

False Imitation versus True Art in Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray

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Abstract

In this novel, I examine Oscar Wilde's creed of the superiority of art to nature is. Wilde distinguished between good and bad artists. He regarded those who imitate lack originality and cannot be regarded as artists. Living a life in which beauty is paramount where it entirely grips Gray's mind, the novel represents Wilde's major practice in his fiction of his art philosophy. He does present his theory of the possibility of living a life in conformity with Nietzsche's justification of existence as only an aesthetic phenomenon. I show that Wilde created another struggle in which he tested such a possibility, which finally ended in the downfall of the protagonist due to excessive indulgence in the aesthetic creed. I conclude that though great artists are always original and the philosophy of art is transcendental in nature, false artists tend to imitate and fail to fulfill Wilde's requirements of true art.

Keywords: Imitation, Dorian Gray, aesthetic phenomenon, Wilde's art, aestheticism

Oscar Wilde said about his novel "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" 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" (Holland 585). Obviously every character in the novel is an identification of Wilde's personality himself, whether as a wish of what he aspires to be or what he looks like in people's eyes or what he really is according to his own confession. To a certain extent, He identifies himself with all of the characters of the novel in which he expounds again as he did in some of his previous writing - "*the Happy Prince*" for example - how art is superior to nature and how a town controlled by the Apollonian spirit may look like. He explored the consequences of an Apollonian-spirit-controlled town and he charted the way for a possible solution. In *the Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde creates a character, which is excessively Dionysian and explores the possible consequences of life controlled by the Dionysian spirit only. A character, which is obsessed by art, beauty, and the idea of a world, lived to the full without boundaries where the ultimate goal is the pleasure of indulging in beauty. Wilde wishes that he could be Dorian Gray but the Victorian age is not mature enough to absorb his theory. At the end, he warns of the possible dangers of being only Dionysian without a reasonable approach.

Nowhere did Wilde mention that morality for him was irrelevant. Indeed the very hedonistic nature of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is to highlight consequences of a purely aesthetic experience. The consequences of a Nietzschean concept that the world can only be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon, a world in which only beauty counts and nothing else to face Nihilism. He preaches a philosophy of beauty that complements life, a life-affirming drive." I can sympathise with everything, except suffering," said Lord Henry, shrugging his shoulders. "I cannot sympathise with that. It is too ugly, too horrible, too distressing. There is something terribly morbid in the modern sympathy with pain. One should sympathise with the colour, the beauty, the joy of life."(Wilde 48) a thing which is reminiscent of the consequences of a lop-sided existence in the short story the *happy Prince* in which art at the beginning of the story was irrelevant to a society that does not appreciate it. Towards the end of the story, art in life made a perceptible difference to townspeople's life. People's religion and morality were seen as being misdirected and need to be redressed for "The terror of society, which is the basis of morals, the terror of God, which is the secret of religion these are the two things that govern us."(Wilde 25). These are the things against which Wilde is rebelling. Patrick Duggan affirms:

In his exposition of aestheticism, Wilde applies the philosophy in a more universal sense, stressing the positive influences of aestheticism in one's life beyond mere craftsmanship. Just as the machines that mass-produce materials with the intervention of human thought are labeled "evil," Wilde similarly condemns men who act as metaphorical machines, programmed to behave in accordance with society's ideas of propriety rather than allowing themselves to act freely and achieve the greatest amount of happiness. Wilde's eloquent advocacy of an aesthetic lifestyle is paralleled in his depiction of Lord Henry in *Dorian Gray*. (Duggan 62)

The same applies to his novel but this time Wilde intends to gauge the possibility of making art superior to morality, reason and rationality as well to see to what extent such a philosophy may succeed. Art in his novel takes a new place making it the ideal to which our existence should aspire. Life should imitate art rather than the opposite on the condition that excess is avoided because excess itself is an ugly term that carries with it its own negative aspects. Hazard Adams confirms that 'the theory of imitation was undergoing a crucial change. The trend, at least since Kant and Coleridge, had been to emphasize art's power to make, not to copy' (Adams 657). Unfortunately for Wilde, a misinterpretation of aestheticism resulted in rejecting the novel as being immoral. He was accused of being immoral in his novel and a myriad pejorative epithets were used to describe it. However, He defended his novel as a piece of art:

If a work of art is rich and vital and complete, those who have artistic instincts will see its beauty, and those to whom ethics appeal more strongly than aesthetics will see its moral lesson. It will fill the cowardly with terror, and the unclean will see in it their own shame...it is the spectator and not life, that art really mirrors. (Mason 23)

