

An introduction to Oscar Wilde

Aestheticism, Decadence and the Preface
to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*







21

Oscar Wilde.

Paul

‘Wit’ refers to a kind of creative intelligence which permits its possessor to associate and express ideas in an original, striking, economical, elegant and amusing way.

What is an epigram? A dwarfish whole;
Its body brevity and wit its soul.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

The only way to get rid of temptation
is to

All women become like their
mothers. That is their tragedy. No
man does. That's his.



Walter Pater (1839-94)

We all live under a sentence of death with an indefinite reprieve [= to cancel or delay a death sentence]. All we have are a few brief moments.

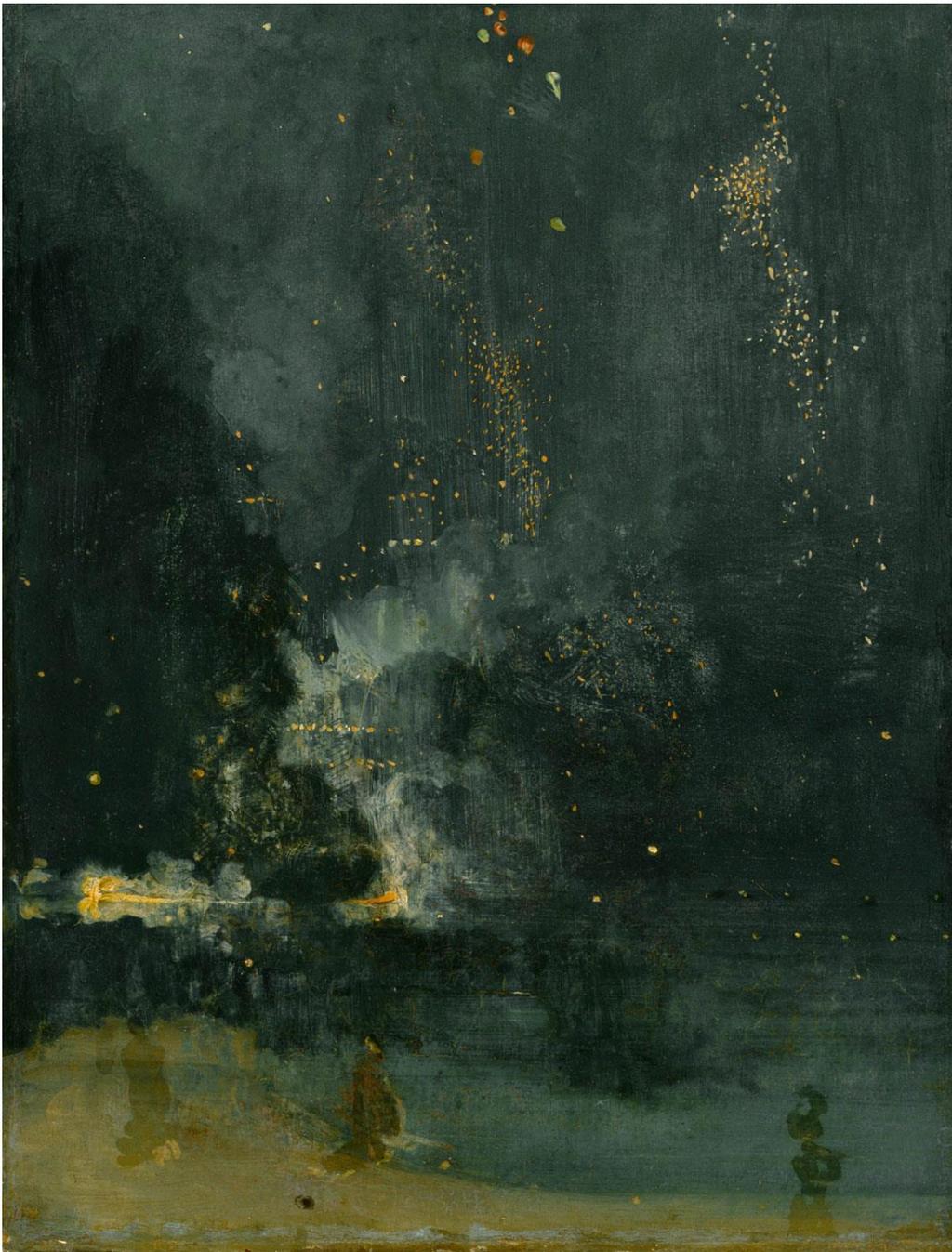
Art 'comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.'

