



Title	Performative and Subversive : Oscar Wilde's "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime"
Author(s)	Kaneda, Masahide
Citation	Osaka Literary Review. 1999, 38, p. 81-98
Version Type	VoR
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.18910/25385">https://doi.org/10.18910/25385</a>
rights	
Note	

*The University of Osaka Institutional Knowledge Archive : OUKA*

<https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/>

The University of Osaka

# Performative and Subversive: Oscar Wilde's "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime"

Masahide Kaneda

Paradox, satire, and parody. These are the most common terms having been used for the literary criticism of Wilde's works. Perversion, inversion, and transgression. These are the more or less new terms labelled to his works and behaviour especially in the cultural or queer studies. Jonathan Dollimore thus uses these words to argue Wilde's transgressive aesthetic. Yet these six terms are clearly connected to one another, though the critical attitudes towards his works are not the same according to the political agenda each type of criticism has and the points are obviously sifted from the traditional aesthetic approaches to the more politically entangled studies. All of these terms are obviously concerned with the subversive nature in Wilde's works. By means of paradox, Wilde overturns the Victorian values; satire and parody are also the familiar strategy to criticise the status quo; with these linguistic manipulation, Wilde transgresses and deconstructs the conventions including sexuality in a rather postmodernist way. Considering some of the characteristics of Wilde, Eagleton thus calls him "a postmodernist *avant la lettre*" (335). In my view, he looms up especially as a deconstructionist, practicing "an overturning of the classical opposition and a general *displacement* of the system" (Derrida 329).

Complaining that Wilde's political commitment has been disregarded, Jody Price claims that "Wilde's focus on the transformative qualities of art presents an aesthetic intent on

idealizing a world free of the oppressiveness of Victorian capitalism" (7). The history of the neglect of Wilde's political entanglement seems not surprising, for his flippancy deflects the serious consideration of his works. Yet that very flippancy is his strategy and consequently should be estimated, especially by the postmodern theory which holds much common notion with his.

As an introductory issue, I have to briefly take up his notion of the self. Dollimore convincingly observes that "Wilde recognizes the priority of the social and the cultural in determining not only public meaning but 'private' or subjective desire" (11), regarding him as an anti-essentialist as opposed to Gide as an essentialist. Price, on the other hand, denying Dollimore's opinion, says that "Wilde is an essentialist who believes in a human nature which can be realized once thousands of years of oppressive socialization are scraped away" (7). Both views are mostly deduced from Wilde's critical writings (*Intentions*) and particularly "The Soul of Man Under Socialism." As a third opinion, Eagleton sees him as having the contradictory notions, arguing his problem is "that he values the non-identical, but is committed to a notion of individualism which depends on self-identity" (336). I am of the opinion that, at least in some pieces of his fiction, Wilde seems to maintain the anti-essentialism,<sup>1</sup> and this is one of the underlying interests I have in examining in this paper "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" with its subversive force.

The critical history of Wilde's short fiction (which is collected in *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*) tells the clear narrative of the neglect of Wilde's subversiveness. It has been taken as a "pure farce,"<sup>2</sup> "mere sketches" (Roditi 76), and "a delightful pieces of buffoonery" (Ransome 84). It has also been regarded as a preliminary fiction to *The Picture of Dorian*

*Gray* and society comedies.<sup>3</sup> As Ian Small summarises: “As *Dorian Gray* has allowed critics to focus attention on concepts such as genre and intertextuality, so, predictably perhaps, the other fiction has been marginalized” (190). Although some critics have recognised some parts of Wilde’s satire of Victorian value, Yeats is exceptional in that he seriously detects the cultural criticism in *Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime and Other Stories*, based on his Irish notion:

We [the Irish] should not find him so unintelligible-- for much about him is Irish of the Irish. I see in his life and works an extravagant Celtic crusade against Anglo-Saxon stupidity. (111)

I do not intend to explore “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime” through his Irishness. Instead, I will examine in detail its textual construction, examining its subversive power. If there are only the signs and the use of them in the constitution of the world, Wilde’s fiction seems to allegorically show this very nature. I investigate his flippant fiction to estimate its potentiality of cultural criticism with the transformative power, focusing on its linguistic events.

