
**Biblical Elements in Oscar Wilde's The Picture
of Dorian Gray**
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Brief Introduction

The author

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was one of the most well-known authors of his time. Most people are only familiar with his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, however, his palette is far more colourful than that; Wilde having written many poems and plays during his relatively short life, we can surely mark him as a well-rounded, brilliant writer.

Those who have heard about his trial are probably familiar with his imprisonment, thus the reason behind it was “gross indecency for homosexual acts”. These days, his sexual orientation would not have caused such a fervent reaction, but at the time it was deemed unacceptable. However, we can still discover this specific topic, and quite many themes that were considered inappropriate during the late nineteenth century in his novel, along with some quite contradictory ones, such as love and emotions, that give a strong contrast to the immoral problems that are brought up.

In this research paper, I wish to analyse the contradictions surrounding the morality and immorality of the characters of the novel along with their psychological background using the *Bible* as a base material, alongside Wilde’s novel. I explored the parallel imagery of the two gardens of the novel and the *Bible* and the occurring themes, for example, sin and hedonism, both happen to be well-captured in both books, and analysing them together might give Wilde’s book a different interpretation. Wilde is known for using aesthetic philosophy to showcase morality. (Jones, 899).

The Picture of Dorian Gray

The Picture of Dorian Gray is one of the most prominent stories of the late nineteenth century, and it is also Oscar Wilde’s only novel. It raises many intriguing questions, and touches just as many significant topics (such as homosexuality, murder, hedonism, and morality). Even though it caused some backlash after its publication in 1891, it had become a very influential book. Most of the discussed topics, such as homosexuality, murder, and morality are still controversial within some social groups, however, it would surely cause an uproar in the twenty-first century.

Nonetheless, it was heavily criticised at the time of its release, some of the critics simply deemed it unworthy of attention (Liebman, 296).

Knowing the fate of the author, and what exactly lead to his quite sad ending, it is rather interesting to observe the bravery he possessed to include so many of these dubious and at the time, problematic details in his works. Wilde's life has inspired some truly exceptional movies, and his works still attract people in to the world of literature. Also, it is worth noting that Oscar Wilde had had a tendency to include pieces of himself and his own life in his works (Nethercot, 835).

The story itself follows a young man, Dorian Gray, who is the instrument for the author to showcase the loss of innocence as his purity gets tainted by the hedonistic side of Victorian England and all the pleasures that life had to offer to young gentleman. According to Wilde, since individuals develop their personality through experimentation, which also includes the "rejection of social norms" (Ivory, 528). This rather self-indulgent and pleasure-seeking lifestyle is the thing that pushes the events further, as his soul gets corrupted by every imaginable sin of the late 19th century. The ending is inevitable, especially if we consider the afore-mentioned and implied meanings of the text, hidden between the lines.

Gothic Themes

European Gothic

Romanticism had several subgenres, and Gothic is one of them. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a pristine example of the European branch of Victorian Gothic, it is less prone to include paranormal and transcendental elements as the cause of horror factors than its American counterpart. European Gothic does not always try to scare its reader with the presence of ghosts right away, like *The Turn of the Screw* does, or with other supernatural beings that do not have a regular place in reality, it oftentimes creates tension with the brutality of human nature, and immoral actions of everyday people. The horrors of human nature are easy to discover within many well-known pieces of literature, such as in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Naturally, fantasy elements are not unknown to European Gothic; we can further observe these elements at their greatest in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, or in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, yet the focus remains strongly on human emotions and their aspect of morality.

Gothic themes in the Picture of Dorian Gray

The eerie impression the reader might get the portrait is what gives the reader the suspense feeling. Lewis J. Poteet also got to this conclusion in his 1970 study that Wilde's most useful tool was certainly realism, and the way he plays with psychology and aestheticism, and these elements help the story to get further away from reality. In the case of *Dorian Gray*, the elements of horror are subtle, as the book mainly focuses on psychological and personal relations, and the way Dorian's soul and persona get tainted by the life-choices he takes.

