

**‘Useless Art’ or ‘Practical Protest’:
The Fin-de-Siècle Artist between Social Engagement
and Artistic Detachment**

Author: Jutta Mackwell

PhD
The University of Edinburgh
2007

Abstract

This thesis follows recent scholarly interest in the British fin de siècle, focussing on the artist and the notion of art within the context of capitalisation and rapidly changing social strata. It claims that the artist can be understood as a socially orientated rather than purely economically motivated player, who tries to position himself and his art within a distinctly transformed cultural landscape. It demonstrates how many texts and art works of the fin de siècle are permeated by a socio-critical and didactical discourse, which serves to legitimize the artist and his art work on the one hand, and aims at the aesthetic education of his audience on the other. This approach allows for a reconciliation of the paradoxical co-existence of socio-critical engagement and the concept of ‘art for art’s sake’ in fin-de-siècle art works.

Chapter One, “Leaving the Ivory Tower,” provides a temporal framework for the discussion of the fin de siècle by tracing the development of the eighteenth-century, idealized notion of the artist through the writings of John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater. It also gestures towards the connection of this tradition to Theodore Adorno’s understanding of ‘social art’. Examining Oscar Wilde’s “The Critic as Artist” within the context of this temporal trajectory, this chapter aims to establish an understanding of the paradoxical demands that face the artist in the light of capitalisation and the development of a mass readership at the end of the nineteenth century.

Chapter Two, “Social Aestheticism,” investigates Oscar Wilde’s “The Soul of Man under Socialism” and several of his fairy tales and George Moore’s *Confessions of a Young Man* in view of their affiliation with Aestheticism. These texts, while insisting on the autonomy of art and voicing their opinions in the disdainful tone of the disinterested artist, are striking because of the social awareness and criticism that they express. By showing how these opposing concepts aim for the legitimization of the artist, this chapter draws attention to the aesthetic-didactical element of Aestheticism, positioning its artists as social critics and educators rather than otherworldly figures.

Chapter Three, “A Map of Utopia,” considers William Morris’ *News from Nowhere* as an example of the artist as visionary and the importance of artistic imagination in the process of social evolution and change. It argues that Morris’ utopia can be read as supporting the concept of autonomous art in that it expresses the omnipresence of art and the realization of a perfect society that this entails. As such, the text demonstrates the social effectiveness of autonomous art which, in turn, supports an understanding of the artist as social agent.

Chapter Four, “Periodical Education,” looks at *The Yellow Book* as an example of audience education and the positioning of the artist through the medium of art. It contrasts *The Yellow Book*’s aspiration to be an ‘art for art’s sake’ publication with its socio-critical content, evidencing how the concept of autonomous art is used at the fin de siècle for the selection and education of an audience.

Chapter Five, “The Author at a Distance,” examines Max Beerbohm’s essays in the light of their aesthetic-didactical tone and the artist-audience relationship they establish. By including a selection of Beerbohm’s later essays, this chapter also gestures towards the difference between the artist-audience relationship implied in fin-de-siècle art as opposed to Modernist art. This attests to the distinct character of fin-de-siècle art. Further, the chapter investigates the effects of these aspects in terms of artist legitimization and the promotion of autonomous art, and thus shows how Beerbohm’s essays contribute to an understanding of fin-de-siècle art as didactical, aesthetic and autonomous at the same time.

In conclusion, this thesis reveals how artists at the fin de siècle used their art in order to legitimize an idealized position of the artist within society, to promote the separation between art and life and to create an audience that would appreciate and understand this view. It thus also demonstrates how the paradox between the concept of autonomous art and artistic socio-critical engagement can be reconciled.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i> _____	<i>iv</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i> _____	<i>v</i>
<i>I. Introduction</i> _____	<i>1</i>
1.1 Legitimising the artist: the hybridisation of art _____	13
1.2 Appropriating an ideal _____	21
1.3 From Arnold to Beerbohm: chapter synopsis _____	26
<i>II. Leaving the Ivory Tower: The Artist as Social Agent</i> _____	<i>33</i>
2.1 Art as means or art as end? _____	36
2.2. Artist, critic, teacher: the autonomy of art and the artist as critic _____	55
<i>III. Social Aestheticism in Oscar Wilde and George Moore</i> _____	<i>68</i>
3.1 George Moore's confessions _____	74
3.2 Oscar Wilde's ethics _____	83
3.3 The artist as role model _____	93
<i>IV. A Map of Utopia: Life as Art in News from Nowhere</i> _____	<i>104</i>
4.1 Aesthetic liberation or, a dream fulfilled _____	108
4.2 Prophet and seer: Guest as artist _____	114
4.3 Picture perfect: Nowhere as aesthetic experience _____	117
4.4 The intrusion of time _____	123
4.5 Utopia as art _____	127
<i>V. Periodical Education: The Artist and The Yellow Book</i> _____	<i>132</i>
5.1 Periodical culture and The Yellow Book _____	136
5.2 Yellow Book or Yellow Press? _____	143
5.3 The art of social criticism I: criticism of shock _____	146
5.4 The art of social criticism II: subversive criticism _____	152
5.5 The art of social criticism III: educating the reader _____	162

<i>VI. The Author at a Distance: Beerbohm and his Readers</i>	169
6.1 Beerbohm, spirit of the 1890s	174
6.2 Teaching detachment: Beerbohm's use of irony	179
6.3 The enjoyment of art	191
<i>VII. Conclusion</i>	203
<i>Bibliography</i>	209
<i>Declaration</i>	218

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been written without the continuous support of my supervisor, Dr Michèle Mendelssohn. I would like to thank her for her enthusiasm for my ideas, her guidance and her good advice throughout the time of writing this PhD. Also, I would like to thank my second supervisor, Dr Andrew Taylor, for being a calming influence in the middle of PhD-induced panic attacks.

I also wish to thank Dr Jonathan Wild and Dr Marion Schmid for their helpful feedback in the course of writing this PhD.

Very special thanks go to Kristin Cook, Penny Faulkner and Lesley Mackwell for battling their way through this thesis to eliminate my grammatical and spelling mistakes. I also would like to thank my husband for his prayers and his patience, and my family for bearing with me and supporting me through the three years of writing this PhD.

Abbreviations

Matthew Arnold

- CA “Culture and Anarchy.” *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*. Ed. Stefan Collini. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- FC “The Function of Criticism as the Present Time.” *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*. Ed. Stefan Collini. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

George Moore

- CM *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888). Ed. Susan Dick. Montreal & London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972.

William Morris

- NfN *News from Nowhere Or An Epoch of Rest. Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance*. Ed. Clive Wilmer. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1993

John Ruskin

- SW *Selected Writings*. Ed. Dinah Birch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004

Friedrich Schiller

- AE *On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In a Series of Letters* (1795). Eds. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson & L.A. Willoughby. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.

Oscar Wilde

- SF *Oscar Wilde: Complete Short Fiction*. Ed. Ian Small. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003.
- SM “The Soul of Man under Socialism.” *The Soul of Man and Prison Writings*. Ed. Isobel Murray. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- MW *Oscar Wilde: The Major Works*. Ed. Isobel Murray. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

- YB *The Yellow Book*

I. Introduction

The 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.

(Wilde, “The Soul of Man under Socialism”)

The figure of the artist—creator, genius, bohemian, bearer of culture and outcast—has fascinated people throughout the ages. Feared by Plato as a disruption to a perfect state, the artist found himself elevated to the position of quasi-deity during the Romantic period. As the nineteenth century moved on, this exceptional status was increasingly contested. Art and the role of the artist within society became the topic of intellectual debate.¹ Under the intrusion of capitalistic and economic forces, their aura of ‘otherworldliness’ began to blur into an apparently disinterested world of art. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century the position of the artist within society had been eroded from demi-god to the extent of requiring re-negotiation and re-definition. In his book *Legitimizing the Artist*, Luca Somigli describes this ‘fall from grace’ with reference to one of Baudelaire’s prose poems, “Perte d’auréole”:

The loss of the halo, the symbolic insignia of the poet’s social status and function, is the result of a transformation that pushes him to the margins of capitalist economy; and this loss of function results in both absolute freedom—going to the brothel, ‘having fun’—and absolute uselessness—that is no longer being asked to play any role in the self-representation of the bourgeois order (9).

As Somigli identifies, over the course of the nineteenth century the special artistic status accorded by society had lost its automatic legitimacy. This development made the artist more vulnerable to the whims of capitalism, compelling him to carve out a place for himself within the economic realm. Many artists succumbed to the forces of capitalistic society; others, however, began to reformulate their understanding of art and the role of the artist within the changing cultural landscape of the nineteenth century. It was at that instant, as Somigli

¹ Throughout this thesis, the term “artist” is meant to be inclusive rather than aimed at one specific artistic field; yet while it includes painters, musicians, writers and poets, in this thesis, it most often refers to writers of fiction.

indicates, that art and the relationship between society and the artist became “political” in the sense that what had heretofore been generally accepted and undisputed now needed to be articulated and clarified (18-19). Somigli intimates this attempt to detail and to express a new understanding of art and the artist within the context of early twentieth-century (Avant-garde)² manifesto writing. He explains that it is at the moment “when the writer’s legitimation is inversely proportional to success that we witness a proliferation of extra-literary texts that discuss, explain, justify, and promote the literary and aesthetic project of [a] group” (64).

Whilst Somigli argues for an extra-literary discourse in the process of legitimisation, I put forward the claim that during the second half of the nineteenth century, and particularly the fin de siècle, the formation of a ‘hybrid’ literary and artistic form arose. This form incorporated a ‘manifestive’ discourse within the work of art itself, combining both didactical and discursive elements with demonstrations of pure art. As can be seen from the epigraph taken from Oscar Wilde’s essay “The Soul of Man under Socialism,” the status of the artist and his position within society were considered controversial issues to be expressed, negotiated and demonstrated within art itself.

I maintain that the legitimisation of the artist and his art played an important role within literary circles of the fin de siècle, as they tried to re-appropriate an idealised concept of the artist as social agent, visionary and prophet. In order to establish an appreciation of fin-de-siècle art as, in a broad sense, ‘manifestive’ with regard to the role of the artist and art within society, I am going to look at a selection of fin-de-siècle artworks, among them Wilde’s “The Soul of Man” and some of his fairy tales, George Moore’s *Confessions of a Young Man*, William Morris’ *News from Nowhere*, the first four issues of *The Yellow Book*³ and several essays by Max Beerbohm. In the following I am going to treat literary texts as works of art, in the sense that they were

² In the following, the capitalized term ‘Avant-garde’ indicates the historic avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century such as Dadaism, Surrealism, Futurism etc., whereas ‘avant-garde’ written with small initials designates the notion of being ‘ahead of one’s time’. As such, I refer to the fin de siècle and artists discussed in this thesis as ‘avant-garde’.

The same applies for references to other literary and artistic movements, which are capitalized throughout the thesis. For example, ‘Aesthetic’ stands for ‘being connected to Aestheticism’.

³ The reason for focussing only on the first four issues of *The Yellow Book* is due to the fact that in the aftermath of Wilde’s arrest and imprisonment in 1895, its publishers took a step back from subjects that could be associated with Wilde, e.g. ‘art for art’s sake’, the aesthetic artist or the concept of ‘épater les bourgeois’, playing down its radical and avant-garde character.

intended to not only convey a textual message, but to produce an aesthetic effect more readily associated with the visual arts or music. At the fin de siècle and particularly in aesthetic circles, equal importance was placed on language, content and appearance of a literary work. Walter Pater, for example, was particularly renowned for his prose style, and George Moore revelled at his language, at “the combination of words of silver or gold chime, and unconventional cadence...” (CM 166). This understanding of fin-de-siècle literary texts as works of art is also corroborated by projects such as *The Yellow Book*, whose outward appearance was as important to its aesthetic and didactic effect as was its inner content; similarly, writers like Wilde, Beerbohm, Moore and Morris placed great emphasis on the layout and decoration of their published texts.⁴

I am going to investigate these works regarding their authors’ perceptions of the role of art and the stance of the artist within the metamorphosing cultural landscape of the late nineteenth century. I contend that one of the defining features of this type of fin-de-siècle art is the establishment of a socio-critical and educational discourse with the audience;⁵ its purpose is to re-define and legitimise the role of the artist within modern, capitalistic society whilst simultaneously advocating and demonstrating the ideal of autonomous art. My analysis will show that whilst these features seem together to constitute an inherent contradiction in fin-de-siècle art, they actually define, promote and legitimise an anti-capitalist and idealised understanding of the artist and his art.

The process of positioning the artist and re-defining his art was consonant with the overall mood of the British fin de siècle. The 1890s have often been described as a time of transition. An awkward moment of ‘neither here nor there’, it almost assumes the characteristics of an adolescent phase. It is striking that the very idea of adolescence, as a stage of human growth, began to emerge at the fin de siècle: John Neubauer, for example, notes that the term came ‘of age’ in the 1890s as interlocking

⁴ This ‘bitextual’ quality of fin de siècle literary texts has received increased attention over the last year. Both Nicholas Frankel, in *Oscar Wilde’s Decorated Books*, and Lorraine Kooistra, in *The Artist as Critic*, for example, argue that the lay-out, the decoration and the illustrations of fin de siècle texts play a decisive role for their understanding and interpretation.

⁵ In the following, I use the word ‘audience’ in the sense of the German word ‘Rezipient’ which incorporates all experiences of art and does not distinguish, like its English translations, between different art forms. It refers to someone reading a book as well as a person looking at a painting or watching a drama.

discourses developed in psychoanalysis, psychology, criminal justice, pedagogy, sociology and literature. According to Neubauer, the emerging discourse testifies to the fact that human nature began to be perceived and defined by a whole new category: the period of growing up. Commenting on the relationship between this concept and end-of-nineteenth-century literary trends he writes:

Looking from another angle at the relationship between adolescence and the cultural climate around 1900, I note that literary adolescence and literary modernism developed in a symbiotic relationship [...]. I suggest that the age focused on adolescence because it found therein a mirror of its own uneasiness with its heritage, its crisis of identity, and its groping for a new one" (10).

This notion of adolescence was also mirrored in the generation of artists most closely associated with the *fin de siècle*: a generation that consisted mostly of artists in their twenties and early thirties, and one which has sometimes been labelled as doomed, since so few of them actually survived the turn of the century. Aubrey Beardsley was only twenty-six when he died in 1898; John Davidson (1857-1909) and Hubert Crackanthorpe (1870-1896) both drowned and it is assumed that they committed suicide, and Oscar Wilde, one of the most prominent figures of the era, died in 1900. Others, such as Max Beerbohm and Arthur Symons, who both lived well into the middle of the twentieth century, remain apparently and inextricably connected to the 1890s. Dennis Denisoff, for instance, describes Beerbohm's twentieth-century writings and drawings as a means to keep "the past alive" (2004:535), and Beerbohm himself, having recognized this sense of 'being captive' to the one cultural period, introduces himself in one of his 1930s radio broadcasts, as "an interesting link to the past" (*Mainly on the Air* 36).

In the just same way that the concept of adolescence once needed to be acknowledged as a stage in the human life cycle, the *fin de siècle* has now, for a long time, struggled to stand as a cultural period in its own right. Flanked by the titans of Romanticism, Victorianism and Modernism, it has long been studied in connection to these better-known literary and cultural movements. Karl Beckson, for instance, argues that two of the main artistic movements of the 1890s, Aestheticism and Decadence, were merely "rechristened" as Modernism in early twentieth-century literary culture (1992:45). Similarly, David Weir, in *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, considers the *fin de siècle* as an interim period between Romanticism

and Modernism, examining the decadence of the 1890s as merely a foreshadowing of the modernist period. Unable to find a “unifying concept” (xiii) for the late nineteenth century, Weir subsumes the period’s characteristics within the term decadence;⁶ a term which he defines as a “medium of cultural transition between romanticism and modernism;” it is a “mystical sphere whose circumference is everywhere but whose centre is nowhere” (xix).

Much of Weir’s proposition is valid and insightful; however, his attempt to impose the definition of ‘decadence’ as an all-encompassing heading for the fin de siècle, and to establish it as an ethereal cross-section between Romanticism and Modernism, both obscures, as well as highlights, the inherent problem of the period: the prevalence of contradictions and paradoxes. Weir’s approach makes the reader question whether it would not be preferable to allow these elements to simply stand, without trying to gather them under one unifying concept; to understand the period as a conglomeration of ambiguities, contradictions and experimentations.

It is these very inconsistencies that pose a challenge to fin-de-siècle scholarship. Holbrook Jackson’s *The Eighteen Nineties*, one of the earliest studies of the era, is still considered one of the most comprehensive and insightful analyses of this colourful and elusive period. Since its publication there has been (especially with regard to more artistic and literary aspects of the 1890s) a notable trend away from Jackson’s comprehensive study into what John Stokes calls “a field of partisans” (1989:xviii). Stokes writes: “Where a literary historian like Jackson looked for synchronic interaction, modern critics have isolated the discrete thread, the significant ‘tendency’, and judged the nineties according to the preference of their time” (ibid). This propensity to grasp at the general in terms of the particular—even though it is certainly not a phenomenon reserved for the 1890s—often results, as

⁶ ‘Decadence’ is a term that seems to be most often used in reference to the fin de siècle. While for some time, the term and its relation to the fin de siècle denoted the period’s ‘dark side’, it now includes a wide range of possible interpretations, stretching from Weir’s broad understanding to defining a specific artistic movement (whose existence in Britain is still being contested). Despite the elusiveness of the term, it is inextricably linked to the fin de siècle, as can be seen from the titles of many studies dealing with the period. Ian Fletcher’s collection of essays on the 1890s, for example, bears the title *Decadence and the 1890s* yet it seems to use the term ‘decadence’ interchangeably with the period itself. Similarly, Linda Dowling’s study *Language and Decadence*, though it is one of the first to move away from seeing decadence as a “cultural episode with sensational or lurid overtones” (ix), still insinuates that the period itself can be subsumed under its heading.

Stokes points out, in the specialized knowledge of isolated aspects; a fact that bears witness to the very indeterminability which defines the fin de siècle.

Accepting that the fin de siècle is a period that cannot be immersed within one inclusive heading, many recent studies have allowed these differing aspects to stand alongside each other, without trying to negotiate the crevasses and contradictions. Thus, there exist several collections of essays highlighting different elements of the fin de siècle: Mikulás Teich and Roy Porter's *Fin de Siècle and its Legacy*, for example, considers the fin de siècle as a "watershed" in terms of the capitalistic system (3). Their study investigates the legacy of different areas such as media, production and consumption in relation to the end of the twentieth century. A similar approach from a twentieth-century perspective is found in both Stokes' *Fin de Siècle/ Fin du Globe* and Sally Ledger's and Scott McCracken's *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*. Whilst the former incorporates a similar diversity of topics as those addressed by Teich and Porter, the latter focuses on those cultural and political conflicts that helped form the fin de siècle. Again, the variety of plausible standpoints and the number of areas prime for investigation are indicative of the impossibility of coming to an all-encompassing understanding of the period: it was and remains, to borrow Ledger and Roger Luckhurst's term, a period marked by "cultural icons of ambivalence" (xiii).

The co-existence of these ambiguities and contradictions did not, as might have been expected, bring the fin de siècle to a deadlock. Contrarily, it stirred into life a productive interchange between conflicting viewpoints and ideas, engendering new perspectives. It was a time, as Jackson argues, "when people went about frankly and cheerfully endeavouring to solve the question 'How to Live'" (33). Major developments in technology, science, philosophy and politics changed the ways individuals perceived life and themselves, and whilst people like Max Nordau envisaged themselves as living in a period of degeneration and decay, many others considered the period to be "the realisation of a possibility" (Jackson 12). Amid major changes in the socio-political make-up of British society, people found themselves able to re-negotiate their own status within the formerly rather static class divides.

In this atmosphere, the concept of social life or culture spread from being purely the topic of intellectual debate to encompass an important part in the positioning of the individual within society. Clement Greenberg, in his essay on “Avant-garde and Kitsch,” points out that

with the introduction of universal literacy, the ability to read and write became almost a minor skill like driving a car, and it no longer served to distinguish an individual’s cultural inclinations, since it was no longer the exclusive concomitant of refined taste (10).

Through the Education Act of 1870 and the technological advances that allowed cheap reading material to be produced, literacy and access to reading material, which had formerly denoted a certain social standing, were now available to (almost) everyone, thus putting ‘culture’ within the grasp of middle and working class members. As the notion of culture no longer depended solely on the ability to read, it now evolved into a question of *what* to read, and the question arose of what exactly ‘cultured’ meant. This question became especially pertinent to the middle classes, since the ‘right’ answer might allow them to move one step closer (at least in theory) to the privileged lifestyle of the upper class.

The artist was naturally most affected by such sociological and ideological changes. As the former bearer of culture and as a figure once answerable only to the well-off and aristocratic, the artist now found himself in a predicament. Not only did he need to identify and re-negotiate his own standing as an artist in relation to the new make-up of his audience, but he also found himself in a quandary which required a re-definition of art itself. Concurrent to the new readership, a new type of art was born, catering to the ‘popular taste’.

Yet at the same time, the art of the period also became experimental, even avant-garde, as studies such as Matei Calinescu’s *Five Faces of Modernity* and Renato Poggioli’s *The Theory of the Avant-garde* suggest, and it developed into a testing ground for new ideas and values. Many artists wrote promoting their own political, social, educational or even capitalistic agendas—a development that was supported by the increased demand for journalistic writing to fill the hundreds of newspapers and journals that sprang up in competition for the rapidly growing readership. For the members of the artistic and literary circles of the 1890s, the question of ‘how to live’ thus expanded to include aspects such as how to understand and position oneself in a

rapidly changing and increasingly capitalistic society; what role art should play within this new society; what the relationship between art and life should be; how the artist could influence life and society through his art, and finally, how he could be more than just a mere entertainer for the masses. Tellingly, it is in the realm of art and culture where the fin de siècle has achieved a succinct status. It is here that the 'juvenile' search for identity and direction is best expressed as it envelopes the idea that artists at the fin de siècle found themselves in a position which forced them to re-define, negotiate and confirm their understanding of themselves and their art.

Growing-up, in this sense, implies a two-stage process: at first, one develops an understanding of one's character, identity and purpose; then, the deeper this understanding, the more intensified the outward focus becomes in order to legitimise one's role in society. As a new identity is individually formulated and engendered, so society needs to be prepared, informed and educated as to the implications and purposes of this identity. Subsequently, I intend to demonstrate how these concepts of identification and legitimisation weave their way through fin-de-siècle art, and how they are best expressed and understood when looking at the implied artist-audience relationship within the works of art themselves. I shall also show how the oscillation between social engagement and artistic detachment worked together towards the realisation of identity and purpose.

So as not to attribute these characteristics to only one specific literary or artistic group of the fin de siècle, I have chosen a broad selection of artists who are often seen as standing in opposition to one another. William Morris, for example, did not want to be associated with the Wildean Aesthetes, who placed art on a pedestal and "guard[ed] carefully every approach to their palace of art" ("Art and the People" 39). Similarly, Wilde and Moore seemed to occupy completely opposing standpoints, with Moore coming from a naturalist tradition and Wilde celebrating the artificial. Personality-wise too, they were never seen as strongly apposite. Referring to comments made by Beerbohm, Elizabeth Grubgeld notes that "[Moore] presented 'in the midst of an artificial civilisation the spectacle of one absolutely natural man'. The personality of Wilde, by contrast, is described by Beerbohm as 'a conscious and elaborate piece of work'" (37).

Yet despite these differences and personality clashes, it is possible to trace a common thread through the works discussed in this thesis: the desire to re-define and legitimise the role of the artist within society; the understanding of autonomous art as a means of social criticism, promoting change; and lastly, the acknowledgement and socio-critical use of the artist-audience relationship inherent in any work of art. Additionally, all these artists specifically promoted the autonomy of art as a form independent of the grip of capitalism. However, their art did not display the extreme elitism of high Modernist literature; rather, it was aimed at a newly developing bourgeois audience that aspired to the exclusivity of the upper classes. As such, one of these artists' prime objectives was to give their audience an understanding of the enjoyment of autonomous or 'pure' art. I contend that they tried to communicate answers to the aforementioned questions about their social position and the purpose of their work through their artistry. This attempt often resulted in an ungainly juxtapositioning of engagement with the audience alongside wayward proclamations and demonstrations of the autonomy of art and the artist, or social criticism set against the pose of complete disinterestedness and contempt.

I will show how many of the contradictions and ambiguities in fin-de-siècle art can be reconciled by recognizing their essentially educational and audience-focussed character. I propound that this art is characterised by a split between two opposing intentions: on one level, it attempted to re-assign art to a sphere independent of the ever-increasing capitalistic cycle, promoting a broadly defined slogan of 'art for art's sake'. On another, it was used to legitimise the artist's standing in relation to his audience, aspiring to the education of an appreciative public. As such, apparently autonomous art contained didactical elements, explaining and demonstrating the 'proper' understanding of art and the artist.

The artistic world of the fin de siècle was to a large extent defined by an overlap between the social and the aesthetic. The importance of this interconnectedness has been recognized in several recent studies on the fin de siècle, and has triggered a growing interest in an interdisciplinary approach to the period. One such example is Peter McDonald's *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice 1880-1940* which, following Pierre Bourdieu's model of the field of cultural production, combines sociological and literary approaches to reach an understanding of the

interrelatedness of different agents in the cultural field. According to McDonald, it is only in finding a “mediating ground between textuality and social history, symbolic value and material production” (20) that the literary culture of late-Victorian Britain can be fully understood. Similarly, scholars such as Laurel Brake and Julie Codell have started investigating the influence of newspapers and journals on artistic circles, commenting on the impossibility of clearly upholding the much-cherished distinction between high art and yellow journalism.⁷ Brake, for example, notes that the “attempt to create a clear-cut dichotomy between literature and journalism belied the involvement of almost all Victorian writers with the periodical press, as contributors, editors and/or proprietors” (1994:xii).

Within this social and aesthetic overlap, one of the central challenges facing the scholar of the *fin de siècle* is the comprehension of the concept of ‘art for art’s sake’ (an idea that meanders through several of the major art movements of the period) within the bounds of an increasingly capitalistic and culturally democratized society. It might be for this reason that Aestheticism and the positioning of its representatives within the cultural marketplace of the nineteenth century have received so much critical attention over the last few decades. Both Regenia Gagnier and Jonathan Freedman, for example, give evidence that Aestheticism was, for many artists, an opportunity to establish themselves as professionals within an economic context. These artists advertised and promoted the cult of beauty and living for art as an escape from the bondage of capitalistic society, thereby firmly anchoring the ideal within the very realm from which it was offering a way out. Freedman argues that, to understand the concept of Aestheticism within the *fin de siècle*, “we need to look at [...] the relation between aestheticism and [...] ‘the culture of professionalism’, and the relation between aestheticism and what a group of historians call ‘the culture of consumption’” (52). He also proposes that the aesthetic concept of the alienated, oppressed artist

was a valuable [...] asset in the new cultural marketplace. [...] the role of the ‘alienated artist’ could (and did) achieve a considerable degree of financial success and social status in the very world whose utilitarianism and moralistic ethos those writers and artists claimed to rebel against (54).

⁷ See for example Brake & Codell *Encounters in the Victorian Press* and Brake (ed.) *Investigating Victorian Journalism/ Nineteenth Century Media and the Construction of Identities*.

It would appear that the general consensus of opinion when trying to understand the underlying paradoxes of artistic Aestheticism is that the movement contained a large percentage of self-fashioning, of selling the person rather than promoting truly autonomous art⁸—an understanding that doubtlessly finds its origin in the way Wilde, as one of the most outspoken representatives of Aestheticism, not only marketed the ‘worship of beauty’, but also fashioned his own personality around the concept.⁹

Although I agree with Freedman and Gagnier that the ‘Aestetization’ of art and the establishment of the notion of the artistic and cultural connoisseur played an important part in the formation of the economic status of the artist in fin de siècle society, the works that are being examined in this thesis do not conform to the notion of truly popular and thus economically rewarding art; nor do they fully satisfy the criteria of the capitalistic understanding of Aestheticism’s ‘art for art’s sake’. Instead, I would argue that they are too socio-critical, too self-conscious and too aesthetically indeterminable to fit into either category: Moore’s *Confessions of a Young Man*, for example, though written to represent the life of an Aesthetic artist, undermines its own proclamation of the autonomy of art through its socio-critical engagement, and Beerbohm’s subtle promotion of the separation of art and life in his essays is countered by a strongly didactical author-reader relationship.

I maintain that the clear tendency to subordinate any aesthetic or artistic function of fin-de-siècle art to the capitalistic necessities and demands of a cultural marketplace results in an unbalanced impression of the artist’s role at the fin de siècle. Although I accede that the investigation into the interconnectedness of the capitalistic and cultural fields is both valuable and helps explain many of the apparent paradoxes that permeate artistic and literary circles during the fin de siècle, I also suggest that amidst economic pressure there still remained a group of artists that upheld an idealised understanding of the artist and his art, and that this

⁸ The notion of self-fashioning and ‘marketing strategies’ of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century authors is the subject of Marysa Demoor’s *Marketing the Author*. Although it does not specifically focus on the 1890s, the concept of self-marketing and the cult of personality that underlies studies such as Gagnier’s and Freedman’s becomes clear.

⁹ This ‘capitalist’ view of Aestheticism has been shifted only recently with the publication of Diana Maltz’s *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes*, which instead emphasises Aestheticism’s social and philanthropic elements.

understanding aimed at finding “a path along which it would be possible to keep culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion and violence” (Greenberg 5).

According to Greenberg, “the avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain the high level of his art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point” (5). Surrounded by the relativity of an uncertain age in which progress and constant change had turned absolutes obsolete, these artists sought to return to a standpoint of absolutes—art itself. Greenberg states that

the avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape—not its picture—is aesthetically valid; something given, increate, independent of meanings, similars or originals (6).

Consequently, to focus on the idea of autonomous art solely with regards to the artist’s economic intentions credits neither the artist nor his resultant works. To do so dismisses an important element of the artist-audience relationship within both aesthetic and artistic fields. I argue that, despite economic necessity and commercial viability, fin-de-siècle art still maintained a distinctly aesthetic element, concerned with an idealised understanding of art and the artist. I therefore propose that in the midst of increasing capitalistic influences, and the liberation of art to the general public, several avant-garde artists at the fin de siècle worked not so much for a positioning of themselves in the cultural marketplace, but within society itself, endeavouring to legitimise a role as social agent, visionary and prophet.

Simultaneously, I claim that they pursued the education and creation of an audience that would be able to understand art outside the economic cycle. By communicating their new understanding of art and the artist’s role, artists at the fin de siècle formed and educated their audience. I thus aver that artists established an intentional connection with their audience through their art in order to allow what I am going to call (using a term borrowed from Friedrich Schiller) ‘aesthetic education’.¹⁰ This notion of aesthetic education was facilitated and encouraged by

¹⁰ While the combination of these two terms and the application to the fin de siècle further an understanding of its distinct character, they also establish a link to succeeding movements such as the Avant-garde. It has been argued, most notably in Peter Bürger’s study *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, that the 1890s movements which promoted the autonomy of art stand in direct opposition to the politically engaged Avant-garde. An analysis of fin-de-siècle art with regards to its educational and socio-critical aspects, however, helps to recognize the parallels and continuities between these two artistic periods.

two elements: one, the desire of the formerly ‘naturally distinguished’ class of the culturally refined to re-claim their superior standing in opposition to the ‘masses’; second, the ambition of the bourgeoisie to climb up the social ladder of cultural status. Artists and book-publishers alike tapped into this phenomenon: to buy books from the Bodley Head, one of the avant-garde publishers of the 1890s, for instance, was “to obtain ‘culture’—in the social as well as in the intellectual sense—[...] and to feel part of a ‘choice’ and ‘rare’ population oneself” (Stetz 1991:82). Also, even though most of the texts that are examined in this thesis pretended to snub the bourgeois reader, they at the same time include him within their target group. Most of Max Beerbohm’s essays, for example, were initially published in popular newspapers and journals such as *The Saturday Review*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Cornhill Magazine* or *The Daily Mail*, before being printed in their more aesthetically pleasing and exclusive book form by avant-garde publishers such as John Lane. This fin-de-siècle endeavour was, therefore, not so much an aspiration to the separation of ‘high’ versus ‘low’ art, but an attempt to create an avant-garde audience who would share an idealised understanding of the artists and his art within an economically defined environment.

1.1 Legitimising the artist: the hybridisation of art

Thus, in the same way that the ‘loss of the halo’ asked for a re-definition of the artist and the work of art, it also required a re-formation of the audience. Greenberg, describing the situation for artists within the rapidly changing atmosphere of advancing modernism, writes: “It becomes difficult to assume anything. All the verities involved by religion, authority, tradition, style, are thrown into question, and the writer or artist is no longer able to estimate the response of his audience to the symbols and references with which he works” (4). Foreshadowing Bourdieu’s theory of the cultural field, Greenberg analyses the intimate and mutually formative relationship between the avant-garde artist and his audience, pointing out that “no culture can develop without a social basis” (8); therefore, the artist needs to make sure that there is an audience that is able to ‘decode’ and understand his work of art.

By the end of the nineteenth century the artist had arrived at a precarious and radically new status: on the one hand, his dependence on wealthy patrons was gone—in this sense, the artist had achieved freedom for his art in terms of subject

matter, form and execution. On the other hand, however, the machinery of the capitalist market made this freedom available only to the already well-off. In this situation, the artist was faced with the challenge to create a community of equals, an audience that would be able to appreciate and understand their art. As Harold Osborne points out in *The Art of Appreciation*, aesthetic appreciation is a skill that can be acquired (2). At the end of the nineteenth century, the ability to acquire aesthetic understanding and refinement thus became a means to denote and establish a new cultural elite. The appreciation of art, rather than merely being an “expression of personal preference, a matter of individual likes and dislikes,” was turned into a matter of “connoisseurship” which, according to Osborne, is “a cognitive skill, purporting to apprehend and discriminate qualities residing in the object of attention, qualities which can be recognized and tested by others who have the skill” (15).

Hence, the notion of connoisseurship, which scholars like Freedman associate with economic aspirations on the part of the Aesthetic artist, reached further into an idealised, aesthetic realm by working for the benefit not only of the artist, but also of his audience. Aesthetic appreciation at the fin de siècle began to occupy the place that beforehand mere literacy held, as it insinuated new “powers of perception, like the awakening of a sense that was dulled, [...] a new dimension of awareness” (Osborne 15). In this regard, to obtain what Osborne calls a “new dimension of awareness” became a means to set oneself apart from the ‘masses’. It designated a different level of understanding, and thereby also a different level of ‘culturedness’.

I therefore argue that the artworks of the fin de siècle, through their inclusion of meta-text and didactical discourse, attempted to pave the way for an understanding of fin-de-siècle art as didactic, formulating the purpose of absolute art and the avant-garde artist’s role in society. It was, in short, an educational venture in aesthetic appreciation. Discussing Ezra Pound, Somigli quotes Lyotard and writes:

‘One’s competence is never an accomplished fact. [...] The truth of the statement and the competence of its sender are thus subject to the collective approval of a group of persons who are competent on equal basis. Equals must be created.’ [...] [I]n the very moment that [Pound] argues that the autonomy of art is founded on the fact that [...] art reveals eternal and non-contingent truths, he then must postulate the existence of a community whose consensus can indeed validate the ‘truth’ of the work and distinguish it from the fake and stereotyped. Lacking such a community, the competence of the artist—and therefore his results—is also suspect (203).

This dilemma which Somigli describes is also applicable to the situation of artists at the fin de siècle. Together with the growing influence of capitalism on society, the advent of ‘popular culture’ in the form of newspapers, myriads of journals and cheap reading material and (in the realm of visual arts) photography, began to undermine the concept of ‘high art’. Society found itself drawn towards ‘light’ entertainment, which left the artist with the choice to either comply or to perish. I suggest that much of fin-de-siècle art is characterized by an attempt to find a compromise between the two by re-assigning art and the artist an idealised position, while making this notion accessible to a larger audience.

The fin de siècle was thus a time when artists searched for ways to ‘recover the halo’, which they had lost in the course of the nineteenth century, without compromising their ideals; a time in which popular art competed against high art, and the idealised notion of ‘artist as genius’ vied against the concept of ‘artist as working professional’. Oftentimes these two concepts would be played off and against each other, and would be presented as either-or alternatives, as seen in George Gissing’s novel *New Grub Street* (1891). The story of the novel is spun around the lives of two opponents, Jasper Milvain and Edwin Reardon. While the latter represents the ‘artist as genius’, the former considers art as a trade, something that anyone can learn and adopt as a vocation. The novel shows how the idealism of the artist who is “at the mercy of his brain,” as Reardon describes it (81), becomes subjugated to the mechanism of capitalism. Amy, Reardon’s wife, for example, advises her husband “to put aside all your strict ideas about what is worthy and what is unworthy” and instead, to “make it a matter of business” (84):

[D]o a short story of a kind that’s likely to be popular. You know, Mr Milvain is always saying that the long novel has had its day, and that in future people will write shilling books. Why not try? Give yourself a week to invent a sensational plot, and then a fortnight for the writing. Have it ready for the new season at the end of October. If you like, don’t put a name to it; your name certainly would have no weight with this sort of public (ibid).

Notably, everything Amy suggests runs counter to the traditional idea of artistic inspiration. Formerly, artistic inspiration was not to be dictated by the market, and the creation of an art was not to be adapted to the timeframe of the London season; but now these are the very things to which Amy asks her husband to resign himself. At the end of the book, Reardon eventually achieves fame through his tragic death,

but it is Milvain who proves to be truly successful: after years of networking and second-guessing the public taste, he ends up with money and with Amy (who conveniently inherits a fortune) as his wife.

Books such as Gissing's reveal how, at the end of the nineteenth century, the artist had become so intertwined with life and (capitalistic) society that he often found himself unable to uphold the ideals of autonomous and truly creative art which he tried to follow. 'Economic' approaches to artistic movements that are linked to the concept of 'art for art's sake' (approaches such as those offered by Freedman and Gagnier) thus find affirmation in Gissing's novel, as it formulates the absolute necessity of positioning oneself in a cultural marketplace. As we can see from the case of Reardon, the dependence on money subjected the artist and his art to the whims and tastes of a society who started to discover its 'power of demand'.

Yet despite this change in the way the artist saw himself in relation to capitalistic society, I aver that (true to Jackson's understanding of the decade as one of 'degeneration and regeneration') Gissing's novel paints too bleak a picture of the artistic situation at the fin de siècle. To confirm this view, I intend to examine how artists at the fin de siècle worked to re-define themselves and their art in opposition to these influential areas. I argue that they strove to carve out a role for themselves which mirrored the idealised notion of the otherworldly, disinterested artist, opposing the idea of the artist as modern popular entertainer, who subjected himself to the demands of the cultural marketplace, while at the same trying to form and educate a new and comprehensive audience. I thereby maintain that the notion of 'art for art's sake' and the cry for the autonomy of art cannot simply be subsumed under and be explained by economic necessities and an emerging cultural marketplace. Rather, I posit that the demand for the autonomy of art was part of a process of re-assigning art and the artist's place within society as genius, social agent and educator.

This process of re-appropriating an idealised understanding of the artist within the bounds of capitalistic, end-of-nineteenth-century society can best be appreciated when examining it within the framework of Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production. In his approach to understanding the make-up of the cultural realm, Bourdieu tries to find a middle way between purely objective analysis and a romantically tainted, subjective conception of the literary and artistic field. Through

the notion of “habitus” or the “agent,” Bourdieu allows the individual an extent of determinative power. Yet simultaneously, an agent always acts within the objective framework of the field which is made up of (objective) social relations between the individual agents. As such, the structure of the field remains objective while being, at the same time, subject to change due to the dynamic social relations between individual agents.

In the course of the nineteenth century the field of cultural production experienced a sharp increase in its number of “agents” (publishers, writers, consumers), especially the realm of what Bourdieu calls “large-scale productions” (popular art). This expansion led to a strong assimilation of the field of cultural production to the “field of power,” i.e. the economic field, which necessitated an adaptation of capitalist rules in the cultural field. As the field of large-scale production rapidly increased, it also affected the “field of restricted production” through a critical move that Bourdieu designates as “position-takings.” He explains:

Every position-taking [...] receives its distinctive value from its negative relationship with the coexistent position-takings to which it is objectively related and which determine it by delimiting it. It follows from this, for example, that a position-taking changes, even when the position remains identical, whenever there is a change in the universe of options that are simultaneously offered for producers and consumers to choose from. The meaning of a work (artistic, literary, philosophical, etc.) changes automatically with each change in the field within which it is situated for the spectator or reader (30-31).

This means that agents in the field of restricted production (e.g. publishers such as the Bodley Head and avant-garde writers like Wilde, Beerbohm and Moore) were challenged to uphold and make heard their own definition of what ‘makes art’, while simultaneously trying to legitimise their own position within the “production of value of the work of art” (36). As Bourdieu points out,

the established definition of the writer may be radically transformed by an enlargement of the set of people who have a legitimate voice in literary matters. [...] In short, the fundamental stake in literary struggles is the monopoly of literary legitimacy (42).

Hence, the acceptance of avant-garde art at the fin de siècle relied on the artist’s ability to shape an appreciative audience as “the work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art” (Bourdieu 35).

This view of the fin de siècle as a time when major changes in the cultural field forced the agents in the field of restricted production to formulate and legitimise their understanding of art is taken up in my approach to the period; also, it is here that my analysis finds itself indebted to Somigli's study of the role of manifesto writing. As mentioned before, Somigli argues that a re-positioning of the artist and his art proved necessary in the course of the nineteenth century, as both became integrated within, and assimilated by, the forces of the capitalistic market. As the production and reception of artworks were increasingly 'privatized', the claim to the autonomy of art (which helped to set it apart from other commodity goods) required a discourse 'outside' itself.

It was in this context that manifesto writing, hitherto a purely political form, was appropriated by the artistic avant-garde (Somigli 46). Somigli explains (referring to Bourdieu's field of cultural production) that, at the level of the artistic field, there exists an opposition between "literary production that does not call into question the relationship between addresser, addressee and referent," and that "presumes that it can provide a representation of reality" which can be "decoded" by the audience, and a "literary production that makes no such claims, and that in fact affirms the incommensurable distance separating the artist from the public and art from the world" (64). The problem is that even though these two positions stand in complete opposition to each other, they inevitably are forced to operate within the same world, following the same (economic) rules. It is therefore, as Somigli puts it, "only through an audience that they can perform their function"—and this audience needs to be created.

It is in this instance that my argument engages and furthers Somigli's approach, claiming that artists at the fin de siècle aimed at creating their audience not through "extra-literary discourse" (Somigli 64), but through the incorporation of manifestive and didactical elements within their art itself, thus fashioning a form of hybridised art. This hybridisation can be identified, for example, in the very form of fin-de-siècle writing which, in many instances, makes clear generic classification impossible. Thus, critical essays oscillated between art, social criticism and propaganda for the autonomy of art; an artistic and literary journal undermined its

claim to autonomy by its socio-critical undercurrent; and semi-autobiographies dissolved the boundaries between art and life in order to re-establish them.

This latter phenomenon, for example, can be found in Moore's novel *Confessions of a Young Man*, whose autobiographical pretensions are undercut by fictional insertions, blurring the boundaries between art and life. Similarly, its ardent worship of art over life stands in uncomfortable relation to its claim of representing factual life. In this hybridisation life is criticised by, and eventually turned into, art. The concept of hybridisation also helps to understand the apparent irreconcilability of works such as Wilde's "The Soul of Man under Socialism," which incorporates socio-political engagement within the theoretical framework of an aesthetic world view, and a venture such as *The Yellow Book*, which seems to be inherently contradictory through its social engagement on the one hand, and its understanding and promotion of art as autonomous on the other. In this regard, these works seem to require an 'either-or' reading, as their engagement with their audience and their dedication to the concept of 'art for art's sake' appear to co-exist in awkward exclusivity, mirroring the paradoxes of their age.

The understanding of fin-de-siècle works of art as hybrids between autonomous art and manifestive writing requires a short detour to the realm of manifestos. Manifesto writing as a genre posits in itself a problem of definition. Most commonly, it is associated with political or revolutionary writings, which also incorporate the politically engaged art of the Avant-garde. In an attempt to give some coherence to the genre, Janet Lyon lists as some of its particular conventions the inclusion of "a foreshortened, impassioned, and highly selective history;" a "forceful enumeration of grievances or demands or declarations which cast a group's oppression as a struggle between the empowered and the disempowered" and the "use of epigrammatic, declarative rhetoric which directly challenges the named oppressor while uniting its audience in an exhortation to action" (14-15).

As can be gathered from this list, Lyon's approach is more political than aesthetic, focussing on power relations and the political-revolutionary nature of manifesto writing. By contrast, Somigli's definition of a manifesto is much broader, for he understands manifesto writing in the sense of a clearly formulated viewpoint with respect to aesthetics, art and the artist. Although he focuses on the explicitly

manifestive writings of Avant-garde movements such as Decadence in France, Futurism in Italy or Vorticism in England, his understanding of the genre proves to be more comprehensive. In his introduction, he states:

I focus on the genre of manifesto because I believe that it is here, in a textual space ambiguously poised between the aesthetic and the political, between the work of art and propaganda, between practice and theory, that we can both trace the shifting terms of the broader debate of what artists are and do, and follow the development of the increasingly antagonistic relationship between artists and their audiences that characterizes much of modernism and, to a certain extent, of post-modernism (4).

Although Somigli considers the negotiation between the “aesthetic and the political” mainly a part of modernist and post-modernist writing, his definition resonates astoundingly well with the hybrid art of the fin de siècle. Although the fin-de-siècle works which will be discussed in this thesis cannot be classified as ‘typical’ manifesto writings (they clearly lack generic characteristics such as the ones Lyon lists), they fulfil demands such as the communicative aspect and the focus upon and interaction with the addressee of the artwork.

Somigli sees artwork and aesthetic discourse connected in what he calls a “double loop,” with the artwork presenting itself as a “self-contained unit that finds in itself its own justification” and the manifesto as a “supplement” which “super-adds something to the work from outside” (65). He explains:

The [artwork] both proclaims the values asserted by the work itself—that is the autonomy of the work and of the artist vis-à-vis the social and economic norms regulating bourgeois life, the divorce of the language of art from the language of everyday social interaction, etc.—and simultaneously supplies to the lack, the gap or void in the communicative process resulting from the withdrawing of the artist in the space of his subjectivity. [...] [The manifesto] ‘fills a void’—the void resulting from the break in the relationship between artist and audience (ibid).

This observation certainly holds true for the Avant-garde of the early twentieth century. Going back to the fin de siècle, however, Somigli’s distinction between aesthetic product and aesthetic discourse dissolves in the hybridised form of artworks, as aesthetic discourse becomes part of the aesthetic product, proclaiming and simultaneously undermining the autonomy of art and the role of the artist. I argue that the amalgamation of the work of art and an ‘external discourse’ can be seen as a defining characteristic of fin-de-siècle artworks. As such, it holds elements

of autonomous art, fulfilling two roles which seem to be mutually exclusive: on the one hand, it proclaims and represents the “void in the communicative process;” on the other, it tries to fill this void through the inclusion of a meta-text for the aesthetic education of the audience.

1.2 Appropriating an ideal

As can be expected, the process of legitimisation and the effect it had on art was preceded and influenced by a long tradition of intellectual debate, and by the struggle to understand the changing position of the artist within society. The nineteenth century in particular offers multiple examples of artists, sages, intellectuals and philosophers contributing to the ongoing debate, trying to come to terms with the strongly felt effects of capitalism and advancing modernism. Due to the sheer number of writers who engaged with this topic, the ‘historical’ sources used in this thesis are quite selective. To outline the development leading up to the fin de siècle, I chose representatives of the nineteenth-century intellectual elite whose close connections to the fin de siècle by now are well-established: John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater.¹¹ As Laurel Brake proposes, these writers were, together with Oscar Wilde, “key participants in a debate about culture which constitutes part of the history of early modernism” (2001:49). Ruskin, Arnold and Pater can be seen as standing in a mutually influential dialogue, with Arnold and Pater both trying to engage and come to terms with Ruskin’s often authoritative and controlling voice.

While Pater stands closer in relation to the fin de siècle, Ruskin and Arnold can be seen as representing a more traditional and conservative stance, that struggled to reconcile the advent of modernism with the Victorian sensibility of the mid-nineteenth century. As Edward Alexander points out in his biographical comparison of the two sages

both men assumed that the criticism of art was the best preparation for the criticism of society [...]. But they were always plagued by the suspicion that, in turning their attention to society, in performing ‘useful’ activities, whether as critics of education, politics, and economics, or as teachers of art and inspectors of schools and even builders of roads, they had neglected their true work and forsaken their true selves (xiv).

¹¹ Their relevance for the fin de siècle is most obviously confirmed in the writings of Arnold, Pater and Wilde as the latter pair both reference and work with ideas on the role of art and culture and that of the cultural critic which Arnold puts forward in writings such as “Culture and Anarchy” or “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time.” Similarly, in Morris’ work we find reflections of Ruskinian ideas, and Beerbohm, in his essays, refines the Arnoldian “man of culture” to perfection.

Their conception of the artist and his art harkens back to an idealised understanding of the figure of the artist, an understanding that believed him to function as corrective, morally excellent and exemplary for the rest of society. This concept found one of its most succinct expressions in Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795).

The impact of Schiller's writings on nineteenth-century Britain offers a wide field of research still to be covered; however, I intend to limit my discussion of his thoughts to outlining his understanding of the role and position of the artist and his art in order to allow a conceptualization of an artistic ideal that stands in contrast to both the notion of the 'economic' as well as the 'ivory-tower' artist, both of which are closely associated with the fin de siècle. In his *Aesthetic Education*, Schiller comments on the corruption of mankind in its altercation between the "empirical" and the "ideal" man, realizing that mankind had come to a stage in history when reason could no longer further civilization, and when society needed something (or someone) else to help the reconciliation between the ideal and the individual. In Schiller's opinion, one of the ways to help this reconciliation was through art as "Art [...] is absolved from all positive constraint and from all conventions introduced by man; [it] rejoice[s] in absolute immunity from human arbitrariness" (AE 55). As such, art contained truth that could neither be corrupted nor taken away. However, in order to create such art the artist needed to claim a special place among his contemporaries, and paradoxically, this meant that he was to be within, yet not part of society: "The artist is indeed the child of his age; but woe to him if he is at the same time its ward, or worse still, its minion!" (AE 55).

Yet Schiller's idea of art and the artist had a deeper purpose than merely to effect their separation from society. In his eyes, the necessity to sever the ties to society only served the aim of renewing this connection in order to influence and educate, allowing for the full potential of man to be developed:

Work for your contemporaries; but create what they need, not what they praise. [...] Think of them as they ought to be, when called upon to influence them; think of them as they are, when tempted to act on their behalf. [...] In vain will you assail their precepts, in vain condemn their practice; but on their leisure hours you can try your shaping hand. [...] Surround them, wherever you meet them, with the great and noble forms of genius, and encompass them about with the symbols of perfection, until Semblance conquer Reality, and Art triumph over Nature (AE 61).

This belief in the redeeming power of art indicates an understanding of the artist as genius, otherworldly yet sympathetic, looking beyond the immediate to something that transcends reality, and conferring this vision to society through his art.

It was this idealised view of the artist which writers such as Ruskin, Arnold and Pater tried to integrate into and adapt to the increasingly sceptical and rational atmosphere of the modern capitalistic age, thus pre-figuring the struggle for the artist's legitimisation at the fin de siècle.¹² Especially when looking at Ruskin's and Arnold's understanding of the cultural critic, the influence of ideas which Schiller put forward in his *Aesthetic Education* becomes obvious. Without a doubt, both had at least read parts of Schiller's work (Arnold quotes elements of it in a letter to a friend),¹³ and even though Ruskin judged Schiller from his writing as having "the feeblest hold of facts and the dullest imagination," he was, as Elizabeth Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby point out,

probably more indebted to [Schiller] than he realised. And not only for his indictment of modern fragmentation [...], but for his general awareness of the artist's power to forge the qualities he abstracts from material reality into a new unity with an aesthetic consistency and reality of its own (clviii).

As Wilkinson and Willoughby evidence, Schiller's aesthetic-philosophical treatise on the social and political function of art and the artist arrived in Britain fragmented and often misunderstood. Thomas Carlyle, for example, who was one of the first to introduce Schiller's thoughts to the British public in his *Life of Schiller* (1825), omitted and falsely emphasised aspects of Schiller's writing that proved essential for an understanding of his aesthetic theory. According to Wilkinson and Willoughby, this was not "due to lack of perception. It was rather a question of things glimpsed, but then deliberately repudiated" (cl). Thus, Carlyle's attempt to "reduce public endeavour in terms of private need, to explain it away as at best sublimation, at worst personal compensation" led to the dismissal of the "political implications of Schiller's 'palabra about the nature of the fine arts'" (cli).

¹² This connection has been acknowledged in one of the earliest and most comprehensive of biographies on Arnold, Trilling's *Matthew Arnold*. See also DeLaura's article "Arnold and Goethe."

¹³ James Berlin, for example, examines the influence of Schiller on Arnold's understanding of the artist as reflected in his poetry and points out that Arnold, even if it cannot be proven that he read Schiller's writings in the original, was most certainly familiar with them through his two contemporaries, Carlyle and Bowler-Lytton (1983:616).

Consequently

a theory of education which took as its point of departure the political situation at a crucial point in history, and had as its aim the betterment of the Common Weal, was presented to the English as though it were advocating a surrogate for religion, and a purely personal religion at that (cli-clii).

This tendency of Schiller's readers to pick and choose passages of his *Aesthetic Education*, engaging with and repeating them outside the context of the whole argument, led to a fragmented and often wrong understanding of his ideas, especially in Britain. Wilkinson and Willoughby write:

The text Schiller chose was of a complexity appropriate to the nature of the problem: 'Only connect—but on no account by confusing.' His followers usually seem content with one half of it or the other: 'Connect at all costs and never mind the confusion' or 'Keep things distinct and never mind the connexion'. They preached on either 'Art for Morality's sake': like Ruskin treating its works as 'sermons in stone', and naïvely assuming that a sense of beauty could not fail to further the performance of moral deeds; or, like William Morris, confusing art with craft, pleasure in labour with joy in contemplation, the social and religious function of art with its aesthetic function. Or else on 'Art for Art's sake': like Pater exhorting their flock, in a kind of inverted asceticism, to deny art any fruits at all beyond that of starting the spirit into a sharp and eager apprehension, and enabling the individual 'to burn always with a hard, gem-like flame'; or, like Wilde, insisting that 'the sphere of Art and the sphere of Ethics' are not only 'absolutely distinct' but 'absolutely separate' (clvi-clvii).

