers – poets in especial – prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy – an ecstatic intuition – and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought – at the true purposes seized only at the last moment ... at the cautious selections and rejections – at the painful erasures and interpolations – in a word, at the wheels and pinions – the tackle for scene-shifting – the step-ladders and demon-traps – the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, constitute the properties of the literary *histrio*.[14]

The implication here, as in Wilde's Chatterton lecture, is that both the romantics and the classicists are self-conscious plagiarists, differing only in their choice of authorial mask. Poe denies the possibility of

spontaneous, worthwhile creation in 'ninety-nine cases out of a hundred'. The theatrical metaphors evoke Shakespeare, the greatest playwright and the arch-plagiarist, regarded by Edward Young as the supreme example of the original artist and by the classicists as justifying their own practices. Originality, chosen by the romantics as the unmistakable sign of the artist's irrepressible personality, is described by Poe as an effect produced in the minds of the readers by a self-conscious, self-critical artist:

> The fact is, originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition. In general, to be found, it must be elaborately sought, and although a positive merit of the highest class, demands in its attainment less of invention than negation.[15]

The romantic and the classical views of originality and plagiarism are also amusingly contrasted in Poe's tale, 'The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq'. The young protagonist is represented as possessing a moderate admiration for the classics, to whom he pays the tribute of wholesale plagiarism. He has some degree of artistic instinct, or what Poe had called the 'poetic sentiment', if not of 'poetic power'. But since the American journals to which he sends his selections are uniformly disparaging of the received contributions, whose true sources they fail to identify, the young man is spurred into creative frenzy along the lines of romantic spontaneity:

> The result of my experiment with the old books convinced me, in the first place, that 'honesty is the best policy', and, in the second, that if I could not write better than Mr. Dante, and the two blind men, and the rest of the old set, it would, at least, be a difficult matter to write worse. I took heart, therefore, and determined to prosecute the 'entirely original' (as they say on the covers of the magazines), at whatever cost of study and pains.[16]

Thus Thingum Bob, the young man with a latent poetic sentiment, becomes a celebrated author, on a level with his unlettered audience, and reaches the pinnacle of unreadable, yet commercially successful, journalism. Renouncing artistic discipline and training, he satisfies and flatters the contemporary obsession with originality – much as Poe himself had done in his shrill denunciations of plagiarism and eulogies of originality which were taken seriously by his contemporaries and are apparently still read in this light by many critics.

The example above is unusually straightforward in promoting the

classical view. Poe provides a model for the aesthetic envisioned by Jorge Luis Borges in 'The Nothingness of Personality' as 'hostile to ... psychologism, sympathetic to the classics, yet encouraging to today's most unruly tendencies'.[17] This means that the almost didactic, all too authoritative statements – Poe was after all, the contemporary of Dickens, Longfellow *et al.* – are woven into an ambiguous, seemingly self-contradictory structure. Two of his other tales have been analysed by Rachman as allegories of plagiarism: 'The Purloined Letter' and 'The Man of the Crowd'. 'The Purloined Letter' has been extremely inspiring to subsequent critics, leading first to Lacan's famous analysis, secondly to Derrida's deconstruction of Lacan, accusing him of having plagiarized the work of Marie Bonaparte, thirdly to Barbara Johnson's deconstruction of Derrida-Lacan, and fourthly to Irwin's deconstruction of Johnson/Derrida/Lacan/Poe, locating another unacknowledged source of Lacan's inspiration in Borges's 'Death and the Compass'. Reflections of the tale can also be glimpsed in nineteenth-century drama from Sardou to Wilde (see Chapter 5). Poe's tale is an allegory of plagiarism inspiring other allegories and accusations of plagiarism as well as an analysis of the creative-critical process itself which subsequent, unavoidably self-reflexive readings, must replicate. Since the pursuit of this self-reflexive plagiarizing game is beyond the scope of this chapter, I shall confine my analysis of Poe's technique to a few of his critical essays.

'The Philosophy of Composition' is a brilliantly-argued classical alternative to the romantic ideal of creativity, yet at the same time, quite recognizably, a hoax, and it has been dismissed by numerous American critics for this very reason, even while its influence on French poetry from Baudelaire to Valéry is fully acknowledged. The demonstration of the way in which the 'work proceeded step by step, to its completion, with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem'[18] is spurious, but it does reflect a partial truth about creation which had been obscured by the romantics. On the other hand, Poe's claim, with regard to prosody, that 'nothing even remotely approaching this combination has ever been attempted'[19] is simply a sardonic commentary on the contemporary obsession with novelty, yet it has occasionally been read by critics as a proof of his critical naïveté and ignorance.[20]

Reflections of Poe's playfully neo-classical doctrine may also be glimpsed in his reviews of contemporary literature. Regan has analysed the famous review of Nathaniel Hawthorne, where Poe notes 'something which resembles a plagiarism – but which *may be* a very flattering coin-

cidence of thought' between 'Howe's Masquerade' and Poe's 'William Wilson'.[21] The analogy is unconvincing and defeated by sheer chronology of publication. On the other hand, Poe's 'The Masque of Red Death', published in the same number of *Graham's Magazine* as the review of Hawthorne, is indebted to 'Howe's Masquerade' and to the other three 'Legends of the Province House'. Regan traces these analogies in detail, but does not convict Poe of plagiarism. Instead, he suggests, albeit tentatively: 'Far from masking his "plagiary", Poe's charge calls attention to it. He invites the careful reader – the *very* careful reader – to see "The Masque of Red Death" as a critical exercise which out-Hawthornes Hawthorne'.[22] Regan views plagiarism as one of Poe's sophisticated games with his readers.

The Longfellow reviews illustrate Poe's polemical use of plagiarism accusations. The derivativeness of Longfellow's much-admired poetry is uncovered and considerably exaggerated by Poe to support his own critical arguments on the superiority of classical imitation to romantic originality. The Longfellow war, carried out by Poe under his own signature and, quite possibly, under the signature of Longfellow's self-appointed defender Outis, ends like a traditional comedy, with a graceful bow to the public and to the target of the critique, acquitting both himself and Longfellow of any dishonourable intentions and reasserting: 'all literary history demonstrates that, for the most frequent and palpable plagiarisms, we must search the works of the most eminent poets'.[23]

One of the examples of Longfellow's plagiarism had been *A Psalm of Life*:

> Art is long and time is fleeting,
> And our hearts, though stout and brave,
> Still like muffled drums are beating
> Funeral marches to the grave.

Poe had retraced these lines to the 'Exequy on the death of his wife by Henry King, Bishop of Chichester':

> But hark! *my pulse, like a soft drum,*
> *Beats* my approach – tells thee I come!
> And slow howe'er my *marches* be,
> I shall at last sit down by thee. (Poe's emphasis)

This had been given as an example of 'imitation too palpable to be mistaken; and which belongs to the most barbarous class of literary piracy; that class in which, while the words of the wronged author are avoided, his most intangible, and therefore his least defensible and least

reclaimable property, is appropriated'.[24] The assertion, perhaps surprising for a contemporary reader accustomed, in practice if not in theory, to the textual definition of plagiarism, would not have surprised the romantics, who were similarly unconcerned to distinguish between plagiarism and imitation, and were equally prone to condemn the loosest as the closest borrowings. Nor would it have surprised the classicists, who had traditionally described the plagiarist as devaluer and defacer of stolen goods, from Martial's 'kidnapper of slaves' metaphor to the updating of it, in De Quincey's version, as 'real plagiarisms of a subtler kind, which ... disfigure, like gypsies, the children which they have stolen'.[25]

Yet the central conceit of King's poem, of the heart beating its own funeral march, had been used by Poe himself in the 'Tell-Tale Heart'. King's poem appealed to Poe on account of its technical virtuosity, and of its theme – the death of a beloved woman and the poet's longing to be reunited with her in death, considered as the most poetic. His tale is a sardonic rewriting of it: replacing the beloved woman by an old man and making the heartbeats not the foreshadowing of peaceful, longed-for death, but its immediate cause: 'It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.'[26] After the murder, it is the imagined beating of the victim's heart, buried under the floor, which prompts the suicidal confession.

By criticizing Longfellow's plagiarism, Poe may be alerting his readers to the source of his own tale and expecting them to compare his masterful rendering of it with Longfellow's admittedly less poignant use. The Longfellow stanza had already been given as an epigraph to the first published version of the tale, in *The Pioneer*.[27] Its inclusion adds an allegorical dimension for what might have otherwise been only a psychological study.

Poe's theory and practice had a most fruitful influence on the writings of Baudelaire. The French poet's neo-classical views on creativity can be discerned in texts that predate his acquaintance with Poe. The brief anecdote, 'Comment on paie ses dettes quand on a du génie' 'How a Genius Pays His Debts' (1845) reveals a sense of humour very close to that of Poe in his satires of the magazine-industry and of the writer's plight. It retells, or invents, the incident of the author of *La comédie humaine* first securing the commission of two articles from an admiring editor, and then paying a fraction of the price for two obscure authors to write them. The story reveals a serene temper, critical not so much of Balzac's writing methods as of the system which fetishizes

the author's signature. Baudelaire's supreme indifference to the subject of plagiarism is indicated by his wholesale plagiarism, the very next year, of a story from an English magazine, which he translates without any acknowledgment nor, it would seem, with any fear of being detected, since he does not even change the title or subtitle of the original. Whether this annexation is provocative or simply an opportunistic gesture, one of the countless plagiarisms typical of the journalism of the time, it, too, functions, as an efficient refutation of the romantic expectations of authorial uniqueness, since 'Le jeune enchanteur' was part of the Baudelairean canon until the discovery of the plagiarism in 1950.[28]

Baudelaire's 'Salon de 1846' incorporates many of the ideas in Stendhal's *Histoire de la peinture en Italie*, occasionally verbatim, as Margaret Gilman discovered in 1939.[29] Baudelaire's plagiarism may be in this case inspired by Stendhal's own extensive plagiarisms from the Italian critics, his book being described by Chaudenay as a 'cento of texts'.[30]

Finally, his only short story, 'La Fanfarlo', is an ironic self-portrait and a sharp reminder of the artist's temptation towards commercial rather than artistic success. What has not been sufficiently recognized is that Baudelaire, like Poe, correlated commercial success with the espousal of romantic values. In 'The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.', the protagonist's renunciation of intertextuality, of the tradition glossed as 'several antique and altogether unknown or forgotten volumes' found in ' the rubbish of an old book-stall ... in a very remote corner of the town',[31] in favour of originality and sincerity brings about social and financial triumph. In 'La Fanfarlo', the poet as critic Samuel Cramer starts off as a self-conscious, methodical plagiarist on the classical pattern, and degenerates into a productive author.

Initially, he is a 'god of impotence', concerned not with increasing the amount of extant literature, but rather with a critical recreation of it. He is the author of a slender volume of poems and 'a literary histrio' performing for an audience of one: Mme Cosmelly, whose impressions of his carefully-considered originality and spontaneity effects he watches eagerly. His artistic life is spoilt, as might have been expected in a decadent tale, by the intrusion of passion, since his insincere love for Mme Cosmelly is replaced by the infatuation with La Fanfarlo and by a productive relationship:

> She is learning to make children: she has just been delivered of a pair of healthy twins. Samuel has given birth to four learned books: one book on the four evangelists – another on the symbolism of colours – a monograph about a new system of advertisement – and a fourth whose title I have no wish to recall. – The most horrifying thing about this last book

> is that it is full of verve, energy and curiosities ...
>
> Poor singer of Ospreys! Poor Manuela de Monteverde! How low he has fallen! – I learnt recently that he had founded a socialist newspaper and wanted to turn to politics.[32]

Unlike his protagonist Samuel Cramer, the author Baudelaire retains classical mastery. The story itself illustrates the view of literature as derived from previous literature, its plot being adapted from Balzac's *Béatrix*. It must further be noted that Balzac's novel had itself plagiarized Gautier's *Portraits contemporains*,[33] so that Baudelaire's appropriation of Balzac is already justified by the classical sense that no absolute originality is possible in literature.

All of the above explain Baudelaire's receptivity to the ideas and techniques of Poe. He discovered the works of Poe first in 1847, through the translations of Isabelle Meunier, and in the following year, he published his first translation of Poe, 'Révélation magnétique'. Baudelaire's discussion of this hoax, which created a sensation in the States and in Europe, shows that he appreciated from the very beginning both Poe's technical accomplishment and his elaborate deceptions of the Philistine public. His first essay on Poe describes him as a marvellous 'jongleur', while regarding this aspect as a minor one; his second essay, written after he had consulted the Griswold comprehensive edition, reveals a far better understanding of the doubleness of Poe:

> He was in himself an admirable protest, and he made his protest in his own particular way. The author who, in 'The Colloqui of Monos and Una', pours out his scorn and disgust for democracy, progress and *civilisation*, is the same one who, in order to encourage credulity, to delight the stupidity of his contemporaries, has stressed human sovereignty most emphatically and has very ingenuously fabricated hoaxes flattering to the pride of *modern man*. Considered in this light, Poe seems like a helot who wishes to make his master blush. Finally, to state my thought even more clearly, Poe was always great not only in his noble conceptions but also as a prankster.[34]

Baudelaire recognizes the subversive potential of Poe's games of deception, including plagiarism, which deliberately thwarts the expectations of a romantically-biased audience. He praises Poe as a lover of Beauty in the midst of a utilitarian society – reduced to the only possible role, that of the angry jester, of the possibly mad jester as in Poe's 'Hop-Frog', Baudelaire's 'Le fou et La Vénus', or of the sad jester, as in Wilde's 'Birthday of the Infanta'.

In his essay of 1852, 'Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages',

Baudelaire had relied on the obituaries published by Thompson and Daniel in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, purified from all moralizing and diverted to serve his own conception of the artist. In his 'Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Allan Poe' of 1859, he incorporates Poe's prose into his own, often without explicit acknowledgment. W.T. Bandy, in communicating to fellow-scholars what he termed the 'sensational' discovery of the plagiarism from the American obituaries in the first essay, found only one way to reconcile this with 'Baudelaire's extreme originality and independence': the French poet had only read very few of Poe's works at the time, and was therefore obliged to resort to plagiarism in writing his influential essay on Poe.[35] Thus Baudelaire's very plagiarisms serve to prove his originality, in the romantic sense of the term, i.e. his independence from the thought and writings of Poe. The explanation is plausible enough, as far as it goes, yet it fails to take into account Baudelaire's equally extensive plagiarism, in the subsequent 'New Notes' (1859), this time from the works of Edgar Allan Poe himself. And in the 'Théophile Gautier' essay, which repeats a significant chunk of the theory already plagiarized in his first essay on Poe, with the tongue-in-cheek justification: 'I presume there are times when it is permissible to quote oneself, especially when it is done to avoid paraphrasing what one has already written'[36] – thus consolidating his appropriation by authoritative repetition.

A psychological explanation of these instances of plagiarism from Poe is proposed by Patrick F. Quinn:

> Technically, the word for this is plagiarism. But it would be equally just, and more charitable, to consider Baudelaire's procedure here as proof that he was scarcely exaggerating when he said that some of the very *sentences* which he found written by Poe had been worked out independently in his own mind well before the work of Poe came under his excited scrutiny.[37]

This, again, fails to account for Baudelaire's plagiarism from other sources, such as Thompson and Daniel in 'Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages', which Quinn chooses to discuss only in the endnotes, thereby distinguishing between his careless and careful readers just as Baudelaire and Poe had distinguished the Philistine from the elect via plagiarism.

A simpler explanation, which can accommodate all the previously discussed and subsequent instances of plagiarism in Baudelaire, is that the French poet did not plagiarize Poe, and other authors, because he could not do otherwise, but because he saw no reason to do otherwise.

He saw no point to originality for originality's sake, for the strong misreading of Poe or indeed of Thompson and Daniel.[38] Rather, he considered Poe as a kindred spirit, to whose ideas he was content to add his own. This is precisely the classical attitude, as Borges would explain:

> For the classical minds literature is the essential thing, not the individuals. George Moore and James Joyce incorporated in their works the pages and sentences of others; Oscar Wilde used to give plots away for others to develop; both procedures, though apparently contradictory, may reveal an identical sense of art, an ecumenical, impersonal perception. Another witness of the Word's profound unity, another who defied the limitations of the individual, was the renowned Ben Jonson, who, upon writing his literary testament and the favorable or adverse opinions he held of his contemporaries, simply combined fragments from Seneca, Quintilian, Justus Lipsius, Vives, Erasmus, Machiavelli, Bacon and the two Scaligers.
>
> One last observation. Those who carefully copy a writer do so impersonally, because they equate that writer with literature, because they suspect that to depart from him in the slightest is to deviate from reason and orthodoxy.[39]

The romantic metaphor of the plagiarist as vampire, or as a timid creature in awe of the great predecessor, clearly does not fit the Poe-Baudelaire relationship, which can more suitably be described as one of collaboration. These affinities are also apparent in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. A posthumously published, unfinished preface continues Poe's mockery of the romantic public. Baudelaire therein denounces his own plagiarisms, 'exasperated by the ignorance of readers', and he offers to teach originality and the rules for mediocre composition in 'twenty lessons'.[40] In the style of Poe, he makes these revelations incomplete, including the names of the plagiarized poets, and even the number of passages plagiarized from each, yet providing no specific references. This is an efficient method of distinguishing between the Philistine, who will treat this partial confession as the starting point of a laborious source-tracking, and the initiated, who will delight in this suitably provocative assertion of the intertextuality of all poetry and of the artist's supreme self-consciousness. The preface may also be viewed as an attempt to stem the tide of author-oriented, psychological criticism and to encourage intertextual readings.

The first substantial study of Baudelaire's sources would not be undertaken until 1927 by Robert Vivier, with the second section of the

book, 'les sources' followed by the expected section, 'l'originalité', reasserting Baudelaire's superiority to the authors that inspired his writing. Jean Prévost's study, first published in 1953 and concentrating on the visual sources of Baudelairean poetry, confidently stated that 'Baudelaire rarely composes poems out of other poems; more seldom than Victor Hugo himself'.[41]

The delay of Baudelairean scholars in recognizing the neo-classical richness of his poetry, notwithstanding the testimony of the preface and of the critical writings, may be partly explained by his supreme virtuosity in mastering his sources. It was not until 1959 that Alfred G. Engström tentatively identified Baudelaire's self-proclaimed plagiarism from Longfellow as referring not to 'Le Calumet de la Paix', an acknowledged translation, but to 'Recueillement'.

The poem is a demonstration of the validity of the classical proposition that plagiarism may be a form of rescue via re-contextualization. While the line adapted by Baudelaire, 'Entends ma chère, entends, la douce Nuit qui marche' is not more artistically successful than the first stanza in Longfellow which inspired it, it is far more effective as the culmination of his elaborately-constructed poem:

Sois sage, ô ma Douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille.
Tu réclamais le Soir; il descend; le voici:
Une atmosphère obscure enveloppe la ville,
Aux uns portant la paix, aux autres le souci.
Pendant que des mortels la multitude vile,
Sous le fouet du Plaisir, ce bourreau sans merci,
Va cueillir des remords dans la fête servile,
Ma Douleur, donne-moi la main; viens par ici,
Loin d'eux. Vois se pencher les défuntes Années,
Sur les balcons du ciel, en robes surannées;
Surgir du fond des eaux le Regret souriant;
Le Soleil moribond s'endormir sous une arche,
Et, comme un long linceul traînant à l'Orient,
Entends, ma chère, entends la douce Nuit qui marche.

Meditation

A gradual numbness spreads through streets and homes.
Be patient, Pain, and tranquillised, at best.
You wanted Evening back, and here it comes,
Bringing anxiety to some, to others rest.
While mortal vermin race to harvest shame
And kiss relentless Pleasure's whip as fast

As it can punish them, and make them swarm,
Walk hand in hand with me, at last,

Far from it all. The Past, in faded gown,
From her dress circle in the sky leans down.
See how Regret smiles, rising from the deep;

The Sun, under a bridge, dies in his sleep,
And all across the West – *Listen, sweet Pain*!
The Night unfurls her winding-sheet again. (Trans. Martin)

Cf. Longfellow:

I heard the trailing garments of the Night
Sweep through her marble hall!
I saw her sable skirts all fringed with light
From the celestial walls!

I felt her presence, by its spell of might,
Stoop o'er me from above;
The calm, majestic presence of the Night,
As of the one I love.

I heard the sounds of sorrow and delight,
The manifold, soft chimes,
That fill the haunted chambers of the Night,
Like some old poet's rhymes.

From the cool cisterns of the midnight air
My spirit drank repose;
The fountain of perpetual peace flows there, –
From those deep cisterns flows.

O holy Night! from thee I learn to bear
What man has borne before!
Thou layest thy finger on the lips of Care,
And they complain no more.

Peace! Peace! Orestes-like I breathe this prayer!
Descend with broad-winged flight,
The welcome, the thrice-prayed for, the most fair,
The best-beloved Night!

'Hymn to the Night' had been quoted in full in Poe's review of *Voices of the Night* as revealing Longfellow's greatest gifts as a poet,

but also his flaws, in particular the lack of unity of conception evinced, in Poe's view, by the oscillation between 'the two ideas of the absolute and of the personified Night'.[42] The mistake is avoided in Baudelaire's poem, where quaint personifications are maintained throughout. 'Recueillement', praised by Pierre Louÿs as Baudelaire's best sonnet,[43] is a poetic extension of Poe's prose criticism of Longfellow.

The most spectacular of the Baudelairean rewritings inspired by Poe's criticism is 'Le guignon'. To the uninitiated French reader, it may appear simply as an autobiographical elegy:

> Pour soulever un poids si lourd,
> Sisyphe, il faudrait ton courage!
> Bien qu'on ait du coeur à l'ouvrage,
> L'Art est long et le Temps est court.
>
> Loin des sépultures célèbres,
> Vers un cimetière isolé,
> Mon coeur, comme un tambour voilé,
> Va battant des marches funèbres.
>
> Maint joyau dort enseveli
> Dans les ténèbres et l'oubli,
> Bien loin des pioches et des sondes;
>
> Mainte fleur épanche à regret
> Son parfum doux comme un secret
> Dans les solitudes profondes.
>
> Unluck
> To raise such a heavy burden your courage would be needed, O Sisyphus! However eagerly one works, Art is long and Time is short. Far from the graves of the famed, my heart like a muffled drum beats out its dead-march towards some lonely graveyard.
>
> Many a gem sleeps buried in darkness and oblivion, far beyond the reach of spade or sounding-rod; many a flower grudgingly spills its perfume, its perfume sweet as a secret, in the depths of solitude. (Trans. Scarfe)

Yet what might have seemed as a heart-felt cry is an elaborate collage of the Longfellow stanza that had been criticized by Poe as a blatant plagiarism of Henry King's 'Exequy' and of a stanza from Thomas Gray's *Elegy*:

> Full many a gem of purest ray serene
> The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear

> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

The materials of 'Le guignon' are ancient, only their ordering is new. Pater's remarks on Plato's writings could apply as well to Baudelaire's poetic experiments:

> in spite of his wonderful savour of literary freshness, there is nothing absolutely new: or rather, as in many other very original products of human genius, the seemingly new is old also, a palimpsest, a tapestry of which the actual threads have served before, or like the animal frame itself, every particle of which has already lived and died many times over. Nothing but the life-giving principle of cohesion is new; the new perspective, the resultant complexion, the expressiveness which familiar thoughts attain by novel juxtaposition. In other words, the form is new. But then, in the creation of philosophical literature, as in all other products of art, *form*, in the full signification of that word, is everything, and the mere matter is nothing.[44]

Baudelaire's use of materials already rich in literary associations is a triumph of neo-classical writing. Just as Thomas Gray had deftly manoeuvred a whole poetic tradition in the writing of his famous elegy that seemed to his contemporaries to have captured the spirit of the age and had generated a number of French translations and imitations, Baudelaire linked the two translated stanzas and added the mythical commonplace of Sisyphus to create a thoroughly modern poem. The modernity of 'Le guignon', as noted by Prévost, consists in its loose linking of the stanzas, rendering it a writerly text,[45] one on which the imagination is forced to work in the search for full meaning. It is in other words a suggestive rather than an expressive text, fulfilling the criteria of vagueness of subject matter posited by Poe and Pater for lyrical poetry ('The Philosophy of Composition'; 'The School of Giorgione').

T.S. Eliot would select 'Le guignon' as evidence of the 'technical mastery which can hardly be overpraised, and which has made his verse an inexhaustible study for later poets, not only in his own language'.[46] On one level a hoax, a plagiarized text masquerading as an original, a heterogeneous text posing as an individual one, it marks Baudelaire's allegiance to the poetics of collage on the model of Thomas Gray and Poe, and his implicit rejection of romantic assumptions. Baudelaire's counter-romantic perspective was only acknowledged in literary criticism from the 1970s onwards, in the studies of Antoine Fongaro and Paul Bénichou, yet it inspired the poet-

ic experiments of Wilde and T.S. Eliot and the intertextual games of Walter Pater.

Pater's plagiarism practice and theory were unquestionably inspired by the experiments of Baudelaire and presumably by those of Poe. More fortunate than his predecessors in not having to address a wide uncultivated audience in order to earn a living, Pater nevertheless had to contend with the earnest, author-oriented criticism favoured by his contemporaries, and he resorted with equal enthusiasm to covert intertextuality as a means of concealing his affinity with the French decadent poets, while signalling it to the elect few.

The technique of *Marius the Epicurean* has been compared by Ian Small to that of Joyce and T.S. Eliot, as it subverts the authority of original sources, blurring the distinction between Biblical and apocryphal texts, historical documents and pastiche and withholds the full meaning of the text from all but the most knowledgeable readers. *Gaston de Latour* is simultaneously a critical reading of the historical period of Charles IX and a meditation on decadent poetry and the decadent movement generally, with Baudelaire concealed under the features of Ronsard and Oscar Wilde caricatured in the fictitious Jasmin.[47]

These techniques are not confined to Pater's fiction. 'The School of Giorgione' uses Renaissance art to advance a formalist theory directly inspired by Baudelaire's essay on Delacroix, concealed under the innocuous reference to 'the German critics'.[48] Like Wilde in the Chatterton lecture, Pater approves of both plagiarism and forgery. Literary counterfeiting had been praised by Pater, in relation to Prosper Merimée's pseudo-ancient ballads in *La Guzla* 'The Lyre' because, as Patricia Clements suggests, he had recognized its subversive potential as 'a means of defeating the censor'.[49]

Pater's covert apology of plagiarism occurs in his essay on 'Style', which, as David J. Delaura noted, is to a significant extent a rewriting of John Henry Newman's individualistic interpretation of style in his lecture on 'Literature' (1852).[50] Pater's ironic and neo-classical plagiarism is justified by its description as scholarly:

> The literary artist is of necessity a scholar, and in what he proposes to do will have in mind, first of all, the scholar and the scholarly conscience – the male conscience in this matter, as we must think it, under a system of education which still to so large an extent limits real scholarship to men. In his self-criticism, he supposes always that sort of reader who will go (full of eyes) warily, considerately, though without consideration for him, over the ground which the female conscience traverses so lightly, so amiably. For the material in which he works is no more a creation of his

> own than the sculptor's marble. Product of a myriad various minds and contending tongues, compact of obscure and minute association, a language has its own abundant and often recondite laws, in the habitual and summary recognition of which scholarship consists.[51]

This passage itself is an example of the covert acknowledgment and partial revelation pattern. It reworks the remarks of Thomas Gray, which ironically treat the romantic obsession with plagiarism as a symptom of effeminacy:

> There is no Woman, that can take pleasure in this kind of composition ... There is a certain measure of learning necessary, & and a long acquaintance with the good Writers ancient & modern, which by our injustice is denied to them, and without this they can only catch here and there a florid expression, or a musical rhyme, while the Whole appears to them a wild obscure unedifying jumble.[52]

And it fuses Thomas Gray's mockery of Wordsworth and of romantic theory with Samuel Johnson's remarks in his essay on plagiarism:

> Yet the author who imitates his predecessors only by furnishing himself with thoughts and elegances out of the same general magazine of literature can with little more propriety be reproached as a plagiary, than the architect can be censured as a mean copier of Angelo or Wren, because he digs his marble from the same quarry, squares his stones by the same art, and unites them in columns of the same orders.[53]

Pater also quotes Montaigne in support of his views:

> A scholar writing for the scholarly, he will of course leave something to the willing intelligence of his reader. 'To go preach to the first passer-by', says Montaigne, 'to become tutor to the ignorance of the first I meet, is a thing I abhor'; a thing, in fact, naturally distressing to the scholar, who will therefore ever be shy of offering uncomplimentary assistance to the reader's wit.[54]

Montaigne is, of course, well known not only as a scholar, but also as a plagiarist, largely, like the decadent Baudelaire and Poe, through self-denunciation.[55] The association of the scholarly and the plagiaristic styles was familiar enough, appearing for instance in John Addington Symonds's discussion of Ben Jonson, which concludes a detailed account of his borrowings with extravagant praise:

> Such are the dainty delights which Jonson, 'at his full tables', has provided for the lover of literature. It is true that a scholar's appetite must be brought to the repast; else some 'fastidious stomachs', as he

> phrases it, may prefer to 'enjoy at home their clean empty trenchers'. But no one who has a true sense of verse will fail to be rewarded by a cursory perusal of those lyrics, upon which even Milton deigned to found his pastoral style.[56]

In Pater's theory and practice, as in that of Baudelaire and anticipating the conclusions of Wilde and Borges, the role of the artist is quite indistinguishable from that of the critic, that of the imaginative and critical reader from that of the writer. In 'Style', Pater provides the most concise formulation of the decadent ideal, at odds with romantic fecundity and originality: 'For in truth all art does but consist in the removal of surplusage'.[57]

Robert Macfarlane notes that the substance and method of Pater's 'Style' would be appropriated by disciples such as Wilde, Lionel Johnson and Arthur Symons. Wilde's review of 'Appreciations' indicates his awareness of Pater's source and his whole-hearted approval of the scholarly i.e. plagiaristic technique, compatible with the greatest originality: 'In Mr. Pater, as in Cardinal Newman, we find the union of personality with perfection'.[58]

Pater's only explicit apology of plagiarism is made in the essay on Coleridge where, with classical serenity, he denies the possibility of absolute novelty of thought:

> 'There can be no plagiarism in philosophy', says Heine ... in reference to the charge brought against Schelling of unacknowledged borrowing from Bruno; and certainly that which is common to Coleridge and Schelling and Bruno alike is of far earlier origin than any of them.[59]

Again in conformity with classical principles, Coleridge is criticized on aesthetical rather than ethical grounds:

> *The Aids to Reflection*, *The Friend*, *The Biographia Literaria*: those books came from one whose vocation was in the world of the imagination, the theory and practice of poetry. And yet, perhaps, of all books that have been influential in modern times, they are furthest from artistic form – bundles of notes; the original matter inseparably mixed up with that borrowed from others; the whole, just that mere preparation for an artistic effect which the finished literary artist would be careful one day to destroy.[60]

Pater objects not to Coleridge's concealment of sources, but rather to the insufficient concealment, leaving a playful ambiguity between the actual destruction of evidence, that is, the burning of books and

manuscripts, and artistic concealment through the perfect mastery of sources. Pater, like Poe, defines originality not as an intrinsic property of the work of art, but as 'an artistic effect', that is, as reflected in the reader's mind. This is clarified in Pater's discussion of Coleridge/A.W. Schlegel's idea of the work of art as an organic whole, of which Pater writes, with devastating kindness: 'That expresses truly the sense of a self-delighting, independent life which the finished work of art gives us: it hardly figures the process by which such work was produced'.[61]

For Pater, as indeed for Baudelaire and Poe, the classical imitation and allusiveness redefined as plagiarism by the romantics were aesthetically justified strategies. While romantically-minded criticism has been content to speculate on the individual motivations of plagiarism, it has never really dealt with its artistic results: results which clearly contradict the romantic, all too facile, equation of plagiarism with lack of originality, of individuality and of artistic value.

Transgressive intertextuality is a sophisticated and innovative technique, as apparent in the writerly collage of 'Le guignon', in arguably the first stream-of-consciousness text, 'The Tell-Tale Heart', and in the critifictional experiments of Walter Pater. Decadent plagiarism was also a practical solution, allowing Poe, Baudelaire and Pater to address a broader, romantically-biased audience while simultaneously creating a neo-classical audience that would come to appreciate the richness of their allusive styles. The irony towards the Philistine public was balanced by self-irony, and their decadent mischievousness by classical generosity, as reflected in the explicit apologies of annexation on classical principles, and of plagiarism, which they all penned.

Nor was the plagiarizing tradition limited to the authors that I have selected as acknowledged major sources of Wilde's thinking and writing. Andrew Lang and Anatole France, to quote but two contemporary scholars, penned explicit apologies of plagiarism and might be deemed to have practiced it as well. Andrew Lang, one of the first reviewers of *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* and an influential scholar, critic and collector of fairy-tales, confessed his own thefts, and explained that he hadn't been found out because the book in which the plagiarism had been committed never became popular and thus a target for the plagiarism-hunters.[62] Anatole France, whose views on literary criticism in his review of Jules Lemaître[63] inspired some of the most interesting remarks in Wilde's 'The Critic as Artist', figures in Chaudenay's *Dictionnaire des plagiaires* on account of his use of obscure sources in his novel *Thaïs*, one of the sources of Wilde's play *La Sainte Courtisane/The Woman Covered in Jewels*, whose very title hints at its

derivativeness, since jewel-setting was a traditional metaphor of plagiarism. Gustave Flaubert's final novel, featuring the enthusiastic and naive readers and copyists Bouvard and Pécuchet has been interpreted by Roland Barthes among other critics as expressing the deepest scepticism over the possibility and value of originality. In *Bouvard and Pécuchet* Flaubert experiments with the erasure of quotation marks,[64] just as in his novel *Salammbô* he had experimented with the collage of earlier texts. Wilde's fellow-dramatists George Bernard Shaw and Victorien Sardou emphasized the sense of a plagiaristic tradition, which might be seen to coincide with great literature (see Chapter 5). Andrew Lang shrewdly noted:

> But if stealing is so ready a way to triumph, then humanity may congratulate itself on the wide prevalence of moral sentiments. So very few people greatly succeed (and scarce anyone who does is not called a thief) that even if all successful persons are proved robbers, there must be a lofty standard of honesty in literature ... It is a little odd not only that our greatest are so small, but that our smallest – the persons who bark at the chariot of every passing triumph – are so great.[65]

The studies of Paul Saint-Amour and Robert Macfarlane have revealed the familiarity – if not necessarily the popularity – of counter-romantic and plagiaristic theory in late-nineteenth century literature. Macfarlane's discussion of Lionel Johnson's poetry, which frequently fails to acknowledge its sources, and of Lionel Johnson's counter-romantic theory, disdainful of superficial novelty and originality, is illuminating and suggests how much work remains to be done in the *fin-de-siècle* writing practices.[66]

The evidence so far uncovered demonstrates that literary plagiarism, while possibly in some cases reflecting the pathological tendencies alleged by psychologists and by literary critics as amateur psychologists, was far more often, and more influentially, a perfectly conscious, and efficient, form of resistance to the romantic ideal of authorship and of creativity, a means of reasserting implicitly, and thus more poignantly, the value of tradition, of shared knowledge, and of craft and artifice.[67]

NOTES

1. The questions of whether Coleridge himself should be considered the first counter-romantic and whether his appropriation of German sources, combined with his ruthless denunciations of plagiarism and plagiarists, should be related to the classical tradition or interpreted in pathological terms, are still passionately debated and could not be considered in the space of this research. While clearly drawn to Kathleen Wheeler's view of Coleridge's plagiarism as ironic (Kathleen M. Wheeler, *Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's* Biographia Literaria [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980]) rather than to Norman Fruman's pathologi-

cal interpretation (Norman Fruman, *Coleridge, The Damaged Archangel* [London: Allen, 1972]), I could not venture to support either, on the basis of my limited readings on the topic.

Another possible precedent for Poe's polemical denunciation of Longfellow is Thomas De Quincey's denunciation of Coleridge. Jan B. Gordon has persuasively portrayed De Quincey as a counter-romantic theorist (Jan B. Gordon, 'De Quincey as Gothic Parasite: The Dynamic of Supplementarity'. In Robert Lance Snyder (ed.), *Thomas De Quincey: Bicentenary Studies* [Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985], pp.239–62); from this perspective, De Quincey's attack on Coleridge might be understood as a playful attempt to re-establish the value of imitation and derivativeness.

2. Stephen Rachman, '"Es lässt sich nicht schreiben". Plagiarism and "The Man of the Crowd"'. In Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman (eds), *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p.52.
3. Ibid., pp.51; 52.
4. According to John Ward Ostrom, Poe's total earnings, almost exclusively derived from his contributions to periodicals, were equivalent to half the 1983 poverty level in the US. Pollin notes that the 'Marginalia' are a fiction, since Poe, who possessed very few books and was often obliged to resell them, had to desist from marginal annotations. Nor did Poe ever see any of his books published with the 'wide margin' he preferred.
5. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Brevities: Pinakidia, Marginalia, Fifty Suggestions and Other Works*, ed. Burton R. Pollin. Vol.2 of *Collected Writings* (New York: Gordian, 1985), p.141.

   Poe's full description of the contemptible plagiarists reads: 'A race of dolts – literary Cacuses, whose clumsily stolen bulls never fail of leaving behind them ample evidence of having been dragged into the thief-den by the tail.' Cf. Samuel Butler, 'An Heroical Epistle of Hudibras to Sidrophel'. *Hudibras*, II, Canto 3, 11.9.
6. Poe, *The Brevities*, p.270.
7. André Gide, 'From the Journals'. *Oscar Wilde*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Kimber, 1951), p.95; original version in André Gide, *Journal 1889–1939*. Bibl. de la Pléiade 54 (Paris: Gallimard, 1948; Rpt. 1951), pp.1275–6.
8. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), bk. II B, ss.45–9. See Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art and the Market: Re-reading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Copywrights: Intellectual Property and the Literary Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), Chap.1 for a discussion of the influence of Young's *Conjectures* on German and English Romanticism (Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition, in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* [London: 1759; Rpt. Leeds: Scolar, 1966]).
9. Edgar Allan Poe, 'Letter to B', in *Essays and Reviews*, ed. G.R. Thompson (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984), p.9.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p.8. For a thorough account of Poe's use of Schlegel and of numerous other sources in 'Marginalia' see Burton Ralph Pollin's editorial notes in Poe, *The Brevities*.
12. Floyd Stovall, *Edgar Poe the Poet: Essays New and Old on the Man And His Work* (Charlottesville, VA: Virginia University Press, 1969), Chap.V, 'Poe's Debt to Coleridge'.
13. OULIPO, 'Le second manifeste', in *La littérature potentielle: créations, re-créations, récréations*. Coll. Idées (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), pp.23–7.
14. Poe, *Essays*, p.14.
15. Ibid., pp.20–1.
16. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Tales and Poems*, ed. John H. Ingram (London: Nimmo, 1884, 4 vols), Vol.2, p.282.
17. Jorge Luis Borges, *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922–1986*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine and Eliot Weinberger (London: Penguin, 2000), p.3.
18. Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition', in *Essay and Reviews*, ed. G.R. Thompson (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984), p.15.
19. Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition', p.21.
20. Stovall, *Edgar Poe the Poet: Essays New and Old on the Man And His Work*; Yvor Winters, 'A Crisis in the History of American Obscurantism'. *American Literature*, 8, 4 (January 1937), pp.379–401.
21. Edgar Allan Poe, Review of *Twice-told Tales* by Nathaniel Hawthorne (May 1842) in *Essays and Reviews*, ed. G.R. Thompson (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984), p.575.
22. Robert Regan, 'Hawthorne's "Plagiary", Poe's Duplicity'. *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 25, 3 (December 1970), p.296.