The haunting themes and the intricate murder are perfectly complemented by the slight supernatural aspect that lingers around the portrait. Dorian only kills one person directly, Basil Hallward, but he also caused the death of his first lover, the young actress Sibyl Vane, although not directly, but these deaths, and especially the murder have left a serious mark on him. His psychological journey is casually cruel in every possible occasion. The descriptive imagery also supports the haunting atmosphere; Oscar Wilde introduces Victorian London in a way that the social and moral differences are easy to make. This perception of the Victorian society serves as a metaphor for "public appearance and concealed reality" (Walker, 92-93).

The psychological transformation of a person was a common topic of Gothic literature, because authors had been moved towards the inner, and sometimes hidden self of the individuals. There are various other examples that dealt with a very similar duality – morality and immorality, such as the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, where a person also battles his immoral side, that makes him act in a rather horrible way, yet deep down he enjoys being free of the social constructs and the rules enforced by the high class community. The other Gothic classic, *Frankenstein* also discusses questionable morals, and some people only realise who the “real” monster was after they had finished reading the novel. Thus, this duality alone makes it a rather complex example of Gothic Literature, however, with the added fantasy elements, and the murderous events, it secures Wilde’s work among the finest examples.

Correlating Scenery – The Two Gardens

In the Old Testament, we do not get such a descriptive scene of the Garden of Eden like we get in Wilde's novel, yet, it is still a good base for comparison; "Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:9). We also realise how the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a delight to the eyes. Due to this, the remarkable beauty of the Garden of Eden has become a cultural and historical commonplace, many famous painters captured it; it is clearly visible in *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man*, painted by Jan Brueghel and Peter Paul Rubens, and it is also the part of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, painted by Hieronymus Bosch.

Genesis marks the start of the history of humankind according to the Bible, symbolising the sinless time period of humanity. The occurrence of original sin takes place in the Garden of Eden, the expulsion happening consequently, therefore we can easily associate the Garden of Eden with purity and the sinless presence of humankind. Not Adam and Eve, nor their children are allowed back there, which deprives them of the carefree, safe environment they were used to beforehand.

Similarly, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* starts off in a magnificent garden that belongs to Basil Hallward, a painter, the person who created the infamous portrait of the young, innocent Dorian. We receive a vague description of the place, the author describing the plants and flowers similarly to the passage in the Bible: Wilde plays with the reader's senses, describing not just the scenery, but the scents as well; "the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn." (Wilde, 5) This is the last place where we can see Dorian Gray as the innocent, pure young man that Basil Hallward grew so fond of, and this is the place where he meets Lord Henry, the person who would end up changing his fate for the worse, as it happened to Adam and Eve, Dorian leaving the house of Basil is similar to the expulsion of Adam and Eve, since it indicates his loss of innocence.

Oscar Wilde was also using contrasting imagery to highlight the difference between morality and immorality. This way, the negativity is emphasized, as it disrupts the beauty and the harmony of the scenery that is "created by virtue" (Jones, 883). The delicate beauty of the

Garden of Eden and the Garden of Basil Hallward at the early stages of the events represent inner beauty, purity and innocence. The looks of Dorian also fall into this category, but the looks of something can be deceiving when it comes to the world building of Oscar Wilde, since the protagonist keeps his charming face until the very last page of the story, it most certainly does not correlate with his inner beauty and morality. On the contrary, the state of the portrait, created by Basil in the end is restored from its disastrous state that showcased the evil nature of Dorian. This contrast fits in perfectly with the way Oscar Wilde usually portrays conflicting morals. The flowers also serve as a “paradoxical dynamic between physical beauty and moral repugnance” for example when Dorian is described with flower references that symbolise purity. (Jones, 886).

