

Running head: THE APOLLONIAN AND DIONYSIAN VOICES IN THE PICTURE OF  
DORIAN GRAY

The Apollonian and Dionysian voices in The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde

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## Abstract

This study interprets Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* from the perspective of Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of the Dionysian and Apollonian voices in order to reveal the relationships between art and a linguistic elaboration of reality. Therefore, this novel is taken as a space where multiple and contrary discourses dialogue among them, creating and elaborating a unique literary universe which represents a metaphor of how human relationships to the world are created. It also discusses the role of morality in the process of artistic creation and the inherent conflict between the artist, art and ethics. Additionally, it shows how art is a subversive discourse that criticizes and undermines the hegemonic ideologies of a certain time, in Wilde's Victorian time.

*Key words:* esthetics, ethics, illusion, morality, reality, discourse, Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde,

Este estudio interpreta *El Retrato de Dorian Gray* de Oscar Wilde desde la teoría de las voces Dionisiacas y Apolíneas de Friedrich Nietzsche con el fin de revelar la relación entre el arte y una elaboración lingüística de la realidad. Por ende esta novela se presenta como un espacio en el cual varios discursos opuestos y contrarios dialogan entre sí para elaborar un universo literario metafórico de la manera como la humanidad crea y dispone sus relaciones con el mundo. De igual forma, se discute aquí el papel de la moral en el proceso de creación artística y el conflicto inherente entre el artista, su obra y la ética. También se muestra como el arte es un discurso que subvierte y critica las ideologías hegemónicas de la época victoriana de Wilde.

*Palabras clave:* ética, estética, ilusión, moral, realidad, discurso, Nietzsche, Wilde

*All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.*

*-Oscar Wilde-*

## Introduction

To begin with, it is important to emphasize that this study views the novel as an encounter of different discourses about the world, and that the relationships established here are based on the interpretation of the different voices that appear in it. Many of the inferences made in the present work draw on a particular context, which is very close in time, and that represents a kind of thought that emerged during the late nineteenth century as a protest against the established notion of art, truth, ethics, morals and society.

Thus, this study takes Bakhtin's ideas of polyphony and carnival, and considers *The Picture of Dorian Gray* a polyphonic novel. This way, one can find that there are critical discourses that seem to be relevant for the comprehension of the novel. Its characters represent these discourses, and the result of the dialogue among them turns out to be an interesting and paradoxical way of understanding life. Taking into account that a novel is an unfinished creation, it is always possible to find new interpretations of the same literary text, and to establish connections with other texts as proposed in this work. The concept of Carnival is important because it allows one to explore some chapters in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that can reveal more about a Dionysian voice, and to analyze its importance within the whole context of the work.

The novel shows the moral and psychological growth of its main character. There is a process of change in the way Dorian Gray feels about morality, beauty, art and his relationships with his friends. Dorian Gray starts out being a very naïve, charming and beautiful chap without any intellectual interest and ends up being a paranoid, hedonist and selfish character. The

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transformation resides in the style of the novel: at the beginning it is very colorful, but when the whole plot is unraveled it turns out to be dark, depressive, dull and even gothic, as well.

### Justification

When I read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* I immediately thought about the illusion we live in, and how the contrast between form and content allow us to color our lives with different perspectives and ways to comprehend our existence. It is a book written to show, not the artist but the reader, and this is what actually, in my opinion, a work of art should do. What we see in a novel or a painting or a poem is the way we ourselves view life, it mirrors and reveals readers' feelings, thoughts and conceptions. But not just that, it gives an incredible picture of Oscar Wilde's conflicts regarding art and the inherent struggle within an artist. I felt identified with some of the conflicts in the novel, and when I read it, I was fascinated with the paradoxes in his statements. At the same time, I have always been very intrigued with Nietzsche's philosophy and I found many relevant and similar aspects between his Aesthetics and Wilde's.

I do not want to impose my interpretation on people, but I want to show and tell my own experience and reflections regarding this novel. Also, I would like to explore other possible interpretations of a book about which so much has been said before. Consequently, I selected the principles of Dionysian and Apollonian theories to interpret *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

This book goes beyond the moral duality of humanity; instead of that, it deals with the tension between the spirit of a man and the external factors that mold him, the double relation between an artist and his work and, why not, the relation between action, word and thought. Likewise, it criticizes, with brilliant irony, the Puritan societies like the Victorian, which played a game of double morals in its time.

Art is one of the most important expression of human culture and I think that generally people do not see this as a relevant topic in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; for this reason, I set out

the question *what is the conception of art in this book?*. I also analyze the concept of “art for art’s sake” and the historical and ideological connotations that it held in Wilde’s times.

Furthermore, I see that Apollonian and Dionysian elements characterize the four main characters in the novel. I want to explore the spirits of the characters which, in my opinion, are related to the essence of art in itself. Thus, I bring up the following question: *what elements of the Dionysian and Apollonian principles are present in the characters of the novel?*

Despite the fact that much has been said about this work, there are few studies about the relationship between art and the artist. I would like people to be aware of these other topics in the novel besides moral duality, historical hypocrisy or the notion of another simple hedonistic work.



## Objectives

**Main objective:** To interpret *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, from the perspective of the Dionysian and Apollonian duality.

### Specific objectives:

- To explore Oscar Wilde's notions of art in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.
- To explore how according to Nietzsche reality is a linguistic elaboration.
- To explain Nietzsche and Wilde's idea that art transcends nature in terms of beauty.
- To explain how morality is a resource of artistic creation, in both Wilde and Nietzsche's conception of aesthetics.

### Limitations of the study

This work is an interpretation; so it will be limited by my own experience and my ignorance about the holistic work and life of Oscar Wilde. Although this is not a historical, sociological, or anthropological study, I will support this study with theories in these fields in order to contextualize and ground my ideas. The work would probably be limited by the relevance that I give to each one of these fields.

Principally, I want to focus on the psychological features of the characters in order to achieve my objective, due to the fact that the relation between the artist and his work depends on certain kind of mentality and a way of thinking that comes from the personal vision of a being. It will be also limited by the Apollonian and Dionysian principles proposed by authors such as Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In the same way, this study will also take into account Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony and carnival in order to approach the different discourses in the novel.

## Referential framework

### State of the art

Oscar Wilde's work is as controversial as it was in its time, and it has been interpreted from different perspectives.

“The Picture of Dorian Gray has been seen as everything from an attack on late-Victorian hypocrisy to a story of the domination of an older man by a beautiful youth; this broad range of interpretation seems ample proof that the novel is not so indisputably clear and simple as some would make it out to be. As his unique novel...” (Houston, 1969)

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is full of references to Wilde's way of thinking, not just about aesthetics but his own inner conflicts. Despite the fact that none of the works I have found up until now refer directly to an interpretation of the Apollonian and Dionysian voices in this work, concepts such as the double, the mirror, aestheticism, impressionism, the craftsman, among others, that were so common in the Victorian times, are of vital importance to identify Oscar Wilde's aesthetic stand in his time.

Significant information has been included here to get a holistic comprehension of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

In “Ethics and Aesthetics in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*”, Gillespie (n.d) presents the different ethical stands of the characters in the novel. The author remarks that within Wilde's work there are multiple value systems and that none has relevance over the other;

this is why the novel “enables a range of possible interpretations, each specifically dependent upon a clear ethical disposition as its point of departure”. (p.138)

To clarify the aesthetic/ethical relationship and to highlight the explicative options open to the reader who acknowledges it, I would like to explore the conclusions that one might derive from two complementary principles that shape the narrative strategy of Wilde’s writing: while his novel eschews the deterministic application of conventional morality, it does not fall into the reductive mode of dismissing all value systems (p.138)

Before elaborating his thesis, Gillespie gives a brief historical description of moral philosophy in western civilization to show “how convergent and divergent moral values have combined to inform modern views on aesthetics”. From Socrates to utilitarianism this author finally shows the origins of the stand “art for art’s sake” in the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, and he states that the whole unraveling of ethics throughout history and the situation of the nineteenth century, which was a relativistic one, influenced Wilde’s view of art and religion:

Buoyed by this critical latitude, the Pre-Raphaelites rejected all artistic conventions designed to heighten the effect of a work through artifice and emphasized truthfulness and simplicity, often reflected in a devotion to Nature. Furthermore, they took a utilitarian position that gave value to art works as ends in themselves rather than as means to separate goals. The Pre-Raphaelites laid the groundwork for the view of art as aesthetically and ethically self-contained, summed up in the single phrase – art for art’s sake—that impelled the aesthetic movement. (p.141)

France was the birthplace of the aesthetic movement; authors such as Baudelaire, Flaubert, and Mallarmé among others, “subscribed to the doctrine that art represents the supreme value because it stands as self-sufficient and has no aim beyond its perfection. To this end, they asserted that the function of a work of art lies simply in its existence and in its ability to exude beauty, indifferent to current social values”. (p.142)

Although the aesthetic movement was a French artistic current, Walter Pater who was Wilde’s professor in Oxford was the spokesman in England for this tendency. It seems that many of Wilde’s ideas came from him. Unlike his French colleagues, Pater argued for a relation between Ethics and Aesthetics based on idiosyncratic values.

Moreover, Pater grounded his version of the aesthetic movement upon an acknowledged --if somewhat idiosyncratic—system of values in a fashion that clearly appealed to Wilde’s imagination. As Wilde himself surely knew, despite the aura of iniquity that the concept suggests to some, Pater’s advocacy of the idea of art for art’s sake does not abandon ethics. Even his notion of autonomous art, seemingly aloof from the influence of moral judgment, rests upon clear, though admittedly unconventional, ethical standards. (p.143)

Gillespie also holds that the aesthetic movement, rather than excluding ethics from aesthetics and being a philosophy of pleasure, presents alternatives to see life from different perspectives. Aestheticism denies the conventional system of values, proposing a critical point of view of the events that were taking place at the time. It was not just a protest against traditional art; it was also against the system of values:

At first glance, art for art`s sake may seem a direct rejection of morality in favor of pleasure , but the aesthetic movement in fact took a more complex view of the relationship between the two. Rather than denying a place for ethics within an aesthetic experience (*the either of choice*), it instead denied primacy to conventional value systems and bluntly asserted the validity of alternative moralities. (p. 149)(Italics are mine)

What the author implies is that “Art for art’s sake” is a form of protest against the conventions of the time; regardless of the aesthetic experience, the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood elaborated a discourse which denied the conventional moral values and which was in favor of alternative moralities. The relationships between pleasure and ethics are more complex as this movement initially wanted to propose an alternative point of view of morality. Indeed, they tried to propose a new ethic from the perspective of art. This was a war against religion and science and the way those discourses where constructing the world.

