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DORIAN GRAY THROUGH THE READER'S GLASS

DORIAN GRAY A TRAVÉS DEL ESPEJO DEL LECTOR

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## **Abstract:**

Oscar Wilde's sole novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, was first published in 1890 in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* and deemed by many of his peers as an immoral work; despite the censorship imposed by the magazine's editor without consulting Wilde on the matter. Wilde however defended his work and stance thoroughly against his critics. This is particularly evident in the very preface of the book; but what is it that could have possibly been so impactful for the readers? What is it that Wilde is trying to defend so unrelentingly? It is the aim of this work to comprehend the relation in between text and audience, which seemed to spark so much debate; by analysing its contents, characters and its own gothic elements, and the effect they can possibly cause in its audience. This will be studied with the aid of "Reader Response Theory" and it shall help determine whether Wilde may have met his objective or if, as many believed, failed miserably by getting to carried away with his aesthetic ideal.

The analysis will be based on the approach of authors such as Wolfgang Iser and, to a lesser extent, Stanley Fish. By following their, and Wilde's, recommendations it can truly be proven how the text is specifically constructed in a way that, without argument, does indeed amuse and inspire both horror and beauty to the audience. But most importantly by using a purposeful ambiguity in significant instances, the text does force the reader to create a judgement of their own. Therefore, showing a great capacity to design a very personal narrative experience and to reveal more about the individual than they may have immediately thought of; and yet, the text is capable at the same time of showing the author's true intentions with well-placed hints for the more receptive readers.

## **Introduction:**

It is mentioned by Oscar Wilde at the very preface of the book how one views art, or in this case the book in question, will reveal more about the reader than the author themselves. This sparked then a curious thought about how exactly the reader is to interpret what Wilde is presenting without taking into account his work and presence, although a lot of his own philosophy especially regarding the arts is within it. However, for Mr. Wilde's and Stanley Fish's agreement or disapproval, the way certain texts are presented are capable to greatly influence the reader's perception of it, other than merely their own perspective and background. That is why this paper intends to comment through the "Reader Response Theory" branch of literary criticism on how a reader is, more specifically constructed after Iser's "implied reader", to interact with the way it is presented. It is important to mention that, despite mentioning Iser and Fish's concepts from time to time, it is not intended to create a debate whether these are the most appropriate forms to approach the reader and text interaction or not, their theories are merely additional tools to venture in trying to explain this relationship and nothing more. There will be special attention shown to the depiction of specific characters and how their perspective may affect the narrative experience. Along with the study of the portrayal of specific scenes and the importance of the order with which they are introduced to the reader, as it happens with the appearances of "minor" characters (those that were deemed as rather significant) as well. All in order to create the very much needed horrifying realisation of the protagonist's descent to amorality; and an empathy and emotional attachment (or as it shall be seen in specific cases a detachment) within the reader that may cloud the audience's perspective as well if they are not careful.

- **What is “Reader Response Theory”?**

Reader Response Theory is a form of literary criticism that focuses on the reader’s interaction with the text in contrast to other formalist schools, the latter generally tend to consider the author’s intentions of bigger importance (rather than the reader’s experience with the text) and thus they commonly have a very strongly set concept that there is a singular objective meaning to the text above any others; this meaning being the one they believe the author had originally wanted to display.

Appearing around the 1960’s and the 70’s especially in the U.S. and Germany with authors such as Norman Holland, Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser (these last two being of particular importance for the work at hand) this branch of literary criticism introduces the reader as an active member in the realization of the text into reality, giving it an unique and equally valid meaning to the author’s intentions. Of course, if this is the case to take into consideration, there is the existence of a particular problem. If every single reader’s perspective is to be validated, and with them the own experiences and beliefs that they will ultimately end up reflecting into the text (since no human being is entirely and absolutely capable of being objective); there must be, then, an infinite amount of meanings and interpretations of one same work or even sentence.

This has certainly been a long discussion amongst experts, many of them attempting to formulate a “perfect” reader to reflect from. Nonetheless, as was and will be mentioned, it is not the intention of this paper to form some sort of discussion on which subject will allow the “perfect reading experience”. Rather, the model to follow will be specified in later paragraphs and from then it will be investigated the particular relationship that is formed between Wilde’s work and the “individual”.

- **Wilde, Aesthetics and the Reader:**

Although it is by no means the main focus of the essay, it is somewhat important to understand Wilde's stance when it came to art, since there is a certain similarity in how he wanted the story to be interpreted and Iser's own perception on how a text must be analysed; both the author and the scholar would prefer the reader to set aside personal moral codes, psyche, views and background in order to truly glance at what the meaning within the paragraphs truly is or might be.

Wilde greatly defended the Aesthetic movement, this is, the idea of "art for art's sake" with no attachments to ethics in the slightest in an attempt to "recover" the abstract idea of beauty and art that according to Wilde was greatly lost; especially due to the intervention of naturalist literature, which he seemed to have a general distaste for, among others. This concept, perhaps, may not be as terribly shocking nowadays but we must consider its subversiveness at the time, the general stance on art (especially literature) during the Victorian period was based on the old maxim "docere et delectare"; to both teach and entertain the audience, although there is no doubt that there was a especial emphasis on the "docere" aspect of it. Precisely, one of the many critiques against the book was in fact that there was no moral to the story, which is something that could easily be argued against. Nonetheless, Wilde's and the aesthetics' concept of art was rather ground-breaking and frequently belittled; Wilde found no reason to shy away from certain topics which often resulted in his wounding the delicate Victorian sensitivities. A particular dispute with the editor of *St. James Gazette* in June of 1890 comes to mind; the editor sharply replies:

We simply say that every critic has the right to point out that a work of art or literature is dull and incompetent in its treatment – as "The Picture of Dorian Gray" is; and that its dullness and incompetence are not redeemed **because it**

**constantly hints, not *obscurely*, at disgusting sins and abominable crimes**

– as “The Picture of Dorian Gray” does (DG 340).

The *Picture of Dorian Gray* is perhaps one of Wilde’s most clear statements regarding the matter; his position is already explicit in the very preface of the book edition where a bit of a similarity in his and Iser’s statements regarding the task of the critics can be found as well. Wilde (1891) lyrically expresses it as “The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things” (p. 3) whilst Iser (1978) more straightforwardly rewrites it as “the critic must then seek to explain why his own consistency-building is appropriate to the work in question.” (p. 17). Both do argue against the use of subjectivity when it comes to creating a proper assessment as “there will be suspicion that he is using aesthetic norms in order to **justify** his own private acts of comprehension.” (Iser 17).

Although Iser’s worries lie within the interpretation of what the text is saying more than clearing the image of the artist, which is what Wilde leans more towards in this case, there is no denying that after all both wish for their readers to remain objective and self-aware. Hopefully by following these directions it will be possible to indicate whether Wilde or not was successful in portraying his original intentions to the reader.