‘To burn always with this hard,
gemlike flame, to maintain this
ecstasy, is success in life.’

The Renaissance (1873)



James McNeill Whistler,
*Symphony in White, No. 1:
The White Girl* (1862)



James McNeill
Whistler,
*Nocturne in Black and
Gold – The Falling
Rocket* (1875)

"HE IS AN AESTHETIC SHAM."

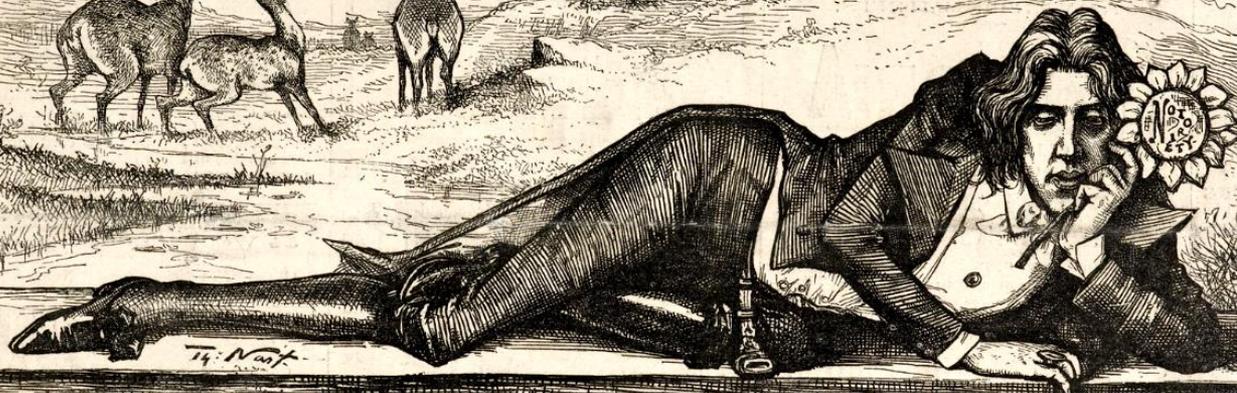
ECHO.

"NARCISSUS, AS HE WAS HUNTING ONE DAY, HE WENT TO QUENCH HIS THIRST

(£ or \$) FROM A SPRING AS CLEAR AS CRYSTAL, AND A GODDESS CAUSED HIM TO FALL IN LOVE WITH HIS OWN SHADOW, WHICH WAS REFLECTED IN THE WATER. THE OBJECT OF HIS DESIRES BEING UNATTAINABLE

HE PINED AWAY FROM GRIEF AND THE FLOWER NAMED AFTER HIM HAS EVER SINCE CONTINUED AN EMBLEM OF HEARTLESS 'BEAUTY'.

SEE CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY.