It is also worth mentioning, how the innocent Dorian was also a part of the garden of the creator of the story, Basil Hallward, so basically the Garden of Eden of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The reader may notice how Dorian is often described using flower-references in the story, more precisely, roses, and sometimes lilies. In the first chapter, before having the chance to meet Dorian in person, only seeing the picture that Basil has been working on, Lord Henry says Dorian looks like “as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves” (Wilde, 7) and later in the second chapter, while talking to Dorian, Lord Henry references the young man as “your rose-red youth and your rose-white boyhood”. (Wilde, 20) Just a few paragraphs later, while manipulating the young Dorian to live his life to its fullest, thus leaving behind his innocence, Lord Henry says “Every month as it wanes brings you nearer to something dreadful. Time is jealous of you, and wars against your lilies and your roses.” (Wilde, 23). In this context, we can interpret the sentences as Henry Wotton simply comparing Dorian’s beauty and good-looks to flowers, but we can also consider the symbolism behind them. White roses and lilies almost always symbolise purity and innocence, and even modesty, therefore these flowers are rather fitting to describe the “untouched” protagonist, whose life lacked sin whatsoever. After listening to the words of Lord Henry, and following his advice, he is no longer described with such qualities, as he lost everything that had made him innocent and pure, due to the immoral choices he had made, including murder.

The greatest consequence of the Fall is also represented in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Dorian’s greatest fear has been mortality since the early chapters, “I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June.... If it were only the other way! (Wilde, 29). Dorian seeks to escape that

consequence and strives to achieve immortality. Mortality is the root of his vanity, therefore it is the very motive that pushes him into living a sinful life, which is the opposite of the thing that is referred to as the “state of grace” in theology. The “state of grace” is the absence of sins. It refers to the time when humans were still living in the Garden of Eden before committing the original sin. When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they lost their immortality – “you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19). This is why it is rather contradicts how Dorian lives his life – he has committed every possible sinful act, yet, until he decided to destroy the painting, he has shown somewhat divine features, since the divine characteristics of the portrait vanish by the end of the novel.

The Concept of Innocence

The concept of innocence appears throughout the entirety of Oscar Wilde's novel, even if the purity of Dorian has been lost after just a few chapters into the story. It is not only Dorian who embodies the sinful quality, but it is significant how all of those whose value system is not entirely flawed end up dead.

Sibyl Vane, who in my opinion, has the purest value system of all of the characters, and is considerably the least flawed person when it comes to morality. However, this purity of hers is the cause of her inevitable fate. The society portrayed by Wilde most certainly crushed those who were significantly "softer" and maybe even weaker due to their humble nature. He even says it in words that perfectly mimic the words of Lord Henry; "In the common world of fact the wicked were not punished, nor the good rewarded. Success was given to the strong, failure thrust upon the weak. That was all." (Wilde, 166) She cannot comprehend the rejection of her love, deciding to end her life. Her never-ending trust and faithfulness makes her quite similar to Basil.

Basil Hallward acts as the voice of reason. In his view, living a sinful life cannot go unnoticed by the higher powers of life (whether it is God or Fate). His idealistic views compel him to inspire people with art "that portrays the union of feeling and form" (Liebman, 304). Due to his morals, he tries to protect Dorian from Lord Henry's cynicism and manipulative words, but fails to do so. He misunderstands human nature and thus idolises a person who does not clearly exist. The portrait is the symbol of Basil's blind love and Dorian's vanity.

Dorian, whose seraphic looks serve his purposes right, is first unsure whose word he should follow. However, gazing upon the portrait Basil painted after listening to Lord Henry's words about youth, his vanity awakens. From that point his fall was unstoppable. He turns his back to the moral order followed by the people that love him dearly (Sibyl Vane and Basil Hallward), believing that he does not have to face the consequences of his attraction to hedonism (which is the perfect opposite of what Basil believes in). In terms of hedonism, Dorian "outshines" Lord Henry.

Dorian, the embodiment of sins

The duality of Dorian Gray's personality is present throughout the novel. He is well-aware of this striking contrast, as he also thinks of himself as "*son of love and death*" (Wilde, 35). And while the dynamic between Basil Hallward and Lord Henry can be perceived through their own perception of "cosmic justice and their concept of morality" (Liebman, 297), basically symbolising the two ends of the same spectrum, the immorality of Dorian Gray is well beyond the immoral acts that of Lord Henry, who still considers Dorian pure, innocent, just like how Basil had described him at the beginning of the book. Lord Henry also believes that every influence has a bad effect on the influenced person; "There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral—immoral from the scientific point of view" (Wilde, 19).

