

**A LATE VICTORIAN INTERFERENCE OF GENRES:  
AESTHETICISM RESHAPING THE FAUST MYTH IN *THE PICTURE  
OF DORIAN GRAY*<sup>1</sup>**

**Patricia Denisa DITA<sup>2</sup>**

**Abstract**

The theoretician of Aestheticism in English literature, Walter Pater, materializes the principles and concepts of Aestheticism in his novel *Marius the Epicurean*. His student and follower Oscar Wilde expresses the ideas of Aestheticism in his own novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which also revives and rewrites the myth of Faust with regard to the character representation strategies in the work. The present study, on comparative grounds of analysis, attempts to reveal the ways in which Wilde's novel unites in one fictional discourse the principles of an artistic theory with those of a literary myth in order to build a distinct world vision and provide a point of view reified by both an aesthetic and a mythic context.

**Keywords:** aestheticism, myth, Faust, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde

**GEÇ VİKTORYEN DÖNEMİNDE TÜRLERİN ETKİLEŞİMİ: DORIAN  
GRAY'İN PORTRESİ'NDE FAUST MİTİNİN TEKRAR  
ŞEKİLLENDİRİLMESİ**

**Öz**

İngiliz Edebiyatında Estetizmin kuramcısı, Walter Pater, *Epikürosçu Marius* isimli romanında Estetikçiliğin ilkelerini ve kavramlarını ortaya koymuştur. Öğrencisi ve takipçisi olan Oscar Wilde ise Estetikçilik ile ilgili fikirlerini, karakter betimleme stratejilerine bağlı olarak Faust mitini yeniden oluşturan ve yeniden yazan romanı Dorian Gray'in Portresi'nde açıklar. Bu çalışma, Wilde'ın romanının farklı bir dünya görüşü oluşturmak ve hem estetik hem mitik bağlamda somutlaştırılmış bir bakış açısı sağlamak amacıyla tek bir kurgusal söylemde sanatsal bir teorinin ilkeleriyle edebi bir mitin prensiplerini birleştirdiği yolları ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlar.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** estetizm, mit, Faust, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde

<sup>1</sup> Bu makale, 12 – 13 Nisan 2019 tarihlerinde, Kırklareli Üniversitesi'nde "2nd International Rumeli (Language, Literature and Translation Studies) Symposium"de "A Late Victorian Interference of Genres: Aestheticism Reshaping the Faust Myth in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" adıyla sunulan bildirinin gözden geçirilmiş biçimidir.

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Bursa Technical University, Department of Foreign Languages, Bursa, Turkey, [dita.patricia290693@gmail.com](mailto:dita.patricia290693@gmail.com), ORCID: 0000-0002-3908-2109

### **Introduction: Aestheticism and Its Predecessors**

In the complex nineteenth-century English cultural and literary background, opposite to naturalism and realism, and continuing the romantic paradigm, were the principles of aestheticism, Parnassians, symbolism, decadence, impressionism, and the entire spectrum of the late nineteenth century artistic avant-garde trends. The major emphasis is on an idea that art must be autonomous, which has its starting point in the 1830s with the French writer, painter, and critic Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) proclaiming the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* (“art for art’s sake”). Rejecting romantic worship of nature, Gautier, Baudelaire and other French symbolists assert the artistic to be superior to the natural: “Nature is stupid, without consciousness of itself, without thought or passion”, declares Gautier, “art is more beautiful, more true, more powerful than nature”. Also, according to Gautier, the formal, aesthetic beauty is the very purpose of a work of art, and, as he claims in the Preface to his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), art has no utility: “Nothing is really beautiful unless it is useless, everything useful is ugly, for it expresses a need, and the needs of man are ignoble and disgusting, like his poor nature. The most useful place in a house is lavatory”. The view of beauty as an independent value and the doctrine of “art for art’s sake” infiltrated into France and the rest of Europe from Kant and his philosophical successors who developed the idea that

there is an aesthetic sense by which we appreciate the beautiful – a sense quite independent of our moral judgement, independent of our intellect. If that is true, it follows that the artist works through this special sense, and that it is quite irrelevant to introduce moral or intellectual standards into the appreciation of a work of art. Kant said works of art had “purposefulness without purpose”, by which he meant that they seemed to have been created to serve some special end; yet they had no clearly defined function like a chair or a machine: rather, they were like a flower. (Hightet, 1976, p. 444)

With Gautier claiming that art has no utility and Poe theorizing the “poem *per se*” and rejecting “heresy and other critics”, the history of criticism encounters the objective theory of art, by whose standards art is autonomous, self-sufficient and serves no other purpose (moral, didactic, political, or propagandist) than the pursuit of beauty, and should accordingly be judged only by aesthetic criteria. These are actually the main principles of Aestheticism, or the “art for art’s sake” doctrine, an important movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, dominated in Britain by Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. The main theoretician of aestheticism in England, Pater actually introduced the ideas of French aestheticism into Victorian England and coined the phrase “art for art’s sake” in English. Unlike Matthew

Arnold, who believes that art has the power to transform the cultural milieu, Pater and Wilde argues that art is self-sufficient and quite useless. Wilde also insists on the separation between art and morality, holding in *The Critic as Artist* that art and ethics are “absolutely distinct and separate” and rejecting any “ethical sympathy” in the artist. Following Gautier, Wilde proclaims in *The Decay of Lying* nature to be inferior to art: “what Art really reveals to us is Nature’s lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition”.

