

**Greek Love and Love for All Things Greek:  
Gay Subtext and Greek Intertext in Works by Oscar Wilde**



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March 16, 2015

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“Whatever in fact is modern in our life we owe to the Greeks. Whatever is an anachronism is due to medievalism.”

Oscar Wilde, “The Critic as Artist”

## Introduction

To the ancient Greeks, same-sex relations were often a way to gain a position of high status and, as Bernard Sergent explains, were “a widespread and institutionalized practice, specifically related to initiatory rituals” (Sergent 2). These ritualized relationships, also known as pederasty or paiderastia, were often sexual and developed between a desired boy, in Greek called the “erōmenos,” and “the warrior, the leader,” the teacher, or the mentor with higher rank who was called “erastēs” (Sergent 2). These same-sex rituals and romances return in numerous Greek myths that involve mortals such as Ganymede, Hyacinth, and Narcissus, and gods like Zeus, Apollo, and Hermes. Even Plato’s philosophical treatment of the topic in his *Symposium* put pederasty on a pedestal. The considerable regard for male-male relations and its institutionalized practice in ancient Greece could not be in greater contrast with the institutionalized homophobia in Victorian Britain. Still, Frank Turner argues in his book *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* that Victorian scholars, politicians, authors, and artists had a deep respect and admiration for the cultural legacy left by the ancient Greeks. “The political parallel between ancient democracy and modern democracy established in English writing in 1790,” Turner explains, is a significant cause for this respect and admiration, as well as the “the possibility of contrasting the ideal of Greek heroism and the Greek appreciation for beauty with bourgeois humdrum and philistinism” (Turner 11). Oscar Wilde indeed picked up political and aesthetical themes from the ancient Greeks, and also frequently attacked Victorian bourgeoisie and the widespread failure to understand art and beauty like the Greeks had. Another Greek theme picked up in Wilde’s work, however, was much more controversial in Victorian times; the love between men. Wilde’s love for Greek things and themes of Greek love resonate in his oeuvre and shall be the main focal points of this thesis.

Oscar Wilde showed an early interest in Latin and Greek texts as a pupil at Portora Royal School in Northern Ireland. In his famous biography of Wilde, Richard Ellmann describes that at the age of fifteen Oscar delivered “deft and mellifluous oral translations from Thucydides, Plato, and Virgil” to his classmates (Ellmann 21). After his time at Portora, Wilde went to Trinity College in Dublin with a Royal School Scholarship. J.P. Mahaffy,

Wilde's tutor at Trinity, further sparked Wilde's excitement over the Greeks, whom Mahaffy, due to a speech impediment, called 'the Gweeks.' Interestingly, Mahaffy openly discussed the issue of love between men in ancient Greek culture and, as Ellmann illustrates, "characterized it as an ideal attachment between a man and a handsome youth, and acknowledged that the Greeks regarded it as superior to the love of man and woman" (Ellmann 27).

Wilde was again awarded a scholarship at the age of nineteen, this time to study at Oxford. At Oxford, Wilde read classics and was introduced to the ideas of Benjamin Jowett, who, according to Linda Dowling, had long been "seeking to establish in Hellenism, the systematic study of Greek history and literature and philosophy, a ground of transcendent value alternative to Christian theology" (Dowling xiii). When Wilde was in his final years at Oxford in April 1877, he finally had the opportunity to visit the country that had comprised such a great part of his education and fascination. With professor Mahaffy from Trinity and two other students, Oscar Wilde went to Greece. After having seen Greece, Wilde went on to discover Rome, where his Catholic friend Sir David Hunter-Blair introduced him to Pope Pius IX. Still, Ellmann calls Wilde's experiences in Rome an "anticlimax" after having seen Greece (Ellmann 70), and goes on to argue that "Pagan Greece was having some of the subversive effect upon Papal Rome that Mahaffy desired" (Ellmann 71). In a letter written in 1893, Wilde calls Mahaffy "my first and best teacher" and "the scholar who showed me how to love Greek things" (Ellmann 27).

Just after his trip to Greece and Rome, Wilde would meet Uranian poet Walter Pater for the first time at Oxford. In addition to Mahaffy's teachings, Pater would prove another great influence on Wilde's work. Plato's discussion of pederasty in his *Symposium*, or as Dowling calls it the "'heavenly' love between males," was a main theme of Uranian poetry, a style that first surfaced in 1858 when William Johnson wrote his *Ionica*, and which was later adopted by Wilde and Pater (Dowling 114). Importantly, Dowling argues that:

Uranian poetry was able to give voice to a counterdiscourse of spiritual procreancy underwritten by the authority of Oxford Hellenism to precisely the degree it was able to represent itself as superior to the blind urgencies of a merely animal sexuality, either the imperatives of heterosexual reproductivity or, in the language of ancient social and religious taboo, the bestial degradation of sodomy as anal copulation. (Dowling 115)

Dowling thus argues that the Uranian poets took advantage of the high status of Oxford Hellenism to argue that the pederastic love between two men, as experienced by the ancient Greeks, was more "spiritual" than the procreative acts between a man and woman, bestiality, or sodomy. The high status of the Greek legacy in Victorian Britain and of Oxford Hellenism,

advocated by Benjamin Jowett, thus provided authors such as Walter Pater, Walt Whitman, John Addington Symonds, and Oscar Wilde with a positive discourse to express their homosexual tendencies (Dowling 36). Dowling stresses that “The degree of sexual innocence associated by the Uranians with the vision of spiritual procreancy derived from Socrates and Plato can scarcely be overestimated,” and it was this associated innocence and spirituality that provided Wilde with material for his famous defense in 1895 (Dowling 115-116):

The Love that dare not speak its name in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo, and those two letters of mine, such as they are. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as the “Love that dare not speak its name,” and on account of it I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an elder and a younger man, when the elder man has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope and glamour of life before him. That it should be so, the world does not understand. The world mocks at it and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it. (“Testimony”)

Wilde’s description of the love between two men as a “deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect,” indeed advocates sexual innocence.

Sadly, Oscar Wilde lived in a time in which deviant relations between men of any kind could by no means be justified. In 1533, sexual relations between men had been criminalized under the “Buggery Act of 1533” in which the “detestable and abominable Vice of Buggery” became punishable by death (“Buggery”). The meaning of buggery is not defined in the law and it was not until 1642 that Sir Edward Coke provided a definition. H.G. Cocks describes Sir Edward Coke’s definition of buggery as anal copulation between men, or between a man and a woman. In addition, Sir Edward Coke described sexual intercourse between a woman and an animal, or the penetration of an animal by a man, as sodomitical (Cocks 32). In the nineteenth century, a succession of legislative changes expanded on the criminalization of sodomy. In “The Offenses Against the Person Act of 1861,” the sentence for “Sodomy and Bestiality,” which fell in the category “Unnatural Offences,” was altered from punishable by death to a life-time in penal servitude. The additional section “Attempt to Commit an Infamous Crime” in the 1861 Act, also criminalized any attempt to commit sodomy with a

sentence ranging from three to ten years in prison (“Offences”). Again, sodomy, buggery, bestiality, and unnatural acts are left undefined in the law itself. Cocks explains, however, that “An unnatural crime of any kind, including an indecent assault could include consenting sexual acts such as oral sex, kissing, touching or mutual masturbation, plus attempts to force someone to have sex or to engage in any homosexual acts” (Cocks 33). In the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, male-male sexual relations are classified under the term “gross indecency,” but are again left vague and undefined:

Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of or procures (a) or attempts (b) to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency (c) with another male person, shall be guilty of misdemeanor, and being convicted thereof shall be liable at the discretion of the court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.

(*Criminal* 68)

Although Wilde’s speech was met with applause from the audience, he was found guilty under this vague amendment of gross indecency and sentenced to two years of hard labor in prison. Dowling argues that the innocent reputation of Oxford Hellenism was significantly damaged after Wilde was found guilty and could no longer “serve [...] as a legitimating discourse for male love” (Dowling 116).

One of the pieces of evidence put forward by the prosecutor in the 1895 trial was Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Although the serving judge did not agree with the prosecutor that Wilde’s literary works prove him guilty of sodomy (Frankel 18), it certainly illustrates the importance of self-censorship in the homophobic Victorian age. In the article “Homosexual Expression and Homophobic Censorship: The Situation of the Text,” Marty Roth illustrates that “the ‘homosexual text’ has had to conceal itself within the folds of a dominant discourse and conceal itself so skillfully that it could forestall any insinuation of its presence while still revealing itself through the mantling” (Roth 268). Writing a homosexual text in homophobic times thus seems to have been a dangerous game of implication and delusion.

