

“OSCILLATE WILDLY”: MORRISSEY’S ART AND PERSONA AS A CONTINUATION OF OSCAR WILDE’S ARTISTIC LEGACY

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Abstract. The works of Oscar Wilde form a link between late Victorian and modernist literature. His art and wit have continued to exert a great influence on other artists. The art of Morrissey, a legendary poet and singer, may serve as a case in point. Thus, this paper aims at presenting Morrissey’s works and persona as a continuation of Oscar Wilde’s artistic legacy. The article presents their attitude to life and to the process of creation. In view of that, breaking with traditional moral code, the artists’ fascination with beauty, their defense of humanity and all possible freedoms, as well as earnestness of their works, is depicted as the key to the analysis of their art. Thus, the writers’ rebellion against society and modern life, along with propounding aestheticism, will be investigated in this paper.

Key words: Oscar Wilde, Morrissey, aestheticism, modernist literature, indie rock

Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in 1854 in Dublin to Lady Jane Wilde and Sir William Wilde. Educated firstly at Portora Royal School in Enniskillen, he received a scholarship to Trinity College and later on to Oxford. While at Oxford, he studied Classics, which was undoubtedly one of the reasons why he was professing the “doctrine of beauty”. Nevertheless, as Iain Ross (Ross 2013: 21) points out, “[t]he classical texts absorbed constituents of his developing self rather than instruments of academic advancement [...]”. He was a poet, playwright, novelist, essayist and short story writer. Wilde became notorious also for his exceptional conversational talent and wit, as well as unusual life. Being one of the most acclaimed and revolutionary Anglo-Irish writers, he is also believed to have bridged the nineteenth century literature with modernist thought (Raby 2004: 18).

However, the contemporary appreciation of Wilde stands in sharp contrast to a part of the previous views on his art and persona. Since homosexuality was punishable in the United Kingdom until 1967 (Brown 2009: 4), Wilde's art and life could not have been analysed and discussed in a straightforward form for more than a half century after his death. Moreover, as it is to be presented in this article, Wilde was ahead of his times both intellectually and spiritually, which made it impossible for his contemporaries to fully understand and appreciate his ideas.

Steven Patrick Morrissey was born in 1959 in Davyhulme and, unlike Wilde, he comes from a working-class background. Nevertheless, he has been exposed to various artistic influences from his early years, with Wilde's works being his crucial inspiration (Brown 2009: 13). It has manifested itself in a great part of his lyrics written while he was a part of The Smiths and during his ongoing solo career.

However, Morrissey's lyrics seem to be not the only reason for this Mancunian singer and songwriter's exceptional worldwide success, insofar as he has been also idolised on account of his remarkable image. Despite the fact that the artist has frequently emphasised the influence of Wilde on his own writing, his image is not a mere copy of Wilde's style and mannerism. Instead, Morrissey seems to be the next incarnation of the writer and his art a continuation of Wilde's work. From his preoccupation with aesthetics and his "art of weakness" (Hopps 2009: 13) to the most unusual rebellion in defence of individualism, Morrissey resembles Oscar Wilde more than anyone else. In his own words: "Whether you like me or not, I remain an individual... individually nauseating or individually interesting. The key word in my vocabulary is individualism" (Brown 2009: 163). As is to be presented in this article, this element is crucial to understand both artists.

Aestheticism

While the variety of definitions of the term "aestheticism" has been suggested ("Art, not life", "Art instead of life, or as an alternative to life", "Life as art, or as a work of art"), this paper will use the one presented by John Anthony Cuddon (Cuddon 1999: 11), who saw it as a movement which "entailed the point of view that art is self-sufficient". According to him, Aestheticism, which was "a reaction against the materialism and capitalism of the later Victorian period", revitalised the art of the time, "an age of ugliness, brutality, dreadful inequality and oppression". Aestheticism, propagating the view that art should not serve any moral or didactic purpose and the artists should be preoccupied with beautiful things, led to "the search of beautiful" (Sikorska 2007: 455). Wilde, as a model aesthete and a truly decadent figure, propounded the view that beauty is an end in itself and an artist should aim at studying beautiful things rather than being concerned with didacticism, so characteristic for Victorian writing. In the preface to *The Picture of Dorian*

Gray (Wilde [1891] 2003: 17), he wrote: “The artist is the creator of beautiful things”. Throughout his splendid career as a writer, Wilde seemed to have fully embraced these words.

