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Art versus Morality: Oscar Wilde's Aestheticism in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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Aestheticism covers the period known as the Nineties, particularly between 1889 and 1895 in the late Victorian era, when it was revised and perfected (Ellmann 288). The origins of this movement are to be found in the works of several German writers of the Romantic period such as Kant, Schelling, Goethe and Schiller who think that art must be autonomous with the right of self-government and therefore the artist was someone special, different from ordinary man, even superior to him (Cuddon 11). The major standpoint of aestheticism was that “art had no reference to life, and therefore had nothing to do with morality” (12). It rejects the utilitarian concept of art as something moral and useful. Walter Pater, whose collection of essays, *The Renaissance* (1873) had a deep influence on the poets of 1890s such as Oscar Wilde, “advocated the

view that life itself should be treated in the spirit of art" (12). The movement was also influenced by the 19th century French symbolist poetry known as decadence, which emphasized the autonomy of art and art for art's sake as its guiding principles (Cuddon 57, 208-9). In England, aestheticism in poetry is also closely identified with the Pre-Raphaelites who strove for beautiful musical effects in their verse rather than for sense.

However, the Victorian era was a time of many contradictions. On the one hand, it was an era of industry, scientific progress and a very strict set of moral standards, but on the other hand, it was also a time of moral corruption, prostitution, poverty as well as materialism and commercialism, which were the effects of the capitalist system of the British Empire. Victorians who were running after the material gains under the influence of capitalist system, were also under the influence of utilitarianism which sought greatest happiness for individuals by the pursuit of utility, namely, a rational notion of usefulness, while failing to recognize people's spiritual and emotional needs. Hence, aestheticism came as a reaction against the materialist and capitalist systems of the late Victorian world, particularly, trying to save art from the influence of utilitarianism through its main principle art for art's sake.

Yet, aestheticism as a movement was not only a reaction against the materialism, capitalism, utilitarianism and commercialism of the late Victorian Period but it was also a reaction against the literary movements, Realism and Naturalism in the second half of the 19th century, which emphasized the portrayal of life with fidelity without any sense of idealization, and both movements rejected the doctrine of art for art's sake. Aestheticism, on the other hand, "was a revitalizing influence in an age of ugliness, brutality, dreadful inequality and oppression, complacency" and hypocrisy (Cuddon 13). It was also against the Philistines of England, in Matthew Arnold's terms, namely, the bourgeois classes who were devoted to money, material objects instead of art and beauty because they were uncultured. Therefore, the movement was regarded as "a genuine search for beauty and a realization that the beautiful has an independent value" (13). Beauty was not an abstract concept because it could be felt by people through their five senses. Hence, in the Nineties, the artists mostly held the view that pleasure should be provided only by arts, not by moral or sentimental messages. Art did not have any moral purpose; it only had to be beautiful.

Oscar Wilde, who lived between 1854 and 1900, established a brilliant academic record at Oxford, following his graduation from

Trinity College in Dublin. However, Wilde became notorious and famous both for his works and for his scandalous life because of his homosexuality which was a serious offence in the Victorian period. Unfortunately, he was sentenced to prison, with hard labour for two years because of his homosexual relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, and as a ruined man who lost his family, friends and wealth, he emigrated to Paris after two years in jail and died there in a hotel room in poverty.

Oscar Wilde, with his aesthetic views about art, was an advocate of aestheticism who reconsidered the relation between art, life, and morality. Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* depicts a story of the idea of art, sensual pleasure, morals, sin, human soul, and civilization in the Victorian society. The book reflects Oscar Wilde's views on aestheticism, first in the "Preface" to the book and then in the story through the themes, plot, conflicts and the symbolic meaning of the characters. When the work first appeared in *Lippincot's Magazine* in 1890, "it was greeted with a storm of protest by the critics" (Holland 11). The revised work appeared as a book in 1891 with six extra chapters and a preface prepared by Wilde which consisted of his epigrams about art, morality, and life. The "Preface" begins with the epigram that "The artists the creator of beautiful things". Indeed *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is replete with beautiful descriptions which reflects his epigram through the use of thought and language as claimed by Wilde in the "Preface" that "Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art". For instance, the first two paragraphs of the first chapter in which the painter Basil Hallward's studio is described, appeals to the five senses of the reader which evokes sensual pleasure with a strong sense of beauty:

The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn.

