



# **NEAR EAST UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT**

**OSCAR WILDE AS A NOVELIST**

**WITH REFERENCE TO**

**THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY**

**UNDERGRADUATE THESIS**

**ADVISOR: ASSOCIATE PROF. DR. GÜL CELKAN**

**Bülent Bilginer**

**June 1996**

**Lefkoşa**

**TRNC**

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## PREFACE

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I extend my warmest gratitude to the President, Dr. Suat Günsel of Near East University for having established such a respectable department in the university and my special regards are for my chairperson, Associate Prof. Dr. Gül Celkan for her great help through my 4 - year education in the department. I should also declare that her assistance in preparing this thesis has been very fruitful.

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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.

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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.

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Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin on 15th October 1854, the second son of a surgeon, Dr. (later Sir) William Wilde, and Jane Francisca Elgee, a noted literary hostess and nationalist writer who used the nom de plume 'Speranza'. He was educated at Portora Royal School, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh and Trinity College, Dublin, which he entered in 1871. He won the Berkeley gold Medal for his essay on the Greek comic poets in 1874, in which year he entered Magdalen College, Oxford, where he held a demyship (Scholarship). Wilde took a First Class Degree in Classical Moderations at Oxford in 1876. In June 1878 he won the Newdigate Prize at Oxford for this poem 'Ravenna', and took a First in Litterae Humaniores.

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About J.K. Huysmans : The novels of Henri Alain - Fournier (1886-1914) and Jean Giraudoux (1882-1944) can be seen as representative of the opposing tradition of symbolism, first introduced into the novel by J.K. Huysmans (1848-1907) in 'A Rebour', 1884 (Against the Grain 1930).



Now, I'd like to turn to the literary tendencies in the period the novel was written and to look at the response given by people to The Picture of Dorian Gray .

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**Great Victorians :** Differences in generations account only in part for the remarkable diversity of the "*great Victorians*". There were always powerful and searching Victorian critics of Victorianism. In the mid-Victorian period, Matthew Arnold challenged stock assumptions about culture and society. John Ruskin and William Morris, continuing traditions that went back to Samuel Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle, prepared the way for the late Victorian and 20th century "*revolt*". Even an accepted Victorian, Charles Dickens, was as influential for what he protested against as for what he what he accepted. At the same time, conformists and rebels had much in common when compared with their predecessors and successors. Charles Darwin and his able apologist, T.H. Huxley, were supremely Victorian - moderate and respectable - even in their approach to the intellectual disturbances that they generated.

#### **a) The Birth of the principle 'Art for Art's Sake'**

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hats and sinister cloaks of Italian brigands and cultivated disdain for the law-abiding citizen.

The law-abiding citizen was, of course, moral; in as if appeared to the ardent sprits, a dull, small, hateful way. It only through the necessity of opposition it was incumbent on them, therefore to be propagandists of immorality or, at least, amorality on a generous, a magnificent scale: and in 1835 there was published a book animated by precisely this purpose. It was a novel, called Mademoiselle de Maupin . It was written by an audacious young man, who hailed from Tarbes in the Pyrenees, Theophile Gautier.

Gautier was born in 1811 (When Napoleon was planning his attack upon Russia) and was just at the right age to experience the full force of the romantic decade. He wrote, with the fervour of youth, to shock: and he attached to his novel a special preface (as my Introduction to this thesis is) so that none should overlook the fact that it was meant to be a deliberate onslaught on the propriety of the bourgeois.

This development was in the meeting and inter course of two remarkable people, the author Mademoiselle de Maupin, in his mature years, and a younger man, the poet Charles Baudelaire. Together they crystallized the exclusive position of the artist and his separation from the middle-class world. Gautier, the man of slogans, put it in a phrase-L'Art pour L'Art-or, as it may be written in English, Art for Art's Sake.

L'Art pour l'Art. The phrase had a clarion sound-apart from what it meant - the sound which would rally the faint-hearted on the battlefield and send impetuous cavalrymen dashing forward in heroic frenzy. It is by the reckless improvisation of such general ideas that Frenchmen have egged themselves on to perform deeds of glory or create works of beauty;



and what the phrase meant was what Gautier had expressed in 'Maupin' and what Baudelaire had learnt from Pope: that moral purpose, deep thought, sage and prudent reflexions, all the worn and respectable trappings of the creative spirit were irrelevant to its free exercise, positively hampered it, in fact.

Gautier defined himself -and the words have the effect of an emphatic slap on a red waistcoat -as 'un homme pour qui le monde exterieur existe!'. 'A man for whom the visible world exist...!'

A world of sensation. Forms, colours, feeling were meant to provide the refined pleasure and enjoyment of the man for whom it existed and he must turn them into art without restraint, scruple or concern as to whether this satisfied the policeman, pleased the minister of religion or elevated the shopkeeper.

### **b) The Aesthetic Movement**

The word 'aesthetic' which Gautier inevitably used in his exposition of the nature of beauty in art, was not of course a French invention. It come from that matrix of general ideas, ancient Greece: in its original form it made a sharp distinction between thought and feeling, things perceptible by the senses, things material as opposed to things thinkable or immaterial.

The source of aesthetic theory is in certain dialogues of the greatest of philosophers, Plato. Plato, in brilliant phrases, with the most profound depth of suggestion, had outlined the independent existence of beauty, independent, that is to say, of truth , edification or usefulness. In succession to him, Aristotle (his pupil) and Longinus (an unknown author of the first century A.D.) provided modifications of this idea of beauty



without altering its essential purport. In this respect, as in so many other, the germ of modern thought was to be found in the ancient world.

The inquiry into the nature of beauty had been resumed most actively in Germany. The German philosophers of the eighteenth century looking wistfully back to the clear light of civilization in which they sought to illumine the obscure longings of the Teutonic soul; piling up mountainous definitions, logical profundities; retrieved and handled anew the word 'aesthetic'. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762) is notable for having first applied it to the 'criticism of taste' considered as a science or philosophy. Immanuel Kant, his greater contemporary, applied it more strictly in the ancient definition as 'the science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception'. Others, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, added to the edifice of words. Early in the nineteenth century, 'Aesthetics' was looked on as German property. Thus the Penny Cyclopaedia, in 1832, calls it 'the designation given by German writers to a branch of philosophical inquiry, the object of which is a philosophic theory of the beautiful !' It was also regarded with some contempt. Gwilt's Encyclopaedia of Architecture criticizes 'a silly pedantic term under the name of Aesthetics... one of the meta - physical and useless additions to nomenclature in the arts in which the German writers abound'.

Baudelaire said: 'Poetry has no other end but itself: it cannot have any other: and no poem is so great, so noble, so entirely worthy of the name as that which has been written simply for the pleasure of writing a poem. If a poet has followed a moral end he has diminished his poetic force and the result is most likely to be bad.'

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The source of aesthetic theory is in certain dialogues of the greatest of philosophers, Plato. Plato, in brilliant phrases, with the most profound depth of suggestion, had outlined the independent existence of beauty, independent, that is to say, of truth , edification or usefulness. In succession to him, Aristotle (his pupil) and Longinus (an unknown author of the first century A.D.) provided modifications of this idea of beauty

without altering its essential purport. In this respect, as in so many other, the germ of modern thought was to be found in the ancient world.

The inquiry into the nature of beauty had been resumed most actively in Germany. The German philosophers of the eighteenth century looking wistfully back to the clear light of civilization in which they sought to illumine the obscure longings of the Teutonic soul; piling up mountainous definitions, logical profundities; retrieved and handled anew the word 'aesthetic'. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762) is notable for having first applied it to the 'criticism of taste' considered as a science or philosophy. Immanuel Kant, his greater contemporary, applied it more strictly in the ancient definition as 'the science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception'. Others, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, added to the edifice of words. Early in the nineteenth century, 'Aesthetics' was looked on as German property. Thus the Penny Cyclopaedia, in 1832, calls it 'the designation given by German writers to a branch of philosophical inquiry, the object of which is a philosophic theory of the beautiful !' It was also regarded with some contempt. Gwilt's Encyclopaedia of Architecture criticizes 'a silly pedantic term under the name of Aesthetics... one of the meta - physical and useless additions to nomenclature in the arts in which the German writers abound'.

Baudelaire said: 'Poetry has no other end but itself: it cannot have any other: and no poem is so great, so noble, so entirely worthy of the name as that which has been written simply for the pleasure of writing a poem. If a poet has followed a moral end he has diminished his poetic force and the result is most likely to be bad.'