There is a notion that (literary) language is performative simply in that it brings into being characters and their actions. The characterisation in Wilde’s fiction ostentatiously denotes such a performativity of language. As particularly seen in his society comedies, in “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime” the importance is attached to the appearances of the characters: how they appear is rendered significant in society. The opening of the narrative depicts Lady Windermere’s reception with the description of characters’ appearances in detail: some are “in their stars and ribands” and women “wore their smartest dresses”; Princess Sophia is “a heavy Tartar-looking lady, with

tiny black eyes and wonderful emeralds" (160).<sup>4</sup> The representation of the guests continues:

It was certainly a wonderful medley of people. Gorgeous peeresses chatted affably to violent Radicals, popular preachers brushed coat-tails with eminent sceptics, a perfect bevy of bishops kept following a stout prima-donna from room to room, on the staircase stood several Royal Academicians, disguised as artists. (160)

If this is the assembly of upper-class people, its constitution is heterogeneous, and the characterisation of people present is rendered chaotic through the difference between their socially established signifiers (for instance, preachers and bishops) and their actions. In this representation the preachers and the sceptics, for instance, may be mocked, their substance being showed, yet this disharmony between the titles and the actions inappropriate for them indicates that character is the unstable thing and moreover that it is created through the interpretation: this opening crucially suggests it is through the interpretation of signs, whether verbal or not, that the signifieds are identified in an arbitrary manner.

Podgers, the chiromantist, and Arthur are two main characters in this fiction. Before he encounters Podgers, Arthur is confident of discerning him. He says: "If he is as wonderful as you say, Lady Windermere, I couldn't well miss him. Tell me what he is like, and I'll bring him to you at once" (161). The response to this indicates the way the appearance is evoked as the index of character. Lady Windermere replies: "Well, he is not a bit like a chiromantist. I mean he is not mysterious, or esoteric, or romantic-looking" (161). In this fiction, characterisation moves unstably through the signifiers and the appearance. As Price observes as to *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*:

Each protagonist provides a mask, an illusion, for society, and he or she is evaluated by society according to that mask. The mask becomes subversive, however, for it reveals to the reader the truth about the character's victimization by Victorian culture. (42)

Although I have to reject this simple treatment of the textual construction as the victimization by culture, the evaluation she mentions is important, for to evaluate always contains the interpretive procedure. If the character, the fiction repeatedly claims, is not fixed in each character's substance but is produced through the plays of the signs, this engenders the anti-essential notion of the self and hence the nature of the ideological formation of the self.

The representation of Arthur also denotes that the signifieds are obtained through the interpretation. To recognise Arthur's interpretation of murder or his sense of duty, one can take up some sentences: "he recognised none the less clearly where his duty lay, and was fully conscious of the fact that he had no right to marry until he had committed the murder" (169); "His excellent common sense, however, soon asserted itself, and his sound, practical mind did not leave him long in doubt about what to do" (175). For him to murder is caused by his "better nature," "conscience" (173), and "reason," and it is "not a sin, but a sacrifice" (170). His sense is exaggeratedly inverted, which indicates how the signifiers and the signifieds are rendered chaotic through his own interpretation. It is not only Arthur but the narrative voice that presents the inverted world view. The intrusive narrator says in the Wildean manner that Arthur "had that rarest of all things, common sense" (170). If this is the case of the narrator, Arthur's inversion is doubly enclosed by the inverted constitution. At the same time, the narrator can interpret Arthur's view in quite an

ordinary way for us. After the description of the protagonist's emotion that "[h]e was amazed at the discord between the shallow optimism of the day, and the real facts of existence," the narrator adds: "He was still very young" (167). Those contrary perspectives the narrator offers also emphasise the way the signifieds are acquired arbitrarily through the interpretive operation.

The crucial nature of this sort in the signification is obviously foregrounded in the way Podgers reads each character's nature or fates through signs or appearances on the hands. The chiromantist reveals the past and the future of each character, which seems to tell the truth. The Duchess exclaims "absolutely true" and some are indeed afraid to be exposed, as narrator says that "it was generally felt that chiromancy was a most dangerous science" (167). Yet whether he says the truth or not is made ambiguous, for while he frightens some, his art is also trivialised and parodied by Lady Windermere. She exaggeratedly says: "Next year, for instance, I am in great danger, both by land and sea, so I am going to live in a balloon" (161). In this sense, as Varty observes, Wilde ridicules the chiromancy, which "became fashionable and enjoyed brief crazes of plausibility during the Victorian period" (101). Coupled with the narrative of the necessity of the interpretive operation to obtain any signified, the treatment of the chiromancy as the hermeneutics indicates that there is no essence as to the nature or the self.

