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The Picture of Dorian Gray Between Aesthetic Proclivities and Moral Duties

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Dedication

To the oh-so-patient and oh-so-beautiful mother, my occasionally annoying sisters and my brother. You all taught me that love is not a thing that has a reason behind it. To my father who showed me how to love reading. For you the gentle reader.

To the brothers life blessed me with, Mustapha Hamidi, Zakaria Islam Bouzadi and Tahraoui Abdallah to you I’m forever indebted.

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Abstract

The current paper discusses the relationship between morality and aesthetics in the light of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. According to his critics, the author's aesthetic proclivities are a transgression against the moral creed they held. The critics argue that the book is immoral while the author explains the existence of a moral plot. Wilde juxtaposes art and morality in his work to create an aesthetic effect. Moreover, he believes that art is autonomous, and that the sphere of aesthetics should not be bordered by any means. Morality is used in artworks to produce an effect, yet from an aesthetic standpoint it is just as colors on the artist's plate. According to Wilde, the two concepts should melt together. Art creates a mood; it does not preach or educate.

Keywords: Aestheticism, Aesthetics, Art, Artist, Criticism, Formalism, Morality.

Table of Contents

General Introduction

General Introduction

Since antiquity, artists and philosophers argued about the value that can be attributed to aesthetic objects. Arts in general are valuable in enriching human experience. Some philosophers argue that art should adhere to morality in order for it to be accepted. Yet others, refuse to acknowledge any link between artistic creation and morality.

Aesthetic experience according to enlightenment philosophers is a sensuous experience. And morality is expressed through the medium of logic. Hence, the two spheres are made distinct in this respect. Nevertheless, works of art that embody moral events inevitably require logical interpretation and assessment. Thus, the relationship between the two concepts becomes problematic. On the one hand, there are those who believe that the moral judgment of such works affects their aesthetic qualities, claiming that what is good is beautiful and vice-versa. On the other hand, there are those who believe in the autonomy of art, unlike the first group, they hold morality to be but a medium for artistic invention.

The Victorian era brought about too many changes. People are adapted to the mentality of supply and demand due to the rise in industry. Realism in arts is also introduced during this era. Hence, the public starts to impose their opinions on artistic productions. Moreover, artists try to produce artworks in order to appease the public. It becomes hard for artists to bring new insight, since it is often rejected by the public. Aestheticism or *Art for Art's Sake* emerges as a movement enforcing the autonomy of art. According to this school of thought art is independent of any didactic, moral or utilitarian functions. Art should be approached for the value that it has in itself. Oscar Wilde, a British aesthete, stands in opposition to the Victorian approach to arts and to such a mode of production. He simply argues that if the artist is compliant to what the people want then he betrays his own craft.

The Picture of Dorian Gray is Wilde's only novel. It is, probably, one of the most criticized works of art during that time. The novel was published as a serial in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* 1890. Later, it was published as a book with a *Preface* that serves as a statement of Wilde's artistic creed.

For Oscar Wilde all art is quite useless. Away from the aesthetic experiences of art, there is no use for it. According to this view, there is no truth to be deduced from an art work. Moreover, art does not provoke action, rather it commands contemplation. Wilde's wife Constance says that "Since Oscar wrote Dorian Gray, no one will speak to us", according to Wilde's critics the novel is immoral. The issue that is highlighted here is the moral aspect of

General Introduction

the work. For the author art should be viewed solely for the aesthetic pleasure it might produce and to suggest otherwise, or mistake the author for his subject-matter is a mistake. Morality for the artist is simply colors on his plate. Hence art uses moral ideas as its material, not its purpose. Nevertheless, critics view ethical aspects of the novel to be fundamental in its assessment and suggest that immorality is a defect to the aesthetic value of the work. According to the latter claim, art should adhere to moral norms in order to be aesthetically beautiful, yet for Wilde this is not possible. Thus, the present paper will discuss the possibility of aesthetic proclivities to be limited by moral obligations.

In an attempt to solve this problematic, the core of this work will address three fundamental questions:

1) According to *The Daily Chronicle*, the novel is "a poisonous book." To this Wilde replied "My story is poisonous if you like, but you cannot deny that it is also perfect." How can the novel be morally poisonous yet aesthetically perfect?
2) Does the moral character of the novel affect its aesthetic features?
3) Did Oscar Wilde intend a moral for his novel? Is such an intention relevant to the aesthetic assessment of the book?

It can be hypothesized that a book can have immoral effects, if it is read, not for its aesthetic features, but as a guide for action. It can contain moral and immoral acts and statements which contribute to the aesthetic qualities, which are to be contemplated rather than taken as a model of existence.

The work is divided into three chapters: The first chapter serves as conceptual frame work introducing the issue from the Greek roots to the modern approach on the matter. The second chapter is an exploration of Wilde's philosophy on arts in general, and on morality and aesthetics as it appears in his novel. The final chapter discusses the style Wilde employed in his work and the three major characters in order to contrast the works aesthetics qualities with its moral plot.

As students of literature, moral approaches to foreign literary works might be problematic given the oriental background. Hence, this study is motivated by the lack of discussion in such an issue. Moreover, literary objects are, mostly, viewed from an aesthetic standpoint which is the main point of focus, hence, it is also worth observing to what extent this motif is achievable. The main setback faced during the rendition of this humble paper is

the lack of accessible documentation. Nonetheless, this paper, hopefully, would serve as a step forward in enriching the discussion mentioned earlier.

Chapter I

Disentangling

Aesthetics

&

Morality

1.1 Introduction

The issue of art bearing any form of knowledge, needless to say a moral one, is not a new one. It can be traced back to the Greeks. The first to question the nature and reliability of knowledge provided by artworks is Plato. He took art to be a form of imitation devoid of knowledge. On the other hand, Aristotle has a different stance as to the utility of art. Unlike his mentor, he believes art could yield cognitive effect, but not in the most important sense. In *The school of Athens* (1509-1511) artist Raphael portrays Plato raising his finger to the sky and the purity of the original forms and the importance of philosophy in achieving the truth. Aristotle is stretching his hand to the ground, believing in the role of mimesis in purging the human soul. The problem is addressed again in more detail by the time of the European Enlightenment. German and British philosophers, mostly, take interest in the faculty of taste. Hume, and his contemporaries, attempted to establish laws that would govern functions of taste. While, Kant ensures the freedom of such a faculty from being subject to reason. Also, he believes sensuous pleasure to be immediate. The Enlightenment debate gave birth to the contemporary definition of the concept of aesthetics. The word aesthetic came to be used as an adjective to the noun taste. The concept is problematic to be defined, some scholars argue that it is attributed to a certain object that we take pleasure in perceiving. Others argue that it is an experience that we have when contemplating objects around us, while some maintain that it is manifested in the judgments we hold toward objects. The question of the utility of art is addressed again by the time of the industrial revolution. The artist and his work are crushed in a utilitarian society. His existence means that he would comply to the rules of supply and demand. Aestheticism emerges as a mode of refusal to the established Victorian norms and traditions. Art for art's sake aims at liberating the artist and his work from social and moral conventions. Wilde, a prime figure in British aestheticism, defends the view of what came to be called formalism. He considers aesthetics and ethics to be two separate spheres of inquiry and to mistake one for the other is a crime according to his view. An overview of the development of the concepts of taste and aesthetics would facilitate the task of understanding the thesis advanced by Wilde and his contemporaries, beginning by the Greek origins to the Enlightenment and then the view held by the eve of the Victorian era.

1.2 Aesthetic Etymology

The first known use of the term can be traced back to 1735. The word *aesthetic* is derived from the Greek "aisthetikos" (*αἰσθητικός),* meaning "of or for perception of the sense, sensitive, perceptive or pertaining to sense perception", which in turn was derived from "*aisthanomai*" (*αἰσθάνομαι*) denoting "I perceive, feel, sense." (Douglas, n.d.)

The term *Aesthetic* received its name in 1735. In his dissertation *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* ("Philosophical considerations of some matters pertaining to the poem"), Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten introduced the term to mean "a science of how things are to be known by means of the senses (Baumgarten,1735, cxv-cxvi)" (Guyer, 2005, p.3). Four years later, in his *Metaphysica*, Baumgarten expanded his definition to include the "logic of the lower cognitive faculty, the philosophy of the graces and muses, lower genoselogy, the art of thinking beautifully, the art of the analogue of reason (Baumgarten,1739, 553)" (Ibid, p.3). The first modern definition of the term appeared in his later fragment *Aesthetica* as "criticism of taste." (Wilson, 2010, p.20). The German philosopher was by no means the first to introduce the tradition of what we understand by aesthetics, i.e. a philosophy concerned with the essence and perception of beauty and ugliness. Since antiquity philosophers have argued about the nature of beauty and the value of what we now consider fine arts.

1.3 The Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics

Discussion of art and aesthetics can be traced back to the Greeks. The debate between Plato and Aristotle gave birth to, probably, one of the oldest issues in literature and philosophy and that is the value of art. The term taste was adopted as a noun to describe sensuous judgments. Later, the adjective aesthetic was introduced instead of the term taste.

The term aesthetic is introduced to the lexicon during the 18th century. It came to be used as an adjective to the noun taste. The concept has various definitions: some scholars argue that it is attributed to a certain object that we take pleasure in perceiving. Others argue that it is an experience that we have when contemplating objects around us, while some maintain that it is manifested in the judgments we hold toward objects. For the most part, aesthetic theories have divided over questions particular to one or another of these designations: whether artworks are necessarily aesthetic objects; how can aesthetic judgments

be issued on perceptual basis, while we give reasons in support of them; how best to capture the elusive contrast between an aesthetic attitude and a practical one; whether to define aesthetic experience according to its phenomenological or representational content.

1.3.1 The Contributions of the Greeks

The earliest aesthetic theory of any scope is that of Plato. According to his *Republic* he argues that reality consists of forms that are hidden to the senses but present to the soul in its purest essence. These forms are the patterns on which all representations are modeled (Ibid, p.20). Hence, from the objects the philosopher reasons to the pure forms of which they are mere imitations. Yet the artist is only copying the objects of the senses without possessing a knowledge of their forms. What he produces thus is an imitation of an imitation. Because the artist doesn't possess the philosopher's knowledge of reality. Socrates, as Plato narrates in his *Republic*, argues that the flute player possesses knowledge and the maker of the flute would rely on the knowledge of the player in the process of making it. The artist who imitates the flute have neither the knowledge of the player nor that of the maker, hence, nothing of truth can be ascribed to him. Socrates concludes that "Imitation, then, is devoid of knowledge, being only a kind of play or sport, and the tragic and epic poets are imitators in the highest degree." (P., p.114).

Plato regards certain types of artistic production, such as those illustrating the character and behavior of base people, to be morally harmful. He argues that certain musical modes can induce laziness or incite the audience to intemperate actions. (Beardsley, 1966, p.48). Hence in his ideal state, Plato suggests rigorous censorship of the existing poets and artists in favor of artist-philosophers whose craft ought to provide moral and political training. (Wilson, 2010, p.21).

In most of his works Aristotle attempts to defend the claims of representative art as the basis for moral education. Just like Plato, Aristotle believes aesthetics to be inseparable from morality (*Politics*). He attempts to develop principles of beauty and art by scientific scrutiny. In his *Metaphysics,* he argues for a distinction between the good and the beautiful: the good is always found in actions, while beauty might exist in static things as well. The good may be described as beautiful in certain instances, maintaining they are two different things. According to him the pleasure beauty provides is of the purest kind. The universal elements of

beauty are order, symmetry and definiteness or determinateness (*Metaphysics*) as well as certain magnitude or sublimity (*Poetics*).

He distinguishes three kinds of "thought", knowing (*theoria*), doing (*praxis*) and making (*poiesis*). Hence, *poietike* is the productive arts in general. (Beardsley, 1966, p.55). In his *poetics* the meaning of the term is further narrowed to denote making as imitation (mimesis) or representation of objects and events. Imitative arts fall into two categories: the art of imitating visual appearances by means of colors and drawing, and the art of imitating human behavior through verse, song and dance (Else, 1957, p.25). The latter is the art of poetry. The distinction is in terms of medium (words, melody and rhythm). Aristotle's primary concern is two kinds of poetic arts: drama (either tragic or comic) and epic poetry.

People usually go to see tragedies because they want to, not because they have to, and generally they derive pleasure from this experience. According to Aristotle the pleasure of a tragedy maybe produced in different degrees by different works. When considering what draws an audience to drama and works of art in general, he suggests that "imitation is natural to man and the recognition of imitation is pleasurable." (ibid, p.57). The audience takes pleasure in imitation, because seeing and recognizing it as such is an occasion of learning. Aristotle's view is very different from Plato's attack on the cognitive status of art. Though they both agree that art does not provide knowledge in the most important sense. The pleasure of art is of the same order as the pleasure of coming to know.

In his *Poetics* Aristotle stresses the need for a work to be unified. The plot (*mythos*) should portray one extended action which is set up, develops, and comes to a climactic conclusion. It should not be predictable, but should have twists and surprises to keep the viewers' interest and arouse a desired catharsis (*Katharsis*). He defines the proper pleasure of tragedy as a "pleasure which comes from pity and fear and is produced by imitation" (Else, 1957, p.410). The term catharsis is derived from Greek *Katharsis* meaning "purification" or "cleansing." It is the purification of the emotion primarily through art (Kuiper, 1995, p.217). Aristotle states that the purpose of tragedy is to arouse "terror and pity" and thereby effect the catharsis of emotions. He argues that experiencing fear and pity in a controlled context, the spectator's own anxieties are directed outward, and through sympathetic identification with the tragic hero, his insight and outlook are enlarged (Ibid, p.217). Tragedy then has a healthful and humanizing effect on the spectator or reader.

The Greeks approach is more concerned with the educational utility of art. Plato's main point is that art have its social responsibilities, and like any other source of pleasure or of ill, must find its rational place in the whole scheme of citizen's life. What Plato feared most as a bad example for Athenian youth is the suggestion that good men are unhappy while bad men prosper. Aristotle's reply is that there is no need for moral censorship of plays. "For the play about the good man who becomes unhappy or the bad man who becomes happy will simply not be a very good tragedy" (Beardsley, 1966, p.67).

1.3.2 The Concept of Taste

The concept of aesthetic is born out of the concept of taste. Aesthetic, hence, is adopted as an adjective analogous to the noun taste. Coleridge, in 1821, writes a letter to Mr.-Blackwood, expressing his wish to "find a more familiar word than aesthetic for works of taste and criticism." He goes on to argue:

> As our language, therefore, contains no other *usable* adjective, to express coincidence of form, feeling, and intellect, that something, which, confirming the inner and the outward senses, becomes a new sense in itself … Taste, is a – not inappropriate – but very inadequate metaphor; there is reason to hope, that the term *aesthetic*, will be brought into common use.(Coleridge, 1821, p.254).

The eighteenth-century theory of taste emerged as a reaction to the rise of rationalism, notably as applied to beauty, and to the rise of egoism, notably as applied to virtue. It opposes rationalism regarding judgment of beauty to be immediate, and against egoism about virtue, it holds the pleasure of beauty to be disinterested.

1.3.2.1 Immediacy Thesis

Rationalism is a philosophical stance according to which reason is the ultimate source of human knowledge. Rationalists view judgments of beauty to be judgments of reason, i.e., that individuals judge things to be beautiful by inferring from principles or applying concepts. By the beginning of the 18th century a group of literary theorists known as "les géomètres" wanted to bring to literary criticism Descartes' mathematical rigor in physics. As one theorist suggest that "[t]he way to think about a literary problem is that pointed out by Descartes for problems of physical science ... There is nothing better than mathematics as propaedeutic for

literary criticism (Terrasson, 1715, Preface, p.65).” (Wimsatt and Brooks, 1957, p.258) This school of thought is challenged by British empiricists who develope theories of taste. The basic idea that shapes the immediacy theory is that judgments of beauty are not reasoned out, but rather have the immediacy of sensory judgments. In other words, beauty is not a statement of reason, but rather a matter of “taste.” In his *Critique of the power of Judgment* (1790), Kant elaborates the idea:

> If someone reads me his poem or takes me to a play that in the end fails to please my taste, then he can adduce Batteux or Lessing, or even older and more famous critics of taste, and adduce all the rules they established as proofs that his poem is beautiful… I will stop my ears, listen to no reasons and arguments, and would rather believe that those rules of the critics are false … than allow that my judgment should be determined by means of *a priori* grounds of proof, since it is supposed to be a judgment of taste and not of the understanding of reason (p.165).

Equally Hannah More says that “taste is an instantaneous decision of the mind, a sudden relish of what is beautiful, or disgust at what is defective, in an object, without waiting for the slower confirmation of the judgment” (1777, p.180).

Nevertheless, the theory of taste encountered an obvious rationalist objection. To judge an object of sense perception is very different from judging the excellence of a poem or a play. Mostly, poems and plays are sophisticated productions, hence, they require a lot of cognitive work such as applying concepts and drawing inferences. Judging poems and plays, hence, is not immediate and so apparently not a matter of taste.

As a way of meeting this objection, Hume suggests a distinction to be made about understanding the object before judging it and judging the object once understood. He suggests that certain types of beauty command affection and if they fail to, then, it is difficult to reason their desired influence or accustom them better to taste and sentiment. However, understanding the object paves the way for a proper judgment as “in many orders of beauty, particularly those of the fine arts, it is requisite to employ much reasoning, in order to feel the proper sentiment” (1751, p.5).

Hume, like other British empiricists, views the faculty of taste to be a kind of an internal sense, a secondary or reflexive sense as Hutcheson describes it (1738, p.20). Unlike the five direct senses, it depends for its object on a *priori* cognitive operation. Reid describes it as follows:

> Beauty or deformity in an object, results from its nature or structure. To perceive the beauty, therefore, we must perceive the nature or structure from which it results. In this the internal sense differs from the external. Our external senses may discover qualities which do not depend upon any antecedent perception … But it is impossible to perceive the beauty of an object without perceiving the object, or, at least conceiving it. (1846, p.492)

Certain aesthetic objects require the employment of reason to dissect the sophisticated nature of their structures. Thus, grasping the form of an object is very different from perceiving its beauty or deformity.

1.3.2.2 Disinterest Thesis

Egoism is to take pleasure in virtuous actions because they serve a personal interest. From a Hobbesian stand point it is essential to judge an action to be virtuous since it (action, treat) is believed to promote safety. British empiricists, notably Hume, Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, stand in opposition to the previous claim. They hold the view that the pleasure derived from an action is disinterested in the sense that it is not self-interested (Hume, 1738, p.218-232). Judgments of virtue are achieved by means of an immediate sensation of pleasure which mean they regard them as judgments of taste. Disinterest in aesthetic objects means that they are judged to be pleasurable or not regardless if they serve an interest. Since judgments of beauty and virtue are equal in being subjects of taste, there is no reason to think that pleasure in the virtuous cannot be disinterested.

The modern definition of aesthetics does not seem to accept the view that judgments of virtue are judgments of taste, since the two concepts aesthetic/moral stand in opposition such that a judgment accepted by one is by default excluded by the other. This is due to Kant's introduction of the disinterest thesis.

According to Kant, interest in pleasure does not mean self-interest in the Hobbesian sense, rather it denotes that it stands in relation to desire. To describe an action as being

morally good is a statement of the desire to bring it into existence. Morally good actions issue the desire and the duty to preform them. However, the pleasure involved in judging an object to be beautiful or defective is disinterested because it evokes no desire to do anything. Perhaps, if it is possible to say, the duty toward aesthetic objects is to be immersed in judging them. Kant suggests that judgments of taste are not practical but rather contemplative (1790, p.95). Kant's influence sets the concept of taste into opposition with the concept of morality, hence, the modern dominant stance in relation to aesthetic is that of him.

