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POLITICS OF DECAY: DECADENT LITERATURE, AESTHETICISM AND IDEOLOGY

DOKTORA TEZİ

Ansı SEV

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INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the aestheticism and literary decadence of the late nineteenth-century Britain. Aestheticism and decadence are two important movements of the period and they attracted mostly negative reactions at the time. The artists who were the representatives of these two movements were usually accused of being morally and socially irresponsible and the debates of moral responsibility of art were generally carried on with a special focus on these movements. The artists who belonged to these movements were blamed and ridiculed by several contemporary critics and the movements came to an end in England when the most prominent aesthete and decadent author of England, Oscar Wilde, was convicted for his homosexual affair. The close connection between a personal affair and these literary movements reveals the interdependence of social reality and literary products of the time however covert it may appear to be. It also implies much about the ideological stance of these movements; apparently, these movements were seen as disturbing for the prevailing social order.

The notions of ideology and utopia are useful and informative while interrogating into this supposed threat aestheticism and decadence posed on the prevailing social order. The two notions are not unique to, but quite important for Marxist thought; various Marxist critics elaborated on these concepts and some Marxist literary critics also highlighted the importance of these concepts in criticism. Accordingly, this study argues that the concepts of ideology and utopia are relevant to and informative for the study of decadent literature and aestheticism. Although the two literary movements adopted the principle of art for art’s sake and seemed to be independent from an ideological stance and political concern, they were essentially laden with ideological and political significance. Therefore, it is important to inquire into the relationship of these literary movements to the dominant ideology of the period. The aim of this study is to reveal the antagonism between these movements

and the prevailing social order; also, the utopian, emancipatory content inherent in these movements will be questioned.

The death of Marxism is a well-known argument posed by various critics. The relevance of the ideas of Marx and his followers to today's reality is widely questioned, especially after the failure of socialist regimes in many countries throughout the world. Yet obviously, Marxism preserves its validity because the oppression and inequality it attempts to bring to the fore are still as strong as they were when Marx and Engels first wrote their manifesto. Accordingly, as Moyra Haslett argues, "Marxism is a critical 'haunting' of capitalism, a knowledge of its contradictions and structural inequalities" (282). In other words, Marxist outlook is still valid because its antonym, capitalism, continues to sustain oppressiveness of the dominant ideology and inequality. Marxism, therefore, is the criticism and a sort of control mechanism of capitalist societies. Besides, Marxism provides the knowledge of the possibility of a better world; it maintains the belief that there may be change for the better. David Punter states that "Marxism punctured a hole in a system which relied on things 'remaining as they are'" (115). Marxism gives a wider perspective of culture and society, and it is in itself the force that has the potential to initiate change and overcome hegemony.

These characteristics of Marxism are valid for Marxist literary criticism, too. It is still relevant as one of the most efficient critical approaches in literature since literature and art are to a certain extent outcomes of the social reality of a specific period and society; therefore, they inevitably reflect the oppression and inequality that is sustained by the dominant social order. In their introduction to *Women and British Aestheticism*, Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades maintain that "aestheticism is not just a series of texts but also a particular historical condition of art in bourgeois culture" (4). According to Marxism, this comment is true for any work of art, and the focus of this study, aestheticism and decadent literature, are no exceptions. They are autonomous works of art and they are also the direct outcomes of their specific historical condition. Paradoxically, despite the fact that aestheticism and decadent

literature are the products of bourgeois culture, these movements are also critical commentaries on this culture. The fact that aestheticism is both the product of and in contradiction to bourgeois culture has been discussed extensively by Regenia Gagnier in *Idylls of the Marketplace* and Jonathan Freedman in *Professions of Taste*. What will be highlighted in this study is the critique these movements posed on the bourgeois culture and society of the time, that is, on the Victorian culture, which gradually came to connote oppressiveness and inequality. The emphasis will fall more on the emancipatory nature of aestheticism and decadent literature than the bourgeois orientation of these movements.

Another criticism that may be directed towards Marxist approach is that it is not a unified concept with specific tenets. It is indeed true that Marxism has various strands and multiple points of view regarding the nature and function of art. Yet, all of these points of view have a single principle in common; it is, as David Forgacs puts it, "that literature can only be properly understood within a larger framework of social reality" (135). The assumption underlying this study is also this belief that works of art and literature are not independent from the social conditions that produce them. Yet in accordance with the argument of this study, the focus will be primarily on the utopian strain of Marxist criticism; the critics that will be referred to will be primarily those who emphasise the emancipatory and utopian nature of art.

The issue of autonomy of art is also important for this study. Aestheticism and decadent literature are considered to be forms of autonomous art. They rely on the principle of art for art's sake and they have no claim to any ethical or didactic responsibility. However, as already stated, no work of art may be considered independent from the social relations that give rise to it; the two are interdependent. As Dave Beech and John Roberts argue, "art's autonomy cannot be presumed to be achieved by its gaining independence from the categories and values of the social world. […] [T]o think of the autonomy of art as an independence from social questions, particularly political and sociological analyses, is to cut works of art off from those

external factors which constitute it" ("Spectres"). Yet this interdependence does not imply any intrusion and manipulation of the work of the artist by an external force. The meaning of autonomy becomes more concrete at that point: the emergence of autonomous art does depend on certain social, historical conditions yet autonomous art is not manipulated by any power that dominates these conditions.

It should also be highlighted that interdependence between the work of art and the social conditions that produced it also implies an interaction the other way around: that social conditions are also affected by works of art. Thus emerges art's utopian potential. As indicated by many critics, the *fin de siècle*, during which aestheticism and decadence were at a rise, was a period of uncertainty and, as Lyn Pykett puts it, "a crisis in civilisation" (2). It was a period of clash of various ideologies and world views. Therefore, it is not surprising that such a crisis gave emergence to various, usually conflicting literary and sociological developments. It should be noted, however, that while the distinctive mood of the *fin de siècle* was a feeling of failure and doom, this condition of crisis was also capable of producing hope from within. Aestheticism and decadence enabled the expression of this hope: works of art produced within these movements were implicit commentaries on that crisis. Although works of art of the aesthetes and the decadents laid no claim to any ideological stance, they were in fact laden with negativity and suggestions for overcoming this feeling of failure. Thus they were both subversive and utopian. This study, accordingly, aims to explore this subversive and utopian nature of specific literary works of the late nineteenth-century England.

The first chapter of this study will be given to the discussion of the concepts of ideology and utopia with reference to various Marxist critics, especially those within utopian strands of Marxist criticism. The aim will be to discuss these two concepts and highlight the relevance of the concepts to the study of aestheticism and decadent literature. First, the concept of ideology will be explained with reference to the ideas of Marxist critics Pierre Macherey and Louis Althusser. Althusser's categorisation of

Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatuses will be explained and his idea of 'interpellation' will be highlighted. Thus the nature of an ideological hegemony and the way such a hegemonic formation functions will be revealed. Macherey's idea that a literary production inherently embodies gaps and silences that reveal the ideological formation behind it is also significant in this discussion. Following this, the relationship between the concept of ideology and the work of art will be questioned; Macherey's description of the concept of ideology and the artwork's relation to this concept will be underlined. It will be emphasised that both Althusser and Macherey share the belief that despite being a product of ideology, a work of art has certain independence from the ideological formation in which it is produced.

After discussing the relationship between the work of art and ideology in the light of Macherey's and Althusser's ideas, the concept of utopia will be dealt with. The ideas of Theodor Adorno, a member of Frankfurt School, will be analysed. One difference of the ideas of Althusser and Macherey from those of Adorno is that Adorno seems to attach further autonomy to the work of art compared to the former critics. He emphasises the capacity of the work of art to surmount hegemony and argues that the critical content of the artwork is closely related to its accuracy; the more critical an artwork, the stronger its relevance to truth. He also highlights that utopia is an important essence of art; a work of art is valuable to the extent that it cultivates the idea and awareness of utopia.

The discussion of utopia will be furthered with the ideas of Ernst Bloch, the prominent utopian thinker within Marxist tradition. The importance of his ideas depends primarily on the fact that he emphasises utopia, and also emphasises the fact that Marxist notion of utopia is not a detached, abstract conception of an ideal world but a concrete, attainable future. This differentiation is significant because, as another Marxist critic Bertell Ollman writes, "any conditions which arise in historical time are capable of disappearing in historical time" ("Utopian"). The notion of utopia for Bloch, therefore, is a realisable possibility. The abstract utopias, however, are detached from

this connection to the historical time, to the sense of a past and a present; therefore, they do not indicate a possibility. Bloch also puts emphasis on the notion of hope, that is the belief in the possibility of utopia, and argues that every cultural phenomenon carries the traces of hope and utopia.

Fredric Jameson, an American Marxist critic, also elaborates on the notion of utopia, and his ideas will be juxtaposed to those of previous critics to be discussed, especially to those of Bloch. His argument that all class consciousness is utopian in nature will be traced to its implications and it will be highlighted that according to him, the consciousness of both the oppressive class and the one under hegemony has utopian character. Besides, for him, a critic is responsible for revealing the utopian potential of a cultural text as well as revealing the ideological formation beneath it. By implication, he also attributes the critic the mission to reveal the nature of utopian thinking underlying a cultural product.

Finally, Herbert Marcuse, another member of the Frankfurt School like Adorno, will be discussed with regard to his ideas on art. He puts stronger emphasis on the emancipatory potential of art compared to Jameson. Just like Adorno, Marcuse also emphasises the privileged position of art against the dominant ideology. His ideas on the significance of the inner dynamics of art will be highlighted along with his belief that art is classless. This emphasis will also be the link to the discussion of aestheticism and decadent literature, whose elitism has been a subject of debate for various critics. The chapters dealing with specific artists and their works will aim to show that these movements, notwithstanding the class belonging of the artists, are subversive and emancipatory. The utopian content of these works will be analysed with focus on a single theme for each author.

Before the discussion of these works of art, however, background information about the Victorian period as well as about aestheticism and decadence will be provided. A chapter will be spared to the discussion of the period along with the

factors that caused the emergence of aestheticism and decadence, and another section will be devoted to the explanation of the characteristics of the two movements. In the section dealing with the Victorian period, the emphasis will fall on the inner conflicts of the nineteenth-century England. The stereotypical image of the Victorian period will be highlighted, and the dominant ideology of the era will be explored along with the oppressed and the marginalised groups.

The effects of industrialisation on the Victorian England will be analysed with special emphasis on the status of the bourgeoisie and its dominant values. A class-based analysis is necessary for an understanding of the social turmoil present during the period; therefore, the characteristics and the source of the authority of the bourgeoisie will be studied in this chapter. Also the instability and insecurity people felt will be highlighted. Besides, the notion of value will be examined and it will be discussed whether the values recognised to be typically Victorian were shared by all layers of society. Another concept that will be analysed is the idea of progress; as it is a notion closely related to industrialisation, it is significant for this analysis. Whether it is a stable notion or a notion with contradictions will be questioned with reference to both the critics of the time and recent critics. Similarly, the ideas of success, morality, faith and religion will be questioned as the elements constituting the oppressive power of the prevailing social order.

Among the critics to be referred to is Matthew Arnold, whose *Culture and Anarchy* is an analysis of the England of the period. This analysis, which focuses on the characteristics of the three main classes of the Victorian society and their attitude towards the idea of culture, will be helpful to carry the discussion of Victorian mentality. Arnold's concept of 'Alien' will also play an important role while indicating the place of the aesthetes and the decadents in this society. Another critic to be referred to in this chapter is John Stuart Mill. His ideas on the thwarted growth of the individual and the power of public opinion will be discussed based on his famous essay

On Liberty. His ideas regarding the status of women in Victorian society as stated in *The Subjection of Women* will also be cited while discussing the woman question.

The problems of industrialisation will be discussed primarily with reference to the works of John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle besides the decadent poet Charles Baudelaire. Despite the fact that these thinkers are from quite different ideological backgrounds, they make similar comments on the negative effects of industrialisation, and the common points they all make are striking. Finally, art will be discussed with relation to industrialisation and its outcomes. Drawing from the writings of Socialist critic William Morris, the status of art will be analysed. This discussion will thus seek to answer which conditions gave rise to the aestheticism and literary decadence of the late nineteenth century.

The chapter following the social context will be devoted to the characteristics of these two movements and their relationship to the prevailing ideology. Rather than providing definitions, the aim will be to discuss the characteristics that make these movements ideologically subversive. The first point of focus will be aestheticism along with its main principle art for art's sake. Théophile Gautier's famous preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* will be used while explaining this principle. The refusal of any moral responsibility and any use value for art will be explained using Gautier's and Wilde's ideas on the issue. Then, the transition from aestheticism to a darker movement, decadence, will be discussed. However, as there are no definite lines between these movements and they share many traits, the difficulty of giving clear-cut definitions will be highlighted.

The next point of focus will be decadent fiction and its characteristics. The main characteristics such as attraction to the perverse and to the morbid will be explained along with the implications of these characteristics. The discussion will be exemplified by Joris-Karl Huysmans's ground-breaking decadent novel *Against Nature (À rebours)*, which is considered to be the most typical decadent text by critics. The love of

morbidity, elements of the perverse and the grotesque will be pointed out in the novel. The 'decadent hero' and his/her characteristics will be analysed through the main character of the novel, Des Esseintes. Also among the themes of a decadent text are yearning for the past, loss of faith, insincerity and hypocrisy, and these will be highlighted with references to the novel. The final emphasis will be on the deconstructive potential of a decadent text. Such a text avoids binaries and also focuses on the particulars so that a sense of a coherent whole is lost. This style of fragmentation and decomposition, which heralds the emergence of modernism, also creates the ideological negativity of a decadent text. Finally, the word 'decadence' will be analysed with its uses that reveal its antagonism to the prevailing order.

The following three chapters will give an analysis of the works of specific authors. The artists to be studied are Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and Vernon Lee. Each of these artists has distinct concerns, distinct writing styles and sensibilities. Walter Pater is one of the most outstanding representatives of aestheticism in England and he has developed the language of decadence in English. Due to his significance for aestheticism and literary decadence as well as the utopian characteristics of his philosophy, his ideas and his work are important for this study. Although he is not the first or only aesthete of Victorian England, he is arguably the one who set up the *fin de siècle* atmosphere in England. Oscar Wilde, on the other hand, was an admirer of Pater and he was the one who popularised Pater's ideas. He became the outspoken advocate of the principle of art for art's sake as well as becoming a popular decadent dandy. The third author, Vernon Lee, is also integral to this study since she is a member of a minor group of women writers who tried to create a space within a primarily male tradition. Her work will give insight to the writing strategies of a group of women writers and also to the ways in which women writers participated in and criticised aestheticism and decadence. Finally, it is significant to note that all three artists produced texts that have negativity. Their works enable a subversive attitude and a perspective which is independent from the dominant ideological stance that gives emergence to them.

Therefore, in the next chapters the points of focus will be these authors and their work. The first section will be devoted to Walter Pater. In this chapter, his novel *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas* together with some of his essays in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* will be studied, and the analysis will centre on the idea of religion as manifested in these texts along with its utopian aspects. These texts are chosen as focus since they reflect Walter Pater's philosophy of art and also an idea of religion as integrated to his philosophy of art. Accordingly, the aim is to explore religion as a motif in these works and to reveal the utopian nature of these texts. In the next chapter Oscar Wilde will be studied; his decadent novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* along with a few essays, especially *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, will be analysed. In this section, the motif to be explored will be art; Wilde's works will be studied as instances of artwork that reflect on their own nature. As in the case of Pater, the aim will be to reveal the utopian content of these works. Finally, Vernon Lee's novel *Miss Brown* and her short story "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" will be studied with respect to the issues of gender and sexual identity. The aim is to find out in which aspects her works are utopian in the context of these issues. After highlighting the utopian content inherent in the works of these *fin de siècle* writers, the study will end with an overall analysis.

IDEOLOGY AND UTOPIA

This study focuses on two literary movements of the late nineteenth-century Britain, aestheticism and decadent literature, concentrating on and investigating the potential of transformation inherent in the works of literature of the period. Aestheticism and decadent literature adopt the principle of art for art's sake, and these movements have generally been dismissed as lacking any kind of commitment. Until very recently the works of this period have been considered to be devoid of any ideological or political content. Now, however, there is an emerging interest in the ideological aspects of these movements. Interestingly, also at the time of their publication these movements were regarded to be laden with ideological significance. It is important to note that they were mostly considered corrupt and dangerous for the public, which alone reveals the transformative power perceived dangerous by the conservative circles of the time.

This study will employ Marxist literary criticism primarily. As a concept, Marxism is a loose term and Marxist criticism differs widely among its practitioners. The attitudes and strategies suggested in order to overcome hegemony and oppression varies from one critic to another. Similarly, there are various approaches to art and literature within the tradition. However, the basic concepts and concerns are the same for all; the importance attached to economic and historical contexts are common to all Marxists as well as the importance attached to the notion of ideology. Therefore, reference to these concepts will be made throughout this study with specific references to the works of certain Marxist critics while drawing the theoretical framework of the study and defining the concepts of ideology and utopia. The critics whose ideas will be given are regarded to be in correspondence with each other to create this framework, and the works of Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and Vernon Lee, who are the focus of this study, will be analyzed in this light.

It may seem contradictory to bring together Marxism with aestheticism and decadent literature because the former is directly related to political commitment while the latter seems to strive to attain a position that is concerned exclusively with art itself, ignoring any concern other than this self-reflexive attitude. However, for Marxism, it is not possible to consider a work of literature independent of the social conditions in which it was produced. Indeed, the importance attached to literature - and art in general- is made evident by the analysis of its function by various Marxist critics. As Marxist critic Terry Eagleton asserts, “[a]ll art springs from an ideological conception of the world” (*Marxism* 15). For him as well as for the other thinkers of the tradition, art is both the product and inevitably the reflection of certain social conditioning.

However, the nature of art is problematic; it has contradictory elements within itself. On the one hand, as already stated, art is shaped under the influence of the dominant ideology and is the expression of that ideological power to some extent. However, it is also beyond it. As Pierre Macherey states, “[a] work is established against an ideology as much as it is from an ideology” (133). Similarly, in “A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre,” Louis Althusser argues: “What art makes us see, and therefore gives to us in the form of ‘seeing’, ‘perceiving’ and ‘feeling’ (which is not the form of knowing), is the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it alludes” (174). These statements reveal the fact that a work of art is both the product of certain social conditions and it also helps to change and reform these conditions; in other words, by its nature a work of art indicates transgression and subversion, with which Marxism is concerned. As Cliff Slaughter maintains, “[w]hile Marxism does not prescribe for art, […] it brings forward, theoretically and practically, […] revolutionary forces which out of objective necessity must struggle to abolish the present order” (137). Although Marxism does not have preset definitions of proper and improper art, true art has transformative powers inherent in it. Though not all Marxists, certain strands of Marxism hold the idea that

literature -and art in general- is an important element of the dialectics of change, it is an element that indirectly participates in bringing about a classless and free society.

It should also be noted that the nature of the work of art is explained differently by Marxist critics from different strands of Marxism. Marx has made few comments on the nature of art and its relationship to ideology and the critics following him have come up with quite diverse ideas on the issue. The concepts of base and superstructure, the basic tenets of orthodox Marxism, play a significant role while determining their attitude. On the one hand, orthodox Marxism holds the notion that the work of art is the direct outcome of the economy, and, in more general terms, every element of the superstructure is strictly dependent on the base. György Lukács, for instance, condemns the works of James Joyce and other avant-garde authors for failing to reflect the reality objectively. According to Lukács, the stream-of-consciousness technique, for example, is an element that distorts reality since it merely manifests the inner life of the character. David Forgacs explains Lukács's attitude, writing that for Lukács such techniques, which are distortions of reality, "had a political significance, since unmediated totalities were reifications, ideological deformations of reality which falsified the objective situation of a society founded on the contradiction between classes" (140). In Lukács's view, especially the nineteenth century novel is suitable to give the knowledge of the capitalist society objectively and in its totality; therefore, for him artists such as Balzac and Tolstoy have created the most accurate literary works.

On the other hand, there is another strand which does not support this idea that the base directly determines the superstructure and that the superstructure is strictly dependent on the base. The Marxist critics who hold this belief attribute literature and art further autonomy and agency. As Philip Goldstein writes in his analysis of Marxism, "[s]hould economic structures rule artistic production, a text serves as the instrument of higher powers, not of political action" (10). If art becomes merely the instrument of a power, it loses its independence and gets under the

command of authority, which is against the nature of artistic production. These critics who do not attribute a subordinate position to art believe that art should be independent of political interference. They agree that a work of art is the product of certain social and historical conditions and of a certain ideological conditioning; yet this does not mean that artists should serve a political power or that such a power can manipulate a work of art. Rather, artistic production has its inner dynamics, and it uses a language unique to itself. The Marxist critics to be focused on in this study are primarily from this strain of Marxism. It should also be noted that these critics also have various other strands; their ideas have differing attitudes towards the nature of literature. This study focuses especially on those critics who attribute to art autonomy and highlight its utopian nature.

As already stated, the concept of autonomy is rather significant for these critics. Despite being shaped under the influence of a certain ideological outlook, a true work of art also indicates an expression of autonomy. It is the free expression of the artist and it is free from the demands of the public. This concept of autonomy has two aspects; as Terry Eagleton maintains, "if on the one hand [the concept of autonomy] provides a central constituent of bourgeois ideology, it also marks an emphasis on the self-determining nature of human powers and capacities which becomes, in the work of Karl Marx and others, the anthropological foundation of a revolutionary opposition to bourgeois utility" (*Ideology* 9). It is true that the idea of autonomy emerged as a bourgeois notion and implies the bourgeoisie's urge and need to create an independent space for itself, which is an ideological attitude by itself. And art is a form of expression of this notion. However, it is also true that the idea of autonomy inevitably implies independence from external intervention. Although a work of art is the outcome of an ideological stance, it is also a means of understanding and evaluating as well as transgressing the ideological factors shaping it.

Apparently the concept of ideology plays an important role in Marxist literary criticism. It is necessary to go over the concept in order to see the place of art within

ideological structures and evaluate its function. Althusser gives a detailed analysis of the institutionalized form of ideology in *On Ideology* published in 1970. He argues that "there is no practice except by and in an ideology" (44), and individuals are defined as subjects in two ways: by means of "(Repressive) State Apparatus" and of "Ideological State Apparatuses" (22). He states that Repressive State Apparatus "functions by violence" and "belongs entirely to the public domain" (18). What constitutes this single repressive force is the police, the army, the government, etc. Althusser qualifies these forces as repressive since they require the individual to obey certain rules and their functioning is explicit.

Ideological State Apparatuses, however, do not form a whole but "present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions" (17). He gives family, schools, the arts, religion, etc. as examples of such institutions. According to Althusser, these institutions play a significant role in turning individuals into subjects. He continues his discussion of ideology with his concept of "interpellation," by means of which ideology "'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all)" (48). Interpellation explains the nature and the functioning of ideology. By internalizing these institutions, individuals are made part of the ideological structure. He adds that "ideology never says, 'I am ideological;'" yet it makes subjects voluntarily join the workings of the system and continue it (49). Although Althusser specifies literature and other forms of art among Ideological State Apparatuses, he also makes an exception; in "A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre" he writes, "*I do not rank real art among the ideologies*, although art does have a quite particular and specific relationship with ideology" (173).

Another Marxist critic, Pierre Macherey, explains the relationship between ideology and art in detail in *A Theory of Literary Production* published in 1966. In this work Macherey draws attention to the gaps, silences that every work of art contains. He believes that ideology manifests itself most clearly in those silences:

> Ideology is enclosed, finite, but it mistakenly proclaims itself to be unlimited (having an answer for everything) within its limits. It is for this reason that ideology cannot create a system. […] [T]he ideological background, which constitutes the real support of all forms of expression and all ideological manifestations, is fundamentally silent – one might say unconscious. But it must be emphasised that this unconscious is not a silent knowledge, but a total misrecognition of itself. If it is silent, it is silent on that about which it has nothing to say. (131-2)

An awareness of these gaps enables the reader to perceive the ideological structure hidden behind the surface, that is why "we should question the work as to what it does not and cannot say, in those silences for which it has been made" (155). Macherey, despite attributing literature the function of a mirror, also gives it further significance, that of challenging the ideological frame that has shaped it. As he argues, "[t]he text constructs a determinate image of the ideological, revealing it as an object rather than living it from within as though it were an inner conscience" (132). Apparently, both Althusser and Macherey grant literature and other forms of art a special form of relationship to the ideological.

This is also true for Theodor Adorno, who wrote extensively on art, especially modernism, and its subversive nature. In his posthumously published work *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno analyzes the artist and his/her relation to ideology, putting greater emphasis on the emancipatory potential of art than Macherey and Althusser did. The subversive attitude, according to Adorno, is the attitude of the artist who can imply a viewpoint beyond the dominant ideology. In *Aesthetic Theory* he primarily focuses on modernist authors such as Kafka and Beckett and explains the revolutionary nature of the artwork. According to Adorno, "[a]rtworks participate in enlightenment because they do not lie" (5). They intrinsically have the capacity to go beyond the ideological framework and subvert this ideological conditioning.

For Adorno, as for many other Marxist critics, a work of art is not separable from society since it is a direct product of society and it reflects society. As Adorno puts it, "[a]rt perceived strictly aesthetically is art aesthetically misperceived" (6). The artwork and society are in direct relationship to each other, and to evaluate a work of art independently of its roots in society results in a reduction in the signification of that work. That is the case with the aesthetes and the decadent authors of the late nineteenth-century Britain, too. They turn to art and appreciation of beauty for truth, and, paradoxically, this is what makes their work laden with counter-ideology. The fact that they write against the grain to overcome the dominant ideological conditioning of the time and that they consciously create a contrast with this conditioning also establish their relationship to the social structure they attempt to subvert. In Adorno's words, by means of art, the artist "denounces the narrow untruth of the practical world" (241).

