

LUNA

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Dorian Gray as a Modern Monster

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NORWEGIAN ABSTRACT

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Emneord: bokanalyse, psykologi, filosofi, moraler, monster	
Sammendrag: <i>Bildet av Dorian Gray</i> er en mye diskutert filosofisk skrekk-roman av den kjente poeten og dramatikerer Oscar Wilde. Figuren Dorian Gray er både tidløs og minneverdig når det kommer til hans ytring av uhyrlighet og de moralske implikasjonene fortellingen hans tilbyr. Gjennom en nøye lesning av romanen håper denne oppgaven å diskutere og vise frem de forskjellige sidene ved Dorian Grays monster, samt innflytelsene og konteksten i omstendighetene hans, som hjalp til å skape monsteret.	

ENGLISH ABSTRACT

Title: Dorian Gray as a Modern Monster	
Author: Ylva Emilie Furuseth	
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Keywords: book analysis, in-depth reading, psychology, philosophy, morals, monster	
Summary: <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> is a much discussed philosophical horror novel by famed poet and playwright Oscar Wilde. The character of Dorian Gray is both timeless and memorable in his exhibitions of human monstrosity and the moral implications his story holds. Through this in-depth reading this thesis hopes to discuss and illuminate the different aspects of Dorian Gray's monstrosity and nature, as well as the circumstantial influences and context that helped create the monster.	

PREFACE

The subject of monsters in literary works has always held a great fascination to me. Although all literature inevitably aims to reflect society and humanity in a way that will profusely affect the reader, no genre or expression seems to accomplish this as well as horror and its attributed monsters. Through monster literature authors aim to not only reflect, but comment on, warn about, and even criticize the society and culture that created the monster to begin with. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is no exception to this, and the novel's philosophical nature creates a multitude of readings and analyses, making it an interesting topic to study further. The story of Dorian Gray has always attracted me, not only for its superficial storyline, but for the implications and societal comments beneath the surface, for instance in its commentary on duplicity and outward appearances in regards to classicism. The question of the story is not what sins Dorian commits, but why he commits them, and even more so; why they are seen as monstrous.

Contents

NORWEGIAN ABSTRACT	3
ENGLISH ABSTRACT	4
PREFACE	5
INTRODUCTION.....	7
THESIS AIM.....	7
CONTEXT	8
AUTHOR	8
TIME AND CULTURE	8
STYLE	9
THE PURPOSE OF DORIAN’S MONSTER	11
WHAT MAKES DORIAN GRAY MONSTROUS	12
THE CONCEPT OF MORALITY.....	13
MORALITY OR REPUTATION	15
FREEDOM.....	17
NATURE VS. NURTURE – WHAT CREATED THE MONSTER	17
HARRY VS. BASIL	20
THE ATTEMPT AT BEING GOOD.....	21
CONCLUSION	23
REFERENCE LIST.....	24

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this thesis I will be looking closely at the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by the famous writer Oscar Wilde. My thesis will largely focus on the character of Dorian Gray as a modern monster in English literature, but I will also expand by examining the circumstances of his character and the novel he belongs to. This thesis will therefore begin by delving into relevant theory, analyzing the context, the author, the time period and the culture that created and inspired the novel. Furthermore I will take a look at some relevant adaptations and discuss these with regards to the original work. Finally, this thesis will culminate in a discussion part where the psychological and philosophical aspects of the novel will be addressed. There are several different versions published of this particular story, where it has been lengthened, censored or otherwise changed, so this thesis will primarily focus on the novel publication from 1891 including a few more chapters and a preface by the author.

THESIS AIM

The aim of this thesis is to illustrate and discuss the monstrosities made apparent in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Through an in-depth reading of the novel this thesis will discuss the different aspects of the text and analyze the different sides of the character of Dorian Gray, but also of the society and culture that envelops him. In doing so this paper will particularly focus on what makes Dorian Gray monstrous, and why these things are seen as monstrous. Additionally this thesis aims to connect these monstrosities to Dorian's invisible monster, as his class and outward appearance seems to protect him from consequences.

CONTEXT

The Picture of Dorian Gray is categorized as a Gothic horror story, taking place in the 19th century Victorian England. The setting of this novel can potentially shed light on what influenced the story to take the shape that it did, and what Oscar Wilde was trying to express through his intricate story and characters. The outer-lying context is therefore of great importance to what created the monstrosities, and why these things are seen as monstrous.

