Cormac Gallagher:

It is a very great pleasure to welcome Dr. André Michels who has come to us from Luxembourg to give a lecture this evening on Oscar Wilde which he has entitled *Aesthete and Homosexual*. It probably sounds much better in French or Luxembourgeois but we have decided to keep the title anyway. Tomorrow morning he will be giving a talk in St. Vincent's Hospital, to which you are all also very welcome, on *The Hatred of the Father in Perversion*, that is, the hatred of the father in perversion. This evening's lecture we had planned, and he had intended, to be a more literary and general introduction to the problem of perversion. Tomorrow morning's talk will be perhaps a little bit more technical.

I would just like to say a word or two. One of the reasons why Dr. Michels is here is that I read an article in a Strasbourg journal called *Apertura* in which he was one of the very few people that I have come across who has actually approached the question of Freud's study of the *Witz*, the witticism, and the way in which it impacts on the style of analytical interpretation. Subsequently, we also met at the Congress of the European Foundation for Psychoanalysis in 1992. More recently again he has published an article in the last issue of *The Letter*, which I can recommend to you warmly, entitled *Writing and Oedipus*, in which he proposes some very interesting, I would say, axes for reflection. By training he is a doctor and a psychiatrist, trained, I just learned tonight, in part at least, with a very famous and I would hate to hesitate to say (but for me anyway), an almost avuncular figure in French psychoanalysis called Lucien Israel, who hasn't been translated much into English but whose work has been extremely influential, who incidentally as Dr. Michels just

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*This is the text of a lecture delivered on 8th December 1995 to an audience at the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies at LSB College. The text given here represents a transcript of a recording and so retains much of the character of a spoken rather than a written text. (Ed).*
said, wasn't very interested in theory but was, I think, pretty much of a clinical genius - from what one hears. Dr. Michels is also a frequent visitor to the United States where he has lectured on a regular basis in New York and in Boston and notably also in Clarke University. Those of you who have done the first three weeks of your psychoanalytical studies programme will I hope know that Clarke University is best known for having awarded a doctorate to Freud on its twentieth anniversary. Now, I don't know what we are going to do in LSB or who we are going to award a doctorate to on our twentieth anniversary, but it gives you a sense of perspective when you see this university remembered for something it did on its twentieth anniversary. All of that having been said, we are delighted to have you with us tonight André and I'll now let you read your paper.

**André Michels:**

Thank you very much for these nice words and for the invitation to your beautiful town. Speaking about Oscar Wilde in his native town to Dubliners who I think know his works much better than I do and, moreover, in English - a language that I use only occasionally - is sort of a challenge for me. I don't know what Oscar Wilde's place in Dubliners' fantasies and maybe hearts is these days - it is surely less important than the one occupied by another child of this country and city, James Joyce who is considered, and rightly so, to be one of the greatest novelists of our century. In his native town there are traces of Joyce to be seen everywhere. However, this did not prevent him from leaving for a distant place to look for and to find his own way as a writer, enabling him to express himself and write about his origins. Only by moving away geographically did he manage to situate the city of Dublin, its inhabitants and his own past life there at the centre of his research work and his writing. Another child of this town, Samuel Beckett who was awarded the Nobel Prize, also decided to leave his homeland and go into exile, an exile not only from his country but also from his mother-tongue. 'An exile from his mother-tongue' would be an appropriate title for a study on Samuel Beckett and his works. Exile takes place in different dimensions and seems to be necessary to the young potential author in order that he be able to find his
way as a writer. Only if his exile was real did the exile have the possibility afterwards of returning to his country. But it doesn't always happen. Sometimes it is only after his death that a writer is welcomed as a prodigal son and sometimes he is rather seen as the poor relative. Just think about Heinrich Heine in Germany.

