

Oscar Wilde, Music, and the 'Opium-Tainted Cigarette':  
Disinterested Dandies and Critical Play

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**Abstract:** This article shows how the musical references in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are important to the identity of the dandy, especially in relation to the literary-critical work of Matthew Arnold, whose guiding presence in Wilde's oeuvre has traditionally been somewhat underestimated. Wilde's male characters, although famously fond of music, reveal 'disinterestedness' in earnest musical pursuits, similar to the 'Indian virtue of detachment' outlined by Arnold in his exploration of 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1864, in Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 26–51). Furthermore, the critical attitude of the dandy–aesthete intersects with the implications that we can read into the posture of the lounging opium smoker. Extensive scholarship has already established the relationship between the East and opium in fictional works by Thomas de Quincey, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde. Music is an essential ingredient to this literature, too, both in terms of its narrative presence and because it is a key element in an ongoing, nineteenth-century British exploration of how stylistic innovations could be represented as 'music'. After disclosing the close connections between dandyism and those nineteenth-century composers whose lives and works were often represented as dandyish (Berlioz, Chopin and Schumann), the essay builds from the tradition of opium-inspired fiction. It suggests Wilde's debt to Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), while also showing Wilde's innovations in making shifts in character and narrative voice into indicators of narcotic consumption.

**Keywords:** Matthew Arnold; Hector Berlioz; Frédéric Chopin; dandies; Charles Dickens; empire; music; opium; Richard Schumann; Richard Wagner; Oscar Wilde

As [Basil and Lord Henry] entered they saw Dorian Gray. He was seated at the piano, with his back to them, turning over the pages of a volume of Schumann's 'Forest Scenes.' 'You must lend me these, Basil,' he cried. 'I want to learn them. They are perfectly charming.'

'That entirely depends on how you sit to-day, Dorian.'

'Oh, I am tired of sitting, and I don't want a life-sized portrait of myself,' answered the lad, swinging round on the music-stool

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, rev. 1891)

Our first encounter with the protagonist of Oscar Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, occurs as he is flipping the pages of Robert Schumann's *Waldszenen*, Op. 82, captivated by the 'charming' music.<sup>1</sup> Schumann is one of three significant references to Western composers in the narrative, including Wagner and Chopin. These composers, along with the others who are mentioned in passing in the novel (Rubinstein, Schubert, and Beethoven) were so popular that

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<sup>1</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), ed. Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 16; further references to this edition appear in parentheses.

their music was ubiquitous on the piano-stands of the 1890s, but the first three were perceived to have personal and compositional characteristics that overlapped with qualities that dandies held dear, too.

It is useful to begin with *Forest Scenes* because, if we can resist being deceived by Dorian Gray's seemingly casual fascination, we may acknowledge that he might also be affected by the music's programmatic content. For in *Waldszenen*'s sounds and sentiments, we find the languorous attitudes of many of Wilde's dandies. 'Forest Scenes' is a group of nine piano pieces prefaced by evocative titles and scraps of poetry that set up a program that the musical idiom seeks to duplicate. 'For Schumann, the forest of *Waldszenen* became a visionary wood, a wood in which were found marvels both of good and evil', observes Eric Frederick Jensen. He quickly follows this statement with evidence for ways in which the moral dichotomy appears through contrasting musical moods and tonalities. The first piece, "Eintritt" [Entrance] begins as a bucolic and pleasant piece in B-flat major.... Suddenly, there is no clear tonal center and the rhythmic flow is abruptly altered; a new and nebulous region has been entered.'<sup>2</sup> The next piece, 'Jäger auf der Lauer' [Hunter Lying in Wait], expresses more sinister emotions, as we can see in its key (D minor) and what Jensen describes as 'tense and impetuous' music.<sup>3</sup>

Speaking in very broad terms, this sense of pastoral ease alternating with evil foreboding characterizes the rest of Op. 82. A composition that oscillates between expressing bucolic charm and strange new, morally questionable regions essentially foreshadows the plot of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Crucially, Dorian's manner here also reflects the playfulness, pleasures, and aesthetics found in the Wildean musical dandy; he finds flipping pages, desiring to play, and swinging on the stool more agreeable than what he perceives as the work of sitting still for the painter, Basil Hallward, who strives to capture the young man's beauty. Of course, as we detect later in the novel, Dorian knows how to play the piano, but he never plays a piece from start to finish. Instead, in Wilde's writing dandy-aesthetes like Dorian often punctuate their witty conversation by playing evocative snatches at the piano while also drawing on the opium cigarette dangling between their fingers.

These musical materials and attitudes contribute significantly to what Ellen Moers terms the 'decorative surface' of the dandy figure, which rests upon the idea of inactivity, of 'never, in fact, do[ing] anything at all.'<sup>4</sup> Inactivity does not mean to relax so much as 'to

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<sup>2</sup> Eric Frederick Jensen, 'A New Manuscript of Robert Schumann's Walszenen Op. 82', *Journal of Musicology* 3.1 (Winter 1984), 85.

<sup>3</sup> Jensen, 'A New Manuscript of Walszenen', 86.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: Viking, 1960), 14, 13.

attain perfection in all the accessories of life',<sup>5</sup> thereby projecting a refined image of self-perfection. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the quality of languor and the idea of posturing remained fundamental to the dandy's identity – an identity that gradually became synonymous with a certain type of artist who combined particular musical and verbal mediums. Scholars generally concur that the dandy figure can be traced back to Regency England when George (Beau) Brummell, as Rhonda K. Garelick puts it, 'launched dandyism in both England and France' as well as 'in the worlds of both literature and society'.<sup>6</sup> These literary and social 'worlds' are mutually dependent in the history of the dandy, for he is constructed largely through works of fiction. Many novels popularized the dandy figure to the point of influencing numerous male readers to emulate him, while the real-life dandy added to this process of fictionalization by obscuring the facts of his life, as was the case when Brummell implied that his family was lower in the class structure than it actually was.<sup>7</sup> This fictionalizing process continued in writings about Brummell. Captain William Jesse's biography of Brummell, which rests largely upon anecdotal evidence, was the basis for many later accounts of dandyism including Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Du Dandysme et de George Brummell* (1843). Barbey went a step further than Jesse, however, and omitted facts about Brummell when they did not meet his purpose.<sup>8</sup> Just as Brummell's alleged ambition 'was to turn his person into a social artwork,' Garelick concludes that 'the goal of Barbey's treatise on Brummell is to turn Brummell's life into a literary artwork.'<sup>9</sup>

A major component of the dandy character is the veritable deification of boredom; this is a point that Barbey emphasizes by beginning his autobiographical *Memoranda* with the words, '*Je m'en vais recommencer un Journal. Cela durera le temps qu'il plaira à Dieu, c'est à dire l'ennui, qui est bien le dieu de ma vie*'.<sup>10</sup> In the middle of the century in France, Barbey, along with Baudelaire, justified opium and alcohol consumption as part of the dandified persona because of *l'ennui*.<sup>11</sup> Baudelaire, moreover, newly associated the dandy with the artist rather than the upper crust and claimed that the dandy exuded 'modernity', by which he meant urbanity, present-day fashions, and the sense of the enduring soul existing

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<sup>5</sup> Moers, *The Dandy*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Rhonda K. Garelick, *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Moers, *The Dandy*, 18, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Garelick, *Rising Star*, 6, 9; Moers, *The Dandy*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Garelick, *Rising Star*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> 'I am going to restart a journal. It will last as long as it pleases God, that is to say boredom, which is very much the God of my life.' Cited by Norbert Dodille, *Le Texte Autobiographique de Barbey D'Aurevilly: Correspondances et Journaux Intimes* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1987), 105. I appreciate Rachel Hammersley's assistance with the translation.

<sup>11</sup> Moers, *The Dandy*, 275.

alongside corporeal desires and sins.<sup>12</sup> By the *fin de siècle*, Wilde reformulated the dandy in England; he built upon these earlier traditions when he combined the aristocrat-dandy with the artist-dandy, while also adding a fresh component by turning that artist into a critic.<sup>13</sup>

Critics generally know and accept the history of the dandy that I have just traced, but scholarship has neglected how important music was to dandyism, too. Looking at *Dorian Gray*, for instance, musically-minded readers will immediately see the importance of the protagonist's name. The Dorian mode is an ancient Grecian scale, as Wilde acknowledges when he talks about the curative properties of 'the noble Dorian music of the Greek' in 'The Critic as Artist' (1890, rev 1891).<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Wilde's youthful advertisement of his dandified persona included representing himself as a string instrument; while still an Oxford undergraduate, Wilde appeared at the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 wearing a suit made to look like a cello.<sup>15</sup> The budding aesthete literally fashioned himself not only as music but also as the effete, languorous dandy, for the cello conjures up a set of apropos associations. Besides the sheer theatricality of the costume, instruments are the passive objects for which composers write and upon which men play, and the string family was commonly seen to mimic feminine form.<sup>16</sup>

Not only did the Wildean aesthete-dandy find music to be significant to his projected identity; nineteenth-century composers also often found that their lives and works were represented as dandyish, sometimes without their permission. Berlioz, for instance, responded by signing a copy of an 1845 lithograph of himself by Prinzhofer of Vienna, which depicted the composer with a slim cane and bejeweled fingers,

je n'ai jamais porté ni bagues ni canne ainsi que mon peintre m'en accuse.

H. Berlioz  
non Dandy<sup>17</sup>

*Le dandysme* was essentially a narrative imposed upon those composers whose works fit a certain breed of aesthetics.

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<sup>12</sup> Moers, *The Dandy*, 273, 280.

<sup>13</sup> Moers, *The Dandy*, 300-302.

<sup>14</sup> Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', (1890; rev 1891), rpt in *Oscar Wilde: The Major Works*, ed. Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1989), 264.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 78-79.

<sup>16</sup> For stringed instruments, see Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England, 1870-1914: 'Encroaching on All Man's Privileges'* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), 82-87.

<sup>17</sup> 'I have never worn rings nor carried a cane, as my portraitist accuses me of doing. H. Berlioz not a Dandy.' Hector Berlioz, *New Letters of Berlioz, 1830-1868*, intro. and trans. Jacques Barzun (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 42.

Liszt's *F. Chopin* aligns even more obviously with the idea of constructing a composer's life in such a way as to share dandyish characteristics. *F. Chopin*, first published in French in *La Revue et gazette musicale* in 1851, and then bound into a book the next year, was largely responsible for establishing Chopin's posthumous reputation. The public might otherwise have easily forgotten a composer whose repertoire and performances focused on the closed circle of the elite Parisian salon.<sup>18</sup> Liszt's biography of his erstwhile friend ensured his pieces becoming 'the mode, the rage',<sup>19</sup> but it also represented the Polish composer in such a way as to conform to a set of nationalist and musical agendas held by Liszt and his co-author and then-lover, the Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein.<sup>20</sup> Proud of her Polish ancestry, Sayn-Wittgenstein identified strongly with Polish nationalism and therefore with Chopin, while Liszt's interest focused on radical compositional techniques and ways of thinking about music that would push the art forward. The princess coined the term for this progressive school of music: *Zukunftsmusik* (the music of the future).<sup>21</sup> Together, they penned the celebrated biography of Chopin, even though only Liszt's name appears on the publication.

