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Gautier, Wilde, and the Visual Arts: Artistic Media and Movement

Claire Bitoun, St Hugh's College, DPhil in Modern Languages

May 2018

In nineteenth-century literary studies and histories, Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) is still remembered as the instigator of the Art for Art's Sake doctrine. His novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) and its preface are recognized to be the starting-points of the propagation of the doctrine but this recognition is usually accompanied by a retrospective appreciation of Gautier's work in light of the more famous authors that succeeded him and developed some of the precepts of the doctrine, such as Baudelaire. This thesis is a comparative study of Gautier and Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) as the two main exponents of the doctrine in their respective cultures. While a comparison between Gautier and Baudelaire mostly highlights the superiority of the latter, the comparison with Wilde allows Gautier to be seen and understood in his own terms, and simultaneously casts a new light on Wilde's contribution to the development of the doctrine. My study is the first to examine the works of the two authors within this comparative scheme through the scope of their aesthetic beliefs.

I argue that in order better to assess their contribution, a formal analysis is necessary to account for their experiments with literary form. The overall aim of the thesis is to re-evaluate the literary value of their fictional works which are often seen, as a result of their commitment to the doctrine, as lacking in depth, content, and as being too descriptive and decorative. The central argument is that it is from the very decorative form of their works that a reflection on literature, its aims and its relation to other artistic media, the visual arts in particular, arises.

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¹ Matthew Potolsky, *Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics, and Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardsley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 48.

Such a linear view of literary history helps understanding the evolution of these movements during the century, but it reduces Gautier's impressive corpus to the production of a stammering writer experimenting with concepts in their infancies, which would only be fully developed subsequently by other writers. This has also shaped the ways in which Gautier is analysed by critics. As a result, some works have become more important than others within his corpus, and *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and *Emaux et Camées* (1852) are now considered to be the referential texts through which Gautier is viewed: the first because of its preface and licentious story, the second because it is envisaged as the most accomplished collection of poems written by Gautier, and has been seen as one of the first Parnassian work before the development of the movement. This restrictive vision of Gautier's corpus does not take into account the importance of the fantastic genre for him, or his engagement with art and art criticism.

This thesis is a comparative study of Gautier and Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) as the two main exponents of the Art for Art's Sake doctrine in their respective cultures. This comparative approach between writers of different periods and different countries has been made possible because of the modern appreciation of movements such as Aestheticism and Decadence as cosmopolitan in nature and travelling across Europe. Such studies usually highlight the influence of Gautier on British Aestheticism and Decadence and on Wilde more specifically.² However, the present study is the first comprehensive comparison between the two authors. While a comparison between Gautier and Baudelaire mostly highlights the superiority of the latter, the comparison with Wilde allows Gautier to be seen and understood in his own terms, and simultaneously casts a new light on Wilde's contribution to the

² Jean Pierrot, for instance, affirms that "the last of the previous generation of writers to capture the particular attention of decadent artists and writers was Théophile Gautier, and more specifically, Gautier the theoretician of the famous notice on *Les Fleurs du mal* and the *Progrès de la poésie* of 1869, as well as Gautier the author of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*." *The Decadent Imagination, 1880-1900* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 42. John R. Reed directly relates Gautier's Art for Art's Sake doctrine with Wilde's aesthetic ideas: "In his preface to *Maupin*, Gautier took an arch stand, very like Wilde's later defense of art for art's sake." *Decadent Style* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985), pp. 23-24.

development of the doctrine. The methodology for the comparison allows for these re-evaluations. Indeed, rather than a study of influence which would only enhance the position of Gautier as the French initiator, I develop a study of the affinities between the two writers following Edward Said's theory.³ Because of the specificity of my approach, Gautier's corpus can be analysed independently from other French writers; although I do also highlight moments of indirect intertextual relationships between the two authors; since Gautier is displaced out of his own context, which lessens his importance as a precursor and allows for a more profound analysis of his work.

Similarly, Wilde has also been seen through other writers and the ways in which he developed the doctrine. While Gautier was the initiator who did not develop the doctrine enough, Wilde is said to have done the opposite and taken the doctrine too far to its extreme, while merely copying what his predecessors in France and in Great Britain had already done.⁴ The comparison with Gautier therefore lessens Wilde's aesthetic extremism and gives a new hindsight into Wilde's aesthetic ideas and practices. My study is the first to examine the works of the two authors within this comparative scheme through the scope of their aesthetic beliefs.

I argue that in order better to assess their contribution, a formal analysis is necessary to account for their experiments with literary form. Indeed, the relationship between the Art for Art's Sake doctrine and form is a rather obvious one: considering the fact that the doctrine rejects any utilitarian purposes in art and advocates for an art which does not include other matters than aesthetic ones, it is unsurprising that writers would focus on form and experiment with literary structures and genres rather than content. The overall aim of the

³ See Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).

⁴ For example, Reed compares the styles of Wilde and Huysmans and suggests that "Wilde goes further than Huysmans in 'reducing much of his novel to phrases'", *Decadent Style*, pp. 38-39. In a similar comparison between *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and *A Rebours* (1884), Jason David Hall and Alex Murray argue that "compared to the syntactical torture of Huysmans' *A Rebours* [...] Wilde's novel is far from grammatically decadent. [...] If there is a trace of stylistic decadence in the novel, we find it most on display in the excessive catalogues of Dorian's vestments and objets d'art.", *Decadent Poetics, Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 3.

thesis is to re-evaluate the literary value of their fictional works which are often seen, as a result of their commitment to the doctrine, as lacking in depth, content, and as being too descriptive and decorative. The central argument is that it is from the very decorative form of their works that a reflection on literature, its aims and its relation to other artistic media, the visual arts in particular, arises. Their works question crucial concepts in literature: the importance of content, the hierarchy within a work between narration and description, the value of beauty, and the relationship between literature and other artistic media.

In order to uncover these reflections in their works, this study analyses the effect of the inclusion of other artistic media, the visual more specifically, in the literary medium. The movements towards visual media come in various shapes through style, correspondences, narrative structures or even the physical presence of artworks. Most critics of Gautier's work highlight the importance of art in his fictional works and refer to his first chosen career as a painter as being very influential on his literary work. For instance, Nathalie David-Weill analysed the effect of Gautier's intimate relation to painting on his creation of characters and of women in particular.⁵ She argued that women are turned into artworks in his work and somehow lack depth and reality, an argument sustained in the collective volume *Art et création chez Théophile Gautier* in which a thematic analysis of Gautier's insertion of art leads to an examination of artworks as agents of mediation.⁶ Whether they are seen to be the gateway into the world of art, the world of dreams or the world of the fantastic, artworks are envisaged as a means to another end, a view challenged in this thesis.

Similarly, several articles are devoted to the pictorial aspect of Gautier's descriptions, but most of these studies are restricted to the depictions in themselves rather than the analysis of the effect of this presence of art in the descriptions and the relation between description and

⁵ Nathalie David-Weill, *Rêve de pierre: la quête de la femme chez Théophile Gautier* (Genève: Droz, 1989).

⁶ Ana Clara Santos and Maria de Jesus Cabral, eds, *Art et création chez Théophile Gautier* (Paris: Editions le Manuscrit, 2013).

narration.⁷ Marie-Claude Schapira is one of the only critics to engage with the fact that Gautier turns the visual arts into words.⁸ The other main critic who offers a deep analysis of the formal aspects of the insertion of the visual arts and how it affects Gautier's works is Rae Beth Gordon in her study of Nerval, Gautier and Huysmans *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century French Literature*.⁹ In her examination of the relations between ornaments and texts, Gordon unites Gautier's fictional works and his art criticism and shows, as this thesis also demonstrates, that there is no clear separation between the two.

On Oscar Wilde's works and their relation to the visual arts, there seems to be a consensus among critics who envisage Wilde's novel as a continuation of his artistic theories and who analyse artworks as both fantastic and aesthetic in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).¹⁰ However, most of these studies focus on a thematic approach and reduce Wilde's corpus to his novel. Josephine Guy and Ian Small offer a new appreciation of Wilde's works by analysing his fairy tales and short stories and examining the links between these, the novel, and the art criticism. This very useful study demonstrates Wilde's continual concern with art throughout his fictional and critical works.¹¹ Nevertheless, the traces of Gautier's influence on Wilde are seen through the scope of French Decadence, a somewhat reductive view of the works of both writers. This brief summary of the studies on the two authors shows the existence of a gap in the criticism which this thesis proposes to tackle.

⁷ Lisette Tohme-Jarrouche, 'L'Art descriptif de Théophile Gautier. La description d'un critique d'art', *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier* (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 1998), XX, pp.125-141; Peter Whyte, 'La Référence artistique comme procédé littéraire dans quelques romans et contes de Gautier', in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier, l'art et l'artiste*, 2 vols (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 1982), II, pp. 281-296.

⁸ Marie-Claude Schapira, 'Le Language des couleurs dans les nouvelles de Théophile Gautier', in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier, l'art et l'artiste*, 2 vols (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 1982), II, pp. 269-280.

⁹ Rae Beth Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ See, for instance, Marie-Noëlle Zeender, *Le Tryptique de Dorian Gray: essai sur l'art dans le récit d'Oscar Wilde* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2000); Christine Queffelec, *L'Esthétique de Gustave Flaubert et d'Oscar Wilde, les rapports de l'art et de la vie* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008).

¹¹ Josephine Guy and Ian Small, *Studying Oscar Wilde: History, Criticism, and Myth* (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2006).

This thesis is divided into three chapters: each chapter sets up a comparison between Gautier and Wilde, focuses on one specific medium, and investigates the ways in which the visual arts are weaved into Gautier's and Wilde's works. Following this methodology, the first chapter offers a comparison of *Arria Marcella* (1852) and 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.' (1889) through the scope of sculpture. Sculpture, and more specifically marble, are intrinsically connected with the notion of purity attached to the Art for Art's Sake doctrine. However, the relation between Gautier, Wilde, and the concept of purity is complex and the two authors also use the metaphor of marble and its association with Antiquity in order to enhance the structural fragmentation of their own works. Marble is also the material medium that brings solidity to literature. The second chapter offers an analysis of the descriptive as shifting towards the visual arts analysing *Le Roman de la momie* (1858) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In contrast to realist trends of the nineteenth century, the two authors free description from its subservient relation to the narration, which allows them to ponder the autonomy of fragmented descriptive passages in their works. In turn, these passages change the focus, and threaten to undermine the coherence, of their works. The last chapter examines incursions into the decorative arts in *Le Capitaine Fracasse* (1863) and Wilde's fairy tales: patterning, cyclic constructions, and repetitive structures dull the reader's ability to find recognizable, and familiar features in the work, seemingly suggesting that ornaments are indeed the points of reference of the works under study. Displayed as the symbol of the desire of Gautier and Wilde to free art from utility, the ornament encapsulates their examination of the relation between utility and beauty, claiming beauty as structural.

The study therefore challenges the prevailing critical perception of Gautier and Wilde's works as minor authors for their literary contribution in fiction (Gautier), or as authors whose importance lies more in their biographical context than in the depth of the content of their works (Wilde). To some extent, the view according to which literature is

valued for its content, its message, more than for its beauty which, in turn, establishes a hierarchy within the literary production and the authors and works which are deemed interesting enough to be analysed, still very much colours our contemporary vision of literature. In the conclusion of the thesis, I argue that seeing literature as decoration completely disrupts the ways in which we consider literature as an exception within the realm of art (we tend not to ascribe such value on content or message when discussing painting, sculpture, or even ballet and opera). In that regard, Gautier and Wilde can be seen as exceptionally revolutionary and visionary in the ways in which the insertion of visual arts, appearing as the foregrounding of superficial and superfluous decoration, actually deconstructs existing preconceptions on the aims of literature.

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Introduction: Art for Art's Sake and Literary Purity in the Nineteenth Century

The central idea of [Wilde's] tortuously disdainful prattling, pursuing as its chief aim the heckling of the Philistine, and laboriously seeking the opposite pole to sound common-sense, is the glorification of art.¹

Théophile Gautier extols, in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, the basest sensuality, which, if it should become the general rule, would carry humanity back to the condition of savages living in sexual promiscuousness without individual love, and without any familial institutions whatever [...].²

These two quotations come from Max Nordau's extensive study of what he believed constituted degenerate art, *Degeneration* (1892). In it he attacked numerous artists, among whom were Théophile Gautier and Oscar Wilde. In *Degeneration*, the two authors are portrayed as representatives of this decayed art in their respective countries and abroad, their influences considered a disease spreading through space and time. Whether the two authors are said to be Parnassians, Diabolists, Aesthetes or Decadents, Nordau's criticisms centred on their conception of art and more specifically their practice of Art for Art's Sake, the exaltation of art above all else, including morality. Nordau placed a direct filiation between Gautier and Wilde, a filiation commonly acknowledged by critics of Wilde or theoreticians of the Decadent or Aesthetic movements in Great Britain. In Nordau's study, the term filiation carries ideas of decadence and degeneration, which suggests a return to primitivism: "[Gautier's] descriptions [...] recall some crude mosaic of the later Byzantine decadence [...]."³ The comparison between Gautier's style and the Oriental decorative arts of a Decadent period was the basis of Nordau's negative judgment on the French author. The

¹ Max Simon Nordau, *Degeneration* (London: London, 1913), p. 320.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 274-275.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

quotation also underlines several key characteristics of Wilde's and Gautier's aesthetic views which are analysed in this thesis: their constant inclusion of the visual arts inside the literary medium, and their references to Oriental art devoid of barbaric connotations.

In their respective cultures, both authors remain perceived as fierce advocates of this vision of aestheticism, that is still associated today with movements such as Decadence, Aestheticism, or Formalism. As the example of Nordau shows, however, these movements seem to confine the two authors and their works within a circumscribed aesthetic, from which Gautier and Wilde constantly deviate, a sign of their failure as authors for several contemporary and modern critics. For instance, Nordau portrayed Gautier as both barbaric and extremely refined, while his decadence regularly lacks decadence in comparison with Baudelaire's, even for modern critics.⁴ Similarly, Mario Praz suggested that Wilde's Decadence, used in his time as a value judgment against his work, is not as real as it seems.⁵ Regardless of the standpoint critics take when discussing Gautier and Wilde, it seems that the two authors are too extreme or insufficient in regards to most nineteenth-century literary movements. Whether it be Aestheticism, for the critic Leon Chai, "a desire to redefine the relation of art to life, to impart to life itself the form of a work of art and thereby raise it to a higher level of existence", and for Robert Vincent Johnson "a new conviction of the

⁴ "Baudelaire's contribution to the cult of artificiality is much richer than Gautier's." Alfred Edward Carter, *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1830-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), p. 9; "what is fully developed in Baudelaire is already adumbrated in Gautier", John Robert Reed, *Decadent Style* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), p. 76; "In this regard, Gautier, not Baudelaire, is the John the Baptist of the Decadent movement; and like the Baptist, his most recognizable gesture is pointing to the true Messiah [...]", Matthew Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics, and Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardsley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 48.

⁵ "au beau milieu d'une scène qui veut être horrifiante, Wilde est capable de glisser une cigarette opiacée [...] et tout l'édifice s'écroule, révélant que le véritable intérêt de l'auteur réside dans le décoratif. [...] Ces images décoratives inopportunes attestent [...] combien superficiel l'hédonisme de Wilde, gourmand et capricieux comme un enfant irresponsable", Mario Praz, *La Chair, la mort et le diable, le romantisme noir* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1977), p. 300.

importance of beauty as compared with- and even in opposition to- other values”,⁶ Decadence, described by Patrick McGuinness as a “synonym of subtle, ingenious and complex”,⁷ or Art for Art’s Sake, the autonomous art which is the starting-point of this thesis, seen by Albert Cassagne as a continuation of Romanticism accompanied by a hatred for the bourgeois and a love for refinement, Gautier and Wilde have been said to fit into most of these movements or groups.⁸ The eclecticism of the two authors prevents them from being studied through the reduced scopes of these movements; their intellectual casualness and ironic distance with their own works and practices make it even harder to affirm anything with certainty about them. However, thinking of them inside these doctrines helps to understand how their own views on art respond to, diverge from, or echo characteristics of these movements, as well as their inner contradictions.

The movements to which Gautier and Wilde belong are transnational or, more precisely, existed in both France and Great Britain. Cultural movements between the two countries and their capitals proliferated at an extraordinary rate during the nineteenth century, so much so that some critics have proposed seeing the fin de siècle as a period of world literature in which national identities were less prevalent and where international currents dominated.⁹ Most studies analysing nineteenth-century Paris

⁶ Leon Chai, *Aestheticism: the Religion of Art in Post-Romantic Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 9; Robert Vincent Johnson, *Aestheticism* (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 1; see also D. J. Mossop, *Pure Poetry: Studies in French Poetic Theory and Practice 1746 to 1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Karl E. Beckson, *Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890s: An Anthology of British Poetry and Prose* (Chicago, Ill: Academy Chicago, 1981).

⁷ Patrick McGuinness, *Symbolism, Decadence and the Fin-de-Siècle: French and European Perspectives* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p. 3; see also Richard Gilman, *Decadence: the Strange Life of an Epithet* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979); Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination, 1880-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Linda C. Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁸ See Albert Cassagne, *La Théorie de l’Art pour l’Art en France chez les derniers romantiques et les premiers idéalistes* (Paris: Lucien Dorbon, 1959); Gene H. Bell-Villada, *Art for Art’s Sake & Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped Shape the Ideology & Culture of Aestheticism, 1790-1990* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

⁹ See Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

view the French capital as culturally dominant in the Victorian era. From Walter Benjamin to Patrice Higonnet, Paris seems to rule supreme in the realm of arts and throughout the modern age.¹⁰ Nevertheless, London simultaneously and likewise asserted its status as a model for global transformation: the British capital was the centre of the largest colonial empire, the heart of industrialisation, urbanisation, as well as the core of developing capitalism. In a situation of intellectual stimulation, the two cities mirrored each other as much as they established themselves as each other's paragon. For instance, British societies such as The National Vigilance Association actively tried to control and censor translations of French novels since "there was nothing that so corroded the human character, or so sapped the vitality of a nation, as the spread of this noxious and licentious literature [...]."¹¹ The poisonous influence of French cultural products was threatening the nation's identity and Victorian Britain resisted this cultural influence stating that morals, good taste, and purity were British exceptions in comparison to France.

However, such exchanges did multiply, both between the two countries and between different artistic media: French writers would refer to British painters, British writers alluded to French painters, and British painters were influenced by French writers.¹² Among these influential French writers was Théophile Gautier. His

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002); Patrice Higonnet, *Paris, capitale du monde: des Lumières au Surréalisme* (Paris: Tallandier, 2006).

¹¹ Alex Coote, *Pernicious Literature, Debate in the House of Commons, The National Vigilance Association* (Uxbridge: Hutchings, 1889), p. 5. For more on the subject, see Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977).

¹² "la peinture anglaise [...] est un art d'observation et de malice, ambitieux de l'applaudissement du sourire. Le roman honnête et le comique, Hogarth et Goldsmith, voilà son lot, tels sont ses maîtres." Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *La peinture à l'Exposition de 1855* (Paris: Dentu, 1855), p. 26. Moreover, George Eliot wrote about the French female artist Rosa Bonheur in *George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals* (Edinburgh, London: W. Blackwood, 1885). Similarly Whistler's famous lecture, *Mr Whistler's Ten o'clock* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1888) was deeply influenced by Baudelaire's *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* (1863). Their connection is depicted in a painting by Henri Fantin-Latour in the 1864's *Hommage à Delacroix* where the two men are joined through their admiration for Delacroix.

importance grew after the legend of the red waistcoat during the battle surrounding *Hernani* (1830), and he quickly became one of the main voices of the second generation of Romantic writers after Hugo, Lamartine, and Musset. Interestingly, Gautier can both be considered as a mainstream author while at the same time representing revolutionary ideas for later generations. Indeed, his involvement in French newspapers of the time as an art critic meant that Gautier became a *passage obligé* for any aspiring artist. They looked for his patronage as one of the writers who made and unmade reputations in the realm of painting, sculpture, or theatre. He was also clearly influential on the literary scene, since later writers would use *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) and *Emaux et camées* (1852) as reference works. These two sources were mainly used by the Parnassians or the Symbolists as revolutionary texts, which were employed to create new rules and ideals for literature.

The Parnassians, who saw themselves more as a group than a school, claimed that the defining feature that was common within their eclectic group was their love for art. In that regard, they built on Gautier's cult for art. And Catulle Mendès, who wrote *La Légende du Parnasse contemporain* (1884), openly placed Gautier as one of the masters of the group: "une parole de Victor Hugo, un sourire approbateur de Théophile Gautier, de Leconte de Lisle, de Charles Baudelaire, de Théodore de Banville, nous faisaient oublier toutes les vaines criailleries et tous les rires cruels."¹³ The Symbolists, composed of former Parnassians or Decadents, heirs of Baudelaire, also recognised the importance of Théophile Gautier, "ce prodigieux écrivain qui a nom Théophile Gautier."¹⁴ In Moréas' manifesto of the movement, the Symbolists claimed that their poetry sought to "vêtir l'Idée d'une forme sensible qui, néanmoins, ne serait pas son

¹³ Catulle Mendès, *La Légende du Parnasse contemporain* (Bruxelles: Auguste Brancart, 1884), p. 10.

¹⁴ Jean Moréas, *Les Premières armes du Symbolisme* (Paris: Vanier, 1889), p. 29.

but à elle-même, mais qui, tout en servant à exprimer l'Idée, demeurerait sujette.”¹⁵ The Platonic influence and the importance of form can also be found in Gautier's works, as well as the Baudelairian concept of correspondences between arts, the seeds of which can be found in Gautier's prose and poetry. As a result, authors such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Huysmans were clearly influenced by Gautier, and they appropriated Gautier's ideas of Art for Art's Sake as their own and reshaped them into their own aesthetic ideals.

Gautier was also known in Great Britain. Authors such as Walter Pater or Algernon Swinburne spread Gautier's ideas and works across the Channel and quoted him alongside Baudelaire as the masters of the British Aesthetic movement. British newspapers only really began to discuss Gautier after his death in 1872: “everyone has heard of Théophile Gautier, many will identify him as the author of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, [...] the collection of veritable gems published under the title of *Emaux et camées* [...]”¹⁶ However, Gautier was seen as more licentious in Britain than in France. Gautier was therefore known more as the man who wrote *Mademoiselle de Maupin* than for the rest of his impressive corpus: “the poet who was guilty of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* [...]”¹⁷ Another reviewer focused on the reputation of Gautier's novel fifty years after its publication:

While *Mademoiselle de Maupin* was meeting with an enthusiastic welcome from artists and people of refined taste, it was spoken of by the public as a work of ill fame; in spite of the fifty years which now weigh upon her, the enigmatical and fantastic young lady still inspires the same careful guardians of their children's innocence with sincere terror- I cannot say that they are

¹⁵ Moréas, *Les Premières armes du Symbolisme*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁶ Anon, ‘Théophile Gautier’, *The Pall Mall Gazette* (26 October 1872).

¹⁷ Evelyn Jerrod, ‘Book Review of Théophile Gautier's *Portraits Contemporains*’, *The Academy* (17 April 1875).

entirely wrong- and honest women do not dare to pronounce her name without lowering both voice and eyes.¹⁸

This time-gap of fifty years is particularly striking, as it relates to the delay through which French writers of the 1850s became representatives of new literary trends in Britain in the 1880s, which highlights yet another layer of complexity to the Franco-British connection during the nineteenth century. One possible justification for Gautier's infamous reputation in Britain fifty years after the publication of his novel could be its utilisation by writers such as Swinburne and Wilde as an object of counter-culture in Victorian Britain, a way to distance themselves from notions of morality, social or religious concerns, following the precepts in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*.

But even without Swinburne's praise of Gautier, the French writer was famous in Great Britain. In the late nineteenth century, several newspapers insisted on how well the British public knew him: "Gautier has many readers in this country";¹⁹ "Everyone has heard of Théophile Gautier, many will identify him as the author of *Maupin*".²⁰ *Mademoiselle de Maupin* was the work that made, or unmade, his reputation in Great Britain, but Gautier was also recognised, to a lesser extent, as the author of travel writings and short stories: "a writer of popular books of travel, or again of short stories, or critical feuilletons on painting and drama in the newspaper."²¹ Through these examples, Gautier is depicted as a protean writer, which is a characteristic that Wilde would try to emulate. However, some reviewers pointed out the fact that there was another Gautier behind the author of *Maupin*: "the brilliant writer [...] is better known

¹⁸ G. de Labrit, 'The Portraits of Théophile Gautier', *Arts and Letters* (October 1889).

¹⁹ John H. Ingram, 'A Posthumous Work of Théophile Gautier', *The Academy* (7 August 1880).

²⁰ Anon, 'Théophile Gautier', *The Pall Mall Gazette* (26 October 1872).

²¹ Anon, 'Théophile Gautier', *Every Saturday: a Journal of Choice Reading* (1 March 1873).

in England by his name than by his work, which are themselves better known by their names than by their contents [...] probably a very few of the number of Englishmen who read French are already acquainted with that or with any other of his novels”.²² It is interesting to note that the same phenomenon would happen to Wilde: the man would become more famous than his works at the beginning of the twentieth century, an image that would remain and still, to some extent, subsists today. This other Gautier was probably envisaged as a writer with more depth, the writer who wrote *Emaux et Camées*, “behind the Gautier of the travels, the tales, and the criticisms, there was another and more significant Gautier, who was but slightly known to the English reader.”²³ This classification of the works of Gautier shows the existence of a hierarchy within his literary production: his short stories, essays, and travel writings are not envisaged as serious works in comparison with his poetry or even *Maupin*. The same judgement would be cast upon Wilde’s works, as his fairy tales are rarely analysed by critics in comparison with his novel and plays. This subtle way of casting judgement on a literary work proves how, when it comes to prose, the most valued work is one that is meant to have a message, in contrast with works of pure imagination, which I will analyse in the first chapter in relation to the fantastic genre. This judgement is still present today in modern criticism, and this thesis questions this hierarchy in literature, which also applies to the arts in general, and justifies the choice I made of analysing certain works, deemed less serious and worthy of interest, rather than others.

Overall, the opinion of the British press was a mixed one: reviewers did appreciate Gautier’s style, and recognized that he was a successful journalist, but they denounced his unconditional love for beauty that led him, allegedly, to forget about

²² Anon, ‘Théophile Gautier’, *Every Saturday: a Journal of Choice Reading* (1 March 1873).

²³ *Ibid.*

morality. To some extent, their representation of Gautier was the same as the one portrayed in France during Gautier's time, and after his death. For example, an anonymous reviewer commented on the first English translation of *Le Roman de la Momie* (1858) in 1886 in terms that mirror the ways in which the novel was being described after its publication in France, as the second chapter will show: "the book is remarkable throughout for an entire lack of moral beauty in the characters, a fact which renders them passively, if not actively, objectionable, one is much inclined to think that the labours of both the author and the translator have been wasted upon the volume before us, notwithstanding its talent."²⁴ The anonymous reviewer of *Everyday Saturday* pointed out this common critical 'misunderstanding' of Gautier's works in Britain and in France: "Even for the general French reader, the most significant man in him was almost put out of sight by the more commonplace."²⁵

It seems that only a 'happy few', which included Swinburne and Wilde, praised what all the reviewers condemned. Several reviewers showed how Wilde was influenced by Gautier's Art for Art's Sake doctrine, and they even went as far as to suggest that Wilde was merely reformulating Gautier's ideas. Téodor de Wyzewa, for example, affirmed that Wilde's *Intentions* (1891) "se rattachent à des principes que nous avons déjà rencontrés chez nos maîtres d'il y a vingt ans. Elles ne sont rien de plus que la doctrine de l'art pour l'art, telle que l'ont formulée les romantiques et les parnassiens, mais poussée à des conséquences extrêmes [...]."²⁶ It is worth noting that this remark was made by a French critic on a British writer, and de Wyzewa could have

²⁴ Anon, 'A novel by Théophile Gautier, Book Review, *The Romance of the Mummy*, Translated by M. Young, London, J. and B. Maxwell', *The Spectator* (7 August 1886).

²⁵ 'Théophile Gautier', *Everyday Saturday*.

²⁶ Téodor de Wyzewa, 'M. Wilde et les jeunes littérateurs anglais', *Revue Bleue* (April 1892), pp. 423-429, p. 427. Richard Hibbitt argues against the fact that Wilde merely copied Gautier's doctrine in his essays in 'Oscar Wilde and 'la critique impressionniste'', *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, 77 (Spring 2013).

obviously tried to emphasize the influence of French literature on British literary production. The cultural opposition between France and Great Britain meant that, at the time, each party was trying to enhance their own importance in comparison to the other. De Wyzewa reduced Wilde's works to a mere reformulation of ideas which were, already, almost out-dated in France, which his commentary on the time-gap illustrates. However, as this introduction will show, it was not only the French who acknowledged the influence of Gautier and other French writers on Wilde. Similar links were created between the two authors by other critics, emphasizing their resemblances. The influential British critic Andrew Lang, in the Preface to Maxime Du Camp's *Théophile Gautier* (1893, English translation by J. E. Gordon) affirmed that Gautier "was not a poet of the highest [...] creative order",²⁷ that he lacked "the moral enthusiasm of Wordsworth, the natural magic of Keats, the ardent spirit of Burns" and "vitality, this large and eager sympathy with what is universal."²⁸ He ended the preface with the regret that "in thinking of Gautier's tales, one remembers [...] the art rather than the narrative."²⁹ Similarly, Yeats commenting on Wilde's style in 'The Decay of Lying' (1891), affirmed that Wilde was searching for sound rather than sense and saw it as "an example of the vague impressiveness that spoilt his writing",³⁰ arguing that Wilde sacrificed meaning for form.

As this introduction has already shown, it is not uncommon for critics to create a parallel between the works of Gautier and Wilde, whether the discussion is on Aestheticism, Decadence, or their respective corpuses. These references to the existence of the influence of Gautier on Wilde build upon an analysis of the echoes and

²⁷ Andrew Lang in *Théophile Gautier*, Maxime Du Camp (Honolulu, University Press of the Pacific, 2004), p. 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

³⁰ Yeats quoted in *Decadent Poetics, Literature and Form at the British Fin-de-Siècle*, eds. Jason David Hall and Alex Murray (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 10.

correspondences of Gautier's Art for Art's Sake doctrine in France and in Britain during the nineteenth century. They suggest that Wilde knew Gautier and drew ideas from the French writer. Indeed, there is direct proof showing that Wilde knew Gautier and his works. In his study of Wilde's books, Thomas Wright refers to Gautier as one of Wilde's favourite French authors, and affirms that *Mademoiselle de Maupin* was an important part of Wilde's library and life: "Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* was probably among the French novels Wilde devoured in his youth", "Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* was another of Wilde's golden books: during his 1882 tour of America, he could not bear to travel without it [...]".³¹ The last quotation refers to a letter in which Wilde claimed that Gautier's books were necessary for him: "I can't travel without Balzac and Gautier [...]".³²

The fact that Wright had to find proof of Wilde owning Gautier's works within Wilde's works is significant, since it shows that Wilde's references to Gautier and his works are indeed the only testaments proving the existence of a relationship between the two authors. In the Catalogue listing Wilde's possessions at 16 Tite Street sold on April 24 1895, Gautier (among other authors) is absent from the list. While Dumas and Zola are explicitly named (lots number 24 and 25), we can only assume and guess that Gautier is present in the 10 lots vaguely entitled 'French novels', which amount to more than 300 volumes in total. But this is merely speculation, and the only tangible proof of Wilde knowing Gautier and his works comes directly from Wilde himself.

Wilde quoted Gautier, and referred to him as well as to some of his works, on several occasions. These references are present in a variety of sources: his correspondence, his essays, his articles, and his fiction. We have already seen a letter

³¹ Thomas Wright, *Oscar's Books. A Journey around the Library of Oscar Wilde* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2008), p. 101, p. 214.

³² Letter to Julia Ward Howe, 6 July 1882, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 175.

in which Wilde referred to Gautier's works, but there are more instances in his correspondence in which the French writer is present. In a letter from 1890, Wilde alluded to Gautier as an exceptional critic stating that: "even Gautier had his limitations just as much as Diderot had". In 1882, he discussed a translation of *Emaux et Camées*, and on two occasions he referred to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*.³³ In *De Profundis* (1905), Wilde claimed his resemblance to Gautier in a sentence which he had already used in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), attributing it to Dorian: "like Gautier I have always been one of those *pour qui le monde visible existe*."³⁴ What is interesting to note for the argument of this thesis is that this quotation is taken from the Goncourt's *Journal*, which displays the existence of a Gautier Wilde knew through other writers. This shows that there is an unmediated link between the two authors, through which Wilde reads Gautier's works, as well as a mediated relationship, through which Gautier's ideas are brought to Wilde by other writers.³⁵ This quotation also highlights the importance of the Goncourt in the discussion around literature and the visual arts, which will be developed further in the thesis.

In these references, we find the same focus on *Emaux et Camées* and *Mademoiselle de Maupin* that was visible in the depiction portrayed by British newspapers. In 'The Critic as Artist', Wilde discussed Gautier's 'Symphonie en blanc majeur' in relation to the Impressionists' pictorial productions, and he described it as

³³ To the Editor of the Scots Observer, 23 July 1890, 16 Tite Street, pp. 441-442; to Theodore Tilton, Postmark 14 November 1882, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 190; "Je trouve la terre aussi belle que le ciel, et le corps aussi beau que l'âme", to H. C. Marillier, Postmark 8 November 1885, Station Hotel, Newcastle-on-Tyne, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 267. This is a quotation from Chapter IX of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. "Have you a copy of Aubrey's drawing of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*?", to Leonard Smithers, Circa 4 May 1898, Paris, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1060.

³⁴ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, De Profundis: 'Epistola: in carcere e vinculis'*, ed. by Ian Small, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), II, p. 192; "Like Gautier, he was one for whom the visible world existed", *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. by Joseph Bristow and Ian Small, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), III, p. 278.

³⁵ Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989), 1er mai 1857, I, p. 254.

“that flawless masterpiece of colour and music which may have suggested the type as well as the titles of many of their best pictures.”³⁶ This quotation proves how Wilde had absorbed some of Gautier’s beliefs about the inter-connections between different artistic media, and the particular influences between literature and painting. In another reference, Wilde compared Gautier’s description of the representation of *As You Like It* in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, named “that golden book of spirit and sense, that holy writ of beauty” in reference to Swinburne’s characterization of Gautier’s novel, to a representation of the play at Combe House.³⁷ Wilde’s comparison between a theatrical representation and Gautier’s novel demonstrates once again how flexible he envisaged the limits between artistic media to be.

In other references, we can also find another typical way of viewing Gautier which has already been discussed in this introduction: the relation between Gautier and Baudelaire. On several occasions, Wilde refers to the two authors together as if they constituted a literary duo: “Like Baudelaire, he was extremely fond of cats, and with Gautier, he was fascinated by ‘that sweet marbled monster’”, “the book that Gautier loved, it is Baudelaire’s masterpiece.”³⁸ We have already seen how the comparison between Baudelaire and Gautier is often used to highlight Gautier’s shortcomings in comparison to Baudelaire. This negative comparison was not developed by Wilde. However, these examples show that Wilde’s understanding of Gautier was coloured by

³⁶ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Criticism: Historical Criticism, Intentions, The Soul of Man, ‘The Critic as Artist’*, ed. by Josephine M. Guy, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), IV, p. 193.

³⁷ ‘As You Like It at Combe House’, *Dramatic Review*, 6 June 1885, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Journalism*, ed. by John Stokes and Mark W. Turner, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), VI, p. 57. Swinburne wrote a Sonnet on Gautier’s novel in which he called it “the golden book of spirit and sense,/ The holy writ of beauty”, Algernon Charles Swinburne, ‘Sonnet (with a copy of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*)’, *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Major Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann and Charles L. Sligh (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 170.

³⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Criticism: Historical Criticism, Intentions, the Soul of Man, ‘Pen, Pencil and Poison’*, ed. by Josephine M. Guy, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), IV, p. 108, ‘The Critic as Artist’, p. 171.

the critical discussions surrounding the two authors in France and in Britain during the nineteenth century, which frequently associated the two French authors. Wilde's vision of Gautier was also deeply influenced by Baudelaire's vision of Gautier, as Wilde's references to *la consolation des arts* in Gautier's poetry come from Baudelaire's analysis of Gautier's works.³⁹ This concept is indeed loosely attributed to Gautier while in reality, it was Baudelaire writing about Gautier in 1859 who said: "D'un autre côté, il a introduit dans la poésie un élément nouveau, que j'appellerai la consolation par les arts, par tous les objets pittoresques qui réjouissent les yeux et amusent l'esprit."⁴⁰

These examples show the complexity of the literary and cultural relations that exist between Gautier and Wilde. They prove that Wilde desired to claim Gautier to be one of the masters who coloured his own works, but they also demonstrate that Wilde knew Gautier through images and associations that were already in place in Wilde's time. Did Wilde know another Gautier than the writer of *Emaux et Camées* and *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, friend and admirer of Baudelaire, and cat lover? This thesis will answer this question by analysing the relations between some of the works of Gautier and Wilde that are less examined by critics. What can be ascertained is the fact that no critic has found a direct connection between the two authors outside of the references already mentioned that would attest of Wilde corresponding with Gautier, or even meeting him since Wilde had not been to France by the time that Gautier died. It seems indeed highly unlikely that they knew each other through other means than Wilde meeting French writers who had themselves known Gautier (mainly Edmond de Goncourt), through Wilde knowing French writers who knew Gautier and his works

³⁹ In 'The English Renaissance of Art', Wilde talks about "that Consolation des Arts which is the key note of Gautier's poetry," *Essays and Lectures* (London: Methuen, 1909), p. 148; in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is another reference to this concept: "Was it not Gautier who used to write about la consolation des arts ? ", p. 261.

⁴⁰ Charles Baudelaire, 'Théophile Gautier' in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1975), II, p. 126.

(Baudelaire, Flaubert, Mallarmé) and through English writers who were also familiar with parts of Gautier's corpus (Swinburne, Pater, Ruskin).

For Swinburne or Wilde there seems to be a clear nostalgia for the French period of the mid-century. However, it can also be argued that naming a master who was both dead and foreign was a means of dismissing the competition of contemporary writers, that is to say, no contemporary of theirs was worthy enough to earn the title of master, which both lessened the importance of other writers and enhanced their own. As a consequence of this French tradition finding its way into British literature, Wilde is sometimes considered more French than British and is therefore placed on the side of immoral and licentious literature, to which the reception of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* bears witness:

There is indeed more of 'poison' than of 'perfection' in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [...]. Mr. Wilde has preferred the sensuous and hyperdecorative manner of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, and without Gautier's power, has spoilt a promising conception by clumsy unideal treatment.⁴¹

Like Gautier and his red waistcoat, Wilde was famous for his own personality and eccentricity. Wilde was also the famous playwright, as well as the author of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, of fairy tales and poems. In addition, he also contributed to several newspapers and wrote essays on art. Like Gautier, he was a protean artist, and appeared as both 'mainstream' (his plays were commercial successes that established his authority as a writer⁴²) and somehow shocking with *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and

⁴¹ The Baron de Book-Worms, 'Review of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*', *Punch* (19 July 1890). For more on the subject, see *Art and Morality: a Defence of The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. by Stuart Mason (London: J. Jacobs, 1908).

⁴² See, for example, Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), for the analysis of the relations between Wilde and his public.

Salomé (1891). As contemporary and modern critics alike point out, there is a clear ‘frenchness’ to Wilde, and the contours of Wilde’s relationship to French literature (and to André Gide in particular⁴³), culture, and politics have been examined. However, Baudelaire, Stendhal, Mallarmé or Huysmans are often brought to the fore as Wilde’s main French masters in spite of the numerous affinities he shared with Gautier. More subtle, significant relations exist between the two authors, whether they are literary, aesthetic, philosophical, or political. Explicit and implicit points of contact occurred between Gautier and Wilde and analysing these in this thesis further enhances our understanding of both writers in a cross-cultural context.

This thesis is a study of the intertextual relationships between Gautier and Wilde. Intertextuality unveils the relationships between and among writings and suggests that the meaning of a text can be found between this text and “all the other texts to which it refers or relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations”, according to Allen Graham in his study of the concept.⁴⁴ Intertextuality, then, accounts for the existence of relations between texts, relations between texts and authors, and relations between authors. This broad and rather elusive concept encompasses all the different kinds of relations that can be found within and outside a text. Allen Graham’s definition of intertextuality as making meaning emerge from references to other texts and relations with other texts or authors highlights two distinct ways of apprehending literary relations. The first one, which suggests the existence of “references” to another text or author, leads towards a study of influence. In order better to understand what this study entails, I will use Ihab H. Hassan’s article

⁴³ See, for example, Jonathan Fryer, *André & Oscar: Gide, Wilde, and the Gay Art of Living* (London: Allison & Busby, 1999).

⁴⁴ Allen Graham, *Intertextuality* (London : Routledge, 2000), p. 1. The involvement of Julia Kristeva with the notion of intertextuality is ascertained by *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. by Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 520.

on the analysis of the definition of literary influence. Here, Hassan problematizes influence in relation to the study of similarities and causality, which are its two main components. Should a critic focus solely on similarities, “his efforts are deemed superficial”:

When we say that A has influenced B, we mean that after literary or aesthetic analysis we can discern a number of significant similarities between the works of A and B. We may also mean that historical, social, and perhaps psychological analyses of the data available about A and B reveal similarities, points of contact, between the “lives” or “minds” of the two writers. So far we have established no influence: we have only documented what I shall call affinity.⁴⁵

By contrast, influence is discernible only when the critic knows “what made a writer susceptible to the influence of another, and we need to know, as a matter of historical fact, the nature and extent of that writer’s contact with his predecessor.”⁴⁶ The study of influence requires “biographical, sociological, and philosophical” proofs attesting the existence of sources that exhibit the relation between the two authors. Therefore, the analysis of the concept of influence unveils a division in the ways in which a critic can examine the relations between texts and authors: one that is the study of influence, “when [...] we have gleaned [...] the facts which allow us to see correlations operating on several coordinate levels”, one that is the study of the similarities, points of contact, or affinities, which does not require the proof needed for the study of influence.⁴⁷ Historically, influence suggests power over someone, as the definition from the *Litttré*

⁴⁵ Ihab H. Hassan, ‘The Problem of Influence in Literary History: Notes towards a Definition’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 14, n° 1 (September 1955), pp. 66-76, p. 66, p. 68.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

(1872-1877) proves: “Autorité, crédit, ascendant [...]”,⁴⁸ while *affinité* simply suggests “conformité, convenance, rapport entre plusieurs choses [...]”.⁴⁹

Within the frame of this thesis, the study of the influence of Gautier on Wilde seems difficult since, as we have already seen, the proofs of Wilde’s contact with Gautier are scarce. Furthermore, the additional complexity of comparing two authors who use (for the most part) different languages makes it even harder to assess the extent of the contact between them, since we assume that Wilde read Gautier’s works in French, while in fact he could also have read some of his works in English or, indeed, he might have read some other sources on Gautier in English, which adds a further layer of mediation between the two authors. But this is not the only problem arising from a study of influence between the two authors. Harold Bloom, in his important study *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life* suggests that whenever there is a case of influence, there is a case of anxiety of influence. He affirms that: “a strong poet seeks not simply to vanquish the rival but to assert the integrity of his or her own writing self.”⁵⁰ In the study, Bloom creates the same distinction already encountered between influence, which he defines as “literary love, tempered with defense” and “echoes and allusions”, which would be the equivalent of what Hassan called affinities.⁵¹ In this context, it is hard to find proof of Wilde’s “defense” towards Gautier, or of the pressure of the influence he could have felt towards the French writer. On the contrary, it appears as if Wilde were actively searching for affinities with the French writer as a way to affirm himself in contrast to other British writers, as we have already seen with Swinburne. Besides, the study of influence infers the existence of a hierarchy in the

⁴⁸ Emile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris: Gallimard Hachette, 1966), T 4, pp. 973-4.

⁴⁹ Emile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris: Gallimard Hachette, 1965), T 1, pp. 199-200.

⁵⁰ Harold Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

literary production since the writer feels the weight of the ‘tradition’ that came before him or her. In order to problematize the differences between influence and affinities, Edward Said’s study *The World, the Text, and the Critic* provides a useful theoretical frame through which the problems of the study of influence become clear.

Here, Said does not divide the study of intertextuality between influence and affinity but between filiation and affiliation. In the nineteenth century, filiation was defined exclusively as a biological bond: “descendance de père en fils en ligne directe”,⁵² while affiliation merely suggests “association”.⁵³ Filiation, which would be Said’s equivalent of influence, is defined by him as a relationship “held together by natural bonds and natural forms of authority- involving obedience, fear, love, respect, and instinctual conflict” and mirrors biological reproduction and lineage.⁵⁴ However, Said argues that modern writers like Eliot showed that this theoretical notion of filiation could not be sustained anymore: “the aridity, wastefulness, and sterility of modern life make filiation an unreasonable alternative at least, an unattainable at most. One cannot think about continuity in biological terms [...]”.⁵⁵ According to Said, filiation poses the more specific problem of envisaging the history of literature within a linear view of time:

filiative conception of sociohistorical time such as this totally obscures the interesting problem of emergence, in which cultural phenomena are not simply ascribed priority or a miraculous birth, but are treated as a family of ideas emerging ‘permanently in discourse’. Cultural events are not best understood as if they were human beings born

⁵² Emile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris: Gallimard Hachette, 1966), T 3, p. 1584.

⁵³ Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, T 1, p. 198.

⁵⁴ Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 20.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

on a certain day; the past is not a set of such births, and time does not move like a clock [...].⁵⁶

Filiation ascribes a specific timeframe to cultural productions, whereas Said affirms that cultural products and events cannot be circumscribed to one date as they do not start or cease to exist at specific dates. This anthropomorphic way of envisaging time is something we will encounter again in this thesis, through the theoretical frame given by Henri Focillon's *Vie des Formes* (1934).

If we were to follow a study of influence or filiation between the two authors, Gautier would become Wilde's literary father. However, this linear organisation does not tally with the ways in which Wilde interacted with Gautier and Gautier's works. As this thesis will show, the analysis of the relations between the two authors unveils two different kinds of contact between them: one that follows the linear view through which Wilde recognizes the seniority of Gautier, in which he acknowledges the fifty-year time gap between their literary productions; and another through which Wilde considers Gautier to be his contemporary in which Wilde's works are envisaged as an immediate and unmediated response to Gautier's. Sometimes, both contacts can be witnessed as Wilde builds upon Gautier's retrospective authority while treating him as if he were of the same period. This peculiar type of relationship is what I call in this thesis a case of 'non-contemporaneous contemporaneity'. A simple study of filiation or influence would not take into account these complex relationships established by Wilde.

The alternative to filiation is affiliation, which Said defines as "that implicit network of peculiarly cultural associations between forms, statements, and other aesthetic elaborations on the hand, and on the other, institutions, agencies, classes, and

⁵⁶ Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, p. 155.

amorphous social forces.”⁵⁷ Through this frame, we can better understand Wilde’s displacement of Gautier in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century. This very displacement erodes the meaning of time in literature and eventually places cultural productions ‘out of time’, which, as this thesis will demonstrate, is in fact a crucial concept for both Gautier and Wilde. This theoretical discussion of the differences between influence, filiation and lineage on the one hand and affinity, affiliation and points of contact on the other shows that the latter is more appropriate for the comparison between Wilde and Gautier. I will analyse the points of contact between the two authors and their works, in order to highlight a strong affinity between them and cast a new light on their works.

This thesis is a reaction to a common view of the criticism towards Théophile Gautier and Oscar Wilde that they lack substance and depth in their works. I decided to bring Gautier and Wilde together not only because of Wilde’s aesthetic affinities with the French writer but also because it appears that they are treated in a similar way by critics. Retrospectively, they both suffered from the development of literary studies focusing on specific aspects of the nineteenth century during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which explains to some extent why Gautier is now rarely studied and is constantly undermined in favour of Baudelaire, and how Wilde is read through a biographical lens that focuses on his trial and the scandal around his homosexuality, which colours our understanding of him as a writer. What I set out to explore are the relations between the aesthetic visions of Gautier and Wilde and the numerous attacks on their works that label them as superficial and lacking in depth. Indeed, most of these attacks focus on the overwhelming presence of art in their works, which was deemed solely decorative.

⁵⁷ Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, p. 174.

When critics describe Gautier and Wilde's literary experiments, they tend to emphasize the excessive nature of their practices by pointing out that the number of artistic references, the pictorial style, and more generally the presence of art within their works are overwhelming and subvert the literary medium. For instance, Peter Whyte, who is one of the only critics who analyses Gautier and Wilde together, talks about the "usage *abusif*" that Gautier made of visual references in his texts.⁵⁸ Irene Joan Driscoll, who focuses on the role of *transposition d'art* in Gautier's poetry, discusses Gautier's style as substituting "the evocation of visual works of art for the creation of *true* literary form".⁵⁹ Michel Crouzet analyses the ways in which Gautier's devotion to artworks has a negative impact on his works leading them to "*se renier comme oeuvre*",⁶⁰ while Joana Matos Frias, an important comparatist, examines Gautier's style in an essay entitled '*Difformités littéraires et déviations poétiques*'.⁶¹ For Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, two of the most influential critics of Wilde's works, Wilde's descriptions are "*diversions* from the main narrative",⁶² while Regenia Gagnier comments on the style of Wilde's works as "*overblown*" [my emphasis] in a study of Wilde's relationship with the Victorian public which was one of the most influential monographs that triggered a revaluation of Wilde in the late twentieth century.⁶³ This non-exhaustive list shows that even some of the most influential critics of the two authors mostly use negative terms to account for this phenomenon in their works. Indeed, the words that would come to

⁵⁸ Peter Whyte, 'La Référence artistique comme procédé littéraire dans quelques romans et contes de Gautier', in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier, l'art et l'artiste*, 2 vols (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 1982), II, pp. 281-296, p. 282.

⁵⁹ Irene Joan Driscoll, 'Visual Allusions in the Work of Gautier', *French Studies*, 27 (1973), pp. 418-428, p. 418.

⁶⁰ Michel Crouzet, 'Théophile Gautier et le problème de créer', *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 4 (July-August 1972), pp. 659-687, p. 661.

⁶¹ Joana Matos Frias, 'Difformités littéraires et déviations poétiques: esthétique et modernité chez Théophile Gautier', *Art et Création chez Théophile Gautier*, ed. by Ana Clara Santos, Maria de Jesus Cabral (Paris: Editions le Manuscrit, 2013), pp. 137-154.

⁶² Josephine M. Guy, Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde's Profession: Writing and the Culture Industry in the late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 182.

⁶³ Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace, Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*, p. 64.

mind fairly naturally when describing the ways in which the two authors manipulate their literary medium would be deformation, distortion, or even adulteration, which all carry negative connotations, and suggest that Wilde and Gautier deform literature to make it as close to the visual arts as possible.

This explains why I chose the term ‘movement’ to describe the phenomenon: its neutrality, in comparison to other words, casts a more positive light on these experiments. It questions the stillness some critics note in the transposition of visual arts within the literary medium, since the different artistic media have different temporalities, as will be discussed in more details in chapter 2.⁶⁴ The concept of movement also adds dynamism to the process rather than suggesting that the insertion of visual artworks pauses or even stops literary time. Finally, the term mirrors the movement my own thesis carries out, since I move away from the negative way through which the two authors and the Art for Art’s Sake movement have been envisaged since the nineteenth century, a vision which, to some extent, still survives in contemporary criticism.

The title of my thesis also reflects on this negativity: the first part of the title, ‘Gautier, Wilde, and the visual arts’ sets up the relations between Gautier and Wilde, and their relations with the visual arts, which could easily lead to similar analyses to the ones discussed above, in the sense that the title creates a contrast between the two authors and their involvement, within their works, with the visual arts. By discussing their literary works and their experiments with the visual arts in terms of ‘artistic media’, I bring together the literary and visual characteristics of their works within the larger concept of art, mirroring the movement carried out by the two authors as they

⁶⁴ For instance, Peter Whyte notes how the artistic references in Gautier’s works impact the dynamism of his works: “si un récit est, de par sa nature même, dynamique, la référence à une oeuvre d’art tend, par son caractère rétrospectif, à immobiliser l’action.” ‘La Référence artistique comme procédé littéraire dans quelques romans et contes de Gautier’, p. 287.

envisage art as an encompassing concept which transcends differences and limits between artistic media. The very definitions of the term ‘movement’ encompass this unification, as movement means shift and change, but it also relates to music (a self-contained part of a musical composition or musical form) and, more significantly for this thesis, to painting (“On dit qu’il y a du mouvement dans un tableau, pour indiquer que la scène qu’il représente est animée, et que cette animation est fidèlement reproduite [...]. Lorsqu’il s’agit de paysages, mouvement signifie variété, diversité agréable”, according to the *Littre*).⁶⁵ The inherent polysemy of ‘movement’ already suggests exchange, evolution, and cross-pollination between artistic forms. The *Oxford English Dictionary* emphasises the link between the word ‘movement’ and the visual arts: “any of the varieties of painting or drawing as determined by the material or technique used.”⁶⁶ It is worth highlighting the fact that the word ‘medium’ also suggests an affinity with music as the second definition of the word given by the *Littre* defines it as a “terme de musique. Il se dit des sons de la voix qui tiennent le milieu entre le grave et l’aigu.”⁶⁷ Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is a complete effacement of the limits between the different artistic realms, which the term ‘media’ accounts for, since the two authors were conscious of the fact that they were experimenting with the limitations of literature, as they were conscious of pushing these limitations in their works.

I examine the complex permutations of the concept of movement in their works: in literature between literary genres and Movements, outside of literature towards the visual arts, as well as movement in time and space. Their literature is not static or fixed;

⁶⁵ Emile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris: Gallimard Hachette, 1966), T 5, pp. 527-532.

⁶⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), <<http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2355/view/Entry/123031?redirectedFrom=movement#eid>> [accessed 26/04/2018].

⁶⁷ *Littre*, p. 42.

it is literature that constantly questions itself, operating inwards curves as well as a literature investigating other artistic media, curving outwards. It is a literature of the arabesque that constantly reinvents itself through other artistic media. The word arabesque suggests in itself a cross-pollination between artistic media, since the noun refers to the decorative arts as “a decorative pattern consisting of flowing lines (typically of branches, leaves, and flowers) that scroll or interlace”, but also to music (“a motif or passage used to decorate or embellish a melody”), and ballet (“a position in which the dancer stands on one leg, with the other leg extended behind with the knee straight and the foot pointed”).⁶⁸

The arabesque perfectly represents the superfluity and gratuitousness that characterises this style, in terms of syntax where the sentences mirror the capricious curves of the ornamental motif, and in terms of content, since the ornamentation is accessory to the narration and therefore embodies the foregrounding of non-structural elements in their works. While I agree with the assessment made by critics about the presence of purely decorative moments in their works, I argue that the complexity of this aesthetics of ornamentation needs to be taken seriously as it unveils the experiments made by the two authors with the form, content, and aim of literature. The inclusion of art and artworks in the works of Gautier and Wilde does not necessarily follow a utilitarian view according to which art is considered a mediating agent towards a higher aim. Both authors experiment with art as decoration, and ponder the limits of words as ornaments in literature. The study of the inclusion of the visual arts in their works also uncovers the way in which the two authors envisage their literary medium, both as a fluid substance which lends itself to these inclusions, and as a rigid material.

⁶⁸ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, <<http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2355/view/Entry/10073?rskey=joTyLU&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 26/04/2018].

The second aspect analysed by this thesis is the link between the inclusion of the visual arts and the relations of the two authors with movements such as Art for Art's Sake and Aestheticism. The Art for Art's Sake doctrine encourages an ideal of an unadulterated form of art: art can only attain its highest degree of perfection if stripped of concerns and matters not deemed artistic or aesthetic such as politics, religion, or social aims. According to this view, perfection is to be found in purity. No critic has tried to question the attachment of Gautier and Wilde to the doctrine by focusing on the contradiction between this aesthetic stance and their own love of art, which is itself usually included in their denomination as aesthetes. This thesis explores the paradox of the involvement of Gautier and Wilde with notions of artistic purity and homogeneity while their constant incursions into other artistic media adulterate their literary medium. How can Gautier and Wilde be called aesthetes, and be seen as 'pure' formalists when hybridity is so obviously central to their own vision of art? This crucial paradox leads to a new understanding of aestheticism as understood by Gautier and Wilde, as well as a re-evaluation of the two authors in the way in which they challenge preconceptions of nineteenth-century literary movements and, more broadly, of literature and its aims.

1. Art for Art's Sake

The doctrine of Art for Art's Sake (which is said to originate back to either Benjamin Constant's *Journal Intime* of 1804 or to 1818 and Victor Cousin) is the starting-point for this thesis, because of Gautier's involvement in its development, as well as Wilde's reformulations of it in his critical essays. Furthermore, the doctrine shares characteristics with Aestheticism and Decadence, namely the cult of art and the distance from nature, among other features, and therefore accounts for the diverse vision of art

of Gautier and Wilde, a vision which spans these different movements. Gautier's link with the doctrine began in 1832 in the preface of *Albertus*, his second collection of poems. In this short text can be found what will later be fully developed: his apolitical standpoint, "l'auteur du présent livre [...] n'a aucune couleur politique"; his contempt for Utilitarian views of art, "En général, dès qu'une chose devient utile, elle cesse d'être belle"; and his desire for an artistic world, "la peinture, la sculpture, la musique ne servent absolument à rien. [...] Qui voudrait cependant les retrancher?"⁶⁹

However, this is not the text that will define the aesthetic views of Gautier and later artists. This book is *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and its famous preface. The preface was Gautier's response to some attacks expressed in *Le Constitutionnel* against his study of François Villon and other poets, which will later become *Les Grotesques* (1844). The genesis of the Art for Art's Sake doctrine is indeed often placed at the time of the publication of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*: "theories of 'art for art' [...] might be traceable to the book which was both the holy writ and unholy scandal of the aesthetes: Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*."⁷⁰ Angela Leighton's depiction of the novel as "the holy writ [...] of the aesthetes" clearly refers to Swinburne's characterization of Gautier's novel as we have already seen, a quotation which Wilde recycled in one of his articles.⁷¹ This demonstrates the first, but not last, indirect filiation between Gautier and Wilde. Gautier had indeed been transformed by other writers such as Swinburne and Pater when he was appropriated by Wilde.

But Leighton's quotation also underlines a problem in the creation of the doctrine, which is the confusion between the preface and its novel. The precepts of the

⁶⁹ Preface of 'Albertus', in *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. by Michel Brix (Paris: Bartillat, 2013), p. 809, p. 810.

⁷⁰ Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 9.

⁷¹ 'As You Like It at Combe House', *Journalism*, p. 57.

doctrine are to be found in the preface but somehow the novel's seductive style and themes are applied to the preface, then seen as Gautier's justification for writing an immoral book about adventurous sexual indecision. The preface has therefore been coloured by its association with the novel, and it was turned into a manifesto for sensuality and sexual perversion. But the role of the preface in Gautier's corpus, as it is in Wilde's, is difficult to assess. As Wilde's preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is sometimes said to create a "disparity between the amoral purpose of art posited in the 'preface' and the novel's moral plot",⁷² the link Gautier develops between the novel and its preface is rather tenuous. Similarly, the direct attacks at journalists led some critics to see the preface as a serious manifesto, but Gautier's humorous tone makes it hard to take it entirely seriously, which led other critics to consider the preface simply as the words of a rebellious young writer: "Cette préface [...] n'est pas du tout une doctorale déclamation contre la vertu; elle est une fantaisie caracole, exécutée pour rien [...]".⁷³ This confusion only adds to the attraction the preface and its novel exerted in France and abroad.

In the preface, the first attack is aimed at morality in art criticism and the way in which journalists judge art according to what they see as moral values, which Gautier deconstructed: "une des choses les plus burlesques de la glorieuse époque où nous avons le bonheur de vivre est incontestablement la réhabilitation de la vertu entreprise par tous les journaux [...]".⁷⁴ Then, Gautier went on to affirm the separation between the writer and his characters, "c'est le personnage qui parle, et non l'auteur",⁷⁵ which

⁷² John G. Peters, 'Style and Art in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: Form as Content', *Victorian Review*, 25 (1999), pp. 1-13, p. 1.

⁷³ Adolphe Boschot, *Théophile Gautier* (Paris: Desclée, de Brouwer & cie, 1933), p. 138.

⁷⁴ Preface of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, in *Romans, Contes et Nouvelles*, ed. by Pierre Laubriet *et al.*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2002), I, p. 211. Gautier's poetry, his short stories and novels have been published respectively by Bartillat and Gallimard, but the rest of his corpus (articles, criticism, travel writings, ...) have not published recently in scholarly editions, which is why I refer to less authoritative editions for these works.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

allowed him to debunk the journalists' attacks on writers on the basis of what their characters say or do. Furthermore, this claim breaks from the Romantic vision of art seen as self-expression of the author, which opened the way to the Parnassians and their belief in objectivity and detachment. Finally, Gautier focused on a utilitarian view of art, which advocated that the aim of art lies in the bettering of humanity. This is problematic for Gautier for different reasons. First, Gautier had repeated several times that he did not really believe in progress: "nous pensons que le présent doit [...] ployer le genou devant le passé [...]." ⁷⁶ Then, he affirmed that utility is a subjective concept, ⁷⁷ which led him to the main argument in the preface and the formula which has been used and deformed after him: "Rien de ce qui est beau n'est indispensable à la vie." ⁷⁸ Gautier obviously played with the Utilitarians' extreme and strict sense of utility here, which he then destroyed in the next question: "On supprimerait les fleurs, le monde n'en souffrirait pas matériellement; qui voudrait cependant qu'il n'y eût plus de fleurs?" ⁷⁹

The claim of the uselessness of art was, at the time of the publication of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, a bold statement, which did not comply with the ideas of the period. Even decades after it, writers would revolt against the idea of the autonomy of art. In the preface of *Le Fils naturel* (1858), Dumas fils would, for instance, claim against "les apôtres de l'art pour l'art" that "toute littérature qui n'a pas en vue la perfectibilité, la moralisation, l'idéal, l'utile, en un mot, est une littérature rachitique et malsaine, née morte." ⁸⁰ Here the idea of Art for Art's Sake as a disease is developed, announcing Decadence and decay in art as Nordau would later develop further. Against

⁷⁶ *L'Artiste* (1857), p. 4.

⁷⁷ "le sens de ce vocable n'est jamais que relatif. Ce qui est utile pour l'un ne l'est pas pour l'autre." Preface of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, p. 229.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Alexandre Dumas fils, *Le Fils naturel*, in *Théâtre complet: avec préfaces inédites* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1896), p. 30, p. 31.

this utilitarian trend, Wilde followed Gautier and other writers such as Baudelaire or Flaubert in their affirmation that there can be no exterior aim ascribed to art, and that art finds its own end in itself. In an adaptation of Gautier's statement "Il n'y a de vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien; tout ce qui est utile est laid [...]"⁸¹ Wilde reaffirmed his attachment to the Art for Art's Sake doctrine: "As long as a thing is useful or necessary to us, or affects us in any way, [...] it is outside the proper sphere of art."⁸² In relation to morality in art, both authors advocated a separation of spheres between ethics and aesthetics, affirming that art should be able to treat any subject. In the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde stated clearly that: "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all."⁸³ Although Gautier is rather conspicuously absent from Wilde's preface (while he is one of the recurring references of the novel), there are obvious similarities between the two prefaces. Wilde also seemed to be countering potential criticisms of his novel and he used Gautier's rhetoric as his own justification for writing *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In creating this correspondence between his preface and Gautier's, Wilde disclosed his desire to become the British Gautier, and wished his novel the same success and influence that *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and its preface had enjoyed.