But what about Wilde? We know that after his three trials, which took place exactly one century ago, his name was erased from the list of past students of Trinity College. I don't know where he stands today. It seems that recently Queen Elizabeth II refused to rehabilitate him. Of course, Oscar Wilde's case is more complicated than Joyce's and Beckett's because he confronts us with some aspects of his personality and sexuality which are rarely addressed without being accompanied by prejudices, either positive or negative. During his life Wilde found refuge in France. It is indeed this country which now, once more, gives him a big audience and commemorates the 100th anniversary of his trials and his conviction by publishing an avalanche of books. Robert Badinter, former Lord Chancellor and former President of the constitutional court has written a play about Oscar Wilde which can now be seen at the theatre in Paris. The interesting thing is that this brilliant lawyer, in a short essay which was published with his play, attacks the English legal system and overtly criticises the political situation of the time. The majority of critics agree that at that time the authorities major aim was to prevent the Wilde affair from becoming a public issue since it would have compromised the then Prime-Minister Lord Rosebury who himself had a relationship with the brother of Lord Alfred Douglas, Wilde's lover. The two affairs were strongly interwound. The public did not have to know. Was it for reasons of state that Wilde had to be convicted and even sacrificed? Although to say this is to oversimplify the case, nevertheless, many facts and documents confirm this hypothesis. But even if it was true, this would not mean that Wilde was not completely responsible for what happened to him. At the same time we must avoid turning him into a hero of modernity who to defend the cause of love, that does not reveal itself, 'that does not say its name', did not hesitate to criticise the law and its representatives.
Wilde's behaviour followed a precise, strict logic which he discovered against his will, - in French you would say 'à son corps défendant', reluctantly or, literally translated, to save his defendant body (I don't know if that makes any sense in English) - and which he is not sure that he has fully understood, not even before his death. It was a completely unconscious logic. What happened to him was tragic. Like Oedipus, and without knowing where this would lead him, he contributed to the provocation of a certain scenario, pushing the law to decide and intervene, to condemn what was intolerable. This tragedy took place before the courts. Some say that Wilde's replies in court were far more brilliant than the ones he put into the mouths of the characters in his plays.

The psychoanalyst is very sensitive to this claim for a legal authority. He sees in this a symptom of the failure of the father's authority. I don't want to dwell on Wilde's trials this evening because the subject will be discussed tomorrow morning during the meeting organised by Dr. Gallagher. However, I would just like to note that Wilde caused his own loss - he provoked it. He did all he could to make it happen. This leads one to think that he was terribly guilty and that, most importantly, the only way for him to endorse this guilt, to take it into consideration, was to enact this scenario, - a scenario both legal and tragic.

In his novel The Picture of Dorian Gray the behaviour of the hero is qualified as sinful. Sin leads to punishment. Dorian's real concerns are hidden behind the provocative behaviour typical of a fashionable dandy. It helps him to betray public opinion and at the same time, at least partly, himself. The situation and social position of Oscar Wilde were more or less the same. It looked as though he was forced to accomplish a fate, which he did with an unusual persistence. This is probably the reason that prevented him, on different occasions before, during and after the trials, from leaving England and going into exile like Joyce or Beckett, which would have been the only way for him at that time, if not to get out of his problems then at least to escape from his prosecutors and persecutors. He did not choose the best time to do it. He left only later on when he had nothing to lose, that is, when he came out of prison. This exile, that he did
not choose but that was imposed by events, was like a death for him. So it wasn't really an exile because it was his way to death.

This information about Wilde's life and tragedy will enable you to better understand and follow what I will try to develop, - especially the importance played by the role of his aesthetic research, - an attempt to define himself. He was exaggeratedly interested in appearances, in the outside look. His speeches were brilliant and detailed but ridiculously mannered. This made him so arrogant and conceited that even his closest acquaintances hated him. He was trying to conceal an immense lack of security and also a real depth of his being which he tried to avoid by all means. Beauty was the only thing that interested him. His attention was drawn by ancient Greece and its cult of the perfect body. He was strongly impressed by the American painter Whistler who stated that morality is first of all something aesthetic and that only beauty could strive for perfection. Wilde himself wrote in the preface to Dorian Gray that 'The artist is a creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim'. He constantly asserted that an artist should not be confused with his work of art. This might seem logical but why conceal the artist? What is there to hide? Another quotation of Wilde's - 'There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all'. He thus places art, and the work of art 'Beyond Good and Evil', (Jenseits von gut und Böse).

This means that an artistic production is subject only to an aesthetic need - it has nothing to do with the issue of evil. However, it is exactly this evil which is staged in The Picture Of Dorian Gray. Evil is represented by an ugliness which is both physical and moral. What Wilde should have done was to further develop the concept of evil. Maybe then it would have helped him to slow down the events that led to his own fate, so that he might have avoided a certain number of sorrows. Other authors did it, like The Marquis de Sade and also Jean Genet, who tried to develop a theory of the mal, of evil. It was not Wilde's concern to develop a theory about evil. He used to say in even more precise terms: 'The moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium'. The usual meaning of morality is at most a source of inspiration for the writer, while the artistic
production is subject to strict aesthetic criteria which are the basis of his moral pretensions. If the work of art is something that goes beyond good and evil, can we say the same for the artist?

