

**“LYING ON THE FLOOR WAS A DEAD MAN”:  
AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND AESTHETIC DISTANCE IN OSCAR  
WILDE’S *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY***

Erkin Kıryaman<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

Oscar Wilde, who is a late Victorian novelist, playwright, short story writer, critic, and poet, is one of the notable figures of aestheticism along with Walter Pater and John Ruskin. Published in 1891, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is Wilde’s only novel, and it revolves around the concepts of art, painting, artistic sublimity, and death. Within the frame of aesthetic beauty and aesthetic experience, Wilde’s novel presents a critical question about the idea of death caused by art and artistic beauty. Dorian Gray as an aesthete and Basil Hallward’s model of his painting in the novel, kills himself in the very end because of his obsession with beauty, youth and art. Both his perception of art and his relationships with Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton imply that Dorian Gray’s aesthetic environment is also a component of his aesthetic experience in which Dorian Gray poignantly develops an indispensable connexion to the painting. The main argument of this study is Dorian Gray’s involvement in the process of aesthetic experience by violating or disrupting the ways of aesthetic distance that cause his death at the end of the novel.

**Key Words:** *Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, Aestheticism, Aesthetic Distance, Aesthetic Experience*

**“YERDE ÖLÜ BİR ADAM YATMAKTAYDI”: OSCAR WILDE’İN *DORIAN GRAY’İN PORTRESİ* ADLI ROMANINDA ESTETİK YAŞANTI VE ESTETİK MESAFE**

**Özet**

Geç Viktorya döneminde önemli bir romancı, şair, eleştirmen, öykü ve oyun yazarı olan Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater ve John Ruskin ile birlikte estetisizmin önemli öncülerinden biridir. 1891 yılında yayımlanan *Dorian Gray’in Portresi*, Oscar Wilde’in sanat, resim, sanatsal yücelik ve ölüm kavramlarını ele alan tek romanıdır. Estetik güzellik ve estetik yaşantı çerçevesinde, Wilde’in bu eseri resim ve sanatsal güzelliğin neden olduğu bir ölüm konusunda kritik sorular sunar. Eserde bir estetik ve Basil Hallward’ın resmine model olan Dorian Gray, eserin sonunda kendini güzellik, gençlik ve sanat mefhumlarına olan saplantısından dolayı öldürür. Dorian Gray’in hem sanat algısı hem de Basil Hallward ve Lord Henry Wotton ile olan ilişkileri Dorian Gray’in estetik çevresinin ve onun resimle

<sup>1</sup> Araştırma Görevlisi, Ege Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, erkin.kiryaman@gmail.com

This paper is an extended version of the paper presented with the title, “‘Lying on the floor was a dead man:’ Aesthetic Distance in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*” in the 2nd International Symposium and Exhibition on Arts & Aesthetics at Elazığ University.

Bu çalışma Elazığ Fırat Üniversitesi ev sahipliğinde düzenlenen 2. Uluslararası Sanat, Estetik Sergisi ve Sempozyumu’nda “‘Lying on the floor was a dead man:’ Aesthetic Distance in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*” başlığıyla sözlü bildiri olarak sunulan bildirinin genişletilmiş halidir.

arasında kaçınılmaz etkili bir bağ geliştirdiği estetik yaşantısının iç içe olduğunu gösterir niteliktedir. Bu çalışmanın başat tartışması Dorian Gray'in kendi resmi ile olan estetik yaşantı sürecinde estetik mesafenin ihlal edilmesi veya bozulması sonucu kendini öldürmesine odaklanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Oscar Wilde, Dorian Gray'in Portresi, Estetisizm, Estetik Mesafe, Estetik Yaşantı

### Introduction: The Problem of Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Distance

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, which was published in 1891, narrates the story of Dorian Gray who falls in love with his own portrait painted by Basil Hallward. While intriguing the minds of the readers with several questions revolving around the perils of beauty, the novel also delves into the concept of death by producing a vital question whether beauty kills. Basil, who is an emotional artist, produces a work of art that not only transcends the meaning of life and death but also kills Dorian metaphorically with its sublimity since Dorian associates the passing of time with the painting. On the other hand, Dorian is obsessed with youth, and has desire to maintain his beauty of the youth. The death of Dorian is still an ambiguous issue which also proffers a wide array of critical questions related to the concepts of aesthetics. At a simpler level, Dorian's death is explained through his intentional but unconscious, ambiguous but deliberate, or formless but sensual attachment with the portrait in the novel. Yet, the novel also branches questions about aesthetic experience and aesthetic distance because, even though Dorian is the model of the portrait without any aesthetic intentions in the beginning, he experiences the finished portrait in an aesthetic way. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to question Dorian Gray's aesthetic experience with the portrait while pinning down his violation or disruption of aesthetic distance which seems to cause his death in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

To begin with, aesthetic experience and aesthetic distance are interrelated since these two terms focus on the aesthetic object and its effect on the aesthetic subject who experiences the aesthetic object. Aesthetic experience is extensively defined as an experience in which an aesthetic subject experiences the aesthetic object that has the qualities of beauty and sublimity, which as a result, requires an aesthetic attitude. That is why "*aesthetic experience can be defined as a special state of mind that is qualitatively different from the everyday experience*" (Marković, 2012, p. 1). The exact detachment from everyday feelings and the remoteness from a work of art, therefore, elucidate the idea that there is a physical and psychological style behind the gaze of the viewer and the object viewed. Thus, rather than focusing on the practical, informative and economical attitudes towards the aesthetic object, the aesthetic subject is surrounded with questions and meanings regarding the aesthetic object which has auto-telos that can be explained as having an end or purpose in itself (Tunalı, 2002, p. 25). In this sense, the object has an aesthetic quality due to its internal characteristics. The subject, who contemplates on the object in an aesthetical manner, has aesthetic experience. Both the manner, which is, in fact, external, and the internal qualities of the work of art, are the constituents of aesthetic object and subject. That is why the contemplative manner and style of the subject are related to the concept of the aesthetic distance.

Basically, aesthetic distance is defined as "*a psychological relationship between an audience and an artwork reflecting a certain degree of disinterest, or critical detachment from it*" (Oxford Reference, 2018, def. 1). In fact, the distance is both physical and abstract since the aesthetic subject is posited in front of an aesthetic object which is judged aesthetically. In this sense, the disinterest thesis, which

was introduced by Kant to discuss the relation and difference between the aesthetic and the moral, illustrates the fact that distancing is necessary “*in order to background subjective emotional responses and to cultivate an approach thought to be appropriate for an aesthetic construct as opposed to everyday experience*” (Oxford Reference, 2018, def. 1). Edward Bullough, in his “Psychical Distance” as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle” uses “psychical distance” rather than disinterest, and argues that aesthetic distance is created

“(…) by putting the phenomenon, so to speak, out of gear with our actual practical self; by allowing it to stand outside the context of our personal needs and ends—in short, by looking at it ‘objectively’ ... by permitting only such reactions on our part as emphasise the ‘objective features of the experience, and by interpreting even our ‘subjective’ affections not as modes of our being but rather as characteristics of the phenomenon” (Bullough, 1912, p. 89).