1.3.3 The concept of the Aesthetic

The term aesthetic is introduced into the lexicon during the 18th century. It is used to describe a sort of object, judgment or an experience. Mostly, theorists disagree as to the issues related to these designations, i.e., whether artworks are fundamentally aesthetic objects, or why are aesthetic judgments supported by reason while they are, in fact, perceptual and subjective, and whether to define aesthetic experience based on phenomenological or representational content.

1.3.3.1 Aesthetic Object

Aesthetic formalism is a philosophical stance which holds that the features which distinguish art, and in virtue of which it is valued, are formal in the sense of being graspable by external senses. Aesthetic formalism is taken to follow from both the immediacy and disinterest theses (Carroll, 2001, p.20). The immediacy thesis implies the negligence of all properties which require the use of reason; hence, it implies Aesthetic Formalism. Also, the disinterest thesis implies the artistic irrelevance of all properties capable of practical import, thus, it implies Aesthetic Formalism.

Aesthetic Formalism was the dominant mode of criticism during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Prominent critics started to use formalism in their various fields of aesthetic inquiry. Euduard Hanslick argues that "music had no content but tonally moving forms" (1986, p.29). The post-impressionist Clive Bell, also, maintains that the formal features of painting, "relations and combinations of lines and colors," alone have artistic relevance. (1958, p.17-18).

Formalism is often met with an issue raised by Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. The boxes' cover design is indistinguishable from the original drawn logo. Danto expresses that it is

possible for any artwork either to have: a– another object that is perceptually identical to it but which is not an artwork b- another artwork which is imperceptible from it but which differs in artistic value. From his observation he arrived at the conclusion that form alone cannot make an artwork or construct its value. (1997, p.91).

Danto takes the perceptual similarity to be the limits of both form and aesthetics. He does so by considering aesthetics and form to be co-existent. Danto maintains that:

> aesthetics could not explain why one was a work of fine art and the other not, since for all practical purposes they were aesthetically indiscernible: if one was beautiful, the other one had to be beautiful, since they looked just alike. (2003, p.7)

Danto maintains that 18th century theorists of taste would not know how to consider *Brillo Boxes* as an artwork. It is due to the art-historical context of the object. Hume observes that artists address a targeted, historically situated, audience, hence, the critic "must place himself in the same situation as the audience" to whom the work is addressed (Hume, 1757, p.239). He is considering artworks to be cultural products; which properties are among the "ingredients of composition" that the critic must understand in order to feel the proper sentiment.

Kendall Walton is another influential critic of aesthetic formalism. In his essay *Categories of Art,* he introduces two mains theses, one psychological and the other philosophical. The former considers the aesthetic features, grasped in an artwork, to be dependent on the category to which it is perceived as belonging to. For instance, belonging to the category of painting, Picasso's *Guernica* will be judged as "violent, dynamic, vital and disturbing" (1970, p.347). Yet if perceived as belonging to the category of *Guernica's* it will be perceived as "cold, stark, lifeless, or serene and restful, or perhaps bland, dull, boring" (Ibid, p.347). Since the work is perceived in a contradictory way it might imply that there is no fact of the matter whether it is violent and dynamic. To answer this implication, the philosophical thesis maintains that it hinges on the category to which Picasso intended his work to belong to. The *Guernica* is in fact intended to be a painting by the artist. Moreover, The society, in which it is produced, differentiate paintings as a category and not *Guernica's*. Hence the philosophical thesis maintains that the aesthetic features a work has are those it is perceived as having when perceived as belonging to its actual category. Walton concludes:

> I do not deny that paintings and sonatas are to be judged solely on what can be seen or heard in them—when they are perceived correctly. But examining a work with the senses can by itself reveal neither how it is correct to perceive it, nor how to perceive it that way" (Ibid, p.367).

The two-thesis suggested by Walton appear to be disregarding natural aesthetic properties, since the artist's intention and society must be consulted. Allen Carlson, a prominent figure in the aesthetics of nature, maintains that the two theses can be applied. Carlson notes that Walton's psychological thesis transfers equally from works of art to natural items: ponies are judged to be 'cute' and 'charming' while Clydesdales as 'lumbering' due to perceiving them as belonging to the category of horses. (1981, p.19) The philosophical thesis, also, equally transfers: tigers have both the aesthetic features of tigers and of mammals, and do not have any contrasting aesthetic effects when perceived as cats. According to Carlson the natural histories as discovered by science determine the category or categories of natural items. (Carlson, 1981, p.21-22). Since the natural history of an item is not a matter of the senses, formalism is not suitable for natural items just as works of art.

1.3.3.2 Aesthetic Judgment

The 18th century Rationalists and empiricist or theorists of taste (or even sentimentalist) did not reach an agreement over the immediacy thesis, i.e., the judgments of beauty are achieved by applying concepts of beauty. The debate is not primarily about the existence of principles of beauty, a matter over which sentimentalists might disagree. Kant affirms the subjectivity of such a matter. He denies that there are such principles in his critique (1790, p.101). Nevertheless, both Hutcheson and Hume maintain that these principles are objective. According to the latter view judgments of beauty are judgments of taste and not of reason, yet taste operates according to general principles that can be discovered through empirical investigation (Hutcheson, 1725, p.28-35; Hume, 1757, p.231-233).

Recently the debate between particularists (i.e., proponents of the idea that aesthetic judgments cannot be supported or justified by general reasons or criteria) and generalists (they hold that general reasons and criteria can be applied in aesthetic evaluation) is a revival of the classical debate between rationalists and empiricists.

Disentangling Aesthetics & Morality

Arnold Isenberg, a particularist, accepts that observers often appeal to descriptive features of works in support of their judgments of value, and he explains that this might make it seem as if the observers are appealing to principles in making those judgments. If some critic appeals to a certain treat in an art object, it might seem as if his judgment must involve an appeal to the principle that any art object having the same treat is so much better. But Isenberg refuses this idea, since no one can agree on such a principle:

> There is not in all the world's criticism a single purely descriptive statement concerning which one is prepared to say beforehand, 'If it is true, I shall like that work so much the better' (1949, p.338).

Isenberg believes that critics are offering "direction for perceiving the work." By highlighting certain properties, they are "narrow[ing] down the field of possible visual orientation" and thereby guiding others in "the discrimination of details, the organization of parts, the grouping of discrete objects into patterns" (ibid, p.336). By doing so the critic gets others to see what he has seen, rather than getting them to infer from principles what he has so inferred. As noted, Isenberg is a particularist with respect to the distinction between description and verdict.

Sibley, on the camp of generalism, observes that the properties to which critics appeal in justifying favorable verdicts are not all descriptive or value-neutral. They also appeal to properties that are inherently positive, e.g., grace, balance, dramatic intensity or comicality. To say that a property is inherently positive is not equal to saying that its existence makes the object much better, but that its attribution implies value. For instance, a work may be made worse on account of its comical elements, the simple claim that a work is good because comical is intelligible in the same way as the simple claim that a work is good because yellow, or because it lasts twelve minutes, are not. But if the simple claim that a work is good because comical is thus intelligible, comicality is a general criterion for aesthetic value, and the principle that articulates that generality is true. Yet none of these disregards the immediacy thesis, In his paper *Aesthetic Concepts* (2001), Sibley notes:

> I have argued elsewhere that there are no sure-fire rules by which, referring to the neutral and non-aesthetic qualities of things, one can infer that something is balanced, tragic, comic, joyous, and so on. One has to look and see. Here, equally, at a different level, I am saying that there are no sure-fire mechanical

> rules or procedures for deciding which qualities are actual defects in the work; one has to judge for oneself. (Sibley, 2001, p.107–108)

Sibley argues that the application of such concepts as balanced, violent, comic or graceful is not a matter of deciding whether the descriptive (non-aesthetic) conditions for their application are met, but instead a matter of taste, hence, aesthetic judgments are immediate as he explains:

> We see that a book is red by looking, just as we tell that the tea is sweet by tasting it. So too, it might be said, we just see (or fail to see) that things are delicate, balanced, and the like. This kind of comparison between the exercise of taste and the use of the five senses is indeed familiar; our use of the word 'taste' itself shows that the comparison is age-old and very natural (ibid, p.13–14).

Sibley notes that there is a difference between the exercise of taste and the use of the five senses. In the former, critics use reason to justify their aesthetic judgments, for instance, by talking they bring others to see what they have seen. (ibid, p.14–19)

Davies claims that the critic is interpreted as arguing deductively from principles relative to a certain artistic type, i.e., from principles characterizing artworks of a specific type or category, e.g, German Romanticism plays, Italian Renaissance paintings, as better for having a certain property characteristic of the category. (1990, p.174). Benders, on the same line, argues that the critic should be interpreted as arguing inductively from principles expressing tendencies that relate certain properties to certain artworks. (1995, p.36).

Davies and Bender contend that the critic argues from the truth of the principle to the truth of the verdict. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that mere reflection on the nature and historicity of art and types of art could produce a list of good or bad making properties. According to Shelley:

> any capacity to establish that works are good by inference from principles evidently depends on some capacity to establish that works are good without

> any such inference, and the question arises why the critic should prefer to do by inference what she can do perfectly well without. (Shelley & Zalta, 2009).

It is not to say that aesthetic judgment could not be inferred from principles. However, it does stress the notion that such a judgment is primarily non-referential, which is why the immediacy thesis still stands.

1.3.3.3 Aesthetic Experience

Aesthetic experience can be approached from two stances when considering what makes an experience aesthetic. Internalist thesis which calls upon properties internal to experience, and externalist thesis which appeal to properties external to the experience, mostly properties of the object being experienced. According to Iseminger the distinction between internal and external theses of aesthetic is similar to that between phenomenal and epistemic conception of aesthetic experience (2003, p.100).

According to Shelley, Beardsley might be described as the founder of what is now considered as the internalist theory.(2009) Beardsley, In his *Aesthetics* (1958), he maintains that aesthetic experience have four common properties, which "some writers have obtained by acute introspection, and which each of us can test in his own experience"(p.527). The four properties are focus, intensity, coherence and completeness. According to Beardsley, coherence and completeness can be subsumed under unity (Ibid, p.527). Coherence entails that elements are properly connected such that:

> one thing leads to another; continuity of development, without gaps or dead spaces, a sense of overall providential pattern of guidance, an orderly accumulation of energy toward a climax, are present to an unusual degree. (Ibid, p.528)

Completeness entails that elements counterbalance or resolve each other; hence, the whole stands apart from its constituents:

> The impulses and expectations aroused by elements within the experience are felt to be counterbalanced or resolved by other elements within the experience, so that some degree of equilibrium or finality is achieved and enjoyed. The

> experience detaches itself, and even insulates itself, from the intrusion of alien elements. (Beardsley, 1958, p.528)

Beardsley is criticized, mostly by Dickie, for not differentiating between properties of aesthetic experience and the aesthetic experience of properties. Remarkably, Beardsley's notion of cohesion is a feature that the critic experiences aesthetic objects as having, but there is no reason offered to think that aesthetic experience has any such property:

> Note that everything referred to is a perceptual characteristic (what Beardsley calls "the phenomenally objective presentation in experience") and not an effect of the perceived characteristics. Thus, no ground is furnished for concluding that experience can be unified in the sense of being coherent. What is actually argued for is that aesthetic objects are coherent, a conclusion which must be granted, but not the one which is relevant. (1965, p.131)

Dickie, also, raises another issue in regard of Beardsley's completeness of aesthetic experience:

> One can speak of elements being counterbalanced *in the painting* and say that the painting is stable, balanced and so on, but what does it mean to say the *experience* of the spectator of the painting is stable or balanced? … Looking at a painting in some cases might aid some persons in coming to feel stable because it might distract them from whatever is unsettling them, but such cases are atypical of aesthetic appreciation and not relevant to aesthetic theory. Aren't characteristics attributable to the painting simply being mistakenly shifted to the spectator? (Dickie, 1965, p.132)

According to Shelley the debate between Dickie and Beardsley, which lasted almost for two decades (Beardsley 1969,1982; Dickie 1974,1987, and Iseminger 2003), can be described as developing an answer to the question "What can a theory of aesthetic experience be that takes seriously the distinction between the experience of features and the features of experience?"(Shelley & Zalta, 2009). Their debate resulted in an externalist theory, presented in Beardsley's *The Aesthetic Point of View,* that an aesthetic experience is an experience that has an aesthetic content. The view that an object has aesthetic value, inasmuch as it affords

valuable experience when grasped correctly, came to be called empiricism about aesthetic value. It reduces aesthetic value to the value of aesthetic experience. The empiricists urge that:

> Aesthetic experience … aims first at understanding and appreciation, at taking in the aesthetic properties of the object. The object itself is valuable for providing experience that could only be an experience of that object ... Part of the value of aesthetic experience lies in experiencing the object in the right way, in a way true to its non-aesthetic properties, so that the aim of understanding and appreciation is fulfilled. (Goldman 2006, p.339–341)

Other empiricists believe it to be impossible to address the value of aesthetic experience without going back to the aesthetic character of the object. For instance, pointing out the values of experiences artworks allow, Levinson asserts:

> if we examine more closely these goods … we see that their most adequate description invariably reveals them to involve ineliminably the artworks that provide them… The cognitive expansion afforded us by Bartok's Fourth String Quartet, similarly, is not so much a generalized effect of that sort as it is a specific state of stimulation undetachable from the particular turns and twists of Bartok's carefully crafted a generalized effect of that sort as it is a specific state of stimulation undetachable from the particular essay… even the pleasure we take in the Allegro of Mozart's Symphony no. 29 is, as it were, the pleasure of discovering the individual nature and potential of its thematic material, and the precise way its aesthetic character emerges from its musical underpinnings… there is a sense in which the pleasure of the Twenty-Ninth can be had only from that work.(Levinson, 1996, p.22-23)

Discussions about the values of experiences granted by certain works of art tilt to describing the works themselves. If an empiricist approach is to be adopted, the tilt is justified by the intimate relation between the aesthetic character of the work and the value of the experience granted by the work.

1.4 Aesthetic and Moral Value

Aesthetic and moral value are compared, linked and juxtaposed since they have been identified as concepts. At the intersection of these two terms several issues appear. On the one

hand, Plato's fear of veiling the truth of existence by the mask of the actor. On the other hand, Aristotle's purging of the human soul, without having to suffer tragic events, through the catharsis of emotions.

Ever since the Greeks, the dispute between those who believe that art have a direct impact on morality, and those who assert its independence, have continued. Tolstoy, despite being an artist himself, is doubtful about the role of the artist. Clashes of art and morality are even taken to courts, for instance, when Penguin Books were sued over the publication of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover.*

From a philosophical stand point, the clear-cut between art, aesthetics and morality have been long questioned. One camp assert that there is no link between the aesthetic and the moral, i.e., a work of art being morally reprehensible does not refute its aesthetic value, while others argue for the cognitive status of art to be influential in moral understanding.

In order to approach the relationship between these three concepts a definition of the terms is required. Aesthetics so far is defined as a philosophy concerned with the essence and perception of beauty and ugliness. Ethics and morality are often used interchangeably to denote the search for the optimal mode of being. Yet what do we mean by ethics and morality?

1.4.1 Defining Ethics and Morality

Ethics is the study of questions of morality, i.e., the search to understand what is right, wrong, good or bad. It is a branch of philosophy that systematically scrutinizes moral ideals and goals, motives of choice and patterns of right and wrong conduct. The term ethics is derived from the Greek *ethikos* meaning "ethical, pertaining to character." (Douglas, n.d.). Issues of personal character and the search for optimal modes of living are at the core of Greek philosophy.

The word moral is from the Latin *morale* pertaining to "character or temperament (good or bad)" (Ibid, n.d.). The Romans used this term to describe customary ways that people tended to act. According to the Oxford dictionary, moral is "concerned with or derived from the code of behavior that is considered right or acceptable in a particular society" (OED), hence, morality denotes principles of right and wrong behavior.

Though the two terms are used interchangeably today, yet morality refers to the social norms that people are taught and conditioned to follow, whereas ethics refers to the rational

investigation and questioning of these norms. The latter view of ethics is said to be normative, i.e., it assumes the existence of some universal moral principles and standards.

1.4.2 Art as a Source of Understanding

Cognitive value is one of the properties that can be ascribed to art. It is controversial in so far as many philosophers have disputed its significance and benefit to artworks. It goes against the claim that the role of art is to induce affective experience, i.e., to make the claim that such a value is relevant to artworks means to misunderstand the role of art and, moreover, to distort its very nature.

Schellkens argues that it is peculiar to hold such a position for at least two reasons. First, "cognitive value seems to be a kind of value that artworks have in virtue of having some other, say, emotional, historical or political value." (2007, p.45). For instance, Picasso's *Guernica* seems to have cognitive value because of its emotional content, it expresses the human suffering that arises from political conflict. Second, "art is obviously capable of generating pleasurable feelings … [which] are at least at times ancillary to the principal value of the artwork, or at least not all there is to it" (ibid, p.46). As discussed earlier many artworks are capable of arousing valuable aesthetic experience, that might last longer than the immediate sensation of pleasure, and might be more meaningful than pleasure.

Aristotle in his *poetics* defends the view that artworks yield cognitive value. He maintains that poetry deals with universals rather than particulars and is an excellent tool for transmitting the knowledge of the former (Else, 1957, p.301). Martha Nassbaum has built upon the Aristotelian approach and argues that great works of literature fundamentally deepen the reader's moral understanding and development. (1990, p.23) They do so by "focusing our attention and shaping our attitudes appropriately." (Schellekens, 2007, p.46).

There are two issues that arise when considering the cognitive value. First, is the issue of whether art is capable of yielding substantial cognitive experience; second, even if art is indeed capable of yielding such an experience, the kind of experience referred to might not be relevant to the overall aesthetic value of art.

The first issue finds an expression in Plato's *Republic*, where he argues that even though mimesis or imitation might allow the existence of knowledge, it in fact only produces a deceptive appearance of knowledge. (p.114). Similarly, it has been held that all avant-garde art

cannot yield any substantial knowledge, since the representative means employed by such an art are incapable of conveying any cognitive content worthy of the name. (Schellekens, 2007, p.47)

The second problem is mostly addressed by formalists, such as Clive Bell, who emphasize the importance of the form to the detriment of any other feature that artworks might have. For formalists, the artistic value, that is fundamental to art and its conception, is defined purely in terms of the formal qualities of the work.

These two concerns need not be solved, for formalists can allow that art has the ability to give us some understanding and knowledge even if such a property is not relevant to the aesthetic judgment of artworks.

1.5 Aestheticism and Decadence

The 19th century brought radical changes in political, social and economic position for the artist. Practical and theoretical problems emerged about the artist and his relation to his art and society. The political scene witnessed a growing desire for individual freedom and political expression, also the broadening of educational opportunity and political participation. The advancement of mechanized industry and the factory system compelled a revision of people's attitudes toward goods, production and utility. The emergence of social classes brought into existence a new basis for moral and aesthetic taste. Thus, how could artistic creation find its place and flourish in the age of mass-production, governed by supply and demand? How could works of art, with their peculiar values, compete in the open market governed by the utility of its goods? How can the artist cater for the needs of an industrialized utilitarian middle class without being unfaithful to his own sense of beauty and vision of life?