This opposition also turns the artwork and its creator into an outsider that needs to be silenced: "The more total society becomes, the more completely it contracts to a unanimous system, and all the more do the artworks in which this experience is sedimented become the other of this society" (Adorno 31). Therefore, it may be concluded that the way works of art are received in a society also gives clues about the attitude of the society and its dominant powers towards difference. Also, by its nature, a work of art cannot aim to legitimize the dominant ideological standpoint. Accordingly, as Wilde and other aesthetes argue, true art does not and should not carry an explicit moral or political message. Indeed, such a commitment would degrade a work of art since it would be shaped and approved by this dominant way of perceiving the world. On the contrary, an artwork is on the negative. As Adorno claims, "[t]he truth content of artworks is fused with their critical content" (35). Antagonism is inherent to the artwork and it asserts itself as a social critique to the extent that it provides awareness of the prevalent fixed ideas. That is why, for instance, Pater had to remove "Conclusion" from the second edition of *The Renaissance*; its straightforward language and radical ideal offended the Victorian society. It was only after he revised it

and also wrote *Marius the Epicurean* in order to further clarify his meaning that he included the conclusion in the third edition.

Adorno also explains the relationship of the artwork to the masses: “Art respects the masses by presenting itself to them as what they could be rather than by adapting itself to them in their degraded position,” he states (239-40). As clarified by Althusser, the function of ideology is the subjection of the masses. According to Adorno, this is why and how the masses are degraded. The masses are corrupt because they are under the command of a set of fixed beliefs of a dominant and dominating ideology, and also because they lack the awareness of this: “Art, however, does not sink to the level of ideology, nor is ideology the verdict that would ban each and every artwork from truth” (Adorno 134). Although art is a product of society and a certain ideological outlook, it has the liberty to imply other possibilities outside the dominant ideology, giving the individual the opportunity to see beyond the prevalent ideological conditioning.

Adorno also adds that a work of art is meaningful and functional to the extent that it cherishes the idea of utopia. He writes: “At the center of contemporary antinomies is that art must be and wants to be utopia, and the more utopia is blocked by the real functional order, the more this is true” (32). Here, Adorno once more indicates art’s oppositional nature. The discrepancy and the tension between the dominant ideology and the artwork reveals that work’s potential to signify utopia, that is, what is not and must be attained. Accordingly, aestheticism and literary decadence denote utopia because these movements are subversive and they undermine the established ideas of the period.

Although Adorno writes primarily to reveal the nature of modernist literature and its antagonistic and progressive character, the ideas he puts forward are applicable to the literary climate of the late nineteenth century, too, because the writers of the late nineteenth century are regarded by many critics to be the

forerunners of modernism. When Adorno argues on behalf of modernist art, saying that "art, mimesis driven to the point of self-consciousness, is nevertheless bound up with feeling, with the immediacy of experience" (259), he at the same time gives insight to their writing strategy, because their works are themselves laden with experience and sensation.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno puts emphasis on the emancipatory potential of Modernism but avoids other movements and periods. The utopian Marxist critic Ernst Bloch, however, rather than emphasizing a specific movement, points out that all art has this utopian potential. In his comprehensive work *The Principle of Hope*, written in three volumes around WWII, he asserts the free, not-to-be limited nature of art. He argues that fairy tales, jokes, religion and all other forms of cultural phenomena manifest utopian content, which surfaces by means of Marxian outlook. He states, "even in misery Marx sees not only misery, […] but the revolting element in misery now becomes truly so, namely active force of revolt against what is causing misery. Thus misery, once it realizes its causes, becomes the revolutionary lever itself" (1357-58). Any text that has emerged out of oppression and reveals this oppression is also the force that will lead to emancipation. As already stated, according to Marxist critics, there is no work of art shaped independently of an ideological framework; consequently, a work of art inevitably carries the traces of subjection within itself. These traces also give insight into the dominant ideology and enable a look from without, indicating the aspirations of human beings.

Bloch emphasizes this potential of a cultural product, and he emphasizes the important potential of Marxism, that of envisaging an emancipated future. He maintains that "only Marxism has given rise to the theory-practice of a better world, not in order to forget the existing world, as was common in most abstract social utopias, but in order to change it economically and dialectically" (1370). He thus makes a distinction between abstract utopias and the Marxist notion of utopia. As Moyra Haslett explains:

> A common Marxist critique of utopianism is that it effectively prevents utopia by deflecting attention from the already existing conditions for change, or that it risks becoming little more than a condemnation of the actual in the light of the impossible. However, Bloch's distinction between 'abstract' and 'concrete' utopias permitted a specific form of utopianism to be retained for Marxism. For Bloch the distinction between abstract utopia and concrete utopia is the difference between wishful and willful thinking, between compensatory and anticipatory thinking, between desire and hope. (282-3)

Thus while abstract utopias indicate mere escapism, Marxism bases its struggle on concrete evidence and traces freedom by means of this evidence, which manifests the emancipatory nature of Marxist approach.

Bloch admits the oppression that human beings are being subjected to throughout *The Principle of Hope*. He writes: "Walking upright, this distinguishes men from animals, and it cannot yet be done. It exists only as a wish, the wish to live without exploitation and masters" (1367). Nevertheless, he excavates hope from the present state of humanity and reveals it. The notion of hope is important in the sense that it indicates the positive transformative power of the creative activities of human beings. He does acknowledge that humanity is at a very early stage of its development; but he also maintains that it carries the potential of reaching a freer state of being, called in Bloch's words, "homeland."

In the same vein, contemporary Marxist critic Fredric Jameson emphasises the emancipatory nature of art in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, which was published in 1981. However, he is more cautious while evaluating this emancipatory potential. He believes that each and every product of culture carries the traces of freedom along with oppression within itself. He argues that "within the symbolic power of art and culture the will to domination perseveres

intact" (277), which reminds the reader of the omnipresent nature of ideology. Yet he also maintains that "all class consciousness – or in other words, all ideology in the strongest sense, including the most exclusive forms of ruling-class consciousness just as much as that of oppositional or oppressed classes – is in its very nature Utopian" (267). According to this statement, there seems to be different kinds of utopia that are in a dialectical relationship with each other. He clarifies that the difference lies in the different forms of consciousness and their potential. While the class consciousness of the oppressed is more universal and emancipatory, that of the ruling class is repressive and violent (268-9).

Jameson goes on to argue that what is important for progress is to struggle to reveal this utopian quality. For him, Marxism can offer such a reading. Considering any sort of cultural text, he maintains that the transgressive potential of any text is inherent in its utopian reflexes. What is important in analysis of texts is that "a Marxist negative hermeneutic, a Marxist practice of ideological analysis proper, must in the practical work of reading and interpretation be exercised simultaneously with a Marxist positive hermeneutic, or a decipherment of the Utopian impulses of these same still ideological cultural texts" (274). Therefore, it is necessary to analyse a text using two perspectives: the ideological, which acknowledges that the text is the product of a certain class consciousness, and the utopian, which has the awareness that the text nourishes a sort of utopian potential. Jameson seems to give a certain agency to the critic at that point. While it is important to figure out the ideological forces shaping a text, it is equally important to understand the utopian potential and the character of this potential.

Herbert Marcuse is another Marxist critic who wrote on the subversive potential of art and its utopian function. He sounds more radical in his emphasis on the emancipatory nature of art. In his 1978 book, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, he argues:

> The political potential of art lies only in its own aesthetic dimension. Its relation to praxis is inexorably indirect, mediated, and frustrating. The more immediately political the work of art, the more it reduces the power of estrangement and the radical, transcendent goals of change. In this sense, there may be more subversive potential in the poetry of Baudelaire and Rimbaud than in the didactic plays of Brecht. (xii-xiii)

This statement is important because it puts emphasis on the inner dynamics of the work of art rather than its direct relationship to the ideological forces creating it. What is necessary for the artwork is to create a feeling of estrangement, which indicates the potential to go beyond the limits of the ideological framework and see it from without. In this sense, Marcuse -as well as Adorno- seems to endow a more privileged position to the work of art than Althusser and Macherey do, who create a relatively more dependent image of the artwork on the prevalent ideological framework.

Although Marcuse admits the fact that a work of art is the product of ideology, he emphasises the potential of art which goes beyond it. For him, art is a means of creating awareness of people's subjection and of an alternative state of being: "Art is committed to that perception of the world which alienates individuals from their functional existence and performance in society – it is committed to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination, and reason in all spheres of subjectivity and objectivity. The aesthetic transformation becomes a vehicle of recognition and indictment" (9). It aims at "the emancipation of sensibility, imagination, and reason," because only through such an instance of emancipation can human beings free themselves from hegemony.

Marcuse also emphasises the classlessness of art. While Marxism puts constant emphasis on class differences and the varying interests of different classes, for Marcuse, art is an exception; it is an egalitarian platform bringing the interests of all classes together. As he argues, "[t]he universality of art cannot be grounded in the world and world outlook of a particular class, for art envisions a concrete universal,

humanity (*Menschlichkeit*), which no particular class can incorporate, not even the proletariat, Marx's 'universal class'" (16). He adds: "The fact that the artist belongs to a privileged group negates neither the truth nor the aesthetic quality of his work" (18). What matters is not which class the author of a particular text belongs to, but to what extent this text is able to produce the emancipatory effect mentioned above.

This remark reminds the reader of the elitism of the decadents and the aesthetes of the nineteenth century. Despite the general tendency to dismiss these artists as aloof and detached, Marcuse highlights the emancipatory, utopian potential inherent in their work. As he puts it, "art is 'art for art's sake' inasmuch as the aesthetic form reveals tabooed and repressed dimensions of reality: aspects of liberation" (19). He goes on his argument giving the poetry of Mallarmé as an example, which he defines as "a feast of sensuousness which shatters everyday experience and anticipates a different reality principle" (19). A work of art is valuable to the extent that it invokes this reality which is outside everyday experience.

Marxism has been criticised by some critics for cherishing romantic notions. Even Raymond Williams, himself a member of the Marxist tradition, detects such a tendency in Marxism and writes: "It certainly seems relevant to ask English Marxists who have interested themselves in the arts whether this is not Romanticism absorbing Marx, rather than Marx transforming Romanticism" (265). As Marcuse clarifies, these critics do not attach the mission of changing the world to the artwork. Instead, they consider it as a subversive apparatus capable of negativity, undermining the dominant ideological conditioning and raising consciousness. He states: "Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world" (32-3), and he adds that "[i]f art were to promise that at the end good would triumph over evil, such a promise would be refuted by the historical truth" (47). Accordingly, the Marxist notion of utopia is not a catastrophic incidence or an unattainable no-where; rather, it is a dialectical process that leads to awareness, which is necessary for change for the better. In this process, art is an

important element since it is one of the most efficient elements creating awareness and emancipation.

The emphasis Marxist critics put on autonomous art is therefore significant. While works of art which seemingly approve the dominant ideology mostly give clues about the blind spots, silences of this ideology; transcendent, autonomous art is capable of challenging it through its artistic qualities. Obviously, this stance implies a shift from the strict formula of the base – superstructure relationship. Economic structure is an important determinant for the cultural institutions and products, yet this control over these products is not absolute. It is also important to note that this is not to say that a work of art is the product of divine inspiration as the Romantic artist maintains. As already indicated, Marxist critics acknowledge the idea that every text is the product of the conditions in which it is born. However, what these critics draw attention to is that works of art do nourish the idea of the better and contain hope; they have the capacity to create sensibility and raise consciousness. Thus, these critics go beyond the idea of a state literature dictated by the dominant ideology of the state and also create a space for autonomous art, which has been generally dismissed for being detached.

Finally, it is important to re-emphasise the significance of utopian perspective for literary and cultural analysis. Besides being an impetus for change and development, utopian thought is a basic constituent of human thought. As Karl Mannheim observes:

> The disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. We would be faced then with the greatest paradox imaginable, namely, that man, who has achieved the highest degree of rational mastery of existence, left without any ideals, becomes a mere creature of impulses. (236)

As Mannheim also points out, a way of thought that is deprived of its utopian aspect leads to a state of inertia, which is against the nature of things. Utopia indicates the human beings' ability and willingness to change for the better; utopian thought is therefore essential for the human development.

Accordingly, utopian tendency is traceable in the works of the decadent authors and the aesthetes of the nineteenth century, who have been accused of being negligent towards society and the social ills of the period. The aim is to analyse their works in the light of the ideas introduced by these Marxist critics. The study also aims to consider the demystifying quality of their writing and to explore in which ways their utopian vision reveals itself in their texts. As Marcuse emphasises, "[i]f art 'is' for any collective consciousness at all, it is that of individuals united in their awareness of the universal need for liberation – regardless of their class position" (31). These works of art, which contain various emancipatory aspects, are among those autonomous works of art which have true emancipatory potential, and they appeal to every individual since they are about one human universal, which is liberation.

VICTORIAN SOCIETY AND ITS DOMINANT POWERS

In this study, the time period under scrutiny is the late nineteenth century, and it is necessary to take a closer look at the Victorian period in order to understand the economic and social context. To begin with, it is important to note that the Victorian society witnessed great turmoil in all directions; intellectual, religious and philosophical, to cite a few; and uncertainty was the prevailing feeling. Industrialism brought progress, but it was not made available to everyone, and it also created great gaps between different layers of society. Different powers clashed, which resulted in an antagonism that based itself on such matters as class, gender and religion. As Raymond Williams puts it, "[t]he one vital lesson which the nineteenth century had to learn – and learn urgently because of the very magnitude of its changes – was that the basic economic organization could not be separated and excluded from its moral and intellectual concerns" (271). The economic growth of the country did not mean growth or stability for other institutions of Victorian society; rather, it could indicate serious problems and disparity, as in the case of nineteenth-century England. The prose writings of the period are helpful while tracing this turmoil and these clashing powers. Accordingly, throughout this chapter, there will be references to the writings of the prominent thinkers of the time as well as some recent research made about the period. The aim is to highlight the characteristics and the nature of the dominant ideology as well as the marginalized groups in society, and to reveal in what conditions aestheticism and literary decadence emerged.

Matthew Arnold is one of the most well-known thinkers of the period. His *Culture and Anarchy*, published in 1869, is the analysis of the social classes in England with reference to their relationship to culture. Firstly, he defines culture as "the disinterested endeavour after man's perfection" (27), and he identifies three major classes in England: the middle class, the aristocracy and the working class. According to him, the middle class, which he names the Philistines, are "the enemy of the children of light" (101). He describes them as a great mass which likes fanaticism, business and

other money-based interests (107). Another group is the Barbarians, that is, the aristocracy, who likes honours and consideration (107). Still another group is the Populace. This is “the working class which, raw and half-developed, has long lain half hidden amidst its poverty and squalor, and is now issuing from its hiding-place to assert an Englishman’s heaven-born privilege of doing as he likes, and is beginning to perplex us by marching where it likes, meeting where it likes, bawling where it likes, breaking where it likes” (105). The common point of these three groups is that all of them are a threat to the culture and the development of society as they are either after their own –basically material- interests or simply ignorant; therefore, they are dangerous. Yet he also identifies a final group which emerges out of these groups but is different from all of them, the Aliens:

> But in each class there are born a certain number of natures with a curiosity about their best self, with a bent for seeing things as they are, for disentangling themselves from machinery, for simply concerning themselves with reason and the will of God, and doing their best to make these prevail; - for the pursuit, in a word, of perfection. […] And this bent always tends to take them out of their class, and to make their distinguishing characteristic not their Barbarianism or their Philistinism, but their *humanity*. (108)

The concept is significant in the sense that it does not signal a certain class or part of society. Apparently Arnold believes in a shared value and a shared truth, and states that each individual should strive to attain this shared ground; what matters for him is the effort and the ability to reach perfection, and those Aliens who are different from the three classes that he identifies and who are after the perfection of their nature are the forces that will take a society forward.

Accordingly, he attaches to literature and literary criticism the mission of transmitting this perfection. As he writes in his essay, “The Function of Criticism at the

Present Time," [criticism's] business is [...] simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas" (588). Arnold underlines the primacy of literature and criticism over politics and economic progress, and emphasises the concept of disinterestedness, which necessitates "keeping aloof from what is called 'the practical view of things'" (588). His belief in the necessity to turn to literature and criticism also implies his suggestion to solve the ills of Victorian society. In his view, England was facing two possibilities; it would either surrender to anarchy or it would develop its culture, and in order to develop its culture it was necessary "to know the best that is known and thought in the world" rather than pursuing the materialist interests that the age offers.

Besides offering a solution to the problems of the age, these writings of Arnold might be suggesting a change taking place in Victorian way of thinking, as well: they may be read as the final remarks suggesting the possibility of an ultimate truth. As Walter E. Houghton suggests, there had existed doubt about the nature of truth previously, too, but it did not mean refusing the mind as a sound means for the knowledge of truth; however, the 1870s marked a noticeable change from absolutes to relativity (14). He writes that "[t]o turn back from Pater to Arnold is to return to the Victorian world. For Arnold threw his whole weight against relativism" (16). His writings were the final efforts of the intellectual to point to an objective truth, and it may be concluded that those who followed Arnold marked a shift from absolute truths to a subjective notion of truth.

Arnold's writing is only one example by means of which it is possible to trace the feeling of insecurity and the undercurrents of anxiety about the contemporary issues such as industrialisation, class inequality, and progress. On the surface, the feeling of confidence created by industrialism kept on thriving during the period. This age created and cherished various ideals all of which had the emphasis of unity and solidarity, but these ideals were also the primary control mechanisms of the money-making class. As Eagleton maintains, "[t]he ultimate binding force of the bourgeois

social order, in contrast to the coercive apparatus of absolutism, will be habits, pieties, sentiments and affections" (*Ideology* 20). Despite the emphasis on shared ideals, however, there was a feeling of instability and insecurity prevalent among a large portion of society. As Thompson maintains, "[e]ach group and subgroup in society was thrown back on its own resources, material, moral, and cultural, and obliged by the alien image of authority to devise its own code of conduct, its own strategies for survival, and its own sanctions for enforcing them" (360). Obviously, Victorian society was far from being an ideally unified whole with elements in harmony and cooperation with each other. Nevertheless, each belief and principle regarded to be the basis of society was under the control of the dominant power, which made these concepts means of domination.

For instance, contrary to the general conviction, the concept of value did not mean the same to every member of society. As Allen McLaurin writes, "'Victorian values' is a nicely alliterative phrase, all the more resonant for being vague and empty" (27). There are some values regarded to be typically Victorian; for example, as Gordon Marsden highlights, "self-help, self-reliance, entrepreneurship, individual charity (rather than a state dole), law and order, family discipline and a stricter sexual morality were the principles that enabled the Victorians to make hitherto undreamed of progress, and were responsible in Britain's case for a 'golden age' of power and influence" (2). On the surface, these values and principles seem to indicate a common ground and equal opportunity available to each member of society. Although these values demanded recognition by every segment of society, however, they were primarily bourgeois values. In truth, they were not available to and shared by the whole population as they were created and shared primarily by the middle class, which alone implies the presence of various forms of inequality in different segments of society.

Beneath these values is the emphasis on success, which is itself a myth. In fact, they carry the implications of capitalism, exalting material gain, and its hold on the individual. For instance, Asa Briggs writes:

> [Trade-unionists] knew that social mobility (although they did not call it such) was severely limited in Victorian England, more limited than it had been in the late-eighteenth century, and they had the feeling, too, rightly or wrongly, that it was becoming more limited as the century went by and new forms of business structure emerged. They knew also that as far as success was concerned […] much of it depended, not upon work, but upon luck. (17)

Briggs also adds that "[t]here remained a very strong feudal element in nineteenth-century Britain" (20). In short, although there appeared to be equal opportunity for all members of society, this was hardly valid for everyone, and labour was not appreciated equally. Despite the fact that hard work was thought to be the basis of success, it was luck that determined whether one would be able to climb up the social ladder or not, and this luck was not accessible to everyone, either.

Besides how to succeed, what success meant was another problematic issue. Just as the accessibility of success was determined by the capitalist drives, its definition was also shaped by it. It reflected primarily the bourgeois motives. As Houghton maintains, "[a] world in which money and respectability were the related goals of social life, and national greatness was symbolized by the Exhibition of 1851, seemed to some Victorians a travesty of what personal and national success ought to mean" (269-70). While labour remained to be an ideal that was rewarded only now and then and did not promise respectability, material gain almost always guaranteed it. The discrepancy was noticed by various critics. For instance, in his well-known article "Signs of the Times," Thomas Carlyle points out the problems caused by industrialisation, calling the age the mechanical age, and highlighting the fact that every value has lost

its importance before power and money. “In fact, what morality we have takes the shape of Ambition. Of ‘Honour:’ beyond money and money’s worth, our only rational blessedness is Popularity,” he writes (291). He translates the moral values of self-help, self-reliance, entrepreneurship into the language of capitalism, and the outcome is the ambition of money and popularity. He continues his criticism and writes:

> By our skill in Mechanism, it has come to pass, that in the management of external things we excel all other ages; while in whatever respects the pure moral nature, in true dignity of soul and character, we are perhaps inferior to most civilized ages. […] This is not a Religious age. Only the material, the immediately practical, not the divine and spiritual, is important to us. The infinite, absolute character of Virtue has passed into a finite, conditional one; it is no longer a worship of the Beautiful and Good; but a calculation of the Profitable. (285)

Carlyle’s critique of the age is based on the dichotomy between brutal materialism and spiritual dignity. For him, the industrialisation and mechanisation along with the values these forces introduced were a threat to real, sacred values of humanity.

In addition to success and profit, the idea of progress, an idea which has also been shaped in the service of the bourgeois ideology, received emphasis, as well. Under the conditioning of industrialisation, progress became a mechanical and purely economic concept, accentuating the discrepant nature of the development taking place in the country. There was a great deal of progress; but the rate of crime, poverty, sexual abuse kept growing, as well. Therefore, the concept indicates the industrial development of the country as well as and ironically the ever growing gap between the poor and the prosperous. As Houghton maintains, “[t]he hierarchical structure of society, spared any direct revolutionary attack, remained relatively firm; and the concept of equality never won any general acceptance – least of all from a middle class eager to preserve the social distinctions it was struggling to attain” (103). Progress did

not mean the same for every class of the Victorian society, and it had no relationship to the idea of equality; as already argued, equality was not a widely accepted concept. The famous decadent poet, Charles Baudelaire, complained about the same discrepancy in France. In "The Universal Exhibition of 1855," for instance, he was asking: "Is it not a matter of astonishment that this oh! so simple notion does not flash in every brainbox, namely that progress (in so far as it exists) sharpens suffering in proportion as it refines sensual pleasure […]?" (71). At the turn of the century, the idea of progress would be realised to be a failure by many, and the feeling of failure would culminate in the idea of degeneration and decay.

This suffering and inequality that Baudelaire drew attention to was a major concern for the art critic, John Ruskin, as well. In his writings he protested against this social discrepancy; in his essay "The Nature of Gothic," for instance, he wrote, "of old, the separation between the noble and the poor was merely a wall built by law; now it is a veritable difference in level of standing, a precipice between upper and lower grounds in the field of humanity, and there is pestilential air at the bottom of it" (17). Obviously he created a causal link between the problems of the age and this gap between the rich and the poor. He also commented on the issue of labour:

> We have much studied and much perfected, of late, the great civilized invention of the division of labour; only we give it a false name. It is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided; but the men: - Divided into mere segments of men – broken into small fragments and crumbs of life; so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin, or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin or the head of a nail. (18-9)

These words sound as if they were taken from Marx, and their focus is the same: that industrialisation alienated the working class poor so deeply from their product that it deprived them of a sense of integrity.

Faith and religion were also under the command of the bourgeoisie. As Louis Billington underlines, one of the primary functions of the main religious currents was "to regulate a deferential lower class" (148). The religious institution got in the service of the money-making classes; therefore, it increasingly became an institution shaped by and under the command of the dominant social order. As G. M. Young asserts, "Evangelicalism at war with habit and indifference, with vice and brutality, with slavery, duelling, and bull-baiting, was a very different thing from Evangelicalism grown complacent, fashionable, superior" (4-5). If a system of belief becomes a matter of fashion creating relations of superiority and complying with whatever the mechanisms of dominant order imposes, it becomes a means of domination, as well, and the main religious current of England was under this process of ossification. Von Eckardt, Gilman and Chamberlin state, accordingly, that "the Church of England had lost touch with the poor, having become a church of the middle and upper classes" (167). It is worth noting that early Victorian England also witnessed the emergence of different sects which were in line with the needs of the poor. As Louis Billington maintains, "most of these sects gave equal power and representation to lay people, and the ethos within the sects worked to prevent the development of a separate and superior clerical order" (148). Yet Louis Billington also notes that "[e]lements of popular revivalism were soon assimilated into a more commercialised style of professional evangelism" (155). Obviously, no minor sect was strong enough to resist the domination of the main religious current, that of the bourgeoisie.