The objective approach or attitude is clearly about aesthetic distance and the disinterest thesis. According to İsmail Tunalı, the aesthetic subject is in aesthetic attitude by disregarding all things outside of the aesthetic object (2002, p. 25-26). The existence of the work of art, thus, is the centre of attention and aesthetic experience in which the attitude transcends the reality and carries the subject into another realm of fiction or reality. That is why the viewing subject is always alienated or isolated from the reality of present time and posited into imagination and fiction.<sup>2</sup>

It is significant to note that in order to understand the concept of the aesthetic distance, the concept of aesthetic experience requires further elaboration since these two terms are somehow used reiteratively and interchangeably to convey the idea of the aesthetic acts. Recent influential studies in aesthetic experience basically and generally present miscellaneous perceptions, evaluations, and definitions. Noël Carroll, in his *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*, categorises the approaches and ways to clarify the concept of aesthetic experience. Carroll suggests that there are four accounts that explain the attitudes towards the term: traditional, pragmatic, allegorical, and deflationary. Firstly, the traditional view and account of aesthetic experience explains the idea that “*an aesthetic experience of an artwork involves contemplation, valued for its own sake, of the artwork. That is, aesthetic experiences are self-rewarding*” (Carroll, 2003, p. 44). This approach presents aesthetic experience as a self-enclosed activity and unity. The pragmatic account, on the other hand, is extensively alludes to John Dewey’s ideas. Carroll (2003, p. 49) writes that “*Whereas the traditional account attempts to define aesthetic experience in terms of the agent’s beliefs about that experience, the pragmatic account focuses squarely on the content of the relevant experience and tries to generalize about its recurring internal features*” It is Dewey’s pragmatic attitude that generalises the concept and enlarges the boundaries regarding the perceptions of “experience”. The third one, the allegorical account, proposes that “*Aesthetic experience, in short, functions as a beacon, encouraging us to realize a new social order where our species-being, in terms of our powers of imagination and sensibility, can flourish*” (2003, p. 52). In this sense, the allegorical account seems to imply symbolical functions of the political or social meanings of the aesthetic experience. Lastly, the deflationary account “*identifies aesthetic experience in terms of the content of certain experiences whose objects it enumerates as, first and foremost, the design of artworks and their aesthetic and expressive qualities. It does not propose some common feature between these two kinds of experience, like disinterestedness, that constitutes the essence of aesthetic experience*” (2003, p. 60).

<sup>2</sup> Please see İsmail Tunalı’s *Estetik for the discussion of the relationship between the aesthetic attitude and the concept of play*. Tunalı, İ. (2002). *Estetik*. İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi. 23-27.

Since “*the artwork is an object designed with the function of engendering aesthetic experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and so forth*” (Carroll, 2003, p. 5), aesthetic distance and aesthetic experience function not only theoretically in formulating the value of the artwork but also practically by drawing attention to the interactions between the aesthetic object and subject. In “Art and the Aesthetic,” Marcia Muelder Eaton (2004, p. 72) suggests that “*When individuals have aesthetic experiences, a necessary element of the experience is that attention is paid to intrinsic properties of objects and events – properties that can be perceived directly*” Eaton’s explanation hints at the idea that aesthetic experience is a direct and deliberate act of experience. By also adding that the concept of aesthetic demands attention and focus in relation to any kind of object that has design, shape, colour, she clarifies that “*When attention is given to the particular properties of an object or an event, it is an aesthetic object or event. When this attention is given to an artifact – a thing or event intentionally created by a human being – then that artifact is on its way to becoming an artwork*” (2004, p. 72). Eaton seems to read the aesthetic experience of aesthetic objects by disregarding the question what makes an artefact a work of art. Nonetheless, her point overtly explains the relations between the aesthetic object and the individual by positing them in an aesthetic environment.

Unlike Eaton’s view, Alan Goldman, in his study, *The Aesthetic*, posits the subject to the centre as he underlines the role of the aesthetic subject who interacts with the aesthetic object. Goldman (2005, p. 185) points out that “*The focus on experience becomes natural, even inevitable, once it is recognized that beauty and other aesthetic qualities are not simply intrinsic properties of objects themselves, but essentially involve responses on the part of perceiving, cognizing, and feeling subjects. This becomes the central topic in later aesthetic theories*”. Thus, the subject’s position is highlighted in order to form an aesthetic experience. Nevertheless, Roger Fry’s famous work, *An Essay in Aesthetics*, which was published in 1919, signals the position of the object by relating its values to the perception of the aesthetic subject. Fry (1920, p. 19) asks a quintessential question to reveal the features of an object of art: “*If, then, an object of any kind is created by man not for use, for its fitness to actual life, but as an object of art, an object subserving the imaginative life, what will its qualities be?*” Fry’s (1920, p. 19) meditation explains, “*It must in the first place be adapted to that disinterested intensity of contemplation, which we have found to be the result of cutting off the responsive action. It must be suited to that heightened power of perception which we found to result therefrom*”. His idea implies the distance that can be discussed in relation to the aesthetic distance because he uses “disinterested intensity of contemplation” in order to explicate the quality of the aesthetic experience. For Fry, aesthetic objects have aesthetic values as long as they are produced with the purpose of the aesthetic; in other words, the aesthetic object is aesthetic because the aesthetic aim designs it so. That is why Fry (1920, p. 24) renders that “*in objects created to arouse the aesthetic feeling we have an added consciousness of purpose on the part of the creator; that he made it on purpose not to be used but to be regarded and enjoyed; and that this feeling is characteristic of the aesthetic judgment proper*” Fry’s point manifests a specific and categorical approach in terms of the aesthetic object that maintains the aesthetic experience. He evaluates the artist’s role in creating an artwork with a purpose of aesthetic concern, which, as a result, specifies the aesthetic object with aesthetic values that arouse aesthetic emotions on the aesthetic subject.

On the other hand, John Dewey, who is an American philosopher, educationalist, psychologist, and a leading figure of pragmatism, conceptualises aesthetic experience with various arrays of distinguishing points and characteristics. Dewey, in his influential work, *Art as Experience*, argues that the concept of aesthetics is in everyday life. He writes that “*It is to indicate that theories which isolate art and its appreciation by placing them in a realm of their own, disconnected from other modes*

*of experiencing, are not inherent in the subject-matter but arise because of specifiable extraneous conditions*" (Dewey, 1980, p. 10). His point places the experience to the centre with a more general attitude that covers many parts of experiences. For David E. Fenner, John Dewey (2003, p. 11) has "*the deepest treatment of the aesthetic experience*" among other critics and theorists in the twentieth century as Dewey relays the angle of his discussion to the individual who is in interaction with many things, which can also be counted as other experiences. In this fashion, the experiences are always intricate. Suggesting that "*Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication*" (Dewey, 1980, p. 22), he underlines the idea that "*Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and enviroing conditions is involved in the very process of living. Under conditions of resistance and conflict, aspects and elements of the self and the world that are implicated in this interaction qualify experience with emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges*" (Dewey, 1980, p. 35). Sherri Irvin interprets Dewey's understanding of and approach to the experience as a process: "*Aesthetic experience, according to Dewey, is on a continuum with the deep feelings of fulfillment that arise from interacting with the environment to satisfy one's needs*" (2009, p. 136-137). It is significant to note that Dewey's perception of aesthetic experience is only distinguished from other sets of experiences with the aim and the purpose of the aesthetic. It implies that aesthetic experience is carried out with aesthetic aims, that is why Dewey seems to suggest that it is not the aesthetic object but the qualifying focus and attention that is attached and given to the object, which also motivates the aesthetic experience.