However, even though these appropriations proved to be distorted and often mistaken, they also show that Schiller's ideas definitely influenced the intellectual climate of nineteenth-century Britain. Reading through his *Aesthetic Education*, one finds that it foreshadows certain aspects of the nineteenth century, and particularly the fin de siècle, in that it engages with the social role of the artist, the purpose of art in the development of the individual and, through it, of society, and the possibility of the realisation of a perfect state through the inclusion of autonomous art within life.

As such, the thoughts that Schiller formulated in his *Aesthetic Education* responded to issues that were still prevalent in and defined industrialized British society at the fin de siècle. The same problems he encountered with the concept of the modern state and modern man still preoccupied intellectuals throughout the nineteenth century, and artists at the fin de siècle found themselves grappling with many of the same philosophical and social issues Schiller had raised a century earlier. As Willoughby and Wilkinson point out, Schiller's treatise was

an impassioned analysis of the cultural predicament of modern man: the evils of specialization [...]; the dissociation of what once was united—sensibility and thought, feeling and morality, body and mind; [...] the reduction of man to a mere cog in the wheel of an over-developed society; the de-humanization of the citizen in a State where he is valued for the function he performs rather than the being that he is (xii).

Schiller believed the artist to play a vital role in this turbulent period of change. It was, in particular, the artist's imaginative and almost prophetic power that he considered elementary for the betterment of society. This importance that Schiller attributed the imagination finds its equivalent in writings such as Wilde's fairy tales and Beerbohm's essays.

It is important to note that Schiller was not alone in his idealised understanding of art and the social function of the artist. Calinescu, drawing parallels between the philosophy of the French utopian socialist Henri-Claude Saint-Simon and of the English artist Percy Shelley, writes:

We find in Shelley's essay [...] some of the ideas stressed in the writings of Saint-Simon and his disciples. First, the image of the poet (or the creative artist in general) as primarily a man of imagination. Then the conception of the poet as herald of the future. The unique social function of the artist is emphasised by both Saint-Simon and Shelley. But whereas Saint-Simon tends to favour a pedagogical and topical view of the artist's mission, Shelley seems to think that this same mission is carried out more naturally [...] through the display of the imaginative power ... (105-106).

It was exactly the artist's imaginative and almost prophetic power that came under attack in the course of the nineteenth century,¹⁴ especially as the notion of the transcendent began to lose validity. Deprived of absolutes, the single 'Truth' that Schiller claimed was to be found in art was turned into mere 'truths'. Relativism entered the realm of life and necessitated a re-definition of art and its relationship to life on the one hand, and to a transcendent ideal on the other. Devoid of an external reference point, the artist was forced to re-define his role in relation to society, while simultaneously trying to re-capture an idealised conception of art.

The notion of the artist as formulated in Schiller's text is relevant for this thesis as it foreshadows the fusion of the aesthetic and the didactic that happened at the fin de siècle, while also presenting the artist as social agent and mediator between the

¹⁴ Shelley's essay "The Defence of Poetry," for example, was written in response T.L. Peacock's satiric essay "The Four Ages of Poetry" which disclaims the avant-garde position of the artist in the present age, calling him "a semi-barbarian in a civilized community. He lives in the days of the past."

two. Consequently, this concept helps to explain the social significance of an idealised understanding of art as autonomous—an art that exists as a distinct and separate sphere from life and (capitalistic) society. The social significance of the combination of all these elements is most fully formulated in philosophical writings such as Theodore Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, who—standing in the tradition of German aesthetic thought—argues that

Art...is not social only [...] because it derives its material content from society. Rather, it is social primarily because it stands opposed to society. Now this opposition art can mount only when it has become autonomous. By congealing into an entity unto itself—rather than obeying existing social norms and thus proving itself to be 'socially useful'—art criticizes society just by being there. Pure and immanently elaborated art is a tacit critique of the debasement of man by a condition that is moving towards a total-exchange society where everything is a for-other ("Autonomy of Art" 242).

It is in the oscillation between re-assigning art once again its autonomous status, and legitimising the artist within his visionary and exceptional role that the art of the fin de siècle finds its purpose. Looking at texts and artworks such as *The Yellow Book*, Wilde's essays and fairy-tales, Moore's fervid criticism of contemporary society in his *Confessions of a Young Man*, Beerbohm's didactical, yet highly enjoyable, engagement with his readers in his essays, and Morris' critique of society versus his idealised conception of art, one notices that they all stress the necessity of understanding the relationship between the social and the aesthetic, which is expressed in the artist-audience relationship within the work of art. As I have indicated before, it is this combination that gives the art and literature at the fin de siècle its unique flavour and helps to understand the paradoxes in the co-existence of 'art for art's sake' and social engagement; the autonomy of art and the manifestive approach to audience education; and the artist in his ivory tower and the artist as social critic.

1.3 From Arnold to Beerbohm: chapter synopsis

The development and appropriation of Schiller's notion of the artist as social agent through the writings of Ruskin, Arnold, Pater and, eventually, Wilde as a representative of the fin de siècle will be elaborated on in the first chapter of this thesis. I intend to illustrate how the artist's struggle for re-definition and legitimisation and the problematic relationship between artist and society at the fin

de siècle are foreshadowed in Ruskin's essays on art and literature, Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864) and "Culture and Anarchy" (1869), and Pater's *The Renaissance* (1893, 4th ed.), together with several of his essays. Developing Schiller's thoughts and mirroring his struggle to reconcile a social ideal with concepts of modern life, Ruskin, Arnold and Pater deeply influenced the group of fin de siècle artists that form the corpus of this thesis.

The most obvious examples of this influence, as will be shown in the first chapter, are found in Wilde's essay "The Critic as Artist" (1891) and the thoughts he formulated in the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). The aim of this chapter is to map out the difficulties that transformed and challenged the idealised conception of art and the artist in the course of the nineteenth century and to thereby arrive at an understanding as to how it influenced and found expression in fin-de-siècle art. Also, I am going to indicate how the art of the fin de siècle prefigures 'what is to come' in the realm of art. For this reason, I will briefly delineate an interpretation of the artistic ideal through a twentieth-century representative of German Romantic tradition, Theodore Adorno, and analyse how Wilde's essay foreshadows and explores thoughts that Adorno himself later formulates in writings such as "The Autonomy of Art" (1970). Having thereby established a historical and ideological framework, it is then possible to analyse and explain in the following chapters the apparent paradoxes found in the hybrid forms of fin-de-siècle writing, which are characterised by the co-existence of social criticism and promotion of the autonomy of art, and the simultaneity of social engagement and artistic detachment.

While this first chapter mostly serves an introductory purpose, the following four chapters are going to closely examine examples of fin-de-siècle art with regards to the representation of the figure of the artist, the artist-audience relationship which is implied in the work, the incorporation of social criticism and the authors' understanding of the purpose and nature of art. The reader will notice that the focus concerning these questions of the artist's legitimisation and the understanding of art shifts slightly from chapter to chapter, though many aspects overlap and re-appear in different form. Thus, for example, the second chapter on Wilde and Moore's writings concentrates on instances where these two writers try to reconcile the artist's social responsibility with the concept of autonomous art; yet, at the same time, the chapter

will also touch upon aspects of the didactic artist-audience relationship that features predominantly in the last chapter on Beerbohm's writing.

Chapter Two analyses Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888)¹⁵ and Wilde's essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism" (1891) together with a selection of his fairy tales with respect to their social engagement and their understanding of art and the artist in a social context. Both writers (though Moore only in his early years) can be considered representatives of Aestheticism. Consequently, in its attention to the socio-critical engagement of the authors, this chapter stands in contrast to the more 'economically-focussed' readings of this movement such as those offered by Freedman or Gagnier. However, it not only argues against the purely economic understanding of Aestheticism, but also against the concept of disinterested 'other-worldliness' that is so often connected with the movement. In this, I follow an approach to Aestheticism which Diana Maltz has recently put forward in *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes*. In her study she demonstrates that the perception of Aestheticism as either anti-social and other-worldly, or essentially selfish and self-promotional, is too narrow to fully do justice to the movement in all its aspects. Moving away from either perspective, Maltz evidences that Aestheticism's representatives and members in fact showed a deep social engagement in their desire to 'distribute' beauty and culture among the poor and working classes.

While Maltz focuses her study on the connection between Aestheticism and social reform, and the introduction of art into the lives of the working class and poor by end-of-nineteenth century social reformers such as Octavia Hill or Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, I am going to appropriate her concept of "Social Aestheticism", which she uses to describe the practical approach of Aesthetic reformers, to apply to the artists themselves and their understanding of their works of art. My concept of "Social Aestheticism" therefore differs from Maltz's insofar as it refers to the socially motivated intention of aesthetic education and social change within the works of art themselves. Whereas Maltz investigates the use of art within the social

¹⁵ There exist nine different (published) versions of *Confessions*, for Moore revised and re-published the text several times between 1887 and 1923. I am going to work with the first version, which was published in book form in English in 1888, because it most directly mirrors the Aesthetic mind of the young Moore. In later version Moore's more self-conscious and critical approach to his early text led to considerable qualifications and changes.

environment of nineteenth-century working classes, I will show how both Wilde and Moore incorporated within their apparently disinterested and Aesthetic art a deep social concern. Therefore, whilst both Wilde and Moore proclaim the autonomy of art, their Aesthetic attitude is undermined by a sharp criticism of society, and a desire to formulate and legitimise the role of the artist. Through their art, Moore and Wilde act as social critics, simultaneously attempting a re-definition of the artist and his role in society and presenting him as a nostalgic version of an idealised saviour figure. As such, Wilde and Moore present themselves, in their role as artists, as social critics and educators of their audience; also, through the oscillation between two different discourses, their writings reflect elements of the hybridised text.

In spite of not being entirely able to fulfil the ideal of the autonomous artist and his art, Wilde's and Moore's work can be understood as attempts to pave the way for realizing this ideal. However, especially with regards to Wilde, it is important to note that my intention is not to formulate a coherent ethical position as has been the aim of critics such as Amanda Anderson, Bruce Bashford and Julia Brown. While I agree that Wilde's ethics and aesthetics can be to some extent reconciled, I am going to shift the focus on an area that Anderson touches upon in her study of Wilde: the effects of the author's ethical positioning within an aesthetic context on the audience. This chapter will investigate the area of Wilde's (as well as Moore's) writings which, in Anderson's words, "belongs neither to the side of conventional morality nor to the side of wilful aestheticism" (148). Thereby, the emphasis is shifted from the authors and their individual ethical and aesthetic stance to their understanding of themselves as 'social' artists and their relationship to the audience.

The third chapter looks at William Morris, who was not only part of the artistic but also of the political avant-garde of the 1890s. Unlike artists such as Moore, Wilde and Beerbohm, Morris often incorporated a directly political purpose into his artworks. This holds especially true for his utopian novel *News from Nowhere* (1891), a work whose political purpose and democratic approach to art has mostly overshadowed its important contribution to the aesthetic realm of the fin de siècle. Even though Morris wrote the novel with a socialist readership in mind, his concern with the questions of how art should be connected to life, and of the artist's position within society, underlay the text, turning it into a valuable asset for understanding the

process of defining and legitimising the artist and his art. The focus of this chapter is mostly on the use of the imaginative power of the artist which was so highly valued among early nineteenth-century artists.

Morris' text represents another paradoxical constellation of fin-de-siècle writing: the combination of an idealised understanding of the figure of the artist within a socio-political context. As opposed to reading Morris' novel as a political dream, I am going to look at the novel with regards to its aesthetic content, as well as its context and form, contrasting its 'being art' with the idealised version of art that it contains. Thus, I will try to make sense of the difficult relationship between art and life displayed through the content of the novel, as well as its own understanding of itself as a work of art. This reading of *News from Nowhere* places Morris the artist within the fin-de-siècle context of attempting to legitimise the artist and his art by demonstrating the importance of his visionary imagination. Therefore, rather than being mere "posturing" or an example of "non-art," as Patrick Brantlinger suggests (40), *News from Nowhere* can be read as an example of the fin de siècle's attempt to re-define art and demonstrate its purpose within contemporary society. This interpretation follows more closely James Buzard's understanding of *News from Nowhere* as an "anti-novel," meaning that it opposes the "great bourgeois novels that preceded it [...] not by departing from their methods but by giving those methods an intensity and heightened self-consciousness" (446-447).

Similarly to Wilde's and Moore's texts, the fin-de-siècle character of *News from Nowhere* is displayed in the contrast between the content describing a world of ideal art and its use of art as a medium. *News from Nowhere* thus presents another example of the manifestive writing of fin-de-siècle artists, pleading for and demonstrating a new and better understanding of art and the artist. What Morris confronts his reader with is the realisation of the Schillerean ideal, in which every person might attain to the sensibility of an artist, and the omnipresence of art and beauty would provide the space wherein a perfect society might flourish.

After having thus established the importance of the artistic imagination, Chapter Four is then going to examine *The Yellow Book* as a fin-de-siècle enterprise that strikes the reader through its subversive approach to the concept of audience education. *The Yellow Book* has always been considered exemplary of the spirit of

the 1890s due to its close connection to the notion of decadence. However, in this chapter I am going to elucidate how it displays its fin-de-siècle character more succinctly in its treatment of the figure of the artist and in its subversive use of art for didactic purposes, while simultaneously promoting the concept of the autonomy of art. I am going to demonstrate how *The Yellow Book*, underneath its veneer of disinterested autonomy, was first and foremost aimed at the selection and education of a ‘connoisseur’ audience.

Thus, *The Yellow Book* most closely parallels Greenberg’s definition of the avant-garde: I argue that it should not be considered avant-garde because it introduced something breathtakingly new and different (in fact, *The Yellow Book* is more correctly characterised by its inclusion of traditional and modern artists and its ability to make room for past and future);¹⁶ rather, it pursued a critical, social and educational purpose and, at the same time, reinforced the necessity to establish art and life as separate spheres in order for art to be effective. *The Yellow Book* therefore was strikingly fin de siècle because of the obvious contradiction between its expressed purpose (‘being art’) and its socio-critical approach. Also, it was explicitly aimed at an exclusive and select audience; yet the audience that was implicitly addressed was a much more broadly defined middle class community. Under the guise of disinterestedness and exclusivity, *The Yellow Book* approached a still uninitiated audience in order to communicate and educate this audience in its perception of art. Subsequently, the role of the artist constitutes a central topic in a large number of *The Yellow Book*’s contributions. A closer analysis of its texts and drawings is thus going to help form a clearer understanding of how the avant-garde artists of the fin de siècle saw their role and how they communicated their perception to their audience.

Chapter Five is going to look more closely at one of the most famous associates of *The Yellow Book*, the essayist and caricaturist Max Beerbohm. It examines Beerbohm’s early essays as well as his later works, which can be read as examples of a ‘mature’ style of the fin de siècle. Whereas the previous chapter discusses one of Beerbohm’s essays within the socially engaged framework of *The Yellow Book* and focuses mostly on his subversive criticism of society (thus emphasizing the socially

¹⁶ For example, the first volume contained contributions by artists as diverse as Arthur Symons, George Egerton, Aubrey Beardsley, Henry James, Arthur Waugh and Frederic Leighton

engaged side of his writing), this chapter is going to present Beerbohm's work as an expression of the aesthetic-oriented, educational art of the fin de siècle. Beerbohm's essays are known for their light-hearted engagement with their audience and their subject, and his art has mostly been analysed with respect to its parodic elements. To a large extent, however, the didactical effect his use of irony has on the artist-audience relationship has not yet been investigated. In this chapter I am going to evidence how Beerbohm's writing epitomises the fin de siècle in its attempt to understand, legitimise and re-define the role of art and the artist through its inclusion of didactical elements within the notion of autonomous art.

Beerbohm wanted to promote the autonomy of art, relishing its ability to open up doors to a realm apart from life and life's dictates. In his essays, Beerbohm demonstrated to his readers how to enjoy autonomous art, while also educating them as to *why* art's autonomy was important. Thus, Beerbohm perfected the aesthetic-didactic style of the fin de siècle which alternates between detachment and exclusivity on the part of the author and simultaneous engagement with the reader. This oscillating quality in the artist-audience relationship can be seen as one of the centrally defining features of Beerbohm's work. Switching between fact and fiction, between engagement with the reader and withdrawal into the world of fiction, Beerbohm's essays provide an ideal example of the hybridisation of texts which serves the re-definition of the role of art and the artist on the one hand, and the forming and education of the audience on the other.

In Beerbohm's texts, these elements are realised through 'telling' as well as 'showing', as direct interaction with the reader about the role of art and the status of the artist is juxtaposed with prosaic fictional paragraphs which draw attention to the necessary separation of art and life and the importance of the autonomy of art. As Beerbohm upheld this stylistic approach well into the twentieth century, his essays also demonstrate how the avant-garde art of the fin de siècle contrast with the art of High Modernism. Even though the art of the fin de siècle and the process of legitimising the artist paved the way for the Avant-garde and the Modernism of the twentieth century, this thesis will demonstrate that it had its own idiosyncratic characteristics that distinguished it (in an aesthetic sense) from what was to come.

II. Leaving the Ivory Tower: The Artist as Social Agent

Humanity has lost its dignity; but Art has rescued it and preserved it in significant stone. Truth lives on in the illusion of Art, and it is from this copy, or after-image, that the original image will once again be restored. [...] Even before Truth's triumphant light can penetrate the recesses of the human heart, the poet's imagination will intercept its rays, and the peaks of humanity will be radiant while the dews of night still linger in the valley.

(Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*)

As can be seen from the epigraph, Schiller considered the artist and his art to occupy a special place within society. As avant-garde prophet, keeper of tradition and seeker of the truth, the artist was the one who preserved “humanity's dignity” within his art. His task was the aesthetic education of society such that people could partake in true culture and knowledge. Humanity could no longer see truth, and it was only by the poet's imagination that mankind could catch a glimpse of “Truth's triumphant light.” Schiller thereby emphasised the importance of the poet's imagination that was expressed in his art for a society that had lost its dignity. He explained that the two main determinants of human development, “Nature” and “Reason,” had brought mankind as far as they could; and whilst the separation of the two had served humanity well, and had been necessary for the progress of civilization, it had also led to a fragmentation of man. Schiller argued that this destruction of the totality of man's nature could only be cured by means of “higher Art” (AE 43) for it was the ennobling of each individual's character that would bring about the purification of the whole society (AE 55).

This purification could only be achieved through the balanced co-existence and development of both Nature and Reason, which art could speak to, and promote, through what Schiller called “Spieltrieb”—the play-drive (AE 102). According to Schiller “[man] is only fully a human being when he plays” (AC 107), and it is in art that this play-drive is realised and fostered. Hence, the concept of the play-drive is, as Schiller claimed, “capable of bearing the whole edifice of the art of the beautiful, and of the still more difficult art of living” (AE 107-109). Consequently, the role of the artist was vital to society, for the realisation of full humanity would be encouraged and developed through art. In this, the artist had a calling that went

beyond the “needs of daily life” and “futile busyness [sic]” (AE 57); he was not subject to the law of humankind because his task was to express ideals, “both in semblance and in truth,” thereby submitting himself to a “universal Law” that reached past the fleetingness of the moment and towards an “Absolute” (AE 57-59).

Whilst this idealised understanding of the importance of the artist and his art slowly lost validity in the course of the nineteenth century, the situation of society itself did not seem to change. Thus, Matthew Arnold wrote that his contemporaries had lost touch with “the best which has been thought and said in the world” (CA 190), and Ruskin, in his lecture “The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century” (1884) warned his students that

for the last twenty years, England, and all foreign nations, either tempting her, or following her, have blasphemed the name of God deliberately and openly; and have done iniquity by proclamation, every man doing as much injustice to his brother as is in his power to do. Of states in such moral gloom every seer of old predicted the physical gloom, saying, ‘The light shall be darkened and the heavens thereof, and the stars shall withdraw their shining’” (SW 277).

In the following, I am going to investigate how Schiller’s understanding of art and the role of artist was adapted to this context of nineteenth-century scepticism, and how, eventually, this development triggered the attempt to express and legitimise a ‘revised’ aesthetic appreciation. As has been mentioned before, the growing commercialisation of art and the gradual incorporation of the artist and art into the economic cycle of capitalistic society began to replace the Schillerean concept of socially relevant art. The notion that art and the artist served a higher purpose was pushed aside in favour of a perception of art as a commercial good and as a simple means of earning one’s livelihood through meeting society’s demands for light entertainment.

However, when looking at the writings of Victorian intellectuals such as Ruskin, Arnold and Pater, who engaged in public debate on the purpose of art and the role of the artist, it seems that Schiller’s ideals still presented themselves as viable alternatives to the capitalistic view of art and the artist. Even though Schiller formulated his notion of the artist as social agent almost a century earlier, remnants of his propositions became the antitheses to the increasingly economically orientated concept of the ‘artist as professional’. They were reflected, for example, in Ruskin’s

‘triumvirate’ of art, truth and beauty; they anticipated Arnold’s struggle between the man of culture and society; and they were contained and altered in Pater’s notion of the perfection of the individual through the influence of art. The writings of these Victorian sages thus mirror a change in the understanding of art under the influence of an increasingly capitalistic mentality on the one hand, and a transcendental scepticism which was brought about by scientific empiricism on the other.

The objective of this chapter is, firstly, to trace the use and development of the idealised notion of art through the writings of Ruskin, Arnold and Pater; and secondly, to determine the influence this development had on the role of the artist within society at the fin de siècle. Ruskin and Arnold, especially, found themselves, personally and professionally, deeply involved in the debate on the nature of art, its social purpose and the artist’s role within society. In their writing as well as in their lives, they tried to reconcile elements of Schillerian ideals with the problematic changes in the understanding not only of art, but also of life, introduced by the advent of sceptical, rational and utilitarian world views. This attempt to reconcile and re-define the purpose of art found expression in texts such as Ruskin’s essays and lectures on art, and Arnold’s “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” and one of his best-known essays, “Culture and Anarchy.”

In the course of this debate, Ruskin’s writing still reflected the quintessential Victorian moralistic stance towards the concept of art and the artist, being thereby much closer to Schiller’s understanding of art’s moral absolutes. As Simon Grimble points out, “Ruskin was centrally concerned with trying to work out a strong and coherent moral position in a world where the principles of order [...] seemed to be undermined” (xi). Arnold’s writings, on the other hand, showed the struggle with paradoxes and contradictory demands that faced the artist, or the ‘man of culture’, within the framework of modern scepticism and the loss of absolutes. Thus, whereas Ruskin still agreed with the Schillerean notion that there were moral absolutes such as truth and beauty, Arnold’s often contradictory theories expressed the struggle to come to terms with the advent of modern sensibilities.

Later, writings such as Pater’s *The Renaissance* adapted the idealised notion of the artist to concepts of modern rationalism: disallowing the possibility of a transcendental truth, Pater tried to legitimise art through its singular effect on its

audience at the moment of aesthetic contemplation, thus fully embracing the doctrines of scientific empiricism, and putting all emphases on subjective impressions and the importance of living fully in the here and now. Thereby, Pater eventually subscribed to the loss of absolutes and embraced the ideal of art as being valid in itself, elevating subjective impressions above transcendental truth. He tried to establish a 'secular', yet still idealised, understanding of the artist and the purpose of art. However, even whilst distancing itself from the concept of art as based on transcendental truth, Pater's understanding was still an antipode to the all-encompassing commercialisation and capitalisation, which swept through the end of the nineteenth century.

Having followed this development of an idealised notion of the artist through the writings of these "key participants" in the cultural debate, I am going to briefly analyse Wilde's "The Critic as Artist" as a direct response to Ruskin's, Arnold's and Pater's writings, reading it as an example of the fin-de-siècle answer to the ongoing socio-aesthetic struggle of the nineteenth century. Wilde's essay will serve as an exemplary 'case-study' to demonstrate how artists at the fin de siècle re-negotiated the ambiguities and paradoxes with which their predecessors grappled; yet it will also show how Wilde's aesthetic philosophy contains and foreshadows elements of Adorno's twentieth-century understanding of art and the role of the artist as cultural critic.

2.1 Art as means or art as end?

And after a space God spake, and said to the Man, 'Seeing that I may not send thee into Hell, surely I will send thee unto Heaven. Even unto Heaven will I send thee.' And the Man cried out, 'Thou canst not.' And God said to the Man, 'Wherefore can I not send thee unto Heaven, and for what reason?' 'Because never, and in no place, have I been able to imagine it,' answered the Man.

(Wilde, "The House of Judgement")

The nineteenth century experienced the advent of positivist rationalism and transcendental scepticism, and its intellectual atmosphere was characterised by a lively dialogue between promoters of science, litigants of religion and advocates of

the arts.¹⁷ “Secularization, professionalization, rationalization, and specialization of spheres of knowledge [...] were the subject of sophisticated debate” (Garnett 196), and life started to be “dominated by scientific empiricism” (Giddings 9). This scientific empiricism and its findings shook man’s belief in the reliability of the Bible, so that a God of absolutes and a transcendental world became, to many, a remote possibility rather than a certainty. The effects of this transcendental scepticism were formulated in Wilde’s poem in prose, “The House of Judgment” (1893), which emphasised the importance of the imagination. Confined to the life in the here and now and the empirical reality of existence, the man in Wilde’s poem loses the ability to see beyond his present existence. Heaven is turned into a non-imaginable place, and, through the loss of imagination, has become impossible. Man cannot enter Heaven because he has never been able to imagine it.

Yet Wilde the artist, through the very act of writing a prose poem about such an unimaginable location, provides access to an artistic reality of things impossible, thereby re-introducing into the world that which had been lost. For Schiller and many of his contemporaries and successors, this ability of art to reach beyond present actuality and to express “Truth” and “Beauty” enlisted it in the service of higher ideals and absolutes. Art, in this sense, could express something of eternity, and its ability to transcend the human world justified and even necessitated its existence because it served as a means of enlarging man’s horizon. It pointed towards something higher and nobler than the present life; in Wilde’s words, it enabled man to “imagine Heaven.”

Nineteenth-century scepticism regarding the possibility of a transcendental reality with absolute values and truth forced people to re-think the social role and purpose of art: if it could not refine mankind any more through its reference to higher and nobler things, then what was its purpose, apart from mere entertainment? What social function did it have, if any? How could it be (re-)defined as socially useful and serviceable to society rather than as a triviality and another good on the consumer market? These questions occupied John Ruskin, art critic and Victorian sage, most of

¹⁷ See, for example, Otis’s anthology *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century* which shows the wide range of literary and scientific writings of the time and the way both camps engage with each other.

his life, and they defined, to a large extent, his relation to the society in which he played a part. In an article in *Vanity Fair*, Thomas Gibson Bowles described Ruskin as follows:

There is, perhaps, no harder fate in store for a man than to be irredeemably at variance with the spirit of the country and the times in which he lives; and it is Mr. Ruskin's great misfortune to be an incurable poet and artist in a materialistic and money-grubbing generation. He is so entirely out of harmony with all of modern life that surrounds him that he is by many regarded as an anachronism rather than as a man, and that his views are looked upon rather as vain protests than as serious opinion. It is, however, his greatest merit that he is utterly careless of the current habits of thought, and that he has thus been enabled fearlessly to supply to them precisely those elements in which they are most wanting. The English people have become meanly practical, and he is grandly unpractical; they have become essentially commonplace, and he is gloriously poetical; they believe in nothing more than cash, he believes in nothing less; they are thoroughly positive, he is thoroughly ideal. It has been reserved for him, in spite of all such disadvantages, to produce works which from the mere power of their language have captivated even the most indifferent, and which have set many thinking in quite a new direction (5).

Reading this portrayal of Ruskin, it is easy to see him as a representative of Schiller's 'artist as prophet'. According to Bowles, both Ruskin's contribution to society and his critique of it were results of him being an "incurable poet and artist." He stood in contrast to society and through this oppositional stance he represented an alternative that could potentially undermine the uniformity of capitalism. Ruskin was thus, in a most literal sense, the 'artist as social critic'.

It has often been noted that there seems to exist an incongruity between the young art-critic Ruskin and his older self who indulged himself in socio-critically and politically motivated tirades against contemporary society. Most of Ruskin's later writing proved to be hugely unpopular with his readers. He was claimed to have gone slowly insane after he started showing interest in political economy, and many of his contemporaries did not understand why he began to meddle in affairs that seemed to go far beyond his aesthetic abilities. There seemed to be a determination that an art critic and artist could not be both politically and socially interested at the same time. This determination even went so far as to say that "readers of Victorian non-fictional prose were once encouraged to believe that John Ruskin had died in 1860. Not literally, certainly, but intellectually and imaginatively" (O'Gorman 1). This negative view of Ruskin continued well into the twentieth century. In particular

his later texts have long been considered ‘unworthy’ of academic interest, and “his refusal to limit himself to any single field of thought [...] became an important reason for the decline of his reputation in the twentieth century” (Birch 1999:1-2).

These later writings have only recently become the subject of thorough academic analysis.¹⁸ Birch, for example, notes that

the vigour and diversity of [Ruskin’s] legacy is beginning to be fully acknowledged. Looking seriously at his late works has helped to define the terms of the debates that we have come to take for granted as the foundation of twentieth-century culture. Science, education, social politics, aesthetics—all bear that marks of Ruskin’s far-reaching influence (1999:3).

In this diversity of intellectual, social and political thought which marks Ruskin’s writings, the importance he attributed to the effects of the aesthetic on the audience never completely vanished (Landow 124). All his life, Ruskin tried to combine the artist and social critic in one person, using his art in order to change man. He spoke to them through his art, and thus even his early writings as an art critic are full of socio-critical elements and attempts to change and educate his audience. Although they were subtler than his later politically-motivated writings, they were in fact meant to produce the same effect.

Ruskin was an art critic because he believed that, through art, people could be taught how to see the truth. One of the most important things was to understand that it was the thought that made a piece of art beautiful, and not necessarily its form. To Ruskin, art was a unique expression of the thoughts of imperfect man. If in art only perfection but not thought was to be found, it would prove that mankind had lost part of its humanity. In “The Nature of Gothic” (1853), he wrote:

You can teach a man [...] to copy and carve any number of given lines or forms, with admirable speed and perfect precision; and you find his work perfect of its kind: but if you ask him to think about any of those forms, [...] he stops; his execution becomes hesitating; he thinks, and ten to one he thinks wrong; [...]. But you have made a man of him for all that (SW 40).

Ruskin professed that it was no use to merely disseminate light without first teaching people how to recognize it. He seemed to have come to believe that even though the absolutes of truth and beauty still existed, people were no longer able to

¹⁸ See for example, Birch *Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern*, Austin *The Practical Ruskin* or O’Gorman *Late Ruskin: New Contexts*

discern them. In his inaugural address to the Cambridge School of Art (1858), he wondered:

To be taught to read—what is the use of that, if you know not whether what you read is false or true? [...] To be taught to think—nay, what is the use of being able to think, if you have nothing to think of? But to be taught to see is to gain word and thought at once, and both true. [...] we want, in this world of ours, very often to be able to see in the dark—that’s the great gift of all;—but at any rate to see no matter by what light, so only we can see things as they are (SW 95).

Therefore, whilst echoing Schiller’s conviction that it was through the appreciation of beauty that morals were refined (AE 63), Ruskin also believed that it was necessary to teach people how to understand and perceive beauty. As Dinah Birch points out in her introduction to Ruskin’s selected writings, “accurate looking is the foundation of Ruskin’s critical thought [...]. As [Ruskin] understands them, spiritual vision and physical vision are not separate. Both have the power to shape action, and to motivate reform” (x). In Ruskin’s eyes, the development and refinement of sight was best served through teaching people the techniques of art (even if they would never use them to actually produce art), and also through making them study “examples of excellent art, standards to which [one] may at once refer on any questionable point, and by the study of which [one] may gradually attain an instinctive sense of right” (SW 197).

In *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder* Elizabeth Helsinger points out that Ruskin “examines art [...] from the perspective of the spectator or reader rather than [...] from the perspective of the artist” (4). It is for this reason that Ruskin’s art criticism always has an educational element to it. His aim was to turn his readership into art critics themselves, enabling them to see and perceive beauty and truth, not only in art, but also in life. Consequently, the idea of aesthetic education played a key role in Ruskin’s writings. Not only did he describe and criticise paintings, he also encouraged his readers to see and think for themselves. Helsinger explains: “As with seeing, Ruskin’s strategy for improving his audience’s skill at reading and speaking is to try to make them do it: to demand active and even difficult reading and seeing. His own prose is an important tool in this process” (281). For Ruskin, the content and the form of his writing were equally important. Content, which always referred back to the notion of perception and how to understand and see the world, was always

realised in the style of writing itself. Hence, whilst the content of his lectures and texts was deeply educational and an expression of his aesthetic theory, their style represented an aesthetic element which qualified them as art.

In one passage from “The Nature of Gothic,” for example, Ruskin tried to communicate the difference between Northern and Southern countries by asking his reader to take a look at the world from a bird’s perspective. However, he did not merely ask his reader to assume this position; indeed, he himself adopted this perspective, and thereby enabled the reader to perceive what he wanted him to perceive. Thus, Ruskin directed and accompanied his audience on its journey to another, aesthetically defined standpoint:

Let us, for a moment, try to raise ourselves even above the level of [the swallow’s and stork’s] flight, and imagine the Mediterranean lying beneath us like an irregular lake, and all its ancient promontories sleeping in the sun: here and there an angry spot of thunder, a grey stain of storm, moving upon the burning field; and here and there a fixed wreath of white volcano smoke, surrounded by its circle of ashes; but for the most part a great peacefulness of light, Syria and Greece, Italy and Spain, laid like pieces of golden pavement into the sea-blue, chased, as we stoop nearer to them, with bossy beaten work of mountain chains, and glowing softly with terraced gardens, and flowers heavy with frankincense, mixed among masses of laurel, and orange, and plummy palm, that abate with their grey-green shadows the burning of the marble rocks, and of the ledges of porphyry sloping under lucent sand (SW 36).

The extensive use of adjectives relating to colours, smells, and mood allow the Mediterranean landscape to form in the reader’s mind, stimulating his visual and olfactory senses in the process of reading. He can actually see the fields and the sea lying beneath him, and smell the heavy fragrance of exotic flowers.

This lyrical description of a view of the Southern countries, however, not only helped Ruskin’s audience to see, but also to appreciate the poetical qualities of art. The skill of “word-painting,” as Landow calls it (134), allowed Ruskin to strengthen his verbal arguments by demonstrating to his readers the beauty of art. Ruskin’s word-painting thus constituted a means to allow his audience access to the work of art it was contemplating—it was his method of ‘mise-en-scène’. In this respect, Ruskin’s writings always worked two-fold: on the one hand through their content, and on the other through their form.

Yet despite the importance Ruskin placed on art and aesthetic appreciation, he never elevated it above life. Rather, he believed that art always pointed towards an ideal, away from itself. Its purpose was to confer truth and beauty to the audience; therefore, even though a work of art in itself might not be perfect, it always could express a perfect thought or ideal. In *The Eagle's Nest* (1872), Ruskin explained that art could always only be a shadow of an ideal. He wrote:

‘BUT SHADOWS!’ Make them as beautiful as you can; use them only to enable you to remember and love what they are cast by. If you ever prefer the skill of them to the simplicity of the truth, or the pleasure of them to the power of the truth, you have fallen into that vice of folly [...] which concludes [...] that she might be seen continually [...] to look with love, and exclusive wonder, at her own shadow (239).

Like Schiller, Ruskin believed that art pointed to something outside itself, containing only the image of an ideal. In this, his understanding of art seemed to differ widely from the ideology of the Aesthetes, as whose forefather he is sometimes considered.¹⁹ However, when looking at Walter Hamilton’s 1882 definition of Aestheticism as a school that has “long been at work educating public taste” (vii), the relevance of this connection becomes easier to understand. Hamilton asserted that “Mr. Ruskin’s writings [...] have, as it were, given eyes to the blind. They have widened the circle of the nobler pleasures, and even when they excite opposition, teach people to think and to see for themselves” (15). By teaching the appreciation and contemplation of art, Ruskin intended to also develop his audience’s perceptive skills.

Art, to Ruskin, was a way of seeing the world, and thus never an end in itself. It could not be understood apart from life, and art and life thus became inseparable, one impacting the other and vice versa. Ruskin was eager for people to realise that humanity and the world were nothing that could be contained either within people’s minds or within art; whilst art could establish a connection between an ideal and this world, it could certainly never replace the former. In this sense, Ruskin’s understanding of art was more practical than ideal: it was a means for perfection, and

¹⁹ Ruskin’s relationship to Aestheticism is a contested one: on the one hand, his support for and defence of the art of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood aligns him within the Aesthetic tradition. On the other, however, his quarrel with Whistler and his moralistic and democratic understanding of art suggest otherwise. These contradictions are analysed, for example, in Nicholas Shrimpton’s article “Ruskin and the Aesthetes.”

a signpost towards some higher truth, which mankind had forgotten; also, it was an expression of man's individuality. As such, art was not about perfection, but was instead about the expression of an idea, however imperfect. In "The Nature of Gothic" Ruskin wrote: "...no good work whatever can be perfect, and *the demand for perfection is always a sign of a misunderstanding of the ends of art*" (SW 48).

To make people understand the ends of art was one of Ruskin's aims, but for him the appreciation of great art required first of all the creation of an appreciative environment. He claimed that one of the biggest failures of contemporary society was that it could not enjoy the art it created. In his inaugural address to the Cambridge School of Art, Ruskin contended that Britain could not compete with other nations in the realm of art because it produced art in order to sell, and not in order to keep and treasure it. He asserted that it was impossible to create truly good art with a view on profit, writing: "There's no way of getting good Art [...] but one—at once the simplest and most difficult—namely to enjoy it" (SW 98).

It is important to understand here that Ruskin's idea of enjoyment differs from the worship of pure form that was expressed by French artists such as Mallarmé or Flaubert. In contrast to those writers, Ruskin expressed his ideas under the premise that good art would always convey truth and beauty, both elements that were beneficial for the development of man. Art, according to Ruskin, should always be both enjoyable and purposeful (SW 101), and in "The Nature of Gothic," he claimed that the failure of contemporary art was that "facts are often wanted without art [...]; and art often without facts" (SW 59). In Ruskin's eyes, art could not be separated from daily life for it had vital truth to contribute, conveying this truth through enjoyment. Therefore, art criticism became a way of giving people an understanding of art while simultaneously re-defining it.

It was thus that the sentence "to see things as they are" (SW 95) became so important to Ruskin's successors. It appeared in Arnold's "The Function of Criticism," was expanded in Pater's *The Renaissance* and was turned on its head in Wilde's "The Critic as Artist," in which he stated that the true purpose of criticism was to "see the object as in itself it really is not" (MW 264). As will be seen, many of the characteristics of fin-de-siècle literature and art can be traced back to this attempt to make people 'think' and 'see'—above all, to make them understand how and what

they could see through art. William Morris, for example, used art as a ‘telescope’ through which one might look into a better world, contrasting present reality with what could potentially be. Similarly, *The Yellow Book* enabled and sometimes even forced its audience to see a different view of life and art, confronting it with many different layers of meaning and possible interpretations. As a result, each artist presented a different view on reality, stressing things that would not be seen normally by looking at the world through art whilst guiding his audience as to how to understand it.

Although Wilde’s statement “to see the object as in itself it really is not” seems like a complete reversal of traditional understandings, it can also be seen as the logical conclusion to the nineteenth-century endeavour of aesthetic education. It realised that appreciating and creating art go hand in hand—one cannot happen without the other, and whoever is able to see with the critic’s eyes and whoever allows the artwork to speak to him has also acquired the perceptive ability of the artist. According to Arnold, the artist had to be a critic in the first place to be able to create truly great art: “A poet [...] ought to know life and the world before dealing with them in poetry; and life and the world being in modern times very complex things, the creation of a modern poet, to be worth much, implies a great critical effort behind it” (FC 29). Hence, in all of the works analysed in the following chapters, society was challenged to be ‘critical’: to see beyond what was on the surface, to think about the way society worked, to reconsider morals and values, and, most importantly, to understand the role of the artist and his art in this process of re-thinking.

Although Matthew Arnold wrote his essays on art, the artist and art criticism around the same time as Ruskin, his approach was characterised much more by the intrusion of modernist scepticism. One of the things that led to major differences in Ruskin’s and Arnold’s writings was the fact that Arnold, much more so than Ruskin, struggled with the possibility of a transcendental reality and the existence of moral absolutes. While Ruskin was mostly concerned with the promotion of ‘sight’ and ‘thought’, Arnold, picking up on the increasing scepticism as to the reality of

absolute truth, grappled with the question of what exactly the object of sight and thought should be.

In this respect, Arnold was a man caught between two worlds. This discrepancy in Arnold appears, for example, in his attitude towards the Victorian middle class: born into a well-to-do Victorian middle class family, Arnold naturally adopted their values and ideas, and very often was and still is considered to be a 'typical' Victorian, who should be put on a par with other sages of that era.²⁰ At the same time, however, this Victorian middle class became the focus of his most severe criticism. Robert Giddings observes that

Matthew Arnold felt permanently displaced, belonging neither to the old world and its certainties, nor could he share the seeming confidence of the modern age into which he had been born [...] There is something very modern about Arnold, and yet, at the same time, the sense of looking backwards is very strong (9-10).

This ambivalent position is noticeable throughout Arnold's writing as he fought to come to terms with the advent of modern scepticism and the loss of a sure authority. Whilst this struggle was especially prevalent in his poetry, it also had a deep impact on his aesthetic theory. David DeLaura comments that

to say that Arnold is divided is also to say that he is at the 'center' of modern culture in a number of ways. He is everywhere the 'mediator': between past and present (and future), between inward and outward, between the claims of a 'dissolving' modern intellect and the claims of man's permanent emotional needs and values (1969:3).

It is this oscillation between the old and the new and this position as a "mediator" that make Arnold so interesting for this thesis as both reveal the difficulties facing the modern artist and his understanding of art in contemporary society.²¹ On the one hand, Arnold still held on to an end-of-eighteenth-century ideal

²⁰ John Holloway, for example, includes Arnold in his study on the great figures of the nineteenth century, *The Victorian Sage* and Stefan Collini, comparing Arnold to Victorian figures such as Carlyle, Newman, Mill and Ruskin, notes that "Arnold is more persuasive, more perceptive, more attractive, and more readable than any of his peers" (1994:1).

²¹ This split is still detectable in contemporary responses to Arnold: "Culture and Anarchy" and "The Function of Criticism" have traditionally been claimed by two different camps of "Arnoldians." Right-Arnoldians tend to concentrate on his anti-modern side and focus on the preservation and transmission of conservative values. Left-Arnoldians, on the other hand, pick up on Arnold's critical approach to society, trying to "copy his concept of bringing a critical perspective to bear upon the pieties of one's own society." (Collini 131). Thus, while one side focuses on criticism, the other emphasises culture. This division is significant with regard to the combination of social criticism and

of the artist and art, which was revealed in his description and positioning of his “men of culture.” On the other, however, he moved even further away from Schiller’s idealised notion in a number of ways, trying to come to terms with the difficulties and contradictions that formed in the collision between the old and the modern. This, for example, becomes obvious when looking at his understanding of culture as authoritative, yet simultaneously as something is eternally moving onwards (CA 78). Arnold asserted that the man of culture was to create an authority that would guide society on the way to perfection; however, this authority would never be absolute. Instead, it was to be “an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces” (FC 29). This flight into the modern concept of relativity, however, did not help to disentangle Arnold’s awkward attempt to integrate a traditional notion within the context of modernity. Thus, while in some instances Arnold admitted to the spirit of relativity and doubt, most of his writing was characterised by an attempt to build on absolutes in which he no longer truly believed.

In two of his best known essays, “Culture and Anarchy” and “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” it becomes obvious that Arnold, like Ruskin, no longer believed that society would recognize beauty and truth through art by itself. Instead Arnold maintained that it was the task of critics and men of culture to re-introduce society to the “main stream of life” (CA 207). Although Arnold preached the positive and almost passive influence of the dissemination of culture, he did not seem convinced that it would eventually bring about change, and he could not accept that art’s social function still lay in its representation of ideals. Unlike Ruskin, who believed that methodically educating people in aesthetic perception would eventually enable them to appreciate art and, through it, life, Arnold sensed that the present time required more than mere methodical aesthetic education; it required a new understanding of what art was as well. With the loss of a sure authority and an absolute reference point, art had lost its natural, legitimate role within society, and its social function was no longer a given.

Arnold’s battle with this loss of absolutes and its implications for art resulted in a self-inflicted, unintentional undermining of most of his key concepts, such as

advocacy of the autonomy of art in the literature and art of the fin de siècle as the two seem to be, to a large extent, incompatible.

“culture,” “the best that has been thought and said,” or “sweetness and light.” In “Culture and Anarchy,” for example, he opposed culture to the vain desires and mindless activism of contemporary society. Yet in his attempt to explain how culture as a concept ‘worked’, Arnold became entangled in insoluble contradictions. Throughout the essay, Arnold referred to what he called the “national current” or “main stream” of human life (CA 77/207), arguing that British society had moved away from both. Yet in so doing Arnold stepped into what Gerald Graff calls the “Common Culture Paradox” (192) which connotes the “shattering of unself-conscious consensus” on what common culture, or in Arnold’s word, the “mainstream of human life,” actually is. Graff argues that

[i]n the kind of common culture that Arnold wanted to recover—if indeed such a thing ever existed—there would have been no need for the phrase *common culture*. For such a culture would already *unconsciously* enjoy a sense of unity [...] thereby relieving its members of the necessity to formulate, rationalize, or theorize its commonality in principles that would be open to debate (192).

By claiming that British society had separated itself from the “current of life,” Arnold involuntarily raised the question of what exactly he meant by that term, and to what exactly it referred. Arnold, on the one hand, presupposed an agreement on objective values and an understanding of what was best; yet on the other hand, he made it clear that British society lacked exactly that knowledge and apprehension. Therefore, the moment he used words such as the “main current” or “main stream” of life, he simultaneously questioned their very existence.

The same paradoxical undercurrent becomes apparent in Arnold’s famous phraseologies such as “seeing things as they really are” (CA 127) or the “the best that has been thought and said” (CA 190). Whilst Ruskin considered the foundation of the expression “to see things as they are” (SW 95) to be that art incorporated and conveyed absolute ideals such as truth and moral beauty, which could be objectively discerned, Arnold failed to offer convincing proof that he had confidence in his own words. Throughout his works Arnold was “alertly aware that such a simple formulation [seeing things as they really are] is only a facade for infinitely receding complexities” (Marcus 1994:170). Like Ruskin, Arnold was trying to encourage thought; yet underneath, he was too aware of the void that lurked behind phrases

such as “sweetness and light” and “seeing things as they are” to establish a convincing argument.

All through his essays he swayed between traditional values and modern uncertainty. Thus, he talked about “inward perfection,” the necessity to develop “our best self” and to follow the “right reason” without offering any guidelines as to what exactly these were or should be. By insinuating that beauty, humanity or right reason were absolutes on which mankind would unhesitatingly agree once individuals had developed their “best selves,” Arnold got caught in a circular argument: whilst suggesting that it was necessary to awaken the desire to reach these absolutes in man in order for him to develop his best self, Arnold made the awakening dependent on the very concepts man could only appreciate once he had developed his best self in full. Also, while in “Culture and Anarchy” he suggested that the foundation upon which culture was built was always already there and that the desire “to see things as they are” (though it might be corrupted) was inherent in every intelligent human being (59), he lamented in “The Function of Criticism” that “[t]he mass of mankind will never have any ardent zeal for seeing things as they are; very inadequate ideas will satisfy them” (41).

Consequently, Arnold continually attempted, and failed, to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. This is also exemplified in Arnold’s discomfort with contemporary society’s tendency to blindly follow rules and laws instead of thinking about what it was doing. His sharp criticism of this ‘Hebraic’ attitude stood in stark opposition to his high evaluation of institutions and establishments, and his belief in the necessity of the regulative power of the state. He reasoned that

instead of battling for his own private forms of expressing the inexpressible and defining the undefinable, a man takes those which have commended themselves most to the religious life of his nation; and while he may be sure that within those forms the religious side of his own nature may find its satisfaction, he has leisure and composure to satisfy other sides of his nature as well (CA 195).

This advocacy of establishment was opposed by Arnold’s praise of what he called Hellenism or “spontaneity of consciousness,” which he set in contrast to Hebraism or “the strictness of conscience” (CA 128). The purpose of culture, Arnold claimed, was to overcome the tendency to ‘hebraise’ and to instead perfect society “by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been

thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits” (CA 190). Yet as Graff remarks: “Arnold is committed to the Hellenic free play of reason only as long as its dictates coincide with those of unreflective custom, tradition, and consensus. [...]. For Arnold no true culture can exist without a common basis of things taken for granted” (188).

Therefore, while in his criticism of society and his suggestions for solutions, Arnold paralleled Ruskin’s thought, his writings simultaneously showed signs of modern scepticism undermining the belief in absolute values and truth. Like Ruskin, Arnold lamented British society’s tendency to act rather than to think. He claimed that the lack of perfection in contemporary society manifested itself in the fact that people preferred action over thought, and mindless obedience over the desire for knowledge. Arnold clearly preferred Hellenism over Hebraism, but he was eager to point out that both forces were equal in their potential of perfecting man. However, the means by which they achieved this aim were radically different. Whereas Hebraism considered “conduct and obedience” as essential for perfection, Hellenism suggested that “to see things as they really are” was the way to happiness (CA 127-128).

Echoing Schiller’s apprehension that Nature and Reason required reconciliation, Arnold claimed that both Hebraism and Hellenism needed to be combined in order to lead to the perfection of society. However, as British society momentarily focused too much on Hebraism, Arnold insisted that what was missing was Hellenism. In the concept of Hellenism, Ruskin’s notion of the individual’s perfection through contemplation and the encouragement of sight and thought was picked up on and enforced. Arnold hoped to invoke dissatisfaction with the present situation in order to empower society “to draw nearer to a sense of what is indeed beautiful, graceful, and becoming, and to get the raw person to like that” (CA 64). In Arnold’s eyes a perfect society was one which constantly strove for “sweetness and light,” with each individual following his or her morally purified conscience and turning new ideas into practice, thus “making reason and the will of God prevail” (CA 61).

In spite of these persuasive words, Arnold’s argument fails to convince. Even though he referred the ultimate authority back to God, Arnold seemed to suggest that

humanity's ideal was something that was found within man. In contrast to the Platonic notion that the world of ideals was separate and independent from the world of mankind, Arnold suggested that humanity itself was responsible for building this ideal. Through this move, Arnold subtly undermined his own call to objectivity and detachment, unwillingly granting the individual's subjective viewpoint more power than originally intended. In his study of the interconnectedness between Aestheticism, Romanticism and nationalism, David Kaiser claims that Arnold, like Schiller, was

engaged in a project of aesthetic statism, a project that seeks to reconcile subjectivity and common culture, not to set one up over the other. [...] Schiller seeks this reconciliation in the process of the aesthetic education [and] Arnold seeks it in his account of 'culture' (75).

Kaiser stresses the productive side of Arnold's attempt to align objectivity and subjectivity under one heading; however, he also draws attention to the difficulties the writer had in coming to terms with the unsettledness of the age as, despite the recurring reference to absolutes, many of Arnold's ideas foreshadowed modern concepts of becoming and relativity, which would, a few years later, find expression in Pater's essays. Describing society's process of perfection, Arnold explained that

it is in making endless additions to itself, in the endless expansion of its powers, in endless growth in wisdom and beauty, that the spirit of the human race finds its ideal. To reach this ideal, culture is an indispensable aid, and that is the true value of culture. Not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming, is the character of perfection as culture conceives it. (CA 61-62)

Thus, underneath the veneer of preaching culture as an absolute, Arnold betrayed the modernist influence on his thinking by leaving defining questions in his argument unanswered. For him, the process of societal perfection resembled a hermeneutic circle; it was "eternally passing onwards and seeking" (CA 78) and what was thought of as best at a certain point in time always needed to be reconsidered and re-approached with a willingness to change one's foregoing conceptions.

Consequently, Arnold's references to absolutes offered no firm ground on which to stand, and the notion of a sure authority began to slip through his fingers. He even admitted his own trepidation when writing that "[i]n all directions our habitual course of action seems to be losing efficaciousness, credit and control, both with others and even with ourselves. Everywhere we see the beginnings of confusion, and

we want a clue to some sound order and authority” (CA 137). While asking man to constantly examine the ground on which he stood, Arnold simultaneously denied the possibility of ever arriving at an understanding of “the best that has been thought and said.” Even though he praised Hellenism for its potential to enlarge the whole law of ‘how to do things’ and to help one rid oneself of ignorance, the implicit scepticism that undermined his argument destroyed the validity of his attempt to re-establish, through the concept of culture, a new authority.

Unlike Ruskin and Arnold, their successor Walter Pater embraced the influence of modern subjectivity and relativity in the realm of art. Rather than trying to erase the question mark over the social purpose of art and its transcendental justification, Pater shifted the focus from art and the authorial intention fully onto the audience. Thus, where Arnold and Ruskin advocated aesthetic education so that people would be able to understand art on the grounds of an ideal behind it, Pater saw the purpose of art in the impression it made on the beholder. Consequently, he added as a first step to Arnold’s famous doctrine that to see “one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly” (ibid). Wendell Harris points out that

Pater’s modification [...] of Arnold’s doctrine that the object of criticism is to ‘see the object as in itself it really is’ [is] not simply eccentric or whimsical [...]. [He] recognized that [...] Arnold had not faced the question of how the artist or critic can get beyond or behind immediate individual impressions. The relativism of all perceptions and impressions stated in the Conclusion to *The Renaissance* implies the aesthetic doctrines [...] which define beauty in terms of the artist’s individual vision and ‘truth’ in terms of the relation between the work of art and that individual vision. [...] Arnold’s airy dismissal of metaphysical questions thus takes its revenge (733).