AUTHOR

Oscar Wilde was an Irish born poet and playwright, rather famous in his time as well as ours. His flamboyant mannerisms and appreciation for aesthetic principles made him somewhat of an interesting character for his time, and contributed to his unconventional writing, as well as his popularity and fame. Many of his plays received critical acclaim at the time, in stark contrast to the reception of his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which was early labelled as immoral and perverted, perhaps especially for its underlying homosexual tendencies, with the Daily Chronicle (1890) calling it “a poisonous book,” and the St James’s Gazette (1890) giving this quote: “The puzzle is that a young man of decent parts, who enjoyed (when he was at Oxford) the opportunity of associating with gentlemen, should put his name (such as it is) to so stupid and vulgar piece of work.” There was no shortage of critics urging readers not to read Wilde’s novel. Only five years after writing *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Oscar Wilde was imprisoned for his homosexual conduct during an affair with the young man, Lord Alfred Douglas, commonly nicknamed “Bosie”. Wilde’s personal life undoubtedly had a lot to say for the creation and shaping of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and its intention. This insight into Oscar Wilde’s personal life sheds a new light on his novel and its themes that will be discussed later on in this thesis.

TIME AND CULTURE

The Picture of Dorian Gray was first published in 1890 during the late Victorian era. This time marked the climax of the British Empire and London was a highly esteemed melting pot for political and social influences, as Britain flourished as the most powerful nation in the world.

In addition to this the Victorian era was in the midst of the industrial revolution and all its technological advances. The British were a proud, progressive and respected people with deep moral values and what was considered a social superiority. The time was a strange mixture of spirituality and science, and of realism and romanticism. Perhaps most notable in its relation to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was the sexual repression and puritan tendencies of the Victorian era. Sexual deviancy of any kind was condemned and a sexual appetite was often linked directly to mental deficiencies. Art and music was widely thought to be a generous substitute for sex, meaning an established gentleman with a moral character would have no need of primal pleasures such as sex. It is here worth noting that albeit a puritan society, England during the Victorian era was secretly heavily sexualized, and upstanding citizens often enjoyed hidden affairs and sexual deviancy (Marsh, n.d.). This might be one of the things Wilde references in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*'s preface, where he states: "The nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass." (Wilde, 1890, p. v) With this quote he moves the focus on to 19th century society and questions its morality and purity. It is worth, then, to note that class and one's position in society in 19th century Victorian England. In many ways *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a story of duplicity and double standards, as Dorian's class and social standing protects him from any major consequences, no matter what he does. It was widely considered in Victorian England for immorality to be connected to the lower classes, while the upper classes were seen as gentlemen regardless of their occupations. This public persona, alongside Dorian's looks, might have shielded him from his own actions, and prevented society from viewing Dorian as a sinner.

STYLE

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a famous philosophical, Gothic novel about the slow, but inevitable decay of morality in the character Dorian Gray. The novel is strongly philosophical and features many pointed philosophical theories and perspectives to force the reader to think and contemplate larger aspects of life, morality and happiness. Philosophical questions are often introduced by way of side-characters such as Lord Henry, and are then analyzed in the mind of Dorian Gray. These questions, though prominent, are never given a clear answer and what seems right or wrong fluctuates throughout the novel, leaving the reader to make up their own mind about the situation.

The novel also features Gothic themes in its way of storytelling. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the portrait of Dorian Gray depicting and visualizing the decay of his moral soul. This inner decay is hidden away from prying eyes in the story, giving Dorian Gray an impeccable outwards appearance, but the decay is nevertheless hanging over the character through the entirety of the novel. This depravity is also noted by Basil later in the story, where he disagrees with the person Dorian has become and shows great disgust for the painting upon seeing it.

Another Gothic trademark featured in the novel is the psychological terror and dilemma that follows Dorian. He is frequently terrified by his own soul reflection and seeks to revert it or escape it at all costs. This fear of his own corruption, and the inability to stop or revert it, is what eventually drives Dorian into madness and causes his death at the end of the novel.

An interesting Gothic point for the novel is its slow transmission into night-time scenes. In the scene where Dorian is first introduced he is seated in the garden, marveling at the beauty of nature and bathed in sunlight. As the novel progresses Dorian's escapades are instead held at night, perhaps to signalize the darkening of his soul or to add a touch of foreboding to the plot.