Evaluated and positioned in the "aesthetics of the everyday" tradition with his ideas of experience in relation to the pragmatic attitude, Dewey (1980, p. 47) writes, "*The word 'esthetic' refers, as we have already noted, to experience as appreciative, perceiving, and enjoying. It denotes the consumer's rather than the producer's standpoint*". The producer's standpoint may refer to the aesthetic subject's interaction with the object. Dewey (1980, p. 47) also illustrates that "*It is Gusto, taste; and, as with cooking, overt skillful action is on the side of the cook who prepares, while taste is on the side of the consumer, as in gardening there is a distinction between the gardener who plants and tills and the householder who enjoys the product*". Thus, Dewey presents aesthetic experience with positive terms (Goldman, 2005, p. 187) as he underlines the taste with metaphors of gardener and cook. Disregarding the role of gardener and cook, who are the producers of the object, Dewey prefers focusing on the subjects whose perception to aesthetic object lays the foundation of aesthetic experience. That is why he concludes that "*The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it*" (1980, p. 106). The creator or the producer of the work of art is removed or detached from the experience since the producer appears to restrict the meaning and the action of the experience to a univocal structure or experience. Nonetheless, "*A work of art no matter how old and classic is actually, not just potentially, a work of art only when, it lives in some individualized experience (...). But as a work of art, it is recreated every time it is esthetically experienced*" (1980, p.108). Dewey, therefore, both links the experience to other experiences and multiplies the experience with repetitive aesthetic experiences of the same work of art. In this sense, Dewey's (1980, p. 122) argument of the interactions of experiences are also interactions of aesthetic experiences because "*Even more important is the fact that the organism which responds in production of the experienced object is one whose tendencies of observation, desire and emotion, are shaped by prior experiences. It carries past experiences in itself not by conscious memory but by direct charge*".

Moreover, in the discussion of aesthetic experience, Monroe C. Beardsley's suggestions and premises render the concept a different aspect. Beginning his argument with the question, "*Is there such a thing*

as aesthetic experience?” (Beardsley, 1958, p. 526; emphasis in original) in *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, Beardsley specifies the term with several features to clarify aesthetic experience. The characteristics include: objective field (1958, p. 527), intensity of experience (1958, p. 527), unity or coherence (1958, p. 528), and self-completion (1958, p. 528). Beardsley’s (1958, p. 575) elaboration not only provides a systematic and formal boundary for the definition of the term but also elucidates the idea that each aesthetic experience is different from another experience for;

“(1) it may be more unified, that is, more coherent and/or complete, than the other; (2) its dominant quality, or pervasive feeling-tone, may be more intense than that of the other; (3) the range or diversity of distinct elements that it brings together into its unity, and under its dominant quality, may be more complex than that of the other. (1958, p. 529). These characteristics appear to lead Beardsley towards one of the significant conclusions, which is the interrelations in the aesthetic experience because “aesthetic experience offers an ideal for human life. This social role of the arts is hard to describe briefly. In aesthetic experience we have experience in which means and ends are so closely interrelated that we feel no separation between them”.

The interrelatedness of experiences once again emphasises a positive side of aesthetics as also evident in Dewey’s arguments. Furthermore (1958, p. 575), Beardsley relates the experience to the ideal status for human life since “One thing leads to the next and finds its place in it; the end is immanent in the beginning, the beginning is carried up into the end. Such experience allows the least emptiness, monotony, frustration, lack of fulfillment, and despair—the qualities that cripple much of human life”. In this sense, the experience becomes to suggest a function that completes the self, and crystallises his/her relation to life.

### Oscar Wilde and Aestheticism

Within the discussion of aesthetics and beauty, Oscar Wilde’s aesthetic perception and understanding of art are exposed in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The novel is considered as one of the pillars of the aestheticism that was prevalent in *fin de siècle* England. Also positioned into the decadence, which challenges the traditional values of the Victorian England and promotes sensuality, and artistic, sexual and political experimentation, aestheticism foregrounds the discussion of art for art’s sake. Questioning the tendencies in realist art, “Wilde argue[s] for an art of invention not representation, an art ‘dealing with what is unreal and non-existent.’ Art should present an idealized creation that may have some relationship or similarity to reality but was not to represent reality” (Peters, 1999, p. 2). Wilde’s aestheticism, therefore, ignores didacticism, combines lyrical language and extraordinary aesthetic subject matters, and implies that life imitated art rather than copying life. In “Style at the fin de siècle: aestheticist, decadent, symbolist,” Ellis Hanson (Hanson, p. 150-151) explains aestheticism by clarifying its meaning in relation to form and scope:

“Some of its defining characteristics in literature are a preoccupation with beauty and refinement of taste in all aspects of art and life, a self-conscious foregrounding of style as a theme, an often languorous preference for contemplation over action, a resistance to moral or political limitations on aesthetic judgement, a valorization of art and artifice even in its abundant references to nature and organic forms, an academic and nostalgic engagement with distinguished aesthetic traditions of the past (especially classical Athens, medieval England and the Renaissance), an Orientalist exoticism (especially by way of the Arabian Nights and Islamic and Japanese decorative arts),

*a tendency to gender ambiguity and erotic transgressiveness, and a resistance to the vulgarity of a modern commercialism and bourgeois taste that it was, nevertheless, sometimes adept at exploiting”.*

Hanson’s elaboration appropriates the meaning and function of aestheticism with the notion, “art for art’s sake,” by demonstrating a significant characteristic that also alludes to Wilde’s aestheticism. In Wilde’s aestheticism, the aesthetic qualities and aesthetic experience are in the centre as Wilde, himself, disregards realist tendencies in art. Lerzan Gültekin, in “Art versus Morality: Oscar Wilde’s Aestheticism in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” writes that

*“Yet, aestheticism as a movement was not only a reaction against the materialism, capitalism, utilitarianism and commercialism of the late Victorian Period but it was also a reaction against the literary movements, Realism and Naturalism in the second half of the 19th century, which emphasized the portrayal of life with fidelity without any sense of idealization, and both movements rejected the doctrine of art for art’s sake” (2016, p. 50).*

In this sense, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* shocked the Victorian readers with “*the morals of its title character and the story’s scandalous homoerotic subtext*” (Introduction, Wilde, 2005, p. vii). Regarding Wilde’s pathological stance and his artistic perspective, it is true that art has no moral responsibility: “*Art, [Oscar Wilde] argued should strive only to be a beautiful object entirely separate from its creator*” (Introduction, p. vii). In his “*Preface*” to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde announces that “*No artist has ethical sympathies*” (Wilde, 2005, p. 4). That is why Wilde feels obliged to state that “*The artist is the creator of beautiful things*” (Wilde, 2005, p. 3).