To view Gautier's and Wilde's affirmations as the separation between ethics and aesthetics is too simplistic, since it is difficult for the two authors to leave the system of values ascribed by the relation between beauty and morality, as this leads to the use of a specific vocabulary, which they cannot escape. Furthermore, a moral discourse surrounding art existed in their works, even if I exclude the most obvious of

⁸¹ Preface of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, p. 230.

⁸² *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Criticism: Historical Criticism, Intentions, The Soul of Man, 'The Decay of Lying'*, ed. by Josephine M. Guy, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), IV, p. 82.

⁸³ *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 167.

their social works such as *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1891) or some of Gautier's later articles.⁸⁴ In 'The Decorative Arts' (1882), Wilde affirmed that art is necessary for the development of humanity, as Gautier had suggested in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, and that it will indeed have a moral impact: "the most practical school of morals in the world [...] is true art [...]."⁸⁵ This strongly echoes Gautier's belief expressed in 'Du Beau dans l'Art' (1847): "les vers d'Homère, les statues de Phidias, les peintures de Raphaël, ont plus élevé l'âme que tous les traités des moralistes."⁸⁶ However, this moral effect is considered an aftermath of beauty and cannot be part of the artist's process of creation, nor can it be his aim.

The next thing to consider is Gautier's and Wilde's definition of beauty since it is at the heart of their aesthetics. It is also necessary in order to understand their vision of Art for Art's Sake, as it leads to the understanding of the aim of art being found in itself, its aim being beauty. One discernable trait of their vision of beauty is its opposition to mimeticism and realism. As Gautier claimed in 'Du Beau dans l'Art' that "l'imitation seule de la nature [...] ne doit pas être le but de l'artiste",⁸⁷ Wilde professed that "Art only begins where Imitation ends [...]."⁸⁸ The same rejection of nature as imperfect can also be found in their works.⁸⁹ The two authors seem to oscillate between an ideal beauty and a material one: one universal and subjective beauty, inherited from

⁸⁴ "il faut donner aux masses le sentiment de l'art [...] le beau a une énorme puissance morale [...]", *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans*, 5 vols (Bruxelles: Hetzel, 1859), V, pp. 243-244.

⁸⁵ *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, 'The Decorative Arts', ed. by Merlin Holland (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 936. Because the Oxford University Press publication of *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* is an ongoing process, I chose to use the HarperCollins edition for Wilde's other essays, his fairy tales, as well as 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.'.

⁸⁶ 'Du Beau dans l'art', in *L'Art Moderne* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1856), p. 153.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁸⁸ *De Profundis*, p. 186.

⁸⁹ "What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition." 'The Decay of Lying', p. 73; "le premier modèle de femme ne me parut pas beau, et me désappointa singulièrement, tant l'art ajoute à la nature la plus parfaite." *Portraits contemporains* (Paris: Charpentier, 1874), p. 6.

Plato and Kant, and one material beauty, born from impressions: “cet idéalisme effréné ne supprime-t-il pas trop décidément, le monde matériel?”, “l’idée du beau n’est pas aussi absolument subjective que l’affirme Kant, [...] mais très souvent une impression.”⁹⁰ Gautier explored the various definitions of art, including Winckelmann’s, whose influence on Pater and Wilde will be analysed in the first chapter, and who delineated the realm of beauty as being inside “l’unité et la simplicité”, to which Gautier replied: “le riche, l’orné, le complexe, sont des éléments du beau, et, si la formule s’applique assez exactement à l’art antique [...] elle est fautive relativement à la peinture, à la poésie et surtout à la musique modernes [...]”.⁹¹ Here Gautier suggested that beauty is protean and cannot be circumscribed by a dogmatic canon, contrary to what Theodor Adorno affirmed when he analysed the Art for Art’s Sake doctrine in the twentieth century: “The idea of beauty advocated by l’art pour l’art [...] did indeed exclude all content as disruptive that did not [...] submit to a dogmatic canon of beauty [...]”.⁹² Wilde followed Gautier’s vision and he claimed that: “Beauty has as many meanings as man has moods.”⁹³ We need only see the disparity between the works inside their own corpuses to understand the extent to which variety is at the heart of their aesthetic doctrine: there is a world between *The Canterville Ghost* (1887) and ‘The Portrait of Mr. W. H.’ (1889), or between *La Morte amoureuse* (1836) and *Caprices et zigzags* (1852).

However, it cannot be denied that the two authors’ inclinations go towards a more material, sensuous beauty, one that is related to the concept of form. The quotation from ‘The Critic as Artist’ (1891) continues in the following terms: “Beauty reveals everything, because it expresses nothing. When it shows us itself, it shows us the whole

⁹⁰ ‘Du Beau dans l’art’, p. 149, p. 157.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁹² Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 322.

⁹³ ‘The Critic as Artist’, p. 158.

fiery-coloured world.”⁹⁴ The sensuality of beauty for Wilde is clearly expressed through the use of sensuous elements in this sentence. He continued later on: “Form is everything”,⁹⁵ which seems to suggest that, for Wilde, form is above idea and content. Gautier repeated several times that he did not believe in form for form’s sake, as numerous detractors of the Art for Art’s Sake doctrine reduced it to, but that the separation between form and idea can never happen since: “la forme ne peut se produire sans idée, et l’idée sans forme.”⁹⁶ Art for Art’s Sake then becomes the form for beauty, for the perfection of form is the means to reach beauty and cannot be an end in itself. Art and Beauty are loosely understood by the authors where once the aim of beauty defines art in its entirety, the two terms become synonymous. And, although Gautier rejected the reduction of his doctrine to form for its own sake, there clearly is a tendency to equate beauty to perfection of form.

Gautier strove to find a satisfactory definition of beauty. For approximately three pages, the reader follows what appears to be a completely digressive passage that diverts from the initial project to theorise beauty.⁹⁷ This beautiful pastoral description ends with the following statement: “Ces simples esquisses révèlent l’idée du beau mieux que de froids raisonnements [...]”⁹⁸ Rather than theorizing beauty, Gautier showed beauty through a visible form, which, after him, would have strong sensuous connotations. Beauty can therefore only be understood and grasped through formal incarnation or embodiment, following Gautier’s suggestion that beauty is an impression, an experience, a memory. In *De Profundis*, Wilde expressed similar ideas.

⁹⁴ ‘The Critic as Artist’, p. 158.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁹⁶ ‘Du Beau dans l’art’, p. 151.

⁹⁷ “il n’y pousse que des pommiers, des cerisiers; la rose n’y vient qu’à l’état d’églantier; mais, à deux pas, le sapin se groupe en forêts majestueuses, et là-bas, où les prairies s’abaissent, la Mantua roule ses eaux rapides et glacées [...]”, ‘Du Beau dans l’art’, p. 165.

⁹⁸ ‘Du Beau dans l’art’, p. 165.

According to him, “every work of art is the conversion of an idea into an image.”⁹⁹ The doctrine is therefore constructed from a series of oppositions, and the new definitions of art and beauty are more indirect than direct. They rely heavily on sensuous incarnation, much of which is visual, which suggests the definition of literary art as an art *of* art, in referring to other visual artistic media.

2. Literature, the Visual Arts and Purity

As suggested in the previous section, the doctrine of Art for Art’s Sake implies a purification of art, expurgating ethics, morality, and politics from the sphere of art. Art for Art’s Sake appears as an essentialist vision of art, stripping art of whatever is not considered art. Utility, everyday life are said to taint the purity of art and degrade it. In what appears to be a reversal of values, Gautier and Wilde equated a ‘good’ artwork with an artwork purified from moral, social, and political concerns. It is striking to note that the vocabulary they were using to leave this system of values is precisely the terms used inside this system, which have moral connotations. It suggests that they were still struggling to escape a utilitarian vision of art, turning the aesthetic doctrine into a reshaping of values rather than the effacement of the said values. For instance, Gautier commented on the choice of the painter Gérôme to include some comic elements in one of his paintings in negative terms. Gautier contrasted Gérôme’s “spirituelle perfection”, his “talent si pur, si élégant” with the act of “descendre au comique”.¹⁰⁰ Whenever something taints an artwork, Gautier reversed the established values and stated that an impure art is precisely a form of art which includes some sort of utility, whether it is

⁹⁹ *De Profundis*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁰ *Abécédaire du Salon de 1861* (Paris: Dentu, 1861), p. 183.

political, social or moral: “un art pur et dédaigneux des vulgaires réalités [...]”¹⁰¹

While trying to escape the realm of morality it seems like Gautier cannot prevent going back to it to define what does not constitute pure art for him, suggesting that banishing any moral connotation in the act of judgment is not an easy task. Similarly, Wilde talked about flaws in painting in the following terms: “they have degraded the visible arts into the obvious arts [...]”¹⁰²

A pure art is therefore one that is free of any exterior adulteration. But a pure art is also, for Gautier particularly, Greek art and sculpture. In his art criticism, the adjective pure is almost invariably linked to marble, sculpture, or Greek art in general: “[statue made out of] marbre de Paros ou de Carrare, pure de toute tâche”,¹⁰³ “Phidias [...] pur, austère [...]”,¹⁰⁴ “nous préférons la beauté absolue et pure, qui est de tous les temps, de tous les pays, de tous les cultes [...]. C’est cependant le grand art, l’art immortel et le plus noble effort de l’âme humaine: ainsi l’entendirent les grecs, ces maîtres divins dont il faut adorer la trace à genoux.”¹⁰⁵ In another art review, Gautier changed the definition of pure art once again. In an article on Rubens, he defined the style of the Flemish painter as an attempt to translate “à la flamande la beauté grecque des Olympiens.”¹⁰⁶ What the painter did with those pure forms was “les [...] mouvementées, arrondies, soufflées, bossuées de muscles, mais par la couleur il leur a conservé la divinité.”¹⁰⁷ Here, Gautier suggested that it is precisely colour that purified Rubens’ work. These abrupt variations on the concept of purity in art prove the difficulty in defining where beauty lies. Gautier seems to infer that there is indeed one

¹⁰¹ *Les Beaux-arts en Europe* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1856), p. 241.

¹⁰² ‘The Critic as Artist’, p. 160.

¹⁰³ *Portraits Contemporains*, p. 170.

¹⁰⁴ *Critique artistique et littéraire* (Paris: Bibliothèque Larousse, 1929), p. 71.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

ideal of purity, the Greek ideal, but later artists reshaped this ideal by adding their personal touch while still staying true to its purity.

While Gautier clearly favoured Greek art as the embodiment of a pure art, which earned him the label of ‘Classic’, his vision of art followed the idea of a protean beauty, which would be an art of totality, an amalgam of styles. What also becomes clear while reading his art criticism is that pure art is an amalgam of different artistic media, and is therefore inherently impure. In his art criticism, Wilde also envisaged purity in terms of form and medium rather than content. However, and this is an important point of divergence between the two authors, Wilde suggested that music is the purest artistic medium, following Pater in this tradition: “there has been a tendency in literature to appeal more and more to the eye, and less and less to the ear, which is really the sense which, from the standpoint of pure art, it should seek to please [...]”¹⁰⁸ The justification of music as the purest art lies in its immateriality. However, following what has been analysed earlier, Wilde’s statement on music seems surprising, considering his taste, shared by Gautier, of the solid, the palpable, and sensuous in art. And indeed, in the same text we find arguments against music: “I don’t want music at present. It is far too indefinite.”¹⁰⁹ We only need to remember the sentence, applied to Gautier and used by Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and in *De Profundis*, “Like Gautier, I have always been one of those ‘pour qui le monde visible existe’”,¹¹⁰ to understand the importance of form and the visual arts for Wilde, as well as Gautier’s influence on him, as he himself placed his persona in a direct lineage with the French writer.

¹⁰⁸ ‘The Critic as Artist’, p. 137.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹¹⁰ *De Profundis*, p. 192.

Expressions abound in order to prove Gautier's attachment to the visual arts, but the following quotation demonstrates how this vision was not simply what others applied to his works and persona but something he knew and claimed as his own:

A proprement parler nous ne sommes pas un homme de lettres, et ce défaut, que nous confessons [...]. Epris, tout enfant, de statuaire, de peinture et de plastique, nous avons poussé jusqu'au délire l'amour de l'art;- arrivé à l'âge mûr, nous ne nous repentons nullement de cette belle folie; nous lui avons dû et lui devons encore nos moments les plus heureux: c'est par elle que nous valons quelque chose [...] d'autres ont plus de science, plus de profondeur, plus de style, mais nul n'aime plus que nous la peinture; nous avons toujours laissé, on le voit bien, les livres pour les tableaux et les bibliothèques pour les musées [...]. L'écriture parle quelque part de la concupiscence des yeux, [...] ce péché est notre péché, [...] Jamais œil ne fut plus avide que le nôtre, et le bohémien de Béranger n'a pas mis en pratique plus consciencieusement que nous la devise: voir c'est avoir.- Après avoir vu, notre plus grand plaisir a été de transporter dans notre art à nous, monuments, fresques, tableaux, statues, bas-reliefs, au risque souvent de forcer la langue et de changer le dictionnaire en palette [...].¹¹¹

The question of purity in art is important as it helps understand Gautier's and Wilde's theoretical position on the autonomy of art. It highlights the originality of their approach at a time when autonomous art, envisaged as devoid of non-aesthetic elements (as vague as this can appear), is not only considered immoral but also lacking aesthetic value, since aesthetic for aesthetic's sake appears as a hollow concept. This purity of art therefore leads to crucial questions about the aim of art and the relation between art and decoration. From these also follow inquiries as to the connections between the different artistic media and the status of literature within them. Through the affiliation of literature with other artistic media experimented with in Gautier's and Wilde's works,

¹¹¹ *L'Artiste* (1857), p. 4.

the two authors reflect on the exception that seems to be literature. While sculpture, the decorative arts and even painting can find value in the aesthetic emotion it provokes, literature seems to need more than beauty for its justification. As a result, Gautier and Wilde question the superfluous and the essential in literature.

3. Form in Literature

This thesis started with a focus on form, with a desire to understand the works as texts, in comparison to studies focusing on the content, or the themes. Primarily seen as an attempt to pinpoint formal characteristics of Aestheticism or Art for Art's Sake in literature, this thesis investigates some formal specificities of the works of Gautier and Wilde which can be linked to the Aesthetic movement. It soon became clear, however, that the study of pure formal literary markers or structures meant moving away from pure literature, and investigating constant progressions towards other art media, the visual arts in particular. Prompted by Delacroix, then developed by the Impressionists and the Synthetists, pictorial art tried to redefine the realm of painting during the nineteenth century, distancing itself from literature. Claiming the autonomy of the painter's practice as well as his or her independence from literary subjects, pictorial art moved towards its purification from literary characteristics and aims.¹¹² Form, colour, and fragment were being foregrounded in place of content, subject, and line. After being expurgated from language, words, time, narrativity, signification or meaning, 'pure' painting in the nineteenth century rejected the inclusion of other art media and professed its autonomy, using what was then seen as inherent characteristics of this

¹¹² See Clément Dessy, *Les Écrivains et les Nabis: la littérature au défi de la peinture* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015).

very medium. While painting found its purity in its unadulterated specificities, pure literature seemed to find its purity in its inclusion of, and incursion into, other art media, turning hybridity and heterogeneity into markers of purity.

Whether Gautier and Wilde drew from painting to frame and set the narration, from sculpture to bring materiality to their works, or from the decorative arts in order to add texture, the visual arts are omnipresent. However, they both went beyond the use of these traditional characteristics that were included in the cross-breeding between the arts, a fashionable custom during the nineteenth century. Transfers of form and content, through the use of ekphrases or pictorialism, from the visual arts and particularly painting and sculpture to literature, have always existed.¹¹³ Indeed, even though Pater stated that “all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music”,¹¹⁴ it was with the visual arts that literature exchanged the most. Wilde and Gautier made use of these transfers and multiplied references to artworks, but they also inserted art inside the narration, not only through the physical presence of artworks but also as elements of the diegesis. What Gautier and in turn Wilde also transferred to the page were the techniques and subjects, or lack thereof, from the new schools. The ways in which the two authors foregrounded colour in their works and related it to specific sensations and impressions, or the presence of the serpentine or blurred line, partook of the new techniques used by nineteenth-century painters. The reduction of the subject or patterning of this same subject throughout their works can also find its echo in the visual

¹¹³ For more on ekphrasis or pictorial works, see Enzo Caramaschi, *Arts visuels et littérature: de Stendhal à l'impressionnisme* (Paris: Nizet, 1985); James A. W. Heffernan, *Space, Time, Image, Sign: Essays on Literature and the Visual Arts* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1987); James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: the Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Henry F. Majewski, *Transposing Art into Texts in French Romantic Literature* (Chapel Hill, N.C.; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); *Écrire la peinture entre XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*, ed. by Pascale Auraix-Jonchière (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2003); Stephen Cheeke, *Writing for Art: the Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

¹¹⁴ Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 124.

arts and decorative arts of the second half of the century: examples include Monet's series of water lilies or Morris' wallpapers.

It can be argued that it was Gautier's and Wilde's relation to language and words that created these traits: they extracted these effects, colours, and textures from the substance of language, which multiplied sensations: "c'est alors que la couleur parle [...] que les monuments se dressent et font saillie sur l'espace profond [...] que le parfum provoque la pensée [...]." ¹¹⁵ By language, I mean the faculty to express one's thoughts through vocal or visual signs, which includes words. The relation Gautier and Wilde have to language is complex as it includes non-verbal signs, which are important in the context of this thesis, and it relates to the language of painting, the language of sculpture, and the language of ornaments. Language also relates to their experiments with non-signifying signs, and the reduction of 'content' in their works. Gautier and Wilde played with language in their works, by analysing the relations between verbal language and non verbal language, and these experiments led them to ponder the faculty of expression of language and its limitations. I discuss language and words as two specific terms because of the importance of the concept of the smallest entity for the two authors, which will be analysed in more details in Chapter 2. This division is also influenced by Paul Bourget's definition of a Decadent style in *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine* (1883) that works by fracturing and splitting the text into independent elements, which will be analysed later on in this thesis. The word, on the other hand, is more specific to their literary medium, and is the smallest element on which they work, extracting its most visual characteristics and making it, as Bourget suggests, independent in the sentence and valuable in itself. Words, as the vehicles for meaning

¹¹⁵ Baudelaire, 'Théophile Gautier', p. 118

within a verbal language, become meaningful in themselves outside of the meaning assigned to them by language: they are independent gems.

The alchemy of words, under the skilful mastery of Gautier and Wilde, allowed the two authors to turn words into lines, colours, jewels, or fragments of marble. Gautier, even though known and often envisaged through his first choice of career as a painter, did not merely transpose the visual arts into literature, or blend the different media to create a visual and physical literary object. At the heart of the aesthetic project of Gautier and Wilde was the desire to invent a literary medium that would be, in itself, an artwork. This thesis will therefore explore the paradox of a pure literature that constantly tends towards the visual arts, and analyse the ways in which the inclusions of the visual arts in the literary medium deform and reform the latter in both form and content. Shifting the focus from message and content towards pure decoration, Wilde and Gautier change the form, content, and aim of literature, and try to provoke a similar aesthetic response in their readers to the one a viewing public would have when confronted with a painting or a sculpture. How is pure literature shaped through the visual arts? To what extent is the literary medium, as defined and used by Gautier and Wilde in their works, defined through impurity, by way of the adulteration of its essence by the visual arts?

4. Methodology

This thesis proposes a comparative study of Gautier and Wilde through their movements towards the visual arts in their fictional prose writings. Rather than a study of influence, this analysis examines points of contact between the two authors, while including references to other writers and surveying direct or indirect dialogues between

them. On most points, the two doctrines are similar and it seems that Wilde translated Gautier's articles into his essays. The transfers from Gautier's art criticism to Wilde's Platonic dialogues highlight Wilde's debt to the French author. They also uncover the way in which Wilde appropriated other artists' works, not only into his works but also into his creative process.

This study focuses on the prose works of Gautier and Wilde rather than their poetry. While asserting that poetry aspires towards the condition of other artistic media and leans towards a decorative use of the word is not that surprising, the fact that they pursued a similar goal in their prose work is more unanticipated. In that regard, the texts will be analysed formally: their structure, narrative logic, and language will be scrutinized rather than applying a content-oriented approach which would focus on the themes of the works. The different texts have been chosen because they show the variety of Gautier's and Wilde's corpuses. One canonical work is, however, absent from this study: *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. While there would be material for a formal analysis of the novel, its exclusion was a deliberate choice to try to show other significant texts from Gautier's corpus, as his influence is often mainly seen through the scope of his novel and *Emaux et camées*, which lessens the importance of other works and somehow influences our vision of Gautier as a sexually subversive writer. While most studies devoted to Wilde or Aestheticism, Decadence, and Art for Art's Sake in France and in Britain recognize Gautier's influence on later artists, very few continue the analysis beyond Gautier's two major works. Even though critics have always acknowledged Gautier's literary influence on Wilde, there has never been a study detailing their intertextual relationship. This thesis aims to fill this critical gap, following Peter Whyte's and Richard Hibbitt's works on the relations between the two authors, and provide a formidable insight into Wilde's creative process, and see how

he absorbed the French writer's theories into his own work and merged them into something new, as well as reaffirm Gautier's importance during the nineteenth century in France and Britain.¹¹⁶

But this thesis also looks at how indirect this affinity is, passing through other French writers such as Baudelaire, Huysmans, Flaubert and Mallarmé then into Britain through Pater, Ruskin, Swinburne, and James who all had differing visions of Gautier and his work, which has therefore shaped and tainted Wilde's appreciation of the French writer. Baudelaire's Gautier is the lover of beauty, master of language, who brought the grotesque to the fore;¹¹⁷ Flaubert's Gautier is Théo, the master of descriptions and infinite talent whom he had chosen as the writer of *Salammbô*'s libretto (1862);¹¹⁸ Pater's Gautier is the Romantic writer who shared his concern with style, his work on form and the aesthetic of the text;¹¹⁹ Swinburne's Gautier is the scandalous and subversive French writer of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*;¹²⁰ and James' Gautier is the author of delicate prose-work.¹²¹ Wilde fed into this protean and heterogeneous figure and added his own image to the semi-imaginary myth that Gautier had become by this time. Wilde saw in Gautier a totalising genius, from whom he drew whether it be prose, poetry or art criticism: Gautier was the comprehensive talent he

¹¹⁶ Peter Whyte, 'Oscar Wilde et Théophile Gautier: le cas du *Portrait de Dorian Gray*', in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier* (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 1999), XXI, pp. 279-294; Richard Hibbitt, 'Oscar Wilde and la Critique Impressionniste'.

¹¹⁷ "Quoique vive et riche qu'eût été jusqu'alors la nouvelle sève littéraire, il faut avouer qu'un élément lui avait fait défaut [...] je veux parler du rire et du sentiment du grotesque. *Les Jeunes-France* prouvèrent bientôt que l'école se complétait.", 'Théophile Gautier', p. 110.

¹¹⁸ "Que Flaubert ait pris le goût de la description chez Gautier, rien n'est plus certain, [...].", Antoine Albalat, *Gustave Flaubert et ses amis: avec des lettres inédites de Gustave Flaubert, Louis Bouilhet, Théophile Gautier...[etc.]* (Paris: Plon, 1927), p. 45; "La confiance de Flaubert dans le talent de Gautier était illimitée. C'est à lui qu'il songea d'abord pour le libretto de *Salammbô* [...].", *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹¹⁹ "[Romantics] set a positive value on the intense, the exceptional [...] always combined with perfect literary execution, as in Gautier's *La Morte Amoureuse*, or the scene of the 'maimed' burial-sites of the player, dead of the frost, in his *Capitaine Fracasse*- true "flowers of the few"." Walter Pater, *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan, 1889), p. 256.

¹²⁰ Swinburne, *Sonnet (with a copy of Mademoiselle de Maupin)*.

¹²¹ "Gautier's first and richest poetry [...] is to be found in his prose [...]", Henry James, *French Poets and Novelists* (London: Macmillan, 1884), p. 40.

wanted to be. This thesis therefore adds to the critical corpus that maps literary influences during the nineteenth century, in particular the studies analysing Wilde's French sources by, for example, Christa Satzinger and Christine Queffélec.¹²²

Another comparative study which has helped shape this thesis is Christopher Bains' analysis of Gautier's and Pound's aesthetic doctrines.¹²³ His survey reassesses Gautier's importance in the larger scope of Modernism in twentieth-century America and brings out the importance of art and visual media in the elaboration of Gautier's aestheticism in his critical and poetic works, as well as his travel writing. His approach is similar to mine, since Bains draws from his authors' critical works to enlighten their artistic practices in other works. Highlighting Gautier's modernity while acknowledging his devotion to Greek sculpture, Bains foregrounds Gautier's inner duality or multiplicity, which is discussed in this thesis, continuing the discussion prompted by Marcel Voisin, developed by Paul Bénichou and Françoise Court-Pérez and, more recently, extended by Alain Montandon.¹²⁴ Wilde studies also highlight a similar protean corpus, particularly Michael Patrick Gillespie's *Oscar Wilde and the Poetics of Ambiguity*.¹²⁵ The works of Josephine Guy and Ian Small analyse the ways in which preconceptions on Wilde fashion our vision of his texts and offer a wide range of texts under consideration, from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to Wilde's fairy tales.¹²⁶

¹²² Christa Satzinger, *The French Influences on Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray and Salomé* (Lewiston; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1994); Christine Queffélec, *L'Esthétique de Gustave Flaubert et d'Oscar Wilde: les rapports de l'art et de la vie* (Paris: Champion, 2008).

¹²³ Christopher Bains, *De l'Esthétisme au Modernisme: Théophile Gautier, Ezra Pound* (Paris: Champion, 2012).

¹²⁴ Marcel Voisin, *Le Soleil et la nuit: l'imaginaire dans l'oeuvre de Théophile Gautier* (Bruxelles: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1981); Paul Bénichou, *L'Ecole du désenchantement: Sainte-Beuve, Nodier, Musset, Nerval, Gautier* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992); Françoise Court-Pérez, *Gautier, un romantique ironique* (Paris: Champion, 1998); Alain Montandon, *Théophile Gautier entre enthousiasme et mélancolie* (Paris: Imago, 2012).

¹²⁵ Michael Patrick Gillespie, *Oscar Wilde and the Poetics of Ambiguity* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1996).

¹²⁶ Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, *Studying Oscar Wilde: History, Criticism, and Myth* (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2006). Another volume of theirs also helps understanding Wilde's creative process by considering notions of plagiarism and self-plagiarism: *Oscar Wilde's Profession: Writing and the Culture Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century*.

These studies show that there are always divergent persona and contradictory desires in the minds of Gautier and Wilde that can be seen in their works. This thesis analyses the inherent hybridity of these two authors, and considers their contradictions as crucial to their practices of literature. Wilde is simultaneously the Decadent aesthete, writer of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and the Catholic moralist of the fairy tales, the gothic and fantastic writer and the ironic author of the mock-horror story, *The Canterville Ghost*, the Irish story-teller, the British Decadent and the French aesthete. Gautier is the ‘bon Théo’, benevolent critic and friend and yet has a more complex and tortuous mind; he is the Romantic and yet ironically distances himself from it in *Les Jeunes-France* (1833); the advocate for Greek art as ideal and the materialist.

Some studies investigate the inclusion of art in the works of Gautier and Wilde, while others inspect their artistic language.¹²⁷ Even though these critical studies demonstrate the importance of art and artworks for the two authors, their focus is usually too narrow (one work from their corpus, or one aspect of art) to grasp fully the constant movements towards other media, which are omnipresent in all their works. This thesis, by choosing several texts as examples of Gautier’s and Wilde’s inclusive and hybrid literature, aims to prove the ways in which the visual arts fashion their practice of literature to an extent that has not been achieved so far in any critical work. Each chapter investigates the ways in which the visual arts are wove into Gautier’s and

¹²⁷ Nathalie David-Weill, *Rêve de pierre: la quête de la femme chez Théophile Gautier* (Genève: Droz, 1989); Marie-Noëlle Zeender, *Le Triptyque de Dorian Gray: essai sur l’art dans le récit d’Oscar Wilde* (Paris: l’Harmattan, 2000); Ana Clara Santos and Maria de Jesus Cabral, *Art et création chez Théophile Gautier* (Paris: Editions le Manuscrit, 2013); Peter Whyte, ‘La Référence artistique comme procédé littéraire dans quelques romans et contes de Gautier’; Marc Eigeldinger, ‘L’Inscription de l’œuvre plastique dans les récits de Gautier’, in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier, l’art et l’artiste*, 2 vols (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 1982), II, pp. 297-310. On language, see John G. Peters, ‘Style and Art in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: Form as Content’; Rae Beth Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Paolo Tortonese, *La Vie extérieure: essai sur l’œuvre narrative de Théophile Gautier* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1992).

Wilde's works and the connections they create between the different media, examining the effect the visual arts have on their works.

The first chapter focuses more specifically on the associations between sculpture and literature. As Gautier's ideal of purity frequently uses sculpture as its symbol, this is the first visual medium to be analysed in the thesis. The chapter scrutinizes the effects of the inclusion of fragmented pieces of art on the narration in 'The Portrait of Mr W. H.' and *Arria Marcella* (1852). Shakespeare's sonnets and Arria's moulding introduce a different temporality to the works, which allow the characters in both tales to revive an imaginary past. Characters and authors alike are fascinated by this characteristic of artworks, cherishing their fixity, which allows the artworks to survive through time while immersing them into the temporality of the narration, momentarily breaking the curse of their immobility. This time distortion, from eternal immobility to eternal transience, breaching through the narrative time, is treated in the two works under study as a fantastic moment, endowing art with magical attributes. Artworks are made temporal and atemporal in the works of Gautier and Wilde. According to them, art is purer and can therefore attain eternity if it does not follow societal changes. In turn, these temporal gaps fragment the narration; the artistic interferences digress from the narrative plan. The fragments on the fragmented artworks are aestheticized by the two authors, who make them some of the purest aesthetic moments in their works. Subtly, the fragmentary replaces the whole, as marbled sculptures have come to stand for Greek art and architecture. The fragment represents the purest object as it has survived through time. Multiplying signs of the presence of the artwork, Gautier and Wilde shift from an aesthetic of the absence (of the whole artwork) to one of the enhanced fragment.

Building on the examination of temporality and its relation to art in the works of Gautier and Wilde, the second chapter offers an analysis of the descriptive in *The*

Picture of Dorian Gray and *Le Roman de la momie*. In the two novels the descriptions shift towards the visual arts and more specifically paintings which create moving images in the two works, and which once again bring their works inside the realm of art. This chapter examines the links between literature, description, and painting, a medium known to be special for Gautier. While this trend is not specific to the two authors, Gautier and Wilde can be contrasted with realist authors of the nineteenth century in their liberation of the description from its relation to the narration. In their works, the description is given an inherent justification for its existence. It not only escapes its servile and subservient role, it also changes the focus of the work: through the accumulation of details and the charge given to these details, the object becomes almost an autonomous element which threatens to fragment the coherence of the work. Magnifying the insignificant, they reaffirm the power of the small fragmented piece. Located outside the space and time of the narrative frame, the description becomes the site of art, considered a refuge against reality.

The descriptions also show a tendency to use mineral comparisons, and Gautier and Wilde draw from gems and jewels to add texture, colour, and materiality to their works. The last chapter scrutinizes Gautier's and Wilde's incursions into the decorative arts, analysing Wilde's fairy tales and *Le Capitaine Fracasse* (1863) through the scope of ornamentation. Patterning, cyclic constructions, repetitive structures, and movements dull the reader's ability to find recognizable, and familiar features in the work, the ornamentation accumulating sensuous and sensual experiences, seemingly suggesting that ornaments are indeed the points of reference of these works. The ornament also is the occasion to ponder the value of decoration, the delineation between what is necessary and what is superfluous in an artwork, the distinction between the two being extremely indefinite in their works. Indeed, as this chapter will prove, the ornament is

by definition superfluous and therefore questions the division in art, and more specifically in literature, between the structural parts of an artwork and its accessory components. Displayed as the symbol of their desire to free art from utility, the ornament encapsulates the constant examination by Gautier and Wilde of the relation between utility and beauty, claiming beauty as structural. Playing with the concept of the margin, they propose a superimposition of background ornaments moving to the foreground, while maintaining their ornamental qualities as ornate additions and beautifying agents. These aesthetics of decentralization and foregrounding of the margins erode these very concepts, and advocate for abnormal, or out of the norm works of art while questioning the relativity and artificiality of the centre.

The three chapters show how the constant inclusions of the visual arts in the works of Gautier and Wilde deeply affect their literary practices. The connections they suggest and experiment with between the different art media, whether they build on existing correlations or develop new ones, define the way in which they write and the way in which they envision literature. Discussing their literary practices in terms of movements in artistic media helps to understand how Gautier and Wilde truly envisaged literature as a medium among others and it also accounts for the material aspect of literature, which emphasizes its 'hardness'. Using the term medium also questions the concept of literature and words as vehicles for content. I have already discussed in this introduction the experiments made by Gautier and Wilde with words, and the fact that a decorative use of words questions the word's ability to convey meaning, as well as its value as a signifier. In a similar movement, literature, understood as the written works in which an aesthetic value is recognised, and which uses words as its main medium, is being challenged. While the strict definition of literature emphasizes its aesthetic value, content and 'message' usually prevail when it comes to judging the value and

importance of a literary work.¹²⁸ Gautier and Wilde experiment with the reduction of this content in order to question the aim of literature. A medium is a means to something, but Gautier's and Wilde's constant play with content and experiments with the reduction of narrative elements including the plot erode this meaning of medium. Seemingly, therefore, they suggest that words are in themselves their own ends and cannot be seen as means to reach another aim. This thesis explores movement in their works within literature, outside of literature, as well as movement in time and space. Their literature is not static or fixed, it is literature that constantly questions itself, operating inwards curves as well as literature that investigates other artistic media, that curves outwards. It is literature of the arabesque that reinvents itself through other artistic media.

¹²⁸ The *Larousse*, for instance, defines literature as the “ensemble des œuvres écrites auxquelles on reconnaît une exigence de qualité, de valeur, d’esthétique [...]”, *Le Dictionnaire Larousse Maxipoche*, ed. by Claude Nimmo (Paris: Editions Larousse, 2015), p. 814.

Chapter 1: Sculpting the Past: Artworks and Magic

Introduction: Artistic Nostalgia

“Nous ne sommes pas Français, nous autres; nous tenons à d’autres races. Nous sommes pleins de nostalgies. Et puis quand à la nostalgie d’un pays se joint la nostalgie d’un temps, [...] oh ! alors, c’est complet !”¹ Gautier had always longed to discover new countries and new worlds, which his travel writings bear witness to, and he affirmed several times that he did not consider himself to be French, but rather belonged to Southern countries such as Spain, Italy or Egypt, their climate and lifestyle becoming him more than a cold Paris, one ruled by reason and too civilized. Posing as a stranger in his own country, Gautier insisted on a feeling of spatial displacement, which produced a longing for countries he did not necessarily know. This quotation enlightens us on yet another nostalgic moment experienced by Gautier, which is to be added to the geographical one: the feeling of temporal displacement. Sometimes baffled by his view of modernity and its exclusive search for utility, Gautier idealized past periods in other countries which usually shared similar characteristics: a pagan world where love, beauty, and art were celebrated in opposition to his Christian world which repressed and regulated these three ideas.

Nostalgia for ancient times was already a Romantic cliché in Gautier’s lifetime; the evocation of ruins was a fruitful metaphor for the destructive power of time. For Gautier, and similarly for Wilde, this nostalgia became a major narrative trope, their obsession with past eras visible in the frequent occurrences of the motif in their

¹ Gautier quoted by Edmond de Goncourt in the preface to Emile Bergerat, *Théophile Gautier. Entretiens, souvenirs et correspondance* (Paris: Charpentier, 1879), p. 3.

corpuses. This nostalgia is also embedded within their discourses on art, and condensed their discontent with modern times. In that sense, they were both closer to Winckelmann than Hugo or Lamartine. The German art historian expressed a similar regret at having been born too late: “I have come into the world and into Italy too late”.² Gautier and Wilde both knew and wrote about Winckelmann. Gautier referred to Winckelmann mostly in his art criticism, as an “érudit archéologue” who confused “la statuaire grecque et la statuaire romaine”, thus showing, as this chapter will demonstrate, Gautier’s acute knowledge of art history and art historians.³ Wilde also alluded to Winckelmann on various occasions both in his fictional work, comparing him to major artists in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, “It was such love as Michael Angelo had known, and Montaigne, and Winckelmann, and Shakespeare himself [...],”⁴ and in his correspondence, “He is so absurdly like the Apollo Belvedere that I feel always as if I was Winckelmann when I am with him [...].”⁵

The way in which Gautier and Wilde referred to Winckelmann is enlightening for this chapter, as Gautier proved to be an extraordinary recipient of knowledge of art in his time, and Wilde used Winckelmann in order to discuss his love for the masculine body through Winckelmann’s devotion to Greek sculpture. Wilde’s Winckelmann was influenced by Walter Pater’s vision and depiction of Winckelmann. As Pater stated in his essay on Winckelmann, “there seems always to be rather a wistful sense of something lost to be regained, than the desire of discovering anything new.”⁶ Wilde repeatedly referred to Pater and acknowledged his importance on his work: “I remember during my first term at Oxford reading in Pater’s *Renaissance*- that book

² Walter Pater, ‘Winckelmann’, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, p. 92.

³ *Guide de l’amateur au Musée du Louvre* (Paris: Séguier, 1994), p. 9.

⁴ *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 269.

⁵ Letter to Robert Ross, MS Clark, [22 April 1900], [Rome,] *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1184.

⁶ Pater, ‘Winckelmann’, p. 87.

which has had such a strange influence over my life [...].”⁷ The obvious link between Wilde’s statement and what Dorian Gray will say about the yellow book is therefore further proof of Pater’s mark on Wilde’s works. Traveling to these countries, as well as reconstructing an imaginary past was akin, for Gautier and Wilde, as it was for Winckelmann, to reuniting with parts of oneself which were missing.

Winckelmann’s longing was for ancient Greece, loosely understood spatially and temporally as incorporating Greece as well as the Roman Empire, proof of the fabricated character of these temporal and spatial reconstructions. In the works under study in this chapter, *Arria Marcella* and ‘The Portrait of Mr. W. H.’, Gautier recreated Pompeii before the eruption of Vesuvius and Wilde resuscitated sixteenth-century Great Britain. *Arria Marcella* tells the story of a young man visiting the ruins of Pompeii with some friends who discovers the moulding of a woman’s bust in the Museum of Naples, becomes fascinated by it, then experiences the resurrection of the town before the eruption and meets the woman to whom the moulding belongs. ‘The Portrait of Mr. W. H.’ narrates the search by two men for Shakespeare’s mysterious ‘Mr. W. H.’ to whom Shakespeare dedicated his *Sonnets*, and the influence of this literary quest on their lives. The way in which the two authors present these past eras is similar in so far as what they focus on is portraying them as worlds of love, freedom and, above all, art. This chapter investigates some traits of these worlds by focusing on the concepts of spatial and temporal displacements. I will demonstrate how these displacements, signs of the nostalgia of Gautier and Wilde, are constantly linked with art and physical artworks. Not only are the worlds depicted brought to life by art, whether it be Gautier’s rewriting of Arria’s moulding as a sculpted woman or Wilde’s

⁷ Wilde, *De Profundis*, p. 168. Wilde refers to him several times in both his fictional work and his essays, and he directly refers to Pater at least twice in *De Profundis* and ‘The Critic as Artist’.

analysis of Shakespeare's verses, but they are themselves filled with artistic references and signs of the physical presence of art.

However, like all ekphrases, the presence of these objects in the literary text is always simultaneously marked by their absence, as their representation in literature is unable to attain physicality. This unsolvable duality is made even more complex in 'The Portrait of Mr W. H.', as the portrait of Willie Hughes, the only visible presence that demonstrates the existence of this character, is a forgery. Furthermore, Wilde himself felt the need to complete his short story through a portrait that he commissioned, but the artwork was lost in the auction during Wilde's trial on Wednesday 24 April 1895. In a constant endeavour to fill this inherent absence (of the artwork, of the period, of the space), Wilde and Gautier tried to overcome it by multiplying signs of physical presence and filling their works with form in an attempt to add content. Spatially, the artworks occupy a vast place in the narration, which the two authors support through an accumulative style. On a temporal level, art also creates distorting time gaps, which allow the two authors to ponder the temporality of artworks. At the same time that Gautier and Wilde cherish the transience of artworks, they cling to the eternity they attach to them.

The fantastic plays an important role, as a mode of envisaging artworks: this temporal and spatial wandering is always prompted by artworks considered inherently magical, a magic used to disrupt the normal and rational order of the world. As this thesis shows, it is no surprise to see that Gautier and Wilde reject reality in favour of a more fanciful world, but their use of the fantastic as a positive mode which allows them to relive past eras and travel to distant countries is rather particular in the sense that the fantastic becomes charged with positive connotations. There is regret for the disappearance of the disruption caused by the fantastic as synonymous with a return to

normal, hence rather unexciting, everyday life. This chapter will investigate the ways in which the two authors played with these concepts, as they show a deep understanding of art history and philosophy in their questioning of time and space, as well as a marked desire and longing for a world in which art reigns.

The two works under study, 'The Portrait of Mr W. H.' and *Arria Marcella*, use art as a trigger for the authors' imaginations to create something: for Wilde, Shakespeare's *Sonnets* acted as the starting-point for the narration and the beauty of Pompeii evoked the dream of another world for Gautier.⁸ Besides, Gautier's inspiration was also found in other texts, whether in history books or *Hamlet*.⁹ Furthermore, drama was an important component of both works and the figure of Shakespeare was used by the two authors to convey the same idea of a projection into space and time. In this regard, both works investigate the productive relationship between the ancient and the modern: Gautier saw Shakespeare as a stop on his journey, a point of reference in his time travel on his way to Antiquity, and Wilde infused the figure of Shakespeare with Hellenic references. Gautier and Wilde related these past periods to their modern time while they showed the contemporary aspects of these eras, somehow effacing the temporal and spatial distance. The two works come together as two 'monstres charmants', hybrid oxymoronic works which display Gautier's and Wilde's attachment to disparate and fragmentary creations born out of the distortion of literary genres: *Arria Marcella* is said to be a fantastic short story but resembles a fairy tale or a piece of travel writing, while 'The Portrait of Mr W. H.' includes fantastic elements, displays literary analysis as a theoretical essay would, and oscillates, in terms of length, between

⁸ References to the 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.' date back two years earlier: "I am writing another story at present [...] The story is connected with Shakespeare's Sonnets." To an Unidentified Correspondent, MS Congress, [October 1887], [16 Tite Street], *Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 325.

⁹ In order to be as accurate as possible, Gautier researched the history and architecture of Pompeii, reading, for instance, *Le Palais de Scaurus* and *Les Ruines de Pompéi* by François Mazois. Shakespeare's play is alluded to twice in the short story, which will be analysed in this chapter.

a short story, a novella, and a novel. Both works demonstrate the continuity between Gautier's and Wilde's critical and fictional works, an important intertextual feature in the context of aestheticism.

This continuity can also be found inside the corpus of the fictional works of Gautier and Wilde: *Arria Marcella* recalls, for instance, *La Cafetière* (1831), *La Morte Amoureuse* (1836), and *Le Pied de Momie* (1840) in which dead women come back to life to love a young hero. *Arria Marcella* also relates to *Omphale* (1834) in the way in which “était suggérée l'idée que le temps n'est rien en lui-même, qu'il existe une dimension temporelle différente de celle dans laquelle nous vivons, et où sont conservés choses et êtres du passé [...]”¹⁰ Gautier clearly evoked this dream of displacement which gave birth to the dream of resuscitation, the origin of the short story: “Il est un rêve que fait naître en tout artiste un voyage à Pompéi, cette ville qu'une mort soudaine a préservée de la lente destruction des siècles et qu'on a retrouvée intacte dans son linceul de cendres, comme une momie égyptienne [...]”¹¹ This quotation demonstrates the obvious link between the short story and the notion of time and its destruction, as well as the fantastic atmosphere surrounding the survival of the city through its very destruction. It also highlights the complex relations in Gautier's work between time and space and the blurring of these two concepts as Gautier evoked ancient Egypt while describing his short story about modern Pompeii.

In the same way, 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.' is often related to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which shows that echoes and patterns can be found between the texts inside the corpuses of Gautier and Wilde.¹² However, if we are to base our analysis on

¹⁰ 'Notes on *Arria Marcella*', in *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, ed. by Pierre Laubriet et al., 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2002), II, p. 1292.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1287.

¹² “'The Decay of Lying', 'A Pen, Pencil and Poison', 'The Critic as Artist' and 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.' - [...]. These essays take up concerns that directly shaped the composition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [...].” Gillespie, *Oscar Wilde and the Poetics of Ambiguity*, p. 36.

Wilde's appreciation of his own works, 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.' needs to be analysed as a work in its own right. In that regard, Charles Ricketts' recollections of Wilde, for whom he illustrated several volumes, are particularly enlightening. According to Ricketts, Wilde had an obsession with the theory he developed in the story and regarded the short story as "one of [his] early masterpieces."¹³ The story has now become somehow tainted as infamous and unfortunate for Wilde as some passages were quoted during the trial as proofs of Wilde's homosexuality. The homosexual subtext strongly relates to Winckelmann's and in turn Pater's visions of Greek sexual freedom, and justifies Wilde's longing for a distant idealized past. But the story not only uses displacement as the only way to love, it is displayed as the way to love art: "on the title-page I intend placing this aphorism, ARS AMORIS, AMOR ARTIS."¹⁴ He continued: "It contains an entire philosophy, does it not?"¹⁵ This leads me to envisage the story as a complex essay with philosophical intentions.

This chapter will first investigate the spatial aspects of the two works, and will focus primarily on artistic objects and the elevation to the status of art through a Winckelmann-like tactile gaze. The theme of the absence of the artwork will then be examined through the saturation of artistic references in the works of Gautier and Wilde in order to fill the gaps. This overpowering presence of art, in turn, haunts the characters, and the artwork's fantastic characteristics are enhanced. Gautier and Wilde used the atemporality of the artworks in order to create temporal breaches in the narration, which allowed them to recreate an imaginary past. Relating everything to art guaranteed, for the two authors, the freedom of art and its purification from external

¹³ Charles S. Ricketts, *Oscar Wilde: Recollections* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1932), p. 48.

¹⁴ "the art of love, the love of art", *Ibid.* This not only shows how the story is as much about art as it is about love, but also how the two were strongly connected for Wilde.

¹⁵ Charles S. Ricketts, *Charles Ricketts, Everything for Art: Selected Writings*, ed. by Nicholas Frankel (High Wycombe: The Rivendale Press, 2014), p. 234.

matters. For Gautier, sculpting the word in a metaphor relying on marble was seen as a mechanism through which his writing could achieve the hardness necessary to survive through time. For Wilde, the hybridity of his literary medium, which condenses the characteristics of other artistic media, was also its main strength that allows it to defeat temporal and spatial restrictions.

1. The Physical Presence of the Artwork

A. Winckelmann's Tactile Gaze and Fragmentation

Arria Marcella does not begin with an artwork. Like *La Cafetière* or *Le Pied de Momie*, it is an object that prompts the narration and initiates the story: Arria's imprint of her bust in the ashes, kept intact by the eruption. However, on closer inspection, there does not seem to be anything in the corpses found in Pompeii able to create the beautiful reverie of love that is Gautier's work. Rather, it is hard not to feel anything but dread, affliction, and pity while looking at the distorted faces of people fixed in their moment of agony as they burn instantly, their bodies exposed to the elements or rooted to the spot in a foetal position in a vain attempt to protect themselves. Gautier even adds to that terrible vision by fragmenting the body, where Arria's remains are reduced to her bust. Somehow, it is made aesthetic by Gautier, and the fragmentation plays an active role in this aestheticization: Arria's bust is turned into a part of a statue rather than a body part. Indeed, whenever Gautier alludes to the moulding he refers to sculpture: "on eût dit un fragment de moule de statue [...] aussi pur de style que celui d'une statue

grecque”; “dans le marbre par Phidias ou Cléomène.”¹⁶ It is not any sculpture that Gautier relates to Arria’s bust, but Greek sculpture, symbol of purity and perfection, as this chapter will show. Through this imagery, Gautier suggests Arria’s artistic beauty, through her body that has been turned into marble sculpted out of destruction and chaos in order to create beauty.

The perfection of the moulding rewritten into marble by Gautier recalls Winckelmann’s Belvedere Torso. In this ekphrasis, Winckelmann marvelled at the perfection of the remains of a statue of a man, now at the Vatican Museums. The statue only includes the torso and higher part of the legs of the man; the head, arms and lower legs are missing. Winckelmann started by pointing out this absence, a sign of fragmentation and even of mutilation: “the image of the hero sits there maltreated and mutilated: head, breast, arms, and legs are all missing [...] a shapeless stone.”¹⁷ Instantly, however, he added, suggesting a sexual or sensuous way of envisaging and contemplating artworks, “if you are able to penetrate into the mysteries of art, you will behold one of its miracles [...]”¹⁸ In order to make it whole and overcome the initial lack and fragmentation, Winckelmann added to the statue not physically but symbolically. He was therefore able to decipher Hercules in this mutilated form, even though who the figure represented is remains open to debate, proving how powerfully evocative the sculpture is. In the maimed members, Winckelmann saw “the complete hero in a specific deed”, leading him to affirm that he “cannot look at what little remains to be seen of the shoulders without recalling that the entire weight of the heavenly

¹⁶ *Arria Marcella*, in *Romans, contes, et nouvelles*, ed. by Pierre Laubriet *et al.*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2002), II, p. 287, p. 306.

¹⁷ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, ‘Description of the Torso in the Belvedere in Rome (1759)’, *Johann Joachim Winckelmann on Art, Architecture, and Archaeology*, David Carter, transl. (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2013), p. 144.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

sphere had rested on their extended strength [...].”¹⁹ He seemed to be overcharging the torso with meaning in order to make sense of it, to add content. Jacques Rancière exposes the paradox of Winckelmann’s description: “The apex of art is the mutilated statue [...].”²⁰ The power of the statue comes from its mutilation, the missing parts and the absent whole allow for gaps in its interpretation, and leave the imagination free to add to it.

In his essay on Winckelmann in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873), Pater analysed Winckelmann’s tactile gaze in the following terms: “he fingers those pagan marbles with unsinged hands [...].”²¹ The heavily erotic language is explained by Stefano Evangelista: “Winckelmann’s gaze moves along the smooth surfaces of Apollo’s body, caressing it with alluring language, taking the reader with him in this exploration which is charged with erotic tension. The striking ekphrasis frequently evokes tactile fantasies [...].”²² Similarly, the desire to touch Arria’s moulding is evoked on several occasions. For instance, Gautier emphasized the curves of the breast turned into a sculpture: “le contour charmant”, “la rondeur d’une gorge”, “la pointe de ses seins orgueilleux”, “la vue de cette gorge d’un contour si correct, d’une coupe si pure [...].”²³ Gautier even played with the tactile fantasy of his hero who instantly relates Arria’s breasts with the moulding discovered in the museum, as if his eyes had caressed them enough to know their shape and circumference: “il lui sembla que ces rondeurs s’adaptaient parfaitement à l’empreinte en creux du musée de Naples [...].”²⁴ The tactile attraction experienced by Gautier and his hero is indeed palpable.

¹⁹ Winckelmann, *Johann Joachim Winckelmann on Art, Architecture, and Archaeology*, p. 145.

²⁰ Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 3.

²¹ Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 112.

²² Stefano-Maria Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 30.

²³ *Arria Marcella*, p. 287, p. 306.

²⁴ *Arria Marcella*, p. 306.

The tactile attraction evokes Goethe's line in the fifth of the *Roman Elegies* (1795): "Seeing with vision that feels, feeling with fingers that see."²⁵ The *Roman Elegies* are a collection of twenty-four poems in which Goethe evokes his experience in Rome. Like Winckelmann, Goethe marvelled at the artworks on display and in particular, like Winckelmann, the statues exhibited in the Roman galleries. Indeed, the fifth elegy describes "marble" as the recipient of Goethe's tactile desire in the same way as Winckelmann, and Gautier and Wilde later on, divulged their desire to feel the statues while contemplating them. Beate Allert explains how this "ocularcentrism" is particular of Goethe's conception of the visual arts: "he placed ocularity in the much broader context of multi-sensory cognition within which the tactile gains new importance in the discourse on the senses. His approach to visual art is characterized by the importance of three-dimensional haptic or tactile qualities [...]."²⁶ This shows the ways in which Goethe apprehended the world through vision coupled with touch. The examination of visual artworks for Goethe, and in turn for Gautier and Wilde, is closely associated with the sense of touch, in particular when they discuss sculptures.

What Beate Allert does not highlight in her analysis of Goethe's focus on touch and gaze is the sensuality, or sexuality, that is included in this tactile gaze. It is not simply a new way of apprehending things through vision, but it is also associated with a sensual desire oriented towards artworks: in the fifth elegy, Goethe describes the ways in which he uses his "adventuring hand" to "study the shape of her lovely/ Breasts [...]."²⁷ This passage clearly relates to Gautier's description of Arria's breasts in *Arria Marcella* and could have been an influence for this specific passage. This sensual

²⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Roman Elegies*, transl. by David Luke (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977), p. 41.

²⁶ Beate Allert, 'Goethe and the Visual Arts' in *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, ed. by Lesley Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 193-206, p. 204.

²⁷ *Roman Elegies*, p. 41.

apprehension of visual artworks is a characteristic that will be developed in nineteenth-century works, especially during the Decadent period. Paul Bourget, who studied the Decadent movement, notes a similar feature in the writings of the Goncourt brothers: “cette éducation de l’oeil que donne la contemplation continue des peintures et des dessins, des tapisseries et des bibelots.”²⁸ He continues his analysis by quoting from *Charles Demailly* (1860): “je réfléchis combien un de mes sens, la vue, m’a coûté. Combien dans ma vie aurai-je tripoté d’objets d’art, et joui par eux?”²⁹ Not only do artworks evoke sensual reveries, the writers who describe them have a sensual relation to them, as they would with a human being. For Goethe, Winckelmann, Gautier, the Goncourt, and Wilde, watching is desiring, and desiring is desiring to touch. The Goncourt brothers seem to have pushed the relation between vision and touch to the extreme in their work by suggesting that the tactile vision can lead to orgasmic experiences. Bernard Vouilloux explains the ways in which “l’élargissement de l’optique au tactile constitue un trait fondamental du type de visualité privilégié par les descriptions des Goncourt”, a vision which “appelle constamment à un *toucher de l’oeil* [...]”³⁰ But this feature is not only recognizable in the works of the Goncourt brothers, and can be seen in the works of Gautier and Wilde as we have already seen.

What is more specific about Gautier and this tactile vision is that it can also be related to his myopia and the fact that he himself had to be close enough to the objects he was looking at in order to see them properly, close enough that he could probably touch them, a distortive vision that I will discuss in the next chapter. We have no proof that Wilde suffered from being short-sighted so it is impossible to argue that his tactile

²⁸ Paul Bourget, *Nouveaux Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1888), p. 185.

²⁹ Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Charles Demailly*, quoted in Bourget’s *Nouveaux Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine*, p. 185.

³⁰ Bernard Vouilloux, *L’Art des Goncourt. Une Esthétique du Style* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997), p. 75, p. 77.

gaze would come from it. However, it is clear that Gautier's myopia had an impact on his vision and his way of envisaging and apprehending the visual arts. It suggests that the proximity of Gautier with artworks could come from his defective vision, that his myopia pushed him as close to the artworks as possible. Being that close, Gautier could see the details, feel the grain of a painting or the asperities of a sculpture through his eyes, which led to a more sensual apprehension of artworks as can be found throughout his works.

It is striking to read a direct reference to myopia and the tactile gaze in the *Journal* of the Goncourt: "la façon de notre oeil qui nous fait autant aimer l'art, embrassant mieux l'objet, que nous caressons de tout près, que nous touchons presque? Il est à croire que les myopes sont collectionneurs et amateurs d'art de nature."³¹ According to the Goncourt, Gautier's love of art and his peculiar vision of it are directly related to his myopia. The Goncourt may have been thinking about Gautier when they wrote this entry as they knew Gautier very well (their relationship will be examined in Chapter 2 in relation to description and the *écriture artiste*). From Winckelmann to Goethe, and Gautier to the Goncourt onto Wilde, they all shared and expanded on the tactile gaze and the sensual features of their ways of apprehending visual artworks. This erotic vision is particularly present when they describe the three-dimensional medium that is sculpture.

In *Arria Marcella*, Gautier described Arria's moulding as he would a statue, as he did the Venus of Milos, and endowed it with aesthetic characteristics: an object created in order to be beautiful, which fascinates its audience or viewer, and is charged with meaning. The formal perfection of Arria's bust evokes sensuous reveries and generates the story that is to come. Gautier's appreciation of Greek sculpture was

³¹ Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal*, 2 Février 1857, I, p. 233.

similar to Winckelmann's in its praise for fragmentation and, to some extent, mutilation. In *Guide de l'Amateur au Musée du Louvre* (1882), a surprising work produced posthumously, akin to a guide book or a piece of art criticism, Gautier takes the reader on a journey to his favourite artworks, each one of which provokes strong emotions and induces imaginative reveries. When describing the Venus of Milos, another mutilated statue, he affirmed that the absence of the arms only adds to the perfection of the whole: "les bras sont absents, mais il semble que si on les retrouvait, ils gêneraient le plaisir de l'oeil en empêchant de voir cette poitrine superbe et ce sein admirable."³² Again, what attracted Gautier's attention is the woman's breasts or bust, which evoked a clear desire to fill and feel these curves with one's hands. In the same way in which Winckelmann saw so many things in the Belvedere Torso, so too did Gautier saturate the Venus with meaning: "le torse de la Vénus de Milo contient plus de moralité que toute l'oeuvre de Hogarth; dans sa blanche nudité luit la splendeur du vrai et rayonne le plus divin concept de la forme qu'ait jamais réalisé la main humaine."³³ Its whiteness, seen through the scope of a Platonic discourse on art in which the god-like artwork's perfection conveys the one and only truth, becomes the symbol of morality imbued with sensuousness through the concept of form. It seems that sculpture, with its simplicity of subject, absence of exuberant details, and emphasis on form, leads to the possibility of symbolic readings and sensuous appreciation.

While the homosexual subtext present in Winckelmann's work is absent from Gautier's short story, it can be found in Wilde's work. Even though the artwork which gives birth to the story is a painting, there are some distinct allusions to sculpture,

³² 'William Hogarth', in *Guide de l'amateur au Musée du Louvre suivi de la vie et les oeuvres de quelques peintres* (Paris: Charpentier, 1882), p. 153.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 321. A similar statement also appeared in the *Exposition de 1859*: "le torse de la Vénus de Milo est plus moral que toute l'oeuvre d'Hogarth [...]. De même un seul vers d'Homère l'emporte en moralité sur les quatrains de Pibrac et les doctes sentences du conseiller Matthieu [...]." *Exposition de 1859* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1992), p. 140.

among which is the “marble pedestal” present in the portrait.³⁴ When the narrator first sees the portrait, its depiction clearly relates to the tactile gaze in the way in which the description insists on textures that call for touch: “the black velvet doublet [...] hard severity of touch [...]”³⁵ The portrait is important both inside and outside the work, since, as has been pointed out before, Wilde asked Charles Ricketts to paint it and, once lost, Wilde asked for another one. Wilde, in this sense, is close to Cyril Graham in the way in which he looked for visual art in order to add meaning to his literary theory. The missing part is always present in the work, and the portrait, Cyril’s suicide, and Erskine’s fake suicide attempt to fill the gap.

Gradually, Wilde gave tangibility to his theory. For instance, it becomes so real to Erskine that, according to him, only a material form is needed to prove the theory: “a really perfected form.”³⁶ The materiality of the phantasm will take form in the portrait. As the narrator falls under the spell of the portrait, it is not the theory that haunts him, but the forged portrait: “I thought of the wonderful boy-actor, and saw his face in every line.”³⁷ When he gives proof of the existence of Willie Hughes in Shakespeare’s works, or so he thinks, the Willie Hughes he sees is not the one Shakespeare may have known, but the one from the forged portrait. The description at the beginning of the short story, “its dreamy, wistful eyes and its delicate scarlet lips”, echoes the depiction given later on, which is then held to be true for the narrator: “his dreamy deep sunken-eyes [...]”³⁸ The narrator seems to have forgotten that the portrait is a forgery as he is lost in its power. As the hold the portrait has on the narrator strengthens, the narrator loses himself. He cannot distinguish his own self from other

³⁴ *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ‘The Portrait of Mr. W. H.’, ed. by Merlin Holland (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 303.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 303, p. 319.

subjects and objects, an experience similarly shared by characters in fantastic stories: “it seemed to me that I was deciphering the story of a life that had once been mine [...]. Art, as so often happens, had taken the place of personal experience.”³⁹ Art seems to fill a void in the characters’ lives. In turn, artworks become objects of sensuous fantasy, and their fragmentation allows the two writers to fill the gaps both physically and symbolically.

B. Accumulation: Multiplying the Presence of Art

Fragmentation is not solely focused on the physical art objects present in the two works, it also applies to the narration in passages which either do not necessarily make the plot evolve or do not directly relate to it. The striking feature of these digressive sections is that they all concentrate on art, whether they allude to the visual arts in the accumulation of details, as the next chapter will develop, or the insistence on some words for their sounds. Charles Ricketts remembered how, when Wilde was reading ‘The Portrait of Mr. W. H.’ to him, he would “pause on certain words, “*narcissus*”, “*amber*”, “*crimson*”.”⁴⁰ Wilde singled out words and expressions, and detached them from the rest of the sentence, adding to an already fragmented narration in which Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* are dissected and dismembered. Sentences and words are taken out of their overall context and, as was the case for the portrait and Arria’s moulding, are overcharged with meaning.

For example, the story of Cyril Graham randomly finding a chest which contains a portrait of Willie Hughes is somehow hard to believe. It seems like the narrator is

³⁹ ‘The Portrait of Mr. W. H.’, p. 343.

⁴⁰ Ricketts, *Everything for Art*, p. 235.

testing his or her reader, seeing how far he can go with the unbelievable while maintaining a semblance of reality and logic. This passage can be seen as an allegory of the act of narration, which reaffirms the artificiality of its plausibility. It also suggests that Cyril's logic is illogical and that he wishes to live his life like the character of a novel rather than like a human being. The real story behind Cyril's discovery of the chest is Cyril commissioning the forged portrait. However, the story he tells Erskine is very different and relies heavily on luck and fate, as if Cyril were made to discover the portrait. What is even more striking is that Erskine himself chooses to tell the story as Cyril did, which perpetuates the lie.