## Analysis of the Novel:

- **Context & Procedure:**

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is Oscar Wilde's sole novel which was first introduced as a short story for the *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*; whose editor greatly censored Wilde's work without his prior knowledge; despite these efforts, the story was still deemed as wildly immoral by many critics which caused Wilde to advocate for his work vehemently against these claims.

This defence of his work is mostly visible in the preface of the book edition (which was published around a year later and this is the version that all these quotes necessary for the paper will be taken from as well), where the author warns the reader before entering the very story about the importance of not applying one's own morals to art: "There is not such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all" (DG 3) Neither reader nor artist should try to implement their own ideals in art. Nonetheless, Wilde also adds that upon a reader insisting in the implementation of their moral code to the work in question, there will be a bigger revelation of who they are as a person and their true nature than about the artist themselves. But, at the same time, it is rather undeniable that the way certain bits of information are presented can greatly influence how one is to perceive it; as Iser (1978) states:

"every discernible structure in fiction has this two-sidedness: it's verbal and affective. The verbal aspect guides the reaction and prevents it from being arbitrary; the affective aspect is the fulfilment of which has been prestructured by language of the text" (p. 21)

Therefore this "two-way process" he discloses between reader and text cannot be seen as "completely arbitrary" (p. 24). This becomes particularly curious when, rather ironically



one might add, the author has portrayed in this case so much of his own philosophy into the text.

Regardless, it is the intention of this paper then to analyse how the relationship between the text and elements appearing (such as characters and ambiance) in *Dorian Gray* and its reader is constructed and developed, along with the emotional and psychological reactions to these elements; and finally, to determine whether Wilde's objective was met in regards to what he may have wanted to transmit as well. A small side note to avoid possible confusions before entering the proper explanation about the model of reader used in this analysis is that, considering that all quotations but the exchange between the *St. James Magazine* Editor and Wilde (which was taken from the Norton edition) were taken from the Alma Classics edition of the book the quotations will appear with the shortened form DG, for simplicity's sake,

Perhaps the best model to design this particular reader after is Iser's "implied reader", created to overcome the restrictions found in other archetypes (such as Fish's "informed reader") like the influence of the historical context or predetermined beliefs, character and level of knowledge, since after all an upper-class reader from the late Victorian period (Wilde's most likely reader when taking into account the historical context) will not perceive it in its entirety the same way a more modern counterpart would and vice-versa. For example, the subtler hints of the homoerotic context and the implications of it may fly over a modern reader's head since it's something more normalised nowadays in comparison to Wilde's own period. And subsequently, the possible contrast between the two would most likely end up in a long-winded and frivolous discussion about the changes of perspective in human society and the psyche rather than the interaction between reader and text.

As Iser himself states in *The Act of Reading* (1978) “If aesthetics and everyday experiences are bracketed together, the literary text must lose its aesthetic quality and merely be regarded as material to demonstrate the functioning or nonfunctioning of our psychological dispositions” (p. 40). Nonetheless in this particular paper, there will also be allusions to the emotional and psychological processes that the reader can go through as well, since after all, when it comes to dealing with gothic literature there is the clear intention to create an unsettling feeling within its audience; it is both a driving device for the story and a tool to further constitute a relationship with the reader by appealing to their emotions.

Whilst one can agree that indeed the verbal aspect that Iser describes does guide the reader when it comes what is needed to be expressed, so as there are undeniable facts that occur within the story in order to avoid extravagant inventions coming from the reader that could change the text entirely, there is also the undeniable fact that there is an emotional and psychological reaction to it too (often wanted by the author themselves) which affects the narrative experience of the story. In addition, Iser (1978) does mention in his book that:

“As an *author’s* perspective view of the world, the text cannot clearly claim to represent the *reader’s* view. The gap cannot be bridged by a “willing suspension of disbelief,” because – as has already been pointed out – the reader’s task is not simply to accept but to assemble for himself that which is to be accepted” (p. 97)

But considering the fact that one of this paper’s objectives is to determine whether Wilde was successful in his endeavour to portray what he wanted in it or not, there will also be a certain “flexibility” when it comes to this concept of his in this essay. Therefore, although the model of reader in question will not be aware of what the author wanted to

convey, one as a critical figure who **is** indeed aware will attempt to evaluate whether these concepts were depicted clearly in the eyes of this particular reader. Hence, despite taking a lot of inspiration from Iser's and Fish's ideas, there will be a disparity in certain concepts for the sake of what is personally considered a deeper intake on the novel.

In addition to the importance of specifying the kind of reader that will be used for this endeavour, the structure of the work will be separated into two main parts that were deemed somewhat vital for a full view of the perception of the whole novel. The sections will be focused on: the importance of the portrayal and perception of certain characters, how exactly is the suspense of the gothic elements constructed and; within that suspense, the emotional impact behind certain events in the story that allow to see the true horror behind Dorian's actions.

Lastly, an important side note to take into account is that it is not the aim of this paper to raise a debate when it comes to Reader Response Theory. Especially considering Iser's and Fish's at times conflicting theories; for instance Iser *precisely* critiques how Fish's "informed reader" needs to have a prior knowledge of language structures and literature, and the dominance in his model of the outer context surrounding the reader over the portrayal of the proper text. It will be attempted to the best of one's abilities to find a certain common ground between both of them, perhaps not by focusing so much on the context surrounding the reader but the one that can be visible within the fiction of the own story for example.

After it has been, at least hopefully, successfully explained the way this analysis is to proceed, it is finally possible to begin with the analysis in question starting with the presentation of the characters free of any doubts regarding the practice.

- **Narrative Voices. Perspective & Awareness:**

It is rather evident for any who has read, or is currently reading the book, that three characters seem to particularly stand out more than any others presented or mentioned. These are no other than Basil Hallward, Lord Henry Wotton and lastly, the main character, the young Dorian Gray. Wilde himself also remarks the importance of these characters as three aspects of himself, or rather, as the different facets associated with him in a letter to Ralph Payne:

“I am so glad you like that strange many colored book of mine: it contains much of me in it. Basil Hallward is what I think I am; Lord Henry, what the world thinks of me; Dorian what I would like to be – in other ages perhaps.”

(Laity 85)

Therefore, the way that Wilde wishes to portray them is incredibly vital. How is the reader to see the reflection of him that is Basil? How did the world think of him? And what does he exactly mean that in some other time he would have wanted to be like Dorian? Whose fatal end should, frankly, not incite anybody to be like him. And also, how important is the interrelationship between them? Undeniably that is another factor that also influences the way they perceive one another. But most importantly, what does the knowledge of all those different perspectives say to the reader as well?

It must be noted, before entering the analysis of the depiction and perspective of the characters in the novel, that even though points of view are of such great importance, the story is fully told by an extradiegetic narrator; capable of entering the characters' thought processes; and therefore, there is no reason to believe that this could be the case of an unreliable narrator that the audience cannot really trust. Even though there are occasional shifts of the point of view in the narrative (at times following Basil, Henry or Sibyl but

mostly Dorian) it is not these characters directly stating their vision; which could indeed make the text more obscure and difficult to interpret. This narrator merely reflects what the characters see and believe faithfully, and thus it is a reliable source to draw proof from when analysing if a character's perspective

Basil and Lord Henry are the first two characters that the reader is introduced to curiously, and it is rather significant for two main reasons; one being the fact that (as it will later be developed) both are opposing "forces", and another being neither of them are the main character whose name appears in the title; the first time the reader is taught about Dorian's existence is through both of them.