In his article, Roth describes different strategies adopted by authors that allowed them to connote rather than denote the homosexuality of characters, plots or themes: cross-writing, erasure and displacement. In the process of cross-writing, Roth explains, “the gender or sexuality of the subject” are interchanged. Cross-writing may for example involve something as easy as switching around gender pronouns while leaving the rest of the text intact (Roth 270). When the erasure-tactic is applied, Roth explains that “the pronouns are indeterminate,”

left out, or neutral, thus leaving it to the reader of the text to fill in the blanks (Roth 273). Lastly, Roth points at the strategy of displacing sexuality to an “acceptable form of male collaboration,” to an “acceptable discourse” or for example strategically framing homosexual or homoerotic context in a larger heterosexual plot (Roth 271-272). Interestingly, Roth claims that the first homosexual and homoerotic literary works in Europe were packed with aesthetic displacement, and names Henry James, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde as the main authors who veiled obscene topics with this discourse (Roth 271). Roth claims that these authors were “constrained, one might even say terrorized by the possibility of homophobic response” by their audience and thus censored their works out of necessity (Roth 269).

In addition, in the introduction to the 2011 edition of *The Green Carnation*, written by Robert Hichens in 1894 about Wilde’s relationship with Bosie, Anthony Wynn writes that “Secret symbols and code words have long been used by persons who are lesbian, gay, and bisexual as means of covert communication in homophobic societies” and names symbols such as the green carnation itself, worn by Wilde in the final years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Wynn claims that it was not until “the final decades of the twentieth century, [that] some of these symbols have been reclaimed by queer persons in order to show a sense of community and pride” (Wynn 11). Both Roth and Wynn illustrate the importance of concealing a text in homophobic times by writing in code and employing acceptable discourse.

Several scholars have aimed to unravel these homoerotic themes in works by Oscar Wilde by examining the Greek discourse (Kamerer; Wood; Duffy; Cohen). Lindsey Kamerer, for example, claims that in his two volumes of fairy tales, Wilde presents a positive attitude toward male on male love by focusing on Greek-like devoted friendships between men, and on inspiring teacher-student relationships while at the same time contrasting these relationships with superficial heterosexual love plots. John Charles Duffy on the other hand, provides a model in which homosexual themes in both volumes of Wilde’s fairy tales *The House of Pomegranates* and *The Happy Prince* can be categorized. Whereas Duffy and Kamerer attempt to unravel homoerotic themes, Naomi Wood points out more direct intertextual references to Greek love as an important device to code homoeroticism. Although Wood’s main objective in the article is to contribute to the debate of determining the target audience of the fairy tales, which she claims are “children – and whoever else would listen,” she recognizes allusions to Hyacinth and Apollo, Hadrian and Antinous, and to other “homosexual icons” in *House of Pomegranates* that would have been recognized by anyone familiar with ancient Greek mythology and culture (Wood 163). In his article “Writing Gone

Wilde: Homoerotic Desire in the Closet of Representation,” Ed Cohen discusses homoerotic subtext and context in *Teleny* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and its political intentions.

Linda Dowling’s much acclaimed *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* traces the development of Oxford Hellenism and argues that its authority in Victorian culture provided many authors in the nineteenth century with a positive discourse to discuss male-male relations (Dowling 115). While Roth and Wynn argue allusions and code are aimed to obscure the male-male romance in texts, Dowling argues that allusions to Greek philosophy, culture and mythology made by Oxford scholars Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and John Addington Symonds, sought not to obscure but to emancipate male-male love. Dowling argues that in the Greek classics that were held in such high regard in the Victorian era, and which were such a great part of Wilde’s interest and education, Wilde found a “legitimizing counterdiscourse of social identity and erotic liberation” (Dowling 36) which was heavenly, pure, and dismissed the term sodomy. Instead, it was “spiritual and intellectual” and for those reasons stood on higher ground than any other type of relationship (Dowling 115).

Dowling does not go into any literary analysis in her book and thus does not point out any of this Greek counterdiscourse in Wilde’s work. In my thesis I investigate Wilde’s direct allusions to ancient Greek myth, figures, and tales and their function in the text. Furthermore, I investigate to what extent Dowling’s theory of a positive discourse of high authority that aimed to emancipate homoeroticism, holds its ground in work by Oscar Wilde. Additionally, I will argue that the Greek intertextuality did not always appeal to the status of sexual innocence.

To conclude, I investigate the use and censorship of Greek intertext in work by Wilde by examining allusions to Greek myth, figures, and tales. In the first chapter I will discuss the Greek intertext and self-censorship of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by comparing the uncensored edition, which before its release in 2011 has remained unpublished, to the two censored editions published in the Victorian era. In the second chapter I discuss the Greek intertext in the pornographic novel *Teleny*, which is attributed to Oscar Wilde. In the final chapter I focus on three of Wilde’s fairy tales and their treatments of Greek myth and story. All in all, this thesis tests Dowling’s theory of an authoritative discourse to works by Oscar Wilde, and thus aims to answer the following question; does the high status of Greek discourse allow for a positive image of same-sex love in different texts by Wilde that is able to avoid censorship and additionally aims for emancipation and elevation?



## Chapter 1.

### *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The inhabitants of southern ancient Greece, who were also known as the Dorians, are generally argued to have been the first to introduce same-sex initiation rituals to ancient Greek culture, although whether they actually were the first in ancient Greece has not yet been made conclusive (Dover 185). Seeing that the Dorians' connection to same-sex relations was argued as early as 1824 by Karl Otfried Müller in his book *Die Dorier*, an academic study which was translated into English in 1830 (Dowling; Frankel), it is very likely that Wilde would have been aware of this connection when he named the antihero of his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* after the Doric people of ancient Greece. This theory is confirmed by scholar Nicholas Frankel who calls Wilde's choice for his main protagonist's name a "veiled reference to 'Dorian' or 'Greek' love" (Frankel 9). Frankel adds that John Gray, a young poet courted by Wilde during and shortly after he wrote *The Picture*, was the inspiration for Dorian's last name as well as for much of the character itself (Frankel 13). This chapter shall investigate Greek intertextuality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and shall argue that the novel's allusions to Greek love are not limited to the main character's name alone. In addition, by examining three versions of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – the uncensored typescript, the version as published in the *Lippincott* magazine in 1890, and the 1891 novel edition, the fine line of what was acceptable intertext of Greek history, mythology, and figures, is analyzed.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* centers on the young and beautiful Dorian, the witty Lord Henry Wotton and the talented artist Basil Hallward. Lord Henry, who proves quite the bad influence, first meets the beautiful and naive Dorian when he finds him posing for a picture by their mutual friend Basil. After having talked to Lord Henry, Dorian realizes his own transience, and as he observes his beautiful portrait he expresses the wish to remain always young and the portrait to bear the burden of time. For this, Dorian says, he would gladly give up his soul. The novel's genre being a modern type of fairy tale, complete with magical elements and a strict moral lesson, this exclamation naturally puts a spell on Dorian and the portrait. Dorian's awful treatment of the young Sybil Vane, leading to her eventual suicide, is the turning point of the novel. After this, the portrait starts to show the corruption of Dorian's soul while Dorian's own beautiful and youthful appearance remains unaltered. As the story progresses, Dorian increasingly becomes self-absorbed, manipulative and vain. After having killed Basil, who pleaded for him to confess his sins, Dorian decides to destroy the last evidence that exists of his true nature. When he puts a knife into the painting, he lifts the curse

and the portrait once again shows the young untainted Dorian. His body however, which is later found dead on the ground, is left “withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage” (*Uncensored* 217).

Before *Dorian Gray* was published in *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine*, its editor, Joseph Marshall Stoddart, oversaw “the excision of material he feared was too graphic for the magazine’s readership” (Frankel 37). An example of one such omission executed by Stoddart is Hallward’s following description of the painting in the *Lippincott* edition: “There was love in every line, and in every touch there was passion” (*Uncensored* 144). Frankel importantly argues that such omissions contribute to a reading of Basil’s feelings for Dorian as more platonically than romantically engaged (Frankel 38). Still, when the story first appeared in *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* in July 1890, it was received with “outright hostility” and it was labeled “‘vulgar,’ ‘unclean,’ ‘poisonous,’ ‘discreditable,’ and ‘a sham’” (Frankel 3,4). In response to this negativity, Wilde wrote a preface to the 1891 novel edition in which he defends his supposedly immoral text and attacks the philistinism of his critics. In this he claims: “No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything” and “Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art” (*Picture* 376). Even though Wilde seems to stand by his original work, he made drastic changes to the novel by adding several chapters and altering numerous words and sentences that were likely to have aroused some of the negative response to the original text in the *Lippincott*, and also further censored Basil’s character.

The omissions and changes are especially visible in the first chapter, in which Basil tells Lord Henry about his new muse Dorian. Hallward’s confession to Lord Henry, which reads “I knew that if I spoke to Dorian I would become absolutely devoted to him” (*Uncensored* 63) in the uncensored and *Lippincott* version, is completely omitted in the novel edition of the text. The bond between Basil and Dorian is further weakened in the reworked novel in the censoring of Basil’s text “I give myself away. As a rule he is charming to me, and we walk home together from the club arm in arm, or sit in the studio and talk of a thousand things” (*Uncensored* 68), to “As a rule he is charming to me, and we sit in the studio and talk of a thousand things” (*Picture* 383). Additionally, when Hallward tries to further explain his feelings for Dorian, the original text and the *Lippincott* text say “Hallward buried his face in his hands. ‘You don’t understand what friendship is, Harry’” (*Uncensored* 64), of which the first part is changed to “Hallward shook his head” (*Picture* 381). Whereas the original sentence puts a focus on Hallward’s inward struggle, the altered sentence puts a focus on Lord Henry’s insincere vision of friendship. The nature of these omissions and alterations shows

that the reason behind this later self-censorship is likely to be that the original lines further suggest Hallward's sexual attraction to Dorian Gray.