The essay “The Aesthetics of Art for Art's Sake” by Irving Singer (1954) makes an analysis of the aestheticians within the scope of post-pragmatism; he characterizes aesthetic ideology and refers to Oscar Wilde as a representative member of this intellectual movement of the late XIX century. Moreover as the author points out his objective as follows:

“In doing so, I shall try to contribute to the resolution of problems concerned with the relationship between what has ambiguously been called "art and morality," "art and life," "art and society," etc. In this essay I shall deal with questions about the artist and the creative process. Questions about the work of art and its influence upon those who experience it I shall leave for a future essay.” (Singer,1954)

This is very similar to one of the objectives of this paper: Must art be ethical? Besides, it contains an explanation of what art means for the aesthetics of the time, and the importance of the critics for the development of art. The text is based on four principles:

1. Artists are different from other people as they possess a predominance of sensuous intuition or creative imagination.
2. An artist is a specialist in the techniques of his/her own art, and insofar as a person is a philosopher, scientist, moralist, propagandist, etc., he is not an artist.
3. Great art is not created by people of high moral character.
4. Artistic creation is the highest end in life. (Singer, 1954)

The last two are the most meaningful for this work and are directly related to a Dionysian ideal. They are also significant because they carefully analyze the concept “art for art’s sake”, and what people of that time were referring to:

In some respects the position of these writers represented the nineteenth century tendencies towards individualism, sensualism, and scientific division of labor-tendencies which, although they became dominant in the 1920's were, throughout the nineteenth century, sufficiently recessive to make the outright defense of them appear immoral and heretical. (Singer, 1954)

The idea of art for the sake of art is related to an ideology, it represents a whole movement of Victorian times, and has specific characteristics and conceptions of the world based on ideas that opposed the imposed utilitarian and Victorian ideology. It shows another dimension that is revealed in novels such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

In a “Tragedy of the Artist: The Picture of Dorian Gray”, Houston (1969) makes an interpretation of Dorian Gray on the basis of Wilde’s essays and his philosophical conception of life. This text introduces the concept of *tragedy of the artist* and tries to interpret Wilde’s unique novel as a message to artists:

This is not to say that we should read Wilde's essays into the novel, but simply that we should read and interpret the novel within the framework of Wilde's major ideas. Wilde's chief concern was always with art, the artist, the critic, or the effect of art and criticism on society at large, and this can be seen by a brief look at the ideas presented in several of his most important essays. (Houston, 1969)

This essay also refers to Wilde’s conception of the artist and the critic in society, and to Dorian Gray’s corruption that not only represents moral degradation, but the corruption of an artistic ideal. Another important idea to emphasize is the importance that this text gives to Hallward as the figure of the artist; the author argues that Basil corrupts his own ideal by putting too much of himself in the painting:

“Hallward's excessive self-consciousness, his selfish desires, and his jealous zeal in keeping Dorian from others have corrupted the simple, natural, and affectionate model who sat for the portrait...” “...It is important to realize, however, that Dorian is first of all an artistic ideal, and the corruption that he undergoes in his hedonistic pursuit of pleasure is the corruption of an artistic ideal. The fact that Dorian's corruption shows only on Hallward's canvas emphasizes this point. Hallward's initial self-consciousness and mis- handling of the ideal have doleful consequences, and it is significant that the artist himself introduces Dorian to Lord Henry. The chain of events seems to be: self-consciousness of the artist, corruption of the ideal, and a hedonistic pursuit of exquisite sensation. Basil Hallward sets the entire sequence in motion.” (Houston, 1969)



What does this mean? It is very common to see the hedonistic model of life in Wilde, but when one reads his texts one sees that “art for the sake of art” carries a lot of social connotations; it is not only form as we can infer at first sight. There is a lot of social criticism and a social ideology. Wilde, as Nietzsche, opposes Aesthetics to Ethics, and in doing so, art acquires a huge value, because it goes beyond morals. So the artist, far from being the representation of the individualistic ideals, has to renounce to his own self and represent the ideal of humanity and arts. That’s the tragedy that this essay explains “... The artistic ideal represented by Dorian Gray moves rapidly toward the sensual corruption of hedonism, and only the destruction of the false ideal can return art to its pure state”. That is why Dorian dies and the painting returns to its original state.

Nevertheless, for some authors such as Felicia Bonaparte (1998), Wilde`s intentions in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were not so clear. Sometimes, he seemed to attack aesthetic ideas rather than support them:

“Many still see Wilde as an aesthete—as, for example, Linda Dowling in her *The Vulgarization of Art*, in which she holds that Wilde believed in what she calls the ‘Aristocracy of the Aesthete’ —but Ellmann is right to suggest that ‘aestheticism’ was more ‘a problem’ for Wilde than ‘a creed’. (Bonaparte, 1998)

Bonaparte argues that Wilde saw a great risk in the aesthetic movement because of its moral relativity that was related to impressionism. This movement was grounded on the fact that reality is a construction of our perceptions, there was no objectivity and as a consequence there is

no good or evil, but beauty and ugliness, or what sensations could give us; as a result everything in humankind's actions is relative:

From that moment aestheticism seemed to be inevitable, an aestheticism, moreover, wedded inexorably to hedonism. For if the world outside our perceptions could only be a doubtful hypothesis, all one could vouch for were one's impressions. And, since there were no objective criteria by which impressions could be evaluated, these could be neither false nor true or, more importantly, right or wrong. All they could do was give pleasure or pain, often by their beauty or ugliness. (Bonaparte 1998)

Thus, for Oscar Wilde there was a conflict between "beauty" and "good" and the characters in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were an embodiment of this conflict: On one hand, Basil was the moral artist "disturbed by the moral neutrality of the aesthetic attitude"(Bonaparte, 1998). And on the other hand, it was Henry Wotton who often seems to support aestheticism, "denying that art may be required to serve any end but its own" (Bonaparte, 1998). In public declarations Wilde defended his work from the aesthetic grounds:

‘I am quite incapable,’ he wrote to Sidney James Mark Low, the editor of the *St. James's Gazette*, in response to comments made in his paper in a review on the morality of the novel, ‘of understanding how any work of art can be criticized from a moral standpoint. The sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate’ (*Letters* 257). He looks forward, he observes in a letter to someone else written at nearly the same moment, ‘to the time when aesthetics will take the place of ethics, when the sense of beauty will be the dominant law of life’ (*Letters* 265).

Bonaparte (1998) argues that morals and aesthetics were worries in the philosophical and ethical conceptions of Wilde, and within the novel Dorian is judged by his sins and moral corruption, when he compares his life with the book that Lord Henry gave to him:

Whether it is the book that poisons him, as he argues at one moment (*Works* 149), or his own inclinations to sin which the book evokes in part (*Works* 163), the fact is that, living a similar life, Dorian is not only corrupted but judged to be so by his author. Unlike Huysmans, Wilde subsumes the aesthetic under the moral. (Bonaparte, 1998)

Moreover, one has to take into account the relationship between Wilde and the Catholic Church in order to have a holistic vision of his ethical and aesthetical philosophy. It seems that his opinion towards religion influenced his latest works specially *De Profundis* where he established a parallel between Christ and his own aesthetical and moral ideal. When Wilde was in prison he wrote a letter to his lover, Alfred Douglas, where he talked about the reconciliation of artistic life with the life of religion in Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*.

Oscar Wilde understood this well. In a letter to Alfred Douglas, written while he was in prison, Wilde remarked that what Pater sought in writing *Marius the Epicurean* was to 'reconcile the artistic life with the life of religion' (*Letters* 476). He himself saw distinctly enough that the aesthetic could never serve as a foundation for the moral. He rejects that possibility explicitly in *Dorian Gray*. A 'charming artistic basis for ethics', scoffs Lord Henry when Dorian expresses a fear that his soul might be rendered 'hideous' if he continued in his sins (*Works* 82). He himself was as eager as Pater to link the beautiful and the good. The very subject of *Dorian Gray*—and we have not sufficiently noted how large a part in Wilde's works and letters religion and morality play—alerts us to its deeper concerns. (Bonaparte, 1998)

Wilde was as contradictory in his life as he was in his style. It is very difficult to elucidate his position; his work contains apparently both the moral and the aesthetic discourse, and it looks as if he enjoyed creating paradoxes in which none of his philosophical and personal perspectives were above the other:

The playful ambivalences within these comments point up exactly the disposition for indeterminacy that runs throughout the narrative of the picture of Dorian Gray. Rather than enforcing the hegemony of a single perspective, Wilde deftly undetermines support for any concept of narrowly defined intentionality or even for the sense that any particular point of view can have an explicit dominance or an inherent legitimacy. In their place he offers the example of his personality which embodies the range of valid responses that one could possibly make to his work. Further, by presenting each response as equally valid, Wilde eschews any move toward closure. Instead, he conjoins a broad consideration of the structure of the novel with a sportive indulgence of the particular interpretative impulses of the individual reader. (Gillespie, 1998)

Despite the fact that the essay “The Mask of Art” mainly refers to Wilde’s homosexual condition, his characters in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and his conflict with the Victorian times, it also refers to the contradictions present in his work, his essays and his public declarations. But besides that, what is important about this text is that it makes a comparison between Nietzsche and Wilde.

There are multiple references to the similar characteristics of Wilde’s ideology of aesthetics and Nietzsche’s. Both of them saw life in aesthetic terms and the importance of art as the final goal of humanity. Aesthetics opposed to ethics. They never met each other as White (1999) points out, and despite the fact that their intellectual struggles were of a different

character, they both wanted to return to a Hellenic state of humanity. The same author explains this by alluding to one of Henry Wotton's statements in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

“...for instance, Lord Henry sounds Nietzschean indeed when he says, “I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream - I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of medievalism, and return to the Hellenic ideal - to something finer, richer, than the Hellenic ideal.” Lord Henry concludes: “The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it.” (White, 1999)

As great aestheticians, both of them saw the ideal of life in the recreation of the Hellenic ideals; they studied the Greek culture for many years and saw in themselves a way of representing life in a colorful and powerful way. They wanted to give different meanings to the way reality is conceived, a different one from the one that Christianity and morality showed to the world at that time.

“...With Pater, Wilde developed the idea that England's culture should become Hellenic. Greece was seen as the ultimate type of a new Renaissance of the arts. Wilde considered his work to be the precursor of this new style, an aesthetics that would combine the best of the Greek with the best of the new realism being an important connection between the two. As he says in “The English Renaissance of Art”, “To the Greek, pure artist, that work is most instinct with spiritual life which conforms most clearly to the perfect facts of physical life”(White, 1999).

Although, they were representative figures of two different ideological stands –while Wilde was an English Dandy and was nearer to the French decadent movement –, Nietzsche was absolutely against a decadent way of thinking:

“...Friedrich Nietzsche attacked the “slave morality” of Christianity and denounced the materialism and pessimism of his century. If Huysmans was the inventor of Decadence, Nietzsche was its great enemy...” (White, 1999)

Thomas Mann makes a parallel between Wilde and Nietzsche in his text *The Philosophy of Nietzsche in the Light of our Experience* where he also shows how their ideologies were intimately related to the same ideal:

Es sorprendente comprobar el parentesco cercano de ciertos aspectos de Nietzsche con los ataques a la moral; que aproximadamente por aquel tiempo venía haciendo Oscar Wilde, el esteta inglés, entre la diversión y el fastidio del público. Cuando Wilde declara: “Por más que lo queramos no podemos alcanzar la realidad buscando detrás de la apariencia de las cosas. Y la causa terrible de ello debe ser que no hay otra realidad en las cosas, fuera de sus apariencias”; cuando habla de la “verdad de las máscaras” y de la “decadencia de la mentira”; cuando prorrumpe: “Para mí la belleza es la maravilla de las maravillas: Sólo la gente superficial no juzga por las apariencias. El verdadero misterio del mundo es lo visible, no lo invisible”; cuando dice que la verdad es algo tan personal que nunca la misma verdad puede ser conocida por dos mentes; cuando dice: “Todo impulso que tratamos de sofocar se anida en la mente y nos envenena. El único medio para librarnos de la tentación es caer en ella”, y “No os dejéis extraviar por las sendas de la virtud”, tenemos la impresión de que todo eso podría ser de Nietzsche. Cuando, por otra parte, leemos en éste último: “La seriedad es un síntoma infalible de bajo metabolismo”, o “En el arte se santifica la mentira, y la voluntad de engañar va unida a la buena conciencia”; o “Nos inclinamos fundamentalmente a afirmar que los juicios falsos son los más indispensables”; o “No es sino un prejuicio moral el de creer que la verdad tiene más valor que la apariencia”, no hay entre esas frases ninguna que no hubiera podido figurar en una de las comedias de Oscar Wilde, provocando la risa en el teatro de St. James. Cuando se ha querido alabar a Wilde, se han comparado sus piezas con “La escuela del escándalo” de Sheridan. Mucho de lo que hay en Nietzsche parece provenir, de esa escuela. (Mann, 1947)

In other words, Nietzsche and Wilde attacked morality in similar ways. He brings up some quotations that refer to the similar ideas that they had regarding appearance, truth, lying and aesthetics. According to Mann, they turned their points of view to art as a way to criticize the current morality, they saw in art a method to show that life is not what people think it is, but it is made of appearance, that is way, they both use the metaphor of lying. Although they were born in different countries, they seem to belong to the same school and both used irony and controversy to question and to undermine morality, as well as the concept of truth which was so widely discussed in those times.

This turns out to be very meaningful for an interpretation from the point of view of the Dionysian and Apollonian principles. It seems as this aesthetic ideology had been elaborated by these authors in similar moments. Although Wilde and Nietzsche had prominent differences in style, they had many aspects in common regarding aesthetics and philosophy.