Seen in context of the dandy who was emerging in mid-century Paris, Chopin had, or was given, a set of qualities that intersected with the culture of the dandy. First, the manner in which Liszt's biography was compiled makes a compelling connection to the biographies of Brummell that depended on hearsay. After Chopin's family refused to cooperate with Liszt's project, the author relied largely upon his own memories, anecdotes told by friends, and the perfunctory responses to a questionnaire that was completed by one of Chopin's most devoted students, the Scottish aristocrat Jane Stirling. Jim Samson observes that the resulting memoir was then 'poeticized to the level of (at times) pure fiction'.<sup>22</sup> We should not dismiss this poeticizing process for it reveals significant cultural associations and beliefs of the day. The fictionalization was only furthered when Martha Walker Cook translated the biography in 1852 as *The Life of Chopin* since Cook's formulations sometimes differ in significant ways from Liszt's original intent. Considering Liszt's words in their English translation is important because it was in this form that *F. Chopin* sparked the English-speaking public's

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<sup>18</sup> Meirion Hughes, Introduction, *Liszt's 'Chopin': A New Edition*, ed. and trans. Meirion Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming); Jim Samson, *Chopin* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996), 283-284.

<sup>19</sup> Martha Walker Cook, Preface, *The Life of Chopin* by Franz Liszt, (1852), trans. Martha Walker Cook, 2nd edn (Philadelphia: Leypoldt, 1863), 8.

<sup>20</sup> Hughes, Introduction, *Liszt's 'Chopin'*, forthcoming.

<sup>21</sup> Hughes, Introduction, *Liszt's 'Chopin'*, forthcoming.

<sup>22</sup> Samson, *Chopin*, 283.

imagination. Significantly, Cook describes Chopin using the lexicon of the dandy. She paints Chopin as responding with ‘impatience and ennui’, for instance, whereas Liszt’s words are more accurately translated as ‘impatience and vexation’.<sup>23</sup> Cook’s version, moreover, attributes Chopin’s ‘almost undecipherable’ character to his Eastern, Slavic blood:

The forms of this politeness, this modesty, have their solution in their manners, in which their ancient connection with the East may be strangely traced. Without having in the least degree acquired the taciturnity of the Mussulman, they have yet learned from it a distrustful reserve upon all subjects which touch upon the more delicate and personal chords of the heart. When they speak of themselves, we may almost always be certain that they keep some concealment in reserve, which assures them the advantage in intellect, or feeling. They suffer their interrogator to remain in ignorance of some circumstance, [...] which they well know how to hide under the subtle smile of an almost imperceptible mockery.<sup>24</sup>

The so-called Eastern dimensions of a quiet, subtly mocking smile that hides a teeming life of tempestuous creativity plays a vital role in the figure of the English dandy-aesthete, as we shall see. Even though Cook may have spread more of the dandy’s veneer on Chopin, however, she did not have to stretch the point very far. Chopin’s physical frailty linked the composer to *le dandy*, even though Chopin’s illness was real while the dandy affected delicacy.<sup>25</sup> Also like the dandy, Chopin was associated with elements of sexual transgression, seen most noticeably in the feminine iconography that surrounded him as well as the gender-bending figure cut by his lover, the cross-dressing George Sand.<sup>26</sup>

About three decades later in England, Schumann, too, was portrayed in terms that could be construed as dandyish. Francesco Berger, for instance, understood Schumann as ‘a poet, a dreamer, a thoroughly unpractical man, and, at times, an impossible one. His life was uneventful.’<sup>27</sup> Although virtually forgotten today, Berger cut a well-known figure at the heart of literary and musical London for over half a century. A friend of Dickens and Collins, Berger composed the incidental music to Collins’s plays *The Frozen Deep* (1857) and *The Light House* (1855, premiered 1857).<sup>28</sup> Later, he taught piano to the author Marie Corelli, joined the faculty at the Royal Academy of Music and the Guildhall School of Music, became the hugely successful secretary of the Royal Philharmonic Society from 1884 to 1911, and

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<sup>23</sup> Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, trans. Cook, 28. Liszt, *Liszt’s ‘Chopin’*, trans. Hughes, forthcoming.

<sup>24</sup> Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, trans. Cook, 28.

<sup>25</sup> Moers, *The Dandy*, 20-21; Jeremy Barlow, ‘Encounters with Chopin: Fanny Erskine’s Paris Diary, 1847-8’, *Chopin Studies* 2, 245-248.

<sup>26</sup> Jeffrey Kallberg, ‘Small Fairy Voices: Sex, History and Meaning in Chopin’, *Chopin Studies* 2, 50-71.

<sup>27</sup> Francesco Berger, Foreward, *Robert Schumann* by J.A. Fuller-Maitland (1913; Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, n.d.), v.

<sup>28</sup> Francesco Berger, *Reminiscences, Impressions, & Anecdotes* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, [1913]), 19-21; Francesco Berger, 97 (London: Mathews and Marrot, [1931]), 15.

edited some of Schumann's piano pieces.<sup>29</sup> Berger, in short, was in a position to know that Schumann's life was far from uneventful; describing him otherwise presents Schumann along the lines of the dandy. Schumann may have especially appealed to the decadent-aesthete in *fin-de-siècle* England given the 'certain circumstances, and in particular those which darkened the close of his career,' which biographers like English music critic J.A. Fuller Maitland only 'hinted at rather than described.'<sup>30</sup> This great Romantic composer suffered from mental illness at the close of his life, an experience that, shrouded in some mystery, aligns with the perverse, bizarre, and neo-Gothic narratives of decadence.

Besides the biographers' role in presenting the idea that these composers share qualities with dandyism, there are further affinities evidenced in the sonic language and impressionistic aesthetics of these great musicians. Their pieces, like Chopin's Impromptus or Schubert's *Moments Musicaux* [Musical Moments],<sup>31</sup> were short and often given suggestive titles. Schumann, especially, valued the idea of impulse and inspiration, making it difficult for listeners to tell where the sound might lead next. This individuality made his compositions seem 'too interior and strange' to Austrian music critic Eduard Hanslick in 1846.<sup>32</sup> These composers' works contrasted to multi-movement works with rigorous sonata structure. They thus allowed for limited attention spans, which probably appealed to Dorian Gray as he swung about on the piano stool.

In addition, this set of composers shared with Wilde an interdisciplinary interest in the synergy between words and music. Not only did Schumann write music that could be compared to Wilde's narratives, but he, like Berlioz and Wagner, was also a well-known music critic. Fuller Maitland placed Schumann on the highest pedestal in this pantheon when he held up Schumann as proof that creative and critical 'facult[ies] can coexist'.<sup>33</sup> While Fuller Maitland limited himself to praising Schumann's intellectual acumen, the composer's rhetorical style was also notable; he appraised scores with a witty, irreverent panache in the journal that he helped to found and then edit *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*.<sup>34</sup> In Leon Plantinga's words, Schumann's journalistic writing includes 'fantasies in ornate prose that are only

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<sup>29</sup> Berger, *Reminiscences*, 45, 47, 67- 79, 171. Robert Schumann, *Immortelles de R. Schumann*, ed. F. Berger (London: Ollivier, [1870]).

<sup>30</sup> J.A. Fuller Maitland, *Schumann* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1884), v.

<sup>31</sup> Because of Schumann's spelling error (*Moments Musicales*), the title is often corrected to *Moments Musicaux*.

<sup>32</sup> Eduard Hanslick, *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 1: *Aufsätze und Rezensionen, 1844-1848*, ed. Dietmar Strauss (Vienna: Böhlau, 1993), 106. Cited by Leon Botstein, 'History, Rhetoric, and the Self: Robert Schumann and Music Making in German-Speaking Europe, 1800-1860', *Schumann and his World*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Fuller Maitland, *Schumann*, 101.

<sup>34</sup> Leon Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), ix-x.

incidentally about music.<sup>35</sup> The musical and the literary, the creative and the critical, come close together in the verbal and musical output of these composers, just as they did in the essays, plays, and fictional prose of the overtly dandyish Wilde.

There are also parallels in plot. Schumann's first essay on the topic of Chopin begins with an exchange between fictional characters (the *Davidsbund*), which strikingly recalls the opening of *Dorian Gray*:

Eusebius came in quietly the other day. You know the ironic smile on his pale face with which he seeks to create suspense. I was sitting at the piano with Florestan. [...] Eusebius laid a piece of music on the piano rack. We were not allowed to see the title page. Vacantly I turned over its leaves; the secret enjoyment of music which one does not hear has something magic in it. And besides this, it seems to me that every composer presents a different character of note forms to the eye; Beethoven looks very different from Mozart on the paper; just as Jean Paul's prose is different from that of Goethe. But here it seemed as though nothing but strange eyes were looking up at me – the eyes of flowers, basilisk eyes, peacock's eyes, maiden's eyes; [...]. 'Now play it,' said Florestan. Eusebius consented; and [...] evoked innumerable figures of actual life; [...] Florestan, who for some time has been without a home, hurried through the moonlit streets to my house. At midnight I found him lying on my sofa with his eyes closed. 'Chopin's variations,' he began as if in a dream, 'are running through my head;<sup>36</sup>

This passage bears many similarities to Dorian's page-flipping at the opening of Wilde's novel, which eventually becomes playing the piano upon Lord Henry's command. The dreaming quality that results from music and the comparison of notes on the page to written words echo in Wilde's novel, too, as does using poetic prose to describe Chopin's Opus 2 ('flowers, basilisk eyes, peacock's eyes, maiden's eyes').

In her fine book on Aubrey Beardsley, Emma Sutton makes clear the connection made between British decadence and Wagnerism (the almost cultish fascination surrounding Wagner, his music, and his critical writing after his death in 1883). But, aside from a passing allusion to Beardsley as a 'dandiacal persona,'<sup>37</sup> neither Sutton nor anyone else overtly addresses the close connections between dandyism and Wagner, Chopin, and Schumann.<sup>38</sup> Yet these composers, opposing the structurally strict instrumental forms inherited from

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<sup>35</sup> Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic*, 63.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Schumann, 'On Opus 2', *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (1831). Translated and rpt in *Robert Schumann: On Music and Musicians*, ed. Konrad Wolff, trans. Paul Rosenfeld (New York: Pantheon, 1946) 126-127.

<sup>37</sup> Emma Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

<sup>38</sup> Some of Ravel's compositions, however, have been discussed as 'self-portrayals of the artist-as-dandy', as Michael J. Puri puts it in 'Dandy, Interrupted: Sublimation, Repression, and Self-Portraiture in Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* (1909-1912)', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 60.2 (Summer 2007), 319.

Viennese classicism, such as Brahms often used, created a musical writing style that is similar to the features I discuss in Wilde's verbal rhetoric. Marcia Citron calls the challenges to generic norms that can be seen in Chopin's emotive Nocturnes or the narrative content of Schumann's *Waldszenen* 'aesthetic transgressions'<sup>39</sup>, a description that also can be applied to Wagner's contributions. His new form, the music drama, overturned the existing norms of opera with its continuous music (endless melody), the intimate oneness of words and music, and the vital role played by the opera orchestra. Wagner's powerful brass and larger orchestra were of course seen as masculine, helping to move listeners to what was often perceived as a state of overwhelming ecstasy, while Schubert's, Chopin's, and Schumann's Lieder and/or solo piano pieces are more intimate genres appropriate for the salon, which had heavy feminine associations in the nineteenth century.<sup>40</sup> Despite these differences, however, all of these composers were thought to be fundamentally different from those contemporaries in Germany and England whose musical works were modeled on classically balanced structures and were often perceived as providing a moral standard that would help to improve the lives of individual listeners and, indeed, the nation.

In this essay, I show how the musical references in *Dorian Gray* to Wagner, Chopin, and Schumann are reciprocally important to the identity of the dandy, especially in relation to the literary-critical work of Matthew Arnold, whose guiding presence in Wilde's oeuvre has traditionally been somewhat underestimated. In particular Wilde's dandyish male characters, although famously fond of music, reveal a '*disinterestedness*' in earnest musical pursuits similar to the 'Indian virtue of detachment'<sup>41</sup> outlined by Matthew Arnold in an October 1864 lecture at Oxford and subsequently published as 'The Function of Criticism in the Present Time' in the *National Review*. Arnold makes clear that criticism should work for the future good by demonstrating '*disinterestedness*.'<sup>42</sup> Stefan Collini usefully glosses this term as meaning to not 'subordinate criticism to some other purpose'; it does not mean 'uninterested' but rather that criticism does not serve a political agenda.<sup>43</sup> It is a 'frame of mind',<sup>44</sup> to Collini, the importance of which is underlined by Peter Keating in his analysis of 'Arnold's Social and Political Thought' where he points to '*disinterestedness*' as summarizing Arnold's

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<sup>39</sup> Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 125.

