

**NIETZSCHE' S PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPT OF  
DIONYSUS AND APOLLO  
IN THE ART OF OSCAR WILDE**

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## Table of Content

<b>TITLE PAGE</b>	1
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	
INTRODUCTION	
<b>I. Art and Fin de Globe</b> -----	5
<b>II. The Path Ahead: Inquiries and Hypotheses</b> -----	21
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	
<b>I. Nihilism and Nietzsche's Life-Affirming through Art</b> -----	27
<b>II. Dionysus and Apollo</b> -----	41
<b>III. Wilde, a Disciple of Nietzsche</b> -----	53
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	
<b>I. Integration of Art and Morality in <i>The Happy Prince</i> and         the Domination of Apollo</b> -----	71
<b>II. Superiority of Art to Nature in <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>         and the Domination of Dionysus</b> -----	91
<b>III. Dionysian Dreamers versus Apollonian Realists in <i>Salome</i></b> --	115
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	
<b>I. The Art of Painting by Words</b> -----	141
<b>II. Poems of Freedom and Passion</b> -----	151

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**I.** Wilde's Religion: a Philosophical and Aesthetic Archetype - - - - 170

**II.** Mythological Aesthetics and the Triumph of  
    Apollo in the "*Sphinx*" - - - - - 183

**III.** Imitation and Dionysian Religion in *The Prose Poems* - - - - - 211

**CONCLUSION** 227

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** 234

**WE HAVE ART IN ORDER NOT TO PERISH OF THE TRUTH**

Friedrich Nietzsche

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **I- Art and Fin de Globe**

*'Fin de Siècle' murmured Lord Henry*

*'Fin de Globe' answered his hostess*

*'I wish it were fin du globe' said Dorian with a sigh .Life is a great disappointment.'*

*The Picture of Dorian Grey (1891)*

The decadence age has been given myriad epithets to describe it. Most of them are negative and pejorative. The word "decadence" itself refers to a state of fall or collapse .The age was called Fin de Siècle, fin du globe, age of transition, age of immorality, age of aestheticism, age of failure. The word Decadence stems from the Medieval Latin word DECADENS which means to fall away. However, all of these refer to the 1890s or the turn of the century. With England, to confine myself to English literature, at the height of its power, and industrialisation sweeping the nation and people still staggering under the shocks of new scientific beliefs while Darwinism was still shaking people's faith and belief in their religion, the literature of the period came as a reflection of new emergent ideals challenging the time-honoured traditions. The poet and scholar A. E Housman (1859-1936) objected to being included in an Anthology of the Nineties replying that it is as inappropriate as including "Lot in a book of Sodomites". The Nineties was in fact short for the decadence period. A period of perversity and degeneration in life and art as general consensus of critics

seems to affirm. Literature of the time was described as being morbid, unwholesome and perverse.

It might be a coincidence but certainly of appropriate significance that the majority of those writers who are accused of being decadent tried to seize and enjoy the moment before their early death. Most of them died young. Oscar Wilde died at 44, Ernest Dowson at 33, Lionel Johnson at 35, and Aubrey Beardsley at 26. So they, in a sense, were themselves obsessed with the idea of the end of existence and the necessity to enjoy a sensual life to the full. Immortality for them seems to have been a far-fetched dream that they all struggled to desperately aspire to. Several factors went into the making of the age where the philosophy of beauty and pleasure gripped the nation as Duggan explains:

The explosion of aesthetic philosophy in *fin-de-siècle* English society, as exemplified by Oscar Wilde, was not confined to merely art, however. Rather, the proponents of this philosophy extended it to life itself. Here, aestheticism advocated whatever behaviour was likely to maximize the beauty and happiness in one's life, in the tradition of hedonism. To the aesthete, the ideal life mimics art; it is beautiful, but quite useless beyond its beauty, concerned only with the individual living it. Influences on others, if existent, are trivial at best (Duggan, 2009, p.61).

Though some critics do not even recognise a period named Decadence, The social, economic, religious, scientific as well as pathological changes of the time were all paving the way for a new age in which the importance of time, newness and change are paramount. The Victorians had already shown that time is of great importance with the invention of the clock and the great advantage coupled with organising work hours.

On the economic level, this period was hard hit by what was called the Great Depression or the long Depression as some had called it. It began in 1873 and ran till the

middle of the 1880s with a noticeable impact on the later decade. This depression started in the United States (though some attribute it to the failure of banks in Austria and Hungary) after the civil war and Britain was the worst hit country in Europe. As a direct consequence, Britain lost some of its industrial lead to other super powers and this economic decline continued well until 1896. The great Panic of 1873 and the financial crisis in the United States prompted by a decline in bank reserves that ensued impacted Europe and Britain in particular. Though the crisis is also attributable to some other factors within Europe like the German expansion, The Austro-Hungarian bank failures and some other factors at any rate, it resulted in bankruptcies, escalating unemployment, a halt in public works, and a major trade slump in Britain. The first marks of decline in Britain, however, are the rivalry it started to get from Germany and America. Germany imported some of the technology exported from Britain and excelled in improving on the new technology. The economic impact did not pass unnoticed as far as culture is concerned. Concepts like high and low culture began to appear at the turn of the 19th century.

The economic decline of Britain, however, triggered off from another perspective a cultural debate over Britain as a colonising power. The British colonial expansion contributed to the enrichment of new emergent ideologies through interaction with the new and novel ideas. The Boer war 1899-1902 ushered in a new phase of weakness and decline in the British Empire. Towards the end of the century the word change was a key word that sums up the late Victorian age. The change which started on the economic level ended up covering all fields. The cultural life of Britain was beset by the term 'new' in all fields like psychology, sexology (Sexology developed as a science and same sex relations were spoken of for the first time) and eugenics. These new dramatic changes sum up the decadence period which is often called a reaction against Victorian optimism. Max Nordau spoke of "the encroaching dusk of nations, in which all suns and all stars are gradually waning and mankind with all its

institutions and creations is persisting in the middle of a dying world” (Ledger and Lockhurst, 2000, p. 13).

The economic and ensuing social problems of the country like poverty and the massive London poor came to the front as a problem. Man’s intervention to improve on Darwinism was felt to be necessary and inevitable. Eugenics (the belief in the possibility of improving the qualities of human species) and rational control of man over mass population was inevitable as well. The new science was gradually replacing the old and traditional modes of thinking. Science begot photography-like naturalism which in turn brought to focus man’s wretched conditions and hence began the discourse of degeneration.

As the imperial expansion during the period backfired, so anxiety over the consequences of this expansion fuelled a new discourse of decay, decline and degeneration. Darwinism meant in a sense that evolution under certain conditions may well entail devolution if these conditions are no longer at work. If the mission of the colonising powers was to civilise the savages in the underdeveloped countries, so these savages are liable to become more or less savage according as certain conditions are met with the implication that we may decline just as we may evolve and develop. The expansion of the British Empire and its claim of leading a civilising mission in the colonised countries whose aim was to take colonised countries out of savagery into civilisation was a commonplace idea.

Historically speaking, the term degenerescence was not new towards the end of the century. The term is attributed to the French physician Benedict Morel (1809-1873) in 1857. This was actually accompanied by certain cultural circumstances. Victorian progress was met with some pessimism and fear of the end of their empire. The naturalist Edwin Lankester equated the imminent fall of the Western civilisation with the fall of the Greek empire. Edwin Lankester says:

As we may cite some of the Indians of Central America, the modern Egyptians, and even the heirs of the great oriental monarchies of pre-Christian times, while the hypothesis of universal degeneration has a very large share in the explanation of the condition of the most barbarous races such as the Fuegians, the Bushmen and even the Australians. They exhibit evidence of being descended from ancestors more cultivated than themselves” (Ledger and Luckhurst, 2000, p. 4).

We do not seem to be have progressed in intellect with comparison to our ancient forefathers of the Greek and Roman empires. This lack of progress in intellect entails the indispensability of starting from scratch in case this modern civilisation collapsed. We are likely, Lankester affirms, “to degenerate into a contented life of material enjoyment as accompanied by ignorance and superstition” (Ledger and Luckhurst, 2000, p. 5).

On a biological level, the development of a living creature was defined on the basis of having two aspects. One is elaboration of structure which means the progress and organic development of a living creature with a view to attaining perfection, on the one hand and regression or less adaptability to new living conditions (Degeneration) on the other. When safety and subsistence is easily achieved by a living creature we may speak of the fact that this living creature is on its way to degeneration. An active man may well become less active when he secures a fortune that guarantees him better living conditions. Degenerative certain insects may even lose some of its legs if they are no longer needed and used. As certain conditions favour progressive evolution so the same conditions, if eliminated, may lead to degenerative evolution. Such thoughts gripped the nation and not without implications.

There are numerous examples that may prove that lower cultures and civilisation descended from higher forms of civilisation. The modern Egyptians, the Australians and some Indians of Central America are good examples. The white man in Europe might as well

degenerate if we assume that the human intellect has not developed since the ancient Greeks. Modern day wrong-doing and falsehood is a reason why our civilisation might well degenerate if certain conditions become available. We as humans are getting more and more addicted to pleasure and all our pleasure seeking senses are being sharpened at the expense of some other senses which may well be beset by atrophy. The late nineteenth century man was bombarded with ideas that confirm plausibility of negative evolution.

But the cultural discourse of an imminent decline was not, however, confined to economy or biology; it went so far as to cover the linguistic field. It all started with a linguistic overhaul of the language philology. The new rules of the neo-grammarians treated language as an autonomous entity “language as a system blindly obeying impersonal phonological rules in isolation from any world of human values and experience” (Dowling, 2016, p. 7).

This new philology brought about a cultural crisis. Linguistics of the time had then declared the language of the great masters as dead in comparison with the living speech. It is in German philology, however, that we first find a mention of decadence. Linda Dowling claims that since language is primarily spoken, so the Victorian ideal of literary language being the national pride of a nation was shaken by the new linguistic theories. This was principally the origin of British decadence. The literary language was seen as a petrified example in comparison with the dynamic spoken language. Accordingly, Walter Pater, for instance, who used a highly literary language, ushered in the decadence or the aesthetic discourse as he was supposed to have used a language that is beyond the reach of common people. Walter Pater is a major figure in Victorian England. He was an essayist, fiction writer and an art theorist who proposed a new theory of living a new mode of life in which beauty and strangeness are its important components. In 1873, he published his book *Studies in The History of the Renaissance*, a book which reflects on Italian art but he used as his springboard

to expound a theory of a new life style and ways of thinking. Pater deviated from earlier thinkers Like Ruskin who emphasized moral values found in Renaissance art forms. With his new way of thinking he shocked the Victorian conventions and showed himself a rebel against traditions and reflected on the art of the renaissance art to speak of thoughts that were regarded bizarre, deviant and immoral but for him were a right to freedom that should be guaranteed to every individual.

In Victorian England in the middle of the century, Italy became a source of fascination for English tourists and the cultivated classes and Walter Pater was no exception who enjoyed, absorbed and reflected upon the great treasures of the ancient Italian cities and their history. Accordingly The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries art of the renaissance exerted a noticeable influence on the Victorians "the Italian Renaissance is itself a nineteenth-century invention, a fantasy of origins for the "individualistic-liberal" embracing a "sensualistic" and nature-based vision more true to nineteenth-century psychology than to any actual Renaissance history"( Fraser, 1992, p. 63).A promotion and merger of the renaissance culture and art as a form of an superior ideal into the English culture was adopted by many authors and fused into the economic and cultural life of the time. Rachel Teukolsky comments:

Beyond these more normative uses of the Renaissance, however, the Italian past also offered a convenient screen by which Victorian authors could explore at a remove disquieting or taboo themes—as in Robert Browning’s poetic monologues, featuring Italian speakers who were debauched, insane, or even murderous. Italian subjects might conform to the type of the Catholic, the Southern, the warm-blooded, and the emotional, as opposed to the ostensibly cold-blooded, logical, and morally correct peoples of the North. This stereotyping allowed Victorians to address indirectly some of the more irrational or carnal strains implicit in their own culture. (Teukolsky, 2017)

Pater studied artists like Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo many other artists with reflections on their stories and making comments here and there on their behavior. He presented their ideas in a novel way that he found logical but shook Victorian's sensibilities. He feigned an agreement with Mathew Arnold but in fact disagreed with him in that he proposed a new type of aesthetic criticism in which the personal impressions of the critic on an object in question are decisive. He confirms that:

To see the object as in itself it really is," has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly. . . . What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to me? (Pater, 2015, p.32)

Pater advocating subjective assessment rather than objective ushered in the birth of the new individualistic and aesthetic style in living and criticism. This impressionistic and individualistic view of the truth counts more importantly than the objective universal truth. It is a celebration of individualism and many truths.

On A psychological level Max Nordau (1849-1923) 's book Degeneration which was brought to English readership sharply criticized most of contemporary writing production from Ibsen, Ruskin, and Nietzsche to Baudelaire and they were all regarded as showing symptoms of morbid pathology. It denoted an inevitable course of decline which he identified as an illness. Everybody, he thought, was striving to achieve some singularity to attract attention. He criticised people writing mystic and symbolic works which he described as being decadent. Though the book itself was described as being pathological, it coincided with another book which dealt with the prevalent pessimism of the time by H.G Wells entitled the Time Machine. Both of these books ushered in the new degeneration discourse of the mid-

nineteenth century. It showed how popular culture of the time was preoccupied by the new scientific progress and technology of the time and the implications of new Darwinist and evolutionary ideas. The French physician B. A. Morel (1809-1873) had an influential impact on the psychological thought of the time through his book *Moral Degeneracy of the Human Race*. He affirmed that not only hereditary qualities can be transmitted from one generation to another but also acquired traits can also be transmitted. This implication means that the human race can easily adapt to environment conditions. This went in the other direction of Darwin's natural or chance selection. So the decline of the individual was possible. Nordau himself recounted some of these confirmations to support his theory. The zoologist Edwin Ray Lankester's book *Degeneration: a Chapter in Darwinism* appeared in 1880 in which the author argues that certain degenerate forms of species descent from more complex organisms which in turn imply that less complex conditions by adaptability lead to less complex organisms. Wells' *Time Machine*, however, actually drew on this biological theory. Lankester's theory may have informed *The Time Machine*. The French poet Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) says:

It was within a decaying civilisation that a few individuals would have the wealth and privilege to create and experience this most intense of pleasures.....one of the cornerstone paradoxes of decadence was that the greatest beauty was seen to arise at the cusp of a society's destruction. (Gail Marshall, 2007, p. 33)

As Decadence to a certain extent was born to entertain the middle class and the bourgeoisie that was looking for new sensations, shocks, surprises as they were fed up with productive experimentation of the time, aestheticism was a key word in the late nineteenth century and art and morality had to be disassociated. The decadents were trying to "Épater la bourgeoisie" (shock the middle class)

On the aesthetic level, The French poet and literary critic Pierre Jules Gautier (1811-1872), being an artist in the first place, attacked those who focus on the moral aspects of art work stating that art is responsible to art only and nothing else and hence his motto “Art for Art’s Sake” (attributable by some to Victor Cousin) which became later the motto of the decadence movement. The French symbolist movement with its important writers such as Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) and Paul Verlaine ( 1844-1896) as well Jean Moréas ( 1856-1910) influenced many English poets including the decadent poets. Carolyn Burdett summarizes some of the major features of the aesthetic age by highlighting Swinburne's agreement with the French symbolists:

Swinburne agreed with them that poetry had nothing to do with didacticism (the teaching of moral lessons). He also insisted that beautiful poetic form and what he deemed ‘perfect workmanship’ made any subject admirable. Like Baudelaire, he put this argument into practice by combining lyrical language and complex metrical rhythms with subject matter commonly seen as antithetic to aesthetically pleasing poetry. Themes of perverse sexuality or cruelty and violence shockingly dismantled what many Victorians felt were necessary or even natural lines drawn between aesthetic beauty and repellent or ‘ugly’ morality. Mainstream Victorian culture saw art and literature as a means of self-improvement or a spur to good works. (Burdett, 2014)

Algernon Swinburne to whom some critics attribute the birth of decadence (1837-1909) commenting on Baudelaire *Fleur du Mal* said that his poetry is “having sounds that suggest colours and perfumes .....the claim that poetry has scented and coloured sounds is itself a decadent move” ( Marshall.2007, p 34). Similarly Baudelaire (1821-1867) was much taken to Synaesthesia, a state in which one object can connect in the mind’s eye with another; the smell of a rose can bring to mind the sound of a certain type of music. This could well be the origin of the stream of consciousness adopted later by distinguished novelists of the 20th

century. Baudelaire affirms that “by making use of these sensory correspondences as well as those between this reality and a transcendent one, poets could capture the meaning of their souls” (Marshall.2007, p. 34)

Baudelaire paved the way for symbolism through his use of Synaesthesia Arthur Symons (1865-1945) who is considered by many to be another representative decadent poet says that “the Symbolists would flash upon you the soul of that which can be apprehended only by the soul, the finer sense of things unseen, the deeper meaning of things evident.” (Marshall, 2007, p 34). The aesthetic emphasis of the age lay however on the perfection of beauty rather than on moralising. Swinburne in his *Poems and Ballads* (1866) focused his attention on mere scenes of conveying sexual experience of lovers. The sensual experience was thought to be the ultimate aim, and hence the accusation of decadence which finally led to his being attacked severely by critics. The pre-Raphaelite movement, however, basing their views on John Ruskin, came to emphasize that good art reflected the good morality of the artist. Ruskin attacked industrialisation which he claims, dehumanised humanity. “Schopenhauer's aesthetics represented shared concerns with the symbolist programme; they both tended to consider Art as a contemplative refuge from the world of strife and will. As a result of this desire for an artistic refuge, the symbolists used characteristic themes of mysticism and otherworldliness, a keen sense of mortality” (Albert Samain, QTE in Wiki, Symbolism). William Morris (1834-1896) on the other hand who defended the usefulness of art claimed too that “nothing can be a work of art which is not useful” (Marshall, 2007, p. 36)

Our major concern Walter Pater ( 1839-1894) whose major favourites were Gautier, Baudelaire and Swinburne emphasised the notion of getting maximum pleasure from the moment “The Conclusion” of his book *The Renaissance* seems to broaden Pater’s notion of viewership from the realm of art criticism into everyday life. The most profound and passionate occasions in life, Pater argues, are the instances when, like viewing artwork, we

are bombarded with emotion and sensory overload in a mere moment. He says in his book the Renaissance:

Our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life ,ecstasy and sorrow of love ,the various forms of enthusiastic activity ,disinterested or otherwise ,which comes naturally to many of us ,only be sure it is passion –that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened ,multiplied consciousness.Of such wisdom ,the poetic passion ,the desire of beauty ,the love of art for its own sake , has most.(Pater, The Renaissance, p. 45)

Aesthetics, then, becomes an opportunity for us to have a “quickened sense of life.” Pater seems to conclude that, when viewing art, time becomes a moment in which an “object,” a form of art, a human life, an entire historical period like the Renaissance, can be encompassed by the act of perceiving its effects — yielding a profound, “quickened, multiplied consciousness.”

Pater lists a number of questions a critic should ask himself of a work — the effect it produces in “me,” the pleasure it gives “me,” the meaning it has to “me” — in order to establish an emphasis on the individual. While all of these questions include the word “me,” so do they repeat “it” — maintaining a connection between art and the viewer. Pater’s focus on “the object” itself suggests that artwork expresses certain sentiments that connect the work with the viewer, and the viewer with the creator. The reactions evoked by viewing art, therefore, represent the true meaning of the work’s abstract, indefinable “beauty.” Pater was more in this sense like Schopenhauer who claimed that aesthetic contemplation is the only thing that can alleviate man’s suffering even if it does so temporarily. The decadent poets who applied ,imitated and wrote under the influence of Walter Pater ( who himself seems to

have been inspired to a certain extent by Schopenhauer's philosophy) brought upon themselves the discredit of critics. They were all deemed as being perverse in style, taste and subject matter. Mainstream criticism of the period as well as later critics has a consensus that poets and novelists of the period who fall under this category fall away from the norm.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) had a century earlier expounded the theory that art is disinterested without regard to utility. The creation of a work of art is supposed to stand in its own right as a beautiful object independent of any morality or purpose. As such the decadent poets and novelists were applying a theory that dates back to Immanuel Kant that influenced Schopenhauer and then John Ruskin whose most significant admirer was Walter Pater summing up all preceding theories in his book *The Renaissance* and particularly *the conclusion*. It is to Kant that the credit goes for linking aesthetics, thinking and acting to turn life into art according. Simpson comments:

It is therefore with the tradition traced here, culminating in Kant and Hegel, that life as art may begin to be seen as a coherent philosophical conception. Considered historically, life as art can be said to merge Kant's formal linkage of thinking, the aesthetic, and acting, with the Hegelian recognition that the work of art and the artist are to be mediated by rationality. If one is to use aesthetic insights as the means by which one frames the terms for living, then the work of Kant and Hegel makes clear that such reflection must in principle be constrained by an account of how one thinks and acts. It must also clarify the nature of the work of art. Life as art thus hangs on the ability to construct meaningful and coherent syntheses of epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. (Simpson, 2009, p. 9-10)

Wordsworth, Hazlitt, Shelley and others considered the perfection of beauty to be itself a virtue and hence a purely moral act. This brings us to Aristotle's theory of happiness who

states that man's function is to behave in a virtuous manner; a thing that virtually leads to man's happiness. If the ultimate good is man's happiness, beauty then by being able to produce in man a sense of happiness is in itself moral. Ruskin reaffirmed all of these Aristotelian principles. The decadent writers were pursuing this ultimate good. The discredit attached by many critics to decadent writers was then based on a false and distorted understanding of the aesthetics theory of the time.

Paul Bourget summed up some of the major characteristics of decadent artistic work which include "such visual art often addresses historical or mythological subjects with decadent pieces also often including images of bizarre creatures, physical distortions, pain, opulence, and explicit and unconventional sexuality. Artifice, anti-or hyper-realism, excessive detail and uncommon uses of colour are also characteristics of both" (Marshall,2007, p. 42) Bourget stresses that "the structure, style and even themes of decadent works encourage a disregard for cohesion and a sense of dissipation.The overall effect is one of discomfort combined with titillation." (Marshall, 2007, p. 43)

It is this titillation that mainly characterises and sums up Walter Pater's book *The Renaissance*. Walter Pater was not only a prominent literary critic and fiction writer but also the author of the decadence manifesto *The Renaissance* that dealt with a variety of themes related to the interests of the decadent poets and novelists. Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) who is often cited as the representative of the period called the book "the Golden Book" as it contains a kind of manifesto very much akin to his intrinsic beliefs, of the decadent movement. His famous statement, in which he expressed his "desire to celebrate the flux and transitory nature of life by stilling the moment and preserving it" Time, Pater confirms, should be exploited to the full. In order to immortalize the moment we need to freeze it. Success in life is the fruit of maximising the moment. The ecstasy that we need to maintain this is achieved

through living every moment with intensity. Nietzsche speaks about those moments in his book *Human All Too Human*:

Life consists of rare, isolated moments of the greatest significance, and of innumerable many intervals, during which at best the silhouettes of those moments hover about us. Love, springtime, every beautiful melody, mountains, the moon, and the sea—all these speak completely to the heart but once, if in fact they ever do get a chance to speak completely. For many men do not have these moments at all, and are themselves intervals and intermissions in the symphony of real life. (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 189)

This sudden interest in time and rapid temporal change was a major preoccupation of the Victorian people and the search for perfect moments in life and the desire to arrest the flow of time turned out to be an obsession by some decadent poets in their search of any form of immortality. They were searching an escape from ceaseless change. This probably justifies the hectic interest in art and painting in particular because it was the one way of immortalising a moment. Paradoxically the poets sought to immortalise a moment while at the same time celebrating the shortness of life.

Aestheticism offered a vista to mortality. Sensuality and pleasure for that matter was taken to be superior to any other thing. Beautiful experience is to be valued without limits and wherever it may be found and regardless of morality or ethical constraints. The recognition of the threat of mortality is mixed with desire to immortalize it; a paradox that permeates some of the prominent fin de siècle poets.

Similarly I intend to argue that Oscar Wilde who was accused of immorality, and perversity and the advocate of the doctrine “ Art for Arts ‘sake “ was struggling under the influence of Pater’s book *The Renaissance*. He was consciously or unconsciously applying

and believing in the same principles in his attempts to fix the moment beyond the realm of the transient and getting “as much pulsations as possible into the given moment” without falling into excess His thought had a philosophical basis that goes back to Nietzsche, Kant and even Schopenhauer. He was, therefore, misunderstood and judged according to traditional Victorian morality. Arthur Symonds’ statement that “art should be judged as moral insofar as it is good art” seems to have gone unheeded by many critics. I expect to defend Oscar Wilde on moral as well as aesthetic grounds and show that he was an important precursor to modernism and postmodernism as well and that he was morally, politically, socially as well philosophically engaged in the affairs of his society. His art depends on the philosophical tension between Dionysus and Apollo that Nietzsche discussed in his philosophical work. His affinity with our popular culture is a merit worthy of our attention. The hypothesis is a rehabilitation of the poet, a defense of his ethics and religion and a better understanding of his philosophy based ideas and his philosophical aesthetics as well.

## **The Path Ahead: Inquiries and Hypotheses**

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) is regarded a major figure in the decadence period. He is a novelist, dramatist, essayist and poet. He is best known for his major novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and his play *The Importance of being Earnest* and less known as a poet. He is known as a popular dandy of the nineteenth century and a pure aesthete whom the philistine disturbs the air he breathes. A hedonist according to some and a non-conformist rebel to others, he was stigmatized by his known scandal that brought about his downfall. As an outstanding Oxford graduate who was versed in German, French and Greek literature, he is better known to many as an Antichrist and a decadent who indulged in and propagated the doctrine of sensual pleasures as the ultimate goal in life. He was a controversial and enigmatic figure, easy to misunderstand and easy to stigmatize to the incautious reader. To hostile criticism is attributed the fact that the term Decadence was used to designate Wilde and a group of other writers who were associated with the group. This study looks at Oscar Wilde from another perspective. The perverse dandy who supposedly writes pastiche poetry and indulges in sensuality inspired by his teacher Walter Pater is discussed from another philosophical perspective where art is used to affirm life.. His doctrine "Art for Art's sake" which dissociates morality from art is not applied in his writing practice and shows him a moralist who believed that aesthetics is a transcendent philosophy that a tradition-bound Victorian society failed to understand. It also shows a religious Wilde who believed in a rational faith in the manner of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Like Friedrich Nietzsche, he was exploring the possibility of thinking of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon where the only way to strive against nihilism is through aesthetics.

Schopenhauer faced pessimism by life negating asceticism while Nietzsche sought to affirm life through aestheticism. Wilde too sought to affirm life through aestheticism. He tried to apply his aesthetic theory to his hostile environment and was in constant search of reconciliation between the Dionysian and Apollonian in a society that relegated imagination to a decorative hallucination. These terms used by Nietzsche in his *Birth of Tragedy* were central principles in Greek culture. Apollonian represents among others, the mind, reason, rationality form and structure. It is also another term for Schopenhauer's *principle of individuation*. Dionysus, on the other hand represents the heart, passion, emotions, madness and ecstasy, which may stand for Schopenhauer's *Will*. In the study, I show that Wilde, contrary to much hostile criticism, which relegates his work to a decadent amoral aestheticism, is in fact morally, socially, politically and philosophically engaged in his society. He also sought to affirm life through art, He struggled to keep the philosophical balance and fusion between the Dionysian and Apollonian, the concept that Nietzsche used in his 1872 book *The Birth of Tragedy*. I divide the study into five chapters and a conclusion.

The first chapter is a general review of the fin de siècle (End of the Century) where Wilde was a product of an evolving age. It is divided into two sections; the first section is introductory showing the way to the beginning of the age of symbolism and aestheticism with some emphasis on Walter Pater's Book the *Renaissance*. Wilde is a product of a milieu that precipitated a jump into modernism with new aesthetic philosophy that predicted modernism. An Emphasis is laid on the concept of time in the Victorian age in general and the social, economic changes impacting the end of the century. The second section explores Nietzsche's philosophical concept of Dionysus and Apollo used in his book *The Birth of Tragedy*. It also answers the question whether it is philosophically valid to dissociate art from morality. It is concerned with the views of the major philosophers of the time regarding beauty, art, and morality. Though such an issue cannot be conclusively settled but it there seem to be a clear

consensus among major philosophers who may have influenced Wilde's view of life that it is impossible to dissociate art from morality. Therefore judging Oscar Wilde's works as being aesthetic and amoral is a critical fallacy as the basis of the argument is itself philosophically untenable. An emphasis is laid on Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.

Chapter **Two** is divided into two sections. It deals with Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of living life as an artist. He discussed art in his book *The Birth of Tragedy* where he stressed the importance of a balance between the sensual part of the human, which he named the Dionysian, and the reasoning part which he called the Apollonian borrowing the terms from Greek tragedy. Art, he emphasized, is a kind of indispensable lie to improve life. Nietzsche's statement that existence can only be eternally justified as an aesthetic phenomenon is also highlighted to show that the struggle that Wilde had lived between life as an aesthetic phenomenon and whether such a life is possible on the one hand and a life of faith on the other. Wilde who lived his life in fiction as well as in reality as an artist did follow in the footsteps of Nietzsche and his aim was to criticize this imbalance in Victorian way of life, which he deemed lacking in imagination and beauty. His essay *The Decay of Lying* in which he attacked contemporary authors of the time for lacking in Dionysian spirit is thoroughly discussed. He is shown as an anti-mimesis rebel who judged art superior to nature. The second section traces the striking similarities between Oscar Wilde's concept of Christ as an archetypal moral figure and Immanuel Kant's idea of the moral archetype where he singled Christ among many to represent his moral imperative. The similarity shows Wilde as a believer in Christ on a rational basis.

Chapter **Three** is also divided into two sections. I proceed in the first section to a textual analysis of Wilde's short story *The Happy Prince* as a representative of his short fiction. In this story, Wilde discusses his major themes, art and morality and his belief of the dominance of the Apollonian spirit in the impoverished town of the happy prince. In the *The*

*Happy Prince*, he proved to be more a moralist than an aesthete. He believed that the Apollonian spirit and lack of art that controlled the city is the cause of the misery of the town. It shows that he did not in fact apply his doctrine Art for Art's Sake for which he is better known. It also shows that Wilde also believed in the inherently moralist nature of art and a balance between the two is essential to building society. He believed that art can transform society into a better one through better appreciation of art realizing thus Kant's theory of appreciating beauty as a mark of good souls. Art may also create the conditions conducive to a further development of a society. Drawing a grim picture of a town where art is not appreciated, he presents the theory that a modern welfare state cannot be constructed without art. He charts the way towards achieving such a project. He makes a statue transform a misery-stricken town into a happy one. He criticizes the crude Victorian society and their hostility to his art as well as their obsession with the new materialism and ugly industrialisation of the age. He indicts inequality, poor living conditions and misery. He concludes his story with the idea that religion does not disapprove of art making the story his proof that applying Nietzsche's concept is the solution. He proves that he is far from being morbid or perverse let alone amoral. In the second section, I examine his major novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In this novel, Wilde's creed of the superiority of art to nature is discussed. Living a life in which beauty is paramount where Dionysus entirely grips Gray's mind that represents Wilde's major practice in his fiction of his art philosophy. He does represent his theory the possibility of living a life in conformity with Nietzsche's justification of existence as an aesthetic phenomenon. I show that Wilde created another struggle in which he tested such a possibility, which finally ended in his downfall due to excessive indulgence in the aesthetic creed. I also discuss his major tragedy "*Salome*" which resumes his discussion of Nietzsche's concept. I propose to imaginatively divide the characters in the play

into Dionysian and Apollonian. Wilde shows with reference to his criticism the harrowing consequences that follow when art is dissociated from religion or vice versa.

In Chapter **Four**, I proceed to analyze his poetry. Wilde is considered by many as a minor poet. His poetry did get sufficient critical attention. I examine his major collection "*Poems*" published in 1881 and I divided the chapter into three different sections. Each deals with a facet of his vision. I selected those poems that most represent Wilde's vision away from images of morbidity and decadence, which are classically attributed to him. The first section deals with some poems in which symbols were interpreted as being only aesthetic emblems describing beauty for beauty's sake without purpose. I show that those symbols have specific meanings; they are either part of his explication of his philosophy of beauty or personal identification of his struggle in a hostile world. They also show that Wilde was more influenced by the American painter James Whistler and the French painter Oscar-Claude Monet more than decadent and grotesque Aubrey Beardsley. The second section is a return to Wilde's nostalgia to the bible and Christ. His seldom discussed prose poems are here examined where no contradiction between his religious and aesthetic views are apparent. He affirms that vision is entirely in line with the philosophy of the bible and with a philosophy of balance between the heart and the mind. His prose poems show that he was much concerned about interpreting his art philosophy in a religious frame. He wanted to give religious credence to his belief in imagination and art. In a poem like "*The Artist*" he comes close to espousing a hedonistic attitude to life where only pleasure counts. It was one of those moments in which he wanted to interpret life as only an aesthetic phenomenon. I highlight in these six poem his strong conviction that God's vision of existence is not different from that of the artist. In the last section of this chapter, I discuss his political views of weak and ugly Victorian England versus a glorious past and a longing for beauty.

The last chapter consists of an examination of his long poem "The Sphinx". In 174 lines I consider his final showdown between imagination, art and beauty as well as the world as an entirely aesthetic phenomenon on the one hand and life controlled by reason, religion, temperance and rationality on the other. He takes a great number of images from Egyptology to create a world of excess. It is a nihilistic world of beauty, power, heroism, courage, love, passion, sex. A life lived to the full to which he refuses to succumb and eventually decides to return to Jesus Christ. Wilde's real life complements his fictional work where he decided to convert to Catholicism on his deathbed having finally realized that the world cannot be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon only.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **I-Nihilism and Nietzsche's Life Affirming through Art**

Life-denying or nihilism in Nietzsche is related to a large extent to the Judo-Christian tradition of duality according to which life is thought of as spirit and matter. The tradition places spirit as the highest value while matter is relegated to a second place. One thinks of the Hereafter and the paradise as the real home for which one has to prepare himself while the soul takes precedence over the matter in this tradition. Desires of the flesh and sensual pleasures are frowned upon and seen as hindering one to reach the ultimate goal. This comes at the expense of ignoring the earthly existence. This concept is at times taken to extremes and one side overtakes the other, which eventually leads to a total denying of life at the expense of a promised utopian life. As a philosopher of instincts, Nietzsche extols and affirms this world rather than the other hidden one. In the course of his discussion, Nietzsche discusses numerous artists whom he believes their works of art are psychologically and physiologically related and intertwined with each other. They reflect to a varying degree Nietzsche's evaluation and artistic vision. Some of them, he believes, affirm life in their art while others negate it. He stresses that a work of art expresses the artist's vision and perspective and through their own vision Nietzsche is able to reflect on their attitude to life and even describe it as being either life-affirming or life-negating "the inference from the work to the maker, from the deed to the doer, from the ideal to the one who needs it, from the very manner of thinking to the commanding need behind it" (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 51). Not only does it reflect the artist's vision but also reflects the artist's psychology.

“thoughts are symptoms of certain bodies” ( Nietzsche, 2001, p. 2). An artist’s value judgements and sentiments are signs of a specific psychology as well physiology. If an artist lacks a healthy vision, his works will be unhealthy too and the opposite is, of course true.