One of the most comprehensive studies about Wilde and Nietzsche is *The Rage of Caliban* by Mabelle Louise (2006). In this book, the author makes a parallel between the philosopher and the writer in order to present the struggle of these authors against modernity, and the established society of the time.

The *Rage of Caliban* is however more than mere gimmicky comparison, but a thorough investigation of the way in which the aesthetic presented itself as the last proper source of transcendental meaning in a world that was rapidly sliding into nihilism. What is more, it is argued that we have still not succeeded in finding an alternative to the aesthetic, hence the many references to the work of Michel

Foucault who can be seen as Nietzsche's heir, and who, like Wilde led a scandalous life as alternative to bourgeois conformity. (Mabille, 2006)

The author advocates that idea that an aesthetic vision of the world was the last hope to change a humanity that was losing the sense of life and that was built on fake concepts. Wilde and Nietzsche attacked this nihilist conception of the world, constructing points of view that criticized modernity. Therefore, they are considered post-modernist authors who tried to decipher the moral and social institutions of their times.

In the case of Wilde, Mabille (2006) makes a brief reference to the role of Dorian Gray as a strong criticism of his society, modernity and nihilism:

He begins to slide into that dreadful disease of modernity, 'that terrible *taedium vitae* that comes upon those that life denies nothing' (CW, 108). In this he is hardly to be distinguished from the rest of his society. He finds himself as part of a world that prefers form to substance. He is only the most radical example of its most sacred principles. 'Society, civilized society at least, is never very ready to believe anything to the detriment of those that are very rich or fascinating' (Mabille, 2006).

So, Dorian is considered a victim of the values of modernity in this essay; he represents the possible end of a society that "prefers form to substance", a superficial and vain character that reveals how a hypocritical society avoids and neglects its failure.

Briefly, this state of the art is a review of works that have explored the relationship between Wilde and the aesthetic movement, and some definitions and interpretations of the state



“Art for art’s sake”. It also explores Wilde’s ideological background and relevant interpretations of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in different articles and essays that refer to the ideas of this author regarding the function of art and its relationship with its creator. Finally, it presents some works that link Wilde and Nietzsche’s vantage points. The upcoming section includes a formal presentation and explanation of Wilde’s and Nietzsche’s theories as well as important concepts on which the present study is grounded.

## Theoretical references

Oscar Wilde posed his ideas in different texts, but it is in the *Decay of Lying* where he explains in detail his thoughts about aesthetics and its relationships to perception, truth, nature and art. The text, which was written in the way of a dialogue between two men called Cyril and Vivian and set in the Library of a country house in Nottinghamshire, presents a claim against the conception of truth called “The Decay of Lying: a Protest”. Vivian reads to Cyril the article he is writing about the necessity of a “New renaissance of art”. It starts when Cyril invites Vivian to go outside the library and lie on the grass to enjoy nature. To this invitation Vivian responds:

Enjoy Nature! I am glad to say that I have entirely lost that faculty. People tell us that Art makes us love Nature more than we loved her before; that it reveals her secrets to us; and that after a careful study of Corot and Constable we see things in her that had escaped our observation. My own experience is that the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature. What Art really reveals to us is Nature’s lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions, of course, but, as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out. When I look at a landscape I cannot help seeing all its defects. It is fortunate for us, however, that Nature is so imperfect, as otherwise we should have no art at all. Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place. As for the infinite variety of Nature, that is a pure myth. It is not to be found in Nature herself. It resides in the imagination, or fancy, or cultivated blindness of the man who looks at her.

So, the aim of art is not to copy nature because of “its unfinished state and its imperfection” (Wilde, 1891), but to perfect it. Art allows us to recreate what we see; that is why, for Oscar Wilde, there was no sense in making a realistic novel. This is also a criticism of those

literary movements such as naturalism or local color. For him, art must not search its inspiration in the description of real facts, phenomena or people's common life.

Then, Vivian begins to explain to Cyril why we should return to a state where lying should be cultivated as an art. However, Vivian makes a distinction between the kinds of lies of a politician which "never rise beyond the level of misrepresentation, and actually condescend to prove, to discuss, to argue" (Wilde, 1891), and the lies which do not have any purpose to prove anything at all and that "are its own evidence":

How different from the temper of the true liar, with his frank, fearless statements, his superb irresponsibility, his healthy, natural disdain of proof of any kind! After all, what is a fine lie? Simply that which is its own evidence. If a man is sufficiently unimaginative to produce evidence in support of a lie, he might just as well speak the truth at once. No, the politicians won't do. Something may, perhaps, be urged on behalf of the Bar. The mantle of the Sophist has fallen on its members. Their feigned ardours and unreal rhetoric are delightful (Wilde, 1891).

This is the kind of lie which could be found in art. It does not have to stand under any concept; artists do not desire to prove anything about nature or reality as people of science do; it is different from the rhetoric that the sophists used, because it does not expect to convince anyone of anything.

Lying and poetry are arts—arts, as Pinto saw, not unconnected with each other—and they require the most careful study, the most disinterested devotion. Indeed, they have their technique, just as the more material arts of painting and

sculpture have, their subtle secrets of form and colour, their craft-mysteries, their deliberate artistic methods. As one knows the poet by his fine music, so one can recognize the liar by his rich rhythmic utterance, and in neither case will the casual inspiration of the moment suffice. Here, as elsewhere, practice must, precede perfection (Wilde, 1891).

Afterwards, Cyril proceeds to give some examples of the dull and unimaginative literature of his times. He starts comparing Zola with Balzac, saying that the difference between these two authors is the same difference between “unimaginative realism and imaginative reality”(Wilde, 1891). So the point is not that art should not use reality as a material for creation, but that it does not make sense to copy reality as it is. It would be lack of imagination, just a kind of descriptive and boring test of reality. The power of art lies in the possibility of animating facts, people and places.

The only real people are the people who never existed, and if a novelist is base enough to go to life for his personages he should at least pretend that they are creations, and not boast of them as copies. The justification of a character in a novel is not that other persons are what they are, but that the author is what he is. Otherwise the novel is not a work of art. (Wilde, 1891)

If the justification of a character is not in other people or the work of art, but in the author her/himself, art becomes a way to express feelings, perceptions, and imaginations. The whole text could be regarded as an artist's aesthetics. Whereas other kinds of aesthetics were more occupied in trying to define the concept of beauty in art, Oscar Wilde's and Nietzsche's aesthetics focused on the recreational power of artists. They are capable of showing other points

of view; art is opposed to positivist science, and at the same time it gives new meanings to reality itself.

VIVIAN (*reading*). ‘Art begins with abstract decoration, with purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is unreal and non-existent. This is the first stage. Then Life becomes fascinated with this new wonder, and asks to be admitted into the charmed circle. Art takes life as part of her rough material, recreates it, and refashions it in fresh forms, is absolutely indifferent to fact, invents, imagines, dreams, and keeps between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style, of decorative or ideal treatment. The third stage is when Life gets the upper hand, and drives Art out into the wilderness. That is the true decadence, and it is from this that we are now suffering. (Wilde, 1891)

It would be important to emphasize the first sentence in this paragraph which says that art deals with what is unreal and non-existent. For Wilde “Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life” (Wilde, 1891); it means that the greatest works of art are remarkable because of their novelty, sometimes for being far detached from what is traditional, for breaking and inventing new rules not only for art, but for life itself. Sometimes art cannot be comprehended in the time it is made, but then it is copied by people, it is copied in style and form. Art also has the power of a premonitory dream whose raw material is life. Nevertheless, the aim of art is never to be a fashion or to accomplish the desires of the public. “Art itself is really a form of exaggeration; and selection, which is the very spirit of art, is nothing more than an intensified mode of over-emphasis” (Wilde, 1891).

In spite of the fact that sometimes Wilde should be seen as a superficial artist, his ideas opposed the materialistic spirit of the modernity. His claims against a civilization based on the

concept of truth, and his position regarding art; show that he was more than a “dandy” or a “moralizing artist”. In fact he criticized American society, which, since those times, was already the capitalist nation “par excellence”:

The crude commercialism of America, its materializing spirit, its indifference to the poetical side of things, and its lack of imagination and of high unattainable ideals, are entirely due to that country having adopted for its national hero a man who, according to his own confession, was incapable of telling a lie, and it is not too much to say that the story of George Washington and the cherry-tree has done more harm, and in a shorter space of time, than any other moral tale in the whole of literature.’ (Wilde, 1891)

Although this theory of aesthetics seems to claim that art is a medium to overemphasize life, to recreate it, it also seems to be a critical theory against the rationalization of art and life. He was criticizing the industrialized society of those times. What had been thought as truth was not really important, but the ability of humankind to invent the world and establish relationships with its environment, to find new ways of understanding our existence and our lives.

‘Nor will he be welcomed by society alone. Art, breaking from the prison-house of realism, will run to greet him, and will kiss his false, beautiful lips, knowing that he alone is in possession of the great secret of all her manifestations, the secret that Truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style; while Life—poor, probable, uninteresting human life—tired of repeating herself for the benefit of Mr. Herbert Spencer, scientific historians, and the compilers of statistics in general, will follow meekly after him, and try to reproduce, in her own simple and untutored way, some of the marvels of which he talks. (Wilde, 1891)

Naturalism supported the idea of an objective and real world; therefore, it was a pillar of the same social, scientific and political structures of the time. For Wilde, the function of art was related to the elaboration and creation of discourses that allowed people to find new and different forms of understanding and comprehending the world. Art provides fresh and original constructions of the world which can be models for people's life; this does not mean that a certain aesthetic experience would become the only possible perspective to see the world; it rather means that multiple experiences of the world can exist, even if they are contradictory. It is a matter of how the world is represented by people. Those societies such as the Victorian, led to a pessimistic vision of the world which was dull and pale and in which people were "indoctrinated" by empty concepts which were supposed to be founded on objectivity or truth. As well as Nietzsche, Wilde made references to Schopenhauer and Nihilism and how the "modern thought" was characterized by emptiness:

Schopenhauer has analyzed the pessimism that characterizes modern thought, but Hamlet invented it. The world has become sad because a puppet was once melancholy. The Nihilist, that strange martyr who has no faith, who goes to the stake without enthusiasm, and dies for what he does not believe in, is a purely literary product. (Wilde, 1891)

The reference to Schopenhauer and the ideas that are supported in the decay of lying show that like Nietzsche, Wilde was influenced by the ideas of the veil of Maya, that is illusion.

Life holds the mirror up to Art, and either reproduces some strange type imagined by a painter or sculptor, or realises in fact what has been dreamed in

fiction. Scientifically speaking, the basis of life—the energy of life, as Aristotle would call it—is simply the desire for expression, and Art is always presenting various forms through which this expression can be attained. (Wilde, 1891)

But besides life it is also nature which imitates art:

For what is Nature? Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence. (Wilde, 1891)

Hence, one might infer that, for Wilde, perceptions of facts were more important than the facts themselves. They exist because we see them, because we name them, we give meaning to the different phenomena. The concept of reality becomes an illusion, which is quite similar to Nietzsche's ideas of truth. Besides, one can see a great deal of influence of Eastern philosophy in Wilde's theory of life, art and nature.

Then, what are beautiful things if they are not in nature or life? They are in the most abstract concepts of humanity, in our ideas. It is not just what is physical; it is the style of things, the form and its shape, that represents not just reality as it is but the spirit of things, re-signification of life, the illusion of different possibilities for life.