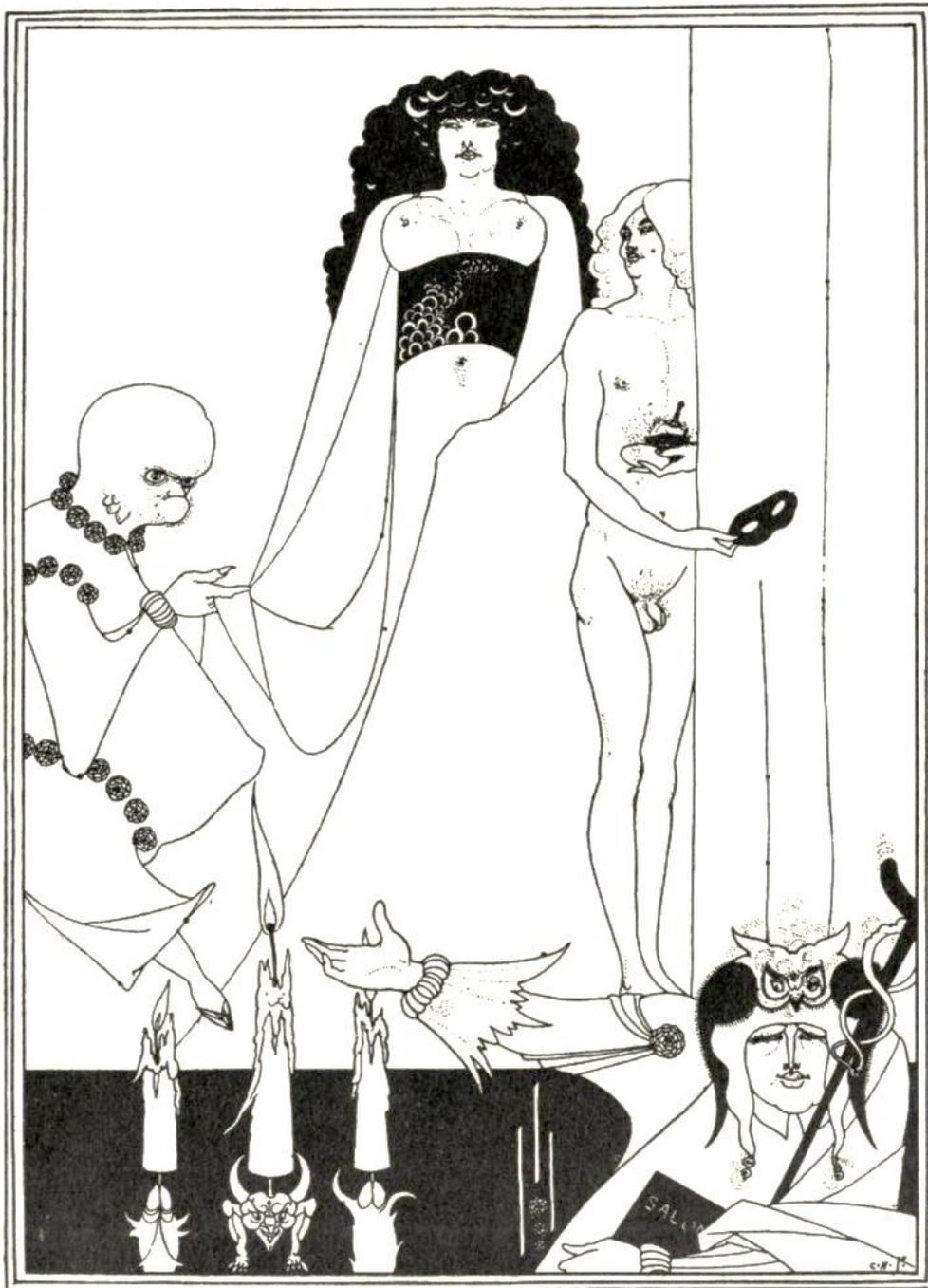
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"MR. O'WILDE, YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST ONE THAT HAS GRASPED AT A SHADOW."