23. 'Plagiarism-Imitation-Postscript to Mr Poe's reply to the Letter of Outis', in Poe's *Essays and Reviews*, p.759. While the authorship of the Outis articles is still debated, it is clear that Poe was involved in their composition, given the perfect fit of Outis's style to Poe's comic intentions.
24. 'Imitation Plagiarism – The Conclusion of Mr. Poe's Reply to the Letter of Outis', in Poe's *Essays and Reviews*, p.749.
25. Thomas De Quincey, 'To the Editor of the Edinburgh Saturday Post', p.3, November 1827, quoted in Jan B. Gordon, 'De Quincey as Gothic Parasite: The Dynamic of Supplementarity'. In Robert Lance Snyder (ed.), *Thomas De Quincey: Bicentenary Studies* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), p.241.
26. Poe, *The Tales and Poems*, Vol.1, p.270.
27. *The Pioneer*, January 1843, pp.29–31.
28. W.T. Bandy, 'Baudelaire et Croly: la verité sur "Le jeune enchanteur"'. *Mercure de France*, 1 February 1950, pp.235–47.
29. Margaret Gilman, 'Baudelaire et Stendhal'. *PMLA*, 54, 1 (March 1939), pp.288–96.
30. Roland de Chaudenay, 'Stendhal', in *Dictionnaire des plagiaires* (Paris: Perrin, 1990), p.278. Stendhal had mused on the possibility of denouncing his own borrowings, in a note to the *Histoire de la peinture* which states: 'Of every twenty pages, nineteen at least are translations and if I have not indicated the sources, it was in order to avoid distracting the reader by the enclosure of eight or ten names at the end of each page.' (Ibid.) There is some evidence in support of the view that Stendhal's plagiarism may also be of a playful, counter-romantic kind: his *Vie de Haydn*, published under the pen-name Bombet, was heavily indebted to Carpani's *Vie de Haydn*, a fact to which he drew attention himself, in having M. Bombet accuse Carpani of plagiarizing his work (ibid.).
31. Poe, *The Tales and Poems*, Vol.2, p.278.
32. Charles Baudelaire, *The Prose Poems and La Fanfarlo*, trans. Rosemary Lloyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.29.
33. Chaudenay, 'Balzac', in *Dictionnaire des plagiaires*.
34. Charles Baudelaire, *Baudelaire as a Literary Critic*, trans. Lois Boe Hyslop and Francis E. Hyslop, Jr. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1964), p.119.
35. W.T. Bandy, 'New Light on Baudelaire and Poe'. *Yale French Studies*, 10 (1952), p.68.
36. Baudelaire, *Baudelaire as a Literary Critic*, p.162.
37. Patrick F. Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), pp.148–9.
38. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997 [1973]), passim.
39. Borges, 'Coleridge's Flower', in *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922–1986*, p.242.
40. Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, ed. Jacques Crépet and Georges Blin (Paris: Corti, 1942), p.212.
41. Jean Prévost, *Baudelaire: Essai sur la création et l'inspiration poétique* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1953; 2nd edn 1964), p.52.
42. Edgar Allan Poe, Review of *Voices of the Night* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1840) in *Essays and Reviews*, p.673.
43. Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, p.554.
44. Horatio Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism* (1910; Rpt. Oxford: Blackwell; New York: Johnson, 1973), p.8.
45. Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (trans. Richard Miller) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).
46. T.S. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', in *Selected Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975), p.233.
47. 'Pater', in Patricia Clements, *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., p.101.
50. David J. Delaura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England: Newman, Arnold and Pater* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1969). Discussed in Robert Macfarlane, *Original Copy: Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
51. Horatio Walter Pater, *Three Major Texts*, ed. William E. Buckler (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p.397.
52. Thomas Gray, 'To Edward Bedingfield', 27 August 1756, Letter 222. In Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley (eds), *Correspondence of Thomas Gray* (Oxford: 1935; 3 vols), Vol.2,

pp.477–8, quoted in David McCracken, 'Wordsworth on Human Wishes and Poetic Borrowing'. *Modern Philology*, 79, 4 (May 1982), p.394.

53. Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, No. 143 (30 July 1751) *The Works* vol. I (New York: Blake, 1846), p.221.
54. Pater, 'Style', in *Three Major Texts*., p.400.
55. Michael de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. Charles Cotton, ed. William Carew Hazzlitt 1877 [1595], II.10. *Project Gutenberg*, ed. David Widger. http://www.gutenberg.org.
56. *Shakespeare's Predecessors*, IX, p.276, see Appendix.
57. Pater, 'Style', in *Three Major Texts*, p.402.
58. Oscar Wilde, 'Mr Pater's Last Volume', in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. Linda Dowling (London: Penguin, 2001), p.29.
59. Pater, *Three Major Texts*, p.436.
60. Ibid., p.434.
61. Ibid., p.439.
62. Andrew Lang, 'Literary Plagiarism'. *Contemporary Review*, 51 (January–June 1887), p.834.
63. Anatole France, *La vie littéraire* (Paris: Lévy, 1910–25, 4 vols), vol. 2.
64. Kenneth K. Ruthven, *Faking Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.125.
65. Lang, 'Literary Plagiarism', p.840.
66. See Saint-Amour, *Copyrights*, Chap. 1; and Macfarlane, *Original Copy*, Chap. 5.
67. For the view of plagiarism, and lack of originality generally, as symptoms of degeneracy, see Max Nordau's *fin-de-siècle* psychological reading of art and literature in *Degeneration* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993 [1895]). Contemporary pathological interpretations of plagiarism may be found in A.S. Byatt's article on Baudelaire, 'An Artificial Paradise'. Review of Frank Hilton, *Baudelaire in Chains: A Portrait of the Artist as a Drug Addict*. *Guardian*, 21 February 2004, www.guardian.co.uk; Fruman's *Coleridg* (London: Allen Lane, 1972); Thomas Mallon's *Stolen Words: Forays into the Origins and Ravages of Plagiarism* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989). An interesting companion to these readings is Michel Schneider's *Voleurs des mots: essai sur le plagiat, la psychanalyse et la pensée*. Coll. Connaissance de l'inconscient (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), which documents the plagiarism anxieties besetting Freud and his circle of disciples.

3

The Art of Collage from Wilde to T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats

The world is holy! The soul is holy! The typewriter is holy
the poem is holy the voice is holy!
Sing, O Orpheus! A tree grows in your ear!
'Tree! You can be a canoe! Or else you cannot!'
Here are swim-stick words you can use to scare away sharks
The sound is spirited, green, and full of silence
The colors ripen on the weightless branch of time
A black, E white, I red, O blue, U green...

From *The Semicento*, ed. Bob Holman

The alleged split between Wilde, the flamboyant critic and playwright and Wilde, the 'failed poet', in possession 'of the darker truths concerning influence' has been reiterated so often as to become almost true.[1] Isobel Murray's introduction to the poems judges them to be striving for 'an individual voice that is only distantly related to the authentic prose voice, so widely and rightly admired'.[2] Jerome H. Buckley's article of 1990 acknowledges Wilde's artistic achievement, yet denies his avant-garde intentions.[3] Nicholas Frankel's article, which relates the strong reactions against Wilde's poetry to Wilde's classical stance, nevertheless hesitates to regard his imitations as deliberately subversive.[4] Finally, Lawrence Danson, who has revealed the impact of Wilde's poetic theory on T.S. Eliot, views *Poems* as an 'inauspicious volume ... only a few years but otherwise a world away from the paradoxical tricks and Hegelian turns which, in *Intentions* as in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, allow him to turn ambivalence into liberation'.[5]

The more subtly dismissive attitude of contemporary criticism nuances the initial, romantically-inspired rejections of Wilde's work by rewriting subversive practices as legitimate, and tame, intertextuality.[6] A few critics such as Ian Small and Averil Gardner have dismissed

Wilde's counter-romantic poetry as confidently as William Wordsworth had dismissed Thomas Gray, treating the most explicit allusions as theft; the majority acknowledge the Wildean suggestive rather than expressive theory of art, yet insist that it is somehow irrelevant to *Poems*, in effect still (mis)judging them against romantic standards.

This chapter proposes a reading of Wilde's poems against the background of his critical theory. If Wilde's poetry is not artistically as successful as his plays and essays, this has to do, first, with the excess of intentionality rather than with the lack of a critical purpose and secondly, with the strong association in readers' minds of poetry with the lyrical, leading to greater resistance towards neo-classical forms and models.

Wilde's first major critical essay, 'The Decay of Lying' (1889) is, like some of Poe's *Marginalia*, almost transparently and didactically classical. Drawing on Greek artistic theory and practice and invoking Plato in its deceptively, entertainingly dialogical form, it mocks the superficially modern naturalist school while defending the classical ideal. The three stages of art, as defined by Vivian, correspond to Hegel's division of art into the symbolic, labelled the stage of 'abstract decoration', the classical, when 'Art takes Life as part of her rough material', and the romantic stage, defined as 'the true decadence, when Life gets the upper hand, and drives Art into the wilderness'.[7] It is the second stage, associated with Elizabethan and in particular Shakespearean drama, which inspires the 'purple prose' passages, the critic's most enthusiastic commentary.

Wilde's 'The Critic as Artist' is ostensibly more ambiguous: while still rejecting the romantic values of spontaneity, authenticity and egotism, it appears to go beyond neo-classicism in its celebration of the anti-rational aspects of art. While Vivian had pleaded for the immortal art of lying, i.e. poetry, Gilbert speaks in defence of the ephemeral and the contemporary. Following the cue of Anatole France,[8] he argues that critics and reviewers are, or should be, creative artists in their own right. He also defends contemporary formalist art and poetry, including the work of the young Oscar Wilde:

> From time to time the world cries out against some charming artistic poet, because, to use its hackneyed and silly phrase, 'he has nothing to say'. But if he had something to say, he would probably say it and the result would be tedious. It is just because he has no new message, that he can do beautiful work. He gains his inspiration from form and from form purely, as an artist should.[9]

It was precisely on these grounds that Wilde's poems had been criticized in 1881.[10] While the defence could be regarded as the continuation of the formalist poetic inaugurated by Poe and culminating perhaps in Archibald Macleish's 'Ars Poetica' (1925), its advocate is not in earnest. This will become clearer as Gilbert's argument is considered more closely:

> The real artist is he who proceeds, not from feeling to form, but from form to thought and passion. He does not first conceive an idea, and then says to himself: 'I will put my idea into a complex metre of fourteen lines', but, realizing the beauty of the sonnet-scheme, he conceives certain modes of music and methods of rhyme, and the mere form suggests what is to fill it and make it intellectually and emotionally complete.[11]

This passage reveals Wilde's awareness of contemporary experimentation in French poetry, as in the poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The sonnet, with its immutable scheme, with the aural and visual emphasis placed on the words in the final rhyming position and with its brevity, enabled form to remain as prominent as meaning. The critic David Scott notes that the leading Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé frequently started by establishing the rhyme scheme for his poems, allowing meaning to be shaped by musical structure, and that his extensive revisions concentrated only on the interior of the lines, with the 'framing' rhymes kept unaltered.[12]

Yet even while 'The Critic as Artist' demonstrates Wilde's awareness of contemporary theory and experimentation, it also reveals his ultimate scepticism about formalist poetry. The argumentation of the above-quoted paragraph, for instance, resembles Poe's equally hyperbolic and polemical demonstration in 'The Philosophy of Composition' and is designed to appear implausible. Even more significantly, Gilbert cites no contemporary theorists or practitioners, the only nineteenth-century poets lavishly praised in the two essays being Baudelaire and Robert Browning. Avant-garde artistic theory is exemplified by Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, an innovative use of anachronism that Wilde had learnt from Pater. Da Vinci is imaginatively resurrected in the essay to support narrowly aesthetic arguments that are more representative of the contemporary painter and art theorist James Abbott McNeill Whistler. The aesthete is paid the compliment of being recast as the supreme Renaissance artist only to find his authority usurped by that of a literary critic. If asked about the meaning of his paintings, Da Vinci/Whistler would have explained that he 'had concerned himself

simply with certain arrangements of lines and masses, and with new and curious colour-harmonies of blue and green'. Pater can provide a much more interesting gloss which, in Gilbert's view, is 'criticism of the highest kind'.[13]

Whistler himself would have undoubtedly regarded this as another example of Wilde's plagiarism, a bold annexation and misattribution of his theory. Yet while from a romantic perspective the aesthete is effaced from his own pictures, from another he is immortalized as an aspect of Da Vinci. La Gioconda is altered not only by Pater's criticism, but also by the subsequent pictures of Whistler. T.S. Eliot asserted in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' that each work of art modifies, and is modified, by subsequent works of art – similarly, Wilde's essay insists on the modern artist's independence from classical models and on his thorough understanding of the tradition.[14]

Turning to Wilde's poems in the light of his critical remarks, we would expect them to be self-consciously derivative; to place at least as much emphasis on form as on meaning and to privilege virtuosity over spontaneous, or seemingly spontaneous, self-expression. Contemporary reviewers were indeed struck by the deliberate aspect of Wilde's poetic intertextuality, an anonymous critic in *The Spectator* denouncing it as 'the trash of a man of a certain amount of mimetic ability, and trash the trashiness of which the author is much too cultivated not to recognise quite clearly'.[15] A few decades later, the same attitude is expressed, in more polite form, by Edward Shanks:

> Young poets imitate, they cannot as a rule help imitating, what they have admired ... But one's first impression on reading these early pieces by Wilde is that a young man who could imitate so fluently, so copiously and successfully the manners of so many different masters ought to be engaged in original work.[16]

Wilde's poetry does not lend itself to the more lenient interpretations of unconscious or timid plagiarism. Instead, as Nicholas Frankel has noted, it challenges the virtues at the heart of the romantic and nationalist canon in showing that the masters are not inimitable after all. Jerome Buckley has pleaded for the revaluation of Wilde's poetry, in the light of classical standards, but only as minor art in comparison to romantic i.e. inspired, bold and careless art:

> Most of his own poetry, close to its models and prototypes, was committed – in form, if not in substance – to retrospect rather than innovation. In all of it he was a *competent* craftsman, *respectful* of meter and quantity, *carefully* revising in the interests of rhythm and euphony, but

> *never* seeking to mock or repudiate his sources. His verses were *essentially serious, untouched by the wit* of his plays and essays.[17] (emphasis added)

The very decisiveness of these negations is telling, diminished by the acknowledgment that Wilde's commitment to his sources was formal rather than substantive. Wilde's European, counter-romantic and witty poetry challenges a canon whose solidification is apparent already in the 1860s, with the publication of F.T. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*, which would prove immensely popular and enjoy numerous reprintings – in revised form – to the present. The book is dedicated to the Poet Laureate Alfred Tennyson and ends with a hymn to English romantic genius:

> In a word, the Nation which, after the Greeks in their glory, has been the most gifted of all nations for Poetry, expressed in these men the highest strength and prodigality of its nature.[18]

Wilde's imitations of supposedly inimitable English masters are, like artistic forgeries, at the same time demonstrations of the modern artist's virtuosity and a challenge for the spectator who is forced to reconsider, and find better and deeper grounds for his/her admiration of the originals. The intertextuality is impossible to ignore in its self-consciousness, differing from the submerged intertextuality of Tennyson, ascribed by his admirers to 'unconscious reminiscence' and by himself most often – perhaps ironically? – to coincidence.[19] Wilde's poetic intertextuality also differs from the more serenely classical palimpsests of Baudelaire, in which literary echoes and visual allusions are seamlessly woven into a new poetic structure (see Chapter 2). It also has a distinctively theatrical, spectator-oriented, air which differentiates it sharply from the meditative, introverted, if equally derivative, poetry of Michael Fields, for example – frequently cast as re-interpretation of classical myths or of canonical paintings. His quotations from other authors are not at as numerous as critics have claimed, from Max Nordau and Bernhard Fehr to the present – not more numerous than in the writings of more widely celebrated poets, but they are used to startling effect. The closest parallel to Wilde's confident appropriations within *fin-de-siècle* poetry is provided by his protegé John Gray, whose debut in *Silverpoints* (1893), illustrated by Charles Ricketts, is visually as well as musically stunning. Like Wilde's debut, it mixes originals and Baudelairean translations, it stresses literary affinities in the dedications to individual poems and it achieves startling modernity in poems of suggestive fragmentation such as 'Summer Past', mischievously dedicated to Wilde, whose technique it imitates and surpasses:

.....
Fruit of a quest, despair.
Smart of a sullen wrong.
Where may they hide them yet?
One hour, yet one,
To find the moss god lurking in his nest,
To see the naiad's floating hair caressed
By fragrant sun-

Beams. Softly lulled the eves
The song-tired birds to sleep,
That other things might tell
Their secrecies.

Deep in what hollow do the stern gods keep
Their bitter silence? By what listening well
Where holy trees,
Song-set, unfur eternally the sheen
Of restless green?[20]

Wilde's poetry struck the first reviewers and is still likely to alienate some readers through the excess of aesthetic intention. Authorial control is maintained via musical ordering, the sections of shorter poems alternating with the 'longer flights of melody', as fellow-scholar Oscar Browning noted in his appreciative review.[21] Detachment is indicated by the titles of poetic sections which emphasize artistic affinities, most ostentatiously in 'Impressions de Théâtre', while the poem titles provocatively reveal the second-hand nature of his poetry and indicate his Baudelairean or neo-classical awareness. 'At Verona' recalls one of its sources, Rossetti's 'Dante At Verona', just as 'The Dole of the King's Daughter' traces its origin to Swinburne's 'The King's Daughter' and the 'Sonnet on the Massacre of the Christians in Bulgaria' evokes Milton's 'On the Late Massacre in Piedmont'. In the first edition, the poems were ordered in thematic sections: political poems in the opening 'Eleutheria', poems of religious and erotic love as 'Rosa Mystica', poems on aesthetic subjects in the 'Wind Flowers', 'Flowers of Gold' and the 'Fourth Movement' sections. The ordering is pedantic and provides the ultimate humiliation of subject-matter by/into style, allowing the provocative juxtaposition of texts expressing apparently irreconcilable religious, political and artistic views. The anonymous reviewer for *The Spectator* protested: 'If Mr. Wilde has changed his mind, why did he perpetu-

ate in the same volume two states of mind so violently opposed?'[22]

Whether Wilde should be identified as the speaker of *Poems*, as well as their author, is a question which seems to have preoccupied twentieth-century critics to no greater extent than the Victorian. Probably because of the comparatively low estimate in which Wilde's poetry is held, it is felt that its main interest is biographical and a straightforward equation that would seem startling in the case of almost any other poet is implicitly posited in this case. Barbara Charlesworth expresses her impatience with Wilde's posing in a time of serious-minded politics and poetry, noting that Wilde is 'much more conscious of himself as Wilde the Catholic, Wilde the pagan, Wilde the humanist, than he is of the Catholicism, paganism, or humanism he professes'.[23] Isobel Murray, in an otherwise excellent edition of Wilde's *Poems*, describes the political sentiments expressed in 'Ave Imperatrix' and 'To Milton' as 'startling ... for the son of "Speranza"'.[24] Finally, the fullest, and often illuminating, account to date of Wilde's poetry has been written by Patricia Behrendt from a biographical perspective, sustained by her interest in uncovering Wilde's glorification of homosexuality and distaste for heterosexuality in his poems on mythological themes.[25]

These biographical readings reveal the strength of romantic expectations in poetry, the strength of the desire for a recognizable persona behind the poetic masks and thus the necessity of counter-romantic strategies and counter-romantic writing. For the subject of Wilde's political and love monologues is certainly not the poet himself in various guises, but Language – the play of signifiers upon the surface.

The question which most preoccupied the French avant-garde was precisely how to render poetry remote from the world of everyday connotations. Poetry, unlike art or music, can, of course, never become fully anti-mimetic: lacking a language of its own, recognizably and instantly different, it is doomed to remain intelligible and thus to a certain extent inartistic. Stéphane Mallarmé's partial solution was to minimize intelligibility as far as possible, reinventing syntax and diction and occasionally even creating new words; Paul Verlaine's to submerge meaning into music. Wilde's equally ingenious response is to emphasize the artificiality of poems, compelling readers to focus on technique, on the surface rather than meaning. The precedent is pictorial rather than literary, most apparent perhaps in Édouard Manet's paintings whose bizarre effects of flatness and theatricality compel the viewers to observe the artifice of painting, in Clement Greenberg's illuminating reading:

> Manet's became the first Modernist pictures by virtue of the frankness

> with which they declared the flat surfaces on which they were painted. ... Whereas one tends to see what is in an Old Master before one sees the picture itself, one sees a Modernist picture as a picture first. This is, of course, the best way of seeing any kind of picture, Old Master or Modernist, but Modernism imposes it as the only and necessary way, and Modernism's success in doing so is a success of self-criticism.[26]

Similarly, Wilde's poems are first experienced as artefacts, as verbal arrangements whose extra-poetic significance is secondary, if at all relevant. The first, political, section of Wilde's *Poems* is an aesthetic *tour de force*: it appears to deal with very recent conflicts, such as the Afghan war (1878–80), the Zulu war in which the last Bonaparte descendant (Napoléone Eugéne Louis), who had volunteered on behalf of the British, was killed during a reconnaissance (1879), the Turkish repression of the Bulgarian independence movement, culminating in the massacre of Plovdiv (1876) and Nihilist agitation in Russia. Yet once filtered through aesthetic technique, these events and emotions become unrecognizable, transformed into musical and visual harmonies. As Wilde would later write, recalling the enthusiasm of Baudelaire, Pater and the Symbolists:

> Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid, and cruel! ... And yet what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things, and to have a music of their own as sweet as that of viol or lute. Mere words! Was there anything so real as words?[27]

Blatant echoes of previous poetry occur with particular urgency in the political section to provide the 'impenetrable barrier of beautiful style' which in 'The Decay of Lying' is regarded as essential to the existence of art.[28] In 'Ave Imperatrix', political intentions and sentiments are already sufficiently ambiguous, as the speaker moves from ostensibly jingoistic celebration to the elegy of empire and finally to republican allegory. Yet this is felt by Wilde to be still too close to realism, notwithstanding the rhetorical flourishes. Potential meaning is promptly undermined by the startling intrusions of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Thomas Gray's *Elegy* – lyrical poems which render the larger canvas of war in 'Ave Imperatrix' unreal, a *danse macabre* that lacks religious or political significance, celebrating, in the manner of Baudelaire, death itself as the exotic destination:

> In vain the laughing girl will lean

To greet her love with love-lit eyes;
Down in some treacherous black ravine,
Clutching his flag, the dead boy lies.

And many a moon and sun will see
The lingering wistful children wait
To climb upon their father's knee
.....
For some are by the Delhi walls,
And many in the Afghan land,
And many where the Ganges falls
Through seven mouths of shifting sand.[29]

'Sonnet on the Massacre of the Christians in Bulgaria' glances at contemporary atrocities only through the veil of Milton's rendering of the 1655 massacre of Christians in Piedmont; whether the effect of the juxtaposition is cathartic and tragically magnifying or whether it is ruthlessly aestheticizing depends on the reader's own classical or romantic expectations. Milton's poem had been unambiguously religious, invoking God's revenge for the Protestant martyrs of Catholic tyranny; Wilde's replica retains much of the form, even part of the original rhyme scheme, yet remains equally open to a Christian and to an agnostic reading – suggestive, in the manner of Symbolist poems, as defined in Paul Verlaine's 'Art poétique'.

The dissolution of meaning or at least of any stable meaning is also achieved through recurring images, whose associations are always different, discouraging authoritative and single-minded interpretations. For example, the metaphor of the kiss which is so prominent in *fin-de-siècle* art and fiction appears with its expected poisonous and decadent connotations in 'Charmides'[30] and in 'Tædium Vitæ', whose speaker pretends to shudder at the remembrance of the 'hoarse cave of strife/Where my white soul first kissed the mouth of sin'.[31] Yet, disconcertingly, it also emerges in the political section, creating a bizarre lesbian allegory that undermines the potential earnestness of the 'Louis Napoleon' elegy: France, personified as the 'free and republican' mother, flees the embraces of the father-figure Napoleon to kiss 'the mouth of Liberty' instead, which is found 'sweeter than his honied bees'. The kissing metaphor is also mischiesously used to characterize William Wordsworth, ironically praised as 'that Spirit which living blamelessly/Yet dared to kiss the smitten mouth of his own century!'[32]

Another frequently recurring symbol is that of the crucifixion,

which links the religious and the political poems with the eroticism of the later Sphinx, and remains precariously balanced between an aesthetical and a philosophical interpretation. 'Sonnet to Liberty', the first political poem in Wilde's ordering of the collection, opens with the bewildering multiplicity of 'Christs' dying 'upon the barricades'; the same image is rather more problematically allegorized as imperial England in 'Ave Imperatrix' and as self-tortured humanity in 'Humanitad'. In 'The Burden of Itys', it is contrasted with a Pagan myth that in Wilde's reworking becomes as significant – or as lacking in definite meaning – as the Christian:

> Sing on! and I the dying boy will see
> Stain with his purple blood the waxen bell
> That overweighs the jacinth, and to me
> The wretched Cyprian her woe will tell...[33]

The last line suggests an association between Hyacinthus and Christ as between Venus and Virgin Mary at the foot of the cross – the interchangeability of myths and of mythical roles. A more striking juxtaposition of Pagan and Christian symbolism is achieved in *The Sphinx*, which culminates with the image of the crucifix, in a symmetrical relationship with the mythological beast both at the level of rhyme and content: sphinx and crucifix are uncertainly poised as objets d'art or objects of contemplation, as physical objects or as living presences – the aesthetic possibly, but not inescapably, contaminated by philosophical allegory.

As Gilbert would argue, 'the one characteristic of a beautiful form is that one can put into it whatever one wishes, and see in it whatever one wishes to see'.[34] The refusal in Wilde's first volume of poetry of any definiteness except that of aesthetic design, of any rigidity except that of line, is confirmed by the similar intuitions of Mallarmé, Verlaine and Walter Pater. Even if Wilde's first intention had been to translate Life into Art, the weight of the subject-matter seems to have prompted a radical aesthetic response: feeling and ideas are not so much kept in control in this first section as annihilated.

This is almost true of the second section of religious and erotic poems, juxtaposed in decadent fashion, even if a shade of the original sentiment or emotion is just faintly visible – far more faintly than in Whistler's portrait of his mother famously titled *Arrangement in Grey and Black, no.1*. Whether a poem such as 'Requiescat', inspired by the death of his sister Isola, is a second or a first stage poem depends ultimately on the imagination of the reader, on his/her willingness to

decipher emotions within a classical structure. Wilde's technique here resembles that of the best poems of Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson, which display the same intertextual simplicity:

> Tread lightly, she is near
> Under the snow,
> Speak gently, she can hear
> The daisies grow.
>
> All her bright golden hair
> Tarnished with rust,
> She that was young and fair
> Fallen to dust.
>
> Lily-like, white as snow,
> She hardly knew
> She was a woman, so
> Sweetly she grew.
>
> Coffin-board, heavy stone,
> Lie on her breast,
> I vex my heart alone,
> She is at rest.
>
> Peace, Peace, she cannot hear
> Lyre or sonnet,
> All my life's buried here,
> Heap earth upon it.

The poem presents itself as an epitaph, as the very space in which Isola is paradoxically buried and kept alive by the poet's lament. Yet the simplicity of the rhymes, the lightness of the music contradict this reading and suggest – *prosodically* – a spiritual interpretation, just as Ariel's song heard by Ferdinand denies, through its harmony, the apparently distressing content (*The Tempest* I.2). The poet's despair is transformed into a musical dirge, emotion into form: in 'Roses and Rue', the poet's heart breaks into music.

Equally wavering between a merely aesthetic and a Christian reading is 'Sonnet Written in Holy Week at Genoa'. This can be read as a modern version of the exuberant religious sentiment in Andrew Marvell's 'Song of the Emigrants in Bermuda'. The divinity that is at the centre of Marvell's poem, praised as the creator of the new world in which they feel welcome, is here decorously hidden, present only as literary allusion. Marvell's 'He hangs in shades the Orange bright/Like

golden Lamps in a green Night' (17–18) is rewritten as 'The oranges on each o'erhanging spray/Burned as bright lamps of gold to shame the day'. It is very likely that Wilde's readers would have recognized this ingenuous metaphor, taken from a poem which had been included in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, and would have enjoyed this hint of religious possibility. The crucifixion is presented in an understated climax that may induce religious contemplation or be read merely as a carefully-balanced composition of symbols: 'The Cross, the Crown, the Soldiers and the Spear'.

In 'Ave Maria Plena Gratia', the confusion between religious and artistic vision is complete, and it is impossible to decide whether the alienation hinted at is that produced by the spectacle of art or the spectacle of religion:

> Was this His coming! I had hoped to see
> A scene of wondrous glory, as was told
> Of some great God who in a rain of gold
> Broke open bars and fell on Danae:
> Or a dread vision as when Semele
> Sickening for love and unappeased desire
> Prayed to see God's clear body, and the fire
> Caught her brown limbs and slew her utterly:
> With such glad dreams I sought this holy place,
> And now with wondering eyes and heart I stand
> Before this supreme mystery of Love:
> Some kneeling girl with passionless pale face,
> An angel with a lily in his hand,
> And over both the white wings of a Dove.

The poem has been given various postscripts by Wilde: 'Florence', 'Vatican Gallery, Rome' and 'San Marco', and the Oxford edition of the *Complete Works* discusses the possible Italian sources of the last image, concluding that 'the poem was a recollected experience and was not composed in either Rome or Florence'.[35] Yet it would be possible to view this as not a poem about a Renaissance painting at all, but as a commentary on Rossetti's representation of the Annunciation, or on the unimaginativeness of Christian doctrine, or on the limitations of the aesthetic perspective itself.

In 'The Critic as Artist', Gilbert's apparent enthusiasm for art for art's sake had been undermined explicitly, if fleetingly, at one point in the text:

> By its deliberate rejection of Nature as the ideal of beauty, decorative art

> not merely *prepares* the soul for the reception of *true imaginative work*, but develops in it that sense of form which is the basis of creative no less than critical achievement. (emphasis added)[36]

In writing *Poems*, Wilde had succeeded in mastering his own, self-expressive inclinations. Two of his impressionist poems, 'La Fuite de la Lune' and 'Le Réveillon', praised by Buckley as 'pure designs, cool impersonal arrangements',[37] were once part of the same Tennysonian elegy, 'Lotus Leaves', inspired by the death of his father. In 'Lotus Leaves', first published in *Irish Monthly*, Wilde had relied on *In Memoriam* to transmute private suffering into poetry, just as Tennyson himself had resorted to a wealth of Biblical and literary sources in his search for meaning and harmony. Yet if Wilde had managed to avoid excessive sincerity, he did not manage to surpass or indeed add anything to his model, whose authority overwhelms the poem. 'Lotus Leaves' is rewritten by substituting a more decorously mythological frame for the personal, yet conventional, poetic lament.

> And, herald of my love to Him
> Who, waiting for the dawn, doth lie
> The orbéd maiden leaves the sky,
> And the white fires grow more dim.

Cf:

> And herald of her love to Him
> Who in the Latmian cave doth lie,
> The pallid Lady leaves the sky,
> And the white torches grow more dim.

In 'La Fuite de la Lune', these lines are further revised into the poetic equivalent of an Impressionist canvas:

> And suddenly the moon withdraws
> Her sickle from the lightening skies,
> And to her sombre cavern flies,
> Wrapped in a veil of yellow gauze.

The other poetic source, Arnold's lament on the injustice of the gods and the brevity of human life in 'Mycerinus', is also extravagantly transformed. 'And jagged brazen arrows fall/Athwart the feathers of the night' replaces the conventional mystery of 'Splintering the veil of holy night' by the celebration of surfaces and pure colour. The poetic allusions to Tennyson and Arnold, vital in 'Lotus Leaves' in subordi-

nating feeling to form, become part of Wilde's word-painting, demonstrating his success in mastering authoritative sources, as well as potentially problematic autobiographical material, to create a slight and graceful composition – as modern as Whistler's 'White Girl' which it now evokes.

The beautifully ambiguous and highly modern 'Vita Nuova', which could serve as the perfect example of the symbolist or writerly text, had first ended, far less interestingly, with the Saviour's emergence from the waters. Bearing a Greek title translatable as 'The Barren Sea', this early version of 'Vita Nuova', published in *Irish Monthly* (1877 – see *Complete Works* for details) had also been inspired by the death of Wilde's father: the title itself recalls Telemachus' search for Ulysses. To translate emotion into music, the echoes of the *The Odyssey* are fused with those of Swinburne. Wilde's lines: 'Alas! I cried, my life is full of pain/And who can garner fruit or golden grain /From these waste fields which travail ceaselessly' echo Meleager's final speech in Swinburne's *Atalanta*: 'And let me go; for the night gathers me,/And in the night shall no man gather fruit',[38] in its turn inspired by the words of Jesus (John 9:4).

The poem's story of conversion is derived from Luke 5:5–6. Wilde reverses the logical sequence: 'My nets gaped wide with many a break and flaw/Nathless I threw them as my final cast' (9–10), and provides a spectacular dénouement: 'When lo! a sudden glory and I saw/Christ walking on the waters'.

While affording some room for Uranian speculation, just as the image of the crucifix is thought to do in Patricia Flanagan Behrendt' s reading of *The Sphinx*, this is nevertheless too resolutely Christian, and is dissolved in the poem's final version into uncertain, multiple meanings: 'When lo! a sudden glory! and I saw /From the black waters of my tortured past/The argent splendour of white limbs ascend!' This could still refer to the appearance of Christ, but also to the emergence of Venus, evoked for instance in 'The New Helen',[39] or of Pallas invoked in 'The Garden of Eros': 'O, rise supreme, Athena argent-limbed' or, in decadent fashion, to an 'ancient sculpture dredged up from the Mediterranean', as the critic Hoxie Neale Fairchild suggested.[40]

Bringing together key canonical texts – The Bible, the *Odyssey* and, by implication, Dante's *Divine Comedy* – and Swinburne's widely admired imitation of classical Greek drama in *Atalanta in Calydon*, Wilde becomes the master of dissolution, the dissolution of stable meaning and authoritative readings. The meaning of the poem is simply the concluding image, and the image is ambivalent, only the fragment of a

vision. This fragmentariness is not perceived as tragic or melancholy, as in T.S. Eliot, but as playful and liberating: the authority of the canon (Greek and Christian) is invoked only to be wilfully resisted, and the longing for meaning and consolation replaced by the immediate gratification of the image, whose reading is delicately balanced between a Christian and an erotic one.

All the different endings and readings of the poem are held simultaneously and not read in turn, as is the case with the more cumbrous playfulness of post-modernist novels with multiple endings, all of which the reader is forced to peruse in order to make his choice, as Julian Barnes sarcastically observes in *Flaubert's Parrot*.[41] Finally, the new title suggests a similar ambivalence in Dante's *Vita Nuova*, perhaps influenced by Rossetti's equally personal interpretation of Dante's life and oeuvre.

To see the effect of these revisions – of Wilde's movement from sincerity to form, and from conventional emotion to artistic design, from the insufficiently expressive to the infinitely suggestive, is to recognize the appropriateness of his formalist theory and the necessity of artistic discipline and self-effacing strategies, at least in relation to his own work. As the admirer of Baudelaire and Dante and the disciple of Flaubert, Wilde wished to claim all themes and emotions as the modern artist's raw material. But as his revisions reveal, the 'raw material' of Life is not so easily mastered: one does not become a classicist at a stroke.

It was therefore pleasanter to work on material that had already been aestheticized, or purified, from everyday connotations. After all, as Gilbert would argue, this is precisely what Shakespeare and Keats did, taking their subjects from previous literature rather than life.[42] Wilde's poetry as art-criticism, on the model of Baudelaire and Gautier, has been illuminatingly discussed by critics such as Albert John Farmer, Epifanio San Juan and Jerome J. Buckley. My analysis will be confined to 'Charmides' as a comic masterpiece whose shock-value is comparable to that of Manet's *Olympia* and *Déjèuner sur l'herbe*.

Drawing upon the more objectionable works of the canonical authors, notably Keats's *Endymion* and Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, and employing the mythological frame, 'Charmides' appears to promise the usual indulgence of the erotic imagination under the thin excuse of the classical setting: 'He was a Grecian lad who coming home/With pulpy figs and wine from Sicily/Stood at his galley's prow, and let the foam/Blow through his crisp brown curls unconsciously...'.[43]

A modern hero posing in antique disguise, the young Greek in love

with the statue of Athena should have appealed to Victorian neo-classical taste as well as to a select decadent audience. His nervous condition resembles that of Des Esseintes, the protagonist of Huysmans's *À rebours*,[44] the novel which – partly through an overstatement of its impact by Oscar Wilde himself during the trial – has come to be read in retrospect as the quintessence of *fin-de-siècle* moods and ideas. Wilde's description of the love-scene between Charmides and the statue appears at first akin to Des Esseintes' predictable and parodic preference for paintings over women. But the sharper irony of Wilde's superb tale for grown-ups is that the statue remains a statue and the goddess something other than a woman dressed up as a goddess to enable the spectator's guilt-free enjoyment; as the poem progresses, it becomes clear that what should have been a mere convention will develop in its flamboyant absurdity as the romance between man and statue, frustrating the expectations of the hypocritical moral critics as well as those of the bloodless aesthetes.

The reader is not spoilt with an aesthetically satisfying picture of the goddess, only with glimpses of her. The first vision is merely an accumulation of ludicrous props:

> The Gorgon's head its leaden eyeballs rolled,
> And writhed its snaky horrors through the shield,
> And gaped aghast with bloodless lips and cold
> In passion impotent, while with blind gaze
> The blinking owl between the feet hooted in shrill amaze.[45]

Athena's descent on the ship again suggests an inadequately working *dea ex machina*:

> ... Through the foam and surging froth
> Came a great owl with yellow sulphurous eyes
> And lit upon the ship, whose timbers creaked
> As though the lading of three argosies
> Were in the hold, and flapped its wings, and shrieked.[46]

Yet among ludicrously theatrical scenes clearly there are glimpses of Baudelairean sublime:

> To the dull sailors' sight her loosened locks
> Seemed like the jagged storm-rack, and her feet
> Only the spume that floats on hidden rocks.[47]

At times, she distinctly recalls Baudelaire's 'Beauty' with her ' pale and argent body undisturbed' (118), her 'chill and icy breast' (120), perhaps

even Baudelaire's 'Giantess' with the 'towered neck' (113),' 'grand cool flanks', ' crescent thighs', and 'bossy hills of snow' (108).