Lastly the novel features a touch of the uncanny. Although the novel is set in familiar, normal circumstances for the time, it also explores the hidden sides of society through Dorian's adventures through sin. The eerie existence of the magical portrait also gives off this vibe of something being slightly off or wrong with what would otherwise be considered normal. This transition from the normal to the uncanny happens gradually, letting the reader, alongside Dorian, experience the slow dread of what is inevitably happening.

The plot itself struggles between realism and romanticism in its narrative, seeming to show elements of both. Whereas Dorian's fascination of the serene and beautiful works in favor of romanticism, Dorian's character development and plunge into madness and evil can be seen as a stark contrast rooting on the side of realism. The preface of the book mentions only realism, but is in itself wrapped up in beauty and virtue.

THE PURPOSE OF DORIAN'S MONSTER

The Latin word *monstrum* from which the word *monster* derives finds its roots in the word *monere* (to warn). Monsters are typically used in fiction as omens or warning signs, showing weaknesses with our society, way of living or other weak points within ourselves, advising us as a society and as individuals (Wright, 2013, p. 3). In the universe of the novel the portrait continuously acts as a direct warning to Dorian about the consequences of his own actions, but Dorian himself can also be seen as a warning to the people. The people who find Dorian charming and are lured into his company, quickly lose their reputations and their honor in pursuit of more carnal desires. At face value the novel could seem to warn people against external influences of immorality, in showing their eventual demise and shame, but with Wilde's backstory in mind, we can spot a separate warning, not from society to the people, but from the people to society. Despite society's Victorian morals, high standing and well esteemed people are continuously being lured into the depths of depravity by Dorian, giving themselves to a life of experiences and sensations. This could be seen as a clear signal from Dorian and his friends to the rest of what they have previously called a hypocritical society, acting on their wills and wishes despite the strict social rules surrounding them. In a way, despite them being viewed as monstrous and shameful, these characters are the only ones who, despite what society tells them to do and want, live the way they themselves wish to; there is a sense of great freedom in that, even if it comes at a price.

A last possible warning of the story could be linked to Plato's monster (Asma, 2009, p. 52), and his insistence in reason ruling over emotion, thus creating justice. Plato was adamant that emotion and animalistic appetites must yield to and be guided by reason and logic. In short, he believed all humans to possess both good and evil, and that we must smartly choose which side of our own psyche to listen to. Where Dorian chose his emotion and pleasure over his reason and predetermined set of values, Dorian's human soul was lost to depravity. This could be seen as a moral lesson of choosing to listen to the moral side of your character and to suppress the monster within ourselves, lest we should end in tragedy.

WHAT MAKES DORIAN GRAY MONSTROUS

The character of Dorian Gray notably exhibit none of the classical, external characteristics of a monster. He lacks the difference and the physical flaws that accompany more typical monsters, such as Frankenstein's monster, Cthulhu, Medusa or Caliban. In fact, he lacks any flaws at all, being an example of beauty and perfection personified. He exhibits none of the wickedness buried inside him and though past the age of forty, is not marred with a single wrinkle. In all aspects he resembles more the brave and kind shining knight than he does the old hag witches of old tales. However, in this particular novel Dorian's perfection is exactly the thing that differentiates him from other people. When all other characters grow old, wrinkled and imperfect he remains a marble statue of perfection, which is exactly what sets him apart from other humans and lets us know something is not entirely as it should be.

According to Stephen T. Asma (2009, p. 7) our definition of monsters changed in the 19th century and the time after to mean something other than strictly physical misshapeness. Asma (2009, p. 7) explains that "the concept of the monster has evolved to become a moral term in addition to a biological and theological term." It is in this moral aspect of the word we find Dorian Gray's true, and most memorable, monstrosity.

The contemporary monster literature at the time of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*'s publication involved works like Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), both of which portrays their monsters as physically deformed and inhuman in appearance. Dorian Gray might be the first beautiful monster since Christianity's fallen angel Lucifer, and paved the way for a more modern and psychological view on monster literature. Wilde here opens the eyes of the audience to a new understanding of monsters; one that tells us actions are more monstrous than appearances, and perhaps more terrifying; that everyone can be or become a monster.

