

ON THE DEATH OF MR. WILDE:
A CRITICAL DIALOGUE

Joseph H. Gardner

Persons: Sebastian and Melmoth.

Scene: Sebastian's Parlour, Number 1, The Pines, Putney. Spring 1901

SEBASTIAN: You entertain me, Melmoth, because I disagree with absolutely everything you say.

MELMOTH: You entertain me, Sebastian, because you are one of the greatest prigs alive, because you maintain an excellent wine cellar, and because you have the courage to flaunt your bad taste in paintings upon every wall in this house.

SEBASTIAN: I should be greatly offended if I believed a word of what you say.

MELMOTH: Perhaps I could come, eventually, to accept those heavy white damask drapes with their reddish bouquets and their cut-glass prisms jangling like beaded curtains in some house whose repute cannot be mentioned. I might even accept that tinny upright thing against the wall passing for a piano – as long as it were never played – but never, never shall I accept those painted literary scenes that merely dampen the imagination by *poaching upon the domain of the poets* (369).¹ Nor shall I accept those imitation Greek, bad imitation Greek, plaster-of-Paris statues stifling under those glass domes your wife seems so fond of, or these torture racks with their spindly legs, bony seat cushions, and bare wooden backs you persist in calling chairs. I should think the lap of some milk-fattened sultana would provide a more comfortable seat.

SEBASTIAN: You are insincere.

MELMOTH: *What people call insincerity is simply a method by which we can multiply our personalities* (393).

SEBASTIAN: You have personality enough as it is. Here, occupy your tongue with another glass of this claret of which you are so fond. You promised to talk of