

**Research Paper**

# Oscar Wilde and the Politics of Irish Aestheticism: A Genealogical Study into *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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Accepted 11 March 2017

This research explored the life of beauty a person can own and it is on the subject of the amount of human agency in one's life amidst all power relations. Oscar Wilde's politics of Irish aestheticism is the instigator of an aesthetic possibility of life in the historical booklet of one's lived experience. But *The Picture of Dorian Gray* does not remain simply beautiful and the protagonist's life has been ruined to nothingness; therefore, the aim of this research was to problematise the aesthetic life being sought for by the characters. This was done to show to what extent art suffices for life fulfillment. Besides, genealogical curiosity considers Wilde's aesthetics amidst all other power relations to discover how a person can push his/her individualistic demands forward.

**Keywords:** Foucauldian Archaeology, Foucauldian Genealogy, Foucauldian Discipline, Problematism, Wildean Aesthetics, The Sublime, The Beautiful, Social Individualism.

**Cite This Article As:** Kharrazi H, Asadiamjad F (2017). Oscar Wilde and the Politics of Irish Aestheticism: A Genealogical Study into The Picture of Dorian Gray. Inter. J. Eng. Lit. Cult. 5(2): 15-25

## INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde is a prominent figure not just in his contemporary period but in the history of literature from his literary rise onwards. This prominence is due to his relevance to socio-political issues as well as his literary success looking back at the new movement he had belonged to. As a result, what is to be presented here is exactly the way politics of that time had been bound up with the literary movement he was trying to propagate. The political atmosphere of an era in which he lived had been an object of thinkers' critical reaction, so Wilde's reaction must be seen in the historical framework giving rise to other counter-thoughts and in it is where Foucauldian criticality lays its main concerns.

Foucault believes that a particular knowledge is formed in accordance with other knowledges in a given time in history. He insists on disclosing the fundamental structure of their formation with regard to all systems of power relations: this is where he introduced the concept of *discursive formation* to reinforce the idea of

interconnected relationships amongst all existing discourses whether they agree with each other or not. The discourse which is examined in this research is Wilde's inference about art for art's sake as against the Victorian episteme which formulated its own aesthetic experience. Wildean aesthetics is expected to offer a *counter-discourse* which is not opposed to other statements of knowledge but it lived in co-existence with all other discourses.

In Foucauldian manner, aesthetics is a way to escape from any disciplinary means; efforts will be made to illuminate how human beings such as Dorian or Wilde wanted to care about their existence in discursive or non-discursive formations. How their identities are formed and to what extent a person in society can self-discipline oneself. Hence, individualistic self-practice leads to the examination of three trajectories running through the novel; consequently, it grows fairly important to deal with different grids of individualism in *The Picture of Dorian*

*Gray*, for instance, both Lord Henry and Dorian desire to wipe any trace of docility off their feeling of pleasure. First things first, as far as the Foucauldian perspective is concerned, it is better to initiate with responding to the question: how did Dorian go through the process of self-transformation in his life (Bios) regarding his aesthetic ideology (Logos) amidst all power relations in life, art, and society? The entrance to Foucauldian ethics can be reckoned as a psychoanalytic procedure but its treatment of psyche is not surrendered to a doctor, but the Gaze of that person must be the master of his existence as a discursive construct. With knowing the Victorian's particular attention to human subjectivity, the aesthetics of existence can be expounded with a more critical outlook. This criticality should not be vanished to a sheer complacency, therefore, this study is a self-practice, the nature of which will become clear in the next parts.

In the second place, the afore-mentioned self-practice is to be discussed in relation to Wildean belief in individualism, that is, when Dorian is continuously seeking for the feeling of pleasure embodied in the idea of the beautiful, it is critical to figure out to what extent Dorian can freely perform his desired impulses. Conversely, there was a revolutionary turn of mind in Utilitarianism which advocated a different conception of freedom. Utilitarianism talks about the happiness of all. In this way, there is a moral code which obeys the will of the others as 'do-as-you-would-be-done-by' and another one i.e. the propensity to take an action with regard to your own interests i.e. 'do the best for yourself'; the prosociality of the former and the self-assertiveness of the latter are the main topics in a Utilitarian discourse (Hinde 15). Prosociality is an abstraction that generates an abstract happiness for all. Maybe it would be said that there is no universalistic rule to encompass the happiness of all members of society. But if there remains some sacrifices on the road to happiness of the majority, then what is that happiness that utilitarianism wants to lead us? It seems that the majority of people are to accept 'the expected utility'. This expected utility follows one's self-interest to adopt a putative moral disposition, a disposition which is self-interested and it normalizes every speech, action, usefulness, and happiness to its own advantage and that is called 'Constrained Maximization' (Superson 23) which calls out people in society to its acceptance. Foucault believes that anyone who does not meet the expectation of utility will be considered as a *moral offender* because he/she breaks the normative ethical rubrics of bourgeois culture industry. This fact causes that person to feel guilt and consequently Normativity rolls up its sleeves to correct and reform the person's attitudes and behaviour (Gutting, *Introduction* 73). But some theoreticians believe that if the happiness of the majority is secured, then society will be in perfect accord. The researcher tries to posit the readers in this forum in order to unravel the issue of

individualism against utilitarianism at a given time in history.