Wilde was judged as being decadent. His art and his doctrine “art for art’s sake” was seen as lacking in morality though some of Wilde’s assertion refer to morality as being inherent in art. Apart from the clear influence of Walter Pater to whom Wilde was a faithful disciple, a mention of any possible connection between aesthetics and morality goes back to as early as Immanuel Kant. As previously mentioned, Wilde achieves two purposes in his novel. The first is to portray a world obsessed with beauty in order to justify a world as an aesthetic phenomenon and if such a world is viable. He witnesses at the end the crumbling of this world as he finds that some other things are equally important to strive against nihilism. A world without a moral impulse will eventually crumble into pieces and that Nietzsche's justification of the world as such may not stand critical scrutiny. The second is to show that temperance has always been a golden mean that he never ceased to preach. Duggan states that:

The ruination of Dorian Gray, the embodiment of unbridled aestheticism, illustrates the immorality of such a lifestyle and gravely demonstrates its consequences. Wilde uses *Dorian Gray* not as an advertisement for aestheticism, but rather, he uses Dorian’s life to warn against aestheticism’s hostility toward morality when uncontrolled. (P. Duggan 63)

Wilde remained throughout the novel faithful to Kant's idea that contemplating beauty is conducive to morality. Immanuel Kant's theory of connecting aesthetics to morality does inform indirectly some of Wilde's writing whether in his short stories or in this particular novel. Kant sets out to explain this connection in his " *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*". He makes a distinction between a judgment based on reason and the aesthetic one which is inherent in contemplation:

Taste makes, as it were, the transition from the charm of sense to habitual moral interest possible without too violent a leap, for it represents the imagination, even in its freedom, as amenable to a final determination for understanding, and teaches us to find, even in sensuous objects, a free delight apart from any charm of sense” (Kant 354).

The aesthetic is regarded as a transitional phase to morality. Senses are charmed into habits that transform into moral actions. He states that “beauty is the symbol of morality” The distinction that Kant draws between the two is that the practical reason is driven by law. This law can be universalised into one shared law that can be applied at all times and in all places, while aesthetic judgment is personal, subjective and cannot be universalised and shared by all at all times and in all places. The moral is driven by duty. This universal communicability which assumes that law legislating reason makes laws binding on all out of a moral compulsion. “duty is nothing more than a limitation of the will within a universal legislation which was made possible by an initially accepted maxim” (Kant 65-66).The aesthetic judgment on the other hand does not involve any such duty-bound universal communicability. Judging a particular object as being

beautiful is a subjective experience that cannot be shared by all at all times and in all places. It arises out of pleasurable contemplation which Kant attributed to mere reflection. The judgment of taste in stating that something is beautiful does not come from a certain concept or law under which we may subsume several types of beauty. It is therefore not logical but subjective and remains subjective. Beauty comes not from comparing a beautiful object to other less beautiful ones but rather from the object itself without contrasting it to other objects. The question is how to make this subjective experience a universal one which can be practised by everyone in order to turn it into a law or in Kantian terms "concepts" Stating that an object is beautiful without expressing a prior desire towards it and without any other personal reasons for admiring the object entails a certain subjective universal validity as we may require that the same reaction is elicited from all at all times and in all places. Every pleasing thing that is admired without concept or law is then agreeable. This type of universality depends on concurrence of opinions as there no rules to govern it. In contrast with reason imputed moral judgment, this universality is then based on a supposition. At this point of the critique of judgment Kant makes a transition stating that "to take an immediate interest in the beauty of nature (not merely to have taste in estimating it) is always a mark of a good soul" (Kant. 2000, 298). So the afore- mentioned subjective universal validity entails that one should be disinterested .If one shows any particular interest in nature one then departs from this subjective universal validity and he is being as such described as showing particular interest not shared by everybody. This immediate and particular interest is thus a mark of a good soul. Man's ability to receive moral law develops in man moral feelings. This moral feeling is also reflected in our aesthetic judgment. The same feeling is present but in the case of aesthetics there is no concept or law that can be universalised. Aesthetic judgment is free and requires no laws while moral judgment is bound by laws and concepts. But both are similar in moral feeling. The appeal to morality for the sake of valid universal validity is itself a moral demand. The influence of art is, however, not questionable any more. Peter Ackroyd comments:

The salutary influence of Art on the universal mind requires no argument: it is impossible that a people can be coarse or vicious whose sources of enjoyment are refined and intellectual; [. . .] men to whom public galleries are open will seldom be found in public houses. (Ackroyd 6)

Real morality is purposeless and not motivated by any interested desire. Beauty is purposeless as well as it stands there to charm our life without any purpose. Much like Kant who explains that beauty exists without a purpose, Wilde comments through his character Henry Wotton that "Beauty is a form of Genius, Is higher, indeed, than Genius, as it needs no explanation"(Wilde, 1985, p. 29). The fact that Wilde chose Basil to be himself is a clear indication that he is being moral in his most aesthetic moments. In his preface to the novel Wilde gives a few key phrases that provide hints to some direction of our perception of his theory of aestheticism. In those epigrams he dissects the nature of art. He describes the good artist as the creator of beautiful things while the critic the one

who can transform beautiful things into a new material. The fact that "the highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography" gives the critic the credit of being individually capable of reflecting upon beautiful objects his own original and new visions. Even his statement that "an artist has no ethical sympathies" is an intensification of man's individuality entirely disinterested of any influences rather than emptying the artist of his moral propensity. If he finds ugly meaning in beautiful things, he is corrupt as beauty can never involve any type of ugliness. If he finds beautiful meaning in beautiful things he is then cultivated. Wilde gives precedence to man's individuality in evaluating art. In the preface to the novel again, Nineteenth century dislike of realism is compared to Caliban's rage seeing his face in the mirror. The ugly industrialisation and expanding economy encroached upon beauty in Victorian England. So as some people find an escape and refuge in beauty others find that romanticism is the other face of the Victorians and that they do not want to see their dislike of romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his face in the mirror. "The morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium". Wilde concludes his epigrams that all art is quite useless and in this statement he intends a reversal of life as it is in the eyes of standard Victorian society to judge art in terms of its direct usefulness and he recalls Kant's statement that "to judge an art object in terms of use' – or truth value – 'is not to make an aesthetic judgment' (Adams 659).

The novel deals with a new life, a life recreated to imitate art. Morality is in not insignificant but it is simply irrelevant as Wilde wants to escape from the Victorian moralising reality to a new one. When he was criticized for being immoral in the novel, Wilde answered "The moral is... all excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment." (Wilde 146).

Dorian Gray, Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward are the major characters of the novel. As mentioned earlier, they represent to a varying degree Wilde. Dorian Gray is supposed to do the experiment of living a purely aesthetic life. To play the role of Dionysus. Henry Wotton is the aesthetics teacher and Basil Hallward is the moralising or Apollonian agent or in other words, the typically Victorian average people. He is, indeed, an incarnation of Ruskin who cannot think of art without a moral message. "Aestheticism in art was inseparable from morality, which . . . had its roots in the moral foundations of medieval Christendom" (Pearce 62). The age old dispute between aesthetics and morality and the superiority of one to the other is being discussed again by Wilde giving priority to the imaginative and creative faculty of art rather than mimetic in other words, creating versus copying. Dorian is made to live a life in which he tries to create as much sensation as possible. Every moment of his life is being seized to provide him with sensual pleasure regardless of whether this sensation is morally achieved or not, keeping in mind, in Wilde's view, the fact that Victorian morality is nothing more than conforming to the standard values of the society. Art in a Paterian sense is no longer a reflection of life "the active principle in art is not entirely natural – not 'rooted in the ground' or 'tethered down to a world' – but rather 'something very different from this" (Pater, 1986, p. 428). The new colour and reflection that the object gets in the eyes of an artist are embodied in the

novel. An artificial life is created, a life of intense sensations or as Pater who greatly influenced Wilde puts it succinctly "“art comes to you proposing to give you nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments” sake”(Pater, 1986, p. 239) as such Lord Henry wants:

a new hedonism that was to re-create life and to save it from that harsh, unhomely puritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival. It was to have its service of the intellect, certainly; yet it was never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be. (Wilde 164)

As an image of the perfect aesthete as opposed to the moralist and Apollonian Basil, he never admits that morality for him was insignificant though he does say that he values beauty more than anything else “How can you say that? I admit that I think that it is better to be beautiful than to be good. But on the other hand no one is more ready than I am to acknowledge that it is better to be good than to be ugly.”(Wilde 215) and again when he was being accused by Dorian of having poisoned him with the book he had given to him he answered:

As for being poisoned by a book, there is no such thing as that. Art has no influence upon action. It annihilates the desire to act. It is superbly sterile. The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame. That is all. (Wilde 241-242)

The Victorian world “knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing.”(Wilde 55) as Lord Henry puts it. In the manner of a Faustian drama Lord Henry who in this case assumes the role of the tempter who wants to teach Dorian Gray how to live his life as an aesthete succeeds in changing Dorian through his philosophy of beauty. Dorian expresses a wish that he could remain youthful for ever as Lord Henry had imagined. His wish comes true and he gets eternal youth while time affects only his portrait. Wilde intends the portrait to represent the soul while Dorian himself as the body or in other words morality versus aesthetics. The portrait painted by Basil as a symbol of the soul is already foreshadowed before even Henry's wish becomes true. Basil said at the beginning that he cannot reveal the portrait. When asked about the reason by Lord Henry he replied:

In the face, “every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul.”(Wilde 12-13)

As clearly stated the soul which has been mentioned in the novel seventy one times will be represented by the portrait while Dorian is made to assume the role of the body that will live and create every sensation disregarding moral conventions but not committing any immoral action that the society might hold him accountable for. As reality and nature are inferior to aesthetic values and Dorian will now indulge in activities which are seen by Henry as being above nature. Even the hints and insinuations at homosexuality throughout the novel which are not entirely direct are meant to emphasise a fact, which is that homosexuality is not against aesthetic art and indeed it is nature that Wilde regards as below true art. Therefore the protagonist will simply devote himself to a life of sensations and any action that procures a sensation of pleasure will be allowed. While the body or the incarnation of aesthetic values, the portrait or the soul will be a mirror of morality to check to what extent aesthetics can survive without it. It is Wilde's nightmare that the body and the soul are separated and their harmony disturbed. Without the Apollonian frame, the Dionysian chaos is destructive not constructive. The body can be equated with Nietzsche's visual plastic arts, which he associated with Apollo while the soul is related to his non-visual art of music, which he associated with Dionysus. The body is visual but not the soul. Wilde believes that the harsh and excessive moralising and realistic surrounding contribute to such a separation. Wilde reflects on the inexplicable and mysterious duality of the body and soul in the novel when he comments:

Soul and body, body and soul how mysterious they were! There was animalism in the soul, and the body had its moments of spirituality. The senses could refine, and the intellect could degrade. Who could say where the fleshly Impulse ceased, or the physical impulse began? How shallow were the arbitrary definitions of ordinary psychologists! And yet how difficult to decide between the claims of the various schools! Was the soul a shadow seated in the house of sin? Or was the body really in the soul, as Giordano Bruno thought? The separation of spirit from matter was a mystery, and the union of spirit with matter was a mystery also. (Wilde 67-68)

The fact that such a disruption of harmony of the body and soul may consequentially entail a denial of individuality and lack of creativity is an accentuation of Lord Henry's motto "Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul." (Wilde 28). Attempting to satisfy others' desires is a denial of one's existence and thus conforming to the standards of the age is itself immoral. Henry tells the Apollonian Basil who is cautious about Henry's theory that:

Discord is to be forced to be in harmony with others. One's own life that is the important thing. As for the lives of one's neighbours, if one wishes to be a prig or a Puritan, one can flaunt one's moral views about them, but they are not one's concern. Besides, Individualism has really the higher aim. 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 of the grossest immorality."(Wilde 53)

Dorian speaking to Henry Wotton shows the temptation he was undergoing and the changes he underwent from a normal decent human to a pleasure and sensation seeking hedonist:

You filled me with a wild desire to know everything about life. For days after I met you, something seemed to throb in my veins. As I lounged in the Park, or strolled down Piccadilly, I used to look at every one who passed me, and wonder, with a mad curiosity, what sort of lives they led. Some of them fascinated me. Others filled me with terror. There was an exquisite poison in the air. I had a passion for sensations. . . .(Wilde 57)

Disparagingly the aesthete Henry answers the naive looking young man who thought he had met the greatest romance of his life when he told him that he had fallen in love with a girl named Sibyl Vane:

I am not laughing, Dorian; at least I am not laughing at you. But you should not say the greatest romance of your life. You should say the first romance of your life. You will always be loved, and you will always be in love with love. A grand passion is the privilege of people who have nothing to do. That is the one use of the idle classes of a country. Don't be afraid. There are exquisite things in store for you. This is merely the beginning."(Wilde 58)

