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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**THE CASE OF THE DISAPPEARING SELF AS PORTRAYED IN *ALICE'S  
ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND AND THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY***

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of English and Comparative Literature

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

by **Thoraia Abou Bakr Tallawi**

Under the supervision of **Dr. Nadya Chishty Mujahid**

December 2012

The American University in Cairo

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## ABSTRACT

The American University in Cairo

The Case of the Disappearing Self as Portrayed in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and  
*The Picture of Dorian Gray*

By Thoraia Abou Bakr Tallawi

Adviser: Dr. Nadya Chishty Mujahid

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are both renowned Victorian novels that successfully made it into popular culture. Alice's adventures have been reinvented many times over and inspired the remaking of it via books and films. The same goes for Dorian Gray; so much so that the original plot faded among the remakes and derivatives. This thesis analyses how the two main characters' selves fade among the collective, mirroring somehow the state of the books in modern society. In addition, the thesis discusses the role of society and the other in encouraging the self to "disappear". The disappearance is caused due to the self being pushed into different situations that cause its fission. The thesis also explores the appearance and disappearance of the authors' selves in the books, and whether the tie between the books and the authors can really be broken. Victorian society is discussed and theorists such as Mill and Bradley are employed to identify the main themes of the era. Moreover, theories of Sartre, Barthes and Jung help contextualize ideas within the thesis, along with a reliance on close reading of the texts. The probability of the return of the self after it is subjected to multiplicity and association is the main issue of the books, as well as this thesis. The conclusion is that the society's superficial approach to the self leads to its disassociation, thus making the return improbable.

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## INTRODUCTION

Being starts with the sole existence of the being-in-itself, where being is independent from surrounding elements, whether it is the external world –prompting the being-for-others– or the being-for-itself. At the discovery of “being” and the realization of the external, the being-for-itself and the being-for-others start formulating, prompting the state of “being” to move away from the condition of in-itself. At that point, the separation causes a gap between the primary state of existence, the being-in-itself, and the other states. This space is what Sartre deems as nothingness because it is a negation of being (Sartre, *Being Nothingness* 186). In addition, the being-for-itself and the being-in-itself, despite the conflict, are lodged within the same dimension of being. One however, is projected to the outside world, the other remains completely isolated. The being-in-itself is the starting point of existence. This is the point at which both protagonists begin their journey; Dorian remembers his innocent youth and Alice remembers her former self. As one moves away from the being-in-itself, there is a longing for it and a wish to return to it. Both protagonists face that issue, and there is doubt whether a return is possible as they move from one state of being to another. It seems impossible to remain in the state of being-in-itself, and at the same time, there is a great desire to do so. The protagonists’ wish to start anew is the driving factor behind such a desire. However, the societies around them and the nature of their existence stand in the way. My thesis focuses on identifying how the primary self gradually disappears into other forms of being due to the pressures of society, which causes it to

resort to duality and multiplicity. There is then the question of its return, driven by the protagonists' desires. Unable to be true to their states of being, the protagonists resort to attempt to restart their self-discovery journeys. In this paper, I explore the possibility of return and what hinders it.

The self, the memory and the body are three interconnected elements in the search for identity: "we have individuated various personalities by reference to character, attainments and (up to a point) memories, and without references to bodies" (Williams, 17). The previous statement is contingent on the body being already identified and unchanging: "there has been no reference to bodies only in the sense that no such reference came into the principles used; but it does not follow from this that there was no reference to a body in starting to individuate at all" (Williams, 17). Therefore, if the body is already identified, then the three other factors come into play more than the physical aspect. One should also note that Williams was referring to identifying multiple personalities inside one person. This may also be the case in the two books, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The former is a tale about a seven-year old girl who stumbles upon a new world, hidden from the prying eyes of adults. The latter is the story of a seemingly perfect Victorian man who is haunted by his own perverted ambitions. The two books are written by authors whom one can describe as eccentric, but in their deceptively simple stories, there is more than one tale to be spun.



Given the frequent use of the terms “self”, “identity” and “individual” throughout this paper, in this section, I will attempt to give a general understanding of each term. “By individuality I have in mind both physical character and inner reality-the existence of a world within each being” (Tuan, 308). The individual is the vessel that carries within it both the physical side and the immaterial side that manifests in ideas and emotions. In other words, the individual is the amalgamation of both aspects of a human: body and soul. The individual is also a part or a component of the whole; the recognition of the individual depends on the existence of the collective (Butler, 22), which brings the term “identity” into focus. Identity is the projection of the individual to the collective. “Identity is the limiting concept of unification: it is not true that the in-itself has any need of a synthetic unification of its being; at its own extreme limit, unity disappears and passes into identity” (Sartre, Being and Nothingness 74). In the projection of being, the infinite possibilities of being are compromised. Sartre argues that the concept of identity is unnatural; recognition limits being, which is ever-changing. While the duality of being is an expected result of the conflict between the being-in-itself and the being-for-itself, the limiting of it happens only in the existence of the other: “identity is the ideal of “one,” and “one” comes into the world by human reality” (Sartre, Being and Nothingness 74). Identity is not the unification of the natural duality that exists within, but it is a compromise to project a limited idea of being. However, the self is the opposite of identity: “the self refers, but it refers precisely to the subject. It indicates a relation between the subject and himself” (Sartre, Being and Nothingness 76). The self is a personal concept that does not factor in the collective, but

allows the subject to exist beyond the scope of recognition. As Sartre puts it, the self refers to the subject, but at the same time it “does not designate being either as subject or as predicate” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 76). While the identity dissipates the unity of being, the self tries to restore it by giving the subject distance from recognition and reality (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 77). From there, the conflict arises, between the identity and the self, at the same time, the individual holds all those factors within, while projecting a separate image to the collective. Meanwhile, the collective recognizes the individual in a different way, and tends to hold that recognition in relation with the subject, making it very difficult to change that projection. The individual remains a constant in respect to the collective, despite the continuous conflict within, and the changing aspects of her/his being.

Memory forms an essential part in the two books. Alice cannot remember her origin: “I can’t remember things as I used –and I don’t keep the same size for ten minutes together!” (Carroll, 71). On the other hand, Dorian cannot escape his memory: “memory, like a horrible malady, was eating his soul away” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 208). So, while Alice cannot completely remember who she used to be before descending into Wonderland, Dorian cannot forget who he is after he transferred his soul to the painting and after he committed different crimes. However, Dorian does remember some kind of pure existence: “he felt a wild longing for the unstained purity of his boyhood” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 243). In one case, frequent altering of the body and, in the other case, the inability of change are the causes of the identity crisis. Matters are exacerbated by the remnants of some memory of a former existence.

The bodies of the protagonists are not stable; therefore they are not permanently identified. Alice's body keeps changing in size, while Dorian's body is irregular as it does not change at all. The frequent changing of the body in the case of Alice and the unchanging body in the case of Dorian both affect the development of the characters. The body-self connection forms an important part of self-recognition. Yet, the recognition of the body's experiences cannot be fully recalled. The essence of the experiences might leave some form of mark on the body as it ages and withers, but the intricate details of the experiences are lost within the folds of the memory. "But there is also a history to my body for which I can have no recollection, and there is as well a part of bodily experience-what is indexed by the word "exposure"-that only with difficulty, if at all, can assume narrative form"(Butler, 27). Butler alludes to that point, explaining that the former existence of the body is fragile, in so far as it cannot be put into a comprehensive narrative. It affects the self, but in an indirect way through the memory.

Butler also uses the term "temporalities" that Sartre uses to explain the stages of the self's existence. Sartre believes that the self undergoes changes that cause the states of a "before" and an "after" (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 130). Sartre points out to a succession of temporalities, where the self constantly changes from a "before" to an "after", each "before" or "after" is different from the one that precedes and follows it. Therefore, the final "after" is a completely different temporality from the initial "before". While Sartre mainly addresses the self, Butler addresses the temporality of the body as well. However, the final result is the same, the unrecognizability of the initial existence: "my account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I have no

definitive story” (Butler, 27). Also, through the persistent succession of temporalities, and the passing of time, the subject forgets: “time gnaws and wears away; it separates; it flies. And by virtue of separation –by separating man from his pain or from the object of his pain– time cures” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 130-131). However, in the case of Dorian Gray, while his body does not suffer consistent temporalities or change, he does have a constant reminder of his sins: the painting. He witnesses the changing of the self as the painting morphs into its final monstrosity. Therefore, Dorian does not truly experience the “time cures” portion of existence. He is unable to move on due to the constant reminder of his transformation. The only portion of the self that he forgets is its initial, unpolluted form. In a way, the painting forms an “other” as the self is incapable of recognizing itself in the morphing painting.

The body’s recognition is different from the recognition of the self. The self is recognized internally, while the body is recognized externally (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 303). In other words, the body, like the individual is recognized by the other in relation to external factors. At the same time, there is an internal relation between the self and the body that is not available to the other: “my body as it is for me does not appear to me in the midst of the world” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 303). The way the self sees the body is different from the way the world sees it; the self cannot see the body in respect to the world. In recognition of her/his own body, the individual is looking from the inside out, while the other is looking from the outside. The relationship between the self and the body is completely different from the relationship formed between the body and the other. At the same time, during the viewing of the

body by the subject, the body –at the time– becomes the other; the individual experiences the object and its projection at the same time. “The discovery of my body as an object is indeed a revelation of its being. But the being which is thus revealed to me is its being-for-others” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 305). The recognition of the body is an external experience, belonging to the external world. As the person recognizes her/his body, they become aware of its shape and its existence in relation to the other. The physical aspect of being becomes the gateway to the other, and how they perceive the individual. The body or the individual’s appearance defines the relationship with the external world and the collective. In the case of the two books discussed, the “other” is considered the society in the form of individuals (in the case of Dorian) or in the form of an acting community (in the case of Alice). Alice is identified as multiple things throughout the book; however, Dorian remains the same person to the outside world. Yet, he bears inside him a different personality than what is shown, causing an inner conflict. While Dorian is identified as unchanging or a constant, his self is not the same and the only witness to the change is him. In this context, Dorian becomes both the subject and the other as the identification is done by outsiders who bring the attention of the subject to the change or need for change, hence reinforcing the multiplicity. “The fact that others are many amounts to nothing more than the contingent necessity, for each individual other, that it exists” (Gardner, 334). Thus, the multiplicity of an identity is a “contingent necessity” which is driven or sparked by the existence of the “other”. For Dorian Gray, the recognition of the multiplicity is done by the other in the form of himself at first. Then, the change is recognized by Basil, who

confronts Dorian, leading to his murder. Basil's recognition reaffirms Dorian's duality and sends him into a fit of rage. Up until Basil's confrontation, Dorian's duality remains in a state of flux. Dorian's ontological insecurity exists, but is not confirmed. However, after the confrontation with Basil, Dorian's doubt towards his duality fades, and his ontological insecurity worsens, leading him to add another form of existence or identity as a murderer. The identification done by an outsider, or an external other, transforms Dorian's duality into a multiplicity.