It is this eerie hint at the uncanny that is our first clue to the monstrousness of Dorian Gray. Alexa Wright uses a particular phrase in reference to famed serial killer Ted Bundy, describing him as "terrifyingly normal" (2013, p. 149). The creeping fear of the unknown behind the seemingly perfect can be likened to the common phobia of dark waters, of not knowing what lies beneath the surface. In addition, there is no clear way for the human brain to rationalize the monstrosity and to "other" the monster. When the monster appears to be just like anyone else,

normal and socially apt, there is no real way to distance yourself, the monster has come too close to home, and to the familiar; it now resembles your friends, your loved ones and even yourself.

Although perfect in physical, outwards appearance, Dorian Gray lives a life of moral depravity and slowly gives in to his more monstrous tendencies. Although his sinful activities are vaguely described and only hinted towards in the novel, the reader is given a clear impression that these activities are immoral and to be shunned. Two very clear examples are shown towards the end of the novel, firstly when Dorian seeks out drugs to numb his sensations, and secondly (and most importantly) when Dorian murders his old friend, Basil.

THE CONCEPT OF MORALITY

Before discussing the issue of Dorian Gray's immoral actions and way of living, it is important to determine and define the concept of morality, in particular Victorian morality as it relates to the novel and the notion of monstrousness. Although Dorian's actions are clearly viewed as immoral both by the Victorian readers of the time it was published, and by observing characters in the novel, morality is not a clear concept, nor a true indicator of good vs. evil, or right vs. wrong. The English Oxford Dictionary defines *morality* as "a particular system of values and principles of conduct." Morality will therefore vary between groups of people; what is moral to a bishop working in the Vatican may not necessarily be what is moral to a secular, homosexual teenager in Canada. Nor is morality a tangible concept in a likeminded group of individuals of the same nationality. Morality as a concept is fluid and will have different meanings to each individual. One way to exemplify this is to imagine the famous thought experiment, devised by Philippa Foot in 1967, known as the trolley problem; would you kill one person to save five? It is not an easy question, and one many philosophers have analyzed and discussed without a clear answer. What is the moral thing to do is no longer clear, or even agreed upon.

With this in mind, we need to understand what Dorian's personal view on morality is. Growing up in Victorian England, he was likely heavily influenced by Christian, religious morality and the common consensus in the society around him. In the beginning of the novel he has clearly adopted this sense of morality as his own, and is therefore viewed by others as a pure individual.

It is not until Lord Henry becomes an influence in Dorian's life that his views on what is right seems to change rather dramatically.

During Lord Henry and Dorian's initial meeting in chapter 2, Lord Henry is accused of being a bad influence, to which he replies all influence is immoral (Wilde, 1890, p. 15). Lord Henry states that any influence removes one's identity and replaces it with borrowed ideals, thoughts and sins. In light of the following story, this scene can be viewed as rather hypocritical or ironic, considering from this point on Lord Henry spends his time with Dorian actively attempting to influence him, seeing their interactions and Dorian's moral development as an experiment of sorts. Dorian is similarly hypocritical, or at the very least illogical, in this situation. It is this philosophy of Lord Henry's, the importance of staying true to one's soul and to avoid external influences, that first takes root in Dorian's mind. Seeing how charming, intelligent and agreeable Lord Henry is, Dorian continues to adopt his philosophies and ways of life.

It can be argued that Lord Henry is not such an all-encompassing influence in Dorian's life, but rather that Lord Henry is capable of making Dorian think for himself. In this argument Dorian is not simply adapting all of Lord Henry's philosophies without question, but rather coincidentally finding himself agreeing with him. Despite this possible reading, this can be considered a doubtful course of events, as Dorian himself frequently finds himself accusing Lord Henry of being horrible. In contrast to Lord Henry we find Basil, who plays the character of the morally good friend. The significance of Dorian's friendship with both these characters will be further investigated later in this thesis.

We can with this information conclude that Dorian's moral character is influenced heavily by two major factors in his life: his Victorian English upbringing and his relationship to Lord Henry, both of which struggle for superiority and control over Dorian's mind. To the reader of the time, who shared Dorian's Victorian upbringing and morality, the latter will have seemed cruel and immoral, and will most likely have been interpreted as a desperate attempt at rationalizing and defending bad behavior and sins. This is most likely the stance the novel takes as well, as the portrait of Dorian Gray, meant as an objective reflection of good and bad, agrees more with the traditional Victorian morals and values, than the philosophies of Lord Henry. It is significant that the portrait of Dorian's soul is kept in Dorian's old school room, and that this is where Basil's murder eventually takes place. The very core and culmination of Dorian's

depravity and corruption lies in the midst of Dorian's childhood morals and purity, effectively destroying the values of teachings that once made Dorian pure. Here Dorian is also forced to look upon and remember his childhood every time he wishes to view the portrait, the room itself being an untouched link to the past.

