



**UNIVERSIDADE DA CORUÑA**

**Grao en Inglés: Estudos Lingüísticos e literarios**

**Research study on the novel: *the Picture of Dorian Gray***

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# 1. Summary

This research project consists of six central sections in a case study of the novel by Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: an introduction to the novel; the idea of evil linked to eternal youth; the creation of the individual personality; morality in the novel; the relation between the characters and their author; and, finally, a comparison with two of the films based upon the novel.

In the first section, I present the novel, its reception, and its author. During the second section, I compare Dorian Gray with the historical figure of Erzebet Bathory: both thought that they had found the source of eternal beauty and youth; and both obtained pleasure committing crimes and sinning. In the third section, I compare Wilde's novel with another Victorian novel, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, by Robert Louis Stevenson. I analyse both main characters in order to trace the way their personalities evolved. Throughout the fourth section, I present the moral context of the Victorian public that existed at the time the novel was published, and analyse the features of morality that I found in the novel. In the fifth part, I explore the connections that the author, Oscar Wilde, may have had with the characters in the novel. In the last section of the project, I compare the novel with two of the novels that were inspired by it. At the end of this work, I present my general conclusions on the project.

## 2. Introduction

In this section I will present the aim of this project, explain its structure, comment on the methodology I used and clarify my election criteria.

### 2.1. Aim

The aim of this project is to analyse the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, written by Oscar Wilde and published in length in 1891. To achieve this purpose I present the main text in the first instance, in order to afterwards compare it with a historical character, a novel, Victorian society, its author, and two of the movies based upon it. The main objective of the project is to carry out an analysis of the main points treated in the novel. These points are: the idea of evil linked to eternal youth and to the search of individual personality; morality, and the relation between the characters and the author. Finally, I will also make comparisons of some of these points with two of the movies based upon the novel.

### 2.2 Structure

The project is organized into several sections. First of all there is a summary section where I introduced the main ideas developed in the project, followed by an index. Secondly, there is an explicative introduction of the work, including the aim, the structure, the methodology, and the election criteria. Thirdly, there is the case study, which is the main part of the work, and which is structured into six central points: an introduction of the novel here analysed, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; the idea of evil linked to eternal youth; the idea of evil related to the search for individual personality; morality in the novel, the relationship between the characters and the author; and, finally, a comparison with two films based on the novel. These are followed by two more sections: conclusion, and bibliography.

## 2.3 Methodology

This project consists of a research study on the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. I explore and analyse the novel through five components: a historical character, Erzebet Bathory; another Victorian novel, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*; the moral standards and values of Victorian society; the author, Oscar Wilde; and, two of the movies based upon it.

After the gathering of information about the novel and components which I deemed useful to make the desired comparisons, there came a technique step in which I thoroughly reread and studied all the information gathered, and discarded all that was not useful or relevant to this project. I then summarized what was left in my own words. To the final pieces of information left after this selection process, I added my own ideas: the ones that I had when I first undertook this project and the ones that entered my mind as I was researching and reading the information.

I then began the building of the main scheme of the project. Throughout this very analytical step, I give my own interpretations while passing through each section. Finally there is the conclusion, in which I designed and constructed a summary of the main ideas along with the conclusion of each section.

## 2.4 Election criteria

During these last four years, we have studied countless authors who have contributed somehow to our development as philologists. Being in Ireland the last year of the degree, I thought about writing the final project on a novel written by an Irish author. I have chosen a novel because personally, I find novels more interesting and entertaining than poems, which are in my opinion made to be recited, or a play, which is made to be performed.

In spite of Ireland's size and location, this country has produced a considerable number of great writers which made my choice difficult. At the very beginning of the project, I considered writing about several authors, among them there were James Joyce, and Lady Gregory. The work that I first thought about was James Joyce's *Dubliners*. I thought it would be an accurate description of middle-class life during the first years of the twentieth century. I also took into consideration a

feminist approach to the Irish writers. Nevertheless, in both cases I had a huge problem, I had insufficient data at my disposal, and that is why I decided to change once again. I had watched the film of Dorian Gray not long ago, and I thought that making a comparison with Oscar Wilde's *the Picture of Dorian Gray* would be a great idea. The more I read the novel, the more ideas came to my mind, leading to an interesting draft in which I continued doing research and writing until I finished the present project.

## 3. Case Study

In the third section of the project I compare and analyse the novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, with a historical figure, other novels, and other authors, in order to create a different perspective.

### 3.1 *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Controversy surrounded *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as soon as it was published. At that time, when Victorian morals were in vogue, some critics thought that the reading of the book would corrupt the minds of young readers. These critics, such as the critics of *the Daily Chronicle*, may have seen certain homosexual implications in the novel, and at that time, such implications were believed to be capable of encouraging young men into homosexuality. It must be remembered that any homosexual practice during the nineteenth century was considered a crime, and as such, homosexuals were given prison sentences. Oscar Wilde himself, author of the novel, was sentenced to two years of hard labour for homosexual practices.

According to John R. Maynard<sup>1</sup>, the novel is anything but a performance of an originary gay identity. The author seems to present a homo-social world where Dorian, the protagonist, has as mentors two males. Without father or mother to take care of him, Dorian is raised up by his grandfather. It is seen that during both his childhood and adulthood, Dorian is surrounded almost entirely by males, with only a very limited appearance of female characters in the novel. As Declan Kiberd<sup>2</sup> explained, Wilde always liked to create manly woman and womanly men, as a challenge to the stratified thinking of his day, in Victorian society.

Nowadays, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is having a great success; especially, after the release of the film *Dorian Gray* in 2009. The film caused interest in the novel in the young population which decided to read it before the film came out. Also the millions of English students all over the world who read and study the novel each year should not be forgotten. One important event which brought attention to the novel was the Dublin Book Festival of April 2010. In the

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<sup>1</sup> *A Companion to the Victorian novel.*

<sup>2</sup> *Wilde the Irishman.*

festival, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was chosen as the book of 2010. The aim of this festival is to encourage people to read the book selected, and a great number of events are organized to promote the book. The publicity given of the novel during the month of April 2010 brought the readers' attention once more to this work by Oscar Wilde.

The controversy that the novel originally provoked no longer exists among the majority of critics. Actually, in our society we no longer live according to Victorian morals; therefore, discussing about themes such as homosexuality is not something that shocks readers. In 2011, Nicholas Frankel, professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University, edited the novel and titled it *The Picture of Dorian Gray: An Annotated, Uncensored Edition*. Frankel reintroduced the novel the passages that were omitted from the full length novel for showing too many homoerotic feelings. In those passages it can be clearly seen that there were feelings deeper than mere friendship between Hallward and Dorian. They suggest that Hallward was in love with Dorian: “*There was love in every line, and in every touch there was passion*”<sup>3</sup>. Despite the fact that some passages were removed from the novel, we can still see that Hallward adores Dorian in the novel published in 1891. Hallward's worship of the young Dorian Gray can be read as excessive, and therefore, can suggest that the painter's adoration comes from his love towards him.

Oscar Wilde is the author of this controversial novel. Named Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, he was born on 1854 in Dublin. During his early life Oscar Wilde was already in contact with great intellectuals like Sheridan Le Fanu and George Petrie. Graduated with first class honours in classics and humanities, he began his literary career at Oxford. He was also hugely involved in the aesthetic movement, even making a lecturer tour around USA and Canada in which he explained the aesthetic philosophy.

This author is known for works such as *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* (1887), *The Happy Prince* (1888), *the Critic as artist* (1891), and *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) among others. Two of his greatest and best-knowns works are *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* saw the light of day as a novella of around fifty thousand words; and it was first published in the issue of Lippincott's Monthly in July 1890. The final and full novel was printed in April 1891. As I mentioned before, controversy appeared as soon as it was published. According to Michael Patrick Gillespie<sup>4</sup>, some American

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<sup>3</sup> *Uncensored picture of Dorian Gray published.*

<sup>4</sup> *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*



critics praised the work as a modern morality tale; nevertheless, in England, a number of reviewers excoriated the work. In the following paragraph I explain the general and most important features of the novel.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* presents a conflict between the impulse of self-satisfaction and the sense of culpability resulting of the preservation of this self-satisfaction. Showing in a sensitive way human appetite, needs and, weaknesses, Oscar Wilde assured the success of this novel. Influenced by the aesthetic movement, he used the double life of the protagonist as one of the major representations of this philosophy. The protagonist, Dorian, enjoys his double life, recreating himself in his private moments. We see two sides of Dorian, the young and innocent one who belongs to the London upper class; and, the obscure and self-confident one who wanders through the lowest places of London. Dorian's attempt to terminate with a part of himself is what put an end to his life. The division of the self is a theme used in other novels such as the Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, both of them belong to the category of Gothic fiction.

Ornate language, great fascination for detail, devotion for paradox, and an expert sense of humour make *The Picture of Dorian Gray* a masterpiece. The omniscient narrator also plays an important role in the novel; the novel's pages are read trusting on the narrator, as he knows everything about the characters, including their deepest thoughts and intentions. From my point of view, the narrator is not only a voice that knows everything, but also a voice which interprets characters' actions and a voice that tries to move the narratee into a certain view, his own.

## **3.2 Evil and the search of eternal youth**

Nowadays, there is an obsession worldwide concerning the preservation of beauty; millions of people cover their faces both morning and night with creams that promise to stop the ageing process. Nevertheless, humanity has wondered for many centuries how to preserve the beauty of youth. There have been many historical and fictional figures who have claimed to have found the formula for the eternal youth, the prodigious source that makes our ageing to stop. One of the most popular figures that appeared to have discovered the secret of eternal youth is Cleopatra, the last Pharaoh of Ancient Egypt. She is regarded as one of the great beauties of the ancient world. Her legend says that she used her charms to influence the most powerful men in the Western world. It is

said that Cleopatra's secret laid in her baths in the milk of asses.

