

LIFE IMITATES ART MORE THAN ART IMITATES LIFE

A Study of Dorian Gray

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To my brother Mauricio Rengifo.

Not only for the spiritual link that joins us, but because he represents wisdom and passion for art.

While on the subject of Art and Life

“Art begins with abstract decoration, with purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is unreal and non-existing. This is the first stage. Then Life becomes fascinated with this new wonder, and asks to be admitted into the charmed circle, 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 idea treatment. The third stage is when Life gets the upper hand, and drives Art out into the wilderness. This true decadence, and it is from this that we are now suffering” (Wilde, 2008 P. 978)

INTRODUCTION

Art is the encounter between imagination and virtue; it defines the creation and expression that artists want to achieve. Art diversifies the senses and the spirit. It is in this respect and in order to soften the soul that the idea of elaborating a work through art arises. Such is the case of the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by the illustrious author Oscar Wilde. It also comes from a literary curiosity, the admiration of this great writer, his epoch, his environment and the English language, the language of his works. It is an initiative that originates from a close and committed reading of Wilde's novel, plays, tales and poems, and also the author's literary criticism about art, in which he articulates personal ideas, particular judgments, and interpretations of what Oscar Wilde would disclose in his only novel.

The first contact with the work came with the zeal to inquire into English literature and later an English course at the university aroused a desire to examine Wilde's work, which offers a wide spectrum of literary and critical analysis. After a biographical and literary study, a question arose: Did Oscar Wilde want to justify the content of his works

and his life to protect and defend his aesthetic principle? The response made possible the formulation of the principal thesis of this monograph.

Wilde aimed to transcend the idea of art in which artists make try to imitate or express the real, that which already exists. He believed that literature should go beyond a linguistic and textual configuration. Wilde proposed the idea of "Art for art's sake" and helped found the Aesthetic Movement that maintains the supremacy of art over life, arguing that "Life imitates art far more than art imitates life." This thesis intends to explore this aesthetic principle and demonstrate how it is applied and confirmed in Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde contends that nature leads one to the admiration of art. As life is full of imperfections, monotony, and indelicacy, it leads one to seek the perfection that only art can offer.

Wilde develops this anti-mimesis in its critical essay, and in *Dorian Gray* he focuses on all the possible relations that can exist between art and life, starting with the characters that represent art and how they meet with some aspects of life represented by other characters. "The nineteenth-century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass." (Wilde, 2008 P. 17). This thesis seeks to defend the precept of art for art's sake and to explore the relationship between reality and art. It intends to evoke the 19th century love for art and open the discussion of an art free of ethical affinities.

OSCAR WILDE

In the late 19th century, specifically in the 90's a magazine called *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* published criticism and literary works created by the writers of the epoch or at least for those that were beginning a long and promising literary career. It was expected to reap the rewards of the kind of arduous and elaborate labor whose purpose was to create wonderful works without awakening, through these, the scandalous zeal of the Victorian society. Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was thirty-six years old and had already written some of his famous poems and stories, including "The Centerville Ghost" and "The Happy Prince." This Irishman of birth but Englishman of experience and wisdom did not have a long career. Nevertheless *Lippincott's Magazine Monthly* asked him to write a story that might arise wonderful effects. Wilde's artistic background as an academic was familiar. His father and mother were professionals in the fields of medicine and the literature respectively and cultivated in their three children, Willie, Oscar, and Isola the love for languages, arts, law, literature, and science. The young Oscar studied at Trinity College, Dublin, and completed his studies at Magdalen College, Oxford. He received a

Bachelor of Arts degree, with the best grades in the study and translation of classical literature as well as the art of great masters such as Mahaffy, Whistler, and Ruskin.

It is possible to see Oscar Wilde's life as dividing into the time before and after his only novel, *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. Before the novel he lived a studious life while also enjoying social engagements, where he was a snob and dandy for pleasure. He flirted with the fashionable Victorian society and he enjoyed engaging in charming conversations full of paradoxes and ironies. Many of his literary, political, and religious habits were taken from his mother, Jane Francesca, whose way of life was determinant in his son's life. She was an Irish woman, a nationalist, and a writer, who enjoyed her social festivities. His brother Willie, on the other hand, devoted himself to the law and his sister Isola died when she was scarcely a girl. In 1884 he decided to marry Constance Lloyd, the daughter of a counselor to Queen Victoria, and later he had two children, Vyvyan and Cyril of a marriage, which would be affected by his eccentric tastes, his sentimental relationships, and his artistic career of the writer.

The date of the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1890 is followed the next year by his meeting with Lord Alfred Douglas, or "Bossie" as the lad was affectionately called. They were total opposites. Bossie was very young and gorgeous, which Wilde was a charming conversationalist with the maturity and the resources to please his friend. Interestingly, his own life would coincide with the lives of the characters in his novel.

Before launching *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, the author had already published his famous essay "The Decay of Lying – An Observation," in which he proclaims his ideas on

aesthetics and shows a disinterested position towards life. The mockery of the bourgeoisie of Victorian society along with the hedonism he proposes with his novel begins to become a thorn for London society. It is possible to consider that his aesthetic principle served as a shield to justify his novel, since he wrote it for the only pleasure of writing and not because it coincided with his life. Nevertheless, it is possible to analyze a transition in his life from the novel's publication in 1890 and the publication of a second, extended version in 1891. Not only are new characters and new stories included, but it is worth nothing that the approach of the first edition is more romantic, whereas in the second edition, the love for art and the beauty art can represent, is evident. In 1891, his sexual orientation was revealed, and his work would provoke scandal as people began to relate Basil's love for Dorian to his love for young Bossie. This may have led the author to revise his novel to clarify misrepresentations. Nevertheless, his sexuality turned out to as much of a public matter as a private matter.

The years later *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were very successful for Wilde, but also very controversial, not only for the artist but also for society. Wilde published his famous plays, which were comic by nature and quite successful: *Lady Windermere's Fan* in 1892, *A Woman of No Importance* in 1893, *An Ideal Husband* in 1895 and *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1895. Around the same time the famous *Yellow Book*, a quarterly edited by the Aubrey Beardsley, a young artist and cartoonist, involved Wilde with the journal when he portrayed Wilde's character Salome in one of the publications. This magazine published all kinds of sparkling works based on the theory of aestheticism. The idea of

making the cover yellow was borrowed from French books with a decadent or indecent content. This journal marked a relevant event in the development of aestheticism.

After the variety of works that the author published with great success and also with strong criticism, Wilde was accused of sodomy by the father of his dear friend Bossie, the Marquis of Queensberry, a rough, conventional man who besides having a problematic relationship with his son, would never accept his pernicious attachment to an Irish, homosexual, married man and a writer of immoral books. Trial after trial were the result of the pressure that Bossie exerted on Wilde, with the aim of confronting and defying his father. It is possible that the motivation to follow the trial produced certain satisfaction in Wilde, as he had once proclaimed: "I'll be a poet, a writer, a dramatist. Somehow or other I'll be famous, and if not famous, I'll be notorious." However, he did not know that living his life as a play would cost him dearly.