Ruth Livesey suggests that “*From the outset of his career, Wilde grasped the critical content of aestheticism with its questioning of the boundaries between art and life; form and content; the coterie and the mass; beauty and virtue!*” (Livesey, 2013, p. 261). Oscar Wilde reflects his opinions and discussions as an artist-critic whose interest in aesthetics and beauty manifests that he objects to the nineteenth-century realism in art: “*The primary target of Wilde’s aesthetic is realist art. Nineteenth century realism sought to accurately represent reality so that whoever experienced an artist’s finished product would recognize it as something from his or her own experience*” (Peters, 1999, p. 2). Thus, Wilde rejects realism through the subject matter and the style, and criticises the contemporaneous works of art in the nineteenth century. In “*Art Criticism Veiled in Fiction: Oscar Wilde’s Views on Art and Literature in The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” Özlem Uzundemir (2016, pp. 63-64) argues that “*Another tenet of aestheticism is the autonomy of art through the denial of the well-grounded mimetic view that art mirrors nature. In his essays on art and literature written between 1889 and 1891 Wilde emphatically objects to the Victorian realist aesthetics and embraces art for art’s sake with a particular focus on imagination, individuality and a challenge to morality*”. Wilde harshly criticises the way art imitates nature and tries to copy it as closer to the object. This criticism is evident in “*The Decay of Lying*,” which is a Socratic dialogue between Vivian and Cyril. Wilde probes into the concept of realism in art and imitation, and conveys his thoughts to the readers by Vivian who objects to imitation: “*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 had no art at all. Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place*” (Wilde, 1905, p. 4). Challenging the imitation of nature, Wilde, therefore, seems to reject naturalist and realist fiction, and proposes that a novel is a work of art when it does not copy the manners of nature. He suggests, “*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” (1905, p. 14). Boldly stating that “Art never expresses anything but itself. It has an independent life, just as Thought has, and develops purely on its own lines” (1905, p. 53), he seems to charge the realist novels as “All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals” (1905, p. 54). As a result, Wilde stresses the imaginative and fictional realms of literature as art since imagination and creation serve to elevate the stance of art, and contributes to “art for art’s sake.”

Wilde’s critical stance, which labels him as an artist-critic, explains the role of writer both as a critic and as an author because Wilde supports the idea that a gifted artist is also a fervent critic. In “The Critic as Artist,” Wilde (1905, pp. 120-121) claims that “Without the critical faculty, there is no artistic creation at all, worthy of the name. You spoke a little while ago of that fine spirit of choice and delicate instinct of selection by which the artist realizes life for us, and gives to it a momentary perfection”. Wilde’s emphasis on critical faculty engages with the act of artistic creation since “The critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticizes as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought. He does not even require for the perfection of his art the finest materials. Anything will serve his purpose” (1905, pp. 136-137). Wilde combines critical perspective with the artistic creation because, for him, these two elements foreground the aesthetic quality of an artwork. An artwork gains its aesthetic being when the author critically evaluates his own artistic manner:

*“Art becomes complete in beauty, and so addresses itself, not to the faculty of recognition nor to the faculty of reason, but to the aesthetic sense alone, which, while accepting both reason and recognition as stages of apprehension, subordinates them both to a pure synthetic impression of the work of art as a whole, and, taking whatever alien emotional elements the work may possess, uses their very complexity as a means by which a richer unity may be added to the ultimate impression itself”* (1905, p. 147-148).

Oscar Wilde’s aestheticism is also influenced by the ideas of Walter Pater, who is a prominent figure of aestheticism. Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873), which presents a survey of Renaissance painting, offers a critical question about aesthetic experience and artist as critic. Riquelme writes that “Wilde himself says in *De Profundis* that Pater’s *The Renaissance* had ‘a strange influence over’ his life, but he does not explain. (Riquelme, p. 126). Like Oscar Wilde, in his preface to *The Renaissance*, Pater focuses on the role of the aesthetic critic, stating, “To see the object as in itself it really is, has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly” (1980, p. xix). Pater’s impressionistic criticism appears to affect Wilde’s views of aestheticism as Wilde himself rejects realism in fiction, and thus, draws upon the effects and impressions produced in art. Since Wilde, in “The Artist as Critic,” suggests that “You see, then, how it is that the aesthetic critic rejects those obvious modes of art that have but one message to deliver, and having delivered it become dumb and sterile, and seeks rather for such modes as suggest reverie and mood, and by their imaginative beauty make all interpretations true, and no interpretation final” (Wilde, 1905, p. 148), it can be stated that Pater’s mode of aesthetic critic has similar sensibilities regarding the artwork. Pater argues that “And the function of the aesthetic critic is to distinguish, to analyse, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which a picture, a landscape, a fair personality in life or in a book, produces this special

impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced. (Pater, 1980, pp. xx-xxi). In this regard, Pater underlines the fact that each critical stance produces a different experience, and he generalizes the concept since experiences are in flux and, thus, changing.

As for Oscar Wilde's aestheticism, therefore, it may be true to state that Wilde emphasises the aesthetic concerns before the realistic and naturalistic elements in art and literature. That is why his artistic and critical outlook marks a significant issue in the late Victorian England where realist tendencies in fiction are dominant. It is Wilde's perception and ability that mixed Pater's reflections on artist and critic, which in conclusion, suggests the idea that "*Wilde combined a commitment to the intense individuality of Paterian aestheticism with the more social impulses of the aesthetic movement*" (Livesey, 2013, p. 267). In this sense, Wilde's critical writings are also about aesthetic experience since he evaluates the work of art with an aesthetic manner. This evaluation not only leads Wilde to conclude that an artist is also a critic in his aesthetic judgement but also lends support to aesthetic sensibilities and concerns illustrated in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

