OSCAR WILDE, KENNETH BURKE, AND THE GOAT-SONG

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ABSTRACT

Critics have long substantiated the modernity of Oscar Wilde and his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. With many unresolved perspectives, readers find that Wilde creates characters in a chasm that exists between various convictions. What critics have overlooked are the archetypes which act as fulcrums to the many perspectives that exist in Wilde’s life and writings. Wilde creates tensions between various irresolvable philosophical viewpoints in his speech and publications, but along with this irresolution, Wilde inserts a device, the archetypal scapegoat, allowing pressures created by changing social values and fluctuating ideologies to be expunged. To understand the scapegoat more fully, this paper unpacks Kenneth Burke’s writings about the scapegoat process and applies that process to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *de Profundis*, and the trials of Oscar Wilde. The research for this paper excavates the scapegoat as an archetype and applies it with abundant evidence to the above works.

INDEX WORDS: Oscar Wilde, Kenneth Burke, Dorian Gray, The Scapegoat, Late Victorian Literature, Modernity, and Religious Archetypes
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Chapter 1

OSCAR WILDE, KENNETH BURKE, AND THE GOAT-SONG

Here are the steps
In the Iron Law of History
That welds Order and Sacrifice:

Order leads to Guilt
(for who can keep commandments!)
Guilt needs Redemption
(for who would not be cleansed!) Redemption needs
Redeemer (which is to say, a Victim!)

Order Through Guilt To Victimage
(hence: Cult of the Kill)

– Kenneth Burke (Religion 4-5)

Critics often point to The Picture of Dorian Gray as a precursor to modernity citing the ways the novel resists textures of religious and social traditions. There is little doubt among critics that what Wilde accomplishes in Dorian Gray makes old ideas new in the modernist mode. Wilde changes the way we look at the intersections of contradictory philosophies. The stylistic context of the novel may present as art for art’s sake, decadent, and aesthetic, but the exchange between Dorian and the picture also points to a more traditional archetype, one that binds the multiple narratives and shifting philosophies into a comprehensive whole. In the novel, Wilde demonstrates the magical nature of the picture brought about by Dorian’s wish to exchange places with the portrait. As the plot progresses, we discover that the way the picture keeps Dorian young is by bearing the byproducts of his lifestyle. This exchange of guilt and shame, along with the renewal the exchange brings, can be found in an archetype in most every culture throughout history. That archetype is the scapegoat.
The scapegoat, in this case, the portrait, stands in for the adverse effects of a life of unrestricted pleasure. So even while the novel explores multiple themes of decadence, aestheticism, social class, and hedonism, the overarching glue that binds the story into a cohesive whole is the archetype of the scapegoat.

Richard Ellmann, in the summary of his book, Oscar Wilde, labels Oscar Wilde both a “scapegrace” and a “scapegoat.” Though he doesn’t extend his criticism through this lens, he does point out Wilde’s transition from favored celebrity to derelict outcast. Wilde became an object of grace, where people gravitated toward him in the public sphere, and then an object of dread, when even his friends refused to meet or correspond with him. Merlin Holland recalls a time when Wilde was in demand for his wit and public performance. So much so that Polish actress Helen Modjeska exclaims, “What has he done, this young man, that one meets him everywhere?” (Holland 60). Joseph Bristow points out that even though Wilde’s “life and work went far towards fashioning a familiar modern queer identity, Wilde’s Achievements also exemplify the high cost of doing so” (49). In reality, the scapegoat is both of these things, hero and outcast. Wilde embraces the spotlight in order to perform his art before the public eye. This performance gave his audience an opportunity to embrace cultural transitions brought to a head by the Criminal Law Act of 1885, but these same transitions produced a social and legal conflict requiring someone to bear the burden of change and public outcry. As we will see, the anthropological scapegoat, embedded in the sociopolitical processes of human development, symbolizes the way in which populations deal with transitional stress by anointing and sacrificing an individual personality.

Among the many critics who have written about The Picture of Dorian Gray and its author, none makes a connection between the book and the archetypical scapegoat. Critical
works on Wilde and The Picture of Dorian Gray skirt the ideological nature of the scapegoat and embrace the unsettled inquisitive nature of both Wilde and his book. Wilde’s novel does contain the D.N.A. of contemporaneous research, but the many facets, from biology to psychology, leads critics away from strict ideologies and easy resolutions. This irresolution causes many of these critics to invoke the term modernism when discussing Wilde’s oeuvre. For example, Elisha Cohn, Phillip Smith and Michael Hefland, Eckart Goebel, and Michael Wainwright all use Wilde's interest in science to make connections between Wilde's discovery process and his novel. Like Cohn, who unearths nineteenth-century research on brain cells to explain the complications of Dorian Gray, and Goebel, who uses Dorian Gray to expose gaps in Freudian psychoanalysis, these writers rely on Wilde's research interests to bask in the spectrum of scientific breakthroughs of the Late Victorian period. These many connections to contemporaneous events create in Wilde's works a layering, but sometimes polarizing effect where the narrative appears to be made up of diverse patterns that refuse reconciliation. Indeed, Oscar Wilde's characters create a narrative that exists in the chasm between various convictions, convictions that oscillate between social expectations and personal pleasure, between what science can do and what it can't do.

Two critics who rightly focus on the narrative layering in Oscar Wilde are Andrew Wenaus and Helen H. Davis. Andrew Wenaus, in his article “monstrorum artifex: Uncanny Narrative Contexture and Narcissism in Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray,” observes the “multiple levels of narrative” in A picture of Dorian Gray (57). He states how these "levels" foreshadow a trend in "Modernist literature . . . that tends to integrate instability between different levels that simultaneously establish, and become a part of, the aggregate of multiple narratives" (57). Wenaus sees the reflection of Narcissus in Dorian Gray as an unsettling vision
of two realities that appear to the reader without settling into one "static" position (58).

Oscillating between viewpoints and ideologies, Wilde unsettles his readers by turning every conviction into a question. Helen Davis furthers Wilde's tendency to irresolution by introducing the concept of circumnarration, a term she uses to describe the way in which Wilde addresses sexual desire between Basil Hallward and Dorian Gray by using gestures which point to information exterior to the novel. Davis suggests that any interpretation of the novel must include the unspeakable objects that the text circumnavigates.

Critics altogether have demonstrated the abstract nature of Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray. The many political, scientific and social perspectives create a collage of Wilde’s inquisitive interests. Wilde critic, Michael Patrick Gillespie, wields the untamable nature of Wilde's novel when he chastises critics who attempt to locate stability through any one lens. Gillespie suggests that any methodological reading of Dorian Gray limits the critical focus and dismantles the novel's modernity: "Just as no fixed or single interpretation of Dorian Gray lies buried beneath the narrative discourse, no fixed or single image of the Victorian era exists as a unified and consistent vision. Rather the idea of the Victorian period incites a range of images across a spectrum of readers" (14). In a later article, “The Picture of Dorian Gray as a Post-Modern Work," Gillespie demonstrates the possibility that Wilde's novel is physical and resists any claim of interpretation. Gillespie dislodges meaning because of the shifting nature of narrative without admitting that the various perspectives, the layering -- what Kenneth Burke would call "perspective by incongruity" -- creates intersections where meaning resides (Permanence 69). It is within these diverse and divergent perspectives and the intersections they produce that we may find the scapegoat. Between the connections of science, philosophy, and religion, Wilde inserts a mechanism to relieve the pressure of change and ideological failures.
Gillespie succeeds in showing "the narrative in hypostatic equilibrium" (13). It is true that Wilde refuses to give any philosophical assurance to the reader, and it is equally true that critics can discuss authorial intent with only a little accuracy. But the political and social events and the life and trial of Oscar Wilde strongly suggests to us a recurring archetype that appears throughout The Picture of Dorian Gray and returns to us in full force in Wilde’s prison memoirs, De Profundis. To support the archetype in Wilde’s life and works, one must reach beyond fiction into contemporaneous politics and social climates. Other critics such as Elisha Cohen, Joseph Bristow, Dominic James, and Adam Parkes, acknowledge concrete connections between Wilde and an ever-expanding array of social and political events. In his recent book, A Sense of Shock, Adam Parkes thoroughly draws "on a wide range of materials including published an unpublished primary text, literary criticism, art criticism, historical scholarship, and newspaper archives" to demonstrate how "psychological and philosophical dimensions are inextricable from . . . public, historical dimensions" (x). Parkes connects the way that impressions affect these characters with the intellectual intersections of George Moore, Oscar Wilde, and Walter Pater, conflating external conversations with the influences that push and pull Dorian Gray in Wilde’s novel. Parkes does not suggest that there is one ultimate resolution to these inquiries, but he does provide an abundance of evidence to demonstrate the way that art connects to historical, political, and philosophical elements.