<sup>40</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 130-138.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1864) in *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 41.

<sup>42</sup> Arnold, 'Function of Criticism', 37. Original emphasis.

<sup>43</sup> Stefan Collini, Introduction, *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings* by Matthew Arnold, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), xvi.

<sup>44</sup> Stefan Collini, *Arnold* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7.

‘programme’, as much as he ‘may be said to have a programme at all’.<sup>45</sup> The aesthetes later applauded the same notion of apolitical purpose when they discussed ideals of the fine and performing arts – although opposing a political stance does, of course, imply a politics of sorts, just as Arnold’s position against party factions nonetheless puts forward his own ideals.

The comparisons between Arnold and Wilde are not neatly binaristic, of course, and I do not mean to dismiss the acknowledged intellectual differences between the two men. Arnold, as many critics have understood, is certainly more moral in his statements than Wilde. Lawrence Danson, for example, observes that Wilde engaged in a type of ‘self-conscious pastiche’ that references Arnold’s role as Victorian Sage for the purpose of ‘parodic subversion’.<sup>46</sup> Arnold himself was anxious to communicate this difference. Amanda Anderson shows that Arnold feared that his notions of detachment ‘were themselves easily detachable from moral substance’ and that he ‘protest[ed] that he had been misunderstood and did not advocate a conception of culture as effete aestheticism.’ As a solution, Arnold offered the view that *disinterestedness* was ‘as much a moral and psychological achievement as a purely intellectual one.’<sup>47</sup> My intention is to reexamine Wilde’s aesthetics by focusing on an aspect of Arnoldian ‘*disinterestedness*’ that scholarship on this famous term tends to overlook. Namely, the attitudes of Wilde’s male, musical characters and the attributes of the repertoire that they enjoy intersect with the implications that we can read into the posture of the lounging opium smoker, which itself is closely connected to what Arnold termed the ‘Indian virtue of detachment’.

Extensive scholarship has already established the relationship between the East and opium in fictional works by Thomas de Quincey, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, and Oscar Wilde.<sup>48</sup> I have elsewhere suggested that music is an essential ingredient to this literature, too, both in terms of its narrative presence and because it is a key element in an ongoing, nineteenth-century British exploration of how stylistic innovations could be represented as music.<sup>49</sup> Examining ‘The Critic as Artist’ and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) in addition to

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<sup>45</sup> Peter Keating, ‘Arnold’s Social and Political Thought’, *Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976), 213.

<sup>46</sup> Lawrence Danson, *Wilde’s Intentions: The Artist in his Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 92.

<sup>47</sup> Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 112, 114.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, John Barrell, *The Infection of Thomas de Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 6-21; Curtis Marez, ‘The Other Addict: Reflections on Colonialism and Oscar Wilde’s Opium Smoke Screen’, *ELH* 64.1 (1997), 257-87; Lyn Pykett, *Charles Dickens* (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2002), 184-7.

<sup>49</sup> Phyllis Weliver, ‘Tom-Toms, Dream-Fugues and Poppy-Juice: East Meets West in Nineteenth-Century Fiction’, *Portrayal of the East: Music and the Oriental Imagination in the British Empire, 1780–1940*, eds Bennett Zon and Martin Clayton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 257–74.

*Dorian Gray* draws into focus the ways in which this potent and revealing subject-matter – the dandy’s languorous posture, aesthetic writing style, smoking opium, and listening to and playing the music of modernity – interact in Wilde’s oeuvre. Each of Wilde’s works is organized to create complicated relationships among this grouping, all of which belong to dandyish characters.

### **Languor and Suggestiveness**

Wilde’s writing essentially adds fresh dimensions to pre-existing strands of thought on the style in which music, language, and the imagination might be brought together. Certainly, the sprawling narcotic-smoker was already a familiar pose and character in literature as fiction became an essential source for showing how the mind’s activity swirls under the surface of seeming indolence. This posture appears repeatedly in *Dorian Gray* in a manner that exhibits significant intertextuality with *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), for instance.<sup>50</sup> The decrepit setting in Dickens’s novel along with John Jasper’s energetic pipe-blowing and vehement weariness (he is ‘troubled with some stray sort of ambition, aspiration, restlessness, dissatisfaction’<sup>51</sup>) contrasts, of course, with Wilde’s languorous cigarette-smokers, as does Jasper’s seriousness about music. The organist’s aptitude at the keyboard ensures him employment at a major Cathedral and he proves to be an exacting voice teacher when he repeatedly strikes the keynote while Rosa Budd sings, insisting that she keep the pitch. Still, the focus in both Wilde’s and Dickens’s novels is on an imaginative exuberance of the mind that brings together the sumptuous East with everyday England.

In *Dorian Gray*, the opium smoker is revealed in the first instance through narrative style. Lord Henry Wotton’s point of view certainly embodies Walter Pater’s theories of living for and in the moment, where art enriches that fleeting present,<sup>52</sup> but Lord Henry’s style of expression also suggests a hallucinatory vision, which would account for a stylistic shift that occurs between paragraphs showing Lord Henry’s thoughts and the narrator’s observations.

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<sup>50</sup> Although I have found no reference by Wilde to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, he does refer to Dickens over the course of his career. My assertion that there are shared clusters of associations between the texts, however, does not depend upon an overt biographical connection. For references to Dickens in Wilde’s correspondence, see *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, eds Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Holt, 2000), 126, 127, 274, 663.

<sup>51</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), ed. Arthur J. Cox (London: Penguin, 1974), 48–9.

<sup>52</sup> See Walter Pater, Conclusion, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, (1873) ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 153.

After regaling us in the novel's first paragraph with a perfumed English garden, Wilde's story segues into exotic images of the Orient, of empire, and of the riches it brings:

From the corner of the divan of Persian saddlebags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs; and now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokio who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion. The sullen murmur of the bees shouldering their way through the long unowned grass ... The dim roar of London was like the bourdon note of a distant organ. (5)

Although this passage shows that these are Lord Henry's associations ('Wotton could just catch', 'making him think of'), the perspective then quickly shifts to the narrator's remarks. The contrast in narrative style between the paragraph above and the one that follows bears out the hallucinatory quality of Lord Henry's discourse:

In the centre of the room, clamped to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty, and in front of it, some little distance away, was sitting the artist himself, Basil Hallward, whose sudden disappearance some years ago caused, at the time, such public excitement, and gave rise to so many strange conjectures. (5)

The foreshadowing of the last words distinguishes the narrator's discourse from Lord Henry's thoughts, as does the more limited perspective. In this single sentence, moreover, the factual statements about Basil contrast with the poetic exuberance in language and image that arise in the previous paragraph and which emphasize heightened sensitivity to motion, color, sound, and scent, like the perceptions of a drug-user. Specifically, Lord Henry's rhetoric may be opium-inspired because only four paragraphs later he lights up an 'opium-tainted cigarette' (6), implying the narcotic nature of his previous 'innumerable cigarettes' (5).

The early use of free indirect speech in *Dorian Gray* thus indicates how the narrator enacts Lord Henry's hallucinatory vision. We can distinguish between Lord Henry's thoughts and the narrator's voice because the narrator otherwise employs a more limited perspective and less minute sensory perceptions. We do not hear Basil's thoughts, but rather witness his actions. When Lord Henry asks Basil to let him see Dorian Gray, for example, 'Hallward got up from the seat, and walked up and down the garden. After some time he came back.' (13). Then Basil speaks. We learn his thoughts from this speech; the narrator does not inhabit Basil's mind.

As a point of comparison, let us look at a moment when the narrator once again emulates Lord Henry's vision while Basil takes 'some time.' (9). Here the narrator enters Lord Henry's musings while he waits for Basil to respond to a question: 'A grasshopper began to chirrup by the wall, and like a blue thread a long thin dragon-fly floated past on its brown gauze wings. Lord Henry felt as if he could hear Basil Hallward's heart beating, and wondered what was coming.' (9). Lord Henry cannot really hear Basil's heart, of course, and the narrator marks this fact by the modal marker 'felt as if'. Of course, the beating heart is also a synecdoche since Basil is about to confess the depth of emotion that the portrait of Dorian Gray enshrines for him. Lord Henry, however, concentrates on the sound in a way that makes hearing the heartbeats seem real because of the other exaggerated sensory perceptions in the previous sentence. Ornamental sensual description thus becomes identified as not only imaginative but also wreathed in Lord Henry's opium-tainted perceptions. In contrast, the narrator's voice sounds clear and objective.

By moving in and out of Lord Henry's visions, while staying at a distance from Basil's inner life, the narrator imitates the difference between characters' belief systems; the opacity of Basil's internal life make him seem flatter as a character in comparison to the radiance of perception that Lord Henry reveals. The two characters thus establish stable, opposing poles, which are then refracted in Dorian Gray's dual selves: his unchanging body (embodying Lord Henry's ideals of 'brainless' [6] beauty) and his portrait (personifying Basil's horror at the idea of sin).

Wilde's use of free indirect discourse emulates Dickens's in order to simulate the effects of drug use before stepping back and showing the contrast between the mental and physical worlds. Just as *Dorian Gray* starts with Lord Henry's perceptions, so does the beginning of *Edwin Drood* reveal Jasper's hallucinatory visions, but even more obviously so. *Edwin Drood* begins with a feverish shift of images between Turkey and an 'English Cathedral town'.<sup>53</sup> Then, in the second paragraph of Dickens's novel, the narrator accentuates the contrast between Jasper's inner wanderings and the lethargy of the opium den where his body sprawls:

Shaking from head to foot, the man whose scattered consciousness has thus fantastically pieced itself together, at length rises, supports his trembling frame upon his arms, and looks around ... He lies, dressed, across a large unseemly bed ... Lying, also dressed and also across the bed, not longwise, are a Chinaman, a Lascar, and a haggard woman. The two first are in a sleep or stupor; the last is blowing at a kind of pipe, to kindle it.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Dickens, *Drood*, 37.

<sup>54</sup> Dickens, *Drood*, 37.

Having smoked five pipes since arriving, it is small wonder that Jasper's consciousness is 'scattered'. The narrator opens a window that looks onto the opium-smoker's fantastic imaginations, further emphasizing this state by starting the novel in the middle of a drug-induced fantasy. The very process of creativity thus captures the reader's attention. Jasper's intriguing combination of images in the opening paragraph contrasts to the 'sleep or stupor' of the others in the room. This torpor functions as their only distinguishing aspect beyond their national and gendered identities. Thus both Dickens's and Wilde's narrators start out with the opulent inner life stimulated by opium and then withdraw in order to show the same scene from an external point of view.

Besides focusing, like Dickens, on the inner hallucinatory life of opium consumers, Wilde's narrative aligns with then-contemporary visual representation of lazy smoking that belies the muscularity of the sitter. The ease with which the narrator moves in and out of the opium-haze that envelopes Lord Henry bears comparison with James Jacques Tissot's painting style in one of his most famous pictures, *M. le Colonel \* \* \**. Wilde knew of this French symbolist painter and actually panned most of Tissot's paintings exhibited at the 1877 opening of the Grosvenor Gallery, lamenting their 'photographic'<sup>55</sup> style. The author did, however, approve of Tissot's *The Widower* (1877), also hung at the Grosvenor Gallery, which communicated 'depth and suggestiveness'<sup>56</sup> – qualities undeniably present in the portrait that I wish to discuss. Tissot's *M. le Colonel \* \* \**, a famous painting first publicly displayed just five years before Wilde's 1877 review of the exhibition, must surely have been known to the author of *Dorian Gray*, although there does not appear to be any documentation that verifies Wilde's knowledge of it. Still, Wilde's effete depictions of lounging smokers bear unquestionable similarities to *M. le Colonel \* \* \**.