Wilde was imprisoned in May of the same year *The Importance of Being Earnest* was published and four years after the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. For two years he endured the defamation by his enemies and the ingratitude of his friends, the censorship of his works, and the coolness of Bossie. In 1897 he returned to freedom without hope and with the heavy load of having supported two years of hard labor and a destroyed artistic career. He decided to call himself Sebastian Melmoth, as Melmoth the Wanderer of Charles Maturin, the writer of Gothic Literature and Wilde's relative. It is said that he met later again with his dear Bossie and that there arose the disapproval from the few people who continued to be his friends. Three years later he died in his beloved land of France, still totally committed to his life as an artist.

Once Wilde noted, "I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me." He chose to make his life a work of art, similarly to what Lord Henry proposes Dorian after Sybil's death. Oscar Wilde wanted to take the dramaturgy of his works to his real life; he wanted as Dorian Gray to imitate art once again.

ANTECEDENTS: THE ASTHETIC MOVEMENT

“The artist is the creator of beautiful things” (Wilde, 2008 P. 17) Oscar Wilde asserted in the preface of his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, introducing his aesthetic adventure. For the new followers of art at Oxford, beauty provided a quality that produced pleasure, satisfaction and admiration; for that reason they felt that every work of art should possess it. Even when the interests of artists such as Wilde were not related to the proletariat of the East End of London, this stance contended that a beautiful environment, for example, was going to influence, in a determinant way, the worker and his labor. The young student of Oxford became interested in the mixture of colors, the decorative objects of spaces, and the male perfection of the Greeks. The latter is ascribed to the influence of Mr. John Pentland Mahaffy, Irish of origin and erudite of conviction, faithful devotee of ancient history and a classical connoisseur. Thanks to his rank and popularity at Trinity College in Dublin, Wilde soon became his disciple. Since their predilections were similar, they enjoyed long and interesting conversations about the Greeks and their exquisite beauty.

The concept of beauty derives from a long journey through history, initiating in anthropology from the innate instinct of the primitive and his sense of decoration; the Adonis for the Phoenicians, the Narcissus for Greek mythology and later the male paradigm and the concept of beauty for this same civilization. However, beauty is a term that seemingly could be described easily, but is actually more complex than it seems. Thomas Aquinas stated that "Beauty is anything that attracts and pleases the senses"; however, socially it has been determined that the beautiful is the good and decent, and in other fields has been said that it is an innate instinct to relate the beautiful with the good. Thus it is innate for a child to relate a fairy with beauty and a witch with ugliness, for example. But is it really something innate or is it socially acquired? Because for the artist, as Picasso mentioned, beauty has more to do with the emotion awakened in the senses. While it could be said that beauty is synonymous with refinement, perfection and excellence, it could also be argued that it stimulates, at the same time, an emotion or an alteration of the senses, of perception.

In the beginning Wilde was completely unaware of the essence of art.; he was barely initiating his artistic adventure. But to his good fortune, he not only chose the best place to achieve an admirable training with teachers such as John Ruskin and Walter Pater, and great friends as Whistler, but following the idea of a new art by French intellectuals, a new movement was born: aestheticism. Even though Wilde was not the originator of this approach, he is known as his most prominent and scandalous representative.

Progressively the young student was shaping his style until he became the dandy admired for his genius. Dandyism was a precept that went beyond the elegant lounge suits,

the luxury, the flower in the buttonhole and the extravagant posture; it was linked to his aesthetician thoughts, an attempt to escape or simply to put aside the actions of the bourgeois society. Since what comes natural for people is not exactly the goodness, but the vulgarity and evil, it was therefore necessary to be apathetic to that nature which represented the whole society. Wilde was seduced by the post romantic ideology and all its cultural, aesthetic and intellectual implications, by the pursuit of beauty, of idealism, and of form. All this exhibition of positions would disrupt the Victorian canon of the time, with its bigotry and self-righteousness, its hypocrisy, intolerance, and intransigence, its great power, but also great social indifference.

The new aestheticism was consolidated from various artistic spheres. However, for this time of the nascent movement, the painting was art par excellence, superior to writing. By the second half of the nineteenth century the impressionism of painters such as Monet, Manet, and Degas influenced the bohemian Whistler as well as the great gods of literature, Baudelaire and Gautier.

Within the literary sphere, intellectuals, artists, writers, and poets were able to distinguish taste from aesthetic value, making people aware of the importance of the aesthetic and the different ways of contemplating beauty. This was the origin of what is called the artistic movement of England of the nineteenth century: aestheticism, the bases of which are grounded in the philosophical thoughts of Immanuel Kant, who gave art freedom from all ethics, utility and pleasure. It was consolidated under the influence of French thinkers such Verlaine, Baudelaire and Gautier, who considered art not in terms of social purpose, but rather in favor of art itself.

But before proceeding with the evolution of the aesthetic movement, it is important to locate its beginning. While in England endured the highest order of social status, in France the aristocracy had collapsed and immediately there arose an opposition to the dull and heavy morals of the time, which led to the fervent appreciation of art, a denial of morality at all costs and an indifference to the bourgeois pride. Thus, there arose a new class of intellectuals, bohemians by nature, characterized by having precarious economic resources after the deep instability caused by the revolution. But the Bohemians had one goal: to fight for and on behalf of art. This ideology flew in the face of the bourgeois spirit which conceived them as beings without any utility. Moreover, the bourgeois was synonymous with vulgarity, devoid of beauty, and therefore a kind of apathetic society to the precepts of the new intellectuals. By 1835 came up the flagship work of these new spirits, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, the author of which, Théophile Gautier, professed the same eccentric tastes for life.

Gautier's work advocated sensations, ecstasy and excesses, a new hedonism, deliberately attacking the bourgeois environment. This work was one of the first to be associated with the significant phrase "Art for art's sake." Gautier's faithful follower, Baudelaire, had already taken the phrase from Allan Poe, saying, "Poetry has no other aim than itself; can have no other object and no poem is so wonderful and so noble and so worthy of his name as one that has been written for the pleasure of writing a poem. If an author, writing a poem, does it with a moral purpose, this fact weakens the poetry of his work and certainly, the end result is not good" (Gaunt, 2002 P. 20-21).

Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* represented the maximum zenith of Art for Art's Sake, but for poets who believed in a moral purpose for art, it was a complete scandal. For the English society, then all these works were considered insubstantial works. A work was insubstantial when it did not leave a message, when it did not intend to teach or inform the society. Wilde defended his work, saying, "I do not think any book or work of art has had any effect on morality. When I write a play or a book, my interest is only in the literature. That is, for art. My purpose is not to do neither good nor bad, but try to create an object that has the quality of beauty." (Gaunt, 2002 P. 183).