The craving for sensation, the fastidious and patrician research for strange refinement, the jealous cultivation of art as a thing removed from



the common affairs of men constituted the prevailing atmosphere of the 'brilliant' period which was now beginning - the second Empire. By a series of republican (and even Bohemian) revolutions, assisted that is to say by 'vagabonds, disbanded soldiers, discharged prisoners, fugitives from the galleys, sharpers, jugglers, professional beggars, pickpockets, conjurers gamesters, grinders, rag pickers, knife grinders, and tinkers', Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, third son of the King of Holland, made himself Emperor of the French. The description of his helpers is that of Karl Marx who, it will be seen, places 'men of letter' somewhere between porters and organ grinders; who further described French Bohemia as 'the scum, offal, and detritus of society.'

The social structure might be imperfect. Nevertheless, it was in the Second Empire that France won back a dominance over the culture of the world not unlike that she possessed in the days of Louis XIV.

The new ideas, passing from one original mind to another and from one art to another in a symphonic movement, changing and yet preserving the influences from which they had sprung, gained an added power and importance by being set against a showy imperial background. But that, with its parade of activity and progress, made no other difference. Amid its slightly satirical and derisive splendour, the arts pursued a destiny already laid down. It was by the theory and practice of art for art's sake, intertwined with a variously interpreted 'de cadence', that the culture of French was to have influence abroad and in particular, to affect the opposed and island culture of Britain.

Britain, in this same period, with all her wealth and power, in spite of the fact that her possessions stretched round the globe, was, in mind, a hermit. When the Napoleonic wars were over, she withdrew herself from



interest in continental affairs. France, as far as she was concerned, was a back number. The future lay in mechanical industry.

Britain had arrived at a way of living previously unknown in the history of the world, and as yet unique. Never before had so many inventions been turned to practical advantage and made to produce riches. Never before had the life of a people been made to depend on machines. This novel development in itself made Britain isolated. She was alone in the Industrial Revolution. Unlike France, she was concerned, not with the moods of defeat and decay, but the problems and anxieties of success.

The result was that Britain, absorbed and energetic in her own business, looked on the continent as a different, and interior world. The discipline of industry had led not to the loosening but to the affirmation of moral principle. That one Englishman was equal to six of any other nationality was an idea firmly implanted by Trafalgar and Waterloo. Great wealth, hard work and a strict regime combined to increase this feeling of superiority. A Frenchman was an undersized, frivolous, vapouring creature left behind in the magnificent competition of Progress; and the only continental sympathy of Britain, in the first half of the nineteenth century, was that with Germany. Germanic morality and discipline were in keeping with the strenuous life of the nation. Historians dated all the national virtues from the arrival of the Angles and Saxons. For the monumental work which he devoted to that least prepossessing of rulers, Frederick the 'Great', Thomas Carlyle was decorated by the Prussian Government. Goodness was incarnated in the person of the Prince Consort.

Hence the strong moral tone of the arts. Progress and the general welfare were their concern. Social, economic and religious questions

were of paramount importance, and even a movement of artists, like that of the Pre-Raphaelites, which began in the forties, was profoundly coloured by these issues. The idea of 'Art for Art's sake' was entirely foreign to Victorian England. That art might be contrary to moral principles or leave them out of account seemed utterly outrageous - the distraction between sensuous perception and sensual indulgence dangerously slight.

It is strange to reflect on, difficult to exaggerate, the mutual absence of understanding between Britain and her nearest neighbors. To the intelligent Frenchman, the demoniac activity of the island (combined with its fogs), the puzzling contrast of prudishness and rigid morality with a wild and abandoned night life, created a sort of admiring horror. The intelligent Englishman, ironically enough, returned the feeling. Used to the fog and the activity, blunted by habit to the poverty and ugliness which surrounded him, he saw himself on a pedestal of respectability at an unquestionably higher level than the rest of mankind. The lurid descriptions of London by Taine in his History of English Literature or by Dostoevsky in his Bourgeois of Paris would have seemed quite absurd to the islander of the sixties, well accustomed as he might be to the scenes of which these foreign observers wrote. At the same time when he went abroad, he became acutely aware of the instability of foreign society, he everywhere scented iniquity and instinctively shut his mind to modes of thought which might threaten his most cherished principles and were contrary to the hygienic soundness, as it seemed to him, on which his life was based; and in consequence he steered clear or remained ignorant of the intellectual life whose discovery was often the ostensible purpose of his visit. The protective spirit of isolation was common to the writer, the painter, and the man of worldly affairs.



Yet the barriers, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, were to be broken down. The 'moat' of the channel, powerful against 'infection and the hand of war', was less so against the onslaught of ideas. Books, pictures, and thoughts crossed the narrow sea. Gautier and Baudelaire were spoken of in London. A few propagandists went to and fro spreading the gospel of Art for Art's sake. A hybrid movement called 'aesthetic' came into being. Decadence became a watchword.

### **c) Symbolism in Literature:**

Symbolism in literature is the use of images to represent feelings and ideas. As such, it is as old as history. In the 1880s, however, a group of French and Belgian poets, the symbolist, put images to fresh use.

Reacting against the didactic, declamatory, impersonal manner of the Renaissance, they believed that the inner world of true reality and ideal beauty is mirrored in the external world. This belief is reflected in their theory that any similarity of impressions obtained from different senses suggests true reality. The symbolists, therefore, relied on synesthesia (expression of one sense through another : "*Lamplight beats like a drum*") to convey feeling and insight. Realizing that they could only suggest, not express, apprehensions of reality, the symbolists freed verse of regular beat so that poetry could assume varied rhythms and develop thematic motifs as in music. They repeated key images to gather clusters of meaning and shades of feeling.

The movement stemmed from general admiration of Baudelaire's Fleurs du Mal (Flowers of Evil), 1857, and from the poetry of three great innovators, Stephane Mallarme, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud. They had already expressed, between 1866 and 1873, the principal aims



of the symbolist aesthetic. About 1885 the founding of numerous little magazines, the issuance of manifestoes, and the hostility of conservative critics created an atmosphere of great poetic fervour. Henri de Regnier, Jean Moreas, Emile Verhaeren, and Francis Vielé, Griffin were important advocates of the new school. In England, symbolism's search for ideal beauty inspired such aesthetes as Walter Pater to withdraw from life.

**Walter Horatio Pater (1839-94)** : English critic Educated at the King's School, Canterbury, and Queens College, Oxford, he became in 1864, and remained for the rest of his life, a fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford. Pater enunciated the doctrine of the aesthetic movement-that the intense personal experience of beauty is the prime value in life -in studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873). Oscar Wilde the best known member of the movement, was influenced by Pater's subsequent books established him as a major literary and art critic. Though none of his work escapes the limitations of aestheticism, he is not simply to be dismissed as an impressionist critic. His criticism goes beyond personal impression to stress the "*formula*", the "*active principle*", the dominant quality of an artist's work. His most famous work, his philosophical novel Marius the Epicurean 1885 reflects Pater's aesthetic synthesis of paganism and Christianity.

**Hedonism** (Gre. *hedone*, "*pleasure*") : Philosophic position that pleasure alone is of intrinsic value. There are two kinds of hedonism: psychological and ethical. Psychological hedonism holds that the only actual goal of human conduct is the pleasure or the agent himself. Ethical hedonism claims that the only justifiable ultimate goal of human conduct

is pleasure. Some species of hedonism recognize "*lower*" and "*higher*" pleasures: the lower connected with physical states and activities; the higher, with the intellectual. Quantitative hedonism distinguishes between lower and higher only in terms of such quantitative aspects as duration and intensity; whereas qualitative hedonism insists on essential differences of quality between lower and higher pleasures. Egoistic hedonism regards the good for each person as his own pleasure; universalistic hedonism regards the good as the pleasure of all concerned. In general, ancient hedonism is egoistic, and modern hedonism is universalistic.

The earliest philosophic expression of hedonism was in the Cyrenaic school, founded by Aristippus in the 4th century B.C. Cyrenaic hedonism was a pure, egoistic hedonism based on the physical, sensuous pleasure of the moment. Epicureanism, founded in 306 B.C. by Epicurus, was the most influential hedonist movement in the ancient world. In contrast to the Cyrenaics, the Epicureans looked beyond the pleasure of the moment to pleasure in the long run, re-defined pleasure as "*the absence of pain*", and recommended a tranquil enjoyment of the higher pleasures.

In the modern world, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-73), as the chief exponents of utilitarianism, developed a universalistic hedonism. Bentham saw the moral good as "*the greatest happiness of the greatest number*" and identified happiness and pleasure. Advocating quantitative hedonism, he proposed an elaborate hedonistic calculus to ascertain the amounts of pleasure involved in alternative activities. Mill stressed the pleasures of sympathy and insisted on a qualitative distinction between lower and higher pleasures.



### **Readers' Response to the novel**

Wilde's only novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray is a Gothic melodrama. The celebrated Preface, which appeared separately in 'Fortnightly Review' (March 1891), contains the famous passage: "(Book are well written, or badly written. That is all!" and it ends with a series of logical syllogisms leading to the stark, and to may at that time outrageous, statement: 'All art is quite useless? Perhaps not surprisingly the book provoked a storm of hysterical protest when it was published, ranging from '(Why go grubbing in muck-heaps?', to a review in the 'Daily Chronicle' which was unanimous in its condemnation of all facets of the work, saying it was 'a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction.'