The story in itself does feel like it has been fabricated. Erskine states that "It was not till he had had the chest in his possession for several days that he had thought of making any careful examination of the inside."⁴¹ It seems rather unlikely that someone would purchase a chest and not examine it immediately. Here, Cyril, through Erskine, is telling a story in a 'narrative' way: he embellishes things, builds the suspense and the listener's expectations. It is even more obvious when Cyril explains how he found the portrait in the chest: "[with a] careful examination of the inside. One morning, however, he saw that the right-hand side of the chest was much thicker than the other [...]."⁴² The chain of events does not match. The insertion of the adverb 'however' establishes a distinction between his examination of the inside of the chest and his discovery of the portrait, which suggests that the portrait was not inside but outside the chest. It is also the most rational explanation since the picture was "clamped against" the thicker side of the chest, which would be hard to imagine if the portrait were inside the chest.⁴³ The question is, then, why would Cyril add the passage about examining

⁴¹ 'Mr. W. H.', p. 310.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

the inside of the chest if the portrait were outside of it? The discordant elements bring to light not only Cyril's forgery but also the way in which he inscribes this forgery in the artistic realm, describing his actions as a narrator would describe the actions of his characters. To some extent, it exposes the art of story-telling as a forgery, and shows its artificiality. It is all the more blatant where half of the narrative comprises quotations from another writer and which begins by alluding to famous literary forgers: "we had a long discussion about Macpherson, Ireland, and Chatterton, and that with regard to the last I insisted that his so-called forgeries were merely the result of an artistic desire for perfect representation."⁴⁴

Digressive or incoherent passages are numerous inside the narration. For instance, while Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are used to justify Willie Hughes' existence, Wilde seems to exaggerate their presence in the short story. When Erskine tells the narrator about Cyril Graham's theory, he quotes almost entire poems: "I remember his reading to me that fine sonnet- [8 lines over 14 of 'Sonnet 38']- and pointing out how completely it corroborated his view [...]"⁴⁵ Notwithstanding the length of Erskine's narrative including numerous quotations, while the passage is supposed to be a story told to another character, Wilde could have simply alluded to the poem. Wilde, also a playwright, knew how to write realistic dialogues. However, it seems that when he was writing fiction, he did not write dialogues in the same way, and the dialogues are closer to the long theoretical cues that can be found in his mock-Platonic dialogues than to the dialogues in his plays. This shows the strong connection between Wilde's critical works and his fiction, a particularly strong link when discussing 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.', which relies on literary theory and analysis. While Wilde pretended to be merely using

⁴⁴ 'Mr. W. H.', p. 302.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

the sonnets to assert the theory, he seemed to be filling the pages of his short story, as well as enjoying the fact that the very premise of the story allowed him to quote Shakespeare at length. The quotations are almost as long as the actual length of the narration. Wilde constantly added these artistic passages, which, although they erode the unity of the overall narration, seem to give more body and more materiality to the theory.

The desire to add details and materiality can also be found in Gautier's work. This extreme attention to detail is particularly present when Gautier described surroundings, but it is also generally characteristic of his style. Both authors suggested that somehow words are multi-faceted media which can be taken to have different meanings, and they therefore felt the need to characterise and clarify the words they were using. Simultaneously, it allowed them to indulge in their passion for words. In a passage from *Arria Marcella*, Gautier could have easily used the word 'bateau' to describe the movements on the sea but he chose two rare and resounding words: "trirème" and "birème". Where one word would have explained what Gautier is saying, he chose two specifically detailed and semantically rich terms. This choice goes hand in hand with his desire for "couleur locale" as well as his attraction, shared by Wilde, to evocative and enchanting words. Through this feature of their style, it seems that Wilde and Gautier tried to fill their works in order to add substance, at the same time as adding yet more artistic references, which then become omnipresent. In that regard, both works can be associated with Paul Bourget's "style de décadence" defined in his *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine* as "celui où l'unité du livre se décompose pour laisser la place à l'indépendance de la page, où la page se décompose pour laisser la place à l'indépendance de la phrase, et la phrase pour laisser la place à l'indépendance

du mot.”⁴⁶ Bourget’s definition highlights the movement’s love for the macabre, the decomposition of the work through its fragmentation that is akin to the decomposition of the dead body. The fragmentation of the work of Gautier and Wilde, which focuses on specific words, or sentences, threatens the overall unity and leaves a collage of independent pieces. If fragmentation were the main stylistic characteristic of the Decadent work, Gautier would therefore be seen as a precursor of the decadent style and Wilde as a British follower, which they were to some extent. However, Bourget’s definition also highlights Wilde’s and Gautier’s distance from the movement, since their fragmentation is more artistic than macabre. The decomposed body, which is given independence, is not the decaying body of Baudelaire’s ‘Une charogne’,⁴⁷ but the body of the statue, or the body of the painted character. Nevertheless, artistic beauty and artworks also have, in Gautier’s and Wilde’s works, a disquieting aspect.

C. Haunting Artworks

In Wilde’s work, the characters often single out words and confess their adoration for them, as is the case for the name of the actor, which is repeated: “His very name fascinated me. Willie Hughes! Willie Hughes! How musical it sounded!”⁴⁸ Through this fetishisation of Willie Hughes’ name, the young actor’s whole being is fragmented, his attraction multiplied, as isolate parts of him are empowered with additional appeal. This fragmentation through a fetish also echoes literary blazons, verses which describe the various parts of (usually) a female body, and which therefore elevate the fictional character to the status of artwork through a poetic reference. Furthermore, Wilde

⁴⁶ Paul Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (Paris: Plon, 1920), p. 20.

⁴⁷ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1975), I.

⁴⁸ ‘Mr. W. H.’, p. 319.

reaffirmed the physical power words can have by asserting that they can change people. The narrator is explaining the love triangle between Shakespeare, Willie Hughes and the mysterious woman and demonstrates how, as he imagines it, Shakespeare began trying to convince himself that he was in love with the woman and ended up actually being in love with her: “he begins by pretending to love, [...] suddenly he finds that what his tongue had spoken his soul had listened to, and that the raiment that he had put on for disguise is a plague-stricken and poisonous thing that eats into his flesh, and that he cannot throw away.”⁴⁹

Words can manipulate people as easily as poison invades someone’s veins. The metaphor of the poisonous words is a repetitive trope in Wilde’s works, which can be found again in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the influence of the Yellow Book on Dorian. According to Wilde, make-believe is actually making. The idea of words or sentences as tropes present in his works is also found in the expression “the visible incarnation of his idea of beauty” attributed to Willie Hughes for Shakespeare, which almost exactly mirrors Basil’s expression about Dorian: “You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal [...]”⁵⁰ Words are seen as musical choruses or echoes, which also suggests that Wilde envisages all his works as a whole, like a musical piece in which each individual work inserts itself within the bigger part.

As I shall explore in chapter 3, words have an enchanting effect and have the power to enact what they mean. They also share, with other artistic media, the power to captivate, a characteristic both authors develop in their critical works as well as in their fictional ones. In order to explain the compulsion exerted by artworks, Gautier’s artistic descriptions abound with terms related to magic. About Ingres, he explained

⁴⁹ ‘Mr. W. H.’, p. 336.

⁵⁰ *Dorian Gray*, p. 264.

how in the *Portrait of Mme Devauçay*, her eyes “vous suivent, vous obsèdent, vous charment en prenant le mot au sens magique.”⁵¹ Being under someone’s charm is to lose one’s will power and individuality: something is being forced on one’s self. The way in which Gautier described his attraction to Da Vinci’s masterpiece is particularly enlightening. When entering the room in which *The Gioconda* is exhibited, Gautier said “notre premier mouvement est toujours d’aller contempler, avant toute chose, *La Joconde* de Vinci [...]”⁵² The urgency and even compulsion felt by Gautier when he is near the portrait suggest that he could not prevent himself from looking at it whenever he entered this room. The word ‘contemplate’, meaning both to watch intently and to consider the object with our minds, relates to something more than just a visual experience.

Gautier often used the word in his short stories, but he also used another to describe this process, a word that will be adopted by Wilde: the ‘fascination’ exerted by artworks. Once again, Gautier described Da Vinci’s works explaining how “ses ouvrages vous fascinent par une sorte de pouvoir magique”.⁵³ In the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, Alain Rey explores the different definitions of the term in France. In the fourteenth century, fascinate means “maîtriser par la puissance du regard”, which then evolves in the sixteenth century to “captiver par la beauté, le prestige, etc.”⁵⁴ These different meanings unite the main concepts of this chapter: the captivating power of beauty which allows artworks to exert an influence on us, to control us; and through magic domination, artworks absorb us. This approach is key to the aesthetic doctrines of Gautier and Wilde, and explains the importance of their use of the fantastic genre. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde used the term ‘fascination’

⁵¹ *Critique artistique et littéraire*, p.78.

⁵² *Guide de l’amateur au Musée du Louvre* (1994), p. 25.

⁵³ *Critique artistique et littéraire*, p. 18.

⁵⁴ Alain Rey, *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, 3 vols (Paris: Le Robert, 2004), II, p. 1400.

at least twenty-two times to analyse the effect of Dorian and his portrait on the different characters in the novel.⁵⁵

Pater discussed Da Vinci's works in similar terms as Gautier did. In his analysis of the Italian master's works, Pater used the words 'fascination' or 'fascinate' three times, establishing a filiation with Gautier and quoting Gautier in the essay "we are no longer surprised by Saint John the Baptist's strange likeness to Bacchus [...] which set Gautier thinking of Heine's notion of decayed gods [...]."⁵⁶ His understanding of Da Vinci is mostly taken from Gautier's description of the painter, and Pater even used almost exact translations from Gautier's art reviews. Gautier said that "ce qui caractérise, en effet, Léonard, c'est l'étude constante, attentive, approfondie, intime de la nature,"⁵⁷ which became in Pater's study "His art, [...] must be weighted with more of the meaning of nature and purpose of humanity. [...] So he plunged into the study of nature."⁵⁸

The example of the Mona Lisa is particularly pertinent to this chapter's discussion as the three authors – Gautier, Pater, and Wilde – interpreted the painting in the same way, highlighting its atemporal as well as a-spatial characteristics. Gautier saw eternity in the Mona Lisa, and emphasized its immortal attraction, "l'admiration des siècles", "une femme sûre d'être éternellement belle [...]."⁵⁹ He also pondered her strangeness that makes her alien to this planet: "de quelle planète est tombé [...] cet être étrange [...]."⁶⁰ Similarly, Pater insisted on the fact that time seems not to have affected the Mona Lisa: "time has chilled it least", and that she belonged to all times

⁵⁵ A few examples: "Your mysterious young friend, whose name you have never told me, but whose picture really fascinates me", *Dorian Gray*, p. 170; "whose mere personality was so fascinating", *Ibid.*, p. 173; "how fascinating the lad was!", *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁵⁶ *Dorian Gray*, p. 184.

⁵⁷ *Critique artistique et littéraire*, p. 18.

⁵⁸ Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 59.

⁵⁹ *Guide de l'amateur au Musée du Louvre* (1994), p. 26, p. 27.

⁶⁰ *Guide de l'amateur au Musée du Louvre* (1994), p. 26.

and eras: “the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the reverie of the middle age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative lives, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias.”⁶¹ Equally, she did not belong to a specific geographic space, as she had “been a diver in deep seas, [...] trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants [...]”, allowing Pater to see her as “the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea.”⁶² The eternal figure prompted a reflection on the synthesis of eras and geographical spaces. The Mona Lisa, in her blurring of time and space, remained “older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave [...]”,⁶³ while simultaneously embodying modernity.

Wilde, in ‘The Critic as Artist’, praised Pater’s analysis of the painting and quoted passages from the *Renaissance*, that showed how Wilde’s own interpretation of the Mona Lisa was influenced by Pater’s and, in turn, by Gautier’s. The Mona Lisa is the personification of Gautier’s and Wilde’s vision of art, a vision which they utilised and developed in the two works under study in this chapter: a magical, eternal presence offering a glimpse into past times and spaces. Gautier also added something that will become central to his aesthetic vision in his depiction of Da Vinci’s painting: the ways in which Da Vinci’s colours and techniques had led to their blurring and darkening. He therefore wondered: “Doit-on regretter que le noir particulier qu’employait Léonard, et dont il était l’inventeur, ait prévalu dans les teintes de la Nonna Lisa et leur ait donné cette délicieuse harmonie violâtre [...]”⁶⁴ To which he answered: “Nous ne le pensons pas. Maintenant, le mystère s’ajoute au charme, et le tableau, dans sa fraîcheur, était

⁶¹ Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 69, p. 70.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 70, p. 71.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶⁴ *Guide de l’Amateur au Musée du Louvre* (1994), p. 28.

peut-être moins séduisant.”⁶⁵ The painting’s decay and fading through time was therefore an added attraction for Gautier, an idea which he also developed when he described Greek sculpture.

What the three authors referred to when discussing the Mona Lisa is similar to what would later be called the Stendhal syndrome, or Florence syndrome, a scientific proof of the power of art. It is a psychosomatic disorder that causes rapid heartbeat, dizziness or hallucinations in someone who has been exposed to a great many works of art. The syndrome had not been discovered during the nineteenth century, but Stendhal described in 1826 how the sight of so many beautiful things concentrated in the same place, Florence, almost made him faint: “la vie était épuisée chez moi, je marchais avec la crainte de tomber.”⁶⁶ The physical reaction that art can provoke in human beings is inherent to its beauty and Stendhal suggested that he was so captivated by the beauty surrounding him that it drained his life and energy. Staring at a work of art, the viewer sometimes forgets everything but the beauty on display: he or she loses sense of time, space, and, to some extent, a sense of self. French and English expressions abound to qualify this phenomenon: ‘je me perds dans la contemplation d’un tableau’, “absorbé dans la contemplation de la beauté sublime”,⁶⁷ ‘absorbed in contemplation’. Gautier and Wilde both referred to Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa as something dangerously captivating: “un attrait invincible ramène toujours vers toi”,⁶⁸ the adjective “invincible” suggests the impossibility of fighting the attraction; while Wilde talked about “the subtle and poisonous curves” of *La Gioconda*’s lips.⁶⁹ Wilde’s use of the word

⁶⁵ *Guide de l’Amateur au Musée du Louvre* (1994), p. 28.

⁶⁶ Stendhal, *Rome, Naples et Florence* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 272.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Guide de l’amateur au Musée du Louvre* (1994), p.26.

⁶⁹ ‘The Critic as Artist’, p. 157.

‘poisonous’ alludes to the potential damage an artwork can create, both physically and mentally.

Being absorbed in a work of art is not an uncommon concept. During the same period in Germany, Schopenhauer, in *The World as Will and Representation* (1844), and to whom Wilde alludes to in ‘The Decay of Lying’,⁷⁰ explains how only beautiful objects can create this type of attraction in us. According to Schopenhauer, abstract thoughts cannot impel us in the same way:

We do not let abstract thought, the concepts of reason, take possession of our consciousness, but, instead of all this, devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein, and let our whole consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object actually present [...] we *lose* ourselves entirely in this object [...] we forget our individuality, our will [...].⁷¹

This concept of absorption is also essential in fantastic literature, and Tzvetan Todorov shows that the character experiences an “effacement of the limit between subject and object”.⁷² This shift in our perception is caused by the fantastic destruction of the limit between mind and matter. In fairy tales, wishes come true: the boundary between words and their actualization breaks down:

The rational schema represents the human being as a subject entering into relations with other persons or with things that remain external to him, and

⁷⁰ “Schopenhauer has analysed the pessimism [...]” ‘The Decay of Lying’, p. 92.

⁷¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, ‘The World as Will and Representation’, in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds., *Art in Theory, 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 16.

⁷² Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 116.

which have the status of objects. The literature of the fantastic disturbs this abrupt separation.⁷³

Since one's mind is not capable of determining what stands as an object, and what does not, the objects perceived by one's mind become subjects, and turn into an extension of one's own subjectivity. This concept can also be transposed onto painting: the scene one is witnessing on the canvas enters his or her own dimension, and the frame, standing as the limit between two different worlds, is no longer effective. One enters the scene, or the scene enters the world.

Graziella Magherini, who studied and conceptualized the Stendhal syndrome in her 1898 study *La Sindrome di Stendhal*, listed the loss of the feeling of one's identity as one of the symptoms of the syndrome. The vocabulary of the loss of one's identity in favour of a work of art is characteristic of a fantastic essence of art. This transposition, or projection, into the artwork and outside oneself already makes one forget where he or she is, and in which temporality he or she stands: one loses all points of reference. Absorbed in the artwork's dimension, one falls under the spell of its beauty.

Wilde created the short story around Willie Hughes' influence on the different characters. The narrator becomes obsessed, as Cyril Graham was, with the young man, and devotes his time to showing that the theory is real. Constantly, during his research, the hero feels a presence forcing him to continue: "there had been a presence beside me always."⁷⁴ This presence, the reader discovers later on, was the forged portrait haunting the hero: "Had I merely been influenced by the beauty of the forged portrait, charmed by that Shelley-like face into faith and credence?"⁷⁵ In the end, two men die because of

⁷³ Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 116.

⁷⁴ 'Mr. W. H.', p. 344.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

the influence of the “fatal portrait”, and it still occupies the narrator’s thoughts and space, as it is said to hang “now in my library, where it is very much admired by my artistic friends [...]”⁷⁶ Wilde introduces the theme of the attractive portrait through the character of Cyril Graham first, who is said to be “very fascinating”.⁷⁷ When the narrator discovers the portrait, his qualification of the painting as “charming” suggests magical attributes, reinforced by the following sentence: “whose beauty Art has so happily preserved for us [...]”⁷⁸ Art’s special ability to give permanence to beautiful things is therefore reinforced.

Wilde used the term ‘fascination’ again in the short story, this time applying it to the portrait: “looking at the wonderful portrait, which had already begun to have a strange fascination for me.”⁷⁹ The qualification of the fascination as strange reinforces its rather sudden and compulsive power (it is only the very beginning of the short story). The term fascination is used twenty-four times in the story. As Erskine’s narration of Cyril Graham’s theory goes on, he explains how Willie Hughes was given more and more reality and physicality: “Willie Hughes became to me as real a person as Shakespeare.”⁸⁰ Wilde explained the concept of influence as follows: “Influence is simply a transference of personality, a mode of giving away what is most precious to one’s self, and its exercise produces a sense, and, it may be, a reality of loss.”⁸¹ This strongly relates to Todorov’s definition of the fantastic absorption of the self, which places the short story clearly inside the realm of the fantastic:

⁷⁶ ‘Mr. W. H.’, p. 350.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

the effacement of the limit between subject and object. The rational schema represents the human being as a subject entering into relations with other persons or with things that remain external to him, and which have the status of objects. The literature of the fantastic disturbs this abrupt separation.⁸²

Through this pervading metaphor of art as capable of ensnaring someone's body and mind, Gautier and Wilde suggest a strong connection between artworks and fantastic objects and subjects. In a mirrored movement, the fantastic influences their views on art, at the same time as art colours their practice of the fantastic genre, and they exhibit not only fantastic monsters in their works, but 'monstres charmants'. But it also suggests something more surprising and original in the two authors, which is the erosion of the negative connotation that usually accompanies the fantastic. Both writers expanded on the dialectic relation between art and the fantastic: art is shown as inherently fantastic, while the fantastic mode becomes intrinsically linked with aesthetics. As the fantastic genre gives life to unreal objects, so does art as 'transpositions d'art' or ekphrases animate inanimate objects.

When analysing the definitions of the fantastic given by the main theoreticians of the genre, it becomes clear that the term has negative connotations. Todorov, for instance, sums up the definitions used by three French critics before him: Pierre-Georges Castex says that: "the fantastic...is characterized...by a *brutal* intrusion of mystery into the context of real life." Louis Vax, in *L'Art et la littérature fantastiques*: "the fantastic narrative generally describes men like ourselves, inhabiting the real world, *suddenly confronted by the inexplicable*." Roger Caillois, in *Au Coeur du fantastique*: "the fantastic is always a *break* in the acknowledged order, an *irruption of the inadmissible* within the changeless everyday legality."⁸³ The words in italics

⁸² Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 116.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

demonstrate the strong negative connotation associated with the genre. The fantastic is characterized not only by its violent opposition to the real world but especially by its savage disruption of this same real world, seen as a brutal experience for the hero as well as for the reader. Surprisingly, in *Arria Marcella* and ‘The Portrait of Mr. W. H.’, the two authors use and praise this very disruption as the only way through which they can interact with other places and times, which breaks the monotony of contemporary everyday life.

D. Fantastic, Fancy, and Caprice in the nineteenth century

Pierre-Georges Castex, who begins a critical tradition of the fantastic genre in France in the twentieth century in 1951 with *Le Conte Fantastique en France, de Nodier à Maupassant*, proposes a historical study of the fantastic short story in France. He analyses the way in which Gautier’s tale, *Onuphrius* (1832), “ne peut passer pour un vrai conte fantastique” because of the narrator’s irony towards the adventures of his hero.⁸⁴ Gautier’s tale is more a *fantaisie* than a fantastic story, a distinction which is a modern one since the two words were directly associated during the nineteenth century. Castex’s aim is not to define the genre but rather to analyse its evolution during the nineteenth century in France. By contrast, Todorov’s study delineates the genre and proposes to divide the fantastic into two categories: the fantastic-uncanny, in which the supernatural is explained, and the fantastic-marvellous, in which the supernatural is accepted. He uses Gautier’s short story *La Morte Amoureuse* as belonging to both categories, which proves the difficulty to circumscribe a fantastic text into one specific

⁸⁴ Pierre-Georges Castex, *Le Conte fantastique en France, de Nodier à Maupassant* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1951), p. 222.

category. On the one hand, the fantastic represents a sudden intervention of a supernatural element into the real world. On the other hand, it leads to a possible new world in which the rational laws of the normal world do not apply. This division is characteristic of the genre and can be pointed out in most studies.

In his 1963 *L'Art et la Littérature Fantastiques* Louis Vax questions the limits of the genre, and puts the fantastic in opposition to the fairylike, but he places both genres within the realm of the marvellous. According to him, the fantastic does not contain any other possible worlds, while in contrast the fairylike does, but it brings imaginary terrors within the real world: “Ce n’est pas un autre univers qui se dresse face au nôtre: c’est le nôtre qui, paradoxalement, se métamorphose, se pourrit et devient autre.”⁸⁵ The terms Vax uses to characterize the genre are mostly negative: “mode de sentir élémentaire et violent”⁸⁶, “L’esthétique du fantastique? Une esthétique du faux, du mal et du laid.”⁸⁷ This statement needs to be analysed since it is one of the first times a critic ever alludes to the aesthetic of the fantastic genre. Freud did introduce his theory of the uncanny through an aesthetic approach in 1919, in which he showed that few scholars had tackled the question of the aesthetic value of the genre since:

As good as nothing is to be found upon that subject in elaborate treatises on aesthetics, which in general prefer to concern themselves with what is beautiful, attractive and sublime, that is with feelings of a positive nature, with the circumstances and the objects that call them forth, rather than with the opposite feelings of unpleasantness and repulsion.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Louis Vax, *L'Art et la Littérature Fantastiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), p. 17.

⁸⁶ Louis Vax, *La Séduction de l'Etrange* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987), p. 72.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁸⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Imago, 1919), p.1.

Freud inferred that the beauty of the fantastic is of a negative type, and cannot arouse positive reactions in the reader, questioning whether the aesthetic of the fantastic genre can indeed be called beauty. Even though Vax entitles one of his essays *La Séduction de l'Etrange*, he only ever describes the attraction the genre exerts on the reader in negative terms, as Freud does. The enquiry about the existence of an inherent beauty of the fantastic genre has indeed never been dealt with, and this thesis will demonstrate the close relationship between the fantastic genre and art in the works of Gautier and Wilde, which could be seen as the first step towards the affirmation of an aesthetic of the genre. These modern definitions of the genre show how the word has lost some of its meaning, since the analysis of the word during the nineteenth century shows its close association with *fantaisie* and *phantasie*. The German word *phantasie* alludes to the gothic genre and its aesthetic, while *fantaisie* suggests a direct link to the decorative arts through its association with caprice and the grotesque: the fantastic during the nineteenth century was therefore more naturally associated with art, which is an association that has been lost during the twentieth century.

The last French critic is Roger Caillois, who wrote *Au Coeur du Fantastique* in 1965. He insists on the power of images at the heart of the fantastic, and brings forward imagination as the main device of the fantastic. In his opinion, the fantastic works best when developed through visual media than in literature: “le fantastique [comes from] l'image et non du texte”.⁸⁹ Caillois' theory is founded upon the importance of mental and visual images and the reader's ability to imagine them, therefore putting forward the theme of visions as the main theme in the fantastic. His analysis also highlights a relation between the fantastic and the visual arts, which is reminiscent of its historical

⁸⁹ Roger Caillois, *Au Cœur du Fantastique* in *Cohérences Aventureuses* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1973), p. 107.

association with the word *fantaisie*. In 1981, Rosemary Jackson proposed a new interpretation of the fantastic genre. She envisages the fantastic as a mode and focuses on its subversive power. In *Fantasy, a Literature of Subversion*, she reflects on the difficulty to define the fantastic, or as she calls it fantasy, and suggests that this very difficulty is an inherent characteristic which builds the identity of the genre: “Its association with imagination and with desires has made it an area difficult to articulate or to define, and indeed the ‘value’ of fantasy has seemed to reside in precisely this resistance to definition, in its ‘free-floating’ and escapist qualities.”⁹⁰ Escaping definition and circumscription, the fantastic therefore lies within this uncertainty, or what Todorov called “hesitation”. This new approach is interesting since it accounts for the originality of the genre, casting a more positive light on the concept.

Jackson also recognizes the attractiveness of the genre, calling it a “seductive subject”, while acknowledging for the first time the pleasure this kind of literature may produce since it is seen as “fulfilling a desire for a ‘better’, more complete, unified reality” therefore “defining it as an art form providing vicarious gratification.”⁹¹ This is a crucial definition since envisaging fantasy as an art reintroduces the concept of an aesthetic proper to the genre. However, this is not the focus Jackson has chosen. For her, the creation of an alternative reality made possible through the fantastic genre is a response to a rebellious mind refusing to abide by natural or social laws. In that sense, it expresses repressed desires, unconscious wishes made illegal or immoral in the eyes of society, showing its psychoanalytic characteristic. According to her, the alternative realities created by the fantastic are “empty, emptying, dissolving”, and therefore “construct nothing”.⁹² They are sterile atmospheres “insisting upon absence, lack, the

⁹⁰ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy, The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 1-2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1, p. 2.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 45

‘non-seen’, the ‘unseeable’.”⁹³ When, at first, Jackson had recognized a positive power in the fantastic genre as fulfilling an unconscious desire, she comes to qualify the satisfaction the genre can give to its reader by proposing alternatives to reality. In the end, the fantastic simply questions reality without proposing a viable alternative, being therefore characterized once again as “a negative version” of what it stands against.⁹⁴

Most of these critics analyse the works of Gautier and Wilde as examples of their theories. In Todorov’s study, Gautier is used several times, especially with *La Morte Amoureuse*, and Jackson analyses Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in relation to Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Castex devotes a whole chapter to Gautier’s fantastic tales entitled ‘Gautier et son angoisse’, and emphasizes the author’s biographical details showing how Gautier believed in the supernatural and the effect of this belief on his works. Vax demonstrates how Wilde subverted the fantastic genre in *The Canterville Ghost* and alludes once again to Gautier’s fear of the supernatural. This clearly places both authors in the fantastic genre, but it also proves how they both partook of the historical construction of the fantastic genre. These modern definitions highlight some natural associations with which the fantastic can be related: imagination, caprice and desire, fancy. These associations were already in place during the nineteenth century and were also being developed by several authors, including Gautier and Wilde.

The *Littré* provides the following definitions to the word *fantaisie*: the first one is “ancien synonyme d’imagination”, the second one is “de fantaisie, par l’imagination, sans réalité”.⁹⁵ This relates the fantastic to the power of imagination.. Then, the dictionary defines *fantaisie* as desire, will, opinion, taste, whim, oddity, which creates

⁹³ Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 45.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁹⁵ Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, T 3, pp. 1405-6.

a link between *fantaisie* and desire. The seventh and eighth meanings of the word are closely related to the argument of this thesis, as they establish a relation between *fantaisie* and the visual arts. They relate *fantaisie* with “caprice” and “terme de peinture. Ouvrage où l’on a suivi son caprice et son imagination en s’affranchissant des règles. Des arabesques sont des fantaisies.”⁹⁶ These definitions prove both the proximity between the fantastic and the visual arts, hinting once again at the existence of an aesthetic proper to the genre, and explain the importance of the fantastic for our two authors. The word describes a work of imagination, which could be applied to all artistic media, but is also specific to painting, and relates to the decorative arts, the grotesque, and the ornamental with the arabesque. The inherent polysemy of the word justifies the ways in which Gautier and Wilde use it, in relation to the fantastic, as a crucial concept within their own theories on art and literature. For the two authors, the fantastic is a genre which allows them to create new worlds in which their characters evolve, but it is also a mode through which they envisage literature, as an artistic medium in relation to the visual arts.

These preliminary definitions show how eclectic the term fantastic is during the nineteenth century. Its etymology suggests a relation with the words *fantasmes*, *fantômes*, and *fantastique*. The *Littre* defines *fantastique* as “qui n’existe qu’en fantaisie, qu’en imagination”, therefore defining the fantastic through *fantaisie*, which is a common association during the nineteenth century when the two words are used almost as synonyms.⁹⁷ It also relates the fantastic with *fantômes* and *fantasmes*: “qui n’a que l’apparence d’un être corporel.”⁹⁸ Therefore, the words *fantaisie*, *fantastique*, *fantasmes*, and *fantômes* are all related. Bernard Vouilloux gives a thorough analysis

⁹⁶ Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, T 3, pp. 1405-6.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1408-9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

of the evolution of the word *fantaisie* and explains how the word, in France, borrowed some of its meaning from the German *phantasie*: “la fantaisie, en tant qu’imagination créatrice, au caprice; elles mettent l’accent sur l’absence de règles; elles induisent une sorte de primauté de la peinture et de l’image [...]”⁹⁹ He adds that: “cette signification est un calque sémantique de l’allemand phantasie.”¹⁰⁰ He then summarizes the evolution of the word in France: “le règne moderne de la fantaisie aura commencé avec les fantômes (gothic novel), se sera pensé dans la phantasie et la fancy, aura fait école avec la fantaisie romantique, et en particulier dans le fantastique, pour enfin aboutir au fantaisisme.”¹⁰¹ Around the 1830s in France, the word *fantastique* appears in correlation with the word *fantaisie*. In 1821, Nodier published the first French fantastic tale: *Smarra, ou les Démons de La Nuit, Conte Fantastique*.¹⁰² The insertion in the title of the adjective *fantastique*, used for the first time as the definition of a literary work, which will later become a device commonly used by fantastic writers, characterizes the tale of a nightmare which Nodier merely ‘translated’, borrowing here from the codes of the gothic novel. Indeed, initiated by Horace Walpole (*The Castle of Otranto*, 1764), Matthew Lewis (*The Monk*, 1796), and Ann Radcliffe (*The Italian*, 1797), the gothic novel usually starts affirming that the story told is merely a transcription of a real tale, a device that Gautier will also borrow.

Nodier wrote an essay in 1830 which is crucial for our understanding of the word *fantastique* during the nineteenth century. In *Du Fantastique en Littérature*, Nodier talked of a fantastic world, an intermediary world between the real and the

⁹⁹ Bernard Vouilloux, ‘Elements pour l’archéologie d’une notion’ in *La Fantaisie post-Romantique*, ed. by Jean-Louis Cabanès, Jean-Pierre Saïdah (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2003), pp. 19-58, p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁰² *Le Diable Amoureux* by Cazotte (1772) is often recognized as the first french fantastic tale, however, the adjective ‘fantastique’ was only later applied to the text, therefore Nodier is the first author to use the adjective to qualify his own work.

unreal. He pointed out the inextricable relation between the fantastic and imagination. While it is commonly admitted that fantastic works play with the world of magic, Nodier went further than this by affirming that there is something inherently magical in art. He tried to understand what makes art special and unique, and how it is the only medium capable of transporting people into an unknown and different universe. His justification of the use of the term magic applied to art is as follows:

Comment douter de la magie, quand le poète, magicien lui-même, vous entraîne à son gré dans des espaces moins familiers à l'intelligence de l'homme que ceux où il a égaré l'hypogriffe, quand ses chants se ressentent d'une inspiration surnaturelle, et semblent provenir d'un autre monde?¹⁰³

Here, Nodier is not referring to the fantastic as a tool, or even as a genre, but more as a mode, which supports Jackson's own interpretation of the concept. It does not necessarily relate to works of a fantastic nature, but more to a fantastic principle, present in most, if not all, works of art as products of the imagination. This vision of the fantastic suggests that it can be seen as taking part in the creative process of any artist, which is something that Gautier and Wilde will develop in their works. Finally, Nodier presented another theme related to the fantastic and art which is the notion of escapism. Nodier considered the fantastic as the only potential source of happiness in a difficult life: "la seule compensation vraiment providentielle des misères inséparables de sa vie sociale."¹⁰⁴ The world of complete freedom and wonders provided by the fantastic becomes a means to escape everyday life.

¹⁰³ Charles Nodier, *Du Fantastique en littérature, contes fantastiques* (Paris: Charpentier, 1869), p. 19.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

2. Magic Marble, Artworks and Time and Space

A. The Moment of the Fantastic

The two authors seem to use the fantastic mode in order to disrupt the narration, and allow the imaginary past they recreate to interact with their characters. Developing the analogy between the fantastic and artworks, the moment when the artwork first appears is treated in a similar way as the appearance of a fantastic element. *Arria Marcella* starts in medias res, and Gautier leaves no doubt as to what the short story is about: the narration begins in a museum, bringing the reader immediately into the realm of art, outside the boundary of time. The three friends visiting the museum already feel the elation of being in contact with so many beautiful things: “les mosaïques, les bronzes, les fresques détachés des murs de la ville morte”;¹⁰⁵ the subordinate clause suggests a displacement of the artworks which opens up the narration to spatial and temporal breaches. Something uncanny happens from the very beginning of the short story: one of the three friends momentarily forgets the world around him while contemplating one piece on display: “le plus jeune des trois [...] paraissait ne pas entendre les exclamations de ses camarades, absorbé qu’il était dans une contemplation profonde.”¹⁰⁶ The world seems to narrow down to the beauty he is faced with, the sounds and people surrounding him do not affect him. He is lost in beauty. Gautier endowed art with magical power: the ability to absorb oneself into the beauty of the artwork.

In ‘The Portrait of Mr W. H.’, Wilde was also complying with characteristic features of the fantastic. From the very beginning, the forged portrait is shrouded in

¹⁰⁵ *Arria Marcella*, p. 287.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

mystery, which adds to its appeal: it is hidden in an “inlaid cabinet that stood between the two windows [...]”¹⁰⁷ Wilde frames the object in this ornamental setting, which is already situated between two windows. Erskine has to unlock the cabinet to display the portrait which was secretly placed right in the middle of the room, as a permanent presence. At first, it seems that there is significant difference in the treatment of the fantastic between Wilde and Gautier. While Gautier seemed to celebrate the genre and its potentialities, Wilde imbued artworks with a frightening and fatal influence, although the pleasure found in this attraction somehow counterbalances this scary atmosphere.

Gautier’s take on the fantastic, associating it with a positive impact on his hero, is particularly visible in *Arria Marcella*. He insisted on the hero’s exceptionality and the uniqueness of his adventures since he informed the reader that time had left its usual place for Octavien, “Pour lui”. Once time allows him to leave the real world, his life becomes full again, “Sa vie se remplissait d’un seul coup.”¹⁰⁸ Octavien feels “son âme redevenir vierge de toute émotion antérieure. Le passé disparut.”¹⁰⁹ Notwithstanding the sexual subtext of the expression, it becomes clear that the fantastic acts as a cleansing experience, purifying the hero. The next statement sums up Gautier’s vision of the fantastic universe: “je comprenais que je n’aimerais jamais que hors du temps et de l’espace.”¹¹⁰ For Gautier, love and art were intimately connected. His short story *La Toison d’or* (1839), for example, tells the story of a young man who falls in love with one of Rubens’ painted characters. Natalie David-Weill, in her study of Gautier’s female heroines, *Rêve de pierre: la quête de la femme chez Théophile Gautier*, argues that most women are turned into artistic beings, if not into artistic objects. It certainly

¹⁰⁷ ‘Mr. W. H.’, p. 302.

¹⁰⁸ *Arria Marcella*, p. 307.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

has a strong resonance with *Arria Marcella*, in which Octavien's love for Arria can be analysed as his love for artworks rather than his love for 'real' women. Therefore, the fantastic is essential to Gautier since it is the disruption of reality that allows artworks to enter our temporality. In the disturbed temporality in which the fantastic takes place (things from the past come back, the future can be foreseen), artworks temporarily invade the ephemeral human timeframe.

From the beginning of his short story, Gautier allowed for this temporal breach. Art acts as a time-travel machine, triggering a palingenetic reverie. Time is nothing in itself, and there might be another dimension in which past things are preserved and keep existing. Once the step into this other dimension is made, it opens up to all other epochs. It justifies the mixing of styles: "deux profondes rainures destinées à laisser glisser une herse, comme un donjon du Moyen-Age [...] qui aurait soupçonné [...] Pompéi, la ville gréco-latine, d'une fermeture aussi romantiquement gothique?"¹¹¹ When the transformation of the city is complete, Octavien interacts fully with his new surroundings. The retrospective power of art is not just a feeling, it affects the hero physically: "excitait chez Octavien des élans insensés vers un idéal rétrospectif [...]"¹¹² Octavien desires Arria as he would desire a real woman. However, time is not simply repeating itself, it becomes ineffective: "il tentait de sortir du temps et de la vie [...]"¹¹³ In this dream-like new-found reality, beauty has the power to last forever. Another sign of the feeling of eternity given by art is the following expression: "ce jour nocturne."¹¹⁴ The poetical oxymoron is what creates the temporal confusion: the world of all possibilities is indeed brought to life and made possible by art and the artist's imagination and skills. Gautier used an expression made out of two existing ones in

¹¹¹ *Arria Marcella*, p. 291.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 297.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

order to explain the projection into another time and space: “la roue du temps était sortie de son ornière [...]”¹¹⁵ This association brings together two clichéd images, the wheel of time and the exit from a difficult enterprise, and creates a new form particularly telling for what Gautier tried to express here. Indeed, “sortir de son ornière” also means getting off the beaten track, thinking outside the box, which is exactly what the fantastic performs in his tales.

The expression is an adaptation of *Hamlet*’s verse “The time is out of joint” in Act I Scene 5.¹¹⁶ In the short story, the word “ornière” is used beforehand in the sentence “ornières de char creusées dans le pavage”,¹¹⁷ which prepares the reader for the Shakespearean quotation and carries the same meaning as something leaving its mark through eternity. The sense of repetition of the same motif is accentuated by the fact that Gautier will use the same quotation five years later in *Le Roman de la momie*. Nevertheless, there is a crucial difference between the two quotations: in *Arria Marcella*, Gautier inserts the quotation completely into the narration by omitting the inverted commas. Gautier appropriated Shakespeare’s material as his own to create something new: it mirrors his reflexion on art and past epochs as creative triggers for new creations. Wilde used the exact same device in ‘The Portrait of Mr. W. H.’ taking over Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* and incorporating them in the narration. The narration is therefore constructed as a palimpsest, playing with different voices merged together in order to create a polyphonic work, unveiling several narrative levels.

Wilde’s insertion of Shakespeare’s works does not seem to follow any rule. Sometimes they are inserted as normal quotations, in a direct speech with inverted commas, but more often Wilde did not put the inverted commas and used indirect

¹¹⁵ *Arria Marcella*, p. 306.

¹¹⁶ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), p. 20.

¹¹⁷ *Arria Marcella*, p. 290.

speech as if to include Shakespeare's words inside the narration. They are embedded in the narration and merged with the words of the narrator. For instance, there is a passage which completely blurs the distinction between Shakespeare and the narrator. Beforehand, the difference in speakers was marked by a difference in register, the narrator or Erskine using nineteenth-century English and Shakespeare's quotations being in sixteenth-century English. Here, the language is the same, and Shakespeare is made to speak nineteenth-century English: "You must create something in art: my verse 'is thine and born of thee'; only listen to me [...]." ¹¹⁸ Who speaks? To whom? The voices seem to merge into one, as the combination of the two authorial voices (Wilde and Shakespeare) become one. What at first seemed dissonant with a clear difference in register has given birth to a beautiful dialogue between the two authors, a beauty born of mixed elements, which allows for time-travel through words. Mirroring the subject of the stories, the form conveys time-travel and actually enacts it. Playing with different temporalities, different registers, various voices and points of views, the narrative thread is constantly deformed and used as a spatial starting-point from which Gautier and Wilde digress. While Gautier and Wilde seem to differ in their practices of the fantastic, both use it in the two works in order to disrupt the narration and allow for temporal and spatial breaches. Simultaneously, they insist on art's fantastic ability to efface temporal and spatial dimensions.

¹¹⁸ 'Mr. W. H.', p. 316.

B. Art and Time: The Ability to Revive the Past

In 'The Critic as Artist', a mock-Platonic dialogue, Wilde explained how art can recreate what once happened, or was thought to happen, and imbue it with everlasting life:

Yet, every morning the doors of the city are thrown open, and on foot, or in horse-drawn chariot, the warriors go forth to battle, and mock their enemies from behind their iron masks. All day long the fight rages, and when night comes the torches gleam by the tents, and the cresset burns in the hall.¹¹⁹

In Gautier's short story *Arria Marcella*, the same idea was developed: "Pâris continue d'enlever Hélène dans une région inconnue de l'espace. La galère de Cléopâtre gonfle ses voiles de soie sur l'azur d'un Cydnus idéal."¹²⁰ Wilde's vision of art as imbued with magical powers was clearly influenced by Gautier's fantastic writings. Both authors were fascinated with art's ability to revive an imaginary past, even though the question of temporality is problematic when applied to the different media in art. Art works in the same way as the fantastic mode does, momentarily allowing for imaginary visions to exist. In the same way as Gautier allowed Octavien to witness the rebirth of Pompeii in *Arria Marcella*, Wilde insisted on art's ability to make the character temporarily revive an imaginary past: "I had lived it all. I had stood in the round theatre with its open roof [...]."¹²¹ The tragic ending does not subtract anything from the power of fascination that the portrait exerts on the characters and the reader; if anything, it

¹¹⁹ 'The Critic as Artist', p. 151.

¹²⁰ *Arria Marcella*, p. 310.

¹²¹ 'Mr. W. H.', p. 343.

enhances it. The short story really is about fascination and possession by art, and develops the idea of a dangerously attractive form of beauty.

It is not coincidental that this time-travel is brought by art. Gautier and Wilde both defined art as timeless and art's creations enable the imagination to wander through time and space. 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.' revolves around the idea that Willie Hughes was given immortality through Shakespeare's Sonnets: "Shakespeare promised Willie Hughes immortality in a form that appealed to men's eyes [...]." ¹²² Gautier's and Wilde's fusion of their voices with Shakespeare's highlights their belief in the continuity and survival of art and writers. Gautier developed this idea several times in his critical writings, alluding to Shakespeare and other foreign and dead writers, and emphasized not only their modernity and resonance for Gautier's own world and artistic ideas but their reality. He showed how, for instance, the French Romantic School learnt new modern ways of apprehending reality through reading past foreign authors: "l'étude des littératures étrangères, de Shakspeare, de Goethe, de Schiller, avait accoutumé les esprits à plus de mouvement, à une reproduction plus immédiate de la vie. Les pensées et les sentiments modernes brisaient les anciens moules et se répandaient à pleins bords." ¹²³ Gautier consciously mixed times together and seemingly changed the meaning of ancient and modern. He talked about foreign literature but did not specify that this literature was from the past, while the last sentence of the quotation clearly divides time into two, ancient and modern. As a consequence, Shakespeare is made modern while an eighteenth-century writer becomes ancient: modernity is not a temporal concept for Gautier. Subtly, Gautier eroded the very concept of time in art, as

¹²² 'Mr. W. H.', p. 319.

¹²³ *Histoire de l'art dramatique*, p. 43.

well as distinctions of modernity and old-fashioned, a task he fully developed in *Les Grotesques*, as the last chapter will show.

In an allusion to the fantastic, Gautier turned these much loved past heroes into haunting ghosts: “ces noms d’Othello, de Desdemona, d’Yago, évoquent des fantômes si fatalement doués de réalité et de vie [...] Chacune de leurs paroles est gravée profondément dans notre mémoire [...]”¹²⁴ Shakespeare’s creations lived with Gautier and accompanied him. In a paradoxical twist, he even claimed that Shakespeare was more real than his contemporaries: “Virgile, Shakspeare, Raphaël, Mozart, ne sont-ils pas plus nos amis que des gens qui nous prêtent de l’argent, nous rendent des services ou nous font avoir des places?”¹²⁵ Charles Ricketts would similarly recall a conversation on Wilde’s influences, and how strong they were, notwithstanding the spatial and temporal gap between him and these voices: “the beloved voices of men he had admired in his youth [...] His imaginative insight would sometimes give an ignorant and incredulous listener the impression that he had met, not only Rossetti- this was possible, but men such as Gautier and Baudelaire.”¹²⁶ As one conversationalist laughingly marvelled at this “but how could he do this? Baudelaire died in...”, a philosopher replied, “everything can seem probable in the world of art. I, myself, have often believed that the spirit of Gautier became united with that of Wilde, just as Baudelaire imagined that Edgar Allan Poe expressed himself through him as a medium.”¹²⁷ The complex intertextuality present in their works is inherent to their artistic approach: building their corpus on appropriation, they considered literature and past art as the raw material they reshaped as their own. Their works are not necessarily

¹²⁴ *Histoire de l’art dramatique*, p. 266.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹²⁶ Ricketts, *Everything for Art*, p. 222.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

from their period: these fragments taken from other sources create a temporal bridge as well as an imaginary world in which artworks and artists live on.

Wilde's dialogue with Gautier and his works which this thesis explores works in a similar way. Gautier's mark on Wilde is a case of non-contemporaneous contemporaneity. The way in which Wilde seemed to reproduce what Gautier had done fifty years before in a different country and in a different language, consciously choosing an author that was not part of Wilde's time and space, shows that Wilde considered himself closer to Gautier than to his own contemporaries. To some extent, Wilde's vision of Gautier was an imaginary projection: Wilde enacted what he developed in his novel, distorting time, and making it ineffective in the way in which Gautier was being made atemporal. These examples show that Gautier and Wilde desired to give body, texture, and reality to the fantastic artistic ghosts with whom they seemed to coexist. Praising them for their modernity as well as their atemporality, time in art is made problematic. Shakespeare's time and his work is a common example but in the two works under study, Gautier and Wilde also gave their modern version of Antiquity.¹²⁸ In so doing, they used these authors and periods in order to reshape their own ideas on art. However, the temporal distortion is but a fleeting moment, and the tension between eternity and transience of artworks inhabits the two works as it haunts their authors. The immersion into another dimension granted by art is only temporary: Octavien goes back to Pompeii the following night and nothing happens. When the narrator of Wilde's story goes back to the *Sonnets* after having failed to prove Willie Hughes' existence, he regrets that "they gave me back nothing of the feeling I had brought to them [...]."¹²⁹ The beauty was momentary and has already faded. This is

¹²⁸ For more on the subject, see Stefano-Maria Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece*, already mentioned.

¹²⁹ 'Mr. W. H.', p. 346.

justified by art's limitations: it can revive the past, like the fantastic can animate ghosts, but the moment of both experiences cannot last.

When inserting art into their narratives, both authors breached the eternity of the artwork in order to allow it to interact with the characters. They cherished its possible immersion into our reality, allowing it to enter our temporality while also praising its immobility, fixity, since this very characteristic allows it to survive through time. In a dialectic movement, they appealed to the eternal power of artworks to immortalize their subjects while destroying this eternity to allow art to interact with our world. The fantastic moment mirrors the ever-lasting moment of the existence of artworks, or what Adorno calls “the paradoxically transient eternity of artworks”,¹³⁰ momentarily allowing the author to break the curse of immobility. The instant in which artworks eternally exist is therefore opened to our ephemeral temporality. Artworks enter a normal timeframe constituted by a succession of moments. When inserted into a narrative, artworks experience what their fixity forbade them to encounter. The author then enacts in words what could have happened before or after the moment of their fixed eternity. But the fight against time is a lost cause and artworks eventually return to their immobility. This dialectic movement witnesses the passage from eternal transience to eternal fixity, proving that art can be seen as timeless at the same time as it can be considered temporal.

Both authors exposed the paradox of artworks: they are created to be eternal but in a process which freezes time, and makes artworks have no past, no future. They only live in an everlasting present. The existence of the artwork is fixed in a single moment, and the relation with the viewer, transposed in the stories, is the only way it can escape from its reduced temporality. Art has this in-between status, neither alive nor dead,

¹³⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 38.

which also explains why it becomes one of Gautier's favourite subjects when he writes fantastic stories. Without insisting on the obvious relation this idea creates between a work of art and the fantastic genre, it shows the extent to which immortality, commonly granted to works of art, is indeed a non-existence, rather than a long existence. The temporality of a work of art is different from human temporality, in so far as its alleged immortality seems only to maintain a pretence of life. The moment in which the painted characters are fixed is the only existence they can have, and, humanizing them, we can only imagine that the eternity they live through is but an endless and nightmarish repetition of that very moment. Gautier seemed to realise that the actualization of the depicted moment through the fantastic mode is merely artificial since two different instances of time come to disrupt it. The ephemerality of the moment prevents the possibility of a future, whereas the fixed eternity of artworks compels them in an everlasting present.

Immobility is what triumphs in the end. The beautiful moments experienced by the heroes when they interact with the works of art do not last long, since the abrupt disruption of normal life makes the illusion of animation disappear. In *Arria Marcella*, Arria's father debunks the illusion the young woman had created. The sudden intervention of the character appears to shatter Octavien's happiness: "le personnage fâcheux qui entrain ainsi brusquement dans son bonheur."¹³¹ Arria begins to lose her strength. The narrator insists on her coldness and marble-like attitudes: "ses beaux bras de statue, froids, durs et rigides comme le marbre."¹³² Arria suddenly loses the colour she had on her cheeks, the illusion of life she was using: "fit tomber des joues d'Arria les teintes pourprées [...]."¹³³ The realization of this illusion is seen, both for Gautier

¹³¹ *Arria Marcella*, p. 311.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 312.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

and his character, as a tragedy. Gautier's originality and specificity appear in his regret for the disappearance of the fantastic illusion, as the genre allows art to live, and not merely survive. In most fantastic novels, the heroes are relieved when their life returns to normal and the fantastic elements disappear. The exact opposite happens in Gautier's tales: the heroes understand that nowhere else will they be able to find such blissful happiness. The life experienced through art, even though illusionary, is unique and extreme. The glimpse of this extraordinary adventure makes the characters unfit for reality, and they acknowledge that normal life is not enough for them anymore. Gautier's will to turn life into a "series of exquisite and art-like 'moments'",¹³⁴ or, rather aesthetic moments, is defeated by reality.

In *Arria Marcella*, Octavien is said to have married an English girl "en désespoir de cause [...]".¹³⁵ He remains distant to her, which makes her think that he has a lover. As the last sentence explains: "Comment pourrait-elle s'aviser d'être jalouse de Marcella, fille d'Arrius Diomèdes, affranchi de Tibère?"¹³⁶ Arria is Octavien's one and only true love, and, even though it might have been an illusion or a hallucination, reality will never be able to compete against it. This artificiality does not mean that what the characters experienced was not real or valuable: the exposure to beauty is something they will cherish forever. Gautier's belief in the eternity of art justifies the permanent presence of art in his works. Gautier and Wilde reunite once again on this particular point. The beauty they developed in their fictional and critical works, which shapes their aesthetics, was a fantastic beauty.

Their idyllic vision of art is what makes their stories unique. When most fantastic authors use art solely for fantastic purposes, they inverted this tendency and

¹³⁴ Cheeke, *Writing for Art*, p. 6.

¹³⁵ *Arria Marcella*, p. 313.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

made use of the fantastic to give life to artworks. In their stories, art is not a mere device used to comply with the fantastic genre, but it is the essence of their fantastic mode. In the works of Wilde and Gautier, art becomes a double presence, both physical and spiritual, capable of haunting the main characters. In 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.', Shakespeare's *Sonnets* change the course of events and influence the characters' lives, so much so that two characters commit suicide. Even the narrator is as smitten with both the *Sonnets* and the forged portrait as the other characters. Even though the temporal breach is defeated at the end of the stories, art's permanence is reinforced by the simple fact that the stories analysed make them live through time. The artist's creation is indeed an eternal creation.

C. Sculpting the Past: Physicality and Artistic Limitations

The thoughts of the two authors on art and eternity inhabit these two works, as well as the rest of their fictional, but also critical, corpuses. The fact that *Arria Marcella* echoes some of Gautier's critical pieces (on Shakespeare, Goethe, or the Venus of Milos) shows that the themes developed in the short story are primordial rather than anecdotal for him. Consequently, the short story appears to be revealing crucial truths about Gautier's views on art. This is even more obvious for Wilde's work since 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.' can be seen as a fictionalized literary analysis. These two works offer insights into the ways through which they apprehend art, and they can be considered as missing parts in their overall critical work. It appears that the notion of eternity in art is linked, for both authors, to the concept of medium; understood both as the different types of art, as well as the medium through which these different types express

themselves. As this last section will show, it is therefore associated with ideas of materiality, embodiment or incarnation, and, eventually, with form.

Wilde's ideas on eternity and art are connected to his theory of artistic media and their specificities and limitations following, in that regard, Pater's essay on Winckelmann. In 'The Critic as Artist', Gilbert affirmed that "Those who live in marble or on painted panels, know of life but a single exquisite instant, eternal indeed in its beauty, but limited to one note of passion or one mood of calm [...]"¹³⁷ He continued: "If they know nothing of death, it is because they know little of life, for the secrets of life and death belong to those, and those only, whom the sequence of time affects."¹³⁸ These conclusions would negate the power of art as Gautier envisioned it. Through his character, Wilde suggested that art's life is but an extreme reduction of what humans can indeed experience since the existence of art is constituted by one fixed moment, and its known eternity is merely an empty concept. In 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.', Wilde praised drama as the most complete form of art in opposition to other forms, sculpture and painting in particular: "there is no passion in bronze, nor motion in marble. [...] It is the Drama only that [...] uses all means at once [...]"¹³⁹ He explained how "all Art has its medium, its material [...] and, as one of the most fascinating critics of our days has pointed out, it is to the qualities inherent in each material, and special to it, that we owe the sensuous element in Art [...]"¹⁴⁰ The 'fascinating critic' could well be Pater who affirmed that "All art has a sensuous element, colour, form, sound [...] each of these may be a medium for the ideal [...]"¹⁴¹ However, Wilde seems to be using Pater's theory in order to enhance the power of drama and therefore subdue the

¹³⁷ 'The Critic as Artist', p. 151.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹³⁹ 'Mr. W. H.', p. 324.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

¹⁴¹ Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 104.

power of other forms of art. Pater's essay on Winckelmann clearly favoured sculpture, as "with its solidity of form, [...] more real and full than the faint abstract manner of poetry or painting."¹⁴² The relation found in sculpture between form, touch, and sensuousness, makes it the perfect recipient for an art that can survive through the ages.

This was not a new concept when Pater expressed it. Wilde, then quoting Shakespeare, showed how the English poet told his lover how he (the lover) would survive in his (Shakespeare's) lines, more so than if he had been sculpted: "Not marble, nor the gilded monuments/ Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme [...]."¹⁴³ Indeed, marble, as the most resistant material, is the favoured one when alluding to the survival of an idea or a person. The metaphor of the monument established in order to transcend time was also used by Shakespeare: "Your monument shall be my gentle verse [...]."¹⁴⁴ At first sight, it seems that Wilde did not follow this theory and rejected marble, as well as art's potential eternity. In an earlier piece, Wilde contradicted what he asserted in 'The Critic as Artist': "If you are an artist at all, you will be not the mouthpiece of a century, but the master of eternity; that all art rests on a principle, and that mere temporal considerations are no principle at all [...]."¹⁴⁵ Therefore, according to him, all good works of art are both modern and eternal: "all good work looks perfectly modern: a piece of Greek sculpture [...]."¹⁴⁶ This statement leads to a whole system of symbols related, on the one hand, to marble, the material used by the Greeks and, on the other hand, to Greek art and what it represented for the two authors, and for Gautier in particular.

¹⁴² Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 105.

¹⁴³ 'Mr. W. H.', p. 319.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

¹⁴⁵ Wilde, 'Lecture to Art Students', in *Essays and Lectures* (London: Methuen, 1909), p. 202.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

As stated earlier, *Arria Marcella* clearly exposes Gautier's obsessions about the destruction of time, survival, and death. For someone so skilled and trained to see beauty, it is impossible for Gautier not to see decay in beautiful things. This simultaneous perception of the eternity of beauty and its relentless dissolution that necessarily accompanies any object is a recurrent anguish for the French writer. As an attempt to deviate from this inalterable circle, Gautier either froze time in an everlasting present, as seen through the fantastic, or detached the object from time altogether. Gautier's insistence on a world outside of space and time alludes to the conviction that time is a subjective construction. Some objects are believed to return, to continue through the past and present, what Gautier would call "les ondulations des siècles".¹⁴⁷ The Faustian reference ("comme Faust, il avait aimé Hélène"¹⁴⁸) comes from Nerval's analysis of Goethe from whom Gautier takes the idea that "la continuation des types à travers diverses formes" exists.¹⁴⁹ Form is therefore the vessel through which the impalpable past resurfaces. This, again, relates to Gautier's utilisation of stylistic devices that bring materiality and physicality to the objects to which he is referring. Filling the pages of the short story with allusions to hard materials gives shape and tangibility to these evanescent and fleeting idealized objects from the past. Recognizing that marble is the most appropriate medium for this task, he multiplied references to the material and stressed its spatial and temporal physicality, as well as its sensuousness, which the desire and possibility to touch makes more palpable.

The many examples of the presence of the noble material in the short story are too numerous to be noted here but it seems like everything is a pretext to refer to it: Pompeii's architecture and decoration, Arria's body and face, and Octavien's

¹⁴⁷ *Arria Marcella*, p. 297.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *L'Univers illustré* (3 Dec 1867). For more on Goethe's influence on Gautier through Nerval, see Georges Poulet, *Etudes sur le temps humain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1949).

artophilia, “Quelquefois aussi il aimait des statues, et un jour, en passant au Musée devant la Vénus de Milo, il s’était écrié: “oh! Qui te rendra les bras pour m’écraser contre ton sein de marbre!”¹⁵⁰ The name of the hero is not chosen randomly either: in comparison to his two friends, Max and Fabio, Octavien already sounds like a Greek name, as the suffix ‘ien’ was common at the time. Beyond Gautier’s retrospective desire for eternal types, his references to sculpture and Greek art also show his appreciation of what this type of art represented for him, namely the recognition that the cult of the naked body leads to a more perfect sensuous form of art. Without going towards a biographical reading of the two works under study, it appears that they both have strong biographical resonances for Gautier and Wilde, the former on aesthetic principles, and the latter for the sexual license the period experienced. And indeed, hiding not so subtly behind the theory of Willie Hughes is the possibility of same-sex love: “there was something beyond. There was the soul, as well as the language, of neo-Platonism.”¹⁵¹ There, Wilde referred to Plato’s *Symposium* and explained how this Platonic form of love has endured and touched numerous great artists, such as Montaigne, or Michelangelo. The latter opens up once again to a reference to sculpture and Greek art, sustained in the work through the development of the ‘Greek ideal’, “a beauty that seemed to combine [...] the grace of Adonis and the loveliness of Helen.”¹⁵² This ideal, like Gautier’s, similarly needs to be fulfilled through some shape or form, and the notion of embodiment recurs several times in the story: “actual reality to its ideal form”, “full realisation”, “form and substance to what was within us [...]”¹⁵³

In similar fashion, Wilde accumulated references to materiality in order to give substance to this ideal form. As the last chapter will prove, Wilde put great emphasis

¹⁵⁰ *Arria Marcella*, p. 297.

¹⁵¹ ‘Mr. W. H.’, p. 324.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 328.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 314, p. 324, p. 343.

on books as physical objects, which he alluded to in the work: “In a little book with fine vellum leaves and damask silk cover [...]”¹⁵⁴ The way in which he developed the character of Willie Hughes is akin to sculpture: the *Sonnets*, the boy, and the portrait establish him as a three-dimensional character. Wilde’s knowledge of Greek art and marble was impressive and he showed on several occasions that he could be very specific about it, proving, for instance, that he could give the exact locations of Paros’ and Pentelicus’ marble quarries: “the discovery of marble quarries in the purple ravines of Pentelicus and on the little low-lying hills of the island of Paros [...]”¹⁵⁵ On several occasions, he urged artists to treat marble as the exceptionally noble material he thought it was: “Do not treat your marble as if it was ordinary stone and build a house of mere blocks of it. For it is indeed a precious stone, this marble of yours, and only workmen of nobility of invention and delicacy of hand should be allowed to touch it at all [...]”¹⁵⁶ He was therefore playing with the marble’s symbolic characteristics, the alleged nobility of the material that leads to pure art. About the actress Hester Grazebrook, Wilde affirmed that her face is “Pure Greek”.¹⁵⁷ In hyperbolic terms that established levels of purity (pure Greek: can there be ‘impure Greek’?) to something which already represents purity (Greek art), marble, as the metonymic equivalent of Greek sculpture (and to a larger extent, of Greek art), comes to represent an ideal of pure beauty for both authors.

But Wilde’s vision of artistic media is difficult to circumscribe. His thoughts evolved from the American lectures (1882), in which sculpture was an important medium through which to think about art in general, to ‘The Portrait of Mr. W. H.’ in

¹⁵⁴ ‘Mr. W. H.’, p. 328.

¹⁵⁵ ‘The English Renaissance of Art’, p. 123.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Art and the Handicraftsman’, in *Essays and Lectures* (London: Methuen, 1909), p. 187. He makes a similar comment in the lecture ‘House Decoration’, “Marble should not be used save by noble workmen”, *Essays and Lectures* (London: Methuen, 1909), p. 168.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Mrs Langtry’, *New York World*, 7 Nov 1882, *Journalism*, VI, p. 23.

which drama seemed to be the medium most praised by Wilde, to *Intentions*, where literature now appeared as the perfect medium. Wilde's inner contradictions highlight the web of influences that shaped his discussion on art, from Pater to Gautier. If we are to follow a historical analysis of his essays, suggesting that Wilde's thoughts evolved on the topic, *Intentions* becomes the most reliable source. However, the essays cannot be entirely envisaged as the expression of Wilde's thoughts as they are mediated through fictional characters. Furthermore, his rebellious tendencies could have led him to affirm strong statements simply for the sake of shocking his audience. In 'The Critic as Artist', the two characters ponder the different artistic media and their limitations in a way which favours literature. According to them, literature includes other media and their strengths:

For the material that painter or sculptor uses is meagre in comparison with that of words. Words have not merely music as sweet as that of viol and lute, colour as rich and vivid as any that makes lovely for us the canvas of the Venetian or the Spaniard, and plastic form no less sure and certain than that which reveals itself in marble or in bronze, but thought and passion and spirituality are theirs also, are theirs indeed alone.¹⁵⁸

Through his character, Wilde seemed to suggest that literature, composed of disparate elements belonging to other media, is inherently hybrid and this very hybridity makes it the most complete medium. Wilde diverted here from Gautier's and Pater's ideas on art in his affirmation of the supremacy of literature over other artistic media, suggesting that literature could express concepts and feelings better than other media. Gautier, on the other hand, regularly praised painting and sculpture as capable of expressing emotions that could not be transferred onto the page.

¹⁵⁸ 'The Critic as Artist', p. 141.

