

“You Are Black Inside”: Class, Race, and Sexuality in John Gray’s *Park**

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John Gray’s *Park* (1932) makes few concessions to the reader. The novella, roughly one hundred pages in length, gives a picture of a future society that has changed radically since the twentieth century but is neither utopia nor dystopia, and the author’s attitude towards it remains obscure. The plot has no clear narrative arc or climax. None of the dialogue is indicated by quotation marks, and some of it is in ecclesiastical Latin; some speakers’ words begin with a paragraph indentation, some do not. Ampersands are often used in place of “and,” but not uniformly or with any discernible pattern or reason for the variations.¹ The narrative is often drily witty, but its meaning remains uncertain, and the reader suspects sometimes that she is on the outside of a private joke. Like other modernist works, *Park* presents itself as something of a puzzle piece, and no critic has given a satisfactory account of the book as a whole; the few critics who have written about it at length have focused on autobiographical elements in the narrative. The novella is not, however, covert autobiography: it is rather, as Jerusha Hall McCormack notes, “a psychic map of [Gray’s] consciousness” (McCormack, *John Gray* 244).² Particularly prominent in that consciousness is Gray’s sense of alienation, which is expressed through the novella’s treatment of class, race, and sexuality; and to understand that alienation, some knowledge of Gray’s life is essential.

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I

Gray was born into the working class in the East End of London in 1866. Despite his good work at school, his father apprenticed him as a metal-turner at the age of fourteen, but Gray found the work uncongenial, and through private study and civil service exams he gained a toehold in the middle class and began to move in literary circles. He was briefly in the orbit of Oscar Wilde and was said to have been the model for Dorian Gray. There is evidence of this beyond the surname (see McCormack, *John Gray* 82-87), but Gray, sensitive about his position as a librarian in the Foreign Office and already wary of Wilde's increasingly indiscreet behaviour, persuaded the older writer to refute the rumour in a published letter (see McCormack, *John Gray* 74).³

Wilde did, however, arrange for the publication of Gray's first book of poetry, *Silverpoints*, in 1893.⁴ As a work of design, *Silverpoints* became one of the defining books of the 1890s, a total work of art in which paper, typography, and binding—the production as a whole supervised by Charles Ricketts—were meant to add to the effect of the poems themselves. The book was memorably, if unfairly, described by Wilde's friend Ada Leverson as “the tiniest rivulet of text meandering through the very largest meadow of margin,” and she suggested to Wilde that “he should publish a book *all* margin; full of beautiful unwritten thoughts” (Bergonzi in Gray, *Park* i).⁵

Gray subsequently repudiated what he called “the odious *Silverpoints*” and later in life bought every copy he came across in order, he said, to “immobilize” them (McCormack, *The Man* 137, 300). The poems continued to be reprinted in anthologies, however, especially as the Nineties became an identifiable period, and Christopher Ricks included twelve of Gray's poems in his 1987 *New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*—more than the pre-1900 Yeats. The title of Gray's next book, *Spiritual Poems* (1896), indicates the direction his life was taking. He had converted to Catholicism in 1890 during a visit to Brittany; after the Wilde period he recovered his early zeal and decided to study for the priesthood at the Scots College in Rome.

Ordained in 1901, he was posted to Scotland and was locally celebrated as a caring and fearless priest in the Cowgate section of Edinburgh, an area where even the police traveled only in pairs (see McCormack, *John Gray* 195).

His closest friend during this period, and for the rest of his life, was a Frenchman named Marc-André Raffalovich. The third son of a Russian Jewish family that left Russia after the Czar's edict that all Jews must convert or leave the country, Raffalovich was rich, an Anglophile, and a fellow convert to Catholicism (see McCormack, *John Gray* 44-47). He and Gray, both members of the lay Third Order of St. Dominic, planned the building of a new church in Edinburgh, funded in part by Raffalovich, with the understanding that Gray would become its parish priest. St. Peter's was completed in 1907, and Gray was its pastor until his death in 1934. The relationship of Gray and Raffalovich was a subject of speculation even during their lifetimes, particularly as they saw each other daily and often had meals together. There is no doubt that both men were gay and very little doubt that their relationship was always chaste. Raffalovich, who wrote extensively on homosexuality, argued that "Uranians" should live chaste lives and devote themselves to higher pursuits such as the arts and philanthropy (see Sewell 230).