Lastly, First and foremost amongst all questions is: How does Wilde's Aestheticism become an object of his resistance to power? Albeit this is just one question but so many questions are inherent in it. The relationship between human subjectivity and material existence has been sparking off a debate which still not yet quenched. In *Fearless Speech*, how to connect Logos (the theoretical knowledge) and Bios (life) is a worry to Foucault; his ethics requires human individuals to problematise their existence. Within the system of power relations, a person needs to re-invent his self. *Master morality* thinks that its formulating an aesthetic experience will be the only truthful Logos, however, for *slave morality*, freedom from a one-way knowledge is the highest ambition (Nietzsche 87) and it should be mediated by their imaginative strength. But keeping balance between these two realms is proved to be challenging since it is the political life of people which is to be aestheticized.

## THE AESTHETIC PROBLEM

It is important to know how art manages to civilize people's lives. Teaching to live aesthetically creates people with cultivated expectations of their lives. But they may get stuck in the sheer abstraction of the idea of beauty or an idea of civilization; then the aesthetic quality of life cannot be enhanced since it is devoid of any application of those ideas in actuality. Any person might want to escape from life to get resided in the higher realms without knowing that for human beings to appreciate art, the idea of beauty should be concretized in their real life. Also, in reverse, life can downgrade human existence to vulgarity since life's raw materiality does not enhance the quality of life. As a result, the question of an aesthetic life will remain insoluble. The question grows problematic since both art and life can captivate human subjectivity and it is of importance to find out to what extent Dorian Gray is successful in keeping due equilibrium between art and the way he wants to live that art. Therefore, the significance of this study refers to the evaluation of the relationship between these two areas and this inquiry has been inspired from Foucauldian desire for getting Logos closer to Bios and vice versa. The other question is: in what ways we can be a free work of art although our very existence is influenced continuously by power and its accessories. This research depicts that power relations can not be divorced from other discourses in society; for instance, if we consider, Wilde's Irishness, then the official identity of the British is shaped not with the elimination of the Irish, but with combination of both together: 'Official identity = A= not- B but A= A/B' (Stallybrass 193)

Hence, the second major concern of this study is to know how an individual like Dorian Gray can prevent from dissolving into power relations. The dissolution of the self brings about the disappearance of individuality and this is the most hazardous incident that can occur to members of a society.

## APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, as an archaeologist of knowledge, the researcher endeavours to find out the structure of art for art's sake discourse. This process consists of showing firstly Wildean aestheticism's formation of objects as they appear on different surfaces like literary genres (aesthetic biography) or social movements (socialism) and so on. Then the authorities of delimitation have to be discussed: There are discourses and counter-discourses propagated by certain formulators of knowledge like that of moral aesthetes as against Romantic aesthetes.

As a genealogist, the researcher with the help of the structural formation of the aesthetic discourse problematizes the contemporary period of Oscar Wilde. In this way the transformation of Dorian Gray will be shown in reaction to those power relations forming his identity. In order not to be disciplined by authoritarian discourses, one should problematise both the contemporary time in which he/she lives, and then their existence. If your existence is undermined then how can a person extricate oneself from the disciplinary systems?

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the archaeological and genealogical approaches are used to realize how Dorian's life is defined by the existent discourses of his time. The other concern is about making sure whether he was able to make a success of his life based on Foucauldian ethics and Wilde's technique of imagination or not, whether his individualism is endangered and if not to what extent he is able to freely bring about change in his life.

### From Urban Vulgarly to Aesthetic Autobiography

Dorian's house in Grosvenor was a palace located in the rich West End of London. In actuality, in London of Dorian's time, there had been a deep fissure between the East End poor and the rich. The 18th c. thinkers cautioned us of the existence of "the grotesque body" living in the poor areas of the city. Aristocratic circles of acquaintances around Dorian distance themselves from the streets of London. 'One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world' (Wilde, Dorian 18), but willy-nilly, Dorian's moral identity was affected by his environmental filthiness, though kept invisible from the rich, it popped up to the surface and there it seems that 'London obscures, annuls, or maims the identity of

characters in search of their true self' (Kohl 149). Lord Henry knew himself as he really is but when it comes to the vulgarity of people he declares that 'death and vulgarity are the only facts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that can not explain away' (Mason 107). Anne H. Wharton sees the artistic delight comes to rescue the writers of this age from the morbidity of vulgar and deprecated souls:

In this novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray," written for the July Lippincott's, Mr. Wilde, like Balzac and the authors of "Faust" and "John Inglesant," presents to us the drama of a human soul, while, like Gautier and About, he surrounds his utterly impossible story with a richness and depth of coloring and a grace and airiness of expression that make the perusal of its pages an artistic delight. (Mason 102)