The portrayal of hedonism is also rather diverse in the novel, since the reader can see it through the eyes of different characters, whose character arch also influences the way they perceive it. According to Lord Henry, one must live life to its fullest; "Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing.... A new Hedonism—that is what our century wants. You might be its visible symbol. With your personality there is nothing you could not do" (Wilde, 23). Lord Henry looks at hedonism through curiosity, similarly to Dorian, however, the latter has pushed himself further away from morality. He is unable to regain even part of his former life, because it is the only part that he is truly fond of (Manganiello, 30).

Basil Hallward has overheard rumours about the young man, leading him to question Dorian about them. This is very similar to the part in Genesis (Genesis 3:13), where God the creator, realises how Adam and Eve decided to act against his will, breaking the image he had of them ("What is this that you have done?"). Basil, who was blinded by love for his "creation", is also shocked by the realisation that the person he idolised is nothing like he had imagined.

The serpent analogy

The serpent of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The serpent that makes an appearance in the Bible in Genesis 3:1 is among the most widely recognised symbol of deception and cunningness. It was the serpent, who tempted Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It twisted the words of God, in order to force them to go against His word. Adam and Eve quickly fall for the words of the snake. Thus, the serpent was cursed by God to live a miserable life; “Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures” (Genesis 3:14).

Just like the serpent of the *Bible*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* also possesses a rather prominent figure, who bears the previously mentioned characteristics, such as cunningness, and he can also play with his words well: Lord Henry Wotton. He introduces Dorian to his hedonistic lifestyle, thus leading the young man to his downfall. He charms Dorian farther and farther away from his youthful innocence, much similarly to the occurrence of the original sin of the *Bible*.

Just like the serpent, who personally did not eat the forbidden fruit, Lord Henry manages a somewhat balanced lifestyle – although he enjoys the pleasures and delights that Victorian London and his wealth can offer, he still follows the moral code that high society conducts. He also never committed murder, and never pushed someone into the depths of suicide. This would probably indicate that his “sin” is malleable, since he is capable of change, unlike Dorian, who cannot escape his immorality.

The forbidden fruit has given the first humans consciousness, exactly the way Dorian Gray has become conscious about his beauty and the influence he has over other people due to his looks. In a way, it was Lord Henry who granted him the knowledge of manipulation, only using his enchanting words to exploit Basil Hallward’s most recent muse. This element is also an ever-present feature of Gothic novels, causing the fate of the protagonist to be a bit more predictable (Poteet, 241).

Dorian was also ordained to choose his path; he had to decide between the ways of Lord Henry and the path that Basil Hallward had intended for him. Purity and sin, or good and evil, Dorian only being able to aim for these two extreme options (Liebman, 296-297).

The significance of the serpent

Although the serpent is rarely present in either of the two books discussed, the course of events occurred due to the intervention of the serpent or a serpent-like figure. It is not hard to predict the outcome. Just like the biblical serpent, Lord Henry was triumphant to lure the innocent human away from “the creator”, in this case, Basil Hallward, allowing him to taint his soul with immorality. Dorian falters, causing him to get farther and farther from the light side.

Lord Henry’s character cannot be simply put into a stigmatized and already labelled box; since his character has more depth. He is actually seen as a rather philosophical character (Liebman, 298), and as I previously mentioned, he actually balances the immorality of hedonism and the values of the Victorian society, for instance, living a life, with a wife and children that was considered completely normal. His overly pessimistic nature, however, can come across as quite radical to the reader. For example, when he discusses the death of Dorian’s former lover with the boy, he does not show emotions at all, and simply comments on how often it happens, as if he is already familiar with every aspect of human emotions and nature. According to Liebman, Lord Henry’s ideas are somewhat similar to Nietzsche’s philosophy (Liebman, 299). Yet, we still cannot ignore how his influence was the thing that has caused Dorian to indulge in hedonism and immoral way of life, but Lord Henry probably never really realised what he had caused, since he told Dorian multiple times that “people like you do not commit crimes”, meaning he still believed that Dorian had remained unharmed and pure, just the way Basil Hallward described him in the first place.