The very incompleteness of these descriptions, as well as the contradiction between the comic and the sublime images of the goddess, force an allegorical interpretation upon the reluctant reader, an interpretation offered in the genuine climax of the poem, which represents Charmides-Endymion symbolically asleep, heedless of the natural world:

> But little care had he for any thing
> Though up and down the beech the squirrel played,
> And from the copse the linnet 'gan to sing
> To her brown mate her sweetest serenade,
> Ah! little care indeed , for he had seen
> The breasts of Pallas and the naked wonder of the Queen.[48]

This had been the 'punishment and the reward'[49] of Swinburne's Tiresias as the archetype of the poet who had seen the 'fair body of Wisdom', 'the breasts and flanks of Pallas bare in sight!';[50] by substituting the statue of Athena for that of Venus in the original story, Wilde fuses Swinburne's poetic archetype with the Baudelairean reverie of poetic creativity, sketched first in 'Beauté' and then sarcastically in 'Le fou et la Vénus'.

The glimpses of the goddess may be read as stages of the creative process, from the most inspiring to the most painful. The tableau of Charmides plunging into the sea, lured by the vision of Athena's eyes, fuses the imagery of Baudelaire's 'Le flambeau vivant' ('The Living Torch') with that of the artist's allegorical descent into the abyss in Baudelaire's 'Les Plaintes d'un Icare' ('The Laments of an Icarus'):

> Les amants des prostituées
> Sont heureux, dispos et repus:
> Quant à moi, mes bras sont rompus
> Pour avoir étreint des nuées.
> .....
> En vain j'ai voulu de l'espace
> Trouver la fin et le milieu;
> Sous je ne sais quel œil de feu
> Je sens mon aile qui se casse;
>
> Et brûlé par l'amour du beau,
> Je n'aurai pas l'honneur sublime

De donner mon nom à l'abîme
Qui me servira de tombeau.

Wilde's creative translation is equally ironic, if more exuberant:

But he, the over-bold adulterer,
A dear profaner of great mysteries,
An ardent amorous idolater,
When he beheld those grand relentless eyes
Laughed loud for joy, and crying out, 'I come'
Leapt from the lofty poop into the chill and churning foam.[51]

Wilde's reiteration of Keats's plea from *Endymion*, suppressed from the final version of 'Charmides': 'Those who have never known a lover's sin/Let them not read my ditty', situating his poem within a tradition of aesthetic indulgence, emphasizes the artificiality of the love-making and anticipates the nominal romance of his most successful comedy.

The reviewers had protested: 'Mr Wilde has no magic to veil the hideousness of a sensuality which feeds on statues and dead bodies',[52] but his poem is made entirely of literary veils, and while it is true that 'there is nothing Greek about his poems',[53] this is equally true of classical imitations and pastiches that would have pleased the Victorian public. When the writer, biographer and Unitarian minister Thomas Wentworth Higginson protests that 'his nudities do not suggest the sacred whiteness of an antique statue, but rather the forcible unveiling of some insulted innocence',[54] it is clear that the innocence being insulted is that of the male spectator desiring sensuous indulgence within classical decorum. What had promised to be a poem of guilt-free enjoyment turns out to be a poem not about women, but rather about men's fantasies of women, which are then turned into mere allegory of their fantasies of literary inspiration and literary fame (the opposite of the Freudian postulate[55]).

The shock felt by W.T. Higginson and Oscar Browning stems not from the sensuousness of Wilde's poem per se, which can be favourably compared with Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and with the erotic scenes of *Endymion* (for example, bk. II, 750ff), but from the absurdity of the plot, from the improper use of the classical conventions. Intertextuality is used by Wilde in the same way as flatness and incongruousness is used by Manet, to spoil mimetic illusion, forcing the spectator to focus on the poem as poem, on the romance of art.

The doubleness of irony, directed at the Philistine public but also at the decadent elite and at the artist in love with the 'dream itself',[56] is

characteristic of Wilde's poems that reflect upon the craft of poetry, as it is of the self-critical writings of Baudelaire. 'The Garden of Eros', for instance, is simultaneously a celebration and elegy of English poetry, the inappropriately titled garden resembling rather a cemetery since the poetic vignettes capturing the style and mood of Rossetti, Swinburne, Keats and Shelley also function suspiciously like epitaphs. The impression is confirmed by the reiterated death knoll: 'But they [the poets] are few, and all romance has flown', which ironically echoes the Philistine impression of literary decadence, yet sounds cheerful enough to the avant-garde. The elegies are only a pretext for demonstrating the modern artist's mastery, through the annexation of the style and imagery of canonical poets, which is regarded by Averil Gardner as 'daylight robbery'[57] while from a neo-classical viewpoint it illustrates Wilde's creative-critical credentials.

The potential earnestness of this neo-classical manifesto is again undercut, dramatically, in this instance, by the presence of the chattering aesthete's silent and presumably unresponsive companion, who serves as the pretext for the lengthy exposition of his literary views. The situation evokes that in Baudelaire's 'La Fanfarlo', where Samuel Cramer's idea of courtship, when walking through the park with Mme de Cosmelly, is to expand upon his artistic and critical obsessions and to present her with a seemingly spontaneous prose translation of 'a handful of bad stanzas which he had composed in his first manner'.[58]

Wilde's dissatisfaction with the solipsistic character of modern poetry appears in its clearest form in the poem first published in 1880, 'Sen Artysty', enigmatically subtitled 'From the Polish of Mme Helena Modjeska'. This incorporates both the tragic and the comic aspects of the artist's isolation and is a meditation on the future of poetry and on the artist's role in a world perceived as increasingly indifferent to beauty. Mallarmé's opinion on the subject, when interviewed by Jules Huret, had been that the artist should withdraw himself from a society 'that does not allow him to live', and occupy himself with 'sculpting his own tomb'.[59]

In Wilde's version, the artist isolates himself to stage a performance, inspired by previous artistic performances. 'Sen Artysty' is a re-reading of Keats through the mist of Baudelaire. The parallel to Keats's 'Fall of Hyperion' is established from the opening lines, in the concise reply to Keats's self-doubting prologue:

> I, too, have had my dreams; ay known indeed
> The crowded visions of a fiery youth
> Which haunt me still.

The setting deliberately contrasts Keats's paradise of innocence with the Wildean décor of pure artifice, with its 'sapphire-vaulted skies' and its 'buds of sheathèd emerald'. If Keats's opening stage is one of abundance – an abundance admittedly achieved also by plundering the imaginative treasures of Milton's Garden of Eden – the impression conveyed by Wilde's scrupulously defined flowers and trees, in terms echoing his own 'Burden of Itys' and 'Ravenna', is rather of an inventory of stage properties, confirmed in the subsequent lines: 'the sweet flowers seemed but a pageant, and an unreal show/That mocked my heart'.[60]

The metaphor used by Wilde to situate himself symbolically within this universe is that of 'the fabled snake which stings itself to anguish ... self-tortured, self-tormented'.[61] This echoes Baudelaire's 'L'Héautontimorouménos', 'the self-torturer', key metaphor of decadent consciousness analysed in 'The Critic as Artist'[62] This particular use of the metaphor is ironic on the verge of sarcasm, and the poet's torment is reduced to that of ambition: 'Oh, let me not die crownless' is the only wish fervently expressed by the last Endymion and the substance of his discourse with the deity.

The laurel motif had been prominent in 'The Fall of Hyperion', which had included ambition, in the opening sequence and in the dialogue with the goddess on the difference between poets and dreamers – a passage that Keats had thought of suppressing as too personal. Yet the fundamental theme had been that of enlightenment and poetic vision, the gift the poet had asked for was god-like understanding since he already possessed the empathy with suffering.

No such belief in the poet's role is possible for Wilde, who brings in Baudelaire to interpret Keats to the modern mind. On the decadent stage, the self-absorbed poet is shown in converse with the goddess. The poet's dangerous initiation, his death struggle to ascension as Harold Bloom would call it, which in Keats's version evokes Dante's *Divine Comedy*, is here reversed and trivialized:

> She bare a laurel crown and, like a star
> That falls from the high heaven suddenly,
> Passed to my side.

The portrait of the goddess is one of Wilde's masterpieces in *pentimento*, for while resembling Keats's Moneta and in particular Moneta's model, Beatrice, his 'Immortal Glory' wears the attributes of Christ in Revelations (1.15): 'the robe more white than flame,/Or furnace-heated brass'.[63]

The protagonist of the poem is Christ-like in the concluding lines so that the Muse, the 'glorious One' is nothing other than a self-portrait, a shadowy double – in the proper fashion of the narcissistic artist, it is himself he hails and invokes under the features of the 'world-conqueror' – a doubleness of gender similar to that suggested by the subtitle of the poem with the alleged collaboration of Wilde and Modjeska: the actor and the actress.

In this artificial paradise of his own making, the poet has to be snake and Adam and Christ, Poet and Muse – in that great economy of heaven with its hermaphrodite angels that would be parodied by Joyce in *Ulysses*. The idea of playing all parts and being all things by turn rather than having to manifest sympathy with them comes from Baudelaire's 'L'Héautontimorouménos', which is repeated without irony in 'Humanitad', but is enriched in this poem with a new, superbly (self-) critical interpretation: the artist is shown here in cheerful alienation or ironic isolation, with only himself for study and model.

Wilde's dream, like that of Baudelaire, is circular and, like Baudelaire's 'Les Tentations ou Eros, Plutus et la Gloire', it reaches its climax with the all too brief gratification of Ambition. The 'fiery-coloured moment', of which Wilde declares 'I leapt up and felt/The mighty pulse of Fame, and heard far off/The sound of many nations praising me',[64] recalls Baudelaire's dream sequence:

> The she-devil ... raised a gigantic trumpet to her lips, something like a mirliton or buzzer, decorated with streamers inscribed with the titles of all the newspapers on earth. She shouted my name through this instrument, and it went hurtling through space with the din of a hundred thousand years of thunderclaps before echoing back to me, echoing from the farthest of the planets.[65]

The concluding lines stress the poet's Christ-like role and are disturbingly ironic, since the implication is that of Christ as the artistic archetype, and of the artist as primarily a performer, stirring the imagination of the multitude. That the artist is an actor is suggested by the affectation of tone, artificiality of setting and rhetorical gesture: 'With wild hands I strove to tear it from my bleeding brow'. It is emphasized by the framing of the poem as 'a translation from the Polish of Mme Modjeska' – a celebrated performer of Shakespeare and Ibsen. Vision and wisdom are no longer conceivable, and this gives a new intensity to ambition, understood as the ambition of differentiating oneself from the crowd, by an ostentatious gesture of the dandy as artist.

Wilde's poems incorporate their own criticism in the awareness of

the limitations of aesthetic poetry. The most successful instance of this double irony is *The Sphinx*, a comedy of the artist's emotions as well as of Philistine emotion confronted with decadent fantasy. Imitating the metre of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, with which it perversely competes, it is a decadent, autobiographical elegy of youth counterpointing the canonical Victorian elegy. Regenia Gagnier has drawn attention to its seductiveness and wit. Patricia Behrendt reads it autobiographically, as expressing the choice of homosexuality over heterosexuality, 'choice merely disguised', she believes, 'by our tendency to idealise the figure of Christ beyond issues of gender and sexuality'.[66]

While the raw material of the poem is incredibly wide-ranging, partly autobiographical and partly earnest, the material, as T.S.Eliot observes, is never the poem: subject-matter is here annihilated by style. If 'the artist gains his inspiration from form and from form purely',[67] *The Sphinx* is Wilde's greatest achievement, in which he frees the poem which had fascinated him from its earnest, painful connotations, retaining only its formal suggestiveness.

Wilde, like Tennyson, relies extensively on Romantic and Biblical sources, yet his plundering of the canon is not justified by the search for consolation or meaning, as that of the Poet Laureate had been, and as that of T.S. Eliot himself was perceived to be in *The Waste Land*, but merely by a craving for unusual images and rhymes: the Bible provides not only some unusual monsters, but also the decadent accessory of the crucifix in the poem's concluding image. Our enjoyment depends on the ability not only to identify the sources, but to appreciate Wilde's flippant use of them. The intertextuality of the poem was fully grasped at least by Charles Ricketts, whose illustrations, as perceptively analysed by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, provide a continuation of Wildean allusive style and emphasize another important intertext, Keats's 'Ode to Melancholy'.

Wilde's poetry is not essentially different from the rest of his work: it reveals the same irony, 'instability of meaning' and bold intertextual techniques.[68] While it might be to some extent deficient in its avoidance of emotion and the distillation or magnification of ideas into nothingness, it represents a necessary stage, a useful corrective of romantic expectations – preparing the ground for the artificial poetry of T.S. Eliot as explicit collage and for the musical vagueness of W.B. Yeats.

It remains only to discuss *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, generally seen as Wilde's departure from his aesthetic style. The most powerful misreading is that of Albert Camus, who had praised the aesthete's lately discovered solidarity with mankind in his preface to the French translation

of *The Ballad. L'étranger* is an extended interpretation of *The Ballad*, proposing the murderer as a Christ-like figure – or, as Camus specifies, as 'the only Christ we deserve'.[69] The novel, like the poem, chooses an ostensibly ordinary protagonist who becomes heroic in his dignified suffering and in his resolute opposition to hypocritical society. In both cases, his guilt is minimized: in *The Ballad*, the murder is 'the result of an excess of passion and wine',[70] while in *The Outsider*, it is presented as a consequence of the unbearable heat and as a form of suicide, the four shots being described as 'four rapid knocks on the gate of unhappiness'.[71] In both cases, the crime is unpremeditated, almost accidental, and the victim is written out of the plot. Even the leitmotif of the poem is echoed in diluted form: 'All sane human beings had more or less desired the death of those they loved'.[72] The symbolic stature of the convict is the result of idealization, of a fusion between artist and ostensible protagonist. 'Camus is clearly visible behind the Meursault of the final pages which are written with such force',[73] just as a glimpse of Dorian Gray 'burying his face in the great cool lilac blossoms, feverishly drinking in their perfume as if it had been wine'[74] is recalled in the prisoner's intense look at the sky and his attempt to cure the soul by means of the senses: 'With open mouth he drank the sun/As though it had been wine'.[75] Meursault's defiance of Philistine society, his passionate embrace of life and its sensuous pleasures develop the implication of the Wildean lines: 'And twice a day he smoked his pipe,/And drank his quart of beer:/His soul was resolute, and held no hiding place for fear'.[76] The longing for death as confirming the value of one's life, recorded in the novel's concluding paragraph, parallels the prisoner's only recorded statement: 'He often said that he was glad/The hangman's hands were near'.[77]

What Camus sees in *The Ballad* is a reflection of his own philosophy in *L'homme revolté*, namely the critique of a hypocritical society that condones rationalized en-masse killings while condemning unpremeditated murder. Yet what for Camus is a fundamental piece of truth and embraced in Wilde's poem as confirming his own views, is for the poet merely a necessary step in the complex and, in this case, laborious movement from emotion to form. Wilde aestheticizes not merely the murder, but also prison-life, transforming its 'unimaginative realism' into the nightmarish and morally ambiguous world of Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner'. To blur the realism further, he invokes allegorical elegies. Baudelaire's 'Le guignon' is recalled in the lines: 'Every stone one lifts by day/Becomes one's heart by night',[78] while Poe's 'Tell-Tale Heart' is invoked in the metaphor of the heart beating 'thick and quick/Like a madman on a drum!'.[79]

His intentions are, as in the case of all his previous poems, to create a second-stage masterpiece. The methods are similar, too: an abundance of intertextual allusions, used to blur the excessively realistic scenes, and a reinterpretation of the events themselves to fit an aesthetic frame. Neither of these techniques pleased his readers. The demotivation of the murder in *The Ballad*, as an accidental and primarily self-destructive act, with an obliteration of the victim, has been analysed by Karen Alkalay-Gut, while the spurious morality of the leitmotif disturbed W.B. Yeats enough to be erased from his version of the poem. As for the blatant intertextuality, it is generally regarded as a flaw which either completely ruins it, in the view of W.H. Auden, or which merely prevents it from being a masterpiece, in the view of most commentators.

It is quite possible to imagine that Wilde, following the example of Baudelaire, would have been able to extract all bad poetry and genuine feeling from this as from previous poems, replacing all private allusions by literary and artistic echoes, both genuine and merely imagined/suspected, just as he had done in 'Vita Nuova' and in 'Le Réveillon'. His revisions certainly show him working in that direction, as for instance when he adds stanzas in the 'romantic vein'.[80] The transformation process is not in any sense different here from Wilde's earlier poems, it is only incomplete, since publication was hastened by financial pressure. Thus, the unfinished *Ballad* would become part of the canon, satisfying the wish for authenticity of at least some of his readers. Ian Small and Averil Gardner are among the harsh critics of Wilde's poetry to pronounce it a 'fine' poem. Buckley, aided by the 'cultivated blindness' discussed by Wilde in *The Decay of Lying*,[81] states that 'the echoes were few now and relatively unimportant',[82] and concludes with the preference for *The Ballad* as 'an often moving concession to the human nature that the artifice of his earlier poetry had largely sought to conceal'.[83]

For most readers, the poem has an emotional focus and a protagonist in Mr O.W. himself, and the fragmentation of the canonical sources is acceptable as a reflection of an inner and 'genuine' sense of alienation and incompleteness, much as the modern form of *The Waste Land*, although largely suggested by Ezra Pound, is perceived as an appropriate reflection of a personal and historical crisis.

But the process of aestheticization did not stop with publication. In a letter to a friend, Wilde paraphrases some of the most melodramatic lines:

> For three long years they will not sow
> Or root or seedling there:

For three long years the unblessed spot
Will sterile be and bare,
And look upon the wondering sky
With unreproachful stare.
They think a murderer's heart would taint
Each simple seed they sow.
It is not true! God's kindly earth
Is kindlier than men know,
And the red rose would but blow more red,
The white rose whiter blow.[84]

Of this pathetic rambling, Wilde, now living happily with Bosie, but still haunted by the imperfections of his most celebrated poem, remembers and uses the following lines for an ironic vignette illustrating the 'trivial comedy' of his life:

> Bosie preys on his femme-de-ménage who now pays for everything, including cigars. When he gives his orders, she 'looks upon the wondering sky with unreproachful stare', she is so bewildered.[85]

This is a playful reading that could amount to a playful rewriting of the poem: using its imagery, its very lines, but discarding its earnest intentions. It is an illustration of the Wildean technique which had enraged the early reviewers of his *Poems*: the technique of flippant, wilful quotation and paraphrase which serves to challenge not so much the canon itself as the readers' superstitious awe of the canon.[86] It is the technique he applies to his own poem, perhaps sensing the danger of its being canonized. To reclaim it as one of the Wildean works, all that is needed is a rewriting which, as we know from Borges (see Chapter 7), need not involve the alteration of a single line, only the change of perspective.

One poet at least was confident enough to revise the poem. Yeats's drastically abridged version, included in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, may contradict Wilde's intentions for this particular text, yet it continues Wilde's creative-critical method. It takes *The Ballad* as the starting point of a new work, treating it precisely as Wilde had treated his predecessors. From a classical and Orphic perspective, it is precisely this fragmentation and endless re-arrangement of the classics into the structure of one's own writing that keeps them immortal.

NOTES

1. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997 [1973]), p.x. 'The Creeds are believed, not because they are they are rational, but because they are repeated', Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. Linda Dowling (London: Penguin, 2001), II, p.270.
2. Oscar Wilde, *Complete Poetry*, ed. Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.xvi.
3. Jerome H. Buckley, 'Echo and Artifice: The Poetry of Oscar Wilde'. *Victorian Poetry*, 28, 3–4 (Autumn-Winter 1990), pp.19–31.
4. Nicholas Frankel, '"Ave Imperatrix": Oscar Wilde and The Poetry of Englishness'. *Victorian Poetry*, 35, 2 (Summer 1997), pp.117–37.
5. Lawrence Danson, *Wilde's Intentions: The Artist in His Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), p.157.
6. Marilyn Randall discusses two strategies of containing the threat posed by plagiarism to cultural authorities: the exclusion of plagiaristic literature from the canon, as illustrated by the case of Yambo Ouloguem, and the re-inscribing of potentially subversive textual strategies as legitimate intertextuality, as illustrated by the reception of Hubert Aquin's writings.
7. Wilde, *The Soul of Man*, I, p.173. See Michael S. Helfand and Philip E. Smith II (eds), *Oscar Wilde's Oxford Notebooks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) for an account of the impact of Hegelian philosophy on Wilde's critical thinking.
8. Anatole France, 'M. Jules Lemaître', in *La vie littéraire* (Paris: Lévy, 1910–25, 4 vols), vol.2.
9. Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist Part II' in *The Soul of Man*, pp.269–70.
10. For example, the anonymous critic of the *Saturday Review* (23 July 1881) notes: 'The author possesses cleverness, astonishing fluency, a rich and full vocabulary, and nothing to say'; another critic sneers in *Athenaeum* (23 July 1881): 'We fail to see ... that the apostle of the new worship has any distinct message'. In Karl Beckson (ed.), *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1970), pp.37; 35.
11. Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist Part II', in *The Soul of Man*, p.269.
12. David Scott, *Pictorialist Poetics: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.84.
13. Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *The Soul of Man*, vol. I, p.239.
14. T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1934 [1920]), pp.49–50.
15. *The Spectator*, 13 August 1881 in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*, p.47.
16. Edward Shanks, 'Oscar Wilde'. *London Mercury*, July 1924, in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*, p.409.
17. Buckley, 'Echo and Artifice: The Poetry of Oscar Wilde', p.23.
18. Francis T. Palgrave (ed.), 'Summary of Book Fourth', in *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* (Cambridge: 1863), pp.390–1.
19. It may be worth quoting A.C. Bradley's discussion of Tennyson's borrowings, a 'larger number than we should probably be able to find in the same amount of verse by any other famous English author except Milton and Gray', in A.C. Bradley, *A Commentary on Tennyson's* In Memoriam (London: Macmillan, 1902, 2nd rev. edn), p.71. It illustrates Randall's point that the distinction between plagiarism and legitimate intertextuality is frequently determined not by textual evidence, but by the author's reputation:

    > Now some of Tennyson's 'borrowings' are doubtless cases of mere coincidence, but it seems to me beyond doubt that a greater number are reminiscences, and that he was more than commonly subject to this trick of memory. The extent of his 'borrowings' is in favour of this view: why otherwise should his language happen to coincide with that of other poets so much more often than does the language, say, of Shelley or Keats? ... If the reader of the Prologue to *In Memoriam* were reminded of only one passage in Herbert's *Temple* he might be content with the hypothesis of coincidence; but when he is reminded of five distinct passages, and when in other parts of *In Memoriam* he is again reminded of Herbert, he can hardly doubt that he is dealing with reminiscences. (p.74)

    If Wilde rather than the Poet Laureate had been discussed, the final word here would certainly have been plagiarism. Perhaps Tennyson's intertextuality was perfectly self-conscious and he, too, wrote with a double audience in mind.
20. John Gray, *Silverpoints* (London: Bodley Head, 1893; Rpt. London: Minerva, 1973), p.xv.

21. Oscar Browning, Review of *Poems*, by Oscar Wilde. *Academy*, 30 July 1881, xx, p.85, in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 38–40.
22. *The Spectator*, 13 August 1881, in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*, pp.42–7.
23. Barbara Charlesworth, 'Oscar Wilde'. *Dark Passages: The Decadent Consciousness in Literature* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), pp.53–80. Reprinted in Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Donald L. Lawler (New York: Norton, 1988), p.387.
24. Wilde, *Complete Poetry*, ed. Isobel Murray, Introduction, p.x.
25. Patricia Flanagan Behrendt, *Oscar Wilde: Eros and Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), pp.28ff.
26. Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' 1960. *Modernism with a Vengeance 1957–1969*. Vol. 4 of *Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp.86–7.
27. Wilde, *The Picture*, ed. Donald Lawler, Chap. II, p.21.
28. Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', in *The Soul of Man,* p.173.
29. Wilde, *Complete Poetry*, p.117, lines 61–80.
30. Ibid., III, 625–50.
31. Ibid., p.126, lines 13–14.
32. Ibid., p.74, 'Humanitad', lines 215–16.
33. Ibid., p.41, lines 205–8.
34. Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *The Soul of Man*, vol. I, p.241.
35. Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works*, general ed. Ian Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press), vols. I–III, 2000–2005, p.243.
36. Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist' Part II, in *The Soul of Man*, p.265.
37. Buckley, 'Echo and Artifice: The Poetry of Oscar Wilde', p.25.
38. Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Atalanta in Calydon* (London, 1885 edn.), lines 2308–2309.
39. Wilde, *Complete Poetry*, p.99–100.
40. Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *Religious Trends in English Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), Vol.5, p.184.
41. 'When a contemporary narrator hesitates, claims uncertainty, misunderstands, plays games and falls into error, does the reader in fact conclude that reality is being more authentically rendered? When the writer provides two different endings to his novel (why two? why not a hundred?) does the reader seriously imagine he is being "offered a choice" ... Such a "choice" is never real, because the reader is obliged to consume both endings ... It's a form of cubism, I suppose'. Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* (London: Cape, 1984), p.89.
42. Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist Part II', in *The Soul of Man*, p. 53, p.237.
43. Wilde, 'Charmides', in *Complete Poetry*, lines 1–4.
44. Joris Karl Huysmans, *À rebours* (Paris: Charpentier, 1884).
45. Wilde, 'Charmides', in *Complete Poetry*, lines 68–72.
46. Ibid., lines 234–8.
47. Ibid., lines 247–9.
48. Ibid., lines 211–16.
49. Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist Part II', in *The Soul of Man*, p.278.
50. Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Selected Poems*, ed. L.M. Findlay (Manchester: Carcanet, 1987 [1982]), p.118, line 179.
51. Wilde, 'Charmides', in *Complete Poetry*, lines 253–8. The lines omitted from the first published version are recorded in vol.1 of Wilde, *The Complete Works*, ed. Ian Small.
    A closer translation of the Baudelairean passage from 'Les plaintes' is given by Walter Martin:

    Men who find happiness in whores
    Are apt to be endowed with grace;
    My arms, embarrassed to embrace
    An empty cloud are broken oars.

    .....

    The intricate extent of all
    That solid air I sought to span,
    But fragile wings could only fan
    The fire that brought about the fall.

    And victimized by the Sublime,

Whose cautery has sealed my doom,
I lie here in an unmarked tomb—
The fallen angel's paradigm.

Charles Baudelaire, 'The Laments of an Icarus' in *Complete Poems*, trans. Walter Martin (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997).

52. Oscar Browning, Review of *Poems*, by Oscar Wilde. *Academy*, 30 July 1881. Reprinted in Beckson (ed.), *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*, pp.38–40.
53. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 'Unmanly Manhood'. Review of *Poems*, by Oscar Wilde. *The Woman's Journal* [Boston] 4 February 1882. Reprinted in Karl Beckson (ed.), *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1970), p.51.
54. Ibid.
55. 'An artist is once more in rudiments an introvert, not far removed from neurosis. He is oppressed by excessively powerful instinctual needs. He desires to win honour, power, wealth, fame and the love of women, but he lacks the means for achieving these satisfactions. Consequently, like any other unsatisfied man, he turns away from reality and transfers all his interest, and his libido too, to the wishful construction of his life of phantasy, whence the path might lead to neurosis.' Sigmund Freud, 'The Paths to the Formations of Symptoms', *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (London: Hogarth, 1963), vol.XVI, p.376.
56. W.B. Yeats, 'The Circus Animals' Desertion'.
57. Averil Gardner, '"Literary Petty Larceny": Plagiarism in Oscar Wilde's Early Poetry'. *English Studies in Canada*, 8, 1 (March 1982), p.54.
58. Charles Baudelaire, *Poems in Prose, with La Fanfarlo*, trans. Francis Scarfe, 1989 (London: Anvil Poetry, 1996), p.8.
59. Jules Huret, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*.1891, ed. Daniel Grojnowski (Vanves: Thot, 1982), p.77.
60. Wilde, in *Complete Poetry*, p.122, 'Sen Artysty', lines 25–7.
61. Ibid., lines 27–9.
62. Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *The Soul of Man*, vol. II, p.250.
63. Wilde, in *Complete Poetry*, p.122, 'Sen Artysty', lines 35–6.
64. Ibid., lines 80–2.
65. Baudelaire, *Poems in Prose*, p.95.
66. Behrendt, *Oscar Wilde: Eros and Aesthetics*, p.61.
67. Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *The Soul of Man*, vol. II, p.270.
68. Patricia Clements, *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), p.141.
69. Albert Camus, 'Afterword', *The Outsider*, trans. Joseph Laredo (London: Everyman's Library, 1998), p.116.
70. Karen Alkalay-Gut, 'The Thing He Loves: Murder as Aesthetic Experience in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*'. *Victorian Poetry*, 35, 3 (Fall 1997), p.351.
71. Albert Camus, *L'étranger*, ed. Ray Davison (London: Routledge, 1993 [1942]), p.108.
72. Ibid., p.112.
73. Davison, Introduction to *L'étranger*, p.38.
74. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. D. Lawler, p.22.
75. Wilde, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, in *Complete Poetry*, p.152, lines 119–20.
76. Ibid., lines 193–6.
77. Ibid., lines 197–8.
78. Ibid., lines 577–8.
79. Ibid., lines 377–8.
80. OscarWilde, *The Letters*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Hart-Davis, 1962), p.653.
81. Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', in *The Soul of Man*, p.163.
82. Buckley, 'Echo and Artifice: The Poetry of Oscar Wilde', p.28.
83. Ibid., p.30.
84. Wilde, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, in *Complete Poetry*, p.152, lines 469–80.
85. Wilde, *The Letters*, p.753.
86. Wilde, 'The Soul of Man', in *The Soul of Man*, p.144.

4

Decadent (and Shakespearean) Versus Romantic Originality: Shaw's Dark Lady, Wilde's W.H., *Joyce's* Ulysses

> When an Englishman has professed his belief in the supremacy of Shakespeare amongst all poets, he feels himself excused from the general study of literature.
>
> He also feels himself excused from the particular study of Shakespeare.
>
> (Aubrey Beardsley, 'Table Talk', *In Black and White*)

Wilde's *Portrait of Mr. W.H*, with its unacknowledged borrowings and its sensational framing narrative, fits uncomfortably into the tradition of Shakespearean scholarship. Nor does it fulfil our expectations of fiction or, rather, of nineteenth-century fiction: its extensive bibliography and explicit citations from scholarly sources have been deemed by Wildean scholars to decelerate the narrative.[1] Yet they would work perfectly in a critifictional text by Peter Ackroyd or John Banville. The ambiguous status of the story/critical essay is part of its meaning since *The Portrait* reveals the shared complicities among critics, biographers, readers and artists: the shared anxieties over plagiarism and the secret dreams of intellectual predominance and absolute originality.

Shakespeare's unquestioned pre-eminence in English letters, combined with the convenient absence of the records of his literary life and opinions, meant that the struggle for canonical recognition often took the form of the reinterpretation of his works. Edward Young's *Conjectures* (1759) had dismissed the classical writers of Greece and Rome as 'accidental originals' – originals only through the readers' ignorance of their sources[2] and chosen William Shakespeare as the unique example of absolute originality. The choice, which might seem

particularly unfortunate in the light of subsequent findings, was supported by a tradition of critical writing and poetic eulogy on Shakespeare as the native genius, superior to the learned Ben Jonson and to the English authors more or less impressed with the classical and generally perceived as 'French' rules of drama.

An alternative image of the playwright as plagiarist had emerged a few years before the publication of Young's *Conjectures*, in Charlotte Lennox's *Shakespeare Illustrated* (1753), a continuation of Margaret Cavendish's critique of the lack of originality in Shakespearean plots in her *Sociable Letters* of 1664. Yet these voices were marginal enough to be dismissed. Samuel Johnson, in his preface to the plays (1765), downplays the Shakespearean sources as familiar narratives that the dramatist used to make himself understood by a wide audience:

> Our author's plots are generally borrowed from novels and it is reasonable to suppose that he chose the most popular, such as were read by many, and related by more; for his audience could not have followed him through the intricacies of the drama, had they not held the thread of the story in their hands.[3]

Thus criticism was content to refine upon the tradition which regarded Shakespeare as an almost self-generated genius, in Dryden's famous formulation, an artist 'who needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature; he look'd inwards, and found her there'.[4]

So the romantic appropriation and reinterpretation of Shakespeare continued unabated, with the arguments of unconscious plagiarism or coincidence occasionally thrown in to justify the very close parallels. Anna Seward's letter to her friend Thomas Park resorts to the great romantic archetype to defend herself from the accusations of having plagiarized Chatterton:

> Disposed to write a sonnet on winter, I conclude some features of Chatterton's impersonization of that season came forward, from the large deposit of English poetry in my brain, and rendered me an unconscious plagiarist ... Exemption from involuntary plagiarisms, to which every writer, conversant in poetry, is subject, affords one of the greatest proofs of ancientry of the Ossianic compositions ... Every other poet, however great, and, on the whole, original, may be perpetually traced to his conscious and unconscious sources, in the writings of his predecessors and contemporaries. Milton eternally, and Shakespeare very often.[5]

A.W. Schlegel's theory of the organic unity of the works of art, pub-

lished in 1808, is ironically founded, indeed inspired by, the works of Shakespeare. And so is the uncannily similar theory formulated by S.T. Coleridge in his lectures of 1811–12. In truly romantic fashion, Coleridge would insist on his priority, on the autonomy of his conclusions from those of Schlegel, and his claims would be taken seriously by many twentieth-century critics, as G.N. Orsini and Norman Fruman noted with indignation and astonishment, resorting to the parallel column device which appears to overrule coincidence.[6]

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the romantic movement had suffered a 'sea-change', and the act of faith which could alone sustain the symbol of Shakespeare as the solitary god-like artist in a universe devoid of other people's books, notwithstanding all the critical evidence to the contrary, was no longer possible. Emerson's essay on Shakespeare in *Representative Men* (1850) casts him as the Counter-Romantic archetype, rendering the ambitions of originality, individuality and spontaneity trivial by comparison:

> If we require the originality which consists in weaving, like a spider, their web from their own bowels; in finding clay and making bricks and building the house; no great men are original ... The greatest genius is the most indebted man. A poet is no rattle-brain, saying what comes uppermost, and, because he says every thing, saying at last something good; but a heart in unison with his time and country.[7]

The archetype of Shakespeare as the greatest counter-romantic is seized upon by Oscar Wilde in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, which concentrates on the most contentious part of the Shakespearean canon – the sonnets. The desire to read them autobiographically, through the romantic lenses that would confer authenticity and sincerity upon them, as the revelation of the supreme English genius, had been checked in many instances by the horror at their homoerotic implications, as Wilde ironically notes:

> Who was that young man of Shakespeare's day who [...] was addressed by him in terms of such passionate adoration that we can but wonder at the strange worship, and are almost afraid to turn the key that unlocks the mystery of the poet's heart?[8]

In Samuel Butler's picturesque description, the sonnets had 'lain among the pots for near two hundred years – the very Cinderella of our literature'.[9] The eighteenth-century Shakespearean editor George Steevens had pointedly refused to provide them with a critical apparatus and some decades later, the influential scholar Henry Hallam, mis-

chievously quoted by Wilde in his story, openly regretted their very existence. The sonnets' eventual inclusion within Shakespeare's oeuvre depended on anxious misreading. Critics pleaded their derivativeness and artificiality – for while in the romantic climate this diminished artistic value, it also reassuringly established the author's lack of sincerity and authenticity. In his authoritative, if misleadingly titled, *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*, James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps insisted on the impersonal, artificial reading of the sonnets, not on the grounds of textual evidence, but for compelling reasons:

> If the personal theory be accepted, we must concede the possibility of our national dramatist gratuitously confessing his own sins and revealing those of others, proclaiming his disgrace and avowing his repentance, in poetical circulars distributed by the delinquent himself among his own intimate friends.[10]

The vast majority of Wilde's contemporaries found sexual transgression more disturbing than any textual wrongdoing: Sidney Lee is so anxious to defend Shakespeare's heterosexual reputation that he traces almost every Shakespearean theme to contemporary sonnet collections and nearly accuses him of plagiarism in his keenness to assert Shakespeare's insincerity and artificiality in the sonnets.

Meanwhile, other influential critics such as Edward Dowden sought to preserve the authenticity of the sonnets and to defend Shakespeare by appealing to the Neo-Platonic tradition of male friendship. Both Oscar Wilde and James Joyce mocked the timidity and veiled language of Dowden's defence of Shakespeare in his edition of the sonnets, yet Dowden's apology of homoeroticism in his *Shakspere: A Critical Study of his Mind and Art* (1875) provides a significant – and within the context of nineteenth-century criticism – comparatively bold precedent for their biographical speculations.[11]

As a serene theorist and practitioner of both sexual and textual transgression, seen as a means of artistic development, Oscar Wilde is ideally placed to annex both traditions of readerly discomfort: the impersonal, derivative interpretation of the sonnets, which is used to justify Wilde's own plagiarisms and those of the entire counter-romantic tradition, and the autobiographical, which crystallizes here into the love story between the dramatist and the actor Willie Hews, the Mr. W.H. to whom the sonnets are dedicated. For Wilde, as later for Borges, the intertextual is the most deeply autobiographical and plagiarism is in no way synonymous with a lack of authenticity or a lack of artistic and philosophical value. Yet his critics – however apprecia-

tive of his playfulness, of his 'originality founded on the already made', the 'newness that flaunts belatedness'[12] – are for the most part still too overwhelmed by the romantic ideal to fully appreciate Wilde's plagiaristic genius. This is particularly clear in Lawrence Danson's interpretation, which notes that for Wilde, as for Symonds, reading is the source of self-revelation, the creation of authorial and personal identity, yet continues to judge Wilde's work against the romantic paradigm:

> Unacknowledged verbatim borrowing – of which Wilde is not much more guilty than many writers who are also omnivorous readers with an ear for a good phrase – is not the real problem. But in the zone of greys that descends from *absolute originality of thought* through influence to derivation to copy, the matter is more complex. (emphasis added)[13]

The taboos have changed, too, and the horror of textual transgression has replaced that of homosexuality, in academic writing at least, which is why illuminating studies have been written on *The Portrait* as an expression of Wildean philosophy, while its composite, collage-like nature is barely mentioned. Lawrence Danson's study, which acknowledges Horst Schroeder's books on *The Portrait* as 'invaluable resources', manages never to mention or to comment upon Schroeder's discoveries of extensive plagiarism.[14] Michael E. Helfand and Philip E. Smith believe that *The Portrait* reveals Wilde as 'the last Victorian sage' and they write admiringly of Wilde's juxtaposition of Cyril's and the Narrator's theory as different 'aspects of the new Hellenic temper, the union of imaginative and historical understanding that constitutes truth in Hegelian terms'.[15] Yet they barely hint at the Narrator's unscholarly methods of constructing his theory, 'developed fully only after months of copious reading in creative and scholarly sources'.[16] In the post-romantic age, the composite or intertextual nature of Wilde's text seems to undermine its authenticity and artistic value and it is therefore minimised or left unmentioned.