Contrary to Arnold and Ruskin, and questioning the traditional belief in (transcendental) absolutes, Pater advocated the modernist gospel of relativity. In the Preface to the *Renaissance* he wrote: “Beauty, like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative” (xix). The “unanswered metaphysical problems” that Arnold raised thus built the foundation of Pater’s new religion of art (Harris 733).

Pater's views on art, beauty and truth were very much influenced by the newest findings of science and led him to believe that nothing could be defined abstractly and generally, but only concretely and linked to a certain moment in time. As Kenneth Daley points out,

[r]omantic vision is for Pater both an ideal and an impossibility. [...] His late romantic obsessions with individual feeling and experience, the dangers of solipsism, and the sacerdotal function of the artist are informed by an empirical belief in the primacy of sensation and the relativity of knowledge (8).

Pater elaborated this thinking in his essay on Coleridge, in which he commented on the impossibility of generalization and objectivity, stating that

modern thought is distinguished from ancient by its cultivation of the 'relative' spirit in place of the 'absolute.' [...] The faculty for truth is recognized as a power of distinguishing and fixing delicate fugitive detail. The moral world is ever in contact with the physical, and the relative spirit has invaded philosophy from the ground of the inductive sciences (*Essays* 2).

In his rejection of a "transcendentalism that makes what is abstract more excellent than what is concrete" (*Essays* 3), Pater directed man's investigative glance to the present and, more precisely, to art itself. Art, in Pater's eyes, had become a means of perfecting man, for it helped him to savour life to the full, finding truth in the "delicate, fugitive details" it offered. In this, art became an entity in itself and began playing a legitimate role through the subjective impressions it offered its audience. It fulfilled its social purpose simply through being art: not through reference to something outside or beyond itself, but merely by conferring "the highest quality of moments" (*Renaissance* 153). In contrast to Ruskin, Pater considered art useful in the sense that through its ability to evoke pleasure and "to rouse, to startle [the human spirit] to a life of constant and eager observation" (*Renaissance* 152), art could teach man 'how to live.'²²

²² This brings to mind Pater's often quoted phrase in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*—"to burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life" (152)—which gained him a sort of notorious popularity especially among the young Oxford students to whom Wilde belonged. Rather unwillingly, Pater was turned into the spokesperson for the English decadent movement and he was reproached and criticised for his apparently hedonistic stance in a way that made him suppress his conclusion in the second edition and re-publish it in the third with alterations. Recent scholarship, however, has focussed on the continuities rather than the discrepancies between Pater and his predecessors, emphasizing his 'moral' side. See for example Tucker's "Pater as 'Moralist'."

While this might look like a break in the development of the 'Schillerean' tradition, it was, to some extent, also an extension of it. As Paul Tucker points out,

the Romantic tradition of a direct service of art to morality through its affective enhancement of the capacity for sympathy survives in Pater's notion of [...] that 'finer justice' of which poetry is the prime example by virtue of its genius for observation, its special attention to circumstance, above all with regard to human actions (113).

It seemed thus that in Pater the reader was confronted with a simultaneous move towards and away from the Schillerean tradition. On the one hand, there was an acknowledged loss of absolutes and ideals to which art could refer and to which the artist had access. Art became self-referential, something that was valid 'in itself.' On the other hand, there seemed to be a new confidence in the positive social influence of art. Art, through its ability to provide people with moments of highest quality and impressions, had again become a means of social influence, affecting the individual, and through him or her, affecting all of society. For Pater, the transcendental referentiality was not necessary to make art socially useful. Art, according to Pater, was communication between the artist and his audience; in his essay "Style" (1889) he wrote: "the attention of the writer, in every minutest detail, being a pledge that it is worth the reader's while to be attentive too, that the writer is dealing scrupulously with his instrument, and therefore, indirectly, with the reader himself" (*Essays* 74).

Like Ruskin and Arnold, Pater considered the improvement and perfection of society a result of the perfection of the individual, a feat that could be accomplished through aesthetic contemplation. Similarly, he believed that not everybody naturally had the ability of "distinguishing and fixing delicate details" and that the faculty of aesthetic contemplation was something that needed to be practiced. Also, he considered the ability of perception, cultivated through the whole area of awareness, as essential to leading an aesthetic life. However, in contrast to both Ruskin and Arnold, Pater pointed to art itself as a means and end of aesthetic education. Art, according to Pater, provided the best way to train perceptive qualities as it was easier to find beautiful motifs for aesthetic contemplation in art than in life. This also gave renewed justification to the artist: through his innate ability to discern and express "moments of highest quality," the artist could put these before his audience on a

golden plate. There was, after all, nothing to detect in a piece of art but art itself, reflecting its perfection back on the audience.

These changes in the understanding of art found their fin-de-siècle expression in one of Wilde's aesthetic statements that "all art is quite useless," which he postulated in his Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (MW 48). Following the development in the nineteenth-century discussion of art and its role in society, artists had now come to a point where they felt art had to stand for itself in order for it not to be enclosed in the capitalistic cycle of commercialisation. Art thus became the new absolute, and only through its being art in an ontological sense (e.g. referring only to itself) could it fulfil a social function—a function that Theodore Adorno would later formulate in his *Aesthetic Theory*.

However, while artists had arrived at this new understanding of art, they also realised that the changes in art's referentiality necessitated a re-definition of the artist-society relationship. In his *Lectures on Art* Ruskin maintained that it was the artists' own fault that they were turned into a wheel in the machinery of capitalism. His own solution to the problem again betrayed his trust in absolutes and ideals:

If every painter of real power would do only what he knew to be worthy of himself, and to refuse to be involved in the contention for undeserved or accidental success, there is indeed, whatever may have been thought or said to the contrary, true instinct enough in the public mind to follow such firm guidance. [...] a really good picture is ultimately always approved and bought (SW 190).

Unfortunately, Ruskin's idealist outlook had lost its value by the end of the nineteenth century, mainly because the idea that art referred to some higher truth and values had been stripped of its validity. Therefore, fin-de-siècle artists found they had to defend their role and the purpose of their art, justifying its difference from the commercialized popular art of the late nineteenth century. It is for this reason that in fin-de-siècle works of art one finds elements of aesthetic education next to aesthetic practice, social criticism next to social indifference, and the critic, educator and artist all incorporated within one person.

2.2. Artist, critic, teacher: the autonomy of art and the artist as critic

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.
[...]

All art is at once surface and symbol.

Those who go beneath the surface do so at their own peril.

Those who read the symbol do so at their own peril.

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

(Wilde, Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*)

The shift from the objective, moral concept of art as representing an absolute truth to the notion of art as self-referential and subjective left the artist in a state of crisis. His natural legitimacy was shaken through the questioning of the function of art; his task was no longer to “intercept the rays of truth” and to make them accessible to his fellow humans, as Schiller had once claimed. Ruskin and Arnold struggled with this loss of authority on the side of artist as, for both, the question of the role of art and the artist was triggered through an urgent personal interest: both tried their hand at poetry and found their true fulfilment in the creation of art; yet at the same time, both could not close their eyes to the wrongs of society and to the alarming changes which, in their eyes, actually defined modern life. Their perspective on contemporary society would have probably agreed with Schiller’s when he wrote that “we see the spirit of the age wavering between perversity and brutality, between unnaturalness and mere nature, between superstition and moral unbelief; and it is only through an equilibrium of evils that it is still sometimes kept within bounds” (AE 29).

Being confronted with the failings of modern society awakened a sense of moral responsibility, and this realisation led both men to question the importance of art and artistic creation within a social community. They felt that they had before them the choice between withdrawing into the ivory tower world of the artist and fulfilling their “obligation, as citizens, to undertake useful activities” (Alexander xiii). This situation of ‘either-or’ which seemed to present itself to both Ruskin and Arnold triggered the earliest attempts to re-define the position of the artist within contemporary society. Their writings reflect a search for an answer to the question of

how to live as a detached artist, uncorrupted by the world around him, but never compromising the social component and responsibility of being part of society. The increasing scepticism concerning the possibility of a transcendental world with absolute truth and values began to confine the artist's area of authority to present reality. As art's role began to change, so did the artist's, necessitating a quest for a new identity. This quest wove its way through the writings of Ruskin, Arnold and Pater, and would eventually determine and form the art of the fin de siècle.

Whereas Ruskin's and Pater's contributions focussed more on the perception of art, Arnold's writing was very much shaped by the emphasis he placed on the relationship between artist and society.²³ Arnold attempted the reconciliation between detachment and social influence; thus, the problems of identity and of positioning the artist within society are especially noticeable in his texts. Arnold struggled with the scepticism that the modern age held against his idealised, almost Schillerian, version of the man of culture as a guardian and disseminator of "sweetness and light." Unlike Schiller and Ruskin, Arnold could no longer fully justify the purpose of art and culture through their natural ability to represent an ideal of truth, and thus (as has been shown) he vacillated between the denial of a transcendental ideal and the need to establish art and culture as a new authority.

Arnold was convinced that the formation of a stable and 'healthy' society necessitated an acknowledgement and an appreciation of the value of culture and the role of those who brought it about—the ones he called "men of culture." In "The Function of Criticism" as well as in "Culture and Anarchy," Arnold tried to obliterate the division between artistic detachment and daily life. According to Arnold, the first concern of every man of culture should be the state of the society in which he lived. He should be a "true apostle of equality" (CA 79), someone who had "a passion for

²³ These different foci are, to some extent, reflected in their respective styles of writing: as I have shown earlier, Ruskin's "exhilarating, overwhelming, emotionally versatile style" turned him into "the critic as artist" (Daley 6). Similarly, as pointed out before, Pater was widely known and appreciated for his intricate and aesthetic style[0] as can be seen from George Moore's comment that *Marius the Epicurean* was the first book in English prose "that procured for me any genuine pleasure in the language itself" (166). Arnold's texts, on the other hand, though entertaining, often lack the poetic qualities of Ruskin or Pater. Rather than purely aesthetic, they more often have the qualities of a didactic piece of writing; with their emphasis on directly political or socio-critical topics they reflect Arnold's attempt to position the artist within a wider social and political context.

diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of [his] time” (ibid). His aim should be to

divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light (ibid).

His desire should be to make equality prevail in society by enabling everyone to know of and act on the ‘best thoughts,’ thus emancipating him- or herself from mental immaturity.

Yet despite this call to social involvement on an intellectual level, Arnold also considered it essential to ensure that the man of culture stay detached. Throughout his writing Arnold tried to present this detachment as a moral necessity, mirroring what Anderson calls the Victorian “opposition between desirable and undesirable forms of detachment” (4). Anderson points out that

Arnold persistently sought [...] to give critical reason an ethical dimension, though not exactly a specific content, by casting it as an ideal of temperament or character, whose key attributes bespeak a kind of value-laden value-neutrality: impartiality, tact, moderation, measure, balance, flexibility, detachment, objectivity, composure (115).

Arnold’s vision for the perfection of society was thus characterised by contradictions, and his ideas were undermined by his inability to reconcile detachment and social engagement under the premise of modern scepticism and subjectivism.

For this reason, Arnold’s cultural elite were placed in a position determined by paradoxes, and complicated by contradictory claims: how could someone, who was detached and objective, influence society in a positive way? Arnold himself, though advocating the aesthetic and cultural education of society through detachment, offered a bleak picture of its feasibility, constantly reflecting on obstacles and possible failure. He professed that men of culture had “a rough task to achieve” (CA 183) and he conceded that “the friends of culture [must not] expect to take the believers in action by storm” (ibid). He likened the man of culture to a “spurious Jeremiah” (CA 63) who strove for a promised land that would “not be [his] to enter” (FC 51); his fate was to “die in the wilderness” (ibid).

These biblical allusions again mirror the ambiguous position the man of culture held in Arnold's model of society. On the one hand, he was to persevere in his attempt to reform society through the dissemination of culture, assuming the same urgency with which Jeremiah preached God's wrath and the need for repentance to the stubborn Israelites. On the other hand, he was to keep himself apart from society, to remain detached and disinterested lest he should fall prey to the same forces which held society within their grip.

Arnold's struggle to reconcile these opposing requirements proved, to a large extent, to be unsuccessful. When looking at his explanation concerning the process of perfecting society for example, this failure becomes apparent. First of all, Arnold averred that in every class of society there were born a few geniuses with an inherent passion for perfection and a desire to see their best selves developed (CA 109). This inborn passion turned them into "aliens" and united them into a new minority class, thus separating them out from their fellow men. Their first concern, according to Arnold, would be self-education, which would leave them unconcerned with the society around them (CA 186). Arnold's urgent call for detachment here represented a remnant of Schiller's advice that the artist, though he would always be a "child of his age," should never be its "ward or, worse still, its minion" (AE 55). Arnold stressed the importance of detachment, advising men of culture to refuse "to lend [themselves] to the point of view of the practical man" (FC 41). He advised against the man of culture's involvement in any practical, political or social concerns of society's daily life (FC 37/ CA 183-185), pointing out that this detachment would enable them to look at society disinterestedly, seeing things 'as they were', without the contortion of selfish interest.

Whilst Arnold understood this detachment and the concomitant clear-sighted objectivity to be the key to disseminating "sweetness and light" among the people, he undermined its feasibility by claiming that "unless you reassure [the practical man] as to your practical intentions, you have no chance of leading him" (FC 41). Under the weight of these opposing demands, Arnold's argument begins to crumble: how could he maintain that the self-education of a few, brought about with complete disinterestedness as to its practicability and applicability, would bring about the education and perfection of society—a society that, additionally, had resisted any

influence of ‘mainstream culture’ for the last two hundred years (CA 195); a society that was unwilling to learn and listen (FC 41; CA 115/123/183); a society that, lastly, would only be persuaded by “the voice of a friend” (CA 115)? In the face of these contradictory statements, the possibility that society would be swayed by the example of an estranged class of disinterested men became highly unlikely.

Arnold was adept at disclosing the flaws of his own theories on the position of the artist in social, political and cultural issues through his practical approach, for he himself never fully embraced the self-consciousness and disinterestedness of the cultural critic he preached. While advocating the disinterestedness of the men of culture, Arnold betrayed his own theories through the polemical tone of his prose and through his active involvement in socio-political matters. E.K. Brown, commenting on the ambiguity between Arnold’s cultural theories and his (non-)adherence to them, refers to him as a “particularly complicated instance of the conflict between disinterestedness and action, art and practical criticism” (1966:181).

Arnold realised that assigning the sphere of detachment an ethical dimension could no longer be asserted with the same ease of earlier times, for the connection to a transcendental reference point had become obsolete. Disinterestedness and detachment could no longer be justified through reference to a higher instance than man himself; rather, legitimisation on the grounds of direct social influence became necessary. This problematic juxtaposition of detachment and “reassuring the practical man as to your practical intention” through which Arnold tried to reconcile artistic ambitions with social concerns foreshadows the dilemma of fin de siècle artists who were caught between two opposing demands, brought about by the nature of his task: to change society through non-action and to become involved through disinterestedness.

Faced with this apparent irreconcilability, fin-de-siècle artists like Wilde, Moore, Beerbohm and Morris found themselves challenged to bridge the gap that Arnold had been unable to close. Accepting the loss of transcendental values and truth, they followed Arnold’s implicit and Pater’s explicit suggestion that art should be assigned a value in itself. Only then could a position for the artist as something other than a player in the consumer market ever be legitimised. The purpose of art, they understood, was to be an entity separate and different from life. Only then could the

artist have any social function and influence on society. In this, they foreshadowed what Theodore Adorno was to formulate more than half a century later in his “The Autonomy of Art” (1970) where he asserts that all art has a dual essence, being simultaneously autonomous and a social fact. According to Adorno, art is never social due to its content but only through its being art. He claims that all directly political or socially critical works are bound to lose some of their truth—a thought that Arnold touched upon when he wrote that art should not lend itself to man’s practical intention.

Where Arnold got caught in a circular and often contradictory argument, Adorno simply accepts the paradoxical position of the artist in society. He suggests that the artist always stands in negative relation to the society of which he is part; yet it is through the very negativity of this relationship that he simultaneously affirms it. In being everything society is not, the artist is defined by this very opposition, and his art is the expression of something that is non-existent: “The relation between the existent and the non-existent is the Utopian figure of art. While art is driven into a position of absolute negativity, it is never absolutely negative precisely because of that negativity. It always has an affirmative residue” (“Autonomy of Art” 251).

Within this framework, the social impact of art is thus mostly concerned with a change in consciousness, working through the recognition of the objective nature of the work of art and thus calling for externalization and the distinction between reality and art. Adorno explains: “Art is practical by forcing [the person who experiences it] to step outside of himself. In addition art is objectively practical because it forms and educates consciousness, provided it stays away from outright propaganda” (“Autonomy of Art” 256). Consequently, the social element of art is its ability to shed new light on the familiar, thereby changing consciousness that will eventually change reality.

In Adorno’s writing the struggle between Paterian subjectivity and Arnoldian objectivity is dissolved as Adorno establishes the reception of art as a two-step process: firstly, there is ‘Betroffenheit,’ the lived experience of the work of art in which the audience gives itself over to the work. The second step is the intrusion of objectivity into subjective consciousness, mediating “aesthetic experience even when the subjective response is at its most intense” (“Autonomy of Art” 258). Aesthetic

experience, according to Adorno, is thus determined by subjective impressions which, at the same time, are formed through the objective influence of society as a whole at a certain point in time. The difficult element, then, is to ensure that there exists a balance between recognition and newness: on the one hand, when an audience is not yet 'trained' to receive art in a particular way, subjective impressions can be overpowering. On the other hand, art can easily lose its critical edge once it becomes assimilated into the dominant culture of society, and its quality as an amalgamation of ideology and protest can turn into an extreme version of either one or the other ("Autonomy of Art" 245).

I argue that the fin de siècle was a time when the audience found itself in a place where it was subject to the influence of a dominant, mostly capitalistic culture. The aim of the fin-de-siècle avant-garde thus was to 'train' its audience to a new understanding of art. In order to develop its full social potential, art had to be comprehended as autonomous. Rather than concluding from the loss of a transcendental dimension that art had become just another consumer good, society needed to be taught that art in itself could have a value other than its purely monetary worth. Hence, the fin-de-siècle artists realised the urgency of Ruskin's and Arnold's contention that society needed to be taught how to understand, how to think and how to perceive, not only art in itself, but also art in relation to life. Only then could the artist re-claim his place within society.

In this sense, the group of fin-de-siècle artists had first of all to assure the "practical man as to their practical intentions." Audience involvement and education was needed, and the interconnectedness of art, the artist and social engagement had to be demonstrated and explained. It is for this reason that one finds in the art and literature of the fin de siècle the characteristic paradoxical mixture of proclamations concerning both the autonomy of art and the disinterestedness of the artist, alongside social criticisms and direct engagements with the audience.

The fin de siècle was thus, in the truest sense, a time of growing up: through overstepping boundaries, through turning traditional values on their head, through feigning disinterestedness and defying expectations, the fin-de-siècle artists forced their audience to think and reflect, to look beyond its horizon and to come to a new understanding of art and life. Their art was designed to shift the focus onto the work

of art itself and onto the artist's relationship with his audience. Consequently, art in this period was often characterised by the strongly personal voice of the author as it established an educational artist-audience relationship. One such example appears in Wilde's two-part essay "The Critic as Artist" (1891). It was first published in 1890 under the title "The True Function and Value of Criticism: with some Remarks on the Importance of Doing Nothing," thereby responding directly to Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time." The essay was defined by Wilde's wilful reversal of traditional notions about art, especially of the ones which Arnold and Ruskin put forward in their writings. However, it also finds itself standing in their tradition, adapting their thoughts and concepts to the time of the fin de siècle.

As mentioned before, Wilde turned Ruskin's critical premise "to see things as they are" (SW 95) on its head, implying that there could be no objective 'truth' within an object. Harris points out: "If it cannot be shown that the object 'in itself' is a possible object of knowledge, we are left with only the effects or impressions of objects; if we have only impressions, we are seeing the object as 'in itself' it is not" (Harris 747). Wilde thus seemed to follow in Pater's footsteps by focussing solely on the reception of the artwork rather than on authorial intention and educational possibilities. Yet Wilde contradicted this advocacy of pure subjectivism with the very form of his essay: written as a dialogue, it represented a conversation between the artist (Gilbert) and the Victorian public (Ernest), with Gilbert educating Ernest on the true nature of art while continually claiming that

I don't wish to destroy the delightfully unreal picture that you have drawn [...]. Still less do I desire to talk learnedly. [...] Don't let us discuss anything solemnly. [...] Don't degrade me into the position of giving you useful information. Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught (MW 248).

Raising expectations as to a light and entertaining piece of work through the dramatic form of the text, Wilde was able to 'hide' an educational text within its aesthetically pleasing language. His essay was, as Laurel Brake suggests, "an alternative metaphor for the site of criticism: Wilde displaces Arnold's pulpit and Pater's academy with the Aesthetic drawing-room, and the setting of the public occasion and audience favoured by Arnold and Pater with the private" (1991:45). Wilde thus turned art into the medium as well as the object of aesthetic education, embellishing seriousness

with witticism, entertaining dialogues and characters. The factualness of his aesthetic theory was clothed in beautiful language so that the words of his central arguments, “Criticism is itself an art” (MW 260) were elaborated in lyrical passages about the critic who “will prefer to look into the silver mirror or through the woven veil, [...] though the mirror be tarnished and the veil torn” (MW 262); or Wilde’s recital of Ruskin’s art criticism, which he described as “that mighty and majestic prose of his, so fervid and fiery-coloured in its noble eloquence, so rich in its elaborate symphonic music” (ibid). Wilde thereby attires his aesthetic theory in art, and this approach seemed to be harking back to Schiller’s advice that

[t]he seriousness of [the artist’s] principles will frighten [the public] away, but in the play of [his] semblance they will be prepared to tolerate them; for their taste is purer than their heart, and it is here that [he] must lay hold of the timorous fugitive. In vain will [he] assail their precepts, in vain condemn their practice; but on their leisure hours [he] can try [his] shaping hand (AE 61).

Wilde let his character Gilbert assume the roles of artist, critic and educator in one, infiltrating his art with criticism and aesthetic education.

Anne Bruder, in her article on Whistler and Wilde, suggests that Wilde “fashions a bridge from critic and consumer” and that in his essay he implies that “the artist becomes a kind of mere middleman between the force of art itself and the critic who will teach the public to understand that which is new” (176). Taking this argument even one step further I claim that, rather than transferring the power of audience education onto the critic, Wilde’s intention was to combine critic and artist in one persona. Thereby he referred back to Arnold’s notion that a great poet needed to be a great critic in the first place, agreeing that “without the critical faculty, there is no artistic creation at all” (MW 253). However, Wilde also moved beyond Arnold by setting criticism on the same level as art: “The critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticizes as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and thought. [...] I would call criticism a creation within a creation” (MW 260-261).

In the person of the art critic Wilde presented his reader with a perfect example of how art should be perceived and understood. The audience was to attain the sensibilities of an art critic, discerning beauty and appreciating art for what it was. This reminds one in particular of Ruskin’s endeavours to turn his audience into art

critics; however, Wilde also aligned his theory with the loss of absolute values and of the belief in a transcendental reality. Whereas Ruskin understood aesthetic appreciation as the ability to extract a deeper truth from a work of art, Wilde considered criticism, and thus aesthetic appreciation, to be utterly self-conscious—it was “the spectator, and not life, that art really mirror[ed]” (MW 48). In this, Wilde echoed Pater and prefigured Adorno’s notion that the first step in aesthetic reception was ‘Betroffenheit’, or the subjective impression given by a work of art. Wilde claimed that it was

through its very incompleteness that Art becomes complete in Beauty, and so addresses itself, not to the faculty of recognition nor to the faculty of reason, but to the aesthetic sense alone, which, while accepting both reason and recognition as stages of apprehension, subordinates them both to a pure synthetic impression of the work of art as a whole (MW 265-266).

Contrary to Pater, however, Wilde transcended the effect of this mere subjective impression, asserting that true aesthetic perception had to have an impact on society as a whole, working through its dialectic negativity. Art’s purpose, in Wilde’s eyes, was to stand in contrast to life and to the world, to worldly ethics and to morals, not necessarily in order to deny them as real, but in order to create “unpractical people who see beyond the moment and think beyond the day” (MW 279). Richard Ellmann’s summary of this Wildean philosophy of art and beauty allows one to detect certain similarities relating to Adorno’s concept of dialectic negativity:

By 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. In these various ways the artist forces the world toward self-recognition, with at least a tinge of self-redemption (1970:xxvii).

In Wilde’s eyes, art’s purpose was to transform rather than transcend ethics. This would happen through the transformation of the individual consciousness. First and foremost, however, the artist’s task was to allow for the spectator to discover him- or herself in the work of art; art was thus, to some extent, a medium of revelation and

self-knowledge. Talking about playing music by Chopin, Gilbert muses:

[Music] creates for one a past of which one has been ignorant, and fills one with a sense of sorrows that have been hidden from one's tears. I can fancy a man who had led a perfectly commonplace life, hearing by chance some curious piece of music, and suddenly discovering that his soul, without his being conscious of it, had passed through terrible experiences, and knows fearful joys, or wild romantic loves, or great renunciations (243).

True to this philosophy, Wilde proposed in his preface to *Dorian Gray* that “to reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim” (MW 48). Wilde considered the purpose of art to be its ability to affect the audience not through postulating new ethics, but through enabling the audience to glimpse part of itself in the artwork. Wilde thus situated himself in the tradition of Aristotle, pointing out that “purification and spiritualizing of the nature [...] is [...] essentially aesthetic and [...] not moral” (MW 251). Anderson explains the process of critical aesthetic reception as follows:

[T]he process of thinking [...] must be entirely free in order to perform its creative and life-enhancing function. [...] critical thought is defined [...] as that which is fundamentally cut off from all aspects of embodied life: action, intersubjective entanglement, pain, sorrow, necessity, heredity. In being so freed, thought is also released from the limitations of any given viewpoint and ascends to the realm of disinterestedness, which is also, paradoxically, the realm of unfettered self-realization, or individuality (152-153).

Hence, subjective impression or ‘Betroffenheit’ is the necessary first step in the process of aesthetic appreciation. Yet the change that is caused in the individual through this subjective element will eventually also change society as a whole. “Culture only exists because it is internalized and then reproduced by individuals who, in the act of reproducing it, inevitably change it in accordance to their individuality,” writes Kaiser (135-136), and it was this maxim that Wilde and the other fin-de-siècle artists built upon. Thus, Wilde remarked that in the critic “the culture of the century will see itself realized” (MW 290), and in “The Decay of Lying” he suggested that once people realised the potential of art, they would, as a whole, come to welcome autonomous art and the artist in its midst: “Society sooner or later must return to its lost leader, the cultured and fascinating liar” (MW 227).

In this respect, Wilde's concept of the process of changing society showed great similarities to Arnold's. Like Arnold, he believed that art and the artist could only fulfil their socio-critical roles in society when accepting that culture was defined by constant change. Wilde wrote: “Life [...] has for its aim not *doing* but *being*, and not

being merely, but *becoming*” (MW 277), thus warning his reader that no position could be recognized as final. The artist’s role within this process again reverted to the idealised notion of the poet as prophet and seer, and in “The Critic as Artist,” Wilde picked up on this understanding. When Gilbert talks about Homer, he postulates that “the story of Homer’s blindness might be really an artistic myth, created in critical days, and serving to remind us [...] that the great poet is always a seer, seeing less with the eyes of the body than he does with the eyes of the soul” (MW 249-250).

As such, the artist is always ‘ahead of his time’, avant-garde in the truest sense, and it is through this ‘temporal discrepancy’ that he is able to fulfil his socio-critical role within society. Adorno, for example, maintains that culture, as a rule, is always one step ahead in the constant development of mankind; only as such can it stand in contrast to contemporary society: “Culture is only true when implicitly critical, and the mind which forgets this revenges itself in the critics it breeds” (“Cultural Criticism” 209). Thus, according to Adorno, culture is in its very essence negation and “to accept culture as a whole is to deprive it of the ferment which is its very truth—negation” (ibid). It is in this ‘negative’ culture that the artist finds his place. His art, however, stands as an absolute, not bound to a time or to a purpose. In “The Decay of Lying” Wilde wrote: “The highest art rejects the burden of the human spirit [...]. She develops purely on her own lines. She is not symbolic of any age” (MW 234).

Some of the fin-de-siècle artists realised, like Arnold, that English society was going through a period of transition from an “epoch of concentration” (meaning delimitation against and exclusion of new and foreign ideas) to an “epoch of expansion” which would finally allow new ideas to intrude upon old patterns of thinking and which would thus make way for a time of great literary achievement (FC 36-37). In such a period of transition, the audience needed education: it needed to be taught how to understand and how to perceive the things that were new and different, the things that provided answers to questions that had not yet been asked. To create this kind of art, the artist had to first create his audience. This idea of audience-education found, tellingly, an expression in the works of an art movement that was noted for its devotion to the very concept of disinterestedness, to the supremacy and autonomy of art, and to the social detachment of the artist:

Aestheticism. The following chapter will analyse texts by two representatives of fin-de-siècle Aestheticism, George Moore and Oscar Wilde. This will reveal how both authors work through the hybridisation of genres in order to create and educate their audiences, thus proclaiming, while at the same time undermining, the autonomy of art. It will show how they accomplish this through reversing tradition and through appropriating and transforming transcendental values and absolutes.

III. Social Aestheticism in Oscar Wilde and George Moore

One of the fin-de-siècle art movements best known for the split between aesthetics and ethics, as well as for a striving to achieve the complete freedom of art from moral, social and political responsibilities, was Aestheticism. It was known for its worship of beauty, and its maxim of ‘art for art’s sake’ advocated art to be a realm separate from and often above life. This complete anti-social, anti-ethical and anti-political view of Aestheticism has, for a long time, positioned the movement in sharp opposition to socially and politically engaged artistic movements such as the Avant-garde of the early twentieth century. One of the most notable examples is Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, a discussion of the historic Avant-garde movements, which he sees as directly antithetical to fin-de-siècle Aestheticism. He claims that “in bourgeois society, it is only with aestheticism that the full unfolding of the phenomenon of art became a fact, and it is to aestheticism that the historical avant-garde movements respond” (Bürger 17).

Whilst Bürger is a prominent example of this apolitical view of Aestheticism and his estimation still finds its way into discussions of the fin de siècle or the Avant-garde, this very narrow and static understanding has been contested in several studies over recent years. One recent publication that argues for a wider understanding of Aestheticism and its social engagement is Maltz’s aforementioned *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Class*. In it she convincingly argues that Aestheticism does not stop with “peacock feathers, blue and white china, lacquered furniture, and sunflowers” (11). Rather, she traces aspects of the movement that she calls “missionary aestheticism,” an Aestheticism that is associated with reformers such as Octavia Hill and with societies such as the ‘Sunday Society’ and the ‘Society for the Diffusion of Beauty among the People’. These representatives of Aestheticism saw, like Ruskin and Arnold, the political and social potential of beauty, culture and art, and were determined to let the poor have their share in it. Maltz draws attention to the many different ‘shades’ of Aestheticism, which reached from missionary to decadent. She also claims that even though the movement was split into many different factions, many of the members of apparently opposed groups were known to have interacted with and supported each other in their pursuit

of the same goal: to achieve the dissemination of beauty (20-25). Maltz posits that the movement as such was characterised by a desire to live one's life as art, making people understand and appreciate its moral importance (19).

This wider understanding of Aestheticism, which leads to a reconciliation of aesthetics with ethics and to the appreciation of art as social engagement, is also reflected in several studies on fin-de-siècle authors like Wilde and Moore, both followers and representatives of Aestheticism. Annette Federico, for instance, postulates that the aesthetic self-fashioning in Moore's writing gestures towards ethical sensibilities (96), and critics such as Julia Brown and Anderson claim that it is impossible to understand Wilde's Aestheticism without taking into account certain ethical implications. Brown, for example, notes that "Wilde asserted the centrality of the aesthetic imagination, but not as something divorced from moral or spiritual life" (xvi), and Anderson examines Wilde's writing "specifically in order to advance our understanding of the relation between aesthetics and ethics in his work" (148).

Thus, even though Wilde and Moore often presented themselves and their writings as mere surface and form, a look beneath that surface very often reveals social concerns, philosophical and political engagement through art. Also, they themselves understood their role as artist to be exemplary: they were to live out the Aesthetic life, and realise art's potential in their own existence. As such, Aestheticism at the fin de siècle can be understood as a reformative ethical process as well as a static aesthetic attitude, allowing and even asking for a re-contextualization of fin-de-siècle writing and an understanding of its socially formative aspects.

In their contributions to the process of re-defining and legitimising art's and the artist's role within society, Wilde and Moore simultaneously used their art as means of social criticism and reform. They thereby tried to reconcile Arnold's as well as Ruskin's dilemma of social engagement versus artistic detachment, and in their efforts one can detect a glimpse of what Adorno describes as the social purpose of art, namely its ability to criticise "the debasement of man" by not being a "for-other" ("Autonomy of Art" 242). Thus, even though Adorno wrote these lines decades after the high time of Aestheticism, his words were foreshadowed in the literature and art of that movement. Increasingly trapped in a market society where even art had become a "for-other," fin-de-siècle artists began to understand the autonomy of art as

the solution for the apparently impossible reconciliation of artistic detachment and social engagement. If his art became autonomous, the artist himself would again legitimately occupy an important social position within society.

Notably, artists at the fin de siècle did not find themselves in the privileged role of a Victorian sage, whose wisdom would be heard, and perhaps even pondered, by his audience. Rather, they found themselves in the position of a rebellious teenager, embracing ideas that did not sit well with long-established traditions, and pushing for change when, to society, no change was needed. Reflecting the notion of the fin de siècle as a time of adolescence, most of the artists stood in an awkward relationship to tradition and their past. Their means of introducing new ideas were often reduced to 'going against the grain', through voicing extremist, shocking and sometimes even perverse attitudes that would, at the very least, be heard for their outrageousness. 'Épater le bourgeois' became a means of infiltrating the bourgeois consciousness, and social criticism was clothed in disinterestedness and shocking proclamations concerning the autonomy and superiority of art. It was a 'writing for' disguised as a 'writing against': notions of aesthetic education were hidden beneath a veneer of aloof disinterest while social criticism was incorporated within praises of the superiority of art over life.

In writings such as Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* and Wilde's collections of fairy tales and his essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism," the above mentioned paradoxical combinations were joined together to re-form the texts and their content into artistic manifestos, working towards a re-definition of art and the role of the artist. At the same time, they functioned as social criticism, thus uniting the artist with the social critic. In this, they strove towards a fulfilment of Ruskin's as well as Arnold's attempt to reconcile the detached position of the artist with his critical role within society. Yet unlike their predecessors, Wilde and Moore mainly used those means offered by the adolescently rebellious fin de siècle: reversal, subversion and shock.

Both authors, although now part of the 'approved literary canon' of the 1890s, have struggled to be recognized for their literary merits instead of for (as was especially true in Wilde's case) a flashy personality, long the focus of Wildean studies. Similarly, Moore's *Confessions* has often been considered entertaining,

though not necessarily of the highest literary quality, for it consists to a large extent of borrowed fragments from various books and copied passages. Graham Hough also notes, rather harshly, that Moore

was incapable of what in any ordinary acceptance of the term would be called thought. He picks up ideas from everywhere, never understands them quite thoroughly or thinks them out, mixes them up to make a miscellaneous stew, and often pretends to knowledge that he does not really possess. As an informant on matters of facts he is unreliable in the extreme. To anyone attempting a critical examination of Moore, particularly to anyone who is sensible of his merits, these are highly embarrassing qualities (10).

However, despite its failures in style and narrative (many of which Moore corrected in his revised edition of 1904), his early version of *Confessions* best displays the struggles of the fin-de-siècle artist at the high time of Aestheticism. As Douglas Hughes remarks: “If we want to find out what the literary scene looked like to a young man of advanced tastes in the eighties and nineties we can hardly do better than look at his [Moore’s] early works” (11).

Similarly, Wilde’s “Soul of Man” and his fairy tales (even though they might not be his most widely studied pieces of work) best display the struggle between engagement and detachment for the artist. For one thing, they all work their effect through their generic indeterminacy. Wilde’s fairy tales, for example, even though they have become classics among children’s fairy tales, are considered as marking a turning point in the tradition of fairy-tale writing. Jack Zipes notes that “the new ‘classical’ fairy tales of [...] Wilde [...] were part of a process of social liberation. Their art was subversive symbolic act intended to illuminate concrete utopias waiting to be realised once the authoritarian rule of the Nome king could be overcome” (1991:131). He argues that Wilde’s fairy tales, in contrast to the fairy tales of the eighteenth century, did not mirror the ethics and moralities of bourgeois society, but rather undermined and subverted them. He writes:

They [George MacDonald, Oscar Wilde and L Frank Baum] were the ones who used the fairy tale as a radical mirror to reflect what was wrong with society, and they commented on this by altering the specific discourse on civilization in the fairy-tale genre. No longer was the fairy tale to be the mirror, mirror on the wall, reflecting the cosmetic bourgeois standards of beauty and virtue which appeared to be unadulterated and pure. The fairy tale and the mirror cracked into sharp-edged, radical parts by the end of the nineteenth century. [...] There was more social dynamite in the contents of the tales, also more subtlety and art (1991:99).

Wilde's fairy tales constitute a hybrid form between children's and adults' fairy tales, following traditional patterns, while also subverting them. As Zipes asserts this did not mean that the fairy tale "abandoned its more traditional role in the civilizing process as agent of socialization" (2000:xxxvii); instead, it turned classical tales "upside down and inside out to question the value system upheld by the dominant socialization process and to keep wonder, curiosity, and creativity alive" (ibid). As such, these fairy tales combined social criticism on the one hand, and educational comments on the purpose of art, and the role of the artist within society on the other.

At the same time, Wilde's fairy tales also foreshadowed what Zipes calls Wilde's "Christian socialism which celebrated individualism and art" (1991:111). This socialism also found its (possibly most distinct) expression in Wilde's later essay "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," which links his fairy tales and the essay inextricably together. Zipes, for example, posits that the "[k]ey for understanding the socio-aesthetic tendency of the tales is [Wilde's] essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*" (1991:114-115). Similarly, Josephine Guy and Ian Small draw attention to the fact that, for example, "The Happy Prince" contains several topical and literary allusions, as well as images, phrases and themes, which are taken up again in Wilde's later work (2006:170). Similarly, the entry for Wilde's fairy tales in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* states that

the protest against social injustice and inequality, the sympathy with the poor and oppressed which was to figure in Wilde's 'Soul of Man Under Socialism', are directly or indirectly expressed in 'The Happy Prince', 'The Devoted Friend', and 'The Selfish Giant', and later in 'The Young King' and 'The Birthday of the Infanta' (550).

Like the fairy tales, "The Soul of Man" linked into well-established traditions in order to subvert them, hiding a socio-aesthetic manifesto behind its political heading. Wilde explicitly combined his Aestheticism with the artist's role as a social agent, not only determining a place for art itself, but also assessing the artist's function in the process of creating a better society. Thus, while elements of these social and aesthetic aspects which Wilde formulates in his fairy tales and "The Soul of Man" weave their way all through his work, it is in these texts in particular that the struggle of the fin de siècle is best formulated. In the following, I will show that the 'flaws'

and inconsistencies of Wilde's and Moore's writings can often be traced back to the attempt to reconcile the engaged reformer with the detached artist.

Moore and Wilde were contemporaries, both producing some of their major works in the 1890s; they shared a love for Paris and its artistic circles, a fascination with everything French and a deep disdain for the Victorian middle class, the target of some of their harshest criticism. Yet their writings also point towards an unwavering dedication to giving people a new understanding of the role of art and the artist within nineteenth-century society. Whilst there was not much love lost between them (Wilde enjoyed making fun of Moore's "vague, formless, obscene face" and disdainfully remarked that his colleague "conducted his education in public" (quoted in Frazier 268)), and Moore very often seems to disappear in the shadow of the flamboyant Wilde, I will demonstrate that both writers were very similar, not only in their approach to 'social Aestheticism', but also in their views on life, art and society. One of their main similarities, which also appears in the works of the other artists discussed in this thesis, is the emphasis they put on the concept of individualism: the development of the individual according to his or her own abilities, needs and talents, unrestricted by the strict moral code of Victorian society. They both considered the artist as the prime example of this individualism and their art as a means to reach this goal.

Yet both Moore's and Wilde's writings also show that they had not yet achieved the stage of perfection that they promoted as they found themselves struggling against the adverse atmosphere of their age. In "The Soul of Man," Wilde, when writing about Byron, claimed that the artist's situation at the fin de siècle had not changed significantly over the years: "Most personalities have been obliged to be rebels. Half their strength has been wasted in friction. Byron's personality, for instance, was terribly wasted in its battle with the stupidity, and hypocrisy, and Philistinism of the English" (SM 8).

Much has been said about Wilde's attempt to "rename the world in order to make himself" (Danson 166). Similarly, Moore's chameleon-like development and his search for his identity as a writer has been documented in studies such as Elizabeth Grubgeld's *George Moore and the Autogenous Self* and Adrian Frazier's recent biography *George Moore 1852-1933*. Moore and Wilde were 'self-inventors',

trying to find a personality that would ‘fit’, and that was not dictated by the rules of Victorian society; however, they also attempted to change the society of which they were part. Susan Dick, for example, writes of Moore that “since the particular colouring and form an artist gives his ideas is affected by the age he lives in, he must make that age as healthy for art as he can” (13). This view draws attention to the fact that their writing not only served self-invention, but also incorporated a message to the reader (not only the reader as consumer, but also the reader as ‘aesthetic’ audience). In the following, I am going to examine their texts in order to explore their message: its social criticism, its depiction of the artist and understanding of art, and, last but not least, its suggestions for a cure for the ills of contemporary society.

3.1 George Moore’s confessions

George Moore was one of the writers at the fin de siècle who generally remained on the fringes of his time. Although scholarship on Moore has been constant, it lags far behind the scholarly (and personal) interest that has been shown for Wilde. Robert Langenfeld, in his extensive annotated bibliography on Moore, stated that “[t]oday modern scholars studying turn-of-the-century British literature commonly judge him as a singularly minor writer, most fittingly labelled ‘influential’ because of the various literary causes he tried to champion” (1). Also, despite such influential studies as Malcolm Brown’s *George Moore: A Reconsideration*, which constituted one of first successful attempts to reintegrate Moore into the canon of fin-de-siècle and modernist writers, it has only been in recent years that interest in Moore has slowly increased. This is evidenced by the publication of Frazier’s extensive and detailed biography, and by the inclusion of Annette Federico’s article on Moore in Marysa Demoor’s *Marketing the Author*. This development reflects what Malcolm Brown wrote almost half a century ago, when he put Moore on par with Wilde and Beardsley:

We see him as [...] the most valuable of the commentators to testify upon the motives, satisfactions, frustrations, and persistent, incurable longing of a practicing artist of talent in the opening phase of the modern age [...]. His adventures summarize the entire epoch of transition, and he represents his time rather more fittingly though with less lurid interest, than Wilde or Beardsley (x-xi).

There now seems to be a consensus that, even though Moore's work varied in its literary quality, his writing, in particular his earlier work, reflects the turbulent and multifarious age of which he was part. Like Wilde, he epitomised the decade of the fin de siècle, and his semi-autobiographical writings directly illustrated the struggles, dreams and desires of the artist in late-Victorian society. Langenfeld, for example, remarks that "Moore's art placed in the context of the Transition period appears not so much a jumble of writings by a curious, mercurial author but a reflection of the changing intellectual currents in the age itself" (19).

Over the years of his life, Moore experimented with many different styles. Coming back from Paris, he wrote in his *Confessions*: "I was as covered with 'fads' as a distinguished foreigner with stars. Naturalism I wore round my neck, Romanticism was pinned over the heart, Symbolism I carried like a toy revolver in my waistcoat pocket, to be used on an emergency" (149). Due to the success of his naturalist novels, *A Mummer's Wife* and *Esther Waters*, Moore is more often seen as a Naturalist and follower of Zola than an Aesthete. Dick, for instance, writes that "Moore knew the aesthetes and published in their journals, but he did not share their way of life" (17). Yet *Confessions* was essentially an 'aesthetic' text, an attempt to import "French aesthetic tastes into England" (Dick 5), and although it is true that his association with the Aesthetic movement as such was early in his life and short-lived, his captivation with "the idea of the new aestheticism—the new art corresponding to the modern" (CM 96)—accompanied him into old age. In a letter to a friend, written in 1922, he postulated that

whosoever follows that fashion loses all individuality—it is necessary to be stiff-necked and obdurate and to treat one's contemporaries contumely. In the great periods the artist took strength from his environment; he was concentric, but in periods of decadence like the present, the artist must be eccentric, stand aloof and disdainfully (quoted in Cunard 137).

This belief in the necessity of detachment found its earliest expression in Moore's semi-fictitious autobiography *Confessions of a Young Man*, in which he presents a young artist whose attitude towards society is marked by a rebellious and supercilious tone, elevating art above life. It has been suggested that *Confessions'* literary flaws stem from its indebtedness to the 'Arnoldian dilemma'—the oscillation between social engagement and artistic detachment. Dick observes that in the text

Moore attempts to merge “two imposing impulses within one character: the reformer’s criticism goes hand in hand with the aesthete’s claim to detachment” (11).

It is in this amalgamation that the text’s ‘failures’ are to be found, and wherein the hybrid nature of the fin-de-siècle works can best be understood. As Dick points out: “The artist who confronts an age inimical to experimentation, one which threatens his development as an artist, can [...] use his art to fight that age and thus, as Moore did, create works with definite flaws” (13). Proclaiming the superiority of art and the disinterestedness of the artist on the one hand, the text simultaneously surprises through its direct didactical interaction with the reader on the other. Although this is mostly an interaction of confrontation with the intention to shock, the following analysis will show how Moore used these aspects to reveal a new and different understanding of the purpose of art and the role of the artist within society.

Even though Moore replaced the narrator’s name, Edwin Dayne, with his own as early as 1889, when the French edition of his *Confessions* was published, the text cannot be called an autobiographical text as such. Rather, it is a mixture of fact and fiction, a “work of art for which the author sat” (Dunleavy 19). Moore himself described it as an attempt to “contrast the art of two great cities: Paris and London” (quoted in Dick 1), and he was eager for people to know that it was meant as a satire (Dick 11)—mostly a satire of Victorian society. As such, “*Confessions* [...] has the subversive edge that is part of the rhetoric of satire; despite the narrator’s pose of snobbery and detachment, it is, like most satires, radically moral” (Federico 100). In a very similar fashion to Wilde’s play with audience expectations as raised in the dramatic dialogue form of “The Critic as Artist,” Moore built up his readers’ expectations as to the content of his novel in order to then undermine and subvert them.

To understand the effectiveness of this play with expectations, one has to realise that the late nineteenth century saw an enormous rise in the number of published biographies, especially biographies on and by artists. Julie Codell, in her study *The Victorian Artist*, notes that

during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, artists entered Victorian ‘biographical recognition’, becoming popular subjects of Victorian biographies on a mass scale not experienced before; serialized biographies, for example, sometimes numbered up to fifty artists’ biographies in a single series (2).

However, as Codell evidences, it was not the “agonized genius,” the “alienated and suffering” bohemian artist who was presented in these biographies; rather, they were biographies of

gentlemen and ladies whose material success and public appeal became representative of English cultural domination and superiority [...]. Victorian artists were models of success, decorum, proper manliness or femininity, and, ultimately, of Britishness, all intended for public consumption (2-3).

Into this atmosphere of shaping public images and promoting the Victorian artist, Moore released his book: the ‘confessions’ of an anti-Victorian, anti-establishment, even anti-British artist, who had come to pull down the literary barriers of Victorian respectability. Grubgeld affirms that Moore’s *Confessions*, though built upon the conventions of Victorian autobiography such as “biblical models of narrative and questions of heredity and nationality” (xi), simultaneously undermined and parodied these conventions as its generic hybridity and its mixture of fact and fiction denied the possibility of a self-integrated text and a reliable narrator. Through the very title of his book, for example, Moore evoked and parodied the tradition of confessional autobiographies such as St. Augustine’s, Rousseau’s or de Quincey’s, (though he claimed to never have read Rousseau before he started writing (Dick 42)), thereby leading his reader to anticipate hearing about (sordid) little secrets and sins, and the way out of temptation to eventual redemption and salvation from sin. Grubgeld writes:

Building upon the literal and symbolic motif of geographical movement, Moore’s exodus not only follows the allegorical path from darkness to enlightenment, but delivers its protagonist from the Egypt of Ireland to the genuine “homeland” of France and, later, London. [...] According to Moore’s ideas of instinct, the move to the promised land is, as in the biblical story, less a discovery of that land than a recovery of one’s birthright. Adapting the sacred paradigm to his secular narrative, Moore openly exploits the terms of conversion—spiritual death, rebirth, and baptism—in what he calls a parody of the Confessions of St. Augustine, a story not of ‘a God-tortured’, but of ‘an art-tortured’, soul (39-40).

Yet whilst Moore followed these terms of conversion, he simultaneously reversed the roles of confessor and confider, attacking the reader who had picked up the book to see the narrator ‘expose’ himself. Echoing Baudelaire’s reference to the “hypocrite lecteur,” he wrote:

Shake not your head, lift not your finger, exquisitely hypocritical reader; you can deceive me in nothing. In know the baseness and unworthiness of your soul as I know the baseness and unworthiness of my own. [...] let us pull off all customary disguise, let us be frank [...]. The one eternal and immutable delight of life is to think, for one reason or another, that we are better than our neighbours. This is why I wrote this book, and this is why it is affording so much pleasure [...], because it helps you to the belief that you are not so bad after all (CM 179-180).

By unveiling the hypocritical pleasure his audience feels when reading the book, the narrator holds up a mirror to the face of society, forcing it to acknowledge the ‘grain of truth’ in his aggressive statements. Like Wilde, Moore chose to “replace Arnold and Ruskin’s pulpit with the drawing room,” and through his art he delivered criticism. He effectively re-located the place of attack into the world of fiction, leaving it up to the reader to decide how best to receive what was said. Thus, the open criticism of society and the Victorian middle class fell into an indeterminable domain of ‘fictitious facts’, denying the reader any real ground for counter-attack except in the realm of literary and artistic fiction.²⁴ It might be for this reason that *Confessions* proved so controversial at the time of its first publication: it left the reader with no distinct clue concerning how to read and understand the content of the novel.

Another element which denied the reader any reliable point of reference was the figure of the narrator itself. Whilst his experience and development constitute the focal point of the text, the narrator himself remains strangely elusive. He is almost a spectator himself, disinterestedly following the unfolding story. He describes himself as a “smooth sheet of wax [...] free from original qualities” (49). Consequently, his ‘exodus’ is about gathering experience, about “being moulded into all shapes” (ibid). However, despite this eagerness to receive and be formed, the narrator stays detached all through the text. After having spent a few weeks in Paris, he writes:

And just as I had watched the chorus girls and mummers, three years ago, at the Globe Theatre, now, excited by a nervous curiosity, I watched this world of Parisian adventures and lights o’ love. [...] With the patience of a cat before a mouse-hole, I watched and listened [...]. Like midges that fret the surface of a shadowy stream, these men and women seemed to me; and though I laughed, danced, and made merry with them, I was not of them (CM 60).

²⁴ The same technique can be found in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* whose ‘decadent content’ is neutralized according to whether one understands the Preface as part of the novel or as an additional but essentially separate manifesto.

This amalgamation of detached spectator, unreliable narrator and central character of the story all in one person has several implications for the reception of this piece of work. First of all, by combining the figure of the unreliable narrator and the central character in one person, Moore draws attention to the frailty of literary constructs. Made even more ambiguous through the exchange of Moore's own name for that of Edwin Dayne, the constructed narrator in the text remains, to a large extent, indeterminable. Grubgeld suggests that the text shows how

Moore disbelieves in the accessibility, not to mention the reproducibility, of any common truth about the self that has not been drastically altered by self-reflection. [...] Roland Barthes warned in 1966 that 'the one who speaks (in the narrative) is not the one who writes (in real life) and the one who writes is not the one who is' (50).

Thus, if the self and the text are both constructed by an indeterminable individual, who mixes fact and fiction, the reader is left with no clear reference point except his or her own impressions and understandings.

Secondly, the confusion as to the identity of the speaker and the main character allowed Moore to re-occupy the position of the artist within, yet outside, of society. As a detached spectator, the main character keeps himself aloof from his acquaintances and their world; his attitude is reminiscent of Schiller's words that the artist "is a child of his age," but should never be "his ward, or worse still, its minion" (AE 55). The narrator in *Confessions* displays a deeply paradoxical attitude towards people which reflects the tension between being in the world, but not 'of it'. Increasingly dissatisfied with the way he is being taught how to paint, he writes:

[T]houghts of love and death, and the hopelessness of life, were in active fermentation within me and sought utterance with a strange unintermittingness of appeal. I yearned merely to give direct expression to my pain. [...] The creatures I met in the ways and by the ways of Parisian life, whose gestures and attitudes I devoured with my eyes, and whose souls I hungered to know, awoke in me a tense irresponsible curiosity, but that was all,—I despised, I hated them, thought them contemptible, and to select them as subjects of artistic treatment, could not then, might never, have occurred to me, had the suggestion to do so not come direct to me from the outside (64).

This passage indicates the paradoxical position in which the artist finds himself with respect to society; however, it also mirrors a loss of ideals and a deep craving for their restoration. The question for art was how to express ideals that were nowhere to be found. The art that the narrator is taught has lost touch with the truly important

aspects of life, such as hope, love and death. It is here that the narrator realises that art is meant to be more than just technique, more than just mere representation of the here and now and the empirical facts of life. Captive in this circle of reproducing what is already there, the narrator finds himself despising the shallowness of a life without ideals.

It is in this loss of ideals that the narrator of *Confessions* differs significantly from the earlier, idealised image of the artist: while the latter occupied the position of detachment as a mediator between transcendental ideals and present existence, the former finds himself trapped in a situation in which change cannot be achieved merely through alerting people as to the discrepancy between ideal and reality. His detachment from society thus only serves its direct criticism through the establishment of a negative relationship. By situating himself outside society, he is no longer bound to its social code, and is thus given the freedom to utter statements designed to shock through their reversal and often perversion of traditional values and ideas.

