

THE PICTURE OF JOHN GRAY

(With accompanying essay)

by

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Abstract

This thesis consists of an original play script and an accompanying essay. The play, entitled *The Picture of John Gray*, is based loosely on a true story, about the nineteenth century poet, John Gray. It is comprised of two acts, six scenes and six characters. The action takes place in a total of four locations: The house of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, the house of John Gray, a hot air balloon over Berlin and a Church in Edinburgh. The play's protagonist is John Gray and, through the course of the play, the audience observes his journey from idealistic, young poet, to mature, world-wary priest. It also witnesses the birth, death and resurrection of his relationship with Andre Raffalovich. Thematically, the play explores love and friendship under pressure, the necessity of marriage, the relationship between laws and morality, and the reality of life for homosexuals in a society that does not understand or accept them.

The accompanying essay considers the process of writing this play, with particular attention paid to the creation of viable, dramatic characters from historical figures. It is divided into three sections. The first focuses on why I decided to write the story, how I balanced historical fact with dramatic potency and how I worked to find the heart of the story, with mention of how the play looked in previous drafts. The second section explores how I decided who the central characters of the play were and which characters the play could do without. It also discusses the fact that the play is all-male, how this decision was reached and why it was in the interests of the play for it to be as such. The third section then explores the characters in the play, their relationships with each other and the differences between the characters and the historical figures on which they were based. The essay then concludes with an evaluation.

For Doobert,

A whole play!

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**RE-SHAPING HISTORY: HOW DO YOU TURN HISTORICAL FIGURES
INTO VIABLE, THEATRICAL CHARACTERS? A CONSIDERATION OF
HOW I WROTE *THE PICTURE OF JOHN GRAY*.**

The Picture of John Gray is loosely based on a true story. A few months ago, it was 'based on a true story' and, at one point, it was even 'a true story'. This is not an admission of inaccurate researching. Rather, it is indicative of what being both a playwright and a researcher entails. Once I decided to write a play about John Gray, I resolved to know everything about him and the people who were important in his life. I have now read each of his biographies, every published book he wrote himself, and nearly every book written about his most famous friend, Oscar Wilde, whose own oeuvre I have also read. I believe it is important to know the truth of any story but, as a playwright, no story is more important than the one you are putting on the stage. This, whether based on history or not, must always be true: true to the characters and true to the plot. If the bending or breaking of a few historical facts occurs along the path to achieving this, it will not have been in vain. Throughout the writing process, I developed characters and plot-lines from their historical equivalents and then left the latter in the history books. My characters grew with the play, with the plot and with each other, orphaned from their factual selves. It was only in this environment that the play itself could thrive and begin to exist as a viable piece of theatre, with viable theatrical characters. None of this dulled my interest in the historical facts of the story. I simply decided the facts would be used to support the fiction. In writing *The Picture of John Gray*, I prioritised dramatic action over historical accuracy, making the conscious decision that it was more important to create a viable dramatic play than tell a wholly accurate true story.

The eventual result was a play with six characters: John, Andre, Shannon, Ricketts, Alfred and Edward. Its main focus, as the title suggests, is John. We first meet John at the house of Charles Shannon and Charles Ricketts, who, as well as a common forename, also share a life together. John is naïve and idealistic: a young poet who believes an older, married man, will soon leave his wife and be with him. Shannon and Ricketts suggest that this is unlikely to happen and John takes great offence. By the next scene, the older, married man has ended his relationship with John, and begun a new one with Alfred. This scene places all six of the play's characters together, with the older, married man having a crucial offstage presence. John's jealousy of Alfred is eased by his meeting Andre. Andre and John begin a romantic relationship. When the older, married man is imprisoned for 'gross indecency' as a result of his sexual exploits, Andre and John flee the country. John believes their relationship cannot go on and he decides to become a priest. Yet, despite this drastic change, and after a period of separation, his friendship with Andre endures. By the play's end, this friendship is purely platonic, but certainly not bereft of love.

John's journey through the play is far from straightforward, and nor was my journey in writing it. With a focus on how I created viable, theatrical characters from historical figures, I will consider how I wrote *The Picture of John Gray*.

PART ONE: GETTING A PICTURE OF JOHN GRAY

John Gray, born 1866, died 1934, was a carpenter's son, who became a poet, who became a priest, who met Oscar Wilde, had sexual relations with Oscar Wilde, was cast aside by Oscar Wilde, disowned Oscar Wilde, fell in love with Andre Raffalovich, fled to Berlin with Andre Raffalovich, decided he could only have platonic love with Andre Raffalovich, studied in Rome, became a priest, moved to Scotland and set up a Church (Hull McCormack 2000).

After extensive research, one thing was painstakingly clear: I had unearthed a fascinating story but I was a long way from writing a fascinating play. I had to decide where the dramatic heart of this story lay and focus on building a play around that. Initially, the heart of the story seemed obvious: it was about a dandy poet who becomes a dour priest. I would, therefore, show this transformation to the audience in as sophisticated a way as possible. There being a transformation, the play would comfortably obey Alan Ayckbourn's rule that characters, specifically main characters, must undergo a journey during the course of the play (Ayckbourn 2002, 44). In the true life of John Gray, he had already undergone a substantial change in his life in order to become a poet. Attending theatre premieres and exclusive gentlemen's clubs was not the natural state of affairs for a Victorian born in working-class Bethnal Green to a carpenter father and a mother who had borne nine other children (McCormack 2000, 7). Gray, against the wishes of his father, had put education before graft (McCormack 2000, 56). This journey from poor boy to educated poet, and librarian at the Foreign Office, could be worthy of a play in itself, but it was not the play I was writing.

I did however feel it was a fascinating part of Gray's story and did not want to ignore it altogether. I also came to realise that mentioning Gray's past added great depth to his character and, most significantly, went some way to substantiating his decision to become a priest. Michael Chekhov advises actors to draw their characterisation from their character's 'psychological make-up' (Chekhov 2009, 83). By mentioning John's upbringing, it presents an extra layer of his 'psychological make-up' for the actor to use, with the precise effect of this layer on John's articulation or gait, for instance, being entirely the actor's domain.

From an audience's perspective, this added layer makes them aware that 'John Gray the poet' is itself merely a passing phase and that this is a character who, for his whole life, has been searching for a place that he can call his own. As he says himself: 'I'm no poet. Though I've tried my life to be one' (112^{*}). John, in the play, is in a state of constantly wanting to be something he is not. In earlier drafts, Andre replies to this with: 'Have you never thought, perhaps, you do not need to be anything at all?' I removed this line because it made my motives too clear. Rather than have another character ask this of John, I want the audience to wonder about this for themselves. As John Yorke puts it: 'Explanation kills drama' (Yorke 2013, 167)

In early drafts, in order to communicate John's back story, I had John speak at length about his past but, in doing so, he did not further the dramatic action of the play at all. Rather, it followed Steve Waters' contention that 'any description that is not dramatically motivated hangs in the air like fog' (Waters 2010, 127). Instead, I decided to let other characters make fleeting references to John's upbringing. This would give a sense of his back story to the audience, without burdening the dialogue

* For all quotations from *The Picture of John Gray*, numbers refer to page numbers in this thesis.

with unnecessary exposition. Moreover, the references to his upbringing would reveal an element of snobbishness in the other characters, notably Shannon and Ricketts.

Additionally, I wanted to get a sense of John's past, and the influence it still has on his present, through the way he speaks. As Ricketts notes in Scene One, John 'tries to talk like Oscar' (26). I wanted this to be true of John's speech: that he would sound like a working-class man who is attempting to speak like a gentleman but, as he has been attempting to speak like a gentleman for so long, he is actually rather good at it. Ayckbourn notes that 'our choice of words can betray class origin' (Ayckbourn 2002, 48). John's manner of speaking; therefore, would be ostensibly similar to that of Ricketts, Shannon and Alfred, with only a few minor imperfections giving him away:

"I...well, no I couldn't say- I know only how he is with me.
We...uh...dined at Kettner's last night- had the most exquisite prawns and didn't pay a penny. Then at the ballet, you'd think he was in tights judging by the attention." (35)

Firstly, John's lines are often populated with ellipses or hyphens, to indicate that he puts more thought into his speech than, for instance, Alfred, who can reel off several lines of poetic language without more than a second's thought. Secondly, a minor and almost unnoticeable grammatical error, using 'you'd think he was' rather than 'you'd think he were', is a subtle hint that John is not as well-versed in the English language as he would like to be; hints that will likely be used to the advantage of a dedicated actor who, as Chekhov advises, should become possessed by the character (2009, 79). He also occasionally uses unnecessary connectives, such as 'that', which halt the fluidity of his speech. Yorke argues that 'good dialogue conveys how a character wants to be seen while betraying the flaws they want to hide' and this was certainly my aim with regards to John (Yorke 2013, 150). As the play progresses, John's speech becomes more natural. By the end of the play, with fewer long words and a more natural level of articulation, John speaks simply in the way that comes naturally

to him. He does not sound like a member of the aristocracy, nor the working-class, nor even the clergy. He sounds, finally, like himself.

Yet, while John Gray's journey sees him move towards the church, my own journey in writing this play moved me away from it, in terms of play setting. When I began the play, John existed as a poet and as a priest and my aim was to stitch these two opposing positions together to make one believable character. Almost immediately, the way to do this was clear: I would show the audience a priest and show the audience a poet and, later, reveal the priest and the poet to be the same person. The priest is merely the poet grown-up.

This is how the action is presented in the first draft, with two separate plays appearing to intertwine. One is about a homosexual poet who is slowly becoming a repentant priest. The other is about a repentant priest who is, in truth, doing little much else other than waiting for the homosexual poet to catch up with him. The priest section did not draw me, or any first draft readers, in the way that the poet section did. Another problem was that there was still a great deal that I wanted to change about the poet section. As a result, I spent yet more time on the poet section and left the priest section to stew, and the gap in quality between the two became more pronounced. As a result, I re-wrote the priest section of the play. I made it consist of two characters rather than four and decreased its length significantly. It now consisted of a repentant priest, at the end of his life, looking nostalgically at his long term relationship with his recently departed friend, who we would later learn was Andre Raffalovich.

Thus, two old men sitting around speaking morbidly became one old man sitting, and occasionally standing, around morbidly. In the fourth draft of the play, a lone priest conducts the funeral of his dear old friend, who we later learn was Andre.

He then returns to his quarters and speaks depressingly to an old photograph of the two of them. He drinks some wine. He reads some of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and he speaks to himself some more. He then dies alone and miserable, but with the knowledge that he has spent his life with his friend.

I discovered I had somehow managed to achieve the impossible and make the priest section of the play even duller than before and, so, after months of reworking and redrafting, I finally realised the priest section would have to go. The play would simply tell the story of a poet who becomes a priest. There would be no sudden realisation that two seemingly different people were actually the same person, and it was probably just as well. By fixating myself so much on there being a trick, I had slightly lost sight of the point of the play and the point of the story I wanted to tell.

Simultaneously, however, the point of the story I wanted to tell had actually changed. The more my drafts progressed, the more I realised the point of the story was not that a dandy poet becomes a dour priest. Far more astonishing was the fact that, despite such a dramatic transformation, his relationship with Andre Raffalovich survives. They end the play as friends rather than lovers but it was as friends that their love first began. I found this life long friendship that endures the passing of years, the deaths of friends, the moving of countries and the changing of religions, to be inspiring.

The extraordinary thing about John is not what changes but what stays the same. Though idealistic and melodramatic at the beginning, and thoughtful and religious at the end, he remains kind and loving throughout and it is this which allows his wonderful friendship with Andre to endure. If this friendship could be communicated without the older John and without an elaborate trick, then both the older John and his trick would have to go.

The older John was in fact the final character to be axed from the play, leaving it with the six who now remain, but he was far from the first. As I went through drafts and revised plans of the play, I followed Waters' suggested method for character elimination: 'lay your hand over the dramatis personae one by one in order to see what's lost from the story as each character is eliminated' (Waters 2010, 106). Until the last few drafts, this exercise always resulted in the scoring of another name from the list. I was searching for the heart of the play while, at the same time, searching for the vital characters. Eventually, and somewhat inevitably, I realised that one search would answer the other: If I could find the vital characters, I would have the heart of the play.

PART TWO: THE CHARACTERS AT THE HEART OF THE PLAY

Henrik Ibsen claimed that in the first draft of plays, he could see his characters as strangers on a train but that, by the final draft, they would be like intimate friends (Galenson 2004, 38). In this sense, I decided to populate my first draft with near strangers, in the knowledge that some of these strangers would not survive to the second draft, and that others would develop from their historical shells into fleshed-out, viable characters as the drafts progressed. Other potential characters would not even make it as far as the first draft. While Robbie Ross, Michael Field, William Butler Yeats, More Adley, Aubrey Beardsley and any of John Gray's family, may have made fascinating characters in their own right, the story could progress adequately without them.

For some characters, however, it was not until I had 'met them on the train' that I could be certain of their unimportance and, as the dramatis personae list from the first draft demonstrates, the carriage was not far from being full:

John Gray
Lord Alfred Douglas
Edward Carson
Lionel Johnson
Bishop
Bertie Grummings
Priest
Charles Shannon
Brother
Charles Ricketts
Andre Raffalovich
Edward Shelley
Gwandoya
Tramp
Olive Custance
Theatre Hostess
Waitress

The characters named 'Priest', 'Bishop', 'Brother' and 'Gwandoya' were all part of the now absent 'Priest Section' of the play. As was detailed in Part One, there was

simply no room in the play for this section or these characters. For the others, their deletion often seemed difficult at the time but, in hindsight, it is hard to see why I ever considered having them as part of the play.

Edward Carson, for instance, was historically the Marquis of Queensbury's defence lawyer. Wilde pursued Queensbury for libel because the latter left a calling card at the Albemarle Club, which read 'For Oscar Wilde, posing as somdomite (sic)' (McKenna 2004, 454). The case went to court and it was Carson who cross-examined Wilde. Carson's relationship with Wilde was fascinating. They were old friends from Trinity College, Dublin (McKenna 2004, 174). This was not, however, vital to John Gray's story. In the first draft, Carson tries to coerce John into testifying against Wilde. Act One then ended with Carson addressing the audience, as though he was addressing the jury, with the implication that he was about to introduce Gray as the next witness. Yet, rather than Gray stepping forward, the witness was revealed as Edward Shelley. It was a decent enough trick, but again indicative of my obsession with outsmarting and surprising the audience, at the expense of building viable and believable characters. Carson had a function but was not a character and, what is more, his function was one that the play could do without.

In contrast, Lionel Johnson existed in the first draft as a fairly substantial and developed character. The problem with him, however, was that he served no real function at all and, as Waters puts it, 'whilst characters often exceed their function, character nonetheless begins with function' (Waters 2010, 106). Lionel was, in essence, Alfred's whipping boy. He would be insulted by Alfred at every turn, and yet would be the only person who would stand by Alfred, and remain his closest friend, throughout the course of the play. Having Lionel present in what is now Act One, Scene Two, complemented the energy of the scene. Although he could see Alfred's

bluntness and lack of tact as clearly as the other characters, he was firmly on Alfred's side, which added to the latter's sense of power. Cutting Lionel was undoubtedly a difficult decision and one that required a great deal of rewriting. As the script stands now, however, I feel his presence is not missed.

The presence of 'Theatre Hostess', 'Tramp' and 'Waitress' is certainly not missed. The first existed solely in a now absent scene that took place at the premiere of *Lady Winderemere's Fan*. It neither enhanced nor hindered the play as a whole and, so, the scene had to go, taking with it the 'Theatre Hostess'. Her expendability could only be surpassed by that of 'Tramp' and 'Waitress', who existed in a bizarre dream-like scene where John imagines meeting his future self. It was inspired by a novella the real Gray wrote, entitled *The Person in Question*, and while my motives for writing the scene were entirely decent, the scene itself was anything but (Gray 1958).

The same could be said of Olive, an important part of the first draft, whose impact and necessity waned as the drafts progressed. By the time the nonsensical cameo roles had been cut, Olive stood alone as the play's sole female character and it was this that was her eventual undoing. In a play about men, I felt that a single female character could only exist if she were strong, memorable and, above all, completely central to the plot. Olive, unfortunately, was none of these things. The real life Olive Custance was a fascinating person but, with the John-centric nature of the play, there was little time to fully explore a character who is only present in John's life for a short while. Instead, Olive has been reduced to the estimable status of 'second most important offstage character' and, in doing so, I feel she is far more interesting. Allusions to her poetry, travelling and sexuality allow the audience to picture a multifaceted character, rather than witness an underwhelming one.

While I feel it is a shame for the play to be without a female character, I believe it would be a greater shame to include one purely for the sake of including a female character. It was not my intention from the outset to write an all-male play, but doing so is certainly preferable to writing a play with six strong, well-rounded male characters and one non-essential female one. To make Olive a stronger, more central character would involve an entire reworking of the whole play and would dilute its central focus. As such, Olive was removed as an onstage presence and the play had found its characters.