We also find this attempt to discover the source of eternal beauty and youth in literature. The novel here analysed serves as an example. The protagonist of *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* made a mad wish, a desperate prayer in which he asked for the only thing that mattered to him at that moment, youth. This particular character, Dorian Gray, is explained in length in the subsequent pages. More examples exist in literature, such as the vampire novels, where desire for eternity and youth go together. The reason why people are attracted to this kind of novels is really simple: all of us wish, perhaps unconsciously, to be young and never grow older. The fact that we do not have any power to alter our ageing process assures the success to this genre of novels, in which we see our dream come true.

In the following paragraphs I will explain in detail the search for eternal youth that was made by a historical Hungarian figure, the Comptess Erzebet Bathory. Afterwards, I will analyse in depth the fictional character of Dorian Gray in relation to the method he found to stay young and free of sin. After the presentation of both figures, I will compared them and explain my conclusion.

Erzebet Bathory is better-known in western Europe as Elizabeth Bathory. She is a historical figure surrounded by a legend which was mostly unknown in the western part of Europe until a film with her name was released. Elizabeth was born in 1560 in Hungary. She was the daughter of the Baron George Bathory and the Baroness Anna Bathory. The Bathorys were one of the most powerful families of Hungary. Elizabeth had a really good education, considering the lack of education of women in early modern times. At that time, only aristocratic women could obtain an education, while poor women barely knew how to read and write. Elizabeth could fluently speak at least in three languages: Hungarian, Latin, and Greek. At the age of eleven she was engaged to Count Ferenc Nadasdy, who was a talented warrior. As she came from a better-off family with ancient nobility titles, she preserved her surname and her husband took it as his own.

During the absence of her husband in wartime she delighted herself by torturing young servants. However, she did not do that alone, rather, she had accomplices who helped her to perform those acts. It is said that she always had been cruel, but after her husband's death, she became even more cruel. When Ferenc Nadasdy passed away, she spent most of the time at her castle in Cachtice. Blood from one of her servants was poured accidentally onto Elizabeth's skin and she thought the maid's blood reduced the signs of ageing. The legend says that this was the beginning of her

fascination with conserving her youthfulness.

After this revealing discovery, Elizabeth started to smother herself in the blood of young virgins. It is said that she was extremely beautiful and that she was terrified of losing her youth and grace. The legend explains that she thought the blood of her young virgin maids was the secret of eternal youth. Her obsession worsened after her husband's death, moment in which the legend suggests the number of deaths increased. In a *BBC* article<sup>5</sup> it was suggested that she might have been insane from childhood, when she was witness to the cruel and disproportionate punishments of servants who were supposed to be criminals carried by the Baron and Baroness.

In the beginning, Elizabeth's acts were not discovered or were at least ignored by the authorities of the time because she only killed girls who belonged to poor families. Nevertheless, as she started to run out of poor girls, she began to cause the disappearance of girls who belonged to noble families. The murder of young ladies in the nobility could not be ignored, and the authorities arrested her along with her accomplices. Her partners in crime confessed under torture that the Countess Erzebeth Bathory had murdered hundreds of young virgins in order to satisfy her obsession. Elizabeth was not sentenced to death, as were her helpers, because she belonged to one of the most powerful families in Hungary; her family had always had a lot of influence in society. Nevertheless, she could no longer live freely, and she was confined in her castle at Cachtice. Nobles who committed crimes at the time were forgiven or just confined in their place of residence in most cases. These nobles were usually allowed to go abroad and to continue their lives there. After three years of confinement, one of the guards who watched over her discovered the Countess dead on the floor. Elizabeth's properties were divided among her children after her passing.

Elizabeth Bathory was not really known in Western Europe until the release of films based on her story. Elizabeth has several nicknames, one of them being “the Bloody Countess”, which explicitly suggests she was a murderer. The ritual she used to preserve her youth and attractiveness became known not only through the films but also because of the number of books in which she is one of the characters. In literature, the figure of Erzebet Bathory is found several times. Carolina Andújar is one of the authors who selected her to be one of her novel's characters. Andújar's novel is titled *Vampyr* and it recreates a vampire environment. In the novel *Vampyr*, Erzebet plays the role of a bloody vampire who enjoys killing.

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5 BBC. *Elizabeth Bathory - the Blood Countess*. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/place-london/plain/A593084>

It is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction when legends have existed around a figure so much time. There exist informational sources such as the documents of her trials, which explained Elisabeth's crimes; nevertheless, not all the crimes attributed to her are described. Many people of the time conspired against her. According to an article from *The Telegraph*<sup>6</sup>, among those conspirators were noble neighbours and even the Hapsburg Emperor. She was a powerful woman in a world ruled by men. She lived in a patriarchal society where women's opinions were considered unimportant and their rights were minimal. Elizabeth's powerful male neighbours did not like that after her husband's death, she was the one ruling her properties; therefore, for them, conspiracy was the most normal way to act. Nowadays, we wonder whether she was a murderer, a harsh master who went too far with her servants, or a victim of a conspirator's trick.

Having done with Erzebet Bathory's figure, I will explain in the ensuing paragraphs the relationship between Dorian Gray and his obsession to keep both boyhood and appeal. Afterwards, I will compare the common points that Erzebet Bathory and Dorian Gray share, as well as the contrast points.

The fascination of Dorian for remaining young starts after his meeting with Lord Henry Wotton, a man who heavily influences our protagonist all during the novel. Lord Henry is a witty nobleman who is seen as a critique of Victorian culture. He meets Dorian contrary to the will of the painter Basil Hallward, a friend they had in common. Hallward is greatly worried about the influence Lord Henry could impose on Dorian, and he is even afraid that Lord Henry will corrupt his mind. Nevertheless, Lord Henry does not accept “no” as an answer and he meets Dorian in Basil's art studio. The encounter is made under the suspicious gaze of Basil who knows nothing good could come out of this meeting. When Lord Henry looks at him the first time, he thinks that “*all the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity. One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world*”<sup>7</sup>. This is the first impression that every person had when they meet Dorian. His beauty and purity are the main features everybody sees in him, and they make him look naïve and inexperienced.

The moment the worry about ageing first appeared is in the first conversation Dorian has

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6 Thorne, Tony. *Countess Elizabeth Báthory: icon of evil*. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3555482/Countess-Elizabeth-Bathory-icon-of-evil.html>

7 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

with the cynical and manipulative Lord Henry. They are alone in the garden when the nobleman is explaining his ideas about youth, saying to Dorian “*you have the most marvellous youth, and youth is the only thing worth having*”<sup>8</sup> and even that “*there is absolutely nothing in the world but youth*”<sup>9</sup>. At the beginning Dorian does not understand what this man is explaining to him, he does not feel that youth is the only thing worth having and he has never really thought about it until then. Lord Henry continues with his explanation; and he tells Dorian that he will feel the necessity of keeping his youth once he would be old, wrinkled and ugly. Lord Henry's idea is that there are only a few years in which one can really live and enjoy completely, because “*when your youth goes, your beauty will go with it, and then you will suddenly discover that there are no triumphs left for you*”<sup>10</sup>. Dorian was listening carefully to him, probably starting to think that when your youth leaves, one can no longer succeed in life. Lord Henry pushes Dorian to make the most of his youth while he has it, and not to waste it with uninteresting and ignorant people. He hurries Dorian almost ordering him, “*be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing*”<sup>11</sup>. Lord Henry finally says that youth will never return, and that the time of enjoying it was right then.

After their conversation, both men entered Basil's house to join him, as he had to complete Dorian's portrait. When Basil quite finishes it, Lord Henry and Dorian look at it. Lord Henry sees in the picture a splendid work of art, but Dorian sees much more than that. The portrait makes Dorian understand Lord Henry's previous speech. He suddenly feels the brevity of youth and the agony that will be born inside him after losing it. Dorian starts to think that his boyhood will be what will make him happy, and successful in life, and without that he will be nothing but one more old man. Lord Henry's warning completely fills his head and as he is staring at the portrait, millions of thoughts cross his mind. His cheeks will lose their candour, his eyes will lose their shine and even his hair will lose his colour; “*as he thought of it, a sharp pang of pain struck through him like a knife, and made each delicate fibre of his nature quiver*”<sup>12</sup>.

Dorian considers every word uttered by Lord Henry while he is looking at his portrait. When he starts talking his two companions can feel his agony when he says “*how sad it is! I shall grow old,*

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8 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

9 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

10 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

11 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

12 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

*and horrible, and dreadful. But this portrayal will remain always young*<sup>13</sup>. In that precise moment he makes a desperate wish, a mad prayer, saying out loud “*if it were I who was to be always young, and the picture was to grow old*”<sup>14</sup>. Pronouncing this prayer Dorian completely changes his destiny; and he condemns himself when he announces that he would give his soul to achieve this wish. After this conversation with Lord Henry, we find a Dorian that has been highly influenced by his speech. Dorian agrees completely with Lord Henry's ideas about youth. At that moment he also thinks that youth is the only thing worth having and he starts to fear the idea of growing old. He even says that as soon as he discovers he is ageing, he will commit suicide. He is jealous of the picture because it will always remain young and beautiful while he will turn in an old, ugly, and wrinkled man. A month after this precise day he remembers Lord Henry's speech, and is still tormented by the idea of growing old; he confesses that he is still jealous of the picture for being a whole month younger than he was.