In the 1910s and 1920s, Gray read the new modernist writers—Eliot, Pound, Lawrence, the later Yeats, and Huxley, among others—and knew writers and artists, like David Jones and Eric Gill, who combined Catholic themes with modernist technique. Gray was not as experimental as Jones and Gill, but his writing both in poetry and prose acquired a new terseness and astringency. *Park* was first published serially in 1931-32 in the Dominican journal *Blackfriars*, then in a limited edition of 250 copies published by Sheed and Ward.⁶ Subtitled "A Fantastic Story," the novella recounts the story of Mungo Park—not the eighteenth-century Scottish explorer but a Catholic priest of the twentieth century who finds himself in a future England ruled by an aristocratic caste of black Catholic priests. They recognize him as a priest, but he does not have his *celebret*—his permit to exercise his

priestly functions—and cannot give a satisfactory account of his age. Park claims to be 59, but as his hosts explain, he must be hundreds of years older if his story is true, and the computational systems of the Wapama are different in any case (see 68). He is therefore put into a special category of beings officially dead, renamed Drak, and spends much of his time learning about the society of Ia, the name of which may be a hint at the story's autobiographical elements. Park/Drak is eventually ennobled and given extensive property for no apparent reason, but his rights remain severely abridged; towards the end of the story he is able to read the official assessment of his condition and the problems he presents to Wapama society.

II

Park is an elusive and finally ungraspable book, but it is fascinating in the way it addresses, indirectly and playfully, Gray's sense of social, racial, and sexual dislocation. Gray avoided autobiography because he was an intensely private person and his life was of interest to the general public only for reasons he preferred to forget, but he used his fictional form to address issues of general importance, and in a distinctly modern idiom. The difficulty of creating a "psychic map" of his consciousness while avoiding anything obviously autobiographical was in fact a kind of liberation—an incitement to art.

Gray's social dislocation is perhaps the most straightforward personal element in the book. Park remains an outsider in Wapama society, just as Gray had passed through various segments of Victorian society—working class, middle class, artistic and religious circles—without, it seems, ever feeling at home in any of them. An early poem called "The Flying Fish," with its idea of flight *from* rather than flight *to*, suggests his alienation:

He prays the Maker of water-things
not for a sword, but cricket's wings,
not to be one of the sons of air,
to be rid of the water is all his prayer;

all his hope is a fear-whipped whim;
 all directions are one to him.
 There are seekers of wisdom no less absurd,
 son Hang, than thy fish that would be a bird. (*Poems* 260)⁷

The idea of travelling to a different society as a way of commenting on one's own is obviously a very old one. The idea of travelling to a *future* society had been popularized in Gray's time by Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888), William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), and H. G. Wells's *The Sleeper Awakes* (1910). Bellamy, Morris, and Wells all use the literary device of a sleeper awaking in or dreaming of a radically changed society; Gray employs the same device, though it is not clear until the very end of the novella that Park has been asleep. *Park* also owes something to Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) in its description of a society still riven by class.⁸ Extensive remnants of the white population, now generally debased, live underground, like the Morlocks in *The Time Machine*, and there is no doubt that they represent, as in Wells, the English working class. Gray's interest, like Wells's, is not in the social and political fact of class but its ability to isolate vast numbers of people not only from power but also from any consideration as fellow citizens.

Part of Gray's strategy of misdirection in *Park* is to employ words and ideas with different and often contrary meanings at different levels of discourse. The first sentence of the novella is this: "Mungo Park walked on in the belief, absurd as he knew it to be, that he had died" (1). The sentence sets up an apparent contrast between "absurd" belief and fact, but the novella will undermine this as Park actually becomes, in legal terms, a dead man; more importantly, Gray suggests a variety of meanings for death itself. As a Christian, Park has died and been reborn in Christ in the sacrament of baptism; as a priest he has died to the world; as a persona of John Gray, he has "died" to various earlier incarnations of himself (labourer, civil servant, associate of Wilde). These are presumably positive deaths, but Park will find himself as much an outsider among the Wapama as Gray did in any of his avatars, and he considers himself a "tormented prisoner" (45)

even though he is always treated well. The name Park may also be a clue here: the explorer Mungo Park died at thirty-five, Gray's age at his ordination.⁹