In addition, it can be said that Wilde often displaces Basil's sexual attraction to aestheticism in his self-censorship of the *Lippincott* text, a discourse that Roth claims aimed to veil obscene topics (Roth 271). When in the *Lippincott* version Lord Henry asks Basil how frequently he sees Dorian, Basil answers: "Every day. I couldn't be happy if I didn't see him every day. Of course sometimes it is only for a few minutes. But a few minutes with somebody one worships mean a great deal," and when Lord Henry then asks "But you don't really worship him?" Basil answers him that he does indeed (*Uncensored* 66). In the 1891 novel version, however, this text is changed to "Every day. I couldn't be happy if I didn't see him every day. He is absolutely necessary to me," and the follow up question is completely omitted (*Picture* 382). Whereas the original Basil professes worship for his muse Dorian, in the novel edition this is altered to Basil Hallward needing him mostly for his art. This alteration from a romantic interest to artistic value is again visible when Hallward says to Lord Henry in the *Lippincott* version: "Don't take away from me the one person that makes life absolutely lovely to me and that gives to my art whatever wonder or charm it possesses" (*Uncensored* 70), which in the novel is changed to "Don't take away from me the one person who gives to my art whatever charm it possesses; my life as an artist depends on him" (*Picture* 384).

Additionally, when in the uncensored and *Lippincott* edition Lord Henry Wotton asks Basil "why won't you exhibit his portrait?", Basil answers him "Because I have put into it all the extraordinary romance of which, of course, I have never dared to speak to him" (*Uncensored* 67). In the 1891 novel version "the extraordinary romance" is changed to "some expression of all this curious artistic idolatry," and, notably, what Basil "never dared" to say, in the new version Basil "never cared" to say (*Picture* 382). This phrase would later be repeated as "the love that dare not speak its name" in Lord Alfred Douglas' poem "Two Loves" and put forward as evidence in the 1895 trial. This further illustrates that whether Basil's affection for Dorian Gray in the original text was intense, seemed to weigh down on him, and was reason to hide it from Dorian, in the 1891 novel edition his admiration for the boy is changed into a platonic artistic interest in his beauty with which he does not want to bother Dorian. Thus, when comparing the original uncensored text to the altered novel version, it indeed becomes evident that aestheticism displaces Hallward's desire for Dorian. Additionally, while the original text illustrated Hallward's personal romantic interest in Dorian's charm and beauty, the altered text emphasizes Hallward's economic dependence on

Dorian as a painter and the inspiration of the aesthetic appeal that Dorian carries to everyone. The affection is moved from the private sphere of love to the public sphere of admiration for the subject of a picture, thus becoming more acceptable for Victorian times.

When closely examining the Greek intertextuality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, it can be argued that these references were made not only for stylistic purposes but, also allude to same-sex relations in a discrete way. By conjuring up Greek mythological and historical characters that were famous same-sex idols, such as Hadrian's lover Antinous, the novel version of *Dorian Gray* still implies Basil Hallward's romantic feelings for Dorian which was at other times subject to censorship in the book. Basil Hallward for example clearly parallels his love for Dorian to the love story between the Roman emperor Hadrian and his slave Antinous when in all the versions he is allowed to say: "What the invention of oil-painting was to the Venetians, the face of Antinoös was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of Dorian Gray will some day be to me" (*Uncensored* 66). The love story between Antinous and Hadrian will prove to be a returning icon in all of the work discussed in this thesis.

In the article "'The Most Famous Fairy in History: Antinous and Homosexual fantasy,'" Sarah Waters claims that since the eighteenth century Antinous has become a "sexual icon" that replaced the iconic mythical Ganymede. At the prime of his youth and beauty, Antinous drowned in the river Nile. According to Kevin Kopelson in his book *Love's Litany: The Writing of Modern Homoerotics*, the death of Antinous was "a notorious and historically indeterminable mystery that engaged the attention of many university-educated gay Victorians," although "most Victorian apologists for Antinous, considered the boy's death to be a Christlike voluntary sacrifice" (Kopelson 26). Waters similarly suggests that Antinous' death might have been "an attempt to extend the life of Hadrian, who was, at this time, ailing," a theory Waters supports with the fact that Antinous' death occurred during festivities surrounding the Egyptian resurrected god Osiris (Waters 194). After Antinous' tragic and mysterious death, Hadrian was struck with heartache and grief and eternalized his lover's name by founding the city of Antinoöpolis, as well as commissioning a "vast number of statues, friezes, and coins" of his beloved (Waters 197,198). Antinous, Waters says, "can be found at the forefront of the homosexual imagination" of the Victorian Era (Waters 194). Waters also recognizes Antinous' presence in the plot of the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as the externalization of Antinous' youth and beauty by the numerous honoring marble statues, can very well be compared to Basil's attempts to eternalize Dorian's beauty and youth in his paintings (Waters 228).

Several more allusions to these Greek icons are present even in the three editions of the text. Hallward, for example, calls Dorian a “young Adonis, who looks as if he was made of ivory and rose-leaves,” and later says “my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus” in all three versions of the text (*Uncensored* 59). The myth of Narcissus seems to carry further significance for the novel’s plot as well as for Dorian’s character development, which becomes clear when examining the legend. In the myth, Narcissus is loved by his Erastes Ameinias, but rejects his affections. Narcissus sends Ameinias a sword with which Ameinias takes his own life (Sergent 82). In a later myth, Narcissus also rejects the love of the female Echo, a myth that is more famous (Sergent 83). According to Sergent, Narcissus is “a paradigmatic asocial character” and the rejection of both his Erastes Ameinias and the nymph Echo are the cause of his “self-destruction” (Sergent 83) as he falls madly in love with his own reflection, which ultimately leads to his death – which is either caused by suicide or murder in the different versions of the tale. The flower that sprung from Narcissus’ blood in the myth still carries his name today (Sergent 82).

It could be argued that the characters of Basil and Sybil are respectively paralleled to Ameinias and Echo. Basil is the erastes in the myth that suffers heartbreak and rejection, while Sybil is modelled on the rejected nymph Echo. This later claim can be supported with textual evidence when it is said in all versions that “He thought only of Sibyl. A faint echo of his love came back to him” (*Uncensored* 122) after Dorian has crushed Sybil’s feelings. The Narcissus of the story is of course Dorian himself. He is entranced with his portrait and increasingly showing narcissistic behavior as the novel progresses. This is emphasized in the text when it is said that “Once, in boyish mockery of Narcissus, he had kissed, or feigned to kiss, those painted lips that now smiled so cruelly at him. Morning after morning he had sat before the portrait wondering at its beauty, almost enamoured of it, as it seemed to him at times” (*Uncensored* 135). Dorian actually becomes so self-absorbed that he is transfixed with his own appearance in the painting and becomes a Narcissus. Dorian Gray’s rejection of Basil Hallward and Sybil Vane, his becoming absolutely self-absorbed, as well as his dramatic death at the end of the story, all very much parallel him to the myths of Narcissus. While Basil Hallward’s romantic feelings for Dorian Gray are censored in the *Lippincott* and the novel edition, they thus remain indirectly present in all three editions by his role as Ameinias, Narcissus’ rejected erastes.

Another presence of ancient Greek rituals of male love in all three editions of *Dorian Gray* is the theme of flowers in bloom. The story opens with the lines “The studio was filled with the rich odor of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the

garden there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn” (*Uncensored* 57). This first introduces a theme of flowery scents, roses, violets, lilies, and fruit trees in bloom that is present in almost every room, and on almost every page of the novel. In his article on floral and bird symbolism, Ed Madden illustrates that this imagery “played an important role in both the language and the cultural symbolism of homosexuality” and that this originated from ancient Greek myths (Madden 331). In several myths, blooming plants were connected to “the transient beauty of young men” (Madden 331) and indeed many mythological eromenoi tragically die in the prime of their youth after which they turn into flowers. Madden names “Adonis (from whose blood sprang the anemone), Attis (the violet), narcissus, and Hyacinth” (Madden 331) and claims that many nineteenth century poets were aware of this pederastic link to floral imagery which “was easily appropriated by gay writers searching for language through which to figure their own desires” (Madden 332).