The narrator adopts “the guise of a cruelly yet naively pre-occupied artist” (Grubgeld 38), and from this position of detachment weighs life against art only to unhesitatingly favour art. In true aesthetic fashion his tales of ‘growing up’ are to a large extent spun around the dichotomy of his love for art and beauty on the one hand, and his equally strong contempt for people on the other. This contempt for life and humanity finds its most scandalous expression in the narrator’s praise of art. Throughout his *Confessions* it is art that rules over all things, that gives value to people, and that makes things worthwhile. “What care I that some millions of wretched Israelites died under Pharaoh’s lash or Egypt’s sun?” the narrator exclaims and continues: “It was well that they died that I might have the pyramids to look on [...]. What care I that the virtue of some sixteen-year-old maiden was the price paid for Ingres’ *La Source*...?” (CM 125). Also, it is not his humanity, his pity for people and the price he paid for their salvation which make Jesus worthy of praise: rather, it is the “picturesqueness” of his “bleeding face and hands and feet,” his “hanging body” and the beauty of the story of “God descending to the harlot” that renders him sublime (CM 124).

It is not only when thinking of the real-life subjects of art that the narrator displays his contemptuous attitude. In the course of his tale, one is struck by the narrator's tendency to objectify human beings, evaluating their worth by their usefulness to him. People are, for him, a "study, a subject for dissection" (CM 61), and he admits that "as I picked up books, so I picked up my friends [...] and as I discarded my books when I had assimilated as much of them as my system required, so I discarded my friends when they ceased to be of use to me" (CM 63). Hence, he leaves his lover without warning or even a note of farewell (CM 118), does not inform his friend Marshall of his departure to London (CM 127), and in his conclusive address to the "hypocritical reader" he praises his so-called friends in terms of what they have to offer him, writing mockingly: "I have had the rarest and most delightful friends. Ah, how I have loved my friends; the rarest wits of my generation were my boon companions; everything conspired to enable me to gratify my body and my brain" (CM 180).

In his contempt for mankind, the narrator also fails to distinguish between different social strata. In the same dehumanizing and unemotional way that he describes Emma, the servant girl in his lodgings, so is his recollection of his well-to-do lover scientific and unemotional. Emma he sees as a "beast of burden" (CM 135) and he recalls how he "used to ask [her] all sorts of cruel questions" as he was "curious to know the depth of animalism [she] had sunk to, or rather out of which [she] had never been raised" (CM 133). Similarly, his description of his lover, though not as obviously contemptuous, is equally degrading and objectifying under the deceptively appreciative surface. Searching for words to characterise her, he ponders:

How like her that letter is,—egoistical, vain, foolish; no, not foolish—
narrow, limited, but not foolish; worldly, oh, how worldly! and [sic] yet not
repulsively so, for there always was in her a certain intensity of feeling that
saved her from the commonplace, and gave her an inexpressible charm
(CM121).

Yet even this charm does not have a hold on the narrator. He continues: "Yes, she is a woman who can feel, and she has lived her life and felt it very acutely, very sincerely—sincerely? ...like a moth caught in a gauze curtain!" (ibid).

However, whilst the narrator thus adopts the life-despising attitude of the decadent Aesthete, he also hides his most subtle, yet compelling criticism in this posture, for it is in his praise of art that his social criticism is found at its most effective. Through his posture, the narrator exaggerates and reverses Victorian attitudes. By describing Emma as a “beast of burden” he voices the underlying attitude many Victorians had towards their servants and the poor. Similarly, his characterisation of his lover can be understood as a realisation of the social code that kept so many young girls captive. They were, after all and despite all their apparent freedom, “caught in a gauze curtain” of expectations and categorisations. Commenting on the narrator’s rather shocking statements, Grubgeld points out that

Confessions’ attacks upon philanthropic reform and its advocacy of hedonism function in a fairly simple way to justify the narrator’s ideas and character by attributing his apparent selfishness to a form of compassion more sophisticated than the philanthropist’s. His resistance to increasing the salary of the abused servant, “Awful Emma,” indicates, if anything, an awareness of how fully imprisoned within class structure she is: an imprisonment a small increase in money or a few holidays does nothing to eradicate, although such may salve the conscience of the self-proclaimed reformer (44-45).

Therefore, in his apparently anti-humanist and supercilious attitude towards people, the narrator reveals a deeper understanding of contemporary society than would be expected—it shows that the narrator sees the lack of individualism and the ability to live one’s life according to one’s personality rather than according to some social code or restriction.

It is for this reason that Moore’s main point of contention with Victorian society was what he called “Victorian Respectability.” “Respectability!” the narrator exclaims, “a suburban villa, a piano in the drawing-room and going home to dinner. Such things are no doubt very excellent, but they do not promote intensity of feeling, fervour of mind” (CM 138). Respectability thus becomes synonymous of the stifling of individualism and feeling; under its influence individuals lose their personalities and what makes them human. Respectability had, the narrator warns, “wound itself about society, a sort of octopus, and nowhere are you quite free from one of its horrible suckers” (CM 141). It had rooted out variety, and now it seemed that “universal uniformity is the future of the world” (CM 139). The same holds true for education, which the narrator denounces as the evil that has turned the world into the decadent place it is. Education, he claims, “destroys individuality” (CM 112) as it

puts an end to the self-education that follows instinct, individual taste, interest and personal enjoyment.²⁵

This condemnation of uniformity and submission to a social code powerfully introduced the notion of the importance of individualism that played such a vital role in fin-de-siècle artistic circles. In it, the effects of doubts concerning transcendental absolutes were mirrored—the very absolutes which formerly constituted a ‘code of behaviour’ that man was meant to follow. As the certainty of these absolutes began to vanish, it became necessary to focus back on the individual: it was about realizing who one truly was or could possibly be. As Federico points out

Confessions is partly directed against the prudery and platitudes of Victorian society, where a young girl cannot read an ‘immoral’ novel but may spend her mornings poring over the Colin Campbell divorce case in the newspapers. [...] *Confessions* is also a brisk, witty confrontation with the ‘hypocritical reader’ who accepts the identity respectable society has imposed upon her, rather than excavating her past for that ideal self, playing with the possibilities of selfhood (100).

Thus, the novel was far removed from merely voicing the impractical impressions and confessions of a disinterested artist. Rather, it was “an activist piece of writing which encouraged social change with the help of the aesthetic movement” (Demoor 13). It encouraged the reader to think, to move beyond tradition, social code and false morality, liberating him from presuppositions that held him captive.

3.2 Oscar Wilde’s ethics

The liberation of the individual from the stifling grasp of society also constituted one of the main themes in Wilde’s writings. Like Moore’s narrator, Wilde enjoyed wearing the aesthetic mask of disinterestedness, and he often hid his social concern behind an anti-humanist stance. This is exemplified in one of Wilde’s statements in the ‘aesthetic manifesto’ of his Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* which claims that “no artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable manner of style” (MW 48). Yet many of Wilde’s texts undermine this statement; when looking more closely at his works, discrepancies between his role as the ‘High priest of Aestheticism’ and the message of his writings begin to appear. The diversity of Wilde’s work leaves one to wonder, for instance, why Wilde the

²⁵ In Victorian times, school education was also an education in class differences and the preservation of inequality. See for example Thomas Heyck “Educational.”

Aesthete would concern himself with socio-political questions such as those he considers in essays like “The Soul of Man,” or why he would underlay the worship of beauty and artifice with a moral message, as he does in his fairy tales.

As mentioned before, Wilde’s most productive years, in which he composed and published most of his major works, were between 1890 and 1895. Consequently, one cannot necessarily attribute the gap between ethics and aesthetics to a possible literary development; Wilde’s oeuvre cannot be split into a phase of Aestheticism and, for example, a phase of Socialism in the same way that one might split Moore’s career into phases of Naturalism and Realism. Whilst some scholars understand the variety of Wilde’s texts as mirroring his response to the forces of the cultural marketplace and the demand of the reading public,²⁶ other critics have come to perceive Wilde’s apparent disinterestedness and dedication to art within the framework of a coherent ethical philosophy, which centred upon the idea of individualism. Bashford, for example, avers that Wilde’s critical dialogues are based on a humanist theory that places subjectivism and the importance of the individual at its centre (1999:28-29). Similarly, Julia Brown argues that Wilde’s cosmopolitanism (even though detached) was never divorced from moral or spiritual life. She observes that “his claim that aesthetics is ‘higher’ than ethics, as the context in which it is uttered makes clear, is based on definitions of both terms that understand the aesthetic to transform, rather than transcend, the ethical” (xvi). Anderson, a few years later, picks up on this understanding of Wilde, and reads his epigrams as successful attempts to reconcile aesthetics and ethics, social engagement and detachment (148-149).

While these critics, in particular Bashford and Brown, try to demonstrate that Wilde’s writing is based on a cohesive ethical philosophy, I argue that it is not so much a definite and intentional ethical position that can be evinced from Wilde’s writing, but rather the struggle to establish a new social understanding of the artist and his art within a period of great cultural change. This chapter admits a reading of

²⁶ There have been several publications considering the influence of market forces and the positioning of the artist within a cultural marketplace over the last few decades. Some of the major ones are for example Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace*, Guy & Small, *Oscar Wilde’s Profession*, Freedman’s *Professions of Taste* or Demoor’s *Marketing the Author*. Their studies have been supported by publications such as Bourdieu’s *The Field of Cultural Production* which addresses the relationship between cultural production and broader social processes, and McDonald’s *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice*.

his texts that does not submit to an understanding of 'either-or'; rather, it sees their aspects of ambiguity and paradox as a reflection of the fin-de-siècle process of re-definition of art and of artists within the context of aesthetic education.

One of Wilde's writings that most obviously and awkwardly combined social engagement and aesthetics is his 'socialist manifesto', the essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism." Many critics consider this essay as only one more of Wilde's attempts to bring his aesthetic manifesto to people, completely dismissing the social aspect of the essay, and claim that Wilde simply used the term Socialism to exploit the mood of the time in order to attract a different and wider audience. William Buckler, for example, maintains that the essay's "subject is 'the soul of man', socialism being merely one of the revolutionary topics of the day and a useful strategy for taunting the entrenched and ever-threatened middle class" (2). Similarly, Norbert Kohl argues that "The Soul of Man" "does not answer the question implied by its title; instead of being a contribution to the discussion of socialist theory, it is in fact a manifesto for aesthetic individualism" (134). Others, such as T.F. Evans, wonder whether in the middle of the essay Wilde

had run out of ideas about the political and social themes with which he had attempted to deal [...] taking it up again, perhaps some time later, [...] turning to subjects on which he might have felt himself more competent to theorise on than on the much wider theme of the future organisation of society (56).

These approaches to making sense of "The Soul of Man" are understandable, because more than any other of Wilde's writings this essay stands out through its rather paradoxical combination of content, form and context. Its title, for example, awakened expectations of a political or socialist piece of writing, especially as it tied in with the general mood at a time of Fabianism, with particular working class movements and with a general desire to see political change. Yet these expectations were completely undermined as soon as one read Wilde's first sentence. Firmly re-locating social engagement within the sphere of egotistical disinterestedness, he stated: "The chief advantage that would result from the establishment of Socialism is, undoubtedly, the fact that Socialism would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others..." (SM 1). Defying expectations through this introduction of a paradox, Wilde caught his reader unawares, opening up new ways of approaching

and understanding a concept that had become (too) well-known in society. Moreover, in this first sentence, Wilde unhesitatingly formulated the core of the ‘Arnoldian dilemma’ as he introduced and advocated a detached standpoint within the context of ethical involvement.

Like Moore, Wilde founded his ‘socialist’ theory on the notion of individualism, and on the way in which art could pave the way to achieving a ‘perfect personality’. Wilde also believed that the perfection of the individual was hindered by society: the stifling social etiquette of “Victorian Respectability” or “Public Opinion” (as Wilde called it) seemed to render any attempt of individuality impossible. Throughout his essay, therefore, Wilde pointed out that what Victorian society considered true self and individuality was nothing more than “social identification” (Dollimore 8). Jonathan Dollimore explains that

Individualism is both a desire for a radical *personal freedom* and a desire for *society itself* to be radically different, the first being inseparable from the second. So Wilde’s concept of the individual was crucially different from the sense of the concept which signifies the private, experientially, self-sufficient, autonomous but ultimately quietist, bourgeois subject (9).

Wilde thus not only showed awareness of the problems of contemporary society, but also addressed them in a manner that gestured towards possible change. Unlike Moore, whose *Confessions* were effected mostly through exaggerated statements, designed to shock society, Wilde used a more subversive form of argument. Whilst his statements were radical and often extremist (like the aforementioned first sentence of his essay), he “was also repelled by the idea of countering moral pieties with naked truth or deep delineation of character, which for him meant running aground on the shoals of human nature” (Anderson 156). Therefore, Wilde’s argument mostly worked through the re-definition and subversion of common notions, pre-determined values and traditional ideas.

This approach becomes evident in his engagement with ideas of Socialism itself: in his essay, Wilde supported the Socialist idea of converting private property into public wealth, and promoting co-operation instead of competition as the basis of a reformation and a renewal of society (SM 1). However, his reasons for supporting the abolition of private property were somewhat different to those of ‘real’ Socialists: he maintained that private property was “immoral,” for it brought with it a sense of

duty; therefore, “in the interest of the rich we must get rid of it” (SM 4). Wilde herein entered the debate from an utterly unexpected side: he positioned himself alongside the rich, arguing for the freedom Socialism would bring them, rather than the poor or working classes. Although he seemed to thus be completely reversing the focus, as well as the argument, of Socialism, he essentially criticised the very same aspects. When he asserted that for the rich, property encouraged charity, strengthening the class divide between the middle class and the poor, he simultaneously pointed out how it helped to keep both captive in a system of ‘musts’ and ‘must nots’. The poor, Wilde claimed, had become vital to the Victorian middle class, as the charitable acts that were showered on them helped Victorians to feel good about themselves.

This viewpoint reminds one of the narrator of *Confessions*, who sees pity as “the most vile of vile virtues,” claiming that the Victorian notion of charity is nothing more than “a little bourgeois comfort, a little bourgeois sense of right” (CM 123). The poor are relieved of the necessity to change their situation, leaving them in the clutches of poverty. Wilde insisted that altruism would not solve the problem of poverty, and Socialism, in Wilde’s terms, was about having, and not about giving. This meant that Wilde’s Socialism was essentially egocentric, but Wilde claimed that in its very egotism it would eventually “lead to Individualism” (SM 2). He asserted that private property had led only to a false sense of individualism among the rich, who seemed to be free, but who eventually confused “man with what he possesses” (SM 7):

Private property has crushed true Individualism, and set up an Individualism that is false. It has debarred one part of the community from being individual by starving them. It has debarred the other part of the community from being individual by putting them on the wrong road, and encumbering them (ibid).

Wilde’s critique was that the influence of social codes and practices did not allow the individual to develop according to his or her needs, abilities and desires. Society should not be a reflection of uniformity, but of variety, enabling each man and woman to freely discover who they are. In the words of the narrator of *Confessions*, “it [did] not matter how badly you paint[ed], as long as you [didn’t] paint badly like other people” (CM 112). Wilde’s concept of individualism thus proved to be very similar to Moore’s. Their main objective was the acceptance of difference, of allowing people to ‘develop their best selves’, not according to some

absolute, but according to their personalities. As such, Wilde averred, individualism was completely unselfish, even though it worked through focussing on oneself. He wrote:

Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live. [...] Unselfishness recognizes infinite variety of type as a delightful thing, accepts it, acquiesces in it, enjoys it. It is not selfish to think for oneself (SM 32-33).

Hence, he and Moore both conceived of individualism to not only point towards, but also to advocate, the aesthetic position of detachment and disinterestedness. According to Wilde, the establishment of a perfect society would only ever be possible through detaching oneself from it in the first place. Only then would society be able to realise that man was “complete in himself” (SM 11), and that “nothing should be able to harm a man except himself. Nothing should be able to rob a man at all. What a man really has is what is in him. What is outside of him should be a matter of no importance” (SM 8).

Where Moore took the sting out of his shocking *Confessions* by positioning his writing in the indeterminable area between fact and fiction, Wilde supported his ‘immoral’ and paradoxical comments by situating them within the authority of the Christian discourse in Victorian society. Throughout the essay, he quoted biblical stories to justify his criticism of Victorian society and used Jesus Christ as a spokesperson and advocate for his promotion of individualism. He avowed, for example, that “over the portal of the new world ‘Be Thyself’ shall be written. And the message of Christ to man was simply ‘Be Thyself’” (SM 9). By (re-)interpreting Christ’s words from the Bible, Wilde made his appeal to society, criticizing the same aspects that Moore touched upon in his *Confessions*, which were materialism, morality and hypocrisy, and countering them with his ideal of individualism.

In his criticism of the materialism that pervaded Victorian society, Wilde, for instance, recounted the biblical parable of the rich young man (Matt. 19) to illustrate the negative influence of private property, and the importance of understanding one’s identity in terms of who one was instead of in terms of what one possessed. The young man who came to Jesus was, in Wilde’s words, a “thoroughly good citizen;” he was “quite respectable, in the ordinary sense of that extraordinary word” (SM 10-11). With these utterances, Wilde turned the young man into a bearer of Victorian

middle-class values, attributing to him the characteristics of the ‘earnest Victorian’. Echoing Arnold’s concept of Hebraism, the description of the young man revealed Wilde’s view of contemporary society as a civilization believing that the way to heaven was based on legalism and material success. Therefore, in the same way that Jesus told the young man that in order to enter heaven, he needed to sell everything that he had and follow Jesus, Wilde told Victorian society that “[it] should give up private property” (SM 10). Private property was nothing more than “a burden,” and Wilde urged society to understand that it was within, “and not outside of [oneself], that [one] will find what [one] really [is], and what [one] really want[s]” (SM 11).

Like Moore, Wilde also attacked Victorian morality. Obedience to the rules of this morality, which were expressed and authorized in what Wilde calls ‘Public Opinion,’ could make or break a man, and thus hindered free expression of personality and the freedom to ‘do as one pleases’. Wilde again used a story from the New Testament to illustrate how dangerous and inherently wrong public opinion could be. This time, the story concerned a woman caught in adultery (John 8). In the biblical story, Jesus saw the woman brought out to be stoned, and he challenged the men in the court room that he who was without sin should throw the first stone. One by one, the men disappeared from the room for no one could claim to be wholly without sin. By appropriating this story, Wilde drew parallels between the New Testament zealous Jews and his contemporary Victorian audience. Like the Pharisees of Jesus’ time, Victorian society was quick to condemn, trying to uphold a standard of morality that none could truly fulfil. What Wilde implied was that the high standards of Victorian morality were built on hypocrisy, and that people tended to condemn and exclude others from society in order to keep the finger of public disapproval from pointing back at themselves.

Wilde thereby not only condemned the hypocrisy that sustained the rule of public opinion, but also maintained that the values on which it was built were essentially wrong. Again drawing parallels to the Bible, Wilde recounted how Mary, a prostitute, came to Jesus and poured expensive perfume over his hair, but was immediately reproached for her wastefulness by Jesus’s disciples (Matt. 26). Yet, Jesus defended her, saying that she had done a “good thing,” for even though material needs were great and permanent, they were not always more important than

spiritual needs. In the same way that Jesus drew attention to the danger of considering one value system more important than another, Wilde emphasised that the ‘majority opinion’ was not necessarily the right one. He asserted that it was easy to misrepresent and misinterpret situations, people and deeds when following the general opinion instead of coming to one’s own conclusions. He warned that the unwillingness to think outside of traditional concepts and the continued suppression of the individual would eventually lead to a stagnating and fundamentally dead society. Hence, one of the most important maxims of society should be the freedom of the individual, which could only be achieved through the complete abolition of any form of institution.

It was for this reason that Wilde attacked the concept of family and marriage. Again situating his argument within the context of Jesus’ teaching, Wilde claimed that Jesus himself “rejected family life” (SM 12), referring to two instances in the Bible where Jesus seemed to undermine the contemporary idea of the importance of family (Matt. 8/12). Whilst Jesus’ comments could be understood in the wider context of his mission on earth, Wilde’s statements at first seemed to be merely provocative, echoing the denunciation of marriage so popular in Aesthetic and Decadent circles. However, Wilde did not attack marriage and family life as such, but only “in its present form” (SM 12), which was based on a legalistic view and was linked closely (at least for women) to the idea of being property. Building on his previous argument, Wilde maintained that “with the abolition of private property, marriage in its present form must disappear” (ibid). Only once all institutional holds on man were abolished would people be able to fully appreciate each other as human beings.

According to Wilde, this idealised approach to other human beings was mirrored and exemplified in the process of aesthetic reception. Wilde compared the individual to a work of art and argued that in the same way that the work of art must speak for itself and required the spectator to be merely ‘receptive,’ an individual could not be judged by someone else’s standards. He explained that

if a man approaches a work of art with any desire to exercise authority over it and the artist, he approaches it in such a spirit that he cannot receive any artistic impression from it at all. The work of art is to dominate the spectator: the spectator is not to dominate the work of art (SM 26).

Similarly, when a person approached another person with the intention of measuring the other by his or her own standards, they would eventually fail to see the essentially human in the other. Human relationship was not about categorising and comparing, but about accepting and appreciating the individual. Therefore, what people needed in their interaction with each other was a “temperament of receptivity” (SM 26). Only then would they be able to approach each other in a non-judgmental way, allowing the perfect society to take shape.

As has been mentioned before, many of Wilde’s ideas which he expressed in “Soul of Man” had already been (at least partly) formulated in his fairy tales. The criticism of society that emerged in the fairy tales was much more tentative and elusive than in “The Soul of Man.” Thus, while their issues of criticism were the same, the former differ significantly in their approach which was a lot more subversive. This was due mostly to Wilde’s use and subversion of a genre that raised expectations of clear-cut boundaries between good and evil, innocence and corruption, morality and happy endings. However, as will be shown, Wilde subverted this established generic tradition, allowing for an indirect and often indeterminable social criticism which also promoted the position of the artist as prophet for, and as a saviour of, humanity. In writing his fairy tales, Wilde acknowledged that his task was not to overthrow current value systems and cherished tradition, but to suggest possibilities of change. As Zipes notes, “Wilde was careful not to portray the contours of utopia because he was so familiar with the sordid conditions in Victorian England and realised that there would be a long struggle before we would even begin to catch a glimpse of real social utopia” (1991:120).

Unlike traditional fairy tales, Wilde’s tales worked through unresolved tension that did not allow for a clear-cut ‘moral’ at the end of the story. One such example with respect to Wilde’s criticism of society is one of his later fairy tales, “The Birthday of the Infanta” (1891). It is the tale of the festivities that take place to celebrate the Infanta’s birthday. One of the performers is a deformed, little dwarf, who comes to dance for the Infanta. She delights in his awkwardness and ugliness in a childishly cruel way; however, the dwarf believes that she has fallen in love with him. Having finished his performance, the dwarf decides to go and search for the Infanta so he can take her away with him. Yet whilst wandering through the palace,

he sees himself in a mirror for the first time, realises that he is ugly and that the Infanta has only been making fun of him, and dies of a broken heart.

It was not only through the complete reversal of the concept of a ‘happy ending’ through which Wilde subverted the genre of the traditional fairy tale, defied readers’ expectations and raised questions as to ‘what went wrong’. He also complicated the usually clear-cut dichotomy of innocence and corruption. Christopher Nassaar posits that Wilde’s fairy tales are characterised by a common theme, namely “the fall from the world of innocence and subsequent attainment of a higher innocence” (20). However, while the notion of innocence plays a vital part in Wilde’s tales, Nassaar’s generalization is not fully applicable to the Infanta. In fact, as Ian Small points out in his introduction to Wilde’s short fiction,

what marks out Wilde’s fairy tales is that such values [selfless love and fidelity] are always vulnerable to society’s vulgar self-interest. In traditional fairy tales, love and constancy are rewarded in this world; in Wilde’s tales love and constancy lead generally to the destruction of the individual (xxv).

Subsequently, it is not so much the development of the Infanta that constitutes the focal point of this fairy tale. Instead, in her position of childish innocence, she becomes a mirror in which the short-comings of society are reflected. By making the main protagonist of the story a child—the Infanta—who throughout the story voices unkind and often heartless opinions, Wilde criticised a society that could turn a child into a vain, opinionated and heartless person. John Stokes comments on this tactic of social criticism and writes: “Children are of all people the most bound up with their own behaviour, yet the most oblivious to what is expected of them, and in that respect alone, as Wilde liked to point out, they are father to the man” (1978:20).

Thus, in the figure of the Infanta the stifling etiquettes of society find expression, and her reflection acts as implicit criticism. The birthday of the Infant, for instance, is an epitome of artificiality, framed by strict etiquettes and hierarchy. The Infanta herself is described as a stiff, little doll, dressed up in her “robe of grey satin, the skirt and the wide puffed sleeves heavily embroidered with silver, and the stiff corset studded with rows of fine pearls. [...] her hair, [...] like an aureole of faded gold stood out stiffly round her pale little face” (SF 98). Yet it is not only in her dress and looks that society’s authoritative hand is displayed; it is found also in her character. In love with everything artificial, vain and self-righteous, the Infanta represents

society's superficiality, its hypocrisy and its unwillingness to approach one another with a "temperament of receptivity" (SM 26). Hemmed in by society and social codes from early childhood, the Infanta reproduces its narrow-mindedness. The dwarf, who (though ugly and deformed) is an example of perfect individuality, is turned into a victim of her unconscious cruelty. Unaware, at first, of the opinions and comments made about him, he is perfectly happy, seeing the Infanta as the most wonderful companion imaginable and unquestionably accepting the white rose as a sign of her love (SF 108). Yet his world of perfect freedom is destroyed when he faces himself, a "grotesque monster" (SF 112), in the mirror in one of the rooms of the palace. It is in this mirror that the dwarf, for the first time, is confronted with society's view of him: "misshapen and hunchbacked, foul to look at and grotesque" (SF 113). Looking at himself through the eyes of society, he realises that rather than declaring her love for him, the Infanta has merely mocked him.

The mirror he faces is thus much more than a mere 'looking glass': it is the eye of society and of the world which judges, condemns and destroys innocence and life. Yet when the dwarf dies in the end, the Infanta's disdainful comment that in the future those who come to play with her should have no hearts (SF 114) is not a condemnation of the princess. Instead, her childish innocence forces Wilde's reader to investigate his or her own ideas and notions, just as parents have to be sure of their own ideals before condemning their children's actions. Small observes that "Wilde's stories run directly counter to the nineteenth-century tradition of moral tales for children that emphasize the role of parents in educating recalcitrant children into the norms and values of *adult* culture" (xvi), and "The Birthday of the Infanta" is therefore a condemnation of the society that has turned the Princess into what she is. In all her cruelty, the Infanta is still a child and has never known anything else but life at the Spanish Court. Consequently, she is merely a mirror reflecting social interactions, and a judgement of her always turns into a judgement of society.

3.3 The artist as role model

Looking at these examples from "The Soul of Man" and "The Birthday of the Infanta" one notices that even though the content of Wilde's writing seemed to support artificiality, disinterestedness and detachment, its purpose proved to be deeply social. Wilde understood that contemporary society was caught in a self-

created system of norms, values and automated perpetuation, making it impossible to see its faults and flaws and (even if they were recognized) to find solutions for them. He noted, for instance, that “misery and poverty are so absolutely degrading, and exercise such a paralyzing effect over the nature of men, that no class is ever really conscious of its own suffering” (SM 5). Someone who could move outside the system was needed, one of those “interfering, meddling people who come down to some perfectly contented class of society, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them” (ibid). Reiterating an idealised notion of the artist with its maxims of detachment and simultaneous social responsibility, Wilde asserted through his fairy tales and “The Soul of Man” that only the artist was able to fulfil this role. This conception of the artist as an “interfering, meddling” person played an important role in his writings, particularly in his early fairy tales, which can be read as allegories, telling the story of the artist’s relationship with a society that had forgotten how to appreciate the true, life-improving purpose of art.

One such example is the story of “The Happy Prince,” one of Wilde’s earliest fairy tales. It tells the story of a beautiful statue, made of gold, rubies and sapphires that stands “high above the city” (SF 3). It is the statue of the Happy Prince, who used to live in a palace where there was no sorrow, and all his life was filled with beauty and pleasure. Now, standing in the middle of the city, the statue is confronted with human suffering and sorrow never before experienced. Together with a little swallow that one day stops at his feet, the Happy Prince attempts to alleviate the suffering he sees through giving away the precious stones and the gold that cover him. In the end, both he and the little swallow die, the latter of the cold, and the former from a broken heart.

The statue of the Happy Prince has symbolic value on two levels: on the one hand, it can be seen as a work of art; on the other hand, as an equivalent of the artist himself. As a work of art, it inspires people, and it is interesting to see children and those who suffer know how to understand and appreciate it the best: a disappointed man finds consolation in the fact that the statue stands as proof that happiness still exists, and the “Charity Children” see it as an inspiration for, and the reflection of, their dreams (SF 3). Wilde contrasts their reaction to those of the “Mathematical Master,” who does “not approve of children dreaming,” and the town councillor, who

describes the statue “as beautiful as a weathercock [...] only not quite so useful” (ibid). These statements, made by a representative of the middle class and by those who govern and educate society, shows the necessity of transforming their understanding of art so as to make them see that art is not useful because it is a “for-other.”

As a representation of the artist, the statue of the Happy Prince mirrors the development and purpose of the artist, and his standing in society. Firstly, he grows up in a place ‘outside of this world’: the “Palace of Sans-Souci, where sorrow is not allowed to enter” (SF 5), a world of ideals and complete beauty. During his time in the real world, he is confronted with sorrow and suffering, and his most urgent desire is to change it. Yet he cannot leave his position of ‘detachment’, and he needs the little swallow to help him. In his quest to help society and to redress the ills that have been done to people, he uses his art, i.e. the rubies, the sapphires and the gold that cover him.

However, the Happy Prince’s, and thereby the artist’s endeavours to change and improve society, meet with very mixed reactions, ending the fairy tale on a note of ambiguity. The responses to the Prince’s gifts, for instance, vary greatly, and mirror, to some extent, contemporary society’s approach to art. Thus, some of the people can fully appreciate the Happy Prince’s gifts, like the children living on the street, who are able to buy bread with the gold; others, however, use it either to flatter their own vanity, such as the student playwright, or fail to understand the real worth of the gift, as does the little match-girl, who mistakes the sapphire for a “lovely piece of glass” (SF 9). Consequently, while the Prince’s efforts ease some of the suffering in the world, the tale’s outlook on the success of the artist’s venture is rather pessimistic: in the end, the town councillors and people of importance are still no closer to understanding the real beauty and purpose of the statue than they are to understanding the beauty and purpose of art. They see the Happy Prince as “little better than a beggar” (SF 11), and begin to argue about which of their statues should replace the one of the Happy Prince. In the end, it is God and his angels who only truly appreciate what the Happy Prince and the little Swallow have done.

While Nassaar considers this a positive ending, indicating that “the higher innocence—far more beautiful than the first world of innocence—has been reached”

(22), I argue that the ending is thoroughly ambiguous, suggesting pessimism rather than a positive outlook. Even though in the end, the Prince and the swallow, “totally pure [...], enter heaven forever” (Nassaar 22), their impact on earth is minimal, if not non-existent. As Zipes points out

[t]he power of Wilde’s story emanates from the unresolved tensions. The fabric of society is not changed. Nobody learns from the good deeds of the prince except perhaps the reader of the tale whom Wilde intended to provoke. In other words, the real beauty of the prince goes unnoticed because the town councillors and the people are too accustomed to identifying beauty with material wealth and splendor. Wilde suggests that the beauty of the prince cannot be appreciated in a capitalist society which favors greed and pomp (117).

In his fairy tale, Wilde opposes the materialistic and capitalistic attitude of the representatives of society with the figure of the Happy Prince who attains Christ-like qualities. These are reflected in the structure of the story (for example, three times the Happy Prince asks the little swallow to stay with him) and its form of a religious parable in which the Happy Prince is contrasted with the greedy town officials.

However, whilst suggesting the Christ-likeness of the artist figure in “The Happy Prince,” Wilde simultaneously undermined its effectiveness by questioning the relevance of heaven and God for the world. God and his angels might exist in the story, appreciating the Happy Prince and the swallow as “the two most precious things on earth” (SF 11), but their decision does not impact the ‘real’ world and its people in any way. They are not acknowledged by anyone as their realm has been separated completely from the world of man. This separation indicates the loss of transcendental authority which left the artist in such a difficult, if not impossible, position when trying to reform and change society. Yet by appropriating the Christ-figure for the artist, and thus re-locating it from a transcendental heaven into the ‘real’ world, Wilde adapted his understanding of the idealised artist with nineteenth-century scepticism and positivism.

However, Wilde also knew that the combination of these two oppositional aspects was an ideal that would be difficult to realise, and he allegorised the concomitantly arising tensions in the hopelessly idealised, and eventually self-destructive, undertaking of the artist in his fairy tale, “The Nightingale and the Rose.” It tells the story of a nightingale who gives her life to produce a beautiful red rose for a student who has fallen in love with the daughter of a professor. The

nightingale's compassion is captured by the student's longing for what the nightingale believes is true love (SF 12-13). It is for this ideal that she is willing to sacrifice her life: in order to create a red rose she has to give her lifeblood. The next day there is a beautiful red rose in front of the student's window. The student is overjoyed, plucking the rose in order to go and present it to the professor's daughter; he does not notice the dead nightingale lying on the ground under the window, and the fact that she has given her life for the realisation of perfect love does not even enter his mind. She has sacrificed herself for an ignorant and essentially benighted humanity—represented in the professor's daughter who haughtily refuses the rose, preferring the artificial jewels she has received from another suitor, and in the student who, devastated by the rejection, throws the rose in the gutter and returns home, musing that love

is not half as useful as Logic, for it does not prove anything, and it is always telling one of things that are going to happen, and making one believe things that are not true. In fact, it is quite unpractical, and, as in this age to be practical is everything, I shall go back to Philosophy and study Metaphysics (SF 17-18).

Society, caught in its materialism and scientific empiricism, is no longer able to understand and appreciate the artist and his art. Although people still dream of ideals, they are quick to ignore and dismiss them, even if they stare them directly in the face. The artist is the one who still passionately believes in the realisation of ideals, and is willing to sacrifice his life and his art for it. Yet humanity neither thanks him for his effort, nor does it understand him: the student, whilst listening to the nightingale singing with a thorn in her heart, wonders:

She has form [...] that cannot be denied to her; but has she got feeling? I am afraid not. In fact, she is like most artists; she is all style, without any sincerity. She would not sacrifice herself for others. She thinks merely of music, and everybody knows that the arts are selfish (SF 15).

Again, this notion of self-sacrifice stands as a reminder of the figure of Christ. Wilde only insinuated and gestured towards this appropriation in his fairy tales; only later, he elaborated and eventually formulated in detail the parallels between the life of Jesus and the life of the nineteenth-century artist, in particularly himself, first in

“The Soul of Man” and later in *De Profundis*.²⁷ Implicitly in “The Soul of Man,” and explicitly in *De Profundis*, Wilde drew parallels between the artist and Jesus Christ, attributing the former with the influence of the latter—without, however, having to resort to some transcendental authority. Jesus thus became an example, not because of his status as the Son of God, but for his status as the son of man. Wilde, in his appropriation of Christ, only looked to Christ’s life on earth, and not to its transcendental implications, and it was for this reason that he could claim that the artist was able to follow in Jesus’ footsteps and eventually even surpass him (SM 52-53). Consequently, the artist’s life, like Christ’s, was to be an example, but in contrast to Christ, the artist at the fin de siècle could not refer to some absolute truth in order to correct society. He was confined to the present reality in his social engagement, and therefore, he had to live his life as an example of perfect individuality. He was, in Federico’s words, to be a “role model for ordinary people bent on their own private acts of self-creation in a liberal society” (104).

This depiction of the artist’s position in society, and the task that had been assigned to him, insinuated a pessimism that seemed to undermine the possibility of a successful social Aestheticism. “You who expect to fashion the whole world in conformity with your aestheticism...a vain dream, and if realised it would result in an impossible world” (CM 111) exclaims the narrator of *Confessions*, thus gesturing towards the utopian element in the aesthetic venture of the fin de siècle. In a hostile society, the artist had to stand apart in the same way that Jesus did. Not conforming to social pressure and the threat of exclusion, he had to live a life of individualism. “Art is [an] intense form of Individualism,” asserted Wilde (SM 17), and the narrator of *Confessions* professed that “Art is not mathematics, it is individuality” (CM 112).

However, the demand on the artist to lead a perfect life of individualism seemed almost impossible to meet, and the difficult balance between leading an ‘individual’ life in the face of a misunderstanding public was apparent in Moore’s and Wilde’s writings. Oscillating between direct social criticism, proclamations of individualism,

²⁷ In *De Profundis*, Wilde writes: “We can discern in Christ that close union of personality with perfection which forms the real distinction between classical and romantic Art and makes Christ the true precursor of the romantic movement in life, but the very basis of his nature was the same as that of the nature of the artist, an intense and flamelike imagination He realised in the entire sphere of human relations that imaginative sympathy which in the sphere of Art is the sole secret of creation” (SM 110). For a detailed study of Wilde’s appropriation see Willoughby’s *Art and Christhood*.

and demonstrations of the disinterested life that the artist was supposed to lead, their texts show that they did not trust the sole power of exemplary art and living. Moore's text, for instance, though on the surface an autobiography, is in context an amalgamation of fact and fiction, art and criticism. It awkwardly held in balance his promotion of the artist's and art's autonomy and his attempt to reform and educate society; to make the public, in Wilde's words, "artistic" (SM 17). This inconsistency shows most prominently in the chapter entitled "The Synthesis of the Nouvelle Athènes." It starts out with a self-characterisation of the narrator, commenting on "two dominant notes in [his] character—an original hatred of [his] native country, and a brutal loathing of the religion [he] was brought up in" (CM 109). Only one paragraph further down, the scene switches to a French café, recording the conversation between two artists in which Moore's credo of art is formulated:

I write to please myself, just as I order my dinner; if my books sell I cannot help it—it is an accident.

But you live by writing.

Yes, but life is only an accident—art is eternal (CM 110).

The next paragraph then jumps into an evaluation of Zola's style, only to be followed by a critique of the institution of marriage, education, democratic art and machinery, interspersed with paragraphs on artists such as Goncourt, Whistler and Baudelaire. The tone of the whole passage constantly shifts between long, elaborate descriptions of artworks, the influences of other artists, the joys of creation and aesthetic reception, and passages of direct interaction with the reader. Eventually, after harsh words of social criticism, it ends with an affirmation of the importance of the artist's role within society, in spite of adversaries: "I closed the window, and sitting at the table, haggard and overworn, I continued my novel" (CM 192).

As the disinterested artist, the narrator of *Confessions* shows the reality of Aestheticism's ethical dimension, asserting that, "the life of the artist should be a practical protest against the so-called decencies of life" (CM 138). Foreshadowing Adorno's opinion that "art is a tacit critique of the debasement of man" ("Autonomy of Art" 242), *Confessions'* narrator claims that art is "an outcry against the animality of human existence" (CM 139). Aestheticism thus represented "social hope, the refashioning of the world into something better" (Federico 103) in which

individualism, the rejection of traditions and values would eventually allow every man and woman to lead a life that was pleasing to them.

Hence, whilst admitting to the difficulties of the aesthetic venture, both Wilde and Moore also acknowledged the possibility of change. Like Ruskin, Arnold and Pater, they believed in the perfectibility of man, and thus in the perfectibility of society through the individual. Consequently, their criticism was not mere condemnation, or an attempt to ‘épater les bourgeois,’ but was intended to stir their readers, and to make them think about the potential that was hidden within them. The artist’s task, then, was to induce the individual to lay claim to what Arnold termed his or her “best self.” However, Moore and Wilde both followed in Pater’s footsteps, firmly re-locating the transcendent in the reality of present existence. Much like Pater’s, their focus was not on an absolute truth or a transcendental reality, which would bring about perfection, but on the individual, living in the present. In this, their approach differed from Schiller’s notion; however, it still concurred with his idea that the artist was the social agent who would eventually pave the way for the individual, and thus for society, to reach a point of perfection.

Together with Arnold and Ruskin, they realised that ‘culture’ would not come naturally to society. An educator was needed, someone who was not bound by the system. In this, the parallel to the figure of Christ becomes, again, apparent: in the same way that Christ came down from heaven to save mankind, the artist enters Victorian society to free it from stifling morality and stagnation. However, like Jesus, the artist was considered a troublemaker. In his society, Christ posed a threat to the cherished normality of his contemporaries, and was eventually killed for his radical ideas and teachings; therefore, when Jesus sent his disciples out into the world and asked them to hold fast to his teachings, and to re-define traditions, common understandings and practices, he warned them that the world would not receive them gratefully or graciously; yet he also told them that they should not let this influence their commitment (Matt 10). Similarly, the avant-garde artist was not welcome in society. In “The Soul of Man,” Wilde laid claim to this aspect of Jesus’s mission on earth, appropriating Christ’s words to his disciples for himself and all other artists.

In Wilde's eyes, Christ's attitude and advice reflected and encouraged complete individualism, and as such should be adopted by everyone:

What do other things matter? Man is complete in himself. When they [the disciples] go into the world, the world will disagree with them. That is inevitable. The world hates Individualism. But that is not to trouble them (SM 11).²⁸

This creed of individualism in a society that was bound by social etiquette and uniformity constituted something utterly and strikingly antithetical. It was for this radicalism that the artist expected to suffer exclusion, for people were not yet prepared to look beyond their own limited horizons to a better, altogether different, world. This almost fearful attitude was reflected in people's approach to art. Wilde, for example, stated that "a new work of art is beautiful by being what Art has never been" (SM26). Accordingly, "to measure it by the standard of the past is to measure it by a standard on the rejection of which its real perfection depends" (SM 26). Elevating (or, in Wilde's words, "degrading") "the classics into authorities" and using them "as bludgeons for preventing the free expression of Beauty in new forms," (SM 20) reflected the fear of anything new and different which seemed to pervade Victorian society. However much Victorian society worshipped progress, it was a progress of materialism and of industrialization, and not necessarily the progress of humanity. Although society seemed to move forward on a technical, scientific or material level, it remained static on the human level. "The only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes," wrote Wilde (31), pointing out the essential flaw of Victorian society, namely a fundamentally human resistance to change.

Faced with this situation, the artist was required to lead a life of ideals whilst being confronted constantly with the pressure of submitting to social norms and codes. His place of positive detachment, which offered freedom, was under threat due to his positioning outside of, and yet not apart from, society, and the necessity to be 'within the world', whilst not 'of it', left the artist exposed to public pressure. The narrator of *Confessions*, for instance, realised the danger of the artist's 'domestication' by bourgeois society (CM 139), and warned that "no man [was],

²⁸ The same thought is expressed in Arnold's adoption of the term "spurious Jeremiah" (CA 63) to describe his own and other artists' standing in society.

after all, so immeasurable superior to the age he live[d] in as to be able to resist it wholly” (CM 141).

In his role as social critic, the option of choosing what Adorno called a “transcendent” position (“Cultural Criticism” 207) was not open to the artist at the fin de siècle. Being ever unable to escape the influence of society and being also, in a way, dependent upon it, the artist’s relationship with society was defined by a negative interdependency, which forced the artist to maintain his uncomfortable position between the ivory tower and the world. Wilde, for instance, declared that the relationship between the artist and society was fundamentally authoritarian. He pointed out how, in Victorian society, artworks were censored, artists were dismissed and ignored, and everything new was often watched with suspicion. Noting the forces of the cultural marketplace, Wilde asserted that “Art should never be popular;” indeed, “the moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be a artist” (SM 17).²⁹

Yet amidst all the difficulties facing the ‘aesthetic educator’, both Wilde’s and Moore’s writings showed that the artist, despite all outward appearance and society’s prejudices, held a deep concern for society, and was willing to sacrifice his life to see his vision realised. The artist’s craving for the beautiful, and his concern with ideals, were not so much a turning away from society, but an attempt to enlarge society’s vision, to bring it back from materialism, ambition and book learning, and to open its eyes to the things that made life worth living.

Wilde’s and Moore’s writing convinced not so much through direct propaganda, but through demonstrating the faults of society, the importance of art, and the potential that lay in the ability to perceive the world aesthetically. Whilst both admitted that their dream represented, essentially, a utopia, their writings still mirrored the belief in its possibility. Utopia, as suggested by the word itself, is ‘nowhere’, and is thus in its very essence a place that is unreachable. In this respect, the equation of the artist’s dream with utopia seemed to render the socio-political venture of Aestheticism impossible to fulfil. The perfect society the artist imagined

²⁹ While this comment might stand in sharp contrast to Wilde’s later popularity, which started especially with the publication and production of his plays, this popularity does not necessarily deny his belief in his aesthetic credo. Also, Wilde’s art, even though popular, always contained subversive elements of social criticism which his audience did not always pick up on.

could only be found in a place far beyond his time. He was thus left in a timeless space, trying to realise a future in the present that could never be realised at all. The period of Wilde and Moore was a striking example of a time when the artist found himself caught in the paradoxical situation of being dependent on the very society he was trying to reform.

Yet at the same time, his task was not the realisation of a perfect society. Rather, it was to ensure that the ideal of the perfect society would not disappear amidst the turbulent changes of the modern world. As Wilde pointed out: “a map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at” (SM 16). This concept of utopia itself touched upon the loss of a transcendental world. As art could no longer point towards a transcendental paradise, the artist’s task now also included the creation of a new and better world, a place people could look to and live for. His role was not only to express individualism, and to promote freedom of personality through his art, but also to picture a society wherein those ideals would find themselves fulfilled. One of the authors of the fin de siècle who tackled this task was William Morris. The following chapter will look at Morris’ utopian novel, *News from Nowhere*, and trace how art and the artist played a vital role in the creation and fulfilment of a man-made paradise.

IV. A Map of Utopia: Life as Art in News from Nowhere

Whilst Moore and Wilde struggled with the ins and outs of their “vain dream of aestheticism,” one of their contemporaries, William Morris, formulated a version of its possible realisation in his utopian novel *News from Nowhere*. Born into a well-heeled middle class family, Morris had originally aspired to join the clergy; however he soon changed his allegiance to the ranks of fin-de-siècle artists. His artistic career, initially cultivated through his friendship with Edward Burne-Jones, with whom he intended to found a brotherhood of art, was then encouraged for a few years under tutelage to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, one of the members of the Pre-Raphaelites. Morris then proceeded to become one of the most versatile and multifarious businessmen, artists and craftsmen in end-of-nineteenth-century society.

Morris not only wrote poetry and prose, translated Greek, Latin and Old English prose and verse, but also created his own version of Icelandic sagas. In 1861, he launched his own company, the “Firm,” which specialised in beautiful furniture, wallpaper, stained glass windows and metal work. During this period Morris also studied, acquired and re-implemented many traditional, medieval craft skills and techniques, in order to authentically create artistic produce for his company. In 1891 he added to the success of “The Firm” his own book printing company, Kelmscott Press. Meanwhile Morris continued to be itinerant throughout the country, lecturing on the importance of art, the prospects of socialism, and the necessity of revolution of the working classes. This diversity of Morris’ achievements is mirrored in the variety of opinions on him, and the fact that over the years, Morris’ reputation has changed, and continues to do so. Peter Faulkner, in 1973 claimed, “it is as social critic rather than designer or poet that Morris is most recognized today” (23). Then, in 1993, Clive Wilmer asserted that Morris “is best known today as a designer and craftsman” and “must be regarded as the greatest European pattern-designer since the end of the Middle Ages” (ix).

As this impressive and wide ranging list of accomplishments and opinions demonstrates, one of the main differences between Morris and the other artists

discussed in this thesis was the difficulty in assigning him a place as ‘mere artist’.³⁰ As an ardent admirer of Ruskin, Morris fought for the re-integration of art into life; because he dreamt of the complete fusion of life and art, he seemed to stand in opposition to artists like Wilde, Moore or Beerbohm. Moreover, Morris’ political affiliation, and his continuous support for the working classes, often made it difficult to appreciate the purely aesthetic element of his work.

However, although Morris continually tried to distance himself from what he considered to be the ‘idle aesthetes’, whose aloof attitude he despised (“Art of the People 39), his writings and especially his utopian novel *News from Nowhere* negate the apparent differences between them. In the novel, Morris painted the picture of an aesthetic paradise in which all people were artists, appreciative of beauty and creation, and they themselves were as beautiful as pieces of art. The people who lived in Morris’ utopian paradise thereby all attained an ideal aesthetic sensibility of understanding and appreciation, which allowed the development of a perfect society. As such, Morris’ utopia presented a glimpse of the possible realisation of aesthetic education, and thus the fulfilment of the fin-de-siècle artist’s dream.

Like many of the other artists, Morris considered art to be a means of righting the wrongs of society, and of providing an escape from the miseries of the modern world. In this respect, he was a lot closer to his avant-garde contemporaries than has often been suggested. However, while Morris’ achievements in the Arts and Crafts’ Movement and as a social critic and political activist are almost unanimously acknowledged, his poetry and prose are often seen reductively as an outgrowth of his social and political championing of the working classes. This, for example, shines through in E.P. Thompson’s formative study *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, which presents Morris, first and foremost, as determined by his political and social activism.

The inauguration of Morris’ political career happened roughly in 1876 when he penned a letter of protestation to the *Daily News* against the Conservatives’ policy in

³⁰ Over recent years, Morris’ novel has become study material for sociologists, economists and ecologists which shows its interdisciplinary appeal. For an investigation of ecological aspect see, for example, O’Sullivan “The Ending of the Journey;” for an economic reading, Buick “A Market by the Way,” and for a sociological approach Kinna “William Morris: Art, Work, Leisure” and *The Art of Socialism*. For a good compilation covering the different areas of research on *News from Nowhere* see Coleman & O’Sullivan *William Morris & News from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time*.

the Eastern Question. Although having been concerned with, and interested in, the plight of poor and the working class all his life, it took Morris until the 1880s to finally ‘convert’ to Socialism. Deeply influenced by Marx’s and Engel’s writings, his political stance and his hopes for revolution and change shine through most of his later writings. Consequently, these have often been read largely as ‘political manifestos’, rather than pieces of literary work. Since few scholars and critics read *News from Nowhere* for its literary value in the first place, Morris’ political affiliation, and his constant and earnest involvement in issues concerning the working class, have subsequently placed Morris the artist as a poor second to Morris the political activist. Articles such as Michael Fellman’s “Bloody Sunday and *News from Nowhere*” and Michael Holzman’s “Anarchism and Utopia” exemplify this by placing Morris’ novel within the political context of the fin de siècle, believing Morris’ political concern to be the prime motivation for writing.

However, more recently (due to the nature of Aestheticism and Morris’ own position within the turbulent framework of the fin de siècle having been freshly scrutinized), it has been shown that Morris was not as different from the avant-garde that promoted the concept of autonomous art as he himself would have wished. There is a general agreement that Morris’ political vision (though it derived its mechanical structure from Marx’s writing) was deeply influenced and shaped by Ruskin’s aesthetic theory of the moral responsibility of art and the importance of beauty and pleasure in work. Ruth Livesey, for example, argues that Morris attempted to “overcome the boundary between aesthetics and politics”, inscribing “aesthetics into the heart of late nineteenth-century socialism” (602), and Josephine Guy suggests in *The British Avant-Garde* that Morris cannot be understood outside the aesthetic tradition, being part of the artistic, as much as of the political, avant-garde of the fin de siècle (119). She posits that Morris, together with Wilde and Pater, epitomises the complex inter-relatedness of social activism, criticism and aesthetics at the turn of the century (134-135). Similarly, Maltz notes that Morris’ lectures on arts and crafts and the ‘art of life’ were sponsored by missionary aesthetic societies (11); this close association provides conclusive evidence that his political activism was firmly grounded within a socio-aesthetic theory.

Yet the reconciliation of Morris' political activism and his aesthetic theory still presents a challenge to critics and scholars, thus providing the springboard for many discussions of Morris' work and life.³¹ In reflecting the paradoxes of Arnold's and Ruskin's attempts to equally accommodate social responsibility with aesthetic detachment, Morris' position as an artist, as well as both political activist and social critic, was defined by contradictions and ambiguities, as will be shown in the following discussion of *News from Nowhere*. Therefore, the question remains if his novel was just another one of Morris' attempts to portray his political message disguised under the cloak of enjoyable entertainment (thus reminiscent of the reading of Wilde's "The Soul of Man" as merely another attempt to relay his aesthetic theory by incorporating it under the popular wing of Socialism)?

This theory is quite prevalent since Morris' *News from Nowhere* was first published in the Socialist League's newspaper, the *Commonweal*, as serialised articles, which replaced the column normally devoted to the political comment.³² Yet even though *News from Nowhere*, at least initially, was intended for the socialist readers of the *Commonweal*, its successful publication as a book only one year later demonstrated that Morris' message had a wider audience appeal than just to the politically aware. Rather, it spoke to a desire to see beyond what science could offer, and to re-invent the meaning and purpose of mankind in a universe without an almighty creator. By suggesting the possibility of a man-made paradise, Morris not only advocated the essential 'perfectibility' of man, which would entitle him, man, to this heaven on earth, but also reaffirmed the belief in the equality, unity and goodness of mankind. Morris' utopia was easily attainable and imminent: it could, he believed, be realised here and now.

Subsequently, I intend to look at *News from Nowhere* not so much as a political writing but as a piece of art—a literary text, a book that almost literally paints a picture of an aesthetic paradise. I propose that *News from Nowhere* was written to affect the reader, not so much through its political vision, but first and foremost through its 'being art'. In fact, it is woven around the concept of art and the idea of

³¹ See, for example, Bevir "William Morris: The Modern Self, Art and Politics," Boos & Silver (eds.) *Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris*, Levitas "Utopia as Literature, Utopia as Politics," Goode "William Morris and the Dream of Revolution."

