



The life, the person and the art of Oscar Wilde have already been subjects of many studies and essays. The life is now as well-known as we can expect it to be. The art, as art, has been sufficiently ~~discussed~~ discussed. About the person, however, not so much in itself as in relation to the art, there is, I think, still something new to say. Therein lies a problem, and I believe it has not yet been solved. Perhaps I may even say that, though perhaps suspected here and there, it has not yet been even clearly put.

Yet it is not difficult to put it clearly. Wilde was, typically, predominantly or characteristically, what is called an ~~aesthete~~ aesthete. He himself thought so, and most have so thought. Now an aesthete is a man who bases the highest interest of his life in the contemplation of beauty, as distinct from the creation of it. His attitude towards life, which is essentially action, and towards art, which is product, is substantially passive and unproductive. When therefore we find a man who is described as an aesthete to be an ~~active~~ active artist, we find what is patently a contradiction in terms. But, as we do find it, we cannot believe it to be a real contradiction. The problem must have some solution. Either we have put it wrongly or the case is a very special one, a departure from some norm. Our solution will lie either in discovering where the problem has been wrongly put, if it so happened, or how that departure from a norm, and what norm, is to be explained.

We shall begin by investigating whether the aesthete has been rightly defined. We shall pass on to investigating whether Wilde was indeed an aesthete. ~~We shall then~~ And, as we have not to prove that he was an active artist, since his works are there to prove it, we shall then, ~~have~~ if our two investigations are affirmative in their results, have to explain how it is that he was one.

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