Time passes and he meets a young and poor actress, Sibyl Vane, with whom he falls in love. One night, while she was performing on the stage, she makes mistakes, and Dorian is ashamed of her. After the play he goes to her in order to break their relationship because he cannot bear the embarrassment of being with her one more second. The attitude of Dorian towards Sibyl is cruel and disproportionate. Sibyl does not deserve this treatment; nevertheless, Dorian is out of his mind and he hurts her with each word he utters. When he comes back home after the argument, his eyes fall upon the portrait that Basil has given to him some time ago. He sees in it something different, but he does not know what has changed. He looks at it closely and goes over the portrait in order to examine it. The expression of his face seems to be changed, and Dorian thinks that, “*one would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth*”<sup>15</sup>. He feels that looking at the portrait is like looking into a mirror after doing something terrible. When he finishes his examination of the picture, the change becomes more real, more apparent. He does not understand what was happening, and that makes Dorian terribly concerned about the alteration on the canvas.

When Dorian re-examines the picture, he suddenly remembers that day in Basil's studio when he wished not to age, and stay as young as the Dorian in the portrait. That day, Dorian prayed for that “*his own beauty might be untarnished, and the face on the canvas bear the burden of his*

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13 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

14 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

15 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

*passions and his sins*<sup>16</sup>”. He continues staring at the work of art thinking about the possibility of this wish becoming true. Dorian wonders why a touch of cruelty has been set in his mouth when he remembers the argument with Sibyl. Far from feeling sorrow or regret, he thinks that she deserved his words because she had seriously disappointed him. He goes to sleep with the sensation that this is a terrible mistake and he is awfully wrong about the portrayal. A picture cannot change its expression like that. Thinking rationally, a canvas cannot, by any means, bear his actions and his age so he can preserve his loveliness and youth.

Next morning, his prior day's perceptions of the portrait does not come to his mind until he sees the canvas once again. He looks carefully at it, and he realizes it has not been a dream but a reality. There is in fact an alteration on the picture. When there is no more mystery and the unbelievable is proved as true by his own eyes, he thinks that the portrait that his friend Basil painted of him will be a perfect guide through life. The portrayal makes him understand that he has been cruel and mean with Sibyl, so maybe it can help him during his life to correct his wrongs. He will be able to see “*an ever present sign of the ruin men brought upon their souls*”<sup>17</sup>.

Lord Henry visits him in order to bring some bad news. Sibyl Vane committed suicide the night before right after talking to Dorian. At first, he feels terribly bad and he blames himself for talking to her in such a disproportionate way. Nonetheless, his friend advises him not to waste his tears on her because, as he says, “*life has everything in store for you, Dorian. There is nothing that you, with your extraordinary good looks, will not be able to do*”<sup>18</sup>. As Lord Henry reminds him that youth and beauty are everything in the world, he realizes how lucky he is to have the canvas, so he can use it to bear the burden of his sins. Finally, he settles that “*eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins- he was to have all these things. The portrait was to bear the burden of his shame: that was all*”<sup>19</sup>. In the first encounter with Lord Henry, the cynical nobleman already said to him that he has passions who have made him afraid and thoughts that have filled him with terror and shame. Now, Dorian can make all those passions and thoughts come true because he will always keep his pure face and his boyhood while the portrait will grow old and sinful.

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16 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

17 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

18 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

19 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

Basil Halward goes to visit Dorian the morning subsequent to Sibyl's death. However, when Basil finds his friend, Dorian's reaction greatly surprises him. Dorian says that Sibyl is in the past and that he does not want to be at the mercy of his emotions, rather, he wants to use them and dominate them in his favour. Seeing such a change in his friend's way of thinking he feels that the only explanation is Lord Henry's influence. Basil does not know anything about the alteration suffered by the canvas, so he blames the nobleman persuasive entirely. During this visit, Basil asks Dorian for the portrait, he wants to look at it. Dorian explains to him that no other person than himself will ever see it again, he tells Basil that the portrait has something fatal, like a life of its own. This is the precise moment when Dorian thinks that he must hide the canvas somewhere inaccessible to others.

The truth is that Dorian's mind is poisoned with the idea of having the power to preserve his purity and boyhood while a portrait becomes sinful and old. He rejoices in the idea of the canvas becoming bestial and unclean while he seems to be innocent and immaculate. Dorian thinks that "*what the worm was to the corpse, his sins would be to the painted image on the canvas*"<sup>20</sup>. He decides that nobody will see the portrayal again; therefore, he locks it inside one of the rooms of his house and he never lets any other person in. He does not want anybody to know his secret, the secret of his youth and innocence.

As time passes, rumours of Dorian's style of life are all around the city. People tells the most evil stories about him and he becomes the main point of conversation in London's social scene. Nonetheless, those who see Dorian cannot believe that this man is an evil sinner with no heart. There is something in his face and in his expression that makes him look like a boy full of purity and candour. Nobody will ever say that he is heartless and cruel because he preserves all the splendour of youth and the loveliness of beauty. From time to time, Dorian himself goes to the locked room in order to stand in front of the canvas with a mirror in his hand. He will be delighted while looking at the evil and old face in the portrait and comparing it with his own face. His young and beautiful face has nothing to do with the one in the portrait who is covered by sin and cruelty. Dorian makes fun of the canvas and laughs at the idea of himself remaining young and pure no matter how many sins he commits, while the portrait and only itself will carry the heavy burden of shame.

Dorian becomes completely captivated by his own beauty and youth. His interest in the

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20 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*



corruption of his soul augments considerably, the more time he spends with the canvas the more he tries to examine it with minute care. Sometimes, Dorian scrutinizes the portrait with a horrifying delight, analysing each touch of sin and considering which sins had been the most monstrous ones. He often laughs at the old and wrecked image in the canvas while he is feeling all the bloom of youth and beauty in his own body. From time to time “*he would think of the ruin he had brought upon his soul, with a pity that was all the more poignant because it was purely selfish*”<sup>21</sup>. In those moments, Dorian is afraid that the burden of shame the portrait bears can be too heavy. However, he also feels a certain fascination thinking about this burden, and he obtains great pleasure knowing that nobody can ever see his real face, his evil soul.

Our protagonist spends several months during the year interested in a different obsession through which to learn something. He exposes his new collections of treasures each year and afterwards he starts with something new that fascinated him. These treasures and trips are perhaps a way to escape from his conscience, which was becoming more and more difficult silent as the years passed by. He cannot bear to be separated from the portrait for a long period of time. It becomes an essential part of his life and he is terribly afraid that somebody might invade this personal part of himself. Sometimes he likes to go at the confessionals just to listen to the people who whisper their sins in the shadows. Dorian wants to keep this secret for himself and he is afraid that a person could discover it if he does not spend at home enough of the time.

The rumours about Dorian's behaviour does not stop and his frank face and his charming attitude are no longer enough answer to the calumnies. Many people are suspicious about his way of living; nevertheless, the fact of being rich is a clear element of security. Almost nobody wants to create trouble among the wealthy class. Dorian is not only rich but also a delightful person in whose company people enjoyed time themselves to the maximum. Because of those two factors, wealth and way of being, our protagonist silences the rumours at the beginning; nonetheless, after a certain number of years, this is insufficient. He never grows a day older than the day Basil Hallward painted his portrayal, and this cannot go unnoticed indefinitely. Dorian starts to create uneasiness wherever he goes and people think he is a fatal influence for his friends and acquaintances. Some of them even think that he made a deal with the devil to stay in the bloom of youth with his angelic and pure face.

Dorian never shares the secret of the canvas with anyone. This burden is heavy to carry all

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<sup>21</sup> *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

alone; but, he enjoys each of the hours he spends admiring the crimes and immoralities that are portrayed in the picture. On the eve of his thirty-eighth birthday, Basil appears at his house in order to warn him about the scandal and defamation that were spread all around the city. Basil is terribly afraid of the damage these rumours can do to Dorian's reputation. He expresses the citizens' concern about Dorian and his unorthodox behaviour. The apparently young man pretends to be offended and disconcerted, and he does not want to hear anything else. Basil clarifies that he does not believe in any of these accusations because sin is something that writes itself across the sinner's face and Dorian has no trace of sin at all. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to judge Dorian because as Basil says: *“one has a right to judge a man by the effect he has over his friends. Yours seem to lose all sense of honour, of goodness, of purity. You have filled them with a madness for pleasure. They have gone down into the depths. You led them there”*<sup>22</sup>.

The discussion continues and Basil seems not to be sure anymore about his innocence. Many of Dorian's friends ended badly and his influence was not good for them. Basil wants him to lead a life in which he will be a respectful man with no scandal behind him. The painter even wonders if he knows Dorian as well as he thinks, and he finishes by saying that whether Dorian ever sinned or not, can only be known by looking into his soul, and that this was only possible to God. Right after hearing that, Dorian starts to laugh. He, the sinner, feels an immense joy when he finally decides that Basil will be the one with whom to share his secret.

Both friends go upstairs to the locked room. As soon as Basil Hallward sees the canvas, an exclamation of terror breaks the air. He recognizes the picture as his own; nonetheless, the horror has devastated the canvas while not yet completely ruined the beauty of the art work. He is wondering what had happened to the portrait he once painted when Dorian says: *“one day you introduced me to a friend of yours, who explained to me the wonder of youth, and you finished a portrait of me that revealed to me the wonder of beauty. In a mad wish, perhaps you would call it a prayer...”*<sup>23</sup>. Basil does not credit what his eyes are seeing, what is in front of him; this is an impossibility. The evil eyes of the canvas look at him, and there is just obscurity in them. Dorian's soul is the face of a satyr, of the devil. Basil urges him to pray for the salvation of his soul, but Dorian does not believe on it. In a mad and sudden impulse, he stabs the painter to death.