It is also clearly shown when Lord Henry’s influence truly reaches Dorian “For nearly ten minutes he stood there, motionless, with parted lips and eyes strangely bright. He was dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him. ... The few words that Basil’s friend had said to him—words spoken by chance, no doubt, and with wilful paradox in them—had touched some secret_chord that had never been touched before, but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses.” (Wilde, 20). The secret chord mentioned here might

have been inside of Dorian since the beginning, but it was most certainly awakened by Lord Henry. It is quite similar to Genesis 3, where Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, and they become conscientious: “*Then the eyes of both were opened*” (Genesis 3:17).

Basically, he could serve as a pristine example with his aristocratic nature, representing the higher society of Victorian London. Based on everything Oscar Wilde wrote about Lord Henry, it is pretty clear that he is a multidimensional, and a morally grey character, and it is upon the reader to decide whether Lord Henry is the one to blame for the crimes of Dorian Gray.

Basil, the Creator

In the first chapter of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, we witness the creation of the portrait. Basil being the creator, similar to God, was responsible for the creation of the portrait, the embodiment of sin and immorality. Basil also stated in the first chapter, while talking to Lord Henry, that “I can now recreate life” which might indicate that he indeed felt like he had the power of creation in his hands. However, the same can be said about Lord Henry in a way, who also possessed an intricate power, the power of words. This may seem insignificant, but Henry Wotton used the same phrase to describe his way of life: “there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new Hedonism that was to recreate life”. It shows the contrast to the ways of Basil Hallward, who idolised morality, and wanted to keep his creation, thus also meaning Dorian, as pure as possible.

Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton, being good friends, still represent two entirely different value systems, and their characters resemble biblical figures who embody completely distinguishable morals. They both try to control the protagonist of the story, while Dorian himself could represent biblical humans. Basil has a strong sense of morals; he strongly believes in a world that is quite fairy tale-like, where people get punished for being immoral, and the good people will be rewarded by the end of their journey (Liebman, 303). He believes, even before he dies, he should be held responsible for everything he has done, including worshipping Dorian and teaching him to be vain. This view shows Basil’s idealistic nature, as he tries to see the good in every treacherous aspect of life. His personality is similar to Sibyl Vane’s, as both of them have a naïve outlook on people, and they are also blinded by their love. Liebman argues that Basil and Sibyl do not represent the moral norm, simply because they are too good, however we never witness them act according to their morals, as they are controlled by their love for Dorian, rather than their logical thoughts. Of course, people might say that it still indicates their tendencies, but the reader can never be sure about that.

Before Basil dies, he still believes that Dorian could be saved. ““Pray, Dorian, pray,” ... “What is it that one was taught to say in one’s boyhood? ‘Lead us not into temptation. Forgive us our sins. Wash away our iniquities.’ Let us say that together. The prayer of your pride has been answered. The prayer of your repentance will be answered also.” (Wilde, 132). He thinks that the events must have been controlled by God, thus he is the one who could help Dorian with finding his way back into the “light”. These sentences indicate that Basil still believes in the

goodness of Dorian, because he thinks the bad and the immoral will be punished for their sins, and he still thinks that Dorian's soul can be saved; seeing the portrait, the reminder for his sins did not break his trust.

Basil partially blames himself for the chain of events, because in the thirteenth chapter he says: "I worshipped you too much. I am punished for it. You worshipped yourself too much. We are both punished." (Wilde, 132). He senses that actions of his friend are indeed vicious, but he never directly states that Dorian is the one being punished for his sins; he only mentions himself, and them together, as if he was taking the blame for the actions of Dorian.