As to Poders's art, here arise not only the question of the self but the performative effects of the chiromancy. What Podgers prophesies comes true in the narrative, though in a perplexed way. Although Austin is mostly if not resolutely concerned with each verbal effect so that he sees "I prophesy [forecast] that" as a pure performative and "I foresee that" not

(88), the chiromancy in the fiction is performative, whether explicit or not, in that Podgers's word "murder" drives Arthur to pursue it, just as Dorian is led to a hedonism by Henry's words. This is what Linda Dowling detects in the fin de siècle literature, that is "[t]he sense of language as possessing an independent life" (160). In other words, Podgers's word has at once the illocutionary and the perlocutionary force, though Austin eagerly separates these two forces. Arthur is conscious of the force of the word: "Murder! Murder!" he kept repeating, as though iteration could dim the horror of the word" (167). To point out the performative effects of the chiromancy foregrounds the fact that there is social or lingusitic conventions in the signification, and further what Derrida calls an "iterability" (314). This is important, at least for this fiction, for this gives an opportunity for detecting the way the signifieds are created in the discursive practices. These involve the interpretive procedure hidden in the signification. Podgers's reading of the hands symbolically indicates that the interpretation is always at work. Yet Arthur blindly believes in what is said about his future and decides to fulfill his duty. Then the absolute enigmas begin to work.

What Podgers says brings about the whole narrative, yet the way Arthur takes it is abnormal. He repeatedly says that the murder is his duty and he is bound up to the fate. Yet for what or for whom is the duty? Firstly, as Arthur himself says, it is "for Sybil's sake" (182) that he attempts to commit a murder: he feels that "to marry her, with the doom of murder hanging over his head, would be a betrayal like that of Judas" (169). This, however, is linked with his sense of inevitability of his fate. Fate, destiny, and doom are the terms he uses to describe the unknown force, and sometimes they are personified as some ancient Gods: he seems to receive an oracle which

can never be changed by the human effort. Even before he hears the concrete content of what Podgers read on his hands, he is obsessed with the inevitability of the fate:

now for the first time he had become conscious of the terrible mystery of Destiny, of the awful meaning of Doom.... Was there no escape possible? Were we no better than chessmen, moved by an unseen power, vessels the potter fashions at his fancy, for honour or for shame? His reason revolted against it, and yet he felt that some tragedy was hanging over him. (165)

Etymologically, "fate" is derived from "to speak"; "destiny" or "destine" come from "to determine"; and "doom" from "judgement."<sup>5</sup> All of these primary meanings suggest that a subject is necessary for these terms. Then who is it that speaks, determines, and judges? Unseen Gods who Arthur thinks control everything he does? Or Podgers who he believes can read the future? There is no answer or he seems not to require it, for he is blind to the fact that the interpellation is at work between a subject and him. What can be said with certainty is that, as I have said, if the chiromancy is performative, there necessarily exists the arbitrary interpretive operation for the performative what it is. Not only the subject who says the utterance but the object who accepts it is indispensable for the performative, and to acquire the authority and the authenticity, the subject, as ideology functions in a successful way, should mystify such a underlying working. Arthur (successfully for the unknown Gods or Podgers?) cannot discern this crucial operation. He tries to do what he thinks he should do. Thus as Price observes: "He is left with a 'shallow' concept of duty and a lost opportunity to evaluate his culture and his superficial existence within it" (45).

That he is not aware of the nature of the ideological

formation of the world by signs is shown in the description of his recognition of another world in which he wanders round after he has been heard of his destiny. When the dawn breaks, he sees an unfamiliar world and thinks:

what a strange London they [the rustics] saw! A London free from the sin of night and the smoke of day, a pallid, ghost-like city, a desolate town of tombs! He wondered what they thought of it, and whether they knew anything of its splendour and its shame.... Rude as they were, with their heavy, hob-nailed shoes, and their awkward gait, they brought a little of Arcady with them. He felt that they had lived with Nature, and that she had taught them peace. He envied them all that they did not know. (168)

He gets the significance by setting up a binary opposition in quite an ordinary manner. His society and its artificiality are contrasted with the sordidness and nature; the former is self-sufficient, enclosed world, while the latter the other natural one. He does not realise that his own world is dependent on its other for its signification (and probably for its cultural existence). He dogmatically interprets the unfamiliar world by imposing on it the otherness of his world. To be authoritative, he sets up his own world as knowing everything and the other as knowing nothing. He does not either conceive that what he thinks is produced on what he sees; he does not attempt to be involved with the otherness but remains taking the superior position. After all, he cannot recognise the way the ideology (and here colonialism) is formed through the interpretation with its authoritative insolence. Therefore, it is not surprising that what is needed for him is the object of his murder. Certainly the representations of the attempts of the murder is rendered superficial, causing much fan, yet making the duty of the murder ridiculous, this fiction exposes the way

the world is created through the hermeneutics.