Victorian authors like Wilde were forever feeling an urgent necessity to sublimate their human souls from the material existence into celestial, transformative strengths and ultimately they got that touch of sublimation from art. Each concept of life was to be made fruitful with the soil and water of aesthetic politics. In *The Decay of Lying*, Wilde scorns those modern novelists who cannot enhance the quality of life by dint of their imagination and beauty and 'the only thing that can be said about them is that they find life, crude, and leave it raw' (Wilde, Decay 17). Aestheticism strode to the fore to colour every aspect of life with the help of its tropes. It revolted against those authors like Charles Dickens who preached about the hard times of the Victorian arena based on the detailed accumulation of facts in order to louden their voice above the voice of art. In *Hard Times*, Dickens highlighted the sheer social situations of his time and life issues seem to predominate: 'Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else' (3). Another aesthetic trope for Wilde was autobiography. You may think that this genre should talk merely about facts of a person's life but for Wilde it is not so. He, together with his life, is fictionalised into a work of art. Oscar Wilde goes beyond himself just the way Dorian goes beyond the realistic appearance of his portrait; it is not sufficient for him to be complacently at the level of appearance. Although autobiography has facts at its disposal, aesthetic biography is an art. Through Leslie Stephen this genre became an 'art of forgetting' and the biographer was a 'forgetter' because he forgets all about facts and turns information into an art \_ what Stephen calls 'forgetting' (Broughton 44). The biographer was acting like a *mediator*, precisely interpreted as a 'conducting wire' by Stephen himself in order to convey the truth of the 'gentleman's anonymity' (ibid 50):

For Foucault, the author is a projection of the text, independent of the actual, physical writer: "it would be just as wrong to equate the author with

the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker; the author-function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance". (Gomel 7)

It is reminiscent of Kant's notion of *disinterestedness* which builds a genuine aesthetic judgment by excluding all charms and interests considered as irrelevant because of their mere empiricity (Bohls 16). Wilde tries to judge the pursuit of beauty in his life disinterestedly; he asserts: 'Lying and poetry are arts\_arts, as Plato saw, not unconnected with each other and they require the most careful study, the most disinterested devotion' (Wilde, *Decay* 13). The transcendental inaccessibility of the author in literature of Wilde, like his counter-part in painting, Rossetti, is a struggle to be an art form which is divine, far away from the dirt of empirical experience of reality. Wilde's perception of nature differs from Victorian women who like Barrett Browning 'inscribes the Wordsworthian myth of nature as "mother nature" a moral teacher, protector of the child's psyche, and maternal substitute' [...] (Peterson 127); he shows in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the character's desire for self-development in art that is 'a veil, rather than a mirror' (Wilde, *Decay* 37). Wilde is a forgetter because he forgets about rigid facts and what he offers in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is an autobiographical sketch of his ambitions and whims in his artistic life; 'Wilde insists that Dorian Gray was directed "against the crude brutality of plain realism" governed by scientific naturalism' (Killeen 83). Hence, the facts he reveals are perhaps not precisely a blow-by-blow history of his life, but the history of his aesthetic imagination for a transcendental move into an ideal type he has been envisaging so long. He thinks a life without "Art will become sterile, and Beauty will pass away from the land (Wilde, *Decay* 15).

However, according to Foucault, biography might be a disciplinary gaze\_ the gaze of the subject-writer\_ which enforces biographical discipline through being disinterested for conveying the message that it is not contaminated with prejudices. When a writer is deemed as a transcendental anonymity then what he prescribes anonymously can be given as the only truth at hand (Rabinow 104). Wilde's avoidance from being involved in the sheer raw materiality of life leads him not to be an actual autobiographer who is writing about facts. Also, he is not a transcendental autonomy managing Dorian's formation. In fact, he is a *mediator* who turns information, desires, and life into art as kind of spirituality. In Foucauldian analysis, 'every aspect of life is subject to a whole series of procedures designed to enforce normality' (Sullivan 29) and Wilde endeavours to rescue us from this normalizing judgment into culture by Criticism (Wilde, *Critic* 229). Wilde redefines the concept of criticism; *his autobiography is a criticism* in which the self is fictionalised:

That is what the highest criticism really is, the record of one's own soul. It is more fascinating than history, as it is concerned simply with oneself. It is more delightful than philosophy, as its subject is concrete and not abstract, real and not vogue. It is the only civilized form of autobiography as it deals not with the events, but with the thoughts of one's life; not with life's physical accidents of death and circumstance, but with the spiritual moods and imaginative passions of the mind. (Bloom x)

Oscar Wilde amongst other missionary aesthetes tried to roll his sleeves up and rescue the poor urban vulgarity from falling into misery. 'Missionary aestheticism' is socially-oriented for it was a medium through which the aesthetes could reform the reality of poor non-aesthetic qualities by exposing the working people to beauty (Maltz 3). So, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* appears to be a trial for each person to make sure how his subjective impressions of Nature will be related to the power relations of art in an episteme.