### **Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Distance in *The Picture of Dorian Gray***

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian's aesthetic experience, which also comprises of aesthetic distance, leads him to his own end since Dorian's own painting painted by Basil mesmerises him. His aesthetic concerns hint at the idea that he is fond of material things. The materiality of the aesthetic object, due to its perpetuity and sublimity, affects Dorian as he distinguishes between beauty in art and beauty in human, which serve as the symbols of art's immortality and human being's mortality. In "Platonic Inversion in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," Stephen Bertman suggests that Dorian's effort for materiality can be interpreted as Platonic since art is immortal. For Plato "*the objects of the material world are imperfect projections of ideal prototypes that exist in a remote realm of ideas. While the objects of the sensible world are subject to change and decay, the abstract forms they reflect remain changeless and imperishable*" (Bertman, 2015, p. 130). Nonetheless, Dorian strives to change the world of materiality by exchanging the forms. The exchange between his ideal self and the material body are situated on the painting which undertakes the role of Dorian's aging body. Dorian, instead, considers himself by relating his self to the painting's materiality. The painting of Dorian, which is an aesthetic object and the igniter of Dorian's aesthetic experience, is central to Dorian's search for youth and his desire for immortality. Thus, his aesthetic experience with the painting sheds light on his personal desire which is to remain young since the picture "*will remain always young*" (Wilde, 2005, p. 27). When Basil asks, "*You are not jealous of material things, are you? – you are finer than any of them!*" Dorian exclaims, "*I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me*" (Wilde, 2005, p. 28). In Wilde's fiction, Dorian Gray is a man of beauty as described by Basil Hallward, the painter. Basil's aesthetic appreciation of Dorian's beauty labels Basil and Dorian as aesthetic subjects, and also places Dorian into an aesthetic aura that dominates over him. In this sense, Basil's artistic creation affects Dorian because, "*As an artist, Basil is an idealist, whose goal is not to provide pleasure either to himself or to others-but to inspire people with an art that portrays the union of feeling and form, 'the harmony of soul and body'*" (Liebman, 1999, p. 304). Basil appreciates both Dorian's real being and his beauty on canvas by representing an image of beauty reflected from and motivated by him. Even though Basil believes that "*every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of artist, not of the sitter*" (Wilde, 2005, p. 9), Basil's character-design fades in time in relation to Dorian's rising interest in his own portrait. That is why Basil rejects exhibiting his portrait by stating "*An artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them*" (Wilde, 2005, p. 15).

As a model of Basil, Dorian Gray cannot restrain his passion for youth and falls into intentional and affective fallacy in artistic terms in order to understand the meaning of the picture. For Wimsatt and Beardsley (1949, p. 31), "*The Intentional Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its origins, a special case of what is known to philosophers as the Genetic Fallacy*". As Basil seems to believe the idea that a portrait is not about the model but about the artist itself, he also appears to insist on that the portrait hints of his character. That is why he does not want it to be exhibited. While intentional fallacy is related to the creator's intention in interpretation of the text,

*"The Affective Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its results (what it is and what it does), a special case of epistemological skepticism, though usually advanced as if it had far stronger claims than the overall forms of skepticism. It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism"* (Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1949, p. 31).

In the novel, when Dorian sees that the portrait is finished, he cannot keep calm and reflects on the idea of art's persistency: "*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*" (Wilde, 2005, p. 30). This scene is a keynote to all critical discussion of the concept of aesthetic distance as he announces that "*I would give my soul for that*" like Faust (Wilde, 2005, p. 30). Dorian, thus, falls into a fallacy, that is either intentional or affective, since he does not focus on the aesthetic quality of the painting but reflects his own desire of youth onto the painting. This poses a question of Dorian's search for youth elixir, and foreshadows the end of the novel: "*When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself*" (Wilde, 2005, p. 31). The violation of aesthetic distance in this scene reveals the idea that Dorian as an aesthetic subject is unable to assess the beauty of the portrait. At this point, it should be noted that Dorian's attitude is contextual rather than formalist because he is able to combine his experience and personal feelings with the painting. On the other hand, he is unable to contemplate upon the aesthetic object as he falls in love with himself like Narcissus. This oscillation between his personal feelings and the contemplation on the painting produce two significant questions in terms of Carroll's accounts. As I have stated above, Carroll defines traditional account as an aesthetic experience where the artwork is valued for its own being (Carroll, 2003, p. 44). Yet, the pragmatic account revolves around "*the content of the relevant experience and tries to generalize about its recurring internal features*" (2003, p. 49). In this sense, Dorian's aesthetic experience in which aesthetic distance is violated cannot be categorised as he seems to appreciate the beauty of the painting with personal inclinations and pragmatic reasons. He says that "*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?*" (Wilde, 2005, p. 31). The contemplation on the painting causes a realisation, or manifests his inner desire and motivation for youth. The representation of Dorian and his youth seem a mocking of Dorian. The appreciation of painting, thus, shows that Dorian is in love with it because "*It is part of [himself]. [He] feels that*" (Wilde, 2005, p. 32). In fact, the disruption of aesthetic distance illustrates Dorian's irrationality as the aesthetic judgement requires a rational thinking of the aesthetic object. Dorian says that "*Man is many things, but he is not rational*" (Wilde, 2005, p. 32). The irrational thinking, therefore, is one of the reasons of Dorian's violation of aesthetic distance.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, all characters are engaged in aesthetic experience; still, the most significant influence can be traced on Dorian. The obvious reason of Dorian's experience is the aesthetics of everyday, which may be clarified as "*when we talk about everyday aesthetic experience, we are thinking of aesthetic issues that are not connected closely with the fine arts or with the natural*

environment, or with other areas that form well-established aesthetic domains, for example, the aesthetics of mathematics, science, or religion” (2005, Leddy, p. 3). The quote seems to suggest that the aesthetics of everyday focuses on the practical in Dewey’s terms without close and tight interactions with the fine arts. Notwithstanding, it is significant that the everyday life in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is also aesthetic and related to art in all aspects. The examples include the characters’ lifestyles, their leisure time activities, their talks about the social panorama and excessive attention to art. As the novel is centred upon the image painted by Basil Hallward, Dorian’s desire is solidified through this image, which also, stands for his aesthetic experience. In this sense, Dorian and other characters’ aesthetics of everyday can be evaluated in terms of their aesthetic experiences in the novel. Therefore, the novel intrinsically proffers a quintessential question about what comprises aesthetic experience: the painting, their lifestyles, the characters’ own thoughts and feelings, etc. Even though in the aesthetics of everyday the relationship between the experience and fine arts is critically undermined, the aesthetics of everyday is closely linked to the concepts of art, aestheticism, and painting in Wilde’s novel because Wilde is a prominent figure of aestheticism and art for art’s sake tendencies. Ruth Livesey reminds of aestheticism as “*In aestheticism the subjective view of beauty becomes the primary means of judging value: when considering whether a poem or a painting is good, aestheticism merely asks if it is beautiful or meaningful as a work of art*” (2013, p. 262). The painting not only affects Dorian but also ties the character to its subjective meanings and beauty. While Basil is the artist that paints Dorian, and believes that each painting carries traces of the artist, Dorian, the model, objectifies his own desire for youth and immortality through the painting. The problem emerges in the subjective meanings of the painting because it is transmuted into a text that loses its own beauty and meaning due to characters’ own inclinations and personal attachments. Even though, the aim of this study is not to diagnose Dorian’s relation to the aesthetics of the everyday, it is quite beneficial to grasp that Dorian’s life is aesthetic in his manners as the novel traces the character’s aesthetic experience until his death.