Throughout his work he attaches a lot of importance to the value of affirmation. Indeed a great deal of his work focuses on this central idea “Nietzsche regards the affirmation of life as his defining philosophical achievement”( Reginster, 2006, p. 2). Affirming life does not mean turning a blind eye to suffering but presupposes the acceptance of life as it is. His vision of looking at the suffering and loss of mankind is seen as some kind of inevitable necessity that one has to accept in aesthetic contemplation, which in turn entails an aesthetic reconstruction “presenting what is necessary in things as beautiful does not occur without artistic reconstruction and interpretation” (Came, 2013, p. 216). But this reconstruction requires “a diluted and hence falsified image of reality” (Came, 2013, p. 215). Life’s facts need to be distorted in order to show another beautified side of reality. This acceptance entails accepting the world with its suffering as a whole without ignoring suffering and accepting to say YES to life despite its agony. He even sees this necessary suffering as beautiful. He asserts:

I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. *Looking away* shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: I wish only to be only a Yes-sayer” ( Nietzsche, 2001, p. 276)

Saying YES to life which emanates from his idolisation of power was an obsession for Nietzsche that recurs throughout his work to the point of dividing morality into two types,

one is the master morality and the other is the slave morality. Slave morality is that which makes one content and satisfied with what one has. The slave morality seduces one to stay meek and complacent. People with this type of morality will not be able to affirm life. His contention is that a type of a seductive religious morality that may induce the individual to accept the fate of the providence may lead to complacency and hope for a better metaphysical world. But life is good if we affirm it and affirming new values only comes when one is capable of aesthetic transfiguration “one of Nietzsche’s central contentions regarding the practical-existential import of art relates to his idea of aesthetic transfiguration, the capacity of art to alchemize the meaningless sufferings of mere natural existence into the aesthetically magnificent struggle that is human life” ( Came, 2014, p.9) He reiterates that life is good only if, upon imagining its return in every detail, we can affirm it as it is” ( Nietzsche, 2005, p. 341)

He condemns traditional morality and even his tirade against Christianity is, in fact, directed against that type of Christianity that preaches the bliss of another world at the expense of earthly existence. It corrodes the will to life. He demands that a superior individual should never admit of slave morality preaching especially if it divests one of his individuality and turns himself against himself and makes him a passive negating individual. Such individuals who carry such views are nihilistic as they obliterate individuality and negate life. He transposes these views about life-affirming and life-negating onto character types like authors, poets or philosophers. To make this point clear he makes an comparison between the French novelist Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) and Marie-Henri Beyle known by his name Stendhal ( 1783-1842). He attacks one and praises the other. He critiques Flaubert’s work for trying to be objective. For the sake of absolute objectivity, Flaubert sacrifices his individual style. He obliterates his personal style by seeking depict scenes and characters without expressing his own views about them. He worked laboriously over his works. He

would even take a lot of time to finish one page. “he famously avoided the inexact, the abstract, the vaguely inapt expression, and scrupulously eschewed the cliché.” (Gosse, 2011, p.4). He pursued the principle of looking for the right word. He would sometimes spend a whole week to write a single page. He was a perfectionist stylist who chiselled out his words carefully. Nietzsche regarded him nihilistic. He describes him wondering:

is it hatred of life or superabundance of life that has become creative here? In Goethe, for instance, superabundance has become creative, in Flaubert it is hatred: Flaubert, a new edition of Pascal, but as an artist, based on the instinctive judgment: Flaubert is always hateful, the man is nothing, the work is everything... He tortured himself when he wrote, just as Pascal tortured himself when he thought — they both felt unegoistic... ‘selflessness’—that principle of decadence, the will to the end in art as in morality. (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 66)

This search of objectivity is doomed as it is a selfless perspective, a way that eventually leads to the end of art and opens the door to slave morality. He lacks the Dionysian superabundance of life, an overflow that creates, fertilizes forces capable of turning desert into beautiful land. He is deemed hostile to life. His lack of perspective signals the annihilation of the individual. It is “the incarnate will to contradiction and anti-nature” of the ascetic ideal (Nietzsche, 2001, p.12). He even considered that Flaubert destroyed his intellect in his attempt to “turn off all the emotions without exception in a vain quest for objectivity, which exemplifies how realism in art can be symptomatic of an unhealthy body” ( Nietzsche, 2001, p. 12). In his quest of the right word, Flaubert acted against Nietzsche’s principle of the Dionysian intoxication which he regarded as indispensable and a physiological precondition for art: “ Without intoxication to intensify the excitability of the whole machine, there can be no art” (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 8). Flaubert failed

to live up to Nietzsche's image of the Dionysian artist as he does not fulfil the conditions of the necessary state of metamorphosis which he regards as:

the essential thing is the ease of metamorphosis, the inability not to react [...] It is impossible for a Dionysian to fail to understand any suggestion, he will not miss any affective signal, he has the most highly developed instinct for understanding and guessing, just as he possesses the art of communication to the highest degree. He enters into any skin, into any affect: he constantly transforms himself" (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 10)

By ignoring his sentiments, Flaubert cannot enter the Dionysian state which means he is unable to "enter into the perspectives of others; ideas, logic, and conscious, dispassionate observation for its own sake are not adequate substitutes.( Le Blevenec, 2017, p.12). Flaubert fails to create characters with a psychological depth. If the artist does not get into a state of intoxication, he will fail to be creative. In some of his novels, he creates characters and comments on their actions objectively without getting involved as an observer to reflect upon these characters., or showing his perspective with regards to their attitudes even at the expense of failing to make the work entertaining. In some of the protagonists of his novels, he does not even praise, admire or condemn his characters. He excessively gives a full and detailed description of the character without taking a position for or against it. Marie K. Leblevenec comments:

Nietzsche thinks that Flaubert's impersonal, objective artistic approach is just a sign that Flaubert is running away from his own sentiments due to weakness and bad conscience. He thinks that Flaubert's "studies 'from nature' seem to be to be a bad sign: they show subjugation, weakness, fatalism, — this practice of lying in the dirt

in front of *petits faits* is unworthy of an artist who is whole and complete. ( Le Blevenec, 2017, p. 14)

Nietzsche regards this as a sign of weakness, and a submission to fatalism and this lack of own interpretation and personal reflection, and denial of sensuality is therefore ascetic and consequently nihilistic:

that will to stand still before the factual, the *factum brutum*, that fatalism of ‘petits faits’ (ce petit fatalisme, as I call it) [...] that renunciation of any interpretation (of forcing, adjusting, shortening, omitting, filling-out, inventing, falsifying and everything else essential to interpretation)—on the whole, this expresses the asceticism of virtue just as well as any denial of sensuality (it is basically just a modus of this denial). (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 24)

Against this unhealthy example of an artist, Nietzsche opposes another example which he regards healthy and life-affirming. The French novelist Stendhal was praised by Nietzsche and held in high esteem. He describes the moment of meeting Stendhal as “one of the best accidents of my life,” and “completely invaluable, with his anticipatory psychologist’s eye and his grasp of the facts, a grasp that reminds you of that greatest facticity of all... and finally, not least of all as an honest atheist, a rare species in France” (Nietzsche, 1992 p.33). He exalts him as a master psychologist particularly his psychological depth in his 1830 novel *Le Rouge et Le Noir* and as a perfect aesthete in his 1822 novel *De l'Amour* “who has had perhaps the most thoughtful eyes and ears of all the Frenchmen of this century. (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 25). Stendhal defines beauty as “a promise of happiness” which does involve interest as well as the personal perspective of the beholder and observer. He does not deny sensuality. His concept about beauty is different from that of Schopenhauer and Kant. They both define beauty as that which pleases without interest. Stendhal involves

his own perspective, interest and sentiments. This is deemed by Nietzsche to be life-affirming aesthetic contemplation and subjectivity placed against Flaubert's ascetic objectivity. Stendhal's "sensuality is not suspended as soon as we enter the aesthetic condition" (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 8). Flaubert's excitement of the will is again placed against Stendhal's extinguishment of the will. Stendhal's healthier psychology is seen as being superior to philosophers or artists giving ascetic definitions of beauty. "he does not have rancour against sensuality" (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 7) and this makes him a great artist who can "enter into any skin, into any affect," (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 10).

This interesting comparison between the two novelists leads us to Nietzsche's concept of aesthetic-self-styling, artistic distance, and self-reflection to affirm life. This denotes a rejection of nihilism. Life is thought to be the highest value and whoever creates a new value, he then affirms life. A naturalized perspective instead of a religious lens is therefore necessary. Aesthetic self-styling does not mean that one should ignore the reality of existence. But in order to affirm life honesty is thought as necessary. Self-deception about the facts of life is not life-affirmation. It is essential to realize first that life is tragic and full of agony and distress and there is no way to escape that. It is imperative to assert and accept this fact as it is. Affirming comes through acceptance and resistance. Therefore he called truthfulness "our virtue, the last one left to us" (Nietzsche, BGE, p. 227). He even reprimands those who do not appreciate honesty and truthfulness :

I do not want to believe it although it is palpable: the great majority of people lacks an intellectual conscience ... I mean: the great majority of people does not consider it contemptible to believe this or that and live accordingly, without having first given themselves an account of the final and most certain reasons pro and con, and without even troubling themselves such reasons afterwards. (Nietzsche, GS, p. 324)

Art can hide the terrible truths of existence. It is a mask that makes life bearable. Neither truthfulness nor art as an illusion are ignored by Nietzsche. Accepting life as it is as a first step and then turning the self into an aesthetic phenomenon is the second.

Those who value honesty are described as being courageous and a mark of having a virtuous character. Such people enjoy resolution and spiritual power while those who entertain themselves by the illusion of biblical faith bestowed on them by a certain alleged blessing have only wishful thinking that eventually does not stand scrutiny as it is cognitively corrupt. But he never takes an extreme side as he regards illusion as also indispensable to live well. Illusion through art is indispensable. He regarded art from an early age as indispensable indeed irreplaceable. It is a source of transcendent lessons. It helps us create value. He even goes so as to affirm that art is a cure to alleviate the terrible truths of life:

every art, every philosophy can be considered a cure and aid in the service of growing or declining life: it always presupposes suffering and sufferers. But there are two types of sufferers: those who suffer from a superabundance of life — they want a Dionysian art as well as a tragic outlook and insight into life — then, those who suffer from an impoverishment of life and demand quiet, stillness, calm seas or else intoxication, paroxysm, stupor from art and philosophy. Revenge against life itself — the most voluptuous type of intoxication for people who are impoverished in this way!( Nietzsche, 2005, p.49)

He confirms that we should learn from artists “ how to make things beautiful, attractive, desirable, for ourselves when they are not” ( Nietzsche, 2001, p. 299). Art provides us with a certain model and gives us the vision to use the same technique beyond art and use them in life itself. “ With them this subtle power usually comes to an end when art ends and

life begins, but we want to be the poets of our life” (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 299). What makes life admirable and worth living is its aesthetic features. He comments:

The same impulse which calls art into being, as the complement and consummation of existence, seducing one to a continuation of life, was also the cause of the Olympian world which the Hellenic will’ made use of as a transfiguring mirror. Thus do the gods justify the life of man: they themselves live it—the only satisfactory theodicy!”( Nietzsche, 1967, p. 92)

An individual’s character and his life has a certain artistic plan with its own moments of sublimity. Art helps the individual form a second nature having gotten rid of all ugliness by reshaping life and character according to a satisfying aesthetic lines. This value of art is opposed to the value of truthfulness. Art saves us from the truth. The truth of existence is disturbing enough to demand a certain degree of respite from the inevitable will to truth. Art alleviates the trouble associated with our will to truth. He says in *The Gay Science*

If we had not welcomes the arts and invented this kind of cult of the untrue, then the realization of general untruth and mendaciousness that now comes to us through science- the realization that delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge and sensation-would be utterly unbearable Honesty would lead to nausea and suicide. But now there is a counterforce against our honesty that helps us avoid such consequences: art as the good will to appearance. (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 107)

Nietzsche believed that error and delusion are part of human sensation. His error theory is credited to the cognitive theories of Kant and Schopenhauer. The fact that cognition cannot help us know things as they really led Nietzsche to scepticism that the world is made to suit our cognitive faculties. Our cognitive faculties lead us to delusion and error because seeking truthfulness through rigorous scientific discipline lead us away from satisfying the

needs of truthfulness. The value of art is advanced as in opposition to the value of truthfulness.

As such, Nietzsche values autonomy and the independence of “free spirit” and individuality. They both help affirm life in the face of constraining religious or moral conventions of the society. His emphasis on individuality is related to the importance he attaches to the natural characteristics of a certain individual which in turn means that for Nietzsche there are “higher men” than others. Valuable individuals are those who “give themselves laws, who create themselves.” (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 335). Those individuals who are able to integrate art and artistry with truthfulness in an independent and autonomous way to affirm life and enhance the value of life itself. When aesthetic individual wills are combined together into a mosaic, the primal unity of existence is affirmed. It is only this integration which entails the combination of all the wills of such individuals that lead to the truth. No one can achieve unity singly. He comments:

For this alone is fitting for a philosopher. We have no right to be *single* in anything: we may neither err nor hit upon the truth singly. Rather, with the necessity with which a tree bears its fruit our thoughts grow out of us, our values, our yes’s and no’s and if’s and whether’s- the whole lot related and connected among themselves, witness to one will, one health, one earthly kingdom, one sun. (Nietzsche, GM, p. 2)

“Self-Styling” which is an important force for self-deception is a way to consider weaknesses and strengths by turning the ugly into sublime. (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 229). He states that he is “against the slanderers of nature” and that “artists conceal naturalness by shielding his perspective from nature and instead living in the world of dreams” (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 294). Distortion of one’s selfhood through aesthetic self-styling helps us reach a transcendent reality that crosses the limits of appearances to reach the underlying reality. In

order to move away from the mechanistic, moral and religious constraints, the artist has to promote lies. Christopher Janaway comments:

In the ideal of self-affirmation, things were different: the acceptance of the whole truth of one's life-what was and is- was to be embraced without flinching, without escape or erasure. But now the self-satisfaction to be attained through artistry consists in actively making one's character pleasing by falsifying it. We seem to have struck upon a deep-lying vein of ambivalence towards truth in Nietzsche.( Janaway, 2013, p. 67)

Nietzsche is obviously arguing for making the self an aesthetic phenomenon. Art is to be viewed as a "deviation from nature" a way to style ourselves into heroes, and " nature is supposed to be contradicted. Here the vulgar attraction of illusion is supposed to give way to a higher attraction" ( Nietzsche, 2001, p. 80). This aesthetic self-styling and artistic creativity are essential for self-satisfaction in the face of what Nietzsche called " great nausea" of existence." Art will not replace religion but, but it can provide partial cures for the nausea we are exposed to in a world of honesty and nihilism" (Cameronafzal, 2013). Nietzsche often return to ancient Greeks for their aesthetic idolisation of the self and life. He asserts that that the revival of modern culture depends on finding an Greek ideal.

In the modern age, however, the philosopher Michel Foucault shared much of Nietzsche's aesthetic self-styling and life-affirming in the face of the nausea of existence. He reverted to antiquity to search for an idea. He found in the Greek culture an example aesthetic self-creating is achieved by making aesthetics of existence an example to be followed by modernity. Greek ethics was to practice freedom in choosing to have a beautiful life. "In Greek ethics people were concerned with their moral conduct, their ethics, and their relations to themselves and to others...what they were worried about, their theme was to constitute a

kind of ethics which was an aesthetics of existence. (Foucault, on Genealogy of Ethics, p. 225). Foucault fashioned "an aesthetics of existence" based on a strategic conception of thinking using the Greek and Roman forms of self-creation. This conception turns out to be a form of artistic ethics. His method revolves around exploring possibilities in the contemporary world of resistance and affirmation in a creative response to oppression based on an analysis of power relation. He therefore had a recourse to an analysis of the Greek and Roman sexual ethics in order to form a self-constitution and through cultivating subjectivity, becoming affirmative and resistive. He looked into the classical period for an ethical course of all the actions that produce pleasure and turned them into rational rituals and codes of conduct. He termed the sum of all those pleasures "aphrodisia". He comments on his work:

My objective has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. My work has dealt with three modes of objectification, which transform human beings into subjects. The first is the modes of inquiry, which try to give themselves the status of the sciences. In the second part of my work, I have studied the objectivizing of the subject in what I shall call 'dividing practices...' Finally, I have sought to study it in my current work the way a human being turns him – or himself – into a subject. For example, I have chosen the domain of sexuality... Thus it is not power, but the subject; that is the general theme of my research. (Foucault, 1982, p. 777)

These actions are unlike in metaphysical Christianity, are forms of conduct judged by their vigor of pleasurable acts and the social demands that such actions exact. The receiver who should take every care in order "attend to oneself is therefore not just a momentary preparation for living; it is a form of living. He calls this attention to living to oneself "the art of "how to live"

Like Nietzsche before him, Foucault believed that the subject can be created and has to be created. It is not a priori in existence. “Basic to [Foucault’s] work is the idea that subjectivity is a complex product rather than a preexisting condition” (Prado, 2000, p. 10). Self-creation has always been Foucault’s major concern and he looked in history for models to be emulated and how subjective self-creation and self- techniques managed to find a place in between *truth* and *power*. Exploring antiquity, he found that their ethics is not based on labelling right and wrong but rather based on self-creating. This idea led Foucault later to conclude that the subject could constitute itself in the face of power relations through means of resistance. Means of resistance means, among other, the resources of self-creation. The subject in this case is not obliged to go always back to Antiquity but can always affirm subjectivity in ways pertinent to the modern age. He did not, however, presuppose that the subject is entirely free but there are always possibilities that are open to us to affirm subjectivity. In this project of future self-transformation of the subject, “the individual has to displace the standard subjectivity and to stylize his life, until it becomes a work of art. (Nica, 2015, p. 33). Foucault believed that human life could be fashioned into a work of art if the individual managed to subject his life to certain criteria of perfection. He wonders if it is difficult for man to turn his life into a work of art:

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something, which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? (Foucault, 1984b, p. 350)

He set out to expound rules a way from Antiquity. His method is to cultivate criticism and philosophy. The individual can always assert his authority against biopolitical

domination and chart for him a way of life not in conformity with the biopolitical principles of the authority. He asserts that:

The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it? What is true for writing and for a love, relationship is true also for life. (Foucault, 1988a, p. 9)

The aim of Foucault's aesthetics of existence is to attain freedom which he also regards as a condition that self-creation may eventually lead to. If an individual is caught in the crossfire of power relations and domination of the authority, then the task of the aesthetics of existence is to find methods which would "allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination" (Foucault, 1987, p. 129).

The Greeks were not so much concerned about following rules and concepts as Kant had proposed. They were after carving out a beautiful existence. What made Foucault; however try to connect this beautiful existence with morality was his notion of man giving his life a beautiful form that makes it pleasurable .He comments:

An 'aesthetics of existence' is a way of life whose moral value [depends] on certain formal principles certain formal principles in the use of pleasures, in the way one distributed them, in the limits one observed, in the hierarchy one respected." (Foucault, 1987.p. 89)

## II- Dionysus and Apollo

The most practical way of living as an artist is the dandyism, which dates back to the seventeenth century aristocrats. Wilde posed as a dandy. But dandyism is not just a novel way of dressing, it is a theory of life. The dandy biographer Jules-Amédée Barbey d'Aurevilly states that:

Dandyism is social, human and intellectual. It is not a suit of clothes, walking about by itself!...It is the particular way of wearing these clothes which constitutes Dandyism. One may be a dandy in creased clothes. . . . Dandyism is a complete theory of life. . . it is a way of existing. (D'Aurevilly, 1897, p. 20)

Nietzsche's ideas of aesthetic self-styling and turning one's life into a work of art finds real incarnation in the dandy. The dandy's aim is to turn his life into a work of art in order to affirm life. The concept of the dandy matches Nietzsche's importance of art in his entire work as a way to affirm life and face negation. He believed that life is not possible without art. In his book published in 1872 He believed that "only as an aesthetic phenomenon are existence and the world justified. (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 38). This radical statement reveals Nietzsche's conviction that life is not worth living without art. His statement is related to his discussion of tragic art as cited and discussed in Greek tragedies. Existence is justified by tragic art. Cruel nature and tragic life caused by pessimism may be alleviated and improved by beauty. A discussion of Nietzsche's argument of Greek tragedy is therefore necessary to understand his statement.

Nietzsche's views with regard to metaphysics and development is indebted to Schopenhauer. They are both nihilistic and search a way of justifying existence away from

the belief in a metaphysical world. Nietzsche quotes from Schopenhauer's major work *The World as Will and Representation*. Metaphysically, Nietzsche believes the world as we see it and as it is recognized by the senses is just a phenomenon. Behind this phenomenon there is a hidden reality that the senses and human normal human experience cannot recognize. He associates these two facets of reality with two gods. Zeus' sons Dionysus and Apollo. While Apollo is the god of, among other things, appearances, Dionysus stands for reality that lies behind appearances.

Nietzsche stated clearly in his *Birth of Tragedy* that he wants to reverse the Silenus wisdom. Silenus in Greek mythology is a companion of Dionysus and his wisest and most drunken follower. When he is drunk he gains a special power of knowledge and prophecy. King Midas wanted him to answer an important question. He ordered his capture. When Silenus was brought before him, the king asked about the best thing to do in the world. He answered that the best thing to do is not to be born at all. When he was asked about the second best thing to do he answered to die as soon as possible. Nietzsche sought to contest and reverse this view which is also held by Schopenhauer. So instead of holding the view that the best thing to do not to be born at all, he wanted to celebrate birth and replace the second best thing which is to die as soon as possible by living as long as possible. "so we might now say of them, with a reversion of the Silenian wisdom, that "to die early is worst of all for them, the second worst- someday to die at all." (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 91).

Apollo represents the form of things, like a sculptor god that chisel things out for us. Through his god things appear to human beings. This god also stands for Schopenhauer's "principium individuationis" or the individuation principle. Apollo helps us see individual things. These individual things work as barriers that prevent human beings from achieving unity. Dionysus is without form where 'the most savage natural instincts were unleashed' (Nietzsche, 1993, p.147). The ecstasy that follows helps dissolve the individual self. It helps

us see the underlying reality without barriers. It brings mankind closer to each other in what he termed the primal unity. It intensifies a sense of community and belonging. The Silenus wisdom shows the horrific nature of existence as exemplified by the suffering of numerous Greek gods from Oedipus and Orestes to Prometheus. How existence is to be endured, Nietzsche wonders:

How else could this so sensitive people, so vehement in its desires, so singularly qualified for sufferings have endured existence, if it had not been exhibited to them in their gods, surrounded with a higher glory? The same impulse which calls art into being, as the complement and consummation of existence, seducing to a continuation of life, caused also the Olympian world to rise, in which the Hellenic “will” held up before itself a transfiguring mirror. ( Nietzsche, 1967, p 90)

Yet the Greeks never gave up their love of life and their glorification and celebration of existence in the face of this nihilistic terrifying existence. They managed to overcome their pessimism through art and beauty. Art grants us a perspective to make our bearable. He says in the Gay Science that “ as an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable to us” ( Nietzsche, 2001, p 107). The truth without art reveals the meaninglessness of the world of appearances. Nietzsche’s superhuman ( Übermensch) is “ filled with Dionysian joy and pride in his own artistry. “ The absence of a designing god leading in turn to a heightened joy in the artistic possibility of man.( Nussbaum, 2002, p 58). In the absence of a religious order what takes lead is art in order to replace the chaos that may ensue. Art, therefore helps us create a meaning of existence. Nietzsche proposes self-creating in order craft the self along aesthetic lines. In order for the world to be aesthetic the self needs to be aesthetic too. Artists help us gain a perspective to see ourselves “ from a distance as something past and whole. (Nietzsche, 2001, p.78). It helps us reconstruct ourselves in a way that makes a possible future super-self. Nietzsche confirms his hostility to life denying doctrines:

I always experienced what was hostile to life, the wrathful, vindictive counter will to life itself: for all life rests on appearance, art, illusion, optics, necessity of perspectives and error. From the very first Christianity was, essentially and thoroughly, the nausea and surfeit of Life for Life, which only disguised, concealed and decked itself out under the belief in “another” or “better life” (Nietzsche, 1967, p 54)

Using another world to slander this world and the fear of beauty and sensuality and saying No to life is detrimental to the will to life and a way to transform it into a “will to perish”. He affirms again:

All this, as also the unconditional will of Christianity to recognize only moral values, has always appeared to me as the most dangerous and ominous of all possible forms of a “will to perish”; at the least, as the symptom of a most fatal disease, of profoundest weariness, despondency, exhaustion, impoverishment of life. (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 55)

Nietzsche sees himself as the ideal type he aspires to in his writing. He keeps referring to himself as exemplar of a future philosopher. He is the Dionysian tragedian as well as the philosopher of the future. He looks like the dandy character that Wilde assumed in his writing. Nehamas writes about Nietzsche’s entire work as an attempt to turn his ideas into a practice in self-styling:

The content of his works, however, remains a set of philosophical views: the literary character who has made of these views a way of life and who urges others to make a way of life out of views of their own- views which ... he cannot and will not supply

for them. Nietzsche wanted to be, and was the Plato of his own Socrates.( Nehams, 1985, p 234)

The different characters that Nietzsche employs in his writing to clarify his philosophical concepts are merely references that embody his reflections and his construction of an ideal type. They are meant to be a concrete embodiment of varying intensities of of an ideal type. Some characters even no longer retain the mythical type. Deleuze comments:

Presocratics, Romans, Jews, Christ, Antichrist, Julius Caesar, Borgia, Zarathustra- collective or individual, these proper names that come and go in Nietzsche's text are neither signifiers nor signified. Rather, they are designations of intensity inscribed upon a body that could be the earth or a book. ....There is a kind of nomadism, a perpetual displacement in the intensities designated by proper names, intensities that interpenetrate one another at the same time that they are lived, experienced, by a single body. ( Deleuze, 1977, p 146)

In his quest for metaphors and conceptual personae and the characteristics of an ideal archetype Nietzsche regarded, Goethe, for example, as being highly cultured human being "skilled in physical accomplishments" and able to keep emotions in check in time and "having reverence for himself, dares to allow himself the whole compass and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for this freedom ...a spirit thus emancipated stands in the midst of the universe with a joyful and trusting fatalism" ( Nietzsche, 1974, p 49 ). For these traits and many other he describes his faith in rejecting what is separate and individual while affirming what is total as the " the highest of all possible faiths: I have baptized it with the name Dionysos. ( Nietzsche, 1968, p 49). The ideal types in Nietzsche's works serve to emphasize his search of metaphors for life as art.

But these ideal archetypes must combine in themselves two essential extremes of tension in order to qualify as a tragic artist who experiences a "mystical unification with

reality and transforms it into music in order to give expression to this unity” ( Degenaar, 1985, p 40). The primordial unity that unites mankind while keeping in check the individual barriers that separate humans from each other. The artist is valued on the basis of his ability to show creative potencies of the Apollonian and Dionysian components of tragedy. The artist plays a crucial role in allowing the viewer to see life as justified as only an aesthetic phenomenon.

In Greek tragedy where the Chorus was seen by Nietzsche as an important element in the flourishing of Greek drama where the audience are transported through the commentators’ intervention in the action of the play on stage. The unified performance of the Chorus represents the deindividuation process. Whatever happens on stage, the Chorus remains eternally unchanged in the face of an individual action. Temporality has no effect on the unified unchanging performance of the Chorus. The spectators feel that they were divested of their individuality. The only true reality turns out not to be that of the cultured hero and the Chorus shows the spectators another reality. The charming music of the Chorus brings the spectators closer to a state where they feel bigger than the action being staged and transported into another reality other than theirs. Alexander Gatherer comments:

What Nietzsche means by this is that the chorus, and Greek tragedy as a whole, helps to bring forth matters such as death and one’s own mortality through the form of art, which in turn makes it a great deal more bearable. The metaphysical comfort springs from being able to consider these issues in an AP way, for the beauty of the dialogue and the poetry utilized within the play is logical and structured – AP indeed. It is this combination of AP and DI that Nietzsche admires, claiming it helps to ‘sugar the pill’ of unpleasant thoughts by displaying them in an aesthetically pleasing way.( Gatherer, 2014)

Dionysus helps them go beyond their reality of appearances into another transcendent reality. Oswald Spengler shared with Nietzsche some of his ideas and the necessity in modern day to combine the Dionysian with the Apollonian. He attacked in his book *The Decline of the West* the lack of the Dionysian spirit. He thought that the mass media moulds the modern personality into clones without this Dionysian chaotic free spirit that promotes innovation and creativity that Nietzsche believed it to be indispensable for a thriving society. Art thus viewed which helps individuals to have such a perspective of life provides a short solution of the problems of life. Nietzsche repeats in his *Untimely Meditations* that:

The struggle art depicts are simplifications of the real struggles of life; its problems are abbreviations of the endlessly complex calculus of human action and desire. But the greatness and indispensability of art lie precisely in its being able to produce the appearance of a simpler world, a shorter solution to the riddle of life ...art exists so that the bow shall not break. (Nietzsche, 2014, p 4)

The philosopher is seen as an example and ideal character in which he combines the Dionysian and Apollonian as he mediates between two worlds and try to produce a balance. The artist does the same and Nietzsche does equate the artist with the philosopher. “ Thus the aesthetically sensitive man stands in the same relation to the reality of existence; he is close and willing observer, for these images affords him and interpretation of life.” ( Nietzsche 1967, p 7). Nietzsche sees the philosopher and artist as having the same traits and spirit and have the same task:

While the philosopher is contemplative-perceptive like the artist, compassionate like the religious, a seeker of purposes and causalities like the scientist, even while he feels himself swelling into a macrocosm, he all the while retains a certain self-

possession, a way of viewing himself coldly as the mirror of the world. This is the same sense of self-possession which characterizes the dramatic artist who transforms himself into alien bodies and talks with their alien tongues and yet can project this transformation into written verse that exists in the outside world on its own. (Nietzsche, 1998, p 3).

Reforming and creating the individual along aesthetic lines lead to them being turned into philosophers.

Nietzsche connects between art and living. “The first sentence of *The Birth of Tragedy*, “...art owes its continuous evolution to the Apollonian—Dionysian duality...” (Chester, 2017). It was issued in 1872 and reissued fourteen years later. This is Nietzsche’s expression of his insight into the nature of the human spirit. In this, he was more original than his predecessors. He believed that the self could be formed and reformed along aesthetic lines. He discussed his artistic theory in his *Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche was not looking for truth as a scientific or religious conclusion but rather he was interested in the bigger sense of the meaning of life. He argued that in man there two striving creative energies that help him take a direction and these are present in all Greek art and philosophy and they come together most significantly in Greek drama or in Greek tragedy in particular. These creative energies inspired from Greek gods are The Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Apollonian represents the regulating rational reasoning form-giving intellect while the Dionysian represents the dreamy ecstatic and emotional side. In a narrower, sense the balance of the heart and mind. This is all seen through the prism of Greek tragedy. The healthy state of existence should stand on the duality of these two energies. Any imbalance could lead to failure. He says:

We will have achieved much for the study of aesthetics when we come, not merely to a logical understanding, but also to the immediately certain apprehension of the fact that the

further development of art is bound up with the duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, just as reproduction depends upon the duality of the sexes, their continuing strife and only periodically occurring reconciliation. We take these names from the Greeks who gave a clear voice to the profound secret teachings of their contemplative art, not in ideas, but in the powerfully clear forms of their divine world. (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 8)

Art is the unifying force that helps us see the triumph of heroic deeds facing the evil forces, how morality vanquishes immorality and the cathartic reactions of the spectators through experiencing the tragic fate that befalls some hero. The spectators on the Greek stage are brought face to face with the tragic fate of every human where one feels helplessness in the face of inevitable nihilism. “Thus the man who is responsive to artistic stimuli reacts to the reality of dreams as does the philosopher to the reality of existence; he observes closely, and he enjoys his observation: for it is out of these images that he interprets life, out of these processes that he trains himself for life.” (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 15). Combining reason and passion to recreate life and give it a new beautified form. Dionysus who is also known as Bacchus is the God of frenzy, the purpose of this Dionysian frenzy is to re-establish man’s connection to nature and humanity in its primordial sense. A sense of belonging to a higher community, which transforms man from an artist to a work of art, which is a revelation of God’s creation. Dionysus is the god of wine, madness, fertility where “the most savage natural instincts were unleashed’ (Nietzsche, 1993, p.147). Apollo is the god of truth; prophecy and light that represent the other side where individual self takes control and keeps the individual from his community, and negates his merger with his fellow individuals. The uncontrolled frenzy and Dionysian intoxication removes barriers and bring man to his primeval sense of belonging. He asserts that:

Through Dionysian tragedy, “the gulfs between man and man give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature. The

metaphysical comfort – with which, as I have here intimated, every true tragedy leaves us – [reveals] that despite the flux of phenomena, life at bottom is indestructibly powerful and pleasurable. (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 22)

It is essential to give free rein to man's dormant abilities. These two aspects are metaphors for a new vision of existence where the aesthetic side takes priority over the scientific and philosophical one. The great time of tragedy suffered at the hands of Euripides and under the influence of Socrates who thought, among other things, ‘Virtue is knowledge; man sins only from ignorance; he who is virtuous is happy’ (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 55). The same rationalization that is prevalent at the present time and another metaphor for the scientific modern age at the expense of an aesthetic way of life. The belief that technology can solve the problems of mankind, Nietzsche argues, ignores the reality of existence. He found the real solution in a new perception in which a “new form of insight rises to view, namely tragic perception, which in order merely to be endured, requires art as protection and remedy”( Nietzsche, 1967, p. 55). The regeneration of authentic and the cultivation of an artistic spirit is the solution to endure the harsh reality “the gradual awakening of the Dionysian spirit in our modern world!” (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 72). The spirit of music and ecstasy represented by Dionysus unites all human being through the primordial unity and bring them back to their original pre-individuation state, which is in contrast to the individual and rational Apollo who represents order and individuation. Nietzsche further elaborates:

Dionysian art, too, wishes to convince us of the eternal joy of existence: only we are to seek this joy not in phenomena, but behind them. We are to recognize that all that comes into being must be ready for a sorrowful end; we are forced to look into the terrors of the individual existence – yet we are not to become rigid with fear: a metaphysical comfort tears us momentarily from the bustle of the transforming figures.... We have become, as it were, one with the infinite primordial joy in existence.... In spite of fear and pity, we are the happy

living beings, not as individuals, but as the one living being, with whose creative joy we are united. (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 60).

The Dionysian is the source of our myths, intuitions, passion and a source of creativity. It appeals to instincts and emotions rather than reason. Science, knowledge and the search for truth was devoted to Apollo while feelings, wonder, intuitions were a work of Dionysus. This fusion between the two creative energies is best represented by the Greek tragedians Aeschylus and Sophocles. With the coming of the rational Socrates and his dialectic denial of this intoxication and chaos, the Greek tragedy started to decline. The Socratic dialectic is in the opposite direction and Euripides is thought to have killed the Greek tragedy by making the spectator watch his double on stage. Dull realism was depicted on the stage. Euripides cared about himself and the spectator as a thinker only and not as a poet. In order for everything to be beautiful, then it should be rational. Nietzsche believed that the Socratic dialectic negates life. The Greek tragedy for Nietzsche is a metaphor for life and he deplores how the artistic way of life gave way to a scientific one. Tragedy begins when man tries to control the universe of phenomena through science and then fails because according to James Chester:

Tragedy manifests itself within the soul as a convergence of the conscious and subconscious realms. It is tragic because it causes the collapse of the Ego. However, the Ego collapses not because feelings come into consciousness, which shatter the Ego, but because those feelings, which define the higher, and more interpretive Self come into consciousness, and the impoverished Ego gives way to the wakening reality. The tragic collapse of the Ego is a frightening experience because one literally feels the ground of being give way, but, in the wake of the collapse, one also beholds a whole and interpretive Self. Tragedy, as I have just described it, cures dismemberment and nullifies the wilfulness by which man is driven away from his Self and his suffering. Once that suffering becomes perceptible again, man

experiences a new resolve and a heightened hope for reclamation, and, in this way, tragedy is redemptory because it catalyzes an otherwise dying mythotropic will. (Chester, 2017)

Wilde as a contemporary to Nietzsche lived through a similar dilemma, experienced this imbalance in the Victorian age, and tried to express it in essays, fiction as well as in poetry. Wilde, the philosopher dandy, lived a conflict between two states, the artistic, emotional sensual and ecstatic on the one hand and the rational, logical and temperate one on the other. He applied Nietzsche's concept to his art as well as his life.

### III- Oscar Wilde, a Disciple of Nietzsche

*It is by virtue of the beautiful that we are able to acquire a lasting remembrance of the true world.....Plato describes the beautiful as that which shines forth most clearly and draws us to itself as the very visibility of the ideal.*

*Hans-Georg Gadamer*

It is this ideal that Oscar Wilde is looking for and it is for this that he brought onto himself the stigma of being a decadent. He believed that art is superior to nature as well as to morality because on the one hand nature imitates art and not the opposite and on the other hand morality is limited by age and time while art transcends both, therefore morality cannot judge art. Hence the concept “art for art’s sake” a doctrine which he firmly believed in but only applied in as far as it leads to an ideal reality that stands above the reality of appearances. His only ordeal was the age in which he was born as it was an age too much bound to earth to be able to transcend the superficial phenomena of its existence:

an age which had witnessed the collapse of established guidelines to truth and morality. It was a period when the leadership traditionally provided by monarchy, aristocracy, and the church was spiritually bankrupt. Art had begun to take over the functions these elements had once fulfilled; it became both religion and political creed. (De Jonge, 1976, p. 60)

Oscar Wilde's response to his age was a philosopher’s response. He used art as a means of facing a conservative and stereotyped age. He used his life to exemplify how life could be lived as art. Though he suffered from the consequences tremendously, but he succeeded in being a voice that transcended time and age to execute a call which was not of his own invention but rather a philosopher's call. It does not probably matter how much he was

influenced by or even read the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche as it is unlikely that he may have met him but surely he read and took from Nietzsche. He declared himself to be a genius using a Kantian term and classified himself a philosopher when he was once asked by the customs officer if he had anything to declare he answered that he had only his genius to declare. His philosophy of aesthetics is not only similar to Nietzsche's but he was in fact a practical example and the fictional incarnation of the art philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. In fact he breathed life into it and gave it flesh and blood and turned the gist of his aesthetic philosophy into fictional characters which by turn stand for and express Oscar Wilde, the dandy, who tried with his behaviour, design, thought and his way of living to live his life as art as Nietzsche had recommended, and thus enforcing the typically Nietzschean life affirmation concepts as opposed to life negation, to use Nietzschean terms, in Victorian England.