### The Rise of the Religio-Romantic Aesthetics

Human agency in *Dorian Gray* grows more individualistic when he finds out that he can take pleasure in the hedonic happiness of life from within that is he derives his greatest satisfaction not from the recognition of static physical attributes but from a realization of his kinetic power to change the rendition of his nature that appears in Basil Hallward's painting. (Gillespie 68)

Dorian was trying to get rid of those 'wearisome round of stereotyped habits' and he was in hope of his eyes being opened one morning to 'a world that had been refashioned anew in the darkness for our pleasure' (Wilde, *Dorian* 125). In line with Foucauldian resistance to be objectified in generalization, Dorian aspires to be capable of making decisions for his life without being fallen into a universal homogenisation (Johnson 90). Ruskin in his book *The Pleasures of England* specified one of the pleasures as the pleasure of learning 'in the sense of receiving instruction; \_ a pleasure totally separate from that of finding out things for yourself, \_ and an extremely sweet and sacred pleasure , when you know how to seek it, and receive' (4). Here through counteracting such learning, a person like Oscar Wilde accepts no such disciplinary instruction but he takes the pain of learning with reference to himself 'because through that he realizes his personality' and he introduces such a person as a real Christian, as an artifact of religious perfection (Wilde, *Soul* 17). On the larger scale if a nation wants to realize its personality, his resolution should be aimed at a life for perfection. However, for Ruskin each person should do his good work i.e. the

same moral norms. In the end, Dorian Gray reiterates the fact that he wants to be good. Maybe conformity to moralism was his intention because he had been experiencing a trauma of being himself.

This glimmer of a hoped-for human's perfection indicates the rise of religio-romantic aesthetics. Gradually, the obsession with objectivity reshaped itself into the excess of subjectivity and what remains is the artist that is consummately submerged into his work of art. What strikes one's mind, indeed, from the word submergence is Basil's oneness with Dorian. The aesthetic hedonism of which Dorian is the proponent was derived its existence as a reaction to the objectifying morality in vogue in back of him. Pater and Wilde were on this side of the story. Both of them created what was named aesthetic hedonism. They attached themselves to the religion of art in which each human being with his mental impressions can alter the way the objects are, as Wilde insists that: one should see things as they are not.

What changes the religion of art from other religions is that it is not compatible with the revelatory reason of an a priori knower conveyed to people, but it is just human reason that constructs its authenticity. Back to the theologians, it is maintained that 'because the exercise of reason may be inadequate or deferred, it was necessary for God to supplement human reason with divine revelation' (Schimmel 21), and that is where Wilde objects. His religion for the realm of creation is not objectified at all into an irrefutable Truth, but art's reason is culturally conditioned and prone to being judged by a person's perception. Basil is the creator who gives life to Dorian through his own lived experience and artistic perception. This can be seen in a way that he sees the picture as his own life being mingled in Dorian's. The reader can take in how Basil epitomizes his own life inside his creation, and from then on, what are seen are Basil's impressions of art managing the scene of aestheticism. Dorian can be interpreted as a dream for aesthetic way of life. He might be a subjective impression of Wilde or Basil. But why did he fall into an abyss of corruption despite the fact that aesthetic-conceived way of life casts high status for art, and Dorian as an embodiment of its existence? In other words, his art for art's sake degenerates.

### Dorian's Aesthetic Error

Kant sees humans 'both as objects, bound by natural laws; and as subjects, who can lay down laws for themselves' (Scruton 123). The desire for transcendence, which Dorian sums up into 'everything whose beauty does not die' (Wilde, *Dorian* 28), is based on an aesthetic perspective that subjective impressions should be considered for the realization of the surroundings (Kirwan 151). Kantianism wants to order the subjective

impressions one can have in relation to their judgments; but to see this act of ordering in Foucauldian eye as a discipline, Kantian perception of aesthetic judgment will become a philosophy which is in hope of subjugating human beings to his order. I want to analyze if it is true to talk about Kant's aesthetic judgment as such or it is Dorian's misperception of these doctrines of art. The question is: how to make connection between noumena and phenomena? I hope that by asking this question, one can appreciate the truth about Dorian's pursuit of the Beautiful i.e. the feeling of pleasure.

Based on Kant's *the analytic of the Beautiful*, imagination is the main criterion for human transcendental progress. Thus, the harmony of imagination with understanding shows that subjective impressions are parts of Kant's beliefs (Kant 20). Dorian Gray fails to abide by the stipulations which Kant had determined. Dorian's imaginative comprehension of the Beautiful was to be disinterested, but he was overwhelmed by his private interests. So his life of beauty was lacking in aesthetic quality. Furthermore, with regard to what quantity criterion stipulates, Dorian's judgment of life was expected to be universally valid, i.e. all people must have accepted his actions. Based on the analytic of the Sublime, his aesthetic experience was a failure, either. The Idea of beauty did not appear in Dorian's way of life, that is, he fails to harmonise noumena with the phenomena; on that account, he did not attain that "repose and harmony" (Etter 61) which Hegel depicts at the time when the Idea is represented in the world of appearance.