Aestheticism developed a theory reflecting the French influence of symbolism – not of Mallarme and Valery as much as of Gautier and Baudelaire – combined with native ideas, but its roots go back to the romantic doctrine of Kant, Schiller, Coleridge and others. Arthur Symons (1865-1945) is claimed to have encouraged the recognition in Britain of the French symbolist poetry (in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, 1899) and to have influenced W. B. Yeats in writing poetry and criticism (namely, the essay *The Symbolism of Poetry*, 1900).

Associated and even confused with symbolism, and having its roots in Poe’s poetry and Gothic fiction, is the “decadence” of the *fin de siècle*. Unlike aestheticism, which is “characterised by the tension between art and life”, the decadent artists (Joris-Karl Huysmans, Arthur Rimbaud, Arthur Symons, and others) are characterised “by socio-psychological tensions between the one and the many” (Gagnier, 2004, p. 41). Urban and elevated, they are first of all introspective, emphasising the psyche, detaching the individual from society, and in this way representing together with symbolism, impressionism, and aestheticism a part of the transition from romanticism to modernism.

It is said that the first ideas of aestheticism date from Gautier’s assertion that art is useless, but as a movement, it was developed by Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), who was greatly influenced by the critical doctrine of E. A. Poe and influencing in his turn Mallarme, Verlaine, Flaubert, Pater, Wilde, Swinburne, Yeats, Eliot, and many others. Baudelaire is acclaimed to be “the first to portray the modern and decadent artist as someone with an overdeveloped nervous system” and for him “the nerves are motors of creative energy, of gigantism, stridency, multiplication, as well as hyper-sensitive registers of sensation” (Scott, 1991, p. 214). Also important is that Baudelaire and symbolism on the whole changed the traditional view of poetic language: “language was no longer treated as a natural outcrop of the person but as a material with its own laws and its own peculiar forms of life” (Scott, 1991, p. 212).

Acquiring the consciousness of language is also Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), the most important American writer-critic of the nineteenth century, who, after practicing criticism as a reviewer of books, turned to a more serious critical endeavour in *The Philosophy of Composition* (1846) and other essays. The main source of his criticism is British and European romanticism, namely Coleridge, as to mention just Poe's definition of poetry from the Preface to his 1831 volume – “a poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having, for its immediate object, pleasure, not truth” – which is almost a quotation from Coleridge. Like Pater and aestheticism in England, Poe in *The Poetic Principle* (1850) establishes the autonomy of art, speaking about “poem *per se* – this poem which is a poem and nothing more – this poem written solely for the poem's sake”. Poe's opinion is “perhaps the first instance on artistic or poetic autonomy by an American writer” and his insistence on artistic autonomy may have been a call to consider the beauty of a poem regardless of its political, as well as its moral content; given that his notion of beauty was somewhat Platonic; it may also have been an attempt to lift art out of and above the sphere of everyday life and its entanglement in bitter political and social struggles (Habib, 2005, p. 464).

Prefiguring aestheticism, Poe rejects any personal source for the poem, focuses on text in itself, the poem *per se*, and develops critical theories on form and techniques of composition of poetry, the genre which he defines as “The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty”, and which is also his main method used, among others, in the creation of *The Raven*, his most celebrated poem. A representative of romanticism and a follower of Coleridge and the Continental poetic theories, Poe nevertheless would neither adhere to the expressive theory of poetic creation nor believe in Wordsworth's “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”, since *The Philosophy of Composition* argues for a design and the proceeding “step by step to its [*The Raven's*] completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem”. *The Raven*, claims Poe, is not the product of “accident or intuition”, but the result of his intention to write a poem “that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste”. The poet aimed at the effect of beauty mingled with melancholy, and the topic that would better combine both and achieve the expected effect is the mourning of the death of a beautiful and beloved woman. Melancholy is “the most legitimate of all the poetical tones” and suggestive of this emotional experience is also a particular word used as a refrain and possessing the sonority of the sound “r” in relation to “o”, hence the word “Nevermore”. Furthermore, there should be a non-human creature that would repeat this word, making it an element of structural cohesion, and, after thinking of a parrot, the chosen one was raven,

**Dita, P.D. (2019). A late Victorian interference of genres: aestheticism reshaping the Faust myth in the picture of Dorian Gray. *Humanitas*, 7(14), 337-357**

indeed a powerful symbol in the poem. In presenting in *The Philosophy of Composition* the ways in which he composed *The Raven*, Poe “not only denies the operation of chance in literary composition – he also severely restricts the element of choice. He claims to have begun with an abstract, impersonal aim which was attained by a series of exclusive artistic decisions, each of which logically and inexorably dictated the next” (Lodge, 2000, p. 70).

In his critical work, and in the deterrent of prose, in particular the realist one, which he considers to be produced by “that evil genius of mere matter-of-fact”, Poe places poetry in his hierarchy of literature at the top, as the most important species of composition. Anticipating aestheticism, for Poe, the real meaning of the text is beneath the vivid surface of the work, and since the aim of poetry is “beauty” (whose highest manifestation relies on the tone of “sadness” or “melancholy”) and its effect only “pleasure”, the text transcends any didactic and moral doctrine. Indeed, as argued by Poe, the most dangerous of the heresies regarding poetry is the “Heresy of the Didactic” since “poetry has nothing to do with either morality or truth, not because these are unimportant but because it is not in the poem that they are best treated” (Regan, 1967, p. 23).

Also in America and in the nineteenth century emerged a literary and philosophical group that, based on the ideas of Plato, Kant, and Coleridge, developed a doctrine of idealism against the social and religious premises of the contemporary culture. Called “Transcendentalism”, this movement found its spokesman in Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) who, in his lecture “The Transcendentalist”, the famous essay *Nature* (1836), and other writings, provides original views on American natural environment, but what is more important is that he develops a kind of “philosophy of intuitionism”, a type of “Transcendental idealism”, by putting forward the idea of the individual spiritual existence “transcending” the physical through personal intuition.