The first and most obvious sign of Wilde’s devotion to aestheticism was his image (Powell 2011: 14–40). Posing as a dandy, he violated strict rules of his times as far as male appearance was concerned, as he was wearing long hair and velvet suits, and used flowers or peacock feathers as decorative accessories. One of the symbols associated with Wilde was the green carnation used in his dress. As James Campbell (Campbell 2015: 42) points out, the fact that the carnation was green – hence “artificial or unnatural”, as this colour could only be achieved by dyeing white flowers – it can symbolize a secret or something unusual. Moreover, Wilde’s extraordinary talent of conversation made him a living sign of the ideas he advocated, such as the power of expression, charm and imaginative power, as he writes in *The Decay of Lying* (Wilde [1891] 2003: 1091):

(...) Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. This results not merely from Life’s imitative instinct, but from the fact that the self-conscious aim of Life is to find expression, and that art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realise that energy... It follows... that external Nature also imitates Art. (...) Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things is the proper aim of Art.

As Kerry Powell (Powell 2011: 2) says, “Wilde’s theatricality (...) was, or became over time, a philosophy with revolutionary aims and high ideals, yet conflicted and compromised, and laboriously worked out in both his life and work”.

Wilde’s fascination with beauty and his cult of youth is visible in a great part of his works. One of the “representative product[s] of the Aesthetic Movement in England”, as Dariusz Pestka (Pestka 1999: 66) puts it, is *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The very description of Dorian’s appearance exemplifies it, as a young man is presented as having “finely-curved scarlet lips“, “crisp gold hair” and “finely-chiselled nostrils” (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* [1891] 2003: 30). As a result, the man resembles rather a sculpture or ancient god than a real person. Moreover, as Campbell notes (Campbell 2015: 57–64), there are homosexual undertones present in the novel, suggesting the intimate relation between the three male characters – Dorian Gray, Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward. According to Liliana Sikorska (Sikorska 2007: 455), homoeroticism was perceived amongst the artists devoted to Aestheticism as “a better, more artistic version of human sexual activities”. However, sexuality was not the only part of human life which was supposed to be artistic, as in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* life and art blend and change places, with art becoming a substitute for life.

Another example of Wilde’s devotion to Aestheticism is to be found in his fairy tales. The language of the tales is highly ornamental and almost biblical in style, and it presents suggestive, exotic imagery. In *The Happy Prince*, for instance, the Swal-

low says: “My companions are building a nest in the Temple of Baalbec, and the pink and white doves are watching them, and cooing to each other” (*The Happy Prince* [1888] 2003: 275). In another fragment of this tale, there is a beautiful description of the Egyptian desert:

He told him of the red ibises, who stand in long rows on the banks of the Nile, and catch goldfish in their beaks; of the Sphinx, who is as old as the world itself, and lives in the desert, and knows everything; of the merchants, who walk slowly by the side of their camels, and carry amber beads in their hands; of the King of the Mountains of the Moon, who is as black as ebony, and worships a large crystal; of the great green snake that sleeps in a palm tree, and has twenty priests to feed it with honey cakes; and of the pygmies who sail over a big lake on large flat leaves, and are always at war with the butterflies (*The Happy Prince* [1888] 2003: 275).

Accordingly, similar imagery can be found in one of Wilde’s most exquisite works, *The Profundis*. Once again, he uses the imagery of flowers, calling Christ the supreme artist and the first to ask people to “live flower-like lives” (*De Profundis* [1905] 2003: 1035). What is more, he calls Christ “charming” and argues that has was truly a romantic, whose life was “the most wonderful of poems” (*De Profundis* [1905] 2003: 1028).