In Tissot's acclaimed painting of 1870, Frederick Gustavus Burnaby, military man and intrepid explorer, dominates the canvas; he is depicted as a figure at his ease, lounging on a divan in a comfortable interior, with a cigarette raised prominently (see Fig. 1). Commissioned by Thomas Gibson Bowles, the founder of *Vanity Fair*, the work was shown in London at the 1872 International Exhibition under the title, *M. le Colonel \* \* \**, and was largely responsible for establishing the artist's fame in England.<sup>57</sup> Although Tissot painted his sitter in captain's uniform, with armor lying nearby and a map showing the Southern Hemisphere hanging behind him, he did not locate this famous imperial officer within distant climes as was the usual trend in

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<sup>55</sup> Oscar Wilde, 'The Grosvenor Gallery', *Dublin University Magazine*, Vol XC, No. 535 (July 1877), 125.

<sup>56</sup> Wilde, 'Grosvenor Gallery', 126.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 89; Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz, ed., *James Tissot* (New York: Abbeville, 1985), 104.

English adventurer portraiture. We can easily read Burnaby's courageous exploits through the props, but this narrative painting has subtlety. It communicates elegance and draws viewer attention through the bold vermilion stripe running the length of the trouser leg, rather than by imposing canvas size and exotic backdrop. In Tissot's painting, heroic feats underlie the seeming indolence of the man and his conspicuous cigarette.



Figure 1. James Jacques Tissot, M. le Colonel \*\*\* (Frederick Gustavus Burnaby), oil on panel, 1870, 496 mm6597 mm, \_ National Portrait Gallery, London, reproduced with kind permission.

Just twenty years later, Wilde's Dorian Gray assumes the same suggestive pose after deserting actress Sibyl Vane: 'he rose from the table, lit a cigarette, and flung himself down on a luxuriously-cushioned couch' (94). Ironically, what Dorian does then is to contemplate his own picture. Just as Burnaby embodies both languor and more adventure than meets the eye, Dorian's veneer of civilization hides his actions. In the years after Dorian discards Sibyl, his acts become so heinous that even the reader is not told what they are. In a paradoxical twist, it is only the picture that reveals the ongoing (moral) reality under the sitter's surface. Therefore, when he examines his portrait, Dorian studies the self represented within the frame. Wilde's entire novel emphasizes the contrast between Dorian's real and painted bodies, and the protagonist's contemplation, making it highly interesting that the recumbent smoker had already entered the visual iconography of the period, both in graphic and written form. Like Wilde's assessment of *The Widower*, the style of *Dorian Gray* could even be described as conveying 'depth and suggestiveness' as the narrative oscillates between speakers who consume opium and those who do not.

Wilde's style thus swings between two models – the detached dandy and the serious Briton. The latter, aligning with Arnold's complaints against his parochial compatriots, represents mainstream society. As for the detached character, Wilde combines two already culturally evident types and then adds a bit more to achieve 'depth and suggestiveness'. To the literary depiction of dissatisfaction, debauchery, musicality, and drug-consumption (John Jasper), and to the pictorial rendition of sophisticated masculine ennui (Tissot), Wilde attaches a sonority that appears, first, in the particular rhetorical style of the dandy who draws on opium-laced cigarettes and, secondly, in his modes of listening to music and playing the piano. Gilbert, the dandy character who is generally seen to speak for Wilde in 'The Critic as Artist', alludes to the former when he describes the best literature as appealing to the ear; words should have 'musical and metrical relations.'<sup>58</sup> The latter can be found in the scenes where playfully rendered Western art music or concerts on primitive instruments reveal an expression of aesthetic purpose that chimes with Wilde's larger espousal of Arnoldian '*disinterestedness*' in literature and criticism.

### **The 'Indian virtue of detachment'**

Along with his indebtedness to Dickens's experiments with opium-inspired writing, Wilde reached back to the sixties when a new emphasis on the Orient influenced how Western Europeans understood the ideals of aesthetic criticism and, by extension, indolence. As has been well noted, Wilde found much to respond to in Arnold's positions,<sup>59</sup> but scholars have tended to overlook how notions of the East in Arnold's writings found their way into Wilde's thinking about languor. Arnold's idea of Indian culture, I believe, serves to model a quality that eventually becomes fundamental to the dandy who tinkers at the keyboard and frothily chats about art over a languid, pre-dinner cigarette.

Such an approach asks us to rethink Richard Ellmann's suggestion that there is a tripartite progression in English criticism that runs from Arnold through Pater to Wilde. Famously, Arnold's position in 'On Translating Homer' (1861), which was then restated in 'The Function of Criticism' (1864), is that criticism aims 'to see the object as in itself it really is.'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Wilde, 'Critic as Artist', 249.

<sup>59</sup> See Richard Ellmann, 'The Critic as Artist as Wilde', *The Artist as Critic* by Oscar Wilde, ed. Richard Ellmann (Random House, 1968, 1969), rpt in *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Jonathan Freedman (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 23–4.

<sup>60</sup> Arnold, 'Function of Criticism', 26.

As Ellmann reminds us, Pater cited and reformulated Arnold's maxim in his preface to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) as 'the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly.'<sup>61</sup> Pater thus emphasizes the beholder's subjective response. In 'The Critic as Artist', a two-part essay written in the form of an engaging dialogue between two dandyish men, Wilde amplifies the reader's or listener's personal interpretation. His main speaker, Gilbert, refers to both Arnold and Pater. When his disciple, the overly pedantic Ernest, asks if a fair summary of Gilbert's theory is that criticism primarily aims 'to see the object as in itself it really is not', Gilbert agrees.<sup>62</sup> On the basis of Gilbert's view, Wilde ultimately arrives at the opposite of what Arnold proposed.<sup>63</sup>

Ellmann's careful tracing of Pater's and Wilde's successive revisions of Arnold's 1864 essay has the effect of making Wilde seem more radical at the expense of Arnold. Ellmann's influential account encourages us to forget how innovative and unconventional Arnold was in his approach of a 'free play of the mind'<sup>64</sup>, a style of thinking that Leslie Stephen found to 'show greater skill in seizing characteristic aspects than in giving a logical analysis or a convincing proof.'<sup>65</sup> Stephen's 1893 assessment places Arnold within an Oxford school of effeminate 'weak-tea arguments', in James Walter Caufield's estimation, which 'lack[ed] the mental and moral toughness demanded by the disciplines of political economy and the felicific calculus.'<sup>66</sup> A concerned article in the *Macmillan's Magazine* issue of November 1886-April 1887 elaborates how this fuzzy thinking and ornate literary style characterizes the age:

This form of writing is, of course, in itself no new thing. ... But in the old time it was but a modish affectation practised for sheer idleness, as a man might spend a summer day in excogitating a new pattern for his sword-knot or cravat. That was then the humour of it, and as such it was recognised and laughed at. But to-day it seems to be the very end and aim of our young ambitions, the very form and pressure of the time; not laughed at, though perchance grieved for by the judicious few, but rather courted and toiled after, as men might toil after virtue.<sup>67</sup>

The author goes on to oppose this affected, worked 'style' to 'the very best possible' rhetoric: a British 'straightforwardness' that demonstrates '*esse quam videri*' [being rather than seeming]. This style fits the author's sense of all that is 'robust, sincere, and direct – in a word, pre-

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<sup>61</sup> Pater, Preface, *Renaissance*, xxiv.

<sup>62</sup> Wilde, 'Critic as Artist', 264.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Ellmann, 'The Critic as Artist as Wilde', 23-24.

<sup>64</sup> Arnold, 'Function of Criticism', 35.

<sup>65</sup> Leslie Stephen, 'Matthew Arnold', *National and English Review*, 22.127 (December 1893), 464-465.

<sup>66</sup> James Walter Caufield, 'Arnoldian Renouncements: Ethical Exemplarity and Modern Thought', Diss. (University of California, Los Angeles, 2008), 108-109.

<sup>67</sup> 'An Alexandrian Age', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 55 (November 1886-April 1887), 32.

eminently manly.’<sup>68</sup> Arnold’s ‘free play of the mind’, in contrast, situates him within the lyrical tradition of writers from de Quincey through to Wilde, a trajectory to which I will return.<sup>69</sup> This rhetorical paradigm (ornamented versus straightforward) may be likened to Citron’s idea of musical ‘transgressions’ as compared to the rigors of sonata form. As I aim to show here, Arnold’s and Wilde’s critical ideals (seeing an object as it really is or is not) are much more similar than Ellmann seems willing to admit.<sup>70</sup> While Gilbert’s comment in ‘The Critic as Artist’ undoubtedly responds to Arnold in the spirit of rebuttal, it turns out that, on closer inspection, Wilde’s view of ‘*disinterestedness*’ is quite close to Arnold’s, especially if we focus on the similarities between the ways in which Wilde’s opium-smoking and languorous dandy exhibits distinctly Arnoldian qualities of mental ‘play’ and ‘Indian virtue’.

In ‘The Function of Criticism’, Arnold argues for a critical approach within ‘all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science’ that differs from the prevalent mode of judging based on cherished ideas, vested interests, political agendas, and what he repeatedly bemoans as ‘practical’ views.<sup>71</sup> Arnold proposes instead a ‘disinterested’ attitude that follows ‘the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches.’<sup>72</sup> Arnold’s theory of criticism not only rests on a ‘free play of the mind upon all subjects’ but it also anticipates Pater’s stress on criticism as both ‘a pleasure in itself’ and ‘an object of desire’.<sup>73</sup> These qualities of mental activity combine with ‘*disinterestedness*’ later in the essay when Arnold writes of ‘a free disinterested play of mind’.<sup>74</sup> Arnold then links these qualities to ‘the Indian virtue of detachment’,<sup>75</sup> by which he means a mode of being that is removed from party politics and practical considerations.

Such racial labeling was positive to Arnold, rooted as it was in ideas of global kinship networks. ‘Hellenism is of Indo-European growth,’ Arnold writes in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), ‘and we English, a nation of Indo-European stock, seem to belong naturally to the movement of Hellenism.’<sup>76</sup> Arnold understands the English as descending from an Indo-European group, which comprised the Caucasus, Europe, India, and Persia.<sup>77</sup> This schema

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<sup>68</sup> ‘Alexandrian Age’, 29, 31.

<sup>69</sup> For de Quincey, see ‘Alexandrian Age’, 29, 31.

<sup>70</sup> My thanks to Ellen Crowell for this astute suggestion.

<sup>71</sup> Arnold, ‘Function of Criticism’, 26.

<sup>72</sup> Arnold, ‘Function of Criticism’, 37.

<sup>73</sup> Arnold, ‘Function of Criticism’, 35.

<sup>74</sup> Arnold, ‘Function of Criticism’, 37.

<sup>75</sup> Arnold, ‘Function of Criticism’, 41.

<sup>76</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), in *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 135–6.