To such attacks, Wilde replied with vigor, and counter-attacks of his own, stating that a central point of the book was that '... Each man sees his own sin in Dorian Gray...' Indeed, Wilde was self-critical of the obvious moral of the book. The DNB Supplement praises The Pictures of Dorian Gray as being "*full of subtle impressionism and highly wrought epigram*". No one seeking an understanding of Wilde and his ideas can afford to ignore The Picture of Dorian Gray touching , as it does, on so many of the themes of this great writer; such as the nature and spirit of art itself, aestheticism, and the dangers inherent in it. It is a work concerning sense and sensibilities which, although not shocking by the standards of the late twentieth century, offended against many of the deeply held beliefs and social attitudes of the fin de siecle.



## WILDE'S TRIAL

One of Wilde's enemies was formidable indeed. It was the eighth Marquess of Queensberry, distinguished as the inventor of the Queensberry rules of the boxing ring.

The Marquess disapproved of the literary friendship of his son and Wilde. The sporting world to which he belonged was precisely that most suspicious of artistic pretensions and attitudes, whose contempt was ever ready to turn into truculence, explosive violence. He disliked Wilde, to begin with on general grounds, and instinctively, as so many did, for his cleverness, his easy wit, the implied superiority of his attitude, perhaps for his appearance of being superbly happy. Mistrustfully he met on one occasion with his son Lord Alfred Douglas at the Cafe Royal; though even he was not proof against the man's charm. They spent hours in the discussion of - atheism. The mistrust of the Marquess was allayed. Wilde was after all a most agreeable and amusing person. He was ready all a most agreeable and amusing person. He was ready to endorse the enthusiasm which Lord Alfred shared with so many others for Wilde's ability as an artist and conversationalist - until finally the mounting tide of rumour left no doubt that he was not a desirable companion and the Marquess felt it incumbent upon him at all cost to pull the man down and expose him.

This was the background for the second of the great aesthetic trials of the century.

Walter Pater (Who died of rheumatic fever in 1894, the year before the trial) seems to have thought highly of 'Dorian Gray'. In 1891 when other critics were running the book down, he had given it appreciation, in

'The Bookman'. 'His genial, laughter-loving sense of life and its enjoyable intercourse goes far to obviate any crudity there may be I the paradox...'(Clever always, this book, however, seems intended to set forth anything but homely philosophy of life for the middle class - a kind of dainty Epicurean theory, rather...')

From the beginning, the case had not lacked interest. The first day roused interest to excitement. There was a feeling that something important was happening. The excitement was coupled with a rising anger. Had the artist a right to the position beyond that of other men? beyond good or evil? Should books be written and the claim made for them that they were works of art when they were immoral in tone and suggestion? Was the famed aesthetic movement a cover for personal licence - or even an incitation to it? So, all the problems implied in the phrase 'art for art's sake' came forward in a manner that could not be denied attention; and the instinctive answer to the first two questions was No; the instinctive feeling that the aesthetic movement was self-condemned.

If the trial be considered, apart from all personal matters, as an aesthetic issue, it would seem that he had failed miserably. As a result of it, the public was convinced that Wilde's books were immoral; that if he was a genius, he was an evil genius. They were confirmed in their belief that a book should inculcate moral sentiments and that the best authors were the most respectable.

It could have been pointed out that his books were entirely free from obscenity; that no word he used was indecent in itself; and that whatever innuendo might be found in his writings could only be apparent to those whom it was beyond their power to harm. It could have been



emphasized as Pater had quietly said that 'Dorian Gray', apart from the beauty of its style, was a most moral production - that it might, if one wished, be construed as a warning against indulgence rather than an encouragement to it. It could have been said that to take a few laughing phrases and heavily appraise them in a court of law, as if they had been intended for anything beyond a play of words, was to show a deplorable absence of humour.

But this emphasis was not given. Nor would it have conveyed the true inwardness of the case if it had been. To say that Wilde's art conformed, in spite of suggestions to the contrary, to the standard of propriety demanded by the middle class would have been to give away all the principles he had upheld. As well might Baudelaire have maintained the improving nature of the Fleurs du Mal. Wilde claimed, implicitly, moreover, not only the artist's right to say what he liked, but also his right to go his own way in living. Now only had he transgressed, in fact, against the moral regulations laid down, but he did not believe in those regulations. If he had really spoken out in court, it would no doubt have been to this effect; but, as he had claimed the protection of the law, he realized only too acutely that he could not say he disowned its standards, and this he was only half-hearted in defence and in a position that was false from any standpoint.

The second act of the drama was now about to begin the trial of Wilde himself - though it was taken for granted that he was 'damned and done for.' The populace booed. The prostitutes danced in wild delight outside the old Bailey. The sale of the books, the vogue of plays was at an end. The press, then much more malicious and personal than it is at the present day-reflecting accurately the period of spitefulness- was without



mercy. 'He appears to have illustrated in his life the beauty and truthfulness of his teachings... the best thing for everybody now is to forget about Oscar Wilde, his perpetual posings, his aesthetical teachings, and his theatrical productions. If not tried himself, let him go into silence and be heard of no more'. Thus 'The Echo', the London evening paper, in a leading article on the day of Wilde's arrest.

Now, I'd like to move to the analysis of the novel with its characteristic qualities and references to the situations just taken from its original place -the pages of the novel.



## AN ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL

### A) Summary of the novel : Chapters 1-20

**Chapter 1-2:** In the studio; the painter Basil Hall ward talks with Lord Henry Wotton about Dorian Gray.

Dorian Gray comes to the studio and gets to know Lord Henry. The two talk with each other. After Dorian's portrait has finished, these two go to theatre.

**Chapter 3:** Lord Henry goes to see his uncle Lord Fermor. He asks him about Dorian. Then he goes to his aunt Lady Agatha.

**Chapter 4:** Dorian is in Lord Henry's house. He meets his wife, Victoria. Then Harry (Lord Henry) comes and Dorian tells him about the girl he loves called Sibyl Vane, the actress. Dorian is engaged to be married to her.

**Chapter 5:** Sibyl talks with her mother and brother about Dorian.

**Chapter 6:** Harry, Dorian and Basil talk about S. Vane. They leave for the theatre to see her acting.

**Chapter 7:** They watch S. Vane. They did not like her acting. Dorian's heart is broken. He leaves S. Vane. He comes home and sees that his picture begins to change.. Then he decides to see S. Vane again.

**Chapter 8:** Dorian thinks about the portrait. He writes a letter of forgiveness to S. Vane. Harry comes and tells him that Sibyl is dead. They talk. Harry goes. Dorian goes to the opera.

**Chapter 9:** When Dorian is at home, Basil comes and likes to exhibit it, he says.

Meanwhile, Dorian asks Basil of his secret in life. Basil tells that he admires Dorian.

**Chapter 10:** Dorian calls for the housekeeper, Mrs. Leaf. He tells her to give him the key of the room upstairs where he is to carry the picture into. Then he writes a letter to Lord Henry to send him something to read. Dorian, having received what he wanted from Harry, begins to read. Then he goes to the club where he is to have dinner with Harry.

**Chapter 11:** Dorian, when reading the book, falls into thoughts. He is poisoned by the book.

**Chapter 12:** It is Dorian's thirty eighth birthday. When he walks in the streets, he sees Basil. They talk about the rumours about Dorian. Dorian says that he will tell Basil everything.

**Chapter 13:** Basil is surprised when he sees the picture. Then Dorian stabs Basil. Basil dies Dorian then, talks with his servant. Now, Dorian likes to see one of his old friends called Alan Campbell who is a chemist.

**Chapter 14:** A. Campbell comes to Dorian's house. Dorian asks him to get rid of the dead body of Basil Hallward and Campbell does it.

**Chapter 15:** Dorian goes to Lady Narboroug's . There he speaks with the guests and Lord Henry. Then he goes back home. After midnight he goes out of the house.

**Chapter 16:** He goes to see his friend Adrian Singleton. After he leaves him, he meets James Vane, Sibyl's brother who came to kill Dorian. But, when he looks at Dorian's face which looked young, he felt sorry about it.

**Chapter 17:** Dorian talks with Duchess of Monmouth at Selby Royal. He speaks to Harry also. He faints and then he goes to dinner with them. .



**Chapter 18:** He stays in the house for 3 days and then goes to join the shooting-party. There he meets sir Geoffrey Clouston, the Duchess's brother. A man is shot dead accidentally. Harry tells Dorian to go home. The man who had been shot dead then turns out to be James Vane. Dorian goes home.