The decadent movement, with its rebellion against Victorian tradition, formed an essential part of the thinking of Oscar Wilde. In a total opposition to realism or, rather, as a supersession of reality, Wilde prefers the sublime to the banal, and although this concept was first expressed by Ruskin (1819-1900) is with Wilde that it achieved its peak.

In his essay, *The Decay of Lying*, Wilde criticizes the typical naturalism of Emile Zola's art among others, as this relates the facts as they occur in reality, with total lack of fiction. It is as if all events of a given society were put into a work, making the artist an unimaginative being of innovation. Is in this sense it can be criticized a work, from the artistic, from creation and not from moral facts found in it. The poverty and misery represented in Zola's works seem away from the beauty and perfection that art appreciates. As Plato would say "artists only imitate for inability to do things themselves." (Spang, P.155) Or, as Wilde manifested "Art leaves everything as it leaves the instrument of fantasy."

The Platonic dialogue of "the Decay of Lying" considers life as imitator of art: "Life imitates art far more than art imitates life" (Wilde, 2008 P. 985). According to Plato, life lacks the perfection that only art can reach. While life is always trying to find its expression, art reveals infinities. All that life constitutes can be represented by art in a superior measure and it is exactly that imperfection which gives existence to art. If nature could create magnificent architecture, create the fantasy of a character or the perfect appearance of a painting, then art would not exist. Wilde warned that "If nature had been comfortable, mankind would never have invented architecture, and I prefer houses to the open air." (Wilde, 2008 P. 970) Nature evidences the lack of complicity, harmony and delicacy. For Wilde, life is the mirror of art. That is why Schopenhauer studied pessimism, but it was Hamlet who created it and Balzac, with *The Human Comedy*, invented the nineteenth century.

During the trials of Wilde, it was argued that his works were immoral and he was deemed a sodomite. As Gaunt says satirically in his work, if Wilde was a genius, he was a wicked genius. Then this genius resulted quite useful to the interests of the Victorian society and its bouquet of prejudices. Wilde maintained that during the writing of his only novel, that he never wanted to show any sort of moral: "There is no such thing as moral or immoral books. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all," (Wilde, 2008 P.17) *Dorian Gray* was "a poisonous book, but perfect," said Mr. Wilde and indeed it was, but also was corrupt and quite exuberant, which proves the presence of a moral, thus representing the only artistic failure Wilde attributed to his novel. "The moral is this: all excess, as well as all renunciation", he said. Nevertheless, he tried to vindicate himself by

saying that at some point he could solve it in later editions. However, it is exactly that excess that makes the novel decadent and corrupt, reflecting all the sins and imperfections of society and of human reality. These characteristics are also what make it be considered a classic of the western Gothic literature. Wilde believed that if the Victorian society found many ugly and nefarious intentions in his novel it was because, evidently, they had corrupt minds.

For Wilde, the artist had no ethical sympathies; art was absolute. In one of his objections to the strong criticism of the *St. James Gazette* against *Dorian Gray*, he said, "Either from temperament or taste, or from both, I am quite incapable of understanding how any work of art can be criticized from a moral standpoint. The sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate." (Gillespie, 2007 P. 335) Furthermore, he said, -The function of the artist is to invent, not to chronicle. There are no such people. If there were I would not write about them. Life by its realism is always spoiling the subject-matter of art. The supreme pleasure in literature is to realize the non-existent- (Gillespie, 2007 P. 358).

It can be recognized then the doctrines that reveal the aesthetic course. Wilde proclaimed that "only art produces beauty, and the true disciples of the great artist are not his studio-imitators, but those who become like his works of art, be they plastic as in Greek days, or pictorial as in modern times; in a word, Life is Art's best, Art's only pupil" so that is why "Art never expresses anything but itself." The peculiarity is in the exaltation of beauty, in the way this exceeds the moral, just as art exceeds life. These aspects not only consolidated his inspiration and his way of conceiving art, but also became the motive of

his work. This is then the natural aestheticism of the evil and ironic genius of the nineteenth century.

THEORETHICAL FRAMEWORK

The central focus of this work is guided by a literary theory which corresponds, both in content and in procedure, to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New Criticism is a method which calls for the close and attentive reading of a text. It grew out of the intellectual movement known as Russian Formalism, which arose at the beginning of the 19th century with the aim of internal articulation of the text, independent of moral, social and psychological systems. Initially New Criticism was applied to the analysis of poetry, but it grew to include the analysis of all areas of literature. It sees the text as self-sufficient and explores the way its elements collaborate to form a single unit. It places emphasis on the work of art itself and not the life of the author.

T. S. Eliot, one of the principle exponents of New Criticism, maintains that a good critic possesses a great ability to create. This idea is in turn developed by Oscar Wilde in his critical essay *The Critic as Artist*. The critic seeks to attribute certain shades of meaning to the text that constitute both a criticism and a creation of new proposals or ideas. Likewise, it is conceived that the artist must possess a critical spirit because it is he who must enjoy a refined and exquisite sense of selection about molding with perfection his work of art. This is determinant for Wilde, as he states: "No one who does not possess this

critical faculty can create anything at all in art" (Wilde, 1920). For Wilde: "There is no fine art without self-consciousness, and self-consciousness and the critical spirit are one" (Wilde, 1920).

What really concerns the New Critic is not the historical frame in which the work was written, but the value of the text without placing the life and time of the author as the main reference. In fact, it cannot be considered that the author's purpose is the same as the text's meaning; sometimes the text is even richer in components and more complex than the author's intention, and that is why New Critics cannot fall into this mistaken consideration, universally known as intentional fallacy. Lois Tyson (2006) suggests, "We can't telephone William Shakespeare and ask him how he intended us to interpret Hamlet's hesitation in carrying out the instructions of his father's ghost, and Shakespeare left no written explanation of his intention. More important, even if Shakespeare had left a record of his intention, as some authors have, all we can know from that record is what he wanted to accomplish, not what he did accomplish" (Tyson, 136).

Focusing on the text as the only source of evidence and arguments, highlighting the formal elements of the text, and showing how they work in unison, is what New Criticism advocates. Tyson points out that there are four vital principal linguistic elements which represent the complexity of a text: paradox, irony, ambiguity and tension. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is rich in these elements, and this critical approach offers the best tools for its analysis. These resources are the elements of written language; the color, the sound, and the delicacy found in a work. In the first instance the ambiguity of the novel provides multiple interpretations that suggest different meanings, as the ambiguous relationship between the

painter, his portrait, and the sitter. Tyson writes that in scientific and normal language ambiguity is synonymous with mistaken and unclear language; however, in literary language it is considered a rich linguistic resource.