These days we are used to hearing about the committed right of philosophers, especially after the events that have marked this century. Today's modern sensitivity would make it inconsistent and even unthinkable for a writer not to express his opinion about an overt injustice. Sartre used to talk about a writer's responsibility. He stated that had Flaubert, while talking of the events of La Commune in the early 1870's, openly expressed his opinion, then maybe things might have evolved in a different way. However, the twentieth century affords us far more serious examples: - Heidegger, a philosopher of world reknown who sat at the same table as the Nazi's and who moreover was not able to openly distance himself afterwards.

Oscar Wilde had a strong dislike for committed writers like Zola and Dickens whose picture of nineteenth century society was so precise that nobody had doubts about what their opinion was. Moreover we know very well the extent to which Zola was involved when the Dreyfus issue surfaced and the influence he had on how it wound up. Wilde stated: 'No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style'.

So, Wilde was very far from the type of commitment we have just mentioned, not because he did not know it existed but because he had other concerns. He did not answer the question about this potential commitment. What he said about the absence of moral preferences in an artist was simply located in a different register. Nevertheless, his position was like a denial, - his behaviour highlighting the fact that he was on the defensive, not so much a defence from the outside world as much as a defence from his own inner problem. His deepest thoughts were at times exactly contrary to what he meant in his destructive statements. This is the case with the following one: 'No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything'. Probably no artist today would like to make a statement like this. While Wilde's intentions were influenced by the mentality of his time and by his intellectual environment, they were first of all a reply to an issue he was dealing with and which he expressed and
tried to face in his own way. The artist cannot of course 'express everything'. Artistic research is looking for its own limits, - the only way to define what art is and to determine the artist's position. These limits are the limits of his subjectivity (like shame, for instance) as well as those which are imposed by social rules and conventions. The artist is hence faced, - and this is very important for Wilde - with a social censorship that is vital in order for his work to advance. This denial of limits highlights the provocative and the challenging attitude of Oscar Wilde, but at the same time reveals the fragility of his subjective position.

The statement that 'No artist is ever morbid' serves as an answer to the question he was asking himself, the question which Dorian Gray, both the novel and the subject, were also wondering about. Wilde was well aware of the closeness between this fictional character, the fruit of his imagination, and himself. At the end of February 1890 after drafting his novel, he wrote in a letter that: 'I have just finished my first long story, and I am exhausted. I am afraid this mirrors my own life; only words, no deeds'. The closeness, of course, was going well beyond this and Wilde was more or less aware of it. After he had finished this novel he fell deeper and deeper into his homosexuality. What was extraordinary about this novel was that it enabled its author to somehow predict what his life was going to be like. The role of this book is similar to that of the inaugural dream, - in French you would say 'rêve programme', - that takes place at the beginning of an analysis, where all the major elements the analysand will have to address during the cure can be found. Probably the dream that we defined as a predichional dream plays a similar role. It reflects an interpretation given by the dreamer on the basis of elements belonging to his past and his present according to his desire. This desire is something totally unconscious having a time structure, a very precise time structure, whose consequence is that the subject projects the accomplishment of his desire into a distant future.

Wilde's literary project is also an investigation of his desire - a question about his desire, not only in the elaboration of this novel but also in the relationship he established (and one that is very interesting to study) between his writing and his life. He could have simply said, like most authors do, 'it is simply a story, the result of my imagination - the only
relationship it has with my own life is the result of a transposition'. Such a statement would have enabled him to move on to something else, to something which could have been completely different. But something prevented him from doing so.

The distinction made by Wilde between the art and the artist can be considered as an attempt to try to get cured, to recover from an illness. Freud said the same thing about the function of the delirium for the psychotic and Lacan added the same hypothesis about the importance of writing for a writer (in his seminar about Joyce). When Wilde declared that no artist is ever morbid he implicitly meant that he is not morbid as an artist. However this does not mean he is not so as a subject. But are we right in considering the artist and his subjectivity as something separate? This might be a big issue for modern literary criticism.

It is in the preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray that he sets up the major project of his life. He used it, at the same time, to both justify himself and to reply to his critics. 'To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim'. He was getting ready to build a mask and to wear it in the most difficult times. He was slowly becoming a sort of a genius at developing an image to hide parts of his real being which he could not recognize or could not consider as such. His famous statement is often quoted: 'I have put my genius into my life, and only my talent into my works'. It was widely recognized that Wilde was a talented writer but that he could have done much better. Maybe he would have managed later on, had he survived the drama of his life. It is this formula that links his life with his art. He needed some genius 'to conceal the artist', to build up a mask. A mask, however, never lasts. He was always close to being unmasked, especially because he had a secret life, because he had something to hide from society, from his family, his wife and his children. Most of his art can be seen as works on masks, that is, on what is shown and what is subject to the gaze (regard) and also on the gaze itself.