Gray's decision to make the priestly elite black is another instance of his playing on various meanings of words and ideas at different levels of discourse.¹⁰ The negative associations of black are of course culturally pervasive, and the society Gray lived in was even more racist than our own. It would be startling for the book's first readers, then, to hear a character say, "Drak, your skin is white, more's the pity, but you are black inside" (39) and mean it as a compliment.¹¹ There is more going on here than a desire to *épater le bourgeois* by turning conventional bigotry inside out,¹² or to suggest, in the wake of the vogue for African sculpture and African-American music and dance from the 1910s through the 1930s, that black societies had produced art worthy of European attention. Early in the novella, Park attends Mass at a church dedicated to "the martyrs of Uganda" (19), a group of young men, Catholic and Anglican converts, who were pages of Mwanga II, the Kabaka or king of Buganda, and were killed on his orders between 1885 and 1887. Although the reasons for the executions are complex, the martyrs were acclaimed for having resisted Mwanga's orders to submit to his homosexual desires and were beatified by the Catholic Church in 1920, a decade before Gray wrote *Park*; they were canonized in 1964. Most of the martyrs were between fifteen and thirty years old, Gray's contemporaries, and he may well have seen in them a steadfast faith that he envied; his own conversion to Catholicism in 1890 had been followed by his friendship with Wilde, a backsliding that Gray considered the equivalent of Peter's denial of Christ.¹³

To be "black inside," then, is perhaps to be faithful, patient, longsuffering, Christ-like. But this is merely a form of romantic racism: the murderous Mwanga was as black as the martyrs he killed, and Gray realized that it would be unrealistic to portray a society ruled by a black priestly elite as ideal; all earthly societies are corrupt, and there are signs that the Wapama elite are indifferent to the plight of the

formerly dominant white population. One of Park/Drak's guides, Ini'in, seems to reverse the easy racism of whites towards blacks and to replicate their lack of concern about how others live:

For if, it is said, you place them [whites] anywhere in history as we teach it, you are faced by an intolerable paradox: mechanical construction & genius we cannot overpraise, with moral degeneration the most complete. The palace of Vulcan inhabited by rats; Vulcan & the rats contemporary, if not identical.

Well?

Why, to make a short ending of a long story, when their troubles came upon them, they took refuge underground and are there to this day.

Contented?

I think so, said Dlar and Ini'in at once. (38)

Clearly they do not know, and have taken no pains to find out. Dlar has earlier admitted that the subterraneans were forced underground but adds defensively "and yet not entirely" (36), and Svillig has suggested that they remain below "because they like it" (29). The master race seems as indifferent to the subject race as master races always are, and if Park is complimented as "black inside," this is no guarantee of moral goodness.

But Gray had another and more personal reason for creating his black priestly elite. He was widely read in African ethnography, in part because his brother Alexander had joined the colonial service and gone to Africa—it is not clear to which country—where he had married an African woman and fathered two children. After Alexander's death in 1919, his sons had come to England and had lived briefly with Gray before being sent to Hawkesyard, a Dominican public school—two half-black, half-white boys named Gray (see McCormack, *The Man* 256). Gray thus had personal as well as intellectual knowledge of the difficulties faced by black and mixed-race people in England. If Park himself is, as Dlar says, white outside but black inside, he too is no doubt Gray—a joke which serves as another clue to the novella's autobiographical elements,¹⁴ but also draws attention to the absurdities of racial classification. We know that race has no

real existence, that it is description elevated into pseudo-science, and the evidence was there a hundred years ago. Here too the name Mungo Park can be seen as a clue, for Park, although a colonialist, felt that there was no essential difference between black and white: "whatever difference there is between the negro [sic] and European, in the conformation of the nose, and the colour of the skin, there is none in the genuine sympathies and characteristic feelings of our common nature."¹⁵

Quite apart from the personal and family issues represented by the Uganda martyrs and the racial divide in *Park*, there is a level of identification with blacks that links Park/Drak and Gray. Early in the novella, long before Dlar says that he is "black inside," Park dreams that he is in Westminster Cathedral, "and it was also a railway station of intolerable vastness & silence."¹⁶

He had lost his server [i.e. altar boy] and his railway porter. I shall recognize him, for he is black. An unending train went through, pouring out passengers without stopping; all were Negroes. Park halted and addressed himself prophetically:

Go through the swinging glass doors; no one will notice you, as you are black. With a wrench and a struggle he came to himself.

