

Wilde and the Magazines: A Dialogue

Mark W. Turner

Oscar Wilde was a man of the press. While we tend today to regard him less as a journalist than an inspired wit, inventive playwright, brilliant stylist, or even as a gay icon, during the 1880s Wilde wrote continually for magazines and newspapers. A regular reviewer for the daily London newspaper, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, for which he wrote over 70 pieces, he also edited a woman's magazine, *Woman's World*, between 1887-89, and contributed to a range of other, various magazines – including the *Speaker*, the *Court and Society Review*, the *World*.¹ His only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* first appeared in a single issue of the American *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890 and focusing on the magazine publication of the text, which is what I want to do today, enables us to see the way Wilde's novel made a significant contribution to two cultural debates that were taking place in the pages of late nineteenth century Anglo-American magazines. Firstly, *Dorian Gray* was read in relation to the prevalent mode of nineteenth century fiction – that is, realism – one object of which was to instruct its readers through a 'truthful' depiction of 'real' life. Wilde's novel, while sharing some of the attributes of realism, finally rejects the realist mode with its emphasis on an objective, moral depiction of the world, and it was this fundamental challenge to the dominant fictional mode that raised so many eyebrows. Secondly, and related to the assault on realism, the novel embraces aestheticism and decadence, with an emphasis on art, beauty and subjective pleasure. The initial reaction to the novel – which posited the certainties of realism against the improbabilities of a romance like *Dorian Gray* – was part of a broader discussion about the role of fiction in Anglo-American culture, a discussion found in the pages of popular magazines like *Lippincott's* and more intellectual journals. Therefore, in order to understand the cultural context of Wilde's novel in *Lippincott's*, we need to explore how debates about realism and aestheti-

cism emerged out of the press, and how Wilde and others before him used writing for magazines as a way to conceptualize ideas about aestheticism and the role of the fiction.

One of the most prominent writers who used the periodical press to formulate and disseminate ideas about aestheticism was Walter Pater, Wilde's tutor at Oxford and the leading intellectual in British aestheticism in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Virtually the whole of Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) – a definitive text of aestheticism in which a homoerotic 'enthusiasm' in aesthetic appreciation is put forward – first appeared as journal articles in two periodicals in the 1860s, the Radical, weighty quarterly *Westminster Review* and the monthly Liberal *Fortnightly Review*. Laurel Brake, who has explored the magazine contexts for Pater's work, argues for the significance of the journals for the development of Pater's aestheticism. For her, his writing for the magazines amounts to a 'self-conscious and sustained project'; that is, these journals allowed Pater a public space in which he could develop his homoerotic version of aestheticism.² I want to suggest that the periodical publication of Wilde's ideas in a variety of forms – through the serialization of *Dorian Gray*, through his non-fiction articles, and through his reviews – was as significant for Wilde's development as for Pater's.

Wilde's Aesthetic Dialogue

Wilde's polemical contribution to debates about Aestheticism first appeared in the pages of periodicals before being collected in his book of essays, *Intentions* (1891). The publication of these critical writings in different journals sets up an important dialogic relationship -- Wilde's own dialogue with himself -- particularly between 1889-91. Consider this very partial list of Wilde's writing for periodicals around the time of the publication of *Dorian Gray* in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*:³

'The Decay of Lying' in the British periodical, *Nineteenth Century*, January 1889; reprinted in the American *Eclectic Magazine*, February 1889.

'Mr. Pater's Last Volume' in the *Speaker*, 22 March 1890 – a review of

Walter Pater's volume of essays, *Appreciations* (1889)

'The True Function and Value of Criticism; with some Remarks on the Importance of Doing Nothing: A Dialogue' in *Nineteenth Century* in two parts, July and September 1890; revised for publication in *Intentions* as 'The Critic as Artist'.

The Picture of Dorian Gray in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, July 1890.

'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' in the British *Fortnightly Review*, February 1891; reprinted in the *Eclectic Magazine*, April 1891.