From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was lying, smoking as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs; (18)¹

¹ Wilde, Oscar. "The Picture of Dorian Gray" *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. London and Glasgow: Collins, 1976. 17-167. Hereafter all the references will be made to this edition and only the page numbers will be given.

Likewise, in the novel, the actress Sibyl Vane with whom Dorian Gray is deeply in love, is also described like a beautiful art object as if she were a creature that comes from “a finer world”, particularly, when she appears on the stage:

A quarter of an hour afterwards, amidst an extraordinary turmoil of applause, Sibyl Vane stepped on to the stage. Yes she was certainly lovely to look at—one of the loveliest creatures, Lord Henry thought, that he had ever seen. There was something of the fawn in her shy grace and startled eyes. A faint blush, like the shadow of a rose in a mirror of silver, came to her cheeks as she glanced at the crowded, enthusiastic house. (80)

....

Through the crowd of ungainly, shabbily dressed actors, Sibyl Vane moved like a creature from a finer world. Her body swayed, while she danced, as a plant sways in the water. The curves of her throat were the curves of a white lily. (72)

Similarly, in the scene in which Dorian’s reaction to the actress Sybil Vane’s death is depicted, Sybil is again portrayed like a beautiful work of art, this time through the combination of Dorian’s language and thoughts. She is compared to Juliet whose extreme suffering and death for love ennobled her as a tragic heroine. Hence, Sybil is exalted and turned into a tragic figure in this scene:

How different Sibyl was! She lived her finest tragedy. She was always a heroine. The last night she played – the night you saw her – she acted badly because she had known the reality of love. When she knew its unreality, she died, as Juliet might have died. She passed again into the sphere of art. There is something of the martyr about her. Her death has all the pathetic uselessness of martyrdom, all its wasted beauty. (90)

However, Dorian’s love affair with the actress Sybil Vane is one of the conflicts between art and life. Dorian loves Sybil Vane only in the world of art, not in real life when she does not act. Therefore, for Dorian, her suicide, though painful it is for him, is regarded as “her finest tragedy” by him because she is again turned into a heroine. This love tragedy, like Dorian’s sinful life, which his portrait

depicts, symbolically implies that when art is reduced to life, it is destined to die. As Wilde puts it in his essay “The Decay of Lying”, “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life” (992) or “Art, in a word, must not content itself simply with holding the mirror up to nature, for it is a re-creation more than a reflection, and not a repetition but rather a new song” (qtd. in Beckson 11). Referring to the autonomy of art, Wilde explains the principle of his aesthetics in his “Decay of Lying”. He states: “Art never expresses anything but itself. This is the principle of my new aesthetics;” (987). Hence, in the novel, Basil Hallward, the artist, also maintains that “An artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them” (25). What Wilde argues in these quotations is that art is superior to life because it creates the beautiful like Dorian’s portrait that reflects his innocent beauty. But when it is reduced to life by Dorian, who exchanges his soul for being young eternally, it becomes the symbol of his sinful soul and life. Then it becomes distorted and ugly as it is reduced to Dorian’s ugly record of guilt due to his vanity and frailties. However, when he wants to get rid of the portrait by slaying it, he also kills himself and the picture returns to its original beauty. In other words, according to Wilde’s aestheticism, if art imitates life with fidelity as in realism, it will depict the materialist world of the Victorians who seek happiness only through material gain while neglecting the sufferings of others.