This is a strange thing, he thought; to dream a fact I did not know awake. I am black. (13-14)

This reflects Gray's sense of himself. Gray's sister Beatrice wrote that Gray was "deeply interested in the black man (he was a keen anthropologist) and used to say, although he was a white man he was black inside, and foretold in a general way that the black man would rule" (McCormack, *The Man* 283). Gray identified, in short, with an "outsider" group. In the novella, Park has found himself an outsider among the Wapama; in this passage he imagines fitting in, but he never really does. Racial difference appears to be a way of dramatizing Park/Drak's—and Gray's—continuing sense of alienation through a reversal of his nephews' situation. Gray was a gay man in a straight society, his unmarried state explained and normalized by his vows as a priest, his real nature repressed and inexpressible. (He may well not

have *wished* to express it, but that is beside the point of his alienation as such.) He was also an Englishman in Scotland and a man who had, to judge by much of his writing, apparently never felt at home anywhere. He had climbed out of the working class into the middle class and into literary circles, but had left these behind to enter the priesthood, which gave him a respected but inevitably somewhat lonely position in the Catholic community of Edinburgh. When the poet Edmund Blunden wrote to Gray suggesting a possible interpretation of *Park*, Gray replied: "Your astuteness has penetrated the whole matter: the man stumbling in his dream upon a chance of vengeance & the free expression of repressed ambitions, yet dogged all the time by the obstacles of his waking life" (Healy 119-20).

Park's situation among the Wapama seems to dramatize the isolation of Gray's own life. Park's legal "death" requires him to wear a beard, a sort of mark of Cain (23, 37, 73); this and his racial difference make him highly visible in the elite circles he travels in, and he is famous throughout Ia, but despite his high status, his estate (his "park"), and his wealth, Park is far from content. "A tomb is a very exclusive apartment" (100), says the narrator, apparently reflecting Park's own thoughts, and when Park is "enfranchised and ennobled" (49) he reflects on the irony of getting these privileges "when all I want [...] is a pair of tacketty boots, forty pounds a quarter, and a miserable life" (50). (The Scottish word "tacketty," meaning hob-nailed, seems to nod in the direction of Gray's own situation as a resident of Scotland and an enthusiastic hiker in mountainous terrain.) Anyone who has felt at odds with his society and himself, especially if he finds a culture which seems more congenial, can identify with Park's longing to escape himself and join another group. Woody Allen has spoken of his admiration for the physical grace of black athletes like Wilt Chamberlain, something he clearly feels he has never had himself. Race may be a fiction, but the appeal of the other is very real.

I have discussed some of the elements of class and racial alienation in *Park*. The third displacement, that of sexuality, is addressed neces-

sarily with great circumspection but also with some wit. Some aspects of the princess's court, for example, are distinctly gay: "This palace had too a vocabulary of its own. *Vara Darling* & *Toni Boy* and other such expressions were in common and frequent use" (70-71). More tellingly, one of the first scenes of the novella has distinctly sexual undertones. *Park* has been shot in the legs by a gamekeeper named *Cuan* and is then helped to recover by the same man.

Cuan showed his face. He saw that he was not called; but he came on, persuasively. He had changed his clothes and had nothing but a cotton tunic, breech-cloth and white sandals. As though he were a nurse he lifted *Park* as he was, & carried him to a bath. There he stripped him and togaed him up in a sheet of the red and blue stripe; but not before he had looked with compassion at the miserable state of his legs, so swollen and discoloured where the saltpetre, or whatever it was, had damaged them. He touched the skin delicately, and sighed. (9)

Cuan leaves and returns, then applies a healing and sweet-smelling balm before taking *Park* to the bathtub. *Healy* (121) refers ambiguously to the "simple sensuousness" of the scene; there are certainly homoerotic elements in it, but they are disarmingly set in a context which suggests both childlike innocence and baptismal renewal or rebirth.

With grimaces and gestures [*Cuan*] expressed: You must try to walk down into the water; for you are so slippery that I should let you fall.¹⁷

He went down first to arrange the sunk furniture; on this he made his bather comfortable with his face just above the surface of the water.