PART 3: THE FINAL SIX*

The first draft of *The Picture of John Gray* has been almost entirely rewritten. Nonetheless, it does contain a scene wherein lies the essential blueprint for the play in its current form. It is the earliest draft of what is now Act One, Scene Two, where the play's current six characters, plus Lionel Johnson, have dinner. There is no poetry contest, no format of any sort, no reason, in truth, for any of them to be there and, yet, this scene pointed very much to the heart of the play and to the characters who belonged there. Lionel disappeared, for reasons detailed previously, but the others remained and, from a relatively short scene in an extremely hazy first draft, these characters would become the lifeblood for the play's heart.

John, Andre, Ricketts, Shannon, Alfred and Edward are all based on historical figures but, the more I progressed with the writing of the play, the more I realised that 'based on' would have to become the crucial term. Whether or not a character is based on a real person or is an entirely original imagining of the author, if such a thing is possible, they are still a character within a play. They must exist within the world of the play, regardless of any other existences they may have. Indeed, some audience members may know the entire biographies of characters' historical equivalents, while others may not even have heard of Oscar Wilde, if such a thing is possible, and the play must speak to both groups alike. Whether or not an audience member has a notion of who Lord Alfred Douglas or Charles Ricketts are before the seeing the play, they will know my Alfred and my Ricketts rather well, once the final curtain has dropped. Capturing the true, historical Lord Alfred Douglas, for instance,

* Act Two, Scene One does include a seventh character, 'Conductor', who operates the hot air balloon. His purpose is deliberately purely functional and, in performance, he would be played by the actor who plays Edward Shelley. As such, he is excluded from this discussion.

was not only impossible, it was also entirely undesirable, as he would be utterly unsuited to my play.

My version of Alfred would have to have concerns, motivations and a system of logic that were relevant to the world in which he exists. David Edgar says that each character should have a surprising characteristic (Edgar 2009, 51). For Alfred, I decided to give him two. Firstly, and this was a characteristic borrowed directly from history, I made him a talented poet. Secondly, I gave him a kind and loving soul. Alfred is set up for a fall in Act One, Scene Two. The other characters and the audience are expecting that, after all his bravado, he will fall flat when it comes to reading his poem. In fact, his poem is the most powerful of the four and he, in essence, wins the day. Yet, rather than this being a stimulus for further boasting and pompousness, it actually precedes the revelation of Alfred's sweeter side. Once accused by John and Ricketts of looking to cause trouble and attract attention, he shows us that his love for Oscar, and his wish for love between men to be able to 'speak its name', are genuine.

Later, I use Alfred to surprise the audience again, with the revelation that he is getting married to Olive Custance, which is based on their factual marriage (Murray 2000, 132). In previous drafts, this revelation was purely factual. It was spoken about by the other characters but we did not see the engaged Alfred for ourselves. In the final draft, however, Alfred returns in the last scene and we see that, far from being an unfathomable decision, it is a decision provoked by Alfred's overriding need: someone to love him. Whether this makes him intolerably self-centred or a wonderfully sensitive man is open to audience interpretation, but what is undeniable about Alfred, in the play, is that he needs to be loved. He was loved by Oscar. He was

not loved by his father. He is, at the play's end, loved by Olive. Ostensibly, at least, he has found happiness because the need that motivates him most has been fulfilled.

Edward is similarly governed by a need for love and acceptance. Like Alfred, he is not loved by his father but, additionally, he is rejected by Oscar and then by John. For Alfred, this need for love is fulfilled, whereas for Edward it is not, hence the differing paths the two end up taking. The surprising characteristic for Edward is that he has a threatening, Machiavellian dimension. Although Alfred has this too, he makes little attempt to conceal it. For Edward, this side of his character only reveals itself in Act One, Scene Three, though the pocket watch in the previous scene hints at its existence. Tellingly, and in contrast to what the audience may expect at the beginning of Act One, Scene Two, it is he, not Alfred, who betrays the rest of the group.

Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon were devised together, with the deliberate aim of giving them complementing characteristics. I decided to make Ricketts reserved and pensive, and Shannon far more flamboyant and temperamental. I was careful to make sure that Ricketts never wastes a word, making his arguments as concise and specific as possible. Shannon, conversely, often loses his train of thought or speaks without thinking at all. This combination is the source of a great deal of comedy in the play. In both Act One, Scene One and Act Two, Scene Two, Shannon and Ricketts wish to impart exactly the same advice to John: to not get too attached to Oscar, in the first instance, and to not lose contact with Andre, in the second. Their methods for doing so, however, are entirely different: Ricketts is cutting and to the point, whereas Shannon attempts to be far more delicate but is also far less clear on what he is saying. Ironically, it is Shannon, not Ricketts, who most provokes John's ire.

Yet, while Shannon as an optimistic eccentric and Ricketts as a pessimistic introvert can generate comedy when surrounded by the other characters, I realised, quite late on in the process, that it could also generate an element of tragedy when they were alone. Ayckbourn points out how we act differently depending on who we are with, and I wanted there to be a clear distinction between how Shannon and Ricketts act in private, as opposed to in front of others (Ayckbourn 2002, 40). In Act One, Scene One, their conversation is focussed mainly on John. Ricketts is painting, Shannon trying to tidy the house, there is little scope for me to delve too deeply into their personal relationship. Besides, my principal objective was to have them set up the play, with my conscious decision to follow in the oft-repeated playwriting tradition of having the principal character talked about before they are seen (Edgar 2009, 44). I was careful, however, to avoid making their conversation a form of ‘table-dusting’: Robert McKee’s term for the Victorian device of having two maids set up the action by gossiping about their employers (McKee: 2010, 25).

At the end of Act Two, Scene Two, I sensed my opportunity to explore the darker, more personal side of Ricketts and Shannon’s relationship. Here, we learn somewhat unsurprisingly that Shannon’s public optimism is mostly a façade. This sense of falseness about Shannon is hinted at throughout the play, with Shannon describing nearly everyone as ‘charming’ and, for example, describing church spires as ‘wicked looking things’ (28) to Ricketts and, later, as ‘so pretty’ to John (121). What is more surprising, however, is the ferocity with which he attacks Ricketts in Act Two, Scene Two, calling him, among other things, ‘sultry’, ‘dour’ and ‘a miserable bastard’ (142). Even more surprising is Ricketts’ reaction. While, up until this point, Ricketts is resolutely serious, here he counters Shannon’s flippancy by

turning the whole thing into a game, replacing Shannon's insults with pleasantries and tricking Shannon into delivering a pleasantry of his own.

Yet, while this scene shows us both characters' surprising characteristic, neither is acting out of synch with the character the audience has spent the previous ninety minutes watching. Shannon's maliciousness still has an air of flamboyancy and his arguments are still woefully incoherent, while Ricketts is still patient and practical, biding his time until the perfect moment arises for him to diffuse his partner's wrath. This type of argument is borrowed from the common romantic comedy trope, where a couple insult each other and then 'modulate this dislike into loving behaviour' (McDonald 2007, 20). Nonetheless, I believe it is a borrowing that works extremely well.

Particularly because I believe that the argument between Ricketts and Shannon actually strengthens, rather than weakens, their relationship in the eyes of the audience. Without it, the audience is privy only to a couple who are permanently content with one another. By showing them at their worst, the audience gains a fuller appreciation of their life together and, while Shannon is damning Ricketts with defamations, I imagine the audience will be longing for the peaceful resolution that finally comes. They will be relieved to see the pair make up, but perhaps even more relieved to observe that this relationship, like all great relationships, has bad moments as well as good. Moreover, the existence of this side to their relationship allows the stubborn and steadfast Ricketts to act in another surprising manner:

John: [Shannon's] Still as high-spirited as ever then?

Ricketts: Hmmh. Always. Knows no other way to be. What makes living with him such a pleasure. (122)

Normally the first person to correct others, and particularly John, here Ricketts lets his friend's false observation go unchecked. Ricketts may have often seen Shannon when

he is far from 'high-spirited' but he loves him too much to divulge this information to anyone else.

The relationship between the play's two most prominent characters is filled with as many bad moments as good. As detailed previously, the lifelong friendship between John Gray and Andre Raffalovich was the historical detail I found to be the most inspiring. Two men who met when they were aspiring, idealistic poets, had a relationship that endured even though their personal circumstances changed markedly. It was this friendship, between the play's two main characters, that was to become the play's centrepiece.

In this sense, the play is a love story: one where the two lovers do not end the play as lovers, but nor do they end the play apart. What I like most about this ending is that it is likely to leave the audience with a dilemma, as they try to decipher whether this is a happy ending or a sad one. The two men feel that they are unable to be together because of the nature of their society and the fact that they are both men. The audience knows that such a relationship between men is still possible in this society, because they have the example of Shannon and Ricketts. This makes John and Andre's self-forced separation all the more tragic. Yet, John and Andre do end the play together and, though not lovers, there is little doubting that their relationship still contains an amount of love. As such, it passes James Scott Bell's test for ambiguous endings, in that it 'causes strong feeling, feels right and can generate discussion (Bell 2004, 103).

For this relationship to have any impact whatsoever on an audience, however, both characters must complement each other, and clash with one another, in a credible way. I believe this is something I have achieved but it was a relationship far harder to develop than that of Shannon and Ricketts. John and Andre's relationship complies

with the classic love story structure, where ‘boy meet girl [...] boy loses girl [...] boy gets girl back’, though in this case, of course, it is ‘boy’ and ‘boy’ (Duncan 2006, 354). Within this structure, however, I had to establish the societal pressures affecting their relationship, plot John’s ever-increasing religiousness and deal with the fact that these lovers do not end the play as lovers. Alongside this, I had to make their relationship matter to the audience.

The key to this was, of course, character. If both John and Andre were viable, theatrical characters, with a credible compatibility for each other, the audience would naturally care more for their relationship. As Ayckbourn puts it, ‘an audience that doesn’t care stops listening’ (Ayckbourn 2002, 14). One technique I used was to take a common component of a love story and use it to build a common and endearing characteristic for the pair. Lovers often begin stories with a dislike for one another, and John and Andre are no exception. Andre, the audience learns, had written a scathing review of one of John’s poem and John is frosty to him as a result. Edward, relaying one of John’s opinions, and unaware that Andre is in the room, refers to the latter as an ‘ugly French Jew who don’t understand poetry’ (44). This later becomes a recurring joke between John and Andre, with the pair playfully exchanging nationality-based insults. Both are capable of making fun of themselves and each other and this attribute, stimulated by their initial dislike for one another, becomes a significant stimulus for their friendship.

In addition, John’s idealism and constant search for his true self are complemented by Andre’s steady grip on the world. Yet, though Andre can see the folly of John’s desire to constantly reinvent himself, he is capable of supporting him nonetheless. As such, Andre becomes a Catholic and moves to Edinburgh: he alters his own life entirely to fit with John’s and, while John often seems unappreciative of

Andre's presence in his life, he finally articulates his gratitude at the play's end:

John: I tell you, I couldn't do any of it without...well, I struggle
enough as it is. You're my...I mean you're...I'm priest to the
people, yes. But you're. Well, you're my priest. Aren't you?
You are.

Pause.

Andre: No, no. I am your friend. (161)

For the whole play, both men are searching for a word to describe fittingly what they are to one another and, in this moment, they finally find that word. John's subsequent mimicking of Andre's accent is an immediate reminder of the fun and laughter that underpin this special friendship.

EVALUATION

The journey I underwent in writing *The Picture of John Gray* was a significant one. As the writing progressed, I moved away from the history books, from Oscar Wilde, from the Church, from minor characters, from multiple scenes, from convoluted exposition, from my own pre-first draft meanderings and mid-first draft indecisiveness. I moved away from a multitude of ideas to one strong, clear focus. In doing so, I believe I succeeded in creating viable, theatrical characters from historical figures.

There are still elements of the play I feel could be improved: notably the specifics of John's journey towards the priesthood. Much of this remains shrouded in mystery, with his visits to various churches taking place off-stage. As such, tough audiences may question the credibility of this journey and, also, that of Andre's conversion to Catholicism. Nonetheless, I feel that the ordered nature of the shifts in time, with an unspecified, but roughly equal, gap between each scene, works extremely well for the play and allows the audience to use their imagination when filling in the blanks. A slight dissatisfaction is perhaps inevitable when it comes to writing a play and, with luck, the next time I come to re-write this script, it will be in lieu of its debut performance.

THE PICTURE OF JOHN GRAY

BY

CRAIG WILMANN

Dramatis Personae

Charles Ricketts

Charles Shannon

John Gray

Andre Raffalovich

Edward Shelley

Lord Alfred Douglas

(Conductor)

Act One, Scene One

The Vale, West London. The house of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon.

*There is an easel with its back to the audience, and places to sit. There are various pieces of décor, as deemed necessary. The room is fairly messy, with an array of items strewn about. **Ricketts** is sitting, paintbrush in hand, beside the easel.*

*After a moment, **Shannon** enters. He looks at **Ricketts**, who does not acknowledge him. **Shannon** begins picking up items from around the room and generally tidying the place. He speaks whilst doing so...*

Shannon He's coming, Charles.
Should be round at any moment. But you know that, don't you?
You know, full well, that Dorian should be round at any moment.

Ricketts I'm working, Charles.

Shannon Oh so you are, so you are. Hadn't noticed. Simply too absorbed in all this tidying. In anticipation of the fact that Dorian should be round at any moment.

Ricketts Want me to help?

Shannon Where do you get your ideas?

Ricketts Painting inspires wondrous thoughts.

***Ricketts** stands to assist with the tidying.*

If only thoughts could inspire wondrous painting.

Beat.

Shannon looks at the easel. His face warms.

Shannon It's beautiful.

Unlike this room.

Ricketts nods knowingly and begins tidying.

Ricketts Oh. Don't call him Dorian.

Shannon Everyone will now. Oscar's made quite sure of that.

Ricketts Hmmh.

Shannon Only a spot of fun.

Ricketts They way he talks. Tries to talk like Oscar. Hmmh. It's a touch...

Shannon Come. Even Oscar tries to talk like Oscar. I mean you'd never guess he'd an Irish tongue, save for the frequency with which it's used and John, well, John's true voice is far closer to Oscar's than Oscar's but who wants a true voice these days anyhow?

Ricketts John. Good.

Shannon Shall we simply call him Gray?

Beat.

Ricketts I daresay I regret introducing the pair.

Shannon Come, they're big boys. Oscar's bigger- I grant you- and not just in the literal sense, though he is literally rather large.

Ricketts I'd hate to be blamed-

Shannon Blame his wife and her portions-

Ricketts Were John to get hurt.

Pause.

Shannon I promise I shan't call him Dorian.

Ricketts nods gratefully.

May I still call you Basil?

Ricketts No.

Shannon But you're so alike.

Ricketts I share his profession. As do you.

Shannon I'm hardly Basil, am I?

Ricketts Nor am I.

Shannon Come, you are.

Ricketts Not.

Shannon You are.

Ricketts Not.

Shannon Oscar told me you are.

Ricketts Oscar says many things.

Shannon Come, you're more like Basil than John's like Dorian.

Ricketts John isn't like Dorian. John pretends to be like Dorian.

Shannon And Basil pretends to be like you.

Oh come Charles. Cheer up.

Shannon looks at the painting.

What is it then?

Ricketts Edinburgh. Eventually.

Shannon Ah yes, the church spires. Wicked looking things, aren't they?

Sharpened as a warning to falling angels.

Ricketts From where we sat. In the park that night. Hmmh. Our view.

Raining in the distance. See. But not...

Shannon So it was.

Ricketts And the wine we drank.

Shannon Exquisite.

Ricketts Trying to make the picture a touch intoxicated. See.

Shannon You're not?

Ricketts I want that view, Charles.

Beat.

Shannon If you paint it, Basil Hallward, it shall grow old and withered while the real Edinburgh remains young and beautiful.

Ricketts looks unimpressed.

Ricketts I was trying to be...to be...

Shannon And you were, you were. Sorry, I simply love making you pout.

Ricketts I'm not pouting.

Shannon (Mockingly)

No. No, you're not. No, of course. No, quite right.

Pause.

Do we still have the Edinburgh wine?

Ricketts Hmmh. Let's not get it now, though.

Shannon Why ever not? Oh. Oh I see. Oh Charles.

He's one of us now, Charles.

He's your protégé, is he not? You introduced him to this world, sired him into civility, swapped his rags for ribbons, did you not?

I'll fetch the Bordeaux- one Raffy gave us.

Ricketts Very special, the Edinburgh wine.

Shannon And Dorian- John- doesn't deserve it?

Ricketts Made it themselves. The sweet Scottish couple. In their own home.

Shannon And not for the lips of common boys.

Ricketts pouts.

Charles, your smile does bear a striking resemblance to a pout.

Shannon exits. Ricketts sits by the painting.

Shannon re-enters.

We could start making wine? Be ever so much fun, wouldn't it?

Could bottle it, give it away, sell it? What do you think? What do you think, Charles?

Ricketts We create enough as it is.

Shannon Oh. Oh yes, I suppose we do.

Looks at the painting.

Oh Charles. Oh, it is splendid.