'A Preface to Dorian Gray' in the *Fortnightly Review*, March 1891.

The Picture of Dorian Gray, heavily revised first book edition, April 1891.

Intentions, 1891 – a book of Wilde's essays including revised versions of 'The Decay of Lying' and 'The True and Value of Criticism'.

In 1889, he is also publishing reviews of Yeats, Walt Whitman, Wm. Morris, Ouida, Swinburne, Wordsworth, Elizabeth Nesbit, and on topics including Darwinism and Irish lace.

As John Stokes suggests, 'carrying out in public a private conversation with himself was a device that Wilde used for his two major aesthetic statements in "The Critic as Artist" and "The Decay of Lying",'⁴ and I would only add that this dialogic, conversational mode is especially appropriate for the *periodical* publication of Wilde's ideas.⁵ That is, the very form of the periodical – in which fiction might sit alongside non-fiction articles, travel sketches, poems, illustrations, and other miscellaneous material – immediately puts any single text in relation to many others, and the meanings from one text might reverberate in another. Readers of magazines did not encounter literary texts in isolation; rather, they read them as part of a single issue of a magazine, and that single issue as part of a broader literary cul-

ture in which magazines proliferated and were central. Taken together, the essays and wide-ranging reviews published by Wilde around the time of *Dorian Gray* were his most extensive non-fictional discussions of aestheticism, and *Dorian Gray* was his only extended fictional exploration of aestheticism. The *Lippincott's* version of the novel, then, needs to be seen in dialogue with Wilde's other writings for magazines, many of which are themselves in dialogue with the aesthetic criticism of Pater and others. To ignore the vibrant, journalistic context in which *Dorian Gray* first circulated, as critics of the novel have tended to do, is to lose something significant about the way Wilde's aestheticism featured in public discourse: as dialogue, as conversation, as intellectual exchange. Furthermore, in a letter to Mrs. Allhusen in early 1890, Wilde reveals something of the conversational nature of the novel:

I have just finished my first long story, and am tired out. I am afraid it is rather like my own life – all conversation and no action. I can't describe action: my people sit in chairs and chatter.⁶

Given Wilde's flair for conversation, this admission is not surprising, any more than is his later move into dramatic literature in which his conversational mode of expression could flourish. Still, even in *Dorian Gray*, it is in a series of extended conversations (chapters 1 and 2, and chapter 6, for example) that debates about aestheticism and decadence get articulated. Through conversational exchanges between Dorian and Lord Henry we understand the significance of *influence* in shaping the individual, and Dorian's Faustian journey into decadence is due largely to the influence of his friend's intoxicating conversation. But conversation is an important concept for Wilde in another way since his ideas and writings are continually 'in conversation with' both himself and others.

As we see in the brief list of Wilde's writing on the handout, he published the first part of his long essay, 'The True Function and Value of Criticism' in the *Nineteenth Century* in July 1890, the same month that *Dorian Gray* appeared in *Lippincott's*. This is an important moment for the articulation of Wilde's aestheticism, expressed both in fiction and in non-fiction simultaneously, and it shows precisely the way his different kinds of writing for magazines were part of an ongoing articu-

lation of aestheticism. But the connection between Wilde's novel and his critical essay is not the only one that contemporary readers would have focused on, since the essay almost certainly would have brought to mind one other work that also discusses the nature of criticism and art, the critic and poet Matthew Arnold's well known essay, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', first published in November 1864 in another periodical, the *National Review*. Playing as it does on the words in Arnold's title, Wilde's essay enters into direct dialogue with Arnold's (the immediacy of this engagement with Arnold is lost when the essay is 'The Critic as Artist' when published in book form in *Intentions*). The magazine publication of the essay calls attention to Arnold, and sets up a dialogue with his ideas. In Arnold's famous essay, he suggests that it is the critic's responsibility to 'see the object as in itself it really is', whereas Wilde inverts Arnold and tells us that 'the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not'.⁷