Indeed, Wilde frequently connects the passing of youth to flowers in bloom, which remains uncensored in all editions of *Dorian Gray*. Lord Henry, for example exclaims about Dorian when he has confessed his love for the young actress Sybil Vane in chapter three in the uncensored and *Lippincott* edition, or chapter four in the novel edition, “How different he was now from the shy, frightened boy he had met in Basil Hallward's studio! His nature had developed like a flower, had borne blossoms of scarlet flame” (*Uncensored* 98). Although Dorian’s appearance remains youthful, his rosy innocence soon passes in his soul when he falls for the young Sybil Vane. Interestingly, Dorian proposes to Sybil after she has played Rosalind in a performance of *As You Like It*, a character that she plays in “boy’s dress.” With her “flower-like face, a small Greek head with plaited coils of dark-brown hair, eyes that were violet wells of passion, lips that were like the petals of a rose” and her performance as a boy that to Dorian is “more exquisite” than anything (*Uncensored* 94), Sybil has arguably become Dorian’s own flowery Eromenos.

Further connection of the flower discourse to homosexuality can be argued when considering that at the end of the nineteenth century several Parisian florists were arrested for male prostitution (Madden 332). This might very well be hinted at when Dorian goes for a stroll after he has left Sybil brokenhearted:

Huge carts filled with nodding lilies rumbled slowly down the polished empty street. The air was heavy with the perfume of the flowers, and their beauty seemed to bring him an anodyne for his pain [...] A long line of boys carrying crates of striped tulips,

and of yellow and red roses, defiled in front of him, threading their way through the huge jade-green piles of vegetables (*Uncensored* 119)

Considering the connection between male prostitution and florists, the verb “defiled” suggests a second meaning that is less innocent. Interestingly, this text has been left intact in all the published versions whereas the line that appears just before, “A man with curious eyes had suddenly peered into his face, and then dogged him with stealthy footsteps, passing and repassing him many times” (*Uncensored* 119) can only be read in the *Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray*.

The abundant presence of Greek intertext in connection to male-male desire in *Dorian Gray* seems to suggest that Dowling’s theory on the high status of Greek culture in the Victorian era, which she argues sparked a positive discourse of legitimating homosexual desire, is applicable. An important omission in the novel edition, however, argues the opposite. In the original typescript and the *Lippincott* edition, Basil Hallward tells Lord Henry Wotton:

Of course I have done all that. [Dorian] has stood as Paris in dainty armour, and as Adonis with huntsman’s cloak and polished boar-spear. Crowned with heavy lotus-blossoms, he has sat on the prow of Adrian’s barge, looking into the green, turbid Nile. He has leaned over the still pool of some Greek woodland, and seen in the waters’ silent silver the wonder of his own beauty. But he is much more to me than that. (*Uncensored* 66)

In the novel version of 1891, this has been significantly reduced to “Of course I have done all that. But he is much more to me than a model or a sitter” (*Picture* 382). Dorian, who is painted by Basil as the sexual icon Antinous with a crown of “heavy lotus-blossoms” staring into the river Nile, is suggested to mean more to Basil than any of these Greek mythological and historical figures. Perhaps even suggesting that Dorian means more to him than Antinous meant to Hadrian. In the altered text, this confession is changed to Dorian merely meaning more to him than a common sitter.

Another explanation for the omission of this fragment could be the inclusion of three other Greek icons; Paris, Adonis, and Narcissus. Not only are these male figures known for their youth, beauty, and sexual appeal, like Antinous they have all been involved in same-sex relations in myths and tales. Whereas Sarah Waters puts focus on Antinous as the nineteenth-century sex symbol of the younger desired man, Paris, Adonis, and Narcissus might have served a similar purpose in the allusion to Greek love in Wilde’s *Dorian Gray*. Bernard Sergent writes that young Paris was the erastes of a boy called Antheus before he famously

seduced and abducted Helen of Troy (Sergent 246), whereas Adonis was, among many other boys, the eromenos of Heracles (Sergent 166) as well as the eromenos of the god Dionysus (Sergent 259). Additionally, Narcissus was the eromenos of Ameinias (Sergent 82). Thus, all four of the Greek characters that Dorian is modeled on can be connected to same-sex relationships in Greek myths and stories. This might explain the omission of this text in the novel edition as a single mentioning of Antinous, Adonis, or Narcissus might have been acceptable, a succession of four homoerotic Greek icons was perhaps no longer subtle or innocent.

To conclude, the comparison of the typescript of Oscar Wilde's with two of its later versions, clearly indicates heavy censorship to eradicate homoerotic content. The main focus of this censorship is pointed at the character of Hallward either by simply omitting inappropriate language, or by displacing his romantic feelings to aesthetic discourse. When closely studying the 1891 novel edition, however, which is the final version of the text, it can be argued that homoerotic content is still present in the Greek intertextuality. A likeness is drawn between Dorian and the Greek eromenos Antinous, and references to the myth of Narcissus further stress Hallward's role as an erastes and Dorian's role as the desired eromenos. The extensive floral imagery in the novel also plays an important part in the further expression of homoerotic desire, and is even applied to parallel the only female love-interest in the story, with her "Greek head with plaited coils of dark-brown hair" and boy's dress (*Uncensored* 94), to a beautiful Greek boy. Sybil Vane is not only an Echo, she is Dorian's very own eromenos. Alluding to Greek love by means of mythological reference and floral imagery indeed seems a more acceptable discourse as it resonates in all three versions of the text. The omission of the sequential reference to eromenoi Paris, Adonis, Antinous, and Narcissus proves, however, that Greek intertextuality could still be too explicit. Although Dowling suggests that Hellenist discourse allowed Wilde and others to venture into positive portrayal of male-male love and desire, this case of censorship illustrates that even this discourse was limited by homophobia.



## Chapter 2.

### *Teleny, or the Reverse of the Medal*

In the 1966 introduction to *Teleny or the Reverse of the Medal*, politician and author Harford Montgomery Hyde illustrates the curious circumstances surrounding the publication of this pornographic novella. The book was published by Smithers in a limited edition of 200 copies in 1893. The author was anonymous. Curiously, in the introduction to the 1934 French edition, translator and bookseller Charles Hirsch claims that the manuscript for *Teleny* was delivered to his London bookshop *Librairie Parisienne* in 1890 by Oscar Wilde himself “carefully wrapped up and sealed” (Montgomery 8). Wilde had been a customer of Hirsch and “used to buy the works of the leading French writers of the day such as Zola and Maupassant” (Montgomery 8). After Wilde delivered the text at his trusted book shop, Hirsch claims it was picked up and returned by several other men. Montgomery Hyde illustrates that Mr. Hirsch was amazed by the “extraordinary mixture of different handwriting, erasures, interlineations, corrections and additions obviously made by various hands” (Montgomery 9). Hirsch argued that the text was obviously a collaboration but he was also convinced that Oscar Wilde “had himself supervised and corrected the manuscript [sic], adding touches of his own here and there” (Montgomery 9). According to Hirsch, he then returned the book to Oscar Wilde and three years later it was published by Smithers. This story remains unproven but has certainly sparked an intense debate regarding the authorship of the novel. Because my thesis is concerned with texts by Oscar Wilde, I will first touch on Wilde’s potential authorship of *Teleny* before I analyze the work’s Greek intertextuality.

In the novel *Teleny, or the Reverse of the Medal*, the young Camille Des Grieux tells the story of his erotic love affair with René Teleny to an unidentified listener. Teleny, who is a talented pianist, initiates Camille into the Parisian homosexual lifestyle of extravagant parties and male prostitution, although interestingly Hirsch claimed the original manuscript’s setting was London. Camille’s discovering of Teleny’s infidelity with Camille’s own mother is the novel’s dramatic twist and leads Camille to attempt suicide by drowning. He is rescued by a curious man who looks remarkably similar to himself. Teleny, who thinks Camille has drowned, is overwhelmed with grief and guilt and takes his own life with a knife. After Teleny’s death, the relationship that was between them becomes public and Camille is held in contempt by society.

Considering the explicit sexual scenes in the book, both heterosexual and homosexual, owning, selling, let alone claiming authorship of the book, would have been prohibited and extremely dangerous in Victorian times. Even when the book was legally published by Icon books in 1966, it was still censored under the Obscene Publications Act. Although scholars generally agree that the book was written by several authors [Cohen; Gray; Norton], there is no strong consensus over the authorship of Wilde. In the book *The Unrecorded Life of Oscar Wilde*, for example, Rupert Croft-Cooke says that “nothing in the whole novel has, or could have, the slightest suggestion of Wilde’s talent in it” (Croft-Cooke 27). In the Introduction to a 1984 edition of *Teleny*, however, some ten years after Croft-Cooke published *The Unrecorded Life*, Winston Leyland argues that “internal evidence certainly points to Wilde’s involvement in the novel as either principal author or chief collaborator/instigator” (Leyland 11). Rictor Norton seems to agree with Leyland as he compares *Teleny* to Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* and argues that “both novels are what the late Victorians would call fleshy, and not incapable of having been written by the same hand” (Norton).

One of the ways to prove authorship is by “computational stylistics,” which entails statistical analysis of the distance and “relative frequencies of many words across a chosen range of texts” (Burrows 27). This linguistic strategy of proving authorship is, for example, applied by Albert Yang to the plays by William Shakespeare (Yang). John Burrows suggests an additional approach to settling authorship debates. In his article, Burrows proposes studying the frequency of unique words in known texts of the author to build up an author’s “distinctive profile,” to then compare this profile to the text of questionable authorship (Burrows 27).