³² For a detailed discussion of the importance of Morris' affiliation with the *Commonweal* regarding his writing see Holzman "Anarchism and Utopia".

the human being as an artist. Moreover, *News from Nowhere* is a text in which the relationship between social and political hope and aesthetic vision is investigated. As such, it demonstrates how Morris used art to enable people to understand and to internalize the artist's vision of a better, art-saturated world. His art thus became a means of actualising change. Consequently, I want to show the influence of Morris the artist, rather than Morris the socialist, on fin-de-siècle society, and discuss how he and his work complemented and contributed to the re-definition of art and the legitimisation of the artist.

4.1 Aesthetic liberation or, a dream fulfilled

News from Nowhere is a utopian novel, describing life after the communist revolution. It tells the story of William Guest, a member of the nineteenth-century socialist league, who, after an evening of fruitless political discussion, wakes up the next morning in a different time and society. In the New World of *Nowhere* he finds himself confronted by a radically transformed society, where mass production and class division have been replaced by creative craftsmanship and equality. Monetary exchange has ceased to exist, and things are created solely for the joy of creation and are freely available to all. The new world is based on an understanding of life itself as art—not in the artificial sense of a Wildean dandy, but rather in the pleasure that everyone finds in both creating beautiful things and in the desire to uphold and contribute to their aesthetically pleasing surroundings.

Interestingly, Morris' new world is, to a large extent, based on similar principles as the ones Wilde and Moore promoted and encouraged in their writing; ideals such as the importance of individualism and freedom of choice. Also, the social ills of contemporary society which Morris so freely criticised, and the solutions he promulgated showed distinct parallels to Wilde's and Moore's main causes of contention. Like many of his fellow artists, Morris saw that in contemporary society the understanding of art had been corrupted, and art itself had been twisted into something it was not meant to be.

In a lecture delivered at the Birmingham Society of Arts and School of Design, Morris explained: "Nothing is wrong or can be with Art in the abstract—that must always be good for mankind, or we are all wrong together: but with art as we of these latter days have known it, there is much wrong" ("Art of the People" 34). Following

Ruskin's school of thought, Morris believed that true art should be the "expression of man's happiness in his labour" ("Art of the People" 42). It was to be the mirror of man himself, his personality, his emotions, his flaws and imperfections, but also of his desire for beauty and elevation. In Morris' eyes, man had lost his understanding of the real beauty and purpose of art, and therefore, he declared that

those devoted men who have upheld the standard of beauty and truth amongst us [...] have but a narrow circle that can understand their works, and are utterly unknown to the great mass of the people: civilization is so much against them, that they cannot move the people" ("Art of the People" 38).

Morris believed true artists to be in the minority (an echo of both Ruskin's and Arnold's understanding), yet still eager to impart their knowledge of something purer, better and, above all, vital for humanity, to the rest of society. Therefore Morris recognized the aesthetic educational value of the lectures and talks he held, but he also expressed it in his fictional writing. In a similar vein to Wilde and Moore, he used the, as yet imperfect, medium of his art to put a dream in words that would be intelligible to the everyday man in the street.

Looking at and probing into the similarities between Morris' vision and that of Moore and Wilde helps to understand how they all shared an ideal of social change achieved through art, and the re-positioning of beauty and art within society. It was, first of all, on a very practical level that Morris' text shows close affinity to the aesthetic dream of the avant-garde artists at the fin de siècle. As has been mentioned before, the society in *News from Nowhere* was defined by the idea of individualism and personal freedom. In her article on Morris' *The Pilgrims of Hope*, Anne Janowitz argues that Morris' opposed the aesthetic ideal of individualism, and instead subscribed to its "communitarian, interventionist strain" (165), which, according to Janowitz, "has been obscured by the triumph of romanticism's other, individualist, aesthetic strain" (ibid). I argue, however, that in Morris' future society the notion of individualism ("the individualist, aesthetic strain") is more important than collectivism and communism. The society of *Nowhere*, even though it is characterised by close community and shared values, is based on what Wilde calls a "temperament of receptivity" (SM 26); in *Nowhere*, individuality is accepted and encouraged from a young age.

This individualistic freedom is also expressed in the way Morris dealt with questions of marriage, gender issues and relationships in *News from Nowhere*. The status of women, for example, plays an important part in Morris' new society, and he dedicated a whole chapter, "Concerning Love," to the answering of gender issues that Guest (and the reader) might have. In this chapter Old Hammond, one of the few people left in *Nowhere* who still remembers the time before blissful happiness, explains that in their new society, the question of the position of women is no longer relevant: "The men have no longer any opportunity of tyrannizing over the women, or the women over the men [...]. The women do what they can do best, and what they like best, and the men are neither jealous of it or injured by it" (NfN 93).

Old Hammond here puts his finger on one of the key issues that continually leads to inequality between genders (and also races, religions and classes): the need to feel secure in one's own position. This is, more often than not, realised through the subjugation of others, as superiority is inevitably dependent on someone else's inferiority. This outlook can be seen as epitomic of capitalistic society. The Victorian 'gentlemanly' idea of women needing their protection, and of having special talents, was, as Jan Marsh iterates, an alternative form of social oppression, relating "with exclusion, with denial, with consciousness, definitions of difference" (120). In the society of *Nowhere*, however, as competition between male and female ceases, so the need to assert oneself vanishes as well. Thereby, it becomes possible to accept and appreciate one another fully, eradicating the need to secure one's own standing, since everyone is valued for who they are in their own individual right, without any comparison to others.

It has been argued that *News from Nowhere* is "a masculine vision of paradise" (Marsh 121) as women still remain almost entirely concerned with looking pretty and doing housework, which, Morris asserts, "is a great pleasure to a clever woman" (NfN 94). Although Morris may have been incapable of imagining women in different, more physically or mentally challenging roles, the freedom he envisioned went deeper than mere liberation from housework. It was, first and foremost, liberation from the cultural bonds that entrapped women in Victorian society. In *Nowhere*, marriage no longer exists; women as well as men are free to choose their own partners, and contact between the sexes is easy and light-hearted, not bound by

conventions, or restricted by false notions of propriety. The women in the guest house can therefore approach the men without “the least affectation of shyness” (NfN 53), and physical touch between them is considered normal and appropriate. Even though *Nowhere* is essentially a monogamous society, marriage is not as binding, and either partner is free to leave the other, without running the gauntlet of being shunned and disapproved of by Victorian society. Neither public opinion nor legislation can enforce or restrict human feelings, emotions and passions; rather, it is the latter that govern and determine life in society.

For this reason, the fact that the majority of *Nowhere*'s women are still mainly engaged in housework and waiting on men does not necessarily imply that change has not happened; what is important here is that they have the freedom of choice. Having this option within a non-judgemental society, which is both accepting and appreciative of this freedom, makes all the difference. Work and lifestyles are valued in all their diversity, and when Guest asks why women are still waiting on men, Old Hammond remarks that “perhaps you think housekeeping an unimportant occupation, not deserving of respect” (NfN 94). Similarly, motherhood is venerated, even though children are brought up by the community rather than by their mothers. This loosening of ties between mother and children again infers an emphasis on the options available—and whatever the choice is, all parties will be supported by the community.

As the nineteenth-century Women's Movement demonstrated, the criticism with which the rebellion against traditional roles as mothers and wives was greeted, and the fear that was caused by women breaching male domains, led to emancipation often being synonymous with the denial of femininity (Beckson 1992:129/143). In *Nowhere*, however, femininity and emancipation go hand in hand. Ellen, the woman who Guest and Dick, Guest's good-natured guide, meet and who later joins them on in their journey embodies this conjunction. She represents, on the one hand, pure femininity which draws Guest irresistibly to her; on the other hand, however, she is the most independent of women that Guest meets on his journey, rowing her own boat up the river to come after him—a thing unimaginable in Victorian times. Thus Ellen is “the most ideal representative of the new society. [...] She has knowledge, intelligence, ability, sensitivity and intuitive awareness beyond the reach of her

compatriots” (Marsh 121). Subsequently, even though Morris generally depicts women in *Nowhere* as being occupied with stereotyped feminine tasks, such as housekeeping, and the text is “deeply imbued with the feeling and language of male desire” (Marsh 121), it does not mean that Morris fails to create utopia for men and women alike. Throughout his description of generic life in *Nowhere* there is always the freedom of choice, and it is in the very existence of this freedom that true emancipation lies. Thus, women like Philippa the carver and Ellen have exactly the same rights to exist and to play their role in society, as does Annie, who waits on the men in the guest house; furthermore, all three are simultaneously valued for their femininity.

The importance that Morris attributed to the concept of individualism and personal freedom also found expression in his dealings with education—yet another bone of contention about Victorian society which he shared with Wilde and Moore. Education in *Nowhere* is not compulsory, but is aimed at promoting the development of distinct talents and inclinations. Old Hammond exemplifies this as he explains to Guest that the children of *Nowhere*, with information ready at their hand, are free to learn “when [their] own inclinations impel [them] to seek it” (NfN 98). Thus, children, as Dick elaborates, are encouraged to learn whatever is useful to them through the imitation of their elders, and in the course of detecting their talents and inclinations, to set their minds on things that they truly enjoy. Even though Dick cannot quite appreciate why people would take to “book-learning,” he wholly accepts this differing aptitude, having “great pleasure in seeing them so happy over work which is not much sought for” (NfN 68).

This forthright acceptance of individuality is extended to Guest himself. To the same degree that people as diverse as Dick, Old Hammond, Boffin the Dustman, Clara, Ellen, or Ellen’s grandfather are respected, accepted and trusted, so Guest, a foreigner, is equally made to feel welcome in the new society just as he is. When he considers getting new clothes so as to fit in with the rest of the people, he is stopped by Dick who entreats him to keep them for a while: “Oh don’t get new clothes yet. [...] I mustn’t preach to you, but surely it wouldn’t be right for you to take away people’s pleasure of studying your attire, by just going and making yourself like everybody else” (NfN 71). Simultaneously, individuality does not necessarily mean

that everybody needs to be different; again, it is the existence of choice to be who one wants which forms the cornerstone of this code of tolerance. Difference is valued, as there is an unspoken understanding of humanity, of things that are really important; such as the trusting of one's own desires and passions above the opinion of anyone else, and permitting human nature to direct rather than submitting to institutions.

Even though this picture of human nature might seem overly optimistic and even completely unrealistic to modern cynics, Morris touched upon an element, which, once removed, might indeed change the face of society: fear. The concept of fear surfaces from an elementary anxiety of not being able to survive the essentially human terrors of abandonment, loneliness, sadness, pain and rejection. Throughout *News from Nowhere* Morris implied that it was these types of fears that made people competitive, narrow-minded and self-centred. In the few moments when fear enters the idyll of *Nowhere*, it is always connected to the danger of possible shortage and the notion of competition. Old Hammond, for example, when explaining to Guest the nature of work, tells him: "...whereas we are not short of wealth, there is a kind of fear growing up amongst us that we shall one day be short of work" (NfN 122). A further example is found when Dick and Guest meet a pretty woman at the market, and Dick remarks that "'tis a good job there are so many of them that every Jack may have his Jill; else I fear we should get fighting for them" (NfN 72).

All of this implies that it is not so much human nature that has changed in *Nowhere*, but rather its social environment. The general absence of fear in *Nowhere* enables people to accept others as they are; they are no longer considered competitors in the struggle for scarce resources, but as fellow humans. This, again, is reminiscent of Wilde's desire to see man as being content in him- or herself, and not valued for what he or she possesses. Thus, the reader finds similarities to the ideal of the Christian heaven in the world of *Nowhere*, as it is defined by an abundance of hospitality, community and mutual acceptance. It seems, indeed, to be heaven on earth.

4.2 Prophet and seer: Guest as artist

The vision Morris offered his readers could be described as the fin-de-siècle artist's dream come true: in *Nowhere*, the attempt to educate society has proved successful, and the former class of the 'elite few' has been broadened to encompass the whole of society. Individuality is valued above everything else, "each man [being] free to exercise his special faculty to the utmost, and every one encourage[ing] him in so doing" (NfN 113). As everyone is "bent on the same enterprise, making the most of [his life]" (NfN 117), the artist's vision is now understood and shared by everyone. Man in the new world has become an artist himself (NfN 123). More than by anything else, Morris' earthly paradise was defined and permeated by art; and even though in a political sense, Morris' utopia might be read as merely describing a communist society, it attained new heights from an aesthetic level.

In the new society that Guest encounters art has become "the centrepiece of people's daily lives, directing their hearts and minds to lofty affairs" (Bevir 179). Work, looks, buildings, the countryside—everything, even man himself, is now considered art, and children, rather than being taught mathematics, writing and languages are taught the "art of living" (NfN 97). Even physically demanding work, such as hay-making and boat-rowing, is considered to be a kind of artistic creation because it makes people "prettier to look at" (NfN 181). In *Nowhere* Ellen can become the "fairy godmother" in a garden straight out of one of the stories of the Brothers Grimm, and, looking at the beautiful countryside and the beautiful people living in it, she can exclaim that "these are our books these days" (NfN 175).

Art and beauty thus created a framework into which the world of utopia is placed, and the supremacy of art is established from the very first chapter of the book. Whilst still in the nineteenth century, Guest witnesses a political discussion about a possible future of society. When this discussion proves to be unsuccessful, Guest "roar[s] out very loud, and damn[s] all the rest for fools" (NfN 43); he finds himself wishing to "but see one day of it" (NfN 44). This wish cannot be granted by politics, but only by art, as is implied in the act of writing the novel itself. What Morris suggested through the writing of his novel was that only through the creation of a fictitious future could transformation be envisioned and, to some extent,

experienced. Art, rather than politics, thus had precedence in all things, and it was the artist, rather than the politician, who could envision and enable change. To desire social and political development was insufficient; the most important thing was to be enabled to foresee and to understand its possible ramifications. In the artist's imaginative creation direction could be found and an ultimate aim presented; contemporary reality was transcended, and replaced with the vision of a better future.

Several aspects of Morris' aesthetic theory that underlay *News from Nowhere* betrayed the influence of Ruskinian thought. Like Ruskin, Morris believed in the interconnectedness of beauty, truth and art, and the superiority of nature to art. He considered "real art" to be "the expression by man of his pleasure in labour" ("Art of the People" 42), and understood the distinction between low art and high art to be false. The concept of art, to Morris, could be applied to all spheres of life, for the pleasure of creation was intrinsic to work as well as to leisure. This was his ideal of 'democratic art'³³—an art in which everyone could participate, a "glorious art, made by the people and for the people, as a happiness to the maker and the user" ("Art of the People" 50). It was an art outside of the capitalistic circle, unsullied by monetary value and corrupted taste.

However, Morris realised that for an art such as this to come into existence, society itself had to change first. He thus placed his dream of a world infused through and through with beauty and art into a possible version of this transformed society. Under the prevailing contemporary circumstances, Morris' vision for art proved impossible; he found himself using an as yet imperfect medium to realise his dream. Therefore, whereas the content of Morris' novel was focussed upon the description of a world in which an aesthetic ideal would materialise, the novel's context and form simultaneously spoke volumes about Morris' understanding of contemporary art and the role of the artist, bound within a capitalistic and corrupted society. Art, to him, was a means, an instrument in the artist's weaponry, to be employed in metamorphosing society.

³³ Both Wilde and Moore strongly argued against the notion of "democratic art," claiming that it would destroy art and the artist. It is important to note that they, when making that comment, looked at contemporary art, corrupted as it was by capitalism and the power of demand and supply. Morris, on the other hand, made his promotion of the 'democracy of art' dependent on a new and different society—a society such as he painted in *News from Nowhere*.

This notion is expressed literally in *News from Nowhere* as William Guest assumes the role of an artist figure within the narrative. Corresponding to Moore's narrator Edwin Dayne and Wildean characters such as the Happy Prince and the Nightingale, Guest not only demonstrates the role of the artist within society, but also illustrates the purpose and importance of art. In his role as a time-travelling narrator, Guest can be seen as a representative of the Schillerian artist who, catching a glimpse of a better world, tries to convey them to his audience. Simply by telling his tale and underlining the differences between the ideal and the real, Guest not only takes the role of Wilde's "agitator" in "The Soul of Man," but also functions as an educator of contemporary society. He becomes an aesthetic communicator, who teaches the reader to see and to understand the world afresh.

Guest thus represents the (only) connection between the world of *Nowhere* and contemporary society. Through his eyes alone the New World is presented to the reader, and it is Guest who defines and restricts possible interpretations of *Nowhere*. His experience of *Nowhere* will also be the reader's, and (as will be shown) this experience is, first and foremost, an aesthetic experience defined by the boundaries between art and life. The time Guest spends in *Nowhere* consists, to a large extent, of mere observation. Throughout the text, verbs such as "watching," "looking" and "observing" are implemented to describe Guest's encounter with the futuristic society. He never actually fully ingresses the scene, and throughout his journey, the world of *Nowhere* is presented to him as would be a play or a painting. Annie, for instance, warns Dick and Clara "not to make [their] description of the picture too fine, or else [Guest] will be disappointed when the curtain is drawn" (NfN 168).

Unlike Dick, who "can't look upon [life] as if [he was] sitting in theatre seeing a play going on before [him], [himself] taking no part of it" (NfN 225), Guest remains a spectator throughout his journey as he "cannot be one of [them]" (NfN 228). Although the piece that is played before him is rich in promises and dares him to dream about its possibilities, it remains tantalisingly out of reach. In the last scene of the book, Guest discovers he is growing invisible, slowly dissolving, unnoticed by his new-found friends, and he comes to the realisation he will always be standing "at the threshold" of the New World, unable to enter (NfN 227). As such, he is recipient and messenger of something situated beyond his reach and unseen by everyday man;

and although he as the artist can see and visually experience it, he still remains at a distance.

Whilst providing his contemporaries with glimpses of an aesthetic vision that seemed worth striving for, Morris' tale of a perfect world also contained explicit criticism of his contemporary reader. The time traveller Guest's temporality marks him out, not only as a guest in Nowhere, but also as a missionary to the Victorian reader, so representing a "spectral rupture in the capitalist present" (Beaumont 51). Thus, attention is returned to the effect of the artistic creation on its audience. Through the figure of Guest, Morris never "allow[s] us to forget this sense of tension between the real and 'ideal'. [...] We are made to question continually our own society, our own values and lives. This is why the story engages our feelings, moves us and changes us, as all serious art must do" (Thompson 804). Together with the other fin-de-siècle artists, Morris realised that contemporary society would only progress on a humane-intellectual level if provoked out of their complacency. Thus, Guest's unsettling return to the present was vital for the advancement of his contemporary, imperfect world. In his own society, he was avant-garde in the purest sense: he actually entered the future, and presented it to his contemporaries as something that was "there for [them] to find" (Morton 173).

4.3 Picture perfect: Nowhere as aesthetic experience

Morris' *News from Nowhere* can be seen as the perfect representation of an aesthetic paradise, in which political and social ills have been cured through the omnipresence of art. At the same time, however, it undermines its own plausibility through the co-existence of two different understandings of art, one being the democratic and all-encompassing 'art as life' in the society of *Nowhere*, the other being the understanding of the novel itself as art. As mentioned before, Brantlinger claims that Morris created an anti-novel, because he "declares art impossible under capitalism," condemning his own work (35). He argues that Morris deconstructed his novel on two levels: first of all, through his own, often expressed, belief that true art was an impossibility under capitalism; and secondly, through the aesthetic depiction of the perfect society in which an ideal of art was realised. Brantlinger suggests that (rather than considering his own novel as art) Morris presented it as mere "posturing" (35); hence *News from Nowhere* could only be read as "non-art." For this reason

[it] must be viewed either as an example of 'popular art' before its time, or as a declaration of the impossibility of 'popular art' and of the inadequacy of traditional 'great art'. [...] it is ambiguously both at once, and it is, therefore, perhaps best to describe it as a deliberate work of non-art, or as an anti-novel (40).

I will pick up on this contrast between idealised art and the notion of "non-art" in Morris' novel, and I intend to show that, rather than being an example of "posturing" or "non-art," *News from Nowhere's* amalgamation of different concepts of art, and the resulting paradoxes within the logic of the narrative, can be understood as reflecting the struggle to re-define and understand art's purpose within end-of-nineteenth-century society.

As *News from Nowhere* envisages a world in which life and art have become indivisible, 'art as art', with all its socio-critical implications, becomes obsolete. However, it is within the very medium of art that this dissolution of art into life is depicted. While posturing as a better and happier world, where art and life have become indistinguishable, Morris' utopia still finds its prime function as a work of art. As will be shown, this paradoxical opposition in Morris' novel contributed to the renewed legitimisation of the artist and his art within capitalistic society. Morris' novel thus displayed similar paradoxes as appeared in the writings of Moore and Wilde, and the representation of the relationship between art and life within his aesthetic paradise was undermined by irreconcilable ambiguities. While his novel advocated the abolition of 'high art', it simultaneously exemplified, commented on and struggled with the understanding of art and the artist's role at the end of the nineteenth century, thus finding its own aesthetic purpose in the present. Morris confirmed this perception through the very act of writing and publishing his novel. Whereas Wilde and Moore turned 'art as art' into 'art as means', Morris unconsciously subverted 'art as means' into an example of 'art as art'. As such, Morris' novel embodied the hybrid nature of fin-de-siècle art at its best.

In his article Brantlinger suggests that in *News from Nowhere* "the borders between art and everyday life blur and perhaps disappear, forming an altogether unfamiliar category of experience" (44). By likening nature to a book, and people to beautiful artworks, Morris does indeed blur the boundaries between life and art; but rather than creating an "altogether unfamiliar category of experience," this attempted elimination of the boundary between art and life complicates the function of text,

context, content and purpose. The infiltration of life by art to such an extent that art and life become indistinguishable proves to be incompatible with human nature itself, rendering the realisation of Morris' aesthetic paradise impossible. In direct proportion to the extent that life yields to art, Morris' utopia is demolished. Therefore, rather than presenting a possible reality, the world of *Nowhere* denies its own realisation through a constant affirmation of its artificial nature. Instead then of arguing for Morris' novel as "non-art," the utopia described re-affirms an understanding of the novel as art, and the blurring of boundaries between art and life serves only to reinforce them.

Morris' intention was to make his perfect world fully accessible to his readers in order for it to be "called a vision rather than a dream" (NfN 227). The co-existence of two understandings of art, however, seemed to erect boundaries rather than tear them down. These boundaries were found not only between Guest and the world of *Nowhere*, but also between the text and its reader. This, as James Buzard points out, already became apparent in the novel's full title, *News from Nowhere or An Epoch of Rest*. He writes:

The more we think about this small document in relation to the text it introduces, the more inappropriate do its four nouns appear to become: for, to put it briefly, what Morris's fiction portrays is a future society that is virtually devoid of news, that is set in a very particular somewhere, that exists in a temporal condition to which the label an epoch cannot be applied, and that is characterized, above all else, by constant work. Pointedly failing to attach to the utopia itself, each noun in the title has its meaning only in terms of the relation between that utopia and the nineteenth-century narrator and readers who desire it. Each noun patrols the border between those desirous Victorian subjects and the future Britain that is their aim and birthright (451).

In the same way that the avant-garde artists at the fin de siècle created boundaries between themselves and society, Morris' utopia was defined by exclusion. It was, in fact, through this boundary work that *News from Nowhere* was effective, for it was only through the creation of difference that change could be achieved. Whilst simulating that paradise was indeed within reach, Morris' novel simultaneously removed it from the grasp of life by constantly drawing attention to its artificial nature. On the one hand, the reader was led to believe that the future which he had glimpsed was only waiting to be uncovered. On the other hand, however, the introduction of Guest as an artistic figure, and the constant appreciation

of *Nowhere* as a work of art, reinforced the notion that Morris' aesthetic paradise could always and only be reached through art. It was in and through art that *Nowhere* could ever exist, and it was thus through the absolute difference that was created between art and life that *Nowhere* proved and legitimised the importance of art within contemporary society.

This understanding of *Nowhere* as pure art is, for example, confirmed through Guest's description of his surroundings. His accounts of the countryside, architecture and people alike are singularly ekphrastic, conjuring up the image of a beautiful pastoral painting of a different world. Standing on the shore of the Thames one evening, he revels in the beauty of his surroundings; yet his words are those of an art connoisseur, talking about "the flat country spreading out far away under the sound of the calm evening, till something that might be called hills with a look of sheep-pastures about them bounded it with a soft blue line" (NfN 219).

The almost surrealist atmosphere that Guest creates by using this description causes the reader to conjecture as to whether any reality can be as picture-perfect as what is presented. This doubt is magnified when, over the course of his journey, Guest's reveries about the beauty of his environment become increasingly compounded by references to traditional pieces of art:

...the clouds high up and light, pearly white, and gleaming, softened the sun's burning, but did not hide the pale blue in most places, though they seemed to give height and consistency; the sky, in short, looked really like a vault, as poets have sometimes called it, and not like mere limitless air, but a vault so vast and full of light that it did not in any way oppress my spirits. It was the sort of afternoon that Tennyson must have been thinking about, when he said of the Lotos-Eaters' land that it was a land where it was always afternoon (NfN 204).

What Morris created here was an artificial paradise, made up of images of old masters, well-known poets and traditional artistic imagery. It was not the invention of a new earth and a new life; rather, it was the resurrection of 'high' art's power to set people dreaming of the land 'at the end of the rainbow', reinforcing the purpose of art in its absolute autonomy from life.

Whilst ekphrastic descriptions of the countryside and nature did not necessarily deny the realisability of Morris' text, it is in Guest's encounter with the people of *Nowhere* that the utopian world Morris created is turned into pure artwork, drawing attention to the incompatibility between art and life. Throughout his journey, Guest's

aesthetic gaze is drawn indifferently to pictures, architecture and people alike, with human beings commanding attention because of their looks rather than their character. When arriving in the beautifully and elaborately decorated Bloomsbury Market hall to have dinner, for example, Guest finds the same aesthetic pleasure in looking at the “wall-pictures” as in staring at Clara, the beautiful young girlfriend of Dick. Then, when encountering the first ‘utopian’ women he notes: “I naturally looked at them very attentively, and found them at least as good as the gardens, the architecture and the male men” (NfN 53). Similarly, when he first meets Ellen in her grandfather’s house, Guest cannot help “staring at her, and thinking that if she were a book, the pictures in it were most lovely” (NfN 175).

Most conspicuous in this respect is his description of Annie, the woman of the guest house, which hardly seems to scratch the surface of a (beautiful) painting: “...there was no careful line on her face; her skin was as smooth as ivory, her cheeks full and round, her lips as red as the roses she had brought in; her beautiful arms [...] firm and well-knit from shoulder to wrist” (NfN 57). Having acknowledged Morris’ connection to Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, it is difficult not to see Annie as a representation of one of the sensual, white-skinned Pre-Raphaelite stunners, with their flowing hair and beautiful, yet at the same time strong, even masculine features. Thus, the people in *Nowhere* give the impression of life being turned into a piece of art—in their very characterisation, they seem to lose their life.

The problematic nature of the relationship between art and life is reinforced through the very notion of art itself in the world of *Nowhere*. Art is defined by an underlying paradox: on the one hand, it seems to be omnipresent—in work, in nature, and in people. On the other, however, art as expressed through the human imagination in literature and painting seems to have disappeared. The conviction prevails in *Nowhere* that storytelling and book-writing belong to the times “when people [were] unhappy” (NfN 60). Also, even though a few pieces of what would be considered ‘high art’ can be found in the British Museum as well as in some private collections, they are brushed aside in favour of tales of machinery and descriptions of “all kinds of antiquities” (NfN 86). Similarly, “bookishness” is discouraged, and books are apparently valued by appearance rather than content. The British Museum’s library, for instance, is famed for its “many exceedingly beautiful books”

(ibid), and one of Old Hammond's neighbours decorates his room with mediaeval books to make it look prettier (NfN 88). Thus, Guest notes later on in his journey that even though the people of *Nowhere* "had mostly something to say about books, [...] they were not great readers [...]. In fact, when Dick, especially, mentioned a book, he did so with an air of a man who had accomplished an achievement" (NfN 166). Similarly, the London theatre that Dick and Guest pass is noted, first and foremost, for its architectural and decorative value, not for any plays that might be performed there.

In an attempt to explain this tension between the omnipresence and simultaneous absence of art, Brantlinger notes that "the dream-vision of *News from Nowhere* suggests paradoxically that under the most favorable socialist conditions 'art' might cease to exist altogether. [...] there would be no need for systems of substitute gratifications because life itself would be gratifying" (38). This explanation is plausible, even given the fact that the text and its content constantly draw attention to their artificiality. At the same time, however, art in the traditional sense is denied existence in *Nowhere*, thus uncovering the almost paradoxical endeavour that Morris undertook in writing his aesthetic utopia: that is, the presentation of a society that no longer needs art, provided through the medium of art.

The system of substitutionary gratification was still valid for the reader of Morris' utopia, yet no longer for the inhabitants of that very utopia he created; consequently, discrepancies arose from this tension and eventually undermined the feasibility of Morris' dream outside the realm of art. In this context, Clara's troubled question of why people from *Nowhere* so seldom deal with contemporary life in their poems and pictures has a double entendre, underlining the paradoxical nature of Morris' vision. Firstly, that what is considered art has become impossible in *Nowhere* as there is nothing to 'look beyond to'; and secondly, the society and environment of *Nowhere* can always only be fiction. What is described as being pure life can never be encompassed within anything else but the realm of art. Thus, as the distinction between art and life in *News from Nowhere* becomes obsolete, life is swallowed up by art, and humankind subjects itself to its own creation. *Nowhere* itself has become encased in art.

4.4 *The intrusion of time*

Under the veneer of happiness, pleasure and eternal sunshine, the reality of Morris' paradise bears marks of imperfection which threaten to destroy the realisation of a new and better world. These marks become most noticeable in Guest's encounter with Ellen's grandfather, the "old grumbler" who, unlike everybody else, cannot see the perfection of the place in which he is living. Rather, he mourns for the old times he believes to have been brisker, happier and healthier. When asked about whether Guest would concur with his opinion, there ensues the following dialogue:

I smiled: 'You wouldn't talk so if you had any idea of our life. To me you seem here as if you were living in heaven compared with us of the country from which I came.'

'Heaven?' said he: 'you like heaven, do you?'

'Yes,' said I—snappishly, I am afraid [...].

'Well, I am far from sure that I do,' quoth he. 'I think one may do more with one's life than sitting on a damp cloud and singing hymns.' (NfN 176)

The old grumbler's comparison of *Nowhere* to the comical version of the Christian life after death, where people are turned into little angels who sit on clouds, playing the harp and singing, sheds a different light on the utopian paradise Guest (and the reader) has experienced so far. It implies (and is corroborated throughout the novel, as will be shown) that *Nowhere* is a place of neither development nor progression. The celebration of life that is found everywhere in the novel provides, to the old grumbler, too static and too narrow a window to guarantee happiness in life. It seems that the old grumbler realises that this way of life fails to accommodate what makes people essentially human as the denial of movement and development is, at the same time, a denial of humanity itself.

Interestingly, it is Ellen who also senses that the suppression of progress and change is incompatible with the very nature of human beings. In a conversation with Guest she puts her finger on the implicit contradiction that underlies Morris' utopia:

Happy as we are, times may alter; we may be bitten with some impulse towards change, and many things may seem too wonderful for us to resist, too exciting not to catch at, if we do not know that they are but phases of what has been before; and withal ruinous, deceitful, and sordid" (NfN 214).

Although she does not agree with her grandfather on many things, Ellen still understands that one of the main characteristics of human nature is that it changes; even reaching the parabola of a perfect and happy life does not prevent humanity's constant progression, development and change being the very process of life.

In spite of a general agreement that utopia, in fact, “promotes ‘a static state of affairs’” (Mazlish 44), speeches articulating such unease as Ellen's cannot just be brushed aside as they have often been by critics. It has been argued, for example, that progress in *Nowhere* lies primarily in the “increase of beauty” (Waithe 462), and others wonder why we “should [...] expect happy, rational adults to develop? [...] ‘[P]rogress’ remains part of human nature only so long as the goal remains out of reach” (Brantlinger 42). While Brantlinger interprets the absence of development and progress as a positive trait in *Nowhere*, since it implies simplicity and rest, I maintain that its underlying currents of stasis and non-movement contradict the concept of progression innate in mankind, thereby undermining *Nowhere*'s claim to a plausible reality.

It is inarguable that *Nowhere*'s society has arrived at a state of perfection in which progress can only be measured by movement towards decline. The only way to uphold the blissful happiness of the present seems to be found by the elimination of the linear progression of time. Indeed, there are very few who seem to remember and be interested in the past—people like Old Hammond, who he refers to himself as one of what he calls “queer animals” (NfN 94). The past, just like everything else, has become subjected to inclination and whim; most do not care about history, leaving Clara to wonder why someone would “find the dreadful times of the past so interesting” (NfN 131).

Surprisingly, it is people such as Old Hammond or Henry Morsom, the apparent ‘guardians of the past’, who encourage collective memory loss and neglect of the future. An illustration of this occurs when Old Hammond tells Clara “to go and live in the present” (NfN 162), and again when Morsom dismisses Guest's worries about what is to come afterwards with a laugh and the slightly flippant remark “we will meet it when it comes” (NfN 201). Old Hammond and Morsom gently become more like ‘guardians of the present,’ defending Morris' paradise against the intrusion of time by upholding and encouraging the illusion of timelessness. Whilst the concept

of the linearity of time is gradually eroded by the enjoyment of the present, the past lies forgotten, and the future consists of “the little details of life: the weather, the hay-crop, the last new house, the plenty or lack of such and such birds” (NfN 193). Even the ties of successive generations, normally so evident, virtually disappear as bonding between mother, father and child grow ever weaker as family is replaced by community.

Death consequently holds an awkward status in *Nowhere*. It remains one of a few pertinent reminders that mankind continues moving onward, developing, ageing and progressing inexorably towards an end. Dick, for instance, ponders that “[o]ne cannot help having a feeling behind all the gaiety, of the coming of the dark days, and the shorn fields and empty gardens; and the spring is almost too far off to look forward to. It is, then, in the autumn, when one almost believes in death” (NfN 224). It shows that even within the attempt to restrict temporal movement in *Nowhere* to the merely cyclical (as is reflected by the way the seasonal changes define and shape people’s lives) the reality of death and the progression of time cannot be ignored. The text is permeated with the knowledge of its own unsustainability, and characters are imbued with an underlying understanding that things cannot substantially improve. This knowledge precludes a feeling of fear, making others than the reader realise that the picture Morris paints is too good to be true. Guest, whilst travelling up the Thames with Ellen, vents this very sentiment: “I was beginning to wonder how it would all end. I had a glimmering of fear of what might follow; of anxiety as to the remedy which this new age might offer for the missing of something one might set one’s heart on” (NfN 213). These ominous overtones reside not only in Guest’s own fear of having to leave this earthly paradise sooner or later, but also in the inhabitants of *Nowhere* themselves, expressed, for example, by Ellen’s question to Guest: “ ‘Why do you sigh?’ she said, kindly and somewhat anxiously. ‘You seem to think that it will not last?’” (NfN 216).

Jan Gordon has argued that with *News from Nowhere*, Morris intended to create a world of perpetual childhood (276) in order to circumvent the obvious contradiction between humanity’s natural, linear progression from birth to death and the concept of a utopia as a place of arrival and tranquillity. The majority have considered this ‘eternal’ quality in *Nowhere*’s society positively: Beaumont, for

example, maintains that “in Nowhere, the here and now is not alienated but disalienated. The present is not absent, but present in itself. *News from Nowhere* proposes no less than a redemptive ontology for utopia” (36). He also claims that this immediacy of the present is something that has been lost over the course of the nineteenth century. Therefore, Morris’ actual attempt to stop the flux of time reflects the truly utopian nature of *Nowhere*.

However, in the necessity to represent time in utopia, Morris is also confronted by the incompatible nature of art and life. It becomes apparent that timelessness is only possible within the realm of art. Whereas art is therefore able to contain the present moment, life is, in its very essence, characterised and defined by the ebb and flow of time. Timelessness and pure presence can be represented by, and discovered in, art, but life itself is always determined by the interplay between past and future, and presence can only ever exist as a result of the two. In its attempt to embed life within art, Morris’ novel depicts Pater’s concept of the time-preserving nature of art, which proposes “frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass” (*Renaissance* 153). Yet while Pater acknowledges the constant flux of time, and the impossibility of stopping it, Morris tries to achieve exactly that. Imbuing life with the ontological quality of art, he dooms it to failure.

However much Morris tries to narrow down past, present and future down to daily essentials, he cannot deny the natural development of man. Progression away from the Victorian times is depicted by the use of personification: Clara and the other young women of *Nowhere*, for instance, strike Guest as “nothing more than specimens of very much improved types which [he had] known in other times,” but Ellen is “the most unfamiliar” to him (NfN 203). As such, she is furthest removed from Guest’s nineteenth-century background and the perfect representation of the new species of mankind which he encounters in the new world. This contrast between Ellen and the rest of *Nowhere*’s society undermines the illusion of ‘time standing still’. Despite every effort to forget about the progress of time, it is evidenced by the inhabitants of *Nowhere* themselves. Whereas Clara and Dick, childlike, are content in the confines of their love and the prospect of the next hay harvest, Ellen is already on the verge of the peak of fulfilment. She, having

understood the beauty of life in *Nowhere*, is looking beyond at what the future may hold. For her, if there is progression, it will be for the worse.

It is essentially the elusiveness of time coupled to man's inability to extricate himself from its constant flux that seems to render Morris' dream of paradise unachievable. His attempt to stop time denies the very notion of life, implying stagnation and an unnatural death, while the concept of man living outside time suggests Godlikeness: both notions which delete the very soul of man itself from mankind. Thus, the social and political message of Morris' novel stumbles and implodes by acknowledging the most natural limit of human nature—its humanity. Although this reading of Morris' text concurs with Coleman in his claim that "a key element in the definition of utopian visions is their claim to transcend the fixed limits of what non-utopians call human nature" (77), it also understands that by seeing Morris' utopia as just that (namely, unrealisable) a further reading of the novel must re-focus, shifting from its utopian content to its present effect as a work of art on the reader

4.5 Utopia as art

Eternal childhood and timelessness not only stand in sharp contrast to the nature of humankind, but also to the concepts of individuality, tolerance and the encouragement of individual development, which Morris so highly praises throughout the book. The reader is confronted with a problem which Bruce Mazlish summarizes as follows:

...utopias, wherever situated, postulated a fixed notion of both self and society, once these two entities had been suitably reformed. [They are] supremely uncomfortable with the notion of modern individualism [...]. Individualism entails unpredictability, and how can one plan utopia for such an unpredictable and uncertain self? (57)

Nineteenth-century humanity, being defined by its apparently unlimited potential, thus threatened the very form of utopia (Kumar 47-48). The idea of Morris presenting a viable alternative to the Victorian desires for conformity and predictability was undermined by his attempt to enclose his paradise and its inhabitants within temporal and spatial boundaries. Whilst these demarcations in *Nowhere* work as means of preventing corruption from the outside, they also turn the society of utopia into a prisoner of its own perfection. The spatial and temporal

boundaries that are imperative for the stability of the world of *Nowhere* also impose restrictions on human beings. Thus Morris' utopia is spun uneasily around the tension created between the simultaneous liberation and enclosure of mankind.

Two instances of this erection of boundaries and the resultant tensions caused by their breaking can be found in *News from Nowhere*. The first is Guest's encounter with Walter, an old friend of Dick's. In the region where Walter lives, a murder has been committed, caused by jealousy. Through account of the incident it becomes clear that deep human passions have no place in *Nowhere*. When bitten with "love-madness," the unsuccessful lover is advised to leave, for, as Walter recounts, "his individual trouble had so overmastered him that we felt that *we* must go if he did not" (NfN 189). However, he refuses, and the situation escalates into a fight between the two men, resulting in the killing of the unrequited lover.

Dick believes that this should be the end to a sad, though inevitable, story. Walter, however, explains that "the excitement and jealousy that was the prelude to this tragedy had made an evil and feverish element around [the girl's lover], from which he does not seem to be able to escape" (NfN 189). This overflow of passion and 'unhealthy' feeling pose a threat to *Nowhere's* society, who now, in turn, advises the girl's lover "to go away—in fact to cross the seas" (ibid). This leaves the impression that uncontrollable passions are intolerable within *Nowhere* as they pose a threat to society. The fact that two people have been so overcome by deep emotions "makes [people from *Nowhere*] feel rather shy of one another" (NfN 188), resulting in their demanding exclusion.

The other source of friction is Guest himself. He is, as Beaumont notes,

a ghost, and he unsettles the tranquillity of utopia. His very presence is a disruption of the epoch of rest. He is the mark of non-contemporaneity. In his person, the specter of pre-history haunts the realm of a redemptive history, just as the 'ghost of old London' still asserts itself as a center in *Nowhere* (48).

Guest, in the most literal sense, crosses the spatial and temporal boundaries of *Nowhere* and threatens the restrictions that have been put on the minds of its inhabitants. Thus, Guest's questions about life in *Nowhere*, born from ignorance, more than once result in awkwardness and embarrassment. They provoke the inhabitants of *Nowhere* to question their own existence, and thereby pierce the

bubble of happiness that surrounds them. Dick, for example, notices that Guest “makes [them] think of all kind of things and already [he] feel[s] as if [he] could understand Dickens the better” (NfN 161). Later, after the short conversation about death and winter, Dick—half-jokingly, half-seriously—tells Guest

One thing still seems strange to me [...] that I must needs trouble myself about the winter and its scantiness, in the midst of the summer abundance. If it hadn't happened to me before, I should have thought it was your doing, guest; that you had had thrown a kind of evil charm over me (NfN 225).

Whilst Dick is able to cast off the uneasiness with a joke, Clara finds herself seriously affected by Guest's presence. Witnessing Guest and Old Hammond looking at each other somewhat earnestly after having talked about the past, she exclaims:

Kinsman, I don't like this: something or another troubles me, and I feel as if something untoward were going to happen. You have been talking of past miseries to the guest, and have been living in past unhappy times, and it is in the air all round us, and makes us feel as if we were longing for something that we cannot have (NfN 162).

This sense of foreboding seems to accompany Guest wherever he goes, turning him into what Waithe describes as a “time-travelling leper” (464). His ‘disease’ precludes him from entering any position other than observer, and he has to acknowledge that he will never fully inhabit the beautiful new country. Even Dick senses Guest's maladjustment to the world of *Nowhere*, and innocently remarks that Guest is the one who wears the cap of darkness, observing everything but remaining—first figuratively, and later literally—invisible (NfN 179). Waithe argues that episodes such as these prove that Morris is careful not to rob human beings of their individuality, leaving the reader with a feeling that “things do happen” in *Nowhere* (466). However, the fact that these exact episodes end with the eviction of the ‘disruptive factors’ demonstrates that too much individuality and ‘happening’ are intolerable in the world of *Nowhere*.

It was thus, in the truest sense of the word, an aesthetic paradise that Morris created. Upon introducing any aspect of human nature, fissures began to appear on the canvas. Despite all the superficial tributes that were paid to nature and living creatures, life, complete with all its complexities, had no place within it. Morris thus sacrificed life on the altar of art, and the ‘art of living’ was resurrected as the ‘living of art’. Morris' utopia could always and only remain that which it pretended not to

be: art. As such, it was essentially through its 'being art', and through its divergence from reality, that the novel effectively achieved what it had initially aspired to do. Its readers were goaded out of their complacency and encouraged to seek something better, something truer, than what they possessed at present. Morris' affiliation with the other avant-garde artists is thus clarified, for it was through art which drew attention to its own artificiality, and in doing so made apparent the incompatibility of art and life, by which change was pursued.

Morris' *News from Nowhere* was not only a political vision of the future: it was primarily a contemporary work of art. In this, Morris' utopia distinguished itself from its predecessor, Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), which so incited Morris that it spurred him on to write *News from Nowhere* in the first place. *Looking Backward* is a story of the time traveller Julian West, who one day awakens in the socialist society of Boston of the year 2000. What Morris so disliked about Bellamy's hugely popular version of a future society was its organisation with strict military precision, leaving the new Boston without that true freedom which emanates from intrinsic motivation. Yet the greatest divergence between the two novels was that Bellamy allowed human nature to be just that, creating a utopia that was indeed viable. His characters were, much more than Morris', a "much improved species" of the average nineteenth-century citizen. Thus his readers could empathise and identify with the world that Bellamy described as it was something that could indeed be realised in the future.

Bellamy created the possible at the expense of art; Morris painted the impossible at the expense of life. The latter skated over the surface of a beautiful painting, and where Bellamy's novel depicted a possible future reality, Morris' *News from Nowhere* was effective in its contemporary setting by reception as a piece of art. As such, *News from Nowhere* proved to be more unsettling than *Looking Backward*. Whilst Julian West is able to fully enter and become part of the new society, Guest would always remain a guest in a place that he himself has depicted. In its effect as a piece of art, *News from Nowhere* drew attention to the unlimited potential of dreams. Art became the limitless frame in which dreams could be, if only fleetingly, attained. The artist's task was to encourage people to be dissatisfied with the status quo, to constantly re-consider, learn and be ready for change. As Wilmer points out: "we are

not expected to swallow Morris's dream. On the contrary, we are encouraged to dream for ourselves" (xxxv). It was this encouragement to look beyond the immediate that spoke from pages of *News from Nowhere*, and as such, its effectiveness and criticism lay in its very indeterminacy. Humanity would only progress if something desirable was placed tantalizingly close to, yet just outside, its reach. Utopia, in Wilde's words, was the "one country at which Humanity [was] always landing. And when Humanity land[ed] there, it look[ed] out, and, seeing a better country, set sail" (SM 16).

It shows that Morris, much like Wilde and Moore, struggled with his contemporaries' understanding of art and the influence capitalism exerted on the position of the artist and his art. *News from Nowhere* can thus be read as a contribution to the re-definition of the artist's position and the purpose of art at the fin de siècle. Like Wilde and Moore's writings, it worked through the juxtaposition of autonomous art and social vision. Through the artist-figure of Guest, Morris gestured towards, and simultaneously legitimised, his own role as an artist within a society where politics did not achieve the desired change. In its complex combination of form, content and context, *News from Nowhere* re-positioned the artist and his art outside the capitalistic circle, depicting their task as with something far larger than satisfying popular demand. His novel, in indicating the absolute difference between art and life, worked its social criticism not through "posturing," but through being art.

The following chapter will examine an example of the opposite approach to re-defining art and the artist's role within society: *The Yellow Book*. This journal was introduced into the world of journalism and the Yellow Press as a bastion against cheap, popular and economically motivated art; yet it surprised its audience through the didactical and socio-critical undertone that permeated its drawings, stories and poems. In the following I am going to look at the 'educational' elements in *The Yellow Book*, and how its apparent paradoxes, which arose in its contrasting autonomous art with social criticism and aesthetic education, can be seen as another attempt to both re-define the role of the artist and educate the public in a new understanding of art.

V. *Periodical Education: The Artist and The Yellow Book*

Nothing like *The Yellow Book* had been seen before. It was newness in excelsis: novelty naked and unashamed. People were puzzled and shocked and delighted, and yellow became the colour of the hour, the symbol of the time-spirit. It was associated with all that was bizarre and queer in art and life, with all that was outrageously modern.

(Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*)

A phenomenon of the 1890s, as closely connected to the fin de siècle as Wilde's flamboyant personality, is *The Yellow Book*. As one of the "little magazines" of the period (Fletcher 1979) it ranks among all the periodicals of generally obscure artistic or ideological groups which proliferated at the end of the century and seldom survived more than a few years (*The Yellow Book* lasted a little over three), occasionally just months. Yet it declared itself as "the most interesting, unusual, and important publication of its kind that has ever been undertaken" (quoted in Mix 79), and, despite its brief lifespan, managed to live up to its promises. It did indeed deviate from what people knew and soon became the flagship of the transition from old to new, from tradition to the avant-garde, from collectivism to individualism—the epitome of the fin de siècle.

In March 1894 a compendium appeared, boldly citing the purpose and objectives of *The Yellow Book* as being:

The aim ... of THE YELLOW BOOK is to depart as far as may be from the bad old traditions of periodical literature, and to provide an Illustrated Magazine which shall be beautiful as a piece of bookmaking, modern and distinguished in its letter-press and its pictures, and withal popular in the better sense of the word. It will publish no serials; but its complete stories will sometimes run to a considerable length in themselves...And while THE YELLOW BOOK will seek always to preserve a delicate, decorous, and reticent mien and conduct, it will at the same time have the courage of its modernness, and not tremble at the frown of Mrs. Grundy. [...] It will be charming, it will be daring, it will be distinguished. It will be a book—a book to be read, and placed upon one's shelves, and read again; a book in form, a book in substance; a book beautiful to see and convenient to handle; a book with style, a book with finish; a book that every book-lover will love at first sight; a book that will make book-lovers of many who are now indifferent to books. (Mix 77-79).

When, after this daring introduction, *The Yellow Book* made its debut in April 1894, it created such a public outcry that it was immediately marked as a 'succès de

scandale'. *Punch* called it "the latest literary epidemic.—The Yellow (Book) Fever" (1894:228), and due to popular demand the first issue had to be reprinted three times; everybody wanted to know what this new periodical was all about. Its yellow cover roused memories of provocative French fiction and of British railway novels, both suggestive associations in themselves, particularly to the "male connoisseurs" (Brake 1999:59). It raised admiration and damnation, outrage and enthusiasm. Yet the overall reaction was one of consternation and revolt. Newspaper reviewers slaughtered it; it was "damned as impertinent and vulgar" (Graham 265). The *National Observer* dismissed the periodical as "bizarre, eccentric, uncomfortably heavy to the hand," "a misarrangement in orpiment" and full of "nonsensical and hysterical matter" (588-589). The London *Times* repudiated it as "a combination of English rowdiness with French lubricity" (3), and asserted that it was "scarcely calculated to attract by its intrinsic beauty or merit; possibly, however, it may be intended to attract by its very repulsiveness and insolence" (ibid). The most widely quoted critique of *The Yellow Book*, however, came from the *Westminster Gazette*: it asked for a "short act of Parliament to make this kind of thing illegal" (3).

Despite this strong reaction by the Victorian public, who seemed to be both intrigued and repulsed, there were, then and nowadays, voices which did not, and do not, understand what actually caused this outcry. The vehemence with which the Victorian society reacted to *The Yellow Book* seemed out of proportion to the actual 'offensiveness' of the periodical, and it indicated a deep-rooted discomfort with the avant-garde. One of the contributors to *The Yellow Book*, Richard Le Gallienne, for instance, remarked in *The Romantic '90s*:

The Yellow Book was certainly novel, even striking, but, except for the drawings and decorations by Beardsley [...] it is hard to realize why it should have seemed so shocking. But the public is an instinctive creature, not half so stupid as is usually taken for granted. It evidently scented something queer and rather alarming about the strange new quarterly, and thus it almost immediately regarded it as symbolic of new movements which it only partially represented (132-133).

As Le Gallienne correctly noted, the majority of contributions to *The Yellow Book* were neither particularly shocking nor repellent. Its editor John Lane continually ensured a good mix of such representatives of the avant-garde as Max Beerbohm, Arthur Symons, George Egerton, and Hubert Crackanthorpe with 'respectable'

writers like Henry James, William Watson, Arthur Waugh and Edmund Gosse. The same practice held true for the art section. Although Aubrey Beardsley's black and white drawings dominated the cover and several pages within the periodical, his 'modernness' was counterbalanced with paintings by Sir Frederic Leighton, the esteemed president of the Royal Academy.

What exactly was it that turned *The Yellow Book* into a symbol of the avant-garde movement which defined the fin de siècle—a connotation which it retains to this day? This chapter suggests that this was not only due to its affinity to movements like Decadence and Aestheticism, alongside its association with fin-de-siècle personalities such as Beardsley, Wilde and Beerbohm; but because the periodical demonstrated the same hybridisation of form, content and context that I have previously discussed in the writings of Wilde, Moore and Morris. Likewise, the periodical is characterised by an almost paradoxical amalgamation of claims to aesthetic autonomy plus texts and drawings full of socio-critical engagement. *The Yellow Book* thus employed subversion and disguised social criticism within a presentation of art as autonomous. Thus, rather than being seen as the epitome of the fin de siècle due to its close alliance to Decadent or Aesthetic artists, *The Yellow Book* can be read as an endeavour to select and educate a 'connoisseur audience'.

Many of the "little magazines" of the late nineteenth century served, as Beckson notes, as informal artistic manifestos, promoting "avant-garde concerns and works as a radical rejection of the popular magazines" (1992:235). Indeed *The Yellow Book*, by declaring itself to be avant-garde and purely aesthetic, fell within this tradition; yet deep social criticism and the educational tone which permeated its pages countered this claim. Although Beckson suggests that these elitist "aesthetic publications generally limited themselves to the arts, avoided articles on religious, social or political issues" (ibid), contributions to *The Yellow Book* infiltrated and undermined its aesthetic ambitions with deep social concern. Arthur Symons's provocative poem about a prostitute, "Stella Maris" (which will be discussed in greater detail later in the text), exemplifies this as, underneath its surface of beautiful verse and rhyme, it presented a commentary on the restrictive status of women within Victorian society, and a call for the freedom of every individual.

Many contributions to *The Yellow Book* were conspicuous by their claim to aloofness and exclusivity, which was often instantly undermined by their social concern and critical engagement. Although it encouraged and promoted a move towards the complete autonomy of art, there was also awareness that autonomous art did not necessarily mean ‘apart from life’. This understanding showed in the pages of *The Yellow Book* in that its contributions were all infused with social relevance. The publication format being in a journal was in itself indicative that its artistic creations were to be read, to be observed—in short, that it sought the dialogue with an audience.

Art in *The Yellow Book* was turned into a social and educational medium, and the role of the artist as social critic and educator returned as a central theme throughout its different publications. This chapter will study *The Yellow Book* as one of the prime examples of the fin-de-siècle’s attempt to ‘create an audience’ and legitimise the artist’s role within society. Whilst avant-garde and supportive of the autonomy of art, the periodical was defined by certain irreconcilable paradoxes that denote its wider agenda: the creation and education of its audience for an innovative understanding of art. Most of the “little magazines” of the late nineteenth century were aimed at an exclusive, elitist audience (Beckson 1992:235); *The Yellow Book*, however, was mainly directed at the very part of society it most harshly criticised. Although difficult to pinpoint exactly the readership of *The Yellow Book*, critics agree that besides representatives of the fin-de-siècle avant-garde movements (such as the New Woman or the younger generation of artists), its audience was mainly middle class. Taking her cue from several newspaper quotations, Allison Pease defines *The Yellow Book* reader as predominantly “petit bourgeois” (80), the lower middle class, who by trying to assimilate and imitate upper-middle-class patterns of aesthetic and decorative consumption earned the contempt of many contemporaries. This targeted selection of a middle-class audience appears to undermine the periodical’s claims to exclusivity and to the expression of the aesthetics ‘art for art’s sake’. As such, it also attests to an awareness that (as Greenberg points out) the avant-garde was dependent upon creating an audience from which it could set itself apart while being at the same time attached to it “by an umbilical cord of gold” (8).