Ricketts Let's view it through a different grape? Hmmh?

Beat.

Shannon smiles and pours the wine. Ricketts is sitting by the painting. Shannon stands behind him.

Shannon Oh Charles. You're not Basil Hallward.

Oscar tells the most splendid stories but that's all they are and we...We are in no way related to 'The Picture of Dorian Gray'.

John enters. He is young and beautiful.

John points at the easel. He gasps.

John That drawing, Ricketts, is delightful. You must let me have it. I think I should die if you refuse.

Ricketts Mr. Gray. We were discussing Oscar Wilde's vivid imagination.

John What do you think? The story? Marvellous, isn't marvellous? And the slumber modern fiction was in. Two weeks it took him to write. Two weeks! Makes God's six days look terribly slack. I'm so glad you like it- Nervous as he is, waiting for reactions. Maybe more so. Well, it's worse for me, don't you think? He's the same with my poetry. And they want him to extend it, of course. More chapters. Print it as a book- Ricketts, I'm sure, will do the cover- yes? I know Oscar would love it. Oh, what a story. And I, it's muse. My life's sprouted wings. Yes. But has no interest in the sun. No, the earth, the earth- Ricketts, Shannon- burns far, far brighter.

He looks at the painting.

What is it exactly? I can't quite work it out.

Shannon Edinburgh, dear.

John Oscar told me your latest piece was genius and he wasn't wrong. He was not wrong.

Shannon Oh Oscar won't have seen this yet dear. Charles only started it last week.

Ricketts Must've meant the piece by the window. The green and blue. 'Brushstrokes', I call it.

John looks in that direction.

John Ah. Yes. Of course.
The world, isn't it? Everything. But nothing. At once. All at once.

Shannon looks at said painting and realises Ricketts' game.

Shannon (to Ricketts)

Was that you testing the paints?

Ricketts, smiling knowingly, focuses on his canvas.

John What's that, Shannon?

Shannon I said it's refreshing, dear boy, how you find art in the most incomprehensible of places, and now do you have some of your own, for our little magazine? Your last piece was such a treat.

John I came here to beg your forgiveness. Afraid I've had no time. Oscar can be quite persistent.

Shannon You've nothing?

- John** Did 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' not take two weeks?
- Shannon** I couldn't say.
- John** Tomorrow. On my honour. I no longer search for poetry. It searches for me.
- Ricketts** You've a real skill. Mind you don't lose it.
- John** Some chance with Oscar around.
- Ricketts** Hmmh.
- Shannon** Come Charles, be civil. One is perfectly capable of being poetic and beautiful- are we not living proof of that possibility ourselves?
- (to John)
- How does it feel, then? To be placed inside a story? To see your future writ by another man?
- John** I could ask the same of you... Lord Henry.
- Shannon** Oh come.
- John** A rough connection, that's true enough, but we're all in it. Every one who counts. Each character's based on someone but in each- and this is what makes them so brilliant- there's a small piece of Oscar. Gives them this edge that real people simply don't have, yes?

Shannon (Quietly, to Ricketts)

Oh a small piece of Oscar's been in plenty real people too.

John So Oscar mixed with me is Dorian.

(to Ricketts)

Mixed with you, Ricketts...Well, Basil Hallward of course. The artist. Creator of my picture.

(to Shannon)

Mixed with you, Shannon...Lord Henry. There's a touch of Walter Pater in there too. So I'm told. Never met him myself. Oh it's terribly fun working it all out. Even the Jew- the ugly theatre owner, you know- one who owns Sibyl- even he's based on someone. Or so Oscar says.

Shannon (to Ricketts)

Not dear Raffy?

Ricketts Charles.

John What's that?

Shannon (to Ricketts)

Be civil Charles.

(to John)

Marc Andre Raffalovich. French, he is, and Jewish of course. Wonderful mind, slightly morbid manner, face like a melted menorah.

- Shannon (cont.)** Filthy rich- has a house in Berlin he never even visits- I'd say he'd more money than sense but he's a great deal of both. Don't imagine I'd visit Berlin much either.
- John** Raffalovich? Fell out, did they? He and Oscar?
- Ricketts** Oscar did, yes. But you know how he is with his boys.
- John** I...well, no I couldn't say- I know only how he is with me.
Dined at Kettner's last night- had the most exquisite prawns and didn't pay a penny. Then at the ballet, you'd think he was in tights judging by the reception.
London with Oscar- it's like hearing Clemetti through Beethoven's ear, you know. And there's no chance of him falling out with me, I tell you.
- Ricketts** Clementi.
- John** Sorry? Ah, yes. Of course. I know.
Well, I can only hope this Raffalovich fellow and I never cross paths. He should surely die with jealousy. Dorian Raffalovich?
No. Doesn't have quite the same feel.
- Ricketts** And what feel has Dorian Gray?
- Shannon** Oh ignore him- he's only upset because his character gets murdered.
- John** And as Oscar says, life imitates art.
- Ricketts** Then you must spend yours proving him wrong.

John Ricketts, if you paint a picture that keeps me eternally young, I promise most solemnly: I will not stab you in the heart.

But, well, if you do not...

Shannon laughs.

So, what are we drinking?

Shannon A Bordeaux.

He pours some for John.

Ricketts A gift. From Andre Raffalovich.

John Oh go on? A gift from a Jew?

Shannon Come dear, they're not all how Oscar depicts them.

Ricketts As with each of this characters.

John Yes. Well. Oscar's Basil is far nicer to his Dorian.

Ricketts I meant no harm.

John No, I know.

Ricketts Merely that Jews are no more ungenerous than Catholics are prudish.

John Well I'm hardly the ideal Catholic.

Ricketts No?

John sips some wine.

John Send my compliments to the Jew.

No, haven't been to mass for months. Haven't prayed,
haven't...The spectacle, that's the things. That's the...Oscar
loves all that too but. And, no, I'm not Dorian Gray either. I do
understand. Believe me.

Shannon It is a splendid wine.

Ricketts He calls you Dorian.

John He calls you Basil.

Look, you introduce me to the man, hope we'll get on
famously, we do and you're upset.

Pause.

Ricketts Gives you quite a raw time in the book - Catholics? Says, what
is it? Priests don't age because they never think or...

Shannon Never sin, was it not?

Ricketts Don't think it was.

John He says beauty ends where intellectual expression begins, so all
intelligent men are hideous. Yes. But, well, because they don't
think in the church...priests, bishops...they all remain beautiful
forever.

Pause.

Ricketts Hmmh. Maybe that's Dorian's secret? No magic picture, he was merely a priest- and his sins, merely sermons. The book does lend itself to interpretation.

John As with all great art.

Ricketts And all great friendships.

Beat.

John Ricketts, I...

Shannon He's simply protective, John. Hate to see you get hurt. Now, about this poem, we'll need it... [by the end of the week.] *

John Wait. What is this?

Shannon No, nothing, nothing...

John Why would I get hurt?

Shannon No of course.

John Well where's the harm? Why the concern?

Ricketts We know Oscar.
And what becomes of the boys he leaves behind.

Shannon Oh Charles...

John Well thank God I shan't be left behind. I am not a feather for his hat.

* Words inside [square brackets] are interrupted by the next speaker.

Ricketts By Jove. He's a married man.

Shannon Charles, please.

John And there we are.

Shannon Oh sweet boy, we meant no harm.

John You mean to belittle our relationship. Because we don't live together, paint together, eat, breathe, insult together, because we're not married ourselves.

Shannon Come John, we're not belittling you. And we're hardly married, don't be obscene.

John You've marriage's manners. And it's meanness.
He doesn't love her like me. He said. He...

Pause.

I tell you, I could marry if I so wished. I...Maybe I shall.

Shannon Dear boy...

John There's a poet. A girl poet. Olive. Olive Custance. She's...she's besotted- and not untalented- and she's- if I asked her, she'd...We'd be married quicker than...than Oscar could pen his next masterpiece. Marriage? Marriage is a...Is a...
I'll send a poem tomorrow, yes? On the topic of- oh- supporters and doubters and...and...

Shannon John.

Ricketts

Don't be erratic.

I am merely saying, be careful. Oscar has many friends.

John

Yes. And I appreciate your concern. He does have many friends, that's true enough. But only one is called Gray, yes?

Only one has a book with his name on...on...Only one, only one...is...

I'll... tomorrow. The poem. And thank you for the wine. And oh...

He gestures towards the canvas on which

Ricketts tested his paints.

That...'Brushstrokes'. It truly is...a...marvellous painting.

He nods and turns to leave.

Lights.

Act One, Scene Two

The Vale, West London. The house of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon.

Ricketts and Andre are present. Andre is French but fluent in English.

Ricketts And I said, quite sternly, ‘If you use too much colour, no one will look at the actors.’ But, naturally, the floor couldn’t be black because Miss Bernhardt’s hair was blue. And no, there is nothing whatever about that in the script. It was what she wanted, what she got. In the end, I gave up. Got my money, Oscar: his moon, and Sarah: her blue hair.

I suspect London said no to Salomé, not, in fact, from a moral point of view, but because they simply couldn’t be bothered with all the fuss.

Shannon enters with the wine.

Shannon Wonderful of you to come.

And I’m sure Oscar will behave.

Shannon hands them both wine.

Andre Last time I am hosting an evening. Mr Wilde: he arrives with five other guests and he says to my housekeeper: ‘May we have a table for six?’

If you are asking me, this John Gray: he is lucky. The new one. Bosie? It is for him we should be concerned.

Shannon John’s ever so sweet, bless him. Taken it quite to heart. He was cute enough to believe Oscar’s interest would survive the

- Shannon (cont.)** winter but then along comes this new boy and Oscar does as Oscar does.
- Ricketts** Believe me. Once you meet Bosie, you'll be concerned for Oscar.
Never stops talking. Tells you he's Scottish, though he couldn't point to it on a map. Detests his father, adores his patronage. But he's beautiful, naturally, which is all Oscar needs.
- Shannon** Still funding John's book, is he? Oscar?
- Ricketts** Last I heard.
- Andre** Poetry?
- Shannon** Mmm. He's quite the talent.
- Andre** I think this John Gray: he may not be too pleased to see me. We met at the Rhymer's Club and he acts as though I am not there.
- Shannon** Ah yes. You were quite mean about one of his poems?
- Andre** Mean? I am honest.
- Shannon smiles.*
- He is coming alone? Mr. Gray?
- Shannon** Sorry? Uh, John's coming with Edward Shelley and Lord Alfred- 'Bosie'- with Oscar.
- Andre** Shelley?

Ricketts Another Oscar cast-off. Works as a clerk for Mr. Lane, the publisher. He and John have clung together. The spirit of mutual rejection.

Shannon He's a charming boy.

Ricketts Everyone's charming.

Shannon It's because of his background.

Ricketts It's because he's a bore.

Shannon Don't be mean.

Ricketts Mean? I'm being honest.

Shannon is unimpressed.

What? It was funny when he said it.

And John has a background too, so that's hardly the reason.

(to Andre)

Father was a carpenter. From Bethnal Green. But John speaks like a gentleman. Tries to. Acts like one too. Shelley, on the other hand. While he does have the name of a gentleman writer...

Shannon He is neither of the two, and nor is anyone who sets foot in this house. They are guests, all.

John and Edward enter.

Ah, John. Wonderful to see you. How are we? How are we?

And Mr. Shelley, always a treat.

John Very well. Thank you.

Edward It's a lovely house you got here. Lovely.

Shannon (to Ricketts)

Hear that, Charles?

(to John and Edward)

And now, you both know Mr. Raffalovich?

Edward What, the ugly French Jew who don't understand poetry? Never met him. Thank you God.

Pause.

What?

Andre I find beauty to be a most subjective idea. Much like a knowledge of poetry. Being a Jew? This: it is much more certain, though, perhaps, not so beautiful. But, perhaps, this depends on one's knowledge of poetry.

He offers his hand to Edward.

Marc Andre Raffalovich. A pleasure.

Edward goes to speak.

No, no. How does Mr. Wilde say? The only thing worse than being spoken about...

Is being called an ugly French Jew when you are in the room.

(to John)

And Mr. Gray. I must apologise for speaking, as I have, about you and your poetry. As this man says, perhaps I have no

Andre (cont.) knowledge on the subject. But we shall find this out later tonight, no?

Edward Uh...I...I am sorry. I didn't...

Andre No, no. Tonight, leave your apologies with your coats. And perhaps we shall create many more incidents for which we must apologise.

Shannon Hear, hear.
Now comes boys, he's only a Frenchman. Won't bite unless you're a snail. Come, come.

Edward and John move from the entrance.

Wine?

Edward nods.

John Please.

Ricketts (to John)
Poems for 'Silverpoints' all finished?

John They are. And your cover, I can't thank you enough.

Ricketts When publication?

John You can ask him when he arrives. He is coming?

Andre Mr. Wilde: he is publishing your book?

Shannon hands glasses of wine to John and Edward.

Shannon notices that Edward has a rather expensive-looking pocket-watch clipped to the outside of his jacket pocket.

Shannon Oooh Eddy, dear. That is a delightful watch.

John (to Andre)

Funding the publication.

Edward (to Shannon)

Uh...yes. Thank you.

Andre (to John)

This is most kind.

John He's a good judge of poetry.

Andre I look forward to writing a review.

John Yes, well, don't feel obliged.

Shannon points to the watch.

Shannon Charming, isn't it Charles?

Ricketts nods in agreement.

(to Edward)

And you've been writing yourself, Eddy? Have you not? About the majesty of clockwork, I presume?

Edward I've done my best. Nothing like John, though. His poems really are...[wonderful].

John Yes. Thank you.

Andre (to John)

Tonight, perhaps, is for you to prove him right. And I do love
so much to be proved wrong.

Mr. Wilde: he will have poems for us too?

*Edward puts the watch inside his pocket, out of
view.*

Ricketts So we've been told.

Andre And this Bosie also?

John Lord Alfred is coming then?

Andre His poetry...It is good, or...?

Ricketts Never read any.

Shannon Nor I.

Edward I have.

Andre What is your review?

Edward Not as good as John's.

Ricketts Edits the 'Spirit Lamp' at Oxford.

Shannon And should he write as well as he speaks...

Ricketts If a touch more sparingly.

Shannon Oh Charles, be civil.

Ricketts Often wonder how he and Oscar ever communicate.

Andre Perhaps without any words at all.

Shannon Oh Raffy, you are terrible.

Ricketts Should each enjoy our fill of conversation now, at any rate.
Listening may be the fashion once they arrive.
Awfully quiet, John?
John looks up, puzzled.

Shannon Deep in thought. Uh. A true poet indeed.

Edward Deep in prayer, right John?

Shannon What's that dear?

Edward Just come from the church, haven't we.

Shannon Oh, I see.

Andre (to John)
You are a religious man?

Ricketts You did say you were going again. I thought Sundays?

Edward And Tuesdays. Often another day too, don't we? But he goes more than me.

John Yes. Thank you, Edward. I...It helps me. I...Being close to God is...
(to Andre)
Well, I'm sure you can understand.

Andre Ah. I practice almost not at all.

Shannon A Jew in the market, not the synagogue.

Andre But of course.

John Well, I'm not deep in prayer, anyhow. If I'm quiet it's because I'm preparing. For Oscar and Alfred's arrival.

Ricketts smiles.

Andre How long has been their relationship?

Shannon Few months at least.

John Five.

Thereabouts. Shouldn't be long now until Oscar gets bored.

Alfred enters.

He is beautiful and impeccably dressed. Though he claims to be Scottish, he speaks with a distinctly English accent.

Alfred Charles. Charles.

Terribly sorry. Quite desperate with time. Count beats in a line, not minutes in an hour.

(to John)

Dorian Gray- how's the picture?

(to Edward)

And dear Shelley. Named for the beautiful poet with the hideous wife. How the devil are you?

Alfred (cont.)

(to Andre)

And...mmm...I do not believe we've had the pleasure and I'm as good with faces as I am bad with minutes, though I must waste a dreadful deal of minutes staring at faces.

Lord Alfred Douglas. 'Spirit Lamp' editor, proud Scot and defender of all things beautiful.

But please, call me Bosie.

Andre

Marc Andre Raffalovich. The pleasure: it is mine.

Alfred

There's a name. There is a name.

(to Shannon)

Love some wine Charles, if you would.

(to Andre)

Heard so much. So much indeed. Essayist. Philosopher. Poet. One of the minds of the century.

(to Shannon)

White, Charles. If you would. Cleans the teeth.

(to Andre)

Oscar is ever so fond. Though he says your reviews are quite the dirty dog.

Shannon hands Alfred a glass of wine.

(to Shannon)

So kind.

(to John)

You were a victim, Dorian, were you not? The reviewing wrath of Raffalovich?

Andre My reviews: they are written with integrity, and honestly also.

John He said my poem was derivative and unkempt.

Alfred Andre, you villain.

(to Edward)

How are you, Shelley, dear boy?

Edward Uhm...I...Uhm...

Alfred Splendid, splendid.

(to John)

You shall draw your sword tonight, old thing, and batter at
Andre's scathing shield.