Several times in his art criticism, Gautier proved that he had actually thought, read about, and reflected on Greek art. In the *Salon de 1833*, he showed that he knew that Greek marbles were usually coloured and what people saw during the nineteenth century as pure white marble was merely the sign of the paradoxical destruction of time, ‘damaging’ the colour while purifying it for the contemporary eye: “toutes les statues antiques avaient des cercles d’or ou d’argent; les cheveux et la barbe de quelques unes étaient de ce métal; témoin le Jupiter Olympien de Phidias; il y en avait même de peintes entièrement [...]”¹⁵⁹ The modern appreciation of the Greek statues is analogous to giving praise to decay as well as to incompleteness. The idea of the beauty of the fragmented as well as the object encapsulating both eternity and destruction simultaneously is developed in relation to Arria’s moulding. Many of the Greek sculptures that both authors praise were in their time part of the architecture: they adorned temples, houses or places. They were therefore secondary to the buildings they adorned, which have now disappeared. Through time, the part has taken the place of the whole, having been transferred to the centre of what constitutes Greek art. Similarly, Gautier’s and Wilde’s borrowed fragments (from Shakespeare, other writers, and artists) are given a central position in their works and become the starting-point from which they digress on art. Gautier once again commented on his beloved Venus of Milo, and another Venus in two different Salons, and he argued that “Le moindre fragment des grands sculpteurs a une valeur indépendante: le torse antique, quoique privé de bras, de jambes et de tête excite l’admiration la plus vive [...] chaque chose est faite pour elle-même et parfaite en soi [...]”¹⁶⁰ “Quand l’Art arrive à cette perfection, chaque fragment acquiert une valeur propre [...]”¹⁶¹ The Venus is one of those fragments that

¹⁵⁹ *Salon de 1833* (Paris: Au bureau de la France littéraire, 1833), p. 146.

¹⁶⁰ 26 Avril, *Salon de 1837* (Paris: 1837).

¹⁶¹ *Exposition de 1847*, Feuilleton de La Presse [Offprint] (Paris: 1847), p. 205.

haunt the artist. The symbolic charge of the Greek torso is empowered by Gautier each time he alludes to it. The ‘valeur propre’ of those fragments gives them independence within the works, which often disturbed critics.¹⁶² What Gautier produced in poetry, the embodiment of the fragmented work being *Emaux et camées*, he also performed in his prose writing.

Marble is a highly symbolic material. Its many connotations come primarily from its colour, the archetypal marble being as pure a white as possible even though marble comes in varied colours. White embodies infinity, newness, innocence, and purity as an untainted absolute colour. It was also associated with wealth and nobility during the nineteenth century since only rich people could afford to wear white clothes without staining them. Its cleanliness is therefore both moral and social. Gautier’s and Wilde’s relation to this colour is complex and its purity sometimes distressed them. However, when they discuss the marble-like qualities of the colour, what the French word ‘marmoréen’ qualifies as something which has a marble-like aspect or nature, they both praise the colour. In his studies of the relation between marble and the colour white, Philippe Jockey refers several times to Gautier as the author who contributed to the myth of what he calls ‘White Greece’: “Nous vivons, reconnaissons-le, aujourd’hui encore, sur les canons esthétiques de Gautier, quand nous évoquons la Grèce.”¹⁶³ It is certainly true that Gautier and Wilde used and developed the concept of Greek Art equating purity with whiteness as part of their artistic ideal. However, their relation to the myth is more complex than it seems.

¹⁶² Enzo Caramaschi comments on past criticisms focusing on the construction of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* as too fragmented: “Pourquoi dire toujours que *Mademoiselle de Maupin* est un ouvrage bâti au hasard, comme si ce roman n’était qu’une sorte de ‘recueil’? Sans doute parce que dans ces longues lettres il y a place pour des fragments qui ont été travaillés pour eux-mêmes; pour des morceaux auxquels on reconnaît vite un intérêt autonome [...]” In *Arts visuels et littérature*, pp. 107-108. John Reed also underlines Wilde’s fragmented style as typically decadent: “a conscious violation of traditional fictional plotting, a fragmentation of story into separable set pieces”, in *Decadent Style*, p. 39.

¹⁶³ Philippe Jockey, *Le Mythe de la Grèce blanche: histoire d’un rêve occidental* (Paris: Belin, 2013), p. 222.

Jockey assigns several characteristics which have been attributed to the myth over centuries, among which are an idealism opposed to the colour's materiality, and white as the ideal of purity as synonymous with innocence and morality. In the passage already quoted in which Wilde described Hester Grazebrook, he compared her to a statue which springs into life. This comparison is made possible because of the marble's veined aspect which recalls human veins. However, this cliché is somehow problematic since what it praises are contradictory characteristics of the material. In the *Salon de 1847*, Gautier marvelled at the life-like qualities of Auguste Clésinger's statues, and affirmed that "les veines y courent",¹⁶⁴ even though they are made of Carrara marble, typically one of the purest types of marble because of its relative absence of impure graining. On the one hand, a beautiful statue or woman needs to be as white as possible, and therefore made out of the purest white marble such as Paros or Carrara. On the other hand, the veined aspect of the material comes from the adulteration of the marble, that is, its mixing with other chemical elements. The second characteristic refers to marble which has less purity than Paros or Carrara. In the same image, Gautier and Wilde therefore praised the purity and impurity of the material simultaneously. The 'image' of marble is therefore an idealised construction, produced by two different stones.

Gautier's poem 'Symphonie en Blanc Majeur', considered one of the masterpieces of *Emaux et camées* of which Wilde said that it was a "flawless masterpiece of colour and music",¹⁶⁵ is imbued with terms that suggest purity. Gautier alluded to swan-like women, creatures made out of "Paros au grain éblouissant", "marbre blanc [...] vierge de souillure", who display "débauches de blancheur",¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ *Exposition de 1847*, p. 205.

¹⁶⁵ 'The Critic as Artist', p. 193.

¹⁶⁶ 'Symphonie en Blanc Majeur', *Emaux et camées*, in *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. by Michel Brix (Paris: Bartillat, 2004), p. 462, p. 461.

which nothing can taint. Nonetheless, the poem finishes with the exclamation: “qui pourra mettre un ton rose/ Dans cette implacable blancheur!”¹⁶⁷ This final sentence expresses the poet’s desire to add some colour to this extreme purity, arguing that they are rather too white for his taste. Gautier seems to be rejecting the concept of whiteness as a synonym for innocence and morality, which is not surprising considering that, on the one hand, he was trying to erase moral connotations in art and on the other hand, his sensuousness and sensuality made him choose immorality (as stated in the preface of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*) rather than innocence. The pure art which the two authors talked about, as well as the association between purity and aestheticism that was later assigned to them, therefore lost some of its moral connotations. The vision of marble as an unadulterated medium is foregrounded as a myth, and Gautier and Wilde praised its very impurity as a way to achieve pure art.

What could explain Gautier’s difficulty in diverting from the Greek ideal is the conceptual eternity he related it to. The cold, white, inanimate marble represents an unaltered beauty which time has not yet destroyed. Due to its inherent qualities as a resistant and long-lasting material, marble represents the privileged means to attain eternity through art. What remains of this art during Gautier’s time is the artist’s mastery of fixing beauty in an eternal frame: “fixer les traits du génie et lui donner l’éternité la plus longue dont l’art dispose, celle de la sculpture.”¹⁶⁸ Even though sculpture is not entirely safe from decay, the remaining pieces are enough to create a strong impression of what constituted beauty at the time, enough to still dictate beauty during the nineteenth century. At the same time as he reasserted the longevity of Greek art, Gautier reflected on his own period and civilisation in general: “Que reste-t-il d’une

¹⁶⁷ ‘Symphonie en Blanc Majeur’, p. 463.

¹⁶⁸ *Portraits contemporains*, p. 371.

civilisation morte? Quelques fragments de poèmes et de statues, du marbre et des vers, deux choses indispensables; tout le reste, politique, philosophie, industrie, science, est bien peu de chose au bout de deux mille ans.”¹⁶⁹ Gautier equated the eternity of marble with the durability of verses as the two forms of art that are able to escape the destruction of time. The small pieces of marble, as Gautier’s “dessein de traiter sous forme restreinte de petits sujets”,¹⁷⁰ are able to survive when the larger structures have vanished. Gautier had pondered the similarity between marble and verse and their resistance to decay, as his famous poem ‘L’Art’ shows: “Tout passe.- L’art robuste/ Seul a l’éternité./ Le buste/ Survit à la cité.”, “Les dieux eux-mêmes meurent./ Mais les vers souverains/ Demeurent/ Plus forts que les airains.”¹⁷¹ One verse of a poem or the torso of a Greek sculpture are independent enough to make up for the loss of the whole. This association also explains how Gautier imbued his medium with materiality and physicality in an attempt to turn it into marble-like poetry.

On several occasions, Gautier introduced a comparison between the work of a blacksmith or a sculptor with the task of the writer:

Nul ne façonne et ne retourne avec plus de précision sur l’enclume poétique un alexandrin ou un vers de huit pieds. S’il faut remettre le fer au feu de la forge, [...] il remue le charbon, active l’haleine du soufflet, et la forme voulue est bientôt imposée au métal rebelle. Le poète se plaît à cette lutte, et il s’agit comme un Vulcain dans son antre, heureux de voir voler à droite et à gauche les rouges étincelles et d’entendre le rythme sonore retentir sous la voûte.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ *Salon de 1840*, 11 Mars.

¹⁷⁰ *Critique artistique et littéraire*, p. 188.

¹⁷¹ ‘L’Art’, *Emaux et camées*, in *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. by Michel Brix (Paris: Bartillat, 2004), p. 571, p. 572.

¹⁷² *Critique artistique et littéraire*, p. 182.

This passage epitomizes several major aspects of Gautier's doctrine. It reaffirms his attachment to form, and the work on form which is the task of any artist. This idea will be appropriated directly from Gautier by the Parnassians, who cultivated the importance of the artist's work through metaphors of the poet as sculptor or ploughman. 'L'Art', in which Gautier defined his Art Poétique, became one of the Parnassians' main works of reference in which they found the reaffirmation of the task of the artist: "Oui, l'oeuvre sort plus belle/ D'une forme au travail/ Rebelle,/ Vers, marbre, onyx, email"; "Sculpte, lime, cisèle;/ Que ton rêve flottant/ Se scelle/ Dans le bloc résistant!"¹⁷³ The first and last stanzas ratify the relation between poetry and sculpture as materials which need to be worked on by the artist. The title, using the singular form also suggests the existence of one art encompassing all media, which reinforces their belonging to the same realm.

The struggle with shaping one's thoughts and feelings into art is the process that makes it noble. It also counters the view of the poet as following his romantic inspiration. The act of writing is not necessarily an easy one, nor a natural one: a writer must be hard at work trying to glorify his material. Furthermore, Gautier's correlation of words and metal suggests that the writer envisaged his medium as a physical material which he can bend and distort as he wished. This explains the sensuousness of Gautier's texts. It also accounts for the title of his collection of poems, *Emaux et camées*, the verse being the material which was transformed into independent formal-jewelled pieces: "sculpter la beauté dans cette forme dure et difficile à travailler du vers, qui est, comme le marbre de la pensée [...]"¹⁷⁴ The simile associating words with marble allowed Gautier, once again, to create an artwork which would have the ability to face

¹⁷³ L'Art', p. 570, p. 572.

¹⁷⁴ Gautier quoted in Constance Gosselin Schick, *Seductive Resistance: The Poetry of Théophile Gautier* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), p. 1.

the destruction of time. Considering his pieces as physical, rigid, and marble-like works empowered them to become eternal. Gautier's considerations on his medium's materiality and the analogy between artistic transformation and the work in the forge as a purifying act had left its mark on literature. Not only can it be found in Wilde's writings but it is also crucial in the French Decadent and Symbolist movements. For instance, two words were invented by the Symbolists and the Decadents to define the process of purification through fire: 'apyre', which means "inaltérable et surtout impressible au feu"; and 'lustral' which means to purify.¹⁷⁵ The necessity to imagine new words in order to better define this transformation demonstrates the continuity of Gautier's influence on art.

Gautier's constant insistence on the statue's immobility acts as proof of his attachment to its resistance to decay. From this quest for eternal art, he drew another quality which a pure art must have. Following the Art for Art's Sake doctrine, the only form of art which can counter the effect of time is an art purified of irrelevant intrusions of moral, political and social ideas. Art is purer, and can therefore attain eternity, if it does not follow societal changes:

Il y a, dans la vie générale [...] un côté ému et palpitant que l'art a le droit de formuler [...] mais nous préférons la beauté absolue et pure, qui est de tous les temps, de tous les pays, de tous les cultes, et réunit dans une communion admirative le passé, le présent et l'avenir.¹⁷⁶

As Wilde also pointed out, only art that is not deeply anchored in its time can last through centuries. Art is at its purest when it does not express any familiar details: the "plaisir

¹⁷⁵ Jacques Plowert, *Petit glossaire pour servir à l'intelligence des auteurs Décadents et Symbolistes* (Paris: Vanier, 1888), p. 10, p. 60.

¹⁷⁶ *Critique artistique et littéraire*, p. 72.

d'art pur" is given "indépendamment de toute pensée, de toute passion et de tout drame."¹⁷⁷ Art in itself is considered an eternalizing process and it can fully attain this quality when stripped of its temporality.

Allusions to idealized past eras and the actual re-enactment of these long-lost times and spaces prove Gautier's attachment to a world of art in which time loses its power and becomes a subjective notion rather than a fixed restrictive entity. However, the references to marble as the lasting material he tried to achieve in words show that he was aware of the contradiction within such a wish. To praise white marble is to praise heterogeneity, hybridity, and decay; these traits mix together within his aesthetics with ideals of eternity and purity. Interestingly, through the differences in artistic doctrines between the two authors, where Gautier tries to bend literature into marble and Wilde praises literature's superiority in its absorption of other media, a common trait is underlined. In their praise of these media, they both see hybridity in art as a positive concept. As this thesis shows, purity and hybridity are closely related in Wilde's and Gautier's vision of aestheticism, and they suggested that purity can best be achieved through hybridity and heterogeneity.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Gautier and Wilde work on the status of the artwork by emphasizing its sensorial appeal, and making it a powerfully alluring object. In *Arria Marcella* and 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.', signs of this power are multiplied, and art becomes omnipresent, even outside the physical frontiers of the artwork. The charm of art, fascinating characters and authors alike, resembles a magical power and the two

¹⁷⁷ *Guide du Musée du Louvre* (1994), p. 37.

authors constantly move towards the fantastic, going back and forth between a fantastic artwork and an aesthetic of the fantastic genre, and cast a positive light on a theoretical negative concept. The fantastic allowed them to create temporal breaches through which they revived an imaginary past filled with artistic references. It also prompted a reflection on the relations between art and eternity, which seems to be a life-long consideration for them. Alluding to ancient Greece and its lasting art, Gautier developed his aesthetic ideals around the symbolism of marble while Wilde rejected the superiority of other artistic media over literature. However, the relation between Greek art and their writing is convoluted and they both rejected some of the principles of Greek sculpture, both eventually arriving at the same conclusion: the secret to the most perfect form of art is hybridity.

In his essay on Winckelmann and Greek art, Pater insisted on sculpture's simplicity and the limitations of materiality as the means by which it attains purity: "why should sculpture thus limit itself to pure form? Because by this limitation it becomes a perfect medium of expression [...]." ¹⁷⁸ He continued: "it has no backgrounds, no sky or atmosphere, [...] a little of suggested motion, and much of pure light on its gleaming surfaces, with pure form- only these", ¹⁷⁹ explaining how its extreme simplicity led to its perfection of style, an idea Pater also developed in 'Style' about literature. However, it is hardly possible to qualify the styles of Gautier and Wilde as simple. And indeed, Gautier stood against Winckelmann's vision of ideal art as pure Greek in 'Du Beau dans l'art' in which he asserted the importance of exuberance in art, as I mentioned in the introduction:

¹⁷⁸ Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 106.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Winckelmann prétend que [...] “l’unité et la simplicité, [...] sont les véritables sources de la beauté”. Nous accordons que l’unité est, en effet, une des qualités essentielles du beau, mais que faut-il entendre par simplicité? Le contraire du riche, du varié, de l’orné, du complexe et, par extension, du recherché, de l’affecté ? cependant le riche, l’orné, le complexe, sont des éléments du beau, et, si la formule s’applique assez exactement à l’art antique, dont Winckelmann se préoccupait trop, elle est fautive relativement à la peinture, à la poésie et surtout à la musique modernes, dont beaucoup de chefs-d’œuvre sont compliqués et splendides. A ce point de vue, que deviendraient Rubens, Michel-Ange, Shakspeare et Beethoven, qui assurément ne sont pas simples ? Si, par simplicité, il faut entendre le don d’être naturel, beaucoup de gens ont cette qualité dans une organisation médiocre, et alors ils sont naturellement plats, voilà tout.¹⁸⁰

Again, Shakespeare is put forward as the epitome of beauty in literature and represents, in this section and several others, Gautier’s ideal of richness, abundance and hybridity in beauty. In fact, both Gautier and Wilde praised hybridity in art as a way to create beauty. As the next two chapters will argue, Gautier’s and Wilde’s works alluded to a variety of artistic media, that range from sculpture to painting to ornament. Not only did they praise this hybridity of media inside their works, but they also suggested that language is in itself hybrid in its ability to turn into marble, a colour, or a jewel. In 1862, Baudelaire wrote a letter to Flaubert in which he equated ‘pure literature’ with several French authors, including Gautier: “comment n’avez-vous pas deviné que Baudelaire ça voulait dire: Auguste Barbier, Théophile Gautier, Banville, Flaubert, Leconte de Lisle, c’est-à-dire littérature pure?”¹⁸¹ In the letter, he neither explained his choice of writers nor elaborated on the concept of pure literature, which suggests that his equation is self-evident. The list of writers presented by Baudelaire is rather eclectic, which

¹⁸⁰ ‘Du Beau dans l’art’, p. 158.

¹⁸¹ Baudelaire, *Œuvres posthumes et correspondances inédites: précédées d’une étude biographique* (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1887), p. 297.

associates the concept of purity in literature with hybridity. His “littérature pure” seems to be made out of the sum of dissimilar elements, which foreshadows what this thesis develops: the purer or purest in art is also the more heterogeneous.

But the relations between Art for Art’s Sake and purity are even more complex than they first appear. Through the marble literature, Gautier suggested an art that follows the precepts of purification of art through its eternalising process, while imbuing pure literature with elements of other media, and which therefore include hybridity and adulteration in the process. Another aspect of the doctrine made famous by Gautier was its apolitical stance, as stated in the introduction. However, as this thesis will prove, this simple narrative cannot be sustained. Baudelaire’s view on sculpture highlights an aspect that has not been developed in this chapter and resonates with the common views held on ornaments during the nineteenth century. In a blatantly negative essay called ‘Pourquoi la sculpture est ennuyeuse’ written for the 1846 Salon, Baudelaire’s main attack on sculpture is its primitive origins: “*l’origine de la sculpture se perd dans la nuit des temps; c’est donc un art des Caraïbes. En effet, nous voyons tous les peuples tailler fort adroitement des fétiches longtemps avant d’aborder la peinture, qui est un art de raisonnement profond, [...]*.”¹⁸² The racial discourse underlying an artistic stance on the inferiority of sculpture in comparison with painting was entirely absent from Gautier’s and Wilde’s visions of the artistic medium. As was the case for the ornament, Gautier’s and Wilde’s views were primarily aesthetic but the context in which they affirmed them made these views somewhat political. Both authors rejected the idea of the classification of art according to its geographical as well as temporal origins. The supremacy of Occidental art, subtly claimed by Baudelaire

¹⁸² Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1975), II, p. 487.

several times in his art criticism, partook of a political discourse on race and racial supremacy that was absent from the discourses by Gautier and Wilde who, as the last chapter will show, praised the merits of Oriental art.¹⁸³ The relations between the professed apolitical stance and their views on art are therefore more complex than the simplicity of the Art for Art's Sake formula indicates.

¹⁸³ "Art [...] plus complet en apparence, mais plus barbare et plus enfantin", *Salon de 1859*, in *Œuvres complètes*, p. 670.

Chapter 2: Digressive and Distorting Pictorial Descriptions

Introduction: Description and Realism

“I should like to write a novel certainly, a novel that would be as lovely as a Persian carpet and as unreal.”¹ Lord Henry Wotton’s response to Mr Erskine at a dinner at his aunt’s house can, to a large extent, be applied to the author’s project when writing *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde’s only novel tells the story of a beautiful young man who discovers the power of these two attributes through a discussion with the aesthete Lord Henry Wotton and who wishes to remain young forever. His wish is magically granted and a portrait painted by his friend Basil Hallward bears the marks of his age and corruption while Dorian remains the unspoilt beauty he was at the beginning of the novel. The magic evoked in the Persian carpet strongly resonates with Wilde’s subtle touches of the supernatural, found in the Faustian pact as well as the compelling attraction exerted by Dorian, sprinkled throughout the otherwise realistic work.

The apparent simplicity of the quotation unveils Wilde’s aesthetic motivations about his work. It is a statement against realist novels of the nineteenth century, which is not surprising knowing Wilde’s feelings towards Zola and his work. Wilde urged artists to go against the contemporary fashion in art to portray real life, to break “from the prison-house of realism [...]”² Comparing Balzac to Zola, Wilde contrasted Zola’s “unimaginative realism” with Balzac’s “imaginative reality [...]”³ Even though he did not clearly explain the difference, he then described Balzac’s characters as somehow

¹ *Dorian Gray*, p. 206.

² ‘The Decay of Lying’, p. 88.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

more coloured, fervent and alive than real people. Balzac transfigured reality: “He created life, he did not copy it.”⁴ For Wilde, Zola was a mere copyist.

Zola argued that “la qualité maîtresse du romancier est le sens du réel”.⁵ He relegated imagination to a position of secondary importance and placed the task of rendering what the author saw at the centre of his doctrine. The realist movement, later redefined as naturalist in order to account for its scientific inclinations (including scientism, positivism, and determinism), assigned new conventions to the novel. Zola described what the naturalist novel should be like, giving *Madame Bovary* (1856) as the archetype: “la reproduction exacte de la vie, l’absence de tout élément romanesque.”⁶ Whatever deviated from the objective observation of nature was prohibited: exaggeration, subjectivity, fancy. The word ‘novel’ was in itself improper since it contained the concepts attached to a work of imagination, a work of fiction: “le mot roman, [...] ne signifie plus rien, quand on l’applique à nos études naturalistes.”⁷ Zola proposed a “déromantisation” of the novel.⁸

An important tool used by realist authors in order to achieve this “déromantisation” was description. Zola defined it as “un état du milieu qui détermine et complète l’homme”,⁹ and showed how description was indeed closely related to realism: “sous cette question littéraire de la description, il n’y a pas autre chose que le retour à la nature, ce grand courant naturaliste qui a produit nos croyances et nos connaissances actuelles.”¹⁰ The advent of the realist novel during the nineteenth century brought the debate on the value and use of description to the fore. While

⁴ ‘The Decay of Lying’, p. 82.

⁵ Emile Zola, *Du Roman: sur Stendhal, Flaubert et les Goncourt* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1989), p. 36.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁸ Henri Mitterand, Préface, in *Du Roman*, p. 21.

⁹ Zola, *Du Roman*, p. 62.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

description had been discussed before by theoreticians (Aristotle, Boileau), it became not only a genre, the descriptive,¹¹ or a mode through which the discourse is organized, but also the sign of a literary period or movement during the nineteenth century: “l’âge d’or de la description serait l’ère du roman réaliste [...]”¹² Description was seen as a structurally unnecessary ornament if not used as a means to describe the character’s milieu or psychology. In this context, Gautier’s and Wilde’s works were meant to challenge their contemporaries’ conceptions of description. In the works of Gautier and Wilde, descriptions are some of the most aesthetic passages, in which literary figures and extreme aesthetization are concentrated. In that regard, they are paintings made in words and can be analysed as yet another movement through which Gautier and Wilde deformed their literary medium into a visual one. The descriptions, as aesthetic fragments, take over the works as sculptures have taken over the buildings they adorned. The examination of the descriptions in Gautier’s and Wilde’s works leads, again, to a reflection on the relations between decoration and the superfluous in contrast to structural elements in the literary medium.

The descriptions in Gautier’s and Wilde’s works seem to be at the heart of the attacks made against them. Regenia Gagnier proposes to analyse the difference in the reception of Wilde’s novel and his fairy tales and short stories. According to her, Wilde’s works are “consistent in both themes and style” but the novel “was excoriated on all accounts while the second [the fairy tales] were praised for both their ‘morality’ and their literary craft.”¹³ Gagnier explains this attitude by the fact that the novel was presenting depravation within English high society, that it “removed art from the

¹¹ As Hamon argues “un mode d’être des textes où se manifeste d’une théorie plus ou moins implicite [...] de la langue comme nomenclature.” Philippe Hamon, *Du Descriptif* (Paris: Hachette, 1993), p. 5.

¹² Marie-Annick Gervais-Zanninger, *La Description* (Paris: Hachette, 2001), p. 6.

¹³ Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace*, p. 58.

locales and sentiments of middle-class life.”¹⁴ However, the same society was depicted in Wilde’s social comedies without causing the uproar *The Picture of Dorian Gray* gave rise to. Following Gagnier’s argument that Wilde’s works are not fundamentally disparate in their themes, and therefore failing to understand how some were deemed moral while some were classified as ‘dangerous’ texts, I would argue that the obvious difference between them is their genre. The construction of the novel, leaving too much space for descriptive passages, becomes the focus of the ‘problem’ that is *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for critics and reviewers.

Gautier’s *Le Roman de la momie* also suffered from the same criticisms and presented the same challenges. J. Turgan, one of the directors of the *Moniteur universel* in which the novel was serialized, criticized what appeared to be a “description continue pure et simple”, and asked whether Gautier could add “une pensée quelconque” in order to bring life to his work.¹⁵ The emphasis put on description leads the critic Pierre Laubriet to propose another definition of the work as a “roman-album à destination des passionnés de l’Egypte et de l’art égyptien.”¹⁶ Critics try to redefine the works under study because of the ‘problem’ of the descriptions. In order to make sense of the importance of the description in the two works, critics justify the authors’ original treatment of the description by shifting the works away from what is considered a novel. They propose new genres which blend literature and the visual arts more naturally than the novel, and turn the works under study into decorative volumes.

Multiple examples of the artistic position against description can be easily found in nineteenth-century texts. In this regard, Walter Besant, an English writer and critic,

¹⁴ Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace*, p. 58.

¹⁵ J. Turgan in ‘Notes on *Le Roman de la momie*’, in *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, ed. by Pierre Laubriet et al., 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2002), II, p. 1337.

¹⁶ Pierre Laubriet, ‘Notes on *Le Roman de la momie*’, p. 1337.

exemplified the widely-held reservation towards description.¹⁷ In 1884, he gave a lecture at the Royal Institution entitled ‘The Art of Fiction’ in which he presented the “power of selection” as a golden rule of fiction-writing.¹⁸ He affirmed that “nothing should be admitted which does not advance the story [...]”.¹⁹ He went on and linked this rule with description: “All descriptions which hinder instead of helping the action [...] ought to be rigidly suppressed.”²⁰ What is more surprising is the continuity of these remarks in modern studies. Josephine Guy and Ian Small define Wilde’s style as an “overdetermined descriptive language, with its excessive use of adjectives and intensifying adverbs to do with the senses [...]”.²¹ The terms ‘overdetermined’ and ‘excessive’ show that descriptions are still meant to be subordinate to other elements of the work (the psychological development, the progress of the plot) and critics still consider that Wilde’s novel is not ‘the norm’, and his descriptive style is considered somehow disproportionate and extreme.

Bringing Zola and Wilde together is particularly enlightening in regards to how descriptions were perceived during the nineteenth century. Lawrence Danson explains that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was deemed dangerous enough that it ought to have been banned by the Vigilance Society, in the same way as Zola’s novel *La Terre* (1887) had been censored: “The overwrought language used to attack Wilde’s presumably anti-realist novel was strikingly similar to the language of the anti-Zolaists: to many outraged Victorians, there was little difference between the French realist and the

¹⁷ Wilde and Besant knew each other: Wilde allegedly used Besant’s Christian name as proof of their close relation. For more on their relation see Angela Kingston, *Oscar Wilde as a Character in Victorian Fiction* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹⁸ Walter Besant, *The Art of Fiction: A Lecture Delivered at the Royal Institution on Friday Evening, April 25, 1884 (with Notes and Additions)* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1884), p. 24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²¹ Guy and Small, *Studying Oscar Wilde*, p. 37.

English aesthete.”²² Zola, one of the main descriptive writers of the century, and Wilde, the excessive aesthete, were both considered decadent in the eyes of the Victorians in part because of their treatment of the descriptive object, suggesting that description, whatever its form, is always a subversive object. Indeed, Désiré Nisard, a nineteenth-century French literary critic, argued in his *Etudes de mœurs et de critique sur les poètes latins de la Décadence* (1834) that the two signs of literary decadence were description and erudition. His study, based on Latin poets, expanded on the literature of his time, which he also considered decadent on the same basis. In decadent literature, “la description sera un genre, et non plus l’accessoire dans des genres plus nobles.”²³ Nisard based his evaluation of decadent literature on the length of the descriptions, the way in which they relate to the things they describe, and the style in which they describe.

To compare Zola, Gautier, and Wilde highlights their divergences when analysing the descriptions in their works. The realist or naturalist style of Zola is in contradiction with Wilde’s and Gautier’s beliefs and practices. Christophe Ippolito argues that Zola, alongside Balzac, justifies his use of description as a means to deepen our understanding of the characters and the milieu as well as to dramatize the narration: “cela participerait de la justification diégétique de la description.”²⁴ The ‘effet de réel’ is what their descriptions aim at,²⁵ in order to get as close to reality as possible. Realism and Naturalism freed the description from its subordinate position (what Nisard called the accessory) and placed it within the desire to represent the real, the description

²² Lawrence Danson, ‘Wilde as Critic and Theorist’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 80-95, p. 86.

²³ Désiré Nisard, *Etudes de mœurs et de critique sur les poètes latins de la Décadence*, 3 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1849), II, p. 169.

²⁴ Christophe Ippolito, *Poéticité de la description au dix-neuvième siècle: (the various ways nineteenth-century French poets and novelists write descriptions of feelings, events, and things)* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), p. 17.

²⁵ See Roland Barthes, ‘l’Effet de réel’, in *Œuvres complètes*, 3 vols (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994), II.

therefore was acting as a necessary component of the study and representation of nature. Considering the length and importance of the descriptions in Gautier's and Wilde's works, it seems that they also desired to bring descriptions to the fore in their writings.

Wilde's quotation from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* shows a different approach. The description does not only serve a realist purpose: the 'Persian' carpet brings exoticism to the work, in the same way that Gautier's mummy in *Le Roman de la momie* immediately transports the reader to another world and time. Wilde and Gautier were not really concerned with reality. They used the realist concept of structural description while liberating it from exterior justifications (social, political, psychological, and philosophical aims). The 'problem' of the description comes from the tension between the two notions: if the description is not kept in its supplementary position, or developed towards a 'higher' aim than itself (the human, the individual) it becomes morally reprehensible:

Otez d'un siècle l'humanité et l'individu, que reste-t-il? L'érudition et la nature extérieure. C'est à cela que va s'attacher le poète, à qui manquera le monde moral; c'est pour des choses mortes ou pour des choses inanimées qu'il aura des veilles ingénieuses, mais infécondes: Lucain fera de l'histoire et de la description, de la description surtout.²⁶

An infertile description, which does not place the human at its centre, is a 'bad' description in terms of taste and morality. Realism seems to be the agenda of theoreticians of description. The novel is circumscribed as a form at the service of the human and all its elements should converge towards it. Gautier and Wilde placed themselves at a crossroads between two visions: they foregrounded the description in

²⁶ Nisard, *Etudes*, II, p. 174.

the same way as realist works did but it remained detached from the realist aim, and therefore kept its ornamental qualities. Gautier's and Wilde's practice of the description was similar: they envisaged description not as a means but as an end, sufficient in itself and almost independent from the rest of the work. They advocated description for description's sake.

Josephine Guy and Ian Small's studies devote at least a chapter to Wilde's novel and several monographs focus on the novel alone.²⁷ Most of these studies emphasize the importance of descriptions as well as Wilde's ornamental style, but, apart from John G. Peters' article on the style of the novel, none truly engage with the status, function, or organization of these purple passages.²⁸ The novel offers an original treatment of description, in comparison with the short stories, the question of length and time being in intimate relation with the genre of the work and the descriptive. The hybridity of the text – the analysis of the two versions that shows Wilde's desire to add some description to the original version, as well as the autonomous aspect of these additions which indeed were unnecessary for the plot in the first version – is one of the aspects which allows its comparison with Gautier's *Le Roman de la momie*, a text as composite as Wilde's. Gautier's non-linear story was indeed serialized, which makes its unity as problematic as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Each chapter corresponds to a different issue, each meant to stand on its own as well as keep the reader hooked and eager to read the next one.

²⁷ Guy and Small, *Oscar Wilde's Profession*; Zeender, *Le Triptyque de Dorian Gray*; David A. Upchurch, *Wilde's Use of Irish Celtic Elements in The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992); Michael Patrick Gillespie, *The Picture of Dorian Gray: "What the World Thinks Me"* (New York: London: Twayne Publishers, 1995); John Osborne, *The Picture of Dorian Gray: a Moral Entertainment* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973).

²⁸ John G. Peters, 'Style and Art in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: Form as Content'.

There are no monographs focusing on *Le Roman de la momie*, but the novel is present in studies on Gautier and exoticism, or the fantastic in Gautier.²⁹ Most of these studies or articles focus on a thematic approach and few critics analyse the novel's structure or its style. It has been and still is seen as a text of surface (*texte de la surface*), having, according to Algernon Coleman "no great value as a novel."³⁰ He continues: "the interesting element of such a book by such an author lies, as might be expected, in its pictorial aspect [...]."³¹ Indeed, *Le Roman de la momie*'s pictorial aspect is striking and directly relates Gautier's practice of description to his love of painting. However, Coleman suggests that the novel's pictorial tendencies are not enough to make it valuable. I will argue that Gautier's approach to the description in the novel constitutes a rare case of literary experimentation towards the decorative.

The novel also presents a similar use of description to Wilde's novel, with more than half of the text being devoted to beautiful ornamental passages. Gautier's novel can be seen as his Egyptian masterpiece, Gautier having worked on the theme several times before, especially in *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre* (1838) and *Le Pied de momie*. Gautier's reworking of the same motive not only recalls Wilde's echoes of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in earlier works,³² but also Wilde's practice of self-plagiarism. In both texts, some sentences are taken from earlier works and reshaped in the new one, where Wilde uses epigrams from his plays and essays,³³ and Gautier misquotes Shakespeare

²⁹ *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier, L'orient* (Montpellier: Société Théophile Gautier), XI-XII; Peter Whyte, *Théophile Gautier: conteur fantastique et merveilleux* (Durham: University of Durham, 1996).

³⁰ Algernon Coleman, 'Some Sources of the *Roman de la Momie*', *Modern Philology*, 19 (1922), pp. 337-360, p. 340.

³¹ Coleman, 'Some Sources of the *Roman de la Momie*', p. 340.

³² See Guy and Small, *Studying Oscar Wilde*.

³³ "You must have a cigarette. A cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied. What more can one want?" *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 236, which is also found in 'The Critic as Artist': "Cigarettes have at least the charm of leaving one unsatisfied." p. 142; and Ian Small gives yet another occurrence of this epigram: "In a cancelled passage from an early draft of the Second Act of *A Woman of No Importance*, [...] the unattributed quotation is from Wilde himself",

for the second time.³⁴ Wilde also quoted and alluded to Gautier directly a number of times in the novel, as has been pointed out by several critics.³⁵ Following Peter Whyte's work on thematic influences of Gautier's works on Wilde's novel, through works such as *Mademoiselle de Maupin* or *Fortunio* (1837) that recall Dorian's love for beautiful objects, and Gautier's stories about dual characters such as *Le Chevalier double* (1840), *Deux Acteurs pour un rôle* (1841), or *Avatar* (1856), this chapter singles out the two authors through their original use of description.³⁶

Gautier's novel starts in the nineteenth century with the discovery of the tomb of an Egyptian queen named Tahoser, which is followed by an account of her life in ancient Egypt. The direct reference to the mummy as the subject of the narration creates a temporal digression, in a similar way as Dorian's portrait, made into the principal actor of Wilde's novel, distorts the time of the narration. The first chapter analysed the impact of the insertion of physical artworks into the narration, in order to see how they created gaps in time and space. In this chapter, I investigate how the structure of the works by Gautier and Wilde and their different components, artistic descriptions in particular, also affect time and space and distort nineteenth-century prescriptions about artistic components in a novel. The insertion of art on this structural level challenges the norm and, once again, leads to a reflection on literature in comparison to other artistic media, as the two authors transfuse materiality through their medium of choice.

Conditions for Criticism: Authority, Knowledge, and Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 113.

³⁴ "Il lui sembla, d'après l'expression de Shakspeare, "que la roue du temps était sortie de son ornière"", *Le Roman de la momie*, in *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, ed. by Pierre Laubriet et al., 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2002), II, p. 504; an expression which he already used, as chapter 1 has shown, in *Arria Marcella*: "la roue du temps était sortie de son ornière", p. 306.

³⁵ Joseph Bristow sees a direct influence of the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* in the preface to the second edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. XXXVI; Guy and Small see in Wilde's quotations of *Emaux et camées* in chapter XIV an allusion to ambivalent sexual figures. *Studying Oscar Wilde*, p. 173.

³⁶ Peter Whyte in 'Oscar Wilde et Théophile Gautier: le cas du *Portrait de Dorian Gray*' argues that *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and *Emaux et camées* are not Wilde's only sources. He argues that *Fortunio*, *Le Chevalier double*, *La Morte amoureuse* or *Avatar* could have been used by Wilde when imagining the novel.

The first part of this chapter analyses the concept of time and temporality inside as well as outside the descriptions, and asks whether the descriptions provoke a pause in the narration. This disrupted temporality is made complex by the pictorial aspect of their works, which suggests a movement towards other forms of art, painting in particular. The second part examines the relation between descriptions and space. The actual material space allowed for the description inside the works deforms the structure. Within the descriptions themselves, the attention to details, analysed as a descriptive myopia – a term inferred from Gautier’s medical condition – focuses on the extremely small and displaces the focus of the work.

1. Descriptions and Time

A. Intertextuality, or Time Disruption

In Chapter XIV, Dorian attempts to distract his mind from the murder he just committed by reading *Emaux et camées*. The hero marvels at the beauty of Gautier’s verses, and digresses on the poems. Wilde used Gautier’s material as his own starting-point for another artwork, twisting the French poet’s words and shaping them in the form he wished. The insertion of passages from Gautier’s poems, from ‘Variations sur le Carnaval de Venise’, recalls the inclusion of Shakespeare’s verses in ‘The Portrait of Mr. W. H.’. It is not the only instance in which Wilde borrowed from other writers. The question of the sources of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which leads to analyses of this rich intertextuality (which this thesis continues), has been the focus of a large number of studies. Isobel Murray, in an article proposing “yet another source for *Dorian Gray*”, quotes Richard Ellmann’s affirmation that “the search for sources of Wilde’s *The*

Picture of Dorian Gray is unending [...].”³⁷ Whether the intertextuality is considered “well-known plagiarism”,³⁸ or a wish to affiliate his novel with other English and European cultural currents, the novel’s originality is often questioned.³⁹ Gautier is often identified as a major influence in the novel, but, as I argue in this thesis, the studies analysing the sources of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* never engage with a comparative analysis of the two authors, and they argue that *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and Gautier’s aesthetic doctrine are the main (if not only) interests for Wilde, and they consider these sources as somehow self-explanatory.

Patricia Clements describes the indirect filiation between Gautier and Wilde by evoking Pater and Swinburne in the elaboration of Gautier’s persona for Wilde: “Pater is the paramount force in Wilde’s treatment of the “senses” through literature [...] but he is joined here by other familiar voices. The very mention of the “worship of the senses” evokes Gautier, whose *Mademoiselle de Maupin* Swinburne had praised [...].”⁴⁰ Once again, Gautier’s influence is reduced to his novel and its sensuality. Although this chapter proposes yet another analysis of Wilde’s sources for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, it does not unveil Gautier’s influence, but rather demonstrates how, in addition to the themes, Wilde reworked Gautier’s structure in the novel. Wilde’s connection with his sources is indeed more complex than mere plagiarism, and the Irish writer established real interactions between his texts and those by others. Isobel Murray notes that Wilde “treats all the great writers he knows as in some sense his

³⁷ Isobel Murray, ‘Oscar Wilde in his Literary Element: yet Another Source for *Dorian Gray*’, in *Rediscovering Oscar Wilde*, ed. by C. Georges Sandulescu (Monaco: The Princess Grace Irish Library, 1994), pp. 283-296, p. 283.

³⁸ On the descriptions of musical instruments in Chapter 11, see Merlin Holland, ‘Plagiarist or Pioneer?’, in *Rediscovering Oscar Wilde*, ed. by C. Georges Sandulescu (Monaco: The Princess Grace Irish Library, 1994), pp. 193-213, p. 204.

³⁹ “in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* he wished to affiliate his distinctly aesthetic story with the anti-realist movement that was afoot in Europe”. Bristow, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, pp. XXXVI-XXXVII.

⁴⁰ Patricia Clements, *Baudelaire & the English Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 166.

contemporaries, to whom he can bow in appreciation, or with whom he can continue to debate.”⁴¹ Considering that there is a gap of almost forty years between *Emaux et camées* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, did Wilde acknowledge this gap?

Several authors came between Gautier and Wilde, such as Swinburne, Baudelaire, Flaubert and Pater, all of whom drew from Gautier, and created an indirect filiation between Gautier and Wilde. Did Wilde recognise that Gautier’s works and thoughts had already been deformed when he came across them, or did he see Gautier as his direct contemporary? Josephine Guy and Ian Small analyse the influence of Gautier on Wilde’s works and Wilde’s use of Gautier. According to the two critics, Wilde used the “French decadent” author in order to express “forms of desire that were forbidden in Victorian Britain”, therefore mainly in relation to Gautier as the writer of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and a few poems from *Emaux et camées*.⁴² Indeed, the two critics highlight “an interest in uncommon forms of sexuality, such as hermaphroditism” in Gautier’s works, of which “Wilde was fully aware [...] he knew it was part of Gautier’s attraction for him”.⁴³ This affirmation is problematic on several levels. To some extent, equating Gautier with Decadence is already witnessing and conveying both temporal and spatial displacements. The adjective decadent, applied rather too easily by the two critics to Gautier, is anachronistic in Gautier’s own context. Gautier never affiliated himself with a movement called Decadence and the movement in itself only really started in the fin de siècle, about ten years after Gautier’s death.⁴⁴ Besides, Gautier’s works do not overall broach the theme of deviant sexuality.

Using what is considered decadent in Gautier’s texts, especially the sexual experiments in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, is to displace the novel to Victorian Great

⁴¹ Murray, ‘Oscar Wilde in his Literary Element’, p. 283.

⁴² Guy and Small, *Studying Oscar Wilde*, p. 173.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ “In 1885, before the term had even taken full hold [...]” Gilman, *Decadence*, p. 99.

Britain, where Madelaine's bisexuality and D'Albert's sexual confusion would probably be considered immoral, while in France several other works were probably more shocking, as Baudelaire's trial for *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1840-67) would show. It is certainly true that Wilde had read *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, and that he had read it through the prism of other writers (namely Baudelaire, Swinburne or Pater) who saw in Gautier's novel the symbol of what they would develop as fin de siècle or decadent literature. The sensuality and sexuality of Gautier's works clearly appealed to Wilde, and Dorian picks up the "monstre charmant" from *Emaux et camées* as an obvious sexual undertext of the hermaphrodite and sexually puzzling creature portrayed in 'Contralto'.⁴⁵

However, as this thesis argues, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* is not the only, or even the main focus of Wilde's reading of Gautier. It would be somehow reductive to envisage Gautier's impressive corpus only through his famous novel. While Wilde was using the gap between Gautier and his time and space in order to enhance Gautier's transgressive power, by recognizing the French author as both his ancestor and precursor, he also considered him as a contemporary to which Wilde's novel was a direct and immediate response. Dorian's experience of Gautier's verses is unmediated and instantaneous. The immediacy of Dorian's impressions and his instant reaction of rapture demonstrate Gautier's modernity and closeness to Wilde's hero. Gautier's verses turn into what they depict, and become a blur of colourful impressions: "The mere lines looked to him like those straight lines of turquoise-blue that follow one as one pushes out to the Lido."⁴⁶ The lines following the hero are Gautier's poetry, like a trail of beautiful impressions left behind, and the verses echo Dorian's memories and

⁴⁵ *Dorian Gray*, p. 305.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

emotions. Kelter Hartley notes of this particular passage how “Wilde semble écrire sous la dictée de son inspireur, tant la continuité est parfaite entre les vers cités et le morceau de prose qui les commente.”⁴⁷ Gautier seems to be inserted completely into the novel, as if he were another character towards whom Dorian leans when in need of advice. In a double movement, Wilde displaced his own work through time and space in order to reach Gautier, while displacing Gautier’s verses into his own work. In the end, both texts seem decontextualized through the process.

The intertextuality present in Wilde’s work demystifies the ‘here and now’ in literature. This other temporality, added by any intertextual reference, is exterior to the temporality of the plot and somehow exterior to the work itself. It places the work inside a different time and space, that belongs exclusively to art as the last chapter showed. In that regard, the two works clearly mark their affiliations to the realm of art through their intertextual genesis. The numerous sources attributed to the two works, either external (Ernest Feydeau’s involvement in *Le Roman de la momie*, making it almost a co-written novel, is recognizable through Gautier’s dedication; the multiple manuals on Egypt Gautier read before writing the novel echo Wilde’s ‘plagiarism’ of museum manuals on instruments) or internal (Christopher S. Nasaar affirms that “a chief influence on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is none other than Wilde’s earliest and highly aesthetic fairy tale ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’ (1891),⁴⁸ in the same way as *Le Roman de la momie* recalls *Le Pied de momie* or *La Nuit de Cléopâtre*), form a patchwork of artistic influences that deform the work, its form and temporality, and distort literary time and shape it into pictorial or sculptural time.

⁴⁷ Kelter Hartley, *Oscar Wilde, l’influence française dans son œuvre* (Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sirey, 1935), p. 258.

⁴⁸ Christopher S. Nasaar, ‘Oscar Wilde’s ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’ and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: Point Counterpoint’, *A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles*, 27 (2014), pp. 137-143, p. 137.

B. The Descriptive or how to Disrupt Time

Pierre Laubriet, in a note on *Le Roman de la momie*, argues that the composition of the novel is flawed in its rhythm:

Il est clair que *Le Roman de la momie* ne présente pas d'innovation dans le domaine de la construction romanesque; tout en usant de procédés d'exposition et de narration utilisés par ses contemporains, Balzac en particulier, Gautier semble moins habile dans la répartition des éléments descriptifs, narratifs et dramatiques. Le descriptif l'emporte de beaucoup sur le reste, Gautier cédant sans doute à son goût pour l'image; les parties dramatiques sont rarement haletantes, si bien que le rythme général du récit reste assez lent.⁴⁹

The comparison with Balzac suggests that Gautier did not propose anything new in the novel, and instead merely copied his contemporaries' structures. According to the critic, the construction of the novel is uneven; Gautier not only favours description over narration but also makes the action appear slow. While the critic infers that this very trait makes Gautier's work less interesting, or not as successful as Balzac's works, I would argue that it is the very reason why Gautier innovates and experiments with literature. This is described as a weakness in his writing: Gautier indulges in a guilty pleasure while neglecting what should be at the centre of his work, the action. The notion of proportion, inherited from classical standards of beauty, equates excess with failure. Nisard illustrated this tendency: "je remarque que les descriptions tiennent plus de la moitié de la Pharsale, laquelle n'est à proprement dire qu'un poème descriptif, et n'intéresse guère à ce titre."⁵⁰ The disproportion is what constitutes the structural flaw

⁴⁹ Pierre Laubriet, 'Notes on *Le Roman de la momie*', p. 1344.

⁵⁰ Nisard, *Etudes*, II, pp. 159-160.

in *Le Roman de la momie*, but Gautier went further than challenging the unity and harmony of his own work.

The first seven pages of the novel are solely descriptive, then the change to the simple past seems to bring movement and action: “fit-elle en frappant l’une contre l’autre ses mains délicates pour imposer le silence à la musicienne, qui étouffa aussitôt avec sa paume les vibrations de la harpe [...]”⁵¹ The use of the adverb “aussitôt” and the subtle change in tense from the imperfect to the simple past suggest an acceleration of the rhythm of the story. However, the only action which is taking place at this instant is the musician who is changing rhythm and song. Even though the use of the simple past is sustained, the end of the first chapter is a description of Tahoser’s servants dancing:

Quelques-unes des femmes [...] frissonnèrent, ouvrirent leurs narines, et, mues d’une impulsion irrésistible, se mirent à danser.

Une coiffure en forme de casque échancré à l’oreille enveloppait leur chevelure, dont quelques spirales s’échappaient et flagellaient leurs joues brunes, où l’ardeur de la danse mit bientôt des couleurs roses.⁵²

The return of the imperfect tense shows that the descriptive creeps back into the text. Gautier rushed some form of action in his novel through the numerous ellipses which accelerate the rhythm of the last part, as if he were complying with someone else’s expectations as regards the construction of his novel, which could well be the case as his publisher’s comment on his work proves. Overall, the novel seems to be building up towards an anticipated event which, in reality, does not take place. The fact that the situation has not changed much between the beginning and the end of the novel

⁵¹ *Le Roman de la momie*, p. 526.

⁵² *Ibid.*

enhances the feeling that the framing of the action through description is pointless. *Le Roman de la momie* is rather anticlimactic in that sense, and its descriptions appear as though they were the focal point of the novel.

The Picture of Dorian Gray also plays with length, extension, and ellipses. The differences between the 1890 and the 1891 versions point to Wilde's desire to elongate and stretch time in his novel. For instance, the 1890 version covers six years less than the 1891 edition: It is said that "on the 7th of November, the eve of his [Dorian's] own thirty-second birthday", while the 1891 version states "It was on the ninth of November, the eve of his own thirty-eight birthday [...]"⁵³ The change in the date of Dorian's birthday is rather difficult to account for, while the fact that Wilde added more years to his second edition demonstrates that he wished to 'cover' as much of Dorian's life as he could. Obviously, the changes are not that significant since no major events are depicted during these added six years. The time added is more literary than active. Nevertheless, it shows that Wilde wished to comply with the genre of the 'roman d'initiation', following his hero throughout most of his life. At the same time, he seemed to be deforming this very genre since most of the time is not actually represented: of nineteen years, a little over two months are described in the novel. The added chapters of the second version add some length to the whole work, and they also seem to delay the passing of time. For instance, the new chapter III delays the one-month ellipsis of the original chapter III in the 1890 version. In the same way that Gautier stretched time to its extreme in his novel, Wilde seems to be adding time as he extended his. The extreme slowness of their works, which at times freezes both the narration and time itself, leads to a reflection on the relations between literature and temporality through the use of description.

⁵³ *Dorian Gray*, p. 126, p. 291.

In J.K. Huysmans' *A Rebours* (1884), the main character Des Esseintes explained why he distanced himself from Gautier as one of his artistic masters, arguing that Gautier's descriptive practice forced him to remain on the surface of things: "L'impression des objets s'était fixée sur son œil si perceptif, mais elle s'y était localisée, n'avait pas pénétré plus avant dans sa cervelle et dans sa chair; de même qu'un prodigieux réflecteur, il s'était constamment borné à réverbérer, avec une impersonnelle netteté, des alentours."⁵⁴ This quotation is extremely rich in terms of ways in which Gautier was perceived. First, Huysmans pointed out a crucial aspect of Gautier's means to apprehend the real: it is the impression of the objects, not the objects in themselves that are being considered. Gautier was disregarded as a writer of surface (*écrivain de la surface*) for that reason: the world he depicted in his works had already been mediated through art before it even entered his own artistic production. Huysmans' confession to having rejected one of his earlier masters also lessens Huysmans' influence on Wilde who, in comparison, never disavowed Gautier's influence on his work or his own love for the French writer. Finally, what Des Esseintes objected to in Gautier's writing was its fixity, the unmovable characteristic of his works. As I have shown, the structure of *Le Roman de la momie* tends to elongate time and indeed does seem to stop time at certain moments. However, I would argue that it is not simply a process of pausing time, but rather an attempt to place things and human beings out of time.

To start with, the characters in the two works under study have no past. It seems that they exist only because the writer summons them. Before the story, they had no existence. The very thin psychological aspect of the characters in *Le Roman de la momie* was the basis of one of his editors' reservations about the novel: "Je trouve que

⁵⁴ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *A Rebours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), p. 280.

jusqu'à présent les personnages, sauf Tahoser, sont trop souvent Egyptiens morts [...]."⁵⁵ Ernest Feydeau noted that it seemed to be a concern for Gautier, who was aware of this flaw in his novel: "Il sentait bien qu'on ne peut faire un roman uniquement composé de descriptions, que l'étude de l'âme humaine et de ses passions doit y tenir la plus grande place [...]."⁵⁶ However, if he knew that his characters were psychologically inexistent, he did not do much to change it. Of Tahoser's past, we only know that her father died a rich man. Nothing is said about Poëri, Ra'hel, or Nofré, and Pharaoh is constantly portrayed as having neither a past nor a future outside of his political role, which allows Pierre Laubriet to mention him as an "être statue".⁵⁷ Their only substance comes from the here and now of the story and it becomes clear, from the figures of Pharaoh, Tahoser as well as Mosché, that Gautier portrayed them as being given a life only through art. The eternity of the characters comes from the fact that they escape real life, as they are beings made of words, beings made of art.

Dorian is also an artistic being. He is never described and is only known through his portrait. Notwithstanding the obvious reasons which make Dorian an artistic creature in relation to his portrait and their exchange of characteristics, Wilde added a mystery around his character in order to aestheticize him even more. In the 1890 version, nothing is known about Dorian's past, and he seems to be born when Wilde through Basil summons him through art. However, in 1891, Wilde added Chapter III in which Lord Henry questions his uncle on Dorian's past and the reader learns that his mother was as beautiful as he is and had a tragic life too. Is it possible that Wilde was attempting to add what Gautier had omitted? Unfortunately, there are no indications explaining Wilde's addition. However, the short summary of Dorian's past does not

⁵⁵ J. Turgan quoted in 'Notes on *Le Roman de la momie*', pp. 1336-1337.

⁵⁶ Feydeau quoted in 'Notes on *Le Roman de la momie*', p. 1335.

⁵⁷ Laubriet, 'Notes on *Le Roman de la momie*', p. 1341.

entirely cover the fact that the hero remains rather insubstantial, which can explain his need to bring some materiality and texture to his personality through his long list of studies and activities in chapter XI. Dorian escapes time. It is impossible to give him an age; Wilde himself loosely adds or subtracts six years of his life, which proves that Dorian was not clearly defined for him either. It seems that Dorian can be taken out of his context, since he does not entirely belong to it. Lord Henry, who claims that Dorian is ushering in an era of New Hedonism, places the hero simultaneously in Greek Antiquity and in a future which has not yet happened: Dorian has no context since he belongs to eternity.

The atemporal aspect of the characters mirrors Gautier's and Wilde's practice of description. Their depictions of nature, buildings, or any objects falling into their consideration are fixed by the way in which they describe them. The opening scene of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the perfect example of what can be called a pictorial style, through which Wilde stabilized the transient. The garden of the exposition passage, framed by the open doors of the windows, themselves framed by the "long-tussore-silk curtains",⁵⁸ displays how it belongs to the realm of art rather than reality from the very beginning. The reader enters in medias res into this artistic world through the very first words of the novel: "The studio".⁵⁹ The scene becomes immobile through depiction, which turns into a visual vignette. In contrast to a real garden in which time affects things, where flowers wither and the light constantly distorts and shifts our vision, Wilde's garden is not affected by any of the above. The scene captures the instant to make it eternally beautiful.

⁵⁸ *Dorian Gray*, p. 169.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Gautier's and Wilde's descriptions are pictorial not only because they borrow techniques from paintings but also because they experiment with pictorial time. Time in the description is a captured moment frozen in its eternity, as demonstrated in chapter 1: it is the moment of the painting. Stephen Cheeke describes the differences between "the single moment or 'now', which presents no conceptual difficulty in a painting" and the "normal time" in which the instant is "impossible to grasp [...]." ⁶⁰ While literature is meant to be able to convey moment and action, the visual arts focus on the moment which they fix into eternity and stillness. Gautier and Wilde tried to infuse the notion of moment in literature through the insertion of pictorial qualities in their writings. The incorporation of a different type of time interferes with literary time. By favouring descriptions, Gautier and Wilde inscribed their novels even more in the realm of the visual arts, and in so doing turned their works into a succession of eternal moments.

What Wilde does with the garden in the opening passage of the novel is similar to Gautier's foregrounding of the buildings' immovable aspect, mirroring Pharaoh's immutability: "L'idée d'une puissance absolue s'attachait à ces masses inébranlables, sur lesquelles l'éternité semblait devoir glisser comme une goutte d'eau sur un marbre", or "un caractère d'indestructibilité était écrit dans les lignes droites et les formes géométriques de cette architecture bâtie avec des quartiers de montagnes: les piliers et les colonnes semblaient se piéter puissamment pour soutenir le poids des immenses pierres [...]." ⁶¹ The eternal power emerging from the Egyptian constructions, an echo to Pharaoh's "sérénité granitique", ⁶² takes from its material (like the marble discussed

⁶⁰ Cheeke, *Writing for Art*, p. 61.

⁶¹ *Le Roman de la momie*, p. 546, p. 547.

⁶² Laubriet, 'Notes on *Le Roman de la momie*', p. 1341.

in the first chapter) its characteristics and becomes both visual (graphic) and mineral (the reunion of quartz and feldspar which creates graphite) in order to achieve eternity.

Feydeau noted in his memories of the French author that Gautier was well aware of the omnipresence of his descriptive style: “Tu as pu t’étonner de voir que, moi, je donne tant de place aux descriptions.”⁶³ Gautier justified this characteristic of his writing in the following terms:

Elle provient des ennuis que j’ai toujours éprouvés, et dont je t’ai parlé souvent, toutes les fois que j’ai voulu faire passer dans les journaux le plus faible reflet de ma pensée. J’ai mes idées à moi sur toute chose: sur l’art, la politique, la philosophie, les religions, la morale, la science, la civilisation, le soi-disant progrès, voire même l’industrie.⁶⁴

Description was Gautier’s refuge against everything he abhorred in life: censorship, vulgarity, as well as his fear of saying imprecise or wrong things.

Je me suis réfugié dans la description, certain de ne choquer personne, de n’être pas considéré comme séditieux quand je me livre à la peinture des choses extérieures. [...] Avec mon procédé, étant pourvu de bons yeux pour voir, et ayant un talent suffisant pour décrire ce que je vois, je suis certain de ne jamais imprimer de bêtises.⁶⁵

This is a crucial element of Gautier’s style: his works are filled with descriptions as an attempt to defeat time, and achieve eternity through pictorial stillness. But the descriptions also decontextualize his works, and take the novel out of Gautier’s time.

⁶³ Ernest Feydeau, *Théophile Gautier: souvenirs intimes* (Paris: Plon, 1874), p. 139.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

The importance of length and its effect on the rhythm of the descriptions in the two novels obliges the reader to ponder their role and justification. According to Genette, descriptions can be seen as necessary pauses in the course of the plot, which allow the hero or the reader to ponder the events, while they frame and enhance the foregrounded action: “l’étude des rapports entre le narratif et le descriptif se ramène donc, pour l’essentiel, à considérer les *fonctions diégétiques* de la description, c’est-à-dire le rôle joué par les passages ou les aspects descriptifs dans l’économie générale du récit.”⁶⁶ However, Gautier’s descriptions are rather useless to the plot as the action they are meant to frame never happens. This practice questions their role in the novel: what are the functions of the descriptions in *Le Roman de la momie*? Are they used as narrative tools as they are in Zola’s works, their length neutralized by their integration in the time of the action? Or, do they fall into the ‘classical’ category analysed by Genette as ornamental descriptions, “la description étendue et détaillée apparaît ici comme une pause et une récréation dans le récit, de rôle purement esthétique, comme celui de la sculpture dans un édifice classique”?⁶⁷ It is clear, as this chapter shows, that the descriptions are moments of heightened aestheticism, which concentrate artistic figures and references. However, does that entail that Gautier ascribed an aesthetic role to them? Are these aesthetic pauses justified when there does not seem to be anything to pause from? Genette thinks about description in terms of its relation with the plot, and its accessory role in the overall work. However, as he himself points to in the quotation through the analogy with sculpture, the description can go from accessory to structural. As the sculpture has taken over the building it adorns, the description takes over the narration.

⁶⁶ Gérard Genette, *Figures II* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), p. 58.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Paolo Tortonese shows how Gautier's original treatment of the description proved to be as surprising in his century as it still is for modern critics. He points out the relation between Gautier's descriptive style and the recurrent attacks on his writings: "manque d'idées, de sentiment, de psychologie, intérêt excessif pour la "description matérielle des objets", which classified him as an "écrivain de la surface",⁶⁸ a deprecating term in a literary world in which substance, depth and complexity are celebrated values. Tortonese explains how "Gautier pose un problème assez embarrassant: celui de la valeur de la description. En l'éloignant de l'émotivité romantique, en lui enlevant la fonction de miroir sentimental, il l'a laissé nue, dépourvue de sens, aux yeux de ses contemporains."⁶⁹ In contrast to other nineteenth-century writers who assigned a clear role to their descriptions, Gautier liberated description from its relation to the narration, which empties description of its value. Tortonese demonstrates the gap between Gautier and his contemporaries through the example of Zola, who felt the need to denigrate Gautier's works in order to justify his own doctrine: "Le plus curieux est qu'il se rencontre ici sur un point avec les écrivains naturalistes, qui ont, eux aussi, le plus grand respect pour les milieux, seulement, eux, ne les étudient soigneusement que parce qu'ils complètent et déterminent l'homme, tandis que Théophile Gautier les veut pour eux-mêmes."⁷⁰ This eventually leads Paolo Tortonese to wonder: "Quand l'objet n'est ni une image du sentiment ni un décor de l'homme, que peut-il être? Quel sens a-t-il?"⁷¹ This mirrors the feeling expressed more than a century before in an article by Alfred Crampon that focuses on Gautier as the leader of the *Ecole Fantaisiste*: "le genre descriptif de l'empire était fastidieux et de toute fausseté; mais encore admettait-il l'homme à titre de détail, pour marquer les plans

⁶⁸ Tortonese, *La Vie Extérieure*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Zola quoted in Tortonese, *La Vie Extérieure*, p. 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

et accuser les perspectives. L'école fantaisiste le supprime tout-à-fait, et pour elle l'homme est de trop presque partout.”⁷²

Gautier's foregrounding of description in his novel seems to question an entire system of values, which still, to some extent, prevails today. During the nineteenth century, description was a useful tool for the narration and took a crucial part in the realistic aspect of the novels of Balzac or Zola, where the details in the description grounded the story. But the description had to remain accessory. This way of envisaging descriptions established a clear hierarchy among the different parts of a story. The descriptive was an ornamental detail that had to be controlled so that it did not become the main part, taking in the process the place devoted to the narration. Nisard talked about the “manie descriptive” of the Decadent Poets, explaining how the decadent emphasis on description was accompanied by the disappearance of the human: “l'homme figure encore, au moins de nom [...] Mais son image y est affaiblie, pâle, dégénérée [...]”⁷³ The decadence did not only come from the length and status of the description, it also resulted from its distance with humanity, the emphasis being put on material objects. Zola centred his attack on Gautier on this very trait: “je trouve justement chez lui la description pour la description, sans souci aucun de l'humanité.”⁷⁴ He added: “Cela met dans ses oeuvres un silence sépulcral; il n'y a là que des choses, aucune voix, aucun frisson humain ne monte de cette terre morte.”⁷⁵ Detaching description from plot and characters was going against the realist vision of a world in which the human and its study should be at the centre of the novel. As this chapter proves, the characters in both novels are not particularly lively or ‘human’, and the

⁷² Alfred Crampon, ‘Les Fantaisistes’, *La Revue des deux mondes* (Paris: Novembre 1852), pp. 582-597, p. 595.