Aestheticism emerged as a movement that reacted to prevailing utilitarian social philosophies and to what is perceived as the ugliness and philistinism of the industrial age. It can be, broadly, defined as the elevation of taste and the pursuit of beauty as a prime principle in art and life. Aesthetes, like formalists, argue that art should be judged on the basis of form. The movement's formula *l'art pour l'art* "art for art's sake" is inspired by the French novelist Théophile Gautier in his 1836 preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. It encapsulates the view

defended by the movement, i.e., praising the sensual qualities of art and the sheer pleasure they provide.

1.5.1 The Philosophy of Art for Art's Sake

According to Beardsley the phrase "art for art's sake" is first introduced by Benjamin Constant, by 1804, in his *Journal intime* (1966, p.286). It is introduced to denote Kant's disinterest thesis, i.e., Kantian aesthetics aimes to shape a sphere of autonomy for art, which Schiller goes on to enlarge:

> The aesthetic object is something utterly different from all utilitarian objects, for its purposiveness is without purpose; the motive that leads to its creation is distinct, and independent of all others … and the enjoyment of the beauty and of the sublime brings to man a value that nothing else can provide, since it has nothing to do with cognition or with morality.(ibid, p.286)

The source of the 19th century's notion about the status of art is already established in the Kantian thesis of disinterest.

The French poet Charles Baudelaire maintains that the idea of utility is "the most hostile in the world to the idea of beauty." (ibid, p.286). On the same line, Gautier in his preface to *Albertuse* (1832) explains that "en général dès qu'une chose devient utile, elle cesse d'être belle." (p.4) ("In general, when a thing becomes useful, it ceases to be beautiful"). Moreover, Oscar Wilde share the same notion that "the only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely. All art is quite useless." (1920, p.5). All of them defend the importance of pure art, free from moral limitations, and they celebrate beauty's independence of, and superiority to, all other considerations. Yet Baudelaire refuses the "childish utopianism of the *art for art's sake* school, in ruling out morals." (1925, p.184). What he seems to say is that art is not subject to ordinary moral code, but it still has its own moral code to adhere to. (Ibid, p.284, p.382).

In France, the representative of the movement is Théophile Gautier, in his *Premières Poésies* (1832), and then in the prefaces to *Albertus* (1833) and *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1834). He defends the liberty of art and artist against moralists and utilitarians. Moralists fear that their daughters and wives would be corrupted if certain novels are not band.(Beardsley, 1966, p.287) The wives, says Gautier, don't read anyway, and "As for their daughters, if they

have been to boarding-schools, I do not see what these books could possibly teach them"(Eugen Weber as quoted in Beardsley, 1966, p.287). To the utilitarians, who ask about the practical value of a book, he says that " a book cannot be turned into gelatin soup, a novel is not a pair of seamless boots,"(Ibid, p.287) and for the spiritual value he says that it keeps people from "reading useful, virtuous, and progressive newspapers, or other indigestible and degrading drugs"(Ibid, p.287). Poems are the same as flowers, but "I would rather do without potatoes than without roses." (Ibid, p.287)

In England, art for art's sake found a voice in Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), and the essays of Oscar Wilde collected under the title *Intentions* (1891). Pater's concluding words are taken as the most passionate statement of the doctrine:

> Only, be sure it is passion, that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake. (p.213)

The *Art for Art's Sake* doctrine is essentially a brief for the intrinsic worth of aesthetic experience, away from other forms of value, and a declaration of aesthetic independence. The doctrine is a defense of the artist sovereignty in his own domain, his right to follow his own enthusiasm or ideal, to experiment artistically as he sees fit. It is an assertion of a human right, the freedom of expression for the gifted individual who must express himself or perish. Such an assertion as Beardsley maintains "was by no means academic under the fluctuating political conditions of France and the limitation on the press in England." (1966, p.289). A number of novelists and poets have to cope constantly with censorship, with suppression of books and threats of imprisonment.

Decadence and Art for Art's Sake were associated with degeneration. Max Nordau condemned writers and artist of the movement in his book *Degeneration* (1895). The same year, the flourishing of decadence is halted, as Oscar Wilde, at the highest of his fame and influence, is put on trial.

Aestheticism is intimately associated with the philosophy of hedonism. Though the latter finds its root in Greece, it became wide spread during romanticism. Both doctrines

advocate pleasure and the pursuit of such before anything else. In hedonism, as in decadence, the social norms and values do not play a significant role over the tendencies of the individual.

1.5.2 Aestheticism and Hedonism

Hedonism is a school of thought that maintains that the pursuit of pleasure and intrinsic goods are the most important goals of human life. A hedonist is a person who strives to maximize his pleasure. Ethical hedonism can be defined as the doctrine that all people have the right to do everything in their power to achieve the greatest amount of pleasure possible. The idea is shaped by Socrates' student Aristippus of Cyrene. (Hastings, 1926, p.6)

The word Hedonism comes from the Greek "hedone" denoting pleasure. (OED) Ethical hedonism claims that only pleasure has worth or value, and pain has the opposite worth. Jeremy Bentham in his book *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1907) maintains that "nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain*, and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do." (p.1)

Aestheticism advocates a form of modern Epicurainism which originates in Bentham's hedonism. For aesthetes, the value of an object is determined only in terms of the pleasure it might produce and the pursuit of beauty is held as the most important aim in life. According to Wilde, the aesthetic movement stresses the idea of creating maximum amount of beauty and pleasure in one's life and Dorian Gray seems to advance this thought. When life ceases to be pleasurable Dorian chooses to stab the canvas and cries his last breath as the only thing worth living for ceased to exist.

> There was to be, as lord Henry had prophesied, a new hedonism that was to recreate life … it was never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience … it was to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment.(1920, p.147)

Indulging in a life of momentarily pleasure and not considering the consequences, the hedonistic sentiment is true for both Wilde and his character. Wilde declares sensualism (the worship of the senses) because:

> the world had sought to starve them into submission or to kill them by pain, instead of aiming at making them elements of a new spirituality, of which a fine instinct for beauty was to be the dominant characteristic. (ibid, p.110)

Oscar Wilde is among the *fin de siècle* writers who assertes the superiority of beauty and pleasure above all. His novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the embodiment of the principles of the Aestheticism's doctrine and a call to embrace hedonism. Ellmann describes the novel as "the aesthetic novel by excellence, not in espousing the doctrine, but in exhibiting its dangers." (1988, p.315).

1.5.3 Oscar Wilde: The Formation of an Aesthete

From 1871 to 1874, Wilde joined the Trinity College in Dublin with a royal scholarship to read classics. (Ellmann, 1988, p.25) Wilde's tutor J. P. Mahaffy was the one to inspire his interest in Greek literature. As a student Wilde worked with Mahaffy on his book entitled *Social Life in Greece*.(Sandulescu, 1997, p.59) "My first and best teacher," Wilde described Mahaffy, " the scholar who showed me how to love Greek things"(Ellmann, 1988, p.26) Mahaffy took pride in "creating Wilde", nevertheless, he ended up naming him "the only blot on my tutorship."(Ibid, p.27)

Wilde became an established member of the University Philosophical Society. He presented a paper titled *Aesthetic Morality,* which was subject of mockery by the member's suggestion book of 1874. (Ellmann, 1988, p.29) In his final year at Trinity College, Wilde won the Berkeley Gold Medal which is the highest academic award in Greek.(Coakley, 1994, p.154) Afterwards, he competed for a demyship to Magdalen College Oxford which he won easily thanks to over nine years spent studying Greek.

During his stay at the Magdalen College, Wilde became associated with the aesthetic and decadent movement. Wilde decorated his rooms with blue china, sunflowers, peacock feathers and other *objets d'art*. (Ellmann, 1988, p.39) He once stated to his fellow aesthetes that he "find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china." (Ibid, p.43- 44) The line became a slogan for aesthetes who were criticised for its senselessness. (Ibid, p.44) Despite the disdain aesthetes faced, yet their dull and flamboyant costumes became a recognised pose. (Breen, 2000, p.22) By his final year Wilde saw himself developing beyond the prescribed texts. This recognition led to rusticating him for one term which he spent on a trip to Greece with Mahaffy. (Ellmann, 1988, p.78)

Disentangling Aesthetics & Morality

Wilde met Walter Pater, the author of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, on his third year, yet he was enthralled by Pater's work since its publication. (Ibid, p.46) According to Pater, sensibility to beauty should have the greatest importance, he stresses that each moment should be lived to its fullest. In *De profundis* Wilde admitted that Pater's work was "that book that has had such a strange influence over my life." (Holland, 2000, p.735) Wilde's devotion to art came from Pater, yet it was John Ruskin who gave him a purpose for it. (Ellmann, 1988, p.95) Ruskin did not believe in the autonomy or the self-validating aestheticism of Pater, by contrast, he maintained that the importance of art lies in its capacity for the enhancement of society. Ruskin was an admirer of beauty but above all believed it must be aligned with moral good. Wilde fervently attended Ruskin's lecture series *The Aesthetic and Mathematic School of Art in Florence,* he learned that aesthetics were simply the non-mathematical elements of painting. He ended up volunteering for Ruskin's project to convert a country lane to a beautiful road tidily edged with flowers. (ibid, p.95)

By 1885, Wilde enjoyed reviewing and journalism. He shared his views on art, literature, and life in a form less tedious then lecturing, his reviews were mostly chatty and positive. (Ibid, p.247-248) He contributed to journal like *The Pall Mall Gazette, The Daily Chronicle,* etc.(Ibid, p.273) By mid-1887 Wilde became the editor of *Lady's World* magazine, he immediately changed its name to *Woman's World*, adding serious articles on parenting, culture and politics while maintaining articles about fashion and arts.(Mason, 1914, p.219) Usually two pieces of fiction were included, one dedicated for children and the other for the ladies.(Mason, 1914, p.219) In October 1889 Wilde found his own voice in prose, he left the magazine at the end of the second volume. (Ibid, p.202)

After getting over journalism Wilde occupied himself with formulating his aesthetic ideas more sharply. He started writing longer prose pieces which were published in major intellectual journals of the day. In January 1889 *The Decay of Lying: A Dialogue* appeared in *The Nineteenth Century,* and *Pen, Pencil and Poison* in *The Fortnightly Review*, edited by his friend Frank Harris. (Ibid, p.71) Wilde's primary concern was the effect of moralising art, he believed in art's redemptive and developmental powers, he argues that:

> Art is individualism, and individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. There lies its immense value. For what it seeks is to disturb monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine. (1915, p.33)

In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, he argued that political conditions should establish the primacy of creativity. Wilde envisioned a society where industry liberates human effort from the burden of necessity, an effort that can be appropriated to artistic creation.

Six pieces by Wilde are collected under the title *Intentions* 1891 "the book on which Wilde's claims as a critic chiefly lie." (Raby, 1997, p.80) The book includes two dialogues *The Decay of Lying* and *The Critic as Artist,* a satirical biography titled *Pen, Pencil and Poison* and an essay about stage realism titled *The Truth of Masks*. Wilde contemplated including in it his view about the meaning of Shakespeare's Sonnets *The Portrait of Mr W. H* and his essay about socialism which stresses individualism and the autonomy of art *The Soul of Man Under Socialism.* (ibid, p.80) Wilde elevated criticism to a creative and independent activity marking his ideas to be similar to the postmodern theory. (ibid, p.81) He rejects the consistently 'sincere' and 'earnest' in favour of shifting 'impressions' and 'moods.' (Ibid, p.81)

Wilde's playful style allowed reviewers to look down upon essays that baffled their sense of intellectual decency. The reviewers hesitantly wished that Wilde would get on with the thought it self, dropping his showy paradoxes in order to devote himself to writing something more solid and reasonable. (ibid, p.81) Wilde's ambitious and ever challenging thoughts were constantly tamed with laughter

1.6 Conclusion

The intersection between art and morality emerges as early as Plato's *Republic*. The Greeks centered their inquiry on the cognitive aspect of aesthetic experience. Later, 18th century philosophers hold that the faculty of taste is both disinterested and immediate. Aesthetic judgments have the immediacy of sensuous judgments. According to Kant the pleasure must be disinterested, if one takes pleasure in an object because of its potential benefit then this is no longer a statement of taste. He creates an autonomy for art, i.e., art works are free from other consideration, such as morality. Formalists have built on the Enlightenment's approach to aesthetics. According to their doctrine, aesthetic objects are known in terms of the formal aspects present in an object, and in virtue of which it is considered art. The judgment of art is to a great extent a sensuous statement; before reasoning to the value of an object it requires to be fully grasped first. The proper contemplation of art requires good understanding of its nature once adequately grasped. Moreover, art manifests itself in the sphere of imagination. According to aesthetes art should transcend reality, and

duplicating or reporting reality faithfully, what came to be called realism, is rejected. To Wilde realism is a mode of journalism not of artistic creation. Moreover, art in itself is devoid of any possessiveness besides admiration. The artist simply creates a mood, he doesn’t preach or educate.

Chapter II

The philosophy

of

Oscar Wilde

The Philosophy of Oscar Wilde

2.1 Introduction

It has been established in the previous chapter that by definition aesthetics and ethics are two fundamentally different components. Aesthetics mainly deal with, sensuous judgments, contemplation and the appreciation of formal aspects of an aesthetic object, while ethics is a conscious, logical and deliberate study of moral creeds and motifs of action.

This chapter is an overview of Wilde's aesthetic philosophy. He takes a stance toward the held believes and costumes of his time. The Victorian society with the rise in industry and literacy shifted to the mentality of supply and demand. According to Wilde art can not comply to that law or otherwise it loses its essence. Moreover, society at the time failes to see the gap between the two domains. It is self-evident that contemplation is a form of a reflection of the inward character of the individual. Hence, the individual who is still new to the scene of aesthetics could not help but project his moral creed into works of art shifting from an aesthetic approach to an ethical assessment of what appears to be the morality of an art work.

In his approach to the issue, Wilde discusses few fundamental points that would clear the conflict. His early essays establish that what is natural is not necessarily artistic. Art, to Wilde, transcends reality and nature. What mimics nature fails to be art since the actual thing already exists, it is simply a mode of journalism as Wilde prefers to call it. Hence, he establishes that art is alien to the everyday and to the natural. Moreover, Wilde believes that for art to be impactful it has to be alienated from society. If art conforms to the norms of supply and demand it has nothing to offer. He then proceeds to gives several examples of why the two are divorced. Wilde believes that aesthetics exists in the sphere of imagination, unlike ethics which are constantly emerging in the sphere of action. Hence, works of art that aim at altering opinions or persuading the individual to action simply fail to be art. The proper approach to art, according to Wilde, is nothing but contemplation. His novel is said to be one of the most criticized books of all time. It was published as a serial in *Lippincott's Magazine*. After its publication over 200 criticisms appeared, and mostly they deal with the morality of the book. Most of what is published is a form of repetition of the same ideas, thus, Wilde chooses to reply but to three papers. His replies summarize his approach to the issue of aesthetics and ethics. Later Wilde chooses to include a preface to his book which would serve as an announcement of his creed as an aesthete. In order to understand the position of aesthetics and ethics, the following chapter will examine the critical writings of Wilde. Also, it will review the criticism that the books received and the author's reply.

2.2 Aesthetics and Society

In a Victorian industrial era, Wilde champions the artist and his freedom of imagination. He considers art to be an important factor in the shaping of culture. Art inspires life, it does not seek to alter opinions or shape morality. In several of his critical essays, Wilde maintains that art is a sphere of imagination from which people can chose naturally the types to mimic and experiences to enjoy.

The late nineteenth century's society witnessed the rise of journalism as opposed to fiction. The context in which the new aesthetics makes its appearance, in Wilde's essay *The Decay of Lying* (1904), is a reading of the decline of art in modern culture. The title refers to the decline in the value of fiction or storytelling. As Wilde explains "the loss that results to literature in general from the false ideal of our time… useful information… we have sold our birthright for a mess of facts." (p.33) According to Wilde the journalist is replacing the artist. The spiritual atmosphere that stories, paintings and music can foster declines with the rise in value of useful information. Art as Wilde noted becomes "useless," and not expressing "anything but itself." The newspaper article usefully imparts information but in itself is an empty vessel, whereas the story or "lie" contains within itself its own concrete suggestiveness and power. (Brown, 1999, p.71) Hence, the first principle of Wilde's aesthetic that art is "useless," rises out of his reading of modern culture. Wilde's assertion of the independence of art from life originates in the experience of late nineteenth century consumer culture.

In *The Decay of Lying*, Wilde maintains that European literature errs in attempting to create "realistic" art. To copy life without altering its given facts is not permissible for Wilde. One of Wilde's characters, Vivian, says: "What is true about drama and the novel is no less true about those arts that we call the decorative arts. The whole history of these arts in Europe is the record of the struggle between Orientalism, with its frank rejection of imitation . . . and our own imitative spirit."(p.25) He addresses both: the social pressures exercised on artistic freedom, and the endorsement of plain realism. Quintus discusses Wilde's moral views in his article *The Moral Implications of Oscar Wilde's Aestheticism* (1980). He explains that "the artist is free from dictates of social customs and norms; hence, he is free to use good and evil as color for the purpose of creating artworks." (p.562). To be an artist according to Wilde is to produce aesthetically beautiful literary forms and types, not to affirm, negate or even preach an idea or a position. Wilde rejects the literature that incites people into action. Art, as Lord Henry expresses "annihilates the desire to act."(1920, p.241) Quintus suggests that Wilde is

arguing that people naturally desire to make their lives an art. (Quintus, 1980, p.567) Wilde's statement matches Schopenhauer's aesthetic view. Fiction provides people with an escape from fact, an alternative which is inviting simply because the facts of one's life are too familiar. (1966, p.390)

2.2.1 The Proper Aim of Art

As an artist, Wilde expresses many of his views on art through his own art. Often he uses characters as masks through which he could express his own views. In his essay *The Decay of Lying* (1904), he argues against the notion that nature is a form of artistic inspiration through the character Vivian. Insight, he maintains, "is not to be found in Nature herself. It resides in the imagination, or fancy, or cultivated blindness of the man who looks at her." (p.3) Wilde instead believes that art is a lens through which individuals experience nature. He explains that one sees mountaintops and roses and houses the way they are portrayed in specific works of art. Vivian elaborates:

> We have all seen in our own day in England how a certain curious and fascinating type of beauty, invented and emphasised by two imaginative painters, has so influenced Life that whenever one goes to a private view or to an artistic salon one sees, here the mystic eyes of Rossetti's dream, the long ivory throat, the strange squarecut jaw, the loosened shadowy hair that he so ardently loved, there the sweet maidenhood of The Golden Stair, the blossomlike mouth and weary loveliness of the Laus Amoris, the passionpale face of Andromeda, the thin hands and lithe beauty of the Vivien in Merlin's Dream(Ibid, p.29)

Wilde's definition promotes art to a greater reality than nature herself. He argues that the experience of nature is not enough, and whether one prefers it or not often one will reimagine and try to recapture art as they deal with everyday natural objects. One cannot interact in an artistic salon without recalling and seeing "The mystic eyes of Rosseti's throat… [and] the passionpale face of Andromeda" Thus Wilde holds art to bleed into our daily lives, and makes our existence all the richer.