However, Nietzsche was unique in trying to forge and implement a connection between thinking and living. He believed, much similar in this to Walter Pater and even Wilde himself, that the self could be reshaped and reproduced along aesthetic lines given the fact that it is a malleable and constantly transforming subject. It is never stable and it is liable to take up new shapes and those shapes could reach an ideal status if it is to be fashioned aesthetically. Nietzsche's basic theory of aesthetics centres on Greek tragedy. The reason why he chose Greek tragedy is because he thought it to be the highest form of art. The rational Apollo against the sensual Dionysus and the capacity to make original beauty, non-mimic beauty at the centre of his theory. Art that life could imitate. A type of beauty that can transfigure reality into another aesthetically transformed one. It is an art that functions like a mask that is only used to guide the way into a path that leads to a new reproduction of man. Whatever Apollonian beauty attempts to show, it is simply an appearance, a mask or even a lie whose aim is a parallel beautifying illusion and dream. This dream is to help man

overcome anxiety, pessimism, and discomfort and Schopenhaurian pessimism. He had read and admired Schopenhauer. Nietzsche's aesthetic theory is even a response to Schopenhauer's pessimism. The Apollonian equates Schopenhauer's representation while the Dionysian is another form of *Will*. Art through which to reach the idealized figure was Nietzsche's response to Schopenhauer's eternal recurrence, his theory of pessimism and pain. It is a journey in search of an idealized being where beauty is supposed to triumph over pain and suffering. "Here Apollo overcomes the suffering of the individual through the bright exaltation in the eternity of the illusion. Here beauty is victorious over the suffering inherent in life. The pain is, in a certain sense, brushed away from the face of nature". (Nietzsche, BT, p. 16). To achieve this, Nietzsche set certain conditions to be met so his theory may be applied. Interestingly enough that Wilde who is a poet, essayist and playwright in another country speaking another language and Nietzsche's contemporary was able to apply his theory. It is therefore incumbent on the individual attempting to apply this theory that a deeper understanding of art follows along with total autonomy in self-creation. "Each person should become an artist—a poet of his own life" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 50). Aesthetics is viewed as a prerequisite for ideal life. Nietzsche was a pioneer in the notion of life as art. "Nietzsche, I argue, looks at the world in general as if it were a sort of artwork; in particular, he looks at it as if it were a literary text." (Nehamas, 1985, p. 3). Self-creation for Nietzsche is a non-ending process that requires "artful, stylish misappropriation, a free fall into metaphor and un-self-ness, auto-aesthetics" (S.Barker, 1992, p. 4).

The first central characteristic of Nietzsche's view, then, is that it assimilates the ideal person to an ideal literary character and the ideal life to an ideal story." (Nehamas, 1985, p. 165). Life as art assumes the use of metaphor to substantiate its existence as a component of artistic creation and literature is used as space for the exercise of a limitless literary creation that opens up vistas of realising them in real life to face the eternal recurrence and life's

eternal flux. This flux which reminds of Walter Pater's passion for using and maximising the time to enjoy the fleeting moment. In *The birth of Tragedy or the Will to Power*, this concept is similarly a Nietzschean concept. He urges people to make his philosophy their way of life. Along literary lines can the self be formed and reformed. To do this Nietzsche used a variety of figures and personalities as archetypes to help explain his theory, be they scientific or literary to stand for and simplify his concepts. "One of the most striking features of Nietzsche's philosophical writings is his extensive use of figures or figurative embodiments of various forms of wisdom, culture, and ways of life" (Hicks & Rosenberg, 2003, p. 26). Nietzsche says in his *Essay on Truth and Lies in a Non-normal Sense*:

What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and; anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions (Nietzsche, 2017, p. 4)

Nietzsche uses types to represent his concepts. Each character mentioned in his books is mere representations of a certain idea which he uses to clarify his philosophy. He uses them as dramatic persona in order to eclipse his own personality for the preservation of objectivity. For this reason artists were some kind of an archetypal philosopher or an idealized type that could be imitated through the fusion of his aesthetics and thinking.

To elaborate further on his philosophical ideas in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche explains two concepts, which he borrowed, from Greek mythology and in particular from Dionysus and Apollo. Dionysus is the God of Wine, passion, ritual, madness and ecstasy. In fact, all of these features are related to the sensual side of the human as opposed to the logical, reasoning and rational Apollo. Apollo is the God of poetry, truth, prophecy stands for reason, logic and rationality, or the drive that seeks to organise man's existence along rational

lines rather than aesthetic. He celebrates through his discussion of Greek tragedy the importance and indispensability of each side to complete the other with particular emphasis on the sensual side or Dionysian. So while Apollo is a symbol of a higher truth that rationality attempts to overcome limitations and bring man closer to perfection through better organisation, in fact it "creates an aesthetic space wherein the world comes to be perfected, beautified, and "veiled"( J.Sallis,1991, p. 37). With this space the spectator is transported to another reality that gives him a sense of euphoria that he termed "Rausch"- intoxication. This Euphoria is in another sense a kind of self-deception that helps the viewer overcome the Schopenhauerian pessimism or, in other words, the eternal recurrence (state of eternal craving to satisfy desires in a non-ending process that leads even more to pain and suffering with the realisation of a non-ending vicious circle). But a higher ideal can only be achieved with the help of this space or the Dionysian which encompasses illusion, deception and lying. This lying or self-deception aided by imagination aims at reaching this higher ideal "art is the highest power of falsehood, it magnifies the 'world as error,' it sanctifies the lie; the will to deception is turned into a superior ideal." (Deleuze, 1983, p. 102).The logical Apollonian or organiser and regulator is only there to prepare the ground for the expressive and creative faculty, which is that of the Dionysian. It is with this Dionysian that suffering and dying can be confronted. Therefore Nietzsche makes the Dionysian art speak to express itself:

"Be as I am! Amid the ceaseless flux of phenomena I am the eternally creative primordial mother, eternally impelling to existence, eternally finding satisfaction in this change of phenomena!"(Nietzsche, 1967, p. 16)

Dionysian art helps throw the individual beyond his limits into a new realm. The creative and successful artist in Greek tragedy is the one who manages to release the creative energies of both the Apollonian and Dionysian of the tragic elements. Art is a lie but an indispensable lie which has its own prerequisites. Art in this sense is an illusion with a fraudulent character

that tries to extract a simple, easy and dreamy world from a complex and intricate one. It is Nietzsche's "transfiguring mirror". Nietzsche confirms that:

The struggles art depicts are simplifications of the real struggles of life; its problems are abbreviations of the endlessly complex calculus of human action and desire. But the greatness and indispensability of art lie precisely in its being able to produce the appearance of a simpler world, a shorter solution to the riddle of life.....Art exists so that the bow shall not break. (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 40)

He did not hesitate to equate the artist with the philosopher. While the philosopher can see reality objectively, the artist sees it with a self-conscious illusion that helps emerge a new critical life affirming existence to face the life negating and pessimistic aspect of existence. He therefore used the term "free spirit" constantly in his book *Human All too Human*. The free spirit is the one that underwent a transformation and freed itself of conventional constraints and lives now by its own newly invented values, like Zarathustra, the tragic poet, the future philosopher, the profound thinker, the Dionysian artist and the Übermensch (superhuman) which is what ultimately Nietzsche's aesthetics is supposed to lead to.

This lie makes living experience more beautiful and bestows more reverence on life as the Greeks did. Their veneration of beauty was to counter the inescapable and inherent eternal nihilism and the tragic end of life. Such a state of artistic creativity - ecstasy-and intoxication referred to earlier leads ultimately to positively transforming the world to match the transformation inside the artist, a thing which paves the way to man's perfection in future. Beauty, Nietzsche believed, lies in the eyes of the spectator or artist who moulds the world while in the described state of frenzy, euphoria or intoxication into a new closer to perfection and happier world. It is man who endows existence with meaning. This rapture or intoxication gives man a sense of fullness which is inevitably reflected on life. Anything man

does under this condition is done perfectly well as the state of euphoria and happiness lends strength and power to any project at hand. This attempt to transform the world to reflect the inside of man is Nietzschean art *par excellence* which is for him the ultimate path that gradually leads to perfection. Nietzsche comments:

Nothing is beautiful, except man alone: all aesthetics rests upon this naiveté, which is its first truth. Let us immediately add the second: nothing is ugly except the degenerating man — and with this the realm of aesthetic judgment is circumscribed. Physiologically, everything ugly weakens and saddens man. It reminds him of decay, danger, impotence; it actually deprives him of strength. One can measure the effect of the ugly with a dynamometer. Wherever man is depressed at all, he senses the proximity of something "ugly. (Nietzsche, TI, 1968, p. 526)

Art is metaphysical and goes beyond the apparent world of phenomena. It transcends time and space. It is a world of its own that gives birth to itself and continues to evolve through art. "Only as an aesthetic product can the world be justified to all eternity" (Nietzsche, 1956, p. 42) and the ultimate aim of this Nietzschean artistic phenomenon is what he called "the Übermensch" or the superhuman, an ideal character mentioned in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. This superhuman sums up some of the characteristics he mentioned earlier like the free spirit, profound thinker, art and illusion, life affirmation against nihilism and self-creation or self-perfection. All this leads ultimately to the future "Übermensch". Nietzsche ignored the temporal element in his discussion of the Übermensch. He is to come if all conditions were prepared for him. "History might one day give birth to such people, too—once a great many favourable preconditions have been created and determined that even the dice throws of the luckiest chance could not bring together today."(Nietzsche, 1974, p. 288)

But art could well bring it together if it does not suffer at the hands of rationality as Greek tragedy had suffered with the coming of the too rational Socrates.

Zarathustra referred to himself as a poet and he clearly affirms that poets lie too much. He was practising the art of lying and self-deception. He is able to combine both the elements of Dionysus and Apollo. He is at once a rigid and rational philosopher who thinks scientifically and a lying poet who uses self-delusion, deception and lying to preach the coming of the future superman. Lying, then, is the indispensable character of art and he states later in his work *Genealogy of Morals* that art is “real lie, a genuine, resolute, ‘honest’ lie.” (Nietzsche, 2001, III, p.19). Nietzsche confirms this point in the *Gay Science* “No, if we convalescents still need art, it is another kind of art—a mocking, light, fleeting, divinely untroubled, divinely artificial art that, like a pure flame, licks into unclouded skies. Above all, an art for artists, for artists only!” (Nietzsche, 1974, preface 4). Nietzsche in his later works repeats that it is through the blend of art as earlier described and science, the Dionysian with the Apollonian that the art of living is fashioned where creative life turns into an aesthetic phenomenon and science play the role of a regulator. The creative ideal life is thus achieved. Nietzsche comments again that:

One thing is needful—To “give style” to one’s character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. . . It will be the strong and domineering natures that enjoy their finest gaiety in such constraint and perfection under a law of their own (Nietzsche, 2001, P 190)

Oscar Wilde and Friedrich Nietzsche were contemporaries who did not know each other. Both of them died in 1900. Both lived through the same age with all of its

contradictions, conservatism and social ills. Nietzsche's philosophy cannot be separated from his views on art and so is Oscar Wilde's. Both worked towards the perfect man through art and philosophy, both were not subjected to the constraints of time and society. Both lived in advance of their times and both were pushed by life-affirming drive versus nihilism. Most importantly both believed in the supremacy of art in fashioning a healthy society. Both believed in hyper-individualism and the transformative power of art. They found in aesthetics the road to fly beyond nature into a realm that transcends reality with nostalgia to beautiful Greek civilisation.

In his essay "Decay of Lying" Wilde applies Nietzsche's aesthetic principles. In much of his work, he explicates his aestheticism which he, as Nietzsche affirms, goes beyond life and nature. Life imitating art is a creed that runs throughout his work. He, therefore, creates in his essay *Decay of Lying* a dialogue between two characters who more or less replicate Nietzsche's discussion of the aesthetic Dionysian and rational realistic Apollonian. One comes from an earthly nature bound mentality while the other is metaphysical. The Dionysian Vivian responds to Cyril's remark to go out and enjoy nature by declaring from the beginning that he had lost the faculty to enjoy nature. Art has taught him that "the more we study art, the less we care about nature". Vivian carefully selects words to describe "nature" like "monotony", "curious crudities", "lack of design" and "her unfinished condition". He thus directly places nature against art with nature being incapable of carrying out its intentions according to Aristotle. The real beauty of nature is only found in the imagination and fancy of the beholder. He is a free spirit. He shifts the beauty of nature, which is being described as crude to the beholder's cultivation and readiness not only to enjoy its beauty but also to reflect on it and even add to it. He continues his attack against nature:

Nature is so uncomfortable. Grass is hard and lumpy and damp, and full of dreadful black insects. Why, even Morris's poorest workman could make you a more

comfortable seat than the whole of Nature can. Nature pales before the furniture of 'the street which from Oxford has borrowed its name,' as the poet you love so much once vileyly phrased it. I don't complain. If Nature had been comfortable, mankind would never have invented architecture, and I prefer houses to the open air. In a house we all feel of the proper proportions. Everything is subordinated to us, fashioned for our use and our pleasure. Egotism itself, which is so necessary to a proper sense of human dignity, is entirely the result of indoor life. (Wilde, Intentions, p. 2)

Cyril's surprise that Vivian is writing an article which he does not find consistent with Vivian's view is explained by Vivian's rejection of consistency. Fancy and imagination are an ever changing crucible and they are only killed by consistency. Only Tedious people are consistent. If he writes the word "whim" he promises "a new renaissance of art". Vivian pleads in favour of lying in art. Zarathustra called himself a liar and was proud that poets all lie. Vivian undoubtedly assumes a character which is much like a creation of Nietzsche or speaker for Zarathustra. He writes an article for a magazine entitled "*The Decay of Lying, a Protest*".

Wilde, through Vivian, claims that the reputation of art fell into disrepute because it does not go beyond stark reality and life as we see it. In other words it is purely Apollonian in nature it is too much down-to-earth. The winged fancy has no place anymore. "The ancient historians gave us delightful fiction in the form of fact; the modern novelist presents us with dull facts under the guise of fiction." (Wilde, 1997, p. 4). They draw from life and never go beyond it. He calls lying as art and those who fail in it end up being crude. As such the novelist develops:

a morbid and unhealthy faculty of truth-telling, begins to verify all statements made in his presence, has no hesitation in contradicting people who are much younger than

himself, and often ends by writing novels which are so lifelike that no one can possibly believe in their probability.(Wilde, 1997, p. 4)

Vivian says that "The only real people are the people who never existed". He attacks those who are tainted with what he termed the modern vice including M. Zola, James Joyce, George Eliot, Balzac and George Meredith, among many others. They all belong to Apollo. They befit Greek tragedy after Socrates when it became too logical and too rigid and without imagination. Nietzsche virulently attacked Socrates for spoiling the Greek tragedy and divesting it of its Dionysian element. Therefore Vivian attacked those novelists because they all take their characters from life and being copies of life is a tarnish for Vivian. What all of these novelists have in common is that they are too much realist and they miss the opportunity of creating a work of art.

We have mistaken the common livery of the age for the vesture of the Muses, and spend our days in the sordid streets and hideous suburbs of our vile cities when we should be out on the hillside with Apollo. Certainly we are a degraded race, and have sold our birth right for a mess of facts. (Wilde, 1997, p.7)

Nature is "behind the age" and life "is "the enemy that lays waste the house of art" Wilde who is associated with decadence defends himself and exposes the real decadence:

Art takes life as part of her rough material, recreates it, and refashions it in fresh forms, is absolutely indifferent to fact, invents, imagines, dreams, and keeps between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style, of decorative or ideal treatment. The third stage is when Life gets the upper hand, and drives Art out into the wilderness. That is the true decadence, and it is from this that we are now suffering. (Wilde, 1997, p. 7)

Vivian goes so far in emphasising the importance of art and its superiority to life and nature in discussing Shakespeare whom he believed made this mistake in his later plays. Characterisation became exaggerated and blank-verse gave place to prose "and The passages in Shakespeare — and they are many — where the language is uncouth, vulgar, exaggerated, fantastic, obscene even, are entirely due to Life calling for an echo of her own "Voice," and he takes as an example the play "the tempest" which is too much realistic and takes its characters from real life and shows the manners of real people and their behaviour and down to their accent. Realism is "a complete failure" according to Vivian. When the oriental civilisation with its artistic spirit and absence of limitation and dislike of realistic representation as in Spain, Sicily and Byzantium is compared to the western one, then the former wins the comparison because the western one is too much immersed in copying from nature than really concerned about creating a piece of art. "The proper school to learn art in is not Life but Art."(Wilde, 1997, p. 8)

Vivian is not desperate about the possibility of a revival of artistic taste. The harmony between emotion and reason which was destroyed by Socrates' rationality, to borrow some of Nietzsche's terms, may be restored as Vivian hopes if novelists become artists and know how to tell a lie and how to use a mask. Some people will certainly try to change the trend. People bored by tales recounted from dull memories by people lacking the intelligence to exaggerate or too scared to tell something beyond sheer probability. He declares that "Society sooner or later must return to its lost leader, the cultured and fascinating liar. The liar whose phantasies "told the wondering cavemen at sunset how he had dragged the Megatherium from the purple darkness of its jasper cave, or slain the Mammoth in single combat and brought back its gilded tusks" (Wilde, 1997, p.9). The liar is supposed to be able to give pleasure to society; otherwise any lecture or discourse will be dull as a scientific theory or like a Greek tragedy after Socrates which is lop-sided in favour of realistic rationality drawn along scientific rather

than aesthetic lines. Art will welcome the liar with open arms as having the key to the secrets of art. Vivian takes a multi perspective view of the truth by declaring that it is a matter of style:

while Life — poor, probable, uninteresting human life — tired of repeating herself for the benefit of Mr. Herbert Spencer, scientific historians, and the compilers of statistics in general, will follow meekly after him, and try to reproduce, in her own simple and untutored way, some of the marvels of which he talks.(Wilde, 1997, p. 9)

Art is not a mirror held up to nature as Hamlet had said. He was trying to convince people of his Insanity and indeed insane whoever believes that art imitates nature. The perfection of art comes from within.Hancock comments:

Like science and philosophy, art is meant to stretch the human understanding of the world. Art is meant to initially be confusing and difficult to grasp, with the hope that it will someday be grasped and absorbed. By attempting to come to this end, the public is doing itself a favor. It is broadening its horizons and expanding its view. (Hancock, 2009, p. 9)

It has its own archetypes of which all human experience is nothing more than copies. “She has flowers that no forests know of, birds that no woodland possesses. She makes and unmakes many worlds, and can draw the moon from heaven with a scarlet thread” (Wilde, 1997 p 10). Greek civilisation is seen as a source of artistic innovation. They never resorted to life for their creations. They valued art as:

They knew that Life gains from Art not merely spirituality, depth of thought and feeling, soul-turmoil or soul peace, but that she can form herself on the very lines and colours of art, and can reproduce the dignity of Phidias as well as the grace of Praxiteles. Hence came their objection to realism (Wilde, 1997 P 10)

The ancient Greeks considered realism too ugly to improve human race and Vivian positively agrees with the statement. Beauty can only be produced by art and great artists are those whose pupils are real works of art and not mere imitators. "Life is Art's best, Art's only pupil." (Wilde, 1997, p. 11)

Turning to literature and how it gives inspiration to life, Vivian continues giving examples of people who modelled their lives on a work of art. Schopenhauer did not invent pessimism but only analysed it. It was Hamlet who opened people's eyes to what he felt and therefore it was Hamlet who invented it. A more modern and similar view is also expressed here by the Irish dramatist Bernard Shaw who stated:

I have noticed that when a certain type of feature appears in painting and is admired as beautiful, it presently becomes common in nature; so that the Beatrices and Francescas in the picture galleries of one generation come to life as the parlor-maids and waitresses of the next...the real world does not exist...men and women are made by their own fancies in the image of the imaginary creatures in my youthful fictions, only much stupider. (Adams, 1971, p. 76)

William Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair* was a work that inspired many to imitate it. He cites the example of a lady who worked as a governess and then eloped with the nephew of the lady with whom she was staying and exactly in the manner of Becky Sharp who was the major character in Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair*. The Nihilist was perfected by Dostoevski and Tourguéneff. Robespierre is a creation of Rousseau. Balzac inspired the nineteenth century and made it the way it was.

Vivian then distinguishes between two types of imitation, the conscious and unconscious. He relates a story of the unconscious type who was behaving under the influence of Robert Stevenson's novel *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He lost his way to train station by taking a short cut. Being in bad evil looking streets, he started running quickly. He then

tripped over a child who began to scream. Then a lot of rough people gathered around the man who was frightened as he remembered the character in Stevenson's novel. Imitating Mr Hyde and what he did, he ran as quickly as he could and went into a surgery where an assistant saved him by paying people some money to make them disperse. It was the scene in Stevenson's novel that inspired him to behave the way he did. This imitation was unconscious and not deliberate. But there is also the conscious one. He relates having met a lady of a versatile character and he became friends with her. The weird thing about this lady was that she would change character and passion every now and then. She would take interest in religion, and then abandon it for politics and then to philanthropy and so on. As he was reading a serial in a magazine, he was shocked by the similarity between the character in one of the short stories and the friend he had met. He was so fascinated by the resemblance that he was about to warn her not to end up doing what the character had done in the story. The heroine had run away with a man below her social status, and inferior to her in intellect and character. Some time later and to his surprise, he had met his friend in Paris and told him about her story of running away with a man exactly like her heroine of the story:

She told me that she had felt an absolutely irresistible impulse to follow the heroine step by step in her strange and fatal progress, and that it was with a feeling of real terror that she had looked forward to the last few chapters of the story. When they appeared, it seemed to her that she was compelled to reproduce them in life, and she did so. It was a most clear example of this imitative instinct of which I was speaking, and an extremely tragic one. (Wilde, 1997, p.12)

It is to the impressionists that Vivian attributes the beauty in nature. The beauty of the fog as it comes creeping on the city skyline is only made impressive by the internal transformation that occurs inside man as he is exposed to more and more art." Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see them, depends on the Arts that have

influenced us. "Poets made us see the beauty of the fog. Art has brought into existence a new way of looking at fog in London. Vivian invites us to use art prism in looking at nature. Indeed nature itself at times turns to be modern. He gives the examples of paintings by some French landscape painters and how Corot and Daubigny's paintings of the past turned into the paintings of Claude Monet and Pissarro. Art creates new effects which then spread everywhere. We no longer take interest in observing sunset as it became old-fashioned. By looking at sunset, one can only assume that it is a bad portrait of Joseph William Turner and not one of his modern ones as the modern ones are far more stunning than real sunset. "When Art is more varied, Nature will, no doubt, be more varied also. That she imitates Art, I don't think even her worst enemy would deny now". Not only that art does not represent the age or spirit of the time and it is not Apollo that plays life melodies but rather Marsyas who challenged Apollo and failed to win the contest and was skinned to death. Nietzsche in his discussion of the *Birth of Tragedy* distinguished between Apollo and Dionysus between the sensual part of existence and the material between the physical and metaphysical. Art goes way beyond the physical world into the realm of the metaphysical. It only expresses itself in any age and any time. Vivian thus corroborates Pater's idea that music is "the perfect type of all the arts" and the perfect art is revealed through the example of the cave theory. Plato's belief that man is like a prisoner chained on a wall and watches the shadows of all creatures on the opposite wall. If this prisoner is freed,-echoing thus Nietzsche's "free spirit"- he will then be able to see the originals of those shadows by seeing the real world and the shadowy one which made people think it real. Art turns its face from the shadows to the real and perfect world, the world preached by Zarathustra, with the hope of paving the way to the coming of the Übermensch. And this is where art belongs, it belongs to perfection. People believe that it is their history told in a new way. Vivian affirms that it gains from new medium and fresh material. As the spirit is abstract so is the art and so it ought to be as ideal

and as abstract as the spirit. It is only the responsibility of lesser imitative art to reflect the visible aspects of the age. As for the real artist, it is the one who can render what he sees with his special unique style rather than what the public see as some minor artist do. The public sees nothing. He calls for the revival of lying as an indispensable part of fiction education.

Athena laughs when Odysseus tells her "his words of sly devising," as Mr. William Morris phrases it, and the glory of mendacity illumines the pale brow of the stainless hero of Euripidean tragedy, and sets among the noble women of the past the young bride of one of Horace's most exquisite odes. Later on, what at first had been merely a natural instinct was elevated into a self-conscious science. (Wilde, 1997, p.15)

Then Vivian finally moves on to explain at Cyril's request the principles of the doctrine of new aesthetics. Art is independent and it only expresses itself. The time or age never impacts it in anyway. It anticipates future and good art may well be understood in the next century as it is above time. The second principle is that bad art imitates life and realism is a failure. Modernity of form in art is a myth and mistake. The past remains its storehouse of fresh ideas. The third principle is that life imitates art. Nature shows certain effects that we have seen in poetry or literature beforehand. As Vivian accepts Cyril's invitation to go out on the terrace, he emphasises that he likes to see the beauty of nature only because it will illustrate a poet's idea or expression. Brian Hancock sums up:

Oscar Wilde clearly maintained an opinion or two on the subject of art. He sought to elevate its importance over that of nature, to alienate it completely from life, to declare it independent of society, to illustrate it as a disperser of monotony, and to teach its dependence on inner unity. He wrote passionately of art and its unlimited potential, and scornfully of all those who failed to grasp this understanding and remained complacent in their unchanging everyday lives. Art to Wilde was a vehicle through

which to perceive, as well as change, the world. It was an entity with the potential to captivate, with the capacity to inspire, and with the ability to make the world a more ideal place. He longed for the world to be as ideal as art itself, and sustained the hope that continual focus and deliberation on art would one day catalyze this occurrence. (Hancock, 2013, p. 9)

## CHAPTER THREE

### I- Integration of Art and Morality in *The Happy Prince* and The Domination of Apollo

Though excess, artificiality, morbidity and amorality are major characteristics of the decadent movement; Wilde shows that he is in the opposite direction of the movement. He is an aesthete who believed in the power of art in effecting a change in the life of the individual. It is only his scandal that stigmatized him as a decadent writer. He is often remembered for the scandal of his homosexuality for which he was imprisoned for committing 'a gross indecency', which precipitated his downfall. He was torn between two choices, John Ruskin and the moral and didactic nature of art on the one hand and Walter Pater's purely aesthetic and hedonistic influence under his manifesto 'Art for Art's sake'. Pater believed that the shortness of life encourages an indulgence in pleasure to maximize the ecstasy. Pater believed:

As Victor Hugo says: we are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve—les hommes sont tous condamnés à mort avec des sursis indéfinis: we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among "the children of this world," in art and song."(Pater, 2015, p.120)

Though Wilde expounded his theory in his Essays, and was known to be an advocate of Pater's doctrine, he did not put this doctrine in practice. His works show him a Ruskinian moralist who strongly believed in the supremacy of art as a philosophy that can make a big

difference in life. This, however, does not mean that pursuing beauty and pleasure is immoral, decadent or artificial. He asserts that:

pleasure is the only thing worth having a theory about," he answered in his slow melodious voice. "But I am afraid I cannot claim my theory as my own. It belongs to Nature, not to me. Pleasure is Nature's test, her sign of approval. When we are happy, we are always good, but when we are good, we are not always happy."(Wilde, 1973, p. 74).

Oscar Wilde expounds in his short story *The Happy Prince* his aesthetic and moral theory, which revolves around the integration of art into morality as a prerequisite for creating a healthy and prosperous socialist society in application of his theory elucidated in his essay *The Soul of Man under Socialism*. Despite the fact that his theory was often misunderstood by numerous hostile critics who accused him of stripping art of its indispensable moral code under the doctrine of Art for Art's sake, he proves in this short story that not only does his aesthetic theory transcend time, space and relativity to which morality is often subjected, but that art is indispensable in creating the mood and individuality that may promote the creation of a socially prosperous society. He imagines a town in which the Apollonian drive only dominates and Dionysus is completely absent. It is a place where people are not allowed to dream. They are stuck to their reality and have no transcendent dreams as they threaten the power relations in the town in the last episode of the series if events in the story Wilde resolves the contention with the idea that religion does not frown on his art for being too much indulged in hedonism and Epicureanism. He assures his readers towards the end that the artist as a creator will always have the approval of the God, the Supreme Creator.

Russel M. Goldfarb is not the only critic who described the decadence movement in literature in pejorative terms. Many critics tend to repeat this criticism. He summarized,

however, some of the major characteristics which are associated with the movement and which was also a summary of the mainstream criticism of the movement. He states that this literature:

does not emphasize philosophical, historical, or intellectual concerns, but . . . does emphasize the values to be gained both from experience of all sorts and from indulgence in a life of sensations. Because of this emphasis, decadent literature is animated by the exploration of immoral and evil experiences; never does it preach morality, nor does it strongly insist upon ethical responsibilities. Decadent literature is characterized by artistic concern for the morbid, the perverse, the sordid; it is characterized by a self-conscious and weary contempt for social conventions such as truth and marriage (Goldfarb, 1962, p. 369-373)

Wilde who belongs to the movement proves, however, in his work in general and in his short story *the Happy Prince* the opposite of such statements. Indeed, he questions the very basis upon which such criticism is based, which is the doctrine of art for art's sake. A doctrine which mistakenly almost entirely separates morality from art. Wilde in this story is not only a moralist but he also expounds his theory that art and free imagination are integral parts of the moral code and an indispensable element that should integrate the moral code of any given society. The Happy Prince relates the story of a prince who was living in a palace of luxury where he did not feel the suffering of his townspeople. He was so happy that he was called the happy prince. After his death the town councilors made him a statue and covered him with gold and precious stones. The statue was set up high in the city where he could now see the misery of the town. The statue then comes to life and befriends a swallow. He solicits the help of the swallow to take the precious stones and gold in order to give to the poor townspeople.

Wilde's doctrine, however, Art for Art's sake seems to be entirely absent from the Happy Prince. Wilde learned from Ruskin that art should tell a truth and from Pater that it should be only beautiful and not to be critiqued and from Nietzsche the creation of art depends on the tension between the two drives, the Dionysian and Apollonian. He managed to combine both. Though he did resort to Paterian sensations to evoke a vision of happiness for the town people of the happy prince. But he departed from the mere sensational critique of art to advocate a vision full of moralizing and deep moral and social consciousness. As a typical aesthete Wilde would not limit himself to creating a mood or sensation: "French and English 'aesthetes' held that art should not be educative, that art's purpose is to create a mood or a sensation and not to advocate moral propositions; art need only fulfil possibilities of beauty inherent in any art form." (Quintus, 1980, p. 559). Wilde incorporated into his work the beauty of this aesthetic sensation with morality.

The story is part of juvenile literature that Wilde wrote to entertain children. It is, however, appealing to both, children and adults alike. He maintained that it appeals to both children and adults albeit the themes involved look beyond the comprehension of children. It is "meant partly for children, and partly for those who have kept the childlike faculties of wonder and joy, and who find in simplicity a subtle strangeness". (Ellmann, 1988, P. 219). It is a fairy tale with typical characteristics that even qualify it as a fable: features like talking animals, happy ending, fantastic events, obvious good and evil forces and a setting in the past. His choice of a fairy tale is apt as it gives him time and space to infuse a free Dionysian spirit in the story and to reflect his favourite Paterean idealisation of art with freedom and with a difference as well:

Pater's aesthetic credo in *'The Renaissance'* clearly informs Wilde's fairy tales.

Wilde, however, is too independent an artist to simply echo Pater's words: he extends

their implications to life, and critiques reflexively by demonstrating both the pleasure and perils of such an ethos.” (Wood, 2002, p. 161-162).

Wilde wanted to directly reflect on modern life while keeping live his aesthetic concerns. He wrote to a friend that the story is "an attempt to mirror modern life in a form remote from reality--to deal with modern problems in a mode that is ideal and not imitative" (qtd in, Hart-Davis, 1962, P. 237)

This tale, unlike the *Selfish Giant*, for example is meant to entertain a judicious audience. In the story Wilde proposed his theory of reconstructing welfare socialist society on the basis of several essential elements. The first is to improve the conditions for the working classes and secondly, he suggests supporting creative people and the promotion of creativity. He also believed that child labour of the Victorian age was a pressing problem that the system failed to address. This is indeed reminiscent of Dickens’ criticism of the living conditions of children and Blake’s ‘the Chimney Sweeper’ as well. However, in Wilde’s case it is the absence of the Dionysian spirit and absence of art that is made to blame. He believed that children are the future of any society and no theory can meet with success unless children’s living conditions are drastically improved. Lastly he calls for a system of social assistance to the needy in order to help them rebuild their life without having to compromise their dignity. All of the afore-mentioned proposals are present in the symbolism of *the Happy Prince*. He made, however, art as the basis of his theory and a prerequisite for making the welfare state. Lack of art in a given society will hinder the creative process of man, which is indispensable to achieve the aims outlined above.

Needless to say that this particular short story was much debated by critics. However, Reading the story as an example of Wilde's homosexuality or trying to prove that the story is a reflection of the Marxist socialist theory looks lop-sided if not too obtrusive as such

theories reflect only one episode in the story without fitting all together to produce the entire effect. The story needs to be read and evaluated as one whole piece and focusing on one part only makes it all the more misleading to understand Wilde's real intention. Wilde unavoidably shows the Victorian reality and proposes solutions. He serves as a social critic like Dickens for example "to see the unhappy truths about material/historical reality, for whether or not authors intend it they are bound to represent socioeconomic inequities and ideological contradictions" (Tyson, 2006, p.66) .His solution only takes art as a pivotal solution to the inequalities of the society. At the beginning of the story, our attention is drawn to the statue of the Happy Prince:

High above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince. He was gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold, for eyes he had two bright sapphires, and a large red ruby glowed on his sword-hilt. (Wilde, 1997, p. 2)

Wilde chose a statue to be the major character in the story. It is easy, however to recognize that the statue stands for art as artistic works, memorials and monuments are set up to immortalise a person or an event. Wilde is conscious of the immortality of art as much as the Nobel Laureate W.B.Yeats. This is, in fact, reminiscent of his poem *Sailing to Byzantium* where in the last stanza the poet says that if he were to choose another life he would prefer to be a long living statue rather than a mortal human because life is short and art lives much longer than living humans:

Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing,  
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make  
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;

Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To lords and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come. (Yeats, 1994, p.1994)

Wilde starts his story with a non-conventional story telling. He did not start it like any other fairy tale with phrases like once upon a time or there lived once ... But he immediately drew our attention to the statue of the Happy Prince placing an adverbial phrase at the beginning of the story. He put thus his emphasis on the pivotal character of his story. The prince statue was beautiful and covered with expensive jewels, sapphires, gold and ruby. It stands as a symbol of artistic perfection as it was admired by people despite the fact that the townspeople do not seem to be happy "I am glad there is someone in the world who is quite happy", muttered a disappointed man as he gazed at the wonderful statue though he is too unhappy to be in a position to express any form of admiration. Paradoxically the Happy Prince contrasts with a miserable town ruled by the town councilors who turn later to be mere hypocrites. The use of the word "happy" in the story is ironically used to accentuate the opposite of what it really means. It is revealing and it foreshadows a society with numerous contradictions.

He was very much admired indeed. He is as beautiful as a weathercock,' remarked one of the Town Councillors who wished to gain a reputation for having artistic taste; 'only not quite so useful,' he added, fearing lest people should think him unpractical, which he really was not. (Wilde, 1997, p. 2)

The misery of the town is obviously caused by the town councillors themselves, by their selfishness, greed and hypocrisy. The town councillor's initial remark was to show his interest in art. He assumes that art should be useful and if it is not, then it is useless. That beauty without a moral message is useless is already inculcated into the Victorian

consciousness. Wilde wrote in his preface to his novel *The Picture of Dorian Grey* that “all art is quite useless” (Wilde, 2004, p. 5). His remark is similar to the remark of the town councillor though in practice he made the statue assume heavy moralising responsibilities. He even affirms himself further when he says that authoritarian regimes fear individualism that art inspires. He remarks that "it is to be noted that it is the fact that Art is this intense form of Individualism that makes the public try to exercise over it in an authority that is as immoral as it is ridiculous, and as corrupting as it is contemptible." (Wilde, 1973, P. 43)

The town councillor’s remark comparing the statue to a weathercock is ridiculous. The weathercock turns left and right to show the direction of the wind, a function which is so insignificant that the remark is only meant to help diminish the value of the statue. Paradoxically the councillor himself is as changeable as a weathercock. An authoritarian, however, does not see in art more value than that of a weathercock. Wilde meant this statue to represent art in all its grandeur, beauty and precious value. There is no wonder why Wilde decorated the statue with the most precious stones. Art for Wilde was even more precious than the precious stones that covered the statue and it is art that would eventually transform the town of the Happy Prince, not alone though as Dionysus alone can never hope to achieve the goals. He often associated beauty with precious stones, as he strongly believed that these stones are symbols of permanence and beauty is permanent.

Art belongs to imagination in the first place. Imagination under this authoritarian regime is forbidden. The town does not approve of dreaming. Therefore the mathematical master frowned when he heard that the school children saw an angel that looks like the Happy Prince in their dreams “Ah! but we have, in our dreams,’ answered the children; and the Mathematical Master frowned and looked very severe, for he did not approve of children dreaming.” (Wilde, 1997, P. 2). Dreaming is not allowed in the selfish town and children are not allowed to dream as this may threaten the very existence of the governing elite and

because there is no art without imagination and dreaming, so is art doomed not to exist in the impoverished town before the reawakening that the beauty-inspired soul of the Happy Prince will later trigger off.

