1-1-2007

Text and paratext in Oscar Wilde's "A House of Pomegranates"

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TEXT AND PARATEXT IN OSCAR WILDE'S *A HOUSE OF POMEGRANATES*

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Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in English
Department of English
College of Liberal Arts

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2008

UNLV
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

Thesis Approval

The Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

April 4, 2008

The Thesis prepared by

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Entitled

Text and Paratext in Oscar Wilde's A House of Pomegranates

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

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ABSTRACT

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A House of Pomegranates

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Oscar Wilde's short collection of fairy tales *A House of Pomegranates* (1891), often considered a minor work, is analyzed textually in conjunction with its book design, by Charles Ricketts and Charles H. Shannon, which accompanied it in the first edition. *A House of Pomegranates* was the first book Charles Ricketts designed for Wilde, and Wilde uses Ricketts's designs almost exclusively from that point. Despite this, the designs for *A House of Pomegranates* have not yet been studied at any great length. The methods Wilde and Ricketts use to lace the all-important theme of individuality, found in Wilde's contemporary piece "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," through the pages of the first edition are examined and explained. Interestingly, the aesthetic themes presented by Wilde and Ricketts are somewhat undermined by the four plates drawn by Charles Shannon, which invoke more traditional values.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my advisor Dr. Beth Rosenberg for helping me persevere in the writing of this thesis. Without her patience and support it would not have been finished.

Thanks to Dr. Megan Becker-Leckrone for introducing me to literary theory and pushing me through all those years of close reading.

Thanks to Dr. Timothy Erwin for introducing me to picture theory.

I thank Dave Hickey for giving me the confidence to take on this writing project.

Thanks to all of the teachers who have helped me through the course of my education.

My mom and dad have always been supportive of my sometimes weird ambitions; thanks for all the encouragement.

Finally, Nick Christensen has been a supportive saint for years. His unmatched optimism has helped me achieve the aforementioned weird ambitions, and I hope he will continue to contaminate me with his optimism in the years to come.

CHAPTER 1

UNITY

In a now-famous exchange between Oscar Wilde and a reviewer for *Speaker* magazine, Wilde wrote of *A House of Pomegranates*: "The reviewer goes on to state that he does not like the cover. This is, no doubt, to be regretted, though it is not a matter of much importance, as there are only two people in the world whom it is absolutely necessary that the cover should please. One is Mr. Ricketts, who designed it, and the other is myself, whose book it binds. We both admire it immensely!" (*Letters* 301). This arrogant-sounding, artist-centered retort is the clearest critique that has existed of the binding of the first edition of *A House of Pomegranates*. The content of the book, too, left the public somewhat mystified. In response to still more criticism, Wilde wrote to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, "In building this House of Pomegranates, I had about as much intention of pleasing the British child as I had of pleasing the British public." The content, the cover, and the designs, created by his friends Charles Ricketts and Charles H. Shannon, were, as Wilde desired, "the unique result of an individual temperament," which refused to take into consideration current trend in thought or style (*Letters* 302).

Oscar Wilde had two volumes of fairy tales published early in his career. The first is *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888). These stories are moral and fanciful, and have been written about often. The book is still anthologized in whole or as individual stories in modern children's books. The second volume, *A House of Pomegranates* (1891), darker in content and richer in decadent detail, remains one of

Wilde's most neglected works. *A House of Pomegranates* contains four stories: "The Young King," "The Birthday of the Infanta," "The Fisherman and his Soul," and "The Star Child," all of which contain the themes of religion and art in varying degrees.

The public disliked *A House of Pomegranates* because it was not expected or contrived. The stories themselves espouse the concept of individuality, an unusual notion for fairy tales of the time. Furthermore, the illustrations are drawn by two young artists who were virtually unknown at the time, who had a distinctive appreciation for the art of the past, and scowled with discriminate eyes on most current forms of art. The cover especially, designed by Ricketts, was immensely unpopular with the public. Despite this, Ricketts continued to design nearly every one of Wilde's works during the next several years. On one hand, the creators of *A House of Pomegranates* can be accused of mere aestheticism, since the fierce individuality of the book stems at least partially from Walter Pater. Chris Snodgrass explains their fellowship with Pater:

> Born into an age which in its decline felt increasingly deprived of spiritual meaning and the old social values, these heirs of Pater sought to resanctify the world by enshrining Art itself as the ultimate source of meaning and value.... Thus freed from discredited and constricting ethical and social categories, one's duty becomes merely to develop one's personality to the most complete degree,..., by living one's life in such a manner that it came to resemble the unity, harmony, and beauty of a work of art. (103) [1]

While it is undeniable that *A House of Pomegranates* flouts its art in the face of society, there is real substance behind the characters, plots, and pictures of the book. It is a central theme of Wilde's works that people are capable of attaining a degree of art's

harmony through developing their personalities. As Snodgrass continues to explain, "...man must never become trapped into one perspective, but must remain ever flexible, continuing to develop his personality and preserving his potentiality of being, in order to be able to deal with the complex paradoxes of human existence" (106). Although Snodgrass refers here to Wilde's social comedies, his words also apply to *A House of Pomegranates.*

A House of Pomegranates does not enshrine art as the ultimate source of meaning, but places the human spirit in the position of a masterpiece that can be created by just one solid act of self-expression. It is self-expression, and not the worship of art, which created the ripple of discord from the public, and it is self-expression that Ricketts and Shannon were able to offer in their designs. The ideas that inform and explain this concept, which Wilde terms individuality, are developed more fully in Wilde's nearly contemporary essay, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism."

Jack Zipes, fairy tale guru of the present age, mentions that "since [Wilde] disliked the personal and first-person narrative, the fairy-tale form allowed him to depersonalize his own problems and expand them to include his unique ideas about Fabian socialism that were clearly articulated in his essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*" (137). Despite Zipes' observation, critics have continued to ignore the connection between *A House of Pomegranates* and "The Soul of Man Under Socialism." The timing of these two publications, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" (1891) and *A House of Pomegranates* (1891), took place during an interesting period in the Victorian art world. In 1885, artists were heavily involved in the Socialist debate, and in the Decadent movement, the artistic book became widely popular as an artistic object.

To say that Wilde was involved in the Socialist debate would be an overstatement. He may have considered himself involved, but others did not take his essay on Socialism seriously (Livesey 606). The Socialist debates of the 1880s involved artists such as William Morris, who was a Pre-Raphaelite and opened the Kelmscott Press in 1890. Wilde's "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," coming a bit after the involvement of other artists seems to have died down, treats the topic of Socialism to his own ends. If Wilde truly supports the institution of Socialism, it is because he anticipates that it would relieve the suffering of the artist at the hands of the public. "The Soul of Man" begins with a simple premise, which develops into a complex theory of art and publicity:

> The chief advantage that would result from the establishment of Socialism is, undoubtedly, the fact that Socialism would relieve us from the sordid necessity of living for others which, in the present condition of things, presses so hardly upon almost everybody. (255)

In "The Soul of Man," Wilde argues that most people are required to labor all their lives to support themselves and their families, "[The majority of people] find themselves surrounded by hideous poverty, by hideous ugliness, by hideous starvation" (255). In trying to solve these "hideous" problems for themselves and others, he argues, most people spoil their lives. The few individuals who have been able to keep "out of the clamorous claims of others" (Wilde mentions Darwin, Keats, Wagner, and even Christ), have been able to "realize the perfection of what was in him, to his own incomparable gain, and to the incomparable and lasting gain of the whole world" (255). Most people never reach these heights of individuality, as they are busy working to avoid, escape, or alleviate poverty, which Wilde describes as a very piteous example of the human

condition. One of the stories from *A House of Pomegranates*, "The Birthday of the Infanta," depicts an ugly dwarf as the ideal individual until he becomes aware of the requirements, or "claims," of others and is destroyed by the knowledge.

Continuing in "The Soul of Man," Wilde argues that implementing socialism, "converting private poverty into public wealth," will allow the great majority of people, no longer concerned with their material well-being, to develop their individuality. What Wilde means by "individualism," a theme that comes up repeatedly in the text and design of *A House of Pomegranates*, is "the full expression of a personality" ("Soul" 262). As Zipes pointed out, "In many respects, the fairy tales prepared the way for his social philosophy about the artist espoused in this essay – the artist as a Christlike figure representing true individuality, and true individualism as being only possible if there were an equal distribution of the wealth" (137). Significantly, Wilde suggests Christ as the prototype for the perfect individual, someone who reached the full expression of his personality (263). Wilde writes that Christ rejected material objects and advised others to do the same, and interprets this to mean, "that a man reaches his perfection not through what he has, not even through what he does, but entirely through what he is" (264). It is because Christ denied all personal property and even all bonds of family that he was able to achieve his perfection of personality. It is this moment of choosing to be oneself that is idealized repeatedly in *A House of Pomegranates*. Wilde summarizes by saying, "He who would lead a Christ-like life is he who is perfectly and absolutely himself" (266). This reversal on typical Christianity, which states that to be Christ-like is to live in the same manner that Christ lived, is one of the main points of *A House of Pomegranates*.

In discussing the reaction of the public against the book, the obscurity of the

artists and the brazen unpopularity of Ricketts's artistic choices becomes especially pertinent. The second part of Wilde's argument focuses on the public's fear of the individual and thus its fear of Art. In the essay Wilde states that, "Art is the most intense form of Individualism that the world has ever known" ("Soul" 270). Art, however, must be created without heed to the claims of others. At the point where the artist is creating things for the tastes of others, he has ceased to be an artist and has become instead, "a dull or amusing craftsman, an honest or dishonest tradesman" (270). Wilde continues to take his argument into the arena of public interest, claiming that "Art should never try to be popular. The public should try to make itself more artistic" (271). When art tries to please the tastes of others, of the public, the artist no longer acts as an individual. In stories such as "The Young King" and "The Fisherman and his Soul," the tension between the individual or artist and the public can be seen in an extreme form. In both of these stories, art begins to assert itself against the public in some way that makes clear the rise of the individual. Both the text and the binding of *A House of Pomegranates* work to highlight Wilde's desire to distance the public by simply not caring what it thinks; this is the work of individual artists. In this way, the work is performative of many of the ideals of the text.

The close correlation between Wilde's goal and his choice of artists was made very clear when he wrote against the *Pall Mall Gazette* reviewer's criticism of the book: "The artist seeks to realize in a certain material his immaterial idea of beauty. Does your reviewer imagine that Mr. Shannon draws for the purpose of giving information to the blind?" (*Letters* 302). This question equates the purpose of the artwork of *A House of Pomegranates* with its textual content, and the artwork is therefore integrally tied up with

the fairy tales. Lorraine Kooistra, in her book *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-siècle Illustrated Books*, points out that many fin-de-siècle artists perceived of themselves as readers and critics in their illustrations.[2] Book design was a philosophically driven movement in Victorian England: if popular opinion during the fin-de-siècle saw drawings as subservient to the text, many of the artists of the time wanted to point out the power of their craft.

In his book, *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books*, Nicholas Frankel describes the potential power of book design in the late Victorian era. He is adamant that Wilde was especially sensitive to the unique ability of a cover and pages to convey more meaning than the text it carried. Frankel explains that the Victorian book cannot be treated as "merely the vehicle" by which the meaning of the text is transferred to the reader's brain (2). Frankel first cites part of Gerard Genette's discussion of the paratext – the pages, cover designs, illustrations, bibliographic information, and etc:

> The features "surround … and extend" the text "precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its reception and consumption in the form of a book… A text without a paratext does not exist and never did exist" (qtd. in Frankel 3).

Genette's claim, then, is that the paratext is the vehicle by which the text comes to the reader. The power of that position should not be underestimated as a potent force affecting interpretation. Frankel emphasizes his point, stating, "no text arrives independent of institutions of transmission, just as no text arrives disembodied, liberated from the constraints of its medium" (6).[3] The importance of the illustrations in the

reader's experience with a text has become a topic of some critical attention in the last ten years, though reader response critics have long recognized the effect of the paratext on reader reception.

That Frankel chooses to use this set of theories to discuss Wilde's books specifically is deliberate, for Wilde took book design very seriously. He was aware that presentation affected reception. With so much power to sway a reader, the role of the illustrator became increasingly important. For example, Aubrey Beardsley's illustrative criticism of Wilde's *Salome* focused intently on sexuality.[4] Wilde did not care for the sexiness of Beardsley's picturing of *Salome*. Kooistra reminds her reader that Wilde seemed to be irritated with Beardsley's work on *Salome* by citing a quote of his recorded by Raymond:

> My Herod is like the Herod of Gustave Moreau – wrapped in his jewels and sorrows. My Salome is a mystic, the sister of Salammbo, a Saint Therese who worships the moon; dear Aubrey's designs are like the naughty scribbles a precocious schoolboy makes on the margins of his copybooks. (qtd. in Kooistra 131)

This quote from Wilde indicates not only that he did not care much for the outcome of Beardsley's work, but also that Wilde identified the impact of the drawings on the interpretation of his characters. No longer the dignified personas he envisioned them, they have been transformed into "naughty scribbles." However, this statement also indicates that Wilde felt that Beardsley had overstepped his bounds to some extent. Kooistra uses this evident aggravation to argue that "the issue was not with aesthetics but with authority" (131). That may be pretty accurate. Although Wilde's defense of the

cover of *A House of Pomegranates* is his reaction against a critic, the defense says more about the book than most critics have noticed. The idea that the cover should please both Ricketts and Wilde is an apparent contradiction with Wilde's general theory that the artist must please no one but himself. It is interesting to question whether Wilde saw the artists he hired as working, at least partially, for his artistic vision or if he was simply raising his critical voice as he would have done for any artwork.[5]

Wilde very regularly voiced his opinion of Ricketts's work for him, for despite the commercial failure of their first book, Wilde continued to use his designs for, notably, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Intentions,* a new edition of *Poems* and *The Sphinx* (*Letters* 249). As Frankel is so quick to point out, Wilde's choice of illustrator dramatically influenced his control over the aesthetic appearance of his writing. The illustrator he chose most frequently, Ricketts, held a fine distinction between textual criticism and intellectual illustration.

Within *A House of Pomegranates*, Ricketts and Shannon constantly communicate with the reader and with the text. This places them in the same position of power that Beardsley seems to have abused. Wilde's defense of *A House of Pomegranates* indicates his approval of their packaging for his elegant ideas on individuality, so it is the point of this thesis to determine how each artist treats the subject matter of *A House of Pomegranates*. Ricketts and Shannon approach the text as two different men, with different styles, backgrounds, and beliefs. In a book where a solid reading has been somewhat elusive, it is not likely that the readings performed by Ricketts and Shannon would be at all similar. In order to understand something more of these two men who were so involved in Wilde's publication career, a bit of background is required.

Although obscure figures today, Ricketts and Shannon were indispensably involved in the English art community from approximately 1888 to 1934, when Ricketts died. He and Shannon were companions and art collectors for more than thirty years; the sort of collectors who gave up food and drink to own a particularly special piece. Their collection, which included pieces from many different eras and artists, was partially sold to pay for Shannon's care expenses after Ricketts's death and the rest was donated to multiple museums.[6] Ricketts was more outspoken of the two men. He wrote much that can be used to get a clear picture of his artistic ideals, including journals, art criticism and theory, and essays on artists.

In a different way from Wilde, Ricketts was also a proponent of individuality: "The artist expresses himself and his preferences. To stand outside common currents and popular aims is in itself a sign of character and originality" (*Self-Portrait* 192). This, Ricketts's reaction to discovering that he and Shannon were seen "as not reflecting the like of [their] time" in 1914, is soon followed in his journal by musings on success. Ricketts's consideration of success is only practical, thus effectively making him the same matter of artist that Wilde had in mind in "The Soul of Man," one whose livelihood is at the mercy of the public. Ricketts knew as well as Wilde that the art world was fickle. As the journal entry continues, he writes, "In England, a man's work dies out of memory a year after its production" (*Self-Portrait* 193). Ricketts acknowledges that to be original, to have that character, is not enough to be successful in art, and that "nothing is actually rarer in art than originality, nothing lasts for so short a time" (192). That is, of course, because others will soon jump on the bandwagon of a successful and original artist.