Indeed, Dorian is not to appear, at least physically, until later pages. The first thing that is displayed to the reader is a pleasant summer day in which Lord Henry appears to be relaxing as he smokes his opium whilst Basil is introduced *right after* his portrait "of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty" (DG 5). This already betrays a certain disposition in both characters. Lord Henry appears as more laid back and carefree with his languid body language and, on the opposite spectrum, Basil appears engrossed and passionate, especially when it comes to his task. When their dialogue begins the position of both is already well established and a constant through the whole novel.

### **Basil. Conscience of the Novel:**

On the one hand, when it comes to Basil it is fairly easy for the reader to form an emotional connection to his gentler and firmer disposition, especially in the way he regards Dorian; the deep devotion he has for the young man is truly shown in the beauty of Dorian's portrait. It is not just that Dorian is a beautiful subject to paint (as he admits later on) but also that he paints him with affection, which the reader can perceive through more ways than just the first description of the portrait, Basil's words and actions play a

role in this vision too. But Basil is more than a lovestruck painter; or as Dorian regards him, the one responsible of creating the portrait that awakens his own vanity, he is in many cases the very conscience and common sense in the novel, especially regarding his relationship with Henry and Dorian.

Although his appearances are fewer and somewhat brief after the first few chapters, he really echoes as the overall conscience in the novel; he, unlike Dorian, and an easily-swayed reader can “be friends” (if that is what they can be called) with Henry because he will not allow himself to be influenced by his ideals when he has his own stance already clear; as is shown in the lines “I did not want any external influence in my life. You know yourself, Harry, how independent I am by nature. I have always been my own master, (...)“ (DG 10). In return, he does not quite try to influence others overall or at least on a negative way; the only moment in which he is trying to influence somebody is when he attempts to convince Dorian to change his ways and forget his hedonism:

I do want to preach to you. I want you to lead a life as will make the world respect you. I want you to have a clean name and a fair record. I want you to get rid of the dreadful people you associate yourself with” (DG 138)

Although Basil may seem in that scene particularly demanding, and for some readers even meddlesome, the fact that he is being presented as a genuinely concerned friend who loves Dorian deeply and as the common-sense paradigm in the story (Dorian himself does state that he only gives him good advice), does make Basil more forgivable in that aspect, because it does not come from a desire for manipulation and personal amusement like Henry; Basil is straightforward and sincere in his intentions with Dorian.

Basil is in that regard what the reader should aspire to be and do to truly understand the novel (especially if one is to consider that he is for a fact the writer’s own voice and

reflection, particularly in his position towards art, but that is not something that our model for the reader figure is aware of). Indeed, one of his most important traits regarding the audience is that although he believes Henry to be enjoyable company, ultimately that allure does not work on him and what he believes in.

But he is by no means to be seen as a perfect character; as that would have made him flat and a difficult figure to relate to for the reader; and if it were to be that way there would be a possibility of breaking that positive association that is to be desired in the novel. He himself assumes the responsibility of adoring Dorian's looks excessively: "I worshipped you too much. I am punished for it. You worshipped yourself too much. We are both punished." (DG 143). His excess has damned them both, and yet he is able to recognise his shortcomings and he believes in Dorian still, unlike Dorian who is quick to shift the blame to calm his own conscience.

His tragic murder at the hands of Dorian, which will be dealt with in later paragraphs, is one of the catalysts that really marks Dorian's deterioration. A character with an overall positive association murdered by the *hands* of the object of his affections not only makes the death more tragic for the audience, but the horrors done by no other than the protagonist that they are to follow through the remaining pages become even more tangible than through the own portrait. Not only has Dorian lost someone who loved him genuinely and a gentle guidance, but the reader too must singlehandedly rely on themselves to be firmer in their beliefs than ever after Basil's perspective is taken away.

### **Lord Henry; or The Devil's Speech:**

Henry, Basil's essentially polar opposite figure, on the other hand is very much the image of a decadent "gentleman" his smoking habits, his body language and voice are made to

be somehow enticing, to have an unknown sort of charm. Dorian for example, who is truly enthralled, describes him in the following manner:

His romantic olive-coloured face and worn expression interested him. There was something in his low, languid voice that was absolutely fascinating. His cool white flower-like hands even had a curious charm. They moved as, he spoke, like music, and seemed to have a language of their own. (p. 22)

He is not beautiful the way Dorian undeniably is, Henry's allure relies more on more abstract matters than the physical, like his oratory capabilities. There is no room for doubt that he is a great conversationalist as well, as a matter of fact, one could find certain similarities between his manner of speech and its objective and The Devil's in S. Fish's analysis of *Paradise Lost* in his book *The Stanley Fish Reader*:

To think "how fine this all sounds, even though it is Satan's," is to be but a few steps from thinking "how fine this all sounds" – and no conscious qualification. One begins by simultaneously admitting the effectiveness of Satan's rhetoric and discounting it because it *is* Satan's, but at some point a reader trained to analyze as he reads will allow admiration to push aside the imperative of Christian watchfulness. To be sure, this is not sin. But from a disinterested appreciation of technique one moves easily to a grudging admiration for the technician and then to a guarded sympathy and finally, perhaps. To assent. In this case, the failure (if we can call it that) involves the momentary relaxation of a vigilance that must be eternal. (p. 17)

Lord Henry Wotton is quite a serpentine figure too; and curiously in many other analyses he is heavily associated with the devil due to his role as the instigator for sin and the "new hedonism"; however, there is quite the difference between Lucifer and Henry.



Whilst in Lucifer's case it is more of a matter of subtlety and requires for the reader to be guarded of his temptations despite him being the very protagonist; it is stated in multiple instances how one should not listen to Lord Wotton: "Your cynicism is simply a pose" (DG 8). Even Dorian, his "experiment", is aware that his words are mostly sophism and a matter of chance than actually believing what he says; but nonetheless he *likes* the nonsense Henry is spewing, and as result, like Fish's reader he makes that mistake of lowering his guard. Once again, as seen in Fish's case, despite perhaps not being able to fully appreciate the technicalities of Henry's rhetoric since the model of reader for this analysis does not necessarily have deeper that knowledge, if the reader is not to heed to these verbal, and often times implicit, warnings and notice the hypocrisy of his actions and his ignorance (such as believing that crimes such as murder simply occur within the lower class and that since Dorian is young and beautiful and also belongs to the upper class he could not possibly do such a thing); a fall such as Dorian's is pretty much inevitable, perhaps something even worse, if one does not even recognise them as empty as at least Dorian does on a few occasions.