With this setting in mind we are then introduced to the second character in the story which is the romantic Swallow. He is idealistic by nature and realistic at the same time. For though he fell in love with the reed because he had admired her slender waist but he still decided at the end to leave her because he thought that such a relationship is " a ridiculous attachment" because he likes to travel and fly and she is static and cannot move. She is a coquette who flirts with the wind and she does not have a conversation and has no money as well. We realize that he is Apollonian in spirit; he is reasonable and logical and does not let his passion and love overcome his other desires. Gradually we get to see more and more character traits of the Swallow. As he flies to the town he wonders if the town has made any preparations for him. He is proud, vainglorious and snobbish expecting the town to celebrate his coming. As he decides to put up between the feet of the statue of the Happy Prince, he sees a drop of water fall from him. He remarks that 'What is the use of a statue if it cannot keep the rain off? (Wilde, 1997, p. 3) he said; 'I must look for a good chimney-pot,' (Wilde, 1997, p. 3). A dirty chimney pot is for him more protective than a statue covered with precious stones. The character traits of the Swallow are symbolic of any ordinary average Victorian personality with typical pride, realism, idealism with a typically Victorian lack of appreciation for aesthetic objects preferring a useful chimney to a useless golden statue. The knowledge to appreciate art will gradually transform him. The statue begins to tell his story to the Swallow. He tells him that behind the walls of the palace, he enjoyed all types of pleasures and he was happy if sensual pleasure can be named happiness. When he was a living human the Happy Prince was not able to feel the misery and suffering of the town people as he was too engaged with carnal and sensual desires. He was able to attain some

kind of self-denial or altruism only when he assumed an artistic shape. He only knew tears when he became a piece of art. Art has transformative powers capable of changing the soul of the prince into a different more sensible, more altruistic one.

In this context art is about to change the Swallow as well and turn him into a new more sensible and more caring character. He asks him to take the ruby out of his sword-hilt and give it to the poor toiling seamstress who is embroidering passion-flowers for the queen's maid-of-honour. Her hands were red and her face was worn and thin. In fact the word passion is symbolic of the passion of Christ; the suffering of Christ on the cross during the crucifixion. Wilde regarded Jesus the inimitable supreme romantic artist. The queen and her entourage do not know what art is, they also do not feel others' suffering as Jesus did. They know art as a mere decoration. The passion in this context is entirely different. Paradoxically it is only to be embroidered on the satin gown to please the rich queen. Religion is here referred to as being used for fake appearances only and not for the sake of the prosperity of humanity. Wilde criticises the religious hypocrisy of the Victorian age. The rich use religion to feed on the poor and only as a piece of decoration to beatify their appearances.

But at first the various desires and wishes of the vain Swallow prevent him from fulfilling the request of the Happy Prince. He says that he is being waited for in Egypt where the weather is warm. His friends are flying up and down the Nile talking to the lotus-flowers and he begins enumerating all types of pleasure he is likely to miss in case he accepted the Happy Prince's request. He again justified his refusal by the fact that he hates boys because

Last summer, when I was staying on the river, there were two rude boys, the miller's sons, who were always throwing stones at me. They never hit me, of course; we Swallows fly far too well for that, and besides, I come of a family famous for its agility; but still, it was a mark of disrespect.' (Wilde, 1997, p. 2)

As mentioned earlier, the Swallow represents the morality of the crude Victorian age. Pride, conceit, dignity and noble descent are reflected in the character of the Swallow. All of them are traits inherent in the Victorian society that block people from accepting art and beauty as essential and indispensable for society change for the better. What the Swallow lacks is only susceptibility to let art enter his heart and transform him so that he can be an altruistic creature feeling the suffering of the needy and shaking off hypocrisy. The Swallow, however, reluctantly acquiesces to the request of the Happy Prince at first when he sees his sadness. He picked up the ruby and flew over the town to give the ruby to the poor seamstress. While flying he passed by a balcony of a beautiful woman speaking with her lover about the power of love. She says that she ordered passion flowers to be embroidered on her dress but the seamstress was too lazy. Wilde lingers again over the image of insensibility of the rich to the poor. He shows their selfish and narcissist nature. Ironically, the lovers speak about love. They do not know true love. True love is not merely love of pleasures. The kind of love that the Happy Prince had known during his life time was not true love. True love is sacrifice and self-denial to attain spiritual perfection that leads to true happiness. Wilde was at pains to make this concept clear. His use of irony to reveal hypocrisy is poignant.

In appreciation of the hard work of the seamstress the Swallow placed the ruby beside the thimble-not anywhere else- and hovered around the feverish boy and with his wings fanned the boy who felt better. The first transformation that the Swallow underwent was his feeling warm in the cold weather. 'That is because you have done a good action,' was the answer of the Happy Prince. Art is changing the vainglorious Swallow. Individualism which is also Nietzsche's designation of the Apollonian and which can only be broken to reach the primordial unity of humanity by the Dionysian spirit which removes individualistic barriers is one of the prerequisites of art as Wilde clearly stated in his essay *The Soul of Man*

*under Socialism*. He emphasized the importance of being unique in the society as imitation spoils the diversity of the human race:

whenever a community or a powerful section of a community, or a government of any kind, attempts to dictate to the artist what he is to do, Art either entirely vanishes, or becomes stereotyped, or degenerates into a low and ignoble form of craft. A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. (Wilde, 1997, p. 14)

The change began with the Swallow who became the incarnation of uniqueness and individual change. He is no longer a conformist who blindly complies with the mores of the society. He is now more sensible, more willing to accept the errands of the Happy Prince. An action which is sharply contrasted with the love of the two lovers at the balcony. Sensual love is placed against spiritual one. The scene is a conflict between sensual pleasures and spiritual ones that the Swallow resolved in favour of spiritual love. In reality the statue or, in other words, art has not only made an atmosphere conducive to change but served as a moralizing agent preaching morality and spirituality.

The professor of ornithology who wonders at seeing a Swallow in winter and writes a long article to the press explaining this extraordinary phenomenon with words that many of the public did not understand. Symbolically not every Victorian, however, was ready to accept what Wilde was doing at any rate. Many did not understand what he was doing with his new style, aesthetics and seemingly eccentric dress. It was undoubtedly an extraordinary phenomenon at the time to understand sacrifice.

The Happy Prince asks the Swallow again to help him. Repeating his delicate and poetic phrase "Swallow, Swallow, and little Swallow" he implores the swallow to help a dramatist. But this time the prince has no ruby to give but he does have sapphires in his eyes.

He is willing to give his eyes to creative people like the dramatist. Having helped the hard working people, or in other words the working classes and rewarded them for their hard work in order to promote their individualism and protect them against poverty, it is time for Wilde to reward creative people for their imagination in the hope that children may start dreaming again. The healthy construction of a good society starts with a similar care to children, their dreams, and the cultivation of their imagination. Imagination can help those children dream of building a better future. The dramatists, novelists, writers and authors represent the intelligentsia of every society, and without them a society cannot be reformed. He gave his eyes to the dramatist so he can finish writing his play. 'I am beginning to be appreciated,' he cried; 'this is from some great admirer. Now I can finish my play,' and he looked quite happy. (Wilde, 1997, p. 4)

Feeling sympathetic for the Happy Prince, the Swallow promises him that when he goes to Egypt he will bring him back more beautiful and more shining jewels than the ones he had given to town people. The choice of Egypt is not without its symbolic significance. The Greek and Egyptian civilizations both fascinated Wilde and he regarded them emblems of beauty, a storehouse of exotic and aesthetic objects. But the prince implores him again and asks him to listen to his command. The word "command" is a deliberate play on the word commandment used in the bible. The religious connotation of the word here is inescapable. Wilde regarded Christ a supreme artist:

To the artist, expression is the only mode under which he can conceive life at all. To him what is dumb is dead. But to Christ it was not so. With a width and wonder of imagination that fills one almost with awe, he took the entire world of the inarticulate, the voiceless world of pain, as his kingdom, and made of himself its eternal mouthpiece. Those of whom I have spoken, who are dumb under oppression, and 'whose silence is heard only of God,' he chose as his brothers. He sought to become

eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, and a cry in the lips of those whose tongues had been tied. (Wilde, 2014, p. 27)

It carries the message that art is real religion as if the Happy Prince is asking him in the name of what he the Swallow believes in, in the name of religion to stay with him one more night to help him reform a society in wretched conditions . Pearson called Wilde`s fairy tales “Lessons in Practical Christianity”. As the Happy Prince gets rid of all of his precious possessions, he reminds us of a statement by Jesus Christ related by Wilde in his essay *The Soul of Man under Socialism* of the rich man who came to Jesus seeking advice Jesus advised him:

‘You should give up private property. It hinders you from realizing your perfection. It is a drag upon you. It is a burden. Your personality does not need it. It is within you, and not outside of you, that you will find what you really are, and what you really want. (Wilde, 1973, p. 18)

At this point he asked him to pluck his other eye and give it to a little girl selling match-sticks. Her father would beat her if she comes back without money because she had lost her match-sticks in the gutter and there is no way she could bring them back. He helps the poor girl and she goes home happy. Wilde regarded children the backbone of any healthy society and the basis for making a true change in the town was to start giving children a carefree happy life. Child labor has been and is still in some developing countries a real problem and an issue that many governments failed to address.

The Swallow resists all the sensual pleasures awaiting him in Egypt. He is now capable of resisting desires for a higher more sublime objective. He undergoes true transformation in the face of carnal and sensual pleasures and in favour of spiritual happiness. He begins to tell the prince of the stories and marvellous things in Egypt:

He told him of the red ibises, who stand in long rows on the banks of the Nile, and catch gold fish in their beaks; of the Sphinx, who is as old as the world itself and lives in the desert, and knows everything; of the merchants, who walk slowly by the side of their camels, and carry amber beads in their hands; of the King of the Mountains of the Moon, who is as black as ebony, and worships a large crystal; of the great green snake that sleeps in a palm-tree, and has twenty priests to feed it with honey-cakes; and of the pygmies who sail over a big lake on large flat leaves, and are always at war with the butterflies.( Wilde, 1997, p. 6)

But all of those beautiful stories do not really interest the Happy Prince as he is no longer interested in any sensual pleasures. He tells the Swallow that 'more marvellous than anything is the suffering of men and of women. "There is no Mystery so great as Misery.' Fly over my city, little Swallow, and tell me what you see there." Wilde regarded the suffering of men and women a mystery as it is quite ambiguous for him why human beings wrong each other in such a way that one group should live in poverty and misery while a few people accumulate fortunes and private property which he regarded the nightmare of an ideal solidarity community. It is another way of asking why we cannot overcome our selfishness and share with our fellows our fortune. Another way of saying that we are either excessively Dionysian or excessively Apollonian and we never manage to merge both in order to transcend our reality and reach the universal and primordial unity. The prince when he was a human was not able to feel the suffering of others. He only felt empathy when he turned into a work of art. The Swallow tells him of what he had seen in in the town, the poor people and the beggars in the streets. This prompts the Happy Prince to ask him for one last errand which is to give the gold that covers his body to the poor to alleviate the suffering of the poverty-stricken town. The gold being less precious than sapphire or ruby is given to the poor classes

of the society. More precious stones were given to the dramatist. Writers and people with imagination are better equipped to lead society to prosperity. The Swallow, however, picked his gold leaf after leaf of the fine gold he brought to the poor, and the children's faces grew rosier, and they laughed and played games in the street. 'We have bread now!' they cried. Wilde would certainly forget that social assistance to support the needy is a corner stone for making people live happily. Having done all the commands of the Happy Prince, the people now live happily and:

The streets looked as if they were made of silver, they were so bright and glistening; long icicles like crystal daggers hung down from the eaves of the houses, everybody went about in furs, and the little boys wore scarlet caps and skated on the ice. (Wilde, 1997, p. 7)

The relationship between the Happy Prince and the Swallow develops and the Happy Prince declares that he loves him. Though the Swallow becomes older and colder but he refuses to leave the Happy Prince. The arrogant and proud Swallow has been entirely changed by the Happy Prince. His concerns are no longer love, warmth, Egypt and rest or pleasure or the sensations that he always describes, but he is now determined not to leave the Happy Prince. He told him that he would not go to Egypt but to the house of death. Spiritually the Swallow finds his rest in death which he calls the "brother of sleep".

The statue gets rid of all of its precious stones for the sake of the different classes of the society. Wilde asserted in his essay *the Soul of Man under Socialism* that when property concentrates in the hands of a few people at the expense of others; this will lead to hindering the natural developments of people and their individual characters:

But it may be asked how Individualism, which is now more or less dependent on the existence of private property for its development, will benefit by the abolition of such

private property. The answer is very simple. It is true that, under existing conditions, a few men who have had private means of their own, such as Byron, Shelley, Browning, Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, and others, have been able to realize their personality more or less completely. Not one of these men ever did a single day's work for hire. They were relieved from poverty. They had an immense advantage...It will benefit in this way. Under the new conditions, Individualism will be far freer, far finer, and far more intensified than it is now. I am not talking of the great imaginatively-realized Individualism of such poets as I have mentioned, but of the great actual Individualism latent and potential in mankind generally. For the recognition of private property has really harmed Individualism (Wilde, 1993, p. 9)

As the mayor of the town finds that the statue became shabby and ugly and all his precious stones were removed, he decides to have it removed. It is no longer beautiful and therefore it is not useful any more according to the Victorian way of thinking. Wilde was aware of the insensitivity of the Victorian age to his proposals and he does expect a reaction like melting down the Happy Prince. The town councillors and the public in general "utterly failed to perceive the significance of the Happy Prince's transformation..., the brisk insensitivity of human characters- or at least the powerful or and learned among them- gives 'The Happy Prince' a tone of scepticism" (Raby, 1988, p. 57). The disregard of what the Happy Prince and Swallow have done is a clear indication of either the Victorian misunderstanding of aestheticism or their inability to understand that art and beauty do have a purpose beyond being simply there to stand as an exhibition object.

A university art professor remarks that as the statue is no longer beautiful, so it is no longer useful. Wilde in fact neither identifies himself with the town councillors nor with the university professor who is supposed to represent the educated people. The educated classes conform to the mores, habits and ways of thinking of the common people to satisfy authority.

Wilde reflects on the Victorian utilitarian view of art that judges beauty by usefulness. The Victorians believed that we only enjoy beauty as a utilitarian means for an end and nothing beyond that. Wilde, however, believed that art and beauty help create a mood and a sensation that transforms man's vision and helps him look at the world from a different perspective. Beauty can make man create another level of beauty that goes beyond the crude beauty of nature. This helps us understand that Wilde believed in the supremacy of art to nature. He reiterates on more than one occasion that life should imitate art and not the opposite. Art is a philosophy that is not relative as morality is. Using terms from Plato's philosophy, Wilde regarded art as a vision that looks away from the parochially minded people. He asserts in his essay the *Decay of Lying* that:

Remote from reality and with her eyes turned away from the shadows of the cave, Art reveals her own perfection, and the wondering crowd that watches the opening of the marvelous, many-petalled rose fancies that it is its own history that is being told, its own spirit that is finding expression in a new form. But it is not so. The highest art rejects the burden of the human spirit, and gains more from a new medium or a fresh material than she does from any enthusiasm for art, or lofty passion, or from any great awakening of the human consciousness. She develops purely on her own lines. She is not symbolic of her own age. It is the ages that are her symbols. (Wilde, 1891, p. 42-3).

He indeed identifies himself with the statue and the Swallow who stands as symbols of the transformation that art can exercise on people and towards the end, the fairy tale turned into a parable with distinct instructive lessons. The Happy Prince and the Swallow were rewarded by God. When God asked his angels to bring him the most precious things, the angels rightly chose the lead heart of the Happy Prince and the dead Swallow. God said 'You have rightly chosen,' 'for in my garden of Paradise this little bird shall sing for evermore,

and in my city of gold the Happy Prince shall praise me.’(Wilde, 1997, p. 8). God rewarded both of them with paradise, which is a sign that religion does not disapprove or contradict art. The perfection attained through art is similar to that of religion. The Happy Prince has sacrificed everything without waiting for a reward from others. Like Christ, he was not waiting for a reward and remained anonymous to the very end of the story while those whom he had helped did not think that the help came from the Happy Prince and he himself never asked about the reactions of the townspeople for whom he had dismembered himself. He was perfectly altruistic. The mystery he had mentioned earlier in the story regarding people's suffering and the reason why suffering is such a mystery is now cleared. Guy Willoughby comments on the similarity between the figure of Christ and the Happy Prince in sacrifice:

In wider social terms, such charitable gestures may be useless, but in individual terms, the terms in which Christ realized himself fully, such sacrifices are vital. When he divests himself of his wealth, the Happy Prince, and not his community, becomes the recipient of grace--or 'perfection', to use the more numinous Wildean term. He is akin to a Gospel character whom Wilde would introduce into both of his later theoretical discussions of Christ. (Willoughby, 1987, p. 18).

Conclusively Wilde assumes that the fortunes and the material possessions spoil the soul of man. Getting rid of material possessions for the sake of others is a form of individual self-realizations and a development of individuality that lead to an attainment of spiritual beauty that the Happy Prince only attained when he divested himself of his possessions. Wilde affirms in his *De Profundis*:

And above all, Christ is the most supreme of individualists. Humility, like the artistic, acceptance of all experiences, is merely a mode of manifestation. It is man's soul that Christ is always looking for. He calls it 'God's Kingdom,'

and finds it in every one. He compares it to little things, to a tiny seed, to a handful of leaven, to a pearl. That is because one realises one's soul only by getting rid of all alien passions, all acquired culture, and all external possessions, be they good or evil. (Wilde, 1985, p 18)

The superficial appearance of the statue at the end of the story was ugly and shabby, though his soul has attained a perfection of beauty that the superficial utilitarian materialistic town councilors and the Victorians for that matter were not able to appreciate, they are likely to continue to see him as ugly as long as they do not fully understand the real worth of art and only looks at its utilitarian aspect which makes them even worse than they really are in the eyes of the aesthete Oscar Wilde.

## II- Superiority of Art to Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and The Domination of Dionysus

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, 2000, p. 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, 1985, p. 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, 1985, p. 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, 2009, p. 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, 1992, P. 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, 1908, p. 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, 2009, p. 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, 2000, p. 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,2000, p. 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 are 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's 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, 1985, p. 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, 1992, p. 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, 1909, p. 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, 2005, p.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, 1997, p.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, 1985, p. 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, 1985, p. 241-242)

The Victorian world “knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing.”(Wilde, 1985, p.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, 1985, p. 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, 1985 p. 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, 1995 p. 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, 1985, p. 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, 1985 p. 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, 1985, p. 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, 1985, p.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,1985, p.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, 1985, p. 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, 1978, p. 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, 1985, p. 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, 1985, p. 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, 1985, p. 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, 1995, p. 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, 1985, p. 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, 1985, p. 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, 2003, p 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, 1985, p. 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, 1985, p.71). Entirely ignoring the fact that Dorian may have fallen in love with for reasons other than her outer appearance, she therefore makes the mistake of neglecting her acting talent and she perform 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, 1985, p.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 surrounding "What a place to find one's divinity in!" (Wilde, 1985, p. 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, 1985, p. 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, 1985, p. 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, 1985, p.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, 1985, p.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, 1985, p. 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, 1985, 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, 1985, p.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, 1985, p. 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, 1985, p.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, 1985, p. 236) and he repeated again later one that "I should fancy, however, that murder is always a mistake."(Wilde, p.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, 1909, p.146).

### III- Dionysian Dreamers versus Apollonian Realists in *Salome*

Salome is another symbolic variation of Wilde's idea of the indispensability of temperance and the importance of balance between two extremes; Dionysian and Apollonian elements and the balanced tension between the two in creating perfect art as opposed to bad art. Remaining faithful to the French symbolists, he deliberately wrote the play in French in 1891 and only three years later did Alfred Douglas translate it into English “ Wilde's choice of French places him in the interesting company of Beckford and Samuel Beckett, and in all three cases there is a correspondence between renunciation of the native language and the artist's subject....because to do so is to enlist the aid of language against nature ... style becomes its own subject.(Conrad, 1977, p.145). He carefully selects characters that symbolically reflect both tendencies with varying degrees of intensity. Through the play, he infuses clashing religious themes and debates into his play in order to reflect his own vision on good and bad art and how the religious landscape affects the whole process of creation... An archetypal religious story like Salome provides him with a precious opportunity to place religion versus art, sensuality and intoxication versus ethics and rules and rationality, or Paterian aesthetics versus Ruskinian morality, and to use Nietzsche's terms again Dionysus versus Apollo in a direct confrontation. Though the play is complex and does not seem to subscribe to a specific agenda, a closer analysis of the play shows Wilde's other themes discussed in his previous works; namely, his art philosophy placed against strict religion and morality. The moral code and religion is a code of rules, which pertain to rationality, and logic as well belongs in a Nietzschean sense to the realm of Apollo. Art, fancy and imagination and whatever is related to them belongs to Dionysus. Religion, however, is

Apollonian only in as far as it is a rational and rigid set of rules and not a philosophy that integrates imagination into it. Wilde regarded Christ the greatest artist and he therefore found a balanced fusion of the Dionysian and Apollonian in him. He never subscribes to views that relegate Christ to Apollo only and regard Christ as only a book of rigid and boring rules to be applied. Salome is a symbol of a work of art while Jokanaan a symbol of the rigid Victorian morality and both of them are not meant to triumph over each other if they become excessive but only if they integrate with each other. Bram Dijkstra comments:

Salomé's hunger for the Baptist's head thus proved to be a mere pretext for the men's need to find the source of all wrongs they thought were being done to them. Salomé, the evil woman, became their favourite scapegoat. In order for the spirit to triumph over the body, Salomé had to be executed "in a cleansing massacre." Her death became the triumph of the Victorian male over sexual temptation (Dijkstra, 1986, p. 398)

Wilde, however, reversed this Victorian expectation and attempted to thwart and spoil Jokanaan's triumph by eventually punishing both. Both of them did not adhere to Wilde's prescription of true religion on the one hand and his advocacy of a type of art that does not imitate life on the other.

Salome is the biblical story of Herodias' daughter who danced the dance of seven veils before Herod for the head of John the baptist whom Herodias ( Herod's wife) hated for stating that her marriage to Herod was illegal. Salome is seen in Christian traditions as a symbol of female destructive seduction. She is an apt example of corrupting art for Wilde. His choice of this character serves his purpose of a known biblical character placed in direct confrontation with John the Baptist who is an important symbol of piety and conformism. Salome becomes "a crucible for testing the conflict he was increasingly feeling between the

requirements of orderly human life and the impassioned dreams of art” (Keane, 2002, p. 187) It represents art in the form of unbridled sensual desires and unlimited fancy coupled with the philosophy of liberty of the mind placed against rules of conduct and human limitations, be they religious or not. In the words of Chris Snodgrass, “it has often been argued that Salome represents the figure of the artist. But in Wilde’s fin-de-siècle allegory Salome represents less the artist than the work of art itself” (Keane, 2002, p. 187) Salome and Jokanaan according to Richard Ellman reflects Wilde advocating the ideas of Ruskin and Pater at the same time “caught between these two opposing influences and unable to decide which one to embrace. Wilde’s intention from the beginning was to display a new direct showdown between religion and art. (Ellman, 1985, p. 85-90). Each character of the play belongs to one or the other side. The direct dialogue serves to make this dichotomy clear and throughout the play, the characters show their nature. The consequences that later ensue are meant to accentuate Wilde’s conviction.

The play opens with two characters at the terrace outside Herod’s palace. The page of Herodias and the young Syrian are talking about the beauty of Salome. Both of them are endowed with imagination as both find symbols in the scene and reflect on her beauty in a romantic dreamlike way. The page of Herodias finds similarities in the moon and describes the moon “Look at the moon! How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. You would fancy she was looking for dead things.”(Wilde, 2002, p. 21). The fact that he finds symbolism and a bad omen in the moon is an indication that the page of Herodias is, though not excessively so, a dreamer, and a character who believes in superstitions or in what is beyond cognitive comprehension. He believes in supernatural things and his vision goes beyond tangible reality and he finds symbols in things he sees, therefore he is best to classify as Dionysian in nature but within reasonable limits. Such a classification is not strict, so he might be to a more or less degree one thing or

the other but after all he is only a shade and a foreshadowing of another Dionysian character one a bigger scale and this character is Salome. Similarly the young Syrian shares him the same nature. He is astounded by Salome's beauty; he is a sensitive soul who is easily charmed by beauty. He is Paterian in spirit. He lives a life of senses and echoes some of Pater's ideas who stated in his *Renaissance* "On a sudden the imagination feels itself free. How facile and direct, it seems to say, is this life of the senses and the understanding, when once we have apprehended it" (Pater, 1986, p.188). The Syrian does not discuss religion is not even interested in it throughout the play and does not pay any attention to religious debates. He represents a current in Victorian England where religion is supposed be the focus of attacks by the so-called decadent writers who mocked religion. Wilde never distanced himself from religion and he even punished the young Syrian by death sooner than expected for his excessive addiction to and gazing at beauty without for that matter using reason to control his emotions. He describes Salome as having "strange look. She is like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver. She is like a princess who has little white doves for feet. You would fancy she was dancing." (Wilde, 2002, p. 22). White doves being a symbol of love, peace and serenity, Wilde does associate these qualities with the philosophy of art which does look strange to a traditional Victorian soul susceptible to be charmed by its beauty. In the bible, however, in Matthew 3:16 and Luke 3:22 the Holy Spirit is compared to a white Dove. Wilde remained convinced that the real spirit of art and beauty is never far away from truthful religion. The yellow, which is Wilde's favorite color and the preferred color of the aesthetes, recurs in this play as in his previous works. The yellow identifies Salome with art. She is the archetypal representative of art in the play. Her white doves are the sacred wings of fancy by which art flies into different worlds. A fancy that assumes different masks to express itself. Wilde gradually introduces the second archetypal figure who would stand up to the philosophy of beauty represented by Jokanaan the prophet

or John the Baptist according to the bible. Christopher Nassaar believes that “Jokanaan is not only Ruskinian but is also Wilde's presentation of Christianity as a religion of sexual repression. (Nassaar, 1995, pp- 94-101). Richards Ellmann who is an Oscar Wilde expert also affirms, “Behind the figure of Jokanaan lurks the image of that perversely untouching, untouchable prophet John whom Wilde knew at Oxford.” (Elmann, 1985, p. 89). The typical Victorian religious landscape is highlighted. While the Syrian and the page are talking about the scene, a noise is heard and two soldiers speak with each other about the coming uproar. The second soldier answers that it is the Jews who always discuss about religion and they never agree. The Pharisees and Sadducees; both are Jewish sects during the time of Jesus Christ. While the Pharisees believed in angels, spirits, and the resurrection of the dead, the Sadducees observed strictly the written law and they did not believe in spirits or the resurrection. The two sects dispute each other's convictions, and the second soldier comments “I cannot tell. They are always doing it. The Pharisees, for instance, say that there are angels, and the Sadducees declare that angels do not exist” (Wilde, 2002, p. 23). For the first soldiers the whole dispute was ridiculous as it is not possible to reach a final conclusion about such matters. We are given two more characters with two different religious beliefs and two different opinions according to how they are classified Ruskinian or Paterian, Dionysian or Apollonian. This religious contention is not invented by Wilde but rather it exists in the New Testament. One with a belief in the supernatural or the metaphysical while the other prefers to believe strictly in reality and the tangible. However, the soldiers in the play are only minor characters, but they help us get a glimpse of his major Characters in his classification, namely Salome and Jokanaan. The religious debates show that the soldiers are accordingly classified into Dionysian and Apollonian. In the meantime, the dreamy young Syrian keeps gazing at the beauty of Salome and never pays attention to a dispute, which looks for a man like him a ridiculous dispute. The page of Herodias advises him not to look

too much at Salome because such a thing may forebode evil. Notwithstanding his warnings, He keeps looking at the princess while the soldiers speak about the somber look of the Tetrarch. The romantic young Syrian gazes at her in such a way that the reader feels that the writer is preparing him for a fatal fate that will befall the first most Dionysian character. He excessively indulges in himself remains ignorant of everything around him except the beauty of the princess “How pale the Princess is! Never have I seen her so pale. She is like the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver.”( Wilde, 2002, p. 26)

Against this background, a new contrast along the same lines is made between the young Syrian and the Cappadocian (inhabitant of a region in Anatolia - known for its natural wonders and beauty) who does not believe in gods as they no longer respond to his calls. The young Syrian, however, is completely taken by beauty losing all sense of his surroundings. The realistic Cappadocian remains down-to-earth and does not believe in unseen gods and remains temperate in his convictions while the soldiers are also completely busy with reality as it stands. They only observe what happens and never try to reflect on it. The Cappadocian states that:

I think they in my country there are no gods left. The Romans have driven them out. There are some who say that they have hidden themselves in the mountains, but I do not believe it. Three nights I have been on the mountains seeking them everywhere. I did not find them. And at last I called them by their names, and they did not come. They are dead. (Wilde, 2002, p. 28).

The Cappadocian is a non-believer and he even wonders that Jews worship a god that they cannot see. It is not difficult to see that he represents Nietzsche whose ideas at the time spread across Europe and who declared the death of god in his book *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. He is another example of a totally Apollonian character that foreshadows Herod's wife

Herodias who does not believe in more than what she can see. While the young Syrian is a shade of Salome, the Cappadocian is a shade of Herodias. The entire conversation between the soldiers, the Cappadocian, and the young Syrians aims at intensifying the contrast in which the young Syrian is shown as entirely cut from reality and immersed in his daydreams about Salome. He is not interested in the Tetrarch and the conversation about religion or even about a man named Jokanaan who is imprisoned. He is an example of excess, another impassioned Dorian Grey. The dialogue about the different wine types that the Tetrarch drinks does not interest him, as he is only interested in beauty and in particular Salome's beauty: "The Princess has hidden her face behind her fan! Her little white hands are fluttering like doves that fly to their dove-cots. They are like white butterflies. They are just like white butterflies."( Wilde, 2002, p. 31). "He proceeds to describe Salome in highly metaphoric terms as if she were not just a beautiful girl but a perfect and mysterious phantasm of beauty" (Keane, 2002, p. 187). Even when a terrible thing like strangling the Tetrarch's brother, the first husband of Herodias, was being discussed by the soldiers and the Cappadocian who expressed his shock at hearing that a king is strangled, the young Syrian's response is entirely out of tune with his environment. He is only concerned about her "The Princess rises! She is leaving the table! She looks very troubled. Ah, she is coming this way. Yes, she is coming towards us. How pale she is! Never have I seen her so pale." (Wilde, 2002, p. 36). The page of Herodias warns the Syrian not to look at her too much as this may bring on a curse. The Syrian is being gradually charmed by Salome who is seen a symbol of beauty. Speaking about religion or death, faraway lands or strange things did not divert him from concentrating on her beauty. The entire dialogue serves as a foreshadowing of what will happen. Being only Dionysian in nature, the Syrian will eventually have to face his doomed fate which Wilde had intended for him from the beginning. He keeps concentrating on the symbols that the princess

evokes: “She is like a dove that has strayed.... She is like a narcissus trembling in the wind.... She is like a silver flower.” (Wilde, 2002, p. 36)

Upon seeing her, he asks her if she has just left the feast and she ignores him. She keeps wondering why the tetrarch keeps looking at her and then she admits that she knows the reason. She reveals her identity and her views about the world surrounding her and attacks the religious atmosphere and the foolishness of her entourage:

How sweet the air is here! I can breathe here! Within there are Jews from Jerusalem who are tearing each other in pieces over their foolish ceremonies, and barbarians who drink and drink, and spill their wine on the pavement, and Greeks from Smyrna with painted eyes and painted cheeks, and frizzed hair curled in twisted coils, and silent, subtle Egyptians, with long nails of jade and russett cloaks, and Romans brutal and coarse, with their uncouth jargon. Ah! how I loathe the Romans! They are rough and common, and they give themselves the airs of noble lords. (Wilde, 2002, P. 36)

She is not interested in religion and regards religious ceremonies as mere petty and meaningless rituals. The Christian world was often blamed for superstitious rituals that are always to blame for hindering progress. She criticizes the barbarians who are only interested in superficial and materialistic gains and Greeks for their painted faces as they are excessively interested in cosmetics to cover their true nature and the Romans whom she loathes for being too much brutal and pretend to be noble lords. Strange religions and convictions are shown in disarray in order to prepare for an archetypal artistic and sensual act, which is Salome’s dance of the seven veils. Christopher Nassaar comments:

The Egyptians, Greeks, barbarians and Romans evoke images of strange religions, for they are associated with the quarrelling Jews and seem quite comfortable in the atmosphere of religious multiplicity and confusion which the Jews create as they argue

over the details of Judaism. They are introduced, moreover, against a background of religious disorder. When Herod promises Salomé whatever she may ask for if she will dance for him (Nassaar, 2005)

She then ignores again the Syrian's comment asking her to be seated. There is nothing curious, or profound or beautiful about him. She, therefore, keeps finding symbolism in her surrounding. She responds only to what is beautiful. She is a typical disciple of Pater who believed that the only aim in life is 'to respond to what is beautiful, curious or profound' (Erickson, 1977, p. 75). She continues her gaze at the moon:

How good to see the moon! She is like a little piece of money, you would think she was a little silver flower. The moon is cold and chaste. I am sure she is a virgin, she has a virgin's beauty. Yes, she is a virgin. She has never defiled herself. She has never abandoned herself to men, like the other goddesses. (Wilde, 2002, P. 37)

The moon stands an important leitmotif. It is seen differently by the different characters of the play. "It is the spectator and not life that art really mirrors" (The Picture of Dorian Gray) Wilde implies that an art critic reveals in his criticism more about himself than about the work of art itself. Therefore, each character finds in the moon a reflection of himself. Salome romantically finds the moon as a symbol of purity and chastity and a symbol of a virgin and chaste woman while the Syrian finds it "a little princess who wears a yellow veil. For the page the moon is "a dead woman" and for Herod it is "a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers" while for Herodias it is just a moon and nothing else. Each one sees the moon from his own perception. Wilde stresses the importance of individual experience and personal perception; no two people are similar. As reality for him is not fixed, indeed it is mutant and changeable to the point of non-existence. Wilde elaborates on this in his essays "The Decay of Lying" and in 'The Critic as Artist'. In 'The Decay of Lying' for example he

writes: “Try as we may, we cannot get behind the appearances of things to reality And the terrible reality may be that there is no reality in things apart from their experiences” (Wilde, 2012, p. 4). What really matters for Wilde is experience and perception and reality seen through the perception of every individual. Every character in the play looks at reality through a different perspective according to how they are classified either Dionysian or Apollonian. Nietzsche’s perspectivism is here present. He stated that there are “there are no facts, only interpretations” and that “convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies” (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 483). The truth depends on one’s own perception and this perception is personal and subjective. Reality is illusive and the idea of illusiveness of reality is attributed to Pater who stated in his *Renaissance that*:

At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action. But when reflexion begins to act upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems suspended like a trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions —color, odor, texture—in the mind of the observer.(Pater, 1986, p. 108)

As reality is only a person’s perception and experience as it has transpired through the religious discussion of the Jews we begin to discern that a confrontation between Salome and Jokanaan, art and religion is being orchestrated by Wilde. Two perspectives and perceptions are displayed for which both of them will be later punished. In other words it is a confrontation between the philosophy of fin- de-siècle rigid rules and the philosophy of a liberal world and sensual beauty, a showdown between Dionysus and Apollo, an attempt to see if they can reconcile with each other and if successful, they may end up creating a peaceful world of love, harmony and peace and if not then they deserve punishment. Nassaar finds Salome a counterpoint of Christ:

Wilde associates her with the pagan moon-goddess Cybele, who jealously guarded her virginity, was served by eunuch priests, and murdered her lover, the holy king Attis, after he mated with her (or tried to, depending on the version of the myth). It is Cybele who is the light of the world while Salomé is the incarnation on earth of that light for a brief moment in history. Wilde's play is a kind of Black Mass in which Salomé is presented as a counterpoint to Christ. (Nassaar, 2005)

She is told by the soldiers that he is a prophet who speaks about things they did not understand. The Syrian warns her that if she does not return: "Pardon me, Princess, but if you do not return some misfortune may happen."( Wilde, 2002, p. 40). She ignores him as if he does not exist and keeps enquiring about the prophet. The fact that she never responds to the Syrian reactions is an indication that Wilde in fact treats the character of Salome as a representation of something else. She is an aesthetic edifice and she stands there to charm and only to get what she wants. She listens and obeys only her desires. "Salome does nothing to seduce or bewitch her admirer, except simply *be*; she is not portrayed as an intellect, or a wit, or a charismatic personality, only a visually beautiful object" Keane, 2002, p. 187). She hears Jokanaan utter his typical religious threatening warnings: "Rejoice not thou, land of Palestine, because the rod of him who smote thee is broken. For from the seed of the serpent shall come forth a basilisk, and that which is born of it shall devour the birds."( Wilde, 2002, p. 41) and she insists on speaking with him though Herod had forbidden anyone to speak with him even the high priest. The soldiers refuse to let her speak with Jokanaan. She has no other choice but to ask the romantic young Syrian who is the chief of guards and who is passionately in love with her. She seduces him to let her see the prophet. Notably she only speaks to him when she needs him to satisfy her desire. She already knows that the Syrian had lost all Apollonian sense and he is now weak and willing to do anything for her. He is a spellbound Dorian Gray and she calls him by his name:

You will do this tiling for me, will you not, Narraboth? You will do this thing for me. I have always been kind to you. You will do it for me. I would but look at this strange prophet. Men have talked so much of him. Often have I heard the Tetrarch talk of him. I think the Tetrarch is afraid of him. Are you, even you, also afraid of him, Narraboth? (Wilde, 2002, p. 44)