**Chapter 19:** Dorian tells Harry that he loves a girl named Hetty, a villager. They also talk about Basil. Then Harry asks Dorian of the secret of his youth. Dorian says that the book that Lord Henry gave him poisoned him. Then Dorian goes out.

**Chapter 20:** Dorian thinks that he is a living dead. He decides to look at the portrait. He sees that the picture did not change. He would destroy it. But he kills himself. The portrait was in all the wonder of Dorian's exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loath some of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was.

This story is a Gothic melodrama. Here is the reference to this:

*There are few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn, either after one of those dreamless nights that make us almost enamoured of deaths, or one of those nights of horror and misshapen joy, when through the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesques, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality, this art being, one might fancy, especially the art of those whose minds have been troubled with the malady of reverie.*

(Thoughts of Oscar Wilde, page 182)



# **NEAR EAST UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT**

**OSCAR WILDE AS A NOVELIST**

**WITH REFERENCE TO**

**THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY**

**UNDERGRADUATE THESIS**

**ADVISOR: ASSOCIATE PROF. DR. GÜL CELKAN**

**Bülent Bilginer**

**June 1996**

**Lefkoşa**

**TRNC**



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## PREFACE

The English language and Literature has always been attractive to my personality; because since I was a boy, I decided to educate myself in the area of the English language and to receive all the benefits it would give me. Therefore, I have chosen to study on one of the greatest figures of the English literature, Oscar Wilde and his only novel The Picture of Dorian Gray.

I extend my warmest gratitude to the President, Dr. Suat Günsel of Near East University for having established such a respectable department in the university and my special regards are for my chairperson, Associate Prof. Dr. Gül Celkan for her great help through my 4 - year education in the department. I should also declare that her assistance in preparing this thesis has been very fruitful.

Bülent Bilginer

12 June 1996, Lefkoşa

TRNC



## INTRODUCTION

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 amoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.

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

The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban Caliban 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.

No artist has ethical sympathies. An 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



Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin on 15th October 1854, the second son of a surgeon, Dr. (later Sir) William Wilde, and Jane Francisca Elgee, a noted literary hostess and nationalist writer who used the nom de plume 'Speranza'. He was educated at Portora Royal School, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh and Trinity College, Dublin, which he entered in 1871. He won the Berkeley gold Medal for his essay on the Greek comic poets in 1874, in which year he entered Magdalen College, Oxford, where he held a demyship (Scholarship). Wilde took a First Class Degree in Classical Moderations at Oxford in 1876. In June 1878 he won the Newdigate Prize at Oxford for this poem 'Ravenna', and took a First in Litterae Humaniores.

At Oxford, Wilde developed the flaunting of aestheticism to the point of outraging certain sections of society and, in the process, attracted great attention to himself and his circle. He moved to London in 1879. 1881 saw the publication of 'Poems', and the following year Wilde embarked on a long lecture tour of the USA and Canada. He married Constance Lloyd in 1884 and settled in Chelsea, London. His sons Cyril and Vyvyan were born in 1885 and 1886 respectively. He edited 'The Woman's World' from 1887 - 1889.

'The Happy Prince' and 'Other Tales' was published in 1888. 'the Portrait of Mr. W.H.' was published in Blackwood's in 1889, and the first version of 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine in 1890, appearing in book form the following year, as did 'Intentions'. 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' and 'Other Stories' and 'A House of Pomegranates'. Some of Wilde's greatest works were published

in the next few years. 'Lady Windermere's Fan' (1893), 'Salome' (published in French in Paris in 1893), 'The Sphinx' and 'A Woman of No Importance' (1894). 'An ideal Husband' and 'The Importance of Being Earnest' were produced in London in 1895, in which year Wilde charged the Marquess of Queensberry with criminal libel, having been, in his opinion, publicly insulted by the Marquess, due to Queensberry's strong disapproval of Wilde's friendship with his son, Lord Alfred Douglas. Following Lord Queensberry's acquittal on this charge Wilde was arrested for acts of gross indecency with other male persons, was subsequently found guilty and was sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labour, by Mr. Justice Wills at the Old Bailey on 25th May 1895.

While in prison, he was declared bankrupt. Also while in Jail, Wilde wrote an apologia for his conduct, which was published, in part, in 1905 as 'De Profundis'. Following his release on 19th May 1897, he went first to Berneval, before joining Lord Alfred Douglas in Italy. In 1898 by now at the Hotel d'Alsace in Paris, Wilde wrote one of his greatest works 'The Ballad of Reading Goal' which drew on his experiences in prison. In 1900 Wilde visited Rome and during a serious illness that year, was baptized a Roman catholic. He died from cerebral meningitis in Paris on 30th November 1900.

The following are some notes on some of his works:

The Picture of Dorian Gray : English symbolic novel\_ (1891). The image of Dorian Gray in his portrait becomes old and monstrously ugly, while the man himself, indulging in all manner of nices, remains young and handsome.



Fairy Tales : He wrote 'The Happy Prince' and other delicately beautiful tales.

The Importance of Being Earnest : Play by Wilde which is a brilliant, high-spirited farce comedy, it presents an airy spoof of British upper-class conventions through an intricately absurd mistaken - identity plot and a series of witty paradoxes.

Lady Windermere's Fan : The polished style and witty society conversation that embellish this work about an English lord and his estranged wife aided in the re-establishment of the comedy of manners on the London stage.

Now, this is to show how Oscar Wilde had been influenced in writing his novel :

While critics have discerned the influence of such French decadents as J.K. Huysmans (Whom I will tell about), but the novel perhaps owes more to R.L. Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde . (In this psychological allegory of the moral duality in human nature, Jekyll, a respected doctor, discovers a drug which transforms him into the evil, grotesque dwarf Hyde. Although the drug restores him to his former self with repeated use it begins to lose its efficacy. After Hyde commits murder, Jekyll's lawyer exposes his client's true nature, and Hyde commits suicide.)

About J.K. Huysmans : The novels of Henri Alain - Fournier (1886-1914) and Jean Giraudoux (1882-1944) can be seen as representative of the opposing tradition of symbolism, first introduced into the novel by J.K. Huysmans (1848-1907) in 'A Rebour', 1884 (Against the Grain 1930).



Now, I'd like to turn to the literary tendencies in the period the novel was written and to look at the response given by people to The Picture of Dorian Gray .

### **Victorian Age:**

The Victorian age derived its only unity from the continued presence of the Queen on the throne. There were sharp differences of mood and feeling with the advent of new generations between 1837 and 1901. Early Victorian England, from the beginning of the reign to the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in 1851, was formed by social conflict, and social critics foretold imminent revolution. The writing of this period with its intense interest in "*the condition of England*" reflected the predominant states of mind. Mid-Victorian England from 1851 to the mid. 1870's was proud of its social balance. The classes that had hitherto contended with each other seemed to have reached a position of equipoise, and writers were free to concentrate more and more on private themes. This was the golden age of Victorian literature, an age that tolerated diversity of opinions within the framework of an accepted moral code.

Beginning in the 1870's the balance broke down, and there was a "*chill in the air*". The favourable economic conditions of the 1850's and 1860's - expanding foreign trade and rising prices, profits, rents, and wages - disappeared. Increased foreign competition was accompanied by the development of powerful new countries, notably united Germany and the increasingly industrialized United States. Free trade, which was the symbol of mid-Victorian England, began to be questioned. There were strong waves of social discontent, some of them socialistic in character.

Even the moral code seemed to be in danger. The restraints of "*Victorianism*" began to be thought of as fetters. After the Queen died, a sharp reaction against her age set in.

**Great Victorians** : Differences in generations account only in part for the remarkable diversity of the "*great Victorians*". There were always powerful and searching Victorian critics of Victorianism. In the mid-Victorian period, Matthew Arnold challenged stock assumptions about culture and society. John Ruskin and William Morris, continuing traditions that went back to Samuel Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle, prepared the way for the late Victorian and 20th century "*revolt*". Even an accepted Victorian, Charles Dickens, was as influential for what he protested against as for what he what he accepted. At the same time, conformists and rebels had much in common when compared with their predecessors and successors. Charles Darwin and his able apologist, T.H. Huxley, were supremely Victorian - moderate and respectable - even in their approach to the intellectual disturbances that they generated.

#### **a) The Birth of the principle 'Art for Art's Sake'**

The names of those who did away with themselves or sank into an early grave, in or about the year 1830, make a distinguished list. Those who did not commit suicide or give up all hope became defiant. Defiance was at once a product of and an antidote to despair. If an idealistic revolution had come to a dull end, it was still possible to express contempt for dullness and to flout the society in which it was enshrined. The ardent spirits of 1830 thus became romantic outlaws and outlawry in due course a fashion. The intellectuals of Paris wore the steeple-crowned



hats and sinister cloaks of Italian brigands and cultivated disdain for the law-abiding citizen.