Originality, to Ricketts, does not mean something new – all rests on his premise that ignoring and resisting "common currents and popular aims" places one in the category of originality. Thus, Ricketts is not certain that he and Shannon will be financially successful, but he still mentions, "My personal belief is that great painting belongs to great artists,..., such as Watts, Puvis, Burne-Jones, Baudry, and Gustave Moreau; that their failures even will seem to possess a personal quality" (193). That is to say, the sacrifice made to achieve originality is worth it because he still recalls these earlier artists as having a unique, personal quality, a quality which can be understood as individuality. Though he continues to ponder technical quality and financial concerns, his questioning of what it means to have success is central to his work for Wilde. Through their artistic individuality and originality, he and Shannon placed themselves into the fiscally precarious position of becoming obsolete for a time; this echoes the concern Wilde expresses about artists in *A House of Pomegranates* and in "The Soul of Man" (*Self-Portrait* 193). For Ricketts, this individuality and originality is tied up with the concepts of mood and *document.*

Ricketts's grasp on the purpose of individualism is at the very least quite similar to that expressed by Wilde in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism." From Ricketts's essay "The Unwritten Book," featured in the second issue of *The Dial*, the "occasional" art magazine Ricketts and Shannon produced from 1889 to 1896, it becomes apparent that Ricketts wanted to make the texts he designed into what he termed *documents*. "The Unwritten Book" largely dedicates itself to the definition of the term *document* and has been called a "manifesto for the Aesthetic ideal" of the purpose of *The Dial* (Calloway 13). The definition of *document* seems to have been at least partially implied, a sort of

activity of individuality. For example, the goal of the *Dial* was to take poems and short stories from their circle of friends and illustrate them. This was done, according to "The Unwritten Book," in the pursuit of *document*:

> These works have been chosen for their lack of story, in its common acceptance; and so we come easily to the color exclamation on some Chinese enamel, dabbed there in a vibrant crimson on a liquid purple, where no subject can exist at all; yet this thing, by its cunning spontaneity, will give the emotion that sudden movement adds to nature – the ripple of grass in a summer landscape, for instance – and so become *Document* – that monument of moods. (Ricketts, qtd. in Calloway 25)

That is, *document* is found in details and the details add to the story. Ricketts actively involves himself in the creation of story. The easiest way to illustrate the pertinent aspects of *document* is to use one of Ricketts's illustrations. Ricketts's publication page for *A House of Pomegranates* features a girl swathed in peacock printed robes, using a grid to paint a mural. In a running motif, this same figure appears prior to every story, beside a pomegranate tree heavy with fruit and an ever-fuller basket – that is, as the stories progress the tree grows emptier and the basket fuller. This image asserts the importance of the illustrator or book designer; however Ricketts's figure is still bound to Wilde, as she is dealing in pomegranates. In a visual pun, Ricketts establishes her as crucial to the storytelling process; she takes each fruit from its "wild" source and places it in the basket, ready for public consumption.

This theme is repeated more strongly, with a different emphasis, on the introduction page of the book. In the forward to *Charles Ricketts: Subtle and Fantastic*

Decorator, Kenneth Clark writes, "As a conceit, the designs which [the Queen] works are the small page ornaments in the book" (15). The figure is enclosed and backed by tall, dense pomegranate trees. This time the emphasis is not on the artist as facilitator but instead on the artist and author as co-producers of a single creation – *document*. Unlike Wilde's experience with Beardsley, where the artist was actively trying to usurp the authority of the author, Ricketts is more than willing to share his authority with the author. Throughout *A House of Pomegranates*, Ricketts's drawings work to embrace and enhance certain aspects of Wilde's stories while maintaining Ricketts's artistic independence. While he may not be completely free from the bonds of authority, as Wilde's idealization of the artist would require, Ricketts is certainly not under the thumb of the public.

Despite being "outside the common currents," Charles Ricketts was one of the most influential book designers of the time, inspiring illustrators such as Beardsley to follow his aesthetic path. His binding of *The Sphinx* is called the height of the decadent tradition.[7] Ricketts, by all accounts, was a talkative and kind-hearted man, with an incredibly thorough knowledge of art and history. Descriptions of Charles Ricketts by contemporary friends and in modern biography sparkle across the page. He had a quick, sharp intellect and a knack for amusing, analytical conversation. Wilde once called the Vale, the house Ricketts and Shannon shared, "The one place in London you'll never be bored" (Kooistra 96). Ricketts was a book designer first, a career launched by Wilde's patronage, and then opened his own small press, The Vale Press (1896). Later, he designed theatre sets and costumes. The Pre-Raphaelites should be counted among his earliest influences, particularly at the time he designed *A House of Pomegranates*, but he

was not given to stable or concrete opinions except that, "great art in all periods was the result of the intelligent study of the art of the past" (Calloway 20). He is responsible for the cover, page layout, and most of the interior decorations of *A House of Pomegranates*.

The other half of the artistic pair, Charles Shannon, drew four full-page picture plates for the first edition of *A House of Pomegranates*. Shannon is a far more difficult figure to discuss. His work on the book has been consistently brushed aside because of a mishap with the printing of the book that left his images very faded. Shannon was overshadowed by his talkative and intelligent friend, though he is described as kind and endlessly patient. Shannon started out as a lithographer but he quickly turned to painting figures and portraits. Wilde called Shannon's self-portrait at the 1900 Paris Exhibition, "the most beautiful thing" he saw there (*Letters* 829). Shannon designed the binding of *Lady Windmere's Fan*, and Wilde asked Shannon to design covers of *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Ernest* (*Letters* 736). Within *A House of Pomegranates*, Shannon creates a very different impression from that seen in Ricketts's decorations. Although the story-telling element of *document* can be seen in Shannon's drawings, it seems he is either telling a very different story with his pictures or that he has somewhat missed Ricketts's intellectual endeavor. In either case, there is a similarity between his work for the book and his paintings that allows some study to be made of his illustrations for *A House of Pomegranates*.

Both Ricketts and Shannon were students of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Both the Arts and Crafts movement and Art Nouveau grew at least in part out of the second (Aesthetic) Pre-Raphaelite movement. The first Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, founded in 1848 and followed by Aesthetic Pre-Raphaelites, rejected the mechanical methods

developed in the Renaissance by artists like Raphael and challenged the confines of art training, hence the name "Pre-Raphaelite" (Mancoff 14). Instead, they admired and studied artwork of the mediaeval period, respecting it as freer and more natural. Two of the primary members of the Aesthetic Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris, were among Wilde's favorite artists. Appropriately, Wilde and Ricketts had several influences in common, including Burne-Jones, Morris, and Pater.[8]

Because both Ricketts and Shannon were proponents of the imagination, they aligned themselves with the Pre-Raphaelites, who looked back for inspiration, and with Walter Pater (Brooks 310). In his excellent variorum on Pater, Wolfgang Iser writes:

> Through the co-existence of opposites, reconciliation makes it feasible for the vast variety of human possibilities to be embraced, and this is the meaning of art, which, however, can only open up this play of possibilities in a realm that lies beyond challenging realities. (39)

A House of Pomegranates is a text that attempts to insert itself into the realm beyond challenging realities. That is where *A House of Pomegranates* becomes a coherent *document*. The reason to reinterpret nature was to exhibit the transformative properties of art that Pater believed in, a cause Wilde and Ricketts also took up: "With the real world now orderless, interest can only be held by the unusual, and by the stimulating effect of things" (Iser 34). By reinterpreting nature, art can become something so stimulating that it helps people realize the endless possibilities that seem paradoxical, but are not. For Wilde, socialism and being Christ-like is all about having the freedom to become the ultimate individual through realizing and disregarding the paradoxes of possibility. In their art, Ricketts and Shannon exhibit their own freedom by transforming Wilde's text

and by transforming nature as their styles find fit. This freedom of transformation is also exercised by Edward Burne-Jones.

Wilde makes numerous references to Burne-Jones, beginning with his piece *Spes*, of which he says, "In so many of Burne-Jones's pictures we have merely the pagan worship of beauty: but in this one I seem to see more humanity and sympathy than in all the others" (*Letters* 52).[9] Burne-Jones set into motion his own standard of interpretation, according to biographer Debra Mancoff, "to extract beauty and mystery from even the harshest of subjects." Later, Burne-Jones would combine classical and mediaeval mythologies, flouting contemporary academic rules in order to allow "a freer flight of the imagination" (Mancoff 47). This trend of interpreting would prove important to future movements growing out of Pre-Raphaelitism and artists inspired by Burne-Jones' work, including Ricketts and Wilde.

This "flight of imagination" from the Pre-Raphaelites is evident in *A House of Pomegranates*. Equally so is the habit of looking backwards. "The Unwritten Book" proclaims, "We make no claim to originality, ...for all art is but the combination of known qualities.... We would therefore avoid all taint of announced reform for those pathetically persistent in demanding it" (Ricketts, qtd. in Calloway 26). Ricketts records in his journal that in a number of American reviews "we are both pitted against each other and classed in the wane of English Victorianism. The last accusation does not pain us. It is also softened by strictures on Watts, Rossetti, Burne-Jones, with whom we are classed — as not reflecting the life of our time" (*Self-Portrait* 192). Delaney notes that, "Whilst they continued the Pre-Raphaelite tradition of imaginative painting, they drew their subjects from the classical tradition in Italian art...rather than the earlier Italian

school with its mediaeval subjects" (36). Even in emulating those they respected, Ricketts and Shannon had no qualms about disregarding whatever did not suit their ideas on art.

Morris, a close friend of Burne-Jones, departed somewhat from the Pre-Raphaelite movement and began drawing heavily on the socialist ideas of Ruskin. He was focused on "reviv[ing] the high standards of craftsmanship that he believed had existed in the pre-industrial world" (Mancoff 20). These are the ideals that led him to opening his own press and looking back to mediaeval book design for inspiration. Wilde wrote in a letter to Morris, "I have loved your work since boyhood: I shall always love it" (*Letters* 291). The Arts and Crafts movement, with its emphasis on the beauty of the craftsman's work and of everyday objects, profoundly effected the development of book design. The Arts and Crafts philosophy elevated the book designer's role from a merely human component who allowed the author's words to reach the public to an active creator and artist. Even a brief discussion on Art and socialism in 1890s must also include some information on William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement and, specifically for the purpose of this thesis, Morris' focus on book design during this period.

Morris' goal at the time was to enhance the lives of craftsmen, returning to a time when everyone had his own craft to be proud of. Ruth Livesey, in her article "Morris, Carpenter, Wilde and the Political Aesthetics of Labor," argues that "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" was written at least partly in response to Morris' various socialist work, such as *News from Nowhere* (607). Briefly put, Morris would represent another facet of the debate over how aesthetics and politics would blend in a new Socialist government. Wilde wrote that through aestheticism or art, people could achieve the

ultimate goal, individuality. Morris, on the other hand, believed that it was through the labor needed to create beautiful things that aestheticism would enter the new, socialized world (Liverey 607). Even labor that does not produce beauty is advocated by Morris, as Liverey explains, "Art was the offspring of labor in a non-alienated, pre- or post-capitalist world, and the desire for labor was, for Morris, an inherent trait of mankind" (607).[10] Socialism, within the scope of this paper, is not a political agenda. In *A House of Pomegranates*, socialism is instead a means to an end: individuality for all humankind. That end so overshadows any intentions that it is useless to bring up the political side of socialism except as it might be portrayed in a fairy tale. In *A House of Pomegranates*, it is seen in the sad state of the poor, the uselessness of the rich, and, for Wilde, the suffering artist/ individual.

Around the time that Morris opened the Kelmscott Press (1890), Ricketts was beginning to toy with the notion of beginning his own small press so he could have more control over production (Delaney 63). This reveals the limited influence of Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, although,

> Ricketts had not yet seen Morris' first commercial designs in December 1890, when, working on his first book designs for Osgood and McIlvaine, he told a friend that he intended to buy a press and print small editions of rare books, illustrated and bound artistically, and that he wanted to be a sort of 'Morris' of the book and illustration. (Pissarro, qtd. in Delaney 63)

When Ricketts alludes to the "Morris of the book design and illustration" he is referencing the idea of aesthetic unity applied to books rather than to architecture. Ricketts would open the Vale Press in 1896, but only for additional control over

production, not because he subscribed to any of Morris' political ideals. In addition to the Arts and Crafts sort of mentality he was leaning towards, Ricketts really claimed to several interrelated fields of art including the Pre-Raphaelites, Art Nouveau, and French Symbolism, among others and at different points throughout his career while really claiming none of them (Delaney 84).

Ricketts style for *A House of Pomegranates* is generally considered Art Nouveau. The Art Nouveau movement developed about the same time as the Arts and Crafts movement, but was informed by a completely different philosophy. Kooistra says of the Decadent aesthetes: "Unlike Arts and Crafts designers, these artists experimented with the decorated text as an object of beauty for its own sake" (31). These artists were influenced by Pater's *The Renaissance* and aimed to combine the object of beauty with fierce individualism. When he designed the cover of *A House of Pomegranates*, Ricketts was beginning to combine Pre-Raphaelite and Art Nouveau elements (Delaney 60).[11]

The timing of *A House of Pomegranates* and "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" creates an interesting context for reading for both the text and the illustrations of *A House of Pomegranates*. What has primarily existed as far as criticism of *A House of Pomegranates* tends to focus on how the stories are similar or dissimilar to more mainstream children's works, especially those of Hans Christian Andersen.[12] The following chapters will focus on providing readings of the four fairy tales found in *A House of Pomegranates*. The readings will be not only textual, which is long overdue, but also pictorial. Chapter two focuses on the work of Charles Ricketts on "The Young King," and it examines Ricketts's contribution to the story's themes of individuality and nature. Charles Shannon's long-ignored pictorial intentions, which contrast markedly

with the intentions of Wilde and Ricketts by creating a moral undertone, are analyzed in Chapter three through "The Birthday of the Infanta" and "The Star Child." In Chapter four, the effects of cultural paradox on individuality are examined in "The Fisherman and his Soul."[13] The Conclusion attempts to reconcile public perception with artistic intention, and sets a course for further development in studying *A House of Pomegranates.*

Endnotes

[1] In his review of Nassaar's *Into the Demon Universe*, Snodgrass claims that Wilde struggled to find equilibrium between the decadent world and a world of morality, a struggle Wilde documented in every work he produced.

[2] In *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-siècle Illustrated Books*, Lorraine Kooistra introduces her theory of bitextuality, or the interaction between artist and author in illustrated texts. Bitextual theory explains the real importance of the paratext using M.M. Bahktin's theory of dialogism. In dialogism, the tension under the surface of texts, to use Julia Kristeva's succinct mental image, is an intersection that the reader, writer and changing cultural context all share. Bitextual theory then analyzes the dialogue between the written text and the illustrations within the cultural context of the decadence. As Kooistra puts it,

> The dialogue between picture and word participates in, and is a product of, its surrounding cultural discourses. For this reason, *fin-de-siècle* illustrated books illuminate their period's struggles and anxieties with regard to sex, knowledge, and power. (4)

Although this thesis will not build on Kooistra's assertion that all *fin-de-siècle* artists were obsessed with sex, the point she makes concerning current events forms an interesting lens of cultural context. She builds on Wilde's familiar assertion that critics are artists in their own right, and that the artist who receives a text to illustrate acts as interpreter and critic of that text. Alongside the contemporary *fin-de-siècle* political developments related to gender, there were also artistic movements in full swing which emphasized the duty of the artist and author to critique and analyze other aspects of society, not only those parts pertaining to sexuality.