Those instances and chapters in which it is possible to glance inside Henry's inner machinations are very important because they reveal his true character more than anything else he could possibly say in a dialogue thanks to that omniscient external narrator; nothing could be more of a warning than seeing him admit to himself "how he enjoys how malleable Dorian is", or the lines "He charmed his listeners out of themselves, and they followed his pipe laughing" (DG 41). It is quite easy to find him a fascinating character and get lost in Wilde's aesthetic and provoking style. Precisely, as was pointed out, a more unaware and inexperienced reader may make that mistake of being misled by his eloquence; somewhat like Dorian himself and Fish's *Paradise Lost* reader, perhaps not fully trusting him but starting by enjoying what he says.

To remain true to one's principles without wavering is very important to comprehend the novel's objective, and someone more influenceable may precisely miss that point entirely. Just as Fish presents it in his analysis of *Paradise Lost*. The reader is to be guarded from Satan and Henry at all times despite them being entertaining orators and if one misses that point by appreciating them to any degree that illustrates more of a "failure" (perhaps a harsh word to utilise but considering the point in both texts it could be called that) within the reader's conscience and vigilance than in the author's own work.

### **Subjectivity & The Influence in Perspective:**

An addition to the contrast between these two characters can be found in the way they both look at Dorian. In a sense, a very interesting way for Wilde to prove his point and make the reader understand how it is all a matter of perspective and how one's own principles may distort their experience with the text altogether. Basil loves, or at least loved, Dorian deeply saw him beautiful not only for his appearance, which he did enjoy, to the extent that he does blame himself for idolising him so much to the point of creating the very portrait that ends up cursing Dorian. But Basil also cares for Dorian because of his charming personality, which "dominated him entirely" (DG 105) that affection for Dorian was also translated into his painting and it is what makes him so hesitant at the beginning to expose it to the world, there may have been after all "too much of him" in that painting. Even in the end, although he is horrified about what the portrait reveals about Dorian, Basil still believes that his very core can be saved, that "It's never too late" (DG 143) for repentance and saving one's own soul.

Henry however only saw Dorian's physical beauty and youth from the beginning, and his whole judgement has its roots in something as superficial as that; since Henry is shallow

and manipulative, he also assumes that Dorian's beauty has to hide something darker. Precisely that youth and beauty give Dorian, in Henry's eyes, the right to act on those obscure desires "Life has everything in store for you, Dorian. There is nothing that you, with your extraordinary good looks, will not be able to do." (DG. 96).

There is no denying that the way that both of them look at him may even influence the reader's attitude towards Dorian one way or another; either giving him a chance because someone like Basil swears he was a good person or condemning him for the way Henry incites him to act and on what he believes are his natural, selfish inclinations. As can be seen when he points out that Dorian left Hetty, not to save her, but due to his own narcissism. A way to look at this display of contrasting perspectives can be explained in the following manner, as Iser (1978) discloses it:

The structure of theme and horizon constitutes a vital link between the text and reader, because it actively involves the reader in the process of synthesizing an assembly of constantly shifting viewpoints, which not only modify one another but also influence past and future syntheses (p. 97)

As was mentioned, the reader is the one who has to ultimately decide how the characters and the story are constructed by either following Henry's perspective, as Dorian does, or having enough judgement by themselves like Basil to not be swayed by the way their points of view are displayed by the narration and the textual evidence.

### **Dorian Gray. Who Is He? His Relationship with The Reader:**

But this is how both of them see Dorian, the protagonist. Now there is a necessary question to be asked about his portrayal; how is Dorian written without relying too much on the other perspectives within the narrative? Not only Basil and Henry's, but Sibyl's as

well who thinks of him as her “prince charming”. As was stated, the reader does not really know him, or form some sort of proper attachment to him prior to his appearance in the second chapter of the novel. The reader does not really know whether he was actually a kind person or if it is just Basil being swayed by his feelings.

In the first few moments of Dorian’s appearance he does seem juvenile and petulant: too annoyed to sit still for the painting of his portrait, demanding Basil to make Henry stay and his shier and yet fascinated behaviour with the latter. And whilst these two are traits dominant in him through the whole novel, Dorian is not as of yet as ill-intentioned as he is later in the story. To be more precise he seems more of a spoiled child than a hedonist with a taste for murder and decadency.

It is rather strange that there is not a proper attachment stated at the beginning of the novel with its protagonist since it is what most novels seek, a connection between reader and protagonist to understand them and their story. And yet in this case the reader does not learn about Dorian’s tragic origin until rather later, and on top of that, this information is stated through some other characters more in a manner of petty gossip and small talk, as if it were not a crucial dimension of the character. But precisely the fact that there is no particular empathy provoked in the reader beforehand by having Dorian’s life and his mistreatment at the hands of his grandfather presented sooner, the reader is allowed to be far more critical of his behaviour.

Had Dorian’s abuse and his mother’s tragic story been depicted through his eyes, the reader might have been more inclined to forgive or excuse his actions and expect his repentance despite witnessing all he has done when there is no mention of any regrets; blinded by that bond to notice how far he has fallen. Dorian can be as well a sort of reflection for a more inexperienced reader, as it was mentioned when analysing Henry. Dorian like the reader may admire Henry’s ideas and rhetoric, and even though the

audience may not as of yet see themselves doing anything of that sort, Dorian did also start with admiration and fascination when it came to his first meeting with Henry. And once again, as Fish stated, it is also how the reader begins their own downfall in *Paradise Lost*, which is the first step to lower one's guard that needs to be watchful at all times. Dorian is then a literal illustration of the reader who fails to secure and watch their conscience and remain true to who and what their values are; and as consequence they end up spiralling towards fatal temptations.

These characters and the way the reader, other characters and even themselves perceive one another alongside the manner in which they are purposefully characterized by the narrative is extremely important when it comes to the full understanding of the story, and it is a "constant" that is far well established from the first few chapters. If one is to allow themselves to be swayed without stablishing this concordance into themselves, it is quite easy to just get as carried away similarly to how the own protagonist does; and that alone should be enough of a warning.

- **The Gothic Elements. Creation of Suspense & Emotional Impact:**
- **Suspense. Dorian's Fears and Madness:**

The way the narrative displays its characters and their interrelationships alone are hardly the only thing to focus when analysing a story or the reader's reaction to it however. The context within, this is the ambiance and the line of events that make the story develop and the characters alongside with it, are also vital to look at. To illustrate with an example; it could be said that the very much urban ambiance, at times rich in beauty almost excessively ornate at times caricature-like in its vulgarity at others, is a big factor to take into consideration when compared to its sisters in the genre. In *Picture of Dorian Gray*,

similarly enough to Stevenson's "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde", the urban setting brings the horror to the city, it is not an evil coming from another country as it occurs in *Dracula* nor does it occur in some other European country like in *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* or some long past time in a distant place like *The Castle of Otranto*. The terror pretty much occurs in the city, home of many, at the hands of no other than a prestigious and beautiful member of high society, a concept rather unthinkable and chilling for the Victorian society.