Kostas Boyiopoulos (2015: 29) points out that Wilde used in some of his writings the so-called “tapestry poetics”. One of the most characteristic examples of this type of poetry is the poem *The Garden of Eros*. Despite the fact that the syntax of the poem is somewhat simplified with the use of the paratactic patterns, the sensuousness of the imagery is astounding. Wilde uses numerous botanical terms, which are accompanied by hyperbolic figures, synaesthetic metaphors and brilliant anthropomorphic descriptions of flowers: “There are the flowers which mourning Herakles/ Strewed on the tomb of Hylas”; “here the daffodil (...) has lingered on/ To vex the rose with jealousy”; “One pale narcissus loiters fearfully/ Close to a shadowy nook, where half afraid/ Of their own loveliness some violets lie”; “The trumpet-mouths of red convolvus [...] creamy meadow-sweet” (*The Garden of Eros* [1881] 2003: 845). As Boyiopoulos (2015: 30) notes, the point of such descriptions is not only to express sensuousness, but also “[to] draw attention to the aesthetic possibilities of language”.

To conclude, it can be assumed that beauty was present in all of Wilde’s works, as everything that he wrote was a celebration of it.

One of the most characteristic and innovative things concerning Morrissey’s image was his use of flowers, bunches of which he used to either carry in a back pocket of his jeans or swing while performing. Although a few possible reasons for these “floral practices” (Hopps 2009: 18) were suggested, the artist usually pointed out that it should be perceived as a kind of aesthetic manifesto, making him a descendant of Wilde’s philosophy. When asked why he carries flowers onstage, he answered:

Then, as I became a Smith, I used flowers because Oscar Wilde always used flowers. He once went to the Colorado salt mines and addressed a mass of miners there. He started a speech with, “Let me tell you why we worship daffodil”. Of course, he was stoned to death. But I really admired his bravery and the idea of being constantly attached to some form of plant (Morrissey [n.d.], as quoted in Robertson 1988: 77).

The use of flower imagery, however, is not Morrissey’s only aesthetic response to pop culture, since he was also a designer of the artwork for all of The Smiths’ albums and singles’ covers (Hopps 2009: 24). The record sleeves featured either the film frames, or iconic figures, such as Oscar Wilde, Truman Capote or James Dean. However, they were not only meant to immortalize certain works of art and the artists who constituted Morrissey’s artistic heritage, but they were also a proof of treating beauty as an end in itself. The quote from one of the interviews shows this point clearly:

A lot of people think that Jean Marais appeared on the cover of *This Charming Man* for very serious reasons but it didn’t really happen that way (...). And the picture seems to really reflect the aestheticism The Smiths really cared about and were interested in. It just simply blended in completely with the way we felt about art, aestheticism and how The Smiths should be projected and how people should really feel about our impressions of art (*Morrissey & Johnny Marr Interview 1985, Part 2*).

It can thus be suggested that such an approach to the visual side of pop records was meant to change the audience’s attitude to pop music and proving that this genre should not be associated only with shallowness and kitsch but rather with beauty and the sublime, equating it with the visual arts and literature.

Yet the most literal allusion to aestheticism is present in Morrissey’s lyrics. In multiple songs, the audience is presented with subjects such as beauty, youth and innocence; for instance in *Miserable Lie* (The Smiths, *The Smiths*, 1984), there is a phrase borrowed from Wilde, a “flower-like life”, a metaphor for innocence. Interestingly, the imagery present in Morrissey’s lyrics concerning these themes is by no means vulgar, nor does it resemble the typical way of presenting a human body. Instead, Morrissey seems to aim at redefining the way of singing about it by using more romanticised expressions, such as “charming man”, “young bones” and “untouched, unsoiled, wondrous eyes”, even in the songs that could be classified as explicit in terms of their theme. As a result, the characters from the lyrics tend to resemble in some way sculptures or paintings. However, as it is to be presented later, both Wilde and Morrissey’s art reveals much more than only the cult of beauty. Gavin Hopps (Hopps 2009: 24) maintains that Morrissey, just like Wilde, is not merely the aesthete, as he combines flamboyance and love of beauty with his connection to working class and down-to-earthness.

The artists as rebels

In the light of his deeds and art, Wilde's dandyical outfit and mannerism, as well as his conversational talents, made him a unique figure in comparison to the artists of his times. In the century where the first imperative in literature was to write useful and didactic texts, he defended one's right to be delicate and to create works which were decorative, witty and scandalous.