He concludes *The Decay of Lying* by stating that "The final revelation is that Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art." (Ibid, p.55) Combined with his view on nature, it seems as though Wilde is championing the mystical over the everyday. He maintains that lies, or the enhancement of everyday events, are preferable to reality. If art captures "the loosened shadowy hair that he so ardently loved," and this is the memory that

remains within the reader's mind, mostly untrue, yet better than hair one observes with his own eyes. In his essay *The Critic as Artist* (1904), Wilde further expands this idea, as Earnest wonders:

> why cannot the artist be left alone, to create a new world if he wishes it, or, if not, to shadow forth the world which we already know, and of which, I fancy, we would each one of us be wearied if art, with her fine spirit of choice and delicate instinct of selection, did not, as it were, purify it for us, and give to it a momentary perfection (p.92)

He believes art to alleviate humanity from the 'monotony' of everyday life. Art, according to Wilde, 'purifies' the world around us and idyllically captures it, hence we might experience our surroundings in the most perfect way. Thus, art should not be relegated for being untrue, but rather rejoiced for being so. A good artist is the one who can transcend reality, and perhaps catalyze a new reality within the mind of the reader. In *the Critic as Artist,* Gilbert notes that:

> the real artist becomes not merely a material element of metrical beauty, but a spiritual element of thought and passion also, waking a new mood, it may be, or stirring a fresh train of ideas, or opening by mere sweetness and suggestion of sound some golden door at which the Imagination itself had knocked in vain (ibid, p.93 - 94)

Wilde thus promotes the artist to a spiritual status. Art doesn't belong within the physical realm, he argues, but rather is derived from transcendent inclinations. The world is outdated, according to Wilde, and art is fresh and innovative. An artist is divinely inspired it seems. Art derives nothing from life, it only enhances one's experience of it.

2.2.2: Aesthetic Superiority

Wilde elevates the idea of superiority in his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1920). Within this heavily critiqued work, he seeks not to position art and life, but rather to alienate the two entities. Lord Henry, who serves as a mask through which Wilde expresses his views, states that "an artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them. We live in an age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography. We have lost the abstract sense of beauty." (p.18) Lord Henry maintains that art should not be influenced by one's surroundings. Doing so would taint the work. If art, he argues, is controlled by one's natural surroundings, then it fails to be art and rather simply becomes a naturalistic representation. With Wilde's idea of art's superiority, it can be concluded that art is

superior to nature because it is independent of it. Thus, art is a medium of fantasy, innovation and the sublime. (Hancock, 2013, p.3) It is a vehicle to escape nature, and should be viewed as such. Wilde's rejection of realism can be observed in his essay *The Critic as Artist* (1904). He criticizes the idea of journalism through his mask Gilbert:

> For they [newspapers & news writers] give us the bald, sordid, disgusting facts of life. They chronicle, with degrading avidity, the sins of the second-rate, and with the conscientiousness of the illiterate give us accurate and prosaic details of the doings of people of absolutely no interest whatsoever. But the artist, who accepts the facts of life, and yet transforms them into shapes of beauty, and makes them vehicles of pity or of awe, and shows their color-element, and their wonder, and true ethical import also, and build out of them a world more real than reality itself, and of loftier and more noble import - who shall set limits to him? (p.174)

By journalism Wilde means realism in its broadest sense. (Quintus, 1980, p.564) Here Wilde reacts against art which faithfully reports reality. The artist does not reproduce reality, instead he organizes reality for purposes mentioned in the passage. Something as "true" as newspapers does not fall under the category of art, and if it is used as a material it must be restructured. His rejection of "journalistic" arts is not unique. Aristotle in his *Poetics* gives the same impression. (Else, 1957, p.301) Wilde agrees with Plato that art is deceiving and not "true," but he does not share the same apprehension over art's delusions. (Quintus, 1980, p.567) Moreover, he accepts Aristotle's concept of mimesis. Art cannot reproduce or copy reality with fidelity, yet that is not art's purpose, neither to Aristotle nor to Wilde.

The *Picture of Dorian Gray* contains several other examples which illustrate this point. As Lord Henry chats with Dorian one afternoon, he begins to express his opinion on his friend the artist Basil, stating that Basil "puts everything that is charming in him into his work. The consequence is that he has nothing left for life but his prejudices, his principles, and his common sense. The only artists I have ever known who are personally delightful are bad artists." (1920, p.65). With this statement, Lord Henry provides a concrete example of how life must be alienated from art. In his eyes, and perhaps in those of Wilde, art and life cannot coexist. Either an artist invests himself into his work and has nothing left to give, or he fails

and has plenty to give. To be a stellar artist as well as an intriguing human being simply is not feasible.

In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1915), Wilde argues this point from a different angle. Instead of alienating art from life, he attempts to estrange art from society. Wilde argues that for art to be impactful, it must be detached from society, rather than conform to society's line of thought. Good artists seek to challenge held believes, thus broadening society's scope. Hence, art must be independent from society because its purpose is to enlighten it. Wilde maintains that the public should understand and accept this point of view, declaring that "Art is like a science or a philosophy in that it should not try to appease the public, but rather the public should be learned of it"(p.30) If the artist brings a work that conforms to society's opinion, then he is doing society no service. Instead, society should observe and appreciate art, and attempt to gain something from it. Wilde expounds upon his example of science and philosophy to further strengthen his claim:

> If a man of science were told that the results of his experiments, and the conclusions that he arrived at, should be of such a character that they would not upset the received popular notions on the subject, or disturb popular prejudice, or hurt the sensibilities of people who knew nothing about science; if a philosopher were told that he had a perfect right to speculate in the highest spheres of thought, provided that he arrived at the same conclusions as were held by those who had never thought in any sphere at all – well, nowadays the man of science and the philosopher would be considerably amused. (ibid, p.30-31)

It is in this passage that Wilde reveals the exact aim of art in the world. Just as science and philosophy, art is meant to expand human understanding of the world. Art, initially, is meant to be confusing and has to be difficult to grasp at first glance, with the hope that one day it can be fully or partly grasped and absorbed; to attempt to reach such a position visa-vi art, the public is doing itself a favor. Throughout the *Decay of Lying, The Critic as Artist* and *The Soul of Man Under Socialism,* Wilde reveals that for art to be good it must be detached from society and life.

In relation to art's capacity to expand the individuals' horizons, Wilde maintains that art relieves one from the monotony of life just as much. In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, he argues that "art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force.

Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine." (1915, p.33) Hence, he presents art as an agent of change. It forces society's norms to dissolve and allows new modes of thought. To be normal or habitual is to be dead according to Wilde, and art is the remedy for such an existence. Art, thus, should be independent of the cyclical order of daily life, and consequently liberates individuals and infuses new experiences.

2.3 Aesthetics and Authority

As an Artist Wilde cautions that writing for acclaim or to please the public is a fatal flaw. In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* he explains that:

> Popular authority and the recognition of popular authority are fatal. Thackeray's "Esmond" is a beautiful work of art because he wrote it to please himself. In his other novels … he is too conscious of the public, and spoils his work by appealing directly to the sympathies of the public, or by directly mocking at them. A true artist takes no notice whatever of the public. The public are to him non-existent. (1915, p.47)

He then proceeds to consider the notion of authority not by the public but over them. He addresses governments, or their lack, best suited for progressing art: In his essay Wilde notes that all forms of authority are bad. He explains that "[the]government that is most suitable" for artistic innovation is "no government at all."(ibid, p.48) Wilde then proceeds to give examples of forms of authority over the artist and how they fail to enrich artistic creation. Wilde paints a picture of the public being a monstrous mob. He notes that mostly the public "stoops down... to throw mud." He concludes his analysis stating that "there is no necessity to separate the monarch from the mob; all authority is equally bad"(ibid, p.49-50)

Wilde, being imprisoned several times for his presumed homosexuality, then run into bankrupt and exile – largely by the church and the mob mentality – constructs a taxonomy of despots. In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism,* he says that "There are three kinds of despots. There is the despot who tyrannizes over the body. There is the despot who tyrannizes over the soul. There is the despot who tyrannizes over the soul and body alike." (ibid, p.50) The three despots Wilde mentions are: The prince, the Pope and the public. For the first form of despot Wilde notes that "The Prince may be cultivated. Many Princes have been. Yet in the Prince there is danger… It is better for the artist not to live with Princes." (ibid, p.51) For the second despot, which is the Pope, Wilde notes that there are few Popes that might be considered as

lovers of beauty, yet he argues that the Papacy is wicked. He concludes saying that "it is better for the artist not to live with Popes." (ibid, p.52) Wilde then moves to the mob and expresses his refusal of people having any form of authority over the artist. He notes that "And as for the People, what of them and their authority? ... Their authority is a thing blind, deaf, hideous, grotesque, tragic, amusing, serious, and obscene. It is impossible for the artist to live with the People… Who told them to exercise authority? They were made to live, to listen, and to love. Someone has done them a great wrong… Let all who love Beauty pity them. Though they themselves love not Beauty, yet let them pity themselves. Who taught them the trick of tyranny?" (Wilde, 1915, p.52 – 55) Wilde proposes individualism instead of authority as the most fertile ground for the artist. He argues that it ignites the human soul and allows for the highest potential possible to attain.

2.3.1 The Ideal Aesthete

Wilde defines the role of an artist in his essay *The Critic as Artist* (1904). He points out that critics are needed because artists are individually motivated. A good artist, Wilde explains, has such a distinctive style that he is unable to spot or appreciate the beauty in another artist's work. He uses the example of Percy Shelley who "with his dislike of actuality was deaf to Wordsworth's message." (p.44)

Wilde maintains that a critic's faculty has to be higher than that of the artist, because he is guided by a conscious aesthetic sense and is necessarily subjective. Thus, the critic is aware of the artist's style while being also critical of it. Therefore, he points out the artist's position and line of thought in juxtaposition with that of the critic:

> This, also, is the explanation of the value of limitations in art. The sculptor gladly surrenders imitative colour, and the painter the actual dimensions of form, because by such renunciations they are able to avoid too definite a presentation of the Real, which would be mere imitation, and too definite a realisation of the Ideal, which would be too purely intellectual. It is through its very incompleteness that art becomes complete in beauty and so addresses itself, not to the faculty of recognition nor to the faculty of reason, but to the aesthetic sense alone. (ibid, p.147)

Wilde believed that art is a product which can be neither too real nor ideal. The artist must embrace incompleteness and appreciate the aesthetic sense if he is to be successful. In the same line, he maintains that the artist must be an individualist. An artist must not be

swayed by public opinion, or even concerned with the trivial judgment of others. In his essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* Wilde notes that:

> the moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist, and becomes a dull or an amusing craftsman… Art is the most intense mode of Individualism that the world has known. I am inclined to say that it is the only real mode of Individualism that the world has known. (Wilde, 1915, p.30)

Wilde have a clear view as to what an artist must endeavor to accomplish if he is to truly carry out the craft.

2.3.2 The Aesthete and His Craft

Wilde's early essays have isolated art from other different entities such as life, beauty, love and society. He has set art aside and framed his arguments with art as one entity which is alien to nature and society. In *De Profundis*, however, Wilde took a new position. The letter, written to lord Alfred Douglas during the imprisonment of Wilde in Reading Gaol, speaks of both Douglass's vanity and Wilde's growing affection for the Christ. (Hancock, 2013, p.7) In the letter Wilde speaks of art in terms of unity rather than disparity. He expresses an inward vision of art. He writes "What the artist is always looking for is the mode of existence in which soul and body are one and indivisible: in which the outward is expressive of the inward: in which form reveals" (1907, p.30) He already separated art from a set of objects, yet in here Wilde sought to unify the artist in the letter to Douglass. He attempted to express the inner mode of a successful artist in which "soul and body are one and indivisible." The artist's inspiration and creation should be expressive of what's within, he argues. By doing so, "the body becomes instinct with the spirit… [and] truth in art [is formed]." (Ibid, p.39) This notion is nothing new to Wilde, in *The Critic as Artist* Gilbert points out that "from the high tower of Thought we can look out at the world. Calm, and self-centered, and complete, the aesthetic critic contemplates life, and no arrow drawn at a venture can pierce between the joints of his harness. He at least is safe. He has discovered how to live." (1904, p.176) Wilde draws a picture of the artist as an island which must be in harmony with itself, away from any other modes of distractions such as society's opinions, and occupying a place of spiritual and physical synchronization. In the *Preface* of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Wilde points out that "when critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself."(1920, p.5), he adds that "Diversity

of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital."(ibid, p.5). The artist must be in peace with himself in order to challenge and inspire others.

Oscar Wilde sought to elevate art's importance over nature, to alienate it completely from life, to declare it independent from society, to illustrate it as a disperser of monotony, and to teach its dependence on inner unity. He writes passionately of art and its unlimited potential, and scornfully of all those who failed to grasp this understanding and remained complacent in their unchanging everyday lives. Art to Wilde is a vehicle through which to perceive, as well as change, the world. It is an entity with the potential to captivate, with the capacity to inspire, and with the ability to make the world a more ideal place. He longs for the world to be as ideal as art itself, and sustains the hope that continual focus and deliberation on art would one day catalyze this occurrence.

2.4 The Moral Utility of Art

In 1890, following the publication of the novel, an intrigued young fan named Bernulf Clegg writes to the author and asked him to explain a line included in the *Preface* that "All art is quite useless." To Clegg Wilde responds with a handwritten letter published in *Letters* (1962) by Rupert Hart-Davis:

> My dear Sir
>
> Art is useless because its aim is simply to create a mood. It is not meant to instruct, or to influence action in any way. It is superbly sterile, and the note of its pleasure is sterility. If the contemplation of a work of art is followed by activity of any kind, the work is either of a very second-rate order, or the spectator has failed to realise the complete artistic impression.
>
> A work of art is useless as a flower is useless. A flower blossoms for its own joy. We gain a moment of joy by looking at it. That is all that is to be said about our relations to flowers. Of course, man may sell the flower, and so make it useful to him, but this has nothing to do with the flower. It is not part of its essence. It is accidental. It is a misuse. All this is I fear very obscure. But the subject is a long one.
>
> Truly yours. (p.292)

The point that Wilde seems to argue is that art, on its own, has no value. Art has the value ascribed to it by the individual, and that is due to what it does to the individual. Art is a

reflection of the artist, which is why he creates it, but the individual only contemplates, what he sees in art is a reflection of himself in some way. Wilde maintains that different forms of art are not necessarily moral or immoral "Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming." (1920, p.5) Hence, art is useful insofar the use ascribed by the individual. If the individual contemplates and finds ugliness, and art is only a reflection of the self, it means the individual is corrupt in some way, whereas someone who can look at something and find the good in it, even if it is ugly, it means that person has good in them. The preface is meant to show why and how art is useless but how and why we give it value.

Art is, indeed, loaded with meaning, but that doesn't silence the fact that art is still altogether useless, just because something holds meaning, doesn't necessarily mean that it's useful. When Wilde constructs his argument, he suggests that when a piece of art beacons an array of criticism the work is established as "new, complex and vital." He is not, however, denying it has meaning or value. Vital which means essential, crucial or fundamental is a far cry from worthless. Some might argue that worthless and useless are synonymous, it becomes evident that they are not the same at all. For example, a piece of paper at a paper factory may have infinite number of uses even though its actual value maybe deemed insignificant. A broken clock might indeed be useless, yet if it is antique, it will be viewed with some measure of worth. Hence, art being useless, should never be deemed worthless.

2.4.1 Aesthetics Between Action and Contemplation

Wilde noted that "the contemplative life, the life that has for its aim not *doing* but *being,* not being merely but *becoming* – that is what the critical spirit can give us"(1904, p.159) His dandies are contemplative and self-conscious individuals, such as Lord Henry Wotton from *The Picture of Dorian Gray.* These individuals are the elect, having achieved what Wilde calls, through Gilbert, the "critical spirit." They are individuals who are free to transcend the confines of Victorian morality because contemplation and imagination provide for them a "high tower" as Gilbert notes.

Action by contrast is, Wilde maintains, "dependent on external influences." (ibid, p.254). If thought is spiritual, action is material. The individual whose mode of self-realization is action becomes trapped by the decision to act. Trapper notes that "to close oneself to the processes of "becoming", and to actively pursue a certain mode of life denies the multiplicity of the imagination." (1998, p.34) In *The Critic as Artist,* Wilde gives various negative definition of action:

> a blind thing dependent on external influences, and moved by an impulse of whose nature it is unconscious. It is a thing incomplete in its essence, because limited by accident, and ignorant of its direction, being always at variance with its aim. Its basis is the lack of imagination. It is the last resource of those who know not how to dream. (Wilde, 1904, p.116)

And he continues later:

> Action is limited and relative. Unlimited and absolute is the vision of him who sits at ease and watches, who walks in loneliness and dreams. But we who are born at the close of this wonderful age are at once too cultured and too critical, too intellectually subtle and too curious of exquisite pleasures, to accept any speculations about life in exchange for life itself. (Ibid, p.154)

Wilde turns to the Greeks for his conception of the individual, and the individual's relationship to society. Like Aristotle, Wilde links actions to ethics. He maintains that "action of every kind belongs to the sphere of ethics," (1904, p.160) and both link ethics to the soul. He argues for "making the soul the protagonist of life's tragedy"(ibid, p.160) For him it is not only the choice to act, as Trapper notes, but "the conscious decision to pursue individualism regardless of its effect upon others that determines the nature of the soul"(1998, p.35). Aristotle notes in his *Ethics* that "when you have thrown a stone, you cannot afterwards bring it back again, but nevertheless you are responsible for having taken up the stone and flung it in the first place." (cited in Trapper, 1998, p.35) Wilde argues the same point, in *An Ideal Husband*, he maintains that one must "stake all one's life on a single moment, to risk everything on one throw"(1899, p.69) Wilde's characters again echo Aristotle where he notes that "for where we are free to act we are also free to refrain from acting"(cited in Trapper, 1998, p.35) His characters reach a point where they are self-aware and it is the self-conscious choice to pursue action rather than contemplation which is critical. Dorian Gray choses to purse a life of pleasure and perversity, not in imagination but in action, because, Wilde explains, "he felt keenly conscious of how barren all intellectual speculation is when separated from action and experiment." (1920, p.149)

Action always has a price, as the Greeks knew, and as Wilde narrates in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that "Each man lived his own life… and paid his own price for living it. The only pity was one had to pay so often for a single fault." (1920, p.210). To choose action for Wilde

is to abandon “The Pleasure that abideth for a Moment” and accept “The Sorrow that endureth Forever.” (1950, p.121). The individual has to choose between the infinite possibilities of contemplation and the limits of action. In other words, between the freedom and multiplicity of the imagination and the restrictions of the material. In *The Critic as Artist,* Wilde argues that the individual cannot foresee the outcomes of an action:

> In the sphere of action, a conscious aim is a delusion… It is worse than a delusion. If we live long enough to see the results of our actions it may be that those who call themselves good would be sickened with dull remorse, and those whom the world calls evil stirred by a noble joy.(1904, p.128)

Hence action for Wilde is problematic since it sets the destiny of the individual to a single path unlike the numerous possibilities of imagination and contemplation.

Wilde has a fascination for the word sin. However, his conception of the word is not religious. It is not theological violation as it can be noted in him saying “what the world calls sin.” (1920, p.210) It is more secular than religious and it tilts towards Greek thought rather than Christianity. As Tapper notes “Sin [according to Wilde] is degrading not because it offends some form of religious dogma, nor because of notions of guilt … so essential to Christian belief systems… but purely because it affects the soul.” (1998, p.36). Wilde uses the word Sin for aesthetic reasons. He uses it because it has a beauty of its own. There is no real equivalent to sin in Greek, “what the world calls Sin” the Greeks called *akrasia,* denoting weakness of will. (Douglass, n.d.) For the Greeks virtue meant temperance or self-control, what Wilde called Hellenic harmony. (Ibid). To step beyond the boundary of temperance meant excess, and this, is closer to Wilde’s conception of sin.