Dorian Gray’s aesthetic experience also necessitates an inquiry of aesthetic moment in Berenson’s terms. For Berenson, the aesthetic moment ingenerates the time when the observer, or the aesthetic subject faces the aesthetic object. He claims that “*In visual art the aesthetic moment is that flitting instant, so brief as to be almost timeless, when the spectator is at one with the work of art he is looking at, or with actuality of any kind that the spectator himself sees in terms of art, as form and colour*” (Berenson, 1948, p. 93). Berenson clarifies the aesthetic experience by regarding the captivating moment between the subject and the object. In this sense, he considers aesthetic moment as a striking feature of the aesthetic judgement. Dorian’s aesthetic moment in the novel is illustrated in the first chapter where Dorian, Henry Wotton, and Basil contemplate upon the painting. Thus, Dorian hears Basil’s words, “*It is quite finished, he cried, at last, and stooping down he wrote his name in thin vermilion letters on the left-hand corner of the canvas,*” and Henry Wotton interprets the painting by pointing out the likeness between the image and the model: “*Lord Henry came over and examined the picture. It was certainly a wonderful work of art, and a wonderful likeness as well*” (Wilde, 2005, pp. 28-29). In this scene, Henry Wotton appears to fulfil an aesthetic judgement regarding the representational manner in the painting. On the other hand, Dorian’s aesthetic moment is based on his bewilderment and astonishing perspective:

*“When he saw it he drew back, and his cheeks flushed for a moment with pleasure. A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time. He stood there motionless, and in wonder, dimly conscious that Hallward was speaking to him, but not catching the meaning of his words. The sense of his own beauty came*

*on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before” (Wilde, 2005, p. 29).*

This moment, in the first phase of Dorian’s contemplation on the painting, reveals the fact that “*He ceases to be his ordinary self, and the picture or building, statue, landscape, or aesthetic actuality is no longer outside himself. The two become one entity; time and space are abolished and the spectator is possessed by one awareness*” in Berenson’s terms (Berenson, 1948, p. 93). Dorian, therefore, enjoys the moment of the aesthetic in the first place, for there is a frozen moment of timelessness that detaches him from Basil and Henry. The moment of ecstasy; however, is disrupted when Dorian’s attitude and perspective is directed to his personal desires that disregard the aesthetic quality of the painting. Instead, he centres his own being in the interpretation of the painting, which as a result, posits the visual image on the periphery. Berenson suggests that “*When he recovers workaday consciousness it is as if he had been initiated into illuminating, exalting, formative mysteries. In short, the aesthetic moment is a moment of mystic vision*” (Berenson, 1948, p. 93). The mystic vision is not fulfilled, and thus, distorted and fragmented by Dorian due to the fact that he is not motivated into the painting’s aesthetic emotions.

One of the convincing reasons of Dorian’s trespass of the aesthetic distance is that he is both the model and the aesthetic subject, which intrigues the interpretation of the text in his aesthetic experience, because as a model painted onto the canvas, he is an aesthetic object, and still, he is regarded as an aesthetic subject when he gazes at the painting. In this sense, the paradox between gazing and being gazed is Dorian’s self in flux. The ambivalence between the model Dorian and Dorian-as-aesthetic-subject causes fractions in Dorian’s aesthetic experience, which in turn, problematizes the aesthetic distance. The fluctuating self between being an object and being a subject causes him to see the fact that “*the full reality of the description flashed across him*” by highlighting his own fantasy of aging body (Wilde, 2005, p. 29):

*“Yes, there would be a day when his face would be wrinkled and wizen, his eyes dim and colorless, the grace of his figure broken and deformed. The scarlet would pass away from his lips, and the gold steal from his hair. The life that was to make his soul would mar his body. He would become ignoble, hideous, and uncouth” (Wilde, 2005, p. 29).*

As a result, the aesthetic moment maintains its effect on Dorian as the slashes of tragic moments since Dorian is obsessed with being young and beautiful. His heightened desire, in this sense, leads him towards an identification with the painting that may also be considered as Dorian’s reminder of tragic moments, but at the same time, a traumatising memory of the aesthetic moment paradoxically.

Whereas Basil is the artist who begins the portrait, and directs Dorian’s attention to his own beauty in Wilde’s fiction, Lord Henry Wotton<sup>3</sup> affects Dorian Gray’s character and ideas in terms of his aesthetic experience. Basil Hallward does not want him to meet Dorian Gray because Basil denounces the negative influence of Henry Wotton on people. Alison Milbank argues that, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, “*characters infect each other with ideas like a disease. Lord Henry starts the game by infecting Dorian*” (2014, p. 31). Still, Henry Wotton believes that “*to influence a person is to give him one’s own soul*” (Wilde, 2005, p. 22). In fact, Henry affects Dorian’s thinking of art and youth when he says that “*Some day, when you are old and wrinkled and ugly, when thought has seared your*

<sup>3</sup> For Lord Henry Wotton’s rhetoric, biographical and factual implications and traces in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, please see Alfred J. Drake’s article, “Izaak Walton, Pater and Wilde’s Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.”

Drake, A. J. (2008). Izaak Walton, Pater and Wilde’s Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. *The Wildean: A Journal of Oscar Wilde Studies*. 33. 74-79.

forehead with its lines, and passion branded your lips with its hideous fires, you will feel it terribly. Now, wherever you go, you charm the world. Will it always be so? ... Youth! Youth! There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth!" (Wilde, 2005, pp. 26-27). These sentences reverberate in Dorian's mind in that "He watched it with that strange interest in trivial things that we try to develop when things of high import make us afraid, or when we are stirred by some new emotion for which we cannot find expression, or when some thought that terrifies us lays sudden siege to the brain and calls on us to yield" (Wilde, 2005, pp. 27-28). Robert Keefe in "Artist and Model in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" suggests that

*"Lord Henry functions in the novel as a critic of culture, letting his consciousness play over works of art, manners, religion, indeed all of existence, without becoming narrowly sectarian on the side of god or devil. His critical penetration has succeeded easily in supplanting the amorphous escapism of Schumann's romantic music. But if language is more powerful than music, painting, in this novel at any rate, surpasses them both"* (1973, p. 66).

Lord Henry Wotton is a man of theories, which causes Dorian to be "a copy and echo of Lord Henry" (Milbank, 2014, p.31). In a short time, Dorian is able to diagnose his character and knows that he is full of "wrong, fascinating, poisonous, delightful theories" (Wilde, 2005, p. 84). In fact, as Liebman states "Henry's knowledge is revealed in his discussions of two of his favorite topics: nature and human nature. On both subjects, his comments demonstrate that he is an incurable pessimist" (1999, p. 298). Even though Dorian knows the nature of Lord Henry's character, he cannot escape the reality misled by him. Through Lord Henry Wotton's ideas and words, Dorian is re-formed and reconstructed, which affects his aesthetic sensibilities. Suzanne Raitt writes, "Lord Henry imagines himself transforming Dorian as if he were a piece of marble, fusing with him in the process of re-creating him" (2017, p. 168). Lord Henry Wotton's words are seductive, which puts Dorian under the spell of beauty and youth. In this sense, one of the major characters penetrating into Dorian's aesthetic experience and life is Lord Henry Wotton, who also captures the lack of incomplete self in Dorian's aesthetic identity.