The law-abiding citizen was, of course, moral; in as if appeared to the ardent sprits, a dull, small, hateful way. It only through the necessity of opposition it was incumbent on them, therefore to be propagandists of immorality or, at least, amorality on a generous, a magnificent scale: and in 1835 there was published a book animated by precisely this purpose. It was a novel, called Mademoiselle de Maupin . It was written by an audacious young man, who hailed from Tarbes in the Pyrenees, Theophile Gautier.

Gautier was born in 1811 (When Napoleon was planning his attack upon Russia) and was just at the right age to experience the full force of the romantic decade. He wrote, with the fervour of youth, to shock: and he attached to his novel a special preface (as my Introduction to this thesis is) so that none should overlook the fact that it was meant to be a deliberate onslaught on the propriety of the bourgeois.

This development was in the meeting and inter course of two remarkable people, the author Mademoiselle de Maupin, in his mature years, and a younger man, the poet Charles Baudelaire. Together they crystallized the exclusive position of the artist and his separation from the middle-class world. Gautier, the man of slogans, put it in a phrase-L'Art pour L'Art-or, as it may be written in English, Art for Art's Sake.

L'Art pour l'Art. The phrase had a clarion sound-apart from what it meant - the sound which would rally the faint-hearted on the battlefield and send impetuous cavalrymen dashing forward in heroic frenzy. It is by the reckless improvisation of such general ideas that Frenchmen have egged themselves on to perform deeds of glory or create works of beauty;

and what the phrase meant was what Gautier had expressed in 'Maupin' and what Baudelaire had learnt from Pope: that moral purpose, deep thought, sage and prudent reflexions, all the worn and respectable trappings of the creative spirit were irrelevant to its free exercise, positively hampered it, in fact.

Gautier defined himself -and the words have the effect of an emphatic slap on a red waistcoat -as 'un homme pour qui le monde exterieur existe!'. 'A man for whom the visible world exist...!'

A world of sensation. Forms, colours, feeling were meant to provide the refined pleasure and enjoyment of the man for whom it existed and he must turn them into art without restraint, scruple or concern as to whether this satisfied the policeman, pleased the minister of religion or elevated the shopkeeper.

### **b) The Aesthetic Movement**

The word 'aesthetic' which Gautier inevitably used in his exposition of the nature of beauty in art, was not of course a French invention. It come from that matrix of general ideas, ancient Greece: in its original form it made a sharp distinction between thought and feeling, things perceptible by the senses, things material as opposed to things thinkable or immaterial.

The source of aesthetic theory is in certain dialogues of the greatest of philosophers, Plato. Plato, in brilliant phrases, with the most profound depth of suggestion, had outlined the independent existence of beauty, independent, that is to say, of truth , edification or usefulness. In succession to him, Aristotle (his pupil) and Longinus (an unknown author of the first century A.D.) provided modifications of this idea of beauty



without altering its essential purport. In this respect, as in so many other, the germ of modern thought was to be found in the ancient world.

The inquiry into the nature of beauty had been resumed most actively in Germany. The German philosophers of the eighteenth century looking wistfully back to the clear light of civilization in which they sought to illumine the obscure longings of the Teutonic soul; piling up mountainous definitions, logical profundities; retrieved and handled anew the word 'aesthetic'. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762) is notable for having first applied it to the 'criticism of taste' considered as a science or philosophy. Immanuel Kant, his greater contemporary, applied it more strictly in the ancient definition as 'the science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception'. Others, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, added to the edifice of words. Early in the nineteenth century, 'Aesthetics' was looked on as German property. Thus the Penny Cyclopaedia, in 1832, calls it 'the designation given by German writers to a branch of philosophical inquiry, the object of which is a philosophic theory of the beautiful !' It was also regarded with some contempt. Gwilt's Encyclopaedia of Architecture criticizes 'a silly pedantic term under the name of Aesthetics... one of the meta - physical and useless additions to nomenclature in the arts in which the German writers abound'.

Baudelaire said: 'Poetry has no other end but itself: it cannot have any other: and no poem is so great, so noble, so entirely worthy of the name as that which has been written simply for the pleasure of writing a poem. If a poet has followed a moral end he has diminished his poetic force and the result is most likely to be bad.'

The craving for sensation, the fastidious and patrician research for strange refinement, the jealous cultivation of art as a thing removed from

the common affairs of men constituted the prevailing atmosphere of the 'brilliant' period which was now beginning - the second Empire. By a series of republican (and even Bohemian) revolutions, assisted that is to say by 'vagabonds, disbanded soldiers, discharged prisoners, fugitives from the galleys, sharpers, jugglers, professional beggars, pickpockets, conjurers gamesters, grinders, rag pickers, knife grinders, and tinkers', Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, third son of the King of Holland, made himself Emperor of the French. The description of his helpers is that of Karl Marx who, it will be seen, places 'men of letter' somewhere between porters and organ grinders; who further described French Bohemia as 'the scum, offal, and detritus of society.'

The social structure might be imperfect. Nevertheless, it was in the Second Empire that France won back a dominance over the culture of the world not unlike that she possessed in the days of Louis XIV.

The new ideas, passing from one original mind to another and from one art to another in a symphonic movement, changing and yet preserving the influences from which they had sprung, gained an added power and importance by being set against a showy imperial background. But that, with its parade of activity and progress, made no other difference. Amid its slightly satirical and derisive splendour, the arts pursued a destiny already laid down. It was by the theory and practice of art for art's sake, intertwined with a variously interpreted 'de cadence', that the culture of French was to have influence abroad and in particular, to affect the opposed and island culture of Britain.

Britain, in this same period, with all her wealth and power, in spite of the fact that her possessions stretched round the globe, was, in mind, a hermit. When the Napoleonic wars were over, she withdrew herself from



interest in continental affairs. France, as far as she was concerned, was a back number. The future lay in mechanical industry.

Britain had arrived at a way of living previously unknown in the history of the world, and as yet unique. Never before had so many inventions been turned to practical advantage and made to produce riches. Never before had the life of a people been made to depend on machines. This novel development in itself made Britain isolated. She was alone in the Industrial Revolution. Unlike France, she was concerned, not with the moods of defeat and decay, but the problems and anxieties of success.

The result was that Britain, absorbed and energetic in her own business, looked on the continent as a different, and interior world. The discipline of industry had led not to the loosening but to the affirmation of moral principle. That one Englishman was equal to six of any other nationality was an idea firmly implanted by Trafalgar and Waterloo. Great wealth, hard work and a strict regime combined to increase this feeling of superiority. A Frenchman was an undersized, frivolous, vapouring creature left behind in the magnificent competition of Progress; and the only continental sympathy of Britain, in the first half of the nineteenth century, was that with Germany. Germanic morality and discipline were in keeping with the strenuous life of the nation. Historians dated all the national virtues from the arrival of the Angles and Saxons. For the monumental work which he devoted to that least prepossessing of rulers, Frederick the 'Great', Thomas Carlyle was decorated by the Prussian Government. Goodness was incarnated in the person of the Prince Consort.

Hence the strong moral tone of the arts. Progress and the general welfare were their concern. Social, economic and religious questions

were of paramount importance, and even a movement of artists, like that of the Pre-Raphaelites, which began in the forties, was profoundly coloured by these issues. The idea of 'Art for Art's sake' was entirely foreign to Victorian England. That art might be contrary to moral principles or leave them out of account seemed utterly outrageous - the distraction between sensuous perception and sensual indulgence dangerously slight.

It is strange to reflect on, difficult to exaggerate, the mutual absence of understanding between Britain and her nearest neighbors. To the intelligent Frenchman, the demoniac activity of the island (combined with its fogs), the puzzling contrast of prudishness and rigid morality with a wild and abandoned night life, created a sort of admiring horror. The intelligent Englishman, ironically enough, returned the feeling. Used to the fog and the activity, blunted by habit to the poverty and ugliness which surrounded him, he saw himself on a pedestal of respectability at an unquestionably higher level than the rest of mankind. The lurid descriptions of London by Taine in his History of English Literature or by Dostoevsky in his Bourgeois of Paris would have seemed quite absurd to the islander of the sixties, well accustomed as he might be to the scenes of which these foreign observers wrote. At the same time when he went abroad, he became acutely aware of the instability of foreign society, he everywhere scented iniquity and instinctively shut his mind to modes of thought which might threaten his most cherished principles and were contrary to the hygienic soundness, as it seemed to him, on which his life was based; and in consequence he steered clear or remained ignorant of the intellectual life whose discovery was often the ostensible purpose of his visit. The protective spirit of isolation was common to the writer, the painter, and the man of worldly affairs.



Yet the barriers, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, were to be broken down. The 'moat' of the channel, powerful against 'infection and the hand of war', was less so against the onslaught of ideas. Books, pictures, and thoughts crossed the narrow sea. Gautier and Baudelaire were spoken of in London. A few propagandists went to and fro spreading the gospel of Art for Art's sake. A hybrid movement called 'aesthetic' came into being. Decadence became a watchword.