Still another concept through which the prevailing ideological conditioning manifested itself was morality. As John Stuart Mill writes in his lengthy essay *On Liberty* published in 1859, "[w]herever there is an ascendant class, a large portion of the morality of the country emanates from its class interests, and its feelings of class superiority" (5). Obviously Mill had the middle class and its sense of morality in mind while writing this comment. It is well-known that Victorian society put great emphasis on moral correctness; ironically, it was also the age during which the prevalent feeling

was hypocrisy. In the words of Edward Carpenter, the leading gay activist of the period, Victorian age was,

> a period in which not only commercialism in public life, but cant in religion, pure materialism in science, futility in social conventions, the worship of stocks and shares, the starving of the human heart, the denial of the human body and its needs, huddling concealment of the body in clothes, the 'impure hush' in matters of sex, class-division, contempt of manual labour, and the cruel barring of women from every natural and useful expression of their lives, were carried to an extremity of folly difficult for us to realise. (qtd. in Rowbotham 200).

His words sum up the insincerity prevalent during the age. And it was this notion that enabled the middle class to keep up appearances and overlook inequality. After all, the very idea that was put forward to protect people from corruption existed side by side with such realities as child labour and prostitution, and London was the home of 'the two nations.' Degradation was so grave and so common in some parts of the city that in 1883, Andrew Mearns and others reported that "[e]ntire courts are filled with thieves, prostitutes and liberated convicts. In one street are 35 houses, 32 of which are known to be brothels" (30). And ironically, as Foster maintains, "poverty itself was the crime" for the Victorians (85). On the other hand, however hypocritical it was, the idea of morality was effective enough to put pressure on individuals, particularly on those from the middle class and the aristocracy. As a result, leading double lives became natural. It is not coincidental that Oscar Wilde put 'Bunburying' at the centre of his play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It is not coincidental either that he became a scapegoat for his homosexuality, a sexual preference which was not acceptable for Victorian morality. It appears that the concept of morality for a Victorian was primarily a means of control.

Public opinion was the means through which this domination made itself felt. Oscar Wilde's constant protest against mediocrity was a result of this pressure created by the masses, yet Oscar Wilde is not the only critic drawing attention to the issue. This pressure was recognised earlier by critics as diverse as Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill. In "Signs of the Times," for instance, Carlyle states that public opinion "watches over us with its Argus eyes more keenly than ever; but the 'inward eye' seems heavy with sleep" (291). John Stuart Mill is also one of those critics who put great emphasis on the issue. In *On Liberty* he draws attention to the fact that the nature and the limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual would soon be a question of utmost importance (1). He writes:

> The will of the people […], practically means, the will of the most numerous or the most active *part* of the people; the majority, or those who succeed in making themselves accepted as the majority; the people, consequently, *may* desire to oppress a part of their number; and precautions are as much needed against this, as against any other abuse of power. (3)

Obviously, public opinion is a very strong means of domination for Mill. This power of domination is exerted by the majority, and the majority, as Mill highlights, is not necessarily the largest number of people, but the group that holds the power to create oppression. The tyranny of the masses is the outcome of this abuse of power. Moreover, since this kind of oppression penetrates into the tiny details of life, it is much harder to avoid (4).

Throughout the essay Mill emphasises the necessity to protect the individual from this oppression, because according to him individuality is of utmost importance for the well-being of society as well as for humanity. Therefore, he warns the reader that "the general tendency of things throughout the world is to render mediocrity the ascendant power among mankind" (55). He also adds that "whatever crushes

individuality is despotism, by whatever name it may be called, and whether it professes to be enforcing the will of God or the injunctions of men" (53). He argues for the development of individuality because it "is the same thing with development, and […] it is only the cultivation of individuality which produces, or can produce, well-developed human beings" (53). According to him, the primary condition of society's development is the free growth of individuality, because only when human beings have a fully developed, unique character can they create a better future for themselves and thus for society.

The oppressive power of the dominant social order was directed towards women, as well. There were many rights that were granted to -privileged- men and denied to women. For instance, they could not vote and they had no property rights. Individual development was almost impossible for a Victorian woman as she did not have the right to be educated and to own a profession except teaching girls. The ideas of private and public sphere were created during the Victorian age as well as the image of the angel in the house, which was named after Coventry Patmore's famous poem about the significance of selflessness for women. For Mill, however, the subjection of women was a serious matter hindering the development of society. In *The Subjection of Women* published in 1869, he develops the statement "[t]hat the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human development; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality" (1).

Many women were also aware of their subjection, and there were attempts to surmount this oppression. As Briggs notes, especially beginning with the 1870s movements for the emancipation of women gained speed (22). Yet these were not unified movements. Rosamund Billington highlights the fact that the feminist movements of the period had various branches as well as contradictions (118). Their primary contradiction was that despite the fact that they were struggling against the

hegemony of the dominant ideology, they adopted the discourse of this ideology and the institutions that caused their subjection was not challenged. They did not question, for instance, the family as an institution. As Rosamund Billington writes, however, they did manage to develop an attitude against this domination from within: "Although in general supporting the prevailing ideology that the natural sphere of women was the private one of home and family, at many points, feminists challenged dominant views of the biological and mental inferiority of women, which were the rationalizations for their economic, legal and social inequality" (121). It is also important to note that the feminist movement of the age also had a class-based orientation; the primary movements of the age such as advocating women's right for education or for suffrage were movements of the middle class women. The working class women did not have the means available to resist the prevailing order. As Rosamund Billington suggests, "an ideological framework which they shared with bourgeois men gave middle-class women access to male dominated channels of communication and organisation without which they were powerless, and which of course, were unavailable to proletarian women" (117). Therefore, their class identity was an obstacle to a certain extent, but it was also what made these movements more effective.

Victorian dominant ideology imposed its values on the art and the artist of the age, too. Especially the concept of morality created serious pressure on artists. As Joan Bellamy states, "[t]here was an unacknowledged commitment from many nineteenth-century artists to the view of the powerful moral influence of art and the correspondingly serious moral responsibility of the artist" (132). The artists felt that they had to write with responsibility, obliged to observe the general conviction that the common people, especially women, were morally weak and that they would be easily affected by what they read. The circulating libraries were also responsible for this pressure as their preference determined whether a book would be a success or a failure. This commercial criterion was a serious strain for the author. Thus Kate Flint observes:

> Reading provoked a good deal of anxiety during the Victorian period. At the centre of this anxiety about what constituted suitable reading material and ways of reading lay concerns about class, and concerns about gender. In both cases, fiction was regarded as particularly suspect: likely to influence adversely, to stimulate inappropriate ambitions and desires, to corrupt. (17)

This emphasis on morality was so powerful that it could affect the writing preferences of an artist. For instance, Thomas Hardy received so much negative criticism for his novel *Jude the Obscure* that he gave up writing novels.

The ideological control over the publishing industry is a significant factor affecting the works of an artist and the expectations of the masses simultaneously. As Gail Marshall maintains, “for all its mechanization and technological advances, the industry of publishing was not fundamentally organized along profit-only lines, but rather maintained a firmly ideological set of practices which were less radical than the authors it sometimes had to accommodate” (8). Thus the publishing industry exerted an ideological control over the artist. The profile of the average reader was accordingly kept rather low. Kate Flint notes the warning given to young novelists at the time, which is revealing: “As ‘those about to write a novel’ were advised in the *Saturday Review* of 1887, the average reader of novels is not a critical person, cares little for art for art’s sake, and has no fixed ideas about the duties and responsibilities of an author” (20). This advice is informative about the control over the artist as well as the profile of the reader in the Victorian period. Commercial interest and ideological control would keep sustaining the image of the average reader and the same mechanism would not let an author write outside the expectations of this supposedly average audience.

Obviously, public opinion which was governed by the dominant social order would be, in its turn, a control and censor mechanism for the artist and the act of creation. As the well-known Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci suggests, “the success of a

work of commercial literature indicates (and it is often the only indication available) the 'philosophy of the age', that is, the mass of feelings and conceptions of the world predominant among the 'silent' majority. This literature is a popular 'narcotic', an 'opium'" (583). These works reassure the continuation of these feelings and ideals as well as guaranteeing the continuation of the dominant social order. Accordingly, in Victorian England, a work of fiction would gain acceptance and therefore commercial success to the extent that it abode by these mass of feelings and conceptions described by Gramsci. The works that resisted or refused to reflect these feelings, however, would be condemned for immorality. Walter Pater's notorious conclusion to *The Renaissance*, Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are typical examples of the case.

As already emphasised, the ascendant class of a period also determines its dominant values and ideals. Accordingly, in the case of Victorian period, this ascendant class is the middle class, and the values, ideals in question are also those of the middle class. Therefore, the attitude of the middle class towards art is significant. Baudelaire is one of the most well-known artists who drew attention to this fact. As an artist aware of the authority of the bourgeoisie and its values, Baudelaire attached great importance to the artistic sensibility of this influential mass. In "The Salon of 1946" he writes:

> You are the majority, in number and intelligence; therefore you are power; and power is justice. […] The governance of the state is yours, and that is as it should be, because you have the power. But you must also be capable of feeling beauty, for just as one has no right to forgo power, equally no one of you has the right to forgo poetry. You can live three days without bread; without poetry, never; and those of you who maintain the contrary are mistaken; you do not know yourselves. (47)

This is a warning to the middle class that is aware of its power and authority. As he implies, a bourgeoisie with power but without appreciation of art and beauty is dangerous because art is what provides the sensibility for justice and, by implication, for the betterment of people. More than a century later, this idea was restated by Herbert Marcuse in *The Aesthetic Dimension*. As he puts it, "art militates against the notion of an iron progress, against blind confidence in a humanity which will eventually assert itself" (47).

On the other hand, in England, the socialist critic William Morris was more alarmed by the attitude of the middle class towards art. In his writing he often sounds anxious about the future of art. In his article "Art and Socialism," for instance, he argues that commerce and industrialisation have destroyed art and has enslaved people; and this enslavement will not come to an end unless upper class people stand against this corruption, which is the outcome of the system. He maintains that freedom will be achieved only when people free themselves from the alienation and bondage created by money power. He observes that "the death of art was too high a price to pay for the material prosperity of the middle classes" (218). Besides announcing the death of art, he also indicates what was responsible for its death: the ambition of the middle class for material gain. Like Baudelaire, he emphasises the supremacy of this class but contrary to the French poet, he sounds quite overtly critical of the bourgeoisie. He writes:

> Can the middle classes regenerate themselves? At first sight one would say that a body of people so powerful, who have built up the gigantic edifice of modern Commerce, whose science, invention and energy have subdued the forces of nature to serve their every-day purposes, and who guide the organization that keeps these natural powers in subjection in a way almost miraculous; at first sight one would say surely such a mighty mass of wealthy men could do anything they

> please. And yet I doubt it: their own creation, the Commerce they are so proud of, has become their master. (212)

Obviously, before the power of money what was at stake was humanity itself. Pure belief of the bourgeoisie in progress and material gain would result in degeneration of the humanity rather than in prosperity. There is also a utopian, more hopeful note in the essay; as Morris writes, “now the cause of Art has something else to appeal to: no less than the hope of the people for the happy life which has not yet been granted to them. There is our hope: the cause of Art is the cause of the people. Think of a piece of history, and so hope!” (219). Therefore, for Morris, art is both what is in danger and what will be the saviour from this process of dehumanisation.

Admittedly, there is a constant emphasis on the middle class and its values while drawing attention to the discrepancies and problems of the period. Yet it is equally important to emphasise that it is not possible to explain all of the conflicts experienced by the Victorians simply by putting the blame on a class. As Raymond Williams notes: “To describe English life, thought, and imagination in the last three hundred years simply as ‘bourgeois’, to describe English culture now as ‘dying’, is to surrender reality to formula” (272-3). Indeed, the criticism directed by Morris, Mill, Ruskin, Carlyle, Arnold and others is a critique of the problems of the age, and the target of the criticism directed to the bourgeoisie is in fact the criticism of an unfaltering belief in progress and material prosperity represented by this class.

Neither is it possible to talk about a homogenous middle class. While they were notorious for their commercial mindset, there were several middle class patrons who supported art and artists. Wolff and Arscott provide various examples to the case and argue that, contrary to the general conviction, some industrialists and businessmen in the nineteenth-century Britain were indeed interested in art and that they were important patrons of their time. Two important paintings of the time that they give as

examples are *Work* and *The Awakening Conscience*, which were commissioned by important businessmen of the time.

Despite these positive happenings, however, England could not avoid the feeling of failure that emerged by the turn of the century. As John Gross remarks, “it is undoubtedly possible to detect by the 1880s a widespread faltering of Victorian self-confidence, a new edginess and uncertainty about the future” (148). Aestheticism and decadence emerged in such an atmosphere of turmoil created by industrialisation where middle class dominant ideology seemed to devour every other value. These movements were the outcome of these feelings as well as a reaction against them. As already discussed, Matthew Arnold attached great importance to literature and the humanities in general and he implied that the future belonged to the Aliens who had the courage to resist the oppression created by the system. It seems that the aesthetes and the decadents were the aliens of the time. They were the outcomes of the feeling of doom and decay brought by the broken self-confidence of the people. There was an underlying feeling of hopelessness in their writing, especially in those of the decadents, but there was also a serious criticism which was still hopeful for the better. Although they no longer believed in the possibility of a common ground shared by every individual, they did believe that there could be a better world where the oppressive mechanisms of the dominant social order could be eliminated, and they emphasised this possibility by creating direct negativity with the existing order.

AESTHETICISM AND DECADENT LITERATURE AS MEANS OF NEGATIVITY

Aestheticism and literary decadence are two of the several literary movements of the nineteenth century, and they represent subversiveness and negativity. The two movements are studied together here since they have a variety of major characteristics in common, including their relationship to the dominant ideology. Therefore, together they indicate a certain stance in art. They form a certain mode of negativity against the dominant ideology the outlines of which have been given above. As Eagleton maintains, "aestheticism is not just some anodyne cult of *l'art pour l'art*, but the considerably more subversive project of living every facet of our experience, including those conventionally thought illicit, with the passionate intensity of our most precious aesthetic investments" ("Flight" 14). Eagleton's emphasis is on the subversive quality of aestheticism, which is also applicable to decadent literature. These movements put great emphasis on the primacy of art, defending the philosophy of art for art's sake and denying any kind of attachment to a political or ideological position. Yet, as already suggested, these movements are indeed subversive and they imply negativity. The aim of this chapter, accordingly, is to introduce the characteristics of these movements indicating their relationship to the dominant ideology and to explain the nature of their negativity as well as their utopian aspect.

As a concept, aestheticism resists definition because it is a broad term and it covers a variety of literary tendencies. In nineteenth-century England, aestheticism did not emerge as a unified movement, either, and it displayed different characteristics in each case; it included both the art of the Pre-Raphaelites and of Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater. Talia Schaffer draws attention to this characteristic of the movement in *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes* and writes:

> If aestheticism was a philosophical movement indebted to Ruskin and Pater, it was also a fashion inspired by Mary Eliza Haweis and Rosamund Marriott Watson. If aestheticism was a serious literary movement

> tailored to an elite audience, with authors like Henry James, it was also a popular literary movement designed for mass readers, with authors like Ouida. […] The high-culture aspirations of the *Yellow Book* can be matched with popular counterparts from the *Woman's World*. (2)

These differences derive from the sensibilities and ideological positions of the contributors. Therefore, while it has an elitist character, it is also made a part of popular culture. Similarly, while a strand of it displays a male-centred character, there is another strand which emerged with a sensibility towards homosexuals. As a loose concept, however, it has one major premise: the primacy of art and beauty.

Théophile Gautier's preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* is regarded to be the manifesto of this cult of art for art's sake. In the preface Gautier bitingly writes that "[n]othing is really beautiful unless it is useless; everything useful is ugly, for it expresses a need, and the needs of man is ignoble and disgusting, like his poor weak nature. The most useful place in a house is the lavatory" (39). This statement is also typical of Wilde, who assumed the role of the corrupt artist and advocated art for art's sake in England as the most popular spokesperson of the concept. In the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for instance, he writes: "We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely. All art is quite useless" (4). Apparently both Gautier and Wilde resist the utilitarian notion of usefulness of art, highlighting that art has an intrinsic value regardless of any other purpose.

Another argument that Gautier proposes is about the moral responsibility of art and the artist. Just as he refuses to attribute art a use value, he denies any moral responsibility. Complaining about the moralizers of his day, he satirically writes that "[n]owadays there is a great affectation of morality, and it would be very laughable, if it wasn't very boring. Every newspaper serial turns into a pulpit; every journalist becomes a preacher" (20). Similarly, Wilde denies any relationship between art and

morality. Again in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* he states, "[t]here is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all" (3). The arguments of the two artists are identical. As the advocates of the cult of art and beauty, they emphasise that art is independent of any claim to morality. Baudelaire similarly argues that art should not carry any moral responsibility. As he emphasises, art is useful only because of its innate characteristics and other attributes such as moral responsibility are irrelevant to the nature of art since such an attribute deprives art of depth and plausibility. In his essay "Of Virtuous Plays and Novels," he writes,

> Is art useful? Yes. Why? Because it is art. Is there such a thing as pernicious form of art? Yes! The form that distorts the underlying conditions of life. Vice is alluring; then show it as alluring; but it brings in its train peculiar moral maladies and suffering; then describe them. Study all the sores, like a doctor in the course of his hospital duties, and the good-sense school, the school dedicated exclusively to morality, will find nothing to bite on. (111-2)

Clearly, all of these artists undermine the arguments related to the moral responsibility of art, rescuing art from the two basic control mechanisms of the dominant ideology; usefulness and morality.

It is not surprising, therefore, that at the time aestheticism as well as decadent literature was blamed for immorality. Marcuse argues that "historically, the attack on autonomous art is linked with the denunciation of sensuousness in the name of morality and religion" (*Aesthetic* 66). These movements were forms of autonomous art, and they did elevate sensuousness, denying any moral commitment. As the aesthetes argued for the detachment of art from any moral or didactic concern, they indeed became targets of moralizers for advocating immorality.

On the other hand, what the movement implied detachment from was the conventional notions about morality. The protest of these artists was against an idea of morality which was, as explained previously, a mechanism of oppression in the hands of the prevailing social order. As Allison Pease puts it, "[w]hat may have appeared to be a move toward a hedonistic or solipsistic aesthetic, 'Aestheticism,' which as a critical outlook distinguished itself by a lack of conviction in social utility or productive value, in fact opened the way for an ethical, productive aesthetic" (39). Although these artists were against an oppressive notion of morality, they implicitly adopted an ethical position unique to themselves. Walter Pater, for instance, was accused of corrupting the youth; however, his works have an ethical standpoint which makes art its basic point of reference. As Walter Pater states in his essay "Style,"

> if [art] be devoted further to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, or the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to such presentment of new or old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world as may ennoble and fortify us in our sojourn here, or immediately, as with Dante, to the glory of God, it will be also great art. (*Appreciations* 36)

Similarly, Oscar Wilde was accused of being morally irresponsible in his writing, especially in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Yet as many critics as well as Wilde himself pointed out, the novel has an implicit though strong moral. Therefore, the primary reason of the accusations may be the fact that this moral was not quite accessible or desirable for the dominant Victorian ideology. Lastly, as an aesthete, Vernon Lee was more explicit in her emphasis on morality. In a different vein from the others, she was anxious to correct the immoral tendency that she thought dominant in the aestheticism of the period; especially in her early writings this emphasis is obvious. Yet it is important to note that her notion of morality was not a reflection of conventional Victorian morality. And there was an underlying point made by all the three artists: that art and beauty are inherently moral.

This premise, as already stated, disturbed the conventional notions about morality. Jonathan Freedman draws attention to this deconstructive potential of aestheticism and highlights “the ease with which British aestheticism may be incorporated into the deconstructive canon” (*Professions* 31). Due to this subversive quality of their writing, the aesthetes had to deal with such accusations as irresponsibility and corruption. Yet it is significant to note that aestheticism began to lose its allure by the 1880s. As Kirsten MacLeod suggests:

> Even if Aestheticism shared many of the same tenets as Decadence – a commitment to art for art’s sake, a rejection of bourgeois industrialism and utilitarianism, and a desire for intensity of experience – its force as a resistant aesthetic for the literary élite was, by the 1880s, on the wane. In part, Aestheticism’s declining power was a result of its popularity with the middle class, a group against which proponents of the movement sought to define themselves. To add insult to injury, Aestheticism had become the subject of much ridicule and parody […]. (2)

The subversive power of the movement being lost, the major names of the movement, above all Wilde, shifted to a darker aestheticism, that is, decadent aestheticism.

The accusations of immorality directed towards these artists were even more accentuated when they assumed a decadent tone. In his 1895 article, “Tommyrotics,” Hugh E. M. Stutfield describes the movement –considering both decadent and New Woman fiction- as a symptom of “mania” (121) and criticises the artists for “their laboured absurdities and inane paradoxes which the vulgar mistake for wit, as well as the assiduous literary and artistic mountebankery with which they have advertised themselves into notoriety” (121-2). Max Nordau’s now notorious work *Degeneration*, in which he attacks above all the *fin de siècle* artists for degeneracy, is another typical example of harsh criticism directed at these artists. In this work, which was published in 1892 and translated into English in 1895, he weirdly brings together medical

arguments and literary currents of the time, and concludes that these are the symptoms of a disease typical of the period. He argues that,

> the physician, especially if he has devoted himself to the special study of nervous and mental maladies, recognises at a glance, in the *fin de siècle* disposition, in the tendencies of contemporary art and poetry, in the life and conduct of the men who write mystic, symbolic and 'decadent' works, and the attitude taken by their admirers in the tastes and aesthetic instincts of fashionable society, the confluence of two well-defined conditions of disease, with which he is quite familiar, viz. degeneration (degeneracy) and hysteria. (15)

Decadence was an outcome of the *fin de siècle* atmosphere, and it appears that by the 1890s aestheticism began to be regarded as decadent. Some critics like Nordau and Stutfield regarded the movement as an illness and used the term in a derogatory sense, and conversely the artists adopted the term 'decadent' as a reaction to describe themselves. By the end of the century, the cult of beauty had turned into the appreciation of degeneration.

Although such clear-cut timelines and definitions do not prove reliable since both of the terms are rather elusive and are used in a variety of contexts, it will be helpful to highlight this relationship for the sake of convenience. As David Weir argues, "[t]here was never an aesthetic movement, though there were, perhaps, a number of aesthetes" (60). For Weir, it is more appropriate to use the phrase 'aesthetic school' rather than characterising it as a fully developed movement. The term 'decadent' is also problematic; David Weir and Thomas Reed Whissen as well as several other critics point out the difficulty of pinning down an exact definition of the term 'decadence' in their works. However, it is clear that when the aestheticism of the late nineteenth-century England coincided with the *fin de siècle* anxieties of decay and failure, aestheticism and decadence came together to indicate degeneration for many. The

period was fertile in the sense that it brought together contradictory powers; as Sally Ledger puts it, it is "[t]he clash of the 'old' and the 'new' that characterises *fin-de-siècle* cultural politics" ("Wilde" 9). Accordingly, the negative reaction these movements received was also due to the fact that they threatened various well-established institutions of society and stirred the fears about the issues of gender, race and class, as well as the fact that they undermined the widely accepted notions of morality.

It is also important to point out that decadent fiction is one step ahead of aestheticism in its negativity and contradictoriness; as Denisoff highlights, aestheticism's "focus is more specifically on artistic ideals" ("Decadence" 34). While the nineteenth century aestheticism primarily cherished the cult of art for art's sake and appreciated the experience of art, the emphasis of decadent literature fell further on negativity, which may be attributed to the dominant *fin de siècle* feelings of doom and decay. Therefore, it is not coincidental that decadence became the negative pole of literary doubles for many critics. As Constable, Potolsky and Denisoff suggest,

> Critics tend to treat decadence […] as the weak other of some "strong" literary movement, distinguishing the (good) Aesthetes from the (bad) decadents, the (transcendent) Symbolists from the (materialistic) decadents, or the (original) Romantics from the (imitative) decadents who merely parrot or plagiarize their imagery and doctrines. (7-8)

However, as Whissen points out, "[w]hile it is clear that decadence appears at a time when a civilization seems doomed and corruption rampant, this is merely the *Zeitgeist* in which decadence flourishes, not the essence of decadence itself" (xxii). Indeed, decadence reflects the prevailing mood of this corruption, mirroring it, yet it is not the essence and the source of corruption; rather, it creates a mood that is subversive for this degeneration. For Marcuse, for instance, the word decadent indicates the emancipatory characteristics of a culture in decay. As he writes in *One-Dimensional Man*, "the term 'decadent' far more often denounces the genuinely progressive traits

of a dying culture than the real factors of decay" (63). It is necessary to inquire further into this negativity along with its ideological and utopian implications in order to understand its relationship to the dominant ideology.

In a 1962 essay, Russell M. Goldfarb described decadent literature, stating that it "is characterized by artistic concern for the morbid, the perverse, the sordid, the artificial, the beauty to be found in the unnatural" (373). Like Goldfarb, many critics use words such as 'morbid,' 'sordid' and 'perverse' to describe it. Although these words usually imply disapproval, these characteristics are useful to describe the negativity of this literature. By embracing morbidity and the perverse, the decadent also refuses the notion of propriety approved by the prevailing social order. Whissen writes that "[t]he decadent sees greater value in what society ignores than in what it honors, regardless of the circumstances" (49). Obviously, decadent literature challenges the notion of propriety and draws attention to alternative forms of perception.