The only beautiful things, as somebody once said, are the things that do not concern us. As long as a thing is useful or necessary to us, or affects us in any way, either for pain or for pleasure, or appeals strongly to our sympathies, or is a vital part of the environment in which we live, it is outside the proper sphere of art. (Wilde, 1891)



In Wilde's aesthetics, religion was of great importance due to the fact that it would arouse the imagination of men and women. All the myths, the supernatural, would color the creative capacity of society. For him, the English church spread skepticism; therefore, it did not fit his ideals of art. Of course there is also the affection of Oscar Wilde for the Greek culture; in Romanticism Wilde saw the return of the ideals of beauty and a new recreation of what art should be. Thus, religion would not serve as an ethical or moral guide, but as a medium to develop the artistic power of humankind. Furthermore, it would be important to mention Oscar Wilde's sympathy for the Catholic Church; for him, that could be the religion of his aestheticism. Whether it was due to the fact that Catholicism was the religion of Ireland, or because it was a controversial position or some kind of contradiction in his aesthetics, it is not clear. This is Vivian's utterance about Church:

As for the Church, I cannot conceive anything better for the culture of a country than the presence in it of a body of men whose duty it is to believe in the supernatural, to perform daily miracles, and to keep alive that mythopoeic faculty which is so essential for the imagination. But in the English Church a man succeeds, not through his capacity for belief, but through his capacity for disbelief. Ours is the only Church where the sceptic stands at the altar, and where St. Thomas is regarded as the ideal apostle. (Wilde, 1891)

There is yet another important point in Wilde's Aesthetics. He denies that Art represents the spirit of its times. Art transcends the entire temporal sphere; for him, that is just a matter of coincidence because this not an aim of Art, it does not seek to mirror life:

VIVIAN. Certainly not! Art never expresses anything but itself. This is the principle of my new aesthetics; and it is this, more than that vital connection between form and substance, on which Mr. Pater dwells, that makes music the type of all the arts. Of course, nations and individuals, with that healthy natural vanity which is the secret of existence, are always under the impression that it is of them that the Muses are talking, always trying to find in the calm dignity of imaginative art some mirror of their own turbid passions, always forgetting that the singer of life is not Apollo but Marsyas. (Wilde, 1891)

Finally, the allusion to Marsyas in this paragraph evokes the character of Dionysius. In fact, he represents the eternal struggle between the god of Intoxication and Apollo.

Before defining the Apollonian and Dionysian principles it is important to understand what the meaning of life for Nietzsche was, and the importance of aesthetics in his philosophical framework. In the *Birth of Tragedy* his main objective was “to view scholarship from the vantage of the artist and art from the vantage of life” (Nietzsche, 1872). Nietzsche proposed a new philosophical system in which an aesthetic vision of existence is opposed to the ethical and religious conception of existence that is based on the search of metaphysical knowledge and the determination of morality (Perez, 2004). In his work, Nietzsche criticizes the value of science and morals and their importance for existence and at the same time, he makes an interpretation of Greek tragedy considering its original manifestations in myth.

Life is appearance for Nietzsche; however, appearance is the reality in itself acting and living. For that reason, Nietzsche claims that that there is no truth; the real value of art is that it

does not claim to have it. “Art is illusion, it depends wholly on the laws of optics, on perspective and illusion; both to the blunt, depend on the necessity of error” (Nietzsche, 1872). Nietzsche criticizes western philosophies that were based on the concept of truth; for him, this was a terrible lie, because there is no such a thing, it is like believing in hollowness. Besides, the concept of truth, as it has been understood by philosophy, can be put at the same level as the Christian God. They both renounce life, both are nihilistic concepts because they give meaning to life only by means of unearthly ideas. If Plato has an ideal world, Christianity has its heaven.

For Nietzsche, life can only be justified in esthetic terms whose creator is the supreme artist; life becoming in itself and the will of the Craftsman which is presented in the form of creation and destruction, life and death:

As a matter of fact, throughout the book I attributed a purely aesthetic meaning—whether implied or overt- to all process. A kind of divinity if you like, God as the supreme artist, amoral, recklessly creating and destroying. Realizing himself indifferently in whatever he does or undoes, ridding himself by his acts of the embarrassment of his riches and the strain of his intellectual contradictions. Thus the world was made to appear, at every instant, as a successful solution of God’s own tensions, as an ever new vision projected by that grand sufferer for whom illusion is the only possible mode of redemption. (Nietzsche, 1872)

In *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirits of Music* Nietzsche claims that the principles of life and art were intimately bounded to Apollo and Dionysius; the opposition of these Greek divinities also gave origin to the purposes and ends of the visual arts, the Apollonian, and the

non-visual arts, the Dionysian. The dynamic conflict between these two forces was the beginning of the Attic Tragedy, the most important form of art in Hellenic Greece:

These two very different drives go hand in hand, for the most part in open conflict with each other and simultaneously provoking each other all the time to new and more powerful offspring, in order to perpetuate in them the contest of that opposition, which the common word “Art” only seems to bridge, until at last, through a marvelous metaphysical act of the Greek “will,” they appear paired up with each other and, as this pair, finally produce Attic tragedy, as much a Dionysian as an Apollonian work of art.(Nietzsche, 1872)

Apollo is the God of light and brightness, his world is the world of dreams where raw reality is disguised by limits and forms. Painting and poetry give us immediate understanding: “every shape speaks to us; nothing is indifferent and unnecessary” (Nietzsche, 1872). Contemplative art makes man feel secure and pleased, he “fashions his interpretations of life; from these events he rehearses his life for himself” (Nietzsche, 1872). This means that art allows humanity to dress and to overemphasize existence; it is the way in which humans construct and relate themselves with the world. Life is highlighted by means of art, it is the expression of the illusion, and it protects us from the terrible absurdity of nature.

Apollo also implies the understanding of what is serious, cloudy, sad, and dark “all this moves past him, not just like a shadow play—for he lives and suffers in the midst of these scenes—and yet also not without that fleeting sense of illusion”, thus he is also moderation, a protection and is compared to Schopenhauer’s veil of Maja:

In fact, we could say of Apollo that the imperturbable trust in that principle and the calm sitting still of the man caught up in it attained its loftiest expression in him, and we may even designate Apollo himself as the marvellous divine image of the *principium individuationis*, from whose gestures and gaze all the joy and wisdom of “illusion,” together with its beauty, speak to us. (Nietzsche, 1872)

Apollo is the principle of individualization, the world of dreams that becomes images; this spirit gives security and is opposed to the reality of drunkenness represented in the God Dionysius. This God, in turn, is linked to the world of intoxication where there are no restrictions among humans. The *principium individuationis* is broken in the Bacchic festivities and there is only ecstasy. Dancing and singing are the symbol of community. During the Dionysian rituals humans become art themselves, they are not artists anymore, the will of the craftsman speaks through them in drunkenness; in unconsciousness, the Apollonian dream is moved away, and life is directly felt, people are Gods:

Now, with the gospel of world harmony, every man feels himself not only united with his neighbor, reconciled and fused together, but also as one with him, as if the veil of Maja had been ripped apart, with only scraps fluttering around in the face of the mysterious primordial unity. Singing and dancing, man expresses himself as a member of a higher community: he has forgotten how to walk and talk and is on the verge of flying up into the air as he dances. The enchantment speaks out in his gestures. Just as the animals now speak and the earth gives milk and honey, so something supernatural also echoes out of him: he feels himself a god; he himself now moves in as lofty and ecstatic a way as he saw the gods move in his dream. The man is no longer an artist; he has become a work of art: the artistic power of all of nature, to the highest rhapsodic satisfaction of the primordial unity, reveals itself here in the transports of intoxication. (Nietzsche, 1872)

Apollo protects us from reality, he gives us light, while Dionysius rips off illusion and shows the raw reality of humankind, which is that there is no morality or no metaphysical principle different from life. Likewise, as life is appearance, a human artist is just an imitator of some of its principles. Nietzsche argues that it is tragedy that contains both and this is why it is the supreme form of art:

In comparison to these unmediated artistic states of nature, every artist is an “imitator,” and, in fact, is an artist either of Apollonian dream or Dionysian intoxication or, finally—as in Greek tragedy, for example— simultaneously an artist of intoxication and of dreams. As the last, it is possible for us to imagine how he sinks down in Dionysian drunkenness and mystical obliteration of the self, alone and apart from the rapturous choruses, and how, through the Apollonian effects of dream, his own state now reveals itself to him, that is, his unity with the innermost basis of the world, *in a metaphorical dream picture*. (Nietzsche, 1872) (Italics are mine)

Apollo is the remembrance of the permanence of life in the world of imagination and dream; he is appearance itself that is why he is the God of Visual arts. Apollonian art appears as redemption to the active becoming which is conceived as the will of the Craftsman in the form of destruction and creation. In the Apollonian state humans are in peace with their existence, they turn into quietness and calm, they reestablish themselves.

Tragic art is the Greeks’ conquest of their passions; the Apollonian principles emerged afterwards from the Dionysian forces, it was the protection of ancient Greeks against bestiality

and instincts. The Greeks were strong enough to bear monstrosity, uncertainty, hideousness and at the same time, conciliate the two opposing spirits:

It was the reconciliation of two opponents, who from now on observed their differences with a sharp demarcation of the border line to be kept between them and with occasional gifts sent to honour each other, but basically the gap was not bridged over. However, if we see how, under the pressure of that peace agreement, the Dionysian power revealed itself, then we now understand the meaning of the festivals of world redemption and days of transfiguration in the Dionysian orgies of the Greeks, in comparison with that Babylonian Sacaea, which turned human beings back into tigers and apes. (Nietzsche, 1872)

Thus, the dithyramb is the expression of God Dionysius, there is no form and man is aroused to another symbolic level, in harmony he felt a sense of oneness with nature. In Nietzsche's words (1872) "a new world of symbols is necessary, the entire symbolism of the body, not just the symbolism of the mouth, of the face, and of the words, but the full gestures of the dance, all the limbs moving to the rhythm. And then, the other symbolic powers grow those of the music, in rhythm, dynamics, and harmony—with sudden violence."

Perez (2004) points out that for Nietzsche, art is the metaphysical activity of humans because it is the exaltation of life, it is mimesis and interpretation, and it reveals the world. Craftsmen create appearance; change the existence that the eternal oneness gives them with their imagination. Art is appearance in appearance. Nietzsche's conception is a different aperture to beings; it is life comprehended through the infinite game of forms in which humans acquire a new way of feeling and thinking the universe. It is also a return to traditions; in Greek culture,

Nietzsche found the ancient celebration of life mystically gathered in Dionysian rituals which express the unity of existence in its becoming.

El arte humano es una recreación de las apariencias, y a su vez, una reinterpretación que pone en juego infinitos significados. Ello ocurre desde la originalidad de la creación laboriosa del artista, quien es capaz de volver a crear el mundo porque lo ha vivido a plenitud y le interesa penetrarlo con su visión. Al crear, el artista construye una mimesis en la que irrumpen variadas figuras de la realidad; devenir y transformación, vida espiritual proveniente del río de la vida biológica, movimiento del espíritu humano, lucha y serenidad; valores en juego, construcción permanente, en suma, el trasegar de la comedia humana y su destino, son el universo por el que navega el artista, como vividor y fabulador a la vez. (p.42)

Artists become creators of appearance; they reproduce the becoming and the transformation of the world, and in doing so, human life is recreated and renewed, so the artist plays an infinite game of meanings which constantly questions moral values and transcends human life in all its dimensions.

Humankind is capable of making its own path in the unpredictable unfolding of history. Nietzsche's metaphorical construction overcomes Hegel's binary dichotomy of the world, because it gives relevance to the fact that art and recreation allows a plural and diverse world, that despite the fact of being continually colliding and struggling it, is composed of multiple and recreational consciences. Hence, in order to reveal such a multiplicity of consciences expressed as discourses in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Bakhtin's concepts of literary creation will turn out to be very relevant.



Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony and carnival will show the relationship between Nietzsche's philosophy and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. These concepts, which are presented in *Problems of Dostoevski's Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World*, have been used to explore the different relationships among society and literature.

Polyphony appears for the first time to express a characteristic of Dostoyevsky's novels, and it is defined as the dialogue between multiple, different and opposed discourses in a text where none of them has more relevance than the others. These discourses appear simultaneously in a novel, and establish complex relationships among them. In a polyphonic novel there must be different visions of the world that are materialized or incarnated by its characters.

En todas partes existe un determinado conjunto de ideas, pensamientos y palabras que se conduce a través de varias voces separadas sonando en cada una de ellas de manera diferente. (Bajtin, 1979)

That is, the set of ideas, thoughts and words that constitute a discourse and that are expressed through the characters voices of a polyphonic novel in a particular and specific way. This gives the polyphonic novel spaces to depict the way in which human discourses are constructed.