The Yellow Book incorporated social engagement in its manifesto of the autonomy of art. It had a message to give, and it gave it through its appearance and content. Its message was one of individualism, of promoting change and of allowing and enabling people to see the world differently. Directed at a middle-class readership, *The Yellow Book* spoke to, and also against, the epitome of Victorian society: of adherence to hypocritical morality and prudery, of fear of ‘strangeness’ and of unwillingness to change. *The Yellow Book* dealt with ideas of art re-appropriating its place in life, much the opposite of separating art from life. The relationship between the artist and society, the problems that pervaded contemporary society, and the question of how the artist could provide solutions to these problems through his art were all observed. Thereby *The Yellow Book* constituted a perfect example of how fin-de-siècle artists in the tradition of Ruskin, Arnold and Pater engaged with society and contemporary problems through their art. In this attempt to re-position the artist and his art within contemporary society, *The Yellow Book* was, in the truest sense, ‘avant-garde’. It is not surprising that it found one successor in Wyndham Lewis’s *BLAST* and another in John Lehmann’s *New Writing*. The former stated in his periodical’s manifesto that “no periodical since the famous Yellow Book has so comprehended the artistic movement of its decade” (quoted in May 87), and Lehmann called his *New Writing* the “Yellow Book of the thirties” (Sullivan 459).

5.1 Periodical culture and The Yellow Book

On its first publication on April 1894, *The Yellow Book* was launched into a time of flourishing ‘periodical culture’, following in the footsteps of a Victorian vogue. During the nineteenth century, periodicals emerged as central media for the critic to spread his thoughts and ideas and to communicate with the public. Although the Victorian age is often seen as the century of the three-decker novel, of Dickens and Thackeray and the circulating library, recent scholarship has come to realise the important role periodicals played in the formation of Victorian culture. Alvin Sullivan, for example, claims that “of no time or place can it be said that periodicals had greater cultural impact” (xiii). The nineteenth century saw an enormous rise in the number of published periodicals. Walter Houghton, for example, states that Victorians published 25,000 periodicals of all kinds and about several hundred

reviews, magazines, and weeklies (4). Often starting out as mere collections of reviews on one or more books, periodicals soon began to accommodate every taste and interest through a wide range of different articles, aiming at a specific readership. Book reviews soon did not just present objective facts, but evolved into “nominal springboards for wider discussions of related matters—hence the ‘review-like essay’” (Sullivan xviii). Soon every political, religious or otherwise ideologically-minded faction of society had, as Arnold put it, their own “organ of criticism,” serving their specific need (CA 37).

Periodicals had many advantages over books. The usually were a lot cheaper, and, with their shorter articles, reviews and essays, were easier and quicker to read. The newly literate readership, a consequence of the Education Act of 1870, thus found them very appealing. The periodical’s journalistic aspects kept people informed about current affairs, and book and theatre reviews provided summaries of ‘must-reads’ and ‘must-sees’. However, taking into consideration that the “educated and would-be-educated alike wanted accounts of new or rapidly developing subjects” (Houghton 4), periodicals had to concentrate increasingly on the journalistic instead of on the literary aspect. It was paramount for periodicals to engage with contemporary ideas and issues, and to provoke discussion by presenting new viewpoints and theories.

Periodical writing therefore constituted a new genre and confronted nineteenth century writers with new opportunities as well as challenges.³⁴ On the one hand, the chances of getting one’s work published in a periodical were much higher realistically than of convincing a publisher to sponsor a book project. As periodicals mostly promised prompt payment, and were more likely to accept pieces of writing, “they could keep the writer alive, in body and mind” (Houghton 19). The difficulties of publishing a book, as Houghton emphasises, were that “most authors of poems, sermons, and works on morals or metaphysics could expect no return from a publisher—if they could find one—and [...] others might have to make an advance varying from £50 to £200 to protect the publisher from loss” (19). Very often, writing for periodicals initiated a literary career, offering what Laurel Brake calls “an informal system of apprenticeship for the would-be writer” (1994:2); thus many of

³⁴ For a very good discussion of the complex relationship between writers, publishers and the reading public and the influence periodicals had on writing and criticism see Brake’s *Subjugated Knowledges*.

the texts that were eventually published as books had frequently made their debut in the serialized form encountered in the periodicals of the time.³⁵

On the other hand, however, periodicals also restricted contributors in their work, forcing them to “suit their work to the carefully targeted readership of a particular periodical, and to trim the length of their text to suit that periodical’s format” (Daly 21). As previously mentioned, periodicals usually represented a certain political, religious or ideological viewpoint, and thus required writers to comply with that stance. Contributions usually were not protected from revision and radical editing, especially in a time when the question of anonymity still conjured up widely differing opinions (see Brake 1994:15-16). Although prevalent, especially during the middle of the century, the question of whether to publish a contribution under its author’s real name played an important part in periodical policy throughout the century. Obviously, anonymity made it easier for publishers to edit and even radically alter texts to own preferences; also, listing unknown (or not yet known) authors might significantly reduce the chance of being read at all. Thus, even though the practice of publishing the author’s name had asserted itself by the end of the century, an author’s name attached to a text certainly had overtones, which influenced the way people viewed texts or pictures in a way that is difficult to comprehend from today’s perspective.

It was against this culture of ‘popular’ periodicals that *The Yellow Book* was set up. It was aimed at a middle-class audience, and its archaic, decorative cover disguised it as a consumer article to be displayed. However, its content simultaneously spoke against the consumer culture and capitalistic mentality that was represented in the periodicals of the ‘masses’. Through these differing messages of form and content, *The Yellow Book* managed to address these issues in a subversive rather than aggressively direct way. It infiltrated its ‘enemy lines’ by declaring itself to be a periodical, and thus paved its way into the hectic world of new journalism, of society news and gossip, of statistics, of information and of the constant pressure of being up to date. Contrary to these elements it demonstrated the value of art and the

³⁵ Examples for this are Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which was first published in *The Fortnightly Review*, or his critical essays, which were assembled in *Intentions* after having been published in different periodicals. Similarly, Arnold’s “Culture and Anarchy,” which came out in book form in 1869 appeared as a series of articles in *The Cornhill Magazine* between 1867 and 1869.

importance of aesthetic contemplation, thereby evidencing the battle between two types of culture, one exemplified by *The Yellow Book*, the other by what Jackson calls “The Yellow Press”:

The one was unique, individual, a little weird, often exotic, demanding the right to be—in its own way even to waywardness; [...]. The other was broad, general, popular; it was the majority, the man-in-the-street awaiting a new medium of expression (58-59).

As has been suggested, *The Yellow Book* showed more similarities with the Yellow Press than has first been assumed (Brake 1995), but it was still its “waywardness” that gave it its special fin-de-siècle character. Whilst its ‘weirdness’ was reflected in the avant-garde contributions, literary and artistic, of Beerbohm, Beardsley, Egerton or Crackanthorpe, its claim to individuality and the right to be was, strangely enough, best mirrored in its suspension between new and old, the tension between traditional and avant-garde, between the older and the younger generation. In the pages of *The Yellow Book* well-respected and ‘traditional’ Victorian artists mingled with the generation of the avant-garde. In his critique of the first volume of *The Yellow Book*, by way of example, Philip Gilbert Hamerton, a well-know Victorian critic, differentiated between his generation and “the younger poets” who “make art independent of morals” (ii, 181). Yet he, in the same way as Sir Frederic Leighton, Arthur Waugh and William Watson, formed part of the multi-vocal variety of the artists that turned *The Yellow Book* into a symbol of the fin de siècle. As such, *The Yellow Book* was, as Ledger notes, “a site for the most significant cultural dialogues and conflicts of the *fin de siècle*” (2007:9).

This mixture of old and new, of avant-garde and tradition, made it impossible to categorise *The Yellow Book*. As will be shown, this indeterminacy wove its way through its contributions. It found expression, for example, in Beardsley’s drawings, which significantly helped to form the character of the periodical. To a large extent, they strike the audience through their indeterminacy, incorporating many different, equally possible definitions of their character and meaning. *The Yellow Book*, as reflected in Beardsley’s drawings, assumed the character of “privileged truth: the perceptive elite shared the joke, while the philistine ‘outsiders’ miss it, or mock themselves by seeing only the most obvious aspects of it” (Snodgrass 181). It exemplified the fin-de-siècle’s attempt to break down hierarchies and orders that

were no longer tenable. It asked its audience to reconsider the traditional and to permit new ideas and manners of understanding life and art. Thus it can be argued that it was, to a large extent, *The Yellow Book's* ability to escape classification and, through that, to set people thinking which turned it into an epitome of the fin de siècle.

It is surprising to see that even though *The Yellow Book* is mentioned in every major study on the end of the nineteenth century, and most scholars would agree that it helped to form and represent an “era” (Sullivan xxi), research done on the periodical is sparse. Recent research has focussed on the involvement of the ‘New Woman’ in the periodical,³⁶ and even until the present day, Katherine Mix’s *Study in Yellow* (1960) remains the most comprehensive discussion of the people surrounding *The Yellow Book*, its reception, development and end. Although her book provides good background information, it is more descriptive than analytical, and neglects to consider the implications of *The Yellow Book's* novelty, its relation to its time and society, and also, it ignores the question of what it was that made *The Yellow Book* so ‘fin de siècle’.

This neglect might be due in part to the fact that about two decades ago, research into Victorian periodicals was still in its infancy. One of the first attempts to work a way through the huge number of Victorian periodicals and to introduce some sort of order was Joanne Shattock’s and Michael Wolff’s *The Victorian Periodical Press*, which was published in 1982. Also, the sheer number of nineteenth-century periodicals, missing indexes, issues and information might appear simply overwhelming, particularly since for a long time periodicals have been considered part of the realm of sociology rather than literary and cultural studies.³⁷ The most recent and productive study which includes *The Yellow Book* is Brake’s and Julie Codell’s *Encounters in the Victorian Press* (2005). It examines the contribution of the Victorian press to public life and social sphere, and encounters between readers, editors and authors. Most other works which mention *The Yellow Book* focus on a

³⁶ See, for example, Ledger “Wilde Women and *The Yellow Book*” and Hughes “Women poets and contested spaces in *The Yellow Book*.”

³⁷ For more sociologically orientated studies see: Altick *Victorian People and Ideas* and *The English Common Reader*, Brake *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, Jones *Powers of the Press*, McDonald *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice 1880-1914*.

specific person associated with the periodical, the majority looking at the lives of Henry Harland, Aubrey Beardsley and John Lane.³⁸

This focus on a person rather than the periodical (though disappointing as it seems for someone searching for information on *The Yellow Book* in its own right) is in itself an indication of the nature of this periodical. It was, first and foremost, people like Beardsley, Harland, Lane and all the other contributors to the periodical that helped to turn it into the epitome of fin-de-siècle life and avant-garde movement. John Lane became the sole owner of the Bodley Head following his break from his partner Elkin Mathews in 1894; thus only the first two issues of *The Yellow Book* were published under both their names. Whilst Mathews tended to prefer slightly more traditional and 'safe' writers, Lane liked to 'specialise' on lesser known authors and writings with risqué subjects, and so had soon established himself as "one of London's leading avant-garde publishers" (Fraser 6). Lane, however, never became 'too avant-garde' for the public to be affronted. Thus, during their co-operation for *The Yellow Book*, Lane's business mind continually balanced Beardsley's and Harland's excessive enthusiasm for everything new and different, qualities calculated to scare their readership away.

Margarete Stetz, in her excellent article on the marketing strategies of the Bodley Head, remarks that "[t]he Bodley's commitment to the avant-garde was less a loving embrace than a marriage of convenience" (1991:71). This "marriage of convenience" was in the main for purely economical reasons. Lane was, as McDonald points out, a "seriously under-capitalized newcomer" (75). This showed, for example, in Harland's quarterly budget of a mere £200 to pay for all contributions to *The Yellow Book*. This left Lane with the difficult compromise of finding "ways of establishing a reputable name, which in the age of mass culture entailed a visible refusal of 'commercialism', while safeguarding his own economic survival" (McDonald 75). However, Lane had the commercial know-how, and his strategy was to sell people a sense of exclusivity, of being tantalizingly 'modern' and en vogue: thus, as previously mentioned, the acquisition of a Bodley book was "to obtain 'culture'" (Stetz 1991:82). Lane thereby managed to create what today would be called a

³⁸ See, for example: Beckson *Henry Harland. His Life and Work*; Ellmann *Oscar Wilde*, May *John Lane and the Nineties*, Reade *Beardsley Re-Mounted*, Sutton *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s*, Weintraub *Aubrey Beardsley*, Fletcher *Aubrey Beardsley*.

designer label, and the expectations which arose through association with his brand name also formulated the way people viewed *The Yellow Book*.

Harland and Beardsley were the ones who approached Lane with their idea of starting a periodical that would be ‘radically different’ from all the others. Lane’s art editor, Beardsley, probably best represents the rebellious spirit of the fin de siècle within the triumvirate of *The Yellow Book*. It was certainly Beardsley’s association with *The Yellow Book* and his strange, Japanese-style black and white drawings that adorned the pages of the periodical that to a large extent contributed to its fin-de-siècle character. For many people today, Beardsley, alongside Wilde, is the epitome of the 1890s, the decade which is often also called “The Beardsley period” (Jackson 17). According to Jackson, “his appearance in the decade was inevitable” (18), for he represented “not art so much as an idea, not an accomplishment so much as a mood.”(125).

However, while Beardsley’s drawings contributed significantly to the character of *The Yellow Book*, they are not the focal point in the following discussion. Whilst the decision to limit the discussion to contributions from the first four volumes of *The Yellow Book* might suggest that, following Beardsley’s departure, the periodical lost its avant-garde edge, this is only partly true. Agreeing with Stetz that it is too sweeping a generalisation to equate *The Yellow Book* with Aubrey Beardsley (1999:33), this chapter focuses on the first four issues only because they best reflect the periodical’s fin-de-siècle character with their optimism, enthusiasm and their freedom from the fear that pervaded the avant-garde movement after Wilde’s imprisonment. Therefore, even though I concur with the claim that *The Yellow Book* changed character after Beardsley’s dismissal and gradually lost its fin-de-siècle character (see, for example, Jackson 53), I attribute this change to the fact that Lane (as well as everyone else associated with the avant-garde movement) had to withdraw a few steps from both risqué subjects and writers in order to maintain his business in the aftermath of Wilde’s trials and imprisonment.³⁹

³⁹ Lane asked Beardsley to leave after Wilde had been arrested with what people assumed to be a copy of *The Yellow Book* under his arm. Although Beardsley made the exclusion of Wilde from *The Yellow Book* a condition, and their only co-operation ever was over the illustrations for Wilde’s *Salome*, their names seem to be inextricably linked. Whether Lane dismissed Beardsley because he had become too risqué in Lane’s eyes or whether he gave in to pressure from many of his contributors is not clear.

Beardsley, through his eccentric drawings, the dramatic story of his success and his short life, tends to be more readily associated with *The Yellow Book* than either John Lane or Henry Harland. However, it was Harland, its literary editor, who largely decided on literary and artistic contributions, and thus significantly formed the character of the periodical. Harland had come to England from America, where he had published two successful novels. When he moved to London in 1889, he had already established a name for himself in the literary world. He soon was seen as a man who could “launch the careers of the unknown or lure the illustrious to the pages of the most talked-about periodical in London” (Beckson 1978:72). He loved to pose as a dandy, in accordance with the age; yet he took his job as literary editor of *The Yellow Book* extremely seriously and often even paid contributors out of his own pocket. Harland “welcomed new talent; indeed, many of the issues contain stories and poems by writers— many of them women—never before published, and he took pleasure in his new discoveries” (ibid).

The mixture of Lane’s business mind, Harland’s dedication and feel for young talent, and Beardsley’s genius and drive decidedly helped to position *The Yellow Book* as a symbol of the ‘yellow nineties’. Whilst Lane ensured that, despite its exclusive character, a wide audience would be reached, Harland encouraged contributions from a broad range of writers, thus creating a mix of different, often contradictory voices that catered for almost every taste, but also warranted high quality. Beardsley contributed the success of his new and daring drawings to both Lane’s and Harland’s aims, and thus all three worked together to turn *The Yellow Book* into the periodical of the fin de siècle.

5.2 *Yellow Book or Yellow Press?*

Not only in the choice of its contributors, but also in its outward appearance, did *The Yellow Book* unite old and new, in an experiment of transience. As Brake notes, its editors, with their decision to use the “archaic format of the quarterly,” positioned themselves against the practises of the ‘yellow press’ “at the very moment in the history of journalism when topicality and up-to-dateness seemed paramount” (1995:57). Although *The Yellow Book* declared to belong to the periodical market, it contradicted the genre of periodicals in almost every major point.

In her article “Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre,” Margaret Beetham lists several characteristics which allow the definition of the periodical as a genre. One of them is its “ephemeral” aspect: “Read today and rubbish tomorrow, each number of a periodical becomes obsolete as soon as the next comes out. Nor is this particular relationship to time accidental; it is, as the name indicates, the defining characteristic of the genre” (19). Contrary to this statement, the prospectus of *The Yellow Book* gave the reader to understand that the periodical would be “a book—a book to be read, and placed upon one’s shelves, and read again; a book in form, a book in substance” (quoted in Mix 79). That is indeed what it was: bound in cloth rather than paper boards, presented in quarto format rather than the usual folio format, its sheer number of pages were out of bounds in comparison with any other periodical, with one of its issues containing over four hundred pages of drawings, poetry and prose. It was not printed on cheap paper, but instead emphasised its durability and worth through large print, wide margins and quality paper, thereby following the tradition of what Beckson calls the “aesthetic publications” (1978:235)—periodicals aimed at an exclusive, elitist audience. Jackson, commenting on this apparent paradox, writes:

It had not hitherto occurred to a publisher to give a periodical the dignity of book form; and, although literature had before then been treated as journalism, it was quite a new thing in this country for a group of lesser-known writers and artists to be glorified in the regal format of a five-shilling quarterly (54).

Harland, Lane and Beardsley thus managed to use a mass market genre for their own purpose of re-introducing art into ‘normal’ and everyday life. *The Yellow Book* thereby served an educational purpose: it was ‘art for art’s sake’ made accessible to an audience that had come to understand art as one more consumer article in the midst of capitalistic society. This periodical marked an attempt to deliver pure art into the sphere of new journalism, daily news and the business of life; it was “designed to remove the periodical from the affray for the ‘busy reader’” (Brake 1995:57). It suggested something of lasting value in the midst of the ephemeral, something that was worth taking one’s time to read, look at and contemplate. By combining mass-marketable readership with the exclusivity of its art, *The Yellow*

Book stood as an example of artistic manifesto combined with socio-aesthetic education.

Despite its slightly higher price, *The Yellow Book* also countered the idea of materialistic marketability of art (although Lane was certainly out to make a profit from it); again, it suggested something of the alignment between tradition and ‘modernity’ by placing its prize between the 2s 6d monthly reviews and the old, six shilling quarterlies. The *Yellow Book*’s editors’ main aim was to promote quality. They managed to fix the price at a level sufficiently low so as not to appear aimed at profiteering, and high enough to stand for exclusivity and value. Brake notes that

as a cloth bound *book*, it was priced at a shilling less than cloth bound, one-volume novels at 6 shillings. Neither the old quarterlies nor the one-volume novels, were likely to be copiously illustrated, and if they were, neither the quality and quantity of their illustrations were likely to match those of *The Yellow Book*. (1995:60)

This idea was further reinforced by the editors’ decision not to permit the inclusion of any advertisements apart from advertisements of forthcoming books. Thereby, *The Yellow Book* made a point of containing nothing but pure literature and art, setting itself and its art apart from the capitalistic cycle of life. It was not established to present itself as a marketable product; rather, its aim was to mirror what art was meant to be. Beetham remarks that, while for most publishers of periodicals, the desire to make profit presented itself as the prime motivation, this cannot be concluded to be a rule. The economic side was not always the most important or sole incentive to publish a periodical; instead, to those involved in the production “the exercise of the power to make one’s meanings stick, the desire to educate the reader [...] could be as powerful as the desire for profit” (21). Superior to the economic aspect, this educational component can be seen as an essential characteristic of *The Yellow Book*. Underneath the veneer of presenting ‘art for art’s sake’, there always was a relational and communicative element—a message about the relationship between art, society and the artist.

These aspects might also explain why *The Savoy* (the periodical that Beardsley founded together with Arthur Symons and Leonard Smithers after having been dismissed from *The Yellow Book*) never achieved the same (posthumous) fame. It was a purely ‘art for art’s sake’ publication, but it appeared in the form of a ‘proper’

periodical. Cheaper, bound in paper, in folio format, it survived for twelve months before its publishers had to declare defeat. Some critics would claim that *The Savoy* is a far better example of the spirit of the Nineties.⁴⁰ Yet even though it reflected certain aspects of the fin de siècle (such as Decadence and Aestheticism, movements that are usually associated with, and thought of, as defining the fin de siècle), it never quite became the epitome of the decade. Jackson suggests that “its failure in twelve months through lack of support proves that there was at the time no public for such a publication” (58). As Jackson implies, it did not, in the same way as *The Yellow Book*, succeed in catching the mood of the decade—which *The Yellow Book* did, first of all, through its embodiment of the sense of transience from old to new that pervaded the eighteen nineties; but even more so through mirroring the avant-garde character of the fin de siècle in its mixture of social concern and interaction, though involving people associated with ‘modern’ ideas, and through its ability to present art as integral to daily life, without it losing its exclusivity. In short, it put art as a social concept right at its centre.

5.3 The art of social criticism I: criticism of shock

This notion of the centrality of art and the artist within society showed not only in the outward appearance of *The Yellow Book*, but also in its content. Walter Graham believes that “The Yellow Book contained some of the most brilliant writing of the ‘nineties’” (266), and its contributors distinguished themselves from any other journalistic writers by their “tendency to conceal the meaning of their stories by studious avoidance of the obvious” (ibid). Whilst focussing first and foremost on the aesthetic, contributions to *The Yellow Book* were also concerned with elements that were central to contemporary society: working life, marriage, the role of women and religion. The underlying tenet was the lament of the loss of a wider vision and of the beauty and wonder of life. The contributors, by re-defining form and content, toyed with expectations and norms, turning traditional assumptions and value systems on their heads, and thus forcing their readership to look at the world anew.

⁴⁰ Beckson, for example, describes *The Savoy* as “the first truly avant-garde publication of the 1890s” (1978:88), and Sullivan claims that “by an appropriate irony the imitator was more authentically avant garde than its model” (1984:xxi) and that it was a “better model of the literary mood of the 1890s” (1984:459).

In contributing to *The Yellow Book*, its writers and artists became part of a complex process of “making meaning” (Beetham 20). It was, as Beetham notes, a process “in which writers, editors, publishers and readers engaged in trying to understand themselves and their society; that is, they struggled to make their world meaningful” (ibid). Through their art, *The Yellow Book* artists engaged in contemporary issues, and thus became part of the process of re-interpreting values and belief systems which came to define the fin de siècle. It is therefore wrong to attribute *The Yellow Book*’s final demise to what Mix calls its “aloof attitude” (275). Rather, its failure lay in its gradual assimilation by the mass marketed periodicals, against which it had initially set itself up; this assimilation eventually caused it to lose its avant-garde edge of combining social concern with the exclusivity of art. The following paragraphs are intended to depict aspects of social engagement which are contained within the different contributions to *The Yellow Book*. The message they comprised about the world, the reader and the artist’s relationship with both will be expounded, and the strong reactions of the press and the Victorian public be explained.

Social engagement and educational concern in *The Yellow Book* can roughly be split up into three different types: firstly into what can be deemed ‘criticism of shock’; secondly, into subversive criticism; and thirdly, into direct educational engagement. The first type is probably closest to what people immediately think of when they consider *The Yellow Book* and its connection to the fin de siècle. It is found in the texts and drawings which were closely related to French decadence, and they often constituted a complete break with Victorian morals and values. Two of the most prominent texts of this kind are Arthur Symons’s poem “Stella Maris”, which appeared in Volume I (1894, 131), and John Davidson’s “Ballad of a Nun,” published in Volume III (1894, 273-279).

“Stella Maris” tells of the narrator’s encounter with a prostitute and of the night they spent together. The narrator presents the memory of the night not as shameful, but as special and worthy of remembrance: “Joy, not shame, is ours to share./ Joy that we had the will and power/ In spite of fate, to snatch one hour/ Out of vague nights, and days at strife/ So infinitely full of life” (131). In these few lines, the

narrator defies all expectations: shame is replaced by joy, and (hinted at through the repetition of the word “joy”) even something akin to pride.

In Victorian times, sexuality and prostitution were topics that tended to be handled ‘under the counter,’ and women in particular were kept in the dark about sexual matters. Prostitution was often seen as a necessity, tolerated in order to maintain the illusion of the angelic and pure woman in the house, while, at the same time, satisfying the man’s healthy and normal sexual appetite.⁴¹ In light of this, the choice of prostitution as a topic for poetry was considered utterly inappropriate and scandalous. Judith Walkowitz notes that prostitutes in Victorian times were considered “social ‘residuum’, the casual laboring poor who inhabited the ‘nether regions’ of society” (1980:3). As such they were—as much as possible—blocked out from Victorian middle class consciousness, who often even denied them their very humanity.

Yet there was another, deeper reason behind this attempt to ignore what James Adams calls the confrontation with “‘savageness’ at home” (132): the fact that prostitution itself presented an escape from poverty turned its existence into a “standing embarrassment to Victorian schemes of progress” (ibid). Moreover, as Walkowitz observes

[a] source of cheap labour and illicit pleasures for middle-class Victorians, this social underworld was also the focus of deep-seated social fears and insecurities, most vividly expressed in the images of filth and contagion associated with the “Great Unwashed”. [...] Literally and figuratively, the prostitute was the conduit of infection to respectable society. She was nonetheless an object of class guilt as well as fear, a powerful symbol of sexual and economic exploitation under industrial capitalism (1980:4).

Not only had prostitution become the “most glaring example of Victorian double standard” (Adams 133), but it brought to the surface some of the worst fears of Victorian times: a confrontation with insoluble problems hovering at one’s own doorstep. It was a sign of the destructive force of capitalism, which began to undermine humanity itself. The fact that these factors pointed towards a rapidly changing, uncontrollable development, undermined Victorian self-confidence and pride in the extreme. With “Stella Maris,” Symons not only subverted traditional

⁴¹ For a slightly outdated yet still valuable study on Victorian sexuality see Marcus *The Other Victorian*. For a more contemporary view see Adams “Victorian Sexuality” and both Walkowitz’s *Prostitution and Victorian Society* and *City of Dreadful Delight*.

concepts of morality and decorum, but also challenged Victorian notions of superiority. The fact that the narrator finds life and joy in the encounter evoked the fears of Victorian society, bringing into question their double standards as much as their worship of capitalism.

John Davidson's "A Ballad of a Nun" also turned traditional Victorian concepts of gender and morality upside down. The ballad tells the story of a nun who, after years of devotion, discipline and dedication to Christ, runs away from the convent to experience sexual love. After having thrown herself at the feet of a handsome young man, offering him her virginity (276), she wanders from town to town to experience "life's great meaning" (ibid). Yet, in the end, she comes to realise that life's meaning is not found in these sexual encounters, and she returns to the convent where a vision of the Virgin Mary offers her forgiveness and welcomes her back.

As with Symons's "Stella Maris," Davidson challenged traditional Victorian gender concepts and touched upon (mostly male) fears. It was—apart from the open references to sexual encounters—the insinuation that a nun, the epitome of unworldly and thus untainted love, could actually nurture hidden sexual desires and, subsequently, even realise them. Victorians held an ambiguous view of women: on the one hand, she was the temptress, the femme fatale, who brought men to fall. On the other hand, she was "the most enduring icon of Victorian antisensualism, [...] 'the angel of the house' [...], a quasi-spiritual being selflessly dispensing love and moral guidance to her family, largely untroubled by wayward personal desires—including erotic longing" (Adams 129).

This complete separation of femininity and sensuality turned women into almost other-worldly beings—an image that appealed to men because it represented "complete subservience" and "a disjunction between female morality and female power" (Adams 129). As such, women had to be protected and kept away from the ugliness of the 'real world', and their apparent need for protection assured men in their role of patriarchal power and superiority. Yet this also meant, as Linda Zatlín argues, that there existed interdependency between the masculine and the feminine: "Victorian definition of masculinity had a symbiotic, even sycophantic, relation to the Victorian definition of femininity, and the masculine image could exist only at women's expense" (61). For this reason, masculine understanding and superiority

were dependent on the definition of the female being weak, defenceless and pure, or fallen, animalistic and dangerous. However, as Elaine Showalter asserts, this system of patriarchy found itself under severe attack by the 1890s. Not only did the New Woman challenge traditional concepts of gender hierarchy, but so did the “avant-garde of male artists, sexual radicals, and intellectuals” (11), leaving Victorian patriarchy sentient of constant fear. Consequently, to speak about sexuality was “to address the most basic structures of knowledge and power” (Adams 125).

Davidson’s “Ballad of the Nun” engaged directly in this moment of fear. He depicted the epitome of “angelic and pure love” as a temptress, a woman led by her sensuality, and thus out of control. As Showalter points out, it is “in periods of cultural insecurity, when there are fears of regression and degeneration, [that] the longing for strict border controls around the definition of gender, as well as race, class, and nationality, becomes especially intense” (4). While the Victorian patriarch expected his wife and daughters to conform to the idea of the ‘domestic angel’, pure and devoid of any sexual feelings, he also was in need of the woman as a sexual being. Yet to have these ‘base’ instincts was considered inappropriate for women. Thus, women were divided into two classes, both robbed of part of their humanity: on the one hand, the pure, angelic, domestic woman, who was elevated to an ideal she could not possibly reach; on the other hand, the animalistic, base and ‘fallen’ woman who, although necessary, was still shunned as ‘femme fatale’, the temptress who, having power over man, caused him to fall.

Both Symons’s and Davidson’s poems can be read as attacks on the Victorian hypocrisy that showed in this sensual and moral ‘castration’ of woman. In “Stella Maris” Symons addressed a prostitute as a fellow human being, worthy of admiration, love and attention, thereby attributing her with features of the angelic and pure woman. Instead of depicting her as a sexual object, the narrator sees her as a person with whom he can share dreams, life and joy. Similarly, Davidson’s ballad corrupted the opposite side of femininity: the pure, angelic female. Whereas Symons vested the ‘inhuman female’ with the qualities of a female companion, Davidson portrayed a nun, one of the most perfect examples of woman as a sexless creature, as craving sexual love and searching for the fulfilment of her sexual desires.

Interestingly, both poems, although they dealt with females from opposing ends of the spectrum, were centred on the symbolic figure of ideal femininity: the Virgin Mary. In the Catholic Church the Virgin Mary is worshipped as the embodiment of pure, holy and motherly love. Having borne a son without having experienced sexual love, her maternal love and femininity are seen as pure and holy; she thus epitomised what Victorian men hoped to find in their ‘domestic angels’. However, Davidson and Symons turned the Virgin Mary into a representative for all women—for the prostitute who sells her body for sex as well as for the nun who aspires to live a holy and pure life, yet cannot help herself being drawn by human desires. The title “Stella Maris” (which originally refers to a hymn to the Virgin Mary) implied that Symons offered a prostitute the praise of perfect femininity that, in the eyes of Victorians, should have been reserved for the Virgin Mary. This insinuation was scandalous, and, in Hamerton’s words, a “sacrilege” (ii, 181).

Both Symons and Davidson thus blurred the previously clear-cut boundaries between whore and angel, questioning Victorian standards. Going one step further, Davidson also tackled the problem of forgiveness for a fallen woman, without reproaches and punishment. In Victorian society, a ‘woman with a past’ would not usually be re-admitted into society. Once her reputation was tarnished, it meant certain social death. Yet, in Davidson’s ballad, it is the Virgin Mary herself who forgives the sinner and adopts her as her daughter (iii, 279). Through ending his poem on this symbolic act, Davidson asked his readers to put aside hypocrisy: not to worship Mary the Virgin without accepting Mary the Prostitute; not to create an ideal of femininity without allowing sexuality; not to claim Christianity as a cornerstone of society without following its every teaching. Both Symons’s and Davidson’s poems thus mirror Morris’ utopia of a perfect individualism and freedom. In their world, women are not judged by their past, nor by their standing in society, but are accepted for who and what they are. Power relations between individuals are destroyed, and full acceptance is granted.

5.4 The art of social criticism II: subversive criticism

Not all of *The Yellow Book* contributions were as openly and shockingly critical as these examples by Symons and Davidson. Many adopted a light tone, and engaged with their audience in an almost humorous way, although usually they maintained a sinister undertone. This showed, for example, in many of Beardsley's drawings, especially in the ones dealing with female gender roles and sexuality. Through his drawings, Beardsley addressed the same aspects of gender identity and "sexist social conventions which fostered [...] hypocrisy" (Zatlin 2) that Davidson and Symons focussed on in their poems. This criticism of Victorian hypocrisy concerning gender roles is exemplified Beardsley's drawing entitled "The Repentance of Mrs. *****" (Fig. 1).

In the drawing, a woman kneels in front of an altar, on which an open book is laid. She wears a sort of penitential robe, and her hands are folded in a gesture of prayer. She seems to be pleading with God for forgiveness, possibly for the sin of committing adultery (the theme of adultery is hinted at by the goat's feet on which the altar stands). However, everyone around her, from the oriental-clad, turban-wearing dwarf to the richly clothed couple who are passing by, seems to mock the possibility of forgiveness. The grotesque-looking dwarf looks leeringly at her, apparently enjoying the scandal that surrounds her. The couple, a well-dressed woman and an older man, who wears a huge wig and a frock coat, smile condescendingly down on the kneeling woman. Their posture is very significant: whilst their heads are turned towards the woman, and they are watching her, their bodies are angled away from her. They are merely onlookers, and instead of offering comfort they seem to rather enjoy seeing the woman in distress.

The most intriguing character, however, is the naked androgynous figure at the right hand edge of the picture, fully turned towards the woman and watching her. Androgynous figures occur frequently in Beardsley's drawings. According to A. Busst, the meaning of these figures was ambiguous throughout the nineteenth century, as two "diametrically opposed" views of androgyny developed (10). It could be seen to epitomise the paradisiacal state of innocence, when male and female were united as one in a God-like unity of complete understanding of each other (26). Conversely, it symbolized "vice, particularly of cerebral lechery, demoniality,

onanism, homosexuality, sadism and masochism” (39). As such, androgyny was often associated with avant-garde artists, especially the Decadents. It is thus possible to assume that the androgynous figure in “The Repentance of Mrs *****” can be seen as a representation of the artist, standing at the edge of society and defying all categorisation.



Figure 1 “The Repentance of Mrs *****” (*The Yellow Book* Vol. IV)

Again Beardsley undermines stereotypes, depicting the androgynous figure (which was commonly considered to be dangerous and evil) as the only sympathetic onlooker in the drawing. Unlike the couple, it is fully turned towards the woman, apparently about to fully step into the picture to advance towards the kneeling figure. Therefore, whilst the artist as mirrored in the androgynous figure was iniquitous and strange in the eyes of the public, Beardsley inversely presented it as a figure of redemption, able to cut across boundaries and to counter social codes and repercussions.

The theme of hypocrisy, especially with regards to gender expectations, wove its way through most of Beardsley's drawings. As mentioned before, the play with, and subversion of, stereotypical gender roles touched upon the fear of the emancipated and empowered female that pervaded Victorian patriarchal society. Like Symons, Beardsley continuously worked with aspects of female objectification and the figure of the female prostitute—what Fletcher calls “ladies of the night” (1987:100). In his picture “Night Piece” (Fig. 2), which appeared in Volume I (1894:127), a woman, dressed completely in black and wearing a huge hat, is walking along a dark street. Her low-cut bodice, which stands out through the black-and-white contrast of her white skin and the dark surrounding, plus the fact that she is walking the streets on her own at night, imply that she is a prostitute, as does the fact that the drawing directly preceded Symons's “Stella Maris.”



Figure 2 “Night Piece” (*The Yellow Book* Vol. I)

However, it was not first and foremost the implication of prostitution that was elemental to an understanding of this picture, but the idea of spectatorship and the objectification of human beings. This holds true for many of Beardsley's drawings; whilst in drawings such as "The Repentance of Mrs. ****", the audience as spectator is included directly in the picture as represented in the couple walking past, most of Beardsley's other drawing only implicate the audience's gaze. As Mark Turner points out with regard to "Night Piece" the "reader/viewer is positioned fairly unequivocally as voyeur or consumer. We remain detached, observing the woman walk the street without any direct visual engagement by her" (142). By shifting the attention from the object of the gaze to the spectator himself, Beardsley forced an understanding of his pictures that did not focus solely on their content, but also on their audience.

Even though many of the female figures in his drawings were presented to the male gaze, Beardsley did not allow the full detachment of mere observation that Turner implies, and the perceived objects generally defied the expectations of the spectator. The woman in "Night Piece" (Fig. 2) for example, seems to be oblivious of being watched, and nothing in her demeanour suggests feelings of shame or a desire to hide. Rather, she looks like a woman determined to follow her own way. She thus represents the figure of the independent female, incorporating everything that challenged and threatened contemporary patriarchal order.⁴² Moreover, she stands for what Snodgrass calls the "transitory state" of prostitution:

Part of what was dangerous about the fin-de-siècle New Woman, and especially Beardsley's version, was that she wouldn't stay put. She invaded the bourgeois classes [...] not as a mere object of pleasure but as a dominating and usurping force, blurring the formerly clear distinctions between herself and the passive and reinforcing 'feminine ideal' (193).

As Snodgrass points out "more and more frequently the former prostitute was rehabilitating herself through marriage to become the very image [...] of the Victorian Lady" (193). 'The woman with a past' became indeterminable, and it was

⁴²Critics have suggested that it was this 'unashamedness' and the courage to defy the male gaze that made Beardsley's less sexually explicit drawings so scandalous. Zatlin, for example, suggests that paintings of naked women were quite common by the end of the century. However, comparing paintings by traditional artists such as Leighton with Beardsley's women shows that the difference between the two lies above all in the depiction of the former as "introspective, if aloofly or archly inviting" (32).

this indeterminability that was represented in Beardsley's picture. The woman in his drawing eludes any possible classification, defying the Victorian sense of control. Subsequently, the controlling gaze of the detached spectator was undermined, and his sense of security subversively invaded. As in the drawing of "The Repentance of Mrs. ****", the spectator becomes the one who is watched.

Beardsley's picture thereby also hinted at parallels between *The Yellow Book* and the fact of prostitution. In the same way in which prostitution had become an uncontrollable element in Victorian society, with former prostitutes working their way up through the class divides, *The Yellow Book* infiltrated the bourgeois homes, corrupting and changing formerly stable boundaries. This subversive quality was reflected in many of Beardsley's drawings, and the notion of hidden truths and indeterminacy played a central role in the frontispiece of the first volume of *The Yellow Book* (Fig. 3). It shows a large, masked woman with light, abundant hair, wearing an almost ridiculously large hat. Behind her left shoulder, there stands a man, also masked, and dressed completely in black.



Figure 3 Frontispiece (*The Yellow Book* Vol. I)

One of the main characteristics of the drawing is that it contains several layers of meaning, allowing for as many different interpretations of this picture as there are critics. This is especially true of the relationships between the man (who has also

been considered to be female instead of male)⁴³ and the woman, and also of the relationship between the characters in the picture and the spectator. Fletcher, for instance, suggests that “the fawning masked male face” appears “to be sharing an occult joke with a gross bewarted woman;” this shared union between the two make the viewer feel excluded and laughed at (1987:96). Fletcher believes the drawing to set the stage and announce *The Yellow Book* as an example of a freak show, one of whose main characters was usually a ‘fat woman’. Yet while this reading understands the drawing to be an invitation for the audience to let itself be entertained, the frontispiece, simultaneously, holds the possibility that it might be the spectator who will be laughed at, conspired against by the man and the woman in the drawing.

In contrast, other critics like Zatlin see the woman in the picture as the victim of a “menacing sexuality” (63). Zatlin maintains that the woman is “unaware of the thick-lipped man with the sardonic gaze behind her left shoulder”: she “lacks knowledge while the man surveys his prey” (ibid). Zatlin implies a sexual encounter between the woman and the man and the conspiracy, in her understanding, takes place between the spectator and the male figure in the drawing. She explains: “Whatever his action is or will be, he invites the viewer to watch, and through that invitation makes the viewer his accomplice. [...] It is the adolescent conspiracy of males to acquire the sex object and share that acquisition with puerile friends” (63). Consequently, what Fletcher interprets as a laugh (1987:96), Zatlin sees as the expression of “hedonistic enjoyment” (63), and whereas Fletcher and Turner suggest that the open gaze of the woman is directed at the spectator, Zatlin argues that her eyes are turned upwards. Similarly, the masked male figure behind her might be looking at the viewer, but could also be looking down the woman’s bodice.

All these different possible interpretations imply that Beardsley did not intend the frontispiece to have one, definite meaning. Allowing a whole range of possible interpretations asked the audience to think beyond what they saw, and it was in this very indeterminacy that the drawing reflected the character of *The Yellow Book*. First of all, through its suggestions of different readings, it catered to a wider, less

⁴³ See, for example, Stetz (1999:33) and Turner (142).

exclusive, audience for it could imply a range of intelligence. This approach is reflected in *The Yellow Book* itself. Brake notes that

female readers seem to be among the audience addressed by its ‘get-up’ and illustrated format, if not the contents of many of the illustrations. At the same time the critic signals to male connoisseurs that Vol. I does cater for them to some extent, that it ‘comprises’ certain good matters for the ‘discriminating taste’ (1995:59).

Beardsley’s drawing hinted at the entertainment that was to be gained from *The Yellow Book*. It intimated the ‘freak show’ which was contained in its pages, but it also spoke about the ‘corruption’ that was to come from it, and the ‘dangerous’ and unspeakable world that hid in its pages.

Yet this corruption was not necessarily the corruption of virtue; in fact, it was the ‘corruption’ of a narrow and hypocritical worldview as the spectator was challenged to broaden his understanding of the world, and not cast aside anything new or different which might challenge his cherished viewpoints. Throughout, *The Yellow Book* thus asked for aesthetic engagement and suggested educational intent on the side of the artist. This notion of audience education was thematised in another of Beardsley’s drawings, “L’Education Sentimentale” (Fig. 4). This drawing is counted among Beardsley’s best for it entails layers of meaning and skilfully hid insinuations.⁴⁴ It shows an older woman (who, again, could represent anything from a governess to a prostitute), reading from a piece of paper to a young girl. The young girl has her hands clasped behind her back in a gesture of innocence and purity.

Whereas many readers might have seen in this picture the epitome of *The Yellow Book*, teaching vice to the pure and innocent, the young girl’s “slightly risqué snug black dress, shifting eyes, lush air, cocked hip, and bemused, worldly-wise expression [...] suggest that she [the young girl] has more in common with Decadent demi-mondaines than Pre-Raphealite damsels” (Snodgrass 191). Innocence and vice thus were no longer presented as clear-cut opposites, but as shifting and interlinked with each other. As such, the drawing was an attack against the Victorian unwillingness to allow shades of grey in a comfortably clear-cut black-and-white world. Beardsley again took a stab against the pretence and make-believe around which Victorian society was centred. He blurred the lines between who educates

⁴⁴ For a very good discussion of the different “layers” of this drawing see Snodgrass “Decadent Parodies” (1992).

whom (and who corrupts whom) and thus implicitly suggested that *The Yellow Book* really did have something to teach the ‘morally impeccable’ Victorian public, for not everything was as it seemed. Consequently, his drawings asked his audience to take a second look, to think again.



Figure 4 “L’Education Sentimentale” (*The Yellow Book* Vol. I)

Alongside Beardsley’s drawings, it was Max Beerbohm’s essays that best exemplified this type of subversive criticism. Beerbohm’s first publication in the first volume of *The Yellow Book*, a short essay entitled “A Defence of Cosmetics” (Vol. I, 1894:65-82)—together with Symons’s “Stella Maris”—got picked apart by the press and bore the brunt of their criticism and outrage. *The National Observer*, for instance, after quoting parts of his essay, concluded that it “was kindest to leave him alone” (589), and *The Westminster Gazette* wondered how “any editor [could] come to print such pernicious nonsense” (3). Beerbohm, seeing himself challenged to answer these accusations, remarked in a letter to the editor in the second volume of *The Yellow Book* (1894:281-284):

What in the whole volume seems to have provoked the most ungovernable fury is, I am sorry to say, an essay about Cosmetics that I myself wrote. [...] The mob lost its head, and, so far as any one in literature can be lynched, I was. In speaking of me, one paper dropped the usual prefix of 'Mr.' as though I were a well-known criminal, and referred to me shortly as 'Beerbohm'; [...] It was a bomb thrown by a cowardly decadent, another outrage by one of that desperate and dangerous band of madmen who must be mercilessly stamped out by a comity of editors (281-282).

As with *The Yellow Book* in general, the feeling of outrage that Beerbohm here commented on was not universal; interestingly, it was Hamerton who in his critique wrote that he “understood [Beerbohm’s] essay to be merely a *jeu d’esprit*, and found that it amused [him]” (ii,182). Reading Beerbohm’s essay from today’s perspective, one can only concur with Hamerton’s judgement. “A Defence of Cosmetics” appears merely as a humorous piece of writing about the virtue of make-up for women, in which Beerbohm blatantly copied Baudelaire (which might have been one of the reasons why it was so heavily criticised) and joyfully bid the Victorian era good-bye (65):

For the era of rouge is upon us, and as only in an elaborate era can man [...] reach that refinement which is his highest excellence, and by making himself, so to say, independent of Nature, come nearest to God, so only in an elaborate era is woman perfect. Artifice is the strength of the world, and in that same mask of paint and powder, shadowed with vermeil tinct [sic] and most trimly pencilled, is woman’s strength (68).

Beerbohm celebrated the ‘return of Artifice’ because it would lead women back to their ‘proper’ place, namely in front of the toilet table and on the couch, to be adored and worshipped by men.

While the essay contained little ‘stings’ aimed at different literary camps such as the Realists, the Naturalists, it, above all, played with the earnest Victorians. In his argument for artifice, Beerbohm, for example, pleaded for the separation of “soul and surface,” because, in his opinion, the Victorian, “through trusting so keenly to the detection of the one by keeping watch upon the other, and by force of the thousands errors following, he has come to think of surface even as the reverse of soul” (67). In contrast, Beerbohm claimed that “truly, of all the good things that will happen with the full renaissance of cosmetics, one of the best is that surface will finally be severed from soul. [...] Too long has the face been degraded from its rank as a thing of beauty to a mere vulgar index of character or emotion” (71).

Throughout the essay, Beerbohm kept a light-hearted tone that (though it is meant to tease) did not seem intended to upset the reader. He applauded the return of gambling (66) and advocated the supremacy of artifice over nature (68-69), and his style very much resembled Wilde's in his best social comedies. If anyone, Beerbohm's essay would enrage the female readership as it was (at least very much from today's perspective) utterly misogynistic in its argument. He maintained, for example, that putting on make-up would keep women from trying to invade into male territories, such as riding bicycles, playing golf and working, for too much physical exercise would destroy their carefully painted masks (69). It was, according to Beerbohm, "quite necessary that a woman should repose. Hers is the resupinate sex. On her couch she is a goddess, but so soon as ever she put her foot to the ground – lo, she is the veriest little sillypop and quite done for" (70). Beerbohm's attitude would have thus probably only earned the criticism of a few New Woman representatives, some of whom, ironically, wrote and worked for *The Yellow Book*.

On the one hand, one would think that in its misogynistic attitude, the essay would have appealed to the Victorian bourgeois reader. Yet on the other hand, the very obvious 'non-seriousness' with which Beerbohm approached the genuinely pressing matter did, naturally, not sit well with his earnest audience. The sore spot upon which Beerbohm thus touched was, like in Beardsley's drawings and Symons's and Davidson's poems, Victorian society's resistance to change and the distrust of anything new. As the fin de siècle brought with it connotations of apocalypse, of irreversible loss, of unpredictability, change was easily associated with threat. Even though the British Empire was at its height in the 1890s, there were, as Niall Ferguson points out, already many "who looked forward uneasily to the decline and fall of their own empire, like all the empires before it" (246). 'At home' in Britain, poverty and diseases began to pose insurmountable problems, challenging the church, politicians and charities alike. Old gender roles and hierarchies were becoming blurred and the church was quickly losing its ability to make sense of it all. Beerbohm's essay subtly touched upon the above-mentioned topics, yet in a way that showed, on the one hand, indifference and a frivolous attitude in the face of problems; on the other, it made people realise the extent of uncertainty, unsolvable situations and England's precarious position on the world stage. Consequently,

Beerbohm's appeal to his English countrywomen to help to advance England "to a place in the councils of aesthetic Europe" even though "Old England may lose her martial and commercial supremacy" (79) must have resonated badly with his Victorian middle class reader.

Yet Beerbohm not only reminded his reader of the fact that times of stability and tradition were over, but even asked them to join him in his light-hearted attitude in the face of these problems. To the Victorian middle class, Beerbohm's "jeu d'esprit" thus translated into something more like a desperate laugh instead of expressing carefree humour. Their feelings were probably expressed more concisely in poems such as John Davidson's "Proem to 'The Wonderful Mission of Earl Lavender'" (Vol. IV, 1895:284-285) in which he wrote: Though our eyes turn ever waveward/
Where our sun is well-nigh set;/ Though our Century totters graveward/
We may laugh a little yet. [...] But we know a British rumour/
And we think it whispers well:/ 'We would ventilate our humour/
In the very jaws of Hell' (284).

5.5 The art of social criticism III: educating the reader

The third type of social criticism in *The Yellow Book* was enacted through direct educational engagement. It often elaborated on a theme which Beardsley had incorporated in "The Repentance of Mrs *****": the position of the artist and his art within society. Together with Beardsley's drawing, there were a large number of texts throughout the first four volumes of *The Yellow Book* which dealt directly with the relationship between the artist and society, trying to directly convey a new and different understanding of art and the artist. The following analysis focuses on a few key texts by representatives of the fin-de-siècle avant-garde, among them Max Beerbohm's "A Letter to the Editor" (Vol. II, 1894: 281-284), George Egerton's "A Lost Masterpiece" (Vol. I, 1894: 189-196) and Hubert Crackanthorpe's "Reticence in Literature. Some Roundabout Remarks" (Vol. II, 1894:260-269).⁴⁵ Whilst these texts fall into different categories, they all display a very similar outlook on the artist-

⁴⁵ Contrary to what might be expected, Henry James's short stories are not included in this discussion, even though they might seem the most obvious choice to talk about the artist-society relationship. However, James cannot be considered a 'typical' representative of the *The Yellow Book* artist, as he only grudgingly consented to contribute stories.

society relationship and the purpose of their art, and the socio-critical aspect of the artist's mission becomes particularly evident.⁴⁶

After the publication of the first volume of *The Yellow Book* and following the heated criticism of "A Defence of Cosmetics," Beerbohm started to correspond directly with his audience and critics in the form of a letter to the editor, which was published in the second volume of *The Yellow Book*. In this letter, Beerbohm replied to the criticism he had received; but while doing so, also retaliated with criticism of his readership. He pondered:

It seems to be thought that criticism holds in the artistic world much the same place as, in the moral world, is held by punishment [...]. As in the case of punishment, then, we must consider the effect produced by criticism upon its object, how far is it reformatory? Personally, I cannot conceive how any artist can be hurt by remarks dropped from a garret into a gutter. Yet [...] these very few remarks, so far from making him change or temper his method, have rather made that method intenser [...] by shewing him how little he may hope for from the world but insult and ingratitude (282).

Although these lines were, first and foremost, directed at journalists and newspaper reporters, they also reflected on the general attitude of Victorian society, which was represented by the 'Yellow Press'. Beerbohm thus asserted that, whilst financially difficult, it was idealistically and personally important for the artist to remain free of the bondage that society's censure and criticism sought to impose on him and his art. For the most part, the audience's opinion on the purpose of art and the position of the artist differed widely from this idealised notion of the fin-de-siècle artists, and interference with the creative process through censorship and an unwillingness to understand a piece of art as just that—a piece of art—led to frustration on part of the artist.

This frustration with the artist's unwilling and interfering audience is also expressed in George Egerton's short story "The Lost Masterpiece." The story is, as Ledger points out, "an archly satirical lampooning of the male aesthete" (2007:17). Echoing the caricatural view of Aesthetes promulgated by journals such as *Punch* or the popular opera *Patience* (1881) by Gilbert and Sullivan, Egerton describes the

⁴⁶ Beerbohm's contribution was a letter, Egerton's a short story, and Crackanthorpe's a direct response to Arthur Waugh's "Reticence in Literature" (i, 201-219), which offered a quite conservative view on art and literature. As Beckson points out, Waugh's article was exemplary for Lane's attempt to balance between avant-garde and tradition (1992:244). Waugh suggests in his article that "Midway between liberty and license, in literature as in morals, stands the pivot of good taste, centre-point of art."

male artist figure strolling the streets of London, finding aesthetic inspiration in his surroundings and the people. Ideas for a new piece of art start forming in his head, which, he believes, will become a work of genius. However, whilst sitting on the bus and pondering these ideas, he is distracted by a woman walking along the pavement in a great hurry. The woman, who in her purpose-driven, self-confident and dominating manner reflects the attitude of the Victorian middle class, stands in sharp contrast to the calm restfulness and contemplative joy which the artist just previously experienced in the aesthetic encounter with his surroundings. The ensuing constant confrontation with the woman's purposefulness and unquenchable determination to keep moving eventually so agitates the artist on the bus that he loses all the ideas for his masterpiece.