⁷³ Nisard, *Etudes*, II, p. 169, p. 170.

⁷⁴ Zola, *Du Roman*, p. 62.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

descriptions do not add to their psychology. If anything, the descriptions tend to enhance their artistic existence and efface their humanity, which fixes them in an eternal pictorial temporality.

If the human is not the justification for the importance of the descriptions in the two novels, what is? Gautier and Wilde forced the critics to go beyond the dichotomy narration-description, since it seems impossible to find a diegetic justification to their descriptions. Their justification needs to be found in the descriptions themselves, and not simply in their relation to the narration. In the novels, the descriptions surreptitiously take over the narration, and question their subservient status. In so doing, Gautier and Wilde freed the description from its narrative prison, and found an inherent justification to its existence. Not only does this approach erode the centrality of the human in literary productions, it also interrogates the status of the ornamental in the literary sphere. If I assume that descriptions are secondary in part because they are ornamental, this suggests that whatever is not considered purely literary has to be accessory. However, Gautier's and Wilde's reversal of order carried out by description explicitly foregrounds the ornamental, and, more generally, the visual arts, inside the literary sphere, which questions the limits between text and visual media.

C. Movement towards other Media: Painting in Literature

Affirming the privileged relation between Gautier and the visual arts is neither surprising nor new. Most critics point out his tendency to turn literature into painting, and analyse the use of the ekphrasis as his favourite literary figure, and show how his first love and first choice of career pervaded through all the forms and genres he

experimented with.⁷⁶ Peter Whyte notes that if Gautier was not the only writer using the visual arts in his writings, he was “celui qui est allé le plus loin dans cette voie [...] il en a fait un usage abusif.”⁷⁷ He also shows how the pictorial reference is mainly used as a descriptive device. The abusive, extreme way in which the visual arts are inscribed in Gautier’s writings were already pointed out by his contemporaries; the Goncourt brothers described his work as “de la peinture écrite”.⁷⁸ Invented formulas abound in order to comprehend the relation between Gautier’s style and the visual arts. Nathalie David-Weill affirms that for Gautier “écrire équivaldrait donc à peindre”,⁷⁹ Irene Joan Driscoll points out how “the qualities of plastic form” are being substituted for the “evocation of visual works of art for the creation of true literary form.”⁸⁰ The visual arts are envisaged as a landslide taking over the literary form and are therefore seen as a flaw in Gautier’s writings. What is striking about *Le Roman de la momie* is the paradox between the richness, quality, and importance of the descriptions when, in fact, Gautier had not yet visited Egypt when he wrote the novel. His first encounter with this civilization took place in 1869.

Moret, Coleman, and Laubriet analyse the sources of the novel and refer to literary texts, as well as visual documents.⁸¹ Moret, for instance, showed how the description of Tahoser’s tomb is almost plagiarised from the *Catalogue raisonné et*

⁷⁶ Etienne de Ullmann, ‘L’Art de la transposition dans la poésie de Théophile Gautier’, *Le Français Moderne* (1947), pp. 265-286; Irene Joan Driscoll, ‘Visual Allusions in the Work of Gautier’, *French Studies*, 27 (1973), pp. 418-428; Robert Snell, *Théophile Gautier: A Romantic Critic of the Visual Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) are but a few examples of the analysis of Gautier through the scope of the visual arts.

⁷⁷ Peter Whyte, ‘La Référence artistique comme procédé littéraire dans quelques romans et contes de Gautier’, p. 282.

⁷⁸ Jules and Edmond de Goncourt quoted in David-Weill, *Rêve de pierre*, p. 8.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Driscoll, ‘Visual Allusions in the Work of Gautier’, p. 418.

⁸¹ Alain Moret, ‘Note sur une Source du *Roman de la momie* de Théophile Gautier’, *Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France*, 3 (1899), pp. 362-366; Coleman, ‘Some Sources of the *Roman de la Momie*’; Laubriet, ‘Notes on *Le Roman de la momie*’.

historique des antiquités découvertes en Egypte (1826) by Joseph Passalacqua.⁸² However, Gautier did not only use the text, but also “une vignette, en tête du catalogue”.⁸³ Moret affirms that “Gautier a su, sans copier [...] choisir tous les détails archéologiques”,⁸⁴ suggesting that Gautier transformed rather than copied his sources. He adds that “Gautier, qui ‘voyait’ plus qu’il ne lisait, s’est servi de la vignette du Catalogue autant que du texte.”⁸⁵ Gautier’s creative process when writing *Le Roman de la momie* enlightens the concept of movement between media, a Romantic trait which he evoked with nostalgia in his article on Delacroix: “En ce temps-là, la peinture et la poésie fraternisaient.”⁸⁶ Gautier imagined and developed his ideas from visual documents, which he transformed into words, which he then shaped as visual tools through his style. This convoluted deformation shows how movement is injected into the apparent stillness of the descriptions. In that regard, Gautier’s and Wilde’s use and practice of their literary medium suggests an art that is constantly moving towards other forms. While they borrowed from the longevity of the visual arts, this incursion, as a displacement towards another medium, suggests movement in itself. Gautier’s and Wilde’s use of the visual arts does not seem to be a petrifying movement in their writings but rather represents a deformation in motion. The use of pictorial descriptions change the very texture of their literary medium. Its constant movements towards visual media turn it into a malleable substance, while it gains from these incursions a new-found hardness given by the materiality of the media it includes.

As Jeremy Lambert explains, “la description relève d’une problématique particulière: celle des rapports entre peinture et littérature. En effet, ce vers quoi tend

⁸² Moret, ‘Note sur une Source’, p. 362.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Critique artistique et littéraire*, p. 64.

la description, c'est avant tout l'image [...].”⁸⁷ To analyse descriptions in the novels by Gautier and Wilde is to examine the ways in which they shift the literary medium towards painting and the effect of this deformation. Lambert points out several literary indicators of the movement towards pictorial art in the descriptions, among which are the use of the imperfect tense implying duration, participles acting as adjectives, and shifters showing the desire to present something to the reader. In this regard, the description of the Valley of the Kings, written almost entirely in the imperfect tense in the Prologue of *Le Roman de la momie* is the perfect example of a pictorial description. Gautier used all the markers designated by Jeremy Lambert: the participles acting as adjectives: “restes de sculptures rongés”, “ossements de mort calcinés au bûcher”, “les créneaux ébréchés”; as well as shifters: “Ces roches”, “cette terre”, “ces réverbérations”.⁸⁸ These processes dilate the temporality and reinforce the pictorial illusion being developed in the text. Through these pictorial devices, Gautier transforms his novel into a textual landscape.

Gautier framed the scene, and circumscribed it as a painting. The description begins with: “l'étroit défilé qui donne entrée dans la vallée de Biban-el-Molouk.”⁸⁹ The narrow path frames the entrance into the valley creating a contrast (of depth, perspective, light, and colour) between the gorge and the valley. The name of the valley partakes of the *couleur locale* effect present throughout the novel, but it is also telling in this very context: the name of the valley translates as the gates or the doors of the kings, which reinforces the idea of an entrance to another world. Surprisingly, the description is devoid of artistic references. It seems that Gautier was unable to find a

⁸⁷ Jeremy Lambert, ‘De L’Of Meat poétique chez Huysmans, le poème en prose et la description picturale’, in *Huysmans, ou comment extraire la poésie de la prose*, ed. by Jérôme Solal (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015), pp. 31-45, p. 32.

⁸⁸ *Le Roman de la momie*, pp. 493-494.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 493.

representation of the Valley of the Kings to refer to in his own depiction of it. The paintings that represent Egyptian landscapes that Gautier could have seen before writing his novel are rather different from his portrayal. Whether it is Jean-Charles Tardieu's *Halte de l'armée française à Syène* (1812) [figure 1], Alexandre Gabriel Decamps' *La Caravane* (1845) [figure 2], or Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Vue de la plaine de Thèbes* (1857) [figure 3], the colouring of the Egyptian landscape is more yellow than red, which is the dominant colour in Gautier's description. Without a visual representation to borrow from and with which to organise his description, Gautier probably had to base his depiction on black and white photographs and texts. One known source of the novel, Joseph Passalacqua's *Catalogue raisonné et historique des antiquités découvertes en Egypte*, describes the valley in the following terms:

Les superbes souterrains de Biban et Melouk sont taillés dans la roche de calcaire à des niveaux différents, sans aucune symétrie relative, dans une vallée, dont l'extérieur présente les précipices, et le mélange confus des pentes naturelles des monts qui l'environnent, sans que l'art en ait ôté en rien l'empreinte primitive et sauvage.⁹⁰

He continues:

Dans le sein des monts qui le cachent au-dessous de leur masses informes, qu'on dirait n'avoir jamais été approchées de l'homme, et abandonnées à la stérilité du triste désert dont elles font partie, et qui paraît régner inaltéré sur elles, comme sur les montagnes des environs, depuis leur existence primitive.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Joseph Passalacqua, *Catalogue raisonné et historique des antiquités découvertes en Egypte* (Paris: C. J. Trouvé, 1826), p. 192.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

What Passalacqua insisted on is the raw, primitive, and wild aspect of the arid and inhospitable valley, which Gautier transposed into his novel.

Gautier's work on his literary medium and its ability to create mental images is striking in this scene. His use of alliterations with 'r' enhances the crudeness of the landscape, and represents it on the page as well: "restes de sculpture rongés", "leurs parois montaient presque verticalement à une grande hauteur et déchiraient leur crêtes irrégulières d'un blanc grisâtre sur un fond de ciel indigo presque noir, comme les créneaux ébréchés d'une gigantesque forteresse en ruine", "qu'on eût pu prendre pour des aspérités de la pierre [...]".⁹² The desolation and primitive aspect of the valley is also mirrored in the intermittent syntax. The following enumeration insists on the hard alliterations and disruptions in the sentence: "des masses énormes de roches calcaires, rugueuses, lépreuses, effritées, fendillées, pulvérulentes, en pleine décomposition sous l'implacable soleil."⁹³ The space of the valley is organised in plan like a painting and the narrator places himself as the observer, pointing out the details of the scene on display as if observing an artwork: "tous les détails nets, précis, arides, se dessinaient, même aux derniers plans [...]".⁹⁴

Another formal literary figure, the metaphor, as a textual moving image, clearly engages with the pictorial aspect of Gautier's writing. He described the geology of the valley in the following terms: "sur la paroi éclairée ruisselait en cascade de feu une lumière aveuglante comme celle qui émane des métaux en fusion. Chaque plan de roche, métamorphosé en miroir ardent, la renvoyait plus brûlante encore."⁹⁵ The metaphors "cascade de feu" and "métaux en fusion" already contain the idea of progression: they are moving metaphors. The continuation of the metaphors inserted

⁹² *Le Roman de la momie*, p. 493.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 494.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

into Gautier's flowing style contrasts with the passage cited above, and represents the contradiction between the hardness of the rocks and the scorching heat which turns everything to liquid, which the alliteration in 'l' magnifies. The extreme imagery of the text, built upon extended metaphors such as that of the burning light, in relation to the supremacy of the colour red in this passage, appeals mainly to the eyes. The visual stimuli are everywhere, and the eye is shown something while being forced to recall and compare this image to another or several other images (through metaphors and similes).

The superimposition of images creates a rich textual landscape, but the eyes are not the only sense to be stimulated in this scene. The effect of the heat on the sense of touch is suggested through various images: "réverbérations croisées", "une chaleur égale à celle d'un four".⁹⁶ They allude to a scorching heat, filling the atmosphere so densely that it is almost palpable. The sense of smell is also present, through the burning decomposition of the valley: "ossements de mort calcinés", "tas de cendres", "torréfié".⁹⁷ The death brought by the heat is amplified by the desired absence of the sense of hearing: "un silence absolu régnait sur cette dévastation; aucun frémissement de vie [...]".⁹⁸ Its very discernible absence makes it also tangible, comparable to 'the sound of silence'. This extremely sensuous synaesthetic scene shows how Gautier mastered his medium, and skilfully used textual images and figures in order to forge a painting in words through a pictorial description. Here, it seems that Gautier stretched his medium in order to reach towards the visual medium, transcending its verbal means in order to "achieve the kind of plasticity and physical thereness that one typically finds

⁹⁶ *Le Roman de la momie*, p. 494.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 493, p. 494.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 494.

in the visual arts [...].”⁹⁹ He was modelling, forming, and shaping his medium in order to make it as material as a visual medium.

In order to enhance the movement towards the material which accompanies the pictorial description, Gautier and Wilde utilise the moving image that is the metaphor or the simile. The two texts under study in this chapter play with these devices. Laubriet notes “l’usage des comparaisons avec des métaux ou des minéraux” as one of Gautier’s descriptive devices, which is more abundant in *Le Roman de la momie* than in any other work.¹⁰⁰ A similar remark can be made about Wilde’s novel: the Irish author used the metaphor of the transmutation several times in the novel. The opening scene of the novel, for instance, describes the branches of the laburnum as “hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs [...].”¹⁰¹ The flame, transforming and shaping metal, used here in relation to the “honey” colour of the tree, is said to add a considerable amount of weight to the tree, which shifts the simile towards a hardening of the tree through fire. Both authors imbued their literary medium with the solidity of metals, gems, or stones. Gautier and Wilde inscribed description in the dichotomy between fluidity and rigidity, or materiality. The images in their novels constantly oscillate between the two, and shift from hardness to liquidity. Even when their practice of description seems to pause, stop, or disrupt the time of the narration, their works are always inscribed in a movement towards other forms, other artistic media.

What is striking is that we find a similar attitude to description and its relation to the visual arts, and painting in particular, in the works of two authors we have already mentioned in this thesis: the Goncourt brothers. First, the relationships between the four authors need to be demonstrated and analysed briefly. To start with, it is easy to

⁹⁹ Sara Danius, *The Prose of the World: Flaubert and the Art of Making Things Visible* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2006), p. 28.

¹⁰⁰ Laubriet, ‘Notes on *Le Roman de la momie*’, p. 1338.

¹⁰¹ *Dorian Gray*, p. 169.

demonstrate the connection between Gautier and the two brothers, as they were friends: they dined at Magny, visited each other's houses, and went to exhibitions together.¹⁰² They also exchanged letters, which prove their close friendship, as well as the influence of Gautier on the two brothers. For instance, several letters from Jules de Goncourt to Gautier can be found in which Jules de Goncourt addressed Gautier as his "cher maître", sometimes accompanied with "et ami".¹⁰³ To which Gautier replied in equally friendly terms "mes très chers frères".¹⁰⁴ Gautier also sent a copy of *Emaux et Camées* to Edmond de Goncourt after his brother's death in which he talked about the two brothers in the following terms: "Aux graveurs sur pierre fine de la prose,/ Edmond et Jules de Goncourt/ Un maintenant, mais toujours double."¹⁰⁵ The dedication clearly established a literary affinity between the three authors and the ways in which all three carved their literary medium into a solid gem, in a continuation of the association between writer and blacksmith discussed in the previous chapter.

This affinity was actively recognized and claimed by the two brothers. The dedication discussed above was included in Edmond de Goncourt's work *La Maison d'un artiste* (1880) as part of his collection of the works of his "cher Théo", which proves its importance for de Goncourt.¹⁰⁶ Gautier is also very present in the brothers' *Journal*, with more than a hundred and seventy references to him or his works. Edmond openly confessed the influence of Gautier on his own style at the beginning of his career, as well as his attempts to distance himself from his master in order to find his own voice, which, as we have discussed in the introduction, is suggestive of a 'true'

¹⁰² For more on the dinners at Magny, see Robert Baldick, *Les Diners Magny* (Paris: Denoël, 1972).

¹⁰³ *Théophile Gautier, Correspondance générale*, ed. by Claudine Lacoste-Veysseyre, dir. by Pierre Laubriet, 12 vols (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1985-2000), vol 8 (1993), Jules de Goncourt à Théophile Gautier, 28 avril 1863, p. 122; Jules de Goncourt à Théophile Gautier, Paris 22 octobre (1863), p. 190.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Théophile Gautier à Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, 1864, p. 379.

¹⁰⁵ De Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, *Histoire des Œuvres de Théophile Gautier* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1968), p. 425.

¹⁰⁶ Edmond de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste* (Paris: Charpentier, 1881), p. 362.

literary influence. As he suggested: “voici que nous débutions, mon frère, sous l’influence de Jules Janin, moi, sous l’influence de Théophile Gautier [...] il était arrivé que mon frère et moi avions cherché à nous débarrasser de ce que nous devions à nos aînés: mon frère à rejeter le papillonnage du style de Janin, moi la matérialité du style de Gautier.”¹⁰⁷ But the Goncourt brothers also had ties with Wilde, since Edmond de Goncourt met Wilde while the Irish author was in Paris, and he referred to him several times in the *Journal* as “le poète anglais Wilde”.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Wilde mentioned his encounter with Edmond de Goncourt in his correspondence in highly appreciative terms: “je serai tout à fait charmé d’avoir le plaisir de visiter Monsieur de Goncourt [...] il est pour moi un des plus grands maîtres de la prose moderne, et son roman de *Manette Salomon* est un chef d’oeuvre.”¹⁰⁹ Wilde even sent some of his works to Edmond after having met him as a testimony of “mon admiration infinie pour l’auteur de *La Faustin*.”¹¹⁰

The Goncourt brothers therefore offer a formidable link between Gautier and Wilde, having known the two authors. They also cover the time difference between Gautier and Wilde (especially Edmond since Jules died in 1870), and their own aesthetic and its diversions from Gautier’s ideas show the evolution of ideas between Gautier’s time and Wilde’s time. In that regard, the Goncourt can be seen as one of the missing links between Gautier and Wilde, showing yet another indirect relationship between them, but they are also one of the missing links in the evolution of Aestheticism (born out of Gautier’s doctrine of the Art for Art’s Sake), towards Realism, and ending with Decadence, as this chapter will later show.

¹⁰⁷ Les Goncourt, *Journal*, III, Jeudi 26 décembre 1895, p. 1211.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, II, Samedi 21 avril 1883, p. 1002.

¹⁰⁹ To Théodore Duret, april 1883, Hôtel Voltaire, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 207.

¹¹⁰ To Edmond de Goncourt, ? april 1883, Hôtel Voltaire, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 207.

Contemporaries of the Goncourt also highlighted their affinity with Gautier. In the *Nouveaux Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1886), Paul Bourget underlined the fact that in the Goncourt's works "l'influence de l'objet d'art sur la littérature" can be seen, which was something that they shared with Gautier: "Théophile Gautier avait manié, au sortir du collège, la palette et le pinceau, et son oeuvre, prose ou poésie, serait inexplicable sans cette éducation initiale de son oeil par l'atelier. [...] Les frères de Goncourt, eux non plus, ne furent pas des hommes de lettres de la première heure."¹¹¹ The three writers share the same initial education in the visual arts rather than a literary one which, according to Bourget, accounts for the relationship the three authors had with the visual arts. It also suggests that all three authors had a distinctive way of looking at things, which in turn had an impact on the ways in which they described things.

More modern critics also discuss the aesthetic relations between Gautier and the Goncourt, although after having asserted the influence of Gautier on the Goncourt's works, critics tend to highlight Gautier's shortcomings through this comparison, an attitude which has already been encountered several times in this thesis. For example, Pierre Sabatier argued in 1920 that Gautier can be seen as the writer who encouraged the Goncourt to develop their descriptions in relation to the visual arts:

le grand mérite de Gautier est-il d'avoir précisément encouragé les Goncourt dans leurs essais descriptifs et de les avoir engagés à rendre le plus possible par la plume leurs impressions visuelles. Gautier était une nature plastique jouissant du spectacle des belles formes, qui a su discerner, chez ses amis, un sens artistique un peu semblable au sien et qui l'a développé par ses conseils et soutenu de ses encouragements.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Bourget, *Nouveaux Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, pp. 138-9, p. 141, p. 142.

¹¹² Pierre Sabatier, *L'Esthétique des Goncourt* (Paris: Hachette, 1920), p. 66.

He instantly added, however, that the Goncourt ‘did it better’ than their predecessor: “Gautier est une nature plastique, qui ne cherche dans sa prose qu’à rendre des impressions plastiques et marmoréennes, sans révéler son émotion intime.”¹¹³ Sabatier developed the representation of Gautier as an impersonal writer, only describing things on the surface, while the Goncourt went further: “l’auteur de *Mademoiselle de Maupin* se borne à nous exprimer froidement des sensations plastiques, tandis que les Goncourt volontairement nous communiqueront les frissons de leurs nerfs [...]”¹¹⁴ And Sabatier did not stop at the negative comparison between the three authors, he even suggested that Gautier was responsible for some of the attacks expressed against the Goncourt’s preciousness of style: “Gautier a développé chez ses amis, la passion des belles formes [...] a encouragé cet instinct naturel qui les poussait à s’intéresser aux décors, aux costumes, et à les décrire minutieusement, et peut-être Gautier est-il, par là, responsable en partie de la préciosité dont on leur a fait un grief.”¹¹⁵

Bernard Vouilloux, in 1997, continued the discussion on the relations between the Goncourt and Gautier in similar terms. He started by acknowledging the debt the Goncourt owed to Gautier in their works: “il est habituel de leur donner [Gautier] comme précurseur immédiat”, simply to reduce instantly the importance and value of Gautier’s works and contribution to the Goncourt’s aesthetic: “chez Gautier [...] la matérialité reste encore trop assujettie à un culte idéaliste de la belle forme plastique [...]. Rien de tel, on va le voir, chez les Goncourt.”¹¹⁶ Although critics seem to merely highlight the influence of Gautier in order to reduce it immediately, this influence cannot be questioned. The Goncourt learnt how to write as artists from Gautier, which

¹¹³ Pierre Sabatier, *L’Esthétique des Goncourt*, p. 67.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Bernard Vouilloux, *L’Art des Goncourt. Une esthétique du style*, pp. 26-27.

is probably one of the most noticeable and important features of their works: the *écriture artiste*. What the three authors shared was the ways in which they established a dialogue within their works between literature and the visual arts. The first common characteristic between Gautier, Wilde, and the Goncourt is their extensive use of description, which in the process reduces the space devoted to narration: “Les Goncourt ont augmenté dans leurs livres ces pages descriptives, et ils ont réduit de leur mieux la portion réservée à l'intrigue [...]”¹¹⁷ As we have already seen, Bourget established a direct relation between the importance of descriptive passages and a specific way of looking at the world, common between the Goncourt and Gautier, which he called “hyperacuité des sensations”, and he noted that it was so extreme in the Goncourt’s works that it could be seen as a disease.¹¹⁸ This ‘sickly’ way of looking at the world was also highlighted by modern critics such as Paolo Tortonese who wrote an article entitled ‘La folie de l’oeil dans *Manette Salomon*’.¹¹⁹

The characteristics of the *écriture artiste* can be closely associated with the practices of Gautier and Wilde in their descriptions. Henri Mitterand listed these features of the style of the Goncourt, among which are “l’étirement de la syntaxe, l’accumulation des groupes nominaux.”¹²⁰ These features have already been pointed out in the works of Gautier and Wilde. However, they are not the only ones used by the four authors in order to bridge the gap between literature and the visual arts in their descriptions. The descriptions also have an impact on the temporality of the work:

¹¹⁷ Bourget, *Nouveaux Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, p. 165.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹¹⁹ Paolo Tortonese, ‘La folie de l’oeil dans *Manette Salomon*’ in *Les Goncourt dans leur siècle. Un siècle de Goncourt*, ed. by Jean-Louis Cabanès, Pierre-Jean Dufief, Robert Kopp, Jean-Yves Mollier (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2005), pp. 157-166.

¹²⁰ Anna-Marie Perrin-Naffakj, ‘Ecriture artiste et esthétisation du réel dans *Germinie Lacerteux*’, in *Les Frères Goncourt: art et écriture*, ed. by Jean-Louis Cabanès (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1997), p. 292. For more on Mitterand’s analysis of the *écriture artiste*, see Henri Mitterand, ‘De l’Ecriture artiste au style décadent’ in *Histoire de la langue française 1880-1914*, ed. by G  rald Antoine, Robert Martin (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1999), pp. 467-477.

“L’histoire racontée marque une pause ou du moins un ralentissement durant lequel le texte peut se déployer en tableaux.”¹²¹ The descriptions in the works of the Goncourt also have a tendency to stretch towards the mineral, accumulating figures of comparisons which suggest the hardness and physicality of the literary medium: “une surenchère minéralogique, [...] comme tentative désespérée de rendre à la peinture l’objet solide qu’elle risque de perdre.”¹²² Finally, the attention to detail, and elongation of the syntax lead to a deconstruction of both sentence and content, fragmenting the work in a process similar to the one we have already seen in the works of Gautier and Wilde: “les frères de Goncourt déchiquettent leurs récits [...] comme les pierres d’une mosaïque”,¹²³ “le peintre déconstruit la réalité; il la désintègre en de nombreux ‘détails’, en de nombreuses touches [...]”.¹²⁴ This brief list of characteristics of the *écriture artiste* proves the similarities between the practices of the Goncourt and of Gautier and Wilde. However, the Goncourt assigned a different aim to this particular style since the brothers are commonly acknowledged to be the precursors of Realism.

Katherine Ashley shows very clearly the link between the *écriture artiste* and the Realist or Naturalist movements, as well as the relations between this *écriture artiste* and the Decadent movement, and the relations between the Realist and Decadent movements: “écriture artiste [...] not a specifically Naturalist or Decadent trait, it crossed the boundaries of literary movements.”¹²⁵ In that regard, the Goncourt can again be envisaged as agents of mediation between Gautier and Wilde, proving the relation between Aestheticism and Decadence, as well as the lesser-analysed relation

¹²¹ Anna-Marie Perrin-Naffakj, ‘Ecriture artiste et esthétisation du réel dans *Germinie Lacerteux*’, p. 291.

¹²² Paolo Tortonese, ‘La Folie de l’oeil dans *Manette Salomon*’, p. 162.

¹²³ Bourget, *Nouveaux Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, p. 166.

¹²⁴ Jean-Pierre Leduc-Adine, ‘Effets de picturalité dans *Manette Salomon*’, in *Les Frères Goncourt: art et écriture*, pp. 401-416, p. 409.

¹²⁵ Katherine Ashley, *Edmond de Goncourt and the novel: Naturalism and Decadence* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), p. 25.

between Aestheticism and Realism. The Goncourt brothers stand between Gautier and Wilde, between Gautier and Zola, and between Zola and Wilde. The brothers claimed the ‘paternity’ of Realism on several occasions. In numerous prefaces to their novels, they described what their literature was aiming for. In the preface to *Chérie* (1884) for example, the novel is described as having been written “avec les recherches qu’on met à la composition d’un livre d’histoire”.¹²⁶ In the same preface, Edmond quoted his brother saying “il faudra bien reconnaître un jour que nous avons fait *Germinie Lacerteux*...et que *Germinie Lacerteux* est le livre-type qui a servi de modèle à tout ce qui a été fabriqué depuis, sous le nom de réalisme, naturalisme, etc.”¹²⁷

However, the relations between the Goncourt and Realism, or the Goncourt and Zola, are far from straightforward. The three writers were at odds with each other several times in debates concerning which style of writing should be the one of the Naturalist movement, as well as the subject-matter that should be treated by Naturalist works. In the preface to *Les Frères Zemganno* (1879), Edmond distanced his work with Zola’s:

Ce roman réaliste de l’élégance, ça avait été notre ambition à mon frère et à moi de l’écrire. Le Réalisme, pour user du mot bête, du mot drapeau, n’a pas en effet l’unique mission de décrire ce qui est bas, ce qui est répugnant, ce qui pue; il est venu au monde aussi, lui, pour définir, dans de l’écriture artiste, ce qui est élevé, ce qui est joli, ce qui sent bon [...] mais cela, en une étude appliquée, rigoureuse et non conventionnelle et non imaginative de la beauté [...].¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Preface to *Chérie* in *Préfaces et manifestes littéraires par Edmond et Jules de Goncourt* (Paris: Charpentier, 1888), p. 64.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹²⁸ Preface to *Les Frères Zemganno* in *Préfaces et manifestes littéraires par Edmond et Jules de Goncourt* (Paris: Charpentier, 1888), pp. 54-5.

The Goncourt brothers advocated for a literature that should equally describe ugliness and display beauty, which they, along with Gautier and Wilde, seem to favour. The next part of the chapter will focus on the space of descriptions, which will allow for a comparison between the styles of Wilde and Zola and show the complexity of the relations between Aestheticism, Realism or Naturalism, and Decadence, and how similar these movements can be envisaged in their use and style of description.

2. Descriptions and Space: Digressive Details, Descriptive Myopia and Displacement of Focus

A. The Imperfect Real: Spaces of Art

The first part of this chapter has examined the effect of the length of the descriptions in Gautier's and Wilde's novels on their structure and their temporality. This second part scrutinizes the descriptions in terms of space as they, literally, take up a lot of space in the novels. But they can also be considered as spaces of art, where extreme aestheticism is concentrated in the two novels. Both Christopher S. Nassaar and Michael Patrick Gillespie show how Wilde self-plagiarized his own work, and recycled materials between the texts.¹²⁹ The example they use is the description of Covent Garden present in 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Both heroes find themselves wandering around London, ending in Covent Garden at dawn. They seem to be drawn by the agitation surrounding the market, where some force drives them to the scene without them realizing it: "he found himself close to Covent Garden",¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Nassaar, 'Oscar Wilde's 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: Point Counterpoint'; Gillespie, *Oscar Wilde and the Poetics of Ambiguity*.

¹³⁰ *Dorian Gray*, p. 244.

“Where he went he hardly knew. He had a dim memory of wandering through a labyrinth of sordid houses [...] he met the great waggons on their way to Covent Garden.”¹³¹

The scenes are aestheticized to the extreme. The choice of dawn as the setting of the description is not anodyne: Wilde drew from the atmosphere and colour of the start of the day to give an impressionist description where contrasts, fiery colours, but also blurred lines can be found and enhanced. In ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’, the sky of the breaking dawn is compared to “the pink petals of some marvellous rose”,¹³² while as darkness disappears, the sky turns fiery in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* “flushed with faint fires, the sky hollowed itself into a perfect pearl.”¹³³ The peculiar light brought by the start of the day allows Wilde to indulge in these unreal metaphors, and the sky becomes an artwork of shifting brushstrokes. The perfection of its colours, whether they relate to flowers or the jewel-hardness of the pearl, recreates Covent Garden as an artistic space that provokes reveries.

Flowers are present in both texts, and Wilde insisted not only on their colours but also on their smell. Wilde filled the whole market with sweet odours of fresh plants and flowers: “a bunch of primroses”,¹³⁴ becomes enhanced in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: “The air was heavy with the perfume of the flowers”.¹³⁵ More surprising is the analogy developed by Wilde in ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’ between “great piles of vegetables” which “looked like masses of jade against the morning sky” which he further reinforced by continuing the sentence after a comma “like masses of green jade

¹³¹ *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’, ed. by Merlin Holland (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), p. 168.

¹³² ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’, p. 168.

¹³³ *Dorian Gray*, p. 244.

¹³⁴ ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’, p. 168.

¹³⁵ *Dorian Gray*, p. 244.

against the pink petals of some marvellous rose.”¹³⁶ Both the simile and the construction of the sentence are startling. A more expected construction would have been to start with the colour green, and then to qualify it as “green jade”, but Wilde reversed the logical sentence structure and turned the colour green into something unfamiliar and gem-like, through which Wilde insisted on the hardness of the colour.

This sentence highlights Wilde’s surprising and unusual use of the word. Wilde’s insistence on the jade refers once again to the hardness of the jewel-like material and the hardness of colour in a synaesthetic image. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde also included vegetables in the description of the market, and used the same metaphor: “jade-green piles of vegetables.”¹³⁷ It seems that the poetic description is ostensibly realistic, and that Wilde tried to infuse verisimilitude into the picture. However, the realist effect is immediately deflated by the association of the vegetables with the precious stone, as well as with the flowers. Furthermore, Wilde added yet another unreal object: the “magical” cherries which “had been plucked at midnight, and the coldness of the moon had entered into them.”¹³⁸ Again, Wilde consciously added mystery and oddity to what should be a commonplace everyday life scene. The banal cherries became the object of the author’s particular attention, who turned them into an experience of exceptional sensuousness and uniqueness. Midnight is never an anodyne hour, and Wilde seemed to gothicise the cherries in the sentence. In the description, even the pigeons become flowers with their “iris” neck.¹³⁹ Wilde’s desire to aestheticise every aspect of the description becomes evident, and it deforms what should have been a depiction of a common scene into a painting of extreme sensuality. He even framed the scene as an artist would a painting, alluding to Covent Garden’s “portico, with its

¹³⁶ ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’, p. 168.

¹³⁷ *Dorian Gray*, p. 244.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

grey sun-bleached pillars [...].”¹⁴⁰ The enclosed space in which the two heroes wander is turned unfamiliar through its poeticisation.

Human life is somehow absent from the two descriptions. It seems that the objects are the centre of Wilde’s focus, and his insistence on their details and characteristics almost infuse them with life. However, there are references to children and childhood. “Draggled bareheaded girls” are included in the scene in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,¹⁴¹ while “a chubby boy, with a bunch of primroses in his battered hat” appears in ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’.¹⁴² The poverty of the children is romanticized, softening and easing it into something charming. Lord Arthur therefore digresses on the scene being “a little of Arcady”,¹⁴³ showing that their potential suffering is not taken into account or included in the idyllic scene of a romanticized simple way of life. Except for the children and a few human presences, the objects seem to be moving magically on their own: “the great waggons on their way”,¹⁴⁴ “huge carts filled with nodding lilies rumbled slowly down the polished empty street.”¹⁴⁵ Real human beings or human activity would probably taint the beauty of the scene as it is, and therefore the presence of people is kept to the minimum, and Wilde suppresses it even when it is needed. Wilde’s recycling of the same motive in the two works also reinforces the feeling of enclosed space given by the delimitation of the scene as a framed painting and inside the text as well. The description is a beautiful parenthesis with no true link to or repercussion on the plot. Wilde’s multiple devices aim at decontextualizing space and displacing it into a different aesthetic dimension, which distorts realistic elements to debunk the real.

¹⁴⁰ *Dorian Gray*, p. 244.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’, p. 168.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Dorian Gray*, p. 244.

In contrast, Charles Dickens also proposed several descriptions of Covent Garden, where the market offered “striking contrasts of plenty and poverty” which appealed to the writer.¹⁴⁶ In Chapter XIV of *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), the heroine enters Arthur Clennam’s house near Covent Garden, which prompts a description of the place. The construction of the description aims at envisaging all the different aspects that make Covent Garden: “Courtly ideas of Covent Garden”, “costly ideas”, “picturesque ideas”, “desolate ideas”, “teeming ideas”.¹⁴⁷ This all-encompassing description tries to cover the varying dimensions of Covent Garden, rendering it as close to what it really is as possible. The social aspect of the location is highlighted by the contrast between the rich Covent Garden and the poor Covent Garden. Dickens insisted on pricing items that were being sold in the market, “where there were flowers in winter at guineas-a-piece, pine-apples at guineas a pound, and peas at guineas a pint”,¹⁴⁸ while Wilde stressed the absence of mercantile exchanges: “[he] wondered why he refused to accept any money for them [...]”.¹⁴⁹ The precise details, proving the variety on display in the market, aim at exhausting the location, in trying to encapsulate the reality of it: “a place of past and present mystery, romance, abundance, want, beauty, ugliness, fair country gardens, and foul street gutters [...]”.¹⁵⁰

The market represents a reduced version of society, a microcosm inside which the different parts of society meet and interact. Dickens was not the only nineteenth-century writer to use this space as an analysis of society’s social interactions. Zola, in *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873), used Les Halles as the general background of the novel, in order to

¹⁴⁶ Murray Baumgarten, ‘Fictions of the City’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. by John O. Jordan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 106-119, p. 108.

¹⁴⁷ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, Oxford Scholarly Editions Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 159.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Dorian Gray*, p. 244.

¹⁵⁰ Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, p. 159.

describe the ‘petit peuple de Paris’ and its habits in this recent construction (Victor Ballard supervised the monumental project from 1854 to 1870). In chapter I, the hero, Florent, arrives in Paris starving and finds himself at the market at dawn. Zola described Florent’s experience of Les Halles in the following terms: “l’épanouissement charnu d’un paquet d’artichauts, les verts délicats des salades, le corail rose des carottes, l’ivoire mat des navets [...]”¹⁵¹

In the novel, the market and its profusion of goods contrast with the poverty described in the French capital where Paris devours its inhabitants who in turn are driven by their basic needs and desires. In a similar approach to Dickens, Zola wished to represent “the whole life of his period” and utilized Les Halles as a representative sample of the city.¹⁵² The setting was as important for Dickens as it was for Zola. The British writer “situates London at the centre of his fictions” rather than merely using it “for the setting of plot and character”,¹⁵³ while Zola’s “ambition to render the world of Les Halles in its totality” gave birth to the novel.¹⁵⁴ However, there are some striking similarities between the three descriptions. Zola and Wilde both portrayed the market at dawn, when the first signs of movement appear and the colours are most beautiful, and the three authors foregrounded various aspects of the market, carefully chosen in order to enhance either the beauty of the place, its abundance, or its energy. The two ‘realist’ authors also selected some ‘morceaux choisis’ of the marketplace, which emphasized its contrasts and paradoxes.

To some extent, all three descriptions are removed from reality in the sense that they all aestheticise their subject, in order to exaggerate its positive or negative aspects. Murray Baumgarten hints at Dickens’ transformation of London in his works while he

¹⁵¹ Emile Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris* (Paris: Charpentier, 1873), p. 15.

¹⁵² Brian Nelson, Introduction, in *The Belly of Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. IX.

¹⁵³ Baumgarten, ‘Fictions of the City’, p. 113.

¹⁵⁴ Nelson, *The Belly of Paris*, p. XII.

talks about Dickens' prose as "magical in its realism," suggesting therefore that the novelist adds something to the real.¹⁵⁵ Brian Nelson also affirms that for Zola "the observed reality of the world is the foundation for a poetic vision."¹⁵⁶ The description seems to be the space of common images, and Zola and Wilde both utilized the locus amoeni of the green vegetables and the fiery colours of objects at dawn. The spaces described are not real: they are mediated by the authors' visions and become spaces of art. Inherently, at the same time as the description's temporal and visual aspects make it move towards painting, the moment of the description is the space of language and rhetoric. It is where the images, metaphors, and common references are concentrated. The world described is a verbal world in which the real is displaced and transformed on the page.

To some extent, no description, in a literary work, can be real or realistic, since it always suggests this mediation through art as well as an emphasis on style and form. What distinguishes Wilde's and Gautier's descriptions from those by Zola and Dickens? As critics of the two 'realist' authors point out, the city is not merely the setting of the work but a subject of the narration, in constant dialogue with the story and that develops the narration. Description is therefore utilised in Zola and Dickens, in order to enhance characteristics which are already present in the narration (the contrast between poor and rich, the space of interaction, the market as absorbing society). In contrast, the descriptions by Wilde and Gautier are justified by the sole power of their evocations. To some extent, Covent Garden is but a pretext for Wilde to digress on the beauty of dawn in the city and to create a space exclusively dedicated to art. The space could be other, and could indeed be non-existent in real life.

¹⁵⁵ Baumgarten, 'Fictions of the City', p. 111.

¹⁵⁶ Nelson, *The Belly of Paris*, p. XIII.

It is striking to see how close realism and aestheticism are through these examples. When Zola described what a naturalist novel should be like, it is structurally close to the novels by Gautier and Wilde. Zola insisted on the thinness and subsidiary position of the plot: “c’est un bout de drame [...] Puis, dans l’économie de l’oeuvre, cela n’a plus qu’une importance très mince.”¹⁵⁷ The hierarchy, or idea of place, inside the work is important for Zola, who classified the different elements necessary to the novel in accordance with their relevance to the final aim: the *effet de réel*. Therefore, the descriptions are necessary, but they should not be given too much value in themselves: “nous ne décrivons plus pour décrire [...] Nous estimons que l’homme ne peut être séparé de son milieu.”¹⁵⁸ The prime place given to the human was the basis of Zola’s attack on Gautier.

On several occasions, Zola confessed that he sometimes indulged in long descriptions, and related this tendency to a moral failure: “nous avons été moins sages, moins équilibrés. La passion de la nature nous a souvent emportés.”¹⁵⁹ As a result: “je blâme absolument toute description qui n’est pas, selon la définition donnée plus haut, un état du milieu qui détermine et complète l’homme.”¹⁶⁰ However, he justified these imbalanced descriptions as imbued with “intentions symphoniques et humaines.”¹⁶¹ He opposed the human-centred descriptions to pictorial descriptions, “l’image plus ou moins proprement peinturlurée”, which he associated Gautier with as a “peintre, il n’a que des mots comme un peintre n’a que des couleurs.”¹⁶² He could not, however, disregard Gautier’s skills, “l’heureux don de la langue, les procédés et les facilités de

¹⁵⁷ Zola, *Du Roman*, p. 34.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 66, p. 62.

la description”,¹⁶³ all the more so when he discussed Flaubert whom he revered. Zola described Flaubert’s hatred for the bourgeois which he explained came from Gautier: “Flaubert avait grandi en plein romantisme, au milieu des terribles paradoxes de Théophile Gautier, qui a eu sur lui une influence dont nous étions tous frappés.”¹⁶⁴ It seems that Zola, aware of his proximity to Gautier on their approach to descriptions, emphasized their differences in order to define his goals. Gautier was the writer Zola constructed himself against.

By contrast, did Gautier construct himself and his works against the developing trend of realism? It seems that he appropriated some of the elements of the realist novel and made them aesthetic. The relative disinterest with the plot, the foregrounding of the description as crucial in the overall structure and meaning of the work, as well as the chiselled style Zola praised in Flaubert are all present in Gautier’s work: “parler au nom de la perfection, du style parfait, de la composition parfaite, [...] au purisme de la forme [...]”¹⁶⁵ The purism of the form is indeed very close to the aesthetes’ approach to style. What Gautier and Wilde developed through working their medium as a physical material, Flaubert did in shaping prose as “dure comme du bronze, éclatante comme de l’or.”¹⁶⁶ Once again, the materiality of the form in relation to rocks and stones brings together Flaubert, Zola, Gautier, and Wilde as blacksmiths of words. Stylistic purism, though achieved through different means, is the main focus of their works: Flaubert in the search for ‘le mot juste’, Zola in trying to equate the word with the real, and Gautier and Wilde in constantly reshaping language and expanding on its materiality. Gautier seemed to be a problem for Zola, who did not really know what to do with him as he realised how much they had in common.

¹⁶³ Zola, *Du Roman*, p. 63.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

And Zola was not the only one coming to this realisation. In the article already mentioned on *L'Ecole Fantaisiste*, although what it represents is hard to define as there was no real *Ecole Fantaisiste* or Movement, Alfred Crampon naturally associated the school of Gautier with Realism and Naturalism. Crampon even claimed that Gautier, with his love and devotion for the exterior visible world, could be seen as the chief, or instigator, of the Realist and Naturalist movements: “La poésie de M. Théophile Gautier et de son école est toute naturaliste; elle ne professe que le culte des choses de la création [...]”¹⁶⁷ This very surprising statement for our modern view of the nineteenth century is justified by Crampon because of the use of description in the works of authors from the two movements. But it is not just any description for Crampon. According to him, “toute une cohorte de jeunes écrivains, tous de même famille, bien qu’ils se classent sous les dénominations distinctes en apparence de romanciers réalistes, de poètes naturalistes et de touristes de la fantaisie [...] peignent à tout prix [...]”¹⁶⁸ What Crampon objected to in both Naturalist and *fantaisiste* works was the dominant position given to description in which the writers emphasized the pictorial qualities of words: “les plus futiles objets, sous prétexte de réalisme, occupant le premier plan du tableau, quand par hasard ils ne sont pas le tableau tout entier. Cette confusion de deux arts, poésie et peinture, engendre, dans la prose surtout, une monotonie [...]”¹⁶⁹ Jean-Louis Cabanès argues that for Crampon, “le culte du détail, l’intérêt pour les descriptions, la mise au premier plan ‘d’objets futiles’ constitueraient des territoires communs” to *fantaisiste* and Realist works.¹⁷⁰ Notwithstanding the differing aims of the movements, the two movements were considered similarly divergent from the norm because they

¹⁶⁷ Crampon, ‘Les Fantaisistes’, p. 593.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 595.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Jean-Louis Cabanès, ‘La Fantaisie dans la *Revue Fantaisiste*: éthos, tonalités, genres’ in *La Fantaisie post-Romantique*, ed. by Jean-Louis Cabanès, Jean-Pierre Saïdah (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2003), pp. 111-144, p. 118.

focused on a pictorial description which emphasized details, instead of placing the human at the centre. Their literary practices were indeed similar, and similar attacks were uttered against their works on the basis that the descriptions brought to the fore the object which threatened the hierarchy within the work between human and object, and description and narration.

While the ways in which Gautier and Zola envisioned literature and its aim seem for our modern vision to be at odds with each other, the movements and schools during the nineteenth century were not as precisely defined as they may appear now. In an article on the relations between Gautier and Naturalism, Paolo Tortonese claims that such relations do exist, and while “affirmer l’existence d’une filiation entre la mouvance naturaliste et l’oeuvre de Gautier pouvait paraître absurde autrefois”, and the fact that “Gautier se serait indigné qu’on lui attribue la paternité d’un quelconque réalisme, et Zola n’aurait jamais admis que le naturalisme dût être redevable de la moindre dette à l’oeuvre de Gautier”, he affirms that: “la pratique de la description, [...] fournit le terrain principal où Gautier et les naturalistes se rencontrent [...].”¹⁷¹ Tortonese is probably the first, and only critic so far, to claim a filiation between Gautier and Zola, and the present analysis shows that there is enough material to claim the existence of affinities between the stylistic practices of the two authors, especially when analysing their descriptive passages. The Goncourt, for instance, can be seen as partaking of what we now call Aestheticism, *fantaisie*, Realism, and Decadence. Realism, and in turn Naturalism, were not clearly circumscribed, as Daniel Sangsue argues: “entre 1850 et 1860, ‘réalisme’ était une étiquette galvaudée, appliquée sans discernement à toute entreprise artistique et littéraire nouvelle et incompréhensible pour

¹⁷¹ Paolo Tortonese, ‘L’œuvre objective et l’écriture artiste: Gautier et le Naturalisme’, in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier* (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 1999), XXI, pp. 209-220, p. 209.

les tenants de la tradition ou [...] de la morale.”¹⁷² We already mentioned how Wilde’s works were put on the same level of immorality as Zola’s works in England a few decades later, which not only proves the links between Aestheticism and Realism but also of Realism and Decadence. These movements were brought together at the time because they were seen as morally reprehensible, and too different from what had been done before to be accepted. It also shows how malleable and fluid these movements were both in France and in England all the way through to the end of the century. To go back to Zola and the problem of positioning his school in relation to Aestheticism or *fantaisisme*, we can see how difficult it was for him to distance himself from Gautier and the Goncourt and their stylistic research in descriptions. In *Les Romanciers Naturalistes* (1881), Zola confessed that he practised a style close to the one of Gautier and the Goncourt:

Que de fois j’ai détesté mes phrases, pris de dégoût pour ce métier d’écrivain, que tout le monde possède aujourd’hui! J’entendais sonner le creux sous les mots, et j’avais honte des queues d’épithètes inutiles, des panaches plantés au bout des tirades, des procédés qui revenaient sans cesse pour introduire dans l’écriture les sons de la musique, les formes et les couleurs des arts plastiques!¹⁷³

And, as the comparison between the descriptions in the works of Gautier, Wilde, and Zola shows, Zola was indeed prone to stretch words towards other artistic media in order to achieve “un raffinement d’art”.¹⁷⁴ However, in the essay, Zola claimed that this was not a productive style, or a style that was best suited for the scientific inclinations

¹⁷² Daniel Sangsue, ‘Fantaisie, Excentricité et réalisme chez Champfleury’ in *La Fantaisie post-Romantique*, ed. by Jean-Louis Cabanès and Jean-Pierre Saïdah (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2003), pp. 191-206, pp. 200-201.

¹⁷³ Zola, *Les Romanciers Naturalistes* (Paris: Charpentier, 1914), p. 118.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

of the Naturalist movement. According to him, “il nous faut de la simplicité dans la langue, si nous voulons en faire l’arme scientifique du siècle.”¹⁷⁵ However, he instantly added: “Et pourtant, chaque fois que je me remettais à lire Stendhal, occupé de ces idées, j’étais rebuté presque tout de suite.”¹⁷⁶ Although he was trying to fight it, the attraction of the ‘beautiful’ ornate language was too strong for Zola. And indeed, later in the study, he described the style he was dreaming of: “dans ce style si capricieusement ouvragé, si chargé d’ornements de toutes sortes, je voudrais porter la hache, ouvrir des clairières, arriver à une clarté plus large. Moins d’art et plus de solidité.”¹⁷⁷ Here, Zola affirmed that he was writing in a style that was capricious and ornamental. The ‘caprice’ obviously relates Zola’s works with the works of the *fantaisistes* and the aesthetes, but it also, surprisingly, links Realism with the fantastic genre, as the first chapter showed the inherent link between caprice and fancy and the fantastic genre. It also clearly associated Realism with the decorative arts and ornamentation, which was the sign of Aestheticism and will be seen as a characteristic of the Decadent movement.

In that regard, it is interesting to see that Zola described this ornamental style, which he confessed to be using, as producing some “jolis bibelots dans notre littérature [...]”¹⁷⁸ Knowing the devotion of the Goncourt for the bibelot and the ‘objet d’art’, it is not impossible that Zola was casting a veiled attack at the works of the Goncourt, since at the date of the publication of *Les Romanciers Naturalistes*, the relationship between Zola and Edmond was more and more tense regarding who created Realism and who was more successful in preserving the ‘real’ style of the school. At that time, Edmond de Goncourt had already begun to change his style, turning away from Realism

¹⁷⁵ Zola, *Les Romanciers Naturalistes*, p. 118.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 376-7.

and going closer to what would be labelled Decadent. In fact, the same year saw the publication of Zola's manifesto of the Naturalist school and Edmond de Goncourt's *La Faustin* (1881). The links between the Goncourt and Decadence have been analysed in depth in several studies, and this thesis has already showed the ways in which Aestheticism is often seen as announcing and preparing the Decadent period, and Gautier is envisaged as the precursor of Decadence.¹⁷⁹ And it is true that, even at his time, Gautier's style was considered odd, unnatural, and degenerate: "la fantaisie est, avons-nous dit, l'enfant dégénéré de ce que l'on a nommé le romantisme".¹⁸⁰ The vocabulary used to describe Gautier's style was filled with adjectives and nouns suggesting notions of degeneration, the same vocabulary that will be used to define the Decadent style. However, as Katherine Ashley argued, "considering an author such as Théophile Gautier as a Decadent [...] ignores the complex relationship between Naturalism and Decadence."¹⁸¹

Huysmans is usually the key author when discussing the relations between Naturalism and Decadence, as he was initially part of the Naturalist school and turned afterwards to a Decadent style. What is more surprising is the link created by Zola himself between his own style and school and the Decadent style. When we analyse the definitions of Realism and Decadence at the time, the two words do not appear to have much in common. Realism as a movement is defined by the *Litttré* as "en termes d'art et de littérature, attachement à la reproduction de la nature sans idéal."¹⁸² By contrast, the *Litttré* defined Decadence as "l'abaissement des choses littéraires, intellectuelles, scientifiques. La décadence fut produite par la facilité de faire et par la paresse de bien

¹⁷⁹ For more on the Goncourt and Decadence, see for example Dominique Pety, *Les Goncourt et la collection, de l'objet d'art à l'art d'écrire* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2003); Katherine Ashley, *Edmond de Goncourt and the novel: Naturalism and Decadence*.

¹⁸⁰ Crampon, 'Les Fantaisistes', p. 587.

¹⁸¹ Katherine Ashley, *Edmond de Goncourt and the novel: Naturalism and Decadence*, p. 31.

¹⁸² Emile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris: Gallimard Hachette, 1966), T 6, p. 936.

faire, par la satiété du beau et par le goût du bizarre.”¹⁸³ This shows that Decadence was a negative concept at the time, even more so since the dictionary associated the term with the Latin decadence, as Nisard did, and therefore associated it with concepts of decay, and degeneration.

Gautier himself, who, defined maybe for the first time what a Decadent style was when analysing Baudelaire’s works, unconsciously suggested a link between Decadence and Realism. In an article on Baudelaire, Gautier discussed the ways in which the Realist school tried to “accaparer Baudelaire.”¹⁸⁴ While Gautier is merely discussing this in order to prove that Baudelaire was not in fact a Realist, the association suggests that there were some similarities between the style of Baudelaire and the Realist school. What is even more striking is that Bourget seems to have used some elements of Gautier’s description of Baudelaire’s style, which will become the first important definition of Decadence, to describe Realist works. In the notice of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Gautier talked about the decomposition, or the deliquescence of Baudelaire’s style, suggesting a fragmentation of the work, which Bourget will re-use when defining Decadence, as we have already seen.¹⁸⁵ In the *Nouveaux Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, Bourget tried to examine the sentence “copier ce que l’on voit”, as one of the simplest way to define Realism, and argued that “toute réalité se présente à la réflexion comme quelque chose de touffu et de mouvant qu’il est impossible de saisir en son entier. Il y faut donc découper un fragment afin de la faire passer dans l’art [...]”¹⁸⁶ The Realist process of selection artificially fragments reality in the same way as the Decadent style fragments the sentence.

¹⁸³ Emile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris: Gallimard Hachette, 1966), T 2, p. 1356.

¹⁸⁴ Théophile Gautier, *Portraits et souvenirs littéraires* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1875), p. 254.

¹⁸⁵ “la langue marbrée déjà des verdeurs de la décomposition et comme faisandée du bas-empire romain et les raffinements compliqués de l’école byzantine, dernière forme de l’art grec tombé en déliquescence.” *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1868), p. 17.

¹⁸⁶ Bourget, *Nouveaux Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, p. 88.

This discussion has shown how fluid the definitions of Aestheticism, Realism, and Decadence can be, and how Gautier and Wilde somehow appear to take part in, or be related to, all three movements. Defining the movement to which one author belongs becomes even more difficult when we look at one work in particular and a genre or a specific form. It is striking to see that when discussing the novel, the works of Gautier, the Goncourt, Zola, and Wilde appear similar, but when talking about the fantastic or the fairy tale, assigning a specific movement is complex. At first, the fairy tale and the fantastic genre seem at odds with Realism and Naturalism, as argued in the previous chapter since their emphasis is on imagination and *fantaisie*. However, as stated earlier in this chapter, there is “magic” in Realism, and numerous Realist authors wrote fantastic stories (for example, Balzac with *La Peau de chagrin* (1831), Maupassant with *Le Horla* (1886), and Zola’s *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) is sometimes said to have fantastic elements¹⁸⁷), which shows a connection between Realism and the fantastic or the fairy tale. Similarly, when we discuss the fairy tale and its relation to Decadence, the next chapter will demonstrate that the genre seems to be in opposition to the ornamental Decadent style, although Wilde created a literary product born out of the two in his own fairy tales. To some extent, the classification of authors into movements does not tally with their own practices and it does not take into account the overlap between the various movements and schools. The desire to rationalise literature and its history leads to a vision which does not represent the fluidity of literature: Zola cannot be entirely understood if only envisaged as a Naturalist, or the Goncourt as Realists, or Gautier as an Aesthete and Wilde as a Decadent.

¹⁸⁷ See, for example, Elizabeth M. Knutson, ‘The Natural and the Supernatural in Zola’s *Thérèse Raquin*’, *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 55 (3) (1 January 2001), pp. 140-154.

B. Details, Displacement, and Digressive Myopia

Gautier and Wilde did not only unveil Realism's inner contradictions (the real is a fabricated concept) but they also showed how aesthetic and artful realism could be, maybe in spite of itself. Their emphasis on the senses, leading to a sensualist style, is but another path towards grasping reality and experience, through which the world is apprehended physically. The descriptions are placed in the realm of art and are the most aestheticized passages in the novels. In that regard, they can be considered as the purest moments according to the Art for Art's Sake doctrine as most only include artistic elements. This self-engendering art practice provokes a feeling of enclosure within art, a feeling reinforced by the infinite loops of details that fill the descriptive passages. Gautier justified his love for details in the descriptions by his short-sightedness. He told Ernest Feydeau: "Toi qui es presbyte, et vois nécessairement tout en grand, tu devais t'intéresser aux modes de formation des mondes, aux cataclysmes qui accompagnent invariablement ces formations; moi qui suis myope, j'étais prédestiné à l'étude des infiniments petits."¹⁸⁸ The way in which he saw, considered a biological flaw, defined his vision of the world. Because of his short-sightedness, the object is already distorted when considered by Gautier's eyes. His deficiency of focalisation explains why Gautier's focal point shifts: while he cannot take into account the whole world, his vision attaches itself to small elements. Similarly, the blurriness experienced by the short-sighted person is visible in his texts. While his descriptions are very precise, the proliferation of details, one detail engendering another one, softens the delineation between the objects under study, as well as the delineation between the object under study and its details.

¹⁸⁸ Feydeau, *Théophile Gautier, Souvenirs Intimes*, p. 221.

Details are omnipresent in his works. *Le Roman de la momie* appears as the novel of details, and of unending lists of objects, people and specifications. Any event happening seems to be an excuse to show what is on display. Every item is the object of a long description, turning it truly into an object of scrutiny, where details seem to overpower the object. In the prologue, for example, the discovery of Tahoser's tomb is the pretext for more than fifteen pages which record every single aspect of the tomb. The entrance alone fills three paragraphs in which Gautier indulged in his beloved *transposition d'art*, and rendered the statues and bas-relief which ornate the door:

Au-dessus de la porte basse, aux jambages flanqués de longs panneaux d'hiéroglyphes, se développait un large cadre emblématique; au centre d'un disque de couleur jaune, se voyait à côté d'un scarabée, signe des renaissances successives, le dieu à tête de bélier, symbole du soleil couchant. En dehors du disque, Isis et Nephtys, personnifications du commencement et de la fin, se tenaient agenouillées, une jambe repliée sous la cuisse, l'autre relevée à la hauteur du coude, selon la posture égyptienne, les bras étendus en avant avec une expression d'étonnement mystérieux, et le corps serré d'un pagne étroit que sanglait une ceinture dont les bouts retombaient.¹⁸⁹

The syntax enhances the almost overwhelming richness of the description, with seven punctuation marks in one sentence. Each word preceding a comma is characterized in the interpolated clause, and so on. This scene is another transformation of Passalacqua's *Catalogue raisonné et historique des antiquités découvertes en Egypte* as Alain Moret shows.¹⁹⁰ Once these scientific collages are inserted into Gautier's poetic prose, they are drowned in the profusion and the extreme elegance of the work, and contaminated by the writer's exuberance and aestheticism. Alain Moret affirms that Gautier was as

¹⁸⁹ *Le Roman de la momie*, p. 496.

¹⁹⁰ Moret, 'Note sur une source', p. 362.

inspired by Passalacqua's written report as by the vignette accompanying the text, but the extreme difference between the three versions of the same object shows that Gautier's style goes beyond the initial source [see figure 4].

Gautier's description of the sepulchral room is as follows:

Deux statues de femmes colorées se dressaient à droite et à gauche du tombeau, soutenant d'une main sur leur tête une boîte carrée, [...]. L'une était vêtue d'un simple jupon blanc collant sur les hanches et suspendu par des bretelles croisées; l'autre, plus richement habillée, s'emboîtait dans une espèce de fourreau étroit papelonné d'écailles successivement rouges et vertes.

A côté de la première, l'on voyait trois jarres primitivement remplies d'eau du Nil, qui en s'évaporant n'avait laissé que son limon, et un plat contenant une pâte alimentaire desséchée.

A côté de la seconde, deux petits navires, pareils à ces modèles de vaisseaux qu'on fabrique dans les ports de mer, rappelaient avec exactitude, l'un, les moindres détails des barques destinées à transporter les corps de Diospolis aux Memnonia; l'autre, la nef symbolique qui fait passer l'âme aux régions de l'Occident. [...] Barques et personnages étaient peints de couleurs vives [...].¹⁹¹

The main addition to Passalacqua's drawing is Gautier's insertion of colours, which translates the richness as well as the lively aspect of the chamber. The colours are bright, emphasizing the contrast between the rich ornaments and the darkness and wilderness of their location, and Gautier suggested their longevity through their preservation. But it is not the only change, and Gautier transformed the scientific catalogue into literature very clearly through the participial phrases as well as shifters which instantly change the tone of the passage. The use of the imperfect tense immediately exposes the extract as an act of narration.

¹⁹¹ *Le Roman de la momie*, p. 507.

Gautier's exactitude, shown through the striking similarities between his source and his text and the archaeological details, proves that Gautier expands on more than distorts his sources. They are the frame, the starting-point of his own invention, which develops every single detail that is turned into an aestheticized object. Pierre Laubriet analyses that through "l'accumulation des détails précis, mais bizarres, il finit par créer l'impression d'un monde [...] fantastique où les choses vivent d'une vie presque menaçante [...]." ¹⁹² Therefore, there is a gap between a scientific document which would testify to the real life of the Egyptians and Gautier's treatment of the subject. Gautier distorted his subject not through the themes he used but through his use of details, which transformed what could have been described as familiar into a work of art.

Gautier's insistence on these details deforms the object which he singled out as worthy of precision, even though it sometimes seems useless and pointless. The charge given to the object through the details is unbalanced in relation to its importance either to the plot or to the *couleur locale*. The detail becomes an autonomous element in the description. Jacques Rancière analyses a similar phenomenon in Flaubert's works. He argues that "la description y est sous le signe de l'insignifiance objective [...]. Cette insignifiance signifiait pour les critiques la mise de toutes choses au même niveau." ¹⁹³ Rancière affirms that "cet égalitarisme de la sensation se lie à un second trait [...] à savoir un bouleversement des proportions." ¹⁹⁴ He adds: "la puissance de l'infime est proprement la puissance de l'infini." ¹⁹⁵ Put under the scrutiny of Gautier's unfocused vision, the larger items are put on the same level as their smaller and even minuscule

¹⁹² Laubriet, 'Notes on *Le Roman de la momie*', p. 1338.