Between Arnold's essentially objective, humanist criticism and Wilde's subjective, aesthetic view of both the critic and artist sits Pater. Wilde and Pater both wrote for some of the same periodicals, and, furthermore, Wilde reviewed Pater's most recent collection of essays, *Appreciations*, in March 1890, and Pater reviewed Wilde, including a review of the book edition of *Dorian Gray*. This sets up another dialogic relationship, another kind of conversation, between the two in the press across time, and it's a conversation that is important for Wilde's rejection of Arnold. Pater, in his Preface to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* also argues with Arnold by urging each of us 'to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly.' For Pater, aesthetic appreciation is subjective:

What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?⁸

Pater's engagement with Arnold, and Wilde's refutation of Arnold by adopting a subjective, Paterian position, both make up part of the intellectual fabric of *Dorian Gray* and both inform the aesthetic debate that takes place in the novel. When the

novel appears to defend sensuality as something like a new religion, Wilde seems almost to be fictionalizing a Paterian principle of pleasure-seeking. The passage on your handout shows very clearly the influence of Pater's aestheticism on Wilde, and I think we can include the novel as part of the ongoing conversation that Wilde was having with his former tutor through the public mode of print culture.

The worship of the senses has often, and with much justice, been decried, men feeling a natural instinct of terror about passions and sensations that seem stronger than ourselves, and that we are conscious of sharing with the less highly organized forms of existence. But it appeared to Dorian Gray that the true nature of the senses had never been understood, and that they had remained savage and animal merely because the world had sought to starve them into submission or to kill them by pain, instead of aiming at making them elements of a new spirituality, of which a fine instinct for beauty was to be the dominant characteristic.

I won't continue to labour the point I am making about Wilde's dialogues with others – I'll simply point out that Wilde's essay on criticism takes the form of a dialogue, a form that he had already employed in 'The Decay of Lying' in 1889. That he chooses the Platonic, philosophical dialogue to express his complex (and even contradictory) views of art and criticism highlights the fundamentally *active* nature of criticism for Wilde, and the importance of the critical encounter through which our own subjective appreciation of art is formed.

The Dialogue in *Lippincott's*

Lippincott's Monthly Magazine, an American magazine based in Philadelphia, may at first appear to be an unusual place for Wilde to have published *Dorian Gray*. However, the transatlantic publication of literature was common, and *Lippincott's* was also published in London by the English publishers Ward, Lock and Co. *Lippincott's* was a general miscellany whose greatest American rivals were the market leader *Harper's Monthly* and the *Century*, two of the most prominent American magazines in the late nineteenth century. Founded in 1868 as the house journal of the major book publishing firm J.B. Lippincott, *Lippincott's Monthly*

Magazine was part of the antebellum explosion in magazines which occurred in print media in America. Like other similar monthlies, *Lippincott's* largely published writers on the firm's own lists, including such prominent figures as Rebecca Harding Davis and Henry James, and they targeted middle-class, family-magazine readers for whom serial fiction and high quality non-fiction articles were a mainstay. From 1887, *Lippincott's* adopted the unusual policy of publishing an entire short novel in a single issue, a practice that distinguished it from other magazines still publishing much longer novels in serial form over an extended period of time. In part, *Lippincott's* recognized the growing appetite for shorter rather than longer fiction, as the hefty three-volume novel came to be challenged by shorter, sharper works. In part, they were responding to the market leader *Harper's*, who had the policy of publishing short works by American writers in their issues. *Lippincott's* focus on British literature was a way of countering what their competitors were up to. So it was in *Lippincott's* that the cocaine-injecting Sherlock Holmes was first introduced to American readers when *The Sign of Four* was published only a few months before *Dorian Gray*, and Rudyard Kipling's *The Light that Failed* appeared several months later – making it a particularly impressive year for depictions of bohemian London in the magazine. The July 1890 issue of *Lippincott's* in which *Dorian Gray* was published is typical of the magazine's offerings generally, and displays the eclectic nature of the periodical form. The full text of the novel appears first, followed by articles on, among other things, an American senator, popular science, and 'the indissolubility of marriage', in addition to other works of fiction and poetry. While today we tend to look back on this particular issue of the magazine simply because Wilde's novel first appeared in it, readers in 1890 encountered *Dorian Gray* as one among many literary offerings for that month, and *Lippincott's* was only one magazine among many vying for the middle-class reader. It is important to keep in mind the messy, competitive nature of print culture at this time, and also to remember that Wilde had not yet become the Wilde that he is most remembered as, that is, the Wilde of the 1890s.