Jonathan Dollimore, in his book, Sexual Dissidence, discusses Wilde in a way that describes the work of the scapegoat, but then he discounts the archetype in one short comment without any further explanation. But to ignore the scapegoat in Wilde’s life and works ties the feet of the reader as they attempt to retrace the aesthetic impact of The Picture of Dorian Gray. In other words, to fully appreciate the beauty of this aesthetic, the critic must be willing to look
beyond the multiplicity of modernity and admit to the roots of an anthropological archetype. All these academics recognize the rich textures Wilde weaves into his work, from philosophy to psychology to biology to religion to queer theory, but none focuses on the constant exchange of fault and the accompanying physical repercussions that nicely parallel the scapegoat. Dorian’s inability to find satisfaction in eternal youthfulness and the many philosophies of both Lord Henry and Basil Howard compel us to consider the process of exchange and how it fails. The Picture of Dorian Gray and De Profundis contain many symbols, from an Eden story to suicide to social class, but one repeating structure inhabits all these other influences and is foundational to understanding the Via Dolorosa of Wilde's life and works – the scapegoat, and any symbol that repeats with such regularity demands our attention as critics of Wilde. The structure of the scapegoat repeats throughout the work. This form contains meanings and suppositions that could be considered unintentional baggage, but Oscar Wilde's own experience, as told through his memoirs, De Profundis, replicates the narrative in ways that may not be accidental. I contend that De Profundis extends a narrative that Wilde begins in A Picture of Dorian Gray, a narrative which includes public blame, hypocrisy, and a face of accusation. Dorian's portrait and Wilde's public persona both represent three stages of the scapegoat found in the introductory poem by Kenneth Burke, the chosen (Law), the bearer of burdens (guilt), and the sacrifice (redeemer/victim). Allowing for the inconclusive nature of Wilde's philosophies and dissertations, I argue that the scapegoat is not merely another element of dialogical counterpoint but a resolution to pressures and inadequacies that develop during times of transition. Whether Wilde intended to invest the scapegoat with so much power could be a point of contention, but the evidence is overwhelming that Wilde and his novel exist within the intersections of historical archetype and contemporaneous politics.
Throughout history, societies have needed a way to redirect the guilt and shame produced by religious, civic, and social expectations too high to be obtained. It could be said; "wherever there is an expectation, there is a failure." A failure to reach ideological status becomes more pronounced when it involves whole societies or classes of people. From the Hebrew children to the Celts, many cultures have developed scapegoats to mollify the effects of legal and social failure. The scapegoat is a focus of dis-ease, the discomfort of not living up to a standard. For the Hebrews, the scapegoat is a goat. For the Celts, the scapegoat often took the form of human sacrifice. From ancient times, priests would ceremonially lay the burden of guilt of the people onto the scapegoat relieving the sense of guilt that comes from failure. Then the goat would be killed or excommunicated to atone for the legal ramifications of inadequacy. Though these rituals have disappeared for many of us, the need to waylay burdens of insufficiency remains in modern cultures. I have chosen the archetype of the scapegoat to reveal the interactions between Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, and De Profundis and the Criminal Law Act of 1885, the social climate created by these laws, and the trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895. Without the scapegoat, Wilde appears to be an intellectual randomly pitting one philosophy against another. The scapegoat anchors Wilde’s many inquisitions allowing us to grasp the intersections of motive and understanding.
Chapter 2

KENNETH BURKE, MOTIVES, AND THE SCAPEGOAT

Kenneth Burke, winner of the national medal for literature, 1981, is one of the most influential critics of the Twenty-First Century. Burke, in his essay "Human Behavior Considered Dramatically," analyses the ways in which humans coopt symbols from the past as they act out dramas in contemporary experience. Burke stresses the symbolic nature and need for the scapegoat so much that he writes, "we ask ourselves whether human societies could possibly cohere without symbolic victims (Permanence 285). In response to his rhetorical question, "what is this drama all about, this social drama," he answers, "Guilt, Redemption, Hierarchy, and Victimage" (xxxi). Burke reaffirms that the scapegoat necessarily becomes a symbolic form of all human interaction. However, Burke's convictions are not altogether original.

Oscar Wilde also writes extensively in De Profundis about the sufferings and sacrifice of Christ, and Wilde explains the Via Dolorosa as the greatest symbol of human art. Wilde secularizes the anthropomorphic scapegoat by reflecting on its aesthetics and comparing the existential Christ to poetic drama. Much of his explication of the Via Dolorosa in De Profundis points to the form of Christ’s sufferings as the ultimate template for art and understanding art. For Wilde, the “misery” and suffering portrayed by Christ is a purple thread that weaves throughout Dorian Gray (93). Wilde confirms his ongoing interest in the scapegoat figure when he explains his interest in the archetypical drama in conversations with Andre Gide:

I remember saying once to Andre Gide, as we sat together in some Paris café,

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1 Wilde’s concern with the Gospel should not be confused with morality as the mainstream church would have it, as he confesses himself to be an antinomian.
that while metaphysics had little interest for me, and morality practically none,
there was nothing that either Plato or Christ had said that could not be transferred
immediately into the sphere of art and there find its complete fulfillment. (94)

Wilde perceived the last supper, the betraying kiss, the submission and exaltation of Christ, the
crucifixion, and all the other details of the Via Dolorosa and the liturgical ceremonies that follow
as sorrow and beauty melded together, a perfect display of the Greek tragedy. Wilde partakes in
the drama as he explicates the suffering road. For Wilde, drama becomes a way to experience life
as well as art, and he the symbol of “the art and culture of his age” (77). Wilde mentions in De
Profundis how he doesn’t regret “for a single moment having lived for pleasure,” but in his
pursuit of pleasure, he confesses that he limited his creativity, he limited his experience (92). For
Wilde, to understand the Passion is to understand the collusion of suffering and joy -- between
pleasure and pain. The difference between Burke and Wilde is that Wilde overtly compares his
artistic journey with Christ, and Burke draws on both Christ and other primitive cultures to
suggest that the scapegoat principle can be seen in society and social rhetoric at large.