But of course, this is not as much the concern of this particular reader and this analysis; the focus of this segment shall fall on how the suspense is created and how is it reflected in the text along with the emotional impact and the consequences of the protagonist's actions. Since both factors help to create a deeper relationship with the reader by either wanting to incite a specific feeling from them, such as unsettlement and fear, or evoking their empathy towards certain characters. These Characters work, simultaneously, as a narrative device as well; as will be seen later on.

First of all, how is that gothic ambiance, unnerving, terrifying and yet mystifying as well, constructed? Or better yet, how is this reader assuming that they are free of being familiar with the gothic genre in literature capable of recognising those traits in the story. To better explain this in action rather than just relying in theory and the repeating of certain patterns a closer look will be taken to certain pivotal scenes to understand the fullest extent of the suspense; these parts being: Dorian's first and last glance into his portrait, Basil Hallward's murder and lastly James Vane's ghastly appearance in Dorian's life after his descent to the opium den.

### ***The Portrait:***

After breaking Sibyl Vane's heart, and his as well although his wound is vastly more superficial, Dorian returns to his home portraying a normal routine that, it is possible to confidently say, has not changed all that much even if the centuries have passed as he "throws his cape and hat into the table" (DG. 83) even if he is surrounded by his newfound taste in luxuries, the scene is all too familiar for anyone. In fact, Dorian's initial reaction to the visible change in his portrait is all the same very realistic after all, who would genuinely consider that there is a *literal* change in the portrait their friend painted of them?

At first one may even think it is merely a lapse in Dorian's subconsciousness a passing moment of guilt reflected in his portrait; but then again, the routinely portrayal of him coming home without a mention of an ounce of guiltiness in his heart should brush off that sort of idea. Nonetheless, Dorian comes back to either confirm his thoughts or perhaps to find an ounce of a clue that it is all his imagination "One would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in his mouth. It was certainly strange" (DG 84). Despite his efforts he is met with the mortifying reality that, although subtly, there is no denying that the expression in his portrait has changed. The portrait is the only direct evidence that reader has of the intervention of the supernatural in the whole novel, and it does seem to represent Dorian's soul, but it is not quite defined how it happened. Easily one would think that Dorian has sold his own soul to the devil for his youth and beauty, similarly enough to *Faust* which was a big inspiration for the story; but one could also possibly argue that it was God's intentions for Dorian to witness the decay of his soul and learn from it even if it was done in a rather harsh approach. The origins of how the portrait has changed are left obscure purposefully, as the nature of *what caused such change* is not as important as the fact that precisely *it has changed to begin with*.

Dorian's first interaction with the portrait shows Dorian as far more regretful and willing to change, make amends with Sibyl in an attempt to cleanse himself. His motives are not as of yet quite as selfish as they will be onwards as he still "felt a faint echo of love for Sibyl" (DG 84). The portrait physically shows Dorian the sins he knows he committed, a concept which funny enough for an attentive reader may be reminiscent of one of Henry's monologues "The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its shame" (DG 198) he may have been right about a few things after all.

The portrait is not something Dorian can truly hide from even behind a beautiful curtain. However, even though the reader and Dorian see the change, it is never quite stated what exactly is it that caused that sin to be manifested as such; was it simply breaking Sibyl's heart or does it blame him as the cause for her suicide? It never quite shows nor says what is it exactly that Dorian has done with those men, once again, completely intentional, because it is quite likely that the author wants the reader to fill those gaps by themselves as it happens with Alan's secret later on. It is an interesting factor to point out Dorian's relationship with the portrait, as he shifts between feeling guilty and proud, he either views it as his personal art or something he should be ashamed of:

He grew more and more enamoured of his own beauty; more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul. He would examine with minute care, and sometimes with a monstrous delight, the hideous lines that seared the wrinkling forehead or crawled around the heavy sensual mouth, wondering sometimes which were the more horrible, the signs of sin or the signs of age. (DG 117)

The deeper he falls into his decadent ways the further he seems to see the portrait as entertaining; something that may shock the reader as they know objectively speaking that it is supposed to be something horrid. Empathising with Dorian becomes increasingly



difficult when that is assimilated as a fact, and it attempts to force the audience to be more critical of him.

In contrast to the first contact with it, the last interaction Dorian has with his portrait does not come as much from shame as it does from the frustration of having to see the face mocking him over and over “The thing was still loathsome – more loathsome, if possible than before - ” (DG 201). His cavillations come more from anger and resentment towards it than regret for his actions as he is quite unapologetic for murdering Basil and, in that moment, to be about to destroy his “masterpiece”.

It is at this point when the reader is more aware than ever before that Dorian is entirely lost, and that there is no coming back from this fight with himself. It truly does make sense that it is by his own hands that he dies in such a horrific manner. Nevertheless, the ending is quite open to personal interpretation as well: does the healing of the portrait mean that Dorian’s sins have been forgiven after killing himself, since it was after all the carrier of his soul? Or perhaps his soul was transferred back to his body after cutting the painting? This amongst many other things are left up to the reader to “write” and interpret on their own, since Wilde does want to signal how each individual’s subjectivity is capable of altering the way they perceive the same element. In later paragraphs it will be shown how Iser rationalizes how the reader is to interact with these gaps in texts, once again displaying a certain similarity with Wilde’s intentions for the reception of his text.

### ***The Implications of Basil’s murder:***

Other than the portrait, which is without a doubt the most important symbol in the whole novel, a more direct manner for the audience to see Dorian’s growing insanity and decaying personality takes shape in Basil’s murder. This is one of those instances in which Dorian is greatly overcome by emotion, a trait generally well shared in gothic literature.

But in this case, unlike with James Vane, Dorian is not overcome with fear to the point of fainting as is often commonly parodied; instead it is an anger so deep and directed towards Basil alone; whom he blames for creating the portrait that “showed him his own vanity”, which drives him to terrible violence.

Although the reader is accustomed to Dorian’s childish outbursts and quickly shifting emotions, this is the most evident case in which it is shown to what extents he can go. The one instance in which the reader is or should be afraid of Dorian. Basil, as was discussed prior, is generally put in a positive light the common sense and only true friend of Dorian’s that is why the fact that his anger is directed towards him (even at the end of the book) breaks the reader’s sympathy and instead they are to be unsettled by his erratic behaviour.

That sudden shift in his behaviour is another element that should come off **more** frightening for the audience than it is for Dorian, as is more commonly shown in the novel, he was cold and upset when breaking Sibyl’s heart but not quite as sarcastic and sharp-tongued as he is with Basil moments prior to showing him the portrait:

There was the madness of pride in every word he uttered. He stamped his foot upon the ground in his boyish insolent manner. He felt a terrible joy at the thought that someone else was to share his secret, and that the man who had painted the portrait that was the origin of all his shame was to be burdened for the rest of his life with the hideous memory of what he had done (DG 139)

The fact that he is so upset at Basil’s attempts to indoctrinate him are also quite ironic when considering that is exactly what Henry has been doing to him; but since Dorian does not like what Basil is saying he, petulantly, sees it as an attack towards him. But overall,

the one thing that makes the scene more monstrous occurs as Dorian decides to murder Basil once and for all:

Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear with by those grinning lips. The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within him, and he loathed the man who was seated at the table more than anything in his whole life he had ever loathed anything. (DG 144)

In that excerpt there is that play between Dorian's madness and whatever vile otherworldly influence the portrait could have upon him, capable of filling the same young man that was crying out of guilt a few moments ago with such a hatred that drives him into an all too deliberate murder of what the victim, the murder and even the reader considered his friend, at least at one point.