After the initial identification, there is a struggle between the being-for-itself and the being-for-others as the subject is confused as to which self is the "original" self. The original self is either identified by memory as in the case of Alice or imagination as in the case of Dorian. Dorian, initially, is shown to be a blank canvas or without a defined self or the author intentionally leaves his identity out. However, for the sake of this paper, it is assumed that Dorian is initially without an identity. What he longs for is the innocence of youth, which also alludes to another blank canvas or the lack of identity. Conversely, Alice does remember a former self at the beginning of the journey, but multiple transformations and misidentifications lead to the forgetfulness of the original self. The character then tries to return to the original self. In Alice's case, the return is possible due to the nature of her journey, which turns out to be a dream. On the other hand, Dorian cannot return to the original self because firstly there was no self to which he can return, and secondly the nature of his experience is different than that of Alice's. In this paper, I attempt to show that the multiplicity of both characters is formed due to the pressures of their respective societies and discuss the possibility of their return.

The author within the text is a conflicting issue, while some authors try to deny the connection, others confirm it. "We hope that our books remain in the air all by themselves and that their words, instead of pointing backwards toward the one who has designed them, will be toboggans, forgotten, unnoticed, and solitary, which will hurl the reader into the midst of a universe where there are no witnesses; in short, that our books may exist in the manner of things, of plants, of events, and not at first like products of man.'" (Sartre, *What is Literature?* 229). Jean-Paul Sartre, a French philosopher born in 1905 was considered a defining pillar of existentialism. Sartre's literary works such as *No Exit* and *Nausea* discussed the ideas of the self and the other. While Sartre refers to book and author as two separate entities after the publication of the book, this is not how a book is treated by the readers. His view of the author-text-reader relationship is quite idealistic. He explains that an author's work is quite holy that it cannot be given a certain price. Sartre's view of literature is not connected to the realistic dealings of the literary world. He suspended both author and book in a separate world that occasionally gets visited by readers. On their visit, the readers are incapable of connecting to the real world, but become stranded in the book-author dimension. The suspension of the readers hinders them from making connections between the author in real life and the characters or events of the book. He puts authors on a pedestal so that their creations are beyond the productions of man, but pre-existing opuses of a divine nature. He equates books with plants, something that human beings have come to find already created, and cannot be dubbed "man-made".

However, Sartre's view is hardly applicable, and includes some great exaggeration. A book is the creation of man, and as anything created by man, it holds room for error as well as for interpretation. Implying that books should be thought of as suspended creations in their own dimension is not only unrealistic, but it also alienates the readers. In addition, Sartre wants to create gods out of authors; they bestow their wisdom on mere mortals, and the receivers are not to question or interpret. In a way, Sartre wants to eliminate the reader's perspective of the book. In his attempt to allow books to portray their messages without any influence from the authors or the external world, he managed to exclude the reader's experience altogether. Reading is no longer a personal experience, but a didactic one.

Roland Barthes, a French theorist and philosopher born in 1915, helped shape the theoretical aspect of semiotics, and he was concerned with the breakdown of writing and reading. His work, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, details the stages of a lover's psyche via the writings of others, hence achieving some kind of neutral writing. Barthes believed that the removal of the author can be achieved through a different mode of writing, and not through severing the relationship between author and text. Through neutral writing, the reader is capable of deriving her/his own perspective, uninfluenced. However, the mere presentation of neutral writing can be regarded as influence, the quotations used, the type of authors, etc... These are all factors that can influence the reader one way or another, even if unintended. However, Barthes was realistic in his view of the author-text relationship. "The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically



on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*" (Barthes, 145). The author becomes a part of her/his book as readers try to find her/him within the text. Barthes argues that this practice enriches the book as it gives it a "past". The book has two sorts of existences or identities; one pre-publishing and one after. The personal relationship of creator and creation between the author and the book ends as the book becomes a public affair. Barthes is more realistic in his analysis, referring to the change in both author and book after publishing.

There remains a connection between author and text, in which the characters, events and storyline are affected by the author's life and ideas. Text contains the morality of its author, whether the author admits to it or not. Just like Basil Hallward is the creator of Dorian's painting and hence Dorian, authors are creators of their texts. They are responsible for their existence. Just like Basil transferred a part of himself to Dorian's painting, authors transfer parts of themselves to their texts, whether intended or not. The connection between author and text cannot be severed or eliminated, but it lives beyond the death of the author; it lives within the book and its readers. It is not the case of finding the author within a text, but rather identifying the theories and ideas used to create the characters and what influenced the authors to create such characters and in which way. The authors mirror their own pressures in the pressures of their characters, so that the identity crisis originates in the nonfictional world. In this paper, I try to uncover the connection between author and text, discovering how the authors influenced their respective texts. The similarities between the authors' lives and the characters' journeys confirm the connection between author and text.

Both books were written during the Victorian age Furthermore, the Victorian Age was known for its encouragement of self-denial and altruism over individualism. I explore the theories that were popular during the Victorian age and –when possible– identify how the authors reacted to them. I tie the attitudes of the Victorian society to the need for multiplicity or duality of the self and explore evidence of such need in the authors' lives.

## Chapter One

### THE VICTORIAN AGE: DEFINING MORALITY IN A CHANGING WORLD

The idea of right, wrong and the ultimate morality was very much on the minds of philosophers and theorists of the Victorian age. The era was one of prosperity, mainly due to the expansion of the British reign. It also marked the beginning of industrialization and mass production: “the Victorian period can be separated into three periods. The first period, which was from 1837 to 1851, is characterized by ‘social and political turmoil’ as well as rapid changes caused by industrialization and urbanization” (Schubert, 3). Societal values shifted towards the collective, and it became the individual’s responsibility to help with the advancement of the community. The individual's entity was no longer in focus, and a moral superficiality was prevalent: “‘early Victorian’ culture energetically embraced –even forced –change, but, equally energetically, struggled to maintain a stable consensus about individual and communal purpose” (Moran, 2). A “stable consensus” implies that the Victorian community of intellectuals believed that an agreement can be reached. However, the familial life portrayed by the monarchy: “she [Queen Victoria] became a matriarchal symbol not only for her empire, but for the entire European world” (Arnstein, 199), and the reserved public appearances served as an example for the society at the time. Queen Victoria became monarch at the age of 18 in 1837, and she died in 1901, making her

reign the longest in British History. "Queen Victoria is associated with Britain's great age of industrial expansion, economic progress and, especially, empire"<sup>1</sup>. The conflict between the individual and the collective is hardly "stable" and to reach a "consensus" in such a transitional time seems more of a dream than a reality.

Quick means of transportation became possible due to the rail roads, which extended into the country making far away, secluded places accessible. On the other hand, industrialization meant the employment of the lower classes in factories, with poor working conditions and widespread child labor. This brought into focus the importance of the middle class and the working class, with some demanding privileges to not be limited to the upper class only. "From the late 1830s, the prosperous middle class dominated this debate, enforcing its values as the means of satisfying both individual aspirations and the needs of the nation" (Moran, 3). The bourgeois became another factor in the rapidly changing society of Victorian England, setting their own rules and traditions. Mainly, their importance stemmed from the need for them; they were the ones to steer the progress of urbanization and industrialization.

The Victorian era also witnessed a noticeable increase in literacy rate and a spike in literary creativity. However, emerging from the Romantic period and due to societal reform, Victorian literature incorporates many themes and ideas. "Victorian literature uses the rhetoric of many contexts to reflect and even redefine the culture of

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<sup>1</sup> "Victoria (r. 1837-1901)." The Official Website of the British Monarchy. The Royal Household, n.d. Web. 14 Sept. 2012.  
<http://www.royal.gov.uk/historyofthemonarchy/kingsandqueensoftheunitedkingdom/thehanoverians/victoria.aspx>

which it speaks... As an object of study, this cultural milieu incorporates multiple voices, competing for control over the shaping of knowledge, the interpretation of experience, and the formation of individual identities” (Moran, 9). The conflict between the different views that resulted from this transitional period made its way to the arts, as intellectuals competed culturally to show the relevance of their opinions. Works concerned with the self, its nature, and the other were common despite the shift towards the collective. Such works include Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* among others. “In literary and visual work, moral weightiness and tender feelings were soon combined to instruct and move simultaneously. With its earnest tone, clear narrative line, contemporary settings, drama and pathos, Victorian art became a persuasive communicator of significant beliefs and values” (Moran, 10-11). Stemming from the legacy of the romantic period, the relaxed “tender feelings” were combined with the fast-paced “clear narrative line” of the transitional period. This unique combination relayed the conflict of this transitional period on a textual level as well as a narrative one.

Great attention was paid to morality, not only in identifying the basic elements of it, but also going beyond what is instinctive, thus creating the perfect society. Mill explains that people’s moral instincts or mental capability is limited. Humans’ mentality is capable of only elementary kind of morality. He also negates it being tied in any way to the emotional side of humanity, and relates it to reason or logic. He does that so as to eliminate the subjectivity of morality since emotional are subjective. “Our moral faculty,

according to all those of its interpreters who are entitled to the name of thinkers, supplies us only with the general principles of moral judgments; it is a branch of our reason, not of our sensitive faculty; and must be looked to for the abstract doctrines of morality, not for perception of it in the concrete" (Mill, 2). In order to really delve into the true, more detailed elements of morality, Mill invites thinkers to identify morals in the abstract. He wants people to not use their perceptions since they are subjective. In short, anything that is subjective cannot be used in the search for the principles of morality since it jeopardizes the entire quest. Logic, for Mill, means the abandonment of emotions and perceptions, in the search for an abstract definition of morality that can be applied to any situation.

Victorian society was more concerned with turning the idea of morality from an instinctive, unmeasured notion to a well-measured science that held no room for anomalies. Mill says that if it happened that in the past there was some consistency in morality, it was because of a standard or a principle that remained unrecognized. In other words, he is attributing consistent ethical behavior to a science or guiding principles that were not identified, mainly because there were no real efforts made to recognize that science. He defines Utilitarianism to be the greatest happiness principle. He manages to separate right from wrong by their consequential reaction. According to Mill, a right action would induce happiness and a wrong action would induce unhappiness. He offers an explanation of what he means by "pleasure", and he divides pleasure into two types, that which is instinctive and that which is more mental in nature. The instinctive pleasure is what human beings share with animals, as in the

more primal kind, and the mental pleasure is that which is more superior in quality (Mill, 8). He supposes that one would always prefer the latter rather than the former: “few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast’s pleasures” (Mill, 9).