<sup>77</sup> Stephen Prickett, ‘Purging Christianity of its Semitic Origins: Kingsley, Arnold and the Bible’, *Rethinking Victorian Culture*, eds Juliet John and Alice Jenkins (London: Macmillan, 2000), 72.

duplicates Georges Cuvier's, Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau's, and Ernest Renan's racial hierarchy, as does Arnold's sense of the English as far from a 'pure' race.<sup>78</sup> Arnold's stance emerged as a consequence of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *English Traits and Representative Men* (1856), Gobineau's infamously influential *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–5), as well as Renan's important *Vie de Jésus* (1863), which was based in part on Gobineau. Both Frenchmen follow a classification of racial types originated by Cuvier that had become standard by the middle of the nineteenth century. This model divided humanity into the skin colors of white, yellow, and black, in that order of descent.<sup>79</sup> In his prose writings, Arnold, following Renan, shows relationships across the European kinship network through connections in blood, spirit, language, and artistic production.<sup>80</sup> He was also influenced by Emerson's conclusions regarding the English as a 'composite character'; this is a theory that Robert J. C. Young characterizes in the following way: 'English culture is made up of an interaction – not just a general mixture – between two peoples of different casts of mind, one intellectual, one practical'.<sup>81</sup> The English are 'English' through the unique combination of cultural heritage, but for Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy*, they are also descendents of a hyphenated race (Indian and European) – 'a racial mixture (though not a mixed race – he never advocated fusion)', as Young puts it.<sup>82</sup> Arnold theorized that, in order to advance, the English needed stimuli from external cultures who shared their heritage: French and German literary influences, for instance, as well as what Arnold had previously defined as 'Indian ... detachment' or '*disinterestedness*'.

Thus a further, overlooked dimension to the term '*disinterestedness*' unfolds when Arnold elucidates how he understands the best type of criticism as Eastern:

It will be said that it is a very subtle and indirect action which I am thus prescribing for criticism, and that, by embracing in this manner the Indian virtue of detachment and abandoning the sphere of practical life, it condemns itself to a slow and obscure work. Slow and obscure it may be, but it is the only proper work of criticism.<sup>83</sup>

The 'Indian virtue of detachment' becomes the way forward for English society; those who practice this type of 'slow' criticism form an elite circle who will eventually influence the

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<sup>78</sup> Prickett, 'Purging Christianity', 71; Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 16, 106–9.

<sup>79</sup> Prickett, 'Purging Christianity', 71; Young, *Colonial Desire*, 103.

<sup>80</sup> See Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1866), rpt in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 3: 291–395.

<sup>81</sup> Robert J. C. Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2008), 143–144.

<sup>82</sup> Young, *English Ethnicity*, 165.

<sup>83</sup> Arnold, 'Function of Criticism', 41.

‘mass of mankind’ and the ‘general practice of the world’<sup>84</sup> just by living according to their beliefs.

Famously fond of much Arnoldian thought, Wilde follows Arnold almost to the letter in ‘The Critic as Artist’, despite the well-known moment when Gilbert suggests that the point in criticism is ‘to see the object as in itself it really is not’.<sup>85</sup> Just as Freud argues in ‘Das Unheimliche’ [‘The Uncanny’, (1919)] that ‘heimlich’ folds within the meaning of ‘unheimlich’, so a remarkable closeness between Arnold and Wilde emerges when we look at other instances in ‘The Critic as Artist’, all attributed to Gilbert, that adhere to Arnold’s ‘Function of Criticism’. After discussing the poetry of Robert Browning in Part I, for instance, Gilbert concludes that ‘[i]t is difficult not to be unjust to what one loves.’<sup>86</sup> Arnold holds in common with Wilde the idea that preexisting biases lead to false critical stances. The difference between Arnold and Wilde, however, is that the former believes it to be possible to practice an objectivity that Gilbert claims to be impossible when one loves. Still, when Wilde illustrates the best way to achieve ‘*disinterestedness*’ the distinction seems negligible. Moreover, ‘disinterest’ could mean impartiality in the 1860s and 1890s, but according to the *OED* it also meant more loosely, ‘lack of interest’. In her article “‘Aesthetic’ and ‘Rapport’ in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*”, Barbara Johnson persuasively contends that the close relationship between interest and disinterest is crucial to the idea of the aesthetic; ‘interest’ is ‘a lack of involvement’, as when one is interested enough to watch rather than to intervene in traumatic, even heinous, events.<sup>87</sup> Wilde, too, plays with similar ideas, as we can see when Lord Henry enjoys his scrutiny of Dorian Gray’s increasingly scandalous life. Thus interest, so to speak, is found within disinterest. Gilbert would be delighted with this paradox; so would Wilde.

Although we cannot treat Gilbert in quite the same way as Arnold in these essays (the former is an imaginary character while the latter is a real writer), it remains the case that Gilbert articulates ideas that are so close to Wilde’s own that he can generally be regarded as the author’s spokesperson. Thus we see Arnold’s and Wilde’s positions slide even closer when Gilbert goes so far in Part II as not only to echo Arnold’s sentiments but also use his lexicon:

action of every kind belongs to the sphere of ethics. The aim of art is simply to create a mood. Is such a mode of life unpractical? Ah! it is not so easy to be unpractical as the ignorant Philistine imagines. It were well for England if it were so. There is no country in the world so much in need of unpractical people as this country of ours. With us, Thought is degraded by its constant association with

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<sup>84</sup> Arnold, ‘Function of Criticism’, 41.

<sup>85</sup> Wilde, ‘Critic as Artist’, 264.

<sup>86</sup> Wilde, ‘Critic as Artist’, 245.

<sup>87</sup> Barbara Johnson, “‘Aesthetic’ and ‘Rapport’ in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*”, *Textual Practice* 7.2 (1993), 171.

practice. Who that moves in the stress and turmoil of actual existence, noisy politician, or brawling social reformer, ... can seriously claim to be able to form a disinterested intellectual judgment about any one thing? Each of the professions means a prejudice. The necessity for a career forces every one to take sides.<sup>88</sup>

Gilbert starts with Arnold's theory that nations advance not through action but through inner cultivation of culture; this is an idea echoed later in Gilbert's maxim, 'self-culture is the true ideal of man.'<sup>89</sup> Arnold's well-known label of 'Philistine', by which he meant the middle classes,<sup>90</sup> also enters Gilbert's discourse, while associating thought with 'practice' in order to despair of England essentially duplicates 'The Function of Criticism'. 'The Englishman has been called a political animal,' writes Arnold, who 'values what is political and practical'. This standpoint is so extreme that 'practice is everything, a free play of the mind is nothing.'<sup>91</sup> To Wilde, like Arnold, 'practice' is nothing and a 'free play of the mind' is everything. Furthermore, Gilbert mentions 'disinterested intellectual judgment', a phrase that obviously references Arnold's '*disinterestedness*', repeating Arnold's worries that most criticism is swayed by political concerns. Part of Wilde's solution for how 'to form a disinterested intellectual judgment' is contained in his subtitle to Part I of 'The Critic as Artist': 'With some remarks upon the importance of doing nothing'. '[D]oing nothing' sidesteps the prejudices that accompany the professions. '*Disinterestedness*', in short, can be achieved through knotting together a set of cultural beliefs and practices that are indissoluble from each other, including languor (not doing) and the narcotic vision where subtle, sensual, and emotional apprehensions become the standard mode of perception.

### **'Divine' Cigarettes, Musical Play, and Impressionistic Writing**

My discussion has so far disclosed that *Dorian Gray* is not a unique instance of Wilde's combined focus on heightened imagination, '*disinterestedness*', rhetorical excellence, and smoking; his essays, notably 'The Critic as Artist', reveal an ongoing interest in finding ways of interlocking these preoccupations. Progressive music also becomes entwined in this tight cluster of ideas. Comparing the individual components of these interconnected concepts elucidates how they become imbricated in one another. Of special significance is Wilde's ingenious reworking

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<sup>88</sup> Wilde, 'Critic as Artist', 278.

<sup>89</sup> Wilde, 'Critic as Artist', 280.

<sup>90</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 106.

<sup>91</sup> Arnold, 'Function of Criticism', 35.

of English Romanticism's famous statements about the effects of opium on the poetic imagination. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' (1816), to give perhaps the best-known example, introduces the poem as a drug-induced dream and then ponders threats to poetic faculties. In contrast to Coleridge's clear statement of narcotic influence on the composition process, Wilde's fictional prose communicates a certain 'depth and suggestiveness' about the drug; at times it mentions opium explicitly and at others it emphasizes the possibility of hallucinogenic stimulus. Contemplating beautiful impressions rather than detailing realist subjects – the 'facts' of the 'practical' world – thus underlie the Wildean universe in general, from the subject-matter of an ageless boy gazing at his aging portrait to the manner of presenting the properties of a cigarette which may or may not be narcotic. This feature is similar to the impressionistic musical repertoire with which this essay began.

In particular, Wilde treats the topic of smoking imaginatively by emphasizing a non-realist approach to naming objects. In other words, an item is not necessarily what it is called. In Part I of 'The Critic as Artist', Gilbert, wearied of Ernest's 'expedition into the dim, dull abyss of facts', says '[t]here is nothing left for me now but the divine *μονόχρονος ηδονή* [momentary pleasure] of another cigarette. Cigarettes have at least the charm of leaving one unsatisfied.' Ernest responds: 'Try one of mine. They are rather good. I get them direct from Cairo. The only use of our *attachés* is that they supply their friends with excellent tobacco.'<sup>92</sup> The 'excellent tobacco' of the day, the highest grade, was undoubtedly Egyptian and Turkish.<sup>93</sup> Even though Ernest identifies his diplomatic friends as bearers of 'tobacco' cigarettes, however, the fact that they come from Cairo suggests that the weed might be opium-laced, like Wilde's own supply. As French writer Marcel Schwob documented in his 1891 journal, Wilde chain-smoked 'opium-tainted Egyptian cigarettes.'<sup>94</sup> Schwob's observation of the author's habits cannot, of course, establish that Ernest was in fact smoking opium cigarettes, but it suggests that the possibility exists. When Gilbert proposes smoking in place of earnest conversation about the 'dull abyss of facts', the precise nature of this pleasure is unclear since the proposed cigarette may or may not be infused with an Eastern substance, but it is certainly diametrically opposed to 'facts'.

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<sup>92</sup> Wilde, 'Critic as Artist', 253.

<sup>93</sup> Jarrett Rudy, entry for 'Cigarettes'; Rosemary Elliot and Gregory Ferris Wayne, entry for 'Product Design', *Tobacco in History and Culture: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jordan Goodman, 2 vols (Detroit: Gale, 2005), 1: 144–5, 2: 451.

<sup>94</sup> '[I]l ne cesse de fumer à demi des cigarettes d'Égypte trempée d'opium.' Pierre Champion, *Marcel Schwob et son temps* (Paris: Grosset, 1927), 99. Translation by Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 346. Wilde was also popularly associated with opium smoking in magazines and cartoons from 1893 and 1894. See Marez, 'The Other Addict', 272.

The identification of the cigarettes as ‘tobacco’ might thus be ironic – an occluding of possibilities rather than a statement of fact. It may, after all, be equally true that *Gilbert’s* cigarettes were opium-tainted. Certainly, de Quincey, the most celebrated opium-eater of the century, repeatedly described the pleasures of opium as ‘divine’,<sup>95</sup> the term also used by Gilbert for his ‘momentary pleasure’. Beyond any reference to de Quincey, however, this reading of the cigarettes as narcotic makes sense because the above exchange comes on the heels of Gilbert’s complaint against Ernest’s fact-finding and just before Gilbert’s ornamental, highly wrought prose: ‘But I see that the moon is hiding behind a sulphur-coloured cloud. Out of a tawny mane of drift she gleams like a lion’s eye.’<sup>96</sup> With a romantic subject and poetic writing style replete with figures of speech, Gilbert rebuts Ernest’s dry intellectualism in a way that aligns with nineteenth-century commonplaces regarding the hallucinogen as sparking imaginative fantasies,<sup>97</sup> while also befitting the rhetorical style associated with drug-users in *Dorian Gray*.