As Peter Raby (Raby 2004: 18) says, "(...) Wilde [desired] a world free from social intolerance, or the oppression of conventional thought and behaviour". Wilde's works prove this statement and give one an insight into the mind of a man who rebelled against double morality of the Victorian society, social standards, institutions and traditional lifestyle. In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* ([1891] 2003: 1174), he writes: "The chief advantage that would result from the establishment of socialism is, undoubtedly, the fact that socialism would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others (...)". This brave and probably shocking statement, as it must have been perceived by people living in his times, shows in fact Wilde's love for individuality and freedom. Later, in the same essay, he says: "Man is complete in himself. When they go into the world, the world will disagree with them. This is inevitable. The world hates Individualism" (*The Soul of Man...* [1891] 2003: 1180). Sadly, these words proved to be prophetic in case of Wilde's trial and imprisonment. Too outspoken and provocative, he did not fit at all to his times and this was the price to pay for individualism and freedom of thought. *The Soul...* presents also an almost anarchist point of view: "All modes of government are failures. Despotism is unjust to everybody, including the despot, who was probably made for better things" (*The Soul of Man...* [1891] 2003: 1181). The highly individualistic statement seems to be almost religious, which indeed is revealed later, when Wilde suggests that aiming at the self-fulfillment is a person's duty in the eyes of God and that losing one's potential or not being in tune with one's inner self is a sin. But it seems that one of the strongest and most revolutionary point made by Wilde is the following: "[A man] can keep the law, and yet be worthless. He may break the law, and yet be fine. He may be bad, without ever doing anything bad. He may commit a sin against society, and yet realise through that sin his true perfection" (*The Soul of Man...* [1891] 2003: 1180). Another rebellious statement, especially shocking considering highly materialistic and capitalist aura of the late Victorian period, was Wilde's comment on work. He argues:

The individual is to make what is beautiful. And as I have mentioned the word labour, I cannot help saying that a great deal of nonsense is being written and talked nowadays about the dignity of manual labour. There is nothing necessarily dignified about manual labour at all, and most of it is absolutely degrading. (...) Man is made for something better than disturbing dirt. All work of that kind should be done by the machine. (...) Hu-

man slavery is wrong, insecure, and demoralising... On mechanical slavery, on slavery of the machine, the future of the world depends (*The Soul of Man...* [1891] 2003: 1183).

According to Norbert Kohl (2011: 132), for Wilde, “[t]he most intensive form of individualism is art, for art offers the most stubborn resistance to the pressure of conformity exercised by public opinion (...).”

As it can be deduced from this passage, Wilde’s aim is not rebellion for its own sake, but rather a defense of humanity and all freedoms which should be guaranteed to every human being, such as dignity and the right to act according to one’s beliefs. Accordingly, his manifesto may be perceived as a humanist call even to a greater extent when it is realised that Wilde called for peaceful resistance, not violent one. As he writes: “The note of the perfect personality is not rebellion, but peace (...). The Ideals that we owe to Christ are the ideals of the man who abandons society entirely, or of the man who resists society absolutely” (*The Soul of Man...* [1891] 2003: 1196).

Despite the fact that Morrissey was born over a century after Wilde, his way of rebelling against society and art of his time are almost identical. Even The Smiths and Morrissey’s solo album and song titles present the mood of rebellion and confrontation, for example *Kill Uncle* (Morrissey 1991), *Viva Hate* (Morrissey 1988), *Strangeways, Here We Come* (The Smiths 1987), *The Queen Is Dead* (The Smiths 1986), *Meat Is Murder* (The Smiths 1985) and *Shoplifters Of The World Unite* (The Smiths, *Louder Than Bombs*, 1987). They resemble rather headlines or slogans demanding attention than typical names for pop records. They bear resemblance to Dead Kennedys’ in-ye-face titles, such as *Kill The Poor*, *Let’s Lynch The Landlord* and *Too Drunk To Fuck*. Obviously, Morrissey’s works are far more subtle and romanticised but the general manner of track naming is similar.