Regenia Gagnier's *Idylls of the Market Place* noted the challenge posed by Wilde's plagiarism and distortion of sources to scholarly interpretations;[17] subsequent studies by Joseph Gerhard, Patrice Hannon and Kate Chedgzoy are content with citing rather than expanding upon her findings and the subject is only eventually picked up by one of her doctoral students, Paul Saint-Amour, who connects Wilde's plagiarism in *The Portrait* with his critique of romantic theory. In the following pages I hope to demonstrate that *The Portrait* is simultaneously the theorization and the realization of Wilde's counter-romantic, 'anti-essentialist' aesthetic.[18]

Opening, like many of Poe's stories and like much decadent fiction,

with a glimpse of the workshop – a Mr. Erskine's library – the story starts by stating the clear-cut difference between the ethics of literature and the ethics of literary criticism, between artistic and critical forgery, but then proceeds to blur and question the clear-cut distinctions in order to reveal the complicities. Before Cyril's theory of the sonnets is even presented to us, the Narrator exclaims: 'I love theories about the sonnets ... but I don't think I am likely to be converted to any new idea'.[19] This reminds us of the difficulty faced by all writers: the public's superstitious awe of the classics, counterbalanced only by the insatiable appetite for novelty.

Confronted with the wealth of tradition, led by the 'inordinate desire to please' and fascinate even those not worth fascinating, i.e. the Philistine,[20] Cyril Graham strikes the grand Romantic attitude and attempts to achieve absolute originality, to discard the intertextual past:

> He told me that he had at last discovered the true secret of Shakespeare's Sonnets; that all the scholars and critics had been entirely on the wrong track; and that he was the first who, working purely by internal evidence, had found out who Mr. W.H. really was.[21]

Of course, the tradition so recklessly discarded is furtively recuperated via plagiarism: the summary of previous critical theories and many of the arguments are derived, often verbatim, from Edward Dowden's introduction to his edition of the sonnets. Cyril's theory is viewed by Erskine as an autonomous artefact, 'evolved as you see purely from the Sonnets themselves, and depending for its acceptance not so much on demonstrable proof of formal evidence, but on a kind of spiritual and artistic sense'.[22] Yet it is also revealingly described as 'a bundle of notes',[23] echoing Pater's criticism of Coleridge's imperfect artistry, i.e. imperfect concealment of his sources in *Biographia Literaria* and elsewhere (quoted on p. 37). For the decadent authors, Coleridge's plagiarism is a poignant demonstration of the failure of romantic ideology, and when Wilde describes the 'bundle' of notes, and presents us with a theory which similarly mixes eccentric and novel ideas with conjectures and phrases borrowed from others, it is to re-inscribe romantic failure. Cyril is further associated with other martyrs of romantic literature: Chatterton and, in the enlarged version, Shelley, both of whom were forgers as well as plagiarists, and he is shown to fail through a similar excess of earnestness: 'Perhaps', Pater had written, 'the chief offence in Coleridge is an excess of seriousness'.[24]

Excessive earnestness was also the fault of much scholarly work on

the sonnets, and Cyril's claim to have found the 'true secret' is already a commonplace of Shakespearean criticism, as apparent from the titles of the mid-Victorian books discussed or parodied by Wilde such as John Heraud's *Shakespeare, His Inner Life as Intimated in His Works*, Gerald Massey's *The Secret Drama of Shakespeare Unfolded, with the Characters Identified*, and D. Barnstorff's *A Key to Shakespeare's Sonnets*. While these studies lacked critical authority, the wish to provide definitive readings and to identify the author behind the text could be easily glimpsed in influential scholarship, such as Thomas Tyler's edition of the sonnets (1886), which claimed to supersede all previous ones, and in Edward Dowden's confident and authoritative discussion of Shakespeare's feelings for Mr. W. H in his edition of 1881:

> If Shakespeare 'unlocked his heart' in these Sonnets, what do we learn from them of that great heart? I cannot answer otherwise than in words of my own formerly written. 'In the Sonnets we recognize three things: that Shakespeare was capable of measureless personal devotion; that he was tenderly sensitive, sensitive above all to every diminution or alteration of that love his heart so eagerly craved; and that, when wronged, although he suffered anguish, he transcended his private injury, and learned to forgive ... The errors of his heart originated in his sensitiveness, in his imagination, in his quick consciousness of existence, and in the self-abandoning devotion of his heart'.[25]

Cyril is not only associated with the romantic forgers, but also with the greatest Shakespearean forger, John Payne Collier. His unconvincing narrative of the alleged finding of the portrait resembles Collier's account of the purchase of the 'Perkins folio' – a copy of the 1632 second folio of Shakespeare's works, bearing the signature Tho. Perkins. Collier had claimed that he had bought a 'much-thumbed and imperfect copy' to complete some missing pages in another copy of the 1632 Folio of Shakespeare's plays which he possessed, but that he only examined the book *after* the purchase, and 'finding that I was disappointed in this respect, I put the book away in the closet'. Only on taking out the volume again after several months did he make the discovery that 'There was hardly a page without emendations of more or less importance and interest'.[26] The account, clearly misleading on a number of points, is especially so with regard to the delay in examining the Folio. In the view of J.P. Collier's biographer Dewey Ganzel, it is scarcely credible that the book-seller and Collier *would* have completed the transaction before a thorough examination of the book, or that

Collier would have failed to notice the marginalia 'on almost every page' even during a cursory examination. This disingenuousness is paralleled in Cyril's account of his acquisition of an Elizabethan chest on the front panel of which 'the initials W.H. were undoubtedly carved'. Given his obsession with Willie Hews, Cyril's claim that he failed to examine the chest immediately after the purchase and that he discovered the portrait several days later on noting that 'the right hand-side of the chest was much thicker than the other' is implausible.[27]

Whether or not Cyril's forgery is meant to resemble that of the leading Shakespearean scholar, it indicates the clear links between the desire for authenticity and the creation of apocrypha. Cyril is understandably keen to minimize the importance of external evidence and to make the theory somehow independent of its proof, yet 'without it the entire theory would fall to the ground';[28] similarly, Collier's reputation was made – and finally undone – by his exclusive possession of the manuscript with the seventeenth-century marginalia, which lent authority to his critical interpretations, and ensured the commercial success of his publications, until those annotations turned out to be forged.

While the decision to forge evidence is of course a relatively rare, if spectacular, occurrence in scholarly criticism, its motivation – the desire to provide an authoritative reading, one that supersedes and owes as little as possible to previous studies – is extremely widespread in the highly competitive worlds of Shakespearean criticism and of modern literature. By having Cyril switch from plagiarism to forgery to suicide in his attempt to achieve absolute originality, Wilde had amusingly indicated the failure of the romantic ideal; the solution to the intertextual dilemma is provided by the Narrator.

Wishing for a 'delightful' rather than an authoritative reading, he has no ambitions of originality. Content with corroborating Cyril, his most exalted claim with regard to the theory is 'I feel as if I had invented it',[29] which recalls the attitude of Baudelaire's Samuel Cramer, as well as foreshadowing Borges's Pierre Menard, author of *Don Quixote* (see Chapter 7). He discards authorship and fails to provide even a signature. His alleged loss of faith in the theory is really the refusal to be tied down to any interpretation or to limit the text by means of authorial intentions. The nameless narrator represents the perfect critical as well as artistic temper, capable of assimilating all interpretations and all texts. He is a Philistine for a moment, stating that the sonnets are dedicated to Lord Pembroke,[30] a Romantic in the next: 'I felt as if I had my hand upon Shakespeare's heart and was counting each separate throb

and pulse of passion'.[31] He is a scholar, scrupulously quoting and amassing evidence, but he is also a forger elaborately mixing bogus and authentic quotations; a sentimentalist, ready to weep over the fate of Cyril Graham, whom he hasn't even met,[32] and a young dandy 'more anxious to convince others than to be himself convinced'.[33]

If Cyril is associated with Chatterton, Shelley, Coleridge and Collier, the Narrator is implicitly associated with Shakespeare 'the myriad-minded', Shakespeare who was similarly self-effacing. By having Cyril Graham commit suicide, Erskine die of consumption and the Narrator survive to tell the tale, Wilde had indicated the superiority of the classical, less personal ideal of art, with romanticism itself possibly reduced to a fleeting fantasy of the ever-mysterious, self-effacing author.

The reviewers obligingly illustrated the romantic bias of criticism which had been part of Wilde's theme. Although they failed to note Cyril's verbatim borrowings from Dowden, they did remember that William Hews had been previously suggested as the subject of the sonnets by an eighteenth-century Shakespearean scholar, and on this basis they protested that 'the theory is not exactly new', an observation that has been echoed in contemporary criticism. Kate Chedgzoy, in an otherwise illuminating study, writes that 'The "Willie Hughes" theory was not in fact his invention'.[34] Annotating *Ulysses*, Jeri Johnson experiences a similar slip of the pen: 'Oscar Wilde ... proposes (as did Thomas Tyrwhitt in 1766) that the dedicatee of the Sonnets was Mr. Willie Hughes, a young actor'.[35]

The theory was new: only the name of William Hews had been previously conjectured, and the failure to provide acknowledgment of a minor source has led critics to downplay the genuine novelty of the theory. What is more, the possibility that Wilde had meant to represent plagiarism rather than simply to practice it, that he had deliberately inserted it into the story, meaning it to be recognized as a symptom of romantic failure, has not even been considered. Yet Cyril copies from the standard reference work on the sonnets, while the name Willie Hews, although indeed conjectured by an eighteenth-century Shakespearean scholar, had been mentioned since, for instance in the popular editions by Dowden and Tyler.

The enlarged edition provided a response to his romantically-biased reviewers. The immediate response, as noted by Horst Schroeder, is to stress the novelty of his theory alongside the borrowings: 'To have discovered the true name of Mr. W.H. was comparatively nothing: others might have done that, had perhaps done it: but to have discovered his

profession was a revolution in criticism'.[36] His more elaborate response is the rewriting of the Narrator's theory into a more explicit demonstration of the virtues of annexation, into an emulation of Shakespearean technique. While the initial version had offered a critique of the romantic bias in literature and criticism, to which it had sought to oppose the classical and Shakespearean ideal of collaboration, the enlarged version is explicitly dialogical and intertextual. Partly in ironic response to the scholarly obsession with acknowledgment, it lists many of the sources it then goes on to plagiarize. Engaging in a debate on the nature and meaning of originality with contemporary scholars and artists, it literally fulfils Barthes's idea of the text as 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'.[37] The enlarged version significantly expands the Narrator's contribution to the theory with the famous apology for 'the Love that dare not speak its name'; the reconstructed pageant of the boy-actors of the Elizabethan stage and the suggestive portrait of the Dark Lady as the Mona Lisa of scholarly contemplation. All these new passages provide a deliberate and insoluble fusion of plagiarism and originality, being built on the ruins of scholarly texts. Borges's paradoxical proposition that *Don Quixote* written by the decadent author Pierre Menard would be substantially different from the *Don Quixote* of Cervantes, perhaps clarified in the essay 'For Bernard Shaw', where he states that the modernity of any text resides not in itself, but in the way it is read, is verified in *The Portrait*, since some of the most Wildean passages are revealed not to be by Wilde, or at least not entirely by Wilde.

The apology for 'the love that dare not speak its name' which Oscar Wilde would famously rehearse in the dock is profoundly intertextual as well as autobiographical, the demonstration of an originality achieved by the masterful synthesis of other people's texts. It fuses reminiscences from Pater's essays on [Johann Joachim] Winckelmann, Giordano Bruno and Pico della Mirandola with passages taken from Symonds's study of Michelangelo. These sources are handsomely acknowledged in the story, whereas the third major source is mentioned only fleetingly, treated rather as a raw material. This is Dowden's edition of the sonnets, which had insisted on a biographical reading, notwithstanding its 'real doubts and difficulties'.[38] Dowden had volunteered an apology for Shakespeare as influenced by the Neo-Platonic spirit of his age, quoting the friendships of Hubert Languet and Philip Sidney, Montaigne and Étienne de la Boëtie. Yet he soon discovered that a prose interpretation was not ambiguous enough and so he described Shakespearean life through the following lines from

Chapman's *Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron* to capture the Shakespearean 'life of great energy, enthusiasm and passions, which for ever stands upon the edge of utmost danger, and yet for ever remains in absolute security', i.e. overcomes homosexual inclinations:

> Give me a spirit that on this life's rough sea
> Loves to have his sails fill'd with a lusty wind
> Even till his sail-yards tremble, his masts crack,
> And his rapt ship runs on her side so low
> That he drinks water, and her keel ploughs air;
> There is no danger to a man that knows
> What life and death is, –there's not any law
> Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
> That he should stoop to any other law. (Act III, Scene I)

Wilde's Narrator rejects the apology, yet retains the last four lines to create the image of Shakespeare as a fellow-antinomian.

If the context of the romance of art is appropriately intertextual, the context of Willie Hews's existence is equally so; ironically, but rightly anticipating the erasure of Collier's name from the canon following the revelation of his forgeries, the Narrator writes: 'I thought it strange that no one had ever written a history of the English boy-actors of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and determined to undertake the task myself'.[39] 'The task' fulfils the ideal of the writer as highly selective reader and compiler, transferring a handful of suggestive quotations from Collier's exhaustive *Memoirs of the Principal Actors in Shakespeare's Plays* (1831) to 'a little book with fine vellum leaves and damask silk cover – a fancy of mine in those fanciful days'.[40] If the artist is known by the 'tact of omission',[41] and critical selection virtually undistinguishable from artistic creativity, as Wilde had argued in *The Critic as Artist*, a successful illustration of this method is the Narrator's creation of the 'scanty record' of the lives of the boy-actors from Collier's lengthy account. While Collier had endeavoured to trace the actors' entire career from apprenticeship to the grave, the Narrator's text, like Keats's Grecian urn, fixes each of them at the moment of youthful perfection, retaining only a suggestive detail and discarding the bulk of evidence. A few of these details are embellishments of Collier's record. For example, from Collier's naming of Nat Field first in the cast list of *Cynthia's Revels*, the Narrator infers that he played the leading role, that of 'the Queen and Huntress chaste and fair'. Collier had listed George Vernon among the actors entitled to receive apparel from the Royal Wardrobe and the Narrator invents an incident: 'George Vernon,

to whom the King sent a cloak of scarlet cloth, and a cape of crimson velvet'.[42] Adding some delightful quotations from Symonds and incorporating a few suggestions from Amy Strachey's article on the Elizabethan child-players, the Narrator produces a pageant full of poisonous suggestions from Collier's scarcely promising material. In this particular instance, the creative and the critical act are indistinguishable.

The most spectacular of the Narrator's textual transformations and appropriations is the creation of the portrait of the Dark Lady by the collation of two unrelated Renaissance texts. The collation may have been suggested by their being quoted together in Symonds, only as examples of the immorality of theatre-going women. The first of these was the well-known and possibly apocryphal anecdote recorded by the barrister John Manningham in his diary of 1601, quoted by Collier:

> Upon a tyme when Burbidge played Rich.3, there was a citizen grewe so farre in liking with him, that before shee went from the play shee appointed him to come that night unto hir, by the name of Rich. the 3. Shakespeare, overhearing their conclusion, went before, was entertained, and at his game ere Burbidge came. Then, message being brought that Ric. the 3 was at the dore, Shakespeare caused return to be made, that William the Conqueror was before Rich. the 3.[43]

The second text was Cranley's poem 'Amanda', published in 1635, which had been praised by Collier simply as an exceptionally 'detailed and highly-finished picture of the habits [...] of wantons'.[44] This text, the Narrator argues, refers to the same woman: 'the fact that Cranley's poem was not published till after Shakespeare's death being really rather in favour of this view, as it was not likely that he would have ventured during the lifetime of the great dramatist to revive the memory of this tragic and bitter story'.[45]

The Narrator's improvisation in connecting these completely unrelated texts attains to the 'rich rhythmical utterance' of the talented liar.[46] First dealing with the anecdote, he replaces Burbage by Willie Hews, on the grounds that 'Tavern gossip is ... proverbially inaccurate, and Burbage was, no doubt, dragged into the story to give point to the foolish jest about William the Conqueror and Richard III'. He argues that Richard Burbage, 'with the physical defects of low stature and corpulent figure under which he laboured', was not 'the sort of man who would have fascinated the dark woman of the Sonnets, or would have cared to be fascinated by her'.[47] Her personality he derives quite elegantly from the *Amanda* poem:

> She was a curious woman, 'more changeable and wavering than the

> moon', and the books that she loved to read were Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, Beaumont's *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*, amorous pamphlets and 'songs of love and sonnets exquisite'. These sonnets, that were to her 'the bookes of her devotion', were surely none other but Shakespeare's own, for the whole description reads like the portrait of the woman who fell in love with Willie Hughes, and, lest we should have any doubt on the subject, Cranley, borrowing Shakespeare's play on words, tells us that, in her 'proteus-like strange shapes', she is one who *Changes hews with the chameleon*.[48]

The Narrator's Dark Lady had been presented from the very beginning as the locus of critical fantasy:

> Who was she, this black-browed, olive-skinned woman, with her amorous mouth that 'Love's own hand did make' ... An over-curious scholar of our day had seen in her a symbol of the Catholic Church, of that Bride of Christ who is black but comely ... Mr. Gerald Massey ... had insisted that they were addressed to the celebrated Lady Rich, the Stella of Sir Philip Sidney's sonnets; the Philoclea of his Arcadia ... Mr Tyler had suggested that they referred to one of Queen Elizabeth's maids-of-honour, by name Mary Fitton ... It was not, however, her name that interested me. I was content to hold with Professor Dowden that 'To the eyes of no diver among the wrecks of time will that curious talisman gleam'.[49]

She is created by the spectacular incorporation of scholarly texts, used in a scarcely scholarly fashion: the Narrator derives from Collier not only the quotations, but also the description of the Manningham table-book, reproduced verbatim to enhance the impression of 'authenticity'. He incorporates Symonds's footnote and slightly misquotes the *Amanda* poem, substituting 'hews' for 'hue' in Collier's transcription to make more obvious the connection with Willie Hews.

Yet if his Dark Lady is derived from an inspired reading, nothing but a collation of texts, so, the Narrator implies, is that of Shakespeare, his love for her inspired by his own, initially feigning, love speeches:

> Sincerity itself, the ardent, momentary sincerity of the artist, is often the unconscious result of style, and in the case of those rare temperaments that are exquisitely susceptible to the influences of language, the use of certain phrases and modes of expression can stir the very pulse of passion, can send the red blood coursing through the veins, and can transform into a strange sensuous energy what in its origin had been mere aesthetic impulse, and desire of art. So, at least, it seems to have been

with Shakespeare.[50]

This is a favourite Wildean conceit, in its turn a rewriting of Baudelaire and Pater.[51] Words are 'more real' because 'it is expression that gives reality to things', and Erskine's assertion that 'Willie Hews became to me as real as Shakespeare himself' reveals the elusiveness of all and any human beings. As the Narrator explains: 'Consciousness, indeed, is quite inadequate to explain the contents of personality. It is Art, and Art only, that reveals us to ourselves.'[52]

It is not simply because Shakespeare's biographical record is scanty that the Narrator derives his theory from literary and critical texts rather than from historical records, it is because all biographical records are scanty and ultimately insignificant. His plagiarism and forgery, unlike those of Cyril Graham, are not circumstantial and guilt-ridden, but a consistent literary preference. Plagiarism enables him to draw freely and creatively on the wealth of Shakespearean scholarship. To reinforce the point that his plagiarism is that which systematically and joyfully replaces sincerity and individuality, in other words a consistent artistic choice, the Narrator's ostensibly biographical reading culminates with the re-imagined Elizabethan performance:

> Yes: I had lived it all. I had stood in the round theatre with its open roof and fluttering banners, had seen the stage draped with black for a tragedy, or set with garlands for a brighter show. The young gallants came out with their pages, and took their seats in front of the tawny curtain that hung from the satyr-carved pillars of the inner scene. They were insolent and debonair in their fantastic dresses ... As they played at cards, and blew thin wreaths of smoke from the tiny pipes that the pages lit for them, the truant prentices and idle schoolboys that thronged the yard mocked them. But they only smiled at each other. In the side boxes some masked women were sitting.[53]

What to the Philistine will appear as the continuation of the long tradition of imaginative and futile identification with 'Shakespeare the Man: His Tragic Life Story' is an assimilation and continuation of the Shakespearean technique of annexation.[54] The passage is a rewriting of a similar reconstruction in Symonds's text, which had been hampered by the truthful intentions of a scholarly study:

> It is three o'clock upon an afternoon of summer. We pass through the great door ... Not many women of respectability are visible, though two or three have taken a side-box, from which they lean forward to exchange remarks with the gallants on the stage. Five or six young men

> are already seated there before the curtain playing cards ... A boy goes up and down among them, offering various qualities of tobacco for sale, and furnishing lights for the smokers.[55]

Symonds's reconstruction had been largely derived, with acknowledgment, from Collier's account of Elizabethan theatre. While incorporating the historical details from Symonds and Collier, Wilde manages to produce an ultimately spurious, decadent picture, a reflection not of the Renaissance at all, but of the Renaissance as reinvented by the late nineteenth-century Narrator: 'And yet it was in this century that it had all happened'.[56]

The reminiscence with which the biographical reading ends is the celebration of the Narrator's method:

> How curiously it had all been revealed to me! A book of Sonnets, published nearly three hundred years ago, written by a dead hand and in honour of a dead youth, had suddenly explained to me the whole story of my soul's romance. I remembered how once in Egypt I had been present at the opening of a frescoed coffin that had been found in one of the basalt tombs at Thebes. Inside there was the body of a young girl swathed in tight bands of linen, and with a gilt mask over her face. As I stooped down to look at it, I had seen that one of the little withered hands held a scroll of yellow papyrus covered with strange characters. How I wished now that I had had it read to me! It might have told me something more about the soul that hid within me, and had its mysteries of passion of which I was kept in ignorance. Strange, that we knew so little about ourselves, and that our most intimate personality was concealed from us! Were we to look in tombs for our real life, and in art for the legend of our days![57]

This alludes to the ancient metaphor of plagiarism as resurrection of texts; and to the opening of Théophile Gautier's *Roman de la momie*, in which the search for an undesecrated tomb, paralleling the search for a yet untold story, is successful. But in the Narrator's version the tablet is blank, unread or rather inexhaustible.

Wilde's story is both an exploration of the biographical fascination invented by the romantics and an exercise into a different kind of creativity, defined rather as the critical manipulation of extant texts. Its innovations include making literary criticism a subject of literature, an idea that would be developed in much post-modernist writing, and using the medium of literature to provide artistically satisfying, if scholarly unsustainable, biographies of favourite authors, a method that would be continued most successfully perhaps by Peter Ackroyd. Thirdly, plagiarism of Shakespearean copiousness is re-introduced as a

fruitful method and accompanied by other intertextual games.

Appropriately addressed to the circle of Shakespearean scholars most likely to empathize with his by now experimental and disturbing implementation of the classical annexation technique, the enlarged version of *The Portrait* remained unpublished during his lifetime, presumably unread by his chosen audience. His reliance on scholarly sources by now obsolete only became fully apparent in 1986, with the publication of Horst Schroeder's *Annotations* on *The Portrait* in a privately printed, limited edition.[58] Schroeder documents Wilde's borrowings, yet refrains from drawing any conclusions, or even from summing up his discoveries. Critics have remained equally discreet, mentioning Schroeder's book in their footnotes without discussing its explosive findings. To paraphrase a Wildean aphorism, plagiarism in *The Portrait* has been merely detected rather than discovered.

Wilde's story, in being *vraisemblable*, provided an impetus for subsequent biographical readings, which also reproduce his technique of partial acknowledgment. Samuel Butler's study of the sonnets, written a decade after Wilde's story, which it fails to mention, adopts an unapologetically romantic stance very similar to that of Cyril Graham, being founded on the principle of 'studying text much and commentators little'.[59] It amplifies, and renders explicit, the Uranian subtext of Wilde's story, presenting the sonnets as the celebration of that 'love which passeth the love of women'.[60] It also amplifies the sensational aspects of the biographical reading, played upon by Wilde:

> The worst of it is that all we who read the Sonnets are accessories after the offence. We are receivers of stolen goods; we are as one who opens and pores over a series of letters addressed to another person, and many of them of a most private nature.[61]

The autobiographical nature of Samuel Butler's theory is emphasized by Alfred Douglas, who argues that Butler's representation of the relationship between Shakespeare and Mr. W. H. is only a reflection of his own unhappy relationship with Charles Paine Pauli, and of his Uranian inclinations. Yet Douglas's *True History of Shakespeare's Sonnets* is equally autobiographical. The very title seems a deliberate echo, a retort to Wilde's mockery of Cyril Graham's earnestness. While Douglas starts by acknowledging previous commentators and congratulates himself on this fairness – precisely, of course, the stance of Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* – the acknowledgment is partial and designed to mystify. For, in fact, all of his notes to the sonnets are shortened versions of Butler's notes, with only a few comments of his

own on prosody. Douglas, like Cyril Graham, relies on second-hand erudition to bolster what is essentially a narcissistic reading, as summed up in these lines: 'I, for my part, shall continue to keep in my heart a warm and grateful remembrance of the wonderful boy who inspired the greatest of all poets to write a great deal of his loveliest poetry'.[62]

Romantic Shakespeare is further reflected in Leslie Hotson's *Mr. W.H.*. This interpretation is also founded on internal evidence, quoting Edgar Allan Poe's aphorism: '*Every work of art contains within itself all that is necessary for its comprehension*'.[63] The field of scholarly criticism on the sonnets, which had been described by Swinburne already in his study of 1879 as 'a preposterous pyramid of presumptuous commentary'[64] becomes again, by an effort of the romantic imagination, delightfully, almost entirely empty. Hotson does not acknowledge any predecessors. The theory, like that of Wilde, builds on the idea of the young man being a performer – in this version William Hatcliffe, the Prince of Purpoole at Gray's Inn – and it depends on the same reading of 'shadow' in Sonnet LIII as meaning 'actor'. Yet Wilde is mentioned only to be dismissed: noting that Wilde visited West Ahby, in the neighbourhood of St Mary's Church where William Hatcliffe is buried, he triumphantly adds: 'Here in Lincolnshire, Wilde had thus casually brought himself far closer to the real W.H. than his imagination could ever do in *The Portrait of Mr W. H.*'[65]

Hotson condescendingly compares Wilde's 'famous fantasy' to what he terms 'the recalled diamond of fact',[66] i.e. his own theory of the sonnets, the one that is entirely original. Nor is he more accommodating to Samuel Butler, whose priority with regard to the arguments for the dating of the sonnets he simply refuses to acknowledge, first by stating his having independently reached the same conclusions and secondly by pointing out alleged flaws in Butler's reasoning, downplaying his priority as an accidental discovery.[67]

Wilde's powerful invention of Shakespeare the boy-lover has given momentum to the essentialist aesthetic that Jonathan Dollimore sees as culminating in André Gide; his anti-essentialist interpretation within the same story has proved equally inspiring. The first significant impersonal reading is probably that of George Bernard Shaw, whose play *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* represents Shakespeare as an endless scribbler-down and snapper-up of other people's words, from Elizabeth I to the palace guards. Shakespeare the man in this, as in other decadent versions of the artist, is not so much tragic or 'myriad-minded' as distinctly uninteresting, on the pattern of the self-effacing, classical artist.

The preface makes explicit the relationship between Shakespeare

and his modern rival and mocks the Philistine expectations of his audience:

> Frank [Harris] conceives Shakespear to have been a broken-hearted, melancholy, enormously sentimental person, whereas I am convinced that he was very like myself: in fact, if I had been born in 1556 instead of in 1856, I should have taken to blank verse and given Shakespear a harder run for his money than all the other Elizabethans put together.[68]

Further, Shaw pleads guilty to Frank Harris's accusations of having plagiarized his theories on Shakespeare, and states that his superiority to Frank Harris, as to other minor authors, consists in his ability to annex whatever is valuable in the arguments of others, renouncing the ambition of individuality.

Shaw also shares the Wildean views on the superiority of the elusive author – an author on whom the meaning of his works is no longer expected to depend. His most remarkable project in self-effacing forgery is perhaps the writing-up of Frank Harris's biography of him, which thus becomes part-autobiography. Shaw fused his own fantasies with those of Harris, and took care to destroy all the manuscripts, creating the perfect decadent game with only one fully knowledgeable reader as writer. The playwright had after all been sufficiently moved by Max Nordau's psychoanalytical reading of contemporary authors to produce his apology titled *The Sanity of Art*, and so his (auto) biography stands as the ultimate challenge to romantically-biased criticism that believes in individual style: a collaborative project in which truth can never be separated from fiction, the critic from the subject, the author from the editor.

Nor is it the only such experiment by Shaw. In his old age, enthused by Douglas's project of writing a life of Oscar Wilde, he sends him a chapter-by-chapter plan of the book and when Douglas, consistent to his own romantic views, rejects the proposition, suggesting that Shaw should write his own biography of Wilde, the eminent playwright castigates the reluctant disciple:

> Childe, Childe, My scenario was an arrangement of *your* ms, not of anything that I have any intention of writing. Anyhow, what does it matter whether it is mine or yours if it does the trick? When Shakespeare lifted the moralizings of Gonzalo out of Montaigne just as they stood, he was not jealous of his 'originality' like a nineteenth-century gentleman amateur scribbler. When Handel copied 'The Lord is a Man of War' into the score of *Israel in Egypt* he was glad to be saved the time it would have

taken to compose it. When I appropriated Mrs Clenham and Jaggers from Dickens and the brigand-poetaster from Conan Doyle, I had no scruples and have none.

But you are such a d_____d fool!
It is waste of time trying to help you.[69]

Shaw's theory of plagiarism is consistent with the classical stance he had adopted partly from Wilde. In a playful letter to Douglas, Shaw invites him to 'emulate Heming and Condell by producing a first folio Wilde'. That Wilde and Shakespeare should be so closely connected in Shaw's mind is not at all surprising: his critique of their works is essentially the same, i.e. the lack of political commitment. And Wilde's plays are described as of 'godlike brilliancy compared to the fashionable pieces of that day ... not only witty but literature with a large L'. Shaw adds: 'I must read them again: Oscar sent me copies; and I must have them somewhere'.[70]

A critic of a romantic disposition would undoubtedly dwell on the last sentence as indicative of Shaw's anxiety of influence and analyze all the echoes and rewritings of Wilde in the plays of Shaw.[71] Undoubtedly, like all the post-romantics, and despite his stated convictions, Shaw was prey to the romantic dream of absolute, male-gendered, God-given originality. Kerry Powell has documented Shaw's perpetual putting-down of female dramatists whose works he then proceeded to rewrite.[72] An argument for Shaw's anxiety of influence could also be made on the basis of his very harsh criticism of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, not only in the famous review, but also in much later commentaries, such as the letter to Douglas which describes it as 'soulless farce without a single human being or human moment in it'.[73]

Without denying this aspect of Shaw's personality and writing, I would suggest that Shaw, like Wilde and partly inspired by Wilde, recognized the superiority of the classical, collaborative model, and he endeavoured to follow it. Allardyce Nicoll has noted that his plays are 'a tissue of reminiscences of earlier work', and has compared his ability to annex all the innovations of fellow-authors to that of Shakespeare and Molière.[74]

Yet it is in Joyce that Wilde's subtle games of decadent plagiarism found their most creative reader. The 'Scylla and Charybdis' chapter in *Ulysses* is also set in a library, and it proposes another Shakespearean theory which is promptly discarded by its author. Like Wilde's *Portrait*, it promises biographical revelation and ends in 'delusion' or rather in the rejection of the biographical in favour of the intertextual solution. God-like Shakespeare, Stephen argues, is 'all in all in all of us, ostler

and butcher, and would be bawd and cuckold too but that in the economy of heaven, foretold by Hamlet, there are no more marriages, glorified man, an androgynous angel, being a wife unto himself'.[75]

Joyce, like Wilde, toys with the possibilities of the biographical reading, and rejects it in equally implicit fashion, since his theory is similarly constructed from the odds and ends of other readings, his main sources being the slightly old-fashioned, authoritative studies by Georg Brandes and Sidney Lee, as well as Frank Harris's more sensational writings. While the surface of the text would appear to dismiss *The Portrait*, which is summed up by Mr. Best and then discussed by the others, much to Stephen's annoyance, who is keen to proceed with the development of his own theory, Joyce provides a shrewd comment on the reception of Wilde's story:

> Of course it's all paradox, don't you know, Hughes and hews and hues the colour, but it's so very typical the way he works it out ...
> Do you think it is only a paradox ... The mocker is never taken seriously when he is most serious.
> They talked seriously of mocker's seriousness.[76]

While *The Portrait* could not but be read earnestly and biographically after the trial, Joyce draws attention to its mocking techniques and literary playfulness: since he is using some of Wilde's sources, it is extremely likely that Joyce noticed Wilde's distortion and perhaps some of his plagiarisms and appreciated the artistic potential of his method; his text, like that of Wilde, achieves dazzling modernity and originality, yet is equally filled with acknowledged and unacknowledged borrowings.

Stephen, like Wilde's Narrator, is a systematic plagiarist, one who achieves originality by well-chosen quotations; not only his theory, but even his inner monologue is revealed to consist largely of quotations and distortions of various literary sources. Joyce places the young Stephen in a position similar to that of Cyril: a young man wishing to fascinate his audience, who is constantly interrupted in his attempts by various intertextual echoes. Before he is allowed to present his theory, the Quaker librarian quotes '"those priceless pages from Wilhelm Meister"; Mr. Best remembers that "Mallarmé, don't you know ... has written those wonderful prose poems ... Hamlet ou le Distrait, pièce de Shakespeare, Hamlet ou...", as Stephen impatiently interrupts, "the absent-minded beggar"'.[77] Yet what appears as a spontaneous, humorous reply, is an intertextual echo, the title of a Rudyard Kipling poem. The demonstration continues in the same fashion, Stephen's plea for

attention constantly interrupted by references to other critics: 'I hope Mr Dedalus will work out his theory for the enlightenment of the public. And we ought to mention another Irish commentator, Mr. George Bernard Shaw. Nor should we forget Mr Frank Harris. His articles on Shakespeare in *The Saturday Review* were surely brilliant.' When he does get to present his theory, it turns out to be heavily reliant on other critical attempts, as well as on Elizabethan texts:

> There is a saying of Goethe's which Mr Magee likes to quote. Beware of what you wish for in youth because you will get it in middle life. Why does he send to one who is a buonaroba, a bay where all men ride, a maid of honour with a scandalous girlhood, a lordling to woo for him? He was himself a lord of language ... Why? Belief in himself has been untimely killed. He was overborne in a cornfield first ... and he will never be a victor in his own eyes. No later undoing will undo the first undoing. The tusk of the boar has wounded him where love lies ableeding ...[78]

Joyce, like Wilde, experiments with the erasure of quotation marks to produce a text ambiguously placed between plagiarism and allusion, since some readers would have been capable of identifying all the echoes, including the 'love lies ableeding' as the title of a play by Beaumont and Fletcher.

The intertextual vision is explicitly related to that of Wilde:

> Coffined thoughts around me, in mummycases, embalmed in spice of words. Thoth, god of libraries, a birdgod, moonycrowned. And I heard the voice of that Egyptian highpriest. *In painted chambers loaded with tilebooks.*[79]

Joyce, like Wilde, plays on the ancient metaphor of plagiarism as resurrection of forgotten texts, and views the act of writing as inseparable from the act of reading – as a rewriting on the margin of ancient texts. The supreme model for both is Shakespeare. Far more useful to the artist than the narcissistic identification with 'Shakespeare the man' is an assimilation and understanding of his technique. This technique is used implicitly and polemically by Wilde in *The Portrait* and by Joyce in *Ulysses*; Joyce briefly touches upon it:

> Why is the underplot of King Lear in which Edmund figures lifted out of Sidney's *Arcadia* and spatchcocked onto a Celtic legend older than history?
>
> That was Will's way, John Eglinton defended. We should not now combine a Norse saga with an excerpt from a novel by George Meredith.

> *Que voulez-vous*? Moore would say. He puts Bohemia on the seacoast and makes Ulysses quote Aristotle.[80]

Just as Pater and Wilde had embraced Romantic plagiarism while objecting to its earnestness and mistaken purpose, Joyce adopts Shakespearean plagiarism, yet objects to the anachronism it occasionally involves: it is the insufficient mastery of the sources, perhaps even of one's emotions, as Stephen argues, which constitutes an artistic flaw. This, of course, was not the view of most Victorian critics, many of whom engaged in elaborate and spurious arguments for defending Shakespeare, applying what Ruthven calls the 'double standard' of praising Shakespeare's verbatim copying as 'alchemy' and rejecting all similar attempts by other authors.

This amplification of *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* has been followed by other, significant works. Tom Stoppard's experiments in dramatic intertextuality, whose links to Wildean theory have been illuminatingly discussed elsewhere, also start from the rewriting of Shakespeare.[81] Robert Nye's novel *The Late Mr. Shakespeare* is written from the perspective of a boy-actor, one who shares Wilde's, Shakespeare's and Symonds's delight in the confusion of sexes, glossed here as 'silken confusion'.[82] Like David Leavitt's rewriting of Stephen Spender's autobiographical fiction (see Chapter 7), it makes explicit the Uranian subtext of its original. It, too, illustrates the Shakespearean principles of annexation, fusing Nye's writing with fragments from various authors, not all of which are likely to be identified by readers. Although the narrator, Pickleherring, provides a chapter of 'acknowledgments' and a listing of his sources, the name of Wilde – in keeping with classical principles of imitation– is not mentioned.[83]

The pastiche culminates, appropriately enough, in a brothel which, in Pickleherring's version, is the abode of the Dark Lady, identified as Lucy Negro:

> Her priory was amply provisioned, a palace of carnal delights. Once within its walls, the real world no longer existed. It was folly there to think of it, or indeed to think at all. The abbess demanded obedience and she got it. Appliances of pleasure were everywhere. Here were women, here were boys, here were dancers, here were musicians, here was beauty in many strange forms, and here was wine. It was a convent sacred to amorous rites ... The tastes of its mistress were exotic and expensive, her imagination unparalleled when it came to any matter touching upon sensual gratification. She had a fine eye for all colours and effects. Her plans were bold and fiery, and her conceptions always

> glowed with barbaric lustre. There were some who would no doubt have considered her mad. Her followers, myself among them, felt sure she was not. It was perhaps necessary to hear her, and to see her, and to touch her – to be *sure* that she was not.[84]

This sounds uncannily familiar, and is in fact a close re-writing of Poe's 'Masque of Red Death':

> The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the 'Red Death' ... But in spite of these things it was a gay and magnificent revel. The tastes of the duke were peculiar. He had a fine eye for colors and effects. He disregarded the *decora* of mere fashion. His plans were bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre. There are some who would have thought him mad. His followers felt that he was not. It was necessary to hear and see and touch him to be *sure* that he was not.[85]

Nye's Dark Lady, is, like Wilde's Dark Lady, a visibly intertextual, paper-thin creation, and the self-indulgent dream dissolves again into an artistic dream, with the astonished spectator having to listen to yet another apology of the counter-romantic imagination:

> Sometimes I thought of that brothel as the very house of fiction. It was like the stories in the *Decameron*, one self-complete imagination leading into another, each particular pleasure foretelling the pleasure of the next room but only when you looked *back* (so satisfying each was in itself). I never exhausted it. Nor, I believe, did Mr. Shakespeare, and he was certainly in more rooms than I tried for myself.[86]

As a result of so much counter-romantic insistence on the subject of Shakespeare as the arch-plagiarist, the domain of absolute/romantic originality seems no longer to extend to drama (see the following chapter). This was the view expressed by Allardyce Nicoll already in his 1946 *History of English Drama*:

> One of the most surprising things about drama is that greatness does not really spring from complete originality. 'The thief of all thieves was the Warwickshire thief' sang David Garick in 'The Jubilee' ... and almost the same might be lilted of every dramatic genius. Molière found inspi-

ration for his work in the *commedia dell'arte* as Wycherley found inspiration in Molière.[87]

Yet the separation of genres is merely an attempt to contain the threat of the counter-romantic doctrine, as is the rewriting of practices which would have once been labelled plagiaristic as intertextual in the writings of Stoppard. None of the authors above would have accepted the distinction: Shakespeare's plagiarism, relevant to the playwrights Wilde and Shaw, was relevant to them across genres. And it was equally relevant to the prose writers James Joyce and Peter Ackroyd (see Chapter 7).