By reading *Dorian Gray* in the context of *Lippincott's* as readers in 1890 did, we see much more immediately the ways thematic strands and ideas in the novel intersect with other fiction and non-fiction published concurrently. In other words, another kind of dialogic relationship is set up. A striking example of the links one

can make across texts can be seen by comparing *Dorian Gray* with the anonymous serial *A Dead Man's Diary*, which came to its conclusion in the same issue. As the title makes clear, it is an account written by a deceased man about life after death, and the narrative reflects on what it is like to die, it ruminates on the past and attempts to describe heaven and hell. An unusual serial – bringing together theological speculation, fantasy, and confession – it clearly reflects the late nineteenth century fascination with spiritualism and the after-life. Its quasi-mystical tone has interesting parallels with *Dorian Gray*, since both, in their different ways, explore the notion of the divided self and divided consciousness. In *Dorian*, Wilde offers us an image of a non-essential Ego, a self that is necessarily fragmented: To *Dorian*, Wilde writes, 'man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead'. The heightened sense of awareness that *Dorian* feels through sensual indulgence leads him to an imaginative conflation of the past into the present – 'there were times when it seemed to *Dorian Gray* that the whole of history was merely the record of his own life, not as he had lived it in act and circumstance, but as his imagination had created it for him' (75-6) – and the *Dead Man's diary* similarly suggests that in eternity, there is an acute ability to revisit the past.

More than this, however, one is struck when reading *Dorian Gray* and *A Dead Man's Diary* together by the prominence of the discourse of sin in both narrative. The conclusion to *A Dead Man's Diary* includes two brief chapters, 'Hope' and 'Heaven', in which the writer finally atones for the sins of his past:

At last there came a time, even in hell, when the burden of my sin lay so heavily upon me, that I felt I could bear it no longer, and that if succour there came none, the very soul of me must wither away and die. It was not that I wanted to evade the punishment of my crime, for I was willing and wished to undergo it to the uttermost. No, that which was so terrible to me was the thought that not all the sufferings of eternity could avail to wipe away the awful stain upon my spirit, or to undo the evil which I had brought upon the woman I had ruined.⁹

The woman he ruins is a young seventeen year old housekeeper he had professed to love and with whom he had sex, committing what he calls 'moral murder'. The echo of Sibyl Vane and of the final chapter of *Dorian Gray* novel is perhaps obvious – *Dorian* confronts his own stain, the 'red stain' of sin on the portrait, and debates how best to atone for and 'get rid of the past':

Yet it was his duty to confess, to suffer public shame, and to make public atonement. There was a God who called upon men to tell their sins to earth as well as to heaven. Nothing that he could do would cleanse him till he had told his own sin. His sin? He shrugged his shoulders. The death of Basil Hallward seemed very little to him. He was thinking of Hetty Merton. (99)

Dorian, of course, opts to 'kill the past' and to destroy the evidence, the portrait, but in doing so he destroys himself. To erase the past is to erase the self. Whether or not the conclusion to *Dorian Gray* is a moral one – that is, whether or not *Dorian* is seen to be punished for a life of self-indulgence – is something that critics have debated ever since the initial publication. Reading the novel in the same issue as the conclusion to *A Dead Man's Diary* highlights the discourse of sin and repentance and reinforces questions about morality and literature.