Kenneth Burke gives us two ways to uncover the scapegoat with Oscar Wilde. First, we can use
Kenneth Burke’s statistical method to analyze “the interrelationships” of the symbols in A
Picture of Dorian Gray, De Profundis, and Wilde’s trial to uncover what Burke calls “motives.”
Motives drive an author regardless of his intellectual intentions. Burke believes that reoccurring
symbols in the works and life of an author can be connected to reveal meanings that the author
unintentionally weaves throughout his narratives. Wilde may express a more complicated
modern world where philosophies collide rather than resolve, but his life and the characters in
The Picture of Dorian Gray are still rooted in anthropological tropes of religion and politics. The
archetype at the intersection of the symbols in Wilde’s life and works is the scapegoat.
Kenneth Burke provides a detailed explanation of the scapegoat as a symbol, its meaning, and its use in literature. The introductory poem in this paper comes from Burke’s A Rhetoric of Religion and sufficiently outlines the work of a scapegoat. Anthropological rituals influence Burke’s analysis of the scapegoat, and he infers that these rituals have become embedded in the social habits of humanity. His process follows this cycle; The Iron Law of History: The laws and social expectations that create standards in society; Order which leads to guilt: The Iron Law creates psychological pressure and fear of repercussions due to failure. Guilt needs redemption: a way for social groups to depressurize their sense of culpability. Redemption needs a redeemer: the redeemer is the victim, and someone or something must bear society’s blame and shame. In this paper, I will use these steps to uncover the ways that Oscar Wilde both wrote about and became, in his recollections of events, a scapegoat in the late nineteenth century. I will also point to the social and political events of the era that influenced The Picture of Dorian Gray. And if these connections are not convincing enough, we have Wilde’s memoirs in De Profundis declaring the relationship between the Passion of Christ and the participation of Dorian in Romantic literature. The beauty of The Picture of Dorian Gray is that it moves toward modernity while admitting connections to an anthropological archetype embedded in the motives of social organization.

Burke claims that the sharp critic can find recurring patterns in a writer's works, and these patterns point to those systems of symbols that represent the artist’s approach to art:

By inspecting his work statistically, he or we may disclose by objective situation the structure of motivation operating here. There is no need to “supply” motives. The interrelationships themselves are his motives. For they are his situation; and situation is but another word for motives. The motivation out of which he writes is synonymous with the structural way in which he puts events and values
Burke’s statistical method looks for symbols intersecting throughout an author’s life and work. He calls these intersections “motives,” which is synonymous with “situation.” These intersections then influence the “structure” of a work of art. Art then acts like a looking glass through which researchers can glean the author's experience. The structure of the scapegoat, as outlined in the introductory poem, appears throughout The Picture of Dorian Gray, De Profundis, and the trials of Oscar Wilde.

Allen Carter, in his book Kenneth Burke and the Scapegoat Process, describes the socially constructed motives necessitating the scapegoat:

> The language system out of which we construct our identities is not a set of detached propositions but a series of moral commandments, by all of which none can abide. The society from which we choose our roles is not a neutral arena, but a pyramid of status and the narratives with which we frame our lives reveal to us our own eventual demise. The result is anxiety, widespread and deep, and a search for scapegoats. (18)

The scapegoat alleviates personal anxiety produced by the weight of failed social and moral obligations. As definitions of moral obligations change from one era to the next, individuals are caught in transition as social boundaries are tested and transformed. The caught individuals often become scapegoats as popular anxiety seeks a way to expunge the guilt, which results from an inability to live up to previous narratives and the moral expectations that derive from those
narratives. According to Burke, rituals like the goat-song are dramatic "hubs," with all human action "radiating' outward from the centers” (Philosophy 103). And to explain the "ritual drama" of the goat-song, he points to the ancient Hebrew tradition of communal cleansing, which I quote here:

And he shall place lots upon the two goats, one marked for the LORD and the other marked for Azazel. Aaron shall bring forward the goat designated by lot for the LORD, which he is to offer as a sin offering; while the goat designated by lot for Azazel shall be left standing alive before the LORD, to make expiation with it and to send it off to the wilderness for Azazel. (New American Standard Bible, Leviticus 16.8-10)

In the above passage, there are two goats. One is sent away out of society and the other killed before the temple of worship. Burke "discounts these ritualistic scapegoats" by reminding us that the ritual represents some other thing: It is not the goats as a goat that must die and be sent out of fellowship but the symbolic container for sin and the blood payment of guilt. But the pseudo- scientific scapegoat is attributed with the characteristics of the broken commandment. Leviticus helps us understand different ways that communities create scapegoats by separating the goat into two parts. One goat is sent away from the congregation to the desert as a symbol of moral separation from impurity, and the other goat is slain as retribution for crimes committed against divine law. But in a "scientific drama," to borrow Burke's terms, the point of social scapegoating is not to cleanse society but to expunge the guilt of society onto a suitable victim. There is a deep psychological yearning to push our feelings of failure under the law onto an outside source, one that we can justify sending away and crucify if necessary. If we then follow the radiating spokes outward from Wilde, his novel, and De Profundis, we should discover “The
Iron Law of History,” the “Order and Sacrifice,” the “Guilt,” and the “Redeemer… (which is to say, a Victim).
Chapter 3

THE IRON LAW

First, I will consider the “Iron Law.” Burke explains the nature of The Iron Law and the importance and effects it has on a community: "The possibility of a fall is implied in the idea of a covenant insofar as the idea of a covenant implies the possibility of its being violated" (Religion 174). Burke describes humanities divisiveness as a "falling" away from the unified nature of the Godhead. The "Iron Law of History" describes the actions humanity takes when moving away from an idealistic unity. Burke sees the Iron Law as a restorative device leading to order or a return to unity. For our purposes, The Iron Law is a response to a social need for "order" (177). According to Burke, political and social order can be applied to "structures in which people can give and receive orders, in which orders can be obeyed or disobeyed" (181). Law becomes even more integral to social concerns when we consider that a return to unity resonates as a return to God, and individuals believe that the good of society requires a restriction of rebellious behaviors.

In the late nineteenth century, Victorian England struggled to maintain a moral unity. As a result, Wilde’s decadent life and risqué works became the focus of a changing narrative as England attempted to wrestle with questions concerning the sodomite and popular morality. Barry Brummet writes, “Because humans by nature respond to symbols and patterns, symbolic forms have the rhetorical ability to induce cooperation by the public” (64). In other words, the public unifies in their symbol building to navigate moral imperatives that do not have outcomes that satisfy their perceived moral obligations. I would also argue that we adopt a Burkean
hierarchy by considering how the public's choice of scapegoat relies on a structure of better-than and worse-than. In this case, the sodomite represents the worst-case scenario in a society burdened by a decadent upper class, a class of wealth supporting prostitution, thereby unburdening a public guilt.

Public opinion about these matters found a voice in the 1885 addendum to the Criminal Law Act: “With this legislation acts of gross indecency between males whether committed in public or private was a misdemeanor and was liable to imprisonment for up two years. “This change expanded the definition of a homosexual act while at the same time making it easier for the prosecution of homosexuality” (Houston, Web, 2017). The Criminal Law Act reads like a roll call of national guilt as the men of parliament wrestle over changing the age of consent (the age whereby a man can aggressively seek sex from a young girl) from thirteen to sixteen, determine the boundaries of exporting young women for prostitution; and as a side note, making any act of sodomy, public or private, punishable by law.

Jonathan Dollimore concerns himself with these types of transitions when he summarizes Arthur N. Gilbert's writing about the increased prosecution of sodomites during the Napoleonic wars:

This analysis suggests that if, in periods of intensified conflict, crisis is displaced onto the deviant, the process only succeeds because of the paranoid instabilities at the heart of dominant cultural identities. Further, such displacements of non-sexual fears onto the sexual deviant, be he or she actual, imagined, or constituted in and by the displacement, are made possible because other kinds of transgression -- political, religious -- are only loosely associated with the deviant, but ‘condensed’ in the very definition of deviance. It is a process especially
apparent in early modern England . . .. At that time sodomy was associated with a whole range of evils, including insurrection and heresy. (237)

Dollimore, without using the term “scapegoat,” describes the process of publically laying hands on a victim and imparting a broad range of inadequacies onto the subject. In this case, the legal system acts as a priesthood to mollify psychological burdens.