Kooistra explains that the theoretical ideologies informing artistic movements heavily influenced the statements they made in their artwork: "Influenced by the pre-Raphaelites, many fin-de-siècle artists set out to be interpretive readers of the texts they embellished" (3). Though many artists were influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites, there was more involved than critical comments. This is possible because: "The proximity of picture and

word draws together two opposing art forms whose contiguity makes their meaning contingent" (13). They interpreted, according to Kooistra, in five different ways. The theoretical approach that informs the artist is important but not necessarily crucial to understanding the approach they take to illustrative criticism. Kooistra's classifications within bitextual theory are "quotation," "impression," "parody," "answering," and the aptly named "cross-dressing."

[3] After this, Frankel's text becomes slightly contradictory: he says it is ineffective to study the "moment of reading" and spends the next 2-3 chapters in a more editorial approach. In chapter 4 he discusses the reading moment in conjunction with the editorial layout of the book.

[4] It is useful to have a demonstration of the type of analysis Kooistra has done with bitextual theory. The second publication of *Salome*, illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley, had an immense effect on its reception and is an example of extreme illustrative criticism and control. Kooistra explains that in *Salome*, Beardsley "parodies" the text. In parody, images "[involve] the viewer in the subversive displacement of authorized representations" (127). In other words, Beardsley sought to exert control over the text – equal to or surpassing that of the author. Kooistra points out that even in the title: *Salome, translated from the French of Oscar Wilde Pictured by Aubrey Beardsley*, Beardsley had removed Wilde from the active role of playwright and inserted himself into the only active role on the page (citation). According to Kooistra, throughout the book Beardsley's illustrations seek to expose the contradiction between Wilde the middle-class artist who would identify with Herod and Wilde the homosexual artist who would identify with Salome the "trangressive outsider" (132). By employing caricatures of Wilde and a series of sexy "symbolic motifs," "Beardsley combines these sexual symbols into an ironic counter-narrative of Wilde's play which offers a transformative counter-narrative for *Salome* by mimicking the author's themes" (Kooistra 132).[4] This counter-narrative, Kooistra claims, was so strong as to virtually pave the way for Wilde's arrest the following year (133).

[5] "The simple answer is that readers of Wilde's day would have seen the binding as a work of art in its own right. Since Rossetti's Poems (1870), a self-conscious aesthetics of bookbinding had been emerging in England, the supreme articulation of which had been the lecture on bookbinding that T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, later founder of the Doves Bindery, gave in late 1888 to the Arts and Crafts Society." Frankel "Book Decoration and the Poetic Text: Charles Ricketts's Designs for Wilde's Poems."

[6] Delaney 400

[7] Kooistra 97

[8] "Since Wilde and Ricketts were fascinated by des Esseintes' life and by his passionate love for exquisitely wrought objects, it is appropriate that Ricketts's designs for Wilde's books should so often carry an aroma of decadence and perversity. But it is only a stylistic effect that they derive from the French decadence. Their deeper roots are from

Ruskin's insistence on the dignity of handicrafts, Pater's defense of the decorative element in art, Morris' stylization of natural motifs, and Whistler's enthusiastic adaptations of the principles of Japanese design" (Brooks 303).

[9] They were also friends, evidenced by a note from Burne-Jones to his friend Eliot Norton, an American scholar whom Wilde visited, wherein Burne-Jones says, "The gentleman who brings you this little note in my friend Oscar Wilde, who has much brightened this last of my declining years" (Letters 123).

[10] That is, mankind has inherited a traditional culture of labor, which is exemplified by communal art using elements from Nature for embellishment (Livesey 606). This contrasts very sharply with Wilde's argument for Art created by individualism. By 1890, Morris had opened his private press, the Kelmscott Press and had started designing books out of his belief that, "The only work of art which surpasses a complete mediaeval book is a complete mediaeval building" (Vallance 376). According to Vallance, Morris set up the Kelmscott Press in November of 1890 when he realized that actual socialist reform was not imminent. (Vallance 376) Therefore, for Morris, book design was putting more power back into the hands of the craftsman, not striving for the same type of individuality that exists in *A House of Pomegranates*. The logic informing different designers varied significantly. Morris was looking backwards to Mediaeval designs, others wanted to express their power over the text, many wanted commercial success and a few wanted to create an aesthetic object. Those few include designers like Ricketts. His craft, next to Wilde's text, is what makes the book a complete aesthetic object.

[11] In this format, it is really impossible to communicate the number of sources that inform Ricketts's artistic ideology. For more information, see Calloway and Delaney.

[12] See Nassaar. That Wilde borrowed from works such as "The Little Mermaid" is pretty well accepted, though the extent to which he reinterpreted seems characteristically underrated, especially in consideration to any of the Christian or anti-Christian themes that Wilde's stories are fraught with. Wilde's Christian themes are simply different from mainstream Christian ideals, especially at this time if the contemporary piece "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" is to be taken into account.

CHAPTER 2

ARTISTIC UNION

As the primary designer of *A House of Pomegranates*, Charles Ricketts was responsible for the layout of text, the typeface used, the binding, front matter, and his own decorations that appear alongside the text.[14] Because he is the primary designer of *A House of Pomegranates*, it is valuable to examine some of his ideas on bookmaking. Ricketts had very specific ideas on every element, including design, style, and current trends. In his manuscript "On Typography," he mused that his contemporary bibliophiles might be tempted to "create the contemporary and the new by means of an art which has no real connection to the materials of the art of book-making" (197). In this, Ricketts advises looking towards the past foundations of book design, for example mediaeval illuminated books, for current design. He goes on to say, "In comparison with the ugliness and dullness of contemporary printing, classic simplicity in the setting-up of the pages and of the titles may appear to the eye of the bibliophile as an affectation of the archaic" (197). That is because the tradition of seeing the printed word as a form of the hand-written word, or any of the other formative processes earlier book designers went through, has been lost. This classic simplicity is key to Ricketts's layout choices in *A House of Pomegranates*. To compensate for their ignorance of the formative processes of book design, contemporary printers employed more pictures and lots of different typesets (Brooks 302). Ricketts found this inharmonious practice incorrect:

> As a result, the illustration begins to dominate and becomes something apart from the text, a sort of metal engraving or even an etching. But this is not right; for not every illustration, not matter how admirable it may seem in itself, is suitable as the ornamentation of a book that is conceived of in a harmonious fashion. ("On Typography" 198)

That is, illustration in book design should be added only on a need-to basis. If the story has a moment that the reader-illustrator, Ricketts, feels needs further emphasis or emotion or mood, then an illustration should be created to supply those things. Otherwise, the words should be allowed to speak for themselves. Often, in *A House of Pomegranates*, Ricketts allows Wilde's words to be the only record of a beautiful scene that another illustrator would be tempted to portray.

In "The Young King," Ricketts's drawings move Wilde's text to one side. Ricketts regularly prepares illustrated pages so that his image takes on an equal weight with the text, but the image and the text still seem to inhabit nearly the same world. There are three textual areas and three image areas, and each piece of text has its size and shape echo in image, which is an example of unity in book design. The equality of the space is also a vivid reminder that while the text and the image are vying on the page for the reader's attention, Ricketts's images are not attempting to usurp the authority of the text:

> In its quality as a special art, this art of illustration, however admirable it may be in itself, is only too often something merely added to the book, without any relation to the book-making process, without any connection

> with the character of the line in the printing and without any tonal relationship to it." ("On Typography" 195) [15]

A pointless mixture of typeface, line and picture, in other words, does not create a harmonious book. Unfortunately, in *A House of Pomegranates*, Ricketts's choice of tonal relationship does not show up as he might have liked it. For one, he did not have the ability to create his own fonts until he opened the Vale Press several years later. For another, there was a printing error that left his drawings very dark and thick, thereby destroying the harmony of the tones and lines (Brooks 311). Therefore, it is impossible to rate the success of Ricketts's achievement according to his own standards of harmony. However, there is a type of harmony in the design and content of the pictures themselves.

By this time it is clear that Ricketts does not intend to usurp the author, but instead to complement the author's work and create a harmonious object, as well as express his ideas and mood. Rather than drawing word-for-word from the text, Ricketts's goal is to create something more substantial in itself, an art object that is neither wholly author's nor illustrator's, but still a "documentation" of the individuality of both. By adding motion, mood, and spontaneity wherever the story is lacking, the artist works to create what Ricketts called *document*. *Document* is best understood as a piece of art that is whole and complete. It fully reflects the emotions and intentions of the artist, in fact, Ricketts called it a "monument of moods" (Ricketts, qtd. in Calloway 14). The concept of "mood" is a difficult one to define. Bollnow points out: "Moods have no particular object. They are states, colourings permeating human existence, in which the self turns in a special way inwardly in order to be at one with itself, and thus they do not point towards anything outside themselves" (qtd. in Iser 40). Mood is, according to this

definition, a reflection of the individual.

To clarify, the practical application of Ricketts's unique technique was commented upon by Wilde, "[Ricketts] was delicious on the illustrations, that are not taken from anything in the book, only suggested by it – for he holds that literature is more graphic than art, and should therefore never be illustrated in itself, only by what it evokes." (Brooks 304). Thus there are at least two points at which Ricketts pictured the text. One, he felt the story needed it. And two, the pictures are evocations of the text. That is, the portions of a text that Ricketts chooses to illustrate are those which needed additional graphic element, and the illustrations are his highly individualized response to the text. *Document* is a testimonial of some sensation. A sudden movement adds emotion to nature, but spontaneity of color and line adds emotion where its loss is felt in literature. It lends emotion and offers a sense of completeness. Thus, in examining Ricketts's pictures for *A House of Pomegranates*, the viewer finds Ricketts is not drawing much from the literature, but instead draws what the literature evokes in him.

Given this understanding of Ricketts's approach, the question then becomes how the drawings represent different elements in the text, where and how they depart, and to what effect. In essence, this is an interesting exercise in reader response because in addition to including his own reactions, Ricketts is also trying to work with Wilde to create a reaction on the part of the reader. This reaction, according to Ricketts's goal of *document*, is meant to amplify those points at which Ricketts felt Wilde's text was lacking. The task Ricketts sets for himself is both involved in the text and detached from it. Ricketts's pictures for *A House of Pomegranates* combine various themes, including classical mythology, self-identity, and nature. It is possible to see some of what Ricketts

attempts to capture by studying the individual text he decorates, where the pictures might depart from or enhance some certain part of the text, and how those pictures work together to create overall meaning. Because Ricketts's drawings shift in content and tone for each of the four stories in *A House of Pomegranates*, it is logical to take one story individually and analyze those pictures separately from the others, although the book works together as a whole.[16]

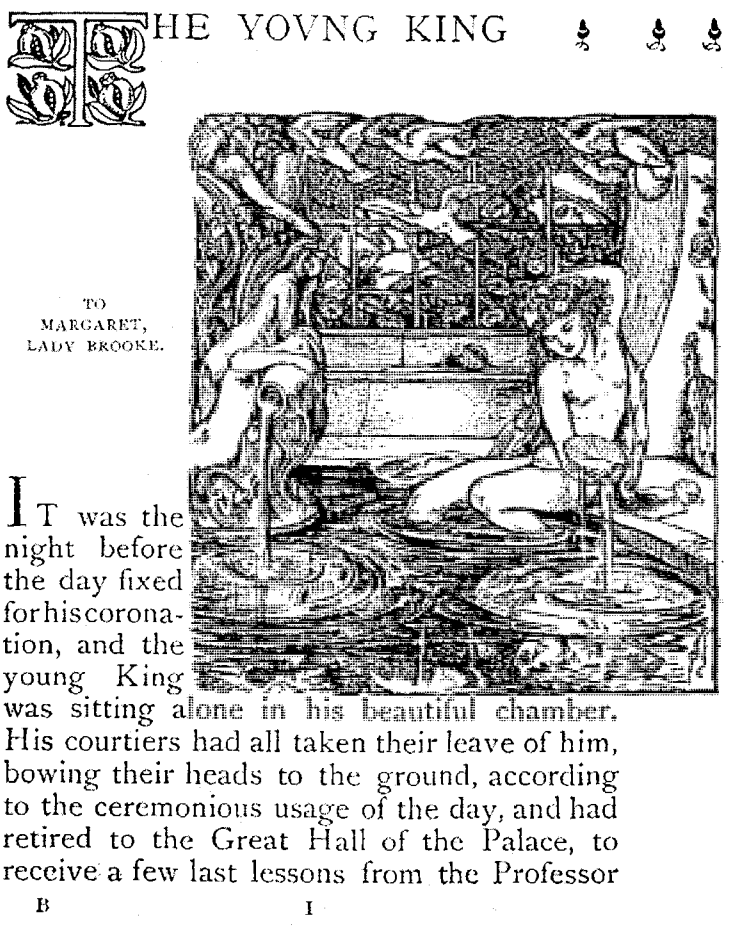
The first story in *A House of Pomegranates* is "The Young King." In "The Young King," Wilde tells of a deposed, illegitimate prince, raised as a goat herder after the murders of his princess mother and her mysterious lover. He learns of his royal status only upon the death of his grandfather, the king. In the time leading up to his coronation while living in the palace, the boy discovers his fervent love of exquisite and beautiful artistic objects. During this portion of the story, the boy is seen putting art as the ultimate point of life; that is, art as a sort wholly new religion (Snodgrass 103). Visual and pictorial elements create a great deal of the presence of the palace and the Young King's personality at this part of the story: he would seek beautiful things "like one who was seeking to find in beauty an anodyne from pain, a sort of restoration from sickness" (Wilde 84). His pursuits to this end include, "Kneeling in real adoration before a great picture that had been brought from Venice" and "gazing, as one in a trance, at the Greek gem carved with the figure of Adonis" (Wilde 85). However, the story then presses past art as a source of "religious" fulfillment into the realm of what has been called the "Christ-like" example set by the Young King. The usual justification for this slightly simplistic reading lies in the result of three haunting dreams.

The evening before his coronation, the prince is eagerly anticipating his stunning appearance the next day in his splendid coronation garments – robe, scepter and crown. He has three dreams, however, that ultimately lead him to reject the garments. As the cost and rarity of each item increases, so too do the dreams become increasingly distant and bizarre and the cost to human life grows dearer. In the first dream, the Young King sees the weavers who are charged with the creation of his robe. Their living and working conditions are squalid and the king is treated with suspicion, as one who could not comprehend their lives no matter how much sympathy he has.

In the second dream, the king sees a diver aboard a slave ship die a gruesome death while retrieving the pearl for his scepter from the depths of the sea. The third dream takes the king to the mines where thousands are digging for the rubies that will adorn his crown. There, he witnesses Death and Avarice arguing over the fates of these men as if they were nothing; indeed, their argument is over one kernel of corn. When the prince awakes, he rejects the vestments and instead dresses in his rough shepherd's clothes, carries his wooden staff, and at his page's suggestion, wears a crown of briars. The people of the court are aghast and ridicule him. When he leaves the palace and travels through the town, the townspeople are horrified at his appearance and demand that his wealth and need for fine things drives their economy. He then goes to a priest, who tries to tell him that it is God's will for him to appear a king. The Young King rejects this and begins to pray. Meanwhile, the attendants at court rush to find and kill him. As they enter the church, a ray of sunlight shines through a stained-glass window revealing that the robe has become a garment of white, roses have blossomed on his crown of twigs and lilies on his staff.