Lying without sensation in the tepid bath he watched *Cuan*, who, besides, was taking trouble that all his movements should be closely inspected, separating and assembling all the things which had been on his body and would never be there again. He could see that it was a sort of mausoleum rite which was being performed; that somewhere in the then world there must be a museum vault waiting for its prey. (9-10)

As he is dressed in new, robe-like clothes, *Park* senses that "the ritual was a mixture of vesting a bishop and dressing a baby" (10), an appropriate description of a scene which combines the happy helpless-

ness of the pre-sexual baby and the post-sexual life of the priest. This bracketing of a sexual life, which in Gray's life may never have occurred at all, with asexual elements is as close as Gray comes to addressing the subject of his sexuality. He may not have been distressed by it, and may, as I have suggested, have accepted priestly celibacy easily or even with relief; it is pointless to speculate. I would suggest, however, that Park's continuing sense of class and racial otherness and alienation in Wapama society represents not only his sense of social displacement but his otherness and isolation as a gay man.

There are other possible autobiographical elements in *Park*; some have suggested that it is in part a satire on some of the Catholic clergy of Edinburgh and some of the people in Gray's own circle (see Sewell 166). There is a character named A Ra, for example, whose name might be an abbreviation of André Raffalovich, but there is nothing in the description of him or his conversation which suggests Raffalovich.¹⁸ If we try to get beyond the coded autobiographical elements I have discussed, however, *Park* becomes almost hermetic in its obscurity, and few would have read it after Gray's death if it were not for Gray's continuing mild fame as a model for Dorian Gray. If there were nothing more in this novella than a coded psychic self-portrait, it would hardly be of interest except to scholars of the Wilde circle, but it does have a more general literary interest, I would argue, and I wish to propose a reading of its theme which goes beyond autobiographical elements and does justice both to the novella's religious elements and its modernity.

III

Park realizes early on that Wapama numeration is different from that of the twentieth century, and that the Wapama also measure time differently, so that his age, fifty-nine, is an impossibility in their terms (22, 26-27, 33).¹⁹ His own sense of time begins to alter, particularly between sleep and waking, and he begins to sense the artificiality of time itself:

I shall never be back in time, he groaned. I shall never be back in time. Every thought has two meanings. If not back in time, in what shall I be back? Shall I ever be back? "Ever" is a property of time, & I shall never be back in time. Every thought has multiple meanings. I shall never be back in time. So he shut his eyes, and when he opened them he was back.

Yes, but am I back in time? (13-14)

This passage is reminiscent of Quentin Compson's monologue in *The Sound and the Fury*, and also of some aspects of the treatment of time in Conrad, Eliot, and Proust. Park's sense of time probably owes more to St. Augustine than to Conrad and Faulkner, but they are not finally very different. Quentin, unable to endure the losses that time brings, wants to escape our necessarily linear experience of time and enter an eternal realm; his desire, as he knows, can only be realized in death. Park, by contrast, feels that he inhabits neither time nor eternity; as in so many other aspects of his life, he occupies a liminal space, as McCormack notes (*John Gray* 246). He therefore decides to immerse himself, as Quentin cannot do, in the present moment. Park thinks, "Tomorrow! It has either gone or will never be; detestable point of imaginary time" (13), and Svillig later reminds him that "the duration of time is best regarded as one second" (31).²⁰

If time is merely a construct, so is almost everything else in our minds, and Park's attempts to understand the new world he finds himself in illustrate our frustration in trying to get beyond the map to the territory itself. Park tries to orient himself physically and discover the old English landmarks beneath the new names, and his attempts to understand the rules and etiquette of Wapama society frequently come up against brick walls. His solution is to live without judging or even trying to make sense of things, and this is significantly expressed, again, as a surrender to the present moment and situation. "Park had again & again to renew his resolution to abandon himself to his present experiences without reflection" (36); "Park, like a drowning man, abandoned himself to the space and the crowd" (92). This surrender is no doubt wise, but it does not satisfy his craving for certainty, and this may explain why Park, although uniformly well-

treated and by any standard privileged, is rarely happy. He naturally wants to *feel*, at least, that he knows what is going on.