In harmony with his emphasis on imagination and Arnoldian ‘*disinterestedness*’ Wilde treats music playfully, rather than seriously, in his oeuvre. The opening exchange of ‘The Critic as Artist’, for example, delightfully puns on ‘playing’: to play the piano, and to play, as in idleness:

GILBERT (*at the piano*). My dear Ernest, what are you laughing at? ...

ERNEST. Well, while you have been playing, I have been turning over the pages with some amusement, though, as a rule, I dislike modern memoirs.<sup>98</sup>

Play is a quality that resonates with the subtitle to Part I, too: ‘With some remarks upon the importance of doing nothing’. The fact that Gilbert converses while ‘at the piano’ indicates his obvious lack of earnestness about playing the piano; serious musicians do not talk while playing. Gilbert, therefore, is playing *at* the piano.

Wilde’s fiction thus opposes the musical dandy-aesthete, languid and lounging in body while poetic in prose, to the prevailing perception in late-nineteenth-century Britain that music should have an ethical purpose. During Victoria’s reign, music was widely thought to have specifically transcendent and transformative elements that worked alongside religion for the improvement of all people, from the most impoverished to the ruling elite. The Reverend H. R. Haweis, a Wagnerite and author of the hugely popular *Music and Morals* (1871),

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<sup>95</sup> Thomas de Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822), ed. Alethea Hayter (London: Penguin, 1971), 32, 71, 75, 81.

<sup>96</sup> Wilde, ‘Critic as Artist’, 252.

<sup>97</sup> If both men smoke opium, their verbal expressions would not necessarily be on par stylistically because nineteenth-century writers believed that the dreamer, not the substance, was responsible for the quality of drug-induced imagination. See de Quincey, *Confessions*, 33.

<sup>98</sup> Wilde, ‘Critic as Artist’, 241.

makes the point clear not only in his celebrated title, but also in his 1884 memoir, *My Musical Life*:

I am convinced that the influence of music over the poor is quite angelic. Music is the hand-maid of religion and the mother of sympathy ...

Teach the people to sing, and you will make them happy; teach them to listen to sweet sounds, and you will go far to render them harmless to themselves, if not a blessing to their fellows.<sup>99</sup>

Argument in favor of music's moral components fueled many philanthropic endeavors from the 1840s to World War One, with titles such as Joseph Mainzer's 1841 sight-singing textbook, *Singing for the Million*, summing up the ways in which he and other eminent educators like John Hullah and John Curwen sought to bring music to the masses.<sup>100</sup> Members of the *beau monde* believed quite seriously in the idea of music as bestowing virtue and extended this creed to their own devotionals. Following a Holy Week sermon in 1872, for example, Mary Gladstone, daughter of the prime minister, wrote in her diary:

The last Chorale, sung almost in a whisper 'If I should e'er forsake Thee, Forsake me not O Lord', sunk the deepest of all in me, so full of holy calm, the last beautiful chords melting away into silence, lifting one up out of this world + surely it must purify one.<sup>101</sup>

In contrast to these musical enthusiasts, Wilde represents an aesthetics founded on playing, idleness, and the piano, all of which come together, most visibly, at the start of *The Importance of Being Earnest*:

SCENE – *Morning-room in Algernon's flat in Half Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room.*

*[Lane is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, Algernon enters.]*

ALGERNON. Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

LANE. I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.

ALGERNON. I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately – any one can play accurately – but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the *piano* is concerned, *sentiment* is my *forte*.<sup>102</sup>

Not caring if he 'play accurately', Algernon, the young dandy who leads the life of a fashionable man-about-town, shows a studied '*disinterestedness*' that contrasts with the more usual earnest Victorian display of musical aptitude at the keyboard. Algernon does not care whether he plays

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<sup>99</sup> H. R. Haweis, *My Musical Life* (1884), 2nd ed. (London: Allen, 1886), 118.

<sup>100</sup> Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840–1914: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 17, 22–6.

<sup>101</sup> Mary Gladstone, entry for 26 March 1872, Diary, (1 January 1872–19 August 1875), The Mary Gladstone Papers, Add Mss 46256, f 23. The British Library. Original emphasis.

<sup>102</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, (1895), rpt *Oscar Wilde*, ed. Murray, 480. Emphasis mine.

accurately. Instead, it is expression that matters. For Algernon, ‘sentiment’ is the middle name of the ‘piano...forte.’

The humor in this exchange results from the contrast between Algernon’s performance of feeling and the mainstream belief that piano playing was a private occupation (except, of course, when performing before an audience). The aspect of assumed privacy is shown by the butler, Lane, who believes it impolite ‘to listen’ when the pianist plays behind closed doors. Algernon, however, in playing with ‘sentiment’, expresses an ironic comment on Victorian sentimentality – a mode of feeling that Miriam Bailin explains as ‘arising naturally from the heart rather than from custom or breeding.’<sup>103</sup> Sentimentality, Bailin makes clear, had an ‘ethical core’.<sup>104</sup> Algernon, however, turns ‘sentiment’ into an opportunity to ‘*play with wonderful expression*’, as if feelings are the material for his nonchalant, easy communication of culture. In a further twist of convention, Algernon assumes that his servant listens at the door to what would generally be considered a private moment. This parody of Victorian norms, however, has a serious undertone for Wilde’s dandyish protagonists find their musicality to express a type of criticism. ‘The Critic as Artist’ elucidates the latter point when Gilbert approves of the critic who ‘chronicle[s] his own impressions’<sup>105</sup> in performance or in a type of exquisitely written criticism. The ‘wonderful[ly] express[ive]’ pianist thus assesses music better than someone who aspires to write rational criticism.

For Wilde these two ideals – the musical and the rhetorical – come together in a manner that follows Pater’s famous dictum, ‘*All art constantly aspires toward the condition of music*’<sup>106</sup> and de Quincey’s invocation of music as ‘the most effective of the Fine Arts’<sup>107</sup> in order to compare it to aesthetics of writing. In his essay on ‘Style’ (1840-41), as I have discussed elsewhere, de Quincey argues that Mozart’s ‘elaborate’ music makes him better than ‘[a] song, an air, a tune’, which supports the idea that substance should not be given greater importance than style.<sup>108</sup> Rather, matter and manner should be viewed as inseparable in written, as well as musical, idioms. To de Quincey, the impetus toward written rhetorical excellence began in a military moment in fifth century BCE during the Greek war with Persia. Style was emphasized over substance, he maintains, because wartime conditions occasioned a

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<sup>103</sup> Miriam Bailin, “‘Dismal Pleasure’: Victorian Sentimentality and the Pathos of the Parvenu’, *ELH* 66.4 (Winter, 1999), 1016.

<sup>104</sup> Bailin, “‘Dismal Pleasure’”, 1022.

<sup>105</sup> Wilde, ‘Critic as Artist’, 262.

<sup>106</sup> Walter Pater, ‘The School of Giorgione’ (1877), *Renaissance*, 86. Original emphasis.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas de Quincey, ‘Style’, *The Collected Writings of Thomas de Quincey*, ed. David Masson, new edn, 14 vols (rpt of Edinburgh: Blake, 1890 by New York: AMS, 1968), 10:135.

<sup>108</sup> De Quincey, ‘Style’, 10:136. See Weliver, ‘Tom-Toms, Dream-Fugues and Poppy-Juice’, 265–6.

dearth of books from which to quote. British poetry inherits and continues writing practices from the classical world that were born during a moment of martial threat from the East, a legacy that de Quincey makes overt when he refers to Wordsworth's understanding of language as 'the *incarnation* of thoughts.'<sup>109</sup> De Quincey thus argues for language and thought as indivisible. Not only do they rely upon each other, but style is also the substance. Already we hear Pater's later echoing comparison of all art to music: 'For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it.'<sup>110</sup>

Similarly, good writing to Wilde exposes the play of thought, with the difference being a more overt preoccupation with the subject of characters performing or listening to music. *Dorian Gray* specifically toys with the idea of the imagination, as Timothy L. Carens argues by linking the 1891 edition of the novel's prefatory comment, '*It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors*' (3; original emphasis) to the opium scenes. In the first of these scenes, Dorian reveals a stash of opium in an ornate cabinet hidden in the library. In the second, he travels to East End opium dens, disguising himself for the journey. In both cases, the narrative does not depict opium smoking. Because of this omission, Carens finds the vestures of disguise to be the ultimate focus.<sup>111</sup> While I agree that the novel pays close attention to imagination, opium smoking is not necessarily the 'secret vice'<sup>112</sup> that Carens contends because we first meet Lord Henry from behind the curling smoke of his 'opium-tainted cigarette'. Rather than focusing on secrecy, the novel continually makes visible '*disinterestedness*'. Opium is the agent for this revelation, as seen through both spoken and written words. Most obviously, Lord Henry's opiate-influenced speech infects Dorian's subsequent lifestyle choices. '[T]o influence a person is to give him one's own soul,' muses Lord Henry. 'He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions.' (18). Subsequently, Wilde's narrative compares 'influence' to being like 'a subtle fluid or a strange perfume' (33), which looks strangely similar to the two most common forms of opium ingestion during the century: liquid and smoke.<sup>113</sup>

*Dorian Gray* suggests that opium is a powerful agent that underpins Dorian's entire transformation not only because he breathes in Lord Henry's advice along with his second-hand smoke, but also because of the aristocrat's mellifluous speech – a sonorous style of speaking that

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<sup>109</sup> De Quincey, 'Style', 10: 230; original emphasis.

<sup>110</sup> Walter Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', 86.

<sup>111</sup> Timothy L. Carens, 'Restyling the Secret of the Opium Den', *Reading Wilde: Querying Spaces* (New York: Fales Library, New York University, 1995), 66, 71–2.

<sup>112</sup> Carens, 'Restyling the Secret', 72.

<sup>113</sup> Early in Victoria's reign, opium was ingested by drinking laudanum (opium mixed with alcohol), while toward the end, the preferred method was to inhale opium smoke.

we have seen to be associated with the hallucinogen. Lord Henry knows that his transmogrifying power over Dorian originates in ‘musical words said with musical utterance’ (51). More than matter (content), it is the speaker’s manner that seduces Dorian:

Music had stirred him [Dorian] like that. Music had troubled him many times. But music was not articulate. It was not a new world, but rather another chaos, that it created in us. Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid, and cruel! One could not escape from them. And yet what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things, and to have a music of their own as sweet as that of viol or of lute. Mere words! Was there anything so real as words? (19-20)

‘Mere’ words are surprisingly potent, for expression is essential to giving ‘reality to things.’ In literary representation, words are not only crucial to expression, they are usually mandatory. But expression can and should challenge the rules of grammar as Wilde observes in a letter about *Dorian Gray* that he sent to the *St James’s Gazette*: ‘Now, as regards grammar, I hold that, in prose at any rate, correctness should always be subordinate to artistic effect and musical cadence’.<sup>114</sup>

Furthermore, printed media infect Dorian like opium when he finds himself ‘poisoned by a book.’ (124). Most scholars agree that the work in question is J. K. Huysmans’s 1884 decadent novel, *A rebours*, which details the sensual experiences indulged in by the dandyish Duc Jean des Esseintes, including composing his own sentimental tunes.<sup>115</sup> A present from Lord Henry, this ‘novel without a plot’ (106) immediately absorbs Dorian and influences him for years subsequently, largely because of its rhetorical sensuality:

The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows. (107)

Besides the focus on form (sentence cadences), the ‘reverie’ and ‘malady of dreaming’ evoke de Quincey’s opium-reveries. Similar to the effect of Lord Henry’s contagious, musical ‘influence’, beautiful writing has agency since Dorian discovers that he ‘almost entirely [loses] control’ of his nature because of ‘the influence of this book.’ (108).