While Egerton's story can be mainly seen as a "critique of the male aesthete" (Ledger 2007:19),⁴⁷ it still comments, although in an exaggerated fashion, on the difficult relationship between artist and Victorian public and the Aesthetic understanding of art as having a social purpose. Walking the streets of London, the artist in the story imagines all the good effects his work of art will have on his fellow humans:

I thought of the treat I would give [the passers-by] later on; the delicate feast I held in store for them when I would transfer this dainty elusive birthling of my brain to paper for their benefit. It would make them dream of moonlit lanes and sweethearting; reveal to them the golden threads in the sober city woof [...] and smooth out tired creases in heart and brain (193).

The artist in the story sees himself as a benefactor to humankind and his art as a means of escaping the daily chores and worries of their busy lives. Art thereby attains a redemptive position; a way to move beyond present existence and a means to beautify daily life in a beneficial and utterly positive way. However, the public to whom he intends to offer this masterpiece proves to be less than appreciative of, even destructive of, his efforts.

This difficult and eventually fatal relationship between the artist, the work of art and the Victorian public also found expression in Crackanthorpe's reply to Arthur

⁴⁷ Ledger argues convincingly in her article "Wilde Women and *The Yellow Book*" that this story can be read in the context of the contemporary association of New Women writers with Aestheticism in general and *The Yellow Book* in particular. As such, it is an example of the collision between the male aesthete and the New Woman, a theme that weaves its way through the pages of *The Yellow Book*.

Waugh's article. In his essay, Crackanthorpe argued along the same lines as the artist in Egerton's story, claiming that "the business of art is to create for us fine interests, to make of our human nature a more complete thing: and thus, all great art is moral in the wider and truer sense of the word" (264-265). However, the Victorian public was a long way off an understanding of avant-garde art in this positive and moralistic way. Like Egerton's purpose-driven and dominating woman on the pavement, who destroys the artist's masterpiece through her unwillingness to take in the world around her, the Victorian public did not seem to have time to stop, to contemplate, even to dream. Thus, avant-garde artists found themselves in a constant battle with a society whose resistance to change was as strong as the artist's desire to promote it. This state of imbalance between artist and society could only be overcome through the education of the public. As such, these artists' understanding of art mirrored what Poggioli considers to be one of the main characteristics of any avant-garde movement in art: the mutual dependency of society and art/the artist. Poggioli explains that "avant-garde art is destined to perish only if our civilization is condemned to perish [...]. But if such a transformation is not imminent or unavoidable, then the art of avant-garde is condemned or destined to endure, blessed in its liberty and cursed in its alienation" (109).

In Crackanthorpe's essay the interrelatedness of artist and society played a central role, and he concurred with the idea that opposition was needed in order to bring out the best in the artist. Society thus would "knock a lot of nonsense out of [artists]" and enable them "to find [their] level" and "to bring out the best—and only the best that is within [them]" (263). There seemed to be a consensus among fin-de-siècle artists that even though society posed a threat to creativity and to the realisation of the social purpose of art, its opposition was also necessary to spur artists on and to help them realise their full potential. Crackanthorpe wrote that

[art] is not interested in any ethical code of any age or any nation, except in so far as the breach or observance of that code may furnish her with material on which to work. But unfortunately, in this complex world of ours, we cannot satisfactorily pursue one interest—no, not even the interest of Art, at the expense of all others—let us look that fact in the face, doggedly, whatever pangs it may cost us – pleading magnanimously for the survival of our moral ogre, for there will be danger to our cause when his voice is no more heard (265)

As Wilde and Moore also pointed out, unwillingness to give in to social pressure best promoted individualism, and consequently, it presented the ideal precondition for creating great art. In accordance with this notion, Crackanthorpe noted: “Every piece of imaginative work must be a kind of autobiography of its creator—significant, if not of the actual facts of his existence, at least of the inner working of his soul” (261). Hence, individualism was mirrored and encouraged in every ‘true’ piece of art, and thereby stood in unsettling contrast to the spirit of conformity and uniformity that had begun to pervade the nineteenth century. Thus, whilst artists craved for independence in their creativity, their artworks were dependent on society insofar as their purpose was to “keep culture moving” (Greenberg 5). Artists became what Wilde called “agitators,” represented in the unsettling figure of Morris’ narrator Guest and Moore’s narrator Edwin Dayne, harking back to Schiller’s notion of the ‘artist-redeemer’—the one who would reconcile nature and culture, allowing mankind to strive for perfection.

In this struggle, the spirit of individualism, that wove its way through Wilde, Moore and Morris’ writings, was also very much realised in the literary and artistic contributions to *The Yellow Book*. As has been pointed out before, the periodical first of all allowed a wide range of voices and opinions to be heard, and engagement with different viewpoints was (as can be seen from the dialogue between Waugh and Crackanthorpe) encouraged. *The Yellow Book* was therefore, in form and content, an indirect criticism of the constant attempts to categorise, classify and label, for the periodical itself defied categorisation. Art was seen, not as a matter of “aesthetic philosophy,” but of “individual temperament” (Crackanthorpe, 261).

As such, it encouraged individualism, but Victorian society’s opposition to this concept of freedom was an aspect that caused almost insurmountable difficulties for the artist in his attempt to educate the Victorian middle class. The Victorian ‘Philistine’, for example, whom Crackanthorpe derisively called “the backbone of our nation; the guardian of our mediocrity; the very foil of our intelligence” (264), would never be able to understand art in its fullest sense, both unable and unwilling to move beyond his comfort zone. Recalling Arnold’s ideas and criticism, Crackanthorpe wrote: “[The Philistine’s] is no complex programme, no subtly exacting demand. A plain moral lesson is all that he asks, and his voice is as of one

crying in the fertile wilderness of Smith and of Mudie” (264). While the artist’s lesson was ‘moral’ in the sense of transforming people, his morality differed significantly from that of the Philistine, to whom it was “concerned only with the established relations between the sexes and with fair dealing between man and man: to him the subtle, indirect morality of Art [was] incomprehensible” (Crackanthorpe 265). In its limitedness, Victorian society was not able to grasp the lesson that art had to teach, in the same way that it was not able to grasp a life that represented more than just morality and adherence to rules. The Philistine had locked himself up in his own small world, trying to keep anything out that might unsettle it.⁴⁸

This reaction suggested that the reformation of the Philistine presented a difficult task. Censorship and criticism had become his weapon, leading Beerbohm to lament that “were it not for the accursed abuse of their function by the great body of critics, no poet need ‘live uncrown’d, apart’” (283). In a world where book reviews could make or break an author, the Philistine attitude had much more severe implications for the artist; according to Beerbohm, it was high time that critics learned “that it is for the critic to seek after beauty and to try to interpret it to others” (283). Whilst in the “old, old Quarterlies” reviews had been “a disgrace to journalism and a glory to literature” (283), these times were now over. In Beerbohm’s eyes, contemporary critics lacked taste, ability and understanding, and this fact left Beerbohm pleading with them to “give over their eternal fault-finding, and not presume to interfere with the artist at his work, [and] then with an equally small amount of ability our pressmen might do nearly as much good as they have hitherto done harm” (283).

However, like Crackanthorpe, Beerbohm believed that there would come a time when “the pack has yelled itself hoarse” and “the level voice of justice is heard in praise” (283). It would be a time when people would grasp the purpose of art and the position of the artist, when aesthetic education would bear fruit, and when the critic, to use Wilde’s words, would become an artist. Yet, for the time being, the purpose of

⁴⁸George Steiner, in his book *Real Presences*, likens experiencing of a work of art to bidding a stranger enter your house (147), a meeting with ‘an other’. However, there is risk in this meeting with strangeness as experiencing art without reserve can also make the recipient a stranger to himself. As Steiner puts it: “Beyond the strength of any other act of witness, literature and the arts tell of the obstinacies of the impenetrable, of the absolutely alien which we come up against in the labyrinth of intimacy” (139-140). The encounter with art thus always has the potential to be utterly unsettling—a threat to cherished Victorian normality. This understanding of art, as has been shown through the previous chapters, wove its way through the art and writings of fin de siècle artists, and it is best expressed in Wilde’s notion of the “spirit of receptivity.”

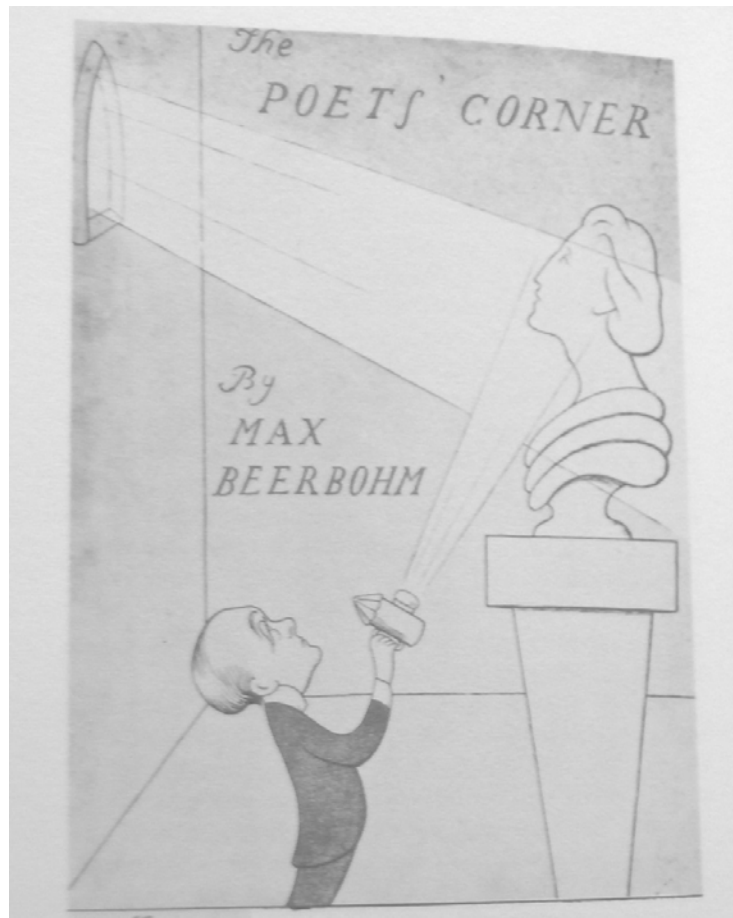
art lay in its ability to educate, and it was this attempt of aesthetic education which spoke from the pages of *The Yellow Book*. By not conforming to expectations, *The Yellow Book* displayed a spirit that was as aesthetic as it was avant-garde, and its focus on art could not deny its social component and its concern with contemporary issues. As Fletcher puts it:

The deconstruction of time, experience refining itself into critical ‘moments’ and the consequent instability of identity, the present becoming unpredictable, dangerous, open, is reflected in the ‘mood’ short stories, evanescent poems and impressionist travel pieces [...]. The magazine is indeed perhaps the most forceful emblem of decadent anxiety [...]—an avant garde gesture, one heralded by a sense of lost coherence in the culture (1979:201)

As such, *The Yellow Book* did indeed reflect its time—a time that had the strange quality of being caught between a past that was no longer valid and a future that was yet to be born. Whereas the Victorian middle class clung to the past with all their might, the artists surrounding *The Yellow Book* were living and writing a future in which a new understanding of art would provide new absolutes that would replace the ones that were beginning to crumble. Art became the focal point and the possible solution to what the future would bring. It was, therefore, not artist and art separated from life that was reflected in *The Yellow Book*, but the fact that artists had left the old time and moved on to the new.

There were fin-de-siècle artists who lived past the turn of the century but did not see their vision fulfilled. One of them was Max Beerbohm, whose idealised view of the purpose of art and the role of the artist was fulfilled neither in the high art of Modernism nor the abstract art of the Avant-garde. As will be shown in the following chapter, his ‘fin-de-siècle’ view on art and the artist accompanied him into the twentieth century, and his art remained reminiscent of the transient time of the ‘yellow nineties’, reflecting the hybrid and often paradoxical art of the fin de siècle.

VI. The Author at a Distance: Beerbohm and his Readers



Beerbohm, Cover (*The Poets' Corner* 1904)

Amid all he has here already achieved, full, we may
think of the quiet assurance of what is to come,
his attitude is still that of the scholar; he
seems still to be saying, before all
things, from first to last, 'I
am utterly purposed
that I will not
offend'.

(Beerbohm, *The Works of Max Beerbohm*)

Max Beerbohm, writer, caricaturist and dandy, was the “comic spirit of the Nineties.” (Jackson 141): “Without being decadent, this extraordinarily modern personality managed to represent the decadence laughing, or rather smiling, at itself” (ibid). The epigraph which prefaced *The Works of Max Beerbohm*, together with the caricature of himself on the front cover of *The Poet's Corner*, are succinct

characterisations of Beerbohm the artist and his art. Both suggest a deference to their subject—the preface through the assurance that it “will not offend” and its triangular shape, which seems to fade the writing into nothingness; the drawing through Beerbohm’s “perfectly modest” countenance (Felstiner 32) and the positioning of himself ‘at the feet’ of the famous poet to which he is looking up.

Yet this attitude of reverence is instantly undermined. As Felstiner notes, the Beerbohm in the drawing points the light of a pocket torch at the bust, catching it “least flatteringly, lighting up a chin and nose from underneath” (29). Also, the author of *Works* did offend, as can be seen from the *succès de scandale* of one of its essays, “The Pervasion of Rouge,” published as “The Defence of Cosmetics” in the pages of *The Yellow Book* only a few years earlier. However, whilst the insinuation of insult was tangible in both preface and drawing, their actual offence remained elusive. As Lawrence Danson points out, the preface to *Works* invited questions rather than giving direct reason for offence, leaving the reader to wonder, for instance, who was the ‘he’ in the text? Who (or was it what?) would he not offend? Similarly, the idea of gaining “quiet assurance” from “what he ha[d] already achieved” seemed slightly cynical considering the fact that *Works* was Beerbohm’s first book publication. Also, the intimation of the drawing that it was the artist’s “own deficiencies [t]hat keep him from recognizing greatness” (Felstiner 32) was undermined by the implicit insult; what Beerbohm suggested throughout was that there might just be different ways of looking at things.

This ability to present objects, people, history and any other imaginable topic from an unexpected and different viewpoint was one of Beerbohm’s greatest skills. He examined, dissected and explained society and the world, always in a way that was slightly ‘out of the ordinary’. In his essay “1880” (*Works* 39-55), for example, he removed the decade of the 1880s from its temporal closeness to the 1890s, re-locating it in the faraway past: “...this period is now so remote from us that much in it is nearly impossible to understand, more than little must be left in the mists of antiquity that involve it” (42). This temporal re-location opened up a completely different standpoint from which to view the recent past. Throughout his works, Beerbohm did not heed the rules of temporal linearity, of common sense and of traditional viewpoints. Nothing was ever straightforward, nothing was quite as it

seemed. Even the target of his criticism remained elusive, and as his alliances shifted, he left his audience stranded without a reliable point of reference.

This chapter explores the reasons why Beerbohm can be counted among the group of fin-de-siècle artists who attempted to legitimise and re-define the role of art and the artist, trying to incorporate art within the question of 'how to live'. Beerbohm was one of the major-minor figures of the late nineteenth century; his success as an artist and a personality (even though he had already made a name for himself when he was only in his early twenties and continued to be popular until his death in 1956) never reached the heights of a Henry James or an Oscar Wilde, and he never ventured beyond what he knew he could execute skilfully and perfectly. J. Riewald notes that "the uniqueness of Beerbohm's art [...] is at least partly due to his firm resolve not to transcend his limitations. [...] It may be said that Beerbohm's limitations subserved his mastery, so that within his self-imposed frame he frequently achieved excellence, perfection even" (x).

Beerbohm epitomised the fin de siècle in that he was one of the most skilled practitioners of the 'art of detachment'. In this, he represented the realisation of Arnold's 'man of culture'; a paragon of the detached, yet socially engaged, artist. Throughout his life, Beerbohm managed to maintain a critical distance to that of which he was part. His biographer, Lord David Cecil, described him as an "ironic onlooker on life" (171), as an "artist with a sense of humour [...], the artist as spectator enjoying life but yet never wholly of it, the practitioner of a fantastic art which yet postulates the power to see things, unerringly, as they are" (197-198). This position of detachment also made Beerbohm one of the most elusive of fin-de-siècle artists, an attribute which had specific implications for the didactic artist-audience relationship suggested in his art. One of them was, for example, the denial of a stable, authorial reference point, which challenged the audience to determine its own point of view. Beerbohm reinforced this instability of the author figure through his use of irony, through which he engaged with and taught his audience. Irony as a stylistic means thus became an 'educational' element in Beerbohm's art, assisting him in determining and simultaneously demonstrating the role of artwork, artist and audience in relation to each other.

The first part of this chapter will engage briefly with the particulars of Beerbohm's understanding of art and the artist within the context of his time; the second section will focus on Beerbohm's use of irony in, and its implications for, aesthetic reception. The third and final part will then investigate the role of aesthetic appreciation, and how Beerbohm accomplished the amalgamation of ironic didacticism and aesthetic enjoyment. Consequently, the second part of the chapter will be more concerned with the 'manifestive' aspect of Beerbohm's work within the context of fin-de-siècle attempts to legitimise art and the artist, whereas the third section will emphasise the 'demonstrative' element in Beerbohm's work, focussing on what Beerbohm considered most important for an understanding of art: the appreciative enjoyment of it.

As will be shown, Beerbohm's oeuvre as a whole mirrors the aesthetically defined, educationally and socially engaged art of the fin de siècle. The following analysis will draw out examples of multiple meanings and interpretations in Beerbohm's writing, achieved through the use of irony. It will concentrate on their instructional value and their implications for the author-reader relationship. These aspects and their ramifications for the aesthetic-receptive process in general (though they have been touched upon in studies such as Danson's *The Act of Writing* or Felstiner's *The Lies of Art*) have mostly been ignored in recent investigations into Beerbohm's art. The reason for this neglect might be that Beerbohm's essays have mostly been understood as the "pure' type of essay; that is to say, they are not written to instruct or edify but only to produce aesthetic satisfaction" (Cecil 145), thereby giving nothing but pure "pleasure" (Woolf 211)⁴⁹—an interpretation part of which I want to contend.

According to Riewald, it was the presence of Beerbohm's personality that created a "central mood" in his essays (1953:86), holding them together and also distinguishing them from mere narratives. However, the very presence of this personality also encompassed the problematic relationship between reader and author

⁴⁹ Riewald places Beerbohm in the "concrete, intimate and discursive tradition of Montaigne" (85); however, he is careful to point out that in Beerbohm's essays, "the illustrative material, which in Montaigne is heterogeneous, though subordinated to the leading idea, tends to become descriptive of the individual instead of illustrative of the general" (ibid). According to Riewald, it is this 'personal streak' which makes Beerbohm's essays stand out. In his writing, he gives "himself" and "the spirit of personality permeates every word he writes" (Woolf 217).

as the personality itself could not be pinpointed. This created an unstable, instead of a reliable, author-reader relationship, alerting the reader to the process of establishing viewpoints and meaning. Thus, whilst elements of pure aesthetic enjoyment were certainly essential to Beerbohm's essays (and this aspect will be the focus of the second half of this chapter), their instructional and socio-critical undertone cannot be ignored. It was precisely the understanding of Beerbohm's writing as parodic and his extensive use of irony, which turned the "central mood" of his personality into an elusive presence that denied its reader a stable point of reference, intermingling pure aesthetic enjoyment with didactical overtones.

Subsequently, Beerbohm's essays demonstrated the hybrid character of fin-de-siècle art, interweaving pure art with didactic aspects of irony and authorial self-effacement. Although most of Beerbohm's art would serve the purpose of demonstrating this co-existence, this chapter concentrates on a selection of his many essays as they, in a condensed and precise form, best display the hybrid nature of fin-de-siècle art. In his appropriation and partial subversion of the essay genre, Beerbohm's approach shows parallels to that of the other artists discussed in this thesis. As Danson notes: "[Beerbohm's] essays turn into fiction as we read them, his fiction turns into parody, his parody into criticism, his criticism into caricature, his caricature into essays" (1). Undermining audience expectations, Beerbohm appropriated and subverted generic elements, including manifestive comments within the demonstration of pure art, oscillating constantly between 'showing' and 'telling'

For this reason, the aesthetic element of Beerbohm's essays is always entwined with educational, critical and instructive aspects. Like Wilde's "Soul of Man," Moore's *Confessions*, Morris' *News from Nowhere*, and *The Yellow Book*, Beerbohm's essays invariably transgress their generic boundaries: they expand in an amalgamation of conversational injections, self-reflexive comments, meandering thoughts and, occasionally, essayistic investigations into the topic at hand. In "The Case of Prometheus" (*More* 191-201), for example, a lecture at the Geographical Society gives rise to a pseudo-scholarly investigation into the case of Prometheus. Quoting different academics' opinion, the author tries to establish whether Prometheus has actually been rescued by Hercules or not, only to conclude that "[i]f Prometheus was wrongly convicted, no miscarriage of justice was ever more hideous

to contemplate. If he was convicted rightly, the sentence passed on him was quite unduly severe” (199). This conclusion causes the author to launch into the tale of his own, rather fantastic, rescue mission, in which he returns safely with Prometheus and the “bird of Jupiter, stuffed, under a glass case” (201). The mixture of academic discourse, legal and logical extrapolations, fact and fantasy shift the attention from the aesthetic subject to the artist-reader relationship expressed within the artwork.

This shift is also emphasised in aspects such as the author’s conversational tone and the incessant oscillation between text and meta-text. In “Some Words on Royalty” (*More* 1-13), for example, the author begins a highly stylized, fantastic paragraph imagining the possibilities of an ordinary life for the king, only to stop himself in order to comment: “That, despite certain faults of exaggeration, is a piece of quite admirable prose; but let it not decoy the reader from consideration of the main theme” (7). These changes in register, tone, topic and focus require more than mere receptiveness on the part of the reader. They ask for a willingness to be open to the unexpected, which will, in turn, allow for the ability to appreciate art.

6.1 Beerbohm, spirit of the 1890s

Whereas the previous chapter discussed one of Beerbohm’s essays within the socio-critical context of *The Yellow Book*, focussing on its subversive social criticism, this chapter emphasises Beerbohm’s work as an expression of the aesthetical-educational aspect of fin-de-siècle art, analysing a much broader selection of Beerbohm’s essays beyond the turn of the century. The reasons (and justification, as this thesis’s subject is the period of the 1890s) for this widening of the temporal boundaries lie mostly in the nature of Beerbohm’s work itself. For one, Beerbohm’s early essays are often considered to be less skilfully executed than his later ones. Critics such as John Hall or Danson, for example, comment on Beerbohm’s excessive use of ‘Wildeanisms’ in his early essays, especially in *The Works of Max Beerbohm*.⁵⁰ Wilde certainly was a major source of influence on the younger Beerbohm, but in contrast to the former, the latter never succumbed to the temptation of putting his personality before his art. Thus, even though the early essays often show too much Wildean influence with their sometimes brash wit and overly clever

⁵⁰ However, they also point out that Wilde was “as much subject as source” (Danson 41), and that in Beerbohm’s work Wilde’s tone was “marshalled, tamed, made more delicate, more subtle” (Hall 32).

paradoxes, they are nevertheless already anchored within the framework of Beerbohm's early developed understanding of the relationship between art and life, and the artist and his audience. Situating them alongside examples from his later essays shows that this understanding remains, essentially, the same.

Continuing this discussion beyond the temporal boundaries of the fin de siècle also allows a positioning of fin-de-siècle art within the context of early twentieth-century art. By including both Beerbohm's earlier and later essays, it is possible to establish the very 'fin-de-siècle' character that was to characterise his art throughout his life. It is interesting to see that Beerbohm came to fame in and is intimately linked to the 1890s, even though he produced his best-known works, such as the novel *Zuleika Dobson* and the parody *A Christmas Garland*, in the early part of the twentieth century. This discrepancy between the temporal framework of his most famous writings and his indisputable, lifelong connection to the 1890s allow the assumption that Beerbohm's twentieth century writings and drawings are closely linked to the fin de siècle. Most of his ideas for novels, essays and caricatures developed in the 1890s, although some of them took years to be realised in books or exhibitions.

Subsequently, even when Beerbohm started doing broadcasts on the BBC in the 1930s and 1940s, he spoke there as a representative of the past—one of the few survivors of the fin-de-siècle avant-garde. Rebecca West, commenting on one of his broadcasts, mused "I felt ... that I was listening to the voice of the last civilized man on earth" (quoted in Hall 13). Despite the fact that Beerbohm was only in his twenties in the period of the 1890s, and two thirds of his life were spent in the twentieth century, this era with its two World Wars and major social, artistic and technical changes never seemed to determine his writing and personality as deeply as the famous 1890s. He closed his first collection of essays, *The Works of Max Beerbohm*, with the often quoted words: "Already I feel myself to be a trifle outmoded. I belong to the Beardsley period" ("Diminuendo" 60).

Additionally, whilst Beerbohm was an ardent admirer and part of the avant-garde of the 1890s, he did not find their (and his) hopes for change fulfilled, and he struggled with the modernist art of the twentieth century. In a letter to Virginia Woolf, he wrote:

In your novels you are so hard on us common readers. You seem to forget us and to think only of your theme and your method. Your novels beat me—black and blue. I retire howling, aching, sore; full, moreover, of an acute sense of disgrace. I return later, I re-submit myself to the discipline. No use: I am carried out half-dead (quoted in Danson 22)

This statement indicates one of the main differences between the art of the fin de siècle and the art of the twentieth century which lies in the relationship between author and reader. As has been shown in the previous chapters, at the fin de siècle this relationship was determined by an almost paradoxical oscillation between both detachment and exclusivity on the part of the author, and the simultaneous engagement with the reader, both sides of which were indicative of a didactical intention that underlay the work of art. This oscillating quality in the author-reader relationship can be seen as one of the centrally defining features of Beerbohm's work, and it was the indifference to the reader which he criticised mostly in the art of the twentieth century.

It has often been commented that Beerbohm was born with a strange, timeless quality. On the one hand, he entered university with a maturity in manners, style and personality that astounded his friends. Wilde, for example, once remarked that the gods had given Max the gift of eternal old age (Danson 19). On the other hand, however, Beerbohm retained a child-like curiosity throughout his life. Danson sees a clear divide in Beerbohm's attitude towards old age and childlikeness in the course of his life: "He assumed the privileges both of infancy and old age. Until about 1910 he emphasised the youthful side; later he emphasised the age. He erased the transitions" (15). Whilst I would agree with Danson that Beerbohm "erased the transitions" between old age and infancy, I believe it impossible to draw a clear divide between his 'old age' and his 'infancy' for his child-like spirit accompanied him all his life. Hall, for example, describes an old school portrait in which Beerbohm appears "baby-faced and younger-looking than many of his contemporaries" (2002:12), and Roger Lewis comments on Beerbohm's refusal to grow up, calling him a "wilful child" (297).

Moreover, this mixture of maturity and child-likeness was displayed in Beerbohm's essays, in which the author's detached, objective post of observation was deserted again and again in favour of a child-like enjoyment of capricious imaginary possibilities and dreams. In "At Covent Garden" (*More* 183-189), for

example, the author displays a child-like enthusiasm for the performance he is watching. Hence, the first sentence of the essay (“I am quite indifferent to serious music” 185) stands in sharp contrast to a later paragraph filled with exclamatory sentences, giving expression to its author’s excitement: “See! The wee tenor is going to kill himself with a dagger. No! The wee soprano prevents him. [...] Hark! They are in the midst of a stormy duet. I vow the little creatures fascinate me! Here comes a whole army of ants in attitudes of surprise” (188-189).

For most parts, Beerbohm could not comprehend the twentieth-century elitism of artists and the ‘seriousness’ of their art; however, his own essays also diverged from the reader-friendly omnisciently narrated novels of the Victorian age. As an author, Beerbohm liked to take a stance of ‘subjective objectivity’, posing as, but also denying, the possibility of an omniscient, reliable narrator. While, as Danson puts it, Beerbohm’s essays were written “against the ground of as seemingly immutable a shape as ever an artist assumed” (1) their author was also deeply unreliable. Danson notes:

The reader tries to engage the author himself precisely because the words that constitute the author are unreliable. What does Max Beerbohm think of what Max Beerbohm creates? The pervasive irony, which makes us uncertain of ourselves as readers, leaves us more dependent on the absent author (38).

The paradox that these two quotes reveal mirrors Beerbohm’s ability to be fully present and completely elusive at the same time—as Beerbohm’s biographer Cecil explains,

Max the essayist is not the same as Max Beerbohm the man [...]. The writer projects on to his page a personality not identical with his own, though founded on it, a figure made up of elements selected from himself and then rearranged and displayed for his aesthetic purpose (145).

One of the most famous quotes about Beerbohm is a question Wilde asked their mutual friend, Ada Leverson: “When you are alone with him, Sphinx, does he take off his face and reveal his mask?” (quoted in Danson 26). In his study on Beerbohm, Danson tries to express the same idea by distinguishing between Beerbohm the author, Max Beerbohm the historical figure and Max, “the created figure inside the writing and drawing” (4). Beerbohm indeed seemed to exist mainly through his art; even Lord Cecil, who after Beerbohm’s death had access to most of his personal

correspondence, admitted to the impossibility of knowing Beerbohm. In his excellent and extensive biography on his friend, Cecil writes:

Max is a character of his own tales, a subject of his own caricatures [...]. Yet how much in fact does he tell about himself? His talk, for all its ease, is not intimate, still less indiscreet; his art is designedly an art of the surface, disclosing little of its author's deeper feelings. [...] Max remains for posterity a puzzle (3-4).

What this quote suggests, not many critics seem to heed. Despite general agreement that Beerbohm the man must remain “for posterity a puzzle,” several still seem to insist on inferring from the implied artist to the man. Danson, for instance, (although he initially suggests the separation between implied artist and Beerbohm the historical figure) still argues that Beerbohm created himself through his art (4). Similarly, Louis Kronenberger maintains that “the personality has found a prose that exactly suits it” (24) and Felstiner avers that “we really have to consider [...] one person. [...] [F]rom all the published, private, and uncollected writing and drawing, which I run together in this study, one comic imagination emerges” (xix). Felstiner additionally claims that Beerbohm’s habit of creating “personal myths” about himself was designed “to lessen himself” (26), and he wonders whether this “self-reductive impulse stemmed from anxiety about not amounting to much” (29).

Although these are certainly possible and valid readings, their tendency to draw the character of the man from his writing denies a primary understanding of the work of art and its creator as separate entities, disrespecting the boundaries between art and life. Whilst the intention of this chapter is not to announce ‘the death of the author’, it still considers the distinction between the implied and the real author as vital for an interpretation of Beerbohm’s (and fin-de-siècle) art. As will be demonstrated in the next section of this chapter, the personality adopted in the figure of the implied author/artist always contained a manipulative element; this relationship helped to establish an educational artist-audience relationship which put an understanding and enjoyment of art at its centre. Consequently, it is not Beerbohm the man that one encounters through his art, but Beerbohm the artist—the mask and fictitious personality, which later allowed Beerbohm the man to live a quiet and uneventful live in his beloved Italy.

It could be said that in the 1890s and the early twentieth century, when Beerbohm formed an essential part of London society, Beerbohm the man really wore the mask of Beerbohm the artist. However, once Beerbohm moved to Rapallo, there occurred a split between the two, and Beerbohm the artist continued to exist only in Beerbohm's art. Whilst the lifelong publication of his books and exhibitions of his caricatures unceasingly presented Beerbohm the artist, Beerbohm the man was very reluctant to give support to people who hoped to write a biographical study on him. As J. Riewald points out, "Max had no confidence at all in the biographical method. He firmly believed that the study of art should concentrate on the works themselves, not on the life of the artist" (xi). It is for this reason that the following discussion of his work refers the name 'Beerbohm' to the implied author rather than the man. It thus adheres to Beerbohm's intentional separation between the man and the artist, and the prevalence he gave to the latter throughout his life and work. Acquiescing to Beerbohm's advice, the investigation into the artist-audience relationship focuses on his works and on the implied creator of his art, rather than trying to find a formula for the personality behind it.

6.2 Teaching detachment: Beerbohm's use of irony

Beerbohm was and is still known as one of the greatest parodists of the nineteenth and twentieth century; one of his best known and most highly praised books is *The Christmas Garland*, a selection of parodies on authors as varied as Henry James, Rudyard Kipling or George Moore. Beerbohm's parodic skill was expressed in most of his work, and many of his acquaintances became targets of his ironic wit at some point in their lives. Linda Hutcheon, in her study on twentieth-century parody suggests that "parody is one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity; it is a form of inter-art discourse" (1985:2) and as such, to some extent inward-focussed and circular. This idea of parody as being self-reflexive and egocentric is taken up by Danson; he claims Beerbohm liked to parody himself, insinuating that "authorial personality is something assumed rather than essential since it can be imitated even by its possessor" (16). This, according to Danson, leads to a self-effacement of the author (1-2). He writes: "Self-parody as a pejorative term suggest that the author is, in this deficient instance, alienated from the style trough

which he exists, that a embarrassing gap has opened between style and author. But Max lives precisely in this gap...” (16).

The realisation of Beerbohm’s self-effacement through parody induces Danson to focus on the author figure and man implied in the writing and the caricatures; however, it also causes him to neglect the didactic effect of the ‘self-effaced’ author on the audience. For some time, this outward-focussed and socially engaged element of the parodic has been pushed aside in favour of its self-reflexive and aesthetic aspect. Yet critics like Hutcheon (although she admits to this inward focus of parody) also emphasise the didactic element of the parodic art form. Hence, Hutcheon describes her study as a “sort of plea to heed the teachings of art” (3). Understanding the parodic art of the twentieth century as essentially didactic, Hutcheon shifts the attention “from aesthetic merit (however determined) to instructional value” (ibid).

This notion that parody, within its relation to art, contains elements of social engagement is an aspect that Dennis Denisoff investigates more closely with regards to the figure of the dandy-aesthete of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He argues that parodist and the parodied subject do not necessarily occupy opposing sides, but follow a joint cause which often lies outside the realm of art. Parody facilitates this engagement as it

sanctions such maneuvering not simply through its structural dependence on the celebration of multiple interpretations, but also by leading its audience to consider the potential existence of still other ontological possibilities that may have remained unarticulated. Through its reliance on double meanings, parody effectively questions the possibility of any such thing as an “original” (2001:3-4)

These elements, i.e. the instructional value and social engagement of parody through its “celebration of multiple interpretations” and the suggestion of “still other ontological possibilities,” are central to an understanding of Beerbohm’s art in the context of the fin de siècle, for it was through these elements that Beerbohm allowed the indeterminacy of the fin de siècle to enter his work and the author-reader relationship within them.

In order to shift the focus from the parodied subject and the parodying author to the implied author-reader relationship, the following analysis will concentrate on one stylistic element that establishes, yet also transcends, the genre of parody: irony. As Hutcheon points out in her study *Irony’s Edge*, irony as a stylistic means is

essentially discursive. She writes: “[I]rony happens as a part of a communicative process” (13), and it is as such that it becomes important in an understanding of the educational aspect of Beerbohm’s writing. As a discursive element, it forms the artist-audience relationship within Beerbohm’s texts; however, it also helps to approach Beerbohm’s work within the context of fin-de-siècle art, as the use of irony became a general trend in late nineteenth-century cultural criticism, replacing the untenable idea of artistic objectivity:

[I]rony and radical disaffiliation are elevated over the now disparaged ideals of disinterestedness, objectivity, and reason. [...] From this perspective, non-traditional, indirect, or inherently restless modes of critique—irony, performance, negative freedom—become the favored forms for detachment (Anderson 26-27).

Beerbohm, in his art, embraced the ‘romantically’ tainted maxim of detachment, and in this detachment, he allowed art to stand as autonomous. Yet he also encouraged his audience to “self-authorization as radical detachment from pre-existing, traditional, or conventional social order” (Anderson 114). One of his main instruments in this educational venture was his use of irony, which allowed indeterminability to stand without resolution, removing the author as a clear point of reference from the text, and challenging his audience to come to an understanding of its own.

Irony, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* states, can be defined, in its broadest sense, as “the expression of meaning through the use of language signifying the opposite, typically for humorous effect.” However, this definition, as straightforward it may sound, only touches the tip of the iceberg. Hutcheon, for example, explains that irony

has been tackled by scholars in fields as diverse as linguistics and political science, sociology and history, aesthetics and religion, philosophy and rhetoric, psychology and anthropology. [...] There seems to be a fascination with irony [...] whether it be regarded as a rhetorical trope or as a way of seeing the world (1994:1).

Among this breadth of possible occurrences and understandings, there are certain essential elements to the use of irony that are important within the context of this chapter as they most directly affect the implied artist-audience relationship within a text. Firstly, irony always holds an element of exclusivity in that it divides the audience into those “who ‘get’ it and those who don’t” (Hutcheon 1994:2). Secondly

(and this point is closely related to the first aspect), it tends to promote the establishment of (elitist) groups because it requires a shared context which enables irony to be understood. The use of irony thus generally demands what Hutcheon calls a “discursive community as it provides the context for both the deployment and attribution of irony” (1994:18). Thirdly, ironic discourse always contains a form of subversive criticism, which usually has political or social implications. The reason for this, as Claire Colebrook notes, is that

[i]rony is both questioning and elitist, both disruptive of social norms and constructive of higher ideals. On the one hand, irony challenges any ready-made consensus or community, allowing the social whole and everyday language to be questioned. On the other hand, the position of this questioning and ironic viewpoint is necessarily hierarchical, claiming a point of view beyond the social whole and above ordinary speech and assumptions (153).

This notion of irony’s paradoxical qualities leads to the fourth element which is the most important one for an understanding of Beerbohm’s writing: its ability to shift the focus from creator to audience in the process of aesthetic reception, thereby reversing power relations. Hutcheon indicates this reversal, and establishes the interpreter, the one who ‘decodes’ the ironic meaning, as the vital element in an ironic process. She writes:

The interpreter may—or may not—be the intended addressee of the ironist’s utterance, but s/he (by definition) is the one who attributes irony and then interprets it: in other words, the one who decides whether the utterance is ironic (or not), and then what particular ironic meaning it might have. This process occurs regardless of the intentions of the ironist (and makes me wonder who really should be designated as the ‘ironist’) (1994:11).

Hutcheon destroys the apparently clear-cut boundaries and roles of “ironist” and “intended addressee,” suggesting loss of control on the part of the author and the vital role of the audience in creating meaning. Thus, the use of irony within the context of aesthetic reception stresses the relation between the work of art and the audience. As Hutcheon puts it:

Irony’s indirection complicates considerably the various existing models of intersubjective communication between a speaker and a hearer. With irony, there are, instead, dynamic and plural relations among the text or utterance (and its context), the so-called ironist, the interpreter and the circumstances surrounding the discursive situation (1994:10).

All these different instances of irony help to establish and define the artist-audience relationship that is depicted in Beerbohm’s essays. First of all, the aspect of

exclusivity is an element which is mirrored in the small number of existent copies of Beerbohm caricatures and texts today. Only a small amount is still being printed and read, and even throughout his lifetime, Beerbohm “knew the value of his elusiveness” (Danson 4). Beerbohm was always very particular about the number and form of his book publications. The *Collected Edition* of his works, for example, was “limited to 780 sets, of which 750 were for sale and 30 for presentation” (Riewald 1953:214). The elitism which this rarity bred becomes even more noticeable as time moves on. As Danson remarks: “To know Beerbohm well, one must track him into private collections and rare book rooms: the elitism implicit in his demand for an exceptionally sophisticated audience has become explicit in the work’s material rarity” (4).

Simultaneously, the elitism of Beerbohm’s contemporary audience is also due to the fact that his art is so closely linked to the 1890s; his references to his peers and the topical occurrences of his time are, for today’s reader, often difficult to grasp. One striking example is the collection of parodic essays in *The Christmas Garland*, in which Beerbohm parodies the different styles of several of his contemporaries. “The Mote in the Middle Distance,” a parody on Henry James’s style and complexity of psychological detail, is still one of the most-read and most popular parodies in the selection; however, the irony of essays parodying lesser-known authors like Arnold Bennett and Maurice Hewlett is very difficult to decode for today’s reader.

Apart from this material and contextual exclusivity, Beerbohm’s use of irony often worked through the identification of an elitist group within his essays. This textual establishment of ‘either-or’ camps usually forced the reader to decide whether he was to be part of this group or not. One such example is Beerbohm’s essay “On Speaking French” (*And Even Now* 287-299), in which Beerbohm divides his audience into French-speakers and French-illiterates, including himself among the majority of “duffers” who “pauses, searches, fumbles, revises, comes to standstills, has recourse to dumb-show!” (299). Not everyone of Beerbohm’s non-French-speaking readers might have enjoyed being thrown in with the majority of Englishmen who, like Beerbohm, pretended to be able to speak French, but really could not. The boundary between these groups seemed to be clearly drawn in this

essay, allowing the reader either to laugh about himself, to feel offended or to flatter himself to be sufficiently superior.

Most often, however, Beerbohm's irony proved to be less clear-cut, and the twists and turns it took generally made it impossible to establish a position of either 'here' or 'there'. In "1880" (*Works* 39-55), for example, the author introduces himself as an historian and researcher, who (finding himself far removed the long bygone era of the 1880s) has "only such poor guides as *Punch*, or the *London Charivari* and *The Queen, the Lady's Newspaper*" (43) to help him in the difficult task he has set himself. The essay is interspersed with etymological footnotes, descriptions of "strange cults" that have long died out, and a sense of uncertainty as to the factualness of historical facts. However, the essay's historic theme deconstructs itself through the obvious fact that the period of the 1880s was not at all far removed from the point in time of writing, and many of the 1880's idiosyncrasies were still alive at the time of the essay's first publication in 1895. Thus, the concluding paragraph can be seen as full of subversive irony:

There is always something rather absurd about the past. For us, who have fared on, the silhouette of Error is sharp upon the past horizon. As we look back upon any period, its fashion seem grotesque, its ideals shallow, for we know how soon those ideals and those fashions were to perish, and how rightly (54).

Beerbohm thus not only places himself outside the period of the 1880s, but also outside the group of his readers of the 1890s, as the role of historian which he adopts assumes a far greater temporal distance than the fifteen year gap between historic subject and time of writing. While the author enters an almost timeless space, his audience of the 1890s finds itself confined to its temporal horizon. This confinement prevents Beerbohm's contemporary reader from distancing himself from the 'grotesque' fashions and follies of the 1880s. Instead of being able to concentrate on the essayistic subject at hand, he is left wondering whether the praise and the ridicule that the author sheds on the 1880s is equally (or even more so) meant for present society? Is the author laughing at his readers after having led them to feel self-righteously superior to their predecessors? Above all, who is included in the "we" and "us"? Is it the reader who 'gets' the irony of the text? Or is it a reference to the elite group of fin-de-siècle artists to which the author belongs, and which distances itself from society as a whole?

Throughout the essay, the question thus remains of what exactly the ironic intention of the author is. Beerbohm refuses to provide an answer, and the ironic disparity between tone and content creates a distance of alienation between the reader and the author; also, it places the ‘power of interpretation’ in the hand of his audience. At the end of the essay, the author withdraws, handing over the responsibility of making meaning to the reader—but not without bowing, slightly mockingly, to his reader and the society he is part of:

I lay no claim to the true historical spirit. I fancy it was chalk drawing of a girl in a mob-cap, signed ‘Frank Miles, 1880,’ that first impelled me to research. To give an accurate and exhaustive account of that period would need a far less brilliant pen than mine. But I hope that, by dealing, even so briefly as I have dealt, with its most strictly sentimental aspects, I may have lightened the task of the scientific historian. And I look to Professor Gardiner and to the Bishop of Oxford (55).

Having established the different groups, who all bear their share of (ironic) praise and slight, the author withdraws, leaving the reader to decide on his own position and opinion. Beerbohm thus played the audience by defining different sides, and asking his readers to decide which camp to belong to: part of the ‘us-crowd’, supporters of Professor Gardiner or the Bishop of Oxford, representative of the society of the 1890s (or even the 1880s)? Beerbohm offered many alternatives but refused to mediate.

A similar form of ‘reader emancipation’ can be found in another one of Beerbohm’s historical essays, “King George the Fourth” (*Works* 57-96). In this essay, Beerbohm advocates a different, more flattering, view on a King who had been notorious for his drinking, his gambling and his amorous adventures. In spite of the essay’s tone being “measured, informative, and apparently modest” (Danson 44), its approach to the topic is rather scandalous as the author sets out to redeem what Thackeray had condemned a “drunken, vapid cad” and the “King of Beasts” (59-60). In doing so, Beerbohm simultaneously takes a stand against the “moral standard of the Victorian Age” (62). By jumping to the defence of King George the Fourth, who had been ‘officially condemned’ by one of the most eminent Victorian writers, Thackeray, the author places himself outside the authority of canonical voices and the age to which he belongs.

Whilst this step seems to only alienate the author, positioning him outside the majority group, his own exploration of the topic and his comparative approach also serve to diffuse the clear-cut boundaries between ‘good’ and ‘evil’, again drawing the reader into the process of ‘meaning-making’. Throughout the essay, the author draws unfavourable comparisons between George’s age and contemporary society, decrying the latter as “decadent,” with women “becoming nearly as rare as ladies” and strong men slowly dying out (62-63). In contrast, King George represented real manhood, real strength, and, according to the author, all the King’s faults and mistakes were due to unfavourable circumstances rather than to a truly wicked character. Beerbohm laments: “We are born into a poor, weak age. We are not strong enough to be wicked, and the Nonconformist Conscience makes cowards of us all” (63). Thus, the more positive King George is depicted, the worse contemporary society looks; the efficiency of the author’s defence is dependent proportionally on the negative portrayal of the current age.

This audacity, of course, should leave the contemporary reader appalled with both King George and the author, and challenged to defend himself and his own age against the not-so-subtle accusations made in the essay. Yet again, the irony that pervades the text makes the author as ‘the other’ elusive. The impossibility of pinning him down becomes obvious, for example, when looking at the following introductory paragraph:

I feel that my essay may be scouted as a paradox; but I hope that many may recognise that I am not, out of mere boredom, endeavouring to stop my ears against popular platitude, but rather, in a spirit of real earnestness, to point out to the mob how it has been cruel to George. I do not despair of success. I think I shall make converts. The mob is really very fickle and sometimes cheers the truth (62).

Again, Beerbohm outlines several different factions of which the reader could claim ownership: a believer in popular platitudes, a member of the mob, a member of the fickle mob who is going to be converted...the possibilities are numerous.

At the same time, however, Beerbohm’s statements are

dizzily self-subverting [...]. Against ‘popular platitude’ he opposes his own ‘real earnestness’—more a dilemma than an alternative, since we cannot believe that he intends to be either earnest or platitudinous. His success in the essay will be measured by the cheers of the fickle mob, from among whom he will have made converts. Does the reader want to be a member of that mob? If not, the alternative is not to believe Beerbohm (Danson 44).

It seems that the reader as ‘the other’ has no choice but to belong to the “fickle mob”, either believing in popular platitude or being converted to the truth. Neither is a particularly flattering option. However, not to believe, as Danson suggests, is no real option either, for the question of whether the reader takes the author seriously or not is only a rhetorical one—the author has secured for himself a position of unassailability from public opinion through his very indefinability. The image of the humble student of history is instantly contradicted by the assertiveness of artistic superiority; the dependence on the approval of the “fickle mob” for success confuted by the supercilious attitude towards society and the eminent Victorian Thackeray. However, the modest, factual and informative tone of the essays undermines the claim to elitism that speaks from its content. Through his use of irony, Beerbohm has removed himself as the author as a point of reference from the text. What, then, is the reader to think?

When asked directly about this in an interview held by Ada Leveron, just after “King George the Fourth” had been published in *The Yellow Book*, Beerbohm explained:

I meant all I said about George, but I did not choose to express myself quite seriously. To treat history as a means of showing one’s own cleverness may be rather rough on history, but it has been done by the best historians, from Herodotus to Froude and myself. Some of my “George” was false, and much was flippant; but why should a writer sit down to be systematically serious, or else conscientiously comic. Style should be oscillant (quoted in Cecil 104).

It becomes clear that even here Beerbohm refused to establish a clear point of reference for understanding. Instead, he offered several readings of authorial intention: the historian’s desire to show off his own cleverness, the writer’s ambition to create a study in style, or simply an essayist’s attempt of a historical analysis. As in his essay, it was through a paradoxical statement that Beerbohm provided answers, and simultaneously denied to reveal the author’s position within the text.

Beerbohm thus implied in the interview that the author should make it impossible for his readership to pin him down. Beerbohm always attempted to present the author’s stance as elusive, pointing towards possible standpoints, but not favouring any. Subsequently, the author meant what he said, yet it was up to the audience to decide what was being conveyed. In this reversal of interpretative power relations, the elitist exclusivity and distinction suggested in Beerbohm’s essays was

undermined. Beerbohm handed over his work of art to his audience, allowing them to understand and appreciate it in accordance with their interpretation and positioning. On the one hand, the author's elitist demeanour was opposed by his ability to address his audience in a voice "which seemed to belong to man no larger than themselves" (Woolf 217). On the other hand, this personal voice was undermined by the indeterminability of the author, and the artist-audience relationship subverted through ironic deconstruction, mirroring the fin-de-siècle oscillation between artistic detachment and social engagement.

In his later essays particularly, the often directly confrontational irony of *Works* and *More* was softened by Beerbohm's 'personal voice' into an apparent complicity with his readership. It seemed almost as if the author, having by now established a faithful following of 'Beerbohmians', did not necessarily want to position himself directly in opposition to his audience anymore. Yet simultaneously, his elusiveness remained, and the underlying irony of his writing still questioned his readership's allegiances and points of view. This attitude shows, for example, in "The Humour of the Public" (*Yet Again* 245-261). In this essay, Beerbohm singles out humour as the one thing that distinguishes men "from brute creation" (248). He writes: "On no possible point of superiority can we preen ourselves save this: that we can laugh, and that they, with one notable exception, cannot. They (so, at least, we assert) have no sense of humour. We have. Away with any one of us who hasn't!" (248).

The irony of this statement is much more subtle and more difficult to ascertain than the ones the reader is confronted with in the essays previously discussed. Beerbohm seems to set before his audience a clear choice: either it has a sense of humour, or it is to be excluded from the human race. Magnanimously, Beerbohm the author positions himself amongst his readership, subsuming himself and them under the all-inclusive "we." Yet within the next few sentences, this seemingly stable statement is undermined by Beerbohm's assertion that "belief in the general humourousness of the human race is the more deep-rooted for that every man is certain that he himself is not without a sense of humour" (248). Is not the very fact that this apparent obviousness needs assertion an indication that there might be some, after all (even among Beerbohm's readers?) who do not have this sense of humour that distinguishes man from animal? This, plus the negligible insertion of an

exception to the animal rule (“they, with one notable exception, cannot...”) again dilutes the reliability of the author’s positioning.

Continuing, the author admits, with almost beguiling openness, that

[h]aving no love for the public, I have often accused that body of having no sense of humour. Conscience pricks me to atonement. Let me with-draw my oft-made imputation, and show its hollowness by examining with you, reader (who are, of course, no more a member of the public than I am), what are the main features of that sense of humour which the public does undoubtedly possess (249-250).

The amount of shifting layers and subversive turns in this passage is astounding. The withdrawal of a previous insult is directly followed by adding a new one, thus undermining the withdrawal in the first place: admitting that his accusing the public of not having a sense of humour might have been wrong, the author immediately positions himself opposite this very public, re-erecting the hierarchical boundaries between them.

Complicating the twist is Beerbohm’s asseveration that his readership, of course, is joining him on the same side—namely opposite the public. Whilst at first the reader is forced to ascertain in himself a sense of humour so as to be able to assure his difference from an animal, he now has to climb even higher in the hierarchy of social classes, escaping the mob of the common public. Yet it is exactly this public that also forms the readership of Beerbohm’s essays, unless one assumes—as the author suggests—that his readers might compose an entirely different class. The audience cannot be sure. Additionally, being an accomplice in Beerbohm’s almost scientific approach to “examining [...] what are the main features of that sense of humour which the public does undoubtedly possess” (250) does not necessarily sit comfortably; the implication of his ‘classification’ rings of almost inhumane hierarchisation. The author’s scientific demeanour seems to turn the ‘public’ into a mere object for experiment, to be dissected, classified and put back together—it even leaves open the possibility of the public constituting that “one notable exception.”

Yet even this ambivalent hierarchisation of author/readership/public is not the end-all. Only a few paragraphs further on, after having established that “‘public’ denotes a collection not of identical units, but of units separable and (under close scrutiny) distinguishable one from another” (250), the author complicates the

relations even further by giving an example of his own type of humour, which, it can be presumed, is meant to leave the reader slightly bewildered:

Mr. Andrew Lang tells a story that has always delighted and always will delight me. He was in a railway carriage, and his travelling-companions were two strangers, two silent ladies, middle-aged. The train stopped at Nuneaton. The two ladies exchanged a glance. One of them sighed, and said, 'Poor Eliza! She had reason to remember Nuneaton!' ... That is all. But how much! how deliciously and memorably much! How infinite a span of conjecture is in those dots which I have just made! And yet, would you believe me? some of my most intimate friends, the people most like to myself, see little or nothing of the loveliness of that pearl of price (251)

Again, this illustration does nothing to ensure a stable position for either reader or author. Although the author asserts that "it would be impossible for any one of *us* to define what are the things that amuse him" (253), he still opens up the question whether this rather exclusive humour puts him on an even higher level than his readership, or with the public after all. The latter possibility is corroborated when the author admits to have been a frequenter of the very place where the public's humour is "hit in the eye, drawing forth a shower of illuminative sparks" (253)—the music hall. Posing as an "earnest student" seeking "material for an analysis of the public's sense of humour" (254), he nevertheless admits that the "little old music-halls have always attracted me by their unpretentious raciness, their quaint monotony, the reality of the enjoyment on all those stolidly rapt faces in the audience" (254-255). Similarly, among the examples he gives of things that excite the public's humour, he lists several that, very likely, his reader has laughed about as well, i.e. mothers-in-law, hen-pecked husbands or old maids (257).