Paradox and irony always accompany Wilde's texts and in *Dorian Grey* they become very apparent. In fact, many critics consider Oscar Wilde the most paradoxical writer of his time. The character of Lord Henry perfectly represents these elements and demonstrates them in the course of his actions and dialogues. Paradox presents a controversy as well as a claim of truth, which makes it a great tool for satire. Some of Wilde's paradoxes are formed with the help of contextual antonyms and contrasting pairs such as exploring the difference between art and life; between Sibyl's reality and Shakespeare works, and between Dorian's youth and the portrait's eternal beauty. With irony, the contextual meaning of a word is directly opposite to its literal meaning. The connotation is mostly negative as occurs with Henry way of speaking. Another important stylistic resource in the novel is the metaphor, which Wilde makes great use of, as when describing Sybil's world.

An example of tension is the conflict between denotation and connotation of words. Tyson contends that "characters are meaningful on both the concrete level, where their meaning is literal and specific, and on the symbolic level, where they have universal significance" (Tyson, 140). Sybil and Dorian are good examples of tension since they represent art and beauty on a symbolic level. They represent something bigger than themselves.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFE AND ART

Basil Hallward as Artist

Basil Hallward is a man in love with art. Art constitutes the driving force of his life and is his preferred ally. He is admired for his artistic charm rather than for his appearance, the contrary of Dorian Gray, but he has a deep passion for discovering beauty. He finds that beauty is best represented in this young Adonis and Narcissus par excellence. It is Dorian's beauty that allows the cultivation of this artistic vein that the painter possesses, which for some reason was laying dormant, waiting for a great source of inspiration. Nevertheless, the situation is more fantastic than it seems. More than inspiring a work of art, Dorian Gray personifies Basil's art. The image of Dorian Gray is not only perceived as model for Basil to paint, it is in every mixture of oils, in every composition of forms, colors, textures and in the very movement of his brushstrokes. Dorian does not perceive this situation; the banality of Lord Henry does not allow him to understand it, even though Basil warns him during their first meeting that his life, his art, and his soul are going to be under the influence of the lad. Basil is a serene, virtuous, moral and free man of an independent nature. His serenity matches the environment of his dwelling, with the warm tones of the walls, the light of the stars, and the aroma of the flowers that adorn his garden. It is mysterious that in

this ideal atmosphere three opposite souls, with different interests and different fates, converge. Something joins them involuntarily and it is Basil Hallward's art.

When the notion of Basil's morality is mentioned, the reference is to what is conventionally understood as moral: the correct and the ethically good, the acceptable thing, not precisely the sense in which Wilde, Henry or Dorian conceive it. This reference is vital as it contrasts with the hedonistic view of Lord Henry Wotton. Basil is the good and generous character of the novel, a good man caught in a degrading world. Nevertheless his conduct is related to certain events that are possibly not well seen by society. Basil is a free and autonomous person who paints only for the pleasure of painting, who paints for the art and contends that he does not need his works to be exhibited, as he does not look for public acclaim.

However, one can question the extent to which he is an autonomous artist and the extent to which his actions are influenced. Dorian goes from being his most valued model, his dearest friend, to being his most terrible caprice. A caprice that restricts his artistic freedom since he does not want to show the portrait for fear the public will discover everything about him and the great discovery for Basil is that art is much more real than life itself: "I know you will laugh at me, but I really can't exhibit it," he says. "I have put too much of myself into it . . . 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, 2008 P. 19-21). This caprice reveals his uncertainty because he feels that it is only when he paints Dorian that his real capacities as painter are realized, though in fact his faculties have always been there. From the beginning, Basil perceives the external force that Dorian provides not only in his nature but in his art; nevertheless, it is here where his real vacillation begins. If he allows this exterior

influence to gain control of him, it will deprive him of his freedom and his ability to renounce his friendship; it will become absolutely necessary for his life.

Basil Hallward is a romantic and sentimental man in his conception of love, social position, intellect, and beauty. For him, possessing someone is synonymous with a terrible suffering. In this respect, Basil never wants to look like Dorian; he does not long for his beauty, he simply admires him, since he already possesses his talent and that is sufficient. Each will suffer in his own way: Dorian for his beauty, Henry for his social standing and Basil for his art. For the painter, the one who does not possess any of these virtues is not disturbed, nor does he disturb anyone. It is a great fortune everyone wants to achieve. But to not be beautiful, to not have any position, nor talent, constitutes the worst kind of tragedy.

After he finishes the portrait, Basil feels a deep satisfaction and admiration for the perfection of his brushstrokes and the exquisiteness of the beauty he has created. He also questions what it is that the portrait really constitutes. "Harry," Basil says, "Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter." (Wilde, 2008 P. 21) The portrait is revealing on several levels: Basil's capacity as painter, the secret of his soul as content, the beauty of the lad, and the record of his conscience.

As for the talent of the painter, the strength and delicacy of his movements to create a perfect picture are discovered. Basil gets away from the earthly world, so that not even the words or the silence of Henry and Dorian disturb his deep concentration; the only thing he becomes aware of is that expression Dorian draws on his face and that Basil paints with accuracy in the portrait: "You were perfectly still. And I have caught the effect I wanted—

the half-parted lips, and the bright look in the eyes." (Wilde, 2008 P. 30) These are gestures that find their maximum expression when Mr. Wotton talks about the immorality of any influence and how he is the tyrant of the Victorian society, printing on Gray the bases of the new hedonism and imposing a feeling of uncertainty on the passions that have been aroused in the mind of the lad—forceful reasons to conceive lips of terror and a gaze of seduction.

The secret that disturbs Basil's soul and that does not allow him to exhibit his portrait is that the portrait would obviate his idolatry for Dorian, his real admiration, something which he is not willing to subject to the scrutiny of society. In addition he hates those artists who put their own life in their work, who see art as a reflection of their existence, that in some way have lost the abstract sense of art; Basil has fallen into this and it is precisely for this reason he does not want to expose his soul. Finally, Basil not only manages to mold the parts of the body, to capture the goldenness of the hair, the whiteness of the skin and the rosininess of Dorian's lips, but he can give expression to what life cannot; Basil manages to fulfill one of his strongest arguments on art: "there is nothing that art cannot express." He feels that he captures Dorian's conscience in the portrait, catches the essence of his being.