After parliament amended the decency act to expand the prosecution to private domiciles, officials began to point to the theater as a place of perverted production. It was a logical move to find an even finer focus of blame among playwrights and actors to represent the scapegoat. And as a playwright, Oscar Wilde's flamboyant style, his association with the Art for Art's Sake group of critics, and his novel with questionable morals become an easy target, especially since he delivers himself up to the court in a roundabout way. Joseph Bristow, author of Effeminate England, Homoerotic Writing After 1885, goes as far as saying that Wilde made an “aesthetic decision to taunt a potentially hostile public gaze,” and that Wilde’s “fatalistic effeminacy” and his flirtation with the tragic drama “meant that he had to negotiate forces that could all too easily spell his doom” (21). Not only does he invite attention with his flamboyance, but also his novel portrays what would then be considered an unhealthy notice (according to Victorian social norms) for the male person, so much so that prosecutors enter passages from The Picture of Dorian Gray as testimony at his trial in London.
Chapter 4

GUILT

Secondly, Burke illustrates how “Order gives rise to a sense of guilt, and insofar as one conscientiously seeks to obey the law, by policing his impulses from within, he has the feel of killing these impulses” (Religion 210). When laws are imposed to establish order, two types of guilt occur, psychological and political. Those whose actions are not concurrent with established laws suffer the internal distancing from a unified society, and those who continue in those actions are liable to the courts for whatever penalties laws have established against those who disobey the order. The latter can be atoned for by paying your debt to society while the former leaves entire groups within a community in a state of dis-ease (i.e. a condition where one is unable to reconcile his/her behavior with beliefs).

Due to an increasing focus on the behaviors of the upper class by legal institutions, Victorian class structure alone no longer mollifies the guilt of a morally deficient society. In other words, hegemonic groups who consider themselves above the moral decay of the uneducated, poor blooded, unwashed masses suffer from a disconnect between their ideologies and everyday experiences. John Riquelme points to this disconnect in Wilde’s novel: “The novel’s narrative concerns a dark and darkening recognition that transforms Dorian’s life by actualizing a potential that was already there in his family, a potential that is one truth about British society” (497). The most disturbing word for people who desire to sustain a façade of fictional morality is “potential.” According to Lord Henry, in The Picture of Dorian Gray, suppressed or secret desire poisons the individual and thus the community: “But the bravest man
amongst us is afraid of himself. The mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives. We are punished for our refusals. Every influence we strive to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us” (19). We could easily label this poisoning “guilt.” Community guilt builds as the laws that are meant to make one better reveal the impossibility of compliance.2 The content of the Criminal Law Act confirms the questionable moral state and conflicts of conscience in England during the late nineteenth century. Parliamentarians fought to keep the legal age of consent for young girls at 13 and the legal age of prostitution at 16. Though these men lost to the opposition, the fact that they were concerned reveals something about their motives – and presumably actions.

Wilde rehearses this hypocrisy in The Picture of Dorian Gray when Dorian recalls “the gaunt cold picture gallery of his country house” and the “portraits of those whose blood flows in his veins” (121). Dorian begins with “Phillip Herbert” telling us that he was “caressed by the court for his handsome face” (121). He then describes “Sir Anthony Sheppard with his silver and black armor piled at his feet” and asks, “had the lover of Giovanna of Naples bequeathed him (Dorian) some inheritance of sin and shame (121). The ladies also partook of fleshly pleasures: “Lady Elizabeth Devereux . . . he knew her life and the strange stories that were told about her and her lovers. George Willoughby, with his powdered hair and fantastic patches? How evil he looked! He had been a macaroni (a dandy somewhat akin to Wilde himself). What about the second Lord Beckenham? The world looked upon him as infamous. He had led orgies at Carlton House (122). These portraits represent the bloodline on which hegemony is built. In every description of his bloodline, Dorian contrasts the beauty “caressed” by royalty and describes the

2 There may be an external compliance, but according to Christian doctrine, on which these laws are based, “People look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart” {New American Standard Bible 1 Samuel 16.7}. 
“lip leers” and “insolence” as guilt contained within the veneer of beauty. After Parliament confirms amendments to the Criminal Law Act, indiscretion among the elite creates an opportunity for young male prostitutes to blackmail their wealthy clients, which was frequently done (Wilde, Three Trials 2). But the Criminal Law Act did more to reveal the underbelly of British society than to eradicate immoral behavior. The editor of the London Evening News addresses this communal guilt and public awareness of it when he writes:

Never has the lesson of a wasted life come home to us more dramatically and opportunely. England has tolerated the man Wilde and others of his kind for too long. Before he broke the law of his country and outraged human decency he was a social pest, a centre of intellectual corruption. He was one of the high priests of a school which attacks all the wholesome, manly, simple ideals of English life.

(12)

The unknown author of this news article spanks his audience by saying Wilde's predicament is a lesson to them. He also uses the phrases "others of his kind" and "social pest" to demonstrate the public dereliction of moral duty and vilifies Wilde by using the metaphor of a "high priest" performing a service to develop further debauchery among the population. The article suggests that the trend toward immorality of all sorts and the neglect of religious duty falls squarely on the shoulders of one group, and this one group's high priest is Oscar Wilde. British society needed a place to unburden their guilt, to bridge the chasm between belief and reality, to pour out what they perceived as divine retribution. Burke names this behavior in his essay Philosophy of Literary Form: "So we get to the scapegoat, the representative or vessel of certain unwanted evils, the sacrificial animal upon whose back these evils is ritualistically loaded" (39-40). The sons of Aaron load the guilt of the Hebrew nation onto the scapegoat through the laying on of
hands. In the same way, there must be a public acknowledgement of this transfer to reconcile the community to higher moral standards.

In 1980, the Scots Observer asked Wilde "why" he goes "grubbing in muck heaps" in his recently published novel. The Observer's writer, Charles Whibley, goes on to say: "the proportion of healthy-minded men and women to those that are foul, fallen, or unnatural is great" (Wilde, Letters 265). Whibley’s rhetoric of righteousness focuses on Wilde to prove that there is a class of "healthy-minded" people. Wilde addresses Whibley's concerns and smartly points to the way Wilde himself addresses individual guilt in the novel:

It was necessary sir for the dramatic development of this story to surround Dorian Gray with an atmosphere of moral corruption. Otherwise, the story would have no meaning and the plot no issue. To keep this issue vague, indeterminate, and wonderful was the aim of the artist who wrote the story. I claim, sir, that he succeeded. Each man sees his own sin in Dorian Gray. (265)

Wilde shows that the problem is not with the immorality present in the novel but rather with the disconnect between unrealistic expectations and reality in the readers' psyche. It is each man's "own sin" rubbing against a desire to conform to an imagined morality that keeps the reader out of the clouds and mucking in the mire.