Having been transformed into an aesthete who seeks to embody the aesthetic principles of his master, Dorian falls in love with a lady whom he thought was the incarnation of art as he watches her on the stage while she was performing. Henry does not approve of the word "faithfulness" in love because he believes that faithfulness in love and marriage is only due to lethargy of custom and lack of imagination. Imagination being the supreme faculty of the artist, a feature of the elite "Faithfulness is to the emotional life what consistency is to the life of the intellect simply a confession of failures."(Wilde 58) What really attracted the attention of Dorian was the girl's art in doing her part on the stage. The girl who was acting the role of Juliet in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. This is how Dorian describes her:

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. She was the loveliest thing I had ever seen in my life. You said to me once that pathos left you unmoved, but that beauty, mere beauty, could fill your eyes with tears. I tell you, Harry, I could hardly see this girl for the mist of tears that came across me. (Wilde 59)

For Dorian, an aesthete, she was not any girl. She was a perfect piece of art. She represented all the aesthetic principles that his influential master had inculcated in him. From art loving Greeks to Shakespeare's immortal characters in his plays, she appealed to imagination which is described somewhere else in the novel as the agent that orders the chaos of life "Actual life was chaos, but there was something terribly logical in the imagination. It was the imagination that set remorse to dog the feet of sin. It was the imagination that made each crime bear its misshapen brood (Wilde 221). Imagination as the opposite of consistency. It is consistency that Henry Wotton really abhors. Imagination is that which helps man be individual, creative and unique. It is in the eyes of Lord Henry the enemy of Victorian conformism and Henry is now using it to reorder life to fit his imagination. "We ourselves are a kind of chaos." Nietzsche affirms, this chaos is full of life-affirming possibilities. He says in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* "I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves." (Nietzsche 5) Thus, we have the possibility of constructing ourselves and our lives out of the potentiality of the primordial chaos in which we exist. Dorian, therefore, fell in love with the girl Sybil Vane because:

One evening she is Rosalind, and the next evening she is Imogen. I have seen her die in the gloom of an Italian tomb, sucking the poison from her lover's lips. I have watched her wandering through the Forest of Arden, disguised as a pretty boy in hose and doublet and dainty cap. She has been mad, and has come into the presence of a guilty king, and given him rue to wear, and bitter herbs to taste of. She has been innocent, and the black hands of jealousy have crushed her reed-like throat. I have seen her in every age and in every costume. Ordinary women never appeal to one's imagination. (Wilde 60)

If she were an ordinary woman, Dorian would not have fallen in love with her or at least he would not have been allowed to fall in love with her because "Ordinary women never appeal to one's imagination. They are limited to their century" (Wilde 60). The fact that they are limited to their century is a clear reference to the immortality of art that Wilde aspires to. The choice of an actress is apt here as it is only an actress that can play different parts and assume a variety of roles. She is not consistent but various. She changes and can change and be changed. She is a birth of the imagination that Wilde was hoping to reorder the chaos of the world around him. She affirms life despite its tragic character. Imagination is even divine and Sibyl Vane is being described by Dorian as "entirely divine. Every night of my life I go to see her act, and every night she is more marvellous." (Wilde 63). Dorian refused Henry's invitation to dine with him because he told him "she was Imogen today" and when asked when she will ever be Sibyl Vane he answered "never" and here Henry congratulate him feeling happy that his aesthetic project is now a great success. Being Sibyl Vane means she will have to go back to the grim crude reality from which Dorian wants to escape. All great lovers of the world who were immortalised by art for their passion and actions are invoked by Dorian as he speaks of her to Lord Henry who was looking at his project happily:

I want the dead lovers of the world to hear our laughter, and grow sad. I want a breath of our passion to stir their dust into consciousness, to wake their ashes into pain. My God, Harry, how I worship her! "He was walking up and down the room as he spoke. Hectic spots of red burned on his cheeks. He was terribly excited. (Wilde 64).

Henry was doubtful about what Dorian told him that Sibyl Vane with her art will make the world mad as she had made him. When he expresses his doubt, Dorian answers:

Yes, she will. She has not merely art, consummate art-instinct, in her, but she has personality also; and you have often told me that it is personalities, not principles that move the age." (Wilde, 1985, p. 165). They decide to go and watch her on stage. They want to invite Basil whom by now Dorian sees as a philistine as he tells Henry" since I have known you, Harry, I have discovered that"(Wilde 65).