¹⁹³ Jacques Rancière, 'Puissances de l'infime', in *Flaubert: éthique et esthétique*, ed. by Anne Herschberg-Pierrot (Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2012), pp. 29-44, p. 29.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

components, and they are also diluted in these components. If we draw a comparison with ornamental art, Gautier's practice of the description seems to foreground the ornament in place of the structural object. Following the arabesque and fluid lines of ornaments, Gautier's details act like an infinite circle, one detail leading on to another in what becomes a landslide of insignificant details that take over the work. There is almost a dizziness caused by the importance and significance given to the infinitely small.

The description then develops into an extra-text, alien from the plot, and undermines what could have been its initial aims: precision and exactitude. The object dissolves into the detail, the reader is unsure as to what was the primary focus of the sentence. The displacement of focus Gautier carries out in his works is forced upon the reader who, in turn, focuses on the infinitely small. This radical change of perspective not only questions order and hierarchy in its affirmation of the power of smallness, it also erodes the very concept of order. The endless proliferation can lead to a lack of focus, without any recognizable point of reference. In that regard, Gautier's digressive myopia brings eeriness to his works, in which most things appear strange.

The object is defamiliarized, in the theoretical sense of the word as "the device of making strange".¹⁹⁶ To some extent, the setting of Gautier's novel was already describing something alien – ancient Egypt – and Gautier's treatment of the description only magnifies this oddity. Paolo Tortonese argues that these details are gratuitous:

la gratuité de ces détails d'un point de vue strictement narratif, est évidente [...]. C'est alors que la dérive dans le langage devient inévitable, et que les mots commencent à s'écouler régulièrement, en glissant sur la surface du

¹⁹⁶ Robert H. Stacy, *Defamiliarization in Language and Literature* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1977), p. 2.

visible, se laissant retenir par chaque forme, chaque signe, conscients de devoir répondre de tout ce qu'ils rencontrent.¹⁹⁷

The author digressed from word to word, each word opening up to a whole new world. It is a slide both in language, where the writer loses himself in the luxuriance of words, as well as of language, where words are powerfully evocative and generate other words.

Le Roman de la momie is a novel of lists, a fact of which Gautier was fully aware. After enumerating precisely every single part of the parade accompanying the return of the Pharaoh, the author ironically specifies yet another component of the procession, introducing it in the following terms: “en tête de cette armée à lasser les nomenclateurs [...]”.¹⁹⁸ The noun “nomenclateur”, a derived form of “nomenclature”, is a rare word and highlights Gautier’s desire to be the “personne qui donne les noms aux choses et aux êtres vivants”,¹⁹⁹ the writer who creates things, emotions, and objects through words, an aspiration which will be developed in the next chapter. While there seems to be no going further than Gautier and *Le Roman de la momie* in the way in which descriptive details overtake all other parts of the work, Wilde developed this controversial aesthetic in his works, and imitated Gautier’s own refractive error of the eye, his myopia, and applied it to the text. For instance Wilde described the attitude of his hero in a sentence in which each word has at least one adjective detailing it: “murmured Dorian Gray, sipping some pale-yellow wine from a delicate gold-beaded bubble of Venetian glass, and looking dreadfully bored.”²⁰⁰ Even the colour cannot be enough indication, as it was in Gautier’s novel. Wilde felt the need or the desire to ornate the colour even more, which made it unique.

¹⁹⁷ Tortonese, *La Vie Extérieure*, p. 70.

¹⁹⁸ *Le Roman de la momie*, p. 539.

¹⁹⁹ Rey, *Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Française*, II, p. 2389.

²⁰⁰ *Dorian Gray*, p. 259.

Nisard explained the relations between the description, erudition, and details: “la description comporte en elle-même une certaine dose d’érudition [...] En outre, la description vit de détails; or, la connaissance des détails, c’est l’érudition.”²⁰¹ Examples of these overriding details are innumerable in Wilde’s novel, and especially overwhelming in the famous chapter XI, which Wilde had prepared and constructed by finding inspiration and scientific justification in manuals: “On handwritten sheets, Wilde added summaries of information on the history of exotic jewels and church vestments that he gleaned from museum handbooks on both of these topics [...].”²⁰² Joseph Bristow also highlights Wilde’s borrowings from Huysmans’ novel *A Rebours*, “Dorian Gray’s acquisition of luxurious objects bears many resemblances to Des Esseintes’ excessive habit of treasuring such sensuous artefacts”, which established a parallel between “the episode when Dorian takes up ‘the study of jewels’ and “a scene in Huysmans’ *A Rebours*.”²⁰³ It is certainly true that Wilde was influenced by Huysmans, especially in the way in which the French writer stretched the concept of Decadence to its limits in *A Rebours*. However, when the two works are analysed together, the styles appear to be rather different. Des Esseintes is producing a jewelled shell for his tortoise, and selects the most surprising and weird pieces he can possibly find:

Les feuilles furent serties de pierreries d’un vert accentué et précis: de chrysobéryls vert asperge; de péridots vert poireau; d’olivines vert olive; et elles se détachèrent de branches en almadine et en ouwarovite d’un rouge violacé, jetant des paillettes d’un éclat sec de même que ces micas de tartre qui luisent dans l’intérieur des futailles.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Nisard, *Etudes*, II, pp. 180-181.

²⁰² Bristow, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. XLIII.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ Huysmans, *A Rebours*, p. 120.

The jewelled tortoise is not only Des Esseintes' excuse for creating a moving jewelled shell, it is also Huysmans' justification for indulging in the radically rare, specific and odd-sounding names of rocks and jewels. In contrast to Gautier, Huysmans was not necessarily after the beautiful word but he leant more towards the bizarre. The green jewels, meant to represent the leaves of the jewelled bouquet, are not represented as particularly beautiful or appealing, where their tones recall vegetables.

Interestingly, it is not the first time that authors compare flowers and vegetables, as this chapter showed, but Huysmans reversed the topos, turning the beautiful flowers into banal vegetables, where the comparison used by Wilde and Zola enhanced the vegetables' beauty by comparing them to flowers. In contrast, Wilde's description of Dorian's hobby further develops the intrinsic beauty of the jewels:

He would often spend a whole day settling and resettling in their case the various stones that he had collected, such as the olive-green chrysoberyl that turns red by lamplight, the cymophane with its wire-like line of silver, the pistachio-coloured peridot, rose-pink and wine-yellow topazes, carbuncles of fiery scarlet with tremulous four-rayed stars, flame-red cinnamon-stones, orange and violet spinels, and amethysts with their alternate layers of ruby and sapphire.²⁰⁵

The chrysoberyls and peridots are present in both descriptions and their colours are compared to everyday aliments. However, Wilde's 'olive' jewel changes colour, and the 'pistachio' peridot seems to be counterbalanced by its proximity to the highly refined colours of the topazes.

²⁰⁵ *Dorian Gray*, p. 282.

In such description Wilde left no word ‘uncovered’ or untouched. Wilde was engaged here in a process of making the word complex. Christine Queffélec remarks that in Wilde’s work, “les couleurs ne sont jamais brutes. Pas de vert mais du vert olive ou du vert jade, de l’opale, du nacré.”²⁰⁶ And indeed, nothing is left untreated in Wilde’s work; every single word needs the mediation and addition of the writer. Huysmans’ and Wilde’s treatment of the word is therefore different: Huysmans trivialised it while Wilde ornamented it to the extreme. In this regard, Wilde was closer to Gautier. His insistence on the refinement of colours relates to Gautier’s devotion to the senses, and sight in particular. Through their beautifully creative prose, both authors imbued the words with sensuousness that emphasize their appeal to the senses, even when they do not relate to any sense in their normal meaning. The glass from which Dorian drinks becomes the receptacle of at least three senses: sight, touch, and smell. Sight, the most used sense in their works, is not as easily turned sensuous as touch or taste, but it becomes a caressing sight in a synesthetic approach. Wilde and Gautier constantly fused the senses together through images.

As passages of purple prose, concentrating most of the sensory experiences, descriptions become not only ‘morceaux de bravoure’ but artistic and aesthetic manifestos that embody Wilde’s and Gautier’s vision of literature as a sensuous medium. The useless detail is mostly related to sensuousness, whether it qualifies a material, a colour, or a texture. Therefore it is no surprise that detail appears to be the focus of Nisard’s criticisms of what appears to be decadent description. Nisard demonstrated how the author can lose himself in the detail, which illustrates what Gautier and Wilde seemed to be doing: “Que de détails inutiles à propos d’une chose de détail? [...] Pendant ce temps-là, que devient Appius, n’a-t-on pas déjà oublié

²⁰⁶ Queffélec, *L’Esthétique de Gustave Flaubert et d’Oscar Wilde*, p. 277.

l'imprécation prophétique de Lucain?"²⁰⁷ The detail of a detail, seen on multiple occasions in the texts under study, displaces the attention from the plot and the characters to the infinitesimally small. The novel becomes a work about details.

Considering the importance of such a phenomenon in the works of Gautier and Wilde, can descriptions still be considered a digression? The word derives from the Latin 'digressio' which is a temporary departure from the main subject in speech or writing. In that regard, descriptions are digressions from the narration and they are in themselves digressive, where the writer loses himself in the accumulation of details. Critics who use the term digression in order to designate Gautier's or Wilde's use of description pertain of the realist hierarchy that installs the subject, the human, as the centre of the work. Descriptive digressions would indeed pull away from the characters, and threaten the balance of the work. However, Gautier and Wilde did more than simply threaten this relation, since the descriptions are not just digressions, but become the centre of the work, by their length, space, and literary importance. Shifting the digression into the heart of the work deforms the normal hierarchy and shifts the focus towards the descriptive. As Rae Beth Gordon shows, "the descriptive passages are not 'filler', or 'merely decorative', nor should they be skimmed in favour of plot [...] there is to be no escape from ornamental detail."²⁰⁸ In a change of perspective, the action, centred around the characters, becomes the margin.

Nisard explained that authors overindulged in details in order to hide a lack of inspiration and imagination, which contrasted with Zola who affirmed that the imagination was supplanted by *le sens du réel*, which also develops through details. On the one hand, details cover up for a lack of imagination. On the other hand, they are

²⁰⁷ Nisard, *Etudes*, II, p. 189.

²⁰⁸ Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire*, p. 119.

meant to lessen imagination and emphasize realism. Nisard wrote about Gautier in his *Histoire de la littérature française* and commented on his poetry in the following terms:

Ce que le poète, dans ses prouesses d'art pur, laisse échapper de sentiments délicats et d'aperçus fins sur la vie morale, fait regretter qu'il n'ait pas eu plus souvent besoin de tourner du dehors au dedans un œil qui voit si bien, et qu'il ait semblé parfois se servir de l'art, comme les orientaux de l'opium, pour se dérober aux souffrances de la pensée.²⁰⁹

Gautier's 'Oriental' art is seen as a refuge against depth and thought. The debate during the nineteenth century around description creates a contrast between a large-scale work, centred around the human and his or her psychological development in which the description serves this purpose – a unified and harmonious work –, and a work in which the descriptions seem endless because of the accumulation of small details which creates a fragmented artwork, the coherence of which is endangered by its shift in focus and emphasis on the surface of things. The details of details, details in details, and detailed details magnify the insignificant and reaffirm the power of the 'small' by its amplification. In this new order, or lack thereof, there is a loss of focal point in which the two authors develop an aesthetic of the ornamental arabesque and zigzag.

Conclusion

The way in which the two novels are constructed distorts the realist vision of the novel – a prominent if not dominant aesthetic during the nineteenth century – by foregrounding description through time (time spent reading the descriptions for

²⁰⁹ Désiré Nisard, *Histoire de la littérature française*, 4 vols (Paris: Firmin-Didot & Cie, 1883), IV, p. 529.

example), space (the space the description occupies on the page), and aesthetic ‘charge’ (the importance allocated to sensuous adjectives and ornate details). Through this process, description shifts towards the centre of the work, endangers the plot and its alleged supremacy, and subverts realism and its conventions. The mere suggestion that description should not be used as an accessory to the plot or the development of human psychology was radical in the context of the nineteenth-century novel both in France and in Britain. The detail for beauty’s sake, provoked by descriptive myopia, is also a puzzling feature of the descriptions by Gautier and Wilde, which instate beauty as the gratuitous aim of the work in contrast to potential ideas, morals, or narrative experiments. The descriptions follow a circular pattern, starting and ending at the same point, as they do not bring forth any progression to the plot or the psychological development of the characters. In that sense, they are close to arabesques in their autonomous, self-engendering characteristics.

In relation to the previous chapter which explores how the materiality of artworks is utilised in Gautier’s and Wilde’s works, building on the metaphor of words as fragments of marble, this chapter showed how another visual art medium is being inserted into their texts: painting. Going further than an inspection of pictorial traits or ekphrases in their works, this chapter investigated the most obvious visual component of their texts, the descriptions, and their place and role. The creative movements between visual and literary arts are continuous, which shows how close they are, as well as how porous the delineations between these arts can be. These artistic structural insertions challenge notions of time and space in the narration. They also lead to assessments on literature in comparison to visual artistic media. The two authors stretch their works constantly towards the visual arts, whether it is through artworks or artistic style, and ponder the limitations of their own medium. However, their works are not

merely paintings or sculptures put into words, since, from the last two chapters, it becomes clear that the two authors are drawing these visual effects from language, the substance of which is made more fluid and malleable as well as more material.

The materialism of their prose is what Zola would regret in Gautier's works and what Maurice Barrès would later associate with realism and superficiality, praising Baudelaire for his separation from Gautier's aesthetic: "Baudelaire est notre maître pour avoir réagi contre le matérialisme de Gautier, qui est le réalisme d'aujourd'hui, et contre tout le superficiel du romantisme."²¹⁰ The justification for such an attack on Gautier's works is the lack of relation between this materialism and a bigger and deeper structure which gives it meaning and significance. The ornamental prose of Gautier and Wilde therefore plays with the subversion of structural hierarchies: between content and form, centre and periphery or margin, materiality and spirituality. Description, redefined as the centre of the aesthetic and of the work, encapsulates their artistic vision of literature that is reshaped into a sensual experience.

These aesthetic passages spill out over the rest of the work and turn the prose into a poetic text. In that regard, Henry James affirmed that "Gautier's first and richest poetry [...] is to be found in his prose,- the precious artistic prose [...] every paragraph is a germ of a sonnet, every sentence a vignette."²¹¹ However, their texts do not only refer to other literary forms but, as this thesis proves, other visual media, among which is ornamental art. Again, Barrès compared Baudelaire and Gautier and wondered why Baudelaire dedicated *Les Fleurs du Mal* to Gautier: "Ne dédiait-il pas ses poèmes au "maître impeccable" Théophile Gautier? Ce ne peut être que la maîtrise du langage qu'il salue dans ce merveilleux décorateur."²¹² Gautier was, for his contemporaries and

²¹⁰ Maurice Barrès, 'La Sensation en littérature (suite): les poètes suprêmes', *Les Tâches d'encre* (5 Dec 1884), pp. 21-43, p. 40.

²¹¹ James, *French Poets and Novelists*, p. 40.

²¹² Maurice Barrès, 'La Folie de Baudelaire', *Les Tâches d'encre* (5 Nov 1884), pp. 3-26, pp. 10-11.

later nineteenth-century writers, using words as decorations, and literature as a decorative art. The next chapter will show how Gautier and Wilde redefine prose not necessarily in contrast with poetry but rather in relation to ornaments and the decorative arts.

Chapter 3: Arabesques and Words: Ornamental Prose

Introduction: Ornament and the Apology for Austerity

As the very word ornament indicates what is in itself non-essential, so the “one beauty” of all literary style is of its very essence, and independent, in prose and verse alike, of all removable decoration; that it may exist in its fullest lustre, as in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, for instance, or in Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le noir*, in a composition utterly unadorned, with hardly a single suggestion of visibly beautiful things.¹

In his essay on Style (1888), Walter Pater advocated austerity in writing as the ideal of prose and poetry. He argued that once a text is stripped of the inessential, its true beauty appears, and the substance of its components are heightened by being necessary and adequate, after having undergone an “exact trial”.² The elements which do not fit into that essentialist purge, which ought to be removed and avoided, are what Pater calls decoration, ornament, or adornment. Building on the definition of ornament as structurally non-essential, Pater showed how a pure style is a style devoid of any ‘surplusage’ in which the author constantly works his material, using the metaphor of the writer as jeweller, and polishing his medium in order to purify it. Ironically, this metaphor, used by Gautier before Pater, highlights the relation between writing and the decorative arts through a comparison between words and gems, the latter being non-essential ornaments. Pater seemed to disregard this link and associated the pure austere style with a moral style, a dichotomy which has already been encountered in this thesis, through which truth, artistic ideal and beauty side with simplicity and where “tarnished

¹ Pater, *Appreciations*, pp. 15-16.

² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

or vulgar decoration, permissible ornament”³ are considered dangerous (they are compared to a “narcotic force”⁴), which damage the effect of the text, and are deemed immoral. In praising Flaubert’s style as meeting the ideals of a pure style, Pater insisted on the adequacy between the word and the idea, “the absolute accordance of expression to idea”,⁵ arguing that in Flaubert’s prose, each word was carefully chosen to perfectly express an idea. It suggests that the word is primarily used as an unmediated means to convey the idea, a concept which does not tally with Théophile Gautier’s and Oscar Wilde’s practice of writing. The fact that Pater chose examples from French literature proves the influence of French literature on English literature as an ideal to follow. However, Pater did not choose Gautier as the exponent of this pure style, although Pater’s inclination for Gautier and Gautier’s influence on Pater’s aesthetic ideas are known. Clearly, Gautier did not fit into this category. The last part of the introductory quotation immediately sentences Gautier’s style as ornamental, if only through his use of “visibly beautiful things.”

In order better to understand the relations between the terms ornament, superfluity, and structure, which are key concepts for this chapter, some definitions are required. If we look at nineteenth-century dictionaries, it becomes clear that the articulation of these concepts with one another was already in place when Gautier, Pater, Ruskin, and Wilde handled them. The definition of the *Littre* is vague and general enough not to appear partial to one or the other side of the argument: “ce qui orne, ce qui sert à orner”.⁶ The other definitions of ornament given by the *Littre* are also enlightening for our analysis: the ornament can apply to architecture, but also to painting, music, and literature. The polysemy of the word relates to the desire to

³ Pater, *Appreciations*, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶ Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, T 5, pp. 1137-8.

decompartmentalise artistic media and fuse them together. However, the examples provided to illustrate this definition clearly suggest that the *Littré* sides with Pater and Ruskin's visions of the ornament. Three of the quotations are from Bossuet who associates ornaments with vanity: "vains ornements", "tous les ornements de la vanité".⁷ Two more (out of twelve quotations) are taken from Racine who also sustains the same association between ornamentation and vanity. Through these examples emerges a moral denunciation of the ornament following Christian precepts rejecting vain embellishments in favour of simplicity.

The rejection of ornaments as superfluous elements of decoration can also be found in the definition given by the *Littré* of the word 'superflu'. The first example given to explain the definition of the word is "des ornements superflus",⁸ which clearly creates a direct association between ornament and superfluity and appears like a tautology. Similarly, in English dictionaries of art from this period the ornament is seen as an accessory: "All the accessory parts of a work [...]."⁹ In modern definitions, the superfluity of the ornament is sustained since the *Larousse* defines it as a "chacun des motifs accessoires d'une composition artistique qui pourraient être retranchés sans défigurer le sujet principal."¹⁰ The association between what is accessory and what has no incidence on the object it embellishes suggests that the ornament is not structural, in the sense that its absence does not endanger the unity, or even existence of the thing it is added to. To some extent, the term ornament can be seen as a floating signifier, its meaning being defined by the person discussing it. It also appears to have hidden signifiers as the definition from the *Littré* shows: behind the term can be found

⁷ Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, T 5, pp. 1137-8.

⁸ Emile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris: Gallimard Hachette, 1967), T 7, pp. 566-27.

⁹ Frederik William Fairholt, *A Dictionary of Terms in Art* (London: Virtue, Hall & Virtue, 1854), p. 316.

¹⁰ *Grand Larousse de la langue française*, dir. by Louis Guilbert, René Lagane, Georges Niobey, 7 vols (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1976), T 5, p. 3839.

conscious or unconscious associations with the concepts of superfluity and non-structural accessory. Throughout this chapter, the term will evolve depending on who uses it, and the examination of its evolution shows on the one hand that the ornament stands to represent and embody the opposite of what ‘good art’ should be, and on the other, it embodies artistic freedom.

Following Désiré Nisard’s attack on the descriptive style as morally reprehensible, the ornamental style not only represents the superfluous but it also alludes to the decadent in art. In an anonymous article entitled ‘Why good people do not sympathize with France’ from *The Spectator* published on 31 December 1870, a columnist concentrated his attack on the decadence of French art on Gautier and *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. He argued that its beautiful appearance hid its poisonous aspects: the novel is “so full of subtle analysis, so enriched with beauty of expression, and so infernal in its viciousness”.¹¹ Clothed in beautiful attire, an ornate prose, the text is made even more dangerous because of its appeal, what Pater referred to as a “narcotic force” or what Baudelaire called the “sorcellerie évocatoire.”¹² Gautier’s handling of his material was indeed praised by Baudelaire, who described its effects in the following terms: “c’est alors que la couleur parle [...] que les monuments se dressent [...] que les animaux et les plantes, représentants du laid et du mal, articulent leur grimace non équivoque; que le parfum provoque la pensée”.¹³ The synaesthetic image built inside synaesthesia is typical of Gautier’s style, which bends the words into a succession of sensorial experiences that participate in an extreme profusion of sensuous images. When analysing Gautier’s style, Baudelaire established a parallel between the styles of Gautier and Flaubert, and affirmed that Gautier also made “jaillir le mot

¹¹ Anon, ‘Why Good People Do not Sympathize with France’, *The Spectator* (31 Dec 1870), p. 1576.

¹² Baudelaire, ‘Théophile Gautier’, p. 118.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 250-251.

propre, le mot unique, enfin ce sentiment de l'ordre qui met chaque trait et chaque touche à sa place naturelle et n'omet aucune nuance."¹⁴ However, if Gautier used the 'right' word, it was not in an attempt to achieve economy and efficiency or simplicity in its style. Rather, the word is valued as much for its content as for its artistic charge.

The ornament "refers to motifs and themes used [...], without being essential to structure and serviceability, [...] for the purpose of embellishment."¹⁵ Treated as a detail inside a larger structure, the ornament is found primarily in architecture or interior decoration and, to a larger extent, in the decorative arts.¹⁶ But a colour or a gem can also be an ornament, and the noun applies both to the motifs and the object on which ornaments are found: it can be a wallpaper, the gem on a necklace or the necklace in itself. One example of a decorative motif is the arabesque. It is the fusion of the two main trends in ornamental art: the geometrical ornament, which relates to the art of Islam and its ban on representation; and the 'natural' ornament, which represents fauna and flora. I have already introduced the concept of an 'arabesque style' of writing. Since the arabesque can be both the ornamental motif and a genre of ornamentation - "Se dit d'un genre d'architecture qui n'admet dans les ornements que des imitations de plantes et de feuillages"¹⁷ - the word describes perfectly the style already analysed in the previous chapter which alludes to the syntactical structure of the texts (endless sentences with added clauses which seem to go nowhere for no reason), where the sentences mirror the capricious curves of the ornamental motif and exemplify the ornament's superfluity.

¹⁴ Baudelaire, 'Théophile Gautier', p. 117.

¹⁵ From *The Encyclopedia of Art* quoted in Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 25.

¹⁶ "Proposition 1: The Decorative arts arise from, and should properly be attendant upon, Architecture", Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (London: Studio Editions, 1986), p. 5.

¹⁷ Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, T 1, p. 534.

Janell Watson, in her comprehensive study of the ‘bibelot’ in nineteenth-century literature, analyses the presence of this gratuitous artefact in several works in terms that could be applied to the study of ornaments. The proliferation of the ‘bibelot’ suggests to her “the sudden invasion of culture by gratuitousness”, and the existence of a culture in which “superfluity, or the absence of use-value, is the sole unifying criterion for the seemingly heterogeneous list of items belonging to that category.”¹⁸ The ornament could easily be added to the list, and, indeed, Watson discusses the bibelots in terms of “bizarre ornamental objects”.¹⁹ She also relates the valorisation of ornamentation in literature to Gautier’s doctrine: “the notion of ‘Art for Art’s Sake’ further valorizes the bibelot”, and then quotes the Preface of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* as the proclamation of the superiority of “the values of superfluity and anti-utilitarianism [...]”.²⁰

This bibelot, ornamental, or arabesque style poses the same problems already analysed in the previous chapter: “there arise issues of balance between persons and things, and between narration and description [...] there is the matter of interpretation, of finding meaning in superfluous material things [...]”.²¹ Similarly, Watson discusses the bibelot in relation to the dichotomy background/foreground already mentioned in Chapter 2: “A sense of instability is created by the foregrounding of elements ordinary considered as background, such as bibelots, resulting in the sort of imbalance which characterizes what Naomi Schor has called “the ornamental text.””²² Watson’s study helps to understand the problems surrounding the ornamental text during the nineteenth century, which can be summarised through the expression ‘arabesque style’.

¹⁸ Janell Watson, *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust: The Collection and Consumption of Curiosities* (Cambridge: Cambridge Studies in French, 2000), p. 1, p. 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

First, the ornament that is the arabesque is brought to the fore as it becomes the main feature of a writer's style, which threatens the balance of the work; second, the arabesque perfectly represents the superfluity and gratuitousness which characterise this style, both in terms of syntax and in terms of content added (or lack thereof). However, there are differences between the bibelot and what I call the arabesque style. By nature, the bibelot is an ornamental object, which means that the ornament includes a larger content than the bibelot. In her study, Watson focuses more specifically on the physical object of the bibelot and its proliferation, which is close to what this thesis has already done in the previous chapters analysing the physical presence of art in the works of Wilde and Gautier. In this chapter, I argue that in addition to the proliferation of artistic objects in nineteenth-century prose fiction, there is a proliferation of ornaments as stylistic devices. In their works, Gautier and Wilde use words as ornaments, which not only has the aforementioned effects (reversal of narration and description, distance from the human and focus on the object) but also has a broader impact on the works themselves. This arabesque style challenges the generic identity of the works (for instance, the fairy tales are, because of this very aspect, difficult to circumscribe within a specific genre) and their value as literary objects as they morph into objects of decoration away from the aims ascribed to literature already discussed in this thesis.

In addition, the bibelot does not carry the same association with notions of structure and accessory as the ornament does, which adds another layer of complexity to the ornamental text. Finally, the discourse on ornaments surrounding the arabesque style of Gautier and Wilde underlines the racial discourse present within the aesthetic discourse on ornaments. As an ornament present in most cultures, the arabesque is considered savage or primitive in opposition with what is seen as the sign of an educated culture. This reveals that the arabesque style of the two authors includes a political

message about the hierarchy of the arts established according to racial and cultural standards rather than aesthetic ones.

The place and value of ornaments had been discussed for centuries before Gautier and Wilde. Goethe, in *Von Arabesken* (1789) analysed the use of the arabesque, and more generally of ornaments, in Antiquity and argued that the ornaments in Pompeii “ont pour seule finalité d’égayer ce mur coloré, dans lequel leurs traits légers se meuvent autour du tableau central et s’harmonisent avec lui”,²³ without distracting the viewer since the motifs remain in the background without taking centre stage. For Goethe, a good ornament was a servile ornament. In 1908, in *Ornament and Crime*, Adolf Loos argued that a good ornament was a dead ornament. Goethe’s essay on architecture and decoration can better be understood if placed in the context of the architectural styles of the eighteenth century. Goethe’s praise for a controlled ornamentation can be seen as a reaction to the Rococo period in architecture and interior decoration. The Rococo, which comes from the French *rocaille*, which refers to rock and shell ornamentation, was an exuberant style using plaster sculpted to appear as if it were stone (what will be considered ‘fake’ ornamentation, or even deceptive), with asymmetrical and curved motifs. It was a reaction to the Classical lines of the previous periods, which would come back in fashion around the 1760s with the Neo-Classical style. The reactions against the Rococo style focused on its artificiality and ornamentation, in complete opposition to the simple, elegant, restrained lines of Antiquity. The rise and fall of the Rococo may explain Goethe’s views on ornaments, which he also expressed in the *Roman Elegies*, showing that it was indeed a durable

²³ Goethe quoted in Dominique Peyrache-Leborgne, *Grotesque et arabesques dans le récit romantique, de Jean Paul à Victor Hugo* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012), p. 114. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find the primary source for this quotation and I therefore use Dominique Peyrache-Leborgne’s study in which she includes Goethe’s essay in French.

concern for him: “I have grown sick of adornments and finery [...]”²⁴ Beate Allert points out the relation between Goethe’s rejection of abundant ornaments and the Rococo style: “In contrast to the contemporary Rococo with its emphasis on an aesthetics of ornament, he rejected redundant “Schnörkel-und Muschelwesen” (curlicues and shell-like ornamentations) and favoured more basic and dynamic lines.”²⁵ The symmetry, simplicity, and clean lines of the style favoured by Goethe are in opposition to the capricious, asymmetrical, and curvacious motifs of the ‘arabesque’ style defined earlier.

A similar context can explain Adolf Loos’ complete rejection of ornamentation in art and architecture. The Austrian and Czech architect was indeed reacting against the Neo-Baroque style, which revived the Baroque during the Romantic period. The Neo-Baroque was seen as doubly superficial, copying a style that was already seen as artificial. In reaction to the neo-revivals of the mid-nineteenth century (Neo-Gothic, Neo-Classical), theoreticians and architects desired to create a style that would represent their period and would not copy a past era. This will be the ‘turn of century’ style, which was to be functional, simple, and using modern technologies and materials. A predecessor of Loos, Otto Wagner, had already proposed a new style in 1898 when he was asked to design the Karlsplatz Station in Vienna, which provoked strong reactions in the public who saw the building as too simple and undecorated. Loos continued this purification of Viennese architecture after Wagner, and in 1910, he began building the Goldmann and Salatsch Building whose simplicity was so disturbing in contrast to the other buildings around it that building work had to be stopped for some time. It is worth noting that Loos was also influenced by Nordau’s *Degeneration*,

²⁴ Goethe, *Roman Elegies*, p. 27.

²⁵ Beate Allert, ‘Goethe and the Visual Arts’, p. 197.

and shared his view of ornamentation as a sign of a ‘degenerate art’.²⁶ The discourse surrounding ornamentation seems to change according to the styles of the different periods which, again, shows how difficult it is to define the ornament as the term evolves through time.

Following the same logic that saw description overtake the plot as a threatening trait, if the ornament breaks free from its ornamental purpose, it becomes dangerous, dizzying and it ultimately overcomes the structural object it was meant to beautify. The difficulty is to define what constitutes the ornament and to differentiate it from the essential parts of the object under consideration. The delineation between what is necessary and what is superfluous is unclear, especially when applied to artworks: is beauty not structural in an artwork? Gautier was well aware of these conceptual debates surrounding ornaments in the decorative arts. Considering his attachment to the Art for Art’s Sake doctrine, it is no surprise that Gautier would advocate for an ornate art, freed from utilitarian purposes: the appeal of an artwork is considered structural to him. Gautier also utilized the visual origin of the ornament in his texts, blurring once again the frontiers between the visual arts and literature.

Knowing Wilde’s devotion to Pater, one could expect that he would follow the aesthete’s principles in his works and strive to develop this austere style. However, in an article on Pater’s *Imaginary Portraits* published in 1887, Wilde distanced himself from his master’s style: “Aestheticism is the keynote of Mr Pater’s prose; at times it is almost too severe in its self-control, and makes us long for a little more freedom. For indeed, the danger of such a prose as his is that it is apt to become somewhat laborious.”²⁷ Wilde’s desire for more freedom, less austerity and more appeal shows

²⁶ For more on Loos, see Juan José Lahuerta, *On Loos, Ornament and Crime* (Barcelona: Tenov Books, 2015).

²⁷ ‘Mr Pater’s *Imaginary Portraits*’, [PMG (11 June 1887), 2-3], *Journalism*, VI, p. 180.

that, once again, he was following Gautier's ideas of an ornate style. Indeed, the profusion of sensorial images and experiences in his texts, his long sentences built clause upon clause, and his work on rhythmic cadences and sounds present in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.', made him the advocate of Gautier's ornamental prose in Britain. In a context in which the Arts and Crafts movement wished to reunite 'high' art and the decorative arts in order to create a beautiful environment for the benefit of society, it is no surprise that Wilde would want to make his own ideas on decoration known through articles and essays. Ruskin and Morris wished to control ornamentation in the decorative arts and imposed a moral judgment on its use: some ornaments are bad, some are vulgar, some are against nature. Wilde's attachment to the Art for Art's Sake doctrine prevented him from sharing these principles.

Le Capitaine Fracasse is the manifestation and embodiment of Gautier's grotesque ideas: based on Scarron's *Le Roman comique* (1651-1657), its themes and style are in keeping with the aesthetic Gautier developed in *Les Grotesques* twenty years before its publication. The novel can be compared to a 'roman d'initiation', following a young man, Sigognac, as he leaves the family castle to try his luck with a troupe of comedians. The late creation of this work shows that Gautier's attachment to this aesthetic was not a whimsical leaning of a Jeune-France but a life-long commitment. The novel's relation to the grotesque has been analysed by several critics, who point out Rabelaisian traits as well as the ways in which the construction of the novel uses the arabesque as a cyclic motif. Jean-Claude Brunon or Elisheva Rosen highlight *Les Grotesques*' influence on the novel and the differences between Gautier's

and Hugo's definitions of the term.²⁸ Rae Beth Gordon singles out Gautier, Nerval, Huysmans, and Mallarmé as the four authors "in the forefront of a revaluation of ornament."²⁹ She justifies her choice of authors by pointing out their "concrete involvement in the decorative arts",³⁰ something also true of Wilde considering his essays and lectures on the subject.³¹

In contrast to Gautier's novel, Wilde's fairy tales are not the works in which one expects to see the presence of an ornamental style, at least not as much as it features in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for instance. The fact that Wilde continued with this style, regardless of genre, proves his commitment to it, and his desire to push the style to the extreme: the ornamental style appears in opposition to the genre, as some critics point out. Two monographs are devoted to the two volumes of fairy tales: Jarlath Killeen's *The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde* and Anne Markey's *Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales, Origins and Context*.³² The first volume highlights the critical opposition between two interpretations of the fairy tales: they are either seen as subversive, following the rest of Wilde's production; or are the sign of Wilde's moralism and Catholicism. The latter is favoured by Killeen who sees attacks on Aestheticism in the tales. Anne Markey concentrates her study on Wilde's Irishness and his relation to folklore and oral traditions. While both studies highlight important contradictions in Wilde's corpus, the ornamental style seems to challenge their reading of the tales since it is a sign of Wilde's continuation of Aestheticism. The articles focusing on the fairy

²⁸ Jean-Claude Brunon, 'Le pittoresque et l'expression de la durée dans *Le Capitaine Fracasse*', in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier*, Société Théophile Gautier (Montpellier: Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier, 1984), VI, pp. 125-134; Elisheva Rosen, 'Les Grotesques ou le grotesque? Aspects d'un débat Romantique', in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier*, Société Théophile Gautier (Montpellier: Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier, 1987), IX, pp. 91-102.

²⁹ Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire*, p. 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ 'The House Beautiful', 1882; 'The Decorative Arts', 1882; 'The Unity of the Arts', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 Dec 1887; 'A Fascinating Book', *Woman's World*, Nov 1888.

³² Jarlath Killeen, *The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde* (London: Routledge, 2016); Anne Markey, *Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales: Origins and Contexts* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2013).

tales seem to also fall in either one or the other category pointed out by Killeen: some enhance Wilde's subversion of the genre he is using, by pointing out the presence of homosexual subtexts, while others emphasize the tales' morality.³³

This chapter examines the presence of ornaments in the texts of Gautier and Wilde as the sign of their decadence. Furthering the analysis of the last chapter, it appears that the ornamental prose of Gautier and Wilde is at the centre of the aesthetic debate of the nineteenth century on the value of ornament in the decorative arts and in literature. This arabesque style is also the sign of a desired structural hybridity, and Wilde's experiments with the form of his works deconstruct the genre he was using, as Anne Markey notes: "the swallow's descriptions of Egypt exceed what is necessary to the plot. Wilde's ornate fusion of the fantastic and the exotic explodes in one long evocative sentence that mingles colours, textures and natural and enigmatic images in a succession of fluid appositional clauses [...]." ³⁴ Wilde's overflowing style transcended the boundaries of the fairy tale, in the same way as Gautier's "beau style onduleux et brillanté"³⁵ developed the image of a 'hard' yet sinuous arabesque, and made him one of the eccentric writers of his time.

Analysing Gautier's and Wilde's texts through the scope of the ornament seems to synthesize and encompass most of the specificities and singularities present in their corpuses: the deformation of the genre through their use of language (the aestheticized fantastic or ornate fairy tale), their leaning towards the visual and decorative arts, the devotion to aesthetic principles and Art for Art's Sake, their treatment of the word as a

³³ John-Charles Duffy, 'Gay-Related themes in the Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 29 (2001), pp. 327-349; Naomi Wood, 'Creating the Sensual Child: Paterian Aesthetics, Pederasty and Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales', *Marvels and Tales*, 16, 2 (2002), pp. 156-170. On morality, see Elizabeth Goodenough, 'Oscar Wilde, Victorian Fairy Tales, and the Meanings of Atonement', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 23 (1999), pp. 336-354; David M. Monaghan, 'The Literary Fairy-Tale: A Study of Oscar Wilde's 'The Happy Prince' and 'The Star-Child'', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 1 (1974), pp. 156-166.

³⁴ Markey, *Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales*, p. 97.

³⁵ Baudelaire, 'Théophile Gautier', p. 118.

jewel, the humour and distance present in their texts, in relation to the concept of the grotesque, their experimentation with hybridity in relation to the concepts of classicism and purity and, eventually, their redefinition of marginality as primordial. Comparing Gautier to Hugo then Wilde to Ruskin highlights the direct lineage between the two authors who deviated from the main voices of their periods.

The ornaments are omnipresent in the texts, either as physical objects, as concepts or translated into the style of the work. The ornament can be understood in two ways, which are not mutually exclusive: the first category comprises identified decorative features such as the arabesque, the rinceau or foliage; the second category suggests the “manner of treating something rather than the nature of what is represented.”³⁶ In the literary discourse about ornament, the two definitions of ornaments are usually fused together, where the ornamental style comes from decorative features such as stylistic figures. Ornaments, used in these two meanings by Gautier and Wilde in their works but also as structuring figures, are turned into the material space in which the two authors pondered the relation between art and ethics, and between art and beauty. Both authors followed a movement through which ornate-jewel words become the marginalia literally transferred from the margins onto the page. The first part of the chapter will investigate the relations between ornament and Decadence during the nineteenth century within the discourse surrounding the decorative arts and literature, and the second part examines the presence of ornaments in the texts under study and their effect.

³⁶ Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament*, p. 9.

1. The Ornament in the Nineteenth Century: The Sign of Decadence at the Heart of the Aesthetic Debate

A. Ornament and Fear

It is no surprise that art historians and theoreticians such as Adalbert de Beaumont, Jules Bourgoïn, Owen Jones, or Ruskin and Morris would write about ornaments during the nineteenth century.³⁷ Concerned with architecture or interior decoration, these authors pondered the value and effect of ornaments in the decorative arts. What is more surprising is when poets and literary critics engage with the debate on ornaments. Authors such as Maxime Du Camp did not appear to have any relation with the decorative arts but did participate in the discussion. Could it be a continuation of what Gautier called the “fraternisation des arts”,³⁸ or is it symptomatic of a deeper concern about the future of literature and, more generally, of art? What happened between Adalbert De Beaumont’s praise of Oriental ornament in the 1850s and Adolf Loos’ moral rejection of ornament as a crime in the beginning of the twentieth century? Starting from the assumption that ornaments are superfluous and redundant, the discourse on ornamentation seemed to harden during the second half of the century accompanying movements of alleged Decadence in architecture, sculpture, painting, and literature. Situated at the heart of the aesthetic debates of their periods, Gautier and Wilde emerged as the voices in favour of ornamentation, which they related to a defence of art’s independence from utilitarian motivations.

³⁷ Adalbert de Beaumont, *Recherches sur l'origine du blason et en particulier sur la fleur de lis* (Paris: A. Leleux, 1853); ‘Les Arts décoratifs en Orient et en France’, *La Revue des deux mondes* (1866); Jules Bourgoïn, *Théorie de l'ornement* (Paris: A. Lévy, 1873); Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*.

³⁸ “En ce temps-là, la peinture et la poésie fraternisaient”, *Critique artistique et littéraire*, p. 64.

In the aforementioned essay *Von Arabesken*, Goethe analysed how the ornamental motif was used in Antiquity, in particular in Pompeii. He affirmed that arabesques can be tolerated if “elles font office de cadre pour un art plus élevé.”³⁹ If the ornaments remain ornamental and serve the higher art they enhance then they are accepted. Since they are redundant to the structure of the painting, building or fresco they adorn, they must remain subservient to it. The discourse against ornamentation in the nineteenth century began with the development of the fear of their excess and eventually their overstepping the boundaries of mere adornment by this very excess and exuberance. In *The Stones of Venice* (1851), Ruskin directly related a luxuriance of ornament with “the debasement of all schools of art [...]”⁴⁰ He added: “I do not mean by *luxuriance* of ornament, *quantity* of ornament. [...] But I mean that character of extravagance in the ornament itself [...]”⁴¹ Therefore, it is not only the profusion but the extravagance in the ornaments themselves and the way in which they are presented which cause the decaying of art.

Freed from rationality and order, the ornament appeals mainly to the senses which leads Ruskin to yet another attack on it: its sensuality, “a lusciousness in arrangement of line, evidently arising out of an incapability of feeling the true beauty of chaste form and restrained power.”⁴² The sexual capacity of ornament will also be attacked by Adolf Loos, as this chapter will show, and utilized by Beardsley in drawings featuring sex-like ornaments, penis forms reproduced in the foliage and tree ornaments [see Figure 5], or the nipples echoed in the peacock’s tail [see Figure 6], an association which Wilde sustained in his fairy tales through the motif of the pomegranate, an ornament usually

³⁹ Goethe quoted in Peyrache-Leborgne, *Grotesques et arabesques dans le récit Romantique*, pp. 115-116.

⁴⁰ John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (London: Smith, Elder, 1853), p. 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*

associated with the female sexual organ. The curved, sinuous, never-ending, and serpentine form of the arabesque-ornament is indeed prone to induce sensuous thoughts and desires. These feelings are encouraged by the trance and fascination which a profusion of ornaments can create on our perceptions, provoking a loss of limits and to some extent a loss of inhibition, as Gordon points out: “ornament works on the viewer either by fascination or by fading into the background, where it is perceived almost subliminally.”⁴³

In a series of oppositions, the debate on ornament is imbued with moral terms which build on dichotomies such as pure against ornate, sane against insane, simplicity against profusion. The chaste and restrained form, which only can attain true beauty, partakes of the search for simple, classical lines in order to achieve pure beauty. Ruskin drew a parallel between the intellectual progress of a period, its use of ornament, and the quality of art ensuing from this situation: “in proportion as the ignorance and rudeness diminish, must the ornamentation become rational [...]”⁴⁴ Accompanying the idea of decaying periods, this sentence highlights another anti-ornament argument of the nineteenth century. In it are found the seeds of a racial discourse in which the Oriental origins of geometrical ornaments and the presence of ornaments in all cultures (Maori tattoos, African jewels, Japanese masks) equate ornaments with the form of art of the barbarians, which is unfit for a civilized country, and analogous to Baudelaire’s reservations on sculpture seen in Chapter I. Indeed, Owen Jones points out in a chapter on the ornaments of savage tribes how “from the universal testimony of travellers it would appear, that there is scarcely a people, in however early a stage of civilisation, with whom the desire to ornament is not a strong instinct.”⁴⁵ In periods when ornaments

⁴³ Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire*, p. 18.

⁴⁴ Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, p. 144.

⁴⁵ Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, p. 13.

disturb clean and classical lines, the art is decadent, and returns to its stammering infancy.

As seen through Nisard's analysis of the decline of Latin poets, Ruskin reproduced a ternary division of time explained by Henri Focillon: "we are exceedingly reluctant to surrender the isochronal concept of time, for we confer upon any such equal measurements not only a metrical value that is beyond dispute, but also a kind of organic authority."⁴⁶ He continues: "making each century begin with a kind of childhood which is continued by youth, and which in its turn is replaced by maturity and then by senility."⁴⁷ Ruskin's appropriation of the notion of the three ages is as follows: "Early Renaissance, consisting of the first corruptions introduced into the Gothic schools: Central or Roman Renaissance, which is the perfectly formed style: and Grotesque Renaissance, which is the corruption of the Renaissance itself."⁴⁸

William Morris, who developed Ruskin's ideas on art, also subscribed to the concept of a cyclic history: "this was the growth of art: like all growth, it was good and fruitful for awhile; like all fruitful growth, it grew into decay: like all decay of what was once fruitful, it will grow into something new."⁴⁹ The last age, which corresponds to the *fin de siècle*, is always the decadent one. The analysis of Gautier's *Les Grotesques* will show that the French author had a different view of time, and he exposed the artificiality of a cyclic history. For Ruskin, an ornament which "has neither meaning nor heart in it",⁵⁰ a simple decorative motif, cannot be civilized, and is seen as going back to a primitive stage.

⁴⁶ Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), p. 138.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴⁸ Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁹ William Morris, 'The Lesser Arts', in *Hopes and Fear for Art: Five Lectures Delivered in Birmingham, London, and Nottingham, 1878-1881*, 3rd ed. (London: Ellis & White, 1883), p. 10.

⁵⁰ Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, p. 144.

As flowing descriptions were the signs of a decadent literature for Nisard, the idle ornament becomes the symptom of the decay of the decorative arts. However, it appears that the attacks on ornaments in the decorative arts also resonated in nineteenth-century literature. Maxime Du Camp, a French writer who knew Gautier and who was involved in *La Revue des deux mondes* to which Gautier also contributed, directly associated decadent art, and especially literature, with an excess of ornamentation in the preface of *Les Chants modernes* (1855): “L’art en est arrivé à une époque de décadence manifeste [...]. Un excès ridicule d’ornementation a remplacé la richesse et la pureté des lignes.”⁵¹ Developing the same opposition between ornamentation and purity and simplicity, he explained how ornamentation in literature works: “On accumule images sur images, hyperboles sur hyperboles, périphrases sur périphrases; on jongle avec les mots, on saute à travers des cercles de périodes, on danse sur la corde roide des alexandrins [...].”⁵²

The accumulation of literary figures, visual and sensual imagery is what Du Camp saw as an ornate style, equating the figures used in the texts with the manner in which they are presented, fusing together the ornament as a figure and the ornament as a style. The nature of what is represented in the texts is therefore directly defined by its treatment, blurring the frontier between form and content. However, according to him, this style in itself was but a symptom of a larger problem in literature: “la pensée ne se formule plus; la forme seule se contourne et se tourmente pour voiler le squelette qu’elle habille.”⁵³ Du Camp saw in this ornate style the foregrounding of form over content. Attempting to hide the fact that they have no ideas, deep thoughts or new stories, writers work on their style instead of trying to produce modern works. These ideas are familiar

⁵¹ Maxime Du Camp, *Les Chants modernes* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1855), p. 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

to this thesis and have indeed been used as attacks on Gautier's works. And indeed, Du Camp explained how: "Il me semble que les temps de l'école de l'art pour l'art sont passés à jamais; on demande à un artiste maintenant autre chose que des phrases harmonieuses et convenablement découpées."⁵⁴ This is one of the first instances in which an ornate style in literature is associated with Art for Art's Sake. Du Camp reduced Gautier's doctrine to a style of writing in which an ornamental prose becomes the artist's aim in his production. Using ornaments both as form and content, Gautier questioned their artificial division.

The key to understanding the escalation of the attacks against ornaments during the second half of the nineteenth century lies in Gautier's development of his doctrine and its influence on fin de siècle writers in France and in Britain. While the ornament represented for Gautier the product of a fanciful imagination, and therefore exemplified what he was trying to achieve in literature, setting himself as far from copying nature as possible, it also epitomized the gratuity and uselessness or impracticality of art. Ornaments adorn: their sole aim is to beautify an object, a building, a text. As Oleg Grabar argues, they are "exclusively calliphoric [...]."⁵⁵ They do not answer to any external motive. *Caprices et zigzags* is a very heteroclite volume composed of pieces of travel descriptions, and scene depictions in which the title describes the indefinable agglomeration of images and ideas which constitute it, the volume being structurally akin to an arabesque. In several pieces, Gautier alluded to ornaments, more specifically Oriental ones, and he expanded on the relation between the beauty and refinement of their ornaments and their philosophy of art, through which they seek beauty before

⁵⁴ Du Camp, *Les Chants modernes*, p. 38.

⁵⁵ Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament*, p. 26.

comfort or utility: “le confortable, qui serait peut être une gêne dans les pays chauds, n’existe pas pour eux; la beauté y passe avant la commodité.”⁵⁶

Displayed as the symbol of Gautier’s desire to free art from utility, the ornament encapsulates his aesthetic doctrine. In the volume, the ornament is used by Gautier in order to question the preconceptions about good taste and the way in which these preconceptions helped build a colonial ideology. He described in ‘Voyage Hors Barrières’ (the absence of limits is also telling in relation to ornaments) a bull-fight in which he affirmed that “quant au reproche de barbarie, il est peu ou point fondé,” and depicted the “capricieuses arabesques” formed by the guts of disembowelled dogs which “le jeune et vigoureux taureau d’Espagne faisait sauter en l’air.”⁵⁷ The gory exaggeration mingled with the ornamental grace of the arabesque shows how taste is a fabricated concept: what appears barbaric to some can be beautiful to others.

And Gautier went far in his rehabilitation of the ornament. Playing with the association between the ornament and the barbaric, he affirmed that “le goût de l’ornement distingue l’homme de la brute plus nettement que toute autre particularité,”⁵⁸ a statement which Wilde would re-use by developing the idea that the desire to ornate fully develops mankind, as will be shown later in the chapter. Even tattoos and piercings, which will become the example of the ornament’s link with criminality for Adolf Loos, were deemed interesting: “le sauvage qui se tatoue, se barbouille de rouge ou de bleu [...] obéit à un sentiment confus de la beauté”; “la narine gauche percée [...] au premier abord, cet ornement semble d’un goût barbare; mais l’on s’y accoutume bien vite, et l’on finit par y trouver une grâce dépravée et piquante [...]”.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *Caprices et zigzags* (Paris: Hachette, 1856), p. 321.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 316, p. 417.

Gautier's love for Oriental art was excessive for Du Camp, who, in his study of the French writer in *Les Grands Ecrivains français* (1890), ridiculed this art: "Il est bon d'admirer l'architecture arabe, mais il faut admettre que les nations ne vivent pas que de colonettes, de stalactites sculptées et d'archivoltes brodées en stuc."⁶⁰ The embellishments, "fioritures", which are deemed unnecessary and somewhat superfluous in the existence of an empire, are indeed ornaments, and Du Camp seems to reason against Gautier in his devotion to ornaments and their importance. In a veiled criticism related to his 1855 preface, he praised Gautier's exuberant style in *Le Capitaine Fracasse*: "le sujet, je l'ai déjà dit, est toujours d'une extrême simplicité, mais l'écrivain a su le parer et l'envelopper, parfois jusqu'à le faire disparaître, d'une forme élégante et touffue."⁶¹ His attack on ornamentation in literature already developed the same idea: that writers adorned their works because of the simplicity or absence of ideas. Du Camp's relation to Gautier was complex: his attack on Aestheticism seemed to be countered by his study of Gautier as one of the greatest French writers. However, his depiction of *Le Capitaine Fracasse* proves how, although beautiful, he did not necessarily see it as a serious or valuable work: it is "un ensemble charmant", "presque un conte de fées."⁶² While his frontal attack on ornamental literature in the 1855 preface seemed to alert writers to the dangers of a decadent art, his study of Théophile Gautier surreptitiously eroded Gautier's importance and influence by classifying his work as simply ornamental, merely complex in style while too simplistic in content.

⁶⁰ Maxime Du Camp, *Les Grands Ecrivains français* (Paris: Hachette, 1893), p. 109.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 146.

B. Ornament and Oriental or Barbaric Art

The French art historian, Adalbert de Beaumont, shared Gautier's belief that Oriental art had value for nineteenth-century western civilizations. In the same way as Gautier saw the ornament as the symbol of a new art freed from social, religious, and political agendas, Beaumont believed that the ornate Oriental art could save art from its decadence brought forth by the Renaissance: "[Renaissance] que nous appelons, nous, la décadence [...] l'a [l'art] conduit droit au paganisme, au matérialisme; c'est elle qui, on peut l'affirmer logiquement, a engendré la philosophie voltairienne et toutes ces révolutions [...] qui nous perdent aujourd'hui."⁶³ Turning the argument upside down, Beaumont affirmed that the return to ornamentation would signify the apogee of a civilization, not its decadence.

These debates surrounding the place and value of the ornament during the nineteenth century show how closely it was related to the concept of decadence in art. Most saw this decadence as already happening as early as the 1850s both in France and in Great Britain and, whether they believed ornaments to be the cause of this decadence or the solution against it, they all involved ornaments in their arguments. However, knowing how provocative Gautier and Wilde can be when it comes to their position on art, can we assume that they believed decadence to be a negative concept?

Even though Wilde had a more 'Ruskinian' view of the question, he did not propose to save art from its decadence. The way in which the two authors discussed the issue shows knowledge of other texts on the matter, where Gautier referred to the way in which ornaments were said to be barbaric, and where Wilde appropriated Gautier's and Ruskin's ideas. We have to assume that they were well aware of going against the

⁶³ de Beaumont, *Recherches sur l'origine du blason*, p. 92.

doxa on the question of ornaments, and capitalizing on ornaments as countercultural. Gordon notes how Nerval, Gautier, Mallarmé, and Huysmans “capitalized on the general perception of ornament as peripheral and nonsignifying.”⁶⁴ For Gautier, ornaments are peripheral and do not have to signify anything, which was indeed something he cherished about them as pure creations. But that does not mean that he did not exploit this alleged lack of meaning. While he played with the gratuity of ornaments, he was simultaneously symbolically adding meaning to them as emblems of his ideal art. For both authors, ornaments represented what they could not find in classical beauty and systems. They praised ornaments for their freedom, caprice, eroticism, exoticism, and primitivism.

The success of their capitalization of ornaments as countercultural showed in the complete rejection of ornaments as criminal, a view that was gaining currency at the beginning of the twentieth century. Adolf Loos, an Austrian architect and theorist, wrote the very straightforward essay *Ornament and Crime* in 1908 in which he announced the end of ornamentation as a way to free the artisan from unnecessary hard work: “ornament means wasted labor and therefore wasted health.”⁶⁵ Not only was the ornament immoral in the way in which it forced the worker to do long hours – Loos subscribing to a somewhat Marxist aesthetic theory – but it also tainted art for the Austrian architect: “a plain piece of furniture is more beautiful than your museum pieces with all their inlay work and carving. Goethe’s language is more beautiful than all the flowery language of the Nuremberg pastoral poets.”⁶⁶

Considering Goethe’s position on ornaments, it is not surprising that Loos would quote the German writer in order to expand his theory to literature. Going a step

⁶⁴ Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire*, p. 6.

⁶⁵ Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays* (Riverside, Calif.: Ariadne Press, 1998), p. 171.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

further from nineteenth-century theoreticians who made the distinction between good art and ornate art, Loos performed the separation between art and ornaments: the latter was no longer part of the former. In other essays, Loos related the use of ornaments with the decadence of culture ('Cultural Degeneration' (1908)) and again pushed the argument further in 'Architecture' (1910) in which this decay, caused by ornamentation, is related to criminal drives (themselves related to erotic desires): "le tatouage est un signe de dégénérescence et n'est plus en usage que chez les criminels et les aristocrates dégénérés."⁶⁷ The racial discourse that accompanies the anti-ornament argument was also present in Loos' essays, in which the degeneration of aristocrats comes from their appropriation of barbaric ornaments. Loos also asserted his desire to see a town freed from ornaments using the common equation relating purity to whiteness: "les rues des villes vont resplendir comme de blanches murailles."⁶⁸

In 'La Cité Potemkine' (1898), Loos also argued against man-made material, or fake materials used in ornamentation which imitate other nobler ones:

Ces palais Renaissance et baroques ne sont pas même constitués du matériau dans lequel ils paraissent fabriqués. Ils donnent l'illusion d'être bâtis tantôt en pierre, comme les palais romans et toscans, tantôt en stuc, comme les édifices baroques de Vienne. En réalité, ils ne sont faits ni d'un matériau ni de l'autre: leurs détails ornementaux, leurs consoles, leurs couronnes de fruits, leurs cartouches et leurs dentelures sont du ciment cloué.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Adolf Loos, *Ornement et Crime* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2003), p. 80. The English collection of Loos' essays quoted before does not include some featured in this French volume and are therefore quoted in French.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

The attack on ornaments based on their artificiality was not a new one. Ruskin had already created a distinction between good ornaments which humans create to reproduce nature and bad ones which are machine-made: “it is not the material but the absence of human labour, which makes the thing worthless [...]”.⁷⁰ Ruskin saw evil in the purposeful deceit that accompanied machine-made ornaments, which suggested or represented something that they were not: “as a woman of feeling would not wear false jewels, so would a builder of honour disdain false ornaments. The using of them is just as downright and inexcusable a lie. You use that which pretends to a worth which it has not [...]”.⁷¹ Valuing truth above all, Ruskin would prefer a world devoid of ornament rather than deceived by it: “Nobody wants ornaments in this world, but every body wants integrity.”⁷² But such ornaments were not only immoral, they were also “ugly” and “monstrous”, “different from anything which it is the nature of man to admire [...]”.⁷³ A good ornament must therefore be man-made and imitate or suggest nature.

Interestingly, we find a similar argument in Wilde’s essay ‘The House Beautiful’ delivered in 1882 as one of the American lectures:

Let there be no sham imitation of one material in another, such as paper representing marble, or wood painted to resemble stone, and have no machine-made ornaments. Let us have everything perfectly bare of ornament rather than have any machine-made ornament; ornament should represent the feeling in a man’s life, as of course nothing machine-made can do [...].⁷⁴

⁷⁰ John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London: Smith, Elder, 1849), p. 50.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁷⁴ ‘The House Beautiful’, in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), p. 914.

According to this text, Wilde placed himself next to Ruskin on the question of ornaments, and distanced himself from Gautier's Art for Art's Sake doctrine. This moralizing judgment on art and ornaments opened the way to analysing his fairy tales as moral texts in opposition to the rest of his fictional corpus as Killeen does:

Wilde is collectively understood, and written about, as a subversive writer, an amoral aesthete and an enemy of Victorian social and sexual values, a judgment based on the corpus of works that generally engage interpreters' critical faculties, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, (1891), the critical essays, and the five major plays. In a strange way the two collections of fairy tales he wrote appear somehow anomalous, tangential, if not entirely unrelated to his canon [...].⁷⁵

How can one account for the gap between these two visions, one that makes him state in the preface of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that morality does not exist in art in 1891 while writing the same year in *A House of Pomegranates* about the glory of God's values "on the loom of sorrow, and by the white hands of Pain, has this my robe been woven. There is Blood in the heart of the ruby, and Death in the heart of the pearl"?⁷⁶

C. Ornament and Aestheticism

Several critics have indeed argued for a moral reading of the fairy tales, in direct opposition to Wilde's other works. Jarlath Killeen analyses the Christian subtext of the two volumes of the fairy tales, showing how Wilde seems to turn towards religion and away from amoral aesthetic principles. For instance, he sees in 'The Nightingale and the Rose' and particularly in the professor's daughter's rejection of the rose in favour

⁷⁵ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1.

⁷⁶ 'The Young King', in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), p. 219.

of jewels a strike against ornamentation: “Christianity has traditionally disapproved of any over interest by women in bodily ornamentation and warned that it stemmed from sin not grace.”⁷⁷ The daughter is unable to recognize the natural higher value of the rose against the material value of jewels which, she says, “cost far more than flowers.”⁷⁸ This would tally with interpretations of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a moral tale in which Dorian’s love for ornaments, particularly visible in Chapter XI, is portrayed as yet another of his moral flaws. However, it seems that Wilde’s complete approval and praise of Christian morals is unlikely given that Wilde criticized nature in art through his attacks on realism, and that he celebrated writers like Gautier, Baudelaire, Stendhal, or Huysmans.

Besides, Killeen appears to equate ornamentation with a form of materialism, which Wilde did not. Killeen points out similar moral attacks in other tales, arguing of ‘The Young King’ that it depicts the corruption of a young boy “into the perverted worship of the things of the empire (the aesthetic ornaments of imperial exploitation)”, of ‘The Birthday of the Infanta’ as an “apparent critique of the aesthetic movement contained in the narrative undermining of the artificiality of the Infant’s beauty”, and of ‘The Fisherman and his Soul’, the most stylistically ornate tale as engaging with “discourses of sexual transgression.”⁷⁹ Wilde’s devotion to Christian morality would entail that he must stand against ornamentation, which reinforces the arguments of the anti-ornament discourse that praises simplicity, purity, and truth against the ornament’s deceit, excess, and sensuality. It seems to suggest that there is no other way than this binary division in respect of ornaments in the nineteenth century: on the one hand, there are the purists who advocate for control (or simple disappearance) in ornamentation in

⁷⁷ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde*, p. 52.

⁷⁸ ‘The Nightingale and the Rose’, in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), p. 281.

⁷⁹ Killeen, *The Fairy Tales*, p. 109, p. 125, p. 141.

the name of morality; on the other hand, there are the aesthetes or decadents who praise ornaments and their amorality who are in turn deemed immoral by the purists.

David M. Monaghan analyses 'The Happy Prince' in relation to the two different standpoints:

By presenting the town councillors, who say that the prince is 'as beautiful as a weathercock...only not quite so useful' as Utilitarians and the Art Professor, who says of the prince, after he has sacrificed all his jewels and gold, "As he is no longer beautiful, he is no longer useful" as a follower of the Art for Art's Sake creed, Wilde locates his story's selfish characters specifically within the nineteenth century.⁸⁰

What Monaghan considers to be the sign of a follower of the Art for Art's Sake creed is but a reformulation of the Utilitarian position. The second proposition, "as he is no longer beautiful, he is no longer useful", still infers a relation between beauty and utility which cannot partake of the Art for Art's Sake doctrine since purpose cannot enter artistic creation or aesthetic judgment.

It is clear that Wilde had an interest in the question and devoted several essays to the decorative arts. In a review of Lefébure's *History of Embroidery and Lace*, he stated that it "is one of the most fascinating books that has appeared on this delightful subject",⁸¹ suggesting that he had indeed read numerous volumes on ornamentation. The Orientalism, present in several fairy tales, shows his fascination for this civilization and its importance for the Western world: "From the East cometh everything that is wise."⁸² On various occasions, Wilde associated the decorative arts with Gautier. He

⁸⁰ Monaghan, 'The Literary Fairy Tale', p. 165.

⁸¹ 'A Fascinating Book' [WW, 2.14 (Nov. 1888), 108-12] *Journalism*, ed. by John Stokes and Mark W. Turner, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), VII, p. 88.