There is a certain dichotomy between Basil's and Henry's relationship with Dorian, and it is that both feel they exercise certain a power on him. Basil, on one hand, is directed towards the artistic aspect, since the painter assures that it is he who sees everything in Dorian, he is the one who finds the most absolute beauty in the young Adonis and who manages to perpetuate what life does not allow: the longevity of the beauty of a body. Basil can capture every gesture, every movement; mold his body, using certain tonalities, light,

or shade to express what Dorian really is, unlike Harry. Though Lord Henry does not see anything artistically, he manages to touch the doors of Dorian's soul and arouse in him the commanding desire for living every moment. They are two types of drastically different authorities. Basil's influence is the driving force or the starting point to undertake the search of life itself, but Harry's power constitutes the process and the evolution of this experience. Thus, the central conflict of the novel between Harry and Basil seems to be established; in it two doctrines of thought are instituted: the materialist and the idealist, respectively. (Seagroatt, 1998 P. 743)

Seemingly Dorian's beauty exercises more power on Basil and though undoubtedly Basil worships his charm, the motivating event for Dorian to start living all the sensations life can offer, is when he observes the magnitude of his beauty in the picture. This said, it can be manifested that Basil's power on Dorian might be considered to be passive, while Henry's would be more active, in terms of the actions in Dorian's life. On the other hand, Lord Henry Wotton does not exercise any influence on Hallward; Basil affirms that "He has a very bad influence over all his friends, with the single exception of myself" (Wilde, 2008 P. 30).

Though Basil's influential way is representative and fundamental for the development of Dorian's character, for the latter it is much more significant what Henry arouses in him. Despite his distrust, Basil accepts the new friendship between the young men. For Basil art is more important than friends, just as Henry expresses, and possessing his grand master piece, he feels happy, for at least now he possesses the Dorian of the portrait, the real one. Dorian begins a new adventure as Basil continues contemplating the real Dorian, the

Dorian of his portrait, the young man who will always remain beautiful, who will never be darkened; who appears with the best background, with the perfect light, in the best position and with the perfect gesture. The Dorian who now looks for pleasure is the one who will change day after day, the one who will not return to be what he was before, the one who will yearn to be the same as the one in the portrait.

As Henry initiates his laborious task of promoting in Dorian the genuine instinct of the new hedonism and the desire to experiment all life's pleasures, Basil Hallward's character loses some force in this part of the novel in relation to Dorian's process of getting to know Lord Henry's eccentric thoughts. Then he reappears with more frequency and in an interesting way when Dorian decides to marry the beautiful Sibyl Vane and starts planning a meeting between his valued friends and the future woman of his life. Basil's first reaction to Dorian's engagement is of amazement and distress; he feels he will lose Dorian completely. Nevertheless when he learns the profession of the woman and recognizes what she really represents for the lad, he understands that art is present and in that way, Sibyl would be worth sharing her lucky life with Dorian. He adopts then the position that characterizes him, saying,

"I believe in this girl. Anyone you love must be marvelous, and any girl that has the effect you describe must be fine and noble. To spiritualize 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. This marriage is quite

right. I did not think so at first, but I admit it now, the gods made Sibyl Vane for you.

Without her you would have been incomplete" (Wilde, 2008 P. 71)

In this sense the artist considers that being the possessor of many virtues, generous of spirit, skillful and an evangelist of art, he deserves not only the devotion of a man but of nature as a whole. Because he can express everything, because he can touch the soul of every individual, he can find beautiful things and transform the grotesque, hideous and frivolous into something beautiful, admirable and substantial. On the other hand, he warns that Sibyl's absence in Dorian's life would make him an incomplete being and he refers precisely to the importance that constitutes art for him, so if Dorian possesses everything that any being could gasp—beauty, charm and youth—he would lack in turn the spiritual and suitable essence that art provides. Sibyl, therefore, would be that perfect complement for the young Adonis. It is possible that Basil, on having contemplated this, thinks of Dorian as the object of his art, as the maximum real representation of beauty and the maximum joy of youth, but he also thinks of Dorian as an uncultured being, as a person who generates a style of art, but who does not find correspondence between his personality and art.

After Sibyl's death the fundamental pieces of the novel are revealed and the inevitable fate of each character is foreseen. For Basil the way in which Dorian proceeds is totally astonishing, his frivolity is reproachable and he suffers for his insensitivity. In spite of it and of seeing reflected in the lad the exploits of Harry, Basil ends up being dominated once again by the power of Dorian, who manages to manipulate the artist in order to make him reveal the secret of his art, the secret of his adoration as victory to the obstinate idea of

the artist of exhibiting the portrait: "you became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal whose memory haunts us artists like an exquisite dream" (Wilde, 2008 P. 93). After that, Basil starts cultivating a sadness that constitutes the reality of the new Dorian and the loss of the real Dorian he used to paint.

More than ten years go by as Henry continues perverting the lad and Dorian is living his life to the maximum. After Sibyl's death, as Dorian moves from assimilating Henry's ideas to experiencing them, in which the character of Basil separates from him or at least does not have the same influence he had before. His reappearance in Dorian's life marks the apex of Dorian's sinful ways, but in turn it constitutes the most intense link between the men. Basil represents the only spiritual calling in Dorian's life; he seeks with vehemence the opposite of his actions, resignation. For the painter, it is inconceivable that Dorian, being so beautiful, could have a perverse soul. These effects do not correspond. "Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed. People talk sometimes of secret vices. There are no such things. If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself in the lines of his mouth, the drop of his eyelids, the molding of his hands even" (Wilde, 2008 P. 117). Dorian, with the perversion that now characterizes him, confirms in Basil the despicable path that he has taken. Basil reproaches his new lifestyle and his degrading influences on other people. However, as much he listens to malicious talk about his dear Dorian, he cannot believe how a man with such beautiful freshness could corrupt the souls of others, especially if such a pure soul is reflected in his beautiful face. Dorian suddenly feels a deep hatred both for the picture and for its creator and demands in a defiant way before God and before the goodness of the artist, to discover his soul. Basil feels

amazement and stupefaction at having seen his masterpiece corroded by the evilness of a being. What Basil does not know is that he is being punished for revealing to Dorian his own beauty; likewise he ignores the fact that art will not have the same misfortune of the human being, demonstrating the fundamental principle of his aestheticism: "Life imitates art far more than art imitates life"

Thus, as an inadvertent event of the novel and probably in opposition to what has been considered in the literary criticism, Basil's character constitutes the fundamental axis and creates the germinating point for the treatment of the story. The first illustration Basil makes of Dorian was like a Greek hero:

"I had drawn you as Paris in dainty armour, and as Adonis with huntsman's cloak and polished boar-spear. Crowned with heavy lotus-blossoms you had sat on the prow of Adrian's barge, gazing across the green turbid Nile. You have leant over the still pool of some Greek woodland, and seen in the water's silent silver the marvel of your own face. And it had all been what art should be, unconscious, ideal, and remote..." (Wilde, 2008 P.94)

Here once again the principle is ratified; it can be seen how art manages to relate or to interlace with two perfections that for being at the wrong time could not converge: the beauty of Dorian Gray and the Greek ideal. Only art can achieve this, only Basil had wanted the young Dorian to cross the fascinating Greek roads and had bragged of his wonderful beauty. Then Basil decides to paint Dorian as he is, leaving aside the ideal Greeks (Adonis, Narcissus, or Paris). However, Basil does not paint Dorian as he really is, but as he observes him, from his artistic point of view, from his idolatry and his obsession.