### **Walter Pater and the Victorian Aestheticism**

In Europe rather than in America, aestheticism established itself as a movement containing both critical theories and artistic practice. The view of aestheticism that art is superior, self-sufficient, and has no use or moral effect, emerged in opposition to the dominance in the second half of the nineteenth century of realism, positivism, the historical and scientific thinking, and “in defiance of the widespread indifference or hostility of the middle-class society of their time to any art that was not useful or did not teach moral values” (Abrams and Harpham, 2009, p. 4).

In the literature of Victorian Britain, the views of aestheticism help define the reverence for beauty of the Pre-Raphaelites (Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, Charles Algernon Swinburne) and their return to medievalism and escapism into art away from the contemporary, actual reality, as it is revealed in their poetry, painting and critical thinking, for instance in the influenced by Carlyle *The Art of the People* by William Morris. Aestheticism also helps define the concern with the form of the Parnassians (Lionel Johnson, Andrew Lang, Ernest Dowson, Edmund Gosse) and in the first half of the twentieth century some thematic and structural aspects of the experimental writings of modernism. Aestheticism “asserts that art is self-sufficient, that there is no connection between art and morality, and that art should provide refined sensuous pleasure rather than convey moral or sentimental messages, have a didactic purpose, or be in some other ways useful” (Golban, 2013, p. 334).

These are some of the principal ideas of the main theoretician of aestheticism in England, Walter Horatio Pater. His most important and influential theoretical book is *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), which sets the impressionistic criticism as a new trend in art criticism and focuses on the effects of a work of art on the viewer. Here Pater displays at full length his aesthetic hedonism, advocating “a refinement of sensation in pursuit of an ultimate truth in Art and Life and in order that an ecstasy of passionate response might be maintained. In the face of the transience of life, he suggests, the cultivation of the momentary appreciation of the beautiful, and therefore of the “truthful”, could serve to fire the spirit” (Sanders, 1994, p. 461). Pater’s ideal is an aesthetic life based on the pursuit of insight, perception and impression. In the Preface to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, Pater introduces the term “impression” to argue that the key to aesthetic criticism is to “know one’s impression as it really is”. Impression means “not non-literary sensation, but the very instance of aesthetic representation” (Matz, 2001, p. 13). Impression represents the highest form of truth, which “makes it a species of metaphor – a style of figuration that would reproduce the inchoate feelings that Impressionism locates between sensing and thinking”, where “impressions bring to consciousness the same kind of truth that metaphor brings to language” (Matz, 2001, p. 65).

In this respect, Walter Pater argues that the best impression is that most strongly felt. In order to understand a work of art in all its complexity, the critic should discover the impressions it produces in the receiver and to discriminate between these impressions and the impressions produced by experiencing other works of art:

the function of the aesthetic critic is to distinguish, to analyse, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which a picture, a landscape, a fair personality in life or in a book, produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced. His end is reached when he has disengaged that virtue, and noted it, as a chemist notes some natural element, for himself and others; and the rule for those who would reach this end is stated with great exactness in the words of a recent critique of Saint-Beuve: De se borner à connaître de près les belles choses, et à s'en nourrir en exquis amateurs, en humanists accomplish.

*Studies in the History of the Renaissance* is also famous for many phrases and passages of poetic prose, as the one describing Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, beginning with "she is older than the rocks on which she sits", but the most influential part of the book is its Conclusion, Pater speaking here of "the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake". The phrase "art for art's sake" was coined by Pater in relation to the general European aesthetic doctrine that art is self-sufficient, could not or should not be in any way useful, and need serve no social, moral, or political purpose. *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* renders the author's conviction that it is in art where the finest sensations are to be found and where the human existence has the possibility of preserving the intense but fleeting moments of experience. The human life is indeed uncertain and fleeting, and, instead of pursuing inaccessible ultimate truths, man should strive to purify his sensations and passing impressions, so that, as Pater puts it in the Conclusion to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, "we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend." The artistic reception is possible when the spirit of the receiver is free from any constraints of tradition or theory, as art itself is autonomous and self-sufficient. Pater promotes what Abrams call the "objective theory" of art by asserting the freedom of artistic reception over normative and prescriptive nature of the "philosophical theories or ideas, as points of view, instruments of criticism", which determine neither the artistic production nor the receiver's understanding, but only "may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us".

Pater's influence marked the thinking and artistic practice of his contemporary fellow-artists, among whom painters like the representatives of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and novelists such as Oscar Wilde. Pater's influence also continued in the literary context of the early twentieth century, namely that of modernism, where his "impressions" and "moments" –

“where every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us” – were transformed into the “image” of Ezra Pound and the imagist poets, and into the “epiphany” of James Joyce. Pater and his followers advocated aestheticism, aesthetic hedonism, the aesthetic doctrine of “art for art’s sake”, and the refinement of sensation in pursuit of an ultimate truth in art and life, defying conventional opinion and the social, moral or political purpose in art. In *Legitimate Criticism of Poetry*, the writer-critic Robert Graves calls the condition when the artist or writer responds by his/her work to some extra-literary demands as “careerism”. Careerism was the plague of the nineteenth century, as it is of modern literature, claims Graves. To him a good poem is “one that makes complete sense; and says all it has to say memorably and economically; and has been written for no other than poetic reasons”, and, continues Graves, “by “other than poetic reasons” I mean political, philosophical, or theological propaganda, and every sort of careerist writing” (Graves, 1979, p. 277).