In his article, "Pater in Wilde's *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* and *A House of Pomegranates*," Christopher S. Nassaar writes that one of Wilde's overarching goals is to blend Christianity with aestheticism, as Walter Pater did in *Marius the Epicurean* (142). Thus the Young King before his dreams is "an ardent disciple of Pater's Renaissance" (143). After his three dreams, the Young King realizes the horrible cost of his artistic objects and so "becomes a Christian, embraces poverty, and goes to his coronation in rags." He is rewarded for his humility when God's light causes the splendid transformation of his poor rags. The result of all being the ideal that "Christianity is the highest form of aestheticism" (144). This is fundamentally a correct reading of the story. For at his base, the Young King is really a naïve country bumpkin, transfixed by shiny things, who realizes the immorality of wearing coronation garments stained with the blood of the laboring classes. However, beneath this very straightforward reading, "The Young King" deserves a second look, in part because of the latent "socialist" aspects of the story and in part because of Ricketts's picturing of the story. Both the text and the picturing emphasize possibility through paradox, and that it is only through unlimited possibility that individuality can be achieved.

Identity, and the concept of self, is one of the strongest themes that Ricketts presents for this story, though it appears amid the themes of nature and mythology from the very first illustration. In order to better analyze these themes, it is important to first examine the image and the text it emerges from. Ricketts's first drawing on the title page of "The Young King" depicts a young man sitting on the edge of an elaborate bathing pool (See Fig. 1.). There are flowers and birds everywhere, growing through the walls and running wild. The young man, who we assume to be the Young King, has longish,


THE YOVNG KING

TO
MARGARET,
LADY BROOKE.

IT was the night before the day fixed for his coronation, and the young King was sitting alone in his beautiful chamber. His courtiers had all taken their leave of him, bowing their heads to the ground, according to the ceremonious usage of the day, and had retired to the Great Hall of the Palace, to receive a few last lessons from the Professor

B I

Figure 1 Ricketts's illustration on the first page of "The Young King."

curly hair with vines woven through it. The water appears murky, like a lagoon, yet reflects the modern touch of the window. He wears a robe, but it is pushed carelessly back. There is a violin behind him. The pool features a fountain element – a sexless or male figure holds a pot with water flowing from it. The fountain figure is less than life-sized so, save the birds, the young man is alone. Above the fountains, however, there are figures woven into the vines and flowers which appear human also; one can just make out a shadowed arm and shoulder and a side and shadowed face. There appears in this drawing to be a battle between the indoors and the outdoors, the civilized world and the

wild. The wild is winning, and the human figures in the background have been overtaken. The juxtaposition of the natural and the civilized is actually a mood created by Wilde. In the story, Wilde makes close associations between the Young King and nature. He is like a "woodland faun" and "some young animal of the forest newly snared by the hunter." "The hunters," in this case, are the inhabitants the royal court. It is an odd comparison, but he does feel trapped by their company: the Young King is "always apt to chafe at the tedious Court ceremonies that occupied so much of each day" and longs for "the fine freedom of his forest life" (Wilde 84). Ricketts's image highlights the contrast between the Young King and his new position and surroundings, but they also recall the reader's attention to the identity of the Young King. He is in-between identities, in a way, as he leaves his former life in nature and prepares to accept a life of prestige. Through juxtaposition, the image creates much possibility for interpretation of the identity of the figure, and so also the identity of the Young King.

As Wilde pointed out himself, this scene, like many others, does not actually appear in the story. The task then becomes finding the point of departure that might have spurred Ricketts-as-reader to draw this picture, noting that in mixing elements, Ricketts may not be representing anything, but more of an emotion – the experience of document. The impressions that exist in the text – nature, mythology and self-identity – all are present to some degree in the text but take on a new level of motion with Ricketts's art. In the first few pages of "The Young King," Wilde mentions Adonis, Narcissus, Endymion, and Antinous as figures who appear in various artistic objects. Ricketts's image makes these references more tangible to the reader – in essence making fake art into real art. Looking at the drawing, the reader is made ready for the experience of

turning the page to hear these names and hear Wilde's ekphrastic descriptions of the Young King's infatuation with each object. Based on Ricketts's knowledge of myth, it is possible that he may have been building on one or more of those myths.

The staging of the reflection and the pool of water is surely meant to evoke Narcissus, and with it the theme of identity. Though the story of Narcissus does make sense within the scope of Ricketts's other illustrations for this text, which all focus to some extent on being seen or understood by others, there are still unexplained elements in the picture. The myth of Endymion then comes to mind, especially because it is mentioned in passing in the text. Keats wrote a poem about Endymion, and it is not insignificant that Ricketts was apparently very interested in Keats – some of his illustrations for *The Sphinx* were based on Keats, and he drew a lot of parallels between Wilde and Keats (Kooistra 102). That myth would correspond to some extent with the story because Endymion was a shepherd and the Young King was also a shepherd, both become kings in a way, and both get into trouble because of beauty.

There are also details of the picture that are reminiscent of Apollo, even though Wilde does not mention Apollo in the story. For example, there is a violin in the background that signals Apollo's connection with the arts. This is an odd little detail that is never mentioned in the story. The white birds call to mind the myth of Coronis, the white crow who reveals Apollo's cuckoldry. The crow is turned black for revealing to Apollo something he would rather not know. Interestingly, Apollo, that king of moderation, heralded the important message "know thyself" (Graves 79). This image, with the vines in his hair, the fountain and the clamshell, puts one in the mind of the ancient Greeks, only to have Wilde mention numerous Greek mythical figures. The

specific way that Ricketts highlights certain aspects of these mythical figures brings attention to an aspect of Wilde's story that might have otherwise gone unnoticed, specifically the theme of self-identity. It also combines numerous different elements, so that no one pictorial element can command control of the interpretation of the entire image.

In the same article that posits the simple Christian reading above, Nassaar compares "The Young King" with one of Wilde's earlier fairy tales, "The Happy Prince." In "The Happy Prince," the prince has died and been made into a statue. He is placed on a pedestal high above the city and from there he can observe the misery of his kingdom for the first time. The prince reports that before he died he lived a privileged and pampered life, but when he realizes the misery of the poor he enlists the help of a bird to pull out the precious gems that adorn his body and the gold leaf that he is covered with and to give these things to the poor to help them. The bird stays with the prince into the cold winter and dies at his feet, and without his splendid gilding the prince is considered an eyesore and is destroyed. No one in the story knows to whom they should attribute the kindness, and at the end of the story, both bird and prince are rewarded when God sends an angel into the city to retrieve the two most precious objects – the dead bird and the lead heart of the prince – for their eternal reward in heaven. This story, written approximately three years before *The House of Pomegranates*, does have the Christian elements Nassaar attributes to it. "The Young King" is not so straightforward as this.

Both "The Happy Prince" and "The Young King" are stories of moral redemption; it is the meaning of the word "moral" that has to be reconsidered. The similarities between the two stories are initially stunning. Nassaar's argument can be

applied to "The Happy Prince" without much incident. In both stories, the person in a position of power is made into a useless social figure, then discovers the lot of unfortunate others and takes steps to make a difference by changing his own behavior. However, in the "The Happy Prince," the prince is saved by his good deeds and repentance. The themes are unmistakably those of traditional Christian morality: God, angel, alms for the poor and secret good deeds.[17] By the time Wilde writes *A House of Pomegranates*, he is working on, or is at least exposed to, some of the concepts that appear in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism." In the case of "The Young King" no "Christian" kindness is ever actually brought to fruition. Instead there is intent to be kind or fair, or not cruel, and the only source of proof that the Young King has actually accomplished anything is the visual emergence of the Christ-like figure at the end. The emergence of this figure, significantly, is not a comparison to Christ except that the Young King has accomplished some variety what Christ also accomplished: he has managed to be completely and utterly himself ("Soul" 266). This is the focus on identity that Ricketts's opening image highlights. The Young King does not try to change the lives of others, he is only interested in doing what he knows he must do and to change himself, per the figure of Christ in "The Soul of Man."

Although Nassaar is correct in his assertion that Wilde is attempting to unite Christianity and aestheticism, he fails to consider the aesthetic ideology that informs the desire to unite Christianity and aestheticism. In Paterian logic, "The quality of the interesting as a subversive force against hierarchies of any kind is that is seeks to rescue all human possibilities from being subsumed under overriding concepts" (Iser 40). Ricketts's picturing of the interaction between the king and his dreams depicts a

confusing expression of conviction, one that unfolds and grows more confusing as the pages turn. In fact, there is no "interaction" per se pictured. A figure is shown reacting to the king's dreams. Not only does the figure react to the events, but it also physically changes based on what it witnesses. The figures differ so much from one another that it is possible that there are three different figures reacting to the three different events; however, it effectively demonstrates the conviction felt by the Young King. Whether or not the figure is the Young King is difficult to say. The three images are androgynous medallions which appear at first human or cherub-like, then grow more moonlike as the series continues. They coincide, appropriately, with the text they sit next to. The first medallion seems to have its hand shoved through a panel of weaving. There is partial wing visible and the person/creature looks concerned or thoughtful. Its other hand is held up as though pointing to its lips in a gesture of worry or thoughtfulness. On its own, this medallion highlights the emotional reaction of the Young King as he observes the peasant's squalid working conditions.

Turning the page, the figure becomes even more demonstrative, but not necessarily of emotion. The next circular figure makes the same gesture as the first and its other hand is holding a pearl, but this time the furrowed brows have eased and the face appears peaceful. This is a confusing reaction to the death of a person, especially when the face appears so disturbed in the earlier picture. There are, of course, options to explain this. For one, the face appears less human that it did initially, so this may show the loss of humanity experienced by the Young King as his prizes grow more costly. In the final circle the face has lost its eyebrows and appears very moonlike. The winged figure is shrouded by black clouds, dripping with blood or black rain, and the face could

arguably be coyly saying, "shhhh." One possibility intended by these images is a sense of reality. That is, the first medallion appears to be on the earth, in a workshop, and observing real misery that occurs in real life. By the final image, the face is up in stylized clouds, looking less human, and observing an imaginary dilemma.

The final image appears in conjunction with the story about Avarice. In another reading, it is important to remember that the story is about his greed. The king may have the face of an angel, but his desire for material objects, even in his ignorance, will make him less human. Avarice is willing to sacrifice human life for her greed. The destruction of human life for material gain is not necessarily evil, since the medallions are consistently shown with angel wings. It is dehumanizing. The extent to which dehumanization is an issue within the story has to be analyzed very carefully. The offering of alms in "The Happy Prince" is a source of redemption in that story. According to "The Soul of Man," this is an insulting and dehumanizing practice, and one the Young King does not indulge in at the end of the story (Wilde 258). The Young King's two separate interactions with the peasants demonstrate the more political aspects of *A House of Pomegranates*.

First, the peasants who create the robe, the only dream figures the Young King interacts with directly in the dream and real life, are the "ideal peasants" that Wilde describes in "The Soul of Man." They are outspoken. They see the miserable weight of their situation. The first dream takes place close to home, in a rank, disease-ridden sweat-shop type place. He has a conversation with one of the weavers, who is suspicious and bitter:

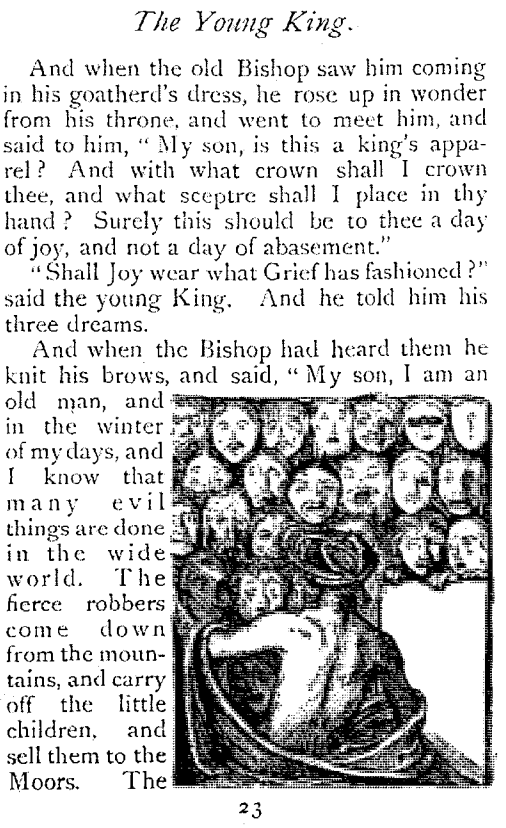
> 'We toil for [the rich] all day long, and they heap up gold in their coffers, and our children fade away before their time, and the faces of those we love become hard and evil. We tread out the grapes, and another drinks the wine. We sow the corn, and our own board is empty. We have chains, though no eye beholds them; and are slaves, though men call us free.' (Wilde 87)

This peasant's statement is all about being stripped of the rewards of their labor. The peasant's tone is the most important part, however. He is angry about his situation. In answer to the popular notion that the poor have many virtues, such as thrift and gratitude, "The Soul of Man" argues that, "a poor man who is ungrateful, unthrifty, discontented, and rebellious is probably a real personality, and has much in him" (259). Wilde's focus on the human reaction of the poor demonstrates his overall emphasis on the individual, perfect personality. He goes on to state that if the poor are not discontent, then they "must also be extraordinarily stupid. I can quite understand a man accepting laws that protect private property,...as long as he himself is able under those conditions to realize some form or beautiful and intellectual life. But it is almost incredible to me how a man whose life is marred and made hideous by such laws can possibly acquiesce in their continuance" (259). The second type of poor, the type who would not rebel against unfair laws, is represented by a second peasant in "The Young King." At the end of the story, after he has dreamed his dreams and rejected his vestments, the king appears before them in his goatherders' tunic. The peasant is angry and demands that the unfair system be perpetuated because he sees no other options:

> Sir, knowest thou not that out of the luxury of the rich cometh the life of the poor? By your pomp we are nurtured, and your vices give us bread. To toil for a hard master is bitter, but to have no master to toil for is more bitter still. Thinkest thou that the ravens will feed us? And what cure hast thou for these things? (93)

Unlike the peasants of his dreams, this crowd demands to remain in unexceptional platitude, a state which makes the Young King weep as he leaves their midst. The Young King enters almost as a rabble rouser, dressed as he is, trying to make them aware that they are equals, in fact asking them, "Are not the rich and the poor brothers?" (94). Their rejection demonstrates their enslavement in their own situation, as well as their status as the "public." The public, as Wilde sees it, is determined to strangle the efforts of the individual.

Ricketts's last drawing features a very Christlike figure, undoubtedly the image Wilde was hoping to get across, standing before a wall of faces. (See Fig. 2.) The faces are all different and some of them have very strange expressions. Every face bears an expression of shock, surprise, or anger, although some of the more unusual expressions are different: one has a backwards question mark, one a mask, one looks very pleased and excited. The public, in this case, is baffled by his actions. And the reactions of the public are drawn in a coarse hand – the questions mark says it all. They do not get it, and it does not matter. The Christlike appearance of the Young King is his act of individuality.



The Young King.

And when the old Bishop saw him coming in his goatherd's dress, he rose up in wonder from his throne, and went to meet him, and said to him, "My son, is this a king's apparel? And with what crown shall I crown thee, and what sceptre shall I place in thy hand? Surely this should be to thee a day of joy, and not a day of abasement."

"Shall Joy wear what Grief has fashioned?" said the young King. And he told him his three dreams.

And when the Bishop had heard them he knit his brows, and said, "My son, I am an old man, and in the winter of my days, and I know that many evil things are done in the wide world. The fierce robbers come down from the mountains, and carry off the little children, and sell them to the Moors. The

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Figure 2. The Young King stands before a wall of faces.