Besides, the decadents appreciate the artificial, because for the decadents naturalness implies normalcy and banality. Therefore, the decadents's preference for the artificial rather than the natural forms a part of their negativity. It is revealing that Joris-Karl Huysmans's 1884 novel, which is regarded to be the bible of decadence, is titled *Against Nature (À rebours)*. The decadent's appreciation of artificiality is studied extensively in this novel. The main character of the novel, Des Esseintes, is a disillusioned recluse who prefers to live an isolated life rather than participate in the bourgeois life of the nineteenth century. As Clyde de L. Ryals discusses in a 1958 essay, "decadence found expression in […] placing value on the grotesque at the expense of the natural" (87). Des Esseintes's devotion to the artificial and his very character are indeed grotesque. Firstly, he dedicates himself to works of art and to elevated sensual pleasures. Also, he is deeply interested in artificial flowers and exotic perfumes. The novel does not have a conventional plot, and the descriptions of the works of art, perfumes, precious stones and flowers in minute detail constitute much of the novel.

Artificiality as well as the grotesque is elevated throughout these descriptions; besides, the decorations of the house also carry elements of the grotesque. The negativity of this decadent novel is partly maintained by means of these elements of the grotesque and the emphasis on the artificial.

The title of the novel is significant also because it refers to the dissidence of the decadent hero, or rather, the anti-hero, of the novel. As Patrick McGuinnes states in his introduction to the novel, "[t]o do something *à rebours* is to run countercurrent, to go against the flow, to do things the wrong way around; but it also suggests stubbornness, perversity, willful difficulty" (xiv). In addition to his interest in the artificial, every characteristic of Des Esseintes accentuates his implicit dissidence. His wilful isolation from society as well as his disregard for social institutions prove this perversity and stubbornness. As Ryals argues, "[t]he decadent forgets that he is part of the universe and ignores his relationship to other forms of life" (88). This is true for Des Esseintes, as well; yet this forgetting is a conscious, voluntary act for him. As the narrator states at the beginning of the novel, "[h]is contempt for humanity grew fiercer, and at last he came to realize that the world is made up mostly of fools and scoundrels" (8). After this realisation he literally ends his connection to other people, and begins living in a country house in isolation.

Des Esseintes's eccentric and antagonistic position is typical of the decadent character, and it is revealing for the ideological stance of the novel. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse argues that,

> in the literature, [a dimension which is irreconcilably antagonistic to the order of business, indicting it and denying it] is represented not by the religious, spiritual, moral heroes (who often sustain the established order) but rather by such disruptive characters as the artist, the prostitute, the adulteress, the great criminal and outcast, the warrior, the rebel-poet, the devil, the fool. (62)

Marcuse writes about the nineteenth century literature here, and what he says is valid for *Against Nature* and, in general, decadent literature, as well. While the marginal and the marginalised are the antagonistic forces before the established order in decadent literature, that order is maintained and reproduced by the religious, moral heroes. While the former reproaches the prevailing social order, the latter constantly confirms that order.

In decadent works, the concepts of value and convention are also challenged. As already argued, widely approved values and conventions are generally those imposed by the dominant ideology on the individuals. By refusing to take dominant values for granted, the decadent refuses, to use Althusser's vocabulary, interpellation. As Weir puts it, "Christian and classical values are very much in the process of being rejected and replaced during the so-called decadent period" (14). Therefore, the decadents were regarded to be a threatening force for the conventional values. The above statement by Whissen about the tendency of the decadent to ignore what society honours is valid for the attitude of the decadent towards values, as well; since the decadent seeks value in what society ignores, prevalent values do not mean much for the decadent. This characteristic is again obvious in *Against Nature*. As the narrator remarks, "his distaste for accepted ideas had hardened into disgust" (82). This disgust reveals itself as self-isolation, as discussed above, and results in exaggerated attachment to the curiosities and rare objects around him.

Memory also plays an important role in decadent fiction. A preoccupation with the past, repulsion for the present and dread for the coming future constitute the shifting feelings of the decadent towards the notion of time. As Ryals observes of the decadents, "[f]eeling the desolateness of their own age, they developed a nostalgia for other places and other times" (90). For Ryals, decadence implies escapism. As he argues, decadence "became merely a method of escape from the world, destroying the ties which bind man to the universe" (91). Des Esseintes's isolation also indicates an escape to another age. This flight to a different age is explained in *Against Nature*

thus: "The fact is that when the period in which a man of talent is condemned to live is dull and stupid, the artist is haunted, perhaps unknown to himself, by a nostalgic yearning for another age" (166). This is a yearning directed to the past. While the decadent tries to escape the present, the past usually becomes a point of retreat. As Neville Morley maintains, "'Decadence' insists on remembering, in the belief that the past contains all future possibilities" (583). Indeed, the indeterminacy of the future is disturbing as much as it is comforting for the decadent. While the pessimism of the decadent is more obvious, there is still some hope reserved for the future. And this hope is based on a recollection of the past. Therefore, memory and remembering are also very important in *Against Nature*. As already stated, catalogues of objects take up much of the novel. These catalogues of objects, whether these be precious stones or exotic parfumes, are in a sense ways of preserving the past. Yet the obsession of Des Esseintes for these is so strong that from a perspective, the novel becomes a parody of preservation and remembering, accentuating the pathetic situation of Des Esseintes.

The antagonism of decadence reveals itself through religion, as well. The crisis of faith is one of the well-known outcomes of scientific developments and findings that took place in the nineteenth century. This feeling of inability to believe is accentuated in the character of Des Esseintes most clearly; as the narrator states, despite all his efforts to believe, "doubts crowded into his fevered mind, upsetting his unsteady will, rejecting on grounds of common sense and by mathematical demonstration the mysteries and dogmas of the Church" (200). And he immediately adds that "it isn't really the physiologists or the sceptics who are demolishing Catholicism; it's the priests themselves, whose clumsy writings would shake the firmest convictions" (201). Obviously there is a more powerful reason deepening his inability to believe. Sarcastically implying Des Esseintes's excessive sensitivity towards écriture, this statement also reveals the distortion of religious feeling and of religious institutions represented by the clergy. Apparently, his loss of piety is not separable from his loss of faith in a civilisation that abuses religious feeling, leading to its ossification and its conformity to authority. As Whissen explains, "[t]o the decadents, nothing is sacred.

Piety brings out the worst in them – or the best, depending on your point of view. Part of this irreverent attitude stems from the fact that decadents are irresistibly inclined to go against the grain, for they see hypocrisy everywhere and are simply unable to accept it or ignore it" (29). The antagonism of Des Esseintes towards piety, accordingly, is because of the insincerity and hypocrisy he observes in every institution and in every feeling of the period.

The decadent's problematical relationship to civilisation manifests itself through other antagonisms besides values and religion. The idea of progress that was initiated by industrialism is also questioned and challenged by the decadent. As already explained, the decadent French poet Baudelaire had questioned an unfaltering belief in material progress since, as Gogröf-Voorhees explains, "[f]or Baudelaire, true civilization is obviously not the one based on material wealth but one which engenders spiritual refinement, artistic productivity, and inventiveness" (71). The emphasis of the main character of *Against Nature* on works of art and other rarities is in line with this attitude. While he escapes from the city and all its implications, he embraces what is old, unique and, by implication, irrelevant to the ideal of material progress. As Whissen notes, "[d]ecadents find it ironic that what the world calls progress is really decay – and vice versa" (72). Max Nordau's previously quoted comments about the literature of the *fin de siècle*, therefore, are paradoxical because he, along with many other critics, took decadent movement to be a symptom of decay while it was essentially the reaction of the decadent against this decay and corruption.

This reaction of the decadent is rather obscure and intentionally so, and this obscurity derives from its complex relationship to what it stands against. The decadent stance avoids clear-cut definitions and binaries; in Charles Bernheimer's words, "[d]ecadence wants to do without truth" (62). Although the decadents' negativity seems distanced and egotistic at a glance, in fact they want to avoid privileging one truth over another. Accordingly, the decadents develop strategies to do away with marginalization and binaries. As Denisoff argues, the movement "challenges Western

thought processes without attaching itself to any one particular cultural or historical agent" ("Decadence" 33). This makes their position ambivalent yet subversive. Also their negativity aims at overcoming well-defined, ossified identities and sparing space for in-betweenness. Constable, Potolsky and Denisoff maintain that "decadent textual strategies interfere with the boundaries and borders (national, sexual, definitional, historical, to name but a few) that criticism normally relies upon to make its judgments, producing what we call a 'perennial decay' of those boundaries and borders" (11). The decadent stance thus enables the artist to blur the boundaries, which highlights its deconstructive potential.

Style is also a very important transgressive quality of decadent literature. Its emphasis on the particular and its tendency to deconstruct the whole are evident in the use of language of the decadent artist. As the French critic Paul Bourget famously observes, decadent style is "that in which the unity of the book decomposes to make way for the independence of the page, in which the page decomposes to make way for the independence of the sentence, and the sentence to make way for the independence of the word" (qtd. in North 88). Decadent style thus refuses to privilege the whole and draws attention to the particulars. Bernheimer similarly notes that "[d]ecadent style is artificial, ornamental, superficial, decorative. It fetishizes the particularized detail at the expense of the organic whole. It is a style of decomposition and disintegration" (55). Thus it at once stylistically mimics a condition of, in Max Nordau's words, degeneration and hysteria, and also refuses to lose sight of the slighter elements constituting the whole. This characteristic also has implications at a larger scale, defining the relationship of decadence to the ideological. While the dominant ideological stance attempts to provide a coherent picture of the world, decadent language deconstructs and gives a perception beyond it.

All these characteristics provide decadence with a political stance and an ideological antagonism. It is not coincidental that the word 'decadence' has been used by some circles to condemn avant-garde or emancipatory art. As Michael St. John

maintains, "[t]he charge of decadence is now and has always been a potent weapon in the hands of political *élites*" (xii). He explains the connotations of the word, writing, "[d]escribing anything, or anyone, as decadent, involves reference to an ideal from which the subject thus described declines, this in turn implies ways in which that subject might be thought of and treated in society" (xvi). There are various examples to this case. For instance, the decadents of the late nineteenth century were blamed for being a symptom of decadence. A further example may be the Stalinist Russia, which censored and silenced artists that refused to make the propaganda of the regime. Similarly, Hitler Germany named the modern art "degenerate art" and destroyed it.

The same observation has been made for the cult of art for art's sake by many critics, too, each critic offering slightly different explanations. In his article on censorship and art for art's sake, for instance, Frederick Burwick draws attention to the fact that the concept of '*fin de siècle*' implies "hightened anticipations and retrospections" (117), and argues that "[o]n the positive side, we have learned to challenge the naiveté of the pretended exclusiveness, 'for art's sake.' On the negative side, we have forgotten the social and political contexts that made the claims of exclusiveness seem a necessary strategy for survival" (117). He highlights the fact that the cult of art for art's sake is a strategy of the artist to defend art from outside interventions. Hiding behind this phrase, the artist gains relative freedom from the oppression directed towards the work of art. He also adds that,

> Crucial to the concept is its resistance to, or defiance of, social values. In the 1890s, 'art for art's sake' offended Victorian morality. A century earlier, amidst the repressive censorship throughout Europe during the 1790s, the aesthetics of "disinterestedness" and the self-determination of art were argued in the writing of Kant, Schiller, Schelling, and the brothers Schlegel. (119)

He emphasises that art adopted the motto of art for art's sake in various locations and various centuries in order to protect itself. This is important to show that even the motto is laden with political implications and that art is inevitably in relation with the milieu in which it is born.

The focus of this study is the work of Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and Vernon Lee, each of whom gave a different quality to the movements of aestheticism and decadence. Walter Pater contributed to the philosophy of aestheticism and constructed the language of decadence in England, arguing for the primacy of sensations and disrupting the widely accepted notions about gender. Oscar Wilde, on the other hand, popularised these ideas of Walter Pater. Vernon Lee, as a woman contributor, occupied a place in a primarily male sphere and further challenged the notions of gender, also questioning aestheticism. In short, as aesthetes and decadents, all of these artists made distinct contributions to the literary currents of their time, and their works were products of an ideological consciousness and they were politically subversive. The following three chapters are spared to the analysis of the works of these three authors. The aim is to inquire into the ideological stance of these works and to reveal their utopian potential.

WALTER PATER: RELIGION AND UTOPIA

Walter Pater’s writings have been evaluated in diverse terms since the time of their publication. While his contemporaries regarded him as a figure of dissent in terms of both sexual identity and political standing, later on he was regarded primarily as an aesthete who was independent of political concerns and whose work lacked any relevance to the ideological. As Jonathan Loesberg states, “Pater’s aestheticism as a form of cultural critique ended in Wilde’s prison cell” (160), and it continued to be considered detached from any sort of political or ideological stance for a long while in the twentieth century. This was partly due to the tendency of New Criticism to evaluate a work of art as an autonomous realm, yet this criticism was itself a consciously restrictive move, trying to limit the artwork to its inner dynamics. Also Pater’s own emphasis on the primacy of art and pursuit of beauty helped create this detachment. As Linda Dowling argues, “in an age of overwhelming vulgarity, those who devote themselves to literature and music and art constitute a fugitive elite, the last guardians of the spirit of beauty in a nightmare landscape of modern ugliness,” - which also reveals its essentially political nature (*Vulgarization* xii).

It is relatively recently that the works of Walter Pater started to be considered in relation to ideological and political contexts. This is an important and necessary change since it reestablished the connection between the work of art and the conditions which gave rise to its emergence. The aim of this chapter, accordingly, is to highlight the ideological aspects of Walter Pater’s writings with relation to religion, focusing primarily on *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*, which was published in 1885. This work is especially important as it was written for the re-statement of the ideas suggested in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, which led to much controversy and compelled Pater to revise those ideas for fear that “it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall” (*The Renaissance* 220).

The reason for choosing religion as the primary point of focus for the analysis of Pater’s works is partly because the concept provides a sound perspective for the study of ideology and hegemony since religion inherently has ideological implications. As already stated, Althusser puts great emphasis on institutions such as religion and emphasizes that it is one of the institutions that turn individuals into subjects by means of ‘interpellation.’ Individuals become willing participants of the dominant ideology through this process. Therefore, it is necessary to explore this theme in Walter Pater’s works in order to understand the relationship between religion and hegemony during the Victorian period. Another reason for focusing on religion is that it is one of the concepts that Pater is preoccupied with in most of his writings. Its importance for him is twofold: firstly, Pater’s approach to the concept constitutes one of his strategies of undermining the mainstream ideology, and secondly, the concept enables him to communicate his philosophy of pursuit of beauty and the concept of perpetual flux. Although his handling of religion does not indicate that he writes overtly for political purposes, the way he deals with the concept points to the emancipatory and transgressive nature of his writing.

Pater’s interest in religion has various dimensions. As Hilary Fraser maintains, “Pater’s attraction to Christianity was indeed aesthetic in nature” (219). That is why descriptions of Christianity and of its rituals focus primarily on the aesthetic qualities rather than its principles in *Marius the Epicurean*. Christianity as well as other religions mentioned in the novel are presented primarily in their outer form throughout the novel and the sensation they create receive more emphasis rather than their doctrines. Thus content is subordinated to form. The reason for this may be found in his observation stated in *Plato and Platonism*. He maintains that “there is nothing absolutely new: or rather, as in many other very original products of human genius, the seemingly new is old also, a palimpsest, a tapestry of which the actual threads have served before” (5). He considers also religion among these products which have no new content but emerges repeatedly in different forms (10). Obviously, such a

perception is transgressive in that each religion spares itself a privileged position and such an argument deprives religious institution of its authority.

This implied position which denies to attribute religion or any other institution a privileged place makes itself felt in his writings and in his philosophy. The way he deals with religion suggests a point of view which is radical and revolutionary. By means of it, he explores various possibilities through different perspectives regarding religion and undermines the prevalent dogmatic outlook of the Victorian period. He stated this attitude most openly first in *The Renaissance.* While writing about the Renaissance, he also stands against the dominant perspective of his own time the outcome of which was “to depreciate man’s nature, to sacrifice this or that element in it, to make it ashamed of itself” (*The Renaissance* 62). It is natural that Pater received negative comments immediately after the publication of this book. His subversive attitude was recognised by his contemporaries immediately, and created serious reaction. As Bell-Villada observes, Pater “offended […] by failing to privilege religion with any special cognitive, moral, or spiritual powers, by systematically subsuming it, along with philosophy and politics, to worldly concerns such as pleasure and beauty” (81). It was a scandal to declare the pursuit of pleasure and beauty the utmost purpose of life for the Victorian moralizer.

This does not mean, however, that Pater has any intention to despise or cast off religious sentiment. On the contrary, he points out religion as a sublime way of experiencing beauty. Accordingly, Jonathan Loesberg comments on Pater’s philosophy and notes: “In using the phrase ‘art for art’s sake,’ […] Pater claims the centrality of art to all other forms of experience, not its separation from them” (11). Since, for him, religious feeling is beautiful in essence, he attaches it great importance in his philosophy and writings. Accordingly, Wilde writes in *De Profundis*: “In *Marius the Epicurean* Pater seeks to reconcile the artistic life with the life of religion, in the deep, sweet, and austere sense of the word” (867). He places beauty as the primary reference point because the sense of beauty cannot be readily manipulated by

hegemonic powers. Religious sentiment, on the other hand, can easily be institutionalised and manipulated by the dominant ideological outlook.

The emphasis Pater puts on beauty and art caused him to be accused of hedonism and corruption. Yet what Pater pursues is "a general completeness of life" (*Marius* 94), the attainment of which is inhibited by the prevalent Victorian mentality. Religious feeling, which is otherwise a part of human nature according to Pater, becomes an obstacle before the freedom of the individual and prevents him/her from being close to his/her nature. This ossification and corruption is highlighted by John Morley ironically; commenting on Pater's *The Renaissance*, he writes: "That a serious writer should thus raise aesthetic interest to the throne lately filled by religion only shows how void the old theologies have become" (qtd. in Gross 118). In *The Renaissance*, Pater indeed "raises aesthetic interest to the throne," and draws a parallel between the medieval ages and his time, suggesting a renaissance for his own time by means of a quest for this feeling of "completeness." What he stands against is the morbid and rigid presuppositions; as in his description of Michelangelo, he himself is "beyond his time in a world not his own" (*The Renaissance* 97). Pater depicts Michelangelo's situation as an outsider:

> [H]e lingers on, a *revenant*, as the French say, a ghost out of another age, in a world too coarse to touch his faint sensibilities very closely; dreaming, in a worn-out society, theatrical in its life, theatrical in its art, theatrical even in its devotion, on the morning of the world's history, on the primitive form of man, on the images under which that primitive world had conceived of spiritual forces. (97)

This idea of a theatrical life and a worn-out society reminds the reader of what Althusser says about ideology: the individual is turned into a subject by artificial structures and a person is not aware of this subjection; rather one becomes a part and

reinforces it. The artist, however, is capable of an awareness that causes him/her to be an outsider and transgress this subjection.

This antagonistic attitude is prevalent in *The Renaissance* as well as in most other writings by him. What he attempts to highlight is the possibility of "'the free play of human intelligence' and, almost more importantly, the free play of the human body, proved profoundly persuasive in the time in which Pater lived, an epoch of industrial capitalism shaped by utilitarian values that had effectively rendered even the idea of 'free play' unacceptable" (Beaumont ix). For Pater, such a renaissance means getting closer to human nature, being capable of keeping outside of the artificial theatricality of his time. In fact this antagonistic attitude had already begun to emerge as a stance against the dehumanizing effects of industrialism; the threat posed against human nature by this mechanization had begun to be criticised before Pater. It may be argued that the appeal of the Romantic poets and J.S. Mill, for instance, to get closer to human nature by means of emotion and feeling, has been furthered by him.

Discontent and in-betweenness caused by mechanization and alienation were also intensified by Darwin's theory of evolution, which caused much controversy among intellectuals. While for conservative people it was not more than an infidel statement, for more liberal circles it opened up a space for new possibilities. For Pater, also, it was a liberating move. Thus Armstrong states:

> It is true that with Pater the post-teleological world is newly configured, as belief is thoroughly historicised and anthropologised, irradiated with the light (one of his favourite words) of a suavely tender but intransigent skepticism. [...] Labour *on* the world is displaced into the recurrent self-making which is made and unmade with each perception. (384)

Pater's philosophy enables the individual to see beyond dogmatic statements and gives reign to a never-ending self-making process. He is particularly preoccupied with

religion in that religious feeling has the capacity of turning into unyielding dogma, thus becoming a very useful instrument for maintaining the mainstream ideology. It is the same sentiment, however, that also has the potential for beauty and new sensations as well as the potential for going beyond the restrictions posed by "the traditional and popular morality, at points where that morality may look very like a convention, or a mere stage-property of the world" (*Marius* 98). What Pater ultimately does is to turn religious feeling against the existing dominant ideology and rescue it from being a mere instrument.

The issue of morality is significant since Pater was accused of advocating immorality and corrupting the Victorian youth with his ideas. Indeed, he refuses to produce works of art laden with moral message or to attribute art a moral function. This would be against his philosophy of pursuit of beauty because his philosophy rejects any didactic function. Still, as he explains in his essay "Measure for Measure," he agrees that art may carry moral significance (*Appreciations* 191). Hilary Fraser accordingly maintains that, "[a]lthough he denied that art bore any moral responsibility or didactic function, he nevertheless conceded that it could have a profound moral effect" (201). And she adds that "Pater's is the assimilation of ethics to aesthetics. Moral virtue is but one beauty among many" (200). Therefore, he does not deny that morality is substantial. On the contrary, he deems it valuable. However, he does not subordinate art to religion or morality and preserves its autonomy.

It is also important to note that Pater devises a state of being that refuses classification or labelling. His philosophy of pursuit of new sensations indicates a process which constantly repeats itself in each new perception. Accordingly, the renaissance is not specific to a particular period in history; it is not unique only to the end of the middle ages. It is "any moment of intense feeling encountered in a world that scientific inquiry, rational thought, 'analysis' itself have reduced to a state of enervation and entropy" (Freedman, *Professions* 64-5). Pater's "Renaissance, that movement in which, in various ways, the human mind wins for itself a new kingdom of feeling and sensation and thought, not opposed to but only beyond and independent

of the spiritual system then actually realized" is possible for his own time, too (*The Renaissance* 37). What he aspires to is a renaissance that leads beyond his time by its elusive and revolutionary nature.

To get beyond the rigid lines drawn by an ideology, a constraining set of values or, as in the above quotation, a spiritual system, does not mean that Pater refuses to accept a common ground for human beings from different periods. On the contrary, while he tries to get beyond the system, he also acknowledges a basic set of characteristics. For instance, one of the essays in *The Renaissance*, "Pico della Mirandola," is the praise of a scholar who tries to reconcile the religion of Greece with Christianity. Pater praises his effort despite the fact that it indicates an attitude that "had no idea of development, of the differences of ages, of the process by which our race has been 'educated'" (57). Pico's attempt is valuable for Pater in that its end is to "unite what men's ignorance had divided" (67). It is based on a potentially secular attitude which presupposes that "all religions may be regarded as natural products, that, at least in their origin, their growth, and decay, they have common laws" (56). Obviously, Pater believes that there is a circular movement in the history of humanity and that it is possible to observe this circularity by means of pursuing the repetitive patterns that constitute this history.

Accordingly, in the shocking "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* he states that "our failure is to form habits" (222). What is put at stake here is any tool or institution that ensures the continuity of the dominant ideology as well as a definite sense of belonging. His strategy against religious dogma or any kind of institutionalized ideology is to adopt a way of thinking and perception which is fluid, refusing to become institutionalized in turn. His writing always indicates an in-betweenness which is against both forming habits and thinking in clear-cut terms. As Iser suggests:

> Pater always focuses, not on the basic ideas which define a period, but on those moments when the old begins to be effaced by the new, when

> contradictions begin to break through the hitherto smooth surface of fixed beliefs. When this happens, the determinate becomes vague and permeated by a dark and still uncertain future, giving rise to a discernable moment of transition in which the old loses its validity and the new is not as yet firmly established. (38)

Although Iser describes Pater's attitude mostly as an observer of change, his role is more than that of an observer. As already suggested, the concept of renaissance does not indicate a specific period, namely the end of the middle ages, for him. It is an all-encompassing concept which enables him to participate in the act of suggesting a different future. His writing itself is a force indicating and facilitating perpetual change.

As already explained, Pater's role as an antagonistic critic ended abruptly when Oscar Wilde, another dissenter and one of most well-known followers of Pater, was imprisoned. Moreover, his work started to be regarded as the proponent of a purely apolitical art, which was a typical move of the totalitarian mentality to censor diverse and revolutionary attitudes. This attitude was due to the antagonism implied in Pater's works, which also defines his works' relationship to dominant ideology. Iain Fletcher describes the reaction of Victorian readers to Pater's work, saying, "Pater's style with its elaborate and refined cadences appeals to the inner rather than the outer ear. The reader must construe as he reads. Yet that prose of Pater's, many felt, with all its artifice, could be profoundly subversive" (9). Iser's comment reveals the potential threat posed by his work to the mentality of the time. Pater's work denotes utopia, because it is radically subversive, undermining fixed ideas of the period. His works are laden with the exaltation of experience and sensation. His aim is to enrich the receptive faculties of the reader by, in Fletcher's words, appealing to "the inner ear" and his emphasis on the transitoriness of experience and "perpetual flux" furthers the endlessly revolutionary proposition of his work.

Marius the Epicurean, which was written in order to clarify and moderate his ideas stated in *The Renaissance*, is in fact as revolutionary as *The Renaissance*. It embodies the characteristics of a subversive artwork along with the characteristics of a transgressive utopian work. As already stated, in *Marius*, Pater makes extensive use of religion throughout and he explores the nature of the concept, as well as the possibilities invested in it. The novel takes place in Rome in the second century A.D. The main character is Marius; and the novel covers Marius's life and concentrates on his intellectual growth. The focus is not on action but on Marius's ideas and perceptions. In fact, there is almost no plot line except the sense of development that Marius's mental improvement provides. Every action of his is defined and amplified by a thick background of ideas.