After the assassination of Basil, he is worried to be discovered; so Dorian decides to force an

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22 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

23 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

old friend of his, Alan Campbell, to get rid of the body. Alan did not want to do this, but Dorian threatens him and Mr. Campbell is left with no other choice. While this man is doing the dirty work, he continues with his usual routine as if nothing happened. Some time later, Alan kills himself in his laboratory, probably unable to bear the guilt. All the evil acts Dorian performs, have a consequence in his conscience, even though he tries to eliminate it. In order to remove remorseful thoughts he visits places full of opium, where the memory of his sins became blurred. In these low and unclean places he is able to forget his heinous actions. Remembering is Dorian's problem, his memories are ruining his soul and he often thinks that there is no remedy for it, that it is sick to death.

Weeks later, Dorian is enjoying his time in company of friends when he happens to have a conversation with Lord Henry. Maybe without knowing it, Lord Henry gives him an interesting talk about the soul, explaining that even if a man gains the whole world but loses his soul, what then would be the advantages of his gains. Dorian does not want to talk about souls, for he says they are a terrible reality. Far from changing the topic, Lord Henry asks his friend what is his secret for keeping youth. Dorian does not have time to answer because the nobleman is already making a whole speech about the importance of youth and finally Dorian disappears with the excuse of being tired.

Dorian is tired of living a life which seems to be full but which is in fact, completely empty. As he determines “*it was his beauty that had ruined him, his beauty and the youth that he had prayed for*”<sup>24</sup>. He did not grow old and he did not lose his loveliness, but yet he has lived too much to continue ignoring his crimes. The corrupted canvas is disturbing him, it is acting stronger than ever as his conscience. He soon resolves to get rid of the portrait so he can start a new and good life. He stabs the picture with the same knife he has used to kill Basil, thinking that with the destruction of the portrait he will be free to have a new beginning. A great cry fills Dorian's house and when his servants go to see what has happened, they find a magnificent portrait of their master in all the splendour of youth and beauty. On the floor, they see a dead man with a knife in his heart, he is old, repugnant, and wrecked. They do not recognize Dorian until they see his rings in the dead man's fingers.

Understanding Erzebet Bathory and Dorian Gray's obsession with youth and beauty, I will compare in the following paragraphs the common points they share as well as the contrast points.

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<sup>24</sup> *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

The two main figures of this section have some points in common. Erzebet, as well as Dorian, belong to the upper layers of society; Erzebet is an aristocrat and Dorian is a wealthy nobleman. Both figures are well-educated, even though Erzebet is a woman, she obtains an extraordinary level of education for the time. Their obsession for remaining young and attractive is the strongest point they share. Both figures have also appear in the cinema on several occasions.

Countess Bathory and Mr Gray also have several points of contrasts. Erzebet was a real person, a woman who really lived; while Dorian is a fictional character from one of Oscar Wilde's novels. She was married, but Dorian never was; in fact, he does not seem really interested in love, with the exception of Sibyl Vane, a girl whom he loved for a short period of time. The Countess shared her secret with some servants, her accomplices, the ones who helped her in every of her crimes. However, Dorian never has an accomplice, a friend with whom to share his burden. One night, he confesses his secret to Basil, but he kills him before he can express any opinion. Erzebet was discovered when she started killing girls who belonged to the middle class, after the discovery she was confined to her castle at Cachtice. Dorian is never discovered, and although there are many rumours about him in the city, no one ever proves anything against him. The brother of Sibyl Vane knows that Dorian had been the reason of his sister's suicide; nevertheless, he does not denounce him to the police. We are not sure if the legend is true or not, it is really difficult to differentiate between fiction and reality; however, we know for sure that Dorian is just a character from a fiction novel. Erzebet was not known in Western Europe until the film was released; nonetheless, Dorian was already well-known at the time of the release of the films based on his story. Dorian Gray's film was possibly a way of creating an approach to Oscar Wilde's novel in order to encourage the new generations to read it. The last difference is the way they passed away. Erzebet died a natural death in her castle of Cachtice after three years of confinement. Dorian unwittingly committs suicide; when he tries to kill the portrait, he kills himself instead.

### **3.3 The creation of personality**

Oxford' dictionaries define personality as the combination of characteristics and qualities that form an individual's distinctive character. The creation and evolution of an individual is complex and it usually takes all one's life to evolve. Brilliant authors created characters who have grandiose personalities. Nevertheless, the fact of writing and describing the process of those who

change and make their personality evolve, is far from being easy. In this section of the work I will explain and compare the creation of the individual personality in our main novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, a novel written by Robert Louis Stevenson.

The creation of a character's personality implies not only an original conception but also its progression in the text. In Victorian fiction the dividing of a character was portrayed by many authors such as Oscar Wilde or Robert Louis Stevenson. This progression in the personality of the character sometimes ends in a division of the self, causing two entities in the same body. According to Athena Vrettos<sup>25</sup>, Victorian fiction often challenged the unity and stability of the self and the coherence of consciousness. Oscar Wilde challenges it with the separation of Dorian Gray's body and soul; while Robert Louis Stevenson does it with the separation of two personalities within a body. In the following paragraphs I will explain the creation and evolution of Dr Jekyll's personality, one of the main figures of Stevenson's novel.

*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is a novel written by Robert Louis Stevenson and published in 1886. The theme explored throughout the novel is multiple personality. At the time the novel was written, psychologists were recording case studies of this phenomenon; a fact that helped writers like Stevenson to start exploring this theme. In many novels of the time, the interest and influence of psychology is present. The novel also introduces a hypocritical bourgeois society in which fragmented selves are shown. Dr Jekyll is a respected member of the London upper class who discovered a way to transform himself physically and give shape to his other self; Mr Hyde, an individual who belongs to the lower classes of society. The existent duality of the selves in the novel is also a common theme in late Victorian literature.

The duality Stevenson manifested in the novel is obvious when talking about the characters. A coexistence is shared by Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, two different personalities, within the same body, even if this body is transformed. As we read the novel, the two characters appear to be two separate persons, two different individuals. The misunderstanding is produced because Dr Jekyll is tremendously different in nature from Mr Hyde. Jekyll is good in the eyes of society and nobody would believe that he is evil. Hyde is the opposite of Jekyll, he is seen by society to be bad, and the rest of the characters see only evil inside him, and they do not believe that any good could exist in him. When Dr Jekyll related his story to his friend Utterson, he says that maybe Hyde is just filled

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<sup>25</sup> *A Companion to the Victorian novel.*

with the evil that exists inside him, “*Edward Hyde, alone, in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil*”<sup>26</sup>. As Jekyll and Hyde are the same individual we can suppose that each person in society is filled with both good and evil; therefore, we ourselves are the ones who choose the path we want to take. Victorian society did not like the duplicity, they expected an individual to be what he or she seems to be.

One last feature that is worth mentioning is the fact that no female characters appear in the novel; males have the leading roles. This fact could make us think about a theme which was not in vogue at the time: homosexuality. During the Victorian period, homosexuality was seen as abnormal and deviant; therefore, when writers addressed this topic, they did so in a very subtle way. Whether Stevenson is trying to incorporate homosexuality in his novel or not, we clearly notice the oddness of the fact that there are no female characters in the novel.

To conclude, in *The strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the polemical end of the novel must be noted. At the end, Dr Jekyll is not able to control his transformation to Mr Hyde and he does not have more substance to produce the *magical* mixture which controlled the already said transformation. He spends his last week locked in a room until his friend and lawyer Mr Utterson arrives. Before Utterson can open the door of the locked room where he is, Dr Jekyll in the form of Mr Hyde commits suicide. The moral of the novel can be that we have to get rid of our evil side before it can overpower the good side.

After analysing this novel, I now address Dorian's personality creation, which had been, as we can suppose, greatly influenced by his male mentors: first his grandfather, and then Basil Hallward, and Lord Henry Wotton. Dorian is an orphan of father and mother whose grandfather, Lord Kelson, has been in charge of his education. Dorian's grandfather always despised him, maybe because he blamed him for his mother's death. Dorian's identity depended on the influence exerted by others on him. Basil Hallward worships his beauty and encourages his vanity, creating for Dorian, without knowing it, the key to keep his youth and beauty. Basil gives him part of his identity by objectifying Dorian in the portrait. However, the painter's influence decreases at the time Dorian meets Lord Henry Wotton. This wise but cynical man shows Dorian how to promote himself and how to manipulate his identity.

It is precisely Lord Henry who recommends to Dorian a book which will have great

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<sup>26</sup> *Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

influence on him. As soon as Dorian starts to read the book, he becomes absorbed by it, and continues to read until night falls. It is in fact a bizarre and decadent volume in which the sins of the world are presented. The work is a psychological study of a Parisian man who tries to sum up the passions, thoughts, rebellions and sins of every century except his own. As the narrator explains “one hardly knew at times whether one was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some medieval saint or the morbid confessions of a modern sinner”<sup>27</sup>. The reading of the book completely fascinates and poisons Dorian's mind, and for years, he cannot free himself from this damaging volume. This magnetic book seems to Dorian to contain the story of his life; he enjoys his reading and each time he turns to the book, he discovers new meanings. Wilde does not tell us the title of this book that Lord Henry has given to Dorian; nonetheless, it can be recognized by the description given as J K Huysmans' *Against Nature*. Huysmans' book was published some years before Oscar Wilde's novel and it was often described as “poisonous”, the same adjective that Dorian uses to talk about the book he is reading.