Ricketts pictures him before the transformation Wilde describes; this ties in to Ricketts's quest for *document* because the description that Wilde provides is immaculate. The wording is almost magical:

> And lo! through the painted windows came the sunlight streaming upon him, and the sunbeams wove round him a tissued robe that was fairer than the robe that had been fashioned for his pleasure. The dead staff blossomed, and bare lilies that were whiter than pearls. The dry thorn blossomed, and bare roses that were redder than rubies. Whiter than fine pearls were the lilies, and their stems were of bright silver. Redder than male rubies were the roses, and their leaves were of beaten gold. (95)

This is almost the end of the story, and Ricketts allows this to speak for itself, alone on the page without any decoration. His final image appears on the previous page, when the Young King is speaking to the priest. What Ricketts chooses to emphasize is the reactions of the public and the figure dressed as Christ. The king does, literally, dress in rags, pray to Christ, and transform into a creature with "the face of an angel." Ricketts's drawing is an indication of where emphasis should be placed.

The attitude of the Young King is contrasted in the story against the attitudes of those observing the Young King, the peasant, court attendants and the priest. In the beginning, the Young King is an epicurean, but not an artist or individual. It could be considered significant that the Young King's love of the early artistic objects is based solely on their pleasing appearance: he shows no distinction between good mythical characters and bad mythical characters, and his devotion does not distinguish between moral or immoral. Yet in his ultimate form of human perfection, he will consider the morality of his vestments. Wilde's claim that "a book is neither moral nor immoral, it is well or poorly written, that is all" comes immediately to mind. It seems like a bizarre contradiction. The Young King is ignorant of the means needed to create his beautiful vestments, and when he becomes, hypothetically at least, aware of what misery may have fashioned them, he rejects them as immoral. The beautiful things he orders come from known and pitiful origins. This is an unusual move for Wilde, this dedication to morality, unless "The Soul of Man" is factored in. The King may realize, in addition to the misery that has fashioned these things, that he did not fashion them. They are not compatible with his intention or needs. The Young King's dismissive question, "Shall joy wear what misery has fashioned?" can be read either way, as question of morality or a question of

intention. Then it becomes less an issue of morality and more an issue of independence. This reading is confirmed not only by the soul of man, but also by the King's decision to wear his own goatherder's tunic to the coronation.[18]

This, of course, ties into the second ending because the Young King's own vestments, which he earned, will become artistic objects because of his efforts. Men do not accept a drab leader – Beauty must triumph. Nassaar states that "Christianity in this tale is the highest form of aestheticism: the Young King abandons Pater's Renaissance and discovers a higher, religious Epicureanism" (145). If Nassaar's reading is true, then this is not only a literal contradiction of the text but also a thematic contradiction: the King rejected art, but art (Wilde's ekphrastic descriptions) ultimately won out. Despite his best efforts to politicize his coronation, the vestments remain more or less the same. "The result is that he becomes a Christian, embraces poverty, and goes to his coronation in rags" (144). That he compares himself to Christ is troubling in the typically Christian sense, but undeniably happens:

> 'Is it so, indeed?' he questioned. `Will they not know me for a king if I have not a king's raiment?'
>
> `They will not know thee, my lord,' cried the Chamberlain.
>
> `I had thought that there had been men who were kinglike,' he answered, `but it may be as thou sayest. And yet I will not wear this robe, nor will I be crowned with this crown, but even as I came to the palace so will I go forth from it.'

Yet a reference to Christ does not necessarily make it a Christian text. The exchange mimics traditionally Christian ideas, but traditional Christian ideas come from

Christ, which is Wilde's point here. He in fact rejects and condemns so-called Christian ideals by rejecting and condemning the Priest. The priest, in the end, actually acknowledges that he has been usurped in power.

Instead of Christianity as the highest form of aestheticism, perhaps the notion of individuality as the highest form of aestheticism is better. Alongside this profound sympathy for the poor, this story is critical of the public as a whole. The values of the public are contrasted against the values of the Young King, or individual. The Young King, through his subjective vision, knows the value of refusing to wear his vestments. Popular opinion, and fashionable tastes as to what is expected of a king, both dictate that he has made an unpopular move. This is rejected by the ending, which glorifies the Young King's decision by transforming him into a glorified individual, almost an artistic object in his own right as well as the goal of Pater's ideas and "The Soul of Man." The rise of the individual is extremely important for the plot to make any actual sense, for the King at the end of "The Young King" has not really done anything or accomplished anything for society. He is elevated by God to undo his self-imposed public humiliation. Wilde does compare him to Christ in terms of "individuality." Wilde defines this Christ-like quality in "The Soul of Man":

> "Know thyself" was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world, "Be thyself" shall be written. And the message of Christ to man was simply "Be thyself." That was the secret of Christ. (263)

Thus individuality is tackled two different ways. As an artist, Ricketts demonstrates his individuality by creating a *document*, by being original, by looking

backwards, and by taking different parts of the illustration from different places, some significant and some less significant, to create a sense of completion to the whole. His knowledge of Wilde's writing and friendship with Wilde make reading his images alongside "The Soul of Man" possible. It is difficult to say if Ricketts's illustrations provide a valuable criticism or not. His preoccupation with self-identity is a theme that is not often picked up on, but provides a valuable take on the text of the story. Ricketts's illustrations are important because of the knowledge he had of Wilde. Wilde uses his story to drive home to the reader his own perspectives on the individual, per his essay. The second illustrator, Charles Shannon, works from an entirely different perspective. Though they barely show up on paper, Shannon's work speaks loudly about his approach to Wilde's work. While he does not deny the importance of individuality, Shannon creates a series of images that favor a more traditional fairy tale morality.

Endnotes

[14] In the special case of fairy tales, when considering the respective personalities of Wilde and Ricketts, it is important to remember that Ricketts was twenty-four at the time of their design. Ricketts was twelve years younger than Wilde, and though intellectual and independent, Ricketts may have unconsciously adopted some of Wilde's mannerisms (Delaney 57). They also had more latent similarities: "There was something of the child in Ricketts. Indeed, he felt the artist always retained the essentially childlike nature, which [Ricketts] considered one of Wilde's particular charms" (Delaney 55). During his frequent, sometimes three times a week, trips to the Vale, Wilde read or talked about much of his current work (Delaney 45). All this is intended to show that Ricketts had a hearty respect for Wilde, and was most likely exposed to Wilde's take on the particular aesthetic ideals presented in *A House of Pomegranates*.

Ricketts later felt his own inexperience during 1890-1891, his first year designing books. When he designed *A House of Pomegranates*, Ricketts was still gaining the experience and exposure to book design that would later lead him to state of his early designs, "I regret that I had not then seen the "House of the Wolfings" or "The Roots of the Mountains" printed for Mr. Morris as early as 1888; these might have initiated me at the time to a better and more severe style" (qtd. in Delaney 63) In his later designs for Wilde, for example *The Sphinx*, Ricketts would create intricate and detailed sub-text (Kooistra). In *A House of Pomegranates*, Ricketts, very likely, is besotted with Wilde.

Still, Ricketts had already written "The Unwritten Book" and the ideals he discusses there are also visible. Many years later, he would present some of his thoughts on book design in "On Typography," and some of these elements are also present in *A House of Pomegranates* and therefore worth examining.

[15] But Ricketts's opinion towards art tended to focus more on the well-crafted and well designed book, and not so much on the circumstances which produced that object: "One finds the conscientious ideal of a harmonious book in two or three manuscripts by William Morris. His calligraphy may be seen in an illuminated Virgil which he and Burne-Jones planned—a project which unfortunately remains unfinished. It is to the efforts of these men that one must ascribe the renewal, in England, of interest in the intrinsic beauties of the book" ("On Typography" 196).

[16] It has been noted by several writers, including Ricketts, that as one of his earliest works, *A House of Pomegranates* has some incongruent parts, including printing errors, that have led to the book being less coherent than it might have been. What I speak of specifically here is the style of drawing and content of the pictures.

[17] "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (*New International Version*, Matthew 6:1-4).

[18] The text says that the Young King put on his goatherder's tunic and carried his staff. That does not necessarily convey the same religious meaning as dressing in rags, especially to Wilde. First, it is significant that he returns to his other clothes, which are "rough" and not rags, the clothes that he has earned "So I entered, so I will go forth" or something like that, in his open refusal to wear what misery has fashioned. This is very different, very political. He does not reject art; he rejects the way the garments have been made. He does not reject all artistic objects; if that were the case he could as easily wear plain slacks and a shirt. He rejects, more broadly, things made by others and wears the clothes he earned or made himself. All of this represents the political struggle between those who made the objects of art and those who enjoy them. This supports the broader idea of becoming an individual. Slavery might shed light on why the king rejects the vestments. The Young King refuses to wear them because they were fashioned "by misery" – as I said, this is a fine distinction. This idea that the laboring classes are meant for something better than labor, that they are not simply slaves, is straight from "The Soul of Man." The end of this is: they are dehumanizing to him.

CHAPTER 3

DISCONTINUITY

It is difficult to find a study of Charles H. Shannon's picturing of *A House of Pomegranates*. There are likely two reasons for this. For one, it hardly seems worth studying images that, most would agree, represent fairy typical fairy tale illustrations. Shannon's images depict peasants, nature, and women in pretty gowns. However, Shannon's artwork has been dismissed not only because it seems trite. A printing "innovation" left the images so faint as to be nearly invisible.[19] Despite these setbacks, it is important to remember that Shannon also works to transmit an experienced emotion within his works (Rutherston 23). In the case of *A House of Pomegranates*, it is difficult to say what that emotion might be. His images, however, seem to debate the role of beauty, but definitely assert the importance of also kind and chaste.

Shannon was an active lithographer and painter, and he made his mark in book publishing as well. He dabbled in decoration a little, but was not as active as Ricketts. He is described as a quiet, intelligent man who supplied support and friendship to Ricketts. After this first adventure in drawing for Wilde, Shannon was charged with the task of designing the binding for all four of Wilde's comedies. Shannon's philosophy on art, though difficult to find any concrete evidence of, seems focused on mood, on beauty, female beauty especially, and on capturing an image or a moment. Shannon's pictorial themes are most often women, nature, and religious and classical subjects. For example,

his painting *Vanity and Sanity* (1921) juxtaposes Vanity, nude and surrounded by peacocks, and Sanity, dressed as a nun and caring for an infant. These associations are also present, to a lesser extent, in Shannon's work for *A House of Pomegranates*.

According to Delaney, both Ricketts and Shannon were drawn to "the study of the past, an interest in figure subjects, and a commitment to the imagination as a primary quality of the artist" (31). Shannon, like Ricketts, looked back to earlier art for inspiration: "The aims and methods of Shannon's art at this period [1897] were in marked divergence from those in fashion at the moment, when the Newlyn School on the one hand, and the influence of the French Impressionists on the other, were leading directly away from the manner of design and the technical methods of the old masters" (Rutherston 9). Between 1890 and 1897, while Shannon worked to develop his style in oils, he created lithographs, pastels and watercolors (Rutherston 10).

The style he developed was learned through mimicry of painters like Rubens and Van Dyke, a style studied by Burne-Jones, which entails the layering of transparent colors upon a very light or white background (Rutherston 10). After the first transparent layer has dried, successive layering of stronger transparent and semi-transparent tones are added: "The principle may be likened to the light shining through a stained-glass window, the lighter tones and colors underneath being allowed to make themselves felt through those above, giving a glow and luminosity to the color of the whole" (11). In turning the pages of *A House of Pomegranates*, the reader first sees, or barely sees, the tawny peach drawing with bold Roman letters declaring it "The Triumph of Beauty" (See Fig. 3). The layering of sienna on peach, though it is only an early illustration, gives this same impression of a glow, and the use of white really intensifies the effect. Although

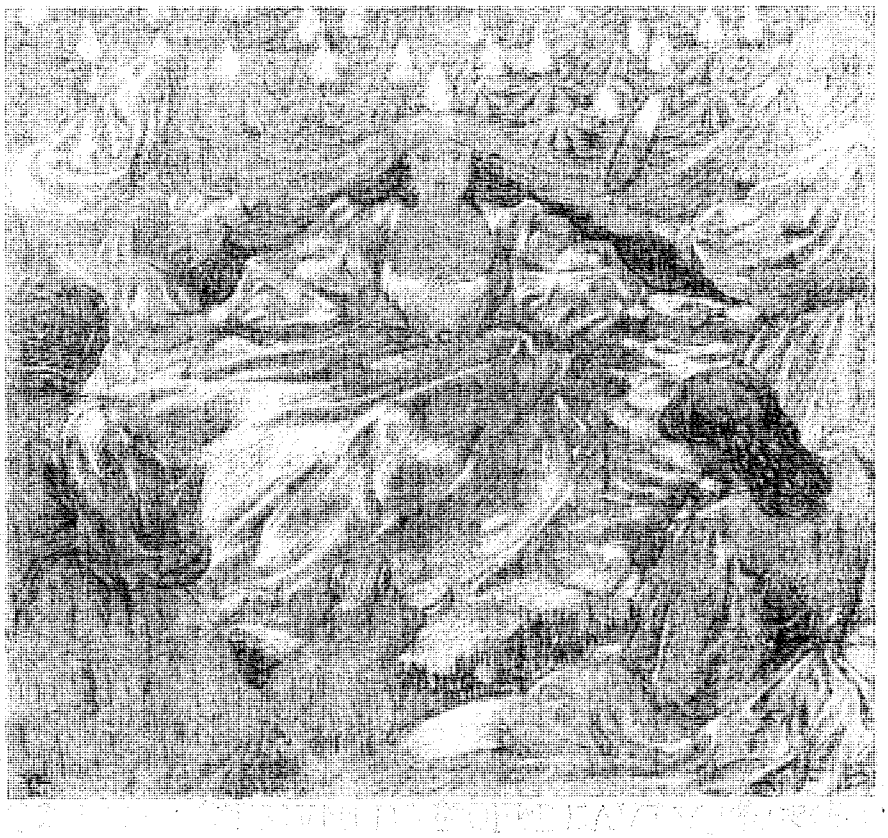

Figure 3. Shannon's "The Triumph of Beauty."

this glow of "stained glass" is carried by all four of Shannon's illustrations; it is also carried thematically by the figures in "The Triumph of Beauty."

For the most part, Shannon's drawings have the same sketchy feel to them. Ricketts's drawings have different appearances and can vary slightly from story to story and even within the same story. The effect of this is a bit bizarre. Shannon's pictures, overall, make even the most piquant scenes feel idyllic. This is partially due to color, but also to the blurry glow of the images as they come across. Any sense of motion, which

Shannon was very adept at weaving into even the plainest backgrounds, has been smudged away for the most part. Thus, the overall impression is a somewhat paradoxical. Wilde's stories are critically proposing individuality; Ricketts's drawings are embellishing and supporting this concept; but Shannon's images, on the surface, present a sort of counterpoint to both. One of Shannon's drawings precedes each of the four stories in *A House of Pomegranates.* At some level, it is impossible to strike the ideal balance between artistic intention and interpretation in this book because Shannon's illustrations do not appear as they were intended to appear, yet they still exist as part of the original text and therefore cannot be ignored (Brooks 301). In fact, Shannon's drawings may have had more of an impact on the overall reception of the book than has been imagined because they consistently attempt to tell a more traditional type of fairytale than the one Wilde is telling or Ricketts is illustrating.

Kooistra observes briefly: "Shannon's series of four halftone plates develop their own narrative sequence, initiated by the first plate, entitled 'The Triumph of Beauty'; the subsequent plates are not titled and seem to be related more to the artist's pictorial themes than to those of the accompanying story" (276). This observation is only half right. While there is arguably a narrative theme running through all four pictures, the images are definitely related to the stories. If Shannon seems to be developing his own pictorial themes, as Kooistra muses, the reason for believing so would be first the lack of association between the first picture and the first story. Second, it would be the tendency Shannon has, when illustrating literary topics, to create what has been called "the right kind of pictorial illustration." [20] Rather than giving in to an overwhelming desire to draw exactly from the text, "the mood dictated by the subject suggests for its expression a

pattern of lines and masses in itself aesthetically beautiful" (Rutherston 28). That is, he does something quite similar in spirit to what Ricketts does, by creating an image based on the mood inspired by the text. In which case it becomes important to deduce not Shannon's mood, but instead the mood of the first picture as it relates to the first story. What is really fascinating about what Shannon does in *A House of Pomegranates* is the contrast between the approaches he takes to introduce each story. In two of the four plates, Shannon's images are, like Ricketts's, only suggested by the text and not actually events portrayed by the story. In the other two plates, Shannon simply quotes scenes directly from the text. It is unusual to see this combination of methods.