Thus the portrait does not represent the real Dorian, but the Dorian of Basil's imagination. It was art for art's sake, not art imitating life. In this way, Dorian, the real one, becomes obsessed with the picture and with the beauty of the lad that is portrayed. His vanity is aroused and he imagines himself to be that beautiful Dorian whose beauty gives him all the strength in the world. Dorian starts imitating the Dorian of the portrait, created by Basil. Henry's influence only consolidates what the young Dorian has already comprehended, that all the power is in his hands; that he can do and manage everything because of his beauty. The person who really corrupts Dorian is Basil, because he exceedingly exercises a vanity that had not even been perceived: "I owe a great deal to Harry, Basil...more than I owe to you. You only taught me to be vain" (Wilde, 2008 P. 90). Henry teaches Dorian the wonder of youth and Basil the wonder of beauty. The latter is undoubtedly the purpose of his new life, and youth is the best tool to exploit such a majestic quality. It is for this reason that Basil is more involved in his life, more than the same artist can imagine. Though Henry's role is determinant and though for Dorian it is he who influences more changes in his life, the principal influence lies with Basil. It can be said that Henry injects certain key elements for the accomplishment of the masterpiece in spite of that fact that it is Basil who perpetuates it, since the artist not only paints his own version of Dorian but the Dorian who was being transformed by Henry's own words, giving expression to those gestures. The picture is the result of the idolatry that Basil has for Dorian and the monster that Henry creates with his words, with a slight evilness that disturbs his tender mind. The portrait is guilty of everything and consequently Basil is too. That is why he is not weighed down by the death of the painter; after all he cannot forgive all that his work of art had caused. In

this way it might be thought of Basil that despite not being clever enough to have enemies and not having curiosity, this being his principal shortcoming, he felt at least an uncontrollable idolatry for everything that Dorian represented, as the novel describes it:

“It was really love, with nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual. It was not that mere physical admiration of beauty that is born of the senses, and that dies when the senses tire. It was such love as Michael Angelo had known, and Montaigne, and Wincklemann, and Shakespeare himself”. (Wilde, 2008 P. 97). A love that would cost him his soul, his art, and his life.

Sybil Vane as Artist

Sybil Vane is the name of Dorian Gray's most fascinating and inconsequential love; a name that dates back to Greek mythology. All those women in possession of the gift of divination and prophets of great events were called Sybils. Possibly Wilde was inspired by these feminine deities to create the character of Sybil Vane. It is clear that the ideal Greek possesses for the author an inexorable importance in the conception of the maximum expression of beauty. In the same sense it could allude to other types of analogies of the character in literature. On one hand, the famous Cumaean Sybil of the Aeneid whose desire is not far from the will of Dorian. Thanks to her prophetic spirit and the captivation he feels for her, she asks the god Apollo to let her reach immortality. In this way her tiny body

placed in a bottle, longing for a vertiginous death. The legend thus applies to Dorian's Sibyl, and Dorian's desire for an early death.

"Eager to reach immortality, [Sibyl] begged Apollo to lengthen her life many years as grains of sand could take with her hands. And her desires came true but, nevertheless, she had forgotten to indicate that time should not pass for her and, therefore, it came for her, since to all the mortals, the oldness and the decrepitude. [She] forgot the best of it: That [she] should be as young as [she] was then" (Horace, 1958 P. 420) .

Likewise, "The Lady of Shalott" by Tennyson finds a certain correspondence to the relation between art and life that is found in Sybil Vane. The poem in turn has been read and analyzed from the same perspective. The Lady of Shalott is unable to see towards Camelot, the kingdom of King Arthur. But because of her desire to see Lancelot, her true love, she disobeyed. Thus the conjuration was fulfilled. Exactly when Sybil feels Dorian's lips on hers, she loses all her artistic charm, as Dickson (1983) suggests. After the disastrous performance of the actress, he expresses the famous lines of Tennyson's poem:

"You had brought me something higher, something of which all art is but a reflection. You had made me understand what love really is. My love! My love! Prince Charming! Prince of Life! I have grown sick of shadows. You are more to me than all art can ever be. What have I to do with the puppets of a play? (Wilde, 2008 P. 75)

Both were enclosed in a world of shades and when they thought they have discovered the light, they died mercilessly.

Now then, centering on the character of the novel, Sybil represents for Dorian what the portrait symbolizes for Basil Hallward, for Lord Henry, and even for Dorian: beauty in

its most virtuous reality. Though she is a humble young girl in social condition and in experience, she possesses and preserves a unique, angelic and delicate beauty; all her appearance seems to be in complete harmony with her body. Lord Henry whispers into to the weak ear of the young Dorian that the pursuit of beauty was the real secret of life. Dorian has in front of his eyes the most adorable creature, who represents the complexity and totality of beauty, and Dorian trusts that his dear Sybil will be some day recognized as the heroine she personifies, or at least she will not take part in the same disheartening destiny of her family. Her mother has turned, after having been an actress in some moment of the epoch, into an old woman, corroded by the years and the crudeness of life itself. And her brother has become a grotesque, common man and without any position or hope in life. Though Sybil is scarcely enjoying the captivations of the tender age, since then she also possesses to her good faith, a determinant fatality in her life. Dorian flaunts a magnificent beauty and Basil Hallward enjoys a great talent, Sybil Vane, on her part, personifies both elements: to the eyes of the painter, they must not coexist and she will suffer in a double way. If she had not been so beautiful as to captivate Dorian's banal taste and if she had not possessed the charm of the great feminine figures, her story would have been different. If one lives without being seen, one can expect little or no tragedy in life. Another fundamental reason for the encounter between the young woman and Dorian is attributed to Lord Henry, since it is exactly in this pursuit of new sensations and poisonous adventures that Dorian examines the vulgar world of the low society, without foreseeing the pure love of the young woman.

The effects that Dorian wants to reproduce in his mind are many. It is for this reason that though being a spectator of the pleasures of the East End London, he is in opposition to his social principles, but at least satisfies his corrupt thoughts. The theatre Sybil represents is not less vulgar than its interested public and its comical owner. It is absurd and pernicious to think that in so peculiar place they represent the works of the great Shakespeare; nevertheless, his genuine instinct presses him to continue experiencing these episodes of his life. He is driven to observe those mundane spirits enjoying the majestic stories of the English dramatist. There would be more Verisimilitude in the works of Shakespeare than in those uncultivated men being delighted by the art in terms of aestheticism. All these thoughts lose vitality at the moment in which Dorian perceives not only Sybil's beauty but her extraordinary talent in dramatizing Juliet. The beautiful young woman could personify the real Juliet, could recite the deepest verses of love to Romeo, could with a gesture express her happiness and the sadness of her soul, she could perfectly dynamize with the exiguous environment of the theatre, could pass with great facility from comedy to tragedy of the work. There is a great mythical resonance of Shakespeare in Wilde's work.