Throughout the novel, Pater uses religion in various contexts to reveal the nature of the concept. His subversive attitude is evident throughout and this gives the novel political undertones. It would not be appropriate to argue that Pater primarily makes an overt political argument in this novel; Pater's work is devoted to appreciation of beauty first and foremost; however, it also follows that his preoccupation with beauty is closely related to the ideological. As Linda Dowling maintains, "Pater's choice of topic signalled to his Victorian readers that his affiliations and implicit agenda were ultimately political" (77). His philosophy of aesthetics, therefore, was a means of transgression and a deconstructive attempt directed at the hegemony of the prevalent Victorian values. The way Pater deals with the ideas of religion, morality and philosophy, therefore, is political in nature, and it is not separable from his belief in the necessity of pursuit of sensations.

Marius's life may be divided into four phases depending on the religion or religious philosophy he encounters and focuses on at certain points of his life. During his childhood he becomes the subject of the religion of Numa. After he leaves his hometown for school, he meets Cyrenaicism. After his education, he works as emperor Aurelius's amanuensis and he gets to know Stoicism. Finally, he meets Cornelius and,

via him, learns about Christianity. All of these phases contribute to Marius's intellectual development, yet all of them are lacking except for Christianity, which comes to symbolise utopia.

The novel begins with the religion of Numa, a simple religion that primarily existed in the rural parts of Rome. It is "[a] religion of usages and sentiment rather than of facts and belief, and attached to very definite things and places" (13). The fact that it is a religion which attaches great importance to observance of ritual, places a strong sense of duty in young Marius. He observes rituals closely. Also as a consequence of the environment he is in, respect for the dead, home and family grows in him. He obtains a deep sense of responsibility for people and things, which brings along with it seriousness towards life and tendency towards contemplation. After recovering from an illness with the help of a priest, he begins to develop an ideal of religious beauty and a liking of the visually beautiful which "operated afterwards as an influence morally salutary, counteracting the less desirable or hazardous tendencies of some phases of thought, through which he was to pass" (35). There emerges a connection between beauty and morality, the effects of which are never lost completely. On the contrary, this connection forms the basis for his perception of things and for his philosophy of life.

It is the same religion, however, that leads him to question the idea and nature of religion, too, and he acquires a speculative tendency which becomes a habit throughout his life. Especially his mother's death leads him to realize that there are aspects of being which are beyond this sense of beauty. Paradoxically, this conservative religion "of places and things" causes him to turn into a questioning individual. "[T]hat old, staid, conservative religion of his childhood certainly had its being in a world of somewhat narrow restrictions" (39), the realization of which causes him to search for new perspectives. After his mother's death, he leaves his birthplace to attend school, and his attachment to this religion comes to an end. Yet the existence of a speculative mind together with a feeling of seriousness towards life

continues during the rest of his life and becomes the impetus of his philosophical journey.

Moreover, Marius's attitude towards religious dogma starts being shaped as early as this period of his life. The speculative character of his also entails a resistance to dogmatic beliefs. Crinkley argues that "Pater's fictional method represents an evasion of commitments which his contemporaries were apt to find annoying or frustrating" (135). From the very beginning, Pater never allows for a clear-cut statement about religions and philosophies; rather, he creates a very intricate web of beliefs none of which stand out as the absolute truth. Accordingly, it is important to note that what Marius adopts for himself is not the dogmatic aspects of the religion. As Crinkley states, he takes in what is "ceremonial rather than doctrinal" (141). Pater's emphasis is on the pursuit of beauty and of experience, both of which indicate transitoriness. Pater's stance is not different or milder from what he suggests in *The Renaissance*; it is once more on the "gemlike flame," on transitoriness of being, and on the appreciation of beauty and experience. Throughout his intellectual and spiritual journey, Marius abstains from doctrines and sticks to change. As his journey advances, the supposedly solid ground of ideas gets constantly weaker, ultimately leaving its place to relativity and speculation.

At school, he meets a boy named Flavian, who comes to represent luxury, intellectual power and corruption for him. He is a figure of authority among other boys, too, but it is Marius who develops a close relationship with him. He becomes a teacher for Marius and Marius becomes his assistant in his studies on Latin. Besides, although there is no explicit reference to homosexual relationship, their friendship has such undertones, as well. Flavian is a decadent figure, similar to those of the nineteenth-century England, who were regarded as dangerous to society. As a teacher, he poses a so-called threat to Marius since, as Potolsky observes, Flavian "teaches a style and a way of living rather than a coherent or readily identifiable doctrine, and thus subjects his student to threats far exceeding intellectual error" (706). Together

they read “The Golden Book” of Apuleius. A story from that book, “The Story of Cupid and Psyche,” symbolizes for Marius “the ideal of a perfect imaginative love” (64); and Apuleius’s book leads them, especially Flavian, to further delve into the study of language. He believes that Latin is almost a dead language and that it is necessary “to re-establish the natural and direct relationship between thought and expression, between the sensation and the term, and restore to words their primitive power” (66). This effort of Flavian is cut short when he dies of a contagious disease.

Flavian’s importance for Marius’s development is manifold. First, Flavian’s emphasis on the necessity to restore the direct relationship between thought and expression suggests that languages may grow old and rigid in time, losing the flexibility and vividness they used to have. There is also a suggestion that, in the same vein, religions or systems of belief, which are cultural constructions just like languages, may become alienated from their roots and their original meaning, too. Through Flavian, Pater once more puts emphasis on the need of refusing dogmas. This attitude of Flavian, however subtle it may be, reinforces the speculative faculty in Marius and makes him resist received convictions and dogmas the authority of which comes from habit rather than reflection.

Flavian is important for Marius also in the sense that his death leads Marius to inquire into existence. For the first time he wants to learn more about life and death. The feeling Flavian leaves behind him convinces him that there is no life after death and what is important is physical existence. The dialogue between Marius and Flavian just before his death prepares for this conviction: “Is it a comfort,” he asks whispering, “that I shall often come and weep over you?” And Flavian replies, “Not unless I be aware, and hear you weeping” (79). That moment creates a basis for his materialism. He no longer believes in the existence of soul; what is physical becomes his truth. The parallel between Marius’s realisation and Pater’s philosophy is that Pater is also a materialist; his worldly emphasis on the appreciation of beauty implies his materialism.

However, it also follows that his philosophy deprives him of a consolation of another world for death and loss.

Marius's loss also creates a curiosity in him as to what philosophers say about the nature of existence. First he gets acquainted with the ideas of Heraclitus and then of Cyrene. It is at that phase of his life that his ideas gain a much more solid logical basis about relativism, temporality of existence and appreciation of beauty. Heraclitus's philosophy, which is based on transitoriness and resistance to dogma, forms the principal aspect of Marius's outlook. He believes in the necessity of "a denial of habitual impressions, as the necessary first step in the way of truth" (86). According to him,

> Men are subject to an illusion, […] regarding matters apparent to sense. What the uncorrected sense gives was a false impression of permanence or fixity in things, which have really changed their nature in the very moment in which we see and touch them. And the radical flaw in the current mode of thinking would lie herein: that, reflecting this false or uncorrected sensation, it attributes to the phenomena of experience a durability which does not really belong to them. (86)

Heraclitus's emphasis on the transiency of being reinforces the idea of a 'perpetual flux' in things for Marius. There is no more a fixed truth, but momentary sensations.

Yet this momentariness is not chaotic but in an order, which entails also a larger system in which every element is only a very small particle. This belief, in turn, leads to a possibility of "the sleepless, ever-sustained, inexhaustible energy of the divine reason itself" (87). While the individual parts of this system are only transitory, the whole that sustains this flux is permanent, and it warrants a continuity of intelligible and meaningful relationships between those individual parts. However, this idea is not taken for granted by Marius; he does not accept it as the absolute nature of

things, either. It "remain[s] by him as hypothesis only" (88). After all, what is available to him is sensations and physical reality, and he prefers to abide by that.

However, this emphasis on constant change imprisons the individual to solitary moments of perception, too. That implies isolated individuals who are themselves subject to perpetual change. No moment or no person is identical to one another, and an individual does not remain the same at any moment, either. That stance leaves back no reliable external source of judgment; "the individual is to himself the measure of all things" (89). Thus, it becomes all the more necessary to rely on experience and sensation as this is the only way of the individual for self actualization and for maintaining rapport with reality: "habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike" (*The Renaissance* 222). Again, Pater argues that it is necessary to get rid of stereotypes and clichés since the pursuit of experience, however momentary it may be, is the only way to ascertain one's being.

Cyrenaicism is another philosophy that he encounters during his questioning of the nature of existence after Flavian's death. Although there is not much left of this philosophy, Cyrenaicism also contributes to Marius's mental formation, and Cyrene's ideas become efficient through the rest of his life. For Cyrene, "things are but shadows, and […] we, even as they, never continue in one stay" (90). This statement again highlights transience, but with a stronger stress on the falsity of existence. This attitude "might indeed have taken effect as a languid, enervating, consumptive nihilism" (90), but for Marius, it does not. Pater's emphasis falls on the reception of a certain stimulus or experience by a certain individual. Once more, the primary criterion in determining the reception of a philosophy just as other things is the individual. Marius, accordingly, shapes this philosophy according to his individuality, projecting a materialistic and positive attitude. He does not let Cyrene's philosophy to completely yield to an otherworldly pessimism. With a sense of responsibility and honour, he is

inclined to dedicate himself to the appreciation of the moment by means of decorous living.

The worldliness of the philosophies of Heraclitus and Cyrene, along with their emphasis on transience, endows Marius with a sense of freedom and agency, as well. The primacy of the individual, autonomy over perceptions and independence from any dogmatic belief provides Marius with a stance above any strictly defined system. Pater, also alluding to the nineteenth-century England, observes: "Men's minds, even young men's minds, at that late day, might well seem oppressed by the weariness of systems which had so far outrun positive knowledge" (93). Marius's philosophy, however, allows him a perspective free from rigid and no longer realistic doctrines; he is a free individual. He continues resisting common assumptions.

It is also important to note that what Marius believes in is far beyond mere hedonism. As already emphasized, he is after a feeling of "completeness of life" based on the pursuit of experience on this world; "energy, variety, and choice of experience, including noble pain and sorrow even […] -whatever form of human life, in short, might be heroic, impassioned, ideal" (99). On the one hand, his emphasis on completeness of life and avoidance of promoting mere pleasure over other sensations enables him to escape the risk of superficiality. On the other hand, the fact that he refuses metaphysical speculation leads him further away from the danger of dogmatic thinking. Thus, he avoids superficiality and hedonism.

It is when he comes back to Rome and becomes Aurelius's amanuensis that he gets acquainted with a very different philosophy, Stoicism. Marius's philosophy and Stoicism are radically different from each other in that, while Cyrenaicism is interested in this world, Stoicism despises it and physicality. Still, it draws Marius's attention and he starts observing it through the emperor. Aurelius is the embodiment of the philosophy; he stands for the "sacrifice of the body to the soul" (123). In a speech to his people, he highlights the principles of Stoicism. The impression that Marius gets

from his speech is a great deal of pessimism and contempt for what Marius has regarded important up to that moment. He discerns an outlook in the emperor that belittles body and emotion. While the emperor also emphasises transience, he prefers to take refuge in a pessimism that does not seem to be productive at all; in fact his viewpoint is cold, arid, affectionless and self-centred.

What constitutes the difference between Marius's and Aurelius's thinking becomes especially evident on one occasion, when Marius attends an arena show and witnesses the cruelty that takes place there. As one who gives primary importance to visual sensations, Marius is deeply repulsed when he sees cruelty and torture. Aurelius is also present, but he does not seem to be much affected by what he sees; he looks unsympathetic, rather. The difference between the reactions of Marius and Aurelius determines Marius's conviction of him: "There was something in a tolerance such as this, in the bare fact that he could sit patiently through a scene like this, which seemed to Marius to mark Aurelius as his inferior now and for ever on the question of righteousness" (153). While Marius's attachment to his sensations proves to be morally correct, Aurelius's indifference to physicality and pain entails moral weakness. This encounter of Marius with a philosophical religion that consists of inefficient abstract principles is a sort of verification of his philosophy. Despite the fact that it relies mainly on sensations and experience, it carries with it a moral attitude, too.

Finally, in Rome, Marius gets acquainted with Christianity by means of a friend, Cornelius. This acquaintance marks the end of Marius's journey as he cannot survive a plague and dies soon afterwards. There are various interpretations as to what to make of Marius's reception and appraisal of Christianity. Many critics argue that Pater ends the journey with Christianity; Marius becoming a devoted Christian, in order to compensate for his previous radical thinking that attacked Christianity. Some others, however, believe that Marius does not become a Christian nor does Pater advocate the superiority of Christianity over other systems of belief. Iser argues, for instance,

that "[h]e is not subordinated to an idea, and indeed he is continually drawing away from all such systems as Epicureanism, Stoicism and Christianity" (131).

Indeed, Marius's attitude to Christianity is not devotion; rather, he keeps his distance of an observer as always. Still, Christianity means a turning point for him in that it comes to indicate a hope, however elusive, for Marius. After all, from the very beginning of his journey, the ultimate aim of Marius's quest has been a better, freer state of being, "a world altogether fairer than that he saw" (*Marius* 37). It is important that Christianity should not be taken at face value; it symbolizes far more than a system of belief for Pater. "In Pater's work, […] a form of nominalism produces the symbol with a disappearing referent, a sign whose meaning is behind or *beyond* the word. Meaning does not lie between words and world but beyond them" (Armstrong 385). As other systems, Christianity is not the absolute truth for Marius, either; but a symbol that stands for a possibility, a different future that is free from cliché and a stance that is outside the dominant ideology. Its importance depends on its freshness and its resistance to dogma.

Consequently, what Christianity provides the novel with is the sense of an endlessly elusive, utopic quest. In this respect the novel is open-ended. It does not provide an ultimate point of stay; on the contrary, by making use of a system that was already dogma at the time it was written, which is only one instance of "systems which had so far outrun positive knowledge," the novel refuses to suggest any dogmatic or clear-cut idea (*Marius* 93). David Weir maintains that "reality is no longer anchored, in Pater's view, by the absolutes of conventional Victorian morality" (67), or any other absolute. In view of that, Pater abstains from replacing a dogma with another one. His philosophy is open-ended, and the utopia he suggests to attain is always elusive. Besides, the aim of the intellectual journey in the novel is to promote a spirit of relativity -primarily suggested by intellectuals one of the most outstanding is Darwin- challenging the rigid moral and religious presumptions of the Victorian society.

Besides, the fact that the utopia he suggests is a religion does not make his statement a conservative one. This suggestion, on the contrary, makes it possible for Pater to subvert religious fixities. As Loesberg argues, "[r]eligious or political enthusiasms […] are also forms of experience, forms of sensation, and cannot be excluded from the sensations Pater finds valuable" (15). Religious feeling is valuable as much as any other sort of sensation as long as it "has, in itself, the expanding power of a great experience" (*Marius* 172), given that it becomes part of the permanent flux and contributes to the intellectual journey of the individual. What is important for Pater is to keep this relative spirit alive at all times and avoid its turning into a rigid system of belief.

For Marius, religion in this purest form as he witnesses it conveys a sort of beauty, too. As already suggested, Marius is especially attracted to the ritual of Christianity just like he was attached to the ceremonies of the religion of his childhood; what appeals to him most is the sensation, the experience of these rituals. The sensation communicated in those rituals is as if a "transforming spirit was at work to harmonize contrasts, […] begetting thereby a unique effect of freshness, a grave yet wholesome beauty" (227). Besides the ritual; Cornelius and another Christian, Cecilia, symbolize peace, beauty and righteousness for him, too. Through Cecilia and Cornelius, Marius establishes a connection with a belief system that offers both beauty and moral correctness. Pater's acceptance of beauty as the criterion for an effective moral system is part of his subversive attitude. As Linda Dowling argues, "he was convinced that the aesthetic was the only possible mode of attack against the philosophical and religious hegemony that was blocking the Victorians' way" (*Vulgarization* 84). Marius relies on his visual faculty for the appreciation of a system; yet this visuality also conveys a moral perspective and an ideological stance with it.

In *Marius the Epicurean*, it is possible to observe what Adorno and Marcuse specify as the characteristics of an artwork which is above the dominant ideology, capable of indicating a new, different perspective; that is, utopia. Pater's constant

emphasis on transitoriness and a constant flux rather than a fixed belief system, along with his emphasis on a future hope, make it a ground-breaking novel. He subtly warns against the subjection of the individual to fixed doctrines and in a sense avoids interpellation. And this quality, which is evident also in his other works, makes him a threat to the conformity and mediocrity of the time. This antagonistic attitude made him the father of the aesthetes and decadent figures of the nineteenth century who also became engaged in an ideological antagonism with the Victorian England; and some of them had to pay dearly for their transgressive standpoint.

OSCAR WILDE: ART AND UTOPIA

In his preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* published in 1890, Wilde states that "[d]iversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital" (4). Indeed, his novel received a huge amount of reactionary comments, which forced him to make such a defence. Wilde's preoccupation with pure art created uneasiness among the public, because this seeming preoccupation also created an inevitable link to what it strives to be independent from; namely morality and life. This attitude posited art in direct negativity to these concepts while, in fact, it was a pose adopted to criticise the Victorian set of values and way of life. Wilde's paradoxical attitude and his constant focus on duality and duplicity are his main tactics while undermining the dominant ideology, which manifests itself primarily as Victorian way of life and Victorian morality.

Throughout his life and in his work, Wilde seeks negativity, and attributes art a utopian function, which works in two ways: He creates direct opposition to what is mainstream, while also aiming to correct it by means of this opposition. It is true that it would be injustice to Wilde and his work to argue that his work carried primarily morally corrective purposes; however, to ignore the moral emphasis is not possible, either. He was a prominent personality of his time; his works and his life stirred a great deal of reaction among his contemporaries. He began his career as a celebrity, and ended up as a convict for 'acts of gross indecency.' The fact that he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for having a homosexual affair carries the traces of an oppressive ideology which often manifests itself as mediocrity and relies heavily on the abuse of private life to rule out a misfit. And it was this mediocrity and vulgarity that repelled him most.

What vexes Wilde is not only the authority the masses have, but also their bad taste. For an artist who regarded art as the supreme form of creation, the taste of the masses was too vulgar. However, this conviction also leads to his paradoxical position.

Although he constantly wrote against the poor taste of the masses, he was very popular for his time. The paradoxical nature of his fame has been criticised by many critics for his being an essential part of this very system he stood against. Quite recently Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small argued, for example, that “in his attitude towards his career as a writer, Wilde was (to adapt Norbert Kohl’s terms) more the conformist than the rebel, much more complicit with, than critical of the commercial interests of late nineteenth century British literary and theatrical culture” (12). From one point of view, this argument may be valid; Wilde did take advantage of being popular to a great extent. However, considering the stance Wilde takes in both his works and his life, it is not fair to accuse him of being a figure of the masses abusing his popularity. This can rather be attributed to the fact that his radical attitude and statements were not taken quite seriously or could be tolerated at the time, until he was accused by the Marquess of Queensberry of being, in the Marquess’s words, “a somdomite.” This charge led to the trial of Wilde, which resulted in his imprisonment. His downfall also made him a subject of social lynching; and many critics agree that this event marked the end of aestheticism in England for a long while.

Moreover, his downfall points to an act of scapegoating that aimed to avoid homosexuality from being in evidence. As a popular bourgeois artist, Wilde was too visible to be permitted to have such affairs; besides, his scapegoating and downfall would create a scandal and a deterring example. As Richard Dellamora highlights, “[a]t the time of the Wilde trials, homosexual activity became a matter of concern in the highest political circles, and expedience required that Wilde be sacrificed as a substitute for more highly placed quarry in the Liberal government and the aristocracy” (84). Obviously, he became the victim of a system which sustained the dominant order and destroyed those who were at odds with the mainstream ideology.

This event, which ended both Wilde’s life and his art, also indicates the fact that he was seen as a threat. His ideas are revolutionary, and the fact that he was popular made him all the more dangerous. Since he is preoccupied with art and its nature, the

focus of this chapter is on his ideas regarding art, which have a subversive nature. As John Gross observes, aestheticism has various political implications varying from a reactionary outlook to political quietism. He adds that in Wilde's case, aestheticism meant a sort of socialism (171-2). Contrary to the general and easy conviction that Wilde is a middle-class author with aristocratic aspirations, he had a utopian outlook and a sensibility of equality. As he argues in *The Critic as Artist*:

> England will never be civilised till she has added Utopia to her dominions. There is more than one of her colonies that she might with advantage surrender for so fair a land. What we want are unpractical people who see beyond the moment, and think beyond the day. Those who try to lead the people can only do so by following the mob. It is through the voice of one crying in the wilderness that the ways of the gods must be prepared. (982)

He considers the concept of utopia a prerequisite of civilisation. He juxtaposes the imperialist ambitions of the state with the notion of utopia, implying that what England needs is the notion, the hope of a better world rather than dominions. Practicality, which is a Victorian notion, is degraded in these words. He values envisioning a better future rather than focusing on ideas of pragmatism and utility. Therefore, seeing the moment is not as important as envisioning utopia. In the final sentence, he implies that the responsibility is on the individual. However, this does not indicate that he attaches a mission to a leader. Rather, as he states in the previous sentence, leaders are not capable of ridding themselves of mediocrity. Finally he seems to conclude that the agency of the individual is of utmost necessity to reach a better future.

Individualism is indeed a significant concept for Wilde, and art is a form of manifestation of this concept. Throughout his writing, he either implies or openly states that individualism is a must for development. In *The Soul of Man Under*

Socialism, for instance, he argues that individualism is what is needed for, in his words, "the full development of life" (1019). In this essay, he brings together and reconciles two concepts which are regarded to be completely different: individualism and socialism. Some critics state that Wilde misuses the concepts. Similarly, Jarlath Killeen argues that the essay has a deeply ironic tone. However, some others think to the contrary, and state that the two concepts are not opposite to one another and that his paradoxical language is intentional. Hilary Fraser maintains that "[i]n *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, Socialism is defined in moral rather than political terms" (198). In the same vein, Dollimore observes that these concepts are adopted by Wilde to transgress the readily accepted notions which reinforce the dominant, oppressive ideology. "Individualism joins with socialism to abolish other kinds of conformity, including, says Wilde, family life and marriage, each being unacceptable because rooted in and perpetuating the ideology of property" (41), Dollimore observes. Apparently, he uses these concepts as a strategy to go beyond the dominant ideology and subvert the unquestioned authority of the institutions.

Wilde wrote this essay to picture a society in which there is no private property, hence no poverty, so that all members can develop to their full capacity. Every obstacle hindering this development, including governments, should be abolished since every sort of "authority, by bribing people to conform, produces a very gross kind of over-fed barbarism amongst us" (1026). Conformity to authority, which leads to mediocrity, is the real danger for individualism. It is clear that he is commenting on and writing against an authority that enfeebles the individual. If an authoritarian power rules, mediocrity and vulgarity –concepts that Wilde constantly uses to indicate the outcomes of oppressive ideology- become inevitable. He also states that this authoritarian power manifests itself in three forms: "There are three kinds of despots. There is the despot who tyrannises over the body. There is the despot who tyrannises over the soul. There is the despot who tyrannises over the soul and body alike. The first is called the Prince. The second is called the Pope. The third is called the People" (1038). So the authority he writes against is not only the governmental authority; he

also stands against other forms of power, which may manifest themselves in the form of religious authority or the authority or power of the masses.

Accordingly, democracy is another concept that Wilde criticises throughout the essay. For him, “democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people” (1026). He develops an argument that is quite similar to the one proposed by J. S. Mill: the argument that the masses constitute a repressive power over the individual. In the hands of a repressive power, democracy becomes an instrument guaranteeing conformity to authority and reaffirming the continuation of the dominant ideology.

He goes on to argue that art is also under the threat of this repressive power; “the attempt to interfere with the individualism of imaginative art still lingers. In fact, it does more than linger; it is aggressive, offensive, and brutalising” (1030). Wilde adds that “Art is the most intense mood of Individualism that the world has known. I am inclined to say that it is the only real mode of Individualism that the world has known” (1029). He regards art closely linked to the concept of individualism as it is the sole way of expressing individuality, adding that the oppressive power of the masses on art is “as immoral as it is ridiculous, and as corrupting as it is contemptible” (1029). The control exercised over art and the artist is immoral and corrupt, because it deters the development of the individual. It is ironic that most of the time the masses put forward the argument that the work of art itself is immoral. Indeed, for the public, morality is the most commonplace standard to evaluate art. However, as Wilde maintains, “[w]hen they say a work is grossly unintelligible, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is new; when they describe a work as grossly immoral, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is true” (1031). As understood from his ironic words, there seems to be a discrepancy between the evaluative standards and the nature of the work of art; the judgement of morality turns out to be a mechanism to censure and limit the artist along with the work of art.

Wilde, on the other hand, seeks a space for the work of art that is not under the control of these powers. He grants art a position above any form of authority, whether it be governmental, religious or public. "The work of art is to dominate the spectator: the spectator is not to dominate the work of art" (1035), he states, emphasising the importance of autonomous art. Wilde ascribes a subversive mission to the work of art, too. As already stated, art is the clearest manifestation of individualism for Wilde, and it is laden with a certain power: "Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force" (1030). It is important to note that this power of art does not indicate an overtly political mission. Wilde does not argue for committed art since commitment for art means being under the influence of a form of ideological outlook shaped by some form of power seeking dominance. Rather, he advocates for an art the subversive power of which emerges from its autonomy.