The formation of character's identity is a difficult task in which not many authors have mastered. We can say that identity is not only an heritage that one owns; it is also a performance one acts out through one's life and experiences. In this novel, Oscar Wilde presents a society in which integration is difficult to achieve and where all life's paths lead the protagonist to self-destruction and disgrace. As McCormack<sup>28</sup> explained, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a double identity cannot be ultimately concealed. Before Dorian finally decides to destroy the portrayal that Basil had painted of him, he has already led most of his friends to degradation and death.

Victorian novels have many peculiarities, one of them is that art and artists appear frequently. In Oscar Wilde's novel, the painter, Basil Hallward, possesses an especial power to capture Dorian's soul while he is painting. The importance of the painter is such that the story will not be possible if he does not paint the portrait. Victorian novelists also unmask the performances of stage artists, that is, of actors and actresses, in order to emphasize the novel's realism. In the novel here analysed, we find this unmasking in order to present the real life and the tragedy of the actress, who loses her talent because she falls in love with Dorian.

As well as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is another example of late Victorian literature. Oscar Wilde also expresses duality throughout the novel. The most obvious example is the separation of Dorian's body and soul. The continuous fight

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27 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism.*

28 *Wilde the Irishman.*

that exists between good and evil within Dorian does not let him rest until the end. Dorian's soul is trapped in the portrait that Basil Hallward painted of him. As he is committing sins and crimes, the portrait shows his shame, guilt and evil while his real face continues unspoilt. The separation of body and soul, pleases Dorian as he can use it as a guide throughout his life; nonetheless, his sins corrupt his soul and he is not able to do good and stop his crimes. This duality is what kills him in the end, he can no longer live with the burden of the picture, so he stabs it. He is determined to “*kill the monstrous soul-life*”<sup>29</sup> and when he does it, he dies instead. After this moment, Dorian's portrait shows a young beautiful boy who is free from sin while in the floor there is an old, dead and shameful man, that is, his other self.

There is also duality between the public and the private selves. Dorian has a good reputation in the London society, his good looks and his charming boyhood make of him an adorable creature. However, when he looks at the portrait, he can really see the shameful and corrupted face he should have had. Ageing as well as the evil he committed are shown in his portrait, and he can see that, as clearly as if he could have a look at his own soul. Dorian is afraid of revealing his secret, that is, his private self, to the society because he knows that he will be judged for all his crimes. He always takes great care in hiding his secret and in locking it in a safe place. The society believe in Dorian, his looks are those of a boy who has never been corrupted. The wealth that he owns also helps to silence many voices, because it is not easy to criticize a wealthy and well-positioned man.

Finally, there is one more duality in the novel, the duality between homosexuality and heterosexuality. As readers, we are confused with Dorian's sexual preferences. He has some relationships with women, especially with Sybil. Dorian has a romance with her but it ends badly because of his arrogance and pride. After he breaks up with her she committs suicide. When he hears the news of her death he is disconsolate; nevertheless, just a few words of Lord Henry Wotton make him radically change his point of view and he thinks of Sybil's death as her last theatrical performance. It also seems that he has an homosexual relationship with Basil, the painter of his portrait. The allusion of Dorian's homosexuality is very subtle in the final version of the novel; however, in the previous version the sugestion of homosexuality is more apparent. According to John R. Maynard<sup>30</sup>, the possible homosexuality can also be read, in the morals of the time in which the novel was written, as a coded version of Oscar Wilde's illicit life and the construction of his identity.

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29 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authorititative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

30 *A Companion to the Victorian novel.*



In Oscar Wilde's novel the end can read as a moral. This moral can be an exhortation to make our nature evolve by the means of the senses, thus, always to be searching for new sensations. As Lord Henry, the witty and cynical nobleman, says “*to cure the soul by means of the senses and the senses by means of the soul*”<sup>31</sup>. Nevertheless, one should be careful of what new sensations one chooses to discover, because this practice can end up bringing disgrace to one's spirit. At the end of the novel, Dorian tries to finish with his corrupted soul by destroying it, and doing that he destroys himself. The moral also can be that he has to redeem his spirit by purifying his sins. To do that, he has to annihilate his evil and shameful soul.

With the analysis of Dorian's personality now complete, in the subsequent paragraphs I offer a comparison between the protagonists of each of aforementioned late Victorian novels. Dorian and Jekyll have many things in common and just a few points in contrast.

Both protagonists are from the upper class of London and each of them delves into his own dark wishes and thoughts. In both novels we find the division of the self, a feature frequently used in late-Victorian literature. Dorian and Jekyll each struggle in order to carefully hide their other self so that no one will ever discover it. In the one case, Dorian locks his portrait in a room, safe from prying eyes because he makes sure that he is the only one who has the key to open it. In the other case, Jekyll invents a life of its own for Hyde, and to that end he rents an apartment and causes everyone to believe that Hyde is an actual person. According to Cannon Schmitt<sup>32</sup>, Dorian, as well as Jekyll, embraces a split between a public and a private self. Dorian imagines his other self as a necessity to keep his boyhood and attractiveness as well as to pursue his crimes without fear of being discovered. Jekyll also sees his other self as a necessity, but not in order to keep his youth and beauty. Dr Jekyll uses his other self to liberate his evil side, and to allow himself to become a criminal. Jekyll's dark side ends up taking the form of Mr Hyde.

There is one more feature that these protagonists have in common. Both characters can also suggest homosexuality. The uncensored version of Wilde's novel makes allusions to the homosexual relationship Dorian maintains with Basil. It is not explicit in either of the novels; however, it can be thought that both characters could have been homosexuals. The fact that the presence of females in

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31 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

32 *A Companion to the Victorian novel.*

Wilde's novel is not large and in Stevenson's novel there are none, shows that both novels are centered in male-only worlds.

There are also a few points of contrasts between these characters. The most obvious contrast is that Dorian is a young boy who is discovering the world while Jekyll is already a middle-aged man who already has led a good life. A more complex contrast concerns the division of the self. This partition is neither produced in the same way nor causes the same consequences. On the one hand, Dorian's separation of his self consists in the division between his body and his soul. This division is made when Basil Hallward paints a portrait of Dorian, and at the same time Dorian prays not to age a single day more. On the other hand, Jekyll's partition of himself is between himself and his evil side, the one he named Hyde. This separation is the product of a chemical mixture he drinks, which then produces his transformation into Hyde.

The ending of both novels can also be seen as contrasting, even if both have a kind of suicidal ending. The night he is going to be discovered, Jekyll's evil form, Hyde, commits suicide before he can be found. Hyde knows he is killing himself when he takes the ampoule. In the case of Dorian, he stabs the portrait thinking that he will only destroy the painting; and, he does not realize that he is actually stabbing himself and committing suicide.

To conclude this section, it is necessary to say that there is a moral in both novels. The moral is that inside each human being there is a primitive, violent savage with no conscience, who is waiting the perfect moment to take control of the person occupying our place. As Vrettos<sup>33</sup> explains, it presents pessimism about innate human goodness.

### **3.4 Morality within the novel**

In this section I address the issue of morality within the novel; however, before doing that, I find it necessary to talk about the prevailing moral standards at the time the book was written and published. The moment when *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published corresponds to the Victorian Period (1837-1901). This period was characterized by sexual restraint, intolerance, and a

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<sup>33</sup> *A Companion to the Victorian novel.*

rigid social code of conduct. It was a time of many contradictions in which Britain was looked on as a highly contrastive nation. On the hand there was a fixed code of conduct full of so called dignity and restraint. On the other hand, there were many cases of prostitution and even child hard labour. These cases created a feeling of contradiction in the objective eyes of foreigners. Nevertheless, many of the Victorian values were exported to other places around the world due to the great influence of the British Empire.

With regard to religion, moral standards changed abruptly during this period. When this era started, the Church of England was forceful and dominant; nonetheless, it decreased its influence little by little. The Church continued to have great influence in the rural areas but its power was diminishing in the cities. In the industrialized cities there were even people who looked at the Church with disconformity. The religious power requested obedience to God, submission to it, and resignation to God's will. All these demands were made in order to impose the Church's control over the devotees. During this period, the Church did not take care of the needs of the lower classes; however, it tried to expand its power. With Darwin's volume *On the Origin of Species*, the crisis of faith appeared. The theory of evolution made many believers question Christian faith as well as Victorian values.

Nonetheless, this was a period in which many artistic styles as well as many literary schools appeared, and a great artistic heritage was created. New political and social movements also emerged during the Victorian Period. Developments in every branch of knowledge were also hugely important. This period was one in which there was much scientific progress. Medicine and Physical Science developed new ideas throughout the century. There was also development in the specialization of surgery, and better hospital-building throughout the Victorian Period. Anesthetics had also a considerable success and modern psychiatry came into being through men like Freud. This period brought prosperity, fortune, and expansion to Great Britain. The moral standards of society also changed, and the idea of the self-made man appeared. This idea was fomented by the individualism of the period.

Even though there was perhaps not as much prudery and repression as is sometimes imagined, during the Victorian period societal moers caused writing about certain emotions and feelings to be taboo. Sexual acts were not described and love was often symbolised or abstracted in

order to illustrate it. As previously explained, homosexuality was illegal and more often considered indecent and obscene by society. However, there were many well-known artists who were suspected of being homosexual during the Victorian Period; an example of this is the author of the novel here analysed, Oscar Wilde. It was definitely not easy to express one's feelings during this era because of the strict ethic model which had to be followed, and for homosexuals it was even more difficult. Many homosexuals were put into trial, and were even imprisoned.