Alfred has, by now, tasted the wine.

(to Shannon)

What is this Charles? It's Eden in a glass. Made from all its
forbidden fruits.

Shannon From Sicily, dear.

Alfred Might've guessed. One of the many things Italians do better
than the French.

Ricketts Oscar not coming?

Alfred He'd be loathe to miss out on Sicilian wine. Though he is rather
distressed at present.

(to Edward)

How do you find it, old thing? The wine?

Edward Yes. Uh...

Alfred Precisely, precisely...

Ricketts Distressed? Why?

Andre You do not appreciate French wine?

Alfred (to Andre)

Oh, of course. I quite forgot you were a Frenchman.

(to Ricketts)

Some unwholesome business.

Andre Does my country alter the nature of its grapes?

Alfred Oh I'd say it makes them at least ten percent sweeter. Only wish you were Scottish- we could dearly do with your help.

Edward I like French wine.

Alfred And there you are. What greater praise could you ever desire?

(to Ricketts)

Yes, Oscar's being blackmailed.

And, I know, what respectable gentleman isn't these days?

Only this time it's someone he knows well- won't tell me who.

A sweet boy, or so he thought. Still mustn't let it get in the way of some good wine.

So then, are we to begin with the poems?

(to John)

Dorian, will you dazzle us with a song from Silverprints?

Shannon Should we not wait for Oscar?

Ricketts Be waiting a while.

Alfred Why, Oscar should join us at the peak of revelry. We each have poems to feed us till morning, after all.

(to Edward)

Even you, Shelley? Is the soil on Percy's grave not bubbling at the thought of a new voice stealing his name?

Edward I don't know. I've never seen his grave.

Alfred Oh. I see.

Shannon Poor Oscar being blackmailed and you've no idea who?

Alfred Oh some meek idle boy, no doubt. Nothing too harmful. Wants gifts, not money. Oscar obliges out of pity more than fear. Bought him a watch last I heard.

And all for the privilege of not telling- what?- that Oscar pulled his pego a few times in the best room at the Albemarle?

Shannon Oh Bosie.

Alfred But such are the laws in this wonderful country. Why stop murderers when you can stop buggers? Because they're all so utterly terrifying, aren't they?

Alfred roars, like a lion, at Edward, who recoils in shock. Alfred laughs wickedly.

Such fun.

Alfred (cont.)

(to John)

Dorian. Begin, if you will. I am terribly excited. Only I must hear you before the second glass or my ears may've turned entirely to blancmange.

John

Are we beginning?

Alfred

Sing on, sing on.

Shannon

If you're ready Dorian. Uh, John.

Edward

His poems are wonderful, Bosie. They are.

Alfred

(to Andre)

Suspect you may be forced to recant, Raffalovich. I smell cadence in the air.

(to Shannon)

Though that may be your perfume.

Shannon

Ooh, I think it is.

Ricketts

John. Are you ready?

John

I am.

Alfred

(to Andre)

I shall look for the glint of recantation in your eye. The crumbling of the critic's cornea.

Andre

This, I assure you: it shall be accompanied by a smile.

Alfred

Or five. And each of them English. British.

Ricketts John.

*Silence as **John**, feeling nervous, searches
through some papers.*

John Uhm. Something from 'Silverpoints'. Chosen for brevity more
than quality but...uh...

Pause.

'Complaint'

He clears his throat.

'Men, women, call thee so or so;

I do not know.

Thou hast no name

For me, but in my heart a flame

Burns tireless neath a silver vine

And round entwine

Its purple girth

All things of fragrance and of worth

Thou shalt! Thou burst of light! Thou throb

Of pain! Thou sob!

Thou like a bar

Of some sonata, heard from far

Through blue-hue'd veils! When in these wise,

To my soul's eyes,

Thy shape appears,

John (cont.) My aching hands are full of tears.'

Pause.

Shannon Marvellous. Marvellous. I cannot wait for the book.

Ricketts Well done, John. And well read.

Alfred Exquisite. Bravo.

Edward I did say.

John Most kind. All of you. I...

Alfred Andre. Your review please.

John We said we'd keep them to ourselves.

Alfred Gah. With the dragon slain, we are safe to inspect his corpse.

(to Andre)

Your review, please.

Shannon Anyone for more wine?

Alfred If you insist.

Edward That'd be lovely.

Ricketts Thank you, Charles.

John Still have some.

Shannon Andre?

Alfred His lips are quite stunned, I fear.

Ricketts It's not a contest. Andre can keep his judgements to himself.

John (to Andre)

Please do. I'd like my book to sell at least a few copies.

Edward You'll sell thousands, John.

Alfred Why, all poets should have a Shelley.

But no, I'm afraid this shan't do. If Andre hates the poem so,

I'd be fascinated, though appalled, to find out why.

Ricketts It is not a contest.

*Shannon fills the wine glasses. They each thank
him as he does so.*

*He stops at **Andre**'s glass.*

Andre Please.

*Shannon pours some wine into **Andre**'s glass.*

Alfred He speaks.

John I don't need to hear his thoughts, Alfred. But thank you.

Ricketts Another poem?

Alfred Not finished with the last.

All had our say. All except one.

John Well, I'm quite content.

Ricketts So we'll move on.

Shannon Oh come, Andre, what's wrong with the poem.

Ricketts He has not once said...[there's anything wrong...]

Alfred It's in every fibre of his being. He hates it unreasonably.
Unthinkably. And has not the charm to say why.
Dorian. I'm terribly sorry and, as you well know, disagree
entirely.

Pause.

Andre When I hear a poem. Or read one...

Alfred (to John)

If you cover your ears, we'll quite understand.

Andre Particularly one which strikes me with wonderment, perhaps, or
beauty. I like to give myself a moment. More. To collect my
thoughts. To understand what I have heard. Often silence is the
best but, in this case of course, it is not possible.
Your poem: it is called 'Complaint' and the only one I can
make is I have heard it but once. And have no copy to keep.
This 'sonata, heard from far.' I hear your words singing to me
now. Their memory is a distant village choir.
So I am sad. And more silent still. Because your hands: they are
full of tears.
Mr. Gray, it is a poem to behold. As for 'Silverpoints': if a
whole book can sing like this, life is more musical than I ever
knew.

Beat.

John I...Thank you, Andre. That's...that's...entirely untrue, I'm sure,
but, no, it's...Very kind of you to say.

Andre It is as true as your skill.

Ricketts And there we are. The value of silence. A lesson for us all.

Shannon Oh Charles. But we all agree. A triumph of a poem and the
challenge has been set.

Edward I always said he was a great poet.

Alfred And your opinion is all any poet ever needs.

(to Andre)

Now Andre, an esteemed critic, there is no doubt. But how's
your poetry? I promise I'll delay my response long enough for
you to assume I despise it.

Andre You do not wish, perhaps, to go next?

Alfred Far too terrified of your silence. Suspect I'll need the third
glass. Unless you insist?

Andre If you wish, I shall go now.

Alfred Can barely contain my excitement.

Shannon Oh this will be quite the treat.

Ricketts (to Andre)

Ready?

Andre To follow John Gray, perhaps, will be a challenge beyond my capabilities but, nevertheless, I will try.

Edward (to John, quietly)

He won't be as good as you.

Andre Thank you, everyone, for listening to my poetry. I hope you will like. This one, I call it: 'To A Man.'

Shannon Ooh.

Ricketts glares at him.

Oh be civil, Charles.

Pause.

Andre 'Call me wilful, call me vain,
Say my pride is false disdain,
Woman's words as drops of rain,
Woman's ways as things that vex,
Cross my wishes, curse my sex,
Call me silly, call me proud,
Love me through a misty shroud,
Lovers seem to hate what's clear,
Truth to lovers bringing fear.
Senseless often men appear;
Only love me; love me, dear!

I am but as thy love does make me,
And as I am so take me,

Andre (cont.) If silly vain or wilful,
This does but prove thy love unskilful.’

Shannon Ah ha. Ah ha. Magnifique. Magnifique.
Andre, dear, you are quite the treat.

Alfred ‘To A Man.’ You could sing that to me any day you wish.

Edward (to Andre)
So, you do know about poetry after all then?
(to John, quietly)
Still not as good as yours, though.

Ricketts (to Andre)
You never cease to enchant us.

Andre Thank you. All.
Mr. Gray: perhaps you are wishing to give your thoughts the
time they need also?

John No. I thought it was utterly abysmal.
Shannon gasps.
Alfred smiles.
Unruly. Unclear. Un...un...
No, I can’t do it. I wished to torture you as...as...
No, it was beautiful and now your praise for mine seems even
more unbelievable. But, well, also more kind.

Andre Ah. Very good, Mr. Gray.

Shannon John, you rascal.

Alfred Yes. Good one.

Andre (to Alfred)

You were perhaps hoping he would defile me?

Alfred But how could he, old thing? Oscar was quite right about your talents.

(to John)

As he was yours. He'd be mad not to fund 'Silverprints'.

John I don't know what 'Silverprints' is. But he is funding 'Silverpoints'.

Ricketts (to Alfred)

He is still funding it?

Alfred You heard it from Dorian.

Ricketts What have you heard from Oscar?

Alfred Not a word.

Ricketts To either end?

Shannon Come Charles, if Oscar's said he'll fund John's book...

Ricketts Because he's so renowned for keeping his word?

Alfred I beg your pardon?

Shannon (to Alfred)

He was hoping to see Oscar tonight, dear.

- Alfred** Can a civilised gentleman not be late?
- Shannon** No, of course, of course.
(to Ricketts)
I mean, really Charles, can a civilised gentleman not be late?
- Ricketts** Can only hope he's not late funding 'Silverpoints'.
- Alfred** Only if this evening should descend into slander, I shall retire early and you'll hear none of my poems.
- Shannon** No, Bosie, we'd be dreadfully upset.
- Ricketts** (to Alfred)
I do not wish to offend you.
- Alfred** Only Oscar? And me as a result? Why, it's worse for me.
- Andre** We should, perhaps, return to the poetry?
- Alfred** A splendid idea.
I came here for wine and song. No more.
- Ricketts** I am concerned for John's book. That's all. It's weeks since I designed the cover and still no word.
- John** Don't be concerned.
- Alfred** There you are.
- Ricketts** I thought you may've heard differently.
- Alfred** I have not.

- Andre** I, perhaps, can make a promise?
If Mr. Wilde cannot fund, for some reason, ‘Silverpoints’, I shall do this myself.
- Shannon** Marvellous. Now that’s settled.
- Alfred** The barbarian turned benefactor?
Dorian, on your honour.
- John** (to Alfred)
My name is John.
(to Andre)
And that’s most kind. But unnecessary. Oscar has given his word.
Pause.
- Edward** I’d fund it if I could.
- Alfred** And it’d be a publication to behold.
Only Oscar will fund the book. Rest assured.
- Ricketts** And a worthy replacement if not, now let’s hear your poem.
- Alfred** No replacement necessary. Oscar has given his word.
- Ricketts** Then it’s an option.
- Alfred** In case John decides...
- Ricketts** In case John prefers...
- Alfred** And what sane man would prefer Andre to Oscar Wilde?

Ricketts Hold your tongue.

Beat.

Shannon Anyone for more wine?

Alfred My tongue has never been held in all its life. It shan't begin now. Shall we hear my poem?

(to Andre)

Please don't take offence. He is Oscar Wilde.

(to Shannon)

I'd love a glass but after my song.

(to John)

Leave your book with me. He'll oblige. Rest assured.

Andre How could I possibly?

Shannon Marvellous.

Alfred (to Edward)

And do listen attentively, Shelley. It's for your approval I most long.

(to Ricketts)

Shall I begin?

Ricketts Please.

Alfred suddenly seems slightly nervous.

Alfred I call it 'Two Loves'.

Pause.

Alfred (cont.)

'I dreamed I stood upon a little hill,
And at my feet there lay a ground, that seemed
Like a waste garden, flowering at its will
With buds and blossoms. There were pools that dreamed
And lo! within the garden of my dream
I saw two walking on a shining plain
Of golden light. The one did joyous seem
And fair and blooming, and a sweet refrain
Came from his lips; he sang of pretty maids
And joyous love of comely girl and boy,
His eyes were bright, and 'mid the dancing blades
Of golden grass his feet did trip for joy;

Pause.

'But he that was his comrade walked aside;
He was full sad and sweet, and his large eyes
Were strange with wondrous brightness, staring wide
With gazing; and he sighed with many sighs
That moved me, and his cheeks were wan and white
Like pallid lilies, and his lips were red
Like poppies, and his hands he clenched tight,
And yet again unclenched, and his head
Was wreathed with moon-flowers pale as lips of death.
A purple robe he wore, o'erwrought in gold
With the device of a great snake, whose breath
Was fiery flame: which when I did behold

Alfred (cont.) I fell a-weeping, and I cried, 'Sweet youth,
Tell me why, sad and sighing, thou dost rove
These pleasant realms? I pray thee speak me sooth
What is thy name?' He said, 'My name is Love.'

Pause.

“Then straight the first did turn himself to me
And cried, 'He lieth, for his name is Shame,
But I am Love, and I was wont to be
Alone in this fair garden, till he came
Unasked by night; I am true Love, I fill
The hearts of boy and girl with mutual flame.'

Pause.

“Then sighing, said the other, 'Have thy will,
I am the love that dare not speak its name.’”

Beat.

There is a long silence.

Edward Well I thought it was good any way.
Shall I go now?

*Edward takes his watch out of his pocket and
conceals it in his hand.*

Alfred Thank you, Shelley. Yes, of course.

Shannon Bosie, I must say, that was quite...

Edward ‘My Pet Fox’ by Edward Shelley.

*While **Edward** recites his poem, he has the watch in his hand, concealed from view, as a safety blanket to calm his nerves.*

Edward 'How bright the orange of your fur,
That sits upon your head and ears
Which points up to the earth's despair
And does its best to hide your tears.

How bright the orange of your fur.
That sits upon your back and tail,
It gives the sign you do not care
And we don't listen to your wail.

How bright the orange of your fur
That sits upon your little paws.
I wish as orange was my house.
I wish as orange was its doors.'

Pause.

That's the end. Should there be a bit more about my house?

Shannon No, no. Not more, not more. No. It was perfect. Perfect as it was.

Alfred Dear Shelley, it was mercifully short and triumphantly forgettable.

Edward Thank you.

John Well done Edward.

Edward

(to John)

I honestly don't think it's as good as yours.

Alfred

How humble this boy is.

Ricketts

As his poetry reflects. Pretty. Sweet. Harmless.

Alfred

Did you not hear how orange was the fox's fur? Quite orange if I'm not mistaken.

Edward

It certainly was.

Ricketts

And your poem was beautiful, Bosie. But not all will see it as such.

Alfred

Thankfully, it was not written for all.

Edward

(to Andre)

Are you giving yourself a moment? I understand.

*On 'a moment', **Edward** opens his hand and taps playfully on his watch.*

Alfred

(to Ricketts)

Poetry is for the elite. Always has been.

***Alfred** notices **Edward's** watch.*

Andre

(to Edward)

I will, perhaps, need years to appreciate it fully.

Alfred

(to Edward)

What's that, Shelley? In your hand?

Ricketts Another song? Who would like to read?

Alfred (to Edward)

Let me see.

Edward shows Alfred the watch.

Why, it's wonderful Shelley. Suits you. Makes you appear positively noble.

(to all)

Look, quite exquisite.

Ricketts John? Andre? Another song?

Alfred How much do you earn, Shelley? Publisher's Clerk. Mr. Lane awfully generous, is he?

Andre (to Ricketts)

I, perhaps, could read one more.

Alfred It is a very nice watch, Shelley.

Ricketts (to Andre)

Splendid.

Alfred We must all stop writing and start clerking, Shelley. Clerking appears to be the thing.

Ricketts Let's listen to Andre's poem.

Alfred No. Let's listen to the watch. Sssh. Silence.

Pause.

Ricketts Splendid. Andre...

Alfred Sssh. I can't hear. The clock of the Clerk.

Where did you get it, Shelley?

Ricketts Bosie, please.

Alfred I'm merely asking.

John What exactly are you asking? So he's got a watch? He's not a noble, a Lord- that's true enough. He's got a nice watch and it's his business.

Beat.

Shannon Anyone for more wine?

Alfred I suddenly feel none too merry.

Andre It was perhaps a gift?

Alfred From Oscar?

(to Edward)

Shelley?

Was it a gift from Oscar, Shelley?

What made him so generous, Shelley?

What would happen if he weren't, Shelley?

John That's enough.

Edward A gift. From Oscar. Yes, it was.

Alfred After you threatened to tell the authorities? How he made you scream? Made you tremble? Made you roar with pleasure?

John That's enough.

Alfred (to Edward)

He gives you gifts and you keep quiet. He lives in fear, paying a meek mouse to silence its squeak.

John Are you seriously accusing Edward of blackmailing?

Alfred Are you seriously accusing Oscar of buying a gift out of the goodness of his heart?

John You do know how he likes to treat his boys, yes?

Alfred The ones he likes. When did he last buy anything for you?