Lord Henry Wotton, the mentor of Dorian, poisons him through his philosophy of New Hedonism and the “yellow book” he gives. The title of the book is not given but at his trial Wilde “conceded that it was almost Joris-Karl Huysman’s *A Rebours (Against Nature)*” (Ellman 298) which is the story of a character, named Jean des Esseintes, an eccentric man who has lived an extremely decadent life in Paris which he loathes, and therefore, retreats to his secluded house where he creates an artificial world of artistic beauty for himself. However, at the end of the book, he returns to human society, realizing that only disillusion would await him if he were to carry out his plans further. The parallelism between Dorian’s life and that of the hero in Huysman’s book is clear. Dorian, who was infected by Lord Henry, was misguided by him to such an extent that he was almost withdrawn from life and continued only to live for bodily pleasure rather than seeking love (Miller 29-30). “His relationships become increasingly self-serving, and soon he is happiest only when he is fondling precious gems and fine brocades, for they make no demands upon him” (30). His inner thoughts betray his desperation and loneliness because he cannot get rid of his guilty conscience, after he discovers the alterations in the picture:

Yet he was afraid. Sometimes when he was down at his great house in Nottinghamshire, entertaining the fashionable young men of his own rank who were his chief companions, and astounding the county by the wanton luxury and gorgeous splendour of his mode of life, he would suddenly leave his guests and rush back to town to see that the door had not been tampered with, and that the picture was still there. What if it should be stolen? The mere thought made him cold with horror. Surely the world would know his secret then. Perhaps the world already suspected it. (111)

As Miller argues, "There are moments, however, when even these pleasures become lost to him" because "they force him into awareness and inhibit the escape from reality that he ultimately finds in drugs" (30). At this point it can be argued that in the book, *Oscar Wilde*, as emphasized by Miller, shows the reader that "Art, like experience, is good only so long as it contributes to self-development". If "it is used as a luxurious means of passing time" as Dorian and Lord Henry did, "it is no better than the drugs to which Dorian eventually falls victim" (30). Such a view does not conflict with Wilde's notion of art that art and life are two distinct spheres. On the contrary, in his essay "The English Renaissance of Art," he writes, "Love art for its own sake, and then all things that you need will be added to you. This devotion to beauty and to the creation of beautiful things is the test of all great civilized nations" (<http://www.tfo.upm.es/> ... 20). In the same essay, he also argues that beauty lives for ever and unlike "philosophies that fall away like sand and creeds follow one another like the withered leaves of autumn", what is beautiful is "a joy for all seasons and a possession for all eternity" (20). Similarly, in his lecture "The House Beautiful" which he delivered in Chicago, he maintains,

Today more than ever the artist and a love of the beautiful are needed to temper and counteract the sordid materialism of the age. In an age when science has undertaken to declaim against the soul and spiritual nature of man, and when commerce is ruining beautiful rivers and magnificent woodlands and the glorious skies in its greed for gain, the artist comes forward as a priest and prophet of nature to protest. (qtd. in Beckson 17)

Wilde also puts emphasis on the role of art in training children to be kind to animals and all living things:

Art culture will do more to train children to be kind to animals and all living things than all our harrowing moral tales, for when he sees how lovely the little leaping squirrel is on the beaten brass or the bird arrested in flight on carven marble, he will not throw the customary stone. (qtd. in Beckson 14)

As seen, for Wilde, true art has a kind of healing effect on human beings as long as it is internalized correctly, simply because of the fact that it is beautiful. For Wilde, “the work of art should dominate the spectator”, but “the spectator is not to dominate art” (qtd. in Beckson 20). Unfortunately, Dorian, misguided by Lord Henry who is a product of Victorian society, misinterprets art and fails to recognize the higher pleasures of generosity and goodness his soul needs. Therefore, he becomes a victim of his own sensual pleasures. Lord Henry “denies the soul, denies suffering, thinks of art as a malady and love as an illusion” (Ellman 300). Furthermore, he is also wrong “in praising Dorian’s life as a work of art when it has been a failure”(300). Even though he claims that one can be a spectator of one’s own life, Dorian, no matter how hard tries to remain distant from his life by being unwilling to recognize his responsibilities and obligations, particularly, his moral responsibilities, he cannot overcome the sense of guilt he feels which eventually causes his own death after committing many sins, including the murder of his best friend Basil Hallward, the artist, the creator of his portrait. The novel reflects that for Wilde, art is neither disengaged from life nor deeply engaged in it. As he himself claims in “The Decay of Lying”, “Life is Art’s best, Art’s only pupil” (983). The quotation from “The Portrait of Mr. W. H.” below, reflects what he really means:

Art, even the art of fullest scope and widest vision, can never really show us the external world. All that it shows us is our own soul, the one world of which we have any real cognizance. And the soul itself, the soul of each one of us, is to each one of us a mystery. It hides in the dark and broods, and consciousness cannot tell us of its workings. Consciousness, indeed, is quite inadequate to explain the contents of personality. It is Art, and Art only, that reveals us to ourselves. (1194)

Art reveals us to ourselves because it shows us our own soul which is in fact very mysterious and dark like Dorian’s portrait which depicts his soul through a shameless expression of cruelty that he could not bear. As Philip Cohen puts it, “It reveals the soul’s depths,

not the mere surface reality” (143). However, to substitute art for life is also wrong as Sybil and Dorian have done. Dorian who is under the influence of Lord Henry’s limited perspective of life and art, cannot understand Sybil Vane and causes her eventual suicide. Lord Henry, on the other hand, is a typical Victorian hypocrite and a cynic who will soon forget all his efforts to influence Dorian, even though, he claims that to influence a person is immoral:

“All influence is immoral – immoral from the scientific point of view.”

“Why?”

Because to influence a person is to give him one’s own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of some one else’s music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him. The aim of life is self-development. To realise one’s nature perfectly – that is what each of us is here for. (28-29)

Unfortunately, young Dorian who is poisoned and misguided by Lord Henry “uses art only as a luxurious means of passing time” and lives a life of passionate self-indulgence, which leads to his eventual self-destruction.

As Richard Ellmann also puts it, “by its creation of beauty, art reproaches the world, calling attention to the world’s faults by disregarding them” (311). Ellmann further argues that, in the novel, “Wilde presented the case as fully as he could. However gracefully he expresses himself, there is no doubt that he attacks Victorian assumptions about society” (311). What Wilde seems to ask through his work, is “to give up hypocrisy both by recognizing social facts and by acknowledging that” the Victorian society’s “principles were based upon hatred rather than love” (311). As Wilde himself also claims, the story of Dorian Gray is moral. The work consists of “the sequence of passages which describes Dorian’s relationship with his soul” (Raby 76) even though Dorian’s mentor, Lord Henry refuses to acknowledge the existence of human soul to which Dorian’s reply is, “Don’t Harry, the soul is a terrible reality. It can be bought and sold, and bartered away. It can be poisoned, or made perfect. There is a soul in each one of us. I know it” (161). Concerning *Dorian Gray*, Wilde said: “Yes; there is a terrible moral in *Dorian Gray*”, [...]

“a moral which the prurient will not be able to find in it, but which will be revealed to all whose minds are healthy” (qtd. in Belford 171). It was an answer against the charges that the novel was immoral which seems contrary to what Wilde advocates about art’s relation with morality. However, as Michael Patrick Gillespie argues,

the Aesthetic Movement in fact took a far more complex view of the relationship between the two. Rather than denying a place for ethics within aesthetic experience... it instead denied primacy to conventional value systems and bluntly asserted the validity of alternative moralities. (142)

Furthermore, Gillespie also argues that Water Pater, the spokesman of the Aesthetic movement in England whom Wilde was deeply influenced by, also advocated that “the idea of art for art’s sake does not abandon ethics”(143). He further argues that even Pater’s “notion of autonomous art, seemingly aloof from the influence of moral judgement, rests upon clear, though admittedly unconventional ethical standards” (143). In the novel, Wilde’s critical approach to conventional morality is expressed through Lord Henry’s commentary on it: “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 grossest immorality” (69). It is in this context that Wilde was rendering the relationship between art and morality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In other words, the novel depicts Wilde’s critical approach to the Victorians’ conventional moral standards and vanity through the characters of Lord Henry and Dorian who conceal their personalities through the mask of hypocrisy. The conversation between Basil, the painter, and Lord Henry clearly depicts Lord Henry’s hypocrisy and cynicism: “I believe that you are really a very good husband, but that you are thoroughly ashamed of your own virtues. You are an extraordinary fellow. You never say a moral thing, and never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose” (20). To this Lord Henry’s answer is, “Being natural is simply a pose and the most irritating pose I know” (20).

