

An Excerpt from The Decay of Lying by Oscar Wilde

A dialogue between Cyril and Vivian

Discussion Questions

What does he mean when he says the ‘wonderful brown fog comes from the impressionists’?

What he means by stating that we get those wonderful brown fogs from impressionists is that the brown fog that we actually see in reality did not come to exist until the impressionists based their artwork on it. He argues that regardless of whether this image actually existed previous to the work of art that depicts it, the majority of individuals did not perceive the brown fog in reality because they did not notice it. What the author is trying to say is that all of our surrounding is composed of only the things that we notice. To some extent this deals with the issue of “we only see what we want to see”. This is because a society aims for communion between individuals. Therefore every individual will make the intent to connect in one way or another to everyone else. So if an artists paints an element of nature or of a city that no one had ever seen before, people will begin to see it with the purpose of fitting into social norm. What is questionable in the author’s Vivian’s theory is not whether it is true that art has that impact on individuals but whether the fog that is painted by these artist in fact exists or if it is a creation of the human imagination striving for a link amongst individuals. There are times where the human mind can result so powerful that it perceives images that do not actually exist, images that may be considered part of an everyday life yet are merely a creation of the mind. So the real question behind his argument is whether artists have realized an

element of the world and therefore passed on their knowledge of this realization to others, or if the product of their representation of a fictive idea created this common perception that we all now come to see. Another aspect of this theory that should be looked at links back to the original meaning of impresionalism. Impressionists strive to connect reality with imagination, most of the time by painting their own perception of reality. It is curious to think that from this intention, a new form of reality is created. This reality consists of the link that common individuals make between what they perceive of reality and what they have interpreted of these paintings. For example, back to the brown fog, as an individual who has perceived the work of art, when looking at fog creeping through the night my perception of this image is completely altered. Not only does my own imagination play with the image I am perceiving, because by nature it is a human quality to contribute part of your own imagination onto an image, but also the image I have previously seen of the painting will influence my perception, creating a new reality that exists in my head and my head alone. Also, the painting that the artist has painted does not exist, not even in the imagination of the author. This is because it would be impossible to paint the exact image he has on his head; therefore by basing my perception of the image on the painting, my entire perception does not exist in a concrete form regardless of my intent to express it.

2) What is the difference between looking at a thing and seeing a thing according to the article?

To see a thing is to look at it without observing it or making a conclusion about it. Instead to look at something is to see the purpose it has, to analyze the internal message of it.

Therefore seeing is similar to spotting, it is more superficial while looking at something is more like staring, and it is more analytical.

3) How is art superior to nature?

Art is superior to nature because art shows different perspectives on nature and is capable of creating new realities. What this means is that although art bases itself many times on nature because nature is part of reality, it is capable of changing reality. The way that it changes reality is by implementing different elements into the minds of individuals allowing them perceive things that they had not taken into account previously. Also the perception of an individual creates a new image in our minds allowing our view of reality to grow. An individual who perceives art alone can be enlightened in the sense that their perception the next time they see nature will grow. The issue is that when one sees nature alone you interpret all your own mind can, one can observe and one can identify new things many times within nature, one can even appreciate nature every time more. But if one studies art and then nature, our understanding of nature will be increased. This is because after studying or viewing nature not only can we perceive what we did previously but we can perceive what another person does, therefore we know more and we have a wider picture of what is being seen, although nature itself may remain untouched. It may be said that art has more control over nature than nature has over art, but it can not be said that art is superior. This is because the definition of superiority can not be stated as definite under this situation. That is to say that because art has control over a human's perception of nature defines it as superior, when art itself is based on reality that is composed of nature itself. Without nature, much of art would not exist yet without art, nature would still exist. So to some extent they are both controlled by one

another. Their existence depends on one another when it comes to the perception of humans hence there is no way to say that one remains superior to the other one.

4) How does life imitate art?

Life imitates art because art impacts our society. It can impact our society in the sense that many times art triggers ideals. Art can be a way to spread ideals that could ultimately lead to a drastic change in the way people think or act. Also we attempt to portray art through life through the simple appreciation of beauty. We attempt to appreciate life similar to the way we admire art.

5) Is art more perfect than nature?

Art is more perfect than nature in the sense that art is more human. Art is more perfect because one can detect the essence of human perception that wraps up our whole existence. Nature is composed not only of what exists but more over of what we perceive. In order to define perfection, perception itself needs to define and the only way to do so is through the method of expression. Art expresses what a certain individual can perceive of what he senses and therefore it is perfect in that sense. Although art will never be the accurate way to express perception it is the closest to perfection in the sense that it is the one of the few basis that we as humans have to express ourselves. Perfection can never be achieved for obvious reasons including the imperfection of humans but for human the only perfection that exists is art for it permits us to implement our own imperfection into an element of life that may be considered perfect. Art can be considered perfect because there is no one way to look at it, there is not only one way to judge it but many and to many what is considered perfect can be found in art. Nature can be considered perfect

because there is not human interval affecting it, meaning we have only a limited control over it and because of this to many nature can be seen as define. But if we look at perfection more as a human development or a goal of humanity art reaches for perfection making it our closes link to perfection. To me, perfection does not lay in the divine instead, perfection is found in reality itself and our proximity to reality. There are many forms of reality, what may be considered real to me may be considered impartial to another. But that is not because my reality does not exist but instead because another can't understand my concept of reality. Therefore through art we express what is closest to our own reality and considering that in order to achieve perfection, there needs to be a great understanding of reality, art is a development towards perfection.

6) Which is more important, truth or beauty?

Beauty can be found in truth regardless of the harshness that lies in truth. Beauty is not always a positive outlook on life, nor is it the beauty that our society has recently defined it as. Beauty can be found in every corner of the world in every truth that exists if one looks beyond the complexity of truth. Beauty itself is based on the appreciation of an aspect of life. As evil as it may seem beauty lies even in the most horrible elements of truth. In many instances a person cannot find beauty in something because a person does not understand it. It is possible that a person finds the truth of something yet believes it to be horrid, but this is simply because the person does not look beyond the horrid surface and into the core. An example of a person who is capable of seeing beauty in truth regardless of the surface of the truth is W.B Yeats in his poem Easter 1916 where he describes the Irish revolution of 1916 as a "terrible beauty". In his poem, Yeats is capable

of defining the atrocities of the revolution as a beauty because he understands beyond the surface of the deaths and violence of the revolution. He understands the motive of the revolution and the ideals, and understands that although the course of the revolution had many horrible events it's essence was beautiful. Therefore to answer the question, neither beauty is not more important than truth nor truth is not more important than beauty but the beauty of truth is most important. This is because beauty by itself has no importance and truth by itself has no importance either. If one can see beauty and truth alone instead of joint, there is no epiphany in this realization, it is a mere observation. But if one is able to see the beauty of truth one can see the essence of life, that brings us closer to the understanding of life which is primordially the our main focus in life.