Mill’s view is shared by F.H. Bradley in *Ethical Studies*: “yes, happiness is the end which indeed we all reach after” (Bradley, 78). He argues that individual pleasure is not happiness, and that pleasure in its primal form is a waste of a life: “if pleasure is the end, it is an end which must not be made one” (Bradley, 80). Like Mill, he refuses to acknowledge human beings’ tendency to prefer individualistic pleasure to mass benefit, which upholds the core belief of utilitarianism: “the end for modern Utilitarianism is not the pleasure of one, but the pleasure of all, the maximum of pleasurable and minimum of painful” (Bradley, 80). Both Mill and Bradley believe that if human beings had chosen individual pleasure in the past, it was because of their lack of knowledge. They do not believe that a mentally superior being would actively choose selfish, individual pleasure over social welfare.

Moreover, industrialization reinforced the renunciation of the individual as the whole society ushered itself into the age of mechanical wonders, speedier transportation and faster communication. “In a variety of ways Utilitarianism presents morality, which is primarily impersonal, appropriate to the life of the large society or city and to the relations between strangers” (Schneewind, 192). The state of isolation which enabled or prompted self-reflection and in-depth knowledge of the self was no longer

available. The romantic notion of being in the midst of nature, reflecting upon man was invaded by the onset of the railway, which linked the British countryside with the cities. “The Victorian mechanical revolution, then, was part of a broad context of interdependent revolutions –intellectual, scientific, economic, political, social, religious, artistic –in an age of revolution” (Rackin, 7). The recreation of the whole meant the recreation of the one, or the individual. A self-involved citizen, who dwells in the woods and contemplates life, would not help in the advancement of industrialization and the mechanical revolution.

In the midst of the recreation of urban living, there was no room for entertaining individualistic ideas. The more efficient society also meant a more intrusive and monitoring one, in which a fully expressed individual is not welcomed. “Renunciation will lead, if sincere, to a self defined by and identified with society” (Nadel, 62). Victorian society was looking for a harmonious environment that bordered on a utopian dream, in which everyone puts the community’s progress before their own self-gain. The morality of the time depended on removing its subjectivity, and applying a more objective view. The generalization of morality into a few simple rules of conduct meant the relinquishing of all that is personal. Even though Mill defends individual liberty in some of his essays, he still managed to relate it to the community. Liberty of the individual could never surmount the good of the community. In case of harming the collective, the liberty of the individual becomes irrelevant. “More stress falls necessarily on action in accordance with moral rules, and an impersonal principle which can be applied by some impersonal technique takes the place of the embodiment of the spirit of morality as the



source of justifiable reform of the rules” (Schneewind, 196). The application of morality was generalized to contain the whole of society, without any emphasis on the personal application and interpretation of it. Victorian ideals did not dabble in the absolute, but instead dealt with watered-down versions of most concepts. The impersonality of morality meant the cancellation of individual ownership towards moral conduct. Instead, a person was to be instructed on proper conduct, and expected to adhere to the instruction. If the person failed to follow those principles, s/he risked social exile.

The Utilitarian idea completely denounced the personal in any way or form, and instead favored the person’s actions, or what s/he portrays to society. Yet, at the same time, an individual was considered one who was capable of great thought, enabling her/him to distinguish false pleasures from real, righteous pleasures. A person living in a Victorian society would be expected to live within the social norm, as in abide by whatever laws set by society. It was not for the community to determine how the individual would abide by such laws as long as the expected end result was achieved. “In one’s relations with strangers one is concerned primarily with *what* they do, and only secondarily with *why* they do it” (Schneewind, 193). Therefore, as long as the individual displays the expected behavior from her/him –allowing her/him to integrate with society– then s/he is considered a happy, well-adjusted person in the eyes of society. The means by which s/he achieves this stability become irrelevant, or at the very least unimportant.

The idea of standardizing morality also allows the previous notion to stand true. If society does not care for the personalization of morality, and only provides a generalized moral code, then morality becomes a somewhat artificial concept. In order to achieve the generalization of it, then, some oversimplification is applied; morality ceases to be a deep, meaningful and personal concept. One application of generalization, and to which Utilitarianism is linked, is that those to whom a principle is applied are “similar to each other” and different from everyone else (Singer, 366). Therefore, the generalization of a principle guarantees the exclusion of a certain group of people. There lies the gap of the Victorian era. The oversimplification of the moral code and societal behavior leads to an emphasis on appearances rather than the core of the subject. Therefore, to be moralistic, an individual need only to oblige society’s shallow whims. This is made clear in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. By playing on the similarities of the human quality, earnest, and the name, “Ernest”, Wilde shows how the two are interchangeable in the Victorian society. Ernest is welcomed back in the arms of society when they discover that his real name is in fact “Ernest”, even though in all of his dealings throughout the play he has been dishonest. Wilde makes a statement: it is not important how you live, but it is how you portray yourself in a Victorian society that is important. As long as one has the right status, money and connections, everything will be fine. It is a superficial society claiming moral depth. The generalization of morality to an abstract collection of principles without subjectivity, results in it being blind to any exceptions. It also bypasses any unique application that can benefit the general principle because it cannot entertain anything beyond the abstract. Hence, morality should be

able to include other views within it, especially as society progresses into different modes of coexisting. Strict application of morality leads only to division within society, which intensifies its duality.

The superficiality of the Victorian community, coupled with the need for fast actions to accommodate the industrialization trend, would seem constricting for an artist. The onset of modernity meant a sudden change from the relaxed, easy life made glorious by romantics, to a fast-paced, unknown world, in which doubt towards the future is emphasized. "Lewis Carroll's rabbit hole captures, in whimsical fashion, the precise psychological state that many Victorians associate with modernity: a narrow space without a floor, constricting but unfixing, finite but unending, a world in play" (Kaiser, 106). The "psychological state" of a Victorian thrown into a world in transition, was transferred to Alice's tumbling down the rabbit hole towards the unknown. Alice, filled with Victorian ideals, faces indirectly the new in-transition Victorian world, where nothing is certain. Alice is "Victorian England", and at the same time, she is facing a "microcosm" of Victorian society, manifested as Wonderland (Kaiser, 106). Carroll is letting two things that appear different face each other, and yet, at the core of things, they are very much the same. Something recognized by the Cheshire Cat and dubbed as "craziness". Both Alice and Wonderland are "crazy", and yet they do not seem to agree. Carroll transfers his own anxieties concerned with being able to "fit in" this new Victorian world. Alice's feelings of rejection by Wonderland, portrays Carroll's own rejection by Victorian society.

Alice changes size almost as soon as she lands in Wonderland, indication of the inability to fit in society with her original shape. She is to change to fit in with the fluctuating world. The reliable rules with which she has conducted her life no longer apply in Wonderland. What is needed is an overhaul of her entire existence, much like a romanticist in a modern Victorian society. The environment of such a society gave way to the duality of personality, where the being-for-itself and the being-for-others may very well contradict each other. A person needed to project an image that allowed him to fit in society, and socialize with “strangers”. At the same time, the real self was one to be hidden from the prying eyes of those very “strangers”. This idea might very well be the basis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in which Dorian’s face is the only façade needed to maintain his status in Victorian England. The projection of purity –despite it not being true and the rumors surrounding him– is sufficient on its own. Victorian society still accepted Dorian within its folds, and he remains accepted until he takes his own life. The Victorian ideals might not have affected Dorian’s private life, but it still affected his thoughts and the way he viewed himself. Even though in appearances, he still maintained his purity, his Victorian consciousness could not deal with its loss.

## THE DUALITY OF REVEREND DODGSON AND MR. CARROLL

At the end of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice had to let go of the society-imposed notions of fitting in. In order to relinquish the control that Wonderland exercised over her, she had to “grow up”, both literally and metaphorically. As she grew in size, she also took matters into her own hands, acting as an adult in the face of Wonderland's aggression towards her. Alice had to let go of her childhood, at least in her dream-like state: “Wendy knew that she must grow up. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end” (Barrie, 1). Debuted in 1902 as *The Little White Bird*, the novel later known as *Peter Pan* became an endearing symbol for the lost innocence of childhood. Peter Pan might have successfully become a child forever, resulting in the permanent identification of his essence with innocence and sweet naivety. Yet, ordinary readers would only realize their inability to hold on to the child within them, and that confronted with a speedy, ever-changing world, their essence would have to yield and change many times over. However, Carroll wanted to retain his childish nature, which he was known for: “but this untinted jelly contained within it a perfectly hard crystal. It contained childhood ... it lodged in him whole and entire ... he could do what no one else has ever been able to do –he could return to that world.”(Woolf, 48). Unlike most people, Carroll did not shed his “childhood”. This child-like facet of his personality allowed him to create imaginative tales that mesmerized children and adults alike. Like Alice, he felt threatened by the need to change in the

wake of a changing society that demanded a certain kind of individual. At the age of 21, the threshold of adulthood, Carroll wrote “Solitude”, in which he expressed his desire to return to childhood:

I'd give all the wealth that years have piled,  
The slow result of life's decay,  
To be once more a little child  
For one bright summer day (Quoted in Pudney, 37)

Carroll wrote this poem two years after the death of his mother, while studying for his undergraduate degree at Oxford. The sentiments that the poem expresses are great sadness, a yearning for solitude and a sense of being lost:

For what to man the gift of breath,  
If sorrow be his lot below;  
If all the day that ends in death  
Be dark with clouds of woe?<sup>2</sup>

Carroll was in actuality Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, a respected member of society, a successful mathematician, and a deacon. Yet, it was not the structured world of adults in Victorian Britain that allowed him to create the immortal Alice books. In the poem, Carroll is obviously contemplating some very dark thoughts, including the value

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<sup>2</sup> “Poetry of Solitude: English Poets.” Hermitary: Resources and Reflections on Hermits and Solitude. Hermitary & Meng-hu, 2002-2005. Web. 16 Oct. 2012.  
[http://www.hermitary.com/solitude/poetry\\_english.html](http://www.hermitary.com/solitude/poetry_english.html)

of life. This is not only a case of grief due to his mother's death. Carroll was a stammerer and this particular ailment haunted him as an adult, preventing him from properly engaging society. At the same time, society was not very fond of him either, a colleague writes: "except to little girls, [Lewis Carroll] was not an alluring personage. Austere, shy, precise, absorbed in mathematical reverie, watchfully tenacious of his dignity, stiffly conservative in political, theological, social theory, his life mapped out in squares like Alice's landscape, he struck discords in the frank harmonious camaraderie of College life" (Tuckwell, Elwyn Jones and Gladstone, 69).

Carroll's need to recreate himself came as much from his shyness as from the reaction of people around him to his eccentricities. He found it hard to function as a lecturer at Oxford: "he lacked a natural gift of communicating to an assembled class" (Hudson, 12). As a deacon, he was not ambitious: "he did not proceed to Priest's Orders" (Hudson, 11). He was also not willing to submit himself to the life of a priest: "Charles Dodgson was not prepared to live the life of almost puritanical strictness which was then considered essential for a clergyman and he saw that the impediment of speech from which he suffered would greatly interfere with the proper performance of his clerical duties" (Pudney, 58). It was not the world of adults that prompted him to create the world of Wonderland, but the nonsensical world of children. The same stammer that hindered his progress in the adult world disappeared when he was around children: "reference to the speech impediment otherwise details a familiar scenario in which, in the company of his child friends, Carroll speaks without faltering" (Smith, 97).