In the Victorian age, Pater’s work was revered by Wilde, Swinburne, Rossetti, and all decadent and art-centric writers of the late Victorian period, who developed the cult of beauty, which they considered the basic factor in art, believing that life should copy art. In art and literature they prompted suggestion not statement, sensuality not morality, and the use of symbols and synaesthetic effects, meaning the correspondence between words, colours and music. Pater stated that life had to be lived intensely, following an ideal of beauty, his work showing a change in his thinking from the abstract idealism of Ruskin to more concrete reflections on beauty. In the Preface to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, Pater rejects the use of abstract terms in critical study, and argues that beauty is not an abstract concept but a concrete one and should be defined by concrete terms.

Walter Pater, the major British aesthete, is the founder of impressionistic criticism (which should be distinguished, as having little in common, from impressionist painting). According to him in *The Renaissance*, the real understanding of literature is less a result of the objective judgement than of the critic’s individual, based on personal impressions, responses to particular literary works and the critical act would be a beautifully expressed appreciation of the work.

Further developing this view, Wilde considers the objective evaluation of literature as irrelevant and develops in *The Critic as Artist* a type of “creative criticism”, which he calls “aesthetic” and which, based on the critic’s own personality being added to the original work



while reading, would “treat the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation”. Influenced by Pater, Wilde believes that the critic’s personal views and impressions represent the substratum of criticism. Unlike Arnold for whom the critic has a secondary role, for Wilde the critic is an artist, a creator and he insists on this “creative” nature of criticism. Also, while Arnold states that the critic’s responsibility is to see an object as it really is, Wilde claims in *The Critic as Artist* that “the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not”. From the perspective of aestheticism, the literary work is independent and self-sufficient, and from the perspective of aesthetic or creative criticism, the literary work reveals its value if open to multiple interpretations. The true criticism, according to Wilde, must not confine itself to discover the real intention of the artist and accept that as final, because “when the work is finished it has, as it were, an independent life of its own, and may deliver a message for other than that which was put into its lips to say”.

### **Oscar Wilde and Aestheticism Reconstructing the Myth of Faust**

The doctrine of “art for art’s sake”, which dominated the late nineteenth century avant-garde culture in Europe and England alike, made Pater the leading mastermind of the English aesthetic movement of the 1880s and the most important influence on the works of the aesthetic writers of the closing years of the century.

Among them, Oscar Wilde openly proclaimed himself a disciple of Pater and the cult of “art for art’s sake”, his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* explicitly materialising aesthetic doctrines and ideas. Especially close to Pater is Wilde reacting against the ethical artist and rejecting the idea of art to be a moral teacher, stating instead in *The Decay of Lying* (1890) that the “final revelation is that lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art”. Apart from the principles of Aestheticism expressed and argued about in the novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* also explicitly relies on the Faust myth, in particular with regard to the thematic treatment of the protagonist.

Curiously, after being released from prison, Oscar Wilde wrote a letter, asking to be given, among other literary works and writers, all Goethe’s works, obviously, *Faust* being one of them. In *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (p.268-272), we can also find another statement made by Wilde in a different letter he wrote, which leads us, once again, to the source of his inspiration: “it is a pity that Goethe had never an opportunity of reading *Dorian Gray*. I feel quite certain that he would have been delighted with it”.

The story of Faust, starting from the German legend of the late medieval era with its deep roots in primitive Christian tenet has developed throughout the centuries through the

interaction between literature, collective attitudes and political events of the past, becoming one of the most important literary myth which has been continuously reconstructed and textualized in different national literatures from Renaissance to the present.

In 1587, all the fragmentary anecdotes and legends about Faust the individual were gathered into a chapbook, *Historia von D. Johann Fausten*, written by an anonymous German author, and published by Johann Spies at Frankfurt am Main. The story has a different version, being used as a cautionary tale by the Lutheran Church in order to threaten the ones who would dare to violate the moral values, as the historical figure of Faust does. Therefore, Faust is pictured as an individual who abandons all the religious beliefs and practices evil dealing with Mephistopheles. He understands the limitation of human condition; thus, he wants to become superior in order to exceed his limits, and turns to these unorthodox doings to satisfy his desire.

The English translation of the chapbook constitutes Marlowe's source of inspiration for his Faust, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. According to Kuno Francke, here the protagonist has become a typical Renaissance man, thirsty for knowledge, power and experience. He is now an adventurer, an explorer who desires supernatural power, new sensations and worldly knowledge, whereas Mephistopheles is represented as a harsh and frightening demon without any ability to understand human ambitions, being an important factor that leads Faust to his own destruction. However, Mephistopheles is not the only one who brings Faust to destruction in Marlowe's drama, but also Helen of Troy becomes a means of the latter's complete fall, being depicted as a she-devil. Lastly, Faust's own aspirations represent the final factor that leads him to damnation.

Another important author that contributed to the shape of the myth is G.E. Lessing. Even though his work was fragmentary, he provided a new version of the story, where Faust becomes the hero of learning this time. In the Classical tenet, knowledge is considered a positive value. The intellectual curiosity is not seen as sinful aspect anymore, therefore, Faust, for the first time, was fated to escape the condemnation of eternal punishment in hell.