Morrissey protested against the shallowness of pop music by writing original, witty lyrics and said about his times: “When we began there was a horrendous sterile cloud over the whole music scene in Manchester. Everybody was anti-human and it was so very human gesture” (“Melody Maker”, September 3, 1983, as cited in Hopps 2009: 18). Moreover, just like Wilde, Morrissey rebelled also against traditional notion of “normality”, war and government. By way of illustration, in *The Youngest Was The Most Loved* (Morrissey, *Ringleader Of The Tormentors*, 2006) there are words: “There is no such thing in life as normal”, while in (*I’m*) *The End Of The Family Line* (Morrissey, *Kill Uncle*, 1991) he says: “I’m the end of the line/ The end of the family line/ The decision is mine”. Just like for Wilde, also for Morrissey the imperative seems to be individualism and freedom of choice. The latter value, freedom of choice, is connected with the right to reject work. The artist, who claimed repeatedly that he was living in a state of semi-poverty because of his refusal to work, sings in *You’ve Got Everything Now* (The Smiths, *The Smiths*, 1984): “I’ve never had a job because I’ve never wanted one” and “I’ve never had a job because I’m too shy”.

In the same way, he defends one's right to be weak, inept and marginalised, especially by showing his own vulnerability. Accordingly, standing for working class, his negative attitude towards royalty and all kinds of social injustice, as well as his fight for animal rights and protesting against cruelty towards children, makes his attitude and aims similar to those of Wilde. Similarly, Hopps (Hopps 2009: 17) claims that Morrissey's rebellion is "Christ-like", and he "heroically [stands] for humanness".

Vulnerability and emotionality

According to Albert Sydney Hornby (Hornby et al. 1987: 961), the term "vulnerability" means "liability to be damaged, not being protected against attack". In the light of this, it may be suggested that vulnerability is an essential part of both Wilde and Morrissey's art and their very persona.

Oscar Wilde has been connected rather with principle of pleasure and beauty than vulnerability. Thus, little can be found in the literature on the question of his emotional exposure which finally led to his fall. However, the evidence of the truth lying in the statement that Wilde was also concerned with emotionality and vulnerability is clearly seen in the case of his fairy tales. These short stories differ sharply from the majority of Wilde's works in that they are "the epitome of man's inherent desire to remain faithful to his childhood's dreams and ideals", as Pestka (Pestka 1999: 30) puts it. Indeed, the driving motifs of the majority of the characters are compassion and love, truly innocent and pure. According to Pestka (Pestka 1999: 30), "On the whole, in view of their emotionalism, Wilde's fairy tales can be derived from Christian Andersen's *Eventyr* rather than from the brothers Grimm's *Household Tales* where the straightforward and factual narrative takes precedence over sentimentalism". However, though sentimental, Wilde's tales are full of tender irony, a characteristic which is also typical for Morrissey's writing. It results from the fact that Wilde's fairy tales were not exclusively written for children, as they contain ambiguous undertones and are characterized by an extremely ornamental style. However, the use of irony does not eradicate their emotionality and sadness. The characters, many of whom suffer and are sensitive to misery, sacrifice themselves for the ones they love. By way of illustration, the dialogue between the statue and the Swallow from the tale *The Happy Prince* ([1888] 2003: 276) serves as a perfect example:

Then the Swallow came back to the Prince. "You are blind now," he said, "so I will stay with you always." "No, little Swallow," said the poor Prince, "you must go away to Egypt." "I will stay with you always," said the Swallow, and he slept at the Prince's feet. (...) "Goodbye, dear Prince!" he murmured, "will you let me kiss your hand?". "I am glad that you are going to Egypt at least, little Swallow," said the Prince, "you have

stayed too long here; but you must kiss me on the lips, for I love you.” “It is not to Egypt that I am going,” said the Swallow. “I am going to the House of Death. Death is the brother of Sleep, is he not?” And he kissed the Happy Prince on the lips, and fell down dead at his feet.

Analogically, the mood of sadness and delicacy is present in other tales, such as *The Nightingale And The Rose*. As the Nightingale says before she dies setting her breast against the thorn:

Death is a great price to pay for a red rose and Life is a very dear to all. It is pleasant to sit in the green wood and to watch the Sun in his chariot of gold, and the Moon in her chariot of pearl. Sweet is the scent of the hawthorn, and sweet are the bluebells that hide in the valley, and the heather that blows on the hill. Yet Love is better than Life, and what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man? (*The Nightingale And The Rose* [1888] 2003: 279).