Carroll's basic nature altered when he was around children; instead of the grieving, contemplative and embarrassed stammerer, he became a happy, creative storyteller, loved by his childish audience. "He was always happiest, as a stammerer, in the company of children. He wrote to please them, and they drew out of him, first his nonsense letters, then his immortal books" (Hudson, 32). The idea for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* flourished when during a trip up river in 1862, his little friend, Alice Liddell, asked him to tell them a story, and afterwards, it was she who asked him to write it down (Pudney, 5). Therefore, the assumption of Carroll's duality in nature does not seem far-fetched. Accounts from both parts of his life suggest that he displayed different personalities around different people. In college, he was the austere, boring and unsocial Dodgson, while at home, he was the lovable, cheerful and entertaining Carroll.

Carroll was so adamant on protecting his childish personality, away from the influence of priesthood that he kept his two lives separate. He assumed a nom de plume as Louis Carroll to assure the separation of his two identities. When asked or sent letters about the books he wrote, he denied any connection to the books, returning letters and claiming wrong address. When he was sent a letter asking him to present his books to the school library, he replied: "as Mr. Dodgson's books are all on mathematical subjects, he fears that they would not be very acceptable in a school library" (Quoted in Collingwood, 274). He exerted a lot of effort in writing his books, which were revered by the public. Yet, instead of reveling in his success publicly, and allow himself to be congratulated, he chose otherwise. "The Reverend Mr. Dodgson strenuously persisted



in public denials of any connection with these celebrated books with which he took such pains and in which he took such personal pride” (Rackin, 15). There is a split in the personality of Lewis Carroll; the quiet, respected reverend and mathematician, and then there is the childish-inclined author. His friendship with children brought him much grief as an old bachelor, and it was the heightened gossip that prompted him to give up his career in photography in July of 1880 (Pudney, 106). The duality that Carroll displayed is a reaction to the superficiality of Victorian society, and also a result of his shy, stammering personality. Carroll only fit into Victorian society as a photographer or reverend or mathematician, but not as his own natural self, and even those previous roles were threatened by his social awkwardness. Additionally, he did not seek fame as Lewis Carroll, preferring to keep his alternate personality known to only friends and family. It is not a great stretch to assume that such a duality in behavior was transferred to his writing, and thus to Alice: “for this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people” (Carroll, 43).

It is not preposterous to see Carroll in all of the characters he created; after all, fictional characters are but reflections of the many facets of their creator. Some authors tend to identify Carroll with other characters in wonderland rather than Alice –Carroll modeled Alice after her namesake Alice Liddell. However, Alice’s need for duality expressed Carroll’s own way of living. She is also a fan of logic, rules and a defined system, an attribute of the Victorian, but also the nature of a mathematician. Carroll was a shy and socially awkward stammerer, who found it hard to change his old ways: “Mr. Dodgson was the product of the old order of things in Oxford” (Strong, 39). The

rebellion of Alice at the end might express Carroll's own need to rebel against an unknown system, namely modern Victorian society with its new rules and unknown variables. "Carroll's two tales both consciously and unconsciously expose Carroll's conception of Victorian adult society and probably his personal neurosis" (Otten, 149). Wonderland is the fictitious version of Victorian society; the speedy pace of Alice's adventures, the unknown characters with no names, the impending danger of execution and the final persecution for no apparent reason. Carroll, in the image of Alice, conveys his own fears of being an incomprehensible eccentric in a very judgmental society. Carroll is making a statement about Victorian society and the world of adulthood. His poem, "Solitude" showed his need to return to childhood and his rejection of the world of adults, years before he had written Alice.

## LIVING FOR THE ARTS: THE LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE

“All art is quite useless” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 8).

He writes this statement among other satirical or perhaps provocative, statements in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Yet, Wilde seemed to dedicate his life to the useless. It appears as if it is a contradiction, between practical living and the absurd. Art is useless because what Wilde is asking of the viewer is to relinquish any form of analysis, to refrain from deriving theories or notions out of art, and instead relish the experience. In Pater’s conclusion of *The Renaissance*, he explains why analysis rips out the essence of art and our own being. He explains that with every attempt towards the dissolution of art, the experience is lost: “it is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off—that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves” (Pater and Wilde, 30). For Pater, art is about the moment one perceives it, and not the breakdown or the theorizing of it. He criticizes Hegel and Comte, and instead praises the romanticism of Rousseau; the way he described how he fell in love with literature, and the exaggeration of it. With its theorizing, the quality of art is compromised, and more is taken away from the experience, tainting it with superfluous ideas. Wilde shares Pater’s view; however, he takes it to the extreme. It can be said that the over-analyzing of art does compromise the experience, but to ban even the simplest of reflections tends to trivialize art. Without reflection on the importance of art or how it influences one’s own

self, its lasting impression dissipates. In order for art to truly affect a human being, a personal connection must be made. That connection cannot be retained through appearances only, by merely looking at art, but it is created by reflecting upon that which is seen. So, indeed, the over-analyzing of art disintegrates it into an unknown mush, where everything is taken out of context and left to rot in the abstract. However, some simple reflection is needed to maintain a connection with the self.

Art is only useless because of the banality of life; one cannot derive value from art, which is simply an imitation of life, when life is itself without value. Wilde might have been making a statement about the aesthetics, but it is not as simple as that. Like Kafka's Joseph K. dying "like a dog", Camus' Sisyphus, who chooses to roll the rock up the hill in a continuous motion, and Shakespeare, Wilde realized the infinite loop of living; "it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (5.5.26-28). Wilde realized the absurd early on and expressed it through the aesthetic experience. When a fan wrote to him and insisted on an explanation, he obliged:

My dear Sir,

Art is useless because its aim is simply to create a mood. It is not meant to instruct, or to influence action in any way. It is superbly sterile, and the note of its pleasure is sterility. If the contemplation of a work of art is followed by activity of any kind, the work is either of a very *second-rate* order, or the spectator has failed to realise the complete artistic impression.

A work of art is useless as a flower is useless. A flower blossoms for its own joy.

We gain a moment of joy by looking at it. That is all that is to be said about our relations to flowers. Of course man may sell the flower, and so make it useful to him, but this has nothing to do with the flower. It is not part of its essence. It is accidental. It is a misuse. All this is I fear very *obscure*. But the subject is a long one.

Truly yours,

Oscar Wilde<sup>3</sup>

Wilde, in his response, is continuing Pater's argument, forbidding not only the analyzing of art, but deeming any artwork requiring reflection to be unworthy. Wilde did not create something new here, but merely copied the thoughts of Pater and made them his own. He did not only negate over-analyzing art or over-thinking it, but he condemned any kind of activity that followed experiencing the work of art. He admits that the subject is "obscure" and he does not attempt to explain it any further. In a way, it seemed that Wilde's intention was to leave this statement unexplained in its entirety, maybe for the readers to make their own assumptions and impressions. He is both contradicting himself and making a point by not explaining the statement. Firstly, he does not want to supply analysis so as not to taint his own theory. Secondly, failing to explain leads people to make their own assumptions and theories. So, in essence, Wilde sticks to his own hypothesis, but his silence makes room for the theorizing of others. Indeed, Wilde's works invited thought and reflection due to their satirical nature. He

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<sup>3</sup> Wilde, Oscar. Letter to Bernulf Clegg. 1891. Manuscripts and Letters of Oscar Wilde. The Morgan Library & Museum, New York. <http://www.themorgan.org/collections/works/wilde/pageEnlarge.asp?id=1535>

seemed to be living in a paradox, where he creates art which requires pondering and yet admits that any kind of art requiring reflection is “second-rate”. Wilde was an idealist when it came to intellect and art; he considered a true artist one who lived for his art, rather than live through his art. Art was the ultimate goal and the ultimate truth: “truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself: the outward rendered expressive of the inward: the soul made incarnate: the body instinct with spirit” (Wilde, *De Profundis* 89). The way Wilde saw art makes it very hard to define it or put it into understandable terms.

The reason Wilde added the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is that he intended the book to be a manifest of his own idea of aestheticism and nothing else. “Wilde, feeling that the book had too much moral, added to it a preface which expounds sympathetically some of that aesthetic creed by which the book shows Dorian to be corrupted” (Ellmann, 24). Despite copying Pater’s line of thinking, Wilde believed that he created “aesthetic creed”, and he wanted to maintain it. Yet, Wilde made Pater’s line of thought more accessible through *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Instead of reading an essay about experiencing art for its own benefit, one can live the life of an aesthete through the characters of *Dorian Gray*. So, while Wilde’s theories are not unique or new, he was able to forever immortalize Pater’s arguments through the image of Dorian Gray. Dorian Gray is not merely a main character in a novel, but he also serves as the model of Pater’s perfect aesthete. Unlike Carroll, Wilde did not want people to seek a moral out of the book, even if it was accidental. Carroll himself never sought to define Alice’s adventures, but he did not mind people coming up with their own explanations: “words mean more than we mean to express when we use them: so a whole book ought to

mean a great deal more than the author meant. So, whatever good meanings are in the book, I am very glad to accept as the meaning of the book” (Carroll, Pudney, 19). Carroll wrote his books to entertain children with the nonsensical nature of his writing, and maybe a way in which to indulge himself in the world of childhood.

On the other hand, Wilde wrote to indulge his own sense of the arts, where the creation of art became the only intention and goal. To explain his art to people would be a waste of time, and people seeking a moral out of his writing was a waste of his own efforts. His works were created to be appreciated, indulged in and nothing else. For him, art transcended anything else and existed on a pedestal on its own, untouched and misunderstood by artists and people alike. “In the artist's own experience, of course, art is fundamentally undefinable, unsayable; there is something sacred about its demands upon the soul, something inherently mysterious in the forms it takes, no less than in its contents” (Oates, 76). Oates begins the paper quoting Wilde’s “all art is quite useless”, and then begins to explain the “futility” of art. Oates explains how the artist views art, or what s/he creates. Oates seems to mirror Sartre’s view of literature, putting the artist’s creation on a pedestal, and making it seem inhuman. Oates tries to explain the unexplainable, namely how an artist portrays his creation. She argues that no artist can truly explain their work, and that most artists would prefer viewers or readers to infer their own ideas from their work. She also addresses the issue of morality of art and seems to side with Wilde’s notion that books cannot be moral or immoral. In short, the artist creates her/his own ethics through their work, thus freeing her/his art.