When published in book form in Britain a year later, Wilde's novel caused a critical uproar in part because its aestheticism seems to undermine the dominant fictional mode in the mid to late Victorian period, realism. In response to some harsh reviews, Wilde wrote to the newspapers defending his novel. I won't go in to these exchanges, since they are pretty well known, but I have given you one of Wilde's ripostes published in the *Daily Chronicle*, in which he defends aestheticism against what he calls 'the crude brutality of plain realism':

Finally, let me say this – the aesthetic movement produced certain curious colours, subtle in their loveliness and fascinating in their almost mystical tone. They were, and are, our reaction against the crude primaries of a doubtless more respectable but certainly less cultivated age. My story is an essay on decorative art. It re-acts against the crude brutality of plain realism. It is poisonous, if you like, but you cannot deny that it is also perfect,

and perfection is what we artists aim at.¹⁰

One of the things Wilde's exchanges in the press do, of course, is create another dialogue, yet another public conversation, about the nature of art, the artist, morality and criticism.

But the debate about *Dorian Gray* was not limited to the robust response of critics after the first book edition; it also took place in the pages of *Lippincott's*, in which criticism of the novel positioned it in relation to wider debates about realist fiction. While it was common for some magazines to review or comment upon the contents of other magazines, it was far less common for magazines to review their own contents, so the publication and responses to the novel in 1890 offer us an unusual case study of a magazine that publishes unconventional fiction but also offers a critique of that fiction. In the September 1890 issue of *Lippincott's* – two months after *Dorian Gray* had appeared in its pages – two articles appeared that directly address issues raised by the novel. Anne H. Wharton's article, 'A Revulsion From Realism' suggests that Wilde's novel was part of a backlash against realism, part of the 'rebound, natural to humanity, from intense realism to extreme idealism'.¹¹ She links Wilde's 'utterly impossible story' to other improbable narratives, including R.L. Stevenson's novella about the divided self, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), but she also addresses the decadent, cult-of-the-beautiful tendencies of the novel:

The reader may reasonably question the author's good taste in displaying at such length his knowledge of antique decoration and old-world crime as in Chapter IX., which, besides being somewhat tiresome, clogs the dramatic movement of the story. Yet, on the other hand, it must be admitted that none but an artist and an apostle of the beautiful could have so sympathetically portrayed the glowing hues and perfumes of the garden in which Dorian Gray had first presented to his lips the cup of life, and none other could have so pictured the luxurious surrounding of his home, for whose embellishment the known world had been searched for hangings, ornaments, and *bric-a-brac*. Amid such an *entourage* of modern London life, with its

Sybaritic indulgence, its keenness of wit, and its subtle intelligence, Mr. Wilde places characters and works out his miracle.¹²

Chapter IX follows Dorian's discovery of the dangerous, decadent 'novel without a plot' in which a man spends his life 'trying to realize in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own. . .'. (64) The influence of that book leads Dorian to explore fully the pleasures of the senses described throughout chapter IX:

He saw that there was no mood of the mind that had not its counterpart in the sensuous life, and set himself to discover their true relations, wondering what there was in frankincense that made one mystical, and in ambergris that stirred one's passions, and in violets that woke the memory of dead romances [STOP READING], and in musk that troubled the brain, and in champak that stained the imagination; and seeking often to elaborate a real psychology of perfumes, and to estimate the several influences of sweet-smelling roots, and scented pollen-laden flowers, of aromatic balms, and of dark and fragrant woods, of spikenard that sickens, of hovenia that makes men mad, and of aloes that are said to be able to expel melancholy from the soul. (69)

Dorian yields to the power of music, studies the beauty of jewels and costume, indulges his passion for vestments and ritual, and collects exquisite objects. While Wharton describes the catalogue of Dorian's decadent project in this chapter as 'tiresome' and an impediment to the pace of the narrative, she also correctly locates Wilde's vision of 'modern London', and by extension, of urban modernity, in a context of such individualist indulgence.