Thus, despite the fact that the voices share the same literary space, they are independent; in some sense, they are also independent of the author. In a Polyphonic novel the plurality of characters is not unfolded in the light of the author's unitary conscience; in fact, these

autonomous consciences are joined together in their literary world, shaping and establishing relationships around events within the novel. (p. 16)

El discurso del héroe acerca del mundo y de sí mismo es autónomo como el discurso normal del autor, no aparece sometido a su imagen objetivada como una de sus características, pero tampoco es portavoz del autor, tiene una excepcional independencia en la estructura de la obra, parece sonar al lado del autor y combina de una manera especial con éste y con las voces igualmente independientes de otros héroes. (p. 17)

The multiple voices are not unraveled within an objective world. They have their own feelings, thoughts, and beliefs, political, cultural and religious values. The multiplicity of consciences results in the creation of a whole literary universe, where no stand is better or more important than the other ones. It is in the whole interaction where the unity of Dostoyevsky's work lies. Nevertheless, the characters are not a pretext to show an ideological stand; in fact, what makes polyphony such an interesting concept is that the characters seem to have a consciousness different from that of the author. This is better explained in Bakhtin's words:

Los héroes principales de Dostoievski, efectivamente, son, según la misma intención artística del autor, no solo objetos de su discurso, sino *sujetos* de dicho discurso con significado directo. Por eso la palabra del héroe no se agota en absoluto por su función caracterológica y pragmático-argumental común, aunque tampoco representa la expresión de la propia posición ideológica del autor. (p.17) (Italics are mine)

Taking as an example Dostoyevsky's heroes, Bakhtin says that the main characters in a polyphonic novel are not objects or a mere pretext to present a discourse, they are *subjects* of that discourse; therefore, they are meaningful and work as an independent conscience from that of his or her author.

This is why the characters in a novel are not just objects of ideological discourses; in fact, these characters have their own inner conflicts, they are the result of inner and external voices, they have contradictory thoughts; they are the result of heterogeneous and incompatible principles; as a consequence, they are inevitably critical voices of society, because their own vision of the world is in conflict with that of their environment, the social organization or the social institutions.

Las ideas en sentido estricto, es decir, los puntos de vista del protagonista como ideólogo, se introducen en el diálogo con base en un mismo principio. Las opiniones ideológicas, como lo hemos visto, están también dialogizadas internamente, y en un diálogo externo se combinan siempre con las replicas internas del otro, incluso allí donde adoptan una forma determinada, extremadamente monológica de la expresión. (Bakhtin, 1979)

In this paragraph, Bakhtin states how the ideas of Dostoyevsky's main characters are framed within inner and external dialogues which are combined to shape a subject. So, the inner ideological opinions of a certain character are mixed with those of another character. This way, all the ideological discourses are linked according to their replies and responses. That is why in the polyphonic novel is based on a constant tension between the inner and external dialogues of its characters.

Nevertheless, the characters are not the result of an ideological dialectic movement; in fact, in Dostoyevsky's novels the thesis and the antithesis appear simultaneously, and as it has been said before, an instance of Polyphony is that the character precedes the ideology, and if there is a dialectic movement, it is the consequence of the movements within the consciousness of the character and his/her dialogue with the other voices within the novel. As Bakhtin (1979) points out: "...En Dostoievski la idea jamás se separa de la voz. Por eso es errónea la afirmación de que los diálogos de Dostoievski tienen carácter dialéctico". This last Bakhtin's quotation refers to the fact that the characters' ideas and the character's voices are intimately bound, and that they are not just the opposition of two opposite discourses; the polyphonic novel overcomes the traditional dialectic based on binaries.

The idea of Polyphony turns out to be a revolutionary concept in the 60's, and the reason why this happens is that it gives an uncommon vision of the notion of texts, where literary texts are not static objects, but structures that are elaborated in relation to other structures. These relationships are of three kinds according to Helene Pouliquen (2001):

1- La relación de un texto artístico con muchos otros textos, artísticos o no, pasados o presentes. A este respecto Bajtin hablaba de un dialogismo, de un diálogo entre los textos. Julia Kristeva acuñará el término, muy exitoso de "intertextualidad" (interna o externa).

2- Una relación necesariamente crítica, construida sobre la base de distanciamientos múltiples, de un juego de diversas focalizaciones, de diversas voces.

3- Una relación dinámica, una relación en movimiento perpetuo, nunca acabada, sobre todo teniendo en cuenta que, para Bajtin, el receptor de la obra es su co-creador y que, por definición, el “objeto estético”, fruto de esa participación plena en el nivel de la creación de la forma arquitectónica, se modifica, se desplaza en el tiempo y en el espacio. (p. 17)

Therefore, multiple and heterogeneous relationships can be found in a literary text; intertextuality does not refer just to the dialogue of the multiple discourses in the novel, but also to the discourses beyond the literary space. It could include, for instance, a philosophical, historical, political or scientific discourse; texts can dialogue among themselves always creating new relationships.

Regarding the second point, the fact that within a novel multiple voices dialogue not just with their own environment but with a plurality of discourses, turns out to be a critical relationship. These discourses do not follow an established vision of the world, nor the author's conceptions; for example, a character might be intentionally created to ideologically oppose his own creator as well as in contradiction with a plurality of consciences in a novel.

La forma novelesca, por lo tanto. Es fruto de una opción ideológica. Es fruto de una axiología, de una valoración del mundo hostil a la seriedad monológica de la cultura oficial; es evidentemente contestataria en todas sus dimensiones: en su tipo de héroe problemático, pero sobre todo en su manera de introducir en su seno una multiplicidad de discursos, sin privilegiar ninguno, convirtiéndose en el discurso de la puesta en relación, en el discurso polifónico. (p. 21)

Rather than privileging one discourse, the polyphonic novel becomes a world where different stands and views of the world co-exist, and where different assessments of the world are producing a constant conflict in which none of them is imposed over the other. This mixture of discourses produces a whole that can be considered the essence of the polyphonic novel.

Finally, the third relationship poses the literary work as an unfinished product; it is not just determined by the time or the spatial conditions in which it was written. Its significance changes and the role of the receptor is of utter importance, because, for Bakhtin, the receptor is the co-author of the literary work. The relationships in a novel can differ radically depending on the kind of readers, the status quo, or the social and historical facts. Thus, a literary piece is also a polysemic phenomenon:

La relación texto contexto es una relación plástica, dinámica, plurideterminada, que se articula no sólo con el polo del productor y su “repertorio” (su visión del mundo) sino, de manera igualmente fundamental, con el polo del receptor. Además tanto el productor como el receptor del texto, si bien no se consideran como entes individuales en un sentido “burdamente psicológico” como solía decir Bajtin, se visualizan en toda su dimensión de “personas”, caracterizadas por su capacidad axiológica, su capacidad de actividad valorativa, es decir, como sujetos plenos y no como seres determinados por la ideología de la clase en la cual nacieron o cuyo punto de vista adoptaron posteriormente. (p. 19)

Words are the material that is used by the author to gather different and multiple valuations of the world, a critical discourse that is organized in the form of an artistic expression and that can acquire different interpretations depending on its relationships with a variety of different structures that are not necessarily artistic.

La obra poética, dice Bajtin, es “un condensador potente de evaluaciones sociales inexpressadas; cada palabra está saturada de ellas. Son precisamente esas evaluaciones sociales las que organizan las formas artísticas como su expresión directa”. El instrumento privilegiado para la manifestación textual de esas evaluaciones sociales son las palabras: “Las palabras maduran en un contexto vivido donde se impregnan de evaluaciones. El poeta escoge las palabras en función de esas evaluaciones. Las escoge desde el punto de vista de los personajes, que son los portadores de esas evaluaciones. Escogiendo palabras, escoge y manifiesta evaluaciones”. (p. 29)

Thus the poetic work is full of unexpressed social assessments that organize the artistic form in order to express themselves. Through words, those assessments of the world are shown, and the author chooses the words that will shape the discourse based on the characters' perspectives and points of view.

Finally, the last relevant concept is Bakhtin's proposal of carnival. It has its roots in the Middle Ages where people celebrated the renovation of life; in popular festivals all differences were forgotten, and there was no distinction between landowners and workers.

Bajo el régimen feudal existente en la Edad Media, este carácter festivo, es decir la relación de la fiesta con los objetivos superiores de la existencia humana, la resurrección y la renovación, sólo podía alcanzar su plenitud y su pureza en el carnaval y en otras fiestas populares y públicas. La fiesta se convertía en esta circunstancia en la forma que adoptaba la segunda vida del pueblo, que temporalmente penetraba en el reino utópico de la universalidad, de la libertad, de la igualdad y de la abundancia. (Bajtin, 2001)

It is very similar to Nietzsche's Dionysian principle: in the Carnival there is no limit between art and life, the carnival makes class differences disappear. It is life that turns into art; the distinction between artists and public does not exist because the carnival integrates all kinds of people:

De hecho, el carnaval ignora toda distinción entre actores y espectadores. También ignora la escena, incluso en su forma embrionaria. Ya que una escena destruiría el carnaval (e inversamente, la destrucción del escenario destruiría el espectáculo teatral). Los espectadores no asisten al carnaval, sino que lo viven, ya que el carnaval está hecho para todo el pueblo. Durante el carnaval no hay otra vida que la de carnaval. Es imposible escapar, porque el carnaval no tiene ninguna frontera espacial. En el curso de la fiesta sólo puede vivirse de acuerdo a sus leyes, es decir de acuerdo a las leyes de la libertad. El carnaval posee un carácter universal, es un estado peculiar del mundo: su renacimiento y su renovación en los que cada individuo participa. Esta es la esencia misma del carnaval, y los que intervienen en el regocijo lo experimenten vivamente. (Bajtín 2001)

Its universal character is an allusion to polyphony, in the carnival all the discourses are dancing and laughing at each other, because they are on the same level; none of them is more important than the other, while in the official festivals the differences remained, every person exhibited his/her social status and insignias:

La abolición de las relaciones jerárquicas poseía una significación muy especial. En las fiestas oficiales las distinciones jerárquicas se destacaban a propósito, cada personaje se presentaba con las insignias de sus títulos, grados y funciones y ocupaba el lugar reservado a su rango. Esta fiesta tenía por finalidad la consagración de la desigualdad, a diferencia del carnaval en el que todos eran iguales y donde reinaba una forma especial de contacto libre y familiar entre individuos



normalmente separados en la vida cotidiana por las barreras infranqueables de su condición, su fortuna, su empleo, su edad y su situación familiar. (Bajtín, 2001)

Therefore, the figure of the carnival allows different and multiple discourses to co-exist regardless the origin and the ideological stand, there is no hierarchy between them. In the carnival, all the barriers between people disappeared; it was an space in which all were the same and there was some kind of free contact between people from different social classes and professions who had prominent ideological differences. This concept will be important to explore the space in which the characters in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* construct their discourses.

To summarize, this study is based on the aesthetic vision of Nietzsche and Wilde, for that reason, this referential framework explored the notions of art and aesthetics in the work of these authors, specially those presented in *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Decay of Lying* respectively. Besides, relevant studies about *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were presented in the State of the art, as well as significant essays and articles about the relationship between Oscar Wilde and the aesthetic movement. Thus, the state “Art for art’s sake” was explored; this opens the discussion to the essential, moral and ethic function of art and the relationship between the artist and his work within TPODG. Finally, in order to find the different discourses which are shown in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and to reveal the Dionysian and Apollonian discourses, this novel will be considered as a polyphonic novel in which multiple and different voices co-exist in a literary space. The concept of carnival will be relevant to interpret the social context in which the novel is unfolded, that is, the space in which the multiple discourses encounter one another.

The Apollonian and Dionysian voices in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde

During the XIXth century many authors developed different theories of Art. The studies about Greek art and philosophy gave as a result, one of the most important periods for the history of art: Romanticism. Its influence penetrated all spheres of art and it was a point of transition between the classical arts and the vanguards. During this period different authors approached Art as a philosophy of life, and as an alternative to understand reality. The influence of art in the moral, social and political fields was widely discussed in the mainstreams of thought in Europe. In those times, Nietzsche who had a strong affection for art, and Oscar Wilde, an Irish Dandy who was known for his sympathy for the aesthetic movement, both revealed new ways of understanding reality in terms of epistemological and artistic discourses.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) Nietzsche's conception of the world was purely understood in an aesthetic way. For him, our existence can only be conceived this way. Two fundamental and opposing forces shape Nietzsche's ideas: The Apollonian and the Dionysian. The first one represents appearance, while the other one represents the eternal becoming itself. What we think is real is just a moment in eternal struggle between them; our life is an illusion, it is the dream of a God who is spoiled and who does not have any moral judgment or cares about human existence. He is an artist creating and destructing life, playing with forms and shapes. What happens in nature also happens within an artist, s/he is an echo, a replica of the primary state of existence; therefore, Apollonian and Dionysian forces are also psychological.