⁸² 'The Fisherman and his Soul', in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), p. 244.

would, for instance, imagine Gautier's copy of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in paradise as "powdered with gilt asphodel",⁸³ insisting on the physical aspect of the book and its appeal as an object. He also united the French writer with the concept of colour: "You have done the only translation of Théophile Gautier which has the music and colour and form of the original",⁸⁴ "There is not a single colour [...] to which [...] my nature does not answer. Like Gautier I have always been one of those *pour qui le monde visible existe*."⁸⁵ The association seemed so natural for Wilde that it sometimes appeared to be rather random to the exterior eye:

I would have liked to have gone to the National Gallery with you, and looked at Velasquez' pale evil king, [...] at that strange heaven of Angelico's where everyone seems made of gold and purple and fire, and which, for all that, looks to me ascetic- everyone dead and decorative! I wonder will it really be like that, but I wonder without caring. *Je trouve la terre aussi belle que le ciel, et le corps aussi beau que l'âme*.⁸⁶

The quotation which comes from *Mademoiselle de Maupin* seems indeed rather gratuitous in this context and only proves how Wilde directly correlated Gautier with ornaments, and the way in which Wilde used Gautier's texts as ornaments in his own work, which created decorative patterns of intertextuality.

Wilde's essay, 'The Decorative Arts', dealt more specifically with ornaments. At first, it seems that Wilde was following Ruskin's lead on the matter, involving questions of truth in art and the idea that art can improve mankind, which therefore

⁸³ To the Editor of the *Scots Observer*, [13 August 1890], [16 Tite Street], *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 446.

⁸⁴ To Theodore Tilton [Postmark 14 November 1882], [48 West 11st Street [New York]], *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 190.

⁸⁵ *De Profundis*, p. 192.

⁸⁶ To H.C. Marillier, MS Hyde, [Postmark 8 November 1885], [Station Hotel, Newcastle-on-Tyne], *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 267.

imbued the artistic discourse with moral principles. However, it seems that Wilde distanced himself from Ruskin on several occasions, taking his argument in another direction. For instance, when Wilde spoke of art as “the best educator”, he affirmed that “if you teach a boy art, the beauty of form and colour will find its way into his heart, and he will love nature more; for there is no better way to learn to love nature than to understand art- it dignifies every flower of the field.”⁸⁷

Unsurprisingly, art magnified nature for Wilde, which allowed him to reaffirm the supremacy of art over nature, a concept in opposition to Ruskin’s ideal of art which is to be found in nature. He continued: “art culture will do more to train children to be kind to animals and all living things than all our harrowing moral tales [...]”⁸⁸ This statement seems to contradict the possibility of a moral reading of Wilde’s works: he believed that art in itself, devoid of moral purposes and principles, was more moral or beneficial to mankind. Wilde drew the line between usefulness and practicality in regards to art and ornaments: “we are told that this is a practical age, and in the rush of business men have no time to think of delicate ornaments [...]. We are told that if articles in everyday use are only honestly made, we are satisfied if they are not ornamental.”⁸⁹ Wilde therefore did not subscribe to the idea that because ornaments were not essential they should be destroyed. He believed that, “unless we are content to be something less than men”,⁹⁰ men needed ornaments in art and could not be satisfied with the knowledge that honesty partook of the creation of everyday articles. Against what Loos would later claim, Wilde wished the everyday life to be ornate. The need for ornamentation relates it to the usefulness of art, which he later asserted: “we must not be deceived by the attempt to draw the fine line of distinction between what

⁸⁷ ‘The Decorative Arts’, p. 936.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 927.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 926.

is beautiful and what is useful. Utility is always on the side of the beautifully decorated article and the skill of the workman.”⁹¹

In what appears to go against Art for Art’s Sake and Aestheticism, Wilde stated that beauty and use cannot be separated. However, the way in which he related the two concepts is different to the Utilitarian standpoint: while the latter would suggest that something useful is beautiful in large part because of its usefulness, Wilde affirmed that an artwork is useful because it is beautiful and that beauty is something to seek in order to achieve man’s destiny as man. To some extent, he stated that artworks were moral because they are ornate. In fulfilling the inherent desire to beautify their environment, people become more than what they are. Wilde’s position on the question of ornaments is complex as he seems to have absorbed different traditions, but it becomes clear that Wilde desired ornamentation to be part of the realm of art. He also seems to subscribe to Gautier’s love for the ornaments’ freedom since he regretted the way in which the world in which he was living neglected them for their uselessness and impracticality. If Wilde’s position on the matter is not as clear as Gautier’s, and can even appear contradictory, his practice of the ornamental style in his texts cannot be questioned.

2. Arabesque Style and Ornamental Word

A. Patterns

The first characteristic that ties together Gautier’s and Wilde’s texts as ornamental is the concept of patterning. Their construction, individually, as volumes and in relation to each other, emphasizes echoes, repetitions and cyclic movements that create

⁹¹ ‘The Decorative Arts’, p. 928.

continuity between them. This structural trait also plays with intertextuality and weaves it into the architecture of the text. Similarly to the hieroglyphs in Egyptian monuments, the ornamental figure of the pattern is integrated into the organization of the texts. In doing so, Gautier and Wilde questioned the supererogatory quality of the ornament by making the pattern structural and meaningful.

The way in which Wilde's fairy tales work together and the way in which the two volumes relate to each other has been analysed by several critics. Philip Cohen suggests that the tales of *A House of Pomegranates* "have little more in common than a more ornate style and more intimately autobiographical import than the tales of *The Happy Prince*."⁹² The volume would be a collage of texts, brought together by a zigzag or bric à brac principle, not unlike Gautier's volume *Caprices et zigzags*. The second volume of Wilde's tales is often seen as more complex than *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888), in relation to its ornate language which is, for Cohen, its main uniting trait. Kate Pendlebury argues that there are more unifying features in the volume and proposes to envisage the volume as a house, each story filling a space inside of it. The motif of the pomegranate is a recurrent theme throughout the volume and creates resonances between the tales. Pendlebury also points out closer associations, particularly between 'The Young King' and 'The Star-Child', "stories that follow an almost identical pattern".⁹³ These sequences that Wilde applies to his tales with little or no change not only unite them but also produce a nagging repetitive rhythm. This rhythm can be related to the fairy tale genre, which, one assumes, is meant to be read to children as bedtime stories and is therefore meant to lull one to sleep through a repetitive soporific tempo.

⁹² Philip Cohen quoted in Kate Pendlebury, 'The Building of *A House of Pomegranates*', *Marvels & Tales*, 25 (2011), pp. 124-141, p. 124.

⁹³ Pendlebury, 'The Building of *A House of Pomegranates*', p. 130.

But this construction also relates to ornamental patterns which work in a similar way through mesmeric, hypnotic effects. As Gordon argues, “something can become ornamental by simple repetition [...]”⁹⁴ And indeed, Wilde used repetitions of themes and structures inside the tales. Anaphoric constructions are numerous, pertaining to the incantatory tempo of the texts, as well as suggesting a cyclic construction: “the young Witch knew his coming, and she laughed and let down her red hair. With her red hair falling around her, she stood at the opening of the cave [...]”⁹⁵ Not only do the cyclic structures create returns and echoes throughout the text, which is enhanced by the use of the ternary rhythm, it suggests that the stories offer no solution, no answer as the endings mirror the beginnings. In this infinite loop, the texts seem to go nowhere as they mimic the capricious curls of the arabesque, curving inwards, outwards, or ending abruptly.

But the volume does not only work individually, it also echoes the first volume of fairy tales. Like the motif of the pomegranate, the nightingale haunts both volumes. Figuring as a main character in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* in ‘The Nightingale and the Rose’, it becomes a background pattern in several tales of *A House of Pomegranates*. For instance, the singing nightingale comes both in ‘The Young King’ and ‘The Fisherman and His Soul’: “Far away, in an orchard, a nightingale was singing”,⁹⁶ “from one of them a nightingale was singing.”⁹⁷ The fact that Wilde situated the nightingale “far away” enhances the idea of a background throbbing pattern, of a distant echo.

More surprisingly, echoes of other works can also be found in the fairy tales. For instance, the mystery of the young king’s birth and origin strongly recalls Dorian’s

⁹⁴ Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire*, p. 13.

⁹⁵ ‘The Fisherman and his Soul’, p. 239.

⁹⁶ ‘The Young King’, p. 215.

⁹⁷ ‘The Fisherman and His Soul’, p. 250.

own troubled past. 'The Young King' is the main protagonist of the fairy tale who, preparing for his coronation, dreams about the suffering caused by his extravagant expenses. The alleged young king's father is indeed described as "a young man of marvellous and foreign beauty, whose hands were tied behind him with a knotted cord, and whose breast was stabbed with many red wounds."⁹⁸ Suggesting a similar pattern as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in which the mother fell in love with a young man whom her father did not approve of, the origin of the king is equally shrouded in mystery and tainted by murder and passion, which somehow predestined both characters. The analogy between both young men is sustained through the tale where Wilde insisted on the young king's love for everything beautiful: "signs of that strange passion for beauty that was destined to have so great an influence over his life."⁹⁹ The concept of influence, dominant in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is again recycled in this tale, producing more than mere echoes between the two works: the Young King seems to be another version of Dorian. The continuity between Wilde's texts seems to disavow the idea that there is a divorce between his subversive works and his moral tales. The recurring patterns prove that it is the work of the same man, that his works are related and their themes and styles are not alien or contradictory.

Another significant echo present in the tales is Wilde referring to Gautier's works. 'The Fisherman and his Soul' is centred around a young man's magical dissociation of his soul and his body in order to live in the sea with the mermaid he loves. The character of the priest in the fairy tale recalls *La Morte amoureuse's* Sérapion: for a priest he is ready to judge very quickly, and his actions eventually try to prevent the hero's happiness. Both stand for erroneous Christian values that are

⁹⁸ 'The Young King', p. 213.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

challenged and tested by the appearance of otherness (Clarimonde, the mermaid) as well as the hero's pure love for this creature. While Sérapion never falters in his beliefs, Wilde's priest is proven wrong by the sudden proliferation of flowers in his parish. It seems clear that Andersen's tales were a major influence for 'The Fisherman and His Soul',¹⁰⁰ but Gautier's *La Morte amoureuse* had also left its mark on Wilde's imagination. As Romuald's personality is split in two, so is the fisherman's character divided between his soul and his heart.

It is also similarly suggested that the priest's violence against the creature he has to face in the tale comes from his own temptation to join her: "accursed be the singers of the sea! I have heard them at night-time, and they have sought to lure me from my beads. They tap at the window and laugh. They whisper into my ears the tale of their perilous joys. They tempt me with temptations [...]"¹⁰¹ The last repetition suggests confusion in the priest's discourse when he describes how the sea people make him feel, proving their influence on him. But Wilde did not simply produce echoes of themes between his tales and Gautier's texts, he borrowed patterns of scenes from the French author. In 'The Young King' Wilde intended to show the extent of the king's love for beauty, which leads the hero to behave abnormally when faced with a beautiful statue: "pressing his warm lips to the marble brow of an antique statue [...]"¹⁰² The scene works exactly like the one in *La Toison d'or* in which the hero kisses his beloved painted Madonna, which gives way to what could be called in both cases artophilia, a perversion also suffered by Dorian Gray and the hero of *Arria Marcella*.

The two corpuses are also related by their use of echoes and borrowings. In the same way that Wilde used Gautier's works in order to reproduce scenes from the French

¹⁰⁰ See Christopher S. Nassaar, 'Andersen's 'The Shadow' and Wilde's 'The Fisherman and His Soul': A Case of Influence', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 50 (1995), pp. 217-224.

¹⁰¹ 'The Fisherman and His Soul', p. 238.

¹⁰² 'The Young King', p. 214.

writer's works, Gautier seemed to copy and paste patterns of genre situations. The ending of *Le Capitaine Fracasse* is the perfect example of Gautier's playing with conventions. The first ending of the novel was indeed very different from the one included in the published novel: Sigognac killed Vallombreuse, preventing any future reunion between the former and Isabelle. The baron then died alone in poverty in his castle. His publisher urged Gautier to change this dark and cyclic ending, which gave birth to the fairy tale ending that was published: Sigognac and Isabelle marry and Sigognac finds a treasure in his garden. As a late addition, the ending partakes of Gautier's reflection on what is essential and structural and what is not. Considering how other endings were contemplated and could have been used as well, is the fairy tale version truly part of the rest of the novel or is it simply present to ornate it beautifully, to encase its ending within a pleasant frame? As Wilde played with the independence of his tales inside a volume, Gautier seemed to suggest the autonomy of scenes or chapters of his novel and questioned preconceptions of what was structurally necessary or ornamental.

In *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, Gautier included reminders of his other works as either direct references or echoing scenes. He alluded to "l'anneau de Gygès" as a reference to *Le Roi Candaule* (1844), and also mentioned *Omphale*, or *Jettatura* (1856).¹⁰³ Gautier even ironically subverted his own work in a pastiche of *La Morte amoureuse*: "quelque beauté morte, amoureuse de moi pendant sa vie, qui m'aura baisé en songe tandis que je dormais. Les baisers des morts impriment en la chair, comme chacun sait, des meurtrissures dont on s'étonne au réveil."¹⁰⁴ The common knowledge of such an event is obviously not that common at all, and the reader knows that this

¹⁰³ *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, in *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, ed. by Pierre Laubriet et al., 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2002), II, p. 736; "Omphale m'eût tiré les bottes". *Ibid.*, pp. 748-9; "ses yeux lançaient des regards fauves pareils à ceux des jettatores et des basilics". *Ibid.*, p. 1029.

¹⁰⁴ *Fracasse*, pp. 764-5.

uncanny explanation is merely a cover for the beating the character receives at the hand of a jealous husband. What appeared exceptional, frightening, and seducing in *La Morte amoureuse* becomes banal and humorous in *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. Gautier even quoted Shakespeare again, in another distorted misquotation already encountered in this thesis: “il comprenait que la roue de son char un moment lancé sur une autre route était retombée dans son ornière fatale”,¹⁰⁵ enhancing the initial cyclic ending of the novel, still apparent here.

The curved and sinuous rhythm of the texts under study follows the line of the arabesque, curving inwards “in a gesture of closure and swings outward again to engender new arabesques.”¹⁰⁶ The inherent polysemous movement of the arabesque is suggested in the texts through echoes, patterns, and closed repetitions. Jean-Claude Brunon notes how “les hésitations, les bifurcations, les improvisations en cours de rédaction, ne font qu’enrichir l’arabesque ou la compliquer, de quelques mascarons ou de quelques courbes supplémentaires.”¹⁰⁷ The complication and confusion brought by the arabesque partakes of the vertigo of the charming rhythm, which overwhelms the structure. In the Avant-Propos of his novel, Gautier affirmed that “*Le Capitaine Fracasse* n’a d’historique que la couleur du style. Les personnages s’y présentent comme dans la nature par leur forme extérieure, avec leur fond obligé de paysage ou d’architecture.”¹⁰⁸ The idea of a main motif being surrounded by an ornamental background is not new to this chapter, and Gautier obviously suggested, stating that

¹⁰⁵ *Fracasse*, pp. 1066-7.

¹⁰⁶ Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁷ Jean-Claude Brunon, ‘Perfection et ambiguïté du *Capitaine Fracasse*’, in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier*, Société Théophile Gautier (Montpellier: Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier, 1987), IX, pp. 171-182, p. 180.

¹⁰⁸ *Fracasse*, p. 639.

“c’est une oeuvre purement pittoresque”,¹⁰⁹ that the ornamental background is foregrounded and takes over the main motif.

The dichotomy – formed of the pairings foreground/structurally important and background/superfluous ornamentation – is constantly questioned in the novel, and Gautier plays with the excessive invasive presence of this ornate background, so much so that the reader loses himself or herself in it. It is particularly striking in the first chapter of the novel, in which the depiction of nature invading what remains of the Sigognac estate allows Gautier to turn his pages into a foliage-like jungle in which the ivy, in itself a common ornamental motif, envelops “l’une des tours”, and the vegetation has, figuratively and quite literally, overtaken the common thread or central plot: “le chemin qui menait de la route à l’habitation s’était réduit, par l’envahissement de la mousse et des végétations parasites [...]”.¹¹⁰ The optical effect created by this dizzying overtaking of the background is enhanced by the omnipresence of the sinuous twisted line: “un mince filet de fumée qui sortait d’un tuyau de briques et se tortillait en vrille comme dans ces dessins de maisons que les écoliers griffonnent sur les marges de leurs livres de classe [...]”.¹¹¹ The simile allows Gautier to refer to marginal drawings and therefore allude to the marginalia, mixtures of scribbles, and ornate motives displaced in the centre of the page in this exposition chapter.

Wilde’s tales seem to be disconcerting to critics because they do not comply with the particulars of the genre. The unhappy endings, echoing *Le Capitaine Fracasse*’s initial ending, contradict the necessary moral accompanying the resolution: all is well that ends well because the villains are punished and good people win. What Wilde proposed in the two volumes are fairy tales without morals. ‘The Devoted

¹⁰⁹ *Fracasse*, p. 638.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 641.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 642.

Friend', a tale filled with irrational claims and false assumptions,¹¹² foregrounds the art of story-telling in meta-fiction. Told by animals around a pond, the story is about an unfair friendship eventually leading to the death of the main character by lack of compassion from his alleged best friend. The Water-rat becomes angry when he hears that the story has a moral, and to the story-teller's regret at incorporating a moral in the following terms the Duck replies, "That is always a very dangerous thing to do."¹¹³ The narrator's voice is heard, the first and only time in the fairy tales, agreeing with the duck: "And I quite agree with her."¹¹⁴

Not only was Wilde advocating against the use of morals in stories, as this chapter has shown, but he also claimed that they are dangerous tools. It therefore seems dangerous to apply moral readings to these texts. The amoral reading seems to be the one that brings together the two volumes with the rest of Wilde's corpus, his beliefs expressed in his essays as well as his literary affiliations. However, most readings of Wilde's fairy tales, whether queer, social, religious, Irish, or related to genre, insist on the display and claim of marginality present in them.¹¹⁵

¹¹² For instance, the ducklings' mother tells them that "You will never be in the best society unless you can stand on your heads" which holds resemblance to the foregrounding of the artificiality of conventions of high society displayed in Wilde's social comedies, 'The Devoted Friend', in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), p. 286.

¹¹³ 'The Devoted Friend', p. 293.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ "Homosexuality falls outside the pale of blessedness. The metaphor of "outsidness" is particularly appropriate [...]" Duffy, 'Gay-Related Themes', p. 341; "The fairy-tale form operated in this marginal space, hovering between hegemony and rebellion, conservatism and subversion and thus was a suitable location for the site of social critique", Killeen, *The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde*, p. 24; "Jack Zipes' categorization of the fairy tales as subversive texts fitted well with a post-colonial reclamation of Wilde's Irish background", Markey, *Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales*, p. 5; "Carol Tattersal has suggested that the fairy tales represent 'and attempt to address their own marginal status as genre, and the notion of marginality in general', quoted by Duffy in 'Gay-Related Themes', p. 345.

B. Textures

The erosion of the centre, the decentred centre, or the re-evaluation of the margins are the different techniques used by Gautier and Wilde in order to highlight the way in which the system that assigns marginality to the decorative in literature is artificial. Ada Leverson prompted Wilde to produce a volume which was only decorative:

There was more margin; margin in every sense of the word was in demand, [...] the tiniest rivulet of text meandering through the very largest meadow of margin, I suggested to Oscar Wilde that he should go a step further than these minor poets; that he should publish a book all margin; full of beautiful unwritten thoughts, and have this blank volume bound in some Nile-green skin powdered with gilt nenuphars and smoothed with hard ivory, decorated with gold by Ricketts and printed on Japanese paper [...].¹¹⁶

Like medieval manuscripts, the whole of the text is not to be found on the page but some of its content is situated in the margins, suggesting, as Nicholas Frankel argues, that the text “conventionally considered the site of a book’s meaning, has been rendered negligible in the extreme.”¹¹⁷ As Wilde’s tales were originally much adorned,¹¹⁸ the original editions of Gautier’s *Le Capitaine Fracasse* were also decorated by sixty illustrations by Gustave Doré, the famous caricaturist who practised the grotesque. While Gautier’s novel complied with the standards of the time, his devotion to ornaments and the decorative arts suggested a stronger relation between the text and

¹¹⁶ Ada Leverson quoted in Nicholas Frankel, *Oscar Wilde’s Decorated Books* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ “The Happy Prince and Other Stories (1888) is remarkable for the experimental quality of its binding and for the intrusion of decorative elements into the body of the text.” *Ibid.*, p. 139.

the illustrations. The focus can therefore be shifted from the text to the illustrations, to the margins, or to the volume as a physical object.

Wilde's tales were published with illustrations. In the second edition of *The Happy Prince*, published in 1889, framed illustrations can be found at the beginning and ending of each tale that echo the themes of the tales. In *A House of Pomegranates*, Wilde rather obviously desired to ornate his collection even more by weaving ornaments into the body of the text. The cover of the hard copy is in itself a beautiful example of pre-Art Deco embellishment [figure 7], echoed in the exhibition pages [figures 8 and 9]. In contrast to the first collection of fairy tales, the illustrations are no longer framed, which suggests their incursion into the text [figures 10, 11, 14, and 16]. Occasionally, at the end of the paragraphs, the same flowers appear, punctuating the rhythm of the stories and linking the tales together through ornamentation. Other smaller illustrations can also be found outside the limits of the space of the text [figures 12, 13, and 15], suggesting that the reader should also look outside the frame of the textual space. This beautiful volume's visual components are strikingly elaborate and ornate, and tell of Wilde's vision of the physical object of the book. It also alludes to the limited view of the text as a rigid visual space that ostracizes visual components as subservient and marginal. This redefinition of limits and of the literary medium can also be found inside the text.

Indeed, Wilde and Gautier did not only experiment with the format and materiality of the volumes, they went a step further to include these margins in the body of the text and inside the language as decorative. These aesthetics of decentralization and the foregrounding of the margins erode these very concepts, and advocate for abnormal, or out of the norm works of art. The ornament becomes the sign and the vehicle through which both authors convey the idea of their own marginality while

playing with the conventions belonging to the centre. The excessive ornamentation of their prose, sometimes regarded as a mark of mannerism, did feed into their marginalization as writers: Gautier as an eccentric writer only devoted to Aestheticism, Wilde as a flamboyant queer author, his style related to his personal sexual preferences. This thesis has shown, however, that their insistence on style and form was not the mere manifestation of a lack of imagination, but rather was a doctrinal stance through which they fought for the artist's freedom. Aestheticism cannot be reduced to the "culte exclusif du beau". It is the cult of art, in its multiple manifestations of a protean beauty and a claim for art's freedom to treat any subject in any possible way, as well as the freedom to talk about nothing. These concepts seem to come directly from Gautier to Wilde. Even though the presence of Ruskin, Morris, or Baudelaire can be felt in Wilde's discourse on ornamentation, his practice of the ornamental style is more similar to Gautier's than to any other writer.

Playing with the concept of the margin, Gautier proposed a superimposition of background and marginal ornaments moving from afar to the foreground, while maintaining their ornamental qualities as ornate additions and beautifying agents. The arabesque line, also zigzag, was the model of Gautier's deployment of imagination in opposition to the straight line:

la ligne droite, celle de toutes les lignes qui déplaît le plus aux gens qui n'ont pas le bonheur d'être mathématiciens ou fabricants de chandelles, et qui ont conservé dans leur âme le sentiment du beau, provenant comme on sait, de l'emploi des lignes rondes et des zigzags, vérité très connue des enfants qui vont à l'école.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ *Caprices et Zigzags*, p. 72.

Once again, Gautier related the capricious beauty of the curved line with innocence against straight, serious, useful and therefore not beautiful lines.

The description of the ‘château de Bruyères’ proves Gautier’s playfulness in using zigzags and arabesques:

les portes s’accrochaient à deux piliers de métal quadrangulaires, travaillés et fouillés à jour, simulant un ordre d’architecture et portant une architrave au-dessus de laquelle s’épanouissait un buisson de rinceaux contournés, d’où partaient des feuillages et des fleurs se recourbant avec des symétries antithétiques. Au centre de ce fouillis ornemental [...].¹²⁰

Without logical or rational links, Gautier keeps adding things, creating a structure in which everything stems from something, hooks on something else, returns to its centre at the same time as it produces something else: it is indeed a jumble of ornaments. Eventually, the dizzying proliferation of marginal figures leads to a loss of orientation, where Gautier multiplies ornamental points of reference. The metaphor of the broken weathercocks, which all indicate a different spatial dimension, is particularly enlightening on that matter: “la rouille empêchait de tourner les girouettes, qui indiquaient toutes un vent différent [...]”¹²¹ The excessive ornamentation of the beginning of the novel prevents the reader from understanding the subject of the novel, and seemingly suggest that ornaments are indeed the points of reference of this work.

Wilde played along the same lines. Anne Markey notes how “the repeated use of ‘and’ produces an oral, childlike form of hypotactical syntax, heaping clause upon clause, sentence upon sentence, in an outpouring of exuberant wonder.”¹²² It is particularly visible in ‘The Young King’ in which Wilde accumulated arabesque

¹²⁰ *Fracasse*, p. 720.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 642.

¹²² Markey, *Oscar Wilde’s Fairy Tales*, p. 113.

sentences, growing without any reason or link, or even an apparent aim, which echoed the absurdity of the situation described:

Again and again he came up, and each time [...] and put them [...] then the diver came up for the last time, and the pearl that he brought, [...] and whiter than the morning star. But his face was strangely pale, and as he fell upon the deck the blood gushed from his ears and nostrils. [...] The negroes shrugged their shoulders, and threw the body overboard. [...] And the master of the galley laughed, and, reaching out, he took the pearl, and when he saw it he pressed it to his forehead and bowed.¹²³

The free-flowing language, simply linked by the non-committing and non-specific article ‘and’ mimics child-like discourse, but it also displays the gratuity of the ornamental style. It also emphasizes contrasts between the different interpolated clauses, whose associations are rendered even more random by the absence of a rational link. The proliferation of stylistic figures and syntactic structures is also the sign of ornamental prose style as Gordon argues:

But what, specifically, characterizes ornamental prose? Rhythmic cadences, repetition of phonemes, and syntactic structures (for example, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, anaphora), wordplay, overwrought imagery, metaphor, simile, extended metaphor, oxymoron, and other figures of rhetoric.¹²⁴

Most of these characteristics have already been pointed out in Wilde’s and Gautier’s texts, as well as the ways in which the authors themselves relate them to ornaments. The next analyses focus on what Gordon calls “overwrought imagery”, showing how metaphors, similes and figures of comparison monopolise their discourse.

¹²³ ‘The Young King’, p. 217.

¹²⁴ Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire*, p. 20.

Indeed, metaphors and similes are omnipresent, particularly mineral imagery as seen in the previous chapter. Precious stones seem to be the images of choice towards which Gautier and Wilde both turn in order to ornate their discourse. Rather than dreams of stones,¹²⁵ they suggest dreams of jewels and crystals. This allows them not only to play with light and visual effects, but also with textures, mineralizing and materializing their prose. In this ornamentalization of their writing, they rely heavily on Oriental art, which they believe to be more material than others. Wilde analysed the way in which Byzantium art represented the synthesis of Greek and Oriental arts: “Greek art, with its intellectual sense of form, and its quick sympathy with humanity; Oriental art, with its gorgeous materialism, its frank rejection of imitation, its wonderful secrets of craft and colour, its splendid textures, its rare metal and jewels, ...”¹²⁶ In this depiction of what Wilde assessed to be Oriental is in fact what he applied in his writing: playing with precious stones allowed him to infuse his prose with materiality and texture, as well as experiment with colour (not to mention Wilde’s rejection of imitation and realism, as the previous chapter showed).

What was primarily seen as a limitation of Oriental art, “that very principle of their religion that forbade the actual representation of any object in nature”, turns out to be its originality and preciousness, “being of the greatest artistic service to them [...]”¹²⁷ Gautier had expressed similar views on Oriental art: “l’interdiction de Mahomet, qui semblait devoir tuer à jamais l’art chez les nations musulmanes, n’a fait que le déplacer.”¹²⁸ In *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, Gautier related most of the similes and metaphors to material ornamentation. When he described the decrepitude of Sigognac’s castle, he constantly referred to the different textures of the environment, using

¹²⁵ See David-Weill, *Rêve de pierre*.

¹²⁶ *Journalism*, II, p. 90.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Caprices et zigzags*, pp. 316-7.

metaphors and similes to add more materiality: “le crépi, tombé par écailles comme les squames d’une peau malade, mettait à nu des briques disjointes, des moellons effrités [...]”¹²⁹ Every single noun already conveys a sense of texture: the roughcast, scales, bricks, and rubblestones all allude to coarseness. In addition, Gautier added texturizing adjectives such as: disjointed, crumbled. Gautier also used verbs which convey ornamental action such as “se pommelaient”, “s’entrecroisaient”, “adornaient”.¹³⁰ The way in which the light plays with reliefs and depth emphasizes the differences in textures: “les physionomies de ses hôtes vivement éclairées et ressortant avec un plein relief.”¹³¹ The ruggedness of what is ornamental brings relief to the description.

Gautier also played with the materiality of colour, extracting different sensations from one word in a synesthetic movement. His use of the adjective “incarnadin”,¹³² for instance, suggests both a strong visual image as well as a carnal one. This densification of sensations, leading towards a materiality of all the senses, is present throughout the novel and brings a suffocating impression of sensuousness. Using synaesthetic expressions as “le froid humide et noir”,¹³³ Gautier concentrated multiple sensations into one idiom, which made them palpable. The description of the skin becomes the excuse to expand on its hieroglyphic aspect, tracing sinuous lines, patterns and reliefs on the wrinkled surface: “des lacis de veines saillantes, des nerfs tendus comme des cordes de guitare, faisaient ressembler ces pauvres vieilles mains tannées à une préparation anatomique [...] une peau parcheminée [...]”¹³⁴ Out of a rugged material, Gautier extracted minuscule traits and sensations which he multiplied almost endlessly, suggesting infinite sensuous, and to some extent sensual, experiments

¹²⁹ *Fracasse*, p. 642.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 643, p. 644, p. 669.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 663.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 647.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 649.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 691.

and touches. Echoing the hieroglyphic skin, Gautier created effects of textures and materials on buildings: “Des bossages vermiculés à refends ornaient les jambages et l’arcade [...] curieusement sculpté et verni dont les ferrures luisaient comme de l’acier ou de l’argent.”¹³⁵ Similes are enhanced by shaping nouns: ornate material forms are omnipresent.

Wilde insisted on precious stones in his fairy tales. He used materials which reflect and refract light such as amber, turquoise, moonstones, and jade. The way in which stones interact with light is also related to their texture, and Wilde created effects of textures in his texts:

Looked round the dimly-lit room. The walls were hung with rick tapestries [...]. A large press, inlaid with agate and lapis lazuli, filled one corner, and facing the window stood a curiously wrought cabinet with lacquer panels of powdered and mosaicked gold, on which were placed some delicate goblets of Venetian glass, and a cup of dark-veined onyx.¹³⁶

Framing the scene with a special light meant to enhance the objects on display, as per his recommendation in his essay on decoration,¹³⁷ Wilde staged the most refined specimens, once again objects which alluded to mineral exoticism. The wealth on display is suffocating, filling the space in a dizzying proliferation, and is omnipresent in this tale: “some to Persia for silken carpets and painted pottery, and others to India to buy gauze and stained ivory moonstones and bracelets of jade, sandal-wood and blue enamels and shawls of fine wool.”¹³⁸ The luxuriance of materials, from smooth to silky, rough to rugged is foregrounded in this synaesthetic description. Wilde also followed

¹³⁵ *Fracasse*, pp. 722-3.

¹³⁶ ‘The Young King’, p. 215.

¹³⁷ “the room shall be lit by reflection of the light rather than by direct light.” ‘The House Decoration’, p. 918.

¹³⁸ ‘The Young King’, p. 214.

Gautier in his use of material colours, and shades of gold, bronze, lapis lazuli, ebony, and rubies abound in the fairy tale: “lions of gilt bronze and its steps of bright porphyry”, “the robe of tissue gold, and the ruby-studded crown, and the sceptre with its rows and rings of pearls.”¹³⁹ Not only are colours never simple in Wilde’s works, but in the fairy tales, they are mainly ornament-related. In some fairy tales like ‘The Young King’, ‘The Fisherman and His Soul’ and ‘The Happy Prince’, the proliferation of such a stylistic device is overwhelming. It is always linked with Oriental imagery and art, and the sense of profusion is exaggerated by Wilde through the multiplication of plurals in his descriptions:

There were huge tortoise-shells full of pearls, and hollowed moonstones of great-size piled up with red rubies. The gold was stored in coffer of elephant-hide, and the gold-dust in leather bottles. There were opals and sapphires, [...]. Round green emeralds were ranged in order upon thin plates of ivory, and in one corner were silk bags filled, some with turquoise-stones, and others with beryls.¹⁴⁰

Wilde filled up the pages with mineral ornaments, creating a suffocating atmosphere of sensuous experiences, in the same way that Gautier densified sensations through synaesthetic expressions. The stylistic devices are used as ornaments by the two authors in order to ornate their discourses but they are also ornamental in themselves and emphasize colours, textures, light effects, and materiality.

Wilde also displayed great knowledge in the arrangement of these precious colours. Owen Jones meticulously analyses the use of light in colour in ornamentation and he points out several characteristics which can also be witnessed in Wilde’s fairy

¹³⁹ ‘The Young King’, p. 214.

¹⁴⁰ ‘The Fisherman and His Soul’, p. 251.

tales. First, he states that “colour is used to assist in the development of form, and to distinguish objects or parts of objects from another.”¹⁴¹ Shaping colours are indeed used to create contrasts and reliefs in the texts. Jones then goes on to specific colours, particularly white, gold, and black which, in ornamentation are the primary colours used to delineate, enhance, contrast, and outline forms: “gold ornaments on any coloured ground should be outlined with black”, “ornaments of any colour may be separated from grounds of any other colour by edgings of white, gold, or black.”¹⁴² Wilde had obviously read essays on the value and use of colours since the exact same idea is found in ‘The Truth of Masks’ (1891): “The value of black is hardly appreciated [...] as a tone-giving neutral its importance is not recognized. [...] Its decorative value is, of course, the same as that of white or gold; it can separate and harmonise colours.”¹⁴³ And indeed, Wilde often used gold with black as contrasting colours: “they have straight black beards, and their turbans are covered with golden sequins [...]”¹⁴⁴ Regarding the importance of colour in Wilde’s texts, he suggested in ‘The House Beautiful’ (a lecture delivered in 1882 in America) how “our Aesthetic movement has given to the world an increased sense of the value of colour, and that in time a new science of the art of dealing in colour will be evolved.”¹⁴⁵ The way in which Wilde appropriated Gautier’s artistic movement shows how the French writer and colours were directly associated in his mind, an interpretation which is reinforced by Wilde’s comments on Gautier’s influence on British painters through his ‘Symphonie en Blanc Majeur’:

¹⁴¹ Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, p. 6.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁴³ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Criticism: Historical Criticism, Intentions, The Soul of Man*, ‘The Truth of Masks’, ed. by Josephine M. Guy, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), IV, p. 226.

¹⁴⁴ ‘The Fisherman and His Soul’, p. 248.

¹⁴⁵ ‘The House Decoration’, p. 917.

I am very fond of the work of many of the Impressionist painters of Paris and London. [...] Some of their arrangements and harmonies serve to remind one of the unapproachable beauty of Gautier's immortal 'Symphonie en Blanc Majeur', that flawless masterpiece of colour and music which may have suggested the type as well as the titles of many of their best pictures.¹⁴⁶

Indeed, it is from words that Gautier and Wilde extracted materiality in order to give texture, light, and colour to their texts, and the French author did not restrict this ornamental style to his poetry, as *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, as well as most of his works, show.

Marie-Claude Schapira notes how Gautier somehow went too far in the mineralization of colours:

Il a bien souvent malmené la couleur en la cernant, en l'arrêtant, en la compromettant précisément avec "la solidité et l'éclat" au lieu de privilégier la touche qui "rend le mouvement, la physionomie, le caractère insaisissable et tremblant de la nature"- cela est de Baudelaire [...] caractéristique de cet emploi à contre-sens de la couleur est la minéralisation que Gautier lui fait fréquemment subir [...]. Tout est or, argent, marbre et pierres précieuses.¹⁴⁷

Once again, it seems that Baudelaire is used in order to emphasize Gautier's shortcomings in his use of colours as minerals, an attack which could well be applied to Wilde's writings. This characteristic of his writing has been pointed out by several critics. For example, Pierre Moreau analyses the way in which "le vocabulaire se charge de ces noms de matières qui donnent à la phrase la solidité du métal, la fluidité des

¹⁴⁶ 'The Critic as Artist', p. 193.

¹⁴⁷ Marie-Claude Schapira, 'Le Langage des couleurs dans les nouvelles de Théophile Gautier', in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier, L'art et l'artiste*, Société Théophile Gautier (Montpellier: Société Théophile Gautier, 1982), IV, pp. 269-280, p. 276.

étoffes, la transparence des cristaux, le guillochage des ciselures.”¹⁴⁸ It seems impossible to talk about the way in which Gautier solidified language without alluding to *Emaux et camées*, and the way in which he described his project when writing the volume:

Le dessein de traiter sous forme retreinte de petits sujets, tantôt sur plaque d’or ou de cuivre avec les vives couleurs de l’émail, tantôt avec la roue du graveur de pierres fines, sur l’agate, la cornaline ou l’onyx. Chaque pièce devait être un médaillon à enchâsser sur le couvercle d’un coffret, ...¹⁴⁹

The idea of small independent jewel-like entities does relate to Gautier’s handling of the word as a hard material with which he played as he would with a precious stone, analysing the effects of refraction and reflection. It is not the first instance in which Gautier spoke about the art of writing in relation to the work of the lapidary or the blacksmith. However, the variation in hardness is what creates differences in the ways in which objects, and most specifically gems, reflect the light:

The optical phenomenon presented by many gem-stones is complicated by their property of splitting up a beam of light into two with, in general, differing characters. [...] There is therefore considerable variation in the capacity of precious stones to resist abrasion or, as it is usually termed, in their hardness.¹⁵⁰

While Gautier created “des effets aussi surprenants de contour, de relief et de coloris, que s’il avait taillé ses strophes dans le marbre, ciselé ses vers dans l’or pur, ou affermi

¹⁴⁸ Pierre Moreau, ‘Le Romantisme littéraire dans ses rapports avec les arts plastiques’, *Les Langues et littératures modernes dans leurs relations avec les beaux-arts: Florence, 27-31 Mars 1951*, ed. by Carlo Pellegrini (Florence: Valmartina, 1955), pp. 341-352, p. 345.

¹⁴⁹ *Critique artistique et littéraire*, p. 188.

¹⁵⁰ George Frederick Herbert Smith, *Gem-Stones and their Distinctive Characters* (London: Methuen, 1912), p. 40.

le brillant glacé des teintes au four brûlant de l'émailleur", it is from "la substance fluide du langage" that these effects come from.¹⁵¹ Somehow, Gautier managed to forge fluidity through hardness, which he suggested through his use of shifting, moving words. The examples that follow show Gautier using shifting words such as rare words, technical words, musical words, image words, material words, the word that contains another word or several others, the word that hides another word, ultimately leading to what Françoise Court-Pérez noted in *Emaux et camées* as "la densification du langage."¹⁵²

C. The Grammar of Ornaments

First, it is easy to see how Gautier and Wilde loved words in themselves, and considered them not simply as a means to communicate but also as ornate decorations in their texts. The word adorns the thing it refers to: "une de ces gentilhommières si communes en Gascogne, et que les villageois décorent du nom de château."¹⁵³ When Gautier described this castle, the words he used were meant to depict the ornamental aspect, albeit decaying, of the building but they were also chosen for their sounds and bizarre consonances that ornamented the castle at the same time as the page in itself: "leurs échauguettes en poivrière et leurs girouettes à queue d'aronde."¹⁵⁴ In order to grasp the extent of Gautier's devotion to ornaments in the novel, the reader needs a dictionary. In this quotation for instance, the "queue d'aronde", synonymous with the expression

¹⁵¹ Jacques Roos, 'Théophile Gautier et les beaux-arts', *Les Langues et littératures modernes dans leurs relations avec les beaux-arts: Florence, 27-31 Mars 1951*, ed. by Carlo Pellegrini (Florence: Valmartina, 1955), pp. 391-398, p. 393.

¹⁵² Françoise Court-Pérez, 'La Pointe dans *Emaux et camées*. Le Langage poétique: un art de l'esprit?', in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier*, Société Théophile Gautier (Montpellier: Société Théophile Gautier, 2001), XXIII, pp. 299-316, p. 304.

¹⁵³ *Fracasse*, p. 641.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

“queue d’hironde” means a tail in the shape of a swallow. The weathercock’s tail therefore engenders other animal-shaped forms in an ornamental proliferation. However, it is also possible not to apprehend these references and just appreciate the words as ornate, rare, specific, and odd sounding decorations, something Gautier also seemed to desire when he chose the words of his novel. One of the words that come regularly in the novel is the archaic neologism “adoniser” or “s’adoniser”, meaning to decorate or embellish. Gautier used the words to ‘adonise’ his style, as ornaments on the page.

But Gautier’s vocabulary sounded as bizarre for the nineteenth-century reader as it does today. The text is sprinkled with archaisms such as ‘fantasier’: “le voisinage de jolies femmes lui fantasiât la cervelle”, an archaism from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; “égyptiaque”, rarely used in comparison with “égyptien”; and, Gautier’s favourite, “truculence”, in its archaic sense of barbarian or savage.¹⁵⁵ In the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, Alain Rey attributes to Gautier the survival of the word in the nineteenth century and its modern meaning:

Emprunté avec le sens du mot latin, *truculent* disparaît de l’usage entre la fin du XVI^e et le début du XVIII^e s.; il est alors repris avec le sens affaibli de “qui veut se donner un air farouche” (1737). Resté rare jusqu’à Théophile Gautier, qui semble le remettre à la mode, il est redevenu usuel dans la seconde moitié du XIX^e s., prenant son sens moderne de “haut en couleur”, d’abord en parlant d’une toile qui présente des colorations vives.¹⁵⁶

Both meanings were used by Gautier and he played with the relation between what is seen as barbaric and what he considered to be appealing and flamboyant. It is not the

¹⁵⁵ *Fracasse*, p. 674, p. 691, p. 706.

¹⁵⁶ Alain Rey, *Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Française* (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2004), III, p. 3941.

only instance showing how Gautier highlights the word's depth and density. Gautier even alluded to this substance of the word in the novel: "tout cela si vague, si fané, si détruit, si disparu, que c'était plutôt le spectre d'une peinture réelle, et qu'il en faudrait parler avec des ombres de mots, les vocables ordinaires étant trop substantiels pour cela."¹⁵⁷ The richness and abundance contained in each word is clearly exploited in the novel and it seems that there are no shadow-words. Rather, the way in which Gautier experimented with polysemy and associations uncovered the shadows of words, what was not necessarily visible at first sight but was included in them.

He also played with the gap between the sounds of words and their meanings: "un nez cardinalisé de purée septembrale, tout fleuri de bubelettes s'épanouissant en bulbe entre deux petits yeux vairons [...]."¹⁵⁸ The 'bubelette', a word with Rabelaisian consonance, sounds rather charming, alluding to a small bubble while it really describes a pimple. Polysemous expressions show words as shifting in the same way that archaisms and neologisms display words as aging and evolving. Oxymorons show how malleable words can be when put together: "il pouvait être braconnier, contrebandier, faux-saunier, voleur et coupe-jarret, honnêtes industries [...]."¹⁵⁹ This sentence shows how associations can modify the word's meaning, and questions both honesty and the alleged dishonesty of the list of employments.

And Gautier often played with this characteristic where the polysemy of the word brought humour and irony: "les bêtes cornues, nous ne voulons pas parler des bipèdes mariés qui lors traversaient le Pont-Neuf, mais bien des bœufs [...]."¹⁶⁰ The multiple meanings of the expression "bête cornue" is put at the service of Gautier's farcical humour in the novel. Gautier constantly experimented with the distance or the

¹⁵⁷ *Fracasse*, p. 645.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 660.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 706.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 914.

equivalence of the word to what it represents, as well as everything it can possibly contain: its imagery, connotation, and association. Gautier seemed fascinated with the invention of words, and how things are baptized, and it shows in the way in which he foregrounded the artificiality of that arbitrary process: “c’était un pauvre ramassis de cahutes, qu’en tout autre lieu moins sauvage on n’eût pas songé à baptiser du nom de hameau [...]”¹⁶¹

Strikingly, Wilde also played with the same concept in ‘The Devoted Friend’ in which Miller’s irrational and manipulative discourse is the excuse for Wilde to expand on the distance between the spelling, sound, and meaning of words: “Flour is one thing, and friendship is another, and they should not be confused. Why, the words are spelt differently, and mean quite different things. Everybody can see that.”¹⁶² Similarly, he showed how words have different values and meanings for different people. He was as sensitive to the sounds of the words as Gautier, and cherished words for their sounds rather than their meaning: “I am deeply distressed to hear that tuberose is so called from its being a ‘lumpy flower’.”¹⁶³ The realization of the origin of the word, the sound and representation of which appealed to Wilde’s senses, somehow tainted the word for him. He therefore affirmed that “there really must be two derivations for every word, one for the poet and one for the scientist.”¹⁶⁴ And indeed, Gautier’s and Wilde’s ornamental use of the word is clearly the one of poets, who are looking for the word’s decorative and formal qualities in addition to, and sometimes instead of, their representational characteristics.

¹⁶¹ *Fracasse*, p. 690.

¹⁶² ‘The Devoted Friend’, p. 288.

¹⁶³ To the Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, [30 March 1885], *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 255.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

Words as ornaments are part of the creative processes of Gautier and Wilde, but they are more than that: words were the manifestation as well as the origin of their imagination. It seems indeed that on several occasions, words engendered ideas rather than the opposite. Wilde explained his creative process for ‘The Nightingale and the Rose’ in the following terms: “I did not start with an idea and clothe it in form, but began with a form and strove to make it beautiful enough to have many secrets, and many answers.”¹⁶⁵ The beautiful form of the word and its sound and power of evocation seem to be an infinite source of inspiration and creation for Gautier’s and Wilde’s imagination: “Rien qu’à la simple nomenclature, vous croyez voir ouvert devant vous l’écrit des *Mille et Une Nuits*”, “surexcitée par tous ces noms qui souvent ne sont représentés que par des échantillons desséchés et flétris, [...] l’imagination a bientôt fait verdoyer en feuilles énormes et bizarres s’épanouir en calices éclatants toutes ces fleurs et herbes mortes.”¹⁶⁶

What is impalpable, invisible or non existent cannot be ineffable for the two of them. This is what justifies Wilde when he compared the artist to a prophet: he could have compared himself to a godlike creator of beautiful things.¹⁶⁷ The ways in which both authors envisaged ornaments and the importance they have in their texts question crucial hierarchies regarding art: “Qu’apporte en effet l’introduction de l’ornementalité dans l’art majeur? Pour le dire succinctement, rien moins que la subversion d’une série de hiérarchies qui fondent la “logique représentative”: hiérarchie entre fond et forme, entre avant-plan et arrière-plan, entre centre et périphérie, ...”¹⁶⁸ Considered as the

¹⁶⁵ Wilde quoted in Markey, *Oscar Wilde’s Fairy Tales*, p. 104.

¹⁶⁶ *Caprices et zigzags*, p. 288, p. 289.

¹⁶⁷ “The artist comes forward as a priest and prophet of nature [...]. In time the true aesthetic principles will prevail.” ‘The House Beautiful’, p. 925.

¹⁶⁸ Georges Roque, ‘Ornement et Modernisme’, *Perspective*, 22 (2010), pp. 19-27, p. 22.

symbol of a freed art, the ornament represents an aesthetic of difference, which Gautier and Wilde exploited in their texts, in relation to the grotesque.

D. The Grotesque

It seems impossible to discuss the importance of ornamentation as an aesthetic of difference without analysing the influence of the grotesque. Foregrounded in the *Préface de Cromwell* (1827), the grotesque became the new Romantic ideal that broke with the rules of Classicism: “dans la pensée des modernes [...] le grotesque a un rôle immense. Il y est partout; d’une part, il crée le difforme et l’horrible; de l’autre, le comique et le bouffon.”¹⁶⁹ As understood by Hugo, the grotesque was an opposite-encompassing concept in art (beauty and ugliness, drama and comedy, grotesque and sublime), hybrid and freed from strict rules in contrast to the Classic aesthetic. Gautier developed this definition of the grotesque, but he also related the term to its etymological origin, Grottesca, the fanciful drawings found in caves. While Hugo used the term as a singular noun, Gautier exploited its plurality. The grotesques as capricious ornamental frescoes bring them within the realm of the ornaments. It seems that the grotesque for Gautier and Wilde encompassed various concepts and notions and escaped a definite definition. Sometimes gruesome, often ironic, at times pathetic leaning towards the sublime, the grotesque in Gautier and Wilde is protean. It also unites all the major concepts linked to their aesthetics from the fantastic (Jérôme Bosch’s paintings), to the fanciful, to art transpositions and translations, the arabesque, the ornaments, as well as hybridity, and the deviation of the centre and the margins. In *Les Grotesques*, Gautier circumscribed the terms as follows:

¹⁶⁹ Victor Hugo, *Préface de Cromwell* (Paris: Larousse, 1971), p. 45.

Le burlesque, ou, si vous aimez mieux, le grotesque, a toujours existé, dans l'art et dans la nature, à l'état de repoussoir et de contraste. La création fourmille d'animaux dont on ne peut s'expliquer l'existence et la nécessité que par la loi des oppositions. Leur laideur sert évidemment à faire ressortir la beauté d'êtres mieux doués et plus nobles; sans le démon, l'ange n'aurait pas sa valeur [...]. La scène la plus touchante a son côté comique, et le rire s'épanouit souvent à travers les pleurs. Un art qui voudrait être vrai devrait donc admettre l'une et l'autre face. La tragédie et la comédie sont trop absolues dans leurs exclusions. Aucune action n'est d'un bout à l'autre effrayante ou risible; il y a des choses fort comiques dans les événements les plus sérieux, et des choses fort tristes dans les plus bouffonnes aventures.¹⁷⁰

The grotesque, or burlesque, is the aesthetic that aims at rendering the truth of nature in its entirety by avoiding pure types such as the comic, the tragic, the beautiful or the ugly. Accompanying the concept are therefore notions of hybridity, deformity as well as exaggeration. Gautier opposed the grotesque to Classicism, the latter seeking pure forms of beauty, uniformity, and harmony.

In his study, Gautier advocated for the inclusion of the grotesque in art “cet élément indispensable que des esprits étroits et minutieux ont voulu rejeter du domaine de l'art,” in order to contrast with a Classical form of beauty, breaking a harmony which appears monotonous when becoming the norm: “ce désir d'harmonie et de régularité ne se satisfait que par le sacrifice des couleurs et des tons. On a une littérature monochrome [...].”¹⁷¹ Echoing the ‘Symphonie en Blanc Majeur’ in *Emaux et camées*, Gautier's search for the grotesque translated his lassitude at seeing or reading pure ‘white’ forms which neglect semi-tones, shades, and flamboyant colours. The

¹⁷⁰ *Les Grotesques* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1853), p. 353.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171, p. 354.

uniformization of art which accompanied Classicism standardized beauty in a way that did not accept other forms of beauty and ugliness, which reduced the scope of art.

Les Grotesques proposed to analyse second-rate poets and forgotten writers at a time when Classicism was reigning over the arts and rejected whatever did not conform: “dans les poètes du second ordre vous retrouverez tout ce que les aristocrates de l’art ont dédaigné de mettre en oeuvre: le grotesque, le fantasque, le trivial, l’ignoble, la métaphore hydropique, enfin tout le mauvais goût avec ses bonnes fortunes”.¹⁷² But the study also includes classic authors whose conformity to pure beauty seemed excessive and therefore became, for Gautier, a pastiche of Classicism and displayed its flaws and artificiality. And indeed, “ce n’est guère que dans le fumier que se trouvent les perles [...]. Pour moi je préférerais les perles du vieux Romain à tout l’or de Virgile; il faut bien un gros tas d’or pour valoir une petite poignée de perles.”¹⁷³

The pearls, François Villon, Saint-Amant, Théophile de Viau, Cyrano de Bergerac, and Paul Scarron stand out among the gold, or manure, depending on how one considers excessive Classicism, such as Scallion de Virbluneau, Le Père Pierre de Saint-Louis, Colletet, Chapelain, and Georges de Scudéry. While there is a clear statement advocating for the literary quality of the authors of the first group, Gautier also took great delight in the bad taste of the second: “c’est d’un mauvais goût très curieux et très amusant”, “le suprême mauvais est aussi utile à connaître que le suprême beau.”¹⁷⁴ In a grotesque exaggeration, Gautier enjoyed describing the escalation of bad taste and ridicule displayed in the works of some of these authors:

Vous avez peut-être cru [...] que c’était le comble du ridicule, les colonnes d’Hercule du mauvais goût, et qu’il n’était pas donné à la sottise humaine

¹⁷² *Les Grotesques*, p. 2.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52, p. 149.

d'aller au-delà; vous vous êtes étrangement trompé: l'esprit de l'homme n'a point de bornes en ses aberrations [...]. Le ridicule du père Pierre Saint-Louis, est un ridicule énorme et titanique qui n'admet aucune comparaison.¹⁷⁵

The concept of bad taste is a crucial one when discussing the grotesque. The standards of ideal beauty set by Classicism are in direct opposition with the grotesque aesthetic, clashing with the desire for harmonious, simple, measured and noble beauty. Rather than presented as different taste, the grotesque is directly relegated to the other end of an artificial spectrum of quality in art, disregarded and deemed bad in comparison.

It is also because the grotesque is considered unnatural, playing with deformities and exaggerations, that it becomes associated with bad taste. Related to the arabesque, the grotesque exploits immoderation, proliferation, free-reigning imagination, and the prevalence of details against the overall harmony: “médaillons littéraires, plus ou moins grotesques [...] collection de têtes grimaçantes [...] toutes les difformités littéraires, toutes les déviations poétiques [...]”¹⁷⁶ The medallions, relating the grotesque to the ornaments, display deviations from a norm which was, and still was at Gautier's time, Classicism. And indeed Gautier's volume was not unanimously well received and criticisms emerge at his publication, from *Le Constitutionnel* in particular. The newspaper had already attacked the production of Alexandre Dumas' play *Antony* in 1833 which was said to be “exhibitions grotesques et immorales qui font la honte de l'époque [...]”¹⁷⁷ The attack on the artistic quality of a grotesque work is accompanied by a moral judgment, as were the attacks on ornaments. After the publication of the first study of *Les Grotesques* on François Villon, numerous articles and reviews attacking Gautier's project of rehabilitation on the same terms appeared in *Le*

¹⁷⁵ *Les Grotesques*, pp. 125-126.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. V.

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in René Jasinski, *Les Années romantiques de Théophile Gautier* (Paris: Vuibert, 1929), p. 175.

Constitutionnel, which led to a trial for defamation. Even though at the time Hugo had already published the preface of *Cromwell*, which defined the outlines of the new romantic spirit through the grotesque, Gautier's volume was still considered an aberration, both in terms of aesthetic taste and morality.

The vocabulary which he used in *Les Grotesques* (deviation, deformity) seems to show that Gautier was, if not entirely prepared for the virulence of the attacks against the volume, aware of the 'bad press' of the authors he analysed. Gautier's delectation at expressing a deformity he knew would probably be seen as shocking is particularly visible in *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. From the Avant-Propos, Gautier warned the reader that "vous feuillotez des eaux-fortes de Callot ou des gravures d'Abraham Bosse historiées de légendes",¹⁷⁸ clearly placing the novel under the tutelage of masters of the grotesque. There is also in this foreword a quotation from Edgar Allan Poe's poem 'The Raven', which we cannot help but relate to another of Poe's works, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840), which Gautier may have been familiar with.

Wilde also shared Gautier's attachment to the grotesque. While he did not devote a volume to this form of art, we find, on several occasions, calls for a different aesthetic to the classical one. For instance, Wilde asked for something different to Pater's ascetic prose. In one of his letters, Wilde praised hybridity in tone and genre as Gautier had done in *Les Grotesques*: "you can produce tragic effects by introducing comedy. A laugh in an audience does not destroy terror, but, by relieving it, aids it. Never be afraid that by raising a laugh you destroy tragedy."¹⁷⁹ The most grotesque fairy tale is 'The Birthday of the Infanta' in which the dwarf, the grotesque character 'par excellence', takes centre stage. The fairy tale tells of the Infanta's birthday during

¹⁷⁸ *Fracasse*, p. 639.

¹⁷⁹ To Marie Prescott [? March-April 1883], [? Paris], *Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 204.

which a dwarf takes part in the celebrations as an act to make the Infanta laugh. The dwarf falls in love with the young princess, oblivious to his own physical appearance. After becoming aware of his ugliness, the dwarf dies.

The word grotesque is used four times in the fairy tale referring to the dwarf: “the most amusing thing about him was his complete unconsciousness of his own grotesque appearance”, “such grotesque and silly attitudes”, “the most grotesque monster he had ever beheld”, “foul to look at and grotesque”.¹⁸⁰ At first sight, it seems that Wilde is developing the negative connotation of the grotesque as unnatural, deformed, and therefore not worthy of art. Bestowing language upon flowers and animals, Wilde used their voice as an aesthetic attack on the dwarf’s grotesque aspect. The attitude of the violets is enlightening on that matter: what they object to is the contrast between the dwarf’s ugliness and his happiness, which creates a physically visible distortion (the dwarf’s smile must be close to a grimacing grin), as well as a moral one: beautiful things, because of their purity, are moral, therefore ugly beings must be immoral.

This loss of proportion brought by enhanced contrasts leads to a loss of meaning: the flowers’ discourse becomes completely irrational and nonsensical. While the mere fact that Wilde gave a voice to the flowers brought them close to hybrid beings, their reaction to the birds’ movements displays their illogical logic: “well-bred people always stay exactly in the same place as we do. No one ever saw us hopping up and down the walks, or galloping madly through the grass after dragon-flies.”¹⁸¹ They are not saying that they cannot move, but that they do not move because they are dignified. Similarly, Wilde gave a voice to the flowers but did not allow the birds to understand

¹⁸⁰ ‘The Birthday of the Infanta’, in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), p. 228, p. 229, p. 233, p. 234.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

the dwarf's language, "they did not understand a single word of what he was saying, but that made no matter [...]." ¹⁸² Playing with the norms and clichés of the fairy tale, Wilde randomly selected the species which are allowed to speak without rational explanation. Eventually, the discourse against the grotesque appears illogical and irrational, and corrodes ideals of beauty, ugliness, morality, and immorality.

This is corroborated by distressing scenes surrounding the Infanta. Wilde began by levelling things, showing that the princess is but a normal child in some respects: "although she was a real Princess and the Infanta of Spain, she had only one birthday every year, just like the children of quite poor people [...]." ¹⁸³ Then, Wilde goes on to her father and his fascination for his dead wife's body, whom he kisses: "he would clutch at the pale jewelled hands in a wild agony of grief, and try to wake by his mad kisses the cold painted face." ¹⁸⁴ This is not without echoes from 'The Happy Prince' and the scene in which the prince kisses the statue, but in this tale, the grotesque image of the king kissing his embalmed dead wife alludes to a darker form of obsession and misplaced affection: necrophilia. But not only is the king dreaming about his dead wife's body, he also fantasizes about his own daughter, whom he associates with her dead mother:

She had all the Queen's pretty petulance of manner, the same wilful way of tossing her head, the same proud curved beautiful mouth, the same wonderful smile –*vrai sourire de France* indeed- as she glanced up now and then at the window, or stretched out her little hand for the stately gentlemen to kiss. ¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² 'The Birthday of the Infanta', p. 230.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

The king watching his daughter remembering the charms of his late wife leans towards paedophilic and incestuous desires, and his gaze gradually eroticizes his daughter and focuses on sensual body parts such as her mouth. The allusion to the French smile is not anodyne either, since at the time, as this thesis has shown, most things coming from France were considered licentious in Great Britain. The king's fantasy is disturbed by the recollection of her youth: "but the shrill laughter of the children grated on his ears [...]."¹⁸⁶ The realization that she is indeed but a child distresses and displeases him. Similarly, the Infanta acts like an adult on several occasions, throwing flowers which adorned her hair to the dwarf, and playing the part of the femme fatale. All these disquieting signs contradict the reading of the Infanta as the ideal of pure beauty.

This led critics to view the tale as a moral denunciation of Aestheticism as the exclusive cult of beauty. Sherry D. Lee proposes to see 'The Birthday of the Infanta' as standing out "with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as one of Wilde's denunciations of excessive aestheticism, in which the author attacks the worship of beauty; it is, as he asserted of the reputedly immoral Dorian, almost "too moral"."¹⁸⁷ However, what the tale seems to object to most is not Aestheticism but a perfect Classical beauty ruling in art. Similarly to Velasquez' painting *Las Meninas* (1656), which is said to be one of Wilde's inspirations for the tale, and in the same way that Gautier had showed, Wilde seemed to suggest that beauty can also be found in contrasts. Wilde certainly played with the dwarf's grotesque appearance, but not so much with his ugliness as a moral tool, but rather as an aesthetic one.

¹⁸⁶ 'The Birthday of the Infanta', p. 225.

¹⁸⁷ Sherry D. Lee, 'The Other in the Mirror, or, Recognizing the Self: Wilde's and Zemlinski's Dwarf', *Music and Letters*, 91 (2010), pp. 198-223, p. 203.

Conclusion

Ugliness is not a new concept in art, neither is it in contradiction with aesthetic principles. Wilde stated in 'Mr Whistler's Ten o'clock' (1888): "that an artist will find beauty in ugliness, *le beau dans l'horrible*, is now a commonplace of the schools, the *argot* of the atelier [...]." ¹⁸⁸ The fact that Wilde treated such an aesthetic as commonplace shows that he considered it normal. Whistler's response to Wilde's comment was that Wilde was encouraging poets to find "l'horrible dans le beau", ¹⁸⁹ which related to what he did in 'The Birthday of the Infanta'.

The beautiful in the horrible, or the horrible in the beautiful, are both present in the works of Gautier and Wilde. The erosion of moral and aesthetic principles leads to a deformation of the Classical aesthetic. Where the serious is mingled with the trivial and the ugly becomes as interesting as the beautiful, hierarchical systems dissolve. Classicism, representing the centre of art, in opposition to "les poètes du second ordre", ¹⁹⁰ is emptied of its meaning and importance. These aesthetics of decentralization and foregrounding of the margins erode these very concepts, and advocate for abnormal works of art. Elisheva Rosen notes that

C'est que le grotesque est en quelque sorte le paria de la réflexion esthétique. Un terme qui ne bénéficie pas des honneurs de la tradition, illégitime, contesté, soumis à d'interminables controverses. Hugo s'en empare pour l'anoblir et le transfigurer. Il mobilise toutes les ressources de son éloquence pour imposer une vision nouvelle de l'art où le grotesque occupe une position centrale.

¹⁸⁸ 'Mr Whistler's Ten o'clock', in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), p. 949. Wilde is quoting Baudelaire's *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*: "rien que l'art pur, c'est-à-dire la beauté particulière du mal, le beau dans l'horrible", *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1975), II, p. 722.

¹⁸⁹ Quoted in Joseph Bristow and Rebecca N. Mitchell, *Oscar Wilde's Chatterton: Literary History, Romanticism, and the Art of Forgery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 190.

¹⁹⁰ *Les Grotesques*, p. 1.