However, the poets of the following generation, who were also the precursors of the Romantic Movement, were the ones who provided a total new image for our character, making him an individualist, a brave rebel who defies society with respect to the moral and religious aspects, and makes a pact with the Devil. One of the most important representatives of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, who puts a lot of himself into the depiction of Faust is the exceptional Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Vaan der Laan claims that Goethe's Faust stands at the

centre of the long and impressive tradition, being the most important conduit for the Faust character, of the Faust archetype. Due to his entire dedication and the changes he makes in his Faust, replacing the story from the popular culture to the realm of high culture, giving a whole new meaning and conduit for the character, Goethe is the one who establishes Faust as a literary myth. His Faust had such a colossal effect, that it became the source of inspiration for many other great artists, such as: Byron with his representation of Faust in *Manfred* and *Cain*, and Oscar Wilde with his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

There is no doubt that *Manfred* is a dramatic Faustian poem, but the materialization of the idea of superhuman that is presented in Byron's work, which actually leads to no fulfilment or joy, makes Manfred an anti-Faustian character. Manfred is an already accomplished Faust. He was able to exceed his human condition, but in the end all that he desires is oblivion and forgiveness which represent typical human needs, whereas Goethe's Faust is so thirsty for knowledge and perpetual desire, that he aims to become a demi-god no matter what the consequences are. Even if both characters are portrayed as rebellious, immoral, and dissatisfied with knowledge so that they would use any means such as witchcraft, conjuring up and dealing with evil spirits to enact their will, they are also different. Whereas Faust accepts his limits, repents, and chooses to attribute power to God before dying, Manfred does not attribute power to anyone, defies all the spirits, does not repent, being a rebel throughout his whole existence. Even when the Abbot of St. Maurice comes to convince Manfred to repent, he refuses the path of penitence, and is ready to calmly embrace death and accept any deserved punishment because he has already achieved what he longed so much for: forgiveness from his beloved Astarte.

Another rebellious character of Byron that reconstructs the Faust myth is Cain. Even though Byron's *Cain* is considered a reinterpretation of the origins of the belief with regard to the Christian doctrine in order to react against the already established institution and authority of church, *Cain* has also got some borrowings from Goethe's *Faust*. Both of the characters are thirsty for knowledge, and due to their disappointment with human learning accept the devils' offers (i.e. the pact with Mephistopheles, the ethereal journey with Lucifer). Although they are both rebellious at the beginning, committing unacceptable deeds, such as Cain killing Abel, that act of extreme rebelliousness happening in a moment of confusion caused by the long journey that Lucifer has offered to Cain to see the other worlds (i.e. prolonged dualism of existence), in the end, both Faust and Cain understand that rebelliousness is useless. Faust accepts to attribute power to God and die. Cain leaves the Land without Paradise together

with his wife and child, the single thing that matters in the end being the only true and eternal value of love and togetherness.

Apart from the congenial ways in which Byron and other romantics attempt to apply the myth of Faust in order to support the romantic rise of individualism, and some of its individual thematic perspectives such as dualism of existence, escapism and rebelliousness, Oscar Wilde expresses the ideas of Aestheticism in his own novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, finding in the thematic substratum of the Faust myth a congenial way to express the aesthetic principles with regard to the thematic treatment of the protagonist, consequently being one of the authors who attempts to reshape the myth.

From the very beginning, Oscar Wilde brings together three totally different types of characters discussing about art and life. One of them is Basil Hallward, a painter who lacks interest, brightness, but still, wants to make progress and become a successful artist. The other one is Lord Henry Wotton, an aristocrat who seems to grab attention wherever he appears due to his exuberance, confidence, stylishness, and scandalous perspective and ideas about life and how one should live it. Interestingly, they call each other “friend” even though these two characters do not share any similar interests or opinions, but are very different from each other. The reason Wilde has brought them together in the opening scene of his novel, is not only to allow two different types of characters to share their remarks on Basil’s work, but to make possible the first “influence” of Lord Henry that he will exercise on his disciple, the young and incredibly handsome man who poses for Basil’s masterpiece, Dorian Gray.

There is no doubt that Dorian Gray is another Faustian character, who through the influence of the flamboyant Lord Henry Wotton, “sells his soul” for youth, sensations, experience and pleasure: [Dorian to Lord Henry] “You fill me with a wild desire to know everything about life”. The bargain here takes a different form, as Dorian is not fully aware of the fact that his desires will eventually come true, where the picture will represent his true soul, and he, the individual, will represent the picture. The question Wilde arises is what happens if art becomes life, and life becomes art?

According to Willoughby, under the influence of Lord Henry, Dorian Gray fails to understand, and later on, even rejects all the signs that the portrait gives to him about his own real self. Wotton’s “New Hedonism” makes Dorian experience all the possible sensations that our world might offer: “Let nothing be lost on you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing ... With your personality, there is nothing you could not do” (22). Therefore, stimulated by his own aesthetic Mephistopheles, Dorian Gray embraces a new life

of intense and immoral experiences and sensations. Even the last remnants of morality left in Dorian are erased by Lord Henry immediately after Dorian's affair with Sibyl Vane, where Wotton teaches Dorian how to reject any feelings of guilt or remorse towards the suicide of the poor actress whom he has betrayed and destroyed: "You must think of that lonely death in the tawdry dressing-room simply as a lurid fragment from some Jacobean tragedy." Wotton urges, "the girl never really lived, and so she has never really died" .

Dorian meets Sibyl Vane at the beginning of his vicious life. She is a young and innocent actress, whom our protagonist immediately worships due to her performance of a new character each night. Sibyl represents for Dorian the unreal and perpetual change that he wishes:

"To-night she is Imogen." he answered, "and tomorrow night she will be Juliet."

"When is she Sibyl Vane?"

"Never."

"I congratulate you."

"How horrid you are! She is all the great heroines of the world in one" (45).

However, when Sibyl reveals to Dorian the fact that she cannot act anymore due to her feelings she has for him, he leaves her since he desires a constant change, a new "great heroine" each night, someone to captivate him in another performance every single night, and not a wife.