Wharton's article is followed directly by 'The Romance of the Impossible' by Julian Hawthorne, a romance novelist, a critic, and a frequent contributor to *Lippincott's* and other magazines. Hawthorne also takes *Dorian Gray's* departure from realism as its chief subject and suggests the curiousness of its attraction:

Mr. Oscar Wilde, the apostle of beauty, has in the July number of *Lippin-*

cott's Magazine a novel, or romance (it partakes of the qualities of both), which everybody will want to read. It is a story strange in conception, strong in interest, and fitted with a tragic and ghastly climax. Like many stories of its class, it is open to more than one interpretation; and there are doubtless critics who will deny that it has any meaning at all. It is, at all events, a salutary departure from the ordinary English novel, with the hero and heroine of different social stations, the predatory black sheep, the curate, the settlements, and Society. Mr. Wilde, as we all know, is a gentleman of an original and audacious turn of mind, and the commonplace is scarcely possible to him. Besides, his advocacy of novel ideas in life, art, dress, and demeanor had led us to expect surprising things from him; and in this literary age it is agreed that a man may best show the best there is in him by writing a book. Those who read Mr. Wilde's story in the hope of finding in it some compact and final statement of his theories of life and manners will be satisfied in some respects, and dissatisfied in others; but not many will deny that the book is a remarkable one and would attract attention even had it appeared without the author's name on the title-page.¹³

Wharton's and Hawthorne's readings of the novel are astute in highlighting the anti-realist nature of this hybrid fiction, and they suggest ways contemporary readers received Wilde's novel. But the critical dialogue does not stop here since these two articles would have resonated with similar articles being published in competitors of *Lippincott's*, both in America and Britain. In particular, I am thinking of the debates about American realism that were taking place in *Lippincott's* competitor, *Harper's*. William Dean Howells, one of the most important American realist novelists of the late nineteenth century, wrote a series of articles for *Harper's* called the 'Editor's Study' between 1886-1892, in which he championed realism over romance as the most important fictional mode of the day. In August 1890, the month after *Dorian Gray* and 'The True Function and Value of Criticism' helped articulate Wilde's aesthetic vision, Howells's column for *Harper's* defined the role of the literary critic as someone who can do a service to the reading public by making honest, comparative judgments about texts in as equitable a way as possible.¹⁴ Howells's view of the critic is not far from Arnold's, while in Wilde, the figure of

the critic becomes a creator, whose subjective response to an object can itself become something beautiful. Read alongside the Wharton and Hawthorne reviews of *Dorian Gray*, the Howells series further points to the ways the novel is enmeshed in a broader debate in which what is at stake in discussions of art, realism and criticism is nothing less than an assertion of cultural values.

Lippincott's was no stranger to the kind of critical response occasioned by the publication of *Dorian Gray*. In fact, there was an even more scandalous novel published in April 1888, Amelie Rives's *The Quick or the Dead?*, the plot of which deals with a widow deciding whether or not to remarry.¹⁵ Although it may sound innocuous to us now, a widow who admits new feelings of love for another man, and chooses not to spend her life waiting to be reunited with her dead husband in the afterlife, was scandalous stuff for late Victorian readers. When those new feelings of love are described in physically passionate terms suggesting an intense sexual attraction, as in Rives's novel, the scandal is all the greater. The outcry over Rives's novel led to huge sales of around 300,000, something which didn't occur with *Dorian Gray*, but it also forced *Lippincott's* to publish articles responding to reviewers' outrage. Much as it was to do two years later with Wilde's novel, the periodical engaged in a critical conversation with itself [this is something the *Yellow Book* makes a showy feature of in the first couple of volumes of that new periodical]. One of the articles, Edgar Saltus's 'Morality in Fiction' addresses the 'novelist who goes about kicking down screens and pulling curtains aside' to reveal the private, passionate lives of his characters, and he concludes: 'The question, then, of morality in fiction is seemingly a question of literary ability. An author may handle any topic, however *scabreux*, provided that he seek less to entertain than to instruct...'¹⁶ Wilde utterly refutes the notion that a novel ought to bear the burden of having to instruct, nowhere more so than in his 'Preface to *Dorian Gray*', a collection of aphorisms first published in the *Fortnightly Review* in March 1891 in advance of the first book edition: 'There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book', Wilde suggests. In the case of Amelie Rives, as with Wilde soon after, *Lippincott's* critical conversation with itself kept the public's attention on the novel (perhaps increasing sales at the same time) while also providing an intellectual context for debating the merits of contemporary fiction. Regular readers of the magazine would have had this previous case of outcry and response in mind when