Refusing to grant her wish for being afraid of Herod, she decides to seduce him for a second time and this time by promising to give him something of symbolic significance “You will do this thing for me, Narraboth, and to-morrow when I pass in my litter beneath the gateway of the idol-sellers I will let fall for you a little flower, a little green flower.” The little green flower is a known symbol of the decadence movement. The color green has always been a symbol of Oscar Wilde. A green flower is usually unnatural promoting exaltation of the unnatural and the recurrent idea and Wilde’s major doctrine that nature should imitate art and not the opposite. The loving romantic young is being seduced by the aesthetic movement and he is doing his best to resist it. After all, he is too afraid to confront religion in a traditional society that exercises zero tolerance against atheists or those who doubt the sanctity of religious people and their ideas. Refusing for a second time, she decides to seduce him for the last time while smiling at him in a seductive way:

You will do this thing for me, Narraboth. You know that you will do this thing for me. And to-morrow when I pass in my litter by the bridge of the idol-buyers, I will look at you through the muslin veils, I will look at you, Narraboth, it may be I will smile at you. Look at me, Narraboth, look at me. Ah! you know that you will do what I ask of you. You know it well.... I know that you will do this thing. (Wilde, 2002, P. 45)

The transfixed Syrian was not able to resist any further and he signaled to the guard to bring the prophet. Salome steps back upon seeing him. The Syrian is still lost in his reverie rejecting the warnings of the page of Herodias who had interpreted the moon as a bad omen. Contrary to the interpretation of the page of Herodias, the Syrian sees Salome and the moon in a different way. "She has a strange look! She is like a little princess, whose eyes are eyes of amber. Through the clouds of muslin she is smiling like a little princess." She hears Jokanaan speak about her mother accusing her of incestuousness because she had married Herod and left his half-brother. A marriage that Jokanaan publicly criticized:

Where is she who gave herself unto the Captains of Assyria, who have baldricks on their loins, and tiaras of divers colors on their heads? Where is she who hath given herself to the young men of Egypt, who are clothed in fine linen and purple, whose shields are of gold, whose helmets are of silver, whose bodies are mighty? Bid her rise up from the bed of her abominations, from the bed of her incestuousness, that she may hear the words of him who prepareth the way of the Lord, that she may repent her of her iniquities. Though she will never repent, but will stick fast in her abominations; bid her come, for the fan of the Lord is in His hand. (Wilde, 2002, p. 49)

The Syrian insists that she leaves him immediately but she is fascinated by his black eyes "They are like the black caverns of Egypt in which the dragons make their lairs. They are like black lakes troubled by fantastic moons". (Wilde, 2002, p.50). Enchanted by his beauty and purity, She insists on staying and she starts to fall in love with him "How wasted he is! He is like a thin ivory statue. He is like an image of silver. I am sure he is chaste as the moon is. He is like a moonbeam, like a shaft of silver. His flesh must be cool like ivory." He refused to speak with her when she introduced herself to him. Being too religious and threateningly speaks of heaven and cannot express his suppressed emotions and potential lust in the face of a beautiful and seductive woman, he asked her to leave immediately. He had

enquired earlier about her describing her “the lady with golden eyes” and “gilded eyelids”. He rejected her advances and says: “Back! Daughter of Babylon! Come not near the chosen of the Lord. Thy mother hath filled the earth with the wine of her iniquities, and the cry of her sins hath come up to the ears of God.”( Wilde, 2002, p. 52)

Salome never gives up her game of seduction. She remains an emblematic incarnation of sensuality, passion and the embodiment of Dionysus, an intoxicated desire that none can stop her. She is completely intoxicated by the power of love. She starts losing even her reason by praising his body first and then changes her mind about the beauty of his body when she is faced by rejection. In art, Wilde confirms, there is no such thing as an absolute truth: "A Truth is that whose contradictory is also true." (Wilde, 2013, p. 20 ). Salome contradicts herself in praising and then denigrating from Jokanaan at the same time:

“Jokanaan, I am amorous of thy body! Thy body is white like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows that lie on the mountains, like the snows that lie on the mountains of Judea, and come down into the valleys. The roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia are not so white as thy body. Neither the roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia, the perfumed garden of spices of the Queen of Arabia, nor the feet of the dawn when they light on the leaves, nor the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea.... There is nothing in the world so white as thy body.....“Thy body is hideous. It is like the body of a leper. It is like a plastered wall where vipers have crawled; like a plastered wall where the scorpions have made their nest.”( Wilde, 2002, p. 55)

Having refused to let her touch him, she moves to sing the praises of his hair. Her second attempt of seduction is turned down again. This has infuriated her and she then turns to his red lips. She uses different colors to describe his beauty. White body, black hair, and

red lips. Reaching the climax of sensuality and lust, she begs him to let her kiss his mouth. The young Syrian could not tolerate the scene of the woman of whom he is enamored begs someone else for a kiss. Being too much Dionysian with an uncontrollable passion, his chaotic reason could not help him control his emotions. He loses all sense of rationality and he decides to kill himself immediately. "All excess leads to destruction" Wilde said in commenting on the moral behind *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde sees the Syrian as an example of an artist who entirely ignored rationality and religion in his conduct. The page of Herodias had warned him not to look too much at her and he predicted his fate from the beginning when he gazed at the moon and found in it a sign of a coming misfortune. Looking and gazing is frequently repeated in the play. It is by looking and through personal perception and individual experience that one can discern what is seen. This perception differs from one person to another. An artist's perception is certainly different from a bishop's. Reality is seen differently through each one's prism. Jokanaan, however, continues with his typical banal speech threatening and warning like a prophet advising her to do one thing for the remission of her sins. He asks her to return to Christ. Her beauty and chastity could do nothing to move him and she was totally ignored by him:

Daughter of adultery, there is but one who can save thee, it is He of whom I spake. Go seek Him. He is in a boat on the sea of Galilee, and He talketh with His disciples. Kneel down on the shore of the sea, and call unto Him by His name. When He cometh to thee (and to all who call on Him He cometh), bow thyself at His feet and ask of Him the remission of thy sins. (Wilde, 2002, p. 62)

Completely taken by lust and desire, she ignores his warnings and pledges to kiss his mouth no matter what happens. She moves gradually in her attempts to seduce him from praising his body and hair to his mouth in order to show her uncontrolled sexual desire. The page of Herodias, however, bemoans his dead friend who has been completely ignored by

Salome. He describes him as being a sensitive soul and a collector of precious things and perfumes, the profile of an aesthete:

He was my brother, and nearer to me than a brother. I gave him a little box full of perfumes, and a ring of agate that he wore always on his hand. In the evening, we used to walk by the river, among the almond trees, and he would tell me of the things of his country. He spake ever very low. The sound of his voice was like the sound of the flute, of a flute player. Also he much loved to gaze at himself in the river. I used to reproach him for that. (Wilde, 2002, p. 64)

Gazing at himself in the river is a bad thing because it shows that he is only interested in the reflection of life as it is. For him art imitates life and not the opposite. He has the qualities of being an artist but lacks innovation. He is also too much Dionysian who gives way to imitation easily without adequate rational thinking. The concept of life should imitate art and not the opposite recurs often in Wilde's characters. The perceiver's criticism of life is influenced by the nature of his personality. As previously mentioned, Herod and Herodias both have different opinions about the moon according to the nature of their personalities. Herod finds it:

The moon has a strange look to-night. Has she not a strange look? She is like a mad woman, a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers. She is naked too. She is quite naked. The clouds are seeking to clothe her nakedness, but she will not let them. She shows herself naked in the sky. She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman.... I am sure she is looking for lovers. Does she not reel like a drunken woman? She is like a mad woman, is she not? (Wilde, 2002, p. 65)

Herodias who is the antithesis of symbolic power is callous, realistic, and totally down-to-earth with no imagination and Apollonian in nature finds no symbol whatsoever in the

moon. Wilde says in the Decay of Lying “all bad art comes from life” (Decay of Lying, p.76) and Barnet relates this to the character of Herodias “The character of Herodias represents realism and a realistic approach to life ...She seems to be the most ‘real’ person in the play and is therefore also the most bland (Baret, 2012, p. xviii). She even ridicules symbolism when she burst out:

No; the moon is like the moon, that is all. Let us go within.... You have nothing to do here”.

Conrad comments on the character of Herodias:

For all their differences, there is an aesthetic conspiracy between Herod and Salome, who are united in opposition to Herodias, the dull enemy of imagination for whom the moon is merely the moon, and nothing more, whereas her husband and daughter know it to be a disturbing metaphor.(Conrad, 1977, p. 161)

She is not a dreamer in a Wildean sense, has no respect for religion, and does not believe in a higher order or in a transcendent reality. She is the least interesting character and most boring as well:

“I do not believe in prophets. Can a man tell what will come to pass? No man knows it. Moreover, he is for ever insulting me. But I think you are afraid of him.... I know well that you are afraid of him.” ...“ Ho! ho! miracles! I do not believe in miracles. I have seen too many!” (Wilde, 2002, p. 81)

Her husband, however, has a different nature. He is a believer in omens and seems to believe in the omens uttered by Jokanaan about the wings of death that Herodias does not hear “I hear in the air something that is like the beating of wings, like the beating of vast wings.”( Wilde, 2002, p. 29). He fears Jokanaan and refuses to kill him because of his

religious sanctity he says about him “He has said nothing against you. Besides, he is a very great prophet.”( Wilde ,2002, p. 58), he refused to deliver him to the Jews despite the insistence of his wife as well as the Jews who had clamored for him and his answer was” Enough on this subject. I have already given you my answer. I will not deliver him into your hands. He is a holy man. He is a man who has seen God.”(p. 76).Herod has contradictions. He believes in what Jokanaan says and regards him a prophet and but keeps him in person at the same time. Wilde, however regarded contradictions as a virtue and the idea that “masks are more important than what is underneath it, the multiplicity of personality and of self-contradiction as a virtue (Danson, 1997, p. 90) is all over his critical essays. Herod cannot resist his lust for pleasure. He looks at Salome as a sexual prey and he does not hide his admiration for Salome’s beauty even before the eyes of his wife. Amid warnings of his wife not to look at her, he tries to seduce her three times and he is met with rejection. In the meantime, a new discussion is started by the Jews about God in the hope of refuting the theory that Jokanaan had seen God. Different opinions are displayed with different connotations. The first Jew claims, “There is no man who hath seen God since the prophet Elias.”( Wilde, 2002, p. 67) and that God does not show himself these days. The second Jew agrees, “it was but the shadow of God that he saw.” (p. 77) and the third “He showeth Himself at all times and in everything. God is in what is evil even as He is in what is good.” (Wilde, 2002, p. 77) while the fourth alludes rumors surrounding religious doctrines “it is a doctrine that cometh from the schools at Alexandria, where men teach the philosophy of the Greeks. And the Greeks are Gentiles: They are not even circumcised.”(p.77) a fifth person looking more reasonable than the others concludes:

No one can tell how God worketh. His ways are very mysterious. It may be that the things, which we call evil, are good, and that the things, which we call good, are evil.

There is no knowledge of any thing. We must needs submit to everything, for God is

very strong. He breaketh in pieces the strong together with the weak, for He regardeth not any man. (Wilde, 2002, p. 78)

Wilde's intention through this dialogue is question claims of perfection of religious theories and he does not subscribe to a specific religious school. His aim is to show Jokanaan under a new light in order to be able to classify him as being Apollonian, an anti-aesthetics character who copies Jesus being an imitator of Jesus but not an authentic voice of God. The tension between spirituality and sensuality in the play is clear with either side taking an extreme position. A character that displays this merger between the Dionysian and Apollonian elements in equal measure is absent. When the first Nazarene speaks about Jesus miracles and how he turned water into wine "He changed water into wine. Certain persons who were present related it to me. Also He healed two lepers that were seated before the Gate of Capernaum simply by touching them."( Wilde, 2002, p. 86). The fact that the Nazarene did not see the act of Jesus but was only related to him is significant in that it shows the writer's doubt about the story and the Nietzschean multi-perspectivism of reality and the impossibility of truth. The second Nazarene affirms that something else "Nay, it was blind men that he healed at Capernaum" and the first Nazarene insists that "'Nay; they were lepers. But He hath healed blind people also, and He was seen on a mountain talking with angels" (Wilde, 2002, p. 82) while the Sadducee denies the existence if angels, a statement to which a Pharisee answered "Angels exist, but I do not believe that this Man has talked with them." (Wilde, 2002, p. 82). Jews, Nazarenes, Sadducees, and Pharisees exchanges different opinions about the same religion. The down-to-earth realistic boring Apollonian Herodias feels sick of their conversation and regard them as dreaming ridiculous people "How these men weary me! They are ridiculous! [To the page.] Well! my fan! [The page gives her the fan.] You have a dreamer's look; you must not dream. It is only sick people who dream. (Wilde, 2002, p. 83). Wilde believes that it is only dreamers who may foresee the future or

even discern religious experience. He states in his *Critic as Artist*: “Yes: I am a dreamer. For a dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world.”(Wilde, 1997, p. 292)

Herod is a believer of omens and has respect for the prophet Jokanaan, believes in him and refuses any insults addressed to him by his wife. “But let us not talk of that matter. I do not desire to talk of it. It is the cause of the terrible words that the prophet has spoken. Peradventure on account of it a misfortune will come. Let us not speak of this matter. Noble Herodias, we are not mindful of our guests.”( Wilde, 2002, p. 90) and when he exchanges accusations of sterility with his wife he tells her that he believes in Jokanaan’s words as he tells the truth. He keeps the golden mean between Jokanaan and Salome; he comes close to succeeding in his attempt at reconciling both Apollo and Dionysus for he is after all a dreamer. He is not excessively a dreamer like Salome or the Syrian nor excessively ethical realistic like Jokanaan and not even a non-ethical realistic character like Herodias. “In homage to the ancient Greeks he loved, Wilde made his Salome tragic in the classical mode, a figure whose distinctive qualities are glorious when judiciously balanced and ruinous when carried to excess” (Keane, 2002, p. 190). Salome began to lose herself as a work of art and turned into a vengeful and lustful character. Sondgrass comments again on Salome’s gradual transformation:

As an incarnated Wildean work of art, Salome is beautiful, irresistible attending only to her own development, and intent on revealing the soul only through the body. But catastrophe befalls her as soon as she departs from her art-like self-sufficiency and seeks to have her soul-body’s passion supersede the contingencies and consequences that govern ordinary human existence- to introduce into human society an aesthetic purity and intensity antithetical to prudent limits and reasoned compromise. (Keane, 2002, p. 190)

Herod too missed this reasoned compromise when he beseeched Salomé to make him happy invoking his sadness as an excuse, he told her of the bad omens he had seen during the day, namely slipping in the blood of the young Syrian and the beating of the wings of which Jokanaan had warned:

Salomé, Salomé, dance for me. I pray thee dance for me. I am sad to-night. Yes; I am passing sad to-night. When I came hither I slipped in blood, which is an evil omen; and I heard, I am sure I heard in the air a beating of wings, a beating of giant wings. I cannot tell what they mean ... I am sad to-night. Therefore dance for me. Dance for me, Salomé, I beseech you. If you dance for me you may ask of me what you will, and I will give it you, even unto the half of my kingdom. (Wilde, 2002, p. 101)

He offered to give her whatever she desires in exchange for her dance and with the constant refusal of her mother Herodias who repeatedly warned him not to look at his stepdaughter. He finds that the garland on his head started to bother him finding them as symbols of fire. He then reproaches himself for his obsession with finding symbols in everything “Ah! I can breathe now. How red those petals are! They are like stains of blood on the cloth. That does not matter. You must not find symbols in everything you see. It makes life impossible. It were better to say that stains of blood are as lovely as rose petals.” (Wilde, 2002, p. 102). He is struggling with the idea that life is not possible to live as a dreamer or a Dionysian character. Though Jokanaan is in prison by his orders, but he still believes everything he says. When he refers to the king of Cappadocia and his hatred to him, he refers to the prophecies of Jokanaan: “But Caesar will crucify him when he comes to Rome. I am sure that Caesar will crucify him. And if not, yet will he die, being eaten of worms. The prophet has prophesied it” (Wilde, 2002, p. 106). He blames himself later for being neither a dreamer and nor a realist in the manner of his wife who does not believe neither in miracles, nor in omens nor in what prophets say. He was ambivalent between two characters and did

fully realize Wilde's dream of holding the line between the two. Though he blames himself for oscillating between two different characters, one Dionysian steeped in the carnal pleasures and sensuality, and the other an Apollonian one with traits that helped him survive all along and have saved him from downfall. Symbolically when he pretends that he does not know who removed the sacred veil from the temple: "They say the veil of the Sanctuary has disappeared, do they not?" His wife retorts that it was he who stole that veil. The symbol of stealing the veil from the sanctuary of the temple is to show him capable of removing sanctity from religion and able to question the untouchable sanctity of religion, not entirely but to the extent, that religious experience exceeds rational limits. Hearing the Jews, the Nazarenes, and Sadducees or Pharisees discuss about religion, he stands without much of a comment pretending to be in the dark about what religious experience whether about Jesus himself or the miracles going round the town. He kept holding the golden mean between an entirely Apollonian wife and an entirely Dionysian stepdaughter. Stealing the veil of the sanctuary is symbolically the road to removing all other veils and the beginning of giving way to the yellow veil. The seven veils that Salome will later remove to dance before Herod is a symbolic gesture that when religious barriers are removed, the road to sensuality and epicurean pleasures is limitlessly open. He indulges in his lustful pleasures, takes his desires to extremes, and mistakenly gives the order to remove one of the pillars that hold the balance by killing Jokanaan. He crosses all taboos and asks his stepdaughter to dance for him in order to please his sensual desires for which he irrationally offered to pay all his treasures including half of his kingdom. Salomé agreed to dance for him but only in exchange for Jokanaan's head. He was ready to sacrifice everything rather than kill Jokanaan: "Your beauty has grievously troubled me, and I have looked at you too much. But I will look at you no more. Neither at things, nor at people should one look. Only in mirrors should one look, for mirrors do but show us masks". (Wilde, 2002, p. 115). While the Syrian was blamed by his friend for

looking too much into the mirror, Herod blames himself for not looking adequately in the mirror. In mirrors, one can see reality and he blames himself for being a dreamer. Realism had saved him all along and helped keep him a king. Wilde commented on this contradiction in the preface to his novel “The nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass” (Wilde, 1985, p.2 ) Natasja Groenwold too touches the question of masks:

He also presented the idea that the greatest work of art an artist could make is elevating his own life into art. This results in the fact that he stresses the importance of masks and not what is underneath. He states that the masks differ with every person, but that what is underneath is the same with everyone (Groenwold, 2015)

Having realized his mistake in giving in to his unbridled desires, he regrets his gaze at Salome all the time. He blames himself for looking at people and things and he reproaches himself for not looking in the mirrors only as the mirrors show but masks. The mirrors reflect reality as it is without transcendence and without admitting any metaphysical dreams beyond the seen and tangible. Here Wilde again returns to the philosophical duality of Dionysus and Apollo and the nature of art. Art is not art if it copies life. People with much imagination run the risk of becoming victims if they do not bridle their desires and keep them within reasonable limits.

Herod’s belief in Jokanaan, however, did not prevent him from giving in to his desires. He was ready to sacrifice all his earthly possessions in order to avoid killing Jokanaan:

I say Salomé, think of what you are doing. This man comes perchance from God. He is a holy man. The finger of God has touched him. God has put into his mouth terrible words. In “the palace as in the desert God is always with him.... At least it is possible.

One does not know. It is possible that God is for him and with him. Furthermore, if he died some misfortune might happen to me. In any case, he said that the day he dies a misfortune will happen to someone. That could only be to me. Remember, I slipped in blood when I entered. Also, I heard a beating of wings in the air, a beating of mighty wings. These are very evil omens, and there were others. I am sure there were others though I did not see them. Well, Salomé, you do not wish misfortune to happen to me? (Wilde, 2002, p. 118)

Having rejected all his temptations and offers, she insisted on having his head on a platter, he acquiesced to her desire and ordered his killing. She stood before the head and started to admonish him for not having shown some leniency in his relation to her. He remained strict and unwavering in his position of rejecting her beauty and love. She is comparing his state when he was alive with his state while dead “But, wherefore dost thou not look at me, Jokanaan, Thine eyes that were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn, are shut now”. (Wilde, 2002, p. 118) His strict religious stance, his extreme preaching and warnings of a coming disaster and the probable punishment in the day of judgement has now been reduced to a closed mouth and shut eyes without life. “Art thou afraid of me, Jokanaan, that thou wilt not look at me?... and thy tongue, that was like a red snake darting poison, it moves no more, (Wilde, 2002, p. 124) it says nothing now, Jokanaan, that scarlet viper that spat its venom upon me.”.Salome sees this punishment as a deserved one because he rejected her outstanding beauty and her advances. He did not even look at her and treated her like a prostitute. She was chaste and pure like a Goddess but he did not appreciate beauty. He was simply Apollonian and never tried to seize the opportunity to see experience pure beauty and immediately condemned it as profane and impure “Thou didst reject me. Thou didst speak evil words against me. Thou didst treat me as a harlot, as a wanton, me, Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judea! Well, Jokanaan, I still live, but (Wilde, 2002, p. 125) thou, thou

art dead, and thy head belongs to me. I can do with it what I will.” She fell so passionately in love with him that she could not control her feelings .She sums up the aesthetic credo in her description of Jokanaan. She was fully intoxicated and carried away by her emotions:

“But thou, thou wert beautiful! Thy body was a column of ivory set on a silver socket. It was a garden full of doves and of silver lilies. It was a tower of silver decked with shields of ivory. There was nothing in the world so white as thy body. There was nothing in the world so black as thy hair. In the whole world there was nothing so red as thy mouth. “Thy voice was a censer that scattered strange perfumes, and when I looked on thee I heard a strange music. Ah! wherefore didst thou not (Wilde, 2002, p. 125) look at me Jokanaan? Behind thine hands and thy curses thou didst hide thy face.”

An indictment of the type of religion that the Victorians had exercised is explicitly contained in Salome’s phrases about Jokanaan religion “Thou didst put upon thine eyes the covering of him who would “see his God. Well, thou hast seen thy God, Jokanaan, but me, me, thou didst never see. If thou hadst seen me thou wouldst have loved me. I, I saw thee, Jokanaan, and I loved thee. Oh, how I loved thee! I love thee yet, Jokanaan, I love thee only... I am athirst for thy beauty; I am hungry for thy body; and neither wine nor fruits can appease my desire. What shall I do now, Jokanaan? She has lost every sense of rationality in favour of her sensuality.She fell a victim of her passion. Having danced for Herod and obtained what she wanted, complemented her perverse desire by kissing Jokanaan on his mouth which translates into a complete self-indulgence in her personal desires. She is an example of bad art where the artist gives too much from himself and indulges in personal pleasures. The perfect artist is supposed to dedicate himself to his art and mythmaker personal self-indulgence. Christopher Nassaar comments:

As a Romantic mythmaker, however, he weaves together a paradoxical aesthetic "religion" of evil and gives it centre-stage in this landscape. In the final analysis, Wilde presents himself as the Saviour of the world, offering the Victorians an aesthetic Satanism, a mythical "religion" of complete sexual freedom that sanctifies all the various forms of perversion, and accepts the hard core of darkness that he discerned in the depths of the human soul. (Nassaar, 2005)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### I- The Art of Painting by Words

Michael Foucault's philosophy, which owes much to Nietzsche in his aesthetic self-creation, was to liberate man through charting an aesthetic autonomy of the individual in effecting a change in existential condition. His was the emancipation of the modern subject by turning his life into a work of art in order to liberate the self from the limits of the authority. Wilde as a dandy in his most aesthetic poems shows himself struggling to emancipate himself symbolically from the authority. Though some of those poems are read as simply Dionysian only in nature and do not communicate any message apart from creating an atmosphere or seen as mere exercises in synesthesia, they are in fact symbolic poems of rebellion against an Apollonian authority. Wilde places his aesthetic self-creation versus Victorian authority.

Not only did Wilde aspire to liberty as a prerequisite for a perfect and full individualistic life, he even tried to imitate painters who liberated themselves from the constraints and rules imposed on them by Salon *de Paris*. One such example is the French impressionistic painter Claude Monet whom Wilde had much admired. Monet once declared, "I would like to paint as a bird sings" (Jennings, 1986, p. 130) and challenged the teachings of the Salon de Paris. He showed his famous painting "impressions, sunrise" in the 1874 exhibition. Wilde emulating Monet and the American painter James Whistler painted some of his poems in words. He worked under the influence of several famous painters including John Atkinson Grimshaw. Whistler and Grimshaw had greatly affected his work, as both were advocates of the doctrine art for art's sake. Some of his well-known poems are symphonies in

colors in which he uses the juxtaposition of colors to express a certain idea. For these poems, he was mostly accused of simply showing his concept art for art's sake. It is true that in some of these poems, he is like a painter drawing a painting but he does not fail to ally a moral to his poems towards the end of the poem. The poem "Impressions du Matin" is one such poem. The poem is in the iambic tetrameter in a four-line stanza form with an ABBA rhyme scheme. The poem is written from the perspective of a viewer who looks at the Thames scene and describes what he sees as though it were a portrait. The title is in French, which translates to "Morning Impression". The fact that he gives it a French title is also significant in that he records his debt to French symbolists on one hand and on the other hand, he asks us to be aware of the symbols used in the poem as they are not to be taken at face value. In fact, Wilde never takes things at face value. He uses different colors to describe the scene, blue, and gold, yellow, ochre:

The Thames nocturne of blue and gold

Changed to a Harmony in grey:

A barge with ochre-colored hay

Dropt from the wharf: and chill and cold

"Nocturne of blue and gold" or "harmony in grey" are titles of paintings by James Whistler. However, apart from the paintings, he describes a scene at daybreak where the color of the Thames changes from blue and gold (reflections of lights at night) to grey during the early morning hours. The description is more that of a painting than a real view using the effects of light on color as Monet did in his paintings. The colors blue and grey are cold colors on the wheel color chart and gradually by turning the wheel we start to get the warm

colors. Yellow is transitional on the chart and opens the way to warm colors like red. The yellow fog then comes to engulf the city of London:

The yellow fog came creeping down

The bridges, till the houses' walls

Seemed changed to shadows and St. Paul's

Loomed like a bubble o'er the town.

The Thames is a symbol of the city of London and hence The London society with all its shortcomings. The color yellow is in fact Wilde's favorite color. It is also mentioned in his novel "*The Picture of Dorian Grey*". The Yellow book was given as gift to him by Sir Henry Wotton. The book is a symbol of the aesthetic movement especially if we know that later the major journal that was dedicated to aesthetic publications was named the yellow journal. Therefore, the color yellow is certainly a symbol of aestheticism. Wilde always carried with him Walter Pater's book the *Renaissance* which he called "my sacred Golden book". The gradual movement from the night scene to dawn is going on slowly and the fog creeps turning the houses and bridges as well as the dome of Saint Paul's cathedral into shadows. Assuming that yellow stands for aestheticism then there remains no doubt that Saint Paul's cathedral which is here a symbol of religion was exposed to be not more than a bubble ( the Oxford Dictionary gives the meaning of bubble as anything which has no substance ...an illusion). Aestheticism engulfed the London society and using its own beauty ideals (the colors); it exposed its reality of sham appearance and religious hypocrisy. The cold colors used at the beginning of the scene are associated with the emotional coldness of the London society from whom he had suffered a great deal. He prepares the reader for a scene that requires warm colors and warm emotions. The transitional Yellow leading to red is an omen

of another coming scene that fits the gloomy atmosphere that the serene night had given way to. This gradual progression into morning busy life is to highlight a scene that in reality belongs to the night rather than day light:

Then suddenly arose the clang  
Of waking life; the streets were stirred  
With country waggons: and a bird  
Flew to the glistening roofs and sang.

The waking life of London and the singing of the bird are disturbed by:

But one pale woman all alone,  
The daylight kissing her wan hair,  
Loitered beneath the gas lamps' flare,  
With lips of flame and heart of stone.

A prostitute all alone with her unnaturally red and fiery lips with pale face and the daylight touches only slightly her hair. She is exhausted. She spent the entire night loitering in search of clients under the street light. She has a heart of stone not caring about the busy life of the waking morning and unsympathetic to her environment. The dehumanizing conditions that caused her to stand the whole night to sell her body is indirectly attributed to lack of social justice that he dealt with in his "*the souls of man under socialism*". There is a clear contrast between the first stanzas and the last one. The gradual shift in color from the cold ones to the warm coupled with the progression of light is to reveal his indictment of a hypocrite society. His mention of Saint Paul's cathedral is yet another indication of the hypocritically religious society that dehumanizes man. In his description of the engulfing fog that turned the cathedral into a bubble. The word "bubble," is significant in that it is a direct

reference to political and religious hypocrisy as well as corrupt authority. A bubble is in fact a reference to a big monument and edifice, which is in reality devoid of real action capable of transforming Victorian England. The religious authority that allows a woman to sell her body the whole night is not more than a bubble. The poem, however, is reminiscent of William Blake's London but Wilde is here far from being derivative or plagiarist as hostile critics often claim.

Art as a source of man-made beauty is discussed in his next poem entitled "les Ballons" which is French for "The Balloons". That art is superior to nature and man-made beauty is more permanent than nature beauty is a concept which he amply discussed in his essay "The *Decay of Lying*" and which surfaces again in this symbolic poem. It is another exercise of his philosophy of beauty. A Dionysian spirit that struggles to craft a place in a hostile environment. He begins his poem by highlighting the supremacy of artificial beauty to nature beauty:

Against these turbid turquoise skies

The light and luminous balloons

Dip and drift like satin moons,

Drift like silken butterflies;

He describes and contrasts the beauty of the balloons with the beauty of the sky. The sky is "turbid" obscure, murky and dark as opposed to the beauty of the balloons, which are "light" and luminous. They move up and down like glistening moons or silken butterflies. (Butterfly was always Whistler's symbolic signature). The moons and butterflies, though they are objects of nature but they are still being described using words that denote artificial beauty like silk or satin. The artificial glare appealed to Wilde more than the natural one. He

deems both as being paramount in beauty in their reflection and glare as compared to the sky, which is murky and foggy at best. From the first stanza, we discern that the poet is making a comparison between the beauty of nature and man-made beauty. The comparison intensifies with the coming stanza in which he refers to the different moves of the balloons. They move in different directions, they are not static, and in their movement, they interact with a variety of objects in order to take different shapes. Though the genesis of man-made beauty is impermanent like everything else it is, however, assuming different shades and color through its constant and non-static movement and transformation. Nature beauty remains as it is and will not take any new shapes without man's intervention. The balloons are being compared to many impermanent objects:

Reel with every windy gust,

Rise and reel like dancing girls,

Float like strange transparent pearls,

Fall and float like silver dust.

The word "reel" "rise" "fall" and "float" are significant in that they all denote a movement in a different direction. They do not remain in on place. They are like "dancing girls". They are beautiful but unfortunately mortal and impermanent. Then he compares them to a more permanent object, which is the "pearl", and then back to another impermanent nature thing, which is silver dust. The different ways of interchangeably comparing the balloons to permanent and impermanent objects match the reeling process of beauty in its constant search of a perfect ideal. The next phase would be its interaction with nature. Beauty does take inspiration from nature but certainly takes on different more beautiful shapes as life goes on:

Now to the low leaves they cling,

Each with coy fantastic pose,

Each a petal of a rose

Straining at a gossamer string.

The balloons then touching the leaves is a capricious, artificial and fanciful bearing like a rose petal trying cling to a fine and weak string. It is a description that accentuates the fragility of beauty, which is struggling to rise to a perfect, permanent and immortal ideal. The balloons are then compared to permanent beautiful objects in contrast with the earlier impermanent objects. Wilde had a fascination for jewel. The jewels occur frequently in his poems as permanent forms of beauty:

Then to the tall trees they climb,

Like thin globes of amethyst,

Wandering opals keeping tryst

With the rubies of the lime.

The perpetual reeling and wandering of the balloons is then rewarded with a final comparison with jewels whose beauty is eternal. They are like globes of amethysts. At this point, the beauty never ends as it has a metaphorical relationship with more precious objects. The amethyst is a semi-precious stone as compared to the ruby, which is the most expensive, and precious stone. The opal is also regarded a semi-precious stone. Therefore the journey of the balloons never end there and will continue its journey as it has an appointed place of meeting with a more permanent and more precious stone which is the ruby up the ladder of the lime tree which is ,of course, symbolic of eternity.

Almost similar in symbolism to the previous poem “*Impression du Matin*” is his poem “*A Symphony in Yellow*”. It is a mixture of musical impressions with a painter’s touches in a painting. It is a synesthesia between sound and sight. We do not see any musical instruments or musical terms other than the word “symphony” in the title. However, it is meant to be read like a symphony in three different parts and three different movement unified by the color yellow. The poem is written in a simple form. It is in three-stanza form rhyming ABBA and in iambic tetrameter. The form mimics a symphony where it moves the reader to stop at the end of every stanza. It is, however, not without its significant symbolic meanings. Wilde acts like an interpreter of a painting. It could be a painting by Whistler or another painter. He begins the poem slowly as a symphony usually starts:

An omnibus across the bridge

Crawls like a yellow butterfly,

And, here and there, a passer-by

Shows like a little restless midge.

He transforms a scene into another one through the prism of an aesthete. As if looking at a painting, he records a fleeting moment in time. It is a London scene that he will catch to show its beauty. It is the responsibility of the aesthete to capture a fleeting experience. Charles Baudelaire who had greatly influenced Wilde asserts in this sense:

By ‘modernity’ I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and immutable...This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with. By neglecting it, you cannot fail to tumble into the abyss of an abstract and

indeterminate beauty, like that of the time the first woman before the fall of man.”(Baudelaire, 1995, p. 12)

The omnibus is like a yellow butterfly. Yellow occurs in all three stanzas. A passer-by is described as being a little agitated and confused insect. The negative description of the person who appears in the painting contrasts with beauty of the yellow omnibus. Yellow is as previously mentioned is associated with the aesthetic movement. He views all hostile critics of the movement as edgy little insects. They are insignificant for him as he sees himself above criticism which he regarded futile and insignificant. The symphony then takes a somber look:

Big barges full of yellow hay

Are moored against the shadowy wharf,

And, like a yellow silken scarf,

The thick fog hangs along the quay.

The yellow fog covers the place including the big barges with hay. The wharf is shadowy and hardly to see. The yellow contrasts with the dark wharf. The beauty of the fog is compared to a silken scarf. It is quite typical of Wilde to liken objects of nature to artificial objects of beauty. The yellow transforms the place. The effect of light on the color yellow is clear to see in the word “silken” which is glistening in the water. Symbolically the aesthetic movement infiltrates into the London society scene while the Thames being always a symbol of London. What started as a beautiful butterfly turned in the second stanza into an all-engulfing fog. The third stanza will signal the fading away of the yellow:

The yellow leaves begin to fade

And flutter from the Temple elms,

And at my feet the pale green Thames

Lies like a rod of rippled jade.

“Temple” is a place in central London that house the four Inns of Court. It is a legal area and center of the English law at that time and even now. The yellow fades when confronted with the English legal system or the constraints imposed by the English judicial system. It is a clear indictment of the English legal system in face of the new movement. The green color is associated with Oscar Wilde himself. He used to wear the green carnation in his buttonhole until it became his symbol. A satiric novel that parodies him was written by Robert Hitchens entitled the *Green Carnation*, which makes direct reference to him. A thing that will later leads to his trial for his homosexuality. Wilde did in fact make a reference to the green color in his essay *Pen, Pencil and Poison- a study in Green*. He confirms in reference to Wainwright who “had that curious love of green, which in individuals is always the sign of a subtle artistic temperament, and in nations is said to denote a laxity, if not a decadence of morals”( Wilde quoted in David Alderson, p158). The last stanza ends the symphony and the yellow may fade for a while but the “pale green Thames” will turn into jade (a reference to the green carnation). The Victorian legal system may not be able to stop the aesthetic movement from making the Thames (London) even greener (Jade) than Wilde had hoped

## II - Poems of Freedom and Passion

Nietzsche wrote in his book "*Human, All too Human*" describing the free spirit:

A soul in which the type of "free spirit" can attain maturity and completeness had its decisive and deciding event in the form of a great emancipation or unbinding, and that prior to that event it seemed only the more firmly and forever chained to its place and pillar (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 3)

Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian is not to separate from his concept of the free spirit. The free spirit is the one that may help achieve a new liberation. Albert Brenner comments on Nietzsche's ideas in his book *Human All Too Human*:

One should view Nietzsche's positivism in relation to the 'Life Reform Movement', a general, free-spirited movement away from Victorian stuffiness and towards such things as communal living, free love, vegetarianism, dance, nudism. *Human*, it seems to me, is Nietzsche's attempt to steer that movement in his own particular direction (Young, 2010, p. 274)

One of the prerequisites of Dionysian transformation for Nietzsche is the direct relationship between freedom and aesthetic de-powerment. He stressed the importance of personal freedom in particular. Wilde's 1881 poetry collection entitled "*Poems*" representative of his aesthetic poetry that display a sense of the free spirit in his longing for freedom and liberty. He is again torn between his sensual desires and religious and dogmatic Christian ideas. Like Nietzsche, he too aspires to a rebirth of the Dionysian spirit in modern

culture in order to emulate the glorious past. The poem “*Helas*” which is the first in the collection is another example of an internal conflict between man’s desire in seeking beauty and experiment with life and the constraints imposed by faith and dogmatic religion. It is a personal poem like most of his poetry. Wilde does not separate himself from the content of his poems. He cannot avoid personal identification, which at times is deliberate. He always touches on the difference between the beauty glorifying Greek classical culture and the Christian world, which he considered a flop forsaken by the beautiful spirit of Greek civilization. He saw himself a representative of this culture and a representative of the Greek spirit in an unseemly Victorian England:

Wilde also considered himself a representative of this spirit distilling his views into an aesthetic fundamentalism that espoused the doctrine of Beauty for Beauty’s sake: Beauty is perfect, Beauty is capable of all things. Beauty is the only thing in the world that does not excite desire” ( Ellmann, 1988, p. 41).