Aesthetically speaking, Henry does not think well of Basil because he conforms well to the Apollonian rules. He believes that:

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."(Wilde 65-66).

For Harry good artist only live in their creations and in the beauty, they create 'the object of Art is not simply truth but complex beauty' (Wilde 107). He continues:

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. (Wilde 66)

Henry believes that real artists live in their creations and through which they achieve immortality. He attaches no importance to his being in the present time. He is like all others will disappear and nothing remain except what they have created. He was in fact teaching Dorian the notion that artist should not be beautiful themselves in order to create beauty. He foreshadows thus the downfall of Sibyl Vane as a piece of art before even seeing her. As such the invitation to see Sibyl Vane will end in a big disappointment for the Master and his disciple.

Not knowing where the real interest of Dorian Gray lies, Sibyl Vane was surprised that a man like Dorian Gray should fall in love with her. She cries to her mother "Mother, mother," she cried," why does he love me so much? I know why I love him. I love him because he is like what Love himself should be. But what does he see in me? I

am not worthy of him. (Wilde 71). Entirely ignoring the fact that Dorian may have fallen in love with her for reasons other than her outer appearance, she therefore makes the mistake of neglecting her acting talent and she performs badly on stage. She believes that she had found real love and real life not just acting while life as it is no longer interests an aesthete who believes in what is beyond nature. She wants to live her life away from the stage. She is fed up with acting it on stage. She was never able to understand an aesthete who speaks about her as a piece of art. Dorian believes, like Nietzsche in his unpublished remark that "we have art lest we should perish of the truth". He says about her "had the arms of Rosalind around me, and kissed Juliet on the mouth." and "I left her in the Forest of Arden, I shall find her in an orchard in Verona." (Wilde 87) using all charming Shakespearean characters to describe her. His Master Lord Henry welcomes the idea of watching her on stage as he likes acting because it is "more real than life". He remarked as he saw the unpleasant state of the theatre and oppressive heat and sordid surroundings "What a place to find one's divinity in!" (Wilde 91) that art is divine is a notion that never escaped Oscar Wilde. Dorian regards her as a creature that is "divine beyond all living things". Indeed it is sacred. Art for Henry and Dorian was not only sacred but also capable of transforming and changing people. The notion that art can change and spiritualize in Kant and Schopenhauer is expressed again here by Dorian. It looks like a description of the Greek spectators watching a play before the coming of Socrates where they are transported by the Dionysian spirit into different people. Dorian has expressed that most clearly when he said

These common, rough people, with their coarse faces and brutal gestures, become quite different when she is on the stage. They sit silently and watch her. They weep and laugh as she wills them to do. She makes them as responsive as a violin. She spiritualises them, and one feels that they are of the same flesh and blood as one's self." (Wilde 93)

The Apollonian Basil is charmed by the word "spiritualises" which was heralded already by Lord Henry and applied by Dorian who was in search of "a new spirituality, of which a fine instinct for beauty was to be the dominant characteristic" (Wilde: 46) and "He sought to elaborate some new scheme of life that would have its reasoned philosophy and its ordered principles, and find in the spiritualising of the senses its highest realisation. (146). Basil comments:

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. (Wilde 93)

Their long and anxious waiting was rewarded by an unexpectedly bad performance by Sibyl Vane. She acted without real passions. Her gestures were absurd and artificial. The beautiful passages said by Romeo and Juliet were recited as if by a school girl. She spoke the words as though they conveyed no meaning to her. It was not nervousness. Indeed, so far from being nervous, she was absolutely self-contained. It was simply bad art. She was a complete failure. (Wilde 95). She has lost the Dionysian spirit. She was totally Apollonian. She was a boring realist giving the spectators the impression that they are watching themselves on the stage. She thought that since she found a real lover, it does not make sense any more to imagine him in her dreams. She gave up ecstasy and passion. Apollo only does charm neither Dorian nor his master. Basil tried to console Dorian stating that love is more wonderful than art while Henry who assumed that art and love are both forms of imitation insisted on leaving because "It is not good for one's morals to see bad acting." (Wilde 96). Bad acting or bad art is not good for morals and here he directly connects good acting and consequently good art to morality. Morality as being inherent in art has always been an indirect and recurrent issue for Oscar Wilde to which he more often than not alludes to.

