Art and society: a consideration of the relations between aesthetic theories and social commitment with reference to Katherine Mansfield and Oscar Wilde

Abstract
The chief purpose of this project is to discuss Katherine Mansfield's aesthetic ideas in connection with those of Oscar Wilde and fin de siècle Aestheticism. The proposed study will also analyse her Modernist technique in Symbolist terms, and consider her major themes from aesthetic and political points of view. The primary, underlying concern of this study is to negotiate two, often opposing critical values: the aesthetic and the political. The artist's negotiation of the conflict between aesthetics (art) and politics (society) is a controversial 'modern' critical issue: the issue all serious artists and critics have been facing and consciously dealing with since the late nineteenth century. Fin de siècle Aestheticism and Symbolism form a dominant stream of Modernism because of this intensified shared concern over the delicate relationship between art, life and society. Wilde's stress on the autonomy of art is related to his notion of an ideal relationship between art, life and society: he shows a keen awareness that the autonomy of art and the aesthetic self-realization of the artist could be realized only in a society without any social, cultural or moral hegemony, that is, in a society without moral, social or political oppression. The Wildean 'poeticization' of society lies in his politicization of art; and this aesthetic influences Mansfield's. French Symbolism suggested to Wilde and Mansfield an aesthetic which enabled them to realize their Aestheticism. Wildean and Mansfieldian Symbolism attempt to 'shock' the reader: they aim at breaking the reader's reading habit, and his or her stereotypic point of view and fixed sense of values. Here lie not only the political potential of Symbolism as a Modernist aesthetic but also the aesthetic and political link between their Symbolism and avant-garde Modernism.

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Oscar Wilde was gay in a society stifled by social conventions and governed by very tough laws on homosexuality. Nevertheless, some critics have argued that the playwright dared include homosexual connotations in the text. Wilde was influenced by Walter Pater, the co-founder of the aesthetic movement in art, literature and criticism for whom all art forms are self-sufficient. Therefore, it may be argued that The Importance of Being Earnest exists for its own sake and, as Algernon, one of the characters in the play would put it, “it’s perfectly phrased,” and that is enough to justify its existence.

In ideology, politics, and society, the Victorians created astounding innovation and change: democracy, feminism, unionization of workers, socialism, Darwinism, and scientific agnosticism. Victorian age is conventionally divided into three periods. Equally significant is the conflict between religion and science. This conflict was not altogether a new one. These debates had been generally between the Utilitarians, the followers of Jeremy Bentham, and the philosophical conservatives, the followers of James Taylor Coleridge. Yet as the leading social critic of the 1860s, Matthew Arnold, showed, there were anomalies in mid-Victorian England, and after 1870 they became evident. Others were influenced by the revolutionary theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. A theory of international relations is a set of ideas that explains how the international system works.

Unlike an ideology, a theory of international relations is (at least in principle) backed up with concrete evidence. National Interest. Most theories of international relations are based on the idea that states always act in accordance with their national interest, or the interests of that particular state. Positivist theories aim to replicate the methods of the natural sciences by analysing the impact of material forces. They typically focus on features of international relations such as state interactions, size of military forces, balance of powers etc. Post-positivist epistemology rejects the idea that the social world can be studied in an objective and value-free way.