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1 March 2013

Kaye, Richard. "Sexual Identity at the Fin de Siècle." *The Cambridge Companion to The Fin de Siècle*. Ed. Gail Marshall. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. 53-72. Print.

In his chapter entitled "Sexual Identity at the Fin de Siècle," from the book *The Puritan Dilemma*, Richard A. Kaye looks at how the "intellectual avant-garde of the fin de siècle offered theoretical insights on Eros that diverged significantly from Freud's conception of sexuality as existing either in a sequestered psychic space or in an inevitable opposition to a social realm that can never fully accommodate the individual's relentless hungers." According to Kaye, there is a difference in conceptualizing sexuality in the private realm of the psyche vs. the social space of society that is seen at the turn of the century. Kaye looks at the "myths" of *Salome*, *Dorian Gray*, and *Dracula* in contrast to sexual reformers like Edward Carpenter, Olive Schreiner, and Havelock Ellis to show this difference. He also argues that although the myths of the time can be viewed from a Freudian standpoint, the works show more than just his theories on the psyche but also look at sexuality from a social standpoint.

Kaye looks at *A Picture of Dorian Gray* first from a pre-Freudian analysis. In *Dorian Gray* Kaye argues that there is not an evolution of character Kaye says, "in linking homosexuality desire to the narcissistic personality of Dorian Gray, Wilde would seem to be accepting both a sexological and a later Freudian conception of same-sex eros" (58). Freud claimed that narcissism is found in people who are distinguished as having aberrations; homosexuals are a good example of this. For Freud, this connection between narcissism and homosexuality was seen to have negative social consequences. However Kaye argues otherwise saying, "narcissism also constitutes as an effort to see oneself in others, to locate men of similar

tastes outside oneself” (Kaye, 58). This is seen in the play with both Dorian and with Basil and his portraits’ of Dorian. Furthermore, Kaye ends his argument by quoting Whitney Davis who said, “narcissism represents an effort by the male of the same-sex preferences to locate in others versions of himself, idealized renditions that entertain homosexuality as a socially acceptable possibility in a hostile world” (58). By suggesting this Kaye is furthering his argument that the Freudian theory of sexuality of the psyche is not all that there is in Wilde, but that society still plays a role.

In the social view of sexuality identity comes into play with the creation of homosexuality that derived from the sex scandals of the late-Victorian period. The Labouchere Amendment made homosexuality and homosexual acts punishable by law stating that anyone found guilty could be imprisoned for up to two years with or without hard labor. With this law and Oscar Wilde’s incrimination a new type of man developed. Kaye points out that it is from Wilde’s trials that the stereotype for a homosexual man is one who exhibits effeminate behavior, that which previously had to do with being an aristocrat. Essentially, those who embodied the life of an aesthetic now represent traits of a homosexual. This change and development of an identity is formed within the construct of society. Society agreed that it was illegal to be homosexual and thus it was. Society said that one who exhibits feminine behavior must be a homosexual, and thus that identity was formed.

Kaye moves from Wilde’s trial to the new sexual theories of the fin de siècle, looking specifically at Ellis’s theories on sexuality. Ellis was focused on “creating the conditions for the public acceptance of his homosexual subjects” (Kaye 63). He did not think that homosexuality was an acquired condition but that, like being colorblind, it was a neutral trait. Kaye says that for the sexologists of this time to make their subjects socially acceptable despite their homosexuality

they would need to win over society and to do this, sexuality would need to be presented in a melodramatic way; “late-Victorian melodrama invited a theatrical representation of inner conflicts, turn-of-the-century sexual theory required that individual psychology reveal a final, sexual truth” (Kaye 63). Ellis used a melodrama to persuade society not to force homosexuals into marriages because it was a threat to the middle-class household. If a homosexual was forced into marriage the woman would put her through as much trouble as it would him. The melodrama Ellis used an to show this was with an example of a suppressed homosexual who was forced to marry a woman and have children, those children were then born with severe medical problems because the father was forced to suppress his sexuality. The use of melodramas shows how sexuality was a social problem that needed to face the public and legal authority for any sort of acceptance or change.

Throughout Kayes argument he presents the differences in conceptualizing sexuality as being identified in the psyche and in society at the fin de siècle. He does this by presenting works from Wilde and other writers of the mid-Victorian period to show how Freud is seen in these works but that examining sexuality in terms of the psyche is limiting. Thus, these works also have to be looked at in terms of how society plays a role in sexual identity. Society’s role in sexual identity is also looked at through Wilde’s trial and through the different theories on sexuality that were developed at the fin de siècle. Kayes ends his essay with this comment, “this attempt to link a managed, enlightened erotic life to an ideal of a socially aware polity remains fundamentally different from Freud’s subsequent explorations of the psyche, which largely downplayed the constructive role of a social order as Freudian psychoanalysis situated sexual dilemmas within a fairly dichotomized acceptance of, or rebellion against, social opprobrium in patters of sexual expression” (Kaye70).