### **c) Symbolism in Literature:**

Symbolism in literature is the use of images to represent feelings and ideas. As such, it is as old as history. In the 1880s, however, a group of French and Belgian poets, the symbolist, put images to fresh use.

Reacting against the didactic, declamatory, impersonal manner of the Renaissance, they believed that the inner world of true reality and ideal beauty is mirrored in the external world. This belief is reflected in their theory that any similarity of impressions obtained from different senses suggests true reality. The symbolists, therefore, relied on synesthesia (expression of one sense through another : "*Lamplight beats like a drum*") to convey feeling and insight. Realizing that they could only suggest, not express, apprehensions of reality, the symbolists freed verse of regular beat so that poetry could assume varied rhythms and develop thematic motifs as in music. They repeated key images to gather clusters of meaning and shades of feeling.

The movement stemmed from general admiration of Baudelaire's Fleurs du Mal (Flowers of Evil), 1857, and from the poetry of three great innovators, Stephane Mallarme, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud. They had already expressed, between 1866 and 1873, the principal aims

of the symbolist aesthetic. About 1885 the founding of numerous little magazines, the issuance of manifestoes, and the hostility of conservative critics created an atmosphere of great poetic fervour. Henri de Regnier, Jean Moreas, Emile Verhaeren, and Francis Vielé, Griffin were important advocates of the new school. In England, symbolism's search for ideal beauty inspired such aesthetes as Walter Pater to withdraw from life.

**Walter Horatio Pater (1839-94)** : English critic Educated at the King's School, Canterbury, and Queens College, Oxford, he became in 1864, and remained for the rest of his life, a fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford. Pater enunciated the doctrine of the aesthetic movement-that the intense personal experience of beauty is the prime value in life -in studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873). Oscar Wilde the best known member of the movement, was influenced by Pater's subsequent books established him as a major literary and art critic. Though none of his work escapes the limitations of aestheticism, he is not simply to be dismissed as an impressionist critic. His criticism goes beyond personal impression to stress the "*formula*", the "*active principle*", the dominant quality of an artist's work. His most famous work, his philosophical novel Marius the Epicurean 1885 reflects Pater's aesthetic synthesis of paganism and Christianity.

**Hedonism** (Gre. *hedone*, "*pleasure*") : Philosophic position that pleasure alone is of intrinsic value. There are two kinds of hedonism: psychological and ethical. Psychological hedonism holds that the only actual goal of human conduct is the pleasure or the agent himself. Ethical hedonism claims that the only justifiable ultimate goal of human conduct



is pleasure. Some species of hedonism recognize "*lower*" and "*higher*" pleasures: the lower connected with physical states and activities; the higher, with the intellectual. Quantitative hedonism distinguishes between lower and higher only in terms of such quantitative aspects as duration and intensity; whereas qualitative hedonism insists on essential differences of quality between lower and higher pleasures. Egoistic hedonism regards the good for each person as his own pleasure; universalistic hedonism regards the good as the pleasure of all concerned. In general, ancient hedonism is egoistic, and modern hedonism is universalistic.

The earliest philosophic expression of hedonism was in the Cyrenaic school, founded by Aristippus in the 4th century B.C. Cyrenaic hedonism was a pure, egoistic hedonism based on the physical, sensuous pleasure of the moment. Epicureanism, founded in 306 B.C. by Epicurus, was the most influential hedonist movement in the ancient world. In contrast to the Cyrenaics, the Epicureans looked beyond the pleasure of the moment to pleasure in the long run, re-defined pleasure as "*the absence of pain*", and recommended a tranquil enjoyment of the higher pleasures.

In the modern world, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-73), as the chief exponents of utilitarianism, developed a universalistic hedonism. Bentham saw the moral good as "*the greatest happiness of the greatest number*" and identified happiness and pleasure. Advocating quantitative hedonism, he proposed an elaborate hedonistic calculus to ascertain the amounts of pleasure involved in alternative activities. Mill stressed the pleasures of sympathy and insisted on a qualitative distinction between lower and higher pleasures.

### **Readers' Response to the novel**

Wilde's only novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray is a Gothic melodrama. The celebrated Preface, which appeared separately in 'Fortnightly Review' (March 1891), contains the famous passage: "(Book are well written, or badly written. That is all!" and it ends with a series of logical syllogisms leading to the stark, and to may at that time outrageous, statement: 'All art is quite useless? Perhaps not surprisingly the book provoked a storm of hysterical protest when it was published, ranging from '(Why go grubbing in muck-heaps?', to a review in the 'Daily Chronicle' which was unanimous in its condemnation of all facets of the work, saying it was 'a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction.'

To such attacks, Wilde replied with vigor, and counter-attacks of his own, stating that a central point of the book was that '... Each man sees his own sin in Dorian Gray...' Indeed, Wilde was self-critical of the obvious moral of the book. The DNB Supplement praises The Pictures of Dorian Gray as being "*full of subtle impressionism and highly wrought epigram*". No one seeking an understanding of Wilde and his ideas can afford to ignore The Picture of Dorian Gray touching , as it does, on so many of the themes of this great writer; such as the nature and spirit of art itself, aestheticism, and the dangers inherent in it. It is a work concerning sense and sensibilities which, although not shocking by the standards of the late twentieth century, offended against many of the deeply held beliefs and social attitudes of the fin de siecle.



## WILDE'S TRIAL

One of Wilde's enemies was formidable indeed. It was the eighth Marquess of Queensberry, distinguished as the inventor of the Queensberry rules of the boxing ring.

The Marquess disapproved of the literary friendship of his son and Wilde. The sporting world to which he belonged was precisely that most suspicious of artistic pretensions and attitudes, whose contempt was ever ready to turn into truculence, explosive violence. He disliked Wilde, to begin with on general grounds, and instinctively, as so many did, for his cleverness, his easy wit, the implied superiority of his attitude, perhaps for his appearance of being superbly happy. Mistrustfully he met on one occasion with his son Lord Alfred Douglas at the Cafe Royal; though even he was not proof against the man's charm. They spent hours in the discussion of - atheism. The mistrust of the Marquess was allayed. Wilde was after all a most agreeable and amusing person. He was ready all a most agreeable and amusing person. He was ready to endorse the enthusiasm which Lord Alfred shared with so many others for Wilde's ability as an artist and conversationalist - until finally the mounting tide of rumour left no doubt that he was not a desirable companion and the Marquess felt it incumbent upon him at all cost to pull the man down and expose him.

This was the background for the second of the great aesthetic trials of the century.

Walter Pater (Who died of rheumatic fever in 1894, the year before the trial) seems to have thought highly of 'Dorian Gray'. In 1891 when other critics were running the book down, he had given it appreciation, in

'The Bookman'. 'His genial, laughter-loving sense of life and its enjoyable intercourse goes far to obviate any crudity there may be I the paradox...'(Clever always, this book, however, seems intended to set forth anything but homely philosophy of life for the middle class - a kind of dainty Epicurean theory, rather...')

From the beginning, the case had not lacked interest. The first day roused interest to excitement. There was a feeling that something important was happening. The excitement was coupled with a rising anger. Had the artist a right to the position beyond that of other men? beyond good or evil? Should books be written and the claim made for them that they were works of art when they were immoral in tone and suggestion? Was the famed aesthetic movement a cover for personal licence - or even an incitation to it? So, all the problems implied in the phrase 'art for art's sake' came forward in a manner that could not be denied attention; and the instinctive answer to the first two questions was No; the instinctive feeling that the aesthetic movement was self-condemned.

If the trial be considered, apart from all personal matters, as an aesthetic issue, it would seem that he had failed miserably. As a result of it, the public was convinced that Wilde's books were immoral; that if he was a genius, he was an evil genius. They were confirmed in their belief that a book should inculcate moral sentiments and that the best authors were the most respectable.

It could have been pointed out that his books were entirely free from obscenity; that no word he used was indecent in itself; and that whatever innuendo might be found in his writings could only be apparent to those whom it was beyond their power to harm. It could have been



emphasized as Pater had quietly said that 'Dorian Gray', apart from the beauty of its style, was a most moral production - that it might, if one wished, be construed as a warning against indulgence rather than an encouragement to it. It could have been said that to take a few laughing phrases and heavily appraise them in a court of law, as if they had been intended for anything beyond a play of words, was to show a deplorable absence of humour.

But this emphasis was not given. Nor would it have conveyed the true inwardness of the case if it had been. To say that Wilde's art conformed, in spite of suggestions to the contrary, to the standard of propriety demanded by the middle class would have been to give away all the principles he had upheld. As well might Baudelaire have maintained the improving nature of the Fleurs du Mal. Wilde claimed, implicitly, moreover, not only the artist's right to say what he liked, but also his right to go his own way in living. Now only had he transgressed, in fact, against the moral regulations laid down, but he did not believe in those regulations. If he had really spoken out in court, it would no doubt have been to this effect; but, as he had claimed the protection of the law, he realized only too acutely that he could not say he disowned its standards, and this he was only half-hearted in defence and in a position that was false from any standpoint.