In *Teleny*, for example, the word “quoth” returns as much as eight times in the first two chapters. Seeing that “quoth” is quite an archaic word that does not frequently return in modern literature, it could be part of an author’s personal style of vocabulary. Besides the fact that much more data is necessary to prove authorship in this manner, seeing that *Teleny* is likely the work of multiple authors, which can be noticed in the alternating prose styles, the fact that Oscar Wilde does not use “quoth” in any of his other works does not prove that Oscar Wilde did not contribute to *Teleny*. These techniques are extremely difficult to apply to a novel of multiple anonymous authors as distinctive profiles are overlapping and therefore hard to determine, which might be the reason why no scholar has yet applied this technique to prove *Teleny*’s authorship.

A strategy that is perhaps more useful in this case, is the comparison of stylistic features of Oscar Wilde, to fragments of *Teleny*. According to Norton, who applies this

technique, “*Dorian Gray*, as much as *Teleny*, is dominated by a profusion of sensuous catalogues of which the main sensation is that of a womb-like softness, and monochromatic Whistlerian color schemes, and the objects are as exotic as Turkish water-pipes” (Norton). Indeed, when comparing elaborate descriptions of ornaments in *Teleny* to descriptions in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the texts carry curious resemblance. This is for example evident in the example given by Norton in the description of Lord Henry Wotton’s room: “It was, in its way, a very charming room, with its high-panelled wainscoting of olive-stained oak, its cream-coloured frieze and ceiling of raised plasterwork, and its brick-dust felt carpet strewn with silk long-fringed Persian rugs” (*Uncensored* 88). This could be compared to the description of Teleny’s room: “It was a most peculiar room, the walls of which were covered over with some warm, white, soft, quilted stuff, studded all over with frosted silver buttons; the floor was covered with the curly white fleece of white lambs” (*Teleny* 1687). Additionally, when René Teleny and Camille go to an all-male party, the lights in the room are described as follows: “There were [...] star-shaped or octagonal lamps from Moorish mosques or Eastern synagogues” (*Teleny* 1709). Interestingly, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* a similar lamp appears: “a rather curious one of Moorish workmanship, made of dull silver inlaid with arabesques of burnished steel, and studded with coarse turquoises” (*Uncensored* 191). The curious similarity in the description of an Arabic lamp in *Teleny* and *Dorian Gray* further supports Norton’s theory of similar exotic ornaments in the texts.

Interestingly, another object that frequently returns in Wilde’s texts and in the novel *Teleny* is the sofa. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* this is introduced on the first page of the book when it is said that Lord Henry was lying on “the divan of Persian saddle-bags” (*Uncensored* 57) to which Lord Henry keeps returning to smoke a cigarette. The divan or couch returns when it is said that Dorian himself “flung himself down on a luxuriously cushioned couch” (*Uncensored* 125). Divans at times described as “Luxurious,” or “Persian” are referred to at least twenty-nine times in the 1891 edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Likewise, the couch is very central in *Teleny*, which further hints at the potential authorship of Oscar Wilde, but of course does not prove anything. Many of the explicit sexual scenes between a man and woman, between two women, and between two men in *Teleny*, occur on sofas rather than in a bed or otherwise, which gives the sofa a prominent place in the novel. At the start of *Teleny*, Camille for example describes how he once watched two female prostitutes have sexual relations on a “low couch” (*Teleny* 1641).

It can be argued that in texts written by Oscar Wilde, although not in such an explicit manner as in *Teleny*, the sofa also plays not just a central but also an erotic role. In the fairy

tale “The Young King” from the volume *A House of Pomegranates* (1891), it is said that the sixteen year old king “had flung himself back with a deep sigh of relief on the soft cushions of his embroidered couch, lying there, wild-eyed and open-mouthed” (*Pomegranates* 935). The description of the boy as “wild-eyed” and “open-mouthed” on the luxurious sofa arguably gives off an erotic tone. Another example occurs in Wilde’s fairy tale “The Fisherman and His Soul” also from *A House of Pomegranates*, in which a “young Emperor” is described as lying “stretched on a couch of dyed lion skins, and a gerfalcon perched upon his wrist. Behind him stood a brass-turbaned Nubian, naked down to the waist, and with heavy earrings in his split ears” (*Pomegranates* 979). The presence of the half-naked slave in this scene surrounding the sofa suggests an exotic sexual image.

This scene in “The Fisherman and his Soul” can be stylistically compared to a scene in *Teleny*. When Teleny and Camille attend a party, a scene on a divan is described as follows: “on faded old damask couches, on huge pillows made out of priests’ stoles, worked by devout fingers in silver and in gold, on soft Persian and Syrian divans, on lion and panther rugs, on mattresses covered over with electric [sic] cats’ skins, men, young and good-looking, almost naked, were lounging there by twos and threes” (*Teleny* 1709). Like the emperor in Oscar Wilde’s fairy tale, the young men at the party in *Teleny* are lying on sofas covered with animal hides. Both the descriptions of the sofas, as well as the “almost naked” young men in *Teleny* and the bare-chested man in “The Fisherman” evoke a similar erotic image in which the exotic is highlighted. This further supports the alignment of recurring themes in works by Oscar Wilde and in the anonymously written novel *Teleny*.

Thus, even though executing statistical analysis of *Teleny* is very difficult due to it being a collaborated work, when comparing fragments of *Teleny* to Wilde’s work, his authorship can definitely be argued. In addition to Norton’s point on Wilde’s “sensuous catalogues” of objects and ornaments that is present in *Teleny*, I add the similarity in erotic scenes surrounding couches and divans in combination with the exotic. Even though these arguments are convincing, I must note that I quite understand the unbelief surrounding Wilde’s supposed authorship of *Teleny* as the novel is filled with crude slapstick jokes while Wilde’s familiar clever wit and irony is missing from the pages. Perhaps this would have too soon given him away as the co-author of this pornographic text when anonymity was absolutely crucial. I must also note that comparing styles does not in any way conclusively prove the authorship of *Teleny*, as Wilde was already very popular by the time this pornographic work was written and any author could have copied this style in *Teleny*.

Nevertheless, I shall analyze the Greek intertextuality of *Teleny* bearing in mind that Oscar Wilde could potentially have dared to write parts of it.

Antinous, the beautiful lover of Hadrian, the Roman emperor who ruled in the second century A.D., found his death in the Nile before he reached the age of twenty. After the death of Antinous, Hadrian remained devoted to him and went to great lengths to retain Antinous' spirit and beautiful image. Hadrian's devotion, and Antinous' mysterious death, must have inspired many fin-de-siècle authors, as it is a frequently returning symbol for the love between two men in literature of that period (Waters; Plessis). In the first chapter, it was already pointed out that Basil Hallward imagined Dorian Gray as an Antinous (*Uncensored* 66) and in her article "The Most Famous Fairy in History," Sarah Waters points out that the image of Antinous also returns in Wilde's poem "The Sphinx," his fairytale "The Young King," and in the tragic ending of the novel *Teleny* (Waters 195). While Michael Du Plessis claims that the image of Antinous in *Teleny* functions as a "sexual signpost" (Plessis 71), Kevin Kopelson argues that the entire novel is a "retelling of the Antinous tale" (Kopelson 27). Next to the love between Hadrian and Antinous, *Teleny* also seems to carry some elements of Homer's *The Odyssey*<sup>1</sup>. Still, the love story of Hadrian and Antinous seems to have the most prominent place in *Teleny*.

When Camille des Grieux first hears Teleny perform, both men experience the vision of Hadrian mourning over his "fair Grecian slave, Antinous, who – like unto Christ – died for his master's sake" (*Teleny* 1612). Before actually having met, this hallucination already forebodes Teleny's suicide as well as Camille's pain that lingers on long after. Teleny's suicide might suggest that his character is modeled after the eromenos Antinous, while Camille des Grieux takes on the role of the erastes Hadrian. Several clues in the story suggest, however, that Camille and Teleny are not fixed as one or the other. While Teleny, for example, eventually does take his own life, Camille twice attempts to drown himself in the river, acts that also closely connect Camille to Antinous. In addition, it is Teleny, not Camille, that is very much familiar with the homosexual lifestyle and introduces its practices to Camille. This would sooner point Teleny out as the erastes and as a Hadrian. Importantly, what keeps returning in the novel is Camille and Teleny's close resemblance to Antinous and to each other, so close in fact that they call themselves "doppelgänger" (*Teleny* 1703).

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<sup>1</sup> Camille's mother is described as: "Rich and handsome as she was, she must have had as many suitors as Penelope herself" (*Teleny* 1725) – perhaps in the turn of the novel, Teleny then becomes one of Penelope's suitors who in *The Odyssey* conveniently also goes by the name of Antinous.