As in his treatment of time, Gray combines a modernist awareness of incomprehension with an orthodox religious sense.²¹ Even the subtlest intellect will not take us far; it becomes necessary finally to *choose* what to believe and how to live. The obsessive ideas of Conrad's and Faulkner's characters, the Hemingway code, the leap of faith, the existential act—all of these go beyond reason. None of them promises happiness but at best a temporary structure, or, if we are lucky, a way of life more or less satisfying. There are suggestions in *Park*—they are no more than that—that Gray felt no more at home in religious life than he had anywhere else. The prior of the Charterhouse says to Park,

Men come to the Charterhouse in a spirit you have never possessed. You will not find here an escape from worldly difficulties merely because you are unable to solve them in a way you would have preferred. A boy who has climbed to the top of the Ondo mast must not, because he cannot make up his mind to climb down, expect to find a trap-door in the sky. I do not like to risk offence by telling you what you know; but for men of every position & every origin there is only one way to peace: purification of the heart, and the proper direction of the energies. You understand me. (104)

This view is both orthodox and entirely modern, analogous to the last lines of *The Waste Land* with their counsel to set one's lands in order, to give, sympathize, and control oneself. Modernism is possibility and returns via modern skepticism to the old distinction between knowledge and faith: where nothing is certain, nothing can be ruled out, including God and meaning. Wallace Stevens, like Johnson, Dowson, Beardsley, and Wilde in the 1890s, died a Catholic.

The resolution of *Park* is extremely conventional: Park awakes where he fell on the first page, and it was all a dream, "somewhat more elaborate than is usual" (108). We are given a clue to the dream half-way through the novella when Park is presented with a medal inscribed "DORMIO, SED COR MEUM VIGILAT" (51).²² The dream reveals the character's subconscious life; Gray could fully express

himself only through fiction and dream, through *Park* and the voices of his poems. As Wilde says in "The Critic as Artist": "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth" (282).

Bernard Bergonzi groups *Park* with other "modern fantasies that dramatize the loss of identity" (Gray, *Park* xii), and to the extent that identity depends upon context and acceptance, he is certainly right. *Park* is one of those modern works that call into question the very idea of personality: out of my usual setting, unrecognized among strangers, who am I? Do I exist at all? The modernity of *Park* is evident in other ways, too. It addresses classic modern themes of alienation, class, race, and sexuality that remain crucial; its treatment of time and the possibility of knowledge engages with both current and traditional ideas. The hermeticism and obscurity I have mentioned are similar to those we find in writers like Eliot and Pound, Joyce and Jones, and need not have interfered with the book's popularity. Its limited appeal may be the result of its wry, equivocal tone and its deliberate avoidance of dramatic confrontations and high emotion. As Bergonzi points out, there is no "existential anguish" in *Park* (Gray, *Park* xii); *Park* is unhappy, but we sense none of the metaphysical torment we find in Kafka's Josef K. or Faulkner's Quentin Compson. The *TLS* reviewer of the 1966 reissue of the novella found Gray's style "a blend of Firbankian preciousness with a sort of avuncular sacerdotal jollity" (Cevasco 131). This is overstated, but it points to something real in *Park*; Bergonzi also notes the "numerous conversations, laconic yet mannered, which in their glancing obliquity have a slight hint of the dialogue of Ivy Compton-Burnett" (Gray, *Park* xi). Firbank and Compton Burnett are minor masters, writers who did not command a large audience but created striking and idiosyncratic works in unmistakably original styles; these are perhaps Gray's real peers.²³

In 1918, when Robert Bridges published the first collected edition of Gerard Manley Hopkins's poems, critics and readers discovered that the most original English-language poet of the nineteenth century was a Jesuit priest of entirely orthodox opinions who lived and died in

complete literary obscurity. John Gray is no Hopkins, but like Hopkins he both used and transcended autobiographical elements in his writing and addressed both contemporary and perennial questions. He wrote at least one prose work in which modernism and orthodoxy co-exist in a fruitful and suggestive way.

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NOTES

¹The original edition was designed by Eric Gill, who favoured ampersands and may have made other decisions about the physical appearance of the text; see McCormack, *John Gray* 176.

²Sewell makes the same point in different words, describing *Park* as "a kind of record in code of [Gray's] personality, and [...] a statement of his mind on a number of things" (166).

