

# *The Picture of Dorian Gray: Preface*

- It is an expression of **ANTI-VICTORIAN AESTHETICISM**
- it's the manifesto of Aestheticism in England and it shows Wilde's view of art and the artist

## **The role of the Artist**

-While Wordsworth had seen the poet as the "priest of Nature" and Shelley had spoken about the poem as the "trumpet of prophecy", the Decadent Artist was the **ANTI-PRIEST** or **DEVIL OF ART**, upturning moral values and refusing a social role in society.

Starting from the concept of the **DANDY**, and from the aesthetic program that inspired it, Wilde developed a new concept of the artist whom he saw as free and superior to other men.

The aesthetic concept of **BEAUTY\*** that began with Keats in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn* finished, perhaps, with Beardsley's heroic-decadent illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*.

(**Salomé**: Wilde wrote it in French. Sir Alfred Douglas translated it into English.)  
Salome = devilish instrument, femme fatale

\*Wilde's definition of aestheticism : "**The science of the beautiful through which men seek the correlation of the arts.**"

## **Contents:**

1. *Art must be autonomous*
2. *He criticises the Victorianism and stresses the independence of art from morals*
3. *Art is neither good nor bad in itself: it's the audience that mirror their souls in it*
4. *The artist has to be in accordance with himself*
5. *All art is useless*

But in 1884 in his lecture "*The Value of Art in Modern Life*" he makes it clear that he has already rejected the doctrine of art for art's sake: "*I have found that all ugly things are made by those who strive to make something beautiful, and that all beautiful things are made by those who strive to make something useful.*"

## **Themes:**

- 1- **The immortality of art** (represented in the final scene of the book when the painting is miraculously restored to its original beauty)
- 2 **The divided self** (= the **DOUBLE** of Gothic literature): Dorian's attempt to hide the portrait, the artistic representation of his other self, is symbolic of man's attempt to deny part of his true personality.
- 3 **Narcissus and Faust**: linked with the whole *fin de siècle* homo-erotic tradition of Dandyism. Like Narcissus, Dorian falls in love with himself when he sees Basil's portrait, like Faust, he makes a devilish pact, prepared to sell his soul for eternal youth and beauty.