For the decadent, as for the classically-minded, Shakespeare's works provided the perfect argument for the superiority of masterful incorporation over Romantic originality. *The Portrait* is one of the most ingenuous attempts to rescue Shakespeare from his 'degrading' position of authority, and to reclaim him for the decadent and Uranian camp, albeit an extremely light-hearted one, which reminds us that it is not Shakespeare, but his worshippers who are in need of being rescued: 'the birth of the reader must be at the expense of the death of the author'.

NOTES

1. Lawrence Danson finds Wilde's decision to expand *The Portrait* 'questionable', as it 'tips a sharp, ingenious parable in the direction of heavyweight exegesis'. Lawrence Danson, *Wilde's Intentions: The Artist in His Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), p.110. This view is echoed by Peter Raby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and by Isobel Murray in her introduction to the *Complete Shorter Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
2. Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison (London: 1759; Reprinted Leeds: Scolar, 1966), p.15.
3. Samuel Johnson, 'Mr. Johnson's Preface to His Edition of Shakespeare's Plays (see Appendix), p.68.
4. John Dryden, *Of Dramatick Poesie, An Essay* (London: 1668), p.47.
5. Anna Seward, 'To Thomas Park', 30 January 1800, *Letters of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh, 1811), vol.5, pp.270ff, quoted by Tim Burke, 'Anna Seward's "plagiarism" of Chatterton'. Thomas Chatterton and Western Culture 250th Anniversary Conference, Bristol University, 6–8 September 2002.
6. G.N.G. Orsini, 'Coleridge and Schlegel Reconsidered'. *Comparative Literature*, 16, 2 (Spring 1964), pp.97–118; Norman Fruman, *Coleridge, The Damaged Archangel* (London: Allen, 1972).
7. Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Shakespeare, or The Poet', *Representative Men*, p.710 (see Appendix).
8. Oscar Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. Linda Dowling (London: Penguin, 2001), p.40). All quotations are from the enlarged version of *The Portrait*.
9. Samuel Butler, *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered* (London: Cape, 1927 [1899]), p.25.
10. James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps, *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*, p.110 (see Appendix).
11. Edward Dowden, *Shakspere: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* (London: Kegan & Paul, 1909, 14th edn).
12. Lawrence Danson, *Wilde's Intentions: The Artist in His Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon,

1997), p.26.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., n.176.
15. Michael S. Helfand and Philip E. Smith II (eds), *Oscar Wilde's Oxford Notebooks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.104; 92.
16. Ibid., p.92.
17. Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Market Place: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), pp.41ff.
18. Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp.6ff.
19. Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, p.35.
20. Ibid., pp.36–7.
21. Ibid., p.37.
22. Ibid., p.41.
23. Ibid., p.37.
24. Horatio Walter Pater, 'Coleridge', in *Three Major Texts* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p.432. Shelley and Thomas Hogg Jefferson co-authored a Republican pamphlet (1810), misleadingly attributing it to Margaret Nicholson, confined to Bedlam for having attempted to kill George III (Kenneth K. Ruthven, *Faking Literature* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], p.109). The collection published by P.B. Shelley and his sister Elizabeth as 'Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire' (1810) contained plagiarisms from Matthew Lewis and Chatterton.
25. Dowden, *Shakspere*, p.lx.
26. John Payne Collier, Letter, *Athenaeum*, 17 January1852; quoted in Dewey Ganzel, *Fortune and Men's Eyes: The Career of John Payne Collier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.143.
27. Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, p.44.
28. Ibid., p.45.
29. Ibid., p.96.
30. Ibid., p.35.
31. Ibid., p.49.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p.94.
34. Kate Chedgzoy, '"Strange worship": Oscar Wilde and the Key to Shakespeare's Sonnets'. In *Shakespeare's Queer Children: Sexual Politics and Contemporary Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.152.
35. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.845.
36. Horst Schroeder, *Oscar Wilde*, The Portrait of Mr. W.H: *Its Composition, Publication and Reception*. Braunschweigher Anglistische Arbeiten 9 (Braunschweig: Technische Universität Carolo-Wilhelmina Zu Braunschweig, 1984), p.50.
37. Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author'. *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p.146.
38. Dowden, *Shakspere*, p.xvi.
39. Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, p.70.
40. Ibid.
41. Pater, 'Style', in *Three Major Texts*, p.401.
42. Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, p.71.
43. Collier, 1: p.319 (see Appendix).
44. Ibid., p.218.
45. Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, p.85.
46. Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', in *The Soul of Man*, p.166.
47. Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, p.85.
48. Ibid., p.84.
49. Ibid., p.79.
50. Ibid., p.81.
51. Charles Baudelaire, 'Théophile Gautier'; Horatio Walter Pater, 'Modernity', *Gaston de Latour: The Revised Text*, ed. Gerald Monsman (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, ELT Press, 1995).
52. Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, p.91.
53. Ibid., p.92.

54. The title of one of Frank Harris's books on Shakespeare (New York: Kennerley, 1909).
55. John Addington Symonds, *Shakespeare's Predecessors in the English Drama*, p.231 (see Appendix).
56. Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, p.92.
57. Ibid., p.93.
58. Horst Schroeder, *Annotations to Oscar Wilde*, The Portrait of Mr. W.H. (Braunschweig: Schroeder, 1986).
59. Samuel Butler, *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered* (London: Cape, 1927 [1899]), p.ix.
60. Ibid., p.159.
61. Ibid., p.154.
62. Alfred Douglas, *The True History of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London: Secker, 1933), p.211.
63. Leslie Hotson, *Mr. W.H.*, (London: Hart-Davis, 1964), p.25.
64. A.C. Swinburne, *A Study of Shakespeare*, p.62 (see Appendix).
65. Leslie Hotson, *Mr. W.H.*, p.118.
66. Ibid., p.204.
67. Ibid., p.305.
68. George Bernard Shaw, 'Preface', in *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, in *Works* vol. 13 (London: Constable, 1930), p.211.
69. George Bernard Shaw, *Bernard Shaw and Alfred Douglas: A Correspondence*, ed. Mary Hyde (London: Murray, 1982), 10 September 1939, pp.124–5.
70. Ibid., 15 February 1940, p.128.
71. The Wildean presence is apparent in the subtext of *You Never Can Tell* (Kerry Powell, 'New Women, New Plays and Shaw in the 1890s'. In Christopher Innes [ed.], *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], pp.76–100); *Man and Superman* (Karl Beckson, *The Oscar Wilde Encyclopedia*. AMS Studies in the Nineteenth Century [New York: AMS, 1998] and David J. Gordon, 'Shavian Comedy and the Shadow of Wilde'. In Innes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*, pp.124–43) and more generally discussed in Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama: 1660–1900. Late Nineteenth-Century Drama 1850–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975 [Vol.V, 1946]), pp.195–200.
72. Powell, 'New Women, New Plays and Shaw in the 1890s'.
73. Shaw, *Bernard Shaw and Alfred Douglas: A Correspondence*, 9 February 1940, p.128.
74. Nicoll, *A History of English Drama: 1660–1900. Late Nineteenth-Century Drama 1850–1900*, p.195.
75. Joyce, *Ulysses*, p.205.
76. Ibid., pp.190–1.
77. Ibid., p.179.
78. Ibid., p.188.
79. Ibid., p.186.
80. Ibid., p.203.
81. See Neil Sammell's *Tom Stoppard: The Artist As Critic* (London: Macmillan, 1988) for a comprehensive discussion of intertextual techniques across genres and of specific Wildean influences; Hersh Zeifman, 'The Comedy of Eros: Stoppard in Love'. In Katherine E. Kelly (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Tom Stoppard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.185–200 for an illuminating discussion of *The Invention of Love*; and Gerd Rohmann, 'Re-Discovering Wilde in Travesties by Joyce and Stoppard', in C. George Sandulescu (ed.), *Rediscovering Oscar Wilde* (Gerrards Cross: C. Smythe, 1994), for the Wildean reading of *Travesties*.
82. Robert Nye, *The Late Mr. Shakespeare* (London: Allison & Busby, 2001 [1998]), p.310.
83. Ibid., p.185.
84. Ibid., p.290.
85. Edgar Allan Poe, 'Masque of Red Death', in *The Tales and Poems*, ed. John H. Ingram (London: Nimmo, 1884, 4 vols), vol.I, pp.159–62.
86. Nye, *The Late Mr. Shakespeare*, p.289.
87. Nicoll, *A History of English Drama: 1660–1900. Late Nineteenth-Century Drama 1850–1900*, p.195.

5

'Plagiarist: A Writer of Plays': The Spectacle of Criticism in Nineteenth-Century Drama

Reviewing Mark Twain's selections from children's unwittingly amusing responses to exam questions in 'English as She Is Taught', Oscar Wilde selected for particular praise the definition of the 'plagiarist' quoted in the title of this chapter, describing it as 'the most brilliant thing that has been said in modern literature for some time'.[1] Plagiarism, or rather the annexation of plot and situation, should have been favoured in English theatre on the basis of Shakespearean precedent and, in France, on account of the explicitly intertextual work of Molière and Racine, invoked by Victorien Sardou in self-defence.[2] Yet if the dramatists themselves and their apologists aligned themselves with the classical tradition, contemporary reviewers frequently struck a highly romantic attitude. The perception of drama as primarily a commercial genre, the haste in which theatre reviews were necessarily written, and the critics' wish to assert their own authority while gratifying the scandal-mongering tendencies of the public account for the extravagances of source-hunting and parallel-drawing dramatic criticism that was disposed to treat the most innocuous of commonplaces as literary crimes.

Since the legitimacy of drama as an artistic genre was itself contested during the latter part of the nineteenth century, the debate on appropriate and inappropriate forms of dramatic annexation was both more urgent and more strident than in the case of other literary genres. Of the authors discussed in this chapter, Victorien Sardou and Oscar Wilde were accused of plagiarism from the beginning to the end of their dramatic careers, Sardou being taken to court on at least one occasion, by the less successful author Mario Uchard. For George Bernard Shaw the accusations of plagiarism came later, alongside artistic success. Henrik Ibsen was so keen to avoid such accusations that he admitted to reading almost

nothing apart from the Bible and the newspapers. None of these authors was as unfortunate as their contemporary I.L. Caragiale in prompting and finally losing a libel trial that hinged on plagiarism accusations.

The greatest comic writer in the Romanian language had taken little notice of previous denunciations penned by the Symbolist poet Alexandru Macedonski, an envious plagiarist-hunter who repeatedly attacked him and Mihai Eminescu since he resented their higher canonical position as the nation's already acknowledged masters in poetry and drama. Yet when in 1901 the young journalist Ion Caion accused Caragiale of plagiarizing a Hungarian source, printing in parallel columns the text of his play and the alleged translation of the Hungarian that was virtually identical, the dramatist felt that the accusations were too damaging and that the only solution was to take him to court for libel. Caragiale was represented by the highly talented lawyer and fellow-author Barbu Stefănescu-Delavrancea, but Caion was well defended by a counsel apparently paid for by Macedonski. Delavrancea revealed Ion Caion's previous forgery and hoaxes and the non-existence of the Hungarian author which Caragiale had been accused of plagiarizing. He ended with a passionate plea for the writer's dignity and for defending his reputation, on which his livelihood depended, from unfair attacks, given the stigma of plagiarism. Meanwhile, the defence council amused the jury with their description of plagiarism as a universal phenomenon:

> Don't most of our authors plagiarize? ... Don't our celebrities keep on copying? As to the professors, who have expelled Caion from university – what are they but a bunch of plagiarists?[3]

The first trial had ended with Ion Caion's conviction; the second ended with his acquittal – a result profoundly humiliating to Caragiale and arguably connected to his voluntary exile to Berlin, where he spent the rest of his life. Yet to the jury, the decision must have seemed a suitable ending for a 'trivial comedy' on a trivial subject, with the leading dramatist cast in an implausibly earnest part. More interestingly, the trial was restaged by the Romanian Literature Museum in 1998. The anxiety about the status of drama and about the status of a 'national author', at the time apparently only felt by Caragiale himself, came to be shared by an entire culture; the comic and indeed theatrical aspects of the initial plagiarism trial had acquired sinister political and cultural implications.

The dramatists discussed in this chapter did not have to submit to equally humiliating trials, yet they kept on imagining it and rehearsing their defence. It is certainly not a coincidence that Sardou, Caragiale,

Wilde, Ibsen and Shaw all wrote plays self-consciously built of theatrical commonplaces, in which the old-fashioned device of the stolen document is central to the plot. The four plays to be analysed in this chapter are apologies or justifications of the dramatist's own method, with the best lines and parts given to a flattering self-portrait, or pair of self-portraits, of the artist as thief, and various rationalizations of the crime being provided. They illustrate the variety of viewpoints on plagiarism available to nineteenth-century dramatists, as indeed the inevitability of the subject.

Les pattes de mouche (*A Scrap of Paper*) was Sardou's first successful play and the first among many by him to prompt plagiarism accusations; it makes expert, self-conscious use of the stock characters and situations of French classical comedy. Yet the precedent which it most constantly invokes is neither French, nor classical, but American and decadent: Poe's 'Purloined Letter', whose structure, situation and reasoning it at times closely reproduces, as the following summary should make clear.

Les pattes, like Poe's story, turns on a love-letter which would compromise a married woman. The letter is stolen by her former lover under her very eyes and she is prevented from reacting by her husband's presence, who is jealously watching the scene, but fails to notice the sleight of hand. The letter could be used to blackmail her if necessary – ostensibly in this case, to agree to the thief's marriage with her younger sister Marthe, already in love with a young man. In the subsequent acts, Prosper allows his former lover Clarisse and her friend Suzanne full freedom in searching his premises for the letter, just as in Poe's 'The Purloined Letter', the Minister allows plenty of opportunity for the police to search his flat. Clarisse's technique replicates that of the police in the original story: she frantically rummages through his papers and disturbs the furniture, while Suzanne, after a moment's reflection, discovers the letter which, as in Poe's story, has been placed among other letters, in full view, but in a different envelope. Just as in the original version, she outwits her opponent, replacing the letter by a blank piece of paper, as Dupin had replaced the compromising letter with another, written by him. The change in the detective's gender enables a traditional comic finale in which Suzanne marries Prosper. Yet the names hint at a decadent, metaphorically incestuous union as they evoke the arch-plagiarist and Shakespeare and his beloved daughter Susanna. Their union is symbolic – perhaps that of the male and female mind.

The closeness of these structural parallels suggests that Sardou meant to create an intertextual context for his play. On one level an effective comedy likely to appeal to an unsophisticated audience with

its lively dialogue and plot complications – not described here and clearly not derived from Poe's story – on another it is a meditation on the possibilities and limits of artistic property and of creativity. Sardou recognized both the necessity of copyright and the attractiveness, indeed in some cases the necessity, of plagiarism: the reiterated allusions to Poe mark his covert allegiance to the neo-classical camp.

As the title suggests, it is the letter itself which is the centre of interest: its ownership, exchange value and meaning are passionately debated by characters who may be seen simply as its carriers. First, there is the question of ownership, disputed by the two detective-thieves Prosper and Suzanne: 'Does the letter dropped into a letter box belong to the sender or to the person to whom it is addressed?'[4] If the letter is seen – and in the light of Poe's well-known story, it could not fail to be seen – as a metaphor of the literary text, the implication is clear: a published text no longer belongs to the author, but to the public, which obviously includes fellow-authors. The meaning of the text cannot remain the meaning it possessed to its author at the time of writing.

Nor can the letter, it seems, remain for long in anyone's possession, or retain its initial form much longer than its content. After Suzanne has replaced the letter, Prosper throws what he believes to be a blank or insignificant scrap of paper, used to light the lamp, out of the window. It is then picked up by the amateur entomologist Thirion, to whom it is just a 'scrap of paper' useful to trap a 'tiger', that is a 'tiger-beetle! a gold-winged tiger!'[5] The paper horn is subsequently found by the young lover Paul who, like his guardian Thirion, is uninterested in the writing on the paper, only glad that the other side of the paper is free, allowing him to scribble his own message to his lover – an illustration of the palimpsest nature of writing. Ironically and classically, the two messages are in fact very much alike: what appears like over-writing is a continuation. Sardou's argument, the classical argument par excellence, of the necessary, often merely coincidental, plagiarism of the artists working on the permanent themes, i.e. the passions, is made once again. The letter is again misdelivered, and goes up in smoke – phoenix-like – for the second time at the end of the play. As in Poe's story, what is important is not the content, but the circulation of the text.

Intertextuality is deployed by Sardou to enrich the meaning of his comedy and to comment upon dramatic principles, including the use of old-fashioned devices and tricks-of-the-trade, as deployed in this very play. Unsurprisingly for its nineteenth-century competitive and romantically-charged dramatic context, *A Scrap of Paper* was attacked as plagiarizing Poe and, according to Sardou's biographer and disciple

Blanche Roosevelt, other sources as well. More interestingly, Sardou answered these accusations in *Mes plagiats!* by stating that the only inspiration derived from Poe was the idea of concealing an object in the most obvious place, acknowledging 'this is a great deal, but it is not the whole play'.[6] He then appears to deflect attention from this literary source by claiming that the starting-point of the play was his noticing, on lighting up his cigarette, that the scrap of paper he had got from the tobacconist's was in fact the fragment of a letter – a mother's letter to her daughter – prompting him to imagine the love-note on which the whole plot then turns. He claims even to have kept 'Mme Laurent's' letter and to regard it as precious.[7]

This reads like a parody of the romantic exaltation of the imagination, and of the romantic obsession with authenticity, modelled on similar texts by Poe. It also raises a very interesting ethical and practical question, since Sardou defends himself from the accusation of having plagiarized a fellow-author by acknowledging a different and arguably more reprehensible gesture: that of reading, retaining and publicising a letter clearly not addressed to him. What is more, this second theft, of the life rather than the text, is done openly, reproducing the Minister's defiant gesture which is seen by the Queen, yet escapes the attention of the less intelligent King. Sardou reveals a shrewder understanding of creativity than either the romantics or the psychoanalysts, the understanding that 'property is theft', whether from literature or life. Indeed, what is striking about even the most brilliantly written texts of romantic as of psychoanalytical theory is the extent to which the necessary theft remains repressed below the level of consciousness: for William Wordsworth and for Sigmund Freud, just as for Oscar Wilde, life, i.e. other people's experiences, imaginings and emotions are merely the 'raw material' on which to exercise their creativity, but, unlike Wilde, they self-contradictorily insist both on the originality and on the faithfulness of their translations.

The implicit question underpinning Sardou's defence of his play and the play itself is one that remains as poignant today, namely: what are writers and artists generally to draw on? Their ability to derive inspiration from the work of fellow-authors is clearly hampered by the spectre of copyright infringement trials; on the other hand, their rights to draw on life, or rather 'non-fiction' material, have been seriously questioned in recent years, and are restricted by copyright, aesthetic and ethical considerations.

In *Mes plagiats!*, Sardou reveals his awareness of the ongoing debate on plagiarism by citing the opinions of the critics who reject the very

notion of plagiarism, and of those who would limit claims of originality to the masterpieces and he concludes with his own chosen definition: 'La proprieté littéraire est une question de forme'. The ambiguity of this sentence perfectly encapsulates Sardou's half-playful, half-classical attitude as, on the one hand, a member of the Académie française and a respected scholar, and, on the other, an admirer of playful plagiarists such as Edgar Allan Poe.

I.L. Caragiale's most successful and influential comedy, 'The Lost Letter', similarly rewrites Poe's 'Letter', while incorporating some suggestions from Sardou, as contemporary reviewers did not fail to note. His version deals with the appropriation of a love-letter by an unscrupulous journalist, used to blackmail the local leader of the Conservative party, his wife and her lover, the prefect, into supporting his candidacy for a seat in Parliament.

His play, like those of Sardou and Wilde, over-emphasizes its obviousness, as in the lover's scolding of his mistress, who negligently misplaced a love letter as one might 'displace some trivial paper, a play bill on leaving the theatre' (Act II, Scene VI). 'Such negligence', he adds, 'is scarcely to be encountered in novels or indeed in the theatre'. The local(ised) queen responds with a display of histrionic sentiment, threatening to kill herself rather than incur the shame of exposure. Caragiale's Wildean disinterest in the novelty of the plot is consistent with his stance as a classical writer on hardly variable human flaws and failings and is reinforced by the implausible and thoroughly provocative repetition of this already too familiar trick: while the love-letter is returned to its possessor, the effect of this is merely that another, even more unscrupulous as well as imbecile politician will be elected, a politician whose candidacy has been supported at a national level because he has also happened to appropriate a compromising love-letter – a letter which he intends to keep, for repetitive blackmail.

Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* is, like Sardou's *Les Pattes* and like his own *Portrait of Mr. W.H*, simultaneously a theorization and demonstration of the artistic merits of plagiarism. With Shakespearean boldness, it annexes the old-fashioned materials of two seemingly incompatible dramatic genres to create a thoroughly modern apology of deception in its various forms, and, above all, of artistic deception. The characters and ostensible themes are those of the bourgeois drama of the kind written by Émile Augier and Arthur Wing Pinero: Robert Chiltern is portrayed magnificently, yet plausibly enough, as a middle-class Faust, Lady Chiltern strikes all the conventional attitudes of the pure woman, and Lord Goring himself, the witty yet essentially earnest

dandy, is not unlike similar *raisonneur* characters of Dumas-fils, such as the title protagonist of *L'ami des femmes*. Yet with Mrs Cheveley's entrance, serious drama is infiltrated by farce and comedy, and undermined by all the theatrical tricks of Sardou.

Criticism has focused on Robert Chiltern, the man with a guilty secret, and on the philosopher-dandy Lord Goring as the most autobiographically significant characters, yet it is Mrs Cheveley who holds the keys to the play, and who is allowed to leave the stage as mysterious as she entered it, after having exposed the others' secrets. Nothing could be more wilfully autobiographical than her spectacular entrance, which already indicates her kleptomania: 'A work of art, on the whole, but showing the influence of too many schools'. The critic A.B. Walkley protested that 'even Sardou has tired of kleptodramatics',[8] and indeed in the course of the play, Mrs Cheveley commits no less than three crimes of appropriation. First, there is her acquisition of Robert Chiltern's compromising letter to the Baron, which could put an end to his political career, and which she uses to blackmail him, in the tradition of sensational (melo)drama. Secondly, there is her theft, committed many years before, of a brooch – an incident itself plagiarised from Rousseau's *Confessions* (as noted by Ann Livermore[9]), which in turn enables Lord Goring's witty recuperation, and her third theft, of the letter. The deliberately improbable episode of the brooch that is also a bracelet, with which Lord Goring traps Mrs Cheveley, is an instance of Wilde's writing for a double audience as analysed by Regenia Gagnier: on the one hand, it satisfies the least sophisticated by its most conventional use of poetic justice, while on the other it is transparently absurd for the perceptive, perhaps even a private joke: Richard Dellamora has argued that the bracelet/brooch could be a metaphor of the third sex.[10] Finally, there is Mrs Cheveley's theft of Lady Chiltern's letter to Lord Goring, which she sends Robert Chiltern, thereby returning us to the founding allegory of plagiarism. Wilde probably included this final instance in the spirit in which a classical artist might include in a self-portrait a vignette of the paintings that most influenced him.

Critics might well be frustrated, and exclaim with Lord Goring: 'You wretched woman, must you always be thieving?'[11] Or, in Lady Chiltern's terrified tones: 'She stole things, she was a thief. She was sent away for being a thief. Why do you let her influence you?'[12] Mrs Cheveley's crimes render her an outcast within bourgeois society, yet she refuses to fit the melodramatic stereotypes. She is not a spy of the conventional drama such as for instance the Countess Zicka of Sardou's *Dora*, as Wilde makes clear in the dialogue in which he toys

with his critics, and points out the modernity of his play: 'Oh! spies are of no use nowadays. Their profession is over. The newspapers do their work instead'.[13] Nor is she a conventional female character, frightened of scandal: 'I should fancy that Mrs Cheveley is one of those very modern women of our time who find a new scandal as becoming as a new bonnet, and air them both in the Park every afternoon at five thirty'.[14]

Her motivations and her life remain mysterious. With Robert Chiltern, she claims to be practical and business-like, appealing to his Philistine ambitions and offering the compromising letter in exchange for his political support. With Lady Chiltern, she adopts an aphoristic style which brilliantly mimics her antagonist's rudeness, authoritativeness and apparent emotion. With Lord Goring, she is charming, romantic even, her proposal apparently as much the result of a momentary flash of inspiration as Lord Goring's own proposal to Mabel. Her chameleonic changes set her apart from the other characters, moved by Philistine passions and ambitions that she parodies while remaining herself a cipher – precisely the stance of the elusive, 'myriad-minded' author on a Shakespearean and classical pattern, exemplified by the Narrator of *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* She toys with the other characters as the dramatist does; perhaps rather than wanting to marry Lord Goring, she amuses herself by forcing him to reveal his conventional, even Philistine, side in insulting a woman:

> MRS CHEVELEY. What do you know about my married life?
> LORD GORING. Nothing: but I can read it like a book.
> MRS CHEVELEY. What book?
> LORD GORING. (Rising) The Book of Numbers.[15]

Similarly, there is little reason to suppose that she really intends to offer money to Sir Chiltern when she can obtain his support in exchange for the letter. Rather, she amuses herself and the audience by compelling him to strike the grand moral attitude before obliging him to agree to her immoral proposition.

She is an agitator, belonging to what Oscar Wilde described in 'The Soul of Man' as 'a set of interfering, meddling people who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community and sow the seeds of discontent among them', 'the absolutely necessary' agents of progress.[16] Her cheerful, bold and scarcely motivated thieving is implicitly and favourably compared to Robert Chiltern's courageous yet narrowly egotistical theft. The act, which led to his position, fortune and marriage, had been repressed below the level of consciousness; yet with Mrs Cheveley's appearance, Robert Chiltern is quick enough to remind

himself that 'all property is theft', as he tells Lord Goring: 'Private information is practically the source of every large modern fortune'.[17] The effect of her intervention is to turn a half-hearted, hypocritical criminal into a principled and hardened one. Even Lady Chiltern evolves from a naively egotistical to a slightly more complex liar, when she assures her husband that she feels 'Love, and only love' for him.[18] And finally, these bourgeois characters are shown to have made some modest progress towards the art of lying, albeit far from lying for its own sake. Lady Chiltern's letter to Lord Goring, stolen by Mrs Cheveley, is boldly reannexed by that lady's husband:

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Oh! Stop a moment. There is no name at the beginning of this letter. There should be a name.

LADY CHILTERN. Let me write yours. It is you I trust and need. You and none else.

LORD GORING. Well, really, Lady Chiltern, I think I should have back my own letter.

LADY CHILTERN (Smiling) No; you shall have Mabel.[19]

The page which, after its promiscuous circulation, is rendered synonymous with unstained womanhood, is the culmination of a number of deceptions and concealments, political, artistic and private, all of which find some justification in the play.

Yet artistic deception, or deception for its own sake, is privileged here as in 'The Decay of Lying', seen as far superior to other, more self-interested forms. Mrs Cheveley is the embodiment of the authorial fantasy of all artists as plagiarists, since she is allowed to leave the stage with the stolen brooch/bracelet still on her arm. Even the moment of her exposure is simultaneously an acknowledgment of her artistic triumph: clasping the bracelet on her arm, Lord Goring casually remarks that it looks 'much better than when I saw it last'.[20] The compliment is apposite to the play as a whole, in which the old-fashioned materials are diverted to modern effect – the technique previously perfected by Wilde in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*

An Ideal Husband delighted Shaw, whose own pleasant plays set out to emulate the Wildean example of creating work that would bear sufficient resemblance to the familiar well-made plays to achieve success with the Philistine, yet was sufficiently ironic and transparent in its use of convention to appeal to the elect. *Man of Destiny* was meant to exhibit the dramatist's craft and his intellectual superiority to the authors he annexed. The plot returns us to the founding story of pla-

giarism allegories within this counter-romantic tradition: Poe's 'Purloined Letter'. Shaw's comedy deals precisely with the theft of the Queen's letter to her lover, and the attempts of a second thief to intercept the letter before it reaches the King. In this case, the husband is the future emperor Napoleon, creating yet another intertext for Shaw's play. Sardou's *Madame Sans-Gêne* had imagined Napoleon as a jealous husband, whose perfectly justified suspicions are laid to rest through the skilful manoeuvring of the title protagonist, a friend of the Queen's lover, in a plot that also hinges on a letter. The Strange Lady as the Queen's friend, who uses her intellect and her feminine charm to recover the letter and who is glimpsed at the end of the play in a love-making scene with the opponent she has outwitted, resembles Sardou's bright female detective Suzanne and Wilde's bright thief Mrs Cheveley.

Shaw's rewriting of Sardou's Napoleon is a symbolic conquest of the theatrical space which seemed to him to be unfairly dominated by the French dramatist. Shaw's confidence in the success of his annexation technique on a Shakespearean-Wildean pattern is revealed in his jibe at Sardou in the published version of the play. One of the numerous theatrical tricks cheerfully annexed by Shaw from the well-made plays had been the identification of the Strange Lady as the thief of Napoleon's correspondence through the clue provided by her scented handkerchief. A variation of this had appeared in Sardou's *Dora*, first performed in 1877, in which suspicion of Countess Zicka is aroused when Favrolle scents her perfume on his letters and realizes she has been reading his correspondence during his absence from the office. Shaw's acknowledgment of this borrowing anticipates Pierre Menard: 'The scented handkerchief reappears, eighty years later, in M. Victorien Sardou's drama entitled *Dora*.'[21] Casting his own play as history, Shaw steals a march on his predecessor Sardou, making his use of allegedly historical material seem old-fashioned at the precise moment when he is annexing one of his tricks. The passage also suggests Shaw's familiarity with Sardou's work, and even with Sardou's plagiaristic theory, since in *Mes plagiats!*, Sardou had defended himself from several accusations of plagiarism by revealing that his source was not a previous literary text, but a historical anecdote, from which both his text, and the alleged literary source, were derived.[22]

In addition, there is the intertext of *An Ideal Husband*, in which Shaw had admired Wilde's toying with the conventions of the theatre and with the expectations of his public. Shaw's Strange Lady is as elusive as The Narrator in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* and more elusive than Mrs Cheveley, since her name and her motives remain equally mysterious. She claims to

be Josephine's friend, ready to court any dangers in order to recuperate the letter and redeem her reputation, yet in the same dialogue, she abandons the letter, criticizes Josephine in the harshest terms[23] and attempts to steal her husband. Her thefts serve to reveal Napoleon's own transgressive desires; her role is precisely that of Mrs Cheveley: to explain the protagonist to himself, and to turn a half-unconscious hypocrite into a perfectly conscious one. The Strange Lady recognizes in Napoleon, as yet only a general, the future Emperor, and praises the scope of his egotistical ambitions, much as Mrs Cheveley had praised Robert Chiltern's sale of a Cabinet secret as a 'clever, unscrupulous thing'.[24]

Yet the comedy is not as successful as might have been expected in light of its amusing intertexts and of its carefully constructed dialogue. The reason is that Shaw, choosing Wilde the dramatist as a model, could not help thinking about Wilde the man, whose career as a would-be king of British drama had come to an end while Shaw was working on his manuscript. A play hinging on a scrap of paper that was also a love-letter could not but be associated in the year 1895 with the insulting card which the Marquess of Queensberry had left for Oscar Wilde at the Albemarle Club, with the crudely biographical reading of Wilde's letters to Lord Alfred Douglas and of Wilde's own fiction during the trials that ended with the condemnation of the entire decadent and aesthetic movement. William Butler Yeats acknowledged in his *Autobiographies* the significance of the Wildean trial for the entire 'tragic generation'.[25] The shock of the Wildean trials reverberated in the Gothic fiction of Henry James and Bram Stoker and was still sufficiently powerful to compel modernist authors such as W.H. Auden and T.S. Eliot to distance themselves from Wilde's tragic performance, which to a heterosexually-biased public seemed to diminish and emasculate his art and the art of his disciples. W.H. Auden disparages Wilde as a performer rather an artist and even as a 'performing artiste'.[26] Shaw would also write disparagingly of Wilde's narcissism and performance of homosexuality in his 'Memories of Oscar Wilde'. Yet in *Man of Destiny*, Shaw finds himself not merely continuing comedy in the Wildean manner, but attempting to rewrite the imperfect Wildean tragedy into the Shakespearean comedy it should have been – if Oscar Wilde had taken the advice of Shaw and of other friends and disregarded Queensberry's card. The Strange Lady explains to Napoleon that, were he to give in to the impulse of reading the letter, the result would be 'a duel with Barras, a domestic scene, a broken household, public scandal, a checked career'.[27] Napoleon's solution – Napoleon standing here for the successful dramatist Sardou/Wilde/Shaw – is to read the letter, and pretend

not to have done so in order to avoid the unpleasant consequences. On one level, this is another allegory of the dramatist as a plagiarist: as the Strange Lady explains, reading the letter 'exactly fulfilled your purpose and so you weren't a bit afraid or ashamed to do it';[28] himself a realist or a responsible artist, he maintains a romantic pose for his Philistine audience. Yet it is also a rewriting of the Wilde fiasco into what it should have been, had the artist placed his artistic intentions above his personal feelings. Shaw also recognizes the indignity of this solution, the fact that this perfect artist would be less than a man: 'That's the meanest thing I ever knew any man do'.[29]

Shaw's severest criticism is reserved for the English hypocritical society which condemned Oscar Wilde. An exchange between Napoleon and the Strange Lady is strongly reminiscent of *Dorian Gray*:

> NAPOLEON (abruptly). Where did you pick up all these vulgar scruples – this (with contemptuous emphasis) conscience of yours? I took you for a lady – an aristocrat. Was your grandfather a shopkeeper, pray?
> LADY. No: he was an Englishman.
> NAPOLEON. That accounts for it. The English are a nation of shopkeepers. Now I understand why you've beaten me.

Cf:

> Would you have me take the verdict of Europe on it? What do they say of us?
> That Tartuffe has emigrated to England and opened a shop.[30]

Napoleon's final speech, which is the climax of the play, concentrates on the hypocrisy permeating all aspects of English life and is an amplification of Wilde's critique. This is not mindless plagiarism but a deliberate tribute to Wilde as a dramatist and a thinker, an emphatic show of solidarity. The emotion apparent in the final passages of the play breaks up the structure of what should have been another serene apology and demonstration of the benefits of classical annexation, yet turned into a meditation on his fellow-dramatist. A serene apology would not be provided by Shaw until *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*. Yet *The Man of Destiny* would remain a significant piece for him: in a letter to Gertrude Elliott, he describes it as 'technically by far my most difficult piece', comparing it to *Hamlet*, which reveals his awareness of the play's intertextual complexity as a dialogue with Wilde and a confrontation with the authors of the well-made plays.[31]

Yet at the same time as Sardou, Wilde and Shaw were elaborating the counter-romantic theory and practice of annexation, more or less

grounded in Shakespearean precedent, the author considered at the time, in British and Scandinavian circles, as the most innovative and influential, resolutely adopted the romantic attitude. Sardou, Wilde and Shaw were happy annexing the ideas of others, as well as in inspiring and advising fellow-authors, to the extent that the canon of Shaw and Wilde at least cannot be established with any certainty.[32] By contrast, Henrik Ibsen jealously guarded his authorial solitude, concealing the trifling details of his work-in-progress even from his wife and son, and reading his work only to the 'charmed circle', i.e. his wife and son, while excluding his daughter-in-law Bergliot, who was also the daughter of the leading dramatist Björnstjerne Björnson.[33] This may well have been part of his authorial paranoia for, as Bergliot Ibsen recollects in her memoirs of the Ibsens, the dramatist had warned his son not to share his unpublished ideas with anyone.[34]

This fear of being plagiarized was accompanied by the expected originality anxieties: Ibsen never willingly acknowledged the influence of other authors on his work, so that the critics working on the intertextual aspects of his drama have had to rely on circumstantial evidence. The first substantial study on Ibsen's Greek sources of inspiration, undertaken as late as 1943, had to answer the question of whether Ibsen had read the Greek tragedies, and to answer it on the basis of circumstantial evidence, such as the curriculum of the Norwegian university that Ibsen had envisaged attending. Norman Rhodes's recent study, *Ibsen and the Greeks* is worth quoting as revealing the peculiar difficulties of Ibsen scholarship:

> Scandinavian schools in the nineteenth century were often patterned after German models, and the dominant form of the German gymnasium reflected the educational philosophy of Wilhelm von Humboldt ... The foundation of his curriculum ... was the study of classical Greek culture...
>
> All of this leads one to suppose that Ibsen, a great student of classical literature and ancient history, surely had read and studied Homeric epics and Greek tragedies – works which were deemed to be key ancient artefacts of his culture. Josef Faaland, as noted earlier, was convinced that Ibsen had read the Greek tragedies.[35]

While the argument could be easily criticized for its series of *non-sequiturs* and sheer tentativeness, Rhodes's book is at least an attempt in the right direction – in uncovering the intertextuality so carefully hidden by Ibsen, in going against the explicit authorial intentions. Henrik Ibsen's fantasies of absolute originality were neither discarded, nor diminished in his extremely successful old age. The preface to the

collected edition of his works, published in honour of his seventieth birthday, makes a rather unusual plea:

> I therefore appeal to the reader that he not put any play aside, and not skip anything, but that he absorb the plays – by reading himself into them and by experiencing them intimately – in the order in which I wrote them.[36]

Far from envisaging with Wilde that criticism might be an independent art-form, using the literary text merely as a starting point, Ibsen is greatly concerned about what he describes as 'the strange, imperfect and misleading interpretations' of his later works. He stresses that only a chronological and extremely attentive reading of his plays – and not, one notes, of texts by any other authors which might have shaped or illuminated his – can lead to the correct interpretation, which is seen to coincide with authorial intentions for the work. Underlying these extraordinary propositions in no obscure manner is the perception of his work as the realization of the romantic ideal: an autonomous whole, a powerful reflection of the artist's evolution, of permanent value and interest – as would alone justify the sustained effort demanded of mere readers.