The first image in the set of four, "The Triumph of Beauty," features a majestic woman in a billowing skirt, attended by four figures. The two rear figures are enhancing her aesthetic appeal by holding her hair back like a curtain as one combs it and the other holds up a mirror. The right forefront figure is playing a flute and the left forefront figure is holding something, possibly a cup. The setting is outdoors, before a field of flowers, and there are a pair of rabbits watching the scene unfold. The woman is doing nothing with her own two hands and appears to be gazing down in a contemplative scowl or perhaps mild snobbery. One of the light colored flowers sits behind her head, lighting her hair ever so slightly, and giving an appearance of a halo that might be associated with royalty or sainthood.

Given the nature of Shannon's next three pictures, all suggested by the characters or scenes of each story, the first image sets itself apart. There are no beautiful females in "The Young King," so Shannon's choice to portray a female figure is puzzling. His depiction of beauty's "triumph" seems shallow at best. Based on the close association all

the other pictures have with the stories they precede, it is difficult to accept that "The Triumph" is breaking away from the stories entirely. Yet based on the unusual opening picture, it is entirely possible that Shannon is creating his own statement, and it may be one focused not on individuality but rather on morality.

The title chosen is very easily explained. It was, as it should be according to the standards dictated in "The Unwritten Book," suggested by the text: "The walls were hung with rich tapestries representing the Triumph of Beauty" (86). Wilde mentions a nonexistent piece of artwork and Shannon makes it exist. Of his four plates, Shannon only introduces a title into the first, and so it is possible that the title applies to the series of pictures he created for the book. Shannon's remaining three drawings can be seen as part of this fictional series of tapestries. This means that each successive plate depicts a moment in the text where beauty can be seen triumphing. With the addition of the title, the picture can be read in a rather cynical light. The title, "The Triumph of Beauty," seems trite for the image. If Beauty is shown triumphing, it is not on her own merit, but based on the fuss others are willing to make of her.

Still, it is not a complete departure from "The Young King." The setting is pastoral, with the flowers, grass and rabbits. This echoes the pastoral and natural theme found throughout Wilde's story, for example, in the description of the Young King as a faun. Yet this setting is fantastical – the glowing flowers and adoring rabbits indicate that this is a moment of other-worldly peace. Shannon's figure, like Wilde's, is crowned and celebrated by flowers, which lend a radiant background to his figure. The "flame" over the head of Shannon's figure mimics a saint-like flame traditionally representing the Holy Spirit, which corresponds to the Christ-like evocation of Wilde's Young King. Just as the

courtesans make a fuss over the Young King, these figures flock to the beautiful woman. Though these things can be seen as invoking "The Young King," the differences are so stark as to bring other intentions to mind. For one, Shannon's picture may be a comment on Wilde's nihilistic story-telling. Despite any political or moral intention, Wilde is compelled to make artistic beauty triumph in some way at the end of the story. When the Young King manages to be completely himself, the proof that he has done well comes by way of artistic approval. Consider the similar phenomena at the end of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which ends with the sinful human withered and old while the painting is redeemed, flawless save its small knife wound. This sort of reading seems unlikely because Shannon was also an aesthete.

Yet "The Triumph" calls into question his intention because it reeks of irony. It does not have anything to do with the story, and it does not reflect reading of the story. If it is in earnest, then it misses even the very plainest reading of "The Young King," the Christian moral provided by Nassaar. By making reference to the Priest, Wilde invokes actual Christianity and everything that comes with it (Monaghan 157). Typical Christian doctrine says that he neither deserves nor should be compared to Christ, so Shannon's picture, with the hallowed girl, picks up the potential problem at the end: the reconciliation of aestheticism and Christianity does not work, and the ending does not really work either, not from a Christian standpoint. The "triumph" of beauty is that it is shallow and accomplishes nothing, that is, the Young King did not really give up anything. When he is crowned at the end, he is given what he neither earned nor deserved. While Shannon's picture does not point to the real reading – individualism – it does point out a very real problem with the typical Christian reading of the story. It just

does not make any sense in a Christian universe for the Young King to be elevated to that status unless he has done something on par with what Christ accomplished. Thus, it is at least plausible that Shannon is creating a counterpoint — not to aestheticism, but to the triumph of art or beauty over "natural" laws governing human behavior.

Another possibility is that Shannon did not feel comfortable drawing the beautiful young male that Ricketts and Wilde portray. He might have been toning down the homosexual tone of the story and Ricketts's artwork by using a woman. Despite the popular idea that Ricketts and Shannon were a romantic couple, there is absolutely no evidence to support such a supposition (Delaney 22). Delaney cites a family friend, Gordon Bottomley, who asserted that had he not met Ricketts; Shannon would likely have settled down and had a family. Delaney asserts that Shannon's paintings prove how he enjoyed female beauty and "The Triumph of Beauty" is no exception (Delaney 22). Most evidence shows that Shannon was not a homosexual, or he was at least primarily attracted to women.[21] The significance of this is uncertain. It might explain why he chose to portray a female instead of a male. At the very least, it is the only drawing that is not suggested directly by something from the text, and in fact directly opposes it. With the references to Adonis, Narcissus, and Antinous, as well as the depictions of the Young King, Wilde's story is very centered on male beauty. Shannon's image is most definitely centered on female beauty. That the beautiful female is enshrined by the phrase "The Triumph of Beauty" seems to add emphasis to a possible assertion that one is more beautiful than the other. On a similar note, the image lends itself to a very "Cinderella" or "Snow White" reading, down to the woodland creatures. Shannon's focus on physical beauty seems to undermine the efforts of Wilde and Ricketts to promote individuality.

Overall, in the remaining three drawings, Shannon's drawings tend to align him with more traditional concepts of Victorian fairytale morality than with the more political/ aesthetic reading suggested by Wilde and Ricketts.

After the first picture, it becomes more difficult to tell if Shannon is making a point or even developing his own pictorial themes. For the story "The Birthday of the Infanta," Shannon's picture simply depicts a gaggle of little party-goers in their finery, feeding a peacock. The peacock rests upon a sundial. The picture prepares the reader for a beautiful scene with the decadent figure of the peacock and many splendidly dressed children. The characters in this scene are suggested by the text:

> There was a stately grace about these slim Spanish children as they glided about, the boys with their large-plumed hats and short fluttering cloaks, the girls holding up the trains of their long brocaded gowns, and shielding the sun from their eyes with huge fans of black and silver. But the Infanta was the most graceful of all, and the most tastefully attired, after the somewhat cumbrous fashion of the day. (Wilde 98)

It makes sense, given the splendor with which Shannon attired the woman in "The Triumph" that he would jump on the opportunity to draw a group of children so beautifully attired. Shannon also takes Wilde's cue and makes the Infanta the central figure of the image while all other, purposefully or not, are less distinct and pushed to the side. Despite these similarities, the scene is not actually taken from the story, but rather appears to take up where the story leaves off, as the partygoers move out to the garden.

It is significant that in complete opposition to the happy picture that precedes it, the story "The Birthday of the Infanta" is very gloomy. Under gauzy linguistic joy, Wilde

tells of an ugly dwarf who falls in love with the Infanta while performing as a clown at her birthday party. The dwarf represents the absence of beauty and the presence of joy: "Perhaps the most amusing thing about him was his complete unconsciousness of his own grotesque appearance. Indeed he seemed quite happy and full of the highest spirits." (104) In this, the dwarf is a puzzling character who is both free from the meddling opinions of others but also very ignorant of himself. His ignorance stems in part from an ignorance of his physical appearance and in part from an ignorance of the ways of the world. Wilde deepens the chasm dividing the world of the partygoers, who are dressed like tiny adults and know what is acceptable in society, and the dwarf:

> When the children laughed, he laughed as freely and as joyously as any of them, and at the close of each dance he made them each the funniest of bows, smiling and nodding at them just as if he was really one of themselves, and not a little misshapen thing that Nature, in some humourous mood, had fashioned for others to mock at. (104)

In this the dwarf represents something of the natural state of mankind. He is perfectly willing to be one with the others and sees them as he sees himself. By contrast, the reader is at first led to feel sympathy for the Infanta because her mother is dead and her extremely creepy father neglects her. Her father has secreted the preserved corpse of the beautiful queen in his palace, and he avoids the Infanta because she so resembles her mother. She has to play alone in the palace, except on her birthday.

The story sets up a comparison between beauty and sorrow: "The King of Spain was already wedded to Sorrow, and that though she was but a barren bride he loved her better than Beauty." This foreshadows the death of the dwarf, or Sorrow, and the Infanta

represents the presence of Beauty without any love or morality. These two characters who represent Beauty and Sorrow are each affected by the "clamorous claims of others," as Wilde put it in "The Soul of Man." Each of them is limited in their free expression because of their earthly situations. The Infanta is disappointed to learn that the dwarf has died of a broken heart and has no compassion: "And the Infanta frowned, and her dainty rose-leaf lips curled in pretty disdain. `For the future let those who come to play with me have no hearts,' she cried, and she ran out into the garden" (114). It is difficult to think of this horrible girl and the lovely drawing at the beginning because it seems like Shannon is preparing such a vapid retelling. In light of the story the image takes on poignant new significance: the dwarf has just died and life goes on, all the more gossamer, for his absence.

Snodgrass surmises that the world of art excludes the world of morality:

> Death is [...] the fate of the costumed dwarf [...], who, like so many other fin de siecle pierrots, discovers that the beautiful world of Art is self-enclosed and heedless of human misery. He is able to dance with glee and dream happily of love until a palace mirror reflects back to him the horrifying truth of his deformity. (107)

Nassaar claims that "The Birthday" is like an inversion of "Beauty and the Beast"; the Infanta is " a beauty who is a heartless egocentric and a beast who remains a beast and dies of a broken heart" (84). But these designations have nothing to do with fairy tales for Wilde. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian is another beauty who is evil and the actress Sibyl Vane is a beauty who is good. In "The Young King," the king is beautiful and is understood to be good.

Nassaar also claims that "The Birthday" is like "The Ugly Duckling," where beauty and happiness are equated when the duckling turns into a beautiful swan. Nassaar makes a broad sweep, stating that the beautiful Infanta has been brought up in the dazzling beauty of the palace, which "leads automatically to the devaluation of moral qualities and to contempt for physical ugliness" and that Wilde portrays her as a "moral monster" (85). This is possible, considering that the Young King was brought up in the wild, and rejects the unethical pleasures of his palace, *Joyeuse*. The Young King does overcome private aestheticism and is glorified on a religious scale. Nassaar continues, "The great problem of the Infanta in 'The Birthday of the Infanta' is that she does not go beyond the private aestheticism Pater recommended in his Conclusion, but remains monstrous in her icy beauty and cold palace with its many objects of art" (Nassaar 143). This is also true. Yet rather than equating evil with beauty and goodness with ugliness, the story chooses to be entirely nihilistic. Neither character is neither good nor evil, and both have lost themselves to the claims of others. The dwarf dies miserable because he does not know himself and the Infanta continues along in her party, also ignorant of herself and what she has caused. In "The Ugly Duckling," even after the duckling has become a swan he is permanently changed from experiencing the cruelty of others, though they will never know it. This is the conclusion that Shannon's picture fully realizes.

The Infanta heads out into the garden, where the peacock is found, and she placidly goes on with her birthday celebration. Shannon takes some of the narrative into his own hands by envisioning a scene that the narrator does not. By depicting the peacock as the central figure, Shannon aligns the Infanta and the partygoers with the

peacock's great line in the story:

> As for the old Sundial, who was an extremely remarkable individual, and had once told the time of day to no less a person than the Emperor Charles V. himself, he was so taken aback by the little Dwarf's appearance, that he almost forgot to mark two whole minutes with his long shadowy finger, and could not help saying to the great milk-white Peacock, who was sunning herself on the balustrade, that everyone knew that the children of Kings were Kings, and that the children of charcoal-burners were charcoal-burners, and that it was absurd to pretend that it wasn't so; a statement with which the Peacock entirely agreed, and indeed screamed out, `Certainly, certainly.' (106)

In the image, the peacock and the Infanta are drawn together by location – the focus is inward – and by the pattern on the bird's tail and the girl's dress. All others in the picture are on-lookers. The two are communicating via the gift of food, but everyone else is excluded from the world of art or beauty. Shannon's picture highlights this as a failure of real humanity or moral feeling. It is like "The Triumph of Beauty," another shallow victory. The vapid little girl runs out to the garden to be with her peacock, who earlier agreed to the natural order of things. The sundial, remarkable for his brush with royalty but no less unable to properly keep track of the time, simply highlights this meaning when it appears in Shannon's picture. Shannon has the foresight of having read the story before the reader, but his drawing is still placid, and includes all the elements of humanity that will eventually kill the dwarf.

In essence, the picture creates for the reader a feeling of injustice. The cost and

the horrors beauty has brought about are completely ignored by the image. The dwarf does not have a place in the perfect image of girl and peacock. Completely ignored is his personal joy as a dreamer and one who was initially unaffected by society. The horrible realization that he was ugly, and that the Infanta was mocking him, destroys his peace. The image anticipates the story by letting the reader see the ultimate outcome: a world of beauty without unattractive elements to be trifled with. Interestingly, Shannon's decision to leave the dwarf out does create an idyllic, blemish free illustration and therefore it is difficult to assume anything about Shannon's stance. That is, Ricketts's illustrations do feature the dwarf and therefore include him in the world of art. In his illustrations for "The Young King" and "The Birthday of the Infanta," Shannon's presents images that can be read many different ways. He could be gently mocking Wilde's fixation with beautiful characters, or he could be very happy simply drawing pretty scenes, suggested by the text. Analysis of Shannon's image for the final story, "The Star Child," indicates that he is attempting to portray a more traditional set of illustrations.

The two last stories of the book, "The Star Child" and "The Fisherman and His Soul," are each preceded by images which are taken from the text on the first page of each story. Shannon chose, for some reason, to approach the creation of these images in a completely different way. In the first two plates, Shannon seems to follow Ricketts's example and draws an image suggested by his imagination and inspired by the text. In the last two plates, Shannon "quotes" entire scenes straight from the story. Kooistra explains the purpose and use of quoting passages:

> The quotation strategy in image/text relations can never be a referential/ deferential arrangement whereby the visual simply copies or translates the

> verbal in pictorial form, however grounded the pictures appear to be in the text. The images' mirroring function in quotation offers the text both the narcissistic delight of seeing its own subject duplicated, and the meta-critical intensification which results from such reflexivity. (Kooistra 16)

In other words, a quote is never just duplication and a duplication of the written word in visual form is impossible. The reflexive nature of such images can give the viewer insight into the artist's intentions simply because the artist offers another way of looking at the same thing. For example, in "The Star Child," Wilde writes of an infant who falls to earth and is found by two poor farmers as they discuss their financial woes. One of the men suggests leaving it to die, since they each have their own families to provide for. The kinder of the two men takes the child home with him, where it grows into the most beautiful and cruel person anyone has ever come across. Years later, an old hag comes and claims the star child as her own. The child rejects her cruelly, and as a result is transformed into a sort of lizard-human creature, covered in scales. He goes wandering through the land, to ask her pardon for his cruelty, but cannot find her anywhere. Eventually he is purchased as a slave and put in a series of positions where he must either follow his master's orders or be beaten by his master. He chooses to do good each time and is eventually rewarded with the discovery that his mother is a queen and he is the new king. In a depressing flourish, he dies three years later and is succeeded by an evil ruler.