Yet, the matter remains suspended without any concrete definition. That is why Wilde ended his letter saying that the matter was “obscure”. Wilde’s obscure ideals were hard to live by in the Victorian age, when theorists and philosophers were trying to get to the basis of morals and life itself; to them, everything was definable and explainable. Wilde longed for the time of Romanticism and the return to nature: “we call ours a utilitarian age, and we do not know the uses of any single thing. We have forgotten that water can cleanse, and fire purify, and that the Earth is mother to us all. As a consequence our art is of the moon and plays with shadows, while Greek art is of the sun and deals directly with things. I feel sure that in elemental forces there is purification, and I want to go back to them and live in their presence” (Wilde, *De Profundis* 144). Wilde compares art to the basic elements, and he accuses the Victorian era of being unable to realize the true use of anything. He praises Greek art for its simplicity, and its use of basic elements. Again, Wilde is contradicting himself. He admires Greek art because it “deals directly with things”, and yet his own art is not straightforward. *Dorian Gray* is fraught with metaphors. Wilde does use the main elements of society to criticize it, but he does not use them in a straightforward or simple way. However, Wilde also sheds some light on society in the previous statement: it is society’s own dealings that have resulted in the shadowy use of art.

Wilde felt that he did not belong to his age’s call for reason or law or religiousness, and he also deemed himself different from any other artist of his time: “Neither religion, morality, nor reason can help me at all. Morality does not help me. I am a born antinomian. I am one of those who are made for exceptions, not for laws”



(Wilde, De Profundis 80). Wilde sought out uniqueness and refused to identify himself with other theorists or authors. He shunned society as society shunned him by placing himself above its rules and “normalcy”. In a community that revered morality and an ethical code, Wilde refused all of the traditional notions of ethics and morality. It can be argued that Wilde could not be defined by the regularity of the Victorian Age. However, Wilde did not stop at that, but he took it to extremes, as expected from his flamboyant personality. He did not write “I became” but instead wrote “I was born”, meaning that he was destined to be the odd one out, who does not fit with society’s notion of what is normal and does not go by its rules. In a society that favors self-negation and altruism, Wilde was demanding individualism: “but for the full development of Life to its highest mode of perfection, something more is needed. What is needed is Individualism” (Wilde, The Soul of Man Under Socialism 6).

With the boom of industrialization and the demand of society to come together to support it, the threat of a well-meshed society was imminent. The calls for a more economic-friendly community were increasing, where everyone would work for the sake of the country, while having the same rights and duties. Such community would mark the end of individualism and uniqueness, and the beginning of uniformity. In his essay, he rejected the idea of Authoritarian Socialism because of its lack of freedom: “It is clear, then, that no Authoritarian Socialism will do. For while under the present system a very large number of people can lead lives of a certain amount of freedom and expression and happiness, under an industrial-barrack system, or a system of economic tyranny, nobody would be able to have any such freedom at all” (Wilde, The Soul of

Man Under Socialism 11). Wilde also goes on to blame private property for the fall of the human, saying that people became more concerned with gaining property than being individuals. He blamed private property for the hindrance of growth of man's soul and its ultimate degradation. Wilde seems to be contradicting himself; he blames possession to be the reason behind the downfall of man, yet at the same time he rejected socialism. However, his sole concern is the individual. He wants society to consider the individual to be the most important element of the community, without any distractions. Wilde considers property to be distracting from the individual and from self-expression, as people greedily seek it out. He believes that society is more concerned with protecting property than it is concerned with protecting the individual. Like his view of art, Wilde is adopting another idealistic view, where he abolishes private property in order to free the individual.

Wilde believed that by freeing man from the need to accumulate possessions, one could free man's personality so as to reach its greatest heights. He believed that authority was the reason behind man's degradation and his inability to flourish: "all authority is quite degrading. It degrades those who exercise it, and degrades those over whom it is exercised" (Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* 23). Authority meant the enforcement of regulations and rules in an attempt to control the human, hence the evil within, which stifles the personality. That same notion is shared by Lord Henry in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "the mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives" (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 25). To deny the savage was to repress the self. Wilde might have had many attributes which he shared with the

character of Dorian Gray, but his nature was also similar to Lord Henry's. "In a letter of Father Bowden which has survived, the priest says, 'Let me repeat to you as solemnly as I can what I said yesterday, you have like everyone else an evil nature and this in your case has become more corrupt by bad influences both mental and moral, and by positive sin; hence you speak as a dreamer and sceptic with no faith in anything and no purpose in life.'"(Ellmann, 22). The letter was written in 1878 while Wilde was still at Oxford, experimenting with different modes of religiosity and existence. The remark points to Lord Henry's nature: he preached about humanity, evil nature and the hypocrisy of society, egging on Dorian to experiment with his youth, while he himself remained on the sidelines; a man of words rather than action. Wilde's inability to act made its way to his writing; Bloom attributed it to the despair of a stifled artist in an unappreciative community. Lord Henry was mesmerized by Dorian's innocent beauty, but at the same time he wanted to dominate him, and in some way, destroy him. His troubles did not steer him towards outspoken rebellion, but towards one that is hidden. Despite his flamboyant personality, his personal life remained successfully hidden. Wilde was not a person who liked confrontation, but instead reveled in hidden, satirical pieces of literature. "In some curious sense, there is a sickness-unto-action in Wilde's life and work, a masked despair that led him to the borders of that realm of fantasy the Victorians called 'nonsense' literature" (Bloom, 2). In addition, like Wilde, Lord Henry preaches about the benefits and importance of individualism: "Lord Henry's attitude is suggested by his advocacy of Individualism: 'one's own life –that is the important thing. As for the lives of one's neighbours, they are not one's concern. Besides, Individualism

has really the higher aim” (Quoted in Dawson, 74). Wilde adopts Utilitarianism’s opposite view, where attention is not paid to others, but instead to one’s own self. How others behave becomes irrelevant, and the individual’s aim and life become more important than that of the collective. This view manifested in Dorian’s behavior, and eventually led him to a life of senses, as taught by his creators. Yet, one might argue that the three main characters combined portray Wilde’s attitude in life: Basil is the pure aesthete, Lord Henry is the man of words and epigrams, and Dorian is the experimenter. The three combined form the attitude, notions and ideas adopted by Wilde.

Wilde’s similarity to Lord Henry, who seemed to be a recycler of empty opinions and baseless epigrams, invites claims regarding Wilde’s originality. Alfred Douglas, a scorned lover and the main reason behind the downfall of Wilde, claimed that his originality was exaggerated. “In spite of all he wrote and said on the subject, and in spite of all that has been said and written by his admirers, there is nothing of Wilde that persists in criticism on the art side which is not to be found in Whistler’s ‘Ten o’clock’ or which he had not gleaned either from his contemporaries or from older writers on the literary side” (Douglas, 45). Douglas might have been speaking out of vengeance after reading Wilde’s *De Profundis*, in which he attributes all his life’s troubles to his relationship with Douglas. Yet, he is not mistaken. As discussed before, Wilde did not create new opinions or theories, but he merely took others’ theories and made them his own. Critics agree that Wilde does not really offer greatly innovative views or opinions, and that he successfully reinvented the views of other thinkers through his writing. “Pater declared that, life being a drift of momentary acts, we must cultivate each

moment to the full, seeking 'not the fruit of experience, but experience itself as our goal'. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian embraces this doctrine as his own in exactly these words without acknowledgment, as if to his other crimes he was adding that of plagiarism" (Ellmann, 12). Wilde adopted Pater's aestheticism, in which art became the only goal to which he aspired. He recreated it in Dorian Gray's character, who sought experience after experience without ever getting his fill; his goal being very expansive. Lord Henry encourages Dorian to live according to his senses, relishing each experience in its entirety as it happens. However, "plagiarism" seems to be too strong a claim. *Dorian Gray* is, after all, a work of fiction and not an essay. Wilde took Pater's ideology and formed a story to tell it. Pater himself is not the first creator of the "art for art's sake" doctrine, which he adopted from the French theorist, Théophile Gautier<sup>4</sup>. In other words, Wilde is not the first or last author to adopt other theorists' views and work it into his work. The progression of theories depends on their discussion through critical essays as well as works of fiction.

What Douglas could not admit, due to his injured ego, is that Wilde took popular opinions of his time and made them accessible to regular readers. In other words, he reinvented them or gave them life so as not to remain forgotten theories in ancient books, but epigrams that echoed through different time periods and locations. Just like Pater adopted Gautier's theory, and added some new attributes to it, Wilde took Pater's ideology and introduced a more profound version. Wilde successfully took the idea of

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<sup>4</sup> "Theophile Gautier (French Author) -- Britannica Online Encyclopedia." Web. 26 Nov. 2012.  
<http://www.britannica.com.library.aucegypt.edu:2048/EBchecked/topic/227288/Theophile-Gautier>

the ultimate aesthete to the extreme, and toyed with the fate of such an individual. He realized that an aesthete is capable of insurmountable self-sabotage. The darkness of the senses overcomes the pure experience of art, ultimately ruining the viewer. “The duplication produces not a repetition of Pater but a new version of his views that says what he cannot or will not articulate, including recognition of the dark dynamics of doubling and reversal that inhabit those views” (Riquelme, 71). Wilde explores the duality of Pater’s aestheticism in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Art remains the goal for Dorian, partially through maintaining his unchanging looks and partially through his need to collect rare artifacts. Dorian feeds on experience and his artistic collection, but to no avail: his hunger remains unsatisfied. The dual side of art for art’s sake; one gets to immerse her/himself in art and revel in beauty, but the emptiness of the soul remains gnawing from the inside. That is why Wilde’s work receives recognition because it explores old ideas in new ways, examining all the sides of the story. “Wilde, in fact, does not imitate a British writer; he echoes his writing. He does so for the same reason that the mythological figure Echo repeats already existing language: in order to say something quite different” (Riquelme, 75). Such is the way of a cynic, using the words of others to make a completely different point. Wilde, the ultimate cynic, channeled this into his writings, transforming his literary work into a duality all on its own. It is that same trait that allowed him to exist within Victorian society without being persecuted: the layering of different meanings in his writing meant that the deepest one could go unnoticed, or at least shrouded in doubt.

## Chapter Two

### THE SUSPENSION BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: *ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND*

Even though Alice incorporates the notions and ideas of a Victorian child, she is hardly a regular child. She does display a need to follow the rules, as well as a tendency to expecting a logical system. Yet, Alice does not question the premise of her journey's instigator: "nor did Alice think it so very much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself, 'Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I shall be too late!' (when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural)" (Carroll, 38). It is only after some thought that she detects the irregularity of the situation. Nevertheless, Alice, at the time, does not display any wonder or amazement. Even when she is falling down the rabbit hole, Alice remains calm. She thinks about how far down the earth she is, but does not occur to her to entertain any thoughts of panic, death or injury. For a child of seven, she barely even cries as she tumbles down into the unknown –something unexpected. Alice is more concerned with being overheard speaking nonsense rather than tumbling to her death: "she was rather glad there was no one listening" (Carroll, 39).