In *The Critic as Artist* Gilbert says “What is action? It dies at the moment of its energy. It is a base concession to fact the world is made by the singer for the dreamer.” (1904, p.133). The imagination is free of the bonds of the material world, yet action is not. “It dies at the moment of its energy” and this is what Wilde means by the limits of action.

Gilbert goes on to describes art as a refuge for the dreamer who seeks contemplation. He says that "in the opinion of society, Contemplation is the gravest sin of which any citizen can be guilty, in the opinion of the highest culture [Aestheticism] it is the proper occupation of man"(1905, p.169-170) Also, he goes on to ask if a life of contemplation and self-expression is "immoral," and concludes:

> Yes: all the arts are immoral, except those baser forms of sensual or didactic art that seek to excite to action of evil or of good. For action of every kind belongs to the sphere of ethics. The aim of art is simply to create a mood ... With us, thought is degraded by its constant association with practice."(Wilde, 1904, p.177)

Art does not incite action; hence, it has no authoritative moral purpose. It does not make people good nor bad, yet it is not to say that art is devoid of any form of morality. According to R. V. Johnson "it does not follow ... that work of art may not embody and communicate insight into life"(1969, p.19) Wilde himself writes that art aims at portraying the "true ethical import" of facts of life by transforming it to something unusual.(Ellman, 1968, p.394) His rejection seems related to the capacity of art to induce action, or the use of art as a medium to incite action.

2.4.2 Wilde's Defense of The Picture of Dorian Gray

It has been mentioned that the author received over 200 criticisms, and he chose to reply but to three. The following passages will highlight the criticism in the letters that Wilde decided to address and the reasoning behind his decision. In a letter to the editor of *Scots Observer* Wilde writes:

> Of the two hundred and sixteen criticisms of Dorian Gray that have passed from my library table into the wastepaper basket I have taken public notice of only three. One was that which appeared in the Scots Observer. I noticed it because it made a suggestion about the intention of the author in writing the book which needed correction. The second was an article in the St James's Gazette. It was offensively and vulgarly written, and seemed to me to require immediate and caustic censure. The tone of the article was an impertinence to any man of letters. The third was a meek attack in a paper called the Daily Chronicle. I think my writing to the Daily Chronicle was an act of pure willfulness. In fact, I feel sure it was. I quite forget what they said. I believe they said that Dorian Gray was poisonous, and I drought that, on alliterative grounds, it would be kind to remind them that, however that may be, it is at any rate perfect. (Hart-Davis, 1962, p.270)

The Philosophy of Oscar Wilde

The following passages are an attempt to summarize the most important points that appeared in the journals and Wilde's response to those accusations.

The first published version of Wilde's novel, which contained thirteen chapters, appeares in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* (July 1890), when published as a separate volume in 1891, the novel contained six new chapters and many revision.(Beckson, 1974 ,p.67) Samuel Henry Jeyes, a journalist and biographer, wrote a review titled *A Study in Puppydom* that appeared on 24 June 1890 in *Mason, Art and Morality.*(Ibid, p.67) According to Sidney Low, editor of *St, Jame's Gazette,* Jeyes:

> waged strenuous warfare against the fads and freaks which were shooting through the intellectual and artistic atmosphere in the last decade of the nineteenth century. For Yellow-Bookism, Water-Paterism, aestheticism, and all other 'isms' and cults sprouting so bounteously from the soil at that period, he had no indulgence. (Ibid, p.32)

Wilde responded to Jeye's attack with a letter to the editor which provoked a series of responses and replies. In hist first letter, dated 25 June, Wilde objected to the reviewer's moralistic criticism of the novel, stating what he was to repeat, in various ways, that "The sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate"(Mason, 2016, p.30) Low asked Jeyes to comment on Wilde's response.(Beckson, 1974, p.68) Accordingly Jeyes appended a note to the published letter, stating that "We are quite aware that ethics and aesthetics are different matters, and that is why the greater part of our criticism was devoted not so much to the nastiness of The Picture of Dorian Gray, but to its dullness and stupidity."(ibid, p.68) Wilde wrote a second letter on 26 June charging that the review contained "the most unjustifiable attack that has been made upon any man of letters for many years"(Mason, 2016, p.34). Wilde then goes on to discuss the use of words by the journalist seeking to describe the work of an artist. Words such as 'exotic,' 'unhealthy' and 'morbid.' He disposes of each in turn. Briefly he says that "the public is morbid; the artist is never morbid. The word "exotic" merely expresses the rage of the momentary mushroom against the immortal, entrancing and exquisitely lovely orchid." (ibid, p.36). He concludes saying that "what the public calls an unhealthy novel is always a beautiful and healthy work of art." (ibid, p.36). In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism,* Wilde writes "To call an artist morbid because he deals with morbidity as his subject matter, is as silly as if one called Shakespeare mad because he wrote 'King Lear." (1915, p.36). Jeyes in turn defended the right of his critical judgment:

> We simply say that every critic has the right to point out that a work of art or literature is dull and incompetent in its treatment—as The Picture of Dorian Gray is; and that its dulness and incompetence are not redeemed because it constantly hints, not obscurely, at disgusting sins and abominable crimes—as The Picture of Dorian Gray does.(Mason, 2016, p.37)

Again, Wilde responded in a long letter, dated 27 June, discussing censorship, the malice of the reviewer, and the difference between art and life, he addressed Jeyes stating that "You say that a work of art is a form of action: It is not. It is the highest mode of thought." (ibid, p.37). Jeyes added a comment insisting that prosecution should not be taken "against a book which we believed to be rendered innocuous by the tedious and stupid qualities which the critic discovered and explained." (ibid, p.37) Wilde concluded his fourth letter, dated 28 June, saying:

> …let me ask you not to force on me this continued correspondence, by daily attacks. It is a trouble and a nuisance. As you assailed me first, I have the right to the last word. Let that last word be the present letter, and leave my book, I beg you, to the immortality that it deserves. (Hart-Davis, 1962, p.252)

The second review appeared in a column titled *Magazines* and was reprinted in *Art and Morality* ed. Stuart Mason. It provoked a response from Wilde in a letter dated 30 June which was published in the *Daily Chronicle* on 2 July. (Mason, 2016, p.40). Wilde addressed the reviewer's interpretation of the moral of the novel, he stated that "the real moral of the story is that all excess, as well as renunciation, brings its punishment", he elaborates that the moral "realises itself purely in the lives of individuals and so becomes simply a dramatic element in a work of art, and not the object of the work of art itself."(Hart-Davis, 1962, p.263). Wilde then concludes his letter stating that his "story is an essay on decorative art. it re-acts against the crude brutality of plain realism. It is poisonous, if you like, but you cannot deny that it is also perfect, and perfection is what we artists aim at." (Ibid, p.263). Unlike the *St. James's Gazette*, the *Daily Chronicle* declined to pursue a response from the critic.

In the 5th of July 1890 an unsigned notice appeared in the *Scots Observer.* (Mason, 2016, p.42). Wilde responded to this brief notice, which appeared in a column titled *Reviews and Magazines*, with a letter to the *Scots Observer* in which he expounded on his often-

repeated distinction between art and morality "An artist, sir, has no ethical sympathies at all. Virtue and wickedness are to him simply what the colours on his palette are to the painter." (Hart-Davis, 1962, p.266). He concluded his letter stating that:

> That the editor of the St. James's Gazette should have employed Caliban as his art-critic was possibly natural. The editor of the Scots Observer [W.E.Henley] should not have allowed Thersites to make mows in his review. It is unworthy of so distinguished a man of letters. (ibid, p.266)

Charles Whibley, a journalist and biographer on the staff of the *Scots Observer,* commented on the notice saying that "Your criticism of Dorian Gray seems to me more than fair… You find in it art and no morals; I detect in its pages lots of morality and no art." (Beckson. 1974, p.73). In a second letter to the editor Wilde elaborates on the morality of an art work in general, he writes that:

> You may ask me, Sir, why I should care to have the ethical beauty of my story recognised. I answer—simply because it exists, because the thing is there. The chief merit of Madame Bovary is not the moral lesson that can be found in it, any more than the chief merit of Salammbô is its archæology; but Flaubert was perfectly right in exposing the ignorance of those who called the one immoral and the other inaccurate; and not merely was he right in the ordinary sense of the word, but he was artistically right, which is everything. The critic has to educate the public; the artist has to educate the critic. (Hart-Davis, 1962, p.269)

The columns of the journal were filled by Wilde and Whibley's letters through the beginning of September. Wearied by the discussion, Wilde wrote to the editors that:

> The newspapers seem to me to be written by the prurient for the Philistine. I cannot understand how they can treat Dorian Gray as immoral. My difficulty was to keep the inherent moral subordinate to the artistic and dramatic effect, and it still seems to me that the moral is too obvious. (ibid, p.292)

Wilde responded to only three magazine reviews' out of all the others. He figured that it would suffice since most of the articles were an attack on the morality of the work. Most of the reviews were repetition of the same ideas. Since "the artist has to educate the critic," his response was a form of education as to the position of aesthetics and ethics. He received other

letters from his readers, some were praising the work, but most contained the same remarks as to the ethical aspect of the work. In March, 1891, Wilde had written *A Preface to Dorian Gray* in the *Fortnightly Review*. (Mason, 2016, p.15) The preface serves as an enunciation for Wilde's creed as an artist. A few months later Wilde published his essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism.* "A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament," he writes. "Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is.... The moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist."(1915, p.29) He considers it to be an impertinence for the public, who know nothing about art, to criticize the artist and his work. He gives poetry as an example and declares that "we have been able to have fine poetry because the public does not read it, and consequently does not influence it" (ibid, p.29).

2.4.2.1 The Preface as Wilde's Aesthetic Statement

The Picture of Dorian Gray has received unfavorable critical comments compared to the little praise which has appeared from those who are sympathizers of it. Those who attack the work point out to the deplorable manner in which certain aspects of it have been contrived or portrayed. The following passages examines the *Preface* in relation to Wilde's literary criticism.

In the *Preface* Wilde notes that "The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography"(1920, p.5) In *The Critic as Artist* Wilde mocks the idea of writing biography and autobiography.(1904, p.178) In the *Preface* He also points out that "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors"(1920, p.5)

On the functional quality of art, Wilde makes statements, which, on the surface seem contradictory. In *The Decay of Lying* he writes "Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper Place"(1904, p.3) In the *Preface* he says that "All art is quite useless"(1920, p.5) Elmimian argues That the author here is using paradox or a rhetorical style, yet contraries do not imply negation.(1980, p.626) Wilde adds that "Vice and Virtue" form "material for the artist"(1920, p.5) He points out to the readers that the realm of artistic discourse is limitless. Art, as mentioned earlier, enhances the individual's reception of reality, yet by itself it is indeed useless. For Wilde when the individual interprets art, he interprets life, since life's colors are enshrined in it. Art complements life.

The Philosophy of Oscar Wilde

Wilde writes that "to reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim"(ibid, p.5) The same idea is echoed in *The Truth of Masks* where Wilde maintains that art, just like metaphysics, conceals.(1904, p.234) In *The Decay of Lying* Vivian expresses the same idea to Cyril:

> Art finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself. She is not to be judged by any external standard of resemblance. She is a veil, rather than a mirror. She has flowers that no forests know of, birds that no woodland possesses. She makes and unmakes many worlds, and can draw the moon from heaven with a scarlet thread. Hers are the 'forms more real than living man,' and hers the great archetypes of which things that have existence are but unfinished copies. (Wilde, 1904, p.27)

Thus, the idea of art as a mask is recurrent and common to Wilde's work.

Wilde also thinks that beauty is a permanent mark of aesthetic conscience. In the *Preface* he maintains that "The artist is the creator of beautiful things"(1920, p.5) In *The Truth of Masks*, He speaks of the "artistic temperament" as that which capture beauty for its own sake, he elaborates "the artistic temperament is always fascinated by beauty of costume, he constantly introduces into his plays masques and dances, purely for the sake of the pleasure which they give the eye"(1904, p.199) In *Pen Pencil and Poison* (1904), he speaks "To those who are pre-occupied with the beauty of form nothing else seems of much importance."(Ibid, p.59) In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, he writes "beautiful colors came from the dyer's hand, beautiful patterns from the artist's brain, and the use of beautiful things and their value and importance were set forth."(1915, p.49) Wilde seems to put beauty above all in artistic discourse.

Another recurring element is the question of "lying" to gain an aesthetic end. In the *Preface* Wilde asserts that "No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved." (1920, p.5) In *The Decay of Lying*, he writes:

> Many a young man starts in life with a natural gift for exaggeration which, if nurtured in congenial and sympathetic surroundings, or by the imitation of the best models, might grow into something really great and wonderful. But, as a rule, he comes to nothing. He either falls into careless habits of accuracy. (1905, p.9)

Divorcing truth from art is very pervasive for Wilde's works that it requires an observation of the principle at work in some detail. Wimsatt and Brooks in their *Literary Criticism: A Short*

History (1967), argue that the principle by which lying became associated with art developed at various times before Wilde. The proponents of such an idea are Kant, Goethe, Tolstoy, Poe, Pater and the French aesthetes in general. Tlostoy, according Wimsatt and Brooks, writes "I belong to the class of people whose task has been perverted by false reason"(Wimsatt & Brooks, 1967,p.485) Goethe believes that "art does not pretend to show the metaphysical depth of things, it merely stick to the surface of natural phenomena"(ibid, p.485) Moreover, Poe writes:

> The manifestation of the [aesthetic] principle is always found in an elevating excitement of the soul – quite independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the Heart – of that Truth which is the satisfaction of the reason. (Ibid, p.498)

Hence, according to Wilde and his antecedents, art requires no reason for existence except that each creation be a work of art. According to Enid Starkie, Wilde borrowed much of the aphorisms for the *Preface* from Flaubert, and both agree that art is also independent of moral scruples. (ibid, p.469)

The critics are bothered by Wilde's character, and question if he is of a sound moral conviction. Such questions are irrelevant since the artist need not necessarily to be sincere and need not to be of a sound moral character. Nevertheless, by juxtaposing beautiful with ugly, moral with immoral, and virtue with vice Wilde shows his good sense. Moreover, by citing Christ and Caesar as figures to emulate he lends authority to his message. In his last essay *De Profundis* Wilde explains that "I have grown tired of the articulate utterances of men and things. The Mystical in Art, the Mystical in Life, the Mystical in Nature – this is what I am looking for." (1950, p.144) The attackers need to know the philosophy under which he worked to appreciate him.

2.5 Conclusion

Wilde's philosophy is centered on the idea of artistic freedom and individualism. For Wilde art is a mode of individualism and self-expression. Hence, Art should be liberated from other notions such as morality, nature, society and so forth. Just like philosophy and sciences, art is an independent sphere. It does not seek to represent or alter reality, but it enhances it because it resides outside of it. Aesthetic contemplation takes part in the imagination of the individual and opts to enlarge it. Contemplation allows for a better reality since a person does not take pleasure in the crude representation of reality, but rather imagines what actually transcends the mere representation. Aestheticism stands against action or the usefulness of art. According to aesthetes all art is useless, the moment something becomes useful the pleasure resides on the use of the object not on its aesthetic qualities, hence, it ceases to be beautiful. The criticism of the novel mostly is a criticism of Wilde himself. Most of what have been said does not reflect but the biased judgment and the moralistic approach to the work. It fails simply because the novel does have a moral explained by the author himself and as he expressed in the *Preface* "all art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril." (1920, p.5)

It can be concluded that indeed aesthetics and ethics are divorced. Since art does not comply to society in the sense that it is a sphere of experiment and as Aristotle noted, it creates a safe and controlled environment where the individual can express and experience different forms of feelings without any harm done. According to Wilde's approach those who seek beauty in things actually defuse any potential immorality the work might project or hint at since they are there for the aesthetic qualities the work has to offer, what goes beyond the boundaries of aesthetics is of no actual worth to them. For Wilde this is the essence of aesthetics. Contemplation, unlike action, offers unlimited potential for things, whereas, action limits and defines the outcomes. Perhaps that is the tower that Gilbert is pointing at, from there the aesthete can indeed gaze at the infinite possibilities within his scope.

Chapter III

Dorian Gray

Between

Morality & Aesthetics

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter serves as an overview of Wilde's approach to aesthetics. His defense of the novel and his responses to reviews represents his view on morality as opposed to art in general. In one of the reviews Wilde declared that "[his] story is an essay on decorative art. It reacts against the crude brutality of plain realism." (Hart-Davis, 1962, p.264) Thus, the most crucial element in the novel is it's style. Wilde uses sensuous language to emphasize the aesthetic qualities over the moral ones. In the novel the moral element is subordinate to the aesthetic effect the author desired to create. Thus, morality is used as a medium to enrich the aesthetic qualities of the work.

In a letter responding to one of his fans Wilde writes that "Basil Hallward is what I think I am Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be—in other ages, perhaps." (ibid, p.351). Thus, this chapter focuses on these three characters and how both Basil and Lord Henry recreate Dorian in their own image and likeness. Basil represents the artist in general. He is constantly crushed between his desire for a more ideal form of artistic expression and society's moral order. Henry is the spokesman of aestheticism in the novel. He does not indulge in much action, yet his wit and philosophy have drastic impact on Dorian. Moreover, he paints a picture of Dorian, and his medium is mere words. Dorian is fascinated by Lord Henry's wit, but he misunderstands every idea the latter enlightens him with. He ends up in a cycle of judgment that never ends. Wilde's novel is a summary of his critical heritage. It is an experiment on style and art. Moreover, it encapsulates Wilde the aesthete and his approach to matters of beauty, morality and artistic innovation.

3.2 Style in The Picture of Dorian Gray

Several readers have noticed a difference between the *Preface* to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the novel itself. Richard Ellmann has noted that "Wilde the preface-writer and Wilde the novelist deconstruct each other"(1988, p.315) Similarly, Robert Keith Miller argues that "Both in its theme and in its style the book is marked by that inconsistency that springs from an inadequately defined purpose."(1982, p.41) Such comments point out the difference between the amoral purpose of art proposed in the *Preface* and the novel's moral plot. In fact, Wilde deliberately juxtaposes art and morality in the novel in order to emphasize their relationship as it occurs in the *Preface*. Wilde maintains that his aim in writing the novel was to create a work of art, and holds the *Preface* to be a declaration of his creed as an artist.

Epifanio San Juan, Jr. maintains that "Wilde's characters seem flat." (1967, p.59) Wilde might disagree with such an unflattering comment, yet he would agree that his characters are indeed unrealistic. Wilde responds to a similar criticism by the *St. James Gazette's* reviewer, he maintains that "There are no such people. If there were I would not write about them." (Hart-Davis, 1962, p.259). The characters in the novel are extremes that the author chooses for artistic effect rather than a realistic representation. Wilde wants the characters to be non-realistic, away from actual experience, depending solely on artistic invention for an aesthetic end. Hence, the significance of the novel exists not in the morality, or the lack thereof, of its events but in the artistic invention. As a consequence, the plot is both Gothic and melodramatic. The aging and corrupt portrait finds its roots in eighteenth-century Gothic literature, while the descriptive style originates from nineteenth-century melodrama. Miller blames the author for "occasionally slipping into the melodramatic." (1982, p.41) However, Wilde is aware of the novel's unreality and highlights this quality. For instance, Sibyl taunts her brother saying "Oh, don't be so serious, Jim. You are like one of the heroes of those silly melodramas mother used to be so fond of acting in." (1920, p.80) Moreover, he repeats the same idea later:

> The exaggerated folly of the threat, the passionate gesture that accompanied it, the mad melodramatic words, made life seem more vivid to her. She was familiar with the atmosphere. She breathed more freely… She would have liked to have continued the scene on the same emotional scale. (ibid, p.82)

The aim behind the melodramatic and gothic atmosphere is to bring the reader away from realistic representation towards artistic invention.