encountering *Dorian Gray* and the very public exchanges that took place not only between Wilde and his critics, but also within the pages of the magazine itself.

Dorian Gray is central to another related debate worth mentioning, about the status of the popular novel at the end of the century. In the months prior to the publication of *Dorian Gray*, *Lippincott's* published a number of articles specifically about popular fiction and, in particular, serial fiction in magazines and newspapers. In February 1890, the article 'Is English Fiction Narrow?' questioned whether English fiction was too conservative, whether middle-class propriety and the figure of the British Matron cast too deep a shadow over popular culture.¹⁷ The article in part responds to a piece that had been published a month earlier in the *New Review* on the 'cleanliness' of contemporary literature, so *Lippincott's* is participating in a wider, Anglo-American discussion taking place across different magazines. In June 1890, one month before the publication of *Dorian Gray*, two articles appeared in *Lippincott's* again focusing on the purpose of literature. In 'Fiction for the People,' Arthur Goddard argues that the popular writer 'has the privilege and responsibility of writing fiction for the people' and immorality must be taken into account.¹⁸ Agnes Reppelier, in 'Reality in Fiction', ends her article on the use of 'real people' as characters in fiction by quoting none other than Oscar Wilde: "The only real people," says Oscar Wilde, "are the people who never existed; and, if a novelist is base enough to go to life for his personages, he should at least pretend that they are originals, and not boast of them as copies."¹⁹ For us looking back on it now, this reference to a Wildean paradox serves almost to introduce, a month in advance, what would be a central theme in the novel. While reviewers of *Dorian Gray* were not explicitly concerned with the 'originals' of the characters in the novel, they certainly were concerned about the seemingly *unreal* nature of the characters, and, of course, the lines by Wilde quoted by Reppelier speak precisely to one of the concerns of the novel (and of his essays about criticism and aestheticism): that life imitates art, and not the other way round. So, the reader of *Lippincott's* encountering *Dorian Gray* in July 1890 would have had a critical context in which to interpret it, which locates it at a dynamic moment when the role of the popular magazine novel, and the responsibility of the artist to the public, were being debated in the very same pages of that magazine, and more widely elsewhere.²⁰

By re-reading *Dorian Gray* as a contribution to *Lippincott's*, a whole different

set of questions emerge than if we simply consider the book form of the novel published in 1891, as critics, editors and readers of the novel and readers have usually tended to do. The periodical version invites us to focus more specifically on the novel in relation to Wilde's other periodical writings at the time, to read the discourse of aestheticism in *Dorian Gray* as part of a broader public discussion that had been occurring in different ways over a number of years. The *Lippincott's* version also invites us to read the novel in relation to a range of seemingly different literary material – different kinds of narratives and non-fiction articles by other writers. We are led to ask questions such as, in what way might reading an article about morality in fiction or reading a scandalous popular novel in advance of reading *Dorian Gray* suggest possible interpretations and thematic connections? How do the thematic strands of Wilde's decadence figure in other writing being circulated in the magazines at the same time? Reading magazine fiction like *Dorian Gray* in its original periodical context requires an intertextual approach to interpreting literature, in which we need to pay attention to the ways the novel interacts with a whole range of other, even seemingly dissimilar, material. *Dorian Gray* is a part of a complex but enlightening network of texts – a network of debates about art, morality, aestheticism, and the role of the novel, to name a few. But engaging with, borrowing from and contradicting others are precisely in the spirit of Wilde's aestheticism, ever in dialogue, in conversation with others.