The hypocrisy and materialist attitude of the conventional Victorian society is also depicted through brief references to Dorian’s scandalous life, which he seems to enjoy, because it increases his charm “in the eyes of many” despite the strict moral conventions and moral standards of the Victorians:

Yet these whispered scandals only increased, in the eyes of many, his strange and dangerous charm. His

great wealth was a certain element of security. Society, civilised society at least, is never very ready to believe anything to the detriment of those who are both rich and fascinating. It feels instinctively that manners are of more importance than morals, and, in his opinion, the highest respectability is of much less value than the possession of a good *chef*. (112)

The hypocrisy of the Victorian society is mentioned by Dorian in a conversation between him and Basil Hallward as well:

"[...] And what sort of lives do these people who pose as being moral, lead themselves? My dear fellow you forget that we are in the native land of the hypocrite." "Dorian," cried Hallward, "that is not the question. England is bad enough, I know, and English society is all wrong." (118)

Likewise, the picture which becomes a mirror of Dorian's sinful soul, also depicts his hypocrisy and vanity: "A cry of pain and indignation broke from him. He could see no change save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning, and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite" (166). Even Dorian admits that "In hypocrisy, he had won the mask of goodness" (166). Hence, both Lord Henry and Dorian, shaped by Victorian society, fail to understand the role of art in human life as advocated by Wilde through his aestheticism, and follow Lord Henry's New Hedonism instead, which "asserts the primacy of a doctrine of pleasure that absolves individuals from the ordinary responsibilities for their actions" (Gillespie 145).

However, despite Wilde's claims that "an artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them" in *Dorian Gray* and "To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim" in the "Preface" of the novel, critics generally agree that the novel "is very much the author's autobiography" (Belford 170). Richard Ellman writes that the novel, "besides being about aestheticism, is also one of the first attempts to bring homosexuality into the English novel" (300). To him, the work's "appropriately covert presentation of this censored subject gave the book notoriety and originality" (300-1). Indeed, the novel contains many implications of homosexuality: Lord Henry's marriage does not seem to be a happy one and his wife leaves him. Basil asks Dorian why his relationship is so fatal to young men. Both Basil and Lord Henry are attracted to Dorian Gray, particularly Lord Henry's attraction is clearly physical: "Yes, he was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank

blue eyes, his crisp gold hair” (27) he thinks when he first meets Dorian who inspires Basil like a muse. And Basil is also very reluctant to introduce Dorian to Lord Henry because he thinks that he might influence him. Obviously, he does not want to share him with anyone else. He also does not want to exhibit the picture of Dorian because he confesses that he has “put too much of himself” in it which he calls “a curious artistic idolatry” and therefore he does not want to bare his soul to the public. In other words, he does not want to disclose his secret. Basil also seems very unhappy when he learns Dorian’s decision to marry Sybil Vane: “The painter was silent and preoccupied. There was a gloom over him. He could not bear this marriage”(70). On the other hand, Dorian feels sorry for Basil after his confession of his secret and understands the meaning of “the painter’s absurd fits of jealousy” and “his wilde devotion”. He thinks that there seems something “tragic in a friendship so coloured by romance” (95) which is an implication of Basil Hallward’s romantic infatuation with Dorian. Basil Hallward also tells about his first meeting with Dorian to Lord Henry at the beginning of the novel, which clearly depicts his fascination with Dorian’s personality even though he tells that it was because of Dorian’s powerful personality. However, the scene seems highly romantic like the first meeting of the two lovers:

When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with some one whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself. I did not want any external influence in my life [...] You know yourself, Harry, how independent I am by nature. I have always been my own master; had at least always been so, till I met Dorian Gray [...] Something seemed to tell me that I was on the verge of a terrible crisis in my life. I had a strange feeling that Fate had in store for exquisite joys and exquisite sorrows. I grew afraid, and turned to quit the room. (21)

In the novel, Basil tells Lord Henry several times how deeply Dorian has influenced him, almost inspiring him like a muse to create his art works which, in fact, reveal the passion of his romantic infatuation with him. However, Basil also reveals his admiration for Greek art as well. He hates realism in art because to him only Greek art never separated body and soul:

Unconsciously he defines for me the lines of a fresh school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek. The harmony of soul and body-how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an ideality that is void. Harry! if you only knew what Dorian Gray is to me! You remember that land-scape of mine, for which Agnew offered me such a huge price, but which I would not part with? It was one of the best things I have done. And why is it so? Because, while I was painting it, Dorian Gray sat beside me. Some subtle influence passed from him to me, and for the first time in my life I saw in the plain woodland the wonder I had always looked for, and always missed. (24)

Robert Miller writes that what Basil Hallward “delicately calls ‘a curious artistic idolatry’ – pretty clearly a euphemism for what is in effect, his passionate infatuation with a younger man” (31). For Miller, homosexuality is one of the daring aspects of the book which is “hardly a new discovery in 1891, but nonetheless a relatively unexplored subject for English literature” (35). The name Dorian Gray is also an implication of homosexuality. “Dorians, Ionians, and Aeolians – it is generally thought that Greek homosexuality originated in the military of the Dorian states... and spread through Dorian influence”, particularly through the “Sacred Band” of Thebes which was “composed only of pairs of homosexual lovers” (Belford 171). And in ancient Greek civilization homosexual male love was both tolerated and respected. In fact, after studying classics at Trinity College, Wilde became primarily occupied with ancient Greek civilization and its supreme form of beauty, particularly through male forms. Besides, Dorian’s last name Gray can be associated with the poet John Gray, who was Oscar Wilde’s friend, and according to Richard Ellmann, “Wilde and Gray were assumed to be lovers and there seems no reason to doubt it” (291). In this context, we may assume that Oscar Wilde wrote *Dorian Gray* to come to terms with his own homosexuality. Wilde himself also admits his own relationship with the novel in one of his letters: “It contains much of me in it. 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” (Miller 33). Wilde clearly associates himself with Basil Hallward, the artist whose only aim is to create the beautiful as pure beauty, and Dorian Gray, despite his wrongs, “with his keen desire to expand and realize consciousness” (Willoughby 74) is like the author, but “in other ages, perhaps”. Obviously, Wilde imagines to live in

future ages when he will live freely and create his works freely without any restrictions of conventional morality. It will be a society in which the harmony between the individual and environment is achieved, because for Wilde, homosexuality was inherent, rather than chosen and therefore it was not a matter of immorality. On the contrary, his transgressive desire which generates his transgressive aesthetic are the main features of his individualism and his art. As he writes in his essay "The Soul of Man", "Art is the most intense mode of Individualism that the world has known. I am inclined to say that it is the only real mode of Individualism that the world has known" (1090). Therefore, his individualism which is a feature of his art, is also a desire for a radical personal freedom in a radically free society. In this context, it is natural that Wilde prefers Romanticism to Realism in art because Realism depicts life as it is with all its ugliness whereas Romanticism, which is independent from any kind of restriction, depicts what is beautiful. He states in his "The Decay of Lying" that Realism, as a method is "a complete failure" (991) because "Life goes faster than Realism, but Romanticism is always in front of Life" (992). As he puts it in a conversation as well, "there are two worlds-one exists and is never talked about; it is called the real world because there is no need to talk about it in order to see it. The other is the world of Art; one must talk about that, because otherwise it would not exist" (qtd. in Redman 56).

In sum, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a novel in which Wilde has put too much of himself. The novel questions the relation between art, life and morality through Wilde's aestheticism which advocates beauty as the only goal of art. Since the end of art is beauty, it should not imitate life with fidelity which will otherwise depict nothing else but Victorian materialism and hypocrisy as reflected through Dorian's sinful life that ruins the innocent beauty of his picture, in other words, the symbol of art as pure beauty. In the novel, the implications of the direct relationship between Wilde's homosexuality and his concept of art as acts of beauty is reflected through Basil Hallward's romantic infatuation with Dorian and the work of art he creates as the embodiment of beauty, which is pure art. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* clearly depicts the fact that Wilde is a man of morals. However, what he criticizes and rejects is the rigidity and hypocrisy of conventional Victorian morality which he considers very oppressive, and even cruel not only for the artist but for everybody. Therefore, for Wilde, art is always superior to life because it creates beauty which trains children and heals the human soul. Hence, it is the only means to teach men to live morally for Wilde.

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