Family was one of the great pillars of Victorian values. Large families with five or six children on average were not uncommon. The system was patriarchal, and it promoted hard work, respect, social condescendence and religious submission. The role of each person in the household was precise, and parents taught their children where their place was. Children learnt from their parents the difference between good and evil, and right and wrong. Therefore, parents and the Church were mostly in charge of the morals of the new generations. Children of the upper class did not spend most of their time with their parents, but rather, with their tutors and governesses, the ones who taught them. Household of the rich had servants who were mostly people who belonged to the lower classes. Servants often came from the countryside to work for the well-to-do in town.

Victorian-age people believed in their Government and they expected to expand their political ideas throughout the British Empire. The hierarchical order was starting to change and the middle classes had begun to grow and become wealthier. The upper class was a mixture which was forming out of the aristocracy and the wealthiest men of the middle class. The elite of society maintained traditional values at the same time that it began to promote opportunities for the middle class. It was a time in which great discoveries in different branches of science were being made, and in which the hierarchies were changing.

Throughout the century, the novel evolved in the hands of some of the best novelists that English literature had produced: Sir Walter Scott, Bronte's sisters, Oscar Wilde and Charles Dickens among others. The novel became popular among the readers and its expansion started. In the subsequent paragraphs I will compare the Victorian morals with those pretended in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and by means of examples, I will explain the moral issues within the novel.

Already in the preface of the novel, Wilde writes: “*there is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all*”<sup>34</sup>. With these words, the author explains that a novel cannot be subjected to moral judgement, but rather, only to an aesthetic judgement. According to Wilde, a book can be a masterpiece or an awful book, but it cannot be moral or immoral. This premise could be seen as a response to the reviewers who gave unfavorable critiques to the novel. *The Daily Chronicle* is one of the best examples, as it said that the book was “poisonous.” From my point of view, a novel can certainly have a moral or an immoral impact on the reader. A clear example of that is the book that Lord Henry lent to Dorian, which certainly influenced his morals. Oscar Wilde does not believe that a book in itself can be immoral; nevertheless, a book which clearly has moral implications in the protagonist appears in his only novel. Why? What remains certain is that Wilde's opinions are, as those of all of us, reflections of his personal experience, libido, and ethics.

In this novel not everybody has the same moral ethics. The characters do not have the same idea of right and wrong, the same idea of good and evil. Indeed, their morals sometimes change in order to satisfy their needs or desires; they subvert the moral codes because hedonism is more important to them. I will now delve into the analysis of the morals of some of the characters of the novel such as Lord Henry Wotton, Basil Hallward, and Dorian Gray, among others.

Lord Henry Wotton is the most cynical and manipulative character on the book. With regard to morals, it could be said that he is an amoral character. His speeches are different from his acts. Lord Wotton preaches a life that he is not leading. Perhaps he gives speeches of the life he would like to lead if he were courageous enough. As Basil says of him, “*you are an extraordinary fellow. You never say a moral thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose*”<sup>35</sup>. From those words it can be surmised that even if he is not sermonizing moral ideas, Lord Wotton never does anything amoral and he always does the right thing. According to Basil's point of view, the nobleman's cynism is just a façade and not his real face. Perhaps Lord Henry uses his cynism as a refuge which no one can penetrate, and therefore, in which no one can hurt him, where he can be the centre of attention and enjoyment. Lord Henry uses cynical sentences in order to reaffirm his posture. An example would be when he says: “*I like persons better than principles, and I like persons with no principles better than anything else in the world*”<sup>36</sup>. He probably does not mean it,

34 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

35 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

36 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

as one of his closest friends is Basil Hallward, a man of high principles.

"*There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral*"<sup>37</sup> says Lord Henry to Dorian. His manipulative speeches to Dorian are countless, and the young man usually ends up intrigued by Lord Henry's words. When the nobleman says that influence is always immoral he means that when a person influences another, this person gives his own soul to the other, and that is the immoral fact. When one is no longer living his own life but someone else's life, he is being immoral. Lord Henry thinks that "*the aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly -- that is what each of us is here for*"<sup>38</sup>. Lord Henry does not give a lot of credit to emotions or faith, he prefers facts and science. He demonstrates that when he says "*I would suggest that we should appeal to science to put us straight. The advantage of the emotions is that they lead us astray, and the advantage of science is that it is not emotional*"<sup>39</sup>.

In the moment Lord Henry meets Dorian, he confounds him with his exaggerated and high-level speech. According to the nobleman, "*the terror of society, which is the basis of morals, the terror of God, which is the secret of religion- these are the two things that govern us*"<sup>40</sup>. Therefore, Lord Henry opines that both morals and religion dominate us, as they are the two pillars of power that sustain the Victorian society of his time. According to the nobleman's idea, what determinates and controls people's actions is the fear of God's and society's reaction to them.

The moral of *the Picture of Dorian Gray* is really complex. One has to consider and think about Lord Wotton's fault when he induced Dorian always to search for new sensations and to make his dreams come true even if they are shameful. Moreover, the book that the nobleman lent to Dorian should be taken into account, especially since he is the one who greatly influenced him, and the same one who brought nothing else but ruin upon his soul. As previously explained, this book can be recognized by its description as J K Huysmans' *Against Nature*. It is true that Lord Wotton does not commit any crime, he just gives a manipulative and urgent speech to Dorian, and it is Dorian who takes it too seriously. This conclusion could also be a moral in the sense that we have to

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37 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

38 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

39 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

40 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

take care of how we advise our friends and family, specially the younger members, because whatever we say may influence them and affect them.

Morality appears all through the novel. Dorian's portrait itself shows the moral and physical decay of the protagonist, while he remains young and handsome. The canvas is the proof that one must redeem his or her sins and crimes or these destroy the perpetrator. From my point of view, the novel is a moral story. Dorian committs many crimes and sins, and for all of them he has to pay at the end. Maybe the book does not persuade the readers to keep their conventional morals; however, the author assumes that these morals are part of the readers's code of ethics.

At the beginning of the novel Dorian seems to be a naive and innocent young man. Nonetheless, his characte undergoes a quick evolution, and soon he becomes a sinful and guilty man. Dorian's morals are complex both to understand and to explain. He has his own moral code, the one which was in part taught by his two main mentors: Lord Henry and Basil Hallward. Dorian believes in what he can see, touch, and experience. This is evident when the author explains: “*no theory of life seemed to him to be of any importance compared with life itself*”<sup>41</sup>. His life is a continuous experiment and his portrait serves as a mirror in which he sees the changes produced by his ageing and his sins. His beliefs are close to those of Lord Henry; nonetheless, Dorian is not afraid to do what he preaches and to experiment everything in life. The Victorian morals are not represented in his character. Dorian hides his crimes and denies them; however, he continues committing them and he seems not to have a conscience until the very end of the novel.

As time passes and Dorian continues to sin, his conscience comes little by little to the forefront of his mind. In order to silence it, our protagonist uses the treasures he brought with him from his trips as a way to forget what he has done. A clear example of that is this sentence: “*for these treasures, and everything that he collected in his lovely house, were to be to him means of forgetfulness*”<sup>42</sup>. In spite of possessing these opulent, exquisite, and unusual objects, Dorian cannot silence his moral sense only with these things all the time. When he is not able to keep his inner

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41 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authorititative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

42 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authorititative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

voice silent, he goes to some dreadful and low places. In London “*there were opium-dens, where you could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new*”<sup>43</sup>. Dorian uses both drugs and new sins in order to forget his past actions. However, this technique is a vicious circle because the more he sins, the more he will have to forget.

After visiting such hideous places, Dorian always comes back to admire the portrait Basil Hallward has painted of him. When he is in front of it he looks at it “*with that pride of individualism that is half the fascination of sin, and smiling with secret pleasure at the misshapen shadow that had to bear the burden that should have been his own*”<sup>44</sup>. This fascination and pride overshadows his conscience every time. Instead of increasing his inner voice, the hours he spends sitting in front the dreadful picture makes him feel glorious, as it allows him to escape from the burden he should be carrying. In those moments, guilt is nothing to Dorian, and he just wants to keep his secret out of the sight of everyone around him.

It is important to highlight that not everyone in Victorian society suffered the same treatment. When a person committed an immoral act or was suspected of having done so, society's reaction was not the same if this person belonged to the lower as it was if he or she belonged to the upper classes. As the narrator explains to us “*society, civilized society, at least, is never very ready to believe anything to the detriment of those who are both rich and fascinating*”<sup>45</sup>. Dorian's wealth, name, and position are an element of security. In this case, manners seem to be more important than morals for the society described in Wilde's novel. The author presents a hypocritical society in which people who possess wealth and status are removed from social and moral scandal.

Dorian “*used to look with wonder at the black confessionals, and long to sit in the dim shadow of one of them and listen to men and women whispering through the worn grating the true story of their lives*”<sup>46</sup>. He is probably attracted by the idea of sharing his secret with a person in

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43 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

44 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

45 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

46 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*



whom he can trust. Nevertheless, Dorian is too afraid of being discovered and judged. Perhaps, he was not only afraid to be discovered but also afraid of the scandal his secret might cause. The only one with whom he shares his secret is Basil, one of his closest friends.

After Basil's assassination, his conscience seems to awaken more often than before. He loved Basil and he admired him as one of his mentors. Perhaps, Basil does not react the way Dorian expected when he sees the portrayal; however, that is not the reason Dorian kills the painter. When Dorian looks at the canvas, an uncontrollable feeling of hatred comes over him, as if the portrait itself is urging him to kill Basil. The picture seems to take control over Dorian's common sense. After this evil act against his friend, *"his soul, certainly, was sick to death. Was it true that the senses could cure it? Innocent blood had been spilled. What could atone for that? Ah! for that there was no atonement"*<sup>47</sup>. He now thinks that there is no hope for his dreadful soul. The (apparently) young man loses his faith in redemption, and he knows there is no way to justify the taking of an innocent life.