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<sup>114</sup> Oscar Wilde, ‘To the Editor of the *St James’s Gazette*’, 26 June 1890, appearing as ‘Mr Wilde Again’ in *St James’s Gazette* (27 June 1890). Published in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Hart Davis, 1962), 258–9. Rpt in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Donald L. Lawler, Norton Critical edn (New York: Norton, 1988), 338.

<sup>115</sup> ‘D’autrefois, il composait lui-même des mélodies, exécutait des pastorales avec le bénin cassis qui lui faisait rouler, dans la gorge, des chants emperlés de rossignol; avec le tendre cacao-chouva qui fredonnait de sirupeuses bergerades, telles que « les romances d’Estelle » et les « Ah! vous dirai-je, maman » du temps jadis.’ J. K. Huysmans, *A Rebours* (Paris: Charpentier, 1884), 64.

To Dorian, this writing has muscularity that does not contrast with, but rather oddly helps to create, the posturing of the indolent dandy. ‘The style in which it was written was that curious jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of ... elaborate paraphrases,’ (107) describes the narrator. Its content is not plot, but gorgeous figures of speech; the book creates interest because of an especially dynamic use of language to create dazzling affect. Mental vibrancy begets languor as Dorian falls into a dream-state caused by ‘complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated’ (107). For Dorian, energetic, ‘elaborate’ language moves his mind into ‘a form of reverie,’ an ‘unconscious’ state, or a sphere of Arnoldian ‘disinterestedness’.

After reading the ‘poisonous book’ (107), Dorian searches for new sensations that are ‘alien to his nature,’ including giving concerts and collecting instruments indigenous to both North and South America. He enjoys the ‘harsh intervals and shrill discords of barbaric music’ that contrast with the Western composers named in the narrative: Schumann, Schubert, Chopin, Beethoven, and Wagner.<sup>116</sup> The ‘monsters’ of Art, with their ‘bestial shape’ and ‘hideous voices’ (114), are pleasurable precisely for their otherness. Non-Western music propels him into a dreamy existence where things have ‘fresh shapes and colours ... a world in which the past [has] little or no place’ (112). In other words, Dorian can exist detached from all personal prejudices because this sonic world differs so vastly from anything with which he might have previously identified. This exotic repertoire differentiates Wilde from de Quincey’s sense in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822) of European opera as furnishing a parallel mental experience to opium use.<sup>117</sup> In *Dorian Gray*, non-Western music is analogous to a state of mind (‘not articulate,’ a ‘chaos’) that Dorian embraces. For his representation of Dorian’s susceptibility to sonority, Wilde thus builds from a literary tradition of earlier opium-inspired writing that values impressionistic style, tempered with Arnoldian ideas from the 1860s.

### **Wilde, Music, and the ‘Cult of Desire’**

Music in Wilde’s novel, however, is more than simply a metaphor for beautiful writing. Using adjectives like ‘barbaric’ (114), which position non-Western sounds as lower than Western ones, places different types of music within a cultural hierarchy. The stratification

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<sup>116</sup> Beethoven probably earns a place in *Dorian Gray* because he was considered the preeminent composer of all time as well as being linked to the future of music. See Franz Hueffer, *Richard Wagner and The Music of the Future: History and Aesthetics* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1874), iii-iv.

<sup>117</sup> De Quincey, *Confessions*, 78–9.

becomes noticeable when Dorian tires of non-Western music and reverts to attending *Tannhäuser* repeatedly, ‘either alone or with Lord Henry’ (114). Wagner’s opera initially seems an odd choice because it, as Sutton has documented, was associated with sensuality and decadence.<sup>118</sup> The composer, too, was viewed even into the early twentieth century with a suspicion similar to how Dorian’s society regards him. ‘If it were discovered, to-day, that Richard Wagner in his lifetime had committed murder and escaped punishment, it would be interesting to know, but not necessarily a surprise’, recalled Carl Engel in 1922 as he reviewed a collection of letters exchanged between Nietzsche and the ‘amoral’ but genius Wagner.<sup>119</sup> So why were not *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Lohengrin*, and *Der Ring des Nibelungen* the content of Dorian’s musical debauch? Since his sonic orgy comprises non-Western music, Wagner’s works appear more cultured in contrast, while also seeming less of the ‘industry’ or commodity that they were in Sutton’s opinion.<sup>120</sup> While non-Western instrument collecting is an expendable and expensive taste in which the Western connoisseur indulges, Wagnerian opera is identified with true, enduring art. Wagner’s music remains to be returned to after Dorian dips into the commodities of Empire and yet still retains the amoral associations that make it appropriate aural fodder for the decadent dandy.

Eastern and indigenous types of music therefore give ‘detached’ pleasure to Dorian Gray, and, by extension, they also delight the reader as part of the sensual substance of the novel. Because the narrative gives non-Western music a long descriptive paragraph while affording *Tannhäuser* a single sentence, the book essentially appropriates and molds non-Western instruments to Western rhetorical purpose; the zithers, copper drums, Indian snake-charmer-pipes, gourds, and *yotl*-bells create sensual experience for Dorian and also for the reader through the alliterative prose (e.g., ‘sonorous green jaspers’), their exotic appearances, and the bizarre performance practices. Just as opium leaves one never satisfied, the instruments themselves are exhaustively listed with snippets of tantalizing stories that leave us hungering for more. To Dorian, one instrument alone could not satisfy an intensifying craving.

The ethnomusicological scene communicates a sense of building passion not only in the listing of gorgeous sonic pleasures of the moment but also in shifts of tense. The paragraph begins with past tense descriptions of playing exotic instruments in London and then shifts to simple present when the narrator relays the cultural context of the instruments:

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<sup>118</sup> Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism*.

<sup>119</sup> Carl Engel, ‘Views and Reviews’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 8.2 (April 1922), 308.

<sup>120</sup> Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism*, 117–20.

‘He had the mysterious *juruparis* of the Rio Negro Indians, that women are not allowed to look at’ (114). Dorian’s process of collecting is in the past tense (‘He had’), but because the larger context is always attached to the instruments (women are never allowed to look at *juruparis*) the tense pivots to the simple present. Since the narrative is mostly told in past tense, the sudden shift to the present tense stands out; it creates the feeling of heightened reality.

Marking the return to normal life, the tense then shifts back to the past tense when Dorian begins to attend Wagner again. While this return to the opera and to London society may seem to communicate a lesser experience, hearing Wagner is anything but the resumption of mundane existence. Instead, no one genre of music will satiate Dorian. From Western music, he turned to exotic sounds: ‘The harsh intervals and shrill discords of barbaric music stirred him at times when Schubert’s grace, and Chopin’s beautiful sorrows, and the mighty harmonies of Beethoven himself, fell unheeded on his ear.’ (114). Then, after he ‘wearied’ (114) of ‘barbaric’ instrumental music, Dorian goes repeatedly to *Tannhäuser*. Wilde’s story thus narrates how a fashionable man of discernment might rotate through the varied, luscious sonorities of the *fin-de-siècle* musical scene. Hearing musical genres in sequence, I believe, reveals a vital aspect of the dandy’s particular aesthetic experience, whereby a particularly lush sensual auralty engenders the same exquisite, momentary pleasure of smoking one opium cigarette at a time.

Several nineteenth-century composers understood this concept of rotation, too. Edward Lockspeiser mentions that Debussy, captivated by the same cultural stimuli as was Wilde, finally met the author in February 1893. Debussy’s sense of the correspondence between his own predilections and those of English decadence is shown by his subsequently scheduling a concert in March 1894 in the gallery of La Libre Esthétique in Brussels where Beardsley’s drawings for Wilde’s *Salomé* featured amongst the artwork displayed.<sup>121</sup> In the same month in which Debussy met Wilde, moreover, the composer referred to a succession of momentary pleasures as the ‘Cult of Desire.’ He explained what he meant by this term in a letter to Prince André Poniatowski:

And when all’s said and done, Desire is what counts. You have this crazy but inescapable longing, a need almost, for some work of art ... and the moment of actual possession is one of joy, of love really. A week later, nothing. The object is there and you spend five or six days without looking at it. The only time the passion returns is when you’ve been away for several months. It’s like the sun, which is so wonderful when you feel it again on an April morning and then all

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<sup>121</sup> Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, 2 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 118-121, 177.

through the summer we're tired of it. You could write down a formula for desire:  
'everything comes from it and returns to it.'<sup>122</sup>

The coincidence in dates, along with the resemblance to Dorian's lifestyle choices, poses an intriguing possibility: Debussy may be explicating an idea that arose in conversation with Wilde. Regardless, Debussy expounds upon a type of ordering that we have already seen in *Dorian Gray* when Wilde's protagonist rotates among exotic instruments, musical genres, and, overall, among sensual studies (aural, olfactory, visual, tactile, and spiritually exotic).

Debussy's comments referred to physical objects ('a Velázquez, a Satsuma vase or a new kind of tie'<sup>123</sup>), but he also understood the lure of exotic sound. In 1889, Debussy's head turned with the shock of realization upon first hearing the Javanese gamelan at the Universal Exhibition in Paris. Exotic instruments could be the catalyst for developing fresh techniques and a radical musical language that would take Western music forward. Although he had been an enthusiastic follower of Wagner up to this point, Debussy suddenly understood that the music of the future did not have to follow Wagner's prescriptions.<sup>124</sup> Significantly, he recognized indigenous music as having more advanced qualities than some Western music. In 1913, looking back on this first experience of the gamelan, Debussy wrote that 'Javanese music is based on a type of counterpoint by comparison with which that of Palestrina is child's play. And if we listen without European prejudice to the charm of their percussion we must confess that our percussion is like primitive noises at a country fair.'<sup>125</sup> Javanese composition sounds so different from Western music because it is based on the concept of cyclical time rather than a goal-directed or linear one.

In 1889, the gamelan sounded for the first time in the West. Immediately for Debussy a pressing question arose: *which* music is more evolved? A year later, Wilde depicted Dorian listening to native musicians playing exotic instruments. By registering his excitement in heightened poetic language and tense shifts, the musical collection in *Dorian Gray* communicates the exhilarating nature of the music of the moment. This novel emphasis on the present moment and on greater expanses of time, simultaneously, is reinforced through its simple present tense; the prose conveys the idea that it is the sound of the ongoing – past, present, and future all at once. Exotic music is finally not simply reducible to the lowest rung

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<sup>122</sup> Claude Debussy to André Poniowski, February 1893, *Debussy Letters*, eds François Lesure and Roger Nichols, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), 40.

<sup>123</sup> Debussy to Poniowski, February 1893, *Debussy Letters*, 25.

<sup>124</sup> Mervyn Cooke, *Britten and the Far East* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1998), 5; Cooke, 'The East in the West: Evocations of the Gamelan in Western Music', *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 259.

<sup>125</sup> Claude Debussy, *Revue S.I.M.* (1913). Cited by Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 115.

of a stratified set of relationships, for Dorian Gray's sojourn in one type of sensuality after another – especially his cyclical sense of sonority – is remarkably similar to the cyclical structure of gamelan music.