In addition, Basil's murder is spared of no details, and the fact that Dorian does so behind his back as the man is praying for his soul makes the audience even more horrified and uncomfortable. Many versions (mainly in films and musicals) portray it by Dorian stabbing Basil as he kisses him abusing the feelings that he knows the painter has for him; but the original is far more horrific in the sense that a character like Basil is not even allowed to defend himself, left in a sad attempt to rise from the chair to do so that Dorian cuts short. Instead the young man he loves stabs him in the back, in almost the most literal sense, but Dorian does target the vein behind his ear and slams his head against the table rather brutally.

Basil's murder is shown in a way that if had he tried to move earlier; he might have had the opportunity to defend himself. And that adds it to how tragic it is towards

him and horrific towards Dorian. Dorian even takes away the little aspect of life that Basil may have had by referring to his corpse as “that thing” or “the dead thing” over and over. Dorian’s own attempts to drown what he has done by the senses as Lord Henry taught him by looking at the daily occurrences in the city through the window and admiring the craftsmanship of the lamp he used to show Basil the way; create in the reader a frustration towards Dorian along with a feeling of mortification at witnessing him commit such violence and trying to minimise it at the same time.

### ***James Vane. Fear of Death Through a Human Character:***

James Vane himself could also be accounted as a device to create that unsettling gothic ambiance. Not the first time he is introduced to the reader quite yet, though, although later on his words do become like a constant echo, but in those later chapters where years have passed since Sybil’s suicide the way he is painted and portrayed do make him as some sort of physical manifestation of a looming death for Dorian.

When Dorian comes into the den to calm his senses the audience is met with a painting of pure decadence that greatly contrasts with Dorian’s looks and may as well be reminiscent of his downfall to hell itself. Everything is broken, forgotten and the people in it, if one is to call the poor souls that, are more grotesque caricatures than anything else. The reader follows Dorian’s glance across it and all its patrons, only a sharper reader would feel a certain type of way, an inkling, when the narration describes “In one corner, with his head buried in his arms, a sailor sprawled over a table” (DG 170) after all, who is the only sailor presented in the story? But it is a hint very easy to be oblivious about initially, because it is purposefully hidden between all those lost souls; at that very moment James is nothing but one more amongst many.

As for Dorian (whose sight is being followed at the moment) he would not really be able to recognise James either, because neither has he met him face to face and either way he was sixteen at the time, a long time has passed and because of it James appearance, never Dorian's of course, has changed since then. It is not until one of the women identifies Dorian as "Prince Charming" and James swears to her to get revenge on Dorian after he allows him to escape the first time that this strange dynamic begins. In addition, the fact that his character is known to keep his promises chills the reader with the idea that he is quite serious when it comes to killing Dorian; for the audience this known trait of his since youth makes it all the more real. It is at that instance in which James, more than a human character, becomes more of a symbol. Yet another ghost haunting Dorian's conscience and an omen of a looming death. Which coincides with the way Dorian describes him in the following excerpt:

I have no terror of death. It is the coming of death that terrifies me. Its monstrous wings seem to wheel in the leaden air around me. Good Heavens! Don't you see a man moving behind the trees there, watching me, waiting for me? (DG. 185)

From that point onwards it is not possible to see James do anything physically to Dorian, for better or worse. But his mere apparition inflicts in him a psychological grievance that tortures him far more deeply than a physical act that could be over with in a moment, to the point of even fainting inside his own home from the fear of just *seeing* James by his window. For Dorian and the reader, James works as an allusion of madness-inducing death that, perhaps, Dorian may not be able to free himself off after all. Or so one is led to think, since James was displayed as so convinced on his oath to kill Dorian it really inclines the reader to think that it may be that way, but those expectations are quickly crushed when James is killed instead in a hunting accident. And what prompts Dorian's

relief turns into the reader's frustration. The "consistency" pattern that the reader may have built is broken in the most pitiful manner and has to be reshaped. This occurrence makes the audience remember that James was merely human after all and not just a ghost as he was painted, and at the same time, wonder if the one person who intended to murder Dorian was not able to, will he ever pay for what he has done to begin with? Or will he be allowed to live on freely sinking deeper into his "new hedonism"? Nonetheless, perhaps James was not able to meet his objective of killing Dorian himself, but his brief reappearance was one of the catalysts to drive Dorian deeper into his conflicting guilt and selfishness that later on lead him to take the matters into his own hands in what would be his last attempt to silence his conscience.

- **Sibyl, Alan and Adrian. What Do They Mean to the Reader?**

This is all of course, to help create that unsettling feeling in the reader, met with the undeniable truths of Dorian's descent into immorality and madness. But of course, the reader expects to feel something else; a fluctuation in their emotions and impressions is necessary because otherwise that would just cause them to simply assimilate and normalise that feeling therefore minimising and devaluing the significance portrayed in those scenes entirely. In addition to that, it is needed to comprehend how important certain "minor" characters and the "order" of their appearance are when wanting to evaluate the novel overall.

They are undeniably necessary to understand the logical composition of the novel and at the same time to make the reader even more aware of the atrociousness occurring in the story by attempting to evoke their empathy. The protagonist's actions have consequences in the other characters' lives. Nevertheless, how is the reader supposed to truly care and grasp the atrociousness and tragedy of things like Sibyl Vane and Alan Campbell's suicides? The reader also knows that Dorian was the cause of the downfall of many young

men. But one thing is being aware of it and another “experiencing it”. It is important to witness the sentimental implications of it by further depicting the aftereffect of Dorian’s actions rather than relying on devices like the portrait singlehandedly, which he alone sees and suffers during most of the story. To make it simpler, it is not the same thing to know something happened (which may leave some rather indifferent) than processing and seeing the full extent of what it implies.

### ***Sibyl. Death of Innocence:***

Starting with Sibyl, what is it exactly that makes her so relevant? The first few times the reader is only aware of her existence through Dorian as he expresses his “affections” for her. What is it then that makes her suicide so significant that it would even soil Dorian’s conscience? In chapter five, right after it is made known to the reader that he and Sibyl are to be engaged, it is finally possible to see Sibyl as herself with her family; without having to rely on Dorian’s words of idolisation rather than love.

There she is depicted as a lively young girl whose infatuation with her “prince charming” make her idealistic rather than a realist; there is a contrast between her “joy of a caged bird” (DG 58) and the delicate feminine qualities associated with her like her “petal lips” (DG 57) and the elements that surround her; an exhausted mother and a home in which the incoming light is described as a “shrill and intrusive” (DG 57) with a “dingy sitting room” (DG 57). Humble seems to be an understatement in this case. By showing that contrast and the interactions with her mother, she has a naïve yet positive association with the reader. She is by no means portrayed as ill-intentioned or completely uncaring of her mother and brother’s words rather she actively chooses to be an extreme positivist.