Wilde's utopian outlook reveals itself at this point. As already indicated, he links England's development to the condition that England should value the idea of utopia. What matters is not practicality but the ability to see the future. His demand for foreseeing the future is not some utilitarian demand, though. On the contrary, it is about a better, richer future free of the domination of the oppressive powers: "[T]he past is of no importance. The present is of no importance. It is with the future that we have to deal. For the past is what man should not have been. The present is what man ought not to be. The future is what artists are" (1039). The past and the present mean corruption since the individual is degraded both in the past and the present. However, the future still carries the hope of the better for human beings. The artist and the work of art will be the guides to a better future, and this guidance is not some form of leadership by guiding the masses, but by creating independent, autonomous individuals out of these masses.

That the artist is under the yoke of the corrupt masses is an oft-recurring anxiety in Wilde's writing. In "De Profundis," which he wrote in prison as a confessional letter, he keeps defending the individual and the critical faculty of the individual

against the masses. “Charming people, such as fishermen, shepherds, ploughboys, peasants and the like, know nothing about art, and are the very salt of the earth. He is the Philistine who upholds and aids the heavy, cumbrous, blind, mechanical forces of society, and who does not recognise dynamic force when he meets it either in a man or a movement” (882), he writes. Using Matthew Arnold’s expression denoting the ignorant and oppressive masses, “the Philistine,” he underlines the fact that these masses which constitute a burden over the individual are incapable of appreciating the reformative potential inherent in art, which is a manifestation of individualism.

For Wilde, criticism is another manifestation of the potential of the individual. In *The Critic as Artist*, critical faculty is juxtaposed against the ignorant dominion of the masses: “England has done one thing; it has invented and established Public Opinion, which is an attempt to organise the ignorance of the community, and to elevate it to the dignity of physical force. But Wisdom has always been hidden from it” (994-5). Public opinion is a force repressing and weakening the individual; it is ignorant and without wisdom. Wilde goes on his critique and states: “Considered as an instrument of thought, the English mind is coarse and undeveloped. The only thing that can purify it is the growth of the critical instinct” (995). He argues that what the English masses lack is the critical instinct, a faculty which has the power to purify the corrupt and ignorant mob.

Accordingly, in *The Critic as Artist* he states: “An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all” (983). The artist deals with dangerous ideas, and these ideas are dangerous because they are beyond their age and against domination as well as corruption. Similarly, to be able to appreciate the ideas presented by the artist requires a critical outlook, which is also dangerous for the prevailing social order. He attributes the artist and the critic the duty of seeing beyond the present, and he writes: “It is to criticism that the future belongs” (993). His preoccupation with the future is an indication of his utopian outlook. He develops this utopian perspective further in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*. It is necessary to

emphasise that what he seeks is not industrial progress, which is a predominant Victorian value. As he states in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, he is after a future in which what he calls "Industrial Tyrannies" (1019) have come to an end, and human beings can do beautiful things. "Progress is the realisation of Utopias" and it depends on the realisation of the individual (1028).

Besides individualism, morality is another recurring idea in Wilde's work. Advocating immorality, he turns the concept into a means of negativity in *The Critic as Artist*. For Wilde, "[a]rt is out of the reach of morals, for her eyes are fixed upon things beautiful and immortal and ever-changing. To morals belong the lower and less intellectual spheres" (987). This emphasis may be considered to be an attempt at deconstructing the concept, which was the most efficient source of authority of the masses described above. Ironically, Wilde became one of the most outstanding victims of these repressive masses; he as well as his writing was judged and condemned on the grounds of immorality.

The judgement of morality manifests itself most obviously in the case of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It is surprising that even Walter Pater, who was the mentor of Wilde and who was himself blamed for corrupting the youth, thinks that the novel is immoral:

> Clever always, this book, however, seems to set forth anything but a homely philosophy of life for the middle-class – a kind of dainty Epicurean theory, rather – yet fails, to some degree, in this; and one can see why. A true Epicureanism aims at a complete though harmonious development of man's entire organism. To lose the moral sense therefore, for instance, the sense of sin and righteousness, as Mr. Wilde's heroes are bent on doing as speedily, as completely as they can, is to lose, or lower, organisation, to become less complex, to pass from a higher to a lower degree of development. ("A Novel" 248)

Pater's judgement may be considered to be too hasty to judge the novel, because his emphasis falls primarily on what the characters do, ignoring what happens to them or their inner conflicts, which creates a partial meaning of the text.

There were more hostile reviewers of the novel, too. For instance, a reviewer from *St. James's Gazette* declared it to be "stupid and vulgar" (214). Similarly, another reviewer from the *Scots Observer* blamed the novel for being "false art; […] false to human nature [and] false to morality" (218). Another reviewer from the *Christian Observer*, however, argued just the opposite, and wrote: "We can only hope that it will be read and pondered by those classes of British society whose corruption it delineates with such thrilling power, and that it may be the means of preserving many young lives from the temptations by which they are surrounded" (219). In this review, one sees an exceptionally rare response to Wilde's writing; that the novel may be taken as a warning against corruption.

These sum up the initial reactions just after the publication of the novel. And it should also be noted that the novel was later used against Oscar Wilde during his trials. As Ellmann writes in Wilde's biography, when Edward Carson, Wilde's cross-examiner "suggested that *Dorian Gray* was perverted, Wilde replied, 'That could only be to brutes and illiterates. The views of Philistines on art are incalculably stupid'" (422). The tension between the moralist and the artist is obvious here. The discussion of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was merely around whether the book was moral or immoral. For Wilde, however, the discussion is irrelevant as "[t]here is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all" (*Dorian Gray* 3). Wilde's statement, included in the preface to the second edition of *Dorian Gray*, is a response to the critics who base their arguments only on the question of morality. Despite his maxims emphasising his amoralism, however, Wilde's work continued to be evaluated on the same basis by later critics, as well. For instance, in *The Moral Vision of Oscar Wilde*, published in 1978, Philip K. Cohen states that "[t]he structure of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is unambiguously, rigorously moral" (123). But

unlike most of the previous critics, he does not blame Wilde for writing an immoral book. His argument revolves around the concepts of moral responsibility, action and the experience of art, and he argues that Wilde himself was influenced by the moral framework of his time and that his works also reflect this framework to a certain extent.

According to Wilde, however, it is the ultimate merit of a human being to be able to appreciate a work of art without considering whether it is laden with didactic and moral messages or not. Only then can a work of art free people from vulgarity. Therefore, it can be argued that, despite being morally conscious, Wilde used the concept of morality as a means of subversion, as well. As Wilde argues in *The Critic as Artist*, "[w]hat is termed Sin is an essential element of progress. Without it the world would stagnate, or grow old, or become colourless. […] In its rejection of the current notions about morality, it is one with the higher ethics" (962-3). Wilde again uses a paradoxical language and subverts the meaning attributed to the word 'sin,' emphasising the emptiness of the concept. Wilde thus creates an opposition between what he terms "the current notions about morality" and "the higher ethics," implying that the current notions of morality are themselves corrupt and stagnant, and they need to be changed. He wants this morality to be replaced by a higher ethics, which embodies the idea of progress, and this is another reference to the utopian perception. Therefore, his son Vyvyan Holland explains the negative reactions that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* received, saying:

> The English Press was almost unanimous in its condemnation of the book. The ostensible objection was that it was prurient, immoral, vicious, coarse, and crude. But the real reason for the attack was that it did so much to expose the hypocrisy of Victorian Englishmen who, living in one of the most vicious cities in the world, kept priding themselves, sanctimoniously, upon their virtue. (70)

Holland's statement makes it clear that Wilde disturbed the people of the time because of holding a mirror to their hypocrisy and lack of virtue. Obviously, rather than being the irresponsible and scandalous figure of English literature, Wilde was deeply concerned about the ethical issues of his time, and the human condition in general. As Raymond Williams maintains, "in Wilde, the pursuit of an isolated aesthetic pleasure is accompanied by a general humanity which is a real ground for respect" (175). The fact that he was convicted for being corrupt and immoral shows the extent of corruption of the means of judgement itself. Therefore, Wilde's art may be considered to be his means of subversion of the prevailing ideology and a means of suggesting possibilities beyond the everyday reality, which is, to use Wilde's expression, vulgar.

It is not only his art that is subversive, though. Indeed, Wilde made use of every chance of negativity provided by his position as a popular artist. His private life was a means of protest and negativity as well as his art; in fact, he turned his life into a work of art, transferring his subversive aesthetic to his life. As Jody Price puts it, "[f]or the Victorians, as for readers of Wilde today, the subversiveness of his aesthetic cannot be separated from the subversiveness of his life" (5). Similarly, Dollimore evaluates his negativity and its relation to the dominant order, stating, "*in*sincerity, *in*authenticity, and *un*naturalness become the liberating attributes of decentred identity and desire, and inversion becomes central to Wilde's expression of this aesthetic" (45). This negativity permeates in every aspect of his life; even the language used to express his negative position is an inversion of the accepted norms of the Victorian society.

His sexual identity is one of these primary means of negativity, because his homosexual affairs are in direct opposition to the expectations of the Victorian society. Ellmann observes that one of the notable aspects of Wilde's aesthetics and life is "the invasion of forbidden areas of thought and behaviour" (*Oscar* 288). His homosexual affair with Lord Alfred Douglas is an instance of such a transgression. As Ed Cohen maintains, Wilde's sexual identity is the violation of "the Victorian bourgeoisie's larger efforts to legitimate certain limits for the sexual deployment of the male body and, in

Foucault's terms, to define a 'class body'" (159). Heterosexual bourgeois men were the representatives of the dominant ideology and Wilde's homosexual affair was a threat to the authority and identity of these representatives. As Denisoff observes, Queensberry's protest against his son's affair with Wilde also indicated a shift "that already threatened the essentialist hierarchies from which the Marquess drew his own authority- as a father, as a nobleman, as a heterosexual, as a man" ("Posing" 84). Therefore, Wilde's radical sexual identity was more than immoral for the Victorian public; it was a threat to much larger concepts such as the family, the nobility and sexual identity. On the part of Wilde, however, his sexual affairs were primarily a means of appreciating beauty. Richard A. Kaye maintains that "[i]n an era when the homosexual was 'invented' by medical sexology as a separate species from the heterosexual, Wilde's aestheticism had offered the retort that sexuality, like taste, was simply a heightened sensitivity to the beautiful" (60). Just as the notion of search for beauty indicated an intellectual position high above the mediocre, Wilde's sexual orientation also indicated a form of transgression. Yet this was beyond the limits of toleration for the prevailing social order as well as it was against the Victorian notions of respectability and morality.

His dandyism is another component of his image implying transgression. However, the concept is problematic in the sense that it has different implications. One implication is, as already stated, transgression; the other is just the contrary, entrapment. Some critics argue that dandyism, rather than being an indication of an independent, alternative identity construction, is the outcome of the commercialism in which the individual has to turn his very being into a commodity. Accordingly, Gagnier argues that "the 1890's dandies Wilde and Whistler accepted the commercialism that artists were forced to adopt if they wanted to participate in life. In an age of debased production, their commercial products were nothing less than themselves" (83). Similarly, Freedman states that "Wilde learned (at first giddily, thereafter tragically) that within [the mass market economy], one's very being could be transformed into a marketable good – a piece of information, an object of publicity, gossip, and

revilement, all in the interests of selling more papers" (Introduction 5). These comments justly point to the market economy and the limited means of the artist for being visible. Wilde was indeed a member of this system of commodification; however, he was also against it.

Therefore, his dandyism does not indicate only subjection; it also implies his transgressive strategy. In "The Painter of Modern Life," Baudelaire writes, "the word 'dandy' implies a quintessence of character and a subtle understanding of all the moral mechanisms of this world" (399). He ascribes the dandy a privileged position, a higher vision in which the dandy is capable of perceiving all of the moral -and, by implication, the immoral- aspects of the world. For Baudelaire, therefore, the dandy has a higher consciousness rather than being a mere instrument in the hands of the system. And he explains the nature of the dandy thus:

> Fastidious, unbelievables, beaux, lions or dandies: whichever label these men claim for themselves, one and all stem from the same origin, all share the same characteristic of opposition and revolt; all are representatives of what is best in human pride, of that need, which is too rare in the modern generation, to combat and destroy triviality. That is the source, in your dandy, of that haughty, patrician attitude, aggressive even in its coldness. (421)

This definition may sound typical of Baudelaire in its elitism; however, it is also significant in the sense that he attributes the dandy the stance against triviality and banality, and the ability to oppose what is degrading for humanity. Moreover, he links the dandy's elitist pose to this ability to stand against vulgarity. Therefore, the principal characteristic of the dandy is to have a deeper insight and the ability to stand against what is corrupt and superficial rather than his social class, his appearance and clothes. His distinct appearance, on the other hand, is a means and a sign of his negativity. Wilde's dandyism, accordingly, is another indicator of his negativity that has shaped

both his art and life. Thus Dowling argues that “the source of superiority in Wilde’s system of values is always art” (*Vulgarization* 95). As a dandy, Wilde does not stand for a certain social class; rather, he stands for this negativity that appreciates art and opposes mediocrity.

As already indicated, his negativity manifests itself most clearly throughout Wilde’s novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as well. The text focuses on art and carries the indications of Wilde’s subversive use of the concept. Admittedly, the text does not offer a clear-cut meaning and a definite message to the reader. On the contrary, it constantly deconstructs itself and refuses to present a definite statement about its subject matter, which enables Wilde to explore the potential of art in all directions throughout the text. Richard Ellmann expresses this potential in his essay on Wilde:

> […] [B]y its creation of beauty art reproaches the world, calling attention to the world’s faults through their very omission; so the sterility of art is an affront or a parable. Art may also outrage the world by flouting its laws or by picturing indulgently their violation. Or art may seduce the world by making it follow an example which seems bad but is discovered to be better than it seems. (“Critic” 34).

In either case, art comments on the world and creates an alternative outlook. In some cases it judges, or annoys, or sets an example for the world. Therefore, art is above and superior to the world, to reality. It projects a utopia.

It should be noted that Wilde juxtaposes art with concepts that indicate the oppression of the individual; therefore, some words denote a wider meaning indicating the dominant and oppressive consciousness that Wilde attempts to subvert. As Dollimore suggests, “[o]ne of the most interesting and significant referents of concepts like life and reality, as Wilde uses them, is the prevailing social order. Even nature, conceived as the opposite of culture and art, retains a social dimension, especially when it signifies ideological mystification of the social” (42). By contrasting

art to such concepts as life, reality and nature, Wilde creates a concept of art which is more than the ordinary meaning of the word; it denotes that which is not oppressive and inhumane; that is, utopia.

Wilde also uses language subversively; the language he uses is quite complicated and challenging. He privileges paradoxes in his writing, which is one of his strategies of revealing and deconstructing the dominant social structures mentioned above. These paradoxes may have had considerable effect in creating an image of Wilde as the corrupt and irresponsible artist, and it is indeed a symptom of his decadent inclinations. Besides, as Thain suggests, a paradox may be employed in order to reassemble a world that is falling apart and at the same time to recognise a newly emerging one (226). Therefore, Wilde not only creates negativity by making extensive use of paradoxes, but also suggests ways of overcoming the discrepancies of the age. Still another aspect may be added to these two points. As the possibility of communicating truth is limited for Wilde, he uses paradoxes to imply various dimensions in a world that dictates one-dimensional, clear-cut judgements: "The way of paradoxes is the way of truth" (*Dorian Gray* 40). As David Punter observes, paradox is "the distilled form of modern resistance to master-narrative" (164). Also Brown states that, for Wilde, "*truth itself is contradictoriness*, or perhaps twofoldness" (93). His paradoxes as well as his use of the concept of art enable him to communicate this contradictoriness, which highlights the dialogic nature of truth.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde explores the various dimensions and possibilities of art; it is a work of art that reflects on its own nature. There are various levels of truth created by Wilde, and art functions as the arbiter between these various levels of truth and the characters of the novel. As stated by Ellmann above, it at once reproaches, outrages and seduces. Wilde makes each character express an aspect of art, yet the final judgement is left to the work of art itself, because it is the reflection and the commentator of that which is not visible, of that which is beneath the surface. As Peters writes cautiously of the novel, "[e]ven *Dorian Gray*, which admittedly reveals

the predilections of an abnormal psyche, was intended to shock and thereby to transform taste" (261). Once again, Wilde draws attention to the work of art that is beyond and above the everyday reality, hence highlighting its utopian, transgressive nature.

The novel is about a young man named Dorian Gray, who is described as the epitome of the beautiful, and his close friends Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton. Both Basil and Lord Henry are attracted to Dorian, and their attraction to him has an undercurrent of homosexuality. Basil Hallward, an artist, draws a portrait of Dorian. Dorian likes the image in the portrait so much that he wishes that the portrait grow old instead of him. On the other hand, Lord Henry, a decadent aristocrat, discovers the impressionable vein in Dorian's character and manipulates him. Dorian becomes morally corrupt as the book advances, causing Sybil Vane's suicide and later on killing Basil. After each sin, the portrait grows uglier, and it becomes the mirror of his conscience. The novel ends when, at an attempt to destroy the portrait, Dorian kills himself, turning into an ugly and old man.

Lord Henry is one of the characters through whom Wilde expresses negativity and comments on the nature of art. He is a typical decadent in the sense that he is immoral, irresponsible, art-loving and degenerate. As Philip K. Cohen states, "Harry is immoral even according to his own standards" (141). However, when inquired into the nature of his immorality, it is not possible to point out any specific deed. Accordingly, Basil tells Henry: "You never say a moral thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose" (8). Jody Price highlights this, and writes, "Lord Henry, like Basil, is fragmented from whom he would like to be and what he is because of cowardice. He is too weak to challenge social convention, and too frightened of exclusion from society's dinner tables" (92). However, immorality does not necessarily result in exclusion from society; on the contrary, it is commonplace for the people. After all, immorality and hypocrisy are two of the characteristics of the society which Lord Henry criticises throughout the novel. Rather than being the result of his in-

betweenness, therefore, just like the pose of the dandy, Lord Henry's pose of the immoral is a means of negativity enabling Wilde to turn the expectations of the reader upside down.

However, his influence on Dorian needs to be highlighted. The theme of influence assumes a variety of forms throughout the novel, as underlined by Mighall (*Dorian Gray* 236). Because the character of Dorian Gray is shaped under his influence, he is responsible for Dorian's doom. He first claims that "[a]ll influence is immoral. [...] Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. [...] He becomes an echo of some one else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him" (20), but later on he thinks: "There was something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence. [...] [P]erhaps the most satisfying joy left to us in an age so limited and vulgar as our own, an age grossly carnal in its pleasures, and grossly common in its aims" (37). Consequently, he influences Dorian deeply, turning Dorian into an echo of himself. Dorian, a tabula rasa before meeting Lord Henry, becomes the reflection of the latter's immoral manipulation. This is significant because, as Freedman notes, "[s]ubjectivity so constituted, [...] is never free from the forces of power, domination, and control" (*Professions* 43). For Wilde, all influence is immoral because it deprives the one under influence of individuality. Thus influence is equated with mediocrity and vulgarity, which Wilde despises. The only immoral act attributable to Lord Henry, therefore, may be his influence on Dorian, because he deprives Dorian of an independent individuality.

Yet Lord Henry is first and foremost the playful spokesperson of the decadents, and to a certain extent, of Wilde himself. He speaks by paradoxes, constantly disturbing the notions about morality. "Sin is the only real colour-element left in modern life" (30), he comments. However, he argues just the opposite towards the end of the novel, when he says to Dorian, "[a]ll crime is vulgar, just as all vulgarity is crime. [...] Crime belongs exclusively to the lower orders" (203). As he suggests, vulgarity is a crime as it is not beautiful. Wilde is preoccupied with the ideas about

morality, immorality, sin and guilt, and the novel is full of statements by Lord Henry commenting on these concepts. For instance, he says to Basil: “Modern morality consists in accepting the standard of one’s age. I consider that for any man of culture to accept the standard of his age is a form of the grossest immorality” (76). These words of him sound as if they are the very words of Wilde himself. Wilde grants him negativity and playfulness, playing with the expectations of the reader and providing the comments of the outsider on a society which Wilde considers vulgar and corrupt. Thus, Lord Henry becomes the character through which Wilde creates the image of the decadent dandy; he is the dreadful immoral that constantly speaks in paradoxes and deconstructs the bourgeois morality.

Although Wilde uses a rich aristocratic character to communicate his critique of society and social convention, the social status of Lord Henry is not imperative to his pose. Behind his aloof and elitist negativity is the aim of drawing attention to the necessity of comprehension and transcendence of these conventions. As Dowling highlights:

> [Lord Henry Wotton is] meant to translate into an older language of rank and status Wilde’s conviction that aesthetic consciousness represents, especially amid the bleakness of a modern mass or industrial society, a superior mode of existence, a way of being in the world that is in some genuine sense higher, richer, and more complete than is available to those who choose to remain ignorant of art, literature, and music. (*Vulgarization* 95)

Therefore, the primary source of Lord Henry’s negativity is aesthetic consciousness and individualism that Wilde constantly emphasises. His interest in the world centres on the realisation of the individual along with beauty and art, and that which is ugly, artless and corrupt is despised by him. Even his class-consciousness is shaped by and focuses on the notion of beauty and individuality. At one point he says, for instance,

"the real tragedy of the poor is that they can afford nothing but self-denial. Beautiful sins, like beautiful things, are the privilege of the rich" (76).

The creator of the portrait, Basil Hallward, is another character that expresses the nature of art. He is an artist and a close friend of Dorian. Although he is an artist, he is under the command of society's expectations. His admiration for Dorian involves the implications of homosexuality; however, he cannot admit it. "I grew afraid that others would know of my idolatry" (111), he says, regretful of his admiration for Dorian, which transgresses the limits of social convention. Accordingly, as Jody Price argues, "Basil represents anyone who is forced to hide one's 'soul' from society" (87). His feelings for Dorian have to be repressed, because they are not acceptable by the standards of society. Again as Price maintains, "Basil rejects human contact and passion, for it would expose him to social condemnation. […] Basil is the antithesis of the artist who is transgressively reinscribed into the culture as a subversive element to challenge hegemony" (87). Therefore, rather than challenging the notion of morality and propriety imposed by the social norms, he concedes to suppress his feelings.

Another effect that results in his paralysis and makes his art ineffectual is the influence of Dorian. Although he tries to hide it, the portrait mirrors the traces of his love for Dorian as well as Dorian's effect on him. "I really can't exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it" (6), he protests, when Lord Henry suggests him to send the portrait to an exhibition. Indeed, the portrait is not a proper work of art by his standards. As he observes, "[a]n 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" (14). His admiration for Dorian, therefore, is an influence that impairs his art. He senses this when he encounters Dorian for the first time: "A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with some one whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself" (9-10). And later on he confesses that Dorian's presence did

affect him profoundly. “Dorian, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power by you,” he tells Dorian shortly before being killed by him (110). Just as Dorian sacrifices his individuality to Lord Henry’s influence, Basil sacrifices his being to Dorian, which destroys both his life and his art.

The relationship between Basil and Dorian also carries the traces of Wilde’s sense of self; it indicates his struggle of existence in Victorian society. Indeed, the parallel between Wilde and Basil has been noted by various critics and this autobiographical element has been pointed out even by Wilde himself. In an interview he says, “‘Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be… in other ages perhaps’” (qtd. in Sturgis 124). Matthew Sturgis draws attention to this autobiographical element distributed among the characters of the novel, and writes, “Wilde’s self-identification with the upright Hallward suggests that his regard for convention, even conventional morality, was much greater that his outward – Henry Wooton-ish – pose would allow” (124). This autobiographical note signifies Wilde’s feeling of entrapment in a society the conventional morality of which is a challenge for his being as well as for his art. Moe Meyer also draws attention to this autobiographical parallel, and carrying the implication further, highlights the symbolic emancipation presented in the novel. Meyer points out that, “[t]he apparent murder of Basil by Dorian actually marks the conceptual birth of Wilde’s homosexual social identity by freeing the artist from self-definitional dependence upon the posed model” (88).

Accordingly, Basil’s death also indicates his emancipation. Symbolically, he becomes independent from Dorian’s influence, and his art survives in Dorian’s body. Meyer states that, “[a]s Dorian commits crime after crime, his interiority is reflected by the mutating monster on the canvas, but his body surfaces, because they now signify only Basil’s desire purified under the ideal of art, remain unchanging and immortal” (87). Thus Basil’s art continues to exist in Dorian’s body free from his interior

corruption. As maintained by Meyers, Basil’s death suggests his separation from the model of his work of art. His art survives in Dorian’s body independently, and the canvas becomes the mirror of Dorian’s conscience. The portrait, surviving independently from Dorian’s corruption, continues to reflect the desire felt by the artist, which is the individual expression he has put in the portrait. And at the end of the novel, the ugly image in the canvas resumes its original form; the death of Dorian marks the moment when the canvas retains its unique image created by Basil. Consequently, Basil fully regains his individual expression.

The main character, Dorian, is perhaps the most ambiguous one of the novel. He is at once the idealised subject of a work of art and the embodiment of evil. Wilde’s novel is a tale laden with a moral message despite Wilde’s attempts to conceal it as much as possible, and this moral is most obvious in the case of Dorian since he demonstrates the consequences of mere hedonism devoid of any sense of morality. As Ellmann suggests, “*Dorian Gray* is the aesthetic novel *par excellence*, not in espousing the doctrine, but in exhibiting its dangers” (*Oscar* 297). However, it would be oversimplification to evaluate his position solely from a moralist point of view. He is more than a hedonist; he is the embodiment of the tension between surface vs. depth, caricature vs. individual. The work of art, which is his subjective image, represents individuality and depth whereas Dorian stands for caricature-like existence and surface without essence.