3.2.1 Juxtaposing Aesthetics and Morality

It is apparent that the novel and its plot demonstrate Wilde's rejection of Realism, yet the novel's style is the most important factor to Wilde's statement. Patrice Hannon in *Victorian Literature and Culture* (1991) argues that "*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a novel of aestheticism because it subverts linguistic conventions of realism… Style, not subject-matter is the determining factor in making the distinction."(Maynard and Munich, 1991, p.144) Hannon moves on to add that the character and plot do not determine the novel's language as in realist novels arguing that "The language of the novel is not the language of realism in part because it rejects outright any illusion of determinism in its narration of dialogue and events. It is highly artificial." (ibid, p.146) Wilde avoids the language of determinism by avoiding the

language of representation. According to Hannon, Realism's representational nature limits the plot, characters, ideas, morality and the language used to describe them. Hence, Wilde's style frees him from conventions and allows him to create and invent. Wilde deliberately creates artificial dialogues.

Wilde's artificiality leads to a very moral story line embedded within the structure of sensuous language. In the light of the *Preface* such a plot appears paradoxical to the amorality Wilde defends. The ambiguity results from misunderstanding the role of the novel's moral events. Wilde himself saw the possible confusion for readers of the serial version of the novel and attempted to rectify this issue in the book version. In a letter to *The Daily Chronicle*, Wilde admits "far from wishing to emphasize any moral in my story, the real trouble I experienced in writing the story was that of keeping the extremely obvious moral subordinate to the artistic and dramatic effect."(Hart-Davis, 1962, p.263) Wilde's attempt to suppress the novel's moral aspect is also an attempt to enhance its aesthetic aspect. As explained earlier, the *Preface* was added to the book later, and in it Wilde did not explain the moral qualities of the work, but he uses them to enhance the novel's aesthetic perspective through paradox. In *Pen, Pencil, and Poison* Wilde says that "to have a style so gorgeous that it conceals the subject is one of the highest achievements." (1904, p.78) In his novel he goes by this rule. Aesthetics, juxtaposed with morality, dominate the novel. Aesthetic qualities overshadow the moral events that morality actually emphasizes aesthetics. Hence, style, unlike the morality of the Gothic or even the melodramatic plot, becomes the novel's dominant content.

3.2.2 Dorian Gray: An Essay on Decorative Arts

Throughout his Works, Wilde underscores the value of style. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* Gwendolen says "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing"(1921, p.150) In *The Rise of Historical Criticism* Wilde declares that "the new age is the age of style"(1923, p.137) He explains this comment when he writes that "the supreme masters of style – Dante, Sophocles, Shakespeare – are the supreme masters of spiritual and intellectual vision also."(ibid, p.137) Moreover, In *The Decay of Lying* he suggests that "[style] is the very condition of any art" and that art "keeps between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style, of decorative or ideal treatment."(ibid, p.137-138) Commenting on the *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde writes to *St. James Gazette* that "correctness should always be subordinate to artistic effect and musical cadence; and any peculiarities of syntax that may occur in *Dorian gray* are deliberately intended, and are

introduced to show the value of the artistic theory in question"(Hart-Davis, 1962, p.258) Wilde's emphasis on style is apparent starting from the novel's opening sentence:

> THE studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn. From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, Innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs ; and now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokio who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion. The sullen murmur of the bees shouldering their way through the long unmown grass, or circling with monotonous insistence round the dusty gilt horns of the straggling woodbine, seemed to make the stillness more oppressive. (1920, p.7)

This passage is one of Wilde's purple patches. He achieves the effect in this passage through sentence length and a variety of sound patterns. He produces a feeling of idleness, the length of the sentence and the use of words such as lying, shouldered, straggling, stirred, heavy, tremulous and monotonous produce the effect Wilde desired. Moreover, when Wilde writes that " From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, Innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could…"(ibid) Here the author gives the reader pieces of the scene and then finally completes the first part of this sentence by introducing its predicate. Moreover, he uses the same approach when he writes "In the huge gilt Venetian lantern, spoil of some Doge's barge, that hung from the ceiling of the great oak-panelled hall of entrance, lights were still burning from three flickering jets."(ibid, p.101) Wilde employs this technique in order to force the reader to experience a scene sensuously before decoding its meaning intellectually. In the opening passage Wilde puts an emphasis on the sensory perception. A descriptive scene using sense images, particularly visual, is common

in literature. However what Wilde does differently is to emphasize on the scent. In many other passages the author highlights sense experiences. In doing so, he creates scenes which are rich and idealized that they could not appear in real life.

Although smell is the dominant sense of the novel's opening passage, other passages have other effects and evoke other senses. For instance, when Wilde describes Lord Henry's library:

> It was, in its way, a very charming room, with its high-panelled wainscoting of olive-stained oak, its cream-coloured frieze and ceiling of raised plaster-work, and its brickdust felt carpet strewn with silk long-fringed Persian rugs. On a tiny satinwood table stood a statuette by Clodion, and beside it lay a copy ef " Les Cent Nouvelles," bound for Margaret of Valois by Clovis Eve, and powdered with the gilt daisies that Queen had selected for her device. Some large blue china jars and parrot-tulips were ranged on the mantelshelf, and through the small leaded panels of the window streamed the apricot-coloured light of a summer day in London. (1920, p.53)

In this passage, Wilde's description matches an art museum more than a library. As a result, and since museums depend upon sight, this passage highlights sight. Hence, he used colors such as olive, cream, brickdust, gilt, blue and apricot. The opening passage has a soft movement to it; however, this library scene is static, hence the use of passive verbs such as was, stood, lay, bound, powdered, were and arranged. It can be noticed that most of the passages emphasize the senses. The work forces the readers to experience the scene through stimuli, and with such an approach the style conveys the sensuous experience of pleasure, the form of beauty about which the book is most concerned.

The author also uses verbs to convey certain feeling and atmosphere. For example, when Dorian rides to discover the identity of the man who has been shot, Wilde writes:

> The trees seemed to sweep past him in spectral procession, and wild shadows to fling themselves across his path. Once the mare swerved at a white gatepost and nearly threw him, He lashed her across the neck with his crop. She cleft the dusky air like an arrow. The stones flew from her hoofs. (ibid, p.230)

In this passage, the author wishes to convey the idea of speed, and touch is the sense he uses to achieve that effect. Such verbs as swept, swerved, flew, fling, cleft, threw and lashed describe

quick sharp movement. Moreover, the use of words such as wild and arrow also convey the idea of speed. Unlike the opening passage the brevity of the paragraph and sentences, along with the active verbs causes the experience of speed in the scene.

Wilde uses style to diminish the novel's moral aspects. Dorian's rejection of Sybil is one of the novel's significant crises. After Dorian tells Lord Henry that he is engaged to Sybil, the latter urges him to test her. After spending the evening together, Dorian tells Sybil to stay overnight and see if she accepts to indulge in this act of indecency. Sybil torn between love and honor almost left, yet she couldn't resist Dorian's charm. This meant that she failed Lord Henry's test, and Dorian ended writing an incredibly hurtful letter. After Dorian rejects her and leaves the theater, a few lines later, Wilde writes:

> The darkness lifted, and, flushed with faint fires, the sky hollowed itself into a perfect pearl. Huge carts filled with nodding lilies rumbled slowly down the polished empty street. The air was heavy 'with the perfume of the flowers, and their beauty seemed to bring him an anodyne for his pain. He followed into the market, and watched the men unloading their waggons. A white-smocked carter offered him some cherries… They had been plucked at midnight, and the coldness of the moon had entered into them. A long line of boys carrying crates of striped tulips, and of yellow and red roses, defiled in front of him, threading their way through the huge jade-green piles of vegetables. (1920, p.101)

The narrative continues in this manner for the next few paragraphs. Wilde emphasizes sensuous experience in here also. He presents a scene of beauty and peace in contrast to Dorian's rejection of Sybil to mute the impact of the action of rejection. The picture Wilde provides blunts the effect of Dorian's rejection of Sybil. A significant tragedy has occurred, and yet rather than continuing in a tragic vein, the author instead leads the reader to a lyric scene that never could exist in reality, only in the perfection of the ideal. Through Wilde's attention to style, he brings the focus around again to the novel's role, as a work of invention, not a representation that requires the reader's pathos.

As in the above passage, shortly after Dorian confronts James Vane outside the opium den. Wilde again uses style to direct the reader's attention away from the plot:

> It was tea-time, and the mellow light of the huge lace-covered lamp that stood on the table lit up the delicate china and hammered silver of the

> service at which the Duchess was presiding. Her white hands were moving daintily among the cups, and her full red lips were smiling at something that Dorian had whispered to her. Lord Henry was lying back in a silk-draped wicker chair looking at them. On a peach-coloured divan sat Lady Narborough pretending to listen to the Duke's description of the last Brazilian beetle that he had added to his collection. (Wilde, 1920, p.214)

This encounter with James Vane is one of the most terrifying events in the novel. Dorian almost loses his life, and this incident will haunt him later. Nevertheless, the author chooses to introduce the scene stylistically to defuses its volatility by taking the reader away from the danger of the plot and again into the world of the ideal. Similarly, Basil's murder is the novel's most significant event. Yet this scene's intensity is also muted by Wilde's style. The actual crises are narrated in a stylistically self-conscious manner:

> The thing was still seated in the chair, straining over the table with bowed head, and humped back, and long fantastic arms. Had it not been for the red jagged tear in the neck, and the clotted black pool that was slowly widening on the table, one would have said that the man was simply asleep. How quickly it had all been done. He felt strangely calm, and, walking over to the window, opened it, and stepped out on the balcony. The wind had blown the fog away, and the sky was like a monstrous peacock's tail, starred with myriads of golden eyes. (ibid, p.177)

The passage introduces a moment of violence then shifts the emphasis away from the event. Wilde's image of a bright sky and a man asleep blunts the scene's emotional effect and make it difficult for this incident to evoke a significant pathetic response. Dorian's rejection of Sibyl, his encounter with her brother and the murder of Basil are among the novel's most important events, and yet each passage is subordinate to a stylistically self-conscious, descriptive passage.

This effect occurs at every significant moment in the novel. Each crisis corresponds to a purple patch, hence, at each crisis the style shifts attention away from the plot and onto form. Thus, subordinating the content (plot) to the form (style) and reversing their roles in the same way Dorian reverses roles with the portrait. The form becomes the content, and the plot and characters merely the medium through which Wilde transmits the novel's style.

According to Peters there are two exception for this juxtaposition. They occur in the novel's opening and closing passages. (1999, p.10) Nevertheless, there are good reasons for these exceptions to the usual pattern of the novel. In the beginning of the work, the author takes the reader from the physical world into an imaginative world, hence, from life to art. The opening style reminds the reader that nowhere in the natural world does such a scene exists. Similarly, in the closing crisis, Dorian's death, there is the lack of the stylistic pattern. When Dorian tries to destroy the portrait and destroys himself instead, they exchange places so that Dorian is no longer the ideal and the portrait the real, hence, they go back to what they were originally. Thus, Wilde brings the reader full circle from the novel's beginning, in which Dorian sells his soul to become the perfection of art and the portrait the imperfection of reality. Moreover, Dorian's attempt to destroy the portrait reverses the process of the novel's opening passage and moves the reader out of the world of artistic invention and back into the world of reality. By doing so, the author reminds his readers that they have just experienced a work of unreality.

3.3 Aestheticism in The Picture of Dorian Gray

The Picture of Dorian Gray is interpreted as a continuation to Goethe's *Faust.* Dorian is seen as flamboyant Faust and Lord Henry as an aristocratic Mephistopheles. This view maybe true to a great extent. Wilde borrowed from other writers, and Goethe is a cultural hero of the Oxford Hellenists. Nevertheless, to read the novel only in light of Goethe's drama is to make the mistake of moralistic criticism which the author condemned through his works of criticism. The corrective to this tendency lies in a greater concentration on Basil Hallward, the creator of both the picture and Dorian. The moral issues of the book are unavoidable, but subordinate to its aesthetic qualities.

Professor Houston A. Baker maintains that "Hallward's excessive self-consciousness, his selfish desires, and his jealous zeal in keeping Dorian from others have corrupted the simple, natural, and affectionate model who sat for the portrait"(1969, p.353) Wilde sees bad art as heinous crime, but there is no indication in the novel that Basil is a bad artist. Professor baker, in seeing Basil as a villain, dismisses Wilde's feeling that great art is criminal.

3.3.1 Artist and Model: Basil Hallward and Dorian Gray

At the beginning of his relationship with Basil, Dorian is not a plain, friendly young man. The character of Dorian Gray resembles and older literary ancestor. When the portrait started to change, Wilde describes Dorian saying "Once, in boyish mockery of Narcissus, he

had kissed, or feigned to kiss, those painted lips that now smiled so cruelly at him."(Wilde, 1920, p.118) The comparison of Dorian to Narcissus is a recurrent motif in the novel.

Wilde, being a classicist, is well versed in a broad array of treatments of the Narcissus myth. The best-known version of the myth is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In this version, Narcissus is the beautiful son of a nymph and a river-god. Both boys and girls seek his love, yet he is too proud and distant to consider any of them. Narcissus' mother asks Tiresias if her son will attain old age. She receives an answer from the prophet that "If he ne'er known himself." (Polybius, Walbank, Habicht, & Paton, 2010, p.348) The mother assumes the reply to be nonsensical, yet her son's sight of his own reflection in the river marks the end of his life.

Ovid's approach to the myth is ironic. The self-fascinated boy is a bit ridiculous, both before and after he sees his face in the stream. His happiness is based on a lack of depth, an acceptance of his own excellence. As he is immersed in contemplation of the reflection the narrator addresses him "O fondly foolish boy, why vainly seek to clasp a fleeting image? What you seek is nowhere; but turn yourself away, and the object of your love will be no more. That which you behold is but the shadow of a reflected form and has no substance of its own. With you it comes, with you it stays, and it will go with you – if you can go." (ibid. p.432) Yet Narcissus did not leave. He lays on the bank mourning, his tears distort the image in the water, and his own beauty is destroyed by his sorrow. At the end, he dies and is turned into a flower.

Dorian, like his classical ancestor, in the beginning of the novel, is free of the anguishes of intelligence. Lord Henry guesses the character of Dorian from examining Basil's portrait, he concludes:

> Why, my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus... Your mysterious young friend, whose name you have never told me, but whose picture really fascinates me, never thinks. I feel quite sure of that. He is some brainless, beautiful creature, who should be always here in winter when we have no flowers to look at, and always here in summer when we want something to chill our intelligence. (Wilde, 1920, p.9)

Dorian exists in a state of mindless perfection. Lord Henry has never seen Dorian, but he has heard of him from his aunt. He tells Basil that:

> She told me she had discovered a wonderful young man… and that his name was Dorian Gray. I am bound to state that she never told me he was good-

> looking... She said that he was very earnest, and had a beautiful nature. I at once pictured to myself a creature with spectacles and lank hair, horribly freckled, and tramping about on huge feet. (Wilde, 1920, p.20)

Dorian seems to be what people make out of him. He is the perfect artist's model but not much besides that. His soul is an empty paper, and any value derived from him lays in the eye of the beholder. According to Robert Keefe His first name "connotes the Hellenism (homosexual, love) of which for Basil he is the embodiment; his last name suggests a Salvation Army drabness."(1973, p.65) Lady Agatha, in the novel, attributes Dorian's perfection to an inner beauty, yet her sophisticated nephew Lord Henry, upon examining the portrait, realizes that it is a perfection of surface and nothing more. He reminds his friend Basil that "beauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins." (ibid, p.9)

Dorian indeed have the quality of innocence, yet it is a passive one. The author writes "One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world." (ibid, p.23) Like Narcissus, Dorian has no desire for self-knowledge. He, constantly, complains to Basil that he is tired of sitting for the portrait. Both Lord Henry and Basil influence Dorian. Lord Henry paints a picture of Dorian through spoken and written words. He enlightens Dorian that his nature is more complex than he realizes "you have had passions that have made you afraid, thoughts that have filled you with terror, day-dreams and sleeping dreams whose mere memory might stain your cheek with shame."(ibid, p.26) The effect of Lord Henry is immediate on Dorian and is framed in the language of aesthetic criticism, Wilde continues:

> Music had stirred him like that. Music had troubled him many times. But music was not articulate. It was not a new world, but rather another chaos, that it created In us. Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid, and cruel! One could not escape from them. And yet what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to form- less things, and to have a music of their own as sweet as that of viol or of lute. Mere words! Was there anything so real as words? (ibid, p.26)

Lord Henry's influence on Dorian is dramatic indeed, yet Basil's portrait changes the young man's life, as Wilde narrates:

> When he saw it he drew back, and his cheeks flushed for a moment with pleasure. A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognised himself

> for the first time. He stood there motionless and in wonder, dimly conscious that Hallward was speaking to him, but not catching the meaning of his words. The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation. (Wilde, 1920, p.32)

The recognition Wilde mentions deepens each time Dorian sees the portrait. As Dorian's observation reveals more of his own nature, Tiresias's prophecy becomes more evident. Just like Narcissus, Dorian has caught a reflection of himself, hence, he will never be the same again. Moreover, Basil did not wish to exhibit the portrait. He tells Dorian the reason saying that:

> One day, a fatal day I sometimes think, I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you as you actually are, not in the costume of dead ages, but in your own dress and in your own time. Whether it was the Realism of the method, or the mere wonder of your own personality, thus directly presented to me without mist or Veil, I cannot tell. But I know that as I worked at it, every flake and film of colour seemed to me to reveal my secret. I grew afraid that others would know of my idolatry. I felt, Dorian, that I had told too much, that I had put too much of myself into it. (ibid, p.129)

The painting reveals just as much about Basil as it does about Dorian. The artist is more self-conscious if compared to the model. As Gilbert explains to his friend in *The Critic as Artist* "Believe me, Ernest, there is no fine art without self-consciousness, and self- consciousness and the critical spirit are one." (Wilde, 1904, p.110) Basil at the peak of his artistic creation, is self-conscious. For Wilde, the artist does not go beyond the boundary of existence to attain a glimpse of the gods, yet his art is a journey inward to reveal his most hidden impulses. In the case of Basil theses impulses are mainly homosexual, but it is irrelevant. Wilde explains that the essence of the artist's immorality lies in his bold voyeurism more than in the vision he attains. (ibid ,p128) As established in the previous chapter, the artist is separated from society by his self-consciousness. Nevertheless, on the one hand, the artist is different from society, on the other, he is merely a representative of it. The same impulses lie in everyone, the artist only have the courage to voice them.