The point is that Dorian was thrown into a quagmire of absolutism, objectification, and incomprehensible ideas of noumenal world where human understanding is conceived as a weak recipient of all magnitude in there. Speaking in Kantian-Lacanian terminology, Dorian wanted to elevate his Reality of existence to that noumenal Real in which the Idea of beauty and vital youth is a priori, i.e. it is not poisoned by the empirical experience of life. It had been said about Wilde that his ideas were for the sake of ideas, and that was Dorian's aesthetic problem, too. It seems he was disillusioned since the road to transcendent beauty and imperishable youth is not one-way and ideas cannot be kept frozen in the noumenal world. He could not mediate between the two worlds, he could not harmonise his body and soul, and he was not conscious of his 'self' in order to reach a point where he could have been capable of saying I am conscious (Carr 65), conscious of my empirical existence in relation to a more cultivated realm. Since Dorian just wanted to reside in the eternity given by the Idea of beauty, this realm with its regulative common sense aesthetics can discipline human subjects in search of the sublime. We can see Kantian regulative influence of the Sublime as a way to moderate fervent individuality in fear of its chaotic aftereffects. Furthermore, imagination's

common sense is constitutive. Dorian can be harmonised with the concepts of beauty which his understanding gives him, but again the criteria of universality can bind his subjective impressions to a universal consensus and this is against the religio-romantic aesthetics of Oscar Wilde. Although universalistic points of view are negated with regard to Wilde and Foucault, Dorian could have remained disinterested; then to Oscar Wilde it seems that human beings can keep themselves farther from despotic moral values. Dorian was disinterested in his life of beauty in such a manner that moralism has no place in his life, but conversely, he observed everything to his benefit and his thirst for the beautiful did not remain useless/disinterested.

Throughout all Dorian's life, Lord Henry was advertising a scientific language which prioritises the biological imperatives over the human soul; and he utters his doctrine of life as such: 'life is not governed by will or intention. Life is a question of nerves, and fibres, and slowly built-up cells in which thought hides itself and passion has its dreams' (Killeen 93). Dorian who had been influenced by Lord Henry followed his natural instincts all the time since Nature at last determines the beauty, youth, and death of human beings. However, when this naturalistic perspective annihilates the beauty of his life, Dorian comes to understand another aspect to human life. His conclusion is an expression of respect to the senses while they are being complemented by some purifying sources. Dorian, at first, undermines the senses' stance in the aesthetics of existence for the practice of self-cultivation, but later on, what he deems to be of high value is 'the spiritualisation of the senses'. He happens to realize this truth about human senses late in the final stages of his lifespan, when he tries to understand his doomed failure.

The true nature of the senses had never been understood, and that they had remained savage and animal merely because the world had sought to starve them to submission or to kill them by pain, instead of aiming at making them elements of a new spirituality, of which a fine instinct for beauty was to be the dominant characteristic. (Wilde, *Dorian* 123-124)

At last, he seems to tell the truth about himself; Parrhesia made it possible for him to admit the importance of the senses because while he was solitarily examining himself, he saw his errors before his eyes. His error was his indifference to his soul as a medium for enhancing the aesthetic quality of the senses. Through the process of self-diagnosis he concluded that for the sake of the stability of the mind, senses would have been elevated into the spirituality of the soul by art's synthetic imagination to create a life of beauty. For Hegel, 'the task of art was the sensuous representation of Ideal' (Etter 57); it is important to notice that the spiritualisation of senses are not for the sake of separating them from empirical experience but human senses can be 'far more

concrete, far more material' to maintain its relevance to an empirical i.e. historical experience and at the same time, to keep his contact with a priori spirituality of an artistic soul (Marcuse 259). Dorian's life does not establish a relationship between the a priori spirituality which art can bestow upon the sensuous life and his senses do not bring their data of experience to the a priori realm of artistic soul. His hedonism can be realised as Dorian's failure to spiritualise his sensuous experience of pleasure. Kierkegaard who is influenced by Kantian-Hegelian discourse believes that one should live poetically for reviving the ethics of life with the help of the beauty and glory of the aesthetic existence. In *The Critic as Artist*, Gilbert said to Ernest: 'in the actual life of man, sorrow... is a passage to a lesser perfection. But the sorrow with which Art fill us both purifies and initiates... it is through Art, and through Art only, that we can realize our perfection' (Wilde, *Critic* 185). The compound of ethical-aesthetical growth in the life of human beings is a religious practice, not that it makes man reconcile only with the grim actuality of his life but the very life of man becomes infinitised; Dorian Gray could not infinitise his life; his life was filled to the brim with raw animality and his material existence remained unspiritualised.

### Aesthetic Imagination in Society

In *Dorian Gray*, while Dorian was engaging in the solitary self-examination of himself, he reached the conclusion that 'Actual life was chaos, but there was something terribly logical in the imagination' (188). These words are reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's separation of life and imagination through sanctifying Dorian in the portrait far away from the encroachment of bitter reality. Near the end of his life, Dorian who was destroyed by the way he had been living for the individualistic grasp of pleasure in the beautiful, he found out that 'he had been the victim of a terror-stricken imagination [...]' (189); the question is: why does imagination which reveals individual freedom, for Dorian become enchainment?