At the end of the novel, Dorian tries to redeem his sins and to purify his soul by stabbing the portrait. Probably, he also thinks that he is bringing some security into his life, because by killing the portrait he would eliminate all evidence that could be used to discover him.

Basil Hallward, Dorian's friend, is, from my point of view, a moral character. He is a good friend and he tries to help his friends in any way he can. At the very beginning of the novel, before he introduces Lord Henry to Dorian, Basil warns the nobleman about the influence he might have over the young man: *"don't spoil him. Don't try to influence him. Your influence would be bad"*<sup>48</sup>. After having introduced them, Basil advises Dorian not to pay any attention to what the nobleman says because he usually has a bad influence on his friends. Since the very beginning, Basil does not want Dorian to meet Lord Henry, but fate operates against his will, and they meet.

Basil's moral standards are high. He is always natural and honest with his closest companions. After Sybil's death he goes to console Dorian; nevertheless, when he finds him, Dorian

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47 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

48 *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

is not sad at all and he seems indifferent to the news. Basil tries to understand his behaviour but he sees that Dorian has completely changed. Basil tells him that he used to be natural and affectionate, “*you were the most unspoiled creature in the whole world. Now, I don't know what has come over you. You talk as if you had no heart, no pity in you. It is all Harry's influence*”<sup>49</sup>. Basil knows that most of Dorian's changes have come out because of Lord Wotton's manipulations.

One night, Basil goes to see Dorian to his house. Dorian does not want to listen; however, the painter insists upon it. Basil says he has something really important to tell him, for his own sake: “*I think it right that you should know that the most dreadful things are being said against you in London*”<sup>50</sup>. Rumours and scandal about Dorian's behaviour are all around the city. Everybody suspects him of committing terrible crimes. Many gentlemen leave a room when Dorian enters, and the rumours, far from stopping, are increasing. Basil tries to make him understand that every gentleman has to keep his name clean and unspoiled. He warns him that the most vile and degraded things are being said about him around the city. He is objective and realist when he says: “*of course you have your position, and your wealth, and all that kind of thing. But position and wealth are not everything*”<sup>51</sup>. As previously stated, Dorian's wealth, name, and position are an element of security; nonetheless, the authorities will not ignore his acts forever, in spite of his position in society. Basil is just trying to help his friend, he is being honest and forthright with him. He tries to inculcate good morals in Dorian, but Dorian will not listen.

Finally, Basil assures Dorian that he does not believe these rumours at all, because every time he sees Dorian, he seems to be obviously innocent. Behaving perhaps more as a father than a friend, Basil says to Dorian: “*I want you to lead such a life as will make the world respect you. I want you to have a clean name and a fair record*”<sup>52</sup>. Dorian challenges him to see his soul and he shows him the portrait. When the painter sees it, he asks Dorian to pray, to try redeem his sins and crimes. The apparently young man is not worried, he just says that it is too late for him to be saved. As a man who believes in both morals and God, Basil comments to his friend that “*it is never too late, Dorian. Let us kneel down and try*”<sup>53</sup>. Basil's intention is to help Dorian; however, his good intentions and his good moral sense are of no use.

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49 Wilde, Oscar. *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

50 Wilde, Oscar. *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

51 Wilde, Oscar. *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

52 Wilde, Oscar. *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

53 Wilde, Oscar. *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

After this analysis of the morals of the main characters of the novel -Lord Wotton, Dorian Gray, and Basil Hallward- I want to make one last analysis about Mr Vane. This is a character who, even if he is not one of the most important, has a moral standard, and that is why I consider it important to include him.

Mr Vane does not appear a lot in the novel; however, when he does appear, it can easily be seen that his main objective is to protect the honour of his sister, Sybil. From its very beginning, Mr Vane does not like the romance that Sybil maintains with Dorian. The ethical code of this character is far stricter than that of the rest of the characters. He has a solid criteria insofar as what is right and wrong, what is good and what is evil. He does not like Dorian because he thinks that he will take advantage of his sister. Mr Vane's aim is always to protect her and keep her unspoiled: "*for as sure as there is a God in heaven, if he ever does you any wrong, I shall kill him*"<sup>54</sup>. For his sister's sake, he stands ready to kill him, even if it means that he will be sent to prison. If Dorian hurts Sybil, he thinks that taking revenge is the right thing to do, the one thing that would give her honour back to her. This act is an example of the meaning of family as one of the great pillars of Victorian values.

To conclude, I would like to remark on the fact that each character shows a different moral pattern. In this section, we have examined a range of moral standards in the characters in this novel, from characters with high moral standards to characters with no morals at all. These characters do not share the same idea of right and wrong; therefore, they each act differently, according to their own personal, and ethical code.

### **3.5 Relation of the author with the characters**

In this section, I will explore the relationship that Oscar Wilde has with the three main characters in the novel: Dorian Gray, Lord Henry Wotton, and Basil Hallward. Through this following paragraphs, I will analyse the connections I have found between those characters and the actual life of Oscar Wilde.

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54 Wilde, Oscar. *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

Dorian is the character who evolves the most in the novel. At the beginning he is an innocent and unspoiled young man who is entering into the social world. Dorian fills his ego with Lord Henry's idea of hedonism, becoming a completely different person. He becomes narcissistic, loving himself over everyone else. His crimes and sins drive him almost mad, until he decides to kill his life-soul, the portrait. In doing that, he kills himself, and that is how the story of the unspoiled creature ends. Nevertheless, it is at first difficult to imagine what the connection with the author could be. In Wilde's words: “*Dorian is what I would like to be- in other ages perhaps*”<sup>55</sup>. Perhaps he would like to be like the main character of his novel because Dorian takes risks doing everything that Wilde would like to do. He enjoys every hidden pleasure that the city of London has to offer. Oscar Wilde would also like to be like Dorian because Dorian walks with the head on his shoulders and he does not care what people say about him.

Another connection that seems evident to me is the fact that Wilde was homosexual, and he could not publically demonstrate the feelings he had towards other men. Victorian society was far stricter and repressive towards homosexuality than is contemporary society today. In the novel, it is also suggested that Dorian is homosexual, or at least bisexual. It is not only the fact of always being surrounded by men, it is also the way the protagonist talks and expresses himself to them. In the uncensored version of the novel, even though Wilde does not describe any actual practise of homosexuality, these conclusions can be seen more clearly. It also seems that Dorian is not judged for that, possibly because he has wealth and a high position in society. Probably that is what Wilde would like, not to be judged for his feelings and emotions, and thus to be allowed to stop hiding them. It is because of Victorian society that he would like to be Dorian, but in another age. In our society, this would not be a problem, and he would be able to show his homosexuality and to have a normal life without the fear of being sent to prison.

Lord Henry Wotton is also a character whose life bears comparison with that of Wilde's. He is a cynical nobleman who profoundly influences Dorian. He probably never means to corrupt him; for him his sermons seem to be just words. Lord Henry always likes to pay especial attention to those who have an interesting life, and the nobleman thinks that Dorian does. The nobleman preaches his theories about life, youth, old age, and pleasure. Most of what he says is not ethically correct according to Victorian moral standards; nonetheless, the characters in the novel see him as a good man with a fascinating personality. The nobleman is one of the characters who shares

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55 *Selected letters of Oscar Wilde*. Edited by Rupert Hart-Davis. Oxford, 1979

profound connections with the author. In Wilde's words: "*Lord Henry is what the world thinks me*"<sup>56</sup>. Therefore, according to the author himself, the way people see him is the way Lord Henry is.

From my point of view, Lord Henry is not courageous enough to live according to what he preaches. It is possible that he does not even believe in what he is saying, and he is just saying it in order to charm his public. This character, as well as the author, criticises the society in which he lives. (Wilde's criticism reached a high point with his work *The Importance of Being Earnest*.) To conclude, Wilde possibly thought that society saw him as a preacher who did not follow his own advice, even though he always had a fascinating and charming personality. It is possible that the author wondered if London society saw him, as well as we see Lord Henry, as a cynical critic.

Basil Hallward is the third and last character with whom I compare the author. He seems a good and honest person who does not see evil in people. He is a brilliant artist who was partially misunderstood by society. He is the painter who provides Dorian with the powerful and magical portrait that Dorian would later use to bear the burden of his sins, crimes, and age. He is an artist, and as such he is in search of beauty in order to capture it in his works. Just as Wilde says that he put much of himself into his only novel, Basil also says that he has put much of himself in the picture he painted of Dorian. This is the first connection the character and the author have with each other, that using their art to put a part of themselves into what they produce. In the words of Lord Henry: "*Basil Hallward is what I think I am*"<sup>57</sup>. Therefore, he sees Basil as a mirror of himself.

In the novel, it is also suggested that Basil is homosexual, just as it was suggested about the author. This is more obvious in the uncensored version of the novel, where it is implicitly shown that Basil is in love with Dorian. The painter seems to hide, as Wilde did, his feelings for other men.

To conclude, from my point of view, Oscar Wilde was a mixture of the three characters. Even though Wilde invented the characters, he put a part of himself in each of them. Dorian is what the author would like to be, as Dorian does not care what others say about him, and he lives trying every pleasure and sin in life. The person of Lord Henry is how society sees the author, as a critic of society and a man with an extremely interesting personality. And, finally, Basil is the way the author sees himself, perhaps as a misunderstood artist with good intentions and morals.