The initial traces of corruption in Dorian’s character as well as the split between Dorian and the portrait emerge when he abandons Sybil, a lower-class actress, and subsequently causes her suicide. At first Dorian is impressed by her because he has “seen her in every age and in every costume” (51) and because “she is all the great heroines of the world in one. She is more than an individual” (54). Apparently, what appeals to him is not Sybil’s individuality, but her art. She seems to be the fulfilment of Dorian’s wish to constantly experience transitory sensations. “She regarded me merely as a person in a play,” (53) he explains to Lord Henry, and adds that she calls him

'Prince Charming.' Indeed, she never learns his real name. His refusal to acknowledge the ethical dimension of life manifests itself in Sybil's case first. Philip K. Cohen states that "Sybil Vane describes the novel's ideal existence: direct participation in life by the authentic, unitary self" (138), which is contrary to Dorian's mode of existence.

Sybil's death accentuates Dorian's isolation from reality. When Sybil decides to quit acting, she says: "You taught me what reality really is. […] I have grown sick of shadows. You are more to me than all art can ever be" (84). "You have killed my love" (84) replies Dorian, with a sudden change of feeling towards Sybil. As Ellmann observes, "Sibyl is no mere performer; her fatal weakness in his eyes is that she values life above art. She loses her capacity to act because, instead of preferring shadows to reality as she once did, she is drawn by love to prefer reality" (*Oscar* 298). If the novel is the narration of Dorian's eventual fall, Sybil's death is the first indication of his doom, pointing towards the outcome of his reluctance to participate fully in life. By reducing life to separate instances of experience, ignoring the relationship between art and life and subordinating one to the other, Dorian takes the first step towards being a mere caricature. It is important that the first change on the portrait emerges after Sybil's death. Paradoxically, as Dorian subordinates life to art, a work of art, that is, the portrait, mirrors his moral corruption. Apparently, he fails to recognise the interdependence between the two.

As already discussed, Dorian is the outcome of Lord Henry's influence; therefore, he lacks a fully developed individuality. His portrait drawn by Basil, on the other hand, functions as his mirror; this mirror is important in that it is the negative reflection of Dorian. As Jackson maintains:

> By presenting images of the self in another space (both familiar and unfamiliar), the mirror provides versions of self transformed into another, become something or someone else. It employs distance and difference to suggest the instability of the 'real' on this side of the

> looking-glass and it offers unpredictable (apparently impossible) metamorphoses of self into other. (87-8)

Dorian's portrait, accordingly, functions as a mirror that creates the image of the other, and highlights the difference between the original and itself. Throughout the novel, the difference between Dorian and his image gets deeper, which implies his moral corruption; he grows horrified of "the terrible portrait whose changing features showed him the real degradation of his life" (*Dorian Gray* 135). While Dorian does not undergo any change, the portrait constantly changes for the worse. This difference also reflects the caricature-like existence of Dorian in contrast to the living portrait.

Accordingly, his lack of individuality carries the implications of an existence without emotional depth. His constant pursuit of different sensations turns him into a one-dimensional being. As Nicolas Daly observes, "Dorian becomes increasingly a 'thing', an unchanging automaton whose defining trait is an appetite for sensation, as his portrait becomes increasingly lifelike" (101). The fact that Dorian is a passive receptor of sensations indicates his subjection. Contrary to Dorian, his portrait is a multi-dimensional being with a life of its own. The work of art is endowed with an independent existence while Dorian turns into a static image merely seeking sensations. The only change that he undergoes is his constantly deepening corruption, and while the mirror gets more powerful as Dorian's corruption increases, Dorian becomes enfeebled by it. Mighall observes: "'Conscience' (whether one reads that in sacred or secular terms) is strongly delineated in the novel. Dorian believes that he has destroyed conscience, but in truth it destroys him" (xxviii). Similarly, Philip K. Cohen argues: "The portrait will mock Dorian, and he will kill himself, but inward corruption rather than the loss of beauty will drive him to self-destruction" (134). While the portrait mirrors this decay, the parallel between the original and the mirror gets weaker; the work of art becomes his conscience making constant judgements on his degradation. Thus, the one-dimensional fixity of the subject is challenged by the multi-dimensional artwork.

The relationship between Dorian and his portrait is also significant as it reveals the essence hidden behind the surface. As Christopher Craft maintains, "[i]nstead of transposing surfaces laterally as everyday mirrors do, the portrait reverses the usual relation between surface and depth, core and facia. It turns Dorian inside out so his eyes may witness what, by definition, they cannot see at all – the legible condition of his inner being" (114-5). This reminds the reader of the double lives that were maintained in Victorian society. The cult of respectability that was promoted during the period caused the emergence of a feeling of hypocrisy that many artists protested against. Wilde is among those who directed substantial criticism on these issues of the time. Peter Ackroyd, drawing attention to the multiple layers of meaning invested in the novel, observes that "if *Dorian Gray* is one of the best narrations of the 'double life' of a Victorian gentleman, so it is also one of the best accounts of the divisions within London itself" (229). It can be concluded that the image of the mirror is a commentary provided by the artist on many aspects of the age: the sharp division between the different segments of society as well as the division of personality experienced by individuals. Just as the mirror is the conscience of Dorian, works of art are the conscience of the age. And, as Lord Henry says to Dorian, "[a]rt has no influence upon action. […] The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame" (208).

The negativity and the subversive power of Wilde's life and works disturbed the dominant Victorian mentality which he described as vulgar and mediocre. He constantly emphasised the attainment of utopia, which indicated a society in which individuals could live free from the oppressive social conventions. The primary means of negativity he used was art and its autonomy. As he writes in *The Critic as Artist*, "[i]t is through Art, and through Art only, that we can realise our perfection; through Art, and through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence" (977). By arguing for autonomous art, he knew that he was standing against the oppressive social order that aimed to create mediocre human beings who served the dominant ideology; and he was arguing in spite of the whole spectrum of the

dominant Victorian values which took the form of social institutions such as the family, religion, education, etc. As Rosemary Jackson comments on fantasy, she writes, "fantasy has tried to erode the pillars of society by un-doing categorical structures" (176). This statement is valid for Wilde's life as well as his work as a whole. He and his writing were fantasy for the average Victorian, and they did subvert the pillars of Victorian society.

VERNON LEE: SEXUAL IDENTITY, GENDER AND UTOPIA

The Victorian period is notorious for its stifling norms, and the issues of gender and sexuality are no exceptions. Both men and women were expected to behave according to well-established standards and division of labour was a standard: men were expected to earn money and provide for their family, and women were expected to be proper daughters and wives. Implicitly, both were expected to serve the bourgeois ideology. As Richard Dellamora argues, bourgeois ideology has two basic myths: 'the gentleman' and 'the Angel in the House' (85). These myths were quite in favour during the Victorian era. Men and women were under the hegemony of the stereotypical, readily adopted notions about gender and sexual identity; it is no coincidence that Oscar Wilde was put on trial for 'gross indecency' and was convicted to two years' hard labour during this period. His conviction reveals the oppressive gender politics of the Victorian period. Despite his sentence, however, the late nineteenth century harboured the emergence of the decadent and the New Woman, which unsettled the readily received notions about gender and sexual identity. The aim of this chapter is to explore the threat that the late nineteenth century dominant ideology faced regarding these issues; and the point of focus is Vernon Lee, whose works destabilised the widely accepted notions about gender and sexual identity.

To begin with, for the Victorians, homosexuality was a very new concept. It was a category which was recently recognised and defined by the sexologists of the time such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis. It is important to note that homosexuality was defined mostly as 'perversion' in the writings of these sexologists, and this category was a transgression of the accepted norms of sexuality and gender in the Victorian era. Thus Dellamora writes:

> Late in the century, masculine privilege was sustained by male friendships within institutions like the public schools, the older universities, the clubs, and the professions. Because, however, the

> continuing dominance of bourgeois males also required that they marry and produce offspring, the intensity and sufficiency of male bonding needed to be strictly controlled by homophobic mechanisms. (83)

This explanation reveals the political significance of the categories about sexuality and gender. Obviously, these restrictions on and stereotypical definitions of gender and sexual identity were part of the control mechanisms of the dominant order.

It is also significant to note that, among the clashing ideologies of the late Victorian period, it is possible to point out neither a unified movement against the bourgeois gender ideology nor a coherent notion of sexual identity. Richard A. Kaye analyses these various attitudes and argues that the *fin de siècle* manifested diverse and at times contradictory attitudes about the nature of sexual identity and gender roles. Kaye writes that "[f]in de siècle political struggles around issues of sexuality were often an odd mixture of reactionary and advanced thinking. Thus many feminists who struggled mightily for suffrage were opposed to contraception" (55). As the bourgeois feminism had to speak within the bourgeois ideology, this strand of feminism did not challenge basic bourgeois institutions such as the family, and motherhood was an indispensable part of a woman's identity.

Similarly, for the feminists who did not define themselves as the New Women, this could even be used as a derogatory phrase. As Schaffer states, "'New Woman' was a catchall phrase that could be used to dispose of anyone the reactionary critic disliked. To criticize the New Women may have been a kind of guarantor of seriousness, higher morals, or even real commitment to feminism" (*Forgotten* 13). Besides, writers did not have a uniform idea about the New Woman, either. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst argue that motherhood and women's sexual freedom, for instance, were evaluated from quite different points of view by New Woman writers. While some writers considered motherhood as essential to a woman's existence, some others considered it a burden. While some argued for sexual purity of women, others

advocated freedom. Obviously, there were diverse feminisms rather than a unified movement, and the attitudes of the members of these groups towards the issue of gender roles were rather diverse. Yet the huge amount of dispute on the issue indicates that gender roles as well as the deep-rooted notions of sexual identity were indeed being undermined.

Besides the New Woman, the decadent figure also destabilised the widely accepted notions about gender and sexual identity. Sally Ledger maintains that "[w]hat most obviously linked the New Woman with the Wildean decadents of the 1890s was the fact that both overtly challenged Victorian sexual codes. The New Woman fiction is generally characterized by a sexual candour which was also a feature of literary decadence" ("New" 25). Similarly, in her essay "The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s," Linda Dowling explores in which respects the two were seen as threats and points out that their subversiveness was directed to the notions of gender, race and class. She argues that "[l]ike the decadent, the heroine of New Woman fiction expressed her quarrel with Victorian culture chiefly through sexual means – by heightening sexual consciousness, candor, and expressiveness" (52). In short, both the decadent and the New Woman stood against the strict gender roles of the Victorian period and created subversive identities.

The decadent and the New Woman were subversive because neither sustained the bourgeois notions of gender roles; neither represented the images of 'the gentleman' and 'the Angel in the House.' To begin with the former, the decadent dandy was not a proper figure of a gentleman. As Dellamora maintains, "[t]he dandy is too relaxed, too visible, consumes to excess while producing little or nothing" (86), which is at odds with the idea of being a gentleman, a bourgeois figure. Decadence itself as a general term is usually linked to femininity, implying a diseased state of being. For Clyde de L. Ryals, for instance, "[d]ecadence [...] marked the virescence of a more feminine sensibility, characterized by a withdrawal from masculine reality" (87). Femininity was not the only characteristic attributed to decadence, however. As

Kirsten MacLeod highlights, decadence has been perceived in rather diverse terms up to the present. As she points out, decadence has been defined "as effeminate and as hyper-masculine and misogynistic; […] as a feminist lesbian aesthetic and as a masculine misogynistic aesthetic," besides several other conflicting ideological positions (18-9). The very fact that it is defined in such diverse and contradictory terms is an indication that it resists definition and undoes the well-established categories of gender and identity. And considering the most prominent decadent figure of the late Victorian England, Oscar Wilde, it can be concluded that, no matter what definition is given, the decadent did become subversive for the notions of gender and sexual identity.

The same subversiveness may be attributed to the image of the New Woman, as well. Just as there was not a uniform definition of the decadent, there was not a standard definition of the New Woman, either. Some were supporters of the New Woman, some were against it, and the attitudes and perceptions changed accordingly. As Ledger and Luckhurst maintain, while "her opponents represented her as, variously, a 'mannish', overeducated bore, […] a bad mother (if not an embittered spinster), and as lacking in all the attributes usually associated with ideal Victorian womanhood" (75), "those writers who were keen to promote the New Woman and her cause represented her as an intelligent, sensitive, and sexually healthy woman, who often had ambitions beyond motherhood" (76). In any case, she was definitely not an image sustaining the myth of 'the Angel in the House.' On the contrary, the New Woman challenged everything this myth implied about the duty of women in the family as well as the assumptions about the nature and capacity of women in education and professional life; it blurred the boundaries of gender and sexuality.

This was highlighted by Edward Carpenter, a famous gay activist of the time, as well. In his essay "The Intermediate Sex" written in 1894, Carpenter draws attention to the fact that with the emergence of the New Woman, the notions about gender and sexuality changed and that the stereotypes began to be surmounted. Thus he states:

> It is beginning to be recognised that the sexes do not or should not normally form two groups hopelessly isolated in habit and feeling from each other, but that they rather represent the two poles of *one* group – which is the human race; so that while certainly the extreme specimens at either pole are vastly divergent, there are great numbers in the middle region [...]. (303-4)

As Carpenter highlights, sexual identity is more complicated than the Victorian standards let it to be, and there are more in-between situations rather than just males and females.

However, this fact was unacceptable for the Victorian bourgeois order, which promoted the figures that were crucial for the sustenance of the status quo. Sally Ledger highlights this threat the New Woman along with the decadent and the dandy pose to the Victorian social order, and writes:

> The recurrent theme of the cultural politics of the *fin de siècle* was instability, and gender was arguably the most destabilizing category. It is no coincidence that the New Woman materialized alongside the decadent and the dandy. Whilst the New Woman was perceived as a direct threat to classic Victorian definitions of femininity, the decadent and the dandy undermined the Victorians' valorization of a robust, muscular brand of British masculinity deemed to be crucial to the maintenance of the British Empire. ("New" 22)

Obviously, the issues of gender and identity were overtly political. And the fact that these issues were being problematized and challenged by the decadent and the New Woman disturbed various circles.

Yet it is also important to note that, although the decadent and the New Woman were regarded to be the representatives of the same transgressive tendency,

there were also significant differences and some tension between the two. For instance, the decadent displayed misogyny in various instances and thus subjected the New Woman to an authoritative and demeaning gaze. Elaine Showalter highlights this tension and writes that "[t]he decadent aesthetic rejected all that was natural and biological in favour of the inner life of art, artifice, sensation, and imagination" (170). The fact that woman is biologically capable of giving birth makes her closer to nature and this fact repulses the decadent, who is against reproduction. Besides, the New Women also had some reserve against the decadent figure. They had conflicting attitudes towards their male counterparts and, as Showalter maintains, "many shared their culture's prejudices against men who were not conventionally 'masculine'" (174). Obviously, many of the New Women were not able to overcome their cultural conditioning and had their prejudices against the decadent figure.

Still, the fact that the readily adopted gender roles were debated over is an indication that these roles were being seriously questioned, and this was a serious threat for the prevailing order. Therefore, institutions such as the family along with sexual stereotypes were promoted by the representatives of the prevailing ideology; these stereotypes and institutions received emphasis from the conservative circles stronger than ever. As Elaine Showalter puts it, "there was a call to reaffirm the importance of the family as the bulwark against sexual decadence" (2). Similarly, Ledger notes that "[w]hilst medico-scientific discourse, for example, concentrated on the threat she apparently posed to women's role as mothers, anti-feminist fictional discourse frequently constructed her as a sexual decadent" ("New" 23). Both medical discourse and anti-feminist discourse speak within the binary definitions of sexual identity and gender. The word 'decadence' implies in itself the ideological stance inherent in the opposition.

Vernon Lee was among this minority that destabilised the ossified notions of gender and sexual identity; her ambiguous position makes her one of the most distinct figures of the time. She was in a position to transgress boundaries due to various traits,

some of which are related to her background. To begin with, her upper middle class belonging gave her various advantages. She lived in Italy, France, Germany and England; she was quite familiar with these cultures, and was fluent in their languages. This multicultural background gave her a privileged position compared to most other women in England. She was also an outsider in terms of sexual orientation. While some critics argue that she was a lesbian, some others state that she never acknowledged this and remained celibate to the end of her life. In either case, she was outside the accepted norms of the Victorian boundaries of gender and sexual identity. In *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual*, Christa Zorn writes that "Lee's reluctance to align herself with one nation, one culture, or one gender provoked all those who desired clearly defined boundaries" (7). Apparently, she existed outside the standard norms of the dominant Victorian ideology.

Above all, Lee's subversiveness derives from the fact that she along with a few other women occupied the male sphere as literary figures and wrote from within this well-established tradition, which created a hostile reaction on the part of the male aesthetes and critics. As Talia Schaffer states, "[c]ritics frequently condemned women writers for inaccuracies that supposedly demonstrated their ignorance" (*Forgotten* 8); she adds that they criticised women writers for lacking humour, as well. Schaffer also writes specifically about the male aesthetes and states that they "often slipped into real contempt for women" ("Fashioning" 40). Nevertheless, Lee wrote as an aesthete and a decadent; she occupied a space within a primarily male tradition and wrote from within as well as against it. Therefore, she challenged the literary boundaries as well as the norms of gender and sexuality. As Margaret Stetz observes:

> Unlike those positioning themselves as aestheticism's enemies, female participant-critics were out not to overturn the principle of art for art's sake but to revise the practices, in both literature and life, of its male advocates. Chief among their concerns was the objectification of women in the act of 'appreciation,' a form of masculine connoisseurship

> dependent on silent and passive female spactacles. […] In denouncing the misuse of women by male aesthetes and in suggesting possibilities for a more feminist practice of aestheticism, they simultaneously opened up larger questions about gender hierarchies, especially in middle- and upper-middle-class British life, and struggled toward change. (31)

Lee was one of those female aesthetes who were both participants and critics. They made use of the advantages of the movement while also criticising it. Women writers provided a point of view different from the one provided by male aesthetes who exerted the authoritative gaze and objectified women.

It may also be argued that Lee brought together the figures of the New Woman and the female aesthete. Schaffer maintains that what differentiates the New Women and the female aesthetes is that the New Women are overtly political. She adds that "[t]he female aesthetes' avoidance of politics in itself implies an interesting political formation, a resistance to the reductive categories of feminist / antifeminist, a silence that ought to be heard" (*Forgotten* 15), and also that "[a]estheticism accommodated a vast range of political positions" (16). Thus, it may be argued that Lee preserved the political subversiveness of the New Woman and also that she participated and undermined a male-defined literary movement, that is, aestheticism, which added to her political negativity.

Accordingly, while, from a perspective, Talia Schaffer's comment on the female aesthetes' avoidance of politics manifests itself most peculiarly in Lee's case, aestheticism's potential to accommodate various political positions is also quite obvious in her writing. Thus, Lee's devotion to women's cause and her concern about the issue of gender is not obvious in her various writings; she is not an outspoken advocate of women's rights. She manifests her attitude openly only in a 1902 essay, "The Economic Dependence of Women." She begins the essay by confessing that the

woman question was not previously among her chief concerns as she believed that overemphasis of the sexes makes them antagonistic to one another and obscures humanness. She adds that she came to realise the importance of an overt emphasis on woman rights when she read Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics*, published in 1898, which deals with the economic dependence of women and its irrelevance to contemporary life as well as its damage to women's status in society. Lee writes,

> the man and the woman […] do not stand opposite one another […]; but in a quite asymmetrical position: a big man, as in certain archaic statues, holding in his hand a little woman; a god (if we are poetical, or if we face the advantages of the case) protecting a human creature; or (if we are cynical, and look to the disadvantages) a human being playing with a doll. (75)

These comments also imply that she is among those who prefer to see the disadvantages of the case as the truth is that women are made to be dolls in the hands of the patriarchal authority without any right or any say. Lee's emphasis falls on the binary opposition between the two poles, the males and the females.

Lee continues her comments and writes that "while men are a great many things besides being males – soldiers and sailors, tinkers and tailors, and all the rest of the nursery rhyme – women are, first and foremost, *females*, and then again females, and then – still more females" (81). Her ironic and biting tone as well as her words that are similar to a nursery rhyme continue the simile of the doll. Naturally, women's degraded position as dolls is even more accentuated in the professions. While any job is available to men, women are left with no option but are confined into their sex: they can only become females, and still more females. She clearly reveals the degraded and limited position of women in every area of her life, either professional or personal. The fact that she comes from an upper-middle-class family with means and that she is a

privileged woman with the opportunity to support herself and be independent does not make her blind to the fact that women are in a degraded position and that it is very difficult for them to be fully developed individuals.

Yet Lee's fictional works deal with the issue more in depth although they are not explicitly political. For instance, *Miss Brown*, a novel published in 1884, reflects Lee's preoccupation with the issues of gender and sexual identity with various dimensions, though more implicitly. It was Lee's first and last try at a novel, and it is regarded to be a roman à clef criticising the aesthetic circles of the time. *Miss Brown* received several negative comments from many people including those who detected allusions to themselves and felt insulted. The novel was regarded to be a failure also by many critics including Henry James and Walter Pater, whose ideas Lee esteemed above that of any other critic. While Walter Pater expressed his criticism more mildly, James was harsher and more open. He criticised Lee, writing, "you have impregnated all those people too much with the sexual, the basely erotic preoccupation: your hand was over violent, the touch of life is lighter" (qtd. in Gunn 105). As Kirsten MacLeod highlights, James's criticism was a typical one directed at women writers "as the male-dominated élite sought to exclude women's writing from the domain of high art" (65). Still, Lee herself became regretful of writing this novel after receiving their negative comments. She expressed this most openly in her journal: "What a pity I didn't put off writing *Miss Brown* thirty years!" (qtd. in Gunn 107). Her motivation in writing the novel was partly to direct a moral criticism at the aestheticism which was primarily a male sphere, and ultimately she came to be regarded to be a dull moralist.

Yet as a woman author with moral concerns, Lee's motives were more complicated than making merely moralising comments on the aesthetic movement. Generally speaking, female participants in the aesthetic movement made use of aestheticism in order to overcome the silence of women and to communicate their problems. As Schaffer puts it, "Ouida, Malet, and their peers found that as long as women were writing in a pretty style, readers might not notice what they were

actually describing. This situation, paradoxically, gave female aesthetes the freedom to write about extramarital sexuality, marital rape, and masochism" (*Forgotten* 5). Schaffer also comments that female aesthetes "challenged the convention that good women deserve happy marriages in the last chapter" (5). These strategies and challenges are apparent in Lee's writing, as well. In *Miss Brown* and elsewhere, she challenged the conventions of a well-established male tradition.

Miss Brown is the story of Anne, a woman who is discovered by Walter Hamlin, a famous aesthete poet and painter, when she works as a maid at the house of a friend of Hamlin's. What strikes Hamlin is her strange beauty, and she receives attention primarily for her unusual physical attractiveness. Hamlin first wants her to pose for his paintings and later on decides to make her an offer: He proposes to cover her education expenses for two years, providing her with an additional income. According to this offer, after completing her education, Anne will be able to decide to marry him if she wishes. This proposal makes Anne very happy since she wants to be an independent, educated woman. Also out of her admiration for Hamlin, she accepts the proposal. After her education, she gets acquainted with Hamlin's environment, getting involved in the aesthetic circles which she begins to regard morally base and irresponsible. She is disillusioned with Hamlin, as well, who she realises to be corrupt like the rest of the aesthetes. Although she attempts to correct his vices, she realises that she cannot change his attitude. She wants to become a governess and become independent from the restraints that her life with Hamlin brings about. When she learns that Hamlin has an affair with Sacha Elaguine, who is regarded to be an immoral and passionate woman, Anne decides to marry Hamlin as she feels she owes him a favour; that of saving him from further corruption. Although she cannot overcome her feeling of disgust towards him and his vices, the novel ends with the marriage of Anne with Hamlin.

Hamlin's presence poses a threat to her identity and individuality throughout the novel. As soon as she accepts Hamlin's offer at the very beginning, her contact

with Hamlin brings about feelings of inequality and disintegration. When she leaves the house she has been working as a maid to receive the education Hamlin has chosen for her, she feels passive and weak: "Her head felt hollow, she seemed to be informed about her feelings rather than to experience them. […] A couple of weeks ago she had had so strong a consciousness of identity and existence, of her own desires and hopes; now she could not well understand how she came to be where she was" (101). This vague feeling of weakness becomes more concrete after her education, and as the book advances the narrator reveals that, "To gain her bread, no matter how harshly; to be of some use, […] this was all that Anne asked; and this, in her future as the wife of Hamlin, as the queen of this aesthetic world, which seemed to poison and paralyse her soul, was what she knew she could not have, what she knew she must do without" (327). Obviously, Hamlin's intervention into Anne's life ultimately destroys her feeling of integrity and independence.