The second act of the drama was now about to begin the trial of Wilde himself - though it was taken for granted that he was 'damned and done for.' The populace booed. The prostitutes danced in wild delight outside the old Bailey. The sale of the books, the vogue of plays was at an end. The press, then much more malicious and personal than it is at the present day-reflecting accurately the period of spitefulness- was without

mercy. 'He appears to have illustrated in his life the beauty and truthfulness of his teachings... the best thing for everybody now is to forget about Oscar Wilde, his perpetual posings, his aesthetical teachings, and his theatrical productions. If not tried himself, let him go into silence and be heard of no more'. Thus 'The Echo', the London evening paper, in a leading article on the day of Wilde's arrest.

Now, I'd like to move to the analysis of the novel with its characteristic qualities and references to the situations just taken from its original place -the pages of the novel.





## AN ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL

### A) Summary of the novel : Chapters 1-20

**Chapter 1-2:** In the studio; the painter Basil Hall ward talks with Lord Henry Wotton about Dorian Gray.

Dorian Gray comes to the studio and gets to know Lord Henry. The two talk with each other. After Dorian's portrait has finished, these two go to theatre.

**Chapter 3:** Lord Henry goes to see his uncle Lord Fermor. He asks him about Dorian. Then he goes to his aunt Lady Agatha.

**Chapter 4:** Dorian is in Lord Henry's house. He meets his wife, Victoria. Then Harry (Lord Henry) comes and Dorian tells him about the girl he loves called Sibyl Vane, the actress. Dorian is engaged to be married to her.

**Chapter 5:** Sibyl talks with her mother and brother about Dorian.

**Chapter 6:** Harry, Dorian and Basil talk about S. Vane. They leave for the theatre to see her acting.

**Chapter 7:** They watch S. Vane. They did not like her acting. Dorian's heart is broken. He leaves S. Vane. He comes home and sees that his picture begins to change.. Then he decides to see S. Vane again.

**Chapter 8:** Dorian thinks about the portrait. He writes a letter of forgiveness to S. Vane. Harry comes and tells him that Sibyl is dead. They talk. Harry goes. Dorian goes to the opera.

**Chapter 9:** When Dorian is at home, Basil comes and likes to exhibit it, he says.

Meanwhile, Dorian asks Basil of his secret in life. Basil tells that he admires Dorian.

**Chapter 10:** Dorian calls for the housekeeper, Mrs. Leaf. He tells her to give him the key of the room upstairs where he is to carry the picture into. Then he writes a letter to Lord Henry to send him something to read. Dorian, having received what he wanted from Harry, begins to read. Then he goes to the club where he is to have dinner with Harry.

**Chapter 11:** Dorian, when reading the book, falls into thoughts. He is poisoned by the book.

**Chapter 12:** It is Dorian's thirty eighth birthday. When he walks in the streets, he sees Basil. They talk about the rumours about Dorian. Dorian says that he will tell Basil everything.

**Chapter 13:** Basil is surprised when he sees the picture. Then Dorian stabs Basil. Basil dies Dorian then, talks with his servant. Now, Dorian likes to see one of his old friends called Alan Campbell who is a chemist.

**Chapter 14:** A. Campbell comes to Dorian's house. Dorian asks him to get rid of the dead body of Basil Hallward and Campbell does it.

**Chapter 15:** Dorian goes to Lady Narboroug's . There he speaks with the guests and Lord Henry. Then he goes back home. After midnight he goes out of the house.

**Chapter 16:** He goes to see his friend Adrian Singleton. After he leaves him, he meets James Vane, Sibyl's brother who came to kill Dorian. But, when he looks at Dorian's face which looked young, he felt sorry about it.

**Chapter 17:** Dorian talks with Duchess of Monmouth at Selby Royal. He speaks to Harry also. He faints and then he goes to dinner with them. .



**Chapter 18:** He stays in the house for 3 days and then goes to join the shooting-party. There he meets sir Geoffrey Clouston, the Duchess's brother. A man is shot dead accidentally. Harry tells Dorian to go home. The man who had been shot dead then turns out to be James Vane. Dorian goes home.

**Chapter 19:** Dorian tells Harry that he loves a girl named Hetty, a villager. They also talk about Basil. Then Harry asks Dorian of the secret of his youth. Dorian says that the book that Lord Henry gave him poisoned him. Then Dorian goes out.

**Chapter 20:** Dorian thinks that he is a living dead. He decides to look at the portrait. He sees that the picture did not change. He would destroy it. But he kills himself. The portrait was in all the wonder of Dorian's exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loath some of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was.

This story is a Gothic melodrama. Here is the reference to this:

*There are few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn, either after one of those dreamless nights that make us almost enamoured of deaths, or one of those nights of horror and misshapen joy, when through the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesques, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality, this art being, one might fancy, especially the art of those whose minds have been troubled with the malady of reverie.*

(Thoughts of Oscar Wilde, page 182)

In this book, we can easily observe the magnificence of Oscar Wilde's descriptive power:

*Out of the unreal shadows of the night comes back real life that we had known. We have to resume it where we had left off, and there steals over us a terrible sense of the necessity for the continuance of energy in the same wearisome round of stereotyped habits, or a wild longing, it may be, that our eyelids might open some morning upon a world that had been refashioned anew in the darkness for our pleasure, a world in which things would have fresh shapes and colours, and be changed, or have other secrets, a world in which the past would have little or no place, or survive, at any rate, in no conscious form of obligation or regret, the remembrance even of joy having its bitterness, and the memories of pleasure their pain.*

Again in these following lines, O. Wilde is amazing when he describes the changing features of the picture of D. Gray:

*No; that was impossible. Hour by hour, and week by week, the thing upon the canvas was growing old. It might escape the hideousness of sin, but the hideousness of age was in store for it. The cheeks would become hollow or flaccid. yellow crow's feet would creep round the fading eyes and make them horrible. The hair would lose its rightness, the mouth would gape or droop, would be foolish or gross, as the mouths of old men are- There would be the wrinkled throat, the cold, blue- veined hands, the twisted body, that he remembered in the grandfather who had been so stern to him in his boyhood. The picture had to be concealed. There was no help for it.*

(Chapter 10,p.171-172).



Generally. This book conveys two important things about the artist:

1. The appearance of a new medium for art;
2. The appearance of a new personality for art.

Oscar Wilde puts these in these lines: .... *And Basil? From a psychological point of view, how interesting he was! The new manner in art, the fresh mode of looking at life, suggested so strangely by the merely visible presence of one who was unconscious of it all, the silent spirit that dwelt in dim woodland, and walked unseen in open field, suddenly showing herself, Dryad-like and not afraid, because in his soul who sought for her there had been awakened that wonderful vision to which alone are wonderful things revealed; the mere shapes and patterns of things becoming, as it were, refined, and gaining a kind of symbolical value, as though they were themselves patterns of some other and more perfect from whose shadow they made real.*

(Chapter 3,p.54).

Along with these two new qualities of the artist. I will explain with the quotations referring to the introduction by O. Wilde -Which I also have chosen as the introduction section for this project of mine.

*Oh, I can't explain. When I like people immensely I never tell their names to anyone. It is like surrendering apart of them. I have grown to love secrecy. It seems to be the one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvellous to us.*

*The commonest thing is delightful if one only hides it.*

(Painter's thoughts, chapter 1, p.11)

*To spiritualise one's age-that is something worth doing. If this girl can give a soul to those who have lived without one, if she can create the sense of beauty in people whose lives have been sordid and ugly, if she can strip them of their selfishness and lend them tears for sorrows that are not their own, she is worthy of all your adoration, worthy of the adoration of the world.*

(Basil's words, Chapter 7, p.114)

*You had brought me something higher, something of which all art is but a reflection.*

(S. Vane to Dorian Gray, Chapter 7, p.120)

*If these elements of beauty are real, the whole thing simply appeals to our sense of dramatic effect. Suddenly we find that we are no longer the actors, but the spectators of the play.*

(Lord Henry's words, chapter 8, p.141)

*Art is always more abstract than we fancy. Form and colour tell us of form and colour-that is all.*

(The painter, chapter 9, p.161)

*There were moment when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realise his conception of the beautiful.*

(O. Wilde about D. Gray, Chapter 11, p.203)

**b) Atmosphere and concepts - Generally, we see in this novel a gloomy atmosphere.**



*Where he went to he hardly knew. He remembered wandering through dimly - lit streets, past gaunt black -shadowed archways and evil-looking houses. Women with hoarse voices and harsh laughter had called after him. Drunkards had reeled by cursing, and chattering to themselves like monstrous apes. He had seen grotesque children huddled upon door steps, and heard shrieks and oaths from gloomy courts.*