Dominick Rossi (p.188-191) claims in his article, *Parallels in Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray and Goethe's Faust*, that the affair which Faust has with Gretchen is very similar to the one between Dorian and Sibyl. The formers' affair starts immediately after Faust's own transformation through the pact he makes with Mephistopheles. Faust instantly worships Gretchen, and as well as Dorian, betrays her when Gretchen unveils the truth about her life, which is one of hard work, and not a phantasy that Faust has imagined. Both girls are seduced, and, shortly after, betrayed and eventually destroyed by their lovers when they reveal their true selves, all the romance coming to an end.

Both Faust and Dorian feel guilty due to the girls' death. Faust tries to save Gretchen only because of his uncomfortable feeling of guilt, and not because he cares about her. At this point he has already left behind any vestiges of moral caution, slowly turning into an amoral and self-divided individual, totally separated from any community, incapable of feeling care for the Other, whereas Dorian is taught by Lord Henry to reject any feelings of remorse, thus jettisoning the last remnants of morality and care that he might possess towards the Other.

Another important matter with regard to the similarities between the two works, stated by Dominick Rossi (p.188-191), are the two characters in Goethe's play, more exactly Gretchen's brother, Valentin, and her mother, that find their equivalents in Wilde's novel, Jim Vane, Sibyl's brother, and their mother. Therefore, Valentin is the counterpart of Jim Vane, both of them being away when it is necessary for the plot. Valentin is a soldier, and Jim is a sailor. They both seek to avenge their sisters' death, but are eventually killed by the protagonists. The girls' mothers are also similar as they are more concerned with money than with their daughters' well-being, making full use and deriving benefit from the poor girls' innocence.

Dominick Rossi (p.188-191) also asserts that youth is another important factor encountered in both *Faust* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Both protagonists have their youth granted under mysterious circumstances. At the beginning of his journey, Faust visits a witch in order to get a youth potion. In Dorian's case, the picture takes his soul in exchange.

Just as Faust, Dorian has a selfish nature. His desire of knowing everything, experiencing each sensation one might feel or discover, is increasing day by day since the very moment Lord Henry stirred these ambitions in him: "There were moments, indeed, at night, when (...) he would think of the ruin he had brought on his soul, with a pity that was all the more poignant because it was purely selfish. But moments such as these were rare. (...) The more he knew, the more he desired". Moreover, his immorality and intense desire do not stop here because every time he would go upstairs to the locked room to watch the picture that represents his true appearance and soul, evil, ugly, wrinkled, guilty, immoral, old, he would "stand, with a mirror, in front of the portrait that Basil Hallward had painted of him, looking now at the evil and aging face on the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed back at him from the polished glass. The very sharpness of the contrast used to quicken his sense of pleasure. He grew more and more enamoured of his own beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul". Not only that he is completely satisfied with his new self, forever young, handsome, charming, but he does not even feel a bit of remorse or guilt for his terrible deeds. As Willoughby claims (p.66-68) Dorian desperately refuses to acknowledge any emotional realities that might disturb him, such as guilt, remorse, regret, or even sorrow, which do not lead him to self-development, but to disintegration and extreme confusion that provoked him into committing murder, and eventually suicide. It seems that all Wotton's theory of how one should live a life was a total mislead for Dorian. Besides the fact that Lord Henry's aesthetic philosophy only confused our protagonist, it was actually "a pose", as Basil

Hallward calls it at the beginning of the novel, because he would never do any of the things or practice any of the outrageous ideas he has uttered for so long: “You never say a moral thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose” . Moreover, Wilde’s question has been answered as well once with Dorian’s self-destruction - aestheticism in practice is limited, and art cannot replace life, nor life can substitute art.

However, there is also a noticeable difference between Faust and Dorian Gray. Whereas Faust reaches the state of boredom pretty soon by sensing only worldly pleasures, and tends to search for perpetual desire to always kindle him in order to provide himself a goal to achieve, and, therefore, to reach a state of permanent satisfaction, or even happiness, Dorian is looking only for new sensations and experiences just to avoid dealing with feelings such as remorse, regret, fear, guilt, in other words, to distract himself.

Curiously, the scene in which Basil begs Dorian to repent finds its counterpart in a scene from Byron’s *Manfred* when the Abbot of St. Maurice comes to convince Manfred to repent, but just as Dorian, he refuses the path of penitence as both of them realize that it is too late for repentance, which at the same time, contrasts the scene in which Faust chooses to repent and attribute power to God because he finally understands that this is the only way to achieve real happiness, as Schopenhauer claims that the real state of happiness is in Heaven. This time different from Faust, Dorian is incapable of understanding the value of repentance even though Basil tries to teach it to him:

“Good God, Dorian, what a lesson! What an awful lesson! Pray, Dorian, pray”, he murmured... “The prayer of your pride has been answered. The prayer of your repentance will be answered also. I worshipped you too much. We are both punished.” Dorian Gray turned slowly around, and looked at him with tear-dimmed eyes. “It is too late, Basil”, he faltered. (p.157-158)

Even though there are so many horrifying signs that the picture displays, making even Basil feel terrified and deeply ashamed by his own work of art, Dorian still refuses to acknowledge any of them, and remains devoted to Lord Henry Wotton and his limited aesthetic philosophy, fact that causes him confusion. Instead of feeling remorse or regret, Dorian starts feeling only hatred towards the poor painter: “Dorian Gray glanced at the picture and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him” . In this fit of rage and moment of confusion, Dorian Gray murders Basil, just as Byron’s Cain kills his brother, Abel. It is obvious that none of the characters is fully aware of their terrible deeds, as Dorian picks up the same knife, he has stabbed Basil with, and attempts to destroy the

portrait, without even realizing that he is on the point of committing suicide, whereas Cain's monologue that follows immediately after the crime indicates that he could not differentiate between the various worlds, the real one and the other worlds he has visited with Lucifer.