Sybil's unhappy existence leads her to seek art as a refuge. It makes her live in artistic terms and not in reality. She leaves aside the miseries of her nature and, night after night, ceases to be Sybil Vane to assume the rivalry of Montague and fight for the love of her Romeo, while Dorian observes her for the first time from the crammed and disgusting public; to hide in Arden forest and to inspire love in Orlando; while Dorian considers whether to talk to her for the first time; to suffer Imogen's pain and the disillusion of her

dear Leonatus; to suffer Desdemona's anguish thanks to Iago's infamies and Othello's distrust; to live Miranda's life in the enchanted island with the horrible Caliban and to resist Ophelia's dementia and death while she exercises on Dorian the most wonderful infatuation. Meanwhile, Sybil escapes from the materiality and Dorian sticks to the imaginary. To fall in love with an actress makes him venture into a world of variety and irregularity: "How different an actress is! Harry! Why didn't you tell me that the only thing worth loving is an actress" (Wilde, 2008 P. 51) Dorian Gray says. Even though other women had their own charms, Dorian found them simple and monotonous, whereas Sybil seduced his thoughts deeply: "Ordinary women never appeal to one's imagination. They are limited to their century" (Wilde, 2008 P. 51). The fact that the young woman can embody so many figures of literature, could go from one century to another, from one soul to another at any time, makes her totally charming. Only art can achieve this; therefore, Dorian is in love with Sybil's art more than with Sybil herself. He is in love with everything that her beauty and her art can achieve. Likewise, a problem of identity might be found in the female character, both from the perspective of Dorian as from the perspective of Sybil: the young woman and the multiple literary figures she characterizes coincide in thought and action; therefore Dorian does not distinguish which moment he feels Sybil from which moment Rosalind is the one who speaks. In an interesting dialogue between Dorian and Lord Henry it is possible to recognize that absence of personality. "Tonight she is Imogen, and tomorrow night she will be Juliet. When is she Sibyl Vane? Never. She is all the great heroines of the world in one" (Wilde, 2008 P. 53).

As Luis Martínez Victorio indicates, the actress is part of the different types of women typical of English literature of the end of the century. Dorian does not want to perceive the barrier of reality; he wants to remain in the charm of fantasy and preserve everything that Sybil represents. The ambiguity and paradox are immanent styles in Wilde's work, for which the condition of the young woman can demand a certain relation to the social Victorian situation as for the dominant factor of man over woman, including the femme fatale, held to the patriarchal order and banned to forge her own destiny. Sybil Vane's fate is fully committed to the power that Dorian exercises over her and in turn that which art exercises over these prominent characters.

Sybil's problem is more complex than it seems. While Dorian feels a passion for her art, she in turn perceives Dorian not as the fascinating young person, but as a theatrical character. She falls in love with the character and not with the real man. In this way she decides to recognize him not for his name but as a "prince charming". Then when Sybil retreats into the multiple personalities she can personify, when she learns who Dorian really is and the sorrows of life, she decides to commit suicide. Sybil crosses the sphere of art and this brings with it the tragedy of her death. She abandons the artistic to live through her love and paradoxically conceives the idea that Dorian has illuminated her. In spite of acting badly, she rejoices and feels victory in her veins

"Before I knew you, acting was the one reality of my life. It was only in the theatre that I lived. I thought that it was all true. I was Rosalind one night, and Portia the other. The joy of Beatrice was my joy, and the sorrows of Cordelia were mine also. I believed in everything. The common people who acted with me seemed to me to be godlike. The

painted scenes were my world. I knew nothing but shadows, and I thought them real. You came . . . and you freed my soul from prison . . . You made me understand what love really is" (Wilde, 2008 P. 75)

Nevertheless what was really convenient for her was to continue acting, since art would turn out to be superior to her life. What she produced in Dorian was so immense that he saw it reflected in the common public who admired her night after night. Though the aim of art is not to moralize nor educate, it has also the power to suggest another way of seeing and feeling life. This is completely wonderful for Dorian and allows Sybil to live her great love through art, but for her the latter degenerates and disturbs her deep feelings.

Dorian then says,

"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 marvelous, because you had genius and intellect, because you realized the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art . . . how little you can know of love, if you say it mars your art! Without your art you are nothing (Wilde, 2008 P. 75).

Immediately after Sybil Vane's death, a series of events occur that highlight once again the supremacy of art over life. In this way, the prominent figures start thinking in artistic terms and not perceiving the tragedy from the reality of the event, even to justify or to mitigate the cruelty of what has occurred or for the aesthetic sense of the novel.

In first instance, it could be seen that for Dorian Sybil becomes his Ophelia, who, due to her mental disorder, commits suicide, unable to accept that her great love Hamlet has killed her father. On the other hand, Dorian, after learning of the tragic suicide, feels that

this does not affect him as it should: "It seems to me to be simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a great part, but by which I have not been wounded" (Wilde, 2008 P. 84). He conceives death in literary terms and this distances him from reality. Finally, to consolidate his ideas, to incorporate less guilt in his soul and to console his spirit, Lord Henry tries to minimize the effect on Dorian:

"No, she will never come to life. She has played her last part. But you must think of that lonely death in the tawdry dressing room simply as a strange lurid fragment from some Jacobean tragedy, as a wonderful scene from Webster, or Ford, or Cyril Tourneur. The girl never really lived, and so she never really died. To you at least, she was always a dream, a phantom that flitted through Shakespeare's plays and left them lovelier for its presence, a reed through which Shakespeare's music sounded richer and more full of joy. The moment she touched actual life, she marred it, and marred her, and so she passed away. Mourn for Ophelia, if you like. Put ashes on your head because Cordelia was strangled. Cry out against Heaven because the daughter of Brabantio died, but don't waste your tears over Sybil Vane. She was less real than they are"(Wilde, 2008 P. 86).

This is what finally the beautiful and not so real Sybil Vane represented for Dorian Gray. For Henry Wotton, to be good is to be in harmony with oneself, When Sybil discovers that she has performed badly and that she is not a good actress anymore, that she has abandoned art for real love, Dorian chases the idea of continuing with his own ideal, of reaching harmony with himself, without caring about or feeling tied to Sybil's feelings. It is only a question of his desires and if Sibyl cannot please him, she is not indispensable. Her

art dazzled him, her life disillusioned him and in this way death came with her . . . as Queen Gertrude had announced "There is a willow grows aslant the brook" (Shakespeare, 1908 P. 190).