Wilde becomes a topic of widespread conversation and eventually legal action because of his participation in behaviors deemed punishable by law in the 1885 amendment. He either is acquiescent to an unconscious pattern or intentionally exerting himself to influence public opinion. Either way, he positions himself as a focus and a scapegoat. According to Burke, "The

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3 Alan Sinfield notes how Wilde’s persona that once pleased the public becomes a point of social “disturbance: "the entire, vaguely disconcerting nexus of effeminacy, leisure, idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism, which Wilde was perceived, variously, as instantiating, was trans 25ed into a brilliantly precise image" (3).
'scapegoat' becomes another kind of 'representative,' in serving as the symbolic vessel of certain burdens, which are ritualistically delegated to it" (Philosophy 27). The questions for Burke are, what "clusters" are represented within the scapegoat, and do the individual parts/pieces for of the clusters act as a synecdoche for the whole? If, say, Wilde exists as a scapegoat, then the legal documents, moral and social expectations, and expunging the source of immorality are the other members of the cluster. Burke would argue that this performance by the artist is "unconscious" and can only be understood in retrospect. But one gets the uncanny feeling that Wilde is aware of his part in the cluster and that his actions are an incumbent philosophical and political process.

Another way to think of this cluster is to consider how Wilde and others resisted the amendments to the Decency Act. Especially how Wilde, by his behavior and in his writings, makes himself a focus of political and social pressure. Even though he is "caught" in the transitions that question men who do not fit into social expectations of masculinity, he doesn't allow his predicament to silence his voice entirely. Instead, he continues to make homoerotic gestures both in his public display of self and in his writing.
Chapter 5

REDEEMER AND SACRIFICE

Wilde famously says to Andre Gide, “Voulez-vous savoir le grand drame de ma vie? C’est que j’ai mis mon genie das ma vie; je n’ai mis que mon talent dans mes œuvres” Wilde, Letters ix).

And in another instance, he says that everything he writes, he writes to be published (De Profundis). Wilde's flamboyance and willingness to transgress hetero-normative values suggests that part of his genius is in performing something of the truth while those who observe him consider his public persona the role of a skilled actor using outrageous behavior to promote both his philosophy and his art.4 What critics haven't considered is the "genius" of Wilde's performance as the drama of the scapegoat, or what Burke calls the "the goat-song" (Philosophy 40). Wilde himself claims, in a missive to André Guide: “It is true I have put my genius into my life – I have put only my talent into my works” (Raby 7). If this is true, then there should be some statistical evidence between Wilde’s life and works supporting the claim. But first, we must reaffirm the Burkean structures of the scapegoat.

In Philosophy of Literary Form, Kenneth Burke looks at the anthropological evidence of a structure that he terms the goat-song. The goat-song produces a paradox in one subject, a sacrifice for the guilt of a nation and a willing subject to fill the role. Burke combines these two meaning into one term, the sacrificial king:

We are now brought into the area of the tragedy, the “goat song” – and recall that

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4 There is a long list of critics including Adam Parkes, Jonathan Dollimore, and Montgomery Hyde who have excavated homoerotic meanings from Wilde's texts and his life, so I feel little need to support such claims.
in primitive societies, the purifying function could be ritualistically delegated to an animal, as societies grew in social complexity and sophistication, the tendency was to endow the sacrificial animal with social coordinates so that the goat became replaced by the sacrificial King. (40)

Societies need a way to unburden corporate guilt in hopes of winning the favor of gods. The scapegoat focuses blame and purifies the tribe filling both the position of incrimination and divine solution. The scapegoating process creates a paradox by gerrymander: the separation of the criminal and the kingly in one subject only to combine the pure and unholy in sacrifice.

Burke goes on to describe the qualifications of the scapegoat:

1). He may be made worthy legalistically (i.e., by making him an offender against legal or moral justice, so that he "deserves" what he gets."

2). He may proceed toward "sacrifice fatalistically," as when "Greek dramatists reinforced operations with a personal flaw."

3). “We may make him worthy by a subtle kind of poetic justice, in making the sacrificial vessel ‘too good for this world’” (40).

We should then look for "legalistically," "fatalistically," and judiciously as Burke's description of the type of social coordinates. There is an undeniably romantic gesture in becoming the scapegoat. The scapegoat is the medium that modulates one instance of a historical paradigm. We are unworthy bastards in need of forgiveness, to a brighter morning; you are the devilish bastard, and we are free to continue as we are in the light of your extreme depravity. Either way, the scapegoat stands on the podium of change and bathes in the floodlights of disparagement and appreciation simultaneously in the present and throughout history. The sacrifice suffers the impact of society’s moral discomfort. English law makes Wilde worthy legalistically by
considering his art and lifestyle evidence of an unseen private sodomy.

**Legalistically:** A short history.

In 1895, at the opening of The Importance of Being Earnest, the Marquis of Queensbury, after a failed attempt to disrupt the play, left a note with a bunch of rotting vegetables for Oscar Wilde accusing Wilde of posing as a sodomite. In a later conversation, Queensbury confronts Wilde: “I do not say that you are it, but you look like it” (i.e. by it, he means a sodomite). Frustrated over the rumors that his son and Wilde are having an affair, the Marquis desires a cessation of their romping about England. At Wilde’s home, the Marquis brandishes a list of rumors that are circulating among the society of London. He then mentions the one item that will eventually prove to be Wilde’s downfall: “I hear you were thoroughly blackmailed for a disgusting letter you wrote to my son.” “Wilde protested. ‘The letter was a beautiful letter, and I never write except for publication’” (De Profundis 25). Wilde does not deny the letter but embraces it as a performance meant for public consumption. Here is an excerpt from that letter:

> My Own Boy, Your sonnet is quite lovely, and it is a marvel that those red rose-leaf lips of yours should have been made no less for music of song than for madness of kisses. Your slim guilt walks between passion and poetry. I know Hyacinthus, whom Apollo loved so madly, was you in Greek days. (Letters 326)

If Wilde intends to display his art through his relationship and writings to Alfred Douglas, the Marquis’ son, then Oscar Wilde challenges notions of masculinity and indirectly challenges the law. This challenge engenders a quick response from the courts, the newspapers, and the general public. As a public document “meant for publication,” the letter submits to the interpretation of the public.
Wilde eventually brings charges of libel against the Marquis and, in turn, the Marquis encourages the courts to bring charges of indecency against Wilde under the Criminal Law Act, a charge that carries a two-year, harsh prison term. During the development of a case against Wilde, the author's friends encouraged him to abandon England and go to France. Wilde delays his departure until he feels that it is "too late" to go from England (Wilde, Three Trials 59). At "five o'clock," Sir John Bridge signs the warrant for Wilde's arrest. Wilde confesses to the Evening News one way that he is determined to be a legal scapegoat:

> It would have been impossible for me to prove my case without putting Lord Alfred Douglas in the witness box against his father. Lord Alfred Douglas was extremely anxious to go into the box, but I would not let him do so. Rather than put him into so painful a position, I determined to retire from the case and to bear on my own shoulders whatever ignominy and shame might result from my prosecuting Lord Queensbury. (58)

Wilde’s choice to “bear” the burdens of public discourses resulted in a campaign of accusation by newspapers. As Charles, J. remarked in his summing up, “for weeks it had been impossible to open a newspaper without reading some reference to the case, and especially Oscar Wilde” (74). The legal proceedings gave the public, through the press, a real outlet for self-righteous rage. Frank Harris later wrote:

> His arrest was the signal for an orgy of philistine rancor such as even London had never known before. The puritan middle class, which had always regarded Wilde with dislike as an artist and intellectual scoffer, a mere parasite to the aristocracy, now gave free scope to their contempt, and everyone tried to outdo his neighbor in expressions of loathing and abhorrence.’ (Wilde, Three Trials 68-69)
Burke enlightens us on the nature of this kind of public blaming when, in reference to the scapegoat, he says: “When this state of affairs prevails, it is not merely men’s differences that drive them apart, it is also the elements they share, vices and virtues alike, since both motives are capable of eulogistic and dyslogistic naming” (Burke, Motives 140, 141). Legalistically, the scapegoat must be capable of combining the principles of “identification” and “alienation” (140). Desiring to elevate himself from the middle to the upper class, seeking to better himself through intellectual achievement, and possessing hidden moral infractions are all ways that England's growing middle class could identify with Wilde. But by succeeding to penetrate the upper crust, outing the imperfections of English morality through intelligent commentary, and embracing a sexual identity that differs from the hetero-normative expectations of Protestant England, Wilde becomes consubstantial with the goat sent into Azazel. He sticks himself squarely into the transitional position. He alienates himself. According to the application of the law, Wilde is worthy to be punished.