A very interesting perspective is given by Terence Dawson in his book *The Effective Protagonists in the Nineteenth-Century British Novel. Scott, Bronte, Eliot, Wilde*, who argues that readers and critics should firstly consider Jung's personality types in order to really understand Wilde's novel. He claims that Basil, who is an introverted intuition type, has more to do with Dorian, an extrovert, than many would imagine. When Basil encounters Dorian for the last time, just before being showed the picture, Dorian confesses to him: "You are the one man in the world who is entitled to know everything about me. You have had to do more with my life than you think" (p. 155). In this respect, Basil determines Dorian's each experience, which makes the former an effective protagonist. Indeed, the one who provokes Dorian into multiple immoral acts is Lord Henry Wotton (another introverted type, but this time an introverted sensation type), but just because Dorian misinterprets Wotton's words, and this happens still because of Basil Hallward. For instance, as Basil attempts to feel again the same intense emotion Dorian gave him at their first meeting, so Dorian collects some tangible treasures that were "means of forgetfulness, modes by which he could escape for a reason, from the fear that seemed to him at times to be almost too great to be borne" (p. 140). Moreover, the way Dorian watches Sibyl Vane perform different heroines, so does Basil with Dorian through casting him in various roles. Basil's fascination and obsession with Dorian Gray reflects Dorian's obsessive life. Basil disinterest to find out more about Dorian as an individual or person mirrors Dorian's disinterest in learning anything about Sibyl Vane besides the roles she plays. Another argument in this respect given by Dawson is the fact that as Dorian rejects the poor actress immediately after she reveals herself, so is Basil shocked to the core on seeing the true Dorian Gray. However, in our opinion, the disinterest that Dorian shows after seeing who Sibyl Vane really is, does not have anything to do with the shock Basil lives the moment he sees the portrait. Dorian simply wants to be delighted every night with another performance of Sibyl Vane. When she confesses that she cannot act anymore due to her love for him, he leaves her. The reason is very simple – Dorian was not looking for a wife, but for a new sensation every night, and he acts with cruel disregard for anything other than his own sensations. He does not care for the Other, but for his sensations, experiences, pleasures, for his own self, which makes him an amoral character. Whereas Basil is of course shaken to see how such an inexplicable thing has happened to his masterpiece. He himself



even feels ashamed by the picture, and tries to teach Dorian the value of repentance, but the latter cannot understand its importance.

Finally, according to Dawson (p.80), the reason why Dorian Gray is not a Faustian character is the fact that he is not the effective protagonist of the novel because everything that happens to Dorian is related to Basil's obsession with him, whereas Faust is the effective protagonist of Goethe's philosophical poem. Dawson also considers in his book the character's cravings, asserting that "Faust yearns for knowledge, Dorian for sensations" (p. 80). However, as knowledge starts with "seen" or "experienced" according to Immanuel Kant, the sensations Dorian is so much longing for are also knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

Since its literarization in Renaissance, the myth of Faust has been one of the most continuously textualized and reconstructed myths in literary history, including in the nineteenth-century English literature. Aestheticism, as part of the late Victorian avant-garde theory and practice of art – with its claims that art is self-sufficient, autonomous, has no connection to reality and morality, and should provide solely refined sensuous pleasure rather than convey moral or sentimental messages, as it should have no didactic purpose, or be in some other ways useful – would also find in the thematic substratum of the Faust myth a congenial way to express its principles and consequently reshape the myth.

For Mircea Eliade and other scholars, "myth is a sacred, timeless and eternal story. Myth recounts a sacred story; it relates an event that took place in primordial times, during the legendary era when things began" (Golban, p. 14). Throughout the centuries, the story of Faust has become one of the most important myths in literature, and as a myth it has been reconstructed, revived and rewritten in various literary works from different periods and movements all over the world. In British literature, Marlowe has made the first step with his Renaissance Faust, an adventurer and explorer thirsty for knowledge, power and experience. After becoming a character for puppet shows, Goethe has changed the trajectory of the Faust character, probably inspired by Lessing's fragmentary version, where due to the Enlightenment doctrine, knowledge is not a sin anymore, and Faust escapes damnation, replacing the story from the realm of popular culture to the one of high culture; therefore, his version becoming an inspiration for many writers. Two of the well-known British writers inspired by Goethe's *Faust* were Byron and Oscar Wilde. As the story of Faust reflects the idea of a rebel attempting to exceed the limits imposed by human condition, to develop and improve, and, finally, rise above all these boundaries of existence, it makes a good support for

the Romantic credo and thematic perspectives, such as the rise of individualism, in general, and dualism of existence, rebelliousness and escapism, in particular. Whereas the late Victorian avant-garde theory and practice of art – with its assertions that art is self-sufficient, autonomous, has no connection to reality and morality, and should provide solely refined sensuous pleasure rather than convey moral or sentimental messages – would also find in the thematic substratum of the Faust myth a congenial way to express its principles.

There are many similarities between Faust and Dorian even though some consider that they should not be compared as they are different types of characters, one being the effective protagonist – Faust, and the other the main protagonist – Dorian. However, Oscar Wilde’s attempt to reverse reality with artistic realm is actually what makes Dorian be a Faustian character, as he puts aestheticism into practice, where his life becomes art, and art, the picture that takes his soul and gives him beauty and young age in exchange, becomes his life. Even Harry considers that “Dorian will tell a startled” (p.110). In the end, “treating art artistically” without any realistic concern as Lord Henry teaches his pupil, will bring self-destruction and inexperience, instead of self-development and experience. Art is art, and life is life, and they should not be reversed.