Ricketts Bosie, perhaps you should leave.

Shannon Oh Charles.

Alfred This is outrageous.

Shannon (to Alfred)

He doesn't mean it, dear.

Alfred I am outing a blackmailer. Confronting an evil. Standing up for what is good in the world and you ask me to leave.

John Confrontation is what you do, yes? The pair of you. Oscar's books, plays, your poem. If you're so happy with one another, be blasted happy. Why the challenges? The accusations? I've seen how he is to criticisms of his work or people who hint

- John (cont.)** at his...at his...He...
You just have to ignore it.
- Alfred** Did you not understand my poem?
- John** ‘The love that dare not speak its name’? Yes, I understood.
- Alfred** With the wish that one day it shall.
- John** That’s not a wish. It’s lunacy.
- Alfred** It will inspire. Oscar and I will...[inspire]
- John** You inspire nothing more than fear.
- Alfred** Or jealousy.
Gah. You’re hideously jealous of Oscar and me and I’m afraid that’s not something I can solve.
Only, jealousy is innocent.
(to Edward)
Blackmail is not.
- Shannon** Come now, Eddy couldn’t blackmail a priest into saying mass.
- Alfred** If someone is making a personal affront to either Oscar or myself- whether that person is Shelley, my dottery, interfering father or the Queen herself- then I will act against him. Her.
- John** And you’ll find yourself in great harm.
- Alfred** I’ll find myself with Oscar.
- John** In prison?

Alfred In Scotland. Looking down on you- married to some poor, docile thing whose prettiness makes you heave.

John Oh. Like Mrs. Wilde?

Alfred He's leaving her. He'll marry me.

John I...What world are you living in?

Alfred One marries for God or the government. If a man believes in neither, he can marry whomever he likes. And, of course, in Scotland, a Douglas man holds greater power than any deity or democracy.

Now, I do hope you'll attend the wedding.

John I won't attend the trial.

Alfred The criminals are the blackmailers.

John The criminals are decided by law.

Alfred The law's an abomination.

John But you can't change it and nor can Oscar.

Alfred Then we'll die trying. I would die a thousand deaths sooner than live your pious profanity of an existence. Shuffling to mass with all the others. 'Please God, make Oscar love me. I promise I won't do anything untoward and we'll use our rosary beads for only their intended purpose.'

God's not watching you, Dorian. Nobody is.

Beat.

Alfred (cont.) Now. Who's next? I could go again? Or Andre? Has one of our hosts a painting to exhibit?

Ricketts (to Alfred)
Your father? He's threatening you?

Alfred No, it's nothing.
Accusations and...He's an old, drunken crone. No one'll care what he says.
Hounding my brother too. Convinced he'd buggering the Foreign Secretary.

Shannon Oh come, why on earth would he think that?

Alfred Because he is but that's not the point.

Shannon Heavens.

Ricketts Lord Roseberry is...

Alfred Why else would he wear a Madrona in the House of Commons?

Shannon Ooh, with the satin lace?

Alfred No, no. All velvet. But silver buttons. Doesn't wear it right.

Shannon Oh no?

Alfred With a long coat.

Shannon A Regency?

Alfred nods.

That'd look fine.

Alfred You think?

Ricketts By Jove, will you both stop.

You are aware Roseberry's all but confirmed as the next Prime Minister? The moment Gladstone finally leaves us alone.

(to Alfred)

If your father is, as you say, hounding the future PM and a daft Irish playwright, it takes no great leap of the imagination to predict which case the authorities will be most keen to follow. If he needs a sodomite's head on a stick, it shan't be the one that rests at number ten.

Pause.

Alfred Thank you, Charles. For your concern. Only I assure you, my father is no more threatening than Shelley here. And no more devious.

Now, I believe I must go.

Andre Bosie. If I may, perhaps, speak.

Your poem: it is beautiful. And one day, that love- the second love- it will perhaps be as happy as the first. I believe. I hope. But, for now, you need no example greater than the one given by this evening's hosts. They live simply, wonderfully. A life as beautiful as your poetry. It is love- not conflict- that will one day speak. Leave this for people who do not know love. If you turn love into conflict, you may perhaps defeat these people- defeat

Andre (cont.) your father. But you will still lose.

Pause.

Alfred Andre. Meeting you has made the sustained attacks, to which I have this evening been subjected, worthwhile. I thank you for your eloquence.

Only, I cannot follow your advice.

We live in an age of unrivalled beastliness. In which the love between this evening's hosts. Between Oscar and I. Between, I suspect, Shelley and Dorian. And I sincerely wish, between you and another. In which this love provides the sole beacon of light. Hide it and the beastliness prevails. Celebrate and, yes, suffering may result. But noble suffering. Beautiful. Warm. Fertile. From which a garden of unblemished joy may bloom.

It is to the cultivation of that garden, I dedicate my life and, quite possibly, my happiness.

And if that is losing...

Pause.

(to Ricketts and Shannon)

Thank you, Charles. Charles. For this evening.

(to John)

John, I shall hassle Oscar over 'Silverpoints'. It would appear he's not coming.

(to Edward)

Shelley, wherever you got the watch is your business.

Alfred (cont.) (to Andre)

Andre. A pleasure.

Alfred smiles ruefully and exits.

Beat.

Shannon (to Ricketts)

I hope you're satisfied.

Ricketts Oh for Christ's sake, Charles.

Shannon The dear boy came to share a song and have some wine. Why the hostility?

Ricketts He is hostile.

Shannon And that's his way. It's not yours. And it wasn't nice.

(to the others)

I'm sorry. Mustn't quibble. I feel, however, I must retire. But, please, stay. Finish the wine.

Ricketts If you're retiring, I am too.

Shannon Be civil, Charles. Stay with the guests.

Ricketts And have your condemnation haunt me from the bedroom?

Shannon Condemnation?

Ricketts has, by now, moved close to Shannon.

They are speaking- at one side of the room- in hushed tones, attempting to have a private conversation, even though Andre, John and Edward can still hear them.

Ricketts Can't bear it, you know I can't.

Shannon I can't bear seeing you so mean.

Ricketts I wasn't being...No. Fine. Please. I'm...
It's just...I...hmmh.
I like it a great deal when you're mean.

Shannon When am I ever...?

Oh. Do you?

Ricketts I love it when you're mean. That could be my punishment?

Shannon You do deserve punishing.

Ricketts I do.

Shannon You were very mean.

Ricketts I was so mean.

Shannon Someone should be mean to you.

Ricketts How else will I learn?

Shannon Mmm.

Ricketts Mmm.

They both turn to the others.

Carry on. We need to discuss Lord Roseberry's political manoeuvrings upstairs. I...uhm...hmmh.

Ricketts and Shannon run giddily out of the room.

Beat.

John Andre. I must apologise. For my frostiness to you...[at the start of the evening]

Edward Should we go too, John? You horrible, mean man?

John looks confused.

You were mean. To Bosie. So should we go?

Pause.

Let's go. You were mean. I'll be mean to you. Let's discuss Lord Rosemary too.

John Edward. I think I'll stay. Buy you go. You go. And I'll see you later.

Edward Later tonight?

John Or...well, mmm.

Edward 'cause you should be punished. For being...[mean]

John Thank you, Edward. For that. I...

Edward I want to punish you.

John Yes. I...I know.

Pause.

Edward So, I'm going then?

John Such a shame.

Edward I could stay?

John No, no.

Andre Mr. Shelley. It has been a pleasure to meet both you and your fox. Were you to return home now, you may perhaps catch a glimpse of him and his orange fur.

Edward Oh but...No. Yeah, maybe I will.

Bye John.

John Goodbye.

Edward nods and exits.

Silence.

Andre. I must apologise...

Andre For saying I am an ugly French Jew who does not understand poetry?

John Well, that was Shelley?

Andre And did he not, perhaps, hear this from an angry English poet who did not like my review?

John smiles.

Mr. Gray. I must apologise also. For my misappreciation of

- Andre (cont.)** England's finest poet. 'Silverpoints', whether paid for by Mr. Wilde or by me: it will be the book of the century.
- John** Well, not so hasty. Shelley's working on a collection himself.
- Andre** Ah. It is called, perhaps, Silverfox?
- John** For shame. No. That fox is exclusively orange. But there's orange birds and orange beasts and, well, who knows what that beautiful mind can conjure? But it will transform poetry in its entirety.
- Andre** Turn it entirely orange?
- John** A colour that's woefully underappreciated, don't you agree?
- Andre** The colour that dare not speak its name?
- John** The colour that dare not speak its name. Yes.
- They both laugh absent-mindedly.*
- Andre** Now, Mr. Gray, there is a serious matter we must address.
- John** Oh?
- Andre** Quite serious, Mr. Gray, quite serious indeed.
- John** Well, out with it.
- Andre** Our dear hosts. In their haste to...to...
- John** Discuss politics?

Andre But of course. In their haste to ‘discuss politics’, they have left us in the care of a substantial amount of Sicilian wine.

John Well, so they have.

Andre Now, I believe it would perhaps be impertinent of us...

John If we did not finish the lot? Yes, I quite agree.

Andre If they were to come down and find the wine undrunk...

John Why, they’d have us flogged in the streets and quite right too.

Andre We must do our duty.

John For Queen and country.

Andre My country: it has no Queen.

John You may borrow mine.

Andre No, no. She is a prune.

John For shame. You treacherous French...traitor.

Andre You loyal English knave.

John You blasted French...uhm...uh...

Andre While we are talking, Mr. Gray, we are not drinking.

John That’s true.

Andre And, while alcohol may not be good for one's health, it remains a well-established fact: the only thing worse than drinking wine...

John Is not drinking wine?

Andre I was about to say: is being called 'an ugly French Jew.' But, no, no: this also.

Andre begins pouring the wine and he and John smile at each other.

Lights.

Act One, Scene Three

John's house. Evening. John and Andre are alone. They are prancing around extravagantly. Andre has a cushion stuffed up his shirt.

Andre Give a man a mask and he will tell you the truth. Unless this mask is touching the skin, as his face: it will get very itchy and he will tell you nothing at all.

John Uh. Gah! Uh. Your words, your words. Like tulips and junipers, blooming through winter snow.

Andre And it is your sweet, warming ears to which, like the sun, they bloom. Oh Bosie, when giving out beauty, Aphrodite: she must have spilt a generation's supply on your sweet head.

John And the burden is quite beastly, Oscar. All the other boys are so hideously jealous. And so jealously hideous.

Andre Fashioning their jealousy to match their faces?

John Oh gah! It's not their faces that interest me.

Andre Nothing like a jealous cock.

John Or seven.

Andre Is that before breakfast?

John Gah!

Andre I find that seven cocks in the morning perfectly sweeten the taste of my cherry jam.

John Oh gah! Gah! Os-gah! Os-gah! Os-gah, gah, gah!

Andre And they sober me for the madness of your kisses, which could not possibly be enjoyed on an empty stomach.

John looks sweetly into Andre's eyes.

Beat.

John You. You are just... You are the most... the... the... You are quite wonderful.

Andre Oh Bosie, your flower-lips produce such magical poison. Flies make it their supper knowing full well it'll be their last.

John unbuttons Andre's shirt and removes the cushion.

John I'm not Bosie.
And you're not Oscar, you skinny French impostor. You are Marc Andre Raffalovich. The most extraordinary man I have ever met.

Andre smiles broadly. He and John move towards each other. They are both trembling. They kiss.

Andre Shall we? Perhaps?

John Please God, yes.

Andre This time...

John Mmm...

Andre I promise. It will be...

John I know.

Andre Magnifique. Marvillieux. Incroyable.

John Yes.

Andre Invraisemblable.

John kisses him.

There is a knock at the door.

John looks towards the door but Andre kisses him. Andre wishes to ignore the knocking.

No, no. Ignore.

Andre kisses John again. There is another knock at the door. John is distracted by the knocking.

Ignore.

John moves away from Andre.

John I'll uh. Two minutes, yes? I... Wait in the bedroom. I'll get rid.

Andre But this: it is the time. This time. It will be...

John Two minutes.

Andre Pour l'amour de Dieu.

John Oh gah! Gah!

Andre exits.

The knocking continues.

John opens the door.

Edward enters.

Beat.

Edward Oh John.

Edward hugs John.

John Oh God.

Edward I needed to see you. I had to.

John Unfortunately, Edward. I...

Edward Nowhere else. Nowhere I could...Father hates me. Mr. Lane is a miserable...miserable...And Oscar. Oscar. The bastard. The...

Pause.

But you don't want me here either. Do you?

John What's wrong?

Edward Oh what's wrong? What's wrong with poor old Eddy? Like it crosses your mind. You don't reply to my letters, you won't talk to me. You...

But you're just like me, that's the thing. You do know that?

And they'll come for you too. They will. And no one'll care about you. Not even me.

John Edward. Who's coming for you?

Edward Yeah? How much? How much you got?

John What?

Edward Won't pay me a penny. Oscar. Won't talk to me. Bosie's seen to that and why don't I do the both of them, eh? The bastards- the rag bastards- and you too- the whole bleeding lot?

Andre enters.

Edward notices him.

Oh. Oh I see.

Andre Now. Perhaps, we stop this. These insults. This anger. And we sit and discuss like civilised men.

Edward Don't you talk to me, Jew.

Andre We sit and discuss what it is that so troubles you.

Edward Only the money. If I had your money. That's why he likes you.
How much you gonna pay me, Jew?

Andre You will sit freely? Or you need my assistance?

Edward (to John)

Oooh, does he speak like that to you?

Andre Sit. Down.

Edward sits down.

Andre (cont.)

(to John)

Perhaps you should speak. My English, with rage, it is not so good. Though still it is better than his.

John

Edward. What's happened?

Beat.

Edward

I...I come because I can't speak to no one else, right. I thought I could speak to you.

John

You can.

Edward

'cause we're the same.

John

So speak.

Edward

'cause however you might try to hide it...

John

We're alike. Yes. Now what's happened? You can trust me.

Edward looks at Andre.

You can trust him too.

Edward

Came to talk to me. Offered money. And all I have to do is say the truth. And what's so wrong with that?

Pause.

Bosie's father. He- he wants me to speak in court about Oscar.

Say the truth. Before God.

John

So it goes to court.

Edward

Oscar's choice. Mr. Douglas called him a sodomite and Oscar's taking him to court. But it's all true.

Andre So what is wrong? Speak the truth. Take your reward. Why are you here? You hoped, perhaps, that he would beg?

Edward (to John)
I wanted you to know.

Andre He knows.

Edward (to John)
You'd let me do it?

John What Bosie's father has alleged makes Oscar a criminal. Help prove he's correct, and Oscar will be tried. As a criminal. Is that what you want?

Edward Think they're better than us.
He gestures towards Andre.
Him. Oscar. But they're not.
We could run away. Leave Oscar to it. Me and you, we could...
You know how good it was, don't you? How good I made you feel.

John That's enough.

Edward How I made you hard as an anvil?

John Enough.

Pause.

Now, Edward. You must ask yourself- could you send a man to jail- for committing a crime you committed yourself- and

John (cont.) enjoyed committing?

Beat.

Remember our first meeting? The premiere of Lady Windermere's Fan. You wore a velveteen suit. Hair impeccable. Looked for all the world a gentleman. And you wouldn't stop smiling. Said it was the best evening of your life. Then the meals at Kettner's. The ballets. Oscar may've broken your heart. But not before warming it, yes?

Edward They all went to his premieres. They all dined at Kettner's.

John So he may deserve your contempt. But does he deserve jail?

Edward What do I deserve?

Andre A chance, perhaps, not to let anger- jealousy- be your ruler.

Edward I was talking to John.

Andre You talk to us both.

John Andre.

(to Edward)

Lying's not always...Well...I...

Rahab- yes? She lied to the King of Jericho to protect the Hebrew spies. And was Samuel not instructed- by God himself- to lie to Saul?

Pause.

Edward Father knows what I been up to- won't talk to me. Whole family. And the people I been up to it with- they- no one'll talk to Eddy.

John We're talking now.

Edward Not because you want to.

Beat.

John You're far more than Oscar's boy, you do realise. You're a worker- a dreamer- but you're...kind and thoughtful. You've come from nothing to be at theatre premieres and exclusive gentlemen's clubs. Bosie's father? There's a gentleman without any of your class.

Pause.

I want you to come here each week. Share some wine, some poems- yes? We'll talk about Oscar- how much weight he's gained, how he's exhausted London's fabric supplies single handedly. We'll read reviews of The Duchess of Padua and search in vain for a single encouraging sentence. We'll count the sales of Dorian Gray using only our fingers. We'll do it all, yes? Tarnish the good name of Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills...Paddy Seamus Maureen Bridget Mary O'Docherty...Wilde!

Edward Is that his full name?

John (attempted Irish accent)
Sure we'll give him all the names in Ireland, but he'll speak like an English King.

Andre (attempted Irish accent)
And eat like an English King.

John (attempted Irish accent)
And dress like an English Queen.

Edward And he's fat!

John That's right, yes.

Andre (to Edward)
A wit as sharp as cold soup.

