

Concerning Oscar Wilde:

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The central circumstance, of course, is that Oscar Wilde was not an artist. He was another thing: the thing called an "intellectual". It is easy to have proof of the matter, however strange the assertion may seem.

There is not a doubt of the fact that Wilde's great preoccupation was beauty, that he was, if anything, rather a slave to it, than a mere lover of it. This beauty was especially of a decorative character; indeed, it can hardly be said to be of any character but a decorative one. ~~In matter~~ Even that moral or intellectual beauty which he craves for or admires bears a decorative character. For it is the feelings and the ideas which may be considered as decorative which he loves and indulges in. He ~~likes~~ makes all other things mental subservient to this outlook upon intellectual beauty. Thoughts, feelings, fancies - these are to him valuable only in so far as they can lend themselves to the decoration and (upholstering) of his inner life.

He loves to describe decorative things and to evoke things decorative. ~~Yet he simply evokes~~

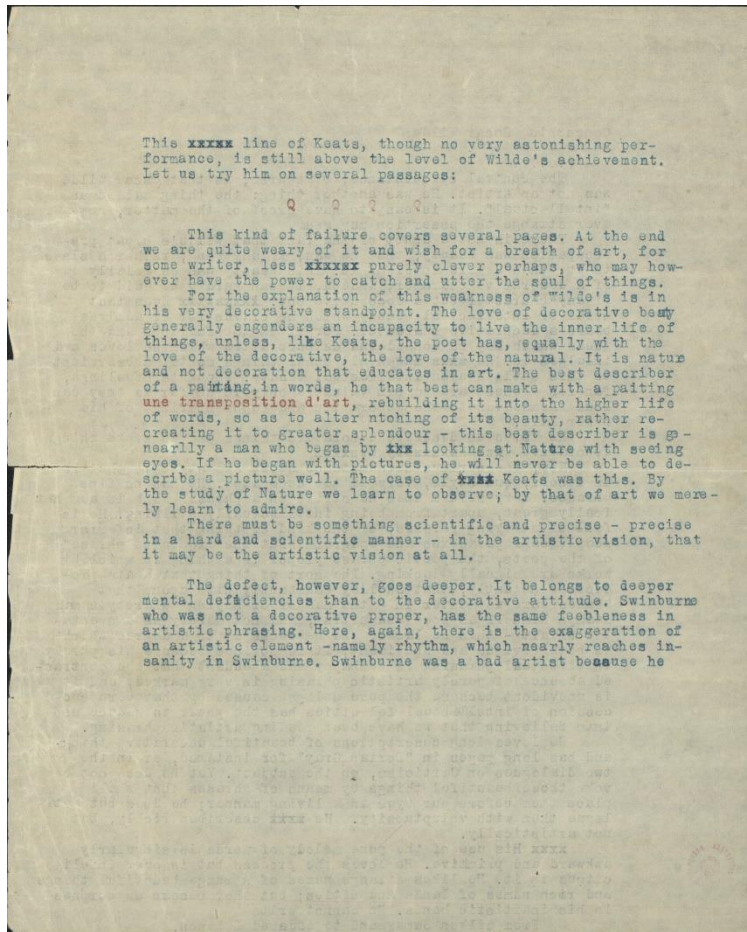
Now, the curious circumstance about his style is that it is itself, quã style, very little decorated. He has no fine phrases. Very seldom does he strike on a phrase which is aesthetically great, apart from being intellectually striking. He is full of striking phrases, of the kind of thing that inferior people call paradoxes and epigrams. But the "exquisite phrase" of the poets, the poetic phrase proper is a thing in which his works are signally lacking. The sort of thing that Keats produces constantly, that Shelley constantly hits upon, that Shakespeare is master in - the "manner of saying" whereby a man stamps himself as poet and artist, and not merely as a spectator of art - this he lacks, and he lacks it to a degree which is both obvious and unevident; it is obvious because his purely intellectual phrasing is so happy and abundant that the contrasted absence of purely artistic phrasing is very marked, and it is unevident because the pure delight caused by that very succession of intellectual felicities has the power to seduce us into believing that we have been reading artistic phrasing.

He loves long descriptions of beautiful decorative things and has long pages in "Dorian Gray" for instance, or in the two dialogues on Criticism, on the subject. Yet he does not evoke these beautiful things by means of phrase that shall place them before our eyes in a living manner; he does but catalogue them with voluptuosity. He ~~writes~~ describes richly, but not artistically.

~~Even~~ His use of the pure melody of words is singularly awkward and primitive. He loves the process but is ever infelicitous in it. He likes strange names of strange beautiful things and rich names of lands and cities; but they become as corpses in his inartistic hands. He cannot write

From silken Samarcand to cedared Lebanon,

BNP/E3, 14E - 69v



Transcrição

This ~~verse~~ line of Keats, though no very astonishing, is still above the level of Wilde's achievement. Let us try him on several passages:

Q Q Q Q

This kind of failure covers several pages. At the end we are quite weary of it and wish for a breath of art, for some writer, less ~~clever~~ purely clever perhaps, who may however have the power to catch and the utter the soul of things.

For the explanation of this weakness of Wilde's is in his very decorative standpoint. The love of decorative beauty generally engenders an incapacity to live the inner life of things, unless, like Keats, the poet has, equally with the love of the decorative, the love of the natural. It is nature and not decoration that educates in art. The best describer of a painting, in words, he that best can make with a painting *une transposition d'art*, rebuilding it into the higher life of words, so as to alter nothing of its beauty, rather recreating it to greater splendour - this best describer is generally a man who began by ~~the~~ looking at Nature with seeing eyes. If he began with pictures, he will never be able to describe a picture well. The case of ~~Keat~~ Keats was this. By the study of Nature we learn to observe; by that of art we merely learn to admire.

There must be something scientific and precise - precise in a hard and scientific manner - in the artistic vision, that it may be the artistic vision at all.

The defect, however, goes deeper. It belongs to deeper mental deficiencies than to the decorative attitude. Swinburne who was not a decorative proper, has the same feebleness in artistic phrasing. Here, again, there is the exaggeration of an artistic element - namely rhythm, which nearly reaches insanity in Swinburne. Swinburne was a bad artist because he {...}

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