The poem is regarded a leading thread which guides us into a full understanding of the entire collection. It is a manifesto of what comes in the collection. It is a Petrarchan strict sonnet with a rhyme scheme ABBAABBA. The preferable poem form for Wilde. The title is in French like many other poems with French titles which is no doubt an aesthetic allusion to the French symbolist movement that later crystalized into the aesthetic movement of which Wilde was to become a pioneer. The poem opens with:

To drift with every passion till my soul  
  
Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play,  
  
Is it for this that I have given away  
  
Mine ancient wisdom, and austere control?

The poet wonders whether he should let himself be driven away, guided and intoxicated by his Dionysian feelings or he should simply exercise his Apollonian self-control and restraint which he acquired over years of knowledge and dedication to ancient Greek wisdom. He uses the metaphor of the musical instrument, the strings of which every wind can move. He describes himself as someone ready to follow every passion he finds enticing. The Paterian “burn always with this hard gemlike flame” comes back again to his questioning whether he should seize every moment to enjoy his life or he should take the role of a sensible man and control those passions:

Methinks my life is a twice-written scroll.

Scrawled over on some boyish holiday

With idle songs for pipe and vielay,

Which do but mar the secret of the whole.

Metaphorically, he regarded his life a scroll written twice. The original wording might have been a little deformed by later scratching but the whole reading is still clear and can still be seen and read. The music metaphor is used to highlight the poet’s life long struggle during his youth when his love drove him away from what others might have thought and considered morality. Those boyish days might have desecrated and polluted his sacred soul but definitely not wholly, as he justifies to himself that innocent escapades cannot have entirely obliterated his wisdom aspiring, and intellectual spirit. He continues with his musical metaphor:

Surely there was a time I might have trod

The sunlit heights, and from life’s dissonance

Struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God:

Is that time dead? lo! with a little rod

I did but touch the honey of romance—

And must I lose a soul's inheritance?

He was most close to God in the past when he was in control of his emotions. The higher demands of the soul were not harmed by his emotional weaknesses. The passions or romance does influence his spiritual experience. The sunlit heights of his intellectual experience that the soul demands could have been easily reached were it not for his escapades. The Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy occurs again taking up this time a new form. It is clear struggle between passion and wisdom, despite the fact that he realizes that they both are part of the human being and suppressing any of them might spoil the other. He then alludes in his words “honey of romance”. It is a reference to a love relationship in the bible. He alludes to the story of Jonathan as it is related in Samuel and his love to David. Jonathan, the son of King Saul loved David and the bible never mentioned that their relationship was sexual or illicit. Jonathan together with his army fighting the Philistines were banned under a strict oath from eating anything until King Saul avenged himself from his enemies. However, Jonathan found in the wood some honey and decided to extend his rod to take some though the soldiers had warned him not to eat. He disobeyed and was supposed to be executed by his father for disobedience. The love relationship between him and David is being alluded to by the poet in order to show that his relationship, be it homosexual or heterosexual, was not as many had assumed and it was not more than a little romance which had not tainted his spirituality. His last line is a questioning and doubting whether he should lose all of his wisdom and status if he released his Dionysian spirit once and indulged in some innocent whimsical romances.

As a rebel aesthete, Wilde took fancy to biblical and Greek allusions and his poems abound in such stories. He incorporated them into his poetry and a great deal of such allusions to the ancient Greek culture are found, which he often use to contrast with the modern world and tries to bring them to bear on the present day. “The new Individualism is the new Hellenism as he says (Wilde, 2014, p 90). The Greek culture was also a paradise of freedom and liberty which he yearningly longed for in his London society. What fascinated Wilde in the Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy is in the words of Jürgen Braungardt is:

exist side by side, mostly in open conflict, stimulating and provoking (reizen) one another to give birth to ever-new, more vigorous offspring in whom they perpetuate the conflict inherent in the opposition between them, an opposition only apparently bridged by the common term ‘art’ – until eventually, by a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic ‘Will’, they appear paired and, in this pairing, finally engender a work of art which is Dionysiac and Apolline in equal measure: Attic tragedy.( Braungardt, 2017)

Therefore, he regarded it an important facet of his art to dedicate some sonnets to freedom that he considered essential to the expression of individualism, which is, in turn, indispensable to art. He gave a major title to this series of poems -Greek word “Eleuthera” which is translated as “Liberty”

The first example in the series is “*A Sonnet to Liberty*”. Similar to Shelley’s poem “*Ode to the West Wind*” and without being derivative or plagiarist as it is often claimed, he expresses a different intention. He is new and innovative as he states that he does not entirely agree with everything related to liberty:

NOT that I love thy children, whose dull eyes

See nothing save their own unlovely woe,

Whose minds know nothing, nothing care to know, —

But the roar of thy Democracy

Those who die for liberty are mostly people who go too far in sacrificing everything for establishing democracy. As an aesthete who believed that beauty and order come in the first place, he does not identify himself with some of the methods of the advocates of liberty whom he describes as being dull because they only care about their own hardships. A philosophy, which is far less below that of an aesthete who believes that art, plays a grave role in improving and radically changing the society in a different less vulgar way. These people will eventually only reap what the democracy will spawn. They only understand the ensuing chaos and roar of democracy. However, he does not entirely disagree with them as he shares with them the same rebellious spirit and wild passion. After all, he prizes the Dionysian spirit. This drive turned him into an artist. He calls liberty his own brother:

Thy reigns of Terror, thy great Anarchies,

Mirror my wildest passions like the sea

And give my rage a brother—! Liberty!

He describes the cries of democracy emanating from liberty as being dissonant and the similarity he shares with is only because his rebellious soul realizes that keeping silent in the face of tyrants will only lead to suffering and pain, subjugation and slavery. Dissonance is a key word as it was mentioned in the previous poem denoting that life around the poet is not in keeping with the poet's vision, which is in discordance with his surrounding:

For this sake only do thy dissonant cries

Delight my discreet soul, else might all kings

By bloody knout or treacherous cannonades

Rob nations of their rights inviolate

And I remain unmoved—and yet, and yet,

These Christs that die upon the barricades,

God knows it I am with them, in some things.

As an artist, he is not always ready to infuriate his government or his tyrant. He therefore describes his soul as being “discreet” and in glorification of those who die for liberty he gives them the title of “Christ” despite his disagreement with the method they used to change the society. The fact is that he agrees to a certain extent with the rebels against their governments. He himself showed himself to be entirely in opposition to the colonialist and expansionist policy of the British Empire. In his poem “*Ave Imperatrix*” which is translated from Latin as “Hail the Empress”, he draws beautiful images of contrast and oxymoron to show the futility of the British colonization. Joseph Pearce confirms that this poem is “not as, the title would suggest a hymn of praise to the empire or a genuflection to the glories of Pax Britannica” (Pearce, 2015, p. 57). Bloodshed and wars are against the Dionysian drive that aims at bringing mankind together by releasing and redeeming man from individual difference. The title itself is ironic calling queen Victoria an empress presiding over an empire of bloodshed and death:

SET in this stormy Northern sea,

Queen of these restless fields of tide,

England! what shall men say of thee,

Before whose feet the worlds divide?

He is confused as to what to say about England whose fields he describes as being restless. People may be divided about it in their estimations but not for an aesthete who would never justify war and the nationalistic spirit can ever entice him to write patriotic poems. His art is one of reversal and he reverses our expectations of a poem hailing the queen and the great empire into a condemnation of the empire and the futility of the policies of the empire. He is an artist who predicted how an artistically minded politician might change the word for the better. He personifies England as a person in whose hands the earth is like a fragile and brittle globe of glass that it can manipulate at will. The color of white and red are effectively used in order to associate metaphorically with blood:

The spears of crimson-suited war,

The long white-crested waves of fight,

And all the deadly fires which are

The torches of the lords of Night.

The war is personified as a person wearing a crimson suit and raising his spears. "crimson" symbolizes blood while the long caravans of army soldiers carrying their spears as they shine under the sun. The bloody war driven by numerous white shining spears like the waves of the sea. They are accompanied by the deadly fire carried by the lords whose interests came together and conspired to lead England down the path it has taken. In stanza after stanza, he gives a vivid description of how the British Empire is conquering one country after another from Himalayan to Samarkand, and from Kabul to Isfahan. The scenes at the beginning are to show the majestic power of the conquering army as it expands from the west to the east. The main aim of the scenes at the beginning in comparison with the scenes in the

second half of the poem is to contrast those scenes of glory with the ones that highlight the misery of the war. In the middle of the poem, he makes a break in theme to start the new stanzas that move from the grandeur of the empire to the consequences:

But the sad dove, that sits alone

In England—she hath no delight.

In vain the laughing girl will lean

To greet her love with love-lit eyes:

Down in some treacherous black ravine,

Clutching his flag, the dead boy lies.

What does glory mean to a girl who lost a lover? Her lover is dead and the glory of the empire cannot offer her a solace and all the grandeur that the poet described at the beginning will not give her any joy. The fact that the boy died clutching his flag is not so much a celebration of his patriotism as it is a condemnation of the cause of his ending up alone in a ravine. He starts giving us dramatic images of the reactions of family members of the dead:

And many a moon and sun will see

The lingering wistful children wait

To climb upon their father's knee;

And in each house made desolate

Pale women who have lost their lord

Will kiss the relics of the slain—

Some tarnished epaulet—some sword—

Poor toys to soothe such anguished pain.

The “slain” replaced the word “martyrs” in which is usually used patriotic poetry. The relics or whatever medals or decoration that they might have got during their service would not alleviate the pain and suffering that their families feel. Women are “pale”, toys are “poor”, the epaulet is “tarnished”, and the slain are the “lords” of their families in the first place rather than lords of the war. The men die away from their homeland in a foreign land in Delhi or in Afghanistan leaving behind grief and sadness:

For not in quiet English fields

Are these, our brothers, laid to rest.

Where we might deck their broken shields

With all the flowers the dead love best.

For some are by the Delhi walls,

And many in the Afghan land,

And many where the Ganges falls

Through seven mouths of shifting sand.

Calling the graves where the dead are buried “wandering graves”, he ironically asks those graves whether they are under the sea or in a ravine to bring back the dead and give up their “prey”. He addresses England saying that its wounds will never be healed and the long and weary race of annexing more land will never be won. It is a desperate cry because neither the dead nor their bodies, which were spread all over the nations, will ever return:

O wandering graves! O restless sleep!

O silence of the sunless day!

O still ravine! O stormy deep!

Give up your prey! Give up your prey!

And thou whose wounds are never healed,

Whose weary race is never won,

O Cromwell's England! must thou yield

For every inch of ground a son?

Go! crown with thorns thy gold-crowned head,

Change thy glad song to song of pain;

Wind and wild wave have got thy dead,

And will not yield them back again.

Ironically again Oliver Cromwell the puritan who imposed a religious way of life alien to the English character in the seventeenth century is being brought in comparison with queen Vitoria. He banned the most basic celebrations and even Christmas. He is still regarded one of the most controversial figures in history. However, John Milton regarded him as one of the advocates of liberties. He made England strong and respected among nations. He achieved several victories for England at the time, crushed its enemies, and took Ireland and Scotland under his control. Wilde, however, does not praise him but he often alludes to him because he had certain character traits that Wilde seems to have admired as he refers to him

on several occasions when he compares the past glory of England with the deplorable present. He is a religious puritan who changed England's way of life:

Theatres were destroyed and actors who continued to perform their plays risked being publicly whipped. The traditional maypoles (a pole with colored ribbons around which village people danced) were pulled down. Religious festivals were abolished and at Christmas, for example, soldiers went around London, from house to house, pulling Christmas dinners out of families' ovens. This also happened on the last Wednesday of each month, which was a fast day. On such days, wrote one Londoner (life in Cromwell's England, 2016)

The use of Cromwell's name is significant in that he is another Queen Victoria. Nevertheless, Cromwell of the past had achieved much for England through his abidance by religious teachings. His strict religious teachings, moves and acts are, as he believed in accordance with the bible. As the puritan or religious spirit that is supposed to prevail in England at the time is paradoxically in opposition to the expansionist and colonialist policies of England. He sees the present England a religious hypocrisy. It is causing England to lose its status as a respected nation. The Paterean influence of the worth of life and the seizure of the beautiful fleeting moments in life are reflected in the non-materialistic view adopted by Wilde and his frowning upon the colonial era. In the stanzas that follow, he questions the validity of the material gains accumulated by England in the face of the calamities that its people are facing:

What profit now that we have bound

The whole round world with net of gold,

If hidden in our heart is found

The care that groweth never old?

What is the benefit of Gold we gain if we spend our life in worries that never end?  
Moreover, how will any war in history or materialistic gains bring mankind together and fuse  
it into its original primordial oneness. In the next stanza again:

What profit that our galleys ride,

Pine-forest-like, on every main?

Ruin and wreck are at our side,

Grim warders of the House of pain.

The English chivalry is gone and no one laments our dead. What benefits do we reap if  
our ships fill all the seas and in reality, we turn into warders in a large and tragic prison of  
pain and sorrow surrounded by ruins. Even worse is the end of all this. He never expects an  
end. With all the pain and bodies lying all over the world and the thorns crowing the heads  
instead of crowns, he ironically imagines someone whispering that we should not disturb the  
noble dead with our cries and simply keep silent and continue to climb the ladder of glory to  
make our empire an entity from whose colonies the sun never sets:

Peace, peace! we wrong the noble dead

To vex their solemn slumber so:

Though childless, and with thorn-crowned head,

Up the steep road must England go,

Yet when this fiery web is spun,

Her watchmen shall decry from far

The young Republic like a sun

Rise from these crimson seas of war.

The poem is an indictment of the belief that real gain comes from wars rather than from crafting and rebuilding man through reviving and emulating the glorious aesthetic heritage of the past. Liberty and aesthetic self-crafting through promoting man's individuality through art has been a key concept of Wilde's aesthetic theory. Laura Martin commenting on "*The Soul of Man under Socialism* says:

Wilde's article is unique in that it credits Christianity in developing man's personality instead of limiting its capacity. Wilde's also introduces the top of art, which is hardly the primary focus of socialist essays, to demonstrate how it promotes individual freedom which helps create the ideal socialist community ( Laura Martin, Wilde Inimitable approach)Wilde affirms that if a fait socialist system was applied then "we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things, and the symbols for things. One will live. To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all (Wilde, 2014, p. 19)

In his poem "*To Milton*", he compares England's state now with the past. The past is always glorious for Wilde be it Greek culture or the middle ages. He chose Milton in this section on liberty because he was seen by many including Wilde as an advocate and defender of liberty. He does not fail to emphasize man's uniqueness and individuality in his poems. Wilde stated in his "*the Soul of Man*" that:

But for the full development of Life to its highest mode of perfection, something more is needed. What is needed is Individualism.....At present, in consequence of

the existence of private property, a great many people are enabled to develop a certain very limited amount of Individualism ( Wilde, 2014, p 6).

He opens the poem with a sense of loss of the spirit of John Milton

Milton! I think thy spirit hath passed away

From these white cliffs, and high embattled-towers;

This gorgeous fiery-colored world of ours

Seems fallen into ashes dull and gray,

And the age changed unto a mimic play,

He complains that Milton's spirit of liberty has left England and the gorgeous fiery-colored country became dull and gray. The use of color is significant. It indicates that the variety and different individual traits of the people at the time were unique and cannot be matched by today's one color where conformity, compliance, and lack of individuality have left the country in a state where everybody is like the other. The age is no more than a play to imitate a scene. Wilde's theory that life imitates art rather than art imitates life find repercussions in the poem where again the dull mimic play lacks art. The age does not promote art because colorful individualism has faded away and was replaced by boring colorless and strict compliance, which has always been the nightmare of the aesthete:

For all our pomp and pageantry and powers

We are but fit to delve the common clay,

Seeing this little isle on which we stand

This England, this sea-lion of the sea,

By ignorant demagogues is held in fee

England is now held hostage “By ignorant demagogues is held in fee,” deploring the state of England, he cries in remembrance of Cromwell under whose rule Milton had lived and had admired and praised him:

Who love her not: Dear God! is this the land

Which bare a triple empire in her hand

When Cromwell spake the word Democracy!

The poet states that we are no long worthy of Milton and the current rule is not that of Cromwell who made glorious achievements for England. Liberty and freedom we aspire to now is in the hands of a few ignorant politicians. This notion is repeated in his poem “*Quantum Mutata*” which is Latin for “much has changed”. Much has changed since the time of Milton. The English were a people who fought for freedom when no one ever was ready to die for it:

There was a time in Europe long ago,

When no man died for freedom anywhere,

But England’s lion leaping from its lair

Laid hands on the oppressor! it was so

He then refers to an important event during the reign of Oliver Cromwell when the *massacre of Piedmont* took place in Italy. The Waldensians Protestants who are known to have renounced their catholic faith were asked by the Duke of Savoy to either attend the Mass or sell their lands and leave the town. Upon fleeing, they were massacred and more than 2000 people were killed. Milton wrote a poem about the event “*On the late massacre of*

*Piedmont*” Cromwell sent ambassadors to the pope to protest the massacre and offer aide to the Savoy people. Wilde records Cromwell’s reaction to the massacre and compares it to the current state of affairs in England where at present only materialistic gains count:

The Pontiff in his painted portico

Trembled before our stern ambassadors.

How comes it then that from such high estate

We have thus fallen, save that Luxury

With barren merchandise piles up the gate

Where nobler thoughts and deeds should enter by:

Else might we still be Milton’s heritors.

Milton shaped much of the idealistic culture of England. By comparison, England now has no ideals. We could be Milton’s inheritors if we were more idealistic and less materialistic. The last lines where only the noble and rich can enjoy better living conditions and hence better individual personalities, we discern Wilde’s call for justice and equality in his discussion of socialism as a proper system of rule where private property is abolished or reduced in order to eliminate poverty. Only then will the poor classes have something else to think about other than money, which will then lead to the development of their personality. He affirms, “There is also this to be said. It is immoral to use private property in order to alleviate the horrible evils that result from the institution of private property. It is both immoral and unfair. (Wilde, 2014, p. 4) and the solution would be to have social classes which are equal in their rights, merits and property so that the entire society could develop on an equal footing. This will give rise to a further development of the individual personality.

The focus on only the rich group will lead to a development of individualism only among the rich classes. He says again:

The poor can think of nothing else. That is the misery of being poor. What Jesus does say is that man reaches his perfection, not through what he has, not even through what he does, but entirely through what he is. And so the wealthy young man who comes to Jesus is represented as a thoroughly good citizen, who has broken none of the laws of his state, none of the commandments of his religion. (Wilde, 2014, p. 24)

Only then and by applying such a system will we be able –he close his last stanza- to lay claim of being Milton’s inheritors, in the current state of affairs we are far from being good representatives of Milton and Cromwell.

Equality that he promoted in his essay is again reflected in his poem “*Liberataris Sacra Fames*” which is Latin for “Sacred Hunger of Liberty” he blames the degraded status of England and the disintegration of culture and arts on the anarchy rule of the few politicians running and serving the queen. This is all caused by the lack of liberty. Social justice and equality lead to better standards of living and albeit freedom can easily be abused:

Albeit nurtured in democracy,

And liking best that state republican

Where every man is Kinglike and no man

Is crowned above his fellows,

With the disappearance of arts and culture, what in fact prevail in England are treason, trade, and political murder:

For no right cause, beneath whose ignorant reign

Arts, Culture, Reverence, Honor, all things fade,

Save Treason and the dagger of her trade,

And Murder with his silent bloody feet.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **II- Wilde's Religion: A Philosophical and Aesthetic Archetype**

Dogmatic religion began to cede place to ethical religion towards the end of the eighteenth century. Mathew Arnold who is considered by some to be the spokesman of religious Victorian morality did not disapprove of concentrating on good works and ethics as a replacement for dogmatic belief. The scientific view of life as opposed to the religious one was still a hot debate. Arnold's attempt at founding a religion based on scientific views did not find favor with Oscar Wilde who regarded the scientific justifications of religion as a death judgment against it. Arnold, however, insisted that religion is entirely based on morality. Morality did not suffer at the hands of Oscar Wild but in fact took a turn towards aesthetic principles. His novel *The Picture of Dorian Grey* was judged by many as lacking moral sense; a thing that Wilde had categorically denied claiming that he was preaching an aestheticized religion. He had fallen earlier under the influence of Walter Pater who preached that art is a translation of man's vision, imagination and emotion; a thing that impacted Wilde's view of art. Ruskin and Pater held almost the same views with relation to art but they differed in that Ruskin was promoting a Christian aesthetic theory while Pater a secular one. Combining both, Wilde managed to use both for a new artistic creation, the prophetic teachings of Ruskin with the aesthetic teachings of Pater. More than anywhere else was Wilde truly in line with the Arnoldian critical tradition in his Novel *The picture of Dorian Grey*. Wilde says that:

Aesthetics are, in fact, to ethics in the sphere of conscious civilisation what,

in the sphere of the external world, sexual is to natural selection. Ethics like natural selection makes existence possible. Aesthetics like sexual selection, make life lovely and wonderful, fill it with new forms and give it progress and variety and change. (Fraser, 1986, p. 192)

It was an age of science, speculation and disbelief. Religion was not an exception. However, Oscar Wilde never abdicated his belief. He believed that religion is a matter of feeling rather than reason. His belief was, however an aesthetic belief in the sense that he was aware that debates about combining religion with reasons to arrive at a rational religion were not possible. He was in search of a moral archetype that can shock man into imitation. He was a stout believer in ethics. Truth and ethics were his real religion. In his long Epistle *De Profundis*, he compared his life as an artist with that of Jesus Christ:

I see a far more intimate and immediate connection between the true life of Christ and the true life of the artist; and I take a keen pleasure in the reflection that long before sorrow had made my days her own and bound me to her wheel I had written in *The Soul of Man* that he who would lead a Christ-like life must be entirely and absolutely himself, and had taken as my types not merely the shepherd on the hillside and the prisoner in his cell, but also the painter to whom the world is a pageant and the poet for whom the world is a song. (Wilde, 2014, p 15)

The artist is endowed with a depth of imagination that only Jesus can match. He again refers to this facet of similarity between Jesus and the artist:

Nor is it merely that we can discern in Christ that close union of personality with perfection which forms the real distinction between the classical and romantic movement in life, but the very basis of his nature was the same as that

of the nature of the artist—an intense and flame-like imagination. He realised in the entire sphere of human relations that imaginative sympathy which in the sphere of Art is the sole secret of creation. He understood the leprosy of the leper, the darkness of the blind, the fierce misery of those who live for pleasure, the strange poverty of the rich (Wilde, 2014. p 15).

Imagination is an integral part of the human being. It accords the human being an extra ethical dimension through better empathy and understanding. The opposite of imagination is philistinism, which he indicted as being:

Philistinism being simply that side of man's nature that is not illumined by the imagination. He sees all the lovely influences of life as modes of light: the imagination itself is the world of light. The world is made by it, and yet the world cannot understand it: that is because the imagination is simply a manifestation of love, and it is love and the capacity for it that distinguishes one human being from another. (Wilde, 2014, p 24)

A quick review of Kant's philosophy regarding religion and his belief in a moral rational Archetype will help us understand the striking similarity between Wilde's faith and Kant's rational belief in a moral archetype. This will also help us understand that Wilde's practice throughout his work was in no way irrational or negligent of the ethical and moral aspect of his life.

The credit goes to Hegel, David Hume and Kant that a shift took place in dealing with religion in the eighteenth century. This shift was to turn critical discourse from religion as a divinely revealed concept directly related to theology to a religion as a human phenomenon that needs to be addressed as a field of philosophical enquiry:

The summit and culmination of the Enlightenment ----- seem to have been culturally rooted in the humanistic, rationalistic and scientific forces sprung up ever since the Renaissance (c. 1440 - c. 1540). Known also as the Age of Reason, and hence of natural Science too, the Enlightenment is the historical era characterized by the emergence of progressive and liberal ideas that led to the French Revolution and remained influential in Western philosophy. (Hampshire, 1956, p 59)

Christian theology was hitherto regarded as the standard by which to measure the truth of any related enquiry. Religion as a philosophy that needs to be discussed independent of the sacredness of Christian theology and its justification and defense of the reasonable belief of Christianity began to form in the eighteenth century. The philosophical enquiry before Kant placed the discussion in one of three categories; cosmological, theological or psychological. The immortality of the soul was discussed on a psychological level, and the existence of God was dealt with and classified as part of theology. Kant showed in his *Critique of Pure Reason* that it is contradictory to assume and deal with these issues as objects, which are not subject to temporal and spatial existence that make them legitimate objects of experience. In his book *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, he deals with religion as a human phenomenon and regarded the philosophy of religion as a distinctive philosophical enquiry. His concern is not to defend divine revelation in a reasonable manner but rather he attributes the whole religious experience to man's desire to live morally in a world where the highest good would be to live virtuously and happily. The most important of his arguments in his Critiques, however, is his Transcendental Dialectic, which principally consists in making morality as the basis of his authentic religion. Not less important is also his endeavor to regard religion as a symbolic rather than cognitive field of enquiry. It signifies thus an end to metaphysics. His transcendental idealism, for which he is

presumably thought to be against belief in religion, is rather the belief that there is no knowledge beyond the scope of experience. God and the soul are beyond our cognition. He therefore based his religion on morality. Religion is therefore free from any rituals or dogmas that may be associated with it. He believed that such rituals might do more harm than good. Christ for Kant was a perfect human who was preaching morality. Apart from his divine qualities, which Kant does not recognize, He is therefore a practical example of the Kantian categorical imperative. He was a human who was able to attain the highest requirements of the categorical imperative, which is the universal law-giving drive inside man. Christ provides us with the hope that righteousness and moral conduct might be realizable. This concept had an influence on Protestant theology in the nineteenth century.

Having placed religion in the realm of the non-cognitive, it was then relegated to the realm of feeling and symbolism. The human mind cannot reach the supersensible. Kant, being reared in a religious environment, also believed that this fact protects religion from philosophy as philosophers cannot argue using sheer reason that God does not exist. In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, he defends his view that there is a relationship between theology and philosophy. Each one tries to reason things out to reach reasonable and logical conclusions. Philosophy can find out the plausibility of religious ideas while theology can move from historical evidence to logical proof of the soundness of Christian teaching. Though Kant never entirely abdicated religious rituals, he sought a reconciliation of both for the service of creating an ideal community. Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) comments on his theory that it is:

in reality nothing other than a practical knowledge of men. The fundamental question of philosophy, encompassing all others, remained for Kant: ‘What is man?’” William H. Walsh further says: “He [Kant] wished to insist on the

authority of science and yet preserve the autonomy of morals (Walsh, 1967, p 306)

Kant thinks that Aristotle's denial of an ideal form and Plato's ideal and archetypal form theory are both difficult to prove. But he also believes that "mathematics and physics are composed of necessary and universal propositions while sensible experience lacks universality and necessity, the conditions of universality and necessity must, he felt, be imposed by the mind"( Synan, 1999, p 455). Universals are impossible to discern in super-sensible experience. He therefore concluded in his *Religion within The Boundaries of Pure reason* that "the inferences to God, freedom, and immortality may properly be based upon the moral experience"(Green, 1960, p 51)

Kant's Copernican revolution helped in shifting focus from the world to the mind and knowledge in the transcendental method. He adopted what is called the naturalistic method. Helped in this by Descartes' earlier skepticism, the human knowing mind was no longer able to accept being deceived unless everything is subjected to empirical analysis. The spiritual was beyond what the senses can discern. Hume's empiricism and Descartes' subjectivism were used by Kant to throw into question the whole of metaphysics:

Kant put metaphysics into question, in the sense that whoever makes claims concerning the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and its liberty must first inquire whether such an enterprise is at all possible. What we call 'external' reality may be shown to be (at least in part) the product of our mind (O' Collins, p 247).

As a result the humanistic transcendental and epistemological method of looking at metaphysics prevailed. The summary of Kant's three critiques can be deduced from his *Religion within the Boundaries of pure Reason*. It looks like a conclusion of the three

critiques. The critique of judgment mediates between the two critiques of pure reason and practical reason and introduces the concept of feeling that can unite both, "in feelings of the beautiful and the sublime we experience a harmony of our faculties, a union of the ideas of reason and the freedom of will which suggests through the phenomenon itself a deeper reality"(Langman, 1963, p 441). The philosophy of feeling has thus been merged into his philosophy of religion. He reduced his theory of religion to a religion of ethics "mysteries introduced into the catechism as though they were wholly popular, but which, ultimately, must first be transformed into moral concepts if they are to become comprehensive to everyone (Kant, 1960, p 13). If religion rituals are not turned into practical concepts of morality they are then of no real worth. Though he quoted from the bible certain exerts to prove the radical evil nature of man but in fact, he never regarded that as part of the maxims of reason to be followed. A ritual has worth only in so far it has a moral significance that can be ascertained by reason. The devil and his temptation of man as part of the supernatural transcendental religion has no place in his theory and is relevant only in as far as it entices man into moral action. He believes that:

that there exists absolutely no salvation for man apart from the sincerest adoption of genuinely moral principles into his disposition; that what works against this adoption is...as it is a certain self-incurred perversity...which lies in all men and which can be overcome only through the idea of moral goodness in its entire purity( Kant, 1960, p 78).

Like Immanuel Kant who based his belief on ethics, Wilde did the same and believed in the human realm of feeling rather than cognition in discerning God's intention in the universe. Kant and Wilde both believed in an Archetype that represents perfect morality to be modeled and imitated by man. Jesus Christ exemplified as a historical figure was for both

this sought-after archetype, which is a morally empowering person. Kant affirms again in his book *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*:

Now the ideal of a humanity pleasing to God (hence of a moral perfection to the extent possible for a finite being who is subject to needs and inclinations) we cannot think otherwise than through the idea of a human who not only performs all human duties himself and simultaneously spreads goodness to the greatest possible extent through teaching and example, but also, even though tempted by the greatest enticements, is prepared to undergo the severest sufferings, ending in the most gruesome death, for the sake of the world and even of his enemies.( Kant, 1960, p 60)

This archetype can only be recognized by faith because Kant did not want to ascribe divinity to Christ in order not to contradict his Critique of Practical Reason, Kant regarded Christ as a potential perfect human being who is realizable in any human being. Kant stated in his *Lectures on Ethics*:

In religion, the knowledge of God is properly based on faith alone. . . . [So] it is not necessary for this belief [in God] to be susceptible of logical proof. . . . sophistication is the error of refusing to accept any religion not based on a theology, which can be apprehended by our reason. . . . Sophistication in religious matters is a dangerous thing; our reasoning powers are limited and reason can err and we cannot prove everything. A speculative basis is a very weak foundation for religion. (Kant, 1930, p 86)

He tried to reconcile the age of science and Newton and the principles of Physics with the transcendental nature of religion by founding what is called a naturalistic religion based on ethics. The empirical reality is emphasized and the teleological concept of purpose in

nature is highlighted as being indispensable to explain the nature of the universe. He found that religion and the existence of God are essential and as foundational principles for a philosophy of a moral world. In founding the ideal kingdom of God he called for founding of the true church not based on the transcendental works of grace, mysteries or miracles or ecclesiastical historical stories but rather on what God wants to get salvation" It is not essential, and hence necessary, for everyone to know what God does or has done for his salvation, but it is essential to know what man himself must do in order to become worthy of this assistance." (Kant, 1960, p. 4)

Kant's belief in ethics and their universality and man's role in making his maxims universal depending on man's reasonable and logical conduct is well commented by Brendan Woods who affirms:

Kant's philosophy comes close to the ideas of many Christians in several areas. For example, his idea of a good will approximates the virtue ethics held by many Christians, and his belief that moral truths can be determined by man echoes Aquinas's commitment to using reason to arrive at the natural law.(Brendan Woods, 2010)

Kant sought a philosophical archetype in order for his ideas to be incarnate. He wanted to embody and apply his moral imperative and the possibility of moral perfection in a concrete example rather than abstract ideas in order for the conversion from radical natural evil to goodness to take place. He started with the Stoics whom he believed achieved a certain degree of perfection in the sense that passion is suppressed in favor of wise conduct. This idea, which he discussed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he had to give up in favor of a better archetype, which is less abstract than these ancient people. He therefore found in Christ. Bubbio who is the author of *God and Self in Hegel* quoting Kant comments:

Christ, being the prototype of pure moral disposition (that is, the first symbolic model that fully represents this notion), confirms the reality of the archetype (Urbild). The archetype is always already present in a human being, although its presence cannot be explained rationally: it is “a God-shaped hole in the heart of human reason.” The presence of the archetype is, in other words, independent of faith in the historical Jesus (the prototype). Previous scholarship has already remarked that Kant was unconcerned about the historicity or “veracity” of the events of Christ’s life as they are narrated in the Gospels. The idea of moral perfection is an idea of pure reason .(Bubbio, 2017, p 18)

Wilde was an Anglican. He long sought and harbored the intention to convert to Catholicism, which he did on his deathbed. He believed that Jesus Christ is the supreme artist who practiced a religion of an aesthete, an archetypal ethical figure who combined imagination with transcendental belief. In *de Profundis*, which he wrote after release from prison, he compared himself to Christ who achieved happiness through suffering. He saw him as a poet. He stated in his epistle *de Profundis*:

Christ’s place indeed is with the poets. His whole conception of Humanity sprang right out of the imagination and can only be realized by it. What God was to the pantheist, man was to Him. He was the first to conceive the divided races as a unity. Before his time there had been gods and men, and, feeling through the mysticism of sympathy that in himself each had been made incarnate (Wilde, 2014, p 16).

Wilde saw his pain, his loss of his wife and kids, his humility and reputation and the injustice done to him by a false system as a replication of Christ's suffering and he attempted to turn this suffering and of his life into a similar art. He continues again in his letter:

I had said of Christ that he ranks with the poets. That is true. Shelley and Sophocles are of his company. But his entire life also is the most wonderful of poems. For 'pity and terror' there is nothing in the entire cycle of Greek tragedy to touch it. The absolute purity of the protagonist raises the entire scheme to a height of romantic art from which the sufferings of Thebes and Pelops' line are by their very horror excluded, and shows how wrong Aristotle was when he said in his treatise on the drama that it would be impossible to bear the spectacle of one blameless in pain. (Wilde, 2014, p 16).

Christ for Wilde as for Kant was not a preacher of rituals or rigid rules. It was a perfect example of a moral code that takes inspiration from the spirit. Both rejected morality when it comes from external laws, they regarded it as an inner world and the conception of justice was poetic. Wilde even equated Christ with the romantic spirit:

But wherever there is a romantic movement in art there somehow, and under some form, is Christ, or the soul of Christ. He is in *Romeo and Juliet*, in the *Winter's Tale*, in Provençal poetry, in the *Ancient Mariner*, in *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and in Chatterton's *Ballad of Charity*. (Wilde, 2014, p 20)

He preached an aesthetic fidelity to truth. Religious truth is faith in what one believes in. Everything true must become a religion. The truth comes from the spirit, from the soul, from a higher being of man, and from a real moral imperative:

When I think of religion at all, I feel as if I would like to found an order for those who cannot believe: the Confraternity of the Faithless, one might call it, where on an altar, on which no taper burned, a priest, in whose heart peace had no dwelling, might celebrate with unblessed bread and a chalice empty of wine.