It can thus be argued that, unlike Basil Hallward and Dorian's bond, the nature of Teleny and Camille's relationship cannot be defined as strictly pederastic. Instead, both Camille and Teleny are young, beautiful, and appearing as the desired Antinous, or eromenos, in the text. Kopelson recognizes this and explains it as follows: "unlike the Platonic deployment, which minoritizes homosexuality by inscribing it within an erotic discourse of the deviant (i.e., classical pederasty), the romantic deployment typified by *Teleny* universalizes homosexuality by inscribing it within an erotic discourse of the dominant" (Kopelson 19,20). Kopelson thus argues that by denying a strict pederastic relationship in which one is the eromenos and the other the erastes, the relationship becomes similar to an erotic romance between a man and a woman. In support of Kopelson's argument, a sexual act between two men in the novel is often preceded by an erotic heterosexual scene with similar content. Before Teleny and Camille for example engage in a certain sexual position that allows anal penetration, Teleny remembers that he only learned it from watching his mother with a stranger and says that "It is a mode of locomotion of which the ladies are so fond that they put it into practice whenever they get the slightest chance" (*Teleny* 1694). The framing of homosexual intercourse with heterosexual anal intercourse, which is said to be widely practiced and enjoyed, seems to function as a justification, as well as a statement of society's hypocrisy.

While Kopelson argues that the text shows a sameness in homo- and heterosexual erotic experience, Ed Cohen claims that "by subverting the claims to 'natural' (read 'ideological') superiority by 'honorable [heterosexual] men,' the narrative's logic opens the possibility for a counterhegemonic representation of homoerotic desire" (Cohen 804). Cohen thus argues that by exposing heterosexual men as hypocritical in the text, the homosexual erotic experience is not only denied as wrong but perhaps even introduced as being a supreme or a "counterhegemonic" experience. When taking into consideration the Greek intertext in *Teleny*, Cohen's claim of the elevation of the love and sex between two men over heterosexual love and sex can be further argued.

First, elevation of the homosexual experience is present in the text by frequent invocation of the Greek gods in the context of homosexual lifestyle, physical appearance, and intercourse. The men in the novel that engage in sexual acts with other men are described as religious followers, and their behavior as spiritual rituals. The friends Teleny and Camille meet at an all-male party, for example, call themselves followers of "the Priapean creed" (*Teleny* 1708). Priapus, son of Aphrodite, was a Greek fertility god and the protector of gardens (Morford 182). He was often portrayed as deformed and dwarflike but with an

unusually large sexual organ and “willing, and able to penetrate boy, woman, or man” (Williams 90). The room of Teleny is described as the “temple of priapus” (*Teleny* 1687), and Camille and Teleny twice as “votaries of the Grecian god” (*Teleny* 1698). In addition, Priapus returns multiple times as a direct name for their sexual organs. Camille, Teleny, and their friends thus see themselves as followers of the ultimately masculine symbol of Priapus whose impression was so strong “that at the sight of this wingless god most men would have –as many did– discarded women for the love of their fellow men” (*Teleny* 1689).

Next to the invocation of the Greek fertility god Priapus, and the descriptions of the homosexual men in the book as devout religious followers, the homosexual experiences in *Teleny* often carry additional spiritual implications. When Camille first experiences feelings for Teleny, he says: “I read all I could find about the love of one man for another, that loathsome crime against nature taught to us not only by the very gods themselves, but by all the greatest men of olden times, for even Minos himself seems to have sodomized Theseus” (*Teleny* 1645). Later, just before the two lovers are about to have intercourse, Camille says, “let us enjoy together that pleasure which the gods themselves did not disdain to teach us” (*Teleny* 1693). About this, Ed Cohen says that “the text mocks the culture's pretensions in defining as a ‘crime against nature’ that which his nature demands and which the ‘very gods themselves’ and the ‘greatest men of olden times’ have practiced” (Cohen 804). By illustrating that the Grecian gods did not look down upon homosexuality but rather aimed to educate earthlings about the “pleasure” that can be had from it, *Teleny* denies the sexual act as being wrong or against nature and at the same time proposes it as being highly spiritual. This defense brings to mind Wilde’s speech at his 1895 trial, in which he also invokes great names to justify his own behavior and argues that “There is nothing unnatural about it” (“Testimony”).

In addition, *Teleny* even suggests that by engaging in homosexual intercourse, men are elevated to god-like status. This becomes especially evident when Camille has reached climax after a lengthy erotic scene in which they give each other oral pleasure, and it says “from hellish fires we were uplifted, amidst a shower of burning sparks, into a delightfully calm and ambrosial Olympus” (*Teleny* 1690). Thus, after having had intimate contact, in an erotic scene which is quite passionate, loving, yet which would have been regarded unnatural in Victorian context, Teleny and Camille are “uplifted” from the label of sodomy, and instead come to share the home of the Grecian gods on Mount Olympus.

The frequent invocation of the Grecian gods, as well as Camille and Teleny’s shared visions and curious doppelgänger, propose their relationship as being highly spiritual. The

spiritual nature of the relationship is highlighted by the frequent allusions to Greek deities in the novel. In that sense, *Teleny* quite fits the Uranian ideology, which proposed male-male relationships as highly spiritual. *Teleny* thus seems to apply the positive discourse of Greek intertextuality that Dowling argues stemmed from the high status of Oxford Hellenism in Victorian times to emancipate male-male love. The use of Greek allusions in *Teleny* as a means of emancipation does not, however, exactly match Dowling's theory. The Greek intertext in *Teleny* does not justify the romance between two men based on their pederastic bond, but justifies the romance and, importantly, also the sex between two men that are on equal footing. This could never, of course, be openly argued by the Uranian poets. The anonymity of *Teleny* however, allows a positive discourse of Greek intertextuality outside of homophobic censorship and limitations: the men are on equal grounds, and even their sexual intercourse is a divine experience.

To conclude, if indeed Oscar Wilde had dared to write such a pornographic work as *Teleny*, it is clear that it was absolutely crucial that his name could not be linked to it. The graphic sexual scenes in *Teleny* were not only unacceptable in Victorian context due to their homosexual nature, but just as much due to the unproductive heterosexual framework. Although the plot and characters of *Teleny* seem partly inspired by the love-story between Hadrian and his lover Antinous, both Teleny and Camille model after the latter. In denying a mentor-student relationship in which the erastes is in charge, their involvement is one of mutual consent on equal footing and, importantly, comparable to a heterosexual relationship. It is Teleny and Camille's relationship within heterosexual discourse, as well as the framework of heterosexual activity in *Teleny*, that argues the hypocrisy of Victorian morality and at the same time justifies the behavior of Teleny and Camille. The invocations of Grecian deities after homosexual intercourse, further reject the Victorians' views on sodomy, and instead propose male-male love and sex as the ultimately sublime and uplifting experience.



### Chapter 3. Three Fairy Tales

In 1885 Oscar Wilde visited Cambridge for a theatre performance of *The Eumenides*. While there, Wilde told a moving fairy tale about a statue of a young prince and a little bird, which Richard Ellmann claims was “so well received by the Cambridge students that on returning to his room he wrote it down” (Ellmann 253). In 1888 this same story appeared in the volume of fairy tales titled *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. Wilde had already written two plays and had had some success with a volume of poems before the publication of *The Happy Prince*. According to Ellmann, however, Wilde’s “reputation as an author dated from the publication of *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* in London in May 1888” (Ellmann 282). In the years following the publication of *The Happy Prince*, Wilde wrote several critical essays, short stories, as well as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It was in the year 1891, a few months after meeting Lord Alfred ‘Bosie’ Douglas, that Wilde again published a volume of fairy tales, this time titled *A House of Pomegranates*. Richard Ellmann has a good point when he argues that “For the most part Wilde subdued his desire to assault his readers with unfamiliar sensations” in his fairy tales (Ellmann 282). Indeed, when comparing both volumes of fairy tales to *Teleny* or even *Dorian Gray*, topics of deviant sexuality and forbidden romance are not as obviously present. Many scholars have argued, however, that Wilde’s fairy tales do discuss pederasty, vice, and are at times even sexually charged (Bartle; Duffy; Killeen; Wood). When closely studying Greek intertext, it can indeed be argued that some of the fairy tales make important points on homoerotic relationships.

One story in which Greek intertextuality is evident is “The Devoted Friend” from *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. “The Devoted Friend” tells the story of Little Hans, a young man who keeps a beautiful garden of flowers. Little Hans is quite dedicated to the self-centered miller Big Hugh. The miller takes advantage of Hans’ kindness, takes his flowers, and assigns him many exhausting tasks and jobs all the while claiming he is a great and “devoted” friend to Hans. For the final task, which is to fetch the doctor for Big Hugh’s son, Little Hans pays with his life as he drowns in a pond trying to find his way back home in the darkness.