The portrait plays an exceedingly interesting role in the novel's expression of morality. Despite morality being a fluid and non-tangible concept, the portrait seems to attempt an absolute morality. What is more, the portrait's definition of morality does not seem to completely match Dorian's, posing the question of whose morality is being viewed in the portrait. As the portrait's magical abilities came to be after a silent wish from Dorian, it can be assumed that a divine power granted the portrait, along with its sense of morality. Here it is fair to assume that the religious, Victorian morality is being used. A different and perhaps completely opposite possibility is that the portrait was granted by a demon or other trickster, and used as a ploy to create evil, chaos and immorality in Dorian before eventually causing his tragic death. In either of these cases the religious, Christian morality seems to have taken hold. The portrait can therefore also be seen as Dorian's previous set of morality and values haunting the person he is becoming.

MORALITY OR REPUTATION

The morality featured in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is depicted in such a way that one question becomes prominent: Is Dorian worried about his morality or his reputation? The notions of morality and reputation are often intermixed, due to their close relationship. A person who is considered moral and good will often have a much better reputation and social standing than those who are deemed immoral or cruel. Those of a higher class usually inherited this good reputation with minimal effort, whilst those of the lower classes often found it difficult to gain a decent reputation due to their lack of money and low birth. Those who could look and act the part of a higher born gentleman earned more respect than those who could not afford that lifestyle. This fondness of appearances is still evident in today's language, for example in the common phrase *he has class*, connoting goodness, fairness and simply being of a better caliber than other people. Dorian Gray challenges these norms and shows how frighteningly easy it is to misjudge based on appearances and class alone.

In the Victorian era, the British were a proud and highly esteemed people, so it would make sense for the people of the time to be very cautious of their reputations. This is reflected several times in the novel by characters such as Basil, who warns Dorian about his declining reputation and tells him what others have started to discuss about him behind his back. To Basil this is an atrocity that must be corrected for Dorian's sake. Dorian, however, waves it off and seems to think nothing about it. This could have several meanings. We could choose to read this moment at face value and truly believe Dorian thinks nothing of his reputation, but we will discuss it a little further.

One simple solution for Dorian's apparent disregard is that he doesn't actually see his reputation being tarnished. When Basil speaks of the general people, Dorian doesn't think of who these might be. In addition, his apparently diminishing reputation has had little effect on his life so far; he is still adored by those he meet, he can still charm whoever he wishes to and his reputation has not hindered his daily tasks nor his misadventures. Without actual ramifications and consequences to himself, it is likely that Dorian simply has not seen the harm. Although the portrait changes, his reputation and social standing stays intact, potentially making it difficult for him to see the damage he is doing to himself. What Basil has told him, however, does re-emerge in his mind later on when he thinks about people leaving his vicinity when he enters a room. This small, and perhaps seemingly insignificant, flashback hints at just a little bit of guilt or apprehension.

Another possible reading of this moment can be seen in relation to Dorian's portrait. Upon first seeing the small changes in the portrait, Dorian is horrified and determined to fix his ways. However, he quickly changes his stance on the picture and starts treating it with a sense of wonder and pride. This seems almost believable for a good portion of the book, but ends with Dorian's hatred for the picture and his wanting to destroy it utterly, stabbing it forcefully with a knife. The stabbing of the portrait was not premeditated, but rather an act of passion, hinting towards how much he truly hated the object, despite his seeming fascination and love for it. The murder of Basil shows similar signs; when Basil reacts poorly to the picture for which Dorian is seemingly proud, Dorian reacts in a fit of emotion and murders his old friend before having time to think about his actions. This moment can also be seen as a defense mechanism, where Basil is shattering Dorian's finely crafted illusion and showing him the reality of the situation, reminding him that he ought to be ashamed. This, of course, is nothing Dorian wants

to hear or think about, choosing to stab his friend rather than reflect on his own mistakes. In parallel with these actions we can see Dorian's denial of his own reputation. It is quite possible that he is shielding himself from the reality of it, by pretending it doesn't exist nor matter, and convincing himself that it does not affect him. This might be a way for Dorian to escape the horrible truths of reality and instead create a beautiful world of his own, without shame, boundaries or ugliness.