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56 *Selected letters of Oscar Wilde*. Edited by Rupert Hart-Davis. Oxford, 1979

57 *Selected letters of Oscar Wilde*. Edited by Rupert Hart-Davis. Oxford, 1979

### 3.6 Comparison with the movies

Since Oscar Wilde's novel was published, there have been many adaptations of it in movies and musicals, and on the stage. The story of Dorian Gray has attracted the attention of many producers as it explores with delicacy the relation of art to morality, the influence of hedonism, and the inexorable spiritual questions that spring from these. In this section I compare the novel with two films that are based upon it. The first film I analyse is titled the same as the novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and it was released in 1945. This movie was directed by Albert Lewin and starred George Sanders, Hund Hatfield, and Donna Reed, among others. It won an Oscar to the Best Cinematography, a Golden Globe for the Best Supporting Actress, and a Hugo for the Best Dramatic Presentation. The second film I compare is called *Dorian Gray*, and it came out in 2009. It was directed by Oliver Parker and starred Ben Barnes, John Hallingworth, and Colin Firth among others. The film was nominated for the best film in the Catalonian International Film Festival.

Comparing the two films, the one released in 1945 is the more accurate one in terms of fidelity to the novel. In the film much of the dialogue is exactly the same as in the novel, so much so that at times during the movie one has the feeling of listening to a reader.

Nevertheless, there are some points of contrasts that may shock the spectators who have read the book before seeing the film. The Basil Hallward of this movie has a niece named Gladys. The romance between Gladys and Dorian is a completely new angle and strategy, probably to add more emotion to the plot and to attract more spectators. There are other small changes in the movie. In this production Sybil Vane is not an actress, but rather, a singer. Her term of endearment for Dorian is also different: in the novel she calls him "Prince Charming" while in the film she calls him "Sir Tristan". When Dorian breaks off his romance, he does it in person in the novel, but in this movie he does it by means of a letter. The last change is at the end of the plot. In the novel Dorian's servants are the ones who find him dead on the floor while in the film Gladys, Lord Henry and other character find him lying there.

The second film I analyse here is titled *Dorian Gray* and it was released in 2009. This movie has fewer similarities with the novel than the previous film herein analysed. However, from the very

beginning of the film, a cynical and manipulative Lord Wotton can still be seen, as well as an impressionable and naive Dorian. Some dialogue from the novel appears in the film, but in a smaller quantity. An example of that would be: “*be always searching for new sensations*”<sup>58</sup>.

In this film there are many more points of contrasts than in the previous one. The beginning of the film is already different from the beginning of the novel. The movie starts with a flashback of Basil Hallward's assassination instead of having the chronological flow of the novel. Dorian stabs the painter in both the film and the book, but with a different instrument. In the novel he uses a knife while in the movie he uses a broken piece of mirror. Another peculiarity is that in the novel, after Basil's death, the young boy forces his old friend Alan Campbell to dispose of the dead body. In the 2009 film, it is Dorian himself who is gets rid of the corpse.

The way Dorian meets Lord Wotton is also changed. In the novel Dorian meets Lord Wotton in Basil's studio, however, in this movie Dorian has this encounter at a party where he attends with Basil. The yellow book that greatly influences the young Mr Gray does not appear in the film. This is a great change because this book, recommended by Lord Wotton, enormously changes Dorian's point of view about life, pleasure, and sin. The protagonist of this cinematographic piece of work sees Sybil for the first time in the club before talking to her in the theatre. In the book, the first time Dorian sees Sybil is in the theatre and not somewhere else. Sybil commits suicide in both novel and film, but in different ways. In the novel, Sybil kills herself by taking something and dying in the theatre; while in the film, Sybil commits suicide by drowning herself in the river. There are other two peculiarities of Sybil Vane's death. The first is that in this movie she is pregnant by Dorian, and in the book she is not. The other one is that when she dies, in the film her brother goes to Dorian's house to blame him; while in the novel, this man does not see Dorian until many years after Sybil's.

There are many more changes made in the adaptation for the cinema. In the book, Dorian announces only to Mr Wotton and Basil Hallward that he is going to marry Sybil; in the film, Dorian gives the good news to his group of friends. In both cases, the young boy invites them to go to the theatre and meet her. Nevertheless, in the novel, both Lord Wotton and Basil go to the theatre; in the movie it is just the cynical nobleman who accompanies Dorian. The reason why Dorian breaks up with Sybil also changes. In the film Dorian breaks up with her because she blames Lord Wotton for having changed him. However, in Wilde's work the reason of the breakup is because she acted really badly onstage and she makes the young boy feel ashamed of her. Sybil's brother does

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58 Wilde, Oscar. *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*

not die in the same way in the movie and in the novel. In the book he dies of a shot while in the film he dies because a train runs over him.

Another big variation, which the film's producer thought would attract more spectators, is that Lord Wotton has a daughter who is having a romance with Dorian. The girl is named Emily and she grows up while Dorian is in his world-wide trips. In Oscar Wilde's novel Dorian leaves for one season to afterwards come back and then go away again. Nonetheless, in 2009's film Dorian seems to have been away for more than 10 years without coming back, and everyone is shocked when they see him again on his 38<sup>th</sup> birthday and he has not aged at all. Emily is born at the same time that Dorian leaves on this journey. After he is back, Emily is a young woman who falls terribly in love with Dorian and defends him even when her father removes him from their family life. However, in the book, Lord Henry never tries to distance Dorian. The nobleman does not even believe Dorian when he suggests that he may be the responsible of Basil's assassination. After Dorian finds out how he would react, Lord Henry answers: *"I would say, my dear fellow, that you were posing for a character that doesn't suit you. All crime is vulgar, just as vulgarity is crime. It is not in you, Dorian, to commit a murder"*<sup>59</sup>.

The last change I would like to comment on is the end of both the novel and the film. In the novel, Dorian is alone when he stabs the portrait and the ones who find him are his servants. Nevertheless, in the movie, Lord Henry suspects that Dorian is hiding something and he goes to the place where the picture is. Dorian meets him there and they have an argument that ends with the nobleman setting the room on fire. Dorian is locked inside with the portrait and he is burned to death. Before Dorian dies, Emily tries to save him; but her father stops this attempt.

In conclusion, many differences between the movies and the book are reflections of the morality of their times. One difference is that in the 2009 movie Dorian is often in feminine company. In the novel, he spends a lot more time with men than with women. The few male characters in the novel do not interact greatly with Dorian, with Sybil being the exception. In the film, Dorian's sexual affair with Basil is obvious. In the novel, such a relationship is not explicitly shown, it is only suggested that Basil is in love with Dorian, and the author does not let it be known whether Dorian returns this affection or not. While in the 1945 movie, Dorian's homosexuality or possible bisexuality is not explicit; in the 2009 version it is more than apparent. In the 1945 movie, neither homosexuality nor bisexuality was acceptable as a theme for cinematic endeavours. Dorian's

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59 Wilde, Oscar. *The picture of Dorian Gray. Authoritative texts, backgrounds, reviews and reactions, criticism*



licentiousness and sexuality are ever more evident as a central part of the plot, reflecting the changing morality of society.

## 4. Conclusion

After analysing the six main sections that compose the project, I believe I can say that the selection of the points treated in it is appropriate. Other points that may be less important than those analysed could not be included because of space in this undertaking. When one is exploring a novel in depth, there are many themes one would like to treat; however, an analysis of all of them would be impossible in a work of this size.

The comparison between Erzebet Bathory and Dorian Gray brought light upon the main theme there treated: evil linked with the search of eternal youth. Even though they had some points in common, the points in contrast are considerably higher if we rely on the legend of the Bloody Countess. One of the greatest points of contrast is that one existed while the other is a fictional character. The relation they each have with evil is to some extent different. The Countess was a bloodthirsty murderer, who was helped by her accomplices, and finally discovered and confined to her castle. Nonetheless, even if Dorian was also a murderer, his crimes are not as explicitly shown as in Erzebet's story. He had no actual accomplices who helped him to commit crimes. Finally, he was not discovered; instead, he destroyed his source of youthfulness and in doing so he destroyed himself. To sum up, both Erzbet and Dorian, when they found the source of youth, and beauty, they found a source of evil as well.

Afterwards, I have made a comparison between *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The key point of this section is to discover the way the personality of each protagonist evolves during the course of his story. These stories evoke a natural pessimism towards innate human goodness, and demonstrate that humankind can be easily corrupted by evil at any time during a lifetime: Dorian was a young boy and Dr Jekyll was already in the autumn of his life. One of the most significant features delved in this section is the division of the self, which always has and always will create interest among writers and philosophers.

I also presented the moral context of the Victorian period, to afterwards explore the morals that one can find in the novel. Every character in it has a different moral pattern, as they do not share the same idea of right and wrong. We can find a character with a high standard of morals, such as Basil, and a character with almost no more at all, such as Dorian. He seems to have a good

ethical code at the beginning of the story; nevertheless, as the character evolves, the evil side of Dorian comes out.

The connections that the author may have with his characters are also here explored. It is suggested by the author in one of his letters that he was a mixture of the three main characters of this, his only novel. Oscar Wilde confesses that Dorian is what he would like to be, but in another time, while Lord Henry is how society sees him, and Basil is how he considers himself. As many other authors such as Tim O'Brien, Oscar Wilde incorporated a part of himself in his novel.

Finally, I have compared two of the films that were inspired by Oscar Wilde's novel with the actual volume. Since it was published, there have existed many adaptations of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* into films, musicals and the on the stage. Producers obviously previewed a great success for the films based upon Wilde's story, as there are so many of them. Dorian Gray's story explores with great delicacy the relation of art to morality, the influence of hedonism, and the inexorable spiritual questions inherent in these.

As a general conclusion, I would like to say that everything I have learned during the past four years has helped me in some way during the mounting of this project. The education provided during my degree was used to my advantage.

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