Edward Thank you.

John So don't send Oscar to jail- who would we insult?
Have you seen his new play?

Edward The Importance of Being Bernard? No.

John We'll go next week. You bring the eggs. Me the rotten tomatoes- yes?

Edward Yeah. Alright.
So when they come back to me...

John You say nothing. No need to lie. No need to speak.

Edward Alright. So next week- a nice play and a nice soup.

John I can hardly wait.

Edward nods and exits.

John turns to Andre.

Beat.

Sorry. I...

Andre No, no.

Do you think he will? Speak against Oscar- to the courts?

John No.

Pause.

He may be a fool. A coward. A...But, no.

I tell you he...No. Certainly not. Not a chance.

What if he does?

Andre As you say, Mr. Wilde: he will be tried as a criminal. Lord Roseberry: he will have his sacrifice. And every poet, actor, playwright, every well-dressed man in London: he will flee. The women of Paris: they will begin to feel ever so underappreciated, no.

John What about us?

Andre Anyone connected to Mr. Wilde.

John Well, my name is only on one of his books. Dear God.

Andre My house in Berlin. If Oscar loses the trial, this is where we will go.

John Flee the country?

Andre Until the appetite for inverts has been fed. It is a wonderful city, one I would wish to show you anyway. Soon it will host the Great Industrial Exposition- a showcase of the world's greatest technology. We will take an 'oliday. We will rest. And when we return, everything: it will be as it was.

John Except Oscar?

Andre Perhaps he will not lose.

Beat.

John Damn you, Andre.

I truly thought this would all stop with Oscar. What I had with Shelley- I tell you, it was out of spite. Thought it would make him jealous.

That evening we read poetry at the Charleses'. I was to end it- all of it- and ask a young girl's hand in marriage.

Andre The poetess?

John Olive Custance. She's quite magnificent. Writes poetry a man would be proud of. I...But I couldn't. Every day for a month, I prayed that I would stop loving Oscar. And the answer was meeting you.

Pause.

Andre Prayer. God. This: it is important to you?

John I...Uh. It wasn't. I...
But, well, the world is mad, yes? Changes too quickly. Too...
God isn't. He...The bible. Mass. The Church. It's always the
same. There's a madness to it, yes, but it's...I...
Oscar says a priest's face never ages because he still preaches at
eighty what he was saying at eighteen. I suspect he's never seen
an old Priest but...
Nothing in my life is constant. Except, every morning I visit the
Church. And every time I turn to the bible, it gives me the same
advice. I...I'm sorry. I...

Andre And me also?
I am a constant in your life.
As regular as the Church bells, no?

Pause.

John And as cumbersome.

Andre Pardon?

John (French accent)

“Eh? Pardon? Pfff.”

Andre What is this?

John (French accent)

“What is this? Eh? Pfff?”

Andre This: it is supposed to be me?

John (French accent)

“This: it is...”

Pause.

Please.

Please be a constant.

Andre smiles and approaches John

provocatively. He kisses him and attempts to resume their previous intimacies. John appears reluctant to comply.

Beat.

Andre You do not want?

John I...No, I. Uh...

Andre Ah. I do not, perhaps, make you “hard as an anvil”?

John Oh.

Andre I do not have his roguish charm?

John Don’t be...

Andre His market stall manners?

John ...absurd. We’re all good at something, yes?

Andre What is it that makes him so good?

John He...I...

Look, he’s not as good as he thinks and I don’t care how good or... Bad with you- yes- is better than...than good with him.

Andre It is bad with me?

John No...

Andre Because I am not like him?

John Andre, please.

Andre I will wear clothes too big and speak words too small. I will rub my hands against a wall and not wash for two weeks.

John Look...

Andre This: it is what you like? Makes you hard as an anvil? Hot as a forge?

John I don't care about Shelley- I don't care about anyone else, I care about you and you'd know that if you'd...If you'd. What...
Andre...What do you want?

Andre I want only that you learn one thing.

Beat.

If you impersonate my accent, I will make you look more stupid than you sound.

Me also- I do not care about Shelley. I have had many boys who are better than you.

John smiles.

If you like, I can introduce you in Berlin.

John No, I'm fine.

Andre Fine? Yes- this describes you perfectly.

John You crafty French bastard.

Andre You cheap English Frenchman.

Beat.

John So- Berlin? That's where we'll go? If...

Andre If you wish.

John Well, as long as we're together, I...
Come what may...As long as the two of us remain- yes? In
whatever country...whatever place...whatever way we... As long
as we...As long as we are still...us. Yes?

Andre You have not seen the German boys.

John I'm sure I'll resist.

Andre I'm sure *you* shall.

Pause.

John Right, well, if we are destined for impending doom, then we
might as well act as any rational gentlemen would in such a
situation. And get well and truly stonkered.

Andre But of course.

John gets a bottle of wine.

John And while we drink, there's no Oscar. No Shelley. No court
case. No...None of it.. These walls, this wine and...nothing-
yes? Just us. While we drink...

Andre Just pour the wine, you dithering English derrière.

John Oh. You ruddy French rascal.

*Lights begin to fade down. So too does their
conversation.*

John You...you...nasty French...uh...

Andre Pour. The. Wine.

John You impatient French...uh...uh... no, hold on. I'll get there.

Andre grabs the wine.

The lights are almost out at this point.

Well that's simply mean...I...

Andre pours the wine.

You shouldn't...

Andre Sssh. The wine: it is speaking.

Pause.

John Oh. Yes. I...If only we understood its language.

Andre I do.

John looks at Andre sweetly.

It says you are a fool.

John Oh...

Lights.

Interval.

Act Two, Scene One

Berlin. Outside. Daytime.

John and Andre are in the basket of a hot air balloon, flying over Berlin and its

*Great Industrial Exposition. There is a German-speaking **Conductor** in the balloon*

with them. He is positioned behind them and faces away from the audience.

John Wait. What was that? Oh dear. Oh dear God...This is not.
Natural. This is not...Andre. Andre? Tell him to stop. Tell
him...We belong down there- on the- on the- we're not birds.
We're not blasted birds.

Conductor Feiger Englander.

Andre Und er ist ein mutiger.

John Having a pleasant chatter? How delightful. Can he speak
English?

Andre Kannst du Englisch sprechen?

Conductor Nein.

Andre This: it means 'no'.

John Well then he won't hear me calling you an evil French bastard.

Andre Er sagt "er ist ein bosser Französischer bastard."

Conductor Besser als ein feiger Englander.

Andre Wahr.

(to John)

John- Enjoy the sky. Enjoy the sights.

John It's difficult to enjoy anything whilst fearing for one's life.

Andre The height of modern technology lives beneath us. Look below.

This: this is the future.

John If we survive the flight, yes.

Andre (to Conductor)

Langsamer.

Conductor Feiger Englander.

John What was that?

Andre I told him: go faster than the wind.

Andre wraps his arms around John, from behind. Both are facing out towards the audience. John appears slightly uncomfortable.

Look- there. That pyramid: this is Cairo brought to Berlin. In miniature form.

John What? Oh. So it is.

Andre And there- East Africa. Cameroons. That's Togo.

Conductor Dass ist das alte Berlin. Die Stadt von 1650.

Andre

(to John)

This: It regulates the lake.

See this lake- centre of it all. This: it is entirely man-made.

Nature crafted by human hands. Berlin: perhaps the perfect
pallet for poetry.

John

I wouldn't know. After 'Silverpoints'...

Andre

The best money I ever spent.

John

What did The Standard say? "John Gray is a poet..."

Andre

"With a promising career behind him." I know. What I do not
know is why you listen to this. One must write poems for
oneself, no?

John

Myself no longer cares for my poetry.

Andre

The world: it suffers for this.

John

It survives- with it's man-made lakes and miniature Cairos.

Andre

Ah, but architects: if they could write poems, we'd have no
buildings at all. They are but poets lacking rhythm. John Gray:
he is an architect with a song in his heart, no?

John

I'm an architect who can't draw.

Andre

Your poetry: more impressive than a man-made sea.

John

You greasy French sycophant.

Andre

You slimy English coward.

John Coward?

Andre grabs the balloon's basket and shakes it.

Aaah! Stop. That's not...That's not fair. Stop. Stop it.

John tries to stop Andre but Andre grabs him and, playfully, pretends he is trying to throw him over the edge of the basket. John squeals in protest.

Andre finally relents and John, breathless, rushes to the other side of the basket.

Andre Now: write me a poem.

John That's not funny.

Andre No, no, that is precisely what it is.

(to Conductor)

War das lustig?

Conductor Ja.

Andre This: it means 'yes'.

John regains his breath, shakes his head and tries to suppress a smile. Andre smiles at him. It appears as though John is about to laugh but he does not. He looks, almost expressionless, at Andre. Then he looks away, with sadness in his eyes.

Beat.

John So, this whole lake? Built by men? That's...

Pause.

Andre I apologise. For pushing you. I should not have done this.

John No. Don't. I...Please, don't apologise.

John gestures for Andre to look over the edge of the balloon.

Do you notice? We're travelling this way but the trees, they're moving in the opposite direction...uh...Almost as though we're completely...uh...

Andre But of course. This: it is because of air currents. The pressure, the temperature: it is different up here to down there. And so the air: it moves in a different way.

John You are so dear to me, you do know that?

Pause.

This past year, you've been my literary funder, my wine advisor, my travelling companion, my...

But we...as we...as how we are now...Well, it can't...It can't go on. I...Not when we...I... We can't. It kills me but...

Andre goes to comfort John but John signals that he shouldn't.

Andre You anxious English aviator. We can be whatever we wish to be. We cannot be stopped by laws, by fear. We cannot. If we want it, we can have it.

Andre (cont.) When we return to London- you think we shall go to jail? This cannot happen to us. Oscar: he was foolish. People were hunting for him. No one is- no one will- for us.

John Won't cheer for us either.
We'll always be- won't we?- hiding away. Pretending- yes?
I never knew I was an outcast. Don't much wish to be one.
For all the nonsense of Shelley's testimony- how Oscar tricked, forced, seduced- it's not all untrue.
Before Oscar I'd never...I'd never once. The simple idea was...well, it was...
And then, just as I feel I'm about to stop- about to recover- I meet you. And you...

Andre Ah. Trick? Force? Seduce?

John Make it all seem clean.

Pause.

What do you want, Andre?

The two of us to own a house together? Sit around writing poetry by the fire? Insulting the latest disaster at The Britannia?

Pause.

The bible says on countless occasions that purpose...Purpose is the...that we must, each of us, have something that means something. That...

Andre The bible? Always with this?

John Well of course- yes.

Andre In difficult times, people...religion: they always turn to this.

John I'm religious at all times and this is far more than difficult.
I...we're flying in the air, enjoying all Berlin's wonders- yes?-
and all the while, Oscar rots in jail for committing the very
crime we commit ourselves.

This has been the most difficult time of my life and the only
reason I've survived is that one person has stood by my side
and that person is Jesus Christ.

Beat.

Conductor Jesus Christus?

John The moment I heard of Oscar's arrest, I wept unstopably.
Through the streets, wherever I turned. Found a church. Fell at
its feet and felt. Simply felt.
So if the Church says we can't go on...

Conductor Jesus Christus?

Andre (to Conductor)

Sie still.

John And if I say...

Conductor Jesus Christus ist wunderbar.

Andre Sie still.

Andre (cont.)

(to John)

So you will marry?

Perhaps, start a family?

This young poetess? Pepper?

John

Olive. Her name is...

And no. Certainly not. I...uh...

She's in Paris. Wrote me not too long ago- I...

That's not important.

Andre

Your proposal? She wrote to reject?

John

Andre.

Andre

Did not jump at your word?

John

Of course not.

Andre

But you asked? You did? You proposed to a woman?

John

Don't be absurd.

I'm not marrying. Nor is she.

She...Olive has fallen in love. But uh...Well...with another
member of...Of her own sex.

Pause.

It would seem they do that too.

Sent her a copy of Lord Alfred's poem- one he signed for me,
you know. Wanted to get rid of it above all. But, well, it might
help her. To understand the misery such love can bring.

Pause.

Andre But I thought this Olive: she loved John Gray. Her prince.
Would marry at his word?

John Well. Tells you how much I know about women, yes?

Pause.

I'd not propose to some poor girl with no intention of...
This is not about pretending to be something I'm not. Quite the
opposite.

Andre Pff. She should be fine. God: he does not visit Paris.

John Please don't belittle my faith. It's not. This is not some whim.

Andre It is important to you? I understand this. You can go to mass.
You have been each day in Berlin. And when we return also.
Go whenever you wish. Pray. Read the bible. Sing the hymns...

John Andre...

Andre Take communion. Confess your sins. Pass judgment on others.
You can do all of this. Of course. You can do whatever you
want.

John I want to go to Rome. I...If they'll have me. To study at the
Scots College... I...I want to serve God, not defy him. I want to
be a priest.

Beat.

Conductor Rom? Du wirst ein Priester sein?

Andre (to Conductor)

Ich sagte sei still. Es interessiert mich nich im geringsten was
du zu sagen liast. Es interessiert mich nicht.

Pause.

(to John)

The guilt, perhaps. Oscar in prison. Us here. I understand this.
You look for a solution but this: this is not it.

John I need my life to mean something. I shan't be an aging,
charmless version of Dorian Gray.

Pause.

Spoke to Father Kroos in town yesterday. Saw people look to
him with such hope and awe and his importance...I...This is
what I want I want to do. What I...

Pause.

I'm no poet. Though I've tried my life to be one.

Andre We must consider this a long time.

John I've considered.

Pause.

Andre It is a common marriage and one that perhaps may work for
you. If you need money for your study or...I shall of course
assist.

John Thank you. I shouldn't. I...
Marriage?

Andre Many: they have chosen this path. The discipline. Abstinence.
The worship of a perfect man. Perhaps I shall become a priest
also.

John I'm not following a path. Not some child. This is not a feather
for my hat. Please understand. What is it that so offends you
about the priesthood?

Pause.

Andre Pff. I do not think perhaps you should sacrifice everything we
have.

John And I won't. We shan't. We'll still be...
But we can't possibly continue the way we are and you know
that as well as I.

Andre But of course. Our wild, uncontrollable lust for one another
must cease? The fire that surges forth from the walls of hell
itself?

John Please...

Andre And- ah yes- your begging- constant begging for more?
No.
Most of the time, your pego: it does not even stir. But perhaps it
is me? I have killed any desire you once had. Perhaps if I were
more like that bastard Shelley- the traitor, the fool, the clown,
the master of buggery...

John Andre...

Andre Because we are, all of us, good at something?

John That is not what it's...I...It doesn't matter how good or not or-
it's still a crime, still a sin, and it must, will, shall stop.

Beat.

Andre You want that we stop with our crime? With our sin?

Please. Let us stop. Let us never again.

You need not touch my baubles to reach my heart.

When I dream, it is not your body, your lips, your round mouth.

It is us. In...London? Paris? Berlin? Pff- in a room. Any room.

There is wine. Or, no. We are old- we have lived- and you, with
sixty, seventy years, you are telling me what you will be. What
your purpose in life is- you have finally decided, worked it all
out.

And I think: I hope this man: he finds meaning in his life. Or, if
not, he has spent far too much time giving meaning to mine.

This is it. Take your body, your sins. This is all I want. For us
to be us- in whatever way we need to be- and I know this is
what you want too and- John- if we want it, we can have it.

Beat.

John I want to serve God.

I want you to support me but if you can't I...

Andre I will write letters of support each week.

John You'll still see me- why not? Because you're a bloody Jew?
You don't pray, don't practice, don't...

Andre I am no Jew.

John Then where's the problem?
Learn about the faith- yes? Read the bible. I...It might at least help you to understand.

Andre The religion which is taking you away: I should turn to this?

John You dramatic, French...

(French accent)

“Ehhh...The Church: it will perhaps make you hate all people with noses like mine- and perhaps if you throw holy water at me, perhaps, I may perhaps burst straight into flames, no?”

Pause.

Look. That man-made lake- why don't we get a boat- yes- and sail about it? Look at them there, darting around. It looks, it seems. I...

Andre This evening?

John Well I was to attend Father Kroos' evening mass...
Well, maybe after? By moonlight if they...

Andre We can see.

John And if you wanted, you could come to the mass?
Or not. No. I...I'm sorry.

Pause.

Andre There is wine, no? At the mass?

John Well, strictly, if you haven't taken communion and- but, no,
yes. Wine. Lots. Lots of wine.
Thank you for Berlin. And the balloon. You know, I can hardly
feel it moving anymore.

Beat.

Andre I will come to the mass. Drink the full supply of wine. And then
a boat- on a lake- on this lake made by man. But this: it will be
goodbye.

John Andre.

Andre This is what you wish? To be a priest? This is what you must
do. But you must do it alone.
I have been your literary funder. Wine advisor. What now is
there for me to be?

Pause.

*They are, by now, both looking over opposite
edges of the balloon.*

John I...What boat would you...uh...should we...I...? There seem to be
all different sorts.

Pause.

Andre Perhaps, a gondolier? I believe they have these.