The arbitrary nature of the signification is foregrounded in the two attempted murders in an absurd way. Arthur first attempts to murder Lady Clementina Beauchamp, and after presenting her a capsule with a poison, he goes to Venis waiting for the information of her death. The sources of information are the newspapers and the telegrams, the assembly of the signs which always need to be decoded. When he accepts a telegram saying the Lady had died, he arbitrarily interprets this as his success of the murder. Sadly enough for him, however, the truth turns out to be her natural death. His interpretation is ridiculously refuted.

As to the second attempted murder, some interpretations are evoked by each character. Arthur peruses again the newspapers to be decoded to see the consequence, yet by the absence of the allusion to his uncle, the Dean of Chichester, he thinks that his attempt must have failed. Herr Winckelkopt who offered the explosive clock deduces the same opinion, while a little German is "not without hope that the clock might still go off" (178). The fiction introduces within the narrative a letter from Jane, the daughter of the Dean, to tell the truth, which again should be decoded. The letter is also scattered with some interpretations of the clock. For the Dean, this is a present by someone "who had read his remarkable sermon, 'Is Licence Liberty?'" and it symbolises "that Liberty can't last, but fall down" (179); for Reggie it is a mere toy to break explosions. For Arthur's mother, the letter "is quite as good as the novels Mudie sends us" (179) while for Arthur it is the crucial one to inform his failure. The fiction in this way elaborately indicates that the arbitrary interpretive procedure is always working in the signification.

After these failures of the murder, Arthur begins to think

that "Destiny herself had turned traitor" and in the event decides: "Let Destiny work out his doom. He would not stir to help her" (180). Just after this, however, he succeeds in doing his duty by murdering Podgers. For him "the decree of Destiny" (181) seems to have been realised. The consequence of his flinging Podgers into the Thames is informed by the same device as before, the newspaper. The fiction again embeds within the narrative the extract of the newspaper which shows its own interpretation of Podgers's death:

It is supposed that he [Podgers] committed suicide under the influence of a temporary mental derangement, caused by overwork, and a verdict to that effect was returned this afternoon by the coroner's jury. (181)

Podgers's death is regarded as a suicide in this article, while Arthur sees this as his murder. The truth is indeed not so clear as it appears, for although the former has less plausibility, the latter is not visibly represented by the narrative. It only depicts the way Arthur flings Podgers into the Thames. The real cause of the death might have been a natural one in the river, as that of Lady Beauchamp. Although this might seem to be a far-fetched interpretation, the narrative so forcefully directs our attention to the interpretive operation in the signification that the death of Podgers becomes an allegorical aporia in the signification: the narrative indicates that the truth depends not on what it is but on how it is decoded so that the death as a murder only shows Arthur's interpretation and never the Truth (the predilection for which is what is called logocentrism).

Another absolute enigma is remaining as to Podgers's character itself. Could he read Arthur's future? As I have said, some of the parts suggest his ability to tell the truth, while it is called into question when it is exaggeratedly represented by

Lady Windermere. As to the prophecy of Arthur's future, Podgers's first convulsion seems to denote that he has really seen "the murder" on his hands.

when Mr. Podgers saw Lord Arthur's hand he grew curiously pale, and said nothing. A shudder seemed to pass through him, and his great bushy eyebrows twitched convulsively, in an odd, irritating way they had when he was puzzled. Then some huge beads of perspiration broke out on his yellow forehead, like a poisonous dew, and his fat fingers grew cold and clammy. (164)

Even if the narrator says that these are the reactions "when he [is] puzzled," the narrator itself is the inverted, hence unreliable one as I have suggested so that it is not certain whether Podgers was really puzzled or not, even if these convulsions are truly represented as the constative statements. Here (or generally) the constative approaches the performative in that the former contains within it "what is doing by words." In this case these descriptions are exposed to the interpellation between the signs the narrative presents and the readers. This is not concerned with the question whether the narrator is reliable or not; this is the general working in the reading of the signs, as I am entrapped in reading this fiction.

I take Podgers's reaction as a purely constative description and hence a real one. Then he seems to be able to see Arthur's future. He prophesies that Arthur loses a relative, and this seems to be guessed rightly if it is the death of Lady Beauchamp he mentions. However, the transactions by money between Arthur and Podgers suggests that the latter is a mere money-hungry person, as his reaction to Arthur's offering of the money implies.