Ibsen's authorial dream seemed to be fulfilled in his lifetime: for his contemporaries, he was already the embodiment of 'authentic' romantic genius, as the following anecdote illustrates:

> An American one day rang the door-bell and asked if he could see Ibsen and Ibsen's study. Fru Ibsen told him it was impossible, but he came again the next day and when he claimed that he had come from America exclusively to see Ibsen, Fru Ibsen took pity on him. Here are her own words:
>
> 'I opened the door and the American came in and bowed. Ibsen stood in the door of his study and glared at him without saying a word. The American said nothing either. He crept carefully along the wall and slipped past Ibsen into the study. He went straight over to the writing-desk, picked up a pencil as quick as lightning and without saying a single word rushed out again.'[37]

Whether this episode is genuine or embellished, it reveals Bergliot Ibsen's awareness of the advertising value of Ibsen's romantic pose. Halvdan Koht has noted that the playwright was almost remarkably shrewd in the marketing of his work,[38] and his romantic mask may well have been part of his self-advertising strategy, just as the pose of the dandy and aesthete served Wilde, or that of the scholar was adopted by Poe, each pose being an artistic exaggeration, or a form of self-(re-)creation reflecting a partial truth or artistic preference. As a large-

ly self-taught writer of a minor European culture, romanticism seemed the more befitting attitude; as an artist living in self-imposed exile and reluctant to get involved in the political and social debates of the time, unlike his much-admired contemporary Björnson, he was better suited to the role of romantic outsider. The romantic mask was subsequently adopted and maintained throughout his life. Ibsen posed for the benefit of Edmund Gosse and others as an author in whose study no books could be found, apart from the Bible – yet all he had to do was to take a few steps into his wife's boudoir, or into his son's study, to reach the plagiarist's paradise. For Suzannah was 'a veritable bookworm' and the step-daughter of the Norwegian playwright Magdalene Thoresen.[39] His son, Sigurd, was also a writer, acquainted with the latest philosophical and artistic trends. The literary propensities of his immediate family were acknowledged by Ibsen, in the remark: 'I don't read books; I let my wife and Sigurd do that'.[40] Suggesting, of course, that his romanticism or originality was to be taken no more literally than the dandy's vicarious living, as summed up in the seminal *fin-de-siècle* maxim: 'As for living, our servants will do that for us' – Villiers de l'Isle-Adam maxim from his play *Axel*, that had made a powerful impression on W.B. Yeats and on John Addington Symonds. Like Wilde's dandyism, Ibsen's romanticism was a theatrical construct.

It is possible that Suzannah and Sigurd did most of Ibsen's reading for him, employed in the manner of the Master-Builder's helpers – or in the manner of Dumas' *nègres* and Zola's *documentalistes*. Georg Brandes, whose influence is occasionally acknowledged, with a generosity thoroughly unusual in Ibsen, was also one of his collaborators, introducing him to the latest philosophical and critical trends. Ibsen also had considerable professional experience of the theatre, as stage-manager of the Norwegian theatre in Bergen (1851–57), where he had staged many plays by Scribe and other popular dramatists, and as artistic director of the Norwegian theatre in Christiania (1857–64). Nor was he unacquainted with the works of August Strindberg, whose portrait he kept in his study, willing himself to work, so as to overtake his once admiring disciple. Yet the erasure of intertextual traces – or, rather, Ibsen's creation of a personal romantic myth – has been so successful that his plays are only infrequently and most tentatively related to those of his contemporaries. In his earlier drama, critics have had no difficulty in tracing the influence of the well-made plays, and of Scribe in particular, as indeed the annexation of themes and innovations from contemporary Norwegian drama, including that of Magdalene Thoresen and Björnstjerne Björnson.[41]

Yet the consensus seems to be that with *A Doll's House*, Ibsen left conventional drama, as William Archer puts it, in 'that famous scene of Nora's revolt and departure, in which he himself may be said to have made his exit from the school of Scribe, banging the door behind him'.[42] This is precisely as Ibsen would have it; yet in his late drama, he constantly returns to the impossibility of solitary authorship and to the unethical aspects of romantic creation.

The 'red thread' which runs through three of his late plays is the powerful manifestation of the romantic artist's desire, poetically understated by Yeats as the wish to build the world anew ('The Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart'). In *Ghosts* (1881), an apparently earnest Ibsen had manifested his omnipotence by burning to the ground all the false idols, that is, the religious and moral conventions as embodied in the Orphanage built to honour the memory of a degenerate patriarch. The gesture itself was strikingly theatrical and 'old school', which did not prevent either Ibsen's admirers or his detractors from regarding this play as the height of avant-garde, or degenerate, sophistication. In *Hedda Gabler* (1890), a fascinating protagonist in whom some of the critics have not failed to recognize a self-portrait, throws into the fire an allegedly highly original manuscript for the fault of being neither by nor about her.[43] In *The Master Builder* (1892), a fire whose cause remains doubtful destroys conventions and tradition, as embodied in the old family house, and all personal attachments: since his children die as an indirect result of the fire, and his wife is reduced to a reproachful shadow, the artist is given both the actual and emotional space needed to concentrate on his work.

The familiar classical arguments, that is, the scarcity of exalted roles and of conceivable combinations, are used by the romantically-minded Ibsen to justify not serene annexation, but the violent destruction of the past to enable a new creative project. 'I am burning your child', Hedda cries,[44] and 'There isn't all that much room to spare round here ... I'll never give way to anybody! Never of my own free will!', the master builder protests,[45] echoing the feelings of Ibsen who was forced to the very end of his career to share all authorial honours with the other national playwright, Björnstjerne Björnson.

Ibsen's unquestionable artistic achievement would seem to suggest that the romantic ideal of authorship was still valid and enabling, as late as the 1890s. Yet, as this analysis will reveal, *Hedda Gabler* and *The Master Builder* are at least as much insightful critiques and parodies as they are a fulfilment of romantic authorial fantasies. Shaw's comment, in relation to 'De Profundis', could be extended to Ibsen: he was too

great a dramatist not to perceive the ironies, indeed the absurdity, of his romantic attitude.[46] By objectifying it, he worked his way towards classical serenity. In *Hedda Gabler*, the romantic-classical conflict has not been solved, and the interest which attaches to the play, one of the most frequently performed, is at least partly due to its profound ambivalence. In *The Master Builder*, perhaps his most overtly autobiographical play, Ibsen finally renounces romanticism and joins the classicist camp.

Hedda Gabler, like the other plays discussed in this chapter, portrays the artist as criminal in the most flattering light. Overly impressed with Ibsen's romanticism and independence from other people's literature, critics have related the play to feminist politics, to the study of female hysteria, and even indicated the real-life models of the protagonists.[47] The most influential early critics, including Georg Brandes, William Archer and Henry James, saw it as a psychological study, a view reinforced in most performances of *Hedda Gabler*.[48] Such interpretations are at odds with the elliptical dialogue, with the dream-like atmosphere of the play, with the disruptions of realism by 'farce' and 'fantastic' elements, perceived by the self-conscious characters. The fantastic atmosphere is maintained throughout the play, the classical characters being constantly seen through the eyes of the romantic and rendered ludicrous.

Hedda Gabler resembles no woman so much as the *fin-de-siècle* artist, whose dream of beauty is spoilt by self-consciousness, whose creativity is impaired by the absence of beautiful surroundings and of an imaginative, empathetic audience. Her vision is so fragmented as to border on farce and cliché: there's the 'vine-leaves in his hair' metaphor, the highly theatrical game with the pistols and, of course, the romantic, yet also histrionic, suicide, preceded by a bow to her audience and by a sly joke for Judge Brack – the Philistine critic? Yet Hedda finds the strength for what she hopes is a significant romantic gesture: the burning of Ejlert's manuscript. The climax of the romantic fantasy has been read psychologically, as 'displaced aggression against the child she herself unwillingly carries'[49] and as the expression of her tragic, or merely New Woman egotism. Real-life precedents have been found in Ibsen's anger on the sale of his early manuscripts after his departure from Norway, and in the burning of the musical score of a symphony by the jealous wife of a Norwegian composer.[50]

Yet there is another, all too obvious explanation: Hedda Gabler by the fire, anxiously peering through a manuscript not by or about her and then burning it, is the fulfilment of Ibsen's authorial dream: the clearing of imaginative space for oneself, the negation of groundbreaking, canon-shaping texts not written by one. Hedda Gabler, like

Mrs Cheveley, Prosper/Suzanne and the Strange Lady, is a thief guilty, as Jörgen phrases it, of 'misappropriation of lost property'.[51] Yet she is also strikingly different: she burns the manuscript without having read it. For a moment, she takes the papers out of the package and appears to contemplate the classical alternative, yet in the next she is a god-inspired Fury: 'I am burning your child, Thea ...'

There may be a more 'beautiful' reason for this destructiveness than the mere pangs of authorial jealousy: Hedda burns a manuscript all too redolent of domestic collaboration to enable a grander romantic project, to free an imaginative space for Jörgen – rather unlikely – or for Ejlert. Her theft and destruction of the manuscript is further justified by the fact that it has already been stolen once, by Thea. Ibsen's distrust of collaborative authorship emerges fully in the final scene with Thea and Tesman. Her destruction may or should be the first step to a new creation; from a symbolic perspective, the burning of the manuscript and her influence on Ejlert may be interpreted as Dionysian rather than hysterical and revengeful.

Having indulged romantic fantasy thus far, Ibsen undercuts it, in the final scenes of the play, in which the romantic characters disappear through suicide and accidental death, allowing the classicists to pair off and produce more durable work. Hedda's gesture is shown to be futile, leading only to classical annexation and triumph. Jörgen, rather than taking over the imaginative space, decides to reconstruct the manuscript, pleasantly remarking: 'this putting other people's papers in order ... that's just the sort of thing I'm good at'.[52] The manuscript once described even by the unimaginative scholar as the fruit of an extraordinary inspiration and as impossible to rewrite, can perhaps be reassembled after all, even in the absence of its author. Ejlert's manuscript had been as intensively theatrical and emphatically alive as its author. It had been spectacularly introduced by Ejlert, who, in describing its contents to Ejlert, could not help unwrapping the papers and ruffling through them – a curious enough gesture, recalling Wilde's aphorism on the sensationalism of one's diary, and a gesture suggestive of romantic egotism. Its loss had been represented as equivalent to a loss of self, the manuscript being claimed as a child, by Thea and Ejlert, the preferred romantic metaphor. Its very disappearance was apt to be mythologized, as its author told Thea that he had torn it up: 'Into a thousand pieces. And scattered them out into the fjord'.[53] Yet the romantic scaffolding is dismantled in the final pages, which reveal the manuscript to be just a text, ripe for deconstruction and reconstruction.

The ending of the play is uncertainly balanced between a comic and

a tragic reading: there is something decidedly sinister, as well as improbable, about the collaboration of Thea and Jörgen, as she takes the manuscript notes out of what must be an unusually capacious skirt-pocket. When Wilde parodies this fantasy of romantic authorship, with the confusion of children and manuscripts, in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (as noted by Kerry Powell[54]), he is fulfilling the comic potential which Ibsen himself perceived and had already exploited in *The Master Builder.*

It is in this play that Ibsen becomes reconciled with dramatic practice, and provides his most insightful critique of the romantic ideal. The change is revealed already in the title, which handsomely acknowledges what he had so far strenuously denied, and what Ibsen criticism has still failed to grasp fully, i.e. the affinities between his drama and the rest of nineteenth-century drama, which was typically imagined in architectural metaphors. Ibsen's detractors were amazed by the admirers' recognition of the autobiographical aspect of a protagonist that was far from admirable, yet the master builder is clearly not meant as a representation of Ibsen, but rather of Ibsen as he might have been, had he ignored his dramatic instincts and followed only his romantic inclinations.

Solness calls himself a master builder rather than an architect because, like Ibsen himself, he is largely self-taught or lacks 'the proper training'.[55] This does not make him more original, instead it compels him to rely on the assistance of his former rival, the architect Brovik. His discretion on the founding myth of his authorship, i.e. the fire that was the starting point of his career, resembles the romantic artist's 'unconscious' annexation of other people's lives and ideas: 'Well, let's suppose I was to blame. In a sort of way ... For the whole thing. For everything ... And yet I may also be completely innocent'.[56] Ibsen's severest critique of the unethical aspects of romantic creativity is given in the master builder's version of the Prometheus myth: 'It feels as if my breast were a great expanse of raw flesh. And these helpers and servants go flaying off skin from other people's bodies to patch my wound. Yet the wound never heals ... never!'[57] The sacrifices are not only his own, yet the work for which they are demanded will only bear his name, and the imprint of his personality. His unethical actions, which include the destruction of his rival's career and the elaborate attempts to block the career of his rival's son, are easily justified by the romantic doctrine of the artist's irrepressible personality: 'There's nothing else I can do! I am what I am! and I can't change myself!'.[58] What troubles the master builder far more than these mere pangs of guilt is the deep-rooted romantic anxiety: that his work may not be so original after all; that having burnt to the ground the old creations to

make way for his own, he is now himself on the point of being replaced, his ideas on the verge of becoming 'old-fashioned rubbish'.[59] It is at this point that Hilde enters the stage; Ibsen's triumph over his romantic anxieties is demonstrated by his Wildean toying with theatrical convention: youth, allegorized as Hilde, knocks on the door at the precise moment when the master builder had expressed his fear of this very possibility. Hilde challenges Solness to climb as high as he builds, a metaphorical rendering of the idea that the artist's life should reflect the ideals of his books. Brandes has noted the absurdity of the proposition, and the skill with which Ibsen renders it plausible;[60] he can render it plausible because the connection between the authenticity of the work and the integrity of the life is crucial to romantic mythology. The master builder climbs into the tower, notwithstanding his giddiness, because it is a romantic artist's duty to live up to the image of greatness shadowed forth in his works. He falls, and is dashed into pieces because he must, like Orpheus, be torn to pieces by the baccantes, to make room for the next generations of dreamers, and builders of castles in the air.

In realistic terms, Hilde is a hysterical New Woman. It is not in those terms she should be thought of, but as the Muse, the 'Eternal Feminine' of Goethe's *Faust* which Ibsen had parodied in *Peer Gynt*.[61] It has been noted that various young women served as a model for Hilde, yet it might sooner be argued that the venerable Ibsen's flirtations with various young women were themselves modelled on Goethe's affair with Marianne von Willemer in his old age, interpreted by Ibsen as 'the rebirth of his youth'.[62] As the romantic artist had to be reconciled to his own mortality and the impermanence of his work, the encounter with youth was allegorized as an admiring young woman. The homage of youth to the grand old master – Hilde and the other ladies waving their scarves in celebration of his senile daring – distracts him from his ascent and causes his death. Yet for once, this destruction of the past to enable the present, the unweaving of some castles in the air for the weaving of others, is envisaged by Ibsen with classical serenity, with the master builder a caricature of his former self. In his swansong, Ibsen resolutely joins the only dramatic tradition, i.e. the classical. And with this poignant critique of romanticism penned by the greatest belated romantic, the debate is concluded in the theatre at least, with a decisive victory of the classicists.

NOTES

1. 'The Child Philosopher', *The Court and Society Review* 20 April 1887, reprinted in Oscar

Wilde, *Selected Journalism*, edited by Anya Clayworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press: Oxford's World Classics, 2004), p.78.

2. Victorien Sardou, *Mes plagiats! Réplique à Mario Uchard* (Paris: Imprimerie Universelle, 1882), p.123.
3. Danielopol, quoted in Ion Luca Caragiale, *Procesul Caragiale-Caion* (Bucure°ti: Muzeul Literaturii Române, 1998), pp.29–30.
4. Victorien Sardou, *A Scrap of Paper* [*Les pattes de mouche*], trans. Léonie Gilmour. In *Camille and Other Plays*, ed. Stephen S. Stanton (New York: Hill & Wang, 1969 [1957]), II, p.260.
5. Ibid., p.277.
6. Sardou, *Mes plagiats!*, p.102.
7. Ibid.
8. A.B. Walkley, Review of *An Ideal Husband*. *Speaker*, 11 (12 January 1895), pp.43–5. Reprinted in Karl Beckson (ed.), *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1970), pp.179–82 (p.182).
9. Ann Livermore, 'Goldoni, Wilde and Shaw: "Co-Inventors" of Comedy'. *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 53 (1979), pp.108–24.
10. Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Market Place: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986); Richard Dellamora, 'Oscar Wilde, Social Purity and *An Ideal Husband*'. *Modern Drama*, 37, 1 (Spring 1994), pp.120–38.
11. '*An Ideal Husband*' in Oscar Wilde, *Two Society Comedies: A Woman of No Importance* (ed. Ian Small) and *An Ideal Husband* (ed. Russell Jackson) (New Mermaids. London: Benn; New York: Norton, 1983), IV, p.242.
12. Ibid., I, p.170.
13. Ibid., III, p.225.
14. Ibid., III, p.185.
15. Ibid., III, p.235.
16. Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man', in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. Linda Dowling (London: Penguin, 2001), p.131.
17. Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*, II, p.177.
18. Ibid., II, p.270.
19. Ibid., IV, pp.268–9.
20. Ibid., III, p.238.
21. In keeping with decadent plagiarism principles of partial revelation and concealment, this note does not appear in most editions of Shaw's play. It appears, however, in *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* (London: Constable,1926), p.172.
22. Sardou, *Mes plagiats!*, pp.12ff.
23. G.B. Shaw, *Man of Destiny*, in *Works*, vol. 8 (London: Constable, 1930), pp.175–6.
24. Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*, II, p.162.
25. William Butler Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1961).
26. W.H. Auden, 'An Improbable Life'. *New Yorker*, 39, 3 (9 March 1963). Reprinted in Richard Ellmann (ed.), *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice, 1969), pp.116–37.
27. G.B. Shaw, *Man of Destiny*, in *Works*, vol. 8 (London: Constable, 1930), p.178.
28. Ibid., p.191.
29. Ibid., p.191.
30. Shaw, *Man of Destiny*, Vol. 8, p.178. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Donald L. Lawler (New York: Norton, 1988), XVII, p.149.
31. Quoted in Charles A. Berst, 'The Man of Destiny: Shaw, Napoleon and the Theater of Life'. *Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies* 7 (1987), p.94.
32. The tales told by Oscar Wilde were in some instances annexed and published by his friends (see Deirdre Toomey, 'The Story Teller at Fault: Oscar Wilde and Irish Orality'. In Jerusha McCormack [ed.]), *Wilde the Irishman* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998], pp.24–36 for details), while the degree of his involvement in the writing of the anonymous *Teleny* and of *Mr. and Mrs Daventry* by Frank Harris remains disputed. George Bernard Shaw was involved in the writing and revising of his biographies, which became autobiographies to a significant extent.
33. Bergliot Ibsen, *The Three Ibsens: Memories of Henrik Ibsen, Suzannah Ibsen and Sigurd Ibsen*, trans. Gerik Schjelderup (New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1952), p.33.
34. Ibid., p.154.
35. Norman Rhodes, *Ibsen and the Greeks: The Classical Greek Dimension in Selected Works of*

Henrik Ibsen as Mediated by German and Scandinavian Culture (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Press, 1995), pp.22–3.

36. Henrik Ibsen, *Letters and Speeches*, ed. Evert Sprinchorn (London: Macgibbon, 1965), p.330.
37. Ibsen, *The Three Ibsens*, p.112.
38. Halvdan Koht, *The Life of Ibsen*, trans. Ruth Lima McMahon and Hanna Astrup Larsen (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), vol.2, pp.313–15.
39. Ibsen, *The Three Ibsens*, p.15.
40. Quoted in Koht, *The Life of Ibsen*, vol.2, p.172.
41. Ibsen's Norwegian and Danish sources are perhaps most fully discussed by Brian Downs, *Ibsen: The Intellectual Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946); Georg Brandes's essays of 1867 and 1882 address the intertextuality of the earlier plays, in *Henrik Ibsen: A Critical Study. With a 42 page essay on Björnstjerne Björnson* (New York: Blom, 1964 [1899]). The intertexts most commonly admitted for Ibsen are Kierkegaard's writings (Brandes), Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and, most persuasively in contemporary criticism, the Greek tragedies (Brian Johnston, *The Ibsen Cycle: The Design of the Plays from Pillars of Society to When We Dead Awaken* [University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1992 revised edn], and Rhodes, *Ibsen and the Greeks*).
42. Henrik Ibsen, *Collected Works*, trans. A.G. Chater. Introduction by William Archer (London: Heinemann, 1912), vol.VI, p.xxii.
43. The autobiographical traits of Hedda Gabler are perhaps most persuasively discussed in Michael Meyer, *Henrik Ibsen*. Vol. 3. *The Top of a Cold Mountain: 1883–1906* (London: Hart-Davis, 1971), and are also mentioned in Koht, *The Life of Ibsen*, vol.2, p.254, and Harold Clurman, *Ibsen* (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp.162–6.
44. *Hedda Gabler* in Henrik Ibsen, *Four Major Plays: A Doll's House, Ghosts, Hedda Gabler and The Master Builder*, trans. James McFarlane and Jens Arup (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1981]), III, p.246.
45. *The Master Builder* in ibid., I, p.273.
46. 'De Profundis was de profundis indeed: Wilde was too good a dramatist to throw away so powerful an effect; but none the less it was de profundis in excelsis. There was more laughter between the lines of that book than in a thousand farces by men of no genius. Wilde, like Richard (III) and Shakespeare, found in himself no pity for himself. There is nothing that marks the born dramatist more unmistakably than the discovery of comedy in his own misfortunes almost in proportion to the pathos with which the ordinary man announces their tragedy. I cannot for the life of me see the broken heart in Shakespear's latest works ... Is it not clear that to the last there was in Shakespear an incorrigible divine levity, an inexhaustible joy that derided sorrow?'(Shaw, Preface, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, in *Works*, vol. 13, pp.220–1)
47. The real-life models for Ibsen's characters are mentioned in William Archer's introduction to Ibsen, *Collected Works*, vol.XII, and are discussed in Meyer, *Henrik Ibsen*, as in most of the critical studies.
48. Frederick J. Marker, *Ibsen's Lively Art: A Performance Study of the Major Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.171–2.
49. Sally Ledger, *Henrik Ibsen* (Plymouth: Northcote & British Council, 1999), p.39.
50. See Archer, Introduction, *Collected Works*, vol.XII.
51. *Hedda Gabler*, IV, p.250.
52. Ibid., IV, p.260.
53. Ibid., III, p.243.
54. Kerry Powell, 'Wilde and Ibsen'. ELT, 28, 3 (1985), pp.224–42.
55. *The Master Builder*, II, p.314.
56. Ibid., II, p.137.
57. Ibid., II, p.322.
58. Ibid., I, p.273.
59. Ibid., I, p.272.
60. Brandes, *Henrik Ibsen: A Critical Study*, p.112.
61. Peer Gynt's words, in German, are translated by Downs, *Ibsen: The Intellectual Background*, p.49 as 'the eternally feminine attracts us'. Cf. the final lines in Faust 'The Eternal-Feminine draws us on high'.
62. Henrik Ibsen, 'To Georg Brandes', 11 February 1895, *Letters*, pp.311–12, quoted in Rhodes, *Ibsen and the Greeks*, p.35.

6

Outside of 'The Prison-House of Realism' and into 'The Garden of Forking Paths': The Plagiarists Goethe, Wilde and D.M. Thomas

The Picture of Dorian Gray has been described as unoriginal from its first publication in magazine form to the present. Jerusha McCormack has shrewdly suggested that 'it is the book's lack of originality that is the secret of its power' and conferred on it the doubtful status of 'modern myth', arguing that 'everyone knows the story while the book itself lies rotting in the attic'.[1] Jeff Nunokawa has described it simply as 'boring',[2] while Edmund White's introduction to the Oxford Classics edition of 1999 notes Wilde's self-plagiarisms and his reliance on melodrama 'of the most conventional Victorian sort'.[3]

Yet plagiarism – in the restricted sense currently preferred by most readers, that is as verbatim unacknowledged copying – is not central to this novel or at least has not *yet* been found essential to it. The only instances of verbatim appropriation from other writers uncovered so far occur in the famous chapter of the poisonous book, in which Dorian Gray's 'infinite curiosity' is reflected in his collections of musical instruments, embroideries, precious stones and extravagant sins. The items are derived from previous texts: from Carl Engel's book on *Musical Instruments*, from Ernest Lefébure's book on embroideries, from J.A. Symonds's *Renaissance in Italy* and from a few other sources. Wilde's verbatim appropriations are fully documented in the Oxford edition of the *Complete Works*, which relies on Isobel Murray's findings in her 1974 edition of the novel.[4]

These borrowings would not have been exceptional in a late nineteenth-century context, when the separation between fiction and non-fictional writing was still sufficiently clear for the displacement of non-fictional material into fiction to be deemed creative. Such borrowings could be justified by naturalist writers as ensuring the authenticity of their account, as Oscar Wilde observed in 'The Decay of Lying':

> The ancient historians gave us delightful fiction in the form of fact; the modern novelist presents us with dull facts under the guise of fiction ... He has his tedious *document humain*, his miserable little *coin de la création*, into which he peers with his microscope. He is to be found at the Librairie Nationale, or at the British Museum, shamelessly reading up his subject. He has not even the courage of other people's ideas, but insists on going directly to life for everything.[5]

Émile Zola defended himself from the accusation of having plagiarized Denis Poulot's *Le sublime* in his novel *L'assomoir* by pointing out that his source was 'not a work of fiction, not a novel' and that to borrow from it was 'to borrow from real life'. To emphasize the absurdity of his accusers, he added: 'If it had been the fashion to acknowledge one's sources, at the end of novels, you may be certain that I would have quoted the work of Mr. Denis Poulot, among many others'.[6]

Zola, like Dumas père, even employed *documentalistes* to do the research for his novels; the plagiarism accusation above had been voiced by a disenchanted collaborator. Other celebrated novelists such as Balzac preferred to rely on their own copying from public accounts. Verbatim copying was not only a feature of realist fiction, but also of the scholarly romances such as Anatole France's *Thaïs*, a source for Wilde's *La Sainte Courtisane or The Woman Covered in Jewels*, whose English title hints at its plagiaristic, ornamental style, and of Gustave Flaubert's painstaking collage and distillation of countless ancient sources in *Salammbo* and in *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, one of Wilde's favourite novels.

The scholar, translator and folklorist Andrew Lang believed that the novelists' acknowledgment of non-fictional sources was pedantic, and could lead to embarrassment, should their sources be outdated.[7] Oscar Wilde's verbatim appropriations are thus grounded in the practice and theory of some of the most influential contemporary novelists and theorists, as Robert Merle has previously noted,[8] and they are justified by the only authorial intervention in the novel, paralleling Flaubert's unique authorial intervention in *Madame Bovary*: 'Is insincerity such a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by which we multiply our personalities'.[9] Wilde's appearance in the novel is as provocative as his onstage appearance after the performance of *Lady Windermere's Fan* and it paradoxically rejects Henry James's view of the novel as the reflection of the author's personality[10] – a definition which recalls Wordsworth's definition of poetry. Here, as in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, Wilde draws attention to his verbatim annexations. He invites readers to compare his transformation of sources to those of Gustave

Flaubert, the acknowledged master of decadent style, as praised by Walter Pater. Considerable space is dedicated to the descriptions of Dorian Gray's collection of jewellery, and collection of stories about jewels, which are also plagiarized from other sources. Robert MacFarlane has noted Wilde's irony in plagiarizing a passage on jewels, since plagiarism was traditionally valorized as jewel-setting and re-setting.[11] Yet this borrowed jewellery and glamour comes to re-establish or create one's recognizable identity: in the final, ironically autobiographical lines of the novel, Dorian Gray, suddenly looking aged and horrid, is identified solely on the basis of the rings he was wearing – much as Oscar Wilde's work was instantly recognizable through its extravagant style. But is it Dorian Gray lying on the floor, stabbed through the heart? Or simply one of his victims, thrown as deceptive bait to a moralizing public, while the unknowable Dorian Gray is allowed to leave the stage as mysteriously as Mrs Cheveley, sacrificing only his stolen trinkets?

The Picture of Dorian Gray was perceived as plagiaristic less on account of the verbatim passages – far more impressive to a post-modernist audience, influenced by today's stricter copyright regulations – than on account of its mixture of styles and genres, of its disconcerting switches of tone and style from one scene to the next and sometimes even from one page to the next. Critics have either dismissed the novel as an incoherent mosaic or attempted to provide unifying interpretations. The novel has been read as modern and autobiographical, perhaps marred by Wilde's timidity in defence of homosexual passion;[12] as part of the Gothic tradition and of the subgenre of magic-picture stories,[13] perhaps spoilt by the excess of aesthetic details superfluous to the story;[14] as a combination of the Gothic and the 'dandy instruction' novel, partly spoilt by the introduction of incongruous comic scenes and of implausible lower-class characters;[15] more recently, as an 'Irish national tale'.[16]

What these interpretations fail to recognize is that the novel's ostensible lack of stylistic unity and recognizable genre is the only suitable way of accomplishing Wilde's critical and creative purpose: which is to undermine confident and authoritative readings and ultimately, the reader's complacent belief in his/her own reality and in the world of facts and to re-establish the significance of a larger, trans-individualist world and of the neo-classical imagination that sustains it. My interpretation is thus related both to Michael Patrick Gillespie's recognition of the novel's complex, anti-authoritative structure[17] and to Michael Helfand and Philip Smith's reading of it as re-instating an anti-individualist philosophy.[18]

The novel resists the illusion of an autonomous, perfectly constructed world just as it resists the illusion of psychological autonomy and stable identity; the realist reading, maintained by the protagonists throughout, is ironically disrupted by the intrusion of fragments from other textual worlds such as the Gothic and the fantastic, just as the personality of Dorian Gray himself, plausible enough at first as that of a gorgeous and impetuous young man, shifts from one scene to the next and from speaker to speaker and is eventually glimpsed only as an ornament – the stage property of the rings. In 'The Decay of Lying', Gilbert had insisted that 'modernity of form and modernity of subject matter are entirely and absolutely wrong', going as far as to set Dumas' *Vicomte de Bragelonne* above the novels of Balzac to prove this point.[19] The next year, *Dorian Gray* was published, featuring a musician, a painter, and a dandy, in up-to-the-minute London settings. This *volte-face* could be plausibly ascribed to the 'whim' invoked by the same Gilbert as the privilege of artistic temperament, but a different possibility is worth considering, namely, that Wilde recognized the strength of the 'realist prejudice', acknowledged by David Lodge in his essay 'The Novelist at the Crossroads'.[20] He recognized also that any novel explicitly falling outside the frame would remain marginal, a curiosity at best read by the few, with no power to stem the decay of lying. His solution was to take the realist frame, to imitate it and to render it distinctly implausible – and comic.

Apart from all the other genres with which it is associated, *Dorian Gray* lends itself to a realistic reading – this is indeed the version preferred for the most part by the three male protagonists. This is how Lord Henry pretends to read everything, and how Dorian Gray and Basil Hallward manage to read events for the most part. There are a few, slight, difficulties, with the realist interpretation. In Chapter II, the protagonist offers his soul in return for eternal youth. In Chapter VII, the pact is sealed and confirmed by the change in the portrait. In Chapter VIII, the protagonist is informed by his companion that his child-like lover has committed suicide, through no fault of his own, and he is taken to the Opera, the sooner to forget this tragedy. In Chapter XVIII, the young girl's brother, who had attempted to avenge her, is killed in a shooting accident. In the final chapter, the guilt-ridden protagonist commits suicide. The plot, apart from the final chapter, bears obvious resemblances to Goethe's *Faust*, as Dominic Rossi noted.[21] It also appears to contain unmistakable elements of the marvellous and the supernatural.

This, however, is not at all how Dorian Gray reads it. A realist

explanation is attempted for all of these events. The pact, for instance, is regarded by himself as only a 'mad wish'[22] and by Lord Henry as part of an absurdly melodramatic scene, unsuitable for offstage representation.[23] The change in the painting is also open to a realist explanation:

> Might not there be some curious scientific reason for it all? If thought could exercise its influence upon a living organism, might not thought exercise an influence upon the dead and inorganic things? Nay, without thought or conscious desire, might not things external to ourselves vibrate in unison with our moods and passions, atom calling to atom in secret love or strange affinity?[24]

Realism and egoism are, one notes, indistinguishable in this passage, reflecting the views of Baudelaire on realist fiction as self-indulgent and unimaginatively narcissistic.[25] The other Faustian events above also lend themselves to realist interpretations: the death of Sybil Vane may be the result of accidental poisoning, as it is presented in the newspaper account. The death of James Vane may be an accident, as Lord Henry states. This leaves only the changes in the painting as evidence of the marvellous or supernatural at work, but it is worth remembering that Dorian Gray is the only one who witnesses these and he may be 'mad', as Basil suspects. Basil is the only other person to be allowed a glimpse of the changed portrait, and the revelation is ambiguously presented:

> Good heavens! It was Dorian Gray's own face that he was looking at! The horror, whatever it was, had not entirely spoiled that marvellous beauty. There was still some gold in the thinning hair and some scarlet on the sensual mouth. The sodden eyes had kept something of the loveliness of their blue, the noble curves had not yet completely passed away from chiseled nostrils and from plastic throat. Yes, it was Dorian himself.
>
> But who had done it? He seemed to recognize his own brush-work, and the frame was his own design. The idea was monstrous, yet he felt afraid. He seized the lighted candle, and held it to the picture. In the left-hand corner was his own name, traced in long letters of bright vermilion.[26]

What Basil Hallward recognizes is the resemblance of this portrait to the portrait of Dorian Gray, the frame, and the signature, and this is done in the light of a half-burnt candle, rather than of the lamp which remains on the table. The frame may have been substituted, the signature forged, and the portrait may be one of the family portraits. This would explain the finding of the original portrait in the final chapter. The man found in the attic is identified as Dorian Gray solely on the

basis of the rings he is wearing. He may not be Dorian Gray at all, but simply one of his victims.

This realist interpretation of the unfolding of events is possible without being particularly plausible or meaningful. These, incidentally, had been Gilbert's main objections to realism and, as the plot unfolds, the novel's critique of realism becomes increasingly pointed. The change in the painting, as witnessed by Dorian Gray, is a turning-point, for the realist reading is presented not as the only one available, but as the one chosen by a protagonist who is the readers' contemporary:

> But the reason [for the change in the painting] was of no importance. He would never again tempt by a prayer any terrible power. If the picture was to alter, it was to alter. That was all. Why inquire too closely into it?[27]

At the crossroads, Dorian Gray has to choose between the realist and the marvellous reading, and prefers the realist not as the more plausible, but as the more convenient. The magic painting is introduced by Wilde not for the hocus-pocus of the supernatural tales, but to make a point which could not be as effectively made otherwise: the sheer scale of modern unimaginativeness. The contemporary Faust, confronted with an extraordinary event, chooses not to 'inquire too closely into it' – to concentrate only on its practical, material benefits.

Throughout the novel, Dorian Gray's dogged adherence to realism is the main source of comedy: while clearly part of a textual universe in which everything is possible, he behaves as if he were bound by the strict laws of probability governing the 'real' readers of fiction. After catching a glimpse of James Vane outside the conservatory, Dorian reasons that he may be merely a projection of his guilt:

> But perhaps it had been only his fancy that had called vengeance out of the night, and set the hideous shapes of punishment before him. Actual life was chaos, but there was something terribly logical in the imagination. It was the imagination that set remorse to dog the feet of sin. It was the imagination that made each crime bear its misshapen brood. In the common world of fact the wicked were not punished, nor the good rewarded.[28]

After the murder of Basil Hallward, Dorian seeks oblivion in Gautier's *Émaux et camées*, which opens at the poem on the murderer Lacenaire, yet he passes on, with a shiver, to read the poem on Venice. And, despite having the infernal powers at his disposal, he

compels the scientist Alan Campbell to destroy the body in the clumsily 'realistic' manner which Gilbert had criticized in 'The Decay of Lying'.[29] Indeed, Dorian Gray pushes prudence so far as to concoct an alibi, and to appear at a society dinner after the murder, and he behaves throughout like an ordinary criminal in an ordinary detective novel rather than as the Hellenic ideal he would occasionally like to portray.

The realism of Dorian Gray reflects that of the readers outside the novel. The identification between characters and readers, the main source of egotistical pleasure within the realist novels, is here used to stir the reader with the suspicion of his/her own unreality. *Mise-en-abyme* has been analysed by Borges:

> Why does it disturb us that the map be included in the map and the thousand and one nights in the book of the *Thousand and One Nights*? Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, the readers or spectators, can be fictions.[30]

The protagonists of *Dorian Gray* are uncannily like the readers outside the novel: equally confident in the separation between fact and fiction, equally delighted to find themselves mirrored and interpreted in art and fiction. The preface of the novel, for instance, is echoed by the characters of the book. On a first reading, the preface appears reassuringly witty, a sharp marker of status and genre, setting Wilde's novel at a stroke above the magic picture stories its title might have evoked, and above the commercial 'aesthetic novel' genre associated with Ouida. Yet some of these aphorisms are subsequently uttered by the characters of the novel. Basil's 'There's nothing that Art cannot express', 'We live in an age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography', and 'It often seems to me that art conceals the artist far more completely than it ever reveals them' all echo, and in some instances divert, aphorisms of the preface.[31] What had appeared to anticipate our reactions to the work of art equally describes the characters' reaction to the work of art within the work of art, creating precisely the unease described by Borges. The seemingly authoritative 'that is all' of the preface is echoed by the male protagonists in support of various (self-) deceiving statements. Thus, Basil defends his fascination with Dorian Gray: 'He is the suggestion, as I have said, of a new manner. I find him in the curves of certain lines, in the loveliness and subtleties of certain colours. That is all'.[32] Dorian Gray acquits himself of any blame: 'If the picture was to alter, it was to alter. That was all'.[33]

And Lord Henry discards all responsibility both as a lender of poisonous books and as a would-be novelist: 'The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame. That is all'.[34] What had briefly seemed to be the voice of the God-like narrator is now deconstructed as perhaps merely the arbitrary collage of divergent voices, whose desire for closure, evoked by the leitmotif 'that is all' – the agnostic equivalent of 'amen' – ironically mirrors our own. Even the novel's ambiguous ending, when the 'real Dorian Gray' is perhaps redeemed through the portrait, is ironically anticipated in Lord Henry's comment 'Art had a Soul, but Man had not'. This line occurs in the enlarged version of the novel, which spectacularly stages its origin and reveals the protagonists' lack of imaginative empathy. In his final dialogue with Dorian Gray who is playing Chopin, Lord Henry causes the music to jar by negligently asking this question: 'By the way, Dorian, what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose – how does the quotation run – his own soul?'[35]

Assuming that Lord Henry is indeed unaware of the relevance of his words, this would be one of the extraordinary ironies of a novel in which neither Mephistopheles nor Faust possesses an imaginative understanding of guilt or redemption. To many of the readers outside the novel, these words from the Bible would also be a mere quotation – these readers may not possess a deeper reality than that of the novel's protagonists, than that of Dorian Gray, self-defined – again through quotation, this time from Shakespeare: 'Like the painting of a sorrow,/A face without a heart'.