Moreover, Lord Henry Wotton's influence on Dorian Gray is also crystallised by the yellow book, which may remind of *À Rebours* (Against Nature) (1884) by J. K. Huysmans. The book is sent to Dorian by Henry Wotton, and it draws Dorian's attention after the death of Sibyl Vane. While Dorian's conscience oscillates between guilt and self-exculpation, Dorian discovers his "self" in the book as it reflects a Parisian character who experiences passions and other emotions intensely. Peter Raby, in "Poisoned by a book: the lethal aura of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," suggests that "In Wilde's story, Lord Henry sends the book round to Dorian's rooms to be discovered, as the serpent might drop an apple at Eve's feet. Books offer an initiation into the potential of another world, or level" (2013, p. 160). Likening Henry Wotton's deed to the serpent's, Raby re-emphasises Henry Wotton's hideous character. The book is significant in terms of shedding light on Dorian's character and desire, and contributes to the discussion of his aesthetic experience. When Dorian reads some pages from the book, he is both absorbed by its title character and influenced by the aestheticism of him. The book is the "strangest" for him since "It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb show before him. Things that he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made real to him. Things of which he had never dreamed were gradually revealed" (Wilde, 2005, p. 134). It, therefore, seems to cause an epiphany for Dorian as he interprets his own deeds and thoughts along with the ideas from the book: "One hardly knew at times whether one was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some mediaeval saint or the morbid confessions

*of a modern sinner. It was a poisonous book*" (2005, p. 135). The book is poisonous, for "*the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it*" (2005, p. 137). Therefore, the book appears to objectify Dorian's hedonism and desire for youth and art.

The objectification of Dorian's desire for youth through the picture highlights the fact that Dorian is unable to maintain the aesthetic distance in the novel. Aesthetic distance is violated by Dorian as he attributes his own desire of immortality onto the picture. Bernard Berenson, in *Aesthetics and History*, writes that "*Tactile values occur in representations of solid objects when communicated, not as mere reproductions (no matter how veracious), but in a way that stirs the imagination to feel their bulk, heft their weight, realize their potential resistance, span their distance from us, and encourage us, always imaginatively, to come into close touch with, to grasp, to embrace, or to walk around them*" (Berenson, 1948, p. 69-70). Coined by Berenson in relation to the characteristics and features of Renaissance paintings in his *Florentine Painters of the Renaissance*, tactile values are linked to the sense of touch and three-dimensionality. The problem of tactile values occurs in Dorian Gray when the painting transmutes as his actual self. It is an exchange that underlines the tactile values in the novel because, even though the novel does not emphasise the sense of touch for the painting, the model is Dorian who is represented. Therefore, the gaze that distorts the painting's meaning belongs to Dorian, as he is both the model and the victim. The image of himself, thus, functions ambivalently and dually in terms of sense of touch; in Berenson's terms, "*the artist not only perceives the object but lives it and identifies himself with it*" (Berenson, p. 71). As a result, since the object being represented is Dorian, he does not need to touch the painting; instead, it is his inner motivation and desire that distorts and violates the aesthetic experience.

Dorian Gray's appreciation of art is too distilled that he ends his love affair with Sibyl Vane who is an actress in a theatre. The love affair between Dorian and Sibyl is fresh and flashy in the beginning. That is why Dorian "*was engaged to be married to Sibyl Vane*" (Wilde, 2005, p. 65). On the other hand, Dorian's indulgence in appreciating art and contemplation on the beauty of Sibyl's performance alter the way of the affair. When Basil, Dorian and Henry Wotton visit the theatre to see the performance, *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Sibyl acts Juliet, the course of narrative demonstrates Dorian's artistic attitude that reflects on the aesthetic quality of theatre and acting. Dorian's perspective is narrated as:

*"Yet she was curiously listless. She showed no sign of joy when her eyes rested on Romeo. The few words she had to speak—*

*Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,  
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;  
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,  
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss —"*

*with the brief dialogue that follows, were spoken in a thoroughly artificial manner. The voice was exquisite, but from the point of view of tone it was absolutely false. It was wrong in colour. It took away all the life from the verse. It made the passion unreal"* (2005, p. 90).

Dorian feels detached and tragically overwhelmed by the acting of Sibyl, and shows that "*She seemed to them to be absolutely incompetent. They were horribly disappointed*" (Wilde, 2005, p. 90). According to Peter Raby, "*Wilde ensures that Sibyl's failure in performance carries weight by quoting at some length from Shakespeare's text, so making her failure more poignant when set against the beauty and power of the language*" (2013, p. 164). Moreover, Lord Henry Wotton affects Dorian

Gray once again when he states that “*She is quite beautiful Dorian ... but she can’t act. Let us go*” (Wilde, 2005, p. 91). The experience in which Dorian evaluates the role and acting of Sibyl manifest his artistic tendency in art and literature. That is why Dorian wishes “*she were ill*” (2005, p. 92). The scene surrounds Dorian’s feelings for Sibyl because “*He looked pale, and proud, and indifferent. The play dragged on, and seemed interminable. Half of the audience went out*” (2005, pp. 92-93). Judging the play as a “fiasco” (2005, p. 93), Dorian believes that he is not in love with Sibyl but with art. When he utters the words, “*you have killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don’t even stir my curiosity. You simply produce no affect*” (2005, p. 94), the aesthetic experience discloses Dorian’s character as an aesthete. The affair ends tragically, Sibyl Vane commits suicide.

The significance of the picture of Dorian Gray in the novel crystallises the concept of the aesthetic distance through his death in the very end of the novel. The picture, which is an emblem of the “ideal I” in Lacanian terms, connotes the fact that Dorian resists the passing of time. For him, “*It held the secret of his life, and told his story. It had taught him to love his own beauty. Would it teach him to loathe his own soul? Would he ever look at it again?*” (Wilde, 2005, p. 99). The feeling of pity is attached to the picture which is getting older and older instead of young Dorian. Still, the change in the portrait preserves him alive while killing Sibyl and Basil, the creator of the picture. In this sense, the true self is bandaged, kept away, and covered: “*The portrait must be hidden away at all costs. He could not run such a risk of discovery again. It had been mad of him to have allowed the thing to remain, even for an hour, in a room to which any of his friends had access*” (2005, p. 126). On the other hand, facing the reality is a break away from the kingdom of imagination in which Dorian imagines his own youth and immortality, and thus, transfers the fear of old age and death to the picture. The reality is distorted by Basil who arrives to the mansion of Dorian on his thirty-eighth birthday. Basil’s arrival is a threshold of realisation of Dorian’s youth along with a feeling of horror (2005, p. 166). Houston A. Baker, Jr., in “Tragedy of the Artist: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” argues that “*Basil Hallward, the artist in The Picture of Dorian Gray, started on the proper path toward self-realization, but in painting the portrait of Dorian Gray he has gone astray*” (1969, p. 352). Even though Dorian is aware of the fact that the picture has destroyed him, he cannot overcome his passion for youth and obsession of beauty. He stabs Basil and kills him. The same knife is used to destroy “the painter’s work, and all that that meant.”

*“But this murder—was it to dog him all his life? Was he always to be burdened by his past? Was he really to confess? Never. There was only one bit of evidence left against him. The picture itself—that was evidence. He would destroy it. Why had he kept it so long? Once it had given him pleasure to watch it changing and growing old. Of late he had felt no such pleasure. It had kept him awake at night. When he had been away, he had been filled with terror lest other eyes should look upon it. It had brought melancholy across his passions. Its mere memory had marred many moments of joy. It had been like conscience to him. Yes, it had been conscience. He would destroy it”.*  
(Wilde, 2005, pp. 237-238)

The destruction is a destruction of the “ideal I” which is confronted with its negated self. “*The false ideal destroyed, the artistic product can regain its purity*” (Baker, Jr., 1969, p. 354). The aesthetic object that deifies Dorian’s beauty and youth is stabbed. Yet, what is destroyed are Dorian’s youth and body. In this sense, the aesthetic object does not lose its aesthetic quality while the aesthetic subject is found dead and old.