Dorian Gray and Lord Henry Wotton's Positions Toward Life

The devil's bargain makes possible all the satisfactions that a human being does not achieve in an earthly world. Goethe gives a certain treatment to this theme in *Faust*, Balzac experiments with it in *The Magic Skin* and Wilde contributes certain elements to the topic that transfigure morality, conscience and spiritual evil. At the beginning Dorian only possesses the highest qualities and is exactly that beauty that is superior to any intellect. Dorian is conscious of this up to the same moment that he admires the portrait of his own image and Lord Henry Wotton says that there exists an implacable tyrant for his beauty and his youth: time. The youth with it his beauty was the only worthy thing, but likewise one was as ephemeral as the other. In this part of the story a duality begins between what is banal and what is not. For Henry beauty is the absolute wonder, but Dorian also begins to feel the desire to know the world and not only enjoy its exquisite beauty, but rely on it to appreciate all the pleasures of life. Basil ends the beautiful portrait and Dorian's guise immortalizes the contemplation of Narcissus of his image, an admiration that causes the beginning of his own tragedy: "I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am

jealous of the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose?...oh if it were only the other way around! If the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now!" (Wilde, 2008 P. 35). "There is nothing in the world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!" (Wilde, 2008 P. 34).

The picture arouses a desire to obtain longevity, an exigency that consists of a long existence but also with a great contentment. The self-worship of the character becomes commanding and begins the difficult balance between the reality of his life and the imitation; the limit and the excess. Dorian feels affected by religion, is touched by Catholicism but finally his thoughts remain rooted in Darwinism, though he considers peculiar the different theories of life that relate to the senses and the soul itself; he mixes and experiences the most pleasant aromas and explores the power these cause over the senses; he devotes himself to exploring the sounds and feelings of seeing the bodies of women and men in sensual movements; he decorates his beautiful skin with the most lucid and exquisite precious stones; he collects the most beautiful and delicate textiles, fabrics and embroideries.

His soul is poisoned by the desire to know all the wonders of life and naturally it proceeds from the material experience to the terrible experience of death. Dorian observes the death with Sybil Vane, escapes from it with James Vane, causes it to Allan Campbell as well as to Sybil and finally he experiences it himself, killing Basil Hallward. For Henry, crime is something insipid and vulgar: crime belongs exclusively to the lower orders. I don't blame them in the smallest degree. I should fancy that crime was to them what art is to us; simply a method of procuring extraordinary sensations (Wilde, 2008 P. 160) .What

Henry does not perceive is that life allows Dorian to experience multiple sensations from different situations or positions.

The position of Dorian and Henry to art defers totally from that of Sybil and Basil. It is possible to affirm that for the first, art manages to work as an intermediary between their reality and their actions or rather as the victim which suffers the excess of their conduct. Dorian conceives his portrait as refuge and is more afraid of the monstrosity of his image in the painting that the sins he commits. The tender, beautiful and shy Dorian ends up dangerously experiencing all kinds of excesses, but also he ends up by resigning to the horrible and unbearable unsightliness of his portrait and the stake in the canvas, brings with it his own condemnation.

Wilde once stated, "Bad people are, from the point of view of art, fascinating studies. They represent color, variety and strangeness. Good people exasperate one`s reason, bad people stir one`s imagination." Was Dorian Gray a bad person? Thus begins then the contrast between the moral and the immoral, the ethical and the aesthetic. An ambiguity that for Wilde, represents the best stylistic resource. For Dorian his tragedy consists in the aesthetic, in his constant struggle to stay beautiful, whereas the ethical has no implication in the meeting of his passions and his pleasures, even more if it is perceived in the novel, as he is punished by his crime.

Lord Henry, in one of his malignant conversations with Dorian, says, "I believe if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream, I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of medievalism, and

return to the Hellenic ideal...but the bravest man amongst us is afraid of himself" (Wilde, 2008, 29). In other of his social meetings, in which the sole aim of his charming conversations was to delight and to poison Dorian's mind, Mr. Eskirne asks Lord Henry to expose him in some moment his philosophy of pleasure with an admirable burgundy. It is evident the way in which Wilde incorporates through the character of Henry, the whole philosophical thought and the deep devotion and study towards the Greek ideology. Henry exposes a new hedonism and manages to cultivate it through Dorian. For Henry mankind should have created the man in terms of a new pleasure, without prejudices and Puritanism, taking the beauty as the fundamental mobile.

Another approach is offered by Kant. Kant breaks with the relation that the Greeks had established between being good and being happy. Kant argues that if a person is looking for happiness, he does not necessarily care to do the good. If that person wants to be happy, he ends up pursuing personal motivations that can supersede a person's feelings. For Kant human behavior is not subordinated to what makes other person happy. It must be dependent on some ideals that guarantee that the people are not going to end up by doing what they want. Dorian is dazzled by his instinct and chases it without caring about the weight his soul would support, without caring about the pain it would cause in other souls.

CONCLUSION

Art and Life in Oscar Wilde evoke a denial of the realistic representation that could be conceived in his life and work. In the pursuit of this sole purpose, it rests on the creation not only of a real world, but of an unreal world. The opposition to realism that Wilde proposes is connected to the plot of the story; in the way he narrates a "supernatural" world that transcends the natural world. The trial of the author ended up being a judgment of his works. He was being condemned and judged paradoxically for something to which he always objected, for something that offended his aesthetic principle. Nevertheless his art survived all the prejudice, degradation and calumny. Though Wilde passed away, his works remained as an important legacy for the universal literature and although Dorian Gray murders Basil Hallward and tries to destroy his portrait, the picture recovers its fascinating condition and will last in the possession of Lord Henry Wotton.

The four characters represent the artistic process: Basil and Sybil are the artists from two different artistic references, Dorian the sitter, and Henry the public. But in turn they represent the failure of life to achieve the ideal. The novel invokes a deep reflection on the moral implication of the artist. Basil represents the foundation of Wilde's proposal about the moral inference of a person to a work of art. In this case Basil does not want to imitate, but is touched by strong sentiments, which is not the aim of the artist. Dorian, in contrast,

represents the lack of humans' essence by trying to imitate that which is perfect, that which never dies, never ages, remains beautiful and delightful. For Dorian the experience has no any ethical value.

This whole idea of art and morality is very Greek. The Greeks culture embraced a very evident worship of beauty. For the Greeks, beauty was vital. Being beautiful physically meant being good. Likewise, art sought to represent the beautiful and the artistic creation, the philosopher sought for a perfect life. The philosopher was an artist of actions that would shape the soul to make of his life a work of art. In contrast, Dorian Gray's portrait is more than an attempt to form a new type of hedonism that could harm the soul of his readers, it is more than a new philosophical principle; it is the best way of anticipating and demanding that art and life diverge.

There is no certainty of life's success, but it is possible to affirm that the last and supreme goal of the artist is to explain the unexplainable, to reveal what cannot be explained with concepts or with actions. The leap from life to art is the leap from the finite to the infinite. It is for this reason that works of art are so beautiful. Life imitates art; it seeks to adjust to the realm of art, the realm which can transcend the quotidian. The beautiful young lad and protagonist of the tragedy is no more than an unsuccessful rendition of the archetype of Dorian Gray's portrait.

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