Oscar Wilde was considered an aesthete; he was influenced by the famous nineteenth century statement "art for art's sake". In several works, he insisted in the importance of art, -

though in his extravagant and paradoxical way-; he claimed that “Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place. As for the infinite variety of Nature, that is pure myth. It is not to be found in Nature herself, it resides in the imagination, or fancy, or cultivated blindness of the man who looks at her”. Art is the way humans dress existence, it makes us intensify what we feel. What is ugly or beautiful has an effect in the way we conceive nature, and perceive reality.

Although, these authors were unknown to each other, both conceived art as an important reason to justify existence and life; they claimed the importance of art in the construction of a new society; they were isolated from society because of their ideas and their way of life. They made the grounds of science and moral beliefs tumble in their countries in the late XIX century.

Wilde wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1891, this novel which caused a huge polemic in different social circles and which was considered a threat to the customs and moral values of the time, was the story of a young man whose desires of eternal youth and beauty led him to a desperate and sensuous path of pleasure and lust. The plot of Wilde’s work is the result of the different visions and discourses in the novel which are constantly colliding and molding its main character.

Dorian’s evolution in the novel is related to the influence of his friends: on one hand, there is Basil Hallward, a very sensitive, measured and moral artist who paints Dorian’s portrait. And on the other hand, there is Henry Wotton, a hedonistic dandy, whose discourse is based on relativity and paradoxes. The development of Dorian’s character is the result of the influence of these characters; they represent two opposite and different visions of the world which are in

tension. They are the first characters that appear in the novel and they discuss their view of life, beauty and art in the first chapter.

Respectively, both characters possess many of the qualities and essence of the Dionysian and Apollonian energies. But what are these forces? For Nietzsche, these two experiences of existence are constantly colliding and struggling; they create and recreate the world; they are represented by the figures of the Gods Apollo and Dionysius. The first one is the redemption of existence by means of representation, while the second is the eternal change, destruction and recreation of these representations.

Apollo is the God of light and brightness, his world is the world of dreams where raw reality is disguised by limits and forms. Painting and poetry give us immediate understanding: “every shape speaks to us; nothing is indifferent and unnecessary” (Nietzsche, 1872). Contemplative art makes man feel secure and pleased, he “fashions his interpretations of life; from these events he rehearses his life for himself” (Nietzsche, 1872). Life is highlighted by means of art, it is the expression of illusion, and it protects us from the terrible absurd of nature.

Basil Hallward is the first influence on young Dorian. He is a painter who is astonished by Dorian’s beauty. He thinks about Dorian as a perfect model for his art, but conceals it throughout the novel. Dorian’s beauty inspires him to use all his skills as an artist and to paint the mysterious picture which will transform Dorian’s life later on. The picture remains young and beautiful, an illusion and a representation of the ideal of art. It is not just an imitation of the real one, but the way Dorian would like to remain for eternity. The picture becomes a culmination in the artistic work of its painter.

Since the beginning of the novel, Basil has a conflict with the fact of showing his picture to the public; when Henry Wotton asks him why he is not going to show the portrait, he answers "I know you will laugh at me," he replied, "but I really can't exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it." For this artist, the fact that the picture shows a lot of himself and of his own emotions is a problem; he reveals his feelings to Dorian:

"every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul." (Wilde, 1892)

Oscar Wilde was very concerned with the main task of the artist and his/her role in society. Through Basil's contradiction, Wilde presents a conflict regarding the main aim of art, and the intention of an artist when making a piece of art. As Houston (1969) pointed out, the novel could be expressing this conflict, and the fact that rather than revealing the conscience of the artist, a work of art should reveal an artistic ideal to the reader and not the individual conceptions and feelings of the artist. In fact in the prologue, Wilde states that "The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim". Basil is very conscious that he is breaking his own rules in the sense that a work of art should not be a work of the artist, it is not made to show the intentions of the artist, instead it is rather a means to reveal the reader. The work of art is valuable in so far as it could be interpreted in multiple and different ways by the spectator:

"An artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them. We live in an age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography. We have lost the abstract sense of beauty. Some day I will show the world what it is; and for that reason the world shall never see my portrait of Dorian Gray." (Wilde, 1892)

Indeed, the artist is not responsible for his/her work once s/he has finished it. Basil does not want to expose his feelings to Dorian and his ideal of art is to some degree, frustrated. According to Houston (1969), TPODG might be a message to artists and a metaphoric reference to the corruption of an ideal:

"Hallward's excessive self-consciousness, his selfish desires, and his jealous zeal in keeping Dorian from others have corrupted the simple, natural, and affectionate model who sat for the portrait..." "...It is important to realize, however, that Dorian is first of all an artistic ideal, and the corruption that he undergoes in his hedonistic pursuit of pleasure is the corruption of an artistic ideal. The fact that Dorian's corruption shows only on Hallward's canvas emphasizes this point. Hallward's initial self-consciousness and mis-handling of the ideal have doleful consequences, and it is significant that the artist himself introduces Dorian to Lord Henry. The chain of events seems to be: self-consciousness of the artist, corruption of the ideal, and a hedonistic pursuit of exquisite sensation. Basil Hallward sets the entire sequence in motion." (Wilde, 1892)

Taking into account the characteristics that are attributed in this work to Basil Hallward, it could be said that he is somehow related to one important principle of the Apollonian voices: the *principium individuationis* which refers to the concept of the individual. Basil is incapable of renouncing to his own feelings being rather, a very self-conscious artist. As well as him, his art is sober, even thorough. His temper makes Hallward appear as a representation of the conquest

of the individual over his own emotions, at least until the moment he meets Dorian. His charming and moral disposition makes him seem like the perfect Apollonian artist.

"I sometimes think, Harry, that there are only two eras of any importance in the world's history. The first is the appearance of a new medium for art, and the second is the appearance of a new personality for art also. What the invention of oil-painting was to the Venetians, the face of Antinous was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of Dorian Gray will some day be to me. (Wilde, 1892)

Art dresses existence, it veils raw existence and allow humans to see the world from a different perspective. In art, a new medium means a new way of representing life, it colors it and allows artists to explore new creative possibilities. What makes art so important is the way it refreshes life; it does not aim to copy nature or to imitate it, but to intensify existence, or even to recreate it, in Wilde's words: "What art reveals to us is nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony". For Basil Hallward, Dorian is a new "school of art", he is the inspiration of a new style and new form.

It is not merely that I paint from him, draw from him, sketch from him. Of course, I have done all that. But he is much more to me than a model or a sitter. I won't tell you that I am dissatisfied with what I have done of him, or that his beauty is such that art cannot express it. *There is nothing that art cannot express* and I know that the work I have done, since I met Dorian Gray, is good work, is the best work of my life. (Wilde, 1892) (Italics are mine)

Art can express everything, even Dorian's beauty, it is a discourse in itself, and one that has not to be based on proofs. It stands on its own "No artist desires to prove anything. Even

things that are true can be proved". Wilde was concerned with the fact that art possesses a communicative power, "all art is at once surface and symbol". Opposite to science or philosophy, art is not necessarily based on logical relationships, on the contrary, metaphor is the medium to express or better recreate reality. The use of metaphors allows art to be seen from a wide range of interpretations, and it does not claim to possess truth, as other fields of human knowledge do. Philosophers intended to elaborate reality on the basis of logical concepts and they believed that they reflected reality. Wilde and Nietzsche used metaphors in opposition to the traditional and logical discourse on which western knowledge was based.

But in some curious way--I wonder will you understand me?--his personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style. *I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me before. 'A dream of form in days of thought'*—who is it who says that? I forget; but it is what Dorian Gray has been to me. The merely visible presence of this lad--for he seems to me little more than a lad, though he is really over twenty--his merely visible presence--ah! I wonder can you realize all that that means?  
(Wilde, 1892) (Italics are mine)

Besides painting a beautiful portrait, Basil changed the way he felt about life and he thought that he was able to recreate his life differently. In fact, this new model transformed his conscience in such a way that it gave him an original model to reconfigure art and his own life. Another relevant aspect to be mentioned about this fragment is that "A dream of form in days of thought" which is a clear reference to the scientific and rational model of the time, to which Wilde opposed style and form as a protest against the traditional model of thought.



On the other hand, Henry Wotton has an absolutely opposite character to that of Basil. He is a cynical thorough hedonist whose life consists in promulgating a life of pleasure and seduction. Henry is the incarnation of a perfect Dandy: elegant, charming, extravagant, sophisticated, controversial, with a broad culture, and an extreme aversion towards hard work. Even the way he dresses and his particularly “opium-tainted cigarette” outline his role in the novel as the temptation to a life of pleasure. Very early in the novel he is attracted by the picture of Dorian:

"Perhaps you will tire sooner than he will. It is a sad thing to think of, but there is no doubt that genius lasts longer than beauty. That accounts for the fact that we all take such pains to over-educate ourselves. In the wild struggle for existence, we want to have something that endures, and so we fill our minds with rubbish and facts, in the silly hope of keeping our place. The thoroughly well-informed man--that is the modern ideal. And the mind of the thoroughly well-informed man is a dreadful thing. It is like a bric-a-brac shop, all monsters and dust, with everything priced above its proper value. I think you will tire first, all the same. Some day you will look at your friend, and he will seem to you to be a little out of drawing, or you won't like his tone of colour, or something." (Wilde, 1892)

This sarcastic character shows a naked and raw perspective of life. He pointed out to Basil that the beauty would just remain in the picture and that his affection towards Dorian was the result of his incredible but temporary beauty. This dandy, in opposition to Basil and the Apollonian forces, represents the Dionysian forces, those of the god of fertility for the ancient Greeks. The God of intoxication, ecstasy, and the main festivities of those times which celebrated life in orgiastic rituals. This energy also represents ripping the veil or the dream that the Apollonian forces confer to humans; it is raw reality transformed into a living work of art in which the spirit of individuality is dissolved and the spirit of community rises.

Dionysius, in turn, is linked to a world where there are no restrictions for humans. The *principium individuationis* is broken in the Bacchic festivities and there is only ecstasy. Dancing and singing are the symbol of community. During the Dionysian rituals, humans become art in themselves, they are not artists anymore, the will of the craftsman speaks through them in drunkenness; in unconsciousness, the Apollonian dream is moved away, and life is directly felt, people are Gods.

Regardless of the resistance of his friend Basil to introduce him to Dorian, they meet in Basil's house. They are astonished by each other; their attraction is mutual and immediate. Their encounter is described as follows:

Lord Henry looked at him. Yes, he was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity. One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world. No wonder Basil Hallward worshipped him. (Wilde, 1892)

Dorian is described as a young narcissus, he is a beautiful chap who had never been touched by anything, not even disgrace or pain. At that stage of the novel, he is very innocent and fresh, but the encounter with Henry Wotton becomes a significant turning point for Dorian's life to change into a life of pleasure and passion. Throughout the novel, Henry Wotton is mindful of the influence he has over Dorian, but he conceals his intentions saying that "to influence a person is to give him one's own soul". And that "His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him. The aim of life is self-development". In fact, what ends up

changing Dorian are the words that this Dandy says to him. He is a kind of Mephistopheles whose entertainment is to play with Dorian's life. In some way, Dorian embodies all his philosophy of pleasure which results in his final destruction.