In chapter one I already illustrated that the connection of floral imagery to the blossom and transience of youth stems from Greek mythology and, as Ed Madden argues, was often incorporated by authors to point to a pederastic relationship in a text. Interestingly, Little Hans keeps a garden of flowers which is filled with:

Sweet-william [...] Gilly-flowers, and Shepherds'-purses, and Fair-maids of France. There were damask Roses, and yellow Roses, lilac Crocuses, and gold, purple Violets and white. Columbine and Ladysmock, Marjoram and Wild Basil, the Cowslip and the Flower-de-luce, the Daffodil and the Clove-Pink bloomed or blossomed in their proper order as the months went by (*Happy* 915)

When considering Ed Madden's argument, Little Hans' garden of flowers might very well highlight his youth and innocence. When focusing on the type of flowers in Hans' garden, however, an even more tangible connection to homosexuality and Greek pederasty can be made.

Sweet-William, Gilly-flower, and the Clove-Pink for example are all types of carnations, flowers that came to symbolize homosexuality in the 1890s if green and worn on the chest (Wynn 11). This might be an early reference to this code word but could of course just be coincidental. In addition, the Crocuses, the Daffodil, and the purple Violets, all point to beautiful boys in Greek mythology. Narcissus, who in some myths is the eromenos of Ameinias and who in some stories dies due to suicide and in others by murder, returns in Little Hans' garden as the Daffodil. Similarly, Krokus was accidentally killed by his erastes Hermes and turned into a Crocus flower. The beautiful Greek mortal boy Attis was driven mad by the goddess Cybele, who was in love with him. After Attis takes his own life, violets spring from his blood. Attis, Krokus, Narcissus, and Little Hans share the common denominator of youth, beauty, and importantly a tragic premature death. Thus, Little Hans can very well be compared to the transformed Greek eromenoi in his garden, not just in his youth and innocence, but also in his tragic fate.

According to Duffy, it is the willingness to sacrifice oneself that elevates a pederastic relationship over any other, and he defines this as "the Uranians' favorite theme, the love of a man who lays down his life for his friend" (Duffy 331). Although Hans' willingness to die for Big Hugh can be argued to be an ideal trait and a sign of true devoting love, the exploitative relationship between Hans and Hugh can hardly be called ideal. Like to the myths of Attis, Krokus, and Narcissus, there is a dark side to this fairy tale, as the innocent and beautiful Hans is driven to his death by his beloved friend and arguably by his erastes. In the case of "The Devoted Friendship" the erastes fails the eromenos, as was the case in the Greek myths surrounding Attis, Krokus, and Narcissus. Like in *Dorian Gray*, this emphasizes the idea that in an ideal relationship between an erastes and an eromenos the devotion must be mutual or else the fate of one or both characters is tragic.

“The Happy Prince” also touches on themes of devotion and sacrifice but in a rather different way. In the story, a little male swallow befriends a beautiful golden statue of a prince. As the swallow spends his nights with the statue, the Prince provides the bird with the task to bring his decorations of jewels and gold to the starving people in the city. The swallow is first reluctant to help the Prince as he wants to continue his voyage to Egypt with his friends: “‘I am waited for in Egypt,’ said the Swallow. ‘My friends are flying up and down the Nile, and talking to the large lotus-flowers’” (*Happy* 898). Nevertheless he performs every task the Prince sets him. When the tasks are performed the Prince says: “‘I am glad that you are going to Egypt at last, little Swallow, [...] you have stayed too long here; but you must kiss me on the lips, for I love you’” (*Happy* 902). Sadly, the frost has already come and after their kiss the Swallow dies. This literally breaks the Happy Prince’s leaden heart in pieces. When the next day the mayor and his councilors see the poor state of the Prince, they pull the statue down. The pieces of its heart, which cannot be melted, are thrown in a dirt pile next to the dead swallow. The tale ends with God bidding his angels to bring him “the two most precious things in the city” and when the angels bring to him the dead swallow and the leaden heart, God says: “in my garden of Paradise this little bird shall sing for evermore, and in my city of gold the Happy Prince shall praise me” (*Happy* 903).

In his book *Art and Christhood: The Aesthetics of Oscar Wilde*, Guy Willoughby argues that in some of Wilde’s fairy tales, such as in the “The Happy Prince,” “a pattern of references establishes Jesus as the compelling ethical model for the central characters, as they battle to win community in a sadly fractious world” (Willoughby 19). The statue of the prince in the tale, Willoughby argues, is modeled after Christ – a theory he supports by unraveling numerous biblical allusions in the text. Willoughby then goes on to describe the bird from the tale as “a kind of disciple, distributing the alms of the master in much the same way [...] that Christ’s apostles did in the Gospel stories” and even says the Swallow bears likeness to “the Holy Ghost itself, that in the form of a dove visits upon Christ’s favored ones the spiritual benison of God” (Willoughby 24). In the book *The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde*, Jarlath Killeen similarly argues about “The Happy Prince” that “Christianity is crucial to the entire structure of the story” as it “[suggests] a possible methodology for transforming the real city of London into the mythic Jerusalem, [...] suggesting that what stands in the way are forms of egotism” (Killeen 25). In agreement with Willoughby and Killeen, Christian imagery and values are foregrounded in “The Happy Prince,” which perhaps is exactly what made the story appropriate reading material for the Christian Victorian child.

Next to the Christian imagery in “The Happy Prince,” a theme that has increasingly received academic focus is its pederastic content. Naomi Wood, for example, claims that “The Happy Prince” embodies the theme of pederasty as the prince “tutors the Swallow in what it means to love” (Wood 165). Duffy argues that the devoted male friendship for which either party is willing to die (Duffy 331), as well as the stressed difference in physical size of the Swallow and the Prince (Duffy 339), indicates the relationship between the little Swallow and the Prince can be read as pederastic. Additionally, a kiss shared between two men was considered an “unnatural crime” (Cocks 33). The kiss between the Swallow and the Prince, who are both male, would have thus been awkward if they represent heterosexual Victorian characters. The pederastic relationship between the Swallow and the Happy Prince becomes even more tangible, however, when considering an important reference in “The Happy Prince” to an ancient Greek love story that has so far returned several times in this thesis: the tragic love story between the slave Antinous and his erastes, emperor Hadrian. The little Swallow’s devotion to a royal figure and his self-sacrifice closely tie him to Antinous. In addition, the Swallow’s yearning to go to the Nile, and the Prince’s final words to him, “I am glad that you are going to Egypt at last, little Swallow,” again point to the Swallow’s connection to the Greek slave who died in the Egyptian Nile.

The theme of self-sacrifice is, of course, not just defining of an ideal pederastic relationship, but is also an important Christian theme. In his book *Masculinity in Children’s Animal Stories* Wynn William Yarbrough argues that due to Wilde’s Irish folk-Catholic background and deep interest in Hellenism and pre-Christian spirituality “pagan and Christian symbols and settings blur” in his fairy tales. Additionally, Kopelson’s consideration of Victorian readings of Antinous’ death as comparable to the sacrifice of Jesus for all men (Kopelson 26), which was already touched on in chapter one, the overlap between themes surrounding Antinous and Christ in the fairy tales becomes even more tangible. Koppelsen also points out that the blurring of this theme of sacrifice is also present in *Teleny*, when Camille Des Grieux describes Antinous as the “fair Grecian slave, [. . .] who - like unto Christ - died for his master's sake” (*Teleny* 1612).

In “The Happy Prince,” the Christian theme of sacrifice similarly overlaps with the theme of the sacrificial love between Antinous and Hadrian. God’s approval of the love between the Swallow and the Prince in the end then comes to signify not only approval of their altruistic relationship but also of a romantic love between the Grecian slave and the Roman emperor. By paralleling the Prince to both Christ and an erastes, the Christian imagery functions as a veil of a pederastic love story, while at the same it proposes an inclusion of

male-male love in religious doctrine. The careless disposal of the dead body of the bird and the melting down of the Prince by the representatives of society versus the divine approval of God at the end of the story, emphasizes that the exclusion of this form of love by society and institutionalized religious doctrine is false.

Interestingly, it can be argued that, like in “The Happy Prince,” in “The Young King” the love story between Hadrian and Antinous also overlaps with Christian imagery. Scholars discussing the pederastic and homoerotic themes in Wilde’s fairy tales often point to a lengthy allusion to Hadrian and Antinous in this particular fairy tale from the volume *The House of Pomegranates* (Duffy; Waters). In “The Young King” a beautiful boy grows up goat-herding and lute-playing until it is revealed he is the rightful heir to the throne. Like Dorian Gray, he quickly turns from quite innocent to quite obsessed and self-absorbed with the beauty of gems, riches, and Grecian boys:

On another occasion he had been missed for several hours, and after a lengthened search had been discovered in a little chamber in one of the northern turrets of the palace gazing, as one in a trance, at a Greek gem carved with the figure of Adonis. He had been seen, so the tale ran, pressing his warm lips to the marble brow of an antique statue that had been discovered in the bed of the river on the occasion of the building of the stone bridge, and was inscribed with the name of the Bithynian slave of Hadrian. He had passed a whole night in noting the effect of the moonlight on a silver image of Endymion. (*Pomegranates* 936)

The beauty of Adonis and Endymion entrance him, and he even kisses the statue of the “Bithynian slave” Antinous. This, when again taking in mind the criminalization of physical contact between men such as kissing, seems like quite a daring reference in a published text. Like the Happy Prince, the Young King kisses an Antinous – this time not in the form of a bird but in shape of a statue that bears his name. Like the Happy Prince, the Young King could function as the emperor Hadrian, again emphasized by his royal status.