For a child, being able to know one's place in relation to the surrounding world is very important. Without the consistency of size, the concepts of hierarchy, relation to others and behavior are all jeopardized. "To all of us the concept of constant or

predictable size is important; to a child of seven it is often a matter of physical and emotional survival” (Rackin, 38). The issue of Alice’s size is a physical transformation, but whether it should be taken literally or metaphorically is a cause of speculation. However, it is clear that the change in her size causes her identity crisis. After several transformations, early on in the story, Alice immediately starts to question whether she is the same person or has been transformed overnight: “I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, who in the world am I? Ah, that’s the great puzzle!” (Carroll, 46). Alice does not use “a” to indicate the great puzzle, but uses “the” as if it has always been a great puzzle, and as if she has been already trying to solve such a puzzle. Alice is leaving the period of life where a child is greatly attached to the parent, and so she is discovering the world on her own. She has no guide, especially in Wonderland, and so has to rely on her own instincts, and also on the information she has collected. Puberty is the time when a child realizes her/his own individuality, but Alice has not reached that place yet. She still craves the collective by following its rules and expecting certain reactions. “In psychoanalytic terms, she moves somewhere between two profound early stages of consciousness, the Oedipal period and puberty” (Otten, 150). Alice might have always questioned her identity; after all, she is at the age of the beginning of perception. She is realizing the world around her, acquiring its rules and regulations, and trying as a little girl to define herself within it.



The identity crisis or quest is already there, yet, it is the world of Wonderland that prompts her to delve deeper into the subject. The idea of an identity crisis seems to be abundant in the world of Wonderland: “‘once,’ said the Mock Turtle at last, with a deep sigh, ‘I was a real Turtle’” (Carroll, 114). The Mock Turtle is aware of the change that occurred to its self, despite the fact that it is repetitive in its conversation and very slow, it is the only character that remembers a different past. The Mock Turtle, like Alice, knows that it is not itself, and that there was once a different reality. It sighs, showing regret and sorrow at its current state. On the other hand, the Duchess who attempts to give Alice some morals fails miserably at giving her anything of substance. Yet, she does highlight the frivolity of Wonderland: “and the moral of that is ‘be what you would seem to be’ –or if you’d like to put it more simply– ‘never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise” (Carroll, 111). There is no need to behave like yourself, but instead behave according to the perception of others of you, or what you seem to be. The Duchess is making a statement on the superficiality of Wonderland’s system. If compared to the straightforward statement made by the Mock Turtle, it is clear that the two are different structurally.

Carroll is deliberately using nonsensical sentences to portray the Duchess’s perceived wisdom as shallowness. The illogical Wonderland is governed by rules that Alice does not know; it seems as if the characters keep making their own rules. Therefore, the documentation of how Wonderland works seems to be an impossible

feat. Wonderland maintains the façade of logic, but Alice –a dweller of Wonderland– discovers that it only provides the appearance of logic, but none of the substance. Wonderland embodies all the shallowness of society that only cares for appearances, in short, an exaggerated form of Victorian society. “Wonderland is a game world which ostensibly values definition and clarity, although it signally fails to achieve these” (Blake, 18). There is a paradox in Wonderland; it is a world of loopy rules and a demanding queen, which might resemble reality, but all those rules and monarchs lead to a nonsensical existence. Much like the use of law jargon in *The Trial*, Carroll is using the system of rules and regulations to make a statement about its absurdity. Like a madman, Wonderland expects the newcomer to understand all its incoherence. An insane person does not explain their logic and neither does Wonderland. Instead of a simple explanation, there is uproar at Alice’s inability to go along with the rules. Alice is even more confused due to the similarities between her own Victorian logic and Wonderland’s: tea time, a queen, and childish jingles. However, they are all mixed up and she is unable to recognize them. “Rather this world represents an older level of mental organization, characterized by an addiction to games and rules, with which Alice is expected to play along” (Blake, 13). Wonderland is also a world of self-involvement, in which the characters entertain only notions of themselves and their worlds, and Alice is presumed to naturally understand their stories and predicaments. They do not only expect comprehension, but also sympathy, and they are easily offended. Alice is not treated as a newcomer or even welcomed; instead she is treated as a burden, forcing her to try and accommodate herself to the needs of the new world. Wonderland is the

world that can be considered reversed when compared to Alice's "primary" world (Little, 43). Animals dressed up in humans' clothing, lack of sanity, and the arbitrary principles of the world all contribute to a jumbled existence, at least for Alice. The reversal of rules, abundance of talking animals, and the lack of logic is only exacerbated by the lack of names. Little points out that characters that are known by human names do not particularly make an appearance in the book, so that the only one with a proper name is Alice. "The absence of proper names increases the strangeness of Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land, and fosters the alienation already inspired by the lack of geographical names" (Little, 43). He argues that the lack of names cause a sense of "alienation" because the relationships with the characters become impersonal and superficial. Finding out the name of something not only enables the namer to become familiar with the named object, but it also allows him to exert some power or authority over the named object. When things remain unnamed, a hierarchy is not possible and therefore a logical world with a system and structure cannot be created. The lack of names signals the impersonality of Wonderland, where all characters are the same despite the fake hierarchy attempted by the queen and her entourage.

Alice's identity crisis is encouraged by the characters in Wonderland, who seem to mistake her for all kinds of things (except a little girl); the rabbit mistakes her for his housemaid, while the pigeon mistakes her for a serpent. Alice does not try to deny the first, but subordinately accepts the role, although she is aware of her class-oriented existence as a "lady"; another facet of the Victorian society. However, in the case of the serpent she tries to deny the accusation despite her long neck: "she was delighted to

find her neck would bend about easily in any direction, like a serpent” (Carroll, 76). Alice portrays classic case of repression. Despite being happy about her serpent attribute, when she is accused of it, she quickly denies it. “Accused of being a serpent, Alice claims to be a little girl. She is of course both” (Otten, 153). Alice at the time displays attributes of a serpent, but her initial existence as a little girl cannot be denied. Otten sees the dual existence as a reference to the original sin, where Alice becomes both Eve and the serpent, especially after she admits to eating eggs, a symbol of “cannibalism” (Otten, 154). Yet, the pigeon admits that it does not matter to it whether Alice is serpent or a little girl, it only matters if she is after its eggs. Alice tells her she would not care for raw eggs, which settles the argument. Considering this part of the story as a reference to the original sin is a bit far-fetched. Firstly, Alice is acting as a child, who becomes elated at the prospect of any new experience, but when caught in the act, becomes afraid and denies. Secondly, Alice is still a little girl, and she is not after the eggs. If it was a reference to the original sin, then Alice would have at least tried to attain the eggs. Thirdly, given the fact that Carroll was writing a children’s book, and that he preferred his childish existence, it seems unlikely that he would subject his young readers to such a reference. The pigeon’s confusion of Alice as a serpent because she portrays attributes of serpents seems more of a statement about the pigeon than about Alice. The pigeon is part of Wonderland, and like the Duchess, she takes people for what they “seem” to be. If Alice eats eggs and has a long neck, then to the pigeon, she is a serpent and it does not matter what she was or is. In fact, the pigeon drops the subject altogether, showing the trademark inconsistency of Wonderland, and also the instinctive nature of a mother

afraid for her offspring. When it identifies Alice as unthreatening, it assumes the position of fake authority and impoliteness just like the rest of the characters, ordering Alice to “be off”. Alice obeys, failing to seek confirmation of her “little girl” status from an outsider. This fortifies her state of confusion: “how puzzling all these changes are! I’m never sure what I’m going to be from one minute to another!” (Carroll, 78).

Alice’s change in size throughout the book is prompted by external factors. She finds herself compelled to grow or diminish in size so as to fit in the nooks and crannies of Wonderland. She does not will those changes, but she is forced into them by the circumstances around her. Those same changes in size and the inability of being identified correctly cause her to further question her identity. More so that she is unable to give a satisfying answer to any question concerning who she is:

‘Who are you?’ said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation.

Alice replied, rather shyly, ‘I – I hardly know, sir, just at present – at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times since then.’

‘What do you mean by that?’ said the Caterpillar sternly. ‘Explain yourself!’

‘I can’t explain myself, I’m afraid, sir’ said Alice, ‘because I’m not myself, you see.’ (Carroll, 70).

Alice is still displaying the attributes of a law-abiding Victorian child, who needs the comfort of a system in order to define herself. She is a “little girl” compared to the adults of her world, but to the nonsensical Wonderland, she seems to be the only “adult” around. Even adults with authority in Wonderland such as the Duchess, the Queen and the King, act like children. The Duchess avoids responsibility by giving her

child to Alice, a stranger, to take care of it, the Queen orders the beheading of everyone in the book, and the King invents rules to suit the situation.

However, Alice remains the “little girl” of Victorian society until she finds herself in court, the ultimate symbol of social order. Inspired by the rebellion of the Cheshire Cat as he hovers nonchalantly over the pandemonium of Wonderland, she attempts her own act of rebellion. The more nonsensical the court proceedings are, the more Alice, voluntarily grows in size. This time, she does not need a stimulus, but only the act of chaos she witnesses: “just at this moment Alice felt a curious sensation, which puzzled her a good deal until she made out what it was: she was beginning to grow larger again” (Carroll, 130). Her growth immediately starts to affect Wonderland as she begins to squeeze the Dormouse seated next to her. When he tells her not to grow, she dismisses his command. Alice is beginning to literally grow into herself as she stands up to the chaos and madness of Wonderland. When finally the queen issues an order for Alice’s execution, she creates a full state of rebellion, acknowledging the insignificance of the inhabitants of Wonderland:

‘Off with her head!’ the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

‘Who cares for you?’ said Alice, (she had grown to her full size by this time.)

‘You’re nothing but a pack of cards!’ (Carroll, 141).

Alice finally identifies Wonderland for what it is and through freeing herself from the need to abide by rules, she is capable of facing its madness. That same madness goes unacknowledged by all characters of Wonderland except the Cheshire Cat:

'But I don't want to go among mad people,' Alice remarked.

'Oh, you can't help that,' said the Cat: 'we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.'

'How do you know I'm mad?' said Alice.

'You must be,' said the Cat, 'or you wouldn't have come here.' (Carroll, 87).

The Cheshire Cat is capable of identifying the chaos within Alice; a common ground between her and Wonderland. Alice might not be a metaphor of the original sin, but she is tainted. She is tainted by her primary world's ideals that prevent her from going along with the madness of Wonderland. Even though the Cheshire Cat realizes the "crazy" in her, she remains unable to fit in with the Wonderland society. The Cheshire Cat is also an example of a somewhat sane character living midst the insanity of Wonderland; it serves as a role model of some sort for Alice. Yet, it is not enough; the damage has already been done. Her obsession with systemized living –courtesy of her Victorian education– separates her from the Wonderland society. She is labeled as an outsider from the beginning, and her behavior does not allow her to overcome such a label. "The measure of Alice's innocence is her ability to journey into Wonderland and the measure of her fallen nature is her inability to remain there" (Otten, 152). Alice shares more with Wonderland than she thinks; after all, what prompts her to follow the Rabbit is her boredom with her sister and sitting by the bank. Alice's criticism of her own world, ruled by logic and adults, leads her to Wonderland, which lacks both. Nevertheless, Alice still cannot shed her nature, not until the Cat points out the common ground.