(Dorian Gray, Chapter 7, p.123)

*You remind me of a story Harry told me about a certain philanthropist who spent twenty years of his life in trying to get some grievance redressed, or some unjust law altered - I forget exactly what it was. Finally he succeeded, and nothing could exceed his disappointment. He had absolutely nothing to do, almost died of \* ennui, and become a confirmed misanthrope.*

(\* world-weariness. D. Gray's words, Chapter 9, p.154)

*He saw that there was no mood of the mind that had not its counterpart in the senses life, and set himself to discover their true relation, wondering what there was in frankincense that made one mystical, and in ambergris that stirred one's passions, and in violets that woke the memory of dead romances, and in musk that troubled the brain, and in champak that stained the imagination.*

(A Dreamy situation, Chapter 11, p.186)

*And yet if it had been merely an illusion, how terrible it was to think that conscience could raise such fearful phantoms, and give them visible form, and make them move before one!*

(Dreaminess, Chapter 18, p.279)

We also find feelings for the situation of the society of the time; vanity, morality, selfishness, Hedonism, Symbolism:

*Anybody can be good in the country. There are no temptations there. That is the reason why people live out of town, are so absolutely uncivilized. Civilization is not by any means an easy thing to attain to. There are only two ways by which man can reach it. One is by being cultured, the other being corrupt. Country people have no opportunity of being either, so they stagnate.*

(Lord Henry, chapter 19, p.292)

*... Ah! realise your youth while you have it. Don't squander the gold of your days, listening to the tedious, trying to improve the hopeless failure, or giving away your life to the ignorant, the common, and the vulgar. These are the sickly aims, the false ideas, of our age. Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing... A new Hedonism - that is what our century wants.*

(Hedonism by L. Henry, chapter 2, p.35)

*Modern morality consists in accepting the standard of one's age. I consider that for any man of culture to accept the standard of his age is a form or the grossest immorality.*

(L. Henry's views on morality, chapter 6, p.110)

*He was conscious also of the shallowness and vanity of his mother's nature, in that saw infinite peril for Sibyl and Sibyl's happiness.*



*Children begin by loving their parents; as they grow older they judge them; sometimes they forgive them.*

(James Vane's thoughts on vanity. Chapter 5, p.94)

*You don't know the danger I am in, and there is nothing to keep me straight. She would have done that for me. She had no right to kill herself. It was selfish of her.*

(D. Gray's words on selfishness, chapter 8, p.139)

*But Juliet! Harry, imagine a girl, hardly seventeen years of age, with a little flower like face, a small Greek head with plaited coils of dark-brown hair, eyes that were violet wells of passion, lips that were like the petals of a rose.*

(D. Gray to Harry about S. Vane, Symbolism, Chapter 4, p.72)

*He was trying to gather up the scarlet threads of life, and to weave them into a pattern; to find his way through the sanguine labyrinth of passion through which he was wandering.*

(D. Gray, Symbolism, chapter 8, p.134)

Now, I'd like to turn to O. Wilde's use of irony, wit, epigram and paradox. To start with, the following lines indicate his use of irony:

*I hope the girl is good, Harry. I don't want to see Dorian tied to some vile creature, who might degrade his nature and ruin his intellect.*

(The artist's views on Dorian, dramatic irony, Chapter 6, p.103)

*What a place to find one's divinity in!*

(L. Henry about the theatre where S. Vane acts, Chapter 7, p.114)

- *I owe a great deal to Harry , Basil, Dorian said, at last- more than I owe to you. You only taught me to be vain.*

- *Well, I am punished for that Dorian - or shall be some day.*  
says Basil

(Dialogue between Dorian and the painter, Chapter 9, p.152)

The following are some at the witty remarks by different characters:

*... And Beauty is a form of Genius -is higher, indeed, than Genius, as it needs no explanation. It is of the great facts of the world, like sunlight, or spring-time, or the reflection in dark waters of that silver shell we call the moon.*

(Lord Henry, Chapter 2, p.34)

*Young people, nowadays, imagine that money is everything.*

(Lord Fermor, Harry's uncle, Chapter 3, p.48)

*Love is more than money.*

(S. Vane, Chapter 5, page 85)

*Pleasure is Nature's test, her sign of approval.*

(Lord Henry, Chapter 6, page 109)

*To be good is to be in harmony.*

(Lord Henry, Chapter 6, p.109)



Now, we will look at some epigrammatic expressions:

*Conscience and cowardice are really the same things, Basil.*

*Conscience is the trade - name of the firm. That is all.*

(L. Henry, Chapter 1, p.14)

*An artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them.*

(Basil, the artist as a response to above quotation, Chapter 1, p.21)

*Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul.*

(Harry, Chapter 2, p.32)

*The less said about life's sores the better.*

(Lord Henry, Chapter 3, page 59)

*The basis of every scandal is an immoral certainty.*

(Lord Henry, Chapter 18, page 285)

*If a man treats life artistically, his brain is his heart.*

(Lord Henry, Chapter 19, page 299)

Now that I will show some of the paradoxical remarks:

*The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure, or the luxury of a regret. The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it.*

(Lord Henry, Chapter 2, p.30)

*I can stand brute force, but brute reason is quite unbearable. There is something unfair about its use. It is hitting below the intellect.*

(Lord Henry, Chapter 3, p.58)

*People are very fond of giving away what they need most themselves. It is what I call the depth of generosity.*

(Lord Henry, Chapter 4, p.80)



## CONCLUSION

The aesthetic movement was never popular in Britain. The denial of moral purpose, the compression of what has to be said into an exact form, the greater importance given to form than to matter, were alien to its complex and romantic genius. In literature, the effect of Art for Art's sake was severely limited, although in France it has coloured all modern poetry and influenced most writers of note. Nor, in painting, was the effect very different. A hybrid school developed, whatever its merits, could not compare with the French art from which it was derived.

There was in total result a grain of beauty, impossible to weigh and estimate against the insignificant expenditure of lives.

Even death could not bring forgiveness or redress the balance between a misdemeanour committed in life and what he had permanently contributed to literature. Hatred followed him beyond the grave, preserved the *éclat* of his disgrace and obscured the memory of his works. Many years had to pass before his plays could be revived. Even now, there is a prejudice against him though not quite on the original grounds. In our highly political and strongly sociological period, the absence of serious purpose and, still more, the implicit mockery of being serious does not commend itself. To be epigrammatic is an error of taste and wit is out of date.

But Wilde's career remains an extraordinary symbolic martyrdom. He said he had put his genius into his life and only his talent into his writings. This is usually taken to mean, and no doubt he himself so intended it, that his conversation was better than his books. Whether it was, in fact, is questionable. There is the same cleverness in both. Yet he

did put his genius into his life by giving it a sacrificial pattern and completing the aesthetic movement with its greatest sensation. By that, something ultimately was gained. The rational and scientific discussion of the 'unmentionable' followed gradually but inevitably after the notorious trial, to the benefit of morality it may be thought rather than other wise.

Finally I'd like to declare my opinion that Oscar Wilde expressed himself in the character of Dorian Gray. The following extracts from the novel, I think, would support my idea:

*For the wonderful beauty that had so fascinated Basil Hallward, and many others besides him, seemed never to leave him. Even those who had heard the most evil things against him, and from time to time strange rumours about his mode of life crept through London and became the chatter of the clubs, could not believe -anything to his dishonour when they saw him. He had always the look of one who had kept himself unspotted from the world. Men who talked grossly became silent when Dorian Gray entered the room. There was something in the purity of his face that rebuked them. His mere presence seemed to recall to them the memory of the innocence that they had tarnished. They wondered how one so charming and graceful as he was could have escaped the, stain of an age that was at once sordid and sensual.*

(Chapter 11, page 178)

*Indeed, there were many, especially among the very young men, who saw or fancied that they saw, in Dorian Gray the true realisation of a type of which they had often dreamed in Eton or Oxford days, a type that was to combine something of the real culture of the scholar with all*



*the grace and distinction and perfect manner of a citizen of the world. To them he seemed to be of the company of those whom Dante describes as having sought to "make themselves perfect by the worship of beauty". Like Gautier, he was one for whom the 'visible world' existed.*

*And, certainly, to him life itself was the first, the greatest, of the arts, and for it all the other arts seemed to be but a preparation. Fashion, by which what is really fantastic becomes for a moment universal, and Dandyism, which, in its own way, is an attempt to assert the absolute modernity of beauty, had, of course, their fascination for him. His mode of dressing, and the particular styles that from time to time he affected, had their marked influence on the young exquisites of the May fair balls and Pall Mall club windows, who copied him in everything that he did, and tried to reproduce the accidental charm of his graceful, thought to him only half-serious, fopperies.*

*(Chapter 11, page 180).*

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