Wilde is even more precise again in this preface to Dorian Gray. 'It is the spectator and not life, that art really mirrors'. Art corresponds to a certain gaze, or even better, to the necessity to set up a scenario in order to erect a gaze. It is that real erection of a gaze which is the measure of everything. It is also because of the gaze that Wilde introduced, or so he
claimed, his genius into his life. He wanted to disassociate his life and his art, but at the same time they seemed to be deeply interwoven and interlinked. The drafting and publishing of *Dorian Gray* seems to have radically transformed Wilde's life. The novel is based on the dialectic between life and the work of art, transferred onto an imaginary level. This very specific kind of transference is a point that we have to deal with if we want to study Wilde's literary production. Dorian Gray is faced with his portrait, extremely and perfectly beautiful, Greek-like. He is very proud of it until the moment when he is very sad at the thought that his portrait will always have those young and very beautiful features, while he would lose them. And so he finds himself wishing that the opposite could be the case, that the person in the picture would grow older, would change, with time, and that he would always have the same features of eternal youth.

It is a factitious and fictitious but clever tool to elude time, its vicissitudes and its sanctions, whose aim is to erase some features in order to inscribe and even engrave some others, namely those of the ageing of the face and the body. The mask can stay, - it is saved - but only if the portrait undergoes some deep changes so that not only the deterioration due to time can be inscribed but also the disfigurement of the features due to the nastiness of Dorian Gray. He emerges more and more like a cynical, rotten and deeply perverse being. Given this incorporation of evil, *(incorporation du mal)*, the hero of the novel must absolutely keep up his appearances. Wilde, subject to the same necessity, tried to achieve this conception, through his creation and his theory of art, which we have briefly described at the beginning and which he used to 'conceal the artist'. He transferred onto a literary plane the major problem of his life, which remained quite inaccessible to him and which he tried to discover in this way. Nevertheless, - and this is a very important point with Wilde - the literary transference would not bring any solutions. It is a completely different sort of transference.

The literary transference did not bring any solutions. On the contrary, it seems to have made things worse and to have accelerated the course of events. Dorian Gray is able to save his face in society. He is very brilliant but he cannot be unaware that he is wearing a mask, because when he is at home he notices the changes in his portrait, that is, the
transformation of his image in the mirror, where slight changes in his behaviour, excesses in his words are already to be seen.

Wilde's genius, which one could also qualify as an evil genius, surfaced a month after the achievement of his novel, when he met Dorian Gray in person - Lord Alfred Douglas. He was flattered by the friendship with this descendant of the very old aristocratic and highly noble family, whose ancestors married princesses and so on. They were so powerful and rich that they managed to stand up to the monarchy's authority. Wilde used all existing forms of seduction to become the object of desire of the young man who will then become 'Bosie'. His pictures represent him with childish features, not at all in keeping with his real age. He was known for his beauty but for his hateful personality and deep nastiness as well. Bosie became his lover but above all his greatest love, - the passion of his life. The passion was so strong that gradually he forgot what the social conventions were. In order to satisfy his protégé he was ready to bring his father, the Marquess of Queensbery, to court. Everybody knows what happened then. Wilde lost the trials which rapidly turned against him. He was given the maximum penalty, - two years of hard labour. When he came out of prison he was a destroyed and broken man, both from a human and a moral point of view.

Between 1891 when he met Bosie and 1895 when the trials took place, his life got worse and worse and he never recovered. He could not ignore the fact that he was heading for disaster. Nevertheless, this did not make him more reasonable. Quite the contrary! In order to understand what happened during this period of his life it is necessary to say a few words about what happened before this.

In 1884 Wilde married Constance Holland Lloyd and had two sons, Cyril and Vyvyan, born, respectively, one and two years after the marriage. Without going into detail, I will just concentrate on a very important aspect of this event. Constance, his wife, met with his taste and perfectly corresponded to his aesthetic expectations. He loved her tenderly and seems to have had a very intense sexual life. However, already during the first pregnancy, his desires started to wane. They totally disappeared after the second. You might object and say that biographers at times go too far and tend to project their own fantasies onto the life of the person they are
analysing. One of Wilde's biographers wrote: 'He had married an immaterial being, an androgyne almost, and discovered the ravages of time and nature'. It is difficult to verify this statement. However, it corresponds to what we know about Wilde. We know of this terrible fear of the ravages of time from what he wrote in *Dorian Gray*. The invention of the character is, as we said, the real turning point of his life and problems.