Dorian reacts violently to her bad acting and lack of art. She is immediately accused of destroying his dreams of immortality. Now he sees her as having no effect whatsoever. She no longer charms people and spiritualises rough people and make less crude and more human than they are. She no longer gives a soul to those without one and creates beauty in them that makes them less selfish. He revolts with the words:

You used to stir my imagination. Now you don't even stir my curiosity. You simply produce no effect. I loved you because you were marvellous, because you had genius and intellect, because you realised the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art. You have thrown it all away. You are shallow and stupid. My God! How mad! was to love you! What a fool I have been! You are nothing to me now. I will never see you again.....You have spoiled the romance of my life. How little you can know of love, if you say it mars your art! Without your art you are nothing. I would have made you famous, splendid, magnificent. The world would have worshipped you, and you would have borne my name. What are you now? A third-rate actress with a pretty face. (Wilde 98-99)

As a consequence of his severing his relationship with her, Sibyl Vane commits suicide and she closes the scene of her life with a tragic death, much like some of Shakespearian tragedies. Her death is similar to the death of Greek tragedy when Dionysus was lost and Socratic thinking dominated the Greek stage. She remains faithful to the idea of being a piece of tragic art rather than a real character. Henry offers his condolences to Dorian claiming that her tragic death atoned for her mistake of relinquishing art and indulging in the pathetic sordid reality. Dorian says that by her tragic Shakespearian death she passed into "the sphere of art"

Dorian's portrait becomes ugly as he commits more sins. Dorian's apparent separation of his body and soul by espousing Henry's philosophy is shown on this portrait. Indulgence in only one part at the expense of the other will bring its own consequences. It is excessive aesthetics at the expense of morality and reasonableness that will lead to his final downfall. The following statement shows how far Dorian went in his excessive aesthetic approach to a life of sensations. He is entirely Paterian in his critique of life:

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 became a confirmed misanthrope. And besides, my dear old Basil, if you really want to console me, teach me rather to forget what has happened or to see it from the proper artistic point of view.....I love beautiful things that one can touch and handle. Old brocades, green bronzes, lacquer-work, carved ivories, exquisite surroundings, luxury, pomp, there is much to be got from all these. But the artistic temperament that they create, or at any rate reveal, is still more to me. (Wilde 124)

Now Dorian is gradually losing his soul. He becomes more corrupt as he separates aesthetics from morality and indulges in sensation-procuring activities without any regard to morality. The more sins he commits the more abominable the portrait becomes. He even could not recognise his picture "It was some foul parody, some infamous, ignoble satire. He had never done that. Still, it was his own picture." (Wilde 173) He commits adultery and becomes an obsessive collector of all kinds of beautiful things that may get him pleasurable sensations while remaining physically immune to the ravages of time. The yellow book given to him by Lord Henry which he regards as his scripture tempts him to fall deeper into vulgar but apparently pleasurable activities. It tells of all kinds of stories, of people and kings who did their best to get sensations of pleasure at whatever cost. It tells of the stories of a Frenchman who indulges in all types of sensational and pleasurable experiences. He is excessively so influenced by the yellow book that he completely loses his soul. The allusion here is clearly a novel that may have influenced Oscar Wilde in his art. Though the yellow book is a quarterly periodical published in London in the late nineteenth century and which is associated with Oscar Wilde who did not even contribute to it, it is a reference to the French Yoris- Karls Huysmans' novel "*A Rebours*" translated as "*Against Nature*". The novel had a tremendous influence on many British aesthetes. Books like this were wrapped at the time by yellow paper to warn the reader of its dubious content. The novel tells the story of Jean Des Esseintes, an aesthete and a hater of French bourgeoisie. With this book, Huysmans decided to break with his naturalistic style to embark on a new aesthetic journey. Wilde referred to the novel as "the poisonous book" and even the prosecutor in his trial questioned Wilde about it. He even suggested that the book must be the novel "A

Rebours". Wilde's reply was that his novel *the Picture of Dorian Gray* was a pure invention but never denied that he might have been influenced by many other books including Pater's *The Renaissance*. Dorian Gray and Jean des Esseintes both share many character traits, as both were aesthetes in search of new unnatural and new experiences and unlimited knowledge. The plot of the novel centers on the experiences of a young Parisian who decided to lead a hedonistic way of life at the expense of his morals. His ultimate aim was to the search of the essence of pleasure. The influence of art is explored in this passage in which he refers to the yellow book:

It was a novel without a plot and with only one character, being, indeed, simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian who spent his life trying to realize in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own, and to sum up "as it were, in himself the various moods through which the world-spirit had ever passed, loving for their mere artificiality those renunciations that men have unwisely called virtue, as much as those natural rebellions that wise men still call sin. The style in which it was written was that curious jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of argot and of archaisms, of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases, that characterizes the work of some of the finest artists of the French school of Symbolists" (Wilde 292)

It is obvious that Wilde shaped Dorian's character after that of des Esseintes. Nevertheless *A Rebours or Against Nature* seems to be a catalogue of a wide range of aesthetic objects that only interest people with highly refined aesthetic senses. Des Esseintes sees all those sensations as charming and he never condemned bourgeois society. Florence Darcy sums up some of the characteristics of Huysmans's novel:

there is no plot whatsoever: des Esseintes, having given himself over to every conceivable form of debauchery in Paris, and still suffering from an incurable *ennui*, decides at the beginning of the novel to retire to a small house in the country outside Paris and live frugally, dedicating himself to purely aesthetic pursuits. At the end of the novel, after spending six months or so living as a recluse, his health deteriorates to such an extent that the doctor orders him to return to Paris. Voilà. End of story. (Darcy 2011)

Though Des Esseintes differs from Gray in that he wanted to show the decadence of the bourgeois society at the turn of the century and never aimed at a transcendent symbolism, he compares the languid degeneracy, perversion and orgies of the end of the Roman Empire to the degeneracy of the bourgeois society. The author's intention through the protagonist in the play, Darcy argues "Des Esseintes postulates that the same climate of elegant decay, the same rank, gamey smell of refined degeneracy permeates the upper classes of the end of the nineteenth century.(Darcy 2011) while Dorian Gray shows a man who is trying to justify the world as an aesthetic phenomenon and finally was punished for failing to live up to his theory because it is a theory that entails an

excessive Dionysian indulgence at the expense of rationality. Strikingly, Des Essentes did not eventually believe in religion though the author Huysmans converted later to Catholicism and became a monk, which is almost the same thing that Wilde did on his deathbed. Despite the striking similarities, the message in Wilde's novel is different from that of Huysmans'.

The yellow book, however, might also well have been Walter Pater's book the *Renaissance* which Wilde always carried around and regarded as his sacred book and regarded as the manifesto of the aesthetic movement as it also extols a an aesthetic life lived to the full.

Dorian exceeds the boundaries that Wilde had set aesthetics to persist and continues to promote good sense and charm people's habits into moral actions as Kant earlier had put it. He further indulges into vulgarity killing the painter Basil Hallward who stands as the moderate character and moral ballast. He once told Dorian that "If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself in the lines of his mouth, the drop of his eyelids, the moulding of his hands even." (Wilde 167). He was influenced by Lord Henry and Dorian and welcomed changes from both. He wanted to combine morality with art. In other words he was Ruskin who insisted that they are inseparable. Though he was moderate but his creation was not. Therefore, his death comes as a natural result of excessive aesthetics on the part of his creation. He is seen as a good artist in character but failed to create a work of art that merges the Dionysian with the Apollonian. It was Basil who created the portrait which turned into a mirror of Dorian's soul. The soul becomes ugly and corrupt because of the sins of the body. The body did not live up to the aspirations of the creator. Basil's death also foreshadows the end of the portrait. There is no reason for the portrait to remain when the creator is no longer alive. Basil symbolises Wilde's theory that art and morality may coexist for a better life provided that no one exceeds the normal limits. The doctrine of "art for art's sake" fails as Dorian constantly checks his portrait after every sin he commits to see the deterioration of his soul as it sinks in unlimited dissipation after every immoral but aesthetically viewed and pleasurable sin. The experiment of Lord Henry's philosophy of trying to create a piece of art fails. When Dorian asks about what Henry's thought was if he knew that he had murdered Basil Hallward, Henry answers: "I would say, my dear fellow that you were posing for a character that doesn't suit you. All crime is vulgar, just as all vulgarity is crime. It is not in you, Dorian, to commit a murder." (Wilde 236) and he repeated again later one that "I should fancy, however, that murder is always a mistake." (Wilde 236)? Obviously Dorian exceeded the teachings of his Master and fell into the trap of vulgarity by murder which Lord Henry the initiator of this experience never recommended. Thus Wilde remains faithful to his statement about the moral of the novel when he said "The moral is... all excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment." (Wilde 146).

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