She feels more helpless as she gets to know the aesthetes better, and the vices of the world are accentuated further as she feels this helplessness. She thinks, "[t]he aesthetes all round her would let all the world rot away in physical hideousness rather than have that physical hideousness put before their eyes" (242). And she begins to loathe Hamlin for that. "Hamlin had redeemed her soul; he had made her a thinking and feeling being – but what for? She dared not admit to herself that it was merely in order that she should despise him" (252). This feeling is caused by her disappointment at the aestheticism of Hamlin and others. Their detached and irresponsible attitude makes her repelled by them as well as making her feel helpless before this moral corruption. Yet her alienation is also due to Anne's perception of herself in the eyes of the aesthetes. Her image before this masculine gaze deepens her alienation further; she feels like an object. As Kathy Alexis Psomiades states, "Anne shrinks from the image of herself that masculine desire has made because it elevates the textual body (theatrical, costumed, pictorial, sculptural) over the natural body (herself) and at the same time opens both bodies up to the erotic gaze of masculine desire" ("Still" 23). Therefore, the objectifying gaze of the male aesthetes is another dimension of their

vices. Their indifference to the world as well as their tendency to reduce women to objects of art makes her feeling of alienation stronger.

Anne's alienation gets further emphasis when the reader juxtaposes her identity with her feelings when she decides to marry Hamlin. To begin with her personality, it is not a reflection of the Angel in the House; she is not definable within the categories of the Victorian notions of gender and sexual identity. As the narrator states, "Some few women seem to be born to have been men, or at least not to have been women" (293). Anne is one of those women who do not quite fit into the traditional roles of women. As the narrator further comments,

> [such women] are not intended to be, except as a utilisation of what is fatally wasted, either wives or mothers. Masculine women, mere men in disguise, they are not: the very strength and purity of their nature, its intensity as of some undiluted spirit, is dependent upon their cleaner and narrower woman's nature, upon their narrowness and obstinacy of woman's mind; they are, and can only be, true women; but women without woman's instincts and wants, sexless – women made not for man but for humankind. (293-4)

Stefano Evangelista draws attention to the context in which Walter Pater uses the word "sexless" to refer to homosexuality and states that "Anne is 'sexless' only in the eyes of male aestheticism and, more generally, of nineteenth-century society, which cannot see her sexual desire because it is directed towards other women and therefore is outside the realm of the 'visible'" (102). Therefore, the word is a reference to the invisible, indefinable sexual identity of Anne and the stiff sexual norms of the Victorian period.

Similarly, the ending of the novel indicates a position which ignores Anne's individuality and sexual identity. As already suggested, Anne decides to marry Hamlin, and she makes this decision in order to save Hamlin from further corruption. Drawing a

parallel between Anne and Lee as an artist, Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham state that, "in a sense, Lee 'marries' aestheticism in order to 'reform' it, to reshape its moral framework" (*Vernon* 14). Considering that Lee's participation in aestheticism is partly due to the fact that she wants to criticise and reshape it, the ending of the novel points out the sacrifices which women aesthetes have to make. Besides this, it also indicates the sacrifices and limitations that the New Woman and the lesbian as well as individuals from other marginalised sexual orientations have to make in a society that ignores their existence. It is noteworthy that after her decision to marry Hamlin, various suggestions imply Anne's metaphorical death: "Anne really felt as if her life were coming to an end" (433). Yet it is also significant to note that the ending of the novel is unusual according to the conventional Victorian literary norms. The novel does not give marriage and death in an either/or equation. Rather, Anne dies, or sacrifices her being, when she decides to marry Hamlin. As Elaine Showalter notes, "fin-de-siècle narrative questioned beliefs in endings and closures, as well as in marriage and inheritance" (18). It may be argued, accordingly, that *Miss Brown* does not give a feeling of closure or a safe ending, but problematizes the concepts of marriage, womanhood and gender, undermining the values as well as the institutions these concepts rely on.

Therefore, there are various interpretations for the ending of this novel. Kathy Alexis Psomiades, for instance, considers that the only bodily rather than textual relationship in the novel is the relationship of Anne to Sacha. Also considering the final scene of the novel when Hamlin's kiss feels rather like that of Sacha, she highlights the fact that Anne's decision to marry Hamlin brings the queer undertones of the novel to the surface. As she puts it, "Anne marries Walter not to save him from Sacha but to keep Sacha for herself" (*Beauty's* 176). Psomiades makes a similar comment in a later article, where she argues that "[s]exual dissidence emerges in the novel's refusal to exclude normative heterosexual desire from its general condemnation of sex, and in its insistent descriptions of the physical sensations occasioned by the only bodily contact it narrates, contact between women" ("Still" 29). What makes *Miss Brown* subversive

is the fact that it is not a romance narrating and affirming a heterosexual relationship. On the contrary, it refuses to approve of the norms of the Victorian narrative conventions and carries the traces of non-normative sexuality.

Another interpretation is provided by Christa Zorn, who considers the novel as an example of the bildungsroman. She argues that in *Miss Brown*, Lee challenges the conventions of the bildungsroman since “[t]he discrepancy between women’s intellectual liberation, on the one hand, and their moral fetters, on the other, cannot be resolved in the idealistic plot of the bildungsroman nor by the bourgeois ideal of ‘Bildung,’ which harmonizes external and internal worlds” (123). She adds that “[t]he ideal of ‘Bildung,’ designed for man’s autonomy, has to fail for woman because of her mediated existence” (125-6). Thus, according to Zorn, Lee both underlines the shortcomings of a male-dominated genre to narrate the story of a female protagonist and also highlights the silence of the female characters before these norms. She also gives voice to silent female protagonists that either refuse to or feel obliged to fit in these norms.

Lee was a versatile writer; she wrote in many genres and created both fictional and non-fictional works. Her fantastic stories are another means to communicate the issues of gender and sexual identity and to challenge widely accepted notions. It may be argued that Rosemary Jackson’s statement about the subversive power of the fantastic becomes concrete in Lee’s fantastic stories, as well. She uses the fantastic as a space to transgress the hegemony of readily accepted notions and binary oppositions. Zorn maintains that “Lee sees in the fantastic the possibility of reassessing and extending the laws of the natural to include the scientifically unproven even within realist discourse. To her, the fantastic operates as a literary complement to mainstream realism” (145). This enables her to speak within a male-oriented discourse while also going beyond it. The transgressive potential of the fantastic lies in this capacity to open up a realm where she can undermine the idea of normalcy and play with alternative forms and states of being. In her essay “Faustus and Helena: Notes on

the Supernatural in Art," Lee states that "the supernatural is necessarily essentially vague" (*Hauntings* 295). And she makes use of this vagueness to avoid clear-cut boundaries and hierarchical binaries. As Zorn suggests, "Lee believed that the fantastic produced a mythical mode of thinking with the *possibility* of harmonizing rational and irrational elements, reality and dream, self and other" (153). This vagueness makes it possible also to avoid binaries of man/woman, self/other and point to the alternative, indefinable space of androgyny and deviant sexuality. While realism follows a pattern that includes various hierarchies including those of gender, Lee goes beyond this language by making use of the ambiguity that the supernatural allows for.

One example for Lee's use of the supernatural subversively is the story "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady," which was first published in the *Yellow Book* in 1896. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham point to the fact that this story was published after Wilde's imprisonment, indicating "Lee's sympathy for Wilde's plight" (*Vernon* 11), which is implied by "Lee's use of a lush Decadent style which distinctly echoes that used by Wilde himself in his own fairy stories" (*Vernon* 11). Lee's sympathy for Wilde is understandable as both of the authors are marginalised in their sexual orientation. Yet making a comparison between the two, Martha Vicinus argues that Lee is the more desperate one:

> In some ways, Lee was even more pessimistic than Wilde about homosexual love, for she could not imagine either a successful work of art or a successful relationship. […] Her tales of frustrated desire, impossible love – who could be more impossible as a recipient of physical love than a woman whose lower half is a snake's tail? – seem to confirm this pervasive feeling of defeat. (100)

Obviously, both of them were entrapped within the restrictive norms of the hegemonic outlook which demanded individuals to behave according to the expectations of bourgeois ideology, and their negativity turned them into outsiders.

In "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady," Lee writes about a young boy who leads an isolated life, trying to keep away from the constraining patriarchal authority of his grandfather, the duke. Vineta Colby draws attention to the fact that this story "is pure fairy tale" (230) and adds that "[n]ot even the background of the duke's corrupt court shatters the mood until the last lines of the story, where we are denied the happy ending of a fairy tale and the 'dry facts' of history prevail" (230). Lee juxtaposes two worlds in the story, and the difference between the two worlds is what creates the conflict. On the one hand, his grandfather, the duke, leads a life in luxury and lasciviousness. He represents the patriarchal world of power and politics. The young prince, on the other hand, leads an isolated life, and he creates a world of his own which depends on the images he sees on the tapestry on his room's wall.

The prince knows about the nature only through the animals depicted on the tapestry. He loves each animal described on it, and pays attention to every detail. The most attractive detail of the tapestry is the part showing a knight on a horse with a beautiful lady behind him; yet the full image is not visible as some part of it is covered with a piece of furniture. One day his room is rearranged, exposing the full image, and the boy finds that the lower half of the lady's body ends in a snake's tail. The boy loves the lady all the more "because she ended off in the long twisting body of a snake" (188). When the duke replaces the tapestry with another one describing Susannah and the Elders, which is, as Zorn maintains, "a prime example of male voyeurism" (153), the boy destroys it. The duke becomes very angry with him and he casts the boy off to live in a deserted castle. To his surprise, the boy realises that the world pictured on the previous tapestry is real in this castle; he finds the very atmosphere depicted on it with all its beauty and colour.

The boy discovers only a family of poor peasants living in the castle. He also finds a green snake which the young prince is not afraid of, "for he knew nothing about snakes" (195). Shortly after his arrival, a beautiful lady, who introduces herself as his godmother, appears, and she stays with the boy only for an hour every evening. She

also teaches him “to play (for he had never played) and to read, and to manage a horse, and, above all, to love” (202). One day, the prince learns about the story of the Snake Lady and the knight from a peddler. He learns that since two of the prince’s ancestors failed to rescue her, the Snake Lady is still under the spell. As soon as the prince learns about this, he knows that he must save the Snake Lady. In order to break the spell, the prince must kiss the snake and must remain faithful to her for ten years. So the prince kisses the snake and faints. When he wakes up, he finds that his godmother is with him. This makes the reader believe that the godmother and the snake are the same person. Thus the strong bond between the snake and the boy is further strengthened. Yet this atmosphere of bliss is disturbed when the duke calls the prince back to the palace. Despite being unwilling, the prince concedes to go back, and he takes the snake with him. As the duke becomes disturbed by the presence of the snake, he gets it killed. Yet what is discovered in the snake’s place is “not the dead grass snake, […] but the body of a woman, naked, and miserably disfigured with blows and sabre cuts” (227). Two weeks later the prince also dies as the bond between the snake and the prince has been disturbed. The duke also dies a few months later, and “the house of Luna became extinct” (227).

It should be noted that, although the snake is a familiar symbol of a malicious and destructive woman, the snake in this story is quite different. As Maxwell and Pulham observe, “the mysterious and beautiful snake lady seems to be Lee’s working of the *femme fatale* common to much decadent literature authored by men, in which serpentine traits indicate woman’s sexually dangerous nature” (*Hauntings* 16). Lee subverts the definition and the image created by the male imagination, creating an elusive image that resists definition. Moreover, rather than a dangerous one, she depicts a benevolent and nurturing creature that belongs to a world which is not constructed by hierarchy and authority but by mutual bond. Zorn states, therefore, that the story implies “a doubling of positive values rather than a dichotomy of good and evil” (154). The duke, on the other hand, does not support this bond. Rather, he is destructive and represents corruption. These qualities are portrayed most concretely

by means of the gardens of the two worlds. The garden of the duke's palace does not host any living being. It is ornamented only by the busts of the Twelve Caesars, which stand for the detached authority of the duke. Yet the castle where the snake belongs is a fertile garden, with all sorts of living beings dwelling in. And the ending of the story is significant since it portrays destruction and extinction.

Besides, the death of the snake carries further significance than merely being the catalyser of the end of the house of Luna. Its symbolical meaning lies in the fact that after its death, it undergoes a transformation and is revealed to be the body of a woman. As Pulham argues, Lee makes use of the image of the dead, disfigured female body as a 'transitional object' which enables Lee to construct "a transitional space in which identity and power can be explored" (78). She adds that "[t]hese women, in death, bear those very marks that signify a disorder" (79). The mutilated body of the woman, accordingly, carries the marks of the destructive power of the patriarchal order. While it forms a unified whole with the young boy, this unity is destroyed when in contact with the patriarchal order represented by the duke and his world, which is very different from the castle that the boy and the snake have been living in. As Maxwell and Pulham maintain, "Lee's portrayal of the tender, nurturing snake lady suggests rather that it is her serpentine traits that expose her to male inconstancy, cruelty, and prejudice" (*Hauntings* 16). Although the source of corruption and death is not the snake, but the duke himself, the victim of violence is this very snake as it is believed to be evil and fearful by the duke.

Besides the snake, the image of the young boy also carries great significance for the story. He is an indefinite, androgynous being that disturbs his grandfather, the representative of the patriarchal authority. Martha Vicinus argues that this image of the young boy is important since it enables the writers to communicate their hidden desires and unrecognised sexual identity. Thus she writes:

> Of indeterminate character, this handsome liminal creature [the adolescent boy] could absorb and reflect a variety of sexual desires and emotional needs. He personified a fleeting moment of liberty and of dangerously attractive innocence, making possible fantasies of total contingency and total annihilation. For men, the boy suggested freedom without committing them to action; for women, he represented their frustrated desire for action. But most of all, his presence in fin-de-siècle literature signified the coming of age of the modern gay and lesbian sensibility: his protean nature displayed a double desire – to love a boy and to be a boy. (83-4)

On the basis of this observation it may be argued that Vernon Lee uses the image of the adolescent boy to transgress the dichotomies of gender and to attract attention to the gray areas in the wide scale of gender. The emerging gay and lesbian sensibility, in short, manifests itself markedly in this story as well as in other writings of Vernon Lee.

Vernon Lee's areas of interest were various; she wrote on various subjects including psychology and aesthetics, and she also wrote fictional works. As already stated, she did not engage explicitly with the issues of gender and sexual identity in these works, yet undertones of such issues are always visible. Moreover, when one reads her work, one realises that a bitter tone typical of most of the previous women artists that was caused by being thwarted by the patriarchal order is not present in Lee's writing. Rather, she constructs a confident, independent stance in her works. In her essay "Women and Fiction," Virginia Woolf argues:

> The great change that has crept into women's writing is, it would seem, a change of attitude. The woman writer is no longer bitter. She is no longer angry. She is no longer pleading and protesting as she writes. We are approaching, if we have not yet reached, the time when her writing will have little or no foreign influence to disturb it. […] The aloofness

> that was once within the reach of genius and originality is only now coming within the reach of ordinary women. (80)

In these sentences Woolf is commenting on the contemporary women's fiction and comparing their mood of writing with the past authors. These comments are valuable and valid for most women writers, yet Vernon Lee seems to be an exception since she could write without anger and without protest; being able to create her own language and pointing to utopia by means of her subversive writing. She could indicate a position which was beyond the stereotypical gender roles dictated by the prevailing order, and thus opened up a space for alternatives.

CONCLUSION

This study is an analysis of the works of three *fin de siècle* authors, Vernon Lee, Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater, with respect to the concepts of ideology and utopia. The aim is to reveal the emancipatory and utopian potential inherent in their works which were produced in the late nineteenth-century England. The *fin de siècle* is a period of turmoil during which various ideological positions emerged and clashed. It was a period of uncertainty in which both a feeling of doom and hopefulness for the future emerged. It was also a period of transition in which the established culture and the dominant ideology were at strife with different and marginalised ideological positions. Accordingly, the literary works analysed in this study reflect the positions of the marginalised, oppressed groups by undermining and subverting the dominant ideological stance, and these works also manifest the feelings of hope and despair present during the period.

The concept of art for art's sake was the starting point for this study and the initial question was whether art can be only for its own sake. This question has been of interest for artists for ages, yet the period which heard this phrase pronounced most was the nineteenth century. Two movements from this period, aestheticism and decadent literature, accentuated the phrase even more. As concrete examples of the cult of art for art's sake, these movements were chosen as the focus of this study. These movements are generally regarded to be the peak points of literary history during which elitism was at its highest, the artist denounced social responsibility and the works of art became detached from social and political reality. And, as Marxist criticism helps to investigate, there are various reasons for this conscious attempt at detachment. However, although the artist denies adopting an ideological attitude, the work of art is inevitably the product of the social milieu in which it is born and reflects a certain ideological formation. Therefore, even the principle of art for art's sake indicates a certain ideological conditioning. The aim of this study is to reveal this relationship of these works of art to the dominant ideology of their time.

The ultimate aim of this study is to reveal that the two movements under scrutiny were in antagonism to the dominant ideological outlook of their time and that all of these authors produced utopian works of art. It is necessary to emphasise the fact that the Marxist notion of utopia is different from the widely accepted one, that is, the conception of an ideal world which is rather detached from the experienced reality. Marxist critics within the utopian strand are anxious to evade this connection since the idealist utopia cuts its ties from reality and loses its potential to lead to change. Accordingly, the works of art chosen for this study are not utopian in the common sense of the word: they do not create an idealised and detached image of the world. Still, these works of art are indeed cut up from everyday reality not because they are explicitly utopian but because they are self-reflexive, and they are the products of the cult of art for art's sake. Yet, this fact supports their utopian potential since art's utopian potential lies in its inherent qualities rather than its connection to everyday reality. A work of art participates in creating a utopian vision to the extent that it frees itself from the everyday reality and alienates the reader from the idea of normalcy, maintaining an alternative outlook.

It is significant to make this differentiation since Bloch's emphasis on 'concrete' utopias rather than 'abstract' utopias reveals the emphasis of Marxism on the inevitable link between society and the work of art. While abstract utopias are mere dreams with no connection to the real, Bloch's concrete utopias are the outcomes of historical change. Therefore, they are neither detached nor unrealistic. It also follows that since none of these works of art are explicitly utopian, the Marxist concern not to separate the work of art from its historical milieu that caused its emergence is evaded. What a work of art implies about the institutions of society as well as what it reveals about the human condition marks its utopian characteristics. One of the conclusions of this study, therefore, is the idea that all art is utopian in nature as long as it is autonomous and carries negativity. Yet it must be clarified that this study does not aim to attribute art a revolutionary function. Art does not participate in political change as a direct force. Still, it is a participant because it helps to give awareness about the

human condition and the potential of the future. It raises consciousness and sensibility. Accordingly, Marxist approach is significant for this study and for the evaluation of literary works as it attributes art the function of raising awareness for a better, attainable future.

As it is not possible to evaluate a work of art without considering the social and political milieu of which it is the product, the study also provides a general overview of the dominant bourgeois ideology of the time and its means of domination. This was a period in which industrialisation gained great pace and the bourgeoisie asserted its power. The study, accordingly, focuses on the progressive values of the bourgeois ideology and these values are revealed to be oppressive. The ideas of progress, success and even morality were shaped by the dominant ideology to protect its economic interests and they reinforced a non-egalitarian, hegemonic outlook. As a result of such domination, many groups were controlled and marginalised including the artists of the period. The principle of art for art's sake may be evaluated from this perspective, too; it refuses to make the propaganda of a certain ideological stance. It is the attempt of the artist to rescue himself/herself from the hegemony of the stifling norms of the prevalent social order and from the demand of approving and recreating the image that the dominant ideology approves. Therefore, following the analysis of the dominant ideology, the study focuses on the aestheticism and decadent literature of the period; general principles of the two movements are studied in this light with an emphasis on their subversive, negative characteristics.

The choice of topics for the analysis of the works gives clues about the nature of the prevailing ideology and the hegemony it creates. Religion, art, and gender politics are the themes that the study focuses on, and these themes are also elements of the ideological superstructure. Each theme is explored in the works of one author. Firstly, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas* by Walter Pater is analysed as well as some of his essays in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* with a thematic focus on religion. Fredric Jameson's statement about the utopian potential of every

text and ideology concretises itself in this example; religion as a theme is utopian in nature. Yet it very often becomes ossified in the hands of the oppressive ideology; a utopian religious ideal may turn out to be an oppressive institution by growing dependent on the dominant ideological outlook, itself becoming a means of oppression. Religious sentiment as Walter Pater reflects it, however, is a kind of sensation which is constantly renewed rather than being ossified. Pater's philosophy of art and life is indispensable to the construction of such a utopian notion of religion. It constantly deconstructs and reconstructs itself, to use Pater's phrase, 'in a state of constant flux.' Thus it attains utopian qualities and rescues itself from the oppressive power of the dominant ideology.

The next chapter, which is spared to the works of Oscar Wilde, deals with art in the same fashion in order to reveal the utopian potential of art. The aim is to explore art as self-reflexive in the works of Oscar Wilde. Accordingly, his works are analysed in the light of these notions of ideology and utopia. The analysis reveals that Wilde's works, including even the most decadent one, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, carry utopian characteristics. The study reveals that art is inherently utopian and has a transgressive, subversive nature. It may appear to be contradictory to deal with art emphasising its utopian – and therefore political – potential, and still relying on the elements that make it art. Yet it must be once more emphasised that an artwork's inner dynamics – considering both form and content – are the very means that make it effectively communicate human being's present state and also the potential of the future. Art can give us a sense of the past, the present, and the possibilities of the future all at once. Even seemingly the most detached one has this potential. Again paradoxically, the deeper an artwork's apparent detachment, the stronger its utopian, transgressive characteristics.

In the following chapter, Vernon Lee's novel *Miss Brown* and her short story "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" is studied in detail. The motif to be studied in her works is sexual identity and gender along with the utopian potential of her works.

Vernon Lee is a woman writer who managed to survive in a male literary sphere. Her writings both participate in and criticise this tradition; therefore, her contribution to the male tradition is deemed significant. Her novel may be regarded to be the criticism of aestheticism and a commentary on the woman's place in a male tradition. The short story, on the other hand, is an example of the fantasy genre which, as Rosemary Jackson highlights in her *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, transgresses the hegemonic outlook dominant in the period. What is revealed in this study is that her works are both subversive and also utopian and that her subversiveness is twofold: First she provides a look from within aestheticism, a tradition that subjects women to the authoritative male gaze and criticises it. The decadent elements and the writing strategies of the aesthetes are made use of by her to transgress the male tradition and highlight its restrictive, biased nature. Second, she questions the stereotypical image of woman as submissive and selfless, also questioning and transgressing the widely-accepted notions about sexual identity. She also gives visibility to alternative forms of identity and sexual orientation.

This study considers the works of these three authors from a single perspective and keeps focus on a single theme. However, this does not mean that their works are dissident only in these respects. On the contrary, their subversiveness is manifold, and a further study may be carried out in order to reveal the relationship of these writers and their texts to the dominant ideology in different aspects. Still another study may focus on other periods and other artists in order to analyse the dissidence inherent in them along with their utopian vision. This aim of revealing the utopian potential of a given text is significant since it enables the reader to be conscious of the relationship between the text and society; it makes the reader interrogate into the ideological conditioning behind the text as well as the basis of its dissidence. Admittedly, every way of looking at a text is shaped by an ideological formation. As Fredric Jameson puts it, "history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in

the political unconscious" (26). Obviously, rather than authoritative texts, there are several ways of textualisation active in the process of interpretation, including that of the interpreter. Still, this does not nullify attempts of meaning making since works of art are valuable to the extent that they create negativity and awareness, helping the emancipation of the individual.

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ÖZGEÇMİŞ

Ansı SEV, Bilkent Üniversitesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı bölümünden 2004 yılında mezun oldu. 2005 yılında Ege Üniversitesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı bütünleşik doktora programında doktora öğrenimine başladı. 2009-2010 yılları arasında bir yıl süreyle ABD'deki Temple Üniversitesi'nde çalışmalarını sürdürdü. 2005 yılından bu yana Ege Üniversitesi'nde araştırma görevlisi olarak görev yapmaktadır.

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, ondokuzuncu yüzyıl sonunda İngiltere'de var olan edebiyat akımlarından estetikçilik ve dekadan edebiyatı ideoloji ve ütopya kavramlarıyla bağlantılı olarak incelemektir. Çalışmada Walter Pater'ın *Marius the Epicurean* ve *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*; Oscar Wilde'ın *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ve *The Soul of Man under Socialism*; Vernon Lee'nin ise *Miss Brown* ve "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" adlı eserlerine odaklanılmaktadır. Amaçlardan biri ideoloji ve ütopya kavramlarını Marksist gelenekte ele alındıkları biçimde incelemektir. İdeoloji kavramı bu çalışma için seçilmiştir çünkü sanat eserinin toplumsal düzenle olan bağlantısını ortaya koymak konusunda yardımcı olmaktadır. Yine Marksist gelenekte yorumlandığı şekliyle ütopya kavramı da sanat eserinin kabulleri alt üst eden özelliklerini ortaya çıkarmak açısından önemlidir. Bu kavramlar estetikçilik ve dekadan edebiyat örneklerini çözümlemek ve egemen ideolojiyle olan bağlarını ortaya çıkarmak, aynı zamanda bu eserlerin ütopyacı özelliklerini incelemek için kullanılmaktadır.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyse aestheticism and decadent literature of the late nineteenth-century England with relation to the concepts of ideology and utopia. The study focuses on Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* and *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*; Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Soul of Man under Socialism*; Vernon Lee's *Miss Brown* and "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady." One of the objects is to explore the concepts of ideology and utopia as interpreted within the Marxist tradition. The notion of ideology is chosen for this study as it is instrumental while analysing the relationship of a work of art to the social order. Also the notion of utopia as interpreted within the Marxist tradition is significant since it reveals the subversive characteristics inherent in a work of art. These concepts are used to analyse aestheticism and decadent literature in order to reveal their relationship to the dominant ideological order and also to explore their utopian potential.