

Oscar Wilde and the interrelationships among critic, artist, and society.

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## Oscar Wilde and the interrelationships among critic, artist, and society



*Strickland, Paul David*

1974

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**Title** Oscar Wilde and the interrelationships among critic, artist, and society

**Creator** [Strickland, Paul David](#)

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### **Description**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Wilde's aesthetic, to find his most consistent beliefs beneath his many shifts in critical viewpoint, and to determine his contribution to modern attitudes toward Art and criticism'. The manner of proceeding has been to study various influences on Wilde, especially those of ancient philosophers, and to place his view of the interrelationships among critic, artist, and society into a philosophical as well as a critical perspective. Wilde's basic critical position is far more consistent than is commonly assumed. Although he shifts first from support of pan-aestheticism then to advocacy of the autonomy of Art, and finally to decorative formalism he never loses sight of the principle that Art is an end in itself. This fundamental principle is based on the Aristotelian doctrine of the autonomy of each of the arts and sciences. The fact that Wilde says that the critic is an artist does not compromise his primary concern with the creative artist. In his later critical writings he gives the true literary critic -- as opposed to the ordinary or journalistic critics -- vast powers to range over and exercise leadership in almost every field of human endeavor. He even goes so far as to say the critic may lead the artist. However, beneath all the overstatement in which he often engages to underscore a point, he means merely to say that the critic is superior to the artist only in criticism's proper domain, and that the critic does well to gain some of the artist's sensitivity, perceptiveness, and sense of proportion. The artist is still supreme in his own area — the arrangement of particular subject-materials to form a perfect image of an ideal. Wilde's paradoxes, epigrams, and extravagant overstatements of his views give the casual reader an impression of reckless irresponsibility and callous unconcern with fundamental moral questions. However, in

addition to using them to give his writings a memorable quality, Wilde systematically employs these devices to subvert superficial and oppressive moral systems which harm both the artist and members of society, and subtly to redirect the thoughts of more intelligent people toward a deeper morality, which means the unconscious, almost instinctive seeking of the good in the beautiful. He looks forward to a harmonious interrelationship among critic, artist, and society, the result of which will be the freedom of every individual to enjoy a truly creative and independent selfhood.

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