The analogy between the death of the Nightingale and Wilde’s own tragic end is striking. Sentenced to two years’ hard labour and imprisoned for “gross indecency” (Pearson 1985: 308), he wrote to his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas: “You came to me to learn the Pleasure of Art. Perhaps I am chosen to teach you something much more wonderful, the meaning of Sorrow, and its beauty” (*De Profundis* [1905] 2003: 1059). As the Nightingale’s “self-sacrifice is ironically juxtaposed with [her] environment’s arrogance or mere obtuseness” (Pestka 1999: 31), the same may be suggested about Wilde. He accused Douglas: “I had given you my life and to gratify the lowest and most contemptible of all human passions, Hatred and Vanity and Greed, you had thrown it away” (*De Profundis* [1905] 2003: 1005). The whole letter to Bosie, in fact, suggests that Wilde’s feelings to him made the writer prone to the lover’s manipulation and cruelty.

The key word in Morrissey’s vulnerability is “nakedness”. The singer has always advocated metaphorical, artistic nakedness, placing emphasis upon earnestness of his lyrics and statements. His refusal to cover up his weakness and awkwardness, as well as brutal honesty of the lyrics with their straightforward messages have clearly made him emotionally exposed.

The pursuit of honesty was signalled by the release of The Smiths’ first single, *Hand in Glove* (The Smiths 1984). The controversial artwork of the single depicted a naked man. Whereas in the British press it was perceived either as a mere provocation or a proof of Morrissey’s homosexuality, in the light of the singer’s statements, it can conceivably be hypothesised that nudity on the cover of *Hand in Glove* has a deeper meaning. Morrissey once said: “We’re naked before the world” (Hopps 2009: 123), and this metaphorical statement shows this point clearly. Throughout his career, the artist’s lyrics have abounded in similar affirmations. In *I Want The One I Can’t Have* (The Smiths, *Meat Is Murder*, 1985), for example, there is a phrase: “I want the one I can’t have/ and it’s driving me mad/ It’s written all over my face”.

Since the person speaking in a song cannot hide his feelings, he is vulnerable and exposed, so in a way “naked”.

However, such emotional nakedness can lead to the danger of being easily manipulated, as it was in the case of Wilde. Indeed, Morrissey captures in his lyrics the mood of passivity, as they present either longing for romance, yet rejecting it, or being unable to engage in any kind of relationship. The lyrical “I” tends to play the inferior part in romance, regardless of the fact that it is usually a man who is speaking. This point is shown clearly in the quote from *Reel Around The Fountain* (The Smiths, *The Smiths*, 1984), where the lyrical “I” says: “You can pin and mount me like a butterfly”. In another song, *Wide to Receive* (Morrissey, *Maladjusted*, 1997), there is a desperate call for attention, affection and resigning oneself in the situation, as the character says: “I’m lying here wide to receive almost anything you’d care to give”. Thus, it can be suggested that in almost Morrissey’s every song the subject of which are love and romance, the lyrical “I” is rather acted upon than acting by themselves. Obviously, such an attitude makes him an easy target for manipulation and leads to disappointment.

As Hopps (Hopps 2009: 4) notes, there is something frail and ailing in Morrissey’s persona. The elements constituting his eccentric image have been, above all, ill-fitting clothes, which are neither exclusively masculine nor feminine, such as oversized flowery charity-shops shirts, and accessories such as plastic jewellery. Similarly, his vocal style, with the frequent use of falsetto, seems to combine masculinity and femininity. As Hopps also observed, the elements of seriousness and parody in Morrissey blend, a case in point being the singer’s awkward, clumsy and embarrassing, yet fascinating dance routines. While the combination of male and female elements in Morrissey’s image is most probably the effect of his attempt to create a genderless category, his embarrassment is yet another way of trying to “collapse the boundaries” (Hopps 2009: 35) between conventional categories. The words of Paul Morley, who was acquainted with Morrissey before the success of The Smiths prove this view: “I remember who and what you used to be. You were like the village idiot, the odd one out, the backward boy” (Hopps 2009: 35).

One of the most visible notions of vulnerability distinguishing Morrissey’s persona is his awkwardness. The poet is perfectly conscious of the fact that both his peculiar appearance and his embarrassment would place him in danger of being subjected to ridicule if he had tried to follow the traditional path in the world of show-business. In Earsay TV interview from 1984 he admitted: “I think that people see me as being quite delicate, which in the world of popular music and rock & roll, if you like, is anathema. It is the worst thing to be, to be delicate or not to be this macho or whatever. (...) I don’t really believe that I could be a successful pop star in the George Michael sense”. Hence, he turned his awkwardness and embarrassment into his greatest virtues. Although these days an artist performing in charity-shop clothes, plastic necklaces and the National Health Service glasses would seem to fit

perfectly to the independent music scene, it is only the aftermath of The Smiths’ splendid success. Despite the fact that Morrissey was not the first performer perceived as effeminate, clearly he was the first to advocate celibacy, abstinence, not-joining-in, failure and disability as well.