It seems, however, that Wilde again attempts to make the adoration of beautiful Greek idols acceptable in “The Young King” by coating it in Christian imagery. To understand this, I first have to return to the story. The night before the boy is crowned in the tale, he has three dreams which reveal the suffering of his people. When he wakes up, he refuses to wear the robes for which so much blood was shed to make them, and instead he decides to wear his goat-herding outfit to his coronation. In the church he prays to the figure of Jesus Christ and his clothes magically turn “fairer than the robe that had been fashioned for his pleasure” as he has been crowned King by a greater power (*Pomegranates* 946). While the story’s protagonist

first adores the statue of Antinous, he has now turned to the figure of Christ. About this, Duffy argues that “for the king, Jesus has replaced Antinous as the object of male desire – a significant replacement, perhaps, in a reading which would see the King as a convert from paganism to Christianity, but not in a reading of the King as aesthete.” Duffy goes on to argue that the Christian God justifies the aesthetic appeal of boys by providing the King with beautiful clothing (Duffy 337). Duffy makes a valid point about the King’s unaltered desire for the male body. When considering the Victorian apologists’ vision of Antinous as a Christ-like figure, however, which is not touched on by Duffy, the final scene of adoration becomes not a replacement of the first scene but instead a repetition phrased in socially acceptable Christian language. It might even suggest that desiring a boy like Hadrian desired Antinous is a similar experience to the spiritual devotion to Christ. In addition, like “The Happy Prince,” “The Young King” similarly ends with God’s approval which again emphasizes the contradiction between society’s judgment and God’s approval of male-male desire and love.

To conclude, it seems that even Wilde’s fairy tales, which were so enthusiastically read by Victorian children refer to same-sex love, desire, and devotion in form of Greek intertextuality. In “The Devoted Friend” the character of Little Hans is illustrated as a mythological eromenos which is stressed by the flowers in his garden. Importantly, the relationship between Little Hans and Big Hugh, although arguably pederastic and self-sacrificial, is far from being spiritual or divine. “The Happy Prince,” on the other hand, presents a very different scenario of sacrifice. In this story the affection is mutual and loving. The sacrifice of the little Swallow and the Prince puts to mind the story of Antinous and Hadrian but is also Christ-like. When closely studying the texts, Wilde has intelligently fused the two bodies of intertext as he makes the imagery of Christ and Greek eromenos interchangeable. The blurring of Antinous and Christ is essential in the sense that it makes the story more acceptable, while at the same time it advocates wider acceptance. While Victorian society rejects the love between men, “The Young King” and “The Happy Prince” both argue that the divine approval of romantic relations between men is already granted. In that sense, it seems Christian imagery is applied to emancipate Greek love in these two stories rather than Dowling’s argument of the emancipation of same-sex love with Greek discourse. This suggests that despite its high status, Greek intertextuality could at times not stand on its own as a justification for male-male love and needed to be veiled with language that enjoyed an even higher status in Victorian times; Christian imagery.

## Conclusions

This thesis has investigated the gay subtext in the allusions to Greek myths, tales, and figures in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Teleny or the Reverse of the Medal*, and the three fairy tales “The Devoted Friend,” “The Happy Prince,” and “The Young King.” By investigating the Greek intertextuality in these works, this thesis answers the question: How did Oscar Wilde apply strategies of allusion in different texts in order to veil the love between men or to liberate it from Victorian stigma, and is Dowling’s theory of a legitimating authoritative counterdiscourse then applicable to these texts?

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian is directly placed in the role of an eromenos by frequently made comparisons to Greek boys like Antinous, Adonis, and Paris, but also in the paralleled story of Narcissus. Dorian is a true Narcissus and in Chapter one I argue that the rejected Basil and Sybil come to represent Ameinias and Echo. While Basil’s romantic interest is for a large part censored in the *Lippincott* and suffers additional censorship in the later novel edition, the relationship dynamics remain present in the story by its parallel to the myth of Narcissus. This suggests that Greek intertextuality was at least a successful veil of homoerotic themes that otherwise would have likely been edited out. The fact that the sequential reference to eromenoi Paris, Adonis, Antinous, and Narcissus was omitted from the reworked 1891 novel version of *Dorian Gray* proves, however, that even Greek intertext at times was too explicit.

Like Dorian Gray, Little Hans in “The Devoted Friend,” is also placed in the position of an eromenos, however in a much more encoded reference. In Chapter three I propose that Little Hans’ garden invokes the Greek eromenoi Narcissus, Krokus, and Attis. The imperfect pederastic relationship between Dorian and Basil in *Dorian Gray* as well as between Little Hans and Big Hugh in “The Devoted Friend,” echo tragic endings in Greek myths and emphasize the fatality of one-sided devotion. While the Greek intertext in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as well as “The Devoted Friend” does indeed point to romantic interests of male characters, there does not seem to be a motive of elevation over heterosexual relationships or even liberation from Victorian stigma. Instead, the Greek intertext merely seems to function as coded reference to stories of (tragic) romances between men. In these two stories the positive discourse of Oxford Hellenism, as argued by Dowling, might have provided Wilde with means to refer to love between men but does not at all seek to elevate, spiritualize, or liberate.

*Teleny* and “The Happy Prince” on the other hand very much tell the story of love between men that is mutual and pure. Importantly, both stories also incorporate the tale of Antinous and Hadrian. The little Swallow’s longing for the Nile, and the Prince’s royal status and heartbreak in “The Happy Prince,” respectively divide their roles as Antinous and Hadrian, while *Teleny* proposes an ambiguity of the parts played by the main characters. It is precisely this ambiguity, Kopelson argues, that places *Teleny* and *Camille* on the same level as a heterosexual couple (Kopelson 19,20). Although placed in the stricter role division as erastes or eromenos, the divine approvals of the characters’ love and adoration at the end of “The Happy Prince,” as well as “The Young King,” also reject the idea that a different judgment awaits heterosexuals and homosexuals after death and levels the two kinds of love. It can thus be argued that unlike *Dorian Gray* or “The Devoted Friend,” *Teleny*, “The Happy Prince,” and “The Young King” do attempt to elevate homosexuality from its inferior position in Victorian society.

In the third chapter it also becomes clear that in “The Happy Prince” and “The Young King” Christian symbols very much blur with Greek allusions. This highlights the spirituality that is experienced in a relationship between two men, a topic often put forth by the Uranian poets. Indeed, the blurring of the symbol of Christ with the figure of Antinous in “The Happy Prince” and “The Young King” very much connect religious devotion to the adoration of boys by men. The blurred discourse in the fairy tales also suggests, however, that Greek intertextuality does not fully succeed in positively presenting homosexual desire on its own, and needs an additional layer of acceptable discourse to either distract the reader or to spiritualize the matter at hand.

Due to the anonymous publication of *Teleny*, it seems to have been unnecessary to censor explicit allusions to Greek love like was the case in *Dorian Gray*, or to infuse a second layer of positive discourse like in “The Happy Prince” and “The Young King”. Instead, allusions to Greek stories, myths, and characters, as well as ancient pagan spirituality, is used as a positive discourse in *Teleny* that can stand on its own and that elevates the homoerotic experience. In *Teleny*, however, the Greek discourse successfully spiritualizes not just the relationships between men, but also the sex between men, which rejects the notion of a strict asexual spirituality connected to the counterdiscourse as argued by Dowling. Of course, it was quite dangerous even to hint at homosexual intercourse in work that was not published anonymously in the Victorian period, and I reckon it is quite absent in all of the works published under Wilde’s name.



I would like to conclude with the statement that Dowling's theory on the authority of the Greeks in Victorian culture that would have allowed for the elevation of same-sex love by authors such as Wilde, suffers a number of flaws when looking at the five texts at stake in this thesis. The case of censorship of Greek intertext in *Dorian Gray* suggests that despite the Victorians' high esteem of the Greeks, mentioning Greek eromenoi was occasionally still too explicit in homophobic times. In addition, *Dorian Gray* and "The Devoted Friend" sooner portray the devastation and destruction of male romance than a profound spiritual connection. By carefully framing references to Greek love with a Christian framework in "The Happy Prince" and "The Young King," Wilde created a second layer of acceptable discourse that distracted the reader from the subtext that was unaccepted by Victorian culture at large. The only text in which same-sex love is positively imagined with Greek discourse, and not censored or veiled, is the novel *Teleny*. The invocation of Grecian gods after same-sex intercourse, however, does not fit the theory argued by Dowling of a counterdiscourse of higher love that is ultimately asexual, innocent, and free of sodomy. All in all, this study has found that even when alluding to the highly regarded Greeks in Victorian times, only anonymity fully allowed the freedom to speak loud and proud of the love and sex shared between men.

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