The fact as well, that her younger brother seems so attached and more protective of her in comparison to their own mother adds to that image of sweet ingenuity and unawareness

of her situation. The reader can clearly see that, despite being younger and somewhat aloof, when compared to Sibyl; James is truly the one with the position of the “eldest sibling” because he is quite aware of the problems in his family, and how respectable gentlemen can behave with lower class women “He was a gentleman and he hated him for that” (DG 63).

Of course that is by no means what Sibyl thinks “She was only a year older than he was, but she knew so much more of life” (DG 62) and yet the reader can make enough judgement after her idyllic daydreaming of her brother being a “pastoral poetry worthy” sheep farmer that Dorian was right when he said she knew nothing of life (in a way being reminiscent of what Basil and Henry said Dorian was himself at one point). They have no need for any other sources of money because Dorian will be kind enough to save them all: her, her brother and her mother, is what the reader is made aware of she believes. And she could not be more wrong.

Certainly, the Vane siblings’ mother’s thoughts echo rather grimly after the reader learns the sour truth “she felt that they all would laugh at it someday” (DG 68). Especially after realising that Sibyl’s mother did at one point the very same mistake Sibyl is about to make, both are and were too gullible to even consider the reality of their situation.

When Dorian brings Henry and Basil to “marvel at her”, Sibyl’s acting makes Dorian cringe in embarrassment with how bad it is. But to the reader she is portrayed as a girl deeply in love with her “prince charming” and therefore cannot empathise with Dorian’s shame as much; after all, when she is described as “standing there alone, with a look of triumph on her face. Her eyes were lit with an exquisite fire. There was a radiance about her. Her parted lips were smiling over some secret of their own” (DG 79) the reader makes the conscious notice that Sibyl’s bad acting does not come from malice and wanting to embarrass Dorian in front of his friends; but rather that she is a girl that has now learned



what “love” truly means and has tired of pretending. Truly this is one of those instances in which the reader, as was previously mentioned, quoting Iser’s work, must make an own assessment of the perspectives that have been presented to them.

Generally, most would not hold Sibyl terribly accountable for her bad acting, but perhaps if one could associate more with Dorian feel the extreme shame at Sibyl’s robotic acting, they could as well comprehend his outburst. And like so, one could also see that indeed Sibyl’s suicide is not to be entirely blamed on Dorian. It is an act that she took upon herself after all. But those who may rationalize the text merciful towards Sibyl would indeed point the blame to Dorian after seeing her grief stricken state, such a terribly contrast towards her happier times, and his indifference make him even more damnable in their eyes even though he may express his regrets afterwards.

In fact, learning about the unrepairable reality from a character like Lord Henry, who Dorian was determined to avoid at that point, makes the wound and the offence deeper; because that is one of the few moments in which Henry is honest and that makes it all the more irreversible in the reader’s mind. Even though before they may have shared the same sentiments as Dorian, those are generally not enough to wish death upon the girl that chapters ago was expressing her happiness with her humble and loving family.

Sibyl’s suicide does take a toll on the audience’s, and Dorian’s of course, conscious because she was presented as innocent, and with the only fault to idolise a man who in return naïvely fell in love with her acting and her looks rather than with who she actually was and at the same time, it is as if Dorian had killed a mirror image of his past self as well.

***Alan Campbell & Adrian Singleton. Not Even the Strong Survive:***

Something similar occurs with Alan Campbell, what does his own suicide imply to the reader when he seemed so opinionated and strong-willed in the scene in which he appeared with Dorian? An opposite reaction to Sibyl's emotional breakdown as was seen previously. And what about the many men that Dorian has apparently seduced to the dark side? There is hardly an emotional connection, a sinking in one's own awareness, to be done with merely a few mentions in short passing sentences. This is where Alan Campbell takes special importance alongside with Adrian Singleton, Dorian's old acquaintance that he finds in the opium den.

It is said that Alan (like many other men including Adrian) and Dorian were great friends, curiously however, Alan is not painted as an artistic hedonist rather as a man of science with a bit of ability for music, and that any appreciation from the "visible arts, and whatever little sense of beauty of poetry he possessed he had gained entirely from Dorian" (DG 150), already pointing a dynamic in which Dorian has a more dominant role since he influences Alan and it does not really occur vice versa.

For reasons not entirely described to the reader, him and Dorian fall out in their friendship which ends up killing even Alan's love for music; when they meet once again Alan's distaste for Dorian is shown through his physical language:

His voice was hard and cold. He spoke with slow deliberation. There was a look of contempt in the steady searching gaze that he turned on Dorian. He kept his hands in the pockets of his astrakhan coat, and seemed to not have noticed the gesture with which he had been greeted (DG 152)

As well as his speech by often calling him "Gray" rather than Dorian, to which even Dorian points out when he finally uses his first name although not in the familiar and

friendly way he might have wanted; Alan is roughly straightforward in his dislike towards Dorian:

“Stop, Gray. I don’t want to know anything further. Whether what you have told me is true or not true doesn’t concern me. I entirely decline to be mixed up in your life. Keep your horrible secrets to yourself. They don’t interest me any more.” (p. 152)

The repeated use of “I” in his speech does show that Alan is the one wanting to take the control of himself and deny Dorian entirely. For the reader, his determination may be commendable although maybe a little harsh due to his clear-cut mannerisms. Nonetheless, considering the act he just committed, the reader’s sympathy is to lie more with Alan than Dorian; even in Dorian’s eyes “there was infinite pity. He knew what he was going to do was dreadful.” (DG 152). Perhaps this may regard the act that is to befall Alan of having to get rid of Basil or perhaps it may have to do with the extortion that Dorian is about to inflict upon him which would make Alan unable to refuse his request. There is a certain ambiguity as to who exactly that second “he” refers to since they are both men. Either way though Alan is the victim in this scenario.

The specific blackmail that Dorian reveals to Alan is never quite revealed (in fact no sins of the other men are ever quite specified). As is stated by Iser “the lack of any connecting reference produces a gap between the different elements, and this can only be filled by the reader’s imagination” (Iser 84). Therefore, it is another one of those blank spaces for the audience to paint on their own. There is a big possibility that Wilde has done this on purpose, for the audience to consider which sins are so great and life-ruining that the idea of exposing it makes Alan so horrified to finally cave in to get rid of the body; once again displaying a deliberate toying with ambiguity and forcing the reader to create their own assessment if they want to satisfy their own curiosity.

Alan is once again “dominated” by Dorian. There is no escape, or rather the only escape that seemed available for Alan’s conscience was suicide. An information that may be a little shocking to learn for the reader, if one is to consider that despite being portrayed as “pale” after disposing of Basil’s body, his mannerisms of coldness towards Dorian are the same, if not amplified, and therefore one may feel more inclined to believe that he simply wishes to disregard Dorian’s existence entirely as soon as possible; but not necessarily kill himself over it.