More examples could be drawn from this one essay; yet the selection above illustrates that Beerbohm's play with the elusiveness of the author and his ability to stir up and criticise his reader had not lost its power. Both challenged the reader to take a stand as the effacement of the author as a point of reference from the text left the reader, mostly, with a multiplicity of questions like the ones Colebrook lists:

How can there be an other or ironical meaning if all we have are texts? For does not the very notion of 'meaning' demand that there is a sense or depth to the text, that there is more to the text than its surface? And if there is this other meaning, and we only know this meaning through what is said explicitly, just what is the nature and location of this meaning? (21).

By uniting all these juxtaposing and contradictory aspects that irony gave way to in his essays, Beerbohm turned his writing into a microcosm of fin-de-siècle

character. Like the other artists discussed in this thesis, Beerbohm reacted against a growing sense of uniformity, of being caught in an anonymous crowd. He, like the others, attempted to situate art within this changing world, and to allow it to contribute to the question of 'how to live'. Against the growing impersonality of his age, Beerbohm raised his 'personal' voice to show his readers that art could be understood as the most personal of encounters and a means of re-claiming individualism. Thus, his 'cultivation of detachment' through the use of irony promoted and encouraged the pursuit of what Anderson calls an "ongoing, partial project, whose interrelated ethical and epistemological dimensions ideally promote the reflexive interrogation of its own practices and thereby further the possibility of the individual and collective determination" (180). Beerbohm's writing thereby achieved a balance between the contradictions of the age, reassigning art, the artist and the aesthetic audience their respective roles in the aesthetic process.

6.3 The enjoyment of art

Skills, including the skill to appreciate things of beauty, are differentiated [...] from knowledge by the fact that they cannot be acquired solely through learning, understanding, and applying prescriptions formulated in words and written down in books. They are acquired by guided practice and by a process of trial and error. They can be imparted by demonstration and example within the framework of broad general precepts but they cannot be taught in the way that scientific knowledge is taught.

(Osborne *The Art of Appreciation*)

Whilst Beerbohm encouraged his readership to attain to an individualistic viewpoint, he also challenged his fellow-artists about their attitude to their art. In order to eliminate any point of reference, and for the work of art to stand as autonomous, the artist had to detach himself, not only from the audience, but also from his own artwork. Throughout his work, Beerbohm emphasised and demonstrated the necessity of creating a distance between the artist and his artwork, for only then could art be fully autonomous. The notion that the effect of the artwork alone was sufficient for the enjoyment of the aesthetic process found expression in his insistence to distinguish between the creator and the creation.

This insistence on the autonomy of art from its creator stood in stark contrast to the emerging 'cult of the author' during the mid- to late-Victorian period. As has been pointed out in the previous chapter on *The Yellow Book*, journals increasingly

printed authors' names instead of insisting on the anonymity of their contributors. Artists' biographies became popular and highly fashionable, for they allowed artists to control their public image through their work (a fashion that, as has been shown, Moore tapped into when he wrote *Confessions*, and subverted for his own purpose). Beerbohm wrote directly against this 'misuse' of art. He went beyond the danger of art being corrupted through an attribution of social, moral, or political intent; his greatest concern was the corruption of art from the artist himself. He did not want the work of art to represent a "mutually reflecting mirror between public and artist" (Codell 5); nor did he care to support the image of the Bohemian artist, who was "often revered for [his] unworldliness, cut off from social, commercial, and professional demands" (Codell 79). Beerbohm did not believe that "[k]eeping the artist isolated guaranteed a pure art object in the end" (ibid); rather, the work of art had to be considered autonomous not only from life, but from its creator as well.

Beerbohm, in creating 'Max the artist' as a personality apart from Beerbohm the man, demonstrated this separation in his own life and work. Guy Boas, for example, sees Beerbohm's attitude as an artist reflected in his caricatures. He writes:

[I]n the portraits, nothing but [the sitters'] entire selves appears, and where is the dapper, jesting figure who portrayed them nobody can tell. Did he vacate the studio on their arrival, and leave reproduction to a magic prism? Did he go out for a stroll, and trust the pen to perform the function of a looking-glass? Or did he at least remain sufficiently near at hand to invoke the sorcery which perhaps tells rather more than the clients were themselves aware of?
(9)

This idea of the artist's self-effacement within the work of art was also expressed, allegorically and directly, in Beerbohm's essays. In "Actors" (*More* 27-35), Beerbohm explains the prerequisites for the necessary detachment between artist and work of art by writing about what distinguishes the artist from the actor. He asserts that actors and singers seem a lot less indifferent to criticism than writers or painters: "One never hears any writer or painter declaring that he has made an inviolable rule never to read a criticism of his own work. One cannot imagine any, save an actor or a singer, trampling a press-notice under foot, or pasting it on his bed-post" (29).

The essay continues to explain the reasons for this difference in the ability to establish a distance between oneself and one's work of art. Beerbohm claims that

actors as well as singers cannot help but identify themselves with their creation because they have to put too much of themselves into their artwork:

The writer's work is given to you between the covers of a book; the painter's on a piece of canvas; the actor's in the lineaments of his own face, the port of his own body, the various inflections of his own voice. In criticising his work, you criticise, also, him. [...] He cannot detach himself, as you detach him, from his work (29-30).

Whilst writers and painters are able to etch their thoughts and ideas onto a physical medium apart from themselves, and thereby can distinguish more easily between the work of art and its creator, actors and singers can only project and realise their art through their own bodies. It is therefore not surprising that a separation is difficult to achieve. Yet this inability also leads to the artwork's 'premature death', for it can only achieve its timeless and thus autonomous quality when completely detached from its creator. "Actors are like pet-birds. When a pet-bird dies, there may be, for those who knew it in the day of its song and its ruffling plumage, some poor comfort in the sight of its stuffed body. [...] Their art dies with them..." (34).

To prevent 'art to die with its creator', Beerbohm expected the relationship between the work of art, the artist and the audience to be one of interacting, though autonomous, entities, which would not be dependent on each other. As such, they could not influence and change each other either wilfully; their mutual influence was one of 'allowing' and not of 'being forced upon'. This notion is demonstrated in Beerbohm's essay "The Crime" (*And Even Now* 243-254) which, on first reading, seems nothing more than another, misogynistic stab at one of his female (and more populist) colleagues. The story is set on a wet afternoon in a lonely cottage, where the author tries to find distraction from the boredom and gloom that surround him. He decides to read a book by a female writer, trying to overcome his prejudices against women writers in general and her in particular. However, after having managed a few pages, he cannot bear to read any more, and he turns from a "man of words" into a "man of action": "The book stood closed, upright, with its back to me, just as on a book-shelf, behind the bars of the grate. There it was. And it gave forth, as the flames crept up the blue cloth sides of it, a pleasant though acrid smell" (250).

His 'criticism' of the book is most drastic and demonstrative in that he actually physically tries to destroy that of which he does not think highly. His opinion seems to become determinative of the work of art as he attempts to alleviate his own

discomfort through the destruction of the book. However, he finds this venture to be more difficult than he had imagined:

...it seemed to me that whenever I left the fire to forage for itself it made little headway. I pushed the book over on its side. The flames closed on it, but presently, licking their lips, fell back, as though they had enough. I took the tongs and put the book upright again, and raked it fore and aft. It seemed almost as thick as ever. [...] Perhaps other books were less resistant than this one? (251-252).

The book which the author tries to burn seems to develop a life of its own; it will not be destroyed, no matter how determined its reader is. This physical indestructibility gestures towards the fact that art is not merely a material thing, but continues to exist in the mind. Whilst trying to fully burn the pages of the book, the author cannot help but notice the words that are printed on the pages. It is in these fragments that ‘the author as reader’ gets caught: “I always loathed you, but, I remember; and ‘ning. Tolstoi was right.’ What had always loathed whom? And what, what, had Tolstoi been right about? I had an absurd but genuine desire to know” (252). The curiosity which is awakened here shows, as Terry Caesar points out, that the book Beerbohm is trying to destroy is “not reducible to its material form. It still has words, a plot, a knowledge of a kind, and Beerbohm is left ignorant of exactly what kind—even as he felt he knew and let the fire burn. [...] His was an extreme form of criticism, but actually futile” (23).

Whereas Caesar considers Beerbohm’s destruction of the book as an analogy to a parodic act, one can also draw conclusions as to Beerbohm’s understanding of the work of art itself. Even though its material form can be destroyed, its content, through which it connects to its audience, is intangible; it exists independent of and apart from its physical shell. Analogous to the relationship of the soul and the body, the content of an art-work, i.e. the ideas that determine its material form and the inspiration that the audience take from it, can be understood as autonomous. Criticism cannot destroy it and the influence it has on its audience, for it is in the audience’s imagination that art has its lasting effect.

Yet what exactly was the effect that art should have on its audience? Whereas the first part of this chapter might seem to suggest that the educational element and the challenge to individualistic thinking left no room for ‘mere art’ in Beerbohm’s writing, this assumption is going to be corrected in the following pages. As has been

mentioned before, Beerbohm considered the enjoyment of art to be pre-eminent in the process of aesthetic reception. It is for this reason that Woolf would rate him among the best essayist alongside Lamb and Montaigne. She explicates:

[The essay] should lay us under a spell with its first word, and we should only wake, refreshed, with its last. In the interval we may pass through the most various experiences of amusement, surprise, interest, indignation; we may soar to the heights of fantasy with Lamb or plunge to the depths of wisdom with Bacon, but we must never be roused. The essay must lap us about and draw its curtain across the world (211).

Despite their ironic indeterminability, all these criteria were equally comprised within Beerbohm's essays. They opened up the door into another world, "drawing the curtain" across the real one; they surprised, they roused the reader to indignation; they followed the whims of fantasy. Beerbohm considered these qualities imperative for art to form a—if not *the*—essential element to life. It was art that offered freedom from the here and now; art that allowed individualism; art that challenged preconceived notions and introduced new viewpoints and ideas. Despite the challenges his use of irony presented to the reader, Beerbohm's aim also was to teach people what art was about through its enjoyment, echoing Schiller's words from his *Aesthetic Education* that it is in "their leisure hours" that the artist can try his "shaping hand" (61).

Beerbohm seldom presented his understanding of art and the artist in a serious manner. He always taught humorously and practically, and not only theoretically. For this reason Osborne's quote effectively describes the impact of Beerbohm's writing on his audience. Like Wilde and the other fin-de-siècle artists discussed in this thesis, Beerbohm replaced Arnold's or Ruskin's pulpit, and, instead, chose to guide his audience through "demonstration and example" (Osborne 6).

A central prerequisite for appreciating (Beerbohm's) art was the ability to separate art from life. In art, reality lost its grip and authority, and life, past and present, could be left behind. Like Morris' narrator Guest, who steps into the fictitious world of *Nowhere* and takes the reader on a journey with him, Beerbohm's audience was asked to follow the author in the progression from fact to fiction. In order to draw attention to the boundaries between life and art, Beerbohm continually crossed from the possible real to the imagined world of fiction. One example of this subtle change from reality to fantasy can be found in the aforementioned essay "The

Case of Prometheus” (*More* 191-201). It begins with a factual description of a paper given at the Royal Geographical Society by Mr. Mitchell about his tour through Asiatic Russia. On his journey Mr. Mitchell discovers a “naked man chained by the wrists and ankles to an upstanding rock” (194) high up on inaccessible mountains. Certain that he has seen Prometheus, Mr. Mitchell attempts a rescue, but the mountains prove too inaccessible.

After having related this increasingly absurd story to the reader, one almost expects the author to find a way to disclaim the truth of Mr. Mitchell’s discovery, revealing fraud, or by offering a more likely alternative. However, the author disappoints all these expectations:

That this story is fiction, no one who knows Mr. Mitchell’s record could possibly aver. That Mr. Mitchell was a prey to one of those illusions which do sometimes beset men on very high altitudes, is an equally untenable theory—as Mr. Mitchell himself said in the course of his lecture, he is ‘an old mountaineer and had seen nothing unusual on the Himalayans’. The only question is whether the captive on the mountain is really (as Mr. Mitchell declares, and as I myself am persuaded) to be identified with Prometheus. (195-196)

This is the moment in the essay when the author invites the reader to join him in the realm of art, of imagination. Even though he offers ‘legal’ proof of the possibility of Prometheus’s existence, the ensuing pages are mere parody of scholarly and legal proceedings. They only serve to allow the author to disappear into the land of vivid imagination where he can elaborate his own rescue plan in which everything is possible. Thus, although the summit of Mount Caucasus is inaccessible till mid-summer (according to Mr. Mitchell), the author “shall find means to reach it.” Then, after having reached the summit, the author “shall shoot the eagle [...] and free [Prometheus] of the rusty fetters that bind him to the rock. Dodging any thunderbolts that may be hurled at me, I shall pick up the shot eagle, and shall lead Prometheus gently down the mountain-side” (201). The last few paragraphs then completely turn the initially serious exposition on a geographical discovery into a spoof; having returned from the mountain, the author will then clothe Prometheus in a tweed suit and introduce him into London society where he “will be much lionised” (*ibid*).

As can be seen from the change in tone and in faithfulness to a possible reality in course of this essay, life, to Beerbohm, was always only a starting point which allowed aesthetic excursions into myriads of directions; it provided the raw material

for the creation of art. One of the biggest mistakes of contemporary society, as his essays suggest, was to confuse life and art and not to treat them as two separate spheres. This thought wove its way through several essays, some of them clearly indicating that life and art should be considered distinct, others only playing with their very interconnectedness. The former aspect is found, for example, in two essays about wax-works, “Madame Tussaud’s” (*More* 37-44) and “The Ragged Regiment” (*Yet Again* 233-244). “Madame Tussaud’s” seems to have been a direct response to the disciples of the Paterian maxim of “ever seeking ‘sensations’ and ‘experiences’” (39) as, in a moment of boredom, the author decides to seek exactly these sensations by visiting the famous waxwork museum. However, the encounter with the too life-like wax statues is an eerie one: on the one hand, the author is frightened of the “cadaverous and ignoble dolls” (40); on the other, he feels himself, in a horrible way, drawn to them: “...I could not tear myself away from their company. Powerless of escape, as in a dream, I must need wander on [...]. I wished to Heaven I had never come into this place, yet must I needs stay there” (*ibid*). His words connote a ghost-like existence: doomed to spend his life in the company of life-like, yet essentially dead figures, the author “must need wander on,” and only an appeal to Heaven seems to be able to save him.

This feeling of entrapment, of having entered a sphere in between life and death begins the moment the boundary between life and art starts to dissolve. In “Madame Tussaud’s,” life is not life and art is not art. By trying to imitate life as closely as possible, the waxworks not only defile life (44), but also mock art: “Though these waxworks are made in so close an imitation of life, they have, indeed, less verisimilitude than the outcome of fine art. [...] Life [...] is inimitable. The more closely it be aped, the more futile and unreal its copy” (42).

The art of imitation, which the author encounters in the museum, thus bears an atmosphere of death, and the author feels “that the place was evil, everything in it evil” (44). Also, whilst art is mocked and robbed of its essential qualities, life itself becomes impossible: the longer the author stays in the museum, his life seems to ebb out of him, and he finds himself slowly being turned into a waxen or ghostlike figure himself: “My brain seemed to be shrinking, all the blood ceasing in my body. [...]

My hands looked smooth, waxen, without nerves” (44). As the boundary between art and life disappears, either becomes a corruption of itself.

The same thought of art and life’s absolute difference is expressed in Beerbohm’s later essay, “The Ragged Regiment” (*Yet Again* 233-244). Intending to write an article on the old waxen effigies of kings and queens that are kept in Islip Chapel at Westminster, the author finds himself in the presence of waxen figures that, again, give him “the illusion of death” (239). Trying to dispel his fear by resorting to a “strong academic line,” the author explains why art and life need to be separate:

Wax-works are not a serious form of art. The aim of art is so to imitate life as to produce in the spectator an illusion of life. Wax-works, at best, can produce no such illusion. [...]. For its power to illude, an art depends on its own limitations. Art never can be life, but it may seem to be so if it do but keep far enough away from life. [...] An art that challenges life at close quarters is defeated through the simple fact that it is not life (238-239).

The understanding of art which is presented in this paragraph seems to directly mirror the conditions of Morris’ aesthetic paradise in *News from Nowhere*. Only as long as art “keeps far enough away from life” can it uphold its power of illusion, and thus its aesthetic effect. Art is to represent a world apart from life, a utopian paradise that has the “illusion of life,” but that can not and should not replace it. Art is to offer an alternative to life, something that (though it might not transcend it), at least complements it.

This difference of art to life is, surprisingly, best understood in its relation to death (and again, one is reminded of *News from Nowhere*, where the intrusion of death renders the aesthetic paradise impossible). As the author in “The Ragged Regiment” notes, the waxen statues are a result of “man’s vain revolt from the prospect of death” (241): “If the soul must perish from the body, may not at least the body itself be preserved, somewhat in the resemblance of life...?” (ibid) However, as the author’s reactions show, it is not in the attempt to imitate life as closely as possible that life can be preserved and death overcome. Instead, it is in true art that an essence of life can be captured, preserved in a world apart. For rather than remain eternally, the waxen effigies are doomed to end up in “the press,” where, “huddled one against another in dark recesses, lie the battered and disjected remains of the earlier effigies [...]. Time has broken and shuffled these erst so significant effigies

till they have become as unmeaning for us as the bones in one of the old plague-pits” (243-244).

In contrast to this disheartening image, art, even though bound to ephemeral matter such as a canvas or a page, has an existence outside the temporal limitations of life. It speaks to man’s imagination, and it achieves its full potential in its audience’s receptiveness. As Beerbohm’s art shows, it is, in Wilde’s words, “the spectator not life that art really mirrors” (“Preface” MW 48). Pure art enables its audience to enter in and to find itself and its own ideas reflected in it. Art’s purpose is to turn its audience into an artist himself—something for which the waxen statues of Madame Tussaud’s or Islip Chapel do not allow.

Another essay that plays with the interconnectedness of art, life and the audience is one of Beerbohm’s earliest works, “Diminuendo” (*Works* 147-160), written in 1895. It is an essay that has puzzled many Beerbohm scholars, critics and readers because it assumes an autobiographical framework, talking about Beerbohm’s time in Oxford. It is generally known that the time at university was, for Beerbohm, “the happiest in his history” as “Oxford life might have been devised to suit Max” (Cecil 43). However, half-way into the essay, the author exclaims: “How sad was my coming to the university! Where were those sweet conditions I had pictured in my boyhood? [...]. I found that the life of the place, like the place, had lost its charm and its tradition” (151-152). Rather than expressing facts, this statement can be seen as a signal to the reader that he is reading fiction, not fact, reminding him that the author is ‘Max’, not Max Beerbohm. As such, the essay, even though it uses life as its raw material, immediately moves away from it.

Yet in the same breath, the essay also demonstrates the author’s failure to keep art and life apart in his own life. Having read Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean* “at school...in bed and with a dark lantern” (150), the author expects life at Oxford to reflect the “variegated dramatic life” which he had experienced in the pages of Pater’s book. However, very soon he has to admit that “bitter were the comparisons I drew between my coming to Oxford and coming of Marius to Rome. Could it be that there was at length no beautiful environment wherein a man might sound the harmonies of his soul?” (152-153).

Again this essay assails Pater's philosophy of "burning always with this hard, gem-like flame" (*Renaissance* 152), which aspires to exchanging the transcendental with life in the here and now. Art, in Beerbohm's eyes, reaches further than present reality. Recognizing this, the author of the essay leaves Oxford and the busy life of London in favour of a "most pleasant little villa in —ham" where nothing ever happens: "Here no vital forces unite" (157). Here, where life does not overpower man and merely offers stimuli, the author finds himself contemplating the world and letting his imagination roam free:

I shall look forth from my window, the laburnum and the mountain-ash becoming mere silhouettes in the foreground of my vision. I shall look forth and, in my remoteness, appreciate the distant pageant of the world. Humanity will range itself in the columns of my morning paper. [...] Tragedy, comedy, chivalry, philosophy will be mine. I shall listen to their music perpetually and their colours will dance before my eyes. I shall soar from terraces of stone upon dragons with shining wings and make war upon Olympus. [...] It may be my whim to wander through infinite parks where the deer lie under the clustering shadow of their antlers and flee lightly over the grass; to whisper with white prophets under the elms [...] or, with a lady, thread my way through the acacias. [...] Unhindered I shall penetrate all sanctuaries and snatch the secrets of every dim confessional (159).

This demonstration of how art can provide a space for the imagination to develop and to grow testifies to the importance Beerbohm ascribed to man's ability to dream and thereby transcend reality. He believed that it was vital to leave room for this imagination in art, a conviction that helps to justify his harsh criticism of the waxen figures at Madame Tussaud's.

In "Diminuendo," Beerbohm wrote that it was the things that "one has not done, the faces or places that one has not seen, or seen but darkly, that have charm. It is only mystery—such mystery as besets the eyes of children—that makes things superb" (156). Beerbohm himself took these mysteries as material for his essays, demonstrating in a practical way how they would stir the imagination. Subsequently, the subject of unfinished or non-existent works of art was a recurrent one in Beerbohm's essay. Two of them were published in *And Even Now*, "Books within Books" (99-113) and "Quia Imperfectum" (197-217). The first one takes (as the title suggests) fictitious books within 'real' books as a subject. Whereas the author finds himself "strangely loth" to read books that are brought to him as a 'must-read', he finds himself wishing to be able to read the non-existent books within books: "[E]ven

as Must implants distaste, so does Can't stir sweet longings—how eagerly would I devour these books within books” (103). By admitting to a craving to actually find proof that the books he is longing to read do exist, the author brings them into existence in his own imagination and makes them real to the reader through his own art. It is thus that the reader can, with the author, see the non-existent volumes filling the shelves of the author's study:

How well they would look there, those treasures of mine! And most of them having been issued in the seemingly old three-volume form, how many shelves they would fill! But I should find a place certainly for a certain small brown book adorned with a gilt griffin, between wheatsheaves. . .” (112).

Similarly, “Quia Imperfectum” takes as its subject the idea of fictitious and unfinished artworks. “I have wondered,” the author begins,

that no one has set himself to collect unfinished works of art. There is a peculiar charm for all of us in that which was still in the making when its maker died, or in that which he laid aside because he was tired of it, or didn't see his way to the end of it, or wanted to go on to something else (197).

The author particularly would like to find a portrait of Goethe done by an artist called Tischbein, whose letters are found in Goethe's *Travels in Italy*. Beerbohm begins to spin a story about the relationship between Goethe and Tischbein and the creation of the portrait, painting characters and describing situations as if they were known facts to him. It is, again, the fascination with the unfinished and the unknown that brings art into existence.

However, this desire for, and fascination with, the unknown required a different audience from the contemporary one Beerbohm was facing. In “Diminuendo,” Beerbohm describes the different, possible types of audience: on one side, there are the “voluptuaries [...]—they seemed so sad, so ascetic almost, like poor pilgrims, raising their eyes never or ever gazing at the moon of tarnished endeavour” (156). On the other, there are “the round, insouciant faces of the monks at whose monastery I once broke bread, and [...] their eyes sparkled when they asked me of the France that lay around their walls” (157). Whereas an audience of the latter approaches the artist with a temperament of receptivity, an audience of the former is so filled with ‘sweet sensations’ and ‘experiences’ that no mystery of life is left for it to dream about. It has lost the child-like curiosity which the monks have maintained throughout their lives, and which is necessary for an appreciation and enjoyment of art.

In his essay “A Cloud of Pinafores” (*More* 169-181) Beerbohm comments on Victorian society’s inability to submit to this child-like enjoyment and curiosity. He claims that although his contemporaries have the desire to return a state of simplicity, they find themselves unable to do so and, instead, project their wishes onto their children so as to at least “contemplate simplicity” (172). According to the author, children and children’s literature were only in fashion because they represented what Victorian society had lost; and the century “for which Science promised mature perfection, [was] vanishing in a white cloud of pinafores” (181). It is also for this reason (so the author claims) that his writing has become so popular, for “if there be one thing which people love more than to read about children, now, it is to read what children write” (175)—and as the author is known to be a “child-author [...] dressed in black velveteen, with legs dangling towards the floor” (175-176), he might as well fill his books “with pot-hooks and hangers” and “the public would be just as well pleased” (176).

Through his art, Beerbohm urged his audience to adopt a child-like eagerness and simplicity; an invitation that did not sit comfortably with the Victorian virtue of toil and productivity. Lewis remarks that childishness stood “in stark opposition to the tendency of the Victorians to become cabined, cribbed and confined with their saturated minds. [...] Growing old was a process of accumulating wisdom and respect. To be ancient was to be eminent” (297-298). Therefore, through his demonstration and praise of a child-like attitude towards life and art, Beerbohm defied Victorian society, turning his prose into a true expression of the fin-de-siècle. He delivered the same message as Morris, Wilde, Moore and *The Yellow Book* artists: that the willingness to dream was outside temporal boundaries, and that the ability to allow art to affect was best served by a child-like spirit. It was a spirit of experimentation, of expectancy and of adventure. In Beerbohm’s writing Morris’ utopia thus became more firmly and directly established within the realm of art and the imagination. Even though (unlike Morris) Beerbohm did not create a specific place for the realisation of this dream, he imposed on it the same rules: it was to be a world removed from reality, free from spatial and temporal boundaries, and it had to be entered and appreciated with the curiosity and temperament of a child.

VII. Conclusion

A successful work [...] is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its inner-most structure.

(Adorno “Cultural Criticism and Society”)

Wilde’s “Soul of Man” and his fairy tales, Moore’s *Confessions*, Morris’ *News from Nowhere*, *The Yellow Book* and Beerbohm’s essays—all these literary and artistic pieces of the fin de siècle display similarities in their ability to contain and combine both contradictions and paradoxes. All of them, in one way or another, deal with the question of the purpose of art, its social implications and the role of the artist within a capitalistic society that was overcome by the rapidity of change it was experiencing. Although their approaches differed, sometimes significantly, all the fin-de-siècle authors and artists discussed in this thesis signalled that art, to them, was more than merely another commodity in the economic cycle. They believed art to have social purpose in that it could impact upon society through its ‘being art’, through being distinct and separate from life. They also understood the artist to occupy a position whereby he could correct, educate and influence society, a truly vital role.

At the same time, these artists were also confronted by the challenge of finding a way in which to both communicate these perceptions and to ensure that people understood and realised them. It was for this reason that all of the fin-de-siècle artworks discussed in this thesis have at their core an inherent paradox: on the one hand, they are influenced by the desire to engage with their audience, which necessitates the infiltration of mainstream ‘popular’ culture. On the other hand, however, there is the understanding of art as something ‘apart from life’, as a tool for social criticism that stands in a negative relationship to reality.

It is unsurprising that these two aims caused friction. Moore’s advocacy of ‘art for art’s sake’ and of the non-accountability of the artist (which is formulated in his *Confessions*) sits uncomfortably alongside the public engagement that speaks out from the social criticism with which it is infused. Similarly, Morris’ vision of a

utopian, art-saturated society is at odds with his perception of contemporary art. *The Yellow Book's* claim to be completely art-dedicated contrasts sharply, not only with its focus on a middle-class audience, but also with the social and critical engagement that speak from its pages. Wilde's essay and his fairy tales also awkwardly combine a 'Christian socialism' with detached Aestheticism, both criticising society, and simultaneously offering art as a means to perfection. Finally, there are Beerbohm's essays, which, despite their claim to exclusivity and their promotion of art's autonomy, have the author-audience relationship at their core, thereby being essentially didactic and demonstrative.

As has been shown, these artists paved the way for an idealised and autonomous understanding of art and the role of the artist. They opposed significant changes in the cultural sphere regarding readership, professionalisation and capitalisation. They advocated an art that refused to be, to use Adorno's words, a "for-other." Their purpose was to legitimise and propagate the social function of art and the artist by upholding and re-introducing an idealised understanding of the artist within a society that was increasingly defined by a capitalistic, utilitarian and positivist world view. They, in doing this, also broke ground for the elitist art of the twentieth century; however, this art itself also represents a corruption of their idealised vision. This, for example, becomes most obvious in Beerbohm's reaction to the twentieth-century modernist art. It is also identifiable in the writings and art of the other artists discussed in this thesis, for the artists' aim was not to completely sever the links between art and life, but rather to create an autonomous sphere for art within life.

In this process, the artists of the fin de siècle lived through a 'phase of adolescence'. They rebelled against traditions and concepts which they considered outmoded and invalid. Furthermore, they also struggled, not only to precisely define and create a new identity, but also with what it meant for art to be autonomous in a capitalistic society, and with how art and the artist could still uphold their social cogency. This battle was reflected in their work and in their oscillation between superficially contradictory notions. However, their art thus is also a representation of a period of "growing-up" in that it opens a window onto a better understanding of the turbulent, transient and indeterminable time of the fin de siècle.

Looking at the epigraph by Adorno, I find that the fin-de-siècle artworks discussed in this thesis can be read as “successful works of art.” They expressed an ideal through their amalgamation of contradictory positions which, once resolved, would usher in an “ideal harmony.” Probably the most vivid example of this process occurs in Morris’ *News from Nowhere*, where an ideal is portrayed through negatively contrasting present reality with a feasible fictional future. Similarly, Wilde’s perception of art and the artist, which he formulated in his fairy tales and “The Soul of Man,” stood in opposition to the contemporary reality. *The Yellow Book*’s main objective was to contrast with the mainstream, ‘popular’ periodical culture of the nineteenth century, and the understanding of the artist this culture promoted. In permitting both present and future, reality and ideal, to stand alongside one another, the artist of the fin de siècle assumed not only a critical, but also a prophetic role within society.

As I have suggested, this role was not necessarily readily accepted within late nineteenth-century culture. As the ‘loss of the artistic halo’ and a rapidly changing audience coincided, the artist at the fin de siècle found himself in a vulnerable position. This necessitated the re-definition of his role within society, and challenged him to simultaneously communicate and demonstrate it to his potential audience. Subsequently, writers like Wilde and Moore evinced this understanding of the socially important role of the artist through their artistic engagement with such socio-politically contested agendas as gender issues or the introduction of socialism. Others, such as the editors of and contributors to *The Yellow Book*, elevated the contemporary situation of the artist-audience relationship into being one of its main themes, thus again contrasting the present reality with a possible future. Morris, in his *News from Nowhere*, demonstrated the difference art could make within the life of society by introducing the figure of the artist as a catalyst for social and political change. Beerbohm, in contrast, took a light-hearted approach when trying to legitimise the position of the artist. His main focus was to teach the enjoyment of art, and the importance of the imagination. The artist’s task, in his eyes, was to remind people of their ability to dream, and to encourage them to allow their imagination to roam. Yet whilst he exhibited and promoted this aesthetic enjoyment in his essays,

Beerbohm also challenged his readers to think for themselves, denying them any clear guidance by maintaining an ironic, socio-critical distance.

My objective in demonstrating these differing aspects of social and didactical engagement of fin-de-siècle art has been to engage with the current understanding of both the artistic and cultural sides of the fin de siècle within the capitalistic framework of the ‘cultural marketplace’, and to suggest an idealised, rather than an economically determined, viewpoint of the artist as one of the key figures of the time. It has been my aim to draw attention to the aspects of fin-de-siècle art that show social commitment, and to how the struggle to re-instate art as an idealised, autonomous realm weaves its way throughout the writings and artworks of different artists. The artists of the fin de siècle, I believe, were contributing to an idealised tradition wherein the artist was understood to be a social agent, a school of thought which emanates from writings such as Schiller’s *Aesthetic Education* to Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*.

This thesis purposed to engage with the fin de siècle, not only as a precursor or successor to the better-established literary and artistic movements such as Romanticism or Modernism, but also to gain a deeper insight into the period itself. Fletcher wrote in 1979 that

we are coming to see that one way beyond the impasse lies in not defining the last two decades of the nineteenth century in terms of a single myth, theme, image or movement; rather in stressing the interconnectedness of the period’s writers, even those who do not assent to fin de siècle, fin du globe (8).

I have thus approached the fin de siècle in just such a manner as described by Fletcher: a period that can neither be categorised under one heading nor determined by a single movement, theme or myth. My aim has been to demonstrate, by examining such writers as Morris alongside Wilde, Moore, and journals like *The Yellow Book*, and by permitting the contradictions and paradoxes of their art to stand, to show that their art was, above all, determined by what Ledger and Luckhurst call the “ambivalence of modernity” (xiii).

My intention, therefore, was not to unify these diverse artists under one heading, but instead to show how they all grappled with contemporary notions of both art and their role as artists within end-of-nineteenth-century society, containing this struggle

within their respective works of art. The disharmonies and inconsistencies that permeate their work are what made them so essentially fin de siècle. Yet whilst these elements still allow each artist to stand individually and distinct from the others, they simultaneously indicate a move in the same direction: the attempt to answer the questions concerning the purpose of art, of the artist and of social responsibility. Thus, where they cannot be unified in approach, form or style, they allow for a formulation of a common, avant-garde goal which was “to keep culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion” (Greenberg 5).

This understanding leaves room for further investigation, especially into the relationship of lesser-known writers such as Beerbohm, or of contributors to *The Yellow Book*, to fin-de-siècle artistic and social culture. The artists discussed in this thesis have been scrutinised as having been products of the fin de siècle, investigating how the culture, world view and society of their time influenced and shaped their work. At the same time, however, I have also indicated how their art contributed to this culture and an idealised understanding of the artist-audience relationship. To pursue this approach further would benefit even the well-established personalities like Wilde and Morris, who (despite the broad range of academic studies on their influence areas such as sexual or social politics) have not been widely examined in respect to their impact on nineteenth and twentieth-century understanding of the artist’s role. This thesis aimed to redress this imbalance by focussing on the artist-audience relationship within the artworks of these fin-de-siècle artists, thereby drawing attention to the communicative and didactical element of their art on an aesthetic rather than an economically determined level.

In this respect, these artists’ connection to Modernist or Avant-garde artist-audience relationships would be worth investigating more closely, as would be the question whether the art of the fin de siècle does indeed stand in sharp contrast to the socio-political Avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. In this thesis, I have suggested that there are, in fact, more similarities than would have been expected. This was especially highlighted by their respective conception of the role of the artist as standing in contrast to society, together with the socio-critical engagement that is expressed through art. Room for further study hereby presents itself; also, one could question in what way the understanding of autonomous art’s

socio-cultural impact (which the artists of the fin de siècle tried to re-introduce into capitalistic society) proves to retain its validity for today's artists and writers, for whom the economic power of the cultural marketplace has become everyday reality.

In today's postmodern culture particularly, so full of relativism and so devoid of absolutes, the challenge to determine art's purpose remains, and the clarion call resounds as to what the artist's social status should be. It would seem, in our fast-paced lives, that the importance which artists at the fin de siècle attributed to contemplation, and to the relationship between perception and understanding, has been lost. As such, almost everything these artists had to say about aesthetic appreciation and the purpose of art should still resonate with today's critical reader, since it is, as Wilde once put it in "The Critic as Artist," "through Art, and through Art only, that we can realize our perfection; [...] Unlimited and absolute is the vision of him who sits at ease and watches, who walks in loneliness and dreams" (MW 274-275).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*. Ed. Stefan Collini. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Beerbohm, Max. *And Even Now*. London: William Heinemann, 1921.
- . *Mainly On The Air*. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1946.
- . *More*. London and New York: John Lane: The Bodley Head, 1899.
- . *The Works of Max Beerbohm*. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1896.
- . *Yet Again*. London: Chapman and Hall Ltd, 1909.
- Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backward*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996.
- Gissing, George. *New Grub Street* (1891) Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978.
- Moore, George. *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888). Ed. Susan Dick. Montreal & London: McGill- Queen's University Press, 1972.
- Morris, William. "The Art of the People." *The Collected Works of William Morris*. Vol. xxii. Ed. May Morris. London: Longmans Green and Company, 1914. 28-50.
- . *News from Nowhere or An Epoch of Rest. Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance*. (1891). Ed. Clive Wilmer. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1993.
- Pater, Walter. *Essays on Literature and Art*. Ed. Jennifer Uglow. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1973.
- . *The Renaissance. Studies in Art and Poetry*. (1893, 4th ed.). Ed. Adam Phillips. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Ruskin, John. *Selected Writings*. Ed. Dinah Birch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In a Series of Letters* (1795). Eds. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson & L.A. Willoughby. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.
- Wilde, Oscar. *Oscar Wilde: Complete Short Fiction*. Ed. Ian Small. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003.
- . *Oscar Wilde: The Major Works*. Ed. Isobel Murray. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- . *The Soul of Man and Prison Writings*. Ed. Isobel Murray. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- The Yellow Book. An Illustrated Quarterly*. Vol. I & II. London: Elkin Mathews & John Lane, 1894.
- The Yellow Book. An Illustrated Quarterly*. Vol. III & IV. London: John Lane, 1895.

Secondary Sources

- Adams, James Eli. "Victorian Sexualities." *A Companion to Victorian Literature & Culture*, Ed. Herbert F. Tucker. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1999. 125-138.
- Adorno, Theodore. "The Autonomy of Art." (1970). *The Adorno Reader*. Ed. Brian O'Connor. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000. 239-263.

- . "Cultural Criticism and Society." (1951). *The Adorno Reader*. Ed. Brian O'Connor. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000. 195-210.
- Alexander, Edward. *Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, and the Modern Temper*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1973.
- Altick, Richard D. *Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature*. London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973.
- . *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- Anderson, Amanda. *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and The Cultivation of Detachment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Austin, Linda M. *The Practical Ruskin: Economics and Audience in the Late Work*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Bashford, Bruce. *Oscar Wilde: The Critic as Humanist*. London: Associated University Press, 1999.
- Beaumont, Matthew. "News from Nowhere and the Here and Now: Reification and the Representation of the Present in Utopian Fiction." *Victorian Studies* 47:1 (Autumn 2004). 33-54.
- Beckson, Karl. *Henry Harland: His Life and Work*. London: The Eighteen Nineties Society, 1978.
- . *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992.
- Beetham, Margaret. "Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre." *Investigating Victorian Journalism*. Eds. Laurel Brake et al. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1990. 19-32.
- Berlin, James A. "Arnold's Two Poets: The Critical Context." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 23:4 (Autumn 1983). 615-631.
- Bevir, Mark. "William Morris: The Modern Self, Art, and Politics." *History of European Ideas* 24:3 (1998). 175-194.
- Birch, Dinah. Introduction. *Selected Writings*. By John Ruskin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. ix-xxviii.
- . (ed). *Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Boas, Guy. "The Magic of Max." *The Surprise of Excellence: Modern Essays on Max Beerbohm*. Ed. J.G. Riewald. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1974. 6-20.
- Boos, Florence S. & Silver, Carole G. (eds.). *Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Ed. Randal Johnson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.
- Bowles, Thomas Gibson. "Men of the Day." *Vanity Fair* February 17, 1872. *Lives of Victorian Literary Figures. III, Elizabeth Gaskell, the Carlyles and John Ruskin*. Ed. Simon Grimble. 3 vols. London: Pickering & Chatto Ltd., 2005. 5-7.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. "News from Nowhere: Morris's Socialist Anti-Novel." *Victorian Studies* 19:1 (Sept. 1975). 35-49.
- Brake, Laurel. "The Discourses of Journalism: 'Arnold and Pater' Again—and Wilde." *Pater in the 1990s*. Eds. Laurel Brake & Ian Small. Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 1991. 43-61.

- . & Codell, Julie F. (eds.). *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- . "Endgames: The Politics of *The Yellow Book*, or Decadence, Gender and The New Journalism." *Essay and Studies* (1995). 38-64.
- et al. (eds.). *Investigating Victorian Journalism*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1990.
- et al. (eds.). *Nineteenth Century Media and the Construction of Identities*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.
- . "Degrees of Darkness: Ruskin, Pater and Modernism." *Ruskin and Modernism*. Eds. Giovanni Cianci & Peter Nicholls. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001. 48-66.
- . *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1994.
- Brown, E.K. *Matthew Arnold: A Study in Conflict*. (1948) University of Chicago: Archon Books, 1966.
- Brown, Julia. *Cosmopolitan Criticism: Oscar Wilde's Philosophy of Art*. Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1997.
- Brown, Malcolm. *George Moore. A Reconsideration*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955.
- Bruder, Anne. "Constructing Artist and Critic Between J.M. Whistler and Oscar Wilde: 'In the Best Days of Art There Were no Art-Critics'." *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)*. 2 (2004). 161-180.
- Buckler, William E. "Oscar Wilde's Quest for Utopia. Persiflage with A Purpose In 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism'." *Victorian Institute Journal* 17 (1989). 1-12.
- Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. [1974. *Theorie der Avantgarde*]. Trans. Michael Shaw. Eds. Wlad Gozich & Jochen Schulte-Sasse. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999.
- Busst, A.J. L. "The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century." *Romantic Mythologies*. Ed. Ian Fletcher. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1967. 1-96.
- Buzard, James. "Ethnography as Interruption: *News from Nowhere*, Narrative, and the Modern Romance of Authority." *Victorian Studies* 40:3 (1997). 445-475.
- Caesar, Terry. "Betrayal and Theft: Beerbohm, Parody, and Modernism." *Ariel. A Review of International English Literature* 17:3 (July 1986). 23-37.
- Calinescu, Matei. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987.
- Cecil, David. *Max: A Biography*. London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1983.
- Codell, Julie F. *The Victorian Artist: Artists' Lifewritings in Britain, ca. 1870-1910*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Colebrook, Claire. *Irony*. London & New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Coleman, Stephen. "How Matters are Managed: Human Nature and Nowhere." *William Morris & New from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time*, Eds. Stephen Coleman & Paddy O'Sullivan. Devon: Green Books, 1990. 75-89.
- Collini, Stefan. *Matthew Arnold. A Critical Portrait*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

- Cunard, Nancy. *G.M.: Memories of George Moore*. London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1956.
- Daley, Kenneth. *The Rescue of Romanticism: Walter Pater and John Ruskin*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001.
- Daly, Nicholas. *Modernism, Romance and the Fin de Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- DeLaura, David J. "Arnold and Goethe: The One on the Intellectual Throne." *Victorian Literature and Society: Essays Presented to Richard D. Altick*. Eds. James R. Kincaid & Albert J. Kuhn. Ohio State University Press, 1984. 197-224.
- . *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England: Newman, Arnold, and Pater*. Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1969.
- Demoor, Marysa (ed.). *Marketing the Author: Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves and Self-Fashioning, 1880-1930*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Danson, Lawrence. *Max Beerbohm and the Act of Writing*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- Denisoff, Dennis. *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody 1840-1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- . Rev. of *Max Beerbohm. A Kind of Life*, by N. John Hall. *Victorian Studies*. 46:3 (2004). 535-536.
- Dick, Susan. Introduction. *Confessions of a Young Man*. Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972. 1-22.
- Dowling, Linda. *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Dunleavy, Janet E. "George Moore: A Reappraisal." *George Moore in Perspective*. Ed. Janet E. Dunleavy. Naas, County Kildare: Malton Press, 1983. 9-24.
- Ellmann, Richard. Introduction. *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*. London: W.H. Allen, 1970. ix-xxviii.
- . *Oscar Wilde*. London: Hamish Hamilton LTD, 1987.
- Evans, T.F. "The Artist as Socialist." *The Wildean* 23 (July 2003). 55-59.
- Faulkner, Peter (ed.). *William Morris: The Critical Heritage*. London & New York: Routledge, 1973.
- Federico, Annette. "Irony, Ethics and Self-Fashioning in George Moore's Confessions of a Young Man." *Marketing the Author: Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves and Self-Fashioning, 1880-1930*, Ed. Marysa Demoor. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 96-113.
- Fellman, Michael. "Bloody Sunday and News from Nowhere." *The Journal of the William Morris Society* 8:4 (Spring 1990). 9-18.
- Felstiner, John. *The Lies of Art: Max Beerbohm's Parody and Caricature*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1973.
- Ferguson, Niall. *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2003.
- Fletcher, Ian. *Aubrey Beardsley*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987.
- . "Decadence and the Little Magazines." *Decadence and the 1890s*. Ed. Ian Fletcher. London: Edward Arnold, 1979. 173-202.
- Frankel, Nicholas. *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

- Frazier, Adrian. *George Moore, 1852-1933*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Freedman, Jonathan. *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Gagnier, Regenia. *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987.
- Garnett, Jane. "Religious and Intellectual Life." *The Nineteenth Century. The British Isles: 1815-1901*. Ed. Colin Matthew. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 195-228.
- Giddings, Robert. Introduction. *Matthew Arnold. Between Two Worlds*. London: Vision Press Ltd., 1986. 7-25.
- Goode, John. "William Morris and the Dream of Revolution." *Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century*. Ed. John Lucas. London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1971. 221-280.
- Gordon, Jan B. "William Morris's Destiny of Art." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 27: 3 (1969). 271-279.
- Graff, Gerald. "Arnold, Reason, and Common Culture." *Matthew Arnold. Culture and Anarchy*, Ed. Samuel Lipman. Yale: Yale University Press, 1994. 186-201.
- Graham, Walter. *English Literary Periodicals*. New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1930.
- Greenberg, Clement. *Art and Culture*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1973.
- Grimble, Simon. *Lives of Victorian Literary Figures. III, Elizabeth Gaskell, the Carlyles and John Ruskin*. 3 vols. London: Pickering & Chatto Ltd., 2005.
- Grubgeld, Elizabeth. *George Moore and the Autogenous Self: The Autobiography and Fiction*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994.
- Guy, Josephine M. *The British Avant-Garde: The Theory and Politics of Tradition*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.
- . & Small, Ian. *Oscar Wilde's Profession: Writing and the Culture Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- . *Studying Oscar Wilde: History, Criticism, and Myth*. Greensboro, N.C: ELT Press, 2006.
- Hall, N. John. *Max Beerbohm: Caricatures*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002.
- . *Max Beerbohm: A Kind of Life*. New Heaven & London: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Hamilton, Walter. *The Aesthetic Movement in England*. London, 1882.
- Harris, Wendel V. "Arnold, Pater, Wilde, and the Object as in Themselves They See It." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 11:4 (Autumn 1971). 733-747.
- Helsing, Elizabeth K. *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder*. Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Heyck, Thomas William. "Educational." *A Companion to Victorian Literature & Culture*. Ed. Herbert F. Tucker. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1999. 194-211.
- Holloway, John. *The Victorian Sage*. (1953) New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1966.
- Holzman, Michael. "Anarchism and Utopia: William Morris's *News from Nowhere*." *ELH* 51:3 (1984). 589-603.

- Hough, Graham. "George Moore and the Nineties." *Edwardians and Late Victorians*, Ed. Richard Ellmann. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960. 1-27.
- Houghton, Walter E. "Periodical Literature and the articulate classes." *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982. 3-27.
- Hughes, Douglas A. Introduction. *The Man of Wax: Critical Essays on George Moore*. New York: New York University Press, 1971. v-xxvi.
- Hughes, Linda K. "Women poets and contested spaces in *The Yellow Book*." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*. 44:4 (Autumn 2004). 849-872.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Irony's Edge: The theory and politics of irony*. London & New York: Routledge, 1994.
- . *A Theory of Parody*. New York & London: Methuen, Inc., 1985.
- "Irony." *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. 11th ed. 2006.
- Jackson, Holbrook. *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1913). London: Cresset Library, 1988.
- Janowitz, Anne. "The Pilgrims of Hope: William Morris and the dialectic of romanticism." *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*. Eds. Sally Ledger & Scott McCracken. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 160-183.
- Jones, Aled. *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996.
- Kaiser, David Aram. *Romanticism, Aesthetics, and Nationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Kinna, Ruth. "William Morris: Art, Work, and Leisure." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61:3 (2000). 493-512.
- . *William Morris: The Art of Socialism*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000.
- Kohl, Norbert. *Oscar Wilde: The Works of a Conformist Rebel*. [1980. Oscar Wilde: Das Literarische Werk Zwischen Provokation Und Anpassung]. Trans. David Henry Wilson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Kooistra, Lorraine. *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997.
- Kronenberger, Louis. "Max Beerbohm." *The Surprise of Excellence: Modern Essays on Max Beerbohm*. Ed. J.G. Riewald. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1974. 21-29.
- Kumar, Krishan. *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987.
- Landow, George P. "Ruskin." *Victorian Thinkers*. Ed. Keith Thomas. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. 103-192.
- Langenfeld, Robert. *George Moore: An Annotated Secondary Bibliography of Writings About Him*. New York: AMS Press, 1987.
- Ledger, Sally & McCracken, Scott (eds.). *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- & Luckhurst, Roger (eds.). *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c.1880-1900*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- . "Wilde Women and *The Yellow Book*: The Sexual Politics of Aestheticism and Decadence." *English Literature in Transition* 50:1 (2007). 5-26.
- Le Gallienne, Richard. *The Romantic '90s*. London: Robin Clark Ltd, 1993.

- Levitas, Ruth. "Utopia as Literature, Utopia as Politics." *Zeitgenössische Utopieentwürfe in Literatur und Gesellschaft. Zur Kontroverse seit den Achtziger Jahren*, Ed. Rolf Jucker. Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997. 121-138.
- Lewis, Roger. "The Child and the Man in Max Beerbohm." *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)* 27:4 (1984). 296-303.
- Livesey, Ruth. "Morris, Carpenter, Wilde, and the Political Aesthetics of Labor." *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2004). 601-616.
- Lyon, Janet. *Manifestos: Provocations of the Modern*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Maltz, Diana. *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, 1870-1900*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Marcus, Steven. "Culture and Anarchy Today." *Matthew Arnold. Culture and Anarchy*. Ed. Samuel Lipman. Yale: Yale University Press, 1994. 165-185.
- . *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964.
- Marsh, Jan. "Concerning Love: *News from Nowhere* and Gender." *William Morris & News from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time*, Ed. Stephen Coleman & Paddy O'Sullivan. Devon: Green Books, 1990. 107-125.
- May, J. Lewis. *John Lane and the Nineties*. London: John Lane. The Bodley Head, 1937.
- Mazlish, Bruce. "A Tale of Two Enclosures. Self and Society as a Setting for Utopias." *Theory, Culture & Society* 20:1 (2003). 43-60.
- McDonald, Peter D. *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice 1880-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Mix, Katherine Lyon. *A Study in Yellow: The Yellow Book and Its Contributors*. Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1960.
- Morton, A.L. *The English Utopia*. London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1952.
- Nassaar, Christopher S. *Into the Demon Universe: A Literary Exploration of Oscar Wilde*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.
- The National Observer. A Record and Review*. [London] 21 Apr. 1894.
- Neubauer, John. *The Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992.
- O'Gorman, Francis. *Late Ruskin: New Contexts*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.
- Osborne, Harold. *The Art of Appreciation*. London: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Otis, Laura (ed.). *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century. An Anthology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Pease, Allison. *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. [1962 *Teoria dell'arte D'avanguardia*]. Trans. Gerald Fitzgerald. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1968.
- Praz, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*. London: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- Punch*. [London] 12 May 1894.
- Reade, Brian. *Aubrey Beardsley*. London: Studio Vista, 1967.
- . *Beardsley Re-Mounted*. London: The Eighteen Nineties Society, 1989.
- Riewald, J.G. *Sir Max Beerbohm Man and Writer: A Critical Analysis with a Brief Life and Bibliography*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1953.

- . Introduction. *The Surprise of Excellence: Modern Essays on Max Beerbohm*. Ed. J.G. Riewald. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Book, 1974. vii-xiii.
- Sargent, Lyman Tower. "William Morris and the Anarchist Tradition." *Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris*. Eds. Florence S. Boos & Carole G. Silver. Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 1990. 61-73.
- Shattock, Joanne & Wolff, Michael (eds.). *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982.
- Showalter, Elaine. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1991.
- Shrimpton, Nicholas. "Ruskin and the Aesthetes." *Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern*. Ed. Dinah Birch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 131-152.
- Small, Ian. Introduction. *Oscar Wilde: Complete Short Fiction*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. x-xxxi.
- Snodgrass, Chris. "Decadent Parodies: Aubrey Beardsley's Caricature of Meaning." *Fin de Siècle/ Fin du Globe : Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century*, Ed. John Stokes. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1992. 178-209.
- Somigli, Luca. *Legitimizing the Artist: Manifesto Writing and European Modernism 1885-1915*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.
- Steiner, George. *Real Presences*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Stetz, Margaret D. "Sex, Lies, and Printed Cloth: Bookselling at the Bodley Head in the Eighteen-Nineties." *Victorian Studies* 35:1 (Autumn 1991). 71-86.
- . "The Yellow Book and the Beardsley Myth." *The Eighteen Nineties Society* 26 (1999). 33-42.
- Stokes, John (ed.). *Fin de Siècle/ Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1992.
- . *In the Nineties*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- . *Oscar Wilde*. Essex: Longman Group Ltd., 1978.
- Sullivan, Alvin (ed.). *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837-1913*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984.
- Sutton, Emma. *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Teich, Mikulás & Porter, Roy (eds.). *Fin de Siècle and Its Legacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Thompson, E.P. *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1955.
- The Times* [London]. 20 Apr. 1894.
- Trilling, Lionel. *Matthew Arnold*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1939.
- Tucker, Paul. 'Pater as a "Moralist".' *Pater in the 1990s*. Eds. Laurel Brake & Ian Small. Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 1991. 107-125.
- Turner, Mark W. "Urban Encounters and Visual Play in the Yellow Book." *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers*. Eds. Laurel Brake & Julie Codell. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 138-160.
- Waithe, Marcus. "News from Nowhere, Utopia and Bakhtin's Idyllic Chronotope." *Textual Practice* 16:3 (2002). 459-472.

- Walkowitz, Judith R. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. London: Virago Press, 1992.
- . *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Weintraub, Stanley. *Aubrey Beardsley: Imp of the Perverse*. University Park & London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976.
- Weir, David. *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.
- The Westminster Gazette*. [London] 18 Apr. 1894.
- Wilkinson, Elizabeth & Willoughby, L.A. Introduction. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967. xi-cxcvi.
- Willoughby, Guy. *Art and Christhood: The Aesthetics of Oscar Wilde*. London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993.
- Wilmer, Clive. Introduction. *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1993. ix-xli.
- Woolf, Virginia. *The Common Reader*. 1 vol. Ed. Andrew McNeillie. London: Vintage, 2003.
- Zatlin, Linda. *Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
- Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. [1983]. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- . Introduction. *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. xv-xxxii.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by me; that it is entirely my own work, and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified on the title page.

Signed: Jutta Mackwell