Dorian Gray Between Aesthetics & Morality

Wilde writes to the *Scots Observer* that “Each man sees his own sin in Dorian Gray. What Dorian Gray’s sins are no one knows. He who finds them has brought them.” (Hart-Davis, 1962, p.265) Few weeks later, Wilde generalized this thought to include all art, he argues that “It will be to each man what he is himself. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.” (ibid, p.267) Nonetheless, if the beholder sees himself in the work, it is still the artist who fashioned the mirror. According to Wilde, the individual is trapped within himself, not able to maintain contact with others. André Gide reports a parable where Wilde used the Narcissus myth to illustrate this:

> When Narcissus died, the flowers of the field asked the river for some drops of water to weep for him. 'Oh!' answered the river, 'if all my drops of water were tears, I should not have enough to weep for Narcissus myself. I loved him!' 'Oh!' replied the flowers of the field, 'how could you not have loved Narcissus? He was beautiful.' 'Was he beautiful?' said the river. ‘And who could know better than you? Each day, leaning over your bank, he beheld his beauty in your water...' "Wilde paused for a moment. . . " 'If I loved him,' replied the river, 'it was because, when he leaned over my water, I saw the reflection of my waters in his eyes.' "Then Wilde, swelling up with a strange burst of laughter, added, "That's called *The Disciple*. (1949, p.3-4)

Art with its ability to bring forward inner experience can serve as a communication tool between the enclosed souls in Wilde’s view. Moreover, when such a contact occurs it is mostly frightening and destructive. Hence, it explains Wilde’s argument of the artist as a criminal and why he is a scapegoat. The artist who is bold to give form to the universal seductive tendencies is always persecuted by society.

Unlike Wilde, Basil does not act or appear as a rebel against society. Lord Henry seems to be misled by his friend’s personality. By the end of the novel Dorian admits to Henry that he killed the artist, Wotton did not believe what Dorian is hinting at, he responds saying that “I wish I could believe that he had come to such a really romantic end as you suggest; but I can’t. I dare say he fell into the Seine off an omnibus and that the conductor hushed up the scandal.” (Wilde, 1920, p.236) Basil suffers from a fragmentation in the form of a split between artistic inclinations and his way of life. Basil is a very successful artist, exhibitor in the best galleries and accepted by society. Hence, his conscious opinions reflect those of society, which to Wilde is an issue. Lord Henry describes this fragmentation in mockery “Why should he have been

murdered? He was not clever enough to have enemies. Of course, he had a wonderful genius for painting. But a man can paint like Velasquez and yet be as dull as possible. Basil was really rather dull." (Wilde, 1920, p.235) Earlier in the novel, Wotton explains Basil's dullness:

> Basil, my dear boy, puts everything that is charming in him into his work. The consequence is that he has nothing left for life but his prejudices, his principles, and his common-sense. The only artists I have ever known, who are personally delightful, are bad artists. Good artists exist simply in what they make, and consequently are perfectly uninteresting in what they are. A great poet, a really great poet, is the most unpoetical of all creatures. But inferior poets are absolutely fascinating. (ibid, p.65-66)

Basil's artistic vision has shown Dorian a new world, at first fascinating, yet later frightening. For this act Dorian kills the artist. Dorian has no idea about his motive for the crime. He did not attain full self-awareness despite the years he spent looking at the picture. He simply gazes at himself from the outside without real understanding of himself. According to Wilde, the crime seems to emerge from the portrait:

> Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips. The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within him, and he loathed the man who was seated at the table… He rushed at him, and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down on the table, and stabbing again and again. (ibid, p.176)

With the murder of the artist, Dorian descends into dullness. He part ways with art seeking forgetfulness. Nevertheless, the portrait haunts him and he finally in a bit of rage attempts to destroy it. Dorian fails and only end up killing himself restoring the portrait to its ideal and pure form.

3.3.2 Lord Henry the Spokesman of Aestheticism

Lord Henry and Basil hold different views in terms of their theory of cosmic justice and their concept of morality. Basil, the artist, believes in a moral order in which God punishes evil and rewards good. He believed that art, as well as human conduct, can be guided by a moral code in which sympathy and compassion are the most important values. His moral position leads to elements of melodrama. However, Henry's beliefs are based on the

assumption that there is no moral order and that the individual is at war with himself, driven by impulses beyond his control. He believes that morality is arbitrary and relative. Henry's approach leads to an isolated existence and the pursuit of pleasure for one's own enjoyment.

In *De Profundis,* Wilde maintains that "Doom like a purple thread runs through the gold cloth of *Dorian Gray.*" (1907, p.86) Basil Hallward starts the fire, but it is Henry who fuels it. Henry is a scientist and an intellectual whose best known for his curiosity. In the beginning of the novel he recommends science as a tool for social reform and emphasizes "the scientific point of view."(Wilde, 1920, p.24) Henry's scientific curiosity mostly leads him to exploration of mere sensation , yet it has also led him to more profound discoveries "Ordinary people waited till life disclosed to them its secrets, but to the few, to the elect, the mysteries of life were revealed before the veil was drawn away."(ibid, p.67) Being one of the elect, he tells Dorian and Basil that "[he] have known everything"(ibid, p.91) The "tired look in his eyes" suggests he is tired of knowledge. Henry is "always ready for a new emotion," yet he knows "there is no such a thing" (ibid, p.91) After the death of Sybil, Henry tells Dorian that:

> It often happens that the real tragedies of life occur in such an inartistic manner that they hurt us by their crude violence, their absolute incoherence, their absurd want of meaning, their entire lack of style. They affect us just as vulgarity affects us. They give us an impression of sheer brute force, and we revolt against that. (ibid, p.113)

Lord Henry's description of tragedy's "lack of style" echoes Wilde's position towards nature, since the lack of style actually is caused by "the sheer brute force" of nature. Hence, the tragedies that "possess artistic elements of beauty," (ibid, p.113) of which Sybil's death is supposed to be an example are really made exceptional by a willful effort of the aesthetic imagination. Later, in his description of Sybil's death, Lord Henry indicates that "actual life" destroys, he explains that "the moment she touched actual life, she marred it, and it marred her."(ibid, p.116) When he is at his Aunt Agatha's luncheon, he explains that "I can stand brute force, but brute reason is quite unbearable."(ibid, p.47) Henry is not bothered by this aspect of nature, since as he explains, he has learned to accept it.

Lord Henry acquires his wisdom about "the passions and the intellect" from literature as well as the observation of human behavior. Hence, his attachment to Dorian's personality. Earlier in the novel, Henry tells Basil that humans cannot abide by morality. He says that matters such as fidelity are impossible, because people are moved by their emotions rather

than their will. Henry's depiction of nature's brutality is repeatedly present in the body of the work, it highlights why Wilde was perusing an ideal existence that can only be found in the imagination.

Henry's hedonism is marked by his choice of only one action to indulge in, and that is contemplation. This serves both his curiosity, which he cannot satisfy, and his fear, which he cannot face. It can be noticed that most of his activities are double edged and serve two opposed ends: approach and avoidance. Contemplation allows him to turn reality into art by transforming everyday human events into aesthetically distant drama. His cynicism allows him to put a pose, as Wilde describes it, displaying the fruits of his contemplation, yet it also protects him from getting involved in emotional temptations; hence, avoiding suffering that follows passion. Basil tells Henry that:

> I hate the way you talk about your married life, Harry... I believe that you are really a very good husband, but that you are thoroughly ashamed of your own virtues. You are I an extraordinary fellow. You never say a moral A thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose.(Wilde, 1920, p.11)

Henry is satisfied with his life of contemplation. Unlike Dorian, He would not do anything strenuous to achieve pleasure. Nevertheless, he is quite willing and eager to manipulate Dorian to satisfy his curiosity and experience the only real pleasures left to him. Dorian will discover this quality in Henry late in the novel. He addresses Henry saying that "You would sacrifice anybody, Harry, for the sake of an epigram." (ibid, p226) Indeed, Henry would do anything for the sake of an experiment that might yield an aesthetic thrill.

From the beginning of the novel, Lord Henry encourages Dorian to indulge in his "new Hedonism." According to Henry's view, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain is natural because it is an expression of what life is really about. He advises Dorian to "Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you!" (ibid, p.30) Henry believes that humans should act according to their natural impulses, he argues that "The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly that is what each of us is here for." (ibid, p.25) He believed this to be the duty one owes to one's self. He goes on:

> I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that

> we would forget all the maladies of mediaevalism, and return to the Hellenic ideal to something finer, richer, than the Hellenic ideal, it may be.(Wilde, 1920, p.25)

Henry believes that if Dorian allowes himself to develop through the expression of his innate creative drive, he could evolve from a simple to a more complex organism.

It is wildly held by critics that Lord Henry Wotton functions as the spokesman for Wilde. Most of his ideas, his rejection of altruism, his theory of self-development, his hedonism, his passive stance towards nature and his aestheticism are recurrent themes in Wilde's critical essays. Moreover, his wit and wisdom are apparent in the style of Vivian in *The Decay of Lying* (1904), and Gilbert in *The Critic as Artist* (1904). Furthermore, Wilde, as the narrator of the novel, expresses Henry's sentiment, mostly in Henry's own characteristics. The effect of his influence on Dorian is disastrous, and he is unaware of Dorian's consistent degeneration. At the beginning of the novel he tells Dorian that "people like you… don't commit crimes."(ibid, p.61) At the end he tells him that "there is no one who would not be delighted to change places with [him]."(ibid, p.225) Moreover, in his last conversation with Dorian, after all his abhorrent deeds, Henry restates his believe in Dorian. Finally he informs Dorian that he "could change places with [him]," (ibid, p.240) because the world always worshiped him and will continue to do so. "I am so glad that you have never done anything," he adds, "Life has been your art." (ibid, p.240) To these moronic words of praise, Dorian replies: "you don't know everything about me. I think that if you did, you would turn from me." (ibid, p.240) The difference between Henry and Dorian is that Wotton only contemplates while Dorian acts upon his desires, according to Wilde's philosophy action is forbidden, and Dorian errs in not refraining from action.

3.4 Morality in the Picture of Dorian Gray

In the novel, Dorian is working to overthrow one moral order and replace it with a new hedonism, yet the novel indicates that this only reproduces the same order. The same as what Lord Henry calls the "twin terrors" of religion and society is reproduced by Dorian's viewing the portrait as prompting him to action. A moral order, of any sort, produces an endless cycle of action, always directed to viewing one's action as sin, and then having to act again to repent. According to Wilde's critical essays, any belief that the portrait can be used to produce a moral order is a delusion. The problematic of the novel, in the light of the *Preface*, is that Dorian attempts to use an aesthetic object which is the portrait. However, the object is useless,

does not actually have any value. Even if Dorian assumes a use, that does not cause the portrait to actually guide him toward the proper course of action. Dorian misuses the portrait, but the lack of refusal from the object highlights the deference between the sphere of art and life. Art does not act, does not do anything that can be interpreted as a use. Dorian constantly acts, but his actions are never refuted.

The role of the portrait in the novel confirms two things: 1) morality, even if imposed externally, is internal to the individual. 2) Sin is not necessarily punished in either of the norms of society or in Henry's hedonism. The portrait, supposedly revealing Dorian's sins to him, ends up unscathed and unpunished. Dorian cannot see the portrait as useless and cease turning what he views as symbolic of moral order into action.

3.4.1 Dorian's Moral Order

According to Wilde's letter to the *St. James' Gazette*, the moral is that "all excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment." (Hart-Davis, 1962, p.259) The fact that both excess and renunciation bring their own punishments does not show a need for Christian morality. Wilde continues:

> The painter, Basil Hallward, worshiping physical beauty far too much, as most painters do, dies by the hand of one in whose soul he has created a monstrous and absurd vanity. Dorian Gray, having led a life of mere sensation and pleasure, tries to kill conscience, and at that moment kills himself. Lord Henry Wotton seeks to be merely the spectator of life. He finds that those who reject the battle are more deeply wounded than those who take part in it. (ibid, p.259)

The "monstrous and absurd vanity" Basil creates in his portrait of Dorian is the excess that kills him, as he adores it "far too much." Lord Henry's refusal of "the battle" of life is renunciation. Dorian tries, both, to live "a life of mere sensation and pleasure," and also "kills conscience" so as to feel free to continue this life, this is excess and renunciation. Dorian is excessive in his life of aimless sensual experiences, but renounces part of himself, his own soul in the portrait.

In *The Decay of Lying* (1904), Wilde denounces imitation as wrong. Much of Wilde's works stand against mirroring reality and championing artistic innovation as the driving force of society. The novel does not contain a portrait that replaces or mirrors morality. The act of mirroring exists only in the eyes of Dorian. The ending confirms the absence of a moral order

revealed by the portrait. Had it been there, stabbing the portrait would have somehow resulted in destroying the moral order he was trying to escape

Lord Henry's speech in Basil's garden prompts Dorian's initial actions. His monologue leads the youth to reconfigure moral order incorrectly. Art is being used by Dorian as a new vehicle for desire. Dorian misunderstands what Lord Henry urged him to do in the beginning of the novel, he says "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful."(Wilde, 1920, p.26) Desire, as defined here, has been made "monstrous and unlawful" by the "twin terrors" of God and society. Desire is understood as something from which moral order protects the individuals, lest they should fall into "temptation." Lord Henry's speech is aimed directly at Dorian. He urges that "A new Hedonism that is what our century wants. You might be its visible symbol. With your personality there is nothing you could not do. The world belongs to you for a season." (ibid, p.30) He believes Dorian could be the realization of this new hedonistic view, and that he can deconstruct the orders that make desire "monstrous and unlawful." Instead, Dorian makes the portrait the visible symbol of this new hedonism by reading the aesthetic object as producing a symbol that prompts him to action. Hence, the order becomes the portrait stashed in the attic. Finally, hedonism is trying to hide from the portrait instead of the "twin terrors."

The artist Basil has heard that Dorian is a man whom "no pure-minded girl should be allowed to know," and is "so fatal to young men." Yet Basil feels quite strongly that Dorian is innocent, as "Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face." (ibid, p.167) The exchange is simple: Dorian's portrait has the sin written on it instead, and he can explore desire completely unmarked by sin's inscription. Dorian agrees completely with Basil; they both see sin as an inscription and the body of sin as having a use.

The ending of the novel is a moral about art's independence of any moral order. Art cannot be used as one's soul or conscience or substitute morality. Throughout the narrative Dorian does not develop that much. He is either hiding from what he assumes is his soul, studies it with intrigue, or attack it. Nevertheless, there is little reason to read the novel as being about Dorian, since art is the dominant object from beginning to end. Dorian errs in ascribing a use to the painting. It is but an aesthetic object which to Wilde is quite useless.

3.4.2 Judgment in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The aesthetic object that invites judgment in the novel is the portrait. The image in the portrait is unique as Dorian makes it symbolic of something it does not show. The self-identification he sees on the canvas immerses the image in his daily life. Dorian attempts to make art judge his actions to be sinful or not. Yet he fails to observe the visual image as an aesthetic object that is quite useless.

In Dorian's relationship with the portrait, judgment works as an expectation. He expects to be a sinner, and to be judged by the portrait. This approach to the portrait leads to disappointment on Dorian's behalf. Two significant events demonstrate his disappointment, his murder of Basil and his attempt to destroy the portrait. Moreover, he is not satisfied when judgment does not produce the desired results. Dorian misunderstands judgment just as much as misunderstanding the portrait. After murdering Basil, he wonders "who made him a judge over others?" (ibid, p.205) without paying attention to the wrong judgment of the entire situation. When he attempts to stab the judgment in the person of the artist, he is both reacting to the artist and reading judgment into him. Nevertheless, his attack does not kill judgment in any manner. This echoes Wilde's view that no attack on the artist or his art will produce the expected or desired results. Finally, in a moment of rage, Dorian attempts to attack the very symbol he holds to be a judge.

Nevertheless, the author does not want his readers to blame Dorian for not escaping judgment. The escape is nearly impossible. The only solution according to Wilde is to find a way to make judgment "smile" at Dorian. The young man occasionally tries to act in a manner he believes would alter the portrait for the better, and is disappointed when it gets worse. The moral in Wilde's letter to the *St. James's Gazette* is a moral about the inability to escape judgment and moral order. Both excess and renunciation bring the punishment of judgment because actions are understood in this manner.

In light of the *Preface*, the murder highlights society's stance toward the artist. Dorian attacks and blames the artist for his interpretation of the symbol he sees in the portrait. The novel argues that the tendency of a disappointed spectator is to attack the artist regardless. Wilde emphasizes the deference between art and artist, hence, his view that art is quite useless is clearer. The portrait and the *Preface* as aesthetic objects are used to enforce this claim. Moreover, Dorian fears that someone might catch a glimpse of the hideous painting. He fears that "during his absence someone might gain access to the room." (Wilde, 1920, p.157) Dorian

is afraid to expose his soul to the world mainly because he is afraid of what the world might think.

Toward the end, Dorian is slowly consumed by the portrait, where his “own personality” is now a “burden” to him.(Wilde, 1920, p.226) The judgment he attributes to the portrait haunts him, and the “image of his sin” often returns to him “Out of the black cave of time, terrible and swathed in scarlet”(ibid, p.222) To Dorian the portrait represented his conscience. Hence, when he speculates that “conscience could raise such fearful phantoms, and give them visible form,” the canvas, as he believes, follows him and haunts him.

Finally, the portrait shows art as something misconstrued as judge. The “evil and aging face on the canvas” shows both Dorian’s soul and the disapproval of judgment. Dorian cannot move beyond judgment because, even when he does not judge those around him, he judges himself most of all. No “new mode of existence” can come out of Dorian’s understanding of the use he sees in the image on the canvas. He understands the portrait as a sinner. He consistently views it as conscience, thus, viewing it as an image permanently scowling at him disapproving of his actions. Dorian constructed a symbol of judgment, yet he fails to see that the symbol is not part of art but only put there by the spectator.

3.5 Conclusion

It can be concluded that the most dominant element in the novel is its peculiar style. Wilde has tamed language to produce a work that is aesthetically beautiful regardless of its moral plot. To an artist morality is but a medium to achieve an aesthetic effect. The juxtaposition of aesthetic with morality produces a world that can only find its resonance in the imagination of the dreamer. The moral plot of the work serves as an extension to its aesthetic effect. Basil is murdered by the hand of his own art because he invested too much of himself in it. He revealed too much and became attached to his own creation which resulted in his demise. Lord Henry's passivity costed him the lives of two of his friends. As Wilde suggests those who do not take part in the battle are, sometimes, wounded more than the ones who engage in it. Dorian errs in constantly linking thought to action. He took art to be his judged and suffered the consequences. He fails to understand that the symbol he reads only exists in the eye of the beholder, not in the aesthetic object. By finally attempting to destroy the canvas, he only reverses the pact he made in the beginning of the novel. He restores arts to its pure and ideal form and ends up destroying the symbol he created out of the innocent portrait.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

The current paper has discussed the relationship between aesthetics and morality in the light of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It has introduced both of the concepts and how their relationship is perceived by *Art of Art's sake* movement. Moreover, it has delved into the philosophy of Oscar Wilde in order to understand his position toward the issue of morality limiting aesthetic proclivities.

On the light of what has been introduced in this paper it can be said that: aesthetics and morality are two components of what is understood as value theory. Aesthetics is concerned with creating a mood or a sensation in the eye of the beholder. While morality is concerned with the study of the ramifications of actions. Hence, Aesthetics is indeed independent of morality since actions of any kind belong to the sphere of morality. Artworks do not insight people into action, rather they direct the attention toward contemplation and thinking critically about various phenomena individuals face on daily basis. The desire to act is individually motivated and most likely it results from a false interpretation of the aesthetic object. Dorian interprets the portrait as a judge for his action, hence, he attributes a use for an object based on a false interpretation of its value.