"I will pay you. I will give you a cheque for a hundred pounds." [said Arthur.]

The green eyes flashed for a moment, and then became dull again.

“Guineas?” said Mr. Podgers at last, in a low voice. (166)

Lady Windermere, after some years, also refers to this kind of nature in Podgers: “He was a dreadful impostor. Of course, I didn’t mind that at all, and even when he wanted to borrow money I forgave him” (182). Norbert Kohl observes that “for all we know it [the prophesy] might just as easily be a lot of hocus-pocus” (63); and Christopher Nassaar regards him as “a groveler at the feet of the aristocracy” (5), though he is of the opinion that Podgers has known that “it is he Arthur is destined to murder” (6). This is a quite interesting interpretation, for this suggests the potential indeterminacy as to Podgers’s chiromancy, indeterminacy in the sense that there is never the Truth but a truth constituted through the performative effects.

Almost all of the narrative begins to be set forth by Podgers’s prophesy, followed by Arthur’s pursuit of it. Yet all these contrary evidences indicate any resolution cannot be acquired. What can be said with certainty is that Arthur is blind to the performative effect involved in the chiromancy so that even at the ending scene, he says: “I owe it [the chiromancy] all the happiness of my life” (183). Fate, Destiny, and Doom are the concepts constituted through the interpellation between Podgers or unknown Gods and Arthur. The lines on his hands are interpreted as showing the murder in future and in turn he interprets it as his duty. Then his happiness or self is the illusory production obtained through the interpretation. “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime” in various ways allegorically informs this crucial nature of the world-making, which extends beyond the making of the fiction to that of the real world. Humorously narrated on the surface, this fiction exposes the way ideologies create our world

through imposing the illusions of the substance. The narrative maintains that there is nothing but the interpretation of signs in the world.

"The Sphinx Without a Secret" which was collected in *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories* has the similar constitution: it is a simple version of the exposure of the way the interpretation is working in the signification. Alroy's acts are interpreted by Murchison as having some secrets, which in turn is taken by the narrator as a misinterpretation; the narrative offers one interpretation while it is negated by another. The question whether Alroy said the truth that she had not met anyone in the house is proved by the seemingly constative utterance of the renter of the house. Taking this as the truth, the narrator explains in an authoritative way: "She [Alroy] had a passion for secrecy, but she herself was merely a Sphinx without a secret" (208). Yet Murchison cannot regard what the renter justified as the truth so that he remains sceptical. The effect of these contrary interpretations is to make the narrative itself an enigma. If the narrator is represented as having an authority, the narrative presents the world where interpretations are working by each character so that the narrator's authority is threatened to the extent that his interpretation is taken as one instance possible. What the renter says is indeed the performative in that it leads to the two contrary conclusions. Alroy, the narrative claims, is a sign that is always interpreted in an arbitrary way. Her character is decoded not by what she is but by how she is considered. There is no essential self but the one created. The title is very suggestive in this respect. Is there such a thing as a sphinx without a secret? Sphinx in an ordinary sense has a secret, so when it is revealed, it is no longer a sphinx. Yet this fiction

suggests the existence of such a thing. In this sense, the title is an allegory of the aporetic signification: even when a sign is decoded in a definite way (a sphinx is revealed as having no secret), it is always open to another signified, exposing itself to the crucial indeterminacy, for it is necessarily a mere instance of interpretation (it remains a sphinx whatsoever). This short fiction, as "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime," indicates that any signified is derived from the interpretation and that as such there is no substance nor essence.

Then what exactly does it mean that there is no essence? The answer Wilde's fiction presents is that there is nothing but the illusory construction by signs in the world. This is subversive, as this exposes the creative nature of ideology; duties are merely what are imposed on the individuals through what Althusser would call Ideological State Apparatus; character is not fixed in the absolute self but is made through interpretive operations. Wilde's fiction has the forces of displacement, decentring the established criteria. Yet this anti-essential politics need to be explored further, for if the self is determined through the cultural effects, then how can one have the force to challenge the centre. It is here that Wilde's politics has much in common with that of the postmodernism, for it is "from within" that it deconstructs the centre. As Dollimore argues:

If the perverse dynamic generates internal instabilities within repressive norms, reinscription denotes an anti-essentialist, transgressive agency which might intensify those instabilities, turning them against the norms. It becomes a kind of transgression enabled rather than thwarted by the knowledge that there is no freedom outside history, no freedom within deluded notions of autonomous selfhood. (33)