This same process can be seen in The Picture of Dorian Gray. Dorian Gray makes an odd cosmic wish/prayer at the beginning of the novel. He prays the portrait would bare his aging process so that he could retain his youth eternally:

How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain forever young. It will never be older than this particular day in June . . . If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that – I would give everything. Yes, and nothing in the world I would not give. I would give my soul for that! (Wilde 25)

In the sacrifice of the scapegoat, there is a belief that once the sins of the individual and the
community are atoned for, the anger of God will be turned away. This sacrifice is essential in that the community believes itself to be eternal and any disruption and any disruption (sin) between the community, the individual, or God will prevent a smooth transition between this life and the next. The motive of Dorian's simple prayer is that the painting will age and he instead will remain young. But as the plot commences, Wilde connects Dorian's deviant acts and the degradation of the portrait. We see the sneer of pride, the hunger for pleasure, and even the effects of, what seems to be, an opiate addiction drawn on the face of the portrait. For example, after the death of Sybil, his fiancée, Dorian sees a cruel sneer appear on his doppelganger. Each act of revelry causes a transition on the portrait. The mutations in the painting cause distress for Dorian. His eternal youth loses meaning because it does not produce a mental state of peace.

Because of this discomfort over the portrait's changes, Dorian sends the picture into Azazel by relocating it in a vacant, dark room upstairs. This gesture recalls the second goat in Leviticus, the goat that the Hebrew priests lay their hands on as a sign of impartation, and sends into the desert outside of the camp. Not only does he not want anyone to see the secret of his youth but he also doesn't want anyone to see the evil of his life. In the end, the scapegoat process does not have a satisfying psychological effect for Dorian. The portrait's very existence continually reminds him of the events that have occurred because of his hedonistic lifestyle. The ineffectual and disenfranchised goat leads us to the goat that must be killed.

Leviticus indicates that killing the first goat pays the price for sin, but in this secularized version, sacrifice is an attempt to destroy a reminder of public guilt. Dorian becomes convinced that the only way for him to experience real freedom is to annihilate the picture. Dorian wants to experience pleasure without facing outcomes, but the picture frames his experience in an unpleasant light. Because of this, the picture becomes the goat that must shed blood to exchange
one life for another:

He looked around and saw the knife that had stabbed Basil Hallward. He had cleaned it many times, till there was no stain left upon it. It was bright and glistened. As it had killed the painter, so it would ruin the painter's work, and all that meant. It would eradicate the past, and when that was dead, he would be free. It would kill this monstrous soul-life, and without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace. He seized the thing and stabbed the picture with it. (Wilde 187)

Dorian’s hope that he would be free from the influence of the soul relates to Burke’s conviction, “(slaying either of self or other) is to be considered a special case of identification” (Burke, Motives 19, 20). Dorian cleans the knife, the one he used to kill Hallward, over and over until it “glistened,” but his sense of inadequacy required something more than ceremonial washing; he needed a blood sacrifice. Repetitive cleaning could not erase the memory of Basil’s murder. Then, when he stabbed the picture, he discovered that he was also killing himself (Wilde 187)

**Fatalistically**: Fate determined by character.

Wilde's love of men, a personal flaw according to English law, makes him "proceed' fatally toward sacrifice. Wilde proceeds "fatalistically" because of his deep desire to be honest combined with his desire for men. In De Profundis, Wilde writes “I had written in The Soul of Man that he who would lead a Christ-like life must be entirely and absolutely himself” and “there was nothing Plato or Christ had said that could not be transferred immediately into the sphere of Art and there find its complete fulfillment (93, 94). Wilde points to the complexity of the Christian experience by associating Christ-Likeness and baring one’s self honestly in the world. Wilde responds to friends who urge him to "forget who he was" by saying the only comfort he could find is "realizing who I am" (82). Wilde touches on the roots of sacrificial
purity by refusing to betray his convictions. He confesses to a visiting friend that "his life had been full of perverse pleasures," and he states that he cannot share any friendship based on pretense (137). There is overwhelming evidence in De Profundis, The Picture of Dorian Gray, and accounts of Wilde’s public life that Oscar Wilde lived on the razor’s edge of public expectations and personal honesty. His desire to live openly and honestly in a Victorian Culture qualified him as the perfect object of England’s self-loathing. He inserts himself into the fatalistic stage of the scapegoat by embracing a disposition contrary to English law. Wilde describes his motive for doing so when he writes: “to speak the truth is a painful thing. To be forced to tell lies is much worse” (137). Wilde proceeds fatalistically by embracing the poetic drama of the Via Dolorosa. The lamb must be pure. The lamb must be honest. For Wilde, these two terms are synonyms.

The complex conundrum of honesty comes across in Wilde’s attempts to explain himself through narratives about his characters. He attempts to be honest, but he cannot except. through his art. Jonathan Dollimore points to Gide’s journal, 1 October 1927, in his discussion of Wilde’s sexuality:

I believe quite the contrary that this affected aestheticism was for him merely an ingenious cloak to hide, while half revealing, what he could not let be seen openly . . . Here, as almost always, and often even without the artist’s knowing it, it is the secret of the depths of his flesh that prompts, inspires, and decides. (75)

Dollimore goes on to argue that Wilde portrays through his life and art an unstable, ever-changing self and the self of sodomy per se. While I concur that Wilde sought a progressive inner man, he, nonetheless, positions his sexual preference within his art and conveys preference as best he can during the age of the Criminal Law Act. Wilde chose to be himself in the public
sphere, a choice that moves him fatalistically toward sacrifice.

Helen Davis, in her article, “Circumnarration in Villanelle and The Picture of Dorian Gray, also discusses the roundabout way that Wilde addresses desire toward men in The Picture of Dorian Gray:

The most important sites of circumnarration are the many conversations between Dorian and Basil and Lord Henry that imply homoerotic desire and love. The most explicit statement of homoerotic love and desire—a confession by Basil to Dorian about why he didn't want to exhibit the painting—was altered slightly by the editor of Lippincott's, and Wilde removed it altogether from the 1891 novel. The passage in the typescript reads, "It is quite true that I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man should ever give to a friend.” (214)

One could suggest that Wilde circumnarrates with every note and gesture of his life. The courts indeed believed this to be true when they used excerpts from Wilde’s novel to indict him on charges of indecency.