Aesthetic experience emerges in the faculty of taste. It has been established that this faculty is both disinterested and immediate. Hence, aesthetic judgments have the immediacy of sensuous judgments. The pleasure that is generated must be disinterested, if the beholder enjoys an aesthetic object for a potential benefit it might have, then this is no longer an aesthetic judgment or statement. Moreover, it has been explained that aesthetic objects manifest in the sphere of imagination. Art by itself is quite useless. The artist simply creates a mood, he does not preach or educate.

Wilde insists that art does not comply to society in the sense that it is an experiment. It creates a controlled environment where individuals might express and try different forms of feeling with no harm being done. He argues for the limitless outcomes of contemplation that occur in the imagination, unlike actions which set an exact outcome most of the time. On the sphere of aesthetics even moral events can be interpreted as having a value in so far, they call upon contemplation. Thus, the use of moral or immoral events to enrich artworks fall under the rubric of aesthetic invention. Moreover, morality is consistently shifting and changing, hence, art as a work of innovation cannot be limited by societal modes of thought. Aesthetics invite the faculty of thought and taste; thus, it is heavily dependent on the capacity of

imagination. Hence, that the existence of moral events, or the lack thereof, should be viewed as a part that contributes to the aesthetic experience of the work. Wilde describes *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as an essay on decorative art. Its peculiar style dominates the work becoming its most important element. The author, through the use of sensuous language, demonstrates that the moral element can be kept subordinate to the desired aesthetic effect. The artist Basil is consumed by his art in which he revealed much of his impulses. He ends up being killed by the art he created. Lord Henry Wotton, whose occupation is contemplation, walks away unharmed. He does not indulge action, but the effect of his wit is disastrous, just as the effect of Dorian false interpretation of the portrait. The latter fails in keeping thought separate from action. Dorian fails simply because he gave form to every impulse he has.

At last, it can be noted that a successful artist is the one who can tame whatever elements he has at his disposal to create something innovative and vital. Morality then becomes but a medium employed to create an aesthetic effect. Hence the aesthetic proclivities of both artist and beholder cannot be tamed by moral dictates since one melt in the other. Aesthetics serve as a vehicle to enlarge the individuals' scope and perception of ordinary events. If immorality is never experimented with on any sphere this results in an individual with a lack of depth and a lack of thought. In literature, both aesthetics and morality melt to produce something valuable. The medium that is employed is mere words. Finally, the sensuous language has a great impact on the reader that the structure employed requires a further study which the shortage of time and documents did not allow for.

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Glossary

Glossary

Aesthete:(n) A person having or affecting sensitivity to beauty especially in arts.

Aestheticism:(n) A movement that developed in the late 1880s. It is based on the belief that art should exist as an independent idea away from utility, morality and other uses.

Aesthetics:(n) a philosophy concerned with beauty and art and the appreciation of beautiful things.

Altruism:(n) unselfish regard for or caring about the need of other people more than one's self

Autonomy:(n) the quality of being self-governing. Self-directing freedom and especially moral independence.

Cadence:(n) a rhythmic sequence or flow of sounds in language. The beat, time, or measure of rhythmical motion or activity.

Classicist:(n) a person who studies ancient Greek or Latin. A person who follows classicism in art or literature

Dandy:(n) a person who gives exaggerated attention to personal appearance.

Decadent:(n) a group of late 19th century French and English writers tending toward artificial and unconventional subjects and subtilized style.

Despot:(n) a ruler with absolute power and authority.

Ethics:(n) the discipline dealing with the study of good and bad. A philosophy dealing with the study of moral duty and obligation.

Hellenism:(n) a body of humanistic and classical ideals associated with ancient Greece and including reason, the pursuit of knowledge and the arts, moderation, civic responsibility, and bodily development.

Mimesis:(n) a Greek term denoting imitation or mimicry.

Morality:(n) principles of rules of conduct as as they are adopted by the public.

Philistine:(n) a person who is guided by materialism and is usually disdainful of intellectual or artistic values.

Prurient:(adj) marked by or arousing an immoderate or unwholesome interest or desire.

Purge:(v) to clear of guilt. To free from moral or ceremonial defilement

Purple Patches: a figurative reference to florid literary passages, added to a text fro dramatic effect.

Rusticate:(v) to be suspended from school or college

Scapegoat:(v) one that bears the blame for others. One that is the object of irrational hostility.

Glossary

Stimuli:(n) something that rouses or incites to activity

Utilitarianism:(n) a doctrine that the useful is the good and that the determining consideration of right conduct should be the usefulness of its consequences.

Volatility:(n) a tendency to change quickly and unpredictably. a tendency to erupt in violence or anger.

Voyeurism:(n) the practice of taking pleasure in observing something private, sordid, or scandalous.

The definitions were adapted from Merriam Webster dictionary and Oxford English dictionary

Appendices

Appendices

Appendix One: The Author's Biography

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, 16 October 1854 – 30 November 1900, is an Irish poet, writer, critic and playwright. Wilde have an array of works in different literary forms such as theater, criticism, philosophy, poetry and short stories. He was one of London's most known playwrights in the early 1890s. Wilde is best remembered for his epigrams and plays, his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, his conviction for homosexuality, imprisonment and early death at the age of 46.

Wilde became fluent in French and German early in his life. At university, he proved himself to be a great classicist, first at Trinity college Dublin, then at Oxford. During his stay at the university, Wilde became involved in the growing philosophy of Aestheticism, which was led by two of his tutors, Walter Pater and John Ruskin.

As the face of British Aestheticism, Wilde experimented with various literary activities; he published a book of poems, lectured in the United States and Canada on the *English Renaissance in Art* and interior decoration, and returned to London to take part in journalism. He was known for his wit, eloquence, flamboyant dress and outstanding conversational skills. By the turn of the 1890s Wilde dropped journalism to enhance his ideas about aestheticism and the supremacy of art in a series of dialogues and essays. He ended up incorporating the sum of his philosophy in his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray 1890*. He wrote Salome (1891) in French while in Paris but it was refused a license for England due to an absolute prohibition on the portrayal of Biblical subjects on the English stage. Unperturbed, Wilde produced four society comedies in the early 1890s, which made him one of the most successful playwrights of late-Victorian London.

At the height of his fame and success, while *The Importance of Being Earnest* 1895 was still being performed in London, Wilde had the Marquess of Queensberry prosecuted for criminal libel. The Marquess was the father of Wilde's lover, Lord Alfred Douglas. The libel trial unearthed evidence that caused Wilde to drop his charges and led to his own arrest and trial for gross indecency with men. After two more trials he was convicted and sentenced to two years' hard labor, the maximum penalty, and was jailed from 1895 to 1897. During his last year in prison, he wrote *De Profundis*, a long letter which discusses his spiritual journey through his trials. On his release, he left immediately for France, never to return to Ireland or Britain. There he wrote his last work, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* 1898, a long poem commemorating the harsh rhythms of prison life. He died destitute in Paris at the age of 46.

Appendices

Appendix Two: Synopsis

Dorian Gray is a young man living in late-19th century London. While wealthy, charming, generally intelligent and very handsome, he is naive and easily manipulated. These faults lead to his spiral into sin and, ultimately, misery.

While posing for a painting by his artist friend Basil Hallward, Dorian meets Basil's friend Lord Henry Wotton. Wotton is enchantingly cynical and witty, and tells Dorian that the only life worth living is one dedicated entirely to pleasure. After Wotton convinces Dorian that youth and beauty will bring him everything he desires, Dorian openly wishes that his portrait could age in his place, and that he could keep his youthful good looks forever. When the portrait of Dorian is complete, Lord Henry hails it as a masterpiece and is surprised when Basil announces he will never exhibit it because he feels he put "too much of himself" into it. Basil gives the painting to Dorian, who proudly hangs it in his opulent home.

One fateful night, Dorian visits a lower-class tavern, The Two Turtles, where he is given a prime seat for the night's entertainment. He is instantly charmed by the tavern owners' daughter, Sibyl Vane, who performs a sweet singing routine during the lineup. Dorian is invited backstage after the show to meet Sibyl, and plays the piano for her in the empty tavern. Sibyl is flattered by the attention of such a handsome gentleman, and her mother encourages the relationship because of Dorian's wealth, but Sibyl's brother James is suspicious. James tells his enamored sister in private that if this young man, whom Sibyl nicknamed "Sir Tristan" after a virtuous knight in Arthurian mythology, ever harms her, he will kill him. James is then deployed to Australia on a sailing mission.

Dorian excitedly tells Basil and Lord Henry that he is engaged to the beautiful Sibyl Vane, and invites them to come with him to the tavern to hear her sing. Despite having heard Lord Henry's disdainful views on marriage, Dorian is so genuinely happy that Lord Henry's words no longer influence him. Basil sees this as a positive development, and after seeing Sibyl perform and making her acquaintance, encourages the engagement for the sake of Dorian's moral purity. Lord Henry, on the other hand, cannot resist exploiting his innate ability to influence his friends, and suggests that Dorian test Sibyl's worth with an "experiment." Dorian invites Sibyl to his house that night and, when she prepares to go home, asks her to stay. Torn between love and honor, Sibyl nearly leaves, but cannot resist Dorian's charm. This meant that she had failed Lord Henry's test, and Dorian sends her an incredibly hurtful letter,

accusing her of "killing his love," and that she can have no part in his life henceforth. He sends her a sum of money for compensation, but Sibyl is emotionally destroyed.

When Dorian returns home after abandoning Sibyl, he notices a slight change in the portrait Basil had painted of him. The mouth looks somehow crueler, and a cold unkindness is present in the face that had not been there before. When he wakes the next morning, the change is still visible. He feels immense guilt over how badly he had treated Sibyl, and hastily composes an apology letter in an attempt to redeem himself. Before he can deliver it, Lord Henry arrives with the news that Sibyl Vane had killed herself the night before. Dorian is initially devastated, but Lord Henry convinces him to not blame himself for the tragedy and invites him to the opera. Abandoning his grief, Dorian falls deeper into Lord Henry's teachings of "new hedonism", and goes to the opera with him that very night. Basil is surprised and worried when he witnesses Dorian's uncaring behavior in regard to Sibyl's death, and Dorian plans to dedicate his life solely to his own pleasure. Because the change in the portrait still disturbed him, Dorian has it covered with a screen and locked in his old school room at the top of the house, to which he keeps the only key.

Eighteen years later Dorian meets Basil again, who is preparing to catch a train to Paris, and invites him to his house. Basil expresses his concern about Dorian's behavior, and admits that in order to truly know what kind of man Dorian is, he would have to see his soul itself. Dorian grimly leads Basil up to the old school room to look upon his handiwork for the first time in eighteen years. Dorian removes the coverings from the hidden portrait, and Basil is horrified to see that the man in the painting has warped into a hideous, demon-like creature to reflect Dorian's multitude of sins. Basil begs Dorian to repent and change his ways, but Dorian feels a surge of anger toward Basil, blaming him for his miserable life because the painting was his own work. Dorian stabs Basil to death and locks his body in the school room with the horrible painting, in which blood has appeared on the hands of the twisted painted Dorian.

The next morning, Dorian summons a former friend, Allen Campbell, whose reputation had since been ruined by his associations with Dorian. Campbell is a scientist specializing in anatomy and chemistry, and Dorian blackmails the highly reluctant man into disposing of Basil's body. The nature of the blackmailing subject is not revealed, but Campbell agrees to disintegrate Basil's body, and departs afterward looking shaken and disturbed.

Appendices

Basil's disappearance is talked about in London society for some time, but Dorian is never suspected. Among the few who have remained his loyal friends are Lord Henry and Gladys, Basil's niece, who was a little girl when the portrait was painted. Dorian enters a romance with Gladys, though he is apprehensive about the effect he appears to have on the lives of those he becomes close to. He visits a seedy inn one evening and finds a former friend, Adrian Singleton, a wealthy young man who had been ruined by following Dorian's influence. Adrian is now a disheveled opium addict, but he knows of Dorian's sordid past and mockingly addresses him as "Sir Tristan" as Dorian departs the inn. The nickname is overheard by James Vane, Sibyl's brother, who happened to be at the inn and had spent eighteen years being hell-bent on avenging his sister. Though he did not know her cruel suitor's name and had never seen his face, the name "Sir Tristan" is enough to motivate him to follow Dorian outside and threaten him. Dorian calmly denies ever knowing a Sibyl Vane, and asserts that he is too young to have had anything to do with a death that occurred eighteen years before. James Vane admits that this man looks too young to be the suspect, and releases him. Adrian Singleton, with both amusement and resentment, explains to James that Dorian Gray was the man he sought, and that he had not looked a day older than twenty-two for the past eighteen years. Enraged, James Vane begins to track down Dorian Gray.

A few days later, Dorian attends a hunting party with several society friends. The sport is interrupted when a man, assumed to be a beater, is shot to death by accident after hiding in the bushes unseen. It is revealed to Dorian later that the dead man was not a beater, but James Vane, having followed Dorian in revenge and lost his own life in the process. Dorian feels even more guilty and cursed, but wishes to make one final stab at having a good and worthwhile life. He soon proposes marriage to Gladys who happily accepts.

Despite his happiness about his upcoming marriage to Gladys, Dorian is weighted down by the deaths of Sibyl, Basil, and James, as well as the ruin of Adrian Singleton and others like him. The last straw is the news that Allen Campbell, whom Dorian ruined and then blackmailed into disposing of Basil's body, had killed himself in misery. Dorian realizes that the one noble thing he can possibly do is to spare Gladys from the certain misfortune he will bring her.

At long last, Dorian ventures up to the school room to face the painting that is the embodiment of his corrupted soul. Using the same knife with which he had murdered Basil Hallward, he stabs his painted figure through the heart. Roused by his screams, his house

Appendices

guests, including Gladys, David, and Lord Henry, rush upstairs and find Dorian Gray's dead body on the school room floor, now in the form of the hideous creature from the painting. The painting itself has reverted to its original image of the handsome, innocent youth than Dorian once was. Lord Henry, stricken, sees the horrible results of his own influence and gazes at Dorian's corpse in shocked remorse.

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Appendix Three: The Preface

THE PREFACE

THE artist is the creator of beautiful things.
To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.
The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things.

The highest, as the lowest, form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.

Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault.

Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope.

They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only Beauty.

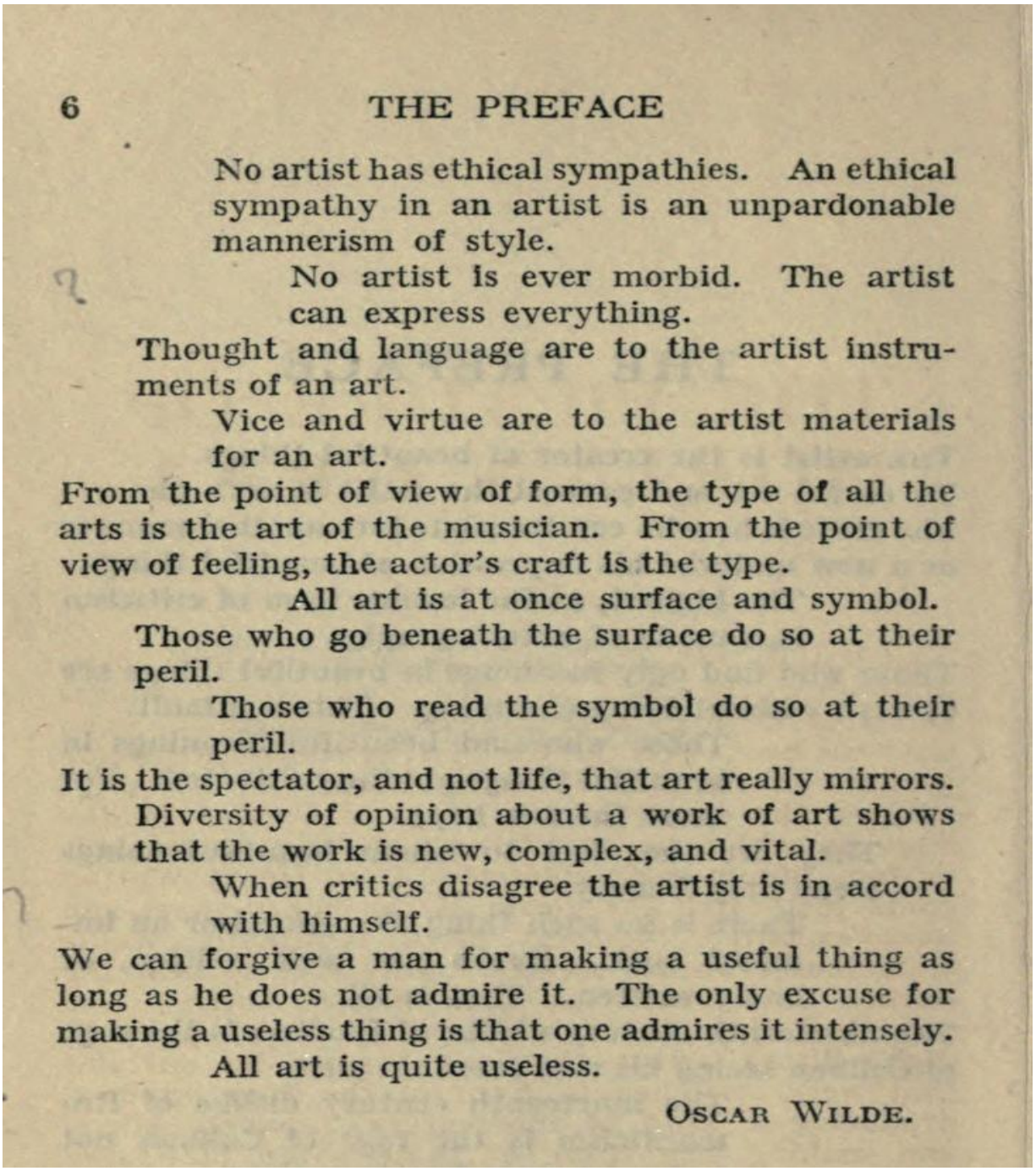
There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.

The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass.

The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass.

The moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium.

No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved.



6 THE PREFACE

No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style.

No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything.

Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art.

Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.

From the point of view of form, the type of all the arts is the art of the musician. From the point of view of feeling, the actor's craft is the type.

All art is at once surface and symbol.

Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.

Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.

It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.

Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital.

When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself.

We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely.

All art is quite useless.

OSCAR WILDE.

The Preface of the novel was added with the book version. After receiving numerous critical letters and reviews dealing with the work's morality, Wilde decided to include a preface that would serve as a summary of his approach to the issues raised by the critics.

Appendices

Appendix Four: The School of Athene

The School of Athene By Raphael

The School of Athene is a fresco by the Italian Renaissance artist Raphael. It was painted between 1509 and 1511. The picture represents Greek philosophy. Plato is raising his finger to the purity of original forms while Aristotle stretches his hand to the role of mimesis in purging the human soul.

Appendices

Appendix Five: Guernica

Guernica by Pablo Picasso

Guernica is a painting by the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso 1937. It is a response to the bombing of Guernica, a Basque country town in northern Spain, by Nazi Germany. The painting is widely acclaimed, and helped bring worldwide attention to the Spanish Civil War.

Appendices

Appendix Six: Brillo Boxes

Brillo Boxes by Andy Warhol

Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* were crafted in the mid-1960s. Andy transferred the product into sculpted boxes identical in size and shape to supermarket cartons. He thought that the boxes would be sold as aesthetic objects, yet none was actually sold.