As is commonly known, Dorian's instrument collection closely duplicates the guidebooks produced by the South Kensington Museum,<sup>126</sup> but Wilde also had opportunities to hear these instruments after moving to London in 1878. Elite London parlors had reverberated with the sounds of exotic folk music for a decade before the Western world first heard the gamelan. Mary Gladstone, a musical aficionado, an extraordinarily fine pianist, and an unparalleled diarist of musical London, noted hearing in 1879 a 'Spaniard guitar band' that performed with 'crossed legs, immoveable faces, glittering eyes'.<sup>127</sup> Gladstone's experience was one of the earliest of what would become a more concentrated interest in the 1880s in other music cultures. A few years later, in 1883, she listened to zithers that accompanied guitars and Alpine choirs.<sup>128</sup>

Wilde was acquainted with Gladstone's set, even if set apart. After a July ball in 1885, Gladstone recorded in her diary how she and friends like Lord Acton conversed and indulged in strawberries and cream in the garden, with 'the flabby huge figure of Oscar Wilde mooning about'.<sup>129</sup> 'Mooning', the *OED* makes clear, characterizes dreaminess or listlessness. These qualities contrast with the vigorous intellectualism that comprised Gladstone and Acton's discussions, as well as her own energetic, 'bright presence'.<sup>130</sup> The dandy and the aficionado thus share an upper-crust world that was exponentially alive with new sounds. But their behaviors are markedly different, from their energy to their mode of aesthetic enjoyment. Unlike the real Mary Gladstone, who hears whatever good or interesting music that she can, the fictional Dorian Gray focuses on one genre after another in succession. Gladstone listens to guitars and zithers owned by others; Dorian collects them and removes his primitive instruments from the hallowed display case, 'lov[ing] to touch and try them' (114). The dandy plays the exotic objects as well as playing with them. Doing so creates the 'free play of the mind' that we recognize as both Arnoldian '*disinterestedness*' and as the momentary pleasure.

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<sup>126</sup> Bristow, Commentary, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Bristow, 215.

<sup>127</sup> Mary Gladstone, entry for 3 July 1879, Diary, (1 January 1879-27 July 1882), The Mary Gladstone Papers, Add Mss 46259, f 25. The British Library.

<sup>128</sup> Mary Gladstone, entries for 23 January and 3 October 1883, Diary (18 January 1883-7 December 1885), The Mary Gladstone Papers, Add mss 46261, ff 3, 24. The British Library.

<sup>129</sup> Mary Gladstone, entry for 9 July 1885, Diary, Add Mss 46261, f 84.

<sup>130</sup> [Unintelligible] Aberdeen to Catherine Gladstone, 30 December 1885 [GG 1024], Glynne-Gladstone Mss 1024, Flintshire Record Office, St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, Wales.

## ‘Playing’ Empire and Resisting Closure

Just as Wilde’s writing aspires to music, Dorian Gray aspires to music, but in a very different sense from a dedicated amateur like Mary Gladstone or even a salaried, professional musician. Lady Brandon describes Dorian to Basil just before they meet: ‘Quite forget what he does – afraid he – doesn’t do anything – oh, yes, plays the piano –’ (10). Dandies, as idle men in London, although seemingly ‘disinterested’ and ‘detached’ from the all-too imperial world that they inhabit, however, find it impossible to escape Empire. Their play, as their opium-smoking shows, is propped upon empire. Dorian is a fine example as he consumes indigenous music and opium cigarettes. Additionally, those Western composers to whom the novel gives the most attention were heavily identified with histories of race and *Volk* [folk]: Schumann’s music criticism helped to create a cohesive German national identity, Chopin’s Polish folk idioms made his music distinct and embodied what Jim Samson calls ‘a symbolic representation of the nation’s spiritual identity’, and Wagner’s music-dramas were rooted in ideas that celebrated the culture, language, and music of the German *Volk* while denigrating that of the Jews, a point that becomes evident in his infamous essay of 1850, ‘Judentum in der Musik.’<sup>131</sup> It is worth remembering here as well that crown politics are at the center of Wagner’s tetralogy, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. George Bernard Shaw famously summarized the plot of these operas as ‘conflict between humanity and its gods and governments, issuing in the redemption of man from their tyranny by the growth of his will into perfect strength and self-confidence’.<sup>132</sup> Dorian thus plays and hears strongly inflected nationalist Western music.

The same topic emerges when we look at the ways in which music is synonymous with beautiful writing in *Dorian Gray*. Wilde’s novel, however, does not yearn to the condition of just any music. Of the music that Dorian consumes, the narrative shares a special affinity with Wagnerian opera. It is hardly accidental, after all, that Wilde the Wagnerian chose to give Lord Henry the family name that he did. Wotton, undoubtedly of solid English stock, references the place where Wilde’s friend, More Adey, lived (Under-the-Hill, Wootton-under-Edge,

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<sup>131</sup> Plantinga, *Schumann*, ix-x; R. Larry Todd, Preface, *Schumann and his World*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), ix; Jim Samson, *The Music of Chopin* (London: Routledge, 1985), 5; Richard Wagner, ‘Judaism in Music’ (1950), rpt in *Richard Wagner: Stories and Essays*, ed. Charles Osborne (London: Owen, 1973), 28-39; Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt, Vol. 2, The Weimar Years, 1848-1861*, 3 vols (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), 2: 354-356.

<sup>132</sup> G.B. Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Nibelung’s Ring* (1898; New York: Bretano, 1909), 73.

Gloustershire).<sup>133</sup> But it is also strikingly similar to the ruler of the gods and the main character in the *Ring* (Wotan). Lord Henry's wife, Victoria, shores up the comparison because her name is also regal, referencing the monarch. Lady Victoria Wotton adds to the complex associations of her name when she shrilly reveals to Dorian, 'I saw you with [my husband] the other night at the Opera.' (41). The opera is Wagner's *Lohengrin*. Playful constructions of characters and their favorite pursuits merge here with genuine enthusiasm for one of Wilde's heroes: Wagner.

And yet this playfulness with Wagnerian associations has a serious edge. Like his imperial brothers in real life, Dorian's awareness of crown influence remains ever present. It is just that Lord Henry Wotton's/Wotan's machinations reign supreme to Dorian, rather than those of Victoria (Lord Henry's simpering wife; queen and empress). By the end of the *Ring*, however, Wotan has dramatically shown himself to be a failed ruler and father. Dorian believes the same of Lord Henry's influence. As Wilde's novel wends towards its tragic close, Dorian bucks even Wotton/Wotan's system, refusing to be governed by his musical words of inspiration. When Lord Henry issues the command, 'Play me a nocturne, Dorian, and, as you play, tell me, in a low voice, how you have kept your youth' (181), Dorian obeys Lord Henry's request to play Chopin, but does not speak. Instead, Henry's stream-of-consciousness monologue dominates the pages. 'You are the type of what the age is searching for, and what it is afraid it has found', concludes Lord Henry at last. 'Life has been your art. You have set yourself to music. Your days are your sonnets.' And then Dorian does something surprising: he lifts his hands off the keys. 'I am not going to have the same life, Henry' (182-183), he says. Although Lord Henry's honeyed rhetoric spurred Dorian on to follow the terrible life he has chosen, he now refuses to play.

But what does it mean for rhetoric to be both like opium and like music? Dissimilar to the 'momentary pleasure' of the ultimately unsatisfactory cigarette, a nineteenth-century musical composition has tonal tensions that eventually resolve in cadences, thereby giving a sense of satisfaction by the piece's end. Teasing, taunting patterns in Western music, as Susan McClary famously contends in her pioneering study, *Feminine Endings*, essentially map 'patterns through the medium of sound that resemble those of sexuality.'<sup>134</sup> The prelude to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, she argues, seems especially erotic precisely because of sonic tensions that come about through compositional techniques. Employing unusual harmonies, chromaticism, and unpredictable rhythms results in an arousal of desire as the unstable sounds make us reach

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<sup>133</sup> Bristow, explanatory notes to *Dorian Gray*, 191.

<sup>134</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 12.

toward resolution – patterns that we also associate with sexuality. Wagner’s music, in particular, arouses an expectation of musical satisfaction that is frequently deferred or withheld entirely.

When an aesthete-dandy amuses himself at the piano and then breaks off mid-composition, the ache of tonal tension hangs in the air; the yearning does not resolve with a final cadence. The presence of desire is both audible and silent; it relies on sounding some of the composition but not the rest. What I am suggesting is thus rather different from Jeff Nunokawa’s examination of ‘[t]he perverse preference that Wilde’s dandy expresses ... for the state of boredom where desire ceases, over the state of desire itself’.<sup>135</sup> According to Nunokawa, the novel registers desire by blushing and trembling – reactions that form stark contrasts to otherwise pale ‘weary bod[ies]’, fatigue, shrugs, and indifferent looks.<sup>136</sup> I am not contesting these excellent points, but if we look at quavers instead of quivers,<sup>137</sup> then we see how ‘playing’ (music) expresses something different from the trembling of desire that Nunokawa notices. Because aesthetes create the audible sense of silent desire through play, longing co-exists with the lounging body in a way that complements how the active mind belies the languorous slouch. Being playful creates the sound of desire (musically, rhetorically). Similarly, because Dorian lifts his hands off the keys mid-composition, an unfinished cadence reverberates uncomfortably in the inner ear. Sonically speaking, this novel never resolves; it resists closure, even after we read of Dorian’s death on the final page. Wilde’s writings often allude to music to create forward movement rather than resolution and, crucially, they frequently begin with protagonists at the piano. When indolent dandies play only snippets of compositions, they aurally create not only the sense of ‘*disinterestedness*’ in a larger social and moral function of music, but also the same cigarette-impression of ‘the perfect pleasure’, leaving one unsatisfied and anticipating further pleasure rather than waiting for closure.

European expansionism works in a comparable way. I am not asserting that *Dorian Gray* is a covertly imperialist text, but rather that, even though it is the last thing he wants to be, the dandy is an imperial subject. His props obviously originate in a culture of empire as does his Eastern state of mind – the ‘Cult of Desire’ which inspires him to collect and savor, and then move on to the next gorgeous stimulus for imagination. The idea of the consumerist dandy, which Rachel Bowlby has influentially discussed, thus rests upon an inherent imperialism.<sup>138</sup> So do his aesthetics. The Western musical material that the dandy finds

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<sup>135</sup> Jeff Nunokawa, ‘The Importance of Being Bored: The Dividends of Ennui in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*’, *Studies in the Novel* 28.3 (Fall 1996), 363.

<sup>136</sup> Nunokawa, ‘The Importance of Being Bored’, 360, 361.

<sup>137</sup> Quaver is the British term for what North Americans call eighth notes.

<sup>138</sup> Rachel Bowlby, ‘Promoting Dorian Gray’, *Oscar Wilde*, ed. Freedman, 178-192.

pleasurable, and which models Wilde's prose aspirations, has unavoidable political resonances, too. Schumann's revealing comment in 1836 – 'Chopin's works are guns buried in flowers'<sup>139</sup> – concerned the hidden depths found in seemingly simple beauty, in this case the danger that Chopin's mazurkas presented to the Russian occupation of Poland. But these words also suggest the unavoidable evocations of empire that sound when dandies sit down at the keyboard. To be sure, in Wilde's works flowery prose does not mask guns, but when Dorian stops playing Chopin as an attempt to throw off Lord Henry's rule, there is nonetheless a lingering reverberation of other imperial presences: Wotan's tyranny, Chopin's nationalism in the face of Russian rule, and Liszt's assimilation of Chopin into his musical empire.<sup>140</sup> In other words, it is easy to miss the dandy's imperialism because it is not jingoistic. Yet, his consumption of opium, together with the particular musical repertoires that he champions, and his posture of Indian '*disinterestedness*', shows that he is a figure whose playful idleness remains inextricably linked with Empire and the East.

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<sup>139</sup> These words are spoken by Eusebius, one of Schumann's fictional characters who appeared repeatedly in his reviews. Robert Schumann, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 4 (1836). Translated and rpt in *Robert Schumann*, ed. Wolff, trans. Rosenfeld, 132.

<sup>140</sup> Chopin himself understood Liszt's admiration as imperial acquisition. See E. Legouvé: *Soixante ans de souvenirs* (Paris: Hetzel, 1886) vol. i., p. 309, cited in Hughes, Introduction, *Liszt's 'Chopin'*, forthcoming. After Chopin's death, Liszt assimilated 'Chopinesque turn[s] of phrase' into his own musical material and began to write in the genres that Chopin was most identified with - polonaises, ballads, a mazurka, and a berceuse Walker, *Franz Liszt*, 2:146.