The star child's act of individuality is almost an inversion of the Young King's. The moral Young King is a celebrated figure who endures public humiliation in order to achieve his ideal personality. The cruel star child is already his own ideal, an ideal based

on his physical perfection. In this, he is very similar to the merciless Infanta. When he is transformed into the hideous creature, he repents for his cruelty, and thus steps out of the position of one who cannot achieve individuality. His trial is self-imposed exile and torture at the hands of his brutal master. He is paid back in kind for his cruelty. When he is freed from his trials at the end and rewarded so splendidly he deserves his recompense after having endured such misery. The star child's moment of perfect individuality is not as momentary as the Young King's. In this way, "The Star Child" is a more familiar sort of fairy tale, where suffering and good deeds are rewarded. Shannon's illustration, taken from the very beginning of "The Star Child," reexamines the overt morality of the story and intensifies it.

Shannon's image for "The Star Child" depicts two farmers wearing straw hats and shabby clothing and carrying umbrellas made of hay. The umbrellas nearly touch, forming a pyramid with the focus down towards the ground and the swaddled child lying there. In the background are cows behind a fence, a peaceful pastoral setting. By contrast, Rickets' drawings capture the image of the disfigured star child, the horror of his trials, and the hideous state of his transformation. In choosing to focus on the two farmers, Shannon highlights their selfless act. He adds extra emphasis to the good deed done by saving a child from sure death. This creates a counterpoint to each story and sets the tone for a more moral reading. The image also creates, much like the other images, a peaceful feeling that does not gel with Wilde's stories. They are beautiful and emotional, without being overtly critical.

It is entirely plausible that Shannon would not focus on the same ends that his co-creators found so compelling. In other works he created, he seems to have been more

focused on morality than Ricketts, and he may have seen some of the fairy tales as overly vain, too aesthetic, or in need of some censorship. This may have been an attempt at moralizing, especially given that the most traditional purpose of the Victorian fairy tale was to socialize children into mainstream ethical ideology (Zipes 80). Shannon's final illustration, for "The Fisherman and his Soul," is best discussed alongside Ricketts's decorations and the text.

Endnotes

[19] Reproductions of Shannon's images have been slightly darkened so that they can be made out more easily.

[20] Most information on Charles Shannon has either been gleaned form biographies on Charles Ricketts or taken from the early twentieth century series *Contemporary British Authors*.

[21] For more information, See Delaney 22-23.

CHAPTER 4

REUNIFICATION

In "The Young King," Wilde combined the themes of Christianity and aesthetics in order to demonstrate how each was individually insufficient to cause individuality. Wilde does not allow Christian themes to account for the great change which took place in the Young King by refusing to allow the Priest to take part in or credit for the king's transformation at the end. Aestheticism is denounced when the Young King rejects his artistic vestments. The Young King is instead saved by his decision to be completely himself. Still, it is not clear in the "The Young King" whether Wilde means to unhinge Christianity, or aestheticism, or both. Rather than dismissing either aestheticism or Christianity from Wilde's repertoire, it is preferable to recall that Wilde often focused his writing on a principle of paradox: "...man must never become trapped into one perspective, but must remain ever flexible, continuing to develop his personality and preserving his potentiality of being, in order to be able to deal with the complex paradoxes of human existence" (Snodgrass 106). Combining themes that seem paradoxical is a way of broadening human experience. This principle comes from Pater:

> No account of the Renaissance can be complete without some notice of the attempt made by certain Italian scholars of the fifteenth century to reconcile Christianity with the religion of ancient Greece. To reconcile forms of sentiment which at first sight seem incompatible, to adjust the various products of the human mind to one another in an one many-sided

> type of intellectual culture, to give humanity, for heart and imagination to feed upon, as much as it could possible receive, belonged to the generous instincts of that age. (Pater 30)

Pater did not embrace the Renaissance because it ruined Christianity, but because it tried to create as much possibility as possible (Iser 39). By creating possibility from seeming paradox, the number of experiences that develop a personality were potentially limitless. The more possibilities humans have available to them, the more possible it will be for them to achieve their individuality without having to take into account other people and their problems. Wilde wrote: "if the world is going to change, it will be through Christianity if man wants it to be, or he'll find some other way, but it will happen just the same" ("Soul" 263). One of Wilde's stories from *A House of Pomegranates* just happens to be an ideal example of pagan and Christian concepts struggling to coexist as they widen the circle of human possibilities, "The Fisherman and his Soul."

"The Fisherman and his Soul" tells the story of a young fisherman who saves a mermaid and falls in love with her. She is not described like a living creature, but more like a piece of art. She is made of gold and silver and does not have a soul: "Her hair was as a wet fleece of gold, and each separate hair as a thread of fine gold in a cup of glass. Her body was as white as ivory and her tail was of silver and pearl." (115) The Priest refers to the mermaid as a soul-less creature. As a soul-less creature, the mermaid is technically a piece of art. It is possible to take this comparison one step further and compare the mermaid to an aesthete, such as the Young King before he has his three dreams or the Infanta. In the latter case, it is important to recognize that the mermaid is referred to in the text by the Priest as a "pagan" creature (119).[22] The priest

compares a pagan or soul-less creature to an animal or a flower, and the Fisherman, who definitely is an aesthete, has to give up his soul in order to join the mermaid in her undersea kingdom. The priest is placed on the opposite end of the spectrum from the mermaid and established as one who is fixated against pagan things, saying, "vile and evil are the pagan things God suffers to wander through His world" (119). The priest, in addition to representing religion, represents someone who is troubled by beautiful things or art (147).

The Fisherman, nonetheless, is willing to give up his soul for this beautiful, pagan object. When he learns that he cannot be with her in the ocean unless he gets rid of his human soul, he goes to the priest, who condemns him for trying to get rid of his most valuable possession and then to a group of merchants, who chide him for trying to give them such a worthless object. Finally he turns to a witch, whose reaction of suave greed and reluctant horror seems to indicate that she knows the true value of his soul better than either the priest or the merchants. She agrees to show him how to release his soul if he will dance with her. "The Fisherman and his Soul" calls into question the value of the soul, with the Fisherman asking repeatedly, "Of what use is my soul to me? I cannot see it. I may not touch it. I do not know it" (119). His question and his dilemma mark the plot of the story, for by the end he will see, touch and know his soul and in doing these things the reader will come to understand, though the Fisherman may not, what use his soul was to him.

After a midnight dance before the devil, the witch gives him a knife and explains that the shadow is the body of the soul: the Fisherman can use the knife to cut his soul away from his body. His soul materializes and is suddenly able to converse with him.

The Soul is very unhappy with this arrangement and pleads with him, but the Fisherman sends it away. The Soul asks very specifically if it can have his heart, a request the Fisherman denies, saying, "With what should I love my love if I gave thee my heart?"(126). The Soul then leaves and the Fisherman goes to the mermaid.

After a year the Soul returns and tells about his amazing and bizarre adventures. He has found a mirror of wisdom, which he will give to the Fisherman if he will reunite with him. The Fisherman rejects this, saying, "Love is better than Wisdom." To some extent, the Fisherman here rejects outside influences that would keep his personality from developing freely. In "The Soul of Man," Wilde describes the "true" personality of man: "It will grow naturally... It will never argue or dispute. It will not prove things. It will know everything. And yet it will not busy itself about knowledge. It will have wisdom" (263). Already then, the Fisherman is developing his personality by rejecting the temptation of his soul that would lure him away from his aim. The next year, the soul returns again, this time with a ring of riches. Again, the Fisherman rejects his offer saying, "Love is better than Riches." This coincides with Wilde's religious idea that money is not the way to individuality, and that Christ urged people to give up their worldly possessions because, "Personal property hinders Individualism at every step" (264).

The third year, the Soul returns again and tells him of a dancing girl, with little white feet. The fisherman's mermaid, of course, has no feet, and this time the Fisherman is tempted to go and look at the feet. He embraces his soul and so reunites with it, thinking that he can come back to the mermaid before he is missed. His Soul, though, seems to have been lying all along, or at least about the feet. He takes the Fisherman to

three cities and in each city tempts him to perform increasingly evil deed, first theft and then beating a child. Eventually the soul tempts him to commit murder. The Fisherman decides to cut his soul off again, only to discover that once he has cast his soul away and taken it back, he cannot send it away a second time. He is outraged when he learns that the Witch did not warn him and exclaims that she is a "false Witch." To this the Soul replies, "Nay, but she was true to Him she worships, and whose servant she will be ever" (142). Realizing that his Soul had become evil and that he was again stuck with it, the Fisherman then heads back to the seaside. He calls to the mermaid and when she does not come, he stays and calls to her everyday. For a year the Soul tempts him with evil, to go and see beautiful things, and for a second year the Soul tempts him with good, to go and correct the evils of the world. The Soul's words are of no avail, however, as the Fisherman will not leave the side of his love. The separation between what the Fisherman desires and the Soul desires is a poignant demonstration of Wilde's claim that individuality is undermined by the clamorous claims of others. The soul has gone off and done these things and poisoned itself, but the Fisherman is intent on his watch. He will not allow outside influences to deter him from his chosen path, to wait for his love. Because the Fisherman cannot be pulled away from his love by the temptation to do good, it is similar to the scene with Mary Magdalene which Wilde refers to in "The Soul of Man."

In her moment to act with individuality, Mary Magdalene poured very expensive oil on Christ's feet, despite the protests that the oil could be sold to help the poor. The disapproval of the hierarchies that existed were nothing to her, and Wilde points out that people still respect her act as a great accomplishment ("Soul" 265). For the Fisherman,

the temptation is made even more poignant, because while his Soul is with him, it is not one with him. His ability to be an individual is undermined by the fact that he is in constant contact with something that is badgering him to do what he would not do. Additionally, it could be argued that without his soul, the Fisherman is not a whole person. Wilde seems to lean towards this reading because after the second year, the soul gives up and asks to be back in the Fisherman's heart, so they can be united again.

The Soul cannot find entry to the heart because it is so consumed with love for the mermaid. However, once the Fisherman expresses a desire to be reunited with his Soul, the sea flings the dead mermaid to the shore. It is also one of the paradoxical moments of the text, expressing the multiplicity of human experiences. Wilde thrusts this story beyond the expected and typical by having the Fisherman make his last confession to the dead, pagan mermaid: "And to the dead thing he made confession. Into the shells of its ears he poured the harsh wine of his tale" (145). After he makes his confession, the sea and the sea-folk begin to churn aggressively:

> And his Soul besought him to depart, but he would not, so great was his love. And the sea came nearer and sought to cover him with its waves, and when he knew that the end was at hand he kissed with mad lips the cold lips of the mermaid, and the heart that was within him brake. And as through the fullness of his love his heart did break, the Soul found an entrance and entered in, and was one with him even as before. And the sea covered the young Fisherman with its waves.

Although he drowns, the Fisherman is saved by both his love and by allowing all the evil experiences of his Soul back into his person. He was able to be an aesthete and have a

soul and be entirely himself. Yet the story does not end there. Wilde wants his reader to know the value of the Fisherman's actions.

The Fisherman and the mermaid are buried in an unmarked grave by the people of the parish, the priest maintaining his condemnation of this forbidden love. The end of the story demonstrates another reunification of Christianity and pagan ideas specifically when the priest, who has very openly condemned the sea and pagan creatures, is prompted to preach a sermon of love. He is prompted to preach this sermon by the intoxicating aroma of a bunch of flowers that grew over the grave of the mermaid and Fisherman. In the end, the priest is also moved by love and blesses all the pagan things. So the Fisherman has no "Christian" interaction, but instead is saved by the ability to coexist with himself, pagan things, and Christian things. The Fisherman is the ultimate Christ-figure and artistic individual. His perfection is so evident that, in another comparison to Christ, the priest has to preach about him. In the presence of all of the paradoxical claims of land and sea, the Fisherman is able to be wholly himself.[23] This theme of paradox is carried by Ricketts's drawings.

In the text of "The Fisherman and his Soul," there are many mysterious and foreign scenes as the soul travels around the world, but Ricketts keeps all of his illustrations set at the sea. This lends a very nautical feel to this section of the book, but it also enhances the time spent at sea, as well as the seaside aspects of Wilde's story.

Figure 4. The Fisherman and the mermaid.

Wilde ekphrastically creates each new place the Soul visits in its travels. According to Ricketts's philosophy, it is unnecessary to recreate these places it the text because Wilde has already created them successfully. Instead, he presents the familiar, the sea, in unconventional ways to create more interest. In the case of "The Fisherman," he contrasts the sea and dry land in every picture. This highlights an interesting element of the story: even as foreign as the other elements are, the true division of the exotic in this text is the soullessness of the sea versus the familiar religions on land.

In the opening image, the Fisherman and the mermaid sit together on a cliff as the sea swirls around them in spiraling waves. (See Fig. 4) In this first image, comparing the

Fisherman with the Mermaid, she is clearly of the ocean. She has bits of coral and seashells in her hair and holds a seashell lyre. Waves pass over her thighs. The Fisherman, meanwhile, is still clearly on dry land, crouching over puddles, and wears a woven cap. He feeds bits of food to the mermaid out of a basket. It is unusual that the mermaid does not have a fish tail in this first picture, although the medallion at the bottom of the same page does depict a mermaid, complete with a tail. Although it was not painted until 1900, Ricketts's image resembles very strongly John William Waterhouse's *Siren*. It seems unusual, with his knowledge of mythology, that Ricketts would confuse giant bird women with mermaid and by the final image, her fish tail is visible, so it is uncertain if Ricketts intended to portray a siren or if the tail is simply covered with water.

The mermaid, interestingly, gazes not at the Fisherman but out at the reader. Her expression might be interpreted as a knowing one, and with the siren's knack for luring mariners to their deaths with song, the opening image has a rather evil look to it. This is emphasized by the Fisherman, whose brow and eyes are completely blackened out by the shadow cast from the brim of his hat. There is also a shadow spreading over the background of the image, a darkening and foreboding sky. This scene is not directly anticipated by the text, but there is a sense that the mermaid is now in control, since she is being fed by the Fisherman, and she will influence him to do something negative. While Wilde depicted the mermaid as a catalyst for the Fisherman to achieve individuality, Ricketts's image here depicts the mermaid in a less rosy light.

The next illustration confirms that, for Ricketts, the Fisherman has done a very evil thing in sending his soul away by depicting the Soul in an almost heroic position.

(See Fig. 5) Ricketts allows for the Soul's "powers" by envisioning him as a sort of saint. The soul's darkness in this picture could represent its darkness in the story, or the darkness of sending one's soul away, or perhaps the darkness of ignorance, or of being out of touch with oneself. The soul seems celestial, though dark. Though the soul is in the dark, which is actually a tree or cliff behind him, light seems to be emanating from it onto the Fisherman, who is backed by light-colored water. The Fisherman, in the pictures, becomes equated with paganism in the story because he grows to look like the mermaid, with seaweed and coral growing out of his hair. He rises up out of the lagoon to converse with the soul. The illustration includes a scroll with the words from the text, "For I have seen wonderful things." The words are both stylized and slightly askew. The art nouveau scroll they appear on is floating at the top of the page, separated from the text itself by tree branches and a border, making the difference between it and the actual text that much more abrupt and calling attention to the words. In this image, the soul is majestic in a way Wilde's text never anticipates. The soul looks almost heroic, as it gazes down with bold eyes on the Fisherman, who, arguably, looks rather silly with a fern growing out of his head.

Within the story, the Soul is very cunning, and knows all the right answers. Wilde depicts the Soul as being able to exact curses and perform miracles, although the

The Fisherman and his Soul.

tamarisk tree to shelter myself from the sun. The land was dry, and burnt up with the heat. The people went to and fro over the plain like flies crawling upon a disk of polished copper.