Lord Henry's invitation to see the divinity of beauty in visible things may be against what Wilde sees in an aesthetic freedom; Wilde says that life can be manipulated, censored, and silenced but human imagination is free to soar, to go beyond its material existence and it is where art can nest his dreams of free expression. But Lord Henry tries to set free Dorian's material existence from the clutch of those worldviews making a body desensuous. It can be said that what the authoritarian bodies want is some docile bodies and in order to let your body speak out its own needs, you have to answer the needs of your sensations. Lord Henry said to Dorian 'it is only shallow people who do not judge by appearance. The true mystery of the world is the visible,

not the invisible [...] (24); at this point we get near the scientific approach in nineteenth century by which they want to eliminate doubt and replace it with certainty for the sake of 'social harmony' (Ferguson 468), but the scientific certainty was doomed to failure since the very usefulness of science which seeks to form socially useful subjects leads to decadent consequences. The life which Dorian led was resulted in a sensuous life which the sense of beauty is polluted with the private interests of the body.

In Wilde, docile bodies can fly into individuality through socialism. His socialism has the reverberation of attending to each individual's personal pleasure. In science, authorities cannot interfere with the result of an experiment in a way to change the final results; scientific formulations cannot be summed up into an authoritarian normativity; it can be inferred that Wilde says in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*: so, why do you change philosophy's beauty into what the norms require (9)? Back to Dorian Gray, the pure product of naturalistic aesthetics of Lord Henry changes the innocence of Dorian into an object of desires, those natural properties of human beings which are to decay. No intervention from the authority can change the natural process of body. The mistake of Lord Henry is his disillusion that by gaining the right of expression for bodily ambitions, one can live beautifully to his advantage. Lord Henry wants the human body to express everything. Wilde wants imagination, the seat of art to express everything even the morbid things. Though maybe Lord Henry's whim is to take body out of docility but in the end Dorian gets involved in bodily deprecation first through the materiality inherent in the real life which can embitter the soul which for Wilde its epistemological ideas are revived through art. Secondly body's docility is not only eliminated but also it will be made more submissive by those disciplinary proponents of moralism that see dehumanization in excessive consumption of body. So then in this situation what will Wilde do to settle the soul in its right place? His individualism is preaching human beings to be useless in society.

What Lord Henry finds in the materiality of existence is its utility; but his version of utilitarian way of looking at the feeling of pleasure seems to be against the abstract power of capitalism in which the surplus value of labour cannot be seen by the labourer; however, though he wants such work that is not stolen from human beings, such work that human beings must have a share of its value, his own conceptualization of human labour in life is commodified human beings into another form of utilitarian definition of pleasure which longs for the possession of use-value of labour; that is taking pleasure in objects to your own benefits in a way that a subject is immersed in the objects themselves. The former tries to immerse people in a consensual competition since man's labour should be in the service of the institutions of the abstract

power, and the latter wants immersion in the mere private interests which leads to human's identification with the objects. Dorian's failure is his inability to make distinct his own self from the objects of pleasure so in the end what remains of him is the subject represented in objects. His immersion is explained by Mahaffey psychologically as the influence of mother over the child leaves no separate existence for him and he is repressed by the mother's shadow compared to the perversion of the child by his father's insistence on transcending above the reality (Mahaffey 190).

But Wilde's pleasure is the application of beautiful in things common to all. Wilde's benefit means that I don't want to be disciplined by your influence, by being commodified into an object so that my labour's value becomes concealed from me, but I want to do beautiful work for my own pleasure of free expression. Dorian must have not been confused with the possessions he has since Wilde believes that what you are, what is within you, is the most important feature in self-realization. He rebukes English Government for treating people's property exactly as if these properties were the same human beings (Wilde, *Soul* 13).

So to sum up, Wilde's individualism is not egocentric, but it is a collective hope for freedom. Be individual! First, it means that a person should not be identified with any authoritarian influence; one should interact, exchange discourses and counter-discourses: 'Wherever there is a man who exercises authority, there is a man who resists authority' (Wilde, *Soul* 15). Second, be individual! Do not attach yourself to the objects, since there would be no 'I' anymore if you are one with them; even worse than this, it is when one immerses himself in the objects, their meanings may be given by institutions and then this fact accelerates the approach of human collapse. You will become those meanings that are institutional. The objects are models for contemplation not for construction; M.H. Abrams believes that art for art's sake\_ art-as-such\_ escapes from the 18th century institutional construction of art works towards placing the whole institutions inside the objects themselves, *the objects of connoisseurship*. Connoisseurship is the polished taste of the elite a century ago according to Abrams which later on was moved into non-disciplinary objects of contemplation (Abrams 24). The Non-disciplinary objects, free from all institutional meanings, become touchstones for specification of a polished taste without being subordinated to any authority other than their own existence. The right of connoisseurship in *Dorian Gray* is delegated to the authorities while the portrait, the work of art, has nothing to say. The free beauty of art becomes dependent on the way institutions inscribe their influence upon the aesthetic existence of the Portrait and art becomes speechless. Empathy is a technique for Burke to attract people's attention to one another. It goes beyond a simple attention into feeling each other's

pleasure or placing oneself in another's stead. In this way the British and the Irish get intermingled in their identities so that no trace of the Irish will be left. So, a nationalist should know on what he should base his existence; rather than being formed under the Gaze of the Other, an Irish man should say Yes to himself. Dorian-Lord Henry relationship can be seen as the symbol of the Irish-British one, therefore, as a person who is susceptible to his master's commands, Dorian should not be identified with him but he has to comprehend the discourse of his master not as an infra-law but as a counter-law. Foucault's enunciating subjects are the events themselves within power relations, hence, subject-events do not immerse in any system of power but they just occur.