But the most powerful sign that he still did not give up on Dorian is when he encourages him to pray more, so his sins would be forgiven: "*It is never too late, Dorian. Let us kneel down and try if we cannot remember a prayer. Isn't there a verse somewhere, 'Though your sins be as scarlet, yet I will make them as white as snow'?*" (Wilde, 132) In this passage, the colour white has been brought up yet again, and in context, it is extremely similar to one of the first time it has been mentioned, symbolising Dorian's rose-white boyhood. Now, Basil is suggesting that Dorian's sins can be "undone" by showing remorse. The colour scarlet, the colour of blood, is clearly the symbol for the sins of the past. Snow usually also represents innocence. (Isaiah 1:18)

The death of the creator

Basil Hallward, the person who represents morality is murdered by the once innocent Dorian Gray, the young man he cherished, even worshipped, the person who had given him his greatest creation. Wilde usually used this method in his works; killing the character with high, or at least the less questionable morals, instead of showing the death of the immoral character to the reader (Jones, 887). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* might be an exception, because we get to see the death of the protagonist (or rather, the villain), but in a twisted way; Dorian tries to destroy the painting that once captured his innocence and youth, but was deformed by the immoral decisions of his life.

The scene, where Dorian murders Basil is quite similar to a scene from the early chapters of the novel. It is the scene where Basil just freshly finished the portrait, and he is showing it to Dorian

and Lord Henry. Dorian expresses negative feelings towards it, and thus, thinking that Dorian actually dislikes the painting, Basil has considered destroying it: “Yes, it was for the long palette-knife, with its thin blade of lithe steel. He had found it at last. He was going to rip up the canvas.” (Wilde, 27) However, Dorian stops him from doing so: ([Dorian] tore the knife out of his hand, and flung it to the end of the studio. “Don’t, Basil, don’t!” he cried. “It would be murder!”” and ““It is part of myself. I feel that.””, symbolising that the connection between him and his portrait is already there. In a way, it also foreshadows the ending of the novel, but also the death of Basil Hallward. The way Basil intended to destroy the portrait is almost mirroring the way Dorian killed him later in the story. The knife and the heightened emotions both seem to be the same, so is the way Dorian acts to protect himself from harm.

Nietzsche’s concept of the death of God was fairly new at the time of the publishing of the novel of course; in the case of Dorian Gray and Basil Hallward, one thinks of an entirely different death, since Dorian murdered Basil. Thinking of Basil Hallward as the creator puts the concept into a new context

Apotheosis

In the last chapter the death of Dorian Gray can be thus depicted as an act of apotheosis. Apotheosis is the act of elevating something or someone to a rather divine rank. We can see Dorian picking up the knife he used to kill Basil Hallward with, “As it had killed the painter, so it would kill the painter’s work, and all that that meant. It would kill the past, and when that was dead, he would be free. It would kill this monstrous soul-life, and without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace. He seized the thing, and stabbed the picture with it.” (Wilde, 184). Dorian wishes to destroy the very last thing that connects him to Basil and his legacy. However, his plan fails, because when he stabs the painting, he dies in the process. There are two explanations for this; either God intervened (Deus ex machina), just like he did in the case of Adam and Eve after committing the original sin, cursing them, and forcing them to leave the Garden of Eden and living in exile. The same might have happened in the last chapter of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: God may have decided to put an end to Dorian’s immoral life, and he deprived him of everything he held dear, thus denied him from redemption. The other explanation is that the portrait was connected to Dorian in a spiritual

level, and his death was caused by Basil Hallward. In a way, Dorian Gray was his creation, and the painting embodied Dorian, and probably contained his soul

The scene of Dorian's death is descriptive and vague at the same time. We see how distorted his body has become as he became the very thing he was trying to destroy – the portrait that showcases his sins and all of his wrongdoings. On the last page, Wilde describes Dorian as “[He was] withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was.” (Wilde, 185). We also get to learn that when they found Dorian's body, the knife was in his heart, even though he is seen using the knife on the painting with the intentions of destroying it. This might have happened due to predestination, meaning his fate was already decided when he made his decision. His atonement never happened, thus redemption has become unreachable for him. Since salvation never came, Dorian's damnation is depicted through his deformed body.