John Oh- do they? Well, that's...Yes. Why not?

Andre Unless you prefer another?

John No, no. I...No. A gondolier is...is...
I imagine that's to uh...to represent...uh...Well, it's...

Andre Venice.

John Yes.
You know so much of the world, don't you? I...

Pause.

Stunning. Andre. Berlin is...It's stunning. I...

A whole lake. A whole lake made by...by...

Beat.

Conductor Kann ich sprechen?

Andre Ja.

Conductor Er wird ein Priester werden?

Andre Es scheint so.

Conductor Feiger Engländer. Er verdient es nicht ein Priester zu sein.

Andre Nein. Die Priesterschaft verdient ihn nicht.

John looks across at Andre. Andre looks away.

Lights.

Act Two, Scene Two

The Vale, West London. The house of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon.

Ricketts and John are seated. John has only recently arrived.

Ricketts Shannon'll be down any moment.

John Good. I shan't stay.

Ricketts How as Rome?

John Wonderful. Serene. The most inspiring time of my life. Well, you'd adore it, Ricketts. I saw 'La bohème' at the Teatro Constanzi.

Ricketts Still have time for art?

John Well, the church has inspired the greatest art of all.

Ricketts offers a bowl of nuts.

Ricketts Filbert?

John takes a nut.

John Most kind.

Ricketts So that's it then. The priesthood. Finished with everything else.

John Sorry? With poetry?

Ricketts Hmmh.

Pause.

John I tell you, the whole experience. The devotion. Prayer. My ordination. I. I've never felt so complete.

And hear this: half way through my study, I ran entirely out of money. I was at a loss.

Well, within two weeks of telling the college, my fees had been paid. They'd received a donation sufficient to cover the lot.

Well, I tell you, no further confirmation was required. It was quite clear- yes- divine forces were working to make me a priest. As though fate simply wouldn't have it any other way.

Drawing me to Rome. Holding me there. So I could become the man I was born to be.

Ricketts Hmmh. I daresay, what I've always admire about you, John, is your refusal to become the man you were born to be.

'La bohème'? Pucini, is it? A comedy?

Beat.

John I can't live that life, Ricketts. I shan't. Nor would I want to.

Ricketts How is Andre? Or has he too gone with the poetry?

John Be happy for me, please. Finally I have something that means something. That exists beyond itself.

Ricketts And I shall stay with my life and its meaningless?

Love is meaning, John. The only real thing we'll never fully understand and if my love is a sin, I shall teach sins like sermons.

John

Please. Blast. I...

You want me to...to...? I...

I know your love for Shannon. I...I doubt I've seen two people who's love is truer and love, well love...it's...That's not the problem.

The problem, Ricketts- and this feels me with sadness as much as dread. Regret too. I...

The problem is...despite your love, your commitment.

Kindness. Despite all that. It cannot stop the fact- it won't- that one day you will both burn in hell and that, above all, is what terrifies me and it must you too.

Silence.

It's actually terribly tragic. 'La bohème'. The...uh...But so beautiful. And uh...

Shannon enters.

Shannon

John Gray. How are you, how are you? A rainbow dagger through the dense clouds. I must say, Oscar's death has quite ravaged us, as I'm sure it has you.

John

Well I have been distracted.

Shannon

Ah yes, finding a new life, a new calling. I am in awe, I truly am.

Edinburgh, is it? Wonderful part of the world. There in '89, weren't we Charles.

He drew this magnificent painting, didn't you? Our view- over

Shannon (cont.) the whole city- from a park, I believe it was, at dusk. Oh it was wonderful.

Where is it, Charles? The painting? We do still have it?

Ricketts 'fraid not.

Pause.

Very popular at an exhibition.

Pause.

Shannon Oh I see.

(to John)

And how's the church? What's it called? Does it have a spire?

They're so pretty- the Edinburgh churches with their little spires.

John It's good to see you, Shannon.

I...It's newly built. Spire, yes. So I've been told.

It's in Morningside. The Scots College generally sends its students to Scotland- of course. Gets them as far away from Rome as...as...uh...St. Peter's it's name.

Shannon And it's near the castle?

John Not too far, no. You'll have to visit.

Shannon Oh try and stop us, try and stop.

When do you leave?

John Actually, I...uh...Tomorrow. I'm really just en route from Rome. Had to stop in to see you.

Shannon And we're so glad you did.

Ricketts Only us?

John Sorry?

Ricketts Others in London have been a part of your life.

John None more so than you.

Ricketts Hmmh.

Shannon And now we shall enrich your life once more with the most delectable array of cheese.

(to Ricketts)

 You didn't tell him about the cheese?

(to John)

 A selection. Three types. Maybe Four. Shepherd Market.

 They're divine.

John Sounds perfect. Though I can't stay.

Shannon Come we'll make it a party. The three of us and three types of cheese. Or is it four?

Shannon exits.

John Still as high-spirited as ever then?

Ricketts Hmmh. Always. What makes living with him such a pleasure.

John Ricketts, I am not telling you how to live your life.

Shannon enters with the cheese.

Shannon Here. Stilton. Cheddar. Dorset Blue. And a little greeny one.
You must try them all. Quite exquisite, aren't they Charles? Do this once a month- go to Shepherd Market and buy cheese. Always get a cheddar so we're safe. Sometimes the others are a bit...you know...

He eats some Stilton.

Mmmm. Uhhhhmmm. But not today, not today. Try, try.

John eats some cheese.

Well?

John Even Roman cheese would struggle to compete.

Shannon Ah, Rome. Do tell, do tell. We so wish to visit, don't we Charles? If only we sell a few more paintings.

John Words cannot do it justice.

Shannon Come, you're a poet.

Ricketts No, he's a priest.

Shannon Oh I'm sure he can be both.

Now, I've always admired the religious life. The dedication, you know. Always been impressed. And you're all at it now, aren't you? Catholics: you, Lionel, Robbie. And Andre of course. Must be some link between poetry and liturgy. Which

Shannon (cont.) cheese did you have there, Charles?

Beat.

Ricketts Uhm. Which one's this?

Shannon Ah yes. The greeny one. You know, I'm not certain.

Ricketts We'll ask them next time. At the market.

Pause.

Shannon Charles. Have I said something I oughtn't have?

John Andre? I said he may benefit from looking into...Uh. But, he didn't write. Or. He didn't. I'd no idea. None.

Shannon Come, why else would he fund your study?

Pause.

Charles, have I said something else I oughtn't have?

John It was...

Of course. Of course. Because I cannot possibly do anything without his patronage. Blast.

Shannon Come dear, charity's hardly vicious.

John I tell you, I'd have found support elsewhere. Didn't search once it arrived but I would, like with everything else, have been fine without him.

Shannon John. You'll always have your supporters- you will. Your poems or now your sermons. They'll like the parts you display and they'll like them for a season. But to find someone who

Shannon (cont.) simply supports you. My dear boy, you may only find one of those your entire life.

John And if one does not care for such a supporter?

Shannon Then one would have to be ever so slightly foolish. Now, all this cheese and no wine? That's more than slightly foolish.

Shannon exits.

John I came simply to say goodbye. Not to be hounded by men I consider dear.

Ricketts Charles loathes ill feeling. He's terribly fond of you and Andre.

John Well, there's no reason why he shouldn't be. I...

Andre enters.

Ricketts Andre.

Andre This is perhaps not the best time?

Ricketts Nonsense. No. What brings you here?

Andre The telegram. "Urgent: cheese in need of eating."

Shannon enters, with wine.

Shannon Oh. Well, well. Now, now. Andre Raffalovich. What a surprise, what a surprise this is. And that you should come when dear John Gray is here too? The wonders of fate and all her ways. You're just in time for wine.

John And you have four glasses?

Shannon So I do, so I do. As though winged destiny dropped one on my tray.

Oh come John, you could hardly have left for Scotland without seeing Andre now, could you? Could he, Charles?

Andre (to John)

Scotland?

John I've a parish in Edinburgh.

Andre We can perhaps toast your journey and success?

Shannon Indeed we can.

Ricketts Good to see you, Andre.

Shannon And to have us all together again. Such fun. So like happier times.

Shannon passes glasses of wine around.

To John's journey and life in Edinburgh.

Andre To Father Gray.

Shannon To Father Gray.

They all clink glasses.

Andre How was Rome?

John Expensive.

- Shannon** (to Andre)
Try some Dorset Blue. Shepherd Market.
Andre takes some cheese.
- Ricketts** Great deal of art. He saw 'la bohème'.
- John** But the faith above all.
- Andre** I am pleased to hear.
- John** And I was not alone? In have a religious experience?
- Andre** Eh? Oh. But of course. I was baptised in Paris.
- Shannon** And how do you find the cheese?
- Andre** Délicieux.
- Shannon** Here. Have some of this greeny one. Charles adores it, don't you Charles?
- John** (to Andre)
A road to Damascus episode? Saw the light and all that, yes?
- Shannon** (to Ricketts)
Have you had the Dorset Blue?
- Andre** (to John)
No, no.
- Ricketts** (to Shannon)
Delightful.
- Shannon** What's your favourite?

- Andre** I read the bible. Attended mass. At first, I simply wished to understand.
- Ricketts** Hmmh. Still the green for me.
- Shannon** Me too.
- Andre** Was perhaps a few weeks after Berlin.
- Shannon** Ah, Berlin. I've seen the pictures- the two of you in that balloon. Oh it melts me. One can feel summer in the silky shades of black and grey. You look so happy.
- John** We were fortunate with the weather.
- Ricketts** Shan't be in Edinburgh.
- Shannon** One hardly needs it in a city so stunning. Ever been, Andre?
- Andre** Edinburgh? No.
- Shannon** We must all visit. A pilgrimage to St. Peter's Church in Morningside.
- John** You must. All of you. Then I can settle the loan for my tuition.
- Beat.*
- I shan't be in another man's debt.
- Andre** But of course. You are not.
- Shannon** Must be all the cheese- can go straight to one's head.
- Andre** No more for this than 'Silverpoints' or Berlin.

- John** Then I shall repay you the lot.
- Ricketts** By Jove, John.
- Andre** There was no loan. There can be no repayment. ‘Silverpoints’: this was an investment. Berlin: it was necessary. And, if not your study, my money: it would fund another Priest.
The Church needs its servants.
- John** Then support another priest.
Once in Edinburgh, I tell you, I’ll draw up a plan and...and have the whole lot settled.
- Shannon** Now. Come let’s the discuss the Dorset Blue.
- Andre** I will instruct every bank in Edinburgh not to send me money.
- John** There are banks in Glasgow. Banks in Aberdeen.
- Shannon** There are banks in Dorset but what about its cheese?
- Andre** I do not want your money.
- John** And I do not want yours.
- Beat.*
- Andre** Why do you think I have supported you? Perhaps a long term seduction plan? A wish to defile your priestly robes with a cheque?
- John** Some Catholic.

- Andre** One day, perhaps after Easter Mass, you will de-robe? Lie naked on the altar, begging for your benefactor to claim his reward?
- For I could throw my money into a club not unlike where Oscar threw his. Feast with all the panthers my francs can afford. So do you know why I spend my money on you and what I hope to get from so doing in return?
- Nothing. Nul. Rien. I wish for nothing in return. I spend money on you for you alone.
- John** Well stop.
- Andre** But of course.
- Beat.*
- John** Shannon. Ricketts. I am terribly sorry. The cheese is exquisite. I only hope Edinburgh markets can compare. I...uh...I must now go and sort the final arrangements for my departure.
- Andre** And because I wish finally for you to be happy but it seems this day: it will never come.
- John** I'm happier than I have ever been. The Church gives me a contentment I fear for years was...
- I can only hope it gives you the same. Now, goodbye Andre.
- John heads towards the exit.*
- Andre** Shut your stupid English mouth and open your stupid English eyes. I have seen you happy. You could be a priest. A poet.

Andre (cont.) A carpenter. A blacksmith. A painter. A dancer at the royal ballet. When you are happy- John Gray- it is far more than any title or calling. I have seen you happy. But my money cannot make you. Nor can I. Nor the church.

Ricketts (to Shannon)
Was there not another cheese in the larder?

Shannon Should we have a look?

Ricketts I daresay we must.

Shannon Hate awfully for one to feel left out.

(to John and Andre)

Won't be a minute.

John, you mustn't leave until we return.

Shannon and Ricketts exit.

Beat.

John Was it purely for the communion wine or...?

Andre Pardon?

John (French accent)

“Eh? Pardon? Pfff.”

(normal voice)

Still can't do it, can I?

Well? You becoming a Catholic? Purely for the wine?

Pause.

Andre At first, a donation from a Jew: it may be a bit strange, no?
But, I must say, I like this way of life. It is constant.

John Mmm. It is. Yes.
Every day is...I...The masses. The wine. The hymns. The
purpose. The church bells. The God I've missed you.

He rushes to Andre and hugs him.

You scheming...French...scoundrel. You...How could you not
write me? Or tell me, see me?

Andre From where else could this money come?

John But why?

Andre You wanted this: to be a priest. So me also: I wanted this for
you.
If I offered you money, you may have said no. Or thoughts
perhaps I was not letting you go.

John Why did you let me go?
I wanted to be a priest. Not to lose you.
Catholic? I...
I thought- of course- I thought if it was Andre. If he did make
the donation, he'll be along soon. Turn up on the college steps
with a bottle of red.

Andre In Rome I am sure you did not think of me.

John I was miserable.

Pause.

John (cont.) Come to Edinburgh.
Help run the church. Help...

Andre Pfff.

John (French accent)
“Pfff. Eh? This: I do not know.”
 (normal voice)

Come to Edinburgh, you crazy French Catholic.

Andre The ability to forgive: you truly have mastered this.

John And, have you?

Andre I will visit.

John You’ll...I. No. Yes. Of course.
But regular visits, yes?

Andre Constant.

*Shannon and Ricketts, who have been listening
at the door, enter.*

Shannon Much like this household’s supply of wine.
And here is a particularly special wine for particularly special
guests. Charles and I make it ourselves, you see.

Andre And this fifth type of cheese?

Shannon Afraid Charles scoffed the lot.

Shannon begins offering the wine.

John?

John But then I really must go.

Shannon Once you've finished your glass, you are free to leave.
(to Ricketts)
As are you, Charles. You've far overstayed your welcome.
(to all)
Invited him in for afternoon tea fifteen years ago and he still
hasn't left.

Ricketts Still waiting for the tea.

Shannon Ah yes. One of these days.
(to John)
How's the wine?

John Uh...It's...

Shannon You don't like it?

John No. I do. I...I...It's wonderful. You can taste the uh...the uh...

Andre Grapes?

John Yes. Certainly.

Shannon And it gets better each time, doesn't it Charles?

Ricketts Wouldn't know. You give it away to all the guests.

John Still as busy as ever here then?

Ricketts Door's always open.

Shannon Slightly less jovial than it was.

- Andre** Still perhaps the most welcoming house in London.
- Shannon** One only comes for the wine.
- Andre** No, no. We come for the cheese also.
- Ricketts** (to Andre)
One comes to yours for the Greek sculptures.
- Shannon** Mmmm.
- Andre** But they have all been replaced by idols of the Saints.
- Shannon** You wouldn't dare?
- Andre** Perhaps not all of them.
- Ricketts** They'd always be welcome here.
- Andre** I do not think the Greeks: they ate so much cheese.
- Shannon and Ricketts agree.*
- John** And still the same crowd- yes?
- Shannon** What's that, dear?
- Ricketts** The ones who remain.
- John** In London?
- Ricketts** In our lives. Shan't see Edward Shelley popping in for a ginger beer.

Shannon Poor boy.

Ricketts glares at Shannon.

Oh come.

John And Lord Alfred? Dear Bosie?

Or is he holding a permanent vigil by Oscar's grave.

Ricketts Hmmh.

Shannon Shouldn't think his fiancé would be too happy if he were.

John laughs absent-mindedly. Ricketts,

Shannon and Andre exchange a knowing look.

John Oh go on. You're not serious?

He looks at Andre who indicates that it is true.

Ricketts Engages last month.

Shannon So we've been told. Not seen him ourselves. He's long since left London.

John Any idea who she is?

Shannon None. Poor girl.

Andre She is perhaps rich? Old? A funder for his extravagance?

Ricketts My thoughts entirely.

John Lady Alfred Douglas? And, well, it's not a mirror wearing a wig?

Shannon Oh come, don't be so mean.
Age does many things to a man.

Ricketts Hmmh.

Beat.

John Well, now this actually is goodbye.

Shannon Come, now. We'll soon reunite at your church.

John And Ricketts. What I said earlier. I...

Ricketts We'll see you soon, John.

John Andre.

Andre You will write?

John nods.

John And you'll visit?

Andre Perhaps.

*John smiles, looks to each of his companions,
and exits.*

Ricketts And now a smoke.

(to Andre)

You'll join us?

Andre Pardon? Uh. But of course.

Shannon You don't seriously intend on staying?

Andre But why not?

Shannon For all your essaying and philosophising, Raffalovich, you truly are a thundering fool.

Ricketts looks at him sternly.