If there was no hope for someone as seemingly strong-willed as Alan what hope is there to have for Adrian Singleton? The old friend Dorian meets when entering the opium den. Alan may literally be dead at that point of the novel; but at the very least how the reader saw Alan last was far more alive than Adrian; the way Adrian is portrayed makes him seem like more of a husk than a living human. To the point that even Dorian is worried enough to at least mention that if he is need of anything, he can write to him.

Adrian is entirely apathetic to everything with quotes such as “As long as one has this stuff, one doesn’t want friends. I think I’ve had too many friends” (p. 170) and ““It’s no use,” sighed Adrian Singleton. “I don’t care to go back. What does it matter? I’m quite happy here.”” (DG 171) he does not even grace Dorian with a definite answer when they part ways, merely a “perhaps”. It would seem to the reader that if one does not die after socializing with Dorian they may as well be; there’s only the smallest hint of Adrian Singleton before the reader sees him in this state, which could very easily be forgotten if one is not observant enough, this is when Dorian mentions an Adrian Singleton that gifted him a book that works to calm his nerves (DG 148), but what Adrian may have been before does not matter terribly to the novel as his ultimate result does.

Alan and Adrian very easily portray two spectrums of Dorian’s victims to the audience: one determined to avoid him at all costs but that ultimately ends up killing himself of

presumably guilt and the other completely apathetic and experiencing burnout towards the life that Dorian seemed so insistent to teach them to enjoy to its fullest.

### ***How Are They Necessary for The Narrative?***

Nonetheless, there are a few questions to be asked, why is there only the direct presence of these two men? When it is clear that Dorian has done this many, many times before; in fact, the same thing could be said in regards to Hetty's character (another girl Dorian "falls in love with" during his stay in the countryside), the reader does not get to see her perspective as they did with Sibyl chapters beforehand, merely the fact that she is noticeably upset about her and Dorian's break up is ever mentioned. Technically speaking, this could lead to a sentiment of apathy when it comes to all these characters since there is no actual portrayal capable of forming a bond like was seeing Sibyl's family life. The reader has no direct witness of what Dorian has done to these men or even Hetty, and as a result the gravity of Dorian's actions could be taken more lightly than they should. However, this should not be taken as a terrible mistake on Wilde's part. As was previously shown through Iser's quote, this is one of those instances in which the work is up to the reader's imagination *once again*. And the fact that Alan, Sibyl and Adrian are shown should already work as having enough fulfilment to form this personal evaluation as well, since it is essentially the same story. These characters function as an example, creating a logic concordance within the contents of the story for the reader to draw their own conclusions from, as well as tools to avoid senseless filler. The only difference would mainly come from Hetty's case where she is last portrayed as upset and the reader is left unaware whether she has taken the same path as Sibyl or if Dorian was in fact correct and saved her. One could imagine that since Dorian was not quite aware of Sibyl's suicide himself until Henry told him; who is to say that the same has not occurred to Hetty and the fact that Dorian believes to see "the red stain larger than it had been" (DG 201) is

precisely regarding her? This of course is a mere display of one of those multiple fillers that need to be connected by the reader's own imagination.

The main concept to bear in mind from these paragraphs is that, thanks to alluding to Sibyl, Alan and Adrian's stories regardless of it being in a deeper or lighter manner, they should be more than enough to understand the implications of what Dorian has done to many others within the novel. Forcing the reader to make use of their own logical process to shape the story and also making them evaluate what are the worst actions that a human being could possibly do.

## **Conclusions:**

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is very interesting work to analyse, not simply because of Wilde's stances on art and his critiques towards the society of his time (which are also very important features of the book); but also because of how aware the author is when it comes to the possible interpretations that each reader could have of his work. And as a result, there are subtle or not so subtle hints for the reader to discern what his point actually is. Many of them are concealed between Wilde's usually lyrical and ornate writing style and in the purposeful ambiguity; the latter used in multiple instances with the objective to make the reader evaluate what they believe to be the most immoral and unforgiveable sins.

In addition, to prove the author's and this analysis' point further, even inside the story onto itself has within its pages allusions that remark the great importance of perspective and insight. How one perceives a person is not that far off from how one can perceive a text although the means to do so may differ; and as was pointed out, there are few instances in which Wilde and Iser seem to find a bit of a common ground: if a reader is to regard their vision as the sole valid interpretation of the text, that subjective disposition

may soil the whole point that is trying to be shown. The text *needs* to be looked at for what it is, preferably without any external and personal influences.

When it comes the main characters, from the very beginning (and on multiple other instances) the reader is pointed as to who they should listen to and should be weary towards. Nonetheless, the text devices a way in which it is very easy to lose track of this idea if one is not careful enough. Lord Henry definitely is a true entertainer and good orator, shallow as he may be, and his speech is even reminiscent of how Fish explains the Devil's works in *Paradise Lost*. Considering as well that his paragraphs often outnumber the character's who should be listened to, this being Basil who is admittedly the author's own reflection in the story, it is as easy for the reader to get as carried away as Dorian if one is not careful.

Dorian himself is a character as well to which the reader must be critical towards in order to not fall from Grace with him; but they may be able to identify themselves with him as well. At the same time, Dorian can be seen as a device to demonstrate the influence that one's own subjectivity can have over how they view everything; as it was insinuated by displaying how both Basil and Henry see him: one as good and beautiful and the other as beautiful and therefore with the right to be ultimately selfish and immoral.

As was stated, characters are by no means the only factor take into account in the novel, or any novel for any matter, although the voices and interpersonal relationships between these characters are very important there is also a storyline and an ambiance to take into account. These factors also have the purpose of creating specific attachments and emotions in the reader. With the portrait it is possible to finally see a physical manifestation of the consequences of Dorian's deeds, Basil's murder is passionate and ruin, James becomes a physical manifestation of death and the opium den may as well be Dorian's own descension to hell and immorality. But of course, the reader is to expect

more than just that, how would one care about Dorian's deeds when there is no proper sinking in one's consciousness of the implications of what he's done? this is why characters like Sibyl Vane and Alan Campbell and their insight are so very important, because it is a direct view on what he has done other than the portrait that no one else will see, his actions have tragic consequences in the lives of the other characters of the novel.

In short, thanks to Iser, Fish and Wilde's recommendation it is possible to see the true tone of the story for what is presented. Not just the individual consideration of the morality and immorality behind Dorian's acts. And also, it makes it easier to not lose oneself in Wilde's often decorated writing, as it was demonstrated through Lord Henry's dialogues, as Wilde's contemporaries often did. It does deal with the moral and immoral, but the way this tale is told definitely marks the tone of the true intentions the author may have wanted to express. Thus, it could finally be said that the story is not simply Wilde intending to be vulgarly unsettling nor just create some aesthetic pleasantries in its decadence. But that there is an actual point to the story that is carefully weaved to determine whether the reader is capable to see beyond their own perspective, all whilst remaining true to themselves. Or if the reader is short-sighted and thus malleable by the evocation of merely "sophistic thought-provoking jabs" that they may find enticing.



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