FREEDOM

In accordance with Dorian wishing to escape reality, there is a distinct possibility that he is also attempting to escape the boundaries that the Victorian era has set for him. Puritan and moralist societies can seem quite confining and limiting, where one is not allowed all one's wishes and pleasures. The act of masturbation, seen as perfectly innocent and normal today, was at the time frowned upon and seen as uncultured, linked to both the devil and to impaired intelligence (Marsh, n.d.). Homosexuality, now beginning to be accepted and considered normal, was then viewed as not only an immense sin, but also a crime. It is reasonable to assume that Oscar Wilde, with his background, used *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a criticism of society's strict hold on the population, using the character of Dorian to experience and express the freedoms that were taken from him. Dorian himself shows little regard for society's norms and frowns, choosing instead to lead a life pursuing pleasure and happiness wherever he can find it, regardless of society's thoughts on his actions. Even so, he is well aware that many of his sins are punishable and chooses to restrict these actions to closed rooms at dark hours, playing instead the perfect gentleman during the day. Whether this is due to his shame or his fear of consequences is hard to tell, but in either case it exhibits the invisible chains that societal norms still have on him.

NATURE VS. NURTURE – WHAT CREATED THE MONSTER

The nature vs. nurture debate is heavily discussed, and most seem to agree a combination of both is responsible for one's actions and developing personality. The case of Dorian Gray is a peculiar one, however, as his change happens at an adult age, begging the question "what caused

the change”, or possibly more important: “What created the monster?” Several moments and experiences in Dorian’s life from the time he met Lord Henry clearly shaped him and his thinking into one that would be more prone to monstrous behavior. The question, then, is a matter of influence, of how much Dorian was taught to think the way he later does, or whether it was already apparent in his personality, but needed a direction or push before being revealed.

From the beginnings of the novel, Dorian is referred to as a narcissus, a reference that is repeated at several points throughout the story. The uncanny parallel to the Greek mythological character Narcissus is not unimportant. Although all references of Dorian being called a narcissus stems from his beauty and outward appearance, Dorian also seems to share a common fate with the character. Narcissus’ doom began with his disdain for those who dared to love him, often brushing them off and telling them to leave him be. When he does this to the nymph Echo, she is distraught and ends up wandering the woods and wilting away, much like Sibyl’s suicide after Dorian’s rejection of her. Notably it is both of these actions that causes the characters to be presented with their own image. Where Narcissus is led to the water and confronted with his own reflection, which he swiftly falls in love with, Dorian comes home to his portrait having changed to reflect his inner self. From this point on both men are deeply fascinated by their own reflections, and both seem to love their reflections equally.

Once Narcissus realizes that the image he has fallen for is in actuality his own reflection, the despair breaks him and he commits suicide. The same can be said to have happened to Dorian. Upon realizing the importance of the portrait and understanding that it is indeed an accurate representation of his corruption, Dorian despairs and stabs the portrait, effectively causing his own death. Deeming from this, one can wonder if Dorian’s fate was sealed by his beauty and charm, his apparent flawlessness and desirable traits working against him to cause his demise from the beginning. It is upon the realization of his own beauty in chapter 2 that Dorian offers to give his soul so to always be young. It is also here he threatens to take his own life upon becoming old and wrinkled. When Lord Henry reminds Dorian that he has only a short time before he has to part with his youth, and that he ought to live as much as he can in the present, Dorian is set on a path of seeking pleasure and sensations that he would not have gone down had it not been for his beauty and youth. Despite Dorian’s fascination and love with his own youth and beauty, he might have been happier without them.

As much as Lord Henry's philosophies and temptations start Dorian down the path of immorality and corruption, other experiences continued to shape Dorian's person; most visibly the portrait of him. The portrait physically changes Dorian to reveal his true self and the truth of his soul, but it also mentally alters him and continues to make him think and change throughout the story. At first glance Dorian is horrified and swears to do everything in his power to be good and to correct his mistakes. Still, upon realizing that his attempts are futile and that the picture continues to show ugliness despite his attempts, Dorian instead takes a certain fascination and even pride in the portrait, almost taking pleasure in seeing it change. At one point he expresses a wish to see the portrait change before him. Dorian treating the changing portrait almost like a personal game continues to send him down the path of immorality and pleasure-seeking, but this time it appears he is almost doing it on purpose, to excite the changes. Whether the portrait was originally meant as a way to show Dorian his errors and to make him a better man, is unknown. Most likely it was meant as an objective indicator for Dorian to do as he wished with, meaning Dorian's demise can be traced to his own actions and not his fascination with the portrait. It does, however, create a drastic change in him, or at the very least pull forth the change that was already occurring in him.