One of the recurrent motifs in Morrissey’s lyrics are inability and deficiency, either in a form of a visible stigma or a covert one. The most important example of his exploration of the theme of disability is *November Spawned A Monster* (Morrissey, *Bona Drag*, 1990) which tells the story of a child in a wheelchair. However, the portrayal of the impaired individual is far from a typical one. Rather than adopting a one-dimensional, sympathetic view on disability, the lyrical “I” is somehow “torn between pity and revulsion” (Hopps 2009: 194) towards the child. Furthermore, not only is disability coined with ugliness, but also with monstrosity, as the very title suggests. Morrissey went as far as to suggest that the antithesis reveals itself within the bonds of one sentence or even a phrase: “poor twisted child, oh hug me”. Interestingly, the imagery of a “twisted child” is presented with a realism, as Morrissey asks the audience if they would be comfortable kissing or embracing such a person or if they would only apply “cheap” sympathy. The rhetorical question: “and if the lights were out, could you even bear to kiss her full on the mouth or anywhere?” suggests the latter, so in a way it implies that it is not really a person, but rather a monster. Hence, the only piece of advice given to a “monster” is to “sleep and dream of love because it’s the closest [he] will get to love”.

What is extremely tricky and surprising is the fact that Morrissey called *November...* the song which “expresses [him] most accurately” (Hopps 2009: 192). Although he was not speaking of any inborn physical deformity, he clearly meant invisible disability – shyness and depression, malady which made him spend “[his] entire childhood with [his] head buried in a pillow” (Hopps 2009: 192). He mentions his severe mental condition in an abundance of interviews and expresses repeatedly his feelings of not-fitting-in, ugliness and inability as well. An example may be also the song *At Amber* (Morrissey, *Viva Hate*, 1988), in which the singer compares himself to the disabled, saying: “Oh, my invalid friend/ In our different ways we are the same”. Interestingly, depression and shyness are not the only sources of Morrissey’s conviction of his own deficiency. There is another curious reason behind it, mainly sexual inability. The speaking persona in abundant lyrics is clearly unable to attract any kind of attention from the side of a potential partner, which is clearly illustrated by the fragment of *Seasick, Yet Still Docked* (Morrissey, *Your Arsenal*, 1992): “I wish I had the charm to attract the one I love but you see, I’ve got no charm”. Yet, this straightforward and honest confession, typically perceived as sign of misery and self-pity, may well be just a flippancy and flirtation.

Hopps (Hopps 2009: 40) wrote about Morrissey: “His refusal to edit out his weakness and tidy up his oddity is thus clearly related to his defence of the human”. In his introduction to Wilde’s fairy tales, on the other hand, Owen Dudley Edwards

(Edwards 2003: 14) says: “Wilde is on the child’s side: but he knows the child will only be truly happy if it hates cruelty, treachery and poverty, if it loves loyalty, laughter – and love. These are stories by someone in love with love. As Tolstoy would say, it is where God is”. If that is indeed the case, then it suggests a strong link existing between Morrissey and Wilde’s reasons for being vulnerable.

So far, Wilde’s art has been analysed in isolation and far too little attention has been paid to his works’ impact on other writers. Returning to the hypothesis posed at the beginning of this paper, it is now possible to state that Morrissey’s works are indeed the continuation of Oscar Wilde’s artistic legacy. It has been proved that their works may be viewed as a reaction against materialism, traditional life-style and social standards, as well as defence of individualism and freedom of thought. The article also presents the artists’ oscillation between art and life, truth and mask, aesthetics and ethics. Oscar Wilde’s and Morrissey’s lives and art seem to be full of contradictions. The multiplicity of their personalities and works is to be revealed in the another article, by means of exploring duality and ambiguity in the works and lives of the artists mentioned and literary devices used by them.

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