Everything to be true must become a religion. And agnosticism should have its ritual no less than faith. (Critchley, 2009)

In order man to emulate the idea of moral perfection and convert into a moral being from a pre-conversion self (an evil one), one needs to find a symbol which is already found in reason as an abstract idea. This conversion process needs something else:

The process of conversion, however, is not completed without the willingness of the new self to take upon itself the evil of the earlier self, and this willingness can derive only from the archetype of pure moral perfection, which is always already in us, but which needs a symbol in order to be activated through imitation; this symbol is Christ. The process of conversion, therefore, culminates in the adoption of a new way of thinking and acting. Subjectively experienced, post-conversion life is therefore a continuous sacrifice, not only (and not primarily) in the sense of a quasi-legal retribution for pre-conversion evil. (Bubbio, 2017, p 23)

Kant believed in the merging of the internal archetype with the external one. The moral code within and the external symbol without that he found in Christ as an incarnate being who may translate his abstract ideas into a living example. The external symbol will serve as a symbol, of sacrifice, of man's struggle against passion. Paolo Bubbio comments on this fusion:

Kant relies on the idea of an internal archetype of moral perfection that needs to be “activated” by adopting a unique embodied ideal on which we model a sacrificial attitude: Christ thus becomes the symbol of a sacrifice that is conceived in an unorthodox manner, not only and not primarily as a punitive retribution but also, and more importantly, as the will to forgive. With this

account, Kant succeeds in avoiding any irrationalist drift in conceiving the process of conversion (via the notion of the internal archetype), while at the same time he takes into consideration the religious element represented by Christ, treated not as an accidental metaphor but as a symbol that has a conceptual connection with the internal archetype (Bubbio, 2017, p 28)

## II- Mythological Aesthetics and the Triumph of Apollo in his Poem

### *"The Sphinx"*

The fact that Wilde dedicated his poem 'The Sphinx' to the French symbolist Marcel Schwob (1867-1905) is an indication that the reader is in for many symbols that he may have to interpret at his own risks. He stated in the preface to his novel *the Picture of Dorian Gray* that "Considerable disagreement about a work of art only proves that the work is "new, complex, and vital."The poem being a saga of legends and conflicts lays itself to different interpretations if read within the stereotyped image of Wilde the decadent hero who wanted to "épater la bourgeoisie". Many tend to stick to the stock decadent interpretation that focuses on images of morbidity and sensuality within an aesthetic context:

In the formal experimentalism of *The Sphinx*, Wilde's triumph of poetic Decadence, collisions with artifice, invested with an intense authorial subjectivity, are the poem's very themes, as we follow a university student in his cell absorbed in the reveries of Wilde, exotic flights of the imagination.

The poem's artificiality seems to be autonomous (Boyipoupolos, 2015, p. 61)

Numerous critics assume that Wilde's *The Sphinx* is a prime example of his decadence. They take his exotic, grotesque and complex images of ancient legends taken from Egyptian mythological past as a proof that attests to Wilde's showy interest in exoticism. Hesketh Pearson describes the poem as being "popular among crossword-puzzle addicts" (Pearson, 1986, p. 3) and he comments again quoting Wilde that:

Wilde seems to have felt that its appeal to his own age would be restricted, saying 'My first idea was to print only three copies: one for myself, one for the

British museum, and one for Heaven. I had some doubt about the British Museum., (Pearson, 1986, p. 3)

The fact that he wanted to print only three copies of the poem shows that the poem is meant for an elite readers. It shows too that he regards the poem a gem or a work of art of a special kind. Its complex symbols, however, were often misinterpreted:

Hence, the Victorian substratum of the poem, its firm rooting in nineteenth century literary history and thought ought not to be ignored as it has been in the few critical works which emphasize its quaint singularity and simply characterize it as "nonsense poetry of the purest verbal music of rhythm and rhyme."(Lennartz, 2014, p.1).

Wilde already defended himself against accusation of morbidity when he stated in his introduction to his novel *The Picture of Dorian Grey* that "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. (Wilde, 2014, p. 4) and he stated again in defense of the complexity of his symbols '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.'(Wilde, 2014, p. 4)

In this Chapter, I argue that Wilde wrote the poem to justify existence as an aesthetic phenomenon but failed to accomplish his task because his belief declared this philosophy a failure. The phrase "justifying the world as an aesthetic phenomenon" belongs to Friedrich Nietzsche as previously mentioned who stated in his book *The Birth of Tragedy* that only as an aesthetic phenomenon are existence and the world eternally justified". He probably in most of his works tried to justify the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. But more prominently did he do so in his master piece "the Sphinx" as an example of the failure of the

philosophy of justifying existence as an aesthetic phenomenon. He tried as hard as he could to convince himself of the futility of this "ecstatic frenzy" or "Rausch" to use Nietzsche's terms but in the end he gave up. When he returns to religion in the last stanza of his poem, he explicitly declares that the world away from belief in God cannot be justified in any other way let alone as an aesthetic phenomenon. He experimented with different beliefs and tried to juxtapose paganism with Christianity or hedonism against religiosity and the body against the soul in an attempt to resolve a conflict that he may not have resolved even by finally converting to Catholicism while on his deathbed. He exposes and displays before our eyes through 174 lines of iambic Quadrameter imitating Tennyson's "in Memoriam" an entire world where passion, love, intoxication, paganism are paramount. An entire existence of its own without the intervention of divinity; full of beauty, glory, pleasure, fidelity and even immortality achieved through heroic deeds. Towards the end this beautiful excessively aesthetically created world crumbles because it turned out to be false and even immortality achieved through such existence is only a sham and not real. It is a work of excess beyond all limits.

In Egyptology, 'The Sphinx' stands for wisdom and knowledge. It was a creature that was reputed to answer all questions about life and death. Wilde did believe that art can provide all answers. "The sphinx's perverse shape—a form which is between woman and beast—inspires a massive range of ideas; historical, geographical, philosophical and sensual. It permits the poetic persona to travel as far as possible from the exigencies of the here and now" (Ledger & McCracken, 1995, 144). Wilde chose 'The Sphinx' as a work of art par excellence to embody his visions of a conflict between the sensual world and the spiritual one, between the body and the soul. Much like the conflict that recur in his previous work in which he tries to seek the temperance between excessive Godless sensual and carnal beauty and between the desires of the soul and spiritual life. The sphinx has been ancient,

ambiguous, and a riddle for long generations. It was a male for the Greeks and a female for Egyptians. It is a mixture of both sexes. It is an ambiguous symbol of seduction. It is an ideal and transcendental work of art for Wilde that can answer all of his enquiries and satisfy all of his curiosities. He opens his poem with a clear contrast between silence, immobility and timelessness versus inevitable temporality:

In a dim corner of my room  
For longer than my fancy thinks,  
A beautiful and silent Sphinx  
Has watched me through the shifting gloom.

Inviolable and immobile  
She does not rise she does not stir  
For silver moons are nought to her  
And nought to her the suns that reel.

The Sphinx is beautiful and stands there timelessly. The gloomy Oxford student's fancy does not measure up to the sphinx. He believes that even his fancy would not be able to image the long period during which the sphinx was in existence. It is a perfect example of timeless entity. It is invincible and can stand time better than any human. After all Wilde's obsession had been to seek creatures or create figures that can withstand time and be a source of sensual pleasure. The sun for day and moon for night show that passing of time which does not mean much to her as she has withstood time for centuries. Wilde's obsession with time is at the core of his philosophy of art, which he equated with religion as being the only two that may lead to redemption. He continues his record of the passing of the time using his palette of colors:

Red follows grey across the air,  
The waves of moonlight ebb and flow  
But with the Dawn she does not go  
And in the night-time she is there.

Dawn follows Dawn and Nights grow old  
And all the while this curious cat  
Lies couching on the Chinese mat  
With eyes of satin rimmed with gold.

Wilde stated 'I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china'(qtd in, Marcovitch, 2010, p. 51). He believed that the Chinese porcelain was unsurpassable in beauty and he found it difficult to measure his life against a perfect piece of art like Chinese porcelain. Therefore, the cat on the Chinese mat is of exquisite beauty with satin eyes rimmed with Gold. The Chinese porcelain which was made only for emperors; it came into the hands of the Nouveau-riches in the nineteenth century. Endowing the sphinx with a Chinese setting is meant to intensify his appreciation of this ingenious timeless work of seduction. He sets the floor for a perfect work of seduction since the beginning of time. The metaphor of the night growing old while the cat does not change is meant to intensify the contrast. The speaker continues in his description. The cat that has yet to turn in the speaker's imagination into a sphinx, looks at him with an oblique glance suggestive of lascivious and malicious interest:

Upon the mat she lies and leers  
And on the tawny throat of her  
Flutters the soft and fur  
Or ripples to her pointed ears.

The speaker goes on with his fancy and asks the cat on the mat to materialize into a real sphinx which Wilde is using now as an artistic symbol for man with all his sensual desires; with beauty and lust fighting their way to prevail. The conflict between the body and the soul, the form and content, art and ugliness, sense and sensuality are perennial in Wilde's work, be it in the picture of Dorian or in his short stories and his poetry as well. He is always in search of a balance that could weigh both religion and art to see which one wins in the end. He always explores different types of excess that could surpass man's fancy through heroic actions, love passions beyond boundaries, or even different types of religions. Rationality or the Apollonian on the one hand that Wilde links to religion and the Dionysian, which he associates with art. "We cannot properly appreciate or criticize the Dionysian from within a tradition of rationality because the Dionysian stands outside rationality. As much as the civilized world may wish to deny it, the Dionysian is the source of our myths, our passions, and our instincts, none of which are bounded by reason."(Spark Note). Nothing falls outside his testing vision. In the next lines, he chooses a word to signify that his choice of the sphinx is to show the sensual side of man which will later come into conflict with the speaker's religious belief that he then decides never to abdicate in favor of carnal sensuality:

Come forth my lovely seneschal!

So somnolent, so statuesque!

Come forth you exquisite grotesque!

Half woman and half animal!

The word 'seneschal', which means a senior servant in a mansion of nobles, is clearly used to denote that the sphinx is a representative of sensuality. The word "seneschal" echoes the word sensual. The word 'statuesque' is to show again Wilde's interest in the statues as symbols of art. He completes his description by adding the qualities, which he associates

with women and animals to the sphinx in order to intensify the purely sensual desires that he adds to his symbol. The qualities he adds to the sphinx do not end there:

Come forth my lovely languorous Sphinx!

And put your head upon my knee!

And let me stroke your throat and see

Your body spotted like the Lynx!

Asking the sphinx to come forward as close as possible so he can touch, stroke and enjoy its presence. With this touch, he is transported through time to a pagan world of pleasurable excess. Languor, for example, is a pleasurable type of tiredness. It is similar to the languor that man feels after fulfilling a sexual desire. The sphinx is beauty, art, desire, sensuality, grandeur, and the possible Dionysian archetype which he so far questions. The speaker is still in hesitation as to whether art can satisfy the speaker's thirst for immortality. The sphinx serves here as a storehouse of legends that he will review one by one and see if they ever fulfill the role which he has assigned to himself of being an aesthete in search of a perfect and purely aesthetically constructed world. He assumes the role of a perfect advocate of the Dionysian spirit that runs through the psychic and ecstatic frenzy of sexual excitement on which he will later lavish his erotic fantasies. He starts comparing his short-lived life with that of the sphinx. He says that he has hardly lived a fraction of the centuries that the sphinx has passed through:

A thousand weary centuries

Are thine while I have hardly seen

Some twenty summers cast their green

For autumn's gaudy liveries.

He is hardly twenty years old though and the metaphor of autumn and summer is to show that he is aging and approaching the end sooner than he would wish. The movement from summer to autumn to indicate the changing of seasons reveals his obsession with temporality and time. Twenty years were enough to bring him to his end in contrast with the age of the sphinx. The sphinx has seen a thousand seasons. He is fit enough to reveal all of its past experiences. He places himself as an aesthete versus one of the symbols of Dionysus. The sphinx may tell him all his exotic stories that it had lived which he may also use to reflect on his theory:

But you can read the Hieroglyphs  
On the great sand-stone obelisks,  
And you have talked with Basilisks,  
And you have looked on Hippogriffs.

The sphinx can read the old Egyptian language on the obelisks. It spoke to the Basilisk which is a legendary creature reputed to be the king of snakes with a lethal gaze and can cause death by simply looking at it (pliny, 2017, p. 33). But the sphinx was able to talk to this creature and survive its deadly glance. It was also able to see many 'Hippogriffs', the legendary half eagle half horse creature mentioned by Virgil in his *Eclogues*. The creature is a symbol of the Greek God Apollo, the God of the sun and truth. Apollo is symbolized as the reasoning part of the human. Nietzsche, as mentioned earlier in this study, did make a comparison between the Apollonian, the reasoning and logical part on the one hand and the Dionysian, sensual and free unbounded orgiastic side of man where he sought a balance between the two in order for life to flourish. The sphinx, in the eyes of the speaker has already met dangers and seen people who were Apollonian by nature just as the speaker himself meets every day. He does meet people who lack imagination and fancy. Then he refers to the legend of Isis and Osiris, which is one of the most passionate love stories of all

times. Osiris was the God of immortality, of the dead, of the resurrection and of the afterlife in ancient Egypt. Osiris was considered not only a merciful judge of the dead in the afterlife, but also the underworld agency that granted all life, including sprouting vegetation and the fertile flooding of the Nile River. He was described as the "Lord of love"'. (Budge, 1969, p. 259). He was a king in Egypt and his beloved queen was Isis. The legend says that he was deceived by his covetous brother Set. He wanted to usurp power from his brother. He made a golden coffin and claimed that whoever fits into the coffin will get the coffin as his reward. Osiris got into the coffin and his brother closed it, nailed it, and threw it into the Nile. Isis, his wife decided to look for him and began a long and arduous journey in search of him. She found him in the trunk of a tree where she then managed to bring him back to life using a spell. He impregnated her and died again. Having heard about the return of the coffin, Set seized the coffin, opened it, cut Osiris body into pieces, and strew them all over Egypt. Isis' love to her husband was so exceptional that she went looking for and assembling all the pieces and put them together. He thus became the God of the dead and upon Isis' death; she could be reunited with her husband eternally. The speaker invokes the story, as it is a symbol of the immortality of love. They were immortalized because of their extraordinary love. They came down the ages as a legend because they were preserved by Art as symbols of an exemplary condition of beauty. They were both "Übermenschen" or superhuman to use a Nietzschean term again... Isis actions were exceptional and out of the ordinary. They both deserve eternity. Another Passionate love story is invoked in the next stanza, which is equally important for the exceptional event surrounding it. It is the love story of Antony and Cleopatra. The exceptional event that the speaker found worth remembering in the passionate love story between Antony and Cleopatra is that of her stunt to impress her love Antony:

And drink the jewel-drunken wine

And bend her head in mimic awe

To see the huge pro-consul draw

The salted tunny from the brine?

The action goes beyond what is normal in a relationship. She orders her most expensive pearl earring to be dissolved in a goblet filled with vinegar. She swallowed the beverage amidst the astonished eyes of the entourage and Antony in particular. She wanted to make the same with the other earring before she was stopped by the proconsul or the adjudicator of the wager declaring her a winner to stop her from doing it again. The act went down to history as being of exceptional quality. An act that is worth immortalizing. History has recorded this act. It is mentioned that the other earring was sliced later in Rome and made into two other earrings for a statue of Venus which was kept in the Pantheon. Cleopatra's act, which is regarded by the speaker as being of artistic nature in that it eventually, immortalized her. What goes beyond the human limits is always worth immortalizing. (Jones, 2006, p. 72). It is an action that affirms life rather than deny it. This story rhymes well with the one that follows:

And did you mark the Cyprian kiss

With Adon on his catafalque,

And did you follow Amanalk

The god of Heliopolis?

Having given examples of exceptional and exemplary love stories and sacrifices, He turns to the possible consequences of rejecting beauty. It is another facet of his vindication process of the Dionysian. He asks the sphinx if she ever saw Aphrodite or Venus, the goddess of love, pleasure and beauty as she kissed her lover Adonis who lay in his coffin as he was killed by the wilde boar. Venus left the mount Olympus disguised as Artemis, a hunting goddess, in order to pursue Adonis with whom she passionately fell in love. Her love was

unrequited. He did not respond to her advances and went hunting and was consequently killed by a wild pig. Symbolically and within the same context, death is seen as a punishment for non-acceptance of beauty, pleasure and love. The sphinx is being asked by the speaker of she witnessed what may befall people who rejects the philosophy of beauty. What is rhyming in those series of legends is not sounds as Boyiupolos had claimed in his Decadent Image but rather Wilde meant his ideas to enter into a conflict in which one had always a choice between beauty, freedom of choice, unlimited possibilities of the imagination on the one hand and parochial thinking, and limited potentials of the mind on the other.

Who better can provide judgment than a god that has the ability to judge between good and evil. Therefore, the speaker invokes another god. Thoth being the God of Wisdom, science, and writing is invoked to lend to the sphinx other powers he did not hitherto possess. By having talked to this God that played many roles:

Thoth's roles in Egyptian mythology were many. He served as a mediating power, especially between good and evil, making sure neither had a decisive victory over the other. [( Budge,1969, p405)He also served as scribe of the gods,(Budge,1969, 408) credited with the invention of writing and alphabets (i.e. hieroglyphs) themselves ( Budge, 1969, p414)

For an artifice of art to be perfect, it must have spoken to one of the most important gods. This god is also associated with time and regarded as a reckoner of time and an arbitrator who is supposed to provide Wilde's sphinx with the ability to answer his never-ending enquiries and doubts about time, immortality, art:

And did you talk with Thoth, and did you hear  
the moon-horned Io weep?

From Wisdom and writing he moves immediately to another legend of passionate love again. It is that of The God Zeus with a mortal which is Io. Zeus fell in love with her. She refused his advances at first but later succumbed to his desires. He decided to turn her into a cow in order to hide her from his wife Hera. When his wife learned of his intentions, she sent a gadfly to plague her forever. She escaped and wandered the whole world to avoid the pain that the gadfly had inflicted on her. She is in the poem another symbol of the pangs and suffering of love, of sin that she had not committed and was not even responsible for but had to pay the price. Io was originally a priestess of Hera who fell into disfavor because of her love with Zeus. The conflict between desire and self-restraint represented by religion is again invoked in this legend. After all Dionysius in genealogical line is a descendant Io. This legend is again meant to emphasize the ongoing conflict in the speaker's mind. He continues his questioning of the sphinx asking her to yield more bizarre and exotic stories and legends if all kinds to charm his fancy, the fancy of an artist who cannot be charmed easily unless it be by exaggerated stretch of imagination:

Lift up your large black satin eyes  
Which are like cushions where one sinks,  
Fawn at my feet, fantastic Sphinx,  
And sing me all your memories.

Sing to me of the Jewish maid  
Who wandered with the Holy Child,  
And how you led them through the wild,  
And how they slept beneath your shade.

'The Jewish maid' being Mary who escaped to Egypt to save her child Jesus as the story is related in the bible when Herod ordered the killing of all new born babies who will threaten his rule in future. His wise men ordered him to take this action and slaughter all babies in anticipation of what might happen. But the story in the bible never tells, however, that Mary, Joseph and their son slept beneath the shade of the sphinx. Though the sphinx could here be a symbol of Egypt that protected Jesus from death, but Wilde's idea was taken from a portrait of the French painter Luc Olivier Merson (French, 1846–1920) *Rest on the Flight* into Egypt that depicts Mary between the feet of the sphinx. The sphinx which is regarded as a pagan symbol of sensuality is being juxtaposed with a religious symbol. Behrendt comments on this juxtaposition:

Wilde's poem, like Merson's painting, achieves its drama by bringing pagan and Christian imagery into juxtaposition and by blurring ideological boundaries, a technique central to much of the art of Renaissance Italy and adapted by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in England. Wilde's sphinx, however, is one whose all-consuming sexuality includes lovers of both sexes as well as several mythological animal mutations. (Behrendt, 1991, p 60)

A strikingly similar story to the fate of Oscar Wilde and his love relationship and his passion is found in the next story that he relates in the coming stanza. It is that of the Roman emperor Hadrian and his passionate love to the boy Antinous.

Sing to me of the Jewish maid  
Who wandered with the Holy Child,  
And how you led them through the wild,  
And how they slept beneath your shade.

Sing to me of that odorous

When his lover died after a boat journey on the Nile river, Hadrian turned into a tyrant and decided to make him a deity. He wept for him and founded a city after his name. That is not the only thing why Wilde was attracted to Hadrian:

He was a passionate huntsman, a talented linguist and, even in his humble campaign tent, an ardent student of poetry and philosophy. Before long he came to the attention of the Emperor Trajan, a distant relative, and joined the imperial staff. In Rome, he pursued his intellectual and artistic interests, while never losing his love of hunting and the vigorous outdoor life. A contemporary wrote that he was 'friendly and dignified, serious and amusing, thrifty and generous, in all things versatile and varied. (Napier, 2008)

He is also known to have built the wall that would protect the empire from marauding forces in order for his people to enjoy prosperity. Wilde admired him much as he admired Cromwell for various reasons. For his contradictions, love relationships, his patronage of the arts:

But tactical wisdom was by no means his only strength. He encouraged culture and the arts. He completed the vast temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens and re-built the magnificent Pantheon in Rome, unaltered to this day.

He climbed Mount Etna in Sicily and travelled widely in Egypt, fascinated by the temples and oracles. His curiosity and zest for life were astonishing.

(Napier, 2008)

Wilde shared with Hadrian his love for Greek culture. It was also in Greece that he met his boy Antinous for whom he also wrote poetry. He was so extreme in his reactions that the extermination of the Jews is being attributed to their destruction of the statue of Antinous which was seen as the last straw in their rebellion against Hadrian.(Napier, 2008). Hadrian was devastated by the death of his friend Antinous. He drank himself to death after having indulged in all types of sensual delights. It is yet another story of the same conflict in which submission to desire is again emphasized as leading to destruction. A most glorious and successful man gave in to sensuality. The balance between the Dionysian and Apollonian was disturbed. A warning about the possible dangers of giving in to excesses. The personal identification of Wilde with Hadrian is manifest in that Hadrian wrote poetry in which he regarded Antinous as his soul mate:

My little, wandering, charming soul,

Guest of my flesh, companion,

Where are you going now - Naked, rigid, pale,

No longer laughing, being alone? (Coldewey, 2008)

Wilde continues with his string of legends to fit in the mosaic he is creating. He asks the sphinx to sing of more and more stories. He invokes the legend of the Minotaur, which is a bull-headed creature in Greek mythology. When Minos ruled Crete, he asked the God of sea Poseidon to grant him a white bull so he can sacrifice to the deity. When he was granted his wish, he admired the beauty of the bull and decided to sacrifice another and keep this bull to

himself. Poseidon knew of this desire and decided to punish Minos. Therefore, Poseidon made Minos' wife fall madly in love with the bull. The wife asked the architect Daedalus to make her a hollow cow made of wood where she can enter and copulate with the bull in secret. The result of this love relationship was the Minotaur, which is half-human, half bull who lived on devouring human beings. Minos decided to create a prison in the form of a labyrinth in which he could hold his enemies as a punishment:

Sing to me of the Labyrinth

In which the two-formed bull was stalled,

Sing to me of the night you crawled

Across the temple's granite plinth

The Minotaur was the fruit of a passionate love relationship between a human and a brute which itself was meant to be a punishment for Minos submission to the beauty of the bull. The eventual consequence of his admiration of the beauty of the bull was the eventual birth of a monster. This monster was later killed by Theseus. A monster born out of Dionysian passion, born of the desire to succumb to sensuality while entirely ignoring Apollo. The same recurrent themes of the previous legends, love passion, beauty, suffering and death and most importantly "The minotaur and his labyrinth are generally viewed as symbolic of internal conflict and the struggle with one's animal nature"(Glossary of Symbols, 2017).

The afore-mentioned struggle with man's animalistic part of his nature lead to another series of legends which aims at defining the final fate of man after death if ever he fails to subdue his lust and sensuality and succumbs to his desires. This time he relates the ancient Egyptian story of judgement and life after death. Addressing the sphinx, the speaker mentions several possible lovers of the sphinx. Though all those possible lovers are in fact meant to

show the sphinx as being entirely indulged in extreme sensual and sexual encounter, but the choice of these particular figures alludes to a much deeper meaning:

Did giant lizards come and crouch  
Before you on the reedy banks?  
Did Gryphons with great metal flanks  
Leap on you in your trampled couch,

Did monstrous hippopotami  
Come sidling to you in the mist  
Did gilt-scaled dragons write and twist  
With passion as you passed them by?

And from that brick-built Lycian tomb  
What horrible Chimaera came  
With fearful heads and fearful flame  
To breed new wonders from your womb?

The speaker is questioning the sphinx about who might be its lovers and whom had he tempted. He starts enumerating some of those possible lovers. In this context, he mentions several other creatures and gods. The Ibis (a wading bird with a long beak sacred to the Egyptians), crocodile, Hippopotami, Chimaera "fire-breathing monster of Lycia, destroyed by Bellerophon (q.v.). According to Homer the Chimaera was of divine origin. In front it was a lion, behind it was a serpent, and in the middle a goat" (Peck, 1898), as well as Anubis (God of mummification and afterlife). All of those apparently unrelated creatures and gods are a part of Wilde mosaic aesthetics to expound the struggle and conflict between sensual

temptation and moral consequences. Egyptians believed in life after death. When someone dies, he is immediately judged and tested in order to decide if he goes to afterlife; if he fails the test he is then eaten by The monster Chimaera. As a first step, his heart is weighed by Maat, goddess of truth, morality, harmony and justice and the result is recorded by the ibis-headed Thoth god of wisdom and science and later god of arbitration. If the result is positive and the heart, equals the weight of a feather he is permitted to go to Afterlife if not he is devoured by the chimeric Ammit, which is a demon, composed of the three man eating animals crocodile, hippopotamus, and lion. It eats the souls of the dead and prevents them from going to Osiris, god of regeneration and immortality." Osiris was considered not only a merciful judge of the dead in the afterlife, but also the underworld agency that granted all life, including sprouting vegetation and the fertile flooding of the Nile River. He was described as the "Lord of love "(Budge, 1969, p 259). The questioning of the sphinx about this whole cycle of generation and regeneration, and the possible immortality of pleasure and sensuality, the possible triumph of Dionysius over Apollo. Wilde is in fact wondering if the sphinx had passed through all those possible erotic experiences, and he remained immortal all these centuries, then immortality of sensuality, beauty is possible. In other words, the world can stand as an aesthetic phenomenon as Nietzsche has claimed. He is still in the process of conjecture though as the conflict has not yet been settled and required more evidence on the part of the speaker to reach a final conclusion.

Among the other possible lovers of the sphinx, the speaker lists many; the swarthy Ethiop, the ivory-horned Trageophos, the god of flies who plagued the Jews, Pasht the god of warfare, the young Tyrian who stands for Adonis, the god of the Assyrian and Apis the god of fertility and strength. The speaker then settles on the last god whom he amply describes. He is Ammon who was one of the most powerful gods in ancient Egypt. He is named king of the gods, the counterpart of Zeus in Greek mythology. When united with the sun god, he

became even more powerful to the point of becoming the sole most important god. "Lord of truth, father of the gods, maker of men, creator of all animals, Lord of things that are, creator of the staff of life" (Budge, 1997, 214). He chose Ammon for his greatness and grandeur which is befitting for the grandeur of the sphinx. An exquisite piece of art like the sphinx deserves an equally worthy lover, as all other lovers, be they gods or mortals did not seem to have impressed the sphinx:

How subtle secret is your smile;  
Did you love none then? Nay I know  
Great Ammon was your bedfellow!  
He lay with you beside the Nile!

His magnificence and respect that he exacted from those who worshiped him is attested even by the way he is welcomed by his worshippers. Wilde dwells carefully on this figure lavishes on him all types of descriptions that show him a unique creature in beauty, grandeur, richness. "Syrian Galbanum" which is a precious material used in perfume and was sacred to the ancient Egyptians as well as the spikenard, which is again another equally precious type of perfume from China and India, are used to be part of his beautifying process. The bible contains several references of these Luxury perfumes in the old and new testaments.

The river-horses in the slime  
Trumpeted when they saw him come  
Odorous with Syrian galbanum  
And smeared with spikenard and with thyme.

He came along the river bank  
Like some tall galley argent-sailed

He strode across the waters, mailed

In beauty and the waters sank.

Then addressing the sphinx again, he attributes to her the seduction role. She was behind all of his decisions. She tempted him to move into one direction or another. She whispered to him all types of secrets. She, as the epitome of magic, sensuality and lust, fancy and perversity. The speaker indulges in erotic phantasies to emphasize the weakness of another powerful, great god in the face of irresistible passion and love that is like death, equals all, and to which all submits:

You kissed his mouth with mouth of flame,

You made the hornèd-god your own,

You stood behind him on his throne:

You called him by his secret name,

You whispered monstrous oracles

Into the caverns of his ears:

With blood of goats and blood of steers

You taught him monstrous miracles,

His "brows" were oiled and perfumed with "Syrian oils" and they were as wide as a tent and his "marble limbs" were brighter than the light of the moon and made during the day even brighter while his extremely long hair looks like a gem that the merchants bring from Kurdistan:

With Syrian oils his brows were bright

And wide-spread as a tent at noon

His marble limbs made pale the moon

And lent the day a larger light,

His long hair was nine cubits span

And coloured like that yellow gem

Which hidden in their garments' hem,

The merchants bring from Kurdistan.

His face is like a must and his azure eyes cannot be turned into saphirine color, which is the shade color of blue. That is, even the seas cannot reduce the blueness of his eyes into shady blue. His pedestal is made of pearl and porphyry (rock consisting of large-grained crystals such as feldspar or quartz). But Porphyry is also the name of Roman philosopher known for his paganism and antagonism to Christianity. He regarded Jesus as just a philosopher. The speaker's deliberate allusion plays on the relationship between paganism and Christianity. Wilde often admired the Greek era as being a golden age as opposed to the Christian one in which man's capabilities were stifled by the rigid rules of religion. His fancy makes him again elaborate on the description of Ammon that looks extraordinary in every aspect. His breast was ivory and on his breast shone the emerald of the ocean. Then in the midst of this description, Wilde deliberately elaborates on the grandeur of Ammon in order to prepare him for his final downfall. The contrast is imminent and inevitable. Within this description, he mentions some of the precious stones that the servant used to bring to Ammon. Those jewels carry with them more significant mythological allusions. They are not normal jewels but they were brought by from the Colchian caves. The word "Colchian" conjures up another legend which shows the power of love in working miracles. The power of love and sexual drive that leads man to work wonders. It is like a driving force. He likens Ammon's shining breast to the mystic jewel brought to the colchian witch.

That mystic, moonlight jewel which  
Some diver of the Colchian caves  
Had found beneath the blackening waves  
And carried to the Colchian witch.

It is a reference to Medea the daughter of the king of Colchis who passionately fell in love with Jason. Medea helped Jason recover the Golden Fleece that would help him claim the throne that his father had lost by assassination. He was given impossible tasks to accomplish and he fell into depression due to the impossibility of accomplishing those tasks. The goddess Hera convinced Eros and Aphrodite to make Medea the king's daughter fall in love with him and help him. That was the key to empowering Jason without which he could not have achieved anything. Her great love and her desire towards him were important in invigorating him into action. According to the legend, she helped him by giving him the herb that drugged the dragon, the guardian of the Golden Fleece that would eventually lead to his recovering the Golden Fleece fulfilling thereafter his promise to marry Medea the witch of Colchis. Wilde again returns to the state of intoxication that the power of love can pour on a man in love. It is this drive to life or as Schopenhauer states the will to life which he attributed to sexual drive and which Nietzsche later replicated in his term "the Rausch".

So Wilde even in his description of a character in his poem, he never fails to make significant allusions in order to help us understand his otherwise hidden intentions. His mythological aesthetics is astounding and his erudition is a storehouse from which he draws insinuations to build his perfect poem. He continues his description of Ammon. He turns to his chariot, which is driven by the Nubians (most ancient people in southern Egypt) among the nodding peacock fans. The merchants' gifts are "steatite" which another is precious stone and heatproof and he adds hyperbolically that the cheapest cup for his drinking is made of

"chrysolite" which is yet another precious green-yellow gemstone. They even bring him "cedar chests of rich apparel" and he states that young kings would be delighted to be his guests and hundreds of priests bow to him day and night:

Ten hundred shaven priests did bow  
To Ammon's altar day and night,  
Ten hundred lamps did wave their light  
Through Ammon's carven house, and now

Having creating a pagan world independent of a real religion, a world where beauty and excess prevail, where the Dionysian is in complete control and Apollo has no part to play. An exotic world that is a perfect example of an aesthetic phenomenon where he tested the plausibility of such a world, he starts to prepare the ground for his final denouement in which apparent triumph of the Dionysian and its sensual world starts to crumble. He contrasts the grandeur and solemnity of the previous lines with the virtual grim and inevitable fate that befell the king of kings in the end:

Foul snake and speckled adder with  
Their young ones crawl from stone to stone  
For ruined is the house, and prone  
The great rose-marble monolith;

Instead of priests, bowing down to him, the snakes and adders now crawl around where the rose marble is now lying flat. He captures an image of a lost glory. What remain of that glory are only the beasts strolling around:

Wild ass or strolling jackal comes  
And crouches in the mouldering gates

The god whom the speaker assumed to be a possible lover for the sphinx is now scattered all over the vast desert:

The God is scattered here and there;  
Deep hidden in the windy sand  
I saw his giant granite hand  
Still clenched in impotent despair.

This lover who turned into sand is only a place for wandering caravans and Arabs who adjust their burnous in order to take their time gazing at this gigantic creature who was once the sphinx's lover:

And many a wandering caravan  
Of stately negroes, silken-shawled,  
Crossing the desert, halts appalled  
Before the neck that none can span.

And many a bearded Bedouin  
Draws back his yellow-striped burnous  
To gaze upon the Titan thews  
Of him who was thy paladin.

Sarcastically he dwells on the impossibility of resurrecting into life that lover. He calls upon the sphinx to do its best by collecting the different fragments and turn these pieces into a new

relationship. He even suggests ironically a method by which the sphinx can do in order to awake passions in the pieces of stone:

Go seek his fragments on the moor,  
And wash them in the evening dew,  
And from their pieces make anew  
Thy mutilated paramour.  
Go seek them where they lie alone  
And from their broken pieces make  
Thy bruised bedfellow! And wake  
Mad passions in the senseless stone!

The speaker starts wondering what brought this shameful source of sin into his room and asks whether the two ancient biblical rivers of Abana and Pharpar near Damascus are dry in order for the sphinx to quench his thirst in the speaker's room. The speaker describes himself as being already cursed and burdened with sin and the last thing he needs is another motivator to commit more sins:

What songless, tongueless ghost of sin  
Crept through the curtains of the night  
And saw my taper burning bright,  
And knocked and bade you enter in?  
  
Are there not others more accursed,  
Whiter with leprosy than I?  
  
Are Abana and Pharpar dry,

That you come here to slake your thirst?

The denouement of this long saga of legends and conflicts nears its final end when calls the sphinx "a false sphinx". He calls the sphinx who he images standing by the river Styx which is one of the rivers of the underworld in Greek mythology where one's soul is ferried across the river by the old Charon. In Greek mythology when a person dies, a coin is put in his mouth to pay for his passage through the river, which is the entrance to the underworld. The river is supposed to serve as a place of purge for the souls. The entire legend is a kind of poetic euphemism for death. The speaker asks the sphinx to leave him to his crucifix, which is a symbol of the crucifixion of Jesus:

False Sphinx! False Sphinx! By reedy Styx,

Old Charon, leaning on his oar,

Waits for my coin. Go thou before

And leave me to my crucifix,

hose pallid burden, sick with pain,

Watches the world with wearied eyes.

And weeps for every soul that dies,

And weeps for every soul in vain.

Wilde declares a return to Jesus. The crucifixion is a symbol of his religious belief. He rejects the world of sin, the world of excess and the world as only an aesthetic phenomenon. The theory that that the world can be eternally justified as an aesthetic phenomenon has failed for him. Andrew McCracken quoting Oscar Wilde comments on his Catholicism:

I am not a Catholic," said Oscar Wilde. "I am simply a violent Papist." This statement, like so many of Wilde's outrageous paradoxes, conceals a sober truth beneath its blithe wit. Another example would be his jest that, of all religions, Catholicism is the only one worth dying in. Looking back over his life more than a hundred years later, we can be forgiven for seeing the irony in such statements, for Wilde's fascination with Catholicism, its mysteries and rituals, did set the stage for his death-bed conversion(Mccracken, 2003)

His long letter entitled "*de Profundis*" is a declaration of his aesthetic fidelity to a new religion where he believe more in things he can touch and see more than his belief in the intangible. Having lost everything, he repented by stating that he became more spiritual and indeed he even identified himself with Christ whom he always regarded as a supreme artist. Simon. He found the beauty of heaven through the beauty of what he can see, touch, and look at. He wrote in his long letter "*de Profundis*":

When I think of religion at all, I feel as if I would like to found an order for those who cannot believe: the Confraternity of the Faithless, one might call it, where on an altar, on which no taper burned, a priest, in whose heart peace had no dwelling, might celebrate with unblessed bread and a chalice empty of wine. Everything to be true must become a religion. And agnosticism should have its ritual no less than faith. (Wilde, 2014, p 13)

He apparently wanted to found a new religion where fidelity to religious experience counts more than religion itself. Simon Critchley confirms this fact when he states that:

I think that "true" is being used in a manner close to its root meaning of "being true to", namely an act of fidelity that is kept alive in the German *treu*, loyal or faithful. This is perhaps what Christ had in mind when he said, "I am the truth and the life".