Nevertheless, it would be important to say that his paradox goes beyond the dimension of good and evil. His philosophy is related to the task of creation and in fact, he considers Dorian a work of art, a real one immersed in existence, unlike Basil who views him just as an ideal for his art. Lord Henry possesses a vision of the world which permeates many instances in life; for instance, the relationship between pleasure and pain, society –he is always laughing at his aristocratic friends and aunts-, art and beauty. Another dimension of his thought about the realization of an individual is:

"I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream--I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of mediaevalism, and return to the Hellenic ideal--to something finer, richer than the Hellenic ideal, it may be. But the bravest man amongst us is afraid of himself". (Wilde, 1892)

He invites Dorian to be a living work of art, to rejoice in his own beauty and to explore all the possible sensations in life. The reference to the Hellenic ideal reminds the admiration that Wilde and Nietzsche felt towards Greek culture. For the latter, art was the metaphysical activity of humanity, and in his first works he opposed it on the grounds of ethics and morals. Besides, for him, it was in the Greek tragedy where this culture achieved its magnificence due to the fact that they were capable of conciliating the spirits of Apollo and Dionysius. Tragic art is the

Greek's conquest of their passions; the Apollonian principles emerged afterwards from the Dionysian forces; it was the protection of ancient Greeks against bestiality and instincts. Greeks were strong enough to bear monstrosity, uncertainty and hideousness.

Even though Henry is not exactly an artist, the way he elaborates his discourse and the impact he has on Dorian is described as music. In fact, this is very important if one thinks about the relationship of Dionysius and music, and that Basil is a painter and a standard of a figurative artist.

Music had stirred him like that. Music had troubled him many times. But music was not articulate. It was not a new world, but rather another chaos, that it created in us. Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid, and cruel! One could not escape from them. And yet what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things, and to have a music of their own as sweet as that of viol or of lute. Mere words! Was there anything so real as words? (Wilde, 1892)

Music is constantly changing, contrary to painting that is defined in form; it is closer to Heraclites' concept of becoming, and conciliates the artist with the "Will of power" and harmony. The Dionysian spirit does not refer only to the artist's recreational power, but like an ecstasy, some kind of possession in which the eternal play of creation and destruction speaks through him/her. That is why Nietzsche considered music an art purer than painting; it is a metaphor of the world's becoming. Henry's discourse mesmerizes Dorian, "Music had stirred him like that", he changes Dorian with words which are clear evaluations of the world, and

again, there is a reference to chaos and creation in the way he whispers his discourse constructed with aphorisms and paradoxes.

On the other hand, figurative arts give us immediate understanding: “every shape speaks to us; nothing is indifferent and unnecessary” (Nietzsche, 1872). Contemplative art makes man feel secure and pleased, he “fashions his interpretations of life; from these events he rehearses his life for himself” (Nietzsche, 1872). Life is highlighted by means of art, it is the expression of the illusion, and it protects us from the terrible absurdity of nature.

Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure, or the luxury of a regret. The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful. (Wilde, 1892)

This battle takes place within Dorian, though in a different way. Until meeting Henry, Dorian had never felt how terrible life could be and how absurd and careless it is; looking at the picture he became conscious of how his life would pass while the picture would remain and contain all his beauty. He felt envious of Basil's work: “I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose? Every moment that passes takes something from me and gives something to it”. The illusion of happiness that he had until that moment passed and he understood that he would become old and wrinkled, that “The life that was to make his soul would mar his body. He would become dreadful, hideous, and uncouth.” And that the only experience worth living was his

youth. It was at this point when he desired with all his might to remain for eternity; the tragedy of human existence is revealed to him in Henry's words:

"How sad it is!" murmured Dorian Gray with his eyes still fixed upon his own portrait. "How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June.... If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that--for that--I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!"

Dorian Gray turned and looked at him. "I believe you would, Basil. You like your art better than your friends. I am no more to you than a green bronze figure. Hardly as much, I dare say." (Wilde, 1892)

Hence, this marks the first turning point in the novel. From now on, Dorian unleashes all his passions; he starts to experience a new life of pleasure, and of course, to reflect upon Henry's ambiguous stands:

"Yes," continued Lord Henry, "that is one of the great secrets of life--to cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul. You are a wonderful creation. You know more than you think you know, just as you know less than you want to know."

...Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing.... A new Hedonism--that is what our century wants. You might be its visible symbol. With your personality there is nothing you could not do. The world belongs to you for a season". (Wilde, 1892)

These words cause an immediate psychological effect in Dorian, all his conceptions about how he should live his life are turned over, and he feels that the way to lead a life worth living is by stimulating his perceptions as far as he can. His innocent and perfect conception of life is absolutely transformed by Henry's advice which apparently makes him understand the secrets of life.

But, not just the characters in the novel represent the Dionysian and Apollonian forces; there are many passages and references to these divinities, especially Dionysius. For instance, the way Henry's influence is shown in the novel is very Dionysian. It is full of images and scenes of Greek myths in which intoxication, forests, and their cult for pleasure and the senses is depicted. In fact, part of Wotton's conceptions claim for a return to the Hellenic ideal and even to a better state of art and existence. This is not random if one thinks of Henry's seductive power and the relationship his discourse has with music. Should this not be considered a Dionysian passage in the novel?

He played with the idea and grew wilful; tossed it into the air and transformed it; let it escape and recaptured it; made it iridescent with fancy and winged it with paradox. The praise of folly, as he went on, soared into a philosophy, and philosophy herself became young, and catching the mad music of pleasure, wearing, one might fancy, her wine-stained robe and wreath of ivy, danced like a Bacchante over the hills of life, and mocked the slow Silenus for being sober. Facts fled before her like frightened forest things. Her white feet trod the huge press at which wise Omar sits, till the seething grape-juice rose round her bare limbs in waves of purple bubbles, or crawled in red foam over the vat's black, dripping, sloping sides. It was an extraordinary improvisation. (Wilde, 1892)

The use of paradox and aphorisms is very important to understand, not just this character but Wilde's tenets regarding art. Henry's discourse does not claim to have the truth as, for example, science does. He elaborates a new system of values in which two things can exist at the same time. Henry does not care providing his own statements; in fact, they stand on their own. The Greeks achieved control of the Apollonian and Dionysian spirits; tragic art was Dionysian and Apollonian, and they would have not been so great, if they had just dominated one of them. They co-existed in tragic art; the way he veiled existence discursively speaking is what is important about them. Besides, both Nietzsche and Wilde used paradoxes in order to overcome the notion of truth, they use them to depict and elaborate their aesthetics. It was not a matter of being consistent but of allowing the public to interpret in multiple ways. In Wilde's words: "Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital. When critics disagree, the artist is in accord with himself".

For Nietzsche, Greek tragedy is the perfect balance between the two spirits; it uses the form of the Apollonian spirit and, at the same time, it showed raw reality and the tragic condition inherent to humans. They are made of discourses but behind them is just raw nature, something that overcomes everything that humankind can do. Nietzsche and Wilde vindicated the idea that we live in a world of discourses that are artificial and constructed by an interpretative being. That is why they had the idea that lies are more important than truths; indeed, they are collective and historical constructions. Nietzsche undertook a deconstructive study of morality and other ideas that were the pillars of western culture, while Wilde, used writing and paradox to show his ideas about art and existence.



For Nietzsche, tragedy gives a non-discursive impression of the contrast between the 'real truth of nature' (far more horrible than the merely unimaginative nature that Wilde depicts) and the 'lie of culture that poses as if it were the only reality' (BT, 8). This contrast is similar to the one between the 'eternal core of things, the thing-in-itself' and the 'whole world of appearances' (BT 8). This means that the whole orderly, apparently purposeful world that we inhabit is in fact a creation that we have placed between ourselves and the 'real', ultimate world that continues to run its course, as indifferent to us as Vivian's 'Nature' in *The Decay of Lying*. (Mabille, 2006)

The changes in Dorian are related to the fact that he assesses the world through an aesthetic experience, and in a sense, through appearance. The idea of an objective morality is weakened by Henry's paradoxical statements which allowed him to elaborate a perspective of life in which pleasure becomes the most important aspect of life while morality is isolated and useless. Nonetheless, all the "immoral acts" that Dorian performs in the novel are characterized by secrecy; therefore, he has a double life, a public one and a secret one, which might be the depiction of the double morality of the Victorian age. Now, morality acquires a predominant role in the novel and Dorian's actions give us clues of Wilde's ideas.

Dorian's exploration takes him to the brothels and low-rate bars in London where he is amazed by the beautiful Sybil Vane, a young empirical actress who interprets Shakespeare's plays in a vulgar tavern. At the beginning, Dorian's devotion for this woman is absolute. He falls in love with her performance of Ophelia, Rosalind, Juliet or Cordelia. Sybil's profession again represents the role of art making us dream. Likewise, the multiple forms our illusion can adopt and how our perception changes, in this case, when one person is in love. This could also be assumed as the illusion of light and brightness that Apollo radiates. The way she performs those roles captivates Dorian, who immediately goes and tells Henry about his discovery.

Dorian invites Henry and Hallward to one of Sybil's performances, but that night she acts awfully and terribly as she does not care about it, the only idea she had in her mind during the play was her lover. Dorian feels disappointed and incapable of understanding Sybil's behavior. After the performance he goes backstage and despises her. In spite of her tenderness, her sincere words and admiration for him, Dorian is already determined to end the relationship. His idealization of her had been torn apart; she was not Juliet or Ophelia anymore, but another common and cheap actress.

"Dorian, Dorian," she cried, "before I knew you, acting was the one reality of my life. It was only in the theatre that I lived. I thought that it was all true. I was Rosalind one night and Portia the other. The joy of Beatrice was my joy, and the sorrows of Cordelia were mine also. I believed in everything. The common people who acted with me seemed to me to be godlike. The painted scenes were my world. I knew nothing but shadows, and I thought them real. You came--oh, my beautiful love!--and you freed my soul from prison. You taught me what reality really is. Tonight, for the first time in my life, I saw through the hollowness, the sham, the silliness of the empty pageant in which I had always played. (Wilde, 1892)

But none of Sybil's requests could make him change his mind. As trivial as it may appear, there are too many important topics here that are implicit regarding Wilde's theory of art. He claimed that nature imitates art, and not the other way around. Dorian Gray is in love with the girl's art, and not really the woman herself; he only sees her through the scope of art. When Sybil reveals her love to Dorian, she does not disguise herself anymore; she stops acting and that is what disappoints Dorian. She incarnates art and art is all about style and form, that is what makes an artist unique, the way s/he dresses existence. Incapable of understanding the real Sybil, he decides to ignore her and this will be the first stain in his soul:

Cruelty! Had he been cruel? It was the girl's fault, not his. He had dreamed of her as a great artist, had given his love to her because he had thought her great. Then she had disappointed him. She had been shallow and unworthy. And, yet, a feeling of infinite regret came over him, as he thought of her lying at his feet sobbing like a little child. (Wilde, 1892)

Afterwards, Dorian goes home and notices that something has changed in the picture. It has a horrible expression of cruelty. He then discovered that the picture would show the corruption of his soul.

The lad frowned. "I don't like that explanation, Harry," he rejoined, "but I am glad you don't think I am heartless. I am nothing of the kind. I know I am not. And yet I must admit that this thing that has happened does not affect me as it should. It seems to me to be simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a great part, but by which I have not been wounded." (Wilde, 1892)

Despite of that fact that Sybil commits suicide, Dorian does not feel remorse; as a matter of fact, he sees that painful moment as a Greek tragedy. Sybil's death becomes part of the play that his life is and, then he becomes a spectator of his own life and the portrait becomes the record of all his acts. He becomes selfish and a thoroughly morally incorrect being according to himself and to the moral values of his time, being rather a representation or a metaphor of the

hypocrisy of a social elite that promulgated the purest values and at the same time was incapable to reflect upon its own decadence.

Although Basil painted the picture and that he is not responsible for the consequences that it had on Dorian, there is still a relationship between Basil and his work. He has a conflict about what he portrayed and this illustrates the relationship between the artist and his/her intentions when creating a work of art. Even if a work of art is able to have multiple interpretations, it also represents the conflicts of a society, in this case, portrayed in Dorian's soul. When Dorian shows the picture to his creator and when he sees his reaction, the only thing he can feel is wrath; what had hidden Dorian's beauty was the ugliness and the corruption of his age. Just Basil or better, the picture, shows him what he has become.