Wilde gratefully acknowledges his predecessors in the use of disruptive quotations: Dorian Gray is seen leafing through Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (1753), the novel in which playful quotation and discreet allusion first suggest and finally crystallize for the reader the tragic aspect of a plot and of the protagonists at the time associated with the burlesque: while Des Grieux, with the benefit of hindsight, relates his romance with oblique allusions to Greek tragedy, viewing himself as the toy of the gods, the theatre-loving Manon can only unwittingly refer to it: she playfully – and prophetically – paraphrases the lines of Racine's Ériphile to protest her innocence, and she will eventually turn out to be as guilty and as capable of stirring our pity, as Racine's heroine.[36]

The title echoes Disraeli's *Vivian Grey*, the novel wherein quotations introduce a wealth of Romantic and Gothic motifs into the world of (allegedly) sophisticated political intrigue. Thanks to playful allusion, Vivian Grey can both hint at the intensity of his political ambitions and propose to a witty young lady in the Romantic guise of Lucifer without

rendering himself ridiculous; through a Gothic tale of double, Mrs Lorraine hints at her affinities with the young dandy and at her genuinely archaic character: she will later turn out to be 'a creature guilty of that which, even in this guilty age, I thought was obsolete', an attempt to poison Vivian.[37] In these novels, quotation and allusion are employed to coax the reader into a suspension of disbelief, rendering credible textual worlds which would have initially been deemed incompatible with modern fiction. *Manon* ends on a purely tragic note, while the last part of *Vivian Grey* is unapologetically romantic: the quotations become gradually more credible and eventually absolutely true. Finally, the late nineteenth-century Gothic novel had also employed the gradual disruption of the realist frame rather than directly plunging into the marvellous. What renders *Dorian Gray* a thoroughly modern novel is that the realist frame is not disrupted in order to be replaced by another: that of the fantastic, of Gothic or of romance, but that the different generic possibilities are problematized without any of them being ultimately chosen. In the printed version of the novel as, incidentally, in the printed version of 'The Garden of Forking Paths', the protagonist adopts the unimaginatively realist solution, despite glimpsing a fictional world of infinite possibility – again, as an ironic reflection on the choice of the readers outside the novel. But this, as Borges writes, is just one of the versions of the tale. That Wilde's view was similar to Borges' is suggested by his divergent comments on Dorian Gray, associated on various occasions with Everyman, with his ideal self, and with Alfred Douglas.[38] What Dorian Gray is, and becomes, depends on the author and, to a large extent in this writerly novel, on the reader. As Lord Henry remarks:

> He was a marvellous type, too, this lad, whom by so curious a chance he had met in Basil's studio, or could be fashioned into a marvellous type, at any rate ... There was nothing that one could not do with him. He could be made a Titan or a toy.[39]

That Dorian Gray, in the infinite world of textual possibilities should, like Borges's protagonist Yu Tsun, become nothing more than a prudent murderer reflects, not the limits of fiction, but only the limits of the realist imagination.

Wilde's use of ironic mise en abyme to shatter the reader's sense of identity as well as the perceived fragmentariness of the work and the elusiveness of the protagonist, used to emphasize the incompleteness of the modern egotistical vision, are modelled on those of its main intertext, Goethe's *Faust*. *Faust* also rejects the subject's autonomy just as it

resists unitary meaning. The work's artificiality and fragmentariness is proclaimed in the Prologue in the Theatre, which precedes the Prologue in Heaven and, like the preface to Dorian Gray, anticipates the ways in which the work would be read, depriving readers of their sense of authority and autonomy. *Faust*, like Dorian Gray, was unusually fragmented and derivative, criticized by that master of collage Samuel Taylor Coleridge as lacking organic unity, as only a sequence of 'magic-lantern pictures'.[40] Byron famously pointed out its indebtedness to Shakespeare and the Bible and the significant influence of Calderon's play *El Magico* was urged with such a degree of probability that G.H. Lewes found it necessary to dedicate several pages of his chapter on *Faust* to disproving the accusation.[41] Just as Goethe's text recognizably merges with other texts, fusing Christian and classical tradition and German folklore, Faust himself seems to degenerate from the initially vivid figure of romantic egotism, prone by turns to measureless ambition and dejection, into caricature in some of the scenes modelled on the medieval legends. And, as G.H. Lewes noted, he vanishes into mere abstraction in the second part of the tragedy, just as Dorian Gray 'never quite solidifies', in the judgment of Jullian Hawthorne among the early perceptive commentators.[42] The illusions of the text and of the subject's autonomy are in both cases thwarted. And, as in *Dorian Gray*, Faust's perspective matches to a large extent that of his most sophisticated, romantically-biased readers – until the final scene, when the incompleteness of his vision is revealed with an irony that seems to shatter the reader's own confidence. For the sounds that Faust mistakes for the building of the new world – a world that would praise him as its creator – is really only the sound of his own grave being dug by the spirits of the dead, commanded by Mephistopheles; the modern artist and scholar seems even to lack the self-awareness of his medieval counterpart, dragged towards damnation without qualms and only redeemed in *coup de théâtre* fashion, by the intervention of divine grace and of the mysterious 'Eternal Feminine'.

In rejecting the originality understood as the absence of literary sources and the illusion of the autonomous and completed work of art, Goethe and Wilde manage to free their readers, however briefly, from the illusion of a familiar, knowable reality and of their own excessive personality – and of letting them imagine that 'we were all suddenly someone else'.

The same feat is successfully attempted in D.M. Thomas's novel *The White Hotel*, which enables readers to imagine that the suffering of others – of people one has never met – is nevertheless both significant

and real. The author's account of the genesis of the novel, as formulated in the autobiographical fiction *Memories and Hallucinations*, reads from the romantic point of view like a confession of plagiarism and self-plagiarism.[43] D.M. Thomas admits that the starting point of his novel was the reading of a Holocaust survivor's testimony in Anatoli's historical novel *Babi Yar*, which he felt the need to re-tell. He had the idea of linking this testimony with his own, previously published poem 'The Woman to Sigmund Freud'; he then turned to the Freudian case studies in order to achieve his pastiche of Freudian style. The core of the novel completed, he added the prologue as an afterthought, to facilitate the reader's plunge into a text which would have otherwise begun, too problematically, with a verse fantasy. And he wrote up the final chapter for the purposes of artistic symmetry. This account appears to combine the reviled characteristics of 'lack of genuine coherence',[44] lack of imaginative resources leading to patch-writing and to perpetual reliance on other's texts. Yet from the classical point of view, it is a suitably self-critical account of writing as revision or reinterpretation of texts which are themselves rewritings.

Freud's studies are translations of the patients' fantasies and nightmares into rational discourse, open to the same charges of illegitimate appropriation as *The White Hotel*. The founding patient of psychoanalysis, 'Fräulein Anna O' (Bertha Pappenheim) had never given permission for the publication of her case, and was perhaps even unaware it had been published; of Freud's five major case studies, two (the case of 'Dora' and the case of Schreber) had been published without the consent of their subjects.[45] The concealment of the patients' authorship, the fictionalization of their biographical details, although justified by the need to safeguard their privacy, also effectively ensure the analyst's control over both the selection and the interpretation of data. Furthermore, the Freudian case studies in particular reveal a conflict between the aspiration for scientific objectivity and their author's artistic inclinations, clearly recognized by his readers, who granted him the Goethe prize for literature, as D.M. Thomas notes in *The White Hotel*. Sigmund Freud himself was fully aware of this conflict and avoided reading the works of Nietzsche so as to preserve his authorial independence.

Anatoli's *Babi Yar*, the other important intertext, is presented by its author as a faithful transcription of historical events, and is similarly undermined by a largely unacknowledged conflict between the intention of testifying on behalf of the victims of Holocaust and the author's ambitions of producing a readable novel. Subtitled 'A Document in the Form of a Novel', it is as problematic in its commitment to realism as

Freud's studies in their alleged commitment to scientific objectivity. Although it is cited, when at all, as if it were a historical document, *Babi Yar* remains a novel, filled with remarks about style and with appeals to the reader, sometimes both at once, as in this painfully self-conscious passage:

> A Word from the Author
> A REMINDER. Well, so you are reading these stories. In some cases perhaps you have just skimmed through unmoved. In others, perhaps (and that would be my fault) you have been bored and flicked on to the later chapters. After all, you think, it's only fiction. But I must keep on reminding you that nothing in this book is fictitious. IT ALL HAPPENED. Nothing has been invented and nothing exaggerated. It all happened with real, live people, and there is not the slightest element of literary fantasy in this book.
>
> There is of course a certain tendentiousness. I am certainly biased in writing because, despite all my efforts to be objective, I remain a living person and not a computer.[46]

The novel is also replete with literary references and at times overwhelmed by metaphors, some of which are repeated in *The White Hotel*, as when the young protagonist realizes that 'The world was just one big Babi Yar'.[47] In one instance, Anatoli cannot resist the novelistic instinct, offering first a fictional reworking and subsequently the 'true account' of the events which led to the arrest and assassination of the entire Dynamo football team.[48]

The annexation of these texts in *The White Hotel* is simultaneously a fulfilment of their latent artistic intentions and an implicit critique or revisionary reading of their authoritative assumptions through transformation into ambivalent fiction.

D.M. Thomas uses psychoanalytical methods and terminology, sometimes closely following the Freudian texts, to create a vivid, if elusive, protagonist. She is first glimpsed in Freud's and Sachs's fictional reading of her fantasies ('Prologue'), then 'directly' by the reader through her verse fantasy ('Don Giovanni'), thirdly through her own prose transformation rather than interpretation of the verse fantasy ('The Gastein Journal'), subsequently through Freud's rational re-ordering or translation of the same material ('Frau Anna G') and through her self-analysis ('The Health Resort'), after the end of her treatment. Her partial recovery enables her to resume her career as an opera singer and to assume the roles of second wife and adoptive mother, following her friend's death. The interpretation and self-interpretation barely started and still 'more

incomplete than most' end abruptly with Lisa's death at Babi Yar, in a section which relies extensively on the testimony of the Holocaust survivor Dina Pronicheva, as transcribed by Anatoli in his novel.

D.M. Thomas's reliance on the Freudian texts has been fully documented by Jeffrey Berman, who notes that 'Many of the sentences in Thomas' fictional psychiatric case study come straight from *Studies on Hysteria*'.[49] Berman reveals that the opening paragraph of 'Frau Anna G' is closely modelled on the opening of Freud's 'Fräulein Elisabeth von R', while the ending resembles the ending of the 'Miss Lucy von R' case. The discussions of patient resistance and of the consolation which the psychoanalyst may offer to the patient are taken almost verbatim by Thomas from Freud, as are many of Freud's general statements.

Yet Thomas's appropriation of Freud appears to have generated few objections: partly because the quotations, extracted from many different texts, would not have been identified by his readers, who had no clear perception of the extent of the borrowings; partly because of the perceived difference in genre, which rendered D.M. Thomas's practice justifiable, given the change of purpose and viewpoint, from scientific to literary text.

By contrast, his reliance on Anatoli's text has been criticized by many readers on contradictory grounds. The ambiguous nature of Anatoli's book, which is both a straightforward account and a novel – and how could it be both? – is reflected in the confusion of the plagiarism scandal. 'The Sleeping Carriage' section was criticized as textual appropriation, as the appropriation of a real experience and as the manipulation of the historical tragedy for a thinly disguised misogynistic fantasy.[50]

Because D.M. Thomas had cited Dina Pronicheva's testimony both in the acknowledgment pages, and in the text of the novel itself, most critics did not regard it as plagiarism in the technical sense, but as very close to it in both ethical and aesthetic terms. Richard Cross, although describing *The White Hotel* as 'the most compelling novel in the visionary Modernist mode to have come from the pen of an Englishman in 30 years',[51] pronounces 'The Sleeping Carriage' section 'substantially derivative',[52] insisting that D.M. Thomas may be granted 'only half the credit' for it.[53] Martin Amis writes with begrudging admiration of the novel's poetic, if 'perhaps over-rated' innovations, but insists that 'The Sleeping Carriage' is 'the best bit of the book and D.M. Thomas did not write it'.[54] Other critics dismiss it entirely and unreservedly as a 'superficially re-worked version of the historical account in Babi Yar',[55] or resort, like Alvin H. Rosenfeld, to the parallel column device as the supreme argument of its lack of value.[56]

From the romantic point of view, the sheer use of verbatim copying decides the question of authenticity and artistic merit; from the classical point of view it might yet be legitimated by artistic success. The sheer amount of critical energy spent on either demolishing or reconstructing *The White Hotel* by comparison to the virtual absence of criticism on *Babi Yar* would appear to confirm the success of the transformation: if much material is taken verbatim, it is much more powerful than in its original context because the whole novel is built as a foreshadowing of the holocaust, while in Anatoli it is only imperfectly glimpsed, alongside other historical events and private tragedies.

The White Hotel is composed in reverse order, according to the decadent principles formulated by Poe and extended by Borges to the novel in 'Narrative Art and Magic', wherein he states that the writer must pretend to be a magician, creating novels in which 'every lucid and determined event is a prophecy'.[57] D.M. Thomas starts his book accordingly with the death of Lisa at Babi Yar and then he composes her sexual fantasies, planting all the prophetic signs which remain undecipherable to readers as to the characters until too late.

As a result, the reader experiences a shock, as does the protagonist of the novel. The readers' response to D.M. Thomas's recycling and critique of scientifically-minded texts ultimately depends on their view of literature. If one subscribes to the Platonic dismissal of art as 'the reflection of a reflection', D.M. Thomas's manipulation of previous texts is profoundly immoral, since we are moved to mourn the death of a fictitious protagonist rather than that of the many real victims of the holocaust. This is the view of Emma Tennant: 'No writer has the right to take the experience of a real human being and attach it, for his or her own ends, to a made-up character, using the very words of that human being's testimony. Fact and fiction, reality and unreality, do not blend in this way; what has been produced instead is an oil-and-water mixture, a distinct whiff of moral unease'.[58] It is also echoed by many other readers, opposed to the whole genre of holocaust fiction.[59]

Yet from a non-mimetic perspective what occurs is not an appropriation, or a fictionalization, but a more adequate representation than in Anatoli's realistic transcription, which is merely insufficiently-, rather than non-fictionalized, as Linda Hutcheon has pointed out: 'already twice removed from any historical reality ... his version of her narrativisation of her experience'.[60]

The question is not whether rewriting is appropriate, but which type of rewriting can help the reader attain to an imaginative identification, however imperfect, with the experience of other human beings.

The answer, for D.M. Thomas, as for Wilde, is literature, which can alone incorporate all other interpretations as myth, defined by D.M. Thomas in the acknowledgment pages as 'a poetic, dramatic expression of a hidden truth'. Magali Cornier Michael believes that D.M. Thomas, while offering a persuasive critique of monomyths, falls himself prey to the temptation of authoritative discourse: there is the occasional 'moralising tone' of 'The Sleeping Carriage' section, and the movement from the individual Lisa to Lisa as a symbol of suffering womanhood.[61] Yet this movement from plausible to symbolic character also characterizes Goethe's *Faust* and Wilde's *Dorian Gray* which, like *The White Hotel*, attempt to tell a universally and spiritually relevant story and can only do so by gradually undermining the sense of the protagonist's – and the reader's – stable and autonomous identity. He adds that the final chapter, although ambivalently set either in the dying Lisa's mind or in Purgatory and thus not imposing a Christian perspective on the reader, nevertheless privileges it by its positioning.

Yet the authoritativeness of a fictional text, its orderly pattern and its narrative omniscience are known to be part of the fiction – and may be easily rejected by the reader. While Freud had aspired to solve the riddle of the human psyche or at least to supersede the interpretations and consolations of religion, and Anatoli had aimed to tell the truth, to testify as if 'under oath in the very highest court',[62] D.M. Thomas's aim is more modest and more artistic: neither to provide the full account of the unexplainable and largely unanalysable holocaust, nor to appropriate individual experience in the manner of Freud, but, by relying on these previous texts, to provide an imaginative identification with the suffering of a single human being, since 'human kind cannot bear too much reality'. The identification may be seen simply as the artist's gesture of solidarity – not unlike Yevtushenko's *Babi Yar* poem: 'I am each old man here shot dead/I am every child here shot dead./Nothing in me shall ever forget! ...'[63] or like the essay of Borges, titled 'I, A Jew'.[64] It may also be interpreted as a gesture of Christian solidarity. Richard Cross has noted that Lisa's death, preceded by the bayonet rape and by the soldiers' mockery, is modelled on the Biblical narrative of the crucifixion.

By imitating and then mocking the individualist and psychologizing ethos, Wilde and D.M. Thomas enlarge imaginative empathy; the plagiarism accusations are a measure of the shock felt by readers on being confronted with the possibility of a world not dominated by male rationality. Yet they undoubtedly found comfort in the answer given by Goethe to similar accusations:

> Lord Byron is only great as a poet; as soon as he reflects, he is a child. He knows not how to help himself against the stupid attacks of the same kind made upon him by his own countrymen. He ought to have expressed himself more strongly against them. 'What is there is mine', he should have said, and 'whether I got it from a book or from life, is of no consequence; the point is whether I have made a right use of it'.[65]

Goethe comes to mock in *Faust* his own previous romantic excesses:

> Godspeed, Original, in all your glory! –
> How stung you'd be to realise:
> Who can think anything, obtuse or wise,
> That ages back was not an ancient story, –
> But there's no threat in even such romantics,
> A few years hence this will have passed;
> Young must, for all its most outlandish antics,
> Still makes some sort of wine at last.[66]

The concluding metaphor again alludes to the unavoidability of plagiarism, evoking Sterne's tongue-in-cheek denunciation, itself plagiarized from Burton.[67]

Far more difficult than the imagined struggle with the predecessors is the achievement of updating the classical masterpieces by an exercise of the creative-critical imagination. *Faust* is the tragedy of modern egotism, of romantic inattentiveness to 'the visible world' and its conclusion is feminist and counter-romantic: Faust is saved not by his own genius, but by divine intercession and by the intercession of his lover, whose role replicates that of Dante's Beatrice. *Dorian Gray* glances at the horror of the materialist, literal imagination and at the Utopian possibilities it ignores. *The White Hotel* creates a feminist version of the crucifixion: the novel's saving grace is that of the female artist, who unites imaginative empathy and analytical ability, extraordinary sexual inventiveness with the assumption of symbolic motherhood, as she adopts her friend's child and sustains and encourages him until the moment of his death at Babi Yar.

All three texts thrive on fragmentariness and ambiguities – up to the ambivalent ending – which are used to mirror the incoherence of the readers' own identity and succeed in unsettling the comfortable egotism of realist fiction. All three display a dazzling variety of styles and innovative techniques to render the very worn – and no longer so commonplace – belief in the soul's existence slightly more plausible and above all suggestive. Retelling Biblical episodes in modernist and feminist fashion, they serenely disregard the technicalities of verbatim originality to achieve the newness of masterpieces.

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25. Baudelaire, 'Théophile Gautier', p.iv.
26. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Chap. XIII, p.121.
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7

Let Us Plagiarize Wildly

THE VERY BRIEF HISTORY OF PLAGIARISM (AND OF LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP)

The pre-romantic stage of literature was conversational and most of it was predictably courteous, people telling each other what they all knew perfectly well. 'Isn't Cicero wonderful' and 'Oh, here's Helen of Troy, looking lovely as ever'. Interacting with the other performers, responding to their arguments – more often, to their small–talk was both polite and sensible, and flattery in the guise of imitation not uncommon. Some, perhaps too many, were tediously deferential – had little to say and said it in the smallest of voices – it was as tedious as the most tedious of academic conferences. Literature and scholarship were almost indistinguishable in their aims and tempers, the people engaged in both being for the most part the same or having similar tastes.

Then the romantics came along and re-invented the playing field. Listening to others now showed disrespect to one's hearers; the artist became a god forced to par his – always his, of course – fingernails since no servants or helpers – indeed no other people – were allowed to exist within the artist's world. He was a hermit, feeding off others' texts only guiltily, hastily, as he secretly ventured out – starved by his self-induced poverty into fantastic delusions. The hearers, meanwhile, were busy reinventing themselves, at a prudent distance from the hermit, whose inspired madness they analysed and documented in sober and measured tones, questioning everything except the truthfulness of the trance. For, as Françoise Meltzer noted, no one has invested more in the romantic myth than the literary scholars, whose subject it authorizes: what would happen to criticism if there were no madness to explain, no hundred years of solitude?

The romantic fantasy of authorship prompted no memorable outbursts of creativity, except perhaps within criticism itself, which became psychoanalytical and polemical and secretly, somewhat shamefacedly, exciting – unless one is willing to count Wordsworth's address to the spade and the creations of lunatic inmates among the literary

achievements. Yet it appealed so much to the public imagination that it soon became the official – if untenable – standard of creativity, turning all professional writers into – for the most part – untried and unpunished criminals. Soon, illogically but not inexplicably in light of the above, the exalted definition of originality which the poets had proposed for their masterpieces was adopted for scholarship and for all other writing, too – all sources not explicitly acknowledged were now viewed as potentially plagiarized. If caught, 'plagiarists' were usually let off lightly, while on occasion the punishments were more severe – a public scolding, or exclusion from the community. This went on for so long that the vast majority forgot on what basis these punishments and rules had been devised, and started to feel quite within their rights in putting and keeping writers in the dock, writers who had given or were still giving them immense enjoyment and inspiration. Writers such as Poe, De Quincey or Baudelaire were accused of being opportunistic and lazy, sometimes excused as insufficiently confident at an early stage in their careers or – as in the case of Shakespeare – as not part of an ethically-conscious world. Contemporaries are and have always been fair game for harsh criticism – to decide that a book should be pulped because a few passages were similar to those in a previous one became not only a duty, but also a pleasure – as a Wildean character remarked: 'morality is simply an attitude we adopt towards the people we personally dislike'. Those we do like may always be excused on the more or less implausible grounds of cryptomnesia or sloppy note-taking. Would we throw Shakespeare into the fire on account of a few passages from Thomas North? Would we pulp Wilde?

Yet, curiously, despite all this intransigence, the plagiarism – or was it merely the writing? – went on as before. Most deluded by this sensational approach were the young, who came to imagine there was something exciting and provocative about cut-and-paste itself – since the tutors were fuming about it and many of the best writers seemed to be doing it. At first it had the attractiveness of all the illegal things that grown-ups secretly did. Then it became merely convenient, like online shopping. Then, for too many, it became a habit. Without classical discipline, without a lively interest in literature, bored by teachers who seemed to them naïve and out of touch with the throbbingly real, commercial world outside the academe, they were soon hooked, part of a parallel world, with its own rules and morality, a morality that includes fair working conditions and fair payment for the writers of commissioned essays, that regards exams as socially exclusive, a form of discrimination against students with a foreign or lower-class background,

a new morality that has made it possible for a student to plagiarize throughout his degree and then, his plagiarism detected in the final year of study, have the support of his family when he decides to sue the university for negligence ('Plagiarising Student Sues University for Negligence', *Guardian*, 27 May 2004). Essay services are now a £200 million industry in the UK (*Guardian*, 29 July 2006), while the free papermills sites remain so popular that most universities find it necessary to submit all student work to plagiarism detection databases – indeed, a significant number of students view the absence of such subscriptions as akin to supporting plagiarism.

Originality, in this changed world, has come to mean something very different from what the romantics imagined or what the classicists understood by it – it has been reduced to the absence of the kind of crude, verbatim copying from freely accessible internet sites that is picked up by the plagiarism detection engines. Student essays are now routinely accompanied by 'originality reports' issued by the plagiarism detection services. The testimonials on the web pages of Turnitin, the electronic plagiarism detection service, reveal this spectacular change in the definition of originality:

> The paper I sent in turned out to be plagiarized (at least not from on-line sources), but it made me feel good knowing that I had a great tool to do 'something' to stem the tide of plagiarism. As a professor, I sometimes feel like a 'chump' when I'm convinced that a paper is not the student's own but I'm powerless to prove it. Now, when I announce to my classes that I actively search for evidence of plagiarism, at least I can have the satisfaction that the cheaters are sweating – at least until I turn the papers back.
>
> Finally, the faculty have a tool to match those available to the student. Unfortunately, some students are beginning to use your 'free test' like a grammar checker to see if they are going to get caught. Great service.
>
> A student recently submitted a written assignment that was outstanding. The professor doubted that the student actually wrote this because it 'was so well written'. I submitted the document and it turned out that the student had not plagiarized it from any internet source. I was pleased to clear the student and the professor learned that she had an excellent student in the class.

The doctrine currently prevalent in academic circles is that good researchers are likelier to be good – or at least interesting – teachers as well. What is scarcely talked about in a system increasingly bent on satisfying the paying customers – previously known as students – is that

teachers need to be inspired as well. If Turnitin 'has become part of how education works', as it boasts on its website, and indeed over 80 per cent of British universities subscribe to it, then the writing process has been trivialised and much of the intellectual excitement has disappeared for both students and teachers. Nothing is more boring than checking for potential plagiarism and few things are drearier and more time-consuming than pursuing detected plagiarism, a process that now involves various members of academic staff and, at many universities, student representatives as well and has all the intricate rituals of a medieval trial – nothing is more boring perhaps, except patch-writing essays and checking them against the plagiarism detection database – do students really waste their time doing this?

Plagiarism, St Onge suggested, is 'the last sacred cow of scholarship and pedagogy, kept in the pasture of ethics as a remnant of values past, and possibly all that remains of academic ethics'.[1] To many academics, the punishment of plagiarism provides reassuring evidence that standards are being maintained. But in many places, even this token evidence of intellectual rigour is taken away: at 12 per cent of British universities, students are allowed to pay cash for their plagiarisms. So the academic world is split into the cynics – who know the price of everything and the value of nothing, and the sentimentalists – whose contribution in making plagiarism part of every day life is far from insignificant. For by insisting upon an excessive definition of plagiarism that is untenable, while in practice silently subscribing to a more modest one that enables them, as the rest of us, to go on writing, the sentimentalists avoid paying the price for their emotions. And that price becomes too high for us all, a perception of academia as old-fashioned and unrealistic, a loss of credibility and cultural influence, and an increase in mindless, wholesale plagiarism that bears no comparison to anything that went on before. Some of the average students who in the past would have acquired sound critical abilities and a love of literature during the four years of study are perhaps now leaving college without knowing even how to write an essay in a quiet room, unassisted 'by research and writing tools'. Soon, some of them will become teachers, and the plagiarism detection services that are now used primarily for student work will become increasingly useful for the work of academics, too. In fact, some journals are using them already.

THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH STUDIES

Oscar Wilde, who plagiarized throughout his writing life and wrote inspiringly in praise of plagiarism, appeared to some to have contributed

to the erosion of ethical values, to have sacrificed philosophy to an epigram, and scholarly endeavour to commercial success. Yet whoever reads *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* and its sources would be struck by nothing so much as Wilde's selective genius, which even his contemporaries recognized. Plagiarism, as practiced by Wilde, is life-giving and not mind-numbing, the assertion of the absolute modernity of beauty. Far from creating a problem at the heart of English literature, it suggests forking paths out of the current dilemma.

Ian Small, in his earlier work, notes that Wilde's writing developed at the time when English studies was being defined as an academic subject. More recently, Suzy Anger has shown how the methods of textual interpretation developed initially for the Bible were gradually applied to literature, in an attempt to consolidate the authority of literary scholarship as a discipline. The increasing objectivity, dryness and earnestness documented by Ian Small and Suzy Anger in fin-de-siècle literary scholarship ran counter to Wilde's intentions. If he had become a tutor at Oxford, as he wished at one point, English studies would look different, purple prose would be the height of fashion and plagiarism far less of a problem, because most work would strive to be readable and would more often be read – the best deterrent for plagiarism there is. Perhaps, too, there would be less writing and more conversation, better-paid and more influential teachers who appeared on radio or TV shows and might occasionally afford to take their students to the Café Royal. There would be more entertainment, and more scholarship. Top-rate scholarship, like that of Wilde, who, despite Ian Small's protests in *Oscar Wilde's Profession* and half-hearted accusations in *Studying Oscar Wilde*, was acknowledged by his contemporaries for the subtlety and range of his reading.

In many ways – and I hope he'll forgive me for saying this – Oscar Wilde would have been the ideal teacher. 'In general', Borges notes, 'writers try to make what they say seem profound; Wilde was a profound man who tried to seem frivolous. He wanted us to think of him as a conversationalist; he wanted us to consider him as Plato considered poetry, as "that winged, fickle, sacred thing"'.[2] He lacked the earnestness and the contempt for popular culture that still effectively cordons off many teachers from their students and he possessed the passion for literature and scholarship. There was nothing apologetic about his love of literature and beauty ('there are two ways of disliking art. One is to dislike it. The other, to like it rationally'); he more than anyone else could have shown students how to plagiarize – selflessly, beautifully and for art's sake just as his writings, like those of the plagiarists Poe and

Shakespeare, have bridged the gap between commercial and scholarly culture. Books are well-written or badly written. There is nothing exciting about plagiarism as such – it is neither objectionable nor heroic. No one realised this better than Oscar Wilde – or was more successful in conveying it to disciples. Reviewing some of the Wilde influences in literature and criticism shows how fruitful plagiarism can be, and how different from the dreary reality of merely original or merely derivative writing.

The fantasy of solitary authorship which would find its perfect expression in the writings of a few romantic writers is the fantasy of absolute control over one's text: viewed as a slave, in Martial's epigram which was the first metaphorical use of the word 'plagiarius' – then, following the decline of that moral institution, viewed as a child or as female. The egotism that enabled authors to think of texts derived from countless sources as a mere extension of their personalities engendered the monstrosity of plagiarism which, as Rebecca Moore Howard has shown, was the horror of male rape of another male or of the male rape of another male's female property.[3] Wilde, keenly aware of this imagery and of its disastrous effect on the imagination of a romantically as well as heterosexually-biased public, left to disciples such as Gérard Genette and David Leavitt the pleasure of rewriting this imagined rape into pleasurable intercourse, and chose instead the equally familiar horticultural metaphors, in amused condescension to the prejudices of his century – and of ours.

Robert Ross records in his introduction to *Salomé* the playwright's classical response to accusations of derivativeness:

> My dear fellow, when I see a monstrous tulip with four wonderful petals in someone else's garden, I am impelled to grow a monstrous tulip with five wonderful petals, but that is no reason why one should grow a tulip with only three petals.[4]

And when Max Beerbohm sends him *The Happy Hypocrite*, his irreverent parody of *Dorian Gray*, Wilde responds with extravagant appreciation:

> I had always been disappointed that my story had suggested no work of art in others. For whenever a beautiful flower grows in a meadow or lawn, some other flower, so like it that it is differently beautiful, is sure to grow up beside it, all flowers and all works of art having a curious sympathy for each other. I feel also on reading your surprising and to me quite novel story how useless it is for gaolers to deprive an artist of pen and ink. One's work goes on just the same, with entrancing variations.[5]

These lines cheerfully authorize the various continuations of his writing. The subversiveness of Wildean writing is increased, and not diminished, as some of his admirers thought, or claimed to think, by his flowery metaphors, his purple passages and his wit – and by the freedom he extends to his disciples to parody and mock as well as imitate his writings and his poses. It is Wilde's disregard for the stability and integrity of his texts which enables his dangerous ideas to flourish in many suburban and provincial gardens as well as in the avant-gardens. Wildean influence – itself a synthesis of European culture – is as pervasive in contemporary culture and literature as his detractors feared it would be.

OSCAR WILDE AS A LIBERATING SYMBOL OF THE ARTIST AS CRIMINAL

Wilde as the arch-plagiarist has captured the imagination of the general public as of fellow-authors from the time of his confrontations in print with the other leading aesthete, the painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler, to the present. The paradox of Wilde, noted by Jorge Luis Borges, is that of 'a man of the eighteenth century who occasionally condescended to the games of symbolism', of 'a profound man who tried to seem frivolous',[6] or, as I might add, of a classical spirit who amused himself with the fashioning of the most memorable, belatedly romantic mask of the artist as criminal. Oscar Wilde has bequeathed to the twenty-first century both the most memorable plagiarist persona and the most serenely classical theory and practice of literature, which treat plagiarism and authorship in Borgesian terms as the delusions of an inflated ego. Three examples will perhaps be sufficient to illustrate the versatility and usefulness of Wilde as a plagiarist archetype in twentieth-century writing.

André Gide: Plagiarism as Self-Invention

André Gide's *The Counterfeiters* pursues the associations between metaphorical and sexual transgression sketched by Wilde both in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* and in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. There is an exuberant multiplication of forgeries, thefts both literal and metaphorical, and impostures, all of which amount to an attempt to outdo Wildean transgression. If *The Importance of Being Earnest* opens with a gentleman reading another gentleman's cigarette case to get an insight into his life, explaining that 'Half of modern life depends on what one shouldn't read', *The Counterfeiters* opens with a teenager accidentally reading his mother's old love letters only to discover his true parentage; the same youth then steals an admired novelist's suitcase and reads his diary as a means of forging an introduction, or gaining an entry into

his life – and the theft is repaid by his becoming the novelist's secretary.

The most Wildean figure in the novel is Robert de Passavant, a successful author whose true power, like that of Oscar Wilde in the judgment of Yeats and Gide, is revealed in conversation with a select male audience. This enables him to draw freely and imaginatively on a wide range of materials, as Gide writes with some malice: 'Tout ce qui n'était pas imprimé, était pour Passavant de bonne prise; ce qu'il appellait "les idées dans l'air", c'est à dire: celles d'autrui'[7] ('Everything that was not printed was fish for Passavant's net; what he called "ideas in the air" – that is to say – other people's').[8]

The naive plagiarism of the artist who steals to dazzle the Philistine public is compared to the perverse and sophisticated plagiarism-as-seduction of the speaker who, like Lord Henry, appropriates texts in order to appropriate souls: 'Il met une sorte de coquetterie à cacher ses connaissances. C'est ce qu'il appelle ses bijoux secretes. Il dit qu'il n'a que les rastas qui se plaisent á étaler aux yeux de tous leurs parure, et surtout quand celle-ci est en toc.'[9] ('He kind of prides himself on hiding his knowledge – what he calls his secret jewels. He says it's only snobs who like showing off all their possessions – especially if they're imitation').[10]

Passavant manages to corrupt his disciple Olivier at least on the literary level for he, too, becomes a plagiarist, quoting Passavant's aphorism to impress his friend Bernard. The aphorism is plagiarized by Passavant himself from 'Paul Ambroise' and, although the narrator does not reveal it, by Gide himself from Oscar Wilde. Thus Gide continues both Wilde's plagiarism theory and his practice – all the time the secret remaining in full view, like Poe's purloined letter: 'que la verité, c'est l'apparence, que le mystère c'est la forme et que ce que l'homme a de plus profond, c'est sa peau'[11] ('that the truth is the appearance of things, that their secret is their form and that what is deepest in man is his skin').[12] The suggestion of regression *ad infinitum* characteristic of plagiarism apologies is made once again – what matters is not the origin of ideas, but their poisonous fruitfulness, as both Gide and Wilde would suggest: 'All art is at once surface and symbol' (Preface, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*).

Peter Ackroyd: Self-Effacing Plagiarism vs Morbid Originality

In Peter Ackroyd's *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*, Wilde is seen both as a practitioner and a theorist of plagiarism, for the benefit of a community which comprises Frank Harris and Alfred Douglas – and not least Ackroyd himself. Wilde is imagined writing an autobiographical fiction, which Frank Harris views as marred by deception and by the

theft of lines from other authors. Wilde answers the latter accusation by a defence of plagiarism that is itself plagiarized from Dumas père: 'I did not steal them. I rescued them'.[13] He is resurrected, as Brian Finney has noted, to justify Ackroyd's own practice of appropriation, both in this, and in subsequent works, and specifically extends a blessing to his successors: 'I am an effect merely: the meaning of my life exists in the minds of others and no longer in my own'.[14] Peter Ackroyd's intertextual exercise is at once a continuation of the Wildean imitation of the masters and an expression of his Wilde confidence in his own classical mastery.

Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* is variously inspired by Wilde – by the thematization of forgery and plagiarism in the still unpublished Chatterton lecture, and in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* which Ackroyd had somewhat mysteriously described in *The Last Testament* as 'revealing a truth ... about the nature of all creative art'.[15] Critics, with the exceptions of Saint-Amour, have been too dismayed by the cut-and-paste plagiarism to consider the Wildean theories first sketched in the Chatterton lecture. But it is at the foundation of Ackroyd's critically celebrated novel, which develops both the Wildean insight, attributed by Ackroyd to his reading of T.S. Eliot, that 'the history of English literature is the history of plagiarism', and the Wildean conceit of reclaiming Chatterton, that Romantic hero par excellence, for the classical camp.[16] The novel turns on an extravagant theory, supported by a forged portrait and forged manuscripts of Chatterton, which lead the twentieth-century poet Charles Wychwood to formulate the theory that Chatterton faked his suicide to continue writing under the names of other poets. In answer to his friend, the librarian Philip Slack's anguished questions, Wychwood concludes that Chatterton was neither the 'greatest plagiarist', nor 'the greatest forger', but quite simply, the 'greatest poet'.[17] As the first sentence of his manuscript sums up, 'Thomas Chatterton believed that he could explain the entire material and spiritual world in terms of imitation and forgery, and so sure was he of his own genius that he allowed it to flourish under other names'.[18]

Just as in Wilde's lecture, the poetic and self-effacing plagiarism of this re-imagined Chatterton is contrasted with the angst-filled plagiarism of the romantically-minded writers. In a climate poisoned by the 'anxiety of influence', other authors' 'literal' death can prove liberating. In *Chatterton*, the successful novelist Harriet Scrope has started her career by stealing the plots of the Victorian novelist Harrison Bentley – presumably out of copyright – and is glimpsed in the novel attempting to appropriate the moribund Wychwood's Chatterton

theory. The subject of her plagiarized novels is a compulsive return to the crime scene, a covert acknowledgment and apology: there is the novel in which 'a writer's secretary is responsible for many of her employer's "posthumous" publications ; she knew his style so well that she was able effortlessly to counterfeit it, and only the assiduous researchers of a biographer had uncovered the fakery',[19] which would certainly be Ackroyd's ideal reading of his *Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*. And there is her novel of the 'poet who believed himself to be possessed by the spirits of dead writers but who, nevertheless, had been acclaimed as the most original poet of his age'[20] – the very subject of Ackroyd's *Chatterton* and also, arguably, of his biography of T.S. Eliot.