During his trials, Oscar Wilde could not confess his sexual activities to the public. But he found it difficult to erase all his feelings and thoughts on the subject. Wilde uses art to mirror his motivations. In the preface to Dorian Gray, Wilde discounts Burke’s statistical approach to understanding motivation when he says, “To reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim” (Wilde 3), but he contradicts himself when he proclaims “C'est que j'ai mis mon genie das ma vie.” To argue the mixture of art and life further, we could follow Wilde’s descriptions of honey sweet and honey coloured viburnum,” from the introductory scene in The Picture of Dorian Gray, to his description of Lord Alfred Douglas as his “honey haired boy” (Wilde, Letters 363). Oscar Wilde presented his case for a body made for pleasure through Dorian Gray, and he confesses
the complications of an unrestrained lifestyle in the same work. Dorian acts as he pleases, but the record of his behavior appears in the portrait to remind him that every action bears unintended effects. As an artist, Wilde could not allow the public to censor thought, and as a man, Wilde was caught in a transition of legal and public opinion forcing him to defend his philosophy and lifestyle. It may be presumptuous of me, but it seems that Oscar Wilde sought a way to embrace his sexuality, a sexuality that drove him to find a resolution.

**Judiciously:** “Too good for this world.”

There are many ways that Wilde’s art and life step out of time and become too good for this world. The beginning of The Picture of Dorian Gray describes a garden scene where Basil Hallward paints his subject, Dorian Gray. In an interchange between Lord Henry and Basil, Lord Henry describes Dorian as “unspotted” from the world. One of the requirements of the goat-song is that the animal be unblemished, perfect for sacrifice:

Lord Henry looked at him. Yes, he was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candor of youth was there, as well as all youth’s passionate purity. One felt he had kept himself unspotted from the world. No wonder Basil Hallward worshipped him. (Wilde 17)

Lord Henry describes Dorian as a subject of physical perfection kept “unspotted” from the world. Dorian not only exchanges his burdens with the picture, but he also becomes the canvas himself, a place on which others paint their guilty pleasures. Hallward begs Lord Henry not to "corrupt" Dorian. He also tells Henry how an artist exchanges the essence of his life with art. As Helen Davis points out, the "secret" of Hallward's soul is his love toward Dorian. Hallward paints his desire into the canvas and confesses:
Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the colored canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my soul. (Wilde 8)

If the mystery of the soul is thus revealed for the artist, then the painting also, without the artist's intention, reveals the potential of the subject's soul. The sneer, the hatefulness, the transgressions are all revealed as the picture begins to show signs of age and experience. Dorian starts out as a pure, worthy subject but moves quickly to "corrupt," as "too good" creates a vacuum absorbing the less seemly qualities of humanity. Hallward chooses Dorian because of Dorian's purity, Lord Henry chooses Dorian because of his innocence, and the trajectory of Dorian's life is determined by the vacuum purity and innocence create.

Wilde notes his own transition from pure to despised when reflecting on the strange habits of "the gods" in De Profundis: "The gods are strange. It is not our vices only they make instruments to scourge us. They bring us to ruin through what is good, gentle, humane, loving. But for my pity and affection for you and yours, I would not now be weeping in this terrible place" (39). There is a resonance of "betrayed with a kiss" and "utter loneliness, and Christ’s "submission and … acceptance" as Wilde approaches his condemnation in the above passage (96).

There would not be any point in decrying the wicked man's reproach in prison, but the good man wants his good deeds to be recognized and valorized. Oscar Wilde wanted the world to know that he filled the role of scapegoat; that his life fell in symmetrical balance with what he calls the "sorrow and beauty…made one in their meaning and manifestation" (96). Wilde inserts
Christ’s passion in his own narrative by interweaving his experience as the focus of England’s dismay, his betrayal by Douglas, and the intertwining of his recollections in De Profundis with biblical narratives. Wilde furthers these comparisons when he describes Christ: “One always thinks of him as a young bridegroom with his companions . . . as a shepherd straying through a valley with his sheep in search of a green meadow or cool stream (97). In the same way, Wilde gathered about him young disciples such as Andre Gide and Alfred Douglass and instructed them in the “transgressive aesthetic” (Dollimore 4). The transgressive aesthetic encourages the individual to die to arbitrary moral restrictions and resurrect the body free to experience “unbounded joy” (5).

Wilde’s famously influenced the thinking and behavior of those around him. So much that one of his jailors observed that the author was too good for his present circumstances and testified:

He has no business here, sir. He’s no more like one of our reg’lars than a canary s like one of them cocky little spadgers. Prison ain’t meant for such as him, and he ain’t meant for prison. He’s that soft sir, you see, and affeckshunate. He’s more like a woman, he is; you hurt ‘em without meaning to. I don’t care what they say, I likes him. And he do talk beautiful, don’t he? (Hyde, Aftermath 64)

The jailor describes Wilde as vulnerable, affectionate, and beautiful of speech. In prison, so harsh that many men died from malnutrition and exposure, Oscar Wilde stood out as a sheep to be slaughtered. He had no business there because he was of a different stock than men prosecuted for crimes. The road that brought Oscar Wilde to Pentonville and Wandsworth was paved with a public guilt, and he, the unspotted goat, bore the punishment of all those who fell short of a general moral liability. Convicting Wilde not only proved that the courts were willing
to cleanse the temple of the upper class but also that corruption flowed from the bottom up as Wilde climbed the ladders of social affairs.

In his prison memoirs, De Profundis, Wilde acknowledges his connection and adoration of the scapegoat and its paradox. It is in the Via Dolorosa that Wilde discovers the perfection of poetic drama. Wilde removes the dogma and condemnation regurgitated by the church and allows the road of Christ to become an aesthetic experience. In the sufferings induced by England’s harsh prisons, Wilde remembers his love affair with the Passion: “Is there anything that, for sheer simplicity of pathos wedded and made one with sublimity of tragic effect, can be said to equal or even approach the last act of Christ’s passion” (96). Wilde sees Christ's Passion as the ultimate structure for art. He uses the nominalization "sublimity" mixed with "pathos" to indicate the kind of aesthetic experience that the Via Dolorosa conjures in his mind. Through Burke's incongruous perspective, we might think of the Passion as an aesthetic experience, but statistically, we must also consider the Passion as a connection to a much larger paradigm, one that reaches backward in time to the present, and then stretches into the future. Christ offers his life to traitors and false friends. He is innocent, yet he is chosen to pay with his “innocent blood’ for the hopeless “stain” on Herod’s hands. Christ is “swathed in Egyptian linen with costly spices and perfumes as though he had been a king’s son.” Wilde secularizes the story by suggesting that Christ is lower than a King’s son. In his secularization of The Passion, Wilde positions himself to take on a role in the drama of the scapegoat. He sees himself as the center of a great public unburdening of guilt, as betrayed by friends, and as the one anointed to pay the price for the many.

Did Wilde consciously rather than unconsciously contribute to his own Via Dolorosa? Once again, I turn to Carter’s explication of Burke:
The sacrificial choice becomes a "vessel…of unwanted evils"; then, driven from the circle, it carries these evils away (Philosophy 39-40). At least temporarily the group's sense of guilt is relieved. The victim must have been "profoundly consubstantial with those who, looking upon it as a chosen vessel, ritualistically cleanse themselves by loading the burdens of their own iniquities upon it. (qtd. in Carter 18)

It is important to remember the social climate in which Wilde integrated his lifestyle and art (at times these are indistinguishable). “In the late afternoon of Saturday, May 25, 1895, Oscar Wilde was found guilty of having committed many offenses contrary to the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885 (Wilde, Three Trials 1).

The English Courts made Oscar Wilde their symbol to represent all the evils of sodomy. The Nineteenth Amendment to the Criminal Law Act changed the rhetoric of the era from it is wrong to display your sexual interests in public to it’s wrong to be the kind of man who commits indecent acts in private. The people of England needed an example because these cruel actions toward a select group were contemporaneously new. Wilde became a convenient example of the evil fruit of sodomy. Wilde was intentionally flamboyant and well known through his plays, speaking engagements, and social events. The court, to convict him of indecency, used all of Wilde's philosophy, art, and public personae.