Instead of setting up the alternative authority, Wilde's politics is to displace and overturn the centre from within. Yet unlike Dollimore, I am not of the opinion that this transgressive aesthetic originates in his notion of sexuality, for the intention of the author is thwarted by his works itself through the narrative of the negation of authenticity. Hence I attribute the meanings not to the "author" that is of course etymologically connected with the "authenticity," but to the productive entanglements of the linguistic effects. This means that I am entrapped in them, yet also that I move back and forth within them. As Miller observes as to the deconstructive procedure, in such a movement "one enters a strange borderland, a frontier region which seems to give the widest glimpse into the other land" (231). This is what Wilde's text represents as its own movement away from the single origin or the source. If there is such a thing as an authenticity, it is engendered in the fluid relationships in the linguistic events.

"Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" is an allegory of the signification, which is one of characteristics of Wilde's works. Humorously depicted, this fiction has quite a subversive force, exposing the interpretive nature of ideology in the signification. It seems that there are not the forces to escape the centre, yet by deconstructing from within, the fiction exposes the instability, moving "beyond."<sup>6</sup> Necessarily it does not show in a clear way the region beyond, yet this position is exactly where the text is most charged with the subversive force. In this sense, this fiction itself is performative. Revealing the underlying nature of the ideological formation, this performative text sets forth a movement away from the Truth. With this politics "from within," it forcefully subverts, decentres, and deconstructs the centre.

## Notes

- 1 Gagnier also argues Wilde's anti-essentialism: "Wilde saw that the 'self' was not inevitably indubitable, rational and progressive, but was socially constructed. It was constructed through language" (20). Yet she suggests that "Wilde insisted in 'The portrait of Mr. W. H.', 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', 'The Critic as Artist' and elsewhere that human individuals had unique temperaments and tastes that should be allowed to flourish according to the laws of their own being" (31). This is the problem of Wilde's notion of the self. Although I see in "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" only the anti-essential politics, the essentialism completely excluded the essential notion is intruded when the so-called aestheticism is set forth, and he falls into the contradiction. This is concerned with his dogmatic notion of art as autonomous. I agree with Eagleton that this problem is unresolved by him.
- 2 Unsigned notice in *Graphic*. Beckson, 107.
- 3 See, for instance, Erickson, Cohen, and Kohl. Kohl succinctly says: "The description of the *soirée*, the upper-class names of the ladies,...the pointed, epigrammatic dialogue of the characters, these all belong to the world of *Dorian Gray* and the social plays" (63).
- 4 Wilde's texts I use are: "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime." *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. (Glasgow: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994) 160-183; "The Sphinx Without a Secret." *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. 203-208. All passages cited are from this edition.
- 5 All etymologies in this paper are taken from *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992).
- 6 As Homi Bhabha says: "'Beyond' signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary ... are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the 'present' which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced" (4). I claim it is this movement itself that is important for the cultural critique for Wilde and us in the postmodern.

## Works Cited

Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Seisa.

2nd ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Cohen, Philip K. *The Moral Vision of Oscar Wilde*. London: Associated University Press, 1978.

Derrida, Jaques. "Signature Event Context." *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. 307-330.

Dollimore, Jonathan. *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

Dowling, Linda. *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Eagleton, Terry. *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*. London: Verso, 1995.

Erickson, Donald H. *Oscar Wilde*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977.

Gagnier, Regenia. "Wilde and the Victorians." *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Peter Raby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 18-33.

Kohl, Norbert. *Oscar Wilde: The Works of a Conformist Rebel*. Trans. David Henry Wilson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Rev. of *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*. *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Karl Beckson. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970. 107.

Miller, J. Hillis. "The Critic as Host." *Deconstruction and Criticism*. New York: Continuum, 1979. 217-253.

Nassaar, Chirstopher. *Into the Demon Universe: A Literary Exploration of Oscar Wilde*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

Price, Jody. *"A Map with Utopia": Oscar Wilde's Theory for Social Transformation*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

Ransome, Arthur. *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study*. London: Martin Secker, 1912. Folcroft Library Editions, 1974.

Roditi, Edouard. *Oscar Wilde*. New York: New Directions, 1986.

Small, Ian. *Oscar Wilde Revalued: An Essay on New Materials & Methods of Research*. Greensboro: ELT Press, 1993.

Varty, Anne. *A Preface to Oscar Wilde*. London and New York: Longman, 1998.

Yeats, W. B. Rev. of "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime." *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Karl Beckson. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970. 110-112.