It would also explain his protecting of the portrait, for example when he jumped in front of Basil, so he would not destroy it, or hiding it from everyone, so it would not raise questions about him. The first, of course, can be because of his vanity, and him being afraid of someone destroying his proof for his existing youth and innocence that would cease to exist one day.

Potential Allegories

There are countless potential allegories lurking within the lines of Wilde's work, since he uses an incredibly complex system of symbolism. The already mentioned scenery and contrasting difference between beauty and ugliness, embodying morality and immorality, also provide a good base for some further ideas that might have been overlooked previously. For this the reader has to look at the story from a different perspective rather than the commonly described ones. Instead of focusing the story's main character, Dorian Gray, we must observe the chain of events from Basil Hallward's point of view.

Without a doubt, the reader can be sure about the tender feelings that Basil had for the young gentleman who became his muse. It becomes more and more visible, by him overlooking the flawed nature of Dorian, and the fondness in his tone when he talks about him makes it crystal clear. In the beginning, when Basil and Lord Henry discuss the young boy, the painter explains that "Love is a more wonderful thing than art." In the preface of the novel, Oscar Wilde states that "Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming." (Wilde, 3) This also foreshadows how the events would unfold, not just in the novel, but in Oscar Wilde's life, since love, being greater than love simply means that it is a beautiful thing; and those who try to find "ugly meaning" in it are in the wrong. Quintus argues that Oscar Wilde has written Basil Hallward as his counterpart within that fictional world, and there are certainly signs pointing towards that conclusion.

We can argue whether or not Oscar Wilde included parts of himself within the character of Basil, however the way Wilde and Basil had viewed the world seems to be pretty similar in terms of priorities. Both of them were artists who used their works as symbols of their souls.

The tenderness of Basil's feelings can be perceived throughout the book, especially when Dorian questions him "How long will you like me? Till I have my first wrinkle, I suppose. I know, now, that when one loses one's good looks, whatever they may be, one loses everything. Your picture has taught me that. Lord Henry Wotton is perfectly right. Youth is the only thing worth having. When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself." (Wilde, 26) At this point, Dorian's vanity has already taken over his personality, since Lord Henry, whom he admired for his curiosity that is similar to his, and his sharp intellect, has already brought up how youth is the significant feature of life, thus age is something that must be considered at all times, even

in terms of friendship. Dorian considers Basil's affection superficial, strictly attracted only to his looks and youth.

However, Basil considers him superior in every aspect; personality-wise as well, not just in terms of appearances. "Hallward turned pale and caught his hand. 'Dorian! Dorian!' he cried, 'don't talk like that. I have never had such a friend as you, and I shall never have such another. You are not jealous of material things, are you?—you who are finer than any of them!'" (Wilde, 26) Even though it was never directly clarified in the Bible how the forbidden fruit had looked, by the time Oscar Wilde was alive, it was already depicted as an apple by many painters. The flower references that are constantly being used to describe Dorian at the earlier stages of the book might be due to the fact that the two flowers (the rose, at least the old, historic species, and the flowers of an apple tree) show similarity – they are both white in colour, indicating purity and innocence. Thus, we could argue that Dorian represents the forbidden fruit in the eyes of Basil, knowing that his yearning for Dorian would be punished, if he decides to act upon his desire. Basil, being the man who truly believes in morality, is probably well-aware of everything his fondness could bring into his life. His worries might be also heightened due to the fact that he was not an aristocrat, thus his mistakes and "immoral" decisions would less likely to be tolerated by society. As Oscar Wilde himself said in the preface, "All art is at once surface and symbol." (Wilde, 3) And if every piece of art is a symbol of something, then it is the case for the portrait of Dorian Gray and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* simultaneously. Both of these works symbolize the duality of human nature, signifying how both can be found in a person; "Each of us has heaven and hell in him" (Wilde, 132).