## Conclusion

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* demonstrates a quandary of art in relation to the concept of death.<sup>4</sup> While many of the critics evaluate Dorian's death as the consequence of his obsession with the passing of time and youth, it is undeniable that Dorian is unable to maintain the aesthetic distance between his portrait and his ideas and feelings towards the portrait painted by Basil. His aesthetic experience with the painting is in fact a tragic experience. It is significant that Dorian Gray is a man of art, which implies that his thoughts and actions are dominated and controlled by his artistic perspectives and tendencies. Once he is intrigued by his own portrait and poisoned with the theories of Lord Henry Wotton, his aesthetic experience that signals his aesthetic attitude and judgement creates a grandeur discussion of his transformation both physically and metaphorically. Thus, he kills himself as a result of his violation or disruption of the aesthetic distance which also explains the idea that Dorian's aesthetic experience is also violated by him tacitly. The death of Dorian Gray implies of an aesthetic compensation for his violation of aesthetic distance because it is his death that renders the aesthetic meaning of the portrait. In this sense, while the aesthetic subject vanishes, the aesthetic object is posited into its aesthetic value once again. While Dorian mixes his own ideals of youth and the beauty in the portrait together, his death repays the integrity of the portrait painted by Basil Hallward. In this sense, the aesthetic sublimity and the beauty of the portrait are regained while Dorian's false identity and hopes of youth are lost with his death. The novel, thus, seems to underline the fact that art is immortal by also implying that Dorian's death is also another aesthetic experience that paradoxically problematizes the aesthetic distance. It is his violation or disruption of the aesthetic distance that causes his death, and therefore, renders the aesthetic quality of the painting to its prior position.

## References

- Aesthetic distance. (2018). *Oxford Reference*. 20 February 2018. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095354604>
- Baker, H. A., Jr. (1969). A Tragedy of the Artist: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 24 (3). 349-355. Retrieved 20, February, 2018 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2932864>
- Beardsley, M. C. (1958). *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.
- Beckson, K. (1998). Oscar Wilde and The Religion of Art. *The Wildean: A Journal of Oscar Wilde Studies*. 12. 25-29.
- Bertman, S. (2015). Platonic Inversion in "The Picture of Dorian Gray." *The Wildean: A Journal of Oscar Wilde Studies*. 130-131.
- Bullough, E. (1912). Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle. *Journal of Psychology*. 5. 87-118.
- Carroll, N. (2003). *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Beckson, in "Oscar Wilde and the Religion of Art," suggests that "In Chapter 11 of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian briefly enacts his devotion to the Religion of Art in his aesthetic rather than religious attraction to Roman Catholic ritual, stirred as he was by the sacrifice and beauty implicit in the sacred Mass" (Beckson, 1998, pp. 27-28).  
Beckson, K. (1998). *Oscar Wilde and The Religion of Art*. *The Wildean: A Journal of Oscar Wilde Studies*. 12. 25-29.

- Dewey, J. (1980). *Art as Experience*. New York: A Wideview/Perigee Book.
- Drake, A. J. (2008). Izaak Walton, Pater and Wilde's Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray. The Wildean: A Journal of Oscar Wilde Studies*. 33. 74-79.
- Eaton, M. M. (2004). Art and the Aesthetic. In P. Kivy, (Ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (pp. 63-77). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Fenner, D. E. W. (1980). *Introducing Aesthetics*. London: Praeger.
- Fry, R. (1920). An Essay in Aesthetics. In *Vision and Design* (pp. 11-25). London: Chatto and Windus.
- Goldman, A. (2005). The Aesthetic. In B. Gaut and D. M. Lopes, (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (pp. 181-192). London: Routledge.
- Gültekin, L. (2016). Art Versus Morality: Oscar Wilde's Aestheticism in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In B. Erol, (Ed.), *One Day, Oscar Wilde* (pp. 49-62). Ankara: Bizim Büro.
- Hanson, E. (2013). Style at the fin de siècle: aestheticist, decadent, symbolist. In K. Powell and P. Raby, (Eds.), *Oscar Wilde in Context* (pp. 150-158). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Irvin, S. (2009). aesthetics of the everyday. In S. Davies, K. M. Higgins, R. Hopkins, R. Stecker, and D. E. Cooper, (Eds.), *A Companion to Aesthetics* (2nd ed.) (pp. 136-139). West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Keefe, R. (1973). Artist and Model in "The Picture of Dorian Gray." *Studies in the Novel*. 5 (1). 63-70. Retrieved 20, February, 2018 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29531571>
- Leddy, T. (2005). The Nature of Everyday Aesthetics. In A. Light and J. M. Smith (Eds.), *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (pp. 3-22). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Liebman, S. W. (1999). Character Design in "The Picture of Dorian Gray." *Studies in the Novel*. 31 (3). 296-316. Retrieved 20, February, 2018 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29533343>
- Livesey, R. (2013). Aestheticism. In K. Powell and P. Raby, (Eds.), *Oscar Wilde in Context* (pp. 261-269). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marković, S. (2012). Components of aesthetic experience: aesthetic fascination, aesthetic appraisal, and aesthetic emotion. *i-Perception*. 3. 1-17.
- Milbank, A. (2014). Positive Duality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. *The Wildean: A Journal of Oscar Wilde Studies*. 44. 24-36.
- Pater, W. (1980). *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. Donald L. Hill, (Ed.). London: University of California Press.
- Peters, J. G. (1999). Style and Art in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: Form as Content. *Victorian Review*. 25 (1). 1-13. Retrieved 20, February, 2018 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27794920>
- Raitt, S. (2017). Immoral Science in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In L. Karpenko and S. Claggett (Eds.), *Strange Science: Investigating the Limits of Knowledge in the Victorian Age*. (164-178). Michigan University Press. Retrieved 20, February, 2018 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1qv5ncp.13>

Tunalı, İ. (2002). *Estetik*. İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi.

Uzundemir, Ö. Art Criticism Veiled in Fiction: Oscar Wilde's Views on Art and Literature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In B. Erol, (Ed.), *One Day, Oscar Wilde* (pp. 63-72). Ankara: Bizim Büro.

Wilde, O. (1905). The Critic as Artist, Part I and Part II. In *Intentions* (pp. 93-218). New York: Brentano's.

Wilde, O. (1905). The Decay of Lying. In *Intentions* (pp. 1-56). New York: Brentano's.

Wilde, O. (2005). *The Picture of Dorian Gray and Other Writings*. New York: Pocket Books.

Wimsatt Jr., W. K. and Beardley, M. C. (1949). The Affective Fallacy. *The Sewanee Review*. 57 (1). 31-55. Retrieved 20 February 2018 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27537883a>