Yet Charles Wychwood's theory – an apology of forgery and of plagiarism itself founded on plagiarized and forged documents – will in the end be appropriated by his friend, the librarian Philip Slack, a textbook case of romantic anxiety. He had given up writing his first novel after only forty pages: 'It had become a patchwork of other voices and other styles, and it was the overwhelming difficulty of recognising his own voice among them which had led him to abandon the project'.[21] The timid writer turns to the pleasures of reading: 'he might seem slow and hesitant in his dealings with the world, but he always read swiftly and anxiously. He knew that his real comfort was to be found in books' (from Ackroyd's *Chatterton*). Yet the pleasures of reading, as well as those of writing, are marred by romantic anxiety: as Philip descends into the library basement, the accidental discovery of the novels of Harrison Bentley and thus of the admired novelist's Harriet Scrope's plagiarism troubles him greatly. The comforting vision of the Total Library becomes the nightmarish vision of the Library of Babel:

> There were pools of light among the stacks, directly beneath the bulbs which Philip had switched on, but it was now with unexpected fearfulness that he saw how the books stretched away into the darkness. They seemed to expand as soon as they reached the shadows, creating some dark world in which there was no beginning and no end, no story and no meaning. (*Chatterton*)

This is the Borgesian sublime, a sense of the 'nothingness of personality' compared to the greatness of literature: 'And if you crossed the threshold into that world, you would be surrounded by words; you would crush them beneath your feet, you would knock against them with your head and arms, but if you tried to grasp them, they would melt away'.[22]

The descent into the musty library basement recalls the descent of

Borges in search of the Aleph, and it eventually leads to a classical, unifying vision: 'And so what did Harriet's borrowings matter? In any case, Philip believed that there were only a limited number of plots in the world (reality was finite, after all) and no doubt it was inevitable that they would be reproduced in a variety of contexts'.[23] Yet it is only Charles's death and the necessity of assuming his manuscript and even his role as a lover and father that enable Philip Slack to become an author.

By comparison, Charles Wychwood is a happy plagiarist on the classical pattern, who is seen 'eating the past'[24] and indeed eating books.[25] Harriet Scrope's plagiarism, which troubles both herself and her admirer Philip Slack, is irrelevant to the serenely classical Charles Wychwood, who believes that 'Everything which is written down immediately becomes a kind of fiction'.[26] That the papers, as well as the portrait, turn out to be forged, is in keeping with the Wildean themes and leitmotifs of the book, and of no relevance to Wychwood, who, not unlike the Narrator of *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, is less interested in facts and historical accuracy than in the beauty or the suggestiveness of the theory.

The reiteration of these views across genres and periods is a means of stressing the continuity of classical theory, the sense of a classical tradition, and is reinforced by the use of anachronism and interpolations, as when we see Chatterton revise T.S. Eliot's elegy: 'Schoolboy tho' I was, it was even at this time that I decided to shore up these ancient Fragments with my own Genius: thus the Living and the Dead were to be reunited'.[27] 'Indeed, Ackroyd's own Chatterton theory, as expressed by the fictitious poet-protagonist Charles Wychwood, serenely and neo-classically merges with the arguments of Wilde in his Chatterton lecture and of Ackroyd himself in the *Last Testament*', as Brian Finney noted.

Ackroyd acknowledges the fascination of originality, yet shows the search for it to be futile: Philip has a vision of Harriet Scrope and 'behind her, his face in shadow', of Harrison Bentley.[28] The search for underlying authenticity is shown to be destructive: attempting to restore the painting underlying the forged portrait of Chatterton, the forger/artist Merk destroys it completely, not before deconstructing it: 'The face of the sitter dissolved, becoming two faces, one old and one young'. But within the novel, this destruction is also a recreation of the final episode in *Dorian Gray*, simultaneously paying ironic tribute to the decadent tradition and to Bloom's theory of the struggle with the predecessor, as Merk is seen: 'in a sudden burst of anger and resentment',

after the de-composition of the painting: 'he stamped upon it, put his heel through the canvas, and kicked it into a corner of his studio. "Dead? Yes?" he shouted, wiping away the spittle from his mouth'.[29] The ritual stabbing or strong misreading amounting to a reconstruction is not so much contradicted as affectionately parodied in Ackroyd, who, like Harold Bloom, recognizes the necessity of plagiarism along classical and decadent lines, but also the fascination of originality.

David Leavitt: Plagiarism for Love and Art's Sake

> It is only for lovers that poets write. Anything resembling an explanation is derogatory to a work of art. (Oscar Wilde, 'To Violet Fane', 1887)

One of Wilde's most provocative recent incarnations is in the writings of David Leavitt. Accused of plagiarism by the novelist and poet Stephen Spender, he delighted in the possibility of imaginative identification with Oscar Wilde, the gay icon, the outsider, the *agent provocateur*. His reply is curiously ineffective in refuting the accusations: curiously, because, as my own reading of the two novels has confirmed, the novel *While England Sleeps* is not plagiarized from Spender's *World Within World*, not even in the extended, romantically-biased definition of that term.[30]

Essentially, it is Leavitt's thoroughly modern and entirely fictitious development of an episode for which Spender provides only the briefest outline. In his autobiographical novel, Spender had hinted at the intensity of his attachment for a working-class man, Tony Hyndman, portrayed as 'Jimmy Younger', whom he had briefly employed as his secretary, and at his guilt on Jimmy's enrolment in the Spanish Civil War, an impetuous decision prompted by Spender's renunciation of homosexuality through his marriage to Inez Pearn. While, as Stephen Spender has argued, the homosexual subtext would not be lost on any reader willing to discover it,[31] the love story remains essentially untold; in rendering it the subject of his book, Leavitt was clearly forced to invent all the details, including all the details of the sexual encounters, as well as the characterization. Moreover, as Alan Sinfield has pointed out, the narrative had been previously used in Isherwood's *Christopher and His Kind*.[32] And the fact that following the destruction of the first edition, the only changes in the second edition were 'minor, primarily changes to locales in the Spanish section of the book',[33] clearly demonstrates that plagiarism was never really the issue.

None of these arguments is advanced in Leavitt's article, which quotes Wilde's definition of originality and goes on to state, reasonably

enough: 'If the current legal trend in England continues, it may lead to the imposition of a standard few works of fiction could ever meet'.[34] This lucid perception, supported by the studies of literary and legal scholars, and by the testimonies of fellow-authors, is concealed by a provocative surface, in conformity with the Wildean precept of staying misunderstood by the Philistine. Leavitt concludes his article with another quotation from Wilde, on England as the land of the hypocrite, a remark hardly calculated to appease his English critics, and he even strikes the grand attitude of contempt towards the Philistine, stating that the parallels between the two novels alleged by Spender's lawyers had been 'picked with legal tweezers out of a narrative that was as intricately woven as a Persian carpet', a metaphor which many readers would be likely to find pretentious and possibly offensive under the circumstances, whether or not they identified the allusion to Lord Henry's ideal novel.

Having ensured that he will be misunderstood and misheard, Leavitt plausibly suggests that the plagiarism accusations are merely a displacement of the anger generated by his exuberant homosexuality. Turning to the texts, he concedes: 'the novel as a whole resembled Spender's account about as much as a cherry tree resembles a cherry stone'. This, rather than dismissing Spender's accusations, appears to confirm them, suggesting the powerful affinities of the two works, indeed the existence of Leavitt's novel as merely an amplification of ideas latent in Spender. The claim is false, and may explain Spender's resentment, prompted precisely by the younger author's attempt to forge a relationship with his work: 'Mr. Leavitt's fantasy accretions to my autobiography'. Yet it makes perfect sense in classical terms, where writing is typically recast as marginalia and recreation rather than creation, and in terms of the gay collaborative tradition, as described by the critics Kenneth Bleeth and Julie Rivkin.[35]

The metaphor chosen by Leavitt, posing the dry cherry stone against the blossoming cherry tree, alludes to that metaphor of the library as (a plagiarist's) paradise, an inexhaustible orchard, a place of textual and erotic exchanges – for pleasure and art's sake – in which the young are inspired by, and inspire, the old. Leavitt may be the thief in Spender's admirable garden, but he is also Cupid, the one who makes it bloom and keeps it alive. In the novel of *Daphnis and Chloe*, Cupid laughs at the old man who mistakes him for a mere thieving child and attempts to chase him from the orderly garden, explaining to him that 'the flowers and trees are beautiful – because they are watered by the springs I bathe in'.[36] In Wilde's rewriting of this story, which, as

he realized, works quite well as a parable of plagiarism, the Selfish Giant's decision to banish the children from his magnificent garden results in the garden's demise. Other authors, such as J.M. Coetzee in his Nobel lecture, confined themselves to arguing that 'if the young are to be forbidden to prey upon the old then they must sit for ever in silence'.[37] Wilde saw that it is the theft, or rather the desirability of texts, which keeps them alive – that the old depend upon the young in equal measure. Without Eros, without treacherous disciples, without the excitement of pages passed from hand to hand, as Leavitt puts in the title of the anthology edited with his lover, there can be no literature.[38]

Text production, for Wilde, as for Leavitt and Gide, is conversation, textual intercourse, and the repeated references to Wilde in this defence make sense, as an invocation of the nurturing versus the Selfish Giant. The argument is developed further in Leavitt's 'The Term Paper Artist'. By the time of this writing, and given the self-reflexive nature of contemporary fiction, plagiarism as a literary theme runs the risk of boring rather than of shocking the Philistine – and it is a sufficiently convincing proof of Leavitt's innovativeness that he managed to generate critical resentment, to the point that the journal *Esquire*, which had commissioned the story, eventually refused to publish it.[39] Proudly enough, and continuing his identification with the great literary outcast, Leavitt had it published in the collection *Arkansas*, with an epigraph allegedly taken from Oscar Wilde: 'I should like to flee like a wounded hart into Arkansas'.[40] The story is an answer, as David Leavitt has acknowledged, both to Stephen Spender himself, now dead – carrying out Spender's suggestion of fictionalizing his own life and sexual adventures, as he had fictionalized those of Spender – and to the critics who had accused him of plagiarism. It begins, conventionally enough (by late twentieth-century standards) with the author David Leavitt recovering at his parents' house from the plagiarism debacle. There is the usual case of a writer's block and, as expected, a resolution, yet David Leavitt recovers from his writer's block not to produce the book promised to his publisher, but to write undergraduate essays in exchange for oral sex with a series of more or less attractive male students. As he confides to the reader, in what is an imaginative continuation of the classical argument, the texts thus produced – untainted by commercial considerations and authorial anxiety, inspired only by the combination of sexual and textual pleasure – are the best work of his life. Self-effacement could hardly be pushed further – nor, on the other hand, could a more provocative manifestation be found.

Noting that the academic hysteria about plagiarism still obscures scholarly discussions of literary plagiarism, Leavitt, with decadent mischievousness, strikes at the very heart of contemporary anxieties – possibly with the vague hope of exhausting them. He extends literary representation to student plagiarism and contradicts the academic statements on the subject by showing the plagiarists succeed. Only in the case of one student in the story is plagiarism detected, but his expulsion from the establishment proves liberating, the first step in the discovery of his unconventional personality and of his homosexuality, just as in the case of Gide's Bernard, the theft of the suitcase, and his reading of Edouard's journal, are part of the self-discovery process. There are further ironies: this story about plagiarism is preceded by an extensive acknowledgment of sources which, as Bleeth and Rivkin have noted, fails to reveal the story's closest source, a pornographic video, *Score 10*, a 'canny' move, challenging the critics either to leave his plagiarism unmentioned or to admit their knowledge of less than canonical materials.[41] And the blurring of the distinction between autobiography and fiction, author and authorial persona, also practiced by Gide in *The Counterfeiters*, is even more disturbing in this text, since David Leavitt, the creator of 'David Leavitt', is not only a literary apologist of plagiarism, but, most disturbingly for the romantic camp, a teacher of creative writing at Florida University, with every opportunity of preaching sexual and textual perversion to a young and impressionable audience.

If the Wildean mask of the artist as criminal has proved inspiring to subsequent authors, a symbol of creative freedom, his philosophy of writing has been even more influential.

THE WILDE EFFECT IN LITERARY CRITICISM: BLOOM, FRYE, GENETTE, BORGES

Explicit derivativeness – or what would today be termed 'hyper/inter/textuality', 'palimpsest writing', 'writing in the second degree', 'metafiction' – has become not merely tolerated, but canonical. Wilde's *Poems* were decried as plagiaristic at the time of publication, and the even bolder experiments in collage they inspired, most notably *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, met with a mixed reaction; by the 1960s, as John Updike noted, the mimetic prejudice had been defeated even in the field most closely associated with it, and it was rather 'the traditional novel as a transparent imitation of human circumstances' which had 'a distracted or tired air'.[42] The shift in perspective is due largely to the pressure of the flamboyantly

artificial decadent texts, and of their modernist and post-modernist continuations; it is worth noting that three of the most important theorists of intertextuality are Wildean disciples. Their assimilation of decadent technique is so perfect that the name of Wilde appears only tangentially in all three key works of intertextuality.

Northrop Frye's understanding of artistic creativity is closely linked to Wildean and decadent ideas, as this oblique allusion to *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* in *The Anatomy of Criticism* indicates: 'The true father or shaping spirit of the poem is the form of the poem itself, and this form is a manifestation of the universal spirit of poetry, the "onlie begetter" of Shakespeare's sonnets who was not Shakespeare himself, much less that depressing ghost Mr. W. H., but Shakespeare's subject, the master-mistress of his passion.' His critique of romantically-biased criticism, which 'confuses the original with the aboriginal',[43] and of the romantically-biased copyright laws[44] is a continuation of Wilde's and Anatole France's critique of the commercialization of art. And just as Pater had successfully introduced Baudelairean ideas into English mainstream criticism by attributing them to 'the German critics', Frye relies on the examples of Chaucer, Milton and Shakespeare rather than those of the *fin-de-siècle* classicists, whose status was still less than canonical.

Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* similarly stresses intertextuality, the inherent intertextuality of all art.[45] His theory of poems as strong misreadings of previous poems confirms the Wildean aphorism (borrowed from A. France) on criticism as a form of autobiography. His study certainly reflects his own struggle to differentiate himself from his brilliant predecessors Oscar Wilde and Northrop Frye, as for instance by the introduction of psychoanalytical and romantic elements. His struggles with these powerful predecessors have been analysed by the critics Polanski and Hartmann. In a recent interview, Bloom has explicitly identified himself with the decadent elite tradition, stating that 'plagiarism is the same thing as literature', and that 'inspired plagiarism is greatly preferable to the endless nonsense that goes on in what used to be the academic world'.[46]

Gérard Genette's *Palimpsestes* is a celebration of rewriting, of the transformations leading from the originary hypotext (approximately corresponding to what in traditional criticism would be termed a source) to hypertext, defined as autonomous from, but always enriched by, one's knowledge of hypotext, which enables 'la lecture palimpsestueuse'.[47] Hélène Maurel-Indart noted in her book *Du plagiat*,[48] which makes use of Genette's scheme, that the transformations listed by Genette are as applicable to plagiarized texts as to the legitimately

intertextual genres discussed in his book, such as pastiche and parody. His theory is clearly influenced by the earlier apologists of plagiarism, and some of the transformations discussed in his book, notably 'excision', 'concision', 'condensation', 'expansion', 'amplification', are suspiciously similar to Oudrad de Richesource's discussion of the possible methods of disguising plagiarism in *Le masque des orateurs* (1667), the first mock-treatise on plagiarism. But perhaps most revealing of the influence of Gide and Wilde is the sheer enjoyment of derivative work. Genette writes: 'si l'on aime vraiment les textes, on doit bien souhaiter, de temps en temps, en aimer (au moins) deux a la fois' ('If one really loves texts, one should wish, every once in a while, to love [at least] two at the same time').[49] He mentions Wilde only once,[50] yet he acknowledges the Wildean disciple and apologist of plagiarism, Borges, as the main inspiration for his theory,[51] and he writes appreciatively of the practices of the Paris-based Oulipo group, who rely on collaboration, methodical selections from dictionaries and other people's texts and indeed on plagiarism, on constraint-based intertextual games as methods of unleashing creativity.

Reversing chronology, Terry Eagleton has described Wilde as 'the Irish Roland Barthes',[52] a view developed by Richard Pine, who analyzed the affinities between the two influential theorists of derivativeness.[53] Yet it is in the writings of Jorge Luis Borges that Wilde's critical theory finds it fullest expression. Oscar Wilde is present in the fiction as in the criticism of Borges, blurring the boundaries between the two as he had in his own writing. In 'Hakim, The Masked Dyer of Merv', he is the lying prophet hiding under an exquisite veil, the prophet who 'seemed to seek out danger', whose love is lavished upon the unworthy: 'On the night a group of hated lepers gathered around his palace, he had them let in, kissed them, and given them silver and gold'.[54] His death is Christ-like: 'the captains ran him through with spears',[55] much as the death of the artist had been imagined in Wilde's 'Sonnet on the Sale by Auction of Keats' Love Letters' and in 'De Profundis'.

In 'The Mirror and the Mask', he is glimpsed under the features of the Irish bard Olan, whose mastery of classical art is acknowledged in the royal gift of a silver mirror, whose sophisticated double writing is rewarded by the gift of golden mask, whose final poem is the very undoing of reality, followed by the gift of a sword, by the poet's suicide and the king's exile. The final poem is an expression of 'the sin of having known Beauty, which is a gift forbidden mankind'[56] – open to a Platonic interpretation.

Just as Oscar Wilde had chosen to read his own story in Plato's *Symposium* and in the Shakespearean sonnets, Borges would find

Wilde's writings more self-revealing than his own life. Paul de Man has noted that 'an act of infamy' is always at the center of Borges' self-reflexive stories – a transgression that is a form of self-invention or re-creation. The editor of the 'non-fiction' has reassuringly stated the sharp difference between Borges' scrupulously scholarly essays and his deceptive fictions,[57] yet there is a distinct overlap of themes and attitudes and there may well be a similarity of method. In 'Coleridge's Flower', for example, Borges simultaneously theorizes and practices artistic/critical deception. He discusses the recurrence of metaphors as supporting either a pantheistic or a classical view of literature. Of the three examples discussed, two he acknowledges to be deliberate allusions, but with regard to the third, he states 'Wells was probably not acquainted with Coleridge's text',[58] thus leaving open the possibility of a mysterious or supernatural coincidence. As the editor notes, 'this is either an error or a joke: Coleridge's lines are the epigraph to the *Time Machine*'.[59] The reader sufficiently stimulated by Borges's essay to turn even to the first page of the text discussed would discover that the only remaining solution is the classical rather than the pantheistic. Borges creates a double text along decadent principles, with a naive interpretation for the lazy readers and another for the classically-minded. In 'Homeric Versions', Borges posits the infinity of plausible translations, extending to criticism as a form of translation within the same language the same freedom as Wilde had imagined.[60]

Borges's 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' makes a paradoxical argument that has captivated contemporary readership much as Wilde's paradoxical and witty argumentation on Life imitating Nature surprised his contemporaries: namely that re-creation is more original than the original. The poet Pierre Menard sets out, with tellingly restrained modernist creativity to rewrite not the whole of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* – rather, in conformity with decadent economy principles, which had led Moore to state that 'One book of beautiful verses is better than twenty books of beautiful verses',[61] merely 'the ninth and thirty-eight chapters of part I of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of Chapter XXII'.[62] He first considers adopting the method of Baudelaire's Samuel Cramer, that of imaginative identification: 'Learn Spanish, return to Catholicism, fight against the Moor or Turk, forget the history of Europe from1602–1918 – *be* Miguel Cervantes', but, in the light of Wilde's and Borges's own critical theories, he rejects this as 'too easy'.[63] His attempt is 'to write the Quixote' from the perspective of a twentieth-century author. In a shrewd overturn of the praises of the imagination and of inspiration sung by the romantics, Pierre

Menard contrasts Cervantes's ostensibly less laborious undertaking with his own creative-critical project: 'My obliging predecessor did not spurn the collaboration of chance; his method of composition for the immortal book was a bit *à la diable,* and he was often swept along by the inertiae of language and the imagination'.[64] Pierre Menard's reconstruction, which aims to arrive at the same text by 'irrefutable' arguments, is more self-denying, more classical than that of Cervantes – hence the Narrator's concluding statement that in Cervantes' text, it is possible to view 'the traces – faint but not undecipherable – of our friend's "previous" text'.[65] A critical-creative enterprise indistinguishable to the Philistine eye from a mere copy, it is 'a task of infinite complexity, a task futile from the outset'[66] – again in conformity with Wilde's aphorism (derived from Gautier) that 'All art is quite useless'.

In 'The Immortal', Borges answers the question later voiced by Nick Groom: 'why does forgery employ a device, plagiarism, which contradicts its narrative of verification?'.[67] His answer, in the tradition of 'The Decay of Lying', is that the concepts of forgery and plagiarism are meaningless: given the 'nothingness of personality', a 'mirage',[68] attacked by Borges from one of his earliest essays to the end of his career, the only immortality is that of texts, or of words: '*As the end* approaches, wrote Cartaphilus, *there are no longer any images from memory – only words.* Words, words, words, taken out of place and mutilated, words from other men – those were the alms left him by the hours and centuries'.[69] The answer, itself partly plagiarized from *Hamlet*, would become not despite, but rather because of its genealogy, the central motif of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, which famously ends – or rather refuses to end – with a Latin sentence suggesting infinite regression, and classical immortality: 'Stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus' ('Only the name remains of the rose, names are all that is left').'

If Borges's fiction is rich in metaphors of transgression, impersonation and espionage as well as forgery and plagiarism, his criticism is quite as outspoken in favour of literary deception. An important justification of plagiarism, proposed by Borges in 'The Doctrine of Cycles', is related to reader, rather than author, psychology. He notes that Nietzsche failed to cite previous authors who supported the doctrine of eternal return not through 'startling ignorance' or an excess of authorial vanity, but for the sake of a powerful effect: 'The prophetic style does not allow for the use of quotation marks nor the erudite attestation of books and authors'.[70] Borges uses Nietzsche's obviously spurious account of the genesis of his theory, presented as an act of divine

inspiration, as a pretext for rehearsing the classical arguments in favour of annexation: 'Because he rethought it at great length, and endured it, the eternal recurrence of things is now Nietzsche's and does not belong to some dead man who is barely more than a Greek name'.[71] The argument, here related to Nietzsche, might have equally been illustrated by the speeches of Lord Henry to Dorian Gray or those of Samuel Cramer to Mme de Cosmelly: in both cases quotation marks being suppressed for dramatic or 'prophetic' effect. Or, indeed, by this very text, in which Borges' rhetorical question: 'If my human flesh can assimilate the brute flesh of a sheep, who can prevent the human mind from assimilating human mental states?' resembles Paul Valéry: 'Rien de plus original, rien de plus soi, que se nourrir des autres. Mais il faut les digérer. Le lion est fait de mouton assimilé.'[72] ('There is nothing more original, nothing more individual than feeding off others. But one must digest them. The lion is only sheep transformed.')

In 'The Total Library',[73] the limits of the imagination, as reflected in the limitations of language, are invoked in defence of plagiarism:

> Lewis Carroll ... observes in the second part of his extraordinary novel *Sylvie and Bruno* – in the year 1893 – that as the number of words in any language is limited, so too is the number of their possible combinations or of their books. 'Soon', he says, 'literary men will not ask themselves "What book shall I write?", but "Which book?"'

The Wildean 'anti-essentialist aesthetic'[74] is crystallized in Borges:

> Every one of us collaborates, in one form or another, in this world. Every one of us wants this world to be better, and if the world truly became better – that eternal hope – if the country saved itself – and why can't the country save itself? – we would become immortal in that salvation, whether they know our names or not. That is the least important; what matters is that immortality is obtained in works, in the memory that one leaves in others ... My opinions do not matter, nor my judgment; the names of the past do not matter as long as we are continually helping the future of the world, our immortality. That immortality has no reason to be personal, it can do without the accident of names, it can ignore our memory.[75]

Borges's definition captures the counter-romantic philosophy that Oscar Wilde and Borges himself had defined less transparently, more flippantly elsewhere. This classical view of immortality differs from the romantic, is understood not as preserving the integrity of one's work, as initially conceived, or maintaining one's signature and authorial persona, but as whatever in one's ideas and techniques is found valuable,

challenging or inspiring by subsequent authors – quite simply, whatever in one's work has the ability to disappear into, or be assimilated into the texts of others.

A contemporary scholar quoted the discussion of imitation in Erasmus: 'Did not Cicero himself teach that the point of art is to disguise art? Therefore if we wish to imitate Cicero successfully, we must above all disguise our imitation of Cicero'. And he could not help recording his surprise: 'There is (once again) an element of witty paradox about a statement of this kind, whose logic, if taken to the limit, would naturally suppress the very name of Cicero'.[76] The conclusion, apparently startling in the post-Romantic, still predominantly author-oriented climate of literary criticism, was a commonplace of decadent criticism. Wilde provides his variation upon it in the preface to *Dorian Gray*: 'To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim'. This is generally read, in the light of Wilde's lecture on Chatterton's self-effacement for art's sake, and of T.S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', as arguing in favour of artistic restraint, the subordination of one's emotion to aesthetic design, perhaps the erasure of one's name (or personality). But, as Borges has pointed out in an essay which explicitly links his understanding of artistic creativity to that of Wilde, the distinction between plagiarism and forgery is irrelevant to the classicists.[77] From the classical perspective, 'everything is available for recreation or manipulation', as Peter Ackroyd would exclaim when interviewed by Susana Onega.[78] Or at least everthing should be. But this story, too, has a moral:

Immortality need not be (so) personal

Can one glimpse at the richness of the neo-classical tradition and still insist that all plagiarists should be punished? Plagiarists such as Yambo Ouologuem, winner of the prestigious Renaudot prize, whose book, on account of plagiarism, was swiftly pulped by his indignant publisher and who became an outcast within French literary studies? Yet he was defended by one of the plagiarized authors:

> I am in no way worried by the use that has been made of *Dernier des justes* ... I have always looked on my books as apple-trees, happy that my apples be eaten and happy if now and again one is taken and planted in different soil.
>
> I am therefore deeply touched, overwhelmed even, that a black writer should have leant on *Dernier des justes* in order to write such a book as *Le devoir de Violence*. Thus it is not Mr. Ouologuem who is in debt to me, but I to him.[79]

Or plagiarists such as Stendhal, whose appropriations were enthusiastically welcomed by Goethe: 'He knows very well how to use what is brought to him, and, above all, how to appropriate the texts of others'?[80] Is plagiarism always wrong, even between consenting adults? And even if one thinks that plagiarism is a form of rape, is one then justified in throwing the babies/books into the fire?

The romantic fantasy of authorship has produced no masterpieces; instead it has provided a basis – however ethically and logically flawed – for the counter-productive system of intellectual property which today hampers the exchange of ideas and the creation of new works. Copyright, Saint-Amour notes, is increasingly 'death-oriented', having been extended from the initial fourteen years under the Statute of Anne (1710), renewable once if the author was still alive, to the current lifetime plus seventy years; the scope of copyright, which initially meant only the right to print i.e. produce copies of a work, now extends not only to adaptations or derivative uses, but even to creative quotations – in a recent case, documented by Matthew Rimmer, a composer who wished to quote twelve words from *Finnegans' Wake* in a choral piece was refused permission by the Joyce estate, that is Stephen Joyce, the novelist's grandson, on the grounds that 'to put it politely and mildly, my wife and I don't like your music'.[81] While fair use provisions seem to provide a solution to many of these difficulties, the mere threat of copyright litigation is enough to discourage many an author's attempts to build explicitly on predecessors' work since few creators and few publishers of innovative writing can afford the costs of copyright litigation. 'Fair use in America', Lawrence Lessig has argued as one of the most influential advocates of copyright reform, 'simply means the right to hire a lawyer' and a number of recent high-profile cases have indicated that judges tend to privilege already established creators and their estates over new creators.[82] Copyright law, as indeed romantic theory, is marked by the inability to define originality – that elusive ideal, which means that the verdict on any particular case of copyright infringement will depend on the subjective preferences of the experts involved and on the judge's tastes and impressions, making copyright infringement trials unpredictable and unreasonably costly.

If in the nineteenth-century, plagiarism as practiced by the neo-classicists was a useful corrective of romantic bias, in the twenty-first century plagiarism provides a practical, if occasionally costly, alternative to the explicit acknowledgment of sources that would require authors to engage in a time-consuming and often unaffordable clearance of permissions. Romantic theory and copyright law are sustained by the same inflated sense of ownership, as noted by Joost Smiers:

> It is not justifiable that someone should claim absolute ownership – and all the rights connected with this, through legislation that commodifies everything that has been created, invented and performed – while his or her own work clearly draws on many, many other sources of influence ... It is even stranger that artistic creations, inventions and different performance interpretations can be traded, with the result that a commercial enterprise can be granted exclusive ownership of the artistic work of others, with rights that are extended for decades.[83]

The solution for the plagiarism obsession is essentially the same as for copyright excesses: both stem from a lack of generosity, a refusal to acknowledge how literature and creativity work and have always worked. This book does not advocate the communism of ideas or the return to anonymous authorship – such concepts are as implausible as the romantic ideal of creation *ex nihilo*. Yet it is equally clear that an understanding of literature which criminalizes some of our most inspiring writers and treats the masterpieces as tainted is no longer plausible; that academic guidelines need to be revised to reflect current scholarship. Copyright laws have to change significantly as well so as to acknowledge existing modes of creativity and in the long term to enable new forms of collaboration and writing. Having ideas, and preferably good and interesting ones, too, is after all more important than owning ideas; the time which is now spent in maintaining attribution for each string of trivial words, for each textual fragment, however insignificant, might be better spent in creating memorable works, works that others would wish to make their own, through criticism, creative re-writing or even plagiarism to begin with. Plagiarizing the best sources marks the awakening of the critical spirit; perhaps the first stage of the creative process.

NOTES

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3. In her article on 'Sexuality, Textuality: The Cultural Work of Plagiarism', *College English*, 62, 4 (March 2000), pp.473–91, Rebecca Moore Howard notes that rape metaphors and metaphors of sexual disease and promiscuity occur repeatedly in Thomas Mallon's *Stolen Words: Forays into the Origins and Ravages of Plagiarism* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), in the subtext of the discussion of Martin Luther King's plagiarisms by Theodore Pappas ['Truth or Consequences: Redefining Plagiarism', *Chronicles*, September 1993, pp.41–2], in Neal Bowers's account of his experience of being plagiarised by the poet David Jones (*Words for the Taking: The Hunt for a Plagiarist* [New York: Norton, 1997]), in academic discussions of plagiarism by Robinson Shipherd [*The Fine Art of Writing for those Who Teach It*, 1926), A.E. Malloch ('A Dialogue on Plagiarism', *College English*, 38 [1976],

pp.165–74), Dorothy Wells ('Causes of Unintentional Plagiarism', *Writing Program Administration*, 16, 3 [Spring 1993], pp.59–71) *et al.*

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8. André Gide, *The Counterfeiters*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (London: Penguin, 1966 [1931]), p.232.
9. Gide, *Les faux-monnayeurs*, pp.274–5.
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11. Gide, *Les faux-monnayeurs*, p.334.
12. Gide, *The Counterfeiters*, p.232.
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17. Peter Ackroyd, *Chatterton* (London: Abacus, 1988 [1987]), p.94.
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20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., p.70.
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24. Ibid., p.15.
25. Ibid., p.48.
26. Ibid., p.40.
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29. Ibid., p.228.
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31. Stephen Spender, 'My Life Is Mine: It Is Not David Leavitt's'. *New York Times*, 4 September 1994 late edn. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/04/26/specials/leavitt-spender.html>.
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69. Borges, 'The Immortal', in *Collected Fictions* (London: Penguin, 1998), p.195.
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83. Joost Smiers, *Arts Under Pressure: Promoting Cultural Diversity In The Age of Globalisation* (London: Zed, 2003).

Appendix
Annotated List of Likely and Confirmed Sources for The Portrait of Mr. W.H.

THE TEXTS IN SQUARE BRACKETS ARE THOSE NOT EXPLICITLY CITED BY WILDE

1579 *The School of Abuse.* By Stephen Gosson. Qtd., probably via Collier.

1587 'To the Gentleman Students of Both Universities'. By Thomas Nashe. Preface to *Menaphon*, by Robert Greene. Qtd, possibly via Collier. *The Misfortunes of Arthur.* By Thomas Hews. Discussion of play adapted from Collier and Symonds.

1594 *Willobie His Avisa.* By Henry Willobie. Qtd., possibly via Dowden.

1598 *Alba.* By Robert Tofte. Qtd, possibly via Halliwell-Phillipps (according to Linda Dowling) *Palladis Tamia.* By Francis Meres. Cited.

1602 Diary entry from *Manningham Table-book.* Qtd. via Collier.

1609 *Shakespeare's Sonnets Never Before Imprinted.* Ed. Thomas Thorpe. Discussed.

1623 'To The Memory of My Beloved'. By Ben Jonson. *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies.* Qtd.

1629 *The Young Gallant's Whirligig.* By Francis Lenton. Qtd.

1633 *Histriomastix.* By William Prynne. Qtd, probably via Symonds or Collier.

1635 *Amanda, or the Reformed Whore.* By Thomas Cranley. Qtd., via Collier and Symonds.

1643 *The Actors' Remonstrance.* Discussed, via Symonds.

1664 [*Sociable Letters.* By Margaret Cavendish.]

1673 [Preface to *The Dutch Lover.* By Aphra Behn.]

1687 [*Momus Triumphans: or The Plagiaries of the English Stage.* By Gerard Langbaine.]

1753 [*Shakespeare Illustrated.* By Charlotte Lennox.]

1759 [*Conjectures on Original Composition.* By Edward Young]

1765 ['Mr. Johnson's Preface to His Edition of Shakespear's Plays']

1780 [*Supplement to the Edition of Shakspeare's Plays Published in 1778 by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens.* Ed. Edmond Malone.]

1790 [*The Plays and Poems of William Shakspeare.* Ed. Edmond Malone.]

1808 [*On Dramatic Art and Literature.* By August Wilhelm von Schlegel.]

1817 [*Biographia Literaria.* By S.T. Coleridge. *The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays.* By William Hazzlitt.]

1831 [*The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the Time of Shakespeare And Annals of the Stage to the Restoration.* 3 vols. By John Payne Collier. Plagiarized for account of Renaissance theatres, of the boy-actors, of Burbage anecdote in Manningham table-book and for description of Manningham table-book.]

1837–39 *An Introduction to the Literature of Europe during the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Centuries.* By Henry Hallam. Qtd.

1849–50 *Shakespeare.* By Georg Gottfried Gervinus. 4 vols. English translation 1863. Paraphrased with acknowledgment.

1850 ['Shakespeare, or The Poet'. *Representative Men.* By Ralph Waldo Emerson.]

1859 [*The Sonnets of William Shakspere: re-arranged and divided into four parts.* Ed. Robert Cartwright. London: Smith.]

1862 *A Key to Shakespeare's Sonnets.* By D. Barnstorff. Qtd., via Dowden.

1865 *Shakspere, His Inner Life as Intimated in His Works.* By John Abraham Heraud. His theory discussed (without mentioning his name). Possibly via Dowden.

1866 ['Coleridge's Writings'. By Walter Pater. *Westminster Review.* Revised version in *Appreciations* 1889.] *Shakspeare's Sonnets Never Before Interpreted: His Private Friends Identified, Together with a Recorded Likeness of Himself.* By Gerald Massey. Qtd. and criticized. Plagiarized for account of the musician Will Hews, for Marlowe as rival poet and for *Arcadia* quotes.

1867 'Winckelmann'. *Westminster Review*. Revised ed. in *Studies* 1873.

1870 *The Sonnets of Shakespeare Solved, and the Mystery of His Friendship, Love and Rivalry Revealed.* By Henry Brown. Cited.

1871 'Pico della Mirandola'. By Walter Pater. Rpt. in *Studies* 1873. 'Poetry of Michelangelo'. By Walter Pater. *The Westminster Review*. Rpt. in *Studies*.

1873 *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. By Walter Pater. Cited and paraphrased.

1875 *A History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne*. By Adolphus William Ward. Qtd.

1874 *Characteristics of English Poets from Chaucer to Shirley*. Qtd. His view of the rival poet as Chapman appropriated by Cyril via Dowden.

1877 *The Fine Arts*. Vol. 3 of *The Renaissance in Italy* by J.A. Symonds. Qtd. Plag. on Michelangelo-Tomasso Cavalieri.

1880 *A Study of Shakespeare*. By A.C. Swinburne. Qtd. on *Willowbie* poem

1881 [*Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*. By J.O. Halliwell-Phillipps. Influential, impersonal reading of the sonnets.]

The Sonnets of William Shakspere, by Edward Dowden. Qtd. Used without acknowledgment for disposing of Pembroke and Southampton claims. Used as a source for Chapman quote, applied to define Shakespeare. Plagiarized for summary of critical theories of the sonnets and for apology of the Neo-Platonists Montaigne, Hubert Languet.

1884 *Shakspere's Predecessors in the English Drama*. By John Addington Symonds. Qtd. Plag. on Lily, on acting as part of Renaissance education, and on the young-actors as cross-dressers.

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Index

Please note that titles of publications beginning with 'A' or 'The' will be filed under the first significant word. References to endnotes will contain the letter 'n' following the page number. References to O.W. stand for Oscar Wilde.

'An immensely enjoyable read which wears its learning lightly. It might help to curb the scholarly paranoia about plagiarism and might be read well beyond the academy.'

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'This book addresses the very controversial issue of Oscar Wilde's "plagiarism" head-on, sifts through the evidence, fully contextualises it in the literary practices of decadent writers of the 1890s, and proposes a new theory to account for it.'

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'Florina Tufescu's book makes us rethink romanticism and classicism as well as plagiarism.'

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Oscar Wilde's plagiarism practices across genres are seen as part of a neo-classical tradition. His allegory of plagiarism in *An Ideal Husband* is compared to those created by fellow playwrights, including Ibsen and G. B. Shaw. Wilde's polemical imitation of Shakespeare's cut-and-paste method in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* inspired Joyce to experiment with the erasure of quotation marks in *Ulysses*. The blatant collage of Wilde's poetry anticipates T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, just as it recalls Manet's paintings, which provocatively assert artistic status by drawing attention to their flatness. The mosaic-like structure of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is akin to that of other anti-individualist masterpieces, notably Goethe's *Faust* and D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*.

The extent of sophisticated plagiarism in canonical works, and the impressive list of its apologists from Ackroyd to Zola, indicate the need for new models of authorship and intellectual property, models that would benefit scholarly and artistic creativity and solve the paradox of plagiarism as simultaneously one of the most serious and most common of literary crimes.

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