Once popular sentiment grew against Wilde, and the people began to shout, "crucify him," "crucify him," "the scales" of justice were "weighted against him" (Wilde, Three Trials 75). In the final court proceeding before Wilde's imprisonment, the judge declared: "In my judgment…it (the punishment) is totally inadequate for such a case as this." And as the new of Wilde's conviction reached the streets, "Several people literally danced for joy, and some
prostitutes kicked up their skirts in glee" (Hyde, Aftermath 1). Wilde spent his time from May 1895 to October 1895 at Pentonville in the most atrocious conditions. He was then transferred to Wandsworth by way of Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum where he underwent a psychological evaluation.

When Oscar Wilde stood emaciated and ill outside the sanitarium. The English crowds were all too happy to focus their anger and judgment on Wilde as the scapegoat. For the spectators, Wilde fulfills the expectations of Burke's qualitative form; his desolate situation was the natural outcome of a depraved lifestyle, he was the subject of news articles and common gossip, his plays were removed from theaters, and his home and book collection sold to pay legal debts. In De Profundis, Wilde describes the mob that greeted him on the street, a scene that Isaiah also details in the Old Testament: De Profundis, Wilde describes the mob that greeted him on the street, a scene that Isaiah also details in the Old Testament:

Of all possible objects, I was the most grotesque. When people saw me, they laughed.

(He had no form or comeliness)

Each train as it came in swelled the audience. Nothing could exceed their amusement.

(there is no beauty in him that we should desire him)

That was, of course, before they knew who I was. As soon as they had been informed

(he was despised, and we did not esteem him)

they laughed still more. (Hyde, Aftermath 40)

(And we hid . . . our faces from him) New King James Version, Isaiah 53.2-3
Wilde’s description of people responding to his wretched condition coincides with the prophecy Isaiah speaks. Here, he magnifies the aesthetic power of his situation with the lens of a historic prophecy. By placing himself in the position of the despised savior, Wilde places the society responsible for putting him in prison as the sinners who need a sacrifice. To imagine Oscar Wilde, poorly dressed, woefully distressed, underfed and pale, standing in the middle of a thoroughfare, surrounded by a mob of onlookers who castigate his existence – as though his present condition is not suffering enough, willing him to die in retribution for imagined crimes, is to imagine Oscar Wilde as the sacrificial king clothed with society’s own self-hatred, willing to suffer that all might see the injustice of an outdated system of morality. The public’s hateful reaction to Wilde's trial overburdens reason. England made Wilde a scapegoat and caused him to bear the weight of their guilt and perceived inadequacies. During his life and trials, Oscar Wilde seems to be aware of his position as the scapegoat. He wrote The Picture of Dorian Gray years after the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 and several years before his trial. But the little novel contains a premonition of burdens and guilt and responsibilities that are taken from one subject and placed on another just as the blame of a nation is passed on to the scapegoat in the goat-song. Wilde’s memoirs describe the ultimate poetic drama, and for Wilde, the ultimate poetic drama is the Via Dolorosa, the Passion of Christ.
Chapter 6
CONCLUSION

Critics may argue over the fractured possibilities or even the postmodernist peculiarities in Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray, but the archetype of the scapegoat cannot be dutifully discounted until we consider how Wilde’s fiction, experience, and recollections recall this reoccurring symbol. The scapegoat begins with the legalities of the criminal law act of 1987 by transferring the dis-ease of the upper class onto the legal system of the day. It begins Wilde’s one novel with Dorian’s wish for transference, and it begins the trials of Oscar Wilde when Wilde becomes the focus of the Criminal Law Act. And finally, it begins De Profundis as Wilde recalls his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas. In the finale of The Picture of Dorian Gray, Dorian slaughters the portrait as he attempts to rid himself of the burdens of his actions and age. The trials of Oscar Wilde culminate in the persecution of Wilde as a symbol of public guilt eventually leading to Wilde’s untimely death after a brutal stay in England’s inhumane prisons. And De Profundis reads like an outline of Christ's Via Dolorosa. Having considered all the evidence, I cannot comprehend a full understanding of the novel without the scapegoat. The scapegoat creates cohesiveness for the many narratives rather than unraveling all that is modern about Wilde's novel.

In the novel, Lord Henry Wotton repetitively makes his argument for a "new humanism," and Basil Hallward reminds us that aesthetics and the beauty they contain should restrain us from acting in ways that mar the purity and loveliness of experience. Dorian Gray seeks ways to integrate both sensuality and a state of pure youthfulness. Wilde playfully searches for ways to
work out the many different philosophies and moralities of his experience through intersections and conversations between the characters. The narrator allows us to see ways that these incongruent perspectives collide and create contention and even murder in a physical plane. Because Wilde refuses to relieve the pressures caused by these tensions, we can appropriate the term "modern" to describe the approach of the novel to philosophy and criticism. However, Gillespie's call to a postmodern reading fails to sever the roots of the scapegoat archetype. The modernity of Wilde's experience and writing does put pressure on human aspirations of stable cultural norms, but it is at this intersection of expectations and reality that the scapegoat steps in to bear the costs of human maturation. As society progresses, the scapegoat shoulders both past sins and pains of transition; the scapegoat stands in for the individual and corporate by suffering the penalty of the law and the symbol of the injustice of the law. The scapegoat allows us to disrupt the status quo and move thinking, and therefore our actions, forward.

But there is a problem with the scapegoat. A problem that anchors Dorian Gray in the modernity critics have come to expect from Oscar Wilde: The transfer of social and legal inadequacies is merely symbolic and leaves society and the individual weighted with the guilt that moral laws instigate. Dorian wishes the aging process into the picture, and from a critical standpoint, one might say that – like the picture - our understanding of art must change over time, that its interpretation depends on the historical perspectives of if the viewer. Just as Dorian reimagines the transfer from aging to sin bearing and then back again to aging, the utility of the scapegoat changes with time and perspective so that where the crowds in London believe persecuting Wilde necessary to retard the decay of morals in society, we now see how Wilde compares his persecution with that of Christ. The scapegoat is a good symbol and an ineffective instrument at the same time. Even Kenneth Burke discounts the scapegoat noting its symbolic
nature. Dorian appears to be spotless, but as Lord Henry points out to Basil Hallward, Dorian's adventures were not a new revelation but a coming-out, a released repression. At the same time, Oscar Wilde seems to imagine himself as a scapegoat to the public: "I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age. I had realized this for myself at the very dawn of manhood and had forced my age to realize it afterward (De Profundis 77). But he is hardly innocent of the charges or pure in his motives. To have a valid scapegoat requires a pure and innocent individual to bear the weight of society’s imperfections. So rather than a scapegoat, we have a symbol negotiating the need to transfer guilt and inadequacy away from ourselves, a symbolic action that fails to satisfy the individual. When Dorian Gray takes the knife and rips through the canvas of his portrait, he acknowledges that the scapegoat has failed, and when, in turn, he subsumes the guilt associated with his deeds, he shows us all how he failed. Oscar Wilde thoughtfully rescues us from our romanticism by showing how the scapegoat fails to alleviate the pressures of disillusionment.

So now we have an instrument that succeeds in containing and progressing art and philosophy, law and society forward into new dimensions, but that same instrument fails when considered apart from its symbolic form. We cannot remove the scapegoat from our thinking when considering Wilde, De Profundis, and The Picture of Dorian Gray; it is too interwoven into the texture of Wilde's life and works. As critics, it seems we have prematurely discounted archetypes in the architecture of modernity.
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