The last clear, immoral influence in Dorian's life comes in the form of a book, given to him by Lord Henry as a gift. Although the title of the book was never stated, it is heavily suspected to have been a book titled *À rebours* by the French author Joris-Karl Huysmans. Following the story of a recluse and his hatred for normal society, and his constant search for aesthetics and a beautiful world of his own, the book became a great talking point of the time, and Oscar Wilde turned out to be a well-known fan, despite its critique of being outrageous and immoral. Huysmans' book was said to inspire Wilde greatly, and it is therefore no coincidence that Dorian seems to relate to the book quite profoundly, letting it guide his life away from society and towards new experiences.

All these things could be pointed at and described as reasons for Dorian's moral shortcomings. However, it is important to note that other characters in the book were subject to many of the same influences without agreeing with them and following them down the path that Dorian chose. For example, it is reasonable to assume many of the time had read Huysmans' book, as it was quite famous. We also see several characters interact with Lord Henry, and instead of finding him truthful, finds him at most charming, interesting and amusing, and yet horrible and

disagreeable. Basil is often seen taking a stand against Lord Henry's opinions and philosophies, despite having been subject to them for far longer than Dorian. It can therefore be assumed that something in Dorian's predisposed nature was prone to the behavior he later adopted.

At several points in the novel we get to see Dorian's reaction to great tragedy, such as Sibyl's suicide or the aftermath of Basil's murder. A moral and decent character would in these extreme circumstances usually revert back to their natural personality, and it is exactly here it becomes most clear that Dorian's character and nature is as immoral as his actions. Quite often he displays clear signs of psychopathy, only considering tragedy in measures of how it will affect him personally. Sibyl's suicide was not grieved, and her pain was not considered. Dorian's immediate response is to think her selfish for denying him the opportunity to apologize. Even when the shock passes he continues to care for nothing but hiding his own involvement in the case. When confronted with her clearly torn brother, he shows no sympathy or regret, choosing instead of reprimand him for his apparent mistake. This complete lack of empathy is disconcerting, but is made most clear during and after Basil's murder. Long after, Dorian continues to blame Basil for his own death, seeing no fault in himself and telling himself Basil had it coming for daring to speak to him the way he had. As Basil was a long-standing friend and ally, it is strange that Dorian feels no regret, or sorrow for his death, and continues to handle the matter in an eerily cold and logical manner. These events all hint at a possible borderline personality disorder in Dorian, such as psychopathy, or indeed narcissism.

HARRY VS. BASIL

Lord Henry, commonly referred to as Harry, and Basil curiously resemble two common characters in popular media: the angel and the devil on one's shoulders. While Lord Henry is often filling Dorian's mind with philosophies and concepts that were commonly seen as immoral, and clearly finds amusement in seeing how his philosophies affect the man's mind and actions, Basil acts as a distinct counterpart, often denying Lord Henry's words and pleading for Dorian not to listen to him or believe his words. Before we are even introduced to the title character, we see Basil and Lord Henry discussing in chapter 1, with Basil already there admitting that he does not want Lord Henry to meet Dorian, for fear of him "ruining" him. Basil is also the only character to tell Dorian personally when he feels he has overstepped, or changed

for the worse. He is increasingly worried for Dorian's moral character, and does everything in his power to get his mind back to what he considers good. Despite this, Lord Henry is described as charming and interesting, and is without doubt appealing to the young Dorian, making it easy for Lord Henry to lure Dorian away from Basil's definitions of good, and tempt him into an adventure of immoral pleasure and sensations. An essential part of this analysis of Lord Henry is his presence when Dorian Gray wishes he could sell his soul to the devil. It can be speculated that Lord Henry is a fictional representation of the real devil, being the one to not only corrupt Dorian, but to accept his bargain and grant his wish.

In chapter 10 there are two telling sentences that reveals Basil's part in this plot: "Yes, Basil could have saved him. But it was too late now." (1890, p. 102). This part solidifies Basil as a failed savior of Dorian's soul, a part that strengthens the symbolic value of Basil's murder by Dorian's own hands. The murder therefore symbolizes not only Dorian's corruption and cruelty in murdering his friend, but his destroying the last piece of good and decency in his own soul, effectively destroying the angel on his shoulder.