Knowing the fate of Oscar Wilde, and how he was on a trial for "gross indecency and sodomy", we might understand why Basil was so quick to take the blame on himself, when he realised how immoral Dorian had truly become. He is (both Wilde, therefore Basil as well) what the public eyes would see if his emotional bond was discovered, and it would be him who would face punishment for it. The fact that his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, was much younger than Oscar Wilde was, made the events eerily similar to those of his famous novel. When Oscar Wilde was facing his trial, his friends urged him to flee England, and move to France, since the laws were less strict there, but he decided to stay. It is similar to how Basil decided to stay by the side of Dorian, even after witnessing the state of the portrait, which meant finally realising the ugly truth about his character.

We get a detailed monologue from Basil, which helps the reader to understand what truly happens inside him: “from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power, by you. You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal whose memory haunts us artists like an exquisite dream. I worshipped you. ... I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you.” (Wilde, 95). The possessive nature (originated of the painter and his not so well-hidden jealousy seemed to control his thoughts through the entire novel. Even in the first chapter he does not want to talk about Dorian to Henry, saying that he would be a bad influence for the young boy, but looking at his confession, Basil probably felt the need to keep Dorian all to himself.

Basil, in his confession to Dorian brings up his art again: “When you were away from me, you were still present in my art.... Of course, I never let you know anything about this. It would have been impossible. You would not have understood it. I hardly understood it myself.” (Wilde, 95). These most certainly correlate with the way Oscar Wilde describes art in the preface of the novel. However, he ironically states that “art is quite useless” (Wilde, 3) in the same preface, which could indicate a certain type of heartbreak and bitterness, not necessarily caused by a person, but rather society as a whole. The way art is admired can signify its worth. Basil admires Dorian the way people usually admire art. Love can be interpreted in many ways, but we cannot question the presence of it.

It is also clear that Basil’s feelings are not reciprocated, and maybe they were not even understood perfectly by Dorian, as he considers it mostly idolatry. “Yet he could not help feeling infinite pity for the painter who had just made this strange confession to him, and wondered if he himself would ever be so dominated by the personality of a friend. ... He was too clever and too cynical to be really fond of. Would there ever be some one who would fill him with a strange idolatry?” (Wilde, 96) He does not see the confession of the painter as a real confession, probably just a weakness. And it certainly does not stop him in the end to commit the crime of killing Basil Hallward.

Conclusion

There are various ways to interpret the characters and the symbolism of Oscar Wilde, not just in this particular novel, but his other works as well. It is important to note that since Wilde was fond of contemplating morality and the questions surrounding the topic, it is safe to say that he might have been affected by other books that disclose similar issues, such as the Bible, of course not just focusing on the Old Testament, and of course, the works of many philosophers. Liebman saw Nietzsche's ideas among the lines of Oscar Wilde, especially in Lord Henry's thoughts.

Dorian embodying the forbidden fruit as well as original sin makes the dynamics of the novel even more complex, because it basically suggests predestination even before the events could unfold. Dorian killing Basil, therefore leaving behind everything that symbolises morality, can be considered as a metaphor for rejecting the ways of God. He even confesses in a way, that he lost his faith, both in God and Basil, just like the way he lost his innocence; *"Those words mean nothing to me now"* he says to Basil, before killing him.

The reader might consider that Oscar Wilde maybe wrote his own confession regarding his sexuality, and used Basil Hallward (and even Lord Henry Wotton, an aesthete, just like Wilde) to vocalise his thoughts and feelings, and to show his own duality through his work. Just like he said it in the preface: art is beauty; but it is worthless, if not observed right.

According to Oscar Wilde, "Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril" (Wilde, 3) which could indicate how dangerous it is to look for the hidden meanings of the text. Oscar Wilde is perhaps warning people not to overanalyse his novel, since they might find some things that are not suitable for the taste of someone from 1891. It could also be due to the fact that the work was somewhat inspired by his own torment regarding his life. It is unknown what Oscar Wilde has truly meant with these words, but it certainly encourages people to search for some more inconspicuous meanings.

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