The Cheshire Cat seems to be the only character that still retains some logic, something perhaps made possible by its ability to disappear. It is able to physically dissociate itself from Wonderland, and therefore to choose when or how to be affected by its chaos. The Cheshire Cat is capable of controlling how it projects itself. Therefore, its identity can enjoy some unity as the conflict between the being-for-itself and the being-for-others lessens. Its disappearance gives it control over itself and over its society. The Cheshire Cat's dissociation encourages Alice to seek her own. Her own detachment begins with her growth, which immediately separates her from Wonderland. She obviously sheds the need to "fit in" and instead seeks to distinguish herself. Alice stops trying to make sense of the world around her and acknowledges the truths that only she knows. Alice does rebel, but she does that by acknowledging the logic within her and seeing the frivolity of the characters around her. In a way, she both incites chaos by refusing to abide by the mad rules of Wonderland and accepts the logic of her old world. She develops only to return to her former self, someone between innocence and experience. Alice does not fall from heaven; she escapes from a world that she does not fancy into another world that confuses her. Wonderland cannot be deemed as "the garden", because it is not perfect or even pleasant. It is different, which is something that Alice appreciates, but eventually she gets frustrated with it. Her fall highlights her duality; the need to belong to a world, but at the same time craving another. "In effect, Alice's fall is a fall in reverse –that is, a return to the garden" (Otten, 152). Yet, Carroll ends the book in a subtle circular motion. Alice does not change, not really, she just remains herself and at the same time she returns to her former world.



Her rebellion causes her to return to square one of her journey. She realizes the dream and instead of denouncing it as nonsense, she admits that it was a wonderful experience: “so Alice got up and ran off thinking while she ran, as well she might, what a wonderful dream it had been” (Carroll, 141). She still does not like reality, but longs for the dream of Wonderland with all its crazy adventures.

Alice, when she woke up, became once again the innocent, Victorian child, who finds reality to be dull. However, at the end of the dream, she became the logic-adopting adult facing the chaos of Wonderland. She reverses her personality according to the world in which she finds herself, sort of a survival mechanism. One might have expected Alice, after her anger-driven rebellious act in Wonderland, to deem the dream as annoying or illogical. However, she does not. She returns to being the “little girl”, gently woken up by the sister and given direction to what to do, but she still longs for Wonderland. The real Alice is not really known. Like the Cheshire Cat, she dissociates herself from the world she is in to ensure her survival, adapting, morphing and changing to fit in the world. However, despite Alice’s attempts to adapt, she cannot withstand being in wonderland, and she rebels, which allows her to return to her primary world. The ending is left ambivalent; Alice is successful in shedding her Victorian nature, but that leads her back to her Victorian loop. She neither eliminates the incomprehensible world of Wonderland nor escapes her boring Victorian world. “Does Alice succeed in destroying the game? Or does it succeed in evicting her, by ejecting her from her dream?” (Blake, 23). The question seems to be unanswerable, much like the riddles in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, one is left with no definite answer to whether Alice’s

adventures have ended or not, or even whether Alice has accepted her world or rejected it. "What is less clear is whether or not the transformed quester lives happily ever after. One suspects that such is part of the unfinished nature of every journey in the nineteenth century, and that the inheritor of Victorian spaces may turn out to be just as tyrannical as those who originally rescued him and set him to work" (Gordon, 100). The end is certainly unclear. Maybe Carroll was portraying his own anxieties towards an unchanging man in a quickly changing world. He, like Alice, is stuck between two worlds, unable to develop to a character or a person that fits in either one. The undefined end expresses his state of mind, which is in turn transferred to the reader.

One is left with the dissatisfaction of no definite answer, but only to mull on the riddle of why a raven is like a writing desk. Carroll cleverly weaved his story to make it seem as if it is on an endless loop, where Alice is left in a state of limbo between logic and madness, reality and dream world, adulthood and childhood. However, maybe the blurring of the lines enables the readers to really ponder their existence. "If we accept the strong hints that Alice visits other dimensions and undergoes an experience which is 'true', in Tolkien's sense, the emotional detachment which the dream framework gives will disappear, obliging us to treat the two lands and their inhabitants more seriously as comments on the human situation" (Little, 53). The reader only has to accept the reality of Wonderland and that it was not a dream so as to be catapulted into a third existence, where one can calmly observe both worlds and make dissociated conclusions. Like the Cheshire Cat, readers will hover around, appearing and disappearing at will, while still maintaining some internal logic to guide them through the twisted turns of reality and

Wonderland. However, Carroll did not leave it open-ended, but he deliberately made Alice admit that it was a “curious dream”. She even tells her sister about it, and transfers the wish of Wonderland to her. Yes, the reader may wonder and critics may gather evidence towards it not being a dream, but the ending remains the same. The admission of the heroine does not change, and so it is forever embalmed as a dream.

## CREATING AN AESTHETE: DORIAN GRAY

“Beauty is a form of Genius –is higher, indeed, than Genius, as it needs no explanation” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 29).

Lord Henry injects Dorian with the need for aestheticism, allowing him to become aware of his own youth as he gazes over Basil’s painting. Dorian realizes that he would never be as young as he was at that moment, and starts to resent the painting. However, when Basil threatens to destroy it as it has inflicted pain on his friend, Dorian is the one to stop him:

‘Don’t, Basil, don’t!’ he cried. ‘It would be murder!’

‘I am glad you appreciate my work at last, Dorian,’ said Hallward, coldly, when he had recovered from his surprise. ‘I never thought you would.’

‘Appreciate it? I am in love with it, Basil. It is part of myself, I feel that’ (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 35).

Dorian has already exchanged his soul for eternal youth, with his soul becoming lodged within the colored layers of the painting. Instinctively, he jumps to protect it. Lord Henry’s effect on Dorian is almost immediate: in one meeting he makes Dorian realize his calamity. Before meeting Lord Henry, Dorian was ignorant of his own beauty. He was admired by Basil, but the painter did not allow him to realize his own self because he did not engage with it. Basil was only concerned with the aesthetics of Dorian, not his soul or his mind. Lord Henry, on the other hand, saw a pure canvas and sought to destroy it with his empty epigrams. Lord Henry saw a blank canvas and sought to make it his own.

He found a chance to pass on all of his theories to someone who can actually carry them out. The thought of living vicariously through Dorian excited him. The experiences that he shied away from –for fear of social ruin– can now be carried out. He did not want to guide Dorian, but to dominate his very existence: “He would seek to dominate him –had already, indeed, half done so. He would make that wonderful spirit his own” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 45). He had already done so by addressing his mind instead of his looks. At the same time, he made him realize his own beauty. Lord Henry sets into motion the duality of Dorian: the duality of man and painting, where Dorian magically transfers part of himself to the painting. The duality extends to every part of the book: “Central to the novel’s structure is the doubling not only of person and painting that Pater mentions, but also of picture and book, both the book within the narrative that Lord Henry gives Dorian, and the book we read that is also a *Picture*” (Riquelme, 76). Basil creates the painting, which introduces Dorian to Lord Henry, and at the same time brings his attention to his own beauty. At the same time, Lord Henry is the one who gives him the yellow book that stains his psyche with all sorts of depravity. Both picture and book serve as important elements in the destruction of Dorian Gray. In addition, Riquelme points out the transference of the duality to the reader. As it progresses, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* becomes both book and picture. The artistic elements within the book help highlight the narrative, so that the reader experiences and almost sees the transformation of Dorian. In addition, Dorian has two creators: Basil and Lord Henry, which is another doubling. They both influence him, but each in a different way: “Hallward and Wotton split up the dual role that Leonardo da Vinci fills as the

quintessential artist-scientist” (Riquelme, 77). Their own collaboration enables the transference of Dorian’s soul to the painting. So, in a way, they “collaborate” in the production of the painting and of Dorian (Riquelme, 76). However, they do not really form an “artist-scientist” kind of person. They are both connected to art, and they relish it in different ways. Lord Henry is hardly a “scientific thinker”, especially not the Leonardo da Vinci type. He does not create anything new, but he just repeats vacant theories passed down from cynical men. He does not offer a science, but merely old wives’ tales. The only “scientific” attribute of Lord Henry is that he likes to experiment with Dorian. While Basil likes to create art, Lord Henry likes to watch it; two sides of the same coin.

Basil and Lord Henry portray the two modes of aestheticism, where Basil lives for beauty and the imitation of beautiful things, while Lord Henry lives without a real goal, only to admire beautiful things and corrupt them. Lord Henry seeks to dominate Dorian, based solely on his purity and beauty. He finds him a challenge for his corrupting intellect, which remains empty of any real substance, something that Basil realizes: “you never say a moral thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 10). Lord Henry himself is living a double life, where he preaches epigrams he does not use in reality. In meeting Dorian, he finds an opportunity to inflict all of his immorality unto Dorian, whose youth compels him to seek all of life’s experiences. Hence, Lord Henry will be able to live vicariously through Dorian and witness the application of his empty immorality: “although he is no more interested in Dorian-as-an-individual than Basil, he is fascinated by Basil’s confession

about Dorian's effect on him. He insists on meeting Dorian so as to experience the sensation that Dorian will arouse in him" (Dawson, 76). Just like Dorian transferred part of himself to the painting, Lord Henry transferred part of himself to Dorian. Lord Henry represents the society as he pushed Dorian to change so as to fit his own ideals and thoughts. While Basil preferred to keep Dorian silent and to fall in love with his beauty, Lord Henry fell in love with the possibility of corrupting Dorian's purity.

Dorian's personality before meeting Lord Henry is not known, and the reader gets to see him only through Basil's eyes. Basil admits to some kind of influence: "because while I was painting it, Dorian Gray sat beside me. Some subtle influence passed from him to me, and for the first time in my life I saw in the plain woodland the wonder I had always looked for, and always missed ... Dorian Gray is to me simply a motive in art. You might see nothing in him. I see everything in him. He is never more present in my work than when no image of him is there. He is a suggestion, as I have said, of a new manner" (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 17). Basil is affected, deeply, by Dorian's beauty and only his beauty since Dorian later admits that Basil prefers to be silent when painting, the only setting in which the two characters meet. It is not his personality that caused Basil to acquire that wonder, but his appearance. The common denominator between Basil and Lord Henry is that they are both attracted to Dorian's appearance, but in different ways. While Dorian's beauty inspires Basil to create better art, it shows the negative side of Lord Henry. Yet, it remains, the reader does not get to see or create any idea regarding the original personality of Dorian Gray. It seems that Wilde has intentionally blurred this part out; the reader can only see the influences that

Dorian inspires and conducts, but never his true self. It is as if his true self is lost from the very beginning of the novel, never to be found.