Rather than showing the corruption of Dorian's soul, Wilde is making a ruthless criticism of the Victorian age. For Dorian, looking at himself in the portrait is unbearable, just as in the reference to Caliban in the prologue: "The nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass". And this rage is expressed when Dorian kills Basil; what art mirrors is unacceptable for him, he is incapable of accepting what he has become, and therefore, the witness of his soul is murdered. Societies are not capable of accepting what they are, and the best example of this is the Victorian age, a corrupt and hypocritical society with two faces: on one hand, all the manners and Puritanism of the Anglican Church, and on the other, a corrupt society where aristocracy led double lives.

As it is pointed out in *The Rage of Caliban* by Mabilille(2006), Dorian is a representation of the decadent values of the Victorian society; he ends up being a symbol of nihilism and the decadence of modernism:

He begins to slide into that dreadful disease of modernity, 'that terrible taedium vitae that comes upon those that life denies nothing' (CW, 108). In this he is hardly to be distinguished from the rest of his society. He finds himself as part of a world that prefers form to substance. He is only the most radical example of its most sacred principles. 'Society, civilized society at least, is never very ready to believe anything to the detriment of those that are very rich or fascinating' (Mabilille, 2006).

This last point is presented in Dorian's excursions to the brothels and the opium dens, and it is also related to the idea of the Carnival and the veil of the *principium individuationis*. In fact, when he goes to those places of decadence being anonymous, all his distinctions as a Dandy or a Gentleman disappear. He is not Dorian Gray but another member of a decadent society, there is no distinction among social classes and he is in some way deconstructed. These spaces represent the basic instincts of humanity and the hedonist cure for Dorian "To cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul." Hence, the opposition between an Apollonian image of himself and his deconstruction are clearly presented this way, the rupture and the illusion of life are exposed and his basic instinct is released in some kind of orgy in London's darkest places. It is an opposition between the world of reason and that of instinct, and that is one of the oldest problems of human existence.

In TPODG, Oscar Wilde wrote his vision of beauty, art and ethics. In the prologue there is a clear intention to define what he thought about the role of the artist, the critic, the spectator,

art and the work of art. He was a known aesthete in his times and this novel might be regarded as a representative work of this movement which was known as “Art for art’s sake”. Though there were different interpretations of this statement, Oscar Wilde followed Walter Pater’s ideas about art and beauty. Pater was Wilde’s master in Oxford, and he gave art a moral and ethic sense:

“ Pater grounded his version of the aesthetic movement upon an acknowledged --if somewhat idiosyncratic—system of values in a fashion that clearly appealed to Wilde’s imagination. As Wilde himself surely knew, despite the aura of iniquity that the concept suggests to some, Pater’s advocacy of the idea of art for art’s sake does not abandon ethics. Even his notion of autonomous art, seemingly aloof from the influence of moral judgment, rests upon clear, though admittedly unconventional, ethical standards. (Houston, 1969)

Hence, the “Art for art’s sake” movement had a position which was intentionally against the traditional morality and that advocated the idea that a work of art stands by itself, but, at the same time, it was based on ethical standards. They viewed art as the only possibility to elaborate new ethical discourses. Although there is a clear contradiction in its essence, it was a way to attack the society of the time and the traditional schools of art.

It seems that Wilde and the aesthetes were looking for a moral reaction of the public, in fact in the prologue of TPODG, Wilde wrote that “The moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium”. So, for Wilde it was difficult to separate the moral life of a man and the work of artist, however, he is stating that morality is an element that the artist can use as a symbol or representation of the historical situation of a certain time; this is paradoxical and sometimes can

be blurred by Dorian's end, which some have interpreted as a moral critique to hedonism. The relationships between art, ethics and morality are much more complex in the novel

Hedonism becomes relevant in as much as it could be considered as the ethic stand of Wilde's. Nevertheless, whether Dorian is a Hedonist or not, what really destroys him are excess and selfishness. It would be also important to point out that Wilde's election regarding hedonism is a clear intention to undermine the condemnation of the body as the symbol of sin by the Anglican Church.

Now, it would be important to explain the historical and social facts that drove Nietzsche and Wilde's aesthetic vision of the world and that expressed the foundations of the moral and ethic conceptions of western civilization. The last half of nineteenth century was a period of revolutions and ideological changes that led European culture to crisis. In fact, everything that had been thought as true was questioned, from the existence of God to the conception of truth. The scientific advances and the industrial revolution undermined the conceptions of a metaphysical world that was based on Christianity and Plato ideas. In fact, the last days of the XIXth century were the culmination of a period that had begun with the Enlightenment and that had lead to the foundations of modernism.

These changes had a strong impact on the way people conceived existence. Firstly, if there was no God, there were no natural laws; indeed, God turned out to be a construction, an idea, a representation and an abstraction of human ideas. Secondly, if there was no natural law, humans had the power to invent laws and to choose their destiny. Thirdly, the notion of an objective and ideal world in terms of Plato were re-evaluated due to the fact that the individual, and in consequence, perceptions were the basis of knowledge. "And this implies existence as

artists; we are forever doomed to constructing, adding to, cutting from and arranging the world in ways determined by our sensory apparatus and psychological needs.” (Mabille, 2006).

As a matter of fact, it is always false, since for humans existing in the world the totality of being is beyond our grasp. No event exists in itself. Everything that happens consists of a group of phenomena that are gathered and selected by an interpretative being”. (Mabille, 2006).

Hence, our knowledge is a construction and an organization of our language and the conventions we have culturally made. Truth and nature were not anymore the guide of philosophy; when Nietzsche’s declared God’s death, the relationships between nature and humans started being comprehended in a different way, as we establish our relationship to the world with words. The notion of objectivity was undermined.

For Nietzsche and Wilde it was high time that man came to recognize the potential for freedom to be found in man’s unique linguistic relationship with the world. This meant that man had to abandon the misconception of language as somehow being able to stand in some “natural” relationship with the world, and to admit that there is something inherently *tragic* about man’s futile attempts to render the world to an even older and wider definition of the tragic, that sees a tragic element everywhere where man is overcome by a force or elements beyond his control and greater than himself. (Mabille, 2006)

Before Nietzsche, science was devoted to the idea of truth which was taken from Plato’s principles of an ideal world; however, Kant had said that phenomena cannot be known in themselves; in fact, knowledge is rather a construction of perceptions; it is constructed by the



observer; interpretation rather than truth was the actual tenet of knowledge. Scientists can describe nature but never comprehended it completely. Western philosophy was based on the notion of truth, an objective, but an inexistent one.

Both Nietzsche and Wilde anticipated the postmodern situation, mankind left, as Lyotard states, with an open multiplicity of heterogeneous or strictly incommensurable language games. And what is more, they both delighted in it. The source of Wilde's wit is the discrepancy between the great expectations and the banal reality of Victorian life, and Nietzsche, as we shall see, measures the health of a culture according to the number of perspectives it can accommodate. But the rest of Victorian society was marked by a sense of profound crisis. (Mabille, 2006)

In the midst of this moral, ethical, scientific and epistemological crisis, many turned their attention to art, understood as the last possibility to elaborate new discourses and perspectives. The recreational power of art and the metaphor within it allow artists to be generators of new values. Artists looked for new ways of representation not just in style and form, but on the ethical grounds of art. Nietzsche and Wilde emphasized the importance of art and they thought of art as a parallel and subversive discourse to the established ethics and conceptions, and all that it involves, including science, art and philosophy.

Rather than opposing ethics to aesthetics, Nietzsche proposed a different possibility based on the fact that art is the metaphysical activity of humankind and that "...Morality, on this view, became a mere fabrication for purposes of gulling: at best, an artistic fiction; at worst, an outrageous imposture..." (Nietzsche, 1872); he wanted to overcome morals, to go far beyond

good and evil in some sense. Christian ideals reject this world and this life putting the efforts of humankind in a life beyond death, something inconceivable for Nietzsche.

“Against the tendency to read the world in simple binaries, Nietzsche posits a polyvalent monist force that distinguishes between degrees and kinds of power. This is the will to power, and it is neither essence, nor structure, telos nor meaning in itself, but rather both the full force of appearance itself and the continual sublation of every telos and the transgression of all ends. The will to power establishes new hierarchies and then continues to undermine them. To impose hierarchies according to which the value of phenomena are measured is the ultimate artistic endeavour, but ‘truth’ plays no role whatsoever in this. Nietzsche’s thought is a perpetual challenge to those who tend to simplify the world, those who operate under the illusion that they make the world more accessible by establishing simple dichotomies such as good and evil, spirit and body, or, epistemologically speaking, mind and body, truth and error...” (Mabille, 2006).

The Dionysian and Apollonian discourses are the metaphor of a new way of understanding knowledge and existence. The struggle between these two forces allows humanity to deconstruct and construct the world in an endless and limitless game, where there is a possibility of changing and transforming the world. This discursive metaphor overcomes Hegel’s dialectic allowing a diverse and multiple interpretations of the world.

Such limitless game relates to polyphony where the simple dichotomy is overcome, and there are multiple discourses that are contradictory and different, and that meld in a universe. Indeed, Dorian Gray has an interpretation of life, he is able to look at himself through the perspective of art, and his psychological and ideological transformation is the result of an individual construction and perception. He understands the world throughout art and beauty,

and therefore, all his moral system is affected by it. Dorian's decisions are his "will of power" if one takes Nietzsche's concept. Likewise, Henry Wotton has created a construction of the world or at least he is a discourse in itself, in the sense that he never acts but is always influencing Dorian, he realizes through Dorian.

In Bakhtin's words, the characters of the novel are "subjects of a discourse", and the ideological background that each of them has is constantly changing through the dialogue among them. Although these discourses are contrary, they co-exist in the same literary space, establishing complex relationships that are linked by the inner and external dialogues -which are made of thoughts, assessments of the world, judges, memories and actions -- of their characters. In TPODG, this tension is more explicit in Dorian's changes throughout the novel; his ideological constructions are transformed by the constant interactions between the dialogues of Basil, Henry, and the society in which he acts, as well as by his inner conflicts.

## Conclusions

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* allows more interpretations than the one posed above; it may be considered a game of mirrors. It is a novel written by means of paradoxes and that is where its meaning resides. Henceforth, whose corruption is interpreted and who carries out? Is it the reader, an age, the artist himself or the (drive) corruption of modernity?

The encounter of such different and contradictory discourses in a literary space allows the public to interpret the book in multiple ways. These interpretations will be based on the experiences and judgments of the readers. In TPODG, there is a metaphor of what a reader can interpret and it is depicted in the relationship between Dorian and the picture, apparently the picture works as a mirror of Dorian's actions, thoughts and intentions. Therefore, the main aim of art is to reveal the reader, it is a symbol whose interpretation will depend on an specific time and a particular public.

This is also a symbol of its time, and in that sense, it reveals the ideological, social, political and ethical conflicts of a particular epoch. As contemporaries, Wilde and Nietzsche had similar concerns regarding the most relevant concepts that build up the Western civilization, that is why they had common interests in Greek culture, the concepts of truth, nature and morality, and the importance of art in the constitution of a new civilization. All these concepts belong to the main topics within *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which constantly criticize the hypocrisy of the idiosyncrasies of the Victorian times.

These authors found that what is called reality is based on the linguistic relationships established between the world and our perceptions, therefore they strongly questioned sciences,

philosophies and traditional ethics that were grounded on the concepts of truth and nature. For this reason they vindicated the idea of lying and art as the possibility to construct new valid discourses. For them, art and ethics are intimately linked, and they intentionally tried to oppose them, or at least they viewed art as a means to convey the understanding that ethics is a cultural construction and that it can be renovated and changed.

The statement “Art for art’s sake” is contradictory because art cannot be separated from a particular context. It is difficult to understand a position which held that a work of art stands by itself; rather those movements were proposing alternative ethical discourses to those that were promulgated during the XIXth century. Moreover, this discourse was revolutionary and opened the discussion to the main function of Art; it was a clear protest to the established political, religious and economical institutions of the time.

Some of the main aspects of the Dionysian and Apollonian figures are portrayed through Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward, whose voices expose the different ideological constructions that mold Dorian Gray throughout the novel. These discourses, which are made of evaluations and judgments of the world, dialogue among them, but finally no one is imposed over the other allowing multiple and different interpretations of the novel. This work focused on the voices that had characteristics of the Dionysian and Apollonian forces, nonetheless, there are others that can be the object of further study and that are important to understand Wilde’s social and ethical context.

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