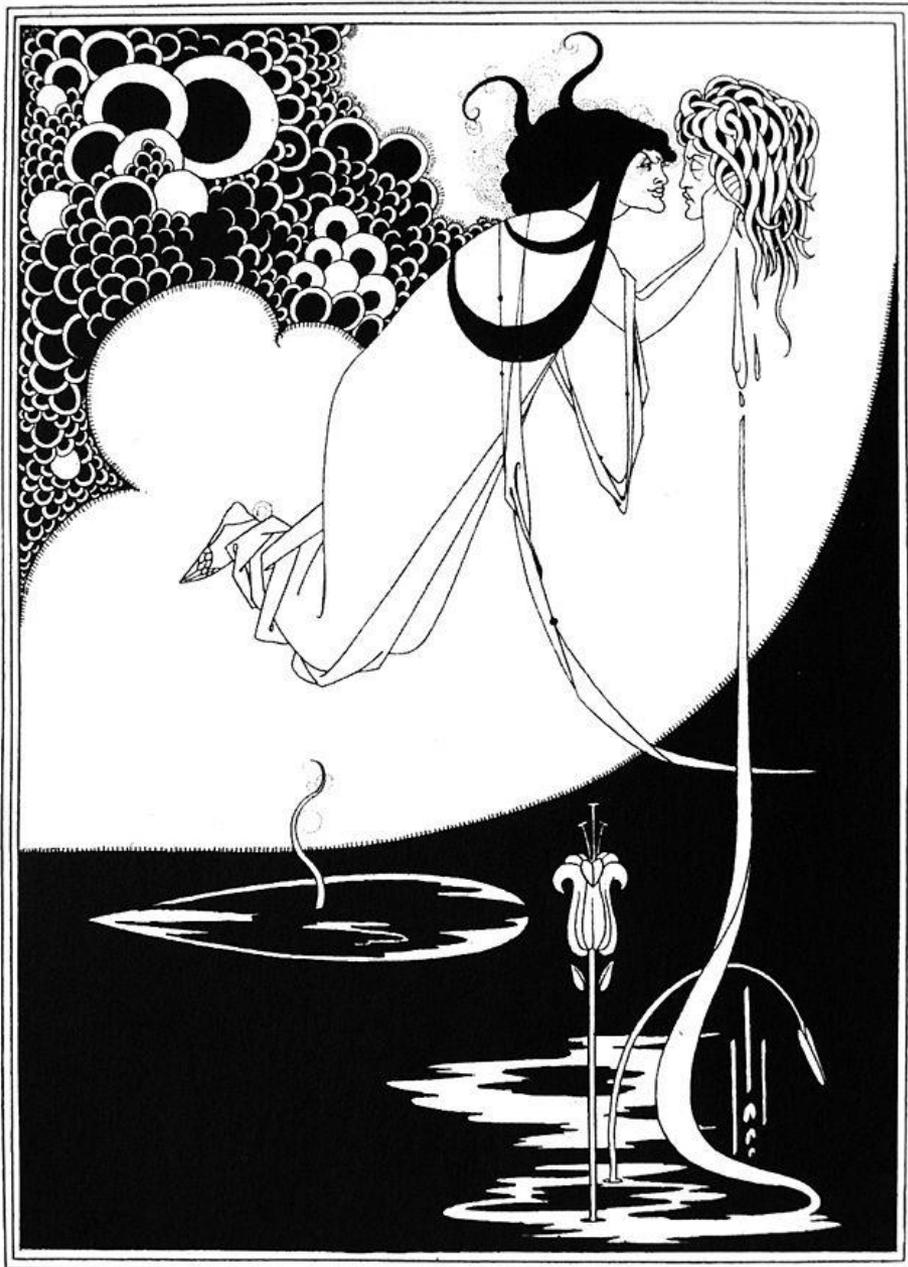
"I have one aim—the grotesque. If I am not grotesque I am nothing."
Wilde said he had "a face like a silver hatchet, and grass green hair."

Aubrey Beardsley,
Enter Herodias
from *Salomé* (1893)





Aubrey Beardsley,
The Stomach Dance
from *Salomé* (1893)



Aubrey Beardsley
The Climax
from *Salomé* (1893)

THIS NUMBER CONTAINS

The Picture of Dorian Gray.

By OSCAR WILDE.

COMPLETE.

JULY, 1890

LIPPINCOTT'S

MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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Reception of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Lippincott: “in its present condition there are a number of things an innocent woman would make an exception to”

The *Daily Chronicle* of London called the tale “unclean,” “poisonous,” and “heavy with the mephitic [offensive] odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction.” The newspaper found the novel to be “a tale spawned [to lay eggs; here, cause something to be created] from the leprous literature of the French decadents.”

The *St. James Gazette* deemed it “nasty” and “nauseous,” and suggested that the Treasury or the Vigilance Society might wish to prosecute the author.

The *Scots Observer* stating that it dealt in “matters only fitted for the Criminal Investigation Department or a hearing in camera” and would be of interest mainly to “outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph-boys”

The Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde

The artist is the creator of beautiful things.

To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.

The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things.

The highest, as the lowest, form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.

Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault.

Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope. They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only Beauty.

There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.

The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass.

The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass.

The moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium.

No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved.

No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style.

No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything.

Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art.

Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.

From the point of view of form, the type of all the arts is the art of the musician. From the point of view of feeling, the actor's craft is the type.

All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.

It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.

Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital.

When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself.

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.

The highest, as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.

Therefore am I still

A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,--both what they half create,
And what perceive;

(Wordsworth, *Lines composed above Tintern Abbey*
ll 102-107)

The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse
if imagination amend them.

(Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Theseus Act V Scene
1).

The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban at not seeing his face in the mirror