In order to have a clearer view over the similarities and differences between the two characters, we have created the chart below:

<b>Faust</b>	<b>Dorian</b>
Makes a deal with Mephistopheles to be able to exceeds his human condition	Is influenced by Lord Henry, his aesthetic Mephistopheles, and in mysterious ways, achieves what he desires: to be always young and handsome.
Yearns for knowledge	Yearns for sensations
Youth is an important factor for Faust, as he visits a witch to get a youth potion	Youth is what Dorian Gray desires.
Agrees on giving his soul to Mephisto in exchange of 24 years of worldly pleasure	His soul is takes by the picture in exchange of youth, power, sensations, experiences
Understands that worldly pleasure does not offer him satisfaction anymore	He is very satisfied with his own self as he stays young and experiences new things all the time, even though there are some rare moments of fear that he tries to avoid, however.

<b>Faust</b>	<b>Dorian</b>
Is looking for perpetual desire in order to avoid boredom and feel satisfied	Is looking for perpetual change in order to get a new sensation every time and, later, to avoid uncomfortable feelings, such as regret, guilt, fear.
At first, seduces Gretchen, and then betrays and destroys her	At first, seduces Sibyl Vane, and then betrays and destroys her
Kills Valentin, Gretchen's brothers, who tries to avenge his sister's death	Kills Jim Vane, Sibyl's brother, who tries to avenge his sister's death
Gretchen's mother is more interested in money than in the well-being of her good-hearted and innocent daughter	Sibyl's mother is more interested in money than in the well-being of her good-hearted and innocent daughter
Is selfish, does not care for the Other, as he is incapable of care, he is amoral	Is selfish, cares about nothing apart from his own sensations. As he is incapable of feeling care, he is amoral
Understands the value of repentance, probably achieves happiness by uniting with God, which proves self-development and self-improvement.	Does not understand the value of repentance, which shows that he could not improve or develop himself either throughout the novel or at the end of it, loses his identity, and therefore destroys himself.

Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a literary work which, like Walter Pater's Bildungsroman *Marius the Epicurean*, differs and departs from the dominant in the period realist fictional discourse of Dickens, Thackeray, Meredith, Butler, George Eliot, and others.

Wilde expresses and argues about the principles of Aestheticism in the novel, and relying on these principles, having explicitly revived the Faust myth, he reconstructs its thematic perspectives in the treatment of the protagonist. By disconsidering the realist concern with the relationship between the individual and the milieu, and any relationship between real life and art, or any moral and didactic significance of art, Wilde would show that a Faust confusing life and art, reality and artistic realm embarks on a way of existence which is not from inexperience to experience, but from inexperience to inexperience.

In this respect, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* can be considered an anti-Bildungsroman of a Faust whose portrait as a piece of art is the source of the loss of identity.

**Dita, P.D. (2019). A late Victorian interference of genres: aestheticism reshaping the Faust myth in the picture of Dorian Gray. *Humanitas*, 7(14), 337-357**

### References

- Abrams, M. H. & G. G. Harpham. (2009). *A glossary of literary terms*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Dawson, T. (2016) *The effective protagonists in the nineteenth century British novel. Scott, Bronte, Eliot, Wilde*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Francke, K. (2009) *Lectures on the classics from the five foot shelf of classics. Vol. L1*. New York: Cosimo Classics.
- Gagnier, R. (2004). The Victorian fin de siècle and decadence. In L. Marcus and P. Nicholls (Eds). *The Cambridge history of twentieth century English literature*. (pp. 30-49) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goethe, J. W. (2015). *Faust*. Bucharest: Humanitas.
- Golban, P. (2013). *The foundations of English literary criticism: from Philip Sidney to Henry James*. Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Golban, T. (2014). *Rewriting the hero and the quest: myth and monomyth in Captain Corelli's Mandolin by Louis de Bernières*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH.
- Graves, R. (1979). Legitimate criticism of poetry. In D. M. Urnov (Ed.). *The idea of literature: the foundations of English criticism*. (pp. 276-281) Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Habib, M. A. R. (2005). *A history of literary criticism: from Plato to the present*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Hight, G. (1976). *The classical tradition: Greek and Roman influences on Western literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lodge, D. (2000). *Modern criticism and theory*. London: Longman.
- Matz, J. (2001). *Literary impressionism and modernist aesthetics*. Port Chester: Cambridge University Press.
- Regan, R. (1967). *Poe: a collection of critical studies*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Rossi, D. (1969). Parallels in Wilde's the Picture of Dorian Gray and Goethe's Faust. *College Language Association Journal*, 13(2), 188-91.
- Sanders, A. (1994). *The short Oxford history of English literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Scott, C. (1991). Symbolism, decadence and impressionism. In M. Bradbury & J. McFarlane. (Eds), *Modernism 1890-1930*. (pp. 206-227) London: Penguin Books.

**Dita, P.D. (2019). A late Victorian interference of genres: aestheticism reshaping the Faust myth in the picture of Dorian Gray. *Humanitas*, 7(14), 337-357**

Van der Laan, J.M. (2007). *Seeking meaning for Goethe's Faust*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Wilde, O. (1992). *The picture of Dorian Gray*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited.

Willoughby, G. (1993). *Art and Christhood: the aesthetics of Oscar Wilde*. London: Associated University Press.