NOTES

- 1 For an account of Wilde as a journalist, see John Stokes, 'Wilde the Journalist' in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 69-79, and Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde's Profession: Writing and the Culture Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), chapter 2. For accounts of Wilde's editorship of *Woman's World*, see the following: Laurel Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), chapter 7; Anya Clayworth, 'The *Woman's World*: Oscar Wilde as Editor,' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 30 (1997), 84-101; Stephanie Green, 'Oscar Wilde's *The Woman's World*,' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 30 (1997), 102-18; Catherine Ksinan, 'Wilde as Editor of *Woman's World*: Fighting a Dull Slumber in Stale Certitudes,' *English Literature in Transition* 41 (1998), 408-26.
- 2 Laurel Brake, *Print in Transition 1850-1910: Studies in Media and Book History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 250.

- 3 For the most complete list of Wilde's journalism, see Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde's Profession: Writing and the Culture Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Appendix B.
- 4 John Stokes, *In the Nineties* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 164.
- 5 In part, I am extending Mikail Bakhtin's reading of the nineteenth century novel as dialogic to the periodical form. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981).
- 6 Letter from Wilde to Mrs. Allhusen, early 1890 [?], in Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis, eds., *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 425.
- 7 For a brief discussion of Wilde's essay that places it relation to Arnold and Pater, see AnneVarty, *A Preface to Oscar Wilde* (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 57.
- 8 Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), xxix. First published in 1873 as *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*.
- 9 Anonymous, *A Dead Man's Diary: Written After His Decease*, *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* 46:1 (July 1890), 150.
- 10 Oscar Wilde, Letter to the Editor, *Daily Chronicle*, July 2 1890.
- 11 Anne H. Wharton, 'A Revulsion From Realism,' *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, vol. 45, part II (September 1890), 409.
- 12 Wharton, 410.
- 13 Julian Hawthorne, 'The Romance of the Impossible,' *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, vol. 45, part II (September 1890), 413.
- 14 See W.D. Howells, 'Editor's Study', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 81 (August 1890), 480.
- 15 Amelie Rives (later Amelie Chanler, later Princess Troubetzkoy) published frequently in *Lippincott's*. Interestingly, she also knew Wilde, who inscribed a copy of *The Happy Prince* to her. He also apparently introduced her to her second husband, Prince Troubetzkoy, at one of his garden parties, believing that she and the Prince were the two most beautiful people there. See Welford Dunaway Taylor, *Amelie Rive (Princess Troubetzkoy)* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973), 49 and 68. Also see Holland and Hart-Davis, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, for the letters he wrote to Amelie Rives.
- 16 Edgar Saltus, 'Morality in Fiction', *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, vol. 42, (November 1888), 711.
- 17 John A. Steuart, 'Is English Fiction Narrow?', *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, vol. 45, part I (February 1890), 288.
- 18 Arthur Goddard, 'Fiction for the People,' *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, vol. 45, part I (June 1890), 879.
- 19 Agnes Reppelier, 'Reality in Fiction,' *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, vol. 45, part I (June

- 1890), 910.
- 20 For an indication of the extent of the contemporary debate about realism and the nature of fiction at the time of *Dorian Gray*, see the following periodical articles: Hall Caine, 'The New Watchwords of Fiction', *Contemporary Review* 57 (April 1890), 479-88; D.F. Hannigan, 'Artificiality of English Novels,' *Westminster Review* 133 (March 1890), 252-64; [Anonymous], 'Modern English Novels', *Westminster Review* 134 (August 1890), 143-58.