The conflict, at the beginning of the novel, is between Basil and Lord Henry. They are the two main forces that affect Dorian's life and behavior. Together, they create what the reader views as Dorian. According to Jungian classification, Basil is the introverted intuition type, Lord Henry is the introverted sensation type and Dorian is an extraverted intuition type (Dawson, 71-72). Each character endows Dorian with some attributes specific to its type, Basil gives Dorian the love of aesthetics and Lord Henry gives him the mad dash for experience. Both Basil and Lord Henry do not really experience life, but are able to pass on their teachings to Dorian. Basil might not have been as great of an influence of Dorian's morality as Lord Henry, but it is through Basil's creation that Dorian realizes his vanity. Basil's own attraction to Dorian brings his end: "Basil finds his intuitions embodied in Dorian; in other words, he projects his intuitions into Dorian. He never even considers that they might reveal something about his own personality. His only interest is in re-experiencing the thrill that Dorian gives him" (Dawson, 74). Just as Dorian becomes addicted to the rush of experience, and the empty ideals of Lord Henry, Basil becomes addicted to Dorian's beauty. Basil creates the medium that facilitates Lord Henry's influence, but he is oblivious of that himself.

Dorian is introduced to Lord Henry in Basil's studio, which is the moment or encounter that sets into motion all the events that lead to Dorian's downfall. It is for that same reason that Dorian murders Basil, he sees the painter as the reason for all his



trouble: “the friend who had painted the fatal portrait to which all his misery had been due, had gone out of his life. That was enough” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 177). Dorian and Basil’s relationship is similar to the relationship of the monster and Victor Frankenstein. Just like the monster, Dorian relates all his misery to his creator and finds relief to his anger in murdering him. The relationship with Lord Henry is more complicated, while Basil created Dorian, Lord Henry was the one who introduces debauchery to his life. Dorian realizes Henry’s effect on him by the end of the novel: “you poisoned me with a book once, I should not forgive that. Harry, promise me that you will never lend that book to anyone. It does harm” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 241). However, his reaction to Lord Henry is not of anger as with Basil, but regret and subtle reproach. Lord Henry does not realize the agony that his teachings have inflicted upon Dorian, just like Basil does not realize the effect of his painting on Dorian’s life. They are both oblivious of their creation.

The turning point in Dorian’s life is the murder of Basil. At first, he is calm and collected as he enlists Alan Campbell to help him get rid of the body and even afterwards. His unchanging looks help him stay away from any nervousness: “certainly no one looking at Dorian Gray that night could have believed that he had passed through a tragedy as horrible as any tragedy of our age” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 194). The fact that there is no fear of detection helps him relish in his twisted achievement: “he himself could not help wondering at the calm of his demeanour, and for a moment felt keenly the terrible pleasure of a double life” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 194). The thrill of a new experience –the goal of his existence– at first

excites him. It is not until he is questioned about his night by Lord Henry that he feels the burden of his deed. He tries to quench the thoughts pertaining to the murder by seeking opium: “he repeated to himself the words that Lord Henry had said to him on the first day they had met, ‘to cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul’” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 204). However, going to the house from where he acquires his opium, he encounters Adrian Singleton, one of his “victims” that Basil had pointed out before his death. “The presence of Adrian Singleton troubled him. He wanted to be where no one would know who he was. He wanted to escape from himself” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 208). The problem worsens by meeting Sybil’s brother, James Vane, who wants to seek revenge for his sister’s death. Dorian is unable to escape his past and he is constantly reminded of his current, corrupted self. The pursuit of Dorian by James Vane brings back the memories of his sin: “it was imagination that set remorse to dog the feet of sin” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 221).

However, Dorian does not fully realize that it is his conscience that is torturing him due to Vane’s pursuit. Yet, it is evident that he longs to go back to his time of innocence, before meeting Basil or Lord Henry. During the hunt, he does not want Sir Geoffrey to shoot a hare: “suddenly from a lumpy tussock of old grass, some twenty yards in front of them, with black-tipped ears erect, and long hinder limbs throwing it forward, started a hare. It bolted for a thicket of alders. Sir Geoffrey put his gun to his shoulder, but there was something in the animal’s grace of movement that strangely charmed Dorian Gray, and he cried out at once, ‘don’t shoot it, Geoffrey. Let it live.’”

(Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 223). Later Dorian explains it: “it looked the loveliest of little live things” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 227). Like the hare, he himself is in pursuit, physically by James Vane, and morally, by his own conscience. He realizes his former innocence in the hare and wants to save it or offer it salvation. The same bullet that kills the hare kills James Vane, freeing Dorian from what haunts him physically, but not morally. After the death of James, Dorian’s life was no longer threatened. The same luck that allowed him to remain physically unchanging saved him from punishment. However, he does not celebrate, but the incident makes him sink deeper into the guilt-induced mania. “Yet, another example of Dorian’s ‘charmed’ life, Vane’s fortuitous removal from the scene points up the fact that Dorian is, in the end, self-defeated, doomed by the enemy within, his own conscience” (Nelson,135). Dorian’s real plight is caused by his own duality, and by his inability to separate himself from his sins. He appears to be unchanging, but with every sin he commits, a part of him alters or dies and his soul suffers. He defeats himself due to the conflict between the personalities within, and the need to regain his innocence. Dorian, like a child, cannot move on from his sins, but wants to delete them all. Even though the threat of James Vane is eliminated, Dorian does not return to his hedonistic self, but wants to return to his former unformed –or innocent– self. The incident prompts him to change or rather return to his innocent self; when Lord Henry tells him not to change, he responds: “No, Harry, I have done too many dreadful things in my life. I am not going to do any more. I began my good actions yesterday” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 232). His first good deed was freeing a country girl named Hetty from his grip. Lord Henry points out

that he has already corrupted her for life. Again, Lord Henry plays the role of the corrupter. Dorian still wants to become good, to return, and so he believes that he can achieve that by destroying the physical conscience that reminds him of his sins: the painting. He destroys the painting with the same knife that killed his creator. "Having destroyed conscience –the enemy, within– Dorian through death is apotheosized in the redeemed portrait as the 'visible symbol' of a new hedonism –an entirely appropriate conclusion to a hedonist romancer's quest" (Nelson, 137). Dorian destroys himself as he has destroyed his creator with the same weapon. He cannot return, but instead, he is forever embalmed as the face of corrupted innocence.

## CONCLUSION

### The Return

Society is a driving factor in the quest for identity. Unless one lives a life of isolation, the effects of the collective upon both self and body cannot be denied. The individual decides her/his own limits, existence and potential according to the collective. Remaining the same throughout existence seems unlikely. Yet, there is a point where the collective overshadows the individual, resulting in its duplicity or multiplicity. The subsequent selves are separated from the original or primary self. "A multiplicity ordered in terms of before and after is a temporal multiplicity...But time is not only a fixed order for a determined multiplicity; observing temporality more closely we establish the fact of succession; that is, the fact that a particular after becomes a before, that the Present becomes past and the future a former-future" (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 130). The previous statement explains in some way the states of both characters, but maybe Dorian Gray more so than Alice. Alice is somehow suspended in time due to the nature of her experience; whatever temporality she is experiencing in her dream, it is not real. On the other hand, Dorian spends years changing and reshaping his self, and by the end of the book, he had become a completely different person. The descent into the perverse was gradual, with every act pushing him further from one "before" to another "after", creating what Sartre dubbed as "succession".

As Butler stated, the individual, even in her/his original state, still suffers from the inability to remember a complete existence, there is always something missing. The original self or body is not perfect or fulfilling, but it is the primary existence. Its incompleteness is part of the fresh start of self-discovery. When transitioning into another self, the primary existence is always missed, as with the case of both Alice and Dorian. However, the reversing of the self might not be possible: “the order ‘before-after’ is defined first of all by irreversibility. We call such a series successive when we can consider the terms only one at a time and only in one direction” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 130). Time forms a barrier between each state, so that each level or change is suspended on its own. Therefore, to reverse the “after” to a “before” would be improbable. Alice is able to return because the change that she endured, or her “after” was not real –her personality did not suffer any transformation beyond the dream world. Therefore, Alice returns to her former self because in actuality it is her only self. She longs for the dream world, but that does not mean that she transformed. She still functions in her Victorian world, obeying her sister and being a “little girl”.

On the other hand, Dorian’s succession or ascension happens over a long period of time, in which many “separations” happen: “time separates me from myself, from what I have been, from what I wish to be, from what I wish to do, from things, and from others” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 131). Dorian’s wish to return to the innocence of his boyhood –“what he has been”– and his wish to become a good person –“what he wishes to be”– are two different states along the temporal succession. They are separated by many other states he has weathered. One might even deem them to be

conflicting. He wants to return to a “before” and at the same time become a completely different “after”. Therefore, Dorian is unable to return to his former self.

The question that remains is whether one should return to the incompleteness of the self and body, or should one continue to move forward towards unknown temporalities. Alice was able to return to her former existence, and Dorian, unable to return, destroyed himself. Both characters considered only two options: to return or to remain within the same existence. There was no middle ground, and it is the result of the inner conflict between the being-for-itself and the being-in-itself: “we found ourselves confronting two radically distinct modes of being” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 617). The being-in-itself is what the self began with, or its primary existence, while the being-for-itself is the self after the duality. The self is changed to an extremely different nature. The choice is torturous, and also impossible. The being-for-itself is the mutation of the self. The individual, to get over ontological insecurity, needs to feel authentic. The being-for-itself does not supply the needed authenticity.

Sartre deemed irreversibility to be impossible, and at the same time he advocated the constant change of the self, refusing the permanent labels that scar the individual. He also insisted that the being-for-itself is a “non-substantial absolute”, meaning that its existence is not permanent (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 619). The reason for it not being an absolute is that it can always change as the self goes from a “before” to an “after”. What the characters failed to see is the third option, namely altering the being-for-itself and descending into another “after”. He concludes that the

need for annihilation is another phase in the progression towards being (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 620). He blames the “inefficiency” of the being-for-itself when the individual cannot move past this stage. Dorian, prompted by Lord Henry’s opinion, was unable to move past the need to return or to destroy the current self. He began to change and progress towards another form of being, but was stopped once more by societal pressures. Unlike Alice, Dorian did not rebel over the pressures of his surroundings. Yet, at the same time, Alice’s transformation or progression was cut short due to the nature of her journey. One is left to wonder what the resulting “Alice” would have been like if she had remained in the Wonderland post-rebellion.

In conclusion, the self is always a work in progress, but it is the individual that chooses to progress to other forms of being, or annihilate her/himself due to society’s pressures. The self will always long for its “primary” state, where it was unaltered and whole. The initial existence is the most perfect one, and it is normal for the self to want to return to it. Yet, it is mental awareness that prevents the self from destroying itself because of the need to return; the realization of the “inefficiency” of the self, followed by a true, unrelenting desire to change should transport the self to safety, or at least to another form of being. Lack of change leads to the destruction of the self, as it becomes stuck between two incomplete stages of being. Only through constant change can the self continue to progress towards a more efficient and whole form of being.



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