THE ATTEMPT AT BEING GOOD

The novel features a turning point in the book where Dorian thoroughly abandons all hope of removing his sin and change his portrait for the better. This is the point in the novel where Dorian understands that his soul is beyond repair and that his soul cannot be changed by superficial actions. After having lived a long life of pleasure and sensations, losing himself in a world of beauty and sin, Dorian actively regrets his mistakes and makes a turn for the better; he decides that from now on he will be good and moral, starting by distancing himself from a girl he believes would live a better, happier life without him in it. Convinced that this act of good will reflect in his portrait, to the same extent that his acts of immorality does, Dorian feels invigorated and truly happy as he seeks out the painting, expecting a positive change. Instead, he is confronted with an even uglier reflection that what he previously had, now showing hypocrisy as well. Understandably this devastates Dorian, who now wonders if nothing can save him at all. Oscar Wilde writes: "Through vanity he had spared her. In hypocrisy he had worn the mask of goodness. For curiosity's sake he had tried the denial of self. He recognized that now." (Wilde, 1890, p. 191-192). In this instance Dorian recognizes his own soul and

relinquishes the hope of redemption, and although realizing that confession might purify him, Dorian chooses instead to continue to follow a darker path and simply burn the evidence that is being left by his actions.

This turn of events creates a separate moral and philosophical question of what *goodness* really is. Most commonly kindness and goodness is connected to empathy, but also here there are those who ask the question of why we do good deeds. Where many will answer that doing good for others in turn makes themselves feel good. The question is then this: Are good actions selfish because they root in personal pleasure and happiness? Can good actions even be sinful and rooted in pride, and a sense of sovereignty, making us feel better about ourselves, or perhaps even better than other people, because we are considered good? Can good actions sometimes simply be selfishness and hypocrisy in disguise? The portrait of Dorian Gray seems to think so when it reveals a further corrupt soul, despite Dorian having attempted goodness and nothing but.

A determining factor seems to be causation; the underlying motive of being kind. If goodness stems from empathy, it might be considered good for the sake of being good. Dorian's attempt at doing a good deed, however, rooted in his belief that it would change and better his soul. The girl Dorian considers himself to have been kind to, is not much thought of in Dorian's mind. He concludes her life would be better without him, but shows no happiness for her. His reasons for attempting good can be linked to selfish and personal needs and desires. This leaves us with a final philosophical question that Oscar Wilde seems to have prematurely answered for us: Is a good deed still as good even with selfish motives, or is a good deed no longer good if it is done to advantage oneself? Although the physical world takes no harm in selfish motives, and will still reap all the benefits of the good deed, Dorian's portrait does not measure benefit, but rather the purity of Dorian's soul and heart.

CONCLUSION

To fully understand *The Picture of Dorian Gray* from a psychological view point, one must first decide which standard of morality and which set of values that define your reading of the book. It could be useful to see this in light of the historical and cultural context surrounding the publishing of the book. The author's life and experiences should also be taken into consideration.

Dorian Gray as a monster challenges the conventional norms at the time of what a monster ought to be; despite his contemporaries Wilde created a monster without any of the common features usually associated with monstrosity, such as a deformed shape or a status as an outcast. Wilde's depiction of a monster as a high-class, beautiful, mortal man was revolutionary for the time and opened the door for fresh ideas and new takes on the concept of beautiful monsters.

The story of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was in many ways ahead of its time, both thematically and conceptually, and although disliked by contemporary critics, the novel made an impact on its audience and continues to be one of the most well-known works of literature of all time.

Dorian's monstrosities hold subjective value to the individual reader. However, his story and corruption has close ties to his abandonment of societal norms and his reluctance to conform, creating in Dorian a distance and an otherness that makes him seem monstrous regardless of moral standpoint.

To conclude, Dorian's monstrous qualities are made apparent through a series of expressions within the novel, such as his sexual deviancy, drug use, distancing from society, his challenging of nature by not aging, and of course his eventual murder. This thesis has attempted to analyze each aspect of Dorian's character from several points of view, as well as his influences and reasoning, and the circumstances that eventually created his monster. Despite one's subjective stance on Dorian Gray, there is no doubt he is a memorable character that has survived the ages and continues to fascinate readers to this day.

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