"When it was noon a cloud of red dust rose up from the flat rim of the land. When the Tartars saw it, they strung their painted bows, and having leapt upon their little horses they galloped to meet it. The women fled screaming to the waggons, and hid themselves behind the felt curtains.

"At twilight the Tartars returned, but five of them were

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Figure 5. The Soul is depicted in an almost heroic position.

Fisherman never actually sees them performed. In this image, Ricketts may be placing emphasis on the Soul's inability to care about his actions, that he has become an evil soul. Ricketts may also be foreshadowing for the reader that the Soul has done very evil things.24 Wilde is making this individualist argument, that people become more perfect and more individualistic as they come to know themselves more precisely, as the Fisherman does, it factors in that Ricketts's drawings might be trying to make the same argument, but by actually doing it: that is, the transition of the Fisherman from a human

who is out of touch with his pagan identity in the beginning, becomes more in touch with it as he comes to look like the mermaid (more pagan).

In Ricketts's final illustration, the mermaid and the Fisherman are both smiling, though presumably dead if the text is to be taken into account, and a priest stands over them waving his arms wrathfully. He has, ironically in view of his expression and the text, a heart on the pocket of his vestment. There are flames over his head, coming from a torch over his head. The torchbearer, a symbol of illumination and enlightenment, looks out at the audience, once again, knowingly. The soul has disappeared and the Fisherman is happy and content, while the priest's visible wrath shows that the priest does not understand the reconciliation the Fisherman has achieved, and instead judges the Fisherman's deeds against his received knowledge. Or, if not pagan in the typical sense, the Fisherman loses his soul to become an artistic object, then regains it to become perfect by accepting everything.

Shannon creates a completely different feeling with his artwork. In the "Fisherman," he acts as a sort of censor. Shannon's drawing for "The Fisherman and His Soul," for example, depicts the Fisherman pulling the mermaid out of the water. (See Fig. 6) The mermaid is wearing a very modest, bulky shirt. By contrast, all of Ricketts's mermaids are nude. The focus is very clearly on the good deed done by the heroic Fisherman, the fairy tale romance, and mystery of finding a woman in the sea. In marked contrast to Ricketts's opening image, where both characters are nude, Shannon's image is very chaste. When compared to Ricketts's drawing, Shannon's picture seems to eliminate all possibility of a pagan love affair.

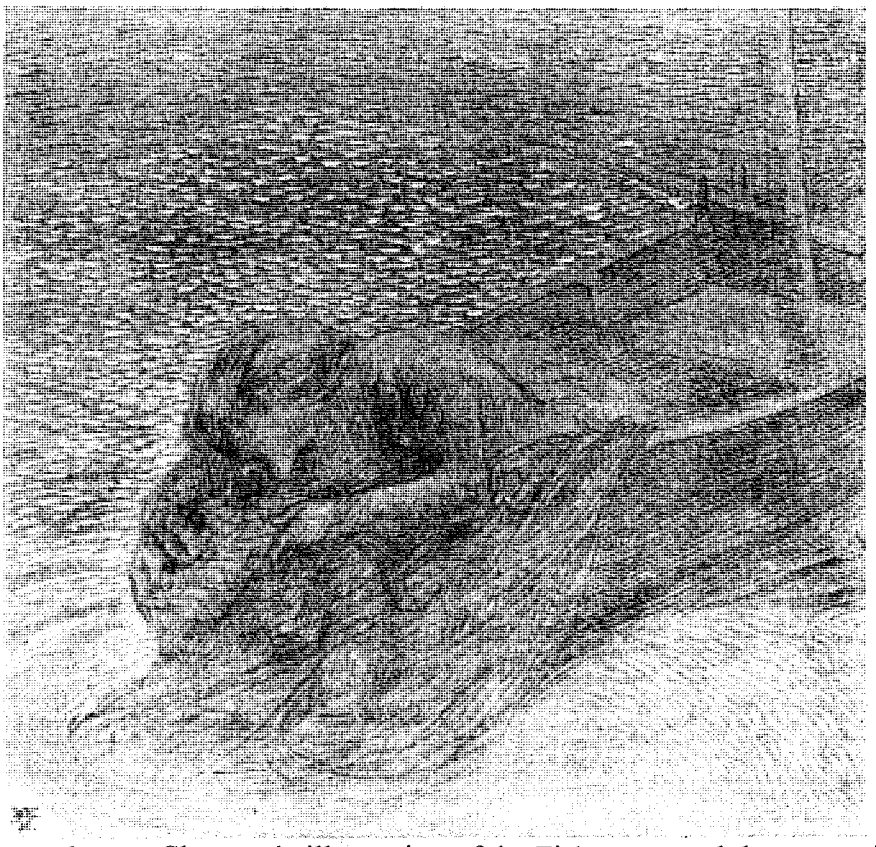

Figure 6. Shannon's illustration of the Fisherman and the mermaid.

There is nothing romantic, and her fishtail is, we assume, underwater. Interestingly, Shannon painted this same scene at a later date with a saucier twist by depicting the Fisherman stealing a kiss from the nude mermaid (see Fig. 7). The contrast between the image for Wilde's book of fairy tales and the later image creates an opening for questioning Shannon's motives. Since he did not care about nudity in general, it seems likely that Shannon put her in a shirt because it was a children's book.

There is nothing in Shannon's picturing that indicates he is trying to pursue the concept of individuality. *A House of Pomegranates* welcomes such discord in pursuit of individuality and finds a sort of harmony in the discontinuity between Shannon and Ricketts within the illustrations. Pagan and Christian themes combine in "The Fisherman and his Soul," and Ricketts's illustrations perfectly exhibit the ideals of the former while

Shannon's exhibits some traits of the latter. Purposefully or not, the two images exhibit Wilde's intention admirably.

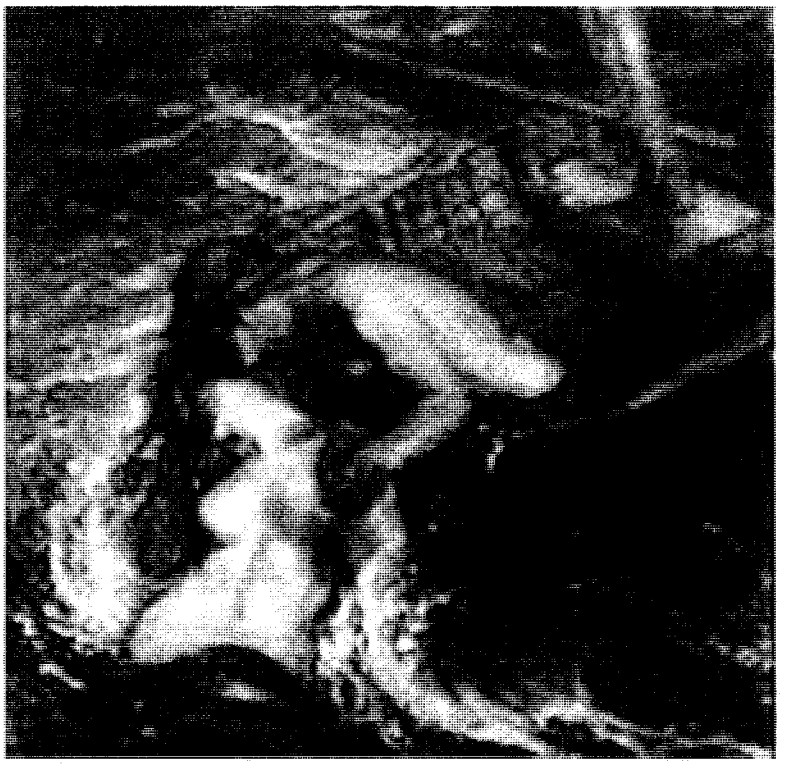

Figure 7. Shannon's later painting of the Fisherman and the mermaid.

Endnotes

[22] The love of pagan things is equated by the priest with the love of the body. The initial love of the fisherman is ambiguous: it could be entirely carnal love, or it could be aesthetic love, "She is fairer than the morning star, and whiter than the moon. For her body I would give my soul, for her love I would surrender heaven" (119). The fisherman is in love with the visual, but the words of the priest have mistaken and misjudged this, to some extent. This is a finer sort of lust, a sort of Epicureanism in a sense. So, I can talk about that here. See The Paradox of Oscar Wilde.

[23] The treatment of the soul in "The Little Mermaid" is entirely different. It is seen as problematic that he wants to send his soul away. It is an odd comparison that Wilde, who allegedly had Andersen in mind, makes the protagonist learn first hand the pain and problematic of having a soul, whereas the mermaid simply accepts its value and is willing to suffer bodily harm to gain one of her own, in the quest for immortality. While

Andersen presumes that his audience knows the value of the soul, which is why the mermaid is willing to suffer so much to gain one, Wilde's story asks continually, "What is the value of the soul?" having the protagonist claim three times: "I cannot see it. I may not touch it. I do not know it" (118). Each time he says this, he is met by a different value opinion of his soul. By the end, he will have seen his soul, touched it (the hug) and then know it, truly, for being evil. The reversal here, clearly, is that he went from not knowing it, ect. To knowing its true value well – the ability to influence him. The priest sees it as a gift and a ticket to heaven. The merchants take it as a worldly possession that has no monetary value. The witch seems to have the clearest idea because she allows for free will. Though seems horrified to do so (125). The value of the soul is something that seems especially pertinent to the socialism discussion.

[24] The story seems to have elements pointing out the control of information. There is a great deal of mystery in this narrative style that leaves the reader feeling a little like the fisherman, in a position of wonder. This is evident in a number of places, but one place where it becomes obvious that the reader is meant to feel a little mystified is when the Soul sees the "pale-faced Circassian" who smiles at him – he figures out who she is, but doesn't reveal that information to the fisherman or to us (134). Every time he does a "strange thing" he ends up acquiring a new object. It still seems like the soul may be lying, but I think it is meant to be ambiguous. Although, when the fisherman finally ventures forth, he doesn't see any of those marvelous things. This may have some relationship to the church's control of information.

CONCLUSION

The Young King found his individuality by rejecting art and the public. The Fisherman discovered his individuality by separating himself from all social hierarchies while remaining true to his heart's desire. If the goal was to promote individuality, *A House of Pomegranates* was a successful work. However, it did not sell well and the public's reaction was a resounding thud. One of the things that is troubling about *A House of Pomegranates* is the idea that Wilde and Ricketts were trying to distance the public. It seems unlikely that unpopularity was the exact aim, though it might have been an unfortunate side effect.

Rather than trying simply to distance the public, it is more likely that the book is based in aesthetic ideals. "The Fisherman and his Soul" seems, more than any of the other stories, to support a very Paterian reading about the multiplicity of human possibilities. Through the combination of aesthetics and religion, of illustrations and text, *A House of Pomegranates* attempts to create as much possibility as it possibly can. Most obviously, the book attempts to insert itself into the "realm beyond challenging realities" by being a collection of fairy tales. The stories, presenting individuals recreating themselves in their own perfect images without taking notice of society, seek to open the eyes of the reader to the possibilities that can exist with the co-existence of opposing personalities and views. It is both fanciful and political, an elegant contradiction.

Despite this, characterizing *A House of Pomegranates* is no easy thing. While the writing is beautiful and intended to be revolutionary, the book seemes to fall short of expectations. Of the stories in *A House of Pomegranates*, Snodgrass argues that it is one

of Wilde's paradoxical traits that, "the force which is presumed to sanctify is so often presented as precisely the force which corrupts and destroys" (107). While technically true, this is an oversimplification of the relationship Wilde creates between good and evil. Even in this simplified world of fairy tales, good and evil, pagan and Christian, must be seen in light of the larger goal they represent and create through paradox. As Snodgrass says, they are paradoxical, but those paradoxes are intended to create possibility. It is ironic that a book intended to demonstrate the creation of possibility, to sanctify the public in a way, was destroyed by the public.

Although Nassaar claims that he intends to discover Pater's influence on Wilde's fairy tales, he misses the significance of paradox to create possibility. In his earlier writing, Nassaar focuses on comparing Wilde's fairy tales to those of more mainstream writers, such as Andersen. In "Pater in Wilde's *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* and *A House of Pomegranates*," Nassaar compares Wilde's stories to the works of Pater without acknowledging the underlying aesthetic ideals which point to possibility as the reason for combining aestheticism and Christianity and to individuality as the reason for rejecting art. Criticism, as Wilde defined it, was intended to create more possibility. Reinterpretation is a creative, artistic act. This was the sort of "criticism" practiced by Ricketts and Shannon.[25] The criticism levied by the public against Ricketts's design may have incised Wilde to respond simply because it was limiting criticism. However, even the harshest of critics deserve some understanding.

Even though it was Ricketts's first break into publishing, he did not position the work among Wilde's best. In a letter to Sir William Anthony Pye many years after Wilde's death, Ricketts asserted that, "Wilde wrote during five years only; it is only in

the very last things, *The Soul of Man*, *Poems in Prose* and *Salome*, and in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, that he has given a hint at the power of thought, sardonic insight, and wit which characterized the man himself" (Ricketts 178).[26] Ricketts's obvious respect for Wilde, though tempered by Ricketts's own exacting standards, may have stinted his approach to *A House of Pomegranates*. A comparison Ricketts's later work, for example in *The Sphinx*, shows the early state of his own pictorial themes, but in *A House of Pomegranates*, Ricketts chimes in alongside Wilde by emphasizing individuality and other aesthetic and Paterian themes. Further research in this area would be well-served by a complete survey of Walter Pater.

That the choices made by each artist reflect his individual approach to the text, and something of the attitude each held towards *A House of Pomegranates*, has already been hypothesized upon. The point is, both use the text as a springboard for their own conception of the creation of this "book beautiful." Ricketts was intensely aware, as we have seen, that his and Shannon's style of art placed them both outside of the popular norms of society. Wilde's defense of the book proves that he had no intention of satiating the public's appetite for more fairy tales. *A House of Pomegranates* was intended to do and be more than that. It was intended to be a beautiful book full of beautiful words that would create a lust for development in the individual. Much like Wilde's Christ-figure, Wilde is preaching the good word of individualism by speaking in parables. And much like Christ, Wilde's parables are not going to be accepted by the public. Despite every attempt to place itself outside of the expectations of the reading public, *A House of Pomegranates* was still a book subjected to those criticisms.

Endnotes

[25] See Kooistra.

[26] What is interesting about the writing that has been done on Ricketts's designs for this book is that it tends to focus on his focus on the natural without explaining why it is important. For example, Brooks has surmised that the pictorial differences between Walter Crane's rendering of "The Happy Prince" and Ricketts's "The Young King" lie in the rendering of reality (Brooks 309). While Crane's illustrations are highly realistic, Ricketts's are fanciful and unpredictable by the standards of Victorian illustration. This is due to great extent to his use of nature in the illustrations. Brooks points out that nature is everywhere in the story, and equally evident in Ricketts pictures. "Crane gives us a persuasive descendent of Donatello's St. George, standing on a real pillar, behind which a real city is given in linear perspective. Ricketts's Pre-Raphaelite maiden, by contrast, lives only partly in the world of real time and real objects; her thoughts are in some infinitely distant, infinitely more enchanting universe" (Brooks 309). Brooks assertions are true: within the stories and the decorations of both artists, nature is transformed into art, and not considered realistically.
But in Ricketts's pictures, like Wilde's text, there is more than merely a preoccupation with nature that was unusual for the time and meant to irritate critics. Ricketts's use of nature is disassociated from both nature and the critics. "If art were to be seen as mimetic, at best it could only convey the senselessness of this world, but this would run counter to Pater's view of the healing effect of art. And so instead of imitating a given world, art defamiliarizes in order to arouse new interest" (Iser 34). Both the text and the pictures defamiliarize themselves with each other and the world to arouse new interest. Although this was not exactly successful for this text, it was a good try.

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