Religious truth is like truth, the experience of fidelity where one is betrothed. What is true is an experience of faith and this is as true for agnostics and atheists as it is for theists. Those who cannot believe still require religious truth and a framework of ritual in which they can believe. (Critchley, 2009)

## **I-Imitation and Dionysian Religion in *The Prose Poems***

Religion, morality and rules are all to a varying degree Apollonian in nature as they pertain to the rational side of the Nietzschean dichotomy. Wilde understands religion not as a set of rules but rather a spirit. His indictment of religion as only as set of rules is clear in his prose poems. The romantic concept of the religion of the heart recurs often in his poems. Real religion should, for him, integrate both the Dionysian as well Apollonian as a vision of life. If any of these sides of the dichotomy is excessive, then the religious vision is bound to fail and it is also the proof that the message is not a heavenly one. In these poems, he expresses an artistic vision that he equates with the prophetic vision of Jesus Christ. No wonder for he regarded the artist as a man with prophetic capabilities. He is supreme in the sense that an artist's vision always transcends space, time, and more than the normal human vision because it is a vision that is neither too real nor too ideal. He states that:

This, also, is the explanation of the value of limitations in art. The sculptor gladly surrenders imitative color and the painter the actual dimensions of form, because by such renunciations they are able to avoid too definite a presentation of the Real, which would be mere imitation, and too definite a realization of the ideal, which would be too purely intellectual. It is through its very incompleteness that art becomes complete in beauty and so addresses itself, not to the faculty of recognition nor to the faculty of reason, but to the aesthetic sense alone. (Wilde, 1977, p. 22)

For him everyone can lay claim to being an artist. He always made explicit that he is an aesthete who saw himself another Keats in his romantic vision. Raising the stature of the artist to that of Jesus is common in Wilde and explicit in his epistle *De Profundis*. Earlier in

some of his fairy tales and in *the Happy Prince* in particular, he made the statue which symbolizes art transfigures an entire town by his actions assuming thus the work of a prophet.

The six prose poems are all religious in rhythm, tone and style in that they try to copy the bible. Repetition of phrases, using myths, archaic words and structures, biblical stories retold are some of the ways Wilde used to reintegrate religion into his art. These poems are in fact a manifesto of his artistic vision which he already stated in some of his earlier writing. The fact that he uses religion is to give credit to the sacred nature of his art. He lends the artist the role of a prophet with a prophetic vision. The first poem in the series is "*The Artist*". The poem opens with a desire expressed by the artist to create and eternalize the pleasure. The artist is searching for a way to eternalize the pleasure that abides for a moment. The fleeting moment is what obsesses the artist. The fleeting pleasure that excited his fancy is worth immortalizing. He attempts to immortalize the momentary pleasure into an eternal object of beauty. To do this the artist needs a way by which he could turn it into an eternal object. He finds the bronze a suitable method to use. And the reason why the artist could only think in bronze is because on a symbolic level the artist's only possible way of eternalizing an object is by using the language which is as docile and as malleable as bronze. Within the context of the poem, the bronze is a material that can always change and be changed and manipulated at will. Rigidity is not the food of the artist. Bronze can always be reshaped into new objects.

ONE evening there came into his soul the desire to fashion an image of The Pleasure that abideth for a Moment. And he went forth into the world to look for bronze. For he could think only in bronze. (Wilde, 2005, P. 47)

At this point, he decides to look for bronze, which he could not find anywhere as all bronze had disappeared. The language is limited and cannot express all the shades of the

nuances of man's emotions and feelings. The bronze that he could not find is the language, which sometimes fails an artist. An artist's fancy is much deeper and wider than language. It breaks beyond the only possible bronze he was able to find is a past creation of his. It was a symbol of sorrow that he had made to immortalize love. It was a symbol to immortalize man's sorrow that does not die. It was to stand as an eternal relic to commemorate man's never ending sorrow. This image, which is to be remembered in order to alleviate sorrow through a symbol of eternal love, is the only bronze image that was left available to him. He had fashioned it using his most intense emotions using the suitable language that went into making it. It was a combination of love and sorrow that he had fashioned and now he decided to replace it with another image that he wants to immortalize. It is this time the image of the pleasure that endures for a moment. Eternity is being replaced by ephemerality:

Now this image he had himself, and with his own hands, fashioned, and had set it on the tomb of the one thing he had loved in life. On the tomb of the dead thing he had most loved had he set this image of his own fashioning, that it might serve as a sign of the love of man that dieth not, and a symbol of the sorrow of man that endureth forever. And in the whole world there was no other bronze save the bronze of this image. (Wilde, 2005, P 47)

The artist decided to create an image of ephemerality celebrating pleasure as the ultimate aim in life. It is the triumph of beauty and art over pain and life. From this image, which is symbolically, Christ's image that is associated with pain and suffering he decides to refashion life anew, his time along artistic lines. He wants to repudiate the cult of pain and suffering and replace it with pleasure and joy:

On the tomb of the dead thing he had most loved had he set this image of his own fashioning, that it might serve as a sign of the love of man that dieth not, and a symbol of the sorrow of man that endureth forever. (Wilde, 2005, p. 47)

Through the use of language, which is so malleable that it is being likened to bronze, the artist recasts the image of pain into an image of pleasure by throwing it into the furnace and under the fire of emotions, the image is remolded into a new one.

And out of the bronze of the image of The Sorrow that endureth for Ever he fashioned an image of The Pleasure that abideth for a Moment. (Wilde, 2005, p.47)

Nevertheless, the artist does not claim that by replacing the eternal image of sorrow by that of pleasurable and momentary ephemerality that this moment of pleasure will not be eternal. Indeed, he is replacing an eternal image of sorrow by an eternal image of pleasure. Both of them are eternal and immortal, and the only difference is that the new image is a result of the work of his art. It is a new life refashioned by an artist. He equals himself with Jesus Christ whom he regards as an artist but a great artist of pain. As an artist, he gives himself the invocation of another Christ. He too is a creator of life but in his own way; a novel way that does not use pain, sorrow and sacrifice to make life but pleasure and joy. Christ died to save humanity and the artist may sacrifice his life for the sake of creating a beautiful world. Wilde confirms:

With a width and wonder of imagination that fills one almost with awe, he took the entire world of the inarticulate, the voiceless world of pain, as his kingdom, and made of himself its eternal mouthpiece. Those of whom I have spoken, who are dumb under oppression, and 'whose silence is heard only of God,' he chose as his brothers. He sought to become eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, and a cry in the lips of those whose tongues had been tied. His desire was to be to the myriads who had found no

utterance a very trumpet through which they might call to heaven. And feeling, with the artistic nature of one to whom suffering and sorrow were modes through which he could realise his conception of the beautiful, that an idea is of no value till it becomes incarnate and is made an image, he made of himself the image of the Man of Sorrows, and as such has fascinated and dominated art as no Greek god ever succeeded in doing. (Wilde, 2014, p. 25)

Uniqueness of personality and individualism which Wilde had often emphasized in his *“The Soul of Man under Socialism”* and which he considered indispensable for real art and creativity is highlighted in his second poem *“The Doer of Good”*. The poem relates the story of Jesus Christ in the Bible when he passed by several individuals who got Christ’s gifts but still did not thankfully react the way a grateful man ought to do if he was offered a gift. They were different. The unexpected reaction described by Wilde in the poem is a manifestation of uniqueness in that no model or ideal behavior could have been imposed on characters. Every character is unique and it is foolish to elicit the same reaction from all people. Identity cannot be prescribed. The characters which were supposed to show gratitude to Christ and behave, as He would have expected is reversed. The antithesis or opposites of good and evil in the human nature is being blurred by Wilde to show the underlying unity and invalidity of these opposites. *“a truth in art is that whose opposite is also true”*. He rejected the Victorian idea of having two opposites one being wrong and the other right. They are both part of the human nature. The Dionysian as well as Apollonian are inseparable and integral part of human nature. Wilde’s art as Kibert confirms is one of antithesis *“art of inversion, where each side exemplifies qualities that we would normally expect in its opposite, as every dichotomy dichotomizes”* (Kiberd, 1991, p.373). The leper whom Christ had healed and was asked by Christ to explain why he lives like that, his answer was:

He saw lying on a couch of sea-purple one whose hair was crowned with red roses and whose lips were red with wine.

And He went behind him and touched him on the shoulder and said to him, 'Why do you live like this?'

And the young man turned round and recognized Him, and made answer and said, 'But I was a leper once, and you healed me. How else should I live?' (Wilde, 2005, p. 48)

How else should a man who was deprived of his health live when his health returns to him. Deterministic theories that entail that one lives just as Christ wants him to. Determinism is opposed to free will and Wilde ferociously opposed the deprivation of man of his free will. The characters in the poem all behaved in a way different way from what we would expect from them. The blind man who was looking at the woman in a lustful way answered that he was blind and now can see "And the young man turned round and recognized Him and made answer and said, 'But I was a leper once, and you healed me. How else should I live?'" (Wilde, 2005, p. 47) Changing human nature and subjecting it to hard and fast rules in order to conform to the man-made moral rules is a central preoccupation of the speaker in the poem. Conformity and turning man into an Apollonian creature is not a religious message that Wilde would approve. Not using his eyes in order to satisfy Jesus would be contrary to basic human instinct. All the characters in the poem who Jesus had asked about what they had done about the gifts God had granted them, they all repeated the phrase "how else should I live?". The speaker is rebelling against any diminishing of humans' desires, which he regarded as part of creation. Suppressing the Dionysian nature in man is not the real religious message of Christ but only the false one, indeed it is a false imitation of his message. Man was created with eyes to see with them and body to enjoy it and life to live it to the full

without oppression. Man's full potential is to be explored which the Victorian society had constrained. The last character in the poem was the man who was weeping. Christ asked him why he was weeping and like all others" And the young man looked up and recognized Him and made answer, 'But I was dead once, and you raised me from the dead. What else should I do but weep' (Wilde, Wilde, 2005, p. 48). Weeping for someone who came back from the dead is justified by Wilde by the fact that Lazarus had nothing to tell people after having died for four days. This questioning of what comes after death is a mystery that plagued Wilde. Even the bible which Wilde profoundly read confirms a fact about death in the words of God to Adam "In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17 - 3:19 AMP). The Nietzschean nihilism and skepticism plagued Wilde throughout his work. Nietzsche's idea interpreting the world eternally only as an aesthetic phenomenon is echoed in moments of skepticism that Wilde had lived throughout his life and against which he strove. The dead man's answer invokes Schopenhauer's idea of life as not more than a vicious circle of constant pain and sorrow where one has no other choice but to weep.

*"The Disciple"* is the next poem in the series of prose poems. The title has its biblical and religious connotation. It does refer to the disciples of Jesus who followed him for salvation. Wilde compares the artist in his message, inspiration and vocation that transcends the earthly and egoistic desires to Jesus Christ. The disciple in the poem, however, is a complete failure as he is the incarnation of selfishness and blind imitation of selfish desires. The poem opens with the death of Narcissus, who fell in love with his reflection in the water until he fell and died:

When Narcissus died the pool of his pleasure changed from a cup of sweet waters into a cup of salt tears, and the Oreads came weeping through the woodland that they might sing to the pool and give it comfort. (Wilde, Wilde, 2005, p. 49)

Narcissus is an example of selfishness, indeed it is a perfect example for Wilde could not have found a better example with which to illustrate his point. Selfishness can best be illustrated by a perfect Master who represents selfishness. No better Master can teach selfishness than Narcissus himself. With his death, the mountain nymphs came all the way from the mountain all through the wood to comfort the mourning Pool. The pool waters turned into salty tears because of sadness. The nymphs then “loosened the green tresses of their hair and cried to the pool and said, ‘We do not wonder that you should mourn in this manner for Narcissus, so beautiful was he.’ (Wilde, Wilde, 2005,p. 49). The nymphs themselves were not selfish despite the fact that they know Narcissus very well and they deal with him on a regular basis. They were apparently not affected by his selfishness and did not learn from the master of Selfishness. Being thoughtful and considerate of others because they took a long way from the mountains only to offer their consolation to the Pool. The pool was surprised to learn that Narcissus was beautiful and when the Oreads (nymphs) explained that the mourning Pool should know him better as he would lie every day at its banks to watch his reflection in its waters. The surprised Pool said” ‘But I loved Narcissus because, as he lay on my banks and looked down at me, in the mirror of his eyes I saw ever my own beauty mirrored.”(Wilde, Wilde, 2005, p. 49). The Pool’s mourning was not about Narcissus himself but rather about the fact that she would not be able any more to see her reflection in his eyes. The pool’s selfishness is a mutual and reciprocal reflection of the Master who unconsciously taught her selfishness to perfection. But the pool remains a disciple who cared about his own desires. By comparison, Jesus’ disciples are seen as being followers who care only about their own salvation contrary to Jesus himself who is seen as a perfect example of savior not of himself but of humanity at large. Jesus is a perfect artist and a perfect representative of humanity but not his disciples who were mere imitators. Wilde saw himself as an artist and the artist should produce a type of art that cannot be imitated. The disciples were not artists

who may manage to take Jesus 'sacred message a step further into modernity but they are mere imitators of nature and nature is static.

False imitation is discussed again in his prose poem "*The Master*". The title is a reference to Jesus as a master and his secret disciple Joseph of Arithamea who buried Jesus after his crucifixion. Again, the theme of Jesus and his disciples or in other words the perfect Master and the imitators is raised. Joseph as being one of those imitators went out one day when darkness came over the earth, which is a reference to the phase following Jesus' death, and he stumbled upon a man "a young man who was naked and weeping. His hair was the color of honey, and his body was as a white flower, but he had wounded his body with thorns and on his hair had he set ashes as a crown. "Much like the way the nymph had asked about the reason behind the pool's sadness Joseph said to the man that he did not wonder that the man was sad and weeping over the crucifixion of Jesus. Surprisingly the man answered that he was not sad about Jesus but about himself:

And the young man answered, 'It is not for Him that I am weeping, but for myself. I too have changed water into wine, and I have healed the leper and given sight to the blind. I have walked upon the waters, and from the dwellers in the tombs I have cast out devils. I have fed the hungry in the desert where there was no food, and I have raised the dead from their narrow houses, and at my bidding, and before a great multitude, of people, a barren fig-tree withered away. All things that this man has done I have done also. And yet they have not crucified me.' (Wilde, 2005, p. 50)

The man had done all what Jesus had done but he was not crucified as he had expected. In reality, He imitated Jesus in every possible way but failed to truly and faithfully emulate the master because his imitation was selfish and was only meant to impress others. He did not have a noble message to convey. In this poem Wilde achieved two aims, the first

was to show that art and real art is not imitation but it is an all transcendent message that is not meant either to impress or convince but it stands there as a lighthouse and a guide for humanity. An artist should not care about others' judgements and in his essay "The *Soul of Man*" Wilde explains:

The moment an artist takes notice of what other people wants, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist and becomes a dull or an amusing craftsman. ....Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known. I am inclined to say that it is the only real mode of individualism that the world has known (Wilde,1993, p. 24)

The second aim in the poem, however, was to show that the critics who seize every occasion to crucify him were mere imitators who were jealous of his art and jealous of every artist. Joseph of Arithamea is referred to in the poem as "the one who had possessions" in contrast to the poor weeping man or in contrast to Jesus who lived for others and died poor without any possessions. Joseph after all was just a disciple, a mere imitator and a follower in search of salvation but salvation for himself only like an artist who simply wants to make both ends meet. Imitation was Wilde's nightmare. Art never imitates but rather is imitated. Jesus is an artist who cannot be imitated. Wilde comments in his essay "*The soul of man*":

All imitation in morals and in life is wrong. Through the streets of Jerusalem at the present day crawls one who is mad and carries a wooden cross on his shoulders. He is a symbol of the lives that are marred by imitation. (Wilde, 1973, p. 30)

Religion as a rigid and a collection of hard and fast rules without imagination, innovation was the target of Wilde's tirade and criticism. Christ was an artist because of his imagination. True religion as represented by Christ and not by imitators and art have a lot in

common. The theme of the next poem is another manifestation of Wilde's critique directed against harsh religion or faith practiced by the Victorians. Wilde gives in the poem

an imaginative. Credence to his claim that ascetic and voluptuary modes of existence are fired by the same laudable motives and that unimaginative piety is as life –denying as rampant and unchecked sensuality ....Wilde demonstrates that the truly personalized doctrine of Jesus calls for a degree of imagination and sympathy that the avowed disciple cannot attain. (Guy Willoughby, 1993, p. 86)

Wilde imagines an encounter between man and God during the judgment day where man is being judged for what he had done in his lifetime. God opens the book of life of man:

And God opened the Book of the Life of the Man.

And God said to the Man, 'Thy life hath been evil, and thou hast shown cruelty to those who were in need of succor, and to those who lacked help thou hast been bitter and hard of heart. The poor called to thee and thou didst not hearken, and thine ears were closed to the cry of My afflicted. The inheritance of the fatherless thou didst take unto thyself, and thou didst send the foxes into the vineyard of thy neighbor's field. Thou didst take the bread of the children and give it to the dogs to eat, and My lepers who lived in the marshes, and were at peace and praised Me, thou didst drive forth on to the highways, and on Mine earth out of which I made thee thou didst spill innocent blood.'

And the Man made answer and said, 'Even so did I.' (Wilde, 2005, p. 51)

Man does not deny the crimes attributed to him and three times did God open the book of life and enumerated all the ugly deeds that man committed in life. Having admitted all of them, the man is waiting for the punishment and God decided to send him to Hell:

And God closed the Book of the Life of the Man, and said, 'Surely I will send thee into Hell. Even into Hell will I send thee.'

And man unexpectedly answered that:

And the Man cried out, 'Thou canst not.'

And God said to the Man, 'Wherefore can I not send thee to Hell, and for what reason?'

'Because in Hell have I always lived,' answered the Man. (Wilde, 2005, p. 51)

Seeing that God cannot send the man to Hell, he decides to send him to Heaven but again:

And after a space God spake, and said to the Man, 'Seeing that I may not send thee into Hell, surely I will send thee unto Heaven. Even unto Heaven will I send thee.'

And the Man cried out, 'Thou canst not.'

And God said to the Man, 'Wherefore can I not send thee unto Heaven, and for what reason?'

'Because never, and in no place, have I been able to imagine it,' answered the Man.

And there was silence in the House of Judgment. (Wilde, 2005, p. 51)

The word "silence" is a keyword by which Wilde wanted to silence all those who believe that religion is a jacket that fits only one person and not another. His retort that God cannot send him to Heaven because he has never been able to imagine how Heaven looks like is a triumph of imagination and the Dionysian spirit. If man is not a dreamer, how could he could one find out how Heaven looks like. The man's answer a vindication of a religion that

should never suppress man's Dionysian spirit. The spirit that helps man transcend reality to see what is beyond appearances. The answer again is Wilde's declaration that he never believed in a religion that divests man of his imagination and separates the Dionysian from the Apollonian, the pleasures of the body and the soul. Not unlike his earlier writing like *the Picture of Dorian Grey* he was trying to find a balance between a moderate hedonistic life and a rational pious one. Therefore, the speaker in the poem describes life that was exposed to him by God as being a life of sorrow and pain. God's punishment is then logically unjustified. The fact that the man cannot be sent to Heaven is because no one can know what heaven and pleasure is without first trying them. His argument is that man's instincts, pleasures, his sense of beauty cannot only be tested using man's normal senses of pleasure. Beauty which some people would otherwise exclude from man's permitted pleasures and falsely deny it for being classified by the religious and pious imitators of Jesus as being illicit activities are in fact normal and natural growth of the human development and should be allowed full play without restrictions.

*"The Teacher of Wisdom"* is the culmination of man's ultimate search of salvation through love. The major character is allusively an identification of Jesus Christ himself or any saint who climbs the ladder of religious perfection and tries to find answers to his enquiries. He decides to leave his city and preach to people about God. He believes that there are many people who never heard about God. He walked through eleven cities and found eleven disciples who followed him and decided to preach with him. He was full of happiness emanating from his love of God and the perfect knowledge of God. Wilde is questioning here the authenticity of satisfying God through simply talking about him. Should speaking about God and preaching be enough for man to go to Heaven? He wonders:

Yet the more the people followed him, and the greater the number of his disciples, the greater became his sorrow. And he knew not why his sorrow was so great. For he

spake ever about God, and out of the fullness of that perfect knowledge of God which God had Himself given to him. (Wilde, 2005, p. 52)

The perfection of form and substance, body and soul, which is Wilde's constant emphasis whether in his aesthetic theory, life or his criticism, is echoed again in this poem. He clearly puts in the balance speaking about God and doing for God. The intentions of man's actions and the actions themselves. Therefore, despite his numerous followers he feels sorrowful and he tries to understand the source of his sorrowful soul and there is no doubt in his mind that the body and the soul are interrelated und indivisible. He asked his soul and the soul answered:

Why is it that I am full of sorrow and fear, and that each of my disciples is an enemy that walks in the noonday?' And his Soul answered him and said, 'God filled thee with the perfect knowledge of Himself, and thou hast given this knowledge away to others. The pearl of great price thou hast divided, and the vesture without seam thou hast parted asunder. He who giveth away wisdom robbeth himself. He is as one who giveth his treasure to a robber. Is not God wiser than thou art? Who art thou to give away the secret that God hath told thee? I was rich once, and thou hast made me poor. Once I saw God, and now thou hast hidden Him from me. ( Wilde, 2005, p. 55)

The soul advised him to be selfish and keep his knowledge to himself for God's knowledge is a precious secret that one should never give away. He decides to listen to his soul and never again to speak about God. He tells his disciples who implored him to speak about God 'Neither now, nor at any time, will I talk to you about God.' He did not listen to their insistent begging to speak about God. He became a hermit and knelt to himself. He found a cavern where he stayed there singing alone the praises of God.

This will not last longer as a robber who passed by his cave enticed him to speak. He still refused to speak to him about God as he sees the robber every day comes back loaded with purple and pearls. When the robber asked the hermit about the reason, why the hermit gazes at him every day the hermit's answer was that his gaze was out of pity:

And the young man laughed with scorn, and cried to the Hermit in a bitter voice, and said to him, 'I have purple and pearls in my hands, and you have but a mat of reeds on which to lie. What pity should you have for me? And for what reason have you this pity?'(Wilde, 2005, p. 55)

The hermit confirmed that he had a treasure more precious than all the treasures of the world. The robber was excited to hear that and threatened the hermit unless he gives him this treasure he would not hesitate to kill him and take it by force. The hermit answered that he would rather die and go close his lord than to live without his knowledge of God. Desperate to get this treasure from the hermit, He told him that he would go to the city of seven sins and exchange for his pearl all types of pleasures. As he left for the city of seven sins, the hermit did not budge to help him at the beginning. Realizing, however, that not attempting to save the robber's soul would certainly make his knowledge of God useless if the robber loses his soul and commits sins. As the robber came close to the city of sins, the hermit then:

And the young Robber laughed in answer, and sought to knock at the gate. And as he did so the Hermit ran forward and caught him by the skirts of his raiment, and said to him: 'Stretch forth your hands, and set your arms around my neck, and put your ear close to my lips, and I will give you what remains to me of the knowledge of God.' And the young Robber stopped. (Wilde, 2005, p. 56)

Upon hearing that the hermit had imparted his knowledge to the robber and saved him from falling prey to sins, God rewarded him and told him that:

‘Before this time thou hadst the perfect knowledge of God. Now thou shalt have the perfect love of God. Wherefore art thou weeping?’ And he kissed him.

The hermit understood religion with an Apollonian spirit, as simply an empty set of rules and towards the end; he started to understand that real religion is not confined to a memorization of a body of commandments and codes. An ending that is similar to his short story “The Happy Prince” the hermit got the reward of God only by acting and not simply by speaking about God. He was driven by a life-affirming feeling. The moral message is clear that true faith lies not simply in speaking about religion but rather in actions. Love of the other is more precious than mere knowledge of God. Indeed mere knowledge and speaking of God caused him more sorrow than happiness. Substance over form or form over substance, the body or the soul, the heart or the mind or in Nietzschean terms the Dionysian or Apollonian and the interdependence of one on the other is a central theme that runs throughout Wilde’s work. Speaking is mere form but acting is the substance.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, I have tried to study Oscar Wilde's works from a philosophical perspective. I used Nietzsche's philosophical ideas of life as art to reflect on the art of Oscar Wilde. My aim is to fill in the gap in Oscar Wilde criticism, which concentrates solely on him as a decadent poet and playwright whose obsession was create art for art's sake. Chief among his works, which did not get the critical attention they deserve, is his poetry. Not only was his poetry ignored over the last century and did not get the critical attention accorded to his other works, but also a consistent lop-sided view of his work remained dominant. His work has always been dealt with from a decadence perspective. He was classified as being of perverse and deviant character entirely ignoring his work as a reasonable and worthy judge on his personality. Regardless of whether he really belongs to this school or not, the distinction between aestheticism and decadence was so blurred that he fell a victim of gross generalization as much as he was a victim of the prejudice of a philistine society. His trial for homosexuality brought the decadent movement to an end. Not only was Oscar Wilde being tried but also a whole body of aesthetic and moral ideas were put on trial. As if the decadence movement was only associated with Oscar Wilde whose works, when closely examined and analyzed show him quite in the other direction. Using the terms aestheticism and decadence interchangeably remain an incalculable risk. In the light of this blurred distinction, he was seen as a decadent, amoral, and deviant writer whose major concern had been to praise beauty for beauty's sake with little attention to the real message he tried to impart. His art theory is a protomodern theory that preceded his time. When discussed from a philosophical perspective, the so-called hedonist is shown a rational religious philosopher and proto-

modern artist with a moral, social and political engagement singing the praises of freedom and free will without losing the balance between rationality and the pleasures of an aesthetic theory. His reading of the doctrine art for art's sake is different from his predecessors in that it promotes man's free will in imagination and in life against constraints and ugliness provided that one understands what is really meant by the doctrine itself. Such an understanding is only guaranteed when his entire work is closely scrutinized.

He reiterated that he was a product of his milieu in which dramatic social and economic changes were taking place. Under the influence of the French symbolism spearheaded by Charles Baudelaire, J. K. Huysmann, Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé and Arthur Rimbaud in France and Swinburne, Pater and the Pre-Raphaelites in England, he adopted his doctrine art for art's sake. He, however, deviated in practice from their own and adopted a new tendency that made art philosophy a modern vision that prizes morality but makes art superior to it at the same time without deeming it redundant or independent of art. He started an imitator of Walter Pater but deviated from this norm turning into another Ruskin with a difference. His golden book, which he took as his model, was Walter Pater's book *The Renaissance*. Walter Pater viewed life as a short experience that man needs to live intensely. He has to live every moment, enjoy, and maximize the pleasure obtained to its full limit. It is not the fruit of experience that matters but experience itself. Pater's message in the conclusion to his book the *Renaissance* is clear. What maintains this moment of pleasure is success in life. Applying Nietzsche's concept of the possibility for every individual to turn his life into art, the avid pursuit of sensations and the desire of beauty made Oscar Wilde consider seriously turning his life into a piece of art to the very last moment of his life.

Whether it is possible to regard the doctrine art for art's sake a logical and plausible concept, major philosophers's opinions were reviewed and it is clear that art cannot be separated from morality. Such an issue will remain debatable but it is philosophically

untenable to separating art from morality. Kant, for example, believed that morality is disinterested and an action is regarded moral since it has no purpose beyond doing the right thing. This disinterestedness on the part of the doer is also manifest in art. An object is beautiful and it has no other purpose to exist except being there to please. He called it the purposive purposelessness of beauty. This shared disinterestedness between morality and art help us understand what morality and beauty share. Kant did regard beauty and appreciating beauty as a mark of good soul ruling out thus the possibility of being immoral and artist at the same time. Nietzsche's philosophical concept of the Apollonian and Dionysian is to vindicate Oscar Wilde's position in that he believed in his vision, which he elicited from his discussion of Greek art that it is impossible to separate between the two and the creation of art depends on the fusion of the two. This philosophical vision is meant to be vision of life and not confined to Greek drama.

There is no denying that the philosophical background of Wilde's ideas came not only the circulating ideas of German philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche and even Schopenhauer but also from his in-depth reading of the philosophical ideas of the time. Wilde was erudite and was versed in English, French, German and the Classics. Nietzsche dealt with the concept of art and life as art in his book *The Birth of Tragedy* in which he believed that the Greek tragedy was at its height before the coming of Socrates when the Dionysian spirit faded out leaving Greek art impoverished. He found in classical tragedy an escape from the Schopenhauerian nihilism and pessimism. It is the joy of the spectators who were looking for ecstasy not in a metaphysical world but in the world in which they lived. The classical tragedy was for Nietzsche great because it merged both the Dionysian with the Apollonian. The gods Apollo and Dionysius came to represent his vision of a balanced world in which every part compliments the other. Dionysus being the sensual imaginative part of the human being while Apollo is the regulator or the logical and

reasoning part. Nietzsche was writing under the influence of Wagner's music. This balance was disturbed with the coming of rationality ushered in by Socrates and Euripides when the Greek tragedy became too rigid, without imagination, too rational and represented stark reality. It was as naturalistic as Victorian England in the eyes of Oscar Wilde. The uplifting spirit of Dionysus, and the life affirming drive against nihilism was missing in the age of Oscar Wilde. Both Wilde and Nietzsche agree that art is a form of lie that makes life more bearable. An escape from the grim reality and man's endless suffering in a world that Nietzsche and Schopenhauer thought does not go beyond itself. The Victorians were not able to tell a lie and they were not able to wear masks. They lacked the spirit of Dionysus and accordingly the past glory of England was gone. Nietzsche confirmed that it is possible for one to live his life as an artist and it is probably the only way out of the misery of a world that does not exist beyond itself. Metaphysical existence was ruled out and the world can only be justified as aesthetic phenomenon. Wilde did apply Nietzsche's philosophy and struggled to remain faithful to it to the last moment until his downfall. It is only his strong religious sense that made him change his mind and declare that the argument about the world as only an aesthetic phenomenon cannot be defended and a metaphysical world is possible through faith. He decided to convert to Catholicism on his deathbed and only a day later did he pass away.

As an Anglican who always aspired to convert to Catholicism, Wilde never departed from the Christian teachings. He might have been misunderstood due to the extreme generalization classifying him as belonging to a group to which he did not entirely belong. A close reading of Immanuel Kant's three Critiques shows that he shared with Kant a faith in an archetypal moral figure who could replicate Kant's moral imperative, which he discussed in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Both of them found in Christ this moral archetype. He believed in a rational religion well understood and absorbed and he regarded Christ the greatest romantic artist. Apart from the fact that he eloquently defended himself in his trial against

accusation of perversity and immorality, his works show him a moralist and a preacher. In his short story, *the Happy Prince* he managed to translate and transform a town without imagination and a Dionysian spirit and not allowed to dream into a prosperous town by infusing into it the appreciation of art. The missing Dionysian spirit returned to the town with the help of the statue that symbolizes art.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which has always been regarded as a symbol of Wilde's immorality and decadence, is in fact another aspect of his art philosophy. Accusations of artificiality spring from his belief that nature is crude and cannot produce real beauty. Therefore, he created a character completely absorbed by Dionysus to warn of the possible consequences of a lop-side view of existence. The artist can do much better by creating beauty of his own. Therefore, he regarded art as superior to nature. In the novel Gray wanted to dictate to nature how life should be lived and the hedonist Gray who has been punished at the end of the novel for his lack of temperance and for his aesthetic excessiveness, wanted to exist for beauty's sake only and for pleasure as well. He wanted to live as freely as possible seeking only that which brings the maximum pleasure and enjoying moments as they pass. He embodied Pater's maxims and aesthetic code. It is the very incarnation of Walter Pater's philosophy of burning with this gemlike flame, and to maintain this ecstasy as much as possible. Wilde resolved this duality of body and soul and epicurean pleasures versus spiritual ones by punishing Gray. He imparted another moral message as he later clearly stated which is that excess leads to destruction.

In his poetry that did not get critical attention it deserves because Wilde was regarded as a minor poet, he continues his struggle in defense of his art. In certain poems, he paints in words using as his background well known portraits of some famous artists and painters like Claude Monet or James Whistler who both had influenced his work. In poems like "*Impression du Matin*", "*les Ballon*" or a "*Symphony in Yellow*" the symbols that are

commonly thought as being impressions of a painter turn out to be meaningful symbols. When these symbols are consistently deciphered, we realize that Wilde used those paintings as a setting to reveal his ordeal and struggle to impart a message and to show that art can always point a finger to a society in distress. They are the poems of a Dionysian free spirit rebelling against the constraints of Victorian England.

His prose poems have seldom been treated by critics. The six poems in the series show Wilde trying to reach a conclusion about life, art and religion by thinking of Christ as a romantic artist. In "*The Artist*", he believed that the suffering of Christ is for humanity. The artist being of the same nature as Christ can also save humanity but in a way. They are similar in every aspect except by turning the suffering moment into a moment of pleasure. The artist can charm mankind into a new transfigured form not by suffering but by beauty and pleasure. In the poem "*Doer of Good*" he takes a story from the bible in which Christ asked different people about why they behave in the way they do despite the fact that God awarded them his blessings. They all answered that when they were granted these blessing what else do God want from them except to enjoy. He reaches the last one who was weeping and God gave him life after death and the man answers that if one dies and is resurrected what does one expect other than weeping. The fact that what comes after death remains a mystery for Wilde. He struggled with his idea that there is no metaphysical world and that after death there is nothing more than nihilism that justifies the man's weeping. It is his ambivalent and undecided stance regarding the world as only an aesthetic phenomenon On the one hand and a metaphysical world that comes after death on the other. In "*the Disciple*", he returns again to those who imitate blindly. He directs his criticism against those who lack individuality. *The theme of "The Master"* is again about false imitation. He reproaches those who imitate Christ's rituals only thinking that they can get God's heaven. Christ for Wilde was not a body of rituals to be imitated but a moral archetype and a romantic individualistic unique character.

In "*The House of Judgment*", he deals with another philosophical question. Whether one can imagine a life after death if one has not first lived this life to the full. If one has not known and fulfilled all desires in this world how one can imagine another existence. In the last poem in his prose series, which is entitled "*The Teacher of Wisdom*" Wilde reiterated his attitude about love which he had hinted at in his short story *The Happy Prince* that only those who are capable of giving will ever know what real love is.

Wilde finally returns to his long-standing struggle between a world of perfect beauty as only an aesthetic phenomenon and a metaphysical world where pious people are either punished or rewarded by eternal bliss. In his long epical poem "*The Sphinx*", he created a world of excess. A world of superlatives choosing from Greece and Egypt mythological characters and gods that best represent a life lived to the full. A life of beauty, passion, love, sex, heroism, wonder and grandeur. As if Wilde was asking himself what could we do compared with those past glorious gods and heroes who no longer exist? How can I live better and if I did will I ever achieve mortality and if I did achieve this mortality away from God, is it worth it? Wilde answered those questions by declaring at the end of the poem that he prefers to go back to Jesus Christ. He went back to religion and thus finished his fictional artistic work by complementing it with his own life by deciding only a day before his death to convert to Catholicism.

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**Als Doktorand in Anglistik**

## Berufserfahrung

06.2016-08.2017  
Lehrer für Deutsch als Fremdsprache –Deutschland  
09.1997-09.1998  
Wissenschaftliche Hilfskraft in der englischen Abteilung-Irak  
09.1998 – 09.2003  
Dozent in **Wassit-Irak**  
**Eingesetzt bei Universität Wasit in Irak**

### **Als Berufsbezeichnung**

- Dozent in Anglistik
- Dozent für englische Literatur

04.2004 – 09.2007

### **in Liege-Belgien**

#### **Als Freiberuflicher Übersetzer**

- Arabisch-Englisch-Französisch- Übersetzung juristischer,literarischer und kommerzieller Texte.
- Englisch- Französisch- Arabisch Übersetzung -Juristische,literarische und Kommerzielle Texte

11.2007 - 9.2009

IT Kundenbetreuer in EDS- *Hp*

### **Tätigkeiten**

- Beratung von Kunden im technischen Bereich- First Level support  
Übersetzung Englisch-Deutsch-Französisch
- Entgegennahmen von Kundenanrufen
- technische Probleme umgehend am Telefon zu lösen oder an Second Level weiterleiten

09.2011-03.2013.

-Dozent an der Universität Wasit für englische Literaturwissenschaft - Irak

### **Berufsausbildung**

01.2005 – 12.2005

Agentur für Arbeit **in Liege**

Niederländisch und Französisch

- Sekretariat
- MS office und Französisch

11.2007- 12.2007

**Als IT Kundenbetreuer**

Ausbildung in SAP- LAN- Digital Workflow

### **Schulbildung**

09.1989 – 07.1992	Al-Kut Schule <b>in Wassit- Irak</b> Abschluss: Abitur
01.1992 – 07.1996	Universität Baghdad <b>in Wassit</b> <b>Abschluss: Bachelor's Degree in Anglistik</b>
09.1996 – 07.1998	Universität Baghdad <b>in Baghdad</b> <b>Abschluss: Master's Degree in Anglistik</b>

**Sonstiges**

Sprachkenntnisse	Englisch ( C2 ) Französisch. (C2) Arabisch (C2 ) Deutsch. (C1) Niederländisch (B2 )
EDV-Kenntnisse	MS office. (Sehr Gut ) Betriebsysteme windows 7,8,10 Android,IOS (sehr gut ) SAP (befriedigend ) Digital Workflow befriedigend) LAN -Local area network ( gut) Internet-Kenntnisse. (Sehr gut) TRADOS
Persönliche Stärken:	Leidenschaft für PC und IT Kenntnisse zu entwickeln Lesen
Hobbies	Forex trading, Lesen, Internet, Kino, PC , Handys

Vorname Nachname  
Ali HAFUDH HUMAISH

Ich versichere an Eides Statt, dass die Dissertation von mir selbständig und ohne unzulässige fremde Hilfe unter Beachtung der ‚Ordnung über die Grundsätze zur Sicherung guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis an der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf‘ erstellt worden ist.

Ali HAFUDH HUMAISH

Düsseldorf 08.02.2018