Gautier, à l'encontre, met l'accent sur tout ce qui associe le grotesque aux marges et au rejet.¹⁹¹

Rather than establishing a new hierarchy, Gautier proposed to shift the vision, placing oneself “résolument dans la périphérie pour qu’inévitablement s’altère la claire perception du centre.”¹⁹² In the same movement through which Gautier foregrounded his works as eccentric, Wilde played with an aesthetic he knew to be decadent. The freedom given to the margins, to the ex-centric, to the second order of art, was indeed cherished by the two authors, in opposition to the conventions immobilizing the centre. This spectacle of the margins was also a way to defend their works. If their works did not belong to the normative centre which they did not have to conform to, Wilde and Gautier placed their works inside the larger yet divided margins, which solidified as a space in the movement. The margins or ‘outsideness’ become more than a periphery and, without necessarily establishing a new aesthetic attached to it, these works highlight and claim their plurality.

This aesthetic uses movement, hybridity, and subversion as creative concepts. Gautier and Wilde were able to treat noble subjects in a Classical way, as well as sublimate the ugly or foreground ugliness as equally worthy without necessarily transfiguring it. In that sense, they have been, still are, and will always be difficult to circumscribe and define. While challenging the norm they also take part in this norm and use it, reforming it and deforming it. To some extent, their eccentric position has now somehow been subdued, where Gautier’s allegiance to Romanticism made him fit within the canon, and where Wilde’s persona undermined his rebellious artistic experiments. Martine Lavaud explains how “ ‘tout’ est en Gautier [...] De là vient que

¹⁹¹ Rosen, ‘Les Grotesques ou Le Grotesque ?’, p. 94.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 98.

la diversité des héritiers de Gautier, de l'épure mallarméenne à la foisonnante exubérance d'Oscar Wilde, répercute l'amplitude de son romantisme et celle du romantisme en général.”¹⁹³ The protean authors studied in this thesis seem to have suffered from literary labels and classifications; literary theories and literary history simplified their works and doctrines to the extreme, and reduced their corpuses to very few texts taken out of the context of their overall careers. There is a clear deforming gap between on the one hand Gautier's and Wilde's practice of the grotesque, the arabesque, transpositions, the fantastic, the aesthetic of fancy, and hybridity, and on the other the vision of two slightly elitist artistic purists only interested in physical superficial beauty which this thesis has reconsidered.

¹⁹³ Martine Lavaud, *Théophile Gautier: militant du romantisme* (Paris: Champion, 2001), p. 575.

Conclusion: Art for Art's Sake in the Twentieth Century: The Legacies of Gautier and Wilde

The three chapters have shown the ways in which the literary incursions of Gautier and Wilde into visual media deform their literary medium, but also the ways in which this hybridity is seen as problematic both during their lifetimes and, to some extent, still today. Whether they neglect Baudelaire's view on sculpture or expand on the ornament's barbaric origins, the impurity of their literary medium becomes a strong claim for hybridity in art, and, in turn, is somehow made political because of the social, moral, and political discourses surrounding art at the time. In a clear contradiction to the common vision of the two authors as apolitical purists, Gautier and Wilde, through their experiments with their medium, become advocates of heterogeneity in art and in society in general, and reject homogeneous forms.

Gautier is still considered to be the embodiment of the poet living away from the reality of his time, shying away from the social and political turmoil of the nineteenth century. Paul Bénichou devotes a section to 'Gautier et la politique' in his study on nineteenth-century writers, in which he reaffirms what Gautier's prefaces, works, and contemporaries strongly suggest, that "le fond de Gautier" is the "négation de la politique et refuge dans la poésie [...]".¹ Indeed, this thesis has shown how Gautier claimed his independence from moral, social, religious, and political matters in his prefaces where he developed the doctrine of Art for Art's Sake. It has also proved how the recourse to art and the multiplication of artistic references in his works produced a form of literature mainly preoccupied with art. This is sometimes described as literature looking inwards, an arabesque literature, instead of being concerned with the world and

¹ Paul Bénichou, *L'Ecole du désenchantement, Sainte Beuve, Nodier, Musset, Nerval, Gautier*, p. 502.

its realities, which was seen as a sterile form of literature for some contemporaries, such as Dumas fils. However, this discourse on the lack of engagement with reality, that Gautier both claimed and that was also applied to him by contemporary and modern critics alike, is too simplistic to account for the complex mind that was Gautier's. In the study already mentioned, Bénichou affirms that Gautier's apolitical stand made him look like a very conservative writer: "face aux affaires de l'humanité, une réaction de rejet absolu, mais aussi une tentation contraire à la moindre apparence d'espoir, une bouffée de dépit tournée en conservatisme virulent à chaque déception [...]"² Nonetheless, Bénichou also devoted a section on Gautier's 'infidélités à l'art pour l'art', in which he examines the differences of opinion between Gautier and Baudelaire on the notion of progress. Baudelaire, according to Bénichou, was disappointed by the fact that Gautier wrote about the beauty of progress and suggested that he could subscribe to some republican ideals according to which art should improve humankind: "Il faut donner aux masses le sentiment de l'art [...] le beau a une énorme puissance morale [...]"³

How can Gautier be seen simultaneously as the conservative poet, the one who failed to see the modernity of Courbet's paintings while Baudelaire was writing *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863),⁴ and the advocate of progress who dissatisfied Baudelaire and the followers of the doctrine of Art for Art's Sake? Bénichou even asks: "comment pardonner à celui en qui on veut voir le maître de la nouvelle école ses complaisances pour le progrès et pour l'avenir de la commune humanité?"⁵ This question suggests that Gautier's involvement with progress represents a deviation from

² Bénichou, *L'Ecole du désenchantement*, p. 504.

³ Gautier, *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans*, pp. 243-4.

⁴ On Gautier and Courbet, see, for example, *Regards d'écrivains au Musée d'Orsay* (Paris: Edition de la réunion des Musées nationaux, 1992).

⁵ Bénichou, *L'Ecole du désenchantement*, p. 567.

the precepts of the doctrine of Art for Art's Sake, that Gautier was being unfaithful to his beliefs, and that, finally, he should be judged negatively because of these inconsistencies. In this binary view of the French writer, Gautier cannot come out victorious. Is there a different way to envisage Gautier's involvement with the world? It seems that the twentieth century re-asserted and ratified this binary vision of Gautier. Sartre, in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1948), denounced the pictorial style of some authors and affirmed that style should remain hidden and that the characteristics of beauty in painting cannot be applied to prose: "La beauté n'est ici qu'une force douce et insensible. Sur un tableau elle éclate d'abord, dans un livre elle se cache [...]."⁶ According to Sartre, this pictorial style was characteristic of the works of the Art for Art's Sake movement and represented an escape from reality. For Sartre, Gautier was unfaithful and untruthful to the nature of literature, and prose writing in particular. Gautier's ideas became even more problematic after the two wars of the twentieth century since to follow the precepts of the Art for Art's Sake was not only to betray the nature of literature but also immoral as a way to turn away from the sufferings of so many.

There has been a new tendency to re-assess Decadence and Aestheticism and their relations with social and political matters in criticism, which examines the links between the movements and cosmopolitanism. Matthew Potolsky, for instance, argues that Decadence represented a corpus of writers who became "Decadent communities", who shared similar values and embodied "real possibilities for social and political transformation gleaned from fictional worlds."⁷ Potolsky affirms that: "recent scholarship on British aestheticism has persuasively teased out the underlying cultural

⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la Littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 30.

⁷ Matthew Potolsky, *Decadent Republic of Letters*, p. 9.

politics of a movement that was long associated with the same apolitical turn world that still defines decadence.”⁸ According to Potolsky, the Decadent communities “served as a medium for marginalized groups- gay men and lesbians, middle-class women, socialists, and avant-garde artists alike- to criticize mainstream society and speak to others who shared their experiences and desires.”⁹ This view of Decadence can be applied to Wilde, or, as these conclusive remarks will show, it can certainly be true of the image the twentieth century developed of Wilde as a gay martyr, a gay idol. However, it is more difficult to apply this vision of Decadence to Gautier. Besides, this thesis has shown that in his works, Wilde was truly engaging with form rather than content or message. Julia Prewitt Brown analyses these cosmopolitan tendencies in Wilde’s corpus more specifically, and she affirms that: “cosmopolitan criticism calls nationalism into question, aware of its tendency towards racism, imperialism, and war [...]”¹⁰ While I agree that there is a questioning of racism and nationalism in the works of Wilde and Gautier, my argument is slightly different to Potolsky’s or Prewitt Brown’s.

I have demonstrated in this thesis how Gautier and Wilde carefully and thoughtfully engaged with their literary medium, an engagement that is visible in all their works, throughout their lives. I want to argue that this engagement with form and artistic media also relates to what Prewitt Brown calls “aesthetic politics” or “ethical aesthetic”.¹¹ I believe that the political and ethical aspects of the works of Gautier and Wilde come from the very characteristic that made their works apolitical: the self-referentiality of their works, which constantly moves away from reality towards art. It

⁸ Potolsky, *Decadent Republic of Letters*, p. 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Julia Prewitt Brown, *Cosmopolitan Criticism, Oscar Wilde’s Philosophy of Art* (University of Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1997), p. 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7, p. 51.

is through their inclusions of sculpture, painting, and decorative arts in their works that a racial hierarchy of art appears, which they highlight and question: sculpture and the decorative arts in particular are considered primitive and therefore seen as ‘lower’ forms of art, while literature is placed at the top of the hierarchy because it is the medium of civilized cultures.

Furthermore, the recourse to the visual arts can also be related to a desire for a cosmopolitan art, which sees the active search for the ways in which culture can be exported out of its national space in the deconstruction of time, space and medium.¹² Generally, the visual arts are more easily transported outside of their national context, since problems of language do not interfere in the process. Gautier’s and Wilde’s hybrid medium questions what is universal in art and what can or cannot be exported. The cosmopolitan tendencies of their literary medium, given in part by their constant incursions towards the visual arts, efface spatiality and, to some extent, nationality, and therefore allow for spatial displacements more easily. However, I would argue that this characteristic does not necessarily convey a desire for a cosmopolitan community but rather demonstrates an experiment with a cosmopolitan form of art, which would transcend national boundaries through painting and sculpture and positively assess the art of other cultures through the decorative arts.

This thesis has proven the extent to which Gautier’s works and ideas coloured Wilde’s works. There are clear and discernable points of contact between the two authors both in their careers and their works. If the study of the influence of Gautier on Wilde uncovers the ways in which Wilde actively looked for and encouraged the idea of a filiation between him and several French authors, appropriating for himself their

¹² For more on cosmopolitanism in the nineteenth century, see Stefano-Maria Evangelista and Richard Hibbitt, ‘Special Issue on Fin-de-Siècle Literary Cosmopolitanism’, *Comparative Critical Studies*, 10, 2 (2013), pp. 123-240.

reputation and ambiguous fame across the Channel, the analysis of affinities between Gautier and Wilde highlights a different side of Wilde. While the influence of Gautier, among other French authors, emphasizes Wilde's 'frenchness' and his rebellious attitude, the correspondences between Wilde and Gautier reveal Wilde's constant reflection on art, beauty, and literature. Like Gautier, Wilde has, throughout his corpus, questioned the supremacy of content over form and pushed his literary medium to extremes of materiality and decoration.

Against the tendency to reduce the literary value of Gautier and Wilde according to a simplification of the Art for Art's Sake doctrine, the study of the correspondences between the two authors displays the complexity of their corpuses as well as their originality and specificities. In comparison to Baudelaire, Flaubert, Mallarmé, or Swinburne who also experimented with new ways of envisaging literature and words, Wilde and Gautier did not, in their fictional works, do so by trying to shock their readers, puzzle them with complexity, or unsettle them with macabre elements. With their emphasis on the visual arts and decoration, Wilde and Gautier challenged expectations through seduction. The formal appeal of their works, the reduction of narrative elements and the decorative patterns act as powerful charming agents to lull the reader and question the aims and justifications of literature.

What remains to be analysed is the impact the two authors may have had in the centuries that follow. Establishing a filiation from Gautier and Wilde to nineteenth-century writers in France and in Great Britain shows the continuation of their principles, albeit changed and deformed each time they are being appropriated by these authors. Gautier's influence on Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Huysmans, and other *fin de siècle* writers is highlighted in most studies focusing on Decadence, Fin-de-Siècle or Aestheticism,

or more specific comparative analyses.¹³ Similarly, we can trace the influence of Wilde in authors such as Max Beerbohm, or Katherine Mansfield, as well as Jean Lorrain, or Marcel Schwob.¹⁴ As Stefano Evangelista affirms, “in the early twentieth century Wilde became the iconic representative of English aestheticism in Europe. His reception can therefore be seen to mask or contain within it the legacies of Pater, Swinburne”,¹⁵ and, I would add, of Gautier.

British writers of the beginning of the twentieth century engaged with Wilde and his works. For instance, Max Beerbohm reverently mocked the aesthete’s attitude in the short story *Enoch Soames* (1916) in which Beerbohm portrayed the last decade of the nineteenth century and its artists in the following terms: “He wore spectacles that flashed more than any other pair ever seen. He was a wit. He was brimful of ideas. He knew Whistler. He knew Edmond de Goncourt. He knew every one in Paris.”¹⁶ The description could very easily be applied to Wilde, through the references to both Whistler and de Goncourt, as well as the idea of an artist bringing Paris to Great Britain. It seems that the spirit of Decadence or of Art for Art’s Sake reaches far from its

¹³ See Marc Eigeldinger, *Le Soleil de la poésie: Gautier, Baudelaire, Rimbaud* (Neuchâtel: Baconnière, 1991); Luc Vivès, ‘Les Poèmes de la momie: influences de l’imaginaire Orientaliste et égyptisant de Théophile Gautier dans l’œuvre de Charles Baudelaire’, in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier, héritiers et héritage de Théophile Gautier*, Société Théophile Gautier (Montpellier: Société Théophile Gautier, 1999), XXI, pp. 53-70; Laurent Mattiussi, ‘D’un Sein calciné: néantisation et fiction, de Gautier à Mallarmé’, in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier, héritiers et héritage de Théophile Gautier*, Société Théophile Gautier (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 1999), XXI, pp. 71-86; Robert Baudry, ‘Influence des contes fabuleux de Théophile Gautier sur Mérimée et sur Mallarmé ?’, in *Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier, héritiers et héritage de Théophile Gautier*, Société Théophile Gautier (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 1999), XXI, pp. 159-172.

¹⁴ See Max Beerbohm, ‘An American’, *Anglo-American Times* (March 1983); Katherine Mansfield’s experiments in Wilde’s style are analysed by Joseph Bristow, as well as Schwob’s and Lorrain’s works which they dedicated to Wilde, ‘Picturing his Exact Decadence: The British Reception of Oscar Wilde’, *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe*, ed. by Stefano-Maria Evangelista (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 20-50.

¹⁵ Stefano-Maria Evangelista, ‘Oscar Wilde: European by Sympathy’, in *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe*, ed. by Stefano-Maria Evangelista (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 1-19, p. 13.

¹⁶ Max Beerbohm, *Enoch Soames*, in *The Book of Fantasy*, ed. by Jorge Luis Borges (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1988), p. 29.

temporal boundaries and its relation with time and active search for atemporality lends itself well to temporal displacements.

Kristin Mahoney suggests that “Post-Victorian writers and painters often turned to Decadence in the hopes of finding an antidote to the chauvinism of wartime and the despair of the interwar period”,¹⁷ and the movement and its exponents offered an artistic refuge for twentieth-century authors. She argues that the alleged apolitical stances of the Art for Art’s Sake doctrine and the Decadent movement of the nineteenth century become politically charged during the twentieth century, a radical claim of non-engagement in a politically challenging period: “Decadent strategies, such as detachment, camp, parody, and perversity, which seem to shirk the political, actually allow post-Victorian decadents to forge a very powerful and effective mode of political intervention.”¹⁸

Although Gautier, and, by way of indirect filiation, Wilde, offer a specific mode of thinking for generations to come, few twentieth-century writers directly relate their works to both Wilde and Gautier, or even only to Gautier, although Christopher Bains demonstrated Gautier’s influence on Ezra Pound for example.¹⁹ Some pervasive traits are pursued from Gautier to other writers, which has allowed modern theorists to elaborate what Barthes calls “une sorte de compagnonnage des Lettres Françaises”,²⁰ making Apollinaire engage with Gautier’s ongoing debate on artistic purity,²¹ or bringing together varied authors such as Gautier, Flaubert, Valéry, and Gide under the

¹⁷ Kristin Mary Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁹ Bains, *De l’Esthétisme au Modernisme*.

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture; suivi de: éléments de sémiologie* (Paris: Gonthier, 1965), p. 56.

²¹ “On mesurerait encore mieux la place tenue par cette pureté en relisant les poèmes d’Apollinaire, où pureté, purification, feu [...] sont très présents”, Didier Alexandre, ‘Sur la littérature pure’, *Puretés et impuretés de la littérature*, ed. by Didier Alexandre and Thierry Roger (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015), pp. 13-51, p. 21.

banner of the artist as laboring over his task, the ploughman, or lapidary writer.²² However, Gautier's ideas and works seem to disappear from the artistic milieu. Even today, there is a discrepancy in both heritage and criticism between Gautier and Wilde, where the critical corpus on Wilde is indeed exhaustive and keeps growing. For instance, Wilde was chosen to be the star of an exhibition in 2016 at the Petit Palais in Paris, which proves that there is still an interest for Wilde in France today.²³ Several criteria are to be taken into account. Wilde's tragic life added to his appeal, the 'glamour' of his trials made him into a literary rebel while Gautier who died of old age (and heart failure), saw most of his contemporaries die before him, and led a rather comfortable bourgeois life. Maxime du Camp's depiction of his lifestyle is enlightening on the matter: "il vivait largement, avait une voiture et deux petits chevaux blancs dont il raffolait..."²⁴ Cherishing his material possessions and having high standards of living, Gautier seemed to have become what he despised, a bourgeois, in direct opposition with the figure of the artist at the time.

His exhaustive production also influenced the way in which his contemporaries and later critics viewed him. His involvement with several newspapers meant that he had to spend time writing articles, reviews, and reports, leaving less time for 'real' personal and independent work. Gautier as a writer enslaved by journalism, unable to devote himself to poetry, is a common image during the nineteenth century. Feydeau, for example, shows how Gautier loved writing *Le Capitaine Fracasse* as he did not have to "compter, comme il était obligé de le faire à l'occasion de ses feuilletons

²² "des écrivains comme Gautier [...], Flaubert [...], Valéry [...], ou Gide [...] où le labeur de la forme constitue le signe et la propriété d'une corporation." Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, p. 56.

²³ See Morel, Dominique ; Badinter, Robert ; Dantzig, Charles ; Holland, Merlin, *Oscar Wilde. L'impertinent absolu*, Musée du petit Palais (Paris: Eds Paris-Musée, 2016). However, this exhibition was mostly biographical, which shows that the vision of Wilde the man overshadowing Wilde's works is still very much present today.

²⁴ Maxime du Camp, *Souvenirs littéraires* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 2002), p. 124.

dramatiques, avec les goûts et les idées d'un directeur jouant auprès de lui le rôle de pion [...].”²⁵ His articles seemed to be done merely to earn a living and the quality of his other work suffered from the time and effort he needed to devote to journalism. It is also possible to trace Gautier's demise to one of the authors whom Barthes said continued Gautier's legacy: Gide. Gide is a pivotal figure for both Gautier's and Wilde's representations in the twentieth century, relegating the former as a second-rate author and emphasizing the latter's flamboyant character over his works.

Gide's relation to Gautier was complex, as was his relationship with Wilde. Like Gautier, he opposed the realist vision of literature to its purity. In *Le Journal des faux-monnayeurs* (1919-1925), Gide dreamt of writing an unadulterated pure novel, in which he would “purger le roman de tous les éléments qui n'appartiennent pas spécifiquement au roman. On n'obtient rien de bon par le mélange.”²⁶ The search for purity by way of stripping the literary medium of anything inessential and accessory recalls the Art for Art's Sake doctrine. However, Gide was extremely critical towards Gautier and did not recognize Gautier's influence on either the survival of the idea of artistic purity or on his own literary masters, Baudelaire and Mallarmé. On the contrary, Gide refuted Gautier's importance for nineteenth-century authors, and negated his influential status during the fin de siècle.

For instance, Gide instigated the idea of Baudelaire's lack of sincerity and ingenuity when dedicating *Les Fleurs du Mal* to Gautier, an idea which still resonates with today's critics: “l'on doute si l'un des plus ingénieux paradoxes de Baudelaire n'a pas été de dédier à Théophile Gautier ses *Fleurs du Mal*? De tendre cette coupe toute ruisselante d'émotions, de musique et de pensée, à l'artisan le plus sec, le moins

²⁵ Feydeau, *Théophile Gautier, Souvenirs Intimes*, pp. 214-215.

²⁶ André Gide, *Journal des faux-monnayeurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1927), p. 64.

musicien, le moins méditatif que notre littérature ait produit.”²⁷ In this description, we can find the origin of the criticisms that were levelled at Gautier during the twentieth century and still appear in the twenty-first century: his aridity of style, leading on to visions of Gautier as an objective, impersonal and detached writer, a writer of the surface obsessed with visual representations and pictorial effects of language in an age in which music is the sign of modernity and purity in literature (as stated by Pater), and, finally, his lack of depth and substance. In a conscientious effort to undermine Gautier’s legacy in comparison to Baudelaire’s, Gide multiplied the comparisons between the two authors as proofs of Gautier’s shortcomings and Baudelaire’s genius.

From this moment on, Gautier will be what Gide made of him in France and in Great Britain, negating both the importance of his contribution to the development of nineteenth-century literature and the arts in general, as well as the complexity and beauty of his works. The absence of any comprehensive study exploring the survival of Gautier and his works during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in France and in Europe, except for the volume mentioned above by the Société Théophile Gautier which stops at the beginning of the twentieth century, is telling. It shows the relative unimportance of Gautier in the artistic production of these two centuries, but it also proves that contemporary critics do not believe in the impact and significance of such a volume, which I believe to be a crucial critical gap, and addressing this issue would help our understanding of the relationships between literature and politics and the autonomy of art during the two centuries.

The persistence of such a vision can be witnessed in Proust’s critical works. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (1895-1900), Proust deconstructed Sainte-Beuve’s critical method according to characteristics which could be attributed to Gautier. Proust

²⁷ André Gide, *Essais critiques*, ed. by Pierre Masson (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 1143.

undermined Sainte-Beuve's approach on the basis of his emphasis on contextual matters: "il voit la littérature sous la catégorie du temps."²⁸ Proust therefore suggested the importance of the detachment of art from its context, praising a more eternal, atemporal art, in keeping with Gautier's vision. Proust's own critical language is filled with pictorial words and images, reminiscent of Gautier's style.²⁹ Proust's praise, though, did not go to Gautier but to Nerval, proving how, once again, Gautier pales in comparison to his contemporaries. And indeed, in *Sur la Lecture* (1906), a dialogue with Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (1865),³⁰ Proust openly discarded Gautier as a stylistic slave: "nous ne pouvons nous empêcher de trouver bien éloignée de l'art véritable cette obligation à laquelle il croit devoir s'astreindre de ne pas laisser passer une seule forme sans la décrire entièrement, en l'accompagnant d'une comparaison, qui, n'étant née d'aucune impression agréable et forte, ne nous charme nullement."³¹ The tone is also clearly patronizing, building on the vision of Gautier as the ever-positive and kind man that was 'le bon Théo', "Gautier, simple, bon garçon",³² which reduced the role of Gautier in his century to the extreme and justified Gide's and Proust's inclinations towards other writers, themselves clearly influenced by Gautier, who were deemed more complex than him.

Gide is also responsible, in part, for Wilde's representation in the centuries to come. Their difficult relationship, although only seen as such by Gide as both the disciple and the aspiring author in his own right, made Wilde an influential figure for Gide, about whom he wrote on several occasions. As Richard Hibbitt demonstrates, Wilde the man came before his work in Paris: "the person preceded the work. In this

²⁸ Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 149.

²⁹ "faciles aquarelles", "nuances troubles", "tableau de rêve", *Ibid.*, p. 166.

³⁰ Which, once again, shows the depth and complexity of the artistic exchanges between France and Great Britain during the long nineteenth century.

³¹ Marcel Proust, *Sur la Lecture* (Bruxelles: Jacques Antoine, 1985), pp. 69-70.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

respect, the social reception of Wilde in France influenced the literary reception by creating the predominant image of Wilde as an artist of life.”³³ Gide built on this deformed image and put an emphasis on the man and in so doing lessened the importance of his works: in his recollection of Wilde written as a memorial work following Wilde’s death, Gide mainly talked about the man and his own close relationship with him.³⁴ Again, Proust can be representative of the promulgation of Gide’s vision of Wilde. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust devoted several pages to Balzac, in which he directly alluded to Wilde, but not Wilde and his works but Wilde as the man who suffered through the trial:

Oscar Wilde, à qui la vie devait hélas apprendre plus tard qu’il est de plus poignantes douleurs que celles que nous donnent les livres [...] il y a d’ailleurs quelque chose de particulièrement dramatique dans cette prédilection et cet attendrissement [...] pour la mort de Lucien de Rubempré.³⁵

He continues: “On ne peut s’empêcher de penser que, quelques années plus tard, il devait être Lucien de Rubempré lui-même.”³⁶

Wilde’s femininity and refinement were also in contradiction with manly ideas of political engagement: “the early twentieth century brought a return to active political engagement and the revaluation of an ideal of primitivism, sometimes identified with conservative notions of masculinity [...]”³⁷ The apolitical stance of the Art for Art’s Sake doctrine was indeed in direct opposition with the engaged literature of the

³³ Richard Hibbitt, ‘The Artist as Aesthete: The French Creation of Wilde’, p. 66.

³⁴ André Gide, *Oscar Wilde: A Study* (Oxford: The Holywell Press, 1905).

³⁵ Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, p. 217.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-218. For more on the relationship between Wilde and Proust, see Emily Eells, ‘Naturalizing Oscar Wilde as an Homme de Lettres: The French Reception of *Dorian Gray* and *Salomé* (1895-1922)’, in *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe*, ed. by Stefano-Maria Evangelista (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 80-95.

³⁷ Stefano-Maria Evangelista, ‘Oscar Wilde: European by Sympathy’, p. 15.

twentieth century but it becomes clear that Wilde's legacy is a distorted one, deformed through other writers of the period. Emily Eells analyses the legacy of Wilde through two different works: Jean Cocteau's play *Le Portrait surnaturel de Dorian Gray* and Raymond Laurent's essay on Wildean aesthetics. She notes how revealing these sources are for both "the complex cultural exchange which characterizes the arts in the fin de siècle period and the early years of the twentieth century" and "the underground reception of Wilde in France."³⁸ Her analysis of Cocteau's work is particularly enlightening regarding the deformation of the image of Wilde already taking place at that time. Similarly to the image conveyed by Gide, Cocteau's vision of Wilde shows how: "Wilde the man came to overshadow his artistic achievement."³⁹ The Wilde that was being created at the time was the "gay icon and martyr to the cause, with no reference to his literary work."⁴⁰ As a result, "his oeuvre quickly became a by-word for homosexuality."⁴¹

The deformation is also particularly visible when one looks at adaptations of Wilde's and Gautier's works throughout the two centuries to follow. Emily Eells discusses Suzanne Mercey's adaptation of *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* in French as a play in 1922, which built upon Wilde's own theatricality and therefore kept with Gide's vision of the man.⁴² It also proves the porosity of Wilde's own medium, as his only novel was displaced as a play in a different language. It is somehow surprising to see that this spirit of displacement of medium continues for the two authors after this date, knowing how much work they devoted to the study and analysis of their own literary

³⁸ Emily Eells, *Two Tombeaux to Oscar Wilde: Jean Cocteau's Le Portrait Surnaturel de Dorian Gray and Raymond Laurent's Essay on Wildean Aesthetics*, ed. and transl. By Emily Eells (High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, 2010), p. 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Eells, 'Naturalizing Oscar Wilde as an Homme de Lettres', p. 93.

medium, of genre and form. For instance, *Le Capitaine Fracasse* was adapted to a series of comic books, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* became a pulp novel in America, and *La Morte amoureuse* was rewritten as a horror movie.⁴³ Similarly, *The Canterville Ghost* has been adapted as a ballet as well as an animated adaptation.⁴⁴

From these examples can be seen the contemporary influences of Gautier and Wilde on the artistic imaginations of our times, in various artistic media. It is interesting to note that most of these adaptations feature in what can be considered to be marginal media, enacting Wilde's and Gautier's reflection on artistic margins. Reminiscences of their spirit can also be found in literature, and through what Jean-Yves Tadié calls the "récit poétique",⁴⁵ of which Julien Gracq and Le Clézio can be seen as embodiments: it explores the continuation of Gautier's experiments with the extreme reduction of the plot and stillness of action. However, these direct traces of the legacies of Gautier and Wilde are not the only signs of their implication in the artistic realm of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Indeed, the Art for Art's Sake doctrine, with its affirmation of art's autonomy and politically problematic or challenging stance continues to be discussed in these centuries, in relation to discourses surrounding artistic purity in various artistic media. From Sartre to Adorno, the doctrine shapes views on art and offers an extreme position in the discussion, from which theoreticians build their own arguments. Sartre, in *Qu'est-ce que la Littérature?*, assigns clear distinct spheres of action to prose and poetry, the former being for him inherently politically and socially engaged. Referring his argument to the question of the purity of art,⁴⁶ Sartre

⁴³ Mathieu Mariolle, Kyko Duarte and Fran Gamboa, *Le Capitaine Fracasse* (Paris: Delcourt, 2008); Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (New York: Royal Books Giant, 1953). The subtitle of the novel was "A Rake's Search for a Perfect Bed-Mate!"; *La Morte Amoureuse*, dir. Alain Vézina (1995).

⁴⁴ *The Canterville Ghost*, London Children's Ballet, (2005); *The Canterville Ghost*, dir. Kim Burdon (Arc Productions, 2016).

⁴⁵ Jean-Yves Tadié, *Le Récit poétique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

⁴⁶ "les puristes nous interdiront peut-être d'écrire sur les locomotives. Mais l'art n'a jamais été du côté des puristes." Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la Littérature?*, p. 32.

consciously places his own doctrine in relation to the Art for Art's Sake ideas, a century after its elaboration: "la vieille théorie de l'art pour l'art [...]. On sait bien que l'art pur et l'art vide sont une même chose et que le purisme esthétique ne fut qu'une brillante manoeuvre défensive des bourgeois du siècle dernier [...]." ⁴⁷ No matter how hard Sartre tried to bury the doctrine, he still proved its modernity by the mere fact that he included it in his argument.

His last attack on the doctrine as a bourgeois art is also present in Adorno's discussion on the matter. While Adorno aimed at an in-between definition and social function of art, affirming simultaneously that "Art is autonomous and it is not", ⁴⁸ he equated Wilde's stylistic work with the commercialization of art: "the crude accumulation of all possible precious materials in Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, where the interiors of a chic aestheticism resemble smart antique shops and auction halls and thus the commercial world Wilde ostensibly disdained." ⁴⁹ The doctrine was therefore seen as counter-productive, and became a bourgeois tool as it set itself far from the concerns of everyday people and portrayed exquisite wealth as an interior decoration magazine would. But Adorno's vision of the doctrine is also associated with Adorno's own context. *Aesthetic Theory* was written between 1961 and 1969, after World War Two, and Adorno was particularly ill at ease with the concepts of purity and heterogeneity linked to the Art for Art's Sake doctrine: "without what is heterogeneous to it, its autonomy eludes it." ⁵⁰ The rhetoric of Adorno, who is extremely uncomfortable with the doctrine as he sees it as being immoral in his own context, is visible in *Aesthetic Theory*, and he noticed that "it was plausible that socially progressive critics should have accused the program of *l'Art pour l'Art*, which has often been in league with

⁴⁷ Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la Littérature?*, p. 32.

⁴⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

political reaction, of promoting a fetish with the concept of a pure, exclusively self-sufficient artwork.”⁵¹ He continues: “What is true in that accusation [...]”,⁵² suggesting that this attack on Aestheticism is somehow justified. Of course, purity, after the Second World War, was not particularly well received in the realm of art and was deemed dangerous. As this thesis showed, however, the distinction between homogeneous and heterogeneous art is too simplistic when applied to practitioners of the Art for Art’s Sake doctrine. To some extent, a writer’s value can be assessed through his or her engagement with reality and whether his or her work provides something to society.⁵³ In Sartre and Adorno’s context, the Art for Art’s Sake doctrine somehow represented an easy way out, a way to escape the terrible reality of the twentieth century without facing reality or trying to improve it. To engage with Art for Art’s Sake is therefore to always question art, what its aim is, and what art can achieve.

How can we envisage the doctrine in the twentieth century? Is it a useful instrument against which writers position their works and themselves? A utopian view of art, which negates the very fact that art, being a human production, cannot detach itself from the social sphere? An extreme view leading to formalism, setting a dogmatic vision of beauty as the aim of art and therefore reducing its scope? Or a recognition of the limits of the power of art, unable to have an impact on society? It probably is all these things, but I would argue that it is more of a ‘passage obligé’, or a necessary step towards the autonomy of art and the advent of modern art. The ways in which the visual arts changed at the turn of the nineteenth century, and continued to challenge their own definition during the twentieth century, were shaped by the ideas constituting the Art for Art’s Sake doctrine. The notion of purity, for instance, is fundamental for abstract

⁵¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 309.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ For more on the subject, see Maxwell Adereth, *Commitment in Modern French Literature: A Study of ‘Littérature Engagée’ in the Works of Péguy, Aragon, and Sartre* (London: Gollancz, 1967).

painters, who directly engage with pure art. Kandinsky wrote an essay entitled ‘Painting as Pure Art’ in 1913 and continued Gautier’s experiments with the colour white in different works such as *Painting with White Form* (1913), *On White I* (1920), and *Whitebound* (1929).⁵⁴ Investigating the essence of their medium, and attempting to strip it of the inessential, artists keep what they envisage as the bare minimum, what Maurice Denis defined as “une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées.”⁵⁵ The claims that representation does not have to be realistic, that content and form can be freely chosen, that they can both be reduced, or even neglected, are notions already developed by Gautier and Wilde through the scope of the Art for Art’s Sake doctrine which will shape modern art.

The doctrine has definitely brought more freedom to the realm of art, and proposed a new way of envisaging art, which eventually led to new forms of criticism that focus less on contextual analyses and more on distinct aesthetic criteria: would Barthes have been able to claim the death of the author had Gautier and Wilde not suggested a divorce between the author and his work, as well as detaching the work from its context? Wondering what constituted the smallest element that can be called art, Gautier and Wilde not only questioned the essence of their art, they also proposed a new way of judging it, devoid of any moral, social, or political influences. This aesthetic criticism aims to determine the value of the artwork based on aesthetic values. Looking at the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it appears rather clearly that the question of the artistic judgment is still unresolved and judging an artwork solely on aesthetic principles is still problematic.

⁵⁴ For more on purity and abstract art, see Mark A. Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁵⁵ Maurice Denis quoted in Antoine Compagnon, *Les Cinq paradoxes de la modernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), p. 56.

Whether or not Louis-Ferdinand Céline should be included in secondary school literary syllabuses in France considering his obvious anti-Semitism is still being debated, where his literary value is weighed against the doctrinal component of his works. Eric Gill's statue, *Prospero and Ariel* (1931), standing in front of the BBC building in London has been seen as shocking since the artist's diary revealed that he was a pedophile, and the BBC was asked to remove the statue several times. In these extreme cases, is it still possible to apply the doctrine of detachment of the author to his or her work? Or, as some critics argue, is the morally questionable message (to say the least) still visible in the artwork and does it therefore become inherent to its form? And, even though we assume the dissociation of the two, should artworks such as the ones mentioned above be exhibited and considered parts of a nation's cultural wealth, or, as it had been argued for the statue of Cecil Rhodes in Oriel College in Oxford, exhibited specifically in order to expose their moral, social, philosophical, and political dilemmas? The ideas of Gautier and Wilde do not provide definite answers, or a circumscribed frame through which it is possible to envisage artworks and to judge them, but they certainly ask crucial questions about art and the limits of its representations, whether these are aesthetic, political, moral, or philosophical.

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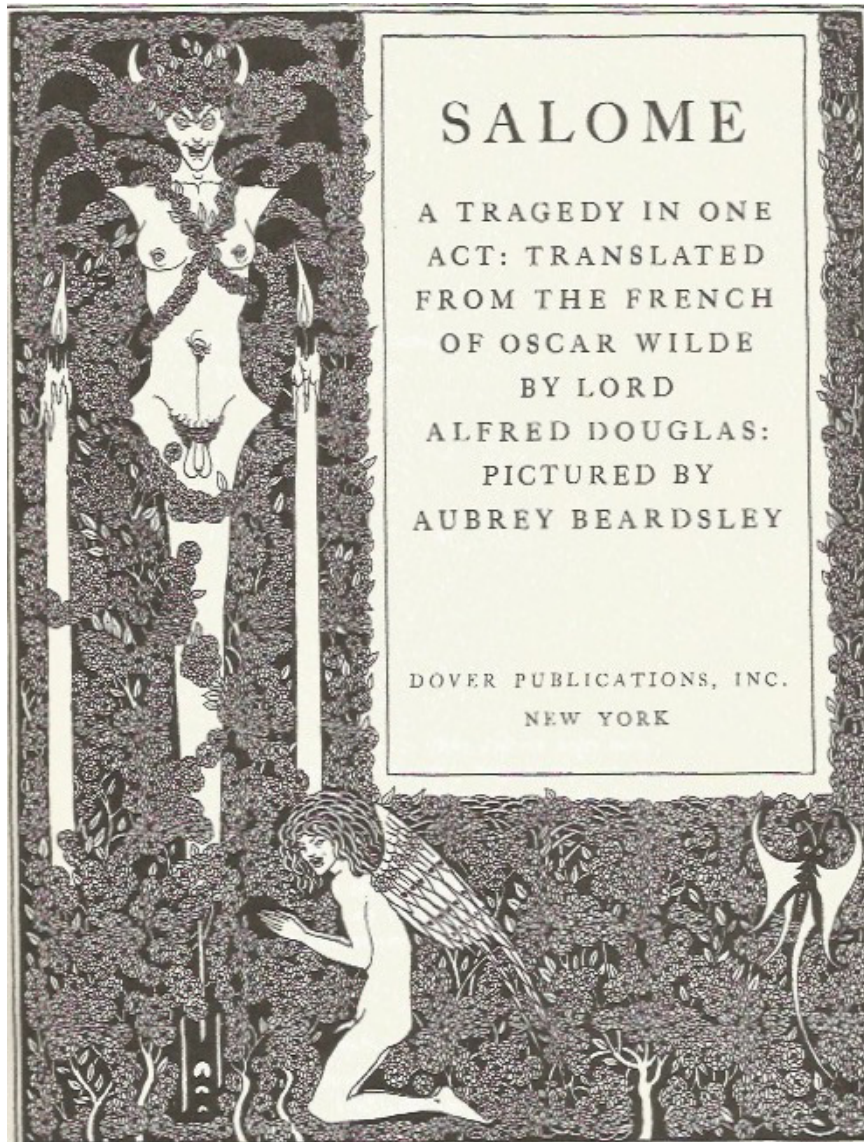


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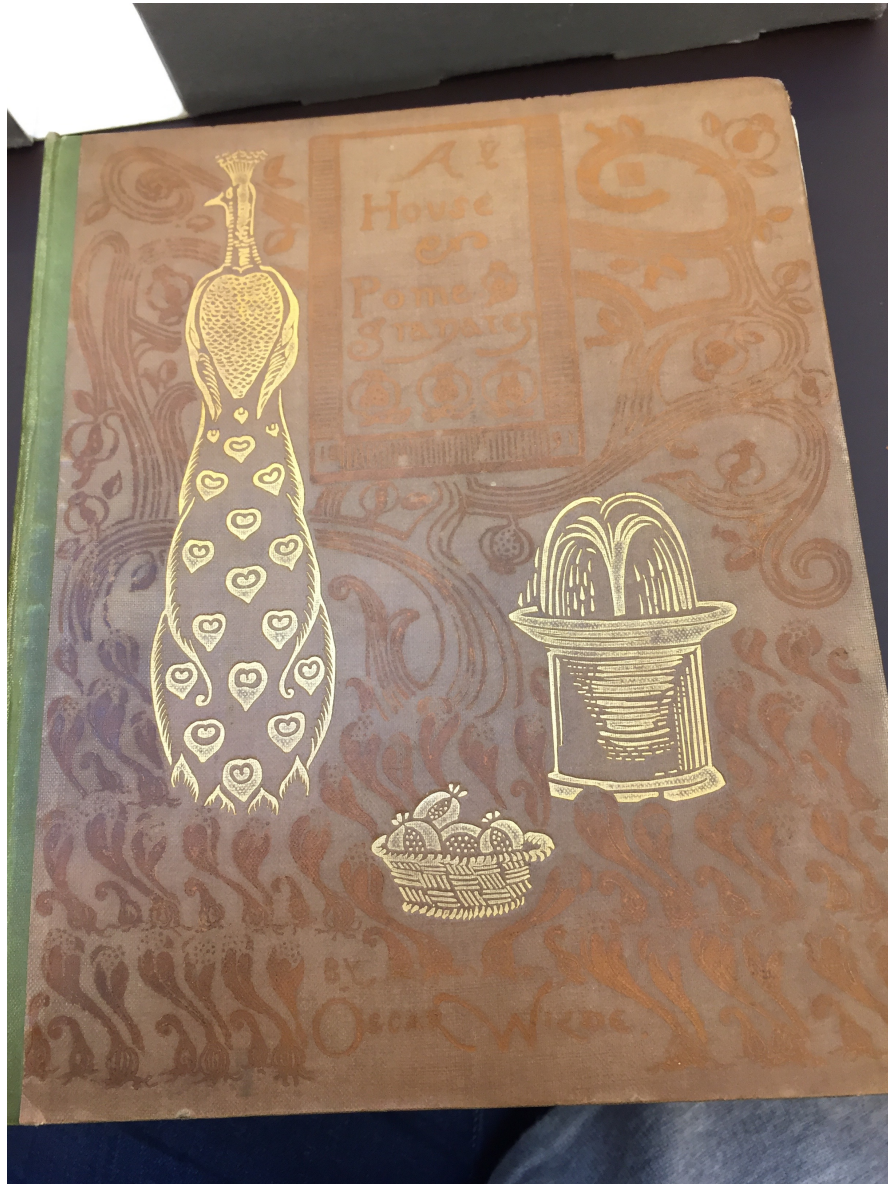


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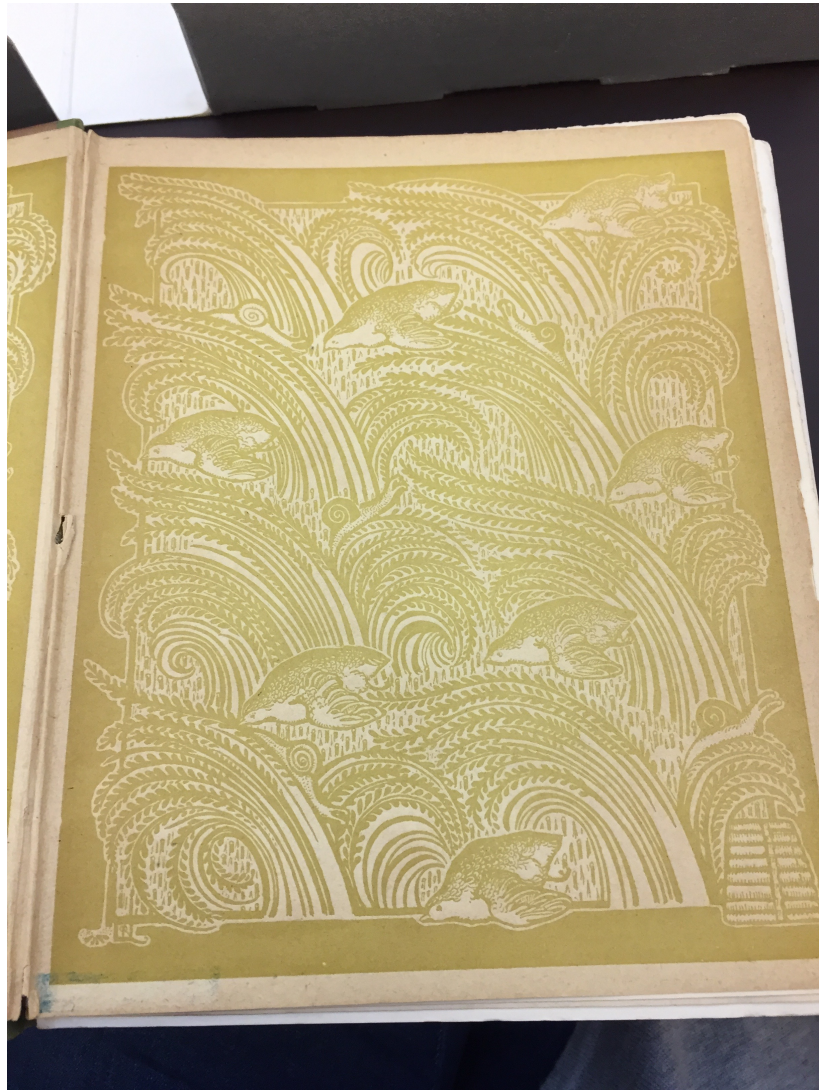


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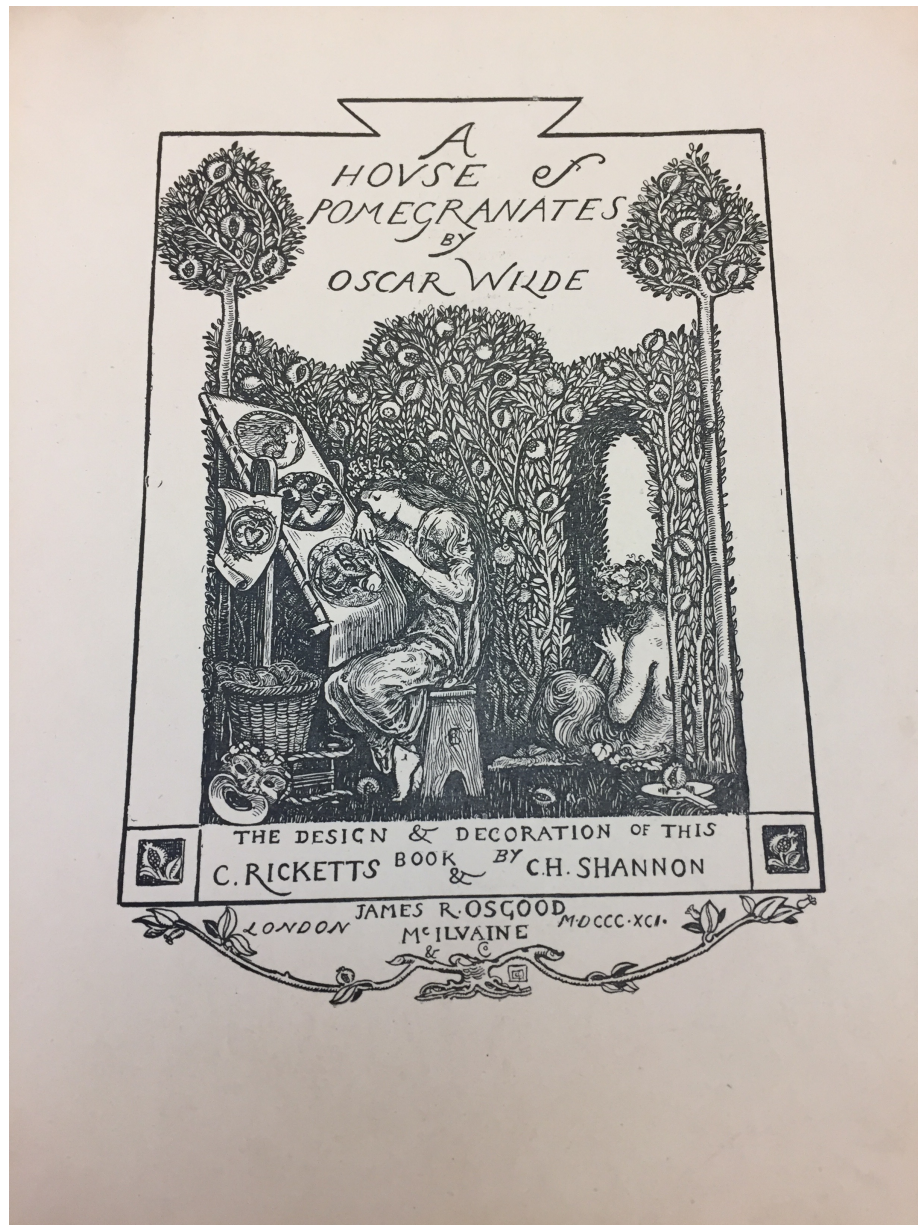


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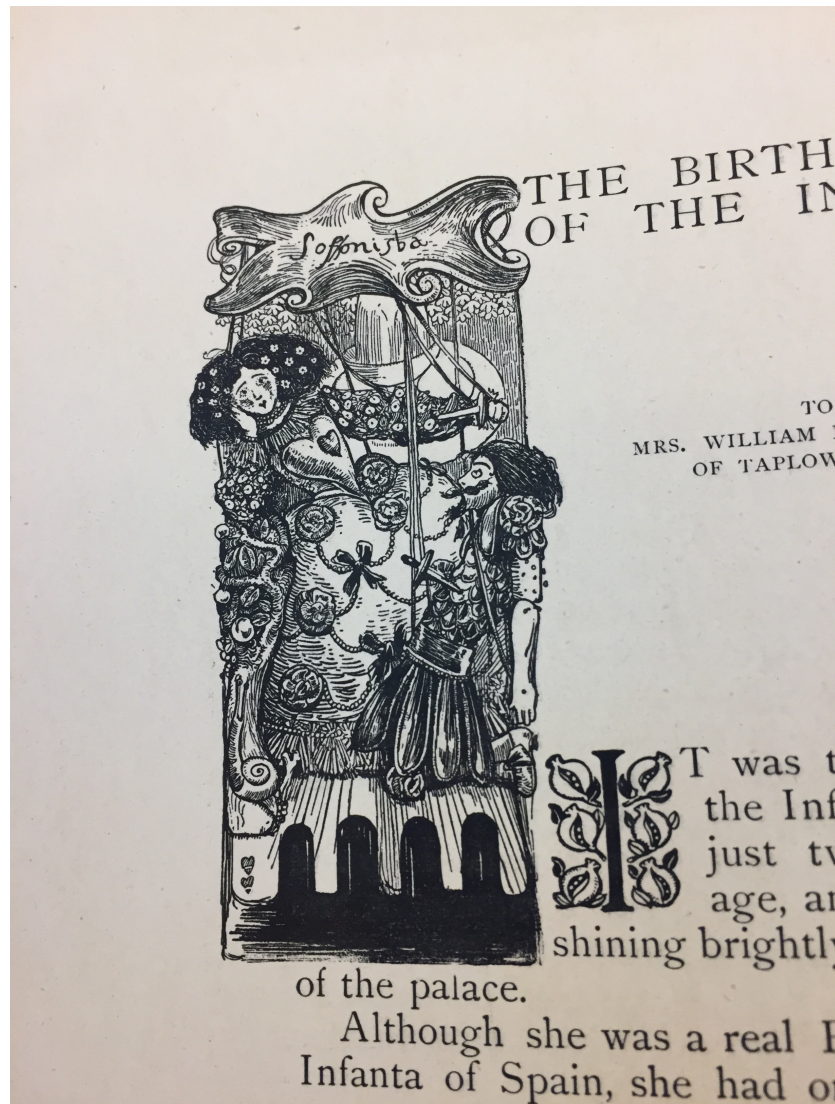


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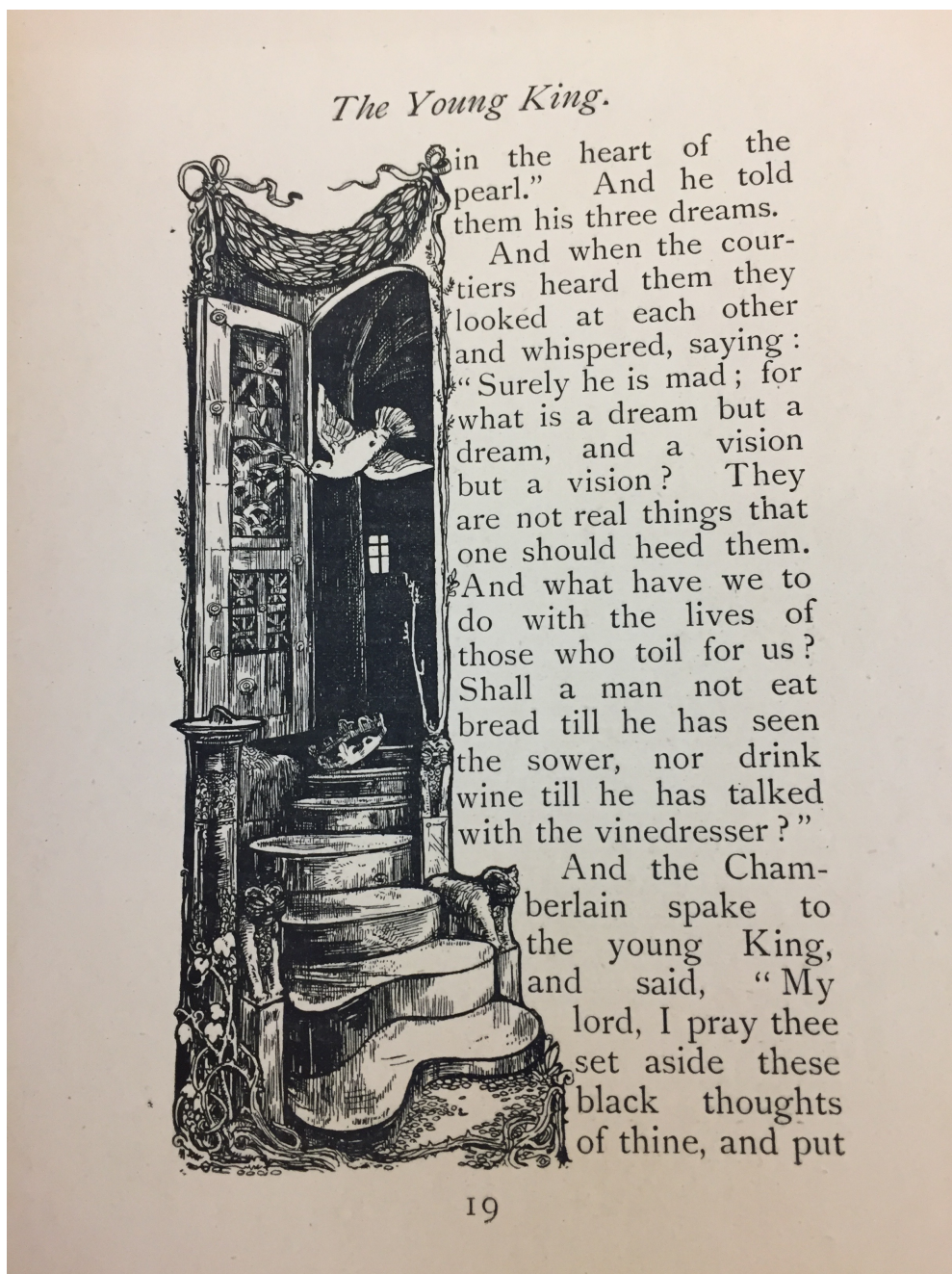


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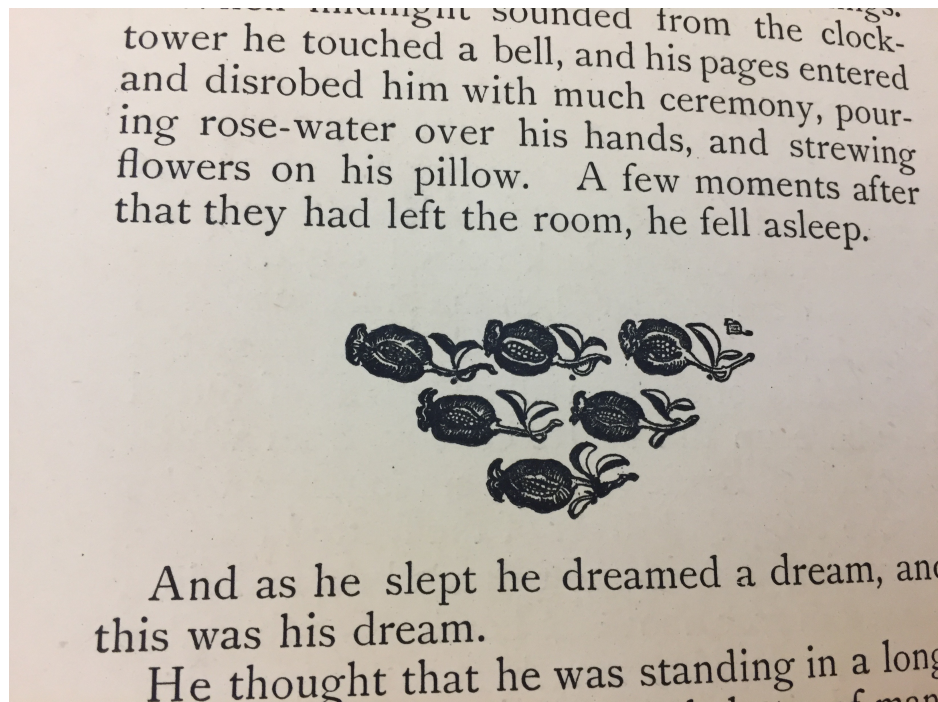


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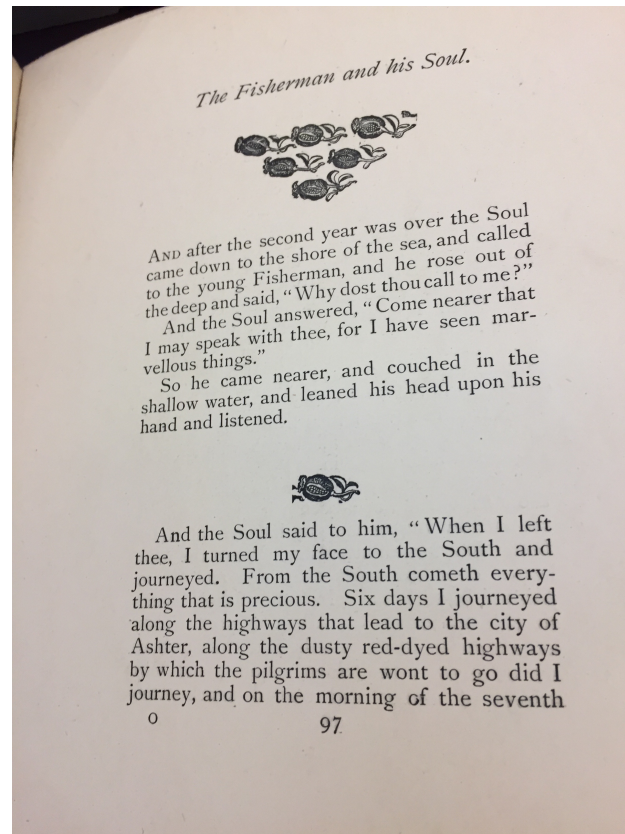


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The Star-Child.

hearth? And who knows if it will not bring us bad fortune? And how shall we tend it?" And she was wroth against him.

"Nay, but it is a Star-Child," he answered; and he told her the strange manner of the finding of it.

But she would not be appeased, but mocked at him, and spoke angrily, and cried: "Our children lack bread, and shall we feed the child of another? Who is there who careth for us? And who giveth us food?"

"Nay, but God careth for the sparrows even, and feedeth them," he answered.

"Do not the sparrows die of hunger in the winter?" she asked. "And is it not winter now?" And the man answered nothing, but stirred not from the threshold.

And a bitter wind from the forest came in through the open door, and made her tremble, and she shivered, and said to him: "Wilt thou not close the door? There cometh a bitter wind into the house, and I am cold."

"Into a house where a heart is hard cometh there not always a bitter wind?" he asked. And the woman answered him nothing, but crept closer to the fire.

And after a time she turned round and looked at him, and her eyes were full of tears. And he came in swiftly, and placed the child



Figure 15: photograph from Oscar Wilde, *A House of Pomegranates*, design and decoration by Charles Ricketts, and C. H. Shannon (London: James R. Osgood McIlvaine & Co, 1891)

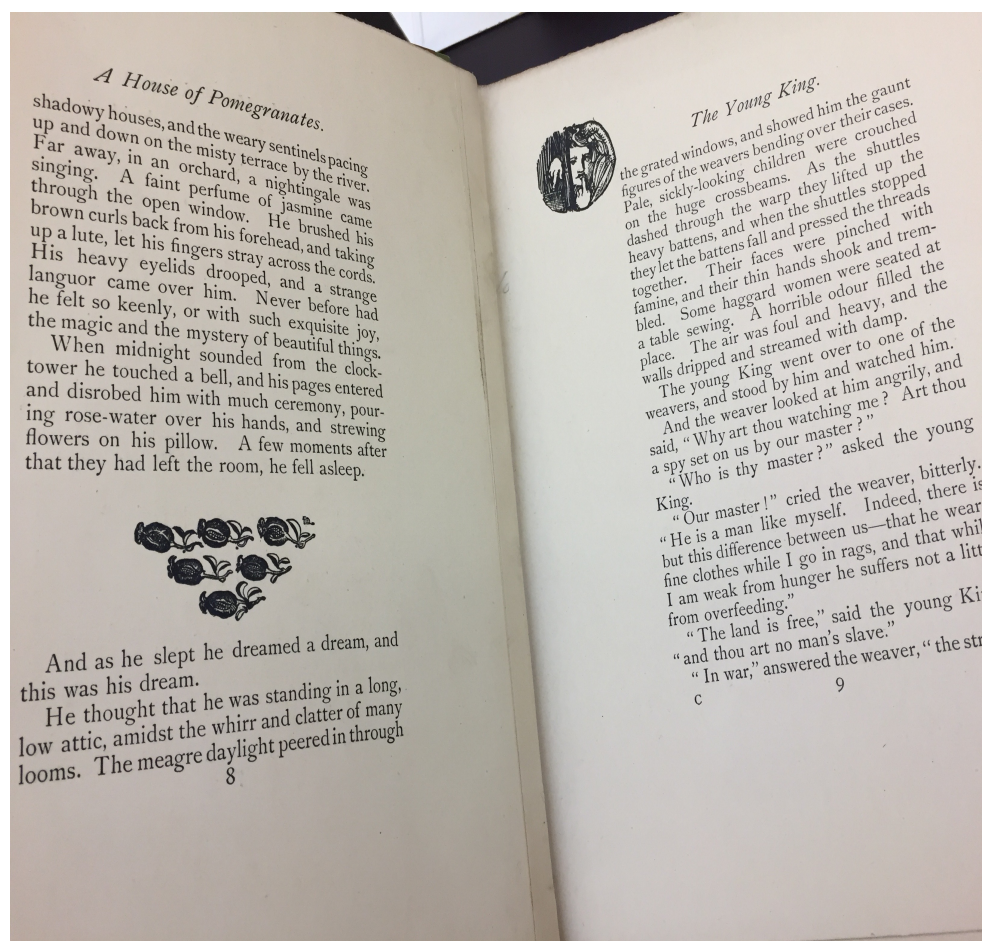


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