Oh be civil, Charles.

(to Andre)

You've finally made up with him and you're content to let him leave alone, after everything we've spoken about these past months?

He may be a priest but he's still the same silly little boy we all love and I shan't have him travelling 500 miles alone. He said you should visit- well, make your first visit now. I'll have no excuses. Come, the Scottish weather's merely a myth to dear John. He'll need your help settling in at the least.

Andre You really think?

Shannon No. Stay and have a smoke. Listen to Charles bore you to tears with his newest painting because that's so clearly what you'd rather be doing.

Andre He did say that he wished for me to come. I could help him to settle in the area- he is not so used to new places. Before Berlin, he had never been...[outside of London.]

Shannon Yes, yes, how charming. Now go.

Andre looks towards Ricketts. Ricketts gestures in agreement with Shannon.

Andre Avez le Coeur sur la main.

Shannon Yes. Au revoir.

Ricketts Bon chance.

Andre smiles, nods and exits.

Silence.

Shannon looks ruefully at Ricketts and then looks away.

Ricketts Something awry?

Shannon Oh no. No, no.

Come let's have a smoke then. Where's my pipe?

Shannon looks for his pipe.

Not seen it anywhere, Charles, have you?

Ricketts gestures that he has not.

No. No. No matter, I'll look. It'll be here somewhere.

Shannon looks, increasingly frantically, around the room. Lifting up objects and casting them aside.

Ricketts Like some help?

Shannon suddenly erupts with anger.

Shannon That might be a bloody good idea! What a wonderful mind you have, Charles Ricketts, what a wonderful, genius of a mind!

Ricketts looks for the pipe without speaking.

If you borrowed it, if you used it, if you stole it, if you sold it,

Shannon (cont.) please do simply say. Save me the trouble, save me the pain, of looking for something I no longer have.

Ricketts looks at him.

I loved that painting. You gave it away without asking me.

Without a second's thought. Without a moment's...

Now where's my bloody pipe?

Pause.

Ricketts Loved it?

Shannon I adored it. Beautiful it was, with our view and the wine and the spires and...

Pause.

What?

Ricketts Sold it two years ago.

Shannon Bloody marvellous.

Ricketts Didn't notice?

Ricketts finds the pipe, under a chair, but does not reveal it.

Shannon It's a work of art, not a bloody pet- don't need to feed it, do I?
The knowledge it was there.

Ricketts So you could picture it in your mind?

Shannon Precisely.

Pause.

Shannon (cont.) Oh brilliant, Charles. Yes, I can still picture it in someone else's house, above someone else's mantelpiece. How much did you get for it? A few measly shillings?

Ricketts The price of a fermenter. And a press. Filters. Grapes.
It paid for the wine.

He reveals the pipe and tosses it to Shannon.

Here.

Pause.

I wanted that view over Edinburgh. I have it.

I have you making the wine too. Drinking the first glass.

Spitting it out. Making the wine again.

Shannon I get the point, Charles.

Are we smoking?

Ricketts Would you like to?

Shannon I don't care.

He drops the pipe on a chair.

Who's our next visitor?

Ricketts No one. We're shut.

Shannon Oh marvellous.

Ricketts Hmmh.

Ricketts sits and pretends to read.

Pause.

Shannon You're a miserable bastard, you are. Sultry. Dour. You dim the room when you enter- bring the atmosphere down. Guests can't stand you- I have to compensate for the misery you bring. They tell me, all of them tell me- why's he so sultry? Why's he so dour? Is it because of Oscar? No, I say, he's always been a miserable bastard and I don't know how I put up with it to tell you the truth, I simply do- nobody else would, nobody else would have the patience.

Pause.

You're a waste of my time and a waste of my life. You've stolen the last fifteen years from me.

Ricketts stands.

Beat.

Ricketts And you, sir, are quite wonderful.

Shannon Don't.

Ricketts You're magnificent.

Shannon Shut it.

Ricketts Talented as an artist. Inspired as a host. You are, without question, the most extraordinary person I have ever met.

Shannon And you're an arse.

Ricketts Hopefully yours- it's quite beautiful.

Shannon Yours is like mutton.

Ricketts Yours is like marble.

Shannon You bring me down, make me miserable.

Ricketts You lift my spirits to the sky. You fill my heart...

Shannon You empty mine.
Ricketts I revere you.
Shannon I reject you.
Ricketts I adore you.
Shannon I abhor you.
Ricketts I hate you.
Shannon I love you.
Ricketts I know and I love you too!
Shannon Oh you bloody fool.

*They kiss each other passionately and
frantically. After the kiss, they both look slightly
disgusted.*

There is a long silence.

Beat.

Charles. I am going to tell you something of the utmost
importance. Something neither of us can forget for as long as he
lives.

One must never, ever...kiss anyone...after consuming such a
varied selection of cheese.

The smile and embrace.

Lights.

Act Two, Scene Three

A Church, Edinburgh.

John and Andre are practicing a wedding.

John Reginald Melvin Blake, do you take Hilary Julia Thornston to be your wife? Do you promise to be true to her in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love her and honour her all the days of your life?

Andre (English male voice)

I do.

John Hilary Julia Thornston, do you take Reginald Melvin Blake to be your husband? Do you promise to be true to him in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love him and honour him all the days of your life?

Andre (English female voice)

I do.

John You have declared your consent before the Church. May the Lord in his goodness strengthen your consent and fill you both with his blessings. What God has joined, men must not divide.

Pause.

Say 'Amen'.

Andre (English male voice)

Amen.

Andre (cont.) (English female voice)

Amen.

John Then the rings.

May the Lord bless these rings.

Andre (English male voice)

Rings? But they are gone.

John Andre.

Andre (English male voice)

Who's Andre? Has he stolen our rings? The wedding is ruined.

(English female voice)

Father Gray, this is all your fault.

(English male voice)

He's ruined our wedding.

(English female voice)

The monster.

(English male voice)

The blaggard.

(English female voice)

The thief.

John Yes. Thank you.

Andre (English male voice)

You've ruined our special day.

Andre (cont.) (English female voice)

You've ruined our life.

John That's enough.

Andre (English female voice)

And you don't even care!

John Enough. Please.

Andre Enough. Yes. Posturing. Posing. It is a wedding. You are a priest. It will be perfect.

John Will it?

Andre But of course, you pathetic English pastor. You say the words. You give the blessing. They do the rest. It is their day.

John And that...yes, that...terrifies me. If I ruin it. I...

Andre But you won't. You cannot.

John Right. No. Yes. You're...You're right.

Andre Unless...

John Unless what?

Andre smiles.

This is not a time for...for...

Andre Smiling? Laughing? You are performing a wedding, no?
But the garden: this must be addressed. As they walk out to begin their life, we need to see the flowers from the weeds.

John Well, you see. There you are.

Andre But God. In his wonder. He has given us a whole day to get this correct. Tomorrow: the first wedding in his new house. And everything- from the prim roses to the priest- it will be perfect.

The sound of someone entering the Church. The person remains offstage but draws increasingly nearer.

Someone for confession, no doubt.

Andre Wish to practice with me first?

John I can cope.

Andre More joyful, perhaps, than weddings?

John Start on the garden, will you?

Shan't be long.

Andre But of course.

Andre exits. The person who entered the church draws nearer. The sound of another door opening is heard and Alfred enters.

Alfred Good day, father. Good day.

Wonder if you could assist a proud Scot in search of a proud Scottish church? Douglas is the name. Lord Alfred...

He notices who the priest is.

Oh my.

Beat.

John Lord Alfred Douglas.

Alfred John Gray.

They embrace.

This is...This is...

You're a...I mean you are...You're...you're a priest.

John Oh. So I am.

Alfred Father John Gray.

John That's right.

Alfred The priest: Father John Gray.

Man of God. Teacher of the faith.

Priest.

John Yes.

Alfred Mmm.

Pause.

Congratulations.

John Thank you.

Alfred It's a splendid church.

John Most kind.

Alfred Quite splendid.

Pause.

And you- you're looking well.

John Am I?

Alfred Not aged a day. Where's your picture, eh? Where's it hidden?

Pause.

John What? Oh.

He laughs politely.

Yes. I...No, no picture I'm afraid.

Alfred Just prayer?

John You say you're in search of a proud Scottish Church, Alfred?

Whatever for?

Andre enters.

Alfred Bugger me sideways.

Andre Raffalovich? The Jew. I...

Andre I thought perhaps my ears: they were deceiving me.

He embraces Alfred.

Jew no longer.

And you: a Catholic also?

Alfred Yes. Well.

It's the spectacle- that's the thing. But you? You're...

John Andre helps run the church.

Andre Organise the masses. Funerals. Weddings.

John If you required the church for an event. A purpose. Andre's who you need to see.

Andre

(to Alfred)

And do you, perhaps, require the church for an event?

Alfred

It really is marvellous to see you both.

John

He's searching for a proud Scottish church.

Alfred

And I've found one. Thank you. Now, how have you been?

Andre

But why is he searching?

Alfred

Why does one search for a church? A quite intriguing question.

John

'Why do you search for a church' is even more so.

Andre

Perhaps he wishes to become a priest also.

Alfred

Can't say I'm not tempted.

John

He may wish to make a donation?

Alfred

Bang out of funds, I'm afraid.

Andre

Perhaps someone he knows: they have died?

Alfred

I...

Perhaps someone I know has died.

John

Oh. So it's a funeral? I'm sorry. I...

Who is it? Poor soul. Who's died?

Pause.

Alfred

Oscar.

John

What?

Alfred Dead.

John And long since buried, yes.

Alfred Ah, so he is. Not to worry then. Splendid to see you both. It really is. Now I simply must dash...

Alfred turns to exit.

John We know why you're here.

Alfred turns back.

Andre This is true.

John It's quite clear.

Alfred Ah.

Andre Quite clear indeed.

Alfred I see.

Pause.

John You're seeking a proud Scottish church because you wish to pray- solemnly and humbly.

Andre Pray for hours.

John Until it's dark.

Andre Simply to kneel and praise God.

John In absolute silence.

Andre Alone with your thoughts.

John Not uttering a single word.

Andre While we watch.

John In our proud Scottish church.

Andre Embrace your prayers.

John Embrace the silence.

Pause.

Alfred realises they are toying with him.

Beat.

Alfred Who told you?

John The Charleses.

Alfred Is there anything they don't know?

Yes, it's all true.

*He points to **John**.*

Priest.

*He points to **Andre**.*

Gentile.

He points to himself.

Bridegroom.

Pause.

I know what must think. She's a stooge? A mute? A tea gown to hide behind? Rest assure, that is precisely what I was searching for. But somehow, by some divine provenance, I find

Alfred (cont.) I've fallen quite madly in love.

Beat.

John Madly, I can believe.

Alfred I'm quite serious.

Andre It is a serious path to choose.

Alfred Not a path. Nor a choice.

Please remember, not once have I questioned you. The pair-
men of God- left alone, hours on end. Not once have I
speculated, insinuated, that anything untoward could be
occurring. That your intentions are anything other than good.
Holy. Wholesome. Not once have I even hinted at such a thing.

Pause.

You know I've loved before.

It was nothing other than his mind and his heart. The same with
my Olive.

It is love. It is true. I love her and I shall marry her.

Beat.

John Olive?

Andre A peculiar name, no?

Alfred Complements her peculiar nature.

John I once knew an Olive. Lovely thing. Poetess, she was, and not a
bad one.

Alfred Mine too. Was poetry that joined us.
At my lowest point, I receive a letter of gushing praise for a poem whose brilliance I'd entirely underestimated.
The she sends some of her own and the whole world is a different place. She's the most extraordinary person I've ever met.

Pause.

John Which one? Which poem?

Alfred Called 'Two Loves.'
"I dreamed I stood upon a little hill..."

John Your Olive. Not Olive Custance?

Pause.

Alfred You know my bride?

Andre He once was to marry her himself. If only he said the word...

Alfred No?

John Not quite.

Alfred You and my Olive?

John We were close. Exchanged poems and letters. Still did until last year. Very fond of Olive. I...I know her well.

Alfred You do.

Ah.

This is...This is...

John I know.

Alfred This is quite marvellous.

John What?

Alfred Why a priest who knows us both. You simply must marry us.

John Is that not the last thing you could possibly want?

Beat.

I'm sorry, Alfred. But I...She...Last I heard, Olive Custance had...had...

It was I who sent her your poem and I did so for the precise reason that she had...well, that she'd fallen in love with a woman and...

Alfred And her name is Lord Alfred Douglas. What makes our union so true. She- soft, delicate- my ageless boy. I, her darling girl.

The world was built so we should meet.

I never thought I could and, yet, I can.

Planned to marry purely for provenance. Trawled the nation seeking a rich heiress.

Andre The nation's women: they did not wish to be trawled?

Alfred Near begged me. But once I'd met my Olive, I knew no money in the world was worth her.

So we'll be poor. Romantically penniless and in love. I should think one day soon I'll be a father.

Pause.

Alfred (cont.) We write poetry together- of the most outrageous sort- hers more so than mine. She's really rather good. Still writing yourself, John? Uh...Father?

John I am, yes.
Working on a new collection. 'Spiritual Poems'.

Alfred (to Andre)
Your review, Raffalovich?

Andre This, I cannot say.

John Won't be reviewed.
I write purely for myself.

Alfred As do I, and quite right too.
Now, how are your acoustics?

John Sorry?

Alfred Need the orchestra to be heard. You do have an orchestra?

Beat.

John Oh yes, we've an orchestra. Don't we, Andre?

Andre But of course. What is a church without one?

Alfred Fifteen piece, is it? Thirty, what?

John How many pieces, Andre?

Andre Ehh. Two. Perhaps three.

John That's right.

Andre Mrs. McLeish on tambourine.

John Mr. Nevin on the...uh...uhm...

Andre Triangle.

John He's splendid.

Andre He is the best.

John And Mrs. Walters. Playing, well, whatever she can get her hands on.

Andre She is blind.

John And deaf, poor girl.

Andre At the wedding tomorrow, she is simply banging two hymn books together.

John But she does it so beautifully.

Andre No one can do this so well.

Beat.

John (to Alfred)

Won't be a problem, will it? Our orchestra? They must play at every wedding.

Alfred Ah. Must they? Shame.

No. At the triangle, I'm afraid I'll have to decline. I fear this church is not the place.

I've warned her our union may be subject to chatter. She

Alfred (cont.) doesn't care. I claim, nor do I.
But on the day itself. A beautiful church alone...It won't do.
Outward splendour is...is...
Price of everything, value of nothing, mmm.

Pause.

No, it's been frightfully good seeing you both. The wedding shall be in Edinburgh somewhere. You'll both be invited, of course.
Good day.

Alfred turns to leave.

Andre Bosie.

Alfred turns back.

Pause.

Alfred My name no longer.
She calls me Alf.

Andre To have you marry in this church: it would be an honour.
If you do not want Mr. Nevin to play his triangle...

Andre and Alfred look to John.

John Andre can play a pretty good violin.

Alfred You mean it?

John If the two of you wish. I. Well I'd be honoured to welcome you here.

Pause.

Alfred You say you're performing a wedding tomorrow?

John You'll come, yes? Both of you?

Alfred I'd love nothing more in the world.

Oh, except a glass of wine. Mine's a red- strengthens the gums.

Beat.

Andre This, we cannot do.

Alfred Why ever not?

John We've given up.

Alfred Oh please.

Andre This is true.

Alfred It's absurd.

(to Andre)

You, the wine-swilling Jew. This is...This is...

May I have some, nonetheless? If communion wine's all there is...

John Afraid not. Sacrament and sacrament alone.

Alfred Oh. Gah. Give Dorian Gray a soul and he's meaner still. No. No matter. I shall return to my bride, who, I might add, can drink wine with aplomb.

John Good to see you, Alf.

Alfred And you, Father.

(to Andre)

Jew-no-longer.

He smiles at them both.

I am slightly concerned about your rejection of alcohol. I hear it's quite hazardous to one's health. Still, I'm sure you'll be fine.

Until tomorrow.

John Farewell.

Andre Adieu.

Alfred smiles, winks and exits.

John and Andre look at each other and nod.

Beat.

Shall I go?

John Wait. Just in case.

Pause.

Yes. Quick.

Andre exits. He returns with a huge amount of wine and two glasses.

Andre I thought perhaps he may smell it.

John And he'd never have left.

Andre pours the wine.

Andre This wine: it is too good to share.

John Could've given him some of the Charleses' muck?

Andre No, no. He has a bride. A future for which to live.

John That is very true.

Beat.

And tomorrow? The wedding? It'll be...It will be...I...

Andre Father Gray. It is the first of a thousand. You shall bring many people together. Bless many lives.

John Well not without your help.

Andre Pfff.

John I tell you, I couldn't do any of it without...well, I struggle enough as it is.

You're my...I mean you're...

I'm priest to the people, yes. But you're. Well, you're my priest. Aren't you? You are.

Pause.

Andre No, no. I am your friend.

Pause.

John (in French accent)

Eh. Pfff. But of course.

They smile and go to drink.

Lights.

The End.

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