The destruction and the ravages he addressed are not only linked to maternity but also to his condition as father-to-be. It is not simply a destruction of the image of the body of his wife, as stated by the biographer but, first and foremost, something that takes place at a symbolic level. It is at this level that paternity is accompanied by a deep inner agony. It affects both parents. However, it is the one who is unsure about his symbolic position who finds it hardest to face. This gives a new interpretation to what we have learned up to now about Wilde. Moreover, it enables us to understand the major aspects of the evolution towards an overt, active and almost committed homosexuality, which will lead to such devastating consequences.

To our eyes his aesthetic research and his theory on art look more and more like a defense mechanism, but we still need to find out against whom or against what such a defense is aimed. It is not simply the marks of time that scare him. The enormity of his anxiety is comparable only to his exaggerated quest for beauty. After Freud, to qualify this anxiety, psychoanalysts describe it as castration anxiety. It emerges in the presence of a totally new event. The birth of a child is the example *par excellence*. Castration is thus a highly symbolic operation which becomes real only if the latter, the symbolic operation, fails. Here one could say that Wilde, through his claim for justice and by instituting a legal action, tried to provoke the intervention of a symbolic authority which he lacked so much, something which had dramatic consequences for him. However, at the beginning his defenses were effective. He hoped to have discovered in art the means by which he could reach a kind of transcendence, something that time could not change, something that is not affected by it. This works

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at times but only insofar as the work of art survives time without losing its splendour, its freshness. This is every artist's desire.

But Wilde was even more lucid than he intended to be. In his novel, *Dorian Gray*, he showed us the other side of his excessive aesthetic research, of his exaggerated quest for beauty, namely the concomitant inscription of ugliness, in another register. The question of ugliness is at least as important as the one of beauty. The main essence of his art was to play with these different registers, or dimensions. He exploited the confusion to achieve his goal. But what goal? We have just been told that he tried to defend himself against the ravages of time, caused by his wife's two pregnancies and by the symbolic modification and alteration due to his paternity. He was in clear conflict with time insofar as it is linked to generations, to the inscription of the name in the generations. In a way this process represents the only real measure of time and is the one to which all the other time sequences spanning our life seem to be subject.

This is a very important point as far as my approach is concerned, this inscription of the name in the generation as a measure of time. According to our hypothesis it is the fact of being faced with paternity and its everlasting, indelible marks, (that means the children!), that triggered off the irreparable in Wilde. It was here that he battled with and ran up against what we call symbolic castration, which could be inscribed in his life only tragically. For a certain time he seemed to have preferred young boys. A relationship with them was less dangerous because there was never a risk that they would make him a father again. Only young bodies, without the marks and the wounds of sexual differentiation, could personify his ideal of perfect Greek beauty. (But could he not have predicted what the dangers would be and that they would be even more serious?)

In 1886 when his second son was born Wilde met Robert Ross. He used to call him Robbie, similar to Bosie. He was 15 years younger and belonged to a group of young people who surrounded him, revered him and even worshipped him. It was with Robert Ross that Wilde lived his first real homosexual experience. Frank Harris later said that he became his real mistress. So it is important to take note of the very precise moment in his life when he met Robert Ross. Was Wilde aware that in
this relationship the legal issue was indirectly already there? Robert Ross's father, a man of Canadian origin who grew up in London, was a former Minister of Justice in his own country of origin, Canada, in the Government headed by his father-in-law. At that time, (and this confirms what we have said), he told his friend Frank Harris:

Maternity kills desire; pregnancy is the grave of passion ... Nature is a monster; it attacks beauty in order to soil it; it disfigures a blond ivory body, which we have adored, and inflicts on it the terrible scars of maternity; it soils the altar of the souls.

So the monster is not 'nature', it is the paternal function whose inscription attacks beauty to soil it and to disfigure the body. The body is seen as the altar of souls and is representative of the object of worship, idolatry even, in its perfection. It acts according to life's specific version of what we call disavowal of castration and hence in terms of the paternal function.