### Against Abstract Aesthetics

The sublime in Kantian epistemology is unknown; the idea of beauty for Dorian is unknown, either. The beauty's sublime presence is always hovering above his life but unattainable. In his life of sheer materiality which is prescribed by Lord Henry, no aestheticisation is possible in actuality. But Wilde wants human imagination to sublimate the chaotic life. It can be understood that through sublimation, art wants to dominate nature and human beings in an authoritarian fashion (Kaiser 120). Sybil's art was to 'spiritualise the age' (Wilde, *Dorian* 79), the age which was without any soul, Basil conjectured, but since her performance had not been above ugly life, Dorian Gray dismissed her cruelly. The regulative common sense of the Sublime can not make a room for those incapable of transcendence.

What Dorian did to Sybil is not just about the sublimation or spiritualisation of life, but it is about aesthetic regulation:

In tracing the sublime we have discovered that the sublimely other is the autonomous other, and that the scene of the sublime, its narrative, is of the life and death battle between two autonomous selves. (Bernstein 177)

Dorian's twofold self is reigned both by bodily pleasure and by the pleasure in reaching the idea of beauty; but the beauty he searched for is kept at the level of the phenomena; although, Lord Henry's naturalist aesthetics is a resistance to power relations in terms of its recuperation of body from docility, Dorian fell into the abysmal discourse of moralists as a proof for moral decay. But another aspect that fails Dorian is his imagination, being horror-stricken by the sublime. The sublime may be the Other, i.e. other discourses or it can be the very aestheticism which Wilde endorses. It may

seem that Dorian could not use aesthetics of life to mediate between ethics and art since he adopted the Paterian doctrines of Lord Henry which assumes no ethics for the life of beauty but sooner or later, Dorian 'recognises its limitations' (Manganiello 29); the sublime devours Dorian's aptitude for an artistic imagination, with that his individualism is splintered to nothing; it means that his sins should be committed through imagination for raising a mature resistance to the sublime. The raw narcissistic care of the self does lead to nowhere, but for sins to be imbued with freedom of expression, one should use imagination to moderate ethics. Imagination is capable of that vital force to be creative and one can present the sublime which is unrepresentable with its assistance. But power relations construe the ability of imaginative talent for free self-expression as sins. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the conception of sin is a discursive construct which is made significant by the abstract sublimity of power relations. Imaginative sins are not unethical crimes, but they are called so due to their disruption of institutional meanings.

There are moments, psychologists tell us, when the passion for sin, or for sin, or for what the world calls sin, so dominates a nature, that every fibre of the body, as every cell of the brain, seems to be instinct with fearful impulses. Men and women at such moments lose the freedom of their will. They move to their terrible end as autonomous move... for all sins, as theologians weary not of reminding us, are sins of disobedience. When that high spirit, that morning star of evil, fell from heaven, it was as a rebel that he fell. (Wilde, *Dorian* 179)

But there are some other theories which find in aestheticism a type of indifference to life. It is the very epitome of a disciplinary Gaze, namely, a disinterested gaze; this form of sublimity observes human life from above as the sole judge capable of measuring pure rationalities from the degraded empirical ones. Dorian as the victim of "horror-stricken imagination" fails to apprehend the horror of this transcendent realm. It is a terrifying magnitude for Dorian, since he puts off the imaginative impulse in his life. Kantian sublimity coined as Capitalist Aesthetics consumes Dorian's individuality and lets out a general abstract idea of beauty. Dorian's life is subjugated to the realm of invisible abstraction which cannot be made presentable in the realm of phenomena. But Wilde's high-esteemed role of aesthetics is not achieved through the medium of sublimity; it is spirituality which is not abstract but his is the concrete one, since the missionary role of human freedom is bestowed upon particular human beings. Aesthetics made tangible by human imagination. Indeed, Wilde's concrete aesthetics validates the individualism of each person in society as against the universalistic Utilitarianism guiding the masses to a happiness common to all, though it is abstract and inconceivable and essential. Dorian understands this fact late in his life