³Everyone who writes on John Gray is indebted to the pioneering biographical and critical work of Jerusha Hall McCormack, who has written two biographies of Gray (the first scholarly, the second fully documented but aimed at a popular audience) and has edited an anthology of his prose which, along with Ian Fletcher's edition of Gray's poems, makes his most significant work available again. All biographical information in this essay is taken, unless otherwise noted, from McCormack, *John Gray*.

⁴Wilde agreed to pay the costs of publication; as Gray distanced himself from Wilde, another contract was drawn up and the costs were paid entirely by the publisher (see McCormack, *The Man* 116).

⁵Although Ada Levenson is often credited as the author of the witticism, she was simply repeating and elaborating a remark by Sir Benjamin Backbite in Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, who says of his poems, "I think you will like them, when you see them on a beautiful quarto page, where a neat rivulet of text shall meander through a meadow of margin" (Act I, Scene 1, 190).

⁶The novella has been republished several times since Gray's death. A second limited edition of 350 numbered copies was published by St. Albert's Press in 1966 to mark Gray's centenary, and a paperback was published by Carcanet in 1984; it is also included in McCormack's *Selected Prose of John Gray* and has been translated into French. The 1932 edition is an expensive rarity; all parenthetical references in this essay are to the 1966 edition.

⁷The poem was first published in *The Dial*, 1896.

⁸Sewell (167), Healy (48-49), and McCormack (*The Man* 278) mention Morris and Wells as antecedents; Cevasco (127) and Healy (49) add E. M. Forster's short

story "The Machine Stops," which first appeared in book form in 1928, as a possible source.

⁹Wikipedia, "Mungo Park."

¹⁰McCormack notes Gray's use of both "black" and "death" specifically as metaphors for the priesthood (*John Gray* 246-47) and argues that his career involved donning successive masks and suppressing his natural impulses. I am concerned here rather with Gray's ambiguous usage of the words.

¹¹Gray probably intended to remind readers of Blake's "The Little Black Boy": "My mother bore me in the southern wild, / And I am black, but O! my soul is white."

¹²Cf. Jean Cocteau's 1920 hymn to the sun, "Batterie": "Le nègre, dont brillent les dents, / est noir dehors, rose dedans. / Moi je suis noir dedans et rose / dehors, fais la métamorphose."

¹³Cf. McCormack, *The Man* 281. It is interesting, in this context, that the church Gray and Raffalovich built in Edinburgh was called St. Peter's. Gray's mandarin manner led to gossip that he considered himself the pope of St. Peter's, but the name seems rather to be an aspect of Gray's humility—a recognition of personal weakness during the Wilde period.

¹⁴McCormack (*The Man* 284) notes the autobiographical joke. Dominicans who read the novella in the journal *Blackfriars* might have gotten a second level of the joke, since the order's habit consists of a black *cappa* or cloak over a white cassock. There is a brief discussion in *Park* of beautiful "three-blood children" (98), perhaps a suggestion of a possible post-racial society in which everyone is of mixed heritage.

¹⁵Wikipedia, "Mungo Park." Healy (120-21) points out that the original Mungo Park was also impressed by the intelligence of Africans serving as professional advocates in tribal disputes.

¹⁶A satirical reference to the extraordinary appearance of the cathedral.

¹⁷Park has not yet learned Bapama, the language of the Wapama, and he and Cuan, who is a gamekeeper and not part of the elite, communicate either in simple Latin or in sign language.

¹⁸Cevasco (130) identifies A Ra with Raffalovich and points out that A Ra has dedicated an oratory to St. Sebastian, just as Raffalovich had funded a large part of the building of St. Peter's in Edinburgh; McCormack notes only the possibility of a link.

¹⁹Healy points out (122) that the historical Mungo Park noticed non-Western ways of numbering among the Bambara people of what is now Mali.

²⁰This is probably an echo of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Ch. XV.20.

²¹Healy makes a similar point in discussing Gray's style: "Paradoxically, the modernism of Gray's prose is most apparent when he is relying on scholastic modes of thought. The intellectualism of the Post-Impressionist world was pre-figured, in some respects, by the intellectualism of St. Thomas; something, of

course, which did not escape the notice of the master modernist, James Joyce" (127).

²²"I sleep, but my heart is awake." The phrase is from the Vulgate version of the Song of Solomon 5:2.

²³Sewell (176) similarly puts *Park* in a class of *sui generis* books such as Johnson's *Rasselas* and Beckford's *Vathek*.

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