Comments

It comes as no surprise to discover that one of his favourite paintings was *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* by Guido Reni. It represents the body of a young, effeminate man cut by two arrows. This is what Richard Ellmann, the Oxford expert and his best biographer tells us: the arrows represent the phallic agency which could not be inscribed differently. It was this same painting of Saint Sebastian which struck Mishima. It contributed to the pubertal awakening of his sexuality. It provoked his first ejaculation and marked the imaginary matrix of his fantasies which he then had to reproduce, even in the final scene in which he played and enacted his suicide. Another important painting in Wilde's life was *Love and Death* by George F. Watts. It represented the naked body of a very young boy over which a totally veiled adult body is leaning. We see only his back, his feminine hips, but not his face. It is impossible to determine the sex. It is like the scene of a very young child seduced by an adult, man or woman, with a fatal ending. These two paintings are
paradigmatic of the role played by art in Wilde's life. On both occasions it is a death scene, but not any death is represented, we must add, to be more precise, that it is a death linked to jouissance, as its sanction. So death is its sanction and its eneluctable fatal consequence and art is the means of fleeing the effects of time, but a deadly means!

I think it is better to stop here. I can tell you the rest tomorrow.

Questions

Stephen Costello: Could I ask you what you think Wilde desired in Bosie What entrapped him - the lure of Bosie's look?

André Michels: I don't know exactly - maybe you could try to develop your question a little bit so that I can think about it.

Stephen Costello: I was just wondering what they enacted together and what was it in Bosie that had Wilde so obsessed, so fascinated.

André Michels: Of course it was his age and maybe his beauty, but I think something else was far more important. It was the origin of Bosie. He was really flattered that his friend and lover belonged to such a famous family, - I think that was very important for him! There is another point; - the two mothers, Wilde's mother and Bosie's mother, supported their relationship. They both encouraged it, as did Wilde's wife, Constance, who at the beginning wasn't aware at all of what was going on, - at least one could suppose so. I will try to say more about this tomorrow because we have to consider this when trying to understand what was going on in the inner life of Wilde and also when developing some hypothesis about his so-called perversion. The term perversion is appropriate here but we have to define what we mean by that.

Cormac Gallagher: You drew an interesting contrast with Sade. Wilde's work you could give to anyone! It is very clever; but it is not scandalous. I don't think Dorian Gray was ever a source of scandal whereas, obviously,
it is still hard to find the works of Sade in a bookshop. So how do you account for the fact that if Wilde was really trying to portray something of what he considered to be some sort of perfection - (and which he lived out in his life in a particular way, paradigmatically if you like, with Bosie; - it wasn't that he lacked courage!) - why was his work almost so bourgeois, in a way, although he might not have liked to hear that word applied to it?

André Michels: You want to add something here?

Olga Cox: Yes. You know, what struck me is that Sade is virtually unreadable! ...

André Michels: That's true!

Olga Cox: ... because of the constant scatology on every page, you begin to be up to the eyeballs in shit, literally! ... or I mean rather metaphorically.

André Michels: Both then!

Olga Cox: I wouldn't consider Dorian Gray at all an evil book. I would consider it one of the most moral books ever written because everything he does is getting inscribed in his portrait. So it is a moral tale.

André Michels: Yes! It's terribly, terribly moral.

Olga Cox: The evil, all the time alluded to in the book, is by and large a literary evil. So I would say that Wilde flirted with evil, - it was a flirtation.

André Michels: That is a very good way to say things - flirtation with evil! That was his approach and it was a way of setting it aside. Dorian Gray is a very moral tale but what is interesting is to see the connection between his writing and what happened in his life. It is at the very moment that he finished his novel that he said 'I am afraid, I hope it is not me'. He had a
certain intuition of what his future would be, of what would happen to him, what could happen to him.

To come back to the question: - My idea about what was going on in Wilde's life, is that he tried to separate absolutely, two different dimensions; - the face which is turned to society from the face which is hidden and absolutely must be hidden. And there is no possible exchange between these two dimensions, or there is only an exchange in one direction, - from the outside world to the inner, but the other way is blocked. That meant that he had to establish a pure world, or at least he tried to do so, the world of a perfect beauty which is not soiled by ugliness and evil. The evil exists, but there is no connection between the two worlds.

Nevertheless he couldn't avoid the other world completely, and so all his effort was therefore directed towards the construction of a mask. But the other side of the mask was the grimace. That is very interesting from the clinical point of view - the grimace always addresses the father and the paternal function. Something of this paternal function didn't intervene and could not be inscribed in his life as a subject. My opinion is that Wilde, the contrary of Sade, was not able to develop a theory of evil. By the way, both Genet and Sade were very destructive in their lives but they themselves were not destroyed by life itself.

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