when he says 'punish us not for purification, but 'smite us for inequities' (Wilde, *Dorian* 207); if universalistic doctrines invite one to accept equity as justice which can be administered to all, and each person is independent, the rationale behind this perception is the social harmony which the capitalist Victorian states had formulated (Host 181). Any digression from that equity will be interpreted as evil inequities. Dorian's sense of beauty is juxtaposed; he is overwhelmed with empirical reality of life but at the other moment he seeks for an a priori Ideal of the idea of beauty. Because of that he could not live beautifully. It is said that through the abstract administration of the politics of aesthetics, different aesthetic images which all of them can represent a person with a name, a representation of certain properties which the sublime tries to show as naturally as possible. For example, if the judgment of the beautiful is not transcendental, it will be empirical and not pure. Purity is a label which sublimity tried to attach to an artwork which is detached from the vulgar life. Wilde's Individualism in this sense is a retreat to a life, an everyday life, which can escape from 'external authority and responsibility and therefore to dissociate experience from the world of reified representations' (Roberts, p.76-77). His separation from life is an escape from that life leading people into accepting authoritarian representations; and Wilde's separation from those arts which are rationalized by the sublime is a distance from an ontologically a priori aesthetics which can not conceive concrete aesthetics of human imagination. In *Salome*, the protagonist with the same name uses the art of dancing to protect herself from the gaze of Herod as the authority; hence, the truth of the veil, the human imagination 'marks boundaries involving aesthetic relations and those of power' (Riquelme 579). In general, abstract power and abstract art are alienated from Wilde's aesthetics. Wilde's approach is much like Foucault, when the origin of power is not of importance, but what is important is to find out the technologies in politics which enable these power relations as they are, as they function in society (Host 3).

## CONCLUSION

Oscar Wilde adopts aestheticism to test human autonomy and perceive to what extent one can employ aesthetic techniques for self-growth, both in personal and public life. But this event has been located in the archive in which warring or allying views have an impact on one another. On that account, aestheticism was not born in a vacuum. Different discourses exist that distributes their own theories or set up institutional sites for the enforcement of their theoretical knowledge. The great variety of discursive and non-discursive formations or the sayable mediums and non-sayable means of interaction are accountable for the creation of the aesthetic

discourse. What is desired is to know how mature individualism can be attained in society. Kantian idealism proves not to be the haven for Wilde's aesthetics of existence. Aesthetic spirituality starts with human beings and not with any disciplinary education transferred from above. This fact helps us to understand the critical stance the human imagination can have in relation to the power relations. Lord Henry is considered as a person who revives in Dorian the sense of self-problematization; it is a matter of an aesthetic self with regard to the vulgar life which authority creates for his human beings subjected to their unilateral whims. The disciplined life is the life which all Wilde's characters deny. The point in this research is whether Dorian can attain that much criticality to work on himself or not.

To be critical, one needs to genealogically look at his life and on the other side, at another realm in which the Beautiful is accessible. Nonetheless, the universality of Kantian aesthetic creates much doubt about human autonomy. If universality conditions the aesthetic judgment of people, then everyone should search for validity in the eyes of the other and this is where Foucault warns us not to be disciplined by a normative purpose of power relations and their deceit is through their humanitarian concern for a rule which can be common to all. Furthermore, the Idea of beauty in the Sublime is inaccessible to human understanding and this seems to be authoritarian but a thinker like Hegel finds harmony and repose in the representation the Idea of beauty in the realm of appearance. In my view, Dorian gets stuck in the abstraction and unintelligibility of the sublime and because of that his life remains indeterminate and chaotic.

Utility for Oscar Wilde has no value in art; he said in *The Soul of Man under Socialism* that human beings should not be identified with their possessions by the government. Art is the creator of a useless man since one should be individual in two ways: 1. estrangement from the influence of any power relations and 2. Prevention from being immersed in their belongings, objects, and surroundings; if your art becomes socially useful, its creativity will be diminished and the artist will just seek to satisfy the needs of power; moreover, if you are so much attached to the objects of desire then you will lose all your individualism since you will be one with the things. The institutional meanings of those objects can be interchangeable with you and you will gradually get liquidated into the objects around. Foucault believes in the co-existence of these discourses although one of them may have delimited the other one because it is more powerful but the weaker one should speak to make its principles, desires, and sorrow be heard. It is not in vain that Wilde introduces the Irish as good talkers but not good listeners. Dorian Gray fails to offer a counter-discourse until when he realised that his life and soul are ruined and there should be a metaphorical death to

compensate for the life which had been led astray.

My aim in this research is to show that Foucault's notion of universal contingency gives to each person in society free prospects to test his/her creativity, regardless of those systems of thought annihilating human individuality. Self-reinvention is to be procured by telling truth to oneself. The purification of your life is evasion from being disciplined; that means genealogy of self is the first step to be attended to, but most of the time human beings surrender to submergence into abstract aesthetics or universalistic theories which level any diversity. Each human individual should participate in educating the discipline of culture to oneself amidst all other discourses. Hence, the point is that human beings, contrary to Dorian's ignorance of self-mastery, take steps in the direction of criticality about themselves, their life, and their present-ness.

After experiencing self-growth through art by which human's ethical transformation is warranted, society will be more mature to cultivate itself without being regulated by any institutional subjectivity. Social change is possible when each person is free to express oneself in his imagination. In general, consensus does not, in actuality, exist as a social repose since the right of difference is undermined and a member of that so-called accordant community stands up to recite his/her account of freedom. The last word is that freedom must be found within the same governmental diagram and it is not something to be sought outside the power relations. Individualistic socialism of Oscar Wilde is a scream for human emancipation from discipline and punishment, label and representation, commodification, and objectification.

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